LABOUR LEFT

Briefing

NOVEMBER 1999 • £1 WAGED • 50p UNWAGED



SPECIAL

The crisis of representation

LONDON MAYOR

Ken Livingstone speaks

RAIL SAFETY

Rail workers demand public ownership

DEBATE

Is the Party over?

LABOUR LEFT Briefing

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

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

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

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

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

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

LLB Club prize draw winner:
J. Stockton £20.

■ The copy deadline for the December issue is Monday 15th November.



November 1999

Cover cartoon by DROS

AGENDA

4 - 10 News and views
NHS challenge for Milburn, nuclear risk in Derby, Third World debt, rail tragedy

11 - 12 Labour Party
Ken Livingstone for Mayor

13 - 17 The crisis of representation
The future of GCs, Tony Benn, Is the Party over?

18 - 19 Labour Party
Party Conference report, the Alan Simpson column

20 - 21 Trade unions
Hillingdon, UCW, the Geoff Martin column

22 - 27 International
Pakistan, India, Germany, Ireland, Yugoslavia, Spain, Chile

28 - 32 Regulars
Reviews, Obituaries, Periscope, Correspondence, the Liz Davies column

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

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

Name _____

Address _____

_____ Tel/Fax/Email _____

Donation _____ Total _____

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

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

EDITORIAL

Ken speaks for us all

Livingstone v. Dobson as Labour's candidate for London Mayor is the most important Party contest since Tony Benn fought Denis Healey for the Deputy Leadership in the early eighties. It is, at last, the set piece battle between New Labour and the Labour Party itself.

You would have thought New Labour might have learned some lessons from its recent attempts to tell Party members how to vote. In the 1998 NEC elections, Neil Kinnock and friends played no small part in the victories of the Grassroots Alliance candidates when they made disgraceful attacks on Liz Davies. He is at it again. Kinnock, Margaret Hodge and Sir Ken Jackson (leader of the AEEU – the major funder of the leadership's "Members First" slate) have all entered the fray with attacks on Ken and the GLC of the 80s which are worthy of the worst tabloid smears of the time and may well be equally counterproductive. In the vote to select Labour's candidate for Secretary of the Welsh Assembly – again conducted by a "failsafe" electoral college – the victory of the leadership candidate over the members' choice cost Labour a majority in the Assembly itself. In Scotland, Dennis Canavan's emphatic victory showed that when the Party imposes its will, the people will not always follow.

This has become a contest between New Labour's bureaucratic gerrymandering and those who believe that Labour's nominee for London Mayor should have the popular support of the London labour movement. Tony Blair no doubt thought that a stitched up electoral college would produce the result he wanted without the shame of direct intervention. But as trade union after trade union – bowing to pressure from their members – decided to ballot, he may think again. If the votes seem likely to go the wrong way he still has the option of not allowing Ken Livingstone on to the shortlist, even at this late stage.

The stakes could hardly be higher. The payroll vote, which has equal weight in the college with the wishes of Party members, may be able to impose Dobson, but the London MPs cannot win an election campaign on their own. Without victory in the OMOV section Dobson would be a flawed and compromised candidate and Jeffrey Archer could be handed the prize he doesn't deserve. Worse than this, the consequences for the Party itself do not bear comtemplating. The stakes are high for New Labour too. A Livingstone victory would demonstrate New Labour's vulnerability and lack of roots in the Party and labour movement – and New Labour will try to prevent that at any cost to the Party itself.

This is a fight which can be won. For London Labour Party members and trade unionists, every effort must be made to ensure the people's choice represents the Labour Party. But much more than the London Mayor is at stake. Ken Livingstone is leading the fight to turn the tide and help our movement reclaim the Party for the members. At this critical moment, he speaks for us all.

A defining moment

Harold MacMillan famously said that "events, dear boy, events" are what blow governments off course. Gerhard Schroeder's SPD government in Germany has demonstrated this phenomenon with dramatic speed. In contrast Tony Blair had been enjoying a remarkably long honeymoon period.

Until now. The train crash outside Paddington was one of those pivotal moments when public opinion gels and warm words from cabinet members are no longer enough. This was more than an horrific accident: it was a symbol of the mortality of a government that had appeared to be bulletproof.

People are not prepared to wait any longer for the safety measures that have been promised time and again. The fat cat lifestyles of the rail company bosses stand in marked contrast to the failure to invest in modern equipment. Of course, the gulf between private affluence and public squalor is not new; but events like the Paddington crash bring it sharply into focus.

Under the Tories a dramatic shift took place in Britain; for the first time in a century there was a major redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich. The tragedy is that the trend has not changed since Labour took office. No-one expected overnight miracles, but Blair has made it clear that he sees no problem with the continuing explosion in the numbers of the super-rich.

Time and again the opinion polls have shown that most people want to see increased investment in public services. Most Party members would certainly welcome it. Of course spending more money is not of itself the solution; it has to be properly focussed. But without extra money – and without the commitment even to halt, let alone reverse, the direction of the redistribution of wealth – all the new policy statements in the world won't deliver the services that people want and need.

This is a defining moment. The usual voices calling for a change in direction have been joined by the wider forces that may at last persuade the Government to listen. The choices are clear: increased public investment in our railways, schools and hospitals – or the PFI road to more big business rip-offs of our public assets.

Man for all seasons leads NHS into winter crisis

There will be little change for the NHS under new Health Secretary Alan Milburn, argues Harry Sloan.



Beds closed by cash and staff shortages: the NHS under Labour isn't ready for the winter.

The run-up to Labour's change of Health Secretary offered a less than promising insight into the politics of Alan Milburn, the man set to steer the NHS into the next century.

As Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Milburn has been busily tightening the cash limits which most NHS chiefs now see as an obstacle to delivering the Government's reforms.

In his previous spell as health minister Milburn made his name as the most vigorous advocate of the Tory Private Finance Initiative as a device to fund new hospitals for lease to NHS trusts. This policy has been roundly criticised as costly, bureaucratic, and poor value for money by a growing range of bodies including the Commons Health Committee, the BMA, health unions, the NHS Confederation (which represents NHS trusts and health authorities) and Community Health Councils.

Indeed there are active and vocal campaigns against PFI funding of hospitals in various parts of the country, uniting trade unionists, community organisations and others. All of them are angry at the potential loss of beds and local accessibility as well as the funnelling of millions from NHS budgets into the coffers of private consortia and the privatisation of NHS support staff.

Milburn must also surmount a major credibility gap, not only with health workers and the public, but even with NHS chiefs. A recent opinion poll of over 200 NHS managers for the *Health Service Journal* found that three quarters of them did not expect to get the resources, staff or training they require to deliver the growing list of Government priorities.

The poll also revealed a dramatic contrast between their priorities as NHS managers, and what they perceived to be Government priorities: for example 77% of managers thought staff shortage was a major issue, but only 23% of them thought ministers had the same view.

Perhaps the most ridiculous contrast is between the tiny handful (7%) of managers who regard the Government's much touted "NHS Direct" phone advice line as important, compared with the 63% who recognise that it is a service promoted by ministers at every opportunity.

Despite promises of a new, dynamic twist to Labour's "modernisation" of the NHS, little is likely to change under Milburn. Labour has locked the NHS into a 5-year period of slower growth than under the Tories, while demands on hospital services, especially from growing numbers of elderly people, have increased. The internal market, along with GP Fundholding, has been formally scrapped – but the complex and costly division between purchasers and providers of health services has continued.

Indeed the split has been consolidated with the establishment since April of Primary Care Groups, which promise local GPs increasing influence over the planning of local health services. Already there are signs that the interests of GPs, seeking to balance the books of PCGs, can run sharply counter to those of NHS hospital trusts, and potentially threaten their financial viability. And as cash pressures mount, with PCGs running into deficit on their drug budgets, some GPs are openly debating economies that would save money by prescribing second-choice drugs for patients.

Cash limits and pressure to meet the demands of primary care are likely to force many trusts into cutbacks to balance their books by next April. After years of bed cuts, more beds have already begun to close through a combination of cash problems and staff shortages. When the first cold night of the autumn struck early in October, hospitals in many parts of the country immediately ran out of beds to admit emergency patients.

Shortages of nursing and professional staff have now reached chronic proportions in many big cities, where suitably qualified people can find a range of alternative jobs paying as much or more than nursing but without the stress of trying to cope without sufficient resources.

This year's pay award to nurses, midwives and health professionals – averaging over 5% – gave a relatively generous increase to new entrants to the profession,

but much less to the mainstream staff nurses and others who are battling each day to keep services running.

Even worse has been the wretched 3% offer to the army of hospital support staff – ancillary workers, admin staff and others – those not covered by a pay review body. They are now balloting on strike action to fight for a similar percentage increase to the nurses.

Whether or not timid union leaders call for action, the NHS could face disruption in the next few months. For the first time in several years the NHS is now running into a winter period without any additional "winter pressures" funding to avoid the threatened build-up of queues in A&E departments of patients on trolleys awaiting beds.

Milburn seems set to follow the Dobson line of issuing occasional new edicts to NHS chiefs. The latest is the new "national service framework" for mental health, published without any extra money identified to implement it. Caught between a rock and a hard place, NHS chiefs have been seeking to solve their problems by piling ever-greater burdens on what they see as the weakest members of the NHS team – front-line nursing and support staff.

It didn't have to be like this: the instant access to cash for the Kosova bombing campaign and rumours of a £12 billion Treasury pre-election "war chest" are a reminder that the Government has choices – and the resources to eliminate PFI, pay the health workers, stop the cuts and cut the waiting lists.

Isn't it time the left turned up the heat to help make them do so?

Justice for Diarmuid O'Neill

It is 3 years since Diarmuid O'Neill was shot dead by police in west London. Since then the justice campaign has been calling for a public inquiry. The coroner has now asked Paul Boateng to use powers granted under new legislation to set up a public inquiry as an alternative to reopening the inquest. The Metropolitan Police have made representations against this, and the justice campaign needs you to write in support of the public inquiry.

Write to Paul Boateng MP, Home Office, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AT; fax 0171-273 2190.

- Contact: Justice for Diarmuid O'Neill Campaign, BM Box D. O'Neill, London WC1N 3XX.

justicedoneill@btinternet.com

Outrage as nuclear risk revealed

Ian Malcolm-Walker, Derby North CLP, reports: For over forty years a secret uranium enrichment facility has existed in the heart of Derby without any plans for the evacuation of nearby residents.

The Rolls-Royce plant, which makes reactors for nuclear submarines was always known to handle radioactive material. But it came as a total shock to the people of Derby when Geoff Hoon gave the plant a clean bill of health in his first days at the Ministry of Defence, presumably in an attempt to quell fears of a repeat of last month's critical radiation leak at the Tokaimura plant in Japan

No one else was as relaxed about the news. The plant is under a mile from the city centre and very close to an Asda supermarket, Derby County's new stadium and the main Sheffield to London railway line. Over a quarter of a million people live within four miles of the site.

Local residents and councillors also voiced concerns and shock over the secrecy surrounding operations at the plant. Labour councillor John Ahern, whose ward covers the factory, said: "There are some serious questions that need to be asked. I am sure the people living near here will be equally concerned. We need to seek clarification that this area is safe and that there are no health problems as a result of this."

Earlier this year, a report by the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate severely criticised safety procedures at the plant.

After the accident in Japan, workers at the Derby plant, fearing a similar disaster, contacted the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. They said the Rolls-Royce plant had no facility for containing radiation if an accident occurred and there was no off-site emergency plan.

The Chief Inspector of Nuclear Installations Lawrence Williams has played down safety fears over the plant. He said that the inspectorate had "not identified any serious safety flaws" at the site but admitted "room for improvement" had been found during an emergency exercise which the inspectorate observed last March.

A Rolls-Royce spokesman said the inspectorate had observed another recent exercise at the site involving the emergency services and judged it "adequate". He added "We have now clarified the position, changed our procedures and practised them three times."

But local people remain unconvinced. CND's Dave Knight added: "As Tokaimura showed, accidents do happen and when they do, the effects are long-lasting, if not deadly. This plant should be immediately closed down."

Whatever action is taken this highlights once again the extent to which quality manufacturing jobs in Britain are over-dependent on the defence and nuclear industries. Urgent action is needed to create a Defence Diversification Agency so we can get out of this business without throwing thousands of workers on the scrapheap.

Labour's rotten core

Opinion polls may favour Labour by a large margin, but the result of the recent Hamilton by-election is more hard evidence that core voters are unhappy at Labour's drift. Squandering a 15,878 majority achieved at the General Election, Labour scraped home with a majority of just 556 over the SNP who benefited from a 23% swing.

What the mainstream media were less willing to highlight, however, was the high vote for the Scottish Socialist Party, in third place with 1,847, nearly 10% of the vote. This was an excellent result for the SSP and consolidates their rising support through the Scottish parliamentary and European elections. The dismal vote for the Liberals, on the other hand, bottom of the poll with just 634 votes, expresses the voters' desire to punish Labour's coalition partners in Scotland. Having campaigned against university tuition fees in the Scottish parliamentary elections in May, the Liberals carried out an immediate volte-face when elected, in order to join Labour in the Scottish executive. This treachery was hailed at the time by Paddy Ashdown as an example of the "new maturity" in Scottish politics; the voters clearly felt otherwise.

A stab in the back

The Welfare Reform Bill has been mauled by the Lords but the changes are for the better, argues Ian Malcolm-Walker, membership officer of the Labour Party Disabled Members' Group.

In its first week back after the Summer recess the House of Lords mauled Alastair Darling's flagship Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill.

An undemocratic second chamber has no place in the democracy of the twentieth century. It would be wrong, however, not to seize the opportunity to put pressure on the Labour MPs to ensure that the changes are not reversed.

The flaws in the Bill need to be spelt out, especially as it has been backed by a massive Government misinformation campaign,

- Incapacity Benefit (IB) replaced both Sickness Benefit and Invalidity Benefit when the Tories moved to slash the cost of benefits by over £3bn. The Government wants to means test it for people with occupational pensions over £50 per week and restrict IB to people with a contributions record in the last two years. Both ideas have been rejected by the Lords.

IB is a contributory benefit and should not be means tested. The move threatens to blur the boundary between contributory and non-contributory benefits and undermines the socialist and co-operative principle of social insurance, in which we are insured on the basis of what we can afford, not on the risk of claiming.

The proposals would see men and women who are forced to retire early on health grounds losing benefits because of their pension. Such pensions are usually much lower than that those paid at the normal retirement age.

Citing isolated examples of prosperous pensioners, ministers plan to reduce benefit by 50p in the pound for every pound over £50 a week. That is half of what they judge a pensioner couple needs per week, and less than ministers spend on a good lunch.

It is a smokescreen for attacking pensions (deferred wages) and victimising the weakest in society. All workers should be on their guard – they could need this benefit tomorrow!

DSS ministers claim people opt for IB as it pays more than the dole, and for longer. In areas of high unemployment, such as South Wales and the North East, there are indeed more claims, but this is due to the legacy of smokestack industries and mining. In any event, the DSS are quick enough to hassle folk on the flimsiest pretext!

The issue of the qualifying time and the contributions link is wrong on three clear grounds. First it would exclude people who lose their jobs and then become ill some time later even if they had worked for 30 years. This includes people with progressive conditions such as MS or who are suffering from back pain and depression.

Second it exacerbates a divided Britain. Why should someone not receive help when ill just because they were unable in the years beforehand to find a job. Claimants will be much more likely to qualify in Newbury than Newcastle although they are more likely to be ill in Newcastle. So much for social inclusion!

Third if you are a part time worker, possibly even with three or four low paid jobs, no contributions means no benefit – a particular blow to many women.

- Severe Disablement Allowance – the Government plans to abolish this for most people who become disabled after age 20. It provides an income for people whose contribution record prevents them from applying for IB.

Ministers argue this move will not cause undue hardship, as 70% of claimants top up SDA with income support. But as the latter is rigidly means-tested on household income, in future a disabled person will be denied income on the basis of their partner's means. Again, this hits women disproportionately.

- Widows' payments – these will be cut by over £20 000 (around 50%) per case under the guise of equality.This means removing benefit altogether from widows over the age of 45 without children and substituting an improved one-off bereavement allowance of £2,000 rather than the present £1,000, plus a benefit lasting for six months.

The Child Poverty Action Group states, "Except for a minority, women's lack of economic independence while bringing up children means that they are ill-placed to take on work after bereavement. The ongoing income of a contribution-based benefit such as the widow's pension is thus an important safeguard." Both the TUC and the Equal Opportunities Commission back the CPAG's opposition to the plans.

What next? When the bill returns to the Commons. Darling will make minor concessions – a higher threshold and a lower taper seem on the cards. But a stab in the back is a stab in the back, no matter how high up it starts, or how long the knife. There is not much time. This bill must be passed by mid-November or the Government loses it all – including the good bits.

Readers should pressure their MPs now to resist restoring cuts to the bill. The four issues to raise are: No means-testing of Incapacity Benefit, no narrowing of qualifying time for Incapacity Benefit, keep Severe Disablement Allowance and no cuts to Widows' Benefit.

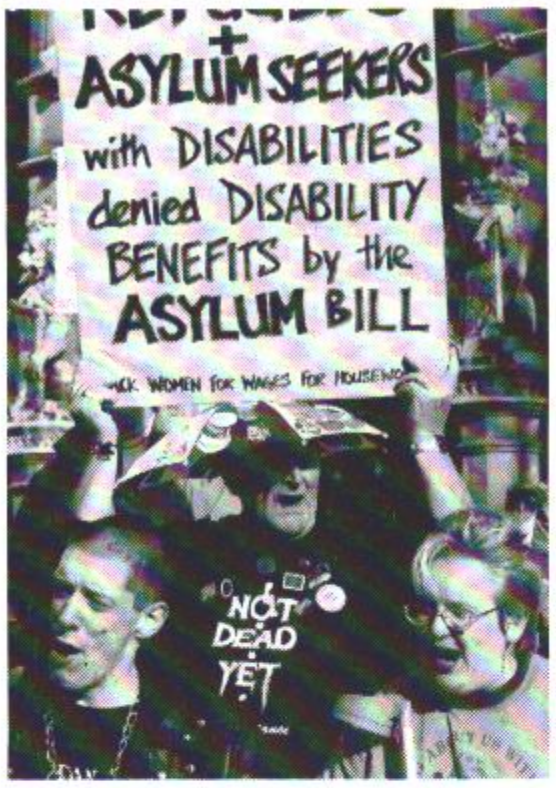


Photo: Paul Mattsson

11th October. Protest at House of Commons against Welfare Reform and Asylum Bills.

Write off debt now!

President Clinton's pledge last month to scrap the $6bn debt owed to the US by the world's poorest countries has caught everyone on the hop. This followed the World Bank/IMF's Washington agreement on a new initiative to tackle the crippling debt problems.

