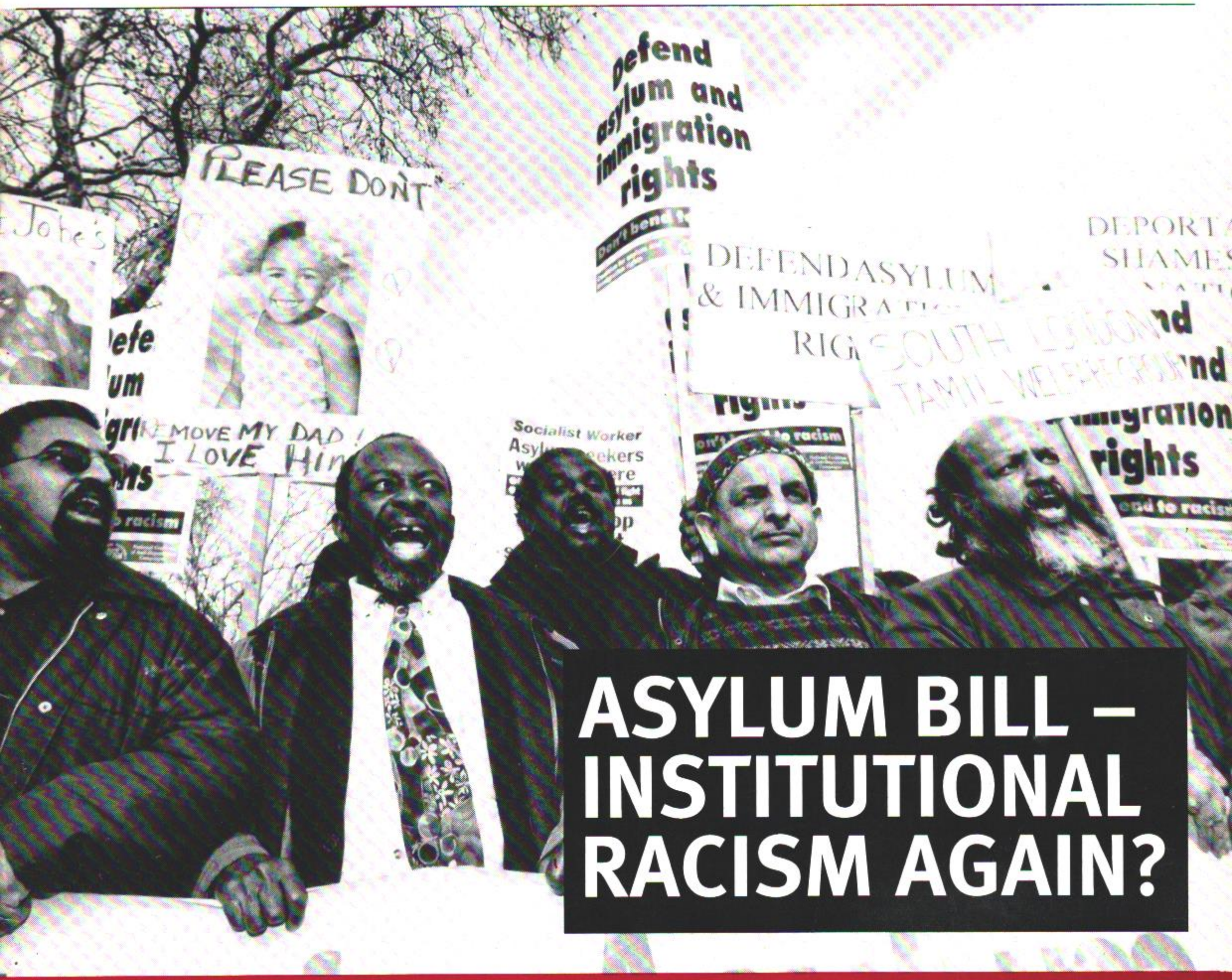
LABOUR LEFT

Briefing

APRIL 1999 • £1 WAGED • 50P UNWAGED



ASYLUM BILL – INSTITUTIONAL RACISM AGAIN?

RACE
Diane Abbott on Lawrence and Labour

LABOUR
Livingstone: a new vision for London

WORLD
Economy and the left after Lafontaine

RACE
Bringing the racist police to account

LABOUR LEFT Briefing

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

LLB is an independent voice and forum for socialist ideas in the Labour Party and trade unions. It is managed by an editorial board elected at its AGM. Both EBs and the AGM are open to all supporters. We are happy to offer a right of reply to all members of the labour movement and we welcome criticisms and contributions. All the articles in *LLB* reflect solely the opinions of the authors, writing in a personal capacity, unless otherwise stated.

Editorial Board
Graham Bash, Padma Bhatt, Ramen Bhattacharrya, Tony Dale, Liz Davies, Mark Donoghue, Jenny Fisher, Sean Fitzpatrick, Jon Green, Colin Hall, Des Kirkland, Liz Knight, Leonora Lloyd (Co-Chair), Sue Lukes, Dorothy Macedo (Co-Chair), Mike Marqusee (Political Correspondent), Fiona Monkman, Mike Phipps, David Pope, Jon Rogers, Christine Shawcroft, John Stewart, Alistair Ward (Editor).

Production Team
Graham Bash, Gary Drostle, Sean Fitzpatrick, Dave Lewney, Leonora Lloyd, Dorothy Macedo, Mike Phipps, David Pope, Eddie Tucker, Alistair Ward. Web site editor: Chris Croome (chris@atomism.demon.co.uk).

***LLB* advertising**
£10 per column inch; £30 for 1/8 page; £55 for 1/4 page; £100 for 1/2 page; £175 for a page. 1/2 price for campaigns and strikers.

***LLB* email list**
Send an email to llb_list@atomism.demon.co.uk with 'Join list" as the subject and your email address in the message.

***LLB* web slte**
http:l/www.labournet.org.uk/llb
"The best link page is maintained by Labour Briefing which lists virtually all the Labour sites currently available (but airbrushes out the Fabians and Progress)"
- Paul Richards, LCC, in *Tribune*.

■ The copy deadline for the May issue is Monday 12th April.



April 1999

Cover photo of the march against the Asylum and Immigration Bill by Paul Mattsson

CONTENTS

4-9 News and views
Diane Abbott MP on UK racism, the Lawrence inquiry, remember Blair Peach, Ken for mayor, welfare threats, the right to roam

10-13 Labour Party
Lords reform, Lewisham's mayor, Scottish conference, Camden, yet more new Party structures, Young Labour, the Alan Simpson column

14-21 International
Ireland centre spread, Turkey after Ocalan's arrest, the euro, Germany: nationality, the parties and Oskar Lafontaine, the Michael Hindley column

22-25 Trade unions
TU notebook, anti-union laws, SkyChefs, living wage demo, Goldsmiths occupation, the Geoff Martin column

26-28 Regulars
Periscope, Correspondence, AOB, the Liz Davies column

"*LLB* is a marvellous magazine. If you don't subscribe to it I hope you will." – Tony Benn

Annual subscription (10 issues): £14 ordinary, £20 supporting sub, £30 overseas.
Cheques payable to *Labour Left Briefing*

Name _____

Address _____

Tel/Fax/Email _____

Donation _____ Total _____

☐ I wish to pay by direct debit and receive three FREE copies
☐ I wish to take copies on a trial basis to sell

Return to *LLB*, PO Box 2378, London, E5 9QU

EDITORIAL

Civil rights not Met

The breadth of the indictment of "institutional racism" in Britain contained in the Macpherson Report is a tribute, above all, to the Lawrence family and the grass-roots campaigners who stood by their side from the beginning. One of the common features in the response to the report in both the right-wing and the liberal press was the absence of any awareness of the history of black struggle in this country and the real sources of many of the ideas and criticisms which have surfaced in the report.

Among the strengths of the report are a number of specific recommendations which the Government ought to implement without delay. These include proposals to subject the police to a freedom of information act, provide complete information to families prior to inquests, remove public interest immunity from police complaints inquiry reports, and grant legal aid for inquests to bereaved families. Suggestions for an independent police complaints system and a separate police authority for the Met are also welcome, although incomplete. Other recommendations, notably the abolition of the "double jeopardy" rule and other reductions in civil liberties, should be rejected.

'It is mechanisms of accountability, not just consultation, that need to be strengthened'

Sadly, the integrity of the report is undermined by its failure to deal with the overwhelming evidence of police corruption and collusion with criminals. This is not a peripheral issue. In this instance, racism worked through corruption, and corruption was reinforced by racism. The refusal to examine this nexus leads the report to over-emphasise the symbolic and "educational" remedies and to understate the "institutional" ones. The investigative process itself will remain largely sealed off in police stations. And, of course, Sir Paul Condon will remain in post, along with the majority of officers complicit in the racism documented in the report. It is mechanisms of accountability, not just consultation, that need to be strengthened.

The report leaves everything to statutory agencies, but without well-funded, respected and genuinely independent grass-roots organisations – those that forced the Lawrence case on to the national agenda – there can be no effective accountability. A meeting to launch a national civil rights movement, sponsored by many of the organisations and individuals involved in the Lawrence campaign, and by the Lawrences themselves, will be held at the Camden Centre in London on 28th March. It's an essential step in turning the fine words of Macpherson into concrete realities.

- Call 0181-843 2333 for more information.

Blair-faced hypocrisy

The new Immigration and Asylum Bill includes proposals to:

- withdraw benefits from all asylum seekers and replace them with food vouchers;
- extend detention powers and remove the right of appeal against deportation for people who have lived in the UK for over seven years;
- increase immigration officers' powers of search and arrest and maintain the immigration status checks by employers, introduced by the Tories, contrary to Jack Straw's specific pledge in opposition;
- require visitors to the UK from countries needing a visa to pay a financial bond;
- require marriage registrars to check the immigration status of couples wishing to marry.

As a whole, the new legislation intensifies the oppressive immigration policies of the Tories. It rests on the same logic which fuels the xenophobia of the right-wing press. It shares the assumptions that asylum-seekers are "bogus" (guilty until proven innocent). The Bill will also encourage the targeting of black people by the state and stereotyping by the media. It makes a mockery of the Government's fine words in the wake of the Macpherson Report. Jack Straw celebrates the Windrush pioneers and the "multi-cultural" Britain they helped to build, but under his current legislation the Windrush passengers would never have been permitted to disembark, and there would be no "multi-cultural" Britain.

The Bill received its Second Reading in the House of Commons in February and is now in committee. Despite speeches highlighting dangers in the Bill, no Labour MP felt able to vote against it. If the Bill is not substantially improved in committee Labour MPs will have to vote against it or lose credibility.

The Coalition for Asylum and Immigration Rights has been set up by the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns and the National Assembly Against Racism to co-ordinate opposition to the Bill. A national demonstration called by CAIR on February 27th brought thousands of people on to the streets of central London. Labour Party and trade union members should raise the Bill at local meetings and urge their MPs to oppose it in the House.

- More information on the campaign against the Bill can be obtained from NCADC on 0121-554 6947 or the NAAR on 0171-247 9907.

Abbott: 'Improve the Asylum

John Stewart and Graham Bash interviewed Diane Abbott, MP for Hackney North and Stoke Newington and a member of the Standing Committee on the Asylum and Immigration Bill.

What will be the main impact of the Bill for asylum seekers?

All asylum seekers will lose their benefits and will be given food vouchers instead. This applies not just to new asylum seekers, but existing ones too. For a number of asylum seekers in Hackney, losing housing benefit will mean losing their homes. The Government wants to move many asylum seekers from London to areas with empty housing. Many asylum seekers are going to find themselves either destitute or redirected hundreds of miles away. Asylum seekers will have to go where they are sent – if they move from there they will lose their food vouchers.

Immigration officers are going to have new powers to interview and arrest. Immigration officers have no training and there's no complaints authority for them. If you give them these new powers it could lead to an unfortunate death – like that of Joy Gardiner.

Also, the Bill takes away rights of appeal for overstayers. Some people come here as students and they settle and have children. Now they can appeal against deportation on humanitarian grounds. This Bill will take away this right completely.

Why has the Government taken this measure?

Councils need more money to provide the services and housing that asylum seekers need. The Government answer to this is not to provide the money but to try and shift asylum seekers out of London.

More fundamentally the Bill represents New Labour pandering to a *Daily Mail*, right wing, middle England agenda. The Bill has been accompanied by a tidal wave of xenophobic press articles about refugees. It's shameful that while Kent police pointed out that some of these articles were an incitement to racial hatred, ministers were silent.

What amendments do you and other like-minded members hope to put forward on the Committee?

I want to challenge the decision to remove benefits. If that fails, I want to see if we can win a reasonable cash sum on top of the food vouchers. If the Bill isn't amended in Committee to my satisfaction, I won't vote for it when it comes back to the House, but I feel it's important to be on the Committee and try to amend the Bill because it is going to be literally life and death to a lot of asylum seekers in areas like Hackney.

There has been criticism that members of the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs, with the exception of Tony Benn and Jeremy Corbyn, voted for the Second Reading of the Bill. Can you explain why this occurred?

I spoke at the Second Reading making clear that I was opposed to the Bill, but I voted for the Second Reading because I was anxious to be on the Committee – the Government won't put you on it unless you've actually voted for the Second Reading. I felt uncomfortable voting for the Bill but it was a tactical decision which has been widely misunderstood. If people read my speech, they will be clear where I'm coming from. I had a responsibility to improve the Bill. If we only get say £10 more cash for asylum seekers it will have been worth going on the Committee. I am aware that I compromised myself and regret that, but I hope people will judge me on my record on these issues and on the Committee. I had a terrible fight with the Whips who still didn't want to put me on the Committee because they know that once on the Committee I'm going to cause them a lot of trouble.

The Socialist Campaign Group of MPs remains the only group of MPs who have spoken out and I would expect colleagues to do so in the future. New Labour is being quite clear that there's a group of us they don't want back in Parliament next time. They will use our voting records against us. This may make some colleagues cautious about voting against the Government nowadays. This Bill is a life and death issue for me. I made my maiden speech on immigration and asylum. Half the cases at my surgery are immigration and asylum cases. If the Bill isn't improved in Committee – I won't be voting for its Third Reading.

What is your response to the Macpherson report on the murder of Stephen Lawrence? Do you think the Government will implement its recommendations?

I was pleased for the Lawrence family that the Inquiry happened. It was a vindication after seven years calling for an inquiry. The Inquiry's analysis of what went wrong and why Stephen died was excellent, but its recommendations are disappointing and now the Government is even backtracking from them. As a black person, you do feel you've been here before.

The report shows that Condon mismanaged the case from beginning to end: but he is still there. Tony Blair was unwilling to remove him because it's counter to the very strong New Labour law and order agenda. They are not interested in the debate Macpherson is trying to start about institutional racism.

