LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING

LLB

September 1998 £1 waged / 50p unwaged

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- Privatisation special
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- Stephen Lawrence
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Labour left – alive and kicking

Vote for the Grassroots Alliance

Labour Left Briefing

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Cover photo of Liz Davies by Paul Mattsson.

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Aiding the world's top terrorist

THE HORRIFIC OMAGH bombing has been condemned, rightly, by virtually every politician in Britain. Tragically, however, these politicians, notably Tony Blair and Robin Cook, have not applied the same standards of law and order and respect for human life in responding to the brutal bombing of Sudan and Afghanistan by the United States government.

In unleashing its notoriously inaccurate Tomahawk Cruise missiles against civilian population centres in these two desperately poverty-stricken, conflict-ridden countries, the United States has once again confirmed its status as the world's number one terrorist regime.

A large section of world opinion is convinced that these high-tech instruments of mass destruction were deployed largely because of Bill Clinton's domestic political difficulties. Sceptics should recall that as Governor of Arkansas, Clinton passed a death sentence on a mentally disabled young man in order to secure a victory in a presidential primary.

However, the real issue is not Clinton's motives but the absence of any justification for this wanton aggression in law, common morality or military necessity.

The missile targets were selected, we are told, on the basis of US government intelligence reports. Our Labour Government is quick to concur, asking us to rely on the 'intelligence' of the people who masterminded Iran-Contra, the Gulf of Tonkin and the Bay of Pigs, and who only recently were trying to persuade us that Saddam's 'elite republican guard' were about to march down Whitehall.

The hypocrisy of the US government 'war on terrorism' knows no bounds. This is the government which directly sponsored some of the most brutal terrorism of modern times in Central America, Angola, East Timor and indeed Afghanistan itself.

This is also the government which wrung its hands in helplessness as Serbian troops committed atrocities in Kosova. Just what criteria guide its lethal interventions in other people's lands? Clearly, they have little to do with human rights or public safety.



The United States must be told clearly by the governments and peoples of the world that it has no right to rain death and destruction on other countries. No one has elected the US the world's policeman. And in most civilised societies, it is understood that just because you're the biggest and strongest bully on the block doesn't give you the right to force your way into your neighbours' homes, wreck their furniture and assault their families.

Tony Blair and his cabinet have spoken often of the need for law and order, at home and internationally. Yet without hesitation they leap to endorse an action that is utterly lawless, has murdered innocent civilians and that can only lead to greater international disorder. In their eagerness to play Washington's lapdog, they have let down the Labour Party and the people of Africa and Asia, who have had more than enough of the west's violent attentions.

NEC elections: vote for democracy

AS WE GO to press, the New Labour clique and its friends in the media are doing their best to muddy the waters in the ballot for the constituency section of the NEC, employing the by now familiar tactics of smear, misrepresentation, and manipulation. Can't the control freaks of Millbank abide the thought of even the smallest dissident minority sitting on the Party's Executive?

No one can predict with certainty how the contest will end, but there can be no doubt that the higher the vote for the Centre-Left Grassroots Alliance candidates, the clearer the message from the rank and file to our Labour Government — and after the summer's revelations about cronyism and cash-for-access, that message is more urgent than ever.

This is not a dry, internal Labour Party squabble. Let's remember the expectations with which the Labour Government was elected, and the possible consequences should there be a mass revulsion against the Party for failing to meet those expectations.

The reason the New Labour clique has reacted to the challenge from the Grassroots Alliance with such ferocity is clear. They have no fear of opposition from the Tories — because they have adopted so many Tory policies. But they do fear serious opposition from the left — because, as numerous opinion polls have revealed, the bulk of the population is well to the left of the New Labour cabinet on the central issues of taxation, social spending, and the need to tackle poverty and inequality.

So when you cast your ballot in the NEC elections, you are not merely boosting the fortunes of the left in the Labour Party, you are helping to ensure that the concerns and demands of working people in this country are heard, loud and clear, inside Labour's highest counsels. You are helping to ensure that this Labour Government serves the people who elected it, not big business and its lobbyists. ❑

Millbank Tendency running scared

Tim Frost reports on latest developments in the battle for Labour's NEC.

WHEN nominations for the constituency section of the NEC were announced in early July, the six candidates of the Centre-Left Grassroots Alliance had captured an impressive one third of the total. Buoyed by this early show of strength, the Alliance hit the campaign trail, sending out thousands of political statements and organising more than fifty public meetings across the country.

In contrast, supporters of the leadership seemed in disarray. For a start, they had too many candidates and Lord Bassam, business-friendly leader of Brighton and Hove Council, was called in to 'knock heads together' and impose some discipline on the gaggle of careerists. The result was a slate of six loyalists, dubbed, improbably, 'Members First'. Ballot papers were released by Party officials only after the excess candidates had been pruned.

In a cautiously worded editorial, the *Guardian* called for a vote for the six Grassroots Alliance candidates. The endorsement was consistent with the *Guardian*'s recent criticism of the Government, but it seems to have shocked Millbank Tower. The leadership hit back with an orchestrated letter-writing campaign suggesting that the Alliance candidates were unrepresentative extremists.

However, no one suspected just how much fear and loathing the centre-left slate evoked in the fast-beating breasts of the Blair babes until Tom Sawyer flipped his lid later in the same week.

It was only when ballot papers went out to Party members in the second week of August that anyone outside the magic Millbank circle knew that a new provision for telephone voting would be included. Several candidates, including Liz Davies, wrote private letters of complaint to Sawyer, noting that the NEC had never authorised the procedure, that there was no precedent for it in internal Labour Party or trade union elections, and that unlike ballot papers, telephone calls could not be individually scrutinised.

Rather than answer these objections through the appropriate internal Party channels, Sawyer press released Davies' private letter along with a denunciation of her so fevered that it led at least one journalist to wonder if a 'raving loony' had taken to sending out faxes in Sawyer's name. The result of Sawyer's extraordinary behaviour was several days of media fixation with Labour's internal 'feud' over telephone voting, which otherwise would have passed unnoticed by the general public. In this case it was Davies and the Grassroots Alliance who showed more care for Labour's public image than its General Secretary. Sawyer then went on BBC radio's *Today* programme to repeat his attack on Davies and the Grassroots Alliance, where he was eloquently put in his place by Ken Livingstone. On its front page *The Times* reported, incorrectly, that Davies had "accused the Labour leadership of rigging the NEC vote". The only source for this allegations was Tom Sawyer himself. At Davies' insistence, the paper printed an unequivocal correction several days later.

As the Party's General Secretary, Sawyer is responsible for the fair conduct of the NEC ballot. His public intervention was a flagrant attempt to sway the result, and elicited complaints from Party members across the country. In response, the Alliance received a written assurance from Sawyer's assistant, David Gardiner, that all Labour officials would remain neutral for the duration of the election. The next day Sawyer wrote to the *Guardian* attacking the Alliance. Complaints have been made, but it is unclear just who will investigate and adjudicate on them.

The code of conduct issued to all candidates states explicitly that no candidate shall attack another. All six of the Grassroots Alliance candidates have adhered to that code. The same cannot be said for some of their opponents. Margaret Payne, for example, attacked the Grassroots Alliance in an article in the *Daily Telegraph*, and Michael Cashman made similar remarks at a press conference. *LLB* understands that complaints have also been submitted on this matter.

Misrepresentation and innuendo reached new heights, however, in an *Independent* article by David Aaronovitch, former NUS president and Communist Party member. Unable to find anything objectionable in Davies' statements or behaviour, he attempted to smear her (and *LLB*) by a broad-brush attack on 'Trots' (ie. anyone remotely to the left of Aaronovitch) in which he implied that she and *LLB* somehow approved of the Omagh bombing. A number of *LLB* editorial board members have demanded an apology and retraction of this suggestion and will proceed to legal action if it is not forthcoming. Like some other former Communists, Aaronovitch seems to have abandoned all socialist ideals while retaining Stalinism's worst habits of cynical dishonesty and authoritarian intolerance.

Meanwhile, the secretive cabal running Members First has spent around £20,000 on paid adverts for the its slate in *The Guardian* and *The Observer*. Lord Bassam has so far refused to divulge the source of the cash. At a hastily organised Members First press conference, David Blunkett and Glenda Jackson trashed the Grassroots Alliance, but their claims that the leadership slate was backed by Peter Hain were dismissed by his office. On BBC radio, John Prescott accused Liz Davies of the heinous crime of 'not agreeing with Government policy'. She pleaded guilty to that one.

Ken Livingstone's manifesto for London

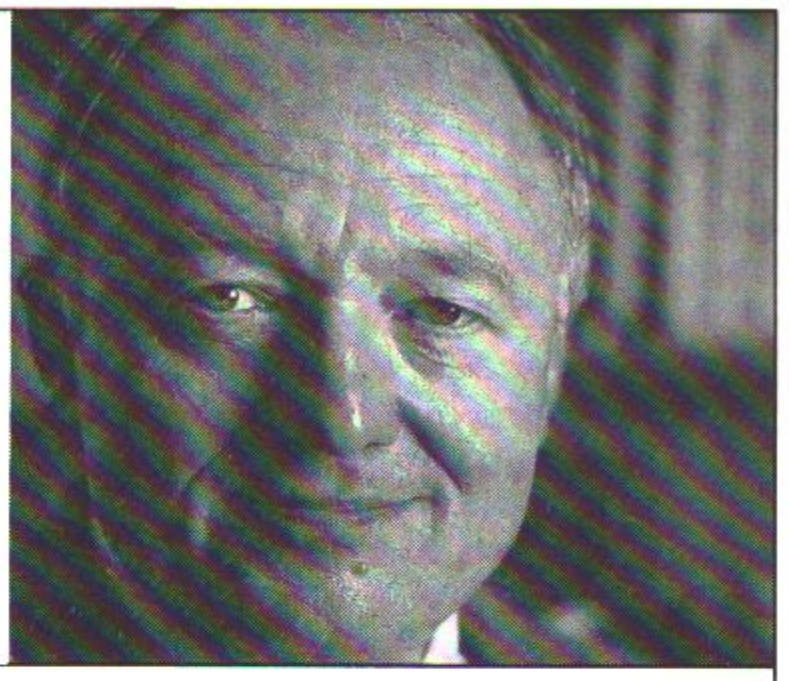
Why not get your branch to discuss these proposals:

- That the mayor and assembly members use public transport. No GLA car pool should be established.
- Substantial pedestrianisation of city centres, such as Soho, and establishment of a proper network of cycle routes.
- City wide bus lanes and reintroduction of conductors; design of a modern Routemaster; restoration of longer bus routes.
- Improvement of London's rail services, particularly their frequency.
- Increasing tube safety by reintroducing guards.
- Improving cleanliness throughout the public transport system
- Early introduction of new taxes on car parking and congestion to pay for these improvements.

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the Ken Livingstone coloumn

Ken Livingstone comments on the desperate tactics of the Millbank Tendency.



Millbank's desperation tactics

LIKE RAZOR clams on a sunny day, Labour's activists suddenly find themselves the focus of press attention each summer, as the annual NEC debate draws the gaze of the media into the inner workings of the Party. Last year it got so ridiculous that I found myself at one point doing a phone interview in the small hours of the morning for BBC Radio from my hotel room in a different continent and time zone. This year it has been the turn of the candidates from the Centre-Left Grassroots Alliance, and they must have wondered what hit them.

What hit them was an amazing level of desperation on the part of the Millbank Tendency. For the General Secretary of the Labour Party to press release a letter to him from Liz Davies suggests that the Millbank machine was genuinely worried by the alliances that have been assembled by the left and centre left.

My battle with Peter Mandelson for election to the NEC last year resulted in close co-operation between broad sections of the Party committed to democratic participation and decision making. This co-operation was hammered out in the heat of the *Partnership in Power* debate. Although we lost the vote at Conference last year, we won the NEC election, indicating that the purest expression of Millbank opinion is still a minority in the Party.

The failure of the Party's apparatus to learn a constructive lesson from that election led to the 'cash for access' debacle. Had the leadership looked more closely at the debates taking place last year it would have realised that the Party has a powerful instinct for detecting when things are going wrong. They understood well before the media that there was a self-serving and arrogant aspect to the Millbank Tendency.

The thing which kicked off the row this year was telephone voting. I have no particular objection to phone voting and there may be quite a good case for it — but that case was never made to the NEC. When the NEC met in July, those in charge of conducting the ballot must have known that this system was going to be used. Had it been raised it would have been possible to address the concerns which are now preoccupying Party members and the press. Safeguards could have been put in, a consensus could have been reached, and Party officials would not have had to defend an internal balloting system to the media.

It is the very method by which this system was introduced, and the subsequent partisanship of Tom Sawyer in media interviews during a period when he should be completely impartial, which explains the debate inside the Labour Party about meaningful democracy. It is articulated by both the 'traditional' left and new groups of the centre-left and the 'Hattersleyite' right like Labour Reform. If nothing else, the events of the summer indicate why these alliances have been such a massive step forward. If the left is to continue to be relevant to the Party's grassroots, then we have to continue to work in this way long after the last NEC ballot paper has been counted.

ON THE subject of the NEC slate, John Spellar recently argued in the *Guardian* that "the core of the organisation and several of the candidates are the same alliance which nearly wrecked the Labour Party in the 1980s, and made it unelectable until 1997." This is the official history, but it is not accurate. The Party was torn apart because the last Labour government pursued economic policies which drove away our supporters. The right wing, having destroyed the government, then split the Party and tried to destroy it too. Throughout most of the 1980s Labour was regarded by most voters as the party least competent to run the economy. Now, one year into the Labour Government, economic indicators are not looking good. The Chancellor has failed to take the choice of slowing overheating by fiscal means instead of interest rate rises. Rather than lifting the ceiling on national insurance contributions, raising the top rate of tax for those earning over £50,000 and introducing tax discrimination in favour of investment and against dividend payments, he has left British industry struggling to cope with an over-valued pound. Doctors' pay has risen by 2.6%, while private sector pay has increased by 6.2% — directors' incomes have risen by 18%.

It is not clear yet exactly how deep the downturn will be, but it has already been enough to force organisations like the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce into conflict with the Government over the effect on British manufacturing. We must learn the real lesson of the 1970s and 1980s, which was that we were thrown out of office because the Government did not listen to the grassroots members, who had been warning them for years that the economic choices the Government was making were eroding our electoral support.

PAUL RICHARDS took up the cudgels against the Centre-Left Grassroots Alliance much in the same way as John Spellar, adding (12/8/98): "for the first time, a member of the Labour Party can have a say on who their parliamentary candidate should be, what the constitution should say, how the manifesto should look, and who should be on the NEC. One member one vote means Party members have real power for the first time." Put like that, it is difficult to see how anyone could argue that such principles cannot be applied to the selection of Labour's candidate for the Mayor of London.

Dobbo's damp squib

UNISON nurse Helen Weatherley calls on Frank Dobson to sort out the crisis in the NHS and then leave nurses alone to do their job.

SO, MOVING into their second year of government, Labour have taken stock of their progress with the NHS and decided that a few pennies extra might be required if they're to convince everyone they're serious about maintaining an adequate service. To trumpeting that would do Nellie the Elephant proud, we were told that the coffers would open and £21 billion will come flooding through the wards over the next three years. That's grand then, roll out the barrels and form an orderly queue for your hip replacements.

But wait — and not just for aforementioned surgery — in real terms this means only around £2 billion per year in actual growth money, and even that is dependent on so many other economic factors that the whole lot could still end up down the bedpan washer. Do the Government think this cash will solve all the NHS's problems?

Labour's track record so far on waiting lists is falling short of their election pledges and doesn't look like meeting their targets even by the end of this term of government. To cut lists by 100,000 probably didn't seem too difficult at the time, but the reality is that elective surgery comes second to emergency work. The ever-increasing demand on inpatient beds for patients admitted via casualty departments means it is becoming more and more difficult to squeeze in those booked for operations. All the time we're seeing patients waiting for hours on trolleys in Accident and Emergencies for ward beds to be freed up, we're not going to get those waiting list figures down. From the patient's point of view this causes longer suffering and in many cases a routine problem can easily turn into an emergency, quite possibly putting lives at risk. These are the issues that Labour has to recognise and address if it intends to keep its election promises.

Health chiefs are keen for the money to be ploughed into capital investment, renovating and replacing buildings. As well as the need to replace hospitals that are well past their structural sell-by dates, the favoured hospital mergers are creating a demand for new buildings in order to condense services on single sites. While we certainly don't want any more PFI involvement, this is nonetheless a completely inappropriate use of limited resources, and neither is it what patients want.

A recent survey by East Kent Health Authority asked users their priority for the service: accessibility or quality. The answer of course is that patients have a right to both; put money into the backlog of maintenance required in existing buildings, and call a halt to hospital closures and 'downgrading'.

However, ask health workers what they want in order to improve their working conditions and the service, and you can bet your boots they will say better pay and more staff. Nurses are the largest group of workers within the NHS and are in the midst of a major recruitment and retention crisis. Unless this is tackled, pumping money into the service itself is pointless because there won't be enough people to deliver it. Dobson has promised us an extra 15,000 nurses to help out; presumably they're all called Dolly. What's needed is a decent pay award to show staff that they really are valued and respected, and which would go a long way to boosting the appalling morale prevalent in the NHS at the moment. In turn it might attract leavers back to the service as well as encouraging retention of staff, and is absolutely vital if we are to give more people the incentive to undertake the training required for health work. Dobson has acknowledged that better pay is needed, but it looks like the best we can hope for is an end to staged awards next year especially as Gordon Brown has instructed the Pay Review Bodies to stick to public spending limits.

The Government has to recognise the real needs of the NHS today, use current resources to meet current needs and then make up the shortfalls in funding. As a first step keep the hospitals we have open and maintained. Pay staff a salary that will attract and keep them, to ensure there are enough of them, to provide quality care. Give us extra beds to prevent long waiting lists and then stop meddling. We've been in a constant state of change and upheaval over the last decade; the best message is, sort it out and leave us alone to get on with what we're best at.