Jeremy Corbyn MP
Islington North

Since Washington, much has been made of the Poverty Reduction Strategies being built into the new debt relief strategy. G7 Finance Ministers have trumpeted the fact that money hitherto spent on servicing debts will no longer be invested in military weapons or bureaucracy, but will go towards improving health, education and other social needs. But any elation anti-debt campaigners may have initially felt must now surely be tempered by the stark realisation that, even without the strings attached, new schemes will not provide nearly enough debt relief to make any profound impact on eradicating poverty.

In Mali, where one child in four dies before reaching the age of five, as much will still be spent in debt repayment as on health which is not even half the recommended level to maintain basic health standards. Likewise in Zambia, where over half a million school age children do not receive any schooling and where the HIV/AIDS crisis is set to cut life expectancy from 43 to 33 years, more will be spent servicing debts than on education and health combined. A similar situation will also continue in Mozambique.

Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs has shown that cancelling all the debt owed by the 52 poorest countries would cost only one third of one percent of the annual income of the richest countries. The transfer of wealth from the South to the North has produced misery and poverty for the majority of the world's people.

The Washington deal is just the latest in a long line of debt relief exercises going back to the early 1980s. All have singularly failed to stem the debt crisis as total poor-country debt has quadrupled to over £200bn. The latest scheme succeeds the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative (HIPC), launched in 1996, but under which, to date, only four countries have actually received relief. Now a new enhanced HIPC promises wider, faster and deeper debt relief than before.

However, when those who control the global economy in their own interests start promising to slash debts, you don't have to be the most cynical of *LLB* readers to wonder what the catch is. Aside from the fact that Clinton's proposals are not certain to be passed by Congress, closer scrutiny reveals that US taxpayers will only have to find a tenth of what he is offering. It is now known that the US Treasury has already secretly written off 90% of poor-country debts.

The IMF's promise of additional debt relief will also be substantially lower than the $100bn quoted in their press releases. That figure actually includes $30bn already written off under the 1994 Naples Terms agreement on Paris Club bilateral debt. It also contains the cancellation of $20bn aid debt agreed by the UN in 1978 (but which was not going to be repaid anyway), as well as $22.5bn carried over from the previous HIPC package introduced in 1996.

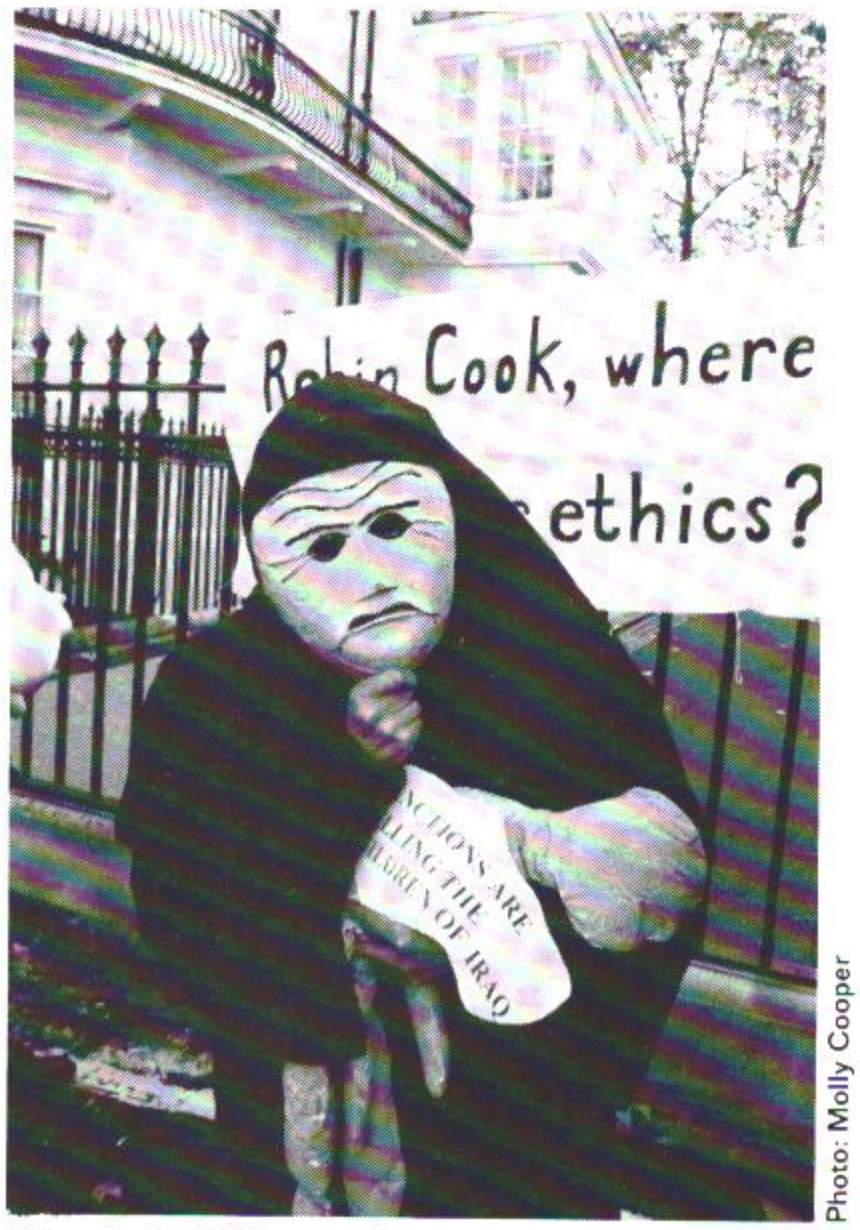


Photo: Molly Cooper

Voices in the Wilderness demonstrate against sanctions against Iraq outside Robin Cook's home to mark the International day for the elimination of poverty, 17th October 1999.

However, apart from the spin, the real catch to the new agreement lies in the strings which the IMF will put on deciding whether a nation will be eligible for the enhanced HIPC scheme. It is insisting that poor countries implement economic reforms under the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF). Similar programmes have been promoted throughout Africa and Latin America over the last fifteen years in return for rescheduling debts. Debtor governments are still being forced to prioritise short-run macroeconomic goals over social needs. The blueprint for these reform packages involves liberalising trade and investment, cutting back on government expenditure, privatising and deregulating.

In practice, IMF structural adjustment has only deepened and aggravated the economic and social crises in poor countries. Public expenditure cuts have led to health and education being put beyond the reach of the poorest families unable to afford to pay fees. Poverty has risen as incomes have plummeted due to the spiralling unemployment that followed the privatisation of state-owned industries. To make matters worse, the removal of price controls pushed up the prices of basic goods. Even the IMF's own review of the ESAF showed that, on average, poor countries not undergoing structural adjustment experienced greater growth than those following IMF programmes.

Third World debt is purely and simply a question of social justice. If the rich industrial countries are really serious about ending that poverty then that debt must be cancelled now.

Rail tragedy – don't let it happen on the Tube!



Photo: Molly Cooper

"The rulebook is written in blood" is a saying on the railway. Lessons are learned from deaths and injuries to passengers and workers which lead to new rules being introduced. After the Paddington and Southall tragedies there must be a new addition to the rule book – all trains must be fitted with Automatic Train Protection. But the key lesson is the consequence of splitting up and introducing the private sector onto the railway – under-investment; fragmentation; higher fares; worse services; record complaints and of course a criminal safety record.

Brian Munro
Branch Secretary
Bakerloo Branch RMT

Within days of Paddington, MPs, the press and the public declared that the same mistake should not be made on London's Underground. Prescott's proposed Private Public Partnership (PPP) will split up the Underground, allowing the private sector onto the Tube. The Government's announcement that Railtrack would run the sub surface lines on the Tube had to be postponed due to outrage at Railtrack's involvement at Paddington. Another "preferred bidder" for the Tube's infrastructure is Amey – the contractor responsible for the signalling at Paddington. Initially it looked as though the message had got through to the Government. But within a few days a "Government source" stated that the PPP and plans to privatise Air Traffic Control - dubbed "Railtrack of the sky" – would go ahead.

At London Underground's Health and Safety Conference a few days after the Paddington disaster, Keith Hill MP, now Minister for London, spoke about how we all have to be vigilant on safety as PPP is introduced! The Underground's directors kept up this theme as they faced condemnation from trade union Health and Safety reps. Keith Hill would also have faced their wrath if he hadn't rushed out surrounded by minders after speaking. The Government and the Underground's management have invested so much in their plans for the Tube, despite public opposition, that they refuse to admit the connection between the lunacy on BR and their plans for the Tube. It will be down to a massive campaign in London to force them to think again.

No alternative to public ownership

Reg Hopkins
National President
RMT

Privatisation of our rail industry is not working. The promises made to the travelling public have not been delivered. What the public need are trains that are safe, reliable, clean and punctual. What they get in reality is ex-British Rail rolling stock painted a different colour. All rail users surveys show a record number of complaints concerning chronic delays, dirty and overcrowded carriages, and often the toilets are out of order.

Privatisation has also failed many of the rail industry workers, with constant attempts to erode their terms and conditions of employment. Track workers are expected to travel throughout the country following whatever work is available, scenes reminiscent of Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*. This jeopardises safety as workers are removed from areas where they are familiar with the infrastructure to those where they lack that vital knowledge.

The winners under privatisation have been the major transport groups: National Express, First Group, Stagecoach, Prism and, of course, Railtrack, with profits of £428m in 1998 and a handful of ex-British Rail managers who were allowed to buy out British Rail businesses, only to sell the concerns shortly after, making huge profits. The ultimate loser was the taxpayer, who subsidised the sale of public assets at knock-down prices. Best estimates indicate that the taxpayer was robbed of around £10bn.

We are supposed to learn from the mistakes of our past – that way lies progress. But this is not the case with the present Government, which is doomed to repeat the same failures if it continues with the plan to privatise London Underground infrastructure, with Railtrack the preferred bidder.

The Public Private Partnership (PPP) is totally opposed by the London Underground workforce and a majority of the travelling public. The only voices in support are John Prescott and Gordon Brown. If this Government is sincere in its policy statements regarding an integrated public transport system, it must ensure that London's Underground remains in the public sector, move towards re-regulation of the bus industry and take back into the public sector the rail franchises, which have consistently failed to deliver the level of service the public has the right to expect.

Let not those who perished at Paddington die in vain. This horrific disaster has once again proved that Railtrack, whose first duty is to its shareholder, should not be in charge of rail safety. There is a conflict of interest: profit versus safety. After spending 46 years as a railway worker I am convinced that public transport must be in the public sector, publicly funded and run in the public interest, not for private profit.

The three rail unions have united to oppose the Tube sell off. ASLEF, RMT and TSSA have launched a *Listen to London* campaign. A Harris poll shows that 66% of Londoners want the Underground to remain in the public sector. *Listen to London* has held fringe meetings and leafleted TUC and Labour Party conferences. The unions argue that there are ways to find the money the Underground needs without privatising the Tube and making the same mistakes as with BR, such as a bonds issue. The campaign is to commission an independent study into the funding of the Tube and hold London-wide mayoral hustings for union and Labour Party members to attend.

This initiative is a good start. But we must bring more pressure to bear on the Government – persuasion from Labour-friendly General Secretaries has not had much impact on the public, partly due to a press blackout. The consequences of privatising the Underground for passengers and workers are dire. Tinkering with safety regulations will not provide the Underground that London needs. We need a united passengers and workers campaign across London that stops the Government in its tracks. We need to get the message across to the whole of London – don't let it happen on the Tube!

- As we go to press, three train companies – Virgin, Connex South Central and South West Trains – have obtained an injunction against the RMT guards' strike. The companies' argument was that they were not responsible for changing the role of the guards, and that the rules changing the guards' role had been brought in by Railtrack. The implications of this ruling are enormous because the guards cannot take action against Railtrack who are not their employers. So as the ruling stands, the guards are legally prevented from taking industrial action on these safety issues.
- Meanwhile ASLEF have advised the train companies that ATP and secure cab radios should be installed without cuts in Driver Training standards. Drivers are instructed to approach signals identified as dangerous at maximum speeds of 5 mph for freight trains and 10 mph for passenger trains. If safety devices are not working correctly they must insist on a second driver being present. If not the train must be taken out of service.

Police are still considering the possibility of bringing charges of corporate manslaughter arising from the Paddington train crash.

Nightmare at Paddington

Tessa van Gelderen
ex-Paddington guard

Imagine the following scenario: you have been a train guard for a number of years but have never run over track that used electricity, either overhead lines or third rail. One day you find out that not only is your station being re-signalled to include overhead lines (25,000 volts) but you are also now running into another area that now has the third rail (600 -700 volts). For the safety of yourself and your passengers, you need some re-training and your safety rep agrees you should have experience in the new system using a mock-up, available at a number of locations. But it transpires that these locations now belong to other train companies and will cost your employers money. So, with the agreement of the HSE, you will be shown a film and then be asked a few questions. And the location of this horror story is – you've guessed it – Paddington.

The re-signalling at Paddington was a rushed job. Its main objective was to meet the commercial needs of the Heathrow Express and not the safety of passengers. There were a number of "incidents" involving Heathrow drivers early on. These were drivers who had been recruited straight off the streets – it was a deliberate policy of the company not to bring in the "bad habits and culture" of train drivers (that's code for union).

The role of the HSE should not be overlooked. On more than one occasion, they have backed employers to the detriment of safe working conditions. High-speed trains have an exit from one of the cabs locked shut because the Post Office requested it after some mailbags went missing. A £1m contract was deemed by the HSE to be more important than the need for passengers to make a quick exit in certain circumstances.

Safety is the issue with a guards' dispute currently going through the courts. The RMT should not be apologetic for fighting to keep the operational and safety role of guards – it's about keeping their jobs. In fact, the unions should be using this opportunity to fight for a guard on every train; for stations to be staffed and high-speed trains to have two drivers. The length of the working day should be reduced for all train crews and proper breaks built into rosters. A five-day week should be compulsory with two days continuous rest. Railworkers still have conditions that many other workers would not tolerate, yet we expect them to run our railway system safely.

Once again, workers are being asked to pay the price for lack of investment in a public service, even before privatisation. The whole network should be renationalised but it has to be run by the only people who care about it: the users and workers.

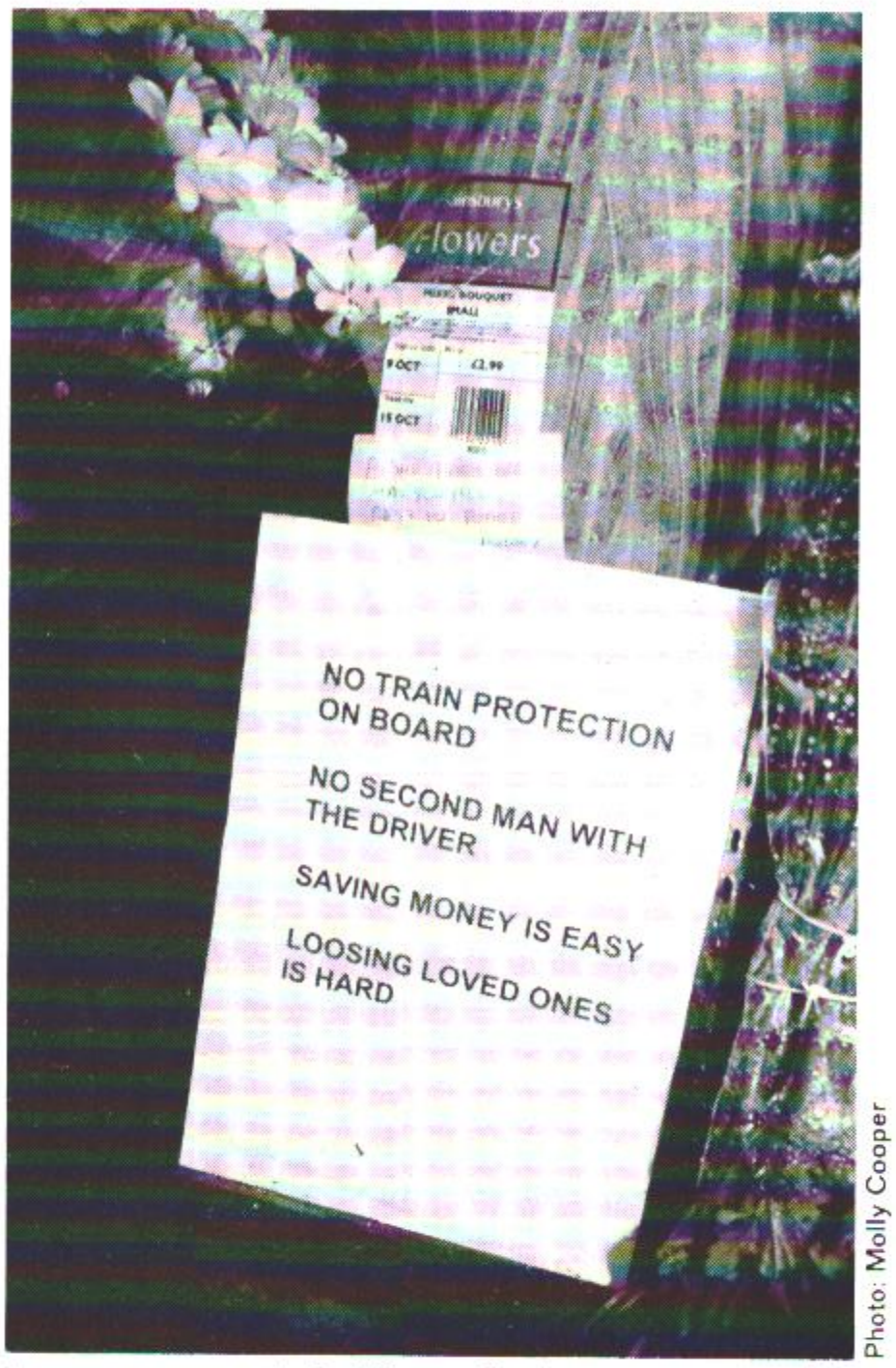


Photo: Molly Cooper

A message among the Paddington floral tributes.

