LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING

LLB

February 1999 £1 waged / 50p unwaged



inside...

- School privatisation
- Livingstone down the tube
- Exposing Pinochet's murderous crimes
- Personal account of Baghdad families' slaughter

Labour Left Briefing

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AGENDA



Privatising schools, NHS crisis, London tube privatisation 4-7



Threat to GCs, Brighton witch-hunt, Grassroots Alliance, executive mayors, Labour Party funding, the Ken Livingstone column 8-11



Jubilee Line victory, Tameside strike, TU notebook, the Geoff Martin column. 12-15



Chile, Iraq, Kosova, Russia, Haiti, Ireland, Turkey, the Michael Hindley column 16-25



Sans-Papiers, refugee victories, asylum law threat, NF Dover march 26-27

Reviews, Obituaries, Periscope, Correspondence, AOB.

Front cover photo: Paul Mattsson

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Hit the streets to stop Blair-backed bombings

THE BOMBING of Iraq was a shameful moment for the Labour Government. All the excuses for the resort to military force collapse on inspection. The UNSCOM process was manipulated and corrupted by the United States. The remaining "weapons of mass destruction" pose no immediate threat, and in any case cannot be neutralised by air strikes. Iraq's non-compliance with UN resolutions hardly makes it unique.

This was a lawless act, predicated entirely on imperial presumption. It has compromised the United Nations and made a nonsense of New Labour's claims to either an independent or an ethical foreign policy.

Some of the sufferings brought about by this action are powerfully recounted by an Iraqi dissident on page 18. He shows clearly the barbarism of a policy that punishes the people of Iraq for the offences of Saddam Hussein in the vain hope that the pain will "trickle up".

Supporters of the bombing should ask themselves why the rest of the world disapproves of it. The United States and its British allies are isolated on the Security Council and even more so in the UN General Assembly. Meanwhile, Blair, Robertson, Cook, and Fatchet heap lie upon lie in their attempts to convince the British public that the four-day bombardment was anything other than unwarranted, cruel and counter-productive.

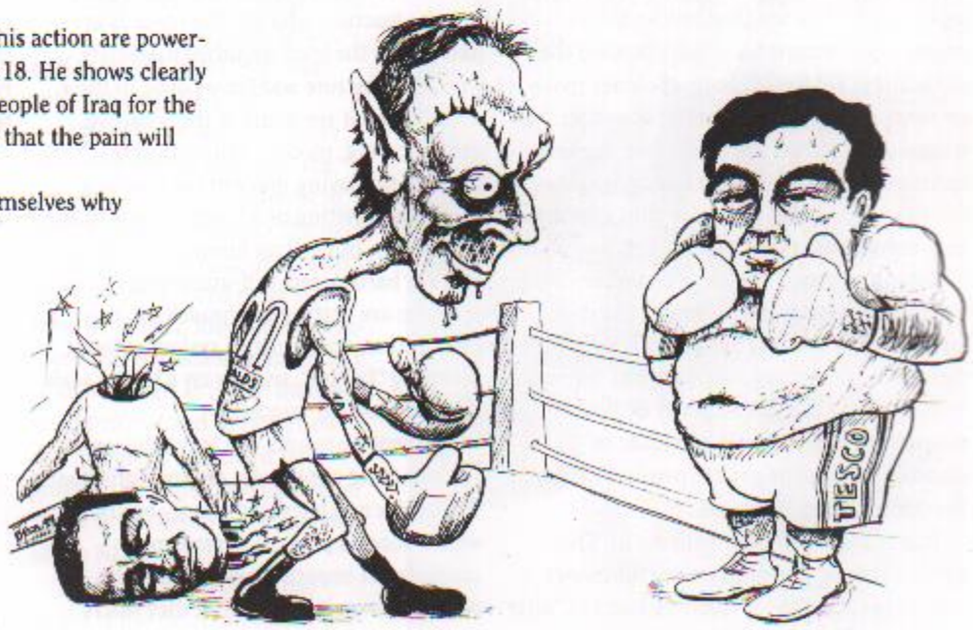
The backing given to the bombing by the leaders of all three major parties has highlighted once again what Tony Benn calls Britain's "crisis of representation". The meagre handful of Labour MPs who spoke out against it (but were cheated of their chance to vote against it) are supported by a substantial section of public opinion. We have to do everything in our power to ensure that this widespread dissent is mobilised – within the Labour Party and, most importantly, on the streets. The only way to stop the air strikes is to make opposition audible and visible and implacable. It's a big job for all of us in the labour and peace movements, but it has to be our priority.

Mandelson's legacy

In the wake of the Ecclestone affair, *LLB* warned that the insensitivity of the New Labour hierarchy to potential conflicts of interest would land the Party in trouble, and so it has proved. The departure of Mandelson and Robertson from the Cabinet was a Christmas bonus, but there is no sign that lessons have been learned. Indeed, not a week passes without further evidence of New Labour's increasing entanglement with big business, the most powerful and least accountable "special interest" in the country.

Under the present government, big business has made unprecedented inroads into our civic fabric, colonising education, health, transport, local authorities and the criminal justice system. At the same time, our Party now accepts funds from many of the corporations benefiting from this process, as well as an unsavoury crowd of arms manufacturers, human rights violators, and wreckers of the environment. For all its talk of democratic reform, New Labour is busy entrenching the undemocratic power of large-scale private enterprises over the public domain.

The appointment of former Tory minister John Wakeham to chair the commission on Lords' reform is a case in point. This is the same Wakeham who, as head of the Press Complaints Commission, has proved himself a faithful servant of the newspaper barons, who, in turn, enjoy direct links to 10 Downing Street. Wakeham recently refused even to hear the shocking case of Greg Palast, the journalist who exposed the New Labour cash-for-access scam. Millbank officials



colluded with Mirror reporters in fabricating a banner headline, front page "sex pest" charge against Palast, a charge which has now been entirely discredited.

Speaking to a meeting of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, Palast criticised the media for trivialising "this incredible and corrosive relationship between business and government. Lobbyists waltzed Tescos through John Prescott's back door, the Transport White Paper was delayed, and proposals for a supermarket car park tax vanished. Prescott's own task force found out in the press."

As for Mandelson himself, no one would expect *LLB* to do other than celebrate his humiliation. However, his legacy to the Party is dreadful. With the exception of his friend Murdoch, he did more than any other individual to corrupt political discourse in contemporary Britain. The casual cynicism in regard to telling the truth highlighted by his handling of the Robinson loan has been his modus operandi throughout. Soundbites have been used not only as a substitute for policies, but as a cloak for the pursuit of special interests.

Unfortunately, the Mandelson method will survive his departure. He has spawned a host of "little Mandelsons" at every level of the Labour Party, and unless their influence is removed, this Labour Government will be principally remembered for its elevation of cronyism to an instrument of policy. ❑

Education: Blunkett misses the target

Bob Spooner
Leeds North East CLP

THATCHERISM HAS multiplied stress and insecurity and destroyed job satisfaction across the board. Blair has recently welcomed an extended middle class; what he failed to say is that the new recruits are as exploited as the working class has ever been. The system has infected commerce and teaching and nursing with new forms of exploitation.

Few would deny that teachers and nurses work best when they are relaxed, secure and appreciated. They are then motivated to improve performance and work beyond the call of duty. Yet New Labour's policies make no sense unless you believe the opposite: that teachers and nurses are instinctive slackers and need the carrot of a personal pay scale and the whip of loss of pay for poor performance to motivate them.

Making money is the main incentive of the commercial world. "Management" is about exploiting the workforce by setting ever more demanding targets and making jobs dependent on hitting them. Ruthlessly deployed, it engenders lies and deceit and leads to scandals such as the private pension racket that took so long to expose.

This is the world Blair believes in. The Green Paper on the proposed performance related pay scheme for teachers seeks to "alter the culture" of the staff room and import into it more of Blair's Tory philosophy. It is a document that the most right wing Tories would have been proud to produce.

Targets are now the biggest bane of the education service and are as dangerous as the millennium bug. The problem with hitting targets is that one is obliged to focus on them and ignore the rest of the landscape. Hitting them takes up an undue amount of time and energy, swamping everything else. Of course, whoever sets the targets determines the workload of those obliged to aim for them. Just by setting the target the minister or the governors intrude into schools. In turn the head teacher becomes a despot and the ambitious teachers become creeps.

Worse still, they are the wrong targets, and the teachers who get the rewards are likely to be the loud-mouthed martinets, who teach by rote and leave havoc in their wake. I do not see many of the sensitive, gentle, caring, modest, self-critical teachers, who are the saving grace of the teaching profession, getting much out of performance related pay, other than humiliation. Already, it is the hard-nosed, self-marketing characters who are getting the headships. You can't run any competitive system without branding "failure", usually on a bigger scale than you reward 'success'.

Payment by results will inevitably result in neglecting pupils who are struggling with their work and lavishing energy on those whose success pays off. Already poor teachers get impatient with those who struggle to understand what they teach. Competitive teaching is bound to worsen relationships in the classroom. In addition, of course, the intention is to extract even longer hours and more work from those few who gain the additional rewards. It will inevitably add to stress. Targets make the ludicrous assumption that all children have the same talents and, if properly taught, can do equally well. They can't; and it is grossly harmful to target a narrow range of skills and call those who fit the Blunkett mould successful, and those who don't failures.

The grisly Green Paper is crammed with sickening marketing sentiments. The reputation of OFSTED is at its lowest ebb because few people believe in its capacity to recognise quality teaching or even suss out failure; yet its verdicts, together with target hitting and "stringent" appraisal (which is code for headteacher bullying) will determine what teachers earn. Self-respecting teachers will not tolerate it; they will join the mad rush to leave the profession. If it is accepted, careers teachers in schools should be required to paste a health warning on teaching as a job option.



Profiteering from education

Adrian Kozlowski writes: In the new ideology of privatisation, education becomes not a response to varied needs but a standardised service offered to clients. In this scenario pupils become consumers of information that equip them for a world of competition, and performance is measured solely by exams that "require cardhouses of knowledge to be massaged back on the paper from whence they came", to quote one US critic.

There are also major concerns about content. What sort of identities are produced when the histories, experiences, values, and desires of students are defined through corporate rather than democratic ideals? If New Labour get their way, we may soon find out.

New Labour must cure the health service's sickness

Helen Weatherly, nurse and UNISON member, reports on the crisis in the NHS and the need for a decent pay settlement.

THE PREDICTED and inevitable winter crisis has hit the NHS; we know it's a crisis because even Frank Dobson has said so. A flu outbreak, nowhere near an epidemic, took a large proportion of the blame, rather than an understaffed and underfunded service.

The realities of this crisis have been many and varied. The first areas hit have been accident and emergency departments. More than 30 patients, more than a wardful, have regularly been camped out in A&E waiting for admission to a bed for up to four days. Patients have died in these circumstances with little privacy and dignity. Staff have been unable to deliver adequate care to these patients when they have to cope with those constantly coming through the door. We have seen patients assessed in ambulances because there's no room in the department – is it any wonder A&E nurses want to leave?

The cause of the difficulties in the A&E departments is the shortage of staff and beds. The flu in itself was not a problem so much as the consequences particularly for frail and elderly patients who developed life threatening complications such as pneumonia. A stretched NHS reached breaking point. Intensive care beds ran out in London, at times the nearest bed being as far as Derby and Taunton. Intensivists had to become far more selective about who would receive ITU care, which must have resulted in some patients dying who would otherwise have had a chance.

Specialist interventions such as respiratory support had to be carried out on general wards rather than in high dependency areas where appropriate supervision and monitoring is available. Doctors had to make decisions about taking the risks with these interventions on the ward rather than let patients die. This put more pressure on ward nurses to manage unfamiliar treatments with a ward full of sick patients, and pressures to discharge patients as quickly as possible to make way for the next batch from casualty. Patients' relatives had to be asked to help provide basic care for them – is it any wonder ward nurses have had enough?

Then there is the knock-on effect on other services, most notably the ambulance service. Ambulances sitting outside A&Es waiting for patients to be allowed in are delayed reaching other calls. We have seen St John's ambulance crews used to transfer the critically ill when no paramedic crew was available. One trust used ambulance paramedics to staff its casualty department – as if there is a surplus of them with nothing else to do.

Although the worst pressure has eased for the moment, the service is no better equipped to face the next onslaught. The net effect is a grinding down of staff, who will leave, need more sick time, or at best, lose the commitment that has enabled the service to cope as well as it has. Staff who are burnt out and demoralised can't transfer, because it isn't going to be better anywhere else. There is no option but to get out of the NHS.

That is why this year's pay award is the most important ever, not just in terms of cash, but to show staff they are valued and respected, and that the Government is committed to the NHS. Whatever the final figure, the response will be the thing to watch for – and there are likely to be a lot of unhappy health workers up and down the country.

The Government have said any "inflation busting" pay award will have to be funded from existing budgets, ie. cuts in services. Gordon Brown incorporated only a 2.5% pay rise into his NHS budgets. Dobson may be reluctant to use up to a third of the extra funding allocated this year on pay. He knows the extent of the recruitment and retention crisis so why does he want to spend money on services that there won't be enough staff to be run? Whatever happens, nurses must not be held to ransom over their pay award through cuts in services or more likely, less than equal pay rises for all other health workers. The whole healthcare team is demoralised. If nurses are given special treatment this year, the recruitment and retention problems will spread throughout the service.

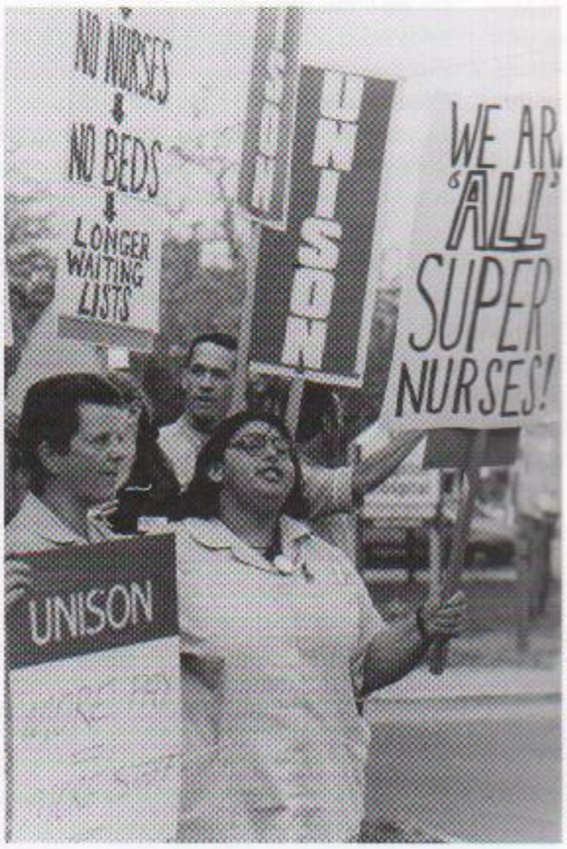


PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

The mood and the opportunity is right for health workers to take industrial action if the awards don't meet expectations. But will health unions deliver? The strength of feeling is definitely there, but without co-ordination and leadership from our unions nothing effective can happen. The worry is that some in the unions are so close to the Government that there is a risk they will do nothing more than send a few stickers out to branches rather than taking the kind of high profile lead required.

Staff need to take action, if only to show their frustrations, to give them some power and a voice. I believe it is the only safety valve available to save the NHS, because otherwise more and more staff will take their own industrial action and leave the service altogether. ❑

Nightmare on Baker Street

Ken Livingstone writes: London's biggest immediate problem is the abysmal state of our transport system. Congestion, pollution and dreadful levels of service pose a threat to our health and London's attraction for business. Just breathing the air doubles the chance of developing lung cancer. Half of all children who live on major roads have developed asthma.

Only a few weeks ago I had what can only be described as my worst ever journey into work, starting at Willesden Green tube at 8.20am. It turned out that just before the height of the peak period a signal had failed at Farringdon, preventing Metropolitan Line trains from going beyond Baker Street. As these trains – from as far away as Amersham and Uxbridge – rolled into Baker Street passengers flocked onto the Jubilee Line. This had a domino effect right the way along the system.

I squeezed onto a train at Willesden Green, but we were then told there was a defective train at Finchley Road and two broken down at Baker Street. I have never seen the platforms so full. As we approached St John's Wood, our driver said that Baker Street and Bond Street stations were closed because of severe overcrowding. The train was so packed that one woman asked for water to be passed down to her. At Green Park the station was closed (partly because of serious escalator problems), and our driver's radio failed, making it impossible to update the passengers on the latest LU disaster. The line was completely closed down between Finchley Road and Charing Cross by 9am. To add insult to injury, part of the station roof collapsed at Wembley Park, tipping rain onto waiting commuters!

At five past nine there was a complete signal failure at both Neasden and Wembley Park. As those masters of understatement at London Underground put it "this disrupted the Jubilee Line service". The upshot of this appalling morning was that I managed to miss my connecting train on my way to a trade union meeting, although I'm sure there were many commuters who were left in a much worse situation than that. Again, as John Self of LU wrote to me a week later "this is not the standard of service that we aim to provide for our customers." I should hope not.

