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LABOUR LEFT Briefing

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■ The copy deadline for the June issue is Monday 17th May.



May 1999

Cover photo by Paul Mattsson

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EDITORIAL

Why we say no to war for NATO 'credibility'

As we go to press, horror piles upon horror in the Balkans, and human-made catastrophe swallows up ever greater numbers. In the face of this suffering, the left, mirroring the general population, asks itself: which is the lesser evil? What is the balance between ends and means?

There can be no doubt and there should be no equivocation about the criminal atrocities perpetrated in Kosova – as elsewhere – by the Milosevic regime. Those on the left who deny this truth or ally themselves with Milosevic's apologists profoundly compromise themselves and the peace movement. The Kosovars, like all other peoples in the region, have the right to determine their future and to defend themselves from attack. Above all, they have human rights which have been systematically violated by Milosevic for a decade.

But there can also now be little doubt that the immediate impact of the NATO military intervention has been disastrous for all concerned – except perhaps Milosevic, whose grip on the population has been strengthened. Since the removal of the OSCE monitors and independent agencies from Kosova in preparation for the bombing, and in response to the bombing itself, the numbers killed or expelled by Serb forces have multiplied many times over. The prospect of a lasting resolution to the conflict has receded out of sight. A huge refugee population has been created. Its long term fate scarcely bears contemplating.

As minimum evidence of its good faith in this self-styled humanitarian intervention, the NATO countries must ensure that all the refugees whom their action has helped create are given a choice of whether or where they wish to resettle. That would require New Labour reversing its current line on refugees and scrapping its Asylum and Immigration Bill. It should be noted that up till now, the British Government has spent at least five times as much on its military assault as it has on humanitarian relief for refugees, and that ratio is widening by the day.

At the outset, the only certain consequence of the bombing was – as with all such bombardments – death and injury, material destruction and social devastation. As the NATO assault escalates and becomes ever more indiscriminate, it is clear that the civilian population of all nationalities in Serbia, Montenegro and Kosova will feel its impact for years to come. It is not enough merely to assert that all this is a price worth paying, especially when it is a price being paid by others. Those who support this action must demonstrate that its ultimate benefits for humanity will outweigh its obvious detrimental impact. So far, they have failed to do so.

'Those who support this action must demonstrate that its ultimate benefits for humanity will outweigh its obvious detrimental impact.'

Apart from strengthening reactionary Serb nationalism, destabilising the democratic regime in Montenegro, accelerating violence against the Kosovars, killing civilians and wrecking the region's infrastructure, the principal outcome of this adventure has been to weaken international law and undermine the few existing checks on the deployment of US military power. International law and international institutions, including the UN, may be inadequate in many respects, but they remain the only protection smaller, poorer and militarily weaker countries have against the few which are rich, large and well-armed. They are an indispensable safeguard against the dictatorship of the cruise missile – and the necessary basis for the implementation of global human rights standards.

Milosevic's regime is not the only one guilty of crimes against humanity and as Noam Chomsky has pointed out, even the scale of its crimes is, horrifically, matched by those currently being committed against their own civilian populations by the Colombian and Turkish governments, not to speak of the impact of the sanctions on Iraq. The US, which now poses as a the defender of human and national rights in the Balkans, aids and abets the most violent attacks on those rights across the globe and in recent times has remained indifferent to and even assisted genocidal acts.

Do the supporters of the NATO action on the left

Continued over

Continued from page 3

believe that the same type of action should be taken by the same forces against repressive regimes everywhere? Should we bomb Jakarta, Ankara or Tel Aviv? If not, why not? The answer given to this question by George Robertson is that Serbia is in Europe, and that makes it different. Like much of what Robertson has said in recent weeks, this argument reeks of cynicism and duplicity, and surely cannot be accepted by any serious internationalist.

Even if NATO's "humanitarian" motives in the Balkans were credible, would it be feasible or desirable for it to mount similar attacks on all countries governed by repressive and murderous politicians? Leaving aside the fact that such a policy would involve the US attacking its own client regimes it should be obvious that global respect for human rights cannot be meaningfully enforced by some kind of high-tech unaccountable hit squad masterminded in Washington.

The hypocrisy of NATO's rhetoric tells us a great deal about its real motives – and the motives of an action do help shape its likely outcome. Statements from Clinton and the Pentagon over recent months have made it clear that their aim is to establish the US's right to act unilaterally and certainly without UN approval, wherever its perceived economic or strategic interests might be at threat. Like the attacks on Iraq, this intervention is intended to assert the unbridled prerogatives of the world's most powerful military state and secure for it a global licence to kill.

The priority for US policy makers in the last few years has been reshaping NATO as the preferred instrument of US global policy in the post-Cold War world. After Rambouillet, NATO had to act if it was to retain what the geo-strategists call "credibility"; the need for "credibility" was the spur for the bombing, and that need explains why US officials, with their British counterparts passively in tow, disregarded the clear warnings that bombing would precipitate fiercer attacks on Albanian Kosovars. It is the insatiable thirst for credibility that is now guiding this war, and will determine its future course, regardless of the consequences for Kosovars, Serbians, Montenegrins or the region as a whole. As in so many wars, it now seems that a terrible price will be paid by ordinary people in order for a handful of politicians to save face.

There are many on the left who accept all or most of these points but argue that ill-motivated actions taken by dodgy characters can still have desirable effects, that the most immediate need is to stop Milosevic and protect his victims and that only NATO's military force can do that. But the assumption here that, given the appalling situation in Kosova, NATO intervention could only be for the better has so far proved unfounded. It rests on wishful thinking. NATO's armed might is a tool that is incompatible with the purpose humanitarians wish it to serve.

It is not always better to do something rather than nothing. The Hippocratic code on medical intervention includes the provision, "First, do no harm." NATO acted in wanton disregard of that principle. Its military action is a cure that can only intensify and spread the disease.

The disagreements within the left reflect the complexity of the issues we are grappling with and the fact that the polarities inherited from World War II and the Cold War are no longer applicable. The Balkans are not and will not be the only place where the cocktail of nationalism and economic (and military) globalisation turns poisonous.

What is needed now is massive assistance to refugees, a halt to the bombing, a new attempt at negotiations and the introduction of non-NATO diplomatic and military participants in finding and enforcing a resolution. Such a course remains the most likely means of establishing and protecting the rights of the Kosovars and containing the spread of violence.

Will bombing spark Euro-wide war?

Frank Allaun of Labour Action for Peace warns of a return to Cold war hostilities.

Even before the NATO bombings of the Yugoslav people there was evidence that the Cold War was on its way back again.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin has publicly attacked the military move, and Prime Minister Primakov has warned that this "terrifying mistake" by the White House could spark a war across Europe.

A fortnight before the bombing raids, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic were admitted to NATO and will soon be supplied with NATO weapons. There is also the possibility of nuclear weapons being deployed there. The President of Belarussia responded by telling the heads of five former Soviet states that his country made a serious mistake in giving up their Soviet missiles (not that I agree with that particular statement).

As the raids started Primakov was on his way to Washington to meet Clinton. Half way over the Atlantic he heard news of the raids and promptly ordered his pilot to return to Moscow.

Professor Paul Rogers, head of peace studies at Bradford University, has made the vital point that preparing the world for war will not save mankind. These plans, many peace campaigners believe, will only hasten such a calamity.

Cold War between east and west was waged for 40 years after the ending of the second world war and very nearly led to World War III. It was ended in 1985 by Mikhail Gorbachev, the newly elected leader of the Soviet Union. In 1986 he unilaterally announced that he would forthwith withdraw 800 planes, 8,000 tanks and 500,000 Red Army servicemen from their eastern boundaries. He carried it out.

This soon led to improved international relations instead of the increased spending during the Cold War. Many governments, including Britain, followed Gorbachev's lead though we still spend a higher proportion of our national income on the military than other European countries. These savings, of course, help to provide funds for the NHS, education and welfare – provided that governments decide to spend them that way.

It is noticeable that the media in Britain is now far more hostile to Russia. During the war against Iraq we were shown TV films of the so-called smart bombs landing direct on military objectives. Admittedly some of the bombs did hit their targets, but most of them did not. Innocent civilians were killed just as they are being killed today – slaughtered in Kosova, Montenegro, Pristina and Belgrade by US and UK bombs.

Blair doesn't give a damn for Kosovars

Geoff Ryan, who has covered events in the Balkans for several years, argues that NATO has been complicit in "ethnic cleansing" from the outset.



Photo: Paul Mattsson

Downing Street picket

The Labour left is hopelessly confused over the NATO bombing campaign against Serbia and Montenegro. Some justify NATO aggression as aiding the Kosovars. Others oppose NATO but refuse to denounce Milosevic's murderous policies in Kosova. Yet there is an alternative to craven support for NATO's aggression and silence on Milosevic's crimes.

Personally I find Tony Blair's lectures on how evil Milosevic is sickening. Over the last few years I have written dozens of articles, mainly for *Socialist Outlook* but also for *LLB* and other publications explaining that western leaders continued to treat Milosevic as part of the solution, not as the major problem in the Balkans. They all opposed the secession of Slovenia and Croatia – including Germany, whatever Tony Benn may claim. They only granted recognition after Milosevic's forces had devastated Croatia and after UN troops – invited by Milosevic – were in place to guarantee Serb control over areas from which Croats and various national minorities had been driven.

In Bosnia the West refused to arm the Bosnian army, in which Muslims, Serbs and Croats fought side by side to defend a multi-ethnic Bosnia, leaving them to the mercies of Milosevic and Karadzic and, to a lesser extent, Tudjman. NATO leaders claim that air attacks on Bosnian Serb positions brought the war to an end. This is completely untrue. When NATO did eventually intervene it was to halt the advance of the Bosnian and Croatian armies which threatened to rout Karadzic and Milosevic's forces.

The Dayton agreement effectively partitioned Bosnia, leaving Milosevic claiming to speak for all the Serbs. Rather than ending nationalist divisions in Bosnia, all those Serbs and Croats who had fought to maintain a multi-ethnic state were deprived of a voice by the Dayton accords. Now Britain and the US appear prepared to countenance partition of Kosova. So much for NATO opposing "ethnic cleansing".

When NATO began its bombing campaign it ignored the warnings of an array of military experts that Milosevic would simply step up his attacks on the Kosovar Albanians. Having refused to support Kosovar independence because it would potentially lead to destabilisation they embarked on a policy which has seen hundreds of thousands of Kosovars forced from their homes – leading to massive instability in Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro, three of the poorest countries in Europe.

Despite the current NATO aggression against Serbia and Montenegro there is actually a common interest between NATO and Milosevic. Indeed, if I wanted to be totally cynical, it would be very easy to make a case that NATO has, in fact, acted in Milosevic's interests. His position in Serbia is massively strengthened. By bombing Montenegro and the Vojvodina NATO has helped silence movements that were demanding greater autonomy from Belgrade – and brought about the exodus of a part of the Hungarian minority community in Vojvodina and Slav Muslims from the Sanjak (a region between Serbia and Montenegro). Hundreds of thousands of Albanians have been forced to flee Kosova. The KLA has been weakened militarily. It is certainly difficult to see how any of this is in the interests of the Kosovars or the people of Serbia, Montenegro and Vojvodina.

Blair and Clinton don't give a damn about the fate of the Kosovars. They simply want to get a toe hold in the Balkans to ensure the necessary stability for investment of capital. If that means partitioning Kosova with Milosevic then they will do it. Partition was certainly not ruled out at the NATO meeting on 12th April.

However the 12th April agreement does make it plain that there will be no independence for Kosova. Nor will the Kosovar Liberation Army receive arms. Kosova will be turned into a "protectorate" – possibly after being partitioned – occupied by NATO troops. Maybe not openly under the NATO name but, whatever other troops participate and whatever label they operate under, Kosova will be turned into a NATO colony.

This is simply a continuation of the policy decided at Rambouillet in March. The KLA refused to sign the accords which rejected Kosovar independence from Serbia and demanded the disarming of the KLA. Madeleine Albright then broke her far east tour to force the KLA to reverse its position. A few carrots and lots of threats were no doubt used to "persuade" the KLA to meet NATO's demands – demands which left the Kosovars totally at Milosevic's mercy when NATO air strikes began.

At the moment most Kosovars still support the NATO campaign; in fact they frequently demand ground troops. After ten years of brutal treatment by Milosevic it is easy to understand why they do so, especially since it is clear they will not be allowed to defend themselves.

However much the Kosovars' views can be understood they are, nevertheless, mistaken. NATO has made clear it will not support independence. Once NATO troops are in place any attempts by Kosovars to fight for independence will be crushed by those who pose as their "liberators". The KLA would be extremely foolish to give up its arms. It will need them again if NATO troops occupy Kosova.

The war of words

Leading intellectuals and activists on the international left have published detailed arguments against the logic of the NATO bombing – not that you would have known this from the British press.



Photo: Molly Cooper

Downing Street protests.

Edward Said

One needs to remember that since the US is a world, and not merely a regional, power one calculation that enters each of its foreign policy decisions is how the deployment of its military might will affect the US's image in the eyes of other, especially other competitive countries. Henry Kissinger made that point a central concern of his Indo-Chinese policy when he undertook the secret bombing of Laos: your enemies will learn that there are no limits to what you are prepared to do, even to the point of appearing totally irrational.

Thus the exercise of massive destructiveness wholly disproportionate to the goal, say, of stopping an enemy from advancing further, is a principal aim of this policy, as it has been of Israel's policy in southern Lebanon, where massive raids on civilian encampments do absolutely nothing to affect Israel's main enemies, the Hezbollah guerillas. Punishment is its own goal, bombing as a display of NATO authority its own satisfaction, especially when there is little chance of retaliation from the enemy.

Immanuel Wallerstein

It has been said that the US had to bomb the Serbs, or else NATO's credibility would be undermined. This is a curious argument because it is circular. If NATO threatens something, and then doesn't do it, of course its credibility would be undermined. But it didn't have to make the threat in the first place.

Or maybe it did. Perhaps the political issue for the US is precisely the need to justify the very existence of NATO, which no longer has an obvious role as such now that the Russian army seems to be so much weakened. But why would the US want to have NATO at all? There seem to me to be two main reasons. One is that its existence in turn justifies the current military expenditure and indeed build-up in the US, which has economic and internal political advantages for the government. The second is that NATO is necessary to prevent the west Europeans from straying too far from US control and above all from establishing an autonomous armed structure separate from NATO. The Yugoslav imbroglio seems ideal for both purposes.

Francois Chesnais

The bombing of Serbia is part of a policy based on the brutal rejection of peoples' right to self-determination, starting with the Kosovars, whose demand for independence is totally justified. At Rambouillet the United States and their "allies" forced the Kosovar representatives to renounce explicitly the demand for self-determination and with it independence. There was no way the US and their "allies" could recognise for the Kosovars a right they have absolutely denied the Kurds.

A war is taking place without either a formal declaration or even a resolution of the UN Security Council. Yet the US and the Clinton government enjoy the complete support of the imperialist European countries, which are second or third rank members of NATO and the EU. They also enjoy the support of the parties that form these governments: socialists and social democrats, but also the French and German Greens and communist and ex-communist parties. Without the support of Javier Solana, formerly No 2 in the Spanish PSOE, today Secretary General of NATO, or Lionel Jospin, Gerhard Schröder or Tony Blair, the bombings could not have happened.

Michael Albert and Stephen R. Shalom

Suppose the US is motivated to wage war and drop bombs in this instance by humanitarian concerns. If so, that would mean that concern for the plight of oppressed minorities and populations ranked very high in US policy-making calculations. We would then expect, it follows, that in any case where large populations are suffering horrible repression Washington would try to intervene to stop the repression.

Now consider the reverse claim that US foreign policy is never motivated by concern for the well being of local constituencies but will only opportunistically use related rhetoric for rationalisation purposes when possible. If this were true, in contrast, we

would expect that the US would intervene in the affairs of other countries only to serve domestic elites in the US or to aid local elites in other countries on their behalf. When upwards of half a million people, mostly members of the Tutsi ethnic minority, were exterminated in Rwanda in 1994, the Clinton administration demanded that a UN force already on the scene be reduced and obstructed efforts to save lives, even failing to apply diplomatic pressure against the killers.

Bombing has a deadly logic of its own. What begins as "surgical" attacks inevitably expands. "We have to drop the bridges and turn out the lights — there should be no more outdoor rock concerts in downtown Belgrade," senator John McCain told *Newsweek*. "Twelve days of surgical bombing was never going to turn Serbia around," wrote *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman. "Let's see what twelve weeks of less than surgical bombing does. Give war a chance."

