LABOUR LEFT

Briefing

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EXCLUSIVE

Greg Palast exposé – how New Labour woos big business

EYE WITNESS

Reports from East Timor, Turkey and South Africa

PENSIONS

Mildred Gordon and Peter Townsend

LABOUR LEFT Briefing

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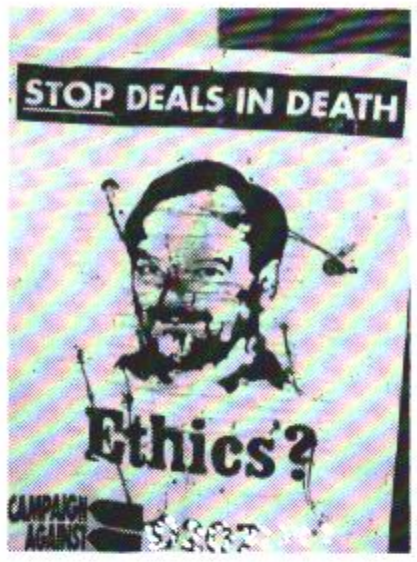
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■ The copy deadline for the November issue is Monday 18th October.



October 1999

Cover photo by Molly Cooper

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EDITORIAL

New Labour; no morality

It is not so much patriotism as "morality", which forms the last resort of the political scoundrel, these days. Indeed, anyone with a passing knowledge of the history of the last century will have felt a shiver down his or her spine listening to Tony Blair lecture the nation on its moral standards. Blair even went so far as to argue that "the people" should enter into a "partnership with the government", when, as any democrat ought to know, the government is meant to be the servant of – and removable by – the people. As so often with New Labour, the chain of accountability has been reversed, to the shame of our Party and the detriment of our democracy.

Judged by the moral standards recognised by most of us in our daily lives, New Labour's record in office is an appalling one. Shrugging off its commitments at the general election, it has presided over a drastic decline in the NHS, and, worse yet, tried to conceal it by cooking the books. It has turned its back on millions of pensioners in poverty. It has sought cheap fixes to its own dilemmas by targeting people with disabilities and single parents for benefit cuts. It has routinely practised the most cynical forms of disinformation and produced an Orwellian Freedom of Information Bill which would actually place greater restrictions on the public's right to know than are currently in place. And over the last few months it has even appealed to racism to justify its asylum and immigration policy – a policy clearly at variance with globally accepted standards of human rights.

Nothing has exposed the fundamental immorality of this Government and its senior figures more than their complicity in the bloodshed in East Timor. In arrogant defiance of repeated appeals and warnings from international campaigners – John Pilger, Jose Ramos Horta, Jeremy Corbyn, and many others – the New Labour Government continued to arm and aid the obnoxious regime in Jakarta. As we go to press, and with callous indifference to the massacres and flagrant contempt for democratic procedures and the United Nations, Britain continues to provide armaments as well as training and diplomatic cover to the killing machine known as the Indonesian army.

It is the illegal occupation by this army of a foreign country, East Timor, which forms the root of the conflict and is the source of the current barbarism. Over many decades, this army and the regime whose survival it ensures were built up by the United States and its allies as a bulwark against left-wing insurrection and an anchor for Western interests in the region. As its economic and military power increased, it became a major trading partner for Britain, not least as a market for our arms industry, bloated by decades of government encouragement and protection. Among the many "special interests" in Britain, none have been pandered to like the merchants of death. Even as Robin Cook regaled gullible journalists with his "ethical" rhetoric, his ministry – with his knowledge and approval – was ensuring that the flow of weaponry and other assistance to murderous regimes, including Indonesia's, continued uninterrupted.

If there was the slightest shred of truth in this Government's claims to moral superiority, Cook, Robertson, Byers and others ministers with blood on their hands would now resign in shame. The fact that they will continue in office, and even prosper by their wrong-doing, is testimony not only to New Labour's indifference to ethical standards, but also to the general corruption of political discourse in this country.

What lies behind both this general corruption and, more specifically, the debasement of New Labour, is the increasing dictatorship of big business over all aspects of our society. Through donations, sponsorships, "tickets for dinners", and lobbyist intermediaries, the corporate giants – including the arms dealers – have entered into New Labour's inner decision-making circles, even as the rest of us have been excluded from them. As Greg Palast points out (see pages 8 and 9), this process is not fortuitous; it is the result of a long-term strategy adopted by key New Labour operators, for whom the rich can never do wrong.

Unfortunately, it will not be possible to call these people to account at our annual conference – because that conference has been stripped of anything resembling democratic procedures. Worse yet, much of conference has now been turned over to the malign forces that the labour movement was born to combat: low-paying employers, war profiteers, dealers in pollution and exploiters of social decay. Every Labour Party member, every member of an affiliated trade union, has a responsibility to make it clear that these people do not speak for us. If we are to resuscitate the Labour Party as an instrument of social justice, we have no choice now but to mount a campaign to drive the money-changers from the temple. It is time the labour movement as a whole began teaching this feckless Government the basics of our morality.

Justice for Diarmuid

Paul Philippou of the Justice for Diarmuid O'Neill Campaign (with the support of the O'Neill family) reports.

If the Good Friday Agreement is to yield peace in Ireland the injustices of the past must be addressed. The British and Unionist roles within the Six Counties have resulted in thousands of deaths and suffering. Those that have fought against injustice – for the right of their nation to choose its own destiny – have been criminalised, imprisoned and murdered.

In Britain, the police and security forces have subverted the law, lied, manufactured evidence and employed a deliberate policy of shoot-to-kill. Diarmuid O'Neill was one victim of this policy. On 23rd September 1996 he was shot and killed in Hammersmith by the Metropolitan Police's firearms squad. Diarmuid was shot six times, dragged dying down steps and denied immediate medical treatment. After the shooting an orgy of lies was produced by the press – including the fabrication of a gun battle.

The Police Complaints Authority and the Crown Prosecution Service have repeatedly delayed their investigations. The former took 23 months to interview the officer who pulled the trigger. Three years later, we still await an inquest. In September the campaign organised pickets and vigils to protest the murder and continued cover-up.

Diarmuid was murdered under the previous Conservative administration. The present Labour Government should welcome the revealing of the truth about Diarmuid's murder; Jack Straw should sanction an independent public inquiry in the interests of justice for the O'Neill family and as support for the peace process in Ireland.

23rd September, Vigil: St. Martin in the Fields Church steps, Trafalgar Square WC2N, 5.30–7 pm

26th September, Picket: Hammersmith Police Station W6, 11–12.30

Contact the Justice for Diarmuid O'Neill Campaign, BM BOX D.O'Neill, London WC1N 3XX; email: justicedoneill@btinternet.com



Photo: Paul Mattsson

Pensioners' rally, Trafalgar Square, 18th September 1999.

Fighting for a decent life

Mildred Gordon, former MP for Bow and Poplar, reports on recent action taken by the country's pensioners.

Southwark pensioners leafleted the Pensioners' Parliament calling for reason and argument to be augmented by a co-ordinated campaign to stop traffic in every major city in the UK. This fell on deaf ears as far as the National Pensioners' Convention was concerned. Nevertheless, the Greater London Pensioners' Association has organised regular parliamentary lobbies, as well as marches and sit downs to stop traffic. Unfortunately 70 and 80 year olds, so desperate to get their case heard that they stage a sit down at Oxford Circus, do not attract media attention.

The petition to raise all pensions to £75 immediately was signed by over 120,000 people and presented to the Government in early September. Signatures are still being gathered for the demand to restore the link between pensions and wages.

500 pensioners attended a lobby of the TUC conference and a fringe meeting addressed by John Monks and Miriam Karlin. Speaking to the successful ASLEF motion at the TUC, Mick Rix said, "It was never expected that New Labour would behave in the same disgraceful and heartless fashion as the Tory Government, which severed the link between pensions and average earnings... The basic pension is now worth only 16% of average income, down from 27% ten years ago. If this Government has a reserve war chest to finance bombing in Kosova, it has the finances to help the pensioners."

An estimated 10,000 people marched from the Embankment to Trafalgar Square on September 18th in support of the pensioners' demands, to a rally addressed by Barbara Castle and Ken Livingstone, who both evoked a particularly warm response, as well as Jimmy Knapp and Trevor Phillips.

Pensioners will continue to agitate until they get a pension which will allow them to live in dignity. They also need an adequate chiropody service, residential care which does not pauperise them and an end to ageism in the NHS. London pensioners, who have enjoyed free travel for 30 years, must continue to fight to retain their Freedom Pass and watch out that the proposed privatisation of the underground does not spell the end of free travel.

New pensions for old!

The Government's proposals on pensions have to be strengthened if the objectives of reducing pensioner poverty and establishing pensioner security are to be met, argues Peter Townsend, Emeritus Professor of Social Policy, Bristol University; Centennial Professor of International Social Policy, LSE.

Pensions policy is the biggest ingredient of welfare reform. It affects ten million elderly and another 47 million younger people in the population.

In 1996 Labour sought to make a break with past policies. Its new ideas included a minimum pension "guarantee" and a cheaper and better regulated form of private pension schemes – called "stakeholder" pensions. In December 1998 a Green Paper *Partnership in Pensions* began to flesh out these ideas. Being a Green Paper the proposals are not set in stone. The next weeks are critical.

Tory governments from 1979 to 1997 transformed society, with the gap between rich and poor becoming wider, benefits being severely reduced and the poorest 20% experiencing no change or even falls in their absolute real income.

Labour must devise a last ditch compromise to resolve this structural problem in the year 2000. What should the strategy be? Pensions policy has to be both international and national. This means that the extent of means-testing and privatisation presently set out in the Green Paper has to be reduced and the minimum state pension increased.

First, means-testing: in opposition Labour vigorously opposed Tory substitution of means-tested benefits for benefits earned as of right through contributions from earnings. Means-tested benefits increased between 1979 and 1997 from 17% to 34% of the cost of social security. By adding the means-tested Working Families Tax Credit and Minimum Income Guarantee schemes, and by limiting annual increases in disability and national insurance benefits to annual increases in prices, not earnings, the Labour Government will continue the trend. But new evidence from different countries shows that means-tests have to be diminished, not increased. A global contract on pensions and social insurance has to be struck.

Social insurance provides a better "floor" of income in many European countries than in the UK. And a minimum income guarantee to replace discredited means-tested national assistance had been proposed long ago by the Wilson Government of the 1960s. This did not work. "Supplementary Benefits" merely replaced "National Assistance."

Second, privatisation: in the 1980s and 1990s the World Bank and the IMF strongly advocated the privatisation of pensions. This led to huge problems worldwide. Many of the schemes do not work and are poor in coverage. Now the international agencies are beginning to change tack. Public schemes are said to have their advantages. Large-scale privatisation seems unfavourable for savings and growth. Money-purchase schemes can be much less secure, and five times more costly in administration, than pay-as-you-go contributory schemes. Collective provision can ensure a minimally adequate income, with private enterprise building on top.

The "stakeholder" scheme now proposed for the UK resembles the "approved society" benefit schemes of the 1930s. In 1941 Beveridge said they were a failure and he recommended a better public scheme. The history of pensions mis-selling in the 1980s is another object lesson. The Government's intention to introduce a similar model is hard to understand. But if restricted to providing additional income over a "minimum decency" threshold of, say, 40% of previous earnings, and if better regulation and smaller administrative cost can be introduced, this model would be helpful to the middle and high paid.

Five practical steps could be taken. First, the pension scheme should consist of two tiers – with the lower tier being a defined minimum but adequate income, financed by contributions through weekly individual "working investments" as a percentage of earnings. Adequacy would be defined through the Government's "poverty audit" and the current reviews of the implementation of the 1995 Copenhagen World Summit.

Second, entitlement to the basic state retirement pension should be widened and its link with earnings restored – taking increases back from the rich by taxation if necessary.

Third, an option to join a new scheme, the "Contributory Additional Pension 2000", based on the former SERPS, should be built into new legislation, to reinforce and enlarge the lower tier of pension income to around 40% of average earnings. (The Green Paper envisages that the combined value of the basic state retirement pension and the proposed State Second Pension will reach only 21-26% of average earnings by the middle of the next century).

Fourth, the Stakeholder Pension should be the principal part of the second tier of pension income, enabling people to add substantially to their retirement income.

Fifth, means-testing could then be diminished by treating the basic retirement pension as the government's "minimum income guarantee," and raising it in value, first to catch up a little of what has been lost in the previous 20 years, and second to ensure an annual share in national economic growth.

These amendments could successfully reduce poverty and social inequality, and put welfare reform back on track.

● See Peter Townsend, *New Pensions for Old: The Key to Welfare Reform*, a *Tribune* pamphlet; Barbara Castle et al., *Pensions as of Right for All*, 27 Amwell St, London EC1R 1UN.

Global capitalism knows no boundaries – neither should the international working class

Jeremy Corbyn MP
Islington North

Shameful Shamrock

Richard Hanford reports on "Monkey Prison".

Shamrock Farm in West Sussex is Europe's largest supplier of monkeys to vivisection laboratories. They are sold to clients including Porton Down, Smithkline Beecham and Glaxo Wellcome. An undercover *Observer* investigation established that Shamrock sells to anyone prepared to pay.

A brave insider obtained video evidence of appalling brutality. The Home Office severely criticised it after monkeys were found dead on arrival or destroyed soon afterwards. Shamrock's owners, Bausch and Lomb, makers of Ray–Ban sunglasses, transferred the farm to a charity, but it was a front. It was transferred to a Bausch and Lomb subsidiary, Charles River, specialists in the vivisection supply trade, now being sold to Global Health Care Partners, a unit of New York based bankers DLJ, for $443.

Demonstrations have attracted hundreds, including many local people. Activists are often outnumbered by police. Save the Shamrock Monkeys is supported by Henfield and District Labour Party, but feels let down by the Government. A letter to George Howarth MP produced a statement from the Home Office, concluding "The Home Secretary is satisfied that Shamrock Farm is operating within the terms and conditions of the 1986 Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act and of its Certificate of Designation". When he visited the farm, "the minister was impressed by the quality and standard of animal care and husbandry and the professional and caring approach..."

Activist Angela Rawlings says "The Government should realise animals aren't needed for experiments and take action to stop the suffering,"

Petitions, posters, leaflets and newsletters are available from Save the Shamrock Monkeys, to whom cheque donations should be made payable, at PO Box 3090, Brighton, BN1 3QU. Tel. 07020-936956; email: shamrockmonkeys@yahoo.com. Saturday 9th October: demo at Horsham Park at noon. Sunday 28th November: demo at Shamrock at noon.

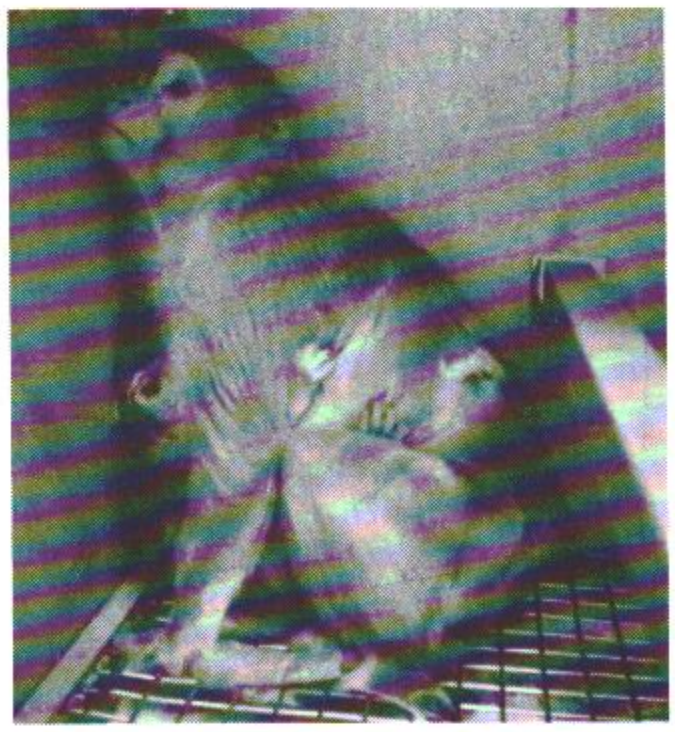


Photo: BUAV

Primate at Shamrock Farm.

The Third Way comes to local government

Dorothy Macedo, Finchley and Golders Green CLP, reports: as New Labour attempts to remould local government in its own image, councillors are fighting back.

At the Labour Campaign for Open Local Government meeting in London on 14th September, Professor John Stewart criticised the impending changes. New legislation offers three models for local councils, without saying what this compulsory reorganisation should achieve. The aim was to replace bureaucracy with streamlined decision making based on community participation: but it is an assertion, not proven, that the new structures will achieve this.

Directly elected mayors are rare in Europe, Professor Stewart explained, where most systems emphasise decision-making – not scrutiny processes. Under our Government proposals, power is exercised in secret, by councillors who gain substantial financial advantage from holding office.

As former Doncaster Councillor, Ron Rose, pointed out, the new structures won't deal with corruption. An Enfield representative put her finger on the problem: local government is facing a new experiment – Genetic Millbanking is here!

John Stewart, Hackney North and Stoke Newington CLP, reports: Hackney's Democracy Convention has made proposals for our new structures:

- all power to be concentrated in the office of the mayor (they insist mayoral candidates won't be vetted!);
- a full-time cabinet of paid councillors from all parties;
- lots of scrutiny from backbenchers, who rotate every year and have no power to block the Mayor's budget.

How do we motivate Party members to campaign for Labour councillors who will be working in cabinets with Tories and Liberals? How is a Mayor on £70,000 per year supposed to relate to people in Hackney (average income £7,500 pa.)?