Ironically, that same week I was speaking at a public meeting in Willesden Green Library Centre in opposition to tube privatisation. It was pointed out, very graphically, that for many trade unionists involved in this dispute this was the most principled action they had ever had to take. Here was an issue that almost perfectly combined the interests of the union's members with the interests of society as a whole.

The proposal for Public Private Partnership for the Underground is the worst possible compromise. In fact, there is a chance that the whole package might collapse. I am absolutely convinced that Londoners – including London businesses – would be prepared to pay more taxes rather than see increased fares and worse conditions for London Underground staff. In fact, it is clear that many business leaders in the City of London understand that in the long term the problems of the underground system cannot be resolved without a contribution from the business sector.

I think most Londoners agree with the RMT that public-private partnership is not the best solution to tube underfunding. The increasing anger about the appalling conditions that commuters have to endure provides a basis for public support for tube workers and like other London Campaign Group MPs I will be joining the RMT on the picket lines in support of a publicly owned and publicly accountable underground system. Especially after the great Jubilee Line debacle!

When is privatisation not privatisation?

Diana Udall, President, London Transport Regional Council RMT, attacks Labour's plans for London's tube.

IN 1996 John Prescott stated "Railways will be publicly owned and publicly accountable...a public service meeting a public need". In the run up to the General Election, Glenda Jackson said that London Underground wouldn't be privatised. Lots of Londoners and London Underground Limited (LUL) workers voted Labour on the strength of that.

Now the Government is putting forward a scheme which hands over the infrastructure and workforce to private companies. Almost everybody except the Government knows this is privatisation. However it is dressed up, LUL workers will be working for the private sector.

The RMT recognised the dangers and campaigned against the proposals. We sought guarantees on jobs, conditions and pensions. That's why we took industrial action in the summer. The action was suspended pending negotiations with LUL and discussions with John Prescott. Both proved fruitless so the action was reinstated. Dates were set but LUL went to court.

Other, less expensive and better supported, options to finance the Underground are available. The present proposals are unpopular. Peter Ford (ex LT chairman) says they are the most expensive, the Transport Select Committee is highly critical and so is the *London Evening Standard*. To add insult to injury the Minister of Transport for London has just confirmed that LUL have already spent £10m on consultancy fees on the scheme.

For socialists there are two main issues: privatisation and the anti-trade union laws. The laws give employers and judges, who are accountable to no-one, the right to interfere with the democratic rights of workers. Organising a ballot or calling off an action should be up to the workers involved.

- Raise the issue of LUL privatisation and repealing the anti-union laws whenever possible, putting pressure on MPs, Labour Party NEC etc.
- Contact the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation, c/o Flat 2, 235 Queens Lane, London, N10 1DN 0181-883 7075.

Lobby John Prescott

2pm, Friday 5th February

Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, Bressenden Place, London SW1.

Law Lords strike out tube action

A London Underground worker calls for action to be escalated in defence of wages, conditions and a public service.

LAW LORD Sullivan's Christmas gift to London Underground Limited of an injunction against the RMT's planned strike action was completely predictable. For the past ten years LUL workers have been used as a scratch board on which to sharpen judicial claws. Many of the anti-union interpretations of Tory legislation have arisen from the action of LUL workers, usually RMT.

Justice Sullivan argued firstly that the RMT had changed its demands since the original ballot, secondly that too much time had elapsed between the original action and the proposed New Year's Eve action, and thirdly that the dispute was political. In a munificent display of concern for public interest, he also commented on his responsibility not to inconvenience passengers on New Year's Eve.

The first point is too silly to refute. The RMT demands clearly centre on guarantees of terms and conditions for its members. The second point was addressed by Bob Crow, Assistant General Secretary of the RMT, when he was interviewed after the decision. He pointed out that the original action had been suspended in order to return to the bargaining table. But which table? LUL insists that its hands are tied, and that it's up to the Government to make guarantees. The Government insists that the appropriate place to negotiate is with the employer. With this sort of industrial ping-pong, it's not surprising there was a long lapse between the original action and the New Year's Eve strike call.

To a certain extent, LUL management has a point. It is up to the Government to enact legislation to guarantee two of the most important points in dispute – pension rights and retention of travel facility. These require legislation because of the tax implications. While John Prescott has made noises about doing it, we have not yet seen these guarantees. Perhaps he's worried about scaring off potential fat-cats, who would be put off by having to honour these commitments.

Bob Crow also pointed out the implications of this ruling for future disputes: unions will now be discouraged from returning to the bargaining table for fear that some Law Lord will take exception to the time lapse between two periods of industrial action.

Most galling is the third claim about the underlying political motives of the dispute. What do you do when your boss is the Government and it is proposing changes which will worsen your terms and conditions of work? This decision gives a clear and sinister message: if the boss is also a Secretary of State, don't bother trying to defend your rights, because you run the risk of appearing "political", and falling foul of present legislation.

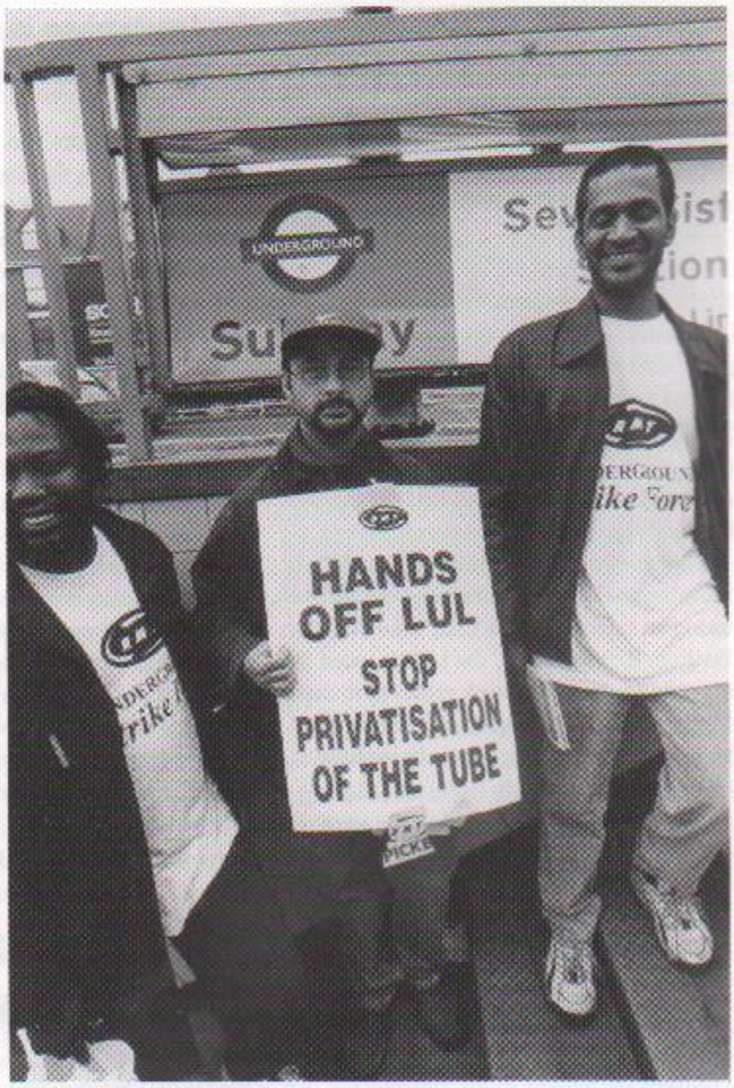


PHOTO: ANDREW WIARD

RMT strikers last summer.

In the NHS, UNISON has run into similar problems. Workers at University College London NHS trust voted by a clear majority to take strike action over similar issues to those of concern to the RMT. The union is worried about terms and conditions of the employees who were to be transferred to a new consortium. They wanted guarantees of no contractual changes for staff.

The trust argued that this was a "political" strike. The court rejected this but still agreed to grant an injunction to the trust on other grounds. They claimed that a trade dispute cannot make demands on future employers, and cannot make demands for future employees. The definition of a "trade dispute" is so precise that a union cannot try to take preventive measures to protect its members. Yet again the goalposts are moved to the detriment of the working class.

In 1984, NUR (as it was) carried out a one-day strike against the transfer of London Transport from the GLC to the Department of Transport. This was lawful at the time, even though the change did not involve the sort of historic upheaval proposed by John Prescott. I will nail my colours to the mast: even if I knew that my terms and conditions were guaranteed for the lifetime of my employment, I would want to take action against privatisation. I would want the right, as a worker, to express my concern over the ownership of a public service. But with the Tories' anti-union legislation still in force, we're paying the price for not having had united union action to defeat it earlier.

So the struggle goes on. On 5th February, there will be a lobby of John Prescott's office at noon. The RMT has already sent out new ballot papers, based on very clear demands. Unless some judge finds another reason to rule it out of order, expect industrial action sometime in February or March. ❑

Brighton block – Stanton stamped on

Brighton Pavilion CLP recently faced the wrath of the Millbank Tendency when it nominated former councillor Richard Stanton to the local government panel. Elizabeth Cotten reports.

RICHARD STANTON was a Brighton councillor for nine years up to 1992. From 1988 onwards Richard broke the Labour whip several times. He took this action because of the pledge made by councillors to "abide by the instructions" of the local Party. Richard was disciplined in 1993 by the national Party and debarred from office for three years.

Last June Richard was accepted by Brighton and Hove Local Government Committee (LGC) on to the candidates' panel. Council Leader Steve, now Lord, Bassam expressed his displeasure. Noting that the LGC had at the same time turned down an ex-Tory councillor, his Lordship declared the Party had "shot itself in the foot" by "rejecting our new constituency."

Millbank intervened, ordering our LGC to "re-interview" Richard, claiming "No. 10 is taking an interest" in the case. Like Brighton Pavilion, Richard's CLP, the LGC insisted on his right to stand. Millbank removed Richard from the panel, pending an NEC hearing. Meanwhile, the ex-Tory James Humphrey immediately appealed to Regional Officers and had his appeal heard within the week. He was allowed on to the panel.

Richard was given two reasons for Millbank's action, the first referring to his alleged misdemeanours in the 1980s and the second to his remark, when originally interviewed in Brighton, that he could not undertake unconditionally to follow the Group whip in all conceivable circumstances.

At the NEC Disputes Panel, trade union NEC members Vernon Hince and John Allen agreed at once that the first reason for exclusion was inadmissible because he had already been tried on this. After a lengthy and serious debate about the difficulties raised by the whip issue, they volunteered – to Richard's surprise – to draw up a 'form of words' which they thought would offer a compromise acceptable to both sides. But this attempt at compromise did not last long. Two days later Millbank wrote to tell Richard that the NEC would be recommended to exclude him from the panel.

Sure enough, the NEC's Organisation Committee decided that he should be excluded. There is no appeal or explanation of its decision.

Seventy local members attended a recent local meeting to hear the case and listen to NEC member Liz Davies. Few members need Millbank to explain their decision. They know what it's about: the dismantling of Party democracy by a clique who – literally, in Brighton and Hove – give a whole new meaning to the term Labour aristocracy.

Educate, nominate, organise

For two years running, Party members have refused to endorse the leadership's preferred candidates to represent them in the constituency section of the National Executive (NEC). Members who had hoped for real social change after May 1997 elected Ken Livingstone over Peter Mandelson. In the 1998 elections – the Centre Left Grassroots Alliance (GA) won the debate and four out of six seats – against interference from the Party machine and untold spending from the shady "Members First" cartel.

With voting this successful, the left can expect it to be abolished, as it has in most other areas of Party life. However, nominations are now open and last year's successful candidates are now preparing to be accountable to the membership for their performance on the NEC to date.

In only two NEC meetings, constituency representatives supported by the GA (Liz Davies, Cathy Jamieson, Mark Seddon, Pete Willsman) have resisted the leadership's welcome (a gagging order on any public comment) by keeping their promise to circulate a full report to constituency parties. They have opposed bombing of Iraq and gratuitous witch-hunts of dissenting Party members. Liz Davies has led demands for an inquiry into business sponsorship of the Party. Christine Shawcroft (GA candidate last year) has led calls for London party members to choose our candidate for Mayor.

The Party members the GA supported in 1998 have continued to speak out for Party members and as we go to press, the GA is drawing up a list of candidates for 1999. Every CLP can make one nomination by the closing date of April 9th. It is up to *LLB* readers to ensure that the arguments for nominating one of the GA candidates are heard in their constituencies, so that Party members again have credible candidates to vote for in the summer's membership ballot.

- For further information, including supplies of leaflets and CVs – and especially details of this year's slate please ring the *LLB* office on 0181-985 6597.
- April 9th is also the closing date for nominating delegates to Party Conference and for nominations to the National Constitutional Committee, Conference Arrangements Committee and the National Policy Forum.

Big cheeses meeting in Red Leicester

Christine Shawcroft reports: Leicester was painted red on 9th January when the officers of the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups met to plan the overthrow of capitalism.

The officers will be concentrating on putting out a regular Network news bulletin with information from local groups. We also need to draw up a suggested timetable and standing orders for the AGM, to eliminate some of the problems experienced last year. The aims and values statement agreed at the AGM will be circulated to local groups for discussion and amendment at the next AGM.

Some kind of conference or event is planned for the summer, possibly around the Policy Forum consultation papers. In any case, we hope to put out suggested responses to Policy Forum papers. Responsibilities were divided up, with the most onerous tasks reserved for officers who weren't able to make it to the meeting.

The delegates to the Grassroots Alliance were mandated to support the retention of the "left" bit of the Centre Left Grassroots Alliance. It was felt that the platform for the slate this year should include disability rights, linking of pensions to average earnings, opposition to Private Finance Initiatives, the UNISON formula for the national minimum wage, and trade union rights, as a development of last year's programme.

So all in all, the Revolution is in safe hands.

GC or not GC – that is the question

New Labour's modernisation project continues, says Christine Shawcroft

SOME LOCAL GCs have provided a refuge where isolated left wingers could shelter from the questing tentacles of the Project. This is about to change. Having considered setting up panels to vet the suitability of delegates and officers of local CLPs, the Blairites balked at the time and effort required and are hoping to abolish GCs instead. All a lot simpler really. Try as they might, there are too many constituencies, too many ward parties, too many activists, even now, for them to be properly controlled.

GCs run by supporters of the Project have been boasting of the cure for boring, irrelevant meetings for some time now. Don't have them! Myself, I always thought that if meetings are boring you should make them more interesting with speakers and informal debate. If they're seen as irrelevant, surely no one is short of a local campaign to get involved in or even start off? I suppose if the local campaign is against the cuts being carried out by the local Labour Council this could present a problem for the New Labour loyalist.

All this is anathema to the leadership. Consultation and discussion are much better – no votes are taken after everyone has "had their say". The trouble with local GCs is that they will keep having votes on things, and sending contemporary motions or constitutional amendments to Annual Conference which then have to be ruled out of order which causes even more trouble. So CLPs are being advised by regional offices to have AGMs and then not meet for another year. With luck, members might be invited to a region-organised Policy Forum to have their say, then...that's it for another year.

The question is, can this be made compulsory? If local parties keep meeting, can they actually be stopped? For now, we should be linking the Policy Forum process into the ward and GC structure, not allowing it to be used as an excuse for sidelining them. Organise local Policy Forums as political education events, discuss the issues thoroughly, then use the ward and GC structure to agree the actual policy you send on to the Commissions. The same applies to trade union branches, of course.



Christine Shawcroft

If your GC officers are not entirely sound (why not?) treat with great suspicion any suggestions to cancel meetings, not meet over the summer, over the winter, because the election is six months away, etc. It could be the thin end of the wedge.

Council cabinets close door on democracy

The Blair Government is eager to promote cabinets in local government, but Hammersmith have already jumped the gun, with an Executive Mayor and a Board of seven deputies since May 1998. Councillor Keith Mallinson reports.

When I was elected in May 1994 the council was streamlined into five main committees. Councillors were not bogged down with overloaded agendas, the paperwork was concise and enabled members to undertake effective constituency and committee work. The system involved all members.

Now that has all changed. Backbenchers are now banished. We no longer participate in decision-making, which now goes on behind closed doors by the gang of seven. Under this new system, decisions from the Mayor's Board can be called in to the new scrutiny committee of the council before ratification. It is chaired by the Chief Whip and has a voting membership of twelve, seven administration and three opposition backbenchers in addition to the chair and vice chair. Backbench members are rotated at every meeting, which means that members get the opportunity to speak at every fourth meeting.

Since its inception the opposition have called in around 30 items, with the administration calling in none, perhaps due to political pressure from the Whip. When I called in an item I was told that while under council rules it was admissible, the Labour Group had discussed the issue and it was therefore against Party policy.

Under the new system, backbenchers are not given the opportunity to scrutinise effectively or gain wider expertise. The executive enjoys an intimidating advantage – the deputies are well briefed and backed by their senior officers. In this environment the backbencher is not going to ask elementary questions for fear of being shown up.

There are dangers for democracy here. Should Labour find itself in opposition in future years and the Tories adopt the present system (although at the moment they are opposed) our role as Councillors would be minimal.