What should we demand for the Balkans? An end to the bombing. Pursue diplomacy, not rejecting out of hand every diplomatic overture (such as the Russian call for talks or Milosevic's offer of a cease-fire). An international peace keeping force overseen by the UN General Assembly to stand between the combatants. An international system, under the auspices of the General Assembly, to adjudicate and make decisions about the use of peace-keeping forces. And an insistence that other atrocities, often perpetrated or abetted or ignored by Washington because they serve US interests, receive the same media visibility and humanitarian attention as the atrocities in Kosova.

Andre Gunder Frank

NATO bombing has effectively emasculated the very Serbian opposition to Milosevic and his rule, which offered the best chance and mechanism for a democratic, peaceful political settlement and the furtherance of more humanitarian policies in Serbia, including Kosova, and also in the Serbian populated regions of Bosnia. This domestic opposition to Milosevic was long led by the Serbian peace, women's and other democratic movements. They became a world wide model of peaceful mobilisation when they brought hundreds of thousands of people out into the streets during months of winter nights and which thereby obliged Milosevic to revoke a number of undemocratic and illegal measures. If the NATO powers had had even the slightest interest in promoting democracy or human rights anywhere in Yugoslavia, including at the time in Bosnia and Croatia, they would have worked with rather then undercut the domestic democratic movements (exactly the same is true in Iraq).

A road to catastrophe

A group of seventeen Serbian human rights, trade union and other non-governmental organisations issued this appeal from Belgrade on 6th April.

"Deeply disturbed by NATO destruction and the ordeal of Kosova Albanians, we, the representatives of non-governmental organisations and trade union 'Nezavisnost' (Independence), strongly demand from all those responsible for this tragedy to immediately create ground for the renewal of the peace process.

The most powerful military, political and economic powers of the world are for two weeks incessantly killing people and destroying not only military but also civilian objects, blowing up bridges and rail tracks, factories and heating plants, warehouses and basins. At the same time, in fear of the bombing campaign and military actions by the regime and the KLA, hundreds of thousands of Kosova Albanians are, in an unprecedented exodus, forced to leave their devastated homes and look for salvation in the uncertainty of fleeing.

It is obvious that this is a road to catastrophe. The peaceful and fair solution to the Kosova problem through international mediation that we have supported for years, today seems more distant than ever. The past activities of our organisations in the field of democratisation, development of civil society and acceptance of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia into all international institutions have been under constant pressure and intimidation by the Serbian regime.

We, as members of civil society associations, have courageously and rationally fought against war and nationalistic propaganda and in support of human rights. We emphasise that we have always raised our voices against the repression against Kosova Albanians and demanded the respect of their liberties and guarantees for their rights. We have also requested the return of autonomy to Kosova. We stress that the only connection and co-operation between Serbs and Albanians during all these years has been preserved among civil society institutions.

NATO military intervention has undermined all the results we have achieved and endangered the very survival of the civil sector in Serbia. Faced with the tragic situation we have found ourselves in, and in the name of human ideas and values, in accordance with all our past activities, we are demanding:

- Immediate stop to the bombing campaign and all armed movements.
- Resuming the peace process with international mediation at the regional Balkan and European level, as well as in the framework of the United Nations.
- Sharing of responsibility between the EU and Russia and their contribution to the peaceful solution of the crisis.
- End of the ethnic cleansing process and immediate return of all refugees.
- Support to the citizens of Montenegro to preserve peace and stability, solve serious consequences of the refugee catastrophe and resume the democratic processes that are underway.

We demand the Serbian and international media inform the public in a professional manner and not spur media war, incite inter-ethnic hatred, create irrational public opinion and glorify force as the ultimate accomplishment of the human mind.

We cannot meet these demands by ourselves. We ask your support."

- Appeal issued by: Argument Agency, Association of Citizens for Democracy, Social Justice and Support to Trade Unions, Belgrade Circle, Centre for Democracy and Free Elections, Centre for Transition to Democracy, Civic Initiatives, EKO Centre, European Movement in Serbia, Forum for Ethnic Relations, Group 484, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Union for Truth about Anti-fascist Resistance, United Branch Trade Unions Nezavisnost, VIN-Weekly Video News, Women in Black, Yugoslav Lawyers Committee for Human Rights.

Exposed – ten years of misery

In a call for working class internationalism, Bob Myers of Workers' Aid to Kosova charts the betrayal of the Kosovars.

The argument rages: for or against bombing, for or against intervention, for the Serbs or the Albanians, NATO versus the UN. Missing in all of it is the need for or the possibility of an independent movement of working class internationalism. Even worse, in much of the so called "Stop the Bombing campaign" there is not even any mention of the ten year persecution of the Albanians in Kosova.

In 1989-90 the Kosova miners, backed by tens of thousands of Albanians staged massive strikes and protests. Their demands were clear – against ethnic discrimination and for democratic rights as laid down by the Yugoslav constitution. Two Kosova miners who visited Britain at that time gave this message to Durham NUM members: "If the persecution of Albanians in Kosova is not stopped then Yugoslavia – a federation of many nationalities – is finished." They were right.

But what support did this working class protest receive from the worldwide movement? Virtually none. The Slovenia miners tried to send food to the striking Kosovars. The Bosnian miners refused to scab. The Durham miners sent a message of support. And that was it.

For ten years the Albanians suffered circumstances as bad as anything in apartheid South Africa. The Albanians were not even allowed to work. This was the beginning of "ethnic cleansing", through cultural and economic pressure, plus the occasional violence that saw community activists killed in police stations every week.

In the midst of this repression trade unionists performed amazing feats of mass self-organisation. 20,000 members of the Education Union built an entire education system for 400,000 pupils financed by the community in makeshift class rooms. Organisations like the miners union, whose 20,000 members have been locked out of the pits ever since their underground strikes in 1990, have ensured that those members who have no source of money do not starve. So the story goes on. A mass movement, overwhelmingly working class, poverty stricken and unemployed, fighting for a society in which people had equal rights, continued its resistance to an ever increasingly violent, barbaric regime in Belgrade.

But it did so alone, isolated, without any offer of help or solidarity from any of the so called leaders of the working class movement internationally and with little or no attention from the left who were all so tied to remnants of Stalinism that they went along with the myth of the Serbian regime somehow defending something called "socialist Yugoslavia". They saw in the Kosova Albanians (as in the Bosnians) a force controlled by nationalists trying to break up some "unity" that did not exist.

Until 1997 NATO leaders were able to smooth talk the Albanians in order to keep them quiet. Then in November 1997, at a conference on Security in Balkans, NATO spelled out it would not tolerate an independent Kosova. This was the green light for Milosevic.

For six hundred years all the great European empires, including the Russian empire, have drawn the Balkan borders to suit themselves denying all national rights. Despite this the Partisan struggle in World War II, against its Stalinist leadership, did open up the perspective of solving the national problems of the Yugoslav people. Within Kosova the Albanians fought to secure their own equal status and in 1974 Tito accepted constitutional changes which gave Kosova exactly the same Federal status as the other Republics. So it is simply a lie of Milosevic and Blair when they say Kosova belongs to Serbia. It is no more part of Serbia than Montenegro or Macedonia or Bosnia are.

But far more important than these constitutional demands is the simple question of "ethnic cleansing". In their attempts to reinstall a capitalist class in the Balkans the west came up against resistance – not from Milosevic or any of the other bureaucrats, who like the rest of their party members throughout Eastern Europe had no other perspective than privatisation and the market – but from the working class. Not in the form of a clear policy of "no to capitalism" but in the form of mass demonstrations against poverty and unemployment – and those demonstrations were pan-Yugoslav. They had to be suppressed but in the course of events it became clear to Milosevic and the west that the only way to do this was to divide people. The war in Bosnia or in Albania has the outer appearance of old ethnic hatreds but its content and dynamic are entirely modern and directed against the working class of the whole region and above all against its ultimate victim, the Serb working class.

Today no one cannot know what is going on. Many miners, teachers and union leaders are missing. Some are in hiding but many are dead. The paramilitary gangs of Arkan and Sesjl are going door to door killing known organisers. If this doesn't make you want to do something to defend Kosova from the Serbian regime then there is nothing much left to say.

● Contact International Workers' Aid for Kosova on 0161-232 9801; workersaid@redbricks.org.uk

INFORMATION AND CONTACTS

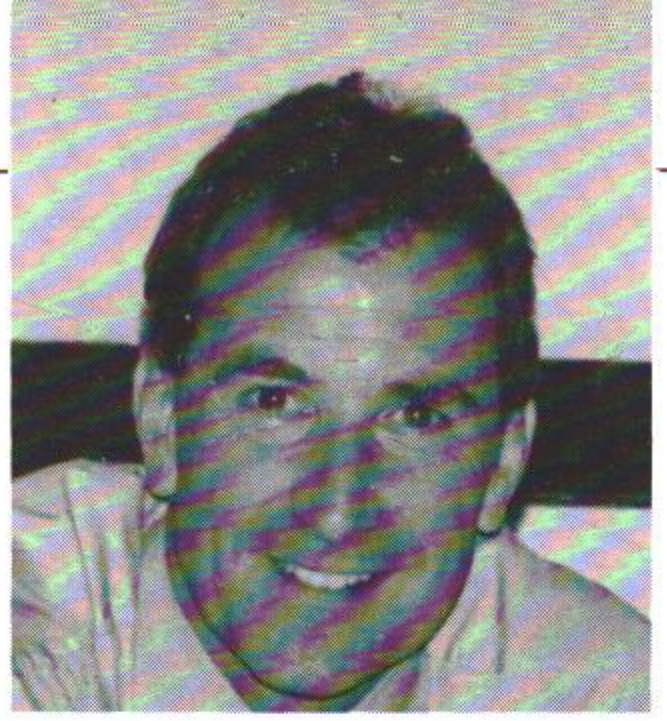
Committee for Peace in the Balkans, c/o Alice Mahon MP, House of Commons London SW1A OAA, 0171-820 9709, committee@peaceinthebalkan.freeserve.co.uk, www.peaceinthebalkans.freeserve.co.uk

War Resisters' International, 0171-278 4040, waty@gn.apc.org

B92, the independent Belgrade radio station closed by Milosevic, is broadcasting through a website: www.b92.net
Institute for War and Peace Reporting: www.iwpr.net

Humanitarian Law Centre (human rights organisation in Serbia): www.hlc.org.yu

Other alternative sources of information on the net: www.yutarget.com, www.beograd.com/nato, www.jbs.org/tra, www.aim.ac.gu



THE **ALAN SIMPSON** COLUMN

The saturation bombing of Yugoslavia is now less about the future of Kosova than that of NATO. The intervention was premised on "military humanitarianism". The best weapons money can buy were to deliver swift retributive justice, the protection of ethnic Albanians, the isolation (and humiliation) of Milosevic and the annexation of Kosova as a NATO/IMF protectorate prior to some sort of "independence" referendum.

Faced with clear evidence of brutalities by Serb soldiers in Kosova, it was an appeal that divided left as much as right. Many of the most progressive voices in Britain were prepared to swallow deep misgivings about NATO to defeat Milosevic speedily. What we are left with is almost the worst of all worlds.

Rather than fight an aerial war that it couldn't win, the Yugoslav army accelerated a ground war they could barely lose. NATO wanted a clean and sanitised war: no ground troops other than to police a surrender. Milosevic was to get retribution – from long-range. Yet most of those who favoured military intervention warned that without ground troops it would be a disaster. None will arrive.

The decision to withdraw UN monitors in preparation for bombing removed the only (flawed) protection Kosovars had from Serb atrocities. They fled Kosova, knowing that no other protection was on offer. NATO's detailed strategic planning of strike targets failed to recognise how little this offered as front line protection in Kosova. Only now is aid being rushed into place to deal with that most predictable of outcomes – "ethnic cleansing" on a scale Milosevic could only have dreamt of.

The US is happy to fight free-trade wars with anyone who stands in its way. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) will give legal force to the new ground rules and NATO (rather than the UN) will be the arm of international enforcement. NATO generals will be able to try out new weapons systems. Just when you thought NATO might die a natural death in the embers of the old Cold War, up it springs as global military policeman.

Is this to be salvation for the Kosavars? Sadly, no. Most neither expect, nor want, a rapid return home. Without a Yugoslav surrender, they wouldn't dream of returning. Even with one, they would want to see troops patrolling the region first.

With or without an army of occupation in Kosova, the legacy of bitterness will outlast any military protection. The bombing will leave vast trenches of poverty that will open up fresh wounds and divisions within Yugoslavia and increase conflict with neighbouring states. The diaspora of Kosovars will soon turn into a Dutch auction – who wants them least? How much (or how little) will the West pay for their resettlement? NATO will not offer to pick up this tab. The West will fall out over the "burden" of refugees. The Yugoslav economy (and its democracy movement) will be set back ten years or more. Further regional insecurity can be guaranteed.

Hardly any serious discussion has taken place about Kosova's viability as an economic and political entity. This is one of the central flaws in the US's Rambouillet ultimatum. To talk of Kosova as an independent state is naive. Ultimately its future lies starkly between Yugoslavia or Albania. If the former, then Serbian society has to be involved. International involvement is a sine qua non, but this probably means the UN, not NATO. Kofi Anan could broker this process, bringing together a UN contingent from anywhere not involved in the bombing. Would NATO allow this? For the central issue is no longer peace in Kosova, but NATO's occupation of it.

The Rambouillet ultimatum virtually presupposes Kosovar secession into a Greater Albania. Would this bring peace? Albania has almost deconstructed. It has no effective government. Its economy is heavily dependent on the illegal export of migrants and drugs (via Italy) and of European arms surpluses (to anyone willing to buy). If NATO wanted such realignment it had better think through the consequences for Albanian minorities in Macedonia and Montenegro. Further "ethnic cleansing" will almost certainty follow from the creation of an "Albanian homeland". Secession in Kosova will send a similar message back into Bosnia, where UN troops have been trying to tell Serb and Croat communities that they cannot have what NATO is to deliver elsewhere. If Russia says it will not allow NATO occupation of Yugoslavia we could also see a liquorice-all-sorts of troop nationalities taking pot-shots at each other, over the right to be regional peacemakers.

We have to look to the UN rather than NATO. When the UN was formed, the intention was to make the World Bank, IMF, etc. accountable adjuncts to it. That is still the challenge. Today, the WTO would have to be added, and resources currently devoted to saving banks from their own speculative follies would have to be redirected into social reconstruction. For today's refugees this may begin with safety and sanitation in camps. For tomorrow, it may mean a UN "dowry" to invest in the rebuilding of a life.

Bombing has left a lot to repair. So too has the ethnic conflict. If Kosova is to rebuild, we need to send cash not cruise missiles. Offering to spend as much on peace as we are on war wouldn't be a bad start. The UN, rather than NATO will have to do this.

NATO has demonstrated the limits of its own mindset. Saturation bombing can destroy an economy, provoke a human exodus and possibly even an official surrender. It cannot, however, deliver a peace. Military machines understand conquest not consensus. Flawed and underfunded as they are, only renewed UN institutions offer the possibility of rebuilding a Balkan peace.

Poverty – it's still there,

Eric Ferguson reports on the "news" that poverty is now three times worse than in 1979.

In March the Labour Government suddenly discovered that widespread poverty exists in Britain. Apparently Treasury researchers had done some number crunching and found that two in five children are born into poor families, that this was the product of an increasing inequality over the last two decades and that three times more people live in poverty now than in 1979.

This so shocked Blair that he promised to abolish child poverty in 20 years. The Government's annual report uninspiringly entitled *Households Below Average Income* (*HBAI*) is the most widely used measure of poverty in the UK, although no government has formally adopted it is an official definition. Poverty, based on *HBAI*'s figures, is an income of half of the national average. At 1998 prices, weekly income on this measure is equivalent to £73.50 for a single adult and £223 for a couple with three children.

The *HBAI* showed, in November 1998, that average incomes grew by 44% between 1979 and 1996/7. However, some 70% of this growth was to be found in the incomes of the richest tenth and, after housing costs, the incomes of the poorest tenth had fallen by 8%.

Thus, while Labour's "discovery" is to be welcomed for the press coverage generated about the issue, the timing of the announcement is key. It is doubtful that Blair and Brown were doing anything more than keeping the centre left of the Party quiet at a time when the Government was pushing through cuts of over £31 billion in disability and widows benefits as part of the Welfare Reform Bill.

The message from the figures is simple. The dominant social policies of free market economics, to wit flexible labour markets and the privatisation of welfare through tax cuts, are producing an ever greater level of poverty. Any serious strategy aimed at tackling this requires a macro-social and economic volte face by Labour.

The 1998 *Acheson Report into Health Inequalities* stated that poor health is linked to living in poverty and that poor mothers and their children are especially vulnerable. Acheson argued that a good way of tackling this was to increase the level of social security benefits. Although commissioned by the Government, the *Acheson Report* was effectively disowned by Labour.

