# LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING

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inside... • Grassroots victory • MEPs carved out • Roma refugees • Kosova • Germany

## *Labour Left Briefing*

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# A victory for democracy

THE VICTORY of the Grassroots Alliance candidates in Labour's NEC elections proves that ordinary Party members can take on the Party machine, the Government, the media, and win. That should give encouragement to all those fighting for a better deal from the Labour Government.

In a field of fifteen, the six Grassroots Alliance candidates attracted almost 50% of all votes cast, despite being outspent by at least fifty to one by their rivals, who were openly supported by Party officers. Liz Davies, personally smeared and reviled by the Party's General Secretary, its former Leader, the Prime Minister, and a gaggle of noisy, ill-informed columnists, was backed by 46% of all members who cast votes. The turnout of 35% (of Labour's claimed membership) compares favourably with those in other internal party ballots, including the manifesto ballot in 1996.



PHOTO: JOHN STEWART

*Victorious Grassroots Alliance candidates at Conference – Pete Willsman, Cathy Jamieson, Liz Davies and Mark Seddon.*

The Grassroots Alliance succeeded for a number of reasons. The slate of six was both credible and diverse. The solidarity among the participating organisations and publications did not buckle under huge pressure. The campaign was vigorous and disciplined, and proved that diversity and effectiveness go hand in hand – a principle *LLB* has long promoted. We were without doubt also aided by some spectacular own goals by the leadership.

However, in the end, it was the broad, principled and relevant political message of the Alliance that won the election, not the heavy-handedness of the leadership side. The most decisive factor in the Alliance's success was that its arguments on redistribution of wealth, enhancement of the welfare state and internal democracy touched a chord among the Party membership. The expectations aroused by the election of a Labour Government are not being fulfilled. Worse yet, the Government has embraced the very policies and priorities of its discredited Conservative predecessors.

A poll in the *Observer* revealed that 60% of the public believe Blair is closer to big business than to ordinary people. Responding to pressure from increasingly disaffected members, trade union leaders at this year's TUC urged the Government to change course on interest rates, public sector pay, taxation and privatisation. Like the Grassroots Alliance, which articulated similar policy alternatives, they were speaking for the mainstream of the labour movement. This movement wants the Labour Government to attack poverty and promote equality, not squeeze the public sector and bolster the privileges of big business.

By voting for the Grassroots Alliance in direct defiance of their leaders, Party members also issued an unmistakable call for the right of dissent, for tolerance, pluralism and democracy in the Labour Party. They have been bullied into line for many years now. They were told that they had to accept autocratic treatment in the interests of securing a Labour victory which would usher in practical steps towards social justice. They will not now accept such treatment simply to see bankers and media barons call the shots, and they will certainly not accept it merely in order to see a Labour Government profess impotence in the face of job losses and poverty pay.

Blair's conference speech issued countless "challenges" to the rest of us to get our act together so that we could weather the coming economic storm. It said nothing of the challenge facing his own Government – the challenge of intervening in the market to build full employment, a healthy public sector and a just society. As even the *Mirror* declared on its front page, Blair's lecture was Thatcherite to the core. The only difference is that instead of saying "There is no such thing a society", Blair says "There is such a thing as society but it will have to look after itself." Government's contribution seems increasingly restricted to admonishing the people to try harder, and locking up those who don't.

Blair was right about one thing. The coming year will be a trying one for the Labour Party. Welfare reform, job losses, public sector pay, global economic crisis... if we are to push the Labour Government away from its negative course on these and other issues, we will need to continue to build the broadest possible alliance, and in particular sustain and deepen the Grassroots Alliance.

The Alliance will succeed if it functions on the basis of consensus, flexibility and mutual respect among all participating organisations, publications and individuals. This is an alliance built on common principles and shared priorities, and it was recognised as such by tens of thousands of Party members, despite a ferocious campaign of misrepresentation. It needs now to flesh out its policy alternatives and its proposals for making Labour a more democratic, pluralistic party, and to develop fresh methods of communicating these to Party members.

As for *LLB*, we will continue to offer a platform to all those in the Alliance, and to encourage the construction of a broad and diverse Labour left that can offer a real alternative to neo-Thatcherism. ❑

# A clear message to New Labour

**Liz Davies, Islington North CLP, reports on her involvement in some recent Labour Party internal election.**

THANKS AND congratulations to the many *LLB* readers who worked to secure victory for the Grassroots Alliance in the NEC elections. It was not the *Guardian* "wot won it", but Labour Party activists and the good sense of Party members in general.

Our opponents outspent us, employed a company to carry out telephone canvassing and wheeled out the big guns to smear us in the press. In contrast, we fought an honest and principled campaign and relied on the voluntary efforts of hundreds of Labour Party activists who secured nominations, organised meetings, distributed leaflets and lobbied the media. *LLB* and its readers were among the most assiduous campaigners for the whole of the slate.

The victory sends a clear message to the Government. Labour Party members want an open, democratic party, where dissent is valued and where voices from the grassroots are listened to with respect. They also want the elimination of poverty and the promotion of equality to be the Labour Government's top priorities. That means boosting pensions and public sector pay, improving welfare benefits and taking action now to halt the tide of job losses. They are dismayed by New Labour's embrace of big business and privatisation and they are not convinced that "there is no alternative". The most encouraging lesson from the NEC elections is that it is possible for ordinary Party members, without big money or celebrity spokespersons, to challenge the establishment and win.

Pete Willsman, Cathy Jamieson, Mark Seddon and I will be raising the priorities of grassroots Party members on the NEC. The NEC's role in policy making has been downgraded, and our input into policy will be as ex-officio members of the National Policy Forum, working with the Grassroots Alliance members of the NPF. On the NEC, we will be arguing for the right of Labour Party members to select all their candidates for public office freely and fairly, without interference from the Party hierarchy.

A key issue will be the selection process for Mayor of London. We will work to promote London Labour Party policy of allowing all candidates who receive nominations from 12.5% of constituencies onto the shortlist. Immediately, we will be arguing for an effective and rigorous code of conduct for all internal Party elections, so that all candidates campaign on a level playing field, spending is restricted and all Party officials remain neutral throughout.

On the NEC we will also press for the pension to be set at a decent level, for lower interest rates and measures to combat unemployment, for investment in the public sector and a better deal for public sector workers, and for an end to further privatisations and Private Finance Initiative. We will argue for civil liberties and human rights for all. We will oppose any attempts to create a coalition with the Liberals. We will report regularly to Constituency Labour Parties, through bulletins sent to all CLPs and through the left press. We will be travelling the country, speaking at regional meetings and reporting the events and votes on the NEC. We ask activists to tell us about the issues they wish to see raised on the NEC. We need you to keep us informed. We hope also to set up a website.



PHOTO: NEIL BUDGEN

*Liz Davies*

The success of the Grassroots Alliance has shown that different groups and newspapers from the left and centre of the Party can work together and that diversity and effectiveness can go hand in hand. We need to sustain the Grassroots Alliance, broaden and deepen it. All the component groupings participating in the Grassroots Alliance are key, and without the breadth of the Alliance we would not have succeeded. We need to ensure that activists around the country who are committed to the broad values of the Alliance feel that their voices are heard and that they can play useful roles. To make this a reality, we must continue to work by consensus, ensuring that all components of the Alliance feel their views are valued and respected.

We have shown that our principles – redistribution of wealth and power, democracy and diversity in the Labour Party – are shared by tens of thousands of Labour Party members. On the NEC, we'll do our best to ensure those principles, and the policies that flow from them, are placed at the centre of debate.

## The results

### National Executive Committee CLP section

| | |
|---|---|
| Mark Seddon | 75,584 |
| Michael Cashman | 70,256 |
| Diana Jeuda | 62,509 |
| Liz Davies | 61,970 |
| Cathy Jamieson | 61,707 |
| Pete Willsman | 58,108 |
| Margaret Payne | 55,651 |
| Christine Shawcroft | 53,897 |
| Terry Thomas | 50,412 |
| Adrian Bailey | 46,210 |
| Rita Stringfellow | 39,020 |
| Sylvia Tudhope | 34,768 |
| Andy Howell | 30,305 |
| Valerie Price | 27,079 |
| Mary Southcott | 8,942 |
| Spoilt ballot papers | 1,990 |
| Total ballot papers received | 133,597 |
| Total ballot papers dispatched | 381,982 |

- 736,418 votes were cast for all 15 candidates in the NEC elections. Of these 341,571 (46.4%) went to the 6 candidates of the Grassroots Alliance. The six Members First candidates got 312,616 votes (42.5%) and the three unaligned candidates got 82,231 (11%).
- Mark Seddon, who topped the poll, got a vote from 57% of all Party members who voted. Liz Davies, despite the vilification she suffered in the media, received a vote from 46% of all Party members who voted.
- The official turnout was 35%. The real figure was actually higher as we know many ballots papers went to dead or moved away members. The turnout was certainly higher than for the Manifesto ballot and about the same as for the 1994 Party leadership election.

# Blair PLC – annual report

**Sarah Cotterill, first time delegate from Manchester Central Constituency Labour Party, gives her impressions of the first Conference held under the new *Partnership Into Power* rules.**

ALL AREAS of policy are now discussed over a two year period, at the end of which the National Policy Forum (NPF) will present a document to the Annual Conference for a decision. Because this was the first year, there were no final policy documents and therefore very little to vote on. The exception was Europe (which was brought forward because of the need for policy to be made before the Euro elections next June).

There were three consultative (ie. first year) documents, on Health, Crime and Justice and Welfare Reform. The consultative documents presented to Conference were the same as we had already seen at the local policy forums. The Conference discussions, together with the local policy forum reports and any other submissions will be considered by the NPF, which will then issue revised documents, for next year's Conference. Where there are differences, minority reports can be presented.

In addition to these consultative documents, Conference discussed short written reports from six other policy commissions, which will now produce consultative documents for next year. Conference didn't have any say on what issues will be addressed. Two hundred contemporary motions on 58 subjects were submitted to Conference by affiliates and constituencies. 50 motions did not even get onto the order paper because the Conference Arrangement Committee decided they were not "contemporary".

On Monday we had a ballot to decide which four of the 58 subjects would be discussed. The major unions were united in wanting to discuss Europe, transport, local government and proportional representation, so these won in the ballot. Next year we should push for more subjects to be discussed possibly eight, four chosen by the unions and four chosen by the constituencies?. In future, we should argue for delegates to get the resolutions in advance so we have a chance to discuss them with our CLPs beforehand.

Despite the lack of votes, there was no lack of controversy. Rodney Bickerstaffe made an excellent speech – "if we've billions to pay off debts on hospitals and schools, we must also be able to find a bit for public sector pay". Many speakers expressed concern about the loss of manufacturing jobs, and John Edmonds and others called for lower interest rates. There was strong opposition to post office privatisation and a call for young people to get the full national minimum wage.

Delegates welcomed *Fairness at Work* in principle but felt it could have gone further. The RMT called for the railways to be returned to public ownership, and opposed a public private partnership for the London Underground. Conference passed a composite from UNISON which opposed public sector pay restraint and called for greater revenue spending on local government.

Conference agreed a document which will further reduce the power of the women's organisation. The National Women's Committee won't be directly elected. It will comprise all the women on the NEC, plus some co-optees to ensure balance. Similarly, the regional women's committees will be all women on the regional board, with up to five co-opted members. There will be an Annual Conference, which will feed policy into the NPF and provide skills training.



PHOTO: DAVID POPE

*Sarah Cotterill*

There was a lot of controversy about the party list system for the European elections, particularly from Wales, where an English candidate has been placed number three on the list. A new procedure was agreed for parliamentary selections. There will be a national approved panel of candidates, but CLPs can choose someone not on this list.

The stalls were prohibitively expensive, so there were lots of businesses, but very few campaigns. UNICEF were asked by Conference organisers to take down posters against baby milk, because complaints had been received. Presumably these were from Nestle and Inform, both of whom had stalls. Both UNISON and the GMB had high profile campaigns around the minimum wage.

The CLPD fringe meeting at the start of Conference was a brilliant introduction to the issues of Conference, and their daily guide was informative. At the Campaign Group meeting it was refreshing to hear a new young woman MP speaking about world development. They are not all Blair Babes! ❑

## Left turn for MPs

**Commentators on the NEC elections missed a significant shift to the left in the MPs/MEPs section (from 35% of the vote to 43%) compared to the Parliamentary Party's Policy Forum vote earlier this year. This suggests an increasing disquiet with the leadership that can't be explained away just by adding in dissident MEPs.**

**Pauline Green described this bunch as "the most sophisticated electorate" when claiming she knew nothing about being put on the typed-up nomination forms. She failed to spot that over 50 of them (13%) not only didn't vote but couldn't even organise a proxy. They'd never get elected without our help!**

**And if the MPs/MEPs had got their act together with a united slate like the Grassroots Alliance did, Helen Jackson or Dennis Skinner would have beaten Anne Begg for third place. As it was Clive Soley, Chair of the PLP, only commanded the votes of just over half his own constituency.**

# Labour tax on capital flows

**Dr Brian Burkitt, Pudsey CLP and University of Bradford, shows once again that there is an alternative to the Government's economic policies.**

DURING THE 1980s and 1990s, democratic socialists have been on the defensive. Our cherished goals – full employment, redistribution of income and wealth, and the collective provision of high quality of public services – have been threatened. These objectives have been challenged by ruling politicians and the industrial elite, who have given unswerving support to both the market allocation of resources and the process of globalisation.

These elites have shared an idea, associated with globalisation, that any government which pursues a high tax, redistributive strategy will suffer from capital outflows, which will damage its economy. In addition, experts have been united in believing that exchange controls, or any other mechanism to direct international finance, are no longer effective in the "new" global economy.

Therefore, these experts believe that world financial markets exercise a veto over democratic decision-making – a veto which is inevitably employed in favour of capital, rather than labour. They claim that any country that breaks the free market rules with socialist policies of redistribution, supported by exchange controls over external capital flows, would face a flight from its currency. The experts also believe that this would cause a substantial fall in that currency's value. In addition to these severe short-term consequences, these authorities also suggest that in the long term, international financiers would be reluctant to invest in any country which broke the rules.