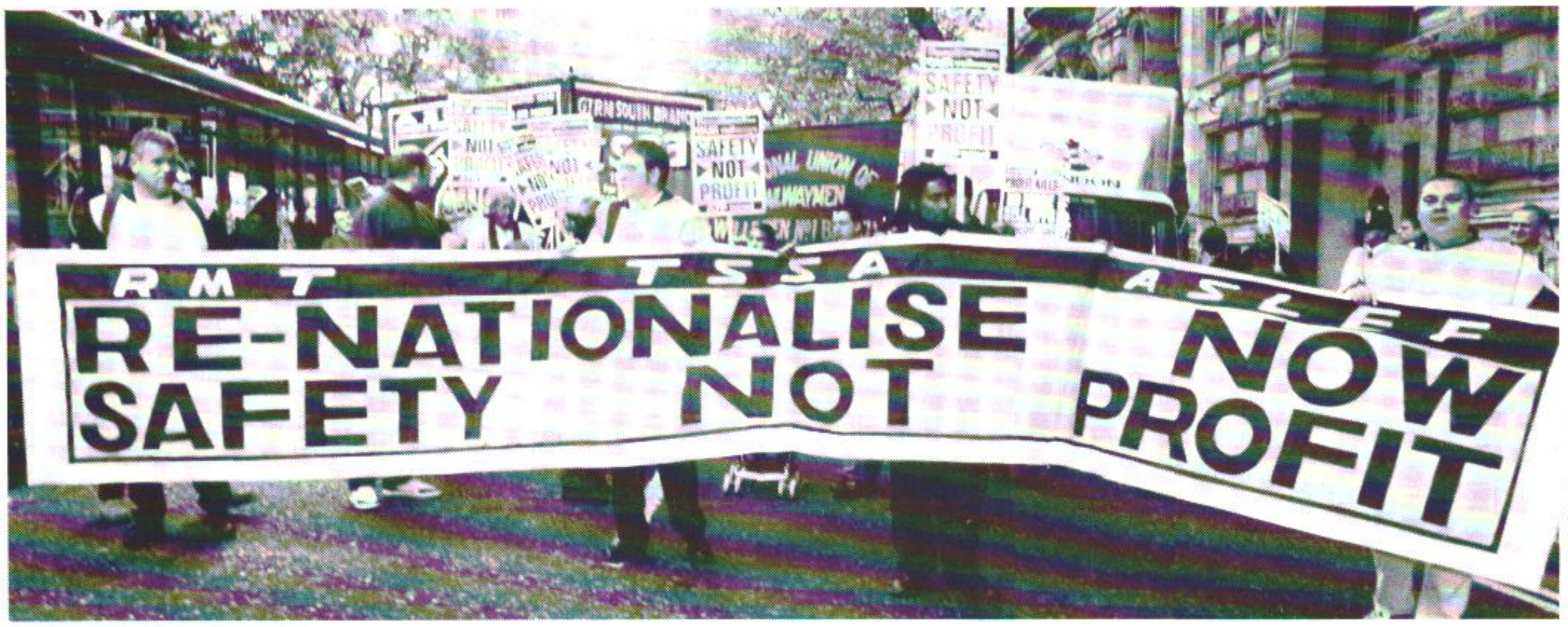


Photo: Molly Cooper

Demonstration for a safe railway, 6th October 1999.

Railtrack in the dock

A train driver on Connex South Central argues for more investment in safety and for the rail industry to be brought back into public ownership.

The reaction of rail users and rail workers to the Paddington rail crash has been sympathy for the injured and for relatives of those who were killed, and concern over safety in the privatised rail system. Following the crash, attention has rightly focussed on Railtrack's record. ASLEF said that drivers, and drivers' reps, had complained to Railtrack that the position of SN109 (the signal passed by the Thames train coming out of Paddington) was such that it was difficult for drivers to see. ASLEF had been pressing Railtrack for four years to deal with this signal and other problem signals in the Paddington area, but Railtrack had done very little about them.

This matches the experience of drivers in my area, who have met a brick wall when trying to raise with our own bosses and Railtrack our concerns over potentially unsafe signalling arrangements at two locations.

A report produced this summer by the Railway Inspectorate said that Railtrack and the Train Operating Companies (TOCs) need to take more action to reduce the number of signals passed at danger (SPADs).

Railtrack's record is one of failure to invest in new rail lines or improving existing lines. Planned upgrading to the West Coast main line is years behind schedule. New lines to take more frequent Thameslink trains linking north and south London, which were originally due in 2000, have only just reached the stage of getting planning permission. A report by a firm of City consultants for the Rail Regulator has confirmed that maintenance and renewal of track and signalling equipment has reduced since Railtrack took over from British Rail, and the track and signalling are deteriorating. Railtrack's publicised £27bn planned investment over the next ten years has been exposed as a sham – much of this is routine maintenance, and projects which will only happen if someone else pays for them.

When serious accidents do happen on the railways – thankfully these are rare occurrences – the cause is often a train passing a signal at danger. The means exist to prevent SPADs, by bringing in Automatic Train Protection (ATP). The Hidden Report on the Clapham crash of 1988 recommended that ATP should be introduced across the whole rail network. But Tory and Labour governments, British Rail and Railtrack, all ruled out ATP. At £1bn it was too expensive. But when they privatised British Rail, the Tories put an extra £1bn per year into rail subsidies to attract private companies. Now, according to the Economist of July 3rd 1999, the private rail firms are making over £1bn per year in profits between them. Once again, private profit comes before safety. The rail unions are campaigning to get ATP introduced, and the public support us on this.

Prescott's preferred cheaper option – Train Protection Warning System – does not work at speeds over 70mph and so would not have prevented the Southall crash.

Public opinion also wants to see the rail industry back in public ownership, but the Government is moving further away from this. At the 1997 and 1998 Labour conferences, Prescott opposed renationalisation because, he argued, it would cost too much to renationalise Railtrack – even though the rail unions had put forward proposals by which the rail subsidy could be used to do this.

Now Labour is passing up the chance to bring the running of train services back into the public sector at no cost. Most of the 25 TOCs have seven year franchises, ending in 2003 and 2004, at which point these franchises could revert to the public sector for nothing. This would be a step towards a publicly owned rail system and enable some re-integration of the fragmented rail network bringing benefits for rail users. However, the recently-appointed head of the Shadow Strategic Rail Authority, Sir Alistair Morton, has told the TOCs – presumably with Prescott's blessing – that reletting of the franchises will start next year and they can bid for new franchises that will be for ten to 20 years.

Despite the Paddington crash, rail is still one of the safest ways to travel, compared particularly to the nine deaths a day on the roads. We need to campaign for more investment including ATP, and public ownership, in order to bring about a shift from car use to rail and other forms of public transport, but this will have to be argued against Prescott and the Cabinet.

Livingstone for London

As the selection contest for Labour's candidate for London Mayor reaches its final phase, Ken Livingstone MP argues that transport is the key issue separating the contenders.

It is unfortunate that the entry of Frank Dobson into the race for mayor was immediately followed by a round of what I can only describe as personal and bitter attacks on me, because in so doing the selection battle has threatened to descend into rancour rather than serious debate.

The issues facing London are very serious and they demand some intelligent discussion. I have made it clear that although many other issues are vital to the lives of ordinary Londoners (and this is particularly the case with policing and crime), the one issue a Labour mayor will be judged on is transport. If the Labour Party in London does not deliver on transport over the course of four years then we are unlikely to win the subsequent election. This does not mean raising people's hopes disproportionately, but it does mean taking what steps can be taken to get London moving again.

There are two strands now to the transport debate. First, there is the consensus between all the candidates that the absolute priority in the system is buses. There are disagreements about how to do this but there is little dispute that this is the only way to shift the transport debate in the capital. I have been arguing now for nearly two years that cutting fares on the Underground on the scale of what the GLC was able to do in the 1980s is no longer practical, mainly because there is no spare capacity on the Underground at present in the rush hour. A dramatic fares cut would throw the system into dangerous chaos.

But the public transport system does require extra capacity, both to relieve the pressure on the tube and to switch commuters from cars to safer, cleaner and more efficient public transport. This means a raft of measures to speed up the buses: primarily the return of conductors and a network of fully enforced strategic bus lanes. It has also been suggested by the TGWU that the present system of bus route tendering could be changed in order to save up to £85 million a year if we switched from individual route tendering to large area franchising. Clearly investigating this possibility must be a top priority for the mayor.

The government's decision to allow the mayor to raise resources through congestion charging is a major political challenge. It is one of the few major revenue streams open to the mayor so it would be criminal not to use it. But the congestion charging car park taxes are unlikely to persuade commuters to make the long-term decision to get out of their cars unless they are confident that the cost of public transport is not going to rise. That is why – although it is proving controversial in some quarters – I believe that we have to promise Londoners that we will not increase fares for at least four years.

Furthermore, there is no chance that Londoners will tolerate a mayor trying to shift the public back onto public transport if the mayor and assembly members are themselves swished around London in chauffeur-driven cars. The mayor must therefore give a lead by using public transport.

Combined, I think these policies are practical and popular choices within a bus-led consensus. But there is one issue where really deep divisions are opening up, and the selection of Labour's candidate will give Labour Party members a clear political choice.

The decision of the government to press ahead with the PFI proposals for the Underground seems increasingly beleaguered after the terrible events at Paddington. The PPP – Public Private Partnership – will hand the infrastructure of the Circle, District, Metropolitan, Hammersmith and City and East London lines to Railtrack, the most reviled company in Britain. Furthermore, the government has announced that the company responsible for signalling at Paddington – Amey – is part of a consortium bidding for the Jubilee and Northern Lines.

You only have to talk to people on the tube to realise that this possibility is profoundly unpopular. It is also the worst possible compromise on offer. The other parties are not stupid and the knives are already being sharpened for Labour's candidate.

Throughout the mayoral debates, Trevor Phillips has agreed with me that this policy is a mistake, which will cost every man, woman and child £1000 more than the cheaper and simpler method of issuing bonds. Trevor's decision to stand as Frank Dobson's running mate leaves the odd situation where I am the only candidate left in the field who agrees with the 66 per cent of Londoners who thinks that the tube should stay public. The choice couldn't be clearer.

David Blunkett, writing in the Guardian as part of what Frank's camp said was their fight back after his disastrous showing in the polls, has this to say about PPP: "Londoners will want a mayor who can get the underground in shape again, recognising that a public-private partnership is the best chance of ending years of neglect." The Millbank Tendency fight back is based on support for a policy which is the most expensive, complicated and unpopular policy available to inject resources into the Underground.

The effect of this is already clear. The London Political Committee of Unison, after deciding to recommend that their members vote for me in the union's ballot, made it clear that support for public services and opposition to PPP was decisive in making that decision. I think there is a consensus in London on this issue and I am standing in this selection on a clear platform that PPP is the wrong way to fund the tube. Over the next few weeks I intend to speak to as many Party members as possible to persuade them that Labour's selection offers Londoners a real opportunity to convince the Treasury to think again.

- What you can do to help Ken's campaign: send your name, address and phone number, to Livingstone for London, PO Box 20052, NW2 5ZH

Donations to the same address payable to 'KRTS'. Visit's Ken's website and subscribe to the news service: www.livingstoneforlondon.org.uk

Democratic denial or democratic renewal?

Hugh Jeffries looks at the local government campaign to defend democracy.

A month ago Hilary Armstrong, Minister for Local Government, launched "Local Democracy Week". The irony did not escape the Labour Campaign for Open Local Government, which regards her proposals to control debate in local authorities as an affront to local democracy.

The Campaign recognises the reasoning behind her proposals: rebellious councillors must always be silenced; opportunities for corruption must be eliminated; central government must never be embarrassed. Ron Rose, the former councillor in Doncaster who blew the whistle on corruption there, was charged with "bringing the Labour Party into disrepute" – some gratitude.

When Hilary Armstrong was a councillor, Durham must have been a formative experience. T. Dan Smith is within her memory. But there are Labour authorities across the country where decency and a commitment to their local communities means that they resent the straitjacket she now wishes to impose. The principle of taking decisions in public and not behind closed doors is fundamental. The Campaign believes that directly elected mayors and cabinets are no panacea for corrupt councils, nor will they be a way to increase voter turnout in local elections.

The small group of Labour councillors who first set up the Labour Campaign for Open Local Government never imagined that within five months they would anticipate success. Their position is now shared across a range of opinion, from the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea to the National Union of Journalists. Above all, the Local Government Association has described Hilary Armstrong's proposals as "too prescriptive" and "unworkable".

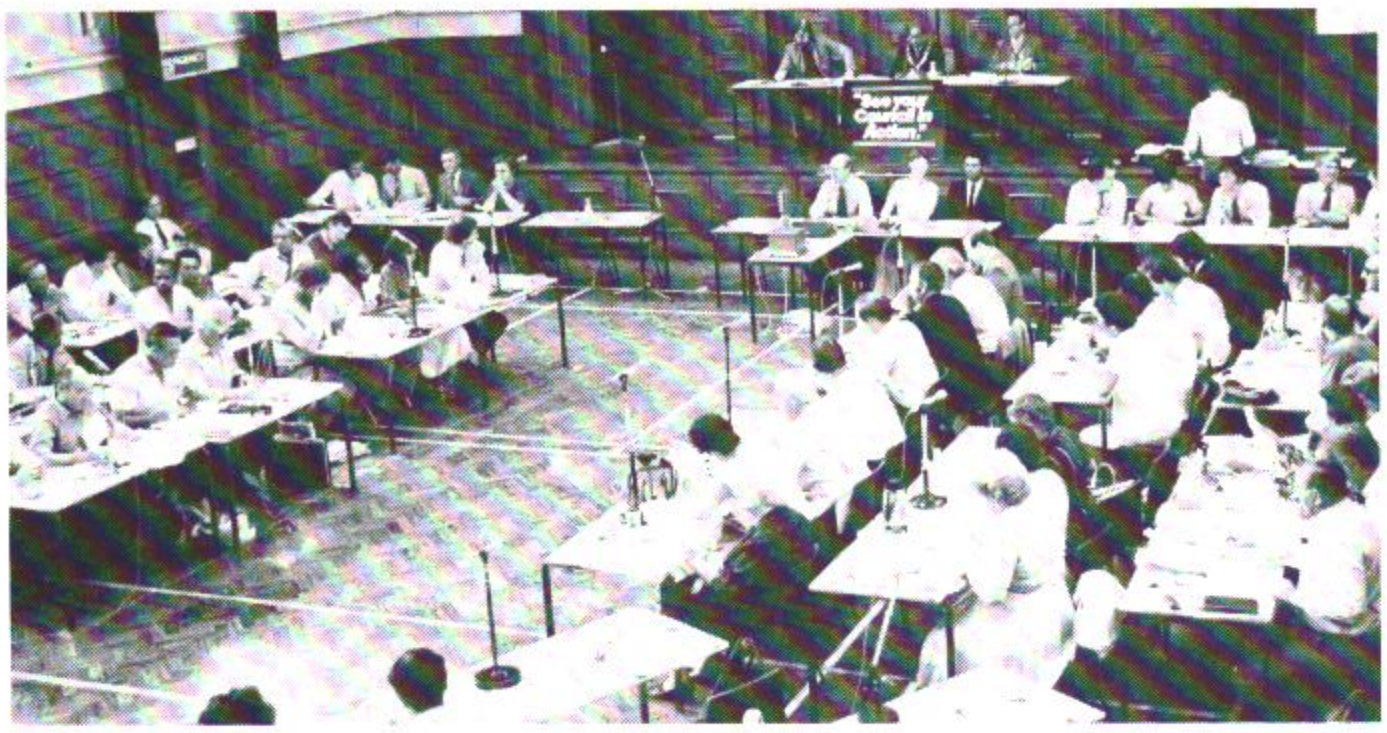
The Campaign's public meeting in September to which the New Local Government Network, which advocates directly elected mayors for all, sent one of its officials to take notes, was a major advance. It brought together Labour councillors from across London, and inspired Islington's Labour Group to wait for the legislation before committing itself to change. The fringe meeting at Conference, with John McDonnell MP and Ron Rose as speakers, even attracted an officer from the Local Government Unit at Millbank. Two spies at two meetings! The Campaign is making an impact.

It's bottom line is that an improved committee system, in which decisions are made in public, must be one of the options for change. The Campaign also wishes to reduce the power of the whip, but when used it should be declared. Local residents and the press must be free to attend meetings, and councillors must be prepared to receive deputations. Private meetings behind closed doors, as Hilary Armstrong intends, are a denial of democratic rights.

Labour councillors from those authorities which have leapt onto the bandwagon have contacted the Campaign to say that "I was told there was no alternative" and, of course, "no, we had no consultation". Councils who do consult soon discover that their residents don't want it.

It is not too late. In fact, if all councils now considering change would wait, they might find that the legislation, even if it is in the Queen's Speech, will be so amended before it becomes law that the basic safeguards of local democracy might be retained after all. Don't jeopardise them now. Keep Hilary Armstrong guessing.

It may not be glamerous, but old-style local government was open to public scrutiny.



Unions unite in Haringey

Jacqui Brown reports: Labour councils across London seem determined to prove that anything the Tories can cut, they can cut better. Haringey Council, having botched the funding for the Ally Pally, is now trying to recoup £3 million of this by attacking the terms and conditions of its staff.

Proposed cuts include withdrawing pay for the first two days of sickness, an increase in working hours to 37, cuts in maternity leave entitlement, and cutting payments for evening and weekend work. The main victims will be women and the low paid. The Council is threatening mass sackings, with re-engagement on new contracts if the unions don't accept these terms.

The result so far has been to achieve a new unity amongst the various unions, with the T&G, GMB and UCATT all supporting joint action. UNISON, by far the biggest union, is currently balloting on a rolling programme of strike action, with the full support of the Region.

The idea for these cuts seems to have come from Tory Wandsworth, but Labour run Ealing is now trying the same thing. If they get away with it in Haringey, other councils will no doubt follow – with Blair's attitude to public service workers, they're seen as an easy target.

The end of the Party as we know it

Millbank's latest proposals on internal restructuring mean the end of the Labour Party as any kind of progressive force, argues John Stewart of Hackney North and Stoke Newington CLP.

The *21st century party* paper, published during Labour Party Conference, is the latest set of dangerous ideas to come out of Millbank. An intensification of the current right-wing policies must be on the way, as these proposals would leave the Millbank bureaucrats and the parliamentary leadership of the Party insulated from any pressure from the membership.

This bland document does not propose that the representative structures of branches and General Committees (GC) are replaced with forums. However, given Millbank briefings and the "New Ideas" section of the document – in which Enfield Southgate, Bracknell and Salford CLPs are glowingly praised for their initiative in holding all-member meetings and downgrading, or eliminating, any role for delegates to representative bodies – it is clear where the consultation is intended to lead.

The questionnaire at the back of the document is ridiculously loaded in favour of change. Potential respondents would be well advised to write with their own response and ideas instead. An elaborate diagram purports to show how complicated Party structures are. In fact the current structures are very simple: delegates represent their branch or constituency at different levels of the Party and then report back to those who elected them, in much the same way as MPs or councillors.

21st century party identifies three key challenges for local parties: renewing and sustaining themselves; reaching out to local voters; and finding candidates to represent the Party in local elections. In most areas only 3 out of every 100 Labour voters are Party members, and this needs to be improved.

