LABOUR LEFT

Briefing

DECEMBER 1999 • £1 WAGED • 50P UNWAGED



Campaign for Ken

LONDON MAYOR
Confessions of a Party loyalist

ANTI-RACISM
Jeremy Hardy on Robert Hamill

RAIL SAFETY
New Labour dithers

QUEEN'S SPEECH
Civil rights eroded

LABOUR LEFT Briefing

Po Box 2378, London, E5 9QU
Telephone: 0181-985 6597
Fax: 0181-985 6785
Email: briefing@gn.apc.org
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 Bhattacharyya, Graham Copp, Tony Dale, Liz Davies, Mark Donoghue, Jenny Fisher, Sean Fitzpatrick, Jon Green, Colin Hall, Simon Kennedy, 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.

Production Team
Graham Bash, Gary Drostle, Jenny Fisher, Colin Hall, Louise Kawakami, Dave Lewney, Leonora Lloyd, Dorothy Macedo, Mike Phipps.

***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* web site**
http://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*.

LLB Club prize draw winner:
S.N.Smith and R.D.Calderon – £10 each.

■ The copy deadline for the February issue is Monday 17th January 2000.



December 1999

Photo: Paul Mattsson

AGENDA

4 - 9 Ken for Mayor!
Confessions of a Party loyalist, Trade Unions for Ken.

10 - 13 News and views
The White Bill anniversary, Queen's Speech, urban regeneration

14 - 15 Labour Party
Policy consultations, the Alan Simpson column

18 - 21 Trade unions
Rail update, UNISON General Secretary, TU notebook, the Geoff Martin column

22 - 25 International
Yugoslavia, Irish peace, Chechnya, world trade, Sweden

26 - 28 Fighting Racism
Ricky Reel, United Families, Robert Hamill

29 - 32 Regulars
Reviews, Obituaries, Periscope, Correspondence, 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

Ken for Mayor!

So finally Ken Livingstone is being allowed to run in Labour's internal selection contest for London mayor. After weeks of hesitation, zig-zags and embarrassing delay, the leadership has at last weighed the odds and decided that gambling on the London Party's verdict is the least bad option.

The last weeks have produced one fiasco after another for the usually smooth-running Millbank spin machine. Nick Raynsford's mayoral campaign was launched only for it to be ditched days later when the utterly reluctant Frank Dobson suddenly discovered an appetite for a job in which he had never shown the slightest earlier interest. Then Trevor Phillips was co-opted as his deputy, shortly after he had turned down a similar proposal from Ken Livingstone on the suggestion that it was arrogant, even racist.

Then the organisational dirty tricks got underway. The Dobson campaign had apparently not only secured the Party's London membership list but with it sufficient finance to bombard members by mail and phone with campaign appeals. London MPs' "personal" letters to their members urging support for Dobson turned out to be identically worded.

Next came the historical revisionism. The GLC under Ken Livingstone was purely about posturing, mere gesture politics, we were told. The impressive levels of movement from private to public transport in London in the early 1980s, thanks to such ideas as bus lanes and flexible travelcards, which nowadays we take for granted, are conveniently neglected. The GLC's very real support for initiatives promoting women's rights, gay and lesbian equality and black representation are now traduced by the same New Labour pay-roll vote that cuts lone parent benefit and tightens the asylum laws. Millbank's desperation was revealed by the deployment of 1980s has-been Neil Kinnock to attack the "loony left", a phrase coined by the same Murdoch press Blair now courts so assiduously. Perhaps the nadir was reached when MEP Michael Cashman publicly accused the GLC's policies of precipitating Section 28 and other anti-gay measures. Or perhaps not: the campaign has a long time to run and Blair, having allowed Livingstone to run (did anyone doubt it was never anyone else's decision but his?) has let it be known that the leadership will wage all-out war on his principles and character.

Yes, Livingstone's personal fitness for the job has also been questioned. Apparently he's a loner, arrogant, incapable of teamwork, although his years as GLC leader clearly belie this, if contemporary colleagues are to be believed. "What has Ken done since 1987?" asked one Blair loyalist recently. To which the answer might be: not sold out.

The final act in the drama, the missed deadlines, the cancelled TV interviews with Blair after the vetting panel deferred its decision and the "clarifications" required of Livingstone represent more than a PR disaster for New Labour. It focused the whole debate squarely back on the policy issues, above all tube privatisation, which Livingstone has put at the centre of his campaign. That Livingstone will be able to put his ideas before the London membership on these matters should be an elementary democratic right. That he can now do so is an important victory – but the fact that it should ever have been questioned reveals the depths of Millbank's intolerance.

All the leadership's manoeuvres against Livingstone have done enormous damage to our Party's reputation and further undermined the integrity of its structures. But they equally explode the myth that the centralisation of the Party since 1994 and the destruction of grassroots democracy and accountability were a precondition for making the Party electable. New Labour's modernisation has never looked so shamelessly authoritarian and undemocratic.

Despite – or because of – all the shabby tricks used against Livingstone, he is more popular than ever. Recent polls show Dobson trailing in third place, even behind Glenda Jackson. The decision to allow Livingstone to be a candidate must be seen in this light. It is a decision that recognises that to ban him would have split the London Labour Party down the middle and possibly precipitated a Livingstone victory as an independent. Blair's gamble is to hope that, with the electoral college formula, he has rigged the rules just enough to allow Ken to be beaten in a "fair" contest. Our aim is to prove him wrong.

The brinkmanship of mid-November shows just how high the stakes are. It is not just an intra-Party struggle between New Labour and the majority of London Party members, but also a conflict between the Labour Government and the aspirations of the people of London. As in Wales, New Labour's commitment to devolution seems conditional upon the people voting for Government placemen.

But much more is at issue than the job of London mayor: the future direction of our Party, perhaps its very existence as a reforming, redistributive party hangs in the balance. Tens of thousands of activists and former activists recognise this. And more, the campaign to elect Ken Livingstone could signal the emergence of a real popular alternative to a government that daily places its loyalty to big business above the interests of the millions who elected it.

Confessions of a Party loyalist

Peter Hart, Agent of Finchley and Golders Green CLP, writing in a personal capacity, explains his change of heart.

It is difficult to underestimate the fury of ordinary members when faced with the sheer stupidity of the Millbank-led Frank Dobson campaign. They have wandered down every blind alley of incompetence, risible deviousness and oafish rudeness.

Twenty years ago, like most activists, I was proud to be a supporter of Tony Benn and Ken Livingstone. However, our Finchley Constituency Labour Party was riven by in-fighting in the late 1980s and in 1990 we watched the Tories capitalise on our internal divisions to win back a ward that we had sweated blood to win. By 1992 I had slipped down the slippery slope from ward agent, to deputy CLP agent, to CLP agent and had largely abandoned my former affiliations to become a Party loyalist who advocated "singing from the same songsheet" and taking my pleasure from shagging the Tories rather than attaining my political goals.

Victory confirmed the merit of this approach. We won Barnet Council for Labour and took Thatcher's former stronghold of Finchley. My personal problems with a Blairite Government were nothing compared to the joy of removing that layer of Tory scum which had besmirched these green and pleasant lands for 18 years!

There I was, pleasantly surprised at the scale of our achievements, when the London debacle occurred. The concept of an executive Mayor was forced through against all advice: likewise the system of a directly elected Mayor. We knew what would happen! Loyalists like me would have rallied to a Frank Dobson or Glenda Jackson campaign if it had been clear from the start who was standing, preferably a year ago. Personally I would not have voted for Ken, although I greatly admired his many achievements at the GLC. He was a figure from the past; loved but passé like Arthur Askey.

Then the farce began. Delay after delay, pathetically obvious manoeuvring by the leadership, squirming from Frank as he tried to avoid the job, posturing from Ken who had been thrown a lifeline by Millbank.

Then the joke candidate whose name I forget (Nick Raynsford) and his ludicrous press conference and the inevitable humiliating climb-down. Finally Frank was dragged squealing from his den: the fight was on. At this stage I was still an unwilling Frank supporter – but no more unwilling than he was!

Then I got the four page letter from Frank and realised how much had been spent on sending one to every London Party member. This was money which, one way or another, Party and union activists had worked hard to raise, only to have it misdirected into this cause for the benefit of those silly Party members who don't know their own minds. I rang to complain and promptly got a warning call from a man the Labour Party insisted was not in any way involved in Frank's campaign.

Over the last month the sheer hypocrisy of Millbank's involvement in the selection panel farrago has led me close to despair. I could feel a strange stirring in the blood that I thought years of toeing the party line had washed away. Sod it – I was going to vote for Ken!

Finally I received a copy of the most offensive leaflet I have seen in 20 years as an activist. Was this shocker directed at a Tory, a Lib-Dem or some idiot Green? No, it was directed by Frank Dobson against Ken and his supporters. It explicitly stated that if you support Ken you are nothing but a Tory or a Trot. I could see the spectre of mass infighting across London looming. I rang to complain, mentioned I was thinking of resigning if that was how they felt about Party members who support Ken. "Resign then!" was the answer. They want rid of me/us – all they cared about was the "Blessed Frank". Oh well, infighting it is, and if Ken wants any help I shall be there to deliver it over the next three wretched months. Who cares about good government and a united Party? Millbank certainly doesn't!

By the way, I think we should campaign to get MPs to refuse to use their block vote in the selection process as a point of principle.

The last straw for Peter Hart. Frank Dobson's extremist campaign leaflet attacks Ken's supporters as Tories or Trots!.

We're backing Frank

Tony Banks
Bernie Grant
Clare Short
Tony Blair
Neil Kinnock

They're backing Livingstone

Jeffrey Archer
Socialist Organiser
Ted Knight
John Gummer
The SWP

Frank Dobson for Mayor

Who do you trust?

Now let's fight for victory!

Ken Livingstone argues that the future of London Transport may depend on the outcome of Labour's selection process for London Mayor.



Now we have a shortlist of candidates for London Mayor, the Labour Party is in a strong position to enter the GLA elections next May united against the Tories.

The selection battle will be hard fought but if it is conducted on a level playing field, it will ensure that Labour voters in the capital will have every confidence in our candidate. That will be a major asset in the campaign.

The three candidates who have emerged through the selection process on to the shortlist have undergone a vigorous test and all of us have been judged by the Party to be good candidates. I made it clear that Glenda Jackson and Frank Dobson would make fine Labour Mayors of London. Furthermore, I want to give the undertaking that I intend to fight a clean fight – there will be no negative campaigning from my supporters because once the selction is finished, we will have to work together as one united party against the Tories.

The selection will be fought on a broad range of issues. Central will be how we break the gridlock on our roads and cut congestion. A moderate and cautious use of the congestion charge, combined with measures such as the return of conductors on buses and the extension and full enforcement of a city-wide network of bus lanes, should form a centrepiece of a Labour Mayor's transport policy.

It is important that we persuade the commuter to make that change. I am therefore committed to freezing the fares on London Transport for four years.

On the question of funding the London Underground, I have made my views perfectly clear. Labour's General Election Manifesto gave a committment that we will fund the required investment of the Tube through a public/private partnership which is both in the public interest and guaranteed to provide value for money for the commuter and the taxpayer. The proposed Public Private Partnership (PPP) arrangements do not meet that commitment as effectively as a bonds issue.

I am totally opposed to bringing Railtrack into one third of the Underground. The proposed PPP would cost £1,000 extra for every man, woman and child in London compared with the cheaper option of allowing the Mayor to raise the necessary investment by the issuing of bonds. I believe this is the most sensible and reliable method of modernising the Tube and I will argue for it throughout the selection.

The extended period for the ballot means that Labour will not have a candidate in place until mid-February, so we have to be in the strongest possible starting point next Spring.

This election will be Labour's last major electoral challenge before the next General Election. It is therefore vital that we gain as many Assembly Seats as possible.

The polls now show I would beat the Tories solidly. No other Labour candidate has such a strong showing or would win the necessary number of votes to win on the first round. Labour must win the election, not run the Tories a close second.

Trade unions for Ken!

A momentous week of high political drama has ended with Ken Livingstone's passing through the eye of the Millbank needle and onto the Labour Party shortlist for Mayor. This now throws up a massive opportunity for a real debate over the capital's public services, and the rejection of the Tory dogma of the quick fix solution of privatisation – now running through the veins of Millbank's apparachiks.

Unions across the capital must now grasp the nettle in the run up to the ballot of Labour Party members and affiliates, by coming together and building a broad based campaign in support of Livingstone's candidacy and the promotion of properly funded public services.

A new independent campaign shortly to be launched – Trade Unions For Ken (TUFK) – will aim to attract the broadest base of support in London's unions by stating a vote for Ken is a vote for a public services.

After the Paddington rail disaster, coupled with the threat to privatise the Tube through PPP, there is a genuine opportunity for a debate on the public funding and running of our services – hospitals, councils, transport and housing – which is particularly timely given the resources in the the Chancellor's burgeoning war chest and the forthcoming mayoral election.

The election of Ken as Mayor will be the biggest opportunity to reverse the years of decline and Tory mismanagement, which include attacks on the workforce and their exclusion from having a say in the future of our public services.

That's why I am inviting all members of London's unions to support Trade Unions For Ken for a better future for London's public services.

For further details contact: Steve Wilkinson, Campaign Liaison Officer of TUFK, 0181-806 8502 or email wage.slave@virgin.net

Ken's policies are just the ticket

LLB spoke to Bob Crowe, Assistant General Secretary of the RMT.

***LLB*: Why do you think the selection of Labour's candidate is so important?**

BC: It's not about individual charisma, it's the policies the candidates are putting to the London electorate. For London Underground workers and commuters these elections are crucial, because the Mayor will oversee the operation and funding of the tube – and will have the opportunity to change the way London Underground operates.

We have looked at all the candidates and we believe that the best way to look after our members' interests is by supporting Ken Livingstone.



Bob Crowe at the Rail Safety demonstration, November 1999.

***LLB*: What do you see as the major differences between the three Labour candidates?**

BC: Frank Dobson and Glenda Jackson both support the Public Private Partnership (PPP). The Tories' privatisation of the British Rail network was a complete and utter disaster. We don't want that exported to London Underground.

Also, Lord Cullen's inquiry into safety may well say that the fragmentation of the railway network contributed to the crashes at Ladbroke Grove and Southall. The Government plans to sign over four underground lines to Railtrack in April. We think that we should wait for Lord Cullen's inquiry to report first.

It sends shivers down travelling commuters' spines even to contemplate that a firm which is under investigation for manslaughter and may yet face a criminal prosecution is going to be allowed anywhere near London Underground. We're looking for our members to support Ken Livingstone in the ballot as the best way to stop the privatisation of the Underground.

***LLB*: You were chairing a "Listen to London" hustings meeting on 9th November, which was organised by the three rail unions, at which Glenda Jackson said that the PPP plans were not privatisation, were not partial privatisation and were not even partial partial privatisation. How do you respond?**

BC: I don't accept what she says. Ask the 4,000 people who are going to be transferred from the public to the private sector. You can't say, "I'm partially pregnant" – either you're pregnant or you're not pregnant. You're privatised or you're not privatised. Our workers' employment contracts won't be held by London Underground any more but by Railtrack or a subcontractor such as Jarvis or Balfour Beatty.

These workers will be transferred to the private sector for thirty years. They won't come back unless some future legislation renationalises both the mainline railways and London Underground. I've heard people say that in thirty years' time the staff will come back to London Underground: that's just an insult to our intelligence.

- UNISON's London Committee of the APF (Affiliated Political Fund) has decided to recommend that all 70,000 APF members vote for Ken Livingstone. The TGWU has made a similar recommendation.

"We need someone who will stand up for London"

Barry Camfield, TGWU representative on the London Labour Party Regional Board, spoke to Leonora Lloyd about the battle for the London Mayor.

***LLB*: Why did the TGWU decide to ballot all their members for the mayoral decision?**

BC: Normally, we might not have done – it is going to cost the London Region 30% of its political fund – but the whole thing has been made so political. If unions had just come out for Ken, we would have been attacked as undemocratic. Under different circumstances, we could have either asked our regional committees for their view – this form of representative democracy is used for many issues – or held workplace ballots. Most MPs have decided not to ballot their constituency members.

***LLB*: Why did the TGWU recommend support for Ken Livingstone?**

BC: Support for Ken was unanimous on the regional committee and we were confident the membership would support him as well – we had very strong feelings about it. This support goes back a long way, to the days of the GLC. Ken had many progressive policies, particularly support for transport and manufacturing and trade union rights. He has a long track record of support for these policies.

We knew there was overwhelming support among the London public and Labour Party members for Ken and we were sure our members would support him too. Ken is trusted. Our committee regards him as someone who will take London seriously and not use it just as a political platform for the party leadership.

