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Briefing

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NATO's dubious victory

LABOUR LEFT Briefing

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■ The copy deadline for the September issue is Monday 16th August. There is no August edition.



July 1999

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EDITORIAL

The charge sheet against NATO

In Serbia today, people are asking Milosevic: was it all worth it? People in Britain and the other NATO countries must ask their leaders the same question.

Far from justifying NATO's military assault, the confirmation that mass executions and other atrocities multiplied many times over in the weeks following the start of the bombing merely adds to the charge sheet against Clinton and Blair. Denying the culpability of NATO in the horrors that unfolded in Kosova as the bombs rained down is as indefensible as denying the Milosevic regime's ultimate responsibility for those horrors. They were preventable. Had the OSCE monitors remained in place, had NATO refrained from bombing and compromised at Rambouillet on the composition of the peace-keeping force, many who are dead would be alive today, many who are displaced would still be in their homes.

Which of the various war aims proposed by NATO spokespersons has been fulfilled? Certainly not the prevention of ethnic cleansing – which intensified during the bombing and which continues in a different form under NATO occupation. Certainly not the prevention of a "humanitarian catastrophe" – this catastrophe had not taken place at the start of the war, but is now clearly a reality in Serbia, Kosova and surrounding countries. Certainly not the "return of refugees", since the majority of these refugees were created in the wake of the bombing, and more refugees are still being created. Certainly not the "degrading of the Serb war machine" – which has withdrawn from Kosova in strength and largely undamaged.

What about "the credibility of NATO" – a war aim first promoted, then disavowed, by Blair himself? Here, there was a partial success, though it owes much to media manipulation. NATO was able to occupy Kosova without having to engage the Serb army. Its sphere of influence has been expanded, and its military prerogatives strengthened. However, it has become apparent that NATO has no plans for Kosova other than to occupy it indefinitely. Outside the Anglo-American elite, the only thing credible about NATO is its threat to use force to get its way.

Any objective examination of the behaviour of the NATO leaders before, during and after Rambouillet, in the course of the bombing and in the negotiations that led to its cessation, reveals that they were driven by a single over-riding concern: to assert and expand the authority of NATO itself. The only non-negotiable item on the NATO agenda was that the "peace-keeping" force in Kosova be NATO-dominated.

Towards that dubious end, thousands have died, tens of thousands have been injured, hundreds of thousands displaced, and the economy and environment of Serbia and Kosova devastated. Along the way, the UN has been marginalised, and one of the essential building blocks of world civilisation – the prohibition on one nation or group of nations attacking another except in cases of self-defence – flouted with impunity, setting a frightening precedent for the future. The prospects of genuine self-rule for the Kosovars have not been advanced one jot. The cause of human rights, which can only advance if it is truly the property of the whole of humanity, not an instrument of the whims of the great powers, has been profoundly compromised.

All this was avoidable. That is the chief indictment of the NATO leaders. They must be held to account for their crimes as surely as Slobodan Milosevic should be for his.

The crisis of representation

New Labour's poor showing in the European elections is not the result of any failure of presentation, but of its policies on public services, welfare, education, transport and civil rights, its cosying up to big business and its cronyism. It also reflects the deep and widespread alienation of Party activists, fewer of whom took part in the Euro-campaign than in any election in the Party's history.

Across Europe, there is a widening gap between the political caste (along with their media partners) and the bulk of the population, especially the working class. The consensus on key issues among the major parties, the emphasis on personalities over policies, the regime of the soundbite and the spin-doctor, the absence of meaningful choice at the ballot box, the prostration of politics before the anonymous dictates of global capital – as these trends are accentuated, so voter turn-out plummets.

Unlike partisans of the Third Way, socialists cannot merely accept decreased political participation as a fact of life. It's our job to meet the challenge of what Tony Benn calls "the crisis of representation", to offer the alternatives to economic neo-liberalism and social authoritarianism, to make democracy meaningful.

Within the Labour Party, the Grassroots Alliance has aimed to rise to that challenge. Its success in the recent NEC elections – where its six candidates secured a higher percentage of the vote than in last year's contest, as well as, once again, a higher percentage than their Millbank opponents – confirms that some half of the Party membership wish to see a radical change in direction from the Government. This weight of opinion is not reflected within the Parliamentary Labour Party, the NEC itself, or the media. Unless, the left finds ways of punching its weight, inside and outside the Party, Blair will remain undeflected from his course, and democracy itself will be the loser.

NEC elections: Hope springs from Party grass roots

With a three-three tie on the constituency section of Labour's National Executive, it looks as if the recent one member one vote ballot was a dead heat. But, argues *LLB* reporter Sherwood Paine, the results offer far more comfort to the Grassroots Alliance than to Millbank.

Having given up on the idea of defeating their opponents through an open and democratic contest, Millbank this year opted for a strategy of containment in the NEC elections. The contest was brought forward and wrapped in obscurity. The body of Tom Sawyer was exhumed from the House of Lords to prop up an uninspiring list of candidates.

In the end, Millbank succeeded in its main aim: avoiding a repeat of last year's high-profile slap in the face. Thanks to Sawyer, the leadership slate captured one seat back from the Grassroots Alliance. The media were told the result was an endorsement of Blair, and reported the story accordingly.

In fact, overall, the results represent a slight improvement over last year's performance for the Grassroots Alliance, and offer little comfort to Millbank. In 1998, 46.38% of all votes cast went to Grassroots Alliance candidates; the leadership-backed Members First slate captured 42.43%. In 1999, on a lower turnout, Grassroots Alliance candidates secured 47.71% of all votes, compared to the Millbank-backed candidates' 43.87%.

Significantly, Grassroots Alliance candidates are well placed to make gains in the future, having taken all three runner-up positions, and pushed the three unsuccessful Millbank candidates into tenth, eleventh and twelth places. Alliance candidate Theresa Pearce also scored a handsome re-election triumph in the National Constitutional Committee ballot.

The fears that we would suffer a major reversal this year proved unfounded. Last year, it was argued that we had benefited from a backlash against Millbank's ineptly flagrant attempts to interfere with the vote. Similarly, the Alliance benefited last year from the endorsement of the *Guardian* and some favourable publicity. This year the *Guardian* has been hostile and other media coverage almost non-existent. In contrast, the Millbank slate benefited from an organised letter-writing campaign by loyalist MPs, plus a sprinkling of positive plugs for their candidates on radio and in print. In that context, and given Blair's claims to speak for the whole Party, the persistence of a plurality of voting members in backing candidates expressly disapproved of by the leadership is a victory for the left.

Losing Pete Willsman is a serious blow, and it is to be hoped he will stand again, but it was always likely that with the addition of Sawyer to the Millbank ticket we would drop a male seat. For Davies and Shawcroft to push Jeuda and Cashman down into 5th and 6th place is a major triumph, a credit to their vigorous campaigning and outspoken opposition to Blairism. Whether Sawyer, as a former General Secretary of the Party, will consider it a triumph that he beat Liz Davies by a mere 1000 votes is doubtful.

Had Cathy Jamieson been able to stand again, we might well have been able to hold four seats; if she had reproduced Christine or Liz's form, Jeuda would have been pushed into 7th place. Bill Butler started with a much lower profile than Cathy in Scotland and elsewhere; in that context his vote is a strong one, and bodes well for next year. Ann Black's vote is also an excellent result for a first-time candidate, and a tribute to Ann's willingness to campaign vigorously within the Party and build on the profile gained from her work on the National Policy Forum.

Interestingly, Adrian Bailey performed better as an independent last year than as a Millbank candidate this year. Val Price, an independent, improved her percentage of the vote substantially. Daniel Zeichner, the other independent, also performed respectably. It seems that among a substantial section of the membership, there is entrenched hostility to voting for anyone with the Millbank seal of approval.

What's left for Millbank? They tried all-out assault in 1998 and a softly-softly approach this year; neither was successful. All that really works for them is the pull of famous names. Presumably they are now looking for a new celebrity to replace Cashman. In any case, it seems likely that they will continue to downplay the NEC elections and, more crucially, the importance of the NEC itself, which seems destined to be further shunted to the sidelines.

● Liz Davies and Christine Shawcroft are available to speak about the NEC at Labour Party meetings. Contact 0181-985 6597.

NEC – results

1	Lord Sawyer	53,656	(48.78%)
2	Mark Seddon	52,699	(47.91%) -8.67%
(1st in '98 with 75,584 – 56.58%)			
3	Liz Davies	52,644	(47.86%) +1.48%
(4th in '98 with 61,970 – 46.38%)			
4	Christine Shawcroft	50,730	(46.11%) +5.77%
(8th in '98 with 53,897 – 40.34%)			
5	Michael Cashman	50,201	(45.63%) -6.95%
(2nd in '98 with 70,256 – 52.58%)			
6	Diana Jeuda	47,271	(42.97%) -3.82%
(3rd in '98 with 62,509 – 46.79%)			
7	Ann Black	45,207	(41.10%)
8	Pete Willsman	40,987	(37.26%) -6.23%
(6th in '98 with 58,208 – 43.49%)			
9	Bill Butler	36,956	(33.56%)
10	Ruth Turner	36,243	(32.95%)
11	Adrian Bailey	35,606	(32.37%) -2.22%
(9th in '98 with 46,210 – 34.59%)			
12	Delyth Morgan	33,782	(30.60%)
13	Val Price	26,227	(23.84%) +3.57%
(13th in '98 with 27,079 – 20.27%)			
14	Daniel Zeichner	23,069	(20.10%)

● In '98 Cathy Jamieson was 5th with 61,707 (46.19%) and Andy Howell was 12th with 30,305 (23.13%)

Euro trashed

Sceptics and non-voters in the recent Euro elections could well have forced the Government to axe plans to introduce the euro, argues author and academic Bernie Moss.

Record abstention (51%), a swing against social democratic governments and the success of Eurosceptic lists marked the European Parliament elections across the 15 member states. Britain proved the worst case with a record low turnout of 22%, an upset victory for the Tories over more pro-EU Labour and Lib Dems and success for the Greens and the UK Independence Party. Almost everywhere Eurofederalism was in retreat. The Labour Party, which avoided Europe and the euro in its campaign, lost out to a Tory Party that was able to tap British hostility to the Single Currency. Most Socialists ran nationally-oriented campaigns with the French including Eurosceptics on their list and the Germans demanding their money back from Brussels. In Germany and Italy governing social democrats were defeated by conservatives pointing to their failure to deal with unemployment.



Bernie Moss

The conservative Popular European Party, which dropped Eurofederalism from its programme, became the largest party in the European Parliament throwing the Socialists into opposition. France divided equally between pro- and anti-EU votes; the nationally-oriented Gaullists of Charles Pasqua emerged as a leading party on the right while revolutionary Trotskyists entered Strasbourg for the first time. The only Euro-federalist to do well was former student revolutionary Daniel Cohn-Bendit running on a far left Green ticket. Eurosceptic left parties in Sweden, Holland, Germany and Greece made significant gains. By far the largest party was the record number of non-voters who expressed growing alienation from the EU. Transfers of national powers to Brussels and Strasbourg since 1979 have been met by increased abstention in European elections and heightened ignorance of European institutions. Nearly half of Europeans now want national sovereignty defended.

This alienation has at least three sources – the non-existence of a European people possessing a sense of common interests and destiny; the 'democratic deficit' of a half-medieval half-Byzantine form of EU governance that is not easily reformed and the monetarist policies encouraged and pursued by the EU since the 1970s, which have resulted in mass unemployment and job insecurity. The forced resignation of the European Commission over corruption charges and the incapacity of the EU to formulate and implement its own policy in the Balkans have not made things easier for Eurofederalists. The resounding vote of no confidence in the EU is another blow to a euro that has already lost more than 10% of its value. Hailed by supporters as a sound currency potentially rivalling the dollar, the euro has shown itself to be vulnerable to recession in Germany and to political shocks in the EU system. The one-size-fits-all interest rate policy has been unable to cope with cynical divergence between a booming Ireland and a semi-bubbling France, and Germany and Italy mired in recession.

The current weakness of the euro is only the beginning of the problems arising from the structural flaw of EMU, the contradiction between the strict monetarism practiced by the European Central Bank and the more or less expansionist policies of governments which are democratically accountable. The election of a conservative majority in Parliament increases the potential for conflict with social democratic governments over the euro.

With the success of Euroscepticsm in the elections, British efforts to join the Single Currency appear doomed. The triumph of the Tories was related to the clear stand they took against the euro and Eurofederalism. Hostility has grown over the last six months of the euro from 52% to 61% of the British public. Contrary to portrayals in the media, the elections demonstrate that the Tories are more united and focused in their opposition to the euro than Labour is in its europhilia. Beneath the facade of unanimity behind Blair's wait-and-see policy, Labour is in fact divided among Euro-monetarists like Peter Mandelson, mainstream Eurofederalists, and Eurosceptics on both the left and right of the Party.

Blair and Gerhard Schröder issued a joint manifesto drafted by Mandelson on the eve of the elections which attacked the principles of the welfare and regulatory state. As a result of Blair's 'Third Way', millions of Labour and SPD supporters stayed at home. After this victory for Euroscepticism Blair will not want to risk his now fragile political future on a Europe that is not to his liking.

● Bernie Moss teaches European history in London. A new paperback edition of his *The Single European Currency in National Perspective: A Community in Crisis?* (Macmillan Press) will appear in the autumn.

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No way for Third

David Holland, Hackney South and Shoreditch CLP, suggests that the Euro elections were particularly bad for parties closest to the Third Way.

The left took a hammering in June's elections to the European Parliament. With the very honourable exception of France, governing centre-left parties experienced sharp set backs.

In Germany the Social Democrats dropped ten points, taking only 32% of the vote. In Italy, D'Alema's Democratic Socialists dropped four points from 1996 to 17.4%, and of course in Britain New Labour met its first serious reverse at the polls, winning only 26.8% of the popular vote and suffering a sharp defeat at the hands of the Tories on 34.2%. The pattern was the same in smaller countries such as Greece and Belgium, where the conservative right inflicted sharp defeats on governing social democratic parties. The right wing European People's Party now holds 224 seats in the European Parliament against 180 for the Party of European Socialists. For the first time in twenty years there is a preponderance of the centre right. Nor is there much comfort for the newly emergent socialist forces to the left of the traditional social democratic parties. In Spain, the United Left share of the vote halved and the entire leadership team has resigned. In Italy, where Communist Refoundation has experienced a recent split, the continuing Refondazione, led by Fausto Bertinotti declined two points to 4.3% and elected four MEPs, while the Italian Communists, who still support the D'Alema government and are led by Armando Cossuta, won 1.8% of the national vote and managed to elect two MEPs. The German Party of Democratic Socialism deserves congratulations on turning in a creditable result and establishing itself as a national party no longer confined to the Eastern Lande, by electing six MEPs for the first time. Outside Germany, the Greens made modest advances, electing their first two MEPs in the UK.

Only in France did a governing centre-left formation score a striking victory. The French Socialists increased their share of the vote from 14.5% to 22% and their number of MEPs from 15 to 22. The French Greens were also very successful, moving from no seats in 1994 to nine. The success of the alliance of Lutte Ouvriere and the Ligue Communiste in electing five MEPs, including Alain Krivine and Arlette Argouiller, is a striking triumph.

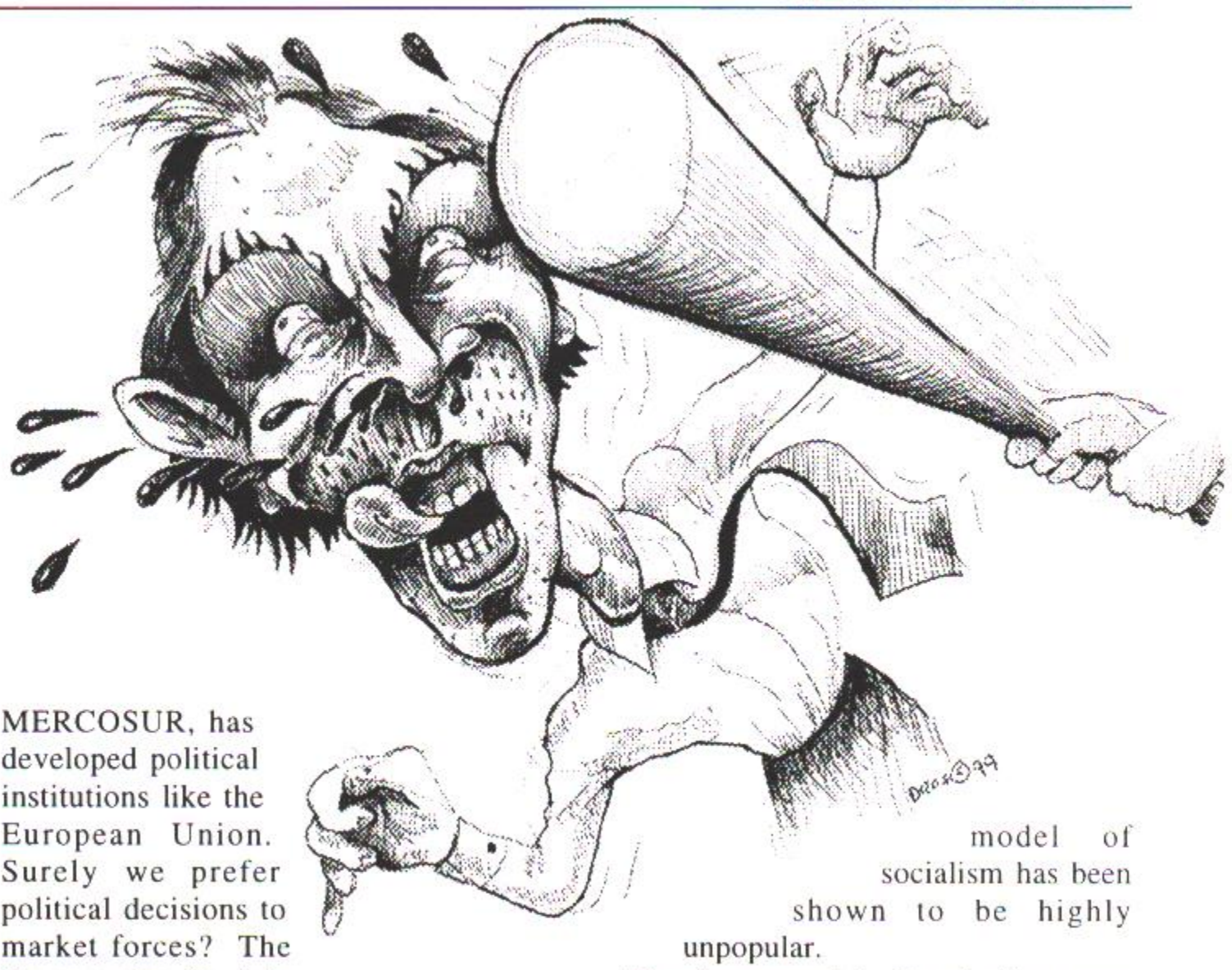
The contrast between the success of the traditional and new left in France and the defeats experienced by the proponents of the Third Way in Britain and Germany is noteworthy. Both the Labour Party and the SPD experienced mass abstentions by supporters in their traditional strongholds.