There's been an appalling backlash in the *Mail* and the *Telegraph*. The *Standard* ran a piece trying to make out that all young black men are criminals. In the end, New Labour will back off from fulfiling its promise of a new era in race

Diane Abbott



Photo: Neil Budgen

Bill – or I cannot vote for it'

relations because catering for middle England is more important.

I was on the NEC for three years, just before the election and immediately afterwards, and New Labour interest in black voters, particularly working class black voters, has been quite limited. There's still only one Asian worker (a woman) in Downing Street among the hordes of advisers and spin doctors and researchers. There are no Afro-Caribbeans.

When Labour took over the GLC they made a point of bringing in women, and black people, and so on. Many of those recruits went on to do well in local authorities and politics. New Labour in government has not opened these doors for black people.

Exactly what do you see as the shortcomings of Macpherson's proposals?

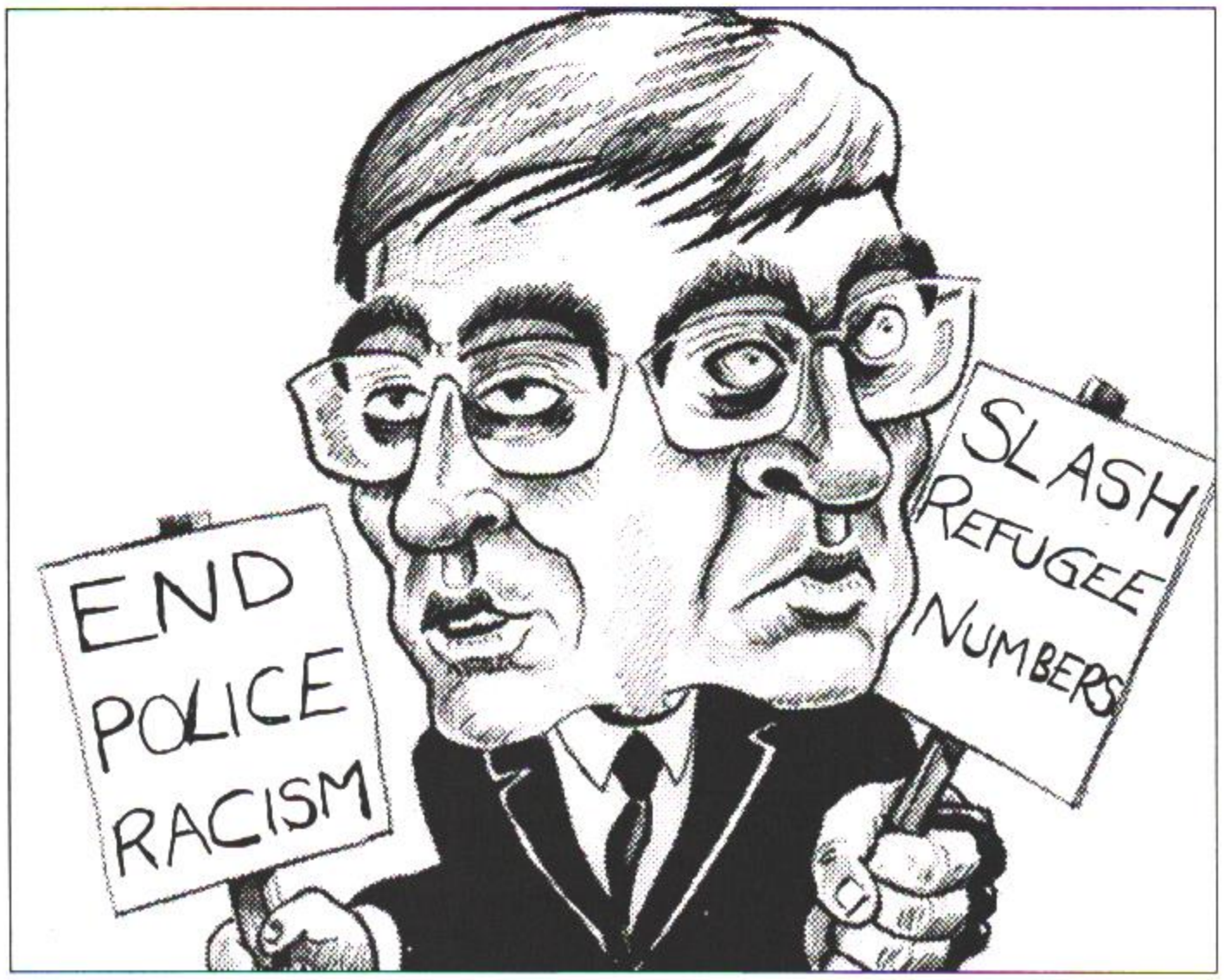
The proposal which means that you can be tried twice for the same offence is problematic in civil liberties terms.

Macpherson recognised the problem of institutional racism in the Metropolitan Police broadly, but he hasn't got to the root of it. Much of what they're suggesting, which is training and codes of conduct, has actually been done before. Jack Straw could build on the Lawrence Inquiry by making sure there is a strong police authority with strong representation for minority groups in London – but I suspect he won't.

Institutional racism has a powerful grip in the Met. The removal of Paul Condon would have sent shock waves through its structures. As he is staying a lot of the recommendations are just lip service.

Would the Macpherson proposals help improve accountability in the Met?

The report does suggest a police committee in London and Jack Straw has taken that up. The details and how members are appointed will be very important. Macpherson understands the issue of police accountability, but doesn't go into enough detail. My worry is that we will end up with a toothless police committee – particularly if we get a Mayor who's a lapdog of Millbank.



How do you think that the Labour Party and individual Party members have performed in supporting the Lawrence family campaign?

Labour Party members in the area were keen members of the campaign. When the private prosecution failed, I was approached by Party members in the area to see if I could get Jack Straw to see Doreen Lawrence. In fact I did get to take her to see Jack Straw (when he was still Shadow Home Secretary). He had never met her and was very impressed. As a consequence she was able to see him after the election and ask to set up the inquiry. People from other groupings have made a lot of noise and jumped on the Lawrence bandwagon, but at every point there's been Party members there giving support and trying to move the campaign forward.

It's been said that the Inquiry represents a watershed. Are people becoming more aware of racism in Britain?

People in Middle England, who have no experience of the Met or race issues, were able to relate to the Lawrences and maybe began to have an inkling of what it really means to be black and to put up with police abuse of powers and incompetence. The Lawrence campaign did produce a breakthrough in consciousness. However, the only time there's been a real watershed in race relations in this country is when black youth take to the streets. I would hate to think it would take that to get New Labour to address the issue properly. It's very hard to disentangle the issue of race from the issue of class. A Labour Government which was serious about race would be looking not just at policing but at education and wouldn't put forward the type of immigration and asylum legislation that it has.

The Lawrence Inquiry has created a wide debate about the Metropolitan Police – which is a good thing. But I'm sceptical as to whether the ground has shifted significantly. I do think it represents an opportunity to advance arguments about race equality. At street level, race relations in this country are better. In a communities like Hackney children mix and so on. But there is still savage racism in institutions like the police, in immigration, even in our school system.

The debate around asylum and immigration has become a vehicle for racism. Racism has economic roots. As long as you've got the economic preconditions for racism, racism isn't going to go away.

Bring the police to book

Jagdish Patel of The Monitoring Group calls for the police to be made accountable to the community.

The murder of Stephen Lawrence on 23rd April 1993 made no front pages. It was reported as a footnote in some papers, and could easily have passed as yet another tragic race killing in South East London. Six years later there must hardly be a person in the country who did not feel that the publication of the report from the Macpherson Inquiry into Stephen's death was a significant event, probably the most significant event this year.

The report presents us with a grim and depressing picture of the state of modern policing and race relations. For those of us who monitor the police force this is nothing new. Indeed there are plenty of reports written by community groups, campaigns and even Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary that have argued this for many years. This is real "kitchen table" knowledge.

The report cites a catalogue of errors, incompetence, possible corruption, and racism. For example on the night of the murder, when Stephen fell to the ground there were a number of officers present at the scene within minutes. The exact number is not clear as notes have since disappeared and officers couldn't remember exactly who was present. Other people present included two 14 year old girls who lived nearby.

The report notes that one of them was "amazed that no-one was attending to the body on the floor or trying to stem the flow of blood. She saw that there was a lot of blood and her knowledge of First Aid told her that something ought to have been done". The report comments, "a 14 year old instructed in First Aid knew what ought to have been done – yet police officers who were trained did not appreciate that this was an action which ought to have been taken.

In the wake of the publication of the report, two issues were put in the forefront of the media coverage. The first was the recruitment of black officers, which the MPS Black Officers Association have eloquently dismissed, and secondly that of defining institutional racism, as if a change of definition will make any difference. In any event, the track record of the Race Relations Acts speaks for itself. Despite the spin, it is worth noting that Sir William Macpherson has made some startling liberal recommendations. That an establishment judge recognises that an independent police complaints authority is needed gives a surprising slant on the case.

As you would expect, many of the recommendations impose the "CRE anti-racist model" onto the Metropolitan Police. The fact that the newly enlightened Metropolitan Police Force now describes itself as "anti racist" tells us a lot about that model.

This case could have disappeared from the public arena. The fact that we now consider the murder of Stephen Lawrence as a significant event in our history is a tribute to the family of Stephen, especially Doreen and Neville, their lawyers and the campaigners who have helped them. This report has not adequately recognised the importance of family campaigns and independent grassroots advocates. Whatever remedies are tried in the wake of the Macpherson report, unless we have in place proper mechanisms to make the police force, indeed the whole investigatory process, accountable to the family affected and the local community, it will always be easy for police forces to harbour officers whose attitudes and prejudices are intolerable to the rest of us.

- The Monitoring Group will be organising a series of seminars to discuss the report and its implications. Please call us on 0181-843 2333 if you want further details.

National demonstration

Who killed Blair Peach?

Saturday 24th April

assemble 1pm,

Dominion Centre,

The Green, Southall

Justice for Blair Peach

John Stewart, Treasurer of the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns writes.

Blair Peach, a thirty-three year old teacher, was killed on 23rd April 1979 at a demonstration in Southall, West London, protesting against the activity of the National Front in the area. Witnesses saw him attacked and clubbed around the head by members of the Metropolitan Police's Special Patrol Group. Despite a vigorous campaign by friends and comrades no public inquiry into his death was ever conducted and no police officer was ever called to account for his killing

.The late 70s were a period of rising neo-Nazi activity. The National Front and other far-right groups had stepped up their activity, both contesting elections and holding marches and demonstrations in areas with large black communities. The anti-NF demonstration in Southall, where Blair was killed, was one of many where thousands of socialists and anti-racists mobilised to stop the fascists from marching

.Twenty years on, as a memorial to Blair Peach and others injured or killed in the battle against fascism and racism, and to restate the call for a public inquiry into his death, a march has been organised through Southall on Saturday 24th April.

Fighting on two fronts

Ken Livingstone links his mayoral campaign to the future of the Labour Party.

The campaign for the London mayor is also about the future of urban living internationally and the future of democracy in our Party.

Some time this year the world's population will surpass six billion and if we are lucky will stabilise at about nine billion by the middle of the next century. Many cities around the world have surpassed London at its most populous and in the Third World's new mega-cities people live in conditions of poverty as bad as anything that existed in 19th century London. The vast majority of people will live in great cities. If London with all its wealth cannot provide a decent quality of life for all its citizens, what hope is there for the inhabitants of Calcutta or Mexico City?

Consequently the challenges facing the new mayor and assembly for London are more important than just the problems facing London. Forging a international agenda for city-dwellers, encouraging commerce and the arts, but always with a strong social and democratic focus, is something that the Greater London Authority will have to do automatically if it is to be a success. Conversely, a Labour led authority which does not begin to map out such an agenda will probably not be sufficiently forward looking to modernise London either.

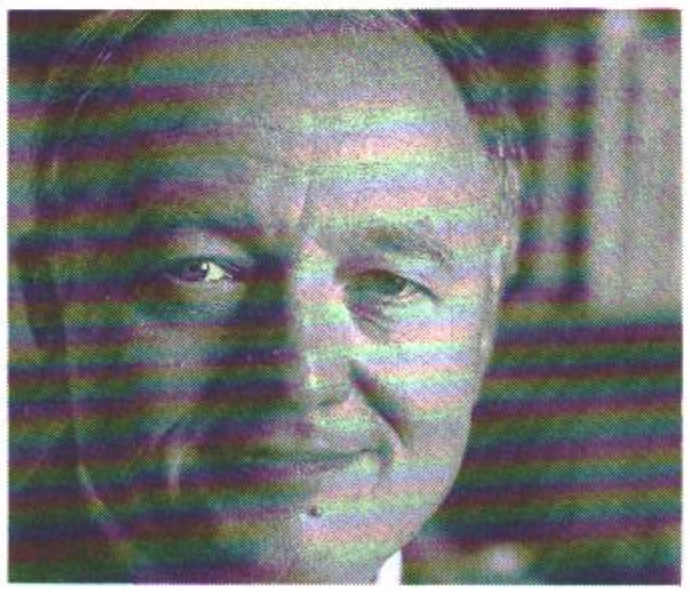
In this light, ensuring that the Labour Party has the most inclusive selection procedure is a necessity, not a luxury. Readers of *Labour Left Briefing* will therefore be pleased to learn that the debate about how Labour's candidate will be selected has reached new heights of maturity over the last four weeks. Having my 'paranoia' and 'ego' attacked by Labour's Minister for London Nick Raynsford was only the half of it. I've never met Sion Simon but I'm told that in New Labour circles he's a real gunslinger. Writing in the *Spectator*, this New Labour insider went one stage further and condemned my "psychotic egomania". Sion suggests that "his is a sectarianism so virulent that it completely transcends policy content"! And you thought the far left was where the bile was.

Underneath all this extraordinary vitriol, the Millbank Tendency's hard line agenda is becoming apparent. The refusal to allow the members to decide for themselves means that one member one vote has now become an expendable commodity. Sion Simon argues: "Labour Party democracy, like that of the nation at large, is representative in recognising that popular support does not confer moral legitimacy. Single member democracy is a simplistic notion which Tony Blair is now paying the price for having previously promoted in a simplistic way." Simon's agenda is clear. OMOV is only acceptable if it gives Millbank the results it wants. The left should take this threat to OMOV seriously.

The debate on the London mayor is now being fought on two fronts: one trying to hammer out a progressive agenda for London within the Government's tight constraints, the other fighting for the rights of ordinary members in the London Labour Party to make the decision on the mayoral candidate. By any standards this campaign has been exciting and invigorating. There is clearly considerable affection among Labour Party members for the agenda set by the last Labour GLC administration. However, contrary to the sniping of the commentators, it is not possible to go back to the 1980s, and the left must play a constructive role in explaining that the new mayor and assembly will not be able to resolve London's problems overnight. For example, there is no spare capacity on the London underground and it is therefore not possible – whatever some parts of the far left are arguing – to cut fares on the tube without completely overburdening the system. To ease the congestion on the tube we must concentrate on rapidly improving the quality of bus services.