Blair adviser John Hills pointed out in the 1998 Joseph Rowntree Report *Income and Wealth – The Latest Evidence* that raising taxes has to be central to any meaningful anti-poverty strategy. Labour was obviously listening so hard that it decided to cut the basic rate by a penny in the last budget.

A recent article in the IPPR's *New Economy* by David Pichaud argued that if social security benefits are not uprated in line with earnings then the end of Labour's first term could see an increase of up to 1.5 million people liv-

United against Murdoch

Ed Horton writes: It was no surprise to me when the Government ruled against Rupert Murdoch's bid for Manchester United. With Mr. Murdoch, it's never personal, it's only ever business: and the bid simply was not that important to a man who knows the difference between what is vital to him and what he merely wants.

Sky will continue to be a major, even a dominant force in football whether it owns Manchester United or not, and it may even rebound to Murdoch's advantage that he has been spurned by a government that was supposed to be in his pocket. A favour, as it were, to be called in at a later date?

It could not have escaped notice that the ruling came just a few days before the tenth anniversary of the Hillsborough disaster, another, far more important issue over which football fans are crying out for Government intervention. We are likely to wait in vain. It is one thing to rebuff a media magnate's attempt to buy yet another company – and doing so doesn't actually involve much more than doing nothing, a field in which the Government has shown much skill – but it is quite another to allow renewed enquiry into the events of 15th April 1989.

Hillsborough is often cited as the event which caused the "transformation" of English football into the money-spinning media circus we know and do not love today. And so it was – but you cannot counterpose then, and now, so easily. It is a million times better to be squeezed for cash than it is to be squeezed to death in a Sheffield pen, but the contempt for supporters so violently displayed ten years ago is still the dominating force in football.

Supporters are only valued in so far as they generate profit: clubs are only of interest in so far as they generate profit. As Manchester United prosper, with or without Murdoch, the likes of Crystal Palace and Luton Town are in receivership, and many other will follow them.

Do we leave it to the market, as New Labour would have it? There are many reasons for socialists to be suspicious of football, but while it exists, our position must surely be that access is the issue and that this means the largest number of professional football clubs, in the greatest number of places, playing for the smallest possible ticket prices.

The trend is entirely in the opposite direction. Manchester United is a victory for supporters, and from the Government, a gesture to supporters: but it a very small one, and as in so many other things, gestures, so much a part of New Labour's soundbite-oriented thinking, are never going to be enough.

Mr Blair

ing in poverty. Pichaud's view goes to the heart of the argument because it points to the fact that the difference in income between those living on means-tested benefits and the rest of society is a major determinant of income inequality in Britain. This conclusion is underlined by recent findings from the New Policy Institute showing that two thirds of those in poverty live in households where the main earner is not in paid employment.

This poses a real problem for Labour as there are only two ways to reduce benefit poverty. The first is to make sure that everyone who wants a job has one, through a full employment strategy underpinned by a decent minimum wage and national childcare provision. The second is to raise taxes to pay for increased benefits for the unemployed. Both measures, however, would fatally undermine flexible labour markets and the tax-cutting paradigm at the heart of New Labour; a programme that is building on Thatcherism rather than reversing it.

When Stephen Byers, Mandleson's replacement at the DTI, explains that wealth creation is as important as wealth redistribution, and Tony Blair calls for the end of the "something for nothing welfare state" while cutting corporation tax to the lowest levels in the EU, it becomes self-evident where Labour's priorities lie. It is simply not the case, as many Labour loyalists would like to believe, that Labour is talking "right" to keep the *Daily Mail* readership happy; it is talking social democratic to keep the centre left of the back benches happy as and when required.

Remember, this is the government of spin. If there is any doubt in your mind as to whether or not Labour is serious about tackling poverty then ask someone who has had their disability benefit cut or perhaps the one in four lone parents who do not eat on a regular basis because they cannot afford to, or even an asylum seeker who is to be denied cash benefits and whose children are denied free school meals. Then the reality behind Tony and Gordon's desire to end poverty becomes clear.



Photo: Paul Mattsson

Facing the future at Haggerston Estate, Hackney.

Field cultivates left revolt

Jon Green, Tottenham CLP, tries to make sense of the current debate on welfare reform.

Frank Field is an unlikely left hero. As the Minster for Welfare Reform he was given the job of re-designing the welfare state to meet the New Labour specification. This included importing some ideas of the US New Right. Field admired the approach of Lawrence Mead who advocated compulsory work-tests. Field also shared the New Right's belief that the welfare system created a layer of work shy dishonest dependants. Stamping out fraud was central to Field's Green Paper. However, this is where Field started to fall out with Gordon Brown at the Treasury.

Central to Field's reforms was an attack on means testing, "the cancer eating away at the welfare state". This set Field on a collision course with the Treasury. Rather than design a reformed welfare state based on universal coverage, Brown relies on affluence tests and adjustments to the tax and benefits system. After over thirty drafts of the Green Paper, Field finally agreed to a watered down version of his welfare reform proposals.He managed to extract a crucial concession.

To head off opposition from disabled activists, following the left revolt over cuts in lone parents' benefits, an assurance was made that there would be no means testing of disability allowances. It was this pledge that the Government has reneged on, alongside the decision to abolish severe disablement allowance for those with insufficient national insurance credits and a claw back of benefits for those with pension or insurance payments worth more than £50 per week.

It is no surprise that Field would be prepared to revolt on this issue. The Government's proposals will increase reliance on means testing for the poorest disabled. It also discourages saving for the slightly better off. Field's approach is the complete opposite. A comparison could be made between Field's approach to pension reform and the Government's disability reforms.

Field wanted to separate the stakeholder pension scheme from SERPS, establishing an insurance-based scheme that would expand private sector pension provision, providing universal coverage and redistribution from rich to poor. Robin Blackburn writing in the latest New Left Review has pointed to the radical nature of Field's proposals. Brown rejected the scheme because it would cost billions.

There is a debate that is needed on the left over the type of welfare reform that can deliver a system of universal coverage. The starting point for this debate would be an inclusive form of social citizenship. This would place the left on a different side of the debate from Frank Field. However, for our different reasons, we both oppose the Government's attack on disability benefits. With Field leading a damaging revolt, a Government U-turn is not impossible. This would mark a major setback for the Workfare State being devised by the Treasury.

European stitch-up

David Holland, Hackney South and Shoreditch CLP reports: **Many in the Party will be looking to the European elections with a jaundiced eye. The new election system and the method for selecting Labour candidates represent innovations in centralised and undemocratic methods.**

The closed list system confers great powers of patronage on party managers and is designed to benefit the Lib Dems, but deny the prospects of smaller minority groups. Cuddling up to the Lib Dems, while purging the left, appears the main feature of changes likely to halve Labour's Euro seats.

In the London Central Constituency, the turnout in Labour's 1998 nomination ballot was 14.5%. It was 42% in 1993. The two candidates nominated by the ELP do not appear on any list. Draw your own conclusions on member involvement and empowerment!

There are strong indications that the selection was not made by regional panels, as claimed, but conducted nationally and centrally. Glyn Ford was parachuted into the South West region to head the list, with no evidence of local support. Michael Cashman was similarly placed number two in the West Midlands and Lyndon Harrison number three in Wales, although he has been persuaded to withdraw to appease Welsh opinion.

The new system will subject the EPLP to control from the Leader's Office. There are fears that funds for members' offices and secretarial support will be used to resource the Labour Party apparatus through new regional offices for MEPs, replacing individual Members' constituency offices.

The common manifesto of the Party of European Socialists is poor too. Much wringing of hands about "putting jobs first" boils down to an exclusive reliance on supply side measures and "flexible labour markets." One stray sentence "this may include agreed reductions in working time negotiated between the social partners" represents the only feeble nod towards job creation.

The left opposition in Labour's sister parties across the EU need to work together for a directly elected delegate conference of the PES to agree its programme and elect a leadership.

Left out of Assembly

NEC candidate Christine Shawcroft reports on the GLA selection process.

I am, in my small way, a connoisseur. I am collecting reasons why I'm not allowed to seek selection for things. Having been kept off the panel for selection as a Tower Hamlets councillor because I might not agree with Labour Party policy at some point in the future, I have now been told I won't even be interviewed for the panel of Greater London Assembly candidates because I've failed Life Experience. Oh, and after twelve years as a councillor, holding officerships of the Labour Group and chairing important committees, I failed Representational Skills.

As usual, I find myself in good company. Comrades like Teresa Pearce, Geoff Martin, Kumar Murshid and Colin Bastin have also been turned down. Colin was told that, after twenty six years on CRS London Political Committee, most of them as chair or vice chair, he lacked teamwork and leadership skills! Raj Jethwa must feel that being kept off the panel is a poor reward for consistently voting with the right over the last year on the Regional Board, but that's showbiz, Raj. Yet young councillors elected in 1998 have been put on the panel without a





Christine Shawcroft

second glance at their lack of a track record.

But then, it is our comrades' track records which have kept them off the panel. I was told that forms were assessed "blind", with no names or personal details indicated. If your form says you are a member of the Regional Board and last year were a runner up for the Constituency Section of the NEC, and that you spent years as a Tower Hamlets councillor, it doesn't take a genius to work out whose it is. Other refuseniks must have similar "giveaways" on their forms.

With no disrespect to those lucky enough to win this particular lottery and make it onto the panel, some of the less experienced candidates I have heard of getting through are clearly there because they have no chance of selection and therefore pose no threat to favoured candidates such as Toby Harris, Kathryn Smith and Val Shawcross (no relation). However, if anything goes wrong and some of these babies get elected by mistake, London is going to be in trouble.

The good news is, they may be making sure that any trace of left wing credential is kept from the panel because they think Livingstone is unstoppable for Mayor. At least, they think, we can saddle him with the millstone of an Assembly totally opposed to anything he may want to do.

At issue is not anyone's wounded pride, or egotistical feeling that they deserve an Assembly seat dropped into their laps, but our democratic right to seek selection. What kind of citizen are you if you are denied this democratic right? What kind of stake do we have in the Labour Party, if a two tier membership is set up, with those allowed to seek selection for local Council, Regional Assembly, or Parliament (I didn't waste my time applying for that panel) and those who are not allowed. Where will this all end? I'm a parent governor of my kids' school. Am I going to round off my collection of excuses by being told I'm not allowed on the School Governors Panel because my children are the wrong combination of heights?

End of the peer show

They said it couldn't happen. Don King couldn't organise a more mouth watering contest. Here, in the pages of *LLB*, we present the contest they've all been calling for. Millbank's Matthew Seward slugs it out with Oxford's Ann Black on the issue of Lords reform.

Matthew Seward:

Ann Black's criticism (*LLB* April) of the timetable for the Labour Party's consultation on House of Lords reform prior to the submission of its evidence to the Royal Commission, is both unfair and misplaced.

The Royal Commission set a date of 30th April by which it wished to receive written evidence and gave official notice of this only on 24th March. The deadline for the Party's consultation had to take account of the need to get responses in, write the submission and get it approved by the Party's democratic structures. Therefore 6th April was, in practical terms, the latest possible deadline.

Obviously, we would have preferred a longer consultation period. This issue is of considerable interest to many Party members and we have tried to maximise as much involvement as we could in the short time available.

It is a pity Ann Black feels the need to undermine the consultation process in this way. The Party has conducted its consultation within a tight timeframe outside its control.

- Matthew Seward is Secretary of the Labour Party's Democracy and Citizenship Policy Commission

Ann Black replies:

I am reluctant to get into a slanging match with Matthew, as we shared a thoughtful and constructive debate at the recent South East Regional Board, and he judged my summary a pretty accurate assessment of the discussion. I accept that the timescale is tight, although the Joint Policy Committee knew before 6th March, and it is unfortunate that regions had so little chance to publicise local meetings.

Far from undermining the consultation process, I have done all I can to extend it. I have solicited views from individual members. I was responsible for the attendance of half the ordinary constituency representatives at the South East discussion, although as this comprised two out of four people the achievement should be set in context.

I also asked if National Policy Forum members could be involved. Matthew assures me that we were not deliberately excluded, but it feels like we are a long way down the food chain. The democratic structures to which he refers are limited to a ten-person policy commission and the twenty members of the Joint Policy Committee.

And while he may not approve of the vehicle, publishing the questions in *LLB* will have reached a far wider audience than the Party's official mechanisms. I regret this. I have proposed many times that all non-confidential policy documents should be displayed on Labour's website, and I am still waiting for a response.

I hope that Matthew and I can talk about better ways of connecting the policy commissions, the National Policy Forum and the Party, though perhaps not through your letters column. Then we can ensure that Labour policies are based on the widest possible participation, an objective which I believe we do actually share.

- Ann Black is a candidate for the Grassroots Alliance in the forthcoming NEC election.

Lefty goes to Holyrood

Our Scottish correspondent reports: Opinion polls suggest that Labour is poised to be the biggest party in the first Scottish Parliament in 300 years but not with an overall majority. The Lib-Dems might hold the balance of power. Jim Wallace, their leader, is reported as being prepared to consider a coalition with Labour (for some changes to Labour's education plans and a seat for himself on the new Scottish Executive). He has also been reported as being prepared to do a deal with the SNP (if it agrees to a delay calls for a referendum on independence).

The are a few independent candidates, most notably Dennis Canavan. The Scottish Socialist Party is standing on all Regional Lists. Former Scottish Labour Party Chair Johann Lamont, is likely to win against Tommy Sheridan in Glasgow Pollok. The SSP could pick up a seat in the Glasgow Regional List, and could have a significant presence elsewhere. The Socialist Labour Party is also standing in some constituencies. The SWP is standing several candidates including Roddy Slorach, the Glasgow UNISON Convenor recently suspended from his post (see Page 20).

The main issues look set to be the SNP's proposal to forfeit the 1p income tax cut announced in the Budget and Labour's continued support for PFI (or PPP as it is now known). Despite a stated willingness by many voters to consider paying more tax to fund services, the SNP proposals have gained little support, being seen as opportunistic rather than part of a reasoned economic strategy. Voters are also expressing concern about the mechanism for collecting the tax, and the fact that the SNP's proposals do not explain how they will deal with the estimated fiscal deficit in an independent Scotland.

PFIs have become an issue following Bob Thomson, Scottish Party Treasurer and former senior UNISON official, speaking out against them. A number of Labour candidates are known to have opposed PFI in the past.

The Scottish Parliament will have a significant left-wing presence within Labour ranks with John McAllion, Cathy Jamieson and Johann Lamont looking set to win their constituency seats. A number of ex-Scottish Labour Action activists including Jackie Baillie, Susan Deacon and Sarah Boyack (all of whom were given key spokesperson roles in the election campaign) look likely to win seats, ensuring continued support for devolving power within the Labour Party itself.

Cross-party support for socialist policies in the Parliament has been speculated upon – that remains to be seen. Donald Dewar has announced that if Labour gains control, the first piece of legislation will be an Education Act – an interesting opportunity to test the water.

Newark Party stays suspended

Fiona Jones' successful appeal against her conviction for corrupt electoral practice leaves a lot of unfinished business, argues Andy Stanton, ex-member of Newark CLP.

So Fiona Jones has escaped the ignominy of being the first MP in 140 years to lose her seat under the Representation of the People Act, having had her original conviction overturned. Labour leaders were caught wrong-footed by the verdict, claiming that Fiona was the hapless victim of a vendetta. The Newark Labour Party was suspended, helping to shift the blame to "disaffected" CLP members.

In fact, members had no notion of a police investigation prior to the Fraud Squad appearing at the Town Hall. Labour Councillors speculated that the visit may have been about planning matters. Council Leader Gill Dawn circulated a memorandum to quell speculation and was accused by a Party official of working to topple Fiona Jones. A week later she was suspended from the Party and ousted as Leader of the Council. Meanwhile the readiness of grassroots Party members to co-operate with the police investigation seems to have been viewed by some as working against the interests of the Party. In another scenario this would have been seen as witness intimidation.

The spin ("Fiona is an excellent MP who is having difficulty with a small group of disaffected activists") was plausible. Party leaders' support for her even before the conviction was overturned on appeal stands in sharp contrast with their willingness to pounce on alleged wrongdoing by individuals whose views it dislikes.

Liverpool setback

John Rice, Bootle CLP, writes:
The final phase of the NEC's Liverpool Taskforce recommendations has resulted in a victory for the arch-Blairite candidate Gideon Ben-Tovim over Labour Group leader and traditionalist Frank Prendergast. The contest was for who was to be the leader of the new Taskforce and de facto leader of the Labour Group. Only 1,005 out of some 3,500 Liverpool Party members actually voted.

Some Labour councillors have pledged to follow the former Chief Whip Bill Craig, who resigned the Labour Whip against what he saw as an NEC purge of the Labour old guard.

