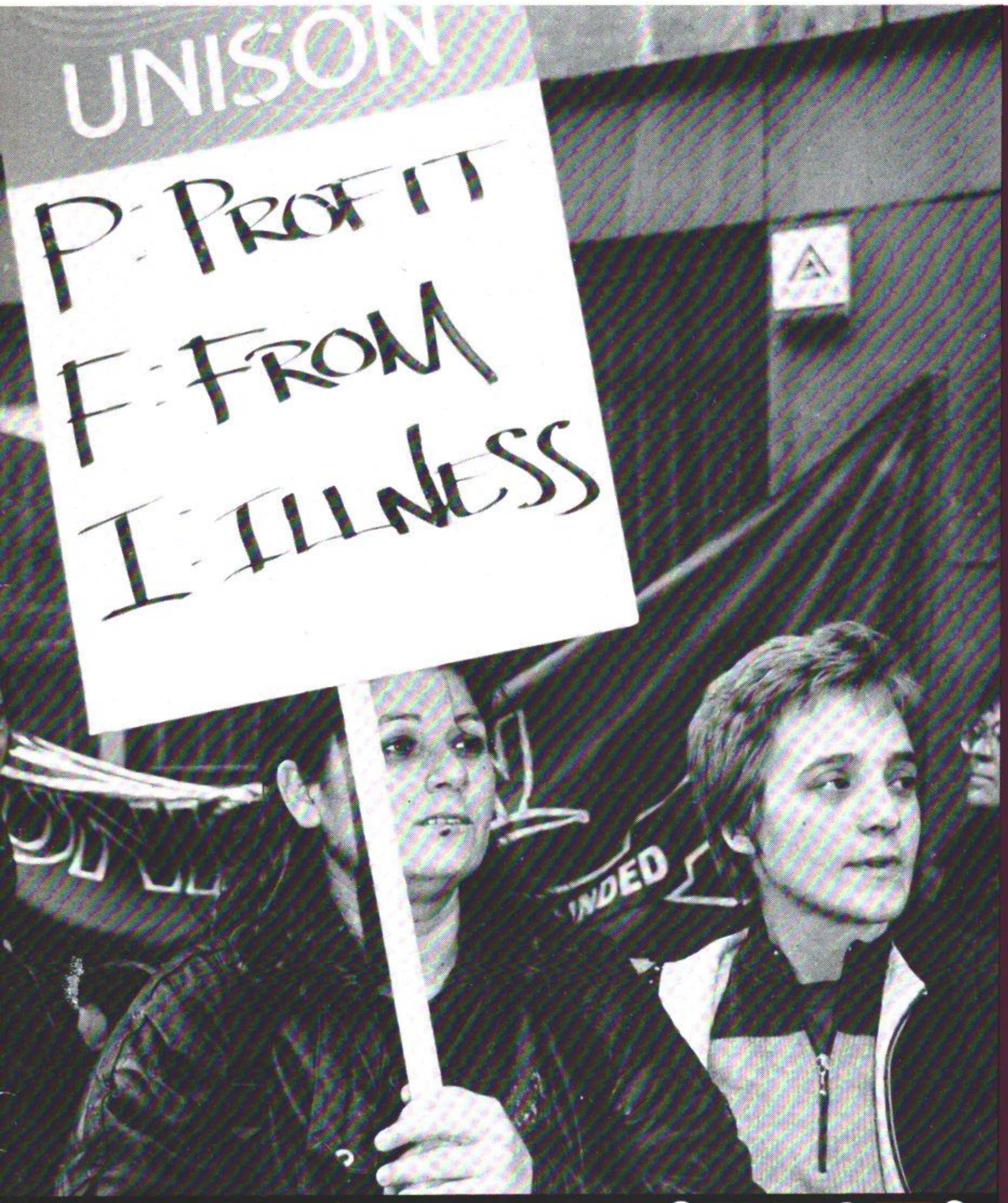
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Briefing

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■ The copy deadline for the October issue is Monday 13th September.



September 1999

Cover photo by Molly Cooper

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EDITORIAL

Seeking asylum from our bogus politicians

In a scene contributed by Shakespeare to a play on the life of Thomas More, the English national poet shows More facing down a London mob on the rampage against resident foreigners ("strangers"). It's a passage which our politicians and newspaper editors should study. More tells the rioters that if the King were to banish them, then they too "must needs be strangers". Shakespeare then places in More's mouth the enduring and unanswerable argument for the right to asylum:

> *Would you be pleased*
> *To find a nation of such barbarous temper*
> *That breaking out in hideous violence*
> *Would not afford you an abode on earth ...*

Summing up, More demands of the mob:

> *...What would you think*
> *To be thus used? This is the strangers'*
> *case,*
> *And this your montainish inhumanity.*

It's clear that Shakespeare would have understood, better than New Labour, the issues at stake in Dover.

Europe shelters a disproportionately small share of the global total of refugees, the vast majority of whom are hosted by third world countries – countries impoverished by the economic and trade policies pursued by the West. Britain, in turn, shelters a disproportionately small share of Europe's total refugee population. And Britain is also one of the few European countries to detain asylum seekers for the "crime" of seeking asylum. If the Asylum and Immigration Bill becomes law, Britain will further default on its basic human rights obligations.

Only months ago, this country went to war ostensibly to defend the human rights of Kosovar Albanians. Now this same community, along with Kurds and others, finds itself under attack in Dover. The irony is bitter. The politics are insidious.

The 'problem' is not those who seek asylum. The problem is the hostile attitude towards them and the way it is propagated by the media and politicians, and institutionalised in law and in practice through Home Office, immigration and police officers, courts and prisons. The problem, in other words, is racism and xenophobia.

Recent remarks by Jeffrey Archer and Prince Phillip, and the ambivalent response to them, confirm once again the casual racism that infects the world view of the rich and powerful. More disturbing have been some of the recent comments made by New Labour politicians. It is appalling, twenty years after Thatcher's infamous remark about British people's fear of being "swamped", to hear the same argument and even the same phrase tripping off the tongues of Labour MPs and ministers.

In any government that was serious about promoting racial justice, Jack Straw's remarks on travellers would constitute gross misconduct for a Home Secretary, and result in instant dismissal. His sweeping and ignorant assertions were classic specimens of saloon bar racism. Meanwhile, the police assault on Anthony Green in Sheffield, the death in custody of Sarah Thomas in London, the unresolved cases of Roger Sylvester and Christopher Alder and many, many more make a mockery of the noble verbiage with which New Labour greeted the Macpherson report.

The performances of Lord Bassam, local MP Gwyn Prosser, Jack Straw and other New Labour spokespersons in the Dover affair have been squalid. At best they have portrayed the refugees as a problem to be managed. At worst, they have endorsed xenophobic perceptions and legitimised racist behaviour. In its response to the incidents in Dover, and its general approach to the rights of refugees, New Labour has chosen to collude with, rather than confront, racism. Since this is an issue that will only grow in importance in the years ahead – thanks to the instability wrought by globalisation and the super-power militarism so heartily endorsed by New Labour – it is vital that Party members and trades unionists join human rights campaigners to demand a radical change in direction from the Government.

Straw, Bassam and the rest claim to speak in Labour's name. It's up to Party members to make it clear they do not. If we fail to hold them to account, we will all be tainted.

Victory for the Ozbay family

John Stewart, from the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, reports.

After four years of campaigning to have their asylum claim recognised, the Ozbay family have finally won the right to stay in the UK. After Hanim Ozbay's appeal hearing – scheduled for 28th July – was adjourned yet again the family were thrown into confusion and a state of some despair. Finally, word came from the Home Office that they were to be granted exceptional leave to remain.

The Ozbays are a Kurdish Alevi Family who fled from Turkey via Northern Cyprus after suffering years of beatings, detention and harassment at the hands of the Turkish authorities. They have lived in north London for almost five years where they have been supported in their asylum campaign by the excellent work of the North Islington Law Centre and by stalwart support from local campaigners and their church.

The family's barrister gave free time and expertise at Hanim's Appeal. Others gave their time to leaflet, petition and speak at meetings to gain support for the family. For the last two years the campaign has probably been the most active, vibrant campaign against deportation in London. Lawyers, churchgoers, trade unionists, socialists and human rights campaigners came together to support this family's campaign.

The Ozbay Family's victory shows again that campaigning can and does make a difference. When people facing deportation reach the end of the legal avenues open to them, campaigning to put pressure on government ministers to show compassion and allow them to stay outside the immigration rules, does work. With the Immigration and Asylum Bill about to make the conditions of those who seek asylum in the UK far worse, more asylum seekers will need to follow the example set by the Ozbays and campaign vigorously for their rights.

Dover's disgrace

Dave Turner, an active anti-fascist in Kent for 21 years, looks behind the recent headlines.

In recent weeks media attention has been focused on the Kent port of Dover, following violence between local youths and asylum-seekers. Behind the lurid headlines about what the *Sun* called "razor-wielding immigrants" is an unedifying story of racist bigotry and scapegoating fuelled by unscrupulous newspapers and opportunistic politicians.

Over the past two years, Dover has become home to a diverse and growing community of asylum-seekers. As well as being corralled in Dover (often with family members held in detention) and forced to exist on meagre benefits in bed and breakfast accommodation while awaiting a decision on their asylum applications, the refugees have had to endure abuse, harassment and violence from some local people. And there have been three NF marches.

Long-term economic decline, particularly since the closure of the Kent coalfield, and the resulting high unemployment have made some Dover people bitterly resentful of what they regard as people coming to sponge off of them. This has been exacerbated by Dover, Britain's gateway to the world, being paradoxically a small-minded, monocultural, provincial English backwater, with census figures showing the town as 99.1% white.

The *Dover Express* has obliged the bigots by giving them unlimited space and printing all manner of lying filth about asylum-seekers (or "human sewage", as editor Nick Hudson has called them).

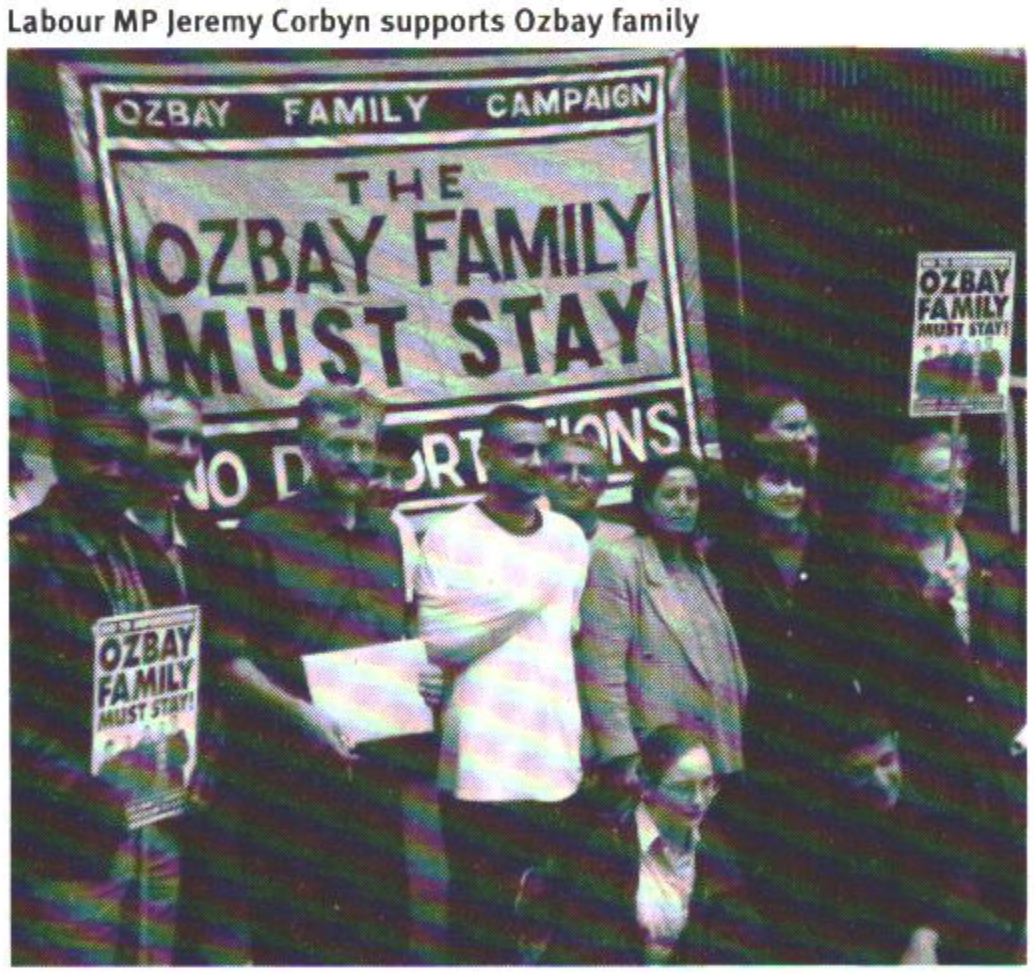
Behind the political point-scoring, there is a consensus between Labour and Tory politicians. Everyone pays lip-service to the need for compassion towards "genuine" asylum-seekers; and everyone concurs that racism is a bad thing. But everyone also agrees that Dover's problem is that it has "too many" refugees, and that Britain is being "swamped" by "bogus" asylum-seekers.

Home Office Minister Lord Bassam told Radio 4's *World at One*: "We've been working very closely with officials abroad, particularly in France, to try and see the problem off before it actually arrives on these shores". This is how New Labour really sees people fleeing persecution – "the problem" which has to be kept out.

When Bassam was challenged on Channel 4 News by Nick Hardwick of the Refugee Council to condemn "the racist nonsense that's spouted out in places like Dover", the minister replied "Well, I don't know that there's a racism problem in Dover"!

Dover's Labour MP Gwyn Prosser told Meridian television why he wanted refugees dispersed away from the town: "We are no more intolerant than any other community but ...

Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn supports Ozbay family



when you do crush large numbers of asylum-seekers into ... an area which is not used to receiving ethnic minorities ... there are bound to be tensions".

Dover's problem is not the few hundred asylum-seekers who make up just 0.4% of the local population. The problem is racism, combined with economic and social problems that make people look for scapegoats.

Asylum figures

Home Office statistics show that 405 people were deported from the UK in April 1999. A further 2,360 were refused admission and removed. 966 people were held in detention centres or prisons on 31st May. These included 182 at Campsfield, 181 at Rochester Prison, 151 at Haslar and 142 at Tinsley House. In London, 16 were held at Holloway, ten at Brixton and nine at Pentonville. Excluding what the Home Office call "overstayers" or "illegal entrants", there were 682 asylum seekers detained at 30th June. Most came from India (88), Nigeria (74), Pakistan (52) and Sri Lanka (40).

The surge in deportations and removals seen in the first 18 months of the Labour Government seems to have slowed and we are now roughly back to the rate of enforcements experienced under the Tories. Under the provisions of the Immigration and Asylum Bill, we can expect to see the rate of removals increase and more people being detained.

Another death in police custody

Sarah Thomas, a thirty-five year old black woman, died on 6th August after being arrested by Stoke Newington police. After being locked in a cell she is reported to have fallen into a coma. Two days later she was dead. Sarah's boyfriend Paul Doyle saw her at the hospital and says she was "covered in bruises and scratches".

Sarah's death follows a long line of deaths and beatings in Stoke Newington.

Paul Doyle has organised a campaign for an independent public inquiry. The campaign is calling for the suspension of the arresting officers and for the media to appeal for witnesses to the arrest to come forward.

● Contact the campaign on 0181-806 0742 or call Inquest on 0181-802 7430.

Pensioners go on the march

Former MP Mildred Gordon is still campaigning outside Parliament.

Last May, hundreds of pensioners marched through Blackpool in the pouring rain to the second Pensioners' Parliament at the Winter Gardens. 2,000 delegates from all over the UK attended.

The hall rang with cries of "Lead us, lead us", to Jack Jones, Jack Thain and others on the platform. So many marches, demonstrations, petitions and submissions to the Government's review had led nowhere, that the frustration of the assembled delegates was palpable.

Pensioners feel that New Labour has betrayed them. For years, the Labour Party attacked the Tories for breaking the link between pensions and wages and pensioners believed that when Labour came into office they would restore the link, thereby substantially increasing the basic pension.

The average pension is now £67.25 per week. Pensions have been increased to £75 (with a promise of £78 guaranteed minimum income in future) for those on Income Support only. Over one million people who are entitled to Income Support do not claim it. So any pensioner eligible for the £75 pension, who is not already on Income Support, must apply for it and go through a means test. This of course is moving away from the principle of universal benefits – introducing means testing by the back door.

Pensioners with small occupational pensions, ineligible for Income Support, housing benefits, council tax relief and other passported benefits are very badly off indeed.

A MORI survey into "subjective" or "self-perceived" poverty using questions based on the United Nation's definition of "absolute" and "overall" poverty showed that by their own standards almost a quarter (24%) of pensioners are in absolute poverty. That means being so poor that you are deprived of basic human needs. In order to avoid absolute poverty, you need enough money to cover all these things:

- adequate diet,
- housing costs/rent,
- water bills,
- adequate sanitation facilities (sewage disposal, flushing toilet, etc),
- access to clean water,
- access to basic health care,
- access to education/schooling

As many as 40% of single pensioners say their actual income falls a little or a lot below the income needed to surmount overall poverty and 20% of pensionable couples say the same.

In order to avoid overall poverty, you need to have enough money not only to cover all the things mentioned in the absolute poverty list above, but enough money to ensure that you are able to:

- live in a safe environment/area,
- have a social life in your local area.
- feel part of the local community,
- carry out your duties/activities in the family and neighbourhood and at work,
- meet essential costs of transport.

The pensioners' movement is split between those who are demanding a £75 pension now for all pensioners, led by Jack Jones, and those who feel that this demand is watering down the fight to restore the link. Most of today's pensioners have lived through the Depression and the Second World War and have paid national insurance contributions all their working lives. They did not expect to meet institutionalised ageism from a Labour Government.

They need the support of the trade unions and younger members of society to help them in their fight for proper health care and enough money to live in dignity in their old age. The ageing process affects us all eventually.

Privatising the air above

Laurence King of the IPMS union says the Government's plans to privatise air traffic control do not merit a boarding pass.

The UK's National Air Traffic Services (NATS) is recognised as a world leader in safe and efficient provision of air traffic services. It has an enviable safety record, stemming from a safety and service culture. It does not cost the taxpayer – its costs are recouped through charging users. It is a fine public service, so why privatise it? NATS recovers its costs retrospectively, so it has to borrow to invest. This has been done via its only route of low cost government loans, repaid in full plus interest, making a positive contribution to the Exchequer. NATS needs access to investment funds for the foreseeable future to modernise and improve the UK's air traffic control infrastructure and to contribute to initiatives aimed at improving European Air Traffic Control. The money required is about £8m over ten years.

What are the options for funding NATS? First the Government could continue to provide loans and receive a positive return. This would be in line with Maastricht criteria and Gordon Brown's 'Golden Rule' on borrowing for investment – the Treasury insists on including it in the Private Sector Borrowing Requirement. Second, the Treasury could relax their rules on public bodies borrowing from private markets, as they have done for regional airports owned by local authorities. Third, two options proposed by the NATS trade unions IPMS and PCS, allow access to private funds but retain public ownership. These are an independent publicly owned company, or a trust method as used for the Canadian ATC system. Fourth, there is Public/Private Partnership (PPP). No matter how many times it is called "PPP", it is privatisation. With privatisation NATS gets something it has never had before – shareholders whose interest is to maximise share price and dividend.