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Labour Left Briefing

Omagh: repressive measures won't help

Brian Campbell, editor of Sinn Fein's *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, considers the consequences of the Omagh bombing.

THROUGHOUT the summer the self-styled Real IRA exploded a number of bombs in the North of Ireland and attempted to explode a number of others in England. Before the carnage in Omagh, their attacks served merely to strengthen those whose political careers are built on calls for repressive measures in Ireland and, of course, hampered those who were calling for a demilitarisation of the conflict.

This small group emerged out of the IRA as the multi-party talks were nearing their conclusion. The 'Real IRA' disagreed with the IRA ceasefire and with a negotiated settlement. For them, the only way to break the link with Britain is through armed struggle. They are militarists who reject entirely a political strategy. In effect, they have ignored the political circumstances of the peace process and taken a fundamentalist belief as their only guide. That belief is that armed resistance is a principle, not a tactic.

Other struggles have experienced similar phenomena and all have disappeared into apolitical brutality. The irony is that they are all militarily incompetent. Without popular support, without taking account of political circumstances, no revolutionary armed struggle can be undertaken. Groups such as these carry out actions which ultimately use force for the sake of force and which cannot hope to take them towards their stated objective.

Omagh was such an action. The 'Real IRA' had become a group whose only purpose was to wreck the peace process by whatever means necessary. Republican writer Eoghan MacCormaic summed up their thinking, "Their goal...is to defeat those who believe that republicanism can be advanced — and republican goals secured — using changed tactics in changed circumstances. Our politics, in fact, were the true target of the bomb, a provocation to reactionary unionism, to uncertain British politicians, to a Dublin administration under strain. The bomb was an attack on the peace process and its authors, an attempt to destroy not buildings, but the hope that conflict can be resolved and justice, freedom and a peaceful future secured for all our people. The bomb was an attempt to thwart the future."

A tiny group born out of political fundamentalism allied to militarism and a large dose of egotism left twenty-eight people dead and hundreds injured. They are now having to take account of the political consequences of their actions and have suspended their campaign pending consultation with their membership.



Repression from Aherne and Blair will not work.

They claim not to have targeted civilians and that seems to have been the case. Instead, their warnings were misleading. The bomb was placed on a busy shopping day and appears not to have reached its intended target. Perhaps significantly, the third and final warning gave a more accurate location than the initial warnings, prompting speculation that the driver of the car had phoned it in. But politically, that is irrelevant. There was an inevitability — given their anti-political stance and their modus operandi — that this group was going to kill civilians at some time. The bombing has left them totally isolated and the only option for them now seems to be to call a complete ceasefire.

Republicans reacted to the bomb with disbelief and bewilderment that has given way to deep fury. A full debate took place within republicanism over a long number of years to chart a united way forward and this tiny group was seen as trying to block that way forward. Not surprisingly, Sinn Fein has been to the fore in demanding an end to their activities. Through intermediaries, they are trying to persuade the 'Real IRA' to call a complete ceasefire.

Republicans were among those killed and injured, as were unionists, nationalists and people of no politics. Throughout Ireland the response has been one of universal sadness as well as anger.

The state has responded by promising more repressive legislation. Greater powers are to be given to state forces whose record of human rights abuses are appalling. Already, civil liberties groups are deploring the further erosion of human rights and predicting future miscarriages of justice. Repressive legislation has not worked in the past and will not work in the future. Instead, the only definite way to defeat the small anti-peace process groups is to build on the Good Friday Agreement, to implement it in spirit as well as in the letter. Anti-political forces are defeated by political progress.

The only positive thing which may emerge from the Omagh bombing is that it may well clear the decks of armed groups. That will give no excuse to those who wish to retain the Six Counties as a British military stronghold. It will also allow republican objectives to be pursued in a political arena which has the potential for advancement. ❑

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Labour sabotages gay rights

Peter Tatchell is sickened by Labour's refusal to crack down on queer-bashing violence and homophobic discrimination.



MANY PEOPLE are convinced that Labour supports lesbian and gay equality. Blair is on our side, they say. Most homophobic discrimination will be abolished within a few years. It is just a matter of time. Leave it to Labour, Tony will fix it.

These ever-optimistic voices keep trailing hints of new pro-gay legislation in the pipeline. But on closer examination, it is mostly speculation. In fact Labour has no official commitment to new equality initiatives. Even its pre-election promise to scrap Section 28 is now vague and uncertain: 'some time in the next five years' is the best Blair can offer.

One exception is the government's commitment to reintroduce legislation in the autumn to equalise the age of consent. But even then — despite two-thirds of MPs voting in favour of equality — Labour is still refusing to endorse 16 officially. It has decided once again to opt for a free vote where Labour MPs will be at liberty to 'follow their conscience'. That is a bloody insult! Labour never leaves women's and black equality to the whims and fancies of individual MPs. It always imposes a whip, insisting that all its MPs oppose race and sex discrimination. Why are lesbian and gay human rights being treated differently?

Of even greater concern is Labour's rejection of two key gay rights proposals. In June, the government turned down an Outrage! backed amendment to the Human Rights Bill that would — for the first time — have ensured some legal protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation and HIV status.

What a U-turn! At the 1997 Pride Festival, Chris Smith read out Blair's promise to the lesbian and gay community: "The new Labour Government wants to build a new Britain free from discrimination". Fine words, Tony! But where's the action?

Labour's refusal to crack down on homophobic violence and to protect queers against discrimination is, sadly, nothing new. Within two weeks of coming to power, Blair reversed his pre-election pledge to lift the ban on gays in the military. The government is now fighting cases in the European Courts to uphold the right of the armed forces to discriminate against lesbians and gay men.

Equally offensive was Home Office ministers rejecting requests to repeal discriminatory, gay-only sexual offences such as gross indecency (the law under which Oscar Wilde was convicted in the nineteenth century) and the ban on gay sex involving more than two people. They also vetoed attempts to end the homophobic bias of the Sex Offenders Act, which results in men convicted of consenting homosexual relationships with 16 and 17 year olds being branded as child sex abusers.

Gay MPs refuse to support equality

Peter Tatchell writes: All six openly gay Labour MPs failed to support an amendment to the Human Rights Bill that would have given protection against discrimination to lesbians, gay men and people with HIV. The amendment — New Clause Ten — was defeated in the House of Commons in July by 234 votes to 18.

What is important is not whether MPs are gay or straight — or even whether gay MPs are closeted or out. The key issue is whether they oppose discrimination and support equality. On the Human Rights Bill all six out gay MPs failed us. Ben Bradshaw and Angela Eagle voted against New Clause Ten. The other four — David Borrow, Gordon Marsden, Chris Smith and Stephen Twigg — did not vote.

The main sponsor of the age of consent amendment — Ann Keen MP — was no better. She too opposed New Clause Ten. Only one Labour MP defied the government to support the amendment — Jeremy Corbyn, the straight MP for Islington North. All other MPs voting for the amendment were Liberal Democrats.

New Clause Ten sought to ensure that the rights and freedoms of the European Convention on Human Rights are guaranteed to everyone 'without discrimination on any ground'. This would have required the anti-discrimination clause of the Convention — Article 14 — to be interpreted to prohibit all forms of discrimination, including discriminating based on a person's homosexuality or HIV status.

This was a simple, easy cost-free amendment. It would have given the lesbian and gay communities valuable legal redress against discrimination. While it would not have remedied every form of inequality, New Clause Ten would have created the legal framework for overturning several key elements of homophobic discrimination.

To be blunt: it would be preferable to have more heterosexual MPs who support equality and fewer gay MPs who endorse discrimination.

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Domed to failure

Ed Hall, Greenwich CLP, contrasts the resources allocated to Mandelson's monument to exclusion with the crisis of funding in Greenwich.

THE MILLENNIUM Dome may cost well over £1 billion. Greenwich desperately needs adequate funding for its schools, its local theatre is threatened with closure, it has significant environmental problems and needs investment to provide long term jobs for the less skilled. One in six 16 to 19 year olds are unemployed — the overall rate for Greenwich is 9%. A billion ponds could build every homeless person in Britain a house and reduce class sizes, while the Government reduces London's education budget by £200m by abolishing teaching services to those who do not have English as a first language.

By their nature, political monuments use the techniques of exclusion. The design of the dome and exhibits has no black or Asian involvement. Design work is neither publicly tendered nor offered for competition. Political interference can be seen at every stage of the design process. No references to labour history and struggle or trade unions appear in the "World of Work Zone".

The "androgynous figure" of the body zone was first hermaphrodite, then sexless, and now is two figures in a heterosexual embrace. The logo — also a 60 ft figure — started as a male advertising Roche medical products. Designer Martin Lambie Naim and aptly named sculptor Mark Reddy have charged the New Millennium Company £250,000 for what must have been a day's work. The central theatre has been abandoned and instead there will be acrobatics on a 'watch it if you want' basis. Mandelson's "Surfball" has been abandoned.



PHOTO: ED HALL

Inside Mandelson's big idea.

The zones make no real comment on the past, present or future. Exhibits are based on theme park aesthetics, excluding many contemporary artists, such as Damian Hirst, Rachael Whitehead and Sarah Lucas who explore isolation and exclusion. Saachi has charged £17m to advertise the Dome. Camelot has the monopoly of ticket sales. Car parks — which would have taken green land from a local school — were ditched after a public outcry.

The structure — which is of a tent rather than a dome — will not be part of the city skyline. Access is awkward - the Jubilee line extension has no station at Greenwich. The Dome station is three miles away, and there are no proposals to solve traffic problems. It has all the disadvantages yet none of the advantages of being in London.

The aim of the Millennium Dome is to promote a new political party with the use of public funds. To do this it seeks the artistic and social values of middle England which are forever exclusive and divisive.

Tooling up for the 21st century

By examining the *Strategic Defence Review* we can find out what the New Labour Government thinks it's worth killing people for, says Chris Williams of Sheffield Labour Club.

"There is today no direct military threat to the United Kingdom" — *Strategic Defence Review.* So in the context of a 2.5% cut in expenditure, what have they decided to expand?

The plan is to fight wars designed to protect UK capital overseas, and to defend client rulers in poorer countries. In the long tradition of British imperialism, our money will receive the best defence that it can buy. Recognising the political damage body bags can cause, the SDR increases the ability of the UK's armed forces to project overwhelming force. All the navy's nuclear-powered attack submarines will be modified to launch Tomahawk cruise missiles: these have a range of 900 miles, and there is no realistic defence against them. We're paying £70m each for Eurofighters so we can be overwhelmingly superior to any potential enemy.

The Navy will get better at attacking people far away, with two new aircraft carriers designed to be able to attack onshore targets worldwide. Each of the new ships will give them about 25 attack aircraft. The minesweeper force will rise from 19 to 22. This isn't surprising either: small, poor countries can be expected to try to use relatively cheap marine minefields to protect their shores. The navy's troop capacity will double to around 5,000. The air-mobile forces will double in size to 30,000 and will be given new armoured vehicles. The RAF will get 4 long-range transport planes.

British armed forces are now going to be "a force for good". They would say that, wouldn't they?

Normal service has now been resumed after the regrettable interruption of the Cold War. "Old imperialism" was dependent on modern technology, and was about protecting capital. It always had an organised component of cheerleaders talking about how much better the world would be if we 'took up the White Man's Burden', protecting 'inferior peoples' from themselves. Ring any bells? The left needs a concrete response to this. We must reject the 'force for good' rhetoric. If transport aircraft are really needed to deliver food to the starving, then we should pay for them as such, calling for a non-military disaster relief force.

We need a democratic UN, with a sovereign General Assembly. Once we've got it, we should demand that all offensive or foreign-based UK forces be placed under the operational command of this UN. But until we make a leap to an economic system that is driven by human need, not private profit, it is likely to be business as usual: freedom for capital and its servants, death and destruction for those who have the audacity to oppose the Almighty Market. ❑

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Glasgow New Labour use courts against UNISON

Glasgow City Council's Social Work Department was brought to a halt on 3rd August as staff walked out in support of colleagues suspended without pay for following UNISON Branch policy. Ian Sharpe, Glasgow City Branch UNISON member, reports.

STAFF RESPONDED instantly when two home care organisers, who manage the home help service, were suspended for refusing to co-operate with management's plans to transfer the home help service from Social Work to a newly designated Department of Catering and Domestic Care. Strike action quickly spread through local offices, residential and day care services and headquarters staff, leaving the department in chaos.

Anger erupted when management appeared deliberately to create a situation it knew would lead to industrial action. This anger was fuelled by general unhappiness about management style that has been building up since local government reorganisation. UNISON has been attempting to negotiate on over one hundred outstanding issues with no success to date.

UNISON members suspect that councillors told management to confront the union — or did not intervene to prevent bad management. Suspicion grew when certain councillors threatened to discipline stewards involved in the dispute, seemingly happy to invoke anti-trade union legislation, forcing a return to work without addressing the strike's causes.

The media inflamed the situation, demonising striking workers, who found themselves described as "uncaring nutters following a bunch of nutters". If the press had spoken to the employees an accurate picture of the dispute and its underlying causes could have been reported: the anger of members because they are seen as uncaring when over the last two years £30 million has been cut from the social work budget, with more to come this year. Staff continue to provide the highest possible services while resources available to them are cut, removed or frozen.

UNISON believes the transfer of the home help service is the thin end of a privatisation wedge. If home helps are no longer part of Social Services, what will go next: residential homes privatised or day care centres sold off? Members feel that current proposals have little to do with improving the quality of service, but everything to do with cutting costs.

The press could ask why Social Work management chose to break the normal negotiating process and seek a confrontation. On day five of the action, the Council sought an Interdict from the Court of Session, forcing UNISON to repudiate the action and instruct members to return to work.

Members returned to work on Monday 10th August, having secured the reinstatement of their suspended colleagues. Although forced to repudiate the action, UNISON officials acknowledge "serious problems in the Social Work Department that have led to these difficulties and have called for the Council to co-operate in discussion on these matters. Meanwhile a ballot for further strike action is being considered.

Staff morale in social work is at an all time low. The latest issue of *Community Care*, the professional journal for social workers, highlights industrial action by home care staff in Leicester Council, balloting for strike action among UNISON members in Cornwall, while a strike ballot has been requested in Sheffield following a four day walkout by social staff protesting in changes to the Children and Families Service.

UNISON members in Glasgow's Social Work Department are still angry with management, councillors, and the press, but mostly at the cuts in local government finance that have led to cuts in service provision, preventing them from providing the quality and level of service people are entitled to.

New Labour and the unions

ALTHOUGH Tony Blair has made it very plain that the unions can expect no favours from New Labour, clearly New Labour expects favours from the unions, **says Leonora Lloyd, MSF activitist.**

The unions continue to provide 30% of Party income while policies continue to be weighted towards the powerful and wealthy in industry and commerce. On the whole little attention is paid to what the unions want — until it directly conflicts with New Labour.

The saintly Tom Sawyer wrote to Roger Lyons, General Secretary of MSF, asking for his views on MSF London Region's campaign for a NO vote in the London Referendum that was "against Party policy". Roger, instead of pointing out that this was a matter for MSF, not the Party, has instigated an investigation of the London Region's officers.

Worse was to follow. Terry Ashton, General Secretary of the Greater London Labour Party, also wrote to Roger complaining, not simply about the NO vote campaign, but alleging that MSF London Region was "a serious thorn in the side of the effective working of the public image of the GLLP". Later Ashton claimed it was a private letter! His main accusation was that the MSF delegation to the consultative conference on London government had been "disruptive". The fact is that this 'disruption' consisted of arguing for voting to be allowed. Whoops! Voting! Whatever next!

The real reason for this activity is to help Roger Lyons in his attacks on the left in MSF and he has seized the opportunity with both hands. So when are trade unions allowed to influence Labour Party policy? The AEEU leadership has admitted that it has made donations towards the Members First NEC campaign because one of its members is standing. Can you imagine the reaction of Tom Sawyer and Terry Ashton if I were standing for the NEC and got financial support from London MSF?

Correction

A mistake slipped into Tony Dale's article on UNISON conference last month. The printed version announced that UNISON "agreed to affiliate to the United Campaign for the Repeal of the Anti-Union laws". Unfortunately UNISON did no such thing.

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the Geoff Martin column

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



● Well, well, well, as I write this column New Labour's finest are pulling out all the stops through their media chums to try to influence the outcome of the Party NEC elections. First off, we had former Trot Lord Sawyer of IS leaking his correspondence with Liz Davies in an effort to muddy the waters which was just the taste of blood that the New Labour hounds "in the loop" were looking for. But the balloon really went up when the *Guardian* editorial admirably advocated support for the centre-left slate. When the usual New Labour suspects begin to boogie you don't have to look far for my old chum Paul Richards, author of political best-seller *How To Be Your Own Spam Doctor.* When there's Trot-bashing to be done it doesn't take long for Richards to emerge blinking in the sunlight from his laboratory deep in the Millbank basement. A blistering missive was fired off to the *Guardian* letters column before a swift return to his electrodes and test tubes. Then the official Blairite slate, incorporating, appropriately, former soap star Michael Cashman, broke cover and began smearing costly adverts over the pages of the newspapers. Calling themselves Members First, well known right wing code for 'leadership stooges', they've been able to rely on Blairite hacks to pump up their chances. Step forward David Aaronovitch in the *Independent* with a nostalgic look back to the days of bedsit Trots and revelations about his own lack of sex as a student when it was apparently shag-a-go-go for the IMG. Why David's frustrated confessions are relevant to the NEC elections only he knows but we'll club together and send you some black market Viagra, sunshine.

● Talking of the NEC elections, is the Terry Thomas on the ballot paper the same Terry Thomas who used to play the role of the archetypal British cad in various films of the 50s and 60s — catchphrase "Aye Curumba!"? Or is it just Derek Draper operating under a pretty obvious Nom De Plume? I think we should be told.