The Government has expressed concern at the low turnout in local elections. But how can the public have confidence in a system where decisions are taken behind closed doors and the majority of councillors shunted to the sidelines? If other councils are considering a change to an executive board system which will firmly establish a small political clique, I would caution comrades to subject any proposals to a thorough investigation. ❑

Kebabing Labour's dodgy donors

Dave Statham, Brent East CLP, does not buy New Labour claims on corporate funding.

THE LABOUR Party used to be funded by Party members and democratically-accountable union political funds, but this is fast-changing. Whereas back in 1986, 76% of Party income came from unions, by 1997 this was down to 30%. Meanwhile the proportion raised from donations of over £1,000 and "events and sponsorship" rose to the same 30%.

These changes encompass many worrying elements. Apart from the dilution of the trade union link inherent in the change and the absence of any democratic element in the company donations, the question of who is buying what looms large.

The 1997 Annual Report listed donations of over £5,000 – but only identified the donors without saying how much they gave, beyond the fact that it was more than £5,000. Unfortunately for the denizens of Millbank, companies are required to divulge political donations in their accounts; work done by the Labour Research Department reveals that large donors included:

- investment advisers GLC who gave £30,000 in the year to June 1997
- sheet metal group Caledonian Mining gave £20,000
- insurance company Sun Life & Provincial gave £15,000
- The largest donation came from the Political Animal Lobby who gave £1,052,000 – unfortunately for them the Government caved in to the hunting lobby and failed to back Mike Foster's bill
- The next largest donation was from Lord Paul's Caparo group which gave £76,000
- Creation Records with £24,838
- £5,000 each from Ranger Oil (UK) and Somers Handling.

Several of the other corporate donors have yet to file accounts for the relevant period so information is not yet available; for more details of the Labour Research Department visit their website at www.lrd.org.uk

The donations of individuals such as Alan Sugar of electronics group Amstrad or Lord Hollick of United News and Media are more difficult to quantify as there is no requirement for them to divulge the details. But an interesting example of an individual donor is Lord Sainsbury of Turville, who was given his peerage by Blair and has since stood down as chair of the supermarket chain to become Minister for Science.

Sainsbury's figure in the list of sponsors of Party events along with Safeways and Tesco. Presumably Somerfield will figure in the 1998 Annual Report after the infamous Conference "tags". Another item to ponder is the £7,000 donation to the Labour Party Front Bench Research Fund from Mirror Group Newspapers in 1997. A recent revelation that Peter Gabriel and Jeremy Irons, who both feature in the over £5,000 list, have got contracts connected with the millennium dome raises shades of Mandygate. No firm figures are available on either the size of their donations beyond "over £5,000" or the value of the contracts although theses are said to be "five-figure" for Gabriel and "four-figure" for Irons.

While the dodgy donations received so far are within the law this may change if the report of the Neill Committee is implemented. The Committee's main proposals include full public disclosure of donations (including sponsorship and benefits in kind) of £5,000 or more at national level and £1,000 to constituencies, an end to blind trusts, a ban on anonymous donations over £50 and on foreign donations except from registered UK voters overseas, shareholder consent for company political donations and party accounts to be publicly available.

Many feel that the proposals do not go far enough. For instance current company law requires that any donation over £200 be declared in the company accounts. Why not apply this £200 limit to both corporate and individual donations? This would get round the problem of individuals making lots of small donations to avoid disclosure. Also why should company shareholders be the only ones to have a say – why should those who create the wealth not have a say? If workforces were balloted on whether or not political donations should be made from the fruits of their labours we might see some very different results!

The reference to sponsorship and benefits in kind is worthy of note; remember politicians whizzing round the country in helicopters? Anyone who thinks the cost of said chopper was disclosed in election expenses can't be a regular *LLB* reader.

The question of the buying of peerages is an area which the Neill Committee has not so far investigated, but it might be worthy of some examination. Under the Tories the link between company donations and peerages was striking and while no such pattern has yet emerged under New Labour it must be watched closely.

The end of Co-operation

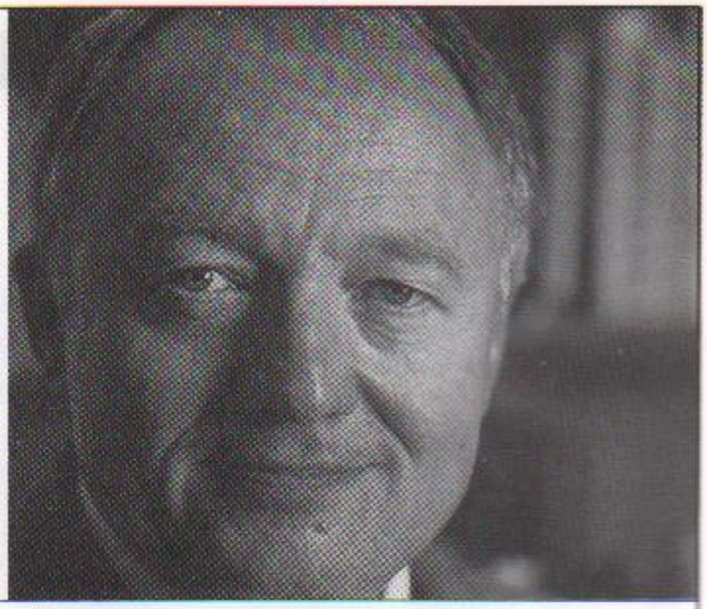
The Co-operative Party is about to vote itself into (even more) obscurity. Having defeated Blairite Minister Alun Michael's proposals that it should practically cease to exist at its 1998 Conference, the working party established there has decided to recommend it disaffiliates from Labour.

Shrouded in a claim of establishing itself as a serious sister party, nobody except those on the working party can seriously expect the Co-op Party will ever regain a position as a serious force in politics once it disaffiliates. Its claim for a place on Labour's NEC will be rejected in favour of a place on the National Policy Forum where its voice can be buried alongside others. The working party's comment that it "must" take up the Prime Minister's challenge to define and promote the Third Way shows who is pulling the strings.

The chair of the working party was none other than Lord Garfield Davies, who as a humble General Secretary of shopworkers' union USDAW fought tooth and nail against supporting a decent minimum wage at Labour Party Conference. As a party, the Co-op was established in 1917, and it once stood independent candidates. It looks like the Blairites have finally extinguished it as a political force.

the Ken Livingstone column

Ken Livingstone MP warns against antagonising Labour voters.



LABOUR'S National Executive Committee will agree a system for selecting our candidate for mayor of London on 23rd March – it had previously been expected to do so in January. There are plenty of rumours about the reason for this decision, not least of which is that the Millbank Tendency has still not settled on a candidate. But it may be that some in Millbank have come to the conclusion that there is more to be gained from allowing London Labour Party members the opportunity to nominate candidates of their choice than there is in antagonising them during the European elections. Leaving the decision for a while may put off a skirmish over the removal of CLPs' right to nominate, but it also gives Millbank time to think.

Indeed, there is a very coherent case for a democratic selection process. Labour will have been through a series of electoral tests by the time we come to select in London, and no matter how well the Party fares there is little chance that we will escape without some losses given the high starting point we are defending.

Gordon Brown's pre-budget report last autumn claims that the economy will grow by between 1% and to 1.5% in 1999. It presumes that the economic slow-down will not lead to an increase in the level of unemployment sufficient to put downward pressure on the growth of real wages. While this could be the case, the real errors in the budget forecast are in those the Government cannot control or will not control, such as investment and trade.

The report also predicts that fixed investment will rise from between 1.75%-2.25% next year, which is nonsense. It isn't credible to suggest that fixed investment will grow almost twice as rapidly as GDP. One of the clearest features of the business cycle is investment fluctuation at a greater rate than GDP. Fixed investment invariably rises faster than GDP during the upswing of the business cycle and falls more rapidly during the downswing. As we are now in the downswing of the business cycle, fixed investment will rise less than GDP in the coming year. In fact, the figures had already turned downwards by the second quarter of 1998 – declining by 1.4% compared with the first quarter.

Treasury advisors seem even less well informed on the impact of trade. The Treasury report claimed that the worsening of Britain's trade gap will cut 1.25% from our GDP in 1999. Up until the second quarter of 1998 exports of British goods and services rose by 4% – a dramatic decline from the peak of 9.5% in the third quarter of 1997 following the impact of high interest rates and an overvalued pound, the surge of cheap imports from Asia as well as the slow down in the whole global economy. Unfortunately the decline of the value of the pound has been too slow because of high interest rates.

THIS REFLECTS the Government's failure to tighten fiscal policy sufficiently during our first year, leading to the Bank of England's interest rate rises. Even if we make the optimistic assumption that fixed investment is merely flat in 1999 and that the deterioration of net trade is 1% of GDP, this gives GDP growth for next year of zero. It is more likely that fixed investment will fall and that net trade will deteriorate more rapidly than Gordon expects. If this is the case then the economy will slip into recession. If there is a more rapid than expected recovery in Asia and Japan these figures would improve, but equally a devaluation in China or a collapse on Wall Street would dramatically worsen these figures.

Declining investment will undermine lethally the welfare to work programme and even the optimistic scenario of zero growth could mean the loss of up to two thousand seats on Labour councils in May, if the downswing reaches its low point before the local elections. We are handing our opponents in the Welsh and Scottish elections a dagger aimed at our heartlands.

But we do not have to have to compound the Party's problems in London. Even Simon Jenkins of the *Evening Standard*, who has not exactly been a friend of the left, wrote recently that the Stalinist code for "stop Ken" goes flatly against the original intention of the reform: that the mayor be an independent figure who would fight for London and not simply do the Government's bidding. It would be a tragedy if having created this new government for London it then fell into the hands of a Tory mayor because of a backlash by Londoners. Tory hypocrisy over the London authority does not diminish their capacity to exploit Labour's selection row and economic difficulties. The breathing space that has opened up between now and the March NEC provides an opportunity to remove the threat of a nobbled selection process that Millbank must seize.

• **Alan Simpson is away.**

Another chance to avoid disaster



Striking sparks victory

Did you read about the Jubilee Line strike and wonder about the result? Here Steve Kelly, Jubilee Line AEEU Shop Steward and secretary of Builders Fightback Group, reports on the outright victory by 700 electricians on the Jubilee Line Extension (JLE).

THIS IS THE biggest and most decisive victory for years in the building industry. The fight was organised by rank and file sparks and won by our 100% united, two week strike.

We took on our bosses Drake and Scull, union busters Bechtel, the capitalist media witch-hunt, the supposedly Labour Government and not least our own union leaders in the AEEU. We won and returned to work with heads held high. It was our self-organised site-power that was key to winning.

The bosses tried to move our best organisers from the big London Bridge site to an irrelevant mini-site, after they called a walk-out over safety fire alarms not working. Bechtel, a known US union-busting company, took over management of the JLE six months ago, and are responsible for hiring sub-contractors like our own aptly-named Drake and Scull.

We agreed a compromise of voluntary transfers. The bosses' refusal to agree was clearly aimed at attacking the working and safety conditions of all the JLE workers, because they need to rush the project in time for that stupid Dome. Corners need to be cut and safety automatically goes out of the window.

We appealed in our *Flying Sparks!* bulletin to all other trades on the JLE sites to copy our powerful rank and file organising. It was this willingness on our part to spread our success, combined with our 100% solidity that, we think, was the final straw in the company giving in.

The *Evening Standard* described it under the headline "Jubilee Line Firm Backs Down to Wildcat Strike".

Sparks first came in numbers onto the JLE project in February 1996. Inside six months the first shop-steward was elected with over 50 sparks in the union. But we did something unique – besides paying (via the company) the union AEEU subs of £1.35 per week we sparks, by ourselves, set up our own rank and file hardship fund of £2 per week. The reason for this was that as there's no sick pay in our contract we needed to do it ourselves – this worked brilliantly.

We call our rank and file body, "the shop". The AEEU full-timers hated what we did. But we've grown from strength to strength, and this financial independence is important because today we do many of the activities that unions were originally created to do. Our shop supports our members in hardship. We finance, organise and lead our own rank and file struggles with great success against management attacks. We give thousands to other workers' struggles.

Solidarity from the labour movement was important – especially the technical support behind *Flying Sparks!*. But more, as a result of this victory, the main rank and file builders groups have united. The Building Workers Group, the Joint Sites Committee, and the Flying Sparks, have now united into one single rank and file group with our own regular journal called *Builders Fightback!*

- *Builders Fightback!* meet every 2nd Thursday at the Cock Tavern, Phoenix Road, between Euston and Kings Cross at 7pm. All builders welcome. Details 0976-762 040.

RMT election for General Secretary

A LEFT-WINGER, Greg Tucker, is standing against Jimmy Knapp in the forthcoming ballot for RMT General Secretary. Greg is calling for a fight against tube privatisation, for rail renationalistion and for improved conditions. He believes that the RMT needs to be strengthend by a strong recruitment campaign and by building a union of activists to oppose the bosses.

If elected he would work with other trade unions to oppose anti-union laws. He said: "The union needs a strong leadership determined to build a democratic, fighting union. The key to our future is developing an industrial strategy that recruits rail workers and rebuilds our organisation in the face of (current) attacks".



Left at Number Ten

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Sacked workers' fight goes on

THE TAMESIDE careworkers, who were sacked in a dispute on pay and conditions, had good news recently when an Employment Tribunal ruled that their cases for unfair dismissal could be heard. The employers, Tameside Care Group, argued that the workers could not claim unfair dismissal as they were on strike when they were sacked.

The Tribunal ruled that the sackings took place on 30th January 1998, the date when the employers issued 90 day notices terminating existing contracts and "offering" new contracts on worse pay and conditions. The 90 day notices used by the employers in an attempt to cut pay and holidays and abolish sick pay pushed a long-suffering workforce into dispute. UNISON balloted the workforce and an official strike started on 30th March 1998.

The notices terminating existing contracts came into force in May – sacking all the strikers. Tameside Care Group was formed to take over the running of Tameside's privatised care homes. Eleven residential homes and one nursing home were privatised in 1990. The careworker's pay and conditions have been under attack ever since. Tameside's Labour Council has a major shareholding and local Labour MP Andrew Bennett is a trustee. As yet the company has refused to budge from its intransigent position. The unfair dismissal claims are due to be heard at the Employment Tribunal in the spring.



Tameside strikers lobby Labour Party Conference.

Union members try to teach college lesson

Sarah Cotterill, Manchester Central CLP, reports: NATFHE members at ManCAT further education college in Manchester took a day's strike action on Thursday 14th January as part of their campaign over compulsory redundancies.

Since last summer some staff have been given only three months notice of redundancy despite the local agreement for twelve months notice. The college management refused even to meet the union to negotiate a redundancy agreement. All the strikers are demanding is that management meet their union representatives to discuss the issue.

The dispute's root cause is the intransigence of the college management. It has stopped negotiating with the union, has withdrawn facilities and have prevented stewards from organising in the college. Union notice boards has been taken down, the internal mail system cannot be used for union distribution and meetings have to take place off site.

Alongside this is an atmosphere of fear and intimidation. Over the past year several union members have faced spurious disciplinary action. NATFHE has successfully won a series of industrial tribunals, at an estimated cost of up to £200,000 in the last year. Management seems more willing to conduct industrial relations through employment tribunals rather than to negotiate through agreed procedures. Two NATFHE activists, Geoff Brown and Ally MacIntyre, have received written warnings for trade union activities. NATFHE is confident they will win at an industrial tribunal.

The strike action has the full backing of NATFHE's national leadership. National president Moira Carr came to Manchester to join the picket line. At a meeting on the day of the strike she said she was very pleased to see people standing up for themselves. She stressed the national significance of the strike, because colleges across the country are adopting a similar confrontational attitude to staff.

The next strike action will take place on Friday 29th January. There will be a lunchtime rally at the city centre campus and an evening social. All supporters are welcome to join the strikers at these events.

- Messages of support and further information from NATFHE regional office, 72A Allerton Road, Liverpool. Tel: 0151-733 6096, Fax: 0151 734 1748.

AFTER THE HURRICANE – A NIGHT FOR NICARAGUA

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

FRIDAY 29TH JANUARY, 8-11.30PM
(DOORS OPEN 7.30)

FOOD, BAR, WHEELCHAIR ACCESS

APPEARING: MARK THOMAS, TOM ROBINSON, FAY PRESTO, VERONICA MCKENZIE, PHIL JUPITUS, JOHN HEGLEY, FELIX DEXTER

PROCEEDS TO THE NICARAGUA COMMUNITY MOVEMENT FOR HURRICANE RECONSTRUCTION

- ADMISSION IN ADVANCE: £9, £6, (CONCS)
- AT THE DOOR: £10, £7 (CONCS)
- TICKETS FROM NSC, 129 SEVEN SISTERS ROAD, N7 7QC; 0171-272 9619. BOOKING IN ADVANCE ADVISABLE, PREFERABLY BY CHEQUE OR CREDIT CARD.

Trade Union Notebook

A political witch-hunt has been going on within MSF for nine months. The target is the London Regional Council of the union and its chief officers who have consistently resisted leadership attempts to Blairise them.