The intensified debate is about a serious fight for London's future. By ensuring that we have stayed linked up to the democratic centre of the Party it has become one of those rare occasions where the left is making the running again, and it is doing so with the basic arguments about democracy on its side.

● Badges, stickers and newsletters can be ordered from PO Box 20052, London NW2 5ZH. Badges 50p each; 10 stickers for 50p. Cheques payable to "Ken's Right to Stand".



Ken Livingstone

MODEL RESOLUTION

We are alarmed by continuing media speculation that Ken Livingstone, who has consistently been the front-runner in opinion polls for the position of London mayor, may be excluded from the ballot to select Labour's candidate, thereby depriving London Party members of a fair choice of candidates and harming the Party's public standing.

We recommend to the NEC:

1. that all candidates enjoying significant public support, including Ken Livingstone, are included on the final shortlist;

2. that the final selection between shortlisted candidates is made by an OMOV ballot of all London Labour Party members. We resolve to forward this recommendation to the GLLP acting Director, and the Labour Party General Secretary.

Workfare: it's not well fair

Jon Green, Tottenham CLP, reports on the latest moves to destroy the welfare state by a government that claims to believe in fairness for all.

Following the confusion of the Harman/Field era at the DSS, the Government's direction on welfare reform has become crystal clear. The welfare state, currently based on the twin foundations of universal benefits and full employment, will be replaced by a "workfare state" with means-tested benefits targeted towards the "deserving" poor. These priorities are underlined in this Parliament's first substantive welfare reform bill and by Gordon Brown's budget. The budget's central themes were "fairness" and "enterprise" rather than equality.

The welfare reform process was launched with the promise that "Beveridge's principles will remain central". Those principles were listed as helping those in genuine need, responsibility to provide for yourself when possible, and work as the best route out of poverty for those able to work. While it is clear that the welfare reforms proposed by Parliament were in line with these principles, it is a sleight of hand to say that these were also the central principles of Beveridge.

The background to the Beveridge report was the experience of the more than a million who were unemployed throughout the inter-war years and the use of the hated means test. Its publication was greeted with enthusiasm and the first 60,000 copies of the report quickly sold out. The launch of the new system of welfare "from the cradle to the grave" led to great expectations.

For Beveridge the principle of universality was central. National Insurance contributions were kept low enough so that all who worked could pay in. This guaranteed entitlements to benefits. Beveridge expected that those who were wealthier would take out private provision while still being entitled to the universal benefits. Beveridge argued that this was the "strongest grounds for repudiating a means test".

Beveridge's other central idea was full employment. This was "for its own sake and not simply to make a plan for Social Security to work more easily". Creating full employment was the responsibility of the Government, using all available means to create enough demand for "jobs at fair wages". He recognised that this would require "a more equitable distribution both of material resources ... and of leisure" to ensure that the state had the means to achieve the end of full employment.

There were several flaws with the Beveridge model: those not working were still reliant on means-tested benefits, benefit levels were too low and full employment did not necessarily guarantee greater equality. The main criticisms of the welfare state from the left were that it did not end poverty – particularly of pensioners.

New Labour's welfare reforms are inspired by a completely different set of influences. The New Right in the US coined the phrase "welfare dependency" to launch an assault on the social security system. Charles Murray in particular blamed the rise of an "underclass" on lone mothers in urban areas. The solution offered by Lawrence Mead was to introduce a compulsory workfare system forcing claimants to work.

As a response to the New Right the communitarianism of Amitai Etzioni offered a "middle way". Etzioni opposed any new rights and placed an emphasis on responsibilities that go with existing rights. Family and community life were seen as the central force for the good of society.

The impact of the New Right and communitarianism on the debate on welfare in the Labour Party can be seen in the Social Justice Commission report. The report centred on community, family and crime rather than equality. The debate on the welfare state was caricatured as being between "deregulators" and "levellers". As an alternative the Commission preferred an "investors' " welfare system. This would combine the ethics of community with the dynamics of a market economy.

The Social Justice Commission report shaped the debate on New Labour's welfare reforms. The New Deal is the main response, aimed at re-skilling the unemployed. The priority is to ensure equal opportunities for all rather than redistribution from rich to poor. The Government has shifted from entitlements to duties placed on individuals as part of a community. Whereas Beveridge saw the state as central to the aim of achieving full employment, New Labour relies on enterprise. The reality is that this reliance on the free market to create work for a re-skilled workforce will lead to increasing inequality, leaving millions in low waged, insecure employment. Those most in need, who rely on means-tested benefits, will become vulnerable to pressures for tax cuts from middle income earners as the welfare state is reduced to a residual safety net.

The terms "fairness" and "community" can have any number of meanings. As *The Economist* put it following the budget; "Whereas 'equality' is a strong political idea whose meaning is clear, fairness is marvellously slippery. You know where an egalitarian government is coming from, what it wants to do and why it wants to do it ... 'Fairness', by contrast, is a label a government can slap on pretty much any policy it chooses."

New Labour's welfare reforms address the wrong set of priorities. We need to place an egalitarian welfare system on the agenda to address the inadequacies of the Beveridge system while remaining consistent with the principle of universality and full employment.

LABOUR'S WELFARE REFORMS

- **all claimants including single mothers and the disabled will be required to attend and actively participate in a work-focused interview before becoming entitled to benefit.**
- **incapacity benefit will be limited to people who have paid full national insurance contributions in one of the two previous years and people with occupational pensions of above £50 a week will have their benefit cut.**
- **the framework for stakeholder pensions is outlined. This will be followed by a more substantive reform of pensions that will abolish SERPS with the aim of shifting millions of pensions into the private sector.**

Get ready to ramble

David Beskine, the Ramblers Association's campaign director, welcomes Government plans for the countryside.

When the Government announced it would, after all, introduce a right to roam you could almost hear the land owning lobby collectively rushing to the nearest gunsmith for fresh supplies of shotguns.

The *Daily Telegraph* – mouthpiece of the Get Off My Land fraternity – spluttered that Environment Minister Michael Meacher had been swayed by "old fashioned class prejudice" and a "squalid electoral calculation based on the fact that most voters live in towns". *Shooting Times and Country Magazine* castigated the decision as an "open invitation for anyone to gatecrash and traipse over the countryside". It said the announcement was part of a class vendetta.

Judging by the widespread frothing of mouths and gnashing of teeth, you might have imagined that Mr Meacher had proposed nationalisation of all private property in the kingdom. Unsurprisingly, however, the reality is far different. The Government has merely committed itself to allowing the public to walk on mountain, moor, heath, down and common land in England and Wales – subject to common sense restrictions to protect crops, animals and the environment. No appropriation of private property will be involved and there is no evidence that land values will be affected in the slightest. Landowners and farmers will be able to continue happily with their daily routine without change, as they do in several other western European nations such as Sweden and Germany, where people already have freedom to roam.

People in this country find the concept of a right to roam so sensible and moderate that national opinion polls – commissioned before the Government's announcement – persistently showed that between 83 and 85 per cent supported it. Indeed, of the 2,200 individuals and organisations responding to the Government's own right to roam consultation paper, 80 per cent wanted legislation giving people access to open, uncultivated countryside.

Walking is becoming increasingly popular as a leisure activity as more and more people start to appreciate the wonders of the natural environment. Ten million people now walk frequently. But too many landowners try to shut the public out of the countryside – barbed wire, electric fences and Keep Out signs have become ever more evident. The right to roam will stop the population being barred from the nicer areas in this green and pleasant land – which after all are part of our common heritage. The overwhelming moral case for the right to roam has been recognised and the Government, which promised a right to roam in the run up to the last election, has honoured its promises. The will of the people has been acknowledged and a policy based on nothing more than common sense has been set in train.

We look forward to getting around the negotiating table with other environmental groups, the Government and the land-owning lobby to help introduce the right to roam as speedily as possible.

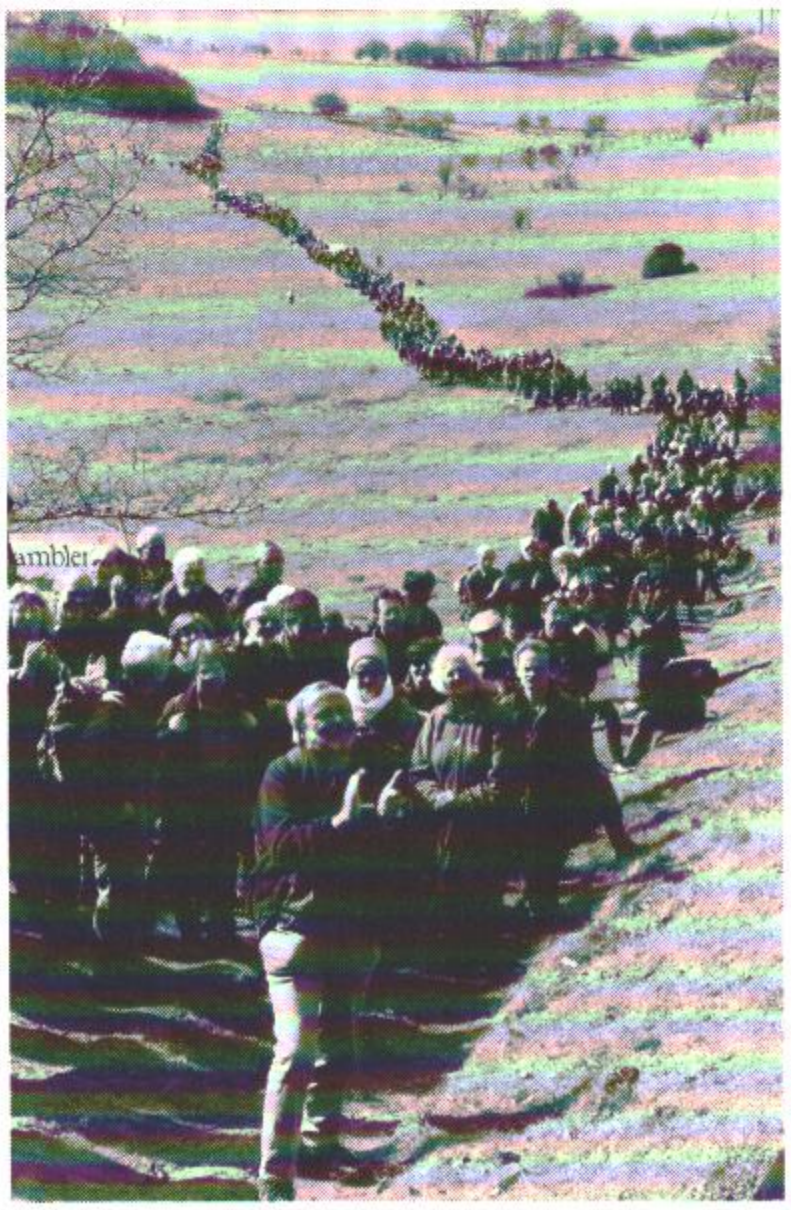


Photo: Ulrike Preuss

Ramblers join day of protest

Walk on the mild side

Richard Moyse of The Land is Ours, outlines the restrictions of the new legislation.

The Government still has one eye to the country landowners, and has decided to pick and choose certain landscapes for the rest of us to walk in. In doing so, it has put the recreational pursuits of the wealthy above the leisure activities of the rest of us

We will not for the time being at least be able to walk in woodland in case we upset the shooting fraternity. We will not be able to walk along riverbanks in case we bother the flyfishers. How many pheasant shooters are Labour voters? Why is their rural recreation more important than ours?

The bitty approach which has resulted from this appeasement process has made a rod for the Government's back or, rather, for the back of its Countryside Agency. First, the landscape types included in the Government proposals will need to be defined. What is downland, for example? Is it a type of wildflower grassland, or does it mean chalky hill country? Then all the land considered to fall within the definition of open country will need to be mapped. Finally, everybody will need to have access to the maps and learn how to use them with great precision. It is workable (just) but it will generate years of wrangling and confusion.

This is not to say that the Government's proposals are not a good thing. It may be possible to include further landscape types in the future, so that we may one day get to roam in woodland, on river banks, in orchards, or along the coast. It is certainly the most significant landrights legislation to have been introduced since 1949.

Lording it over the members

Ann Black looks at Lords reform and finds Party members will have little influence over decisions.

"Consultation, consultation, consultation" is New Labour's catchphrase, but it yields little visible influence on policy or issues like Parliamentary selection. The latest exercise, on a successor to the House of Lords, does not even allow time for local branch discussion. On 10th March, CLP secretaries received a paper and an invitation to regional meetings, some – including London – as early as 13th March. The deadline for responses is 6th April, sent to Millbank or emailed to democracy@lpho.poptel.org.uk, and copied to your National Policy Forum representative.

Serious issues are at stake. While a purely elected body could challenge the Commons for legitimacy, other methods of selection are open to charges of patronage. Some have suggested that the second chamber should be elected through a system modeled on the wildly unpopular Euro-lists. It is unfortunate that the Democracy and Citizenship Policy Commission cannot ensure better democratic debate within the Party.

Constituencies are already unhappy that they could not select and rank their European candidates, especially when £2,000 of their membership money is being sequestrated for the elections. Coincidentally, the total amount, a million pounds, is just what the NEC has earmarked for a new glossy quarterly magazine. Is this really the people's priority?

● Ann Black is a member of the National Policy Forum and the Labour Reform Steering Committee. She is standing for the NEC as part of the Grassroots Alliance slate.

Members are asked to consider the following questions:

- What sort of second chamber would best maintain the position of the House of Commons as the pre-eminent chamber of Parliament?
- What should be the functions of the reformed second chamber? Are there new functions it should be asked to perform?
- Should the powers of the second chamber be reduced?
- How can the second chamber take account of the newly-devolved institutions and regional interests in the UK?
- How can a proper geographical spread of representation be achieved among the membership of the second chamber?
- How can we ensure that an independent element is retained in the second chamber, as promised in our manifesto?
- How can we retain an element of specialist knowledge among members of the second chamber?
- How can we ensure fair representation for currently under-represented groups in the second chamber such as women and ethnic minorities?
- Any other comments?