Labour's result was truly dreadful. 62 MEPs elected in 1994 declined to 29, with sitting MEPs falling like ninepins. Farewell then to Hugh MacMahon, Carole Tongue, Shaun Spiers, Gordon Adam, Tony Cunningham, Mike Elliott, Mark Hendrick, Roger Barton, Barry Seal, Veronica Hardstaffe, Angela Billingham, Sue Waddington, Mike Tappin, David Hallam, Clive Needle, Peter Truscott, David Thomas, Anita Pollack, Ian White and Joe Wilson. Some of these casualties will inspire regret and perhaps recriminations. For example, Ian White was for a long period Labour's lone voice in the South West. Because Glyn Ford was brought in from Manchester and imposed in first place on the list, Ian White has been pushed out. Similarly, Michael Cashman was the beneficiary of leadership patronage in the West Midlands, with a similar effect on incumbents listed below him. In London, where Labour took only a third of the vote and only narrowly outpolled the Tories, the new Green MEP Jean Lambert almost certainly owes her seat to defecting Labour voters, taking the opportunity to protest at the direction of New Labour. Informal soundings indicate that large numbers of Party members in London voted Green.

The campaign was fought entirely around Tony Blair's leadership and there is no avoiding the conclusion that at least one factor in Labour's defeat was resistance to New Labour among the Party's supporters and members. The joint statement with Schroeder on the need for cuts in the welfare state across Europe and more flexible labour markets gave very negative signals to Labour supporters and won no support in the centre. In this kind of election, with a low poll and success dependent on mobilising committed supporters, this was a very poor campaign strategy. The decline in the turn out from 36% in 1994 to 23% is too great to be explained by pointing to long term trends of declining participation, or recent bad press for the European Commission. A large part of the explanation must be mass abstention by disillusioned Labour voters. Labour has been defeated twice now in the Rhondda. Dennis Canavan and Tommy Sheridan have shown that the Labour base in Scotland can no longer be relied upon. The Labour leadership will be inviting a disaster if it tries bureaucratically to carve Livingstone out of the Mayoral race. The political price for doing this may now be too high for the leadership to pay – in which case there is everything to play for in the Labour Party. The rout experienced by the Liberals and the inconvenient realities of PR elections have also done nothing to

> "The best single explanation for Labour's poor performance is that Labour did badly because large numbers of erstwhile Labour supporters feel let down by Labour's performance in office. The Labour Party – 'their' party – has not delivered for them. It has scarcely dented long-term unemployment. It has not raised the pay of workers in the public sector. It has not perceptibly improved either the NHS or the education system. Most Labour supporters in this frame of mind are not yet ready to vote Tory, but they have other options: in Scotland to vote SNP, in Wales to vote Plaid Cymru, in all parts of the country simply to stay at home. A BBC poll also suggested that better-educated and more middle class Labour supporters were switching in considerable numbers to the Greens, notably in London and the South-East."
>
> **– Anthony King, Professor of Government at Essex University**

Way



further the Blair project of gobbling up the Liberals and positioning Labour permanently in the centre of British politics.

With a remarkably buoyant xenophobic Tory Party and the election of three UK Independence Party MEPs, the left can feel little satisfaction at the discomfiture of the leadership. The vote for left groupings such as the Socialist Labour Party, the Socialist Party and the Alternative Labour List was dwarfed everywhere in England by the right wing nationalist vote for UKIP candidates. In Scotland and Wales, by contrast, the SNP and Plaid Cymru were positioned clearly to the left of Labour and marginalised such forces.

Some will now believe that Tony Blair can be crucified on the Euro. In my view it would be a mistake for the left to try to pick up the crumbs from the nationalist right's beanfeast. We cannot compete on this terrain. Our emphasis should be to place demands upon the political institutions of the European Union, in the same way as we do upon national institutions (or indeed local and regional ones). No other trading bloc, like NAFTA, or MERCOSUR, has developed political institutions like the European Union. Surely we prefer political decisions to market forces? The Euromarches for Jobs and the two European Full Employment Conventions point the way to the common front needed of the European left.

While we should certainly be opposed to a Single Currency on a deflationary basis, boosting demand and large scale job creation are now inconceivable on the basis of sterling – unless we propose to end the convertibility of sterling and opt for a socialist economy of shortages, queues, black markets and rationing. This model of socialism has been shown to be highly unpopular.

The foreground to the elections was provided by the relentless bombing of Yugoslavia, with Labour acting as the most bellicose cheerleader. Not only was this a deeply shameful episode, it was an ugly harbinger of things to come and underlined the need for a pan-European peace movement capable of mounting serious opposition to the transformation of NATO from a defensive alliance to an imperialist war alliance, capable of intervening regionally and globally at will.

Left of Labour results

● The Socialist Alliance ran a busy, unifying campaign across the West Midlands, with a mixture of Socialist Party, Walsall Democratic Labour Party (including former key councillors), the SWP and the Alliance for Workers Liberty candidates. Fronted by Coventry Councillor Dave Nellist, it gained 0.8% of the vote, which was a surprise given that a leak from Millbank revealed worries about Nellist's chances.

The Alliance had offered Christine Oddy, deselected Labour MEP, a place on the list. This was rejected and Christine gained 32,000 votes (4.3%) with her last minute, one-woman campaign.

The Socialist Labour Party fared even worse than the Alliance, with 0.6% of the vote – coming behind the Socialist Alliance in the West Midlands and well behind the Scottish Socialist Party. London, as expected, produced the SLP's best result of 1.7%.

Ken Coates' Alternative Labour slate, backed by the Independent Labour Network, gained 2.4% (17,409) votes in the East Midlands. In Yorkshire & Humberside, Alternative Labour gained 1.3% (9,554).

● The Greens narrowly won their first UK seat in the European Parliament when Caroline Lucas gained a South East seat. She was assisted by Lynne Armstrong, who stood down as a Labour candidate in protest at the electoral system and Labour's rightward drift and joined the Greens. Jean Lambert won their second seat in London, in a vote thought to be boosted by many who voted Labour at the General Election. As Caroline Lucas said, "I lost count of the many, many traditional Labour supporters who have come up to me in the past few weeks and said that they did not spend 20 years fighting Thatcherism to have the Labour Party perpetuate those things."

● Every CLP was charged £2,000 for the Euro election campaign. Agents up and down the country are seething at the poor return for this money. Leaflets (rather than the far more effective mailshots) were of laughable quality.One agent said, "the leaflets gave no reason why you should vote Labour. Instead there were photos of people no-one recognises with personal details of no interest to voters."

● No wonder the UK electorate held the European institutions in contempt. The supposedly sacked European Commissioners still appeared regularly in the media, going about their work and claiming their fat cat salaries. Unbeknown to most British observers, two have even been elected to the European Parliament – disgraced President of the Commission, Jacques Santer (on the Centre-Right list in Luxembourg) and Emma Bonino in Italy who led her own 'radical' list. Bonino has even had the cheek to say she won't take up her seat if Italy returns her as a Commissioner.

Meanwhile, Neil Kinnock took the opportunity of telling off the electorate of Islwyn for not voting. You couldn't make it up.

French exceptions

Andrew Coates points to the results in France to show that there is an electoral alternative to Blair's Third Way.

Defying the trend of the victory of Europe's right in June's elections for the European Parliament, France saw the left maintain its position. Overall the mainstream left won 38.5% of the vote compared with 35% for the diverse conservative parties. So split were the right between Gaullists, liberals, Euro-sceptics and centrists – standing in three separate lists – that they fought more amongst themselves than against the left. With a poor showing at 12.5% (just below the anti-Euro Charles Pasqua) commentators are now talking of the break-up of President Chirac's party, the RPR.

Prime Minister Lionel Jospin's Socialist Party, with the Citizen Movement of John Pierre Chevenment and left radical allies, gained 21.88% of the vote and 22 seats. The Communists (PCF) remained at a low 6.83% with only six seats. Their "open list", which included diverse "personalities", had difficulties over the Yugoslavia war, with some candidates backing the intervention. Their programme, for a Europe that "moves" was largely a mildly radical version of the Socialists'. The PCF now faces serious difficulties from internal opposition, notably from its Communist left. The Green Party, led by pro-war media star Daniel Cohen-Bendit, made waves by winning nearly 10% and nine seats. In view of this result (perhaps due to worries over genetic engineering and food scandals) Cohen Bendit has called for a special meeting with Jospin to demand a greater role for his government colleagues.

The joint-list Lutte Ouvriere-Ligue Communiste had a score of 5.2% and five seats. Slightly less than expected, this was the first time they have entered the European Parliament.Their forthright stand for the working class and all types of social movement had a big audience at hundreds of meetings across the country. However, Alain Krivine and Arlette Laguiller, appear to have dropped the idea that they would proceed to create a new "anti-capitalist party" bringing in a broad section of the left.

At 5.7% and 5 seats the far-right Front National, led by John-Marie Le Pen easily beat off its rival, led by Bruno Megret, who obtained only 3.1% and no MEPS. Nonetheless, Le Pen was beaten by a pro-hunting list who got 6.8% and the extreme-right vote was nearly halved.

The successful performance of the French "plurielle" left, which despite its retreat on many issues remains anchored in social democratic perspectives, is in sharp contrast with the disasters faced by the Third Way parties of Britain and Germany.

Dutch socialists win first Euro seat

The Dutch Socialist Party scored a record 5% in the election to send a representative to the European Parliament for the first time. As well as its usual rallying cry "Vote Against, Vote SP", the party used the slogan "*Schoon genoeg van dit Europa?*", a play on words which translates as "fed up with this Europe?" but

Steve McGiffen reports on the rise of the Dutch anti-European Union left.

uses the verb which in normal parlance means "to clean up". Handing out tens of thousands of kitchen sponges in the shape of the SP's distinctive bright red tomato symbol, the Socialists concentrated on the hot issue of corrupt and money-wasting practices within the EU institutions. In addition, the campaign focused on poverty, the environment, public transport, genetic engineering and the way in which the transfer of powers from The Hague to Brussels and the new European Central Bank is undermining democracy. That the SP is a unique phenomenon in Europe was underlined by the fact that it will be the first party from outside the mainstream Communist tradition to join the EP's United Left Group. Beginning life as a tiny Maoist current in the early 70s, it quickly evolved into a loose federation of activist groups with some representation on local councils. In the late 80s, however, it transformed itself into a much more unified political party under the leadership of Jan Marijnissen. In 1994, the Netherlands' PR system allowed it to send its first two MPs to The Hague, despite scoring well under 2% of the vote. Last year, this total rose to 3.5%, giving it 5 MPs.

The party's colourful style, shunning traditional far left language and symbolism but maintaining a commitment to real socialist policies and values, is providing the Dutch electorate with a real alternative to the Blairite Labour Party and the increasingly misnamed pro-NATO, pro-EU Green Left. The turn-out in this election was so low, however, that the prizes went to those parties which could turn out the highest proportion of their usual support, which the SP clearly achieved. New SP Euro-MP Eric Meier put the party's success down to the fact that "we were the only party to criticise the EU from a left perspective. All we did was convince people who stayed at home last time that it was worthwhile having a critical Dutch voice on the inside."

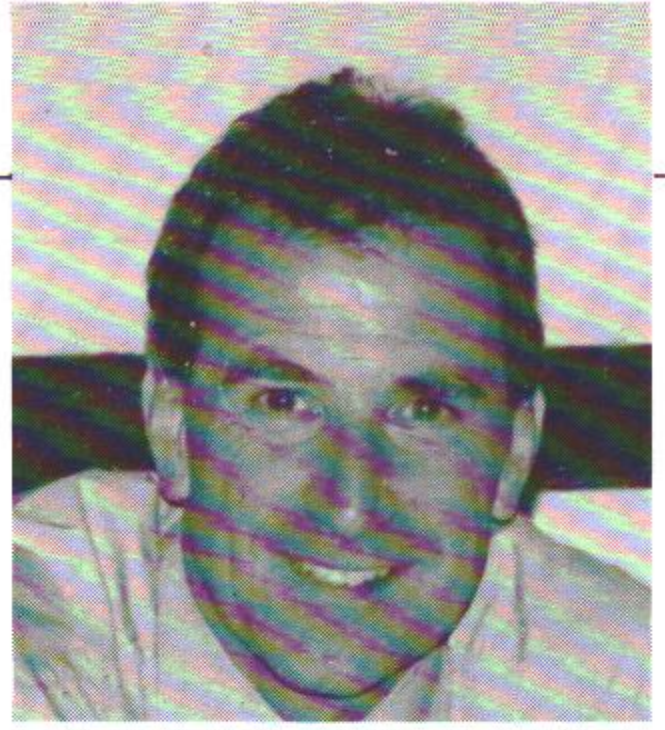
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THE **ALAN SIMPSON** COLUMN

The European election results were a disaster for Labour and the spin being offered by New Labour apologists threatens to turn it into a farce.

In political terms, many of the excuses are simply embarrassing. We were lost without Mandelson – send him back to guide us. Blame it on Beckett – her holiday betrayed us. The voters were too happy – their contentment abandoned us...what a load of guff.

There are more important lessons Labour must learn. The first is that we fought the elections almost without any political programme at all. Europe faces huge challenges in the coming decade but we addressed none of them. Just look at some of the possibilities.

- Building of a pan-European consensus to take on United States biotech multinationals wanting to dump GM food and milk onto markets worldwide.
- A European commitment to uphold the right of any country to define its own "safe food" policies – this would have an internationalism extending well beyond Europe's frontiers.
- Nuclear decommissioning: there is a chain of nuclear reactors along the corridor joining Eastern Europe with the EU that demands assistance no single state can manage. Many are on the same model as Chernobyl. All are ageing and unsafe. Even those with no love of nuclear energy know we will need the industry's skills to decommission the stations and manage the waste.
- European security is no less at risk from the distortion of political priorities from welfare to warfare. The war in the Balkans will have a tax cost of 2p in the pound, the peace even more. Without a re-commitment to welfare spending, Europe will have an increasingly means-tested, socially divisive and anti-immigrant basis to its welfare system.

'We fought the elections almost without any political programme at all. Europe faces huge challenges ... but we addressed none of them.'

- Sustainable agriculture has to be the basic fundamental reform of CAP. Britain lags way behind the rest of Europe in the support given to traditional and organic farming. To commit Britain to a "catch-up" programme within this term of the European Parliament would have been as welcome to farmers looking to convert to organic, as to the public currently heading for supermarket checkouts.
- Investment, jobs and inequality. The huge hole in the Single Currency (non) debate is that it ducks all questions about taxation and redistribution. No Single Currency zone survives without such a framework and, with or without a Single Currency, Europe has to address the details of how it is to rebuild public investment, reduce income inequality and tax corporate wealth.

If Labour wanted to offer the 'strong leadership' in Europe these are the issues it should have taken up. As it was, New Labour tried to take politics out of the Euro elections, and was punished accordingly. The pre-pubescent plotters in Millbank's tuck shop presumed that all they needed was to roll out Tony and that would deliver Labour the vote. It was a disastrous misjudgement.

Personality politics can no more deliver the European elections than public support for GM foods. Nor will they deliver a public vote for the Single Currency. Labour must face up to this reality if it is even to think about an internationalism that can reach beyond the shackles of European monetarist dogma.

