LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING

May 1998 price £1/50p

inside...

- Ken Livingstone
- NEC • PR • EMU
- Australian dockers
- Campsfield



Does this mean



Peace and Justice?

Labour Left Briefing

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

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One year on

IN MAY 1997, the electorate overwhelmingly rejected the Tory Government, yet one year later we still suffer under their spending limits which have been implemented more stringently than the Tories themselves would have dared. The electorate voted for better public services and a fairer society. Of course, no one expected a radical transformation in a mere twelve months. But what do the priorities the Government has demonstrated so far tell us about the direction we're headed in?

Public sector wages have been cut in real terms, while corporation tax has been slashed — not once, but twice — to the lowest level in any major Western economy. The top rate of income tax remains untouched, the ceiling on National Insurance contributions remains untouched, pensions remain at insultingly low levels, free tuition for higher education has been abolished, and benefits for single parents have been cut. £750 million is lavished on an ego-enhancing Dome for Peter Mandelson while hospital waiting lists reach record highs and hospitals continue to close around the country. Jack Straw is handing draconian powers to local authorities to impose youth curfews and evict noisy neighbours, while his cabinet, like its Tory predecessor, starves councils of cash, forcing them to cut libraries, schools, and other facilities.

We were promised an economy managed in the interests of the many, not the few, and what we got was an independent (i.e. unaccountable) Bank of England, and interest rates choking off investment and costing jobs.

Of course, there have been positive measures which we would never have seen under the Tories — the cut in VAT on fuel, the Scottish and Welsh referenda, the allocation of funds for childcare. Soon we'll have the minimum wage — but the Government appears to have decided already that it will be set at the unacceptable and destructively low level of £3.50 and will not apply to young workers.



While the Government's own supporters have been asked to content themselves mainly with sound-bites and symbolism, the corporate sector gobbles up the tangible goods. Taken together, Private Finance Initiatives, Best Value schemes, Welfare-to-Work, and the proposed Education Action Zones represent a major colonisation of the public sphere by the private sector. The profits up for grabs here are enormous, as are the long-term costs to those who rely on public services.

Now the Government's eagerness to forestall any conflict with the CBI is making a mockery of our manifesto commitments on trade union recognition and other workplace rights. These commitments were widely recognised as an absolute minimum — the result of numerous concessions made by the TUC during the long years of Tory rule. It is absurd for the TUC even to contemplate further dilution of such an elementary and modest proposal. Instead, the trade unions should mount a major public campaign, including large-scale demonstrations, to compel the Government to keep its promises.

All those Party members who campaigned for a Labour Government in good faith, believing that its pledges on workplace rights and the minimum wage were rock solid, should use whatever means they can find to put pressure on MPs and Party officials to deliver the goods. And should the Government attempt to force an unsatisfactory deal through the Commons, every single Labour MP will have the right and duty to stand up for a clear-cut manifesto commitment and oppose the Government in the House.

Murdoch's errand boy

AT RUPERT MURDOCH'S request, Tony Blair asked the Italian Prime Minister whether a Murdoch bid for the Italian TV market would be well-received. The answer was no. Blair duly informed Murdoch and Murdoch revised his business strategy accordingly.

Like any tycoon, Murdoch knows the value of inside information, and is willing to pay for it. Unlike Bernie Ecclestone, he didn't actually have to write a cheque to the Labour Party to ensure the New Labour Government's co-operation. The continued support of the Murdoch media empire is worth far more to any politician than a mere cash donation, and everyone knows it.

The phone call was only one of several favours New Labour has performed for Murdoch. Two years ago, when Blair's initial tête-a-tête with Murdoch resulted in a reversal of Labour policy on cross-media ownership, *LLB* warned that the price of Murdoch's support in the general election would be exorbitant. Now Murdoch has made clear he wants to see the dismantling of public service broadcasting in the UK. It would take a brave soul to bet that he will not get his way.

What exists is a golden circle of access and influence, which ring-fences the Labour Government's aspirations and policies. Murdoch's media empire is a major threat to democracy. His domination of the airwaves and the printed page enables him to shape and mis-shape debate across continents. A prime duty of any government pledged to upholding democracy and protecting diversity must be to tame and ultimately dismantle this empire, along with the other major conglomerates of the communications industry. Instead, our New Labour Government helps him extend and entrench his power. ❑

A new challenge

The peace settlement could trigger key changes within the nationalist movement, argues Seamas Keenan.

HARD-NOSED journalists kissing the greying stubble of politicians, self-serving and patronising articles from Seamus Heaney and assorted sensitive literati, a welter of banality and cliche, an unseemly bubble-bath of tears, whiskey and sentiment — it must be another Irish peace settlement. So what have we got this time, apart from the approval of the world's media?

According to the unionists, we have either guaranteed the Union or embarked on the slippery slope to a united Ireland. And according to republicans, we have either entered a transitional phase to Irish unity, or been sold out by a treacherous leadership. The British and Irish governments, the SDLP and the Alliance Party are reasonably content with the outcome. But then, they've been through this process before.

The unionist veto is intact, the twenty-six county administration will amend Articles Two and Three, Northern nationalists will be allowed to feel Irish and will be treated as equals. There'll be referenda and assemblies and the proposed cross-border bodies will have, among other irrelevancies and chimeras, the power to crack down ruthlessly on social security scroungers and fraudsters.

It can reasonably be argued that a republican split was always part of the unspoken agenda agreed upon by Major and Bruton, and latterly by Blair and Ahern. In the eyes of the British and Irish establishments, the IRA is the only real barrier to a deal, and if the IRA could be demoralised, weakened and split, then the possibility of the deal holding would be enhanced. Already, the Continuity Army Council and the Thirty-Two County Sovereignty Committee are offering an alternative to the current Sinn Fein strategy. They claim to be the rightful heirs of 1916 and the first Dail Eireann. They argue, mistakenly, that they can prosecute a similarly successful guerrilla campaign.

I don't for a moment doubt the sincerity of these dissidents, but they must recognise that times have changed. For many republicans, the split has been a necessary sloughing off of old political skin, intended to establish a separate organisational and ideological identity with clearly defined revolutionary aims.

But republican splits have never been simply a battle between compromise and principle. They have always been an unhealthy combination of political difference, personal animosity and internal power-plays. They begin with verbal warfare. Twelve years ago, during the "abstentionist" debates within Sinn Fein and the IRA, the then leadership of the republican movement was the victim of a sophisticated public campaign to discredit it for exhibiting political and military naivete and for leading the IRA to the brink of destruction. Now it is the turn of Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness to hear the chilling accusations of treason and betrayal.

Since 1969, the Provisional IRA, the Official IRA, the INLA and the IPLO, have fought each other, to the dismay of their communities. This poses a real problem for the Continuity IRA and the Thirty-Two County Sovereignty Committee. Do they possess the will, or even the desire, to embark on such a feud? And will the nationalist community, which increasingly looks to Sinn Fein for leadership, quietly accept such action?

Sinn Fein is no longer an isolated party of commemorative gestures and military solidarity. It has widespread and growing support, and may, in the near future, eclipse the SDLP as the dominant voice of Northern nationalism. It is also likely that the Sinn

A basis for dialogue

Tony Dale, Manchester Central CLP, believes socialists should welcome the Northern Ireland peace agreement.

THE AGREEMENT does not deliver a united Ireland but it introduces important constitutional changes. An all-Ireland Council will be created establishing the right of the Irish Republic to be part of the Northern Irish political arrangements. The Agreement commits Britain to accepting the right of Northern Ireland to join a united Ireland if that is the view of a majority in the Six Counties. It creates an Assembly based on proportionality and consent with both Catholic and Protestant parties effectively having a veto.

Checks and balances will prevent Unionism from re-establishing the pre-Troubles "Protestant state for a Protestant people". The agreement promises the release of all prisoners affiliated to organisations respecting the ceasefire.

While many republicans may be unhappy with the principle of consent for the people of Northern Ireland, the fact is that a united Ireland has not been established precisely because of the opposition of most people in the North. At the same time Catholics have been able to prevent the re-establishment of Unionist majority rule. The present political situation is dominated by vetoes exercised by both sides.

Sinn Fein's leadership deserve credit for being prepared to take bold political steps in the realisation that a long military campaign cannot deliver a united Ireland. Mitchel McLaughlin, Sinn Fein's chairman, recently stated that the party's leadership have conceded that the conditions did not exist at present for a united Ireland and a transitional approach was needed.

The Irish Government is to recommend dropping Irish claims of jurisdiction over the whole island. In practice these articles have been meaningless and were of no assistance to Northern Irish Catholics when they faced decades of discrimination.

The Agreement is the political settlement needed to end the military campaigns which have become bogged down in a stalemate. Hopefully, the Agreement can create the space necessary for increased dialogue and political movement.

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for republicans

Fein surge will continue in the twenty-six counties, given its levels of poverty, unemployment and inequality. Sinn Fein has discovered a new, young constituency, no longer obsessed with the internal exotica of republicanism. These supporters want effective representation, they want to shout out loud that they are not second-class citizens, and Sinn Fein gives them a voice and an attitude.

But Sinn Fein's relative respectability has been gained at a price. There are many older republicans who find it hard to be part of a political mainstream. They have always been happier with isolation, defiance and suffering. Some of them feel uncomfortable, unwanted. The old certainties have evaporated, and there is an understandable resentment from people who believe that they have given their whole lives to a movement that no longer treasures them.

Sinn Fein must deal with this problem by decommissioning the culture of secrecy. Given the confusion about the new peace settlement, it is vital that Sinn Fein shares its medium and long-term objectives with all its supporters. Equivocation, secretive nods and winks, or a cynical reliance on the legendary loyalty of the republican family, will not be successful, but will create a disillusion and animosity that may lead, at worst, to a violent, destructive split or, at best, leave radical Ireland without an effective political voice for the foreseeable future. And who, apart from the British Government, its allies and its security services, would take comfort from such a disastrous development?



PHOTO: AN PHOBLACHT/REPUBLICAN NEWS

Sinn Fein delegation, Stormont — 9/4/98.

An historic defeat?

Liam Mac Uaid, West Ham CLP, believes the peace deal will institutionalise working class division.

ON MAY 22nd referenda will be held in both the Irish Republic and the North of Ireland. Voters in the North will be asked if they support the Agreement and voters in the Republic will be asked for their approval to delete from the constitution those articles which declare that the national territory is the whole island and its territorial waters.

Both the British and Irish governments will be throwing their full weight behind the campaigns to obtain a "yes" vote. The alternative offered by groups like the Continuity IRA is history repeating itself as farce.

The situation within loyalism is volatile and ugly. The Official Unionist MPs are evenly split on their support for the agreement and some have said that they will campaign for a "no" vote. They will be joined in this campaign by Ian Paisley's DUP. In a development largely unreported in Britain the DUP has been aligning itself with the Loyalist Volunteer Force. Ian Paisley junior has spoken at its rallies and both organisations share a hatred of nationalists and an analysis of the agreement as a capitulation to republicanism.

A split in the Official Unionists is possible and largescale loyalist opposition will make the operation of any settlement difficult. It will also put pressure on those loyalists who have signed up to the agreement not to allow themselves to be outflanked by the sectarian far-right which means that as far as possible they will want the new administration to resemble the old Stormont.

The republican leadership, if it is to be consistent with its support for the talks process is bound to enter the new Assembly. This parliament will be a carve-up between two sectarian blocs and can only institutionalise sectarian division. The continued division of the Irish working class by the border will be incorporated into the Irish constitution and the sectarian division of the Northern working class will be reinforced by the posturing of Trimble and the DUP

In return the republicans and the SDLP have been rewarded with the promise of some equal opportunities legislation, some concessions on the Irish language, the possible renaming of the police and prisoner releases contingent on the IRA's adherence to the ceasefire. The passage on policing in the Agreement is indicative of its whole tone. While referring to RUC casualties and offering platitudes about a police force acceptable to the entire population it makes no reference to the RUC's role in its shoot to kill operations, its passing of information to loyalist terrorists or its widespread sectarian ethos.

The organisations fighting for a "no" vote in the two referenda for the right reasons will be very small and very weak. Many of them will have no view about what to do next other than to return to militarist strategies that have already failed. The surrender of an anti-imperialist struggle is a depressing spectacle but the future does offer the promise of new struggles. Only the demand for self-determination simultaneously rejects British interference and offers the hope that both religious communities can jointly determine their futures together.

But a strategy that offers to Protestant workers simply an extension of the 26 county state and its corrupt political system will not break them from loyalism. A struggle to free Ireland which relies on a bosses' party like Fianna Fail will not succeed. Only a struggle which seeks to give leadership to Irish workers offers the possibility of defeating British imperialism and Irish capitalism.

A basis for real change?

Thirty-two hours of non-stop negotiations didn't produce a thirty-two county republic. Brian Campbell, editor of Sinn Fein's *An Phoblacht/Republican News* gives his assessment of the peace agreement.

THE UNIONIST veto on constitutional change remains firmly entrenched (along with Tony Blair's support for the Union) and it is proposed that the Irish constitution will no longer define the national territory as the whole island of Ireland.

The unionists have expressed themselves satisfied with the constitutional elements of the Agreement. The political elements are causing them a lot more trouble. The proposed Assembly, for example, can only agree major decisions with a majority of both nationalists and unionists. Its "ministries" will be headed by parties in proportion to the number of seats they hold. This is causing consternation in unionism because if Sinn Fein decides to take its seats it is likely to have two ministers — the prospect of Gerry Adams as Minister of, say, Education is too much for many unionists to stomach.

But Sinn Fein's constitution bars its members from taking seats in an Assembly and if the unionists' nightmare is to come true, a special SF Ard Fheis (National Conference) would have to remove the constitutional bar by a two-thirds majority.

Other proposals include All-Ireland bodies covering twelve areas of responsibility (the environment, fisheries, teacher training and others), the release of prisoners within two years, a Commission to recommend changes to the RUC, help for the Irish language, and a British-Irish Council which will bring together representatives of the two governments and the devolved institutions in the Six Counties, Wales and Scotland as well as representatives from the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands.

The last item was not high on the nationalists' agenda and there has been very little discussion on it (one participant said it was nothing more than "a day out twice a year"). The implications of the Agreement within Britain are unclear. For example, does an Assembly with devolved powers and links to cross-border bodies represent the "semi-detachment" of the Six Counties? Or, as seems more likely, is it simply a case of doing the minimum to ensure stability?

People on the ground need to see real change in the short term. The Agreement is full of high-blown aspirations but can it deliver employment equality, an end to discrimination, fair policing and justice?

Sinn Fein is now engaging in an intensive debate on the Agreement but it is the constitutional issues which prompted initial comments that "this is not a settlement". Meetings which I have attended have produced creative and comradely debate from activists who have always sensed the need to push forward for real change. But the Agreement represents uncharted waters. Sinn Fein Ard Comhairle (National Executive) member Micheal Mac Donncha said: "The over-arching question is: Can this outcome advance the drive to national unity and independence, or, at least, not delay it? Some others will attempt to use it to stabilise partition and British rule; Republicans must make their judgements on the basis of their ability not only to thwart such reactionary efforts, but to turn the situation in a progressive direction."

Sinn Fein Ard Fheis

John Stewart, Hackney North and Stoke Newington CLP, reports.

SINN FEIN'S Ard Fheis was dominated by discussion of the peace deal, with the final decision delegated to a special conference next month.

Gerry Adams got a thunderous reception. News came through that Trimble had won his vote in the Unionist Council and Adams sent a "well done David" message. He stressed that the SF leadership was reporting back to the Ard Fheis on the negotiations and that ordinary members would have time to examine the peace document before any agreement.

Adams stated that the document was a recognition that the days of unionist supremacy are gone forever, and that it was not a final settlement but the basis for a settlement. It made constitutional changes towards a republican position. The unionists had moved but will need to move further. He reassured unionists about their future: "Unionists are nervous...we mustn't force them into a corner. We must understand their fears and worries and, as people who have suffered ourselves, must not take lightly unionist fears". He said that nationalists had no wish to dominate, marginalise or drive unionists from the land of their birth.

Martin McGuinness gave a detailed explanation of the agreement. He reaffirmed SF's commitment to a united, democratic, secular republic and insisted on the right of the Irish people as a whole to national self-determination. He paid tribute to the IRA for its ceasefires of August 1994 and July 1997 which made the peace possible. He concentrated on the "touchstone issues" which directly affect people's lives like policing, justice and equality and the release of prisoners. The UK no longer has any constitutional claim on the Six Counties. The union would last only for as long as the majority of people want it to — "a bit like partners splitting up but agreeing to stay together until the children have grown up". The SF team had also successfully negotiated the removal of any unionist veto on joint north/south bodies. He believed the SF team had successfully moved republican analysis to the top of the political agenda.

The Ard Fheis called for the release of all political prisoners — loyalist as well as republican — even though many Sinn Fein supporters wouldn't recognise the actions of some loyalist paramilitaries as political. The release had to be seen as part of the ongoing peace process. It demanded the repatriation of Irish political prisoners held in British prisons pending their release.

Speakers saw the agreement reached at Stormont as part of a transitional process moving towards an ending of the political and constitutional status quo in Ireland. Justice and equality have to be seen as matters of right — not concessions to be negotiated.

Sinn Fein wants to see policing, human rights provisions and the legal system to come under the remit of joint north/south institutions; equality for the Irish language, fair employment and equal housing rights and an end to discrimination against nationalists in the north.

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Derail Prescott's tube privatisation

By our London Underground correspondent.

IMAGINE THAT you are a capitalist looking to buy a trainset. John Prescott makes you the following offer: you use your business acumen and contacts to raise £7bn; you take the business risks; you mend and update London Underground Ltd infrastructure and trains; you do the work needed to get it into shape; then at the end of a specified period of time you hand back the assets in pristine condition and walk away. Would you consider this to be a good deal? Maybe, if you were a Victorian-style charitable philanthropist or a Branson-type egomaniac.

So what exactly has Prescott proposed?

- London underground operations remain as a public sector company responsible for drivers, station staff, signal operators, network controllers, marketing
- LUL to be under the control of the Greater London Authority
- LUL will award up to three contracts to the private sector to maintain and modernise the infrastructure (track, signals, tunnels) and rolling stock
- LUL will pay the contractors for use of the infrastructure and rolling stock
- The performance regime will subject contractors to incentives and penalties.

After the obscene debacle of the British Rail privatisation, this almost looks innocuous. However, let's get back to the original question: why would investors be interested? How will they make their money? What does this mean for the travelling public and the staff?

As soon as private contractors get their hands on the infrastructure, they will begin charging LUL for use of the track, signal and stations. Presumably they can charge what they like. It's not as if the Piccadilly Line can choose an alternative, cheaper route to Heathrow. To paraphrase an old British Airways ad: "We always remember you don't have a choice". If the LUL operating company needs to fulfil its statutory obligation to provide a public service, it will have to run over private tracks and use private signals, no matter what the cost.