***LLB*: How should unions be involved in the selection?**

BC: We think there should be a trade union role within all major decisions of the Labour Party, so we are not opposed in principle to electoral colleges. But if we have an electoral college, we want our members to have a proper role, so we were concerned about the weight of votes given to MPs, MEPs and GLA candidates.

***LLB*: What are the key issues for you in this contest?**

BC: They remain the same as the ones Ken supported in the GLC – manufacturing, transport and the right to work. He's been campaigning for them for a long time. The other candidates have come into the picture very late in the day.

Our view is that we need someone who will stand up for London. It's not a problem for us – indeed, we would only support a candidate who would be prepared to do this, even if it meant opposing the leadership.

***LLB*: Do you have any comments about how the campaign has gone so far?**

BC: It's all about the concern of some people to have control over the outcome. On one level, I can understand that – we all have candidates we prefer in any contest, but there are limits to how far you go in damaging a candidate to ensure someone else's success. Frank Dobson has a reasonable record, but all these issues are damaging him, and the whole thing is a gift for all Labour's opponents.

The question of money is central. I've had two mailings – a letter asking for support and a postcard for a meeting (sent by first class post). These issues about costs should have been sorted out earlier – months ago.

Ken doesn't need to spend that kind of money. His publicity comes mostly from his personality and name and his popularity in the polls. I heard Nick Raynsford attacking Ken as a lightweight – after Raynsford had withdrawn to clear the way for Dobson! It's not serious politics, is it? The leadership dislikes anybody who is not on message and does not toe the line. I'm hopeful he will clearly win the trade union and CLP sections. Then everyone will have to start backtracking.

Whatever happens, Ken won't stand as an independent – it would split the Labour vote, and allow the Party to attack him if the Tories then won. I heard that Margaret Hodge said she thought he would stand as an independent, but this sort of thing is just tittle-tattle. We and the other unions wouldn't support him and he knows that. I've told him that the position of Mayor is not so important that his career should go out the window over it. It's more important to keep on winning on progressive issues. Ken will take the long-term view and these stories about him are scurrilous. They suggest Ken does not really mean what he says.

But there would be uproar if he is not selected to fight the election for Labour. It would bring the Party into disrepute – in fact all these manoeuvres are doing that. It would be a huge mistake.

ACTION CHECKLIST

Make sure your CLP is covered by ward organisers who are finding the Ken voters. As soon as the ballot papers go out (as we go to press, they are due to be issued mid-January), phone round everyone to check they've voted.

Don't ignore members who think they might support other candidates (copy page 4 of this *LLB*).

The Tories and the press can now unite around a non-Archer candidate: only Livingstone can rally a vote for Labour to beat them.

Ask your MPs and GLA candidates to conduct a members' ballot.

Contact: Livingstone for London, PO Box 20052, London NW2 5ZH; 0171-436 2702; www.livingstoneforlondon.org.uk.

The road to Intolerance Pier

Colin Hall (Leicester East CLP) examines the roots of the rampant right-wing paranoia which fuels the "Blair witch-hunt project".

Many Party members and supporters will have been left incredulous at the malicious and vindictive attacks on Ken Livingstone at his interviews for the London mayoral candidates' shortlist. Although Ken was eventually allowed onto the shortlist, the proclamations, from Tony Blair downwards, which accompanied this act, made it clear that the leadership, far from graciously conceding defeat on the issue, is in fact merely staging a tactical retreat in order to regroup and resume fire.

Whatever the personal views of the leadership may be, the decision within the corridors of Millbank is that the campaign against Ken must be conducted by "democratic" rather than bureaucratic means in order for the Party to retain any credibility both within the ranks of its own members, and among the London electorate in general.

Yet the attacks by the Party leadership on the left are nothing new. As long ago as 1981, the then Labour leader Michael Foot was goaded into withdrawing support for Bermondsey parliamentary candidate Peter Tatchell, following an article Tatchell wrote in *LLB* stressing the need for mass extra-parliamentary action to defeat the Thatcher government.

Although Tatchell was eventually reinstated as a candidate, his subsequent heavy defeat in a 1983 by-election, together with that of Deirdre Wood in Greenwich four years later, are still often cited as evidence that the left in London costs Labour votes, and used as a pretext for intervention in candidate selections at all levels. This analysis ignores the extent to which Labour authorities at the time, especially in London, were routinely vilified by the Tories and their allies in the media, with little or no attempt being made by the parliamentary leadership to defend their fellow Party members.

Indeed, under Neil Kinnock, the leadership actually took a stand against Labour local authorities, as illustrated by Kinnock's notorious attack on Liverpool City Council at the 1985 Party Conference, and his role in the expulsion of several leading members of the authority from the Party the following year. These actions, together with endless media briefings (both on and off the record) by shadow ministers attacking Party policies (most notably on nuclear disarmament) merely served to highlight divisions within the Party, which Thatcher exploited to the full in securing a third successive term of office.

Many activists concluded that a greater degree of unity within the Party was necessary if Labour was ever to regain national office. Unfortunately, this left them vulnerable to efforts by Kinnock and his cohorts to force the Party to the right and endorse Thatcherite policies. Constituencies and individuals identified as obstructing this rightward march were isolated, and the attacks on Militant and other left-wing groups intensified. But the strategy failed to yield electoral success, as the tabloid media remained unimpressed by Kinnock's efforts to appease them, and Labour suffered yet another election defeat in 1992.

When John Smith took over as leader of the Party, hopes briefly rose of a more tolerant internal regime. However, given the background of many of the Party bureaucrats whose positions had depended on loyalty to Kinnock, his scope for improvements was severely curtailed. Blair's succession to the leadership following Smith's death in 1994 gave the Kinnockites the opportunity to complete what they regarded as unfinished business. Thus "New Labour" was born, the constitution of the Party was rewritten, and radical policies were watered down yet further in attempts to secure support from big business.

Any Labour candidates whose record was considered to provoke media wrath could be judged as unsuitable for public office, no matter what democratic mandate they may have received from fellow Party members. Thus, when the *Daily Mail*, among others, demanded the removal of Liz Davies as candidate for Leeds North-East, Blair swiftly intervened to grant their wish. This gesture was not simply an attack on Liz, or *LLB*, but an effective means of ensuring other constituencies would select bland, compliant candidates who could be trusted to do the leadership's bidding, once elected to the House of Commons. This pattern has been repeated at regional and local government level, aided and abetted by a compliant and openly partisan Party hierarchy. The results have left the calibre of Party representatives at the lowest level in decades.

Blair and those around him fail to understand fear of the Tories can no longer be used, as it was by Kinnock and in subsequent years, to intimidate members and impose unwanted changes. There is a genuine mood, both in London and elsewhere for radical change and whether Blair likes it or not, Ken Livingstone is seen as the most likely person to effect that change.

At last members have the chance to throw away the chains that have shackled them for far too long. Ken has won the battle to get on the ballot paper. The left's task is to ensure he wins the war, and reverses the tide that has flowed against us for nearly two decades.

Martha Osamor and Sharon Atkin at Labour Party Conference, 1988. Roy Hattersley said, "If there was ever anyone who has been used by extreme elements, it's Martha Osamor. She's a simple woman, of that sort. She could never have got elected to Parliament." Hattersley escaped charges of bringing the Party into disrepute.



Photo: Leesa Herbert

Who is setting the women's agenda?

Maria Exall reports: Who speaks for women in the Labour Party? Most government decisions affect the lives of millions of working class women, but women's voices have been sidelined in the Labour Party by the changes to the Women's Organisation pushed through at 1998 Party Conference. The Government will run conferences to listen to women from the business communities, but the structures of Labour Party Women's Conference are designed to exclude the collective voices of CLP and Women's Section delegates and trade unionists.

Regional women's structures have been reduced to an "as and when" basis. In London, the broad based Women's Committee, elected by CLP and trade union women directly, has been replaced by a small number of women from the Regional Board, who have met once in one and a half years. The annual Regional Women's Conference has gone too.

This lack of internal Party democracy has serious implications as we approach the Greater London Assembly (GLA) and Mayoral elections. Despite the important debate about the future of the London Underground (in itself a big issue for women transport users and workers), other policy issues that are important for women have been overshadowed. However, the Party consultation on the manifesto is running to 10th December and provides an opportunity for members in CLPs and affiliated organisations to send in submissions – and we should use it.

To highlight the issues for women in London and to encourage debate within the Party we have produced The *Womens' Agenda for the London Mayor and Assembly*. Covering the policy areas of transport, planning, economic development, environment, police and fire services, culture, and health we have tried to identify the key issues for women and suggest policy priorities that could gain the support of London women in the elections. Our manifesto can be used as a starting point by women outside London to develop their own manifestos or re-examine those they have already started.

We want the priorities for working class women in London to be the priorities for the Mayor and the GLA now, and to influence this Government and the next one.

MPs must ballot!

John Cryer MP for Hornchurch gives a lead to his fellow MPs.

I shall be balloting all members of Hornchurch CLP to see which way they want me to vote. Trade unions can be called to account by their members on how they wield their votes and many unions have chosen to ballot their members. Ordinary Labour Party members have a vote and that's right as well. The vote of each MP has equivalent weight to the votes of about 1,000 ordinary members – but there is no mechanism for calling them to account over how they exercise this block vote in their third of the electoral college. I am prepared to be mandated by my Constituency Party and whoever they go for I will support.



Personally, I have become more inclined to support Ken Livingstone over the past few months as I have seen all the dirty tricks that have been used against him. With every comment and every off the record briefing, Ken's popularity goes up a couple of notches. You would have thought that the Labour Party hierarchy would have learnt something from that, but it appears not and they have carried on attacking him. His popularity is likely to increase further and in all probability he will get support from the vast majority of London Labour Party members. I know members of Hornchurch Labour Party who, a few months ago, would not have thought in their wildest dreams that they would ever support Ken Livingstone, and who are now saying that they will support him enthusiastically.

A directly elected Mayor is a unique and important position, without enormous power but with vast influence. In effect whoever becomes the Mayor of London will probably be, in terms of influence and profile, second only to the Prime Minister in the country.

The key issue is transport, without a shadow of doubt. Public opinion has left Parliament behind – it is now dead set against any form of privatisation. In 20 or 30 years, people will look back on the Paddington tragedy and say that was the turning point. You won't even find many Tory supporters who will argue for any form of privatisation and the plans to hand over maintenance of the tube to companies like Railtrack could prove to be a real vote-loser.

The Women's Agenda

The Women's Agenda for the London Mayor and Assembly is a comprehensive contribution to the debate on the priorities for the London Labour Party in the run up to the Mayor and GLA elections in May 2000. It is a 20 page publication covering all the main areas of responsibility of a London Mayor and Assembly.

The authors outline the key issues for women that Labour could address, and the "pledges" that should be made by Labour candidates to improve the lives of working class women in London.

The publication is aimed at Party members and active trade unionists and is intended to raise the profile of women's issues throughout the Party and promote debate.

It is free! Order your copy now! The writers of *The Women's Agenda* are all women members of the London Labour Party who have had experience within the Party, in local government, the trade unions and in community campaigning. They are available for local policy forum discussions and welcome invitations from CLPs.

- *The Women's Agenda for the London Mayor and Assembly*, produced by Ruth Clark, Maria Exall, Nadine Finch, Carol Kay, Loraine Monk, Teresa Pearce and Julie Reay, can be ordered from Ruth on 0181-854 4957.

The last push is the longest

Twenty-five years after the White Bill nearly destroyed the 1967 Abortion Act, Leonora Lloyd, founder member of the National Abortion Campaign, says that women still do not have a right to choose.

Labour MP James White's private member's bill led directly to the formation of the National Abortion Campaign early in 1975. Little did we think that we would still be fighting for a woman's right to choose 25 years on.

The 1967 Act is outdated, a remnant of the time when even pioneering women's organisations like the Abortion Law Reform Association were paternalistic towards women. The current system is expensive, unfair, arbitrary and discriminatory. Whether you can get an NHS abortion depends on where you live and on your doctor's attitudes. In Northern Ireland, abortion remains effectively illegal, leading to women being forced to undertake the expensive and upsetting journey to London or Liverpool. If abortion were decriminalised and uniformly provided on the NHS, women would be able to determine for themselves how to deal with unwanted pregnancies.

It is especially disappointing that a Labour Government with the most women MPs ever has not improved the situation. With Labour's current overwhelming majority it should be quick work to change the law, but the opportunity to use the recent health service legislation came and went, with silence from those women MPs. Despite the welcome setting up of a pro-choice group of parliamentarians – Voice for Choice – no MP has produced a private member's bill to correct the many anomalies in the current situation.

Contraception only became available on the NHS after the 1967 Abortion Act. If abortion were available on demand, we might start to see improvements in contraceptive provision, especially for young women, better sex education and easier access to "morning after" birth control. Media sensationalism over the "twelve year old mums" earlier this year shows we still have a long way to go.

NAC has a proud history of defence of the 1967 Act. It was one of the few progressive causes not defeated during the dark Thatcher years – abortion law was marginally liberalised if anything. But NAC has always had problems in attracting support for campaigns to get a better law rather than defend the current one, not least because it has always had to work alongside other pro-choice campaigns with a much more conservative agenda. The way to overcome this problem is to build NAC into a truly mass campaign. The anti-abortionists know in their hearts that women won't return to the days of illegal abortion – every union region and branch, local Labour parties and every socialist should be a NAC member, prepared to make that last push to change the law.

- Contact NAC at The Print House, 18 Ashwin Street, London E8 3DL, tel. 0171-923 4976. The NAC AGM is on 4th December.

Racism almost hit for six

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) has issued its first-ever report on racism. After years of ducking the thorny issue, the ECB now appears prepared to tackle a disease that to varying degrees infects the game at all levels.

An anti-racist code of conduct will be imposed throughout the game. Racist chanting will be banned. Sections of the ground will be reserved for spectators with musical instruments or banners. Some tickets will be reserved for sale just before the match. Perhaps most significantly, in the long run, there are proposals to establish local and national forums for organisations involved with black and Asian cricket.

All these measures have been urged on the ECB by Hit Racism for Six since its inception in 1995 and were outlined in the campaign's formal submission to the ECB's Racism Study Group. They are no more than other sports implemented years ago, but for cricket they represent a significant step forward.

However, there are still problems with the report. The ECB is still reluctant to recognise the scale and nature of the problem, and too often talks only of "perceptions" of racism. It also ignores the central question of resources. Perhaps the single biggest disadvantage facing young black and Asian cricketers is the paucity and poverty of public cricket pitches, especially in inner city areas. The report looks to local government for remedy, but it seems unlikely that local authorities which are closing libraries are going to start investing in cricket facilities. English cricket is awash with money, but redistribution of the existing resources within the game is a radical step beyond the ECB's current thinking.

The big south Asian turnout for many of the World Cup games played here this year has forced the ECB's hand. But it was the persistence of Hit Racism for Six, boosted by an Early Day Motion signed by 55 MPs, that ensured the issue could no longer be ignored.

An England star is born ...



Photo: Phil Maxwell

The pantomime season begins

Jeremy Corbyn MP takes a critical look at the Queen's Speech and its promise of more draconian legislation to come.

They were all there for the big day. Fitzallan Pursuivant alongside Rouge Dragon Pursuivant closely followed by Rouge Croix and Arundel Herald Extraordinary and others led the Sovereign's procession. The Queen followed behind waited on by her pages, the Lady of the Bedchamber, the Mistress of the Robe and the Equerries. In new democratic Britain the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod still summons the members of the Commons to Her Majesty and the elected politicians stand in a ruck while the Queen reads out the programme. Hereditary Peers may have (mostly) gone but the fundamentally undemocratic structure of Parliament remains.

When the Queen finally deigned to speak to Parliament we learnt that in the next session the Government is to bring forward over 20 substantial bills, including key legislation on transport, local government, welfare reform, criminal justice and crime.

The Speech included welcome proposals to establish an integrated transport system, a Countryside Bill which will increase rights of access to the countryside, a bill to ban fur farming, the reform of policing in Northern Ireland, and new steps to tackle racism and promote equality of opportunity.

The new package for transport will establish a new strategic rail authority to make rail regulation more effective, and will contain measures to improve bus services and reduce road congestion and pollution. While all this is welcome, it is the plans to bring new finance into the National Air Traffic Control through public private partnerships (PPPs) which is causing alarm on all sides of the House of Commons. The public overwhelmingly supports public ownership of transport infrastructure and the Paddington disaster ought to be warning enough that PPP is inappropriate for Air Traffic Control. The Government can only lose out by going down the road of PPPs. Several CLP resolutions to Annual Conference against this privatisation were all shunted into the sidings of the National Policy Commissions which will report after the law is made. These CLPs should resubmit their resolutions to the NEC now, with copies to Liz Davies and Christine Shawcroft.

The Queen's Speech included much else which is going to cause serious disquiet on Labour's backbenches. Foremost among these are the Government's chilling and draconian proposals on crime and criminal justice including compulsory drug testing for offenders, extending the use of electronic tagging, removing part or all of the benefit payments from offenders who fail to comply with community service orders and restricting the rights of defendants to trial by jury.