No one should gloat about the Euro elections – there were no winners. There was a loser. Democracy itself takes a serious blow when the public turn their backs on political parties in what they regard as sham or irrelevant elections. And that was what we offered them. Party candidate lists, unaccountable European structures and incomprehensible constituencies played a part in the public contempt for the elections, but none of this will be put right by a naive dash for the safety of Mandelson's manipulative magic.

Labour's more urgent need is to bring back the Party not the person. This is the significance of the centenary conference at the TUC in July. The theme is "Democratic Socialism into the 21st Century". What it celebrates is a century of Labour's broad church and the achievements of a party committed to a universal and inclusive welfare, comprehensive education, full employment, accountable democracy and income distribution. What it anticipates is the debate about how these principles are to be applied to the challenges of the century.

All sections of the Party and trade union movement have been drawn into the conference. Those unable to attend will be able to participate by contributing to the positional papers, all of which will to be placed on the Internet. It is about the re-starting of a genuine political debate, not the closing of one.

Every party has to go through its own processes of democratic renewal. Every democracy has to renew its mechanisms for holding the powerful in check, and for placing public need before private greed. This is what socialism is about – the setting of political priorities, not the spinning of plausible fibs.

Immigration Bill –

John Stewart, of the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, explains how 310 Labour MPs voted for the Immigration and Asylum Bill.

Despite the overwhelming opposition of just about every organisation in the country working with immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers, the Government pushed the Immigration and Asylum Bill through the House of Commons in June. There was speculation about a major rebellion against the Bill on the Labour back benches but this failed to materialise. Most Labour MPs who had expressed concern at the provisions contained in the Bill melted away like summer snow leaving only seven Labour MPs with the courage to vote against the Bill on Third Reading.

In *1984*, Orwell's Winston Smith pondered how people cheered when it was announced that the chocolate ration was to be increased to 20 grams per week, when he clearly remembered it had, only the previous week, been cut to 20 grams. He didn't understand why the suckers went for it. In much the same way many Labour Party members will not understand how Labour MPs could be so easily suckered by Jack Straw's sleight of hand manoeuvering.

The much trumpeted concessions amounted to nothing very much at all. The increase in cash provision to asylum seekers from £7 to £10 per week was achieved by cutting the value of food vouchers. The overall budget was unchanged and this will force asylum seekers to eke out an existence, forbidden to take work, on only 70% of minimum income support levels. This legislation will create massive poverty and an increase in begging on city streets. The Bill now goes to the House of Lords. It is to be hoped that the peers, untroubled by the concerns of patronage and career advancement open to members of the Lower House, will amend the Bill and delay its Royal Assent beyond the summer parliamentary recess.

Campaigners against the Bill gathered outside the Houses of Parliament on 15th and 16th June hoping to persuade MPs to go into the "no" lobby against the Bill or to vote for MP Neil Gerrard's amendment which would have given more protection to families of asylum seekers with children. Sadly Neil declined to push his amendment to a vote and so the chance for a larger rebellion was lost. It is possible this amendment may be taken up in the House of Lords in July.

Three hundred and ten Labour MPs voted for the Bill's Third Reading on 16th June. Only seven Labour MPs voted against the Bill in its entirety. They were Diane Abbott, Tony Benn, Jeremy Corbyn, Neil Gerrard, Ken Livingstone, John McDonnell and Alan Simpson. The Liberals and a Welsh Nationalist also opposed the Bill. The seven Labour rebels deserve credit but the tiny size of

Cricket bosses urged to tackle racism

Mike Marqusee writes: The cricket World Cup just staged in this country may have passed largely unnoticed by the general public, but within the cricket world it has precipitated a reassessment of English cricket's place in the wider world, and the game's place within English society.

It is now widely acknowledged that England is on the periphery of a global game whose epicentre is the Indian subcontinent. It is also, finally, being accepted that the most dynamic and committed support for the game in this country is found in the black and Asian communities.

Commentators across the political spectrum have noted and welcomed the enthusiastic Asian presence at World Cup matches, and many have observed that English cricket should do something to tap that enthusiasm. Few, however, have been prepared to concede that racism is a factor in holding back English cricket.

Nonetheless, the case made by Hit Racism for Six, the independent campaign for racial equality in cricket, is gaining widening support. "It is now obvious that it is vital for the future of the game in this country to address the realities of racism and racial inequality," said Ian McDonald, a campaign spokesperson. Hit Racism for Six has urged the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) to adopt a wide-ranging package of practical measures to address patterns of racial exclusion at every level of the game.

In a formal submission to the ECB's recently established Racism Study Group, the campaign outlines proposals for research, development and empowerment. It calls on the ECB to convene a national consultative forum of all those concerned with black and Asian cricket, to draw up a development plan for inner city cricket and earmark funds to implement it, to abandon the ban on banners, placards and musical instruments, and to adopt and promote an anti-racist charter.

The submission is by far the most comprehensive strategy yet devised to address the long-standing issue of racism in cricket. "We are urging the ECB to adopt the three 'R's of cricket development: recognition, respect and resources," said McDonald.

- Hit Racism for Six supporters leafleted cricket fans at the India-Pakistan World Cup match in Manchester on 10th June. The match, always a highlight of the international cricket calendar, took on an unwelcome significance following the military clashes along the Line of Control in Kashmir, with renewed hostility between India and Pakistan, both now in possession of nuclear weapons.

The HR46 leaflet urged fans to: "Support your team! Respect the opposition! Have fun! A World Cup match between India and Pakistan is an occasion to be celebrated and enjoyed. A cricket match is not a war and should not be treated as one. Politicians who try to use cricket to whip up hatred and division – in the sub-continent or in Britain – should be rejected by all those who value the game of cricket."

Hit Racism for Six also warned against heavy-handed security measures, and urged officials, police and stewards to treat the match as a festival. In the event the day was a huge success, the crowd were magnificent, and there may even have been a message for the fans watching at home in the sub-continent.

- See the Hit Racism for Six website: www.hr46.cricket.org

how opposition disintegrated

the rebellion will do nothing to stop the stream of left-wing members out of the Party. It was particularly disappointing to see good left-wing MPs like John and Ann Cryer, Audrey Wise, Ronnie Campbell, George Galloway, Kelvin Hopkins, Llew Smith and Chris Mullin voting for the Bill.

The campaign against the Bill will continue. NCADC will continue to oppose all racist and discriminatory legislation and give support to families and individuals facing deportation. When Jack Straw and his minions at the Home Office are long forgotten the campaigns of deportees who fought back will be remembered.

- NCADC can be contacted on 0121-554 6947, www.ncadc.demon.co.uk



Asylum Bill vigil, 16/6/99.

Photo: Paul Mattsson.

Family asylum fights continue

Emmanuel Eboka and his family continue to campaign against deportation to Nigeria. His uncle brought Emmanuel to London when he was 14 and then abandoned him. He has now been here for over ten years. Four years ago, he met and married Sandra, a UK national from South London. They now have two young children, Theresa and Fiona.

Immigration officers at Becket House, London Bridge, called Emmanuel for an interview on 17th June. Fearing that he would be detained, the Eboka family's supporters organised a protest outside while Emmanuel was being interviewed. Thankfully he was allowed to go home after he had answered their questions.

The Nigerian High Commission in London has pointed out that Emmanuel has no documents proving that he is of Nigerian origin and so they would not necessarily accept him as one of their citizens if he were deported from the UK. Emmanuel is now stuck in limbo with the UK Government trying to deport him and the Nigerian government not prepared to accept him in Nigeria. All the while he, Sandra and their two children have to live with the threat of their family being broken up by the Home Office and forced to live thousands of miles apart.

- Contact the Eboka Family Campaign on 0171-740 3255.

Supporters of the Ozbay Family anti-deportation campaign were cheered by the outcome of Mrs Hanim Ozbay's recent appeal hearing. The Ozbays are a Kurdish Alevi family who fled to Britain after suffering persecution and torture in Turkey and Northern Cyprus. They have a well-supported campaign, backed by their church, the local MP Jeremy Corbyn, local trade unions, and friends from the community.

Mrs Ozbay's appeal hearing was originally scheduled for March but had to be adjourned after the Home Office failed to provide the proper translation facilities. Other members of the Ozbay Family, friends and supporters of the campaign attended the rescheduled hearing. Representatives of Women Against Rape and the Black Women's Rape Action Project were also there to give support.

The hearing was adjourned again (until July 28th) after Hanim broke down while giving evidence on her ordeal in Turkey and Northern Cyprus. However the Home Office Presenting Officer was so moved by Hanim's story that she agreed to recommend that the family be given exceptional leave to remain. Following this the Ozbays received a Home Office letter giving them a further six months admission to the UK while their case is considered.

Supporters of the Ozbay Family should now write to the Immigration Minister Mike O'Brien MP at the Home Office, London SW1, asking him to act on the Presenting Officer's recommendation and allow the Ozbays to remain safely in the UK.

- Contact the Ozbay Family Campaign on 0171-263 7358.

Agriculture's neutron bomb

Consumers and environmental groups here are winning the argument about the safety of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). But their economic impact on Third World farming could be equally devastating. Mike Phipps reports.

World population levels may be set to double over the next 50 years, but the US seed giant Monsanto claim to have found the answer to food shortages and famine. GMOs, they argue, producing higher yield crops on smaller plots of land, are the key to ending global hunger. But if this is true, why are subsistence farmers from poorer countries – supposedly the main beneficiaries of this breakthrough – so militantly opposed to the new technology?

The answer lies partly in the modified seed being promoted, whose "terminator" gene makes the next generation of seeds sterile, forcing farmers to buy new seed every year. Currently a massive 80% of crops in Third World countries are grown from seed saved by farmers from the previous year's crops. By marketing "suicide seeds", fertile for only one year, multinationals like Monsanto will force farmers to buy new seeds every year, driving up production costs. For many this could make the difference between survival and starvation.

One effect of GMOs will be increased dependence of poor countries on the multinationals. Companies like Monsanto are buying up smaller local seed companies so that farmers will have little choice but to buy seed from the big monopolies – at a price determined by the latter of course. In Argentina, for example, Monsanto already control half the maize seed market. The result will be the elimination of smaller farmers and rising costs and food prices that will threaten the food security of 1.4 billion rural people who rely on recycled seed.

Another effect will be a decline in agricultural diversity. Fifty thousand varieties of plant are grown currently in India alone. Each has different characteristics allowing it to survive under different conditions – a genetic insurance policy against drought and disease. But with farmers forced to buy declining varieties of seed from the big companies, their crops could be more vulnerable to pests. At the same time, the environmental impact of herbicide-tolerant GMOs has been likened to giving one plant a genetic radiation suit, then dropping a small nuclear device to wipe out all other plant life in the area (as well as animal life that depends on it). With it would disappear any hope of sustainable farming. No wonder GMOs have been called the neutron bomb of agriculture.

At the international level, the seed giants have brushed aside all objections to GMOs as a breach of World Trade Organisation rules. At the Biosafety Protocol in February, they blocked attempts to make them accountable for the safety of the new technology. The US Administration was not even formally present at the negotiations, preferring to send lobbyists direct from the biotech industry. The close nature of the relationship is illustrated by the fact that Monsanto's chairman Bob Shapiro is also a member of Clinton's Trade Policy and Negotiations Committee. The company continues to seek closer ties with European governments.

Excluded from these international negotiations, Third World farmers are taking direct action. The KRRS, the largest farmers' movement in Karnataka, India, has been leading a 'cremate Monsanto' campaign by burning experimental crops. Similar crop burnings have occurred in the huge soya growing region of southern Brazil in protest against illegal planting of GMOs by Monsanto's affiliate Monsoy.

These protesters know that it's not lack of food that causes hunger and starvation in the world. It's lack of access to land, credit and money to buy or grow food – in short, the whole unequal power structure that multinational biotech companies seek to strengthen.

- Contact the World Development Movement, 25 Beehive Place, London SW9 7QR.

Toxic disaster in Paraguay

Union and environmental organisations are calling on the US-based Delta & Pine Land Company – the world's largest cottonseed producer and currently in the process of being acquired by Monsanto – to assume responsibility for a public health disaster created in Paraguay by its local subsidiary.

Last November, Delta & Pine Paraguay dumped 660 tons of expired cottonseed in a rural community 120 kilometres from the capital Asuncion. The seeds were treated with high concentrations of toxic pesticides, including carcinogenic compounds and organophosphates – powerful poisons which attack the central nervous system.

Health problems were immediately reported. Well-known symptoms of pesticide poisoning – vertigo, nausea, headaches, neurological disorders, memory loss, insomnia and skin rashes – appeared immediately, and worsened as the first rains brought with them a malevolent odour which hung over the area. Instead of water, toxic sludge oozed from the wells and pumps.

One man has died from the effects but so far the government has taken no action. Activists are demanding the immediate decontamination of the area, medical treatment and compensation for the victims and full disclosure from the company about the circumstances of this and other possible dumpings.

Islington North Labour Party
Women's Section

Open meeting

Do women want a different kind of politics?

Rachel Mclean,
Labour Party National Women's Officer
will talk about the new Women's Forums

7.45pm, 5th July

All women welcome

Red Rose Club, 129 Seven Sisters Road, N7

(Finsbury Park tube)

LABOUR LEFT

Briefing

WAR SPECIAL

A poisonous peace imposed

The war is over. But why was it waged in the first place? Mike Phipps investigates.

Looking at the terms of the Yugoslav peace deal, one immediately wonders why NATO felt it necessary to bomb continuously for 80 days. Virtually everything in the agreement had already been accepted by the Milosevic regime at the Rambouillet talks.

The things to which Belgrade objected have mysteriously vanished. Gone is any reference to a referendum on the status of Kosova within three years, possibly leading to independence. The Western intervention in Kosova will now be under UN auspices, something the Serbs had always insisted on. Appendix B of Rambouillet, giving NATO sweeping legal immunities and unfettered access throughout the whole of Yugoslavia, has been dropped. What then was the purpose of NATO's aerial offensive, producing 2,000 civilian casualties and massive infrastructural and environmental damage?

It now seems that the Serbs' rejection of the Rambouillet "diktat" was deliberately engineered by US negotiators. A State Department official told journalists at Rambouillet, before NATO attacks began: "We intentionally set the bar too high for the Serbs to comply. They need some bombing and that's what they're going to get."

Other aspects of the peace deal confirm the view that NATO was operating to a US economic agenda quite distinct from its professed humanitarianism. Kosova is to enjoy "substantial autonomy" within Yugoslavia, taking full account of the Rambouillet Accords. These call for the economy to be reorganised on free market principles. The same stipulation in the Dayton Agreement for Bosnia has resulted in the privatisation of all industries, services, utilities and banks amid widespread allegations of corruption and fraud.

Many Serbs are fleeing Kosova, creating ethnically pure regions. As in Bosnia, those in ethnically mixed families will struggle to find a place.

It's hard to see what the Kosovars gain from this deal. With no long-term arrangements for their future status, any attraction in returning to their devastated homes will be overshadowed by this insecurity. Whether 17,000 angry KLA soldiers will be willing to disarm under these conditions is also questionable. It remains unclear just what is meant by "demilitarisation of the KLA", as required by the agreement.

Milosevic will probably stay in place despite his indictment by the UN for war crimes. US State Department officials have argued throughout that it is legitimate to blame the Yugoslav population for the actions of its government – hence their indifference to NATO's many "off-target" raids on hospitals, residential and shopping areas. While socialists here, like oppositionists in Yugoslavia, welcome the indictment of Milosevic, we need to ask why charges are not laid against Western leaders who ordered the use of depleted uranium warheads and cluster bombs in civilian areas.

The broader consequences of the war are far-reaching. NATO is committed to extending its role across the whole of Europe, as far as the Caucasus. A military pillar of the European Union, implicit in the Maastricht Treaty but so far unactivated, is now being established. The use of armed force in defiance of international law against countries that do not bend to the demands of Western imperialism is likely to recur.

Here, many in the Labour Party will heave a sigh of relief that the war is over and hope politics will now return to normal. But in reality the war has utterly transformed domestic politics, with thousands of Party members feeling a deep sense of alienation from a war-mongering leadership that has betrayed basic human values. Then there is the cost – an estimated bill to Britain of £400 million for the war alone, never mind the further billions needed for reconstruction.

Military strategists claim that the war against Yugoslavia is the first to be won by aerial bombardment alone. But it is also the first to be waged by an alliance whose European governments overwhelmingly comprise parties based on the votes of workers and the poor – Blair, Schroeder, Jospin et al. The disjunction between these governments and their supporters looks likely to deepen in the period ahead.

Hollow victory

We never went to war for the return of refugees. We went to war for a peace agreement accepted by the Kosova Albanians but rejected by the Serbs – an agreement that NATO's leaders have themselves now rejected in their desperation to finish the air bombardment on Serbia ... Incredibly, we have allowed our leaders to bend the historical record, to twist the truth out of all recognition so that NATO's "victory" will be the return of an army of refugees who were not even refugees when we began this wretched war...NATO had every reason to know what would happen if it went to war with Serbia; on 18th March, General Nebojsa Pavkovic said in Belgrade that "settling scores with the terrorists [sic] still in Kosovo doesn't pose any problem and that's what we'll do if our country is attacked from the air or the ground".

– Robert Fisk in *The Independent*

Victors' justice?

Fred Abrahams of Human Rights Watch comments on the war crimes investigations now underway in Kosova.

Hundreds of war crimes investigators are descending on Kosova to collect evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Serbian and Yugoslav forces in recent months.