Air Traffic Control is labour intensive. Staff account for around 60% of total costs. As with many privatisations, the quickest route to profit is to reduce staff and staff costs. There is a fear that pressures will be brought on staff to handle more traffic, or even that investment will not be forthcoming – only the Government could guarantee that if they so wished. Those pressures could increase the risk of something going wrong. Currently, to allow controllers and support staff to concentrate fully on their tasks, the NATS unions and management work together to ensure stable employment conditions. Changes are incremental rather than radical. It is about minimising the chance of a mistake. There are expensive safety management procedures in place. Air Traffic Controllers must by law have a 30 minute break after two hours. NATS recognises the fatiguing effects of very busy positions now commonly found around the country, and agreements schedule breaks after 90 minutes or even one hour so that controllers can remain mentally alert. Will pressure be brought to bear to stick to the legal minima? How will controllers be treated in a private company following an 'incident' such as an airmiss? Will they receive support, encouragement and any necessary training, as at present, or be regarded as a liability?

What of the future? There is a need to focus on handling the dramatic growth in air travel as safely as possible. There are new systems pending such as the delayed New En-Route Centre at Swanwick, Hampshire. That is taking considerable effort, but is also causing uncertainty for the staff who will have to move there from the current London Air Traffic Control Centre near Heathrow. The added uncertainty and inevitable upheaval that privatising NATS would bring for questionable gain, if any, is not something that we believe is worthwhile. There are many other areas beyond this article that could be adversely affected by privatisation such as the need to integrate and harmonise European ATC.

- The Keep Our Skies Safe campaign, backed by Labour MPs including Gwyneth Dunwoody (chair of the Transport select committee) and Gavin Strang (ex-Transport Minister) are asking CLPs to adopt the following motion as their contemporary resolution for conference :

"This conference notes with grave concern the announcement by the Government that they intend to proceed with the sale of 51% of the National Air Traffic Services, under a Private Public Partnership scheme. Conference calls upon the Government to reconsider this approach giving much further detailed consideration to the proposals put forward by the IPMS and PCS, the two Unions recognised within NATS, for either an independent publicly owned company or a trust similar to that set up in Canada. This conference also notes the support given to the Union's case in parliamentary debates on the issue and the Early Day Motion in Parliament supported by 117 Labour MPs. This conference agrees that we need to maintain the excellent safety record and effectiveness of the Air Traffic Control System. Arrangements should be put in place to provide it with the investment funds for the future which do not involve a sell off to the private sector and commands the broad support of the labour and trade union movement."

Pensions Day 1999

March and Rally ◆ Saturday 18th September ◆ Trafalgar Square

Commemorate 24th September 1908 when UK pensioners registered for the first public old age pensions, under the pioneering 1908 legislation.

***Speakers*: Jack Jones (chair), Baroness Castle, Jimmy Knapp, Will Hutton, Trevor Phillips**

1pm: Assemble, Embankment

1.30: March via Parliament, Whitehall and Downing Street

2.30: Rally in Trafalgar Square

Inquiries: Roger Warren Evans, 0171-831 8600 or 0498-528137

66% say no!

The campaign to keep London Underground totally within the public sector is hotting up, reports Diana Udall of the RMT.

Following a successful rally earlier this summer the three main rail unions, RMT, ASLEF and TSSA have joined forces and set up the "Listen to London" campaign.

An opinion poll showed two thirds of tube users want the system to stay in the public sector. The same poll also said that 78% believe fares will rise through privatisation and 69% believe that the Mayor and the Greater London Assembly (GLA) should be responsible for funding the Underground – not the private sector. The campaign has also commissioned research into the whole question of funding methods, in particular that of issuing government-backed bonds, successful in modernising New York's subways. The Government seems prepared to go down this road for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. In the interest of accountability, it must be prepared to think again about the tube.

The question of public transport will be key in the Mayoral and GLA elections. Surely those in Millbank Tower have not forgotten that the promise not to privatise the tube was a reason for many Londoners, including transport workers, voting Labour in 1997. In a separate "Listen to London" survey, 50% of Labour candidates for the GLA said they wanted the Government to look at other options for funding the tube. A pity they didn't give this greater prominence when seeking Party nominations!

London Underground management is forging ahead regardless. It is proposed to hand over the "sub-surface" lines on a plate to Railtrack. Yet their safety record was recently criticised (again) by the Health and Safety Executive. As they do not employ maintenance staff, work is sub-contracted out, with all the uncertainty that brings with it. Eight consortia have expressed an interest in the deep-level lines, many of them contractors on the main-line, and guilty of widespread sub-contracting, compulsory redundancy, and aggressive attempts to change terms and conditions.

There is then supposed to follow a period of shadow running with no-one quite knowing how it is all going to work. John Prescott and co. admitted that this approach was a mess when the Tories wrecked the main-line – so why the blinkered approach now? Wake up New Labour and "Listen to London". Labour's candidates for Mayor and GLA must oppose any kind of privatisation.

- There will be fringe meetings at TUC & Labour Party Conferences and a campaigners conference in the autumn.
- Ensure that there are articles in local papers, stalls in shopping centres, markets etc.
- Raise it at your trade union branch.
- Get involved with the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation, c/o John Leach, 47c Wadeson Street, London, E2 9DP (0181-981 8065). Subscribe to the CATP e-mail list at http://keep-thetubepublic.listbot.com or by sending an e-mail to CATP-subscribe@listbot.com

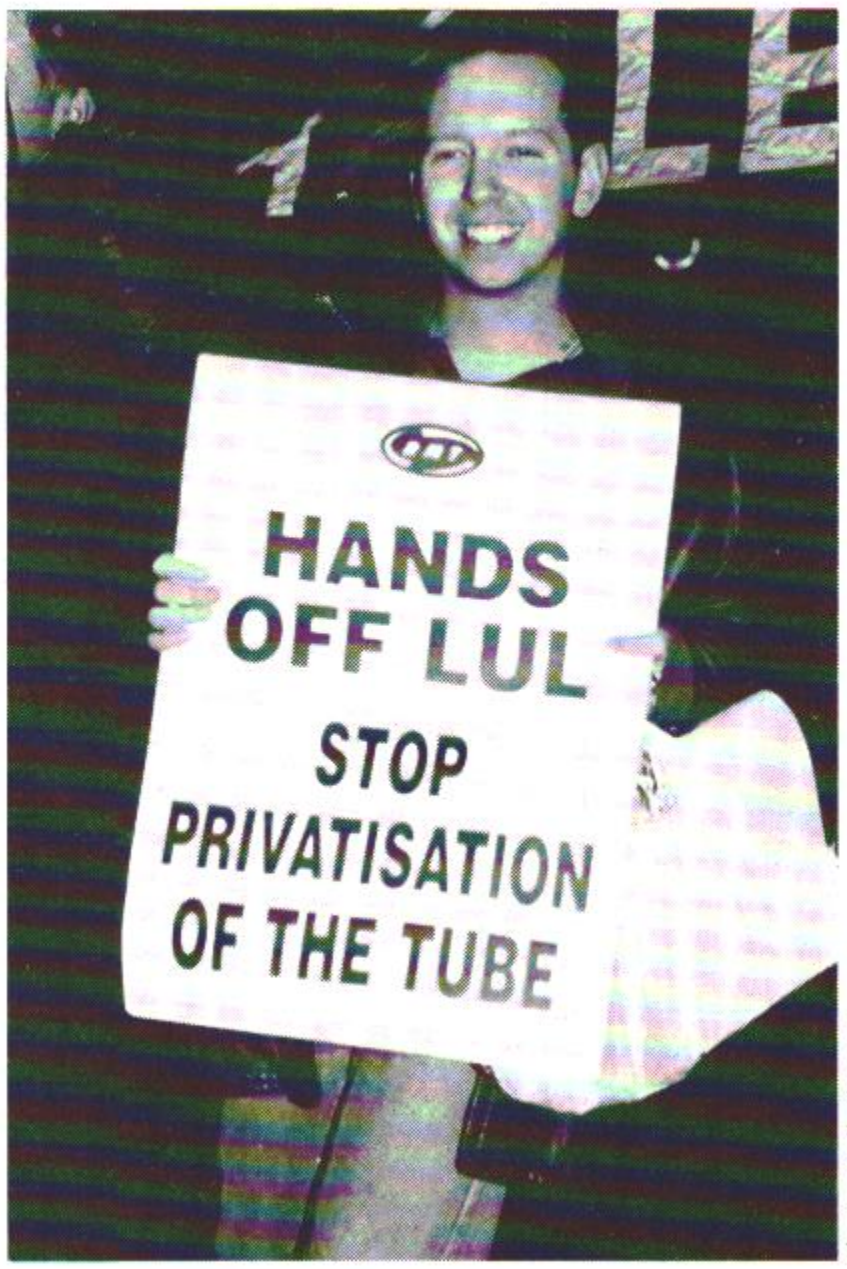


Photo: Molly Cooper

Union and community action is needed

Tote sale accumulates to bad bet

Geoff Martin writes: It baffles me why there hasn't been more of a protest on the left about Gordon Brown's plans to privatise the Tote.

For those who don't know, the Tote is a pooled betting system which is a bit like a mini lottery on each race. It's of little or no interest to wealthy big-time punters but is popular among working class racing fans. The profits from the Tote are re-invested in the racing industry.

At a meeting on privatisation at the UNISON conference in June I spoke at some length about the outrage of flogging off the Tote only to be met by blank expressions all around the room. It may not be as sexy as Air Traffic Control but the principle is just the same and the damage is compounded by the fact that it will be felt hardest by core Labour voters.

I was amazed that a recent issue of *Tribune* carried an article by that barking old Thatcherite John McCririck saying just what a good thing it would be to knock the "Nanny Goat" on the head. That should be enough to get us wound up into a campaign.

Ladbrokes and William Hills make a fortune out of the betting game and now that they're planning to move offshore as a tax dodge they'll rake in even more. An imaginative Labour government would look to expand the Tote in order to compete with the private sector, an even more imaginative Labour government would put the Tote in charge of the national lottery.

So who's up for a campaign to "Save the Nanny Goat"? Answers on a postcard to me care of *LLB*.

Post Office plc – next stop sell-off

Mike Kyriazopoulos, a CWU Delivery Unit representative, outlines the dangers of 'commercial freedom' for the Post.

"At least they won't privatise the Post Office" – that was the reason given by many postal workers for voting Labour in 1997. Now, the announcement that the Post Office is to be made a plc is widely viewed among CWU activists as a first giant step towards privatisation.

Union General Secretary Derek Hodgson says he is satisfied with Stephen Byers' assurances about retaining the Post Office in public ownership while providing "commercial freedom". But activists recall BT lasted a mere six months in the public sector as a plc, and over half the workforce was lost after full-scale privatisation.

Being a plc will increase the market pressure to cut jobs in a bid to push up productivity and bring conditions into line with the private sector. The end result would be all too familiar – more part timers and "flexiblility" and less job security and union influence.

Already, some of the Post Office Corporation's constituent businesses face privatisation. Sales and closures of Crown Offices continue apace, and last year 49% of Royal Mail's catering operation was sold to Granada Services. Across the country, managers constantly warn staff of the "competitive threat" from foreign postal services and courier companies waiting to grab the most profitable parts of the service. There is an ongoing drive to increase productivity and tame the union in the run-up to privatisation that management sees as inevitable.

The attempt at a new regime in Royal Mail has been going on for years. The company's plans for teamworking, "The Employee Agenda", resulted in eight days of national strike action in 1996, which the then General Secretary, Alan Johnson, ended by committing the union to a series of negotiations that seemed to go on forever.

Now the "outstanding issues" have apparently been resolved with a string of agreements fervently recommended by the CWU leadership. First the Interim Delivery Agreement opened the door to earlier start times on delivery. Then the Productivity Bonus Scheme commited postal workers to achieving ever-increasing productivity levels which could only be achieved by cutting jobs. The Bonus Scheme was accepted by an individual members' ballot on a slim majority and a record low turn-out.

The latest agreement, deceptively entitled "The Way Forward", covering everything from pay restructuring to ways of working, undermines long-established rules on seniority for allocation of duties, marginalises union influence at a local level and includes elements of teamworking. Members are currently being balloted and a large number of branches are recommending rejection.

Meanwhile, Johnson has been rewarded with a position in the DTI with special responsibility for the Post Office. Hodgson's initial reaction to the leaks preceding the White Paper's release had a lot of harsh words about plc status, but his tune changed considerably after publication, concentrating solely on the "premature" reduction of the Royal Mail's letter-carrying monopoly. Shortly afterwards, the press revealed Hodgson had received the heftiest increase in pay and bonuses for a General Secretary – 30%, taking him to £92,000 a year.

The CWU leadership seem to think they are in a honeymoon period with New Labour. In opposition, prominent Labour politicians were queuing up to join the CWU-led "Stand by your Post" campaign, which, together with a big public mobilisation, was the only successful campaign against a Tory privatisation. Now it is all too apparent that the union's approach of arguing for an independent publicly-owned corporation with commercial freedom has been totally ineffective. "Commercial freedom", the watchword for the CWU Executive and Royal Mail's top management alike, has proved to be just a stepping stone to privatisation.

The union rank and file needs an alternative strategy based on the principle that the Post Office should be a service to the community, not a cut-throat multinational, clearly stating that it should be run under democratic control of those who know best how to deliver the service – postal workers – and those who need it – the community. Technological advances must be used to improve the service and the lives of its workers, for shorter hours without loss of pay instead of job cuts. The socialist principle of taxing the profits and assets of the super rich has to be restated as the alternative to private sector involvement.

The CWU rank and file, although strong industrially, has so often failed to live up to its potential to challenge the bureaucracy due to its limited degree of organisation nationally. The twin threats of privatisation and Royal Mail's profit drive are already resulting in closer co-ordination between branches. Clearly the only way this can succeed is if this resistance is able to produce a massive national campaign that unites postal workers with the public, as well as involving other public sector workers facing similar threats.

A growing number of activists are also beginning to question the operations of the CWU political fund. We should certainly refuse to give any financial support to Labour MPs who vote against union policy. The CWU organises over 250,000 workers across the postal and telecoms industries. It's about time its voice was heard clearly and unequivocally.

Lewisham says No to private housing

Lewisham tenants rejected a 7,077-property privatisation despite the Council spending £300,000 on publicity. Dave Sullivan, who has appointed himself executive Mayor ahead of any referendum, and Government Whip Jim Dowd supported the transfer. Campaigners challenged a Council doorknocking and video campaign and in a 61% turnout, tenants voted 55-45 against the deal.

Voters had already rejected the pro-privatisation New Labour Council in a by-election. The vacancy in Pepys ward was caused by the resignation of a Labour Councillor fed up with the new executive "democracy" being piloted in Lewisham. Leading public housing campaigner Ian Page, a former Labour Councillor who joined the Socialist Party halfway through his term of office in the mid-90s, regained the seat as 'Socialist Alternative'.

Pupils reject EAZs

Ed Hall, Parents Against the Cuts, Crown Woods School (Eltham) and Greenwich CLP, reports on the campaigns against Education Action Zones.

On 20th July, the pupils of Kingsland School, Hackney, walked out in protest that they would be included in an EAZ bid and joined a large demonstration at the Town Hall. Already the Governors of Ashmount Junior School refused to be included in the EAZ.

In contrast, the governors of Thomas Tallis, Eltham Green and Kidbrooke schools in Greenwich, have voted to be in an EAZ, with little opposition. Perhaps speed and secrecy explain this. The law establishing EAZs is not yet one year old, and the bid was made without contacting governors or parents. Only in May were governors of Greenwich schools sent the outline of the application, and expected to vote in consent six weeks later.

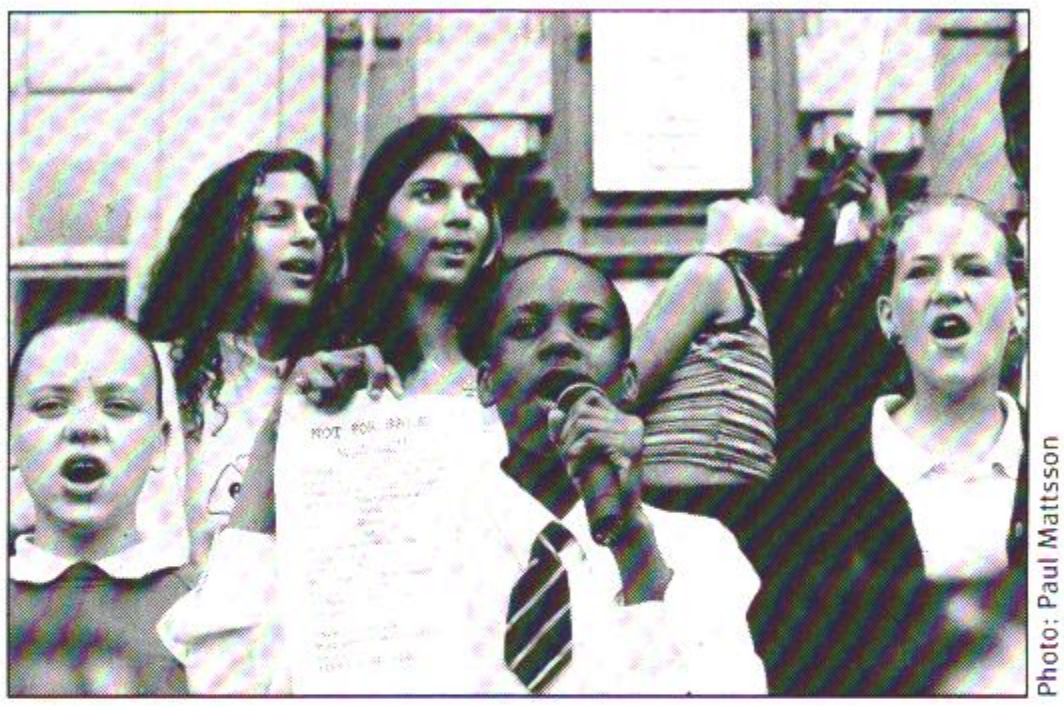


Photo: Paul Mattsson

EAZs give control of comprehensive schools, once the pride of London, to big business. In Greenwich, the EAZ spans the area in which the Acourts, Norris and Knight ran their racist gang and went to school. Despite the Macpherson report, the Director of Education is refusing to meet parents to discuss a growing crisis of confidence.

In addition Greenwich has sacked 18 staff from Crown Woods, which is not included in the EAZ. This led to a one-day NUT strike and many parent and pupil demonstrations.

EAZs will allow the profit motive to replace the search for educational excellence. In Greenwich the largest grouping on the EAZ forum is "business partners". A selective school will be part of the EAZ and pupils who are "disaffected" will be trained for manual work in non-selective schools.

The community is fighting back. Work has started to re-establish the comprehensive principle in Greenwich and elsewhere. This action is against the Labour local authorities that once again, as in the 60s, are allying themselves with contractors.

PFI is unhealthy

John Lister, Information Director of London Health Emergency, challenges the Government over the Private Finance Initiative (PFI).

Ministers are closing their ears to criticism and ignoring all of the warning signs as they rubber-stamp more hospital building projects financed by the PFI.

