LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING

March 1998 price £1/50p

inside...

- Irish peace talks crisis
- Blair's antics roadshow
- Liz Davies on the NEC
- Hospitals emergency

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Ethical foreign policy?

Labour Left Briefing

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Cover photo: Paul Mattsson
Anti-Gulf War vigil, Whitehall, 18/2/98.

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Clinton's lapdog

THE GULF WAR of 1991 took more than 200,000 lives, mostly Iraqi civilians. Since then, sanctions have cost another 500,000 lives, mostly children. Neither war nor sanctions has hastened the fall of Saddam Hussein nor the spread of democracy and peace in the Middle East.

No socialist will deny or extenuate the evils of Saddam's regime. Indeed, it is the left — not least many of those MPs now opposing military action — which has been most insistent and consistent in agitating for national rights for the Kurds and for human rights and democracy across the region. But none of the rationalisations for renewed military action against Iraq stand up to examination.

Unlike in 1991, Iraq is not occupying anyone else's territory, which cannot be said of Washington's pals in China, Israel, or Indonesia. Clearly, a loathing of brutal dictators cannot justify a bombing campaign, since both the US and British governments continue to support a wide variety of repressive regimes. Nor can concern for the rights of the Kurds, which are routinely abused by Turkey, a key US ally.

If non-compliance with UN resolutions is the real reason for the current military build-up, why is no action taken against Israel or Indonesia, not to mention the US itself, which refuses to pay its outstanding UN dues? It was revealing that the British attempt to secure support for a resolution at the Security Council authorising military action was rejected by all the Council's other members, including the US, whose position is that such authorisation already exists by virtue of previous resolutions. In a particularly pathetic display of Atlanticist sycophancy, Britain withdrew the resolution and changed its position to accord with that of the US. So, far from being about upholding the authority of the UN, this whole sabre-rattling exercise is about circumventing it.



Nor can military action be justified by the alleged threat posed by Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. The USA's stockpile of chemical weapons and its capacity for biological warfare far exceeds Iraq's, and India, which may be on the brink of electing a dangerous right-wing Hindu communalist government, possesses nuclear weapons. As anyone who has read the fine print of Foreign Office statements will know, the threat from Iraq remains highly speculative. The only certain result of any bombing campaign will be to ensure that the United Nations Special Commission (Unscom) is never allowed back to Iraq, a point that has been made forcibly by other governments but brushed aside by the US and Britain.

Why have the US and Britain refused to call Saddam's bluff by withdrawing those members of Unscom to which Saddam has objected? If the aim is to reduce any threat posed by Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, why have the US and Britain dismissed out of hand Iraq's offer (conveyed by the Russians) to open all its sites for 60 days provided that inspections are carried out by experts accountable to the UN Secretary General and the Security Council? And what sovereign nation — including the US and Britain — has ever granted a foreign power the kind of unrestricted access to defence and governmental installations currently being demanded of Iraq?

The people threatened by Saddam do not live in Western Europe or North America, but in his own country. The neighbouring states which Clinton says he is seeking to defend have made it clear they do not want defence of this kind. The brutal truth is that the only people currently threatening to use weapons of mass destruction are the US and their British lapdogs.

Surely the unequivocal opposition of the democratic Iraqi and Kurdish opposition to any new bombing campaign ought to carry decisive weight. Robin Cook's arrogant disregard of their pleas speaks volumes about the hypocrisy of this latest bout of Cruise missile diplomacy.

And let's remember how we were lied to before, during and after the war of 1991. Both the US and British governments sought to conceal the scale of civilian casualties, propagated obscene lies about the targeting of "smart bombs", and grossly exaggerated Saddam's fighting capacity. Back then the public was led to believe this was a war for democracy and against dictatorship — only to find the West turning its back on the Kurds in the north and the Shiites in the south while continuing to prop up the tyranny in Kuwait.

As in 1990-91, the war aims remain ill-defined, incoherent and obscured in semantic disingenuousness. No one should fool themselves that this dispute can be resolved by a quick "surgical" strike. The Pentagon has briefed reporters to the effect that a prolonged aerial bombardment will be required. This can only mean loss of life on an unacceptable scale and further misery for millions in Iraq.

Our New Labour Government has given Clinton the kind of unconditional support which even abject client states like Saudi Arabia and Bahrain have withheld. The irresponsible war-mongering of George Robertson and the unreconstructed cold warriors in Blair's defence ministry was to be expected. But much better was hoped for from the team at the Foreign Office — both Robin Cook and Derek Fatchett entered Parliament on the back of their activism in the peace movement. Their conduct in office has turned the phrase "ethical foreign policy" into the latest addition to the degraded lexicon of Orwellian Newspeak.

It is time for the Labour Party to rouse itself and to oppose by any means necessary this entirely unjustifiable and avoidable bloodshed. It is time we acted upon our finest traditions and highest principles — of internationalism, anti-militarism and common human decency. Not for the first nor last time, it falls to the Labour left to ensure that a rational choice is placed before the British public. ❑

Peace not bombs

Parliament's unconditional backing for a war against Iraq was an astonishing piece of political history we may soon come to regret, argues Alan Simpson MP.

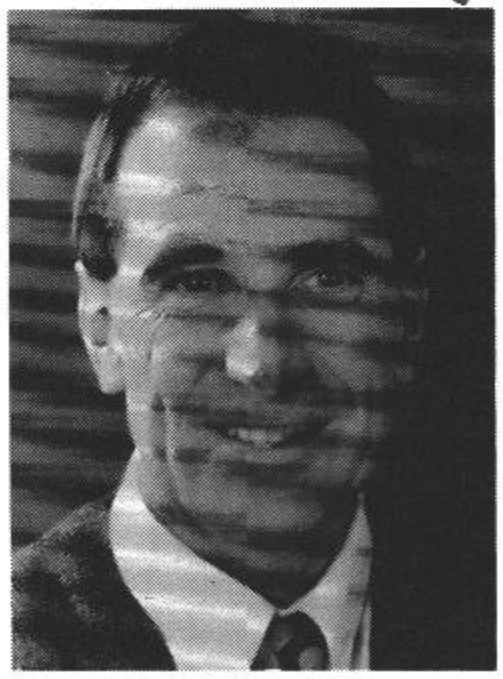
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TO BOMB or not to bomb? That was the question. Whether 'twas nobler to resolve matters by non military means never really came into it.

War making is a government prerogative. It never has to seek Parliament's approval. In no one's living memory had the House of Commons been able to vote for (or against) going into a war. Yet as US and British forces lined themselves up for an aerial bombardment of Iraq, the House was asked to give the Government support to use "all necessary means" to resolve the dispute over inspection rights for the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) team. No level of military response was ruled out. No assurances about what degree of diplomatic initiatives would be exhausted first were ruled in. The reasoning behind this is simple. The Government wants to bind in cross-party support for Anglo-US bombings, to hedge its bets, in case the whole thing goes pear shaped. It's called sharing the blame.

Even more bizarre was that the Labour Government did this under a three line whip, which presumed some sort of manifesto commitment we had all stood on. No government, of any persuasion, or with whatever majority, has a constitutional right to require its MPs to sign up to military conflict they do not believe to be right. I joined a political party not a war party, and I suspect that the 27 MPs who opposed the motion (and a fair number of the 130 who did not vote) shared something of this belief. What was at stake was not just the vote but the constitutional duty of Parliament to act as a check on government rather than a rubber stamp.

Though it would be wrong to argue that a majority of MPs had any great enthusiasm for a war, most seemed happier to ignore that moment. What do we seriously believe that bombings will achieve? To eliminate Saddam's weapons of mass destruction (chemical and biological stockpiles)? to destroy his delivery systems? The arguments supporting either simply flirt with the absurd.



Alan Simpson MP

We were told that "smart bombs" would incinerate chemical and biological agents that they struck. This might be plausible if the bombs were smarter than those used in 1991 when they just killed thousands of innocent civilians; and if we knew where the stockpiles were being stored. Since when has Saddam made things easier for anyone? Britain and the US both know that they haven't a clue what stockpiles Saddam still has, or where they are. The odds against a direct hit (by luck rather than judgement) are remote. The odds of accidental damage are much higher, and once you release the VX nerve gas or anthrax spores into the atmosphere it is a whole new ball game of social and geo-political consequences.

Who would be blamed for such an event? Who would be responsible for those killed, maimed or injured? Who would accept the refugees from lands which might not be habitable for 50 years or more? There would not be a welcome waiting at Dover.

And how wide should the bombing net be cast in pursuit of Saddam's chemical and biological weapons capacity? There are already reports that much of this has already been spirited into the Yemen, Sudan and Algeria. Should we bomb them too? Will the Middle East welcome our bombs with open arms, proclaiming "thank god (allah) for friendly fire"? We must be crazy to think so.

Even the notion of bombing to destroy Saddam's delivery systems for germ and chemical weapons is a fatally flawed one. The reality of the world we now live in is that the most effective delivery system for germ warfare is a suitcase, not a scud missile. This doesn't make the germs any less of a threat. It merely makes bombs less of a solution.

There is growing evidence that the rest of the international community understands this in ways which Britain does not. We should not kid ourselves about just how wide this gap is growing. The Government knows that the resolution it had endorsed by the House of Commons would not get through the UN Security Council. Russia has already claimed that military authority, under UN resolutions 678 and 687, applied only to reversing the invasion of Kuwait. Further military action would require a fresh UN mandate that Russia, France and China would be unlikely to support. Yet Britain has tied itself to the US's claim that there is already full UN approval to pursue military action against Iraq as far as it goes.

What other country has to prove it has peaceful international intentions before being freed from sanctions? And who among us would pass the tests required for Iraq? None of the permanent members of the Security Council would, for instance, allow independent inspection of their nuclear weapons research establishments. None of this is precisely where the US is taking us. But what the debate really highlighted is that confusion about the political purposes behind the military plan ranks second only to the military confusion about it. If Saddam does not back down it will be a looming catastrophe. If he does, it will leave unresolved anger amongst those whose only interest is his assassination. The death toll of Iraqi citizens ("collateral damage") is an incidental aside in this pageant.

Leave aside the moral issues for one

Roll of honour

Labour MPs who supported Tony Benn's Amendment against air strikes on Iraq: Tony Benn, Tam Dalyell, Diane Abbott, Harry Barnes, Andrew Bennett, Dennis Canavan, Mick Clapham, Harry Cohen, Jeremy Corbyn, George Galloway, Neil Gerrard, Bernie Grant, Ken Livingstone, John McDonnell, Alice Mahon, Bill Michie, Mohammed Sarwar, Alan Simpson, Dennis Skinner, Llew Smith, Bob Waring, Audrey Wise, Jimmy Wray.

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the states which have illicitly developed nuclear capabilities have been threatened with bombing raids to take out their "delivery systems". The contradictions of this situation are not lost on the Middle East, and nor is this response meted out to Israel in response to weapons of mass destruction, breaches of UN resolutions and the illegal occupation of South Lebanon since 1967.

None of this argues for a wider remit for bombing missions. It is simply the case for a rethink of the "special relationship" Britain has with the US if we are to have any prospects of developing an ethical foreign policy or an independent international lead (in Europe or anywhere else). New Labour's new friendship with New Bill has nothing new to it at all. It is merely old style subservience to the hegemony (and whims) of US foreign policy. The current crisis over Iraq merely highlights how far we have boxed ourselves in.

We will never know whether Saddam Hussein was just trying on a ruse when he objected to the predominance of Americans in the UNSCOM investigating teams. The offer to France, Russia and China to send more of their own experts was blocked by the Americans saying Iraq had no right to choose its inspectors. Britain backed the US.

Even more perplexing, while the New Labour Government was happy to send its Prime Minister to Washington to discuss the plans for war, it would not send the Foreign Secretary to Baghdad to attempt to broker peace. Britain may well have played a leading part in attempts to draft a new resolution for the UN Security Council. But peace brokering is a face-to-face process, not a paper exercise.



PHOTO: STEVE FRENCH

Recent demonstration outside Downing Street.

It used to be the left who were criticised for playing "resolutionary politics". It is no help if these merely give way to resolutionary diplomacy. France, Russia and Turkey have all sent their own political representatives to Iraq in pursuit of a diplomatic solution. Yet Britain declined to do so, saying it was the prerogative of Kofi Annan for the UN. We similarly declined to give a European lead (during our period holding the EU presidency) or to support a Middle East initiative which took a regional lead in defining priorities for a stabilising regional solution. There is a cruel irony in a Labour government being willing to share a lead role in preparing for war, but not in direct negotiations for peace, and perhaps this is the rub.

THERE IS no doubt that Saddam Hussein is a cruel, despotic, self-serving tyrant whose greatest crimes are against his own people. Yet the current crisis has little to do with this. Some no doubt see the coming war as the chance to topple Saddam. The debate in the US over the last 18 months has been about who should replace him. Iraq's democratic opposition parties have seen financial support for them drying up. Some sources have argued that the US has concluded that Iraq is not ready for democracy. They now favour a military coup, under a more amenable dictator. There are echoes here of the Noriega doctrine, "he may be a bastard, but at least he's our bastard."

More far reaching is the question of whether a permanently weak and divided Middle East is the precondition for US's support for Israel, and the absence of progress in their own so-called peace process. This may well fit with US foreign policy but there is no reason it should fit for ours, Europe's or the Middle East's.

This is a classic moment at which it should be possible for Labour to define a genuinely ethical foreign policy. It simply has to begin from different presumptions. In the same way that we need policies for an inclusive society at home, so we need an inclusive internationalism. In Iraq's case it means a programme and timetable for dismantling sanctions. This also offers the best mechanism through which societies monitor themselves against the manufacture of weapons of mass destruction.

We are all vulnerable to secret manufacture of such weapons, but the open society is the best way of tackling this. New international mechanisms are no doubt needed to monitor this, but Britain could give a lead in its own openness. At the moment we ourselves are closer to a model of the closed society in concealing the extent to which we still have research (and manufacture) of weapons of mass destruction. What's more, we do so in clandestine co-operation with our US partners.

Someone also has to champion the growth of regional solutions to regional conflicts. Inevitably this would weaken the power of these aspiring to the role of global policeman. But democracy, development and demilitarisation are still the most sustainable underpinnings of UN policies for the 21st century. With or without the permission of Buffalo Bill and the US cavalry, this is also the starting point for any viable solutions in the Middle East.

There are tens/hundreds of thousands of Iraqi citizens — men, women and children — who will not even see such a solution if the missiles start to fly. If New Labour will not lead the demands for a non-military solution to this crisis, then Old Labour must do so. If anything is well past its sell by date it is the presumption that the world can bomb its way towards a peace in the Middle East. This is the vacuum and vacuous belief that socialists have to replace. ❑

"The equivalent of seven and half Hiroshima bombs was dropped on the people of Iraq — the biggest bombardment since the Second World War. Some 200,000 Iraqis died. Depleted uranium bullets were used. I have had two or three letters from Gulf War veterans in a mass of correspondence in the last week, one of whom has offered to be a human shield in Iraq because he feels he was betrayed by the British Government and does not want the Iraqi people to suffer again.

... sanctions are another instrument of mass destruction. They destroy people's lives, denying them the food and medicines that they need. The United Nation's Children's Fund now say that there are one million children in Iraq starving, along with 500,000 who have died.

...The first victims of the bombing that I believe will be launched within a fortnight will be innocent people, many, if not most, of whom would like Saddam to be removed...Are not Arabs and Iraqis terrified? Do women weep when their children die? Does not bombing strengthen their determination? What fools we are to live as if war is a computer game for our children or just an interesting little Channel Four news item." — Tony Benn MP.

Mitchell's flexible principles

Liam Mac Uaid, West Ham CLP, argues that there are a few weeks respite for a Time to Think Campaign.

SINN FEIN has been temporarily excluded from the talks process. The IRA killed two men and this was viewed as a breach of its ceasefire. One of the men, Brendan Campbell, was a drug dealer who seems to have believed that real life was just like Al Pacino's film *Scarface*. He had thrown a hand grenade and fired shots at Sinn Fein premises in Belfast. The other, Robert Dougan, had been the driving force behind a two year petrol bombing campaign on a Catholic enclave in Belfast. This was in the context of a loyalist murder frenzy which left nine Catholics dead and twenty four injured in a ten day period. It is accepted that every loyalist terrorist organisation participated in the murders.

The grounds for Sinn Fein's exclusion are that the party is connected with the IRA and that the movement is now in breach of the Mitchell principles which oblige all the parties in the talks to commit themselves to exclusively peaceful means. Setting aside the British Government's lust for Iraqi blood and the fact that it has not renounced violence as a political instrument in Ireland (or anywhere else) virtually every other participant in the talks has breached the Mitchell principles.

Those loyalist parties whose gunmen have murdered Catholics and not publicly claimed responsibility are allowed to remain. This despite the fact that RUC officers privately acknowledge their role. Members of the Official Unionist Party have participated in the mass intimidation of Catholic areas through which the Orange Order wants to march. In fact the Alliance Party formally indicted David Trimble's unionists after last year's events at Dumcree but the SDLP and the two governments wanted to keep them in the talks. The point of all this is that the Mitchell principles are applied differently when the violence is directed at nationalists by loyalists.

It seems that the Republicans miscalculated what they would be allowed to get away with. It appears that they wanted to remind their own supporters and the other parties in the talks that they retain their capacity for armed action. They also wanted to warn the loyalist terrorists that they could not murder with impunity. By not claiming responsibility and not targeting police or army personnel they would have hoped to meet these objectives without compromising the party's position in the talks. Everyone makes mistakes.

A possibility suggested by loyalists is that the Republicans are seeking to engineer their permanent exclusion from the talks. This seems very unlikely. The whole thrust of Sinn Fein's politics for most of the last ten years has been towards negotiation, discussion and making the party respectable. Unless a dramatic return to the old, failed forms of struggle is what motivated the recent attacks we have to take seriously Sinn Fein's claims that it wants to be in the talks.

Just what the Adams leadership hopes to get from the talks' process is another question. Unionism won a major political victory in January when the Heads of Agreement document was released. This means that the most nationalists can expect from the talks is a cross border talking shop whose decisions have to be approved by an elected assembly in the North. This is another Stormont with complete unionist control. It is simply impossible to present such a charade as a stepping stone to a united Ireland or as any kind of progress on the national question. It is a unionist victory facilitated by the British Government. To participate in the talks is to give political validity to the new settlement.