Their findings will be forwarded to the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia, the international court established to prosecute war crimes committed on the territory of the former Yugoslavia since 1991 in The Hague.

For the first time in the Tribunal's short history, therefore, investigators will have direct and timely access to victims, witnesses and sites of serious war crimes.

While the crimes committed by Serbian forces now dominate the newspaper front pages and lead television news bulletins, they are hardly new. Violations of the rules of war increased in both intensity and frequency in the wake of the NATO bombing, but indiscriminate attacks, summary executions, and the systematic destruction of civilian objects have been standard features of the Serbian government's anti-insurgency campaign since the outbreak of fighting in February 1998.

What is new is the Western governments' enthusiasm for and commitment to international justice. While the Tribunal pleaded for more financial and political support – especially much-needed intelligence on Yugoslavia's chain of command – from the beginning of the conflict, it was only after NATO launched its bombing campaign that such assistance was forthcoming.

While human rights activists must welcome this support, the timing of the West's new-found commitment to war crimes investigations suggests a selective approach to international justice. It seems the West is only promoting justice when it suits its political needs.

After the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement that ended the fighting in Bosnia, most Western governments downplayed the importance of the Tribunal, and turned a blind eye to human rights abuses in Kosova, because Milosevic was deemed essential as a guarantor of the fragile peace.

As a result, despite spending more than three-and-a-half years in Bosnia, NATO has failed to arrest the two most notorious Bosnian Serb war criminals, Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic. Had they been arrested and placed on trial, NATO would have sent out a clear signal that it was not prepared to tolerate similar violent and abusive behaviour in other parts of the Balkans. It may also have deterred Serbian forces from committing atrocities in Kosova.

The use of investigators from countries who were parties to the conflict, such as the US and UK, risks undermining the Tribunal's credibility as an objective judicial organ and even creating a sense of "victor's justice". Lasting peace requires a more comprehensive approach to punishing war crimes which is, above all, seen to be just.

In order to demonstrate genuine objectivity, the Tribunal should investigate potential war crimes committed by all sides in the conflict. This includes investigating actions of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) – which may have executed as many as 140 ethnic Serbs before the NATO bombing began – and even NATO for its selection of targets in Yugoslavia and its use of indiscriminate weapons such as cluster bombs.

- Fred Abrahams is a senior researcher covering Kosova for Human Rights Watch. Article courtesy of Institute for War and Peace Reporting.

Network of Socialist Campaign Groups Conference

Get organised and get involved: a socialist approach to the Policy Forum process

Conway Hall, Saturday 24th July 1999, 2pm-5pm
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Speakers: John Cryer MP, Liz Davies NEC, Christine Shawcroft NEC elect, Ann Black NPF.

Workshops, creche, refreshments

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Tel: 0171-515 3868

Workers' Aid for Kosova

The NATO-Milosevic deal over Kosova is a peace without justice. Blair and Clinton remain steadfastly opposed to the Kosova people controlling their own destiny. On paper Kosova remains under Serbian control. In practice it is under NATO control. Aid and assistance from Western government agencies and the "aid business" will be used to consolidate this deal, to prevent the whole Kosova population having democratic control over events.

It is up to the working class movement internationally, to the anti-fascist, anti-imperialist movement to provide support to the Kosovars in ways that helps their own self-organisation and their right to self determination.

Since 1996, Workers' Aid has been co-operating with the Kosova education and mining unions and more recently with the student union. We sent lorries of food to refugees in Albania and recently we sent supplies to Pristina, including office equipment for the education union as their office was stripped bare by Serb police. Food is also being taken to the miners in Mitrovica who we hear have just re-entered the mines they have been locked out of for ten years. On July 20th a bigger convoy of supplies will go to Mitrovica and Pristina.

- Workers Aid for Kosova, Unit 26, 41 Old Birley Street, Manchester M15 5RF.
Tel 0161-232 9888
email: workersaid@yahoo.com

"I feel like an empty shell"

Viktor in Belgrade tells an Italian journalist of his rage as the war in Kosova comes to a halt



Photo: Paul Mattsson.

Anti-war demo, London, 8/5/99.

I'm going to write in Serbian to you again, since there are no words in English that could explain what I am feeling right now, and what I think that the majority of people in Belgrade feel about the "peace" that seems to have come. No, I haven't accidentally put the word peace under quotation marks, therefore making it relative... You know, when a man finds himself in a dramatic and uncommon situation, as we were in for almost eighty days, he invokes basic defensive instincts in order to help himself in the struggle for survival. But when everything ends, you should go back to normal life. The sad fact is that prospects for "normal life" seem much worse now than before March 24th, when everything started.

The "peace" has finally arrived, but there is still a bit of bombing just to remind us. I hope that we won't end up like Iraq, which has had a "peace" like this since 1991. I remember when Students' Protest 1996/97 ended, I got the same problem of adaptation to normal life. What helped me then was the feeling of joy and pride because of victory against our regime, as well as the hope that we would live slightly better then we lived before that. And what do I have now?

My heart is black with rage and sorrow because of all that happened, and I deeply believe that it could have been avoided. I'm disappointed with the world that hails democracy but couldn't (or didn't want to?) solve this problem, but reacted as Alexander the Great did long ago – pulled out his sword and cut, without thinking of the consequences. I'm afraid that this is not the end, but also that this is not even the new beginning. It is as if we are caught in some commercial break between two movies.

Both sides have declared victory through their propaganda services. So what? All of us should be happy about that... But after so much destruction and killing; after the downfall of a few blossoms of democratic institutions in Yugoslavia, and as well after the end of faith in democratic institutions of the world; after the loss of hope that something is going to change after the war (because the same ones that started this will remain in power after it, on both sides); after the announcement that no economic aid is going to come to us; after all this I wonder, can I be happy? I'm sorry, but I can't. I'm not happy. I feel like an empty shell. I'm trying to recover my strength and fill it with something.

Depleted uranium – for the record

Mr Jeremy Corbyn **(Islington, North): May I ask the Prime Minister to turn his mind to the situation in Yugoslavia? Does he accept that, after two months of bombing, seeing hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing Kosovo, hundreds if not thousands of civilian casualties in Yugoslavia and an environmental disaster caused by the use of depleted uranium and the bombing of chemical works, it is time to achieve a peace settlement by involving, rather than bypassing, the United Nations?**

The Prime Minister: **First, on a point of fact, in the last day, the United Nations body responsible for the environment has said that the Serbian claims are nonsense and untrue – there has not been the environmental damage claimed...**
– 26th May

Mr George Robertson: **The US confirmed that it used depleted uranium based ammunition during the Kosovo air campaign.**

– 22nd June. Written answer to Llew Smith MP.

Debate: how could the l

Alan Thornett probes the effectiveness of the anti-war movement and the role of the left within it. He argues it was weaker because it did not embrace Kosovar national rights and unambiguously oppose ethnic cleansing.

In truth the mobilisations were small given the scale of the war, and were unable to exert an influence on its outcome. This reflected the success of NATO propaganda, the politics of the anti-war movement, and the role of the left. A section of the left, exemplified by Ken Livingstone, disgracefully supported the war. Of those on the left who opposed the war, most failed to understand that there were two wars taking place – the bombing of Serbia by NATO and the ethnic war against the Kosovar Albanians by Milosevic. Although this was intensified by the NATO bombing it was not started by it.

The nationally recognised campaign against the war was the Committee for Peace in the Balkans which had existed since the Bosnian war. Then it opposed the right of the Bosnians to indepen-dece, and even denied, or minimised, many of the atrocities committed by the Serbian military. Now it (rightly) opposed the bombing but set its face against the aspirations of Kosovan independence.

This stance shaped the politics of the anti-war movement, at least at national level. There was little mention of the rights of the Kosovars, even ethnic cleansing took a back seat. Yet most potential opponents of the war, beyond the ranks of the organised left, strongly opposed Milosevic's "ethnic cleansing", and stayed away once they perceived the pro-Serb bias of the movement – even those who did not see NATO as a solution. Consequently the demonstrations were comprised largely of the hard-left and sections of the Serb community including contingents of Serb nationalists who militantly opposed Kosovan self-determination.

This was compounded when the biggest far-left organisation, working within the campaign, the SWP, fell in behind the politics of the Committee. It led to the bizarre situations where Serb nationalists were happy to carry SWP placards (saying stop the bombing and NATO out) while chanting anti-Kosovan slogans. On one anti-war demonstration those carrying placards supporting self-determination for Kosova were subjected to the continuous chant of "Kosovo is Serbian" from Serb nationalists carrying SWP placards. It became normal for anyone defending the Kosovar Albanians to be intimidated by Serb nationalists. Even giving out a leaflet with the Albanian spelling of Kosova could invoke a challenge. Not that Serbs nationalists should have been excluded from the demonstrations, but to maximise them it was necessary to get the balance right between opposition to NATO and the rights of the Kosovars.

Of course the SWP cannot be responsible for who carries their placards. But they failed to distinguish themselves politically and publicly from Serb nationalism. Their opposition to Milosevic did not resolve the problem since the real divide was any mention of the rights of the Kosovars.

On the first national demonstrations Kosovar Albanians were barracked by most of those on them and treated as the enemy. These were the very people who have been ethnically cleansed by Milosevic! They were completely wrong to support the NATO intervention, as most of them did, but it was understandable after years of persecution by Milosevic.

Those rejecting self determination for the Kosovars also had no solution to the war since there was, and is, no answer to conflict in the Balkans without a solution to the national question. Consequently some resorted to a "UN solution", others to abstract appeals for "peace", a future socialist society, or to workers unity across the Balkans.

The anti-war movement did not take a position on the arming of the KLA of course, although this was an important debate. Many of us argued that they should have been armed. This did not imply any political support for them. Socialists should never support nationalism as an ideology. What we supported was the right of the Kosovars to defend themselves and pursue their choice of independence. In any case the KLA, with all its problems, does not have a single political character and can best be described as a national liberation movement in formation.

So what "solution" has now been reached? For Milosevic Kosova remains a part of Serbia, the multi-national force moving into Kosova is nominally under UN auspices, and the KLA is being disarmed. Previously unacceptable conditions, such as the right of NATO access to any part of Serbia, have been removed. NATO, on the other hand can claim victory – messy as it may have been – with some justification. NATO held together during the bombing, and has secured its new role as an offensive force. US imperialism and its main allies such as New Labour in Britain have been greatly strengthened. For Kosova, it is now under NATO occupation and yet another solution is to be tried which fails to resolve the underlying political problem.

One face of the anti-war demos



left back the Kosovars?

The anti-war movement was caught between two extremes, argues Mike Marquesee.

As a participant in the campaign against the NATO assault on the Balkans, I sometimes felt sandwiched between two rival extremes.

One extreme adopted what might be called a "campist" view of the war. They were reluctant to criticise the Milosevic regime or to acknowledge the persecution of the Kosovars, and tended to dismiss every claim about "Serb atrocities" as NATO propaganda and every criticism of Serb nationalism as "demonisation". Strangely, they made the same link between the Serb people and the Milosevic oligarchy as the NATO bombs. In many respects, this extreme was the mirror image of NATO ideology, with the moral polarities reversed.

While I don't think speakers at anti-war events should have been required to denounce Milosevic, I do think a failure to acknowledge the culpability of the Milosevic regime and its racist ideology made our humanitarianism seem as selective as NATO's. Any anti-war movement that could be construed as pro-Milosevic would have remained isolated, whatever course the war took.

On the other extreme, there was an insistence on the sole culpability of Milosevic to the exclusion of others – inside and outside the Balkans. This was often accompanied by knee-jerk hostility to any argument that appeared to endorse any of the claims made by Serb nationalists, and a resistance to criticism of either the KLA or Albanian nationalism.

Photo: Paul Mattsson



At the root of this view is the antiquated habit of classifying all nations and nationalisms in a rigid hierarchy of oppressor and oppressed, and to align one's sympathies accordingly. The slogan "national self-determination for the Kosovars" was treated as a self-evident and pre-eminent truth, the magic solution to the complexities of opposing an imperialist war against an obnoxious regime.

The insistence on turning the claims of national identity and national territorial rights based on identity into absolutes has itself been one of the driving forces in the last decade of suffering in the Balkans. Of course, when a minority faces persecution and exclusion, it has the right to form whatever institutions of self-organisation are necessary to protect itself. But as a slogan, "Independence for Kosova" raised as many questions as it answered. Independence at any cost? By any means? What if an independent Kosova led to an expanded Albania? And "arm the KLA" was always a Pandora's box. Those who raised this slogan will be as appalled as the rest of us at the revenge killings and the reverse "ethnic cleansing" – but they are in part the result of the KLA being armed.

Experience in Sri Lanka, Kashmir, and, yes, Ireland, suggests powerfully that the first issue is human rights – these are non-negotiable. Apart from cases of outright foreign occupation, national rights, however, are clearly matters of dispute, in which claim and counter-claim are measured against each other. This applies most strongly in multi-ethnic regions like the Balkans where various populations with shifting ethnic, national, or religious affiliations have mingled for centuries. That is not to say that in the end some claims do not prove much stronger than others. But it is to suggest the danger of transforming any of these claims into absolutes, and the futility of attempts to impose one claim over another through coercion. Too often, the solution of one "national question" merely gives rise to another.

There were not "two wars". There was an escalating and ultimately explosive military conflict in which several parties – each with their own constituencies and objectives – took part. The KLA's war was subordinated to NATO's war, and when that subordination breaks down, it will be followed by a multi-sided conflict in which different parties will claim the mantle of Kosovar nationalism.

Though our media and much of our intelligentsia would have it otherwise, in any serious moral discourse the logical presumption must be against war. That is not a pacifist but a rationalist and humanist stance. The burden of proof lies overwhelmingly with those who advocate war. That is why the anti-war movement was right to highlight the human cost of the NATO intervention, and to ask how that cost could be justified by any of its "humanitarian" achievements.

The left needs to draw on the critique of war sustained by the various elements of the international peace movement. Its insistence that war itself is an evil and that "just wars" are few and far between is a corrective to the moral instrumentalism that has marked Stalinist, Trotskyist and social democratic traditions. There is also, of course, a long-established socialist critique of war well-founded in generations of bitter working-class experience. The poor and voiceless always pay a disproportionate share of the costs of war, while the rich and powerful determine its means and ends. It is in the nature of modern warfare that its agents are unaccountable; and wars of the sort NATO conducted are invariably anti-democratic in their impact.

Many people in Britain seem quite certain where the borders should be drawn in the Balkans and who should be allotted which territory, but surely the preconditions for any just and lasting resolution are peace, respect for civil rights, economic development, promotion of dialogue and a broad struggle for accountability.

All are worse off

Jan Oberg, director of the Transational Foundation for Peace and Future Research, on the price of a misnamed peace.

The media tell us that there is a 'peace' agreement and that NATO 'peace-keepers' are in Kosovo. To a peace professional it's all Orwellian Newspeak. This authoritarian NATO operation bodes ill for the future, for world order, lawful governance, democracy, moral politics and peace. The present and future costs of this type of peace policy are unacceptable and out of proportion with the problem it purported to solve. Today Serbs and Albanians are more polarised than ever.

None of the diktats make reference to institutionalised consultations with the Yugoslav government. There is no mention of an independent Kosovo, and the KLA must be disarmed. So, neither the Serb nor the Albanian side is going to get or achieve anything beyond what NATO will allow them to.

There are some 800,000 Albanian refugees. It is highly unlikely that they will be able to go back this year; getting 50,000 troops operable in a heap of ruins full of mines and with no water is not done overnight. And what would they come home to? After four years about 10% of the refugees have returned to Bosnia. Then there is the other – forgotten – refugee problem. Since 1995 Yugoslavia has hosted some 600,000 predominantly Serb refugees from Croatia, Bosnia, and Macedonia. There are 150,000 to 200,000 Serbs in Kosovo; if they choose to leave, there will be as many Serbs inside as Albanians outside waiting to come home.

In addition, the bombings have made many leave Belgrade and other parts of Yugoslavia for Hungary and other European countries (if they can) and displaced thousands inside Yugoslavia. Finally, when the worst is over we may expect hundreds of thousands wanting to leave as they see no future in the double cage of the Milosevic regime, the NATO occupation and the devastation of the country. So the real refugee problem may reach two million people.

Countries around have paid a multi-billion dollar price too. Although some may capitalise on it, full compensation is out of the question. Macedonia is on the verge of collapse; Albania is converted to a combined refugee camp on the one hand and a NATO base and KLA training ground on the other. Croatia suffered a heavy blow to its tourist industry this summer. All Yugoslavia's trade partners have lost markets, first during years of sanctions and now because of the bombing devastation. This type of peacemaking has destabilized the region for years to come.

And there is a larger framework. The Ukrainian parliament has voted unanimously to revert the country to its former nuclear status. The Russian National Security Council has approved the modernisation of all strategic and tactical nuclear warheads. It decided to develop strategic low-yield nuclear missiles capable of pin-point strikes world-wide. The defence ministry authorised a change in nuclear doctrine. Thus Russians feel humiliated through the 1990s, but go along with most US/Western demands because of its frail leadership, its economic weakness – it can hardly pay for its own troops to be deployed in Kosovo for years ahead – and its dependence on the West. And in Beijing, the bombing of the Chinese Belgrade embassy has resulted in a shift away from the no-first-strike principle. Add the spy accusation, human rights policies and WTO negotiations and we begin to see the contours of a new Cold War. Russia, China and India – and others – have learnt not to trust the stated peaceful aims of the West. Many countries with secessionist minorities are likely to wonder anxiously when they will get the treatment Yugoslavia did.