Watch out: what is being proposed in Hackney will be coming to a Town Hall near you soon.

Don Rocinante reports from Brent: Ten years ago the Conservative Government encouraged schools to opt out of local authority control by letting them jump to the head of the funding queue.

By the early 1990s, all but two of Brent's 15 secondary schools had opted out. Willesden High, which hasn't, was starved of resources. Rolls fell, until the opt-out schools, with their own admissions policies and trigger-happy expulsions policies, bequeathed Willesden High ever larger numbers of children with problems.

Now Ofsted has labelled it a failing school and closure looms.

One solution is to reopen the school under a new name and management. But in order to write off its £0.75m debt, it makes financial sense to Brent's Labour Council to hand it over to someone else. Step forward the Church of England: a safe pair of hands and not a commercial body.

So much for multi-cultural equal opportunities education! Children of new arrivals (now 40% of the pupils) are innocent victims of a Tory schism in education which New Labour leaves unaltered: the logic of Blair's policy of "standards not structures".

Money, money everywhere – nor any drop to spend

Should Labour use the current budget surplus to fund tax cuts or more public spending? Dave Gordon, Bristol West CLP, wonders why we are even having this debate.

Recent analysis of public spending figures has shown that expenditure is likely to drop below 40% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the first time since the Macmillan Government. The combination of unexpectedly robust economic growth and keeping government expenditure to the levels proposed by the last Tory Government has resulted in the present Government being awash with money. They are using it to pay off the national debt for want of any better ideas, but Tony Blair has recently been giving interviews about using this windfall for tax cuts.

Despite repeated opinion poll results, and even the results of their own focus groups, the Party hierarchy has swallowed the Tory myth that the public prefers tax cuts to decent public services. In fact, voters not only say they want more public expenditure: when given the chance, they also vote for it. In a local referendum in Milton Keynes in February voters were given three budget options for their Council Tax:

- 15% Council Tax increase (six times the rate of inflation)
- 9.8% Council Tax increase (four times the rate of inflation)
- 5% Council Tax increase (twice the rate of inflation)

Only 30% voted for the lowest increase, with 70% voting for either the 9.8% or 15% increase. There was a large 44.7% turnout, with 66,647 people voting – greater than the turnout for any of the annual Milton Keynes local council elections of the previous five years.

Tony Blair has committed the Labour Government to ending child poverty "for ever" within a generation. This is simply impossible without increased public expenditure. Gordon Brown's last budget was hailed by the press for its "redistribution by stealth" to the poorest. Yet analysis by economists at Cambridge University showed that among the "poorest" two and half million households, 1% would be better off, 1% would be worse off and 98% would not see any change to their incomes. So much for redistribution by stealth!

What is needed is well known to Gordon Brown, as shown by his stirring conclusion in *Scotland the Real Divide*, a book he edited with Robin Cook in 1983:

"This would mean restoring to the centre of the tax system two basic principles: the first, that those who cannot afford to pay tax should not have to pay it; and the second, that taxation should rise progressively with income. Programmes that merely redistribute poverty from families to single persons, from the old to the young, from the sick to the healthy, are not a solution. What is needed, is a programme of reform that ends the current situation where the top 10% own 80% of our wealth and 30% of income, even after tax. As Tawney remarked, 'What some people call the problem of poverty, others call the problem of riches'."

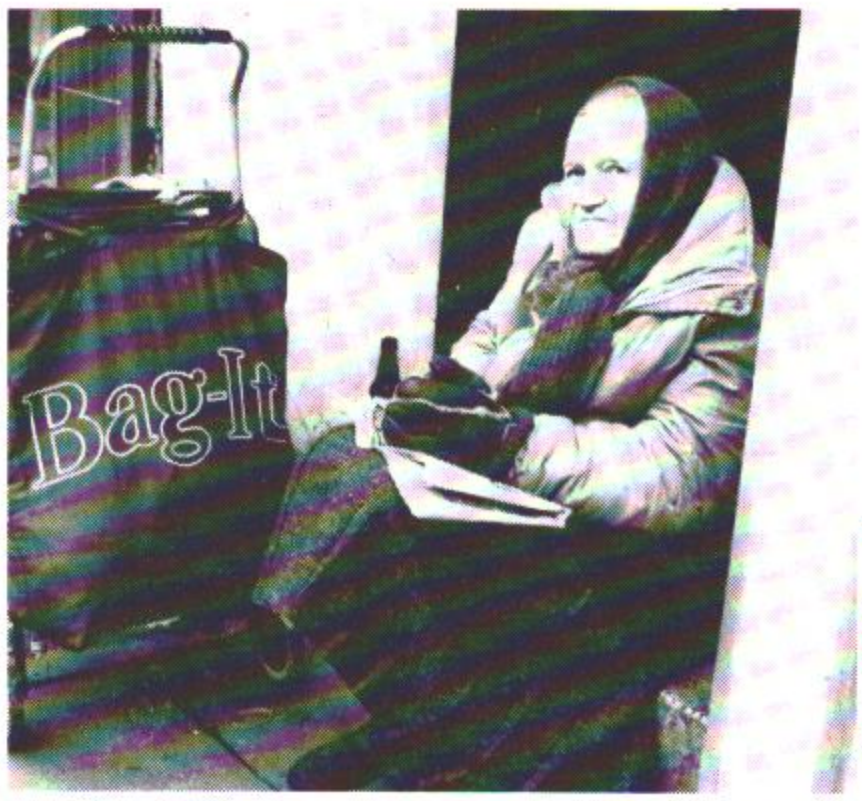


Photo: Phil Maxwell

Joy on the streets at the news that the National Debt is being reduced.

Where has all the money gone?

Mark Donoghue, North East Herts CLP, denies poverty can be tackled with such a Thatcherite approach.

No party wants to make a case for more public spending. They share the assumption that high levels of public spending result in low growth, whereas the era of "high public spending" from 1945 to 1973 saw higher levels of growth than the last 20 years. The refusal of governments to spend money on new hospitals and schools as a result of the Maastricht criteria has helped businesses to make a profit out of the NHS and other state services.

The declining levels of public spending from 1979 have had terrible consequences. The poorest people have suffered most and the number of people in poverty nearly trebled to over 14 million by the mid-1990s. Tax cuts for the rich have resulted in one of the largest transfers of wealth from poor to rich in the developed world.

The fact that Labour is seriously considering new cuts in direct taxation is repugnant to many. Each 1p cut in tax means £2.8 billion less to spend. Martin Barnes, the Director of Child Poverty Action Group has said, "It is difficult to see how cutting income tax is compatible with reducing inequality and ending child poverty."

In fact poverty is set to rise unless social security levels are uprated. The money is there: the National Insurance fund is forecast to have a surplus of £5.9 billion over the level recommended by the Government Actuary. This is enough to re-establish the link between earnings and pensions for years, according to the National Pensioners Convention.

Love for sale:

How New Labour woos big business

Investigative reporter, Gregory Palast, blew the whistle on Derek Draper in the "cash for access" scandal earlier this year. But that was only the start of the story Greg uncovered.

"I am very excited," lobbyist Derek Draper told the US businessman, speaking in strict confidence. "*Very* excited."

What had excited the boyish Government affairs consultant?

"Gordon Brown put the cap on total spending at 2.75%, not 2.5%, like everyone expected! And we said so!"

The businessman praised Draper's forecasting abilities, but the former aide to Peter Mandelson was modest.

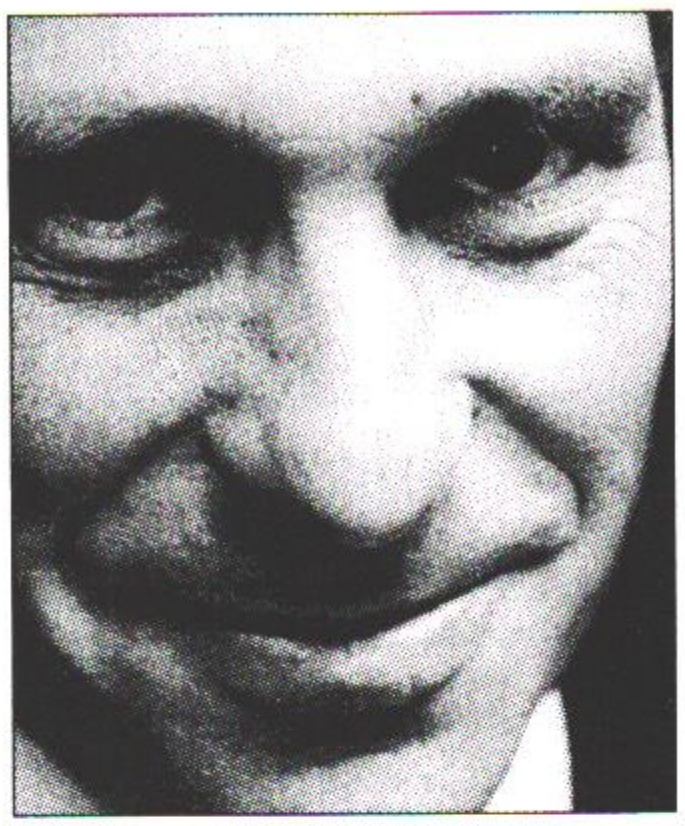
"No, I'm afraid it's inside information."

A week earlier, he had passed on the valuable information to his American client, investment banking giant Salomon Brothers.

A Casbah in confidences

I know about this June 1998 conversation because I was the American "businessman" – actually an undercover reporter for the *Observer*. When a handful of the conversations I taped hit the headlines, all hell broke loose. Following the "Lobbygate" revelations, solemn editorials excoriated the lad lobbyists and their £100 lunches with Downing Street Policy Unit experts. Draper lost his job, contemplated suicide, but decided instead to host a radio talk show. The nation yawned, rolled over and returned to its political slumber.

No one's dreams seemed troubled by the unasked question: If Draper received confidential information, who in government gave it to him? Details of the Treasury's budget, tax proposals, terms of the energy white paper and more all ended up in the hands of selected British



and American corporate chiefs, and not only Draper's clients. The hot info ("worth a fortune in market terms" one lobbyist told me) wasn't filched off minister's desks nor snatched from unguarded file cabinets. It was handed to the lobbyists, virtually pushed on them for discreet delivery to selected corporate clientele.

Why? Jack Straw's former aide, super-lobbyist Ben Lucas explained, "This Government likes to do deals."

What deals? Lucas and his partners, tutoring their new American client in the ways of New Labour, gave this example. The Government was concerned that their client, Rupert Murdoch's News International, would through their tabloids savage the proposed Competition Bill. Downing Street contacted these lobbyists, all former Party functionaries, to pass a message to the Murdoch group that quiescent coverage of the Competition Bill would be rewarded by taking care of News International's wishes in the upcoming union recognition bill. The message to muzzle journalists was not, said Lucas, "an easy one in their culture." But still, the gentlemen of Downing Street and Wapping were able to conduct business.

The result was an adjustment to the *Fairness at Work* White Paper. Mr Blair kept his election pledge to grant unions recognition based on a majority vote of workers, though adding a crippling "but only." The majority vote would rule but only if that majority equals 40% of the workforce. It's a sly little change, but one that can kill off union organising with exhausting battles over definition of workforce.

Lobby in reverse

Something strange was going on here, and it wasn't the tawdry little fix, though I did find swapping press-control for union-busting legislation quite imaginative. What caught my ear was that the Government approached the lobbyists and not the other way around. Mark Swedlund, my confederate in these meetings (and real American businessman) dubbed this, "Reverse Lobbying." Traditionally, lobbyists hector, cajole or bully their way into government corridors. But New Labour had reformed the ways of the influence marketplace. Now Government made the first flirtatious overtures, offering up favours of the state to selected corporate chiefs.

As GJW lobbyist and former Gordon Brown aide Karl Milner said after faxing me confidential parliamentary documents regarding electricity policy:

"We have many friends in Government. They like to run things past to get our view, to let them know if they have anything to be worried about, maybe suggest some changes."

The Government's aim is to obtain backdoor feedback, buy assent or grant secretive veto authority over laws or proposals for business interests. The lobbyists are merely safe conduits for quietly advertising the policies on offer. But the

goodies are not available to unions, consumer groups or others, even if they fork over fees to connected lobbyists.. As Jonny Mendelsohn, Blair's liaison to business during the election campaign explained,

"Labour's super-majority in Parliament means the only counterveiling force is media and the business community. So when the economy turns soft, as it naturally must, we will make certain they stay with us."

What about the public's concerns? Mendelsohn shrugged. "If we have business and media, the people will come along."

Mendelsohn and his partners Lucas and Neil Lawson (their firm is known as LLM) were especially proud of having helped pull retailer Tesco into the Labour column. Some time around November 1997, LLM was tipped off that pressure from environmental groups would force the new Government to include a call for a car parks tax in its Transport White Paper. The early insider information allowed LLM "to plot as it were" to head off the tax. First, LLM "re-positioned" Tesco as a Labour-identified company by pushing the retailer to give £11 million to Peter Mandelson's Millennium Dome project. (The payment was announced before the tax was proposed, says the Government, but three sources say otherwise.)

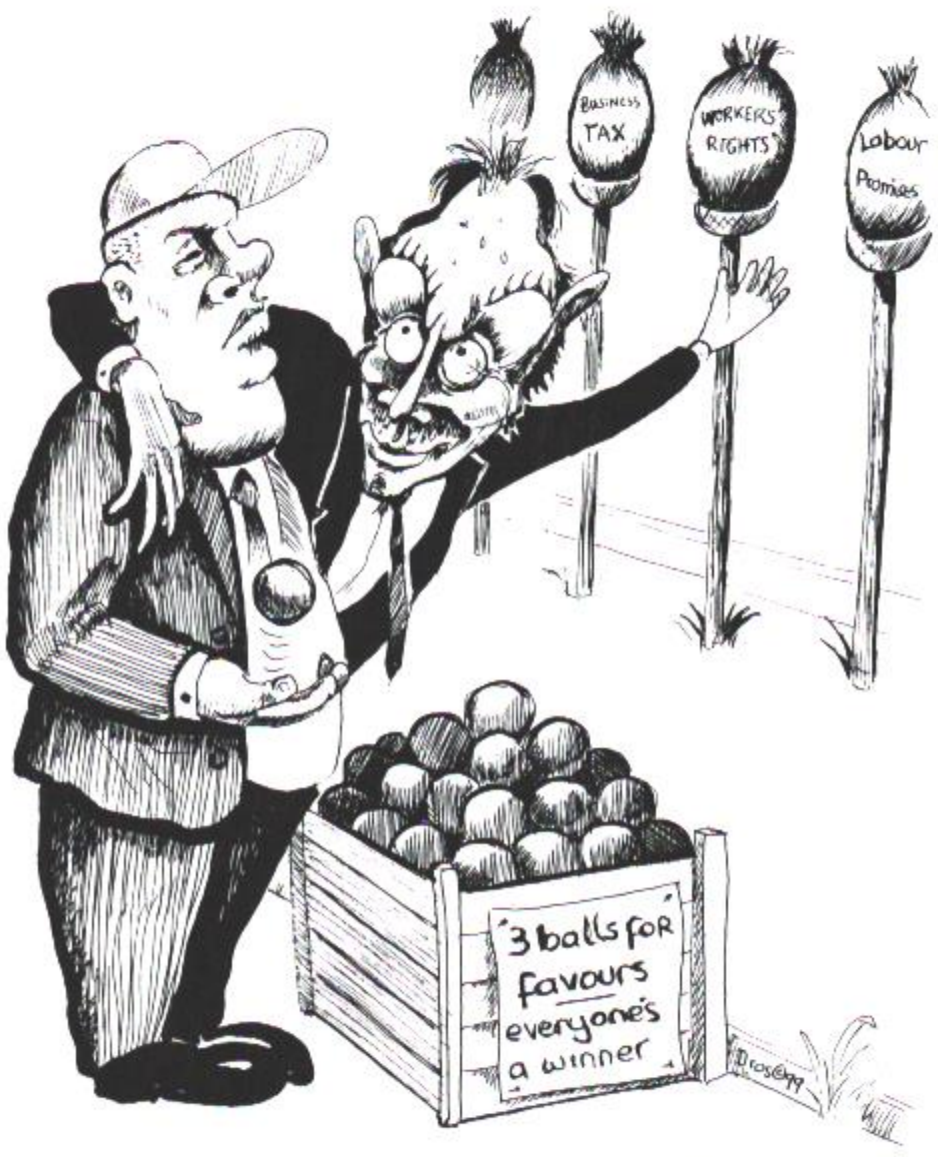
John Prescott's office invited a Tesco executive on to the Transport White Paper Task Force. In June of last year, the task force completed its work, a draft paper including a car parks tax. In the early official meetings, Tesco raised no objection to the tax though it could cost the company up to £40 million per year.

Then, after the task force dispersed, a back door opened at Downing Street and Tesco was waved in. The White Paper's June 23rd release date was mysteriously postponed. Official task force members, such as the public interest group Transport 2000, had no idea that the delay was used to permit LLM, during the week of June 20th, literally to re-draft the Government's document to insert a list of deductions from the tax, designed especially for Tesco.

The White Paper was released in late July with the Tesco fix quietly patched in without notice to, or discussion with, the task force. But the task force had done its job, unwittingly providing a fiction of open process to cover the secretive horse-trading engineered by Downing Street policy advisors.