On welfare, Alistair Darling, the Social Security minister, may also be in store for a tough time when he introduces a second Welfare Reform Bill to build on the Government's previous attacks on single parent benefit, incapacity benefit and bereavement allowances. The new bill is set to overhaul the Child Support Agency and pensions in line with the Government's strategy paper which envisages a reduction of one third, over the next fifty years, in state expenditure on pensions. By detail, stealth and legislation we are moving increasingly to a virtually compulsory system of private pensions to complement a very low state pension.

When we won the election in May 1997 there was a massive rejection of the Tories' privatisation, sleaze and anti-democratic practices. It was also a vote of hope for the poorest and most dispossessed in Britain. New Labour is betraying these hopes with its authoritarian approach and a Victorian philosophy of compulsion on welfare and crime. The last session of Parliament saw the Government force through cuts in incapacity benefit in the same week as it gave huge tax hand-outs to company directors. That's not why people voted Labour in 1997 and it won't get them out to vote for us again.

I represent an inner city area with unemployment over 15% and an enormous housing waiting list. We have all the multiple deprivation factors alongside a property boom that prices one bedroom flats at £150,000. Market forces created these problems and while we welcome any new money the situation will not improve without a massive investment in housing by the public sector.



Democracy needs a shot in the arm. Removing votes from hereditary peers is one thing. Replacing them with the patronage of the Prime Minister or a committee of the great and the good is no more democratic. In this Queen's speech we should have been hearing plans for a bill on the House of Lords to create an elected second chamber and the limiting of Prime Ministerial power as exercised through the Royal Prerogative. How can we enter the next millenium relying on Maltravers Herald Extraordinary as anything more than a tourist attraction?

Property sharks maul London

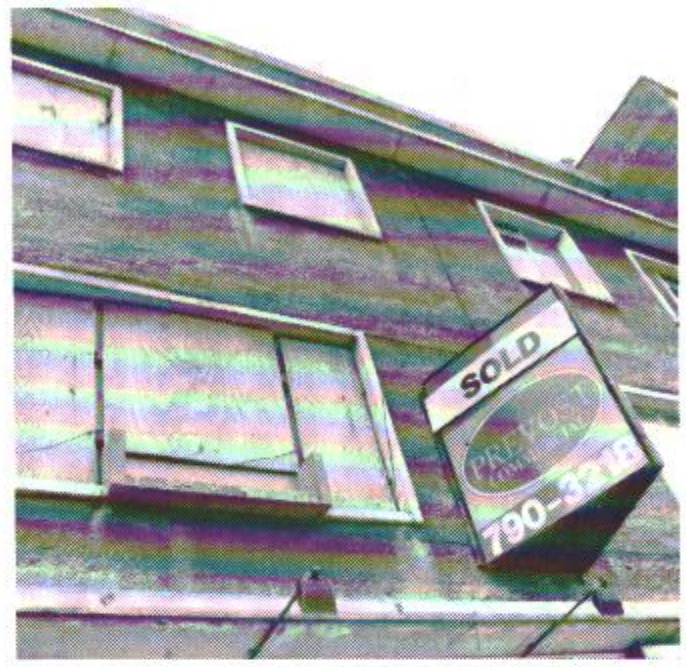


Photo: Phil Maxwell

New Labour's vision for the inner city.

Planning laws must be changed if we are to get affordable housing in the inner cities, argues Lucio Buffone of Vauxhall CLP.

Gentrification in inner London is getting worse. Average rents for a single room in a shared flat in a terraced house are now nearing £500 a month in parts of Brixton. Some house prices have risen by up to 50% in the last 18 months alone.

Living in London's zone 2 is now very popular. Commuting prices are far cheaper and commuting time is reduced and you are less likely to need a car. Leisure facilities are often better than in the suburbs – clubs and cinemas, for example – and of course central London is only 15 minutes away by Tube. But with a property boom in inner London forcing up house prices and private sector rents, we should all start worrying about the social make-up of our capital city. Lambeth Council's housing repairs backlog stands at £1 billion, so the temptation to dispose of some of its housing assets will become irresistible, further reducing the number of affordable houses in an area with many homeless people.

To enable whole communities to benefit from urban renewal, more social housing provision is needed. With local authorities unable to build new homes, and the private developers only having to "donate" 15% of new accommodation for social housing, this is not happening. The problem is with the planning laws. Currently under unitary development plans, residential development is just listed as that. The only distinction made is in the density of development. But in inner London, high density housing need not equate to social or affordable housing. If local authorities were able to designate areas for social housing and brownfield sites could be compulsorily purchased at a reasonable rate rather than a market rate, the net effect would be an end to property sharking over disused wasteland. This would lead to a gradual reduction in land prices, which would also reduce the inflationary pressures of an unsustainable housing boom.

The building of sustainable communities depends on the influx of capital into all areas. However, without safeguards for social and affordable housing, there will be a repeat of the Docklands regeneration, where physical improvements were facilitated by "social cleansing".

Equally a large number of people in zone 2 don't want permanent residence in London. Many choose to live in the capital for just a few years and their housing needs must also be met. There need to be curbs on the excesses of private landlords, but without placing unnecessary burdens on those who rent out the spare room to help with the mortgage. An increase in affordable permanent housing could reduce rents in the private sector.

Planning laws must recognise that land in inner London is limited. The distribution of these limited resources cannot be left to an unregulated market. The planning laws in the UK already restrict the rights of property owners where it is in the public interest – for example, you would not be allowed to stone clad the outside of a Tudor mansion. The housing needs of our capital's inhabitants are of similar vital importance and our planning laws should recognise this.

Mugabe three plead not guilty

Three OutRage! members who attempted a citizen's arrest of Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe pleaded not guilty to public order offences at Horseferry Road Magistrate's Court on 19th November.

The prosecution secured a week's adjournment to give them time to force Sky News to hand over unused film footage so that they could review the charges against the three OutRage! defendants, Chris Morris, Alistair Williams and Peter Tatchell. Peter Tatchell asked the court to rule that the prosecution's review of the case should include an investigation into why, despite being presented with evidence of the Mugabe regime's use of torture, the police failed to arrest the President when he was apprehended by members of OutRage! on 30th October.

"Our citizen's arrest of President Mugabe was an attempt to enforce the 1984 UN Convention Against Torture, which Britain has ratified," said Peter Tatchell. "We are being prosecuted for trying to prevent the crime of torture, while the torturer has been allowed to walk free. The Government arrested General Pinochet, but President Mugabe is at liberty. Both men stand accused of crimes against humanity. Why is there one law for General Pinochet and another for President Mugabe?" said Mr Tatchell.

A full briefing about the citizen's arrest and the regime's human rights abuses is on the OutRage! website: www.OutRage.org.uk

A defence fund is being launched to cover the legal costs of the Mugabe Three. Cheques should be made payable to "OutRage!" and sent to: OutRage!, PO Box 17816, London SW14 8WT, with a cover note that the donation is for the Mugabe Three Defence Fund.

The forward march of Labour's quangos

Regional Development Agencies have been set up to bring prosperity to the regions. But they may achieve little without proper resources and a democratic structure. *LLB*'s economics correspondent reports.

Like many New Labour policies the new RDAs recognise a real problem but fail to provide a real solution. Set up in recognition of the fact that all UK regions except London and the South East have below-average GDP, RDAs have been described by John Prescott as the "powerhouses of the regions". But who runs them and what do they do?

According to the Act that set them up, RDAs have the following purposes:

- to further economic development and regeneration;
- to promote business efficiency, investment and competitiveness;
- to promote employment;
- to enhance the development and application of skills relevant to employment;
- to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom.

Each region has just produced a Regional Economic Strategy. These are without exception unremarkable documents, unlikely to change anything. Still, it could be argued these are early days and after all, greater regional autonomy has got to be a good thing.

But as with so many New Labour projects there is a democratic deficit. The composition of RDAs is an appointed mixture of business people and civil servants, mirroring fairly closely the composition of the discredited Urban Development Corporations. The original intention was that RDAs should be set up in parallel with Regional Chambers. Regional Chambers would themselves not be very democratic, consisting of a few hand picked councillors and other key stakeholders, but were supposed to be a political balance to the economic arm. Regional Chambers were promoted as a compromise alternative to devolved regional government, which is now well off the Government agenda, whatever John Prescott may say. While Regional Chambers will follow, they are clearly junior partners. RDAs are not a stepping stone to regional government.

Does it matter? Yes, because they are given powers over regeneration funds and will be allocating the 'Single Regeneration Budget and other programme expenditure. They are a further extension of the quango state which Labour came to power committed to roll back.



Photo: Paul Mattsson

Swan Hunter shipyard, Tyneside. RDAs will not be able to tackle unemployment in the North.

In London the situation is slightly different. Because the London Assembly and mayoral elections were pushed back a year while Millbank worked out a way to stop Ken Livingstone, the RDA equivalent is not yet in place. The London Development Agency will be accountable to the Mayor and Greater London Assembly. The hiatus in decision making is causing a number of real problems and producing inconsistencies between London and its neighbouring regions whose economies are so inter-related. In the meantime there is a shadow agency called the London Development Partnership. The Chief Executive is Eric Sorenson, former Chief Executive of the London Docklands Development Corporaton, which does not bode well for accountability.

Aside from the democratic deficit there is also a serious economic gap. The regional economic strategies do not form part of a coherent national economic approach. There is a large and growing disparity between the parts of the South East, whose concerns are about excessive pressures for development, and much of the economy of northern England. GDP per head in Berkshire is roughly twice that of Merseyside. Employment is rising in the South East yet falling in the North East, which reflects the growing disparity between growth in parts of the service sector and the struggling manufacturing sector. However well-differentiated regional economic strategies may be, they face a single exchange rate policy, a pressure that will be exacerbated if the UK joins the euro.

The setting up of RDAs does not bring with it additional resources for regional economic development. Resources must clearly be used as effectively as possible and devolving decision making down will probably assist. But any analysis of economic development programmes will show that the most significant factor in success is the amount of money involved – an uncomfortable conclusion for the Government and thus not part of its agenda.

The Government needs to tackle this as part of a coherent national strategy. Serious job creation initiatives are needed for the north of England in particular. If not, we will continue to have a situation where parts of the South East are under pressure from internal migration, rapidly escalating house prices and housing shortages, while other parts of the country have severe structural unemployment and good quality housing being knocked down because it can't be filled.

Building for victory in Brighton



Christine Shawcroft

Christine Shawcroft, National Executive Committee and National Policy Forum member, outlines the Party's policy making timetable

The Policy Forum process is drawing to a close for this Government's term of office. There are no first-year documents this year, only second-year ones. After they go through the 2000 Annual Conference, we will be starting on the *Road to the Manifesto* process for the next General Election. Doesn't time fly when you're enjoying yourself ?

At the last Conference, the final-year documents passed were Crime and Justice, Welfare, and Health. Next year, there are six final-year documents; Britain in the World, Democracy and Citizenship, Economic Policy, Education and Employment, Environment Transport and the Regions, and Industry, Culture and Agriculture. In case you think that's not enough bedtime reading, The Jenkins Commission report is open for consultation until December this year, and the *21st Century Party* (lack of) document is open for consultation until June. London comrades also have a *Vision for London* (severely limited) document which must be discussed by December.

The final-year papers passed at Conference this year are presumably on their way to being reincarnated as a manifesto. Although defence of universal benefits, index-linking of pensions, etc, were not accepted into the Welfare document, it was announced at the last National Policy Forum (NPF) that Alistair Darling is to lead a national welfare debate, with question and answer sessions for Party members, citizen's juries, IPPR options papers, and reports by academics on welfare issues. I don't expect the aim of all this is to reinstate index-linking of pensions into the document, nor do I think Professor Peter Townsend will be asked to contribute an academic paper, but it gives us a chance to have another go on these issues. No national debate of Party members that I meet on my travels is going to come up with the notion that reduced, means tested benefits are a great idea, or that pensioner poverty is a great concept to take into the new millennium.

The comic geniuses on the Policy Commissions sent summaries, masterpieces of hilarious understatement, of submissions they have received so far. The report of the Economic Policy first year consultation stated "Some concern was raised over public/ private partnerships." I bet it was. "Better, safer public transport was a priority," said the report back on Environment, Transport and the Regions. There wasn't a call for the privatisation of the London Underground, then?

Documents for the 2000 Conference contain key issues (for example, transport, PFI / PPP) which threatened to blow up at the last Conference and are growing in importance. Members only have until 31st March 2000 to get submissions in for six documents. The drafts will be agreed at the Joint Policy Committee in May, and the final drafts will go to the NPF in July. There will be Grassroots Alliance delegates prepared to support your amendments. Last year we had a week to digest 700 pages of CLP submissions: please help us this year by sending copies of any submissions you particularly want to push to Liz Davies and myself c/o *LLB*, PO Box 2378, London E5 9QU (particularly on Air Traffic Control – see page 11). We also want to support the right to have amendments or minority reports at the 2000 Annual Conference: CLPs should pass resolutions calling for this and copy them to us. At Bournemouth, delegates defeated the platform on economic policy – let's celebrate the millennium in style by repeating the experience in Brighton.

Obituary: Milton Babulall

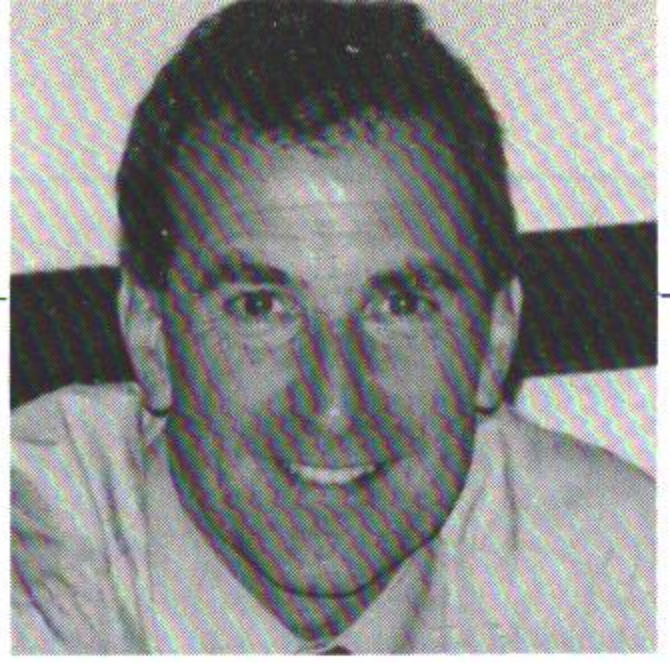
Islington Councillor Milton Babulall's sudden death from a heart attack was a tragic shock to all who knew him. Over 250 people attended his funeral – a real tribute to a principled and respected socialist.

Milton was born in Guyana and as a young man was active in Cheddi Jager's independence movement. He later came to Britain and joined Islington North Labour Party in 1976. He and his wife Sally have been stalwarts of the Party ever since, never too proud, or too busy, to undertake the mundane tasks of organising a local party.

In 1982 Milton was elected to Islington Council. It was due to his efforts that Islington set up a Race Equality Committee in 1982 and that it survived, with influence, to 1999. Milton made a point of supporting the other equalities committees against threats of abolition, to the point of serving as chair of the Lesbian and Gay Committee when no one else would.

Milton was always on the left of the Labour Group. In 1994 he deliberately broke the whip and voted against the closure of adventure playgrounds. His last campaign was against Cabinet-style local government – despite being offered a seat in the Cabinet. Milton will be greatly missed in Islington.

Liz Davies



THE **ALAN SIMPSON** COLUMN

Gordon Brown's pre-budget report was a technical *tour de force*. Presented to a national press hungry to pay homage, it was duly welcomed as a pre-Christmas feast; a bumper hamper containing goodies galore. That, perhaps, was what made it so clever. There really was a little something in there for everyone – free TV licences for the over-75s, the permanent winter fuel allowance, a commitment to halve child poverty within ten years and end it within 20, applying the 10p tax rate to basic savings, excluding renewable energy industries from the Climate Change Levy, along with extra "hypothecated" tax going into the NHS.

In the midst of all the celebrations however, two awkward questions whispered their cautionary warnings. Is the economy actually as good as the Chancellor? And, within all the technical complexity of the pre-budget report, what is the philosophy which runs through it? What does Labour now stand for?

In the week which also saw New Labour push through cuts in disability benefits and the introduction of low value vouchers for asylum seekers, this last question requires us to examine the pre-budget report in a different light.

I have argued before that Third Way politics require a re-opening of the divide between the deserving and undeserving poor. The debate about whether overall taxes have gone up or down masks the more significant shifts in welfare presumptions. The first is that universal benefits are no longer affordable. Language has to shift towards targeting – to the poorest children, the most severely disabled, the most vulnerable elderly. Beyond this, everyone will be caught within an increasingly elaborate matrix of means testing.