The local media fosters anti-Prendergast sentiment. The involvement in the contest of a Government minister and a whip, along with two other Liverpool MPs, didn't help.

Two-thirds of the Labour Group have publicly expressed their opposition to changing the leadership and an unwillingness to work under a Ben-Tovim leadership. However, Frank Prendergast has stated that he intends to stay part of the Taskforce Executive.



THE LIZ DAVIES COLUMN

The March NEC was dominated by the Code of Conduct for one member one vote ballots, which will apply to the NEC elections now underway. Grassroots Alliance representatives had called for a code after the Millbank shenanigans that marred last year's contest. After much delay, we were presented with a document that did little to allay our concerns. Pete Willsman called for all organisations supporting candidates to publish their accounts. Mark Seddon proposed that there be an independent scrutineer to receive and adjudicate on any complaints concerning the conduct of the ballot. Cathy Jamieson proposed that all Party staff, rather than just those concerned with the ballot process, be required to be neutral. I moved deletion of the clause prohibiting candidates from making any public comment on the ballot. Cathy's amendment was accepted. The other three were put to the vote and were all defeated with only the four of us voting in favour of each amendment. The Code of Conduct was then passed by 21 votes to four – no prizes for guessing who the four were.

The NEC met five days after Fiona Jones, MP for Newark, and her agent had been convicted of election fraud (a conviction subsequently reversed on appeal). There was a recommendation to suspend Newark CLP and the District Labour Party, which was said to be entirely unrelated to the proceedings against Fiona Jones. We were told that the Party's investigations into Newark had uncovered a CLP engaged in internecine warfare. As so often in these cases, the account of events in Newark offered by Party officials was stronger on innuendo than evidence and was entirely at odds with accounts offered by Party members on the ground. It seemed to me that the local party was being scapegoated for the embarrassment caused by the Fiona Jones case. The four

'I told Tony Blair that the only thing that bombing achieves is the killing of innocent civilians...and the reinforcing of support for Milosevic'

Grassroots Alliance representatives voted against the suspension – although we had to fight just to get a vote.

The meeting took place the day before the start of the NATO bombing campaign and the Prime Minister reported on the Kosova situation. I told Tony Blair that the only thing that bombing achieves is the killing of innocent civilians, who are being punished for the undoubted crimes of Milosevic, and the reinforcing of support for Milosevic in Serbia. If military intervention was to be undertaken, I asked, why was it not through UN? The Prime Minister's answer was that one of the reasons why intervention had to occur over Kosova was that the "credibility of NATO" was at stake and that there was no point in going through the UN since intervention would be vetoed by Russia or China. He ruled out ground troops, saying that a commitment of 100,000 – 200,000 soldiers on the ground would be more than any country could consider committing.

There is no doubt that the conflict in the Balkans is one of the most difficult issues that the left has had to face for many years and it is hardly surprising that there is disagreement and uncertainty. I have spoken on anti-war platforms and my own views are broadly in accord with those outlined in the editorial of this issue of *LLB*. But I appreciate that this is a difficult balancing act and the atrocities committed against the Kosovars are such that if military intervention could succeed in halting them, it might be possible to support that intervention. At the meetings I have attended, feelings have run high, which is hardly surprising given the high stakes involved, and I have certainly appreciated the opportunity to discuss the issue with comrades on the left. What has struck me most forcibly is that everybody's position is genuinely felt, and is based on humanitarian concerns. For that reason, we must ensure on the left that we treat everybody with respect. Opposition to the bombings does not mean that someone is a Serb nationalist, or in favour of genocide. Similarly, support for the bombings does not mean that someone is a NATO-loving militarist.

One issue that the left can unite around is the Immigration and Asylum Bill. It is a bitter irony that while the British Government is at war supposedly to protect the rights of Kosovars, it is simultaneously depriving asylum-seekers (including Kosovars) of basic human rights and seeking to restrict their opportunities to claim asylum. The Labour Government has been reluctant to commit itself to provide asylum to the refugee Kosovars, arguing that it is better for Kosovars to have their homes restored to them. I know I'm not the only one to view this position with some cynicism. The choice belongs to the Kosovars, and should be offered to them.

The NEC elections are on us again, and this year is likely to be rather quieter than last. The rumours are that Millbank will not repeat the high-profile attacks on the Grassroots Alliance. The whole process has been shortened; nominations were taken during March and now we are into the election campaign. My thanks go to all those many *LLB* readers who ensured that their CLP nominated one of the Grassroots Alliance candidates.

The birth of a movement

Paul Donaldson witnesses a gripping meeting launching the National Civil Rights Movement

More than six hundred people packed the Camden Centre in London on 28th March for the launch of the National Civil Rights Movement, an initiative which grew out of the Stephen Lawrence campaign and the urgent need of large numbers of family-based and local campaigns for support, resources and co-ordination. For two hours the meeting was gripped by a succession of powerful personal testimonies by family members and campaigners from across the country, including Sukhdev Reel, Kwesi Menson, the Ozbay family, Diane Hammill, and representatives of the campaigns for Roger Sylvester, Butetown 2, the Chokkar family in Scotland, Satpal Ram, and many others. The meeting agreed a provisional statement of purpose and a plan of action. More than 70 people volunteered to serve on the Steering Committee. Speaking at the launch of the National Civil Right Movement, Suresh Grover of the Southall Monitoring Group urged the meeting to seize the time.

"The civil rights movement aims to develop a genuine network of supporters across the country, to support families actively, to advise and assist and develop campaigns which they themselves can run, not to treat them as people who can't control their lives but people who, given confidence, resources and support, can rise to challenge the racist criminal justice system.

We want to build a movement of solidarity and support. We want to draw on the experience of the American civil rights movement, to emulate its boldness and bravery, its spirit of inclusion and direct participation, although we know that we are in different circumstances. We know that we have some rights but we need a movement to enforce and develop those rights. What brings together all the families represented here today is that we all know, in the words of Martin Luther King, that true peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of justice.

The challenge we face is intense and possibly insurmountable, but we have no choice and we have a window of opportunity now, a window created by the tenacity of the Lawrences and the determination of the families speaking here today. If we do not seize this moment, we will continue to respond to injustices in a piecemeal manner, families will continue to struggle in isolation.

No longer do we have the luxury of fighting with each other or sitting on our bums and letting others do the tasks for us. Building a civil rights movement will be hard, but it is something we owe to the Lawrences and the other families. Over the last 20 years, the situation for black people in this country has got worse. If you look at our communities they are poorer, and when you hear from these families you will be devastated by their experiences and you will know the kind of brutal injustices our communities face.

We can't just leave the positive recommendations of the Macpherson inquiry to the Government, to the great and the good. We have to do it ourselves."

● Contact the National Civil Rights Movement, c/o 14 Featherstone Road, Southall, Middlesex UB2 5HH. Tel: 0181-574 0818.
email TMGroup@aol.com .

Battling the Bill

John Stewart, of the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, provides the latest news on the campaign against the Immigration and Asylum Bill.

MPs in the Special Standing Committee discussing the Bill have taken evidence from people working with asylum seekers and refugees. They have been told the devastating effect the Bill would have if enacted in its current form.

At the first meeting of the Committee, on April 13th, only the first clause was considered, leaving 137 to be discussed. The Government will probably timetable the Committee proceedings (a "guillotine" motion) to limit debate and ensure the Committee approves the Bill in time for the Government to get it through for Royal Assent.

If the Bill emerges from Committee without substantial improvements then Labour MPs with any conscience should vote against it, in its entirety, on Third Reading. That will probably be the last stage MPs get to show their opposition to this horrendous legislation. Parliamentarians should not shirk their responsibilities to the most vulnerable people in our society or to Party members whom, when asked, are overwhelmingly unhappy with the Bill.

Labour Party activists should raise the Immigration and Asylum Bill at Party meetings and encourage Labour MPs to vote against it at Third Reading. A Lobby of Parliament is being organised on May 25th to increase pressure on MPs to oppose the Bill at Third Reading and other events, including another national demonstration, are planned.

The House of Lords is expected to oppose sections of Bill, pointing out that it conflicts with the UK's duties under international human rights treaties. It is possible that the Lords could delay and amend the Bill where elected Labour MPs were unable to do so.

This legislation goes further than even the Tories dared to go. It makes it even harder for asylum seekers to get to the UK. For those that do make it here it is planned to reduce them to a state of absolute destitution, living on £1 per day and 50p per day for children over three years old, supplemented by food vouchers. It will increase the levels of immigration detention in centres such as Campsfield House and Harmondsworth. It increases the powers of immigration officers to search and arrest people they believe to be here illegally. For black people living in the UK legally it will cause more harassment and discrimination. It is a truly appalling piece of legislation and should be resolutely opposed.

● The campaign against the Bill has major debts. Donations (payable to CAIR) can be sent to NCADC at 101 Villa Road, Birmingham B21.

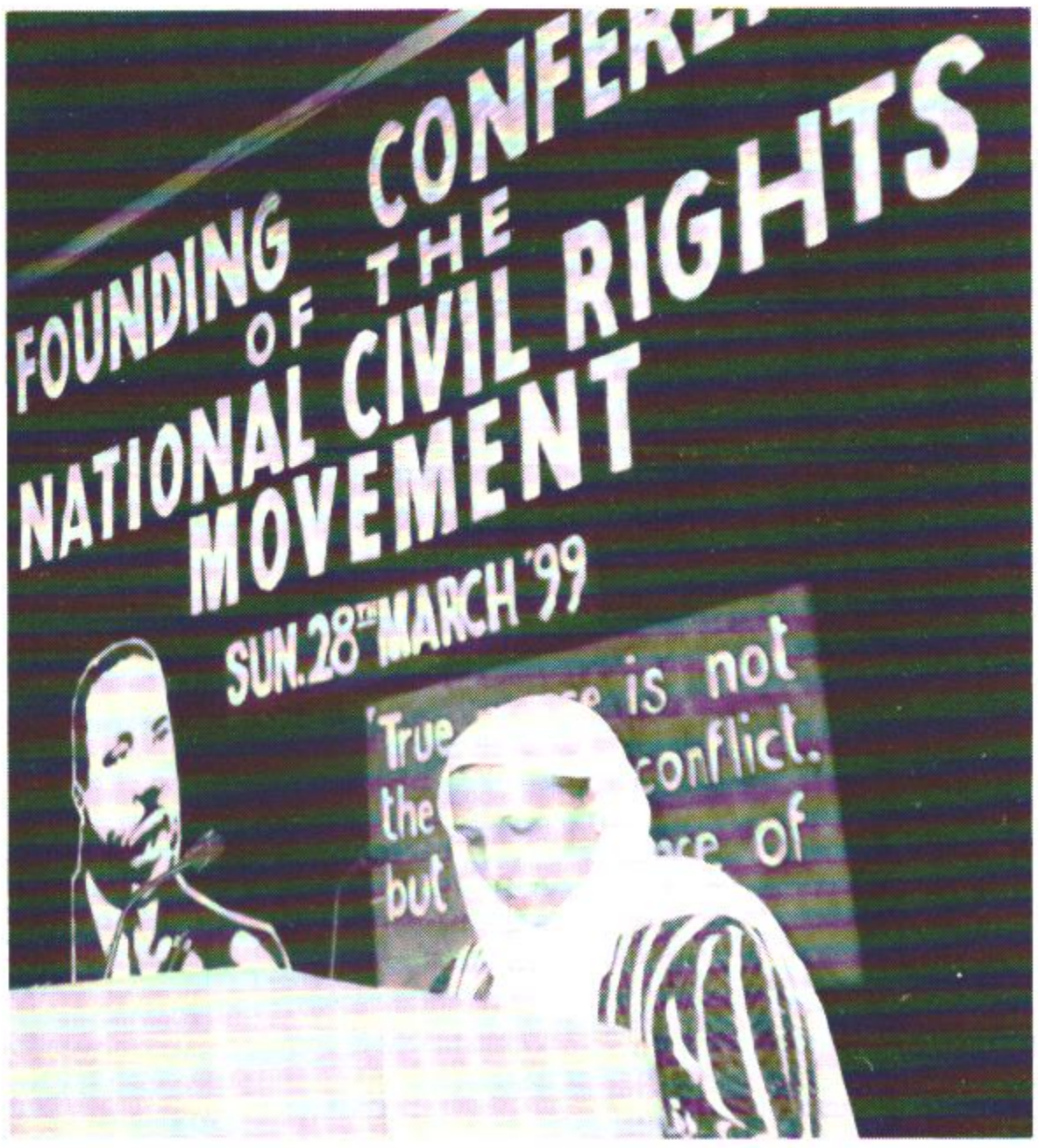


Photo: Ed Hall

SkyChefs striker addresses National Civils Rights Movement conference.

"I won't give up"

At the National Civil Rights Movement launch there were many moving testimonies from families directly affected by racial injustice. Janet Alder spoke about the death of her brother Christopher in police custody.

Christopher was a 37 year old para-trooper who served five years with the Armed Forces. He served in Northern Ireland.

On 31st March last year he went out with his friends to a nightclub in Hull. He was seen on CCTV walking out at 2.20am. He was assaulted by one of his companions and fell to the ground, bumped his head and received superficial head injuries and a mouth injury. He was taken to the hospital by paramedics. There were two police at the hospital for some other incident.

Christopher had a head injury, but the police forcibly took him to the toilet. The police version of events is that he was causing a breach of the peace, he was told to leave and threatened with CS gas. He wouldn't leave and when he got outside the hospital they decided to arrest him. Christopher complied when the handcuffs were put on him, spoke to a security officer and was put in the back of the van.

He had been in the hospital 56 minutes. The journey to the hospital to the police station is about three or four minutes. When the police opened the door at the other end, he did not respond to the request for him to get out. Christopher was unconscious. The police dragged him out and in the process his trousers and his boxer shorts ended up down his legs. They dragged him into the police station and put him on the floor.

There is video evidence showing Christopher left there gasping for breath every ten to twelve seconds. The police do not seem to care about this; they're walking about getting on with their everyday business. One police officer even says that he is play acting, that he has been awkward all night. Christopher dies after 10 minutes.

It was two weeks later that the police in Burnley actually came to my house and told me that Christopher had died in police custody. I felt totally isolated, having no family there, and did not know who to turn to. I decided to go to Hull to meet with my other brother and go to the police station and find out what was going on. The first policeman I talked to sat chewing gum leaning back in his chair, hands behind his head and said, "Your brother went to a nightclub, had a fight, due to the fight he died in police custody."

I went home and I thought I have got to go back again, I have got to find out what is going on. So the next day I phoned them up and asked them about the cause of death, and they said you came in here yesterday. I then went to the hospital. The top consultant, who was not actually there on the night, took time to talk to me, he said "This is no murder enquiry, what do you want to know." I said, "Was Christopher in a mess when he left this hospital?" He said, "Christopher had a superficial injury and a mouth injury."

I then got in touch with the coroner and asked him if he had found the cause of death, he told me he still had tests to do. I said to him I was thinking of getting a solicitor involved. He said, "It wouldn't do you any harm."

I then went back to the police station and met with the detective. I told him I just wanted to know what was going on. He reeled his chair over to me and said, "We don't deal with outside organisations, we deal with the family." He was trying to intimidate me. I walked out, telling him "any communication from now on will be through our solicitor." The police then followed me to see where I was going.

I have received the pathologist's report and to me they are all involved in it. They are trying to cover up what has happened. Five police officers remain suspended and they have been for a year. It is now in the hands of the Crown Prosecution Service in London. I was told that there was going to be a decision made two weeks ago but nothing has happened. Nearly a year on, Christopher is still in deep freeze.

I won't give up and I don't want any other family to go through what I have gone through. A civil rights movement can connect all the families nation-wide and help them get support. I still have fears that they are going to get away with this but I don't intend to give up at all.

Teachers challenge Blair

Liam Mac Uaid, Tower Hamlets NUT, slams performance-related pay and calls for a fighting unity between teaching unions.

Blair's determination to emulate Thatcher is boundless. She had a squalid little war with Argentina and he wages war on the civilians of Iraq, Kosova and Serbia. She set out to destroy the NUM and Blair targets the NUT as his own "enemy within". His method of attack is the proposal to introduce performance related pay. Anyone with any connection with education would know that most teachers find the idea itself repugnant and that a confrontation is inevitable.

The job relies completely on co-operation with every other teacher in the school. Performance related pay (PRP) is the one thing which is guaranteed to kill off any sense of mutual responsibility to the people with whom one works. It encourages a scramble over the backs of others in a degrading squabble for a few pounds more. The joke is that if everybody were to meet their appraisal targets there would not be enough money to go around. What is encouraging is the virtually unanimous opposition to PRP across the membership of all the teaching unions.