It's not as if the private infrastructure companies will have other customers from which to make profits. The £7bn which they will want to recoup, not to mention further profit that, after all, is their raison d'etre, will come from charging LUL. Let's run through that again. The private companies will invest £7bn that they will recover by charging LUL user fees. The Government will act as guarantor to LUL, so the money will flow from the fare payer and tax payer via the Treasury through LUL to Stagecoach or GEC! Why not just invest in the underground and cut out the middleman?



RMT demo 13/2/98.

PHOTO: ANDREW WIARD

Who's going to cough up the huge sums of money LUL will have to pay to the contractors? The obvious sources are the fare paying passengers and the beleaguered staff. Authoritative transport watchdog groups have already forecast that fares will probably rise massively. And the private companies are unlikely to maintain even the meagre levels of staffing presently provided by LUL. Although Prescott has presented a sugar coated picture of things by saying that staff taken over by private companies will be protected, TUPE regulations only protect them on day one. The shock will come on day two.

Those staff who remain with LUL will not be safe either (assuming there are no further privatisations). LUL will have to find the money to pay the user fees. Don't be surprised if there is further de-staffing of stations in remote overground areas. Station staff are still under threat from a plan put into motion during the time of the last government — the euphemistically named Project Prestige that will effectively dispense with staff in the booking offices by contracting out ticket sales!

John Prescott reassures us that the contractors will be subject to tough contractual terms, with built-in periodic reviews and crippling penalty clauses. Fine on paper, but completely meaningless in real life. Anyone working on the Jubilee Line Extension would concur. If penalty clauses had been invoked against the present contractors on the JLE, many would already be out of business. You simply cannot put a contractor out of business in the middle of a major project by applying the penalty clauses. Business does not work that way. Instead they muddle through no matter what.

We are also supposed to be enormously relieved that LUL will be responsible for safety. Sure, they will be responsible for safety policy and safety standards, maybe even training. But how will they be able to administer and supervise these standards on a day-to-day basis, on the ground where it counts? In 1990 LUL put the train cleaning out to private contractors. Managers in depots have been completely frustrated with their lack of control over the quality of the work. Imagine how much more is at stake with the contracting out of infrastructure maintenance, or rolling stock repairs? If quality control means nothing with cleanliness, how will it be exercised in the more crucial areas such as safety?

John Prescott's "third way" is being presented as a palatable compromise to improve London's transport for the Millennium. In fact, it is completely insidious. RMT members have been out leafleting the public to expose the con. We are holding a rally on Thursday 30th April, 2.00 pm at Central Hall Westminster. Please come and give us your support. It's in your interest as well. ❑

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For a People's

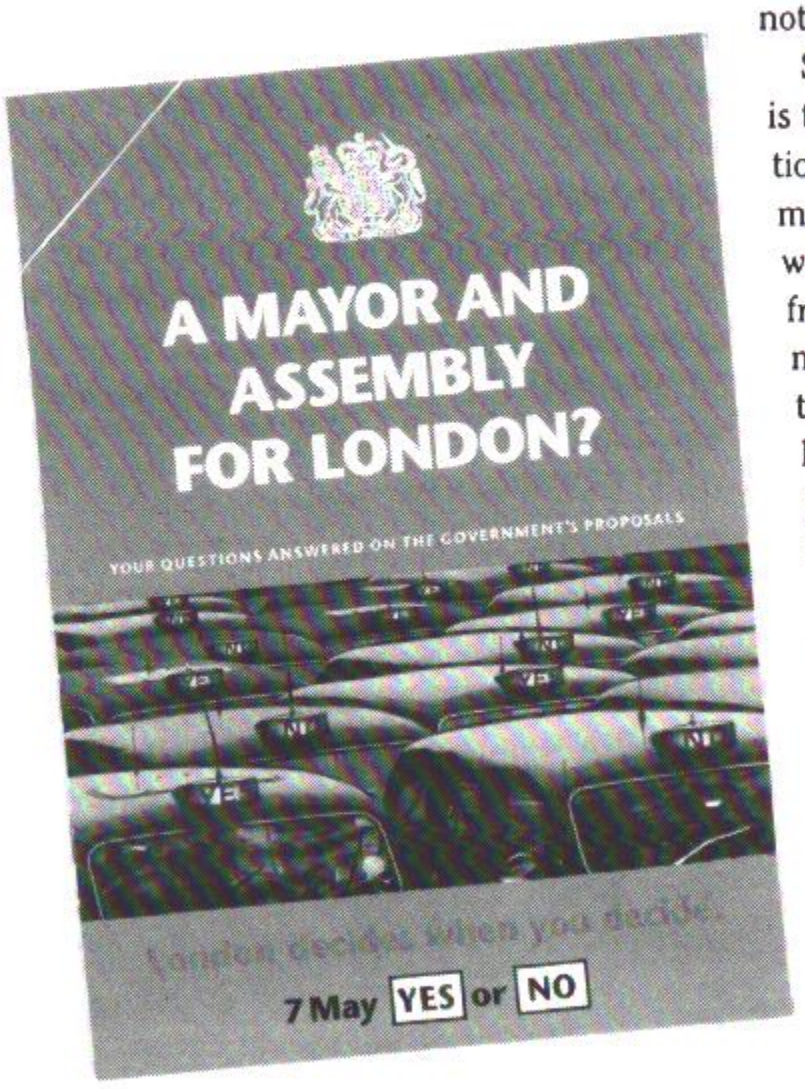
Yes/No? — the issues you can't decide on

Now that the White paper on London's new authority has been produced, we know just what we are being asked to vote for on 7th May — but do we want to vote Yes? Leonora Lloyd, Press Officer of the Campaign for a People's London and a member of the London Labour Party executive, looks at the issues.

THERE IS no question that London needs a new overall authority and no question that local democracy needs renewal and revitalisation. But the proposals from New Labour give an unsatisfactory response to the first and little hope of the second.

There have been changes from the original proposals in the Green Paper, some good and some bad. Some excellent ideas in the pre-election discussion document on London in the *Road to the Manifesto* series have been dropped altogether; for example, there are now no proposals for gender equality or ethnic balance.

From the range of possibilities for the size of the assembly, the smallest (25) has been chosen. Only 14 of these members will directly represent new, large, constituencies — the other eleven will be voted for on a party basis, divided up according to the vote each party gets. Not only will this increase the power of the central party, it will reduce the chances of independents and small parties to be represented. The discussion document proposed breaking up the City of London and fully incorporating it into the new setup. Although the few inhabitants of the City will now get to vote for the new authority, the City is left untouched, with its separate mayor and council and its own police force.



In the discussion paper, the idea of a separately elected mayor was simply one of a number of options. This was always dishonest — it was clear from the first presentation on the subject to the London Labour Party executive that the leadership wanted this and was not going to budge. This is why we are not being given the chance to vote on one of the most important issues of all — whether we actually want a separate, executive mayor. In the White Paper it says that the vast majority of respondents to the consultation paper *New Leadership for London* supported the concept of an elected mayor. This is rather surprising, as there was no direct question asked about this. There were lots about the way in which the mayor could be elected, what the division of powers should be between the assembly and mayor, if it should be a full-time, paid job or not.

Since the fact of a separately elected mayor is taken for granted throughout the consultation document, the possibility that a "vast majority" spontaneously wrote in to say they wanted a separate election for mayor is, frankly, unbelievable. It is more likely that many did not specifically oppose it, unlike the many organisations from within the labour movement, the Party itself and pensioners' organisations. For New Labour, not saying No amounts to saying Yes.

Do we need a mayor who, as in local authorities, is elected annually from the majority party to perform largely ceremonial duties? Do we want one who performs the duties of the leader of the largest party in local authorities? What we are being offered is one who does both these things, without real accountability to the assembly, but with much greater executive powers and opportunities for patronage. Saying "Yes" to the proposals means saying yes to all this.



Leonora Lloyd

While there are some advances from the Green Paper, reflecting wide unease about many of the proposals, the mayor will still wield very wide powers. One improvement is that the assembly members will now be full time and paid, with positions on many of the London-wide bodies to be set up — but it will still be the mayor, not the assembly, who will appoint them to those positions. The assembly will have the possibility to amend the budget proposed by the mayor but, at the end of the day, if the assembly cannot agree amendments, the mayor's proposals stand. The overall role of the assembly is to be consulted by the mayor, to propose amendments and oversee them. But the executive decisions stay with the executive mayor.

In the final analysis, the proposals will increase centralisation in British society, not accountability and local democracy. The mayor will be one of the most powerful people in British politics. But is a greater concentration of power what we want? Because that is what we will get with a Yes vote on 7th May.

● Contact the Campaign for a People's London at 37-39 Great Guildford Street, London SE1 0ES, tel. 0171-633 9060.

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London

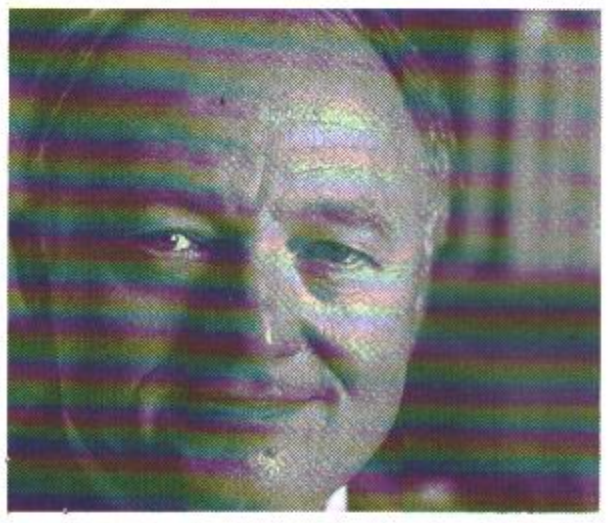
For a democratic GLA that delivers

Aspiring mayor for London, Ken Livingstone MP, awaits the return of democracy to the capital.

THERE HAS been a great deal of media interest in those of us who have declared that we are seeking our Party's nomination for the London mayoral elections in under two years time. But the attention of the labour movement also needs to turn to what should be in our manifesto. The most recent opinion poll of Londoners, conducted by MORI for the BBC between 6th-10th March, makes fascinating reading. For those who think that the GLC has left a legacy which must be avoided at all costs, it is interesting to note that 51 per cent of Londoners, over ten years after the GLC was abolished, still think it did a good job, with just 9 per cent against.

More importantly, when asked "if a mayor and a GLA are set up, which three things do you think will be most important for the new mayor and assembly to address?", the figures found the following had the highest response rates: reducing traffic levels (37%); improving health services (37%); tackling crime (31%); improving public transport (30%); regenerating London's poorest areas (27%); improving the quality of the environment (18%); improving schools (18%).

The Government states in its White Paper that "there will be no increase in total government expenditure", but the major strategic issues identified by the electorate all require the allocation of additional resources. London combines extreme wealth and poverty, with a public transport system visibly in decline and a road network turning into one hideous car park, slowly choking us all. As I argued during the consultation process for the Green Paper, these problems require extra public spending, which in turn means raising taxes.



Ken Livingstone

Under the Tories, companies proved that they do not invest out of free will. Trade unions were smashed and unemployment was used as a downward pressure on wages. Wages and salaries as a share of the economy fell by 3.9 per cent of GDP to an all time low. Simultaneously, company savings as a share of the economy fell by 35 per cent over the same period. Most of this money ended up in dividends to shareholders, which as a share of the economy have quadrupled since 1979. A very large proportion of that wealth is locked up in the company sector in London, which is now paying the lowest rates of corporation tax anywhere in the Western world. London must have access to some of those resources.

If Labour does not argue that London's problems require increased taxation we will find ourselves in conflict with the electorate, and with public sector unions which have fought a rearguard action against cuts-driven policies. MORI found that 42 per cent agreed that without tax raising powers the GLA will be unable to tackle London's problems effectively, with 34 per cent against. It is the task of the Labour candidate for mayor to convince the middle ground between those two blocks that their desire for improved services can only be met with increased public expenditure.

However, before we can stand candidates, we must first have a democratic selection process. The role of the Greater London Labour Party will now be more important than at any time since the GLC was abolished. It is therefore vital that the regional party retains its democratic structures, and expands on these for the GLA. Not only must there be an OMOV ballot to select our candidate for mayor, but the short-list must reflect the number of nominations in the unions and CLPs, with no inexplicable or undemocratic exclusions. We also need to decide who should draw up the short-list. Likewise, the selection of the constituency-based assembly members must be made by OMOV in each of the new constituencies, not by an elite panel, and the top-up party candidates should be ranked by the Party membership. The scandal over the abolition of One Member One Vote for MEPs must not be repeated in this selection.

It would also be intolerable if the selection for the authority did not reflect the requirement to fully represent the black communities in London. At the last census, black people (including the African, Asian and Caribbean communities) comprised 20 per cent of the population and they are projected by the next census to make up over a third of the population — well over a quarter of the electorate. Black representation must be central to our approach to the GLA.

Labour must win the GLA elections. For that reason, we need candidates who have the confidence of London Party members, and we must place ourselves at the head of the huge social and political forces which have waited for so long for democracy to return to the capital. Only on that basis is it possible to make the GLA deliver for London. ❑

After the Referendum — Making the GLA deliver for London

A one day conference to discuss the priorities for the London labour movement after the referendum.

Saturday 30th May, 11am-5pm
TGWU District Office, Headland House, 308 Grays Inn Road, London WC1

● trade unions and the public services ● role and powers of the GLA — Labour's policies ● ensuring representation of women and the black communities ● democracy, accountability and the London Labour Party.

£10 (TU or CLP delegates), £5/£2 individuals.

Speakers include: Ken Livingstone MP, Labour Women's Action Committee, Mark Seddon (*Tribune*), Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, Labour Reform

Organised by London Labour Left

A new opportunity for the left

John Morrissey, co-ordinator of The Way Ahead — the left current in the Green Party — and a past chair of the Green Party Executive, argues that Blair's victory in the Labour Party gives socialists the opportunity to build something better.

LIFE IN the Labour Party is pretty grim these days, they tell me. Comrades weep into their pints down at the Labour Club, gloomily contemplating whether to shred their membership cards. Yet — paradoxically — the left outside Labour has rarely been more confident or more buoyant.

The question which has dogged us for years — whether to work in, through or alongside Labour, or whether to build the alternative to it — is at last solved. As former MP Dave Nellist told the Network of Socialist Alliances at its Conference in March, New Labour is "now an openly capitalist party with a big business agenda." A burden has been lifted from our shoulders. Thank you, Tony Blair.

Another reason for optimism is the advent of proportional representation. Under PR the Scottish Socialist Alliance is set to gain seats in the Scottish Parliament. The likelihood of the Green Party sending MEPs to Strasbourg next year is small, but not nil. There are problems: the PR systems introduced are rigged, engineered to exclude small parties. But a bandwagon is unmistakably rolling.



As Blair's project to build a Christian Democratic coalition of the centre gathers pace, the emergence of a left opposition alliance is now almost inevitable.

The immediate problem is that the potential opposition is inchoate: from Socialist Party newspaper sellers to anarchist eco-warriors, from Green Party politicos to peace movement veterans. Not all these groups are on the best of terms. The question is whether the present culture of "openness" and "non-sectarianism" will hold, or whether we will fall back into our bad old ways.

The more fundamental issue is whether this potential alliance yet has any political basis, whether we all agree sufficiently on the issues to make it work. The present basis is little more than "my enemy's enemy is my friend". We agree what we are against — rapacious exploitative globalised capitalism (and Tony Blair) — but do we have sufficient consensus on what we are for?

Three emergent groups attempting to pull the strands together are the Network of Socialist Alliances, Green Left and the Independent Labour Network. Representatives of those organisations gathered in Sheffield in April and agreed — tongues only partly in cheeks — to form a "triple alliance".

There are about 20 local Alliances in England, with separate Alliances in Scotland and Wales. They are autonomous and adapt their activities to local circumstances. Dave Nellist stressed the importance of building unity by campaigning on issues: his Coventry Socialist Alliance has campaigned against housing privatisation, hospital closures and the Job Seekers Allowance.

There is no national policy on whether local Alliances should contest elections. Some, like Manchester, focus on brokering agreements between existing parties. In contrast, the ad hoc Committee of the London Alliances announced a target of 100 local candidates this year. However, many considered this irresponsible and adventurist: a couple of dozen is more likely.

The consensus is to avoid quick fixes and short cuts. One such which will likely not materialise is a Green-left assault on New Labour in next year's Euro elections, the first to be held in Britain under PR. Such "rainbow lists" were advocated by Hugh Kerr and Ken Coates when they quit Labour.

But the Green Party had already decided to stand full lists of its own candidates and saw no reason to change. A fringe meeting of 120 representatives at the Green Party Spring Conference welcomed Hugh Kerr and the opportunity to work with him in the future, but politely declined the offer of co-operation in the Euros. Coates and Kerr probably misjudged the position of the Green Party and over-estimated the present electoral enthusiasm and confidence of the left.

In the long term however prospects for such a Red-Green coalition have never been more favourable. Green Left, an organisation constructed with painful difficulty over the past three years, now provides a route to draw in both party Greens and a layer of the direct-action movement. It too seeks to build unity through campaigning on issues — in its case on economic globalisation. The ILN has the potential to reach out to disaffected members of the Labour Party.

There will inevitably be tension between those who — ignoring the dreadful lesson of the Socialist Labour Party — wish to rush ahead, and those who want to delay until some mythical objective material circumstances are right. At this stage it is probably correct to err on the side of caution. It will take time to build the alliances, the infrastructure and the platform, and above all the confidence and trust. But that cannot take forever.

Revolutionary theory is now mostly redundant, but at least it teaches us that historic opportunities must be grasped. Tony Blair's intention is to bury the left. Ironically he may be remembered as the person who gave it new unity and life.

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A nasty smell in Birmingham

EVEN Roy Hattersley, in the *Guardian*, said "It stinks". Raghib Ahsan, a councillor in Sparkhill, Birmingham, for six years and the main challenger to Roger Godsiff in the recent Parliamentary selection, has been denied the Labour nomination to stand again as a councillor. Our correspondent reports.

Three Birmingham CLPs have been suspended for over three years, so a regional panel selects councillors for these mainly inner city, safe Labour wards. Raghib Ahsan's removal sparked an enormous outcry locally — three thousand residents signed a petition, 65 Labour councillors signed a letter of protest. The leadership's tactic has been to say as little as possible in reply.

Ahsan is pursuing a case against the Party under the Race Relations Act, maintaining discrimination when a white man was chosen as his replacement, and also that the suspensions are discriminatory as membership rights have been withheld only from wards with a majority black membership.

Race is a vital factor. Inner Birmingham has a large ethnic minority population, the biggest single group being of Pakistani origin. As well as consistently voting Labour, they have recently been joining Labour and, unsurprisingly, selecting members of their own communities to represent them.