However, such conventional wisdom overlooks the fact that the global market only exists because national governments are in slavery to an outdated nineteenth century view of market allocation via free trade. Because of this, they have voluntarily chosen to abandon control of international finance. What governments give away, they can always repossess – in the democratic interests of their people. The sadness is that, at the moment when the international economy needs an alternative, leaders of the western labour movement have sold their souls to the ideology of the global market.

Now change is under way. The current financial crisis has rudely shattered complacency about globalisation. It has destroyed the myth that markets generate efficient, socially desirable outcomes. The crisis has also demonstrated that the socialist non-market strategies are a viable way to overcome economic crises. Stock market disruptions do not inexorably lead to depressions, yet deflationary economic policies, such as the interest rate increases provided by the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England since the last election, can ensure that they do.

A Labour government can only achieve its welfare, redistribution and employment objectives by designing a financial system that buffers the real economy against shocks, rather than magnifying them. The problem is not a shortage of economists with strategies for re-regulating capital. The difficulty is a lack of political will and courage at a time when there is desperate need for governments to break with the prevailing economic orthodoxy and face up to the twin perils of deflation and global financial anarchy.

The experience of some countries during the financial turbulence in Japan, Russia and the Asian tiger economies has proved that it is possible to abandon the globalisation model and to benefit from exchange controls that sever domestic monetary policy from unfettered movements of capital.

So, the Hong Kong Monetary Authority has dared to intervene in its own financial markets to fend off unwelcome speculation and to improve banking liquidity, thus preserving its currency peg with the US dollar. From 7th September, the amount speculators must wager to force a rise in interest rates increased substantially from HK $2 billion (equivalent to £3,155 million) to HK $32 billion – due to changes in the way that the Special Administrative Region's inter-bank system functions. The Hong Kong Monetary Authority also provided the banks with an undertaking on convertibility – guaranteeing that it will exchange all money

## Five measures to challenge the crisis

- The Labour Government could take advantage of the financial crisis to regulate capital flows, thus providing a secure platform for its domestic reforms. In addition to reimposing exchange controls, it should levy a 0.5% tax on the 90% of foreign exchange transactions unrelated to trade. As around £3,190 billion is traded daily on the London Forex Market (the foreign exchange market), such a tax would yield considerable sums that could be devoted to improving welfare state services. This transaction tax would also help to dampen destructive international capital flows. The tax could be avoided by moving to offshore havens, but the authorities could deter this tactic by removing legal status from currency transactions not undertaken through a registered exchange. Consequently unpaid offshore debts would not be backed by the force of law. The removal of legal support and the low tax rate would prevent most speculators from moving elsewhere.
- Ideally this tax on foreign exchange transactions unrelated to trade should be adopted internationally to achieve its maximum effect. However the outcome of recent G7 summits demonstrates that waiting for such international action would in practice involve lengthy, if not permanent, delay. If Britain took a unilateral lead in this direction, other countries could be stimulated to follow.
- In order to achieve full employment, growth and redistribution from the rich to the poor, the Labour Government must ensure that the external value of sterling conforms to its internal value set by domestic policies, not the other way round.
- The Government should retain control of interest rates so that it keeps the rate sufficiently low to meet the UK's employment and growth targets, without being destabilised by the ebb and flow of international capital.
- To attain democratic socialist goals, while being determined to prevent inflation, Labour must not accept deflation as the antidote. Therefore no Labour government should again adopt the instruments of the interest rate and control of the money supply, operating through the rise of unemployment, as a means of forcing the UK economy into line with external forces.

# could halt global tidal wave

in clearing accounts into US dollars at a rate of HK $7.75. This move towards introducing capital controls has enabled Hong Kong to break the vicious circle that saw speculative attacks on the currency peg, forcing interest rates higher, raising the cost of borrowing and thereby weakening the already struggling local economy.

Also, on 1st September, the Malaysian government imposed rules that foreign investors could only continue to buy Malaysian shares if they kept their investment in the country for at least a year. It also reintroduced exchange controls and curbs on stock market speculation. The result was that the value of shares rose by almost 20%, as local buyers re-entered the market.

By flouting the rules of the free market, both Malaysia (through capital controls) and Hong Kong (through new discouragement to speculators) have already enjoyed lower interest rates – a reward for their decisive state action.

The contrast with the performance of economies which followed the orthodox, global, free market strategy, demonstrates the benefits of planned intervention. Indonesia, which accepted the full International Monetary Fund treatment, is suffering from an alarming rise in unemployment, a steep fall in school enrolment and a reversal of the anti-poverty programme of the past 30 years.

In Thailand, patients have been sent home midway through treatment, because the cost of their care has escalated or because hospitals have run out of drugs. Surely, all socialists prefer the introduction of exchange controls to orthodox policies that force cancer patients out of hospitals!

Developing countries that enjoy political confidence and determined leadership are no longer willing to accept a global economy dominated by the hedge funds and bank treasuries of the West. Can the left propel the developed economies to follow suit? Already the spillover effects of the crisis in the emerging financial markets have forced the Italian central banks to support the lira – despite the fact that it will be subsumed into the euro on 1st January 1999.

A central plank of Labour's philosophy and programme to date has been support for globalisation, free trade, untrammelled investment flows, and a limited role for governments in providing stable fiscal and monetary conditions. The current worldwide financial upheaval provides the Labour Government with an ideal opportunity to break free from this debilitating consensus.

Implicit in recent protests by trade union leaders and left wing MPs against New Labour policy is the belief that free markets have failed and that the Government should intervene to rescue the British economy from global storms. Contemporary evidence clearly supports such a perspective. The labour movement must launch a campaign to force the Government to change its economic strategy into one which addresses the movement's fundamental concerns.

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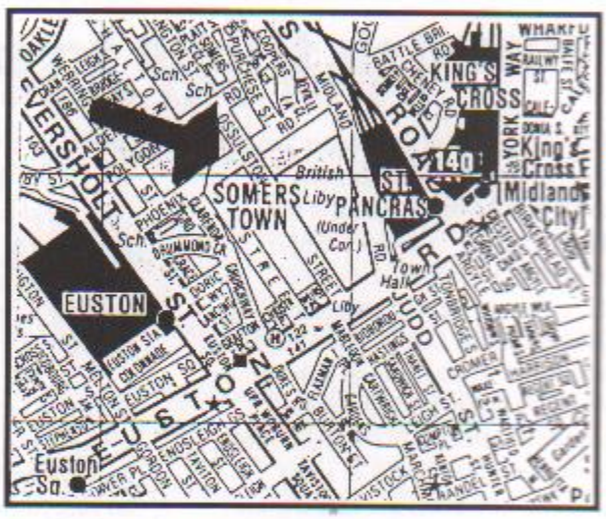
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## *THE LEFT AND THE LABOUR GOVERNMENT*

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# Euro carve-up dumps left

**Labour's new selection procedures for candidates for next year's elections to the European Parliament have resulted in wholesale exclusion for the left – and many more. Mike Phipps reports.**

UNELECTED selection panels have launched a cull of sitting left MEPs. Along with some other sitting Euro-candidates, the left-leaning MEPs have now no chance of being re-elected to the European Parliament – despite most being endorsed by the overwhelming majority of their local Party members. Under new rules, New Labour selection panels have ended these MEPs' parliamentary careers, even though many have received the endorsement of over 90% of members voting in consultation exercises.

Of the 32 Labour MEPs who called for the retention of Clause IV of the Party constitution four years ago, only seven are likely to survive. Under the new rules, local members were asked to nominate suitable candidates for new regional lists. While other parties are selecting by one member one vote ballots, New Labour set up leadership-nominated panels to interview candidates and place them in order on regional slates. Many incumbent MEPs were placed so far down the list they stand no chance of re-election. Some left MEPs stood down, rather than be axed. Campaign Group supporter Alex Smith withdrew rather than run in an unwinnable position on the Scottish region slate.

On the other hand, newly elected NEC member Michael Cashman, from the Blairite Members First Group, is just one of those to benefit from the new selection procedure. Despite bitter local opposition and little previous connection with the West Midlands, he was positioned in second place for the area. Labour bosses defended his record in the region, however, saying he acted in The Rocky Horror Show at Birmingham Rep earlier this year!

Strangely, none of the several Internet sites devoted to publicising Cashman mention his West Midlands links. Sitting West Midlands MEP Christine Oddy, who was placed in an unwinnable seventh position out of eight candidates, described the selection panel as a "humiliating charade". She claimed the decision to dump her had already been taken before her interview. Oddy's support for Clause IV and commitment to Central American solidarity work may account for her treatment.

The election procedure has shown other horrors and local opposition. In London Central, the two candidates nominated were not even listed at all – showing contempt for consultation. Also carved out are Mike Hendrick, Labour's only sitting black MEP, David Morris, Chair of Wales CND and West London MEP Michael Elliott, placed tenth on a slate of ten. European Women's Rights spokesperson Sue Waddington is placed in an unwinnable position in the East Midlands and Hugh McMahon, who received the biggest personal endorsement from members, has also been forced out in Scotland. Another casualty is Carol Tongue, placed halfway down the list in London, despite her longstanding loyalty to the leadership. But her principled opposition to concentration of ownership in the media, and therefore Rupert Murdoch, may have led to her falling foul of Millbank.

Gordon Adam in the North East, Barry Seal and Veronica Hardstaff in Yorkshire, David Hallam in the East Midlands, Peter Truscott and David Thomas (Eastern region), Sean Spiers (London), Anita Pollock (South East) and Joe Wilson (Wales) are others who are unlikely to survive. This is in addition to those on the left who are standing down, such as Alf Lomas, Stan Newens, Michael Hindley and Eddie Newman, the latter well before retirement age.

There is little enthusiasm among the membership for these new procedures. Participation among the membership in London Central was 14%, down two-thirds from last time. And one side-effect of regional rather than constituency MEPS will be a likely cutback in MEPs' support staff with resources being diverted away from individuals towards the Party, thus reducing the service to constituents.

Two lessons emerge from this. Firstly no electoral system that gives the Party control over the selection of candidates can be trusted by grassroots members. Secondly, this extension of patronage and control makes it all the more essential that London members have the final say in a democratic ballot on who should be Labour's candidate for the new mayor.

## Knavish tricks to stop Ken

THE DIRECTOR of the Greater London Labour Party, Terry Ashton, has postponed the next meeting of the Regional Board, to enable members "to have a more informed and useful discussion on the NEC proposals for the Greater London Assembly and Mayoral selections". In other words, to have stronger excuses for ditching the unanimous decision of the GLLP June conference to use OMOV to select Labour's candidates, and have anyone nominated for mayor by 10 CLPs to be automatically on the short list.

It is rumoured that New Labour will be pushing Pauline Green MEP if Glenda Jackson MP does not get enough support, as part of its anyone-but-Ken campaign. The Tories, who have an anyone-but-Archer campaign of their own, are at least being consistent in proposing to bar all MPs, MEPs and members of the Lords. Problem is, Geoffrey is not popular in London but currently Ken is recognised by everyone – except New Labour – as the one person certain to win.

CLPs are urged to pass resolutions to go to the postponed Board meeting (now on 10th November) calling on them to honour the London conference decision. (A suggested text is available from CLPD, tel: 0181-458 1501). Meanwhile, there are no plans to postpone a fundraising "business dinner" at £85 a head, with Stephen Byers MP as guest speaker.

# How I stopped worrying and learned to love the National Policy Forum

**Christine Shawcroft, Canning Town and Poplar CLP, reports on the mysterious workings of the National Policy Forum.**

DEEP SUSPICION and cynicism abounded on the left when the leadership brought in OMOV ballots. It was a device intended to break the federal and accountable structure of the Party. The leadership thought that by going over the heads of the activists they could appeal to a right wing, passive mass of the Party. But they have been proven to be out of touch. Like most of us, I was taken by surprise by the Grassroots Alliance's stunning victory of winning four out of six constituency section seats on the NEC. I had thought it would take years to build up a decent vote. But now we all know that you can use OMOV ... and win.

Now we have to do the same with the National Policy Forum (NPF). We are not going to be able to change the structure in the short term, so let's use it for something the leadership never intended – a democratic, mass-participation system for making policy. Although we lost heavily in London, elsewhere in the regions we are building up a good base of NPF members. We would most likely do better in London if NPF members were elected by OMOV, so that constituencies with large paper memberships wouldn't have disproportionate influence.

We need to work with the Grassroots Alliance NPF members to make sure the policy documents are a real reflection of politics in the Party. We need to send them resolutions from GCs and comments from local Policy Forums. Together, we need to track what happens to resolutions sent in. Are they ever seen again? If so, in what form (amendments? minority reports?) and if not, why not? We should also press for all submissions to the NPF to be published. This should be a non-negotiable demand at every Policy Forum.

It's crucial that the left gets involved with the process and not boycott it as something we didn't want in the first place. Wherever possible we should ensure that submissions go via the democratically accountable process of GCs. But leaving the field open to the right means that only right wing policies will get any kind of airing at all. It means a lot more work than the old system, but we proved this summer that we are the best organised and the most hard-working.

We have to choose which proposals to push forward in a concerted way. We need to defend universal benefits and push for the index linking of pensions to average earnings. We need a job creation programme aimed at full employment, and a realistic level for the national minimum wage. Public ownership of transport (Tony Blair told me a couple of years ago he was in favour of this) and the privatised utilities must be a long term aim, and in the meantime, why can't the Government re-define the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement so that local authorities can borrow for capital investment in the same way as any private organisation? Stopping Private Finance Initiatives and abolishing Compulsory Competitive Tendering or Best Value would also find a great deal of support in the Party.

That's the point really: articulating deep concerns about policy in the Party, winning the political arguments, building the left, and engaging with the present process so that members really do have their say – and then vote on it.