At the instigation of Tom Sawyer, when he was Labour Party General Secretary, and Terry Ashton, Director of the Greater London Labour Party, an investigation was launched into the Council last spring. The investigation concerns the Council's campaign for a No vote in the referendum on London government and the policy on supporting Labour Party candidates in the borough elections. In both cases, the Council acted completely properly within the MSF rules and procedures.

Lawyers were called in to give an opinion that a rule was broken. Anonymous witnesses gave evidence without any attempt to check their veracity. After an interim report, the NEC is now considering disciplinary action. Despite all the pressure, the Regional Council has remained united. Counter-measures are under active consideration and may include legal action, media publicity and demonstrations. There is every likelihood of a major clash at the MSF Annual Conference. The balance of forces in the union is not unfavourable and it may well turn out that the right wing is over extended and vulnerable.

The Hillingdon Hospital dispute continues despite the tribunal victory, which *LLB* reported in November 1998. The tribunal awarded re-engagement and compensation to 21 of the workers sacked by Pall Mall but Granada, who now own Pall Mall, have refused to implement the award and have sought to challenge it.

- Donations are urgently needed. Send to: Hillingdon Strikers, c/o 27 Townsend Way, Northwood, Middx HA6 1TG (cheques payable to HSSC).

Hillingdon strikers



PHOTO: ED HALL

The Newsquest provincial paper series, which owns papers across the country from Darlington to Brighton, has targeted the Father of one of its strongest NUJ chapels, at the *Bolton Evening News (BEN)*. Managers singled out David Toomer, who is also FoC for the entire Newsquest Group, for compulsory redundancy in a blatant move against the union ahead of the promised new labour laws.

The union has been recruiting strongly at the *BEN*. The day after the biggest ever chapel meeting, which protested at plans to introduce productivity targets, editor Mark Rossiter told Dave Toomer he was being transferred to the Horwich district office. Three months later it was announced that the office was to close and Dave Toomer had been provisionally selected for compulsory redundancy. It was later admitted they had planned the closure in advance.

No attempt was made to find volunteers for redundancy until the chapel protested. Despite two reporters taking voluntary redundancy, Toomer was told to go on 27th November. The chapel voted for industrial action and launched a reinstatement campaign. Despite attempts at intimidation, *BEN* journalists joined more than 100 supporters at a protest rally. Bolton South East MP Brian Iddor told the crowd that *BEN* Managing Director John Waters had admitted to him that he knew the Horwich office would close when David Toomer was transferred there.

The National Union of Journalists is calling on trades unionists everywhere to defend Dave Toomer who is also a member of the union's leadership. Newsquest has consistently refused to grant its workers basic rights and will not recognise trade unions.

- Send messages of protest to Mark Rossiter, Editor, *Bolton Evening News*, Churchgate, Bolton, BL1 1DE or fax on 01204-365 068.
- Send messages of support to *Bolton Evening News* NUJ Chapel, c/o 49 Ferndown Road, Manchester, M23 9AW.

A long running industrial dispute in Northern Ireland over privatisation of cleaning services has ended in victory with the services being returned to the National Health Service. The dispute goes back to 1990 when a cleaning contract covering 100 staff at Lagan Valley hospital was awarded to a private contractor. This was followed by the privatisation of domestic and cleaning services at five other hospitals and 53 residential homes, day centres and health centres across Counties Down and Antrim, affecting 400 workers.

In 1995, after a history of numerous problems, the workforce took part in a week long official UNISON strike. In 1996 there was a two week strike after Compass, the company running the privatised services, unilaterally terminated employees' contracts and imposed pay cuts. The dispute became one of the longest and bitterest disputes in the history of the NHS in Northern Ireland. In April 1997 the employers agreed to restore the cuts in pay and conditions, recognise the rights of new staff and end the use of casual contracts. The company also agreed to recognise UNISON fully. The final victory came in December 1998 when the NHS Trust agreed to transfer the cleaning services and all the employees back to the NHS.

The Critchley Labels dispute, which began after the company, previously owned by British Telecom, derecognised communication workers union CWU, will soon reach its second anniversary. To mark this the CWU is planning an international multi-media picket on 5th February, and a major demonstration on Friday 12th February at 1.00 pm outside the factory at Pen-y-fan Industrial Estate, Croespenmaen, Gwent.

- For more information call the special Critchley Anniversary Information Line on 0181-971 7278.

The strike at Stagecoach Ribblebus in Blackburn and Burnley saw the tragic death of driver Frank Dean who was crushed by a scab bus before Christmas. The drivers, members of the T&G transport union, were striking over a pay dispute when he was crushed against the Blackburn depot's entrance gate. There will be further one day strikes this month.

the Geoff Martin column

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



● As a rent-a-mouth trade union lefty I often encounter some strange people in my travels around the various newsrooms.

A few weeks ago I was asked to do the Nicky Campbell phone-in on Radio Five on the subject of the NHS crisis and was happy to do so. After about an hour of calls the next guest on the show was ushered in – Geoffrey Boycott. It was bad enough having to share a studio for even a few minutes with the pompous sod but I was amazed when the presenter proceeded to question Boycott on his views on the NHS.

Needless to say he spouted out predictable right-wing claptrap about compulsory private insurance and means-testing for the poor. In the process he chewed up the remaining minutes that we had left to wrap up what had been an interesting show. Afterwards I complained bitterly about Boycott being asked for his opinion on the NHS while no one had asked me my view on a boring cricketer convicted of beating up a woman. I'm not convinced that I'll be invited back.

● Talking of the Nicky Campbell show on Radio Five it was on this very programme that Tony Blair let it slip that he has been making secret Princess Di-style visits to London hospitals to see for himself what's going on.

Let it slip my arse! This was just another stage-managed stunt to try and turn down the pressure over the NHS crisis. Although whether there is a crisis depends on whether or not you believe Alistair Campbell or Frank Dobson. For all his faults I'm inclined to go with Dobson on this one. As I write this the spin is that new nurses are going to get an 11% increase and existing staff 4.7% – if it's true it will turn out to be another divisive mistake which will drive morale even lower.

All NHS staff, not just nurses, need an across the board rise of 10% or £1,000, whichever is greater. Anything lower and the kind of horror stories we've seen this winter will run and run. While we're at it, if the Government don't fully fund the health workers' pay award, and it has to be financed through service cuts and job losses, they will deserve the public kicking which will come their way once the voters rumble them.

● I don't want to gloat, and I don't want to alienate *LLB*'s non football-friendly readers, but I'm sure that everyone will agree that it's fantastic to see Chelsea at the top of the table as we head into the New Year. I was interested to see that one of the little known reasons why Charlie Whelan had to go was because of the publicity surrounding his ticket-touting activities. I have it on good authority that Whelan would always be a good source of tickets for major sporting events for MPs inclined to follow the Brownie line (whatever that might be). I just hope that I don't bump into Whelan in a camelhair coat outside Fulham Broadway tube on match day mumbling "anyone need tickets". I expect he'll find far less dubious ways to earn a crust.

● Some *LLB* readers will have heard that I've had my collar felt for saying on the local telly that I couldn't see any circumstances under which UNISON would fund the mayoral campaign of any candidate who can't demonstrate support for UNISON's policies. This statement of the blatantly obvious has got some of the usual suspects in a flap and has also led to the launch of a "Defend Geoff Martin Campaign" by the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic UNISON which would have been a highly unlikely scenario just a few years ago and which has caused merriment in some quarters.

On the general scale of terror a formal complaint from a full-time union official doesn't really rate up there with being chased around the back alleys of Filbert Street by the Leicester Baby Squad or even the contents of Katie's nappy after she's been on the Weetabix and scrambled egg.

I hope this nonsense can be put to bed without the need for a full-scale mobilisation of my supporters in UNISON. However, a transit van is already on standby should the need arise.

● On the subject of the London Mayor I see that the London Labour Party Chair Jim Fitzpatrick has issued a circular telling us that Labour in London always used to have a selection panel for the GLC elections. How Jim would know is beyond me. The last time there were GLC elections in London Jim Fitzpatrick was a member of the Socialist Workers Party.

LEADING WITH THE LEFT

T&G members at LSG Lufthansa Skychef at Heathrow airport are in their third month of a strike that has attracted widespread support. It began after the company failed to honour negotiated agreements and, following two one day strikes, all the strikers were sacked. Management isn't budging and the union has had meetings with MPs and involved ACAS.

● Support the strike: join the picket at Faggs Road, Feltham and send donations to TGWU, 218 Green Lanes, Finsbury Park, London N4 2HB (please mark reverse of cheques "LSG Lufthansa Skychefs Dispute").

Local government trade unions have submitted a joint pay claim for £500 or 5% for council workers. Jean Geldart, chair of UNISON's Local Government Service Group Executive, stated "We have put up with inadequate pay rises for years. Our pay has fallen well behind the private sector and it isn't even keeping up with inflation. It's time we got a decent pay increase – we deserve it".

Negotiations with the employers are due to start on 5th February.

LLB **needs your trade union reports. Please send them to us at PO Box 2378, London E5 9QU or (ideally) email us at llb@labournet.org.uk**

No amnesty for

Pinochet's murder plan exposed

As the Chilean dictator's PR campaign takes off, his supporters demand that national sovereignty is respected. Patricia Isasa, Argentine architect and human rights researcher, tells *LLB* how little the general respected it in power.

OPERATION Condor was the code name given to the collaboration and information exchange between the intelligence services of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay in the 1970s.

In 1971, General Hugo Banzer led a military coup in Bolivia and in the same year the Uruguayan parliament ceased functioning when the President Juan Maria Bordaberry decided to close it and set the country on the road to a dictatorship. On 11th September 1973, General Augusto Pinochet carried out a coup against the oldest democracy in Latin America and killed the elected president, Salvador Allende. Lastly, on 24th March 1976, Jorge Videla, Emilio Massera and Ramon Agosti organised the military coup in Argentina.

So, within five years, the whole of the southern cone of Latin America changed from democracies to dictatorships, and fierce repression against dissidents began. According to the records of Amnesty International, the Organisation of American States and the United Nations, this hunt for human victims left 50,000 people murdered, 30,000 "disappeared" and 400,000 imprisoned. Among the dead and disappeared were 3,000 children. There are still no reliable figures for the numbers exiled.

Within this framework, the dictatorship of General Pinochet designed the "Condor Plan", which involved the collaboration of the different intelligence organisations to persecute dissidents and those in opposition across the whole region. The aim was "in the first phase to exchange information about the enemy (a euphemism for political exiles), in the second phase to investigate them, and in the third to arrest (kidnap) them and send them to their home country or the one requesting them". This is taken from a text that forms part of a case in the Spanish Court 5.

This plan was supervised by General Contreras, and carried out by agents of the DINA, the Chilean secret service, as revealed in the legal case in which Contreras and Pedro Espinosa were condemned for homicide. The exchange of prisoners took place directly between the intelligence services. The military attaches in each embassy acted as links. Other documents confirm that they carried intelligence information (such as a witness statement by Anibal Miranda, who was involved, made in 1993). This operation respected no frontiers or passports.

On 12th September 1973, in front of witnesses, Jorge Rios Dalenz, a Bolivian citizen, was arrested at his home in Santiago, Chile. Two days later his body appeared, shot six times. In September 1974 the Chilean ex-Minister of Defence under Salvador Allende and his wife, Sophia Cuthbert, were murdered in Buenos Aires, Argentina, when a bomb placed under their car exploded. The Argentine authorities never investigated the case. On 2nd November, the British/Chilean citizen, William Beausire, was arrested at Ezciza airport by the Argentine police and handed over to the DINA. They took him to Chile, a thousand kilometers away, where he was seen in various detention centres: Jose Domingo Cañas, Villa Grimaldi, and the Discotheque, from which he disappeared on 2nd June 1975. In all, 93 people of different nationalities were kidnapped in Argentina and taken to Chile and murdered.

On 16th May 1975, two Chileans, Jorge Isaac Fuentes Alarcon and Amilcar Santucho, were kidnapped in Buenos Aires, Argentina. From there, they were taken 1,300 kilometres to Asuncion in Paraguay, from where, after being tortured, they were taken to Santiago de Chile, where they were seen several months later, still alive, in Villa Grimaldi, from which they disappeared.

In October 1975, the Chilean Christian Democrat leader, Bernardo Leighton, who had been Allende's vice-president, along with his wife, survived an attempted assassination in Rome. The Italian investigators found an international network which linked the Latin American intelligence services with Avanguardia Nazionale, an Italian neo-fascist group, and especially with Stefano delle Chiaie, who met Pinochet in Madrid a month after the attempt.

Jean Yves Cluadet Fernandez, a French/Chilean national, was kidnapped on 1st November 1975 in the Liberty Hotel in Buenos Aires, and killed in Argentina, with the help of the Chilean DINA, according to the documentation that forms part of the extradition case against Pinochet. In September 1976, Allende's ex-minister of defence and foreign relations, Orlando Letelier, along with his US assistant, Ronni Moffit, was assassinated on Embassy Row, Washington. The bomb was placed in his car by Michael Townley, a DINA agent working with a group of anti-Castro Cubans. Two years later, the case got to the US courts and they were found guilty of murder. The first proofs of "Operation Condor" appeared in this trial.

Today, the ex-dictator, Augusto Pinochet, is accused of committing crimes of international terrorism. He respected no rights, no nationalities and no frontiers. The Spanish state demands his extradition to try him for the crimes of state terrorism, genocide and torture. On 31st October 1998, the Spanish Supreme Court, by unanimous decision of all eleven judges, declared itself competent to try these appalling crimes. Switzerland and France also demand his extradition. With this new legal precedent, a new stage in the fight against impunity, the fight for and by the victims of dictatorships, opened up.

Chilean terror tyrant

Campaigning for Pinochet's victims

The arrest and proposed extradition of Pinochet has galvanised many into activity. Sue Lukes, who chairs the Chile Committee for Justice, explains its work.

THE CHILE Committee for Justice is a group of Chilean and British people including relatives of the disappeared, refugees, political campaigners, enemies of dictatorship and supporters of democracy in Latin America. We came together when Pinochet was arrested, with the aims of:

- ensuring that the voices of his victims were heard
- co-ordinating the various organisations involved in the campaign
- seeking to involve a wide range of people in the fight for justice

We are now a formally constituted organisation, Chile Committee for Justice, and we can no longer afford to work out of people's homes, Jeremy Corbyn's office and from our own pockets. So far, we have:

- held press conferences and produced press briefings
- organised meetings at the Houses of Parliament
- organised religious services for peace and justice
- organised the email campaign that generated thousands of messages to Jack Straw
- involved personalities such as Jack Lemmon and Juliet Stevenson
- organised the visits of major Chilean political figures such as Isabel Allende, Juan Pablo Letelier, Sola Sierra, Sofia Prats, and others.

- Patricia Isasa (see page 16) is building up an international network of organisations against Argentina and Chilean impunity. She was kidnapped at the age of 16 and held in three different concentration camps for over two years. One of the few survivors, she has borne witness in cases against both the Chilean and Argentine dictatorships.
- An article on Pinochet's arms dealing in the last *LLB* ("More than just tea with Thatcher") was credited as "Sue Lukes reports". This should have read "Sue Lukes reviews information from the Latin American press".



PHOTO: ANDREW WIARD

Families of the "disappeared" demand justice

We have set up an office with volunteers and two part-time staff (Diane Dixon and Claudia Bracchita). This will:

- issue press releases and work closely with journalists to ensure a steady stream of coverage
- work with supporters to keep them briefed and liaise with human rights activists in Chile and the UK
- bring lawyers, victims and others from Chile who will appear in the media, inform the debate and could appear as witnesses where necessary

We have reached a stage where it is no longer possible to carry on with so few resources. We are asking you to help us to ensure that those that have committed crimes against humanity do not escape from justice. Pinochet, who understands the importance of public opinion, has hired a PR firm to improve his poor image: reportedly they have a budget of £200,000. Ours is 3% of that, but we believe that we can rely instead on support and solidarity from all those in Britain who want to see Pinochet tried.

We are asking for an investment in justice. Please make a donation or get any organisation to which you belong to do so, if you can, however small, but do it this month when it will make a real difference. If you can donate money, please make the cheque payable to Chile Committee for Justice and send it to the address below.

Please help with the campaign: we urgently need volunteers to help in the office and with organising events. Contact the office and offer your skills and time, now.

Please organise a local meeting, or help others organise one. Three important human rights campaigners from Chile are available now: Sola Sierra, president of the Association of Relatives of Disappeared Political Prisoners, Emilio Astudillo, member of the executive of the Peasants Confederation and the Chilean TUC, and Alicia Matus. We can provide other speakers as well: just contact the office. Contact us for more information: we have briefings to help you write your leaflets or do letters to local press etc. and you can go on to an e-mail list for regular updates etc. Write to 101635.3364@compuserve.com

- Chile Committee for Justice, c/o Praxis, 2, Pott St, London, E2 0EF. Tel: 0171-749 7611, email: chilejustice@cwcom.net
- A group of Chileans are organising a campaign to argue that charges against Pinochet will damage Chilean reconciliation.
- The group have a website (http://www.reconcile-chile.co.uk). Pay a visit to let them know your thoughts. ❑

Iraqi blood is on Blair's hands

Dr Mohammed Al-Obaidi, an Iraqi exile long resident in Britain recounts the sufferings of his family in Iraq.