GRASSROOTS ALLIANCE SLATE FOR NOMINATIONS TO BE MADE BY APRIL 9TH

National Constitutional Committee (Constituency Section): **Teresa Pearce**

Conference Arrangements Committee (Constituency Section): **Audrey Wise**

National Policy Forum:
Eastern – Russell Cartwright, Jenny Holland, Mathew Willgress (youth)
East Midlands – Helen Anderton, Gary Ransford
West Midlands – Pat Tough, Raghib Ahsan
London – Dorothy Macedo, Kumar Murshid
North West – Kath Fry, Valerie Wise
Scotland – Pauline Bryan, Gordon Munro
South East – Ann Black, Claire Wadey, Simon Hewitt (youth)
South West – Ella Davison (youth)
Wales – John Lewis, Maggie Simpson, Veronica Wood, Darren Jones (youth)
Yorkshire and Humberside – Eddie Hart, George McManus, Alexis Powell, Gerry Ramsden

Democracy off the agenda in Lewisham

Des Kirkland, Deptford CLP, argues that the decision on an elected mayor will destroy local democracy.

The Labour Party is promoting directly elected mayors with wide ranging powers within local councils. Lewisham, eager to show that it is a modernising council, has already taken the decision.

A select committee was established, which excluded Labour councillors who were not seen as part of the council leader's "modernising" team. As well as mayoral issues, the committee was charged with revamping the council structure into an "assembly", with eight assembly members appointed to a cabinet.

With such dramatic structural changes proposed it would be natural to expect a full public consultation at all stages. But the majority of residents are totally unaware of the proposals, as the committee only consulted with the Minister for Local Government, and select Lewisham Citizens Panel members.

The recommendations from the select committee were adopted by the full March council meeting:

- The mayor shall be elected using the supplementary vote system.
- A maximum of two four-year terms for the mayor.
- Cabinet members may have full or part-time posts.
- The Assembly shall consist of 54 councillors (as against the present 67).
- The majority required to vote down a proposal of the mayor shall be two-thirds.
- Favour a move to proportional electoral system.

The proposals to be implemented from May 1999. When these changes go through, massive amounts of power and decisions about the use of the council budget will be held by a very small number of people, the mayor and cabinet. This will leave other councillors and residents with no real ability to challenge those decisions. It is being reported widely that the leader of the council Dave Sullivan is aiming to be Lewisham's first elected mayor.

Scottish Conference – fightback on the fringe

Bill Butler, Glasgow Maryhill CLP, reports on the Scottish Labour Party Conference. He is a member of the National Policy Forum and Convenor of the Campaign for Socialism. Bill is standing for the NEC constituency section as part of the centre-left Grassroots Alliance.

This year's abbreviated conference was, in effect, a pre-election rally for the Scottish General Election to be held on 6th May.

Presentationally, the conference was slick and professional, and was marked by a determination to present to the Scottish electorate a picture of a strong, united party capable of defeating the nationalists and making the Parliament work. There is little doubt that at this level the conference proved a success. No less a personage than the Prime Minister himself concluded his address by calling on "New Labour, Old Labour, Social Democrats, Socialists and Just plain Labour" to campaign together to defeat the separatists. Such a call to arms from the leader himself is a welcome departure – and a recognition, let us hope, that the Party's real strength resides in all of its committed members, and not just a small number of apparatchiks passing down a pro-ordained line to be faithfully regurgitated.

Coincidentally, the need for a renewed commitment to participatory democracy at all levels of the Party was one of the main themes explored at the busiest meeting on the conference fringe, the Campaign for Socialism (CFS)'s Towards A New Socialist Scotland.

There was general agreement that the Party at all levels must not only be democratic, but must be seen to be democratic. It was clearly recognised that all strands of opinion within the Party must have the opportunity to be involved directly in Labour's decision-making processes.

The need for One Member One Vote (OMOV) at all levels of the Party was also aired. In the opinion of many comrades the centre-left of the Party has little to lose and much to gain by embracing OMOV, certainly in elections to positions of responsibility within the Party. Incidentally, for the first time ever, the election to the constituency section of the Scottish Executive will be by OMOV. CFS supported this change and remains cautiously optimistic as to its effect. It is vital that a party that correctly preaches the need for social inclusion must avoid any suspicion of internal political exclusion.

A related issue raised at the CFS fringe was the need for a devolved Scottish Labour Party. It was argued that the advent of the Scottish Parliament presented an opportunity to develop a devolved structure. It was acknowledged that greater autonomy was not a threat to the UK Party but simply a realisation that political devolution required a parallel devolved Party structure.

There was talk of the need to pursue a post-devolution accord; a modern agreement that recognised the changed circumstances of the relationship between the Scottish Labour Party and the Party centrally. This issue is clearly one that the Party will return to after May 6th.

The tenor of the weekend was reasonably optimistic. Perhaps the mood was best caught by John McAllion MP, one of the speakers at the CFS fringe, when he summed up the purpose of the new Scottish Parliament by quoting Keir Hardie – the aim was to enable "the sunshine of socialism" to illumine the lives of the people.

More prosaically, Labour MSPs must develop policies that promote jobs, expand educational opportunity, provide quality housing and ensure a modern Scottish NHS.

Fighting Camden cuts

Councillor Roger Robinson
St Pancras Ward, Camden

The voluntary sector may be used to annual cuts in grants by now but local authorities, particularly those run by Labour, should know better if they are really serious about equality. Camden's Leisure Services Committee met in February and decimated services in St Pancras, the ward with the highest social exclusion levels in the borough.

The volunteer-run local Youth and Community Centre lost most of its grant and was told by the Young Person's Committee to join another over-subscribed under fives group. The Advice Centre, which dealt with over 1,000 cases in six months, had its grant withdrawn as officers claimed the centre was under-performing! Numerous services and facilities saw a similar fate. Why? The site joining both venues will most likely be sold to a developer as Camden Town becomes even more gentrified. Our ward has the second highest unemployment in Camden, is overcrowded and dominated by the red route and heavy commuter traffic. Its people are being sacrificed to the profit motive and Camden Council's desire to become a beacon council.

We are fighting back with a public meeting at the Camden Palace on 29th March and continuing talks with the Chairs of Finance and Resource Management and Leisure and officers alongside those fighting the library cuts and cuts to the youth service.

'Stuff the Party: let's party'

Christine Shawcroft, Grassroots Alliance candidate for the NEC, condemns the shift away from politics in Labour's organisation.

The current party organisation of CLPs, DLPs and LGCs which is enshrined in the Rule Book in now to be seen as advisory only. Favoured areas are being encouraged to experiment with forms of organisation which have no official backing, rules or standing orders, and therefore can't be challenged by local members.

Regional officers are now advising CLPs and LGCs that they need reform. They should vote themselves out of existence and set up Local Government Forums (run by unaccountable cliques) and new Constituency Co-ordinating Groups. The latter are elected by an all member annual meeting. Then the fun really starts. Constituency Issue Groups are set up: three on the National Policy Forum papers, one on Local Issues, one on Topical Subjects (eg. the Undeclared War With Iraq Issue Group), in fact as many as you want. This assumes your political interests can be compartmentalised in this way. If you are interested in local schools, do you go to Education or Local Issues? Should the Iraq bombings be discussed in the Crime Issue Group? What if you are interested in lots of issues – you could be going to six or seven Issue Groups. Ordinary local members, as opposed to the activists, are not prepared for this level of activity, and Party managers know it. Expect lots of Issue Groups to be set up and sink without trace. Oh well, the regional hierarchy will say, better reform all types of meetings out of existence then.

The new structures do have good ideas about holding lots of events for new members to get them involved. They suggest quarterly new members meetings which is an excellent idea and I hope activists will take this up now without waiting for their GC to be abolished first.



Christine Shawcroft

Monthly social functions are suggested, which I suppose are a good idea if they feature coffee or cats, but not if they mean pubs. But ancillary groups are being mooted, including a Labour Football team (yawn), a book circle (interesting possibilities) and restaurant and wine tasting groups !

That the People's Party should have come to this! I hate it when people come over all prolier than thou. I would never pretend that I've never set foot in a restaurant and prefer to race my whippets, but the idea that Party members have enough money, time and babysitters to regularly go round comparing restaurants and expensive wines, and to do all this as a substitute for political activity, absolutely beggars belief. These structures are the negation of political activity and the establishment of monied urban elites with a regular table at Granita. Why not use the coming Centenary Year celebrations to remind all your local members what the Labour Party really stands for?

Blairites smother Young Labour

Jane Cosher, Youth and Student Officer, NE Hants CLP discovered how stage-managed youth conferences are in today's Labour Party.

London Young Labour's "Europe and the Future" conference started with pro-Blairite MPs Nick Raynsford MP and Siobhain McDonagh MP praising the Government's achievements. Raynsford, when asked about his views on the selection process for Mayor of London, said that it would be fair but he was not against a selection committee to ask candidates about their views.

Pauline Green talked about her experiences as an MEP. Asked about suggestions of corruption within the European Commission, she said that such allegations should be based on proof rather than speculation. If individuals were found to be guilty, they should go, but she felt that certain levels of corruption were permissible in some societies.

The most interesting discussion was on fighting racism across Europe with Claude Moraes, Paul Boateng's adviser Ashish Bhatt, and a Home Office spokesperson. Moraes was concerned at the benefits of PR for far right parties, claimed many black and Asian people did not feel that they "belonged to the European Union", and stressed the need to combat racism. Bhatt felt that the only reason why fewer UK respondents to a Europe-wide survey said they were racist was because people in this country were less likely to admit this openly.

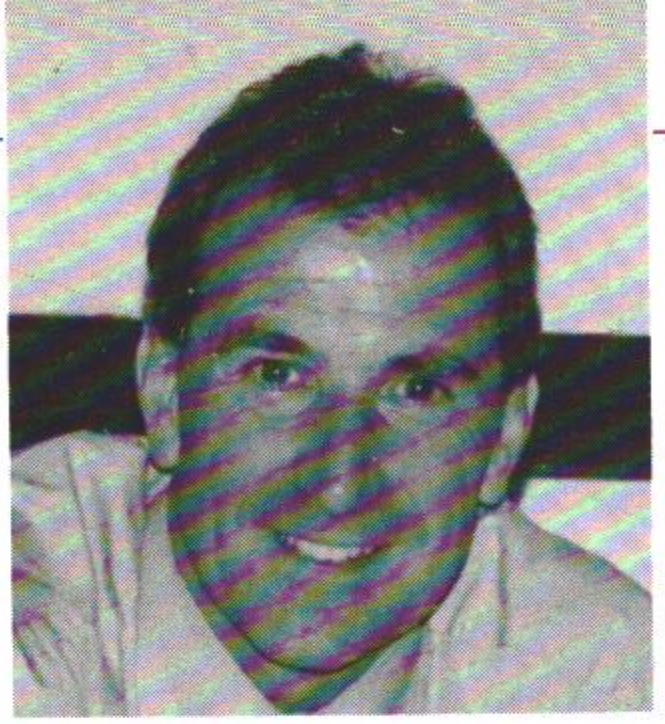
Personally, I found the "Labour and the future" session frustrating as everyone preferred to dwell on the positive sides of the agenda and how this should be publicised to young people. I didn't feel confident to speak up, as I appeared to be in a minority. It would have been more interesting and balanced to have a variety of speakers representing different sides of the Party. It got a bit tedious hearing people toeing the party line and saying how brilliant Tony Blair and his cabinet were.

GRASSROOTS ALLIANCE NEC SLATE

- **Ann Black**
- **Bill Butler**
- **Liz Davies**
- **Mark Seddon**
- **Christine Shawcroft**
- **Pete Willsman**

As many CLP nominations as possible are needed. The closing date os 9th April. Liz, Mark, Christine and Pete are asking CLPs who nominated one of them last time to nominate the same person this year.

Call 0181-985 6597 for leaflets and speakers.



THE **ALAN SIMPSON** COLUMN

It was always hard to think of Harold Wilson as a radical. I could never quite bring myself to forgive him for the absence of a stand against the Vietnam War. But three things prompted me to think more generously of him after Labour's latest budget.

Firstly, we were told this would be the budget to guarantee Labour a second term. One thing no one could take from Harold was his ability to win re-election. Yet such is the state of our collective lack of confidence that, even with the biggest majority a Labour government has ever had, we still have enormous doubts about our ability to win a second term without occupying substantial amounts of ground more comfortably embraced by the Tories.

The second Wilson recollection was that when he first stood at the dispatch box, having been elected as leader of the Party, he was denounced by the Tories for holding closet convictions about Clause IV and its commitment to the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange. Wilson took the opportunity to confirm that that was exactly what he believed in. Sadly, in today's competitive political race for the "middle ground", such an ideological distinction between Labour and Tory is dismissed as sterile conflict over outdated issues. So the closest we now get to any form of common ownership is in the heart flutter of new employee share ownership schemes. Everything today is driven by a touchingly naive belief that the free market will come up with all that it has conspicuously failed to deliver over the last 20 years – full employment, social equity and economic growth.

'Everything today is driven by a touchingly naive belief that the free market will come up with all that it has conspicuously failed to deliver over the last 20 years – full employment, social equity and economic growth'

One of Wilson's most important observations about the age he was living through was his view that "in an increasingly technological society, the engine of economic growth is in public sector investment". You would not find this within the core assumptions underpinning current Labour budgets. In fact, it is hard to see where the engine of economic growth now is. For all the Chancellor's moving about of deck chairs on the ship of state, it is difficult to see where the ship is being steered.

Some things are clear enough. New Labour is fiscally cautious. It is pro-business and pro-tax cuts. We are also pro-family (if they are working) and pro-pensioners (but not a lot). The budget was mildly redistributive in its taxes (by a net £1.4 billion) but caught a lot of people by giving with one hand and taking with the other. The fundamentals of the new welfare are driven by means-testing.

Historically, Third Way politics have always been about managing the poor rather than managing the economy. Today, it is no different. Means-testing is simply a mechanism for division, stigma and frustration, and was always best honed by the Tories.

Yet the most startling gap in the Chancellor's calculations is the belief that economic growth will somehow save the day. Even the scaled-down Treasury assumptions of 1.5% growth this year look wildly hopeful when you glance beyond Britain's shores. City financiers are beginning to say that Japan may have to nationalise its banks (ie. their debts) in order to control their collapsing economy. The USA rides a wave of stock market hype that belies the collapse of company profits. If Japan is forced to repatriate the capital it currently has in US bonds, we will all have to head for cover. Other storm clouds threaten, such as devaluation and austerity measures in Brazil, corruption in Europe, lingering shocks from south east Asia and the ongoing chaos in Russia.

If growth is to come sooner rather than later, we will have to return to public sector investment – building new homes, and upgrading old ones, a national public transport strategy, low impact and sustainable technologies – and to the re-regulation of global markets. As Larry Elliott pointed out in a post-Budget debate in *The Guardian*, if growth is what you want, consider this: if you divide Britain's post-war era in half, the first half (with massive public investment and intervention) had twice the rate of growth of this final (post 1973) period. Keynes delivered in a way monetarism simply cannot.

I wouldn't bet on getting to the end of the century before we are all rudely reminded of this.

What future for Irela

Beacon for justice snuffed out

Michelle Gildernew, Sinn Fein Assembly Member for Fermanagh/South Tyrone, reports.