*Christine Shawcroft*

## What is the NPF?

- The NPF is a national committee which includes regional representatives.
- A year ago it produced four policy documents (Europe, Welfare Reform, Crime and Justice, Health) which went out for a two year discussion period. "Europe" was in fact voted on at 1998 Annual Conference, while the others will go to 1999 Annual Conference.
- The NPF will produce four more policy documents this year for a two year discussion leading up to 2000 Annual Conference.
- The NPF meets twice a year to discuss its policy documents. It is unclear whether it votes on them before sending them out. It does not seem to produce minority reports.
- Some regional parties, or "most favoured CLPs" are allowed to hold local policy forum meetings to discuss one or more of the documents. These are not regional policy forums, which do not exist.
- You can organise your own policy forum in your own CLP and discuss the documents.
- Formally, there is no route for local members to influence the NPF except for the election of regional representatives (who are voted for by regional groups of CLP delegates to Annual Conference). NPF members can raise matters on behalf of members in their regions.

# PR – let's have a proper debate

**At the end of October the Jenkins Commission is due to publish its proposals for electoral reform. Tony Dale, a supporter of Proportional Representation, believes that the proposals are unlikely to produce a more democratic electoral system.**

THE JENKINS Commission is likely to recommend a hybrid of the Alternative Vote system (AV) to elect 500 MPs and the Additional Member system (AM) to elect an additional 150 MPs based on party lists.

AV is similar to First Past The Post (FPTP) in that each constituency elects one MP. It differs in that voters rank the candidates in numerical order. If no candidate polls more than half of first preference votes the candidate with the lowest number of votes is eliminated; their votes are redistributed according to the voters' second preferences. This process continues until one candidate gains over 50% of the votes.

AV is different but it is not a proportional voting system. It works to the advantage of centre parties – they will attract second preferences from voters whose first preference party is on the left or the right. If the last election had been run under AV the Tories would have lost about another 55 seats with the Lib Dems gaining an extra 38 seats.

At first glance AV would appear to have some advantages. If the 1992 election had been run under AV John Major would have lost his majority. However AV creates as many distortions in the elections as FPTP. AV is also Peter Mandelson's favoured system!

The second plank of the Jenkins Commission's likely proposals is the idea of additional MPs elected from party lists. Under AM, "top up" seats are distributed to parties to bring their number of MPs into line with their share of the vote. In Germany half the MPs are elected in constituency FPTP elections, the other half are distributed to parties based on party lists. This pure form of AMS produces parliaments which accurately reflect the votes of the electorate. In 1992 it would have prevented a Tory majority but in 1997 it would have left Labour 18 MPs short of a majority.

This form of AMS would not have given any party a majority back to and including the 1945 general election. The Liberals would be in a more powerful position to form and break Governments than their votes justify. It would also mean that up to half of MPs would have no direct link to the electorate via constituencies – their seat in Parliament would depend on the patronage of the party machines.

The rumours are that the Jenkins Commission will recommend the election of 150 MPs via additional member top up seats. These additional "top up" MPs would be unlikely to produce a proportionate Parliament as 500 MPs would be elected by the highly disproportionate AV.

There is strong support across the labour movement for FPTP. Roy Hattersley says "after 'electoral reform' there will never be a Labour government". This view is not based on fact. Variants of AMS (with a third or less of MPs being elected from regional lists) would have given Labour an overall majority in 1997, 1966 and 1945. STV would also have produced majority Labour governments in these three general elections.

The Single Transferable Vote system (STV) is the form of PR used in the Republic of Ireland, Malta and for many elections in northern Ireland. STV is based on multi-member constituencies with electors electing on average five MPs. The voters rank the candidates in order of preference. Candidates are eliminated and their votes are redistributed according to second preferences until sufficient numbers of candidates reach the required quota.

STV allows voters to prioritise between different candidates of the same party. It also keeps a strong link between MPs and the local electorate as MPs are elected for a distinct local area covering about five of the existing Westminster constituencies.

STV produces broadly proportional results, keeps the link between MPs and local constituencies, allows voters political choices between candidates of the same party and would produce majority governments. Despite these advantages the Jenkins Commission likely recommendations will not allow for this option to be considered.

The present debate about electoral reform should be about giving the electorate greater choice and yet the Jenkins Commission will only be putting forward one alternative to the present system. If there is going to be a debate (and a referendum) different forms of PR should be discussed. Instead an undemocratic and unaccountable body, the Jenkins Commission, composed of three peers, an ex-civil servant and a journalist from the *Economist* will be dictating the terms of the debate.




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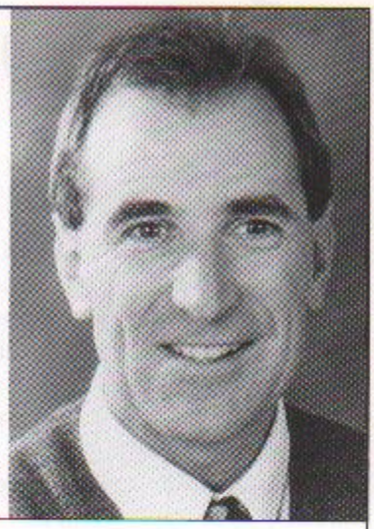
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***"I challenge each and every one of us over the welfare state. We are spending more and getting less, failing those who need it and sometimes helping those who don't."***

# the Alan Simpson column



**The Secretary of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs.**

# The real welfare challenge

THIS WAS the gauntlet of welfare reform Tony Blair threw down at Conference. For a long time those of us who have opposed cuts in welfare spending have argued it was untrue to say the welfare state was unaffordable. Yet I now believe that one area of welfare abuse can no longer be ignored. It is a part of the dependency culture which has grown malignantly, and where fraud and abuse is rife, parental responsibility is negligent, and where a tough line on delinquent behaviour, crime hotspots and curfews is desperately needed. It is time to get tough on corporate welfare.

At Conference delegates ran the gauntlet of corporate merchandising just to get in, and ran the drinks' tray of corporate hospitality to get out. Such largesse may have been impressive, but it was also tax deductible. The costs are paid not out of profits or dividends, but out of tax obligations. What made the process even more fascinating was that many of the sponsors are also at the front of the queue for government handouts and tax favours.

These are the sartorial squeegee merchants who beg for government favour. Sometimes, even their patter is the same when tapping you for a little something from the public purse – "Of course we would really like to come to your country. But, honest guv, you'd need to build us a factory first, give us the land, put in the services and infrastructure and arrange for a university research and support package." And in return? Well, we will promise you a glittering future and zillions of jobs ... No, they won't all be immediate, but if you could see your way to getting the TEC or Enterprise Council to support these jobs, and pay for half of them under New Deal, we'd be off to a flying start ... A loan? A loan? Why would we consider a loan? This is the market, not the benefit system. Oh, and one last thing, could you just have a word with the local authority and arrange a ten year exemption from the Business Rate?

This may be begging, but it's also a class act. More than that, it confuses me. If welfare is demeaning, if it breeds a culture of dependency, sloth and dishonesty, why do we saddle big companies with the burdens of subsidy, tax concessions and hand outs which currently run to over £23 billion per year? In a society driven by Labour's values, shouldn't we, at the very least, be reminding them that rights are no longer separable from responsibilities?

In a moral sense it would require us to be much tougher on those who parade their poverty before our eyes. Rather than going for lone parents, why not begin with a look at the conduct of corporate freeloaders? Many have an international record of loose living and fecklessness that would send the Child Support Agency ballistic. They have shacked up with one country after another, succumbing only to the allure of whoever waved the biggest wad of money at them.

FROM THE northeast of England to South East Asia these global strutters have spawned thousands of jobs (for children and adults), and promptly abandoned them when a delectable bit of market "tottie" lured them elsewhere. If children are for life and not just inward investment, and if abandoned partners have every right to expect support, we need a new package to foster global parenting responsibility.

Obligatory parent (company) classes could educate chief executives about the importance of loving and lasting relationships. Attachment of (overseas) Earnings Orders may be needed in pursuit of reckless and reluctant payers. Tough laws for "TWOCers" those who "take cars without the owners consent" – should be applied to those who steal jobs and livelihoods in the dead of night, devastating the lives of whole communities.

We need new policies on hot spots and curfews. Many of those most guilty of anti-social behaviour are those who maraud around the world money markets. These are probably among the world's twenty worst crime hot spots, but by tougher policing policies we could bring them to heel.

A speculation tax of half of one per cent on the global casino deals of $1.3 trillion per day, would raise enough money to pay for family responsibility programmes on a global scale. Link this with curfew policies – speculative capital having to be back home by 9pm – and we would be doing something brave and bold to bring global nuisances and tearaways back into line.

Could we do it? Of course we could. We have an Iron Chancellor, an iron commitment. Backbone not backdown is what Britain needs. Billions are wasted every year through corporate fraud and abuse and we must have the courage to take the tough decisions to tackle it.

This, after all, is our own money paid for in tax contributions that the rest of us tip into corporate welfare, and without the barest mention of stakeholder obligations or social ownership. Would the corporations like such tough measures, which balanced rights against responsibilities? Of course not.

But, as Tony said, better to be unpopular than wrong.




# Decent pay for all!

**Geoff Martin writes:** As we head into the winter months whole sections of London's public services are teetering on the brink of collapse. The crisis is driven by staff shortages resulting from the poisonous cocktail of low pay, low morale, privatisation and rationalisation.

The recent revelation that London is short of nearly 5,000 nurses is only part of the overall picture. Other areas of the NHS are just as stretched and the constant drive for "efficiency savings" has led to the deletion of many posts with a dwindling number of remaining staff expected to shoulder the burden.

The same is true in local government where the ludicrously misnamed Best Value regime is blowing like a whirlwind through the New Labour boroughs and beyond. A new culture of macho management has sparked off what would appear to be almost a competition between managers to see how many staff they can get rid of. Meanwhile, PFI is lurking around the corner, just waiting for the opportunity to mug workers across the full range of public services.

Higher education, the utilities and the voluntary sector all face similar pressures. Every one of UNISON's 130,000 members in London is facing the threat of one attack or another with no sign of any let-up.

The current pay round will be crucial in determining whether or not there is any serious prospect of re-building London's public services but the signs from the Government are not encouraging. When Gordon Brown told the "independent" Pay Review Bodies that they should build the Government's 2.5% inflation target into their terms of reference it was a kick in the teeth for our members. You can bet your boots that the employers' negotiators in local government have been heavied in the same fashion.

When we see MPs, whose only real function is to act as lobby fodder, scooping up £43,000 a year plus expenses and the fat cats in the City blatantly taking the piss with their telephone number bonuses is it any wonder that the nursing colleges can't find enough young people prepared to provide professional care in impossible circumstances and run the risk of serious assault for £12,000 a year? I have yet to meet a single nurse who thinks that Blair's SuperNurse scam is anything other than a gratuitous insult.

The new minimum wage at £3.60 an hour won't help much either. I've even heard whispers that some private sector care homes might drop their hourly rate to £3.60 on the basis that the Government think it's a fair wage! By setting the rate so pitifully low there is a very real danger that it could help institutionalise low pay for the rest of this Parliament. Our challenge, as always, is to bring together our members' concerns across the services we organise under one umbrella rather than being boxed off into separate campaigns. For example, although nurses and midwives are important, they are only one part of the health service team. We want a decent pay rise for all health workers, not just the ones that are backed by the *Daily Mail* and who the Government regard as politically sensitive.

I hope in the future we see the benefit of harmonising the various pay claims we submit. The demand we've put in for NHS support staff of 10% or £1,000, whichever is the greater, seems to strike the right note and gives us a fighting chance of building broad support. We should make this the pay target for all our members.

## Trade Union Notebook



THE UNISON branch at University College London Hospitals (UCLH) has seen the High Court override a 70%+ vote for strike action on the dubious grounds that a strike against privatisation is "political" and not a trade dispute. UNISON is appealing this decision, which blocks a fight against a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme which threatens NHS beds and jobs.

This decision will have important ramifications for UNISON members and other trade unionists wishing to fight privatisation with industrial action. UNISON activists will be watching closely to ensure that the UCLH branch receives the full support of the union particularly because the leadership of the branch (who are associated with the SWP) are exceptionally unpopular at UNISON's London Headquarters. It is being suggested that some of the publicity issued by the branch – describing the strike action as a fight against Government policy – helped to ensure the adverse legal judgement, but it is vitally important that any such criticisms or debate remains within the union and that the UCLH branch receives the fullest support in seeking to overturn the ruling banning their strike.

It is a disgrace that a Labour Government – for whose shadow health team UNISON provided enormous resources while Labour was in opposition – is continuing to rely on Tory anti-union laws to block workers who wish to fight in defence of the National Health Service.



UNISON has won re-engagement and compensation for 20 mainly Asian domestic and catering workers who were sacked by Hillingdon hospital contractor Pall Mall for striking against the imposition of massive cuts in their pay and conditions.

An Industrial Tribunal has ruled that the women should be re-engaged on similar terms and conditions within six months. It also awarded the maximum compensation possible of £11,300 with just one striker receiving slightly less.

Bob Abberley, UNISON Head of Health, said, "This should act as a warning to other contractors to think twice before treating workers so disgracefully, cutting pay and conditions just to maintain huge profits".

Originally, 200 catering, domestic and portering staff at Hillingdon Hospital employed by Pall Mall were offered new contracts from 1st October 1995. These contracts cut the gross hourly rate, greatly reduced payments for weekend working, ended London weighting and reduced holidays. On average staff stood to lose between £25 and £35 per week, leaving domestic staff on a gross hourly rate of £3.58 and porters on £4.59 per hour.



Steve Hedley has been victimised for defending his fellow-workers. Steve is chair of the RMT Harlesden Engineering Branch and the local staff representative for GTRM (the private company) workers at Euston. He was sacked on 2nd July on trumped up charges of criminal damage to a scab van during the recent strikes over wages and conditions.

Steve said "I have fought hard against management attempts to cut corners on safety to boost their own profits, and they

# the Geoff Martin column

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




• A couple of weeks ago Helen [Geoff's long-suffering partner – Ed] was hauled in by GMTV to confront Junior Minister Alan Milburn over the Government's policy on health workers' pay. According to the technicians on the show Milburn was not prepared to sit on the GMTV sofa with a living and breathing nurse – something to do with a view at Millbank that such a direct confrontation beamed live into the nations kitchens might portray the Government in a bad light.