The peace is popular, and, with the exception of some sections of the republican movement, no one wants a return to an armed struggle which has failed in its aim of forcing the British out of Ireland. But it is clear that the talks strategy is also going to fail to achieve Republicanism's principal demand. The period of exclusion from the talks should give anti-imperialists in Ireland an opportunity to review what has gone wrong and why.

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Sinn Fein: "shut up!"

This headline is a bit odd - cd be seen as telling 'SF' to shut up

Brian Campbell, editor of Sinn Fein's *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, looks at SF's expulsion from the peace talks.

I WAS IN Dublin Castle when Sinn Fein were fighting to stay in the multi-party talks. Not with their delegates as they sought to defend the charge that they had "demonstrably dishonoured" the Mitchell Principles, but among the two hundred or so media people who were paid to speculate and analyse while they waited for something to happen. The wait was made more palatable by the high class food and endless cappuccinos, all free of course.

The well paid, well fed press began the week in the certain knowledge that Sinn Fein would be expelled, no doubt about it. By lunchtime they would be gone. The RUC Chief Constable Ronnie Flanagan said that the IRA had killed a drug dealer and a top loyalist therefore Sinn Fein had to be thrown out of the talks. Of course Sinn Fein and most of the nationalist community look at things in a different way and nowhere were those outlooks more clearly different than in Dublin Castle.

The media pack took Ronnie Flanagan's word as gospel. On the Monday morning it had not entered their heads that he might not be the most impartial judge in all this. His force, after all, had been known to issue the occasional judgement which turned out to be a pack of lies. Last year, when Robert Hamill, a nationalist from Portadown was kicked to death by loyalists as the RUC looked on, the RUC said he had died "in a clash between rival factions." They said they had moved in "to separate the groups" but had been forced to withdraw after coming under attack themselves. All lies.

Sinn Fein were in Dublin Castle with a large dossier of similar lies going back years. The media were also less than interested in the fact that in January, following intense pressure and nationalist street protests, Ronnie Flanagan had taken three weeks to say that the UFF had killed three Catholics. Within twelve hours of the deaths of the drug dealer and the loyalist, his officers were briefing journalists that the IRA was responsible. The double standard was not lost on nationalists.

Yet another double standard emerged. Last year Flanagan said that both the UVF and the UFF had broken their ceasefires, yet no moves were made to put the PUP and UDP (who claim to speak for the UVF and UFF) out of the talks.

Besides, Sinn Fein clearly had nothing to do with the recent killings. They don't claim to speak for the IRA. Whose interests were going to be served by expelling Sinn Fein? Was it being done so that an agreement could be cobbled together between the SDLP and the UUP? Was the New Labour Government going back to the failed policy of marginalising Sinn Fein? It would be a step towards madness. No agreement is possible unless it is produced by an inclusive process.



By Monday lunchtime the media were learning that Sinn Fein were going to fight their attempted expulsion "every single step of the way". Through the courts, if necessary. They argued that it was against natural justice to be accused of something without being able to examine the evidence, or cross-examine witnesses — they couldn't defend themselves against a vague assertion from the leader of a discredited paramilitary force. Nor was it right that the British Government should act as both prosecutor and judge.

From then, the media saw where the story was and every time a Sinn Fein spokesperson emerged they were engulfed in a scrum of microphones and cameras. But some of the best known commentators in Ireland's establishment media soon worked out a different angle. Sinn Fein was moving into "victim mode", they said.

It is a common enough charge against people who stand up for their rights; indeed against oppressed people everywhere. The subtext is: "why don't they stop whinging? Why don't they just put up with it and shut up?" It is the last defence of the well fed and well paid. The journalists in Dublin Castle knew in their hearts that the attempt to expel Sinn Fein stunk to the high heavens. At its heart was a threat from David Trimble that unless Sinn Fein were thrown out he would collapse the talks. ❑

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The antics roadshow: the value of welfare reform

(head across 2 pages?)

Robert Deans, North East Cambs CLP, rejects notions that we cannot afford the welfare state.

THE FORCED intervention by Tony Blair to set up and chair a cabinet committee on welfare reform and to launch personally a national roadshow to convince a sceptical public of its necessity are signs that the Government's flagship policy is in crisis. Harriet Harman has been sidelined following her ineffectual handling of the cuts in single parent benefits and her subsequent inability to allay fears that the sick and disabled are the next in line. As for the Green Paper, there are rumours that Frank Field completed it some time ago and that it is being withheld by Tony Blair until he judges it safe to hazard its release. The "unthinkable" has for the moment become the "unpublishable".

In an attempt to deflect criticism and restore confidence New Labour has embarked on a nationwide hearts and minds campaign to win support for its proposals. However, given what has already happened to single parents and the leaks concerning sickness and disability benefits, New Labour should not be surprised that it is accused of shutting the stable door long after the horse has bolted. It also highlights the growing tendency of the Government to exclude health and education from the definition of the welfare state by referring solely to social security expenditure when talking about welfare reform.

The danger in splitting health and education from social security is that if the middle classes, as it looks increasingly likely, are forced to make their own provision through personal insurance, or do not qualify due to the imposition of an "affluence test", there is a danger that as voters they will withdraw their support for a social security system which they are expected to pay for, but whose beneficiaries are primarily limited to the poor. The Government further exacerbates this situation by continually using offensive terms such as "dependency culture" and "underclass" to stigmatise social security claimants.

To coincide with the launch of the national roadshow the DSS has produced a briefing entitled *Case for Welfare Reform.* This two page document sets out the guiding principles of the Government's review:

- Society has a responsibility to help people in genuine need who are unable to look after themselves;
- Individuals have a responsibility to help provide for themselves when they can do so;
- Work is the best route out of poverty for people who are able to work.

The statement has been carefully worded to ensure that most people, whatever their political persuasion, will find it hard to disagree with. Consequently, the document says nothing about what these principles actually mean or how they should be achieved. Nor does it begin to get to grips with the difficult problems that any reform of the social security system will have to face.

Should there be individual or collective responsibility for protecting against the risks and costs of unemployment, sickness, disability and old age? What benefits should be provided for those who are unable or fail to protect themselves adequately against these risks and costs; whether there should be other citizenship benefits provided above this last resort safety-net; whether benefits should be means tested and paid for out of taxation or be universal and paid for by social insurance contributions; whether benefits should be set at levels which are redistributive and reduce income inequalities or should be restricted to meeting subsistence needs and relieving hardship; and whether such benefits should be increased in line with earnings or be restricted solely to inflation.

Until these matters are properly acknowledged it is impossible to place any of the Government's proposals for welfare reform within any rational context. The principles it has announced only serve to beg questions, not answer any. Sadly, there is nothing in the rhetoric so far that indicates it is seeking to stimulate and lead an informed debate on welfare reform. With an obstinacy bordering on the pathological, the Government refuses to confront publicly the issues that should be central to any discussion on the future of the social security system.

Due to New Labour's lack of a coherent ideology it continues to pass off moral imperatives as policy: asserting commonly held values at the expense of polemical clarity and detailed explanation. It is a tactic designed to build consensus and avoid confrontation, but it does so only if contentious disputes can be avoided. The Government states that it "wants the debate [on welfare reform] to be based on facts, not scaremongering". It could start by showing that it understands the complex issues involved and by being more open.

Also produced by the DSS were seven Welfare Focus Files. They contain the facts and figures the Government thinks need to be known and cover such topics as: Social Security Overview; The Evolution of Social Security; Unemployment and Access to Work; Benefits for Sick and Disabled People; Social Security Support for Housing Costs; Pensioners' Incomes; and Children and Families. The conclusion of the focus files is that the social security system is failing to alleviate poverty and inequality; costs are spiralling out of control; and the country cannot afford to sustain current and projected levels of expenditure.

As with the statement on principles, it is what is not discussed which is perhaps most revealing about the Government's agenda. The welfare state has been the subject of extensive research yet, disturbingly, this work has not been thought relevant enough to be quoted. For example, two recent

Rob Deans



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reports published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation: *Inquiry into Income and Wealth* (1995) and *The Future of Welfare: A Guide to the Debate* (1997) found that:

- over the last 20 years Britain has experienced the greatest increase in inequality of the most advanced industrial countries with the single exception of New Zealand. In this period the poorest 20-30% of the population have failed to benefit at all from economic growth and at the same time the number of households receiving less than half average income (used as a definition of official poverty) has more than trebled.
- over the last 20 years the share of GDP spent by government on welfare (education, health, social security, personal social services and housing) has not been inexorably rising or declining, but has levelled out at approximately 25%.
- Britain's welfare state is smaller than that of most advanced industrialised countries — 13th out of 19 in 1993, falling from 11th out of 18 in 1981. Within the European Union only Portugal, Ireland and Greece are lower down the table.



Tony Blair thinking the unthinkable.

ANOTHER recent study from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Social Protection and Inclusion: European Challenges for the United Kingdom* (1997) found that:

- inequality within the United Kingdom has greatly increased in the past two decades roughly cancelling out the previous four decades of narrowing.
- the social security system in the United Kingdom is less generous in its provision and less effective in reducing inequality and poverty than most other European Union countries.
- the proportion of GDP taken in taxation in the United Kingdom has stabilised at a time when in other advanced industrialised countries it has risen.
- the United Kingdom — a medium tax country in 1978 — was imposing a lower relative tax burden on its population than any other European Union country except Greece in 1995.

The latest edition of *Social Trends* (1998) found that:

- Britain was 9th out of 11 European Union countries ranked by expenditure on social protection benefits, spending only 50-60% of the per capita figure of most other member states. Only the countries of Southern Europe spent less.
- of the G7 countries only Japan had a lower rate of direct tax and social security contributions.

OECD statistics published in 1994 comparing the level of taxation (direct and indirect) and social security contributions as a percentage of GDP of the 20 most advanced industrial countries found that:

- the United Kingdom had fallen from 8th place in 1983 at 37.3% to 12th place in 1988 at 37.1% and then to 17th place in 1993 at 33.6%.

The inescapable conclusion is that there is no crisis of funding; rather there is a crisis of commitment. Costs are not spiralling out of control and the country can afford existing and projected levels of expenditure. The United Kingdom spends less on the welfare state and raises less in taxes and social security contributions than most other advanced industrial countries. Perhaps the Government should start here in looking for an explanation of the unprecedented increases in inequality and poverty that the poor have endured over the last 20 years.

It could also consider the effects of macroeconomic policies that have willingly sacrificed the unemployed on an altar of monetary and fiscal rectitude and the increase in underemployment, marked by part time, low wage and insecure jobs, that has resulted from the relentless drive towards labour market flexibility.

There is undoubtedly a connection between New Labour's economic policy and its social policy. It is not just that the latter is a hostage to the fortune of the former, but that there is an inherent antipathy towards welfare spending (on social security benefits as opposed to health and education).

New Labour mixes economic liberalism, social conservatism and political authoritarianism into a noxious brew that threatens to poison the Labour Party's traditional egalitarian and redistributive concerns. Monetarism and communitarianism have united in New Labour: the first requiring that cuts be made to government expenditure and taxation; the second providing the justification for attacking social security benefits in order to reassert individual responsibility and social obligations.

New Labour is acting just like the characters we have all seen on a certain TV programme who bring along for valuation a family heirloom discovered while clearing out a deceased relative's attic. While desperately trying to appear sincere by saying how sentimentally attached they are to the heirloom and how they could never bear to part with it, we all know that they are itching to find out how much it is worth so they can flog it off at the earliest opportunity.

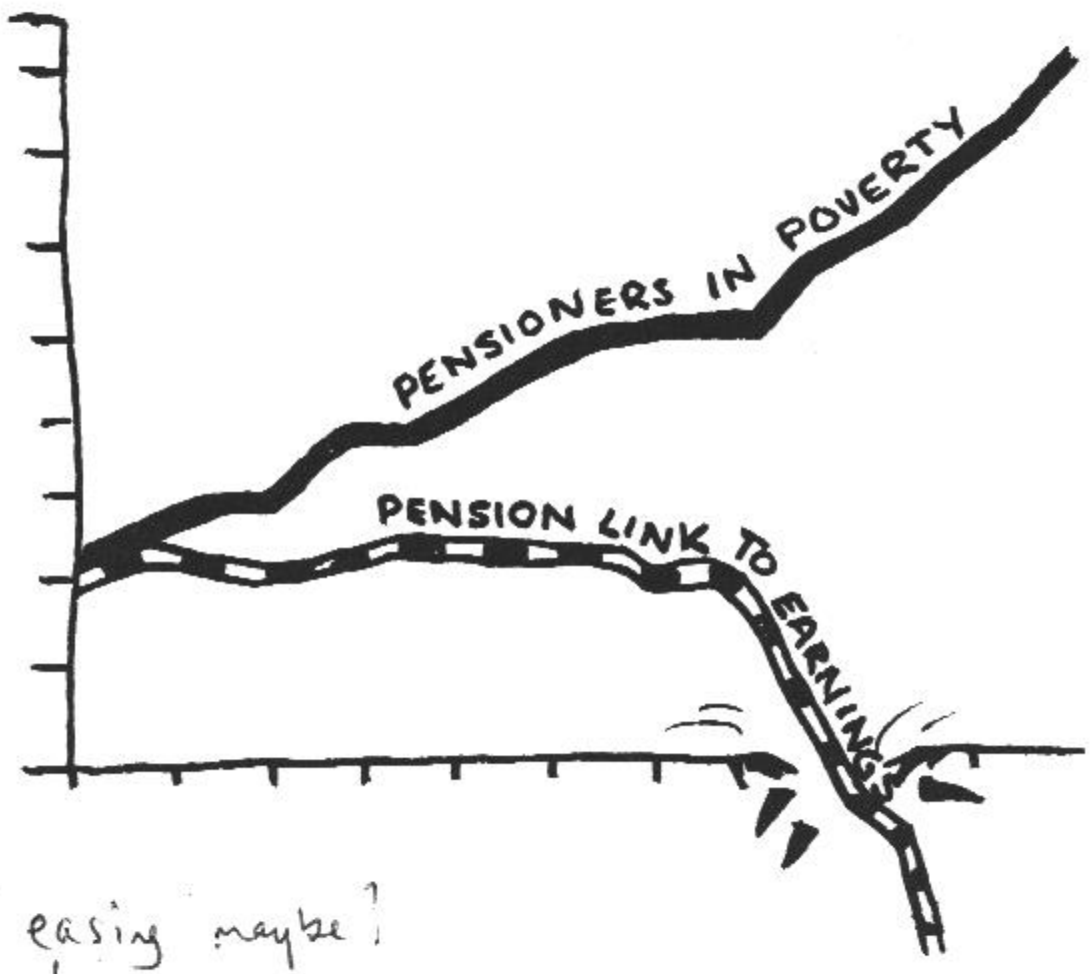
In New Labour's case the deceased relative is the Conservative Party, the family heirloom is the welfare state and the valuation sought is the magnitude of the expenditure cuts that its proposals for reform can achieve. ❑

Action on pensions needed

Terry Heath, secretary of the South West TUC Pensioners Forum, argues that Labour must link pensions to earnings.

EIGHTEEN years of Conservative government had a major impact on pensioners. One single action has had more impact on pensioners than any other: the breaking of the link between wages and pensions. While continuing to collect contributions at a rate depending on wages earned, pensions were paid at rates linked to the RPI or the rate of whatever they decided was the inflation rate. Consequently pensions have reduced by 20% in value — around £30 per week for a couple. It is the prime objective of pensioners' organisations to get the link restored.

Labour promised a complete review of pensions and has indeed kept this promise and invited representatives to attend. The TUC, the National Pensioners and the British Pensioners Action Association have taken up the invitations. During review meetings it has become clear that Labour has no intention of restoring the link. New Labour continues the Tory practice of invoking scare figures that wildly overestimate the cost of pensions. Professor Peter Townsend and others have shown conclusively that New Labour's estimates are wrong.



Three other Tory measures have impoverished pensioners. First, the privatisation of utilities. In the South West the water companies have levied three-fold increases in water and sewerage charges. Pensioners have had to pay or be cut off. Why should a pensioner in Devon pay three times as much for a gallon of water than a millionaire in Surrey? Labour will not reclaim control of these companies.

Second is the decline of the NHS. The Labour Manifesto noted that 200,000 were waiting on orthopaedic lists, 8,000 for over a year. These figures would be cut by efficiency measures. What has happened? More and more hospitals are closed with elderly patients transferred so far from their homes that their elderly friends cannot visit. While local hospitals struggle to provide beds to meet other demands, elderly patients are placed in homes with entirely inadequate resources as Social Services is without the funds to provide home assistance unless the patient can afford £5 per hour. A referral case classed as high priority can wait eight months before seeing an occupational therapist who may be able to provide items to ease the problems in the home.

Third is fuel costs. There has been some easement of the VAT burden but the Government should do more. Only a strong protest and pensioners' rally prevented a rise to 17.5% under the Tories. After six review meetings — where all the problems of health and finance have been raised — the only easement has been a publicity stunt involving a fuel cost sum of £20 that was means tested and remains unpaid. Pensioners have had to meet their ever increasing heating bills in the meantime.

The first New Labour act on pensions was to skim off a few billion in a raid on the pension fund assets by changing the funds' tax free allowances. Despite Government protestations, the inevitable effects will be that pensioners can no longer look to better payments and improvements on fringe benefits and secondly, more of the input from present payers will provide them with less benefits on retirement. After more than 40 years contributions today's pensioners are given less than a third of their previous working wages.

For tomorrow's pensioners, there are two clear messages to be understood. While they continue to pay contributions at the same rates, their state pension will be means tested in the future. They have the alternative of starting a private pension by paying into the same insurance and life companies that have ripped off pensioners for years and continue to blatantly ignore all the Ombudsman's pleadings and fines for pension misselling.

To obtain a pension approaching half pay or even reach Treasury limits, the contributions must average at least 16% of wages if the pension is to be based on a "final wage" scheme. With employers threatening to close funds if forced to contribute, tomorrow's pensioners have no option but to hand over money to the biggest thieves in the finance business.

The Government continues with the identical confidence trick of the Conservatives, a scare story that pensions cannot be paid out on the present basis due to a future population explosion of the elderly. In fact pensions paid now are a smaller percentage of GDP than when they started. The Pensions Review is a delaying tactic while the Government prevaricates and persuades through repetition of false figures that your future is safe in their and the insurance companies' hands. If you believe that...

- National pensioner's rally, Central Hall, Thursday 26 March, 11am, followed by lobby of Parliament, from 2 pm.

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Benefit cuts make us sick

NOW THAT vicious and extensive cuts to disability benefits are a key component of Labour's welfare reform, the media are reporting the effects this will have on people's lives.

