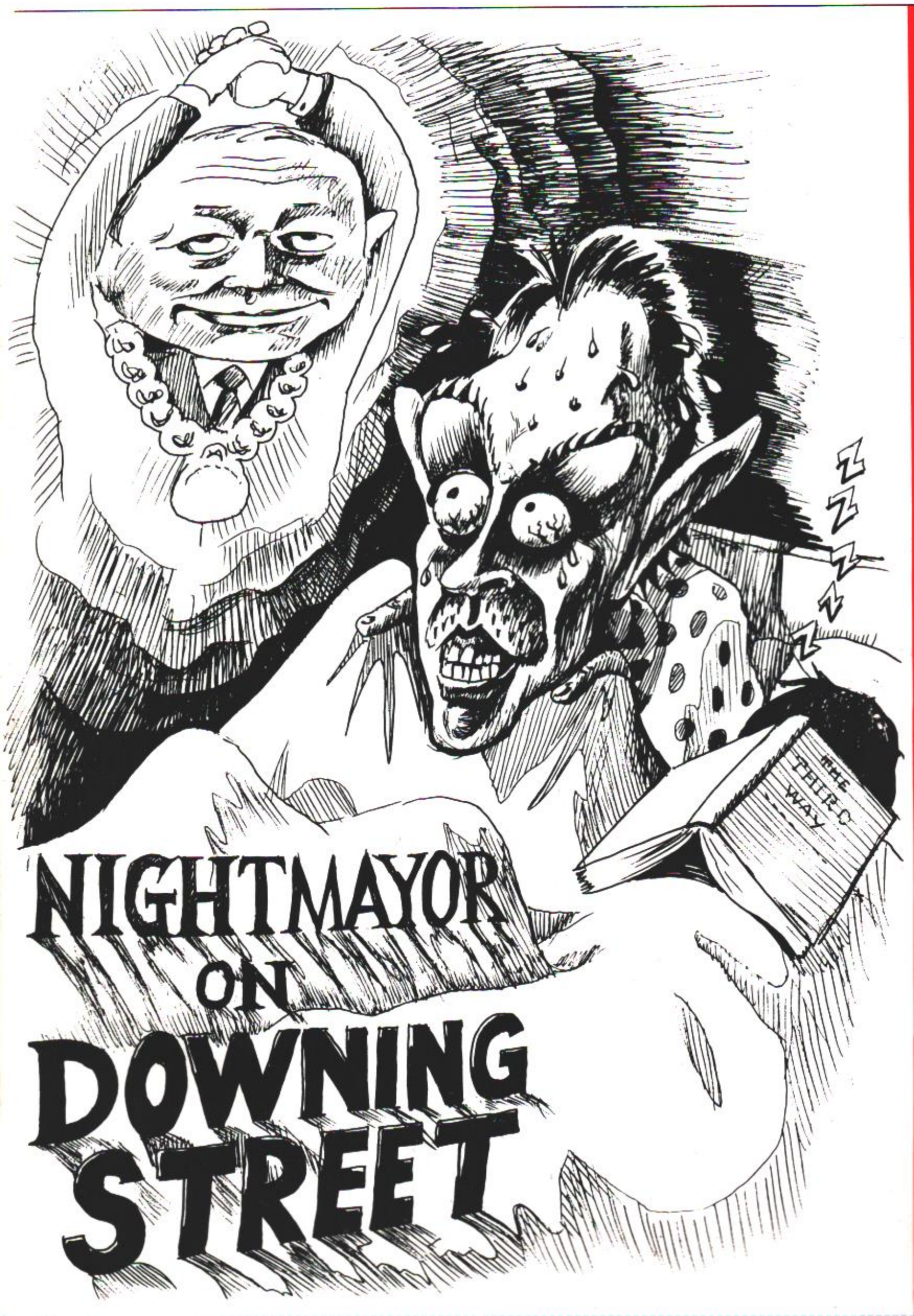
LABOUR LEFT

Briefing

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LONDON MAYOR

Paul Flynn MP, Christine Shawcroft

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Backing Ken Livingstone

SCOTLAND

Repeal Section 28

INTERNATIONAL

Pakistan: eye-witness report

RIGHT TO ROAM

What a weedy bill

LABOUR LEFT Briefing

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

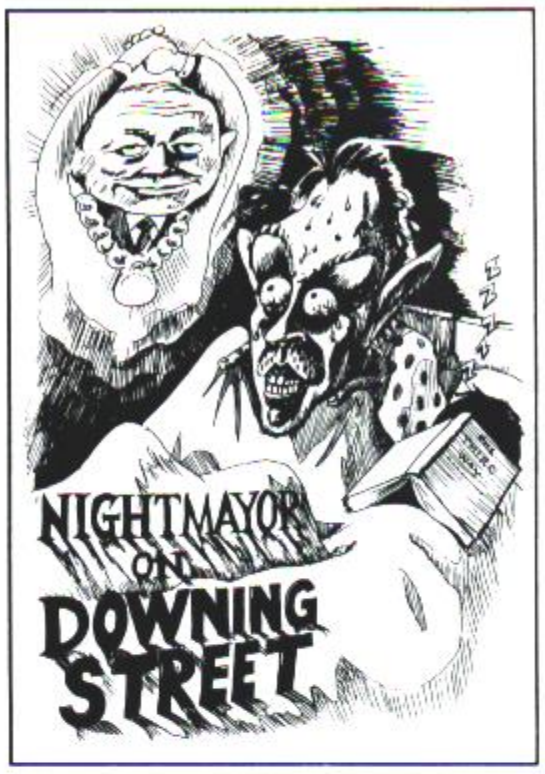
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April 2000

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EDITORIAL

New Labour in a right fix

Tony Blair has gambled much of his national credibility on defeating Ken Livingstone in London. Although in formal terms, Mayor Livingstone might have limited local powers, Blair clearly fears him as a potential focus of resistance capable of jeopardising New Labour's rule across the country. Last December, after months of dirty tricks to discredit Ken's candidacy, Blair recognised that barring him from the selection ballot risked provoking London Party members to defect to an independent Livingstone candidacy. Blair hoped to avoid this by rigging the electoral college.

But this was one stitch-up too many. Blair's manoeuvrings to keep control in Wales and Scotland had disastrous electoral consequences. In London, Blair's transparently dictatorial scheming produced the very outcome it had been designed to prevent. Labour Party individual and affiliated members across the capital voted by convincing majorities for Livingstone.

What has happened in London is the most graphic expression so far of the growing crisis of representation which we have debated in our pages in recent months. LLB readers are united in condemning New Labour's stranglehold over our Party. The working class and trade unions are now disenfranchised: the Labour Party is no longer serving the historic function for which it was created.

The introduction of executive mayors was a classic example of New Labour's attempts to depoliticise the British electoral landscape. In the next few weeks, this can be turned on its head as socialists, labour movement activists and trade unionists use the mayoral and Greater London Assembly elections to ensure that the issues facing us – Tube privatisation and defence of public services – occupy centre stage. London UNISON in particular has led the way by producing a manifesto for London public services.

Livingstone's selection battle united the labour movement. Although only Labour Party members had an individual vote, the pro-Livingstone trade union ballot outcomes were achieved thanks to members inside and outside the Party working together at branch level.

Now that he has declared as an independent candidate, Ken Livingstone is in the unusual position of having cut himself free of the labour movement in order to be its true representative – with all the attendant dangers of a campaign not formally accountable to the movement that so overwhelmingly supported him. United against New Labour, *LLB* readers reflect the diversity of opinion in the wider movement about where we go from here. These views are debated more fully in the following pages.

Regardless of'our editorial position, perhaps the easiest decision which our readers in London have to make is how to vote on 4th May. To them, Ken is the candidate of the labour movement, while Frank Dobson is the New Labour nominee imposed on the Labour Party from outside and above, by fix and by stitch-up.