Anyone who was watching would have witnessed the farcical charade of Helen being wheeled in half way through the Milburn interview while the programme producers waited to see if the minister would do a runner. He didn't, but the whole episode speaks volumes about this Government's attitude to the staff who provide our public services at the sharp end.

I'll give you good money that Milburn wouldn't have had any problems with sharing the sofa with a Director of BUPA or some clonk from the tobacco industry. I just hope for his sake that the junior minister isn't so shy of getting close to nurses if he's ever rushed into a hospital casualty department in need of emergency care. Just for the record, anyone who goes out of their way to insult a member of my family in this fashion really does need to watch their step. We're waiting for the apology.

• I was really sad to hear the news of Paul Wozny's untimely death. Readers of this column will know that me and Paul, a UNISON and CFDU activist in Hampshire, had been sparring for years over a number of issues relating to our UNION.

Whatever differences we'd had over the years were overcome at UNISON's National Political Forum where we worked together to try to get decent left policies through. I disagreed profoundly with Paul on a wide range of things but he was a good bloke who was on the side of the workers. I'll miss him.

• Here's a date for your diaries. On 2nd November the Office of Fair Trading will have to decide whether to refer the Murdoch takeover of Man Utd to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. Even the old duffers at the FA have attacked the takeover bid as "not something to be welcomed". This is about as hard-hitting as the gin-soaked old fools who run the beautiful game ever get but any stirrings from the leather arm chairs are to be welcomed.

I've said it before but I think that it's worth repeating. For millions of traditional Labour voters, men and women, the Government's response to Murdoch over this will have more significance than the dumping of Clause IV. I hope that the Grassroots Alliance will make it a major issue on the NEC if, as expected, Mandelson sides with Murdoch.

• Warmest greetings to all those UNISON national officials who I understand are regular readers of this column. According to my mole this page gets photocopied and circulated around HQ. I'm amazed that such well-educated people would find anything of interest in my humble ramblings but there you go. But if you are reading this on a scrappy sheet of A4 why not do *LLB* a favour and take out a sub. Go on – it's only a few quid.

• Congratulations to the electricians working on the Jubilee Line extension. As I write this I understand that they are threatening to strike over the implementation of the working time directive and that if they win they could be on as much as a grand a week.

Years ago, as a young man, I trained as a sparky and I've got the knackered knees to prove it (a lot of crawling around you see).

If I'd known 20 years ago that there'd be the prospect of earning a thousand pounds a week AND screwing up Mandelson's Dome plans I might have stuck with it rather than chucking it in and opting instead for a grey coat and a seat in the Royal Marsden porters' lodge.

That's rock and roll.

# LEADING WITH THE LEFT

know it. They want to set an example to all other union reps and RMT leaders".

Railworkers have responded to the sacking with unofficial and, now, official action. During four days of official action at the beginning of October, rail workers and supporters, including Reclaim the Streets, occupied the ground floor of Railtrack HQ at Euston.

• On Monday 2nd November the Rail Strike Support Group is planning an action outside Euston Station. Messages of support and donations to: Rail Strike Support Group, 145 Imperial Avenue, Victorian Road, N18. Tel: 0171-249 0041. For a speaker, phone Terry Dunn on 0181-314 5222.

## Obituary – Paul Wozny

**Glenn Kelly, National Secretary CFDU writes:** On behalf of the Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Unison National Committee I wish to send our sincere condolences to Paul's family and friends at the time of their tragic loss.

Alongside his role as a leading activist in UNISON's Southern region Paul had also been a member of the CFDUs National Committee since its inception in 1993.

Paul was always an ardent defender of the need for socialists within the union to organise themselves to mount a campaign to not only force the union to fight in the interests of its members but also to win the union to socialist ideas.

Our memorial to Paul must be to continue to fight for, and organise the left unity within UNISON that Paul always held so dear.

FIGHT RACISM

# Roma Refug

**Anti-Roma sentiment permeates Slovak society from top to bottom. The British Government has just introduced visa requirements for migrants from Slovakia but asylum applicants are never granted visas. Amanda Sebestyen reports.**

A POLL conducted by the Social Science Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in 1992 asked: "What would be your first emotional reaction in terms of accepting or not accepting Gypsies/Roma?" Choosing from seven options, 65.6% of the Slovak respondents answered: "I would expel Roma".

In December 1994, in response to a research poll by the Center for Social and Marketing Analysis of Bratislava, 85% of respondents denied that Roma suffered discrimination, but 57% then stated that "Roma are a different group of people so stricter laws should apply to them." Racism against Romany Gypsies in Slovakia has been expressed at the very top. In 1993, recently-ousted Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar demanded welfare cuts to Romany mothers in order to curtail "the reproduction of socially unadaptable and mentally retarded people." He described Romanies as "antisocial, mentally backward, unassimilable and socially unacceptable".

Here, the Home Office claims the Roma are not in any danger. It cites civil rights clauses in the Slovak Constitution, yet it is precisely breaches of the constitution that caused Britain in the EU Presidency to reject Slovakia's membership application. Paul Polansky, member of the US Congressional Committee on the Roma issue, has spent the last four years living in Slovak and Czech Romany communities while interviewing Holocaust survivors. He comments on the exodus of Slovak Roma:

"Despite what the constitution says, one only has to read the national and international press to see how Slovakia's political leaders are ignoring the constitution to run a feudal-democratic state today...The criminal code looks good on paper, but in practice local authorities and the police do what they wish. When I was in Kosice, the mayor proudly evicted several Romany families from their slum dwellings and had them bulldozed down before the families could move back inside or find a lawyer to defend them.... It is common practice for the police and village mayors personally to beat Roma at the police station and in the town hall. I have interviewed scores of Roma in Slovakia who have been beaten by the local authorities but are afraid to report it.....Romanies are being evicted from town and city centres and forced to live in slum dwellings and in some cases even in caves."

The January 1997 report by the European Roma Rights Center revealed repeated violent police raids on Roma communities, arrests without charges, police beatings of children, women and the elderly; the use of electric shock prods, knives and machine guns by police officers during raids and interrogations. A particularly high instance of police violence (as well as police and municipal complicity with skinhead violence) is reported from Eastern Slovakia, the district which many of the asylum seekers have fled. In Jarovnice, north-east of Michalovce, a one year old girl was beaten on her feet, tied up and hung by the hair during a three-hour raid. The Mayor of Jarovnice was seen pointing out Romany homes to the police immediately before the raid. In Kosice, 50 kilometres from Michalovce, the evening newspaper carried a statement from skinheads thanking the police for their co-operation.

The Slovak National Party was a partner in the ruling coalition until September. It espouses an extreme nationalist programme, is opposed to all concessions to minority rights and its leader Jan Slota has made repeated speeches against the Roma both in parliament and through the media. On 21st July 1995, 17 year old Mario Goral had been beaten and then burned alive at the former site of a Gypsy pogrom in World War II. The boy died of his burns ten days later. On 23rd August, Jan Slota of the Slovak National Party stated on Slovak National Radio: " I love roast meat Gypsy-style very much, but I'd prefer more meat and less Gypsies".

Roma in Slovakia are being evicted not only from their places of work and then from public spaces such as restaurants and shops, but from their homes in towns. A growing trend is for a town to pass ordinances forbidding Roma to come inside the city limits. After expulsion from the towns, the next ambition (often stated) is expulsion of Romanies from the country.

## Welcome to Britain

**Amanda Sebestyen writes:** Last month, the Roma Refugee Organisation was contacted by a man whose recently-arrived relatives had been placed in a condemned school building in Camden. This building was being used as emergency housing for refugees, mostly Romanies from Slovakia and Poland.

There was neither water nor kitchen. The Benefits Agency was refusing to accept the school as a valid permanent address. Hence, no money to buy food outside. People literally did not have enough to eat.

I went to investigate three days later. There was a security guard at the gate and no-one was allowed inside the building, not even relatives. I was told indignantly by the school manager that water was definitely connected. We found out later that for the first week all the water was cold.

A week later we got permission to go inside. Conditions were a shock. Hardboard cubicles had been erected, with only beds inside. There was no storage either for food or clothes. Heating was on during the daytime only. The shower room was unheated and consisted of a bank of showers with central controls high up on the wall. There were no basins. One child with diarrhoea and an ear infection had been to hospital; her mother explained that there was nowhere to wash her. Food had to be kept on the windowsill of the room.

The inside of most cubicles looked like wall-to-wall beds, admittedly kept scrupulously clean. It was only a matter of time before an infection spread to other children.

The overriding consideration of the staff seemed to be security. There were no interpreters in the building so people made do with sign language. The most disturbing element was the lack of food. We had been told that people were eating "somehow" – but how?

# ees' Catch-22

"WHAT ARE OUR 'democratic governments' doing? They proclaim there is no racial hatred, and that whatever happens is only a local difficulty. Is this true?

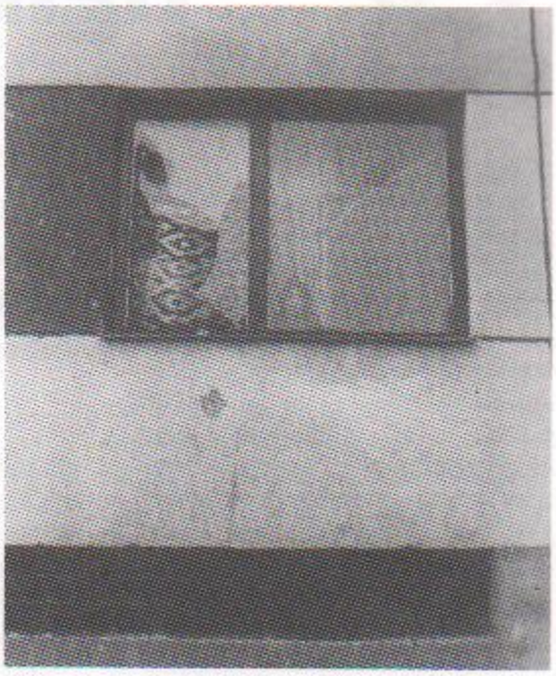
Isn't it true that we cannot get accepted for a job because we are Roma? Isn't it true that we cannot get served in a restaurant precisely because we are Roma? Isn't it true that when there is a cultural or sporting event we cannot attend because none of us wants to risk it? How is it part of a local difficulty when racially motivated murders have taken place as far apart as Pisek, Prague, Pilsen, Ostrava, Vreclav and many other places all over the Czech Republic and Slovakia? Is it absolutely normal that our houses are being burned down?

It is well known that there is a strongly organised movement of skinheads in the Czech Republic. They walk the streets in uniforms displaying swastikas and other fascist and racist symbols, and armed like a commando raid. What do the police do? Nothing.

Some MPs are publicly inciting the people of their countries to hatred and brutal attacks on Roma. You can openly buy publications with racist and fascist texts. Anyone can read them for instructions on how best to attack the Roma, abuse them and beat them.

This is the real truth. All of it is happening in our homeland, and this is how we suffer. That is why we ask the United Kingdom and its people not to reject us. Don't send us back to places where we will be threatened with danger." – Jan Demeter, speaking at the founding conference of the Roma Refugee Organisation in London.

- Contact: Roma Refugee Organisation, 1B Waterlow Rd N19.



*Lunik IX – a dump estate for Romas in Kosce.*

## Deportations increase under Labour

Figures obtained from the Immigration and Nationality Department of the Home Office by the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns show that more people are being deported and removed from the UK by Blair's Labour Government than under the Tories.

Under the Tories, some 100 people were deported every week – around 440 per month. In the first six months of 1997 2,958 people were deported from the UK. In the last six months of 1997, after the General Election the figure rises to 3,272 deportations and for the seven months to July 1998 the figures show an alarming rise to 3,935.

Figures for refusal of entry and removals show a similar rise. 12,000 people were removed in the first six months of 1997. In the six months to the end of that year the figure rises to 12,375 and for the first seven months of 1998 continues to rise to 14,800.

The recently published *Immigration and Asylum White Paper* envisages a dramatic increase in the use of immigration detention powers – to the extent of building more detention centres to provide places for people desperately fleeing oppression. Coupled with the removal of all benefit rights from asylum seekers and an increase in the powers of search and arrest of immigration officers the future is looking bleak for refugees and migrants coming to the UK. Faster and firmer but not so fair!

## No-one is illegal – papers for all!

**John Stewart, Treasurer of the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns reports on the German campaign for asylum rights.**

THE GERMAN caravan of protests and demonstrations across 44 cities, towns and refugee camps in the run-up to September's elections culminated in a mass rally in Cologne main square. Thousands chanted "Kein mensch ist illegal – Bleiberecht uber alle (No-one is illegal – papers for all). The march was led by Africans and there were large contingents from Turkish, Kurdish and Tamil communities as well as German supporters.

At the rally speeches were translated into English, French and Turkish showing the international nature of the protest. On the following day a conference took place to discuss the future of the movement in Germany. Many of the speakers, including Viraj Mendis who was deported from Britain ten years ago, stressed the racist nature of German citizenship laws. For the two million Turkish and Kurdish people living in Germany there would be no vote in the elections. The needs of the refugee and "guest" community could safely be ignored by the establishment politicians as they are not allowed to vote.

A speaker from the churches network told of the suffering of refugee families and how twelve churches in Cologne alone are now offering sanctuary to families threatened with deportation. A speaker from France brought greetings from the National Co-ordination of the Sans-Papiers and encouraged everyone present to continue their fight.

A speaker from the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns explained that Britain is still behind many European countries in terms of repression of refugees and migrants but that the Blair Government had just announced plans to cut off welfare payments to asylum seekers altogether and to detain more people under Immigration Act powers. Anyone expecting a better deal under Shröeder should look to the example of his mentor in Britain to be quickly disabused of their fantasy.

Another conference will be held in Hamburg to finalise details of another caravan next year but it was broadly agreed to focus on three issues: mass deportations; the specific oppression of women refugees; and police terror. It is hoped to build up more support in other countries around Europe and create a long hot summer against racism in 1999.