FOR ALMOST eight years now, Britain and the US have been punishing the Iraqi people for the sins of Saddam Hussain. More than half a million Iraqi children have died as a result of sanctions, which have proved more destructive than Saddam's weapons of mass destruction. The Gulf War of 1991 and eight years of sanctions have sent Iraq back to the pre-industrial era – fulfilling the promise made eight years ago by James Baker, then US Secretary of State.

Innocent Iraqis have died not only as result of sanctions, but also as a direct result of military action by British and US forces. During the Gulf War, more than 400 women, children and elderly people were incinerated when one of the US's most sophisticated weapons struck their bunker in Al-Ameriah. The world seems to have forgotten that tragedy. I hope it will not forget the following story of my family.

"Khensa". was an ordinary, 34 year old Iraqi woman. She lived peacefully with her husband, my brother "Ahmed", a mechanical engineer, their three children and her mother and father in law in a simple house in the northwest suburb of Baghdad.

The sufferings of my family began when Khensa lost her 22 year old brother during the Iraq-Iran War in 1989, a war in which the majority of Iraqi families experienced the loss of a family member. A year later in 1990, the Iraqi security police arrested Khensa's father in law.

The 82 year old man was suffering from hypertension, cataract and Parkinson's. The purpose of the arrest was to put pressure on me, his son. I was then studying for my PhD in Britain and actively involved in a movement opposed to the Iraqi regime. The security police hoped the arrest of my father would compel me to return home. When I refused to go back to Iraq, the old man was given a lethal injection by the security police.

After the Gulf War, Saddam Hussain wanted to show the world that he retained the capacity to rebuild the country's infrastructure. He set up a special committee to rebuild the country's bridges, which had been heavily targeted during the war. Ahmed went to work rebuilding one of the bridges in Baghdad. One day he simply vanished. Two days later, the security police brought him home dead; like his father before him, he had been given a lethal injection. The security police ordered the family not to show any sign of grief. The family later learned that my brother had criticised some of the technical work on the bridge.

After that incident, Khensa picked up the pieces of her life and continued to live peacefully with her three children and mother in law – until the night of the 17th of December, 1998 when their house suffered a direct hit from the US-British air bombardment.

Khensa, her three children (all under eleven years old), my mother and 22 other people in surrounding houses were killed. Thirty-seven others were wounded. It appears that rescue personnel were unable to collect all the pieces of their shattered remains.

During the first day of the bombardment Khensa had been asked by one of her brothers in law to leave the house and stay with him for a few days until the air strikes had passed. She refused to leave. She told her brother in law that the British Prime Minister and the US President had said they intended no harm to the Iraqi people, so she felt safe.

Khensa and her family had been brutally murdered by four countries, Iran, Iraq, Britain and the United States. Can anyone find a reason why these four countries should collaborate in exterminating an innocent family? If there is anyone left from this family, they are probably beyond shedding tears. That must be left to the rest of us, as is the task of ensuring that the same fate does not befall others.

We have often accused Saddam Hussein of lies and deceit but are the lies and deceit of our politicians, British or US, any better? Only recently, George Robertson, the Secretary of Defence, announced that there were no civilian casualties during the four days bombardment of Iraq. Pentagon sources admit that only 75% of the 425 cruise missiles launched at Iraq hit military sites. What targets did the remaining 25% hit?

CND statement on the brutal bombing of Iraq

"Bombing Iraq solves nothing. Militarily, bombing chemical and biological manufacturing or storage installations is deadly dangerous.

Politically it is counter-productive. Each time it has been tried, Saddam not only survives but emerges stronger than before.

Bombing kills the innocent. No bomb is smart enough to distinguish between military and civilian targets. Anger, both from the helpless Iraqi population and throughout the Middle East is increasingly directed at the US and Britain.

Accusations of hypocrisy increase as Israelis are seen to ignore UN resolutions with impunity.

International support for bombing is steadily slipping away, particularly in the UN Security Council.

Any long-term solution will have to depend on international agreement. Bombing simply makes the problem worse."

– Dave Knight, CND chair.

Bonanza for arms industry

On 2nd January, Clinton announced he would increase the US $260 billion a year military budget by an additional $110 billion over the next six years.

On 6th January, Clinton announced that the US would finally build the long-delayed Star Wars missile defence system, on which $55 billion has already been spent. Even Reagan and Bush backed away from this commitment, which would represent a violation of the START II agreement, still being considered by the Russian duma.

Executioners tighten noose

Glen Rangwala, of the Campaign Against Sanctions on Iraq, reports on the devastation wrought of "a policy primarily affecting the poorest and weakest in the vain hope that the pain will trickle up".

IRAQ'S PEOPLE – whom economic sanctions have left impoverished, with minimal food security, and largely unemployed – remain dependent upon the goodwill of distant decision-makers for the primary goods needed to sustain not just a meaningful form of life, but any life at all. There is now reason to fear that their situation will deteriorate further. When it becomes apparent that the bombing was counter-productive, economic sanctions will be left as the sole strategy to prove that the US and UK are just as tough with Iraq as ever.

Not only did the missiles destroy a warehouse full of rice in Tikrit and an agricultural college in Kirkuk, damage ten schools in Basra, and cut off water supplies to 300,000 people in a Baghdad suburb; they also severely damaged all hope of reversing the transatlantic sanctions policy, a policy primarily affecting the poorest and weakest in the vain hope that the pain will trickle up.

And so Tony Blair, like an executioner speaking of his noose, says sanctions will have to be "tightened". Since sanctions can't be tightened without it becoming obvious that starvation is being used as a means of warfare, what Mr Blair really means is that smuggling both into and out of the country will be prevented.

It is easy to see why sanctions have lost their legitimacy among neighbouring states. Security Council resolutions derive their compliance from a pretence that they accord with higher values, like the international rule of law or human well-being. This was why the authors of the United Nations Charter stipulated that the Security Council must act in accordance with the purposes and principles of the UN, which include, crucially, economic development and the observance of human rights. Yet at the moment, through sanctions, the Security Council grossly violates these principles by placing health, adequate nutrition and clean water beyond the purchasing power of ordinary Iraqis.

"Approximately 250 people die every day in Iraq due to the effect of the sanctions"
– UNICEF, April 1998
"Starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is prohibited"
– Geneva Protocol 1, Article 54

Ministers put great store in their claims to be providing humanitarian supplies through the oil-for-food programme. However, as Kofi Annan records in his latest six-monthly report on this programme, oil-for-food's net effect upon child malnutrition, water treatment and education has been not to reverse the deterioration but merely to stabilise it. Indigenous food production remains a key problem, with 75% of combine harvesters and 63% of tractors requiring major repairs with spare parts unavailable. This casts suspicion over Robin Cook's oft-repeated yet unsubstantiated allegation that Iraq was now exporting food – a serious claim, given that this would itself be a violation of the embargo, incurring responsibility for the unnamed importers.



PHOTO: ANDREW WIARD
Protesters challenge slaughter

Sewage systems continue to malfunction, resulting in widespread contamination of rivers with untreated effluent; as a result, diarrhoea, cholera and typhoid remain major problems. Kofi Annan also reports that some essential drugs remain unavailable in Iraq's health centres.

Even if Iraq's oil facilities are repaired and oil prices rise sufficiently to enable Iraq to earn the sums needed for the oil-for-food programme to function as intended, the basic problem remains. Since oil-for-food is a highly centralised scheme, a unilateral interruption at any stage of its implementation will disrupt the provision of essential goods for the Iraqi population.

This has been seen in the last two military crises, when the staff of Lloyd's Register (who authenticate the arrival of humanitarian supplies) were withdrawn from their positions, preventing the lawful entry of any goods into Iraq.

The population thus remains critically dependent upon US military decisions, disempowered to an unparalleled extent. Meanwhile, the US government has imposed huge fines on humanitarian workers from Voices in the Wilderness, who have been taking medicine and children's toys into Iraq.

● The Campaign Against Sanctions on Iraq is helping to co-ordinate a National Day of Action against the economic sanctions on Iraq on 27th February. They can be contacted c/o Colin Rowat, King's College, Cambridge CB2 1ST; tel: 0468-056 984.

Noam Chomsky speaks out

"The US and Britain have simply announced very clearly and loudly, that they are violent criminal states that are intent on destroying totally the fabric of international law, a fabric that has been built up laboriously over many years.

They have announced that they will do as they please and will use violence as they please, independently of what anyone else thinks. In my view, that is the sole significance of the bombing and is probably the reason for it.

This action is in fact a call for a lawless world in which the powerful will rule. The powerful happen to be the United States and Britain, which is by now a pathetic puppy dog that has abandoned any pretence of being an independent state.

Every time Tony Blair opens his mouth, he looks more disgusting and ridiculous, and his performance marked a painful and shameful day in the history of Britain."

– Noam Chomsky, interviewed in the Indian publication *Frontline*. ❑

Butler's UNSCOM serves US interests

Mike Marqusee reports on how the US exploited the UN weapons process.

NEITHER Richard Butler nor the US has challenged the Iraqi Foreign Minister's allegation that since November 17th 1998, when Iraq allowed weapons inspections to resume, there have been 427 inspections, 128 of them at new sites. UNSCOM has cited only five alleged obstructions. One was a 45 minute delay before allowing access. Another was a rebuff to a demand by a US arms inspector, Dianne Seamons, that inspectors be allowed to interview all of the undergraduate students in Baghdad University's Science Department. Another, on December 9th, was the inspection of a Baath party office. The other two concerned attempts by UNSCOM to make inspections on Fridays, the Muslim day of rest. The Iraqis insist they were acting in accordance with the agreement between Iraq and UNSCOM about Friday inspections.

UNSCOM was set up by and is supposed to be answerable to the UN Security Council.

Yet the Security Council was neither asked to approve nor given a chance to debate the withdrawal of the UNSCOM team and the subsequent US-British air strikes. In fact, the bombing began at exactly 5pm (US Eastern Standard Time), just as the Security Council was opening an emergency session to deal with the crisis. "That was surely intended and understood to be a message of contempt for the Security Council." observed Noam Chomsky.

On December 18th, the *New York Times* reported that the air strikes had been planned since December 1st and described Butler's report as a "formality".

It has now been confirmed that UNSCOM provided data directly to US intelligence. Some of that data was used in planning the air strikes. Scott Ritter told the *Boston Globe* that the United States took over the UNSCOM electronic surveillance operation in April 1998. "The US decided this system was too sensitive to be run by UNSCOM. They bullied their way in and took it over," Ritter says "The US gained 100 percent access and was not feeding any of it back."

A bill passed in the US Senate in 1997 allows the President to deny international inspections of US weapons sites "on grounds of national security".

"The US has perverted the UN weapons process by using it as a tool to justify military actions, falsely so... The US was using the inspection process as a trigger for war." – Scott Ritter, former head of the UN arms inspection team in Iraq, on the NBC *Today* show, December 17th, 1998.

Blair's weapon of mass deception

● Patrick Cockburn in the *Independent* (13th November, 1998) described the Downing Street dossier entitled *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction* as "misleading and calculated to deceive. Even by the standards of the First World War it is crude propaganda...The dossier says Iraq is 'capable of regenerating a chemical warfare capability within months'. This is true, but a small Japanese religious sect was also able to produce sarin gas, which was dispersed in the Tokyo metro system..."

"There is a frightening paragraph about Iraq's nuclear programme. It says Iraq could build a crude air-delivered nuclear device 'in about five years'. But it adds that this would only happen if Iraq were 'to procure the necessary materials abroad'. By this standard Samoa and Iceland also pose a nuclear threat. ..The document also glosses over the point that the real difficulty in gas warfare is delivering the weapon to the target in a lethal form... References to '3,000 tonnes of precursor chemicals' have little meaning..."

● In February 1998, former weapons inspector Raymond Zalinskas, a University of Maryland professor, stated that the inspections had already resulted in the destruction of all major targets related to chemical and biological warfare.

● On 14th December Iraq received a favourable report from inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency, who said that Iraq had complied with all their inspection requests.

● The US is the largest stockpiler of chemical and nuclear weapons in the world. The Associated Press reports that the US is currently in violation of the global treaty to dismantle chemical weapons. The US has yet to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

● US arms merchants have sold a new generation of high-tech weaponry not only to Saudi Arabia but also to Turkey, Egypt, Kuwait, the UAE, Jordan and Israel. Israel possesses over 200 thermonuclear weapons and has violated 69 UN mandates.

● A report from the US Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs states that nine out of ten biological materials used in Iraq's weapon components were bought from US companies.

● Noam Chomsky notes that "There is no measure of whether you have succeeded in 'degrading facilities'. If you shoot a pistol at one building, you have degraded the facilities. That is a meaningless war aim and was understood to be so, which means that it was not the war aim at all".

Campaigns

- Campaign Against Sanctions on Iraq (01223-507858); email: soc-casi@lists.cam.ac.uk; website: http://linux.clare.cam.ac.uk/casi; c/o Seb Wills, Clare College, The Colony, Chesterton Lane, Cambridge CB4 3AA.
- Campaign Against Sanctions and War on Iraq; CASWI, BM 2966, London WC1N 3XX; phone 0171-436 4636; fax 0171-436 4638; email justice@easynet.co.uk
- Iraq Action Coalition, American organisation with useful website: http://leb.net/IAC/
- Voice in the Wilderness (breaks sanctions by delivering medicines to sick children in Iraq), 12 Trinity Road, London, N2 8JJ; 0181-444 1605.
- Labour CND, 29 Stodmarsh House, London, SW9 6HH.
- Labour Action for Peace, 9 Blakesware Gardens, London, N9 9HX; 0181-482 0535.

Oil, dosh and destruction

Were oil prices a factor in the bombing of Iraq? Here we reproduce the view of Noam Chomsky.

"THERE IS now a consensus among geologists that the world may be heading for a serious oil crisis," notes Noam Chomsky. "It is expected that within a decade or two, the magic halfway mark – or the destruction of half the world's known exploitable hydrocarbon energy resources – will be reached, and after that the way is downhill. Also, the rate of use of oil is accelerating. Close to half of the total use of oil in history has been in the last 20 years, that is, after the oil price rise.

The other crucial point is that a very substantial part of the world's oil resources is in the Arabian peninsula-Persian Gulf region. The resources that exist elsewhere are nowhere near as abundant or as exploitable. The share of West Asian oil in total world production is getting back to what it was in about 1970, and that share will increase. That means that the importance of the region as a strategic centre and as a lever of control over world affairs is increasing...

There is a temporary oil glut and prices are very low, and that is harmful to the big energy companies, which are overwhelmingly US and British. The US Government does not want the price to go any lower, because its economy relies quite heavily on recycling petrodollars from other countries. These go to US treasury securities, arms purchases, construction projects and so on. The US will be happy for oil prices to go up and does not want Iraqi oil on the market right now."

"Before the Gulf War, the Saudis exported less than five million barrels of oil a day. Today, as a result of sanctions against Iraq [Ed: which has the world's second largest oil reserves], the Saudis export more than nine million barrels a day," notes Sacramento State University professor Dr Ayad Al-Qazzaz. "Since the imposition of sanctions against Iraq in 1990, Saudi Arabia has made more than $200 billion. Most of this money is spent in the US by buying billions of dollars of military equipment."



PHOTO: ANDREW WIARD

Milosevic launches murder massacre

Maude Paul reports: People in Britain saw on our TV screens a little girl in Kosova screaming uncontrollably in horror at the sight of her father lying dead alongside 39 other civilians massacred in the village of Recak by Serbian forces. We saw villagers huddled together in the woods on the mountainside in freezing weather. Their village had been surrounded by Milosevic's soldiers, shooting and shelling indiscriminately into their homes. And we remembered Bosnia.

Bosnian miners were saying throughout the war in Bosnia: "This really started in Kosova and that's where it will end." It was back in 1991 when the so-called international community was heralding a new era of freedom in eastern Europe that Milosevic's Serb regime imposed military rule on Kosova. It was this move that began the breakup of Yugoslavia.

Thousands of ethnic Albanian miners resisted and were thrown out of work and in the name of imposing so-called unity, the nationalist bureaucracy in Belgrade sent in troops against the Kosovan miners, beginning the brutal war of conquest of Greater Serbia.

In the spring of 1998 Serbian special police units started the killing and destruction of villages in a so-called anti-terrorist offensive. By the autumn 400,000 people had been uprooted, 400 villages and hamlets had been targeted. Altogether 257 settlements had been abandoned by their inhabitants, 200,000 people were living rough in the hills and fields.

Reminiscent of the arms embargo imposed on the Bosnian people, New Labour's Robin Cook proposed an arms embargo in Kosova. Milosevic's troops guarding all the borders and terrorising the villages are armed to the teeth with tanks, artillery, helicopter gunships, cluster bombs and such like. They laughed in Cook's face. According to his philosophy they were upholding international law when in December they killed 36 ethnic Albanians as they attempted to smuggle weapons across the boarder from Albania.