Less encouraging is the low key campaign the union leaderships are conducting. It looks like Nigel de Gruchy of the NAS/UWT is ready to strike some sort of deal. Proposals from Blunkett to introduce only pilot schemes next year seem to have created the rift between the two biggest teaching unions that the Government wanted. While it is true that the NUT has agreed to ballot for a one day strike and a boycott of appraisals, its leader Doug McAvoy has shown little appetite for the battle that will be required. There is a lot more enthusiasm for a fight to destroy PRP among ordinary teachers.

McAvoy is up for re-election later this year. Christine Blower is standing against him. If Blower wins it will be the strongest possible signal to Blair and Blunkett that teachers do not want PRP and that what they do want is a properly funded comprehensive state education system. That is why supporters of *LLB* who are teachers should be organising for a Blower victory in this election. It gives the chance of a real battle to squash PRP.

Give plane bosses a roasting. SkyChef strikers are holding a special picket, barbecue and cultural event on Monday 3rd May, 12-4, opposite the Green Man Pub, Faggs Road, near Heathrow Airport (5 mins walk from Hatton Cross tube).

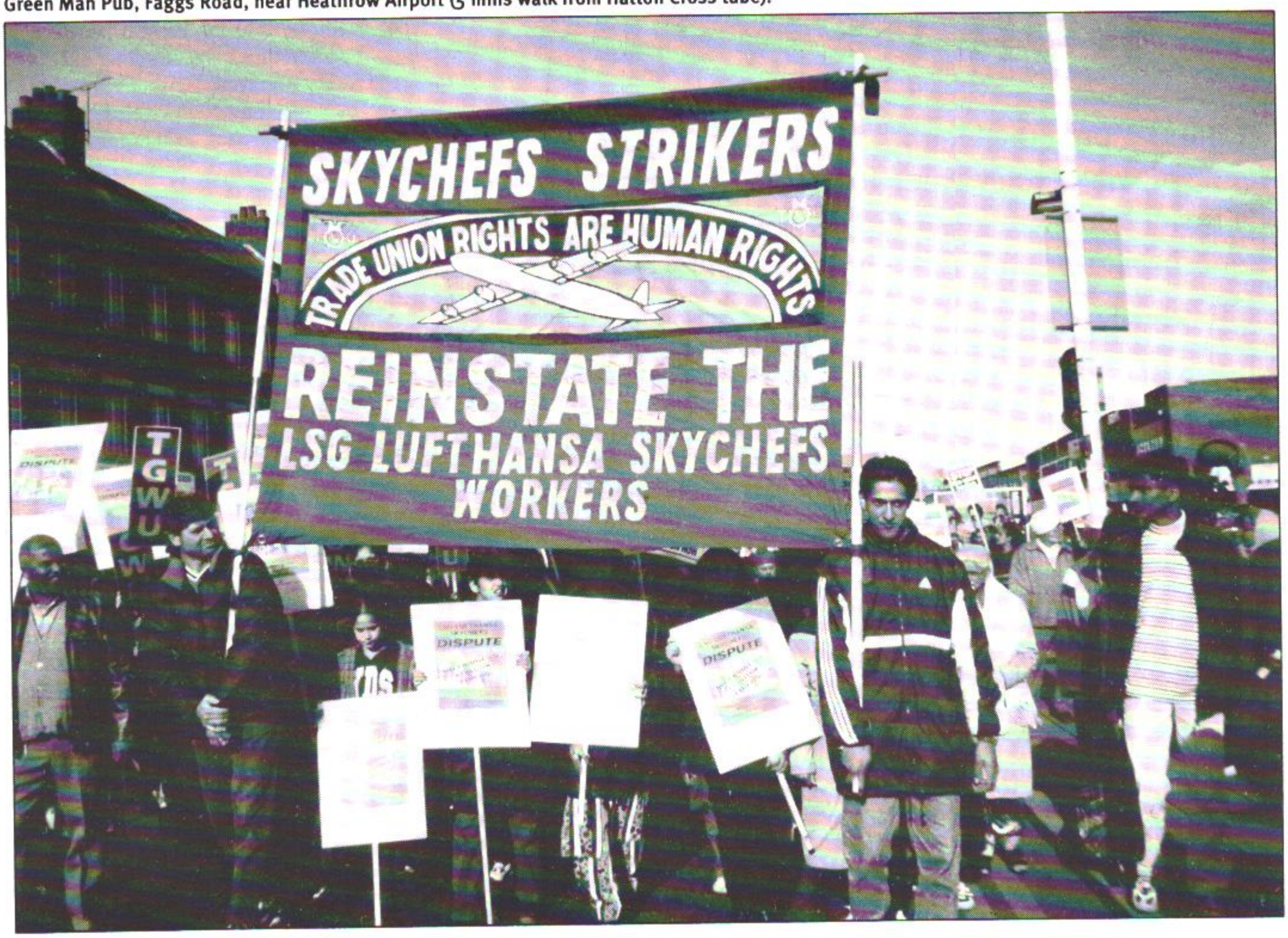


Photo: Ed Hall

Minimum wage: maximum rage

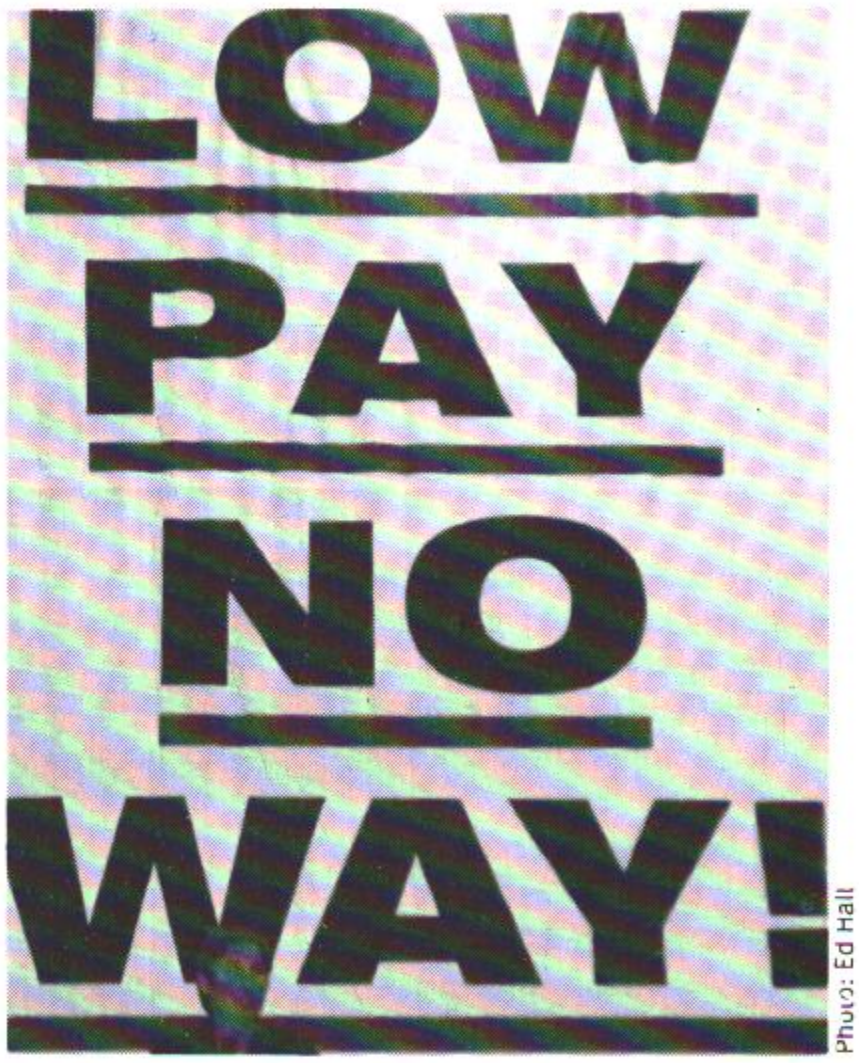


Photo: Ed Hall

Liz Davies at Living Wage rally.

Jon Rogers, UNISON London Regional Committee, reports from Newcastle.

Although you would not have known it from the Sunday papers, the first mass demonstration of trade unionists against the policies of the New Labour Government was held on Saturday April 10th.

Participants in the UNISON inspired Living Wage "event" in Newcastle, supported by the TUC and 20 other unions and national organisations, reckon they can safely double the police estimate of 10,000 on the demonstration.

Marchers fought their way across the Tyne Bridge in the face of strong winds – and also demonstrated in the face of some fairly bizarre decisions by the UNISON NEC. The NEC had decided to "ban" unofficial or "party political" placards on the demonstration. This proved to be impossible, leaving the NEC with quite unnecessary egg on their faces.

The NEC had also decided that it would be "old fashioned" to have speakers or a rally at the end of the demonstration. The local UNISON branches in Newcastle organised a rally to make up for this omission, although the NEC tried to stop the rally. There was standing room only at this "unofficial" rally in the 2,000 seat theatre booked as a venue, demonstrating that the NEC was wrong not to provide some official speakers to address UNISON members who had travelled the length of the country to reach the demonstration.

Speakers at the rally included Liz Davies from the Labour Party NEC and CFDU supporter Roger Bannister from the UNISON NEC. The focus was on the purpose of the day's event and the next steps in fighting for a decent minimum wage. Sukdhev Reel, mother of murdered Londoner Ricky Reel, brought the rally to its feet with her story of callous police racism. The rally also heard from a number of UNISON members facing political attacks from the UNISON NEC, mostly for their association with the Socialist Workers Party.

In all, the day's events were a tremendous success in spite of the line of the UNISON NEC. This underlined how important left-wing unity is in the union. It was this unity that delivered the Conference decision to call the demonstration. A sensible NEC would try to work with activists to build support for the agreed policies of the union through more events.

If UNISON Conference delegates are concerned with the interests of UNISON members, then they will see to it that the NEC is not left with a choice – UNISON's London Region is already calling for a major demonstration on 1st May 2000 to take forward the campaign for a living wage. UNISON members should mandate Branch Conference delegates to support this call.

Manchester City Council faces action

Tony Dale, Manchester UNISON, reports: Manchester City Council is on the verge of major industrial action over the length of the working week. The local UNISON branch is balloting its 10,000 members for three one-day Council-wide strikes.

The dispute has been sparked by the Council's attempts to rip up a 25-year-old local agreement for a 35-hour week for white collar workers. Since 1st April the Council has been employing all new starters on a 37-hour week.

On 1st April the national local government Single Status agreement for a maximum working week of 37 hours for all local government workers came into force. As a result, manual and residential workers' hours have been reduced from 39 to 37 hours.

This national agreement does not terminate existing enhanced local agreements and so Manchester's local agreement for 35 hours for certain groups of staff would remain unaffected. That was until the City Council decided to introduce a 37-hour week in 35-hour areas. In the spirit of Single Status, UNISON, the GMB and the TGWU submitted a joint claim for the phased reduction to 35 hours for all Manchester City Council workers.

The unions gave an undertaking to co-operate in an effort to minimise the cost of its introduction. The Council's initial reaction was positive and agreed to look at ways of reducing the working week to 35 hours for all. Now, the Council's unilateral action in forcing all new starters onto 37 hours threatens a major dispute.

The turnout of nearly 1,000 UNISON members at a branch meeting to vote for the strike ballot was unprecedented and is a good indication that there will be a positive vote for action.

Trade Union Notebook

● Southwark UNISON members scored what the local branch is calling a 70% victory following three days of strike action in March. Southwark Council has been forced to concede the equivalent of four years' protection of earnings for staff who lose out as a result of a regrading exercise.

● **In London, militant tube, rail and bus workers have finally got their act together and will be producing their own triple-alliance rank and file paper. Contact: Steve Hedley (railworkers) 0181-374 4079, Gerry Downing (bus-workers) 0181-450 5161. For tubeworkers contact Strike Support Group 0171-249 0041, estevm@aol.com**

● UNISON's industrial action committee called off the UCLH strike in its second week against the transfer of staff to a private contractor and will negotiate with management. Last year the NHS trust won an injunction against the union for striking to prevent changes to future terms and conditions. The case is being appealed to the House of Lords by UNISON.

● **A new rank and file builders' group will be producing its first paper shortly. The outfit brings together the Building Worker Group, the Joint Sites Committee and the Jubilee Line "Flying Sparks". Meetings are in central London on the second Thursday of each month. Contact: Steve Kelly, 0976-762 040.**

● Camden UNISON is reballoting for strike action of rehousing staff after the High Court ruled that the union had acted illegally.The Court ruled that a previous ballot for action, which led to an earlier one-week strike, did not apply as it was more than four weeks after the ballot.

● **London's Strike Support Group supports a wide range of struggles as an ongoing solidarity network. It meets every Monday at 7.30pm sharp in the Cock Tavern, Phoenix Road, between Euston/Kings Cross. Contact: 0171-249 0041.**

● Roddy Slorach, a UNISON convenor, has been suspended by Glasgow council for allegedly using a council photocopier to copy anti-war leaflets. There was a mass walk out of staff that has been "repudiated" by UNISON's leadership.

● **The Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) is balloting members on proposals to alter the balance of policy-making powers between the NEC and Conference.**

PCS was formed a year ago by a merger of CPSA and PTC. The new union's rulebook omitted many amendments demanded by the respective unions' conferences. Among the more controversial rules are biennial conferences and NEC elections and a requirement that amendments to major rules and policies must be endorsed by membership ballot.

November's conference called for a ballot on reverting to annual NEC elections and conferences, as well as deleting the requirement to submit rule and policy changes to ballot. The NEC was instructed to campaign in favour of this. In fact it has issued a circular which sets out its opposition. The union's journal contains two and a half pages from the President and joint General Secretaries defending their position. The views taken by conference are not represented.

These NEC moves are in stark contrast with the pathetic effort expended on the political fund ballot, where the vote was lost. This speaks volumes about their priorities. They are also balloting members on two motions carried by conference. One called for opposition (including industrial action) to PFI and the other demanded the repeal of all Tory anti-union laws. No prizes for guessing the NEC's recommendation.

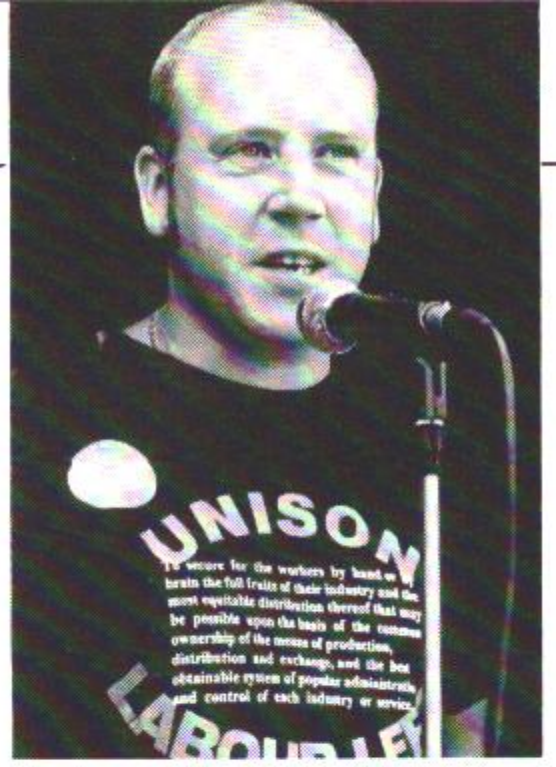
● UNISON's 17,000 strong Birmingham local government branch has had all of its branch officers suspended. UNISON officials have publicised a number of long standing problems of branch organisation in Birmingham, which were not the fault of the recently elected leadership, along with redbaiting smears, in order to justify this suspension. Informed union sources suggest that some full time officers could not tolerate UNISON's largest branch being led by left wingers, some of whom were in the SWP. Nine full time UNISON staff have been sent in to run the branch.
Other disciplinary action against UNISON's left include recent action in Leeds against four activists, including a left-wing member of the NEC; and the five year old disciplinary action against three shop stewards in Liverpool who supported unofficial strike action in opposition to racism, and whose cases are now at the appeal stage, having cost the union tens of thousands of pounds.

● **Sheffield UNISON is also under attack. Two ex-branch officers and the current branch secretary are being investigated. Branch officers' elections have been declared void by the region, without any independent investigation, after allegations of irregularities suspected of coming from certain individuals who did not like the outcome of the result.**

The regional officer has sided with the council in cutting down the time-off facility for branch officers. The branch has been told it will not be entitled to send delegates to national conference (where they would challenge these actions) and funding for branch employees' salaries has been suspended.