Gestures of affection

Throughout the undercover investigation, I was fascinated by the Government's succumbing not so much to offers of cash for persons or party (though there was no shortage of that), but the symbolic gestures of industry affection for New Labour. There was Tesco's ponying up for the Dome and the stranger claim by LLM about a favour requested by Gordon Brown's office.



According to the lobbyists, LLM was asked to arrange for their client, the big accounting firm KPMG, to hold a banquet of City honchos with Mr Brown where, for the media's attention, they heaped praise upon the Chancellor and his first budget. The public was unaware that the beatification of Brown by the nation's financial elite, worth its weight in gold in the realm of New Labour, was instigated by Brown's own office.

It was after performing this favour (one of many for Brown and Jack Straw, LLM claimed) that LLM clients were favored with confidential information from the Exchequer. Of course, the timing of all these events, assuming they occurred as told, could be just coincidental. But simple minds might conclude that public policies were bent, special access granted, and inside information parcelled out to purchase the loyalty of the nation's businessmen.

And note that the businessmen's nation was not always Britain. Government's greatest policy contortions were performed for the benefit of American industrialists. One US power company stormed into London demanding their UK lobbyists arrange a meeting with Blair advisor Geoff Norris. (Interestingly, the Chairman of the US corporation could not identify "Tony Blair", which may evidence his deep understanding of the true ways of government.) But the British lobby firm turned down the demand as an improper intrusion into what they saw as a quasi-judicial deliberation regarding the moratorium on building new gas-fired power plants.

"Appalling" one lobbyist called the request.

But the Government itself was not so appalled. After some unsubtle calls from the Clinton Administration, the Americans got more than a meeting. The Government reversed Labour Party policies designed to save jobs in the coal industry.

The alternative to democracy

What if Jonny Mendelsohn is wrong? What if, when the New Labour/Old Money Project yanks the chain, the people don't just "come along." What if they don't come at all, staying away in droves, as in the European Parliamentary elections. Tony Blair, once the monkey-see monkey-do imitator of Bill Clinton, fails to study the Comeback Kid's feint to the left. In 1993, Clinton advertised the Democratic Party as the party of big business. In 1994, the Democratic core, not welcome in their own party, forgot to vote, and Clinton's candidates were slaughtered in low turnout Congressional races. In 1998, after a contrite President began to give unions, minorities and progressive forces a place at the policy table, it was the party's old guard which saved him from impeachment.

By contrast, the Blair Business Project is fuelled by smug hubris, believers in their own invincibility. The jury is still out whether this alternative to democracy can maintain its hold on power.

● Investigative reporter Palast writes a fortnightly column, "Inside Corporate America", for the *Observer*. With Antony Barnett, Palast wrote the award winning *Observer* exposé, "Cash for Access" – Lobbygate.

Gregory.palast@guardian.co.uk

New Labour finds new paymasters

Graham Copp reveals the recent changes in Party funding.

The run-up to the 1999 Conference has seen the ignition of a new controversy over the funding of the Labour Party. Led by Lord Levy's "High Value" fund-raising unit, the Millbank Tendency has sought to cosy up to big business and further marginalise the trade unions, attracting massive donations from the rich.

Donors to the Labour Party extend far beyond the pop music and media world – such as Mick Hucknall and Alan McGee – to those who represent a genuine conflict of interest. The donation from former SDP bankroller, Lord Sainsbury, has been foremost in the media furore that has built up, but perhaps more sinister still is the sponsorship of the US arms company, Raytheon. This corporation has Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and, of course, Indonesia on its customer list; in addition, it has a history of union busting and asset stripping, and as a US company its sponsorship breaks Party guidelines.

The question of Labour Party funding runs to the heart of what is happening to the Labour Party. We must see this as an attempt to distance the Party leadership from two groups: its members and the trade unions. It would be naïve to believe that these donations have been made without strings attached; he who pays the piper calls the tune. It is all very well to talk of partnership but the interests of labour and capital are fundamentally distinct. These donations are investments which will push the Labour leadership even further in the direction of business.

Of course, these donations may flow while the Party is doing well and is in government, but when it gets tough, the donors may not prove so generous. The first signs of trade unions alienated from Labour are already apparent, as Ken Cameron of the FBU showed at the TUC. The trade unions and ordinary Party members have been far more reliable supporters than big business and they are isolated at the Party's peril.

The GM food scandal is a case in point. Science minister Lord Sainsbury has shares in a food-marketing group with an interest in GM food development. This, coupled with the 1997 sponsorship from Novartis Pharmaceuticals (also a player in the GM stakes) and recent sponsorship from Sainsbury, Tesco, Somerfield and Safeway supermarkets, leads one to wonder whether these companies, with so much to lose should GM not take off, aren't influencing Government food policy.

LLB's own Liz Davies has joined the debate in her submission to the current review on Labour Party financing. In it Liz points out that "Most corporate institutions are not known for their philanthropic spirit. The general assumption, from the press, the public and Party members, is that corporate donations to or sponsorship of the Party is intended to produce some benefit for the corporation involved."

At the moment the Party discloses donations over £5,000 but not the actual amounts. As Liz points out, "...There is a difference between £5,000 and £50,000 or £100,000 or more, and the Party will remain suspicious of partial disclosure that appears to evade those differences in scale."

The current ethical criteria also leave much to be desired. Foreign sourced donations are unacceptable. Despite this, donations or sponsorship have been received from Raytheon, Enron (a subsidiary of a US power company) and Novartis Pharmaceuticals (associated with the Swiss company Novartis). In addition to this, the Labour Party may refuse donations from companies whose activities are inconsistent with the principles of the Labour Party. What this actually means is left to the Finance Sub-Committee of the NEC.

The Party needs a clearer set of guidelines. First, full disclosure of the size of donations; second, clear indication of the sort of companies that are unacceptable as donors. These should include, for example, arms companies. Finally we must not accept donations where there is a perceived conflict of interest. The appearance of corruption was one of the causes of the Tories' downfall. We can't let the same happen to us.

Liz Davies
Christine Shawcroft

send greetings to Conference delegates

Support the Centre Left Grassroots candidates for the National Policy Forum elections

Sutton and District Socialist Campaign Group

Conference Greetings Comrades

– Say No to the euro –

LLB will soon be recruiting staff with writing, editorial and organising skills. We pay badly, but the rewards are inestimable. All posts require commitment to *LLB*'s independent voice and ability to work with our many volunteers. Please send your contact details to 17 Birchmore Walk, London N5 2TJ or email: 101635.3364@compuserve.com and we will send you job descriptions, person specifications and details of how to apply.

LLB AGM
Saturday 27th November
11am - 5pm
Kingsway College
Sidmouth Street, London WC1
Speakers include:
Tony Benn, Liz Davies,
Christine Shawcroft
Geoff Martin, Ann Black
Suresh Grover

Ken consensus confounds spin doctors

Ken Livingstone invites us all to join him on the campaign trail for the Mayoral elections in London.

This year's Labour Party Conference fringe guide indicates that there are plenty of people who want to debate the issues around the London mayoralty. From the Fabians to the GMB London Region, everyone can see the importance of Labour's last major electoral test before the general election. The fact that so many of those meetings are debates between Labour's candidates for mayor – including me – shows that last year's speculation that I would be ruled out of the contest has been overtaken by real politics.

At the beginning of September I launched my campaign for the Labour nomination with a dedicated website (www.livingstoneforlondon.org.uk), a billboard poster with the slogan "Vote London", and a six point campaign card designed to ensure a quick guide to my policy priorities:

- Four year fares freeze; conductors back on the buses, fully enforced bus lanes
- No tube sell off; New York-style bonds issue to raise investment on the underground
- An open government Mayor via www.london–mayor.com website; internet access for all Londoners
- Make the Met Police "London's finest" – root out the corrupt and racist minority
- Firm targets to cut air, water and noise pollution for a clean, green London
- Mayor's taskforce to tackle inner city arc of poverty

Until the launch of Livingstone for London my organised campaigning was devoted to the issue of Labour's selection process. In the teeth of regular and damaging publicity in the press that I would be blocked, it was necessary to mobilise all the democratic opinion in the London Labour Party to demonstrate that there was no support for my exclusion. By the end of the summer, even David Aaronovitch in the *Independent* was arguing that I should not be blocked: "No candidate – however brilliant – who is selected by Labour in a ballot that excludes Livingstone, will be regarded as legitimate." Good old David wasn't actually backing me ("the best and only answer is to allow Livingstone to participate in the primaries, and then to trust Labour voters not to vote for him") but his basic premise was correct.

When everyone from Michael Foot to David Aaronovitch, Nick Cohen to Derek Draper, and every other Labour mayoral candidate, are all saying that there is no case for excluding me, then you have to conclude that there is a consensus.The off the record briefings haven't gone away but their main purpose appears to be persuade the media that I should not be taken seriously, with the longer term objective of weakening my candidacy within the London Labour Party.

In fact, the hard political facts indicate that my candidacy is the one that can best unite Londoners and Labour Party members.

First, I have remained ahead in the polls for months now. An ICM poll in May 1998 found that 30 per cent wanted me for mayor, against 29 per cent for Richard Branson. When Branson was removed from the poll and voters were offered a range of Labour candidates to choose from, the poll found that 41 per cent backed me against 22 per cent for Glenda Jackson and 13 per cent for Trevor Phillips. Among Labour voters my support rose to 50 per cent to Glenda's 24 per cent and Trevor's ten per cent

The very latest poll now suggests that my lead has increased: A MORI poll found Archer stuck at 23 per cent with my candidacy way ahead at 40 per cent.



Photo: Paul Mattsson

Ken Livingstone surveys the pensioners' rally (see p4).

MORI also found that if I were not the Labour candidate, Archer's support would increase to 31 per cent against 28 per cent for Glenda Jackson.

Second, my support in the polls is because the issues that I am campaigning on are finding a resonance with the public. In particular, my candidacy is the one most associated in Londoners' minds with the issues of public transport.

Of all the main parties, only Labour is capable of putting together the radical mix of policies that Londoners want to see. On breaking the transport gridlock, investing in the Underground, reforming the Metropolitan police, modernising our economy, opening up London government and tackling social exclusion, Labour in London is poised to be at the forefront of the devolution agenda.

- If you want to be part of the campaign then visit my website, or write to me c/o PO Box 20052, London NW2 5ZH. I look forward to seeing you on the campaign trail!

Socialist Greetings to all Labour Party Conference delegates

John Cryer MP

Hornchurch

Voting didn't change much, but they still abolished it

New NEC member Christine Shawcroft says Conference is a non-event.

Annual Conference delegates are getting their suitcases down from the top of the wardrobe totally underwhelmed with excitement. Once eagerly fought for, Conference delegateships are now awarded to anyone who can be bothered to ask for a week off work. The Conference papers are a great cure for insommnia. With apologies to Barbara Castle and the Duke of Wellington, I don't know what effect New Labour has on the country but they're boring Party members to death.

When *Partnership in Power* was open for "consultation", Lord Sawyer came to what was then the London Regional Executive, promising a new dawn of democratic accountabilty. There would be an end to unamendable NEC reports you had to vote for on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. We would make policy free from the combative set piece debates at Conference.

Not all of this was unadulterated bunkum – freedom from Conference debates is certainly true. New Labour once thought it important that the trade union block vote at Conference should be reduced. Now the large unions have control of the four issues that are debated. The average constituency has more chance of winning the Lottery than getting a resolution composited and onto Conference floor.

But Sawyer surely had his tongue in his cheek when promising an end to unamendable NEC papers. The proposals were presented as unamendable Policy Papers, which made me a little suspicious. Two years on, the promises of minority reports and voting have disappeared. No minority amendments were agreed at the last National Policy Forum, so this year we are faced with... unamendable NEC Policy Papers. Some people voted for *Partnership in Power* in 1997 believing all the guff about better, more inclusive ways to make policy. This year's non-event must be a bitter disappointment to them.

We must campaign for more contemporary resolution topics to be taken – four for the unions and four from the constituencies. We must demand that the National Policy Forum does not sift out amendments sent in by affiliates in good faith. And we have to demand votes at Conference. There are some good things in the Policy Papers that we wouldn't want to vote against – but voting for them means giving a seal of approval to all sorts of things we are against. We need support for reference back of the Policy Forum Reports until key demands from the Durham National Policy Forum are put to Conference for voting.

Adapt or die!

Ann Black, representing South East CLPs on the National Policy Forum, reviews the policy-making process two years on.

Many members feel that old ways of making policy gave them little real power, but at least they understood them, unlike the policy forum process.

Simple improvements could involve members in developing policies: local policy forums with voting; participants approving what is submitted in their names; publication of comments and resolutions. A National Policy Forum web site would give access to much material at little cost. Forum representatives should have CLP secretaries' addresses, and vice versa. A directory of postal and email addresses and telephone numbers should be compiled. Public attendance registers would let members know who turns up. Policy commissions should talk to the rest of the Forum.

Forum members should receive papers, including amendments to final-year documents and ministerial opinions, in time to consult their constituents, and outcomes should be published. Regional offices should circulate reports from representatives in addition to the Authorised Version. The Forum needs reminding of its duty to reflect mainstream currents in options for Conference and constituencies should be able to submit Conference amendments to final year documents.

The new system offers better ways of debating complex issues, extending participation beyond General Committees to individuals and branches. Many who embraced it with enthusiasm, devoting hours to responding to draft documents, imagined that views would be collated and the majority would prevail. Instead, in a number of key areas, the National Policy Forum has rejected them out of hand. The system could be reformed, but won't be and specific proposals will soon be out of date. Next year the Forum will complete Labour's platform for 2001. No minority reports were allowed this time, and they certainly won't be permitted at the Conference launching the general election campaign. After that, our role is unclear.



Ann Black

Technological development offers radical opportunities. September's *Action Brief* talks of new membership systems, including direct access for CLPs. Other reports suggest email addresses for all members, and targeted mailings to different interest groups. The aim may be greater central control, but the same technology can create a Democracy Wall for the many, not the few. We should be using it now, to talk across boundaries, to share experience, and to build the new consensus.

● Ann Black is co-chair of Labour Reform.

Evans above!

Richard Hanford interviews David Evans, North West Regional organiser and fellow Chester City fan, about his plans to restructure the Labour Party.

RH: Why has your document, *The New Labour Party – a vision for organisational modernisation,* taken a year to emerge?

DE: Margaret McDonagh asked me to write down ideas I've had for years. It was leaked after the Euro elections.

RH: Aren't you simply trying to stamp out General Committee activists opposed to the "Third Way"?

DE: No genuine Labour Party people have anything to fear from the proposed changes. GC delegates would have more power if they represented the views of large numbers of members and supporters.

RH: You claim "there is a widespread recognition that the Party's structure is flawed". Where's the evidence?

DE: That's based on 22 years of experience as a Labour Party activist – an almost universal experience of dismal, unfocussed, fractious local organisation. The structure is not totally to blame, but if we were setting up the Labour Party now would we design it as it is?

RH: "The whole Party is focused inwards and upwards rather than downwards and outwards", you wrote, but isn't "upwards" preferable?

DE: There's a big role for influence upwards – no-one would claim otherwise. But there is an insufficiently deep foundation to base it on. Dorothy Macedo's absurd assertion that her branch of Finchley and Golders Green CLP can have its own foreign policy is an example of this. I thought Party policy and action undertaken by a Labour government was agreed or ratified by Party conference.

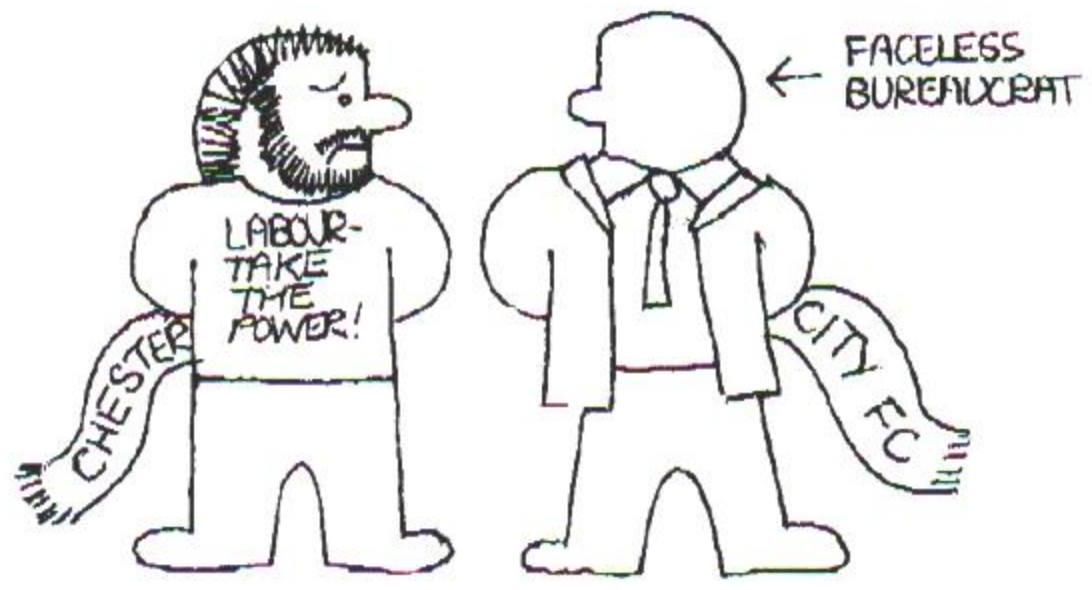
RH: I don't recall handing responsibility for interest rates over to the Bank of England or cutting lone parent benefits being ratified by conference! "The Party ... needs to recognise diversity", you wrote – why the witch hunts then?

DE: Diversity is fine and healthy. Subverting the organisation from within is not.