# Australian Labor fights back

**Roy Green, Director of the Employment Studies Centre, University of Newcastle, Australia, has worked for both the British Labour Party and Australian Labor government. Here he maps out the Australian Labor Party (ALP)'s fightback.**

ALTHOUGH THE ALP lost October's general election, it still achieved what was thought to be impossible, making up all the ground that it had lost – and more – in its traditional working class heartland. Labor ended up with a higher vote than the conservative coalition, but fell short of a parliamentary majority because it could not make sufficient gains in the handful of key marginal seats in Sydney and Melbourne's suburbs.

By the time of the election campaign, Pauline Hanson's One Nation was no longer the issue. The focus shifted from race to class as a result first of the botched attempt to de-unionise the waterfront and, second, the government's controversial pledge to introduce a goods and services tax (GST). Both were issues where Kim Beazley's ALP could demonstrate what lessons the party had learnt from its previous period in government and how it had begun to reposition itself on the key areas of economic policy and industrial relations.

While Howard's Conservatives have been returned, it is widely recognised – even in the business community – that they have squandered their mandate for further market-based reforms. In the first place, they have little chance of introducing the GST, given the in-built opposition majority in the Senate. Moreover, their proposed "Second Wave" of union reforms – by contrast with the position after the 1983 election in Britain – can claim no endorsement from the Australian electorate. Significantly, the unions are committed to fighting these so-called "reforms" with the full backing of the ALP.

The message of this bitter-sweet election loss for the ALP is that it need not embrace a "Third Way", whatever that may mean, but it must simply build on its largely successful policy realignment, communicate it to the wider electorate and provide effective opposition. This will be reinforced by the appointment of the former president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, Simon Crean, as deputy leader and shadow treasurer. Crean has performed well on the front bench, and was responsible for developing a more interventionist approach to industry and regional policy.

Australian Labor has no intention of spending 18 years in the wilderness, let alone the 23 years that followed its own near fatal split in the 1950s. Beazley knows that to win power on a programme of social and economic renewal, the party must reconnect with its traditional base before it can reach out to other groups and interests. After this election, victory is in his sights.

# Sweden's Social Democrats defeated

**Goran Karrman reports from Stockholm.**

"MANY PEOPLE have been hurt by our policies and many of the cuts in the welfare system have been severe and hit the weakest groups. The election result shows that Swedish people want a more radical and just society."

Those rare words of clarity comes from Swedish Premier Social Democrat leader Goran Persson on the night of his party's crushing election defeat.

With just over 34% of the votes, the SAP lost 9% since the 1994 election, its worst result since universal franchise was established in 1922. Both the Left Party, formerly the communists, and the Christian Democrats made gains: the Left went up almost 6% and with 12% become the third biggest party in the parliament. The right jumped from 4% to over 11% on a platform of "family values" and "care for the elderly".

The Social Democrats' defeat resulted from its austerity programme after 1994. During these four years the party violated almost every single political principle it had. The most striking was the lowering of the unemployment benefits from 80% to 75% (together with benefits for childcare, sickness leave, maternity pay, etc) when it had organised massive protests just a year earlier against the lowering from 90% to 80%.

For the Left Party the results was a sweeping success, increasing its votes among young people, workers and women. About 22% of LO (TUC) members voted for the Left Party whereas the trade union officials overwhelmingly supported the SAP, spending £5 million on its election campaign. Working class voters turned to the Left Party as the most radical alternative to the right wing policies of the SAP without paying too much attention to the fact that it had supported the SAP in parliament, including 80 billion kroner of cuts.

Despite the defeat of the SAP, the right wing parties are in crisis, with the main conservative party losing votes and the liberals and the centre party, partners in all right wing governments since 1976, all but extinct with just over 5% each.

The small left wing groups outside parliament managed to hold and sometimes to increase their votes in the local elections, held at the same time, but with 50 elected councillors are fairly insignificant compared to over 1,400 of the Left Party.

The outcome of the election is that the SAP will continue in power with the parliamentary support of the Left Party and the Greens. The main question is whether it will continue its disastrous politics with some freshly painted make-up. If the left betrays the aspirations of workers, other dangers lurk – already in this election some 100,000 votes were gained by openly racist and ultra-right organisations.

# Germany – "Happy, but with no illusions"

**Alexandra Schulte and William West, our correspondents in Germany, assess the results of the country's recent general elections.**

AFTER SIXTEEN years in power, Helmut Kohl, the self-styled elephant of German politics, has been ousted from office, and left to trundle off to that graveyard of defeated Chancellors. His Christian Democratic Union (CDU) suffered its worst electoral results since 1949, falling from 41% (1994) to an all-time low of 35%. The German electorate turned instead to the Social Democratic Party (SPD), which increased its vote from 36% to 41%, and its relatively young leader, Gerhard Schröder.

In the absence of any fundamental differences in political philosophy or policy, the battle was fought very much along personality lines, with the electorate choosing the dynamic Schröder over the dour Kohl. One of the SPD's election slogans was "Time for a Change", and many voters – at least in the west – switched to the SPD because they were heartily sick of Kohl and the CDU. The Machiavellian Schröder spent most of his energy trying to prove his and his party's electability, which meant keeping up with the CDU in its populist law-and-order pronouncements, stressing his pro-business and pro-European leanings, and not saying anything radical or controversial.

Echoing Blair's commitment to a (mythical) Third Way, the SPD promises to represent The New Middle for Germany. One such problem – perhaps the greatest – is unemployment, and Schröder intends to set up a committee consisting of employers and trade unionists whose task it will be to create more jobs, as if the interests of both parties could (or should) be the same. The situation in the east is far more volatile and interesting than the west. The CDU's share of the votes fell by 10 points to 26% (in contrast to a drop of five points in the west).

Having previously invested their hopes in Kohl, the hero of German unification, the voters in the east finally realised that his promises to tackle unemployment and to invest heavily in the social infrastructure were hollow. Gains were made by the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), consolidating its position as the third force in east German politics. Under the leadership of the charismatic Gregor Gysi, the PDS represents a wide forum of socialist views, incorporating members of the old West German CP, left-wing socialists from the east who are just as opposed to the SPD as they were to the old GDR regime, a new generation of young east German socialists, and ex-members of the old SED which was in power until 1989.




The PDS remains very much an east German phenomenon (in the west, it polled only 2%), but, with its commitment to the "democratisation of democracy" and to political activity at local level, the party should soon be making significant gains in the west. The fear that one of the three far-right parties would gain a parliamentary proved unfounded, with a combined vote barely above the 3% mark. Nonetheless, the fact that a high percentage of men in the 18-24 group voted for the far right (in the east, 20%; the west, 10%), and that their vote in the east increased fourfold, demonstrates the threat that fascism still poses in Germany.

The PDS's success in the east just about enabled it to surmount for the first time the 5% hurdle needed to gain representation in parliament on a national level, and it is now, after the SPD (41%), CDU/CSU (35%), Greens (7%) and FDP (6%), the fifth power in German politics. This is a major breakthrough for socialists in Germany. Since the SPD has no working majority, the question now arises as to with which party it intends to form a coalition. A grand coalition with the CDU has now been ruled out, and the PDS is still seen by many social democrats as lying beyond the pale.

A coalition with the Greens now seems inevitable, with its leader, Joschka Fischer, becoming foreign minister. How long such a coalition can last, though, will depend largely upon the Green Party's willingness to accept the largely unecological basis of many SPD policies. The role of the PDS will be decisive, as it acts as the left-wing opposition to Schröder's centrism, and seeks to hold the SPD to its more radical election promises, which include progressive tax reform to fund social spending and allowing dual nationality for the five million or so "foreigners" in Germany.

In short, the headline of the main national weekly newspaper in Germany, *Die Zeit*, after the election said it all: "Illusionslos glucklich" – Happy, But With No Illusions.

# Self-determination for Kosova

Bob Myers
Workers' Aid for Kosova

THE FORMATION of the Yugoslav Federation after the anti-fascist struggle of World War II began to fulfil the national aspirations of the different peoples of the region. This process was often stifled from above. In particular the Kosova Albanians remained in a state of colonial servitude to Belgrade. However, in 1974 they won changes to the Yugoslav constitution giving the Autonomous Region of Kosova, with its 90% Albanian population, equal status with the six republics.

In 1989, as the Soviet empire collapsed, Milosevic, who had risen to power through a campaign of anti-Albanian hatred, struck a mighty blow against the Partisan legacy by ordering the military occupation of Kosova and the suppression of its parliament. Twenty thousand Kosova miners were locked out for striking and 170,000 other Albanians were also sacked. This aggressive advance of greater Serbian nationalism signalled the end of Yugoslavia as a free and equal federation.

Since 1989, Kosova Albanians have lived under a regime of terror. Aware of the genocidal capabilities of the Serbian regime, they pursued a policy of passive resistance – encouraged by speeches of support from US and UN representatives over the following years.

For eight years, 20,000 miners remained locked out, living in utter poverty. When a Workers' Aid delegation went to Kosova in 1996 we were the first people from the workers' movement to visit them and express concern. It was hard to explain the idea of international working class solidarity. Where was this class?

So with a hope born of desperation, the Albanians looked towards the UN and NATO who had the power to halt their persecution. They had to learn the hard way about "western democracy".

Last November, NATO convened a conference on Balkan security with the leaders of Albania, Greece, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. A resolution on Kosova stated that it was a "Yugoslav" (ie. Serbian) problem. This was the coded language used by the great powers to support Serbia's claim to Kosova. This conference gave the green light for Milosevic's campaign of ethnic cleansing in Kosova this year, as a reaction not – as the Serbian regime claims – to the actions of the Kosova Liberation Army.




PHOTO: ED HALL

*Solidarity with Kosova demonstration, 4/10/98.*

Earlier this year Foreign Office Minister Tony Lloyd said "the international community does not support separatism in Kosovo. We do demand that Belgrade provides enhanced and real autonomy for Kosovo, without which the demands for independence are too likely to grow."

The Kosova people know that the Serbian regime, driven by the social crisis inside Serbia, has to have somebody to be at war with to survive. Autonomy under such a regime is impossible. Yet opposition to the right to self determination of the Kosova people is the cornerstone of all NATO activity. Their present actions are not intended to liberate Kosova. They stood by as 300,000 people were driven from their homes. NATO's concern is to prevent self determination which they fear will encourage people throughout the region to seek control of their own lives free from imperialist robbery.

Kosova contains gold, silver and platinum mines. In 1997 Milosevic privatised the mines and sold the Kosova mineral rights to a Greek company Mytilinaeos for $500 million. Self determination for Kosova would stand in the way of this and many other similar deals.

- Contact Workers' Aid for Kosova on 0161-226 0404. WAFK managed to get food through to Kosova miners in August. They are planning a bigger convoy in December.

**Dear Friends,**

In 1990 all Albanian teachers in Kosova were dismissed. Educational buildings were closed to Albanian students. As teachers we could not tolerate this attempt to end education for Albanian children which was aimed at destroying the Albanian presence in Kosova. Through our union we began to organise school and university classes in private houses and any other premises we could obtain.

Despite a total lack of educational equipment, books, desks etc., we have maintained education for 400,000 pupils for the last eight years. Because of this defiance of the Serbian regime, many of our teachers have been arrested and some killed in police detention. Children are constantly threatened by police and their books are often confiscated.

From the beginning of this year, the Serbian regime has begun a military offensive of ethnic cleansing, driving over 300,000 people from their towns and villages. Thousands are trapped on mountainsides in desperate situations as winter approaches.

We appeal to people in Britain for help in two ways:

1) Material assistance: we need every kind of educational material, books, pens, blackboards, chalk, computers, school furniture. We also need good quality winter clothing. Financial assistance is required both to help transport this aid and for us to purchase supplies in Kosova.

We co-operate with Workers Aid for Kosova, who will organise the transport of any aid and also the transfer to us of any financial donations. Please contact Steve Longworth, tel/fax 0161-226 0404. Send cheques to 169 Leytonstone Road, London E15 1LH (cheques made to Workers' Aid for Kosova).

2) Political assistance: the people of Kosova must have the right to determine their own future. A referendum in 1990 voted overwhelmingly for independence. Write to your MP.

Yours,
Nexhmi Rudari, President, Pristina Region, Education, Science and Cultural Union of Kosova
(tel/fax +00 381 38 26 112)

# The Peace Deal must not fail

**Brian Campbell, editor of Sinn Fein's *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, urges Tony Blair not to repeat the mistakes of previous British governments.**

MANY ACTIVISTS across the world have said that the best political lesson they ever got was when a policeman's baton cracked across their skull. This painful truth can be affirmed by the civil rights activists in the north of Ireland whose campaign hit the headlines thirty years ago. Their peaceful demonstrations demanded equality and fair play in employment, housing allocation and voting rights – they were straightforward demands which attracted support across a wide spectrum from liberal unionists to communists and republicans.

But when the RUC beat the marchers off the streets in Derry in October 1968 it was clear that these demands struck at the very heart of the state (and that the alliance of forces in the Civil Rights Association was a clear threat to unionist supremacy). It was a sudden, shocking political lesson flashed across the world's television screens. Although it proved to be the end of a peaceful path to change, there was nothing inevitable about what followed.

The Labour Government of the time was faced with a range of policy options but when it refused to acknowledge that conflict was rooted in the very nature of the state, its decisions only added to the crisis. Harold Wilson's Government dithered. It put pressure on the unionist government at Stormont but the type of changes demanded were always going to be too little, too late. Wilson refused to confront the sectarian nature of the state. It was a missed opportunity of tragic proportions.

Much has changed in the last thirty years but some of the fundamental political realities have survived. Indeed, those forces which sought to uphold the corrupt Stormont regime are now doing their best to undermine the Good Friday Agreement and are threatening once again to prevent a peaceful path to change. Once again a Labour Government has tough decisions to make.

The Good Friday Agreement was an attempt to deal with the causes of conflict. It is no wonder it took so long to negotiate and it is not surprising that the main threat to the Agreement's implementation comes from unionists. For nationalists, the Agreement represents a number of advances. It is a chance to tackle the inequalities and sectarian discrimination in the institutions of the state, notably in the RUC, the justice system and in the civil service.