The document states that many CLPs take voters for granted and still use outdated campaign techniques – if they campaign at all. It doesn't admit that Government policies and resentment among Labour's core vote have triggered bigger losses of Party members than any bureaucratic structures or inward looking local parties. My CLP suffered a surge of resignations from members citing the bombing of Serbia, the Asylum Bill, tuition fees for students and public sector pay restraint.

Party officials, up to the General Secretary, have argued that CLPs are held back from campaigning due to being caught up in bureaucratic meetings. In my area Party members went on strike during the Euro-elections, refusing to canvass for New Labour's candidates as they resented the stitched-up list. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many Party members in London voted Green in protest.

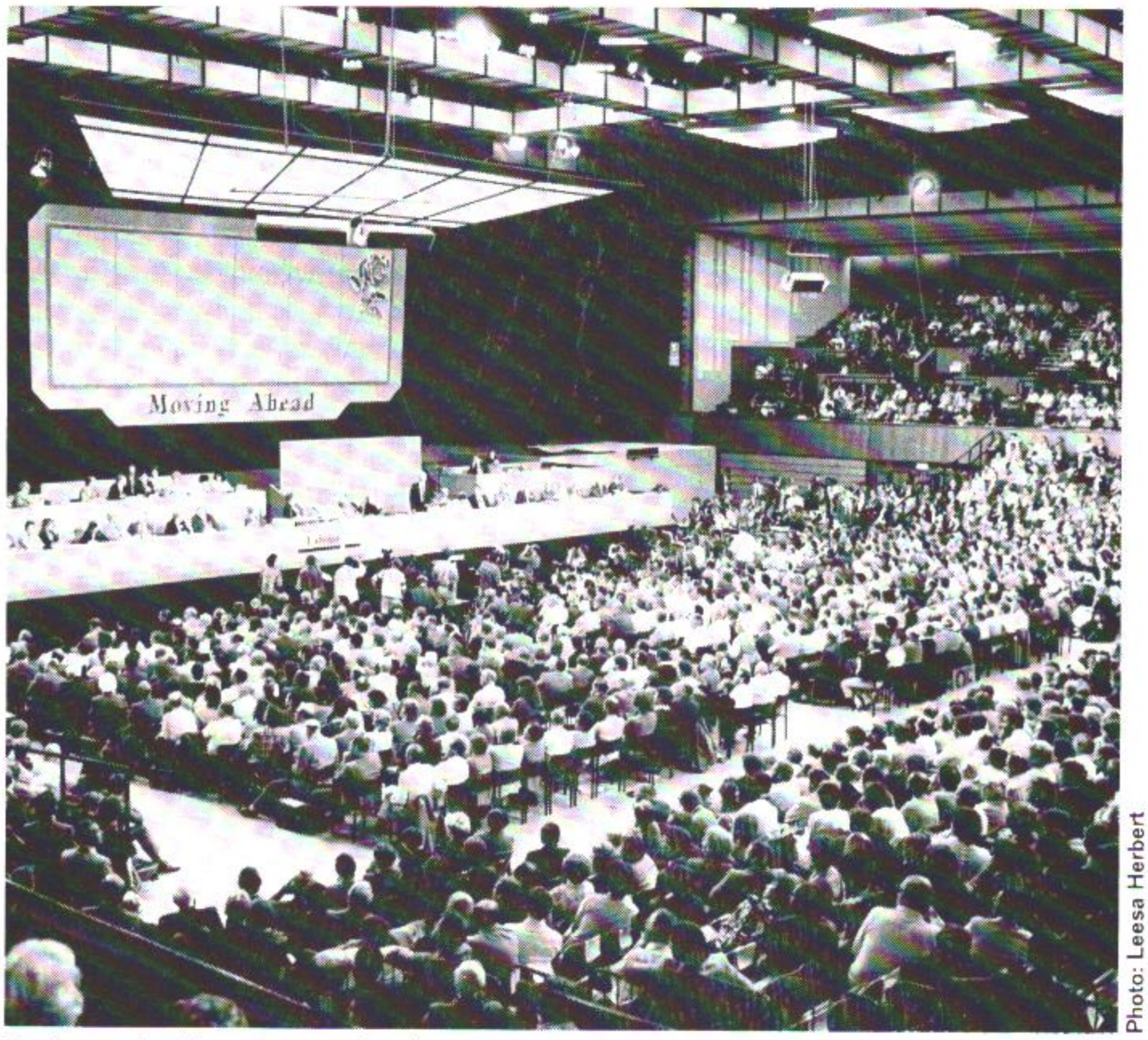


Photo: Leesa Herbert

Conference has been destroyed – what structures are next?

Encouraging candidates to stand for public office is a laudable aim, but *LLB* readers will know that many longstanding Party members on the left like Christine Shawcroft, Raghib Ahsan, Kumar Murshid, Geoff Martin and Liz Davies have been prevented from standing as Labour candidates at all levels and that Millbank used the new system for the European Parliament elections and devolved assemblies to promote sycophants and weed out critics within the Party.

Ian McCartney's introduction to the document makes it clear that this is the sequel to *Partnership into Power*, which removed the power of Annual Conference to decide policy and, effectively, disaffiliated the CLPs by making it impossible for them to submit motions direct to Conference. The Blairites' contention that they are making the Party more inclusive, transparent, and democratic is exposed by the outcome of the National Policy Forum meeting in July. Millbank loyalists voted to exclude any debate at Conference on uprating pensions, benefits for asylum seekers or trial by jury. The *21st century party* proposals would continue this by abolishing internal elections and accountability. All grassroots members will be equal in the *21st century party*: equally impotent to affect the parliamentary leadership.

Continued on page 14

Continued from page 13

Currently trade unions send representatives to General Committees. If GCs are abolished, trade unions will be disaffiliated at local level. The only remaining lever for trade unions will be at the National Policy Forum, on the NEC and at Conference where, no doubt, General Secretaries will continue to enter into backroom deals with Labour leaders when it suits them, away from the scrutiny of their members.

For those of us who retain an allegiance to the idea of a democratic, transparent and accountable party these are difficult times. Our concern is not so much to defend current Party meetings, which are often boring and badly attended, but to support basic principles of accountability of elected representatives. Neither should we oppose all-member meetings in themselves. When interesting speakers can be found and where members are willing and able to travel (which in rural areas is a real consideration), these meetings are to be welcomed. Indeed the current rules already allow any Party member to attend a General Committee. The point, of course, is that only elected delegates can vote. In this way decisions can be made where there is disagreement and CLP leaderships and local authority Labour Groups can be held to account by informed members who have the authority of being elected.

Millbank's has given us a year's notice of their plans to wind the Party up. It is crucial that the left and centre of the Party, along with the traditional right around Roy Hattersley, build on the success of the Grassroots Alliance in the NEC elections and combine to block these proposals. Ideological divisions or disputes over policy or history will count for nothing if there is no Labour Party left to argue over. If MPs are too cowed by the Millbank machine to speak out then grassroots representatives must take the lead in opposing these proposals.

Consultation lasts until June 2000. The July NEC will take a report on responses to the document and next year's Conference will vote on rule changes. The new structures will be implemented from January 2001. In that time a campaign must be built from the bottom up to stop the *21st century party* proposals, to defend branch and General Committee structures as the means of maintaining democratic accountability within the Party, and to safeguard Labour's links with the trade union movement. The stakes on this are incredibly high – we cannot afford to fail.

Is the Party over?

Mike Phipps considers whether the Blairisation of Labour now makes it futile for socialists to continue working within the Party.

With the Blair Government dropping more bombs after just two years in power than the Conservatives managed in 18 years and Labour voters deserting the Party in their millions in the local and European elections, the question whether socialists can achieve more outside the party than by continuing to work within it seems to be posed with a new urgency.

Labour has a unique place among social democratic parties as the creation of the trade unions, and the only party to which those unions with political links are affiliated. This, combined with the effects of the first past the post electoral system for parliamentary elections has historically meant that a government based on the support of a majority of the working class cannot be anything other than a majority Labour government. Thus the fact that large numbers of core Labour voters were willing to vote for other parties, in particular in the European elections in June where the existence of a majority Labour government was not itself at stake (note for example, the high vote for the Greens in London and the South East or the Scottish Socialist Party in Scotland) is a testament to their political maturity.

The centrality of the Labour Party to political activity can also be demonstrated negatively. Every attempt to construct alternative parties has hitherto resulted in sectarian failure. Just recently, we have the experience of Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party. At its inception it attracted hundreds of former Labour activists who subsequently left in protest at the Party's monolithic internal regime and sectarian refusal to work in alliance with organisations to the left of Labour.

So what is new about New Labour that might call into question these historic verities? Not the slavish advancement of pro-capitalist and imperialist policies, for which, sadly, many precedents exist under the Attlee, Wilson and Callaghan governments. There are two distinctive differences with New Labour. The first is a clear ideological shift. In five years the Party has gone from abandoning Clause IV, its historic commitment to common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, to Blair's "Third Way", which has little in common even with traditional reformist discourse.

Rather it constitutes a toxic brew of



social conservatism, political authoritarianism and economic liberalism.

But how permanent is this shift? Here there are important nuances. In government, the dismissal of Peter Mandelson for financial impropriety at the end of 1998 was an important blow to the Blair project. Among Labour MPs there are clearly differences with the trajectory of New Labour. The Government faced its biggest backbench parliamentary rebellion so far earlier this year when over 100 Labour MPs either voted against or abstained on Government proposals to cut benefits for the disabled. Away from the attention of the whips, MPs have exhibited a greater tendency towards independence, such as electing Dennis Skinner back onto the Party's NEC this year.

Certainly the membership has not been Blairised. The 1999 victory for three of the Grassroots Alliance candidates in the members' ballot for the NEC was in key respects an improvement on last year's results. The two most left-wing of those elected, Liz Davies and Christine Shawcroft, actually improved their share of the vote, despite a lower turnout overall. The trades unions too remain relatively unconvinced by the new ideology. So the Blairisation of the Party as a whole has not been achieved. Indeed it is due to the very fragility of the project that the leadership has felt it necessary to push through so rapidly a series of major organisational changes.

The five years since Blair took over have witnessed a huge erosion, not just in the advances in democracy made following the fall of the Callaghan Government in 1979, but also of all the long-standing channels of accountability since the Party's foundation. The autonomy and scope of the Party's conference has been severely downgraded, with its agenda now filtered through a Byzantine structure of Policy Forums, tightly controlled by the leadership. These Forums have also supplanted the democratic functioning of regional delegate conferences. Local constituency management structures have also been downgraded, and in some cases abolished altogether. The Party's NEC has had its scope and frequency of meetings greatly cut. There is also a sustained attempt to liberate the Party from its reliance on trade union funds at election time – the latest in a series of measures aimed at reducing trade union involvement – thanks to seeking more donations from business and wealthy individuals, and the possible introduction of state funding for parties. Lastly there has been an unprecedented level of ideologically vetting potential candidates. New central vetting panels have been used to prevent local constituencies from choosing their own candidates for the European Parliament, the Scottish Parliament and the new Greater London Authority. Dissident Labour MEPs were given unwinnable positions on centrally-determined slates for the European Parliament, and in Scotland Dennis Canavan, was barred as unsuitable to be a candidate for the new Scottish Parliament. Logically it is only a matter of time before these procedures are extended to parliamentary candidates for Westminster, allowing the leadership to cull the twenty or so hardcore left-wing MPs. Just the threat of this has contributed to a further decline in internal opposition. These last two measures – loosening the union link and centralising the selection of candidates – are wholly new and call fully into question the influence activists can have inside the Party.

The centralised vetting of candidates in particular has given impetus to the process of splintering and fragmentation, which necessarily proceeds in a locally differentiated fashion. The expulsion from the Party of MEP Hugh Kerr, and the development of the Scottish Socialist Alliance contributed to the establishment of the Scottish Socialist Party, with largescale Militant involvement, which won a seat in the new Scottish Parliament and 2% of the overall vote. This doubled to 4% (nearly 40,000 votes) a month later in the European elections, when the Party beat the Conservatives and Liberals to third place (behind Labour and the Scottish National Party) in its Glasgow City stronghold. This contrasts with a poorer showing for a number of local independent campaigns by deselected ex-Labour MEPs and others elsewhere.



Photo: Paul Mattsson

Party workers celebrate outside Tory central office, 2nd May 1997 – the victory of the Moet drinkers and Union Jack wavers.

These emerging developments to the left of Labour are fragile and as yet there is no real national framework that can rally the growing numbers increasingly alienated from the Labour Party. Thus, the long-term contradictions remain. Much as the Labour leadership may try to free itself from trade union and rank and file influence, as long as it remains a party based on the votes of the working class, then the pressure from the base will find mechanisms to make itself felt, even if traditional democratic channels are increasingly closed off.

Furthermore, if we are right in our analysis of Blair's ideological project, then his government will be driven not simply to abandon the favourite policies of the left, but to attack frontally many of the gains of the whole movement won over half a century – the welfare state, the remaining public sector, workers' rights and so on. This will not merely intensify the process of estrangement at the base of the Party but is likely to set the bulk of its voting support – not just the left, but moderates, traditionalists, and even former Blair supporters – on collision course with the Government's neo-liberal agenda. In this context, socialists in the Party need to resist subjectivist pressures and think very carefully before lightly abandoning their very real influence among the mass of ordinary members.

● This is an edited version of an article that appears in the current issue of *What Next?*

Rebuild our forces to

Labour Left Briefing's editorials this year have concentrated on the prostration of politics before the dictates of global capital and New Labour's attempt to entrench its power with counter-reforms in the Party structure aimed at silencing the grassroots members. *Labour Left Briefing*'s AGM later this month is entitled "The Crisis of Representation", a phrase coined by Tony Benn MP, one of its keynote speakers. Recently *LLB* asked Tony Benn to develop this idea.

***LLB*: How do you see the crisis of representation?**

TB: What is really happening is an absolutely systematic attempt to eliminate any democratic choice and make people fit in with the requirements of global capital.

The Cabinet hardly meets. Parliament is taken for granted with the big majority. There is a deliberate strategy to bring in Tories and Liberals, called "the project" or "big tent politics", and create a one-party state whose participants remain permanently in power. Their job will be to enforce politically the will of those who have the power, the forces of international capital – gamblers, speculators, banks, the multinationals. The International Monetary Fund, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the World Trade Organisation, the Multilateral Agreement on Investment are all designed to limit and control the power of people in the world and to stop any attempt to control capital in the interests of labour, of the people, or the environment.

This is also being applied inside the Labour Party with the damping down of any opportunity for internal debate. The Labour Party can no longer be an instrument for changing the political system if that might challenge the power of capital.

Now, if you put it like that, at least it's clear. People do not understand what's happened because they have had it presented to them piecemeal: Clause IV, end of the class war, *Partnership into Power*, modernisation, globalisation, and so on.

People clearly do not feel represented any more. MPs are seen as sub-agents of the Millbank Tower Corporation, which is a subcommittee of Great Britain plc, which is a sub-committee of the World Trade Organisation/World Government.

When people feel unrepresented, they often just opt out. One of the "great achievements" of New Labour is to depoliticise the nation. It also creates cynicism. People say the whole thing is a fraud and become disillusioned. That is the seedbed of a potential right-wing revival, as we have seen in Austria and with Le Pen in France. It was the same in the 1930s. The temptation is either to turn on the Labour leadership, which I don't think gets you very far, or to set up new left parties – but a divided left is exactly what the right wants.

The trouble with new left parties is that they tend to live on destroying each other, as you can see from the pages of the sectarian left press, and they are seen as part of the political process in

LABOUR LEFT
Briefing
Annual General Meeting

The CRISIS of representation

LIZ DAVIES
Labour Party NEC, constituency section
SURESH GROVER
National Civil Rights Movement
GEOFF MARTIN
Convenor, London Regional UNISON

TONY BENN MP
CHRISTINE SHAWCROFT
Labour Party NEC, constituency section
ANN BLACK
Vice-Chair, Labour Reform

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

Kings Cross tube
Creche bookable by 19th November.

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

fight global capital

which people have lost confidence. Although they include many sincere people, people will say you are all the same, including the left parties.

Instead of forming new parties, we have to build the whole thing up again from the bottom. The early Labour Party, like the Chartists, was about getting democratic representation in order to gain democratic control of economic power. The trade unions limited the power of capital. The municipal socialists limited the power of the market in local areas and the welfare state did it nationally – and we have to go back to that job.

I find it interesting that Karl Marx has now been listed as the most famous philosopher of the millenium. The word "Marxist" is used so often as a term of abuse, but people have somehow sensed that Marx was saying something relevant to their condition. That is an amazing thing, but it doesn't necessarily reflect itself in a show of support for left parties.

Although there are fewer socialists in Parliament than in any time in my life, I think there's a much bigger audience for a socialist critique of capitalism than I have ever known. That is because it's not just socialists who don't feel represented: nobody feels represented, and the middle class and the managerial class are equally insecure as a result of market forces. Even a managing director may get a message on his or her mobile phone telling them to clear their desk by lunchtime. Even the well paid need the NHS and well equipped schools, and we are all subject to the risks of war.

Socialists have to support and give leadership on the individual issues – trade union rights, employment, wages, conditions, the environment, non-discrimination, racism, women's rights, housing, education, health, and peace – and then educate people to show that all these issues are linked. The left has to be positive, constructive, work together and always support people in struggle. It's easy to make a socialist speech but the test is whether you're there when the going gets rough.

Genetically modified food is about profit. The arms trade is about profit. The cuts in the welfare state are about profit. The socialist argument is not secondary in importance, but secondary chronologically in what we have to do. We have been squeezed out by the establishment that cannot believe its luck, that there is now a government in power with the loyalty of the TUC and Labour Conference doing what Thatcher couldn't do. We have to rebuild a democratic base, with proper representation.

***LLB*: The problem is how we do that within the structures of a party which has been closed down and which is of little use to socialists or anybody involved in struggle against the status quo. What does that mean specifically for our relationship to the existing Labour Party that is left?**

TB: It's less of a problem than you think. If you want to campaign in your constituency and the GCs and branches have been closed and there is only a Policy Forum – you won't find any agency for that campaign within what's left of the local Labour Party. But that doesn't stop you doing it anyway.

Being in the Labour Party is not difficult for me. I can say and do anything I like from within the Labour Party. If they started expulsions, that would be different. But they haven't done that yet, because they're trying to use other mechanisms to shut us down.

When you come to polling day, you decide which is the lesser of two evils. That's all you can ever do. I don't think that setting up a new left party is the answer. I may be wrong about it, but who knows – maybe New Labour will die, like the Liberals and the SDP did.



Photo: JMolly Cooper

Tony Benn speaking at the rally against privatisation of London's tube, 16th October 1999.

I am giving up the House of Commons in the next election to spend more time fighting for socialism, but I don't feel it's necessary to give up the Labour Party to do it.