● Do I really want to get myself dragged back into the Draper business? My views on him and his ilk are well known. When he was interviewed on his return from Italy he described himself as a "bit of a tosser". Not so much of the "bit of", hey, Derek. I've been itching for the opportunity to engage Draper in a serious confrontation for some time now. He blew out a live debate with me the Christmas before last much to my disappointment. Any producer who wants to set it up should give me a bell.

● Drunken Grant Mitchell clone? Not since he started up the road work to work off the beer gut I'm afraid. Still thanks to Catherine Goss for the kind thought.

● Two things always remind me that summer's on the way out — the start of the football season and the September issue of *LLB.* Don't read too much into Chelsea's shaky start, we'll be up there at the end of the season. If you think my judgement's a bit shot don't forget that my 150 to one World Cup tip, Mexico, were just 20 minutes away from a semi-final place before Germany sneaked two past them. I've been amazed at the number of people I've spoken to recently who've had a blast at Chelsea for including too many foreign players. Some of these are the same people who a few years ago used to tell me that only racists support Chelsea. From anti-fascism to xenophobia in just a few short years and three major trophies.

LEADING WITH THE LEFT

Tameside care dispute

TWO HUNDRED and fifty careworkers in Tameside, Greater Manchester, have been sacked by a privatised company, Tameside Care Group (TCG). **Tony Dale, Manchester UNISON, reports.**

In 1990, eleven residential care homes and one nursing home were transferred to a private company. Ever since staff have suffered cuts in sick pay and maternity leave, have been refused a cost of living pay rise for five years and in 1992 management forced through pay cuts.

Earlier this year, on 30th January, TCG issued 90 day notices to the workforce stating it intended to terminate their contracts and impose one which would cut their pay, holidays and abolish the sick pay scheme. UNISON balloted for industrial action. There was an overwhelming majority in favour of a strike which started on 30th March. TCG refused to budge. The 90 day notices came into force in May — sacking all the strikers.

The dispute has received official backing from UNISON. A number of demonstrations have been organised locally. UNISON conference gave unanimous backing and Rodney Bickerstaffe spoke at a rally in Tameside in July.

This dispute highlights all the dangers involved in the transfer of council care homes to private companies. It also shows up the shortcomings of many New Labour politicians — Tameside Council has a major shareholding in Tameside Care Group but has done little to resolve the dispute and local MP Andrew Bennett is also a trustee of the company.

The strike now enters its fifth month. The Tameside Care workers need your support.

● Messages of support and donations (cheques payable to "UNISON Tameside Branch") should be sent to: Tameside UNISON, 29 Booth Street, Ashton-Under-Lyne, OL6 7LB.

Lambeth: a democracy free zone?

Mary Atkin and Katrina Payne, Streatham CLP Women's Section, fear that they are part of a New Labour experiment to tame the women's organisation.

LAMBETH'S women's organisation is under attack, anticipating the national abolition of women's organisation in the Labour Party. Streatham General Committee abolished its women's organisations without consulting them and with no regard for the Party's constitution. It's the final shot in a ten year war of attrition, in the context of a move against democracy in Lambeth.

The Lambeth Campaigns Forum replaced the suspended LGC in 1989. LCF is explicitly banned from discussing policy or holding the Labour Group to account. Its membership is very restricted and most are CLP officers.

The Women's organisations were labelled as left for being one of the few Constituency organisations tabling political resolutions. They consistently led debates focusing on local and national issues (decriminalisation of prostitution, and cuts in local services affecting women) and supported such campaigns as Lambeth Against the Witchhunt.

The women's organisations were undermined with arguments over funding, while women joining the Party were told that the women's organisations were 'unfriendly'.

Attempts to 'take over' the women's organisations at AGMs failed. Now these women's organisations are deemed to have failed in their objectives. All three CLP's Women's Sections and the Lambeth Women's Council are to merge to form a new campaigning organisation with five key principles:

- promoting Labour's policies on women
- recruiting women members
- political education, training and skills development
- fundraising in support of the Party and women's activities
- social activities for women members

The membership will be the three women's officers elected from each CLP, who shall comprise the chair and two vice chairs, all women members of Lambeth Campaigns Forum and three women councillors elected on behalf of the Labour Group. The group is "charged with drawing up an annual programme of work for the LWC and for ensuring its implementation".

The objectives are similar to those of Lambeth Women's Council and Women's Sections but they are being replaced with a 'top down' model whose membership will focus on women already participating, without resolutions, policy discussions, or an inclusive Party membership. Women cannot vote for their representatives: women and men will elect women's officers.

What constitutes a healthy party and healthy democracy? In our women's organisations a recurring theme has been "why do we join a political party: to participate or to follow others? to debate issues and resolutions or to enable the 'hierarchy' of the Labour Party to find solutions for us?"

A national review of the role of women's organisations is currently under way. Campaign Forums like Lambeth are now being set up in areas where LGCs or District Labour Parties have been shut down. We want to warn other women's organisations what is likely to come.

Going through the motions

David Pope, Leyton and Wanstead CLP, explains the arrangements for submitting motions to this year's Party Conference.

PARTNERSHIP INTO POWER changed the formulation of policy of in the Labour Party, with the emphasis placed on motions put to the National Policy Forum (NPF) rather than Conference.

Conference will debate motions to amend the constitution (the deadline was 5th June and the text of those submitted has been circulated) and resolutions on Contemporary Issues (deadline 18th September). HQ must receive emergency resolutions, covering events arising after 18th September, no later than 12 noon on 25th September. (Organisations cannot submit a Contemporary Issue resolution if they have already submitted a constitutional amendment.)

The Constitutional Arrangements Committee has ruled that Contemporary Issues motions are limited to: European Policy; policy issues arising after 21st July; and party issues not addressed in the NEC Report.

They are limited to these areas because policy matters should be addressed via the NPF. This has set up Policy Commissions to cover a range of areas: Britain in the World (including Europe); Crime and Justice; Democracy and Citizenship; Economy; Education and Employment; Environment, Transport and the Regions; Health; Industry and Culture.

Health, welfare reform, crime and justice and Europe will be debated at length at Conference, as part of the two year policy review programme. Consultative documents will be presented on the first three and a final policy document on Europe, in view of the 1999 European Elections. These documents were circulated to CLPs a few weeks ago. Contemporary Issues resolutions may be submitted on the Europe paper, provided they concern an issue that it does not substantively address but not on the other three, because they are in the first year of the two year programme. They may be submitted to the NPF after Conference. The final policy documents on these areas will be submitted to the 1999 conference.

The NPF has produced a progress report summarising its work on all the above areas. It refers to resolutions sent in by CLPs over the last year. This has been circulated to CLPs and will be sent to Conference delegates in September. The Report will be debated at Conference and Contemporary resolutions may be submitted provided they concern events or issues arising after the NPF's last meeting on 21st July. A ballot will be held at Conference to decide which subjects to debate.

Conference will debate resolutions on Party matters, provided they could not have been submitted to the NEC beforehand or the issue is not substantively addressed in the NEC's Report. This will be published in September but CLPs have been sent a summary of the issues to be covered. These comprise Party Objectives, Other Reports and Organisational Issues.

Invasion of the privateers

Schools, health, transport, housing, social services, prisons, policing, air traffic control...New Labour is taking privatisation where the Tories feared to tread. Mike Marqusee introduces an eight page *LLB* special.



NEW LABOUR'S fiscal rectitude has attracted extensive comment and criticism, but its embrace of that other pillar of Thatcherism, privatisation, has not yet received the attention it deserves. With PFIs and PPPs, Education Action Zones and Best Value, New Labour is inviting big business into the heart of the public sector and indeed into every nook and cranny of civil society.

It may well prove that Blair's most lasting legacy is a qualitative transformation of the relationship between government and big business, in which case this summer's revelations about New Labour lobbyists and 'cash for access' are even more sinister than the newspapers suggest.

Once again, New Labour is well out of touch with the underlying temper of the times. In Britain, rail users and utilities 'customers' know from first-hand experience how privatisation fails to deliver what it promises. In the USA, as Greg Palast reported in the *Observer*, "the public has abandoned faith in privatisation as the miracle cure for infrastructural ills." There electricity and water are being de-privatised by popular demand.

The ever-deepening incursion of large-scale capitalist enterprises into every aspect of social relations will have a profound impact on the rights of both the individual and the community. As big business's share of the pie increases, the possibility of democratic control over our own lives decreases. This is why socialists are right to raise the fundamental question of ownership. But in doing so we must acknowledge the inadequacies of previous models of public ownership — their unresponsiveness, inefficiency and unaccountability.

Thatcherism made headway because it was able to exploit these inadequacies. We need to think boldly about the alternatives to privatisation, to imagine and describe in detail new forms of democratic social ownership. *LLB* readers are invited to contribute to the debate.

London Underground for sale

A tube driver asks why John Prescott refuses to consider alternatives.

ALTHOUGH it is six months since John Prescott's long-awaited pronouncement on the future of London Underground, no one knows yet the extent of the involvement of private finance or its full impact on jobs or services. No one knows exactly which parts of the service will be taken over by how many separate companies. We are told these decisions will be made by October. By next April, Prescott wants 'parallel structures' to be in operation, whatever that means.

The Transport Select Committee has been less than enthusiastic about Prescott's report, which it politely termed "a convoluted compromise". It suggests that it may have been better to retain an integrated railway and condemns the split between operations and infrastructure, which will cause confusion and contractual nightmares. This is already the case with the partially privatised Jubilee Line Extension where operations are LUL, train maintenance is GEC, and the new Stratford depot, still under construction, is engulfed in a protracted contractual wrangle between eight different contractors!

The Select Committee was also concerned that the Price Waterhouse report commissioned by the Government had not been made available. It has effectively recommended that the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions "open the books" — in other words, that it displays their financial calculations so that comparisons can be made between the PPP (public/private partnership) option preferred by the Government and other options. These other options include:

- funding through public subsidy
- allowing the Underground to raise its own funds
- privatising the Underground as a single entity
- using alternative methods to raise money (ie. specific taxes)

The Select Committee also recommended the adoption of minimum passenger service levels and capped fare increases and that the Greater London Authority have access to additional revenue for spending on transport.

The Committee estimates that the administrative costs for preparing PPP would be £65 million (surely an underestimate), which might be better used to improve and modernise the network. This will be easy money for lawyers and consultants, who will ultimately be the only ones to benefit from the break-up of the system. Ex-LT chair Peter Ford estimated that PPP would cost approximately £1 billion more over 25 years than other options. No wonder Prescott sacked him!

The Select Committee report says what tubeworkers have been saying all along: "We are seriously concerned that in the event of a gap between the income from fares and the payment to contractor(s), the Mayor of London may be under pressure to raise fares and reduce service levels." In other words, passengers will be hit twice: with higher fares and a poorer service. An *Evening Standard* front page highlighted the plans for the introduction of 'smart cards' for the payment of fares. The booking office clerk and ticket collector will soon be found only in the LT museum in Covent Garden.

The RMT and ASLEF have both put submissions in to the Committee opposing the break-up of the system, and have put forward alternative ideas for raising money. The recent RMT AGM also passed a motion calling on its sponsored MPs to sign a statement condemning Prescott's proposal and calling for a publicly funded system. Don't hold your breath. The motion also called for the withdrawal of sponsorship from those MPs who fail to comply. Again, don't hold your breath. ❑

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privatisation special

Ending the dictatorship of the private sector

***LLB* interviewed economist Harry Shutt. His recently published book *The Trouble with Capitalism* looks at the problems of privatisation and ownership. Oxford-trained Shutt acts as an adviser to overseas governments.**

Your book concludes that "the maximisation of profit must cease to be the basis for allocating resources." Given that's the rationale of the entire system, that's a very fundamental transformation. How would you respond to charges of being utopian?

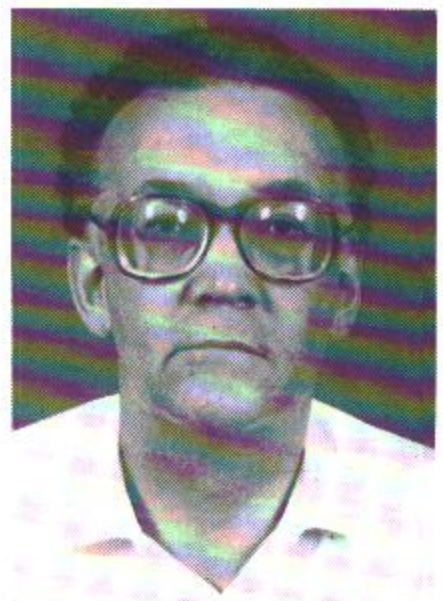
The piling up of useless profits at the cost of the dignity and lives of hundreds of millions round the world is as irrational as the human sacrifice once practised by the ancient Carthaginians. The question is, when should we expect reason to prevail and unreasoning destruction be stopped? Given probable financial collapse on an unprecedented scale, it is not fanciful to think the moment is at hand when people will say there must be a better way. There is already widespread questioning of the primacy of profit maximisation; advocates of 'stakeholding', for example, recognise it is not enough but refuse to grasp the nettle that other, conflicting interest groups — consumers, employees, taxpayers — can only be meaningfully balanced against shareholders if their rights are given legal status.

You suggest that recent governments are all too aware of the problems inherent in privatisation; so why is New Labour pressing ahead with it?

For the last 25 years the dilemma facing any mainstream party of the left in the western world has been whether to humour the voracious demands of capital or to challenge the whole basis of the system. While there was any hope that economic conditions might spontaneously improve there has never been any question of opting for the latter, especially as the 'old left' has never managed to advance beyond the failed prescriptions of the Keynesians. Given this basic stance in favour of the status quo, it was inevitable that Labour (new or old) should increasingly adopt the agenda of big business, especially given the corruption of the democratic process.

You call for collective ownership of key resources. How would you see this differing from post-war nationalisation? How can we make financial institutions more accountable, so that ordinary people can exert control over resource allocation priorities?

Meaningful performance targets and incentives are both essential and compatible with collective ownership. Quite how tight such targets should be will depend on what view is taken in future of the relationship between work and income — ie. to what extent people need to be in 'employment'(and for how long) to qualify them for receiving an acceptable income. If it is accepted that there must be limits to growth and limits to competition, the whole question of the nature of work and the distribution of income must be seen in a different light. Since the debate on these issues cannot even begin under a regime dominated by *laissez-faire* capitalist ideology it is impossible to anticipate how it will ultimately evolve.



Harry Shutt

The question of enterprise accountability is inseparable from that of democratic accountability. It could function in a number of ways. I would favour maximum decentralisation of control over resource allocation and enterprise strategy that is compatible with stable national, regional and global markets.

In your chapter on the essential features of a sustainable world order, you advocate a 'new globalism'. Can you explain this idea?

Global interdependence is an unavoidable reality, and current distribution of wealth and income between nation states is intolerably skewed. Hence any attempt to stabilise output and incomes at sustainable levels based on the present pattern of international distribution would be unacceptable. Nor, given the limited scope for competition in future, would the more deprived countries or regions be allowed unrestricted access to the markets of the richer ones. So patterns of investment, trade flows and ultimately income levels must increasingly be determined on the basis of co-operation and intergovernmental agreement, with transfer payments from rich to poor areas being a permanent necessity (as now within most nation states and within regional grouping, such as the EU). Yet if this is to be a tolerable relationship — based on equality and dignity rather than paternalism and imperialism — it must permit an increasing influence on the part of different nations over each other's policies, expressed through genuinely democratic channels. Ultimately this must imply progressively greater integration — such as the EU has espoused but without advance limitation to any continent or region.

Is there anything you would add about the major upsets in the international economy since you wrote the book?

The most obvious development has been the Asian crisis, which validates the scepticism expressed in the book over the hyping of 'emerging' markets. Likewise, the absurd and self-contradictory attempts by the western establishment to suggest that the crisis resulted from 'crony capitalism' (which they've effectively encouraged), rather than from the destabilising effects of speculative capital flows from the west. The same applies to the deepening crisis in the former USSR. A new twist has emerged here in the scheme (reportedly devised by Goldman Sachs) to get Russia and Ukraine to issue local currency bonds — or 'treasury bills' — carrying very high interest rates to compensate for the supposed risk of devaluation. Western speculators and eastern Mafiosi will make huge profits at the expense of western taxpayers and of the increasingly destitute local population, while at the same time reducing still further the prospects of economic recovery. Since it must be obvious to all involved that this can only end in disaster it indicates truly terrifying irresponsibility at the highest level.

- *The Trouble with Capitalism*, Zed Books, £14.95.

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Hiving off council housing

privatisation special

Liz Davies looks at the Government's enthusiasm for local housing companies.

PRIOR TO the 1945 Labour Government, most working class families lived in private rented accommodation. There was no security of tenure and rents and building standards were subject to minimal regulation. The post-war Labour Government embarked on a major public housing drive, building some 100,000 new dwellings a year. This programme was continued under the Tories and by the 1970s over one third of all housing was in the public sector.

Thatcher's right to buy legislation, enacted in 1980, began to reverse the process, and the Housing Act of 1988 took matters further by channelling funds to housing associations. A year later the Tories prohibited local authorities from subsidising council rents by ring-fencing housing revenue accounts. By 1990, councils across the country had virtually stopped building new homes. As existing stock deteriorated money for repairs was constantly squeezed.

The Labour Government could have taken a number of positive steps to improve the situation. It could have restored fair rents in the private sector and released capital receipts for improvements in the public sector. It could have introduced a single tenancy for all social housing so that tenants are not caught between the greater security of council tenancies and the more restrictive security offered by housing associations. Above all, it could have abolished the ring fencing of housing revenue accounts.

Instead the Government seemed to embrace the Tory presumption that private is best. The flavour of the month is local housing companies, an arrangement in which estates are funded through housing associations and managed by a tripartite body made up of the association, the council and tenants representatives. Under present legislation, tenants will have less security, and fewer rights to succeed to parents' tenancies.