Kate Adams
Incapacity Action

Proposals to tax, means test or even abolish direct payments of Disability Living Allowance and time limit Incapacity Benefit to 13 weeks are mainstream news. Consequently, there is public awareness of disabled people's anger and of the growing resistance within the disabled people's movement. Four years ago, when Incapacity Action was set up to fight Tory-imposed cuts to Incapacity Benefit, the issue was almost invisible. The disability movement's focus on civil rights at that time was a valid goal but failure to link civil rights with rights to benefit left claimants in a vulnerable position.

To date, more than 160,000 claimants of Incapacity Benefit have been stripped of their income, falsely branded frauds and subjected to what in some cases amounts to physical and mental abuse, via the All Work Test. Incapacity Action's call for the repeal of the Incapacity Act has been consistently supported by campaigns defending the welfare state and, of course, the disabled people directly affected who have taken action.

Barry Shaufler was fined £500 and given a conditional discharge for throwing red dye at Richmond House, the Department of Health in Whitehall, in protest against the All Work Test. Sarah Chapman, whose arm was fractured during her All Work Test examination, spoke out to the media, faced a DSS internal inquiry and has pursued legal action at considerable cost to her health. Unbelievably, she has been called for further testing by the DSS, only managing to negotiate a six month stay of execution by involving her doctor and MP.

Keith Rushworth was recently on hunger strike for 40 days in protest against the continual testing for Incapacity Benefit by Benefits Agency doctors, in spite of evidence from his GP that he is clearly unfit for work.

Perhaps if the stance taken by Barry, Sarah and Keith had been validated by the disabled people's civil rights' movement, creating more media and public interest, it would have been less easy for Blair to continue to push for cuts, making the savage reduction of disability benefits his personal crusade. The movement against cuts to Disability Benefit must be inclusive, demanding rights for all disabled claimants. This should be argued for within the context of the broader demand for civil rights and an improved, updated welfare state funded by progressive taxation.

Waiting lists up

John Lister, London Health Emergency, looks at the crisis in the NHS. by line only?

HAVING TAKEN over the Tory Government's NHS spending limits, Labour ministers are now confronted by the consequences. The latest figures show that the total waiting hospital treatment has climbed to an all-time record (1.26 million by the end of December) and that the queue has been growing at a massive 4,000 a week in the final quarter of 1997. Numbers waiting over a year for treatment have more than trebled in 12 months from 22,000 to 68,000. Another 820 patients joined this line of long-waiters each week in the last three months of 1997.

Even more dramatic has been the rise in numbers waiting over 18 months for treatment, which had been pushed down to just 123 nationally by the Tories in December 1996, but which has rocketed almost eight-fold to 974 a year later. These figures tell a much more significant story than a broken Labour electoral promise. Rather than waiting lists being cut by 100,000, they have increased by 100,000. They show a hospital system that is bogged down by a massive financial crisis, and in many areas reduced to an emergencies-only service for much of the year.

Despite the handout of an extra £300m to relieve "winter pressures" and ease blockages in the system, and despite the absence of severe winter weather or the sort of flu epidemic which routinely causes problems for hospital services, the system is clearly unable to cope. Many of the beds freed up by discharging elderly patients to nursing homes have immediately filled again with frail elderly patients.

Tory policies of slashing back numbers of front-line hospital beds have left little scope to manage elective as well as emergency services. But there is no sign of a rethink: instead the financial regime is getting tighter. At the end of last year the NHS Finance Director Colin Reeves admitted that the combined deficits of Trusts and Health Authorities added up to over £460 million. Labour ministers are insisting that these deficits must be cleared by £190m by April, and the remaining £250m by April 1999.

Draconian cuts are being proposed by health chiefs across the country for the coming financial year. With little flexibility on treating emergencies, the bulk of these cuts hit "elective" (waiting list) care. Many managers have freely admitted that a consequence will be to boost waiting lists, and in many cases breach the Patients Charter standard of a maximum 18-month wait. Hospital bosses are warning of queues stretching out past the millennium. In some cases health authorities have gone further and opted to "ration" services, effectively excluding lists of treatments from the NHS, forcing patients to pay privately or do without. Health Secretary Frank Dobson, however, continues vainly whistling in the dark, claiming that the NHS had "coped better than ever with winter pressures".

It doesn't have to be like this. There is no economic crisis. Gordon Brown is sat on a growing cash surplus. An injection of new money to fund the reopening of front-line beds would enable immediate progress in clearing the waiting list. If Labour leaves it too long, the extra numbers added to the list will make it impossible to claw back to the levels left behind by the Tories.

- **Conference: A Rescue Plan for the NHS, Saturday March 14th, 12 noon, ULU, Malet St., London WC1. Called by Welfare State Network. £4/£8. Speakers include Tony Benn, Jeremy Corbyn, Dr Alyson Pollock, Geoff Martin (London UNISON), John Lister (London Health Emergency). Details 0171-639 5068.**

New *Labour into Power* — what price democracy?

New Labour proclaims its desire to democratise and decentralise politics. Leonora Lloyd of the London Labour Party executive, suggests that the opposite is happening in the London Labour Party.

SOME months ago the NEC decided that the regional women's conferences would not take resolutions. National Womens' Conference has not had resolutions for some years now, having been replaced by "education conferences". At the London Women's Conference there was an angry discussion about the way in which the conference had been changed, No one defended the change and workshops discussed resolutions that had been sent in. Two weeks later, the executive of the Greater London Labour Party heard that their conference is to go down the same road.

There was already anger that the conference had been postponed from early February, initially on the flimsy excuse that the venue was unsuitable. Other excuses included: lack of time due to by-elections, the need to prepare for the local elections and the forthcoming referendum on the new Greater London Authority and mayor. But when committee members said that the real reason was the number of resolutions hostile to the plans for the GLA and independent mayor, there was no denial from the leadership.

Then, surprise, surprise, the nature of the conference was revealed. Just like the women's conference, it was no longer to be a "resolutionary" conference. This has been decreed by a "Regional Review Committee" unilaterally established by the NEC (apparently they don't need Conference backing now *Partnership in Power* is passed!). The London Conference will have workshops and the only voting would be for the regional executive committee.

The EC will be much smaller than the current one and it will no longer have "sections". First to go, therefore, were the new representatives of the women's section elected last month. It seems that, now we have quotas throughout the Party, special women's seats are not needed. However, in reality it is mainly those women who come from the women's sections who raise the issues around gender and — often — ethnicity. Certainly this has been the case in London. The move reveals a deep lack of understanding of why special measures are still needed if the Party is to tackle sexism and racism.



Leonora Lloyd

In addition, there are no guarantees that trade union, Co-op or socialist society representatives will have places on the new committee. London's General Secretary, Terry Ashton, claimed that they would, but it is not part of the Review Committee's report and therefore there is no way he can make such a guarantee. The new executives would be "boards comprising of a smaller stakeholder group similar to the principles governing the composition of the NEC". Terry Ashton's main worry was around proposals that meant reductions in affiliation fees. I pointed out that some unions — my own MSF London Region for example — were already debating reducing the numbers at which they affiliated. The new proposals would only strengthen those who want to withdraw totally at regional level. Other committee members said that they would have a fight in their unions also to maintain affiliation levels.

PLP Policy Forum elections

Alice Mahon was elected and Audrey Wise, Harry Barnes, John Cryer and Lynne Jones from the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs fared reasonably well (with about 20% of the vote) in the PLP election of reps to the new National Policy Forum. This was despite meagre campaigning efforts from the SCG and an out and out campaign by Government whips to muster votes for the leadership slate.

Although Blairites won nearly 53% of votes, and seven of the nine places, the leadership did not run their best clones which helped their votes. Their slate included MPs like Anne Campbell and Helen Jackson who argued against the lone parent benefit cuts. The vote for unaligned candidates like Colin Pickthall, Bill Rammell, Julia Drown and Charles Clarke cocked a snook at the leader.

Clive Soley *239, Anne Campbell *222, Helen Jackson 208, Charles Clarke *189, Rosie Winterton*199, Hazel Blears *152, Mick Gapes#151, Alice Mahon*140, Alan Johnson *137, Jacqui Smith *128, Gordon Prentice #126, Hugh Bayley *117, Roger Berry #106, Colin Pickthall 103, Maria Fyfe #85, Harry Barnes #79, Audrey Wise #75, Phyllis Starkey 75, John Cryer #74, Lynne Jones #68, Martin Salter #66, Debra Shipley 49, Bill Rammell 45, Geraint Davies 40, Julia Drown 34, Nigel Palmer 26, Nigel Beard 21. (* — leadership slate, # — left slate)

CLPD model resolution for branches/ CLP General Committees/European Constituency Parties/Affiliates on the Selection of Candidates for the 1999 European Elections

We note with regret the proposal in the consultation document *Labour in Europe 1999* to remove from Party members the power of decision over the selection of candidates for the 1999 European elections and replace it with a mere right to nominate. This recommendation is particularly regrettable when it appears that Conservatives and Liberal Democrats will vote to select their candidates and flies in the face of promises that OMOV procedures would give power to Party members.

We therefore call for a system of balloting members which will decide the selection of lists and their ranking order.

- **Responses to the consultation document are requested by 10th March to David Gardner, Millbank Tower, London, SW1P 4GT. Fax: 0171-802 1234.**

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Why I'm standing for the NEC

Councillor Liz Davies, Islington North CLP, calls for a united and effective campaign for the NEC.

THE constitutional changes passed at last autumn's Labour Conference have burdened the Party with a labyrinthine policy-making structure designed to keep ordinary Party members as far as possible from the levers of power. The various forums established by the *Partnership into Power* package are packed with people dependent on the patronage of the leadership, which is also now able to manipulate the Party's agenda at will. Yet even as the party structures become less democratic, the role of the left becomes more crucial, and the need for a united and effective campaign to win the constituency seats on the National Executive Committee and National Policy Forum more urgent.

Although the NEC's powers have been circumscribed, it remains, in theory, the Party's governing body between conferences. The NEC can only perform that vital function effectively if it is made up of genuinely independent individuals accountable to the grass roots of the party, not to the leadership. During the general election campaign, tens of thousands of Party members worked long hours and millions of working people went to the polls to vote Labour because they believed a Labour government would build a fairer, more compassionate and more collective society.

Tragically, since 1st May, the New Labour Government has implemented or proposed measures which will have exactly the opposite effect. Already we have suffered cuts in lone parent benefit, the abolition of free tuition for higher education, a frightening increase in hospital waiting lists, the abolition of legal aid in civil cases, the continued de facto capping of local authority expenditure and a pay deal for public sector workers that amounts to a pay cut (at a time of economic growth).

Now, looming in the future, are cuts in benefits for disabled people and others, the further erosion of the value of the state pension, the handing over of state education to private businesses, and yet more restrictions on public spending of all kinds. The 47 MPs who broke the Party whip on lone parent benefit and those who have continued to speak out against similar proposals that will extend and intensify poverty have voiced the feelings not only of a substantial section of Party members but also of many millions who voted Labour.

This year's NEC elections are a critical and historic opportunity for Party members to express their disappointment with the Government and their alarm over its apparent future direction. Only six months ago — during the Government's honeymoon period — Party members made it clear that they preferred Ken Livingstone's politics to Peter Mandelson's. Since then the Government's policies have only caused more alarm among Party members who have had no chance to express their mounting discontent.

As I write, the left and centre-left are working to mount a united and effective team of NEC candidates — a slate representing that broad swathe of labour movement opinion that wants to see a more democratic and accountable Party and a Labour Government enhancing, not dismantling the welfare state. All the evidence indicates that on 1st May the electorate voted for an increase in public services financed by progressive taxation. It is our job as Labour Party members to articulate these popular expectations within the Party's democratic structures.

← ← ← Return of the daleks

Mark Seddon, editor of *Tribune*, calls for a "Real Labour" challenge for NEC places.

TONY BLAIR should be worried when he learns that a significant proportion of Labour's membership have walked in the ten months since the Party's historic election victory. Some may try to persuade him that the "old" politics was about Party "activists", while the "new" politics has more to do with supporters simply being around at election time and that the loss of members doesn't really matter. Sillier people still may claim that an altogether new party fashioned from free market Liberals, Conservatives and New Labourites can do without the old lags, or more particularly socialists, altogether. This is the logical conclusion of the "Project", although I begin to wonder if it has any basis in reality.

We all should be worried about membership decline. *Tribune*'s research suggests that the newly departed fall into two distinct groups: those who joined out of a sudden enthusiasm in the run up to the election but who were not particularly active and those of a more solid disposition who have been offended by some of New Labour's policies. This latter group tend not to be linked with any particular grouping within the Party, are not councillors, but are the middle-ground bedrock of many CLPs. The left, on the other hand, seems to be sticking — and these are just the sort of people New Labour would like to wish away.

I joined the Labour Party when I was fifteen and have absolutely no intention of leaving. In the absence of PR, any attempt to form an alternative left party is doomed. Moreover, New Labour is essentially transitory and Labour can be re-claimed as a broad coalition. However uncomfortable it may be currently under the desert sun, the place for gestures is the splinter parties of the outside left.

But aren't the new Party structures designed to winnow out any real membership influence on policy? True, but our job on the left is to take the argument for democratic accountability into the CLPs and unions. There is a growing reaction to the empty politics of the "Third Way" and the left is making the running over a whole series of issues from trade union rights to Iraq. A broad "real Labour" alliance stood for positions on the new National Policy Forum. Considering the usual dismal fixing by the equally dull and dismal apparatchiks, these candidates did rather well. This same broad alliance must turn its attention to the annual elections for the NEC. There have been preliminary discussions from Party members associated with Labour Reform, *Tribune*, CLPD and the Socialist Campaign Group over standing a joint slate. If this initiative is successful there is every chance for the broad left to gain more representation on the NEC.

While the NEC now has little influence over Party policy it is about time that it stopped being a rubber stamp and started to represent the interests of the wider labour movement. If a slate can be agreed, I hope that all candidates will agree to a joint statement on Labour Party democracy and the need for democratic socialist policies. And if senior Party figures have any regard for healthy dissent and debate within Labour they would not fear the prospect of the broad left having a voice. The chances are however that they do and the search is now on for suitable daleks. What a shame that daleks have gone out of fashion.

Free to speak out

Ken Coates MEP replies to criticism in last month's *LLB*.

ALISTAIR Ward thinks that Hugh Kerr and I follow good policies using bad tactics. His thoughtful piece deserves an answer. First of all, he is quite right that New Labour has used the reform of the electoral system to stitch up the selection of Labour MEPs. But Alistair should also understand that the stitching does not merely put MEP selection in the gift of New Labours leaders. It also acts as a severe disciplinary measure on present Labour MEPs.

During the build up to the first Gulf War, I prepared a letter of outright opposition which was endorsed by more than 130 MEPs. This letter was signed by almost all the Labour MEPs, except for a handful of officers, who might have been in difficulties with the national leadership had they signed. But today the positions are reversed. Half a dozen have been bold enough to sign the declaration which Hugh Kerr and I have been circulating, calling for the establishment of a peace mission from the European Parliament. The other Labour Members have declined, usually most apologetically, explaining that there is no way they could appear on the electoral list if they crossed the line on this question at this time.

New Labour wants to impose discipline, because Tony Blair is breaking with the Socialist International and establishing what he hopes may become a global centrist alliance, with the help of Bill Clinton. Discipline will be entirely necessary through the delicate manoeuvres which will be required for this operation. Therefore one member, one vote is quite impossible for the real selection process, although it can maintain a cosmetic shadow in the nomination process.

Alistair would have a point if there had been any realistic possibility of resisting these changes throughout the Labour Party. But, when we were asked to sign the gag, prominent leftist leaders advised us to do so. It came as no surprise to us that the National Executive Committee approved the most undemocratic form of selection with only the most perfunctory debate, and facing only the minimal number of opposing votes.

Alistair's sociology is partial. He can see an all too slow movement to the left inside the Party. But the Party's structures have been adjusted to take care of such an eventuality. What Alistair does not see is the concomitant all too fast movement out of the Party by masses of despairing people. Neither Hugh Kerr nor I wish to discourage attempts to elect principled people to the Labour Party Executive, and certainly we strongly encourage Labour Party members to try to hold their Members of Parliament to account. Our new situation undermines none of this work.

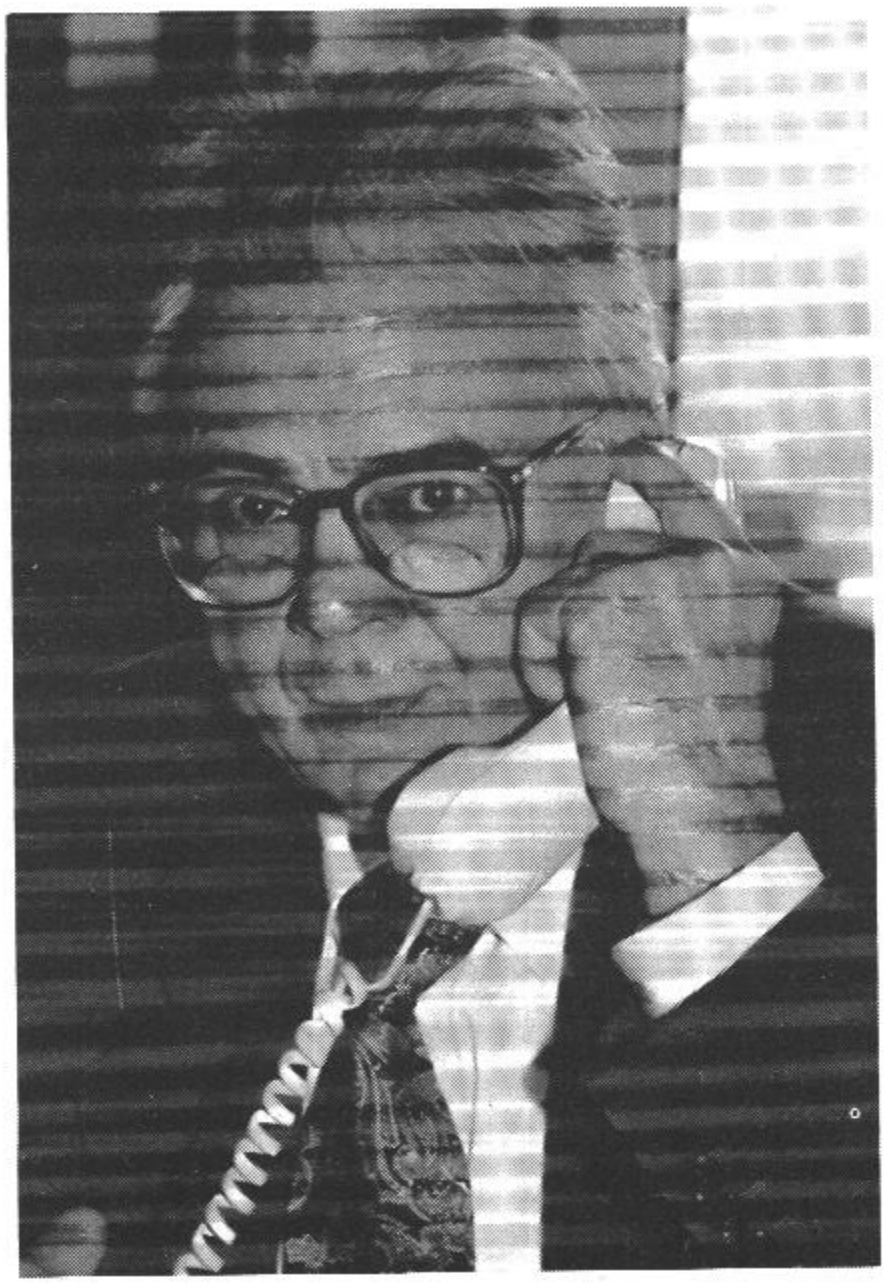
The fight to defend the welfare state, to oppose the further destruction of the coalfield communities, and to insist that full employment and the redistribution of income are top priorities for any half-way decent humane administration, is a fight which will increasingly take place outside the Parliamentary institutions, and outside the Labour Party, not because we wish it to do so, but because those institutions are silted up, and will only respond to significant external events. The effort to mobilise 47 MPs to vote against cutting lone parent benefit involved enormous efforts by the left within the Labour Party. But even if this effort produced three times as many MPs it would still be necessary to mobilise external pressures because the parliamentary arithmetic. It is one thing to organise demonstrations and lobbies, and all of us should help to do this. But there is no Chinese Wall between this kind of activity and the presentation of protest candidates.