***LLB*: Aren't you, in practice, giving up on the fight for an electoral alternative at the next election?**

TB: Is there an electoral alternative at the next election? My impression is that what is lacking is really strong popular pressure on the Government. When you have the pressure, as from the movement against genetically modified food, then governments have to change. What we need is more pressure, not more parties, although there are some differences, like in Scotland, with Tommy Sheridan – he's fighting in a new context.

I don't think you should assume that New Labour is all that strong, just because the media love them. As you get near an election, governments get a bit more vulnerable, because there's no votes for the World Trade Organisation on polling day, but there are votes for pensioners, for single mums, students. I don't think New Labour's thought of that at all. The real danger for them is that people just won't vote.

In the twentieth century there have been two attempts at socialism: The communist one failed because it wasn't democratic and social democrats simply capitulated 100% to capitalism and are now the most passionate ideologically committed advocates of capitalism. After 100 years of trying, we've had a bit of experience and now we know what has to be done. We have to build up again but on a democratic basis and on an internationalist basis because we have to challenge globalisation – the power of capital to roam around the world freely at any human cost. So I am an optimist – but we have a lot of work to do.

Leadership flounders on Bournemouth rock

NEC member Christine Shawcroft takes heart from the delegates' mood at 1999 Annual Conference in Bournemouth.

To the casual observer, Conference looked pretty much stitched up. The National Policy Forum had done its work of ensuring that there were no amendments to any of the Policy Forum documents, and the Conference Arrangements Committee had done its work of referring back any controversial motions to the Policy Commissions.

Recent conferences have shown themselves to be more than willing to take part in a PR exercise, and vote through the NEC line on the nod. Right? Wrong. Amazing Monday showed that delegates are very unhappy with the way they can't vote on Policy Documents, and they showed this over two issues which will be key for the year ahead – pensions and PFI.

On the welfare reform final year document, tame speaker after tame speaker was brought to the rostrum. Delegates began to call for Barbara Castle to be asked to speak. When the Chair, Vernon Hince, stated he would only take one more speaker, Castle went to the rostrum without being called, to great applause. Hince refrained from telling her that she hadn't been called and asking her to leave the rostrum, a wise decision which probably saved his life. But when he asked Castle to wind up, delegates started to boo him.

The document was then passed, but the mood of Conference had irrevocably changed. A little later, on the economic policy first year document, Clare Wadey from Brighton Pavilion came up on a point of order to refer back the paragraphs on PFI. She quoted from documents agreed at the 1997 Conference, which state that paragraphs can be referred back. The Chair denied this, but she stuck to her point, and when the vote was taken the economic policy document was lost. Much has been made of confusion in the hall at this point, with many delegates not voting at all. But whatever the confusion about what was actually being voted on, it was clear that delegates were in favour of the principle of amending policy documents – and we had defeated the platform on PFI.

The vote was later reversed on the grounds that first year documents are essentially for noting, and therefore no vote is really needed, but let's vote again anyway because there were a lot of abstentions. (Honestly, I am not making this up.)

The debate on pensions need not be over with the rubberstamping of the welfare reform document. At the economic policy seminar on Thursday morning, most of the contributions were about PFI or pensions. Therefore, if pensions are part of economic policy, we can talk about them next year, can't we? The main objection to index linking pensions is that this policy would be the Trojan horse which would let the Tories in at the next General Election. Party members are not going to have their intelligence insulted in this way.

There is blank denial from the leadership that PFI schools and hospitals are more expensive. This is actually grist to the mill, because we can provide examples, case histories, and figures to prove that it is more expensive. When my own, dear, Tower Hamlets Council was trying to foist a PFI scheme on my children's school, the most vehemently opposed school governor was the business representative from Morgan Stanley who said that we shouldn't touch it with a bargepole as the figures did not stack up. Never forget: we started to win the argument on the minimum wage when we proved it was more expensive not to have one.

So we look like having an exciting year. Victories on important issues are well within our grasp, and as long as we all stay within the Party and fight we can achieve them.

Mandelson ushers in virtual Labour

Having hardly had time to get his feet back under the Cabinet table Peter Mandelson was dispensing advice on how to modernise the Labour Party far in advance of even the most fervent moderniser. In an article in the *Independent*, published during Annual Conference, Mandelson set out his vision of a party without structures, meetings or even members.

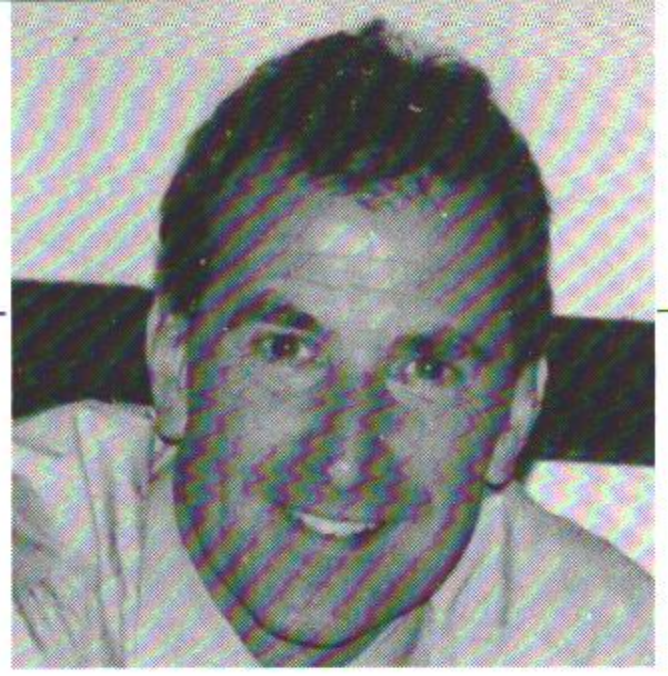
The plan is to set up a register of Labour supporters and "blur the line between electoral support and Party membership" thereby "reinventing what it means to be a Labour Party member". In Mandelson's brave new world "conventional canvassing and knocking-up will be a thing of the past" and every member will get their own email address to tell ministers exactly what they think of them direct.

Mandelson's plans could usher in a new spirit of harmony in the New Model Labour Party. Without members, there will be no need for selection meetings; no need to exclude left wingers from selection panels – Regional Office just need not choose them to stand. The constitution can introduce a single disciplinary charge of "bringing the email list into disrepute", with the penalty of instant cybersilence. Finally, there will be no more post mortems on electoral failures: with the members gone, the leadership will have only itself to blame.



Photo: Jacqui Brown

Lobby of Labour Party Conference, Bournemouth 26th September. Thousands of trade unionists march to demand a minimum wage of £5 an hour, restoration of the link between pensions and earnings, an end to privatisation, and lots more policies supported by *LLB*. The rally at the end of the march was addressed by, among others, Tony Benn and Liz Davies.



THE **ALAN SIMPSON** COLUMN

After a general election, Margaret Thatcher famously said, "we must do something about the inner cities". Only later did the public realise that this was not the launch of a crusade against poverty, homelessness and unemployment, but simply a declared intention to change the electorate. Paying tenants to leave, council house sales and the gentrification of estates was little more than a crude attempt to guarantee a better class of voters, more sympathetic to Thatcher's own political prejudices.

How galling it is, then, to see New Labour going through the same gyrations and gerrymanderings to stop Ken Livingstone from becoming the most popular candidate for mayor that Londoners can imagine. This is where we have sunk to. Forget the policy issues, if the people are likely to vote the wrong way, then change the people.

The Millbank Mafia have been clinically clear in their machinations, after their unsuccessful efforts to seek a candidate for the membership to choose in preference to Ken. It must have been in a different century that Tony's Taliban were the champions of "one member, one vote".

Those constituency parties deciding to uphold the structures of representative democracy (and accountability) were denounced for their Stalinist attitudes which allegedly blocked Party members from a full and equal say in the election of candidates. But today, in London, the members would choose Ken, so the members have to go.

The electoral college, which won so many friends and admirers for Labour in Wales, has again been rolled out to dish the dirt. We may learn nothing from such disasters, but you have to admire the consistency of contempt which the Project has for the Party. "One MP, 1,000 votes" slips easily across Orwellian tongues which deliver Millbank's message of new democracy. The trade unions, previously derided by modernisers for their use of the block vote, could surely be relied upon to bail out the leadership line.

But something went wrong. In a fit of democratic pique, most trade unions (except for the AEEU) seem to have decided to ballot their members... who are likely to go for Ken. So now it appears that some unions will vote not for a candidate, but for proportions of each candidate. Meanwhile the anti-democrats of the AEEU will vote in undivided admiration – for Frank.

If this is such an important principle, why not extend it to MPs? After all, the equivalent of 1,000 votes is an awful lot to place on one person's shoulders. Wouldn't it be a good time for the listening Party in London to listen to their constituents? If it were too threatening to open this up to the electorate, what about a trial run for the much-vaunted "all members meeting"?

The Party, of course, will not entertain it. As the whole world can see, the name of the game is "stop Ken" not democratic participation. The catalogue of loyal stabbers who now trail their way through press and television interviews, blaming Ken for everything from the Thatcher years to the Black Death are doing their best to make this a very personal issue... but it's a lot sadder than that. It's about the discrediting of democracy itself.

We are a long way down a path which has "weeded out" independent minds from the process of representing Labour at all levels of governance in Britain. The last general election sanitised all the safest seats which became available. The selections in Scotland and Wales followed suit. The Euro "loyalty lists" turned the fetish into farce. And local government panels across the UK are being levered into remarkable exclusions of those with identifiable inclinations to stand for Labour rather than New Labour.

Many Labour supporters may fume at this, but the worst part is that we don't understand how much of a joke we are becoming. Returning from Bournemouth, I was shocked to be asked to recount the "hilarious" moments when Conference voted to refer back proposals relating to the PFI. It wasn't the decision that caused amusement, but the subsequent ruling/over-ruling. "Conference must have been confused" was the platform rationale for disregarding the decision.

I recalled experiments where researchers had gone into mental hospitals and behaved normally, only to find this re-described as the archetypal signs of madness. Now, like it or not, we need to face up to the prospect that the public are reaching the view that the lunatics are already in charge.

But the undermining of democracy also allows for its renewal. For years the left has bemoaned the way that trade union votes have been used to railroad through policies for those in the Labour Party who would most happily destroy the trade union link. In the contest for the London mayor it looked as though the same shabby charade would stitch up any genuine selection. But the trade union commitment to ballot their members allows for a far wider discussion than whether Ken is more of a sex god than Frank. It is an opportunity to refer back without restriction – re-visiting PFI, the sale of public assets, privatisation, the case for common and public ownership, progressive taxation, decent pensions, secure employment.

Labour founded itself as a result of precisely these discussions within the trade union movement. We must use this opportunity to refound ourselves in exactly the same way.

CWU fudges on Post Office monopoly

Tim Row
Political Officer
Leicestershire CWU
(in a personal capacity)

After a year long battle between the DTI and the CWU over the future of the Post Office the issue seemed to have been resolved at Labour Party Conference. General Secretary Derek Hodgson claimed a victory for the Union in forcing a U-turn from Stephen Byers. The argument centred on whether the Post Office should become a PLC or an Independent Publicly Owned Corporation with both options intended to give the PO commercial freedom to expand and invest.

This was seen as the only solution to allow the PO to compete against rival services without privatisation. However, the proposal to reduce the monopoly that the PO has on letters from £1 to 50p threatens further job cuts.

Hodgson had promised not to stand in the way of making the PO more competitive but wanted to avoid serious repercussions for CWU members. Post Office management weren't particularly keen to get into a fight with the Union, so pressure was put on the Government to reverse its decision – in the main by extensive lobbying of ministers by Hodgson.

Unfortunately, this has resulted in deferring the decision to an independent regulator next year, with a commitment for public ownership of the Post Office to be in Labour's next election manifesto. Byers has now been given a convenient escape route – the decision on the monopoly is now not his or the Government's any more. And whatever the commitment in the next manifesto, should the monopoly be reduced there is the prospect of a PO in dire financial straits having to confront union resistance to cuts with Hodgson sitting comfortably in the House of Lords.

Whatever the sentiments expressed in Bournemouth, the decision made at Party Conference could be an important step towards the privatisation of the PO.

Left unity in UNISON?

Jon Rogers
Branch Secretary
Lambeth UNISON

The campaign for General Secretary of UNISON saw a blow struck against sectarian rivalry, with a fine show of left unity behind the candidate supported by the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic UNISON (CFDU): Roger Bannister, Secretary of the Knowsley Branch and a member of the Union's National Executive.

Following the decision of London Region Convenor (and *LLB* stalwart) Geoff Martin to retrieve his hat from the ring, many activists who were keen to see him take on the establishment candidate, Deputy General Secretary Dave Prentis, have thrown their weight behind Bannister.

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) have also supported the campaign. As Roger is a member of the Socialist Party (aka. Militant) this is a very welcome step away from the mutual hostility which has weakened the left for years. The CFDU (and Socialist Party members in particular) must ensure the campaign is open and inclusive. Equally the SWP need to learn how to work with other people as none of us (not even their Central Committee) has all the answers.

Already the unity of the left has the UNISON machine rattled. Three regions which backed Bickerstaffe last time have held back from endorsing Prentis. The North West Region, dominated by supporters of the *Morning Star*, who are backing Prentis in spite of a continuing witch hunt against leftwingers in the union, only narrowly voted to support him. Branch nominations for Roger are also coming through very strongly.

There is every prospect that Roger can mount an effective challenge, which could be a springboard for the left in UNISON, including the possibility of winning more seats on the National Executive.

The other candidates seeking support on the left cannot pose a serious alternative. Malkiat Bilku, leader of the Hillingdon strikers, is a great rank and file leader who lacks the breadth of experience to be a credible General Secretary candidate. Linda Muir, a regional official backed by Scargill's Socialist Labour Party, is a courageous socialist but lacks the national profile to pose an effective challenge.

Roger Bannister is the only candidate who poses a real alternative to the current regime in UNISON which has failed to take on the Blair Government. Socialists in UNISON should now pull out all the stops to support Roger's campaign to be General Secretary.

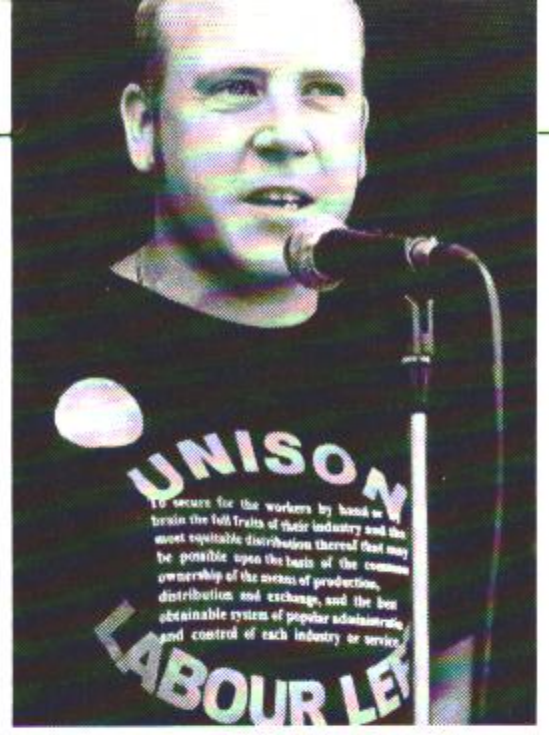
Hillingdon four years on

Jon Rogers, UNISON London Regional Committee member, writes in a personal capacity: Hillingdon hospital strikers and supporters meeting in Uxbridge on 2nd October heard speakers, including local MPs Alan Keen and John McDonnell, express support and admiration for the long struggle for justice. The strike began four years ago when private contractor Pall Mall sought to cut pay for cleaners and other staff at Hillingdon hospital.

The tribunal claims for unfair dismissal ended with awards of compensation for all those legally entitled to claim.

The strikers are determined to continue their campaign to secure employment at Hillingdon hospital. Pickets of the hospital every Thursday morning continue and the strikers are calling for Granada to be thrown off the Low Pay Commission (which ironically includes UNISON's own Rita Donaghy, whose vote was decisive in removing official backing from the strikers in January 1997, against the policy of UNISON Conference).

Officials have continued to block a £10,000 donation agreed by London Region in 1997, but the strike has retained the sympathy of rank and file UNISON members, with the 1998 Conference instructing the NEC to restore official support.



THE GEOFF MARTIN COLUMN

It's a jam-packed column this month, time is tight, so settle down at the back there and cop a load of this....

- I'm just back from a rapid visit to France where at the invitation of some of my comrades in the CGT and FO, I addressed a meeting of five and a half thousand trade unionists at the Paris Expo Centre on a Friday night.

The sheer scale of the event blew me away and left me wondering what it would take to generate the same kind of momentum in London and across the UK. I chewed this over with Andy Gilchrist, FBU National Officer, over a few beers after the rally. It would take a seismic shift to get us anywhere near events on this scale. Yet one issue may open up just the opportunity we need – the campaign to take the rail network back into public ownership.

I fully support the call from Bob Crow and the RMT for a massive public campaign for renationalisation of the railways. Apart from Prescott, (currently, it seems, locked in battle with Robin Cook for the title of "Most Ludicrous Member of the Cabinet"), who will seriously defend the right of private companies to rip off the railways for whopping great profits at the expense of public safety?

The TUC's silence on the public ownership question in the wake of Paddington is predictable, but scandalous nonetheless. The RMT campaign can be broadened out to include PFI in the NHS, PPP on the tube, "best value" in local government, air traffic control and the rest of the profiteering package across the public sector. While we're at it, why haven't those responsible for privatising the railways in spite of the warnings about safety, Brian Mawhinney and the rest of them, been called to public account?

'It's a tragedy that it takes a disaster like Paddington to focus public opinion on privatisation'

It's a tragedy that it takes a disaster like Paddington to focus public opinion on privatisation. But the moment must be seized. Nobody should forget that it was nurses, paramedics and firefighters who once again had to pick up the pieces and risk their lives in attempts to straighten out the carnage left behind by Railtrack and others. These are the "inflexible" workers that Blair is so fond of slagging off – laughing boy, we'll have the apology as soon as you like.

- On the subject of privatisation, can anyone honestly support Glenda Jackson or Dobbo for London Mayor, knowing that they support privatisation of the tube and the handing over of a large chunk of the system to the scumbags from Railtrack? I can't see it myself.

Dobbo's gung-ho support for PFI and his decision to phase the nurses pay award last year will hardly endear him to our members, but they will have the final say themselves. The setting up of the electoral college as Millbank's ruse for blocking Livingstone could yet backfire as union after union, except for the AEEU, decides to ballot the rank and file. Even the decision to give brown-nosers like Jim Fitzpatrick and Twiggy 999 more votes under the college system than one of our members working in a London casualty unit still might not be enough.