Raghib Ahsan

Rather than welcoming this, elements within the Labour Party panicked. Sitting MPs Clare Short, Jeff Rooker and Roger Godsiff all faced reselection challenges. The number of Pakistani councillors was also growing and threatening to become an effective bloc within the Labour Group. The introduction of OMOV was likely to give ethnic minority communities greater influence.

The suspensions — based on vague allegations of "membership abuse" — are about control of the unpredictable Asian membership. Similar events have occurred in other constituencies in Bradford, Manchester and Nottingham where the Asian community has been influential. Instead of a likely growth in the number of Pakistani councillors, they will be reduced from 13 to ten.

- Donations for Raghib Ahsan's court case should be sent to to Sparkhill Voice c/o Birmingham Trades Union Council, 723 Pershore Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29.

Community saves councillor — but three out in Leeds

Mike Davies, recently expelled from Leeds North East CLP reports: TWO MORE members of Leeds North East CLP were expelled last month. A third, equally innocent, was suspended for five years. But pressure from the local community, coupled with threats of legal action, won reinstatement for a councillor.

Garth Frankland has served Chapel Allerton Ward as its councillor for 18 years. When he was suspended, over a hundred Party members in his ward signed a petition calling for his reinstatement. Outside his National Constitutional Committee hearing, nearly a hundred local people, from all parts of the multi-religious and multi-racial community he represents, demonstrated. At the hearing evidence was given of Garth's loyal work for the Party and the local community by prominent local figures — the the Islamic Centre leader, the local Methodist minister, and the deputy leader of Leeds City Council.

Garth had made it clear that if he were not reinstated he would take legal action. Evidently Blair and Co were not prepared to take the risk of a court defeat. Perhaps they bore in mind the court action by Glasgow's Pat Lally, which drew some forthright criticism of New Labour's disciplinary process from the Scottish judge. Nevertheless, Blair's panel, while not imposing any further punishment, found Garth "guilty". On the most damaging allegation — intimidatory behaviour at a meeting — there was only one statement in support and that was from an official paid to say whatever he's told. Seventeen people, virtually the entire attendance at the meeting in question, submitted written statements that the allegation was entirely false.

Malcolm Christie, CLP Treasurer for twelve years, and Mike Eslea, ex-chair of Chapel Allerton ward, were expelled. Malcolm's expulsion shocked many members on both left and right. He is known as hard-working, scrupulously honest and a mainstay of the ward and CLP. Lorraine Hardy, CLP Secretary, was suspended for five years.

Leeds North East CLP has been suspended since February 1997. While the three wards regarded as less outspoken have been reinstated, Chapel Allerton remains suspended for campaigning to be reinstated. One of the wards allowed to resume activities has since passed motions condemning the cuts in lone parent benefit, and calling for the reinstatement of myself and Celia Foote. Perhaps the New Labour machine will have second thoughts about whether it was safe to let that ward meet again. ❑

Punished enough

Councillor Garth Frankland reports on his appearance before the NCC: Though the NCC panel found the charges against me proven, they felt my ten month suspension was punishment enough, reinstating me immediately. This perverse result raises more questions than it answers. Other loyal Labour Party members have been expelled or suspended. With seventeen witnesses against just the full time official on the central charge, any kind of guilty verdict seems bizarre.

There should be stricter guidelines for the operation of the NCC. It should not be possible to introduce new evidence, unsupported assertions and hearsay. The NCC hinted that a Leeds Campaign Group meeting I attended had hindered the election campaign. I recalled that it had discussed the NEC's *Party into Power* document which the NEC regarded as too important to delay until after the General Election!

The Chair of the NCC panel, Nigel Beard MP, asked me to use "your considerable influence inside the Party and the community to heal the deep political wounds in the Leeds North East Constituency". I agreed and will work over the next year to bring the CLP together so that it can be reinstated along with the suspended Chapel Allerton ward. Such a healing could lead the way to re-examine the cases of those expelled and suspended.

PFI: profits from illness

Kevin O'Brien, UNISON National Executive Council member, slams New Labour plans to introduce private capital into the NHS.

ON 7th April the Labour Government announced that it had agreed a further ten Private Finance Initiatives (PFI) projects within the NHS. This is on top of the fifteen that it has already agreed in England with three underway in Scotland. This Government, a Labour Government, has already achieved more in eleven months than the Tories did in the previous five years. The PFI announcement came as UNISON delegates from the NHS were meeting at Brighton for their Health Service Group Conference. PFI and pay were top of the agenda. UNISON opposes PFI and has argued its case coherently.

Under PFI, a private group or consortium pays for a new hospital. The NHS trust pays fees covering construction costs, rent, support services and the risks being transferred to the private consortium.

The new hospital will be built, owned and run by the private group for at least 25 years, maybe longer. The trust may continue to employ some staff, mainly doctors and nurses. Porters, receptionists, domestics, secretaries, lab technicians and maintenance staff would almost certainly be employed by private contractors. This is a major step towards privatisation — is the NHS safe in Labour's hands?

This Government believes that the Tories came up with a good idea, so it is continuing to privatise the NHS 'through the back door'. It will not end here — next there will be increases in charges on the pretext of improving services. Big business is not setting up consortiums because it believes in the NHS or is feeling charitable. The shareholders and 'fat cats' want big profits and they will get them on the backs of taxpayers.

What makes it worse is that Labour is also committed to continue subsidising the consortiums to plan and negotiate PFI. In January 1997, eleven NHS trusts were offered access to annual subsidies ranging from £300,000 to £1.5m provided they signed contracts within three months, within the lifetime of the then Conservative Government. Labour is continuing these subsidies for the entire period of PFI contracts — 25 years or more — amounting to £24m on the first 15 schemes alone.

Health Minister Alan Milburn had a rough reception from UNISON delegates, who gave a clear message that continuing PFI was not on. Despite promising a review, the Government has done nothing to reassure health workers that conditions would be protected or union rights maintained.

The Health Minister has set up the NHS Capital Prioritisation Advisory Group (CPAG) within the NHS Executive to rubberstamp PFI schemes with a capital cost of over £25m, supposedly on the basis of health service need. But the traditional — and cheapest — method of paying for new hospitals is government borrowing. Why the Government is not sticking to this is unanswered in their propaganda.

Labour argues that PFI provides new capital without counting against the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement, so adding to government borrowing in the short term. The Accounting Standards Board (ASB) takes a different view. It believes the key accounting decisions centre on whether the property concerned is owned by the purchaser of the PFI services, such as a hospital, or the operator, the private sector consortium. It proposes a two-stage test. First any item relating to services such as cleaning should be stripped out, as according to ASB they do not matter when deciding who owns the asset. Then if all that remains is payment for a property, it is likely that the asset will appear on the NHS balance sheet and therefore count against PSBR. So much for their argument.

UNISON is continuing its campaign against PFI and has had national and regional conferences on the issue. We will continue to use every opportunity to challenge the fundamental weaknesses and highlight the damaging impact of this government policy. A national lobby of Parliament is planned to emphasise that a democratic government cannot act like a dictator and we will not let it ignore what is right and in the public's best interests.



Red in High Places

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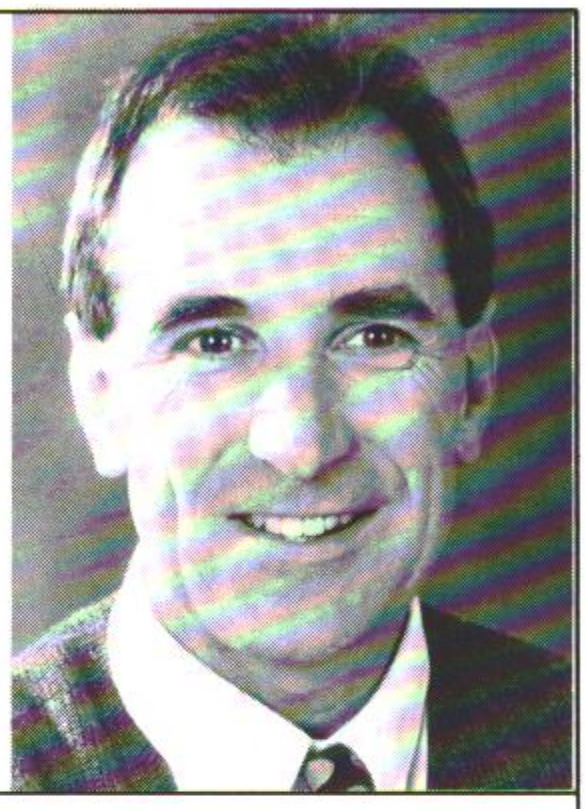
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Labour Left Briefing

the Alan Simpson column



The Secretary of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs.

IT IS always embarrassing when one columnist tries to suck up to another in a magazine they both work for. But that's what you're going to have to live with. It wasn't my fault that Geoff Martin teamed up with John Lister (of London Health Emergency) to write a blistering pamphlet: *EMU and the NHS*. They just did.

Though they are more likely to receive brickbats than praise for their endeavours, the whole labour movement owes them a debt. Martin and Lister offer a timely reminder of how disastrous Europe's obsession with a single currency is becoming for public services and public investment. The strength of their pamphlet is that it connects cuts in services in the UK with parallel ones in other parts of Europe — not a nationalist rant but the clarion call for a people's Europe based on expanded public services, genuine social inclusion and full employment.

When thousands of copies of the pamphlet were distributed at the recent UNISON Health Conference it will have given NHS health workers their first clear explanation of how the (much hated) PFI is central to the Maastricht single currency. Many will have settled for Will Hutton's contention that "the PFI is becoming the means of liberally privatising the state". But they may not have sussed its importance in meeting the Maastricht convergence criteria.

The single European currency demands that a ceiling be put on the level of government debt and government borrowing. So if you want to build a hospital, a school, a (channel) tunnel or launch a national programme of council house building, how do you raise the money? Traditionally, governments have done this by raising taxes and/or borrowing on the market. Today, such suggestions would be an affront to the Government's commitment to Tory spending limits or EMU borrowing restraints. That's where the PFI fits in.

Private finance does not count as Government debt. It simply puts us all in hock to private sector leasing charges for up to 60 years. Not only will we be paying rent out of money we should be paying to nurses, teachers, etc. but at the end of it all everything will be owned by the private sector. This is an enormous price to pay for borrowing that the state could do much more cheaply for itself. For capital, however, such a move satisfies both the rentier (who would privatise the state) and the Eurocrat (who would simply hand it over to the corporate boardroom).

DO NOT be under any illusions about the scale on which this little lottery is being played out. When Labour came to power, it was against the backdrop of £4.9 billion of PFI deals stitched up by the Tories. Rather than calling a halt, Labour has increased the projections of PFI spending to £10.4 billion in our first 3 years in office. There is little doubt that this is as a replacement for direct public investment, not an addition to it. Once you take account of depreciation, today's public sector investment rates are half their level at the start of the 1990s and about a fifth of the rate in the 60s and 70s.

None of this is God-given. It is simply the demands of Maastricht and monetarism. Far from helping us out of a hole, the PFI will throw us into a deeper one, which EMU will only make worse. Tragically, it also distracts us from more sensible alternatives.

This would be a really good time to increase public investment dramatically. Government borrowing or taxation would help to collapse a massively over-valued pound. This would take the pressure off interest rates and direct spending into investment rather than consumption.

Most of us could easily be forgiven for agreeing with Keynes' criticisms in 1925 of obsessive monetarism and an overvalued currency: "... by committing us to a period of deflation, it necessarily postponed active measures of capital expansion at home, such as might facilitate the transference of labour into the home trades."

The single currency that Keynes was warning about was the return to the Gold Standard, a move that was to prove disastrous for the whole of Europe. Yet today the same siren voices draw us down this path again. The problem (we are told) is Britain not being in EMU. Joining would somehow make everything all right. Oh, what fools history makes of us! In 1925 Keynes also wrote: "The President of the Board of Trade has asserted in the House of Commons that the effect of the restoration of the Gold Standard upon our export trade has been 'all to the good'.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has expressed the opinion that the return to the Gold Standard is no more responsible for the condition of affairs in the coal industry than is the Gulf Stream. These statements are of the feather-brained order."

Today's manufacturing exports head the same way as yesterday's coal. And the drive towards EMU (at any cost) systematically undermines public services, public investment and public employment. Keynes would be amongst the first to tell you "get out and read Geoff's pamphlet". A wisdom from beyond the grave could yet save us from an early one.

- Copies of *EMU and the NHS* are available from People's Europe Campaign, c/o House of Commons, SW1A 0AA.

EMU can seriously damage your health

EMU: a flightless bird

Dr. Brian Burkitt, Pudsey CLP and Senior Lecturer in Economics at the University of Bradford, argues that the single currency will stop our economy getting off the ground.

JOHN PALMER, former European editor of the *Guardian*, has long been renowned as an ardent supporter of closer European integration in general and of EMU in particular. However, in his *Tribune* article of 13th November, his Euro-enthusiasm leads him to neglect economic reality. British participation in the single currency will prevent the Labour Government from achieving its basic objectives of restoring full employment, of improving the quality of public services and of reversing the Tories' regressive redistribution by directing resources towards the poor.

Economists have recently analysed the costs and benefits of sovereign states adopting a single currency. They concluded that monetary union proves beneficial when participating countries possess similar economic structures and international trading patterns. If they do not, a single currency is inefficient and in fact widens differences in performance between its component parts. Comparing the United Kingdom to other EU countries, it becomes apparent that divergences of structure and trade are so great that EMU will damage economic welfare. These divergences rest upon a number of factors, including the following:

- Britain's lower level of unfunded pensions
- A greater volume of high technology exports
- A more service orientated industrial structure
- A relatively small agriculture sector and a relatively large gas and oil sector
- A system of variable-rate finance that makes small businesses and owner-occupiers uniquely sensitive to interest rate changes
- A currency linked by foreign exchange markets more closely to the US dollar than to EU currencies
- A comparatively sizeable financial sector related to Tokyo and Wall Street versus Bonn and Frankfurt
- Income from overseas investment, 80% of which originates outside the EU, which is greater than from manufacturing exports.

Such disparities, particularly the UK economy's greater sensitivity to change in the short term interest rates, means that EU-wide policy will exert a different impact between countries. A recent Centre for Economic Policy Research report entitled *The Ostrich and EMU* demonstrated that interest rate variations exercise most of their impact in Britain within two months, compared to six months in Germany and Italy. In Britain, the impact of interest rate movements on economic activity after two years is four times the EU average. Under such circumstances UK participation in EMU would be a disaster.

Any change in European monetary policy will be disproportionately channelled through the British economy, which would thus become disproportionately volatile. The British economic cycle is not synchronised with the rest of the EU; between 1961-93, the UK grew or shrank in line with the EU average for only six years in every ten, as against nine years out of ten for France and Germany.

The impact of EU-wide interests could be softened to suit Britain through fiscal measures that loosen policy in downturns and tighten it during upturns. But the scope for budgetary flexibility within EMU is limited by the stability pact, under which countries can be fined if their state borrowing in any year exceeds 3 per cent of GDP. Had such rules applied from 1992-96, the UK could have been fined up to £15 billion. It will be many years, if ever, before member states can achieve the necessary budgetary scope for counter-cyclical policies. The room for manoeuvre allowed by the stability pact is extremely narrow.

Conceived in a different inflationary era, the single currency project ensured that the EU experienced deflation when it should have enjoyed reflation. Politicians who were long on historic vision but short on economic common sense have imposed it upon Europe's 20 million unemployed. For the foreseeable future, EMU cannot operate effectively, because it is trying to achieve an EU economic homogeneity that simply does not exist. Without flexible exchange rates, and with limited labour mobility, under-performing countries will suffer chronically high unemployment.

The main lesson of the EMU project is that economic policy can never be operated efficiently through rigid rules but needs to be interpreted according to changing circumstances. Critics of EMU are often reproached for putting European co-operation under threat. However, the greatest danger to EU harmony lies in the design of the single currency, that already has led millions of its citizens to identify with the EU economic and social deprivation, or even exclusion. The people of Europe deserve an economy that serves their interest.

Labour's priority should be creating jobs by stimulating aggregate demand, not deflating the economy to achieve the Maastricht criteria. In the long run increasing economic activity, which generates tax revenue and cuts expenditure on benefits, reduces government borrowing.

The Treasury estimates that each involuntarily unemployed person costs the Exchequer approximately £9,000 per year via lost tax revenue and higher social security payments. Labour must reject the single currency because its risks of deflation and greater unemployment are too high.

Non-participation carries positive benefits, a fact that the Labour Government seems to have overlooked. Outside the single currency, Labour could pursue an expansionary economic strategy by reducing interest rates, increasing the money supply and allowing the exchange rate to reach the level required to achieve balance of payments equilibrium at full employment.

The success of such a strategy will enable Labour to create jobs, improve welfare services, abolish poverty and reduce inequality. Indeed, the successful expansion of employment in Britain might eventually stimulate new ideas within the EU outside the obsolete, monetarist Maastricht framework that John Palmer wishes to impose on us.

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Joan Maynard:

an appreciation by Jeremy Corbyn

AFTER Joan Maynard's funeral, Radio Five Live hack Andrew Roth unleashed his bile on *Brief Lives*, claiming that her examination of everything in class terms had "crippled" her judgement, presenting her as boring, extremist, irrelevant and very dangerous — not the warm and very human Joan I knew.

At Joan's funeral there were speeches from Tony Benn, Chris Mullin, Peter Medhurst and Tony Gould from the T&GWU, and local activist Don Cartridge. The final singing of *Jerusalem* was pure Joan.

The capacity congregation in a village Church opposite her home included local Labour Party people, supporters from Sheffield and many friends and political activists of the left — people who ordinarily would have plenty to argue about. I sat next to Michael Jopling, former Tory Agriculture Minister, who spent years profoundly disagreeing with Joan but respected her sincerity and honesty.

Joan grew up in North Yorkshire, campaigned for farm workers, became agent for Thirsk and Malton and was later on the Party's NEC and MP for Sheffield Brightside.

I knew Joan for many years. She never moved from an unshakeable belief in the cause of the working class. Always prepared to take up issues she believed in, her fights for farm workers, steel workers, Ireland and much more always had a clear class analysis. She once said that when a minister said that a decision was a "fair balance between employers and workers", she knew the workers had lost.

In her crusade for rural workers, she saw no common cause with hunters, landowners and *Country Life* magazine. Rather she sought to expose class interests in rural areas that thrive on poverty and the destruction of the environment through intensive farming.



Joan Maynard

From North Yorkshire, fighting on behalf of farm workers, she was selected for Sheffield Brightside. Her successful promotion of the needs of her new constituency and her own union, the Agricultural Workers, showed her strength and ability to unite apparently disparate forces around a clear agenda.