In fact, the Kosova Liberation Army has obtained some arms and more young Kosovans are joining in the fight against the occupying forces. Socialists cannot share the army's nationalism, or its tactics which rob the working people the chance to decide their own future by their own mass actions. However, we will not join those hypocrites who condemn so-called violence and preach pacifism to the oppressed.

By the end of the year, what was called an agreement had been reached and monitors were sent in. They watch the killing and destruction from a distance, protected by NATO forces, with the threat of armed strikes against Milosevic.

But that is not really a serious option for imperialism. They can bleat as much as they like about "crimes against humanity" but the last thing they want is victory against Milosevic which would give confidence to the working class. They can do business with Milosevic.

As socialists, we seek to strengthen links between workers internationally. In defending the Kosovan people's democratic national rights, it is our responsibility to help workers of Kosova to lead the freedom fight. In opposing Serb military rule in Kosova, we, at the same time, place no confidence whatever in NATO, imperialism's military arm.

- Contact: Workers Aid For Kosova, c/o Bob Myers, 29 Demsne Road, Manchester, M16 8YD, telephone: 0161-226 0404; email: workersaid@redbricks.org.uk, website: http://www.redbricks.org.uk/workersaid ❑

Russia: genocide and fascism loom

Lisa Taylor reports on the situation in Russian and the launch of a new solidarity campaign.

A NEW CAMPAIGN, International Solidarity with Workers in Russia (ISWR) has been set up to unite the labour movement and socialists of all backgrounds in support of the progressive anti-racist wings of the Russian labour movement. It has been launched because the financial and economic crisis has brought on an even more catastrophic political crisis.

Yeltsin, once again undergoing emergency treatment in hospital, is a dying man. But something else is dying too – passivity. Ordinary Russians are no longer willing to work for months on end without pay, to be paid in coats or coffins instead of cash, or to stand and watch their families face this fierce Russian winter without fuel or food, while their society descends into chaos. The average life expectancy in the country is now less than it was in the nineteenth century. The dramatic increase in strikes and occupations last year demonstrates for sure that the long awaited fightback has begun.

For some years now the restoration of capitalism in Russia, lovingly guided by the IMF, has been creating massive wealth for a tiny few and deep poverty for almost everyone else. Russia's industrial base, once mighty, has been eroded dramatically and self-sufficiency has been replaced by 40% reliance on (western) imports. The massive oil and gas resources are largely exported, while whole cities have had their electricity cut off, unable to pay the bills. The advanced capitalist countries want Russia to become a semi-colony.

In August last year the crisis reached a peak when Russia defaulted on its debt. Overnight, ordinary workers, already impoverished, found their living standards shockingly halved. But the middle classes also saw their savings hit, and rich tycoons found to their horror that they were unable to control the crisis as the rouble underwent devaluation. With the IMF refusing further loans, the rulers found something else passing from their grasp – political power. Pro-IMF Yeltsin was unable to force through his appointment of Chernomyrdin as prime minister, and was forced to accept Primakov, the choice of the Communist-dominated Duma – lower house of the Russian parliament.

Yeltsin now stands at less than one percent in the polls. He is in every respect a spent force. The only political party of any size that enjoys mass electoral support right now is the Communist Party, the CPRF. The obvious failure of capitalism to benefit the masses has created a ground swell of anti-capitalist feelings and this is reflected in sections of the base of the CPRF.

But its leaders have refused to blame capitalist restoration for the crisis, finding a "safer" scapegoat instead – the Jews. So, on 23rd December 1998, CPRF chairman Zyuganov took the incredible step of blaming the "zionisation of the governmental authorities of Russia" for the "mass impoverishment and extinction of its population". "Zionism", he declared (in code for Jews) was worse than Hitler's fascism and "strove for world supremacy". In case anyone could possibly mistake his message, he clarified that this was "not a struggle against the state of Israel"(!)

These shocking statements come against a background of unprecedented collaboration between CPRF leaders and openly fascist parties such as Russian National Unity. In some CPRF-controlled regions, nazi militia have been drafted in as auxiliary police and given immense powers, terrifying local Roma, Caucasians, Jews and other "non-Russians". In Krasnodar, governed by a fascist-Communist-ultra-nationalist coalition, 12,000 Meskhetian Turks have found themselves stripped of all civic rights. Dark-skinned Caucasians are abused and attacked, synagogues burned. Leading Communist MP's have publicly called for the extermination of Jews. If nothing is done, pogroms will surely follow.

It is said that politics abhors a vacuum. In a crisis of this severity, if socialism does not come to the fore, its most appalling opposites will.

There is some light in the darkness. For example, at last month's Congress of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League, the delegates of several branches stormed out in protest at the racist statements of the Leningrad reps. The Moscow branch has now left the League, urging others to follow. Some colleges have refused to teach new antisemitic schoolbooks, and young people have engaged in hand to hand battles with armed fascists.

In recent months workers have taken to the streets in unprecedented numbers and strikes abound. Workers have blocked the trans-Siberian railway, occupied many workplaces and picketed parliament. Many even in the CPRF oppose the Zyuganov-Primakov pro-market partnership. But this has been protest without a clear political direction.

At present the balance of forces is grim. Without immediate practical support and solidarity from workers' organisations internationally, the progressive wing of Russian labour is likely to be swept away by an avalanche of genocidal racism and "communist"and fascist collaboration.

Russia is a vast territory stretching from Europe to Asia, with a 150 million population and immense resources – and the world's second nuclear power. Dictatorship in Russia will have far-reaching implications for the whole planet. Our new campaign has already received many pledges of support both here and internationally and we urge all *LLB* readers to support this vital campaign.

- ISWR's next meeting is on 11th February in London. For more details please contact: ISWR, Box R, 46 Denmark Hill, London SE5 8RZ or email: antek5@aol.com

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US puppets cling on in Haiti

Recently Ben Dupuy, leader of the National Popular Assembly, one of Haiti's largest popular organisations and co-director of the newspaper *Haiti Progres*, visited London and spoke to Mike Phipps.

IN SEPTEMBER 1994 a US military intervention in Haiti restored to power Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the country's first democratically elected president, who had earlier been overthrown in a coup. Over four years later, US and UN troops are still there. The new government of Rene Preval endorses neo-liberal policies and structural adjustment, and the Lavalas party has split into two, with the government on one side and on the other supporters of the still highly popular Aristide.

Meanwhile the former dictatorship's death squads continue their intimidation, robbery and murder across Haiti with impunity – in the last year alone six of Aristide's security guards were assassinated. US and UN officials have repeatedly blocked attempts to bring to justice leaders of the 1991 coup or people who raped, tortured and murdered in its name. Instead there is clear evidence of an FBI campaign to smear Aristide and intimidate his supporters into implicating him into criminal activities.

It's been said that Haiti has not had a proper government for the last 18 months. Can you clarify this?

Looking at the situation from the perspective of western parliamentary democracy and the 1987 constitution, there is no government. But there are ministers dealing with "current affairs". In reality, Haiti has traditionally been a presidential system and effectively Preval is fulfilling the functions of both president and prime minister. The publicity around this issue is a pretext for the "donors" not to come up with the aid packages they promised when the re-establishment of democracy was completed. The real reason for this apparent crisis is the split in the Lavalas leadership under pressure from the US. This was originally Aristide's party and in 1995 it won a relative majority in Parliament. Soon after, it defected and was willing to implement a neo-liberal policy dictated by the IMF.

After the betrayal of the party leadership, Aristide formed his own party, the Lavalas Family. This new party doesn't have any representatives in the executive or the present Parliament. The governing party is concerned it may lose any future election. They are therefore demanding a new provisional Electoral Council be chosen from among supporters of the ruling elite. Yet the 1987 constitution calls for a permanent Electoral Council comprising delegates appointed by the Territorial Assemblies – decentralised bodies in different localities. The members of these were elected in April 1997 and a majority are members of ex-President Aristide's Lavalas Family. As any future election is likely to be won by Aristide's supporters, the government is trying to get hold of the administrative apparatus that would supervise such elections. They want to adopt the model of the Mexican PRI, thus becoming the permanent party of government.

What is happening about the US and UN forces in the country?

At the end of November the UN Security Council reviewed for the sixth consecutive time the mandate of the UN mission. The terms of the first mandate were a clear violation of the UN Charter, which stipulates that the UN has no authority to interfere in the internal affairs of its members. The coup of September 1991 was essentially an internal problem and the US, feeling compelled to retake control of the political situation in Haiti, pressurised the Security Council to adopt its resolution. The first phase of the UN intervention in Haiti was spearheaded by 20,000 US troops. Presently the occupation forces have been reduced to 300 civilian police, supposedly to train the new Haitian national police.

But in reality the recruitment of the 7,000 members of this police force has been done by a subdivision of the US FBI. Meanwhile the US have signed a bilateral agreement with the Preval government to station in Haiti 500 US Special Forces, supposedly to carry out humanitarian works. This deal has not been approved by Parliament.

This illustrates that the "international community", when it's convenient, isn't so concerned about legality. Another example of their hypocrisy is that recently a special rapporteur of the UN Human Rights Commission, in his report to the General Assembly, acknowledged that a new law entitled "Judiciary Reform" had called for the withdrawal of all UN forces in Haiti. After holding discussions with Parliament, the law was amended to calling simply for the removal of all foreign armed forces. Following discussions with President Preval and other high officials, the UN rapporteur then announced that this reference to "all foreign armed forces" would not be interpreted as the UN police monitoring mission. Soon after he stated that the challenge for Haiti continues to be the establishment of a state ruled by law! This demonstrates both the UN's meddling in Haiti's political process and their hypocrisy about it.

• The Haiti Support Group is demanding the US return to Haitian human rights organisations documentation taken from the Haitian army in 1994 that would help prosecute criminals from the time of the coup. For more information on this and the devastating effect of Hurricane Georges which made 177,000 people homeless and caused $200 million of damage, contact the HSG, Trinity Church, Hodford Road, London NW11 8NG, tel and fax 0181-201 9878.

Haiti crisis comes to a head

On 11th January, the day on which the MPs' mandate expired, President Preval closed down Haiti's Parliament announcing he would appoint a Prime Minister by decree. The next day, the President's sister, a member of Aristide's political party, was seriously wounded, and shots fired by unknown assailants killed her driver, a former Aristide bodyguard.

Aristide's party and many popular organisations, including Dupuy's National Popular Assembly, support Preval's move to end the stalemate, but many of the deposed MPs and small right wing parties are calling it a constitutional coup d'etat. With both sides calling strikes and demonstrations, and more violence expected, Preval has appealed for calm and announced that elections for a new Parliament would be the Prime Minister's first priority. ❑

Rebels breach castle walls

Brian Campbell, editor of Sinn Fein's *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, visits the seat of the new Northern Ireland Assembly.

I DROVE THROUGH the gates of Stormont for the first time recently. When I saw the splendid building on top of the hill the hairs stood up on the back of my neck This was architecture designed to inspire but also to intimidate. The Stormont Parliament Building in the unionist heartland of east Belfast was opened in 1932 at a time when British imperialism still had its necessary confidence and arrogance. In the newly established statelet of "Northern Ireland", this solid seat of a colonial parliament – with its view over the Harland and Wolff shipyard and the other industries that excluded Catholics – spoke of permanence and domination.

How unionists hearts must have swelled as they strode through those gates and saw the gleaming white building on the hill. And how nationalists must have burnt with resentment and humiliation as they looked upon this pillared symbol of their exclusion from power. It is significant that hardly any nationalists saw Stormont in real life – their view of it was confined to pictures and newsreels. None of my family, friends or neighbours have ever seen the building, nor did they know anyone who had been there, except in recent months.

For forty years Stormont was the seat of one party rule, presiding over discrimination, gerrymandering and repression. It was not a place nationalists cared to visit, nor would they have been welcome if they had. It speaks of unionist power, beginning with the statue of Edward Carson, the unionist hero standing guard at the top of the drive. Inside more imperial symbols send a clear message to any nationalists finding themselves there.

These trappings make the sanctuary of the Sinn Fein offices all the more welcome. The party has over 20 offices, one for each of their Assembly members, others for meetings and administration. The state-of-the-art computers, faxes and office furniture are a world away from the usual decrepit premises and equipment activists have used over the years. Revolutions are always run on a shoestring.

Among the Sinn Fein people in Stormont are many I was in jail with. Their very presence, their easy formality allied with a professional approach and healthy disrespect for rules and procedures was as subversive here as it had been in the jails.

It is no wonder unionists are fighting so hard to keep Sinn Fein from taking their seats in a new Executive and on the all-Ireland Ministerial Council. The very fact that Sinn Fein occupies a part of this hallowed building is almost impossible to stomach. It is the ultimate shock to their political system.

What the Sinn Fein presence in Stormont symbolises is that everything has changed. Not only are nationalists and republicans about to take their share of power, but they are doing so in an administration that has an all-Ireland dimension that will change forever the face of politics in Ireland. Despite what unionists say, that is what is going to happen – because that is what they signed up to in the Good Friday Agreement.

What the Sinn Fein presence also symbolises is that unionists cannot turn the clock back. The castle walls have been breached and the rebels are swarming all over the fine furniture. They are ready to turn the place upside down and there is nothing the unionist leadership can do about it.

"British state remains in complete control"

Not everyone supports the Irish peace process. Liam Mac Uaid spoke to John McAnulty, an activist of thirty years' experience and one of the authors of the new Socialist Democracy book *The Real Irish Peace Process*.

In the book you argue that Ireland remains a country dominated by imperialism. In what way?

In the North the colonial nature of the state is underlined in the new agreement. The British remain in complete control of the economy and the state forces. The South remains a semi-colony. So how can people who fought for republicanism now see imperialism as a benign and progressive force? The answer is that they have been defeated – defeated so comprehensively that they have internalised the defeat and they now parrot the sayings of their enemies. In the North the republican argument is now remarkably similar to the position of the bourgeois nationalists and the British – that the British are honest brokers and the real difficulty is intercommunal. In the South we have had years of social partnership where the trade union leadership has policed wage restraint. Every major party has taken its turn in government, all with identical pro-capitalist policies. We're looking for a conscious anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist opposition.

The book seeks to give a political focus to those who reject both armed struggle and the new ruling class consensus. Has it found an audience?

One of the most striking things about this process is the extent to which both the republican leadership and their supporters have avoided any debate and the endemic political exhaustion which has accompanied the agreement. The book is selling reasonably well but in the context of the massive political change nowhere nearly well enough to signify the beginnings of a new resistance.

The Real Irish Peace Process

£7 from Socialist Democracy, PO Box 40, Belfast BT11, 9DL. Cheques payable to "Socialist Democracy".

the Michael Hindley column

Michael Hindley MEP gives a global perspective.



The divine right of bankers?

I ONCE thought, in a foolish moment of hope, that the politicians who front the European Union would see the folly of introducing a single currency and would find a convenient excuse to hold back from this ideologically driven and very risky venture. But no, we now have the euro, though not yet in anyone's pocket. I still find it incredible that we have reached the pass where elected politicians hand over the levers of economic planning to non-elected bankers, who are expected to have magical powers to do the right thing for the economy without any corrective influence from the democratic and accountable political process. The Millennium it seems will mark the divine right of bankers.

It is only a few weeks since almost everyone in the country, including the elected Gordon Brown, was sending desperate and none too coded messages to the non-elected Eddie George, to lower interest rates. Where is the mechanism for Europe sending messages to Wim Duisenberg in his bank in Frankfurt to vary the interest rates? Economic steering requires inevitable changes and adjustments and the idea that we will profit from fixed rates is illusory.

One of the alleged benefits of the euro is price transparency – if we have a common Euro, then we can compare prices across Europe, but that only has value for ordinary people if they have the bargaining power to adjust their wages accordingly. If a week's shopping is cheaper in Brindisi than Blackburn, there's no realistic way of the Blackburn shopper can either go there to shop, or force the prices down in Blackburn. This myth has been exploded many times in the automobile trade. The same cars are sold much cheaper in Belgium than here, but most people have not the time or means to exploit the differentials and British car prices remain higher because the customer is in effect trapped.

ROY JENKINS told us at the time of the Common Market referendum that food prices were higher in Europe, but so were wages. We have long since had higher food prices but are still waiting for higher wages. A recent survey showed that a leading supermarket actually charges its customers in working class areas more than in middle class areas, simply because working class people's lack of knowledge and mobility allows them to be exploited more easily.

The introduction of the euro will increase regional differentiation. Realistically, the only way you can compensate for wealth being sucked to successful areas of the free common market, which western Europe now is, is by a vigorous regional policy. There is absolutely no chance of the EU developing such a policy. The transfer which already take place under various EU budget lines are fractional and concentrated on the very periphery.

The fact that Britain has stayed out of Euroland (a splendid coinage ranking with other make-believe worlds like Disneyland and Legoland) has already provided a foretaste of stresses to come. Long have manufacturing interests, employers and unions complained that the high pound is bad for exports. As the euro climbed on the euphoria surrounding its introduction, the pound fell, thereby making British exports more competitive. Clearly, staying out has its advantages.