● The NUJ conference gave unanimous backing for a motion calling upon the union's NEC to co-ordinate a campaign for union rights, to include the repeal of all Tory anti-union laws, a right in law to time off for trade union duties and an end to the exemption of small firms from the proposed statutory trade union legislation.
Delegates also unanimously backed NUJ policy of a single merged media union and called for a public campaign against the Regional Independent Media group (RIM has dismissed two NUJ activists, John Toomer of the *Bolton Evening News* and Greg Challis of the *Sheffield Star*). Toomer was elected vice-president of the union.
The conference condemned the failure of the national press to support the Lawrence family's demand for Condon's resignation. Non-media unions offering single union deals to media employers were condemned. This issue has arisen because of the AEEU's offer to the *Western Mail* in Cardiff of a deal giving the AEEU sole bargaining rights – including journalists. This move would put the AEEU in breach of the commitment made by its predecessor union ETU not to seek to recruit or represent journalists, extracted as a condition of its re-admission to the TUC after the Wapping dispute.

● **Can it be true that Millbank moles in UNISON are using their dominance over the Affiliated Political Fund section of the union to try to secure a change of mind from the union's international committee, not noted for its support of NATO around the world? UNISON members might like to ask about the union's policy position on the bombings of Iraq and Yugoslavia, as the policy of opposition to the former adopted by the union's NEC is a very well kept secret.**



THE GEOFF MARTIN COLUMN

● I've just had a polite little letter from the London Labour Party informing me that my application for the panel of candidates for the London Assembly has been knocked back at the first stage.

The initial part of the process was like a written examination. Apparently I failed on two key areas – my "Vision Statement" and a lack of "Life Experience". To be honest I can now see that I don't match up to the kind of life experience required of a New Labour approved candidate – university, a firm of political lobbyists, several years of grovelling subservience and the ability to sink to your knees in front of the Leader. We should never underestimate just how much Blair has learnt from his hero Bill Clinton.

My 20 years membership of the Labour Party, eight years of work as a councillor committed to direct services, a shot as a Parliamentary Candidate and the best part of two decades as a public sector trade unionist and a health campaigner are clearly inadequate preparation for representing London Labour voters. Leaving school at 16 to train as an electrician and three years as a hospital porter were clearly bad career moves and I'm paying the price now, that's for sure! I blame the teachers.

Of course I'm not the only one given the heave-ho by Millbank. Several good black comrades have been bombed out and a number of women as well. None of this is any great surprise. We're likely to end up with a Labour-controlled London Assembly run by daleks under direct pager control from Millbank across the water.

Londoners want a London Assembly that's prepared to stand up for London. If it's nothing more than another wing of the Downing Street Policy Unit and Millbank then what's the point of having it? Londoners will be sharp enough to rumble what's going on and it won't be long before the clones are out on their ear.

● I see that New Labour's big business backers and the Luvvies For Labour just aren't coming across with the wedge at the moment and the Reverend Blair is creeping around the unions with his collection plate. We should test our contributions to the Party by New Labour's own Best Value criteria and then tell them to piss off.

● The six match ban imposed on Robbie Fowler by the FA shows where their priorities lie. Fowler's homophobic abuse of Graham Le Saux got him a two match ban and his juvenile "coke-sniffer" prank got him four matches. I thought at first that the FA spokesperson had got it the wrong way round but I should have known better than to give the old duffers at Lancaster Gate the benefit of the doubt.

● After months of sustained campaigning from this column the Government has caved in and blown out Murdoch's bid for Man Utd. Nobody should underestimate the scale of this triumph and it proves my point that this is a Government that bows to sustained public pressure. Have the TUC learnt the lesson when it comes to union rights and the minimum wage? What do you think? When you bear in mind that the Man Utd Independent Supporters Association were able to take on, and beat hands down, one of the most powerful men on the global capitalist stage with two and six in the bank it makes you realise just what a miserable failure the TUC, with its vast resources and seven million members, has been under John Monks. Maybe our friends at Congress House should invite the Man Utd Independent Supporters around for a cuppa and ask them just how you deal with a jumped-up little Blairite like Stephen Byers. As Byers continues to rip the last remaining guts out of the Fairness at Work proposals I suggest that they move quickly. I understand from my contacts within "the loop" (yes, I've got friends in the highest and the lowest places) that many New Labourites are terrified of the revenge that Rupert Murdoch might wreak down upon them over the Man U/BSkyB affair. Good. It's about time some of these smug bastards felt a bit of heat.

● I was pleased to see that one of my old friends John Evers wrote in last month to pull me up on the subject of socialist football fans. John is no stranger to the 3 am knock on the door and the spotlight in the eyes which passes for the internal Labour Party disciplinary procedure but nothing can be worse than the decades of misery that he's suffered on the terraces at Fulham. So he can be excused for seeing Mohammed Al Fayed as some sort of saviour. And he's right that Ken Bates ain't exactly Mother Theresa either but that he saved Chelsea. Correct, but I still loathe the bloke and I loathed him even more when my season ticket renewal form dropped through the door – jacked up by sixty quid to £585 next season. I'll cough up because I can't bear to miss a game. I'm not one of these public school nouveaus like Charlie Whelan. I was there on the rain swept terraces with ten thousand others when we were at the bottom of the second division. That's the kind of life experience that gets you banned as a Labour Party candidate in this day and age.

Be ethical: curb the arms trade

Steve Battlemuch
Nottingham North CLP

The Government came to power with a pledge for an ethical foreign policy. Robin Cook stated on taking office that there would be an Annual Report on Strategic Arms Exports. Two years later, the first report was slipped out the day after the bombing of Belgrade started! There has been little if any public scrutiny of it. Stewart Wallis, International Director of Oxfam, stated that "while this report helps reduce the secrecy in the arms export system it still does not tell us how many arms we are selling to individual countries and what they are going to be used for."

Arms scandals have been around for a long time. In 1996 the British company Miltec was revealed to have been sending arms to the Rwandan government, in contravention of the UN embargo, through a loophole in the UK law. Under Labour we have witnessed the brokering of arms to Sierra Leone. Britain is the second biggest exporter of small arms in the world. The legislation has not been updated since 1939. When 84% of war casualties are civilians and 90% of these are caused by small arms something needs to be done.

The DTI produced a White Paper in July 1998 on Strategic Export Controls. Consultation ended in October. To date no commitment has been made to introduce legislation. On 23rd March an early day motion was put down in the House of Commons in the name of Oona King MP. It attracted 48 MPs within a couple of days. It highlights the EU code of conduct on Arms Exports adopted last year and welcomes the German government's efforts to build on this code by introducing EU wide controls on arms brokering. It calls upon the British Government to support these proposals and incorporate the EU code into UK law. Now is the time to put pressure on Labour MPs to ensure that tough new legislation is brought in by the end of 2000.

More information can be found about Oxfam's Cut Conflict campaign on their website – http://www.oxfam.org.uk or by phoning 01865-313 600.

After Pinochet – is Duvalier next?

Inspired by British and Spanish attempts to bring General Pinochet to justice, a group of Haitian exiles living in France have formed a committee to push for the arrest and trial of Jean-Claude Duvalier, the former Haitian dictator. Charles Arthur reports.

In February 1986, Duvalier was forced to flee the country when a popular uprising against Tonton Macoute repression and Duvalierist corruption persuaded the United States to end its support for his 15-year dictatorship. He was allowed to enter France on an eight-day visitor's visa, having been denied formal political asylum. However, the French authorities turned a blind eye when his documents expired, and he stayed on in France living a life of ostentatious luxury on the Cote d'Azur. The tens of millions of dollars he had accrued in Haiti by siphoning off overseas aid and looting the Haitian state coffers were rapidly frittered away on socialising and gambling, and according to news reports, by 1994 he was broke, and staying with friends near Paris.

Now the Paris-based Committee to Bring Duvalier to Judgement is preparing legal suits to present to the French courts on behalf of individuals who suffered torture or the loss of relatives at the hands of the Duvalier terror machine. Gerald Bloncourt, a Haitian writer and poet who founded the Committee, said, "It is our duty to make sure Jean-Claude Duvalier is tried on behalf of the memory of the 60,000 victims of both his regime and that of his father Francois."

Last December, the French Justice Minister declared it was possible that a case against Duvalier could be tried, but that the Ministry of the Interior had "lost track" of him. A few weeks later, from "somewhere in France" Duvalier appeared on a French TV interview to make the risible claim, "I do not believe there was a lot of violence during my time (in Haiti)."

After an Amnesty International activist, acting as a private citizen, filed a complaint against Duvalier, a court hearing on the status of his residency in France was held in March but he failed to appear. The court postponed the hearing until May. As the process of compiling the legal cases against Duvalier for crimes against humanity continues, the Committee to Bring Duvalier to Judgement denounced the preparations being made for the ex-dictator to escape justice by leaving France for another country.

In Haiti news of the move to indict Duvalier has been welcomed by human rights groups at a time when violence is again on the rise. Former Tonton Macoutes, and soldiers from the now-abolished Haitian army, are believed to be responsible for a recent spate of murders and shootings in the Haitian capital.

The legal process against Jean-Claude Duvalier in France focuses attention on the more recent role of the United States in blocking the pursuit of justice in Haiti. Since the 1994 US intervention in Haiti, the Clinton administration has refused to deport the leader of a CIA-sponsored Haitian death squad from his new home in New York to Haiti where he is wanted for murder and torture charges relating to the 1991-94 years of military rule. The US also continues to reject Haitian government requests to hand over 160,000 pages of documents taken from Haitian army and death squad offices by US Marines in 1994.

● Charles Arthur is co-ordinator of the London-based Haiti Support Group which is backing the international campaign launched by Haitian human rights organisations to petition the US to return the stolen documents. For more information contact the Haiti Support Group: email haitisupport@gn.apc.org.

A new book on Haiti, *Libete: A Haiti Anthology*, edited by Charles Arthur and Michael Dash, is published by the Latin America Bureau in May.



Photo: Ed Hall

Pinochet set for trip to Spain

Enrique Santiago Romero, a Spanish lawyer from Izquierda Unida explores the Pinochet judgement.

Jack Straw has agreed to uphold the judgement of the Law Lords – that Pinochet has no immunity from prosecution. He has decided that the former Chilean dictator can be extradited to Spain for trial, at least for those crimes of torture and conspiracy committed by the Chilean military after September 1988. This has put an end to much of the judicial debate that started worldwide when the dictator was arrested in October 1998 on the request of the Spanish judge Baltasar Garzon. The Law Lords reaffirmed the Nuremberg principle that no-one can have immunity if accused of crimes against humanity or flagrant abuses of human rights, even if they hold high office. This establishes the importance of three treaties: the conventions on torture and genocide and the international treaty on political and civil rights.

The decision of the courts to allow extradition only for crimes committed after 1988 limits the advances made so far in the international struggle against impunity. The decision also allowed the Spanish to add 51 new cases to the nine allowed by the Lords, all relating to torture committed in the period after 1988. All of these, like the other cases, have been documented and witnessed by the thousands of victims, their families and many organisations that defended human rights in Chile in difficult and terrible times. It is important to note that the General Assembly of the United Nations has declared that "disappearance" is a form of continuing torture of both the "disappeared" and of their families, until the day when the truth about what has happened is made known. These cases, 1,198 fully documented, may form part of Pinochet's charge sheet.

The British courts will take months to decide on the extradition, during which the Chilean ex-dictator will have the right to use any legal defences. This right to a decent defence is an essential characteristic of the rule of law in a democracy and is, of course, a right that Pinochet denied systematically and arbitrarily to the thousands of people who fell victim to the reign of terror he imposed after 11th September 1973. Who in those times could have imagined that the day would arrive when the traitor general would have to appear in court to account for his crimes, even if it was 25 years later? Straw's decision is a great one for international justice and a tribute to the many thousands of campaigners inside and outside Chile.

● Translated and edited by Sue Lukes, Chair, Chile Committee for Justice.

A dangerous political game

Stephen Walker reports: Constitutional experts are still grappling with how to deal with the mass resignation of the EU Commission.

Alarm bells rang last year when the Parliament refused to clear the 1996 accounts because of suspected fraud. The move was led by British Conservatives, who wanted to prove their Eurosceptic credentials, and German Christian Democrats, who wanted to damage the Commission, and consequently the German Presidency of the EU under the new SPD government.

In January a motion of censure – tabled by the Socialists in order to give the Commission a vote of confidence – was defeated with the votes of conservatives from other countries who were frightened of losing "their" commissioners and voted with the Socialists. Socialists were accused of saving a discredited Commission: three days of "toothless tiger parliament" headlines fed the pre-electoral eurosceptic campaign.

The Socialist comeback centred on the report of the independent commission of experts, demanded by the Socialists following the censure motion. This seemed a classically British solution, but the report was much more devastating than anyone expected.

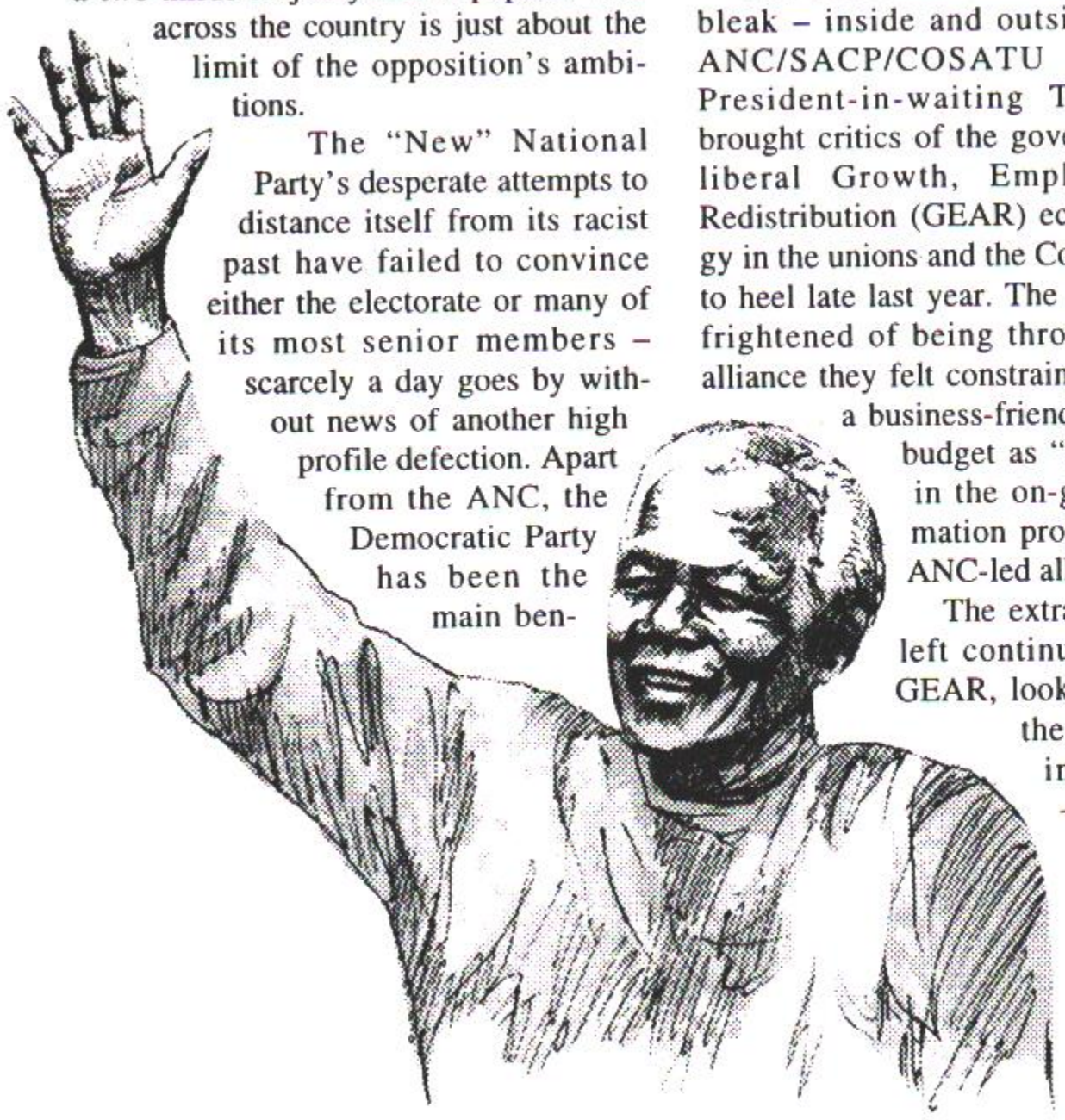
I suspect that the right are about to win round three. With Socialists in government in 13 out of 15 Member States, the European elections are likely to involve a "protest vote" swing to the right. This, combined with the certain loss of many British Labour MEPs because of the change of electoral system in the UK could give the conservatives and Christian Democrats their chance. With Council and the new Commission likely to be dominated by Socialists, the Parliament could then, with the help of the press, become the platform for a recovery of conservatism in Europe.