As a new MP after the 1983 election, I found Joan a friend and inspiration. She helped and encouraged, cheerfully telling me there was no shame in being unpopular in the PLP when we organised a visit for Gerry Adams to discuss Ireland. She chaired the Campaign Group with skill and leadership and was always prepared to travel and talk to any audience of any size on political affairs. She seemed happiest making speeches at Tolpuddle for the Annual Martyrs Rally and at the Burston School Strike Rally.

Her internationalism was clear. She saw the cold war for what it was and the way imperialism, having lost its colonies, was reinventing itself through punitive trade agreements. Delegations from liberation movements never forgot the experience of meeting Joan.

She seemed unworried by the way she was treated and described as "Stalin's Granny". She was not in the least sectarian. While very active in the Labour Party, she was prepared to work with other groups, opposing the witch hunts that started with the register in the early 1980s and gathered intensity. On the NEC she was a friend of the party activist and could sense the feeling of anger and isolation that we all feel when our party heads in a direction for which it has no mandate.

Joan came to Islington to launch our 1987 election campaign and spoke with such warmth and feeling that it was a pure joy to listen to her. I will always be grateful to her for coming to Wiltshire to address a memorial meeting for my parents, David and Naomi Corbyn.

Thank you Joan for all you did and the help and friendship you gave to so many; there never was a more honest and trustworthy person in parliamentary and union positions. ❑

Joan Maynard's funeral service was held in the parish church of St Oswald's in the beautiful North Yorkshire Village of Sowerby. Tony Benn and Chris Mullin praised her political courage, kindness and encouragement. They stressed her internationalism including her support for a united Ireland, her opposition to the PTA and her support of the cause of the Palestinian people.

This straightforward support went well beyond the confines of the Labour Party when she helped arrange accommodation and food for the Young Socialist marches against unemployment in the early 1970s. It was Joan who suggested at a meeting of West Yorkshire *Labour Briefing* that the left should pull together and form a Campaign Group. This lead to the formation of the Leeds Campaign Group (still going strong), the first in the country outside of Parliament.

Her friend Don Cartridge emphasised how her completely non-New Labour politics had transformed her rural backwater by building a 2,000 strong CLP.

Dennis Skinner, Jeremy Corbyn, Audrey Wise, Tom Dalyell and many others travelled to her quiet village home to pay their last respects. The final hymn *Jerusalem* lifted the rafters off the church. Her example renews our faith in a socialist future.

Councillor Garth Frankland

Victimising

Rob Deans, North East Cambridgeshire CLP, casts an economist's eye over New Labour's welfare reforms and finds them wanting.

IN THE foreword and introduction to the Green Paper on welfare reform, *New Ambitions For Our Country: A New Contract For Welfare*, Tony Blair writes: "The principles guiding reform and our vision of the future welfare state are clear. We want to rebuild the system around work and security. Work for those who can; security for those who cannot." The paper identifies three key problems with the existing system:

- increases in inequality and social exclusion despite more spending;
- barriers to work and financial disincentives trap people on benefits rather than helping them off;
- fraud diverts resources from genuine claimants.

Four 'ages' of welfare are defined: stopping outright destitution, alleviating poverty, preventing poverty and promoting opportunity and developing potential.



Rob Deans

We are considered to be in the third 'age' and aspiring to the fourth. The alternatives contemplated are: privatisation and a residual safety net; the status quo, but with more generous and costly benefits; or the Government's "third way" — promoting opportunity instead of dependence based on eight key principles:

- the importance of work,
- new partnerships for welfare,
- the importance of welfare services,
- support for disabled people,
- tackling child poverty,
- attacking social exclusion,
- rooting out fraud,
- a modern service.

Attached to these are a total of 32 success measures against which performance is to be judged over the next 10 to 20 years. A new contract between citizen and government, based on mutual responsibilities and rights, will be at the heart of the modern welfare state.

The Green Paper must be evaluated within the wider context of New Labour's plans to regenerate the economy, restructure the state and reinvigorate civil society. Established social democratic conceptions of welfare have given way to a neo-liberal approach justifying withdrawal of state provision of adequate levels of social security, increasing regulation of those claiming benefits and enforcement of a duty to work.

While the social security system has failed to alleviate inequality and poverty, the Green Paper is premised upon a highly questionable interpretation of the reasons for its ineffectiveness that ignores the impact of changes to entitlements and benefit levels made by previous governments. As to its unaffordability, it is simply a fallacy to suggest that costs are spiralling out of control or that current and projected levels of expenditure cannot be sustained.

Table 1 shows spending by the 'big three' welfare departments as a percentage of government expenditure between 1982 and 1996. Over this period spending rose slowly in all departments, except education, and combined they took a larger share of the Government's budget.

Table 2 looks at the share of welfare spending by the same departments and also the share of total government expenditure as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) over the same period, during which their share of GDP has again risen slowly in all departments, except education. Combined, they also took a higher share of GDP, but a lower share of total government expenditure and it is projected to decline even further.

Table 1 Welfare Spending as a % of General Government Expenditure

	1982	1987	1992	1996
Education	12.91	11.80	12.03	11.98
Health	12.65	11.97	13.13	13.38
Social Security	28.74	28.11	30.17	31.67
Sub Total	54.30	51.88	55.33	57.03

Source: adapted from *Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 1997-1998* (HM Treasury, 1997)

Table 2 Welfare Spending and Government Expenditure as a % of GDP

	1982	1987	1992	1996
Education	5.4	4.8	5.2	4.9
Health	5.2	4.9	5.7	5.5
Soc. Sec.	11.9	11.4	13.1	13.1
Sub Total	22.5	21.1	24.0	23.5
Govt Exp'ture	45.5	40.5	43.4	41.3

Source: *Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 1997-1998* (HM Treasury, 1997)

Table 3 looks at how spending by the 'big three' welfare departments and government expenditure has increased in relation to increases in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) over the last five years. A ratio of 1.00 implies that welfare spending or government expenditure has increased at 100% of the increase in GDP, so as GDP has grown this item has maintained its share of the national cake. A ratio less than 1.00 implies an increase of less than 100% of the increase in GDP, and a ratio greater than 1.00 implies an increase of more than 100% of the increase in GDP.

Table 3 % Change in Welfare Spending and Govt Expenditure/% Change in GDP

	92	93	94	95	96
Education	1.86	0.99	0.88	0.73	0.31
Health	2.23	0.69	0.91	0.96	0.81
Soc. Sec.	3.01	1.69	0.46	0.96	0.89
Sub Total	2.56	1.30	0.65	0.91	0.75
Govt. Exp.	2.38	0.94	0.70	0.85	0.51

Source: adapted from *Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 1997-1998* (HM Treasury, 1997)

The ratios show that apart from 1992 and social security in 1993, welfare spending and government expenditure failed to grow at the same rate as GDP. The figures for 1992 and social security for 1993 are affected by the recession at the beginning of the 1990s which reduced the growth in GDP and increased the level of social security payments. A significant increase in the ratio is therefore to be expected during a recession due to cyclical factors. However, during a boom the Government has discretion whether to take advantage of the rising national prosperity to spend more. Given the

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the victim

choice, governments have chosen instead to restrain expenditure.

Table 4 looks at how spending by the 'big three' welfare departments and government expenditure has increased in relation to increases in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in cumulative periods over 1982-1996. The interpretation of the ratios is the same as in the previous table. By taking cumulative periods the recent trend for the increase in welfare spending and government expenditure to fall behind the increase in GDP is again shown. The effects of the 1990s recession are still visible, especially in the 1987-1996 data.

Table 4 % Change in Welfare and Government Spending/% Change in GDP

	1982-96	1987-96	1992-96
Education	0.94	1.05	0.95
Health	1.07	1.16	0.97
Soc. Sec.	1.12	1.17	1.00
Sub Total	1.07	1.14	0.98
Govt. Exp.	1.02	1.04	0.95

Source: adapted from *Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 1997-1998* (HM Treasury, 1997)

This survey shows how stable welfare spending has been over the last 15 years, whether measured as a percentage of government expenditure (Table 1), or of GDP (Table 2), or as a ratio of change in respect to GDP (Tables 3 and 4). It also demonstrates how reliant these are upon growth and therefore upon the success of macroeconomic policy. Poor performance not only results in increased cyclical spending on social security benefits, but also reduces both the ability to fund this increase and to make discretionary spending. Sustained growth requires both increasing demand and increasing capacity. Neither have grown at the required rates as the current orthodoxy, fully subscribed to by New Labour, eschews anything to do with the former and severely damages the prospects of the latter due to its high interest rate / high pound anti-inflationary policy. Much of the pressure on welfare budgets has therefore been of governments' own making.

However, New Labour's proposals for welfare reform should not be dismissed simply as a pretext for cutting expenditure. This is secondary to its main purpose — imposing a stricter market discipline on the workforce, especially the non-employed, whose very existence questions the morality of an economic system that produces increasing inequality and poverty, and whose mass organisations, if permitted, could create a political consciousness that threatens its continued dominance. What the Green Paper is really about is the reinforcement of the social relations essential to capitalist reproduction.

The welfare state has never been a neutral structure with the objective of ensuring the population's well-being, but rather an apparatus underpinning, through class conflict and institutional compromise, the imperatives of capitalist accumulation.

It is therefore no surprise that New Labour's proposals for welfare reform have concentrated solely upon supply side reforms aimed at the labour market. It accepts the underclass thesis that benefits are a disincentive to work and nurture dependency. By focusing upon behaviourial and cultural explanations of poverty it neglects structural factors at the macro level. The danger of this approach is that once the argument is accepted that poverty, if not caused by welfare dependency, is at least sustained by it, the inescapable policy conclusion is that poverty will be eliminated by reducing benefits, restricting entitlement and coercing claimants into punitive workfare schemes. New Labour is thus constructing an ideology that blames the poor for their poverty and justifies abandoning collective responsibility for the provision of adequate social security protection.

No longer are inequality and poverty regarded as flaws of the market economy, but as flaws of the social security system. Whereas these problems would previously have been remedied through progressive taxation and redistribution, now they are to be remedied by measures which discourage reliance on benefits.

Policies designed to create jobs are now taking second place to policies designed to compel people into accepting whatever jobs are available. New Labour is intentionally placing the burden of market failure onto the shoulders of those groups in society that are least able to bear it. It is victimising the victim.

Green Paper Blues

Andy Walker, Secretary of Ilford South CLP, reports on the Welfare Green Paper.

THE WELFARE Green Paper is published by the Stationary Office Ltd, a private company born from a Tory privatisation. Profits for the private sector should not be made out of producing government publications. The Green Paper is silent on this point. Unfortunately, this is not the only piece of Tory ideology it accepts without question.

The paper uses the word "dependency" to the degree one might expect of a medical textbook on persistent vegetative state. Like patients who do not respond to treatment, New Labour is prepared to let young unemployed people starve if they will not accept the medicine of workfare. What condemns people to unemployment is governments which refuse to intervene in the economy to create jobs, not "fecklessness" to be solved by quack remedies.

Millbank is keen for the paper to be discussed widely. An indication of the preferred limits of the consultation is given by this statement regarding mutuals and private providers: "In 2020, these providers will deliver a substantial share of welfare provision, particularly pensions." Legal and General have a different timetable; in their view, stakeholder pensions should not only be substituted for SERPS but for the state basic pension as well. Responses from CLPs calling for state expenditure to create work and no privatisation of welfare will influence forthcoming legislation.

- **The consultation deadline is 31st July 1998. Responses should be sent to The Welfare Reform Green Paper Consultation Team, Department of Social Security, 7th Floor, The Adelphi, 1-11 John Adam Street, London WC2N 6HT.**
- **Free summary versions are available from: Welfare Reform, Freepost (HA4441), Hayes UB3 1BR. The Green Paper costs £11.50 and is available by phoning 0345-023 474.**

Labour prevaricates on pensions

The Pensions Review is in danger of being hijacked by proposals to allow the state pension to wither away, warns Terry Heath, Secretary of the South West TUC Pensioners' Forum.

TOP-UP private pensions, as favoured by Frank Field, can only intensify the miserable conditions many pensioners endure. The present workforce, especially those on the low pay scales so favoured by many employers, will never be able to make adequate provision for their retirement, which may well come earlier than they think. To attain a reasonable retirement pension, it is necessary for some 16% of salary to be invested through one's working life, but 16% of low pay equals not much pension.

Many employers are threatening to close down their company schemes if any government requires them to actually pay into employees' schemes as they once had to if they wanted to attract and hold staff. The TUC totally failed to grasp the opportunity to start up its own scheme in conjunction with their Unity Bank. A portable scheme such as that enjoyed by teachers, NHS and Civil Service employees would have boosted union recruitment as workers want a feeling of stability and are denied it by both government and employers.

Pensions Review members met Pensions Minister John Denham in September 1997 and discussed the vital restoration of the earnings link. To avoid frightening him, they proposed an annual increase of 1.1% above average earnings to restore the link gradually. In October, they discussed the restoration of SERPS to its original value. In November, the subject was the pathetic 25 pence increase for those who reach 80 years. December saw the idea of "Stakeholder" pensions rear its ugly head and the January meeting covered community care, or the lack of it. The sum total of concessions to date is £20 for winter fuel. What really gets up pensioners' noses are the persistent leaks from government, totally negating any real dialogue and giving the impression that all the real decisions have already been made and the Review is a cosmetic exercise.

- A further Pensioners Rally is to be held in London on Saturday, 19th September starting at 1 pm from Embankment Tube. For more information contact the Pensions Day Group, Tel: 0171-831 8600.



- **The South West TUC Pensioners' Committee** has discovered a problem facing pensioners as a result of changes introduced in the budget. The State Retirement Revision was increased by 3.6% but Income Support (IS) allowances and premiums were increased by only 2.4%. For the first time for many years, the level for IS is set lower than the state pension.

The resulting loss of IS is bad enough under this "caring" government, but it has drastic repercussions as receipt of Income Support gives automatic entitlement to other benefits, notably Housing Benefit and Council Tax Rebate. Pensioners now need to complete new claim forms and to advise the DSS Health Benefits Division to obtain exemption from prescription charges, etc.

The local DSS office will not tell pensioners this unless they ask! Pensioners must also make immediate application to the local authority for housing and council tax benefits. Local authorities are unaware of the general implications of the budget changes or so they would have us believe. Eventually after many weeks the local Benefits Office will officially notify local authorities.

30 years of abortion rights celebrated

Leonora Lloyd reports: 27th April marks the 30th anniversary of the 1967 Abortion Act. The Act was a big step forward for women but a lot has changed since then. The idea that two doctors — rather than the woman concerned — should make the decision, is not acceptable to women three decades on from the start of the modern women's movement. Women can increasingly control their own lives but still cannot make the most important decision of all — whether or not to continue a pregnancy.

Thanks to the National Abortion Campaign and other pro-choice groups, the population as a whole agrees with this, as polls consistently show. Now the time is ripe for the next step. We have a Labour Party in power, with pro-choice policy and a record number of women MPs. We have a Secretary of State for Health who has publicly called for progressive change. And on the 30th anniversary itself a new pro-choice Parliamentary group — Voice for Choice — is to be launched.

The main problem remains finding MPs prepared to put forward the necessary private member's bill. A wide spread of MPs is needed — one must come in the top six if the bill is to stand a chance of becoming law. A vigorous campaign is needed to ensure that opposing MPs cannot filibuster the bill. MPs in marginal seats may be reluctant to face an onslaught from anti-abortionists if they go ahead with a bill. Pro-choice groups must explain that anti-abortionists make a lot of noise but are a tiny minority of the electorate. No one will be risking their seat by supporting choice.

30 years ago a young, unknown MP — David Steele — made his name with the original Abortion Act. But he could not have succeeded without a Labour Government giving the bill parliamentary time. Now we must demand the same of our current Labour Government if we are to have the abortion law that women deserve and need for the next century.

PR, STV, AMS, SV, AV — what's it all about?

Do you know the difference between STV and SV? Or is PR just a list of incomprehensible initials? Tony Dale, Manchester Central CLP, produced this guide to the different forms of proportional representation.

LABOUR'S General Election manifesto promised a referendum on PR for Parliament and different systems are being introduced for the Euro elections, the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Greater London Authority.

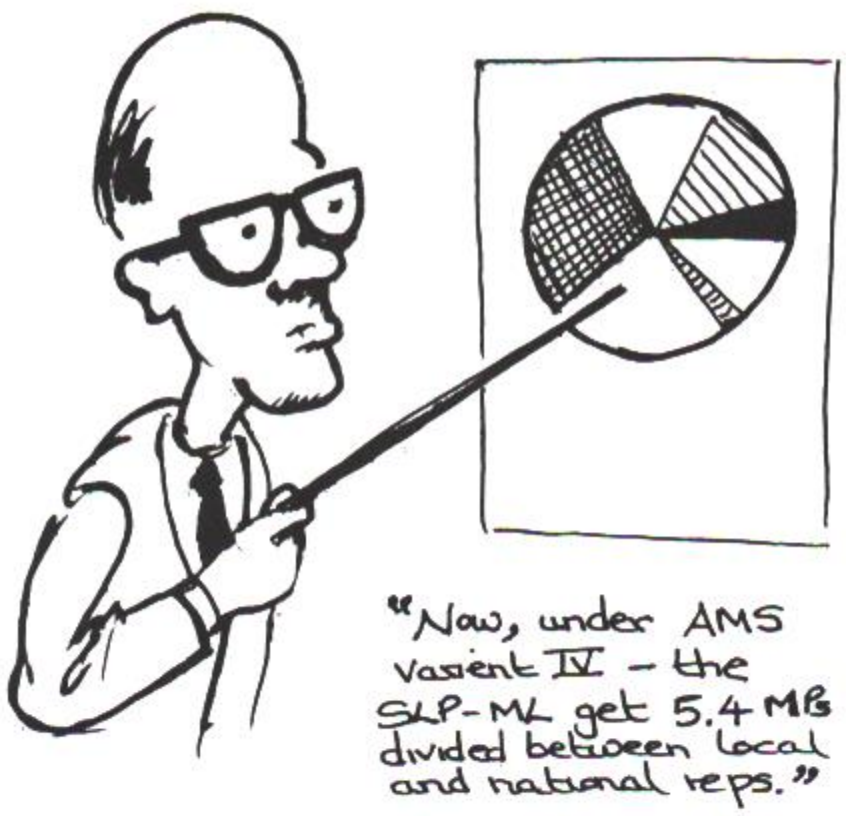
Next year's elections to the European Parliament are to be run on a Party list system. Britain is to be divided up into regions and voters will vote for a Party list. The regional seats will be distributed according to the percentage vote of each party. Party list systems are quite common in Europe. The voter will not be able to give preference to specific candidates as the parties will have control of the order of the list. This system gives enormous power and patronage to the party machine.

The most accurate PR system would have a single country-wide constituency where each party got the same percentage of seats as percentage of votes. While this system gives the purest result, MPs would have no link to an area and therefore no possibility of accountability. Only Israel and Holland use a national list system. Only under this system would, for example, the Socialist Labour Party have gained seats in the last election.