RH: You wrote "...the natural constituency for the Party should become the community itself. The Party must become 'none other than the political extension of the British people as a whole'." Why? The interests of the exploiters and exploited will remain mutually exclusive.

DE: I don't say the Party should become the community – the community should become our constituency by building into our structure a much better relationship between our voters and the Party.

RH: The Policy Forum is central to your proposed "radical overhaul". Isn't this a pointless diversion designed to filter, frustrate or deter policy input?



DE: Your opinion, not mine.

RH: You would provide "a diverse range of career paths". Is this a priority, paving the way for careerists?

DE: By career, I mean find out what our members' expectations and desires are from their relationship with the Party and seek to meet them.

RH: You say "the vast majority of progress ... in our local performance has been carried through in spite of the local Party machine rather than through it." Isn't this nonsense?

DE: Not nonsense, it's the truth. In the general election, a whole new generation (young and old in case you accuse me of ageism) helped with the campaign. We couldn't retain their interest afterwards – our fault, not theirs. Almost everything that happens in the Party is through the informal structures rather than the formal ones.

RH: You wrote that "a beneficial side effect (is to) ... empower modernising forces within the Party and marginalise 'Old Labour'." Is this a side effect or the central aim?

DE: You ignore the positive impact on fighting the real enemy – the Tories. It's essential to marginalise Old Labour – every party not welcoming to new members, that's exclusive, that thinks it has its own foreign policy, that doesn't value and respect diversity.

RH: "The General Committee should be abolished as soon as practically possible." Why the rush?

DE: GCs are symbolic of the anachronistic structure, with no democratic, administrative, political or organisational function that could not be done better.

RH: "The Party should be able and willing to conduct its business in public rather than as now where it operates like a secret sect." So Millbank Tendency control freaks and spin doctors will "conduct their business in public"?

DE: Wherever possible, yes.

RH: "Representative democracy should as far as possible be abolished in the Party. All members are equal, so there is no need for general committees." So there's no need for Councils or Parliament then?

DE: I am not proposing the abolition of democratic structures, just the discredited version we have.

RH: You describe activists as salespeople and the electorate as consumers. Who are the producers?

DE: Of course our activists (including me) sell our policies but are also involved in defining them.

RH: You claim that "while our members have confidence in the Government, they do not have ... confidence in ... their local Party." On what evidence is this based?

DE: Opinion polls ... anecdotal evidence ... many local parties find an anachronistic structure, that requires a minimum of 50 people simply to fill offices before anything creative is done, too heavy a burden. Radical overhaul of that structure would liberate them.

New Labour betrays black people

Atma Singh, Secretary
Labour Black Representation Committee

The issue of equitable black representation is testing New Labour rhetoric. Not one black person has been elected to the Scottish and Welsh Assembly. In last year's NEC elections, not one black person even stood in the contest. Recently in Birmingham, the Labour Party lost the legal case that it was not subject to the Race Relations Act over selections at an Employment Appeals Tribunal, taken out by Raghip Ahsan, a popular Birmingham Councillor who was deselected in favour of a white man. Having only one black person, Gurcharan Singh, selected in a winnable Greater London Assembly seat (Ealing and Hillingdon), is the final straw.

26% of London's population is black. No wonder then that Nick Raynsford MP, the Minister for London, said that if the new Assembly was not representative of the capital's cultural diversity, it would be a failure.

The procedure has failed to produce equitable black representation due to vetting at the application stage. Prominent black people such as Lee Jasper, Chair of Operation Black Vote and director of the black civil rights organisation, the 1990 Trust, Councillor Kumar Murshid, Chair of the National Assembly Against Racism and prominent in the defeat of the far right BNP in Tower Hamlets and rallying the community after the Brick Lane bombing, Peter Herbert QC, Chair of the Society of Black Lawyers, Raj Jethwa, GLLP Ethnic Minorities Officer and GMB Youth Officer, Claudia Webbe, Director of Westminster REC and National Black Alliance, and many others were barred for no apparent reason. In an Open Letter to Tony Blair, the Labour Black Representation Committee said: "The exclusion of such a high calibre of black people, who have a record in fighting racism, will seriously damage the credibility of the selection process and the standing of the Labour Party in London."



Photo: Leesa Herbert

Labour's young hopefuls, 1987.

The result of these exclusions was a panel list with only 16% black people, only 2% black women, only 5% African Caribbean. This translated into the GLA constituency selection results with only two black people selected – Gurcharan Singh and Jagdish Sharma – no African Caribbean candidates, no black women.

The Labour Black Representation Committee is calling for nominations to be re-opened for the top-up places, for allowing candidates who were unfairly barred to put themselves forward again and for having a members' ballot for the top-up seats with black people guaranteed the top two places – to rescue this process from being translated into electoral disaster.

Middle-aged Blairites party alone

Matthew Willgress, Peterborough CLP reports: John Prescott recently came to Peterborough for a meeting. He sounded quite the lefty, admiring Nye Bevan and rueing the lack of young people's involvement inside the Labour Party. However, he didn't draw the conclusion that this was due to New Labour policies.

He assumed young people are uninterested in politics, so Labour must recruit them in the same way that they might be recruited to a social club. Sounding like several speakers to the recent Labour Women's Conference, the Deputy PM suggested that one answer was more quizzes and social evenings. I can think of nothing worse than a night out with middle-aged Blairites, but Prescott was missing the point. Labour's active youth organisation was closed down and Young Labour was launched with no base or democratic structures. Its annual conference is a mixture of standing ovations to cabinet ministers and workshops with no votes, where real issues are never discussed.

Why don't the Blairites trust young people to vote on political issues? It's because young people have this annoying habit of thinking for themselves: they oppose mass poverty, inequality and wars against innocent peoples. The *New Statesman* recently reported that young people cared passionately about racism, the environment and poverty but didn't link them with party politics. That's because the leaders of the mainstream parties represent roughly the same philosophy. None proposes a decent minimum wage for all ages, they all support racist asylum measures while peddling myths about "humanitarian" wars, and are for privatisation and destroying universal welfare.

So how do we change the situation? From below: activists must attempt to build a vibrant youth organisation to link struggles on these issues and create an alternative vision of society.

Direct debits for access!

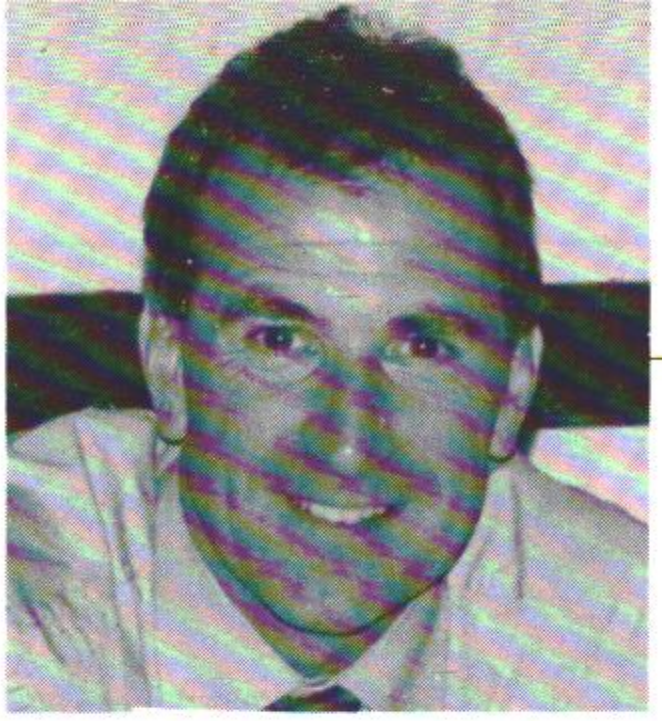
How is the Labour Party improving access to selection procedures for all sections of the community? The answer lies nestling in the small print of the rule changes at Annual Conference. The full NEC considered and agreed a draft rule change that public representatives should pay their membership subs by an appropriate method. By the time it reached the Conference papers, the amendment stated that this had to be direct debit.

The explanation given is that this will smooth selection procedures by making sure memberships of prospective candidates can be checked easily. So if you want to be a councillor, or an MP, you know what first step to take: get a bank account!

Proposed rule change

To be and remain eligible for membership, each individual member must:

(d) on becoming elected as a public representative (ie., member of Westminster, Scottish or European Parliament, GLA, Welsh Assembly or local government body) pay their membership subscription by direct debit.



THE **ALAN SIMPSON** COLUMN

An awful lot of shudders will have run down spines when Labour supporters heard Tony Blair set off in pursuit of a "moral manifesto for the 21st century". Many people retain vivid images of the descent into shambles of John Major's "Back to Basics" campaign. Yet again we see the starting point being the morality of the individual, not the system they live within.

We have moved on from lone parents in general to the specific target of teenage pregnancies. Britain's record of having the highest level of teenage pregnancies in Europe is certainly one to be concerned about, but it is a perilous arena in which to moralise. Young people are bombarded by advertising and magazine images of active sexuality. Yet we retreat from an equally assertive health education programme which equips children to understand their personal worth along with their sexuality, rather than being duped into an acceptance that they are one and the same. To do so would commit us to short term public spending to avoid long term social cost. And the trouble with this is that it would take New Labour's fundamentalists into a spending commitment rather than just a moral one.

This was the dilemma Major got himself into. He wanted a moral society without a moral economy: a crusade against the poor but not against poverty. His fate should offer a cautionary warning to Labour. Social reform is a laudable objective, but cannot be separated from wealth redistribution and economic security. To do so reduces the "manifesto" to reactionary cant. No government in its right mind can cast itself in the guise of the nation's contraceptive police force. Even the most wild eyed of the Millbank Mujahadeen cannot believe the message can be sold simply on the basis of the Prime Minister's image and exhortations. A beaming poster smile proclaiming "Buy me and stop one" will not make the slightest impact on teenage pregnancies, parental responsibility or a healthy society. All of these require a more practical starting point.

'Social reform is a laudable objective, but cannot be separated from wealth redistribution and economic security. To do so reduces the "manifesto" to reactionary cant.'

Four million children in Britain are currently growing up in poverty. The housing they live in often extracts disproportionate costs from family income just to keep warm. The schools they attend have insufficient budgets to redress the inequalities they bring in with them. And the areas they grow up in are often the deep pockets of urban despair that even New Deal finds impossible to penetrate. It is a picture that demands far more than moralising.

The Treasury has recently anticipated two years of vigorous economic growth. It coincides with the lowest unemployment figures since Labour was last in office and record low inflation. Sadly, it also coincides with figures depicting this Labour Government as spending a smaller proportion of GDP on public services than any government since Harold Macmillan's. Public spending between 1997 and 2001 is set to be 39.4% of GDP. It takes some swallowing that this is 3% less than the Major years... and 5% less than Thatcher! It is here that a Labour analysis of the moral economy should begin.

During their years of governance, the Tories enjoyed an entirely promiscuous and exploitative relationship with British society. Public services were seen as a dirty activity, likely to make you blind. Many were shoved out against the back wall to be rogered by privatisation and the PFI. People in them, who had given their working lives to these services (or who were dependent on the support they offered) were abandoned as the bastard children which a free market system no longer wanted. Means testing and moralising replaced the inclusive commitments of full employment and a universal welfare state that the post–war consensus was built upon.

It is the mindset of this Thatcherite legacy that Labour has yet to break free of. We face a choice between big picture morality and small picture morality. If we are to avoid the trap of blaming the individual for the problems of society, then poverty, ignorance and inequality are the problem... and redistribution and direct investment are the best means of tackling it. If we can't do this when the economy is set to grow, where will we find the moral courage to do so when it's not?

Stop deals in death – th

LLB interviewed Jeremy Corbyn MP who spent a week in East Timor as an official UN observer during the referendum on independence. The visit was organised by the all-party Parliamentary Human Rights Group.

***LLB*: What did you see and learn in East Timor?**

JC: East Timor is an incredibly beautiful island, and a place of great sadness, haunted by the two hundred thousand people killed since the Indonesian invasion of 1975. The referendum itself was well prepared and efficiently administered. My impression was that the militia were engaged in a long-running, systematic effort to damage the electoral process and sabotage the efforts of UN staff and local people. They didn't succeed in damaging the registration process, although it took much longer than necessary. On voting day itself there was a significant amount of intimidation, some of which we witnessed.

Nobody expected the situation to deteriorate with such rapidity, but certainly there was tremendous tension in the air. It was palpable as we walked around Dili. My feelings are very mixed about much of what I saw there. On the one hand, I fear for the safety of the people who hosted our visit, drove us around and allowed us to stay in their homes. On the other hand I was overwhelmed by the absolute determination of people to ensure that their votes were registered – over 500 were waiting outside one polling station at 5:30 in the morning, an hour before polling began.

At another polling station I visited, some people had walked for many hours in order to cast their votes. They were then prevented from leaving the polling station by the presence of a militia group. Three of us – an American observer, a member of the Scottish Parliament, and myself – then accompanied them on a four mile trek back to their village in order to protect them, because at that stage the militia were not attacking foreign observers. When we got back to their village, some of the homes were still burning from an arson attack staged by the militia the previous night. Interestingly, the houses were within sight of an Indonesian army post.

When we arrived at another polling station, officials were only just reopening following gun fire on the crowd queuing to vote and on the staff within the polling station. The gun fire came from behind an Indonesian police post; the police claimed they hadn't noticed the militia were there. The militia were only removed from the area when UN civilian police arrived. That sort of incident happened all day long in various places. But the absolute determination of people to vote was demonstrated by a 96% turnout and an 80% vote in favour of independence.

Before we went to East Timor, having had enormous difficulty in getting our visas agreed by Indonesian authorities, Ann Clwyd, Alice Mahon and I stopped overnight in Jakarta and had a one and a half hour meeting with Xanana Guzmao at his home, where he was held under house arrest. Guzmao is the leader of the CNRT (the Council of National Resistance of Timor). He was subsequently released, but ended up seeking sanctuary in the British embassy because his life was under threat from Indonesian forces. Guzmao was very impressive both in his magnanimity towards people who have murdered so many in Timor and in his absolute determination to see the whole process through.



Jeremy Corbyn met Xanana Guzmao, leader of the Council of National Resistance of Timor.

He welcomed the presence of foreign observers and hoped that independence – first offered by Portugal in 1974 – would at last become a reality in the near future.

Meeting people within Timor itself, one was conscious of the ghosts of the past. Everywhere there are cemeteries and other signs of loss of life. Every family has lost somebody. The Timorese crowds were determined that, in memory of those who had died, something new and different must emerge. On our first day there, I attended a Catholic church service, held in the open air, and attended by nearly 1,000 people. There was a long discourse from the priest, inspired by Bishop Bello (Nobel Peace Prize winner). The message was that people should vote, go home, and await the result. It was clear that the church was providing a place of solidarity where people could meet together in some degree of safety.

We met with MPs from other countries as part of a group called Parliamentarians for East Timor. We put together a report, endorsed by MPs from New Zealand, Japan, Canada and the Philippines, in which we recognised that the voting process had been technically correct, and that despite the widespread intimidation by the militia acting in concert with the Indonesian army, it was nevertheless a fair reflection of people's opinions.

***LLB*: What should be done to stop the massacres?**

JC: The massacres are terrifying in their severity and intensity. During the time I was there, the militia were already in operation, stopping vehicles at random and seizing passengers, many of whom simply disappeared.

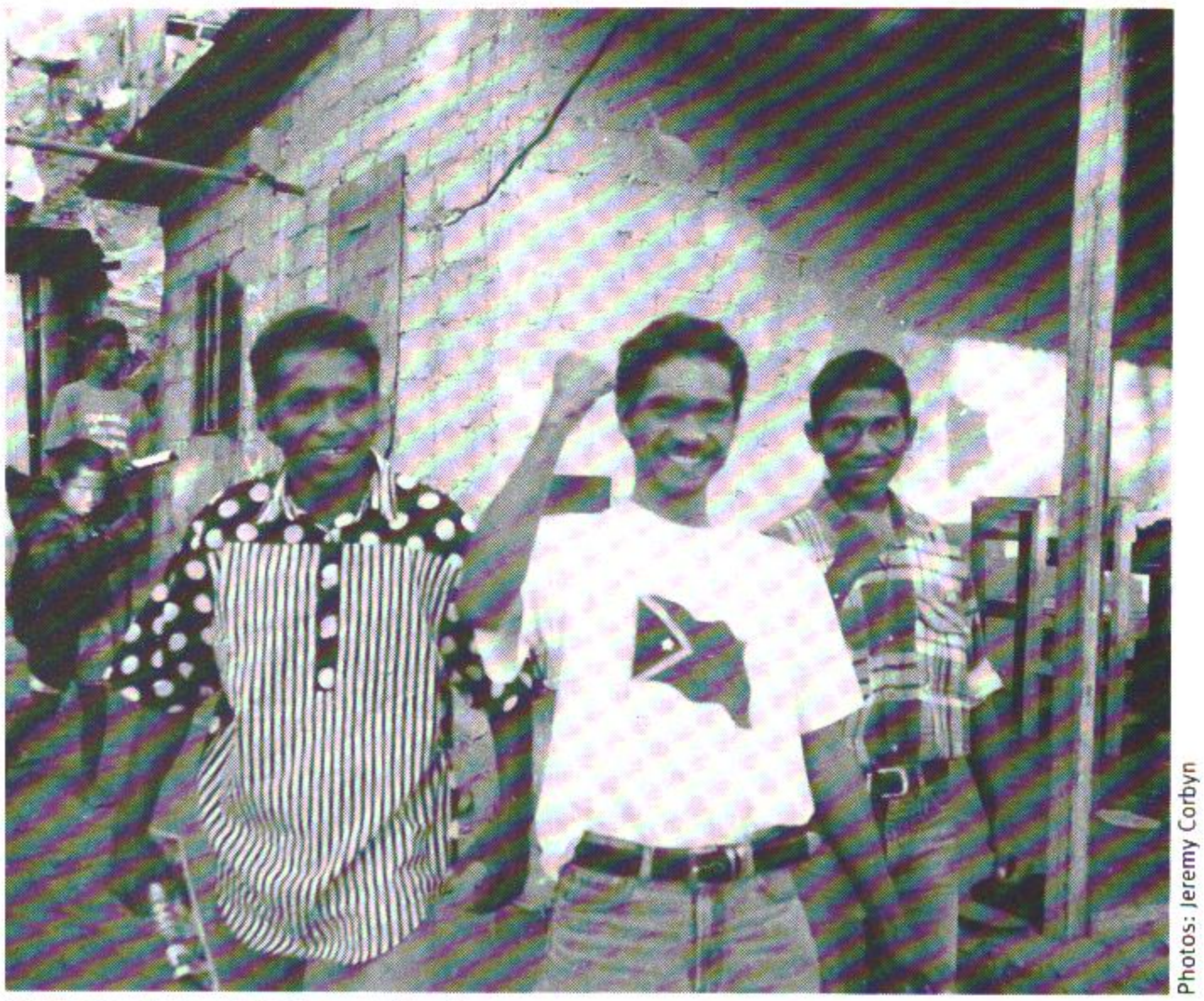
In our report, we called on the UN, first of all, to accept its responsibility, not just for the UN staff posted in Dili, but for all the Timorese people who were employed by the UN during the registration and voting process. Subsequently the UN did take responsibility for them, but tragically three were already dead following an incident on the night of the voting itself. We also recommended that there should be an immediate increase in the civilian police presence in East Timor and that this should be the kernel of a future civilian police force. The fault of the UN agreement in May was that it was made with President Habibie and the Indonesian gov-

he tragedy of East Timor!

ernment. It effectively legitimised the Indonesian invasion of the island and, disastrously, allowed Indonesia to act as the guarantor of the security of the voting process through both its military and police presence.