Left out after Mandela

South Africa's second democratic elections take place on 2nd June. Andy George explores the state of the parties and the main campaigning issues, following the president's farewell.

Nelson Mandela's emotional farewell to Parliament at the end of March signalled the beginning of a ten-week campaign leading to polls for the National Assembly and the nine provincial legislatures.

In one sense, the outcome of the election is beyond doubt: the ANC will win another large majority. Its continued dominance of post-liberation politics leaves a fragmented and fractious opposition jockeying for position in the provinces, hoping they will scratch together enough votes nationally to block any attempts by the ANC to amend the constitution. Stopping the ANC from wresting control of the two provinces it hasn't governed since 1994, turning it out of office in two others, and depriving it of a two-thirds majority in the popular vote across the country is just about the limit of the opposition's ambitions.



The "New" National Party's desperate attempts to distance itself from its racist past have failed to convince either the electorate or many of its most senior members – scarcely a day goes by without news of another high profile defection. Apart from the ANC, the Democratic Party has been the main beneficiary of the NNP's decline and hopes to supplant it as the second largest party in the National Assembly. But the DP will have to attract black voters to be more than an irritant to the ANC – which it seems currently unable to do.

The United Democratic Movement – led by former Transkei strongman and ANC MP, Bantu Holomisa – and Mangosuthu Buthelezi's Inkatha Freedom Party are the only opposition parties with some hope of seducing working class and (more plausibly) rural black votes from the ANC. Neither poses a serious threat to the ANC this time round – the UDM has had little time to put down roots anywhere while Inkatha remains essentially a regional party dependent on a conservative Zulu constituency.

The left's immediate prospects are bleak – inside and outside the ruling ANC/SACP/COSATU alliance. President-in-waiting Thabo Mbeki brought critics of the government's neo-liberal Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) economic strategy in the unions and the Communist Party to heel late last year. The SACP were so frightened of being thrown out of the alliance they felt constrained to welcome a business-friendly pre-election budget as "a decisive step in the on-going transformation programme of the ANC-led alliance".

The extra-parliamentary left continues to snipe at GEAR, looking forward to the time when its implementation – and the ANC's cautious reformism in other areas – brings about a realignment of South African politics, creating the political space needed for a workers party to contest the 2004 election.

To the opposition, the problem with GEAR is the ANC's hesitancy in pursuing it to its logical conclusions by taking on organised labour and slimming down a bloated public service bureaucracy. GEAR and the policies of export-led growth, privatisation, and fiscal discipline that go with it, would be the main election issue were it not for the stifling consensus that exists about the need for South Africa to maintain its status as a stable and competitive emerging market attractive to international capital.

Crime, corruption, good governance, and the dangers of one-party rule have long been themes of the white-oriented NNP and DP. Parties aiming to attract support from the black majority such as the UDM and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) concentrate their attack on the ANC's failure to deliver on its election promises of 1994. On the white right fringes of the political spectrum, minority rights and the chimera of an "Afrikaner homeland" still bring tears to the eyes of retired apartheid-era generals and khaki-shorted fascists.

The ANC is forced to stand on its record of keeping South Africa together and – in most places most of the time – at peace for five difficult years. Statistics on access to a safe water supply (up from 70% of households to 80%), electricity connections (up from under 40% to over 60%) and telephone lines (up from 25% to 35%) are reeled off as evidence of the government's ability to manage an internationally competitive economy and provide basic services to those most in need.

Questions remain about how much more could have been done if the government had not nailed its colours so firmly to the neo-liberal mast. Would unemployment have remained so stubbornly above 40%? Would the ANC's own target of a million new homes in five years have been reached? Would the still yawning social and economic gap between black and white have begun to close? The ANC must hope that most South Africans continue to believe that the government had no alternative but to bow to the demands of capital.

Don't bank on Blair giving up on euro battle

Brian Burkitt, Pudsey CLP and Bradford University, unmasks the bunch of bankers running the European Central Bank.

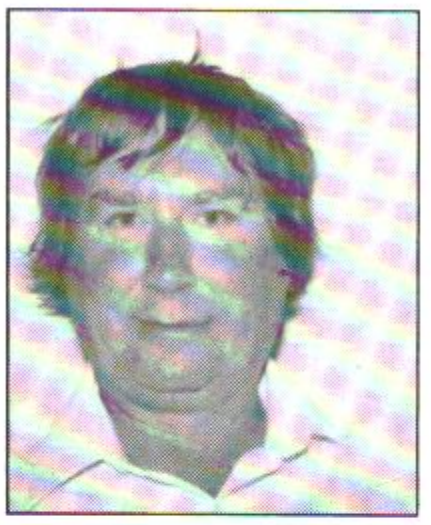
Bernie Moss's perceptive article (April *LLB*) argues that the early problems encountered in operating the euro will deter Tony Blair from asking for a Yes vote in a referendum on the single currency. I hope that his argument is correct, but I doubt that Blair's motivations are primarily economic.

The Prime Minister believes that Britain's EU credentials will always be suspect if it remains outside European economic and monetary union, and he can never secure his desired power base "at the heart of Europe". However, such intangible influence is a flimsy prize to gain for joining a structurally flawed economic policy-making mechanism. EMU remains a device for achieving price stability by deflation – through job cuts and reduced public expenditure. Thus the priorities of the Maastricht Treaty run directly counter to the objectives of the labour movement. Given New Labour's current drift towards euro participation, an immediate Party-wide campaign is required to spell out the anti-labour, anti-welfare basis of the existing project for EU integration.

The first months of the euro's life demonstrated its capacity to inflict future damage. It is obvious that one interest rate cannot meet the needs of all eleven euroland economies; for example, Germany and Italy currently require lower interest rates, while Ireland and Spain need higher ones. The OECD's March report argued that unless the EU governments moved to iron out structural differences between their economies, a momentous task that would take generations to accomplish, "output volatility could rise". The varying conditions faced by these economies demand separate policies, a problem that would intensify if the UK joined, given its even greater cyclical and structural divergences. Therefore the Maastricht Treaty makes it impossible to conduct a coherent economic strategy to generate rising living standards, more jobs and welfare expansion.

This problem is accentuated by the conflict at the heart of EMU policy-making between the monetarism of Maastricht, entrenched in the European Central Bank (ECB) and the responsibility of national governments for their citizens' economic and social welfare. Such conflict was reflected in the resignation of Oskar Lafontaine, although its basic causes lie much deeper than the role of any individual. The quarrel between national governments and the ECB hurt the credibility of the euro, which fell 9% against the dollar and 7% against the pound in its first three months of existence, implying a lack of confidence in the eleven nations-one currency experiment. Thus the advent of the euro weakened, rather than strengthened, the EU's voice in the world.

However, the biggest obstacle for democratic socialists contemplating euro entry is the role and structure of the ECB. Until its statutes and policies are completely reformed, EMU will inevitably operate to the detriment of the labour movement. Firstly it is completely unaccountable to any outside authority, operates in total secrecy and refuses to publish either voting records or minutes. ECB members cannot be removed from office by the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers nor even by the European Court. An institution with such absolute immunity from outside monitoring may succumb to the corrupting influence of absolute power, as did the EU Commission.



Brian Burkitt

More importantly for socialists, the ECB controls the key levers of monetary policy that affect millions of lives totally free from any democratic control. It was to prevent such a situation that the Attlee Government nationalised the Bank of England in 1945!

Secondly, the ECB's economic objectives are ill-defined. The Maastricht Treaty states that "the primary objective of the ECB shall be to maintain price stability", but adds that "without prejudice to this objective the ECB shall support the general economic policies of the community with a view to contributing to sustainable and non-inflationary growth and a high level of employment". However, price stability is left to the ECB to define, so that the broader economic objectives (already secondary in the Treaty) become irrelevant. The ECB can and already has ignored its wider concerns, causing unemployment to remain unacceptably high, at 11% across euroland compared with 6.2% in Britain.

Thirdly, the ECB's operating philosophy is wrong. It employs an outdated economic theory resting upon the belief that interest rate changes exert little or no effect on output or employment! The ECB rejects any responsibility for demand management. It blames elected politicians for euroland's economic problems, creating the potential for permanent conflict with national governments.

Therefore the ECB as currently constituted is an anti-democratic, economically inept and potentially corrupt institution. The confusion of powers in euroland economic policy-making invites a prolonged turf-war, with rising unemployment as a consequence. The ECB's lack of accountability, transparency and democratic legitimacy makes clear that no government committed to full employment, social justice and empowerment of its people could submit to its monetary authority. Therefore it is crucial that the British labour movement, when and if consulted, steers clear of this inefficient, inegalitarian nightmare.

IMF pillage spree leads to wave of ultra-nationalism

Lisa Taylor of the International Solidarity with Workers in Russia Group (ISWoR) reports on how Russian workers are fighting back.

As NATO bombs rained over ex-Yugoslavia, the head of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF – Russia's only remaining mass-based party), ministers and army chiefs united with fascist parties in a loud call for Russia to join the war on the Serbian side.

This was played down by the West, but the announcement that Yeltsin had ordered the pointing of nuclear missiles at NATO countries, and its subsequent low-key denial by the Kremlin, was allowed to get through. Yeltsin warned once again that NATO's actions could lead to "world war".

When Russia defaulted on its debt, the IMF cut off loans and insisted Russia opens up more of its wealth and provide stronger guarantees for greedy, corrupt western investors. Nationalism soared and former friends of Yeltsin scrambled to dis-associate themselves from him as his ratings plunged. CPRF leader Zyuganov, whose party swiftly dominated the vacuum, appealed not only to ultra-nationalism but also to racism, blaming the crisis on the Jews.

ISWoR was formed in January to support the progressive Russian workers movement. We already have supporters in a dozen countries and are now setting up a US section. Some of our practical activities include:

- The Tula revolution. This covers the fast-spreading struggle of the workers of Yasnogorsk, Tula. Unpaid for over a year, they took over their machine-building plant, expelled management, and now run it themselves. Ten thousand local people supported their blockade of a major rail artery, repulsing the heavy attack by police sent in by the local (CPRF-run) authority. ISWoR has collected messages of solidarity and sent donations so that they can continue to be a beacon to others.
- The Samara strike committee. When the workers at Zim factory took control of their plant, they spread their struggle, conducting solidarity actions with miners and participated in the famous rail war. Their strike committee represents the city's biggest industrial enterprises. ISWoR publicised its appeal for funds to organise an all-Russia Congress of Strike Committees and we will continue to support it in this quest.
- The Krasnodar three. These are young anti-fascists framed on serious charges by the racist CPRF Governor Kondratenko. He rules the Krasnodar region in alliance with openly fascist parties, and has granted legal powers to tens of thousands of Cossack militiamen to terrorise local black people (mainly from Caucasus). One of the anti-fascists, several months pregnant, is in extreme danger due to the starvation prison diet. Our statement, signed by workers' organisations around the world, simultaneously condemns CPRF racism and the IMF-Yeltsinite destruction of Russia's economy and is due to be published in the Russian media.
- The Borovichi Jewish community. This group issued an emergency call for help due to fascist activity in their town in north west Russia. Letters to the mayor by ISWoR and others resulted in an anti-racist programme being set up in the schools, the first of its kind.
- Contact ISWoR, Box R, 46 Denmark Hill, London SE5 8RZ.

Iraq faces chilling economic future

Iraq's total GDP has fallen to just $5.7 billion, or $247 per capita, according to estimates by the well-respected Economist Intelligence Unit in *The Economist*'s newly published annual supplement "The World in 1999." Just prior to the Gulf War, Iraq's GDP was more than ten times higher – around $60 billion.

Last year the Economist Intelligence Unit estimated Iraqi GDP at $30.4 billion, or $1,300 per capita. This year's figure represents both a further precipitous decline, and more accurate estimates. To put this in perspective, Jordan, Iraq's tiny neighbour has a GDP of $8.6 billion. With an estimated per capita GDP of only $247, Iraq – once one of the most developed countries in the Middle East – is now poorer than many countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

Denis Halliday, former UN humanitarian relief co-ordinator for Iraq, has noted that Iraq's recurring annual budget need for health, food and essential services, is $12-15 billion. With the Oil-for-Food programme, which Halliday ran for thirteen months, Iraq gets barely $4 billion.

With a total GDP of $5.7 billion, Iraq's economy is worth about the same as four B-1 bombers and less than half Bill Gates' fortune. The entire Iraqi economy amounts to just 2% (two per cent) of the annual United States defence budget of $265 billion. The increase in the US defence budget proposed for next year by the Clinton Administration ($12 billion) is more than twice the entire GDP of Iraq.

You do the maths. Just exactly what kind of threat can Iraq present?

● Compiled by Ali Abunimah, Chicago.

What the hell is left in social democracy?

Andrew Coates, Ipswich CLP, examines whether Tony Blair's Third Way really is sweeping across Europe.

Former German Finance Minister Oscar Lafontaine's hope for a "new Social Democratic era" now looks sadly misplaced. With control in eleven out of fifteen European Union governments, social democracy is powerful electorally but appears to be losing its identity. Chancellor Schroder's "new middle" and Blair's "radical centre" set a template. Economic pragmatism, partnership with business interests and protection of the prosperous are in vogue. There is to be no Keynesian reward of full employment for the left's flexible working or workless supporters. Europe is to be refitted for globalised competition and dragged into expanded NATO intervention.

After a series of modernising and pro-market European social democratic governments in the 1980s, last year's victory of Germany's SPD appeared as an opening to the left. However, despite many policies to the left of Blair (on unemployment and social issues), left of centre administrations are gradually giving in to neo-liberalism. The German red-green coalition has made slow progress on progressive tax reform, and ending nuclear power, and favours cost-cutting welfare changes and labour flexibility. In France, Socialist Prime Minister Jospin is succumbing to the "market society". The 35-hour week is being implemented "flexibly", which has led to grassroots strikes. Blair's Third Way offers an appealing justification for the re-invention of government bound by fiscal prudence, and committed to a withered public sphere.

In the decade before Blair came to power most European social democrats had dropped public ownership for regulated private enterprise. Since 1996 an accelerated rhythm of denationalisation, the internationalisation of stock holdings and Brussels competition rules have shaken Europe. Supporters of technocratic state voluntarism have been affected. Fear of capital markets prevented the French left coalition from stopping the closure of Renault's Belgium Vilvoorde car plant. Now a vast slice of France's public sector, from banking to telecommunications, is being sold off. The pattern is repeated elsewhere, from Italy to Germany. Defended as a means to capitalise companies faced with international competition, this continues to erode the state's ability to defend electors' interests.

Opposition has so far been uncertain. The French Communist leader, Robert Hue, even supports limited access to private capital. By contrast Julien Dray of the Socialists' Gauche Socialiste, is critical, saying to *Le Monde*, "The gap between democracy and finance is the trade mark of globalisation." But French strikes against privatisation and giant banking mergers have had limited impact. In other lands, the defence of public ownership amounts to symbolic protests.

Accepting economic change, Anthony Giddens has found a Third Way response to globalisation in "cosmopolitan democracy". Government coalitions in Germany and France include many Greens and liberal-minded ministers favourable to this idea. Writing in *Prospect*, Mary Kaldor echoes some European intellectuals in calling for a "benign imperialism" based on a "global legal regime" to guarantee "a universalistic concept of ethics".

Enforcing human rights through NATO attacks on Yugoslavia has exposed a conflict between moral rhetoric and military reality. Across Europe the left is riven between supporters of a "humanitarian militarism" and those continuing the tradition of the 1980s peace movements. It is possible that Green parties will not survive the split. In Germany inside the Social Democratic Party, voices have been raised questioning the intervention. Berlin MP Christian Stroble and other prominent Greens have launched a manifesto calling for a halt to the bombing. In France a broad section of the French left, including Communist Ministers, Interior Minister Chevenement, some Greens, the Gauche Socialiste and many intellectuals, have opposed the intervention.

Many supporters of European social democratic parties are unimpressed with Third Way globalisation. Opposition to the war is strongest amongst these voters. For the Euro-elections it is not surprising that some are turning to radical socialist groups. The LCR/Lutte Ouvriere (Revolutionary Communist League /Workers Struggle) list in France is averaging at 7.5% (two points above the Green list headed by pro-war Daniel Cohn-Bendit). The anti-war German ex-Communist PDS looks likely to win seats. In contrast the Italian Communist Refoundation Party and the Spanish Izquierda Unida are stagnating.