PR systems can be tested against exactly how proportional they are, but democracy is not just about getting an accurate distribution of seats. It must also mean creating a structure to hold elected representatives accountable and giving voters a real choice.

The Additional Member System will be used for the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and the Greater London Authority. Here people get two votes: they vote for a representative and cast a second vote for a party list. The parties' total votes across the region are compared to the number of candidates elected. Disparities are balanced out by giving parties additional seats. AMS produces the odd situation where those elected locally can boast a strong personal mandate and those elected regionally can claim to represent a broader constituency across the region. Party machines can exercise considerable power by controlling the regional party list.

The Alternative Vote system is very like the present electoral system. Voters rank candidates 1,2,3 etc. in single seat constituencies. Candidates with the lowest votes are eliminated and their votes redistributed according to the voters' second preferences until one candidate gets over 50% of the votes. The Australian House of Representatives is elected by AV. It is also similar to the exhaustive ballots used in many internal labour movement elections.



Peter Mandelson supports AV. While this would seem good enough reason to reject this system there are other deeper problems. First, the results of AV elections are not very proportional. Secondly, it will create an unhealthy political situation as the campaign in many constituencies would be dominated by a battle to win the Lib Democrats second preferences.

The Supplementary Vote is a close relation to the Alternative Vote except the 1,2,3 preference voting is dispensed with. A SV ballot paper has an additional column to vote for a second preference. A variant of this system is used in France where voters return for the "second Sunday" to vote between the highest placed candidates if no candidate has won 50% of the votes in the first round.

The Single Transferable Vote is used in the Irish Republic and in many N.Ireland elections. Elections are run in multi-member constituencies with voters ranking candidates in order of preference. Existing constituencies would be combined to create new constituencies returning on average 5 MPs. STV delivers a broadly proportional outcome while maintaining a local link for MPs. Also, it avoids party lists and allows voters to prioritise a specific candidate over another candidate from the same party. It could allow Labour voters to choose between voting for a left winger or a Blairite. Many in the Labour leadership want any system but STV!

The big argument against PR is that PR will inevitably lead to coalitions. The last election would still have produced a majority Labour government under STV, AV or Supplementary Vote systems.

It is also important to bear in mind the shortcomings of the present first past the post electoral system. This system was devised to simplify and minimise the choices for a largely illiterate electorate. It consistently fails to accurately reflect the views of the electorate, Thatcher's famous 1983 landslide 144 seat majority was achieved with under 43% of the vote. The present system has the ability to throw up bizarre results. In 1951 the Labour Government was ejected from office despite winning a quarter of a million more votes than the Tories. The present system has helped Blair and Mandelson to use electoral expediency to justify ignoring Labour's core vote. ❑



War on the wharfies

One thousand four hundred dockers employed by Patrick Stevedoring in Sydney, Australia, have been sacked. Legal writs are flying all over the world in an attempt to stop solidarity action. This looks like Mersey all over again. Eddie Tucker reports.

INTERNATIONAL trade unions have threatened to boycott goods from one of Australia's dock-handling companies after it sacked all of its 1,400 "wharfies". Security guards with rottweiler dogs evicted workers at 17 Australian ports in pre-dawn raids in an attempt to introduce non-union, individual-contract labour and speed up production. Thousands of trade unionists around the country stopped work in support of the dockers, raising the prospect of a national strike.

The sacked men represent the entire unionised workforce of the docks company, Patrick Stevedoring, which intends to replace them with non-union labour. The conservative National Party government is encouraging the 'drive for efficiency' that management claim will result from its action.

The London-based International Transport Federation (ITF) told its 500 worldwide affiliates in 120 countries to campaign against Patrick, and the effectiveness of this led in turn to the company's lawyers slapping an injunction on the ITF. On 17th April, the High Court in London threw out the action, and ITF General Secretary David Cockroft hailed the victory and attacked the union-busting of Patrick as "an attack on the fundamentals of freedom and democracy."

The protests are an extension of a waterfront battle that began in 1996, when new laws restricted the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA)'s ability to call strikes. The union, which represents all waterfront workers, has asked workers to remain united and not accept individual contracts with Patrick. Meanwhile, other unions are threatening a national oil strike in support. The Government's stated intent in provoking this dispute is to break the unions' hold on waterfront work by establishing scab docks.

It is speculated that the intervention by the government is a move to bolster Prime Minister Howard's National Party's share of seats in parliament by blaming the labour movement for the touch of Asian economic flu their economy is feeling. Roy Green, Director of Employment Studies at Australia's Newcastle University, told *LLB*, "Howard is right on at least one point. The waterside dispute will be a 'defining moment' for industrial relations in Australia." Laws against primary and secondary boycotts are as oppressive as the Thacherite legislation on which they are modelled, and all unions face expropriation of assets and jail for any supporting actions, in violation of ILO agreements.

The Labor Party's Transport spokeswoman, Alannah McTiernan, says it is not just waterside workers who should be worried about their jobs, "If an employer can just come in, without there being any local dispute at all, and sack all their employees and say: 'we want to sack you because we're going to replace you with people on workplace agreements', that has amazing ramifications for every worker in Western Australia." Community support is being organised through the trade union movement, and the sister of Patrick's boss told her local paper, "I didn't want anyone to know I was Chris Corrigan's sister" and urged him to return to the negotiating table.

- *War on the Wharfies* is an independent web page which contains news reports on the Maritime Union of Australia's fight against the rightwing attack by the National Farmers Federation, waterfront bosses, and federal and state governments: http://www.users.bigpond.com/Takver/soapbox/index.htm



Redbridge Campaign Group

Inaugural meeting

Wednesday 20th May, 8pm
Gloucester Room, Central Library, Ilford

With Alan Simpson MP, Liz Davies and Geoff Martin

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Camden libraries: strikers dig in

ELEVEN of Camden's 13 libraries have been closed by indefinite strike action by UNISON members since 26th February. The strikers' mood is resolute and defiant in the face of game playing by management negotiators, who tabled and then withdrew an offer of a settlement which went some way to dealing with the issues involved.

Jon Rogers
Secretary, Lambeth UNISON

The key issues of down-grading and pay cuts have not been addressed by management, and UNISON members are determined to resist cuts in pay threatened against a fifth of the workforce. Public support for the strike has been impressive, with thousands of signatures on a petition, and positive media coverage of high profile supporters. There is widespread recognition that the dispute is as much about the future of the service as about pay and conditions.

Since the main picket line at St Pancras Library is almost on the doorstep of UNISON's Mabledon Place HQ, the strikers have even enjoyed the presence of UNISON Assistant General Secretary and Head of Local Government, Keith Sonnett, on the picket line!

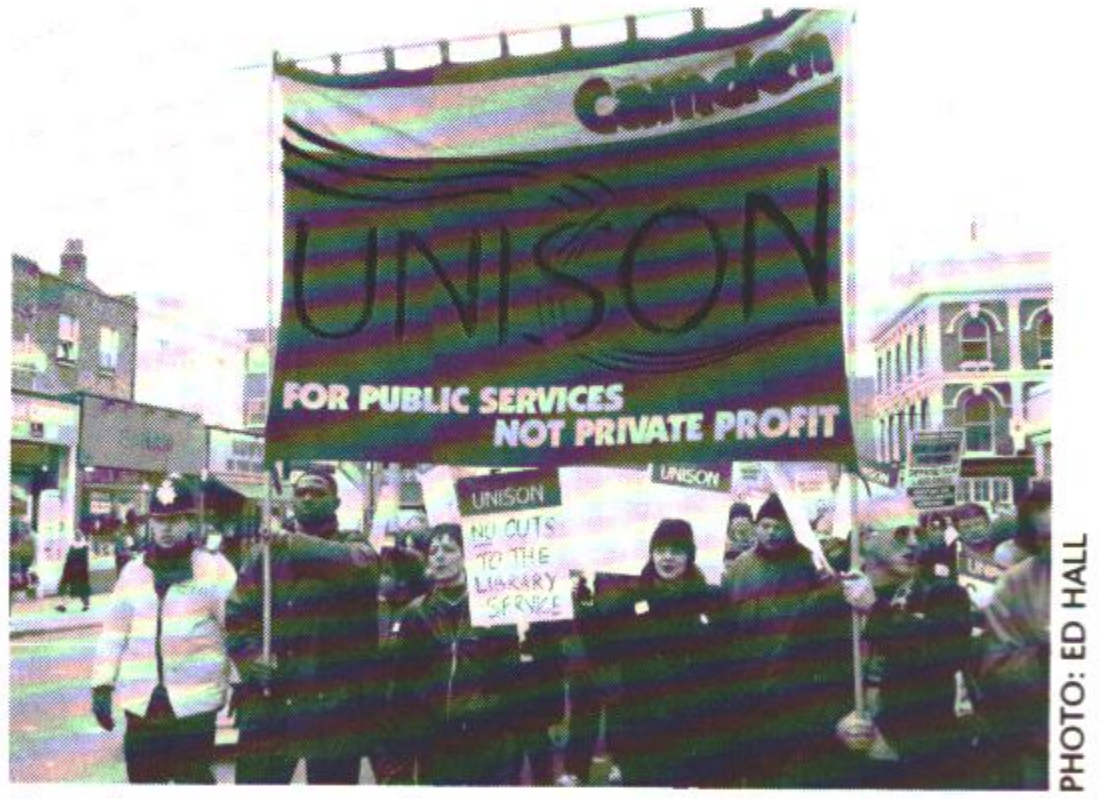
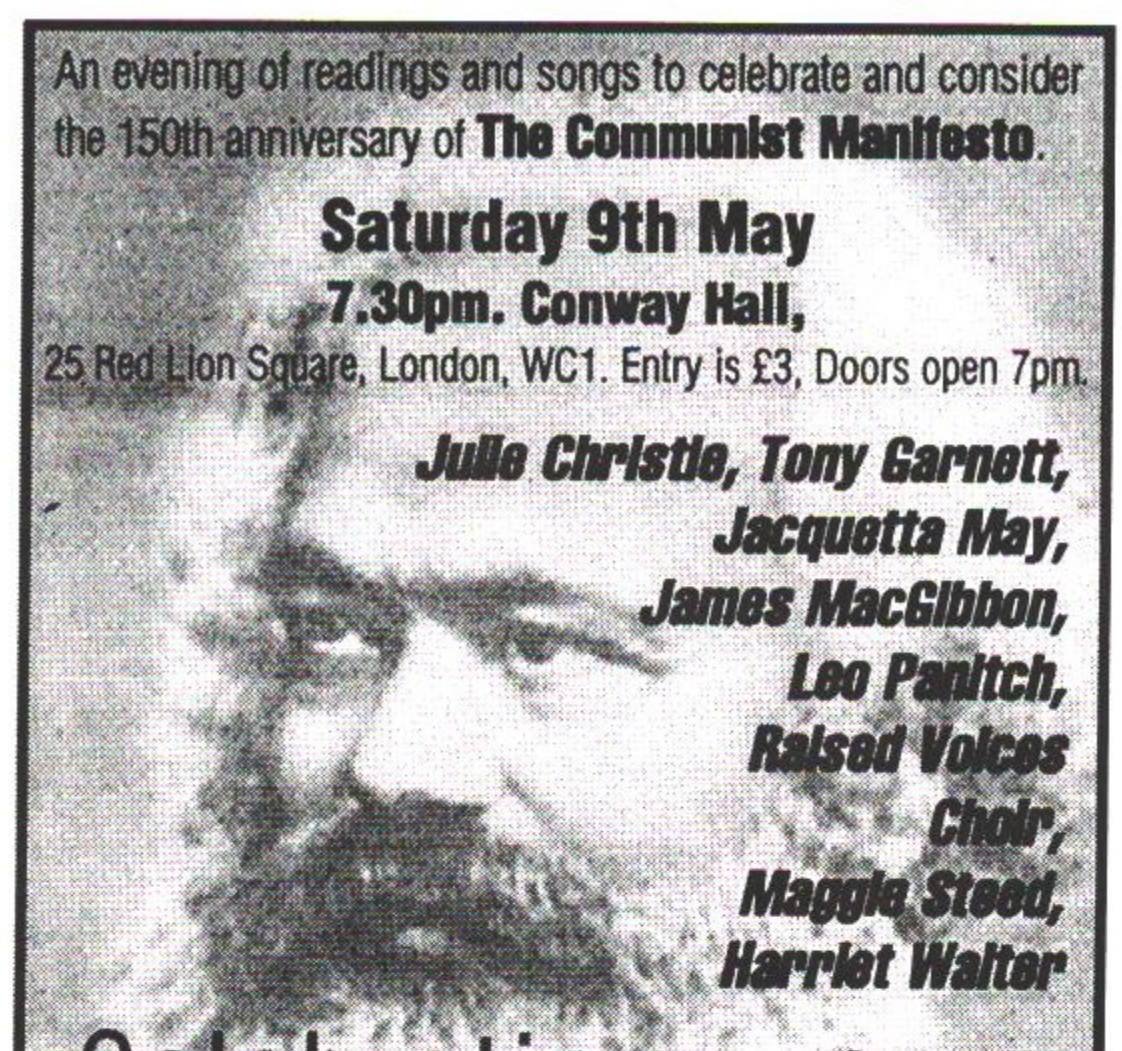


PHOTO: ED HALL

Even the cops support the Camden library strikers.

As *LLB* goes to press, the strikers are preparing for a demonstration when they hope to emphasise the support the dispute has to councillors on the brink of the local election campaign. Unfortunately, New Labour in Camden seems quite willing to go into an election in dispute with the trade unions and to turn its back on a loyal, committed workforce. They can't have read what "Culture" Secretary Chris Smith has to say in UNISON's latest glossy magazine — that libraries, and the UNISON members who work in them, are valuable "people's universities"!

- Contact: Camden UNISON, 59 Phoenix Court, Brill Place, London NW1 1ES, tel: 0171-911 1633.



Unity in UNISON?

IN THE WAKE of last December's crucial decision by UNISON's supine National Executive Council to follow the lead of paid officials and accept legal advice that UNISON branches may not support organised campaigns within the union (such as the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic UNISON — CFDU), the union's faction-ridden left-wing might have been expected to ensure a united approach to the NEC elections taking place this spring.

In London one 'general' seat is held by Labour left-winger and key health service activist, Kevin O'Brien, a recent resounding victor of a by-election. Other left-wingers with disagreements with Kevin on a number of issues decided not to oppose him. The union's officials can, however, always count upon the Socialist Workers Party, whose 'leader' in UNISON, Brian Butterworth (or BB as he is affectionately known) is standing against Kevin. With this sort of "unity" on the left UNISON activists may even be able to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory in the vital debate on union democracy at UNISON National Conference in Bournemouth in June. Watch this space! ❑

Unionising the maquilas

Some of the most exploited workers in the world are starting to take on the multinationals — and win. Mike Phipps reports.

FREE TRADE and globalisation initiatives are routinely promoted in the West with unbridled optimism about their capacity to promote growth and jobs. Yet although they control 70% of the world's trade, multinationals account for only 5% of employment globally.

The erosion of borders envisaged by treaties such as the proposed Multilateral Agreement on Investment systematically erodes labour rights and environmental standards. This is despite the OECD's own evidence that reducing basic workplace rights brings companies no long-term competitive advantages. The social consequences are well-documented: familiar brand names such as Disney paying workers as little as six cents an hour to make T-shirts in Burma in a factory part-owned by the military government.

Some of the worst abuses take place in the burgeoning maquila sector — cheap labour assembly plants, many just over the Mexican border, set up to dodge US environmental and labour standards. 2,000 such plants, including companies such as General Motors and General Electric, now operate in northern Mexico. Only one-third comply with Mexico's toxic waste laws, preferring to discharge heavy metals into open ground. The resultant birth defects in one area alone are thirty times the national average.

The maquila phenomenon has now spread to Honduras (70,000 workers), Nicaragua, whose free trade zone is expected to treble in size in the next two years, and elsewhere in Central America. Typical pay is $2 a day, shifts are often ten hours long and workers are frequently short-changed, physically abused or sexually harassed. In one recent case in El Salvador, 125 workers from the Dindex textile factory were rushed to hospital suffering from carbon monoxide poisoning due to bad ventilation.

There are, however, signs of a fightback. After a five-year battle to organise, workers finally won recognition last year in a Taiwanese-owned plant in Nicaragua's free trade zone. After a joint campaign by an independent union in Costa Rica and the World Development Movement here, Del Monte has been forced to allow union



recognition on its plantations. Prior to this all union rights were suppressed and organisers faced sudden pay cuts and blacklisting. Birth defects and illnesses among workers are common due to the intensive use of pesticides without protective clothing. Last year, the first ever collective agreement was signed in Guatemala's maquila sector.

In November, 30 women from unions and other groups in Central America, the Caribbean and the Philippines met in Guatemala to develop a wider strategy to improve working conditions. In Nicaragua's free trade zone 80% of the workers are women and 60% are under 25. Women's organisations are playing an active role in the maquila sector, working to train and empower women in the fight to organise. The male-dominated unions in many countries have tended to be content with signing up members and pushing for collective agreements over their heads.

On February 1st 1998, a Code of Ethics developed by maquila workers was adopted by the Guatemalan government after a successful lobbying campaign. It covers pay, health and safety, non-discrimination on grounds of pregnancy and the right to organise. It's the first such Code to be endorsed by any government in Central America and marks an important step in a region where 95% of the maquilas still lack legally established trades unions.

- For more information, contact the Central American Women's Network, c/o OWA, Bradley Close, 74-77 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF, tel: 0171-833 4075, email cawn@gn.apc.org

Labour wobbles on union rights

Barry Camfield, TGWU Regional Secretary, South East and East Anglia, sounds the alarm.

THE White Paper on statutory recognition is anxiously awaited by trade unionists. We must get this right first time, as there is likely to be only one piece of industrial relations legislation in this Parliament.

The 1996 *Road to the Manifesto* proposed "a legal obligation on employers to recognise a union for collective bargaining on the issues of pay, hours and holidays, and training. The bargaining agenda could be extended to other issues by mutual agreement." However, the 1997 election manifesto diluted this to: "where a majority of the relevant workforce vote in a ballot for the union to represent them, the union should be recognised."

Statutory recognition was policy for both the Conservatives and Labour during the 1970s, but this was scrapped in the Thatcher-Major years. In the current debate the Government must favour either union recognition or employer resistance. Hence the argument over the manifesto phrase — should it mean a majority of those voting or a majority of those eligible to vote?