• doctors' leaders are warning that ministers are unleashing the largest acute hospital closure programme ever to hit the health service;

• the all-party Commons Health Select Committee has called for a halt to new PFI projects while the true costs are evaluated;

• the Association of Community Health Councils conference has voted to call on the Government to abandon PFI as the principal method of funding project because the NHS can't afford it;

• the National Audit Office has warned that the first PFI hospital to be completed, Dartford and Gravesham, will fall short of promised savings;

• academics are warning that PFI deals can only claim to represent value for money by fiddling the figures and leaning on government subsidies;

• building firms and others in PFI consortia are boasting of the fat profits they expect from these projects over the next 30-60 years;

• campaigners across the country are protesting that PFI deals will result in hospitals moving to remote greenfield sites, leaving local services desperately short of front-line beds.

In Wakefield, campaigners are claiming the scalp of the controversial PFI scheme to replace two hospitals with a new PFI-funded one. Local opinion was sympathetic, and powerful allies were won; UNISON secured support from crusading comedian Mark Thomas and the local newspaper to publicise the issue and they invoked a little-known clause in the Local Government Act 1972 to trigger a local referendum on the issue. It notched up massive majorities against the use of private cash to build NHS facilities. A staggering 81% said that if no public sector funding were available they would rather see no new hospital built than one funded privately. This gives the lie to all those MPs and councillors who have kow-towed to PFI schemes under the flimsy pretext that local people want a new hospital regardless of the cost and consequences.

In Kidderminster campaigners decided to take their protest into the electoral arena, standing 15 candidates in May's local elections, under the banner of Health Concern. On a higher than usual (37%) poll, eleven of them won, seven in Wyre Forest, where they toppled Labour's overall control. And in West Hertfordshire, a successful campaign has forced ministers to bounce back proposals to build a PFI hospital on a greenfield site, which would have replaced existing NHS facilities.

The longer PFI deals are allowed to go on, the worse will be the long-term damage to the NHS.

Blair plc sets left a challenge

Andy Walker, Ilford South CLP, takes on New Labour's business culture.

New Labour's imposition of a commercial culture, by tactics such as changing the name of the Regional Executive to the Regional Board and Regional Secretary to Regional Director, has not inspired many members. The point of having different titles from a public limited company is to stress that the Party is a voluntary organisation. To undermine that ethos may weaken motivation. Members would not work for nothing for a PLC, so why work for a Labour Party structured like a PLC?

However, providing we can grit our teeth, New Labour's fondness for business-speak might be useful in promoting democracy within our Party. Shareholders expect a Managing Director to be ruthless in the pursuit of maximising profits – any MD who fails this test can expect to face a challenge and a move elsewhere. It is vital for our Party to have a similar attitude to the Party Leader.

At present a Labour Prime Minister cannot face a challenge while in office – the constitution of the Party forbids it. Tory MPs know about the place of loyalty in politics and ousted Mrs Thatcher when she became a liability to them retaining power. Constituencies putting constitutional amendments allowing a Labour Prime Minister to be challenged, albeit with a hefty proportion of the PLP signing up for challenge (say 25%) might gain support. We must never be sentimental enough to believe that any one individual is more important than the whole Party.

PLCs look to avoid rows with customers when appointing managers. Yet we manage to alienate a proportion of members virtually every by-election by not allowing the local Party to nominate who it feels is the best person on to the shortlist. *Partnership in Power* would become more of a reality if local parties had the right to nominate one person on to the shortlist, along with whoever Millbank perceives to be the best candidate.

The Policy Forum is an essential ingredient of the Labour brand that is sold to members as a means of participation and influence. Yet in my area one had to be cancelled because of lack of interest, and another attracted twenty people after a mailing of two thousand members. Even the recent National Policy Forum meeting in Durham had a high number of missing faces. If the Policy Forum were a school, it would be on the failing list for its absentee rate and narrow curriculum.

Building on the practice of one member one vote and surveying the entire membership about policy may be a way of making our Party more saleable. Many members would welcome the opportunity to tick some boxes each year on policy to give themselves a stake in policy making, especially the large majority who never attend policy forums. Large corporations want to know how their customers feel about their product and make a point of asking them, why should Labour be any different?

The sticking point is who gets to write the questions in the annual survey to fit in with the annual report and the rest of the business culture we now have. The best way of finding out what our members feel is to let them ask the questions via constituencies.

An annual constituency "board meeting", to take place over a weekend, could select the most popular questions through debate and balloting. The constituency NEC representatives could address the meeting as a means of increasing this year's 30% turnout. People have a very short attention span when it comes to mailshots so one side of A4 and big print, while restricting the number of questions, would increase responses.

Using the Internet to decide one of the questions would widen participation further. An interactive site could be designed to allow any member to put down a question, and then allow other members to vote on it. To give the survey some purpose, if one of the questions is affirmed three years in a row (for example, linking benefits to earnings), then it automatically enters the next General Election manifesto.

Critics of such a plan would say such a survey could be damaging as the members might not think the same as the leadership. But the greater problem is a party that loses members. The poor turn out by activists at the Euro-elections shows we lose seats when members no longer believe they have real influence. A party without activists will become a losing party.

Businesses innovate and adapt to changing circumstances and we must do so too. Rather than merely opposing the latest Blairite idea, such as electing the NEC constituency section on a geographical basis, the Grassroots Alliance could agree and promote a series of constitutional amendments to empower members. The Greens threaten to attract young idealists who once would have joined our party.

We need to try new methods to win majority opinion on to our side, otherwise socialism could have the same market share of the Labour Party as the British motor cycle industry has of the economy.

LABOUR LEFT

Briefing

The only way to get your say at Labour Party Conference

October's issue of *LLB* will be sold at this year's Labour Party Conference. So ask your union, CLP or campaign to place an advert or conference greeting.

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George Robertson – war lord

John Booth, Islington North CLP, chronicles the Defence Secretary's rise to power.

At an age when most ambitious politicians consolidate their position in the Cabinet and broaden their party support to bid for even higher office, 53-year-old Defence Secretary George Robertson is quitting Parliament to become secretary-general of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. This seems to be throwing away a lifetime's work. Why spend all those years toiling away in Opposition only to chuck away your parliamentary career two years into a Labour Government?

The member for Hamilton South will doubtless miss his constituency surgeries as much as Labour in Scotland will regret having to fight a by-election. But these are footling affairs compared with the world in which Robertson has built his career – which, like his landing of the NATO job, owes much to his close relationship to the powerful in the United States.

The welcome new use by *The Guardian* of the US Freedom of Information Act to throw light on domestic British politics revealed Robertson's closeness to Pentagon chief William Cohen. Headlined "Robertson's Dear Bill letters reveal love-in with his US counterpart", the documents – which Jack Straw's proposed Freedom of Information Bill would have kept secret here until 2029 – have Robertson gushing: "We are all profoundly grateful for the leadership provided, and the example set, by the US." Six months later Cohen eased Robertson into the NATO post.



This is a long way from the policeman's son recruited by Giles Radice into the research department of the former General and Municipal Workers' Union in the late 1960s. He had to wait until 1978 to enter Parliament. Once there he was quickly made secretary of the Atlanticist Manifesto rump of Gaitskellites, but unlike the majority of them stayed with Labour when the Social Democratic Party was formed in 1981.

Not that Robertson was happy with Labour, especially on foreign policy and defence. In 1981, as CND accumulated members even faster than the SDP, he joined the Thatcher government-funded British Atlantic Committee to promote NATO policies on the siting of Cruise missiles in Europe. After Neil Kinnock became leader, Robertson – a long-standing supporter of the European Movement – became shadow Europe minister and had a discreet but important role, with his old friend Radice, in easing Labour into a pro-Brussels position.

At the same time, he worked closely with the Americans in recruiting members of the British American Project for the Successor Generation, an Atlanticist network of rising politicians and so-called opinion formers.

In addition to Chris Smith, Mo Mowlam, Peter Mandelson, Liz Symons and No 10 chief of staff, Jonathan Powell, journalists Jeremy Paxman, James Naughtie and Trevor Phillips are part of the influential political network Robertson helped assemble, along with Lord Holme of Cheltenham, latterly a key Liberal Democrat figure in the Blair Lib-Lab "project", and Lord Carrington, the previous British secretary-general of NATO. Like Carrington, Robertson attends the discreet international gatherings of the powerful known as the Bilderberg Group.

In opposition he was vice-chairman of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, an outfit modelled on the US National Endowment for Democracy which, coincidentally, supplied Congressional cash to the former Labour Committee for Transatlantic Understanding, an outfit supported by many of Robertson's old parliamentary colleagues during the Cold War.

Robertson's progress tells us not only a good deal about him, but about the Labour Party during his time in it. New Labour would have us believe that members are divided between dinosaurs who supported Michael Foot looking rather scruffy at the Cenotaph, modernisers who preferred Neil Kinnock looking rather silly at the Sheffield rally, and Tony Blair looking rather wonderful everywhere.

The truth is more profound and too complex to be fully explored here. But one of the important defining questions is this: what do members think about the dominant political and economic power of the United States and what do they think British socialists should do about it? George Robertson's letters to William Cohen tell us what he thinks and the NATO bauble is his reward for lifelong service to that conviction. His departure leaves scope in the Labour Party for the rest of us to work for more decent, democratic and dignified alternatives.

Benn mightier than the sword

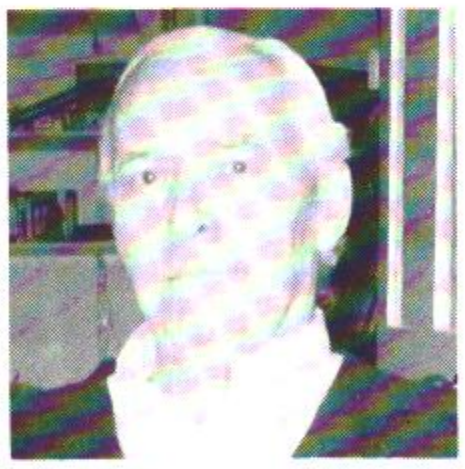
NEC member Christine Shawcroft salutes Tony Benn who recently announced his retirement from Parliament.

In 1988, I attended a Socialist Economists' conference at Sheffield University. This was during the Benn/Heffer leadership bid and Tony Benn had been asked to speak to the participants during the lunch break.

But no time or room was set aside for the meeting. So Tony had to speak in the middle of the dining hall. He started to speak with clattering cutlery all around him. I actually felt quite sorry for him – he had no table, chair, microphone, nothing. I would hate to speak under such circumstances.

As he started to speak, the din died away – you could hear a pin drop. He was electrifying. People stared at him, transfixed. He was inspirational, he was funny. He joked about his age and how Kinnock was making much of the anniversary of the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 – "which was when I was quite young!" No one there was in any doubt that we were in the presence of greatness. I will be proud to tell my grandchildren that I was there.

Tony Benn's career – renouncing his peerage; cabinet minister; moving to the left; the bid for Deputy Leader lost to Healey, betrayed by Kinnock – is so well known there is no point in going over it here. Despite his many gains and achievements, particularly the support for the Meriden workers while Secretary for Trade and Industry, the most important role that he filled and continues to fill, is of lantern bearer for socialism. He has converted, inspired and encouraged thousands to fight for socialism and as he ages he just gets more generations to work on.



Tony Benn

There has been a tendency lately to affect a patronising tone, to write him off as a harmless, dotty old codger – utterly wrong. This man is dangerous, and always will be.

Recently I spoke about Policy Forums in Chesterfield. As usual, at the meeting there were socialists in despair, on the verge of leaving the Party. But this time there was a difference. There were people there who had left, but been persuaded to rejoin - by Tony Benn.

So Tony continues to do wnat he's best at – arguing for, and converting people to, socialism. I will remember till the end of my life a room full of people lost in wonder, meals forgotten, with tears pricking their eyes and the hairs standing on the back of their necks.

Durham Forum ensures Conference stitch-up

Ray Davison, South West CLPs' delegate, reports from July's National Policy Forum held in Durham.

Meetings of the National Policy Forum rarely quicken the blood, especially that of Grassroots Alliance delegates who actually want to change New Labour's anaemic agenda. However, I must confess to having a sense of excitement about the Durham Forum – the climax of a consultation process involving tens of thousands of members, hundreds of submissions, endless hours of talk and revisions of revisions. Here also, was the first use of the new amendment procedures, with ministerial dialogues. A chance at last to cast a vote, to finalise a document and maybe to produce that rarest of flowers, a minority report. Last but not least, there was the prospect of seeing Pete Willsman dance in defiance of his marxist critical mass.

The advance documents were an endless Niagara of words signifying nothing. Curiously though, there were no amendments to study, despite the fact an accompanying letter stated that 225 amendments had been submitted by Forum delegates and 90% of these had met the criteria (supported by eight delegates and arising from the consultations). Also missing was any indication of whether the JPC was endorsing or opposing specific amendments. So much paper but the vital bits were not there for some reason.

In Durham it became clear that almost all the amendments had been endorsed but a number, emanating largely from the Grassroots Alliance, had been rejected and had to go through the dialogue procedure. Only the proposer and a friend and not all eight supporters of a rejected amendment had access to the ministerial exchanges which went on well beyond the scheduled timetable. They were confronted by a ministerial team of around a dozen who tried to secure revision and excision of offending material. Any agreed alterations had to be supported by eight delegates. Only 26 unendorsed amendments survived the exchanges and thus qualified to be voted on. The rest is well-recorded history: none of the unendorsed amendments secured the necessary 35 votes to obtain minority status. Ninety voting members out of a theoretical 175 shot them all down in flames.

The Forum thus delivered an entirely Blairite agenda for Conference which lost the power to resolve key issues on pensions and benefits. Conference will simply fall asleep giving the nod to the Government. No doubt this will be hailed by some as a triumph of the Forum's new consensual politics and a welcome departure from the conflicts of the past. Others will see it as the final proof that the Forum lacks any credibility as an instrument of democratic policy debate. But at least I got to see Willsman dancing, a fascinating dialectic of heavy matter in movement involving steps and armstrokes curiously suggestive of golf.

Devolution revolution

Cathy Jamieson MSP looks at how devolution is working in practice, and what lessons can be learned regarding further devolution in the English regions.

Are the moves towards devolution based on nationalism, parochialism, separatism and the break up of the UK? I never have been tempted by Scottish Nationalism. Though conscious of my cultural heritage and history, I am also a socialist, trade unionist and co-operator. That's why I campaigned for a Scottish Parliament and devolved government in the UK.

In 1888, the Scottish Labour Party identified Home Rule as a way of bringing decisions closer to the people, providing an open and democratic forum as part of a wider agenda for social change. The principles of devolution are not exclusively Scottish, or Welsh, but applicable to the rest of the UK and elsewhere.

Red Clydesider Jimmy Maxton, describing the future role of a Scottish Parliament, said: "It should make landowner-ridden Scotland into the Scottish Socialist Commonwealth and should operate, not in the spirit of national exclusiveness, but as a service to the people of England, Wales, Europe and the cause of internationalism generally." Devolved government is not an end in itself, but a step towards the kind of society we want. How can we use it to advance democracy, tackle inequality and poverty, and influence events nationally and internationally? In the first few weeks there were some encouraging moves but others that should cause concern.

The first debates centred around administrative issues and MSPs' allowances. Though necessary, greater use could have been made of the Constitutional Steering Group's work in the run-up to the Parliament. The press was able to portray MSPs as preoccupied with personal concerns.

We saw sustained attacks on female MSPs. My first speech acknowledged that I am paid much more than most of my constituents. I asked MSPs to ignore guidance given on getting their staff to opt out of the 48-hour working time rule, and instead put family friendly policies into practice. I supported people in the voluntary sector, especially carers, acknowledging that many organisations would be delighted to receive similar levels of funding. I was subjected to an astonishing attack from a Nationalist, suggesting I should not be in Parliament, as I could not command a similar salary "in the real world".

I've spent all of my working life in the public and voluntary sectors and am well aware that wages are not equal to some private sector salaries. It was outrageous to suggest this is because of lack of ability. More use should be made of the skills of those working in these sectors generally – they know how to provide quality services at minimum cost and give something back to local communities.



Cathy Jamieson

Lack of clarity over procedures meant some people were determined to make it like Westminster. Some felt that the mark of a good MSP was to shout loudest in the chamber. We should also take heed of the impact of PR. It's given the Tories a lifeline in areas where they had been wiped out, and encouraged many regional list MSPs to engage in point scoring, seeking to undermine the work of constituency MSPs elected under first past the post. People in my area were outraged that people rejected under FPTP got in. They get press coverage and can criticise constantly, without having to do anything very constructive.

We are in a 'Partnership for Government' with the Lib Dems, who have several ministerial seats. The proportional element of allocating Committee Convenorships and places has given many opposition MSPs high profile roles. There is a Labour/Liberal Democrat administration with a Tory/SNP opposition, with little sign at present of opposition parties being prepared to deal with things on an issue-by-issue basis.

More positively, just before the recess, real issues were put on the agenda. The independent Committee of Inquiry on student finance and tuition fees will ensure debate and an investigation into student hardship and finance which I advocated during the election campaign. The Inquiry team has asked for people's views and outlined a programme of public meetings – a welcome move towards a participatory style of consultation.

New rules on Public Finance Initiative projects limit their use, allowing the prospect of a return of PFI projects to public ownership. Proposals were outlined on land reform, transport, and local government. Sixteen parliamentary Committees were elected. They could be new forums where ordinary people and campaigning organisations can put their views forward – they can consult interested parties and experts and initiate as well as scrutinise legislation.

The first Private Member's Bill may propose a ban on foxhunting. Although there will be a free vote, and intense activity by the pro-hunt lobby has already begun, most MSPs are thought to support a ban.

Keir Hardie, who once lived and worked in my constituency, said: "To the socialist, the state means the people." We must ensure that ordinary people have more say and control over issues that affect their own lives. The Scottish Parliament begins its business in earnest this month. Its success should be judged on how we deliver for people.

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

Lobby Labour's Conference!

Mike Marqusee, *LLB* political correspondent, argues the case for support.

In the recent elections to the constituency section of the NEC, the Grassroots Alliance candidates once again captured just under half the vote. Yet the policies supported by the Grassroots Alliance – on pensions, benefits, taxation, privatisation, criminal justice, asylum rights, public sector pay, etc. – will not be debated or voted on at the Party's annual conference.

As in recent years, the SWP is organising a lobby of Labour Conference. Last year's demonstration attracted some 10,000 participants, including a large number of trade unionists unaffiliated with the SWP. Tony Benn and Arthur Scargill spoke at the rally, where news of the Grassroots Alliance's first NEC victory was greeted with cheers. This year, the organisers hope to draw in a broader base, and in particular are looking for support from Labour Party members.

The political demands of the lobby are broadly similar to those advanced by the Grassroots Alliance – and echo the official positions of many major unions on the minimum wage, welfare, privatisation, etc. In the current climate, with Labour conference reduced to an extended TV advert for the Government, surely any visible, public expression of support for these policies is welcome. Without such support, I doubt we'll get very far – in or out of the Labour Party.

How are the tens of thousands of Labour Party members who believe the Blair Government is headed in the wrong direction to make their weight felt? Branches and CLPs have been cut off from the mechanisms of decision-making and only a handful of Party members can engage directly with the remaining structures (the policy forums, the PLP, the NEC). Is it enough to vote once a year for the Grassroots Alliance candidates? Can they be expected to achieve anything in the absence of public support for the policies they advocate?