The Chancellor worked hard to separate the good news about tax reductions on savings from the clawback consequences within the welfare system. But if the debate over pensions and welfare reform told us nothing else it told us that benefit recipients know a 73p tax rate when it stares them in the benefit book. Paradoxically, every combination of a tax cut and another round of targeting leaves the poor with the highest marginal tax rates in the land.

As Frank Field now consistently points out, it also increases the pressures on the poor to earn illicitly, as the most credible pathway out of poverty. This will almost certainly be the reality facing refugees and asylum seekers living on vouchers. Sadly, it will also play well to those whose Third Way credentials are forged in the heat of campaigns against benefit cheats. Tough on the poor but not on the causes of poverty, the Third Way demands that more effort goes into managing the people than managing the economy.

At the other end of the scale is the new welfare state. The rich are to be bombarded with inducements to act ethically. Share options schemes for company directors, capital gains tax cuts, up-front tax relief of 20% for large companies that invest in (ie. prepare to take over) smaller ones... yes, its tough at the top. Executives may not get concessionary TV licences but they spend most of their lives in hotels which do. Corporate catering now demands an increasing slice of the welfare cake and governments around the world scramble to offer it to them, almost unconditionally.

Somewhere in the middle of it all, in an unconnected universe, stand those who create the wealth in the first place and the never ending income streams of inducement and subsidy. New "employee share ownership" schemes will reward those who buy into their own company for three to five years (providing they are employed for that long). Yet in today's flexible labour markets this almost qualifies for a long service award. So why don't we simply give this as a stakeholder entitlement: an obligation on companies to give shares to their employees for each year of service while they are in the company.

Better still, if we want to challenge the "something for nothing society", why not recast corporate welfare as a stakeholder "investment process"? In the privatised rail companies the annual dividend payments to shareholders turn out to be almost identical to the public subsidy paid to the companies. Why should the taxpayer reward the shareholder in this way when nothing – not even safety standards – are guaranteed in return?

It would be a simple process to turn subsidy into stakeholding. But here's the rub. The market wants money but without obligation or constraint. It does not know which would be worse, shares in the hands of the Government or the company in the hands of its own employees. For today's Government it would be no less traumatic. The Chancellor has applied great effort and ingenuity in reducing the role of the state in the economy. If Maastricht alone doesn't demand this, then friends in the IMF, World Bank and WTO do.

We now live in a strange world in which personal welfare is deemed unaffordable and corporate welfare untouchable; where budgets are to be admired for their technicality, without questioning the disappearance of a credible philosophy. Perhaps it is a good time for politics to come back onto the agenda.

A challenge to our readers:

Mike Marqusee responds to questions raised by Mike Phipps in last months's *LLB*. Looking to the next General Election, he asks socialists to consider the impact on democracy as a whole of the continuing absence of a credible alternative to the left of New Labour.

It may be difficult at the moment, in the midst of a major inner-party battle over the London Mayor, but in assessing the future of the left in the Labour Party, we should try to look beyond the next few months.

Let's assume that Tony Blair goes to the polls in 2001 on another New Labour manifesto, with another tranche of deadbeat New Labour candidates, and wins another majority over a right-wing Tory Party reduced to a nationalist rump by Blair's occupation of the centre-ground. Can there be any doubt that the policies his next government pursues will be detrimental to working class living standards and democratic rights?

Even now, New Labour is entrenching unaccountable, plutocratic power in political institutions and across civil society – from the House of Lords to the town halls to education, health and transport. Neoliberal on economic policy, neo-authoritarian on social policy, neo-imperialist on foreign policy, New Labour's burgeoning links with big business go way beyond the Party leadership's traditional compromises with capital, and signify a much deeper change in the very nature of the beast.

It's common ground on the left that the trends associated with Blair's Third Way must be exposed and opposed. But can that be done effectively without offering an alternative at the ballot box? Specifically, are we seriously contemplating sitting passively through the next general election, keeping a low profile while our fellow citizens are led to believe that the entirety of politics is the choice between a Blair and a Hague?

Without meaningful political choice democracy is a sham, and democratic participation declines. Inside or outside the Labour Party, no left can flourish in a climate of atomised abstentionism.

Many of us joined the Labour Party precisely in order to take meaningful part in a democratic process – to help shape the policies and choose the candidates and then mobilise public support for them during elections. Our activities helped ensure that there was a choice before the electorate. But in today's Labour Party that role is no longer open to us. Indeed, the costs of staying in the Labour Party increasingly seem to include effective withdrawal from active participation in electoral politics.

The franchise is the single greatest political gain of the working classes internationally, and socialists should consider very carefully the consequences of allowing electoral choice to be eviscerated, as it has been for some time in the United States. A trip to the ballot box is certainly not the last word in democratic participation but it remains the essential check on the powers of our rulers, and the principal available counterweight to the dictatorship of the market.

During election time, socialists should be able to engage in honest collective discussion with their neighbours on the choices available and the consequences of casting a vote one way or another. These days, membership of the Labour Party often precludes that activity. Under Millbank control, grassroots Party members have little role in elections. More important, the policies on which New Labour stands, and with few exceptions the candidates it offers, are unconscionable. Not merely diluted or inconsistent – but diametrically opposed to the interests of the millions we claim to speak for.

Are we to muzzle ourselves at election time and offer no intervention in the principal remaining mass democratic exercise in an increasingly fragmented society? Are we to continue to tailor our public actions in order to preserve our Party cards?

When serious local challenges to New Labour emerge, as they are doing in piecemeal fashion in many areas of the country, are we to look on from a distance, secretly wishing the comrades well, knowing that a strong showing for them will strengthen our hand inside the Party?

It is argued that Labour can still somehow be extricated from New Labour, that the rank and file can somehow "reclaim the Labour Party". Given the constitutionally entrenched disenfranchisement of the membership, it's hard to envision just how we could get there from where we are now. A massive and co-ordinated revolt by the trade unions, backed up by a substantial section of the Parliamentary Labour Party, would certainly precipitate a crisis, but how likely is such a revolt, and how long do we have to wait for it?

The PLP is and will remain almost entirely a creature of interests opposed to organised labour. And the trade union leaders, like Blair, benefit from the depoliticisation of their members and will not buck the trend. This is not to rule out the possibility of the emergence of a new generation of trade union militancy, but it is to suggest that sitting inside the Party waiting for it to happen is an inadequate and perhaps self-defeating strategy.

Government policies alienate young voters from the Labour Party.
Save Free Education demonstration, London 1997.



Photo: Paul Mattsson

what will you do in 2001?

New Labour is now the British elite's preferred instrument of governance. Powerful social interests – including direct financial interests – are bound up in the ultimate success of the Blair project (whether under Blair or someone else). They will not permit the membership or the trade unions to seize back their precious new toy, and – as we are about to see in the London Mayoral campaign – will mobilise all their resources to stop us.

Realistically, within the Party, what levers, what engines, what resources could we possibly command to push these interests to the margins? Ken Livingstone has forced his way on to Labour's London short-list because of the huge base of popular support he enjoys, a base he acquired through the democratic experiment of the GLC, an experiment made possible by an effective electoral intervention from the left. In the end, Blair decided that allowing Ken on the short-list was preferable to facing him as an independent in the May elections.

Of course, the Labour left and the unions, and more broadly the social constituencies they represent, do occasionally extract concessions from New Labour; to a degree, our presence does inhibit Blair. But we carry much less weight these days – both in Government and even in our Party's highest councils – than industrialists, financiers, media barons and the lobbyists and consultants that swarm around them. And one reason is that Blair sees the social constituencies for which the left speaks as electoral captives; they have nowhere else to go. Rupert Murdoch can always decamp to the Tories.

Any examination of opinion polls and social attitude surveys confirms that there is a growing electoral space to the left of New Labour. The Lib Dems have declined to occupy it (inevitably, given their hybrid social composition). Plaid Cymru and the SNP have flitted in and out of it, coupling their nationalist appeal to an appeal to Labour's forsaken core voters. But the existing array of parties in most of Britain leaves the interests of the poor and the excluded, and the larger working class of which they are a part, unrepresented. Socialists cannot allow such a vacuum to persist indefinitely.

The strongest argument for staying in the Labour Party remains the disparate, disputatious and largely ineffectual nature of the forces outside it. Anyone with any experience of life on the left will know that building a credible electoral alternative to New Labour (and in my view that means a social democratic and not a revolutionary socialist one) is a task so daunting it scarcely bears thinking about.

But think about it we must. The difficulties may seem intractable, but that is a poor reason to postpone tackling them. With each passing election, the franchise is rendered ever more hollow and apathy and cynicism deepen. If we fail to offer a vocal and visible alternative to Third Way politics – and in the end, one aspect of that alternative must be a clear electoral option – we become accomplices in that degenerative process.

In last month's *LLB*, Mike Phipps rightly argued that in assessing our future in the Labour Party we should beware of giving way to "subjectivist" pressures. But that argument cuts both ways. The habits of many years, the conclusions reached in a different era, the fear of the unknown, the fear of entering "the wilderness" may prevent us from drawing a realistic balance of probabilities. They may also blind us both to new opportunities and to our enduring responsibility to provide democratic representation to all those on the wrong end of the capitalist system.

LABOUR LEFT
Briefing
Annual General Meeting

The CRISIS of representation

LIZ DAVIES
Labour Party NEC, constituency section
SURESH GROVER
National Civil Rights Movement
GEOFF MARTIN
Convenor, London Regional UNISON
TONY BENN MP
CHRISTINE SHAWCROFT
Labour Party NEC, constituency section
ANN BLACK
Vice-Chair, Labour Reform

Saturday 27th November 11am-5pm
Kingsway College, Sidmouth Street, London WC1

Kings Cross tube
Creche bookable by 19th November.

Admission £3, £1.50 (unwaged). Free to comrades from outside London

Where is our Party going? A day of open debate on the year ahead for Labour Party members.

Rail safety still on collision course

The issues raised by the Paddington crash remain unresolved. A London Tube worker reports.

The Paddington rail disaster upgraded transport from a peripheral issue to centre stage, with four major political issues converging: public health and safety, Tube privatisation, the race for Mayor for London and residual Tory employment legislation.

In early November a rally in London called by Safety on the Trains Action Group (which involves relatives of the victims of the Southall, Paddington and other rail disasters) and supported by the *Daily Mirror*, featured speakers from groups representing the bereaved families, the railway and fire brigades unions, Tony Benn and two of the prospective candidates for Mayor of London – Susan Kramer and Ken Livingstone. Absent from the platform was anyone representing the Labour Government – oh yes, and Frank Dobson.

Speakers went beyond the technical issues involved in railway safety, looking at issues of ownership of the networks. Those who advocated bringing the railways back into the public domain and opposed privatisation of London Underground won the greatest cheers. This indicated more than just a gut-feeling hatred for Railtrack fatcats – it represented awareness of the conflict between responsibility for public health and safety and responsibility towards private shareholders.

Frank Dobson has recently announced his support for the revival of the Crossrail Scheme – an old idea dating back to debates in the late 1980s about how to get London moving, with widespread support at the time. Crossrail was put on the back burner in favour of the Jubilee Line Extension (JLE) because Olympia and Yorke, the Canadian company behind the Canary Wharf fiasco, pledged the private funding.

Frank Dobson is now supporting Crossrail because of City promises to provide financial backing. But the public-private partnership between Olympia and Yorke and the public sector ended up costing the taxpayer billions after O&Y went bankrupt. Funding destined for much-needed maintenance and upgrading on the underground system as a whole was gobbled up by JLE.

Frank Dobson has long championed private investment in the public transport network. In 1994 he attended RMT's Annual General Meeting as Shadow Transport Secretary. That summer had been dominated by the prolonged signal workers dispute and the creation of Railtrack leading up to full privatisation. Frank Dobson had nothing to say to the signal workers, and little about railway privatisation. Most of his address was on the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) being offered to the Northern Line train maintenance depots. His main point was that he had been the first to advocate involvement of private finance in LUL, and now the Tories were taking all the credit.

Dobson's claim to be the saviour of the Crossrail scheme is sheer bravado – the go-ahead for such a major project would have to come from Parliament, not the Mayor. He is really only claiming to be in a privileged position to put the squeeze on Gordon for £3.5 billion and to be experienced in doing business with the private sector. But Londoners remain unimpressed.

John Prescott has all but said that there will be an open cheque-book when it comes to railway safety. Suddenly they will find (taxpayers') money to upgrade the system. Just as the NHS patches people up after botched operations in the private sector, the public purse bails out botched transport projects, like the Jubilee Line Extension, the Channel Tunnel and Railtrack signalling. In the meantime, Railtrack still collects a public subsidy, and earns billions per annum.

Finally, Tory legislation has stopped railway workers taking action to uphold safety standards.

RMT guards on most mainline companies wanted to take industrial action against changes in the role of the guard which will downgrade the guard's safety responsibilities, putting undue pressure on the drivers. The courts granted an injunction against this dispute, because it is only lawful to take industrial action against one's employer, in this case the Train Operating Companies. The RMT asked if they could ballot against Railtrack, who have the responsibility for safety. The courts refused – Railtrack is not the employer.

The new Employment Relations Act, for all its celebrated progress on union recognition, does not help unions already recognised – they can do very little to protect their members against ruthless employers or, in this case, non-employers.

ASLEF, RMT and TSSA held a hustings meeting to which they invited all the prospective candidates for the Labour Party nomination for Mayor of London. Ken Livingstone and Glenda Jackson attended; Frank Dobson – still, shamefully, on the RMT's list of sponsored MPs – did not. The Labour Party has ruled that unions like the RMT who are behind in paying their dues to the London Labour Party cannot participate in the ballot.

Tony Blair was very clear at the TUC Conference this year when he said to the unions "No favours". It's time the railway unions told Tony Blair that the "No more Mr Nice Guy" approach can work both ways.

Rail safety demonstration, November 1999.



Photo: Paul Mattsson

Campaign Diary

● In a vile red-baiting letter supporting Prentis, Dave Anderson, soft left NEC member in UNISON's northern region, put his reputation on the line. However, at Anderson's own branch committee in Newcastle, he found himself in a three person minority as his committee voted overwhelmingly to nominate left-wing challenger Roger Bannister. Equally embarrassed on that occasion was former left winger and NEC member for the Gas Service group, John Flynn. Flynn's credentials include ex-membership of the Socialist Party (nee Militant) where Bannister remains today. Dave and John may no longer have red politics, but they do have red faces.

● Hundreds of ordinary union members attended the Hammersmith branch nomination meeting. Prentis, known for avoiding these engagements, shocked the branch by turning up. When the votes were counted, Prentis came in a dismal third to left candidate Roger Bannister, who polled a majority of the votes cast despite being unable to attend.

● Among the saddest of the personal endorsements of the lacklustre campaign supporting UNISON Deputy General Secretary Dave Prentis is the one from Local Government Executive chair Jean Geldart. Jean – once seen as a potential candidate and who has won (and retains) respect for her principled support for democracy in a union where red-baiting and witch hunts are common. Rather than building bridges to the left, Jean is now backing the campaign for the man who is the senior paid official and therefore heads the machine that suspended UNISON branches in Birmingham and Sheffield, while selectively pursuing allegations against left activists. Jean opposes these outrages, but supports the campaign for the man responsible.

● No such brickbats can be hurled at *LLB*'s own Geoff Martin. As UNISON's London Regional Convenor, Geoff is responsible for the content of the region's newsletter, *London Calling*. According to our mole, when the London Region's chapter of the Campaign to Elect Dave Prentis saw the *London Calling* headline "Bannister Win in London" everyone in the telephone box was really angry!

Bannister slides up

Steve Wilkinson, regional publicity officer, UNISON London region, reviews the progress of would-be candidates for the post of General Secretary.

The London Region of UNISON hustings meeting, the first stage in the selection process for the next General Secretary of Britain's largest union UNISON, ended with a regional nomination being won by a lay activist for first time ever in the union's six year history. Roger Bannister gained a whopping 62% of the total Council vote polled on 22nd October 1999.

Speaking after this decisive result, Bannister said, "The endorsement of the London Regional Council is a big step forward in my campaign." NEC nominated candidate, Dave Prentis, tipped as the favourite to become General Secretary, has not commented on the result.

Talking about this setback to Prentis's campaign, Bannister claimed the election is still "wide open". According to Bannister: "Rodney Bickerstaffe – the trade union movement's longest serving General Secretary – won 12 out of the 13 Regions. At this stage four Councils have refused to endorse any candidate; which shows the support Rodney called on has not been realised by Prentis."

Bannister is a Branch Secretary and member of UNISON's NEC. Pledging to take the average member's salary if elected while critical of the "witch hunt of the left", Bannister wants UNISON's political fund spent only on Party candidates who sign up to UNISON policies.