Protest voting will not decisively alter the drift to the right. Small cadre parties, such as the LCR and Lutte Ouvriere, do not have the capacity to force a change in direction. Nor can independent left parties in Germany, Spain and Italy; to exercise power they were forced into alliances that have given them only marginal influence. France illustrates the real challenge for those opposed to the Third Way. A pluralist government combining modernisers, republican socialists, Greens and half-reformed Communists, it has deep roots among public sector workers and the unionised. Over the continent these bodies may be weakened but they are not dissolving. Conflicts over globalised capital and war may revive them. Where mechanisms of party democracy exist it is possible that the left will make advances inside the mass social democratic parties if it develops policies that advance social ownership, welfare protection and an anti-militarist internationalism.

Greetings from

Alex Smith MEP

South of Scotland



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Parliamentary Group of the
Party of European Socialists

New ideas needed

A Future for Public Ownership
By Malcolm Sawyer and Kathy O'Donnell, published by Lawrence & Wishart, price £7.99
Reviewed by Mike Phipps

Commissioned by The UNISON leadership, this book looks at the effects of privatisation on wealth distribution, performance and the cost of borrowing. There's strangely little, however, on its impact on wages, conditions and the environment. Much of it covers old ground: a rebuttal of the alleged greater efficiency of the private sector over public ownership and a critique of the limited regulatory approach favoured by this Government and the last.

The weakness of the book is its failure to put public ownership in a context that might transcend the existing economic, political and legal framework. Ideas on ownership that go beyond nationalisation are welcome, but the authors' ideas on independent companies with a majority government holding, regional or local authority ownership, or mutualisation all seem flawed. There's an interesting look at democratic employee ownership or workers co-ops, owned either collectively or by individuals, but the difficulties of access to capital markets highlights just one of the problems of this approach.

At the heart of any debate on public ownership lies the issue of accountability. The idea of publicly-owned utilities being responsible to Parliament is laughable: the same Government that appoints the directors also controls the functioning of all Parliamentary committees. More direct ways of holding services directly accountable to their users are not explored. Equally, while there is a strong 'public interest' argument for centrally-managed utilities, the authors assume that central control is the precursor for rational planning. There's little evidence of that from governments past and present: just look at the absence of any integrated transport policy even in the decades when public transport was largely nationalised.

The timidity of this book conceals the vast potential of public ownership. The fact that publicly-owned industries dispensing power or water need not be motivated by the pursuit of profit should not be something to apologise about. It could be the starting-point for a complete rethink of the nature of control and management structures, workplace hierarchies, the quality of service delivery, sustainable provision, a prices policy that goes beyond the free market and a range of other issues that are not addressed here.

Private profit, social risk

Profit over people: neoliberalism and the global order
By Noam Chomsky, published by Seven Sisters Press, price £12.99
Adrian Kozlowski reviews

In a recent *Guardian* article on farming in India, Vandana Shiva wrote of the disastrous effects of opening up the seed sector to multinationals, whose products are not renewable. Her conclusion reflects a key perception of Chomsky's latest collection of essays and lectures, namely, that "profit is privatised, cost and risk socialised."

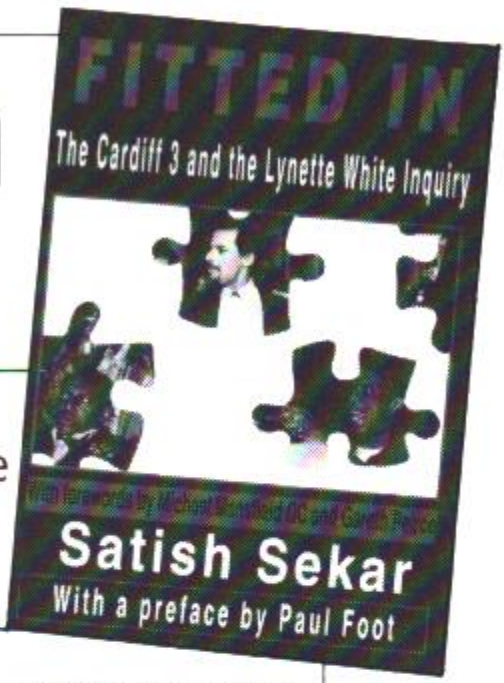
The thrust of these essays is that we can understand neoliberalism only if we attend to economic history, structures of power, and the ways in which meaningful democracy is limited in a world ordered by trade agreements between the rich countries. It's an account that helps us see the Multilateral Agreement on Investment as relating to investors' rights, not free trade, and that Clinton's attempt to fast-track the agreement was in contempt of democracy.

"Profit over people" is an important guide for appreciating the economic and political global order, located in Europe, Japan, and the US – a corrective to an order seen as "inevitable", against which popular struggle is discounted as "narrow nationalism".

Apart from its detail and historical sweep, this book provides a focus for people organising in practical ways – as with the MAI, where the campaigning has, temporarily, been successful.

You've been framed

Fitted In
By Satish Sekar, published by The Fitted In Project, price £10.99
Reviewed by Mike Phipps



There have been many books about recent miscarriages of justice. But Satish Sekar's book on the wrongful conviction in 1990 of three men for the murder of Cardiff prostitute Lynette White must be unique. Sekar not only spotted the conflicting evidence, police bullying and use of unreliable witnesses in the original trial, and then "nagged" Guildford Four solicitor Gareth Pierce (her words) to take up the case. After the successful appeal of the "Cardiff Three" and the South Wales police's refusal to investigate further, Sekar then dug up new evidence himself which led to the case being reopened. No wonder even Lynette's mother expresses her gratitude to Sekar in the Foreword, alongside fulsome praise from Michael Mansfield QC, Paul Foot and many more.

PERISCOPE

Blow up

Private Eye has a report of a New Labour apparatchik who was seconded to the ANC in Cape Town. While there he befriended an English couple. Shortly before one of Mr Tony's visit to South Africa, the Millbanker visited the couple and said he'd noticed a photograph in their house that meant they would not be welcome at any of Blair's photocalls. The photograph? **Liz Davies** from her friend's college days. Apparently the couple were not broken-hearted.

Read my lips

So **Lord Sawyer** has been nominated to stand for the constituency section of the Labour Party NEC. Would this be the same man who, when moving the changes to the Labour Party Constitution that created a new MP-free Constituency Section of the NEC, said that this would not be a place for parliamentarians? Or is it the Tom Sawyer who abused his position as General Secretary (and thereby the official in charge of national Party elections) to leak and condemn private correspondence from NEC candidate Liz Davies? How does Sawyer square this? Maybe he does not consider the Lords part of Parliament, a reasonable assertion given the attendance record of most noble Lords.

Liz has more than twice as many nominations for the NEC as the leaker.

Coppers narked

Part-time rally driver and arms dealer, **Mark Thatcher**, is finding a suitably lucrative day job hard to find in sunny South Africa. Sad to relate then that his latest venture – loan sharking to Cape Town's cash-strapped police officers – has plunged off the rails. A top-level investigation into Mark's complaints that he had been ripped off by some of his "book runners" has come to nothing leaving the poor boy with losses of more than R420,000 (£42,000). One person who won't be sorry to see an end to Thatcher's nice little earner is retired policeman Cecil Meder, whose loan of R4,500 ended up costing him almost four times that (R19,447.60) at compounded interest rates as high as 20% a month. And to think that the police did so much for his mother as well .

Let them eat hay

Trust ***Horse and Hound*** to be the one voice speaking out against the minimum wage. A March editorial says the new law will "send shock waves through the horse world". Of course, they do really care about their workers, as shown by its comment that "my guess is that many people who work with horses could actually be worse off through having to join the black economy to find a way round the law." Nothing new there then.

Mandy discovered?

Political pundits have been speculating on the whereabouts of former cabinet minister **Mr Mandleson**. See what you think of this comment on the captured US airmen in Serbia, "Of course they won't be tried and they will be back in their homes as soon as this stupidity stops." The same dismissive, patronising tone - surely Milan Bozic, Belgrade's Minister Without Portfolio, is one and the same?

Man of Straw

Tough on crime, not afraid to tackle street muggers himself, **Jack Straw** switched the church he was giving a reading at last month. The reason? To avoid 30 animal rights campaigners complaining at cats being strapped to electrodes. Thank god he hasn't got to face the Serbs.

Paul Richards beats Murdoch

So the Government finally stood up to Murdoch over the BSkyB/Man United deal. Former No. 10 Press Officer **Tim Allen**, now working for Murdoch, obviously wasn't a very good investment if he couldn't deliver on this one. He whined, "the judgement should have been based not on a calculation of the reaction of different sections of the media, but on the merits of the detailed competition arguments." Funny, we thought that was what the MMC and DTI did. It was no surprise to us that one of the figures behind the successful campaign against the merger was Paul Richards (see previous Periscopes) – obviously, still possessed of godlike genius.

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Correspondence

While I welcomed another excellent contribution from Bernie Moss on the single currency and the current economic situation, I believe he is wrong in one respect. I believe that Tony Blair's commitment to the single currency means that he is prepared to form a grand coalition to tackle the social and economic consequences of taking us into the euro. This means that the "Big Tent" brings in fellow travellers, such as left wing Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats and anyone else who wants the UK in the single currency above anything else.

Blair's attacks on democracy, for example the privatisation of education authorities and the "independence" of the Bank of England, are designed to make people ready for the undemocratic rule that the euro will mean.

Let us build the alternative programme of democratic socialism and reclaim the Labour Party as a party opposed to globalisation and the decay of democratic structures throughout the UK and Europe.

Mark Donoghue
Baldock
Herts

I must take issue with Ken Livingstone's comments in April's *LLB*. Livingstone writes: "there is no spare capacity on the London underground and it is therefore not possible – whatever some parts of the far left are arguing – to cut fares on the tube without completely overburdening the system." In other words, London Underground should continue to price poor people out of public transport. Hardly a socialist policy.

There could be "spare capacity". The construction of new lines and extensions, strengthened infrastructure, state-of-the-art trains and signalling, refurbished stations, more staff – all would increase the capacity of London Underground. And all could be achieved with the political will to invest in a publicly owned, publicly accountable Tube.

That poses a problem for Ken, who asserts that the London mayor's "progressive agenda" must fit "within the Government's tight constraints". Wrong. To achieve any form of "progressive agenda", any real change for working-class Londoners, the mayor and assembly will have to challenge the Blairites' refusal to tax the rich to fund public services, not lamely accept it.

If *LLB* is to continue supporting Livingstone, you must explain in what sense his platform is left wing. On this evidence, it is far from it.

Janine Booth,
Branch Secretary, RMT Central Line West

The Land is Ours is right to keep up the pressure on the Government for a proper right to roam (*LLB* April). The Ramblers Association is mistaken to think it is a done deal – ask Freedom of Information campaigners. After Michael Meacher announced the measures, Tony Blair's first action was to appoint Ewen Cameron, former head of the Country Landowners Association, to head the Countryside Agency. This new quango will carry out the all-important mapping of open land and arbitrate in local disputes between ramblers and landowners. There are real problems with the measures and you can bet the CLA is lobbying like hell.

We must not allow Downing Street to reduce our expectations continually by leaking false stories of impending betrayal, then have us welcome measures which would have not been acceptable in the first place.

Dave Timms
Red Rope (The Socialist Walkers and Climbers Club)

Like Christine Shawcroft (April *LLB*), I view the prospect of a Labour Party football team with complete horror although not from her professed boredom but from the sheer naffness of the idea.

To play to a decent standard involves training for at least two nights a week plus playing on a Saturday or Sunday thus taking activists away from political activity (this is perhaps why this idea is being floated). To play at a less than decent standard is to invite ridicule. After the Labour Party First team's tenth thrashing at the hands of a pub team will they all be up before the NCC for bringing the Party into disrepute?

No, this is one idea that will never get off the ground.

John Evers
Worcester Park

I am deeply disappointed with Tony Benn's distancing himself from the NATO offensive against Serbia. Diplomacy has not worked – and never will with Nazi regimes. When genocide occurs we (the human race) must act in some way to halt it and to prevent it recurring. If force is the final resort then it must be used. I detect a degree of nimbyism in those who oppose it and would be very interested to hear what real alternative they would offer.

Anthony Tattersall
Fareham

Why can't the trade union movement agree that specialist unions should have agreed "spheres of influence" which won't be poached by other unions? Many hours of senior union manpower have now been spent on this specific issue when resources could be better spent on constructive areas like progressing socialist policies.

Surely if the movement is to advance, the basics should be sorted out in a collective manner? Despite Tory attacks, decline of membership and the general state of the labour movement, we are still fighting internally over what seem to me very straightforward issues.

This I can only assume is due to the way certain union leaders jealously guard their own self-interest etc. Any views?

Rob Caravan
Burnley

● Send your letters to *llb*@labournet.apc.org or *LLB*, PO Box 2378, London, E5 9QU.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

"You do not fight barbarity with barbarity"– Lord Hugh Jenkins, former Labour MP, resigning the whip over the war.

"What I had hoped was that the Government had moved away from this kind of blanket, machine-gun attack, thinking that savings can be made by firing at all claimants in the hope of catching some of those who should not be claiming" – Frank Field on disability benefit cuts.

"You made democracy in Chile possible" – Thatcher to Pinochet.

"They told me politics was the road to hell, but I didn't realise it was just a mile down the road with a dome on it" – Abraham Lincoln.

Alliance has *really* put members first

Liz Davies, Cathy Jamieson, Mark Seddon and Pete Willsman were elected to the NEC on the Grassroots Alliance slate last October. Here's a brief summary of what they've been up to.

- **NEC away-day:** GA supporters argue that the NEC's purpose is to communicate the views and priorities of Party members to the Government, rather than communicating the Government's message to Party members, which, according to Millbank, is what the NEC is for.
- **November NEC:** The four GA supporters on the NEC oppose the gagging "code of conduct" on NEC members speaking to the media and insist on keeping their commitment to produce a regular bulletin. The GA four also question the Prime Minister on the situation in Iraq and oppose proposals for bombing. Pete and Mark request discussion of the Jenkins report.
- **January NEC:** GA four submit motion regretting the bombing of Iraq and calling upon the Government to work with the UN for a peaceful and democratic solution in the Middle East. Discussion is blocked when next business is moved before motion can even be proposed; next business agreed by 19 votes to 5 (the four plus UNISON representative). The GA four oppose proposals to commission a feasibility study to "outsource" the membership department of the Party. Liz and Cathy propose motion calling for review of Party sponsors and corporate donors; motion referred to Finance Committee. As a result of the motion, a review has been set up in which Liz is trying to participate. The four object to the imposition of a £2,000 levy on each CLP for the Euro elections. The four oppose selection panels for the Greater London Assembly, and question the independence of so-called "independent" members on the selection panel.
- **March NEC:** The GA four propose amendments to the Code of Conduct on internal Party elections. They propose that organisations supporting candidates should be asked to publish accounts, that there should be an independent scrutineer and that there should be no prohibition on public comments about the ballot. All the amendments are defeated with only the GA four in favour. The GA four then vote against the Code as a whole. The GA four oppose the suspension of Newark CLP and the District Labour Party. Mark and Pete propose a motion requiring affiliated organisations to hold OMOV ballots before participating in leadership elections. The GA four ask the Prime Minister questions about the bombing of Kosova, the performance of Ofsted, and the smear against Abbott and Cook.
- **On the sub-committees**, the GA four have taken up the cases of Labour Party members subject to disciplinary action. Mark is a member of the Economic Policy Commission and has moved amendments questioning the direction of the Government's economic policy, and calling for lower interest rates.
- **At the National Policy Forum**, along with other GA supporters, the four have been arguing for amendments to the consultation documents on PFI, privatisation of public services, pensions, higher wages in the public sector, a genuinely ethical foreign policy and a policy that tackles the causes of crime.

NEC ELECTIONS

GRASSROOTS ALLIANCE SLATE

ANN BLACK

BILL BUTLER

LIZ DAVIES

MARK SEDDON

CHRISTINE SHAWCROFT

PETE WILLSMAN

■ **The dates for the election are not yet known, but ballot papers are likely to be sent out some time in May, or even late April and the closing date is likely to be in June – three months earlier than last year.**

■ **The election is likely to be much lower-profile than last year. We need to ensure that Party members are aware of the election and are encouraged to vote.**

■ **Grassroots Alliance leaflets are available from the *LLB* office (0181-985 6597) – distribute them as widely as you can within local Labour Parties. Individual leaflets for Liz Davies and Christine Shawcroft are also available from the *LLB* office.**

■ **Remind Party members that they have six votes – and they should use them to vote for the six Grassroots Alliance candidates. They are the only genuine independents.**

■ **Make sure that you remind any member you know who voted for the Grassroots Alliance last year to do the same again.**

■ **All of the candidates are delighted to address local meetings. Mark, Pete and Liz can provide a report on events at the NEC. Call the *LLB* office if you want to arrange a local meeting.**

■ **Please notify the *LLB* office of any evidence of "dirty tricks" from the opposition – any mailings that seem to have come from Labour Party offices, any phone calls to Party members on behalf of a slate of candidates, etc.**

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