Rosemary Nelson was a beacon for truth and justice. Like Pat Finucane before her, she fought against state injustice and in particular the excesses of the state police – the RUC. For this she was threatened many times. The people who killed her are no different from the people who murdered fellow human rights lawyer Pat Finucane and law student Sheena Campbell, like Ms Nelson, a native of Lurgan.

Rosemary vigorously defended the nationalist residents of the Garvaghy Road who have been under constant siege from the Orange Order – of which First Minister Designate, and local MP, David Trimble is a leading member – for the last 260 days. She also represented the family of Robert Hamill, a young catholic man who was savagely kicked to death by an Orange mob, in the middle of Portadown, while four RUC personnel watched from the safety of their armoured Landrover. These are only two of the high profile cases which Rosemary, in spite of constant threats to her life, prosecuted with vigour.

The murder of Rosemary Nelson was not an attack on republicans or on nationalists. It was an attack on the "Good Friday Agreement", which proclaims the rights of citizens to live free from sectarian harassment. There is a heavy onus on the two governments and all political leaders to redouble efforts to break the present impasse and move the process forward.

There is a particular responsibility on David Trimble, the First Minister Designate, in whose constituency this murder happened. Mr Trimble has refused to meet and talk to the residents and representatives of the small besieged nationalist community including Rosemary Nelson. Following her murder, Mr Trimble must change this stance. Others also have a responsibility to ensure that transparency, accountability and truth are the cornerstone of any investigation. Based on the track record of the RUC these requirements rule out any involvement of this partisan force.

The required inquiry must be fully independent, internationally-based and public. The inquiry announced by Ronnie Flanagan, irrespective of how he would attempt to portray it, is not independent. It is an RUC inquiry, headed by an English Chief Constable assisted by an FBI agent. It is wholly dependent on the co-operation of the very force alleged to be responsible for several threats to Ms Nelson's life, the RUC.

The nationalist experience of such inquiries is not a positive one. We have had four previous such inquiries at critical points in the past. The first was carried out by a Scotland Yard Detective Chief Superintendent Kenneth Drury who was brought in to investigate the death of Derryman Sammy Devenney, following his brutal beating in his own home, by a number of RUC members in 1969. Drury failed to establish the truth, prompting the temporary head of the RUC, Englishman Arthur Young to charge that there was a "conspiracy of silence" within the ranks of the RUC to protect the guilty.

Three further investigations by English policemen – John Stalker, John Sampson and John Stevens – into RUC collusion and "shoot to kill" tactics were never published and to this day remain under wraps. Clearly, this mechanism of appointing English policemen to get at the truth of controversial events here will find no support or confidence among nationalists.

The only mechanism which will gain any degree of acceptance is an international, independent investigation and inquiry. All people who believe in truth and justice should support this demand.



Michelle Gildernew addresses *LLB* fringemeeting, Labour Party Conference 1997.

nd's peace process?

Is this what victory looks like?

In the first of two contrasting pieces, Liam Mac Uaid, Bethnal Green and Bow CLP, argues that the sectarian basis of the Northern Ireland state remains unchanged.

The big division between supporters of the peace process and those who oppose it is whether it can be described as a partial victory for republicanism or a complete victory for the British.

One fact can help us determine that: whether or not Sinn Fein will be allowed to participate in the Executive of the new local assembly. Another way of expressing this is that the old sectarian state is to have a new parliament. Its relationship with Britain is utterly unchanged. An organisation which had as its reason for existence the unification of Ireland and a complete transformation in relations between Britain and Ireland is begging to be allowed to help run the state. Who won that one? To rub salt into the wounds of a movement which was bound together by its support for armed struggle instead of politics, the precondition of participation is the surrender of weapons. The joke is that Irish Prime Minister Aherne, designated by republicans as the head of their imaginary "nationalist family", is at one with Blair and ultra-bigot David Trimble in demanding that nationalist areas be left defenceless. The SDLP supported his call. A clever tactical victory for Adams and McGuinness or imminent humiliation?

Since the 1970s, the RUC supplied information to the loyalist murder gangs. There is to be no enquiry into this. The sort of police force a society has tells a whole story. The new Northern Ireland will have one which was an active participant in a thirty year campaign of sectarian murder, absolutely unchanged.

The high point of the struggle since 1969 was the collapse of the Stormont regime, due mainly to the success of engaging tens of thousands of ordinary people in the political process. In 1999 the political leadership of those who support a united Ireland is trying to assure supporters that the restoration of a tinpot parliament with a sectarian division of its institutions is a step towards national unity.

For matters such as social security and education, we will see Blair's Thatcherite agenda pushed through with the occasional grumble but no attempt to lead a resistance of those affected. The only alternative they have to the process they have helped create is to become targets of the sort of witch-hunt directed at the republican dissidents in the name of the investigation into the Omagh bombing.

No sane person wants a return to violence. The problem for those who still see the situation as a denial of the Irish people's right to self-determination is that there is no credible alternative to republicanism. Those dissidents who want a return to "real" republicanism are only offering a re-hash of what didn't work last time. Game, set and match to the British Government – until an alternative leadership for Irish workers is born.

Move towards a united Ireland

Mark Donoghue, North East Herts CLP, argues the peace process is a major improvement on the thirty years of violence that preceded it.

The Good Friday Agreement is the beginning of the end of the Six Counties and should meet with the qualified welcome that the parties in the Six Counties gave it. Yes, it may be a flawed agreement but the British Government has for the first time accepted Irish republicanism as a legitimate political view within the Six Counties.

The document seriously weakens the Union between the Six Counties and Britain. We are on the road to a United Ireland. That road is a long one but, the Good Friday Agreement means that we are now much further along than the position of ten years ago.

Sinn Fein is increasing its share of the vote. At the 1997 British General Election Sinn Fein received 16.1 per cent of the vote. At the Assembly Elections it received 17.3 per cent. Four out of five first-time Catholic voters voted for Sinn Fein. There are expectations that Sinn Fein will have three Westminster MPs and 3 Irish TDs by 2002. Sinn Fein has given ground but so has the British Government. The process of compromise began when Peter Brooke said the British Government had no selfish strategic interest in the Six Counties.

Some people say Sinn Fein have sold out because it is talking to business about investing in the Six Counties. Sinn Fein has a democratic mandate from their voters. Do people expect Sinn Fein to come to its electorate in a few years and say it has not done anything to attract businesses into an area? Unemployment for nationalists is at least double that of unionists. Can a party that represents a seriously deprived electorate be expected to ignore the levels of unemployment and not try to talk to business to create jobs?

Sinn Fein has not accepted all the agreement: no party has. Sinn Fein signed a document that weakens the union between the Six Counties and Britain, that means co-operation with the Irish Republic and tackling inequality for all people in the Six Counties. It can only be in a 32-county republic that we will finally see a democratic Irish socialist republic.

Kurds defy Ocalan arrest

Liz Knight and Erkan Gok of the Campaign for Human Rights in Turkey, tell of the renewed onslaught on democratic rights in Turkey.

In the face of the capture by Turkish security forces of Abdullah Ocalan, Kurds across the world have demonstrated in their hundreds of thousands. 10,000 marched in London. Their anger is rightly expressed not only against the Turkish state. Ocalan was refused asylum in every country. His arrest was clearly the result of an international conspiracy in which the CIA and MOSSAD were involved as well as the governments of other imperialist countries. Behind the crusade against terrorism and the relentless hunting down of Ocalan lies the determination of the west to secure control over the Middle East and its oil riches, and maintain its military bases, especially in Turkey. The outcome of the undeclared war against Iraq depends on the maintenance of these bases. The capture of Ocalan was part of the price Turkey extracted from the west for its continued loyalty.

The capture of Ocalan represents far more than an attack on the PKK alone. It heralds a new wave of repression by the military state on a scale unprecedented since the 1980 coup. In order to ensure "stability" and a climate in which business, local or foreign, can flourish with few restrictions, trade unions and political parties which demand human rights have been heavily attacked. The present situation is that of a country in a state of civil war: a war by the state on its people. War, bomb attacks, political murders, detention, torture, genocide, coercion and food embargo are part of every day life in Kurdistan. Now the Turkish government, state-controlled media and nationalist-fascist organisations are actively inciting hatred against Kurdish and democratic organisations throughout Turkey. Peaceful demonstrations in major cities are broken up by armoured vehicles and the notorious "robo-cops" who have no scruples in beating women and children. Security officials have been given orders by police chiefs to shoot demonstrators. Two demonstrators, one a nine year old, were shot last month.

Part of the background to all this is the upcoming general election in Turkey on 18th April. The Chief Prosecutor applied to the Constitutional Court to ban the Kurdish-appointed party HADEP from taking part in the elections on the excuse that its participation could be a threat to state security. The Court did not uphold the ban this time, however. Thousands of people have been detained since Ocalan's capture: there were 3,369 arrests in one week in February, mostly from HADEP but also including trade unionists from Diyarbakir. The dominant parties, all of which are supported by the National Military Council, want to maintain at all cost their monopolistic hold on power and privilege.

Through media propaganda, the regime has done its utmost to provoke extreme national chauvinism and hatred of Greece as well as of the Kurds. Furious hostility has been shown towards all those internationally who have expressed concern over human rights violations in relation to Ocalan and the Kurdish people. Foreign observers are not to be allowed at the trial.

The captured Ocalan has been ritually humiliated, paraded before TV cameras bound and blindfolded, then forced to stand in front of the Turkish flag. He is being held in isolation on an island prison. His lawyers, until recently denied access, have been so intimidated by organised fascist demonstrations, permitted by the state authorities, that they are now in fear of their lives and say that they cannot represent Ocalan unless their safety is guaranteed.

The British Government, like the US, has supported the Kurds when it suited them and condemned them when it did not. It continues to sell arms and give economic aid to the Turkish regime, when it is clear that this is being used in the war against the Kurds.



Photo: Paul Mattsson

Kurdish people picket Greek embassy.

The DTI is currently preparing to make £200m available for the construction of the Ilisa Dam on the Tigress River. This project, supposedly for necessary irrigation, has as a political aim – the destruction of dozens of Kurdish villages and a historic town, and apparently cutting off the river's water supply to Syria. The World Bank is not getting involved with this – why is Britain?

Human rights organisations internationally are appealing for pressure to be put on the Turkish regime for a fair trial for Ocalan and no death penalty.

The resolution of the Kurdish question requires an international and united campaign to demand an end to the war. This has to be linked to the demand for human rights for all. Turkish as well as Kurdish political prisoners are being "disappeared", imprisoned and tortured.

Here the role of the present British Government, as well as other western governments, must be held up to scrutiny. An immediate end to arms licences and economic aid, in particular for the Ilisa Dam, would be a start.

NO MORE BOMBINGS LIFT THE SANCTIONS

Libya 1986 – Iraq 1999
Saturday 17th April 1999
1pm: assemble Hyde Park Corner
3pm: rally in Trafalgar Square addressed by Ahmed Ben Bella, first President of Algeria, Tony Benn MP and others.
- **Donations urgently needed: write cheques to "IIS" and post to: IIS, BM 2966, London WC1N 3XX**
- **To sponsor the march, to confirm details of the route, or for other information, phone 0171-436 4636.**

Greetings from

Alex Smith MEP

South of Scotland



Alex Smith MEP
Damside, Ayre KA8 8ER

Tel: 01292-280 096 ● Fax: 01292-280 141

Parliamentary Group of the
Party of European Socialists

Will Euro gearshift stall?

Bernard Moss, author of *The Single European Currency in National Perspective: A Community in Crisis?* questions whether Tony Blair is really committed to the euro.

Tony Blair's announcement of preparations for the euro was a "change of gear" rather than of policy. Britain declares its intention to join if conditions are met. Ministers are encouraged to promote the euro and departments to spend tens of millions on preparations in advance of a decision.

After talking with Blair, Lord Hollick of United News and Media has agreed to form Britain in Europe to co-ordinate the euro campaign. Yet, while the CBI, the TUC and many Labour supporters press for an immediate affirmative decision, Blair has not budged from a wait and see policy, which defers a decision until the next parliament and subjects it to convergence and performance criteria that are becoming increasingly difficult to meet.

For Blair, however neoliberal and monetarist, is also a smart politician, and he knows that the euro is not a winning proposition. First, public resistance to the euro is solid. Only 29% approve while 52% oppose; the rejection rate is higher among workers and among women. Many workers may be *Sun* readers, but they are also Labour voters. Even without left leadership they know instinctively that a monetarist Europe is not in their interest.

Establishment debate over the euro is heating up with the formation of New Europe by Lords Owen, Sainsbury, and Healey. This group consists of wealthy and enlightened Europhiles who know the danger the Single Currency poses to capitalist stability and who are prepared to work with the more conservative Business for Sterling to stop it. Unlike the left, these dignitaries cannot easily be denied a hearing on the BBC. Business remains divided over the euro between most of the City, multinationals and exporters who support it and most small and medium firms, traditional Tories, who are opposed.

Tribune has joined a campaign against EMU with the *Morning Star*, and about 80 Labour MPs grouped around the Socialist Campaign Group are preparing to come out against the euro. The TUC decided at its last Congress to open debate on the question, but the case against has yet to be heard.

The emergence of socially active governments struggling to loosen the Maastricht straitjacket has dismayed conservative and business supporters of the single currency. This development has left Blair isolated in Europe. His only friend is Manuel Aznar, Prime Minister of Spain whose governing Partido Popular previously backed Franco. Against the Socialists, Blair and Aznar have signed a joint declaration calling for the deregulation of labour markets in Europe.

Lafontaine's resignation in Germany, which was feted with champagne in the City, was a setback for workers but doesn't end Blair's isolation. Lafontaine was outspoken in his attack on monetarism and the European Central Bank, running ahead of public and cabinet opinion. His resignation brings little change to the alliances he built, but much uncertainty which, after the initial euphoria subsides, will further rattle financial markets.

German Chancellor Schröder, who presents himself as business-friendly, has pledged to implement the anti-business fiscal reforms already decided and to respect the party's redistributive programme and Green alliance. Hans Eichel, the new finance minister, is little different from Lafontaine. There is still a left majority in the party and country. Most observers believe that the German welfare state with its guarantees for trade unions and social security is too entrenched for even a neoliberal government to reform. In any event market solutions will produce only more capital flight and unemployment.



Bernie Moss

Meanwhile, Lafontaine's assault on the Bank has exposed the structural flaws of EMU, the contradiction between the monetarism of Maastricht and national governments responsible for economic and social welfare. The quarrel between national governments and the Bank has hurt the credibility of the euro, which has fallen ten per cent against the dollar since its inception. Even the Europhile financier Georges Soros has discovered its structural flaw. It is now obvious that one interest rate does not fit all economies, that Maastricht makes it impossible to conduct coherent economic policy on any level, and that the euro has weakened rather than strengthened the European voice in the world.