The remaining candidates – Linda Muir, a regional officer in the north-east region; Melkiat Bilku, Hillingdon striker; and Peter Hunter – failed to move the Council into supporting them to any significant degree winning a total of 7% of the poll between them.

Hunter, a right wing candidiate who came second in 1991, prompted an exodus of roughly a third of the delegates from the meeting in protest at his stance against many of the national policies of the union, including the equalisation of the age of consent for gay men and a woman's right to choose. Hunter has added a potentially popular policy – disaffiliation from Labour – to his agenda, which focuses on attacking progressive policies of the union.



Photo: J. Harris

Young Rodney Bickerstaffe's number of nominations has not nearly been matched by his favoured successor.

If the result in London reflects a broader consensus, the absence of a woman in the race who can secure enough support to make a serious challenge is disappointing in a union where the majority of members are women.

To get on the ballot paper for the election nominees will need to gain the support of two regions, 25 branches, the NEC or two national service groups. At this point it is unlikely the five who spoke at the meeting will all go through to the final round in February 2000.

TRADE UNION NOTEBOOK

400 tool room workers and nearly 200 paintshop workers have taken industrial action in Ford's troubled Dagenham plant. The tool room dispute is over pay, while the action in the paint shop arose from the victimisation of a shop steward.

Earlier in the month a commitment to establish equal opportunities committees at each of Ford's plants in Britain was promised at the meeting between Ford's global president Jac Nasser, Bill Morris and other union leaders. However, continued unrest on the shop floor indicates there is still a long way to go.

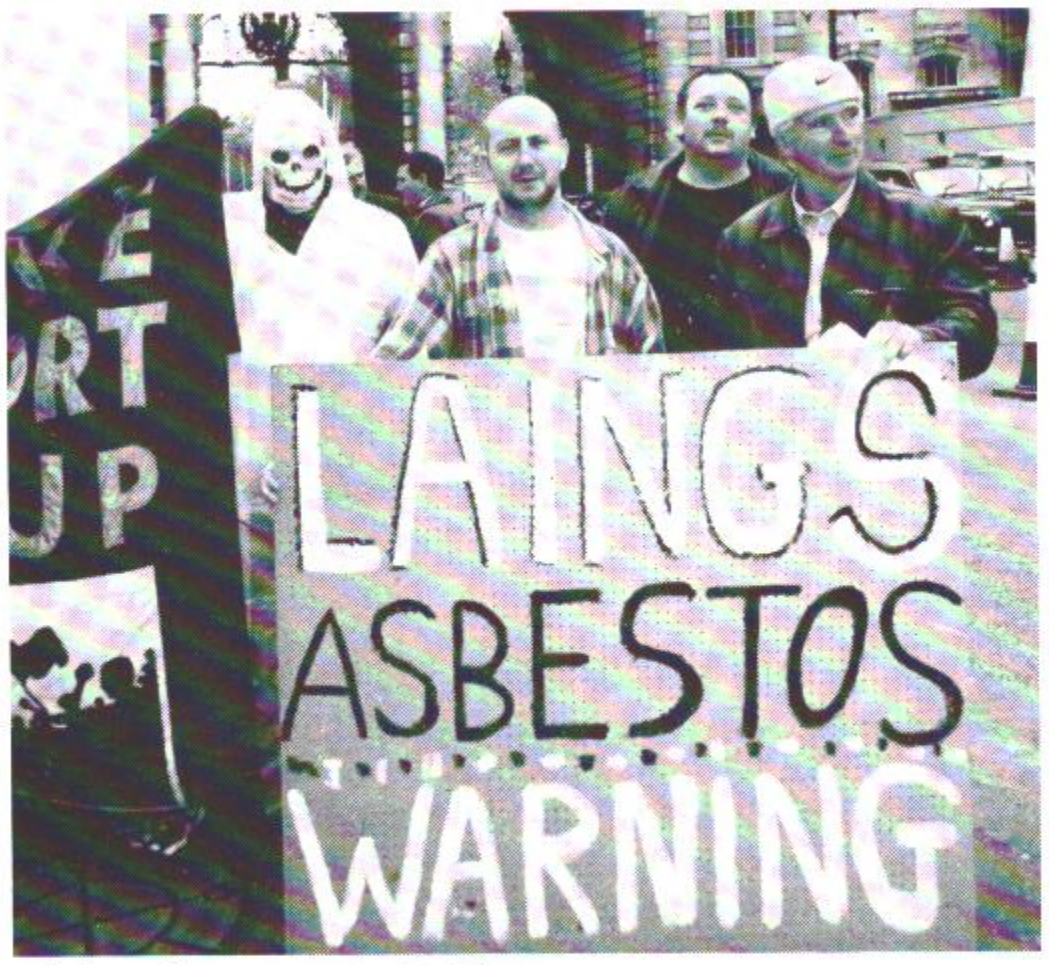


Photo: Molly Cooper

Laing's workers protest about safety issues.

In what will probably be the first ever call centre strike in Britain, four thousand members of the CWU have voted by over four to one to take strike action over the excessive and long-term use of agency staff at a BT call centre. According to the CWU, inadequate staffing levels have led to stress and excessive pressure. The first in a series of one day strikes was announced for 22nd November.

The TGWU called a solidarity conference on 20th November to commemorate the first anniversary of the Skychefs strike. The 270 workers, sacked after a one day strike, have been picketing Heathrow airport. The only action taken by the TGWU has been to call for a boycott of Lufthansa, the main customer of Skychef, a manufacturer of in-flight meals. Calling out the rest of the TGWU membership at Heathrow would, of course, involve the union in breaking the law.

Wandsworth Council faces strike action over its draconian proposals on sick pay. The Tory-controlled council tried to impose a limit of five days sick leave with any further leave being effectively unpaid. The 4,500 staff voted by four to one for a one day strike on Wednesday 24th November.

GMB members employed by Onyx on refuse collection duties for Westminster City Council are in dispute over a threat to move their depot from Paddington to East London. Discussions between the union and the company continue.

UNISON members at Cardiff City Council went on strike for a day in October over restructuring which places services in jeopardy.

In another dispute involving UNISON members 80 staff at Erewash Council in the Midlands took action after their Labour-controlled council decided to make them bear the costs of introducing a 37-hour week. The leader of the council said they supported the 37-hour week as long as the cost of introducing it did not fall on the council tax payers.

On 22nd October officers from Richmond Council carried out "a smash and grab raid" on the local UNISON branch office, seizing leaflets on a housing transfer ballot being kept there on behalf of the local Trades Council and allegedly harrassing a female union member.

A council press officer claimed the raid was prompted by concern the UNISON branch was involved in "unprincipled use of council resources" and the leaflets had been noticed by a member of staff. The council later returned the leaflets but refused to apologise for the raid. The branch has called for an independent investigation into the raid. Steve Cowan, UNISON branch secretary, will be calling on UNISON General Secretary, Rodney Bickerstaffe, to intervene.

- **The ballot was in favour of the transfer into the private sector. However the Trades Council should be proud of its opposition as huge concessions were won from the council to guarantee future rent levels.**

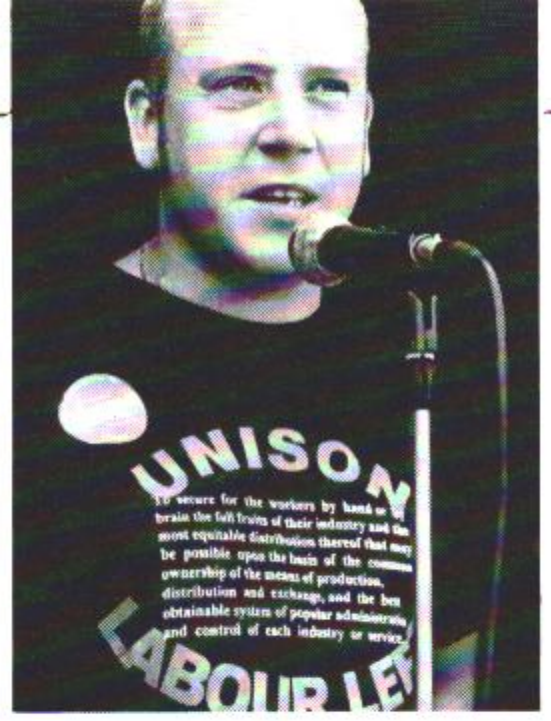
Globalisation comes to Suffolk

Andrew Coates reports on a stealthy initiative threatening public sector jobs.

"Welfare reform" is to hive off large parts of the benefit system (lone parents, incapacity benefit) to partnerships between the voluntary and private sector. October's *One News*, the bulletin explaining the new provisions, announced that Leeds and Suffolk are to have major parts of the system run by multinational Deloitte Consulting Ltd. The new Gateway is being handed over to this shadowy consultancy, better known for its advice on currency markets. Other pilot areas are to be run by local authority consortia, while North Nottinghamshire is in the hands of the Reed/Shaw Trust, NatWest Bank, and SEMA.

Deloitte is part of the annual Davos Conferences, and its web site waxes lyrical on the possibilities globalisation offers for big business. It has yet to announce specific plans for Leeds and Suffolk, but worrying details are emerging. As "implementors" of *One* Deloitte have to set up new offices. Initially their Suffolk HQ was to be based in Ipswich Civic Centre, accessible from the town centre through a non-wheelchair negotiable subway and a major road death-trap. No doubt the disabled and poor who have to trek to this outpost will be reassured by lectures on how to present themselves in the global market of opportunities.

After the scandal of PFI, the involvement of the private sector in welfare promises to be New Labour's next major catastrophe. That this turn in government policy has gone through without any public debate and that information is hard to come by shows the shallowness of Blair's commitment to open government.



THE GEOFF MARTIN COLUMN

Here we go, heads up for an all singing, all dancing, cockney knees up of a London Mayor special in the column this month.

● So, Ken's on the shortlist for Mayor and look who's getting the blame for the fiasco surrounding the selection panel. Yes, it's London's laugh-a-minute stand up queen, Margaret McDonagh. I first met Margaret back in about 1981 when, as a nineteen year old NUPE steward, I was invited along to address the Mitcham and Morden GMC on the fight for the future of the NHS.

Back in those days I was permanently fuelled up on a heady mixture of Tennants Extra and testosterone (these days I'm more cocoa and cardigans). I offered Margaret a lift on the back of my Yamaha; she was busy with her essays. Probably a bloody good job for both of us.

● There's a mountain of explanations as to why and how Millbank and the best brains of New Labour made such a balls up of the selection panel. The truth is simple: these people are used to dealing with the shambles which is the current Tory Party and as soon as they're confronted with anything runing in a higher gear than William Hague they go to pieces. No wonder some senior members of the Cabinet are looking worried.

When you see what is supposed to be the most sophisticated political machine in Western Europe acting like a bunch of tenth rate spivs trying to fix the annual church fete raffle, Labour MPs in marginal seats are right to be looking over their shoulders.

'Ken's campaign in the unions ... will rest on his opposition to privatising the tube and his support for London's public services.'

● The one good thing so far about the Dobbo campaign is the return to front line politics of my old pal Terry Ashton – former London Labour General Secretary.

I thought that El Tel had taken early retirement to spend more time running the Neasden 1958 Teddy Boy Reunion Society. But now his drapes and brothel creepers are back in the wardrobe and he's having to put up with Dobbo's apparently endless supply of knob jokes. If the contest for Mayor was based on how many times you can say fuck in a sentence Frank would walk it.

But hold on, I've just heard Blair on the box saying that he doesn't want the Labour Party in London to go back to the 1980s. But who was in charge of the Labour Party in London during the 1980s as General Secretary, chief bottle washer and sandwich maker? Step forward Dobbo campaign supremo – Terry Ashton. Bloody marvellous this politics business.

● The idea that slagging Ken off as an extremist is going to deflect public attention from New Labour's plans to break up and privatise part of the tube is just barmy. I heard Mo Molam on the box saying that handing over three of the main tube lines to the greedy bastards from Railtrack isn't privatisation. Why do these people continue to insult our intelligence after everything that's happened in the past few weeks?

Ken's campaign in the unions, in which I will play whatever part I can, will rest on his opposition to privatising the tube and his support for London's public services. It marks out clear ground between him, Dobbo and Glenda. If it's extremism to support properly funded and safe public services in London then there'll be hundreds of thousands of us pleading guilty, Your Honour.

● I agree wholeheartedly with the lettter in last months *LLB* which said, if I understood it properly, that all of the glamour went out of the UNISON General Secretary election when I pulled my hat out of the ring. I understand the disappointment, but important elections like this should not hinge on the ability of individuals to play punk rock electric guitar and to roll a decent spliff. I hope that's clear.

● Finally this month, Joe Strummer at the Astoria was brilliant. Buy the new album, it's a great antidote to the depressing state of modern music. I don't want to sound like an old fart but our daughter already jigs around the front room to something called Steps despite being forced to listen to the first Clash album through headphones for an hour a day – kids today, huh? I won't mention the member of the *LLB* Editorial Board who spent the afternoon before Strummer in the boozer next to the TUC with Camden UNISON, bought a ticket off a tout, can't remember anything about the show and then fell asleep on the train home and ended walking back from the arse end of nowhere. Cheers, Jon Rogers!

Trade Unions, Public Services and the Euro

A hard-hitting new pamphlet by Geoff Martin

Copies from Unit 6, Ivebury Court, 325 Latimer Road, London W10 6RA

A bleak winter for Yugoslavia

Mike Phipps reports: With 44% of its industrial production lost, and its economy paralysed, Yugoslavia is now the poorest country in Europe.

Air and river pollution from the bombing of factories is beyond the reach of local clean-up technology. But countries such as Finland, expert in dealing with pyrolene pollution, refuse to co-operate due to sanctions.

NATO has now confirmed that each anti-tank shell fired by US Thunderbolt planes contained 275 grams of depleted uranium. Scientists have predicted up to 10,000 further deaths in the area due to related cancers.

Two and a half million hectares of land lie uncultivated due to lack of water. With many grain processing plants destroyed by bombs, food shortages are inevitable.

As winter approaches, the electricity supply (vital for heating) is down to 30% of its pre-war capacity. Of £56 million of international reconstruction funds, only £400,000 has gone to Yugoslavia, the rest to Kosova, where the aid is 60 times per head more than that given to any other country in the world.

In Kosova the roses thrown at K-For tanks have long since died. The UN is increasingly seen as an occupying army, monopolising civil power. With tensions still bitter between Serbs and Albanians, the UN has no practical exit strategy. The KLA, now a "lightly-armed" force responsible for civil policing, alarms many. Ninety per cent of non-Albanians – Serbs, Roma and others – have left Kosova in recent months, after intimidation and terror. Human Rights monitors confirm that the worst incidences of violence have been by KLA members.

The British media now recognises that the public was hoodwinked by Government warmongers. "Television swallowed the Government's line that the war was fought for human rights," wrote one Channel Four journalist. "The refugees were the most readily available story and made the best pictures. Only after the war started did details of the agreement the Serbs refused to sign at Paris come out."

The Committee for Peace in the Balkans is calling for the lifting of economic sanctions and the provision of financial and humanitarian aid assistance for Yugoslavia. For more details, phone 0171 275-0164 or email: committee@peaceinbalkans.freeserve.co.uk

The future of New Unionism

Brian Campbell of Sinn Fein examines the decisions facing Ulster Unionists.

Soon after the mightily relieved George Mitchell flew back to the States, the Ulster Unionist MP Ken Maginnis went on radio to urge Unionists to accept the deal the former US Senator had left behind. Like many Trimble supporters, Maginnis was searching for the argument which would sway his party's ruling Council behind its leader.

"Look," he said, "each time we have come back to the negotiating table over the last thirty years, our position has been weaker than the time before."

It is a position that is widely accepted but rarely expressed. After all, what negotiator would own up to such a fundamental weakness? But the negotiations are over and Unionists are locked in an internal battle as vital to their party's future as any fought within the Labour Party.

The surface debate centres on the decommissioning of IRA weapons but underneath are competing visions of the future of politics. Some Unionists want to go back to simple majority rule within the Six County state. Theirs is a fundamentalist position which allows no talk of power-sharing or all-Ireland institutions.

Other Unionists wholeheartedly embrace the Good Friday Agreement and have no ideological objections to anything which they believe can bring peace and stability. But the majority of Unionists are pragmatists. They are keen to have devolved government, fearful of republican intentions and determined to maintain the Union with Britain. And, like Ken Maginnis, many realise that this is as good as it is going to get. They have retreated from a position where they dominated every institution from Stormont to the shipyard (with its 30,000 workers now reduced to 2,000) and from Queen's University to Belfast City Council. The years of domination are over and their electoral strength is slowly but inexorably weakening. They can no longer dictate the type of arrangement they want.