Meanwhile, the lobby is drawing widespread support from trade union branches, trades councils, pensioners' groups, peace campaigners and left-leaning trade union activists – far beyond the pockets of SWP influence. Tony Benn has agreed once again to speak at the final rally, and the lobby itself has been endorsed by Jack Jones, NUJ General Secretary John Foster, Frank Allaun, former MEPs Christine Oddy and Ken Coates, Mick Shaw of the FBU Executive, the Liverpool Dockers, the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, Sukhdev Reel, writer Alastair Gray, Peter Tatchell, Tariq Ali, among others. I hope *LLB* will add its name to the list.

For many comrades, the problem with the lobby is not its policies, but the principal force behind it – the SWP. So far, there seems to be a genuine effort to make the local mobilising committees broad-based affairs. The door is wide open for Labour Party members, if they wish to walk through it.

We have marched with the SWP on countless demonstrations. The objection in this case seems to be that this time we're marching outside Labour Party conference. Well, our voices have been excluded from that conference. We can and should march as Labour Party members, alongside those who voted Labour in 1997, to demand a better deal from our Labour Government. The more prominent the Labour Party presence, the more credible and effective the lobby will be.

The lobby is not an alternative but a supplement to activity within the Party structures. Endorsing it does not imply a break with the Labour Party or indeed any particular strategic perspective. Surely it is socialist common sense that mobilising large numbers of people, particularly trades unionists, to demonstrate in support of a broad left programme is a useful activity? And where better to demonstrate this support than outside the annual conference of the Labour Party? Or should we just sit at home and grumble at our TV sets?

● The lobby will be held on Sunday, 26th September, Bournemouth. Contact Lobby 99 at 0171-803 9877.

Do we march with the SWP? No, not this time

Alistair Ward, *LLB* editor, declines the invitation.

You can't unpickle sectarian stunts. Yes, non-SWP members may be welcomed with open arms. That's the point. The objective remains the same: a party building initiative.

That's the problem with the lobby of conference that the SWP have been holding for a few years now. It is their event and it is seen as being their event. It cannot be transformed.

Politically, of course, we can agree with most of the criticisms that the lobbyists make of New Labour – but *LLB* seeks to advance socialist policies within the Labour Party. That is not the objective of the march. We need a political alternative to Blair within the Labour Party.

There are many times when *LLB* supporters will work closely with members of the SWP in the unions and on single issue campaigns – but not on the question of the Labour Party and its policies! This is the last issue on which to turn towards the SWP.

There may well be a need for a march at Labour's Conference. But for such to have any meaningful impact it needs to be built from start to finish by Labour Party and trade union organisations.

21st century socialism

Jane Thomas, Brighton Pavilion CLP, reports on a major conference of the left.

In July more than 300 people attended the "Democratic Socialism into the 21st century" conference. Held at the TUC, it had a wealth of backers including about 50 MPs and was strongly promoted by *Tribune*.

Barbara Castle sounded a key note of the conference that Government policy needed a philosophical framework that did not pander to the middle class – but which one which could reach out to its more radical elements. "We have not said what we've done in the context of – this is our goal, and this is what we progressively intend to reach. The middle class respects people who can hold out a vision of society". Her anger against the rigging of the National Policy Forum debates was an expression of disgust that united the whole conference.

Environment Minister Michael Meacher said that the interests of private companies and the public do not always coincide and gave Monsanto as an example! And that as a result of this view the CIA was watching him.

Alan Simpson, reported that Labour spinners have been saying that, "we can win without our core vote" and "we have to get rid of representative democracy in the Labour Party".

Diane Abbott MP said she believed that New Labour tended to downplay economics. Clause IV used to put economics at the heart of our programme. She said that "they never talk about the importance of a redistribution of wealth". Holding up the flexible US as a model economy was bizarre since inequalities had increased to 1930's levels.

The trade union speeches were rabble-rousing stuff which got some of the biggest claps of the day. But there was bitterness against the unions too – Labour members want to see more than just fine words. As Mark Seddon diplomatically put it: "the trade unions are not doing us all a favour at the moment. The people at the top should know we can only win on key issues if we have their support".

Overall the conference was a success – all involved were united in their concern about the direction of the Party. For years the Labour left has called on MPs who hold such fears to go out and organise their supporters. This was a first step on that road and should be applauded for that. It is less positive, therefore, that little seems to have come out of the conference to channel the enthusiasm that was felt by many on the day. One aspect of the conference was that speakers provided notes outlining their visions for the future.

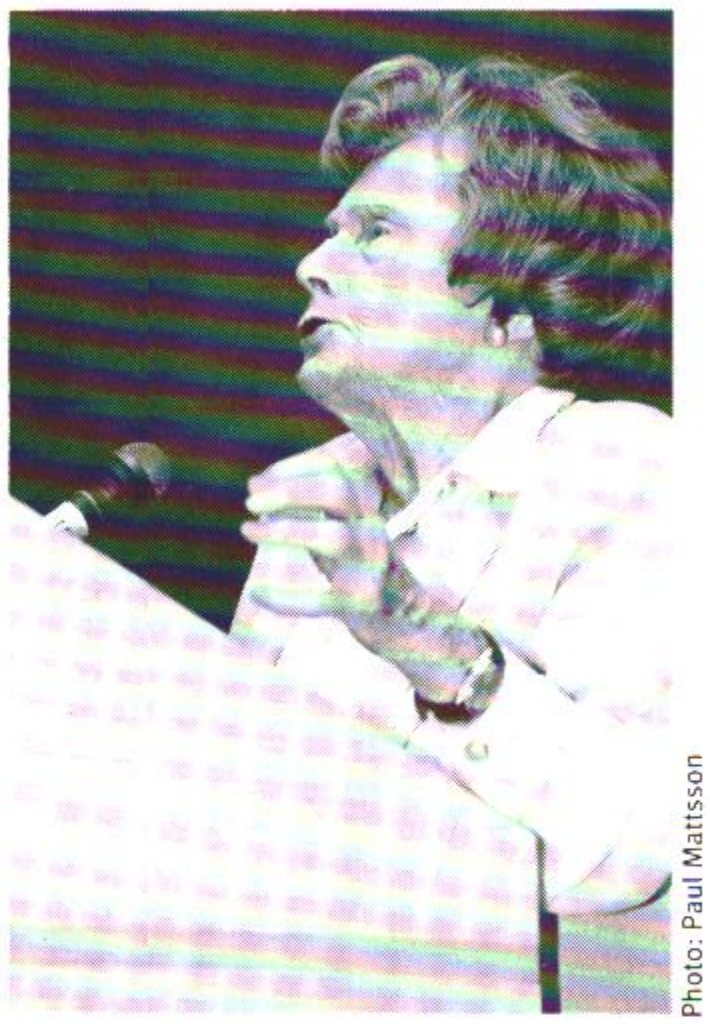


Photo: Paul Mattsson

Barabara Castle

- visit the conference website at www.abel.net.uk/~rost2000/tribune/conference/index.html

Leeds councillor can stomach no more

Garth Frankland, councillor for Chapel Allerton in Leeds, explains why he has left the Labour Party.

After nearly twenty years as a Labour Councillor, I have decided not to renew my Labour Party membership. The right-wing approach of the Blair Government nationally, combined with the elimination of democracy within the Party, have made it impossible for me.

On GM foods, New Labour has been totally committed to the food and chemical giants and entirely unconcerned for the safety of the public or the environment. The only debate has been on what plausible lies to tell. New Labour used the guillotine to curtail parliamentary debate on disabled people's allowances. To see a supposedly Labour Government cutting essential support to disabled people is terrible. New Labour is also consistently corrupt. From Ecclestone to Mandleson, the behaviour of New Labour has been an affront. Blairism has supported the rich against the poor, and has been subservient to the USA politically and commercially.

These policies are opposed by most Party members. To prevent opposition the leadership has demolished democracy in the Party nationally and locally. It is now impossible develop any meaningful discussion of politics beyond slavish adherence to the leadership line.

Many of us believe it is no longer possible to reclaim the Party – its democratic structure has gone and any serious opposition is silenced. However, other principled people on the left may not (yet) share the judgement that the Labour Party is irretrievable. It is vital that we work together to defeat Blair and to defend the ideals that once drew us into the Party.

It would be as stupid for anyone still in the Labour Party to regard those who have left as "disloyal", as it would be for those who have decided the future lies outside to see those inside as "Blair stooges". Loyalty to political principle is what matters, not loyalty to a party name.

Those who believe that it is still possible to win back the Labour Party should stand back and look at how political parties are changed. Pressure for change is exerted both from the inside, by members, and from the outside, by the threat of opposition. The classic example is the SDP. Conventionally supposed to have failed, it actually succeeded beyond its founders' wildest dreams – by influencing the Labour Party from the outside and laying the foundation for New Labour. Blair could not be less interested in what Party members think. If we want to reclaim the Labour Party, we will need both strands – inside and outside – working together.

Fighting to save Labo

Keeping our eye on the ball

It's about democracy and power, not just structures, argues Ann Black, Vice-Chair of Labour Reform.

Abolishing General Committees will be, according to our friends in the media, the final victory of the modernisers over Old Labour. But in the continuing struggle for Labour's soul, it would be disastrous to get sucked into the wrong battle for the wrong reasons, and miss the real dangers.

First, there may still be constituencies where a hundred people come to branch meetings and discuss the forthcoming GC agenda with their delegates, where all branches send full delegations, and where GC decisions truly represent the local party. In many more the structure of representative democracy has long ceased to function, and the GC is already in effect a collection of individuals. Most GCs allow all members to attend and speak, but few see them as either enjoyable or relevant. Policy forums are, in general, more fun.

Second, changes are not automatically wrong because they are endorsed by the centre. For many on the ground the system is broke and does need fixing. Chipping Barnet is not alone in saying that "The Party desperately needs a new generation of activists for campaigning and policy development". If they find some answers, I for one will be knocking on their door.

Third, in opposing all-member meetings the left lacks the confidence of its convictions. I believe most members support universal benefits against means-testing, environmentalism against multi-national greed, public services against creeping privatisation. Just as one-member-one-vote elected Ken Livingstone and then Liz Davies to the NEC, all-member meetings can vindicate, not marginalise, the centre-left majority. With a quorum of just 25, as some parties suggest, it should be easy to endorse popular policies and to elect officers who will take them forward. Twenty years ago this would have been a gift to extremist infiltrators, and probably banned because decisions would depend on who was organised on the night.

But the real issue, omitted from the official agenda, is how the grassroots can influence the centre. It does not matter whether candidates are chosen by GCs or by all-member meetings, if both are limited to Millbank-approved clones varying in race and gender but not in politics. It does not matter whether GCs send resolutions or policy forums send flipcharts, if both are equally ignored. However attractive the format locally, members will tire of talking if nothing they say makes any difference nationally.

We should be asking why the National Policy Forum denied Conference a vote on re-linking the state pension to earnings when nine out of ten Party submissions wanted it, why there will be no debate on PFI, trial by jury, asylum laws or cuts in incapacity benefit. Charles Kennedy, new leader of the Liberal Democrats, highlights "the sickening sight of Tony Blair living it up at a Number 10 party for the rich and famous on the very day that Parliament cut benefits to single mothers". Our core supporters may well prefer that line to Labour's hard-edged compassion.

And we should ask policy commissions to publish comments and resolutions from branches and constituencies. NorthWest Regional Director David Evans, in his leaked "vision for organisational modernisation" says that closed meetings should be the exception rather than the rule, with the Party able and willing to conduct its business in public. It would be interesting to extend this to the National Policy Forum and the commissions, far more secretive and exclusive than the old Annual Conference.

Labour Reform is not wedded to any particular structure, but judges change by whether it promotes free and constructive debate, and whether it distributes power more widely. We support open and accountable organisation at local, regional and national level; policy-making which reflects the diversity of experience within the movement; and one-member-one-vote democracy without prior screening in all internal elections and external selections.

We are campaigning across the Party for democracy against centralisation, so that Labour remains in touch with members, supporters and voters, and builds on the broad coalition which brought victory in 1997.

- Labour Reform, c/o Suite 5, Marquis House, Winchcombe, Gloucestershire GL54 5LH.

Labour Reform Members' Charter

"We propose that a modern, forward-looking Labour Party which continues to be attractive and responsive to people in the 21st century must develop democratic structures which:

- widen membership of the Labour Party and involve all members actively in policy-making;
- tolerate a range of viewpoints based on the common and inherited values of the Party;
- accept the legitimacy of democratically established minority and dissenting views within a democratic socialist framework;
- provide options and choices within consultative structures;
- establish policy openly and transparently without recourse to opinion management or manipulation;
- use a framework of representative democracy in national level policy- making;
- use one-member-one-vote as the main vehicle for selecting representatives for elective office nationally, regionally and locally without central pre-selection of candidates."

our Party democracy

We have been warned

Dorothy Macedo examines David Evans' plans to abolish representative democracy within the Party

My local Party branch runs a Saturday morning stall. When passers-by reproach us for the Government's shortcomings, our stock reply is "That's them – not us! The local Party agrees with your criticisms of the Asylum Bill/bombing of Yugoslavia etc."

Not for much longer; a document drawn up by North West regional organiser David Evans spells out the plans to abolish local parties' ability to take independent positions on policy issues.

This document is required reading for all concerned Party members. It argues that the political modernisation of the Labour Party has not been matched by organisational change, which the author considers necessary, since he believes the Party's basic structure is out-dated and can't be reformed.

Evans proposes to "abolish representative democracy within the Party" because it means only activists, a minority of members, are involved. He says the new structures will ensure that far more members participate (why stop there? what about representative democracy in councils and Parliament?). So General Committees are to be abolished this year and Policy Forums will become central to all Party activity. "Once policy-making is removed from branch and constituency then an Executive or Officers can undertake the business". This executive will be elected at an annual all-members meeting.

"The Party must become none other than the political extension of the British people". The last time a Labour PM tried to do that, Ramsay McDonald called it a Government of National Unity.

Membership fees will be reduced or even abolished in a new effort to build a mass membership of "registered supporters". There will be problems servicing such a membership, but this "could lead to joint ventures as a way of funding communication". Somehow I suspect these joint ventures are more likely to be with Sainsburys than with UNISON!

The concluding section of the document is particularly insulting. It appears "the vast majority of progress that has been made in terms of our local performance has been carried through in spite of the official local Party machine". And you thought they valued all that work you do! Another revealing sentence states that reorganisation "done correctly ... will empower modernising forces within the Party and marginalise Old Labour".

So we have been warned. Do you want to be a registered supporter of a focus group, or a member of a democratic political party? Members from constituencies which have already experienced reorganisation report that it leads to a tiny clique running the Party without any real accountability, and to lower levels of activity as members feel marginalised and excluded.

Decimating Party membership

Des Kirkland, Lewisham Deptford CLP, reports on the reality of curtailing representative democracy.

Millbank claims that policy forums enable membership participation in decision-making and that General Committee meetings are boring and adversarial – with mundane business issues that could be more effectively dealt with by constituency officers, reports no-one but the speaker is interested in, and acrimoniously debated motions which, if passed, are never seen again. They contend that this structure alienates members and doesn't involve them in the decision-making process.

There is a groundswell of opposition gathering pace in my CLP, where "modernisation" started in 1997. A coup was engineered with the support of London Region officers; the right-wing got every officer post, with the seven key players holding fourteen positions between them. They moved to quarterly General Committees, with policy forum meetings in between.

The membership was prepared to try it, but it soon became clear that these meetings were designed to present the leadership's thoughts on various issues and obtain endorsement. Any real debate was extinguished before it began. Members don't know if submissions went to the Policy Forums – there have been no report-backs. For all we know the officers could have written that the CLP agreed with all the points raised in documents.

GC business meetings changed radically. Officers colluded to ensure contentious issues were not voted on. Where this failed, or they had to take a vote, they packed the meetings with supporters who were not seen at any other meeting. As a result, attendance at policy forum meetings and then GCs fell dramatically. Members became very disillusioned and a quarter left the Party over the last two years. New people have not rushed to join.

Members opposing modernisation should not resign – it plays into the hands of the Blairites, who would like nothing better than every left-leaning supporter to leave. If instead we each encouraged at least one extra left-supporting person to join the Party and become actively involved we could change the balance of power at constituency level. Think what we could achieve if the leadership had to take notice of the grassroots other than just at election time.

● **Eddie Tucker adds:** Acting London Labour boss Dave Wilkinson has threatened 18 mainstream backbench councillors (including two former leaders) who formed a group asking for more information about what Lewisham Council's new pilot Executive is doing. Wilkinson, who turned up unexpectedly at a Labour Group meeting, claims the '99 Group' is "beyond" Party rules and therefore unconstitutional, ie. he couldn't find a rule it was actually breaking.

Transport is the key to London's future

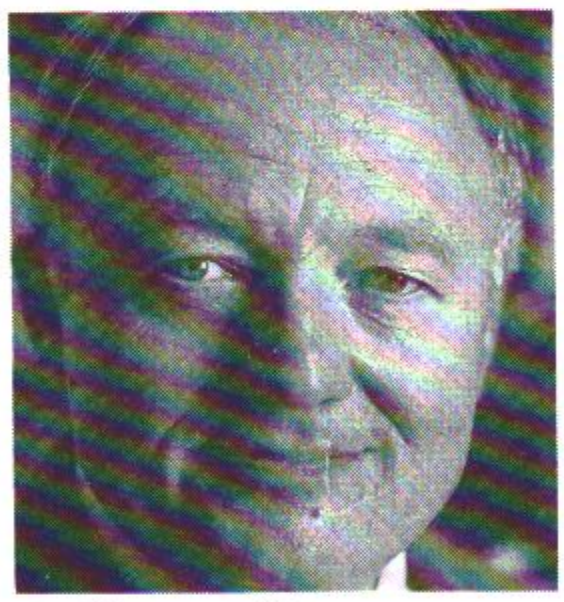
Ken Livingstone MP argues that a congestion tax on cars must be matched by improvements in public transport.

The question now facing the Labour Party in formulating policy for the London elections next May is how to get the political balance right to win support for public transport. That means making a political judgement about how to take the electorate with us.

When we were drawing up Labour's transport policy for the 1981 GLC election we firmly rejected anti-car proposals in favour of improving the quality of public transport while cutting fares. Having cut the fares by 35% we saw a 70% increase in passenger miles which led to an 11% increase in fare revenues in real terms. One in twenty switched to public transport, resulting in a real reduction of congestion, pollution and accidents.

There is no longer any unused capacity on the tube, particularly in rush hour. So the problem facing Labour today is how rapidly we can increase the overall capacity of the transport system to get more motorists out of their cars and onto public transport. Modernising the tube is a 10-15 year programme – something needs to be done much more rapidly and dramatically than that to improve capacity on public transport.

As well as a tax on company car parks the new mayor will have the power to introduce a congestion tax on cars driving into central London. Many in London's business community are suggesting a congestion charge of £5 a day. The Government has guaranteed that all money raised from these taxes must be spent on improving public transport for at least the next ten years. It is not necessary to ban all cars coming into our cities in order to solve our transport problems – the GLC fares cut only needed to attract five per cent of car drivers back onto public transport for the situation to be transformed. Set at a moderate level the congestion tax will encourage just enough drivers to switch.