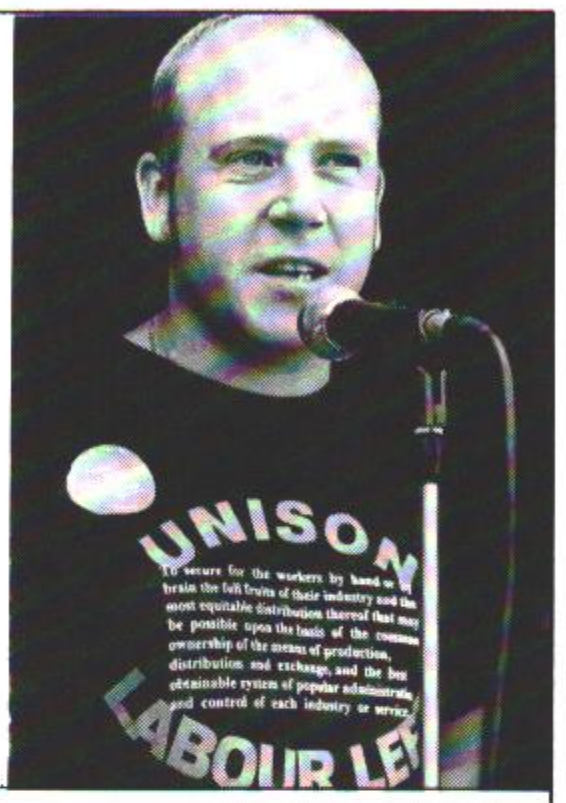
An 80% "yes" vote on a 60% turnout would not be enough to win recognition if the law required a union to win a majority of the electorate. Employers want to define the electorate to include those unsympathetic to trade unionism in the ballot, as American employers do. They also insist that small firms be exempt from the whole procedure.

1998 is the 50th anniversary of the UN's Declaration of Human Rights enshrining a universal right to form and join a union. If this is to mean anything, Labour must legislate to give an absolute right to trade union representation — when the worker chooses, not at the employer's discretion.

Statutory recognition, individual representation and working time are all areas where the Government could make a difference. A supportive legislative framework would set the tone for a new pluralism at work and strengthen relations between Labour and the unions.

the Geoff Martin column

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



● I came as close as I ever want to come to dropping a bacon sandwich while I was leafing through the contents of a recent mailshot from UNISON HQ.

There among the usual offers of cheap loans, trips to Disneyland and circulars on the dirty deeds of the hard left was the most extraordinary invite I've ever received. Would I like to put my name forward to attend a royal garden party in the presence of the Queen Mother to celebrate the NHS's 50th birthday? This was no wind up — this was an official UNISON circular.

As a republican who believes that UNISON should be campaigning under the slogan "Axe the Civil List — Cut the Waiting List" I thought that maybe I should go along just to have a quick chat with the dear old Queen Mum on her excessive use of taxpayer's money to finance her private healthcare. This woman must be the world's most highly subsidised bed blocker. I say it's about time she learnt to stand on her own two feet rather than relying on state handouts.

Meanwhile, I'm still waiting for details of the labour movement's official national event to celebrate fifty years of the NHS.

● So guess who decided to put in her first appearance at 3:29 on the afternoon of Chelsea's victory against Middlesborough in the Coca-Cola Cup Final? Kathleen Georgia Martin — all six pounds and nine ounces of her. Helen went into labour on the Saturday afternoon just at the point when I was in full rant mode on the platform at the Reclaim Our Rights conference. It was lucky I didn't take up the offer of going for a pint with Jimmy Nolan and the Liverpool dockers.

Kathleen was safely delivered nearly two weeks early by the local UNISON branch chair, Nora Pearce, to the sounds of the *Radio Five Live* commentary from Wembley. The unused ticket is now framed up alongside the first picture of her.

● Now that Tony Blair is acting as a kind of self-styled sales rep for arch union buster Rupert Murdoch, you'd think that the TUC would have spotted that the writing is on the wall over the new laws on recognition. Apparently not. The word on the streets is that Monks is still looking for some kind of shabby compromise that would involve both a voting threshold and exemption for "smaller employers".

This is an issue where the left can almost certainly hold the line within our own unions. Combined with the prospect of a minimum wage set at around £3.50 an hour, the possibility of mobilising serious rank and file union resistance this summer looks very real. I'm optimistic that the Reclaim Our Rights conference could be the springboard for just such a mobilisation. We must not let sectarian self-interest blow the prospects apart.

LEADING WITH THE LEFT

advert

The Greens in the European Parliament

Independent Labour Network

May Day Greetings to *LLB* and all its readers

MAY DAY MANIFESTO

● Are you disappointed in New Labour? ● Do you want to defend and improve the welfare state? ● Do you want to defend and extend trade union rights? ● Are you for real policies for full and sustainable employment in Britain and Europe? ● Are you for free universal access to education? ● Are you for peace, an end to nuclear weapons and major cuts in arms spending? ● Are you for a progressive social and environmental agenda for Europe? ● Are you against the rule of the so-called free market?

If you agree with the above, then you agree with the need for an Independent Labour Network and a May Day Manifesto. The Network, set up by Ken Coates MEP and Hugh Kerr MEP, is already attracting widespread support and giving encouragement to those who seek to reclaim the labour movement from the alien domination of New Labour. The May Day Manifesto begins with what will be a widespread discussion on how to defend those values which New Labour has abandoned. Its first instalment, *Defending the Welfare State* seeks to understand New Labour's strategy and encourage the growing opposition to it.

If you wish to subscribe to the May Day Manifesto, receive a copy of part one, *Dismantling the Welfare State* (price TBA) or to purchase a copy of the ILN pamphlet on New Labour's policies for higher education, *Bugger Bognor* (£2.00), please contact Ken Coates MEP, c/o 8 Regent Street, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire NG18 1SS, tel 01623-427 622, fax 01623-427 155 (Cheques payable to the "Independent Labour Network Publications").

If you want to know more about the Independent Labour Network and make a donation (please send at least £5 payable to the Independent Labour Network), contact Hugh Kerr MEP, c/o 15 Linford Close, Harlow, Essex CM19 4LR Tel/Fax 01279-435735.

Hugh Kerr Independent Labour MEP for West Essex and Hertfordshire East

Paying for

Britain sees itself in the forefront of trade liberalisation and Tony Blair is preaching its benefits to the rest of Europe. Can it bring economic improvement for all, asks Caroline Dumonteil, or does it just produce social polarisation?

BRITAIN'S free-market orientation has a long history. Trading on a world market produced the empire and helped shape the social structure, with the dominant role of financial institutions. But major changes followed the introduction of deregulation and trade liberalisation in 1979. On one hand, the transnational sector of the economy flourished. Capital was free to move overseas and UK Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) rose from around $51 million from 1973-1980 to $202 million in the decade following 1981. British companies showed a marked preference for investing abroad rather than in the UK. In 1994, of the top 100 global firms, while the US, Japan, Germany and France had 30-40% of employment abroad, the figure for the UK was 77%.

On the other hand, the country more or less abandoned manufacturing and opted for a service economy, mainly in financial services. After the stockmarket underwent the big bang, well over a third of UK stock was in FDI, in contrast to Germany, France and the US with around a mere 7%. Britain now has the highest level of stockmarket capitalisation and lies in third position behind the US and Japan in its share of high performing businesses. All this stands in marked contrast to the performance of domestic firms. The programme of privatisations produced an endless stream of grossly undervalued state assets sold off to groups of insiders who then sold them on for large profits, often to overseas firms.

The political climate engendered a never-ending series of financial problems and scandals as business interests were given priority over the general good, and the word "market" became ubiquitous. Research funding disappeared for anything that was not "near-market", pseudo-markets were created in public services such as health and education, civil service functions were market-tested and areas of work were syphoned off into agencies and run as businesses, and local authorities sacked and rehired employees on lower pay. Yet real markets were left to run unchecked by commercial or competition law, producing powerful oligopolies.

Examples of how ordinary people have paid the price for these policies are numerous:

• The 1980s housing boom encouraged home-ownership, but resulted in many house repossessions and large numbers of people in negative equity. Yet there are still over one million people living in substandard and overcrowded accommodation.

• In 1984 the Government abandoned a law holding company directors liable for non-payment of social security and National Insurance contributions. The companies were thus free to go bust while the employees were left without any cover. It is estimated that £1 million per day was being lost in PAYE by 1988. This was justified by John Major, the minister responsible at the time, who said that the Inland Revenue had to balance the problem of getting their money against the desirability of keeping businesses going.

• The drive to sell private pensions which moved people out of occupational schemes may cost the country as much as £18 billion in compensation.

• The privatisation of water produced high returns to shareholders while costs to users increased 43%. The costs of this and other essential services have risen relentlessly but being in the private sector, graduated payments relative to income cannot operate. This resulted in people having their water cut off if they could not pay their bills. In 1992, 21,000 homes were disconnected and cases of dysentery and hepatitis A increased markedly in areas with high disconnection rates.

Using the argument that foreign direct investment creates employment, the Government introduced numerous policies to create a "flexible" workforce. This has produced striking differences between Britain and other European countries. Since the 1980s, while working hours decreased in countries like Belgium, France and Ireland, they increased in the UK. Britain now has the longest working hours and shortest holidays in Europe — for both men and women. In hourly wage rates, the UK comes fourth from the bottom, above Spain, Greece and Portugal, yet these countries have a high percentage of their economy in small-scale agriculture whereas the UK has the largest number of farms in the largest category and boasts of their efficiency.

There has been a major shift to insecure forms of employment — temporary work, self-employment, agency work, homeworking, and working unsocial hours. Despite these efforts and the many anomalies in the calculation of unemployment figures, overall unemployment rates are not much below EU average and there are many EU countries with lower rates. While British firms chose not to invest in the UK, it was a favoured location for firms from other

MAI delayed

AN INTERNATIONAL campaign by pressure groups, trade unions and grassroots activists has successfully blocked the signing of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment by its original deadline. The OECD treaty may now be negotiated on a new timetable, probably running on into 1999.

A strong coalition of activists across Western Europe mobilised against the treaty which would have directly attacked countries' rights to regulate the activities of inward investors, including labour and environmental controls on multinational companies. In Britain an anti-MAI resolution was passed at the Scottish Labour Party Conference and local councils have also expressed concern at the MAI's potential impact on their activities.

Yet despite mounting pressure from backbench MPs, Labour continues to peddle the previous government's line that the treaty is desirable. Pressure needs to be maintained: the MAI would be a charter for multinationals against any democratic control of the economy — Britain's included.

the market

countries. This pattern is now changing and firms in the UK and other countries now show a preference for investment in France. Companies find the benefits of low wages are outweighed by the costs of poor education and infrastructure.

The skills of the UK workforce have fallen behind those in other countries. 16% of men and 21% of women of working age have no qualifications. The OECD level of literacy considered the minimum for coping with modern life and work is not achieved by about 50% of men and women in the UK. In France, nearly all 3 and 4-year old children attend nursery school, compared to under 60% in the UK. And while over 60% have the equivalent of one A-Level in France, less than 25% have one or more A-Levels in the UK.

It is now well-established that these policies have produced a sharp rise in income inequality. This has accelerated since Thatcher. Recent figures given by the *General Household Survey* show that the poorest households spend £94 a week while the richest spend £677. The proportion of people living in poverty rose more here than in other EU countries and more than doubled during the 1980s. Britain now has 12 out of Europe's 50 million poor, the largest number of those earning less than the European decency threshold, and receiving some form of benefit: one in six compared to one in twenty in Germany. Yet the UK hands out a lower percentage of GDP in social protection (again coming just above Ireland, Portugal and Greece), and apparently plans to give still less. While 18 million people in the UK own shares, nine million, or 10% of all consumers, have no bank accounts and three million have to borrow from loan sharks.

Many of the poor are pensioners — three-quarters of them have only the state pension to live on, three million don't qualify for state pensions and there are 1.5 million women pensioners on income support. While there are pensioners who receive lower incomes elsewhere in Europe, the UK has higher mortality rates in the older age groups, and the highest winter death rates. There are eight million people in Britain who can't afford to keep warm in winter. After many years of blocking reports on the matter, the links between poverty and ill-health have finally been admitted.

Rather than conclude that poverty should be reduced, efforts seem to be going into preventing it from having these effects, mostly by forcing people into low-paid work, from which they are now being enjoined to be "thrifty" and save up for their old age. As the rich have got richer, the idea of taxing them has been made more unthinkable. The idea of redistributing shared wealth to those in need in accordance with humanitarian values has been undermined by portraying anyone receiving "something for nothing" as culpable. Frank Field says we shouldn't reward people for being inactive or deceitful. Thus the bare survival money to feed and clothe yourself and your children is seen as a "reward".



Children are one of the most vulnerable groups. Britain has the worst maternity care in Europe. As hospitals are free to subject women in maternity units to pressures to use commercial babyfoods, the UK has one of the lowest breastfeeding rates in Europe. Despite having a National Health Service, of the 19 countries with the lowest infant mortality rates, the UK came 18th. The numbers of poor children have increased dramatically, as the proportion of families without a full-time worker increased from 18% in 1979 to 31% in 1993, and 20% have no-one working.

Many children in the UK work, (one-third of Europe's working children can be found here), some for as little as 33p per hour, and some for as many as 29 hours per week. Higher numbers of children get killed on the roads here, despite very low traffic accident rates. The UK has the highest rates of teenage pregnancies in Europe. Over the last seven or eight years, prosecutions for child prostitution have increased and actually doubled in 1996.

Britain has one of the largest prison populations in the developed world, currently 65,000, and numbers continue to rise, including the numbers of women, most of whom have children. Most of this is for drugs, and heroin use is closely associated with areas of high deprivation. Women are also held in jail for non-payment of small sums, such as the recently cited case of a woman with a small child who was jailed for non-payment of a £14 taxi fare, and who was too poor to raise £400 bail. Child jails are planned and children can now be jailed from the age of ten for up to a year under detention and training orders.

This mere recital of factual information does not reveal the quality of social relations under a marketised regime. People in work increasingly have to spend time competing with each other for money rather than doing their work, engendering suspicion and dislike rather than co-operation. Anyone negotiating the system of social protection will be well aware of the moralistic nature of the system which tells you that one's misfortunes are due to personal failure.

The policy area covered by some notion of the common good is minute in comparison with other countries. The example of farmers burying their dead animals (as the rendered products are no longer saleable) illustrates this point. The collapse of the cattle market does not lead the Government to conclude that dead animals should be removed as a matter of public hygiene. ❑

French politics polarise

Andrew Coates
Ipswich CLP

THE CENTRE of French politics is "threatened with collapse" historian Jean-Francois Sirinelli commented just days after Tony Blair addressed French MPs. The British PM's call for a new "radical centre" was quickly forgotten as a political storm broke out. With 15% of the vote in the March regional elections (over 30% in some districts), France's far-right Front National, led by John-Marie Le Pen, became the referee in hung councils.

Local leaders of the conservative-centrist UDF (founded by former President Valery Giscard d'Estaing) answered the Front's appeal for a joint "minimum programme". In traditionalist Picardy, the Centre, Bourgogne, and, also in Languedoc-Roussilon, where many North Africans and ex-colonial pieds-noirs live, UDF council leaders were elected with FN support.

Le Pen's party's municipal policy is "national preference" for French citizens. The FN, which runs its own private security services, wants to set up special municipal police to enforce order. With these echoes of Vichy, even many French conservatives issued accusations of "collaboration". Convicted of violence against one Socialist candidate, Le Pen seems temporarily out of the way. Anti-fascist Gaullists and many mainstream commentators remain horrified. Under this pressure, Bourgogne and the Centre region backed down.

But others continued their alliance. In the Rhone-Alpes, UDF's Charles Millon ignored demonstrations in the streets of Lyon and Grenoble to govern with FN votes. Travelling to the National Assembly he received the sympathy of many right-wing deputies. Millon claims he is creating a new "national movement". The umbrella body, the UDF, the alliance of nationalist-liberals, Christian and centre parties, can hardly survive intact.

With the right in disarray, France's left dominated the result. Thirty six per cent of the vote and 676 seats was a high score for regional politics, influenced by localised patronage and low turnouts. Councillors have joined the mass protests. In turbulent scenes inside council chambers the "plurielle" left — Socialists, Communists, Greens and Citizens' Movement — attacked the pacts.

In the elections other left groups emerged. The League Communiste Revolutionnaire (LCR) had gained respect for their work with the unemployed and the "sans papiers". Before the election they had face-to-face meetings with Political Bureaux of the Socialists and Communists and had a small breakthrough by winning three posts. Lutte Ouvriere — run as a clandestine organisation of "soldier monks" (*Le Monde*, 18.3.98) — now has twenty councillors to promote their brand of Trotskyism modelled on the early Bolsheviks.

With the centre ground disappearing, France is now polarised. Insecurity and exclusion have fuelled the far-right's success. But spokespersons for the unemployed body, AC, Christophe Aguiton and researcher Catherine Levy, have stated that unemployed movements that have swept through the country have transformed people's passivity and resignation. They have connected people across the continent in the fight against the breeding ground of fascism: Europe's elites' concern with monetary unity at the expense of employment. With the right imploding it is up to the left, in government and outside, to ensure they do not despair of the future.

High politics remain cloudy. Prime Minister Jospin backs the Common Currency but supports measures to fight the dole-queue. His backing for the 35-hour week has met a hostile, ultra-liberal bosses' organisation, the CNPF. They want Blair-style flexibility and welfare reform to go with European integration. By contrast, the Socialist Party left, the Gauche Socialiste, Greens, Communists and the Citizens' Movement, are committed to a People's Europe, and sceptical about the Euro. Nevertheless, they are not realistically able to provide an alternative government.

On the ground AC and others have organised hard. The workless, in a myriad of different bodies, largely co-operated for last year's cross-Euro marches. They dominated the headlines this winter by occupying dole offices, the Bank of France, and the top university Ecole Normale Superiere. This alliance of activists unites people from many backgrounds, including Communist trade unionists and LCR supporters. By linking up with the unions they may well be able to influence the Government's course.

With the uncomfortable importance of the street some French professional politicians are attracted to Blair's ideas — from Gaullists to the post-social democrats. Tony Blair was invited to the National Assembly by former Prime Minister Laurence Fabius. Perhaps Fabius was nostalgic for the 1980s when modernisers, spin doctors and the wealthy friends of President Mitterrand ran the show. Now, France's modernisers have had to compromise with the left and been submerged by mass politics. If the UDF splits, a section may want to ally with the Socialists.

Far from heralding Blair's dream of a new Centre, this would create strains for Jospin, whose party could not easily work with its enemies of thirty years' standing. Whether the left will emerge as the final winner, with European integration at stake, remains unclear.