These three bodies have the unionist ethos embedded in their core – they are the survivors of the old Stormont regime and any changes to them will have to be fought every inch of the way. Within each of these institutions are people who have fought all along to sabotage the peace process. They are enemies of change who will not countenance anything but a full-blown unionist state. The Agreement is also a chance for nationalists to create all-Ireland political institutions. Those all-Ireland institutions depend on the formation of a ministerial executive from the Assembly.

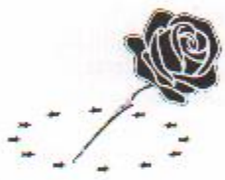
The Agreement explicitly states that that must be done before the end of October but the demand for decommissioning is once more a stumbling block in the process. It has been raised at regular intervals since the process began. It was first mentioned as a precondition to progress by John Major's Government in a clear attempt to prevent negotiations. Now it is being used to scupper the Agreement and it may succeed unless Tony Blair's Government sees it for what it is – the last chance for supremacist unionism to defy change.

Both Blair and Trimble know that the demand for decommissioning before the formation of an Executive is not part of the Agreement. They have a stark choice. They must either keep their word and implement what they signed up to or they will see the process founder. For Trimble, that means facing down those within Unionism who are against change. It is a difficult choice for him but one he must take. The future does not lie with those who want to turn back the clock to the days before 1968. For Blair, the choice is more straightforward. He cannot allow the Agreement to fail. That means he must do what Harold Wilson failed to do. He must push full steam ahead for real, fundamental change. He cannot afford to dither.


# The European Union and the South

**Looming catastrophe in world markets overshadows a deep crisis in the world system and in the relations between rich countries and poor ones.**

**Saturday, 28th November**
**Open University Conference Centre**
**344-354 Gray's Inn Road, London, WC1**



Parliamentary Group of the Party of European Socialists

**A day of briefing and discussion on aid and trade relations between the European Union and the underdeveloped world, on the debt crisis and human rights campaigning, with speakers from Oxfam, One World Action, Jubilee 2000 Afrika campaign, Liberation, and human rights campaigners on Indonesia, Mexico and other countries.**

**Registration and inquiries to: Stan Newens MEP, Basement Office, 92 Ladbroke Grove, London, W11 2HE; tel 0171-221 0092; fax 0171-792 3691; email office@newens.demon.co.uk**

# "Reconciling human dignity and economic necessities"

**Victor Hugo Tinoco of the Sandinista National Directorate and leader of their Parliamentary group was in Britain recently to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign. Mike Phipps spoke to him.**

**Alejandro Bendana once said "it took Marxist-oriented revolutionaries to make liberal pluralist democracy a reality in Central America." Given that so much of the Sandinistas' economic and social achievement has now been overturned, is this what remains of the Sandinista legacy today?**

The Revolution left a basic inheritance. Firstly, democracy. The Sandinistas aimed to overthrow Somoza's 50 year dictatorship. So democracy is very important to Nicaragua and the role of the FSLN in achieving this was essential.

Secondly, we transformed the army. We now have a professional and independent army, willing to respect any electoral result, whether a victory of the left or right. This is saying a lot in Latin America where it is uncommon to see the army happy about a left victory. We should remember the army in Nicaragua was a family army, owned by the Somozas. The transformation of the army was very important in our history and this creates advantages for democracy. Elsewhere the army can upset any election result.

Thirdly, the distribution of land and property to co-operatives and individual campesinos. The Revolution distributed property to about 400,000 families so 1.5 million people, or 50% of the population benefited in some way. Even after our election defeat in 1990 the process of distribution continued. When the government began to privatise everything, the FSLN strategy was to privatise at least some state-owned property in favour of workers, campesinos and retired soldiers. This is threatened by the neo-liberal model which is now trying to dismantle this, but after nine years of right-wing government, about 70% of what was distributed by the Revolution is still in the hands of the people.

**What do you say to critics who argue that the Sandinista leadership has gone too far in making alliances with agri-business sectors, and in doing so has neglected its traditional base?**

Capitalists in Nicaragua are not as strong as capitalists in the developed countries. In 1996 we ran on a programme which tried to rally not just the progressive sectors but also those associated with production. Our slogan was "a government for everybody" – that is, one that would not just govern on behalf of the revolutionary sectors. Most of the big capitalists in Nicaragua didn't buy this proposal, so we didn't get better results. But it would have been difficult to have been more to the left and still rallied middle sectors. An important part of the population feared we would be too radical. This is a dilemma for the left everywhere: how to combine the best and the most viable programme.

**The political terrain in Latin America and beyond has changed enormously in the last twenty years. Today the enemy is not military dictatorship, but the devastating effects of neo-liberalism on people's lives. What kind of a movement is necessary to fight this and what prospects do you see for this?**

Latin American revolutionaries and left parties have been meeting in the Sao Paulo Forum where they have made a good analysis and developed a platform for the left. They are trying to produce solutions for poor people based on current realities. Left parties should have a clear message for neo-liberalism. We are in favour of macro-economic stability as a governing party. But we will fight to change the social effects of these policies. We need a stable deficit and no hyper-inflation, but also the right of poor people to solve the problems of food, health, education and housing. We have to reconcile the economic goals with these human objectives.

The advantage for the left is that the policies of the international financial institutions have already failed, however much they criticise our policies. So we're not looking for an alternative to a successful policy but to a disaster. We need to change the emphasis from macro to microeconomics. There is no hidden magic solution – the problem is one of reconciling human dignity and economic necessities.

There is a conflict between this and structural adjustment, but the latter has failed. The proposal of debt relief for highly indebted countries is totally against the IMF's views of five years ago, but this has to change and we welcome the international pressure on this. In Nicaragua there is no solution to the debt problem within the current parameters of the IMF – there will simply be more debt, poverty and instability. Bigger countries may have the economic capacity to create their own alternatives, but for small dependent countries like Nicaragua, where 40% of the value of our exports go on debt servicing, then the only solution is debt relief.



PHOTO: RICHARD MARSHALL

*Richard Marshall (Chair NSC) with Victor Hugo Tinoco celebrating 20 years of solidarity with Nicaragua.*

## Transnational sues NGO

**Centro Humboldt, a Nicaraguan environmental organisation, is being sued for damages by a Korean company that is illegally logging the forests of the Atlantic coast and violating the rights of indigenous communities. The government refuses to act and the company filed for damages after the agency denounced its activities to the press. This is the first time in Nicaraguan history that a transnational company has sued an NGO in this way.**

**Centro Humboldt said, "The power of money is working in this case. We have been the victims of slander by the company and persecution. We appeal for support and stand firm in the struggle to defend biodiversity."**

- **Send messages of support to telefax: 00 505 2492903; email: humboldt@ibw.com.ni**
- **For more information, contact ENCA, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7 7QG.**

# We don't want gold – we want life

**Liz Knight, Chris Knight, and Arif Bektas, from the London Workers Support Group, report on ecological damage being inflicted in Turkey and how villagers are fighting back.**

"THEY ARE poisoning our wells." In a village in Bergama , western Turkey, a street meeting is being held. Villagers and supporters from across Turkey, as well as international delegations, have gathered.

Bergama lies off the Aegean coast. You can see a vast landscape of tobacco and cotton fields, rivers, streams, villages, and the sea beyond. You can also see a huge military base and the site of Eurogold.

In 1989 executives from Eurogold, a multi-national gold mining consortium, came to Bergama. Local people believed that the company would bring jobs and prosperity, and agreed to sell land to it. The company built villagers a mosque and wedding salon.

Some researched Eurogold and discovered that the company used cyanide in extracting gold and had left a trail of ecological devastation. In Bergama, Eurogold has used 3,000 kilograms of cyanide to extract 30 kilograms of gold. There are 18 tons of cyanide in the area waiting to be used. The company has issued leaflets saying that cyanide is not harmful to health.

When water systems became polluted, the civic authority and representatives from 17 villages set up an action committee. Women have been at the forefront of this struggle. They pushed men into militancy by going on sex-strike. Women went from village to village winning solidarity.

The community decided to take direct action as well as taking Eurogold to court. They boycotted the company-built mosque and wedding salon. They 'sent to Coventry' locals who worked for Eurogold. They blockaded roads to the mines. They marched barefoot. Last year several hundred villagers travelled 500 miles to Ankara to demonstrate outside Parliament. In December, all villagers boycotted the census.

This action takes place under a regime ruled by the military, where dissent is regularly met with arrest, torture and sometimes death. But the mass scale of the protest, with up to 8,000 being involved, and the fact that these are Turkish peasant farmers who cannot be labelled as terrorists or Kurds, has meant that the state has been wary of direct confrontation except when protests have been directly around Eurogold's land – these have been met with beatings and arrests.

An international camp at Bergama this August was hosted by Bergama City Council. Two and a half thousand attended. The camp was the initiative of the new Emegin Partisi (Labour Party) which is struggling against constant harassment and bannings.

Under mass pressure, the High Court has ruled three times in the last five years that Eurogold could not operate, on the grounds that the mining was adversely affecting local farming lands and productivity. But each time the Government has bowed to corporate pressure and bribes, and re-issued the company's licence. Early this year the court again suspended the company's licence. The company is now waiting for Turkey to sign the MAI. Ratification of MAI will enable companies like Eurogold to over-ride national laws.

Eurogold plans another 560 new sites across Turkey. The villagers' banners say: "We don't want gold. We want life."



*Camp translator Leman, Liz Knight and two village headmen.*

- Contact the Campaign for Human Rights in Turkey 0171-275 8440; E-mail: DayMer@migranet.demon.co.uk

# King-size creeps

**WE'VE HEARD about Nestle's violation of World Health Organisation Rules in their drive to push artificial baby foods at mothers in the Third World. But what about the increasingly aggressive marketing ploys of the tobacco giants? Mike Phipps reports.**

**How would you feel if a stranger offered your child free cigarettes? In Chile British American Tobacco is doing just that – employing glamorous women to hand out free cigarettes to young people in malls, video arcades and discos. In Cambodia cigarette companies advertise on ice cream vans. In Sri Lanka BAT sponsors a "Healthy Child Contest" and a campaign for "child safety". This aggressive targeting of poorer countries is the natural outcome of selling a product which kills 350,000 loyal customers every year. As law suits mount in the West. European and North American tobacco companies are eyeing the vast markets of Africa, Asia and Latin America. As a Rothmans executive said in one west African country recently: "The average life expectancy here is about 40 years, infant mortality is high; the health problems which some say (sic) are caused by cigarettes just won't figure here."**

With only 7% of women in developing countries thought to smoke, compared to 24% in the industrialised world, the push for new women smokers is also on. Small wonder BAT's former chief believes these to be "the most exciting times in the tobacco industry in the last 40 years." As cigarette consumption falls in the west, it increased 67% in poorer countries between 1970 and 1994.

- The World Development Movement has launched a campaign to make global the kind of restrictions and regulations that tobacco companies face in the West. For more information, contact the WDM, 25 Beehive Place, London SW9 7QR, tel: 0171-737 6215; web: http://oneworld.org/wdm/

# South African privatisation: Mandelson muddies waters

**Last month *LLB* reported on water privatisation in South Africa. Here Anna Weekes, media officer of the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU), reports (in a personal capacity) that it will need superhuman effort to stop water transnationals from getting a foot in South Africa's door.**

THE BRITISH Labour Government has now become involved in the latest South African privatisation. As the ANC-led administration launched new attacks on organised labour over the sell-offs, British minister Peter Mandelson visited South Africa. The Trade and Industry Minister's stay was just weeks before a water privatisation contract with a British transnational is set to be sealed. The firm, Biwater, planned to finalise a contract to run the municipality of Nelspruit's water on 1st November. Mandelson insisted that he had not come to "sell privatisation to South Africa". Yet it was alleged that one of the main aims of his visit was to see why the contract to privatise the water had not yet been finalised and to push for its immediate conclusion.

The visit came as the ANC government stepped up its assault on those fighting privatisation. The union SAMWU has faced its most vicious attack yet by South African Minister of Constitutional Development and Provincial Affairs Valli Moosa. The minister accused the union's campaign against privatisation as being based on "ultra-leftist" ideological leanings and of blocking transformation and service delivery, views echoed by the South African press.

However, SAMWU's General Secretary Roger Ronnie slammed the charge. "The accusation reminds one of the kind that flew around during apartheid – of a red under every bed." Yet the minister's claim is also the clarion call of the conservative town clerk of Nelspruit Roelf Kotze, who accuses the union of jeopardising services on a regular basis. It is deeply ironic that Roelf Kotze accuses the federation of jeopardising services when, three years after local government elections, he has made no effort whatsoever to restructure existing human or material resources to deliver an equitable service.

The strong arm tactics being employed in this privatisation battle are familiar to SAMWU. In November 1997, Biwater used the threat of economic sanctions against a critical programme which was broadcast on South African TV reporting criticisms of its track record as a water company.

Biwater threatened to withhold a R200million (about £920 million) investment, putting several thousand South Africans' jobs at risk, unless the television station involved issued an apology and corrections. This led to an immediate retraction. By no small coincidence, Biwater is now suing the highly respected *Weekly Mail and Guardian* newspaper over a critical story.

Meanwhile, opposition from below continues unabated. At the Alexandra Civic Organisation Workshop, held at Chamdor House on 11th October, it was agreed to maintain opposition to privatisation and to campaign to extend water rights to all. A campaign has been launched to force the local authority to initiate a programme to fix leaking pipes and taps and to call for a "lifeline" of 50 litres of water per person per day for free, but for increased tariffs for any excess water used.

A recent provincial congress of SAMWU endorsed the continuation of the campaign against privatisation – despite the heavy odds stacked against the union. Dramatically, but without the sense that this was any laughing matter, one delegate proclaimed that "We are prepared to die for this campaign against privatisation."

# Rambo nation

**Andy George in Cape Town looks at the background to South Africa's disastrous intervention in Lesotho – the first foreign deployment of troops since the demise of apartheid.**

THE OFFICIAL line on why Southern African forces had to intervene is deceptively simple. Action was taken in response to urgent appeals from the duly elected government of Lesotho for assistance in dealing with what amounted to a coup attempt by supporters of opposition parties backed by dissident elements in the Lesotho Defence Force (LDF).