However, this will lead Euroland to increase pressure on Britain to join the euro, that is, to decrease the competitiveness of British exports. After all these years Britain still exports more outside the EU than within and it is in our interest to stay outside.

The blue paper was lit on 1st January. We are not sure to which region the fuse will first lead, but it leads somewhere and the powder keg of growing regional poverty in the EU is waiting to be ignited.

Political crackdown in Turkey: two murdered

PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan's arrest in Italy, and the Italian government's refusal to extradite him to Turkey, has provoked a storm of chauvinism within Turkey orchestrated by the Turkish ruling class. The ruling National Military Council which stands behind the government recently issued an internal policy statement to the heads of the army, gendarmerie, secret police and city mayors as well as to the Foreign Ministry, the religious issues Department, the Press and Publications Department, the Anatolian Press Agency and the Turkish Radio and TV authority.

Their edicts include the instruction that those who join demonstrations or support the PKK must be stopped by any means necessary by "psychological and physically effective means"; and that police and other authorities suppressing demonstrators must not be given negative media coverage. Following the edict, two protesters have been killed: one by fascists on 21st November, the other by the police on 18th November. ❑

FIGHT RACISM

Refugee rights campaign is all there on papers

Sara Callaway (Black Women for Wages for Housework) and Benoit Martin (Payday Men's Network) report on the French asylum rights campaign that is crossing state borders.

IN DECEMBER, the Sans-Papiers (literally "without papers")movement and Madjiguène Cissé, their main spokeswoman, received the prestigious Carl-von-Ossietzky Medal from the International Federation of Human Rights League (German section) in recognition of their "public-spirited courage" in campaigning for the rights of immigrants and refugees. In accepting the Award, Ms Cissé asked for a minute of silence in memory of Semira Adamu, the young Nigerian woman killed by Belgian police attempting to deport her last September.

The Sans-Papiers movement started in Paris in 1996 when 300 African women, men and children occupied churches to stop deportations and claim the right to "papers for all". Their organisation has grown, crossing the divides between economic and political refugees of 40 nationalities – immigrants, asylum seekers, students, migrants and others denied the right to stay.

The award, presented to Ms Cissé in Berlin, has given an impetus to the anti-deportation movement in Germany: a caravan of Sans-Papiers has been touring the country, and Kurdish immigrants went on hunger strike against deportation.

The strength of the Sans-Papiers has been their autonomy. While encouraging widespread support, they have insisted on meeting independently from established human rights organisations in order to work out their own demands and tactics. Women – the "Sans-Papières" – have been crucial to sustaining this autonomy and keeping the organisation together. Ms Cissé, a mother of two, wrote *The Sans Papiers: A Woman Draws the First Lessons*, a compelling account of why and how the Sans-Papiers organised independently from established organisations and political parties, and how their success has depended on women's autonomy.

In Brussels last September, 2,000 people protested on the day Ms Adamu was murdered, while inmates at the detention centre where she had been held went on hunger strike. A poll showed that two thirds of Belgians support the regularisation of Sans-Papiers. Protests in London highlighted how Joy Gardner suffered a similar fate as Ms Adamu at the hands of immigration officers and police in 1993. The widespread outcry gave an impulse to a series of church occupations which went ahead despite opposition from established organisations.



PHOTO: RAS L'FRONT

Elsewhere in Europe, protests in Italy led to the closure of a detention centre in Trieste, and in December 350 protesters sailed to Albania seeking justice for the intentional sinking of a boat of refugees by Italian authorities last year. The movement for refugees and asylum seekers' in Britain has also drawn strength from the Sans-Papiers in opposing New Labour's proposals. Like other European governments, it plans to grant amnesty to a few refugees while cutting benefits, housing and other resources, stepping up detention and implementing fast tracking deportations for many.

With the birth of new Sans-Papiers collectives, autonomy continues to be a priority. Women are pressing to be heard and to gain official recognition for rape and violence against women as grounds for asylum.

- Sans Papiers website: http://www.bok.net/pajol
- Send donations for the Collectif des Sans-Papiers d'Ile-de-France (cheque to: CGT-CCP Solidarité Sans-Papiers).
- Information: Black Women for Wages for Housework and Payday men's network, PO BOX 287, London NW6 5QU. Tel 0171-482 2496.

Double victory for campaign against deportation threats

John Stewart reports: The Nanga and Lemba families from Hackney, east London, were both able to celebrate Christmas free from the fear of deportation this year. The two families, asylum seekers from the brutal conflict in Angola, have lived with the threat of deportation back to a war-zone hanging over them for eight years. At the end of last year news came from the Home Office that they would be able to remain in the UK.

Both campaigns had been led by the families' children, based at their school in Haggerston. Mansanga (now 18) and Feliciana (16) Nanga and Muyeke Lemba (15) petitioned, leafleted, appeared on TV and radio, and spoke at public meetings in Hackney and around the country. The Nanga sisters went to the NUT conference in Blackpool at Easter last year where they received a standing ovation from delegates when they spoke about their case. NUT General Secretary Doug McAvoy agreed to take their case up with the Government.

Both families were supported by teachers at Haggerston School, their local law centre and by their MP Brian Sedgemore. The case of the Nanga and Lemba families shows once again that campaigning against injustice can make a difference and unjust deportation orders can be overturned.

Racist press stokes up fascist menace

Dave Turner, an active anti-fascist in Kent for the past 21 years, reports on opposition to Nazi activity in Dover and the local media's role in targeting Roma refugees.

ON SATURDAY 9th January the National Front (NF) held their third march against asylum seekers in Dover. Despite having barely three days' notice, anti-fascists mobilised 60 people – twice the number mustered by the fascists.

For their first two marches in Dover, in November 1997 and February 1998, the NF bussed in members from as far afield as the West Midlands. This time they were only able to mobilise their London supporters. Despite a huge police presence, thanks to the efforts of the anti-fascists, it took the NF nearly an hour to march the half-mile along the seafront from the Eastern to the Western Docks.

As before, hundreds of police were drafted in to ensure that the NF could march, at an estimated cost of £40,000. They were equipped with dogs, horses, riot vans, riot gear, photographers, numerous video "evidence gathering teams", a motor-launch in the harbour and a spin-doctor to deal with the media.

Anti-fascists were systematically stopped, searched, photographed, filmed and interrogated. Three were arrested. Since November 1997 there have been 34 arrests of anti-fascists in Dover; so far the police have not managed to have anyone convicted.

One of those arrested was filmed by the same police squad that had filmed her when she was arrested during a protest in North Kent in 1998. She was told that this squad had been specially detailed to follow her in Dover. No such treatment has ever been meted out to the NF in Dover, not one of whom has even been arrested – not even when, during the first march, one of them wounded an anti-fascist with a bottle. The bail conditions of the two arrested people from outside Dover stipulate that they must not visit the town. This may be connected with the fact that it's being rumoured the police have already given permission for two more NF marches in Dover in the near future.

The fascists are being encouraged by the vile racist campaign against asylum seekers waged by local bigots, aided by the local press, the *Dover Express* and the *Folkestone Herald*.

The papers' editor, Nick Hudson (who learnt his journalistic craft on the *Sunday Sport*), has written editorials calling asylum-seekers "human sewage"). His papers have devoted large amounts of space to campaigns by local bigots who have falsely alleged that asylum seekers are responsible for a huge local crime wave, run brothels and are driving local prostitutes out of business by "selling their bodies for the price of a spud".

Asylum seekers in Dover and Folkestone have had to endure abuse, assaults and firebombings. Nick Hudson must take his share of responsibility for having encouraged this. Kent police tacitly recognised this in December when they warned Hudson that he could face prosecution for incitement to racial hatred if he does not tone down his papers' coverage of the issue.

- Send messages of support, donations and offers of help to Dover Residents Against Racism c/o Refugee Link, PO Box 417, Folkestone, Kent CT19 4GT.
- The campaign against the National Front in Dover has a homepage at http://www.canterbury.u-net.com/Dover.html. ❑



PHOTO: MIKE COHEN (*SEARCHLIGHT*)

Join the fight for asylum and immigration rights

John Stewart, of the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, looks at an important joint campaign against further restrictions on asylum and immigration rights.

The National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC) and the National Assembly Against Racism (NAAR) have initiated a campaign against the Labour Government's proposals to further undermine the rights of asylum seekers, refugees and black people living in the UK. The intention is to include many other campaigns, trade unionists, immigration lawyers and any other organisations and individuals.

The new Immigration Bill, expected this month, will introduce proposals contained in the Immigration White Paper, published last summer – despite the overwhelming opposition from organisations and individuals working with refugees and asylum seekers.

The proposals include:

- complete withdrawal of benefits from all asylum seekers, replaced by food vouchers
- massive extension of immigration detention including the possibility of building new detention centres for asylum seekers
- removal of the right of appeal against deportation for people who have lived in the UK for over seven years
- increased powers of search and arrest for immigration officers
- maintaining the Tories immigration status checks by employers (despite Jack Straw's specific pledge not to operate this provision)
- requiring that visitors to the UK from countries needing a visa will have to pay financial bonds – a change which clearly discriminates against the families of black Britons coming to visit.

This intensifies the misery of Immigration Acts passed by the Tories, despite Labour opposition, over the past eighteen years. CAIR will provide information and briefings on the legislation as it goes through Parliament – including naming and shaming Labour MPs who vote for it. We will also be organising demonstrations and protests against the new Bill.

- CAIR demonstraion in defence of asylum and immigration rights. Assemble 12 noon, 27th February, Embankment, London. Rally at Trafalgar Square.
- More details of the campaign from NCADC on 0121-554 6947 or NAAR on 0171-247 9907; email: cair@ncadc.demon.co.uk

Cracking the code of cancerous capitalism

Mike Phipps reviews three books which take a look at the left's response to "globalisation".

THE EDITORS and authors of these three books all agree: the left needs to refine its understanding of globalism. *The Threat of Globalism* (from *Race and Class*) is a good place to start and Jerry Harris's article emphasises the sheer scale of the problem. Computerised international transactions on the financial markets are now estimated to exceed $1.5 trillion daily. Speed is of the essence: software creating a ten-second advantage has made one company millions in profits.

The biggest market is in foreign exchange, where transactions are sixty times larger than the world trade in manufactured goods, Put simply, the main concern today of a western investor in a Third World plant is not so much whether the product is saleable (market risk) nor whether the government might nationalise the plant (political risk) but rather the changes in the value of the currencies involved. A dramatic example was the Mexican economic crash of four years ago. Fearing the currency was overvalued, western electronic capitalists withdrew their billions – in less than three days – recovering their profits but simultaneously creating a 1930s scale depression for millions.

At first glance, governments seem powerless in such a situation. Government bonds sold on the markets to finance domestic expenditure can be manipulated by conservative money managers. "Since social programmes are seen as inflationary, which devalues money, bond holders can dump their holdings, drive up interest rates and slow economic growth." This is precisely the menace facing many fragile Third World economies.

But it's wrong to suggest that the state is powerless in the face of rising globalism – as many New Labour politicians do to justify their opposition to economic intervention. As John McMurtry points out in a new book covering similar themes, the global free marketeers envisage a central role for the state both as debt collector and corporate underwriter. While demanding freedom from government intervention in the economy – and increasingly the fields of education, housing, health, pensions and benefits – they are happy to call for more government roads, police, subsidies for corporations and defence contracts. For free marketeers, "big government" is a problem only if it helps people; spending $1 billion a day on the military, as Reagan did, is fine.

Boris Kagarlitsky develops this line in the new *Socialist Register*. If multinationals see the importance of using nation-states to secure their aims, the left too needs to re-engage with the state. Given the complete absence of democratic institutions at the global level, the state must be the starting-point for developing an economic alternative to globalism. Once the left realises the anti-capitalist potential of democracy at the national level, it can begin to confront the international order more effectively.

These books cover a range of globalism issues. Perhaps one of the most original is the *Race and Class* interview with Angela Davis on what she calls the "prison industrial complex". The term reflects the huge growth in the US prison population to two million people – 70% of them people of colour, with Black women the fastest growing group – and the fact that much of the apparatus for this is in private sector hands. Thus the corporate profit motive is pushing towards the same goal of social destruction as the US military industrial complex, the tie-up between the Pentagon and arms producers that fuelled the Vietnam war.

Globalisation initiatives like the North American Free Trade Agreement may have devastated parts of the US manufacturing economy, but they've meant good business for the private prisons industry. It has targeted and mopped up in those communities where unemployment and social exclusion have pushed people to the wrong side of the law. Inmates make a captive workforce too, typically paid $1 a month with no rights whatsoever. It's estimated that 5% of all US jobs now take the form of prison work. By the end of the century, private prisons will outnumber state ones threefold and have a combined revenue of $1 billion. And Britain, under this Government and the last, is already following the US lead.

The Cancer Stage of Capitalism presents this drive for corporate profits as a danger to the future of humanity. McMurtry's analysis comes with some solutions and a ringing endorsement from Susan George.

- *The Threat of Globalism*, a special double edition of *Race and Class*, price £9.00.
- *The Cancer Stage of Capitalism*, by John McMurtry, published by Pluto, price £15.99 pbk.
- *Socialist Register* 1999: *Global Capitalism versus Democracy*, edited by Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, published by Merlin.

One of the prices of war

Mike Phipps reviews Hidden Wounds *by Aly Renwick, published by Barbed Wire, price £4.99 paperback.*

In World War One, traumatised soldiers were shot for cowardice. In World War Two bomber crews were ordered to shoot down their own comrades' aircraft if they were seen as defecting from missions by flying off course to neutral countries. Still today the MoD scarcely recognises the existence of post-traumatic stress disorder.

One study of Vietnam veterans showed that 20% of them had been exposed to violent atrocities – 9% had actually committed them. National servicemen in Malaya literally collected the heads of "communist terrorists" they killed. In Aden, units had "kill charts" and competed to see who could kill the most curfew breakers.

The great strength of Aly Renwick's book is that it explores the link between the atrocities of military conflict and their effects on soldiers who go on to commit violent crime in civilian life. Case after case is cited to show how post-traumatic stress led former soldiers to attack violently friends and strangers alike, in a seemingly motiveless way, with often fatal consequences. A compelling book.

- ***Hidden Wounds* is available from Barbed Wire, PO Box 958, London W14 0JF.**

Film's Bul-worth going to see

Mike Marqusee reviews Bulworth.

STRANGE BUT true. Fox, Rupert Murdoch's arm in Hollywood, has given us a film that is consistently funny, formally inventive, politically literate and uncompromisingly hostile to big capital and all its agents. There is hardly a tender spot in the American political psyche that is not zapped by the script, from the health care racket to Jewish-Black relations. Most fearlessly, the film dares to dig out the nasty truths about racism in the US and the complex responses to it in the black community.

Full of grotesque farce and satirical mischief, Bulworth is anything but worthily didactic, and unusually for a Hollywood film these days, it relishes words and plays with language. Its central device is ingenious. Senator Jay Bulworth suffers a breakdown and starts telling the truth – about politics, special interests, the media and American society. But the twist is that he tells the truth in a rapper's argot replete with skipping rhythms, lame rhymes and gobs of obscenity. It's as if official discourse has been so corrupted that it is only possible to"speak truth to power" in this kind of radically reconstructed voice.

I thought it was a pity Beatty as co-writer and director bothered with the ropy conspiracy sub-plot, but his own performance is a revelation. Here he's as convincing as the burnt-out, glazed-eyed, ex-liberal hack as he was unconvincing as the brilliant intellectual John Reed. Substitute New Labour for New Democrat and it's all too familiar.



The ramblings of a mediocrity

Eddie Tucker reviews The Unfinished Revolution *by Philip Gould, Little, Brown and Co., £16.99.*

I CONFESS. I was bored over Christmas, so I picked up the focus group guru's opus on how he won the General Election. You may have thought Blair was the one, even Mandelson. In a moment of relief after twenty years hard work you may even have thought you had a small role yourself. But no, it was Philip wot won it.

It gets worse. Remember the Democrats' victory in the US. You thought Bill Clinton was the deciding factor? Sultan of Spin George Stephanopolous the main man? Nope, again, it was Philip Gould, who "determined last week thinking", wot won it. In his own words, those days, "I like to think changed – in part through me – the subsequent course of progressive politics. Nothing would be the same again."

Oddly enough, while he won these elections, there is no mention of his role in the Sandinistas' disastrous defeat in Nicaragua; and despite being in charge of much of the party's campaign in 1992, despite admitting that he hid Kinnock's disastrous poll ratings from the Party leadership, he wasn't at fault there either. He actually reprints the tiny percentage point that changing Kinnock as Labour leader would have gained the Party, citing this as meaning his decision not to reveal how the public distrusted the Welsh Windbag was OK; he ignores the fact that a swing of just 1,200 votes in 21 key seats would have kicked the Tories out.

It would be sad if it wasn't so, well, sad. Let Pip speak for himself: "On more than one occasion Larry Whitty asked me to take even more responsibility...Patricia (Hewitt) and I effectively took over the running of the 1992 campaign." His political honesty is similar to Blair's – in the light of recent events, his comment that "good or bad, I would stick with Mandelson," gains an even more important insight.