Remember Gandhi's famous dictum that "means are ends-in-the-making." Mighty weapons, NATO dictates, de facto occupation and an all-dominating US presence cannot bring genuine peace and democracy to the peoples of the Balkans. It is not diplomacy backed up with force, it's force backed up with diplomacy. The process has systematically marginalised small NATO countries, non-NATO countries, the UN, OSCE and NGOs. It has torn to pieces every vision of a multi-cultural, participative world order and the principle of bringing about peace by peaceful means. We are all worse off with this outcome.

This hard examination of NATO's 'victory' comes from Stratfor, a private intelligence company based in Austin, Texas which provides businesses with in-depth analysis on geopolitical issues.

NATO did not win the war militarily. It won the war with a breath-taking diplomatic performance in the last week that was duplicitous, disingenuous, and devious – precisely what brilliant diplomacy is supposed to be. Yet, at the same moment that NATO's diplomacy snatched victory from the jaws of military stalemate, its very characteristics have set the stage for an ongoing and perhaps insoluble problem not only in the Balkans, but within the councils of NATO and ultimately, in the global geopolitical reality.

Unlike the Iraqi war of 1991, there can be no argument that NATO's air power had defeated Serbia's ground forces in Kosovo or elsewhere. Serbia's ability to resist NATO's entrance into Kosovo remained intact. Milosevic did not act as he did because the air campaign had crippled him. Milosevic acted as he did because it appeared to him that a satisfactory diplomatic resolution was available and because he believed the geopolitical situation had developed in an unfavorable direction. The shift in the strategic environment was, obviously, the fall of Primakov and the increasing unreliability of Russia as Serbia's patron. The diplomatic solution was the G8 compromise, which was understood to differ fundamentally from the Rambouillet accord. As the G8 was written, Milosevic's acceptance of it did not mean a capitulation to NATO, but the acceptance of an international peace-keeping force under UN control, enabled by a UN Security Council resolution.

NATO, mainly the US and UK, went into action the minute Milosevic accepted the compromise. NATO created a public atmosphere in which it successfully portrayed Milosevic's acceptance of G8 as its own victory. What began as a public relations campaign designed for domestic consumption was rapidly transformed into the accepted reality.

From the collapse of the border negotiations with Serbian generals on the evening of June 6th until the entry of NATO forces on the morning of June

NATO's dubious victory

13th, NATO diplomats brilliantly manipulated, by completely confusing, the situation. For example, they agreed to enable the Security Council resolution called for by the G8 accords. They agreed to give the UN control over civil administration. They agreed to extensions in the Serb pullout. They agreed to a Russian presence in Kosovo. They agreed with everything, yet gave away nothing. Their goal was simple: to get NATO troops into Kosovo. NATO understood that once that was achieved, they would run Kosovo, regardless of agreements.

The critical part of these manoeuvers was to keep the Russians under control. Therefore, its goal was to split the Russians into as many camps as possible and to isolate hard liners. NATO simply had to impress on Milosevic that the Russians were not prepared to enforce the accords they had themselves negotiated. NATO used its influence in Moscow to limit the Pristina force to a symbolic gesture. NATO then proceeded to surround, isolate, and ignore the Russians. Russian forces at Pristina, rather than becoming the trigger of a NATO-Russian confrontation, became benignly treated hostages.

Even more than a victory for NATO, this was a victory for the Anglo-American coalition that drove this war. And therein lies the tale. Everything has a cost. The first price that NATO must pay is the victory itself. It now controls Kosovo. That is a booby prize if there ever was one. Second, NATO is now responsible for the stability of the whole of the Balkan peninsula. On the bright side, NATO now has a full-time mission to keep it occupied.

NATO's greatest price will be paid in NATO itself. Gerhard Schroeder has tried to put a good face on it, but the Germans were and remain appalled by the risks the Anglo-Americans forced Germany to accept in relation to the Russians. Schroeder insisted that Russia should be treated with "respect," a code word for avoiding another such confrontation.

Germany cannot afford another episode of Anglo-American diplomatic brilliance. Schroeder said, "Human rights are and should be inviolable," but that "we have to look at issues very closely and in fact differentiate between different situations." He went on to say that NATO action should be "confined to its own territory and that should continue to be its way." After Kosovo, a compliant Germany within NATO simply should not be taken for granted any longer.

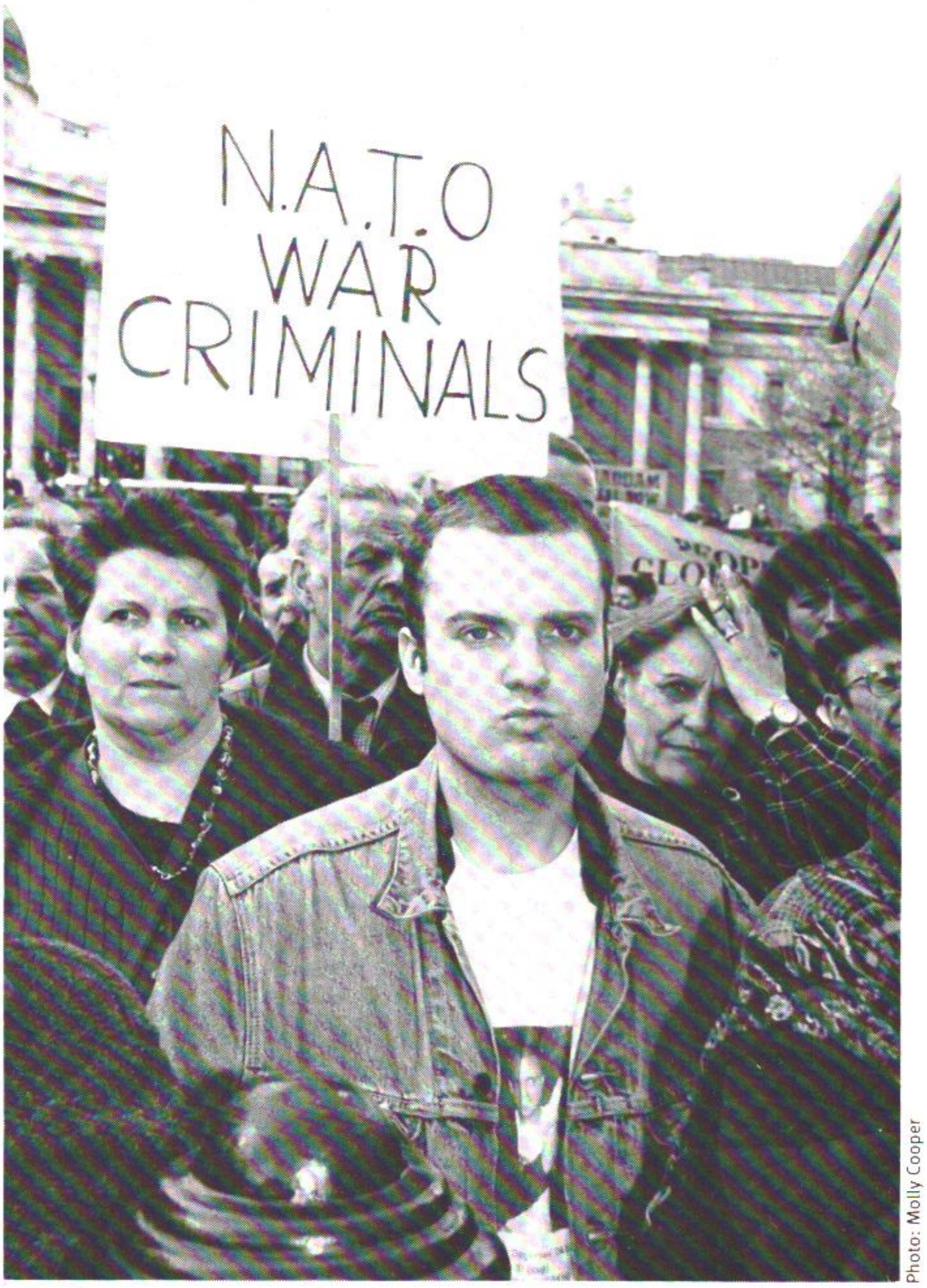


Photo: Molly Cooper

Anti-war demo, Trafalgar Square, April 1999.

The Kosovo affair carries with it another price. Kosovo was beyond Russia's reach. There are areas that are very much within its reach, such as the Baltics, Ukraine, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. NATO has established a precedent: it can intervene in other countries so long as human rights issues justify it. Human rights violations abound in the former Soviet Union. If suffering humanity is a justification for war, NATO just gave Russia the moral basis for reclaiming its empire.

This is a victory whose price will be higher than anyone anticipated or would have been willing to pay at the beginning of the war.

Destroying a whole society

Andrea Needham, *Voices in the Wilderness UK*, reports on the consequences of the West's war on another region of the world and the effects of the immoral sanctions against Iraq.

"We have no quarrel with the people of Iraq." These words, repeated ad nauseam by Messrs Blair and Cook in an attempt to justify their continued support for the most devastating economic sanctions ever imposed on any country, would sound very hollow to Nadwa, a young woman we met in a hospital in Basrah, in the south of Iraq, in May. She was feeding her son, Anwar, who at six months old was only half the normal weight for children of his age. He made a pathetic sight, lying limply on a plastic mattress (sheets are not allowed under the sanctions), his bones sticking out and his uncomprehending face showing the withered 'old man' appearance characteristic of children with marasmus – advanced malnutrition. Nadwa told us that the monthly government food ration supplied to every citizen usually ran out after three weeks; after that, she fed Anwar only soup and rice. Her husband was out of work, and with four more children to feed they simply couldn't afford to buy nutritious food.

Anwar has plenty of company in a country which has been subject to UN sanctions for nearly nine years. A quarter of Iraqi children under five are chronically malnourished and the UN reports that child mortality rates have tripled since sanctions were imposed. This is in a country which previously had one of the best health systems in the Middle East, and where the most common nutritional problem affecting children was obesity. Now, hospitals are crumbling, medicines are in short supply, and children are dying in huge numbers.

The problem is not simply lack of food. Water treatment plants and distribution networks were severely damaged during the Gulf War, which caused $232bn damage to the civilian infrastructure. In the absence of funds to repair the system, water quality has been decreasing ever since, leading to a huge increase in water-borne disease. Lack of antibiotics or even simple intravenous fluids means that children often die from entirely curable conditions such as gastroenteritis.

We were in Iraq as part of a five-person delegation from Voices in the Wilderness, the 23rd such delegation to Iraq since 1996. Voices was set up to break the sanctions by taking medicines and medical supplies to Iraq without applying for export licences. This is an offence punishable by up to twelve years imprisonment for US citizens and five years for those of us from Britain. So far, nobody from either country has been prosecuted, although the US group, and four named individuals, have been threatened with fines totalling $163,000 for taking medicines and toys to Iraq. The first delegates from Britain, in February 1998, had their medicines seized by Customs and on their return were arrested and threatened with prosecution, although no action was subsequently taken.

Although it might be possible for us to obtain licences for the supplies we take to Iraq, we refuse to apply for them, seeing the act of breaking the sanctions as a powerful statement of conscience, an act of civil disobedience against an inhumane and illegal system.We do not accept that the British Government should have the right to veto our attempt to help people in Iraq and cannot co-operate with – and thereby give legitimacy to – the licensing system.

The issue of sanctions on Iraq has produced a storm of disinformation from the British government. We are told again and again that, "We have allowed Saddam to sell oil to buy as much food and medicine for the Iraqi people as is necessary," (Tony Blair, 16 November 1998). This is completely untrue; low oil prices and US-inspired delays in procuring spare parts for the oil industry meant that last year, oil revenues from the oil-for-food deal amounted to only $3.04bn over six months, rather than the $5.2bn Blair would have us believe. 30% of this was deducted for the UN Compensation Fund, UN operating costs and pipeline fees, leaving only $1.7bn available for humanitarian relief, well below what is needed even to provide for immediate needs. This is borne out by an expert panel set up by the UN Security Council to report on the humanitarian situation in Iraq.

The British Government, in insisting on the continuation of sanctions, bears direct responsibility for the crisis in Iraq: the 4,000 children under five dying every month, the nearly one million malnourished children, all the people deprived of their fundamental human right of access to health care, clean water, housing, education. As former UN Humanitarian Co-ordinator for Iraq, Dennis Halliday said after he resigned in protest at the effect sanctions are having on Iraq, "We are destroying an entire society. It is as simple and terrifying as that. It is illegal and immoral."

- Voices in the Wilderness UK,
12 Trinity Road, London N2 8JJ.
Tel 0181-444-1605,
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Sinn Fein's capital result

In which European country is a party of the left the third largest party with a growing support of young, working class voters? Indeed, where in Europe do young, working class people even bother to vote?

The answer is Ireland and the party is Sinn Fein. The headlines said it all. "Sinn Fein surge ahead" and "Sinn Fein makes the breakthrough". Those were in the broadsheet Dublin papers above stories of how Sinn Fein candidates in local elections topped the poll in working class Dublin and rural border constituencies. They trebled their number of seats throughout the 26 Counties (albeit from a low base) and laid down a marker for possibly four parliamentary seats at the next general election. At the same time in the Six Counties Mitchel McLaughlin more than doubled the Sinn Fein vote in the European election. Taking local election results from the whole island, Sinn Fein is now the third largest party.

Are there lessons to be learned for the left in understanding how Sinn Fein draws support from those sections of society which in other countries are so alienated that they don't even bother to vote?

Certainly the political establishment in Ireland have pondered the question. In the days following the election the Dublin media set about analysing the Sinn Fein vote. Mixed in with the usual anti-republican propaganda, they wrote about support rising on the back of the peace process, anti-drugs and anti-crime campaigns, and constant, street-level constituency work. The spin sought to reassure their well-heeled readers: Sinn Fein had "successfully targeted a niche market" and therefore didn't threaten the larger parties and their mainstream constituencies.

Are the analysts right? Is Sinn Fein's rising electoral strength destined to peak with a small working-class base? In any analysis it is important to consider that Sinn Fein is an activist-led, campaigning party. They wage campaigns that are directly relevant to the working class communities in which the activists live. Go to any of these

Sinn Fein's Brian Campbell welcomes a surge of support from young workers.

communities and the live issues are drugs, crime, housing and services, and a long list of other things that directly affect the quality of everyday life. And they are tackled by organising in a very pro-active way.

Take inner city Dublin, which has been ravaged by heroin. The response has been an unbelievable coming together of the community. At massive public meetings drug dealers are confronted with the results of their actions and made to promise to stop dealing. Thousands of people have marched on the homes of drug dealers and forced them to move. Allied to this has been agitation for treatment centres and help for addicts. The buzzword is empowerment. Working class communities are taking control of real politics and coming together to make their voices heard.

In rural areas issues such as potholed roads, grants for small farmers and rural housing elicit a less spectacular response. But the same activist and leadership skills are needed. Whatever the issue, activists are the key. It is sometimes dangerous work (drug dealers, criminals and loyalists constantly target Sinn Fein members) with no financial reward (not even the top elected representatives receive more than a very basic wage). It is time-consuming and often demoralising. But the last thirty years of the struggle have been the perfect training ground and the cadre of experienced activists from the very top to the bottom of the party is reaching out across the country.

Those activists have now made the much-awaited electoral breakthrough in the 26 Counties. If their policies and their approach to grassroots politics gains no more than their present level of support (about 8% in Ireland as a whole), then the working class is a very small group of people indeed. Sinn Fein certainly doesn't believe that. And neither, one suspects, do their political enemies. In the months and years ahead the attacks on Sinn Fein will come mainly from a political establishment – North and South – which fears the rise of a truly radical force in Irish politics. That could see the start of the real battle for Irish liberation.

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Thabo Mbeki's triumph

As Nelson Mandela heads into retirement, Andy George reports from Cape Town on the implications of his successor's victory in South Africa's second democratic election.