The deterioration of European economies with the widening gap between France and Germany and the political weakness of the euro make it almost impossible to meet the tests Blair has set for British entry. In his declaration to Parliament Blair warned Europe that it must convert to the Third Way or else. Faced with a high risk of defeat in a referendum and a Europe not to his liking, Blair may backtrack further whatever the disillusionment this may cause among the Party's euro ingenues.

● *The Single European Currency in National Perspective: A Community in Crisis?* will be available in a revised paperback edition at the end of the year.

German government retreats in face of right

The German government's climb-down on reforming the right to citizenship has encouraged a sinister xenophobic campaign. Our correspondents Alexandra Schulte and William West report.

Germany has seen a dramatic and frightening lurch to the right. One television pundit said, "it's respectable again to hate foreigners".

This began with the new SPD-Green government of Gerhard Schröder announcing its intention to honour its pledge to reform the 1913 law regarding the right to citizenship. The reform would mean, among other things, allowing dual citizenship to children of "foreign" parents (as things stand, citizenship of only one country is allowed). This would have made a great difference to 7.4 million "foreigners" living in Germany (many of them born here to Turkish parents), who, despite working and paying their taxes like normal citizens, are – as non-Germans – denied the basic rights of citizenship such as the right to vote.

Instead of arguing forcefully that reform was a matter of respecting inalienable human rights and democracy, the coalition's presentation was apologetic and timid, emphasising those "foreigners" who would not be eligible for citizenship, such as those dependent upon welfare, with a criminal record, or classified as "enemies of the constitution".

This gave the opposition space in which to mount an attack. Concentrating upon the issue of "dual citizenship", the CDU/CSU said that the government's projected reform was unfair to German citizens (two passports are better than one!) and that it would hinder integration! Under the slogan "Yes to Integration; No to Dual Citizenship", the CDU/CSU launched a nationwide petition, collecting signatures and "offering objective information to concerned citizens". The "Yes to Integration" part of the slogan was a sop to more moderate elements in the CDU, though, and the campaign is clearly being driven by the racist CDU/CSU right, and in particular by the CSU in Bavaria, where the action began. Still flushed with the success of having "repatriated" a young German-born Turkish boy with a history of petty crime, the CSU's leader, Edmund Stoiber, has warned against the dangers of Germany becoming a "mixed race" society. He described dual citizenship as posing a greater threat than international terrorism.

The CDU/CSU's populist campaign is shocking, but even more shocking is its huge success, with outraged citizens leaving their homes in the dead of winter to sign the petition "against the bloody foreigners". It is estimated that 50,000 a day signed the petition in Munich alone. In the recent local elections in Hessen, the state at the geographical heart of Germany, the CDU based its campaign almost exclusively upon dual citizenship, with its leader, Roland Koch, aping the gestures and words of the Austrian fascist Jörg Haider. He appealed to the young, lamenting the fact that many had had "negative experiences of young Turks at school". In a surprising result the CDU was rewarded in this SPD stronghold with a 5% swing and control of the local parliament. In the run-up to the election, the CDU collected from a total population of 6 million (including children and "foreigners") more than half a million signatures against dual citizenship.

The campaign has obviously tapped into a very deep vein of xenophobia as the CDU/CSU plays upon fears that dual citizenship will bring about "the Islamicisation of German society" (one Hessen CDU MP talked about "civil war" breaking out if the reform goes through); that it will mean an end to the "German way of life"; that the "new Germans" will bring their family members into the country and "flood" the native population; that they will take the jobs from "real" Germans and (paradoxically) claim state benefits. Perhaps most shocking of all, that dual citizenship will grant the Gastarbeiter (guest workers) who came to Germany in the 1960s to assist in the "economic miracle" the same rights as their former "hosts"; that, in other words, they will not be going "home" after all.

Schröder's predictable response to the Hessen defeat was one of retreat. He announced without consulting either his own party or the Greens that the government would now adopt the model of citizenship outlined before the general election by the FDP, the CDU's former partner in government. According to this model, a "foreigner" could hold dual citizenship for a limited period only, after which s/he would have to relinquish her/his passport in order to gain a German one. Paradoxically, the success of the CDU/CSU action has strengthened Schröder's hand in the SPD and particularly with regard to the junior partner in the coalition, the Greens. It has also strengthened the right of the CDU/CSU, Stoiber claiming that the party's campaign has been a first and decisive blow against "political correctness". More of the same is expected for the European elections on 13th June, with gays and lesbians thought to be next on Stoiber's reactionary agenda. Even Kohl, being conscious of Germany's reputation abroad, would not have stooped so low.

Left loses out on Oskar

Gus Fagan, editor of *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe* and Lecturer in European Studies at the University of North London, looks at the departure of Oskar Lafontaine and the possible reverberations.

On 11th March, Germany's left-leaning finance minister and SPD leader Oskar Lafontaine was ousted from his cabinet post by the SPD "new centre" Chancellor, Gerhard Schroeder, in what Klaus Zwickel, leader of IG-Metall described as "the first victory for capital". Much has been made of the resistance to Lafontaine from German business, especially from the nuclear industry, and insurance companies. Hans Schreiber, head of the Insurance Companies Organisation, described it as "the happiest day of my whole career". But it is probably in Lafontaine's political project rather than in his modest tax increases that we should look for the real reasons for his dismissal.

Lafontaine's forced resignation is undoubtedly a setback for the German left. His project of attacking unemployment by boosting demand in the domestic economy, redistributing wealth to those on lower income and tackling the regulation of financial markets was the beginning of an attempt to undo some of the neoliberal inheritance from 17 years of conservative rule. The coalition with the Greens was also his doing. With his departure, the SPD-Green coalition is in crisis, whatever Schroeder or Trittin may say publicly.

But it was Lafontaine's project of constructing a new left majority involving the PDS (former communists) that Schroeder could not accept. The SPD has ostracised the PDS from the beginning. In December 1994 the SPD's Dresden Declaration formally excluded any co-operation with the PDS. But not everyone in the party agreed. In Saxony-Anhalt in eastern Germany, SPD chief Hoeppner leads a minority government "tolerated" by the PDS. In practice it is a coalition, with both parties having formally agreed a policy document. In Mecklenburg-West Pomerania on the Baltic coast the SPD, led by Ringstorff, is formally in coalition with the PDS.

Earlier this year the SPD general secretary, Ottmar Schreiner, a Lafontaine supporter, suggested that the Dresden Declaration should be scrapped because it was no longer relevant. Lafontaine himself signalled publicly his support for this, calling the Dresden Declaration "old hat". It has now been admitted that Lafontaine and PDS leader, Gregor Gysi, had been meeting regularly to discuss co-operation.

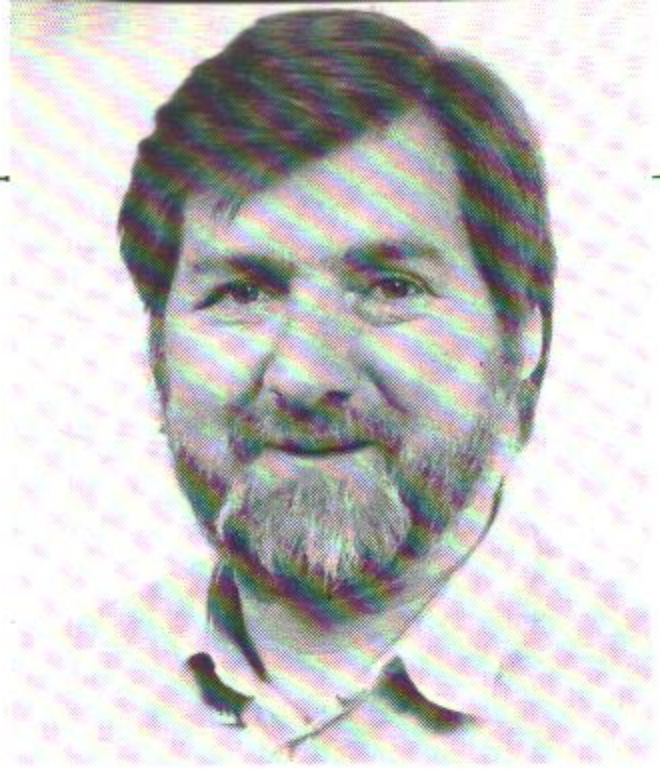
SPD-PDS relations took on a new importance recently when the SPD-Green coalition lost the Land election in the state of Hesse, thus losing its majority in the Bundesrat, the second chamber of parliament. The Bundesrat is not directly elected but each Land government sends delegates. In September this year, there will be Land elections in two other eastern German states, Saxony and Thuringen, both currently governed by the CDU. In both cases the SPD local leaders (Peter Porsch in Saxony, Richard Dewes in Thuringen) are Lafontaine supporters and have been thinking of coalitions with the PDS, which the polls suggest could win a majority. If the SPD then were able to come to some agreement with the PDS, it would regain its majority in the Bundesrat. The PDS is aware of this and has been preparing itself for precisely this situation. Gysi has suggested the slogan: Thuringen can reverse the Hesse defeat.

How has the PDS responded to the overtures from Lafontaine? A meeting of the PDS parliamentary group in January discussed a document outlining its strategy towards the SPD. The document was unknown to the membership and a limited number of copies were distributed to the party's 36 MPs and collected back at the end of the meeting. However, the secret document was leaked to the left-wing daily, *Junge Welt*, and published on 5th March. Although the document is not an official policy statement, it is known that the leadership around Gregor Gysi supports its general direction. In brief, it suggests that the PDS will remain a regional party (in the east) and its long-term goal should be to be part of a centre-left coalition with the SPD at both Land and federal level. Its opposition to the SPD, therefore should not be "frontal and universal". The freedom of choice of coalition partner (PDS, Greens, even FDP) would also be advantageous for the SPD. The PDS presence in the Bundesrat, a reflection of its strength in the east, would be a crucial weapon in making its offer of support attractive to the SPD. This means that the PDS would also have to make itself into a possible coalition partner.

Lafontaine's resignation has created a serious problem for this PDS strategy. Under a Schroeder leadership there would be little likelihood of an opening to the PDS at the federal level, and with Schroeder now in charge of the party as well as the government, there must be some doubt about any new coalition in Saxony or Thuringen. In Magdeburg in Saxony-Anhalt, before Lafontaine's departure, a group of Schroeder supporters, appropriately named the New Centre, had been formed to oppose any opening to the PDS. They have been given new wind.



Gysi looking over Lafontaine's shoulder



THE MICHAEL HINDLEY COLUMN

It is a sign of how integrated Europe is now that the resignation of a German Finance Minister should have made such headlines in this country. Oskar Lafontaine has proven in the past to be a resilient politician, but his resignation, not only as Finance Minister but also as party leader, and Gerhard Schroeder's assumption of that role, is a severe setback to the left generally. This latter move is as dangerous as Lafontaine's departure, for it now ties the SPD into supporting whatever Schroeder feels is necessary to stay in power.

Lest anyone has any illusions, Oskar Lafontaine was an inventive, provocative Social Democrat, more a Tony Crosland than a Tony Benn. But we live in lean times and Lafontaine was one of the few prominent politicians willing to challenge the overwhelming inertia besetting western left of centre politicians, whose anthem is "there is no alternative".

He has been written off before, most notably when he was the defeated Chancellor candidate in the first unified German election of 1990. Lafontaine justifiably claimed that unification was going ahead too quickly and has subsequently been vindicated. A recent survey of the richest and the poorest regions of Europe revealed, as ever, that four of the richest regions are in Germany and for the first time ever, four of the poorest are also in Germany. Predictably the richest four are in the west and the poorest four in the east. Memories are short – the dereliction of eastern Germany is a warning for all to see of a premature currency union driven by ideology.

'Lafontaine was one of the few prominent politicians willing to challenge the inertia besetting western left of centre politicians'

Oskar's comeback owed much more to his opportunism than to any move towards his political position. The SPD, like Labour, convinced itself – aided by the media – that the centre ground must be occupied in order to defeat an incumbent right-wing government. Gerhard Schroeder's bland politics and good presentation made him unstoppable as candidate for Chancellor. Lafontaine took advantage of the acclaim greeting him at the party conference plus the obvious unpopularity of the then party leader and Rudolf Scharping's own hesitation to declare himself candidate for leader. Driven by the pre-election necessity of a unified party image, the dumbfounded Scharping was outmanoeuvred.

Schroeder promised Lafontaine any job he wanted, a decision he must have regretted long before the SPD won the election and Oskar asked to be made Finance Minister.

Lafontaine has done the outrageous, demanding back some of the real powers the eleven EU countries had handed over to the unelected European Central Bank headed by Wim Duisenburg, a man who makes even your average local bank manager seem charismatic and dangerously adventurous.

Quite revealingly, the pundits are now saying that the Central Bank might lower interest rates because it can do the sensible thing without seeming to bow to political pressure. This is a bizarre twist indeed indicating just why Lafontaine had to go and why his defeat has been rapturously received, not least in Downing Street. As the Managing Director of Blair plc, Alistair Campbell, has informed the press, Oskar Lafontaine had to go, not because he was "red", but because he was a politician, pure and simple not a grinning manager.

Schroeder, who incidentally started political life far to the left of Lafontaine, is now where he wanted to be – Chancellor minus the powerful pressure from his own party. He would still prefer a coalition with the Christian Democrats, and I personally would not rule this out. Little noticed last week were the results of the Greens' congress where there was a purge of the left. In the list for the Euro-elections, two prominent MEPs in the peace lobby who are close to the left – William Telkaemper and Frieder Otto Wolff – have been relegated to positions where they won't win. The part of the Greens which wants to participate in NATO and bomb the Serbs is in control.

So Germany is moving towards the "new middle" which Schroeder promised. The most immediate beneficiary will be the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) which is confident of breaching the 5% threshold to ensure a place in the European Parliament.

A large puzzle remains. It was amazing to read last week that one man could cause the weakness of the euro which was launched with such confidence. When the euro continues to falter, who will they blame now that Oskar Lafontaine has gone?

● Bill Morris has proscribed the TGWU's Campaign for a Democratic Union. Sadly, Barry Camfield, who has been outstanding in his support for Ken Livingstone's right to stand for London's Mayor, has assisted by issuing a Region 1 edict. He weakly states "many of us have fought against the 'bans and proscriptions' of the post war period ... this is quite different ... CDU has formally established a separate structure within the union".

Insiders suggest that this is a payback for CDU backing Fred Higgs over Margaret Prosser in the recent election for Morris's No.2. Higgs is said to have been forced out of the union and taken a job in Europe, and his supporters sidelined.

● MSF is in internal turmoil following allegations made by Assistant General Secretary John Chowcat accusing the General Secretary and National Finance Officer of serious financial irregularities.