Ken Livingstone MP

The resources raised can be channelled into overland train and bus services. The reduced road traffic would also improve the speed and regularity of the buses. Since we would be increasing the cost of motoring in central London, we have to encourage motorists to switch to public transport. Labour's team of mayoral and assembly candidates must therefore give a guarantee of a four-year fares freeze. Then every motorist can make a personal calculation about whether it is in their financial interests to leave their car at home.

If a Labour mayor – backed by the thousands of Labour members in London – is at the forefront of the Government's campaign to change the transport patterns of behaviour of the last 50 years, it will be a dramatic triumph and an enduring vote winner.

Healthy women's organisation – not

Jenny Fisher and Dorothy Macedo report on the 1999 Women's Conference.

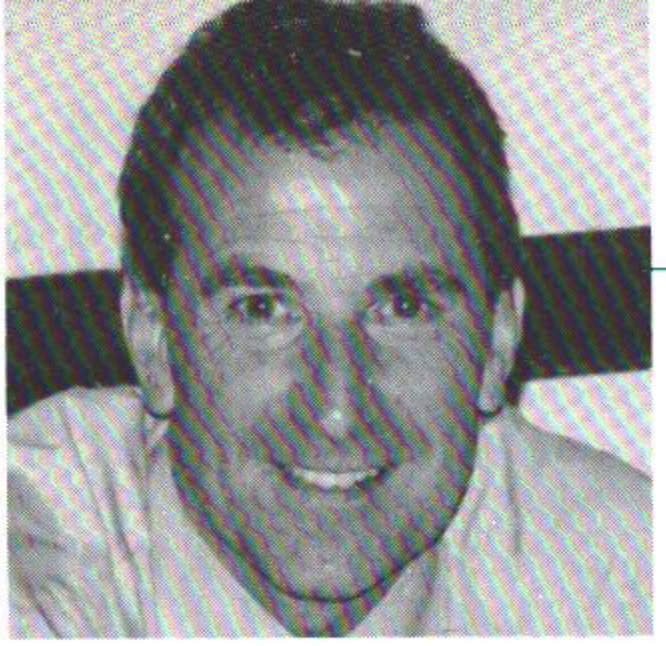
Since it became New Labour, the Labour Party holds its women's and youth conferences at the same time and in the same town. One reason is to ensure a respectable audience for the leader's speech when both groups merge for the opening session. Even so, the hall was not full for Blair's speech in Scarborough on 10th July.

Women's conferences these days don't have delegates; any woman Party member can attend, as long as she can afford the delegate fee, fare and accommodation costs. Some women are funded by their CLP but unsurprisingly most do not see sending a non-delegate to a non-voting non-conference as a priority. The unions make sure they have some members there to raise their key points, and without them it would have been a very middle class gathering. Total attendance was about 300, well down on the heydays of Labour women's conferences when three times that number attended.

There were three themes to the weekend. First, the leadership had to explain the results of the Scottish, Welsh, European and local elections. It was our fault: local activists had failed to get the Party's message across. Second was policy – no resolutions of course, no debates or votes. No doubt this is the leadership's idea of an ideal conference! Instead we broke up into workshops on the current Policy Forum topics. There is no way of knowing if our comments made it into the reports as we did not get to see these; the note-takers were all Party staff (including some token men).

Third, we were trained: more workshops. We were encouraged to put ourselves forward as Labour candidates. Some said we had done this, only to be barred on political grounds by vetting panels, which created a bit of a stir. Other workshops were instructed on "how to build a healthy women's organisation", out with old style Women's Sections, in with new Women's Forums. These are intended to do outreach work among women in local communities, which is supposed to keep us out of trouble, but could be a great opportunity to get involved in local campaigns. Joan Ruddock said that *Partnership in Power* guarantees the funding of Women's Forums by local Parties.

But what if they can't afford it after being docked £2,000 to fund the Euros? She simpered that it is "a question of priorities". Indeed, but why should they prioritise funding a section of the Party that has been comprehensively marginalised?



THE **ALAN SIMPSON** COLUMN

The Liberal Democrats now have a candidate for Mayor of London – can Labour delay much longer?

Soon Labour and the Tories will have to choose their candidates. It is just possible that New Labour's ayatollahs, beavering away in Taliban Tower, will run out of pretexts for blocking Ken Livingstone's right to stand, and that Party members will have a genuinely open choice. But we should be very careful about claiming this as part of the onward march of democracy.

Ken would rescue the contest from being the turgid turn-off it threatens to be. He would bring a genuine sense of grass roots, political debate into the election. But it would not leave London with a remotely democratic and accountable system of local governance. The democratic issues have given way to a much more personalised debate.

Who should strut down the Mall, Clint Eastwood-style, for a shoot-out to determine who is the meanest dude in town? Who is the sharpshooter most capable of cleaning up the city streets? For just a few dollars more, London could have had a restored GLC with all the democratic rights, powers and responsibilities it once had.

The sadness is not confined to London, for the obsession with mayors and council cabinets is likely to become one of the most disastrous, rapidly discredited, parts of the Millbank project. It will strip democratic scrutiny out of local democracy, leaving it exposed to all the worst corruption and excess of the past.

At the moment Donnygate hangs as a cloud over local government integrity. It isn't the first, and won't be the last, local government scandal about fraudulent expenses claims. The danger is that all the lessons from it will be used to draw the wrong conclusions. I have no doubt that the "spin as we speak" process will already be citing Donnygate as the reason we should replace the current structure of local government with a streamlined system of administration. Sadly this is exactly what got Doncaster into its mess. The allegations are that an inner cabal of councillors was able to take enormous decisions beneath a cloak of secrecy beyond any form of public account or democratic scrutiny.

'The obsession with mayors and council cabinets is likely to become one of the most disastrous, rapidly discredited, parts of the Millbank project'

This is precisely the role to be ascribed to the new backbench councillors; mute and marginalised, they will be unable to halt the resurgence of the cabal. In fact, the current obsession with public-private partnership will not only encourage this style of local politics, but also expose it to the corrupting influences which big commercial interests invariably bring with them.

Of course we've been here before. Nothing has ever matched the corruption that rocked local government in the north east, when T. Dan Smith and friends took public-private partnerships into an era that guaranteed that public contracts made a number of private individuals very well off indeed. But do we need to go down that path again? I suppose that anything run by people has the potential to be corrupted. But we limit this by making government as open as possible and subjecting it to rigorous public scrutiny. Strengthening rather than streamlining democratic accountability has to be the benchmark against which local government takes place. Trying to do so by vesting power in the hands of a single person or small group just takes you further away from anything durable, credible or accountable.

Back in California, Clint Eastwood gave up being mayor of Carmel in 1988. As one of its wealthiest citizens, he has bought up a considerable amount of land there, built a golf course, put large parts of it into a conservation trust and given generous amounts to charity. At a personal level, this probably says a lot about the sense of civic responsibility in someone whose wealth allows influence way beyond the reach of whole towns, let alone ordinary citizens. But it says nothing about democracy.

Look more broadly across the US map of local government in partnership with private/corporate finance, however, and you find fiefdoms that are not only corrupt and self-perpetuating; you also find a transformed democratic process that holds itself more directly accountable to a corporate electorate rather than a civic one. In return, the private sector pays handsomely into the coffers of a compliant system that masquerades as democracy.

In Doncaster, this is still something you can get sent to prison for. Tomorrow, in any town around the country, the only way to hang 'em high may depend on us demanding that public, democratic rights come before private prospects. Have mayors if you want, but it is the retention of wholly elected, wholly accountable local government that is the real battleground.

Trade Union Notebook

, Millbank spinners have been busy trying to stick the boot in to one of the early potential runners for UNISON General Secretary – *LLB*'s own Geoff Martin.
Millbank is right to be worried. One of the issues that Geoff has flagged up is a pound by pound scrutiny – using the Government's own Best Value criteria – of the million and a half quid a year that UNISON donate to New Labour. Platinum-carded Millbankers, long term beneficiaries of UNISON's largesse, are rightly concerned that the gravy train could soon be uncoupled.

In a significant snub to New Labour, the RMT Conference voted almost unanimously to work with Scottish socialist MSPs Tommy Sheridan and Dennis Canavan for the renationalisation of the railway. Ex-RMT executive member Greg Tucker, who recently took 34% of the vote in the ballot for General Secretary, told *LLB* "this approach should be mirrored in a similar campaign to fight the privatisation of the London Underground. We should be prepared to support candidates for the Greater London Authority who take this position."

Patrick Sikorski, Secretary of the RMT's London Underground Regional Council, has been suspended from holding any position in the union in a move widely seen as a witch-hunt of the left. Sikorski recently won 45% of the vote in a challenge for the Assistant General Secretaryship of the union. The RMT leadership claims he has been suspended for distributing unofficial election material but in practice, they are taking action against him for forcing a rerun of the election after he exposed breaches of union rules. Pat was given no hearing or right of appeal.
In what can only be presumed to be part of an internal faction-fight, the action has been supported by members of Pat's own political group, the Socialist Labour Party, on the RMT Executive.

The University of Hull has made 110 out of 143 cleaners of student houses redundant. After the sackings take place in October, students will be expected to take over their responsibilities. Steve Torrance, UNISON Branch Secretary, denounced the decision as "short sighted in the extreme."

He said: "This is a triple whammy on staff, students and the local community. It is a real blow for the cleaning staff who earn as little as £3.40 an hour for tough, physically demanding work. Some of these loyal workers have been here over 20 years – this is no way to repay their long service and dedication.

Students have been offered no reduction in rent but will now be expected to undertake responsibility in respect of maintenance and cleaning of residences. This must raise very real concerns over health and safety."

Members of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) in the Home Office have rejected a pay offer by 4-1 and expressed willingness to support industrial action by 2-1.
Management offered 3.9%.
PCS recommended rejection, especially as half the award would be non-consolidated and non-reckonable for pension purposes.
PCS officials contrasted the offer with the 2% bonuses (on top of salary) paid to senior management and the Home Office's readiness to spend money on failed privatisation schemes.
PCS is seeking to re-open negotiations. If this proves unsuccessful the union will begin plans for walkouts, non-co-operation, and a work to rule.

Two long running disputes have ended. In late May, the Tameside Care Workers agreed to accept £400,000 between 217 of them after striking for over one year.

A month later, the Critchley Labels dispute ended after two and a half years. The 31 CWU members were sacked after industrial action over derecognition. Some of the strikers have found employment with BT, who previously owned the company.

The TGWU is asking you not to fly with Lufthansa, the parent company of Skychefs, who sacked 270 TGWU members for going on a one-day strike. Despite a committed campaign by the workers, the best they have been offered to date is six jobs. What the TGWU leadership is not doing, however, is calling out the rest of the TGWU's membership at Heathrow – which would shut the airport down instantly.

Following a one-day strike in May and a four-day boycott of examination work in June, in furtherance of their pay claim, university lecturers in AUT took two more days of action to coincide with A-level results coming out. David Blunkett accused them of a "major own goal". Lecturers have seen a major deterioration in their conditions over the last 20 years, as numbers of students continue to increase.

When Alvis in Telford was taken over by GKN Defence, they moved some workers from the GKN plant at Coventry to Telford. They were offered loyalty payments of £5,500 if they agreed to stay longer than eight weeks. No loyalty payments were offered to existing Telford workers, who went on an overtime ban, then from 2nd August started taking strike action every Monday and Tuesday. The 110 workers concerned are members of GMB and AEEU.

Bik bows out

Jon Rogers, Lambeth UNISON Branch Secretary, reports on the race for the top job in Britain's biggest union.

The surprise announcement by UNISON General Secretary, Rodney Bickerstaffe, that he would not be seeking re-election next year has precipitated a predictable rush by careerists and time-servers to rush to support the heir apparent for the top job in the largest union.

With a breathtaking contempt for democracy and the membership, the union's NEC have all but nominated the current Deputy General Secretary already, even though the period when nominations open does not begin until October. Dave Prentis, who was previously Deputy General Secretary of NALGO, is not well known, nor is he a charismatic or obvious leader.

More surprising perhaps are indications that the unions' soft left, which includes supporters of the Morning Star, are lined up for Prentis. Cynics have suggested that it may be payback time following two recent official circulars to branch secretaries encouraging UNISON branches to make donations and take out subscriptions to the Morning Star.

LLB columnist and London Region UNISON Convenor, Geoff Martin, is seeking support in order to determine

whether a bid is a runner – he has credibility on the left and centre-left of the union because of his track record of support for socialist politics from a Labour Party perspective.

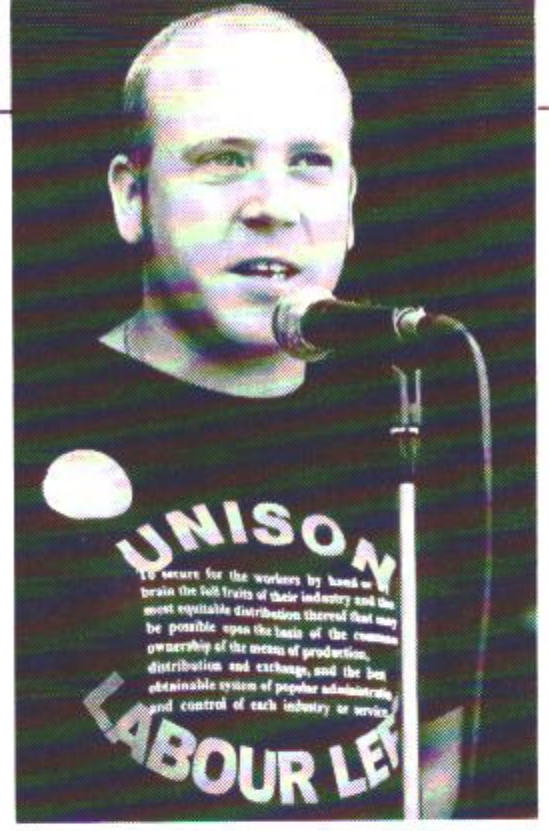
The threat of Geoff standing has already been enough to provoke a whispering campaign from HQ to the effect that Geoff would be the hapless tool of the unspeakable trots – a claim so daft that only a right-wing full-time UNISON official could have dreamt it up. Geoff could unite the disparate forces of the left with much wider layers of members who are concerned that the union has done too little to distance itself from government policies which fly in the face of UNISON principles. His campaign could rally UNISON members around policies which amount to a progressive alternative to Blair's Third Way.

All socialists in UNISON should support the call for Geoff to stand and should work for his election (and that includes you, Rodney).

£20 each month must be won by joining the *LLB* Club

A donation of as little as £1.00 a month can bring you £8, £12 or £20 in prizes. You will have a good chance of winning monthly prizes and a 100% chance to ensure *LLB* can thrive. Send more for more chances. Send a cheque of £12 for one entry for a year to *LLB*. Or phone 0181-985 6597 or email us on llb@labournet.org.uk for a direct debit or standing order form.

This month's winners:
J. Stockton (£12)
M. McCloghry (£8)



THE GEOFF MARTIN COLUMN

● The leaked letters now prove that the Government was responsible for forcing Man Utd to pull out of this years FA Cup and now we just have to wait until the backlash filters through to the opinion polls.

I suspect that football-hating *LLB* readers gave up on this column years ago so I feel safe to vent a bit of spleen on this issue without affecting the subscription rates. In a nutshell, Blair, Banks, Al Campbell and the rest of the crew have effectively ruined the best knockout tournament in the world. Period.

The idea that the animal-loving Ms Hoey and her fox-hunting friends are now going to ride to the rescue with their horns and their red jackets is nonsense.

At what point Tony Banks was officially appointed as Minister for Man Utd beats me. Banksie's forever banging on about how he's supported Chelsea since before the war but if he's serious about running for London Mayor I would not advise him to kick off his canvassing in the Finborough Arms, the Imperial Arms, the Jolly Brewers or any of the other boozers within a mile radius of Fulham Broadway. Chelsea fans who throw their lot in with Man U are worse than former lefties who go over to New Labour. Banks scores heavily in both categories.

The theory goes that football fans in the UK are desperate to see the 2006 World Cup held over here. That's the theory and it's complete bollocks. The vast majority of football fans are only really concerned about their club and have nothing but a passing interest in the national side. Attendances at England matches bear this out.

I reckon we should all be campaigning to support the African bids for the 2006 World Cup. The millions wasted on the failed attempts to generate public support for the England 2006 campaign would have been better spent on developing sport in the inner-cities. While we're at it, Banksie, Man Utd and all the rest of the hangers on should learn a lesson from Ronnie Biggs while they're in Brazil for the world club championship – they should stay there for the next 30 years.

● So, UNISON General Secretary, hey? Yes I lobbed my hat in the ring early on with the specific aim of generating broad support behind a campaign which stretches far beyond the traditional ranks of the left. There are plenty of UNISON members and activists out there who feel seriously disillusioned with the Government and their own union's relationship with New Labour. The question is, can we connect with them against the massive weight of the UNISON full time machine? The jury's still out on that one.

The absolute killer issue in the election has to be UNISON's relationship with the Government. As a public sector union the day-to-day issues that affect our members come directly under the control of Whitehall and its agencies at regional and local level. If we're going to be seen to be fighting on the issues that the members expect to see us fighting on then that means visibly challenging New Labour – there is no other choice.

If this pivotal point of pressure is compromised by being cuddled up too closely to Millbank then you haven't got a cat in hell's chance of carving out the kind of distinct and independent position that the members expect.

It baffles me, and many others, as to how we can justify handing a million and a half quid a year over to Millbank Tower while New Labour's Prime Minister's parades around at meetings of venture capitalists slagging off our members. This was no cheap jibe – our members pay well over a million pounds a year for the privilege of being slagged off by the poor little rich boy. When I get to meet with Mr Tony it won't be "scars on his back" that he'll have to worry about.

● On a lighter note, I spent a good few hours at the Fleadh hob-nobbing with some of *LLB*'s finest as a guest of the Workers' Beer Company.

Alright, so it was a freebie but it's hardly a bleeding holiday in Tuscany is it?

● Next month I hope to have an exclusive interview with Joe Strummer and his new band if we can make the right connections. As the bloke predicted nearly 20 years ago "There ain't no asylum here..."

The story of an RUC informer

Brian Campbell of Sinn Fein argues that informers are a product of the capitalist system

Occasionally in Irish fiction, the figure of the cattle dealer emerges to represent the forces which cheated and connived to keep the working farmers poor. In John B Keane's *Durango* the cattle dealers, dressed in long coats and tan boots, and always with their snarling dogs at their side, hold a grip on the small farmers in North Kerry. They keep the prices low and will go to any lengths to maintain their monopoly.

The cattle dealers were market forces' first line of defence, ensuring that honest families didn't make what they had earned.

Those days are largely gone as the Common Agricultural Policies and the large meat factories replaced the cut-throat trade of market fairs, lessening the power of the cattle dealers (without, of course, much improving the lot of the small farmer). But cattle dealers are still about, earning their living as pure wheeler dealers at the animal sale yards.

John McKeown was a part-time cattle dealer and came from a long line of cattle dealers. He is a small man, 29 years old and as street-wise – or country-wise – as you'd expect from someone who earned his living where there weren't many fools among those who bought and sold cattle.

But that wasn't the only way he earned his living. Last week John McKeown admitted that he had been working as an RUC informer for the last ten years in South Armagh.

His career as an informer began in classic fashion. In 1989 he worked in a meat factory in Newry and was caught stealing £1,000 worth of meat. The management called the RUC, and he was arrested and charged with theft.