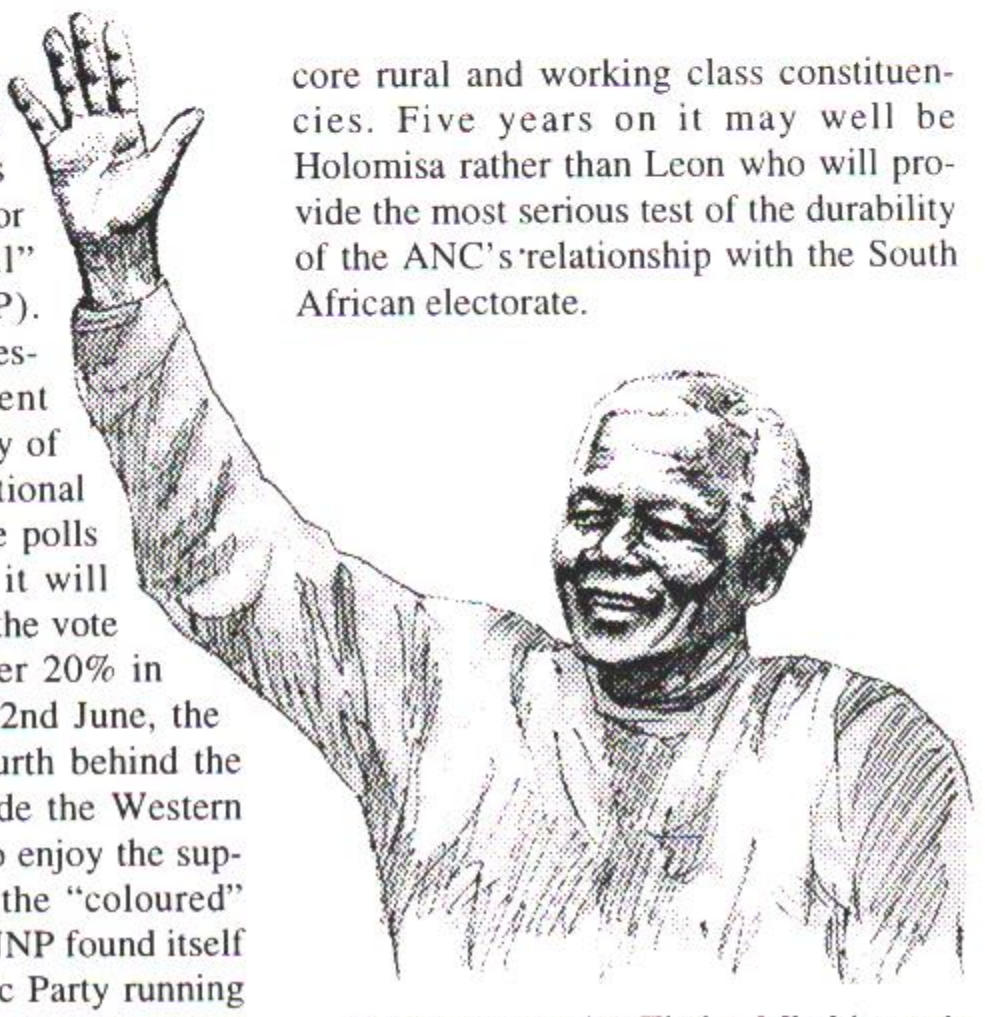
The scale of the ANC's victory on 2nd June is impressive – just one seat short of a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly. In several provinces the ANC took more than 80% of the popular vote. Only in KwaZulu Natal – where Mangosuthu Buthelezi's Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) confounded the opinion pollsters – and the Western Cape did support for the ANC fall below 50%.

For media commentators obsessed with the notion that a rampant ANC might seek to rewrite the constitution and challenge the independence of the Reserve Bank – a totem for domestic and international disciples of neo-liberalism – the election has been a great success. For South Africans the election result means that the process of transformation at the heart of ANC policy will continue. President Thabo Mbeki's new government will carry on grappling with the legacy of apartheid within a macro-economic strategy designed to appeal not to the mass base of the ANC but to the World Bank, the IMF and the markets. But it will do so against the backdrop of a political landscape that has undergone some significant changes since 1994.

Though unable either collectively or individually to threaten the electoral dominance of the ANC at national level, the opposition parties enjoyed mixed fortunes in the elections. For the unreconstructed white right, the election was a disaster with Afrikaans-speaking voters deserting General Constand Viljoen's Freedom Front in droves for the supposedly "liberal" Democratic Party (DP). Despite its increasingly desperate attempts to reinvent itself as a multi-racial party of the centre, the "New" National Party took a beating at the polls from which few believe it will recover. With its share of the vote down nationally from over 20% in 1994 to less than 7% on 2nd June, the NNP trailed in a poor fourth behind the ANC, DP and IFP. Outside the Western Cape where it continues to enjoy the support of large sections of the "coloured" urban working class, the NNP found itself overtaken by a Democratic Party running hard to the right in pursuit of conservative white voters.

So successful has this strategy been for its leader, Tony Leon, and his backers in the boardrooms of corporate South Africa, that the DP is now the official opposition in the National Assembly with 38 seats and almost 10% of the vote. Yet, in the longer term, his vociferously anti-ANC "fight back" strategy gives him little room to manoeuvre. More of the same rhetoric in 2004 might garner the DP a few more white votes. But it is very unlikely to endear the party to black people who may see the DP's message as a thinly veiled challenge to majority rule.

The other big success story of the election was the United Democratic Movement (UDM) of Bantu Holomisa (formerly of the ANC) and Roelf Meyer (formerly of the "old" National Party. As a post-1994 party with no access to state funding, the UDM did remarkably well to win over 3% of the vote and 14 seats in the National Assembly with a campaign centred on the ANC's failure to deliver jobs, security and services to its core rural and working class constituencies. Five years on it may well be Holomisa rather than Leon who will provide the most serious test of the durability of the ANC's relationship with the South African electorate.



One person who Thabo Mbeki won't be worrying about is Stanley Mogoba, the leader of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), whose party – along with the rest of the "struggle" opposition – was humiliated at the polls. The failure of the PAC and the two factions of the black consciousness movement AZAPO that stood in the election to gain more than four seats between them suggests that if any progressive opposition to the ANC's flirtation with neo-liberalism is to emerge before 2004 it will be based not on cheap populism or claims to a glorious past but on a clear-sighted analysis of the present.

In the wake of the ANC's massive election victory it will be no easy task to build principled opposition to the siren voices arguing that "there is no alternative" for the incoming Mbeki government but to extend its accommodation with global capital. But this is exactly what needs to be done. And it is only the left – both inside and outside the ANC/SACP/COSATU alliance – that is capable not just of constructing the necessary critique of neo-liberalism but of popularising alternatives to it among the millions of people who remain economically and socially disenfranchised five years after the birth of the new South Africa.

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Ocalan must not hang

Only a movement of working people across ethnic divides can strengthen the struggle for human rights and democracy in Turkey, writes Liz Knight

At the first hearing in PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan's trial on treason and terrorism charges, he called for "the democratic republic of Turkey" to give civil, language and cultural rights to the Kurdish people. Independence or autonomy are not mentioned. He promised that the reward for a peaceful solution will be consolidation of the Turkish state "from the Balkans to the Caucasus to the Middle East." He appealed to Turkish nationalism to act in its own interests by conciliating the Kurds.

The PKK has now endorsed this line. Many in the West may be confused. Is Ocalan simply trying to save himself from execution? Thousands of Kurds have died in struggle, thousands imprisoned and tortured – the others remain in prison. The Turkish army destroyed 4,000 villages, displacing two million Kurds. Ocalan described as utopian the cause his supporters were ready to die for.

Ocalan has suffered extreme psychological pressure, maybe physical torture, since his capture in March. His imprisonment and court hearings take place under rigorous security on a tiny island emptied of its occupants. But Ocalan is prepared to negotiate with the regime, offering it the goodwill that it never shows the Kurds. The Turkish media and security forces have been given carte blanche to smear and terrorise all those attempting to secure Ocalan a fair trial. The hearings are merely a means for the state to display its might further.

But limiting the PKK struggle to an ethnic and nationalist one has led into a cul-de-sac and the extreme Turkish chauvinism victories in the recent general election are partly a consequence of this. The PKK sought aid from Western regimes and public opinion while declaring all Turks over the age of three as the enemy. It became difficult for Turkish socialists to join forces with such a party: members of other left organisations were sometimes killed on PKK orders. Turkish socialists have nevertheless continued to support and defend their struggles – suffering imprisonment and death for that cause, which has never been the exclusive preserve of the PKK.



Even if Turkey hangs Ocalan and kills or imprisons PKK members, the Kurdish struggle will continue until Kurds find a political resolution which affords them real justice. But only a movement of working people across the ethnic divides can offer an answer. Socialists must strengthen international solidarity with the cause of Kurdish and Turkish people for democracy and human rights. The hearings continue as we go to press. In Britain we must insist on no death penalty for Ocalan, and an end to all British economic and military aid to the Turkish regime.

Kashmir: peace through participation

The present crisis highlights how non-combatant civilians have become the victims of India-Pakistan rivalry. Kargil's people, mostly Shias within a predominantly Buddhist region (Ladakh) of Jammu and Kashmir, have not been part of the Valley's "azadi" (freedom) agitation. But they have turned refugees en masse.

This is not inevitable. The Kashmir problem is amenable to a peaceful solution. This can only come about through two processes: first, a change in Indian and Pakistani mindset and a beginning of talks on Kashmir; and second, the involvement of the people of Kashmir in the determination of their fate. Kashmir is not just about the peculiarities of Partition and the shenanigans of a Maharajah who refused to accede to India until October 1947. Nor is it about how many Kashmiris are Muslim. It is about giving the people a voice in a just solution to the problem,

Praful Bidwai, India's leading campaigning journalist, reports on the clashes along the disputed border in Kashmir.

which enhances the collective security of all concerned. The question of Kashmir's identity and relationship to India and Pakistan must be settled on a modern, secular, pluralist basis.

Kashmir is not just a territory. Kashmiris have emerged as important agents of their identity and interests. They must be respected as such. The Kashmiri people's involvement in the process of dispute resolution will transform its nature. All concerned will then have to confront the issues of democracy, decentralisation, and plurality in culture, society and politics. This will take the issue out of its present straitjacket. This is precisely what is needed. Fortunately, there are at least the beginnings of an intra-Kashmiri dialogue across borders and ethnic and political divides.

Around The Hague Conference on Peace in May, a large number of Kashmiris, from Panun Kashmir to the JKLF to pro-Mujahideen groups, met – perhaps for the first time in such numbers. They called for an end to all violence, for free dialogue and interaction between Kashmiris, and for a return to Kashmir's tradition of peaceful co-existence. This is a major step forward. It must be heartily welcomed. Real progress will come through such moves, not military confrontation with its horrific potential for escalation to the nuclear level.

UNISON inches to the left

Jon Rogers, Lambeth UNISON Branch Secretary, sounds a note of (very) cautious optimism.

UNISON National Delegate Conference saw some minor shifts to the left by the UNISON National Executive – even while a witch-hunt against the union's left is growing.

Last year, Conference witnessed a battle to get UNISON to call a National Demonstration against the low level of the National Minimum Wage. This year the National Executive supported a call from the Greater London Region for a national demonstration – which should be held around May Day 2000 in London.

The top table were also as firm in their condemnation of the Asylum Bill as the floor of Conference. Calls to have faith in the Government were markedly less strident than they had been a year before.

This may have a limited impact upon the union's Labour Party involvement owing to the separate Affiliated Political Fund (APF) – set up at the creation of the union to insulate the union's Labour Party work from rank and file pressure. However, on some issues the Conference heard what amounted almost to pledges of loyalty to union policy from the APF members.

The Standing Orders Committee ruled out of order all attempts to debate the union's relationship with the Party (in line with a consistently strict interpretation of the Rules) but it is clear that more and more activists are questioning the return we get for our £1.30. It will not be possible to duck this issue forever.

Attempts to discuss the wholesale suspension of the Birmingham and Sheffield branches were also ruled out of order. Outside Conference they were a major talking point, provoking by far the largest fringe meeting of the week. Over 400 people heard London Convenor, Geoff Martin, give an impassioned speech in defence of the rights of members, including those in the Socialist Workers Party (this year's witch hunt target – and not exactly Geoff's favourite comrades).

Partly as a result of the pressure exerted by this obvious and widespread support for democracy in the union, but also thanks to some principled and consistent advocacy for democracy by the West Midlands Regional Convenor and other leading regional activists, it seems that the Birmingham branch will be reinstated before too long. Sheffield, where the local leadership are seen as more closely linked to the SWP, and where the regional leadership are less sympathetic, remained firmly beyond the pale.

Partly in response to this witch hunt, the left in the union began tentatively to move together. Daily discussions between representatives of the SWP and the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic UNISON (CFDU) ended with a commitment to further joint work in opposition to the witch hunt and to build and develop the union's opposition to PFI and privatisation in general.

For years union membership levels have been falling. Now that trend has been reversed in UNISON. If the left can build its organisation as disillusionment with the Government continues to grow, we have a real opportunity to see UNISON become an effective fighting force for its members.

FBU defends national conditions of service

Mick Shaw, FBU Executive Council, reports.

Several thousand FBU members lobbied a meeting of the Fire Brigades National Joint Council in London on 7th June. They were there to demonstrate to the councillors who sit on the Employers' Side their determination to defend their national agreement (the Grey Book).

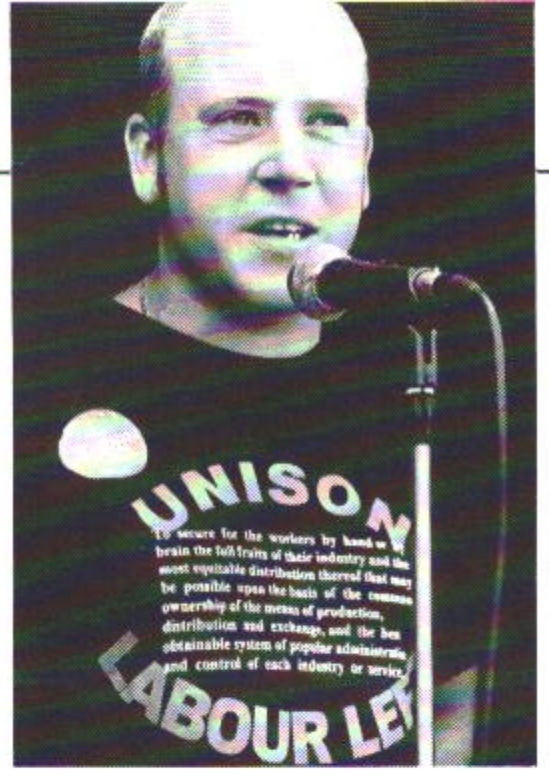
Britain's fire brigades, under pressure from rising costs and inadequate Standard Spending Assessments from central government, see attacking firefighters' and control staff's pay and conditions as a means of balancing their budgets. The FBU's Annual Conference in May voted overwhelmingly to oppose the employers' proposals and to ballot for national strike action if the employers attempt unilaterally to impose plans to cut pay packets and introduce "local flexibility."

The Employers' side now wishes to refer the dispute to ACAS for arbitration. Having had talks with senior ACAS officials, the FBU position is that this is not a dispute on which ACAS can arbitrate. There is no halfway house between a national agreement and "local flexibility." Tony Ritchie, Chair of the Local Government Association Fire Committee, portrays the employers' proposals as "modernisation" and describes them as "a modest step towards significantly improving the protection of the public and providing the best value for money."

The reality is that there is nothing modern about "local flexibility". In fact, it means turning back the clock more than fifty years to the days when each local authority had its own fire brigade on its own pay and conditions. These proposals will do nothing to "improve the protection of the public" either. The thing that is endangering the public is not the pay and conditions of firefighters and control staff, but government under-funding. That is what is leading to fire station closures and reductions in fire cover. That is why our employers want to change our duty systems to reduce fire cover at night – precisely when most deaths from fires occur.

The ball is now firmly in the employers' court. They have a choice – they can either attempt to impose their attacks and force a national dispute; or they can enter into dialogue with the FBU on how to campaign for proper funding for the fire service.

London Irish Women's Centre
Trade Union Survey
Launch 4 pm Thursday 15th July
CRE, Elliot House, 10/12 Allington Street, Victoria, London
Suirbhe na gCeardchumann
(Trade Union Survey)
looks at trade unions and the progress they are making with ethnic monitoring and the position of Irish people.
Speakers at the launch include Bob Purkiss, Mary Jo McAllister, Aoife Danoghue, Kamlijeet Jandu
Contact LIWC on 0171 249 7318



THE GEOFF MARTIN COLUMN

● If you believe the Millbank spin, and, let's face it, you'd be a fool not to, the reason why three quarters of the population can't be arsed to vote in elections any more is because the vast majority of us, particularly in the Labour heartlands, are deliriously happy with New Labour. In these halcyon days the workers are far too busy inspecting loft-style apartments in Docklands, or chucking their £3.60 an hour minimum wages around in poncy restaurants, to troop off to the polling station.

Even that grizzled old opportunist Peter Hain has been able to work out that this is all bollocks and in fact what's happened is that Labour's core vote have been alienated from the political process by the self-serving greasers who run the New Labour machine. The Labour disaffected in England don't really have anywhere else to go so they stay at home, leaving Blair to rely on his new-found supporters to pile into their Cherokee Jeeps off to the voting booth.

This is a dangerous game for New Labour. The *Daily Express* readers will drift back to the Tories as soon as there's the slightest hint that they've got their act together, leaving Blair dangerously exposed. The working class have made it damn clear that their support cannot be taken for granted and quite right too.

For a Government that's supposed to be committed to tackling "social exclusion" they've done a brilliant job of excluding millions of people from the democratic process. Governments built on spin, gloss and rank opportunism will always be found out in the end. The higher you've managed to shin up the greasy pole – the further you've got to fall.

The turn-out of less than 20% in Hilary Benn's new Leeds seat is a sickening indictment on the state of British politics in 1999. You can bet your boots the turn out would have been a damn sight higher if his old man had been standing.

● I see that Liz Hurley and Hugh Grant have been moaning about the builders that they've brought in to do up their expensive gaff. It made my day.

In those dim and distant days when I was on the tools we would always take the piss if we were working on a job up Nob Hill. I always viewed the position from an orthodox Marxist perspective but most of the blokes that I worked with just hated the rich.