The military simply cannot be trusted. They are part of the problem, not part of the solution, and they are hand in glove with the militia, who get arms and support from them. There is a suspicion that many of the militia are actually paid by the army to undertake these attacks. The police force is ill-equipped, incompetent and in league with the military. Future policing must be undertaken by East Timorese civilians. In our report, we recommended an immediate deployment of a police force throughout East Timor to disarm the militia and guarantee the democratic process ahead of the Indonesian parliament's ratification of the vote itself.

People have been driven into internal exile in refugee camps, either in East Timor itself or to Kupang in West Timor, and many have now been taken to Darwin in Australia. Ultimately, this is part of a process of genocide against the whole Timorese people. The UN process has to be seen through and a force must be sent to the island to ensure that it is seen through. The UN trusteeship of Timor should be a short one, lasting only until such time as an independent government can be elected by the people of Timor. But if we ignore what's going on there at the present time, then the aggression of the Indonesian army will continue and the 200,000 dead will be joined by many more.



Photos: Jeremy Corbyn

CNRT supporters celebrate on voting day.

***LLB*: The rhetoric about human rights that we heard during the NATO war over Kosova seems in stark contrast to the indifference of Western leaders towards East Timor.**

JC: What's happening in East Timor is not new and not unpredictable. When Portugal agreed on the principle of independence after their revolution in 1974, Indonesia saw it as an opportunity to invade and did so. Ironically, they used the same methods as the Japanese forces did when they invaded Timor during World War II. The Indonesian reign has been a brutal one. Initially, it was supported by the Australian government, then led by Gough Whitlam, who also recommended that Timor become an integral part of Indonesia.

This was followed by a series of arrangements concerning the exploitation of minerals in Timor by Australian companies. The massacres and killings have been well chronicled by Amnesty International, by exiled Timorese, and by Jose Ramos Horta and Archbishop Bello, and of course in the books and films of John Pilger. For anyone in authority in Western countries to claim that they didn't know about it is complete nonsense – they've known about it all along. However, both the US and Britain have been more interested in Indonesia's role as a regional power and trading partner.

Indonesia is the largest country in the region with the largest army. It has a huge amount of US equipment and training facilities at its disposal and has been a significant buyer of British arms, most notably Hawk aircraft, along with many other items. When the Labour Government was elected in May 1997 and declared its "ethical foreign policy", a small delegation – Ann Clwyd, Tess Kingham and myself – went to see Robin Cook to insist that all sales of arms to Indonesia be halted immediately and that the Government cancel the contracts signed by the Tories. He refused to agree to this course of action. Although some of the contracts were subsequently cancelled, the bulk of them were implemented, including the delivery of Hawk aircraft, despite reliable eye-witness accounts that Hawks had been used in military activities over Timor.

The first thing the Government should have done was to stop all arm sales; the second should have been to end all training arrangements for Indonesian military officers at Sandhurst or other British military establishments; and the third should have been to support the right of the people of East Timor to self-determination and ultimately independence. Had these steps been taken in 1997, preferably in conjunction with other countries, we would not be in the desperate situation we are in now.

***LLB*: What hope is there for the future?**

JC: The tragedy of what's happened in East Timor is paralleled by many other events in Indonesia itself. The coup of the

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Continued from page 17

1960s, when the non-aligned Sukharno government was replaced by the pro-western Suharto regime, was followed by huge Western investments – essentially investments in cheap labour, protected by Suharto's anti-trade union policies and indifference to environmental controls. So the tragedy is compounded by the dreadful poverty of people living in urban areas and those in rural areas relying on remittance of wages from others lucky enough to get poorly paid jobs in factories making clothes and sports shoes.

The overthrow of the Suharto regime was followed by an election; the final allocation of seats to the political parties has just been agreed, and the parliament will soon elect a new president. It is by no means certain that Megawati Sukharno, the principal opposition leader, will be elected – it's quite possible that Habibie will secure enough votes to continue in office. Tragically, the debate between the two main presidential contenders is not marked by significant political differences. If anything, Megawati is worse than Habibie on the subject of East Timor and she is very critical of him for even agreeing to the UN supervising a referendum. In the wake of the referendum and the carnage that followed, Habibie has been forced to allow a UN force into East Timor to prevent further bloodshed. The interesting question is whether Habibie actually has any control over the army and whether the army will simply refuse to abide by the wishes of the civilian government.

The situation is extremely dangerous and unless the army is brought under some kind of civilian power in Indonesia as a whole, then it is very unlikely that we will see significant social or economic change. There are serious problems in other parts of the country, notably in West Papua, where large numbers of people strongly object to rule from Jakarta, and in Aceh, the most westerly province of Indonesia and the nearest to Malaysia, where there is a growing independence movement. So the pressures on the Indonesian government are powerful indeed, and the likelihood of mass uprising against the economic and social conditions of the people is a major factor which may stretch the Indonesian armed forces to the limit.

Internationally, we need to build solidarity with the people of East Timor. I believe we should strongly support the demand for UN trusteeship for East Timor, which should last only long enough to enable independence to come about.

Free Allan Nairn – and East Timor!

US journalist Allan Nairn was arrested at the start of September and is now facing prosecution in Indonesia for two violations of Indonesian immigration law: engaging in unauthorised activities and overstaying his two-month visa. If convicted, Nairn could face ten years in prison. We print below extracts from Nairn's own statement to his captors.

I know that the army has put me on the black list because I watched their soldiers murder more than 271 people at the Santa Cruz cemetery. This crime was the responsibility of the Indonesian army commander, General Try Sutrisno and the Minister of Defence, General Benny Murdani.

The murders were committed with American M-16 rifles. The American government also bears some of the responsibility because they have armed, trained, and given money to the TNI/ABRI, even though they knew the TNI/ABRI is led by murderers and is responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Timorese, Acehnese, West Papuan and Indonesian civilians.

Because I survived the massacre and denounced the crime to the outside world, the TNI/ABRI and the Suharto government banned me as a "threat to national security". That ban has been reaffirmed by each subsequent TNI/ABRI commander, including General Tanjung and General Wiranto.

I do not think that I am a threat to the Indonesian or Timorese people, but I hope that I am a threat to General Wiranto and General Tanjung, and the other present and former leaders of the TNI/ABRI. I believe that they feel threatened by anyone who would expose their crimes. General Wiranto and Generals Bambang, Zacky, Syafei, Kiki, and many others, for example, are responsible for the current militia terror in occupied East Timor and for the increase in repression against the people of Aceh who have suffered for decades under the repression and corruption of TNI/ABRI. Many brave Indonesians, Timorese, Acehnese, and West Papuans have been killed, arrested, tortured or raped because they dared to criticize the army and demand their right to freedom.

As a foreigner and a journalist, particularly an American journalist, I know that I enjoy a certain de facto political leeway that enables me to say things that local people would be killed for saying. I have tried to use that privilege to tell the truth about TNI/ABRI. If, because of this, the army feels they must arrest or jail me, then I know that there is nothing I can do to stop them. But they know that they cannot arrest or kill all the people of Indonesia. That is why they are now so fearful, and that is why I believe they will lose their desperate struggle to retain their hold on power and their police state.

During my most recent detention, I have been interrogated by officials from army Intel, police Intel, Kopassus Group 5, and many other units. They have asked me many questions about my political motives and opinions. I would summarise my opinions this way:

I am pro human rights, pro democracy, and anti TNI/ABRI. I am a supporter of the people of East Timor, Aceh, West Papua, and Indonesia, and an opponent of the officials who have repressed and exploited them.

As an American citizen who is visiting Indonesia and occupied East Timor, I also want to be clear that I believe in even-handedness. The same political, moral and legal standards that are applied to TNI/ABRI officers should also be applied to the officers and political leaders of the United States. So while I support the UN Secretary-General's call for war crimes and crimes against humanity prosecution on East Timor, I think it should not be limited to Indonesian officials. Foreign officials who were accomplices to atrocities in East Timor, and provided both murder weapons and the logistics of repression should also be charged, prosecuted and if convicted, jailed.

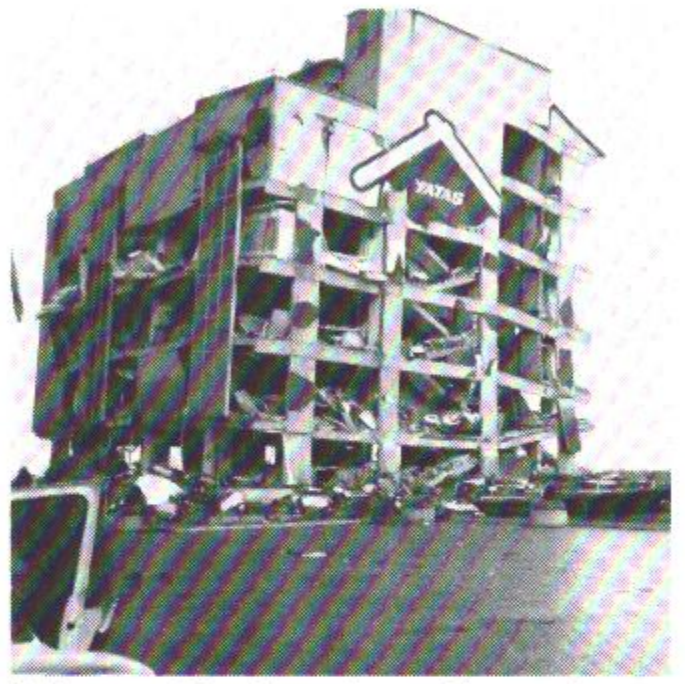
Pragmatically, it is hard to imagine General Wiranto sitting in jail. It is even harder to imagine President Clinton as his cellmate. But justice should be impartial.

It is time for the genocide to end. Untold thousands of Timorese lie slaughtered. Their families are bereft. The victims of Santa Cruz, Liquica,and Suai can no longer speak. Those of us who can should insist that the killing stop right now and that the killers face justice, regardless of who they are.

These same principles apply of course to atrocities everywhere. I think that this is a simple idea and that most people would agree.

This material is taken from Znet.
http://www.zmag.org/CrisesCurEvts/Timor/timor_index.htm

Turkey's earthquake: a man made catastrophe



Police guard furniture store as thousands sleep in the open.

40,000 people are dead or missing, 10,000 injured, and 600,000 homeless. Liz Knight and Erkan Gok examine who is responsible for the devastation.

As many as 80% of earthquake deaths are caused by collapsing buildings and 85% of Turkey is vulnerable to earthquakes. Yet more than half of all buildings in Turkey violate construction rules and unknown numbers lack planning permission. Inspectors turn a blind eye and politicians, often linked with building contractors, regularly grant amnesties for illegal buildings at election time. In the last ten years, millions of the rural poor, economic migrants in their own country, or driven from army-occupied Kurdish villages, have flooded into Istanbul and the industrial north-west. Often they can afford only badly and illegally built housing. Tens of thousands have now suffered or died. Working class districts, and in some cases virtually whole towns, have been wiped off the map.

Scientists predicted this quake two years ago. Officialdom ignored the warnings. When it happened, the first official reaction was a government statement: "The Turkish state is strong, and the damage will be repaired." Yet army help was directed first only at the Golcuk navy base. Many other areas received no official help whatever until four days after the earthquake. People tried to lift concrete slabs with their bare hands to reach family and neighbours they knew were still alive but most of whom were dead by the fourth day.

Journalists were unanimous in their description of the bureaucratic inertia, bungling and downright criminal indifference of the various wings of the state in relation to their people's suffering. Robert Fisk in *The Independent* pointed out that Turkey has one of the largest and best-equipped armies in NATO: "They could destroy a thousand Kurdish villages, bomb Northern Iraq, help NATO assault Yugoslavia but had not thought of organising a single specialised earthquake brigade to help their own people in one of the most earthquake-prone regions on earth." When Turkish soldiers did arrive belatedly at disaster zones, they brought guns, not rescue equipment or even soup.

In fact the state actually blocked help. Medical agencies made urgent pleas for blood donors. Blood came from ordinary Turks – and from Greeks (including from spectators at a football match in Thessalonika). Not one Turkish MP offered blood. Offers of rescue teams and aid came immediately from all over the world: the government delayed acceptance where they did not refuse it outright – initially refusing help from Greece and Armenia. Only popular protest forced them to concede. The Health Minister still went on to declare that, "Turks do not need foreign blood" and insulted overseas aid workers and doctors.

The arrogance of the ruling classes in the face of this horror seems unlimited. While bodies were still trapped in buildings, parliament tried to rush through two measures. One was a bill granting amnesty to 60,000 criminals, including murderers, police torturers, mafia gangsters and politicians jailed on corruption charges. There was to be no amnesty of course for Turkey's thousands of political prisoners. The other measure was a social security law attacking pension and union rights for public sector workers. Weeks earlier, 500,000 workers had demonstrated against the proposed legislation. The proposed amnesty for criminals evoked such protest from an already distraught people that the measure has now been delayed.

The earthquake starkly revealed the implications of plans to build nuclear power stations across Turkey, many on known earthquake zones. The fate of the Tupras oil refinery is an indication of the destructive potential of an earthquake at any of these sites. It could dwarf the effects of Chernobyl and contaminate vast areas of the Middle East and Eastern Europe. British Nuclear Fuels as well as nuclear companies from Canada, the USA, France and Japan are involved in these projects, which will go ahead unless sufficient world protest prevents them.

With violent aftershocks hitting the same region, the nightmare is far from over for the victims. International aid is still pouring in, but the army and ruling parties are trying to control it for their own purposes and to take credit for its distribution. Human rights organisations, voluntary and community groups, trade unions and democratic political parties of the left have themselves set up tent cities to by-pass the bureaucracy's stranglehold. It is these organisations which are best able to ensure that aid reaches those in need directly and speedily.

Report from Day-Mer

Our warm thanks to all those in Britain, including many from varied ethnic groups, who donated to our earthquake appeal. Aid is still coming in. So far we have collected and sent to communities in Turkey nine tons of material aid and more than £30,000 in donations. Among many, many generous donations were £1,000 from the sacked Liverpool Dockers and £500 from the Strike Support Group.

All the Turkish and Kurdish community, religious and political organisations in London have now joined in one united campaign to continue support for Turkish earthquake victims. Please contact us at: Day-Mer Turkish and Kurdish Community Centre, Former Library, Howard Road, London N16 8PR. Tel: 0171-275-8440; Fax: 0171-275-7245; e-mail: info@daymer.org; website: http://www.daymer.org. Aid cheques payable to: Day-Mer Migranet 2.

Workers struggle for change of GEAR

As the South African government tries to run a Thatcherite economy, workers are fighting back. It has been a hot winter in South Africa, says Sean Coyne.

The industrial relations climate has been turned up dramatically, revealing new insights into the relationship between the ANC government, the South African Communist party and the trade union movement. In almost every sector, including mining, manufacturing, transport and public service, workers have taken industrial action for either increased wages or to stop the wave of retrenchments sweeping through the economy.

The Minister of Finance told parliament – elected three months ago – that austerity was to be the order of the day, with tight budgetary controls imposed on government departments. Workers in the private and public sectors were asked to moderate wage claims in the interests of "adjusting" the economy in favour of competitiveness. The government argued that its central economic policy, GEAR, had to be implemented so that it can tackle poverty and historic deprivations – promises that were central to its election manifesto.