He neglects to mention how the Labour Euro MPs held him in contempt, and how he milked their public funds to pay for his other work; of course despite the Eurodosh he wasn't impressed with anything he saw in the European Union. "People accuse me of looking more to the United States than to Europe, and it is true." But our saviour was there. "I devised the notion of a 'People's Europe'." Fortunately for the future of a continent, "Europe was welcoming me ..."

Heffernan and Marqusee's *Defeat From the Jaws of Victory* is vindicated by everything Gould writes. New Labour promised us "things can only get better." On 23rd December they did. Don't buy this book. And for God's sake don't show it to anyone thinking about leaving the Labour Party.

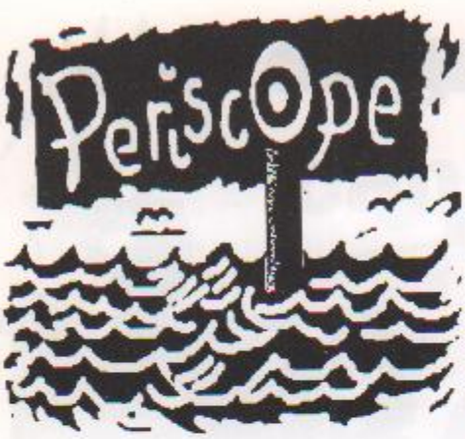
Obituary – Donald Soper

Leonora Lloyd pays tribute to a neglected aspect of his activites.

Donald Soper, who died in January, was a great socialist and supporter of feminist causes. The last time many of us saw him was during the Clause IV campaign, when he spoke to a meeting despite being on crutches and having to negotiate steps to get there.

During the campaign against David Alton's anti-abortion bill, we held the main rally at the Methodist Central Hall. It would never have happened without Donald. Just two or three days before the rally, the hall management wrote to say that, because of an aggressive demonstration by the SWP outside an anti-abortion rally in the hall, we were being denied its use.

I went to see Donald Soper, who not only advised on the letter we should send in return, but agreed to contact them himself. We got the hall and he agreed to speak at the rally. He told us of his memories of being a young minister when abortion was still illegal and how that had formed his views. His wonderful voice and warm, friendly personality remain with me. The movement has lost one of its great figures.



LCC – RIP

It is with great sadness that we have to report the death of the **Labour Co-ordinating Committe**. Set up to back Tony Benn's bid for the deputy leadership in the early eighties, its members rapidly spotted that the best way to a career was to swerve to the right. Recently it spawned the arch-modernisers of the lobbying and political full-timer world, to be seen scuttling in and out of Millbank under cover of darkness. In December it voted to disband itself, its job done and its guru installed in 10, Downing Street. The only note of regret at a self-congratulatory wind-up meeting? That the Grassroots Alliance had gained four NEC seats to their two. Yes, comrades, we're still here.

Paul Richards – still godlike

Periscope has written in protest at the banning of our arch fan **Paul Richards** (of LCC fame) from the Politicos bookshop Book of the Year awards. The ban from a free nosh up was, according to *Tribune*, imposed after Richards tried to rig the poll in favour of his own tome, *How To Be Your Own Spin Doctor* (reviewed glowingly in *LLB*), by emailing friends and associates. We'd have thought that showed just the political initiative that Politicos should be encouraging. It's called lobbying.

Donnygate

It could only happen to New Labour. The Blairite sent in as leader of **Doncaster Council** to sort out the corruption there has been arrested for – corruption. He has resigned from the Labour Group and is contesting the allegations which apparently "are not current but go back some years." Well, that's OK then.

Bankrupt Fabians

Pity the poor **Fabian Society** – just eleven people booked into their summer conference on education, so they had to cancel it. Combined with the NEC results and falling membership, things aren't looking so rosy for the fervent Blairistas; looking as bankrupt as a Fabian Hamilton Society, in fact.

Back from the dead

Eric Hammond, the man who led the EETPU out of the TUC and scabbed on the Wapping dispute has risen out of the grave to appear as chairman of Save Kent Schools, a body set up to...attack schools in Kent. Kent County Council intends balloting all parents on whether the elitist grammar schools should be abolished. As Chairman of Governors on Gravesend Grammar School for Boys, Wreckless Eric intends pursuing his usual attitude to democracy – by blocking the vote.

Taking the Michael

The Labour Campaign for Criminal Justice has been complaining that it has achieved very little recently due to its former chair stifling debate and publication of documents before the election. The man concerned? **Alun Michael**, appointed Home Office Minister after the election, whose department is concerned with criminal justice. Michael, incidentally, has singularly failed to gain a nomination in any constituency for the Welsh Assembly, and will now be imposed onto the central list.

Divisive Unionist

John D Taylor, Ulster Unionist Party MP for Strangford, took time off from his busy schedule recently. Between waiting in for the builders at his second home and visiting his printing business, he stopped off at a Covent Garden restaurant to meet the London representative of the North Cyprus government. MPs from the Labour and Conservative parties were also, apparently, present. "North Cyprus" is, of course, that section of the island invaded by the Turkish army and recognised by... well, only Turkey. It appears to have found a new friend in the Unionists' Deputy Leader.

Progresswatch

Ultra-modernisers' magazine ***Progress*** has resorted to that sad old ploy of getting people to pay to have their articles in the magazine. Parliamentarians are being offered space if they pay the £25 supporters' fee. The new chair of the advisory board is "Baron" Tom Sawyer, who refused to take action against those Labour Parties and MPs who sent their GC membership lists to *Progress* for its mailing list in '96 and '97. The organisation's new Director is Darren Murphy, better known as part-time Special Adviser to Deputy PM Prescott on local government, who we are sure will not use his insider information in any way.

Farm Lobby Fodder

Yet another Government Special Adviser has joined the lobbying world. **Cathy McGlynn**, assistant to Jack Cunningham at Agriculture has joined Bell Pottinger Communications, dealing with, would you believe, the Meat and Livestock Commission's account. You couldn't make it up.

Walkering into a safe seat

The iniquity of Blair's closed-list system for the Euro Elections is shown by the result in North East Scotland. Labour came a humiliating third behind the SNP and Tories in the recent by-election, but Labour's "accident-prone" (Millbank-speak for stupid) Brussels-based **Kathleen Walker-Shaw** will still be an MEP in June, having been imposed above sitting MEPs on the regional list. The Scottish Socialist Party beat the Greens but failed to save their deposit.

Militant mix

During the TV coverage of the Mercury Music Awards, football fantasist **David Baddiel** refused to comment on one of the nominated LPs, Asian Dub Foundation's *Rafi's Revenge*, on the grounds that their music was "very angry" and one of their songs was "a death threat".

When ADF learned of the remark, they protested. "We've never encouraged violence in any way and Baddiel has no right to misrepresent our message in this way." They also pointed out that the song Baddiel takes for a "death threat" is in fact the story of the legendary Udham Singh, the revolutionary secularist who assassinated the former British governor of the Punjab in revenge for his role in the Jallianwallah Bagh massacre in Amritsar in 1919.

A discomfited Baddiel was forced to offer ADF an "unreserved apology", but couldn't help but add, "It's just that I find their music humourless".

In fact, wit and satire are a major element in what ADF call their "militant, conscious mix", but you wouldn't expect it to be appreciated by a man who thinks it's funny to take the piss out of women with large breasts, men with small penises and black footballers' haircuts.

Undeterred by blank-minded post-modern pundits, ADF are burning up venues across Britain and abroad, all the while stoking up the campaign to free Satpal Ram. "It's not fashionable to mix politics with music", ADF say, "but we don't care."

Catch them while you can.

AOB

"Look liberal, while calling yourself Labour and working for capital – that's the Third Way." – A. Sivanandan, *Race and Class*.

"We believe they represent a sleeping dinosaur" – Phil Moffat on plans to revive the 60's Liverpool Protestant Party as a branch of Paisley's DUP.

"The third way? Designer drivel" – Mark Lawson, *Guardian*.

"Geoff Mulgan, the Director of Demos, warned in 1995 that unless Britain imitated the Far East, Thailand would overtake us. The Thai economy is now in ruins. Mulgan is now in the Downing Street Policy Unit" – Nick Cohen, *Observer*.

"Two elements, therefore, need to be considered alongside industrial policy: one is employment policy – shorter working week, work-sharing and early retirement (as well as greater educational opportunity at the younger end of labour availability) – and the other is leisure opportunity and provision of recurring education" – Peter Mandelson, then Chairman of the British Youth Council, *Labour Student*, 1978.

"If the inspectors couldn't find the weapons, how come we know where to fire the cruise missiles?" – Robert Fisk, *Independent*.

CORRESPONDENCE

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



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I'm writing to mention the plight of Toni Negri. In 1979 the university lecturer, and activist in the Autonomia movement, Toni Negri was condemned to thirty years in jail for being the brains of Italian terrorism in a trumped up trial organised by his Communist opponents in the Magistratura. Negri escaped by being elected in 1983 as a Radical deputy. He was exiled to France where he had the discreet protection of the state – he taught at university from 1984 to 1997. Deciding to return to his own land Negri was thrown in prison to serve out a reduced sentence of nine years (though new charges are pending).

Negri was judged on evidence culled from his writings – not a single act of terrorism. It would be similar to slinging the late Ralph Miliband in the clink for opposition to the capitalist state.

I knew Negri from 1985-7 as a comrade in a small intellectual discussion group, Disenssus. Anybody further from being the mastermind of Italian armed struggle would be hard to find – indeed fellow Italian exiles who had participated in such combats disliked him for his refusal to endorse individual violence.

The fact that the Italian state, a member of the European Union, can imprison someone for political beliefs is a scandal. In France there has been a broad campaign to free him. Moves should be taken to follow this lead.

Andrew Coates, Ipswich

The recent *LLB* AGM was superb. Excellent speakers – both from the platform and the floor reminded us that there is much still to fight for from the left end of Labour and many achievements to be proud of.

Chief amongst them is the great success of the Grassroots Alliance candidates in the NEC elections – not just those who were elected, but also the vital contribution to the victory made by our two candidates who didn't make it onto the NEC this time.

Our priority now must be to consolidate those results, focussing on strengthening the already strong position of last year's candidates and building on the high level of support and recognition all six have already achieved so that this year we can celebrate the election of a full slate of candidates to the NEC. The Grassroots Alliance is the most positive initiative for the left in Labour I've seen in my time in the Party. We must not allow the gains made by the hard work of so many to be dissipated in the year to come.

Paul Daintry, London E18

LLB is right to warn against the growing merger plans between the Blairites and the Liberal Democrats. Here in Sutton, Labour Party members who were caught red-handed "number taking" at a polling station during the 1998 local elections for the Liberal Democrats are let off with a slapped wrist while Labour left wingers who publicly criticise "questionable" activity within Sutton Labour Group are threatened with expulsion.

John Evers, Surrey

In the December *LLB*, you carried a picture of the national student demonstration for Grants Not Fees alongside contact details for a group called Student Unions Against the Act. The march was called originally by the Campaign for Free Education and then opened up to include others. The CFE has been campaigning for nearly four years now and we are still the only campaign on this issue that organises regular, democratic conferences to elect our committee and decide our policy. For further details Campaign for Free Education PO Box 22615, London N4 1WT; tel: 0958-556 756; email: cfe@gn.apc.org

Campaign for Free Education

Obituary – Ron Huzzard

Frank Allaun pays tribute to a man of the highest principles.

As a socialist put it long ago: "Man's dearest possession is life, and since it is given to man to live but once, he must so live that dying he can say: I gave all my strength for the greatest cause in the world – the liberation of mankind."

That can truly be said about Ron Huzzard who died on 30th December at the age of 78 after a year-long illness.

Ron was the most effective leader that Labour Action for Peace has ever had. He helped build up the organisation to a powerful movement with thousands of supporters through the affiliation of Constituency Labour Parties and trade unions as well as individual members.

Ron was definitely Old Labour (or Real Labour as some of us would prefer to call it). He felt especially strongly about the American-UK bombing of Iraq. "It made me sick," he said, "that it was a Labour government which joined with Washington in these raids, contrary to the views of the United Nations." He charged that the raids strengthened rather than weakened support for Saddam in his own country.

Leaving school at 15, Ron Huzzard became an engineering draughtsman and, after night study, a chartered engineer. He was declared redundant by his employers when he was 59. For six years he held the position of Peace Secretary to the Society of Friends (the Quakers). During the Second World War he had joined the Labour Pacifist Fellowship, which later broadened its outlook and became Labour Action for Peace.

Ron played a lively part in the Association of Engineering and Shipbuilding Draughtsmen (now part of MSF). He was elected branch chairman of AESD and was sent regularly as their delegate to the union's annual conference. He is remembered by many members for the way he often managed to speak due to his persistence in standing up to catch the chair's eye. There he met Jim Mortimer, a national union official who became his lifelong friend and comrade. Mortimer, later appointed General Secretary of the Labour Party, told me that Ron played a bigger part than any other individual member in helping that union pursue a good peace policy.

The union put him on its panel of parliamentary candidates. He was selected by his Constituency Labour Party to stand in two seats, both Tory strongholds at that time. He was defeated in both contests, but in one of them only by 1,500 votes. Ron was also active in local government. For two periods covering 18 years he was a councillor on Bromley Borough Council and for some years leader of its education group.

This is the passing of a man who had the highest principles about peace and socialism and helping working people – which he lived up to throughout the years. ❑

the Liz Davies column



Labour Party NEC member Liz Davies provides a viewpoint from the grass roots.

I SHARED THE horror of many Labour Party members when our Government joined the US in bombing Iraq. The rest of the world viewed our actions as indefensible and hypocritical. All we have succeeded in doing is increasing the sufferings of the Iraqi people and compromising the UN. We have lost any right to claim we have either an independent or ethical foreign policy.

These assaults may well be renewed. Because of their sporadic nature, protests are inevitably organised at short notice. Despite the difficulties, the Campaign Against Sanctions and War in Iraq managed to arrange daily pickets of Downing Street during the bombings. I attended several of the pickets, which were publicised by word of mouth and through email.

Grassroots Alliance members have submitted a motion to the NEC condemning the bombing. CLPs up and down the country have passed similar motions and I have received letters from many disgusted Party members. The only way we can stop further destruction is to ensure opposition is audible and visible. All of us in the peace and labour movements will co-operate to build on the pickets and ensure that protest cannot be ignored, either by the media or by Labour MPs.

FOLLOWING Peter Mandelson's resignation, the links between New Labour and big business are causing increasing concern among Party members. Much has been made of donors to the Labour Party – Bernie Ecclestone springs to mind – but the list of sponsors of the Party also makes interesting reading. Sponsors include Raytheon (one of the world's largest missile manufacturers, condemned in the US for irregularities in a tender process and for abuse of labour laws), Enron Europe Ltd (whose US sister company is the largest power company in the Indian sub-continent and whose efforts to silence environmental protesters have been condemned by Amnesty), and most of the major supermarkets.

At January's NEC, Cathy Jamieson and myself will be moving a motion calling for a review of Party sponsorship and the establishment of a sub-committee to consider criteria on which the Party accepts sponsorship, donations, etc. Obviously the Party's financial needs cannot be ignored. But the Party and the Government must be – and be seen to be – independent of big business. In any case, the negative publicity generated by the Party's links with major players in the private sector probably lose us as many votes as we could hope to gain by spending the money they give us.

THE NATIONAL Policy Forum met in Swansea on 16-17th January. There were no votes. Delegates to the NPF discuss prepared documents on broad policy areas in workshops. A Labour Party official makes notes of suggestions and reads the notes back at the end. Somehow ideas from Grassroots Alliance delegates tended to be left out. Reports from the workshops were then put to a plenary session, where, again, there was a reluctance to record our comments, which, in the end, are nothing more than suggestions.

Despite the lengthy discussions, the content of the policy documents remains in the hands of full-time officials. In a few weeks, draft policy documents (which may or may not incorporate views expressed at the NPF) will go to CLPs. Branches, CLPs and local policy forums are entitled to make submissions. What weight any of these will have is anyone's guess.

In some form the submissions come back to the NPF in June, when delegates will have a short time in which to propose amendments. If these amendments are even to be put on the Conference agenda, so that Conference can vote, they must be supported by at least 35 NPF delegates.

That threshold could be reached easily if some of the trade union delegates would join with Grassroots Alliance supporters from the constituencies in ensuring real policy choices were put to conference.

Like the policy-making process, the policy documents themselves are opaque and hollow. Often they bear little relationship with actual government policy. I read the *Crime and Justice* document while watching Paul Boateng on *Newsnight* justifying "three strikes and you're out". I searched the document in vain for any reference to mandatory and minimum sentencing, though I did find something about community sentencing, a different matter altogether. On pensions, public sector pay or workplace rights, the documents give little inkling of either the plans of the Government or the feelings of the Party.

Central American Women's Network

Challenging violence againsts women in Nicaragua

7.00pm, Wednesday 24th February, Conway Hall, London WC1.

Violeta Delgado (National Co-ordinator, Nicaraguan Women's Network Against Violence)

• For more info on meeings in Aberdeen, Belfast and at UNISON conference call 0171-833 4075.

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