Hugh Kerr and I do not suggest the formation of an alternative political party but a convergence of forces to present protest candidates. That is why we have taken our seats in different political groups in the European Parliament, while we are working together to build up the Independent Labour Network. We hope that this network will stand candidates in the European Elections. Because of PR, there is no danger of allowing the Conservatives to profit from the split in the votes. Blair looks rightwards to cover himself. Protest candidatures will ensure that he will have to look over his left shoulder as well.

If the protest is successful, then the protesters will be able to negotiate with Labour at every level (from councils upwards) and establish an agenda on which the left could reunite. If no protest takes place, the Labour left, which has already been marginalised, will be further marginalised. The Liberals will grow in strength, and thousands of good Labour members will withdraw from political activity. That is why I think there is more to discuss between us. I remain completely solid with the resistance to Blair in the Labour Party, and indeed expressed my view on this matter with complete candour in a book which was published in 1995.

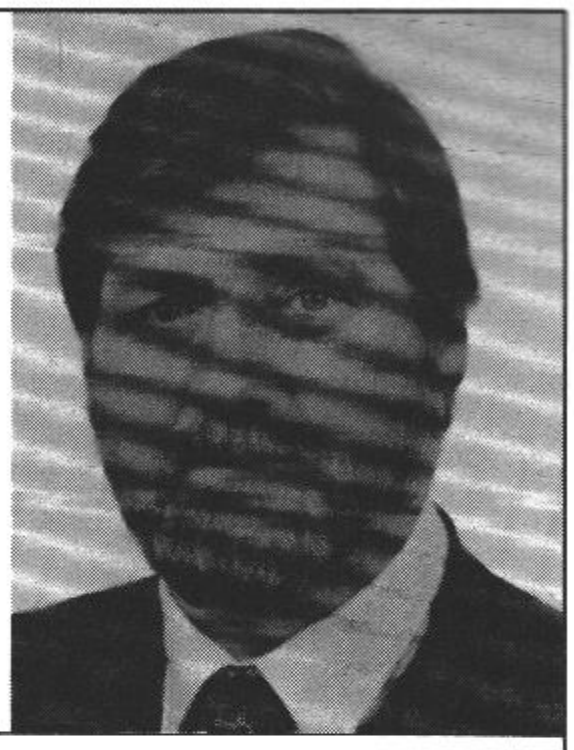
Alistair will find that it was rather accurate in its picture of what was happening to us. Blair's inner cabinet, led by Jonathon Powell, formerly of the Washington Embassy, and Commander-in-Chief of Spook Liaison, has a very clear agenda, and Alistair Ward is not included in its determination. The reformation of the Labour Party is a pressing task, and somebody must be free to speak about it clearly.

Ken Coates MEP



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the Michael Hindley column



Labour's MEP for Lancashire South puts Blair's welfare reforms into a global perspective.

Welfare: what's in a word?

AFTER A quarter of a century in Europe, Britain is more Americanised than ever, and for a view of what will soon happen here it is more instructive to head westwards than to visit Brussels. The Blair government team is the most uncritically pro-US administration ever in this country; from the higher levels of geopolitical consideration — witness Blair's obsequious following of the Clinton line on Iraq — to the admiration of Clinton's ability to present right-wing pro-business politics in the rhetoric of progressive change. Most disastrously for the social fabric of British society, Blair and his apparatchiks will copy Clinton's "welfare reform".

It is clear that Blair uses the term "welfare" in the common American usage, that is pejorative and dismissive of those whose economic straits force them to need financial support from the state. Oscar Wilde remarked that a visit to the USA had proved to him that we have everything in common but language. He had a point, for "welfare" in British politics is something which a civilised society feels morally obliged to provide for all its citizens. It was something unselfishly fought for and eventually won in the wake of the stupendous act of collective effort to survive the war.

It was also based on a feeling of "never again" — that is, no return to the fractured society of the past, hence the idea of "universality" to continue the social solidarity of the war effort by a system of "all paying in and all taking out." Blair, like the New Tory he is, believes that the social democratic welfare state has seen its day, but, unlike socialists who would agree and want to go on to a more redistributive society than ever social democracy offered, Blair wants to go back, like his mentor Thatcher, to a golden age where the sanctimonious cant of self-help was all that the poor were offered.

The times are ripe for him, but also for us. For years the free traders have been banging on about competition from Asia and the recent collapses (more to come, Japanese banks next, then Chinese devaluation) will actually increase rather than diminish that competition. South Korea will retrench its investment abroad — witness the postponement of Hyundai's Scottish plant — and try to recoup their losses by an ever more intensified drive for export led growth, egged on by the IMF. Very quickly we are back in the merry-go round of cutting back on social expenditure in order to compete with the Asian states whose social welfare costs have so far been covered by the private sector employers.

THE ONLY thing that gets in the way of this depressing downward spiral are the poor themselves, and nowadays we have to reckon with that appalling comment on modern civilisation, the "working poor". That is where the American experience is vital for Blair's project, for if only he can get our poor to feel guilty failures like in the USA he is relatively safe.

Fortunately, the poor are, in the best sense of the word, revolting. The left should be much encouraged at the moment by developments in continental Europe where we are beginning to witness growing revolt against the cuts in social expenditure. Belgium is wracked by protest actions against cuts in contractual conditions of welfare. The Belgian Government in a rush of honesty actually announced that the cuts were necessary to meet the Maastricht criteria for EMU. The announcement of yet another post-war high in German unemployment figures saw street protests demanding that the victims learn from France where, as ever, the victims of the new conservatism are taking traditional vocal, public and imaginative action. There have been occupations of government social agencies and symbolic occupations of luxury hotels.

Britain is pivotal in the clear breach with the post war west European consensus in favour of social welfare. The new conservatives want to destroy it in order to make us competitive in a free market economy; those wanting to defend the welfare model in Europe instead of finding an ally in Labour have found a Tory cuckoo in the welfare nest. The shock of this realisation is profound underneath the niceties of the photo opportunities. The string of UK ministers coming before the Committees of the European Parliament as representatives of the British Presidency of the EU are receiving gasps of astonishment as to just how right-wing they are.

However, the opposition is not going to succeed in the debating chambers. The Blairites and their growing acolytes in European social democratic parties, who also want to be in office at all costs, are immune to such pressure for they feel, rightly enough to an important degree, that as long as the media support them they are comfortable. Successful opposition to further welfare cuts will only come about when the parliamentary left allies itself to the extra-parliamentary opposition.

Zapatista Challenge Conference

Saturday and Sunday 7th-8th March
Praxis Centre, Pott Street, London E2
(Bethnal Green tube)
£2.50 waged / £1.50 unwaged

The conference will:

seek to raise awareness about the situation in Chiapas,

organise brigades to attend peace camps in Chiapas,

discuss the struggle against neoliberalism in Britain and worldwide,

exchange experiences in Britain for the newly formed Zapatista Support groups.

TRADE UNION NEWS

Liverpool dockers:

A dragon emerges

Liz Knight, London Support Group for the Liverpool Dockers, reports. After 28 months the Liverpool dockers have been forced to settle. The settlement offers up to £28,000 for each of the older dockers, but the eighty young dockers (whose picket line sparked the dispute) were excluded. The older dockers want to share the money, but the younger ones refuse to take it! Every family is over £20,000 in debt after over two years struggle.

The Labour Government could have ended the dispute by using its 14% shareholding in the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company. But Blair was adamant that the dockers must be defeated and Bill Morris (now on the Board of Governors of the Bank of England) faxed dockers' and labour organisations worldwide to scupper solidarity action.

In October a dockers' secret ballot overwhelmingly rejected a previous offer of £28,000: jobs for the future generation, not money, was the issue. Morris and the TUC had forced the ballot but then refused to honour the result. At this stage, they decisively turned their backs on the dockers.

Solidarity action was instead left to trade unionists on the other side of the world. An international network remains in being to fight docks deregulation and casualisation. Support for Liverpool lives on in a new form, as a global alliance of mutual solidarity. In the USA, Jack Heyman, a leader of the International Longshoremen's Union (ILWU) and Robert Irminger, chair of the Golden Gate Chapter of the Labor Party (USA), are being sued by shipping companies for millions of dollars over the affair of the Neptune Jade (the ship which dockers pursued around the globe in support of Liverpool). They remain unrepentant. In December, Japanese dockers — who sent several delegations to Liverpool — struck for 24 hours against casualisation in their own ports. Other actions continue. The stand of the dockers and Women of the Waterfront has inspired a new wave of struggle.

The dockers have been called old-fashioned, fighting a battle that belongs to the past. It certainly is an old struggle — the oldest of all, for simple justice. It is old, but it is also new. Dave Cotterill, of the Liverpool Support Group, expressed this eloquently at a Liverpool rally on 7th February: "History is not a story with an ending because we are in it...The dockers have played for us the music of the future".

Every Friday at mass meetings, which still continue, the dockers themselves discuss, determine and vote on the form and continuation of their struggle. It was this which gave

Jimmy Nolan

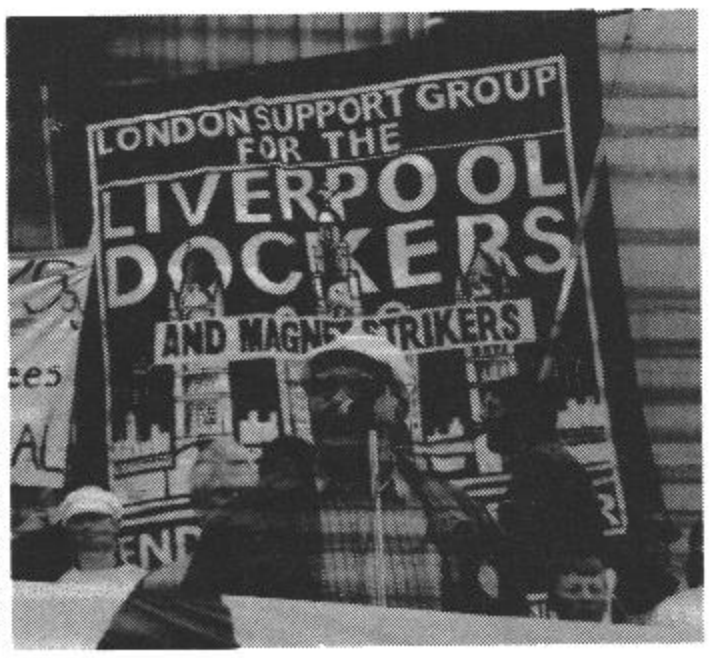


PHOTO: ED HALL

Membership control needed

Steve Battlemuch, CPSA BA Nottingham, reports on how the courts have stopped a union merger that the left in both unions opposed.

The merger of two civil service unions (CPSA and PTC) has been halted by legal action. The left in both unions opposed the terms of the merger but the person co-ordinating the challenge is Alan England, a maverick from the Ministry of Defence section. He has a history of taking both unions to court. He gained notoriety by standing in the PTC NEC elections in the black members' section. He is white!

One of England's arguments is a PTC rule which states that the NEC must implement conference policy. In this case both union conferences opposed the merger on the terms drawn up by the senior officers. Both NECs balloted the members on terms which suited them: reducing conference and NEC elections to every two years, and introducing postal ballots on all major policies and constitutional amendments.

Both unions had voted by clear majorities in October to merge although the turnout was less than 45% in each union. There was then a challenge to the Certification Officer (CO) by one CPSA member and eleven PTC members on various aspects of the ballot. The CO dismissed some challenges and refused to adjudicate on a constitutional issue. The complainants then appealed to the Employment Appeal Tribunal. At a preliminary hearing on the 12th January the EAT ruled that the unions had a case to answer. This case will be heard on 2nd March.

The result of the delay has been to give even more power to the NEC/Senior Officers. There is now talk of possible delays to NEC and Section elections and possibly of conference being postponed. At local level members are left bemused after being told the merger was going ahead and then being stopped at the last minute. The issue raises important questions about the role of the legal system inside the trade union movement because if the merger is ruled null and void then others (including some on the left) will take heart and see the courts as a solution to continuing battles with the bureaucracy.

The real issue is building a rank and file movement in the unions to ensure that when the leaders call ballots the left can win them. As for this merger however much we would like to see the plans of Reamsbottom and Sheldon scrapped, we have to see the members' ballot vote in favour of the merger as being more important than any EAT decision. The members not the courts should control the union!

LLB page 16

the music of the future



PHOTO: DAVE SINCLAIR

Dockers meet after the end of the dispute.

them the confidence to take on the world. They started and ended together, fully understanding what they had and had not achieved. One end marks another beginning. The old union structures, where they were rotten and corrupt, have been shed by the dockers like snake-skin. A dragon has emerged. This new force has reached out not only to other dockers and trade unionists, but to the young everywhere, to eco-warriors, to Reclaim The Streets, to refugees fighting deportation, to nurses defending their hospitals, to pensioners, the disabled, students, single parents and many others across the world. The sacked Hillingdon workers have been receiving £500 a week from the dockers' meagre funds. Liverpool dockers, during their dispute, braved police terror inside Turkey, initiating a campaign for human rights which still continues.

All this is a long way from the vision of Tony Blair and Bill Morris, and there is no going back. The dockers' tradition was always democratic, internationalist, and their own. But two years of the most tremendous fightback have lifted it to another plane. The whole social, economic and political landscape has been changed through their vision, even though many on the left may still not realise what has happened. "Who is it speaks of defeat? I tell you a cause like ours is greater than defeat can know. It is the power of powers". In this way, Jimmy Nolan, Chair of the Liverpool Port Shop Stewards Committee, ends his letter of thanks to supporters throughout the world. So for all of us, a new chapter begins. To hear the music, we need only listen.

- Donations are still urgently needed. Send to the dockers c/o Father Michael De Felice, Saint Joan of Arc, Peel Road, Bootle L20 4RW. Cheques payable to "Family Hardship Fund".
- National meeting and rally, 1pm, Saturday 28th February, Conway Hall.

LLB's tribute to the dockers

"After 28 months of struggle, *LLB* salutes the 500 Liverpool dockers, Women of the Waterfront, your children and families. Unlike our 'leaders', you gave us leadership. Unlike the so-called 'Labour Government', you acted for our class. With solidarity from dockers in five continents, you built your own magnificent International. Disregarding your own hardship, you helped sustain the Hillingdon hospital strikers. You defended human rights in Turkey, stood on the Magnet picket-line, campaigned with the homeless, helped reclaim the streets. You began to unite our struggles. We need you to keep doing that. You, the Liverpool dockers, are the one leadership which has stood the test. You would not cross a picket line. Keep that banner flying."

LLB dockers' raffle

"Throughout our struggle we have been privileged to be associated with so many people, who have proved beyond any doubt that a greater objective for all human beings is possible. We have experienced a unique solidarity and generosity that has sustained us all for almost two and a half years.

The initiative undertaken by our comrades at *LLB* succeeded in contributing in excess of £8,000 to the Liverpool dockers' Families Hardship Fund. We have to identify the individual generosity of Peter Frankental, whose kindness ensured the success of the Dockers' World Cup Raffle. We also understand that through this process thousands of people were made aware of our struggle together with the broader issues that affect all in the human struggle for justice.

Please express our deepest gratitude to *LLB* and all those comrades who joined the dockers' struggle for human rights in the workplace and society at large."
— Jimmy Davies, Merseyside Port Shop Stewards Committee.

Raffle: winners

Thanks to all who sold and bought tickets. Congratulations to all the winners:
1st prize: No 11239 — 2 tickets to the World Cup Final: G. Hellen, South London.
2nd prize : No 8550 — Progressive Tours trip to Cuba: D. Neall, North London.
3rd prize: No 6661 — New Forest holiday cottage stay: U. Pearce, West Midlands.
4th prize: No 19630 — Vinceremos wines case of rum: J. Doyle, Herts.
5th prize: No 33810 — Signed copy of *Fighting back* by Tony Benn: G. Beagley, South London.

boxes should be 'parted' with text. Raffle down column 3 instead?

Britain — UN law breaker

John Hendy QC examines Britain's repressive anti-union laws and reports on new initiatives to campaign for changes.

NATIONS are subject to international law. Indeed, Mr Cook is prepared to bomb Iraq into compliance with UN resolutions. Moreover, he has made clear that the Government's trade with, and aid to, foreign countries should be dependent on their respect for international human rights law.