The landlord will not be directly accountable to tenants through the ballot box, as with council housing and the assignment of tenancies cannot be part of a larger policy for social justice and equality. Unless the council retains 100% nomination rights, the estate effectively enters the private sector, and the availability of accommodation on it will not be determined by need, but by market forces. With investment being channelled into local housing companies and away from local authorities, the result could be the creation of a two or three tier system in which the lucky ones end up on well-resourced estates, and the unlucky are left behind on estates even more deprived of resources than at present.

Asset? Profit? Loss?



PHOTO: PHIL MAXWELL

Selling off the silver

A Lewisham Council employee reports on the reality of housing privatisation in South London.

LEWISHAM COUNCIL is spending lots of money promoting a local housing company in three of the borough's 16 housing neighbourhoods, which will form Lewisham Community Homes (LCH). Freed from public sector borrowing restrictions LCH will borrow to carry out essential repairs neglected for years. Rents will rise in line with council rents for five years. Councillors and tenants would form part of the board, along with local businessmen (which means Citibank, the only large private employer in the borough).

The three neighbourhoods were chosen because of their asset value rather than because of needs. Only tenants in the three neighbourhoods will be balloted — Lewisham knows that if it lets all tenants vote it would lose. But the sale affects all tenants. It reduces the asset base of the whole council and increases the unit cost of central services, leading to cuts in staff and repairs, or rent rises, or both. The remaining 13 neighbourhoods are set to go down the same route — but presumably not those estates with negative value. In July, the Assistant Director of Housing said there would be five local housing companies in all, which would mean one for each of the Assistant Directors. Fat cats feathering their nests or what?

A local campaign against housing privatisation, run by Lewisham Socialist Alliance, must now build a broader coalition around a Vote No campaign. The Council has employed consultants to sell the idea to tenants, but it is unlikely that similar resources will be made available to tenants campaigning against it. The Federation of Lewisham Tenants and Residents Associations, funded by a levy on Lewisham tenants, has said that it wants a co-op run by tenants instead of the LCH idea, but either way, the same arguments apply ❑

privatisation special

Inviting McWo

Dave Morris, McLibel trial defendant and single parent in North London, examines the impact of opening up schools to private companies, including McDonald's.

McDONALD'S have become more and more interested in schools throughout the 1990s, taking part in interview skills days, science week projects, breakfast clubs, work experience placements, pupils' visits to local stores, school fetes, good attendance voucher schemes, painting competitions and reading volunteer schemes. They have also sponsored conferences for school governors, are now involved in Education Action Zones (EAZs) (eg. the one covering 23 primary, junior and secondary schools in Weston-Super-Mare) and claim to spend over a million pounds a year on their Education Services.

What could explain such apparently touching concern for our children's welfare?

If you're struggling to answer this vexed question, here's a huge clue from the marketing section of the Corporation's secret Operations Manual, the McBible for every local store manager:

"Schools offer excellent opportunities. Not only are they a high traffic [sales] generator, but students are some of the best customers you could have. McDonald's have developed a number of programs that you can take into the schools in your area... Good relations with your local schools can also offer opportunities for crew recruitment."

In the witness box during the mammoth McLibel trial (which ended last year) the Corporation's Chicago-based head of marketing admitted that children were "virgin ground as far as marketing is concerned", and agreed that community and charitable activity was "a benefit to the company", and "good business" which gained "free publicity". He related how educational promotions in schools "generate better feelings towards McDonald's" and lead to more "patronage". Their UK marketing chief stated: "It is our [general] objective to dominate the communications arena...because we are competing for a share of the customer's mind."

The McLibel trial judge ruled that McDonald's marketing strategy "exploits children". McDonald's argument that their advertising was totally legal and not fundamentally different from other companies' only serves to underline the damaging effects of the continuous assault on children of a wide range of nauseating propaganda from industry in general. Do we really want such bodies to have even more direct access to our children, all the more sinister for being dressed up as concern for their welfare?

McDonald's itself obviously aims to promote junk food as normal and nutritious (the McLibel judge ruled that this was a deceptive pretence), benefiting from the gradual deterioration of the quality of school meals. The judge also ruled that McDonald's workers, 66% of whom are under 21, were so low-paid that it "helped to depress wages in the catering industry", and the company was also anti-union to boot. Again we must ask, should such organisations be allowed within a hundred miles of any school?

The Government's aim is not just to advance the interests of particular companies but to ensure the commercial colonisation of areas of society where people have successfully fought in the past to keep capitalist ideas and practices out or at least to a minimum (eg. schools, hospitals, community centres, council services and so on).

Regarding schools, the wolves are being invited into the fold. But there is resistance by teachers, parents, children and local communities. It's up to us to defend our kids by encouraging them to see through commercial hype and by organising, supporting and strengthening parents' groups, children's councils, teachers' union branches, local residents' associations and general opposition to capitalist ideas.

- McDonald's brought the libel case to suppress the distribution of critical leaflets,

Dread zones

Former teacher Bob Spooner, Leeds North East CLP, looks at Education Action Zones (EAZs): EAZs stand condemned on so many fronts that the detail doesn't matter. It is wrong to typecast schools as failing just because the spread of ability is weighted towards incomprehension of the academic learning games that dominate the system.

Most of the pupils have their counterparts in average comprehensive schools and don't deserve to be branded just because rather more than average lie below their academic ability. Why should the 80% who fall within the normal spread of ability have a distorted education just because their school has become a classified ghetto? If the national curriculum is really designed to protect pupils' interests, why should they be denied this protection?

Teachers in these areas are not a different breed of teacher. They are not the dregs of the profession. Many are committed teachers with unusual skills who see their role as serving social needs. Why should they be penalised by being denied the protection of national employment conditions?

The answer to these questions cannot be found in educational theory or practice. It can be explained only by recognising that New Labour is interested in running education on the cheap, and in currying favour with disgruntled Tories, who they believe voted them into power, and on whom they rely for a second term. So they are prepared to put educational influence up for bids. Blair and Blunkett are not offering to privatise the state education system. No one in their right minds would buy it. They are offering influence without responsibility. They are saying 'Chip in some of your surplus cash and get these children taught what it is in your financial interest for them to learn.'

No public or independent school would tolerate the interference of specific business interests in their curriculum, nor would the parents who provide their profit. They would not tolerate a narrow curriculum or the reduction of education to a 'skills' training programme. Only state schools, in depressed areas, are so far designed as cannon fodder. But don't be fooled, this is designed to be spread in time across the whole system. One could of course quote some horrific examples of the way private companies are gaining undue influence in the present round of EAZ commitments, but this would be a mistake as it would encourage those areas where the damage is less explicit to accept what appears to be a more liberal solution. The most dangerous areas are where the schemes seem most innocuous. When all the principles are wrong, it is better to have proposals that are plainly obnoxious. It is where the dangers are masked that the real betrayals will occur.

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lf into the fold

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at the time given out in thousands — which are now distributed in millions worldwide! The McLibel Appeal, seeking to overturn oppressive UK libel laws, is scheduled for January 1999. World Anti-McDonald's Day protests will be held on 16th October. Contact the Anti-McDonald's Campaign (including special leaflets for kids): c/o London Greenpeace, 5 Caledonian Rd, London N1, 0171-713 1269. Email: mclibel@globalnet.co.uk ; Website: www.mcspotlight.org



US thumbs down for big business in schools

Privatised education has been a flop in the USA, reports Ernie Haberkern, Centre for Socialist History in Berkeley, California, and Rosalyn Haberkern, state school teacher and educator.

EDUCATION ACTION ZONES have existed in the US for twenty years. They always fail to deliver what they promise, but are regularly revived because the underfunding of state schools combined with the inner cities' social crisis means that the state system keeps worsening. Baltimore gave Education Alternatives Inc. $135 million to run nine schools. The company pledged to cut administration and concentrate resources on teaching, but spent $750,000 on lawyers and $2 million on 'overheads' at its office. The profits paid for two luxurious homes and a fleet of nine cars. One of the company's brilliant solutions was to fire the unionised staff and replace them with non-union workers on much poorer wages and benefits. Class sizes rose to 39 after 25% of teaching posts were cut.

There are three other forms of privatisation. Channel One sells educational videos to schools, and makes money by including adverts. Unlike most of the privatised systems they are financially successful, although many schools drop the project once initial enthusiasm wanes. The videos just aren't very good. The second form of privatisation is the voucher system, which gives each pupil a grant of money to be applied to the school of their choice. However, there are real problems with this. African American groups, for example, have often protested that their children are more likely to be suspended or expelled for disciplinary reasons, and they have a case. But the Catholic schools, which are relatively inexpensive and an attractive alternative to the state system for many African Americans, set much higher standards for behaviour. What vouchers will do, therefore, is allow Catholic and other private schools to siphon off students from more stable working class families leaving the state schools to function as little more than recruiting officers for the prison system.

The third form of privatisation is the charter school movement. Many districts now grant individual schools a charter to operate independently of the school district and state authorities if a majority of the parents and teachers wish it. This is similar to the British practice of allowing schools to opt out. The basic problem is that these schools also siphon off the better, more motivated students and leave behind the kids who need rescuing.

The last two schemes abandon the idea that the education of children is the responsibility of society as a whole. Instead, the whole system of public financing of education is increasingly devoted to allowing parents, at public expense, to pass on to their children their own privileges, allowing only a small minority of the less privileged to rise a notch or two in the class system. ❑

EAZ — the facts

The Government's School Standards and Framework Bill, published last December, proposes to establish 25 Educational Action Zones, comprising groups of schools to be run by partnerships including commercial, voluntary, government and local authority organisations.

The first five zones are due to become operational this September, the rest next year, and each will run for three to five years. Each zone, covering two or three secondary schools and their feeder primaries, will be led by an 'action forum' which will draw up and implement plans to raise standards.

Zones can opt out of national provisions for teachers' pay and conditions, can alter the National Curriculum and will receive up to £500,000, half from a government grant, the rest from sponsors and businesses. The Government wants at least one of the first group to be business-led — although to date this does not look likely.

The zones will use 'advanced skills teachers' — super teachers earning up to £40,000 — a new grade designed to encourage the best teachers to stay in the classroom.

The NUT claims that there is a 'consensus of opposition' to EAZs amongst LEAs, parent, governor and teacher organisations. But the Association of Teachers and Lecturers has participated in establishing a zone, for which it has been condemned by other teaching unions, and schools are worried that participation in zones could have an adverse effect on parental preference, according to Devon's Education Director Tony Smith. The Campaign for State Education condemns the idea as Thatcherite and wants all schools needing help to get it, not just those who can get private sponsorship.

● Information: *Labour Research*

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Protecting his privates

Vehement in his criticism of Tory prison privatisation in opposition, and a popular turn at successive Police Federation conferences, Jack Straw has taken less than 18 months in government to come to terms with the 'realities' of office. Alex Taylor reports.

UNDETERRED by reports that the newest private jails in South Wales and Merseyside are in shambles, the Home Secretary has finally come out in support of a programme even New Labour zealots seemed to accept was a privatisation too far. Only last month he was happy to go along with the 'modernising' Chief Constable of Surrey's suggestion that the police should respond to "an accelerating loss in our share of the security market" by setting themselves up as a regulatory agency for their competitors, the growing body of private and local authority 'parapolice' responsible for patrolling everything from shopping malls to housing estates.

Some arguments against the privatisation of criminal justice can be dismissed as special pleading. When the Police Federation warns that their rivals are unaccountable and may abuse their powers you can admire their chutzpah but not their reasoning. Nor does whimpering about the impoverishment of prison regimes in the private sector carry much conviction when the organisation doing it represents public officials responsible for the widely reported brutalisation of inmates at Wormwood Scrubs and numerous deaths in custody.

When the state starts shuffling off responsibility for the security of its citizens to the private sector, where effective demand is a function not of need but the ability to pay, many questions are raised. The image of shareholders and directors growing fat on the profits of incarceration and collar-feeling will not have universal appeal — though a small sum paid into a blind trust might keep Millbank Tower happy.

Perhaps the most dangerous prospect of all is the emergence of what has been called a 'penal-industrial complex' of powerful corporations with a vested interest in promoting more police and prisons as solutions to complex problems of social order. Like the defence contractors with a stake in the Cold War arms race, Securicor, Group 4, Rentokil and the other giants of the private security industry will have massive investments and important income to protect.

There are lucrative contracts to patrol town centres and accommodate a still-growing prison population up for grabs. It won't be long before the Derek Drapers of the Westminster underworld are hard at work bending ministerial ears on behalf of Law and Order PLC with spine-chilling tales of murder and mayhem — and reassuring offers of cut-price policing and bargain-basement imprisonment courtesy of the market leaders in national security.

When crime really does begin to pay we may all end up counting the cost of the ultimate privatisation.

Children in Group 4's hands

Frances Crook, long-time campaigner for a better prison service, outlines the dangers in privately-run prisons:

Privatising prisons is running the system on a mortgage. It means that vast sums of capital expenditure can be delayed and paid for on a contract running for 15 to 25 years.

This happened in the United States, where capital expenditure on state projects often has to be agreed by plebiscite. Politicians wanted to be 'tough' on crime but the electorate did not want to pay increased taxes. The way round the dilemma was to do it on a mortgage, inevitably more expensive in the long run but it allowed politicians to talk tough and send more people to prison.

There is no evidence that commercially-managed prisons offer any better service than many state-run prisons. Seventeen people have taken their own lives in these prisons since 1992, a worse record than comparable state prisons.

In addition to the main prisons, Group 4 has just opened the first prison for children aged 12-14. The contract for this was signed just before the election by Michael Howard but Jack Straw has decided to go ahead with it and add another four. Within weeks of opening there was a mini-riot when there were only 17 children in the prison.

Introducing the profit imperative into the prison system adds pressure to keep the numbers high. Yet more than half the people sent to prison on remand will not receive a custodial sentence and the majority of convicted prisoners have not committed offences involving violence.

The way to deal with the majority of offenders is to manage them safely in the community, not to hand them over to profiteers.

There are currently seven prisons managed by commercial companies, out of a total prison estate in England and Wales of 135 prisons. They are:

Blakenhurst near Redditch run by UK Detention Services which holds 830 adult men.
Buckley Hall in Lancashire run by Group 4 and holding 380 adult men.
Wolds near Hull run by Group 4 which holds 440 adult men.
Doncaster is managed by Premier Prisons, holding 530 males under 21 and 550 adult males.
Parc prison in Wales is the first Design, Finance, Build and Manage private prison and is run by Securicor holding 475 adult men and 260 under 21s.
Altcourse in Liverpool run by Group 4 holds 600 men including some 80 young men.
Lowdham Grange near Nottingham is run by Premier Prisons and holds 400 adult men.

- When in opposition, the Labour Party vigorously opposed the principle of commercially managed prisons. But, as the prison population is increasing faster under Labour than under the Conservatives, they have decided to privatise even more prisons just to "warehouse" the numbers.

privatisation special

Investing in immigration control

Sue Jones finds that business is good at the Home Office, as long as human rights are kept at arm's length.

BROWSE THE web for prison providers and you will find the Wackenhut 'customer survey'. Wackenhut, based in the US, runs immigration detention centres for the Home Office as well as prisons all over the world.

At first it seems a welcome innovation — asking prisoners what they think of the system. It transpires that the 'customers' in question are the security services of the world. The prisoners are just goods, to be shunted around to make a profit. In the UK there are prisoners who have never been charged with a crime but can still spend more time in jail than someone convicted of murder. Since they are foreigners, they may know little of their rights, and already be accustomed to abuses of power under the repressive regimes from which they have fled. They therefore make ideal goods in which to trade.

Wackenhut are not the only ones eager to do business with Britain's immigration system. Other firms, notoriously Group 4 at Campsfield, already run detention centres and airport secure facilities.

The Government now proposes to give privatised immigration detention staff 'specific powers', including those of force and search. The proposals in the recent White Paper *Fairer, Faster and Firmer* only hint at the business opportunities available.

Many are in technology: much is made of the new computerised casework system at the Home Office, a Private Finance Initiative contract awarded to Siemens (before they disinvested in the UK) and which is now well behind schedule, although the job cuts it heralded are going to plan. More juicy contracts like that one are in the pipeline.

Perhaps the biggest new business opportunity is offered by recent changes in support for asylum seekers who are waiting for the computer to sort out their case. Places for them will be purchased by a central Home Office agency from a variety of providers, including several from the private sector. The aim is to keep costs down (reducing them by almost 30% over two years) and to introduce a punitive regime designed to discourage 'abuse of the asylum system'.

The involvement of businesses in immigration control can be even more sinister than this straightforward contracting out of the right to jail or punish the innocent. Carriers' liability (where airlines and other carriers pay a fine if they bring people with the wrong documents into the UK) encourages closer co-operation between the immigration services and carriers. For the carriers this is a purely commercial issue. Their shareholders have given them no human rights brief. They must simply reduce the level of fines, and do so by refusing to carry people whose lives are in danger if they do not get out.

We always knew that immigration controls were based on racism and sexism. Why be surprised when commercial interests intrude?

Social services on the cheap

Leonora Lloyd examines how local authorities are using charities to privatise services through the back door.

AT ONE TIME charities offered services the state could not or would not provide. Today they offer services the state used to provide. As local authorities' income becomes ever more restricted, they seek to pass more of their responsibilities on to the voluntary sector. Charities tend to have other sources of income — donations and the lottery in particular. They use volunteers, often paid minimal expenses, and they pay their staff less and often expect them to put up with conditions that might be unacceptable in the public sector. One of these conditions is amateur management.

Many charities are run by voluntary management committees, which either run the organisation themselves or work with a small number of professional managers. Most committee members will have full-time jobs elsewhere, meet infrequently and are not in touch with the day-to-day concerns of the workers.