Victory for BTR workers

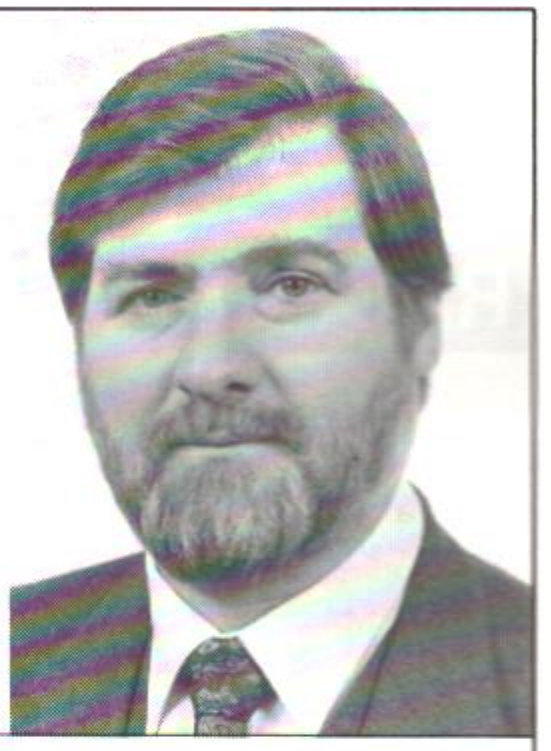
IN MAY 1985, 970 striking workers at BTR Industries SA (Pty) Ltd were dismissed. The strike was over recognition of the Metal and Allied Workers Union. Many on the left in Britain were actively involved in the subsequent solidarity campaign.

Thirteen years on the strikers have been vindicated. Many had worked for the company for up to twenty five years, and lived in areas where alternative employment was almost impossible to find. Supported by their union, the dismissed strikers remained united in their ongoing search for justice. Finally, in March of this year, after a series of protracted court cases, the highest court in South Africa (the Supreme Court of Appeal) found that they had been unfairly dismissed. The case was referred on for the determination of compensation. The BTR dispute precipitated widespread organised support and action within South Africa. It was regarded by all within the progressive labour movement as strategically critical in the apartheid era.

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the Michael Hindley column

Michael Hindley, Labour MEP for Lancashire South, looks at the problems for developing countries caused by the burden of debt.



A MAJOR problem in dealing with the question of international debt is the huge psychological barrier erected by ordinary peoples' fear and shame about personal debt; surely it is bad personal management, and, by extension, national management, to run up huge debts, and to write off debts will only encourage future mismanagement.

This view is in stark contrast to the actual way in which economies work and neglects the overwhelming and influential fact that individual people and countries are actually encouraged to run up debts. Indeed modern market capitalism could not work without debt — if today all the credit companies demanded immediate repayment on credit card loans then the economies of the West would collapse. The international debt crisis stems from the West, particularly the USA, exporting its problems. Giving evidence before a Congressional hearing, a US Treasury official said "The debt crisis is to a large extent an indirect result of our success in curing inflation and revitalising the American economy".

In order to find new markets for their goods and to find locations for footloose capital, Western governments themselves extended credits, and encouraged private banks to extend credit to countries whose best interests would have been better served by drawing up their own sustainable development plans. However, no capitalist wants to fund that kind of activity. There's little new in this, especially in the world's longest standing exporter of finance in the modern age: Britain. The ill-gotten gains made in the Lancashire textile mills were creamed off and invested in the newly emerging independent states of Latin America in the early nineteenth century, ensuring that as quickly as countries like Mexico threw off the yoke of Spanish imperialism, they were ensnared into the imperialism of debt.

Modern capitalist entrepreneurs though are reluctant to undertake risk and want government guarantees, so that they do not have to suffer the consequences of their lack of judgment as recently seen in East Asia, where we all will have to bail out rash speculators. The rescue packages for South Korea will not go to workers facing redundancies but to Western speculators. There is a very good argument, moral and economic, for simply telling speculators faced with debt, "tough luck".

ONE OF the major reasons why the Russian Revolution evoked such hostility is that is precisely what the Bolsheviks told creditors of the Tsarist regime. If everyone behaved like that, where would capitalism be ? Mobutu, the late unlamented Western supported leader of Zaire, left his country with a debt of $13 billion and it has been calculated that during the 1980s, when he was seen as a bulwark against the radicalisation of Africa, he contracted some $8.5 billion loans from the West in secret.

Clearly in no way are these the debts of the new Democratic Republic of the Congo. They are certainly not the debts of its people, who new nothing about the deals, and had no opportunity to influence the contracting of such loans. In the private business sector, a change of name would allow an old company to go bankrupt and a new one to start up — there is no reason why this should not apply to cases like the Congo. Moreover, a simple way of avoiding such future catastrophes is to disallow "secret" loans in future.

Jubilee 2000, which is campaigning for debt reductions through moratoriums on debt repayment, advocates that no loans backed by taxpayers' money, government loans or IMF and World Bank loans should be given to foreign governments in secret.

If such a realistic view is not taken then there is no alternative to the spiral of decline entrenched through "structural adjustment programmes" by which a debtor country's economy is dictated to by the IMF which acts as a kind of international receiver for countries facing huge debts.

The sheer folly of forcing an economy into cutting its own spending and going for a headlong export led drive for growth was proven in Europe in the inter-war years. A structural adjustment plan was forced on Germany by the vengeful allies at the end of the First World War and certainly hastened the rise of the Nazis. The results were so catastrophic that at the end of the Second World War the Allies were much more generous and actually reflated the German economy and rescheduled its debts.

The USA has already written off half of Egypt's debt in reward for Egypt taking its side in the Gulf War, precisely the right economic measure for precisely the wrong reason. Egypt then agreed to cut its domestic budget which creates more discontent and the government's subservience to the USA fuels the fundamentalists' resentment in a manner similar to that which made Saddam Hussain a hero among the dispossessed. The victims of such resentment are not bankers but ordinary civilians.

It pays to be generous, economically and politically. If we begin to fund Third World countries' plans for self-developed and sustainable independent economic growth, they will actually want to trade with us, they will actually want to use our expertise and their dispossessed will not fall prey to the next megalomaniac who thumbs his nose at the West and taps into the resentment we are storing up.

Camden Nicaragua Association

Globalise or Die
The economies of Central America

7 pm, Thursday 14th May
Quaker International Centre,
1 Byng Place, London WC1

(between Dillons Bookshop and Gordon Square)
With Colin Lewis, Blanca Rosa Molina and Barry Coates
Admission free

Debt, who pays ?

FIGHT RACISM

Two cultures of English cricket

Mike Marqusee
Islington North CLP

WHILE football and rugby league authorities have embraced anti-racism and admitted that racism may be a problem in their respective games, the upper class louts who run cricket have, up till now, adopted a "hear no evil see no evil" approach. Now a new study from the Centre for Sport Development Research at Roehampton Institute has confirmed that cricket in England suffers a major racial divide.

Anyone for Cricket? Equal opportunities and changing cricket cultures in Essex and East London concludes that there are "two distinct but related cultures of cricket". One is mainly black and Asian, urban, and confined to council-maintained public pitches and "largely exists outside the official structures". The other is white, rural, and endowed with well-kept private facilities and "exists largely as part of the official structure". The report repeatedly stresses that, in practice, these two cultures "are not equal".

Black and Asian cricketers, despite their formidable hunger for the game, simply do not enjoy the same facilities, access to leagues, and opportunities to compete as their white counterparts. What's more, they find their way of playing cricket — overtly competitive, sometimes highly vocal — frowned upon by white players and officials. "Most black and Asian players argued that the mainstream leagues hide behind league regulations and cultural stereotypes of black and Asian cricket, to prevent the admission of black and Asian clubs into the official leagues." As a result, "many young people are being lost to the game".

The report concludes: "Whilst the culture of English cricket may not be explicitly racist, it can lead to a culture of racial exclusion, racial stereotyping and to a lesser extent racial abuse of black and Asian cricket players." The researchers also interviewed 62 eight to eleven-year-olds from six east London schools — girls and boys, white, black and Asian — and found their perceptions of the game largely free of stereotypes. Most children rejected the Tebbit test and took a relaxed attitude towards national affiliation. Many believed "one's choice of cricket team was independent of one's ethnic background or indeed original nationality." All were asked whether they agreed with the statement, "cricket's an Asian game, football's a white game and basketball's a black game". Hearteningly, every single interviewee disagreed. Many dismissed the formula as "racist". "While making strong ethnic identifications with cricket and cricketers themselves, the students nevertheless expressed clearly the opinion that cricket was a sport for all." Significantly, "there was no association made between cricket and its English origins and only three students stated that the sport was invented in England."

- For more information, contact Ian McDonald, CSDR, Roehampton Institute, London, SW15 3SN.

The Nangas must stay

John Stewart, Treasurer of the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, reports on the Nanga Family's trip to NUT Conference.

Mansanga (17) and Feliciana (15) Nanga travelled from their home in Hackney, up to the NUT conference in Blackpool. Both girls received a standing ovation from the 1,200 delegates when they spoke about the war in Angola, the suffering of their family and their fears for their future if they are deported.

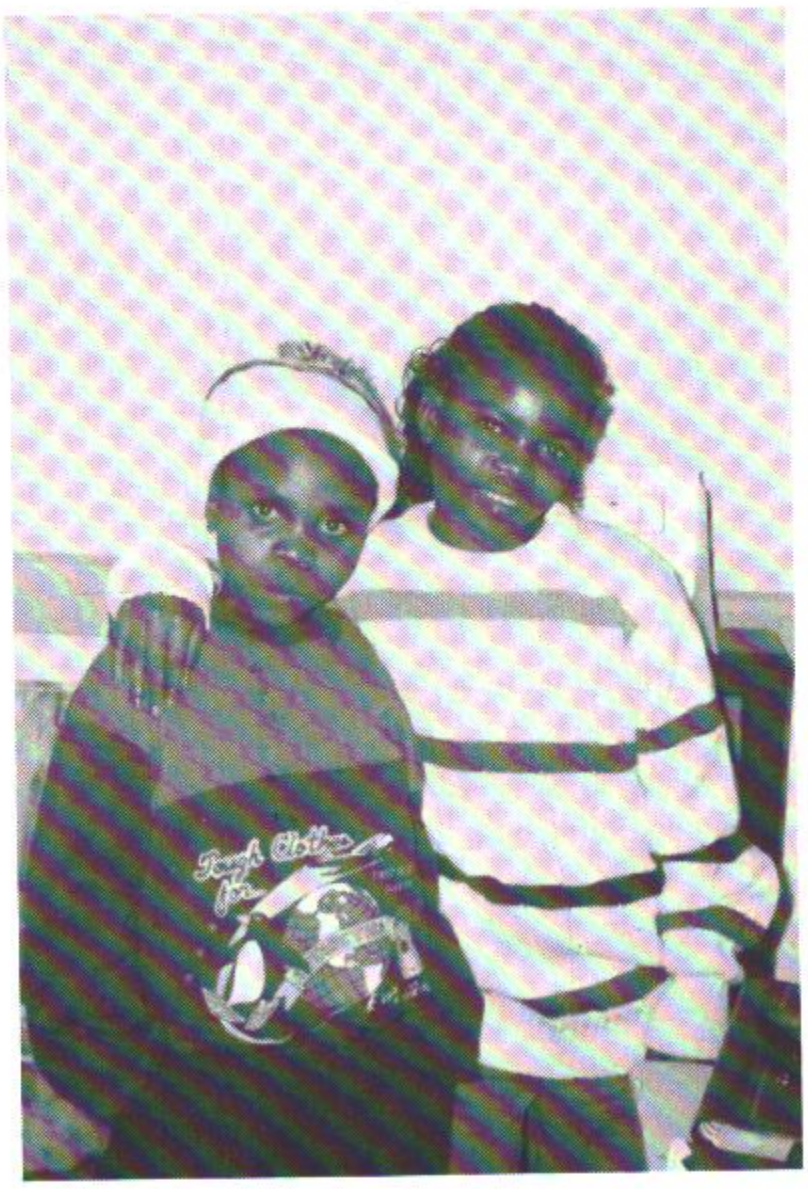
The Nangas have lived in London since 1991 when they fled from war and political persecution. Mansanga and Feliciana and their younger brothers and sisters have little memory of their homeland. Their main recollection is of violence and brutality and the disappearance of their older brother, Daniel, a former teacher, who was detained and tortured.

The Nanga children also spoke at packed fringe meetings organised by the Socialist Teachers Alliance and the Campaign for a Democratic and Fighting Union. Hundreds of signatures were collected on the petition to allow the family to stay.

NUT General Secretary Doug McAvoy congratulated Mansanga and Feliciana on their speech and promised to seek a meeting with Home Secretary Jack Straw and Education Secretary David Blunkett to raise their case. Deportations of families and individuals are currently running at record levels with over 100 deportations per week. *LLB* readers angry about this should raise the matter with their MP and pass resolutions through their CLP or trade union to be forwarded to the Home Secretary.

- The Nanga Family Anti-Deportation Campaign can be contacted c/o Ms. Sibley, Haggerston School, Weymouth Terrace, London E2.

Mansanga and Feliciana Nanga.



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Close Campsfield now

Sue Jones writes: As we gear up to fight local elections, *LLB* readers will be heartened to read that Mike O'Brien has moved to sort out the shambles that is Britain's asylum and immigration policy. A clue as to his intentions was provided by those flanking him at the press conference: representatives of Wackenhut and Group 4 Total Security, the private contractors who run the detention centres that he believes are "necessary to safeguard immigration control."

A further pointer was the Home Office press release responding to the scathing report from the Chief Inspector of Prisons on immigration detention centres. Sir David Ramsbottom made a total of 207 recommendations for change after inspecting Campsfield and Tinsley House. He pointed out that detention was not an effective deterrent to "illegal immigration", demanded that judges decide who is to be detained, and for how long, and found the current lack of statutory duties and obligations for staff in centres unacceptable. In most respects, he echoed the recommendations of the report of the Asylum Rights Campaign, a copy of which was sent to O'Brien. It concluded:

"The central problem is that, if the two hundred detainees in Campsfield can be trusted sufficiently to be detained "by consent", supervised by 20 people, in a system described by a senior manager as "based entirely on trust" it is pretty obvious that they do not need to be detained. Were Campsfield, or any other detention centre, to close, then all that would happen is that less people would be detained, just as if a new one were to be opened under the current system, more would be. Unless detention is an end in itself, closure can only be for the best."

The Labour Party now faces a problem. It opposed Tory policy on asylum and immigration, it criticised most aspects of it and announced reviews as soon as it came into office. But the Minister concerned seems to believe that he brings more credit to the Party by congratulating the commercial jailers and providers of muscle than by striving to produce an ethical and effective asylum policy. Did we put Labour into power to keep foreigners out more effectively? Mike O'Brien clearly thinks we did. Or did we work so hard because we wanted to see fair, anti-racist policies developed and put into effect? If so: take a copy of *Providing Protection* and the *Campsfield Report* to your local, regional and national policy forums and get them adopted as the policies the members want.

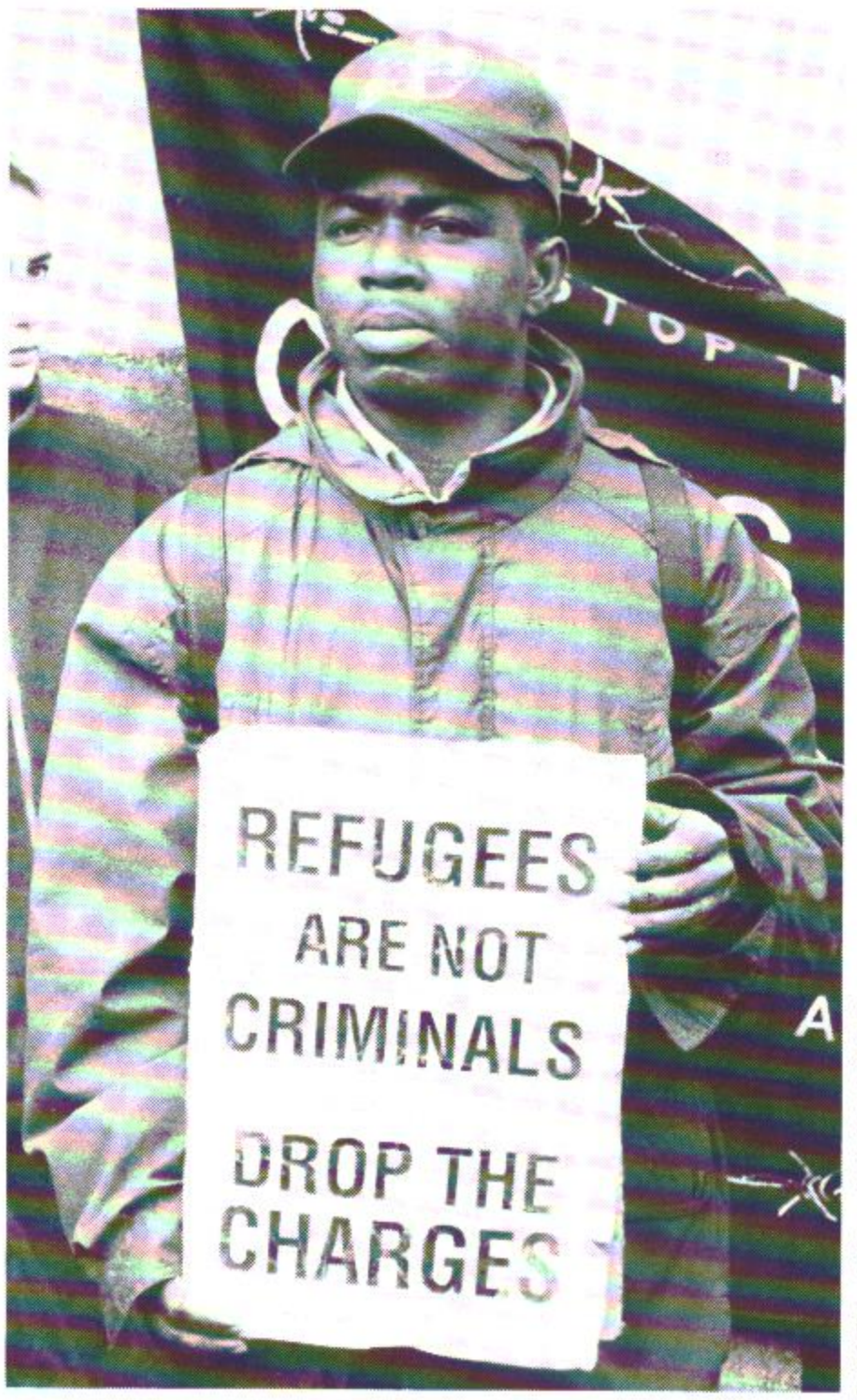


PHOTO: STALINGRAD O'NEILL

Campsfield demo, 9/2/98.

- *Providing Protection: towards fair and effective asylum procedures* is available from JUSTICE, 59, Carter Lane, London EC4V 5AQ tel 0171-329 5100 email justice@gn.apc.org .
- *Campsfield Report,* published by the Asylum Rights Campaign, is available from Refugee Council, 3, Bondway, London SW8 1SJ tel 0181-820 3000.

Justice for Ricky Reel

LAKHVINDER "Ricky" Reel went missing after being racially abused in Kingston on Tuesday 14th October 1997. He was found dead a week later in the River Thames, less than half a mile from where he was abused. The circumstances surrounding his death remain a mystery. Ricky was an accomplished swimmer and had won several awards for swimming. He was well aware of the dangers of swimming in open water and constantly advised his family members against it.