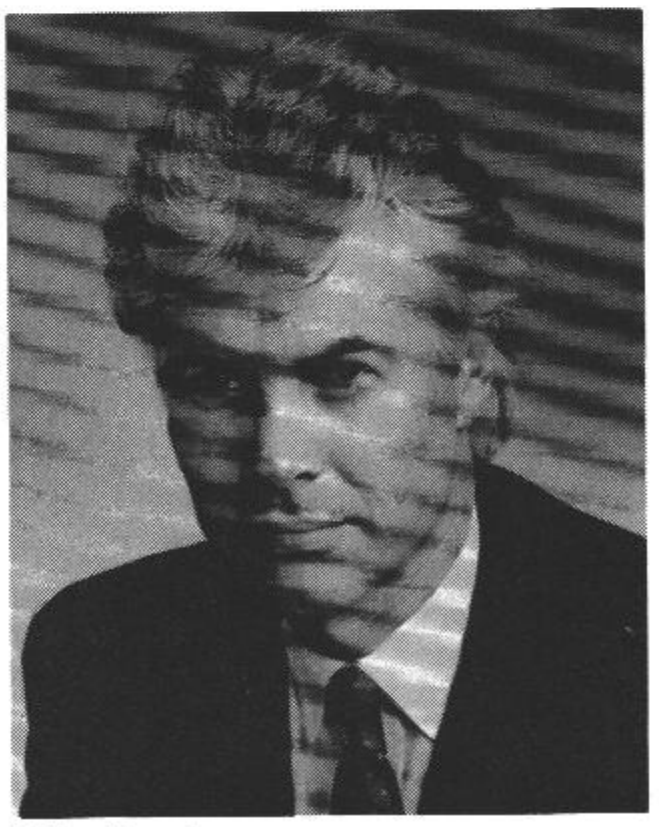
This Government's respect for international law does not however, apply at home. The right to freedom of association is a basic, fundamental, human right recognised in every international human rights instrument. It is breached by Britain's anti-trade union laws.

In February, the Home Secretary announced that the 1994 ban on prison officers' right to take industrial action would not be repealed; Merseyside dockers were sacked for crossing a picket line and the TGWU was not allowed in law the right to support them fully. Before the election, Tony Blair wrote: "The changes that we do propose would leave British law the most restrictive on trade unions in the western world" — one election promise that New Labour has fulfilled.

In December, a UN Committee published its review of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), which is binding on the UK. Article 8 of the Covenant protects freedom of association and the Committee held that Britain was breaching the Article by its failure to incorporate the right to strike into domestic law. British common law only recognises the freedom to strike; strike action is considered a fundamental breach of contract justifying dismissal. The Committee held this is not consistent with protection of the right to strike, and the proposal that employees who go on strike can appeal against unfair dismissal at a tribunal is not a satisfactory remedy. They should not ipso facto be regarded as having committed a breach of employment contract.

Last June, the Governing Body of the International Labour Organisation (an arm of the UN) ratified its Committee of Experts who had condemned (not for the first time) UK strike law as being in breach of ILO Convention 87, which is binding on the UK. The Council of Europe — the UK was a founder member — has a Social Charter (1961) that also includes the right to freedom of association. Article 6(4) — ratified by the UK Government — gives workers and employers the right to take collective action in cases of conflict of interest, and this includes the right to strike.

It is therefore not surprising that Britain's anti-strike laws (and other anti-union laws) have been condemned on several occasions by the Council of Europe at its highest levels: the Committee of Independent Experts, the Governmental Committee, and most notably in January 1997, when the Council of Ministers (which includes the UK) made a recommendation (the ultimate diplomatic sanction) that the UK's laws be brought into line with the Charter in relation to strikes and other matters.



John Hendy

The Conservative Government did not conceal their contempt for international law and workers' rights. GMB members at Magnet, CWU members at Critchley Labels, TGWU members at Mersey Docks and UNISON members at Hillingdon Hospital have all lost their jobs because of this Government's continued refusal to implement its international legal obligations. The trade union movement, the Labour Party's main funder, is entitled to demand respect for international laws and repeal of the anti-union laws.

Not surprisingly, trade unions are supporting a national conference called to "Reclaim our Rights — Repeal the Anti-Trade Union Laws", to be held in London on 28th March. A successful repeal will mean the removal of laws that many British lawyers (even fat-cats) now feel embarrassed to earn a living from as these laws are themselves breaches of international law.

National Conference

Reclaim our Rights

Repeal the Anti-Trade Union Laws

Saturday 28 March - 11am to 4pm
at Central Hall, Westminster, London

Speakers: **Tony Benn** MP, **Christine Blower** (Pres NUT), **Bob Crow** (Asst Gen Sec RMT), **Bill Etherington** MP, **John Foster** (Gen Sec NUJ), **John Hendy** QC, **Michael Hindley** MEP, **Carolyn Jones** (*International Union Rights* journal), **Joe Marino** (Gen Sec BFAWU), **Jimmy Nolan** (Merseyside Port SSC), **Arthur Scargill** (Pres NUM), **Shirley Winter** (Magnet Support Committee), *– plus other national and international speakers*

Please send delegate fee made payable to "Reclaim our Rights" with completed slip to: Reclaim our Rights, PO Box 17556, London EC2Y 8PA

Conference delegate fees: £5 waged/£1 unwaged

Delegate's name: _____ Union/Organisation (if any): _____

Address: _____

_____ Tel no: _____

I enclose a cheque/PO for £ _____ *Signed:* _____

If you want to use the crèche please phone 0171-638-7521 to book place(s) by 7th March at latest.

print for small to read

UNISON officials prepare for civil war?

Jon Rogers, branch secretary, Lambeth UNISON, reports on the attacks on left-wingers in UNISON.

SF should be in text in C2+3.

A GATHERING witch hunt against left wing activists in UNISON is shaping up to be a destructive civil war which will undermine attempts to reverse falling membership and divert energies which could be used to fight for decent public sector pay and the restoration of public spending.

As well as the long running disciplinaries of shop stewards in Liverpool, disciplinary action is now being taken against activists in Leeds — where full-time officials seized branch computer equipment — and in Birmingham, where one shop steward faces discipline for campaigning against privatisation (in line with UNISON policy!).

In Sheffield the branch leadership are under investigation largely because they are in the Socialist Workers Party, and in the West Midlands, full-time officers have been caught vetting the politics of branches who supported last October's lobby of Labour Party Conference — contrary to UNISON rules which specify that the union is lay member led. In Nottingham, the witch hunt has taken a bizarre turn, with local activists facing police raids and fanciful allegations that they fabricated a racist group in order to justify anti-racist campaigning!

In London, there are now investigations under way against shop stewards in Lewisham and Newham. In both cases there is a clear agenda to punish activists from formerly militant branches now in the grip of the right wing, and to use the chaotic financial management of many former NALGO branches to justify allegations of financial impropriety.

The agenda of the "loony right" in UNISON which is backing this suicidal McCarthyism is made clear in an anonymous diatribe circulating within the union, which is widely considered to be written by an NEC member who is barely literate — phoney allegations that the left is "siphoning off" UNISON members' money for its pet causes are to be used to try to increase central control of resources in the union which still devolves more of its money to branches than most other major unions.

This attempt to centralise power in the hands of a small clique who have already bankrupted one union so that they can do it to another fits nicely with Blair's appeal at last year's TUC to the unions to "modernise". This is reflected in Rodney Bickerstaffe's new year message to branches which explains that UNISON will be able to influence the Labour Government if it isolates the far left (dream on Rodney, Jack Straw kept you waiting weeks to discuss the fate of Abdul Onibiyo — and then refused to exercise his discretion in spite of your pleas!).

The most disturbing recent development is the threat of discipline against Bromley UNISON Branch Secretary, Socialist Party member Glenn Kelly, who is also National Secretary of the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic UNISON (CFDU). This threat comes not from UNISON officials, still wary of a too blatant an attack on a left led London branch, but from Tory Bromley Council, who have clearly received information circulating at UNISON HQ to enable them to issue threats against Glenn.

The London and Northern Regional Councils of UNISON have both agreed to convene a meeting of branches before Conference in June to organise opposition to the attacks on UNISON democracy, and a wide range of activists, stretching far beyond the "usual suspects" of the CFDU and SWP, are mobilising to stop the officer clique from carrying through its project.

Hillingdon strikers scent settlement?

Jon Rogers writes: The Employment Appeal Tribunal has overturned an industrial tribunal decision to throw out the claims for unfair dismissal by 27 hospital workers sacked at Hillingdon hospital by contractors Pall Mall Services Group. Granada, who inherited the contract from Pall Mall, have offered to meet local MP John McDonnell to discuss the striker's claim for reinstatement.

UNISON's successful appeal was launched after the original decision by the London North Industrial Tribunal in February 1997, with the hearing taking place in December.

The argument put forward on behalf of the 27 members was that Pall Mall had already decided to cut wages and reduce terms and conditions, but merely deferred the cuts for about a year to avoid being caught by the Transfer of Undertakings Regulations.

The workers were dismissed after refusing to agree to the cuts in their wages. In upholding the appeals, the EAT set aside the findings of the original tribunal. The cases have now been sent to a fresh industrial tribunal, which will have to decide whether or not the dismissals were unfair. The appeals tribunal agreed that the London North tribunal had not approached the case correctly, nor had sufficient evidence to support its conclusion. But it does not automatically follow that the new tribunal will accept that the dismissals were unfair, nor that the 27 members will necessarily receive compensation or their jobs back and any legal remedy will be decided by the new tribunal if it agrees with their claim for unfair dismissal.

UNISON General Secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe has welcomed the ruling, whose significance is "to send out a signal that no contractor can ride roughshod over the low paid workers with impunity." Supporters of the Hillingdon strikers will, of course, remember that UNISON's NEC itself did a bit of fairly roughshod riding when it withdrew official backing from the strike at Hillingdon hospital without a ballot of the strikers in January of last year.

UNISON has added insult to that injury by refusing to allow the strikers to retain full membership rights following two years of unemployed membership, and by accepting an initiative to transfer the strikers non-voting membership into a "holding" branch.



PHOTO: STEVE FRENCH

Jon Rogers and Hillingdon strike leader Malkiat Bilku.

Union leaders on go-slow

John McIlroy, Withington CLP and author of *Trade Unions in Britain Today*, gives his seasonal round up of the state of play in the unions.

Very boring standard!

IN JANUARY TUC General Secretary John Monks surmised "1998 promises to herald a restoration of worker power in the UK". So far Mystic Meg isn't losing any sleep. The phasing-in of pay review awards for 1.3 million public sector workers saw New Labour doing exactly what the Tories would have done. This particular restoration of worker power means that with inflation increasing at an annual rate of 3.6% and a 2% increase in wages until December, nurses and teachers are facing a wage cut in 1998.

New Labour's caution over the minimum wage also continues. The Bill published in November provides for a single national rate. The figure has still to be decided upon. The armed forces will be excluded and there remains the possibility of a lower rate for those under 21 or 26 and it is here that low pay is concentrated. Employers are still lobbying for exclusion of the two million workers under 26 and the CBI's evidence to the Low Pay Commission suggests a bread-line level of £3.20 an hour. The preference of Blair's advisers is said to be £3.50 while the TUC has finally come down for £4. The IMF have put in a plea for third world wages saying if the level is "as high as £4 an hour, thousands of jobs will be lost". There is growing support for the rate to be set initially at a low level with increases phased gradually. The bets are on £3.60 an hour.

As Blair boasted about retaining the bulk of the most iniquitous labour laws in the western world, action over recognition was seen as the bare minimum unions had to have in return for sustaining political loyalty and funding. Here, too, 1998 has seen prevarication and vacillation. In what was either fudge or incompetence, modernised well-advised union leaders claimed the manifesto gave them all they wanted on recognition ("where a majority of the relevant workforce vote in a ballot for the union to represent them, the union should be recognised").

Blair, insisting it should not impede flexibility and should constitute an exercise in social partnership, has urged the CBI and TUC to agree between themselves on what should go into the legislation. Not surprisingly, the potential wrongdoers have sought to limit the scope of legislation which could be used against them. While opposing legislation, the CBI kindly suggested that Labour's manifesto meant that recognition would require the support of a majority of the workforce (not a majority of those voting in a ballot on representation). So a 60% vote for recognition on an 80% turnout would mean no recognition as only 48% of those eligible would have voted for it. The CBI has also demanded that:

- recognition should require a minimum 30% turnout in the ballot
- employers can pick who's to be balloted
- votes on derecognition happen every five years
- recognition strikes be banned

What was promised as a non-negotiable union right is now the subject of trade offs.

Despite slow progress, union leaders have talked up the prospects and maintained their pre-election restraint. Monks has even derided ungrateful colleagues: "Many union leaders still don't seem to realise just how much this Government is promising". Writing in the *Guardian* — in uncritical appreciation of Bill Morris' support for the Liverpool dockers — Monks urges us to accept the anti-union laws on industrial action. He urges trade unionists to take on bad employers. How about starting with the Mersey Docks and Harbour company?

Morris says that sympathy action was not forthcoming for the Liverpool dockers. He has a point. But there was some solidarity action. Yet when a UNISON branch voted to take strike action to attend a dockers' picket their action was immediately repudiated by the UNISON leadership — just as action by TGWU members would have been repudiated by Morris! Even if we accept this is necessary to protect union funds, the same branch has successfully defied injunctions in other cases.

The question remains: just what is being done to remove this restriction and threat to union funds? John and Bill would have a good wicket to bat on. The restrictions on sympathy action maintained by the Blair Government have been condemned by the ILO as a breach of their convention to which Britain adheres. Last year, TUC Conference called on the Government to honour ILO conventions. A Labour administration sustains the violation of the basic right to support fellow workers — surely the stuff crusades are made of?

With the public sector pay cuts there was, in contrast, strong condemnation from leaders of UNISON and teaching unions. But not a dicky bird when it came to organising protest action. On welfare cuts, the TUC congratulated union leaders for not getting involved! Across the unions the trend is to focus on a few issues and amplify what has been achieved: adhesion to the EU Social

Bill Morris' trade unionism: get broad left backing, sellout the dockers, join the board of the Bank of England.

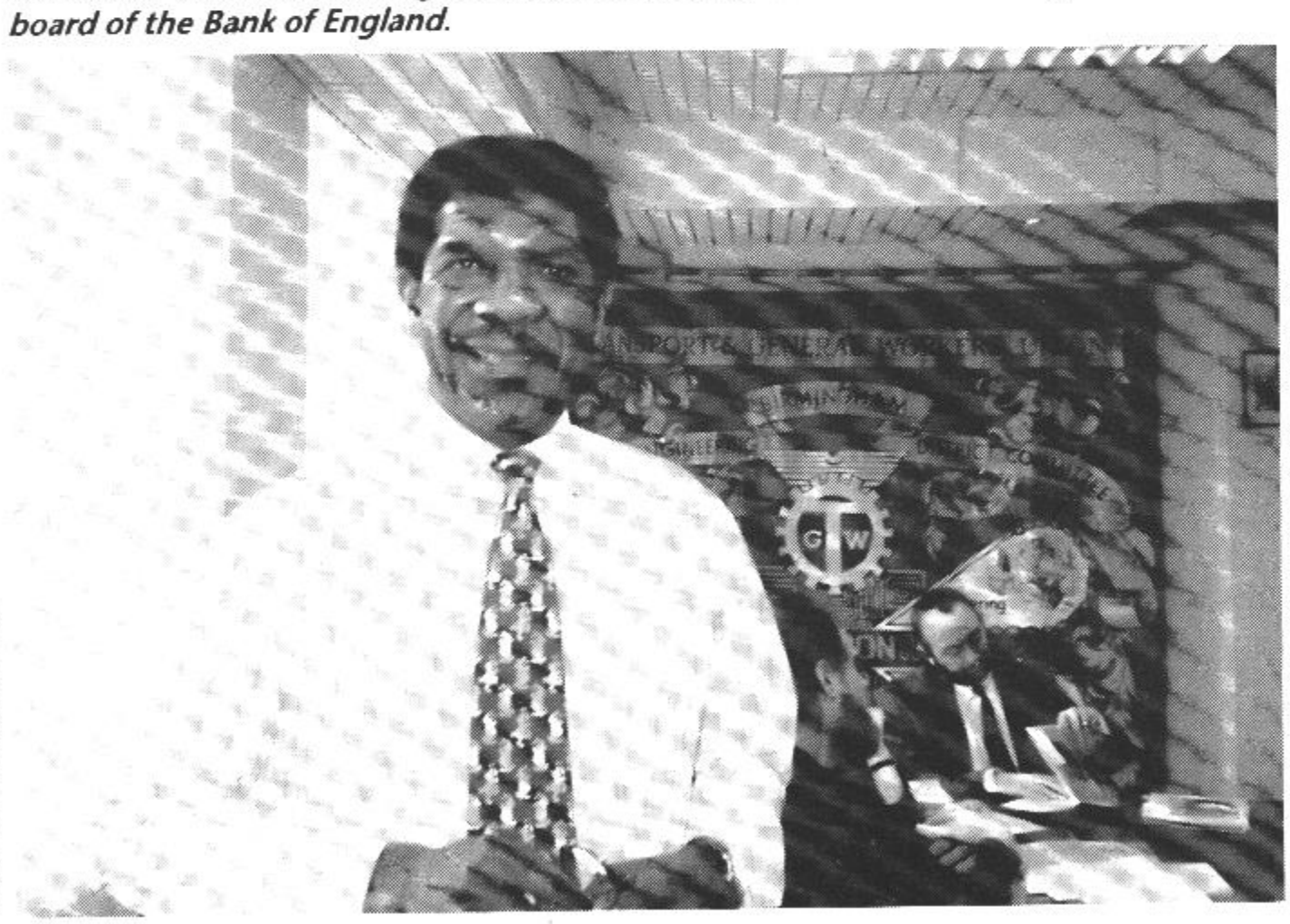


PHOTO: STEVE FRENCH

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Chapter, GCHQ, union leaders invited to Downing Street, meetings with Margaret Beckett, good relations with Ian McCartney, Morris elevated to the Board of the Bank of England. Then urge patience, "don't take on Tony when he's got a 110 per cent approval rating in the polls. We'll get what we want by playing ball".

Of course some pressure has been applied. The TUC has systematically and successfully lobbied MPs over recognition. But it has been limited. Weakness breeds conservatism. Union politics have been reorganised around partnership with employers, and idealisation of the EU social market and social dialogue popularised by Will Hutton. Blair too toyed with the social market given cohesion by a developmental state, strong, responsible unions, greater equality, and a modernised financial system as an answer to Britain's regeneration in the global economy. However Blair retreated into the current crude credo that there is only one possible response to globalisation: modified Thatcherism, neo-liberalism with soundbites.