One Unionist Assembly member has taken to calling this strand of pragmatism "New Unionism". That may send shivers of repulsion down many readers' spines but if it is any consolation, this political animal lacks the powers of central control and spin-doctoring of New Labour. You may want to know that the New Unionism label pre-dates the arrival of Peter Mandelson but that hasn't prevented him doing everything in his power to nurture it. Reports that he is prepared to revise the *Patten Report on Policing* as a concession to David Trimble have infuriated republicans who see it as further evidence of this Government's obsession with short-term advantage.

If the Ulster Unionist Council decides to accept the deal, with or without Mandelson's sweeteners – and it is by no means certain – what sort of politics can we expect in the Six Counties?

Certainly there will be plenty of issues around health, education, roads, housing, jobs and all the other elements of "regular" politics. Gerry Adams has promised that Sinn Féin will bring to these issues a "Republican Labour perspective" which should find ready support within the broad mass of people in the Six Counties – and ready opposition from right wing forces within both unionism and nationalism.

In addition, there will be issues which indicate the unique nature of the political situation. Equality and human rights will feature much higher up the political agenda in a society where those two commodities have been in short supply.

The all-Ireland institutions will also be a major dynamic in the country's politics. With economic forces as well as civil society pushing towards an integrated approach within the island of Ireland, politics will surely follow. Hundreds of civil servants will find their main function is to harmonise policy North and South, which together with the increasing role of the European Union will point towards a greater acceptance of Irish unity as a practical option. Of course that will meet with fierce opposition but how soon before the pragmatic New Unionists begin that important debate?

No checkmate in Chechnya

The Kremlin justifies the war on Chechnya as a response to the apartment bombings in Moscow and Volgodonsk and the threat of "Islamic terrorism". But who carried out the bombings? Steve Myers, a supporter of International Solidarity with Workers in Russia (ISWoR), retraces the steps which led to the declaration of war.

In August the Yeltsin camp was in a dire situation. The "money-laundering" corruption scandal had already broken out implicating the president, his family and political friends. The new Luzkhov/Primakov partnership through the Fatherland All-Russia (FAR) party, which was set up in opposition to Yeltsin (but not so much his politics), looked unbeatable in parliamentary elections in December and Presidential elections months later. The economy was continuing its trajectory from bad to unbelievably desperate; and in key industrial areas a winter of workers' struggles bigger than the 1998 "rail wars" loomed.

There were also further deepening problems for the Kremlin over control of the Caspian basin. The NATO victory over Yugoslavia is deeply imprinted on Russian minds ("is Caspian oil and gas the US's next target?"); the US is intervening politically and with investment into energy rich Caucasian and central Asian countries; and now Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are known to be funding Islamic guerrillas across the region.

Enter Vladimir Putin, appointed in late August as Prime Minister by Yeltsin. Putin, leader of the FSB (ex KGB), also has good links with the military-industrial complex and many military leaders. His constituency represented big bureaucrats who used to have enormous power and prestige in Soviet times. Now they are fighting to get this power and prestige back – but under capitalism.

Suddenly in September came the Kremlin's salvation in the form of two big Moscow bombings, killing hundreds of people. The destroyed apartment blocks were typical of the kind of housing in which most of Moscow's ten million – mainly poor – residents live. The message was unmistakable – anyone could be next.

The Kremlin machine, without an ounce of evidence, launched a media campaign blaming Chechens and Caucasians. A wave of nationalist fervour and anti-black racist hysteria swept Moscow and the country. Any "black" (a swear word like "nigger" for anyone not very white) now faced police harassment. Vigilante groups mushroomed, egged on by the media. All the big political parties joined in including the leaders of the Communist Party, who have formed a temporary bloc with Yeltsin and Putin.

But it was all just too neat and tidy. Media rumours began to grow after the second Moscow bomb on 13th September. One famous author pointed to the judicial precept "who benefits most?" A leading political analyst, Piontkovsky, asked if there was a parallel with the Nazi burning of the Reichstag in 1933, contrived to usher in a climate of national panic.

And these viewpoints are more than logical. There has been no tangible evidence produced yet and no precedent of such bombings by Chechens or Caucasians.

The media-sown doubt grew quickly, polls showed rapidly increasing numbers of Russians believing it was Kremlin-organised. A few days later, a massive bomb exploded outside a working class apartment block in Volgodonsk near Chechnya – more Russians are dead. It was all too convenient, as media blame moved away from Yeltsin and the Kremlin, back onto Chechens and Caucasians.

Immediately, massive Russian troop deployments towards Chechnya were made. The media and population were placed on a war footing. Yeltsin's boy, Putin, soared from 2% popularity to decisive leadership in all political polls. It now seems likely he will be elected President, and the corruption charges smothered.

Amidst this dire crisis caused by the Yeltsin-IMF decade of failure, the Russian elite now support a more dictatorial regime capable of ruthlessly putting down workers' and national struggles. They need to protect their interests in the Caspian basin and stop US attempts to gain control there. Ultimately they would like to expand Russia into a Soviet Union mark-II – but this time, as a purely capitalist power. The US, if it cannot have the Caspian oil now, is content to see Russia fighting the Islamic world, as long as the atrocities are not too public.

But this war is not over. The Chechens have organised an orderly retreat and even if Grozny is lost, the Russian army faces a winter of many losses in a war they cannot win. As usual at the beginning of a war, workers' struggles have subsided, and in Russia today their mass action plans have been postponed – for the moment.

- Email: ISWoR@aol.com; web: http://members.aol.com/ISWoR/english/index.html; or write to ISWoR, Box R, 46 Denmark Hill, London SE5 8RZ.

Vyborg: Russian workers defeat state militia

In July and October this year, armed police units called "Typhoon" and other mercenaries in the Leningrad region in Russia failed militarily to take control of Vyborg Pulp and Paper mill from the workers' occupation. The modern mill, worth $500 million, was sold to capitalists for $4 million, who then threatened to sack most of the workers. Then came the occupation. The mill has been run by the workers since early in 1998, and the workers pay themselves out of the profits. They have organised their own defence units and have armed worker-guards. In the attack on 14th October many shots were fired and two workers were seriously injured in an eleven hour battle. Since then, an armed unit of army veterans of the Afghan war from nearby St. Petersburg has promised that if the state attacks the workers' mill again, they will mobilise and turn up with their rifles to join the workers in battle. More info on the ISWoR website.

Nightmares in Seattle

The World Trade Organisation meeting in Seattle is no intergovernmental junket: these people are dangerous. Caroline Dumonteil explains why.

The new round of trade talks held in Seattle between member countries of the World Trade Organisation have been wide-ranging. The negotiations cover virtually anything tradeable, including goods, services, agriculture and intellectual property and are designed to eliminate any further barriers to trade.

For services, one important "barrier" is said to be the "monopoly" exerted by states over matters of health and education. What this means is that any sense of obligation felt by governments to educate and care for the health of their citizens forms an intolerable barrier to the rights of companies to operate freely in the market place.

The effect of accepting such deregulation would be to undermine completely any commitment to the equality of people as citizens: under a market in services, those with more cash get better service and the poor make do with the residue, a pattern already becoming discernible under the British pseudo-market. But as some with private health insurance have already learned, even those who believe they would be the winners in this nasty race could rapidly discover that relying on a profit-making insurance company for your health care is a hazardous business.

The WTO is often described as a unified, faceless and secretive body, but we actually know quite a lot about the participants in these negotiations. Bearing in mind that their representatives speak for the interests of their governments and not necessarily for those of the people, there are still clear faultlines between the participating countries.

Agriculture provides a good illustration. Here, countries that are net exporters oppose those that depend on imports. Others, like India, which do not import but whose agriculture still consists largely of subsistence farmers, want subsistence farming to be completely withdrawn from negotiations and for food security to form a main focus. At the other end of the spectrum, the US, which is the largest agricultural exporter, sees agriculture as the core topic for these negotiations. While the US is keeping its head well down on the question of gene technology, it also wants agricultural products to be seen as any other industrial product and for disputes to be dealt with purely on the basis of "science".

This "hardline" view of agriculture is shared by the other free trade group of agricultural exporters, the Cairns Group, which lines up Australia and New Zealand alongside Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Chile. While most of the ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) group agree on treating agriculture as an industry, they also want to include demands for "Special and Differential Treatment" for developing countries.

It is the agricultural protectionist countries, Japan and the European Union, that persist in seeing farming as doing more than simply producing tradeable goods. Europe has produced the notion of "multifunctionality", by which they mean that farming does more than just produce goods.

Bizarrely, the concept managed to slide into negotiating texts way beyond those of agriculture, giving the message that economic considerations cover more than the mere exchange of goods and services. This approach horrifies those committed to a single-minded focus on profit, who want to see everything as a commodity and trade decisions made on purely "scientific" grounds. The US, key proponent of this view, wants to focus on "hard" targets, while others worry about the collateral damage, the "multifunctionality" of any economy. But by now we are familiar with the random damage done by "scientific" laser-guided weapons!

Seattle has become the focus of hundreds of lobby groups and protesters. Their demands range from merely reforming the WTO dispute resolution procedure to reforming the WTO itself, from reforming the behaviour of nasty capitalists to the abolition of capitalism itself.

Charlene Barshevsky, chief US negotiator, recognises that they now have a severe public relations problem selling "free trade". For a country that managed to pass off Kosova as a humanitarian war, this surely poses few problems. One of the main weaknesses of the anti-WTO lobby is that, while they are clear about the financial triumvirate making up the new world government (the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO), they never mention its military arm, NATO. This is quite an error, since what we are dealing with here is more than "free trade" and a set of powerful corporations – it is war.

Multifunctionality? Oh yes, we're doing that in the National Curriculum now!

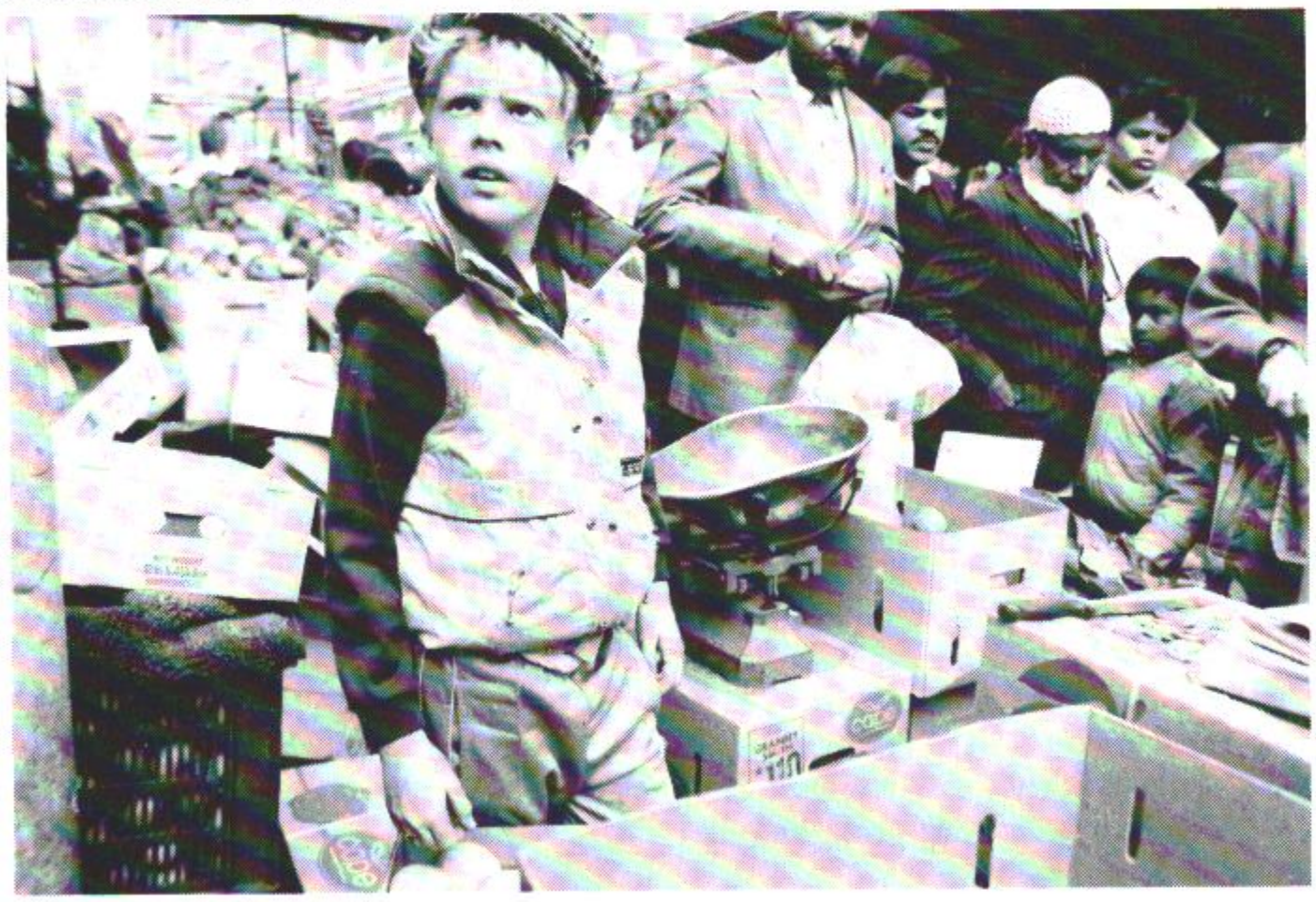


Photo: Phil Maxwell

Sweden and the euro

Bernie Moss, who has been visiting European countries to find out what they think about the euro, reports on developments in Sweden.

Discussions of labour and the welfare state have often compared Sweden and Britain. Though different in size, the two countries have much in common historically and politically. Both countries had monarchs who broke with continental Catholicism to become independent and Protestant. Both were only intermittently engaged in continental wars, the Swedish withdrawing after the Napoleonic Wars into a policy of armed neutrality. Both developed strong reformist labour movements that pioneered the Keynesian regulation of business cycles and the welfare state.

These factors are not unrelated to the fact that Britain and Sweden, as the most sceptical members of the European Union, have so far refused to join the euro and have adopted a wait and see policy. While the British under John Major obtained an opt out clause from economic and monetary union, when the Swedish became members in 1994 they signed up to the whole thing while insisting on the need for approval by referendum. With a currency floating (like the pound) above the euro and a flourishing economy, they stand in violation of both the Maastricht and Rome treaties, which straitjacket most other members into low growth and high unemployment.

Historically, the Social Democrat government's resistance to the EC in Sweden, like that of the British Labour Party, was based upon their experience with Keynesian regulation and the welfare state, which were threatened by the EC's free market and monetarist principles. In the EC, the Swedes saw the evil of the four Cs: capitalism, conservatism, catholicism (in the form of ruling Christian Democrats) and colonialism (EC aid to French colonies). After touring Europe in 1970 Olaf Palme, the then prime minister, although sympathetic to



Gudrun Schyman, Chair of the Left Party, which has gained electorally from government policy.

the EC, concluded that joining would "strengthen the forces of monopoly capitalism."

However, the Swedish model, like the British one, ran into trouble in the 1970s producing both inflation and unemployment. Large exporters, complaining of high taxes, wages and social charges, threatened to leave the country for the EC and some in the Social Democratic Party wanted to accommodate them. By the late 1980s capital was leaving Sweden for the EC at a frightening rate, until in 1991 the new Swedish prime minister, breaking with public opinion and an electoral and party promise, decided to apply for membership.

Caught, like Blair, between capitalists who wanted to join the euro immediately and a sceptical public, the Swedish government adopted a wait and see policy. Benefiting from a pent-up consumer boom and a floating currency, the economy has done extremely well outside the euro, much better than our own. Like Blair, the Swedes have continued to pursue fiscal rectitude and a winding down of the welfare state, notably with pension and health benefits, which have resulted in sharp electoral gains for the Left Party, which is a modern communist party aligned with the United Left in the European Parliament.

In contrast to Britain where pro-EC monetarist ideas swept the Labour Party and TUC in 1988, the majority of Social Democrats remain sceptical. The leader of the Social Democratic euro-critics in parliament is Bengt-Ola Ryttar, a former construction worker who is very popular with his working-class constituents in the north-west, a mining and timber region.



Bengt-Ola Ryttar

Unions are divided between the export-oriented metal workers, who are linked to the ETUC (European Trade Union Confederation) in Brussels,and public sector and service employees, who are euro-critical. Trade union economists, convinced that nation-based Keynesian strategies can still work, are sceptical of an economic and monetary union that since 1980 has produced record real interest and unemployment rates.