Recently another factor has arisen. Local authorities which pay a high proportion of the costs of these charities, either directly or via various bodies such as the London Grants Unit, are expected to get 'best value'. As a result, voluntary organisations are now expected to spend time producing reams of 'policies' about all their activities and 'quality statements' at the behest of their funders. They are expected to create recording methods for all their activities.

The time taken to produce these things is either found by the workers working ever longer (unpaid) hours or using time that should be put into the job itself. The reality is that having produced them the workers then go on exactly as before — trying to do their best against all the odds. But the funders are satisfied, and that is the name of this game.

Another big advantage of using the voluntary sector, as far as councils are concerned, is the widespread use of short-term projects. They can use these as test runs to try out new ideas — and if they need to save money quickly they can always refuse to renew them. The organisations, in their turn, have to take on workers with short-term contracts. But the beauty of it all is that it looks so good. The voluntary organisations are not for profit, only the largest and best-established ones have highly paid executives, and the whole thing is at arm's length from the local authorities. How can they lose? ❑

privatisation special

Scrap PFIs

There are alternatives to the Private Finance Initiative writes Kevin O'Brien, UNISON National Executive Council member.

UNISON continues to lead the fight against Private Finance Initiatives (PFIs) with a strategic response. It spells out its opposition to PFIs, proposes changes to the current PFI regime and is encouraged at the way the campaign is gaining momentum.

The Public Service Privatisation Research Unit, on behalf of UNISON, has researched and written *Alternative Models of Public Private Partnership*. It examines the use of PFI and other Public Private Partnerships across the public sector and in Europe. It is a well researched paper and a useful tool in the fight against PFI.

A national lobby of Parliament was organised by UNISON on 8th July and hundreds of members from all over the country lobbied their MPs, constructively arguing the case against PFI. The outcome of a survey carried out during the lobby found that most Labour MPs do not agree with the Private Finance Initiative. They see it as short termism but with extreme long term costs for the taxpayer. They realise that the Government will carry the long term risks and the private sector will get the long term profits. The National Audit Office recently criticised the first roads to be built under PFI for failing to deliver the promised savings and costing more than if they had been publicly funded. The first two prisons build under PFI have also been criticised by MPs for wasting money.

UNISON believes the Private Finance Initiative should be scrapped. It piles up the bills and problems for the future. It will end up costing us more, will deliver worse services and result in poorer pay and conditions for staff. The solution for this Government is to think again. Financing new schools and hospitals through taxation and by government borrowing remains the cheapest and the best way. PFI's 'buy now, pay later' philosophy is not sound economics. The figures just don't add up.

Many schemes have now been approved. However, UNISON is working to make sure safeguards are built into schemes on pay and conditions, for greater openness and accountability, and for standards of service.

But finally, I put out this challenge to all Labour MPs who are opposed to PFI — stand up and be counted and do not be afraid to represent the country's interests as opposed to those of big business and the fat cats.

- Copies of *Alternative Models of Public Private Partnership* are available from UNISON, 1 Mabledon Place WC1H 9AJ.

The Spanish sell-off

Socialist privatisation? Carlos Martin Urriza of the journal *Viento Sur* looks back at Spain's disastrous experiment.

THE PRIVATISATIONS CARRIED out by the Socialist government of Gonzalez were intended to improve publicly-owned businesses by internationalising them, introducing new technologies and reducing their dependence on subsidies. Until 1991, all sales were of industrial companies to single buyers, most of whom were foreign multinationals. Seat, for example, was sold to Volkswagen in 1986, but the state paid out £1.7 billion to strengthen and restructure it first — effectively paying to lose it.

The companies sold gained access to international distribution networks and so increased in value. It was the multinationals that benefited from that, not the enterprises sold, and the multinationals' interests were not necessarily those of Spain. Most of the privatisations were followed by a centralisation of the more valuable activities in the headquarters of the company outside Spain. In other cases, the company was bought for its national distribution channels and client lists, and production was gradually closed down altogether.

From 1992 onwards, the rationale changed to raising resources to lower the state deficit. Another great argument for privatisation was 'popularisation capital' via sales to small savers. The main privatisations in this period (to 1995, when the Socialist Party lost power) were of services like gas and water.

But reducing a structural deficit like Spain's is difficult using this exceptional type of income. In fact, the net effect on the balance sheet was even negative in 1994. As for popular capitalism, shares quickly became concentrated in the hands of the larger banks which were able to get control of important public industries with very low outlays. Another group of beneficiaries were the merchant banks which advised and negotiated the privatisations. The top ten banks in the world earned £3.66 billion doing this in Spain. It is not surprising that they are among the most persistent lobbyists for more privatisation.

Privatisation achieved none of its objectives in the ten years that Gonzalez promoted it, during which one-third of the government's businesses were sold off. Aznar, the right-winger who won the elections, promises more of the same, but in half the time.

- *Viento Sur* can be contacted at: Aptdo de correos 50.522, 28080 Madrid, Spain. Email: vientosur@nodo50.ix.apc.org

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Nigeria at the crossroads

Sean Coyne recently spoke to Nigerian trade union leaders following the deaths of dictator General Sani Abacha and MKO Abiola, the imprisoned winner of the 1993 election.

Was Abacha disposed of by rivals within the military?

Possibly. When millions of dollars are at stake without accountability cut-throat tactics apply. A section of the military lost faith in Abacha's ability to manage the economy. There was no guarantee that they could continue to suppress the masses, and maintain their high standards of living.

Abacha was loathed by the masses. He may have silenced opposition, but he had to pay heavily financially to popularise his plans for self-succession.

The death of MKO Abiola, days after Abacha, must have had a dramatic impact?

Yes! The military sensed the masses' anger. They became afraid. Demonstrations were allowed. While there were some arrests, some places were declared no-go areas. Millions believed that MKO was murdered. Even if he did have a heart complaint everyone believes that detention killed him.

So the scene was set for upheaval. The military knew that they had to move quickly. Concessions were rapidly agreed to.

What was Lagos like in this period?

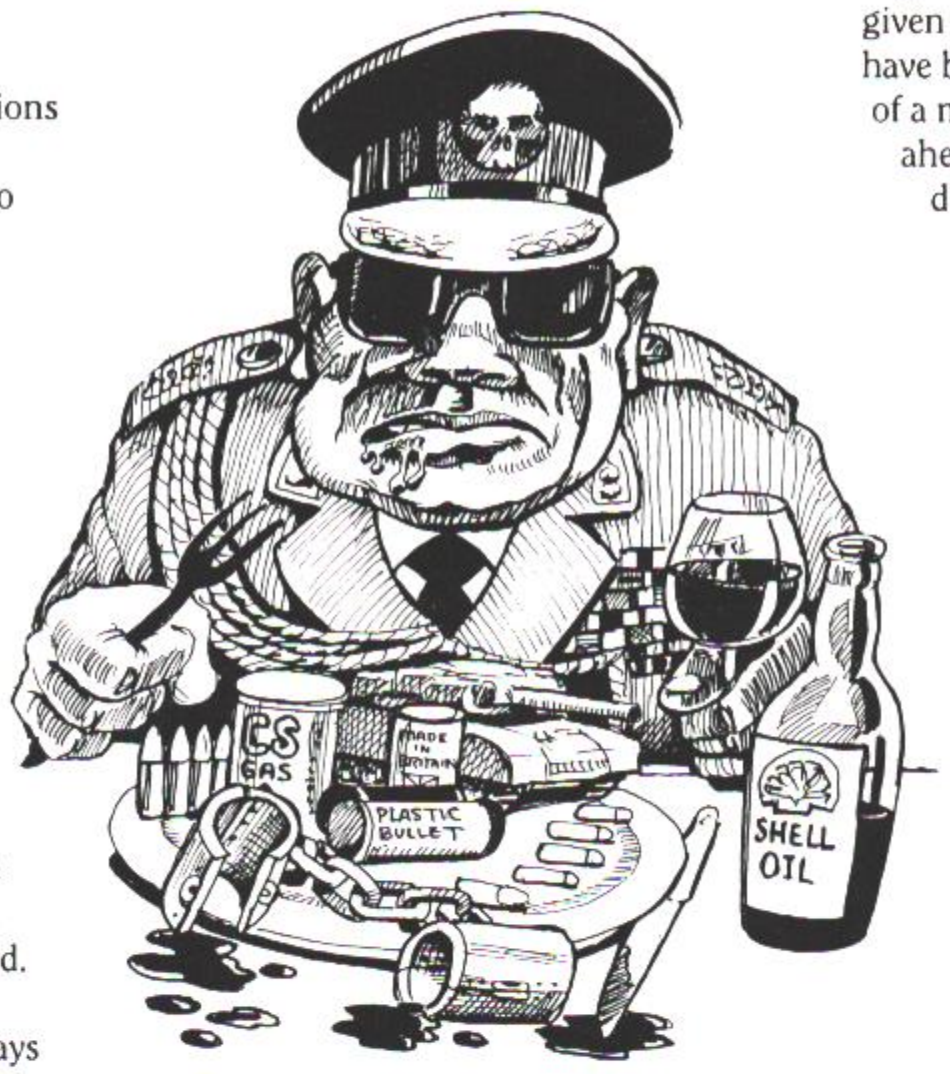
Incredible! Thousands came onto the streets to celebrate Abacha's death challenging the military to arrest them. After Abiola's death no one went to work, the streets were deserted. Small northern businesses were attacked. It was ugly, but not unexpected. The military and the political class have always exploited regional chauvinism. Thankfully it petered out, but not before a number of deaths.

Activists began to enjoy the room to organise more openly. Detainees were released. Interviews with them appeared in the press. Some were very strident. Comrades Frank Kokori and Milton Dabibi of the oil workers' unions made impressive statements — despite their fragile health. They condemned union leaders who had sold out. They attacked the political class and talked about the need to rebuild the tradition of militant trade unionism.

The military were busy trying to deal with a severe fuel crisis. It was impossible to buy petrol in Lagos. Nigeria is fifth in the OPEC league and we are now reduced to buying sub-standard fuel from eastern Europe!

What is happening inside the labour movement?

There are strikes and protests all over the country. The new union leadership which emerged while the Nigeria Labour Congress was occupied by the military during the last four years, has started to rebuild. It has already pressurised the new Head of State, General Abubaker, to cancel a range of anti-union decrees, and to respect ILO conventions, particularly on the freedom of association. We can now manage our own affairs. We must never allow ourselves to be incorporated into governing the country. Our job is to represent workers, and fight for a society where workers are not exploited. When we interact with government it must be on the basis of a mandate from below. There must be accountability and transparency: no deals behind closed doors this time.



The workers' movement is set to grow dramatically. Legislation has divided workers. Those over a certain grade could not join NLC Unions. They had to join a senior staff association. We have decided to ignore this separation. The senior staff associations will join the NLC. This could mean a movement of 5.5 million workers.

What is happening in political organisations?

When Abacha died so did the five legal political parties that called for him to be the sole presidential candidate. They were totally discredited.

The UAD (United Action for Democracy) is growing rapidly. It has brought together a broad range of organisations and individuals on a programme of democracy, individual and collective rights, and for a radical economic overhaul.

The more traditional democratic opposition organisations such as NADECO and those around Wole Soyinka, it's probably sacrilegious to say, do not really have an organised mass base. This is understandable given the repression and the way leaderships have been forced into exile. But the absence of a mass base and a clear policy for the way ahead means that they get drawn into discussions about who sits at the high table. That's the difference between say the UAD and the other organisations whose leadership was almost wholly based outside of the country.

And what about those with a socialist perspective?

We have a small, fragmented left. But it is not insignificant. There are the same political configurations that you would see in Europe. Those who have argued throughout for a principled, democratic and socialist opposition have been rewarded with popular trust. Those who were prepared to go to prison for their beliefs enjoy enormous credibility. Of course, agreeing a joint strategy is not easy, but there are thousands of new activists emerging who do not carry dogmatic ideological baggage.

Labour Factsheet is an independent journal that has played a critical role.

What is emerging as a focus for international solidarity?

We should get union delegations invited to other countries to explain the situation. There is a danger that everyone thinks the Nigerian crisis has been resolved. There is a long way to go, and we must prepare the ground for solidarity actions to ensure that we win a proper democracy, regain an independent workers' movement, and are free to form political parties and contest elections free of military interference. ❑

Indonesia —

What is Indonesia like since the rioting and student uprising in May overthrew Suharto's 32 year dictatorship? How are President Habibie's policies different from those of his mentor? How is the pro-democracy movement developing? And what should be Labour's response here? Celia Mather, who has been following developments in the Indonesian workers' movement for over twenty years, reports.

THE INDONESIAN economy is in meltdown. The Government has admitted that 80 million, or 40% of Indonesia's 200 million people, can no longer afford food and other basic goods. It says the figure will be 95 million by the end of the year. Real hunger is growing. "No country in recent history, let alone one the size of Indonesia, has ever suffered such a dramatic reversal of fortune", says the World Bank. Armed forces commander General Wiranto warned in July, "Looting cannot be tolerated even if it is done to secure oneself from starvation".

The Asian financial crisis hit hardest in Indonesia. The levels of corruption and nepotism there were the worst. The banking sector was little more than a money laundering network for Suharto cronies. Its collapse, taking with it the currency and liquidity, has led to the closure of thousands of otherwise functioning businesses. There appears to be little confidence among economists and businesses in Indonesia that President Habibie can undo economic paralysis on such a scale. The IMF bailout of US$49 billion will do little more than cover the budget deficit and roll the country's debts over into the future. It is a short-term measure that will allow foreign investors and banks to get some of their money back, and get some parts of the economy moving again. The long-term debt will increase.

The Indonesian crisis has led to an IMF policy shift on social spending. It is no longer making its financial intervention conditional on a removal of subsidies from basic commodities. The rioting, which is now thought to have led to 1,200 deaths, was triggered when transport prices went up because fuel subsidies had been lifted. The spectre of such burning, looting and violence returning is haunting international business.

The fact that the rioting targeted the Chinese in Indonesia has had its own knock-on effects economically. Indonesian Chinese have lost all confidence that the government will protect them. Many, including local doctors, allege that the rape of 168 Chinese women and girls at the time of the rioting was orchestrated from within the Army. In his Independence Day speech on 16th August, Habibie apologised for the outrages but there is no sign of an official investigation, let alone prosecution of those responsible. Protest demonstrations at the anti-Chinese terror have taken place among many Chinese communities abroad, from Beijing to Los Angeles. Chinese business interests, which played a key role in creating Indonesia's (mythical) status of an 'Asian tiger', are unlikely to continue choosing Indonesia as an investment opportunity.

If the economic mood is despondent, the political mood is more upbeat. The lid that was kept securely down for over thirty years has been lifted. Pro-democracy organisations are unbanned, there is open debate in the press, and political parties are being formed.

Leading activists such as the trade union leader Muchtar Pakpahan have been released as will be, it is rumoured, several of the old prisoners held without legitimate trial since

Sierra Leone: inquiry reveals business as usual

Sean Coyne reports on the outcome of the Legg Inquiry: The Legg Inquiry into the breaching of the UN Arms Embargo in Sierra Leone was little more than a white-wash. It is quite clear that Cook and co were duped by their officials, denied information, presented with misleading briefs, and given the run around by part of the Whitehall mandarinate notorious for secrecy.

The central questions were barely addressed. Is it proper for a supposedly democratic government to co-operate with a bunch of mercenaries? Should it be left up to High Commissioners to interpret UN and British foreign policy without reference to ministers? Why were Foreign Office mandarins who contrived to mislead Parliament not exposed and sacked?

The Sierra Leone affair offered a golden opportunity to show what an ethical foreign policy could have looked like. The British Government could have campaigned globally for an escalation of sanctions to isolate the regime fatally. They could have made clear that the regime had no future, and that compromises were not possible.

They could have made common cause with those campaigning for democracy and given explicit support to the tens of thousands of trade unionists, petty traders and religious organisations who refused to co-operate with the military regime and who suffered dreadful hardships as a result. They could have launched a worldwide campaign to cancel Sierra Leone's debt.

They could have collected pledges for aid and assistance from sympathetic governments to rebuild schools and hospitals, put in place facilities to re-establish agriculture, and practical measures to help deal with the traumatised population. These measures would have given heart to the domestic opposition in a much more progressive way than embarking on a precarious adventure with unpredictable mercenaries who respond to the highest bidder.

Instead we are presented with Sir Peter Penfold, the British High Commissioner, secretly facilitating contact and million dollar trading between the exiled civilian government and a bunch of discredited hired killers, to claim later that he did not fully appreciate the terms of the UN arms embargo. No one could possibly believe that Penfold, an experienced former military intelligence operative, did not know intimately the terms of a major UN policy affecting the country in which he was stationed.

It is hoped that a few lessons have been learned by the British Government but who can tell? The Legg Inquiry and the reaction to it provided little reassurance. The people of Sierra Leone are no doubt making their own balance sheet, and faced as they are, with continued impoverishment, instability and continued war in the north of their country, they must also be wondering what the grand declarations of a new ethical foreign policy have delivered for them.

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all still to fight for

the late 1960s when there was a bloody crackdown on the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). Even the radical Peoples Democratic Party (PRD) can become active again, though its senior figures such as Budiman Sudjatmiko and the workers' leader Dita Indah Sari are still detained.

There is still no date set for the promised elections. Most of the structures and personnel of Suharto's 'New Order' are still in place. Habibie has reportedly been dishing out banknotes so as to ensure control of the ruling party, Golkar. To that extent, little has changed.



PHOTO: STEVE FRENCH

TAPOL picket Foreign Office, 20/5/98.

Nor is the pro-democracy opposition coalescing around a clear set of demands and activities. The policies and programmes of the newly-formed political parties have yet to be announced. There seem to be at least two initiatives towards forming 'labour' parties. One, the Indonesian Labour Party (PPI), is led by Wilhelmus Bhoka, head of the government's official workers' organisation, the FSPSI. While the PPI may come to speak on behalf of workers, the FSPSI has no democratic structures or practices on which to model a supposedly democratic political party. As for the previously unrecognised and harassed workers' organisations, like Pakpahan's organisation, the Indonesian Workers Prosperity Union (SBSI), they can now go about their business legitimately. The FSPSI no longer has the sole right. A new confederation of trade unions and workers' associations is being debated.