Less than a month after the election, the National Union of Mineworkers was confronted with the impact of the gold market's anarchy, and the tightening up of subsidies to the mining industry. The result was an explosion of anger. Mineworkers took to the streets, demanding that their industry be properly protected from the greed and short–term profiteering of the mine-owners. Part of their campaign was also aimed at condemning the selling of gold stocks by the Blair Government and the IMF and its impact on gold prices.

This threw into sharp relief the question of globalisation, and the reluctance or inability of governments to engage the global financial institutions. The NUM calculated that every miner has on average nine dependants relying on his wage to survive, so if 50,000 miners lose their jobs this would impact on 500,000 people. Retrenchments in the mining industry were calculated at 150,000 over the next three years. The arithmetic makes for grim reading.

Then transport workers learned that the restructuring of state assets in the sector is leading to many thousands of job losses through the commercialisation and out–sourcing of many prime functions. Transport unions took up the challenge, mobilising their memberships in a way that took the government by surprise. Links between the old "white" and the more militant COSATU unions added a fascinating dimension. This has led to considerable back-pedalling by the government.

But it is in the public sector where militancy has been greatest. The state remains the largest employer in the country but the government has responded clumsily. Public sector unions in COSATU and FEDUSA (Federation of South African Trade Unions) have formed a united front involving teachers, prison staff, health workers and smaller groups. They have made connections with workers in other sectors. Their aim has been to engage in negotiations as agreed with the government on pay and salary structures with a view to compensating workers for inflation, and to tackle many of the disparities which were a legacy of the old regime. The unions have behaved in a highly disciplined manner, stating their demands clearly and with great conviction, tirelessly reminding the government of their commitments and promises.

The government's reaction was extremely revealing. At first it acknowledged the unions' demands, saying they were confident that discussions would lead to an amicable solution. However, when it became clear that the unions were not to be seduced by rhetoric about the "good of the nation" and the need to "moderate expectations", it adopted tactics that would not be out of place in a Thatcherite environment. It stated that the global figure handed down to the public ministries by the treasury was sacrosanct, that there simply was not any further funding available. Then it took a page out of the old regime's book of tricks by unilaterally imposing a wage increase, saying negotiations were closed. The wage increases imposed were precisely what the government had brought to the negotiating table at the beginning of negotiations. This was tantamount to saying that agreed arrangements for collective bargaining, and indeed ILO conventions that the government supported with a grand trumpeting, are not worth a bean.

The unions are outraged. Industrial action has been stepped up, with workers throughout the country mobilising on a scale not seen for many years. This reactionary, anti–worker approach was backed up by a crude and short-sighted press campaign. In the press the Minister responsible for the public sector, a leading member of the Communist Party, berated the unions' "narrow-mindedness" and referred to Lenin's *Left-wing Communism: An infantile Disorder*, implying that the unions were acting in their own selfish interests at the expense of the real poor. Those *LLB* readers familiar with this particular holy text will recall that the pamphlet by Lenin was actually an attack on the conservatism of the old craft unions, who refused to see their interests in broader class terms, attempting to preserve their special status. To equate the South African trade union movement with the tunnel vision of the craft unions a hundred years ago beggars belief. The Minister clearly had not read her Lenin for a long time, if at all, and received a timely response from the



Photo: Graeme Cookson

British solidarity for South African liberation: have all our hopes been dashed?

Special COSATU Congress last month.

Union leaders and activists lined up to lambaste the government. They unanimously supported a call for a general strike to defend the living standards of public sector workers and force the government to abandon GEAR in favour of a worker-friendly policy to raise the living standards of the poor – hardly the reaction of a trade union movement supposedly concerned only with their own narrow interests.

Other cabinet ministers have joined in the deluded denunciation of trade unionism. The new Minister for Safety and Security lectured POPCRU, the union for police and prison staff, that just because they had won the right to join a union did not mean that they could "misbehave".

The militancy of the public sector workers is far from receding. Boosted by victories in other sectors (in early September, the communications workers unions won substantial increases in pay and halted job losses in the state's Telkom services) workers are realising that struggle wins gains, not relying on a friendly government to "look after you". All of this has shown that the government is unable to enlist the support of unions in the fight against poverty. It should be creatively using the mobilising power of the unions to pressurise and expose the bankrupt policies of the Neo-liberals/pro IMF and World Bank, which are being increasingly embraced by the leadership of the ANC.

The strains between the Alliance partners (the ANC, COSATU and the SACP) are now publicly acknowledged, and have revealed how the alliance is by and large a one-sided affair when it comes to redistribution. During the first wave of mass mobilisations, the 20,000 strong Communist Party's central committee stated that it would not be appropriate to comment on the dispute because it did not want to inflame the situation, and it hoped "normal bargaining arrangements" would recommence towards a settlement. This angered many shop floor party and union activists. The Party is supposed to be a defender of the working class, and this lukewarm response kicked off a discussion that had the leadership running from one secret caucus to the next! The Party's General Secretary had little choice but to condemn outright the actions of the government to the Special COSATU Congress, receiving a standing ovation for doing so.

Meanwhile, President Mbeki, who had given at least six leading members of the Communist Party key jobs in either Cabinet or as advisers to the Presidential Office, must be rethinking his options! He may have hoped to head off the militancy of the trade union movement, but so far has only succeeded in exposing the limitations of his government in really engaging with the movement that put him into power.

Longer–term consequences for the ANC government and the Alliance are concentrating the minds of the new COSATU leadership. They have shown themselves more than willing to assert the need for socialist policies to the crisis and have been tremendously effective in arguing for their demands. Within the trade union movement, there is a new enthusiasm despite the procrastination of the government and the Party. Many new militants are emerging, unhampered by historic considerations, who do not see loyalty as a one sided affair. They helped put the government into power, and they want it to represent their interests. If this means you have to educate the government through mass action, then so be it!

Foreign Office blames the victims

Milan Rai
Voices in the Wilderness UK

In August, UNICEF, the UN children's agency, released a report which found that half a million more children had died during the period of sanctions than would have died "if the substantial reduction in child mortality throughout Iraq during the 1980s had continued in this decade." Not all could be attributed to sanctions, but sanctions were "certainly one factor." So perhaps hundreds of thousands of children have died in Iraq as a direct result of sanctions.

The report was a major blow to the Government, already isolated internationally over the sanctions issue. The Foreign Office could not fault the methodology or integrity of the UNICEF survey, so chose instead to focus on the difference in child death rates in different parts of Iraq. In the northern governorates, outside government control, child death rates over the last five years have been almost half those in government-controlled Iraq.

According to the *FT*, the Foreign Office spin was that this difference showed that "the primary cause of suffering in Iraq was not the sanctions but Iraqi government policy, which did not give enough priority to vulnerable groups, and distributes goods poorly." (In the Kurdish area, the UN administers the oil-for-food humanitarian programme directly, whereas Baghdad runs oil-for-food in south-central Iraq.)

This was directly contradicted by UNICEF in its Questions and Answers for the Iraq child mortality surveys which accompanied the survey (Q&A is available at www.reliefweb.int, the survey at http://www.unicef.org):

"The child mortality surveys describe the child mortality situation – but they do not explain why the levels are as they are. What we do know is that the difference [in mortality rates between the north and south/centre] cannot be attributed to the differing ways the oil-for-food programme is implemented in the two parts of Iraq. The oil-for-food programme is two and a half years old. Therefore it is too soon to measure any significant impact of the oil-for-food programme on child mortality over the five year period of 1994-1999 as is reported in these surveys."

Much as the Government twists and turns to evade responsibility, the political pressure is increasing – as evidenced by major reports on Iraq by the BBC *Nine O'clock News* and ITV's *Tonight* with Trevor McDonald, and the wide coverage given to the return of the latest Voices in the Wilderness sanctions-breaking delegation.

The British anti-sanctions movement is mobilising the increasing public opposition to economic sanctions with a National Petition Against Sanctions On Iraq, over 43,000 copies of which have already been distributed. The National Petition is available from http://go.to/iraqpetition or from Voices, 12 Trinity Road, London N2 8JJ.

Indian election offers little hope

Ramen Bhattacharyya asks if it matters who wins.

In India's general election, the third in three years, 605 million eligible voters will elect 543 members of the national parliament over a voting period stretching from 5th September to 3rd October. Early results, indicating the strength of the parties, will be evident within days.

No single party or party alliance is likely to secure an absolute majority but according to polls the BJP-led 20 party alliance known as NDA (National Democratic Alliance) is predicted to become the largest single group and to form a stable government with the support of smaller parties. Though the BJP-led government was losing electoral support through the actions of some extremist Hindu components, it is assumed to have recovered after the nuclear tests and successful military eviction of Pakistani infiltrators from Kargil.

Diminishing support for the Congress Party of India – Congress (I) – was reversed when Sonia Gandhi agreed to be its leader and Prime Ministerial candidate. But the prospect of Sonia Gandhi being Prime Minister caused concern in non-aligned India, as she was born and brought up as a Catholic in a completely different politico-cultural context in Italy, a member of the aggressive Nato alliance. A pamphlet produced by the VHP (an organisation linked to the Hindu communalist RSS, which provides the cadre for the BJP) accuses Sonia Gandhi of Mafia connections, being dictated to by the Pope and being a puppet of a secret international agency. The election results will show if these accusations have had any effect.

Congress (I) elected her as their leader to exploit the Gandhi name with the electorate, mainly in rural India, though the name has no connection with the historical non-violent architect of the Indian freedom struggle – it is the surname of Indira's forsaken Parsi husband, Feroze Gandhi, Rajiv's father.

The electorate has little to choose between Congress (I) and the BJP-led coalition, both representing mainly the Hindu upper castes and the middle and upper classes. Congress under Nehru and Congress (I) under Indira, Rajiv and Rao have ruled India for more than 45 years since independence. Over 40% of India's one billion population remain illiterate, a third still live in abject poverty in unsanitary conditions with little provision for drinkable water and unemployment is high. Whichever party or coalition wins, nothing much is likely to change and the left is too divided to have any impact.

Can Unionists veto the vote?

Brian Campbell of Sinn Féin looks at the background to the stalling of the peace process.

David Trimble's supporters outside Unionism cringed at his petulant response to Chris Patten's report on policing. "A betrayal" and "the shoddiest piece of work I've ever seen in my life," the Unionist leader called it.

"What on earth did he expect?" was Patten's response as he pointed out that his terms of reference were explicitly outlined in the Good Friday Agreement, which David Trimble had signed.

Similar questions could be asked about Trimble's reaction to prisoner releases, the right of Sinn Féin to have ministerial positions in a new Executive and other aspects of the Agreement. If he didn't like them, why did he agree to them?

It is futile to present an analysis in terms of Trimble's personality. His truculent arrogance simply makes him an easy target. It also makes it difficult to accept the line that he represents the most progressive strand within Ulster Unionism. But there is a grain of truth in it (though for "most progressive" read "not very progressive at all"). The fact is that Ulster Unionism finds itself in that most difficult of positions for reactionary forces – "change is inevitable; how do we minimise it?"

Unionism's first, most natural response, has been to raise the art of delay to a central tactic in a muddled strategy. Negotiations were endlessly delayed. Negotiations about the conduct of negotiations were spun out for the most spurious reasons. The negotiations themselves would have lasted until Doomsday except that deadlines were imposed, and now the implementation of the Agreement is held up by the Unionist refusal to form the Executive. They even asked Senator George Mitchell not to impose a deadline on his current review. To his credit, his answer was that the review would be concluded "very quickly". Unionists are even trying to delay the Patten report on policing by calling for a long consultation process. To date, Mo Mowlam has stuck to her position of insisting that legislation for its implementation will be passed next spring.

Those who advocate a withdrawal from the entire process oppose this strategy of delay within Unionism. Trimble's "progressive" label results from his arguing that Unionism cannot walk away from the only game in town but must put the Unionist case.

Trimble must know, however, that his delaying tactic cannot go on forever. And as the process reaches its climax with George Mitchell's review, Trimble must decide whether to implement the Agreement, which means forming the Executive, or to walk away. Increasingly, it appears, his own party wants him to walk away. How he responds will depend largely on Tony Blair.

Blair hailed the Good Friday Agreement as an historic turning point. It gained the British and Irish governments international acclaim and, more significantly from their point of view, was ratified by over 80% of voters in Ireland. That, they argued, was democracy. The people have spoken, their will be done. And now, almost 18 months on, it still has not been implemented. What is Tony Blair going to do about it? He too must know that change is inevitable. Does his crusade to "modernise" Britain allow room for a supremacist ideology that has set its face against change?

There are those who argue that there must be "parity of pain"; that nationalists/republicans must give at the same time as Unionists. That argument allows Unionists to win more concessions through their delaying tactic, and ignores the fact that the "parity of pain" happened eighteen months ago. The Good Friday Agreement was the great compromise. It cannot be re-negotiated in favour of Unionists without setting it aside, and with it the will of the people.

One assumes that Tony Blair knows this also. It leaves him with a simple choice. He can either continue to pander to Unionist tactics or push wholeheartedly for the implementation of the Agreement. If he chooses the former, he will effectively be supporting those who don't want a Catholic about the place. Some moderniser.

Restoring international legality

Jim Addington, Labour Action for Peace writes: The British media has recently been recalling the start of the second world war sixty years ago. But there has been little discussion of its origins or those of the many wars during this bloodstained century. While the recent conflict in Kosova was one of the shortest, it may turn out to be the most significant of the century because of the forces involved and the weapons used.

People who were silent when the war against Yugoslavia could have been averted now say that it was wrong. Lord Carrington said recently that "it was impossible for Milosevic to accept the Rambouillet agreement," because it would have allowed NATO "to use Serbia as a part of the NATO organisation... he couldn't accept that." Carrington added, "I think what NATO did by bombing Serbia actually precipitated the exodus of the Kosovo Albanians into Macedonia and Montenegro. I think the bombing caused the ethnic cleansings."

Governments which organised the attack are not apologetic. Their strategy of air attacks made sure that there were no "allied personnel losses". But the legality of the whole operation remains questionable. The peace movement needs to mount a campaign for legality in international affairs and the reinstatement of the United Nations as the principal international authority responsible for peace and security.

Some peace organisations are already mobilising, among them Labour Action for Peace, which is organising a meeting in the House of Commons on 20th October. Others are planning a conference in January 2000 to mark the start of the United Nations "Year of the Culture of Peace".

After the Yugoslav war: What future for Europe?

Wednesday 20th October, 7-9pm
House of Commons
With Jeremy Corbyn MP, Tony Benn MP, Alice Mahon MP, Bruce Kent

Further information from 0181-399 2547.

Trade Union Notebook

The Government has decided to close three coastguard stations – at Oban, Pentland and Tyne Tees. A fourth station, Liverpool, has been reprieved after a campaign by the coastguards' trade union PCS and local MPs. Two other stations will be merging. PCS will be lobbying MSPs to try to keep the first three open.

The closure plans were criticised earier this year by the Transport Select Committee and a debate in the House of Commons is likely to follow. The Coastguard service is already overstretched. PCS officials stated that Dover station was understaffed during the recent collision involving a cruise liner.

The ongoing dispute between the firefighters and the employing fire authorities has changed focus; while at national level there is effectively a stalemate, three of the employing authorities have taken local decisions. In London the employers are proposing to impose new contracts of employment on new recruits from January next year, there is a similar proposal in West Yorkshire, and in Greater Manchester the FBU is already balloting its members. The dispute revolves around attempts by the employers to change the conditions of service of firefighters.

Postal workers have rejected a pay and conditions offer by 49,000 to 39,000 and their union, the CWU, is seeking further talks with Post Office management. The deal would have increased basic rates by up to 18% and made them fully pensionable, plus bringing many allowances into basic salary. However, many postal workers were concerned at the effects of the deal on overtime pay, which constitutes a substantial part of overall earnings – around 17% according to the last *New Earnings Survey*.

NHS staff who are not covered by Pay Review Bodies – around 200,000 in total – are to balloted on this year's 3% pay offers. The ballot is due in November and will cover paramedics and other ambulance workers, NHS scientists, laboratory, professional, technical, craft, administrative, clerical and ancillary staff. This follows the Government's decision to award nurses 4.7% and doctors 3.5%. Meanwhile the junior doctors are also in dispute over working hours.



Paul Mattsson

"Stop," Blair tells the TUC, "don't bite the hand that feeds you." Choreography by the Spice Girls.

TUC goes through the motions

Maria Exall, CWU NEC member (personal capacity) reports on this year's TUC.

As this year's Trades Union Congress met, issues of dispute between unions and the government were at a crucial stage: privatisation of Air Traffic Control and London Underground; the reduction in the Post Office monopoly and the threat of a future share sell off; resistance to many PFI projects; and cuts in the fire services in many Labour controlled areas.

While leaders of the unions involved made clear their opposition to Government policies in these areas in motions to Congress and in public statements, only one – Ken Cameron – raised the relationship between the Labour Party and affiliated unions. The Labour Party-trade union link is one way – the Party telling affiliated unions to shut up. Tony Blair told Congress that this is his Government and unions should restrict themselves to lobbying. New Labour sees no room for the organisations of the working class in policy or power.