Public opinion is divided and capricious. Large companies and the Moderates and Liberals (the so-called "bourgeois parties") are spending lots of money to promote the euro while small businesses, workers and farmers remain sceptical. The feeling that Sweden, a nation of only eight million, cannot afford to go it alone, is stronger than in Britain, especially among the trendy middle classes for whom the EC represents corporate mobility. The pro-euros currently outnumber the confirmed opponents in opinion polls. Consequently the Swedish Prime Minister has recently told the *FT* that he thinks Sweden will have to join the euro sooner or later. But he is not likely to go against a hostile majority in his own party's opinion in the near future.

Jury backs Reel family

Resisting police pressure, an inquest jury returned an open verdict on the death of Ricky Reel. Suresh Grover, co-ordinator of the National Civil Rights Movement, welcomes the verdict, but warns of a police counterattack on the Macpherson report.

Throughout the inquest into the death of Ricky Reel, the Metropolitan police insisted there was only one verdict possible – accidental death.

One after another, police witnesses rigidly discounted any other possibilities: that Ricky Reel disappeared on 15th October 1997 immediately after a documented racial attack; that he was never seen again until his body was discovered in the Thames on 21st October 1997; that the police pathologist testified that the marks on his back could only have been made by an assault or a hard fall on land, and not by accidentally falling into the water, as police claim. Numerous other items of evidence were brushed aside in a determined attempt to deny that Ricky's death was a result of racial violence.

The senior investigating officer in the case, DCI Sue Hill, had told the Reel family throughout the past year that she had an "open mind" on the case. But at the inquest she directly addressed the jury, and on her own initiative asserted, "It is an accidental death and nothing else."

The police tried to turn the inquest into a mini-trial of the family and the campaigners. There was innuendo to the effect that the family had not told the truth to police, that campaigners had threatened witnesses to get them to change their statements to say that it was a racial attack. In fact, the initial statements made by witnesses to the police – before campaigners came on the scene – make it clear they had always regarded this as a racial attack.

It was claimed that I personally, as a member of the Justice for Ricky Reel campaign, may have been involved in threatening witnesses and even in "kidnapping" one of them. There is no basis whatsoever to these allegations, and after I demanded legal representation at the inquest, the police dropped them.

The police generated a poisonous atmosphere in the court. It was constantly implied that Sukhdev Reel was on a "mission". The coroner, Dr John Burton, questioned Sukhdev in court on why she had attended the Stephen Lawrence inquiry. At one point he argued that campaigners for the Lawrence and Reel families were to blame for the increase in racial attacks because they had "whipped up racial hatred."

The coroner also said that he wanted to report Louise Christian, the Reel's solicitor, and myself to the Director of Public Prosecutions for allegedly releasing the confidential Police Complaints Authority report into the handling of Ricky's death – parts of which were read out in the Commons by John McDonnell MP.

Not once during the inquest did police speak directly to Sukhdev Reel. The cross-examination of her brother was insensitive in the extreme. He was even asked about his knowledge of my activities.

In this context, the open verdict is of enormous significance. The jury rejected the police line and returned the verdict for which the Reel family legal team had argued.

The Met learned nothing from the Stephen Lawrence inquiry. Since the verdict, the police have not contacted the family – though it is clear that they must be involved if the questions surrounding Ricky's death are to be resolved.

The Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police should apologise for the treatment of Sukhdev and her family. DCI Hill should be removed from the case. The PCA report should be published in full. Now that the inquest is complete, there are no grounds whatsoever for continuing to suppress the document. And the police must now explain to the family what plans they have for new investigation, and with what resources.

What we witnessed at the inquest was the police counter-attack to the Macpherson report. They fear the public awareness raised by the Stephen Lawrence campaign and seek to marginalise the reality of racial violence and to discredit both the families of victims and those who support them. The inquest strategy appears to have been led by John Grieve, head of the Met's Racial Crimes and Violence Task Force. PR-management, and not institutional change, seems to be the Met's answer to Macpherson.

The Justice for Ricky Reel campaign will be updating our leaflets and holding public meetings. There will be a working conference on 4th December in west London to broaden the national base of the Reel campaign. Sukhdev and the Reel family are more determined than ever to see justice done.

The National Civil Rights Movement has constantly supported the Reel family, and the Michael Menson family (Michael's alleged murderers are currently standing trial in the Old Bailey). With branches being organised in Manchester, Sheffield, Plymouth, Bradford, Glasgow and elsewhere, the NCRM is progressing towards its goal of building a national network of solidarity. A constitutional conference will be held in Sheffield on 22nd January.

For more information on the Reel campaign or the National Civil Rights Movement, call The Monitoring Group on 0181-843 2333.

AS IT IS
Photographs by Phil Maxwell

21st November - 16th January

SPITZ GALLERY
109 Commercial Street
Spitalfields Market
London E1

A 20 year retrospective of international and multicultural photographs.

Families demand justice

Deb Coles and Helen Shaw, co-directors of INQUEST, welcome growing support for their campaign.

On Saturday 30th October, families, friends and supporters of over 35 people who have died in police custody, in prison and in psychiatric hospitals gathered at Trafalgar Square in central London for the first ever remembrance procession. Many others sent messages of support.

Representatives from the families of Rocky Bennett, Brian Douglas, Joy Gardner, Glen Howard, Leon Patterson, Kenneth Severin and Harry Stanley went into Downing Street to present a letter to the Prime Minister demanding an independent public inquiry into the way deaths in the custody of the state are investigated.

The procession was organised by the United Families and Friends Campaign, a coalition of the relatives and friends of black people who have died in the custody of the state, with the assistance of INQUEST. The procession was also supported by relatives of those from every community who have died in custody who support the Campaign's demands which are:

- all deaths in custody to be independently investigated;
- the Police Complaints Authority to be replaced by a body independent of the police;
- police and prison officers involved in custody deaths to be suspended until investigations are completed;
- officers responsible for deaths to face criminal charges, retired or otherwise;
- police forces to be made accountable to the communities they serve;
- legal aid and full disclosure of information to be made available to the relatives of the victims;
- where an "unlawful killing" verdict is returned, a prosecution should follow automatically.

INQUEST monitoring of controversial deaths shows that a disproportionate number of black people have died in custody following the use of force. These concerns have been raised with the UN Committee Against Torture, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the European Committee on the Prevention of Torture.

We are campaigning for an inquiry into the inter-related process of investigation following deaths in custody, to examine the role of the police, the Prison Service and psychiatric hospitals, the Police Complaints Authority, the coroner's inquest system and the Crown Prosecution Service.

This is an issue New Labour cannot afford to ignore.

- For further information contact: INQUEST, Ground Floor, Alexandra National House, 330 Seven Sisters Rd, London, N4 2PJ

"My brother should have been celebrating his birthday this weekend. Today the families and friends of those who have died in custody have come together to remember our loved ones. We will never forget what happened to them and we want to make sure we do not allow them to be forgotten by others. We are going to the highest level of government and will not rest until we have justice." – **Brenda Weinberg, sister of Brian Douglas.**

"My brother was a caring and considerate man, an ex-paratrooper who fought for his country. He died an horrific unjustifiable death. We unite together today, both black and white alike; to highlight what is going on. No more will we tolerate the disregard for human life. We are demanding justice so that our loved ones can rest in peace and to prevent this type of suffering happening to future generations." – **Janet Alder, sister of Christopher Alder**

"I will never stop fighting for justice for Joy. She is dead because of the actions of police and immigration officers. We are coming together as families and friends to demand a full and independent public inquiry into all these deaths. Why won't the Government let people know what is happening in this country? We need justice for all who have died." – **Myrna Simpson, mother of Joy Gardner.**

"We need to unite and demand justice for all those black men who have died under 'unusual circumstances' in police custody, prisons and psychiatric hospitals." – **Dr Joanna Bennett, sister of Rocky Bennett, who died following the use of restraint in a psychiatric institution.**

Mary must stay!

Mary Wandia Njuguna is fighting deportation to Kenya. Mary and her British-born son, five year old Patrick, have lived in Camden since 1994. She fled to Britain after discovering evidence of corruption by an electoral commissioner while working at a solicitor's office in Nairobi. Mary and her colleagues were threatened and, later, the Chief Justice investigating the scandal died in what many Kenyans believe were suspicious circumstances. Mary fled to the UK in fear for her life. The Home Office is now attempting to send her back and disrupt the life of her son, who has known no other country.

Mary, and her friends and supporters, are campaigning to stop this deportation. They are currently attempting to get a judicial review of the case and to secure the support of local labour movement and community groups. If you can help, contact the Mary Must Stay campaign c/o the Refugee Education Project, 136 Chalton Street NW1 or call Claire on 0171 388 4346.

Same story, same bigotry

Guardian columnist Jeremy Hardy explains the background to the killing of Robert Hamill, and why the family is seeking support for their campaign for justice.

On December 14th, Robert Hamill's sister, Diane, will be sharing a platform with relatives of Ricky Reel and Michael Menson. The meeting, at Camden Town Hall, is jointly hosted by the National Civil Rights Movement and the London committee of the Robert Hamill Campaign.

Those of us campaigning around the issue of Robert's killing often describe it as a racist murder. Perhaps it's not a precise description but I can't think of a better one. Robert was kicked to death by thirty or forty people, for the crime of being a Catholic who ventured into the centre of Portadown at night. There may be little real difference between the ethnicity of Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, but racism is always based on illusions. Loyalists believe that they are the superior settler people and that Catholics are the backward natives, tolerable only if they know their place. Loyalist graffiti does not just say, "Any Taig (Catholic) Will Do"; you can see "Kill All Irish" daubed on the walls of Portadown.

Another reason why black and Asian people find common cause with Robert's family is the gross failure of the police in this case. Not only did RUC officers fail to administer first aid as Robert lay unconscious on the ground, not only did they fail to make arrests for two weeks, not only did they fail to secure the crime scene, collect forensic evidence or interview witnesses – they actually witnessed the attack.

In fact, they knew that trouble was brewing that night because there was a dance at St Patrick's Hall, a Catholic club that stands isolated in the town centre. Young Loyalists were hanging around on the main street and Catholics making their way home were at risk, as always. An RUC Land Rover was parked up a few yards from the junction that Catholics must cross to be back on safe territory. One young man coming from St Patrick's got past the gathering mob and asked the RUC officers in the Land Rover to intervene to secure the safety of others leaving the hall. But the officers did nothing.

They did nothing a few minutes later when the mob seized upon Robert Hamill and his friend Gregory Girvan. They did nothing when his cousin Siobhan screamed and banged on the side of the Land Rover. When the officers finally got out, the crowd was standing around the two unconscious men. The killers loitered for about an hour. One man was held for a couple of minutes and then released. An eye-witness protested to an officer, "he's one of the ones who did it." The officer has testified that she does not know why she neglected to take any details from this witness. It was not until Robert died twelve days later that six men were arrested. All asked to be held with Loyalist paramilitaries in the Maze. As one might expect, none of them was convicted of the murder.

Since Robert's murder, his family have been the targets of constant abuse. In April, graffiti appeared close to their home reading, "Where's your Robby now, where's your flowers now?" This was a reference to the fact that every wreath placed at the scene of Robert's death has been vandalised. The cry of "Where's Robbie Hamill?", accompanied by a kicking movement, has become a standard anti-Catholic taunt in Portadown.

The family have also been harassed by the RUC since making complaints about their handling of the case. On one occasion, a police car swerved in front of Diane's, forcing her to brake. On another, a Land Rover hit her brother Martin's leg. Diane has also suffered officers pointing fingers at her in imitation of guns.

In March, Rosemary Nelson, the family solicitor, who was preparing to bring private proceedings against the six suspects and the RUC, was killed by a car bomb. Shortly before her death, Rosemary launched the London committee of the family's campaign. We are dedicated solely to assisting the family in any private proceedings, and campaigning for an inquiry into the circumstances of Robert's murder.



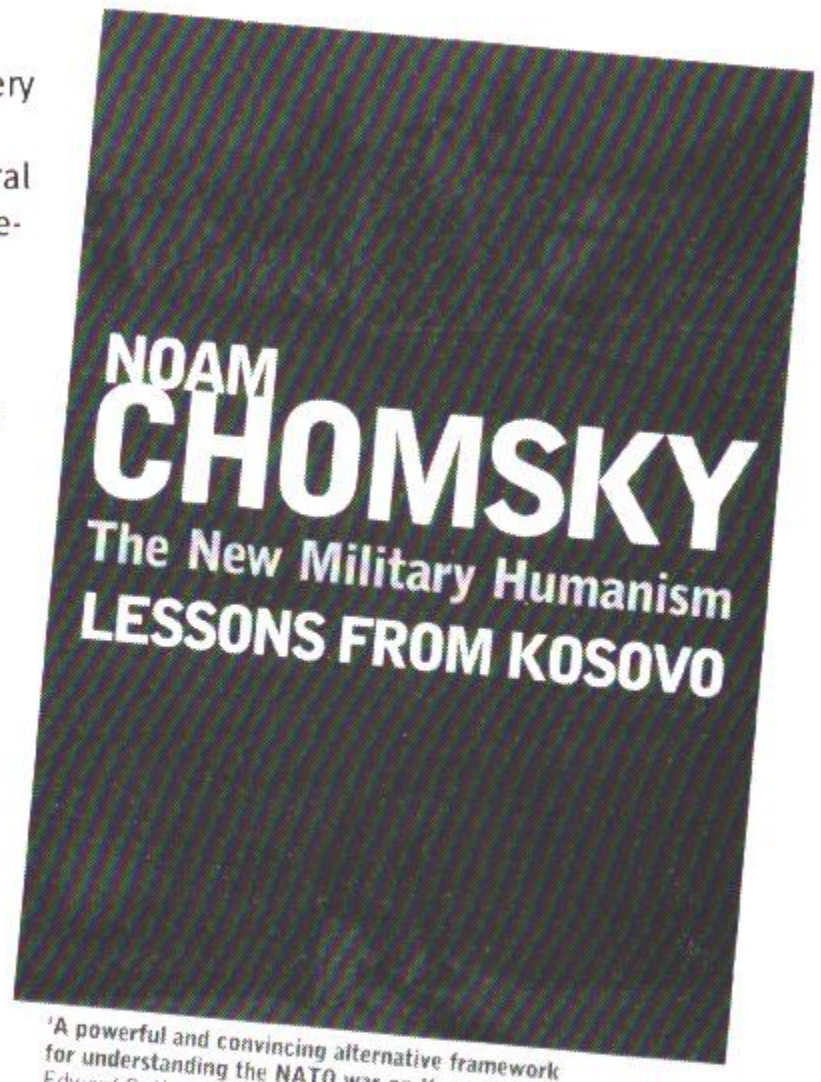
This mural by Danny Deveny in the Lower Ormeau Road, Belfast, photographed by Liz Curtis, forms the campaign's postcard.

- Please write to Tony Blair, urging him to establish independent judicial inquiries into the murders of Robert and Rosemary; and ask your MP and local party to support this call (please forward replies to us). You can contact us at BM Hamill Campaign, London WC1N 3XX (Cheques payable to Robert Hamill Campaign).

The meeting "Robert Hamill – a racist murder" at Camden Town Hall, Judd Street will be held at 7.30pm on December 14th.

Where next after Kosova?

Mike Phipps reviews *The New Military Humanism: Lessons from Kosovo*, by Noam Chomsky, published by Pluto, price £9.99 pbk.



What does the military intervention in Kosova tell us about the current philosophy guiding US foreign policy? Was the bombing campaign determined by humanitarian principles or by "something more crass and familiar"?

Chomsky's new book systematically destroys the argument that there is a new humanism underpinning US policy. Firstly, there is the obvious gulf between the West's apparent concern for the Kosovars and their indifference to the plight of the Kurds, whose land continues to be occupied by 300,000 troops from Turkey alone. The destruction of 3,500 Kurdish villages (seven times greater than in Kosova), mass torture, the creation of tens of thousands of casualties and two million refugees, and most recently the jailing of the President of Turkey's Human Rights Association, are inconvenient facts, especially as Turkey is armed by the US. Similarly the granting of more arms licences to Indonesia by New Labour than by the Conservatives over a comparable period is an equally awkward truth that might undermine the moral rhetoric that Blair adopted over Yugoslavia.

Critics have objected that this evidence doesn't directly invalidate the possibility that at least in Yugoslavia the West was sincerely motivated by humanitarian concerns. Yet here too the evidence speaks clearly. It is now apparent that the Rambouillet ultimatum, authorising NATO unrestricted access to any part of Yugoslavia, was simply the latest in a long tradition of diplomatic trickery practised in Indochina, Central America and elsewhere. Indeed, Chomsky's eye for detail notes that some of the key players in Yugoslavia served a treacherous apprenticeship elsewhere. William Walker, for example, whom the US imposed as head of the OSCE observers in Kosova and who led the war crimes verification team investigating the Racak massacre – a "defining moment" for the White House in its determination to target Milosevic – was a veteran of some of the US's nastiest operations in Central America. After the 1989 massacre in El Salvador of six dissident intellectuals, Jesuit priests, along with their housekeeper and her daughter, he told Congress there was no evidence to implicate the Salvadorean military, and suggested leftist rebels may have committed the atrocity while dressed as soldiers. He maintained this view long after a Salvadorean colonel confirmed the army had indeed carried out the murders.