However, in practice, mobilisation and real organisation of workers is still suppressed. The SBSI has had to call off large-scale demonstrations. Rubber bullets were used against striking metalworkers in Bekasi to the east of Jakarta. A mass meeting between worker activists and students in Jakarta was forcibly broken up. There has also been a propaganda campaign against Pakpahan, accusing him of having a communist father and of making anti-Islamic statements, which will whip up Muslim sentiment against him and the democracy movement. These are typical of old Suharto regime tactics.

Instead of organising workers and pro-democracy activities, the SBSI, like others, is having to take on social activities, distributing food to the jobless. Government supplies intended for the hungry are being sold abroad for cash.There are attempts to create a cleaner image for the Armed Forces (ABRI). Lieutenant General Prabowo (Suharto's son-in-law) has been brought before a Military Honour Council for the abduction and disappearance of human rights activists by the crack army unit KOPASSUS that he led. It may even be that he will be court-martialled as a scapegoat to save ABRI's reputation. But this will do nothing to push ABRI back to barracks and out of the political and business roles that military brass at all levels have enjoyed for over thirty years. Having to cope with a severe stain on its reputation, the armed forces commander, General Wiranto, has been forced to withdraw his notorious crack troops from the contested territories of East Timor, Aceh and West Papua, but the territorial troops remain and the political demands of the population are far from being resolved.

What is official British policy to the 'new' Indonesia? Over 60 licences for arms sales have been issued since Labour came to power, and only six refused. As yet details of the licences are still not open for public scrutiny and debate, despite Robin Cook's assurances. It is known that Clare Short's DFID wishes to assist the development of democratic trade unions in Indonesia through the ILO and TUC. But it will not be easy to back the right horse in a country where the structures and practices of democracy have been banned for so long.

During Suharto's regime, the UK became second only to Japan as a source of foreign investment in Indonesia. One might hope that government and business interests which turned a blind eye to, and prospered from, the corruption and repression of the Suharto years have learnt the lesson over the financial crisis that ensued. But one would have to be quite an optimist in what is sadly rather a pessimistic scenario.

- For up to date information and analysis on Indonesia, East Timor, West Papua and Aceh, read the TAPOL Bulletin, published by TAPOL, the Indonesia Human Rights Campaign, 111 Norwood Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR7 8HW.

THE NICARAGUA SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN CELEBRATES

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3RD OCTOBER, 2:30PM - MIDNIGHT

CONWAY HALL, RED LION SQ, LONDON WC1 (HOLBORN TUBE)

WHEEL CHAIR ACCESS

£5 WAGED/£2 UNWAGED FOR AFTERNOON CELEBRATION EVENT AND LAUNCH OF EXHIBITION

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2:30 RALLY

6:00 EXHIBITION

8:00 - MIDNIGHT LATIN AMERICAN FIESTA

CRECHE 2:00 - 5:30PM

(BOOKING ESSENTIAL)

DETAILS: NSC, 129 SEVEN SISTERS RD, LONDON N7 7QG 0171-272 9619.

EMU attacks democracy

Dr Brian Burkitt, University of Bradford and Pudsey CLP, continues *LLB*'s debate on EMU and argues for a dose of euro-realism.

OVER THE last six months Bernie Moss, John Palmer and I have provided *LLB* readers with running commentary and controversy on the attitude the left should adopt towards EMU. In view of our conflicting opinions a return to basics may clarify the factors that the labour movement must consider.

Continental leaders, unlike most British supporters of EMU, openly admit that they desire a Single Currency not merely for its own sake, but as a stepping stone to political union. However, historically successful monetary unions have been preceded by the prior formation of a political community, so that the EU is attempting a completely novel process of integration. More pertinently for the left, the precise form that EMU takes has been determined by central bankers. The Maastricht Treaty was based upon the recommendations of the Delors Committee, which was composed entirely of bankers (except for its chair).

Central bank hegemony was reflected in the policies embodied by the Single Currency. Its aim is unambiguously the pursuit of price stability. Labour's traditional objectives of maintaining full employment, of improving the quality and quantity of public services, and of achieving a fundamental redistribution of power and income in the direction of greater equality are only permissible under the Maastricht Treaty to the extent that they do not deflect from the achievement of stable prices. Therefore EMU subordinates the labour movement's concerns to central bankers' obsession with eliminating inflation, thus strengthening the probability that they will not be met.

Securing price stability is the task of the European Central Bank (ECB). The ECB is designed to be completely independent of the political process. Members of its board are appointed for a fixed eight year term and the Maastricht Treaty expressly prevents it from consulting, or being consulted by, national governments. Consequently the instruments of monetary policy — the rate of interest, the money supply and the exchange rate — are removed from democratic control. The ECB would return Britain to the 1920s when the unaccountable Governor of the Bank of England, Montagu Norman, determined economic, and sometimes even foreign policy. As the inter-war depression demonstrates, monetary policy is too important to be left to central bankers.

Monetary policy determined at EU level will inevitably affect Labour's budgetary stance, even in the absence of the Growth and Stability Pact, which explicitly limits national fiscal independence. Consequently citizens lose the power to influence the economic policy that determines their standard of living through their votes. Such power is exercised by unaccountable EU bankers and bureaucrats, so that the scope for democratic decision making is reduced. In these circumstances the labour movement will be even further removed from the key decisions that structure working people's lives.

Consequently UK participation in an EU Single Currency on the Maastricht basis will be both inefficient, generating high levels of unemployment, and undemocratic — removed from popular pressures. The

EMU is good for you

John Palmer, formerly *The Guardian*'s Europe correspondent, responds to critics of EMU.

Even the most hardened euro-sceptic reader of *LLB* must have blinked in amazement at the assertion by Bernie Moss that Margaret Thatcher was "gentler on wage earners" than trade union supporters of European economic and monetary union (*LLB*, July). In a bewildering display of "Alice Through the Looking Glass" economics Bernie also tells us that lower interest rates — which we both agree are urgently needed to halt a slide to recession in Britain — "are excluded by the Maastricht arrangements." In fact the exact opposite is the truth. If Britain were to join the Single Currency at its launch next January it would be required to reduce interest rates. This is one important reason why Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, the Bank of England and a large part of the City (to say nothing of *The Sun*) join with Bernie in the campaign to block or delay British participation in EMU.

Inside the Single Currency the Blair Government would have little option but to use tax policy rather than interest rates to deal with any threat of excess inflation — which is another reason why New Labour has opted for John Major's policy on EMU. By the way, Bernie should have a look at what is happening in the real world outside. Economic growth is picking up in all European Union countries with the exception of Britain whose economy is, once more, grinding to a halt. The fact is that — thanks in part to four decades of devaluation — Britain has moved from being one of the four richest EU countries to now being one of the four poorest. The idea that under conditions of integrated global capital markets it is possible to generate sustained economic growth by running massive budget deficits where more and more output goes in debt repayment to rentier capital is simply bizarre — as Marx long ago demonstrated.

But this is no mere academic debate about the right timetable for taking part in a currency union. The world economy is headed for a period of massive financial instability and a real danger of global depression. Within an economic union, European governments have some chance of using their sovereignty-sharing powers to offset external deflation with internally generated growth and employment policies. Whether they do or not will depend in large measure on whether the European left can get its act together.

Bernie Moss, on the other hand, wants the British left to take its chances trying to navigate through the global financial storms in a pathetically leak-prone old barge called 'The British Pound'. Thanks, but no thanks. He is right about one thing. I should have said that Ireland and the other fast growing EMU countries had increased welfare spending, not overall public spending, in the run up to EMU.

Finally Bernie can rest assured that since I left *The Guardian* a year ago, its columns are unpolluted by my internationalism — "shallow" or otherwise.

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concept, objectives and operation are rooted in monetarism and appear completely inimical to socialist objectives. Yet John Palmer and others in the labour movement are among its most ardent supporters, because they base their analyses, not on EMU as it will exist, but on EMU as they wish it would be. Their wishful thinking takes a number of forms.

First, John Palmer asserts that "as the countries entering the Single Currency show, preparation for the Single Currency stimulates faster growth and (too slow) reductions in unemployment". Such a claim flies in the face of all the evidence. Widely accepted measures of economic dynamism are the growth of GDP, labour productivity and employment. Real GDP growth in the EU slowed down over the past four decades. The annual growth rate of its present membership averaged:

- l 4.8% between 1961 and 1970
- l 3% between 1971 and 1980
- l 2.4% between 1981 and 1990
- l 1.7% between 1991 and 1997

Productivity growth fell from 4.6% to 2.6%, 1.9% and 1.7% over the same periods. More new jobs were created in the USA in two months than in the EU over the past ten years! Second, John believes that EMU could be the catalyst for creating an EU-wide strategy for employment, social justice, and an ecologically sustainable economy. Similar hopes have been indulged by others in the labour movement, notably the TUC after Jacques Delors' speech in 1988. However, no one has yet detailed a mechanism by which political acceptance for such a strategy could by secured. The EU budget cannot fulfil this role at its current level of around 1.3% of the EU's GDP and the obstacles to increasing it seem huge. The two largest net contributors to the EU budget, Germany and Britain, are currently seeking to reduce their bills and no other member state is volunteering to make up the financial shortfall. Moreover, a strategy prioritising employment and ecological targets conflicts with the priority given to price stability in the Maastricht Treaty. Given the difficulties of negotiating and ratifying that Treaty, it is hard to imagine governments being willing to re-negotiate it.

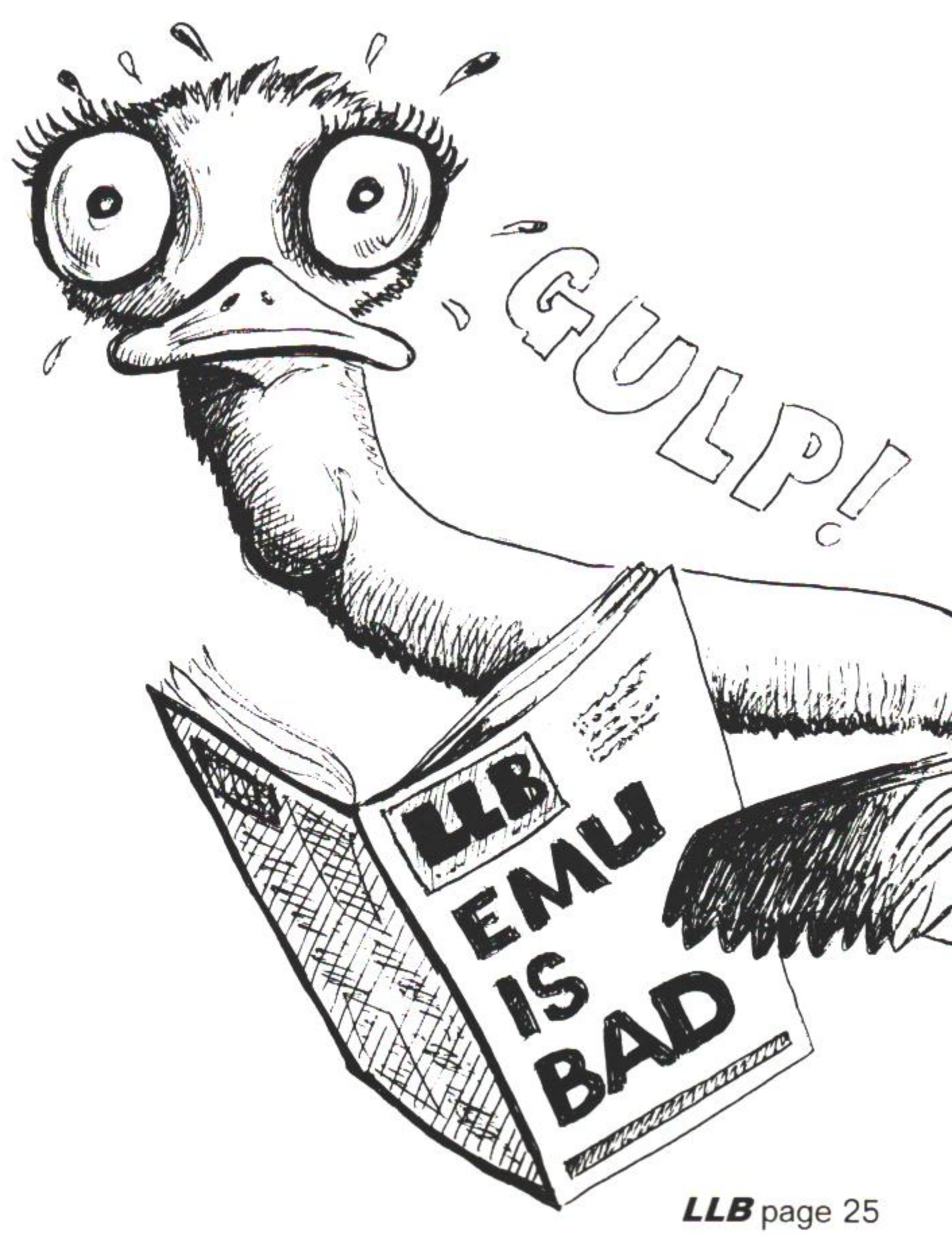
Third, John argues that "EMU will give governments which share key decision-making powers the capacity — for the first time in history — to challenge the priorities of global capital and global markets in a way none could do on their own". The key to this golden scenario is that Euro-land will be a sea of tranquillity, because there will be no national currencies to be played off against each other.

Such a belief ignores the fact that currency speculation is a symptom, not a cause, of economic divergence. After EMU is established, speculation among the dollar, euro and yen (not to mention other currencies) will be rife; more significantly perhaps, there will be substantial speculative activity in different national and municipal bonds within the EMU-zone. Given its fondness for telling its critics to 'live in the real world', Labour's pro-European right wing displays astonishing economic illiteracy by imagining that the abolition of national currencies will remove financial volatility.

Fourth, many trade unionists, particularly John Edmonds, offer conditional support for EMU; they argue that the risks associated with the Single Currency are worth bearing, providing that they are accompanied by the 'European Social Model', ie. Social Chapter legislation designed to reduce job insecurity. Unfortunately the Social Chapter provisions are far less comprehensive than the preparations for a Single Currency based on monetarist principles. Moreover, the 'European Social Model' has been under pressure in recent years, whilst Tony Blair (and others) argue that EMU will act as a trigger to induce labour market flexibility (ie. greater job insecurity).

Certainly considerable evidence exists that the distinctive features of German corporate governance are being eroded. Reunification created a need for additional sources of investment capital that could not be found domestically, so that German companies were forced to turn to foreign investors (principally UK and US financial institutions), which now hold around 20% of the shares in German firms. The logical development is concentration on profitability, dividends and share prices, formerly claimed to be alien to the 'European Social Model'. The latter therefore is a fragile foundation on which to build a left programme.

If the left is to develop a coherent response to EMU, it must be based not on euro-fanaticism nor euro-scepticism, but on euro-realism. That perspective demonstrates the monetarist characteristics of the Single Currency, which no democratic socialist can accept. Maybe, ultimately, Europe could design a Single Currency that facilitates full employment, greater equality and improved public services. However, such a radical transformation will only occur when the present EMU project has been completely unravelled, and a totally new initiative is launched.



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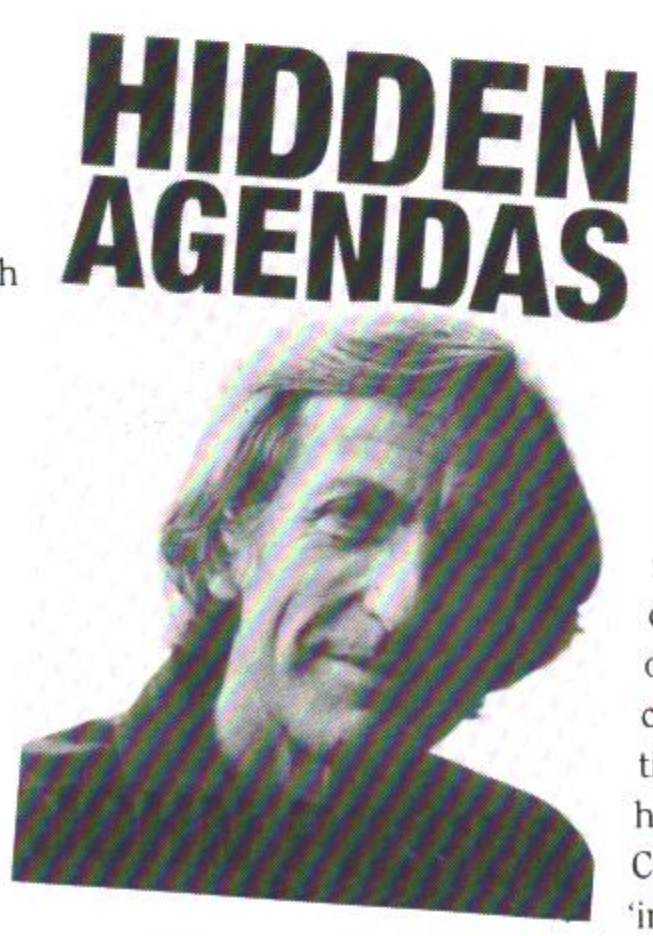
Beyond Newszak

Mike Phipps reviews Hidden Agendas *by John Pilger, published by Vintage Books, £8.99 pbck.*

AT 687 pages John Pilger's latest book is a massive achievement. It took me a bit longer to read and absorb it than some of the mainstream commentators who perhaps skimmed it to confirm their prejudices and then dashed off denigrating and often inaccurate notices.