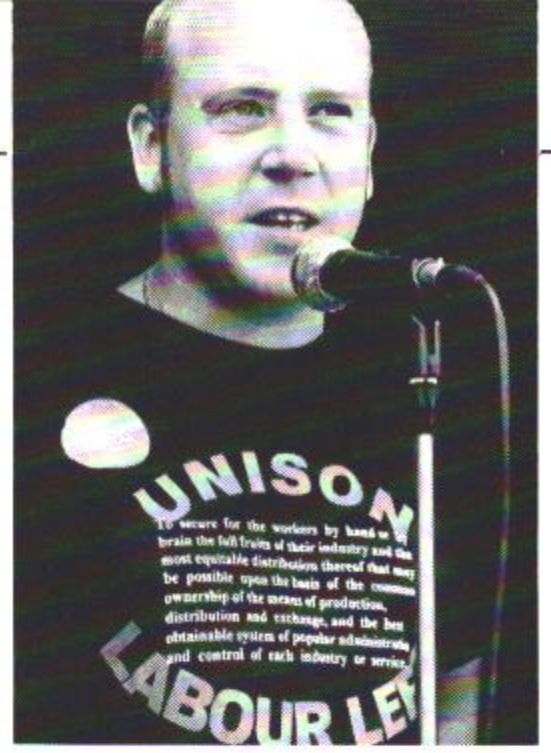
In the employment rights debate, Congress passed a composite calling for the Government to bring in a right to strike and take solidarity action in line with ILO conventions. It called for the right of reinstatement for those sacked after taking legal action and queried the proposal for an eight week moratorium in the Employment Relations Bill. Congress also accepted the need to redefine a trade dispute so workers can take action against future employers as well as present employers, a desperate need in times of the transfer of staff in PFI initiatives.

But this policy has come too late. The Employment Relations Bill is law and new legislation will not be possible until after the next election. With the political heat off the issue, trade union leaders are happy to talk left.

But watch this space. The fringe meeting of the United Campaign for the Repeal of the Anti–union Laws was packed. Delegates heard Tony Benn launch his Bill for workers' rights and plans for the mass demonstration against the anti-union laws due on 21st October next year.

The welfare debate was another example of just talking left. Congress adopted strong policy on pensions but the affiliated unions will be meek and mild at Party Conference. The collapse of union opposition at the National Policy Forum has effectively derailed any real opposition to the Government's welfare policies.

Other issues discussed in Brighton included the TUC attitude to the war in Kosova (on balance justified), British involvement in Europe and joining the euro (a good idea) and the future structure of the TUC itself. The General Council asked the CWU to remit the composite calling for two motions from the Women's TUC, the Black Workers TUC and the Lesbian and Gay TUC to be accepted onto the Congress agenda for discussion. The CWU delegation would not remit and the issues was put to the vote – with the General Council opposed. It was lost by the narrowest of margins. However, this is a hollow victory as the General Council has just delayed the inevitable by a year. They are opposed to such a structural change as it risks important equality issues arriving raw onto the Conference floor.



THE GEOFF MARTIN COLUMN

● Firstly, thanks to all of the *LLB* readers who've supported me in my campaign to try and build up a grassroots coalition around the UNISON General Secretary election.

I said right from the outset that I would only take my campaign forward to the nominations phase if there was clear broad support for such a challenge that reached well beyond the ranks of the organised UNISON left.

After well over a month of hard campaigning the feedback has been patchy. The real difficulty is finding a way of making the connection with the broad mass of activists who feel badly let down by New Labour. This includes many people from the health group whom I see as my natural constituency – asking them to support an all-out fight with the union establishment is asking them to make a real leap of faith.

● Meanwhile, the massed ranks of the union full-time machine are ranged up against any attempts to mobilise the kind of rank and file movement that's needed in order to protect lay democracy in the union. I was told by a national official at a very early stage of the campaign that I would be portrayed by the machine as the "Trot" candidate "who dances to the tune of the loony left". No time has been wasted in getting this negative campaigning up and running around the regions but those responsible have blown in some of the wrong ears. For the benefit of music lovers everywhere I would like to confirm that the only tune I dance to is "White Man in Hammersmith Palais" by the Clash.

Frankly, at the moment I cannot be arsed to report those paid officers of the union who have blatantly broken the rules governing elections. It's not my style anyway, but they know who they are and I'd like to thank them for their efforts.

It's not that long ago that I was being accused of being far too friendly with the ex-NALGO Stalinists in the union. Just to set the record straight my favourite Russian revolutionary is Stakhonovitz – he organised the carry-out and the card school after the storming of the Winter Palace.

It's sad that the election for probably the most important job in the trade union movement has been devalued by negative campaigning tactics. The members deserve better. I've refused all opportunities to knock any of the other candidates in the hope that we could focus in on the big issue – independent, campaigning and democratic public sector trade unionism which puts the members and the services that they work in right at the top of the agenda. It seems I was asking too much.

Running a national campaign aimed at connecting with the bulk of UNISON's 1.3 million members is a massive task. If you're going to take it on seriously you need to be confident that you've got a strong support network across the regions that you can work from. The payroll vote delivers this for the establishment but jacking up such a machine almost from scratch and within a few months is bloody hard. The chances of getting your message across without it are negligible.

'... for these reasons, and with a heavy heart, ... I have decided not to move the campaign forward into the nominations phase'

It's for these reasons, and with a heavy heart, that I have decided not to move the campaign forward into the nominations phase. I haven't taken the decision lightly. There's been plenty of long conversations with trusted comrades but after weighing up all the factors I know that it's the right thing to do. Some on the left will be pleased, many others will be disappointed – not least Harry the Bastard down the Plough, an RMT activist who was looking forward to seeing me square up to Blair.

I backed Bick in the last GS election but I have no intention of backing the establishment candidate this time around. I will be watching with interest to see who else emerges over the next few weeks.

● My job now is to address the big issue which has led me to take this decision – the lack of any cohesion between the disparate left, Old Labour and grassroots forces which make up a majority in the union. I've learnt a lot over the past couple of months – what I've learnt will be put to good use in the future. The heart and soul of public sector trade unionism, and a platform for mobilising united opposition to the excesses of the New Labour regime, are there to be won over. They'll only be won over if we build from the bottom up.

Labour's rotten record on asylum rights

John Stewart, of the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, asks why Labour governments always follow a Tory agenda on immigration and asylum.

As the Immigration and Asylum Bill completes its progress through Parliament, it is worth asking why Labour governments always do so badly on immigration and asylum issues. This latest Bill will cause enormous suffering to people seeking refugee status, make it harder for asylum seekers to get to the UK, and will increase the likelihood of black people legally resident in the UK suffering from racist prejudice and discrimination.

Despite rhetoric by Government ministers and media, the UK has no massive "influx" of refugees. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees world survey for 1998 shows 22,376,300 refugees, asylum seekers, returnees and displaced people in the world – an all-time high. Of these, 15m were located in Africa and Asia, continents already racked with poverty and war. Within Europe, the UK has a disproportionately low number of refugees and asylum seekers relative to our European neighbours. Millions of refugees are not coming here to benefit from our welfare state. However, many are victims of the UK's highly successful and profitable arms manufacturers.

In a world cursed with war, hunger, and persecution, it is unsurprising that many people feel forced to leave their country to move to another offering safety and a better life. When Western economies were growing in the 1950s and 1960s, governments – both Labour and Conservative – encouraged people from other countries to come to the UK. When unemployment is high and rates of growth lower, immigrants are prevented from coming to the UK, while those seeking asylum are abused by the media and politicians and often interned in detention centres and prisons.

Throughout this century Labour politicians have supported racist policies and pandered to the interests represented by the Conservative Party. The Labour Party has always had a shameful record of supporting the British Empire. Early in the century Labour MPs led the cheering in Parliament at the news of the execution of James Connolly and the leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin; the Attlee Government opposed decolonisation.

In the 1960s, Enoch Powell got the headlines for his openly racist opposition to immigration, but Harold Wilson's Labour



Photo: Molly Cooper

Iraqi asylum seekers lobby Downing Street, September 1999.

Government put through the 1968 Commonwealth Immigration Act. As recently published Cabinet papers make clear, this legislation was deliberately designed to stop members of the Commonwealth – Kenyan Asians – coming to the UK. Roy Hattersley recently wrote of his shame at voting for that bill and declared that he now wished he had opposed it. Wilson's Government was then supporting the US war against Vietnam – a catastrophic war resulting in thousands of refugees.

While past Labour governments maintained firm control over immigration and asylum, their rhetoric was about making the system work more fairly, showing more compassion and ameliorating the worst excesses of the Tories. As late as 1992, the Labour election manifesto promised to repeal the 1981 Nationality Act and restore the right of citizenship to those born here.

That approach now seems to have been abandoned as New Labour seeks to demonstrate its toughness in clamping down on "foreigners who abuse our hospitality". Deportations and removals from the UK shot up after the 1997 General Election. After a drop, the rate of enforcements for the first six months of 1999 is up 9.6% on the first six months of 1998. Over 100 people are still being deported from the UK every week and around 800 men and women are detained under Immigration Act powers in detention centres and prisons around the country at any one time. The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JWCI) estimated that over 10,000 immigrants and asylum seekers are detained for at least one night every year.

For members of the Labour Party it a matter of shame that our government can act this way. every party member who disagrees with the leadership position on immigration and asylum must speak out. If not, we will all be tainted with the truly terrible record of the Labour Party in government.

The North of Ireland – What Next?

A one day conference on the current situation in the north of Ireland

Confirmed speakers:

John McDonnell MP – Parliamentary Friends of Ireland Group

Sinn Finn ★ Relatives for Justice

Kevin Lawrenson – Newton Butler Residents Action Group (re Orange Marches)

Delegates welcome from trade unions, political parties, community and women's groups etc. Individuals also welcome.

Saturday 20th November 10 am - 5 pm
The Union Club, Birmingham
723 Pershore Road (A441) Selly Park B29
Buses 45 & 47 from City centre



For further information contact:
Troops Out Movement, PO Box 1032 Birmingham B12 8BZ
Tel: 0121-643 7542/0121-773 8683
email: TOM @sparkle123.freeserve.co.uk

Is tension over in Dover?

Are the racists still riding high in Dover or has the tension subsided? Martin Bradley of Kent Refugee Action Network on racism and refugees provides an update.

Media attention continues to focus on the Kent port of Dover following violence between local youths and asylum seekers in August. *The Dover Express* has printed an avalanche of letters claiming that "we have lost our English culture" because of immigration and that Britain should accept no more refugees because it is overpopulated. Many were written by people with no local connections. *Dover Express* editor Nick Hudson called for any immigrants convicted of attacks on local people to be deported. Presumably, Mr Hudson is aware that for some this would constitute in effect a death penalty. No doubt mindful of the possibility of prosecution for incitement to racial hatred, he continues to tread a fine line between what he can get away with and what could land him in court. His *Folkestone Herald* headline on August 19th read: "Welcome to camp Kosovo in Calais: fares please (4,000 francs) and it's next stop Garden Coast".

In contrast, the *Dover Mercury* has printed very few anti-refugee letters and several sympathetic ones. The editorial comment has been more balanced and a very positive story about a kite building project which has build friendship between refugee and local children appeared. Predictably, sensationalist drivel continues to appear in the national tabloids, with the notable exception of the *Daily Express*, which has been quite good.

The second half of August saw a very heavy police presence in the town, with frequent stop and searches. Then the National Front jumped on the bandwagon and announced a march in Dover, which was banned by Home Secretary Jack Straw. While the ban was welcome, it applied to any march in the town connected to refugees. Although anti-racists had no plans to march, believing it to be inappropriate, the message from Mr Straw seems to be that anti-racists are just as much of a problem as fascists. 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.

Tension in Dover appears to have subsided. Superintendent Chris Eyre of Kent Police admitted publicly that racist attacks and incidents of racial abuse have been happening regularly for some time. He welcomed the continuing work of refugee support voluntary groups in building bridges between communities. There has been virtually no public acknowledgement of the vital role of community refugee support groups from other statutory agencies in Kent. Initiatives are now being taken to encourage refugees to report racist incidents. Kent Refugee Action Network has now been established for three months. Its role is to co-ordinate the work of the various voluntary groups and liase with statutory authorities. In the meantime, Anne Widdecombe MP and Brenda Trench of Kent Social Services continue to give the impression that Dover is flooded with asylum seekers and refugees. In reality, they represent less than 1% of the borough's population.



Photo: Martin Bradley

Demonstration against the National Front, Dover, November 1997.

Former head of the Immigration Service, Peter Tompkins, on BBC Television's *Kilroy* programme, called for all asylum seekers entering in breach of the Immigration Acts to be detained. He was adamant that this should include children. He claimed that only 5 to 10% of asylum seekers are "genuine". In fact, over 40% are given full UN refugee status or exceptional leave to remain on compassionate grounds, including those successful in overturning negative decisions on appeal.

The Government fails to point out that many of its EU partners accept more refugees per head of population than Britain. The new Asylum Act will further reinforce the negative stereotypes of the bigots of Dover. At the same time, it will further marginalise asylum seekers and refugees in society.

The Coalition for Asylum Rights (CAIR) has co-ordinated campaigning activities against the Asylum & Immigration Bill and will continue to do so this autumn. Funds are urgently needed.

Conctact CAIR via its two co-ordinating bodies:

National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, 101 Villa Road, Birmingham B21 1NH, 0121-554 6947, ncadc@ncadc.demon.co.uk

National Assembly Against Racism, 28 Commercial Street, London E1 6LS, 0171-247 9907, AA_R@compuserve.com

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President: Sue Michie
Secretary: Hugh MacGrillen

Best wishes to Conference delegates from

Cathy Jamieson

Labour and Co-operative MSP
for Carrick, Cumnock
and Doon Valley

ken@labourconference

Catch up with Ken Livingstone speaking on the conference fringe this year:

Sunday 26

Defend Grassroots Democracy ■ **CLPD** 10am, Palace Suite, Stakis Hotel, Westover Road

Monday 27

Directly Elected Mayors ■ **Catalyst** 6pm, Bay Suite, Cliffeside Hotel, East Overcliffe Drive

Grassroots fight back ■ **Labour Left Briefing** 7pm, Marsham Court Hotel, Russel-Cotes Road

After the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry ■ **NAAR** 7pm, Dorchester 3, Swallow Highcliff Hotel

Tuesday 28

Mayor Necessities ■ **Fabian Society & London Tourist Board,**
1pm Bourne Hall Hotel, 14 Priory Rd, West Cliff

Mayor or Nightmare for London? ■ **GMB London**
5.30pm Avon Room, Marsham Ct Hotel, Russell-Cotes Road

Tribune rally 7pm, The Winter Gardens Theatre, Exeter Road

Wednesday 29

Trade Unions Responding to Globalisation ■ **GMB London**
12.45pm, Avon Room, Marsham Court Hotel, Russell-Cotes Rd

UK Immigration Policy: firmer, faster, but still not fair? ■ **JCWI**
5.45pm, Carlton Hotel, La Causserie Suite, East Overcliffe

Addressing Discrimination ■ **1990 Trust** 8.30pm, Trouville Hotel, Priory Rod

21st Century Socialism ■ **Socialist Campaign Group** 9pm, Wessex Hotel, West Cliff Road

Thursday 30

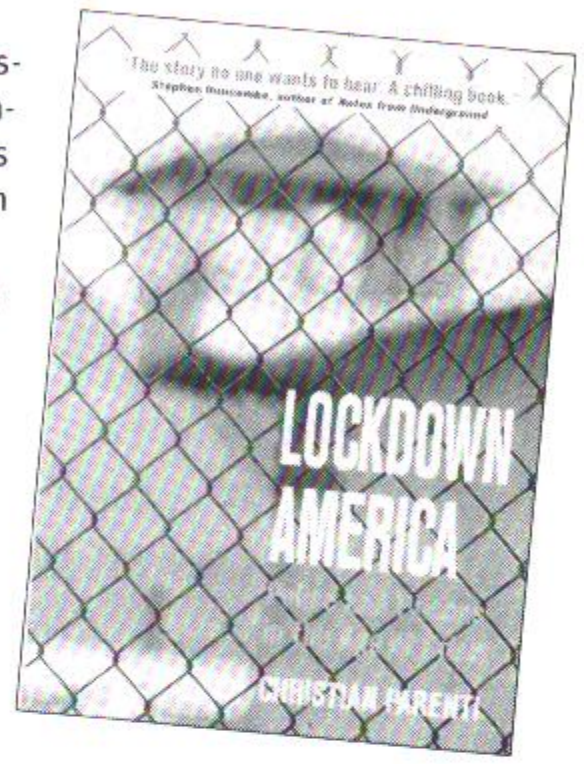
Reforming Britain's Institutions ■ **New Policy Institute** ■ **New Economics Foundation**
1pm, Disraeli Suite, Royal Bath Hotel, Bath Road

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America's new gulags

Mike Phipps reviews *Lockdown America*, by Christian Parenti, published by Verso, £20 hbk.



Consider the facts: 1.8m Americans are in prison, a 300% increase in twenty years. By next year one in ten black men will be in jail. Already, one-third of young black men in some US cities are in jail, on probation or awaiting trial.

The thesis of this book is that the latest phase of the US's crime and punishment build-up is a key aspect of the economic restructuring of the US since the 1980s. Detroit, for example, the symbolic centre of industrial the US, having lost half its population in the 1980s, by 1990 was 80% African-American with one-third of its citizens in poverty. The disappearance of work and the ensuing social breakdown have sparked a new wave of criminal justice crackdowns aimed at controlling these newly "deregulated" populations.

The "war on drugs" is central to this. For all its rhetoric about targeting big dealers, it's invariably the small fry that are punished most harshly. This is partly due to the US's forfeiture laws, whereby accused major drug traffickers can have their charges reduced in return for forfeiting assets – before a case even reaches court. The same laws fuel racist policing, as in the case of an African-American who paid cash for an airline ticket and had to forfeit the money because he fitted a "drug courier profile". Similarly in Florida, police used traffic offences as a pretext for confiscating tens of thousands of dollars from (mainly black) motorists.