But before readers outside the capital dismiss our metropolitan agonies as purely a London issue, spare a thought for the general election now on the horizon. Look at your New Labour prospective parliamentary candidate – most have already been selected – and look at your New Labour policy forum documents: is this what you joined the Labour Party to fight for?

Tony Blair faces the biggest crisis in the Party for a generation – which can only rebound unfavourably on a Government already in growing crisis. The left has a new unity and sense of purpose and has been strengthened by the emphatic arrival as electoral players of the trade union left, many of whom are fresh from their own internal victories.

Livingstone a London issue? No, it's just a dress rehearsal.

Trade unionists for Ken

FIRE BRIGADES UNION

The FBU's ballot for the London Labour Party mayoral candidate produced a conclusive result – 93.9% for Livingstone, 2.4% for Frank Dobson. London's firefighters were outraged by the outcome of the farce of the electoral college. FBU General Secretary Ken Cameron called on Dobson to stand down and make way for the candidate who received most votes – but the call fell on deaf ears.

Ken Livingstone's decision to stand as an independent means that the FBU – along with other London trade unions – faces a major dilemma. Do we support the candidate our members support, who has given us a pledge to stop cuts in London's fire service and stop the attacks on firefighters' pay and conditions, or the official Party candidate as an affiliated union is expected to? The shambles of the selection process has led to a situation where Party members face expulsion and affiliated trade unions are facing a revolt from their members.

Our decision will be made by our London Regional Committee on March 27th, when delegates vote on a resolution from fire stations in Ken's borough (Brent) calling on us to back Ken's independent campaign.

By Mick Shaw, FBU Executive Council

RAIL, MARITIME & TRANSPORT

The RMT London membership voted with a resounding 91% majority for Ken Livingstone, showing their fundamental opposition to the Underground privatisation. More than that: the Government's handling of the issues around the mainline railway following the tragedies at Southall and Ladbroke Grove was unacceptable to the men and women who do the job.

After Labour's NEC banned the union from the electoral college, the RMT's Council of Executives decided to continue support for Livingstone, donated £3,000 to his campaign fund and offered his team the use of our offices. This is still the policy. We are backing Livingstone because he is in favour of public ownership and control of the Tube. We will ensure that he keeps his promise.

Following the rigged ballot result, RMT's London Transport Regional Council made national headlines as the first union to declare formally that Livingstone should stand as an independent. Our current position is that we will continue to support and raise money for his candidature and we are building links with the FBU London Region.

Under no circumstances will we offer any support to Labour's official candidate. The RMT played a formative role in setting up the Labour Party but that does not mean we will be bounced into the role of turkeys voting for Christmas!

By Brian Munro, Assistant Secretary of the RMT's London Transport Regional Council.

GLATUCS

At a meeting on 13th March called by the Greater London Association of Trades Councils, trades council activists discussed the UNISON manifesto for London. We are to meet again (17th April; all lay activists welcome) before the London elections to consider a joint trade union manifesto along broadly similar lines to lobby all candidates – and, after the election, the Mayor and Assembly – to pursue a trade union agenda.

●TGWU comrades reported the union had already decided to back the "official" Labour candidate, on the basis of the traditional arguments for backing Labour candidates, though there was no sign of enthusiasm for Frank Dobson, or of donations to his campaign from that quarter.

CWU

London Socialist Alliance candidate Paul Foot addressed a meeting of more than 40 CWU postal office reps, meeting after members had voted for Ken Livingstone as preferred candidate for London Mayor by 11,941 to Frank Dobson's 2,548 votes.

The meeting voted to support both Ken Livingstone and the LSA by organising hustings to which they are invited, circulating their campaign material, encouraging CWU members to actively join in the campaigns as well as vote for them, and agreed to donate £200 to each campaign.

Trade union leaders are announcing their unions will be supporting Dobson before branches have time to meet. Several union bodies have passed resolutions in support of Livingstone as an independent candidate.