One year ago Roger Lyons, the General Secretary, took over Chowcat's position as officer in charge of the General Purposes Committee (dealing with union finance).

Chowcat has been asked to work outside the office, but the two accused – who have denied the six charges – continue working as normal. A union circular from MSF President Dave Cook says that there is no substance to the allegations. The allegations include misuse of funds to improve Lyons' holiday home in France and the setting up of two 'shell accounts' with the union's bank to keep funds relating to non-existing or defunct branches.

It is reported that Lyons has been completely exonerated by the NEC – who have not yet received the auditor's report – but set up a disciplinary committee to investigate Chowcat. The trade union Certification Officer has moved rapidly to investigate the allegations.

● Nearly 3,000 UNISON members in Southwark have taken three days of strike action against pay cuts. Southwark's Labour Council wants to break from national agreements and impose a job evaluation scheme developed for the private sector and allowing for no union involvement.

This scheme threatens hundreds of workers with a seven year pay freeze if their job is downgraded, while at the same time rewarding senior managers with large rises. One councillor has resigned from the Labour Group leaving control with the Mayor's casting vote.

● The GMB is denying the veracity of a letter purportedly from a GMB full-timer to Derek Sawyer, leader of Islington Council, thanking him for allowing the GMB to stage a recruitment drive in order to "erode the UNISON position".

Islington Labour Group plans to force through £36 million of cuts over the next few years and sees UNISON as the most likely source of opposition.

● London Underground RMT members are balloting for action against new proposals from management on employment assurances in the lead up to PFI-privatisation. The Campaign against Tube Privatisation meets every second Tuesday at 7.30pm Cock Tavern, Phoenix Road, NW1. Contact: John Leach on 0181-981-8065, 47c Wadeson Street, London E2 9DP.

● Ninety UNISON members in Sheffield Council's benefits section have been on strike since 1st March in defence of terms and conditions and against privatisation.

For speakers contact Sheffield UNISON on 0114-273 6307. Donations to "Sheffield UNISON Benefits Fund", Arundel Gate Court, 175 Arundel Gate, Sheffield, S1 2LQ.

May Day alert

Maria Exall, Assistant Secretary of the United Campaign to Repeal the Anti-Trade Union Laws

The first Labour legislation on union rights for two decades is about to become law – do we celebrate or protest?

Trade unionists and all working people are sold well short by the Employment Relations Bill. It's what's not in it that is the main problem. The vast majority of the Tory anti union laws are retained and justified by New Labour.

Under the Tories, the union bureaucracy's phobia of the demand to repeal all the anti union legislation provided the unfortunate background to the inability of many to stand up for union rights effectively. But with the election of a Labour Government there was still the opportunity to make positive demands and make clear the unions' priorities. However, at the 1997 Trades Union Congress, policy on employment rights was, at best, incoherent. Policies on the right to solidarity action, reforming balloting legislation to allow urgent defensive action, and demanding reinstatement for workers sacked for taking part in legal balloted industrial action were rendered ineffective or fudged.

It got worse. Once the discussions began in 1998 on the proposed legislation, a new law on union recognition was immediately tainted. The 40% threshold and the exclusion of up to five million employees working in small firms not being challenged by the TUC was the product of a deal. At the end of the year, after lobbying by the CBI, Peter Mandelson let it be known that there were to be other compromises like a ceiling on the compensation for unfair dismissal. The automatic right of recognition if the majority of staff are members of the union was lost and the decision of who to ballot to achieve the 40% was taken out of the unions' hands. The right to be represented by a union in an unrecognised workplace was restricted to "serious grievances".

Then it got even worse. Now, the much heralded "family-friendly" proposals were shown to have no teeth when the new right to parental leave was to be unpaid. Zero hours contracts were not to be outlawed.

The TUC and the leaders of some of the biggest trade unions in the country are not prepared to stand up to those in the Labour Government who would deny us our basic rights. In his role as TUC President last year, John Edmonds threatened a march on the scale of the Countryside Alliance to demand trade union rights from this Government. The United Campaign for the Repeal of the Anti Union Laws has taken him at his word! We will be marching in London on May Day to free our unions and reclaim our rights.

Trade union leaders are telling their members and activists there is no alternative. We are not fools, we can tell the difference between rhetoric and reality.

The watered down and totally inadequate Employment Relations Bill will do little to advance the cause of organised labour. As trade unionists we may find that in trying to create a new unionism adequate to meet the challenges of the workplaces of the new millennium we will have raised expectations without the means to deliver.

Just plane exploitation

A South Thames TGWU branch activist reports on strikers who are taking on one of the world's largest flight caterers.

"They didn't expect women to come out on strike, but we had to, this is about our rights". Those were the words of a determined woman striker on the Lufthansa Skychef picket line.

Last year, senior management at LSG Lufthansa Skychef in Heathrow, West London, tried to impose new working practices (aka intensification of work) on their workforce. The world's largest in-flight caterer, with a annual turnover of more than a billion dollars, attempted to increase its rate of exploitation of 300 mainly low paid workers by discarding agreements negotiated with the TGWU. To their massive credit the workers stood resolute and voted 75 percent in favour of four one day strikes. Hours into the first day of the legal dispute the work-force received letters of dismissal for "gross mis-conduct".

Four months on and the strikers remain solid in the face of extreme hard-ship. Their determination to win their jobs back can be witnessed every day on the picket line. They must win for themselves and for the sake of the organ-ised labour movement.



Photo: Mary Cooper

Strikers on SkyChef picket line.

Recent victories in recognition dis-putes demonstrate to workers that their collective strength through trade union organisation can defeat intransigent anti-union bosses. Successful recruitment of Asian and women workers in service and high-tech industries challenges the trade union "male and pale" stereotype. In the run-up to "Fairness at Work" becoming law, when "these dismissals would have been illegal, no question" (Ian McCartney, DTI Minister), other bosses may be tempted to try "union busting". So South Thames TGWU is pleased to report the labour movement's response is growing and intensifying by the day.

More than a thousand workers marched in solidarity through the streets of Southall on Saturday 20th February, shoulder to shoulder with the men and women of Lufthansa Skychef and Rosti. Dozens of union banners were carried in support.

The TGWU is prosecuting the Lufthansa Skychef strike through tri-bunals, through Parliament, through sister unions abroad and through the International Transport Federation. Bill Morris has promised to organise a public demonstration in Trafalgar Square.

John Monks has assured the strikers of the TUC's support in winning their dis-pute and SERTUC has built support from unions within the region and to generate much needed publicity.

The local community continues to be hugely supportive of the striker's strug-gle. To this has been added the support of London's trades councils. Messages of solidarity and financial donations from trade union branches have provided a vital buttress to the strikers.

- Messages of solidarity and donations to LSG Lufthansa Skychef Dispute, TGWU Region 1, 218 Green Lanes, London N4 2HB. Visit the picket line in Faggs Road, Feltham, West London (24 hours). For speakers contact Garth King on 0498-757 367.

RECLAIM OUR RIGHTS! FREE OUR UNIONS!

UNITED CAMPAIGN TO REPEAL THE ANTI-TRADE UNION LAWS

May Day Rally

Help make 1st May union rights day
Assemble Clerkenwell Green at 12pm
March 1pm
Rally at Trafalgar Square 3pm

Speakers include Tony Benn MP

- **Organised by the London MayDay Organising Committee.**
- **The march will be led by representatives of the Tameside Careworkers, the Hillingdon Strikers, the Critchley Strikers, the Magnet and Liverpool Docks disputes and the SkyChef strikers.**
- **Contact for more info: United Campaign for the Repeal of the Anti-Union Laws c/o John Hendy, Secretary, PO Box 17556, London EC2Y 8PA. tel 0171-638 7521, fax 0171-638 7507**

It ain't half good enough

Tony Dale, Manchester UNISON Branch Executive, calls for a just minimum wage for all.

History will be made in Newcastle on 10th April when the trade union movement makes its first tentative steps in demanding a better deal from the Labour Government. A demonstration organised by UNISON will call for a higher minimum wage. The minimum wage becomes law on 1st April and will be introduced at £3.60 per hour and £3 per hour for young workers. UNISON is calling for a minimum wage at half male median earnings which now stands at £4.79 per hour.

UNISON in a public statement calling on people to join the demonstration stated: "Well, here we are, nearly at the end of the 20th century and a national minimum wage is about to find its way into the laws of our land. That's good. But it is to be set at £3.60 an hour. Could you live on £3.60 an hour? Could you live on £3 an hour, which is what young people will be asked to do? A minimum wage at this level just isn't enough. We want it to be higher and to be the same for everyone doing a full job, never mind their age. We are asking for at least £4.79 (half the median male earnings rate). It's not much to ask of one of the richest countries in the world."

The demonstration is being supported by the TUC and some 24 TUC-affiliated unions including MSF, rail unions ASLEF, RMT and TSSA, the northern region of the GMB, the Fire Brigades Union, broadcasting, print and media unions BECTU, GPMU and NUJ, finance workers' union BIFU, bakers' and food union, BFAWU, the university and college lecturers' union NATFHE, TGWU, building workers' union UCATT, the Communication Workers' Union, the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists, the Public and Commercial Services union and the Association of Magisterial Officers. The National Union of Students is also backing the event, as is the British Youth Council. Both organisations are particularly concerned about the lower rate of £3 per hour for 18-21 year olds. Under 18s will receive no minimum wage protection.

For the past two years, the Labour Government has made it obvious that it would rather spend its time entertaining big business than listening to the unions. At last the unions are making the first steps towards publicly campaigning for a better deal from the Government. The issue of the minimum wage can unite the whole labour movement. Join the demonstration and call for a decent minimum wage.

DEMONSTRATE FOR A LIVING WAGE

10th April Newcastle

Assemble at Gateshead Civic Centre (15 minutes walk from Newcastle rail station, three minutes from Gateshead Metro station) at 11.30am. March off at noon, cross the Tyne Bridge, go through the streets of Newcastle to the Telewest Arena for two events:

- **a concert in the arena featuring Ash, The Divine Comedy, Space, Travis and Fungus.**
- **a free event in the marquee 2pm - 8pm. Featuring Martin Stephenson and the Toe Rags, Cuban salsa and international guests.**

Goldsmiths' students march against fees.



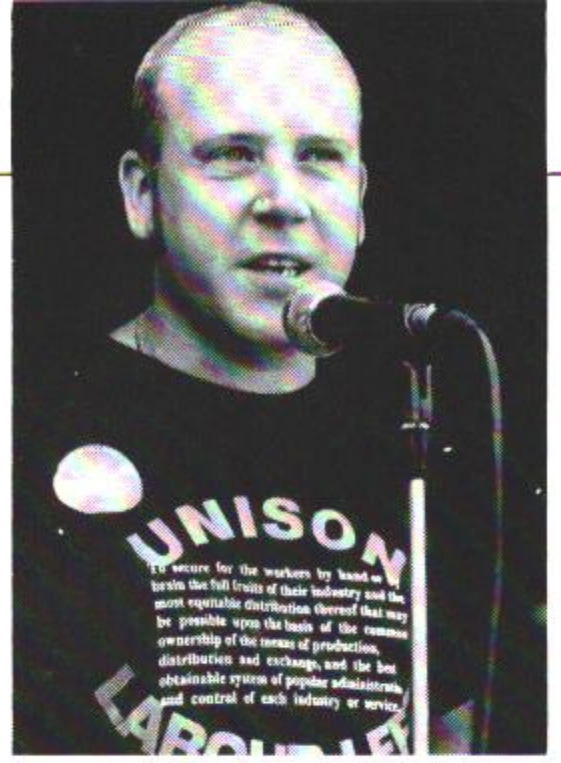
Photo: Molly Cooper

Students win at Goldsmiths

Chris Knight, Chair, Barking NATFHE

Students at Goldsmiths College have won a spectacular victory for the national campaign against tuition fees. Early in March, 400 students responded to the expulsion of eight non fee-paying colleagues by occupying a key building and expelling senior management. With official backing from their students' union, occupiers barricaded all exits and appealed for London-wide support. Within hours, a strong delegation from my own university, East London, had arrived, accompanied by our samba band – with the drumbeat attracting several van-loads of police. We got a terrific welcome. Throughout the following week, a succession of well-known comedians, rock musicians and other entertainers continued to enliven the occupation. Morale was high, boosted when the left on the NUS executive won backing for the occupation and support was given by local unions, community groups and prominent figures such as Ken Livingstone.

Although the management eventually obtained a court injunction, by that stage negotiations had already secured an undertaking that letters of expulsion sent to the eight non fee-payers would be revoked. All other student demands were, in essence, met. Following hard on the heels of the recent victory at the Greengate site at UEL, this remarkable outcome signals that students across London are now becoming confident and radicalised.



THE GEOFF MARTIN COLUMN

● When Robbie Fowler displayed a Liverpool dockers T-shirt it was a real boost for the strikers and raised the possibility that not all professional footballers spend every waking hour dreaming of the latest Ferrari or how to pull a Spice Girl. It's a shame that Fowler has now revealed himself to be just another thick, homophobic prat.

For anyone who doesn't follow these things, especially those *LLB* readers who still believe that football is merely a distraction from the class struggle, Fowler spent most of the recent Chelsea vs. Liverpool match baiting his England colleague Graeme Le Saux for being a "rent boy". Apparently, the dressing room theory that Le Saux is gay is based on the surefire knowledge that he reads the *Guardian*.

Fowler's abuse brought to the surface a poisonous streak of intolerance that runs through football at all levels and which the Professional Footballers Association really ought to start shaking out.

The PFA has a good record in the fight against racism among supporters. However, they still have a long way to go with their members on the pitch as their reluctance to get involved in the infamous Peter Schmeichel/Ian Wright incident demonstrated.

Chelsea supporters, once fertile ground for the extreme right and still not entirely free of their influence, chant the name of Ian Wright at Schmeichel out of solidarity with the player that the Man Utd keeper racially abused.

As far as I can recall there have been no efforts whatsoever to stamp out homophobia in football. I could reel off here a long list of players who are rumoured to be gay, often based on the Le Saux test of reading books and visiting art galleries. Only one professional footballer has ever come out.

That player, Justin Fashanu, was hounded from club to club and tragically took his own life. The fact that Fowler felt confident enough in front of 35,000 people and BBC cameras to turn his backside on Le Saux and shout "come on rent boy – give it to me up the arse" shows how far football has got to go.

The fact that much of the media debate after the event focused on whether or not Le Saux was gay, and his furious denials, meant that the point was missed by a mile. There are few areas of our society where homophobia is as deeply entrenched as professional football. It will take a monumental effort to drag it into the 21st century.

● News that UNISON is implementing a major cuts package to balance the books has started me thinking about the thorny subject of trade union affiliation levels to the Labour Party.

For example, UNISON has recently cut its welfare spending from £1.5 million to £1 million. Cuts in the campaigning budget are also in the pipeline.