But, critics object, the reason why the opposition parties in Lesotho were supported, not just by elements in the army but by large numbers of ordinary Basotho, was precisely the governing LCD's lack of legitimacy. It won an election widely thought to have been invalidated by large scale fraud. Indeed, early drafts of a report by the Langa Commission set up to examine allegations of electoral malpractice, and chaired by a senior South African judge, appeared to support many of the opposition's claims. But, when the report was published immediately before the forces marched into Lesotho, any potentially inconvenient findings had disappeared.

The military intervention's effects has had truly cataclysmic consequences for Lesotho. Damage to its commercial infrastructure has been estimated at being twice the country's annual GDP. The widespread looting and arson followed rather than preceded the military invasion. Businesses owned by South Africans, other foreigners and locals associated with the Lesotho government were targeted, suggesting that the destruction was at least in part a form of protest – albeit misdirected and self-destructive. Yet, rather than South Africa being targeted to pay, it is the Lesotho government which has already been handed an extensive bill for the military assistance in the first eight days of the intervention.

Little considered reaction to events in Lesotho has emerged from South Africa. The ANC's allies in the South African Communist Party (SACP) have endorsed the action – but only after what the government must have seen as an unconscionable delay.

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# the Michael Hindley column



**Michael Hindley MEP gives a global perspective.**

# Good signs for the European left?

THE VICISSITUDES of proportional representation have given a result in Germany which few expected. The SPD and Greens have 46% of the vote (40% and 6% respectively) but this has actually produced a numerical majority in the lower House under Germany's mixed system of first past the post and regional top-up – the very system which allegedly Lord Jenkins is most in favour of.

It seems there will be a SPD/Green coalition government, though how stable that will be remains to be seen. Oddly enough the result leaves all the parties happy, apart from the right-wing of the SPD whose euphoria at being in power again is tempered by the fact that they wanted a grand coalition in order to restructure Germany's welfare state to be "competitive" in the global economy.

Schröder had championed the "New Middle" (or Third Way in Blairspeak) and a coalition with the CDU minus Kohl would have enabled him to ignore his own party and its strong leftist party leader Oskar Lafontaine. Not only is Schröder stuck with his own party but he is stuck with the Greens who have their own strong left wing committed to preserving a welfare state. The CDU were the big losers with their share of the vote falling to a new low of 35%. Shorn of the responsibility of governing, the CDU can choose a successor to Kohl and steadily push for cuts in social welfare to drive a wedge between Schröder and his own party and allies.

The Greens have been unexpected winners. A few months ago most pundits thought their radical demands for fuel tax rises had placed them beyond the pale, but PR has rescued them: their actual vote went down, but they end up in government. Though I am pleased with the result I cannot but feel disturbed about a voting system which allows a party with 6% to have cabinet seats, but denies any share of power to a party with 35%. So much for fairness.

The other winners were the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) who actually increased their percentage of votes both in the west and among young first time voters. Though their vote remains minuscule in the west, the PDS can no longer simply be passed off as a nostalgia party for the old German Democratic Republic. Certainly it is good to have an elected opposition to the left of the SPD.

The liberal FDP also were returned and now have a rare spell in opposition before them. I personally think this might not last; they have crossed the floor once before to bring down Helmut Schmidt and if Schröder finds he cannot take the Greens with him towards the New Middle, the FDP might prove a tempting alternative support. Finally all will take comfort from the fact that none of the various extreme right-wing parties made it into the Bundestag.

GERMANY NOW faces considerable difficulties. There is a superficial complacency shown by the fact that most people wanted a change of face at the top rather than a change of policy despite the fact that Germany is experiencing growing unemployment and a continuing rift between east and west.

The new coalition government is going to cause strain within the SPD itself. Schröder cannot control his party like Blair can – he is not even party leader, though he belongs more to his party and its traditions than Blair ever has. However, the pressure on him to be the Chancellor and act in "the nation's interest" will be played up by the media and the opposition. Coalition government will also bring out the spilt in the Greens between the moderate and pragmatic "realos" and the radical "fundis".

The implications for European politics are good. With mainstream left-of-centre politicians in positions of prominence in Paris and Bonn the resistance to Blair continuing the Thatcherite counterrevolution throughout Europe will grow. Schröder was at pains to direct his first foreign policy statement towards Paris where Jospin desperately needs an ally more in tune with his anti-free market stand. Next year the Germans take on the Presidency of the European Union and with Greens sitting in ministerial positions not only in Bonn but in Brussels the greening of politics looks likely to get beyond the cosmetic stage.

For the European left, the combined vote of 11% left of SPD (Greens 6% and PDS 5%) in Germany on the back of a 16% vote left of the Social Democrats in Sweden (Left Party 12%, Greens 4%) is most encouraging. As Germany shows, PR has its inequities, but it does offer the chance of proper radical political alliances for progressive change, despite the best efforts of the establishment.


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# Just a puff of green smoke

**The Government's record on the environment is a sad joke, argues John Morrissey, Co-ordinator of The Way Ahead, the left current in the Green Party, and a past chair of the Green Party Executive.**

GREENS SHARE part of the responsibility for electing a Labour Government last year. Many felt even New Labour could not be worse on the environment than the Tories. Eighteen months on, many are wondering why they bothered. New Labour in government is neither centre-left pink nor the palest shade of green. In a blast timed to correspond with Labour's conference Charles Secrett, Executive Director of Friends of the Earth, condemned the party for producing "more green smoke than the Wizard of Oz".

Despite environmental promises at the last three conferences, little of significance has been delivered. From Tony Blair and Number Ten's Policy Unit we have had at best silence, at worse obstruction. The list of issues on which New Labour has let down environmentalists is already a long one: animal rights, genetically modified organisms, access to the countryside, to name only three.

Two key issues are transport and energy. On transport there is a wide consensus that building more roads to accommodate more cars is futile. People need to be cajoled out of their cars onto public transport – which means planning, subsidies and investment. In the longer term land use planning needs to ensure that housing, work, shops, services and recreation are closer together, reducing the need to travel at all. The trend towards excessively large low-density developments on the edges of urban areas must be reversed.

The Government has indeed axed several dozen road building schemes, but most would have been dropped anyway as unaffordable. The much-hated Birmingham Northern Relief Road will go ahead as a private development, to the anger of local people who were assured by New Labour before the election that it would be scrapped. So will the widening of the M25, in parts up to twelve lanes. The only conceivable justification is access to the proposed Terminal Five at Heathrow, the enquiry into which is still running. It appears the large donations by British Airways and the BAA to the Millennium Dome will be rewarded.

John Prescott's Transport White Paper is green in parts. But little of it will be implemented as policy, since Number Ten has repeatedly intervened to water down or block the proposals. The middle classes are supposedly too wedded to the use of their cars for Tony Blair to risk annoying them. In September, Friends of the Earth – in a story which had the hallmarks of a high-level leak from Prescott's department – revealed that the Deputy PM had been reduced to trying to pass parts of his White Paper into law in London alone as part of the legislation to establish a mayor and Assembly there. This would be seen as political compensation for Number Ten's snub to the White Paper.

New Labour has retreated even from the Tory position on out-of-town supermarkets and shopping centres. John Gummer, environment minister in the last government, attempted to curb such developments, although somewhat belatedly. New Labour has now dropped shopping centres and supermarkets from the car parking tax provisions central to the White Paper. Protecting the interests of supermarket chains is clearly more important to New Labour than protecting the environment.

On energy, the usually loyal *New Statesman* stated bluntly: "The Government still has no energy policy", attributing this to "a complete lack of enthusiasm for the environment on the part of Number Ten." Yet it is quite clear what needs to be done. Nuclear installations must be closed as soon as humanly possible. We need a major programme of energy conservation – again, this means planning, subsidies and investment. In the long term the reduced energy requirement should be generated from renewable sources. Meanwhile the shortfall can be met through advanced technologies which burn coal cleanly.

New Labour's General Election promise was to reduce UK carbon dioxide emissions by 20% over 1990 levels by 2010. The Government has now retreated to the European Union target agreed at Kyoto, 12.5% over 1990 levels by 2012. The UK is in fact well on track to meet the original 1992 Rio targets for reduced emissions, although this is due to structural change in the UK economy and the "dash for gas" unleashed by the Tories, not conscious environmental policy.

New Labour has little detectable emissions policy other than to rely on these trends continuing, trust in the market and hope for the best. These failures by New Labour are not accidental. They stem directly from its commitment to a competitive UK economy in a deregulated global free market. They result from its determination to place the interests of business above all others, even if that means trading tomorrow's ecological security for today's corporate profit.

The accumulated demands of environmentalists do not add up to a socialist response to ecological crisis – just sensible, prudent measures which would protect the environment, improve the quality of everyday life and create jobs. But the need for a socialist response is pressing. Socialism does not consist of letting the free market rip and seeking to mitigate its worst inequities. It means bringing production under conscious democratic control, not least for ecological reasons. A real socialist alternative to New Labour would be a green one too.


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# End school segregation

LABOUR'S CONFERENCE was vigorously lobbied by Young and Powerful, an autonomous group of young disabled and non-disabled people campaigning for the rights of disabled people and others to genuine social inclusion.

"We're here to tell David Blunkett we want an end to compulsory segregation from mainstream schools," said Lucy Mason. "At the moment the law says young disabled people have no choice over where they attend school. We want a change in the law to guarantee us access to mainstream education."

The protesters also want the Labour Government to allocate the resources necessary to make access and equality a reality. "We have tax cuts for multinational corporations but we're told there isn't the money to guarantee us our human rights" observed Simon Aspis of People First, one of the organisations backing the lobby.

Across the country, some 98,000 children are currently being educated in special schools. Many of these young disabled people are effectively banned from mainstream schools by local education authorities, a flagrant example of the social exclusion the Labour Government decries.

One parent of a disabled youngster commented, "You're labelled disabled, you end up in a special school, then a day care centre, and at the end of the road is the cemetery. What kind of life is that?"

- Contact Young and Powerful, Unit 2, 70 South Lambeth Road. London SW8 1RI.



PHOTO: JOHN STEWART

*Supporters of Young and Powerful lobby at Labour Party Conference.*

## A leap of faith?

**Andrew Stevens, former Director of the Campaign for the Separation of Church and State argues for disestablishment:** THE CASE against an Established Church is that religion should be a matter of individual conscience, and that the state should refrain from any interference in this. Moreover, the privileged position the Established Church enjoys is a cause for concern. Given the impending removal of hereditary peers in the second chamber of Parliament on the grounds of their lack of democratic legitimacy, the same could be said of the 26 Church of England Bishops who sit there.

The left tends to view disestablishment as a minority concern, but in fact it impinges on current Labour policy. In the absence of any opposition, Jack Straw caved in to the lobbying of the Church to remain outside the scope of the new Human Rights Act, thus further entrenching its privilege within the British legal and political system.

Calls for disestablishment have arisen from a variety of sources such as politicians on both the left (Tony Benn MP) and right (Lord Tebbit) wings of the political spectrum, the ecclesiastical ranks of the Church itself (the former Bishop of Durham David Jenkins and the Bishop of Woolwich Colin Buchanan), the former Director of Charter 88 Anthony Barnett and more recently from The *Independent* newspaper. Given that Tony Blair's own favoured Labour socialist society, the Christian Socialist Movement, is even adding its voice to this call, isn't it time we revived this crucial tradition ourselves?

- For more information send an A5 SAE with a 20p stamp to the Campaign for the Separation of Church and State, 56 Wolviston Road, Billingham, Stockton-on-Tees TS22 5ET. Web site at http://www.angelfire.com/pa/churchandstate/

## The thoughts of Chairman Roy

Labour Reform recently interviewed Roy Hattersley for their journal *Labour Review*. Here are some highly selective highlights.

"Tony Blair does not want to find an improved form of democratic socialism. He wants to find an alternative to socialism. And his version of modernisation isn't really modernisation at all".

"What I find quite extraordinary about the current 'reforms' is that the Party seems to be endorsing and enjoying them".

"I believe it (the Third Way) is the only philosophy in the modern era where people have found the name first and tried to find out what it means afterwards... it is quite farcical for the PM to say 'I believe in the Third Way and I am having a seminar to decide what it is".

"I think that the PM's philosophy is not to have a philosophy...he wants to take the politics out of politics".

"What he (Blair) really believes ... is that men and women of goodwill, character and integrity, sit down together, and discuss problems without any ideological bias. It's an honourable position. I also think it is a nonsensical position. Because whether they know it or not, they've got an ideological bias".

"We must not let the 1992 election defeat be misinterpreted as the last stand of redistributive socialism ... You don't have to abandon socialism to be elected".

"The Labour Party remains the best vehicle there is for achieving the sort of society we want. It may not be achieving it at the speed we want. It may not be achieving it at all. But there is no better vehicle. And what you ought to do in these circumstances is not do less with the Labour Party but do more. And people should be in the Labour Party trying to nudge it forward".

- *Labour Review* is available for £1 from Labour Reform, Suite 5, Marquis House, 2 North Street, Winchcombe, Glos. GL5 45W.

# Unite the fight against fees

**Neil Ormerod, Reading University Labour Club, calls for united opposition from the National Union of Students to oppose tuition fees and the abolition of grants.**

ANGER IS brewing as the new academic year begins because the new arrangements for student finance will leave Britain's young people in terrible hardship. The introduction of tuition fees, plus the abolition of the maintenance grant, will typically leave a graduate from an English university (it's worse in Scotland) with debts of around £20,000 – more than many of their parents will have earned in a year.

How has the Government been allowed to get away with this assault on the finances of ordinary people – an attack even the Thatcher Government was unable to mount? The drip drip of propaganda from all political parties in the years up to the General Election must be partly to blame. The politicians argued that the present increase in students (to the levels normal in other countries) was unsustainable without a massive increase in the financial contributions by those being educated. And, with the carrot of extra money dangled in front of them, the vice-chancellors and principals were unable to resist the politicians.