Looks like being a white-knuckle ride right up to the wire.

- Milburn as Health Secretary – good old Mr PFI himself. At the risk of boring *LLB* readers I should remind you that I've still got a score to settle with Milburn after he refused to share the GMTV sofa with my partner a couple of years ago because he was scared of being publicly criticised by a nurse in uniform.

And guess who's just landed the job as Milburn's PPS? Yes, the very same Jim Fitzpatrick. All the ex-Trots together.

Is this the Jim Fitzpatrick who once stood up as a witness for me in Barking Magistrates Court when I was on a charge of assaulting a police officer on a picket line? Did that enthusisatic, SWP-supporting firefighter – freshly polished helmet under his arm – really turn into a Millbank speak-your-weight machine. Apparently so.

- I was stunned to see the Commander in Chief of the ultra-Blairite goon squad formerly known as the LCC, Paul Richards, lurking around in the lobby of the hotel before the *LLB* meeting at the Labour Conference.

I seriously considered apologising to Comrade Richards for once describing him in these pages as resembling Boris Karloff after a bad night in the graveyard. That was until I saw him pass a mirror – there was no reflection!

- You'll have noticed that the promised Joe Strummer interview has not yet materialised. Rayner,a music agent who works downstairs in our office block, reckoned he could set it up, but we've been swamped by all the media attention on the Clash live album and video.

Still, I'm off to see Comrade Strumski later this week, so I'll do a review for you next month. I'm hoping he'll do the song which could be the signature tune of all those old student revolutionaries who now pack the Labour benches...

"You grow up and you calm down – Working for the clampdown

"You start wearing blue and brown – Working for the clampdown

"You've got someone to boss around – makes you feel big now

"You drift until you brutalise – made your first kill now."

They don't write them like that anymore.

See you in the mosh pit at the Astoria.

The left and the dictatorship in Pakistan

Farooq Sulehria,
National General Secretary
Labour Party of Pakistan

On October 12th General Pervaiz Mussaraf, Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, dismissed the government of Nawaz Sharif. The former Prime Minister and his brother were taken into custody.

A week after the take-over, most parties had given their support to the military coup, including those on the left. The Pakistan National Conference (PNC), an alliance of seven left and radical bourgeoisie parties, welcomed the military dictatorship and demanded a strict accountability of the outgoing Muslim League leadership. So corrupt was the Muslim League that most political parties supported popular sentiments in favour of the change.

The left parties which have supported the military dictatorship include the National Workers Party (NWP), established in June with the merger of three left parties: Pakistan Socialist Party, Awami Jamhuri Party and Pakistan National Party. The Communist Mazdoor Kissan Party has taken the same stand. These Stalinist parties have tried to find alternatives to the corrupt bourgeois parties within the framework of the capitalist system and concluded that the military must rule before the masses are ready for democracy. They have believed the charming words of military dictator General Pervaiz Mussaraf that he is there to clean up the mess, that his main aim is to develop the economy and hold to account the civilian politicians who looted state assets and failed to repay loans. He says that this process will go back to 1985, thus ignoring the lootings of the Zia dictatorship from 1977 to 1985.

He has given four weeks to those defaulters of the banks to return loans before taking action, an initial popular move designed to win the masses' sympathies. His real plan is to complete the unfinished agenda of the IMF and World Bank – rapid privatisation, reintroduction of a General Sales Tax, devaluation, raising fuel prices and reducing trade tariffs.

Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples Party also gave support to the military dictatorship. She is willing to give the military dictatorship six months to carry out its promises. Mussaraf, unlike Zia, has not used Islam as a political weapon, but tries to show a liberal face, one reason why the left parties had given him initial support. General Pervaiz Mussaraf does not call himself the Martial Law administrator but Chief Executive, so hiding the regime's real face and pleasing the imperialists.

The Labour Party of Pakistan (LPP) has firmly opposed the military dictatorship, calling for impartial general elections for a new constitutional assembly.

At a meeting to pay tribute to a revolutionary workers' poet, I was the only speaker openly criticising the dictatorship, explaining what had failed was not democracy but capitalist democracy. The alternative is not a military dictatorship but the building of a workers' movement. Addressing a press conference the next day, I opposed the military dictatorship's proposals for a national Security Council. An emergency meeting of Karachi LPP comrades discussed the situation and a possible fight back by the party. In Lahore, the first edition of Mazdoor Jeddojuhd (Workers Struggle) declared "no to military dictatorship" and appealed to the workers and peasants to prepare for a struggle for the restoration of democracy.

Background to the takeover

The causes of the military takeover are Pakistan's deep economic and political crisis and the Kargil dispute with India over Kashmir.

The economy was in absolute tatters. A government attempt to introduce a General Sales Tax was successfully defeated by the small traders' association of Pakistan, which organised a nation-wide strike on 4th September. In a bid to cool down the traders, the government – in opposition to the IMF instructions – withdrew the GST and introduced a new tax.

Cotton growers across the country took over roads, organising massive demonstrations demanding a rise in cotton prices. The powerful All Pakistan Textile Manufacturers Association opposed this. Cotton amounts to 70% of Pakistan's total exports, and 10% of world cotton production.

These developments showed the extremely unpopular nature of the government – which at the beginning of 1997 had won the General Election with 40% of the total vote and a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly. It used its majority to introduce new amendments in the Constitution against remaining trade union rights and against minorities, women and minority nationalities.

But the government was unable to implement the agenda of the IMF – which was the speedy privatisation of the main public sector institutions such as the railway, telecommunications and electricity. It also got into conflict with some of the international power companies which had made contracts with the previous Benazir government to build power generation plants. This led to the intervention of the World Bank who asked the government to seek a compromise with the power companies.

It tested a nuclear bomb despite the hypocritical opposition of the US. It went to war with India over Kashmir and lost, and tried to blame the military. The government had thus become isolated from its domestic constituency and from its international backers.

So the government was weak and unstable and the take over of the military was not met by resistance from the people – rather there was a sense of confusion, and to some extent, relief.

Serious setback in India

Achin Vanaik assesses the results of the recent Indian elections.

The Indian parliamentary elections represent a serious setback to progressive hopes, aspirations and struggles. The National Democratic alliance (NDA) coalition of 24 parties led by the BJP needed 272 out of 543 seats in the lower house to obtain a working majority. With a few results to come in, the NDA's tally is 297 seats; the BJP has 182 – the same as before – and Congress fell from 142 to 112. The Left Front, comprising the two mainstream Communist parties, the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM) and the Communist Party of India (CPI), and other minor Allies, has 42 (six less than in the outgoing assembly). The remaining seats (almost 250) are distributed among state-level and regional parties either allied to the BJP or the Congress or independent from both, confirming that the regionalisation of the Indian polity is now an established fact.

Despite hype about the charisma of the BJP leader and prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and the media furore about leader of the Congress Sonia Gandhi's foreign birth, the election results unequivocally show that it was state-level issues of governance and development that decisively swayed the voters. With few exceptions, the parties in power at the state level were rejected in these national elections. The BJP scored over the Congress by accepting that coalition politics has come to stay in India and so it had to forge a pre-election alliance, and pay the price of being very junior partners in those states where their regional allies demanded (and got) the lion's share of seats. Thus the NDA gained electorally although the BJP remained static.

The chances of this coalition government lasting a full five-year term are now greater than before. There is a more comfortable margin of safety this time. More importantly, such is the scale of the defeat of the Congress that the electoral arithmetic counts strongly against any alternative coalition government even with significant small party defections from the ruling alliance. Disaffection and contradictions in the NDA are unlikely to cause a collapse of the government because a new government would almost certainly have to be formed through elections once again, and these regional parties could not expect to perform as well as they have this time.

Congress' fatal mistake was in retaining illusions that it could obtain a majority on its own, or emerge as the single largest party, without needing to forge a strong counter-coalition. The party is now in its most serious crisis ever, despite its partial revival in the north, especially in the single most important state of the Indian Union, Uttar Pradesh. For all its deficiencies, and direct and indirect contribution to the growth of neo-liberal ravages in the economy, and to communalism, Congress remains the main centrist and national political-electoral rival to the BJP.

The left remains the principal ideological opponent to the BJP and its cohort organisations making up the Sangh Combine, the strongest and most dangerous reactionary rightwing challenge that Indian society has ever had to face since Independence. Unfortunately, from a post-Independence high of 55 seats the left is now weaker than at any previous time in the decade. This is part of the reason why the setback is so serious.

The electoral forward march of the BJP alone may have halted – it is certainly difficult for it to think it can come to power on its own in the short or medium term. But though the BJP cannot pursue a hard-core Hindu fundamentalism (Hindutva) – opposed by most of its allies – it can still pursue with greater success a more modulated form of its basic communal strategy of carrying out a "long march through the institutions" of both the state and civil society.

On the economic front, it has become easier for the new government to push harder with its existing neo-liberal orientation. No wonder the Stock Exchange, the capitalist class, and the urban elite and middle classes have all welcomed the results in the name of stability!

The main, still powerful, obstacle



Photo: Phil Maxwell

Will the capitalist class welcome the coup as the means of attaining financial stability?

opposing the political-cultural monolithism of the Hindutva project, which also frustrates somewhat the ambitions of economic neo-liberals, is the objective complexity, segmentation and diversity of Indian society and the social churning from below also existing in India. But if the reactionary onslaught is to be decisively turned and permanently defeated it needs reinforcement by the all-important subjective factor of a living and dynamic political practice. The left has long relied on an electoral-parliamentary strategy of back-room party deals, manoeuvring between a variety of non-BJP regional parties and with Congress to build some common front, against the Sangh Combine. This strategy has failed.

The left must strengthen itself by engaging in a direct ideological-political challenge to Hindutva and neo-liberalism through the politics of extra-parliamentary mass mobilisations in civil society. Only then can it become a core factor in a wider democratic and progressive third force bringing together a range of progressive movements and political formations expressing the interests of Dalits (untouchables), tribals, lower castes, oppressed ethnic and religious minorities, whose existence constitute key resources of hope.

The Schroeder-Blair witch project

Matt Heaney asks whether the German version of the "Third Way" is already dead.

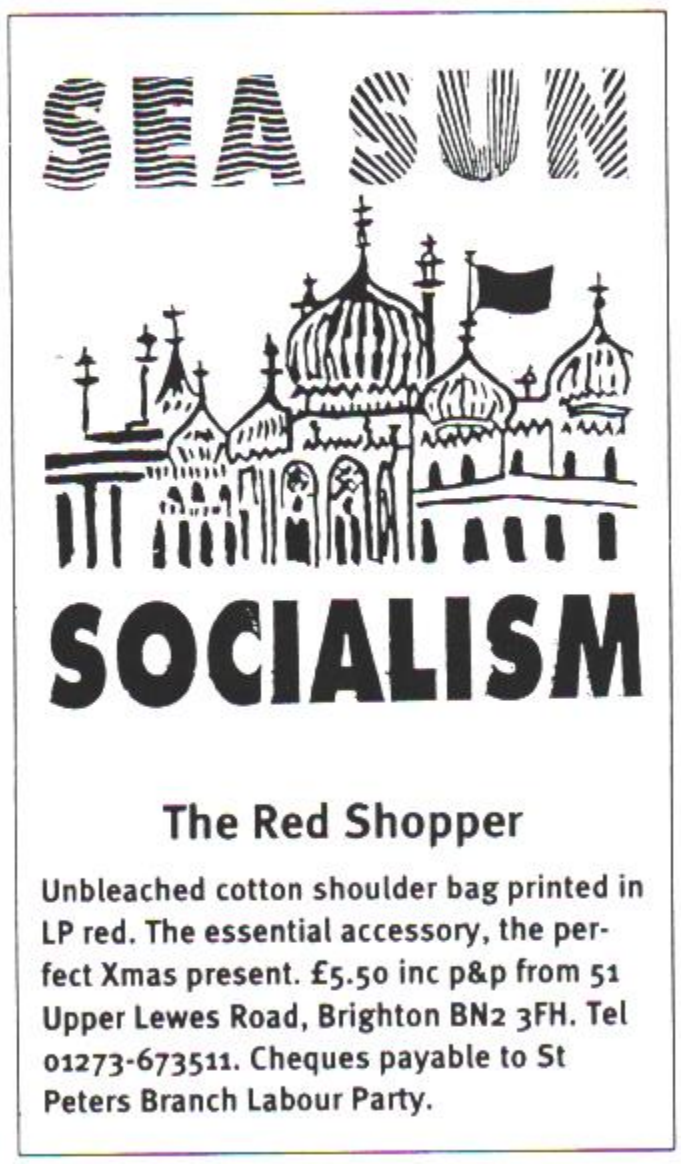
The SPD has been setting a lot of records recently. Firstly, in the Euro elections, they got 30.7% – their worst election result since 1953.

• In the elections to the state parliament in "red" Saarland, the SPD lost the overall majority that they had held – under a PR election system – for the past 14 years. Now the Christian Democrats (CDU) are in the majority there.

• On September 10th, the SPD managed to come third in the east German state of Thüringen, behind the CDU (in the first place), and the ex-East German ruling party, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), who were second.

• This trend was repeated in Saxony on September 29th, where the SPD managed to get only 10% of the vote, the PDS got more than double this, and the CDU got 57%.

• On October 10th in Berlin, the SPD managed to do even worse than 5 years previously (which itself was their worst result in the city since 1945) getting only 22.4%. The PDS got 18.5%, the CDU 42.6%.



The Red Shopper

Unbleached cotton shoulder bag printed in LP red. The essential accessory, the perfect Xmas present. £5.50 inc p&p from 51 Upper Lewes Road, Brighton BN2 3FH. Tel 01273-673511. Cheques payable to St Peters Branch Labour Party.

Just a year after Gerhard Schröder, "the bosses' comrade", took office, his government and party are in crisis. Before the Euro-elections, the SPD and New Labour published a joint strategy document "the Schroeder-Blair Paper". This was written by Peter Mandelson and his German equivalent, Schroeder aide Bodo "prinz of darkness" Hombach (currently "on holiday" after some dodgy land deals).

The paper answers the question "what is the third way?". It's basically right-wing Tory neo-liberalism, masked by a few warm words about "solidarity" (with the bosses) and "social justice". It states "social conscience cannot be measured by levels of public expenditure", "corporation tax rates should be cut", "companies should not be gagged by rules and regulations" and "traditional conflicts at the workplace must be overcome".

The meaning was not lost on the SPD "left" (as left wing as Prescott), or on the tiny free market liberal party, the FDP, who congratulated Schroeder for stealing their policies, and themselves for being "right all along".

Inside the SPD criticism has been half-hearted, not so much of Schroeder's policies, but instead about their presentation. Recently there's been a change in tone, but not enough to cover up the policy of the SPD-Green government: cuts, cuts, and then more cuts – not just tax cuts for the rich. Old-age pensions will be cut, unemployment benefit and income support not increased. Tuition fees on the Blairite model are on the way – despite promises to ban them. Alternative military service posts in the health service are to be cut without replacing them with proper jobs.

The CDU plays left without actually opposing the cuts. The former communist PDS are opposing them, but pushing through cuts and privatisations locally wherever they have power.

Franz Münterfering, SPD General Secretary from December, described the election results as "a lesson, a warning, and a resounding slap in the face" for his party and for the government. But they say "Kurs halten" ("carry on as before"), just try to improve the presentation.

In eastern Germany the main winners are the PDS but this is not some great success for the left. The PDS is dying. Its members were cadres of the East German Communist party, the SED. Its image is one of a young, lively, active, and radical organisation, but nothing could be further from the truth. Failing to notice the events of 1989, many of its prominent members celebrated the "50th anniversary of the founding of the GDR" in October. It's essentially a conservative party, without a major working class base. The leadership is trying to "modernise", to become a Volkspartei – ie. a Social Democratic Party like the SPD after it abandoned Marxism in 1959. In the Brandenburg regional elections in September, the PDS slogan was "Vote PDS out of love for your *Heimat* (homeland)". Left-wing? I think not.

In Berlin, some ex-PDS members, ex-Greens, and ex-SPD members have formed a new party, the Demokratische Linke (Democratic Left), standing on a more radical (but not socialist) programme than the PDS. Very small in number, they got only 0.1% of the vote – though considering the media blackout and lack of resources, it is a promising start. In eastern Berlin Prenzlauer Berg, the DL called for a vote for the "Socialistische Alternative" (sister group of the Socialist Party/Militant), who got 0.7% on a socialist programme. The SPD did not win a single constituency, instead getting all their mandates based on their percentage of the vote.

But what will happen next? Schroeder is changing his tune. He told the IG-Metall trade union conference that he would love to be able to have a retirement age of 60, but "sorry, we just can't afford it," as opposed to his usual "wake up, join the real world" message. The unions called a mass demonstration against the cuts in October in Berlin. With the government sitting in the German capital for the first time in 50 years, Schroeder and Co. may well have to wake up to what the working class wants.

Playing for extra time

Brian Campbell questions the contribution Peter Mandelson can make to the peace process.

When is a good time to send Peter Mandelson to the Northern Ireland Office?

That's a question that must have troubled the mind of Tony Blair for these last months, and of course, like all good questions, it prompts further questions that help to clarify Blair's dilemma. Such as: a good time for whom? For New Labour? For Peter Mandelson? Or just perhaps for the people of Ireland?

When asked in those terms, it seems clear that the considerations which led to Peter Mandelson's appointment as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland began and ended with the internal politics of the New Labour Government.

If seen from this side of the Irish Sea, the appointment brought to mind the age-old advice to football managers: don't make a substitution when you are about to defend a corner. It appeared that Tony Blair was sending Peter Mandelson into the fray just before the most crucial weeks of the peace process. He arrived beaming from ear to ear when George Mitchell was about to crank up his review for a last ditch attempt to save the Good Friday Agreement. It seemed a strange decision.

But of course when seen from inside Downing Street, it wasn't so strange. Frank Dobson's resignation freed the way for a reshuffle. And where better to fit in Mandelson? He would have little or no contact with his rivals and enemies in the Cabinet as he presided over his own little government in Stormont. He would gain valuable experience in a "real job" and no blame would attach to him if the peace process ground to a halt in a welter of noisy recriminations.

But, it is fair to ask, what experience would he gain if a new Assembly and Executive in Stormont took over all his powers? Wouldn't that leave him bored and restless with nothing to do? It would, but Mandelson would then preside over this triumph in an orgy of positive publicity that would propel him to a more central Cabinet position.

The alternative is that Tony Blair had calculated that the Mitchell Review was heading for failure – and who better than the master of spin to handle it? He hoped the feeling would be that if Peter Mandelson could make a silk purse from the sow's ear of the peace process, he deserves any promotion he wants.