Blair has put blue water between New Labour and the TUC since 1995. His embrace of low wages, low welfare, and flexibility has repositioned Labour as the national party of capital. This envisages weak unions operating at best as extensions of management. The bathos of the strategies of union leaders lies in their inability to grasp the reality of Blair's conversion to Thatcherism with a human face.

They stubbornly believe that they can bring him round to their way of thinking. And they doggedly insist that the way to do this is by responsibility and loyalty to a man who has little understanding of trade unionism and sees its resurgence as a barrier to economic and political success.

Blair abases himself before the rich and powerful. For the union leaders he is the rich and powerful. The Blairisation of the unions is facilitated by the absence of strong workplace organisations able to launch autonomous action and the weakness of the left. In the TGWU, supporters of the broad left have sustained the march of Blairism on Labour's NEC. Elsewhere, the left has been able to act as some constraint on accommodation but has been unable to influence decisively the agenda and, as in UNISON, is under some threat.

Our energies have to go into building the left in both the Party and the unions by winning the arguments. If the honeymoon is over for us it is not over for many trade unionists. We must support the long running disputes at Critchleys, Magnet and Noon Products which are hopefully the first signs of struggles to come.

the Geoff Martin column

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



● As I write this the contents of the Government's White Paper on employment rights are still shrouded in the mists of speculation.

On the key question of recognition it looks like Blair is trying to come up with a formula that will buy off the CBI and keep the TUC banged up in their Congress House bunker. Despite all the fighting talk from Monksy and, god help us, John Lyons, my hunch is that the TUC will try and dress up any slight shift away from the CBI's ludicrous demands as a victory.

None of this should detract from how pitiful the TUC's demands were in the first place. As Blair himself has said, even if we do get the right to ballot on recognition in the workplace we will still have the most restrictive anti-union laws in the whole of Western Europe. That's the key issue.

Everything is so heavily loaded against the unions, right from the acrobatics you've got to perform in order to hold a legal strike through to the absence of any meaningful employment protection until you've been in post for two years, that the unions virtually have to put their hands up for permission to go to the toilet. Unfortunately, some of our leaders don't seem too bothered.

When nurses and midwives end up being shafted by the New Labour Government through the Old Tory con trick of a "phased" pay award it should be clear to anybody that the softly-softly approach of cuddling up to this bunch of sub-Thatcherite war mongers is hopeless.

If you lie down with dogs you end up with fleas. Sorry, I withdraw that. It's seriously unfair to dogs. Anyway, I look forward to the day when the TUC once again has more influence with the Labour Government than the Kennel Club.

● Isn't that marvellous that the dear old Queen Mum, gawd bless her, is out of hospital at last.

Three weeks in hospital to recover from her hip op. Funny that the hospital didn't describe her as a "bed blocker" which is the term that NHS chiefs use for 97 year olds who need more than a week on the wards to get over major surgery. No such problems for the Royal Family because you and me pay for them to go private.

Apparently, according to the main item in one news report, the Queen Mother is in excellent health for a 97 year old — hardly surprising as she's never had to do a days work in those 97 years and has a team of flunkies hovering around to attend to her every need. No threat to her from cuts in the local social services budget.

Another programme last night revealed that the average life expectancy of a rough sleeper in London is 42 years.

● I've just had my season ticket renewal form through from Chelsea which is asking me to cough up another 70 quid a year.

I'm pissed off but what do you do? Football Clubs have got you by the throat. I know that *LLB* readers who don't like football and who see it all as part of a capitalist conspiracy to hold down the working class masses will have little sympathy. Fair enough, but that's little comfort to those of us who've got it in our blood.

Personally I blame the *Guardian* and the rest of the chattering classes for all of this. Before the middle classes latched on to the game and started demanding all these poncy new facilities, covered seating and the rest of it, anyone could afford to go to football.

I remember as a boy getting the bus for a shilling from North Cheam to Putney Bridge, walking to the ground and getting in for three bob and still having enough change from half a crown for chips on the way home. Then it would be back for a cup of cocoa and maybe a little Dixon of Dock Green on the black and white telly and...[Editor: thanks Geoff, that'll do for this month].

LEADING WITH THE LEFT

Brown fiddles while "tigers" burn

Brian Burkitt, Pudsey CLP and University of Bradford, presents an alternative to Gordon Brown's neo-Thatcherite economic agenda.

THE BRITISH economy faces two immediate problems, one international and the other domestic, both of which threaten Gordon Brown's objective of creating a stable economic environment. First, the widespread devaluations in Asia will put the UK balance of payments under pressure and, second, the increase in interest rates since the General Election will reduce investment, cripple industry and generate a higher, non-competitive exchange rate. Consequently all recent economic forecasts predict that growth will fall sharply in 1998 and 1999, possibly precipitating a recession and certainly lying below the 2.5% level at which unemployment will again begin to increase. These problems can only be resolved by a radical socialist strategy.

The meltdown of the so-called "Asian tiger" economies could affect Britain through financial contagion, whereby the loss of confidence in the currency markets of Asia spreads to those in the developed world. However, the most certain and damaging impact will be the spillover effects upon world trade and UK economic growth. This impact has yet to be felt; thousands of Asian companies will go bust and millions of Asians will lose their jobs. The collapse of incomes and currency values in Asia will cause British exports to decline in their fastest growing markets of recent years, while cut-throat competition from devalued Asian exports will hit world markets.

The key to the Asian effect is Japan, since its economy produces twice as much wealth (£2.8 trillion per annum) as the rest of Asia put together. The Japanese economy is currently in its sixth year of stagnation, but since 1995 the Japanese yen has been devalued by 50%. As a result, Britain will shortly be flooded with more Japanese goods, while our manufacturers will find increasing difficulties in selling abroad. Consequently the British balance of payments will deteriorate dramatically over the next year.

The Asian economies are squeezed between Japan's stagnation and the competition of China. China has devalued its currency by around 70% since 1993, forcing down other Pacific currencies. Thus Malaysia has devalued by 12%, the Philippines by 16%, Indonesia by 22% and Thailand by 31%. In the face of such intensified competition, the IMF has warned that the $23 billion trade surplus which western industrial economies enjoyed with East Asia in 1997 will turn into a $29 billion deficit in 1998. Britain, with an overvalued pound, is particularly defenceless in the face of cheaper Asian exports, unless the Bank of England cuts interest rates. Otherwise the spectre of deflation will haunt and hurt the UK economy in coming years.

As an election-winning ploy, the New Labour leadership pledged not to increase taxes, but failed to point out that keeping taxes down meant interest rates would be increased. So instead of implementing an economically coherent and socially just policy of tax increases upon the better-off, Labour has presided over interest rate rises that stifle investment.

The current relatively modest consumption "boom" cannot be sustained because the UK's investment lags far behind its competitors. Indeed investment actually fell between the third quarters of 1996 and 1997 (the latest figures available), while manufacturing investment dropped by 4.4% in the third quarter of 1997. The Bank of England's high interest rate policy deters investment, while lower investment reduces the long term rate of growth. In a negative double-whammy, interest rate increases push up the exchange rate of sterling, thus pricing UK exports out of world markets and sucking imports into Britain.

It was remarkable to see a Labour government, elected with a huge majority, within days relinquish power over monetary policy to an unelected quango, the Bank of England. At every stage over the last century, the Bank has pushed for high interest rates and a high exchange rate for the pound, a major factor in Britain's decline from being the workshop of the world to an economy dependent on the service sector.

Despite the widespread assumption that independent central banks generate low inflation, academic research suggests that no causal relationship can be established. However, it does show that since 1962 economies with independent central banks suffered deeper recessions on average than those without. Independence makes it hard to achieve co-ordination between fiscal and monetary policy, in addition to the risks to economic growth and the danger of an overvalued pound. People will lose their jobs unnecessarily, because Gordon Brown is abdicating responsibility for controlling inflation to the Bank of England. Given their deflationary bias, it is imperative that effective democratic accountability be imposed upon central bankers.

On their current strategy the Labour Government and the Bank of England risk turning economic slowdown into recession. The public sector borrowing requirement will rise once unemployment begins to increase, creating pressure for cuts in welfare expenditure that would reduce Labour's electoral support and deeply divide the Party. An alternative socialist policy is urgently required: its essence is to cut interest rates, while raising taxation on high incomes, dividends and profits. The resulting boost to government finances would enable an increase in welfare provision to the poorest, while meeting manifesto pledges on class sizes and NHS waiting lists. Interest rate cuts, balanced by tax rises for the wealthy, would stimulate economic growth, but more importantly, meet the labour movement's basic objectives of creating full employment, eliminating poverty and reducing inequality.

If the Labour Government could repeat the achievement of Lloyd George's 1909 "Peoples

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FOOD AND BAR
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Budget", in raising the revenue needed for its economic and social policies by taxing the rich without increasing the fiscal burden on most voters, it could enjoy as long a period of rule as the Edwardian Liberals.

A socialist programme to achieve this objective entails:

(i) allowing the external value of sterling to fall to the level required to generate jobs in export and import-substitution industries. The pound's exchange rate needs to fall to the level that secures full employment, while simultaneously achieving a balance of payments equilibrium;

(ii) reducing the level of military expenditure to that of European Union competitors. Over five years £8 billion would be saved if Britain spent the same proportion of its national income on defence as Italy, while £13.3 billion will accrue if Germany's pattern of military expenditure was followed;

(iii) developing a programme to raise tax revenue for spending on social services and industrial infrastructure by

- abolishing the present ceiling on national insurance contributions for those earning over £40,000 (this would raise £4.5 billion per year)
- increasing the rate of income tax on those earning over £40,000 to the European Union average of 55% (yielding £6 million each year)
- raising the level of corporation tax from 31% to the European Union average of 48% (generating £4.5 billion per annum)
- imposing VAT at its maximum 17.5% on private education and health expenditure (over £900 million a year)
- levying a 0.5% tax on the 90% of foreign exchange transactions unrelated to trade.

As some £190 billion daily is currently traded on the London forex market, such a tax would raise considerable sums. If speculators sought to avoid the tax by moving to offshore havens, their tactics could be prevented by exempting all currency transactions not undertaken through a registered exchange from legal status. Consequently unregistered offshore debts would not be backed by the force of law.

If New Labour continues upon its current course, it will retard the economy's progress, move still further from full employment and freeze the pattern of ever greater inequality bequeathed by Tory administrations. There is, however, an alternative socialist strategy available that would increase economic growth, create jobs and meet at least some of the requirements of social justice that the labour movement was created to achieve. The choice lies with the Labour Government, but all who cherish the movement's traditions must use all the avenues open to them to influence that choice in a socialist direction.



Guatemalan women tour Britain

Two Guatemalan women union activists were in Britain last month to talk about their experiences of organising in "maquila" factories. Angela Hadjipateras (Central America Women's Network) reports.

"Maquila" factories are predominantly foreign-owned and invest in the country because of the cheap labour available and lavish tax breaks. Working conditions for the majority female workforce are appalling and anti-union tactics are commonly employed.

Ana Maria Lopez (a labour lawyer attached to the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation) pointed out that while, on paper, Guatemalan labour law is not as bad as many other countries, in practice it is not enforced by employers or the Government. Also, illiteracy stands at about 60% and very few workers are aware of their rights. Those who are and try to defend them risk unfair dismissal as experienced first hand by Maria Gonzales, one of the two visitors.

In the face of these constraints, new organising strategies have been developed including canvassing workers outside the workplace and working closely with sister unions and solidarity groups based in the factory owner's home country to exert pressure at the consumer level. This strategy recently proved successful in the case of the Camisas Modernas factory owned by the US company Phillips Van Heusen. On 14th August 1997, following a six year struggle, management signed the first ever collective bargaining agreement in Guatemala's "maquila" sector. This victory was the fruit of a co-ordinated campaign of action at the shop floor level backed up by public protests simultaneously held in five major US cities.

Addressing a meeting at UNISON's Women's Conference in Bournemouth, the women spoke of the role of international worker solidarity and stressed the need for unions to change and become more responsive to women's demands. "There is also a need to enhance greater understanding and co-operation between women union activists and members of the women's movement", said Lopez. "A key lesson for me has been that real improvements in the lives of women workers will only come about if women's groups and unions work together to pressure for change."

The tour was organised by the Central America Women's Network, an informal grouping of women set up to promote links between women in Britain and Central America.

- For more information, contact Jane Turner at CAWN, 0171-833 4075 or cawn@gn.apc.org

New Deal for old money

John Perry, a member of the National TGWU/ACTS trade group committee who works in the voluntary sector in Lambeth, examines the reality of Labour's "New Deal".

LAMBETH is the first London borough to implement the New Deal for 18 to 24 year olds. New Deal is at the cornerstone of New Labour's reform of social security and the only manifesto pledge that made any spending commitment. Surplus from the windfall tax will fund the extension of the scheme to the over 24s and other New Deals are promised for disabled people and lone parents.

On 5th January, Employment Minister Andrew Smith MP launched the scheme at the Employment Service's flagship job centre on Brixton Hill in South London. This job centre has corporate colours, interactive information screens and security guards who say "How may I help you?" on entrance.

Lambeth's young unemployed are currently going through the "Gateway" process of initial skills assessment. From the end of February, the majority of trainees will be assisted to choose a work or training "option" for the following six months.

These options are: Employment, Full Time Education, Environmental or Voluntary Sector. In getting tough on benefit scroungers the Government made it clear that "there is no fifth option" and claimants who refuse to be placed into one of the options will have their benefits cut off. However after pressure from the advocates of free enterprise, the Government will allow Option 4a — self employment, which will come on stream in the summer.

The Employment Service is not directly delivering the service of training and placement of the unemployed is subcontracted. Consortiums, partnerships and single tender bids will compete for part or all of the options. Successful tenderers would be paid on the numbers of young unemployed who were processed. Payment would be made on a pro rata basis, depending whether they turned up, completed certain time limits etc. An extra 10% would be given if that trainee actually got a job.

Special encouragement was given to small voluntary sector and community projects to apply — thus the deal was that needs of the local community would be catered for by local unemployed people. Many small organisations invested in preparing for tenders to enable a local voice to be heard.

Just before Christmas it was announced that the Gateway process had been contracted to five providers: Equinox Consulting, Hamnet, Mari Consulting, Training and Business Group and Centrepoint. All bar Centrepoint are commercial companies with track records of Employment Service contracts, most in "Project Work".

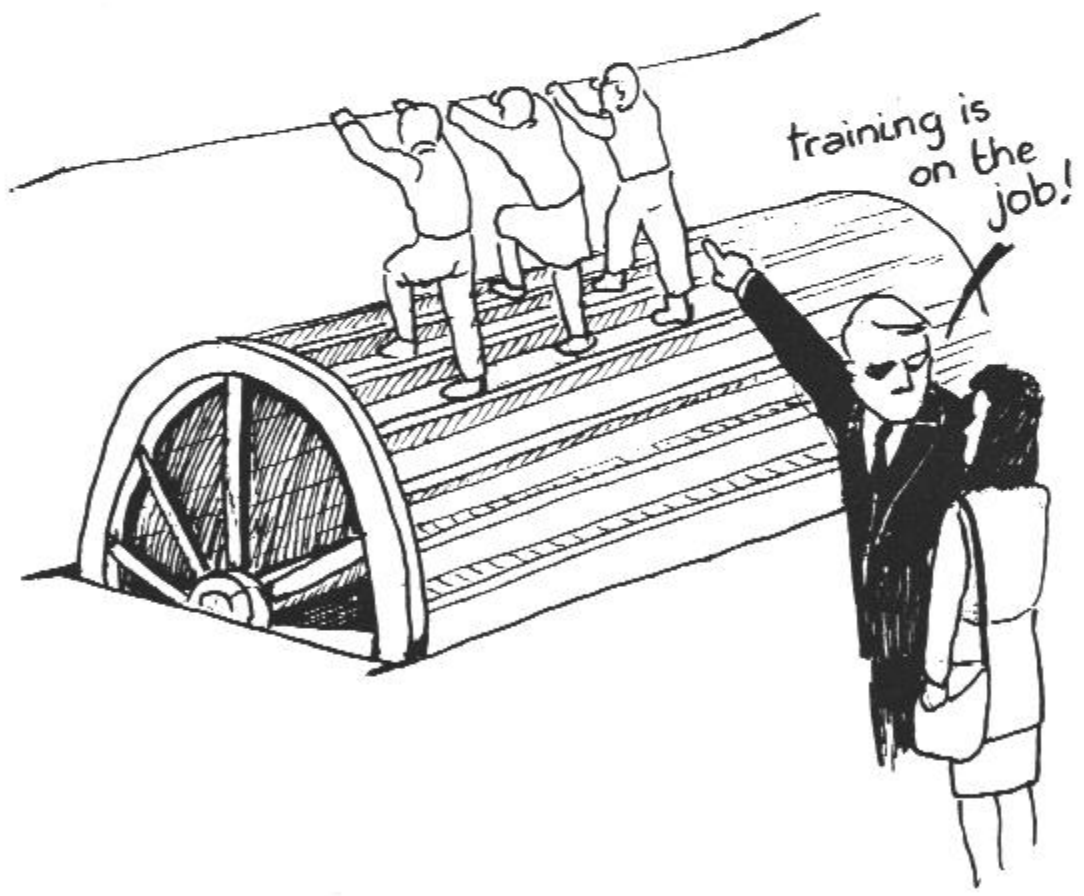
The only other non-commercial agencies to be given contracts were Lambeth College, Prince's Trust Volunteers and British Conservation Trust. The directors of both Centrepoint and The Prince's Trust were members of the national New Deal task force set up by the Government to set the criteria for the New Deal.

The rhetoric of community involvement was certainly not turned into reality. In Lambeth the Voluntary Sector Option is now managed by the Enfield based profit making organisation, Hamnet, who have little if any understanding of the local community. There is of course nothing new in public contracts going to the private sector. Employment Service bureaucrats will naturally tend towards those they have built relationships with — after all it is the technical delivery that they are interested in. What is surprising is the obvious lack of political will of New Labour officials in ensuring that the New Deal built local inclusive partnerships — this reflects the Government's fascination for private business.

Private sector organisations unhindered by community accountability and motivated by payment on placements places the issue of standards and good practice on the backburner. This should be of great concern to trade unions who face threats of displacement. Because the criteria is left up to the contractors, employers are being allowed to set the conditions in which New Deal participants work. It is up to trade unions themselves to demand that trainees receive minimum standards of employment, trade union membership and representation.