Inside the RUC barracks a deal was put to him. If he would supply information on some of his neighbours in Crossmaglen, the charges would be dropped. He agreed, and every two weeks for the next ten years he met or phoned his RUC handlers, "Gerry" and "Brian", and passed on information. He received, he says, between £20 and £50 for each piece of information, a total of £10,000.

He would be asked who was with a particular individual or what vehicles visited the individual's farm. And he was asked to spy on political activists (who canvassed for Sinn Fein? who put up posters? who was in Sinn Fein Youth? etc).

He was taken to a house in Portadown where he was shown videos of political protests and asked to identify anyone he knew. When the IRA declared a ceasefire, he was told to concentrate on gathering information on Sinn Fein.

Finally, three days before he was due to get married, and while he was being questioned by republicans about stolen cattle, he decided to come clean. He told them he was an RUC informer. "I wanted to end the pressure and start with a clean slate when I got married," he said. When asked at a press conference why he hadn't come forward earlier, he replied: "The money was handy. It kept the car in diesel."

It's not difficult to view John McKeown as a repulsive individual. He comes across as entirely self-centred and selfish without a shred of concern for his community. But he is, of course, a product of his background. John McKeown has operated all his life as the perfect capitalist – with no concerns in his life outside himself and money. (It may or may not be significant that he admitted his role as an informer only when he was due to get married.)

For the RUC, John McKeown was the perfect target to be recruited as an informer. He cared nothing for anyone but himself, and they cared nothing for him when his usefulness to them ended.

There are many in our society with the same world view as John McKeown – the drug pusher, the pimp, the arms seller to Indonesia, the tobacco company executive... they'll not all get the chance to become informers but, if the price is right, they'll destroy ordinary working people.

Campaign Against the Arms Trade

14th September
7.30am Waterloo Station peace train to Chertsey
8.30am Assemble at Virginia Waters Station for procession to the Government's Defence Systems and Equipment International exhibition

15th September
8am Assemble at Mile End Park for procession to Canary Wharf

• Contact CAAT, 11 Goodwin Street, London N4 3HQ; 0171-281 0297

US block justice in Haiti

While the Clinton Administration continues to talk up its humanitarian credentials in Kosova, it applies a wholly different standard to the pursuit of war criminals elsewhere. At a recent UN Human Rights Commission meeting in Geneva, the Haitian government called on states to "make available all possible information" on the involvement of the Haitian military and paramilitaries in the coup against the elected President Aristide, in order to aid the search for truth and justice. Only the US opposed the proposal, effectively vetoing it.

Charles Arthur of the Haiti Support Group told *LLB*, "Everybody can see the blatant hypocrisy when right now in the Balkans all the talk is of apprehending and prosecuting war criminals, while the crimes committed in Haiti during the 1991-4 coup regime remain hidden from view. We assume the US wants to protect the culprits, who include former CIA employees such as death squad leader Toto Constant, and perhaps US agents as well." Constant, former chief of a Haitian paramilitary organisation, the FRAPH, lives in New York and is one of a number of Haitian exiles that the US organisation Human Rights Watch believes should be tried for murder, torture and other abuses.

Sanctions kill Iraqi children

Colin Rowat, co-ordinator of Campaign Against Sanctions on Iraq, describes a disastrous situation.

On 12th August, a week after the ninth anniversary of sanctions against Iraq, UNICEF released the first independent survey of child mortality in Iraq since 1991. It found that the child mortality rate had doubled under sanctions, killing up to half a million children under five who would not have otherwise died between 1991 and 1998. That's 170 every day, over ten Dunblanes of pre-schoolers.

On 6th August 1990 Security Council Resolution 661, passed after Kuwait's invasion, halted Iraq's exports, froze its assets and stopped all imports except medical supplies and, "in humanitarian circumstances", foodstuffs. The exemptions were initially irrelevant – Iraq could not pay for imports, it was blockaded by an allied navy and the Security Council did not acknowledge "humanitarian circumstances" until April 1991.

That April, Resolution 687 extended the sanctions. Concerned by threats to use "weapons of mass destruction" during the Gulf War and noting Iraq's Scud missile use, the new sanctions enforced a weapons inspection and destruction programme. When the Security Council agreed that Iraq had disarmed, export sanctions could be lifted; import sanctions could remain for as long as the Council saw fit. For the US, with a veto on the Council; this would be as long as President Saddam Hussein remained.

Weapons inspection and destruction was supposed to last 120 days. Underfunded by the UN, obstructed by Iraq, and manipulated by the US and Britain, inspectors left Iraq for the last time last December, just ahead of the US and British bombing. Sanctions, then, have not prevented a 120 day programme from failing for over 3000 days. As to the US' goals, President Saddam Hussein is still in power and still one of the world's richest men.

Failing to achieve their intended goals, sanctions have helped to kill Iraqis. Iraq is particularly vulnerable because it depended on easily-blocked oil exports, it normally imported two thirds of its food and its civilian infrastructure was battered during the Gulf War.

Iraq is falling apart: polluted water, unreliable electricity and decaying schools. Scarcity, family breakdown and growing crime are commonplace. Inadequately fed children and overworked mothers suffer from diarrhoea and respiratory illnesses. Militant Islam may be growing, ironic as the West used Iraq against Iran's revolutionary Islam in the 1980s.

In 1991 the Security Council offered Iraq oil exports to fund imports. The amount offered was just over half what was thought necessary to meet Iraq's most basic needs. Iraq refused, trying instead to grow more food. By 1995 Iraq had failed and accepted a slightly improved resolution, starting the oil for food programme



Protest against sanctions.

Oil for food allows Iraq $5.2 billion of oil sales every six months; Iraq's damaged pumps have managed half that. Receipts are paid into a UN controlled account, 30% settling foreign reparation claims. To import, Iraq applies to the Sanctions Committee which, if it approves, releases money from the account. The Committee's decisions are not made public; the Security Council's permanent members have vetoes, which they have used to reject legitimate Iraqi requests.

UN documents are the best sources of information, especially the Secretary General's quarterly reports and the March 1999 Humanitarian Panel report. These find that child malnutrition in South/Central Iraq is steady at about 25%, lower and falling in Iraqi Kurdistan. The British Government attributes this exclusively to UN administration of Iraqi Kurdistan; UN documents do not. In addition to the UN's better management they report that the north gets more oil-for-food and aid money, and has more smuggling and more flexible rules.

The Government also accuses Iraq of deliberately hoarding medical supplies. UN documents instead cite "the lack of modern managerial tools, poor working conditions within the warehouses and the lack of transport... [and] the rigid hierarchy in the Ministry of Health administration". Perversely, "stockpiling seems to have increased following September 1998, when tensions mounted, and superiors may have deliberately withheld supplies in anticipation of emergency needs" such as December's bombings.

On 6th August, eleven UK groups launched a National Petition Against Sanctions on Iraq calling on Britain to lift the non-military sanctions on Iraq; over 40,000 copies will be distributed. Britain is currently trying to resurrect the old formula, punishing Iraqis for their government's non-co-operation. This may make Iraq less dangerous to neighbours; it has been lethal for half a million pre-schoolers.

- Get the petition from 12 Trinity Road, London N2 8JJ.

- The Campaign Against Sanctions on Iraq (a registered society at the University of Cambridge) is exclusively concerned with the humanitarian consequences of sanctions on Iraq, does not have any political affiliation, does not support Saddam Hussein's regime and is not opposed to military sanctions on Iraq.

- Website www.un.org/Depts/oip, stores UN documents. The Campaign Against Sanctions on Iraq's website, linux.clare.cam.ac.uk/casi, is also useful, linking to articles and other UK groups.

Growing crisis throughout Russia

Steve Myers, International Solidarity with Workers in Russia, previews December's elections.

It is just over a year since Russia declared a moratorium on its debts and the rouble crashed – sending an already dire situation spiralling down into deeper levels of social, economic and political crisis.

Since then, much of Russia's opposition has blamed not just Yeltsin but Jews and other ethnic minorities. Last year saw the largest mobilisation of militant workers for the last decade, with mass blockades of railway lines by miners and other workers, and up to 15 million participating in the October general strike. In July Vyborg Pulp and Paper Mill was occupied by its workers. On 9th July, large gangs of armed bosses' mercenaries (in conjunction with local police) tried to repossess the mill by force. The scab militia was physically beaten off by 500 unarmed workers – two were seriously injured.

That same day a famous victory was declared by workers of the mass eight month occupation of Yasnogorsk machine factory, ending in a degree of workers' control unheard of in the west. Boosted by this victory, nearby Kimovsk workers occupied a large factory – also with demands to oust the bosses and for workers' control. And now the Tula region miners' committees have voted to march on the Kremlin – with support from other Tula workers. There are important hunger strikes in Vladivostok for back pay (17 workers are near death). Perhaps more ominous for the Kremlin are numerous reports from the giant Kusbass industrial region where there is much talk of a mass general strike and even of insurrection.

The workers tend to be extremely pessimistic and suspicious of all political parties. Yet once they take the decision to act, they do so with heroic militancy. All this comes in the context of the draconian proposals for a new Labour Code now going through the Duma. These new laws stand to rescind hard-won rights – far more than the anti-union laws passed in this country – and give unprecedented dictatorial powers to the bosses. The question is – can they be implemented and what will be the composition and political character of the government that implements them?

The elections will take place on 19th December. The most likely victors are a populist-nationalist alliance more anti-western than Yeltsin. The new Fatherland All-Russia (FAR) party is an alliance between Moscow mayor Yury Luzhkov's own Fatherland Party, and the All Russia movement of regional Governors. If it wins, one of the two leading lights in FAR, former Prime-Minister Yevgeny Primakov, or Luzhkov himself, would inherit Yeltsin's semi-dictatorial constitutional powers, following Presidential elections in June 2000. FAR is characterised as centre-left and friendly to labour. This is wrong! It is a coalition of those who will protect the weak but emerging capitalists from Yeltsin (and IMF) domination. The bureaucrats of the largest trade union federation (the FNPR) have also joined this unholy alliance.

Luzhkov promises to implement the new Labour Code and use all the dictatorial powers needed to crush workers' resistance – while at the same time he has promised to force Russian businesses, at the threat of investigating their accounts, to provide cheap food for the poor. He is now using the Army as scab harvesters at local farms around Moscow, lowering vegetable prices.

In recent presidential polls, Primakov led at 20%, Zyuganov followed at 16%, and Luzhkov was on 11% but rising fast. Luzhkov supports the Orthodox Russian church. Openly critical of democracy, his populist slogan is "Food – Heat – Order!" Waiting in the wings of FAR is Zyuganov (CPRF leader) and the red-brown alliance. Already in a number of regions, there is collaboration between the CPRF and outright fascist groups. Zyuganov has called an extraordinary national Congress on 4th September, to ditch the name Communist in the elections, in favour of a broad patriotic front. There may well be a split.

A broad range of 31 organisations to the left of the Communist Party (mainly those involved in organising and supporting the actual workers' struggles mentioned above) have recently had a unity Conference in Moscow to launch the Movement for a Workers' Party. An initial statement says they base themselves on Marxism, dialectics and revolution. They are set to stand candidates in the coming election.

- Contact: International Solidarity with Workers in Russia (ISWoR), 46 Denmark Hill, London SE5 8RZ; ISWoR@aol.com; http://members.aol.com/ISWoR/english/index.html

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The Labour left must shun euro

Dr Brian Burkitt, University of Bradford and Pudsey CLP, replies to our last issue's features on the Euro elections.

Firstly, the "Third Way" strategy, summarised by the joint manifesto issued by Blair and Schroeder on the eve of the elections which undermined the principles of the universalist welfare state, was rejected both by British and EU voters. The left now faces the challenge of creating its own programme, not as a counterpart to the nebulous "Third Way", but as an alternative to the Euro-monetarism that dominates New Labour and Euroland economic policy.

Secondly, the Euro-elections demonstrated at least indifference, and at most hostility, to further economic and political integration between EU member states. High levels of abstention in traditional Labour areas were combined with a strong vote against EMU – registered by the fall in the Liberal Democratic vote, the most pro-euro party, and gains for both the Conservatives and the UK Independence Party. Those, including Sir Ken Jackson and John Monks, who have argued that Labour should react to its poor results on 10th June by adopting a more decisive pro-euro stand are not basing their case upon the factual evidence provided by these elections. Bill Morris, who has called for a referendum of all UK trade unionists on the issue, is closer to the views of voters.

Therefore our second crucial task becomes the development of a democratic socialist political economy that avoids both the knee-jerk reactions of the nationalist right and the drift to European integration of New Labour. EMU and the European elections provide such a catalyst. To illustrate the fundamental issues at stake, we should look at the arguments advanced by David Holland in July's *LLB* in favour of participation in the euro.

David correctly states that "it would be a mistake for the left to try to pick up on the crumbs from the nationalist right's beanfeast". However, it is essential that we oppose the euro on other democratic socialist grounds. As Bernie Moss argued, it rests upon three insecure foundations – the lack of an EU-wide political community, where citizens share a sense of common interests; the undemocratic, non-accountable character of the European Central Bank (ECB), its central decision-making institution; and the monetarist policies pursued by the EU since Maastricht. Moreover, genuine socialist internationalism extends beyond a narrow concentration upon the euro, by providing solutions to problems such as currency speculation and environmental degradation, which are global rather than European in origin. Economically, democratic socialism focuses upon higher investment and growth, job creation, less inequality and the need to rebuild public investment by taxing corporate wealth. The euro prejudices all these initiatives through its inherently monetarist and unaccountable structure.

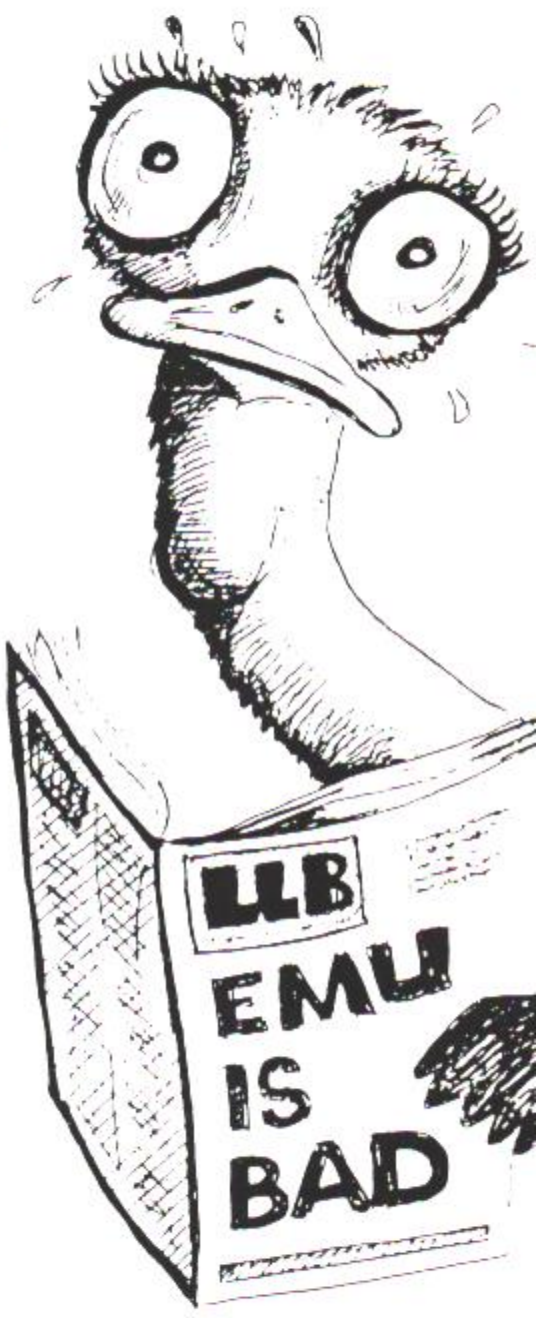
David claims that "our emphasis should be to place demands upon the political institutions of the EU": aren't political decisions preferable to market forces? Democratic socialists answer resoundingly "Yes", on the crucial proviso that political decisions are made by those who are directly elected by, and are subsequently accountable to, voters. None of the crucial EU decision-taking institutions, the secretive Council of Ministers, the European Commission nor the ECB, meet these criteria. Because the EU's political institutions are neither democratic nor accountable, no mechanism exists at EU level to perform the desirable activities which David advocates.

David asserts that, "while we should certainly be opposed to a single currency on a deflationary basis" (the only one on offer for the foreseeable future), "boosting demand and large scale job creation are now inconceivable on the basis of sterling – unless we propose to end the convertibility of sterling and opt for a socialist economy of shortages, queues, black markets and rationing". However, it is possible to boost demand and restore full employment if a democratic socialist strategy is followed. Its crucial elements are:

(a) allowing the external value of sterling to fall to the level required to generate jobs in export and import-substitution industries until full employment is achieved, while maintaining a balance of payments equilibrium;

(b) reducing the level of military expenditure as a percentage of national income over a five year Parliament to the average of other western nations, thus generating investment in productive capacity, public services, and research and development;

(c) providing additional funds for these purposes by raising tax revenue through an increased rate of income tax on high earners, raising corporation tax, imposing value-added tax on private education and health expenditure, and levying a tax on the 90% of foreign exchange transactions unrelated to trade.



In the face of these possibilities, it is clearly unrealistic to argue that national strategies for creating jobs on a large scale are "unrealistic". Joining the euro can only be advocated on the grounds of any positive benefits it generates, rather than being based on an imaginary failure of full employment policies based on sterling. Britain's basic economic problem is insufficient production. The labour movement alone can solve this problem, but only if it rejects domestic or EMU-induced deflation, instead adopting a democratic socialist strategy to regenerate the economy and reduce the inequalities within it.

War and its unending cost

Praful Bidwai looks at the hidden costs of India's "victory" over Pakistan in the recent Kargil crisis and its implications for the country's forthcoming general election.

India is paying a heavy price for the "victory" in Kargil: 400 lives, billions of rupees, external meddling, jingoism, and an explosion of a territorially obsessed national chauvinism. Behind every successful, "sweet" military operation lies a not-so-sweet calculus of risk and failure. No wars are cost-free.

The real cost of repulsing intruders from Kargil is likely to be much higher than estimated, way beyond the admitted 410 dead and 594 injured. (The official figures do not sound very convincing either in light of New Delhi's own figure for Pakistani casualties of 698 dead). Operation Vijay deployed three divisions and top-of-the-line equipment, using over 150,000 rounds of Bofors shells costing $1,000 each. Direct costs, according to defence sources, were a huge $80 million.

To be fair, Indian troops succeeded in repulsing Pakistani intruders, whom they outnumbered 30 or 40 times. India also managed to isolate Pakistan diplomatically, particularly among the Group of Eight, and to ensure that China would maintain its neutrality. India received acclaim for not crossing the Line of Control. Defending its integrity was a medium-term gain, although that hardly settles the long-term future of this disputed boundary, leave alone the Kashmir issue in which it originates.

These gains have to be balanced against the heavy losses incurred. The government initially failed to use diplomacy. It committed a serious security breach by ignoring intelligence reports. Worse, it then hurriedly drafted into Kargil whole regiments without acclimatising them or providing adequate clothing and snow-shoes. As a result, several hundred soldiers probably perished. Operation Vijay was launched in panic, with the air strikes raising its profile. Conventionally superior India was bound to succeed militarily.