The police post-mortem said there was no sign of bruising on Ricky's body and deduced that he had fallen forwards while urinating. The coroner did not even visit the site where the body was found. The family's own independent post-mortem revealed that there was bruising on Ricky's back — indicating that he had fallen in backwards, probably after being pushed. Police have not acted on an anonymous letter sent to the Reel family naming the boys who killed Ricky.

The Reel family continue to ask for a televised reconstruction of the last hours of Ricky's life in the hope that it may bring forward fresh witnesses. The police have so far refused to stage such a reconstruction. However, they have now issued descriptions of Ricky's two white attackers, both males in their 20s.

A Justice for Ricky Reel campaign has been set up to find the truth about Ricky's death. His mother Sukhdev and family and friends have leafleted in Kingston and Southall and held vigils outside a police station and the Home Office.

"The campaign has broad support from all sections of the community," commented Suresh Grover of the Southall Monitoring Group, which is working with Ricky's family. "It is actively supported by community groups in West London, Gurdwaras and other religious organisations, trade union branches such as UNISON, the Stephen Lawrence family, and MPs John McDonnell and Piara Khabra."

- **Donations urgently needed to: "Justice for Ricky Reel", Account Number: 0232/703 284 256, Nationwide, 5 Station Road, Hayes, Middlesex, UB3 4BA.**
- **Contact: Southall Monitoring Group, 14 Featherstone Road, Southall, UB2 5A. Tel: 0181-843 2333 (daytime), Website: www.iansmith.co.uk/justice/**

Lawyer, diplomat, revolutionary

Mike Phipps reviews No Other Reality, the Life and Times Of Nora Astorga, *by Patricia Daniel, published by CAM, £8.50 paperback.*

ON INTERNATIONAL Women's Day 1978, Nora Astorga, a respectable Nicaraguan lawyer, lured a top member of the military, General "The Dog" Vega — so-called for his bestial torture methods — to his death at the hands of revolutionary guerrillas. It was this that led *Time* magazine to call Nora "the Mata Hari of the Sandinista Revolution."

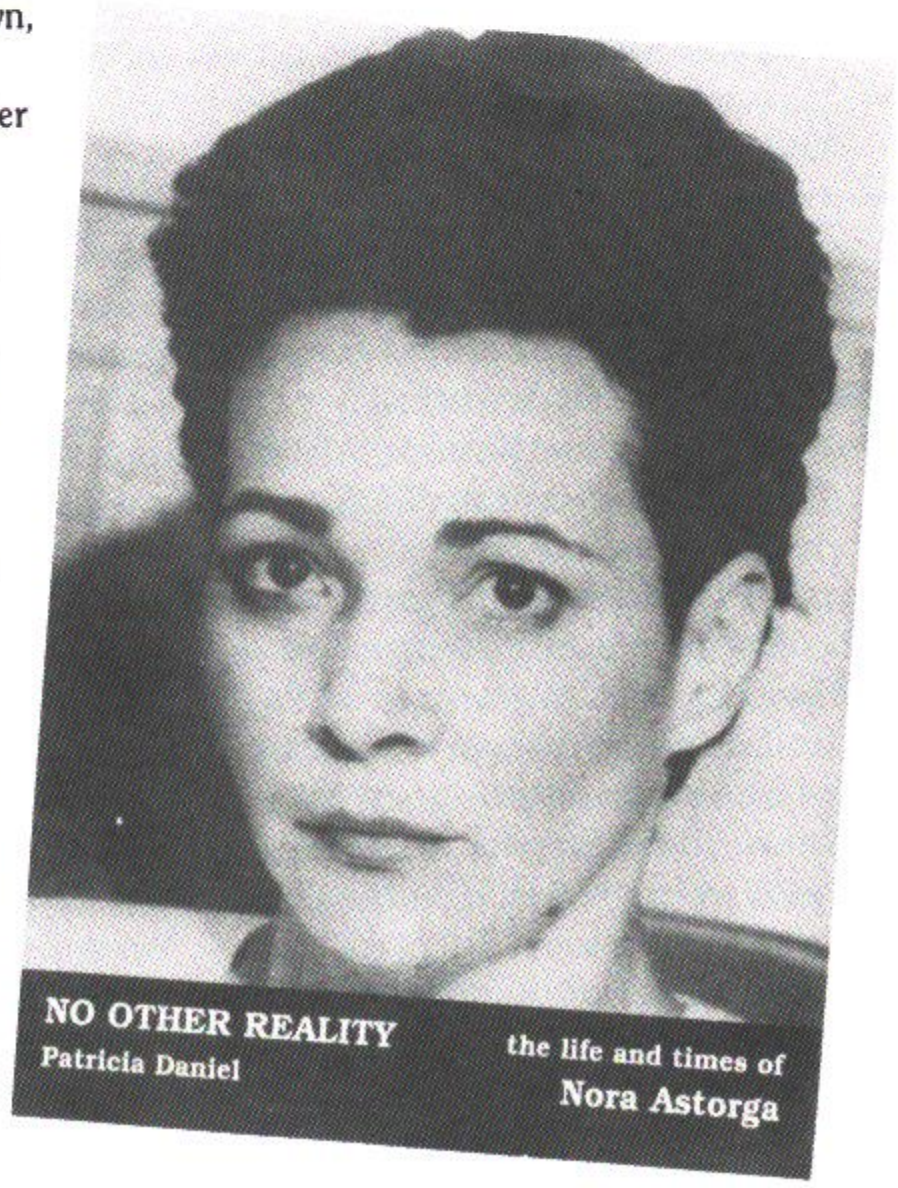
To understand how a middle-class girl from a quiet Catholic upbringing went on to become a revolutionary guerrilla, you have to appreciate the brutal nature of the Somoza dictatorship in 1960s Nicaragua. Nora had lost faith in legal opposition when the dictator's National Guard massacred 500 Conservative Party opponents in the 1967 'elections'.

She joined the Sandinistas clandestinely at university and took part in secret activity for many years, effectively leading a double life behind the front of career woman. The consequence of discovery and capture would have been torture and death at the hands of the National Guard.

Nora met Vega through her professional work. A local CIA recruit, Vega had supervised massacres of peasants, recently bombing Masaya following anti-government protests there. Taking advantage of his sexual interest in her, Nora lured him into what was originally meant to be a kidnapping by Sandinista comrades, so that he could be ransomed in return for political prisoners. In fact Vega put up so much resistance, they were obliged to execute him.

For Nora, the event led to a massive upheaval in her life. Her cover blown, she had to flee to Sandinista-held territory near the Costa Rican border — the 'southern front' — leaving behind her two young children. Here she trained as a guerrilla and took part in battles with the National Guard, initially as part of a medical squad — ironic considering she'd given up medical school ten years earlier out of squeamishness. Later she joined a mortar squad and fought as a combatant, now pregnant with her third child.

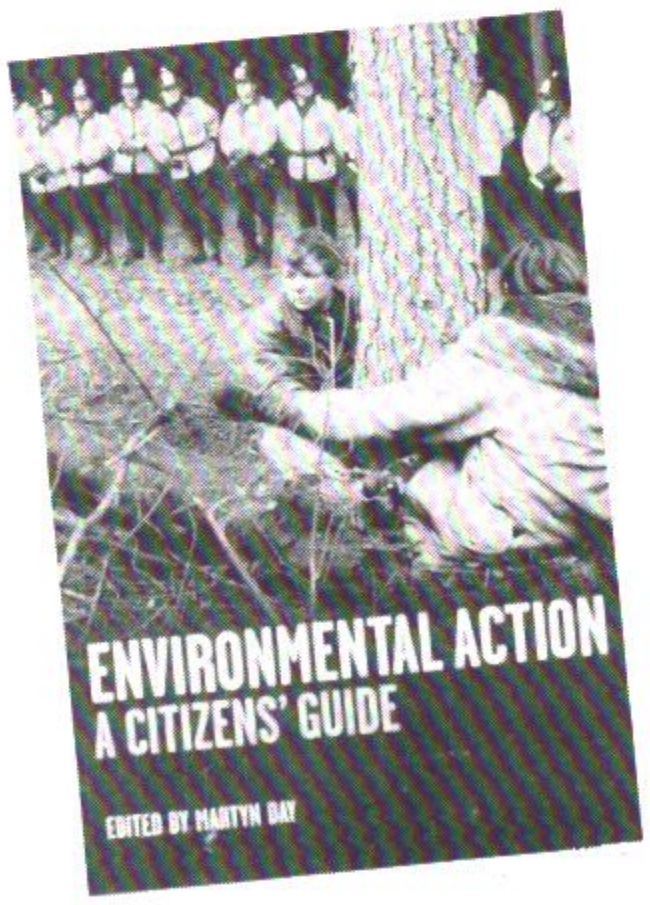
In July 1979, a final Sandinista offensive toppled the Somoza dictatorship and a revolutionary government took power. Nora's first job was as Special Attorney-General, presiding over the prosecution of Somoza functionaries and guardsmen, effectively developing a legal system in Nicaragua from scratch.



In 1981 she moved to the Foreign Office, rising in 1986 to become Nicaragua's Ambassador to the United Nations, one of only three women worldwide in such a position. Two years later she was dead, aged 39, from incurable cancer.

Patricia Daniel's biography is a well-researched account of a remarkable woman whose short but adventurous life was an expression of the inventiveness and courage of the Sandinista Revolution itself.

● *No Other Reality* is available from CAM, c/o the Greenhouse, 1 Trevelyan Terrace, Bangor, LL57 1AX, tel: 01248-600 908.



Eddie Tucker reviews Environmental Action: A Citizen's Guide. *Edited by Martyn Day (Pluto Press, £15.99).*

"THE BOOK has been completed in the immediate aftermath of New Labour's election victory. It would be a pleasure if, as a result of this change, this book were soon to become obsolete. Somehow I doubt it." Prophetic words from the editor, former Lewisham Labour Councillor Martyn Day, in the preface to this technical but extremely accessible book.

Day heads a team of specialist environmental litigators at Leigh, Day and Co., working for both individuals and pressure groups.

The book examines all aspects of the legal process, including European law, and how campaigners can use the law as a complement, rather than an alternative, to action. As such, it is a valuable weapon, a book genuinely "about the empowerment of the citizen." It provides a step-by-step guide to building a legal case, but also describes how to use the media and contains up-to-date information about the legality of public protest. Essential reading in your tunnel before the bulldozers arrive.

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Full Marx

Ernie Haberkern reviews The Adventures of the Communist Manifesto *by Hal Draper, Center for Socialist History, 1250 Addison St., Room 101, Berkeley CA 94702. $19.95*

THE 150th anniversary of the publication of the Communist Manifesto will undoubtedly be commemorated in hundreds of books and articles interpreting, polemicising for, and polemicising against this remarkable document. There will probably be new translations. All of this material, however, will suffer from one serious problem. It will be based in large measure on the Engels-Moore translation of 1888 and there is no doubt that this translation is itself now an "historic document" as Marx and Engels frequently called the original. But how reliable is it as a guide to the language and thought of the original?

This new reference and guide by Hal Draper addresses this question by considering various versions and translations, comparative analysis and looking at their literary merits and accuracy. The final section of the book contains over 120 pages of annotations explaining obscure references and elaborating where necessary on the political circumstances surrounding the text. The book is fully indexed and is an irreplaceable reference tool. But its value as a reference does not exhaust its usefulness. Important political points are highlighted for the first time.



New Labour goes surreal

The media campaign to "free the Weatherfield One" would be laughable if it weren't so deeply offensive. The very newspapers which helped convict victims of real miscarriages of justice, and which effectively censored their stories for years, have leapt to the cause of an imaginary victim, *Coronation Street*'s Deirdre, with the aid of a gaggle of politicians, including Tony Blair.

MP Fraser Kemp issued a strident call for Deirdre's release, and even drew up an Early Day Motion on the subject. Pity the M25 Three can't count on Fraser's support. As BBC's *Rough Justice* recently confirmed in irrefutable detail, these three young black men have been jailed for murders they did not commit, while the real (white) perpetrators walk free, with not a little assistance from the police.

Call us "Uncool Britannia", but here at *LLB* we like to draw a clear distinction between real people and TV characters.

Legal snag in the net

Company lawyers are beginning to take action against the use of the **internet** to spread information about their clients' actions. LabourNet has been forced to remove a press release by their web server (GreenNet) following threats from Peter Carter-Ruck Solicitors. The release concerned Biwater, Britain's Aid and Trade Provision Programme, a cabal of Thatcherites and a water privatisation programme in South Africa. Want to know more? Sorry, our lawyers advise...

Unco-operative

Home Office Minister **Alun Michael**'s review of the **Co-op Party** suggests that local Co-op Parties should no longer be able to affiliate to Labour, but instead should "make donations". He makes a spurious comparison to the idea of Woolworths or Tescos affiliating to the Tories. The difference is that the Co-op is owned by its members who have a democratic say in its running.

Co-op members look set to fight this proposal and keep the third tier of the labour movement intact. Aside from the fact that you'd think Government ministers had better things to do with their time, it's an obvious first step to disenfranchising the unions.

Ethics man

New Labour's commitment to an ethical foreign policy was revealed very clearly recently. **Mike Hancock MP** asked if the Government would impose an immediate moratorium on defence equipment being sold to Indonesia. **Derek Fatchett** responded in unexpectedly clear terms: "No".

So it's business as usual — crematoriums rather than moratoriums for the people of East Timor.

...And without a referendum

Democracy was never a strong point in the **Referendum Party** (now reduced to a mere Movement) either. Its constitution states that it shall be governed by a "Council of no more than ten members, in whom is vested supreme authority over the movement." Nowhere does it say how the Council is appointed — the only certainty is that it isn't elected.

Freedom of Information?

Premature leaks of Government documents are all too frequent in Whitehall, but you'd have expected the enquiry into the leaking of the Freedom of Information White Paper to be revealing. But no, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (an obvious target for the Modernisation Committee, that one) **David Clark** reported "the established procedures were followed and have been concluded, but yielded no evidence to identify the source..." Sir Humphrey Appleby is alive and well — oh yes, Minister.

Hedging their bets

A footnote to last month's *LLB* article on the countryside. Those great protectors of all things green, **Britain's farmers**, managed to plough up 2,000 miles of hedgerows in the past nine months — a 30% increase on last year — in a desperate attempt to pre-empt new protective legislation.

AOB

"A slight hitch held up the appearance of the consultation document for greater access to the countryside" — *David Kidney MP on Labour's concession to large landowners removing the compulsory element in the right to roam.*

"Because of the incredible pace of the process, when I arrived in Westminster with no desk and no office to find stacks of correspondence waiting for me on local subjects that I knew nothing about, it was very traumatic" — *Alan Johnson MP, after being elected.*

"There are many reasons why we were elected on 1st May, Alistair (sic) Campbell is one of them. He is doing the job he was appointed to do and doing it very well" — *Letter to the* Guardian *by Siobhain McDonagh MP, Caroline Flint MP, Joan Ryan MP, Rosie Winterton MP, Jacqui Smith MP on April Fools Day.*

"All we are saying is give peace a chance" — The Unionist, *Magazine of the Ulster Unionist Party, GB Office.*

"Michael Heseltine had some good ideas..." — *Margaret Beckett MP, President of the Board of Trade.*

Labour's alternative voice

AGREEMENT has now been reached between the Labour left and centre on a slate for the Constituency Section of the National Executive Committee and on a political statement on which the slate will be based. (See below).

Labour Left Briefing, *Socialist Campaign Group News*, *Tribune*, Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, Labour Women's Action Committee, the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups and Labour Reform have made a significant step towards unity around the basic issues of Party democracy and Labour's core values. The statement is moderate in content and tone (more moderate than some of us would have liked!) and is a compromise between the different wings of the alliance. But it inevitably brings the alliance in direct collision with the centralising and anti-welfare tendencies within New Labour, and clearly represents an alternative voice for disaffected constituency members to support.

Seven names so far have been agreed. The closing date for nominations is 5th June and then the slate will be reduced to six for the elections.

Party HQ has changed its rules and now nominees need no longer be delegates to Party Conference. No doubt the leadership was worried that its own celebrity choices couldn't get delegated. This is a big chance for the Party membership to express its opinion on the Government's record and for the left to break out of its isolation and speak once more for the Party majority.

Christine Shawcroft



Graham Bash
Hackney North & Stoke Newington CLP



Liz Davies

Support the candidates of the centre/left grassroots alliance

THE 1998 elections to the NEC will be conducted under new rules. One of the key changes is that MPs can no longer stand for the Constituency Section. This creates an opportunity to elect representatives who are in close touch with the Party's grassroots. A number of democratic socialist pressure groups and newspapers representing a broad consensus across the centre and the left of the Labour Party — including Labour Reform, the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy and *Tribune* — have come together to support potential candidates for the six new constituency places.

To secure a place in the ballot, potential candidates need to be nominated by their own CLP and by two others from different Party regions. Each CLP can only make one nomination. Please urge your CLP to consider nominating members on our slate. Each of them, while retaining freedom of judgement on other issues, has undertaken to uphold the following principles:

Cathy Jamieson



- **Democracy, transparency and accountability:** In their dealings with their NEC colleagues, MPs, MEPs and Party officials these potential candidates will seek to represent the interests of the membership. They will:
  - insist that the Party operates at all times in a democratic, accountable and transparent way, and set an example by regularly reporting back to those who elected them;
  - demand that consultation with, and participation of membership is genuine, and that policy is determined by following the Party's democratic procedures, including the sovereignty of Annual Conference, and not through unelected parallel structures;
  - defend participatory democracy and one-member-one-vote in the selection of candidates for public office;
  - uphold the integrity of the Party's federal and regional structures, including the links between the Labour Party and the trade unions and oppose attempts to centralise decision-making in the hands of the parliamentary leadership;
  - promote local and regional autonomy in the selection of candidates for public office.
- **Democratic socialism:** Our suggested candidates will seek to uphold the Labour Party as a party of democratic socialism. This includes the commitment to the redistribution of resources and power from the few to the many.
- **Elimination of discrimination:** Our suggested candidates will fight discrimination on grounds of gender, race, age, disability, sexual orientation or religion.
- **A reforming Labour Government:** Our suggested candidates will support the maintenance of the Labour Government in office, and monitor the implementation of the Party's manifesto promises.

They will seek to ensure implementation of the Party's commitments to trade union recognition, employment rights, the national minimum wage, increased powers for local government, to improved provision in health, education, pensions and welfare services and for the maintenance of universal benefits.

NEC Slate

Liz Davies
Andy Howell
Cathy Jamieson
Annie Marjoram
Mark Seddon
Christine Shawcroft
Pete Willsman

Printed by Wernham Printers Ltd (TU), 4 Forster Road, London N17.