New Deal is a trade union issue and it is ironic that the first organising moves are being made by CPSA representing workers in the Employment Service whose management has announced that as an employer it is taking on 300 New Deal trainees to do work in Job Centres. Local authorities are also committing themselves to taking on New Deal trainees and proposals are being made to enable them to be set work "mentoring" other trainees. This is in a period when both social services and voluntary sector organisations are facing funding cuts. Union organisers in shops and supermarkets are being told that overtime and shift work bonuses are being cut back with the implementation of New Deal trainees.

Trade unions and community organisations have, as the saying goes, "been sold a pup" by a government who far from delivering community self help and quality based training environments have once again delivered for big business.



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Defend municipal housing

Manchester City Council is one of many Labour councils considering proposals to transfer council estates to local housing companies. Tony Dale, a Manchester UNISON branch executive member, outlines why the branch is not happy with the headlong rush by Labour councils to embrace local housing companies.

MANY OF Britain's council estates are in a terrible state. The Tories had a political vendetta against Labour councils and tenants paid the price with local authority housing being starved of the necessary resources. From "right-to-buy" to privatising estates, the Tories used every trick to undermine municipal housing to the advantage of their friends, the private landlords.

Now, having won the General Election, Labour councils are opting to privatise many estates by creating local housing companies. While councillors and tenants will have some representation on the boards of these companies, ownership and control of estates is being privatised with few, if any, guarantees of low rents, democratic accountability or tenants' rights.

Many tenants exasperated with years of disrepair and poor housing may be happy to trade democratic accountability in exchange for repairs and investment. Extravagant claims are being made on how much private investment will be attracted to the local housing companies. Some estates — freed from the unfair financial restrictions placed on Housing Departments — may well attract private investment. But financial institutions will not invest in housing that they view as high risk. Hard to let estates or estates needing substantial repairs will not attract investment. Private investors will line up to put money into popular, no problem, structurally sound estates because they will see a profit to be made. Local Housing Companies will further ghettoise council housing with popular estates attracting all the funding and problem estates sinking further.

Local housing companies have not proved as popular with tenants as many local councils or housing professional organisations believed. In September last year tenants in Sandwell voted against the transfer of 8,500 homes to a local housing company. Tenants in Cheltenham and Camden have also voted against transfer. Tenants' concerns over rents, security of tenure and accountability have produced these "no" votes and lukewarm support elsewhere.

Local housing companies also have serious implications for the council workforces. UCATT fear that direct labour organisations will be at risk if local housing companies opt for the cheapest bids coming from firms with low health and safety standards, little training and low wages.

The Local Government Association is promoting an alternative to local housing companies called "local housing quasi corporations". These would be semi-autonomous bodies with the ability to raise private investment directly. They are being tested in Derby, Leeds, Salford, Sandwell, Southampton and Wakefield. The estates remain within the local authority and tenants' rights would be protected. Decisions to opt for a local housing quasi corporation, unlike local housing companies, are not permanent. If the views of tenants, the political situation or the financial rules change, local housing quasi corporations retain the flexibility to adapt to the new situation.

PHOTO: PHIL MAXWELL (Newham)

Profiteers won't develop 'bad risks'.

All alternatives to local housing companies require the relaxing of the public sector borrowing rules to allow local councils to get outside investment. The Tories rigged the rules to starve local authorities of finance. There is a strong and growing lobby to urge the Government to switch to the general government financial deficit, which is the public sector accounting rule used in the rest of Europe. Last year's Labour Party Conference passed a motion calling for a review of Treasury rules. John Prescott in the run up to the General Election stated that the present public sector borrowing rules are "a creature of narrow Treasury dogma...with disastrous results for public investment" and called for a switch to the general government financial deficit.

Many inner city estates are facing a crisis situation never seen before. The fundamental problems of poor quality housing and estate regeneration will not be addressed without a major injection of financial resources from central government.

With government spending being reviewed, pressure growing for change to the public borrowing rules and widespread support for investment in the regeneration of the inner cities, now is not the time for local councils to privatise estates by transferring ownership to local housing companies. Local Labour councils need to become advocates for change and not the implementers of Margaret Thatcher's council housing privatisation dream. ❑

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Reproductive rights — a year of change

Leonora Lloyd reports: With a Labour government complete with the largest ever group of women MPs, surely the least we could hope for is that one of the demands of the 60s Women's Liberation Movement would at last be fulfilled — for free abortion and contraception on demand.

Frank Dobson's call for abortion on request up to 12 weeks did not result in enthusiastic responses from women MPs and there is still no denial of suggestions that the Pill will no longer be free (see last month's *LLB*). But some developments offer hope.

The Government has put out a consultation document, which recognises the link between poverty and ill health (while still not accepting the role of central government in reducing the poverty gap). A paper on sexual health is to follow. Maybe it's been delayed because of conflict within the leadership on issues such as contraception charges and changes in the abortion law.

One change being piloted brings together family planning facilities and testing for sexually transmitted diseases. There is a particular problem with young people: despite campaigns to persuade them to use condoms, STDs are increasing in teenagers. It is hoped that bringing the two services together will make it easier to treat them. But suggestions that any form of contraception should be charged for will make it that much harder to get teenagers into clinics in the first place.

On abortion, MPs should be lobbied to introduce amendments to the NHS Bill making provision of abortion facilities mandatory for health authorities. Eighteen years ago the late Jo Richardson MP introduced a "Facilities Bill" to do just that and since then new methods and earlier pregnancy tests make it easier than ever to ensure that all women who want it can get an early abortion.

The good news on the abortion front is that Catholic Portugal has liberalised its law, bringing in abortion on demand up to ten weeks. The bad news is that in Germany, campaigners have succeeded in stopping the company that manufactures the "abortion pill" from making it.

Back here in Britain, the other challenge for campaigners is finding an MP — preferably a woman — to introduce a bill giving abortion on demand, as Frank Dobson suggested. There is a myth that introducing an abortion bill is death to an MP's career. David Steel, whose bill led to the 1967 Abortion Act, ended as leader of his party. Jo Richardson, who introduced more than one bill, was shadow Minister of Women when she died. Only those who introduced anti-abortion bills have failed to climb high!

When Blair's bubble bursts

John Nicholson, convenor of the Network of Socialist Alliances in England, sees things altogether differently from *LLB*.

WHEN BLAIR'S bubble bursts where will you be? The Labour Party? Many of us want to be in a party. Our experience comes from party work. Our vision remains that of collective action taken through collective decision-making through open, accountable and democratic party structures.

We do not criticise the Labour left for any struggle they may be able to take up. However, they defend their position inside the Party on the (rapidly diminishing) grounds that the link with the trade unions has not been broken. This is a mistake because the Labour Party is now a Christian Democrat Party (or worse).

Socialists now need something new. This does not mean simply reacting to the latest awful stance taken by "New" Labour. We need to reclaim the word "new". Then we need new ways of working, which include uniting to take up issues regardless of who thought of them first or whose name goes on the leaflet. The possibilities of this are shown by the way people are forming local alliances of socialists, following the lead given by the Scottish Socialist Alliance which has brought together socialists from Labour, Militant, Communist, nationalist, environmentalist and other backgrounds in a powerful combination to oppose all the English dominated Tory and quasi-Tory political parties. Now in England and Wales there are local alliances in a number of areas.

The Conference of Socialist Alliances in Walsall in November 1997 showed that people are willing to work together, to overcome the sectarian approaches which have beset us in the past, and try to create unity both for specific single issues and for a more widespread challenge to the free-market economy and all its parliamentary proponents. Since the Conference, those leaving the SLP and those in green and other networks, have shown increased willingness to check out the alliance way of working.



People can't wait for Blair's bubble to burst. We have to help make it happen. This is because New Labour's new danger is still the same old danger: that the opposition to its sunshine smile and camelot carry-on will come from the far right. To redress the balance, to counter the threat, there is no one correct answer. No one has a monopoly of ideas. Instead there is a compelling argument for developing alliances of forces.

- When Blair's bubble bursts: Recall Conference of the Socialist Alliances in England, Coventry, 21st March. Details from Pete McLaren, 32 The Green, Long Lawford, Rugby CV23 9BL.

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The class struggle

Tobie Glenny, a teacher in Islington, looks at Labour's school policies.

SOME OF the developments since 1st May have been good for schools: the abolition of assisted places, the allocation of more resources (though not enough), the focus on class size, the introduction of proper training for management and a less hostile attitude to the profession in general. However some of the initiatives being taken by Labour are a source of real concern.

Labour has decided not to readjust the balance of power between schools and local authorities, considering that more change will only further disrupt the system. As a result most of the responsibility for running schools will remain with schools themselves. This has three key problems. First, the present culture of competition between schools will remain, leading to greater differentiation of intake. Some schools are evolving a wide range of techniques to take in only privileged children. These range from intimidating interviews, to expensive school uniforms (if you can't afford it, don't apply!). This process will probably get worse.

Second, the school based approach causes an enormous waste of resources. For example Islington recently introduced the Literacy Project in primary schools, but it was left to schools to develop their own schemes of work. Across the borough individual language co-ordinators had to take time off teaching, at great cost, and with considerable disruption to their children, in order to do all the necessary work. Organising such an initiative on a co-ordinated, borough wide basis would have been far more effective and efficient, but that would have required a level of collective administration that no longer exists.

Third, school based administration means an enormous amount of power and responsibility for governing bodies. These are volunteer bodies, made up of various people willing to give up a bit of time. Some are very dedicated and hard working but volunteering to turn up to a meeting six times a year does not qualify you to run education. Replacing professional managers in the education department by amateur volunteers has not necessarily been good for schools.

Another cause of concern has been the way the Government has focused on "raising standards through raising expectations". Of course everyone wants to raise standards of achievement, and having appropriate expectations is important; however the relationship between standards and expectations is a complicated one. Recent research suggests that children exposed to high expectations must have high self esteem to be successful.

The last few years has seen an increase in the expectations on children, without a corresponding enhancement of their self esteem, and has seen a massive increase in exclusions and truancy. Recent figures from the Metropolitan Police suggest that 40% of street robberies and 33% of car thefts and burglaries are committed by 10-16 year olds. If New Labour continues to raise expectations without also raising the self esteem of children, then expect an increase in these figures.

And what happens to teachers if you raise expectations, while undermining self esteem? The situation at the moment is that a large number of heads, deputies, and teachers have left the profession; many of them completely broken and demoralised. 8% of head/deputy posts are vacant and many schools can't even get a full teaching staff, having to rely on an endless supply of temporary teachers. In these circumstances the issue is less "how you raise standards", and more "how you keep your head above the water".

They talk of "improving the quality of management", but as so many heads have been pushed over the cliff by Ofsted thugs, we are now desperately short of managers and would settle for anyone. They talk of Saturday schools and holiday schools, but who is going to do the teaching? Many teachers are already working 60 hour weeks or more, and working much of their weekends and holiday time. I would suggest less hours not more would be an appropriate target, if you want to decrease teacher burn out and increase the quality of teaching.

New Labour has many aspirations for education that are simply not grounded in material reality. It is time they started talking to teachers and observing the actual reality of schools if they want to find out what is possible and what is desirable.

"I'm sorry...you just cannot call Ofsted 'thugs'"!



PHOTO: PHIL MAXWELL

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The shopfloor betrayed

How was the most powerful trade union movement of the 1970s reduced to a fraction of its former strength? Mike Phipps finds lessons for today in Inside Cowley, *an important new book by Alan Thornett, who played a leading role in a key industrial struggle of our time.*

BY THE early 1970s, piecework bargaining in the hands of directly elected shopfloor representatives had made carworkers the highest paid industrial workers in Britain. The Cowley plant with 23,000 workers was the most militant: in 1969 alone there were 600 unofficial strikes.

Thornett's earlier book, *From Militancy to Marxism*, explained how shopfloor organisation was built up from scratch to achieve this. *Inside Cowley* centres on the crucial 1974-9 period, when national and regional trade union officials, often in collaboration with management and backed by media witch-hunts, fought tooth and nail to break shopfloor militancy and keep a Labour government in power at all costs. The story of Cowley is a microcosm of how the trades unions were demobilised at national level and the way was paved for the authoritarian Thatcher governments of the 1980s.

Unlike older industries such as mining, where negotiations over pay and conditions were conducted by often remote full-time union officials, the carworkers' success lay in plant-based sectional bargaining by elected stewards. Turning Fordist principles against the employers, wildcat strikes by small groups of workers in turn could paralyse production across the plant, extracting concessions from management. The results were a confident and militant workforce which played a real part in the movement that brought down the Heath Government in 1974, but which inspired equal fear and hostility among right-wing union leaders who could not control this force.

The return of a Labour government brought this problem into focus. To deal with Britain's economic mess, Labour was committed to a Social Contract with the unions, which very soon amounted to little more than wage controls policed by national union leaders. British Leyland carworkers were rightly seen as an obstacle to this and targeted at the highest level. As Cowley workers sought to defend themselves against speed-up, pay norms and victimisation, they were repeatedly betrayed by full-time officials who collaborated with management in witch-hunting militants — notably, Thornett himself — and stamping out disputes. In the TGWU, officials deliberately dismantled the highly successful Cowley carworkers' branch, controlled by the left, and set up new structures. Despite the pressure on them, the left was able to win control of the new branch within two years — only for officials to set up yet another branch in order to neutralise this result.

As opposition to the methods of the

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The battle for Angola

Mike Phipps reviews Death of Dignity *by Victoria Brittain, published by Pluto, £9.99 paperback.*

The protracted war in Angola evokes comparisons with Vietnam rather than decolonisation struggles elsewhere in Africa. Only perhaps in the Congo, later Zaire, was there, in Brittain's words, "such an international struggle for the soul of a country", partly because Angola too was rich in natural resources, including oil and diamonds. Ironically it was the overthrow of Mobutu in Zaire which finally sealed the isolation and defeat of the remnants of Jonas Savimbi's Unita forces.

The Portuguese withdrew in 1975 but for the west Angola was too great a prize to leave in the hands of Angolans. The Cold War became the justification for the sending of arms and mercenaries — many from Britain — and the creation by the US and South Africa of a monstrous force that would one day ignore the orders of its imperialist paymasters.

Unita was a terrorist organisation in the literal sense. Many of its foot-soldiers were kidnap victims, welded into a pliant murder machine by shared involvement in killing ceremonies — "witch-burning" of women and children was common in Unita camps. Random massacres, even of Unita supporters in the Central Highlands, were the hallmark of Savimbi's forces from the outset.

The book charts the scale of US and South African involvement in the destabilisation of Angola in the Reagan years. What is often less appreciated is the treacherous role of the United Nations following the 1991 Peace Accord in the run-up to nationwide elections. Such was the conviction that Unita could not lose, the UN turned a blind eye to Unita's refusal to disarm and its violence in parts of the country before the election.

When the first results showed Jose dos Santos and the MPLA significantly ahead, Savimbi launched a long-planned all-out attack in what proved to be the bloodiest phase of the war so far.

The UN's "demobilisation camps" had served Unita well. "Their troops had had a respite from the harshness of life in the bush and been fed, clothed and given medical attention by international aid agencies while remaining as intact military units." Meanwhile the MPLA had effectively disintegrated as a military force. In the "war of the cities" that followed, many thousands were killed in street fighting. As town and countryside fell to the well-planned Unita offensive, the UN attempted some grotesque diplomacy. In a travesty of justice, it ignored the elections it had just judged free and fair and argued that both sides were to blame and had the same legitimate concerns.

Despite the embarrassment that Savimbi's latest atrocities now caused to the western powers that had once patronised him, they still refused to freeze his international assets. Ultimately it was the fall of apartheid and Mobutu that eventually marginalised Unita, rather than any change of heart in the west.

The devastation and human misery wrought by the war has been better documented than the political cost Angola has paid for the decades of conflict. The days of international solidarity when 40,000 Cuban troops fought alongside the MPLA against the puppets of imperialism are long forgotten. In December 1995, in a gesture towards Washington, Angola failed to vote in the UN General Assembly against the US blockade of Cuba. What price victory?

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bureaucracy mounted, its tactics became even more destructive. Ballot irregularities — even the premeditated miscounting of hand votes — were routine. The pivotal Joint Shop Stewards Committee was wound up — anything to avoid the left being represented. The logic of supporting a Labour government that was attacking the working class led TGWU leaders in the 1977 toolmakers' dispute to instruct their members to cross the picket lines of workers defending their conditions.

In the face of this sort of treachery, it's surprising there were victories at all — but there were, a fact which shows the tenacity of the rank and file. Thornett's own victimisation was successfully fought and a tabloid-orchestrated "Cowley wives movement" calling for the sacking of militants was effectively destroyed by counter-mobilisations by Women in Support of the Union. Generously Thornett acknowledges that this important campaign by women workers, wives of strikers and socialist feminists was not only independent of union activists inside the plant but took most of them by surprise.

Only in late 1977 was the left able to sweep out the right-wing plant leaders at Cowley, just in time for the arrival of Michael Edwardes and his then unprecedented — today routine — brand of class war management. By then, the experience of worker participation — Labour's gesture towards industrial democracy, which Thornett correctly calls "one of the most damaging episodes in the history of unions" — had helped develop a corporate outlook in the workforce and soften them up for the first big closure announcements. Even here union leaders declared, over the heads of the rank and file, their willingness to accept the closure of 13 plants and the loss of 25,000 jobs. And when Longbridge convenor and Combine Committee chair Derek Robinson was sacked by the new management, it was AUEW leaders who worked to get strikes in his defence called off — a massive blow to shop floor organisation.

By now Thatcher was in power, but rank and file militancy remained the prime, indeed the only target for the union apparatuses. Despite ballots for strikes over pay for four years in a row, officials manoeuvred each time to prevent any action being taken. In one case AUEW leaders called off a national strike just three minutes after it began! The result of such cave-ins was invariably a new round of closures and victimisations — including ultimately Thornett's own in 1982.

What happened at Cowley was one expression of a much larger process at national level. The TUC did not just work to isolate and defeat those unions taking action against Labour's Social Contract. Having weakened the capacity of workers to defend themselves, piling up demoralisation on defeat, they continued to marginalise and bully unions taking action even under Thatcher — on grounds of legality, timing and so on. Every section of workers that fought in the 1980s fought alone. All were defeated and we are still paying the price, as the treatment of the dockers, the TUC's support for a single currency and New Labour's contempt for union "sectionalism" all show.

The Cowley assembly plant has today been razed to the ground and only 4,500 people work in the "business park" that has replaced it. As Ken Loach, who wrote the foreword, said recently, there are many histories of working class struggle from this period that need to be written up and studied if we are to learn the lessons. Books like this lay bare the myth of the apolitical selfish worker and show the depth our leaders are prepared to plummet to head off a challenge to the system.