If all that sounds too cynical, forgive me. It's a difficult attitude to avoid in the present political climate. Everyone deserves a chance and Peter Mandelson will be allowed space to make an impression. He has experience of Irish politics through his work as a television producer and, it is said, he has followed events closely. That said, it is not productive to see British policy in terms of individuals. Mandelson is unlikely to depart from current policy, though he has a reputation as a strategic, pragmatic thinker who will have an important influence.

None of this presupposes a change to a policy of being persuaders for Irish unity. After all, Mandelson is credited with ditching that position. But what republicans will expect as an absolute bottom line is that the Good Friday Agreement is implemented.

If, as appears likely as I write this, the Mitchell Review fails, then those free-standing elements of the Agreement – relating to human rights, policing, equality, and so on – should be speedily implemented. That will be Mandelson's first test. Is he going to leave in place structures and institutions that have perpetuated inequality and conflict? Or is he going to take on the conservative forces that stand for discrimination? His decision will be the first chance to tell whether he's here to play safe until a bigger job comes along or to make a real impact.

We won't have long to wait. In the meantime, I'll keep my cynicism handy.

Yugoslavia – lift the sanctions!

Alice Mahon, MP
Chair, Committee for Peace in the Balkans

In September I led a delegation to Yugoslavia to see first hand the effects of NATO bombing.

The Zastava car plant in Kragujevac was destroyed by cruise missiles, injuring 170 and leaving 36,000 without jobs, affecting over 120,000 people in a town of around 240,000. The town relies on the factory's power plant for heating and it is unclear whether the boilers will be repaired before winter.

We were told: "People don't have work. They live by the help of the government. We are trying to reconstruct the factory – but our workers are not specialised in this." Sanctions bar international companies from assisting with reconstruction.

Yugoslavia now has nearly a million refugees of all nationalities. The Red Cross told us their soup kitchens could only feed a third of the 300,000 refugees they should be helping.

The most recent refugees said that Serbs, Roma, Jews and other ethnic minorities are being murdered and driven out of their homes Kosova, notwithstanding the Kfor mandate to protect all ethnic groups. First hand testimony confirmed that the perpetrators are the KLA.

- The Committee for Peace in the Balkans is calling for an end to sanctions, humanitarian assistance and for NATO states to clean up the environment and rebuild the civilian infrastructure.

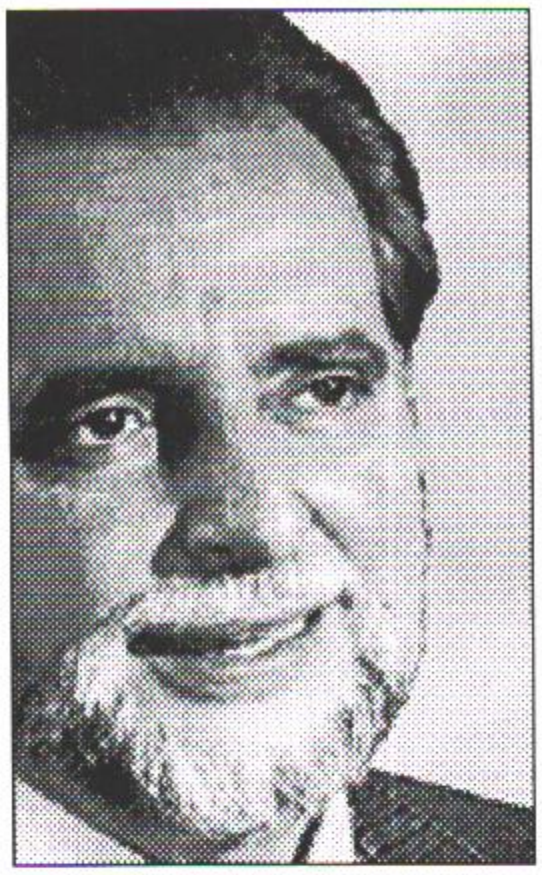
This is an edited version of an article in *Target*, newsletter of the Committee for Peace in the Balkans

New thinking needed by the Spanish left

Mónica García Quesada.
former member Izquierda Unita

The bad results for the Spanish Izquierda Unida (IU) – United Left – in the last European, regional and local elections have opened a debate in the heart of the coalition aiming to prepare the next national elections in March 2000. The coalition's previously increasing share of the vote – 4.1% in 1982 (Communist Party), to 9.05% in 1989, 9.57% in 1993, 13.6% in 1994 – was reduced to 5.8% in the last European elections.

IU was created in 1987 by the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) to provide a political space for the broad left. It aimed to offer a political alternative that encompassed the PCE and other smaller parties and social movements concerned with ecology, feminism, and anti-militarism. IU's decision making processes were to be inclusive, democratic and based on a consensus of grassroots opinion.



Julio Anguita, leader of the PCE and IU.

In the early 1990s, the Spanish political system suffered its greatest crisis since the transition to democracy. The press revealed a series of political scandals that shook the Socialist government: embezzlement of secret funds set aside for internal security, the dirty war in the Basque Country, insider dealing and illegal financing of the Socialist Party. This came on top of a decade of neo-liberal economic policies from the Socialists.

This was the critical moment for IU: however, the strategy they adopted was not to be effective. It was a moment to channel the interest and energy of people who believed in a common front to regenerate public life and to stop the foreseeable coming of a Conservative government. The majority of IU, in line with the PCE, decided to adapt an antagonistic position to the Socialist Party rather than supporting the left of the Socialist Party to strengthen its position. Because of this policy, the right wing Popular Party was able to form administrations in local government where the left had a majority.

Within the coalition, this tactic provoked much division and disunity. However, the disappearance of the consensus principle and power disputes within the coalition were the most damaging consequences of the dispute. It caused the departure of many of the members who had contributed to the creation of IU in 1987. Most notable was the chasm between IU and Nueva Izquierda (New Left), the party set up in the early 90s by those favouring closer links with the Socialist Party.

The inability to manage internal disputes at such a serious time was seen as a weakness and led to a profound disenchantment among the IU's membership and electorate, which explains why the European elections saw a massive abstention among IU voters. The IU share of the vote has dropped to almost the same levels as the PCE received in 1982. Therefore, a bi-partisan trend has been established in the Spanish politics, which has been reinforced by the belief that IU does not represent a credible alternative to the Popular Party.

Since the European elections, IU has entered talks with the Socialist Party in order to set up coalition governments in local authorities. However, IU is now negotiating from a weaker position, due to its bad electoral results.

To recover its lost space in the Spanish political scene, IU must carry out a wide-ranging review. It must seek to recover the spirit and principles that inspired the creation of IU which were the keys to its electoral growth.

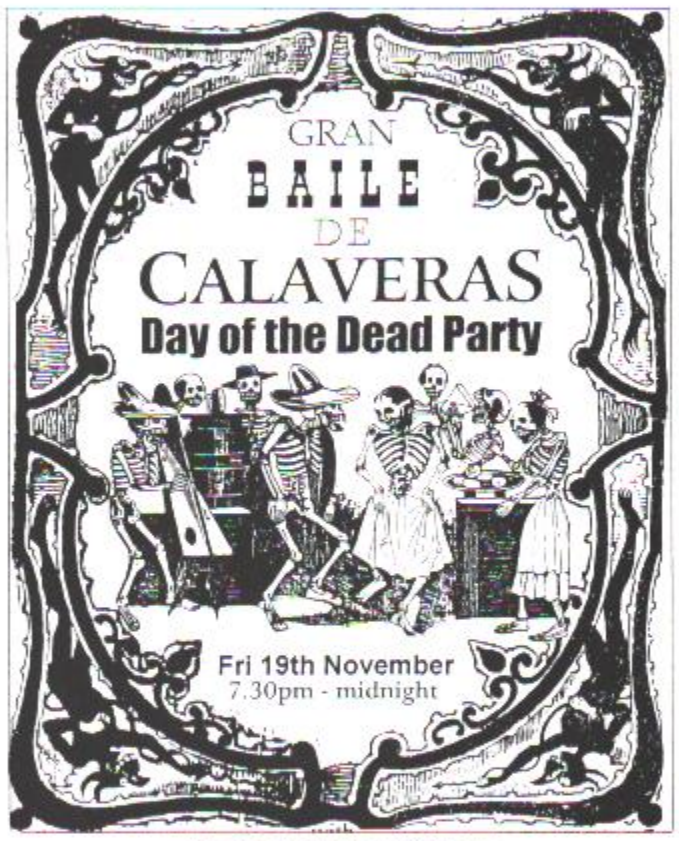


Photo: Molly Cooper

Free Tibet Campaign protests at the visit of the Chinese president.

● Jeremy Corbyn MP has spoken out about the treatment of demonstrators protesting against the visit of Jiang Zemin to the UK. Jeremy said, "I am disgusted that our Government is currently wining and dining the president of a country that denies basic civil liberties and grossly abuses human rights, whilst human rights activists in Britain are being denied the right to publicly express their genuine grievances in a peaceful manner."

Jeremy has also tabled an Early Day Motion calling on the Government to protest to the Chinese government about the occupation of Tibet and suppression of human rights in China. The motion asks that the right to peaceful protest is upheld in this country.



Mexico Support Group,
Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign
Day of the Dead Party
Friday 19th November, Conway Hall, London (Holborn tube)
with Merengada
(ten piece merengue and salsa band)
Mexican musicians; food; bar
£7/£3.50. Disabled access

Pinochet: one year on

The former dictator has some unpleasant supporters besides Margaret Thatcher, reports Sue Lukes, Chair of the Chile Committee for Justice.

October 8th: Bow Street Magistrates Court. A man talking to the press is photographed and turns to ask what the photographer is doing. She tells him she is collecting his picture because people need to know who he is. That her sister disappeared into the hands of Pinochet's security services and he should be ashamed of supporting this mass murderer and torturer. The man shouts: "Police, come and arrest this woman!" A bemused constable looks at him, as the woman tells him he is not in Chile now and can't just get people arrested and disappeared because he does not like what they say. The man is Thomas Schad, a Swiss national often quoted in the British press as a Pinochet spokesperson, who is alleged to be financing the campaign from the money he made from arms deals in the 1970s and 80s. Many of these deals were "triangular", apparently between Chile, South Africa and Israel, and also involving one David Feurstein, who sent a video of himself to the Blackpool meeting at which Thatcher spoke. In it he stated that Pinochet was a great friend to Chile's Jewish community, a curious statement given that many Jews were murdered and disappeared under Pinochet, as well as under the overtly anti-Semitic regime in Argentina with which he worked so closely. Pinochet, it should not be forgotten, came to Britain a year ago to set up an arms deal that would have netted him $4 million. It is this sort of money that pays for Tory Party rallies and press conferences. Almost a year after Pinochet's arrest, his extradition has been ordered by the British courts. He may yet appeal, or go direct to Jack Straw to ask for release because he is too sick to stand trial, although there is little evidence for this. There is a mounting chorus in the press that he has suffered enough, even from *The Guardian*. Campaigners will continue to keep the pressure on, however – and not just for the sake of justice for the disappeared, vital though that is. Pinochet's luxurious confinement here has given Chilean politics a breathing space, with Chileans now believing that real changes may be possible, as they see the threats from the right come to nothing.



Photo: Paul Mattsson

Campaigners celebrate outside Bow Street Court as extradition is confirmed.

NSC drops FSLN

Mike Phipps explains why the Sandinistas are being accused of self-serving treachery.

In an historic step, the Nicaraguan Solidarity Campaign has voted to delete references to supporting the FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front) from its constitution. It also resolved to write to the FSLN leadership to express its "serious concern" about the party's collusion with the corrupt right-wing government of Aleman.

Henceforth the NSC will fund and support "progressive organisations" in Nicaragua. The NSC was founded over twenty years ago explicitly in solidarity with the FSLN which led the successful Revolution in 1979.

What has led the NSC to this unprecedented step is the emergence this summer of a pact between the FSLN and the Aleman regime. Condemned by many grassroots supporters as benefiting only the political elites, the pact proposes major constitutional changes. The electoral system will be modified to benefit the two parties and exclude independents. It will allow a number of state posts to be party-nominated, despite 80% opposition to this in opinion polls. The Comptroller General, who has exposed widespread corruption by Aleman, will now be removed and replaced by a five person panel nominated by the political elites. The pact also lets Aleman have a seat in the National Assembly after his presidential term finishes. This has been denounced by one former Sandinista legislator as "getting a legislative seat Pinochet-style" and will allow Aleman parliamentary immunity – and therefore impunity – for life. FSLN leader Daniel Ortega has been accused of repaying a favour, after he was allowed to hide from justice behind his own parliamentary immunity, following accusations of child sex abuse from his step-daughter Zoilamerica.

With 80% of Nicaraguan households in poverty and government corruption and theft at unprecedented levels, grassroots organisations are voicing a deep sense of betrayal. One opposition Sandinista group says: "the government needs to negotiate with the FSLN to impose the policies of hunger ordained by the financial institutions of world capitalism. It needs to control popular movements and neutralise revolutionary public opinion, in order to create stability to let the government run the country. For imperialism, stability is simply the smashing of people's rebellion against the implacable economic dictatorship we Nicaraguans are suffering."

Boris Kagarlitsky: the long struggle ahead

Boris Kagarlisky spoke to *LLB* about the impact of globalisation and the emergence of new socialist formations. His latest book *New Realism, New Barbarism* is reviewed on page 29.

***LLB*: In the book you suggest that the impact of neo-liberalism is breaking down our sense of community and society, leaving only the most basic forms of identity intact – kinship, the "voice of blood" – hence the rise in ethnic tensions in Europe and beyond. What recent examples of ethnic conflict would you mention to support this analysis?**

BK: We see the manifestations of barbarism in the Balkans – on the Serb side as well as on the Albanian side but most of all on the Western side. We see Chechen extremists attacking peaceful villages in Daghestan and crazy Russian generals bombing Chechen villages in retaliation for the terrorist acts in Moscow which even the Russian press attribute to the people inside the Kremlin.

Islamic fundamentalism is replacing national liberation because leftist hegemony in the Third world failed but hatred against Western capitalism did not disappear and will not disappear. In the West the far right is stronger than ever – this is European fundamentalism. But the EU's building "Fortress Europe" is just a softer version of it. Have we forgotten the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that proclaims the right of people to live where they want?

***LLB*: Why don't the pauperising effects of neo-liberalism strengthen class identities – is it solely a failure of political leadership by the main left parties?**

BK: No, neo–liberalism is not just pauperising, it is atomising people, making everybody almost declassé. Don't forget that Hannah Arendt, in her book on totalitarianism, mentioned atomisation as one of the sources of totalitarian dictatorship.

***LLB*: You say the left parties exaggerate the importance of globalisation, presumably to justify their own inaction. This is undoubtedly true in Western Europe, but does the same logic apply in South Africa, Latin America or Eastern Europe?**

BK: I think it is even more true in Eastern Europe or Latin America. These countries are part of the periphery but most of them were peripheral long before globalisation. In that sense very little has changed. It is in the West that this problem of globalisation is central.

***LLB*: If the crisis of left parties is ideological, can they be regenerated by socialist ideas – or is our task now to build new structures?**

BK: Actually I think that the situation will be different in different countries and parties. I am not one of those political gurus who think they can give perfect recommendations to everyone in every situation. It will be a long process. Maybe some attempts at renovation will result in the formation of new parties and maybe people trying to build new parties will end up influencing the old ones. My guess is that in most countries new parties and movements will emerge but this will in the long run depend on concrete political struggles.

Soapbox Cabaret

The *Soapbox Cabaret* is returning to London after singing the spin to delegates and apparatchniks at the Labour Party Conference.

Rated as "best party" in The *Independent's* "Bournemouth Highlights", the Bournemouth *Daily Echo* wrote: "Reports of satire's death have clearly been exaggerated." The *Hackney Gazette* enthused, "...if you want to have a laugh at Tony Blair and his buddies, this is a must see." *Socialist Worker* commented, "I only hope Tony Blair stumbles into the show so that they can rub salt into those scars on his back."

The show that made Alistair Campbell exclaim "Wonderful!" and Charlie Whelan ask for royalties will be at the Riverside Studios, Crisp Road, Hammersmith W6 on 26th and 27th October, with further venues to be announced.

Contact John Rogers on 0171-359 9113 or soapbox_cabaret@hotmail.com

Reclaim the railways!

Agitprop action at a railway station near you

Tuesday November 30th
4pm-7pm

Supported by Reclaim the Streets, London Strike Support Group, Campaign Against Tube Privatisation

Danger in Euroland

Eddie Tucker reviews *Trade Unions, Public Services and the Euro*, by Geoff Martin.

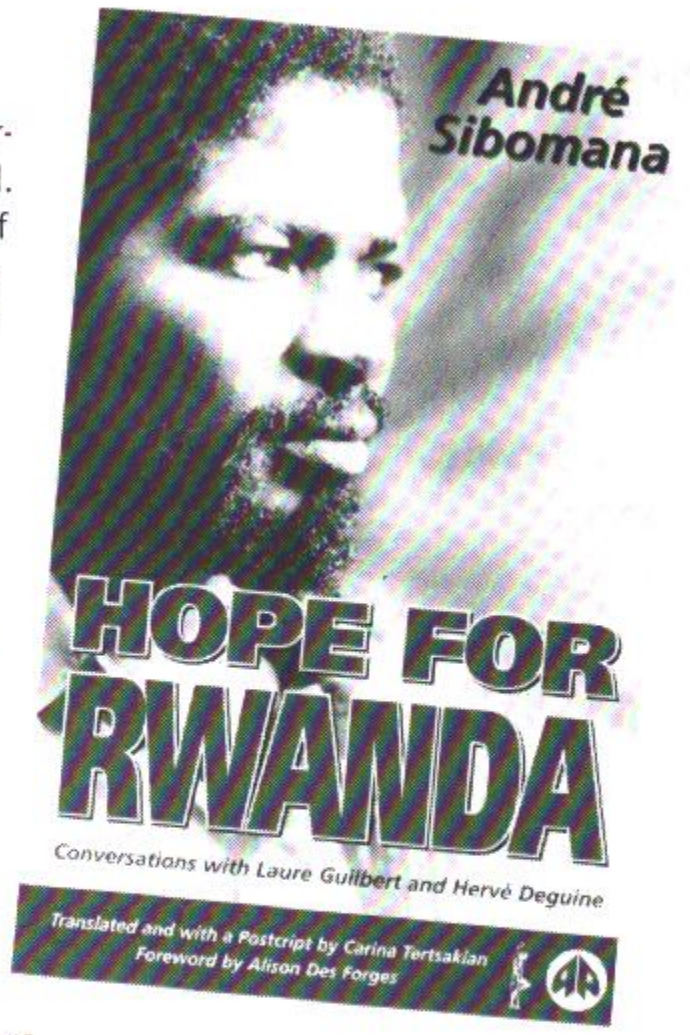
In this hard-hitting new pamphlet, Geoff Martin gets serious about the euro-threat. He effectively challenges the pro-euro line being pumped out by the TUC and points out the irrevocable link between cutting the welfare state and joining the Single Currency. Drawing on examples of what happened in the build up to entry in other EU countries, he outlines the real threats to public services.