London region bodies meeting in April will consider such matters and will be looking at ways of representing their members' interests.

Union branches which have passed resolutions in support of Livingstone so far include: CWU London West End Amalgamated branch, CWU North/North West London branch, CWU West London Telecoms branch; Islington UNISON; RMT Hammersmith & City Line branch; ASLEF East Finchley branch; MSF Wembley-Hendon 640; GMB Holborn.

If you have additional information or want to be kept up to date on developments contact Pete Firmin at petefirmin@gn.apc.org or on 0171 624 0032.

Ken Livingstone speaks to FBU rally for the Homerton 11, March 2000 (story, page 24)



Photo: Paul Mattsson



UNISON's Manifesto for London

Steve Wilkinson, UNISON London Region Publicity Officer, outlines the policies that should be at the forefront of the London elections and why no candidate should be given a blank cheque.

Ask any Londoner what they think about their city and you'll be told it's one of the greatest in the world, followed by a customary gripe about over-stretched and under-funded public services, glaring inequality and widespread homelessness.

To get London working, UNISON has launched a *Manifesto for Public Services*. The Manifesto will fill the vacuum in the policy debate, establishing a clear forward-looking agenda with the goals of achieving quality public services and a well overdue boost to the esteem of our demoralised public service workers.

Focusing on six key areas for improving London's public services, we will be seeking the backing of the future Mayor and Assembly for this agenda aimed at improving the quality of everyday life for all Londoners.

UNISON's manifesto calls for:

•a new deal for NHS staff involving improvements to staff safety, while addressing the recruitment and understaffing crisis through real improvements to pay and service conditions that will benefit the majority of NHS staff;

•proper levels of funding for and an end to the damaging privatisation of local authority services which has led to poorer levels of service provision to the public while undermining staff morale;

•a living wage of £5.00 per hour to overcome the fact that many working people live in poverty and depend on benefits rather than a wage they can live on, and a realistic increase in London Weighting allowances;

•opposition to the costly and unpopular part-privatisation of the Tube and similar financial arrangements in the NHS and local government driven by the Private Finance Initiative and the Public Private Partnerships;

•tackling institutional racism in the light of the Lawrence Inquiry and recommendations, while promoting equal access and opportunities to employment and public services for all Londoners;

•making affordable housing available to public service workers who are priced out of the overheated housing market and cannot afford to live and work in London, depriving the capital of skilled public service workers it so desperately needs;

UNISON wants the Mayor and Assembly to recognise that the underground, hospitals and public housing are all at breaking point. However, there are a whole range of other less visible front-line services now desperately in need of a major programme of renewal and public investment.

It is now up to the candidates to make their positions clear on how they intend make London's public services into quality services Londoners can really be proud of.

●UNISON London Regional Committee has decided, going against the grain of the national union, not to back any candidate in the mayoral election. The Committee was exasperated with union funding for GLA candidates, some of whom are managers in public services who have damaged the interests of our members. The Regional Committee will write to the Affiliated Political Fund advising it also to adopt a neutral stance.

Control freaks out of control

Paul Flynn MP

Few things are more distressing in political life than a control freak out of control. New Labour has had to learn the bitter lesson three times that nothing fails like abject failure.

New Labour did not want Dennis Canavan to be a member of the Scottish Parliament. He is. New Labour did not want Rhodri Morgan to be the Leader of the Welsh Assembly. Now he is the Leader. New Labour were determined to have anyone but Ken Livingstone as London Mayor. In spite of the dirty tricks, Ken still seems unstoppable.

'It is depressing to see the biggest Commons majority we have had in our hundred years used to bludgeon through illiberal and repressive laws'

The political cost of these unravelled stitch-ups is enormous. In Falkirk and Wales, about 250,000 people who were Labour voters before New Labour was invented deserted the official Labour candidates. Many abstained, others voted for other parties – mostly nationalist. The self inflicted wound of the Dobbo-Ken stitch-up will result in a huge retreat from party loyalties. Votes will stack up for Ken, the London Nationalist.