Two themes dominate the book: the role of the media and Pilger's own internationalism. Nicaragua, Israel, El Salvador, Cambodia, Malaysia and Diego Garcia are all visited — and that's just in the first chapter. There are strong pieces on the arms trade, the situation in Burma and above all East Timor — including an examination of the Australian government's collaboration with the illegal occupation of the island at the expense of the lives of Australians killed there by the Indonesian military. There's also an excellent analysis of the new market reforms in Vietnam where the government is obliged to honour the bad debts of the defeated Saigon regime — in other words it has to pay back the loans incurred by its enemy to bankroll the US war against it. In consequence 70% of the population now live in absolute poverty and half the children are severely malnourished. This is on top of the after-effects of the US chemical war against Vietnam — an estimated six pounds of toxic chemicals were dropped per head of the population.

Part of the strength of Pilger's analysis is that it is underpinned by crucial evidence often neglected by the mainstream. Optimism on progress in the new South Africa, for example, must be tempered by the fact that there has been a doubling of deaths in police custody since 1995. A symptom of Russia's socioeconomic collapse is that male life expectancy there is down from 69 in the 1950s to 58, an unprecedented fall anywhere. Pilger has no difficulty identifying the reasons and is scathing about the way the media presents human tragedy disconnected from its causes: "Imperialism may be rehabilitated, but its consequences remain unspeakable. Throughout the world people are still paraded on television as the victims of their own misfortune."



Media responsibility is a key thread in this book. It's now a familiar story how the media enthused about the Gulf War — especially the modern 'hi-tech' aspects of it (although less than 7% of bombs dropped were smart: old-fashioned carpet-bombing of civilians was the norm). The same media then censored its own coverage because the scenes of carnage were too distressing. Five hundred pages further on, Pilger documents the same approach 20 years earlier in Vietnam. US newspapers would not publish pictures of GIs torturing suspects because the public would not accept them. Contrary to received myth, 600 reporters were in Vietnam at the time of the My Lai massacre of 200 unarmed civilians, yet none of them broke the story.

But Pilger charts huge changes in the media too: a decline in genuine investigative reporting — for example by the *Mirror* — and a rise in dishonesty that goes beyond propaganda. Where the British media is headed may be glimpsed from Australia where Murdoch controls seven out of twelve daily and seven out of ten Sunday newspapers, including a complete monopoly in Adelaide.

Such concentration bears a heavy political price. *LLB* readers will be familiar with even the broadsheet press's love-in with New Labour, but perhaps less aware of the media's readiness to tone down its coverage of oppression abroad out of commercial considerations. Even the BBC, which has a growing trade with China, dropped after 'internal consultation', a secret film shot in occupied Tibet and an assignment showing conditions in Chinese sweatshops. Equally insidious is the arrival of "Newszak" — news sentimentalised into entertainment — which gave us the Diana grief-fest and Live TV's News Bunny. Meanwhile real journalists around the world face jail and death just for trying to tell the truth — fifty were killed in Russia in 1996 alone.

Telling these uncompromising truths has triggered some vindictive reactions in the mainstream, like the *Guardian*'s waspish preview of Pilger's recent TV documentary on South Africa. Perhaps the most frenzied response to *Hidden Agendas* has been William Shawcross's polemic in *Literary Review*. In a highly personalised attack, Shawcross describes Pilger as "the Henry Kissinger of journalism" and accuses him of basking in the reflection of his own glory, pomposity and "mawkish presentation of the facts, half-truths, sleights, elisions or omissions." Later Shawcross admits he didn't read the whole book!

Hidden Agendas has also been favourably received, including in sections of the right-wing press. It's ironic that those who applauded his book in newspapers like the *Times* are unable to do more to resist the news manipulation and media dumbing-down that Pilger so effectively savages in his book.

In Defence of Trade Unionism

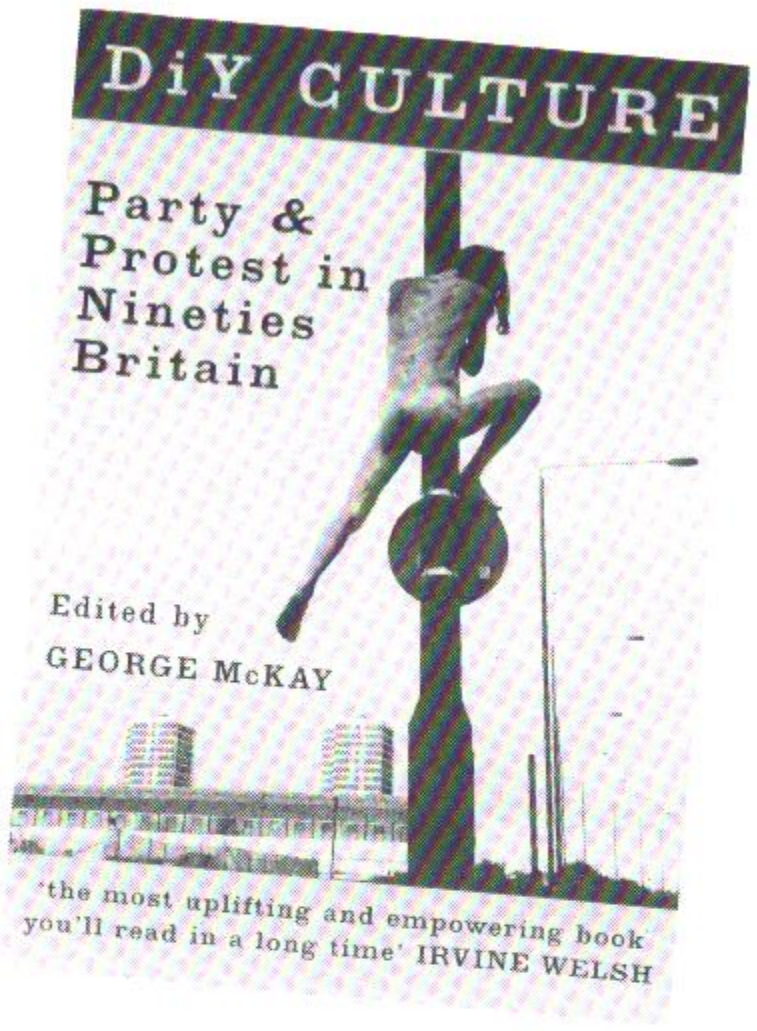
BRITISH trade unionists today face more legal restrictions and state interference than at any time since their emergence from illegality. Such restrictions are the toughest in western Europe and, as Jim Mortimer reminds us in this well-argued pamphlet, Tony Blair is publicly committed to keeping the basic elements of 1980s Thatcherite legislation.

In Defence of Trade Unionism is published by the Institute of Employment Rights, which in its ten year history has produced 65 titles and sold 120,000 copies. It's available from 160 Falcon Road, London SW11 2LN, price £5 to unions and students, £10 to others.

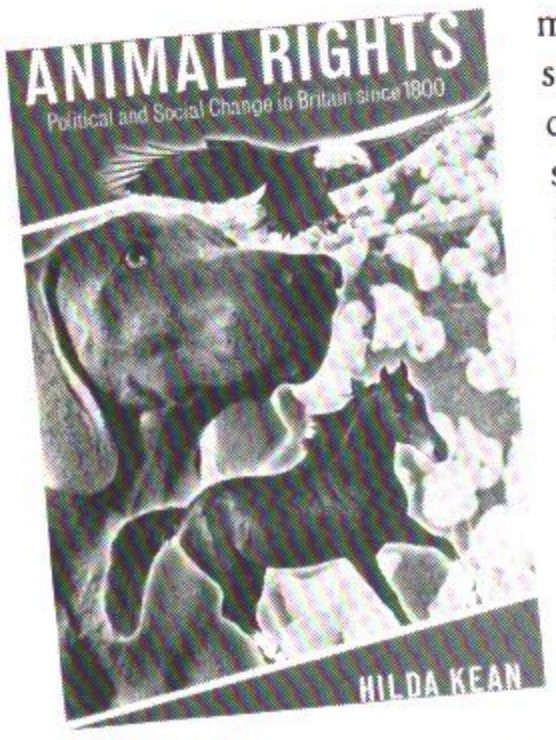
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Nimby? Nope!

Mike Phipps reviews DiY culture, *edited by George McKay, published by Verso, price £11.00 pbck, and* Animal Rights *by Hilda Kean, published by Reaktion, £19.95.*



SQUATTING, campaigning against the Criminal Justice Act, anti-roads protests, Reclaim the Streets parties, disused land occupations, unlicensed raves — it's all here. Direct action single issue campaigning has seen a phenomenal growth in recent years, perhaps an expression of the historic failure of self-styled left parties, most of which see genuine campaigning simply as a framework for recruitment. These campaigns have thrown up some unlikely alliances — between the respectable 'nimby'(not in my back yard) and the committed 'nope' (not on Planet Earth), along with a great deal of tactical inventiveness. The account of how activists hid a camcorder in the toilet of a conference centre on the eve of a corporate AGM, so that on the day itself they could get past the security guards, redeem it and secretly film their disruption of the meeting reads like an ingenious reworking of an idea from *The Godfather*.



Equally imaginative are the tactics of roads protesters, such as tunnelling through connecting walls in 35 terraced houses in the way of the M11 link road, both as a way of evading the bailiffs and as a statement about communal living. Despite the tactical flexibility, divisions between those who wanted to keep the protest 'fluffy' (responsible and non-violent) and those who are 'spiky' (confrontational, by all means necessary) are highlighted, as well as the limitations of this debate. Sabotage and vandalism of industrial equipment, for example, may be seen in context as 'property enhancement'.

To some extent, the discussion about violence reflects the disparity of the movement and class tensions within it. As one activist observes, "the middle class don't traditionally like to get personally involved in violence," preferring to leave it to others. Amid some overblown writing about contemporary dance culture (four chapters!) there are some thoughtful pieces, such as George Monbiot's of The Land is Ours campaign, who has written books about environmental destruction in Indonesia, Brazil and East Africa.

His conclusion is that there is no basic difference between land alienation there and in Britain — except that the sheer size and historical timescale of the process here tends to make us less aware of it. For him, and many others, the fight to save Twyford Down changed that.

This book is an excellent introduction to a type of politics much of the left has ignored for too long. More practical readers will find the cartoons on how to build a treehouse especially useful.

- Hilda Kean's *Animal Rights* looks at another area of single issue campaigning, although with a far broader historical sweep. Tracing public concern over cruelty to animals from the late 18th century to the present, she explores campaigns against maltreatment, inhumane slaughter, vivisection, hunting, the fur trade, whaling and more recent issues. The premise that the way we treat animals provides insights into political, social and cultural changes in people's lives is illustrated in many ways — not least the current boom in animal consumerism reflected in the marketing of dog toothpaste and cat sunblock.

Wit and wisdom

Dave Lewney reviews The Noble Sayings of Lord Bassam *by Tony Greenstein.*

STEVE BASSAM recently emerged on the national stage as 'the voice of ordinary members' fronting the Blairite Members First slate for the NEC elections. This six-page pamphlet does a 'class traitor' job on him. Greenstein states that the purpose of the pamphlet is "to use Lord Bassam as an example of the corruption at the heart of New Labour. When political differences between parties disappear personal advancement and corruption follow".

Greenstein has trawled through the archives of *Brighton Labour Briefing* (and its breakaway publication *Brighton Labour Campaigner*) to catalogue the words and wisdom of the former anarchist-squatter turned Blairite Baron. Now in his 12th year as Brighton leader (he overturned a three-year maximum term clause), Bassam combines this with being a KPMG consultant.

Rumours abound that Bassam is considering another closure of Brighton Labour Party following the selection of former Councillor and Ireland campaigner Richard Stanton to the panel of council candidates. Bassam wanted him 're-interviewed'.

- *The Noble Sayings of Lord Bassam*, £1 + 50p pp (five or more post free) to "The Lord Bassam for Government Fund", c/o BUC, PO Box 2536, Brighton BN2 6LX. All proceeds to Brighton Unemployed Centre.

Lord Bassam speaks

"I shall not be part of a government that urges wage restraint and holds back the demands of working people."

"Labour must confront the Government and local Tories with a policy of non-compliance."

"Hard work around a radical socialist programme can work wonders for party unity and party morale."

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Stephen Lawrence inquiry: what next?

After 56 days of shocking revelations of racism and corruption in the Metropolitan Police, the Stephen Lawrence inquiry adjourned earlier this summer. When it reconvenes in the autumn, it will examine the lessons to be learned from the case and the policy changes required. *Labour Left Briefing* interviewed Suresh Grover, co-ordinator of the Lawrence Campaign and director of The Monitoring Group.

The Lawrence campaign appears to have had a bigger impact in the black community and the anti-racist movement than anything since the New Cross fire. Why?

It's important to keep in mind the dramatic shift that's occurred over the last few years. At first, the Lawrences suffered all the frustrations that have beset so many other campaigns. Neville and Doreen went to the 1993 Notting Hill Carnival, a few months after Stephen was killed, and could muster only two signatures on their petition and not a single donation. They were devastated. But they didn't give up. In my own view, there are four factors that have contributed to the growing stature and strength of their campaign.

First, the centrality of the Lawrence family was never compromised. They remained the chief spokespersons and decision-makers throughout, and their dignity and effectiveness has won widespread admiration. However, this did not happen by itself; it was the result of a prolonged struggle. Understandably, the Lawrences themselves often wished to withdraw from the limelight. But the campaign insisted that they remain pivotal. In The Monitoring Group, we had learned how vital this was from our own long history of struggle against racist violence.

Second, the campaign was bold enough to experiment legally and set innovative precedents, including the private prosecution and the insistence that the inquest address not only the cause but the manner of death — which resulted in the inquest jury declaring that Stephen's death had been a racist murder. Again, these innovations did not come out of thin air; they reflected twenty years of experience working against racial harassment, and of course they were only made possible because of the Lawrences' own bravery and determination.

Third, it has to be remembered that at the time Stephen was killed, racial violence was becoming a huge concern in the black community. In the previous months there had been the murders of Rolan Adams, Rohit Dougal, Ruhalla Aramesh and others. As a result, the anti-racist movement was engaged in a deep discussion about how best to respond to these killings, to support the families and to convince organisations like trade unions and churches to take the issue seriously. The Lawrences became a catalyst for all these concerns and their struggle has advanced the whole movement to a new level.

Finally, the inquiry itself has acquired a remarkable dynamism that has changed the media agenda. The revelations coming out of it amount to an epic tale of police racism, incompetence and corruption. They have confirmed what ordinary people had increasingly come to suspect, and as a result there is now little doubt in the public mind that Stephen was murdered by racists for racist motives. This wasn't an isolated incident and more and more people know it.

The media made much of the intervention of the Nation of Islam. Can you clarify what happened?

The Lawrence campaign appealed to all those who shared its concerns to attend the inquiry. From the beginning, we insisted on an inclusive campaign. We knew that the larger the public presence, the more cautious Macpherson would be and the more defensive the police. The Nation of Islam rang the Lawrences and asked if they could come. In accord with the inclusive policy of the campaign, they said yes. It was always clear that on the day the killers themselves finally appeared, there would be a massive presence. As chief steward appointed by the Lawrences, I met with the inquiry officers to make preparations, and asked them to set up an audio-video link from the inquiry to the large hall downstairs. The inquiry officers refused.

Then, on the day the killers appeared, there were 900 people waiting — and space for only 130 in the inquiry chamber. The Nation of Islam had mobilised about 70 or 80 of their members, who were on hand from 7:00 am. We had organised a rotation of the public seats in the inquiry chamber — so that the maximum number of members of the public could see for themselves what was going on — and the Nation agreed to take part in the rotation.

After about one and a half hours of testimony, the members of the Nation prepared to take their turn in the rotation and approached the lift. Suddenly the police intervened to stop them going upstairs. Leaders of the Nation tried to explain to the police that what they were doing was agreed in advance and was completely orderly. But the police started pushing them around and then assaulted them with CS spray. At that

German caravan campaign

John Stewart, Treasurer of the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, reports: Refugee, anti-racist and human rights groups across Germany are organising a caravan of demonstrations and protests going from city to city to draw attention to racist attacks on refugees. The convoy will last for six weeks in the run-up to September's elections.

Politicians of all parties are trying to appear tough by clamping down on 'bogus' refugees and 'criminal' foreigners. Chancellor Kohl and Finance Minister Waigel have denounced the idea of Germany as a multi-cultural society, calling for a halt to immigration and demanding the repatriation of any foreigner whose children are convicted of a criminal offence.

The caravan's organisers hope to link up with the low paid and unemployed, to demonstrate to German workers that refugees are facing the same attacks faced by them — only more so.

A manifesto is being drawn up and the caravan will culminate with a mass rally and conference in Cologne over the weekend of 19th/20th September.

- To attend or support the caravan please contact Frank Duval at the International Human Rights Association, Kornstrasse 51, 28201 Bremen, Germany. Telephone 00 49 421 5577093.

point some members of the Nation ran into the lift and rushed into the chamber, which is when the widely-reported remark about slavery being over was made.

In the chamber the police rushed towards one of the killers to 'protect' him from the Nation — the killer was smiling and making 'come and get me' signs. Macpherson retired from the chamber. Our stewards reported the sequence of events to Neville and Doreen and made it clear that the public order problem had been entirely created by the police. We then told Macpherson that if he didn't set up the audio-video link we would not be responsible for what happened downstairs or outside.



PHOTO: ED HALL

Lawrence demo 29/6/98.

Already one elderly woman, one pregnant woman, and one male member of the Nation of Islam had been taken to hospital for treatment because of the CS spray. Macpherson asked us to arrange the link and we did. As a result there was a three hour delay while our technicians sorted it out — this was the real cause of the disruption in the proceedings reported in the press, not the Nation of Islam.

At first the Nation wouldn't speak to many of us, because we were Asian. But the next day, after they had seen us stand up to the racists and the police, one of them came up to me, told me 'You're a black man' and shook my hand. On that day there were fights between the killers and members of the public but the Nation had absolutely nothing to do with any of these. In fact, they remained disciplined in the face of a highly provocative police presence.