But New Delhi invited external intervention that it may later regret. The United States was said to merely "facilitate a dialogue between the parties" or more generally to "mediate". The truth is that Washington has acquired, and been granted by New Delhi, a role in South Asia quite unlike anything it earlier enjoyed.

Kargil's internal costs are even heavier. They include militarism and chauvinism, and "loyalty" tests for the minorities; growing intolerance in sections of the media towards those who question the conduct of Operation Vijay; and abridgement of democratic freedom through censorship and manipulation. It now emerges that media manipulation, especially on TV, was far worse than thought. No reporter moved – or was allowed to move – much beyond National Highway 1-A. Recycled stock pictures were presented as live originals. Much of the media went along with the official "patriotic" spin on reports.

Unless there is an India-Pakistan political breakthrough, which looks unlikely, the armed forces will have to maintain a huge round-the-year presence at Kargil, costing an estimated £33m a day. The Kargil operation has also shifted the political balance of forces in the government in favour of the military. Already there is a strident demand for raising the defence budget to at least three per cent of GDP (from the existing official figure of 2.5 per cent). The military will pitch for even bigger funds under the guise of rapid nuclear weapons manufacture, induction and deployment. This will mean diversion of resources away from socially productive uses.

All this waste makes the ruling coalition vulnerable in the coming elections – provided the opposition gets its act together. For the most part, however, the opposition has not been in great shape, with the Congress still unsure of its orientation, and the Janata Dal splitting. The Opposition has not properly countered the BJP's attempt to make capital out of war and sacrifice and its sordid resort to "coffin politics". Nonetheless, the opposition has a good chance to turn every argument on its head – if it makes a clean, decisive break with the BJP brand of "nationalism". This it can do only if it resists the temptation to play the "patriotic" card when in doubt and stops lending uncritical support to Pakistan-bashing. It must actively fight jingoism.

Opposition Members of Parliament must talk about the past's negative lessons of chauvinism and jingoism, starting with how we look at national borders and boundaries. These were drawn in modern India by the colonial state with its own devious purposes. However, the rulers of independent India saw themselves – contradictorily – as heirs of the colonial state. For many of them, India's boundaries became sacred and holy: inalienable parts of the motherland, with a life of their own, severed from the past.

It is illogical, unwise and unprincipled to make concessions to territorially obsessed chauvinism. But many of our political parties seek refuge in this kind of nationalism. They lend uncritical support to the government's aggressive moves in the neighbourhood: for example, in Sri Lanka, Nepal and Sikkim. This has allowed the government to "externalise" internal issues and evade responsibility. The opposition would be ill advised to let this happen today, when it has so much evidence with which to put this government on the mat.

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G7 offers little relief

Mike Phipps examines the likely impact for Latin American debt relief of the recent G7 summit in Cologne.

The Cologne summit agreed to cancel $45 billion of new debt in Latin America, in addition to $55bn previously agreed. The six-year qualifying period to become eligible for such debt relief under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries initiative may be reduced if governments meet criteria on economic reform, and interim assistance could be available during this period. These modest achievements are a testament to the international campaign which made debt relief a front-page issue and culminated in a petition of 17 million signatures and the Jubilee 2000 human chain of 35,000 people around the city of Cologne.

But the summit also had a less widely reported downside. The G7 failed to actually commit funds to ensure faster and deeper debt relief. This will be left to individual countries, with the largest creditors such as the US still not making a clear pledge. Given that the annual cost of the Cologne reforms is less than one-third of the amount cut from aid budgets since 1992, there seems to be an integrity gap here.

Secondly, the relief is available only to those countries that qualify under the restrictive terms of the HIPC initiative. In Latin America this applies to just four – Nicaragua and Honduras, but not for example Haiti, probably the poorest country in the western hemisphere. Within this, the relief available will have a limited impact on these countries' devastated economies, especially when the small print is examined. Within the headline figures on cancellation, for example, are proposals to convert debt into grants to buy donor countries' products, Japan's for example. Instead of directing debt relief into poverty reduction, this kind of "Toyota-debt swap" will benefit only western exporters.

Most worrying of all is the fact that the package imposes new conditions on eligibility, which will be policed by the IMF. Progress will continue to be linked to the failed neoliberal programmes of structural adjustment – privatisation and cuts in social spending and credit – three quarters of which fail and all of which make the poor poorer.

For a country like Nicaragua, with a debt of $6bn, if it meets all its targets by 2001, then debt service will be reduced from one-half to one-fifth of the national budget – still more than the spending on health and education combined. Small wonder many see the HIPC initiative as a means of perpetuating debt bondage and the Cologne summit as a missed opportunity.

Turkey hardship fund

LLB readers will be shocked by the recent earthquake in Turkey.

Some may blame God but the Turkish government shares most of the responsibilty for not enforcing its own building regulations and it has left the working people of Turkey to cope with the disaster unaided.

The Turkish and Kurdish Community Solidarity Centre, DAY-MER, is organising a hardship fund to be sent to the relief committees set up by democratic mass organisations in Turkey.

- Send donations (payable to "Day-Mer Migranet 2") to Day-Mer, Former Library, Howard Road, London N16 8PR.

Close Pabrade camp – release the detainees!

Steve Cohen and Dave Landau call for solidarity with imprisoned refugees in Lithuania.

"Thirteen Somalis had spent three months in the dark, three metres underground in horrifying conditions. They never saw the light of day except during the daily exercise hour. They suffered from eye problems. It was terribly hot. The air was heavy and unbreathable. The place made you claustrophobic. The Somalis were in the midst of their second hunger strike." – 1995 UNHCR report on Yanaua detention centre, Lithuania.

Somalian refugees are in a Lithuanian detention centre because they were double-crossed by criminal racketeers who promised to get them into mainland Europe. They are also there because Sweden, Norway and Denmark act as financiers for the erection of immigration controls around the Baltic states of Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia. These countries are in effect on trial – their role is to act as buffer zones to control migration into Fortress Europe. Then they may be offered membership of the European Union.

The Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs is open about this process, stating: "A main objective of Sweden's co-operation with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania is to approximate these countries' refugee and migration policies to those of Western Europe ...As a result the Baltic states will cease to be attractive to refugees as transit countries. This should also facilitate those countries eventual accession to the EU."

The only black people in Lithuania appear to be refugees awaiting expulsion from Pabrade. The Lithuanian Red Cross has reported handcuffs and gas being used as a form of punishment, and refugees being beaten because they refused to remove garbage from the camp or wanted to use the telephone.

Pabrade is not a concentration or death camp. However, the physical presence of barbed wire and emaciated faces echoes those camps. Lithuania's civilian police helped the Nazis and ironically, Pabrade is today under the administrative control of the police – history does not automatically teach any lessons.

Globalisation and our human rights

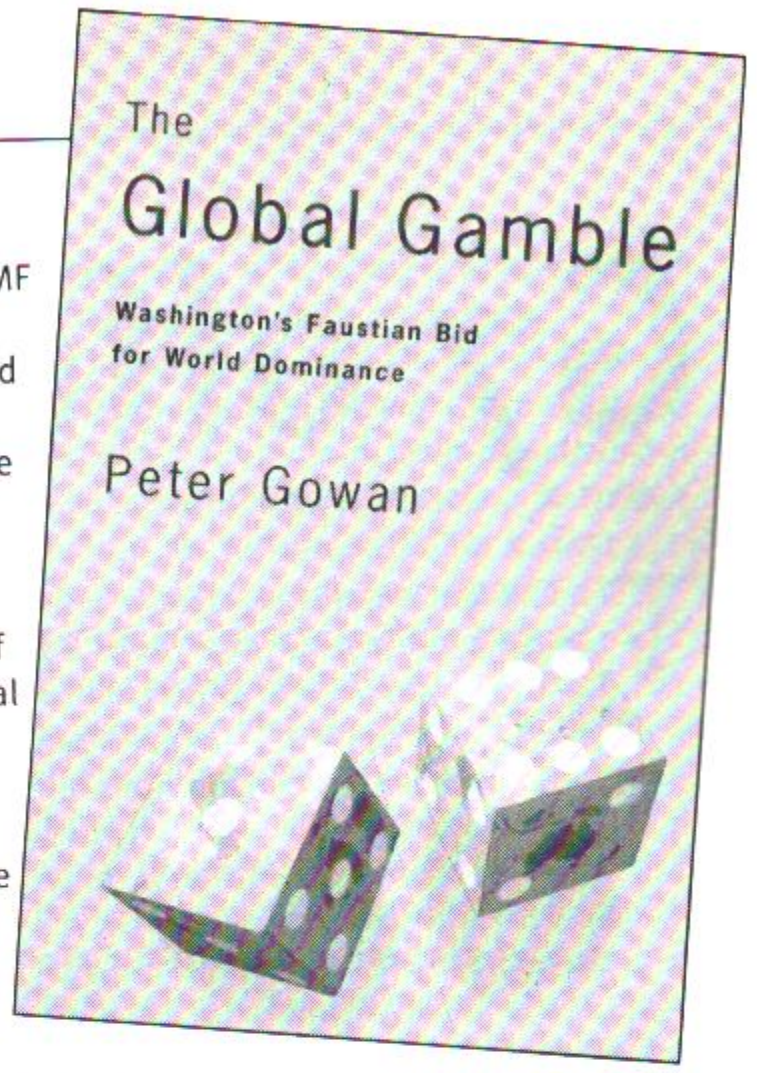
Mike Phipps reviews *The Globalist Gamble* by Peter Gowan, (Verso, £13 pbk).

This is a book of two halves, the second being the more uneven. In Part One, Gowan examines the US's relentless drive towards asserting the global supremacy of what he calls the 'Dollar-Wall Street regime'. He shows how each economic crisis in the periphery has been manipulated to strengthen the US as a financial centre. Thus, expanding American influence in South East Asia may have been consciously used to precipitate last year's Asian crisis.

In particular the US administration worked closely with the hedge funds which carried out the huge currency speculations which had such devastating impact on local markets. As hedge funds attacked one South East Asian currency after another, earlier liberalisation measures, promoted by the US, that had opened up domestic banking to hot money inflows fuelled the collapse of entire currencies. "The lines of credit were wrenched back into London and New York," observes Gowan, "and economy after economy was dragged onto the operating table of the IMF and the US Treasury."

The subsequent IMF bail-outs were invariably constructed to further US policy objectives. Part of the upshot of this huge regional crisis has been the US Federal Reserve's bringing of the Long Term Capital Management Fund under one organisation, creating arguably the most powerful financial force in history with the ability to ruin entire economies in the interests of speculative profit. In Gowan's view, this is a weapon they mean to use.

Part Two consists of articles that appeared elsewhere during the 1990s. There is some useful analysis of how the West promoted 'bandit capitalism' in Eastern Europe – a phrase coined approvingly by Lord Howe in his capacity as an adviser to the government of Ukraine.



Full Marx for Flik

Richard Hanford reviews *A Bug's Life*, (Video, Disney).

I was astounded by the dexterity with which our kids, Robin and Madeleine, on their first-ever cinema visit, managed to devour a bucketful of popcorn without once taking their eyes from the screen. Stripped of scary special effects, silly songs and the obligatory princess, this is a Disney video for the discerning viewer. In this frantic, action-packed film an ant colony finally free themselves from their oppressors – the greedy, grasping grasshoppers. Hapless hero Flik courageously confronts the towering, glowering Hopper with the words: "Ants are not meant to serve grasshoppers. They pick food for grasshoppers and feed themselves as well. Ants don't need grasshoppers. You need us. We are a lot stronger and you know it".

Disneyworld turned upside down! What would Walt have made of it? Okay purists, it's not The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists. But kids will love it, and may learn from it: unity is strength, and can overthrow exploitation. Watch it, children. Watch out, capitalists.

The Soapbox Cabaret

John Rogers previews his own play, which promises to be a highlight of Party Conference

Labour Party Conference. A delegate takes the platform, slowly unfolds his speech, clears his throat, then throws off his jacket to reveal a sequinned vest, clicks his fingers and an irresistible show time refrain kicks through the PA as he launches into the opening line: "I am the Third Way". Blair, Brown, etc. form a chorus line and join in with, "are you on message". And so the debate begins in this manner and continues with a rock opera on GM food with mutant vegetables and a chorus line of cloned sheep.

This won't be happening in the Conference Centre at Bournemouth next month but something very similar and even more subversive will take place in the basement bar of the Roundhouse Hotel in Bournemouth every night of Conference. Through writing *The Soapbox Cabaret*, with composer Andy Dobson providing the infectious tunes, I've created a forum where ideas and arguments can be aired in a way completely unthinkable in the stale environs of a constituency or student meeting ("comrades, I would like to illustrate my point with the following song, if the chair will permit me to bring my chorus line into the meeting").

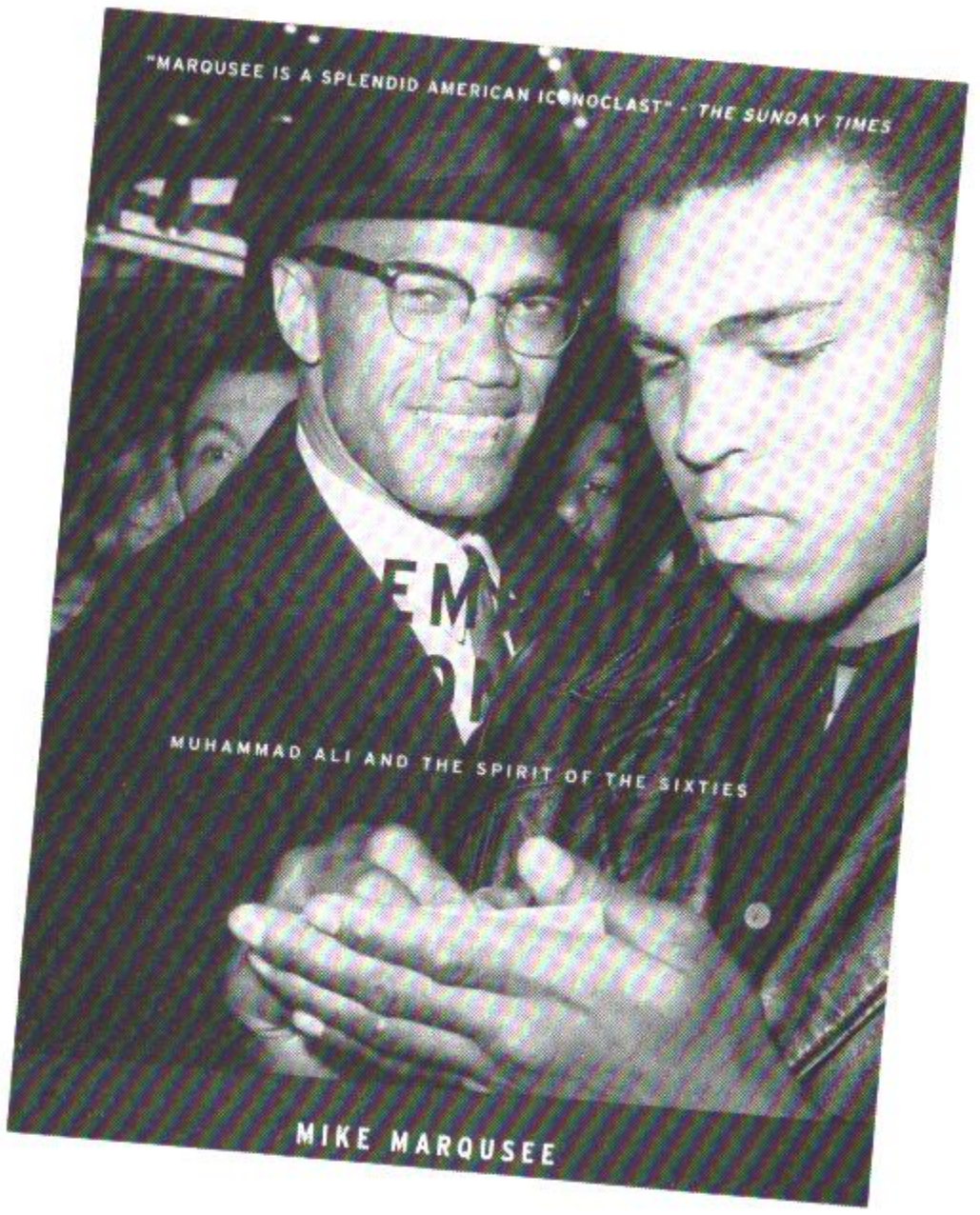
The theatre has long been a forum for dissent and agitation. Blair and his cult have hijacked the Labour Party – I can't tell anyone that I live in Islington and sometimes go on holiday to Tuscany without being tarred with the same basting brush. I came out of the student movement when it was dominated by Stephen Twigg and Lorna Fitzsimons and their bunch of badly dressed geeks called "New Directions". They got jobs in the Party and seats in Parliament and New Directions became New Labour. I was now Old Labour at a very tender young age.

- *The Soapbox Cabaret* runs at The Hackney Empire Studio, Mare Street, E8 on September 4th, 5th,11th, 12th, 18th and 19th at 8:30pm. Box Office: 0181-985 2424.
- Then at The Roundhouse Hotel, The Landsdowne, Bournemouth, September 26th-1st October at 10pm. Tickets £5/£4(concs).

Call 0171-359 9113 for more information.

"No quarrel with them Vietcong"

Comedian and writer **Mark Steel** reviews *Redemption Song*, the new book on Muhammad Ali and the spirit of the sixties by *LLB*'s Political Correspondent, Mike Marqusee (Verso, £17 hardback).



When Muhammad Ali fought Joe Frazier for the World Heavyweight Boxing title in 1970, I was ten. In the week before the fight, no-one in my class discussed anything else. And we all desperately wanted Ali to win. How did a Black Power-supporting, Vietnam War-dodging Nation of Islam member come to be idolised by an all-white class of Kentish ten year olds? Surely the slogan "Swanley, Alabama: one struggle" would have meant very little to us.

Thirty years later, celebrity is attained much more easily. A spot of gardening, cooking, or healing sick lizards, and as long as a camera is pointing your way, you're guaranteed a dozen front covers and a guest slot on *Celebrity Squares*.

One of the many strengths of Mike Marqusee's book is that it shows Ali's adulation was a result not just of his fame, or even of how he arrived at that fame, but at how he used that fame.

The book is sub-titled "and the spirit of the sixties." So it's timely, as the current trend for sixties nostalgia insists that the period revolved around flowery shirts and brightly coloured transit vans, that Marqusee reminds us of other images from that decade. Weaving Ali's story through the upheavals of the Civil Rights movement, Anti-Vietnam protests, and the impact of other icons such as Bob Dylan, Paul Robeson and Sam Cooke, he regales us with the series of extraordinary symbolic moments which Ali gave to that generation. There's the yelling to Floyd Patterson, as he pummelled him during a world title fight, to "stand up white America", after Patterson had promised to "win the title back for America". And the taunts of "Uncle Tom, what's my name?" as he knocked over Ernie Terrell, who'd refused to use Ali's Muslim name at a press conference.

And most strikingly, the simple sentence "I ain't got no quarrel with them Vietcong"; eight words around which the decade revolved. Marqusee illustrates the impact these incidents had on the millions around the world, black and white, as they legitimised the anger and spirit of resistance that swept the globe.

All of this was lost on us at Downsview Primary School. Or maybe not all of it. I suspect we sensed a rebel, a man who'd embrace us, not look down on us, and encourage the optimism and screams against injustice that occupy a ten year old mind.