The Millbank myth has been that Labour core voters were in the bag. They were bound to vote Labour because they do not have anywhere else to go. They do. They can stay at home or vote for other parties. The horror is slowly dawning: if Labour cannot rely on its core voters and our fair-weather *Daily Mail* reader friends desert us, the Party could be in trouble. Will we ever learn?

In 1995 I fretted that we did need to drop some old baggage overboard to become electable. The problem was that we jettisoned so much we arrived in port in 1997 with a vessel that was almost empty.

It is depressing to see the biggest Commons majority we have had in our hundred years used to bludgeon through illiberal and repressive laws. On our removal of the right for jury trial for 400,000 people, Michael Howard drooled with enthusiam. He was seen arguing with his whip because he did not want to oppose a measure he found irresistibly severe. Any differences between Jack Straw and Michael Howard have gone. They are two sides of the same coin.

But the worst blow was while the bill on terrorism was going through its third reading. "You're not voting for this right wing rubbish, are you Paul?" said a familiar voice as I was leaving the Commons dining room for a division on Wednesday. It was John Major, a rare visitor to the Commons these days. He was not voting and stayed firmly in his place at the dining table. "You'll be please to know I'm voting against it John," I told him. Along with several other MPs, the prospect of treating demonstrators as terrorists was an intolerant vote too far.

"You know," said the ex-Prime Minister, "I'm amazed when I think just how left wing the Government that I led was." An exaggeration, but he has a point.

In one other area we have behaved disgracefully. According to the Government's figures, 700,000 of the poorest pensioners are losing, on average, £318.18 a week.

Action was promised in July 1998 by the Secretary of State for Social Security, who said that data matching would begin in April 1999, but nothing has happened. Action was twice promised for the month of February 2000. By mid-March nothing had happened. The pensioners lost the money – not through any fault of their own, but through the fault of Government. Yet there is a stonewall refusal to compensate pensioners for the time lost. The cash will be pocketed by the Treasury

Is it any wonder that the cry goes up that we have lost touch with our core voters?



Not to be illegally pasted over 'New Labour' election posters

New Labour can stick it!

The membership of the London Labour Party voted decisively for Livingstone as our mayoral candidate, while Frank Dobson was imposed by New Labour. A range of suitable election stickers, designed to highlight that distinction, is now available. Let Millbank's control freaks know that despite their best efforts, the Labour Party remains alive and well.

●To obtain your stickers, write to Chris Knight, Chair, Barking Branch NATFHE, Dept. of Anthropology, University of East London, Dagenham, Essex RM8 2AS. State how many sheets of peel-off stickers @ £1 per 40 you require and send a cheque payable to Chris Knight, or contact C.Knight@uel.ac.uk.

Will they ever learn?

Dear Ken,

Congratulations! I know how you feel but, believe me, you have made the right decision.

By this time, you will probably have received written confirmation from Party HQ that you have been suspended. They might even disconnect your pager! In my case, that was the final act of excommunication. Like you, I had no other option but to let the people decide. The people responded by electing me to the Scottish Parliament with the biggest vote and the biggest majority in Scotland.

When I recently asked Tony Blair what lessons he had learned from the people of Falkirk West, he arrogantly replied that they would return a "loyal" Labour MP at the next election. He confuses loyalty with blind obedience.

You must now brace yourself for the toughest and probably the dirtiest fight of your life. So go for it, Ken! Your city, your country and your party need you.

● *Extract from an open letter to Ken Livingstone from Dennis Canavan MP*

London members are revolting

Christine Shawcroft
NEC member

The fiasco of the London mayoral selection, specifically the role of the London Board and the NEC, has almost led to open revolt in the London Party. Admittedly, we London activists are pretty revolting, but we are entitled to wonder what on earth the Board thinks it is playing at. It was elected at the same 1998 London Conference which passed the composite that 10% of nominations get you shortlisted, then elections are by OMOV ballot. The Board has spent the intervening 18 months attempting to live down its mandate by becoming the eager lackey of Millbank. Want to fix the selection of the GLA candidates by screening the panel? We can do that for you. Want to change the basis of selecting the mayoral candidate? Be out guest. Need a meaningless London manifesto, devoid of democratically agreed contents? Our working party can come up with just the thing.