"Zero tolerance" is another strand of this offensive. The fact that it was introduced in New York in the same year as the city's first cases of cholera and bubonic plague in decades reveals the administration's distorted priorities. The policy targeted the homeless, truants, squeegee merchants and street vendors, generally criminalising the poor and excluded, often in an overtly racist way. Much of this harrassment is now being licensed out to private security guards.

The police are encouraged to be more trigger-happy too. The killing of an unarmed African immigrant when the police fired 41 shots at him earlier this year was not an isolated case. In cities across the US, innocent bystanders have been gunned down by SWAT teams, as they sweep entire ghettos. In California children as young as six were handcuffed in a routine trawl through a housing estate.

Sentencing has got tougher – and also more arbitrary. If a defendant is labelled a "gang member" by police, according to criteria such as "wearing baggy trousers", they can expect to have several years added to their sentence.

Prison is now the ultimate in official terror. Only about one third of male inmates (20% of women) are in prison for violent crime – the rest are serving time for property or drugs offences. But the regime is one of torture, brutality and death. Between 1989 and 1994, 175 male inmates were shot with live rounds by guards in Californian jails alone, sometimes in their cells. Very few of these incidents were investigated and the worst punishment any guard received was a six-month suspension from work. Psychotic prisoners are routinely used by guards to break restive inmates by using rape and battery. An estimated quarter of a million male inmates are raped every year: the process is often institutionalised to create a divided and politically docile prison population. For women, rape by guards (male and female) is epidemic in some jails, resulting in 400 pregnancies a year in the jails of Washington DC alone. A 1996 Human Rights Watch Report on the rape of women prisoners ran to 350 pages, yet covers only five states. Redress is increasingly unavailable: a 1996 law effectively makes prisoners' access to the civil courts impossible.

So for many inmates, joining a gang – often based on race, and whose induction into membership may involve killing someone, as is alleged with the white supremacist Aryan Brotherhood – may provide the only security from abuse. Again, such murderous divisions among inmates can be useful to the authorities in controlling prison populations. Unfortunately, this prison race war is later discharged onto the US's streets.

There's big money in all this. Building prisons costs $7 billion a year and prisons employ half a million people, the biggest growth areas being in former areas of industrial employment. Prison work – the prison industrial complex – contributes fully 1% of all US economic activity. Most prisoners are paid peanuts – in Texas, they work for nothing – and even local government bodies are now hiring low security prisoners for their work crews to keep down labour costs.

Private prisons are booming too, many taking advantage of the climate of deregulation to hire poorly-trained, low-paid guards (sometimes ex-convicts themselves) to run jails devoid of facilities. All these trends should concern activists here. New Labour's fondness for private jails is matched only by their enthusiasm for more prisons as a deterrent.

This is an angry, passionate book whose vivid descriptions of these new gulags constitute a shocking indictment of Clinton's America.

London Irish Women's Centre

Trade Union Survey

Although the Irish comprise the largest ethnic minority group in Britain and have a long, proud history of trade union activity, only two trade unions include "Irish" in their ethnicity recording. As a result, there is little indication of whether they are being discriminated against as employees or union members. The London Irish Women's Centre carried out a survey of trade unions last year and recently held a conference to discuss the resulting report.

Not only is this an excellent report on the specific issue, it also highlights general issues relating to ethnic monitoring. Get a copy (50p stamps to LIWC, 59 Stoke Newington Church Street, London N16 0AR) and follow up its recommendations within your union.

Sola Sierra

Sola Sierra, President of the Association of Relatives of Disappeared Political Prisoners of Chile died during surgery on 1st July 1999. Her funeral in Chile was attended by tens of thousands. Sue Lukes, Chair of the Chile Committee for Justice, pays tribute.

I first met Sola during a press conference at the House of Commons. The journalists were chatting and eating their sandwiches and recording testimonies of the atrocities of the Pinochet regime. I was struck by her quiet determination and straightforwardness, as well as her insistence on working with all, going anywhere, talking to anyone. It was an expression of her profound political knowledge and abilities that led her to insist on a broad, uncompromising and non-sectarian practice. Finding out about her previous activities, as a schoolgirl and as a women's activist, a social pioneer during Popular Unity, and a campaigner for human rights, made me wonder what she would have done in other circumstances. Certainly the cause of human rights and the disappeared found in her a true leader as well as a symbol.

Thousands of British people owe a real debt to Sola Sierra. She worked hard here, travelling all over the country. She lent dignity to the proceedings in the House of Lords (something few have succeeded in doing), just by being there: an act of presence, sitting, watching, with her photograph pinned to her coat, symbolising the struggle to which she devoted herself. Were it not for Sola, Pinochet would not now be under arrest and facing trial here.

Sola Sierra gave us a vision of what justice could mean and do, even in Britain. She gave us a model of personal authority, which came entirely from her own sincerity and constancy and which was so sharply in contrast with the arbitrary authoritarianism which she always opposed. It was an authority that also contrasted with and stands opposed to the authoritarianism that we sometimes find on the left: one that places more emphasis on structures than values and prefers quoting text to learning from our lives, our experiences and our feelings.

We have lost such an important person but are thankful for the chance we had to get to know her and to join her on part of her long journey towards truth and justice.



Jeremy Corbyn adds:

Sola paid a very heavy price for her role in the election of the Popular Unity government in 1970 and the department of social development set up by the Allende government to promote community development and better quality housing and health schemes in the poorest parts of the country. Family members who were known supporters of the government were executed and her treatment by the military and by the police was abominable.

Before returning to Chile she invited me to come to Santiago to meet the Agrupacion to talk to them about British solidarity work. Her life was dedicated to social development and social improvement in Chile and to human rights and socialism. It's a tragedy that she died before seeing Pinochet on trial and hopefully imprisoned.

Ron Hallett 1913–1999

Richard Hanford writes: **Whenever he rose to his feet a committee meeting would have a collective sigh: sighs of resignation from the right, sighs of relief from the left. On countless occasions he would rise to the rescue of floundering socialists, and was ever ready to leap to the defence of younger comrades. Eyes burning bright beneath energetic eyebrows, with complete command of policy and procedure, Ron's wit and wisdom would invariably win through.**

"As Assistant Secretary of the NUJ, he founded the union's tradition of defending legal cases," said his successor, Bob Norris, "He hadn't an enemy in the world" – except Robert Maxwell! On his retirement, Ron was awarded NUJ honorary membership for his outstanding service.

His son recalls him being rushed to hospital on Christmas Eve. It was feared he might be slipping away, when his eyes suddenly opened and he announced, "Good evening. I'm conducting a survey on customer care on behalf of the Consumers Association."

Ron, a subscriber to *LLB*, read an obituary I wrote last month and phoned me to discuss it. It is ironic that I should now be writing his obituary. From now on, *Moonlight Serenade*, played at his funeral, will always seem to me a socialist anthem. I shall remember Ron as a caring, compassionate and courteous comrade, dignified but devastating in debate.

Elizabeth Ann Viney, 1947-1999

Cllr Garth Frankland writes: The death this summer of Ann Viney (formerly Watkinson) has robbed the labour movement of one of its most colourful characters. Anne was always proud of her working class origins. Her mother was a shop worker, her father an engineering shop steward. Throughout the many twists and turns of her ultimately tragic life she held true to her belief in socialism.

Born in the former mining village of Garforth, she became a Labour Party activist and despite its relative isolation became involved in a series of left wing groups like the Workers Socialist League, the Socialist Party and *Labour Briefing*. Anne was never an organiser or someone who struggled with deep theoretical problems. Her politics came from her heart.

She flung herself into a series of struggles from the 1981 miners strike – where she was arrested on the picket lines along with Ann Scargill – to raising money in Harrogate for labour movement causes last year. I can clearly remember seeing her on the Grunwick picket line, her blonde hair disappearing into the thick of the fighting between the pickets and police.

Despite the complexity and problems of her personal life, she was always willing to help on labour movement campaigns and to help and show kindness to individual comrades.

Condolences must to go her husband Paul and her two sons. She will be sorely missed.

Correspondence

Criticising the lobby of the Labour Party Conference on 26th September, Alistair Ward says that such a lobby can only really be organised by the trade unions and Labour Party organisations.

I'm very much in favour of putting pressure on leaders and official organisations to back lobbies of this kind. Some have. However, I'm not sure that the asylum seekers, single parents and pensioners who are in New Labour's sights, would appreciate waiting until everyone is on board. Ward's opposition to the lobby seems to me little more than a variant of Millbank "don't rock the boat" politics. That is a pity.

Keith Flett
Tottenham, London

Unfortunately, due to editing, some key criticisms were omitted from my review of Peter Gowan's *The Global Gamble* in last month's *LLB*, giving a far more favourable impression of the book than is warranted. After the positive points I made, I went on to say the following.

"There is also Gowan's particular take on the Gulf War. Since the 1991 war to expel Iraq from Kuwait was justified by Western leaders on human rights grounds, Gowan concludes there is something inherently wrong with the concept of human rights – 'rights-based individualism/liberalism', as he calls it. This was recently echoed when Tariq Ali, pointing out that NATO leaders were justifying the bombing of Kosova in terms of human rights, suggested that there was a danger of a human rights fundamentalism emerging. But as Gowan notes in the Gulf context (and we can add the Balkans), US policy objectives in reality had nothing to do with protecting human rights.

"In fact human rights are one thing it might be fruitful to be fundamentalist about. What about the human rights of the hundreds of innocent Serbian civilians killed in the NATO campaign? For too long much of the left has been inconsistent on human rights as a result of viewing regional conflicts through the distorting mirror of good and bad global camps. The reality is that modern warfare is invariably one of the worst options for advocates of democracy or socialism, workers and the poor.

"Furthermore, if there is to be a hierarchy of political principles, respect for human rights is not a bad one to put at the top. It could take precedence for example over national rights to self-determination, as Boris Kagarlitsky has argued, when the latter and other majoritarian 'solutions' threaten to undermine basic rights. Perhaps by more consistently championing human rights, we could be more successful at unmasking Western leaders' hypocrisy when they selectively use the rhetoric of rights."

Mike Phipps
Brent

The Labour Party today is nothing like the party I joined 25 years ago as an eager young recruit. They have inherited 18 years of Conservative legislation and adopted it willingly. The word socialist is treated like a curse and they are in danger of overtaking the Tories in their quest to appease capitalism. The obscene amount of money spent on the Trident programme and the blank cheque that was magically produced for the conflict in Kosova could have been used to build new schools and hospitals instead of killing innocent civilians.

It is no longer the party of the poor and unfortunate but of the rich and powerful. Yes there are still good socialists in the Party but our numbers are falling and the Millbank machine has pledged to wipe us out.

The Labour Party should take a leaf out of the great Communist Councillor Bob Selkirk who on a number of occasions when challenged to explain why he fought so hard for the working class said, "nothing is too good for those who are forced to sell their labour". As a socialist I intend to be part of a party who believes in those sentiments – if not the Labour Party, then one that can accommodate true socialist policies.

Billy MacGilvray
Fife

LLB has recently given extensive coverage to the EMU, quite rightly criticising the euro as a neo-liberal policy that puts power into the hands of the unelected bankers of the ECB. I wouldn't fault this analysis for one second but there are questions of tactical opposition to neo-liberalism that are open to debate.

The EU is here to stay for the time being and indeed withdrawal would represent an absolute disaster for the British economy as tariffs and other barriers to trade were reimposed. The realities of the greatly expanded international capital markets, combined with EU membership which entails free movement of capital, do impose limits on the ability of governments to conduct expansionary economic policies if the markets disapprove of them.

Of course, it makes sense to try as hard as possible at a national level, but as politicians such as Lafontaine have realised, the EU represents an opportunity to manage the economy for full employment at a European level. A supranational effort to deal with unemployment would be far more resistant to the sorts of capital attacks that destroyed Mitterand's socialist programme in 1983.

So we have the question of membership of the euro. At the moment it must remain out of the question for the left. However, a potentially effective method of opposition to neo-liberal Europe, would be linking British membership to a re-democratisation of European monetary policy and the creation of fiscal institutions, which could mean an effective investment bank if tax harmonisation is too controversial. This is the hope of European social democracy

It is also my contention that there is a dynamic of integration as the superstructure evolves to a European level, to deal with the large part of the economy that has transcended the national level. Critical socialist engagement with the EU is vital if we are to shape the nature of the evolving institutions, and it is likely to be more fruitful than outright opposition in the long term.

Graham Copp
Barnet

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

"New spy scandal uncovered"

M15 have raided an old people's home in Cambridge following a tip-off about links to an international spy ring.

Officers arrested Gladys Burgess, 98, after she was found secreting several copies of *Stalin for Beginners* in the home's bring and buy sale on 1st May. Officers became suspicious as they toured the stalls and noticed only redcurrant jam and revolutionary Garibaldi and Bourbon biscuits on the refreshment stall.

The home's manager, a Mr Philby, 78, is to be investigated following revelations that the social communication class had been making collages of GCHQ; the origami class had been using the *Morning Star* for raw material; and *Songs of Praise* had been dropped in favour of collective singalong evenings featuring "Stalin wasn't Stallin'" and "Tanks for the Memory". Mr Philby has already denied that his home movies have featured during "Saturday matinee" video sessions, while head chef Mr Molotov promised that his cocktail hour would remain unaffected.

Further investigations revealed that the annual seaside outing was no longer to Margate but a guided tour of Albania by Attila the Stockbroker. The home's minibus driver, interviewed on the regional news programme *Look East*, was seen shaking the snow off his boots as he denied that the vehicle was in fact a T34 tank.

Home Secretary Jack Straw confirmed to reporters that he had been informed by security services that Russia had invaded Poland eight months ago and he would be letting the Prime Minister know "at the earliest opportunity."



THE LIZ DAVIES COLUMN

Among the documents at May's NEC was the list of guests to Labour Party Conference. It was clearly meant to be an uncontentious item, but among the names of most of the ambassadors to this country was the Ambassador from Indonesia. I objected to the quite inappropriate inclusion of a representative of a government guilty of the most appalling human rights violations and was told that it would be wrong not to invite him given that there had been a general election in Indonesia. The regime's human rights record was clearly of no consequence.

After 25 years of genocide and repression in East Timor, recent events have shown the world the brutality of the Indonesian regime. The Indonesian Ambassador's presence at Labour Party Conference should be objected to by all Labour Party and trade union members. I hope that every Party member will write to the General Secretary calling for the invitation to be withdrawn and, if it is not withdrawn, everyone attending Conference will make it clear that he is not welcome. Any reception he attends, any event he participates in should be boycotted and he should be made to feel a pariah.

Of course, Millbank's attitude was not wholly surprising. For two and a half years, human rights campaigners, most prominently John Pilger but also many hundreds of others, have been calling on the Labour Government to adopt a real ethical foreign policy and cease the export of arms to Indonesia. The Government refused to suspend arms sales until the spotlight on East Timor, and undeniable evidence that Hawk aircraft have been used as part of the military operation there, shamed them into recanting. Tony Blair responded to public questions in July by claiming that he could not stop the arms sales. What nonsense! The Government could withdraw export licences at the drop of a hat and failure to do so has undoubtedly caused the deaths of hundreds of East Timorese.

In January (see February's *LLB*), Cathy Jamieson and I put a motion to the NEC calling for a review of the sponsors to the Labour Party – given that Raytheon (one of the world's largest arms dealers), Enron Europe Ltd (part of a power company condemned by Amnesty for its human rights abuses) and Novartis (purveyors of GM foods) were sponsors of the Party. We were not allowed to vote on our motion, but told that a review had already been set up and I was invited to participate. In May, I sent in a submission which called for ethical criteria to be implemented, so that the Party would not accept sponsorship or donations from arms manufacturers, or from companies condemned for human rights abuses, which used child labour or had violated labour laws. I have heard nothing since – despite numerous chasing letters and phone calls. I am therefore circulating my submission with a model motion to Labour Party branches and I encourage every Labour Party member who is ashamed of the Party having accepted money from arms dealers (and other unsavoury characters) to make their feelings known.

Publication of the Party's 1999 Annual Report, with the 1998 accounts, drew press attention to the names of some of the high value donors. However, more diligent readers will note that the Party's dependence on high value donations and sponsorship has increased from 10% in 1997 to 30% in 1998 – the same percentage contributed by trade unions. I have no doubt that most Labour Party members would rather see the Party financed by trade unions – with the laudable aim of putting pressure on the Government to improve the lot of their members – than by big business who will call for favours for the few in return. Next thing we know, there will be seats reserved for big business at Conference and a shareholders' ballot for a new "fatcats" section of the NEC.

The presence of Lords Sainsbury and others among the high value donors led to understandable press speculation that government office and honours are for sale. A Labour government should avoid not only actual conflicts of interest, but also the appearance of conflicts of interest. Not reported was how the amount of Lord Sainsbury's donation was revealed. At present, the Party discloses the names of those giving more than £5,000 – but not the amounts given. The draft Bill emerging from the Neill Committee recommendations requires all political parties to disclose amounts over £5,000. At the July NEC, I asked the Prime Minister if he would support the Party voluntarily disclosing amounts over £5,000 in advance of the legislation. He and the General Secretary both replied that they saw no need to. The Party's Annual Report therefore discloses Lord Sainsbury as a donor of £5,000 or more. It is only due to a leaked document that anyone (the press, Party members and members of the NEC) learnt that he had in fact given £2 million.

Six months ago, I read in a minute of the Party's Finance Committee that "we must not be embarrassed to encourage high-value donations." What Party members are asking is: "will we be embarrassed by the price exacted by the donors in return?"

Check out Liz Davies' new website at www.lizdavies.org

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