Stripped of his title and his passport, and about to be charged for his campaigning against the Vietnam War, Ali told a crowd of students "I have lost nothing. I have gained the respect of thousands world-wide, I have gained peace of mind."

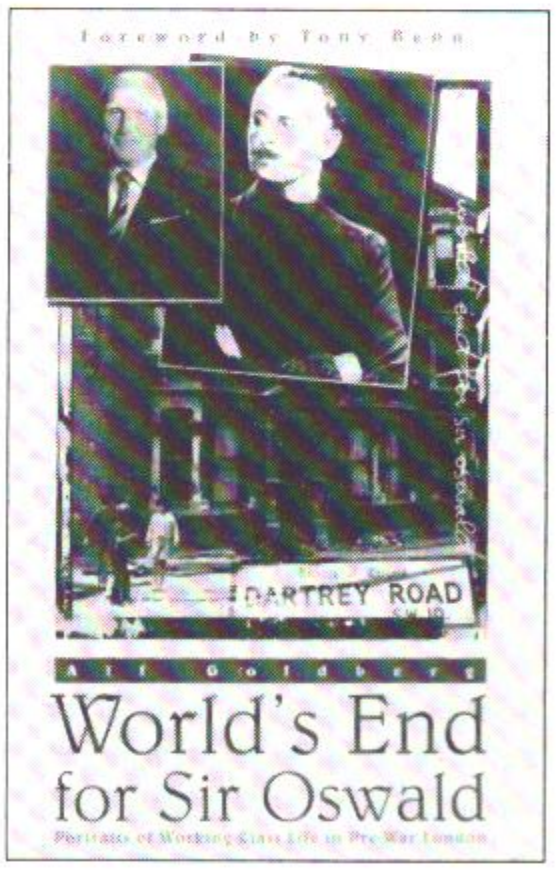
In our New Labour era, when principles and resistance are seen not just as tradeable, but as a positive nuisance, Ali's spirit of the sixties echoes via this splendid book to pour shame on the spirit of the nineties.

World Class

Steve French reviews *World's End for Sir Oswald* by Alf Goldberg (106 pp, The Book Guild, £10.95).

Many Labour left activists will know comrade Alf if they have visited Blackpool for Party Conference. Alf is a stalwart of the Blackpool left but grew up in the 20s in London. Here he documents tales of working class life in SW10 in the early part of the century.

Alf evokes a real feeling for the working class culture of the day. Battles with the Moseleyites are brought to life and Alf reveals that Vidal Sassoon was once a militant anti-fascist. A wonderful read, with a foreword by Tony Benn.



Obituary: Neelan Tiruchelvam

Mike Marqusee pays tribute to the Sri Lankan human rights activist murdered by the Tamil Tigers.

The assassination of Neelan Tiruchelvam by the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) on 29th July is a tragic setback for the causes of peace and democracy in Sri Lanka.

Neelan was an uncompromising global champion of human rights, a world-renowned expert in constitutional law and a Member of Parliament for the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF). He was a major contributor to the devolution plan proposed by the current Sri Lankan government, which remains to date the best hope for a lasting solution to the ethnic conflict, and his death bodes ill for the immediate future of any meaningful Sri Lankan peace process.

Neelan was a long-standing and outspoken critic of the racist and repressive practices of successive Sri Lankan governments, not least the abuses committed by the Sri Lankan army in the course of its prolonged war with the LTTE. But he also firmly rejected the LTTE's violent and authoritarian ethno-nationalism. He was one of a number of Sri Lankan progressives, from various ethnic backgrounds, who came to believe that the ethnic conflict could only be resolved in the context of the democratisation of Sri Lankan society as a whole. With his brutal elimination – by a suicide bomber in the broad daylight of Colombo's morning rush hour – the LTTE have signalled once again their refusal to tolerate the existence of any alternative leadership or programme for the Tamil people. As a result, Tamils have lost one of their most eloquent and credible advocates on the international stage. Neelan was a remarkable multi-dimensional figure – an intellectual and an activist, a pragmatic politician and an idealist, an institution-builder, film-fan and cricket enthusiast. He was prepared to engage with the refractory details of the present while also applying his imagination and expertise to a vision of the future.

Neelan was an individual of exceptional modesty, gentleness and good humour. His generosity to the legions who came to him seeking advice or assistance was legendary, as was the quiet power of encouragement from which so many drew strength. In the days following his death, there were messages of grief from heads of state, academics, religious figures, journalists, and most piquantly scores of NGOs and human rights groups from all corners of the world.

In a recent speech to the Sri Lankan parliament, Neelan called on both sides in the country's civil war to recognise anew "the sanctity of human life". Referring to the recent assassination of other TULF officials, he noted: "Sadly, the impact of these deaths were only too brief as we uncritically resign ourselves to war, destruction and political assassinations as being an inextricable part of our troubled history." Yet Neelan refused to "surrender to despair". His death is a bitter blow for his family, his friends, the human rights community in Sri Lanka and around the world. But his legacy is immensely rich, and will nourish many in the years to come.

Comrade Compo

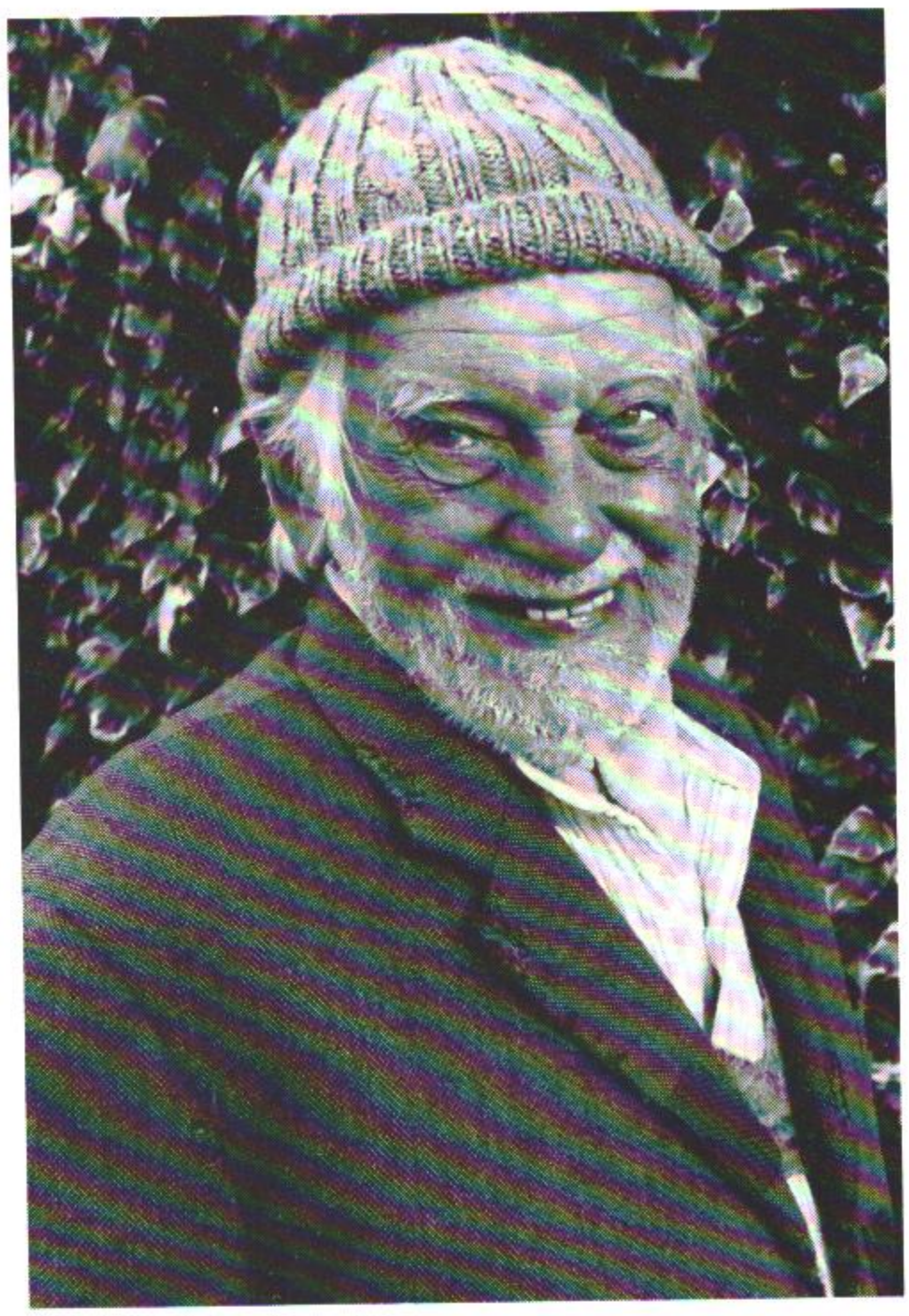
Richard Hanford remembers Bill Owen who died on 12th July, aged 85.

In complete contrast to the tatty tyke he portrayed so convincingly in *Last of the Summer Wine*, Bill Owen was really rather suave. But unlike so many Stars for Labour, he would readily volunteer to help with routine office tasks at Arts for Labour, which he created on advice from Tony Benn and Jim Mortimer long before it became fashionable for the famous to be seen supporting Labour.

As AfL Chair his commitment was total, his style somewhat eccentric. At an AGM he insisted upon taking votes before speeches which would "waste time", and at a fringe meeting threatened to have one persistent critic ejected, failing to recognise our Shadow Arts Minister!

He disliked bureaucracy. He proposed me to fill a place on the Party's Youth Committee left vacant by Red Wedge, and was dumbfounded when HQ preferred to leave the seat empty. Disillusioned with New Labour, he left the Party in recent years. A staunch socialist, he also had a longstanding commitment to London's old Unity Theatre. Prolific playwright and songwriter, his musical *Matchgirls* portrayed the women's strike of 1888.

He will be best remembered as a fine actor, but should not be forgotten as a fine activist.



Correspondence

LLB contributors are giving increasing credence to the Socialist Workers Party, particularly in UNISON. While union activists' work is clearly political, and often they are members of political parties, as stewards their main purpose should be to represent the views of their members except when clear party political views are debated at union meetings.

The SWP don't embrace such democratic niceties. They have a political programme of opportunism and oppositionalism. Disputes with management are accompanied by threats of strike action. They break union rules to advance their view of "workers rights", while arguing they must be strictly followed if this can cause industrial unrest. The union leadership is always wrong and members are characterised as waiting to start the revolution.

There is currently a great deal of tension within many UNISON branch committees, where SWP activity now threatens the capacity of branches to function efficiently, with violent debates over the political direction of the union, regions and branch executives. Democracy should not be abandoned in favour of unity – criticism must not be covered up – but it should be constructive. Stewards want to argue for members' rights, not the SWP's political views. Their activities have created an atmosphere of mistrust and continual opposition. Most members are non-party political – they want a union which fights for their rights, not one involved in party political infighting.

This situation discourages members from participating in branch democracy. SWP activities weaken the union. They should be shunned not supported.

Jim Mearns,
Glasgow

The sight of nationalist residents being battered off their own streets in Belfast and Derry last month bodes ill for a just peace and the "parity of esteem" promised in the Good Friday Agreement. But then the letter of the Agreement has already been sacrificed – the Executive has not been formed, the Agreement has been parked and once more the British Government today talks of a security review and thus an increased security presence in the six counties.

An *Independent* editorial in July on the Orange Order marches went to the heart of the issue. It said that the "marches symbolise the burning racial and religious divisions between the Protestant British and the Catholic Irish". Orangemen cannot attend catholic religious services. If they marry a Catholic they must leave the Order. Their agenda is separatism. As long as the order continues to march these divisions will smoulder.

Their laughable claims that a denial of their rights to walk where they like (in law non-existent) is qualitatively similar to the denial of homes, work, education and social and political rights to the nationalist community leave me speechless.

Irish people everywhere must challenge the unionist agenda and any agenda which pushes the line that nationalists' rights are for unionism to bestow at its own pace and in its own time, once it has managed (if ever) to come to terms with the painful idea of equality with Catholics.

Peter Middleton,
Friends of Gavaghy Road,
London

PERISCOPE

Pearls from Mandy

The ANC has problems. Not only are rich whites joining for their own reasons, but earlier this year they also had a "advisory" visit from our very own **Mandelson**. At least he understands how difficult it is for whites to attend branch meetings with their servants who might spill the beans on the shitty conditions and pay being offered by 'comrades' in the same branch, so he supported the idea of 'house' meetings instead. He told one member that the ANC should not bother to promote representational structures at grassroots because they end up 'being a noose around one's neck'.

Postcards from the edge

The Labour Party's latest wheeze for attracting new members and persuading existing ones to stay is to ask CLPs to deliver postcards from **Bournemouth** during conference week. The cards will be sent to constituencies shortly and officers are asked to organise teams to deliver them. Persicope has no doubt that members will be volunteering in droves for the honour of dishing out Greetings from Tony.

Guess who?

Ilford South CLP had a prominent speaker who did a fund raising meeting recently. Over fifty people paid £5 a head to listen and various items were auctioned off including subs to *LLB* and *Chartist*. The speaker was ideological, stating we should move towards a country where private education and health were unnecessary. He cited the example of Canada, where private health care does not exist, as the way forward. His radical views got him into trouble in an earlier Labour Government where Harold Wilson overlooked him for promotion as he was thought untrustworthy after attacking private education. The speaker thought the last manifesto too cautious, the pledges not to raise income tax and copy Tory spending should have been left out, even if it meant our majority was not so large. Should your constituency be in need of money and want to debate the purpose of the Labour Party with a quality speaker then write to the noble **Roy Hattersley** at the Lords.

Roses weeded out

It's comforting to be able to rely on the judgement of interviewing panels used to weed out unsuitable candidates on behalf of the Labour Party. They did a great job with the candidates for the Greater London Authority. They weeded out our own **Christine Shawcroft** – for her lack of experience in representing Labour after only 13 years as a councillor – while accepting Aktar Beg. During the *Satanic Verses* controversy, he called for Salman Rushdie's hands to be chopped off.

The cost of sending every Party member a leaflet in some GLA consistencies exceeded the candidates' spending limit (of £1,000) just for postage. Who paid? Some leaflets for Helen Gordon and Chris Robbins were in envelopes franked by KPMG. It cost candidates £100 to get a set of address labels: one candidate had to threaten the Party with an injunction in order to get the labels he'd paid for.

EU couldn't make it up

European Commissioner **Martin Bangemann**, one of those Commissioners who despite the fact that they resigned stayed at work on full pay – you work that one out – has taken a £700,000 job with a private telephone company. He was, of course, the telecommunications Commissioner. Or rather, at the time of his appointment, he still is.

Love a duck

Animal welfarists have condemned Environment Minister **Michael Meacher** for backing a duck cull in the West Midlands. Apparently the poor ruddies don't realise the Spanish white-headed ducks are a different race and when they migrate to the Iberian peninsula they do what many British holidaymakers do in the same situation and, well, you remember Geoff Martin's 18-30 holidays. Let's just say it produces an "unacceptable" mixed-duckrace alternative. Wildlife writer Trevor Lawson says, "it's not science; it's ecological apartheid." Flying in the face of basic evolutionary theory, the inaptly-named Royal Society for the Protection of Birds supports the massacre in order to save a pure white-headed breed.



THE LIZ DAVIES COLUMN

As I went into the NEC on 27th July, the BBC asked me about a Millbank document on the Party's recent election setbacks, which, I was told, we were to discuss at the meeting. I had to admit that like most other NEC members (but unlike some journalists) I'd had no advance sight of the paper. Not surprisingly, Millbank's analysis proved little more than a desperate cover-up. The local, Scottish and Welsh elections, it argued, had been good results for Labour in comparison to the Tories. Not a word was uttered about Labour's losses to Plaid Cymru, the SNP, or Dennis Canavan.

However, even Millbank couldn't deny that the European elections were disastrous. The official conclusion was that the electorate as a whole cannot be taken for granted (whatever that means), that the Tories were able to motivate their core vote, and that there is a lack of campaigning ability among Party members, particularly in safe seats. The recommendations included a consultation with the Party on changes to the electoral system (with a proposed move away from the unpopular list system), a request to the Government to hold local and European elections on the same dates in future; and another consultation on "whether local Party structures are suitable for current campaigning demands and whether there is a need to reform and modernise them". So the activists whom New Labour has done so much to exclude have been set up to take the blame for New Labour's electoral shortcomings.

Even by Millbank standards, it was a crass argument. The discussion included some devastating attacks (not just from the Grassroots Alliance) on the Party's campaign, both politically and technically (MEPs were furious at having been trivialised in the leaflets). Mark Seddon, Pete Willsman and myself (Cathy Jamieson was unable to attend) argued that the activists were alienated by Millbank control, and that the Government was failing to deliver for its core supporters. The GMB representatives spoke fiercely against any form of proportional representation. They were the only NEC members to join the Grassroots Alliance representatives in voting against the recommendations. Watch out for Millbank's "reforming and modernising" roadshow coming your way soon!

The NEC also discussed a number of changes to the Party rulebook, including a recommendation that the constituency places on the National Constitutional Committee be elected by Conference delegates rather than by OMOV. Pete Willsman observed correctly that this proposal had only arisen because Teresa Pearce of the Grassroots Alliance had won the OMOV ballot two years running. Only Mark, Pete and myself voted against narrowing the franchise. We took the opportunity to table three democratic rule changes for future NEC ballots: prohibiting members of the House of Lords from standing in the constituency section (the "Sawyer" amendment), declaring a vacancy if a constituency member was elected to Parliament or the European Parliament (the "Cashman" amendment), and providing a fixed timetable for the annual election. This year the dates were set arbitrarily by the General Secretary with little notice to candidates, and at one point she announced that she would not initiate the count until each candidate had signed a pledge not to criticise the ballot!

We also tabled amendments aimed at democratising the National Policy Forum, calling for the right to propose motions with speeches at the NPF and the removal of the threshold of 35 votes for minority amendments. Basic democratic stuff, you might think, but anathema to Millbank. Our amendments were all declared out of order by the Chair. The reasons for this ruling remained unclear, and even those who disagree with us on the NEC were beginning to wonder whether there was an unwritten code making all Grassroots Alliance proposals automatically out of order.

In his report, the Prime Minister echoed Millbank's analysis of the European elections. I asked him to reconsider the Asylum Bill in light of the recent judicial review decision reversing a ruling by the Home Secretary (access to judicial review would be removed by the Bill). I also asked if the Party would voluntarily disclose the specific amounts and name the sources of all donations and sponsorships exceeding £5,000. The Prime Minister made it clear that there would be no concessions on the Asylum Bill; he claimed the asylum system was fraudulent and corrupt and that vast numbers of judicial review cases were pursued solely to postpone inevitable decisions. He saw no reason to disclose voluntarily the amounts received from high-value donors - until the draft Bill on party funding required all parties to do so.

We were informed that reports on MPs' records on voting against the Government and unauthorised absences were being sent to CLPs. One member suggested that MPs with "poor records" should be considered for interview by the NEC. There was near universal opposition to this, but also some worrying warning signals. Prescott opposed the proposal because, he said, there was no definition of a "poor" record, but added that at the end of the year, once CLPs had selected, there might be intervention.

Contrary to *Tribune*'s reports, Clement Attlee's portrait has not been removed from the NEC meeting room. He stares at us throughout the meeting.

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

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