At the last London Board meeting I was the only Livingstone supporter in the room, a deeply odd experience when one is more accustomed to playing "Spot the Frank voter". But when the whiskered one paid us a visit he magnanimously forgave me for not voting for him. After much blather about healing the wounds, forgiving and forgetting, and going forward now united, in peace and harmony, I asked if it would be better, in the interests of finding a way forward, to abandon plans to partially privatise the Tube? No, said the People's Frank, that cannot be done because "I promised at the General Election to bring in a Public Private Partnership scheme for the Tube, and I always keep my promises." So that's why Labour won by a landslide! People went flocking into the polling stations to express support for Tube privatisation. After the candidate left us, I moved that the Manifesto should remove the pledge to privatise the Tube. Apparently, the Working Party will consider it. And maybe they will, but Millbank won't, and that's all you need to know about regional devolution in London.

And Millbank never learns. Grassroots Alliance delegates to the NEC have been warning for months about the dire consequences of another Wales-style fix. We were assured that the situation was under control, right up to the time the balloon went up. How many elections have these people got to lose us before they see sense?

Some activists are now ready to express their long standing disquiet with the direction of Party policy by leaving. I suppose if they're determined to go it's not possible to stop them, but strangely enough, some are cursing Livingstone for not trying to split the London Party and start a new one of his own. This really seems a trifle unfair. For myself, I have long held the view that anyone who voluntarily leaves the Labour Party should be put up against a wall and shot. But for every rule there must be an exception. After the breathtaking ballot rigging of the past few weeks, many Livingstone supporters feel that their man is justified in standing – for the sake of democracy and a signal that the vote riggers will not be allowed to get away with it. But standing up for the democratic rights of Party members does not entail leaving their company as soon as practicable. It means remaining and fighting on. To think you can force Livingstone into starting a new Party in the Scargill mode against his will is a very odd take on the struggle for socialism. He has called on his supporters to stay in the Party, fight to stop anything like this from happening again, and campaign for his reinstatement as a Party member. We should show our support for him by doing precisely that.



CLP ROUND-UP

Erith and Thamesmead

Members are not resigning, though of course they may not renew. We ordered GLA literature to avoid potential difficulties with members unhappy to distribute literature about the Mayor. There is considerable confusion about the voting system on the doorstep and widespread disillusionment with Labour and with politicians in general.

Merton & Wimbledon

Last spring the voters were treated to MPs, MEPs, paid party workers, Euro Candidates and GLA wannabes hitting their streets whilst more humble members stayed indoors to wash their collective hair. Now we are seeing Euro Fiasco II, as members feel alienated by the selection method and the result. Not one of the five CLPs nominated the Labour candidate, Camden Councillor Maggie Cosin. Yet some GMB members (their national HQ is in Wimbledon) are now trying to run a campaign without the inconvenience of consulting elected constituency officers.

Islington

Islington North GC carried a motion calling for:

(a) the NEC to retrospectively apply selection procedure in national rules to the mayor selection (this would eliminate AEEU votes);

(b) Dobson to stand down;

(c) the NEC to adopt Livingstone as the Labour Party candidate.

Brent East

Three branches passed resolutions calling for Frank Dobson to stand down in favour of Livingstone; Carlton branch called on Ken to stand as an independent candidate if Frank doesn't.

Exit Ken: offstage



Photo: Molly Cooper

Who will Ken surround himself with in the mayoral campaign?

Colin Hall
Leicester East CLP

Ken Livingstone's decision to stand as an independent in May's London mayoral election has received widespread acclaim, from left, right, liberals and non-aligned alike. But could a Livingstone victory also be ultimately a blow to the left and the working class as a whole?