Martin articulates the views of the 61% of trade unionists found in an ICM poll to be opposed to entry and he does so without resorting to any of the little Englander prejudices of the UKIP and right wing Tories. Martin has a proven track record of refusing to appear on anti-EU platforms with any dodgy characters from the far right and this pamphlet will be a vital tool for those opposing entry from a working class and internationalist perspective. None of the usual Martin jokes, just cold hard facts and analysis that add balance to the current debate that we ignore at our peril.

Geoff Martin is UNISON London Region Convenor and a member of Trade Unionists Against the Single Currency. Copies from Unit 6, Ivebury Court, 325 Latimer Road, London W10 6RA.

Socialism or barbarism?

Mike Phipps reviews *Hope for Rwanda* by Andre Sibomana, and *New Realism, New Barbarism*, by Boris Kagarlitsky, both published by Pluto, price £12.99 pbk.



Rwanda 1994: over a million people were killed in a 100-day genocide. The scale is mind-numbing: 14,000 people killed in a stadium in a few hours; 27,000 bodies discovered in one mass grave; 50,000 corpses floating in the mouth of Lake Victoria, the water red with blood.

These interviews with Rwandan priest Andre Sibomana explore the causes and consequences of the genocide. Sibomana was an outspoken human rights activist who died last year of a rare illness. His criticism of the new government's human rights abuses cost him his life; he was denied a passport and was thus unable to seek expert medical treatment abroad when he fell ill.

Sibomana's analysis of the causes of the genocide avoids simplistic explanations. Certainly the ethnic/caste divisions between Hutus and Tutsis which predate, but were intensified by, colonial rule were a factor. But this was compounded by a high population growth rate, a shortage of land, economic recession and the presence of 600,000 refugees beyond Rwanda's borders – the result of earlier conflicts. The genocide was clearly organised by the Habyarimana regime and took place with the full collusion of the local authorities. But the role of the government's international backers must also be examined. France in particular fully supported Habyarimana, motivated both by a desire to hold a strategic position in the event of Zaire's implosion and by profits from trafficking – the region was a hub for French arms dealers.

In a moving passage, Sibomana discusses the differences between Rwanda and the Holocaust. Whereas in Germany, it was to some extent possible for citizens to be ignorant of what was happening, in Rwanda the massacres took place in broad daylight: "the whole population was at least a witness to the crime." Women and children killed, as well as men. Although very highly organised, much of the genocide was small scale, with very basic weapons being used – which is why the withdrawal of UN peacekeepers was so criminal.

Sibomana is pessimistic about the future. The judicial investigations into the genocide have been agonisingly slow, with many special police inspectors massacred in the field. The International Criminal Tribunal is hugely under-resourced and often incompetent. Thousands of detainees awaiting trial literally rot in jail, in some cases standing knee-deep in mud and decomposing corpses. Meanwhile killings continue on both sides, hundreds of thousands of refugees remain outside the country and the trauma of survivors goes untreated. Rwanda is now one of the poorest countries in the world and 30% of its urban population has the AIDS virus.

Fifty years ago genocide was declared unlawful, treaties were signed and courts set up. Yet it occurred again before the eyes of the world in 1994. "It is as if we learn nothing from history," comments Sibomana. "Sometimes I wonder if it's still worth investigating human rights violations. We publish reports which require a huge amount of work, for which we take enormous risks. So what? Who reads them? And what happens afterwards? What is the point of building monuments to the memory of victims?"

Boris Kagarlitsky sees events in Rwanda as a prophetic warning in his new book *New Realism, New Barbarism*. Will the bloodshed, crisis and collapse in the periphery affect the centre? After Kosova, it seems that way.

Most politicians talk as if such ethnic conflicts were unconnected to social and economic problems. But it is neo-liberalism that destroys social ties – its watchword might be Thatcher's dictum: there is no such thing as society. As this philosophy is put brutally into practice, destroying all mutual obligations or sense of community except that of kinship – the "voice of blood" – it is scarcely surprising that ethnic chauvinism and fascism are on the rise.

The simple thesis of this book is that capitalism is in crisis, but so is the left. The crisis of the left is moral and ideological, rather than social. The last few years have seen increased popular support for left parties in Europe and beyond – perhaps because, despite all the talk that the working class is disappearing, growing numbers of people see themselves as working class due to increased exploitation. The left can win elections, but it is reluctant to lead and win struggles. Across Eastern Europe, socialist leaders appealed to the "international community" for aid in the face of the abuses of the free market, rather than provide leadership for the popular anger. Yet the left's weakness does not make neo-liberalism strong – the left exaggerates the importance of globalisation and the weakening of the state to justify its own inaction.

How long can parties like New Labour, the French Socialists and the German SPD continue to exploit their traditional social bases while going over to the new neo-liberal ideology? For Kagarlitsky, the answer lies with the left intelligentsia who have ceased to make demands on "socialist" leaders and view workers with contempt. There is a pressing need to overcome the defeat of Communism – which began long before the collapse of the Eastern bloc regimes in 1989: that was just the final discarding of long-empty rituals. The priority now is to reconnect Marxist ideas with the mass movement.

Correspondence

I am concerned by *LLB*'s attitude to the Irish "republican" movement. A number of articles have expressed sympathy or outright support for Sinn Fein and one went as far as to depict it as a "party of the left" which socialists should positively support.

For too long the Labour left has displayed a complete ignorance of the situation in Northern Ireland. Understandable revulsion at Orange bigotry and the institutionalised anti-Catholic discrimination of British rule has blinded socialists to the true nature of Sinn Fein-IRA – a chauvinistic terror group that aims to impose a solution on Northern Ireland's Protestant population.

Nationalist warlordism in the Catholic ghettos of Ulster is just as brutal as its Unionist counterpart. Whole groups of people have been expelled from Northern Ireland under threat of death, violence erupts from the personal quarrels of IRA commanders and organised crime and drug-dealing flourish.

Worse, Sinn Fein seeks a fundamentally British solution to the conflict, demanding that the Westminster government forcibly overrides Unionist objections to a united Ireland.

This is not a war between Ireland and British imperialism, but between two sections of the Irish people. Partition has aggravated the conflict: it did not cause it. The dismantling of the artificial Six Counties structure is essential if there is to be lasting peace in Ireland, but it must be implemented democratically. This means a united republic with autonomy for the Protestant-majority areas, as well as closer links to Britain. The peoples of Ireland must come together freely to agree on what neither the Unionists nor the anti-republicans of Sinn Fein can accept – an Irish solution.

Alexander Ismail
Oxford

So Geoff Martin pulled out of the race for UNISON General Secretary even before nominations officially opened. Though I'm not a paid up member of his fan club, like many in the UNISON left, I feel let down by this decision.

He claims this is because of the hold the bureaucrats have over the machinery, and the lack of cohesion among the various left leaning elements, which he wants to address. Yet how does he expect to do this from his self-inflicted sidelines? Of course the bureaucrats were briefing against him – what did he expect?

As a declared candidate, he had a real chance of pulling together the organised left and that growing number of members thoroughly fed up with the leadership's inability to remember its responsibilities are to them and not New Labour. Even if he didn't think he could win, he could have generated a groundswell of support for the left, and improved the chances of left candidates in the next NEC elections.

I'd hate to think he bottled out of a fight, just because he wasn't immediately hailed as the union's true saviour, and hope he will now publicly declare his support for Roger Bannister, who has widespread backing from the left. Maybe if he does, he can help to kickstart the opposition to New Labour and make that desired left unity become a reality.

Jacqui Brown
Brent, London

Periscope Special: London Mayor

The *LLB* production meeting this month was interrupted by the phone. The caller announced: "It's the Frank Dobson campaign here." Unfortunately, the individual who answered thought it had to be a joke and just answered, "Stop taking the p***." Debate the following day on whether the call had been genuine was halted by the phone again. The woman who told us she was from the Glenda Jackson campaign was told we were supporting Ken, like the rest of Hackney. We'll probably never hear from Trevor Phillips or Nick Raynsford. What's that you ask? Have we heard from Ken? Of course: but mindful of the new instructions on inter-Party commmunication from Peter Mandelson (see page 18), he sent us an email.

● Glenda Jackson's manifesto for Mayor contains some fine words, even "socialism", but little of substance. For instance the pledge "to eliminate homelessness" is not backed up by any concrete proposal to implement the pledge. The "mayoral apprentices" to improve the job prospects of young Londoners sound fine, but "negotiate a number of places with employers" is so woolly as to be farcical. But probably the worst element in Jackson's entire manifesto is transport; the Public Private Partnership is, post Paddington, a thoroughly discredited policy – but still she backs it. There won't be an Oscar for this performance.

● Dobson's circular to supporters boasted, "I led Labour's successful campaign to drive the BNP out of Millwall." True, he was in charge of Labour's campaign in London. However, Bengali groups issued a statement of "astonishment" at his claims and reminding him of their involvement: "The Bengali community expects a relationship with Labour politicians based on dialogue and mutual respect, not manipulation of history for crude electioneering." Hear, hear!

Apology

In the last issue of *LLB*, the third paragraph of the article "Is tension over in Dover" by Martin Bradley of Kent Refugee Action Network concluded with the sentence "According to the *Dover Mercury*, 14 National Front supporters were reported to have gathered over 400 signatures for their petition in the town centre that day." The paragraph should have concluded, quite differently: "According to the *Dover Mercury*, 14 National Front supporters arrived in defiance of the ban, but were sent away by the police. Anti-Nazi League supporters were reported to have gathered over 400 signatures for their petition in the town centre that day." We apologise to Martin Bradley for our error.

Save £20

Socialism in Birmingham and the Black Country 1850-1939

George J. Barnsby

This 600 page book is an encyclopaedia of the early years of the trade union, labour and co-operative movement in Birmingham and the Black Country.

What they say about this wonderful book:

"Very well produced and enticing," **Dorothy Thompson**

"This latest volume represents the most helpful succession to (George Barnsby's) previous writings on Birmingham and the Black Country," **Professor John Saville.**

"An important contribution to our history," Birmingham Councillor **Theresa Stewart.**

"The author deserves a great deal of praise for the efforts that have gone into the writing and production of this splendid book," **Ken Purchase MP,** Wolverhampton NE

This splendid book is published at a price of £32 but it can be obtained for only £12 including postage and packing from: Integrated Publishing Services, 141 Henwood Road, Wolverhampton, West Midlands WV6 8PJ. Cheques made payable to Integrated Publishing Services.

PERISCOPE

Privateers ahoy!

It was good to see Lewisham Council's gung-ho privateer **Dave Sullivan** getting short shrift from ADLO, the Association of Direct Labour Organisations, who voted overwhelmingly against his plans to adopt a more pro-private stance. He took his ball away and set up a new group, the New Local Government Network, whose meetings at Labour Party Conference – very much on the fringe – were sponsored by Onyx and Serviceteam, two companies who have done much damage gaining contracts from in-house teams in Labour authorities. Serviceteam in particular were involved in a long running industrial dispute with the GMB (see previous *LLB*s). Bad enough, but why was Labour Local Government Minister Hilary Armstrong appearing on platforms sponsored by such anti-Labour organisations?

Fell on sword; landed in clover

There was speculation as to why **Lyndon Harrison**, the English MEP parachuted into the Welsh regional list fell on his sword and withdrew to all-Welsh candidates. He's landed on ermine with an elevation to the House of Lords and, irony of ironies, he wouldn't even have won his seat anyway due to Labour's appalling performance.

New Labour, no democracy

Brent South is the latest CLP to dump the tiresome idea of regular **General Committee** meetings that might hold the MP, Councillors and other public representatives of the Party accountable. A recent meeting decided to have just four GCs a year and to exclude branch delegates from Executive Committee decision-making. The proposal was circulated two days in advance of the meeting and carried by a majority of one, despite the Party Standing Orders requiring seven days' notice and a two-thirds majority. The deleted GCs will be replaced by Policy Campaign meetings, where members will be allowed to "air their views" (but not vote on issues), and summer and winter socials.

Man of straw

One of the "perks" of Labour Party Conference is legging around the posh hotels rubbing shoulders with the rich and famous. Imagine our shock therefore at getting physically cleared off the steps of the Highcliffe Hotel in Bournemouth by spooks and security guards just because **Jack Straw** was coming in. Perhaps he was worried no-one would recognise him. Or that we would attempt to clean his glasses with a squeegee.

Our own Portillista

There can be only one Labour candidate with the bottle to take on Portillo in Kensington and Chelsea. Not, not our own Geoff Martin, but old friend Paul Richards. Who better "suited" to such a seat? *LLB* is considering organising a write-in campaign if Margaret McDonagh refuses to let him stand along the lines of "he's rich, he's hard, he's Paul Richards..."

Conference news

Young Labour's annual star studded bash – who could forget Mo Mowlam bopping with Chris Evans in Blackpool? – was cancelled. They claimed they couldn't find a suitable venue, but word on the streets (well, in the cocktail bars) is a lack of big wigs still interested in Blair's babies was the real reason

Sell first, vote later

The British Government fully supports the privatisation of **Haiti**'s state-owned industries and services, announced the British Ambassador to the neighbouring Dominican Republic on a visit there recently. Contentious to say the least, given that the sell-offs have been going full speed ahead despite the closure of Parliament by President Preval in January of this year. Haiti is now governed without reference to elected representatives at all. Perhaps a more ethical foreign policy should encourage some democratic openings – rather than exporting Thatcherism.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

"I'm a socialist. a left wing socialist – because I'm from a working class background it's quite weird to have all this money. But I think if you have a load of money you should get taxed to the hilt."
Sporty Spice Mel C

"The trouble is that whenever a story appears about the school I get Alastair Campbell on the phone. He really is a pig of a man."
Mr McIntosh, Headteacher of London Oratory School, attended by Tony Blair's sons.

"Don't mind me. I'm only the press secretary."
Tony Blair, being "ironic", whilst interrupting a mid-Atlantic press briefing by Alastair Campbell.

TRIBUNE

News from the Inside



Every week, TRIBUNE carries all the news and views from Labour and the Left. TRIBUNE is essential reading for all those keen to keep up with events inside the Labour Party and the Government and in touch with key issues and campaigns. TRIBUNE is the Independent Voice of the Left.

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

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

❑ Please send me details of annual subscriptions by Direct Debit

Name.....

Address.....

.....Postcode.....

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



THE LIZ DAVIES COLUMN

● At its September meeting, the National Executive Committee prepared for Annual Conference. The Prime Minister emphasised that it was to be a mid-term showcase, making no reference to Conference being a forum to decide policy and a chance for delegates to express views from the grassroots.

I asked him how our Government's arms sales to Indonesia could be justified under an ethical foreign policy, especially given the evidence that these arms were used in the terror and genocide in East Timor, and if the Government would support an immediate freeze on all investment and loans to Indonesia. I also asked if the Prime Minister would withdraw the invitation to the Indonesian Ambassador to attend Labour Party Conference. (The Ambassador had been on the guest list approved at May's NEC. Grassroots Alliance NEC members protested but were told we would be failing to encourage democracy in Indonesia if we did not invite him.)

The Prime Minister replied that cancelling arms sales would have cost hundreds of millions of pounds; there was no evidence British arms had been used in East Timor; the killings had been done by the militias, not by the Indonesian military. He ignored the question on investment and announced that the invitation to the Indonesian Ambassador had already been withdrawn.

Later on, the General Secretary also said that the Ambassador's invitation had been withdrawn. It was fairly clear from her inaccurate recollection of the original invitation (she claimed it was in July and unopposed) that both she and the Prime Minister were responding off the cuff. My guess is that the withdrawal of the invitation was sent out immediately following the NEC meeting.

Pete Willsman invited the Prime Minister to agree that PFI for the NHS was disastrous and cost the public purse more. Mark Seddon, noting concern in the Party that the Government was still sticking to previous spending limits, said that he thought the electorate would be quite receptive to greater public spending instead of more tax cuts. The Prime Minister repeated that public services would depend on prudent management of the economy and simply failed to reply to Pete.

The GMB representative complained about Government attacks on public sector workers, particularly the Prime Minister's reported comments about the scars left on his back from his dealing with them. He replied that he had not actually talked about public sector workers, but about reforming the public services. That was far from the impression that the newspapers had given!

The NEC refused a request from Ron Davies to put himself forward for selection to Westminster while retaining his seat in the Welsh Assembly (it is Party policy that no individual should be elected to both).

The NEC considered CLPs' constitutional amendments which were going to Conference. One, from Calder Valley CLP, wanted to restore a commitment to public ownership to Clause IV. At least ten CLPs were calling for restrictions on the ability of the NEC to refuse to endorse a properly selected parliamentary candidate – following the 1995 Leeds North East case. Grassroots Alliance votes were the only ones in favour of these amendments and the NEC voted to recommend rejection – which Conference duly did.

● In May 1997, the largest arms contract to Indonesia was for 16 Hawk aircraft which at that time had not been delivered. In line with new Foreign Secretary Robin Cook's "foreign policy with an ethical dimension", the contract could have been cancelled overnight although manufacturers British Aerospace would have reclaimed the cost from public funds. However, we may not have escaped paying for those aircraft. In January 1999 Indonesia rescheduled its arms debts and may yet default. Hawk aircraft have been seen in action over Dili and contributed to the recent terror and genocide in East Timor.

In 1998, the same British Aerospace was listed as a Labour Party sponsor contributing in excess of £5,000. Party members are entitled to ask whether Cook's failure to cancel the contract was related to this gift.

The sponsorship list is in the back pages of the "Centennial Report" to Conference, in the 1998 Party accounts . A tip for all readers of New Labour documents: the most interesting information is usually at the back.

● When Thatcher couldn't defeat the GLC, she abolished it. When "one member, one vote" started to produce the wrong result, the Blairite modernisers dropped their loyalty to OMOV like a hot potato. At a special NEC meeting on 12th October myself, Christine Shawcroft, Mark Seddon and Dennis Skinner voted against the proposals for selection of the Labour candidate for London Mayor. The proposals retained the system of self-nomination and a selection ("political vetting") panel (thus retaining the power to weed out Livingstone if Millbank get desperate), followed by voting in an electoral college. All four declared Labour candidates on *Newsnight* that night expressed surprise and said they had expected an OMOV selection. The Grassroots Alliance argued for London Labour Party policy – any candidate with at least ten nominations should be shortlisted – and for OMOV. Ours were the only votes against the proposals, with all the other NEC members voting in favour.

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