I should make it clear that the Nation had previously played no role in the Lawrence campaign and that, speaking personally, I believe they have little to offer our movement as long as they are so wedded to misogyny and anti-Asian and anti-white prejudice.

At the outset of the inquiry, the family and their advisors were heavily criticised — not least by a number of self-appointed black leaders — for questioning Macpherson's suitability as chair. Looking back, do you think the challenge to Macpherson was a mistake?

On the contrary, it has been entirely vindicated by the course of the inquiry. We ensured that Macpherson knew that every move he made would be scrutinised, and that any attempt on his part to prevent the inquiry dealing in full with all the Lawrences' concerns would lead to difficulties for him and embarrassment for the Government. Those who made these attacks were pursuing an agenda of their own. Some were trying to drive a wedge between the Lawrences and their legal team so that they could get a piece of the action. Others were trying to win friends in high places by smearing the campaign as 'leftist' or 'anti-Labour'.

From our point of view all that mattered was that this inquiry served the Lawrences and their demands for justice. We had to make the challenge to Macpherson — and anyone who attended the inquiry regularly can be in no doubt that it had a decisive effect on him — because if we failed here, if the inquiry was turned against the Lawrences, if the police were let off the hook, the consequences for all of us involved in fighting racial violence were severe. It would have been a green light for more racial attacks.

What do you want to come out of the inquiry?

The long standing demand for an independent police complaints procedure is a minimum, but if that is all Macpherson comes up with, it will not be nearly enough. The inquiry should recommend that the killers be tried for perjury, and it must respond in detail to all the revelations that have come before it. We will not accept any attempt to pass over in silence the catalogue of police misbehaviour. Above all, the inquiry must recommend a radical transformation in the Metropolitan Police, and in policing in general. Police must become accountable not only politically but also operationally. The investigative process must be overhauled and supervised independently. It's important to remember the Lawrence case is not only about how racial murders are investigated, it is also about how all murders are investigated.

We don't want a re-run of the Scarman inquiry of the 80s. Scarman refused to accept there was institutionalised racism in the police and thought the only problem was prejudice on the part of some individual police officers. This inquiry has proved beyond doubt that this approach is, to put it mildly, insufficient. What we need, above all, is not more draconian police powers, but a major extension of the civil rights of black people.

And after the inquiry?

The Lawrence family have agreed in principle to mobilise in alliance with other democratic and anti-racist forces for the first ever national civil rights procession in Britain. It will be held in central London on a date to be announced. The issue of racial violence can only be addressed through a broader movement for human and civil rights. We have to galvanise substantial social forces to stand up for the right of black people to live free of violent attacks. Our aim is to move the fight against racism onto a broader platform and a higher level of activity.

The anti-racist movement has been in crisis for years. National groups come and go but do not have a base, while community groups which do have a base have no national profile or reach. The Lawrence campaign has given us an historic opportunity to overcome these problems and transform our movement. ❑

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Refugees: faster but not fairer

Last month the Government published *Fairer, Faster and Firmer*, the new asylum and immigration White Paper. Jane Smith, a refugee agency worker, examines its provisions.

AMONG THE 44 proposals outlined in the White Paper is the planned removal of benefits from all asylum-seekers arriving in the UK. These measures, if implemented, risk creating Third World levels of poverty and ill health among some of the most vulnerable people in the UK. It is essential that the left joins with other concerned groups to fight these proposals.

The proposals outlined in the White Paper are the latest in a long line of restrictive policies enacted by successive governments. Visas and carriers sanctions have been used to keep asylum-seekers out of fortress Europe. All over the EU asylum-seekers have seen a gradual removal of their social rights to attempt to deter them.

In the UK the last government withdrew welfare benefits from asylum-seekers who applied 'in-country' — after arriving in the UK — and those appealing against a negative decision. Responsibility for supporting destitute asylum-seekers shifted from central to local government, under the provisions of the Children Act 1989 and the 1948 National Assistance Act. The latter supports adult asylum-seekers by giving them temporary accommodation and supermarket vouchers of around £28 per week but does not provide for clothing, shoes and underwear.

Social services departments in Greater London currently support over 23,000 adults and children. Others have slipped through this safety net. Social services departments are not fully compensated for this expenditure and asylum-seekers have become unpopular with local government. The local media has responded with such headlines as "Hordes of Refugee Children are Descending on Richmond" (*Richmond and Twickenham Times*, 5/6/98). Public hostility to refugees has increased as a result.

The Home Secretary states in the White Paper that he believes that refugee communities can provide for most asylum-seekers' needs. The White Paper proposes to remove benefits from all asylum-seekers. Those without any other means would be sustained by a largely cashless system of vouchers and pocket money.

The voucher system would be administered by an, as yet, unidentified national agency. Local authorities current responsibilities to asylum-seekers under homelessness legislation would be removed. Instead asylum-seekers would be allocated housing all over the UK. Those who refused an offer of housing will lose all rights to support. The proposals, as they stand, risk turning the present shambles into a disaster. If present levels of voucher support are an indication of the Government's magnanimity towards asylum-seekers, children and adults risk going hungry.

Another major cause for concern is the proposal to place immigration officers alongside airline staff in the airports of refugee-producing countries. These pre-entry controls could mean the difference between life and death for some endangered people.

Not all the proposals contained in the White Paper are unwelcome, and given this, it is important that the left adopts a considered and informed attitude to its contents. The granting of leave to remain in the UK to the 10,000 asylum-seekers waiting a decision for over five years should be welcomed, as should the abolition of the White List. But a campaign must be launched and involve as broad a coalition as possible. Concerned faith groups, the human rights lobby, refugee agencies and community organisations, black and ethnic minority groups and the child welfare agencies must be included in the campaign. For greater issues are at stake: if the Government sees cash benefits removed from one group without protest, who will be next?

The White Paper proposals:

- Pre-entry controls such as airline liaison officers who may stop asylum-seekers boarding planes to the UK
- Streamlining the appeals process
- Backlog management
- Allowing those who have been waiting for an asylum decision since before 1993 leave to remain in the UK
- Abolition of the White List of so called safe countries of origin
- Regulation of immigration advisers
- Greater use of detention, especially for those refused asylum and awaiting removal or deportation
- All detainees given written reasons for their detention
- Greater enforcement of deportation and removal orders for asylum-seekers who have been refused

AOB on Cronygate

"I don't understand what I am supposed to have done wrong." — Derek Draper, *World at One*.

"Not a single allegation in the *Observer* article is true." — Tony Blair, Question Time, 8th July.

"You right-winger, you f****** c***. You better watch out. We're going to f****** get you." — Derek Draper to then *New Statesman*, now *Tribune* contributor Nyta Mann, in the Grand Hotel, Brighton at Labour Party Conference, 1995.

"I have never seen so many happy, smiling faces." — Government Whip, *Observer*.

"Former Mandleson aide Derek Draper has been fingered as one of the sources of a *Sunday Times* article...newly elected MPs were variously itemised as "suspect", "dodgy on the minimum wage" and, in one case, "clinically insane." — *Tribune*, 1997.

"We should have a three month moratorium and see which lobbying firms survive." — House Builders' Federation, *Observer*.

"I don't think you will be surprised that we have decided to postpone the GJW party until later in the year." — Wilf Weeks, Chairman, GJW Government Relations, letter of 9th July.

"Had he chosen to put himself forward Derek Draper would have got on to the Scottish candidates' list no problem." — Rejected candidate and secretary of *the* Tribune MPs, Ian Davidson MP.

"I have better things to do in my life than hang around waiting for Derek Draper." — Peter Mandelson, Minister Without Loyalty, *Observer*.

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CORRESPONDENCE

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



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llb@labournet.co.uk

Bill Dixon, you're quite right to be humbled by my dad (Correspondence, July). He is Superman, and I know because I've seen him wearing his pants outside his trousers.

Katie Martin (age six months), Sutton

Catherine Goss of Basingstoke (Correspondence, July), how dare you compare my Grant to that toe-rag Geoff Martin.

P Mitchell, London E20

Pit Wurher perpetuates a common misconception when he claims that racism in Germany "is mainly a problem in the east" (*LLB*, July 1998). It may be true that the openly racist parties in Germany have more support in the former GDR, and that racist abuse and attacks are more common in the east. But German society as a whole is founded upon racist tenets.

'Nationality' is conceived of in terms of 'right of blood' rather than 'right of place' — a distinction which dates back to the 1890s. Seven million 'foreigners' currently living in Germany are defined as 'guests'. This holds true even for the Turkish Gastarbeiter 'guest workers' who arrived in the 1960s and their offspring. Their blood is still not German, therefore, they do not enjoy full-rights of citizenship (such as the right to vote). Recently, there have been moves to 'send back' to Turkey a 13 year old Turkish boy and his entire family for persistent petty crime, despite his having been born in Germany.

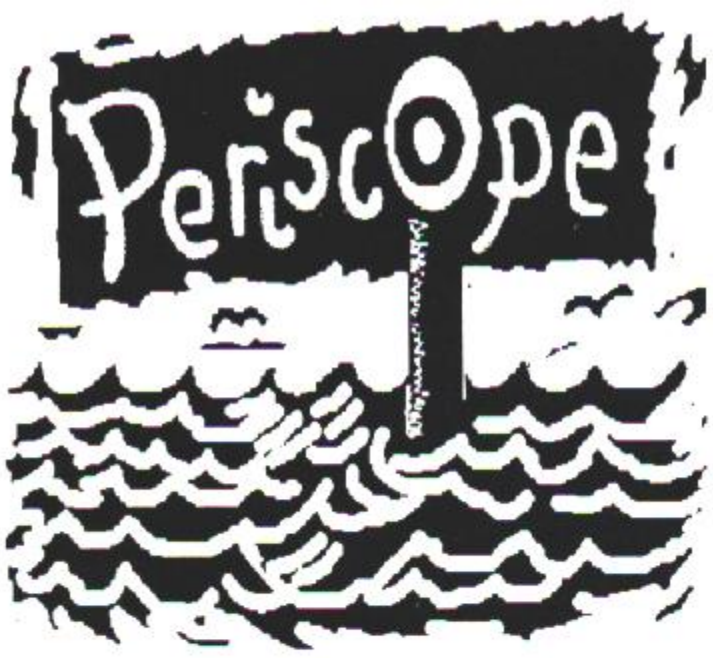
William West, Munchengladbach

Your interview (The Blairisation of Germany, July, *LLB*) got some key facts wrong. Statutory sick pay was reduced from 100% to 80% of the person's last income. Walkouts at Mercedes Benz happened after this change and against the company refusing to honour a collective agreement in the metal industry of 100%. The company gave in, but won some other concessions.

Not only the relatively small media union but also the metalworkers union IGM got the 35 hours and are discussing moving to 32. Racism might be more widespread in the east but is a problem in western Germany too. Racism exists within the SPD and the PDS.

The outcome of the elections in Saxony-Anheudt (13% for the fascist DVU) did not follow the pattern of CDU voters swinging over to the extreme right. Many of the votes came from people who otherwise did not vote and youth who voted for the first time. In the latter group of the electorate the DVU got about 30% of the votes and became the strongest party. The Greens did not reach 20% but fell well below the minimum threshold of 5%.

Heiner Dribbusch, Mannheim



Ethical?

Eighty five thousand pounds is what the Labour Government spent subsidising the **UK's arms industry** attending a Paris arms fair. So much for New Labour's ethical foreign policy.

Belt up John

Readers may be aware of the £1m campaign launched by the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) to persuade back-seat passengers to wear their seatbelts. Which Government minister was one of the first to be caught out, when his ministerial limousine was stopped in Whitehall by the police? Step forward DETR's boss **John Prescott**. An unsmiling Prescott was given a copy of the official DETR leaflet advertising the campaign.

Duck!

Britain's shooting fraternity have launched a series of 'duck stamps' to raise money for wildfowling (ie. shooting ducks). The scheme was launched by Labour peer **Baroness Young**, whose last job was as...Head of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds!

Wagewatch

He couldn't live on the minimum wage. 'Tony Crony' peer **Lord Haskins**, chairman of Northern Foods, has shown his view of Government policy on pay restraint and awarded himself a 16% pay rise, taking his wages and bonus to £208,479 a year.

Testing times

Labour's candidates for **London's Mayor** will be required to sit a written exam on their knowledge of and support for Party policies. Maybe **Lord Bassam** can supply a crib sheet.

Double standards — double scotch?

Some Scottish Labour MPs have put down a Parliamentary motion attacking the SNP leadership for refusing to allow one-member one-vote selections for its Scottish Parliament elections. Let's see if they kick up the same fuss when Labour Party members are refused this right in the selection of Scottish candidates for the Euro elections. It is particularly ironic that one signature is **Anne Begg**, who is benefiting from the Labour whips' handing out pre-printed nomination papers for the NEC with her name on, rather than trusting the members to decide.

Donnygate

The poll tax is still with us. Betty Jack, 71-year-old grandmother, who suffers from Parkinson's disease and had just had her hips replaced, was jailed by Doncaster's Labour Council last month, for outstanding poll tax debts. That's the same **Doncaster Council** that is riddled with expense-fiddling, junket-taking councillors and where longstanding critic Ron Rose is threatened with expulsion for exposing the wrongdoing of the councillors.

Minister Without Diplomacy

Over the summer, **Mandelson** sparked a furore on a visit to Brazil when he publicly criticised Lula's Workers Party — like the Labour Party a member of the Socialist International — as having a "backward-looking vision not consistent with the Third Way." Presumably it's "backward-looking" to want all children over four to attend school, a reduced working week of 40 hours and health spending increased to the World Health Organisation recommended level of £1.30 per person. These are all Workers Party policies and Mandelson's right — they are inconsistent with the "Third Way".

Your chance to make a difference

Liz Davies, Grassroots Alliance candidate for the NEC, sets out her reasons for running for Labour's ruling executive.

RECENT OUTBURSTS from Millbank suggest that the Grassroots Alliance campaign for the NEC is viewed seriously and with alarm by the Party leadership. This confirms the feedback that the candidates have had at meetings up and down the country. We have all addressed many meetings of Party members, encouraging members to vote and trying to persuade them to vote for us.

At those meetings, the coming together of the centre and the left in the Grassroots Alliance has been greeted with approval and even relief. At long last, there is a clear alternative to the Blairites. We have found at those meetings that the beliefs shared by the Grassroots Alliance candidates and spelled out in our joint statement have struck a chord with Party members.

We are united by our commitments to protect the rights of Party members and to the redistribution of wealth and power from rich to poor. We share a burning commitment to social justice.

Had we been on the NEC last year, we would have opposed the cut in lone parent benefit and the introduction of tuition fees. We intend to campaign for a realistic level for the minimum wage and an end to the 40% threshold for trade union recognition. We will be defending the public sector and arguing that public sector workers should receive a decent, long awaited pay rise.

We oppose further privatisation, especially the growth of Private Finance Initiatives for health, education and local government.

We will stand up for pensioners' rights to a decent standard of living. I personally believe that pensions should again be index-linked to earnings, a formula which ensures that pensioners share in economic growth.

We stand for democracy, transparency and openness within the Party. Consultation should not be an exercise in rubber stamping the views of the leadership. We will work to ensure that members have the opportunity to amend policy documents and that their views are listened to and respected.

We stand for the right of Party members to select their own candidates for public office, be it for local government, for Westminster, the European Parliament, the Scottish Parliament or the Welsh Assembly. In London, Party members should have the right to determine, through an OMOV ballot, their candidate for Mayor, without the prior screening of candidates by Millbank.

We promise to keep a watchful eye on all attempts to use Party discipline to stifle dissent. Party members have the right to speak their minds and to disagree with the leadership without fear of disciplinary action.

Even within the self-imposed fetters of our pledge not to raise income tax, we can take steps to redirect resources. Corporation tax could be increased, rather than cut twice, as it has been since 1st May 1997. Money could be raised for local government by an increase in the top level banding for Council Tax. The ceiling on National Insurance contributions could be lifted. Cuts could be made in defence spending. Dividends can be taxed. And the revenue raised can be poured into revitalising the public sector and protecting and improving universal welfare benefits.

I believe Labour's foreign policy should be ethical in more than name. We should not be exporting arms to Indonesia, Nigeria or other oppressive regimes. I deeply regret that Labour did not, on the first day in office, restore welfare benefits to asylum seekers. Spending billions on new aircraft carriers is obscene and unjustifiable. As a start, we should adopt a plan to reduce military spending to the levels of other European countries.

I was asked at one meeting why there is no mention of peace in the Grassroots Alliance policy statement. The Alliance is a broad and healthy one and there is a diversity of views among the candidates. Its strength is that we all retain the freedom to speak our own minds, while coming together on basic socialist principles.

Speaking for myself, I remain a committed unilateralist. Events in south Asia have shown the continuing danger posed by nuclear weapons, and I can see no justification for Britain retaining an expensive and dangerous nuclear armoury.

Finally, I am deeply distressed at our Government's alacrity in supporting Bill Clinton's wholly unjustified Cruise missile attacks on Afghanistan and Sudan. A Labour Britain should be a friend to the poorer countries, and speak with a genuinely independent voice in world affairs.

- Vote now for Liz Davies, Andy Howell, Cathy Jamieson, Mark Seddon, Christine Shawcroft, Pete Willsman.
- Deadline for return of ballots is 25th September.
- Leaflets for the Centre-Left Grassroots Alliance slate are still available. Make sure everyone in your branch, constituency or trade union has one.
- Telephone every Party member you know to ensure they vote for all six Grassroots Alliance candidates.
- Report any irregularities to 0181-985 6597.

The Labour Party National Executive Committee		
Constituency Labour Parties		
	Place ☒ here	↓
Liz Davies	14	☐
Andy Howell	15	☐
Cathy Jamieson	16	☐
Mark Seddon	21	☐
Christine Shawcroft	22	☐
Pete Willsman	27	☐

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