The Hurley/Grant stuff sparked a rash of articles from other poor dears sobbing into their cappuccino about their beastly treatment at the hands of the builders they'd brought in to renovate the half a million pound flat in Notting Hill.

If these people had got themselves a proper trade and a proper job in the first place, rather than milking mega bucks out the media and PR, they wouldn't have to worry.

Anyway, if a plasterer knocks an actor, a banker, a politician or a Fleet Street columnist for a few grand I call it wealth distribution and I'm all for it.

● Why has there been no protest from the left about the Government's plans to privatise the Tote? This proposal is just as bad as anything that Thatcher and her lot came up with but nobody seems to be remotely concerned.

Just for information the Tote is a nationally owned bookmaker which ploughs much of its profits back into the horse racing industry and New Labour wants to flog it.

It may not be British Telecom or the water companies but the principle is just the same. Thousands of punters have a few bob on the Tote and if and when they lose at least they're not just pumping more dough into the pockets of the Ladbrokes' shareholders.

If there is a campaign against Tote privatisation can someone tell me where I can contact it and if there isn't, we should organise one.

● Interesting political sight of modern times: members of the SWP charging around London ripping down their "Let Livingstone Stand" posters just minutes after he announced that he supported the bombing of Belgrade.

Brighton UNISON beats back privatisation

UNISON in Brighton and Hove Council has stopped a plan to privatise the Revenues and Benefits service. The Council was planning to set up a regional processing centre with three other councils and hand control to Capita (well-known predator of public services). Council leader Lord Bassam had been a paid consultant to Capita until only a few weeks before they were selected to run the project!

UNISON set up its own local referendum on the proposals and delivered 50,000 leaflets locally. Returns showed that 95% were opposed to privatisation. Members also voted unanimously for strike action.

On 23rd June it was suddenly announced that the scheme was being dropped. This victory shows that if members are mobilised to defend services they can succeed. The original proposals were part of a Best Value project. Best Value is New Labour's replacement for CCT, but many UNISON activists see it as something worse. Best Value seems to mean more privatisation.

One piece of unresolved business is that Andy Richards, Chair of the UNISON branch and a leading figure in the fight against the privatisation plan, is facing disciplinary action. Andy's "offence" was to give information to the local paper which exposed that the Council was about to embark on a public consultation exercise without mentioning the privatisation proposal.

Initially the Council suspended Andy with the threat of dismissal, but after a fortnight it backed down in the face of pressure from the local UNISON branch and the UNISON national conference (which was taking place in Brighton at the time). However, Andy still faces charges of "serious misconduct" which could lead to a final warning.

UNISON has made it clear that it considers that Andy was representing his members and has not done anything wrong. The branch will continue to campaign for disciplinary action to be dropped.

Party misses message from the grassroots


Ann Black

Ann Black of the Labour Reform Steering Committee and a close runner up for Labour's NEC, finds that calls to tackle inequality made by Party members have been ignored.

As I write, less than a week before the deadline for amendments, promised National Policy Forum documents are still held up in the post. However, the Policy Unit kindly emailed the text to the wired-up and the persistent, and at least we did get giant wodges of feedback.

On welfare this comprises 97 submissions from February/March 1999. Thirty-five CLPs, around six per cent, contributed, with others represented through 41 local policy forums. Fifteen branches, four unions and two affiliates make up the total. Although involving perhaps one per cent of the membership, it is impressive during two months in the midst of AGMs and election preparations.

A complete picture would have included regular updates on comments through 1998. Also, and this is important, resolutions are not referred to the rolling policy programme even where they relate directly to areas under development. In future CLPs and branches should ask explicitly for them to be taken into account.

Whizzing through welfare, remarkably little has altered, except for updates on work in progress. The controversial disability measures are spelt out, and I hope they will still be worth debating in Bournemouth. As well as paying National Insurance contributions in the two tax years before claiming, people on the minimum wage must work for twelve weeks, three times as long as people on average earnings, further deepening inequality. Not surprisingly, calls for restoring the link between the state pension and average earnings are rejected. Finding work remains an individual responsibility, whether or not jobs exist.

The Economic Commission has ignored widespread demands for equal emphasis on fraud and on better take-up of benefit entitlement. Many submissions also want Labour to crack down on the larger sums stolen in tax fraud and corporate crime. Bizarrely, the section on Rooting out Fraud and Error is rewritten instead as a paranoid rant, obsessed with shoring up the efficacy of our defences against the thieving hordes, and omitting all positive measures. Getting income support to pensioners, advising claimants on entitlement, creating a trustworthy child support system, are dropped. Tracking down employers who cheat on National Insurance is apparently no longer important.

The paper includes, as one of Labour's policy aims, the statement that the welfare system should be fair to all people. Our approach should therefore be that all fraud is wrong; that those on the highest incomes have the greatest responsibilities; and that penalties should be proportionate to the magnitude of the offence. Whether this will be accepted, or the official one, parachuted in by the Commission against the overwhelming sentiment of Party members, will tell us a great deal.

The National Policy Forum in July will decide what Conference is allowed to debate. The Government has enough votes to dictate the agenda. But if it refuses to discuss this, or other alternatives which resonate across the Party, members may conclude that never in the history of the Labour Party have so many talked for so long, about so much, and made so little difference.

- National Policy Forum members are expected to attend Annual Conference. However, they must pay an ex officio fee of £64.62 plus their travel and accommodation. The Party does not understand that some people simply cannot find several hundred pounds. Well-heeled sisters and brothers, or those who can double up as CLP delegates, will be in Bournemouth, but lone-parent and low-paid Cinderellas will, alas, be unable to offer their insights into social exclusion to the New Labour programme.

FBU backs change to political fund

DISSATISFACTION with the record of New Labour in government and with the actions of Labour councillors on fire authorities was expressed at the Fire Brigades Union's Annual Conference in May. This was apparent in a rule change on the Political Fund moved by Strathclyde, which was passed despite opposition from the Executive Council. The rule change will enable members who contribute to the Political Fund to indicate that they wish no part of their contribution to be used to finance a political party.

That dissatisfaction was also apparent from a number of resolutions that were submitted calling for the union to disaffiliate from the Labour Party, although these were ruled out of order as they required a rule change. The Government is not providing sufficient finance for fire authorities, who are forcing through cuts and attempting to solve their budget crisis by attacking pay and conditions. It is understandable that union members question how their contributions are being spent.

However, the danger is that individual members will vote with their feet, reducing the union's ability to express their political viewpoint collectively within the Labour Party. This makes it even more important for affiliated trade unions to articulate opposition effectively to Government policies that harm the interests of their members and to campaign within the Party for socialist policies that will benefit working people.

Don't mention the war, please!

He wants the left's support to be Mayor of London, but no-one was more Blairite when it came to bombing Yugoslavia. Don Rocinante asks what Ken Livingstone is playing at.

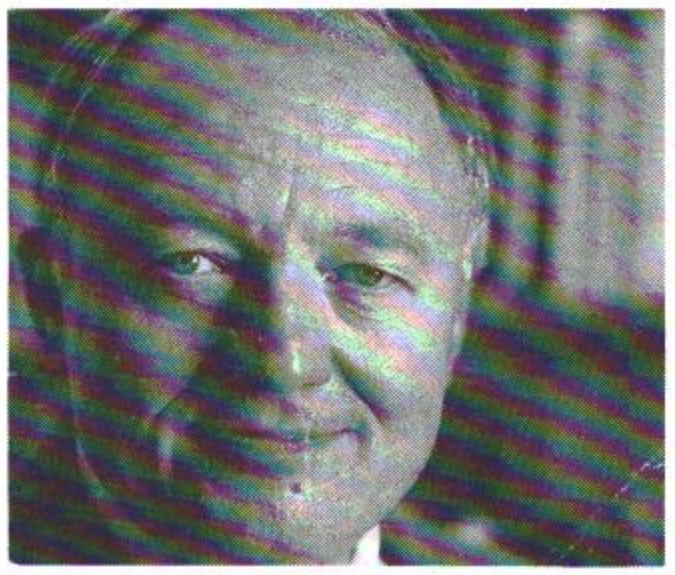
It's been a strange few months even by Ken Livingstone's standards. In February he hosted a huge rally in Central Hall, Westminster, to court the left – Labour and non-Labour alike – in his campaign to be London mayor. Press releases came out daily; stickers and petitions were sent far and wide.

Suddenly the press releases dried up. Like yesteryear's Social Democrats, Livingstone seemed to have put aside domestic differences in his support for NATO's "humanitarian war". For someone so critical of Labour's Millbank tendency, he was astonishingly "on-message".

Worse followed. In May he failed to take part in the biggest backbench rebellion yet, on disability benefit cuts. Livingstone claimed he was tied up debating Jeffrey Archer – but the vote occurred before the meeting started. A few days later in the *Independent* he pledged loyalty to the Party leadership, promising to abide by whatever procedures were used to select Labour's mayoral candidate.

The war ended, the last bomb dropped and Livingstone found his left foot again. In a week of frenetic activity, he was one of only seven MPs to vote against the Asylum Bill on its Third Reading, followed by a vitriolic newspaper article opposing plans to bring Peter Mandelson back into an election campaigning role. On 18th June he was interviewed on TV demonstrating against Third World debt outside the Treasury.

Of course, some will say, he's done this before. In March 1985 he ruthlessly moved against the left on the GLC after "bottling out", in one colleague's words, against fighting the Thatcher Government over ratecapping. A spell in



the Kinnockite Labour Co-ordinating Committee followed before returning to the hard left as an MP.

But what are the alternatives? We still support his right to be on the London Labour Party ballot, and he's probably the best candidate running – certainly streets ahead of the utterly hopeless Trevor Phillips.

Some on the left will see it differently, however, fed up with their enduring support being taken for granted by one more career-minded Labour politician. Others see the war as a question of principle – like the angry pensioner who told me she'd sent all the mayoral campaigning materials back to Livingstone's office. Above all, the alienated layers beyond Labour's traditional ranks that a Livingstone campaign might have genuinely galvanised – the black community, young people, the poor – are likely to be less favourably disposed to these latest twists and turns than we on the Labour left who are used to campaigning for flawed candidates.

LLB has supported and will continue to support a Livingstone candidacy for Mayor. But will other potential supporters still feel the same way?

GLA: time to grit your teeth

Recently elected to Labour's NEC, Christine Shawcroft presents her cut out and keep guide.

FOR ANYONE on the left, trying to find someone to support from the panel of candidates for the Greater London Assembly is not a matter of scraping the the barrel. We've scraped the bottom clean out of the barrel and now we're through the floorboards underneath. The panel members are either totally unheard of or the kind of person you wouldn't want at any price. So the total unknowns have been trawled through for those who may be relatively harmless. Professional looking CVs are to be avoided. The suspicion that the Greater London Labour Party had helped some with their CVs was dispelled because the CVs are far too good for the GLLP to have been anywhere near them.

Try to extract a promise of support for Ken Livingstone's right to stand in the event of an electoral college in return for your support of a total unknown. Then you've got to get them nominated. Ward nominations are usually pretty easy, although nothing can be taken for granted. At my ward members voted for a local councillor they were actively opposed to, because it was a name they recognised. Now you know why Tom Sawyer got such a good vote for the NEC.

Bear in mind that your candidate will have to face a hustings meeting at a GC, and may need help. Coaching from some of the seasoned operators kept off the panel may be required. Use the hustings meetings to put would be candidates on the spot on key issues – national or local.

You may have to grit your teeth a bit with these selections, but as a Labour Party member your teeth should be permanently gritted, anyway. No matter how awful some of these people may be, never forget: anything's better than one of Tony's cronies.

Freedom to hide or find?

Andrew Ecclestone, of the Campaign for Freedom of Information, examines Jack's house of straw.

Jack Straw says his Freedom of Information Bill will "radically" change the relationship between government and citizens. The only 'radical' thing about it is that is the opposite of what a Freedom of Information (FoI) Act should be.

A FoI Act should embody three fundamental principles. First, public authorities should have to demonstrate in all cases that releasing the information would cause harm to one of a number of areas, including defence, law enforcement or another person's privacy.

Second, the Act should remove from authorities the final decision as to whether information should be released. People with an interest in keeping the information under wraps should not be judge in their own cause. If you disagree with the authority's decision you can appeal to an independent enforcement agency: under the Government's proposals, an Information Commissioner, in other countries to the courts. The Commissioner should be able to see all the papers, decide whether their release would cause harm and if not, order their disclosure.

Third, the Commissioner should still be able to order the disclosure of exempt papers if the public interest in disclosure outweighs the harm this would cause. Papers that would cause harm to commercial confidentiality should be disclosed if they reveal corruption or threats to health and safety.

The Bill misses on all three counts (and has many more flaws). Ministers have insisted on class exemptions containing a "no harm" test. Information gathered in investigating an accident – such as the recent rail crash in Cheshire – will be out of reach, regardless of whether its release would harm the investigation or any subsequent prosecution. Material held for the purpose of policy development and formulation is likewise under a blanket ban. The Bill actively prohibits the Commissioner from imposing a judgement as to whether there might be an overriding public interest in disclosing exempt information. All s/he will be able to do is ensure the authority has fulfilled its duty to consider the discretionary release of information in the public interest. Worse, authorities can withhold documents from the Commissioner if they believe the papers would reveal they are committing an offence. What is a FoI Act for, if it is not to help uncover wrongdoing?

Mr Straw justifies his position by saying authorities will have to consider the discretionary release of information in all cases. But FoI is supposed to give us a legal right to know, not be dependent on authorities' goodwill. This Bill takes us backwards, not forwards, because the voluntary openness code the Tories introduced in 1994 gives us greater rights to know what central government is up to.

● Contact the Campaign for Freedom of Information at Suite 102, 16 Baldwin Gardens, London EC1N 7RJ. Tel: 0171-831 7477; web: http://www.cfoi.org.uk.

Running for democracy in Greece and London:

The St Pancras Declaration

Bernie Moss
Hampstead and Highgate CLP

Bob Littlewood, a Labour councillor from Redbridge who is competing in the Athens to Sparta marathon this summer, has set a world record by personally delivering the St Pancras declaration to thirty-four town halls in the London region. The declaration is named after the railway station opposite the Camden Town Hall where the Labour Campaign for Open Local Government (LCOLG) was launched on May 29th. In its declaration LCOLG states its opposition to the draft local government bill and sets out its own programme for the democratisation of local government. On June 24th the campaign gave a presentation to the Joint Select Committee on the bill. It hopes to involve Labour councillors and other concerned people from all over the country.

The campaign grows out of mounting local opposition to plans for the replacement of local council democracy in Britain with professional managers, executive cabinets or locally elected mayors, Blair's favoured option for "modernisation". The ideas for reform come primarily from the New Local Government Network headed by Professor Gerry Stoker of Strathclyde University, but the aims of executive efficiency, business-friendly culture and depoliticisation are consistent with the Blair-Mandelson agenda. Stoker has made no secret of his desire to sell off local assets and shut down "inefficient" councils. The draft bill makes the connection between executive government and 'best value', which is Blair's euphemism for cheap.

The campaign was started by Labour councillors in Camden, Lewisham, Hammersmith and Fulham and Haringey who have faced precipitous and pre-emptive efforts at "modernisation". Lewisham, which has seen the emergence of a "godfather culture" around Dave Sullivan, has opted for an elected mayor. Procedures established to scrutinise decisions of the executive cabinet in Hammersmith and Fulham have been faulted by an independent review. Efforts by Richard Arthur, majority leader in Camden, to rush through an executive cabinet have provoked a grass-roots citizen rebellion and forced a referendum offering the option of an improved status quo – the preferred choice of most people in informal consultations.

The declaration calls for improving local council democracy through a more open and flexible committee system and greater input from neighbourhood forums and area committees. This rather than executive government is seen as the best response to low voter turnout and disaffection seen recently in local, regional and European elections. Constitutional changes such as those proposed by the Government require a thorough review by an independent commission. The group demands that any proposal to restructure council democracy be approved by popular referendum.

To join the campaign contact Gerry Harrison. Tel: 0171-209 4661.



No trial, no jury. Police attack demonstrators at the Carnival against Capitalism 18th June

Photo: Paul Mattsson

Trial and error

Jack Straw's plan to axe most trials by jury is a step back into the last century, argues Liz Davies, barrister and member of the NEC.

Jack Straw intends to deprive the majority of people who plead not guilty to criminal charges of the right to trial by jury. Until the nineteenth century every offence was jury tried. In opposition, Jack Straw opposed any restriction on this right. Now his proposals would mean that the vast bulk of offences would be heard by magistrates.

In the Party's *Crime and Justice* report it is argued that "many defendants are using this option to abuse the system by changing their plea to guilty when the case gets to crown court." Really? Even the Party's own figures show that of 405,000 defendants charged with "either way" offences, only 4% choose trial by jury.

In these cases, lawyers will recommend trial by jury if the defendant wants to plead not guilty for a number of reasons. Magistrates become case-hardened. They are more likely to rely on police evidence. They are drawn from a narrow band and do jobs which allow them to take a day off each week. They are overwhelmingly white and middle-class. Juries are selected at random, from across society and are not case hardened. Because of a wider experience of life, they show a refreshingly tendency not always to believe the police.