Also, the grounds were laid for the introduction of tuition fees three years ago, when Jim Murphy (then NUS President, now a Labour MP) persuaded NUS to abandon its historic commitment to free education. The only way, Murphy argued, that fees could be avoided was if NUS accepted the argument that more money would have to come from students themselves, and offered up the maintenance grant to the sacrificial altar. Of course, once they saw that the grant was up for grabs, the Government reached deeper into students' pockets to extract the £1,000 tuition fee.

Ever since, the main activity of the Labour Students NUS leadership has been to put a stop to activity and frustrate the many imaginative schemes of opposition that have sprung up around the country. It refused to learn the positive lessons of the poll tax struggle – frustrating non-payment campaigns wherever they have emerged. Or perhaps the Labour Students leaders learnt too well; hoping to follow Murphy, they will do nothing to put their Labour Party careers at risk.

As Tony Benn remarked at one of the many well-supported lobbies of Parliament organised by Student Unions Against The Bill, the priority for all those who support free education must be to oust the present farce of a leadership. The public needs to hear a strong united voice from the NUS.

But the NUS can only be won through unity. All left forces must unite to throw out Andrew Pakes, the current ( Labour Students) President of NUS, and his supporters. There are hopeful signs. The comradely co-operation of the Socialist Worker Student Society and the Campaign for Free Education (CFE) saw the United for Free Education candidate for President, Kate Buckell of the CFE, defeated by Pakes by only 15 votes. It was a good start and must be built upon. Moreover, we must not forget that the left, of all shades, has a vital part to play in pointing out the role that the students have in the wider struggle to defend and extend the welfare state. We know that our fight is the same as that of the underpaid, overworked nurses and teachers and pensioners struggling for a decent standard of living.

We have to build the struggle now. Despite the machinations of the NUS leadership, successful campaigns go on, often concentrating on simply frustrating the administrative machinery of collection. The national demonstration against fees in London on the 18th November must be built for and built on – this is the opportunity to mobilise the opposition of students who are paying for their education for the first time.

- Contact the Campaign For Free Education at PO Box 22615, London, N4 1WT.

# Does Young Labour need a Grassroots Alliance?

**Duncan Hall, Skipton and Ripon CLP, wonders if the left could get another place on the NEC.**

CONSIDERING Young Labour had its first conference some years ago now, it has never flexed its muscles or asserted itself. It remains a largely inactive section of the Party, dominated by the Labour Students right wing. It has neither debated nor voted on policy since that first conference and so its political balance is difficult to estimate.

What does happen at Young Labour Conference is an election. Two places on the National Policy Forum are elected along with one place on the National Executive Committee. After the impressive gains made by the Grassroots Alliance in the NEC elections, the left should not discount the possibility of organising again for next summer's Conference. A Young Grassroots Alliance could well perform the task of uniting the traditional youth and student left with the much broader disaffected majority who would thrive on the opportunity to be part of a more active, more muscular Young Labour.

This is unlikely to come about via self-organisation by young members. While Young Labour networks, groups and bulletins do exist on the left, the alliance which brought about September's victory might have to set to work again earlier than they had originally imagined. Young supporters of *Campaign Group News, LLB, Tribune* and Labour Reform will need to be mobilised if a repeat performance is to be pulled off.

- Feedback to: Duncan Hall, 5, Spring Rise, Draughton, Skipton, North Yorkshire or email:shrbl@csv.warwick.ac.uk




## CORRESPONDENCE

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



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

The October *LLB* article on the MAI was both welcome and important. Details of the proposed treaty were leaked some months ago. Since then the US magazine *Z* has devoted three valuable articles (two by Noam Chomsky) that outline the threat to democracy that the MAI poses. Interested readers can access these articles on the internet at www.zmag.org.

*Adrian Kozlowski, Birmingham*

*LLB*'s Conference fringe meeting celebrating the success of the much-maligned Liz Davies and her Grassroots comrades, was both euphoric and responsibly constructive and your October magazine has articles on many vital topics.

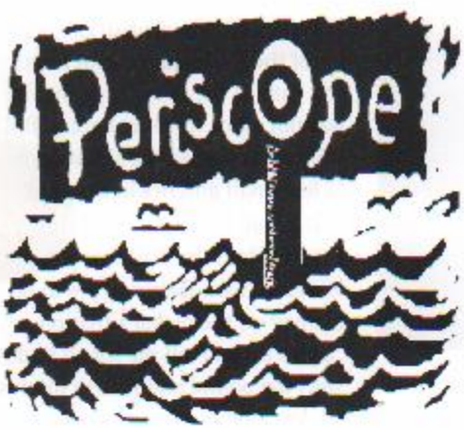
I suggest, however, that the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy has listed two incompatible policies in its three target issues at Party Conference. Pete Willsman stresses "the right of CLPs to select the parliamentary candidate of their choice", yet urges the reintroduction of "mandatory women-only shortlists"! In other words, CLPD objects to limiting choice to a Millbank-approved list, yet wishes to limit choice to its own approved list comprising all female Party members.

My first Parliamentary selection vote was cast for a woman in 1948 and I'm all for choosing the female if other things are equal – but they seldom are. We should seek PPCs who excel in candidateship and who, when elected, will strive for just and righteous laws. Their shape is no more relevant than their colour.

*Cllr. Frank McManus, Todmorden*

I currently work for ICI. In recent years it has been badly mismanaged but the results cleverly hidden. ICI is leaving Wilton and Runcorn yet the media have not picked up the fact. Worse still they are applying pressure on staff, who do not know exactly what is happening. It is time the situation was made public.

*Ian Taylor, Middlesbrough*




### Need a friend?

The "liaison officer" who was "sacked" by the GLLP (or moved back to Hackney Labour Group – who employ him) for compiling lists of delegates with damaging comments was **Luke Akehurst**, a particularly unpleasant little LCC hack. There is spectacularly hilarious stuff about Luke's activities as a student hack on the Bristol University SU website. However, the real story is that Luke was the sacrificial lamb to save the hides of **Heidi Nash** and **Traci Paul**, the two regional officials who were responsible for commissioning the report. Evidence that this was not an aberration but a policy can be found in the attribute "as 1997" against one of the delegates, indicating that a similar list was compiled last year.

### Export drive

South Africa's *Sunday Independent* reports the visit of a foreign dignitary under a headline "SA needs more than spin". It goes on to talk of "media blandishments" wearing thin at the end of an official programme "liberally dotted with photocalls" during which the visitor took time out to offer Britain's experience in the "difficult but necessary process" of privatisation and comment on how a leading local trade unionist was "wrestling with the overwhelming need to come to terms with economic reality and how to react to rapid change". And the identity of the distinguished guest? None other than **Peter Mandelson**, of course. Nice to see our man at the DTI promoting Britain's exports of used ideology so tirelessly.

### Baron Bassam's rubber fetish

**Lord Bassam**, fresh from his Members First disaster, has turned his fire on the selection procedure for next year's council elections in Brighton. Following **Richard Stanton**'s adoption to the panel of candidates and his shortlisting in a number of wards, Bassam has used his "contacts" to over-ride the democratic procedures and got the NEC to suspend his name from the list. This is the Bassam's second attempt – two months ago he got Millbank to ask the local Party to re-interview Stanton, only for the Party to reject the advice. Already one branch has passed a resolution unanimously calling on the NEC to withdraw its decision. So why is Stanton the target of Bassam's latest campaign? A remark about the Grand Hotel bombing? That he opposed the Poll Tax? Or possibly just the fact that Richard Stanton will not be a rubber-stamp.

### Junk mail

*LLB* co-chair **Leonora Lloyd** was a little surprised to receive several items of mail addressed to the Business Manager and the Managing Director of the Greater London Labour Party offering her unmissable opportunities to exploit the European markets. It's a little ironic as, since she stopped being a member of the GLLP Executive in June, it has become a Board. Leonora has written to the Director of the Board – **Terry Ashton** – to ask how her name and address ended up being used in this way.

### AOB

"Liz Davies is not the kind of person we want on the NEC" – *Derek Draper, Channel 4 News, 14th August.*

"Once again *Briefing* rides to the rescue" – *David Aaronovitch,* Independent, *29th September.* Not the only journalist who can quote out of context!

"As plain Steve Bassam, he (the organiser of the Members First slate) had played an active role in *Brighton Labour Briefing*, a magazine which makes the current *LLB* appear temperate in comparison" – Tribune, *9th October.*

"Measured criticism of Blair from the left, particularly in the absence of a strong opposition, is all well and good, but this urge to shoot first and ask questions later is destructive and needs to be stifled" – *former Trotskyist Andrew Marr in the* Observer.

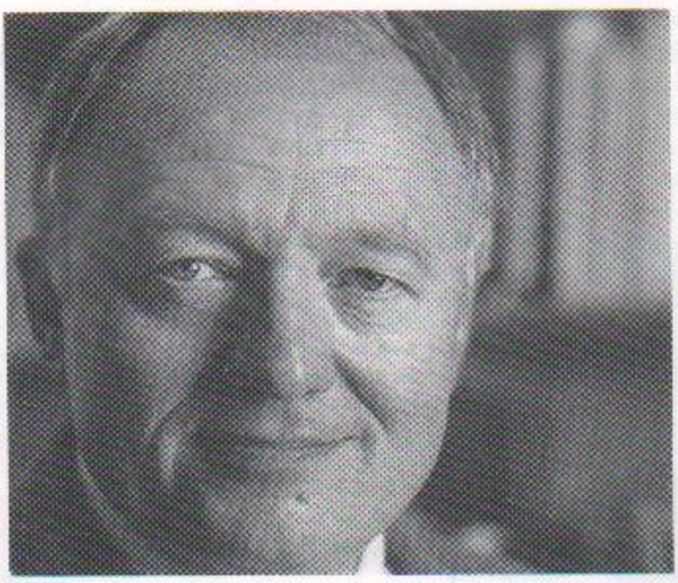
"Blair seems to have got the attitude that he only got his majority by being more Tory than the Tories and he can only keep his position by being more Tory than the Tories. It's a strange psychological state" – *Ted Heath MP,* Independent, *5th October.*

# Centre-parting Blair sows seeds of Grassroots glory

**Ken Livingstone MP looks at the outcome of Labour Party Conference and the prospect of future gains for the left.**

ON TWO MAJOR tests for the Dalek faction of the Millbank Tendency, who want to wipe out all signs of life from the Labour Party, this year's Conference indicated yet again that they do not command a majority. First, the election of four out of six candidates from the Grassroots Alliance to the NEC was a remarkable result.

The seeds of this victory can be found in the alliances forged in the defeat of Peter Mandelson in 1997, when the left was joined by many from the centre and old Labour right. That year, candidates opposed by the Party establishment increased their share from around 31 per cent (which we were stuck on from 1994-1996) to 39 per cent. Subsequently, a strengthened coalition of the left, the radical democrats and Hattersleyites of Labour Reform and the soft left readers of *Tribune* came together in the Grassroots Alliance. That was even more spectacularly demonstrated this year, with the Alliance candidates polling 46.4 per cent of the votes, as opposed to the 42.5 per cent for Members First.



I was therefore dismayed over the summer to learn that not everyone had been campaigning for this victory. One, Kate Ahrens, writing as an officer of the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups in the May edition of *Action for Welfare* (the paper of the Welfare State Network), argued: "The Socialist Campaign Group should withdraw their support for the platform [of the Grassroots Alliance slate] and judge who to support on their merits". That is to say, we should not support the whole slate.

Anyone who thinks that the Campaign Group is about to unlearn the lessons of the past few years is living in cloud cuckoo land. Only a swing of tiny proportions against our candidates would have wiped out all but Mark Seddon from the NEC. Millbank will no doubt already be preparing their campaign for next year, and this time they will not be hindered with rival Blairite slates as they were this year.

Their ruthlessness over the summer – when they turned an ex-leader of the Party and the then General Secretary out for battle – was certainly counter-productive on one level, but the obsession of the Daleks with exterminating Liz Davies must have had a negative effect on some wavering voters. On the other major test for the Party managers – the debate on the economy – the majority of trade unions clearly rejected Gordon Brown's policies, and support a coherent alternative of lowering interest rates, devaluing the pound and opting for progressive taxation. A succession of trade union delegates, led by UNISON and the GMB, went to the rostrum and made it absolutely clear that if there had been a vote, the leadership's central policy would have been defeated at only our second conference in government.

The great shining lie of 1998 is that there is nothing the Government can do about the economic problems which are now unfolding. When the South East Asian financial events began in the summer of 1997, the Treasury failed to consider their effect. Gordon told us in November 1997, in his Pre-Budget Report: "World economic growth is robust. The G7 economies are expected to grow slightly faster than average this year and to expand at a healthy rate next year. The recent turbulence in global financial markets is not expected to have a major impact on the world economy."

It was meaningless to talk in this way when the most serious financial crisis since the end of the Second World War had already commenced. The British Chancellor of the Exchequer can at least rest easy in the knowledge that he was not alone in being wrong. Bill Clinton described the situation as "a few small glitches in the road".

It is odd therefore that John Prescott told the TUC that job losses in manufacturing are to be blamed on the global situation. "Don't try and tell me it's all to do with the pound and British interest rates" he said. In reality, international developments have been seriously compounded in the UK economy by the rise in the exchange rate of sterling since the first quarter of 1996.

The Government started on 2nd May 1997 pursuing orthodox high interest rate, high pound policies which have had a massive impact on British manufacturing, and they have refused to reconsider them in the light of an international tidal wave. The derisory 0.25 per cent interest rate cut on 8th October was judged by all sides as too little too late. The Chancellor has now been forced to reduce his over-optimistic growth predictions, and even his new ones are probably a little ambitious. Thus the central problem in the Labour Party now is that in the centre and left of both the constituencies and the unions there is a majority on a number of decisive issues, in particular the economy, that is critical of Government policies.

Simultaneously, the leadership has managed to obscure that fact in alliance with some sections of the trade unions. We have the bizarre spectacle of trade union leaders pouring thousands of pounds into election campaigns of candidates for the NEC least likely to support them in their campaign to re-orientate the Government's economic priorities. If that situation were to change over the coming months, uniting the unions and constituencies around the core of the economic consensus which has emerged since the TUC congress, there would be a real chance of a rethink on the economy. ❑

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