● *Inside Cowley*, published by Porcupine, is available from the author at 14 Colyton Road, London SE22 0NE at £11.95 plus £2 p&p.

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Stopping EMU is just the start

James Smart (Reading East CLP) reviews Sovereignty For What? Why stopping European Monetary Union is just the start *by Will Podmore and Phil Katz (published by Will Podmore, 32pp).*

Thatcherism was built on a number of paradoxes: the free market and the strong state, laissez faire policies for industry and subsidies for defence contractors, nationalistic rhetoric whilst signing away economic sovereignty. *Sovereignty For What?* explores this paradoxical attitude towards the EU and examines the costs, both economic and political, of further integration and the possible benefits of leaving the EU.

The first half of the pamphlet serves as an excellent primer on the economic consequences of EMU. All the usual suspects are identified: the madness of CAP, the enforced regressive taxation of VAT and the economic pain caused by the Maastricht criteria. Podmore and Katz put the cost of EU membership at £255 billion. £255 billion that could have been used in rebuilding the country.

The second half of the pamphlet looks at the future of the European Union. If Britain joins the EMU, the economic levers of government will be handed over to an unelected central bank. The losers, as usual, won't be the speculators or the ruling elite, but the working man and woman.

The pamphlet is an excellent contribution to the European debate. It moves it away from the nationalism that fuels the Tories' opposition to the EU and instead provides sound economic and political reasons, from a left wing perspective, why we should oppose EMU.

Free the Campsfield 9

John Stewart, treasurer of the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, reports on the case of the Campsfield 9, the latest case of immigration detainees punished for protesting their detention.

OVER 50 people gathered outside Oxford Crown Court on 9th February to show solidarity with the Campsfield 9 — former detainees at Campsfield House charged with riot and violent disorder following a protest at the detention centre back in August 1997.

The nine, all from West Africa, are being scapegoated by the authorities following the protest at Campsfield last year when over 50 detainees briefly took over parts of the detention centre. There have been many protests inside Campsfield and other immigration detention centres in recent years, but no detainees have previously been charged. Now, following the direct intervention of Home Secretary Jack Straw, through a telephone call to Banbury Police Station where he encouraged the initially reluctant local police to lay charges, the protesters face the possibility of up to ten years' imprisonment. While the number of asylum seekers detained under the Tories escalated dramatically, even Michael Howard never felt the need to charge detainees when they protested at their incarceration. Straw's action is another example of New Labour's much vaunted "firmness".

The nine all pleaded not guilty and the case was adjourned until 9th March, with the full trial due to open on 1st June. The protesters outside the court, from the Close Down Campsfield Campaign, local UNISON branches, the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, the Pan-African Freedom Fighters Asylum Campaign, the Socialist Party and Turkish socialist groups, pledged to continue to support the nine, to call for the charges to be dropped and for the Government to stop detaining asylum seekers.

Over 900 people are detained in prisons and police stations in the UK under Immigration Act powers at any one time. The Government claims that this represents only 1.5% of the total number of asylum seekers but respected organisations like the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants have estimated that over 10,000 asylum seekers are detained for at least one night every year — making the true figure closer to 25%. When the Labour Government announces the outcome of its immigration detention review next month, it should declare it will cease detaining asylum seekers like criminals.

- Contact the Campsfield 9 Defence Campaign at 11 Magdalen Road, Oxford, 01865-558 145.

Stop dividing gay families: Abdou must stay

John Stewart reports: Abdou Mahmoud came to Britain as a student from Morocco. He met Russell in January 1995. They developed a relationship and now live as a couple maintaining a home together and running pubs in Bedford and Luton but the law does not allow gay men and lesbians to marry. The British immigration laws also deny the right of gay and lesbian couples to apply for their non British partners to join them in setting up home in the United Kingdom.

In the summer of 1997 Abdou applied to the Home Office for leave to remain in the UK on the basis of his relationship with Russell. Abdou made no attempt to deceive the Home Office — he told them the truth. The Home Office rejected Abdou's application to stay on the grounds that the law does not allow gay partners to stay in the country. Abdou's solicitors have appealed against the decision of the Home Office.

Unfortunately, the solicitors have, correctly, advised that the appeal cannot be won. In short, the appeals system has its hands tied by the Immigration Rules. This will mean that the Home Office will, after the appeal is heard, begin proceedings to have Abdou deported.

The only way that Abdou and Russell will be able to stay together is to persuade the Home Office to allow Abdou to remain on compassionate grounds outside of the rules. Abdou and Russell have started a public campaign to raise awareness of the issue. Abdou is unable to return to Morocco because of attitudes towards gay people. Russell needs to stay here because of his business interests and to care for his elderly mother.

The way that Russell and Abdou have been treated is not unusual. Many heterosexual couples from black communities are divided by the operation of the immigration rules. Until the rules are changed both black and gay communities will continue to suffer discrimination in immigration matters. In the meantime Abdou must rely upon public support if he is to be allowed to stay with Russell.

- Write to your local MP and ask him/her to write to the Home Office. You must use Abdou's full name (Mr. Abdelghani Ait Mahmoud) and quote reference M713712. Send copies of any letters you write to the campaign — they can be used in the appeal.
- Invite a campaign representative speaker to your trade union, church, college, constituency party or other meeting.
- The campaign requires funds to support the appeal and to produce publicity material. Any donations are welcome and cheques should be made out to Abdou Must Stay Campaign.
- Write to Abdou and Russell to show support at Abdou Must Stay Campaign! c/o The Clarence Hotel, 13 St. John Street, Bedford, MK42 DAH.

Stop deportations — amnesty for all!

Re-unite divided families!

Restore benefits!

End detention under asylum and immigration law

National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns

Lobby of Parliament

Weds 29th April, 1.30 - 3.30

(Public meeting 3.30 - 5.30 pm)

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

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CORRESPONDENCE

We welcome feedback, especially (thoughtful) vitriolic replies and sycophantic praise. However — due to demand — letters over 300 words will not be considered and those via email (or PC disk) are particularly welcome.



PO Box 2378, London, E5 9QU.

llb@gn.apc.org

On the 12th December 1997 the parole board rejected my application for parole. I will have to serve an additional two years before my case next comes up for review.

I have now served over eleven years in prison, primarily for defending myself against a racially motivated attack. During this time I have consistently challenged the very basis of my conviction, my last appeal having been rejected in November 1985.

Had the parole board based their decision on the facts then I would not be in prison today. I have already served the sentence which was imposed upon me by the then Chief Justice, Lord Lane, who recommended ten years. This tariff expired in November 1996. I am now being made to serve an additional sentence, my tariff having been increased by the present Home Secretary, Jack Straw.

I have been the victim of two racist attacks. The first back in November 1986 when I was forced to defend my life against an assailant who stabbed me with broken glass after subjecting me to a torrent of racial abuse. The second has been a sustained attack by the British State — the police, the judiciary and the penal system.

During my time in prison, I have suffered many indignities, hardships and systematic abuse that amount to a flagrant violation of human rights. I am frequently transferred (ghosted) from prison to prison — 53 times to date. I have experienced mental cruelty (often held in total isolation in solitary confinement) and forced to endure prolonged periods of deprivation, psychological abuse, intimidation, starvation diets and physical torture. On numerous occasions I have been shackled in a body belt and thrown into strip cells. The guards often display sadistic tendencies and specialise in humiliation and degradation.

It is against this background that I have spent many years protesting against my wrongful conviction. I feel that I have suffered in more ways than one and my continued imprisonment is totally unjustifiable and goes against the principles of natural justice.

I would ask anyone concerned with justice to support me in my fight for freedom. Please send letters of protest to Jack Straw.

Satpal Ram
E94164, Nottingham Prison, NG 3AG.

Mandy Moore (in last months' *LLB*) gives a completely distorted account of discussions in the North Nottinghamshire and Chesterfield ECLP regarding Ken Coates' position in the proportional representation controversy, and the train of events leading to his expulsion. She complains that Ken Coates did not tell the European Constituency of his position on the Code of Conduct for British Labour MEPs at the 3rd October GC.

But the Code was not even made known until 7th October, when it was sent to the EPLP. The October GC expressed virtually unanimous support for Ken Coates' trenchant criticism of the new system proposed for the European elections, which will entail the abolition of constituencies and the selection of MEPs by the Labour Party leadership. In these circumstances, he did not think it right to obey the gagging order written into the Code.

Neither Mandy Moore, nor her partner Reg Race (the Party Secretary), contacted Ken or his office to express solidarity or even sympathy with their MEP, who was in difficulties for his insistence on supporting openly the position endorsed by the Euro Constituency. Instead, they waited until the November GC to launch an attack on Ken Coates.

By the time this GC came round, Ken, with three colleagues, had been suspended on less than 24 hours notice by the EPLP whip. But it was subsequently discovered that the whip had exceeded his powers, and the suspension was declared invalid. Ken made it clear that he intended to continue speaking out publicly on this issue, and he received support from the large majority of the delegates present. So much so that Reg Race was not able to pursue his attempts to censure Ken. The Party did not feel that it needed any assurances from its MEP, and did not ask for any.

Contrary to what Mandy says, Ken Coates did not join the Green Group. This is an attempt to perpetuate the spindoctors' myth which was seized on by Tom Sawyer as an excuse to expel him. Ken Coates never applied to join the Greens. He wanted to stay with the Socialist Group, but as that has been made impossible by the Labour leadership, he is sitting as an Independent Labour member with the Confederal Left Group, while continuing to follow the Socialist whip.

If Reg Race and Mandy Moore were not so obsequious to New Labour, they would surely be much more supportive of their MEP, and recognise the importance of the stand he has taken for socialist principles and democratic practice, despite the massive pressures that have been brought to bear on him to keep quiet and to conform.

Ken Fleet,
Political Assistant to Ken Coates

David Taylor ("The Party's Over", last month's *LLB*) attacks "a number of grim men ranted about the correctness of the regime in China and the old Soviet Union". Is David Taylor trying to say that Arthur Scargill should ban these people from the SLP? Of course, the development of socialism in the two countries named has not been without some very serious mistakes, and most would argue that China is currently embarked on the road to full capitalist restoration (although that doesn't mean that it will inevitably happen).

I object to the use of the term "Stalinist". Stalin has been the subject of one of the most intense hate campaigns in history and we cannot take at face value all of the things that capitalists say about him. Since Kruschev denounced him at the CPSU 20th Party Congress, the Soviet leadership tried to pretend that Stalin had never existed. This has made a true assessment of Stalin very difficult. Although I do not accept that everything Stalin did was beyond criticism, there is no doubt that many of his supposed "crimes" are simply fabrications. Much of what Kruschev said about him in his "secret speech" (which he kept secret from the Soviet people — why?), is simply a lie.

What about those who totally reject these countries? Do they think that nothing worthwhile was achieved by them at all? Would the United States have been able to inflict such appalling suffering on the Iraqi people if the Soviet Union still stood, even though it were not a perfect model of socialism? Would the capitalists here have been able to make such bold attacks on the welfare state and the wages and conditions of workers? I think not.

Paul Lockwood,
Socialist Labour Party,
Cambridge

Don't bomb Iraq

Will McMahon, Hackney North and Stoke Newington CLP, argues that key motives for the latest US attack on Iraq are to send a message to other world powers and test new technologies.

AT A RECENT public meeting in the House of Commons one speaker from the floor put the matter very succinctly. He said that you can't rain down ethical bombs on the people of Iraq. Yet this is precisely what the Labour Government is trying to persuade the public that the war against Iraq will mean.

As Iraqi citizens "duck and cover" in response to more bombings any notion that Labour's foreign policy has an ethical dimension can be rejected. The attack on the people of Iraq only serves to highlight the rank opportunism and cynicism of a Labour leadership which chose with such gusto to ban landmines in the name of civilian casualities and now with equal vigour joins the US in raids that will surely kill Iraqi civilians.

Yes, Saddam is a repressive and murderous dictator, ask the Kurds or the marsh Arabs; and yes — he probably has the capacity for chemical and biological warfare — we should know, we gave it to him — but none of these issues will be addressed by outside military intervention. In fact it is not these issues that the bombing is about at all.

The Iraqis sat in their air raid shelters are not the only one who are supposed to get the message. Washington hopes that the bombs will be heard in Beijing, Moscow and throughout the Middle East. All of the scare-mongering about Iraq's military potential conceals the real fears of western military planners.

Having supplied repressive regimes with the military wherewithal to keep control of oil fields for western multi-nationals for the best part of the twentieth century, planners in Washington are now genuinely worried that a mixture of indigenous expertise and military exchanges with the Russians and the Chinese will create regional powers who can resist plans for global dominance of the United States in the 21st century.

Military journals are focusing on just that technical problem. The latest issue of *Janes International Defence Review* (January 1998) carries two lengthy articles on the problem as military planners see it. The first, titled "Adding new punch to cruise missiles" begins thus "Earth, rock and concrete are cheap and readily available. This fact is not lost on what the west perceives as the rogue states [that] protect their most valuable military assets by burying them or tunnelling them into mountains.".

THE ISSUE for the US and UK is how do you destroy command, communication and control centres if they are deep under ground? Dr. Strangelove had the answer: you build a bigger bomb. These days big bombers with bigger conventional bombs — no matter how stealthy — are expensive and can be shot down by increasingly sophisticated air-defences. Now they reckon they have the answer — adding warheads specialised for the job to long range cruise missiles. Their only problem is that they need to test them to see if they work before they really need them — this is where the people of Iraq come in.

The second article on "Theatre Ballistic Missiles" (TBMs) points to the fact that, curiously enough, more countries are acquiring TBMs and that the US Navy is now busily engaged in working out how to knock them out of the sky. Military planners expect that by the year 2020 "hypothetical states" in North Africa and the Middle East will have the capacity to drop TBMs on London, Berlin and Paris.

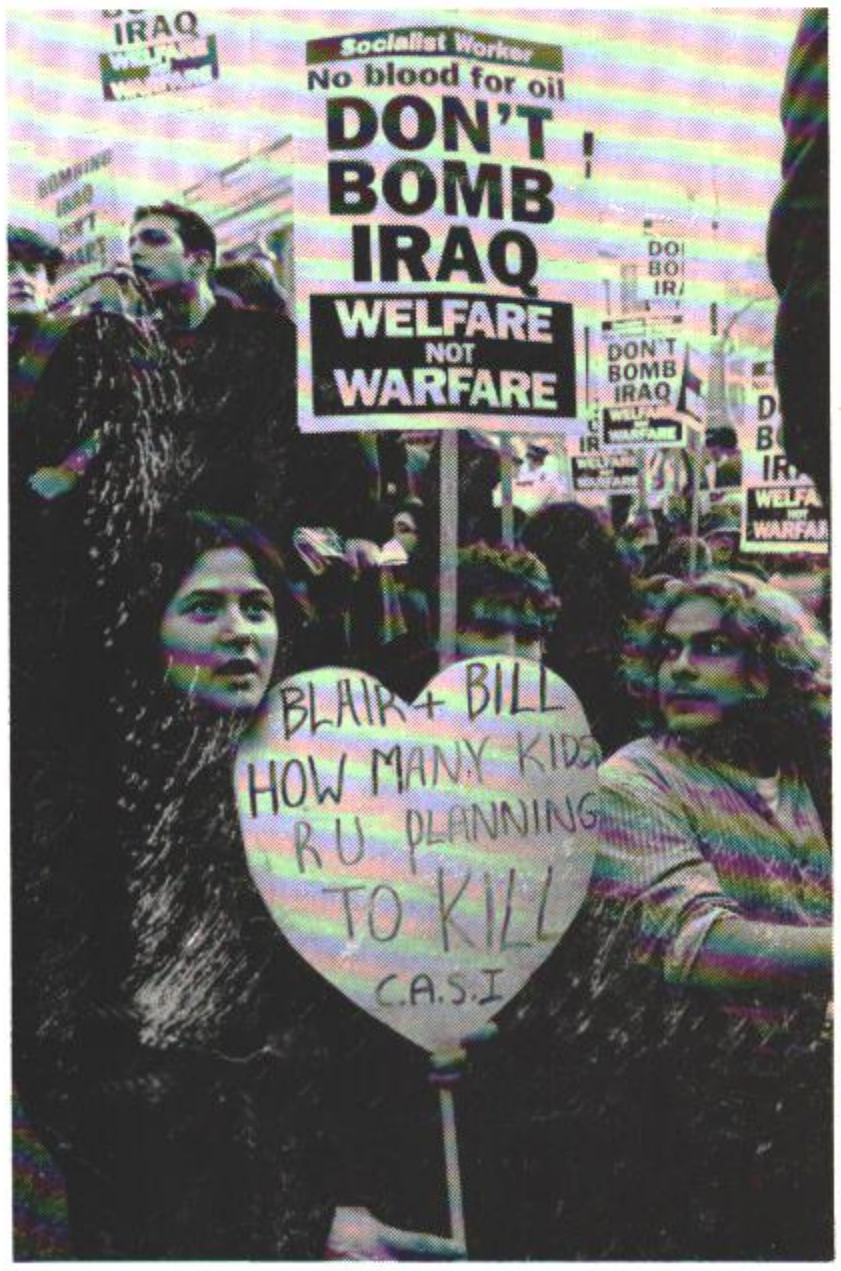


PHOTO: ANDREW WIARD

Already there are US warships wandering up and down the Mediterranean tracking Syrian TBM test flights and simulating knocking them out. The same is going on off the coast of Taiwan where the Chinese Government has been testing M9 TBMs.

The beauty of both systems for the US is that they are naval based and so can protect "American Interests" across the globe without either having to deploy ground troops or the tactical nuclear threat for the time being. For the Americans such warfare is called "painless".

As soon as Iraq has been blasted back into the dark ages by the civilised west the guns of US diplomacy will turn unerringly towards Tehran because if there is any serious threat to the US dominance of the Middle East, it comes from the rapidly growing axis between Iran, China and Russia. It is in this perspective that the attack on Iraq must be viewed.

If this sounds a bit apocalyptic then that's perhaps because not now, but maybe a decade down the road, the bombing of Iraq will be seen for what it may well be — the opening guns of World War Three. No one has yet to show that free-market liberal democracies are not prepared for global war to defend their vital interests. As Andrew Murray puts it in his book *Flashpoint: World War Three*, these days, as in the past, "Capitalism means war".

Demonstrate

opposite Number 10 Downing Street every Saturday 12 noon to 1.30pm. If war starts there will be a demonstration on the same day outside Number 10 Downing Street 5.00 -7.00pm.

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