NATO's humanitarian concern is further undermined by its choice of weapons. Cluster bombs, similar to those dropped on Serbia, are still killing children in Laos thirty years after they were dropped by the US military. Recently US monitors found 700 pieces of unexploded ordnance in one schoolyard measuring one-third of a hectare.

The real motives of the Balkan intervention have been openly admitted. One columnist wrote, "The debate about intervention is no longer a dispute over a means to an end. It is a debate over abandoning NATO and the American claim to international leadership." Much was heard after the bombing about how NATO's credibility had been salvaged. Predictably, victory was followed by talk about opportunities for business. Here the DTI is seeking to co-ordinate efforts by British companies to participate in the "reconstruction of Kosova" a plum estimated to be worth around £2 billion over the next three years.

Leading Clinton staffers argue that the end of the Cold War has allowed the US to move from containment to an offensive for open markets. In pursuit of this, the Clinton years signify an open defiance of international law, widely lauded as "the new internationalism". With liberal opinion joining forces with traditional foreign policy hawks, the conditions are ripe for new Kosova-style interventions elsewhere.

TRIBUNE

News from the Inside



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 Government and in touch with key issues and campaigns. TRIBUNE is the Independent Voice of the Left.

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)

Correspondence

Mike Phipps "Is the Party Over?" is correct in stating the next important test regarding working class support for Labour is going to be seen in London.

The London Socialist Alliance was relaunched in August to bring together those socialists wanting to see a left challenge to Labour in the Greater London Assembly elections and a way of linking campaigns in local boroughs defending jobs and services. However, major obstacles are likely to be in our way in seeking to put forward a challenge, not least the financial one. The Government has circulated a discussion paper which is suggesting a deposit of £10,000 will be required for the mayor, £1,000 for each directly elected seat and £5,000 for the top up seats. That's £29,000 even before a single leaflet is printed.

Those involved in the LSA include a wider range of forces than were assembled for discussions regarding the Euro elections in June. It is likely that a challenge, even if limited to the list, is likely to emerge, perhaps in the form of a broad based campaign in defence of the Tube. In a number of directly elected seats local campaigns are likely. The threshold for gaining a seat to the assembly is only 5% and it could well be the case that a number of left candidates, independents and Greens win seats.

The Blair project has advanced further in London than in many other parts of the country with Brent South and Enfield CLPs abolishing ward structures. The introduction of cabinet style local government and deletion of traditional committees is gathering pace. Already in three boroughs – Southwark, Hammersmith and Newham – Labour councillors have had enough of this autocratic centralisation and have resigned from the Labour Party. The moves to deselect left MPs in London will also pose a dilemma for socialists still battling inside the Labour Party, should these MPs decide to follow Canavan's example.

These elections for the GLA are likely to be just a taster for the local borough elections which will follow in 2002. Already we have seen Lewisham electing the first socialist councillor in London and the Greens gaining seats in Hackney. The cold reality for socialists still within the Labour Party is that over the next few years the Party will be consistently winning a minority of working class support and those standing to the left of Labour gaining growing support. The challenge socialists outside the LP face is to pull together this growing opposition together into a new party of the left.

Nick Long
Chair London Socialist Alliance

So, another bone has been thrown to pensioners. When does Mr Blair intend to honour his pre-election promises that "pensioners will share fairly in the prosperity of the nation" and that "the state pension will form the foundation of income in retirement"?

The state pension's foundation is crumbling – worth 22.6% of average earnings in 1989; 17.4% in 1998; 13% in 2010; 10.8% in 2020; caused by removal of the earnings link, a policy perpetrated on pensioners by the Conservative Government in 1980. A policy which, despite being condemned by Labour, including Blair, in opposition is now being continued by a Labour Government. As a result a single pensioner now loses £29 a week, a couple proportionally more.

Free eye tests, £100 per household and free TV licences per household for over 75s, worth at most £2.30 a week for a single pensioner under 75, £4.24 over 75 and £1.34 a week for each couple under 75, £2.31 over 75, are no substitute for a fair pension. Three per cent reduction of VAT on domestic fuel, worth roughly 34p a week per household, is of benefit to every household, including MPs and Ministers of the Crown. Can this be Blair's idea of sharing fairly in the nation's prosperity?

We paid National Insurance, based on earnings, during a lifetime of work to sustain those then in retirement and give free education to all, in a contract with the Government for a state pension as of right to give dignity in retirement. We did not contract for, or expect, means testing and demeaning handouts in lieu.

Clifford Fuller
Gloucester

Scouring the pages of the November issue of *LLB* from the other side of the world, I was looking forward to reading a fitting conclusion to October's coruscating editorial on New Labour's moral decline.

And what do I find? A lot of hand-wringing and hair-tearing about the "crisis of representation" inside and outside the Party topped off by Mike Phipps calling for socialists in the Party to "resist subjectivist pressures" to abandon "their very real influence among the mass of ordinary members."

Sad to say this is *LLB* at its worst. Like Mr Micawber, the Labour left is always confident that something will turn up to justify its loyalty to the Party. Unlike Mr Micawber, something always does.

Despite every defeat, every betrayal, every denial of democracy, some reason to stay and fight can always be found. A couple of years ago *Partnership into Power* seemed to signal the end of the road. But no, along came the Grassroots Alliance. Now there's *21st century party* but Ken (Livingstone) is coming to London and Liz (Davies) is still on the NEC. However dark the clouds, the left always finds a silver lining.

From 6,000 miles away in a country where many socialists – just like the Labour left – remain loyal to a party committed to the central tenets of neo-liberalism, I wonder why some of Britain's best and most committed activists continue to bang their heads against the brick wall of New Labour reaction. Is carrying a card and toiling away in what passes for its democratic structures still a pre-requisite for influence over "the mass" of ordinary Labour Party and trade union members? Was it ever? Or does the continued association of the left with the Party of the Asylum Bill, the bombings in Serbia and Iraq, welfare "reforms" and privatisation do the cause of socialism more harm than good?

Who knows? I certainly don't. I admire the sheer bloody-mindedness of those who choose to stay and fight. But please spare us the calls to arms and the elevation of a personal commitment to the Party as it once was to a point of political principle to be abandoned only at great peril to the future of socialism. If I took Mike Phipps seriously I would join the ANC tomorrow. But I hope readers of Sean Coyle's excellent piece on South Africa in October's *LLB* will understand why I won't – and why I believe being in or out of the Labour Party is no longer the critical issue for the British left it may once have been.

Bill Dixon
Cape Town, South Africa

The fact that Ken Livingstone is on the selection shortlist for the position of London Mayor shows how even the Millbank Tendency are susceptible to pressure from below. Despite his

political deficiencies, he is the obvious choice for London.

This goes for young people as well. For this reason he is supported by the likes of prominent anti-racist student Brook Dukes.

This is partly because of Ken's stand against racist policing and also his defence of asylum rights. The former especially has affected so many young people in London. When he ran the GLC he created many jobs for ordinary black people so often excluded from mainstream society.The GLC also opposed discrimination against gay people. Meanwhile, his concern for the environment is a concern shared by ordinary youth throughout the world.

In addition to this he has opposed tuition fees. This is one issue which clearly separates him from Frank Dobson on how he views young people's role in society. He also has a proven record on the issue of public transport. This is crucial for London's students, who increasingly rely on buses and the Tube to travel around. Following the Paddington rail disaster, surely the same people responsible shouldn't be put in charge of the Underground?

Matthew Willgress (16)
Peterborough

Hugh Jeffries (November *LLB*) calls on local authorities to "keep Hilary Armstrong guessing" with their proposals of reform. Unfortunately, the signs at local level are that this won't happen.

As residents in Leicester and elsewhere know only too well, local authorities are fully aware of the wide range of sweeteners (for example, millions of pounds in extra grant aid) available from central government in the event of compliance with the latter's wishes. Consequently, councils can be expected to draft structures which meet ministerial thinking rather than the needs or wishes of their electorates.

In many cases, especially with regard to the question of elected mayors, local leaders' career plans will also be a significant factor. Consultation processes, whether with local constituency parties or the wider public, will in most instances prove to be a purely cosmetic exercise.

All *LLB* readers must therefore be vigilant. Ask your local authority what its plans are, and why?

Unless we act, local democracy, weakened by the Tories, may finally be damaged beyond repair.

Colin Hall
Leicester East CLP

PERISCOPE

The shape of things to come?

US schools are plumbing new depths in exclusive contracts in their search for corporate sponsorship. A teenager in Georgia was suspended for insubordination after he wore a Pepsi T-shirt on his school's Coca-Cola day. Could this catch on in New Labour's privatisation-friendly **Education Action Zones?**

"Draper quits Villa"

Always look twice at a headline on the back page. Periscope's wild imaginings kindled by spotting this newspaper headline from afar (was **Derek** finally to lose his Tuscan holidays?) were extinguished on reading the story – about the football transfer market.

Wrong again, Tony

Eager to paint **Ken Livingstone** as an unnacceptable extremist, **Tony Blair** in his *Newsnight* interview with Jeremy Paxman said that *London Labour Briefing* was supporting Livingstone. He quoted our editorial last month which said it was the most important battle in the Party since Benn versus Healey in 1981.

For the record, *Labour Left Briefing*, formerly *Labour Briefing*, dropped the "London" from its title a decade ago.

Now who's stuck in the 1980s!

Defend our services (a bit)!

With the organised left in UNISON lining up behind **Roger Bannister** in the election for General Secretary (see page 19), imagine our surprise that *Campaign Group News* had offered the establishment candidate **Dave Prentis** space for an anodyne defence of public services. Is this decision related to the claim by the Prentis camp that the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs are backing their man?

Kelly scores duck in Islington knife-edge

Councillor **Milton Babulall**'s death (see obituary, page 14) has changed the balance of seats on Islington Council from 26-26 with the Mayor keeping Labour in power, to Labour 25, Liberals 26. The Liberals called for an interregnum, with the Chief Executive taking all decisions, subject to approval from the Liberal and Labour leaders. However, pending a by-election on 16th December, all Council meetings have been cancelled!

Milton's Hillrise ward is normally a safe Labour seat, but the Liberals have a track record of deluging Labour seats in by-elections (they snatched **Stephen Twigg**'s Council seat in 1997 after his election to Parliament) and the Council is deeply unpopular.

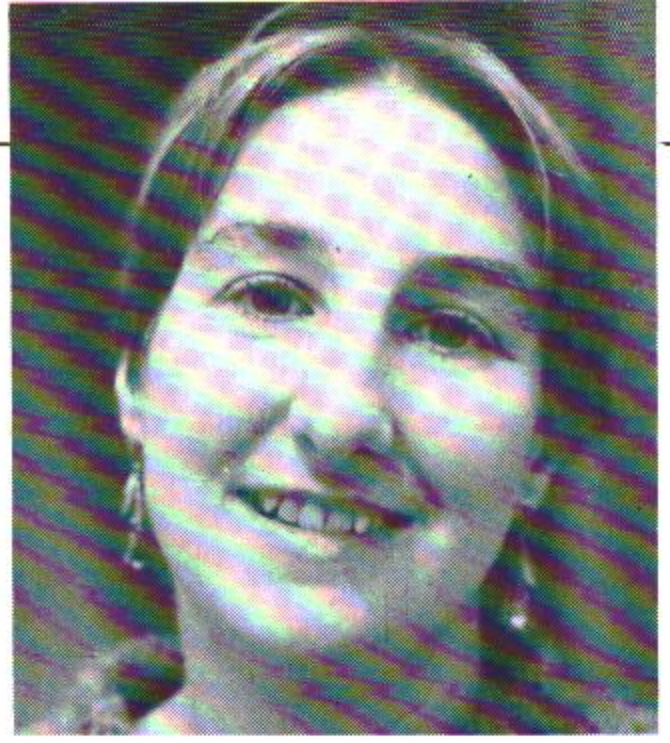
Meanwhile, a damning Ofsted report on the Education Department confirmed many criticisms made by parents and teachers. The Labour Party's response – from **David Blunkett** and the Council – was to announce that the service would be privatised and to hire a public relations firm.

One consortium has pulled out of the tendering process and the Chief Education Officer has suddenly left. There are now rumours that the decision will be taken behind closed doors, before the by-election. The Liberals are stuck: they did not oppose privatisation in the Council but want to court popularity in the by-election.

Meanwhile, **Phil Kelly**, grand architect of the privatisation proposals and one of the councillors forced to apologise to **Liz Davies** for libelling her, received a ringing o votes at a Party selection meeting; and there is a talk of an anti-privatisation candidate in the election.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

"Why does Central Office, every Conservative MP, every rag, tag and bobtail Trotskyist outfit from Socialist Workers to *London Labour Briefing* support him, and why does he not have the support of a single London Councillor or Labour GLA candidate?" Tony Blair (about Ken Livingstone) in *The Observer*, 21st November



THE LIZ DAVIES COLUMN

● So Ken Livingstone is on the shortlist for selection of the Labour candidate for London Mayor. But what a farce! The only lesson I drew from the shenanigans was that you can never believe anything emanating from Millbank, Downing Street, or the Dobson campaign. Ten days before the selection board, the spin suggested that Livingstone would definitely be barred. The weekend before, the spin was the opposite – Blair wanted him on the shortlist. By Tuesday night, it looked as though nobody knew what they wanted, the Prime Minister included. I did not believe a word of the supposed leaks of the exchanges during Ken's interviews with the selection board, or indeed the stories about what the Prime Minister wanted or Frank Dobson wanted.

My own guess, for what it's worth, is that the selection panel was instructed to bar Ken, but couldn't find anything on which to hang the verdict. By the time they'd called him back two days later, the public outrage had convinced Millbank and Downing Street that they couldn't get away with barring him. But that is only speculation – I only know what I read in the papers and it's not as if NEC members are privy to what's decided in the top ranks of the Labour Party.

What is clear is that Londoners, and London Labour Party members, want Ken. The task to select him is an uphill one – given the "patronage" element of the electoral college which has its own reasons for following Downing Street's orders. But the recent opinion polls are cheering, and Grassroots Alliance supporters know we can manage uphill tasks when we put our minds to it.

● Londoners want Ken for several reasons. We broadly approved of the record of the GLC and trust him to run London. We approve of his opposition to New Labour, particularly New Labour's obsession with privatisation. And we don't want to hand the Tube over to Railtrack. Ken's intention to raise money through a bonds issue makes utter sense – even to the independent economists now commenting in the media. Nobody would choose a mortgage with a higher rate of interest than necessary.

● It needs to be repeated over and over again that Labour's manifesto for the London elections has not yet been written. Clive Soley was speaking as if the manifesto had already been written – in Downing Street – and as if Livingstone was bound to disagree with it. In fact, the selection for London Mayor should be one of the mechanisms of consultation on the manifesto, not least because candidates have clearly different views on the key issue of transport. If Livingstone wins – or if he obtains a majority in the members' and trade union sections but doesn't win overall – the London Labour Party will clearly have voted against Public Private Partnership and in favour of a bonds issue. It would then be outrageous for the manifesto to put forward a different policy. What else is a selection contest about if not the opportunity for Party members to decide between the different political views of the candidates?

● Purely by coincidence, a consultation document was sent out by Millbank on 1st November entitled *Labour's vision for London*. It trumpets the national achievements of Labour in government – working families tax credit, minimum wage (who says that left wing policies can't be vote-winners, then?), £21 billion on health, etc – rather than considering specific policies for London. The PPP is not put as a proposal but as a *fait accompli*. Policy forums and Constituency Labour Parties should send in their views on the Underground by the deadline of 10th December.

The document also names the GLA top-up list candidates, led by Trevor Phillips of course, even though these names have never been through the NEC. These candidates, handpicked by the leadership, are down to receive the same vote as a CLP in the electoral college, despite the fact that all they will have contributed to the GLA is being rejected by any selection meeting they attended and (in most if not all cases) not being elected to it.

● *LLB* readers will recall my campaign for ethical guidelines to govern who the Party accepts money from. After putting a motion to January's NEC, Cathy Jamieson and I were told that a committee had already been set up to review Party finances. Now I've been told that the committee was set up in March.

In June I sent a submission in. The committee has now met. I was invited along and presented my submission. As yet I've not had a response, but I don't detect any political will to refuse money from shady sources. I am more hopeful that the committee might recommend increased transparency – disclosing the amounts of donations as well as the names – which was also part of my submission.

My assertions that Labour Party members would be unhappy at taking money from arms dealers were disputed.

My response is that if the committee is unclear what Labour Party members think, it should ask them.
A simple "should the Labour Party take money from arms dealers and human rights abusers – yes or no"
will do. I'm sure we can find 650 first class stamps.

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