Crown Courts are more likely to impose heavier sentences, so a defendant who really knows that they will plead guilty would be nuts to favour the higher court. Keeping your options open is a basic right and the defendant usually only has a twenty minute chat with a solicitor during which a choice must be made. If the case remains at magistrates' level, the option for a jury trial would be closed forever.

The Labour Party does not have figures on how many defendants actually do alter their plea before a jury trial. What is known is that in 1997 62% of those who pleaded not guilty at Crown Court were acquitted, against 24% who pleaded not guilty in the magistrates' court.

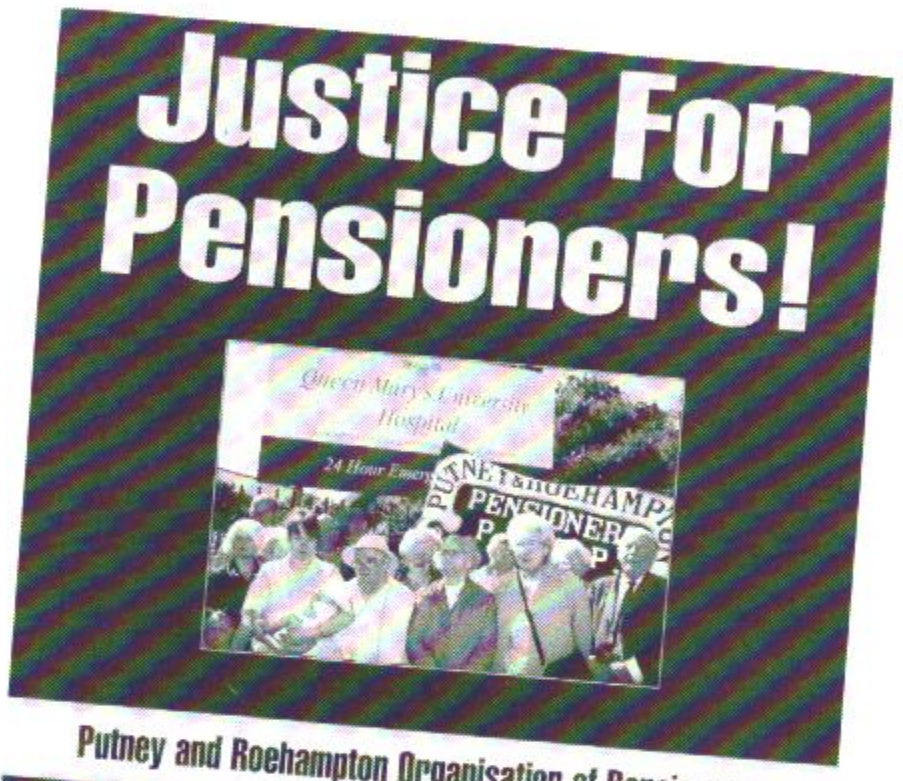
Black defendants are treated particularly badly in magistrates' courts. Statistics gathered in Leicester exposed magistrates' attitudes. Black defendants were 16% more likely to be refused unconditional bail.

As a result, 45% of black defendants had absolutely no faith in magistrates and preferred trial by jury. The academic carrying out the survey observed that black defendants who elect trial by jury often find the charges reduced by the CPS: suggesting that the CPS were pinning their hopes on the magistrate.

Black defendants in particular get more acquittals from juries than magistrates. So maybe black people are disproportionately wrongly charged by the police and trial by jury is more likely to bring justice. Sounds like a system worth defending.

Justice for Pensioners!

Eddie Tucker reviews *Justice for Pensioners* by the Putney & Roehampton Organisation of Pensioners (PROP) (£3) and Pensions as of Right for All by Barbara Castle, Peter Townsend & others (£1)



The PROP has fought long and hard for and on behalf of older people in the face of attacks on services and lack of adequate resources by Tory flagship Wandsworth Council and successive governments. A fascinating account of campaigns in the '80s and '90s highlights the role of pensioners' groups in the campaign against hospital closures. This booklet gives a useful insight into tactics as well as being an important account of one of the often-overlooked groups struggling for a fair and just society.

Barbara Castle and allies' response to the Government's green paper on pensions is backed by UNISON's political fund. Well-researched and packed with statistics, it argues an effective case that a decent state pension for all is affordable and necessary. It is an argument the Government ignores at its peril.

- PROP, 39 Hotham Road, London SW15.
- Pensions as of Right for All, 27 Amwell St, London, EC1.

Chomsky classic gets a makeover

Mike Phipps reviews *Fateful Triangle* by Noam Chomsky, published by Pluto, price £14.99 pbk.

Chomsky's hugely important 1983 book on the Middle East conflict has been reissued with three new chapters, an up-to-date Introduction and a Preface by Palestinian writer Edward Said. At its centre is an analysis of Israel's 'Peace for Galilee' operation, the Orwellian-sounding name of its military destruction of Lebanon. Starting with the little-reported Israeli bombing of Lebanon in the early 1970s, Chomsky documents how entire villages were wiped off the map. Then in 1982, with a green light from Washington, came the notorious invasion: 10,000 killed, hundreds of thousands of refugees created and whole towns reduced to ruins.

Mass detentions and torture followed: one AP reporter wrote of a room with hundreds of men piled on top of each other, without food or water and unable to move. The Sabra and Shatila massacre soon followed. Beyond the human suffering, Chomsky also charts Israeli attempts systematically to efface Arab culture – mosques, schools, cemeteries, crops and orchards – in an orgy of vandalism. The entire 25,000 volumes of the PLO research library was stolen, despite its diplomatic immunity under Lebanese law. New chapters deal with more recent events. Chomsky looks at the background to the Intifada in December 1987, including routine incidents such as the unpunished shooting by Israeli forces of Palestinian primary school children. 50,000 people died in the uprising, crushed "like grasshoppers" in the triumphalist rhetoric of Shamir, Prime Minister at the time. Entire villages were blown up, their inhabitants given fifteen minutes to gather their possessions. In its aftermath, Israeli settlers continued to open fire on Palestinians, rarely suffering more than a rebuke from the authorities. Palestinian shopkeepers, in contrast, face five years jail if they fail to wash anti-Israeli graffiti off their buildings. Other chapters look at the 1993 bombing of South Lebanon – aimed at "creating a wave of flight" in the words of so-called peacemaker Rabin – and the Oslo Peace Accords. Chomsky shows how these formally institutionalised the inequalities – ceding to Palestinian autonomy the policing of the slums while Israel keeps control of all the wealth and resources such as fresh water, available for perhaps one day every few weeks in West Bank Palestinian villages while nearby Israeli houses enjoy green lawns and swimming pools. Nor is there much room for optimism in the current situation. The Wye Memorandum signed in Washington last October precipitated a new Israeli 'land grab' using the usual techniques – "razing Palestinian houses in search of 'Jewish archaeological remains' and establishing 'nature reserves', later to be converted to Jewish housing." Summary executions, detention without trial and illegal kidnapping by Israel continue – indeed Israel is perhaps unique in having "effectively legalised the use of torture", according to Amnesty International. Chomsky identifies the root of the problem as the nature of the Israeli state, a state which bars from election anyone who rejects the idea of Israel as the state of the Jewish people. "In short, even implicit advocacy of the traditional conception of a democratic state as the state of its citizens suffices to bar political participation." As long as the Palestinians are treated as a non-people there can be scant hope for peace.

Farewell Peter, hello Ken

Don Rocinante reviews *Mandy* by Paul Routledge, published by Simon and Schuster, price £17.99 hbk and *Turn Again, Livingstone* by John Carvel, published by Profile, price £6.99 pbk.

Perhaps because political careers tend to end in failure, political biographies frequently leave the reader disappointed. We feel we already know these public figures well enough not to be surprised by new revelations.

Peter Mandelson apparently once told a member of staff at Walworth Road whom he wanted to sack, "If we have to terminate your contract I will make any fabrication of the truth and stick by it faithfully". This seems entirely in keeping with the now disgraced ex-minister's ruthlessness. No wonder Joy Johnson said of him: "He hasn't a democratic impulse in his body."

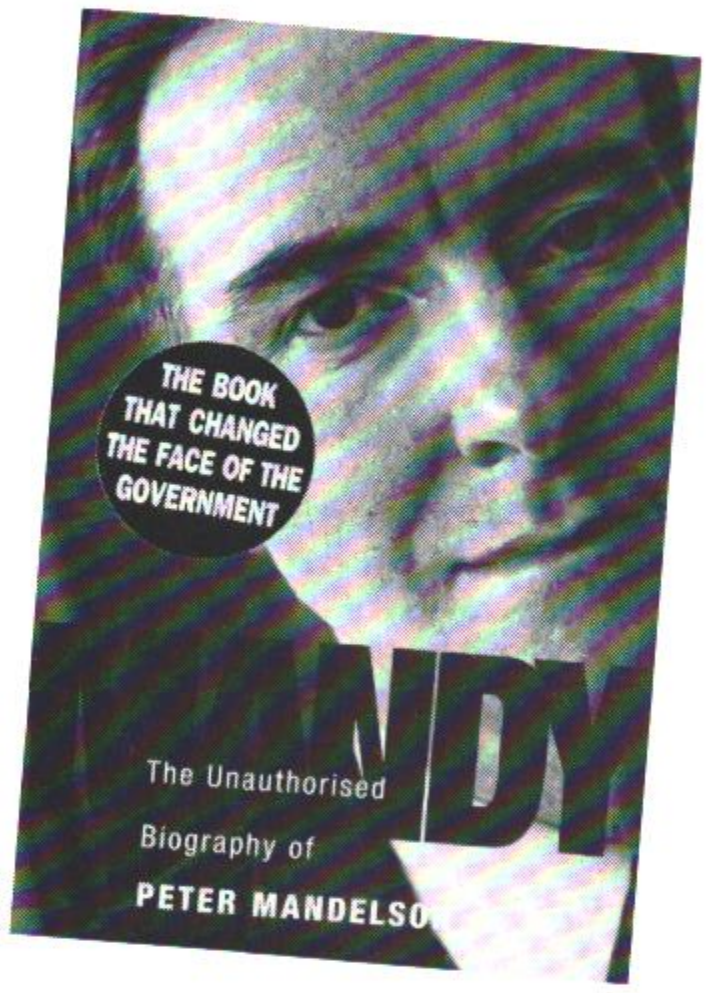
Similarly his obsequiousness is well-known – not just by his desire to ingratiate himself with key Labour figures – he was briefing the media in favour of Blair within twenty minutes of John Smith's sudden death – but even with the Royal Family. Rupert Murdoch spotted this tendency and described Mandelson as "starfucker".

He admired Thatcher too – "a mite too far, but in principle, right" was how he described her legal shackling of the unions. Yet for someone whose political rise (and fall) was so rapid, his own ideas are distinctly shallow. According to Bryan Gould he is "surprisingly banal", "ignorant" according to Roy Hattersley, and Peter Kilfoyle said he is "trite".

None of this feels surprising – it's wholly in character. Yet *Mirror* hack Paul Routledge is so determined to do a hatchet job on Mandy – there's page after homophobic page about Mandelson's sexuality, for example – that it's hard to decide if the author or his victim-subject is the more obnoxious.

John Carvel's book on Livingstone, much of which appeared in the 1980s, also contains few revelations. One exception is that in 1988 – even while Tony Benn was mounting a challenge for the Party leadership – Livingstone privately approached John Smith and told him he had a duty to run against Kinnock. Another is the Downing Street source suggesting Blair might have given Livingstone a job if he'd behaved more loyally after the 1997 election.

But what of Mayor for London – the one directly elected politician with the biggest personal mandate in the country? Highly unlikely, according to Carvel's "sources", but not impossible, given the absence of credible New Labour alternatives and the slim possibility of a damaging Livingstone candidacy if he's barred by an internal vetting panel from being the Labour candidate. In this scenario, the cracks in the Labour vote in Scotland could be echoed with the appearance of a credible left alternative to Labour in London. Alternatively, Blair may be only too happy to flush out the capital's Labour left. Despite the press speculation, however, Carvel's book throws little light on Livingstone's intentions here. What do *LLB* readers think he should do?



Benn portraits

David Pope reviews *New Labour in Focus* by Tony Benn, from Politico's, £13.99.

New Labour in Focus is a video diary by Tony Benn, recorded towards the end of 1998 and shot largely on his own equipment. He asks: "What sort of party has Labour become?"

The first part of the video features brief shots of scenes not normally seen by the public, such as the Whips' daily planning meeting, Alastair Campbell's press briefing and Millbank Tower. There is an amusing meeting with sheepish policy staff who compose the faxes sent to MPs each day, telling them what to say to the press. Interspersed are members of the public voicing disappointment with the Government on issues such as foxhunting, unemployment and pensions.

The second half is more substantial, featuring quotes from Benn and other MPs on the policies and practices of New Labour. Those from Roy Hattersley are illuminating: "When you begin to agree with the bourgeois parties about the nature of society you begin to have a party which helps most of all the middle classes...The Prime Minister favours a non-ideological party which decides things on their merits. This is not possible because it becomes an ideology in favour of the vocal, the self-confident, the influential and the prosperous."

Ken Livingstone is equally unambiguous: "I'm not aware of any human society... in which there's a middle way in which nice people share their power and wealth".

Benn's own answer to his question is unequivocal: "New Labour is the beginning of a totally new party in which Liberals and Conservatives are brought into the heart of Government."

As we go to press, Tony Benn announced his intention to retire as an MP at the next election. He explains that he is standing down to spend *more* time on politics!



THE LIZ DAVIES COLUMN

Labour's poor showing in the European elections, particularly the exceptionally low turn out in Labour's heartlands, should serve as a warning to the whole Party. Our core voters are abandoning us because they believe we have abandoned them.

A BBC exit poll for the recent European elections showed that 50% believe there has been no improvement in the NHS under Labour, and another 30% per cent believe the NHS has got worse. These people want to see results and will not be mollified by soundbites.

In addition, some 25-35% of the population, according to opinion polls, opposed the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia. None of the major parties spoke to this substantial minority. Most will have voted Labour in 1997, but stayed at home or turned to fringe parties to express their discontent in the Euro elections.

Increasing voter apathy across Europe is a symptom of the growing and dangerous gulf between professional politicians and the people. Unless voters are offered a genuine political choice they will see little reason to go to the polls. And unless Labour members are offered a genuine chance to participate in the selection of candidates and formation of policies, they will play little role in election campaigns.

As a whole the Euro-results illustrate yet again the crisis of representation which infects British politics. To address that crisis, Labour must re-enfranchise its members, discard control-freakery and adopt policies to end poverty and promote equality. Calling for the return of Peter Mandelson, or the head of Margaret Beckett, is not the answer. The answer is politics, not personalities.

At May's NEC meeting there was only cursory discussion of the Scottish, Welsh and local election results. According to Millbank officials, where Labour did badly it was because local parties didn't campaign and they would need "reviving". Off the cuff remarks were made deprecating the ability of Party activists in Sheffield and throughout the whole of Scotland. I would hate to see the state of any constituency party after Margaret McDonagh went in to "revive" it.

There was no discussion whatsoever about Labour entering into coalition in Scotland. Obviously, it is a decision for Scotland rather than the whole of the national Party, but such an unprecedented step should surely have warranted at the very least a brief discussion at the National Executive.

When the Prime Minister reported, he dealt cursorily with the war in Balkans, and then moved smartly to his latest message: that MPs should stop moaning and support the Government. Pete Willsman and I asked about the use of cluster bombs and depleted uranium shells, and I pressed the Prime Minister on the civilian casualties in Kosova and Serbia. Mark Seddon praised the Prime Minister for taking action against Milosevic and the GPMU rep spoke in support of ground troops. The Prime Minister was happy to answer Mark and coyly indicated he could not comment on ground troops. But in response to Pete and myself all he said was "don't believe everything you read in the newspapers".

'... Labour must re-enfranchise its members, discard control-freakery and adopt policies to end poverty and promote equality. Calling for the return of Peter Mandelson ... is not the answer. The answer is politics, not personalities.'

Most of the meeting was taken up with a debate on the future of the membership department. The feasibility study commissioned in January from KPMG had unsurprisingly returned with a recommendation that the whole of the membership department should be "outsourced" – New Labour speak for privatised – and that companies should be invited to tender. It became clear during the debate that the very real problems in the membership department were due to a lack of investment in technology in recent years. The Grassroots Four objected, principally on the grounds of lack of confidentiality, lack of guarantees for the staff and concern that a large City firm would be processing Labour's membership record. The proposal to "outsource" was agreed, but the Grassroots Four achieved a record in that the vote against the proposals was six – us and the GMB reps – the highest number opposing a proposal from Millbank so far this year.

Pete Willsman and I moved a motion calling for a further right of appeal for those candidates turned down in the GLA selection panel – radical stuff! Clive Soley told us that it was inappropriate to conduct discussions by motion and that we should withdraw it. He also told us that at the end of the selection interview, he had asked each candidate if they had any complaints about the procedure and, surprise, surprise, nobody had any! There were no causes for concern, he said and where people had failed, it was because they failed to fill the form in properly. We refused to withdraw and the motion was defeated 4:14.

Finally, many thanks to all those who worked and voted for the Grassroots Alliance candidates in the recent NEC elections. Although the three of us who have been elected will sorely miss Pete Willsman, I know that Christine Shawcroft will give Millbank more than a run for its money.

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