Needless to say, the union's annual handout to New Labour remains untouched at well over £1 million. For what?

I'm not for a moment suggesting disaffiliation but it's grotesque to be hacking back our direct welfare spending on our members while the Millbank machine continues to fill its boots at our expense.

If the Government wants to apply Best Value criteria to the services that our members work in then we should apply Best Value criteria to the money we hand over to New Labour.

I reckon that we could comfortably halve our affiliation and, since *Partnership in Power*, easily maintain our level of influence (whatever that might be). The cash saved could be used on upfront political campaigning in pursuit of UNISON's key policy objectives.

A motion to UNISON's conference suggesting that there should be a full evaluation of our Party affiliation has been ruled out of order. If the officers responsible for running our affiliated political side were really confident that our affiliation was money well spent they would welcome the opportunity to mount a robust defence of the current position. Hiding behind procedural mechanisms just looks feeble.

This issue won't go away. A number of branch activists who have no axe to grind have questioned the validity of UNISON's affiliation to New Labour at current levels. The case for those of us who support the maintenance of the link is not helped by a barrage of propaganda from our Affiliated Political Fund informing our members that they have been living in some sort of workers paradise since 1st May 1997.

Something's gonna snap before too long.

● My friends across the globe who read this column on the internet can sleep easy in their beds tonight.

At the UNISON London Region AGM last month I narrowly managed to hold off a challenge to my position as Convenor which means that you're probably stuck with this incoherent monthly rant for another year.

My agent is currently involved in intensive negotiations with the *LLB* editorial board for a significant bonus payment for ushering the magazine into the Millennium commensurate with the £500 that we are seeking for our members working this New Years eve in the NHS.

I expect to reach agreement, probably based around the supply of a few yellowing back issues of *LLB* for free distribution to close friends and family in lieu of a cash sum, without reference to ACAS.

● Due to technical difficulties we are unfortunately unable to carry any reference in this month's column to Chelsea's most recent fixtures.

PERISCOPE

Guardian left unguarded

"Fortunately multi-culturalism is something we can all celebrate," declared a *Guardian* leader writer in the wake of the **Macpherson** report. "It has brought vibrancy, energy and vitality to a wide range of cultural and sporting activities: art, music, dance, language, food, fashion, football, cricket and athletics. Britain is a better place for it."

Natural rhythm, a splash of colour and a dash of curry! The *Guardian*'s ability to stumble into stereotypes sometimes rivals the *Telegraph*'s. Politically, however, the *Guardian* is a lot more important to the Government than the *Telegraph*, and the Millbank Tendency will be pleased at the news that left-wing columnist Mark Steele has been sacked.

According to David Leigh, *Guardian* assistant editor, Steele's contract was not being renewed in keeping with an upcoming "political" turn in the paper's line.

Less than secure balloting?

Millbank professes outrage at the slightest questioning of the conduct of elections by **Unity Security Balloting**, which is held to be above reproach. In particular they have rounded on Rhodri Morgan for voicing concern about the apparent foreknowledge of the result of the ballot in **Alun Michael**'s camp. One veteran of several national newspapers informed *LLB*: "Of course, Michael knew the result. In every trade union election I've covered in the last decade the general secretary has been told in advance of the close of the ballot how the votes were going. They pay the piper, they call the tune. What do you expect?"

Can the *Telegraph* resist a Welsh leek joke? Does a one-legged duck swim in circles?

New Labour listens?

Been caught out by the deadline for nominations for the new **Greater London Authority**? Not to worry: LP officials have decided to extend the date from 28th February to the end of March. Seems that there were embarrassingly few applications, probably because many Party members suspect that they whole thing has been stitched up in advance.

An anonymous GLLP spokesperson said that the extension was because of "justified complaints" that there had been insufficient time to get forms in. Funny that: they don't usually take any notice of our "justified complaints".

The non-Monetarist

The *Economist*, bastion of the free market, seems to have become an FT (Fellow Traveller). They have recently declared that they have had enough of deflation (Monetarism) and now favour reflation (Keynesianism). So, we're all Keynesians now?

Moving the goal posts

So, the Party leadership wants the NEC elections to be conducted in May and June. In the long term they seek to relegate results they fear to just being summer madness. But for this year, could this be a way of assisting **Michael Cashman** before he disappears to Brussels on 10th June as MEP for the West Midlands?



London's Mayor

Ken Livingstone —

let the members decide

Stan Newens MEP

One business, many votes

God bless the 'payroll' vote. Government ministers, whips, private secretaries and assorted loony-right hangers on like Giles Radice were wheeled out to steer through the City of London Bill, giving more votes in elections in this district to big businesses. A rearguard action by 91 socialist and democratic Labour MPs couldn't stop the "free vote" by the Labour hierarchy, Tories and Liberals in favour of this obviously undemocratic Act. One member one vote in Blair's Britain? You've more chance of seeing a one-legged duck swim in a straight line, Rhodri.

Rambling on about Leninists

The shock on **Gordon Prentice**'s face was there for all to see when Michael Meacher announced in Parliament the Government would back a statutory (and compulsory) right to roam.

Prentice still has a Private Member's Bill down on this, and has suggested the Government take it over and get legislation on the statute book as soon as possible. Prentice's actions have earned him the dubious complement from Alan Clark MP (yes, that Alan Clark) who said his "general attitude to social issues is down-market Leninist."

Meanwhile, the MP for Shrewsbury & Atcham, Paul Marsden, has given a 'Labour' cover to the Country Landowners Association by submitting a ten-minute rule bill on access to the countryside that deliberately discounts a compulsion on large landowners.

It turns out that Marsden sits on a major national committee of the CLA and obviously feels the need to repay his friends in high places. Perhaps the Ramblers should organise a mass trespass on Marsden's back garden. Get the right MP called Marsden, though, or we'll all end up going back to bloody Blackpool again.

Keeping up with the Jones's

Fiona Jones's court case will open a floodgate of Blair babes claiming Newark as their family home (if they can find it on a map).

Anti-abortionist Jones made little impact on the Commons but it will be interesting to see who gets the blame at Millbank for not rescuing her.

Shop a Toady

Guidance has just been issued to **civil servants** on conduct during election campaigns. It includes, "Special Advisers ... must resign if formally adopted as a candidate or if they decide to campaign for the Labour Party during the election." Keep an eye out on the doorstep for that toady who sits at the back of your Labour Party meeting taking notes before returning to their job with a Minister.

Correspondence

Pensioners will welcome Christine Shawcroft's report in February's *LLB* that Socialist Campaign Groups have the linking of pensions to average earnings as a discussion item on their agenda this summer.

For 20 long years pensions have fallen in real terms and we are now trailing behind our European counterparts. Old Labour (True Labour) put our pensioners first, unlike New Labour's policy of pursuing the Thatcher treatment of yesterday's heroes.

Blair claims restoring the link was not in his Manifesto, but he gave a personal assurance to reduce the gap between rich and poor. A recent UN survey reports this gap is widening faster in the UK than any other European country, so when will he honour that promise?

Thousands of pensioners who voted Labour feel betrayed and unless they receive a restoration of the link before the next election, continued support for New Labour is in serious doubt.

A Harling and P Chennell, Chair and Secretary, British Pensioners and Trade Union Action Association, East Grinstead and District Branch

As one of the Fulham fans Geoff refers to in last month's *LLB*, I would like to take issue with his criticism of Mohammed Al Fayed. Geoff must surely realise that one of the compromises any socialist footie fan must make is that we have to turn a blind eye to what the owners of our clubs do in the world of business and commerce. If we didn't, no socialist would ever visit any of the 92 League grounds.

Ken Bates, the Chelsea Chairman, is not exactly Mother Teresa but I for one applaud and respect what he has done for Chelsea over the years and I would like to think that Geoff would extend a similar feeling to our much loved Chairman.

But for Mohammed Al Fayed there would now be posh people's flats where once proudly stood Craven Cottage. Instead we have a team destined for the First Division and eventually into the Premiership and Europe.

John Evers, Worcester Park, Surrey

What sort of person can actually say, when a third of the children in the country are undernourished, that the real problem of poverty is "poverty of ambition"? What sort of person can talk about a "something for nothing culture" and not be referring to inherited wealth, spiralling house prices, or untaxed dividends?

We could classify our failure to do anything effective about poverty at home as a sin of omission. But we have gone out of our way to wage a punitive war against Iraq and have a direct responsibility for the dramatic decline in the expectation of life there and the daily deaths of scores of children. "Have bombs, will use them" is now our foreign policy.

We once had a Labour Party which believed in the brotherhood of man, common ownership, redistributive taxation, full trade union rights, equal opportunities, a state run education system, welfare rights, generous wage-linked pensions, a free NHS, affordable housing for all, nuclear disarmament and armed forces only for defence. We are watching a daily betrayal of all these principles.

Some have found excuses for themselves in the taxation promises made before the election. But Blair and co can find money for bombs and take public delight in privatisation, protecting the rich, trying to run schools like businesses, reducing the state pension, leaving the brotherhood of man to the tender mercies of the World Bank, acting tough at Clinton's command, persecuting immigrants and distancing themselves from unions. On welfare and education they revel in quasi-Tory philosophy.

In the whole of world history there has never been a betrayal to equal Blair's nor such a set of cowardly colleagues prepared to condone it. He makes Ramsay Macdonald look like a life-long socialist. How long can we ordinary grassroots members be expected to keep our heads down and hope for better things?

Bob Spooner, Leeds

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

"We are being asked to accept ... that homosexuality is equal in value to heterosexuality ... I do not believe that to be the case ... in the gay community sexuality seems to matter almost totally ... it is not healthy ... Homosexuality is dangerous to the men who practise it ..." – Jamie Cann Labour MP for Ipswich. (Ed: it gets worse, but we are too bashful)

"The public actually quite likes this" – Margaret Mythen, Head of Policy, Labour Party, questioned on control freakery.

"Democracy is about winning the next election" – Roger Poole, Assistant General Secretary, UNISON, again on control freakery.

"If I'm in a bar with people I don't know, to say you are a Labour MP isn't always a good move. I have said I'm a solicitor" – Claire Ward, the New MP for Watford.



Left at Number Ten

TRIBUNE

Every week, TRIBUNE carries all the news and views from Labour and the Left. TRIBUNE is essential reading for all those keen to keep up with events inside the Labour Party and the New Labour Government and in touch with campaigns on key issues such as the Welfare State.

Tick the top box on the form below to subscribe to TRIBUNE at the special three-month introductory rate of £10, saving 20 per cent on the normal price. Or tick the bottom box to receive details of annual Direct Debit subscriptions.

❑ **YES**, I want to subscribe to **TRIBUNE** for three months under your **SPECIAL OFFER**. I enclose a cheque/postal order for £10 made payable to "Tribune Publications Ltd" and crossed "not transferable".

❑ Please send me details of annual subscriptions by Direct Debit.

Name.....

Address.....

.....Postcode.....

Send to: **Tribune Subscriptions Offer, Freepost, 308 Gray's Inn Road. London WC1X 8BR** (no stamp needed)



THE LIZ DAVIES COLUMN

It appears that there will be proposals before the next NEC (to be held 23rd March) to disqualify any candidate in this year's NEC elections who queries the conduct of the ballot.

LLB readers will recall that during last year's ballot several candidates, including myself, wrote to Tom Sawyer, then General Secretary, querying the use of telephone voting (which had not been authorised by the outgoing NEC). To my amazement, Sawyer chose to press release some of my comments and to accuse me of insulting Labour Party staff. During the August silly season, the story was briefly front-page news. So Millbank's current paranoia about candidates publicly criticising the ballot leaves me open-mouthed. After all, it was Tom Sawyer who chose to make my query public.

The attempt to bar questions about the conduct of elections is the latest Kafkaesque twist in Millbank's drive against dissent. Obviously any candidate with concerns about the integrity of a ballot process should initially raise those concerns with the scrutineers or the returning officer. But what if no answer is received? What if there is a refusal to investigate the allegation? What recourse does the candidate have?

In public elections, there is a right for anyone – candidate or voter – to bring a petition to the Court alleging irregularities in the ballot. This is necessary in order to ensure confidence in the electoral process. I can see no reason why this widely accepted principle of natural justice should not apply to Labour's own internal elections.

Get elected to the NEC and travel the country! At the numerous Labour Party meetings I have addressed in the last year, I have usually been warned by local sources that a particular individual is present solely to report back to Millbank. I tended to dismiss such notions as paranoid – until at one meeting the Millbank spy blew his cover when he tried to use his mobile phone to record the proceedings.

At these meetings, the same concerns are voiced again and again by ordinary Labour Party members. Horror at the bombing of Iraq (no ordinary Labour Party member has yet to say to me that he or she supported it), disappointment at the level of the minimum wage and the level of public sector pay, dismay at the lack of democracy in the Party and Millbank's high-handed treatment of Party members. The £2,000 levy on CLPs for the Euro-election has caused particular offence, especially as those CLPs that can afford to pay the £2,000 in a lump sum receive a 10% discount. Redistribution of resources from the poor to the rich.

'The conduct of elections is the latest Kafkaesque twist in Millbank's drive against dissent'

One of the most inhumane actions of the last Tory government – comparable to decimating the mining communities or re-introducing imprisonment for debt for poll tax non-payers – was the withdrawal of welfare benefits from asylum-seekers who had not immediately applied for asylum on their arrival in the UK. The measure was initially overturned in the Courts and condemned by senior judges as uncivilised. The Tories re-introduced the proposals in primary legislation, thus making them "judge-proof".

The effect has been chaos in the lives of asylum seekers. At first many had simply no resources – money, food or accommodation. Various test cases resulted in local authorities having to provide accommodation and food vouchers for the destitute.

A few years ago, it would have gone without saying that Labour – which denounced the measures in opposition – would have reversed them once in government. Tragically, the Asylum and Immigration Bill before the House of Commons entrenches and extends them. The voucher system will apply to all asylum-seekers. Local authorities will be able to place asylum-seekers in hostels anywhere in the country, thus depriving people of the support of a local community.

Jack Straw says that the Bill will deter "economic migrants" from masquerading as asylum seekers. As anyone with experience in the immigration field can tell you, few people are willing to endure the humiliation of being questioned endlessly by a succession of hostile officials about the most personal details of their lives unless they are genuinely escaping persecution. In the "globalised economy" that Straw champions it isn't easy to draw a clear line between economics and politics, between zones of poverty and zones of warfare and repression.

Thousands of people who have committed no offence other than expecting Britain to be a haven from fear and terror will find themselves stigmatised, isolated in hostels away from their communities, dependent on vouchers for bare subsistence and in many cases detained as if they were criminals. It's a shameful piece of legislation and should be vigorously opposed by Labour Party members and especially MPs.

Printed and published by Wernhams Printers Ltd(TU), 4 Forster Road, London N17