His action has seriously weakened the anti-Blair forces within the Party at a time when our standing among members and trade unionists was at its highest since Blair became leader. Lest we forget, Ken's majority among Labour members in London was comparable to Blair's six years ago.

Given that Livingstone has successfully withstood months of sustained abuse from Millbank and the media alike, it seems unlikely that either can erode his base of support in the weeks ahead.

So far his campaign looks ultra-cautious. It may even be, the symbolic issue of tube privatisation apart, more Blairite than Blair, as he distances himself from organisations such as the London Socialist Alliance, seeks supposedly "non-aligned" candidates as running partners for the London Assembly, and stresses support for business and the police.

But if Livingstone is elected, what then? Given a hostile London Assembly (of whatever complexion) it'll be relatively easy for Blair to neuter him, especially as he would be unable to build organised support.

Will Livingstone's candidature result in the development of a stronger, united, more disciplined left, or reverse decades of political apathy among many working-class communities? On both counts, the answer must be no. Therefore it would be a serious misjudgement for *LLB* to back his campaign.

We should evaluate the Labour candidates who are financed by our subscriptions. Already, Frank Dobson appears out of his depth, wallowing in a combination of crass machismo and sub-Thatcherite smears. He has made minimal efforts to attract the majority of Party members and trade union activists who preferred Livingstone to him. Is it any wonder that his poll ratings are derisory?

If Blair and Millbank do not seek an alternative candidate, even at this late stage, there is a danger of a result so catastrophic that it will cause permanent damage to our national standing and thus revive the prospect of a Hague-Portillo government.

An enemy worse than Ken...

Lynn Wyeth, Secretary, Leicester South CLP, blames Millbank for the mess.

So Ken waited for the result: then, after great soul searching, quit the Party he loved. Our hearts go out to him for this sacrifice, don't they?

Well, no, actually: because Ken has let some down, and left others in turmoil about what they think. He said he wouldn't stand as an independent. He admits that if he had won under this system he would have accepted the result. Oh I bet you would Ken! It's like Leicester City happily going through every round of the Cup, losing it on penalties, and then announcing that the penalty shoot out system is totally unfair and they won't abide by the result.

Only time will tell whether the independent Livingstone will be as brilliant a Mayor as many believe. He has charisma and talent. He had the vision to take issues by the scruff of the neck when others did not dare. But is he really the champion of Londoners or just an ambitious egotist?

Ken is not public enemy number one. Far more dangerous to Labour, its members and its unity are the "Millbank Mafia", the faceless wonders who put the phrase "control freakery" into the English language. Their arrogance and foolish miscalculation in this contest are worrying on many counts: ignoring the polls; ignoring the members; fixing it for Dobson. The Tories made a huge gaffe in selecting that dodgy Archer. Do Millbank capitalise on it? No, they make a bigger mess.

Yet still they won't admit it. They insult our intelligence by claiming it was the same college that elected Blair. We know this is untrue so their continued assertions merely fan the flames. When you're in a hole, stop digging! Giving the Dobson campaign the membership lists was a downright disgrace and in breach of Party rules. The election should have been declared void. Millbank use our loyalty against us and accuse critics of endangering Party unity. Yet it is Millbank who have created the threat of a split in the Party, not Ken. By the time he had decided to stand, most of the damage had been done.

There is only so much of New Labour that grassroots Labour Party members can take for the sake of being in power and remaining united. Taking democracy away from members and voters is not the right of Tony Blair or Margaret McDonagh. It is not Tony Blair's Party. It is not Ken Livingstone's party. It is OURS. And we want it back.

News from Nowhere

Jacqui Brown, Pete Firmin and Dave Statham report on the mixed feelings in Ken Livingstone's Constituency Party, Brent East.

On 9th March, Brent East General Committee(GC) proved it has learned how to roll over and die for Tony.

Despite earlier massive support for Ken to be included on the shortlist, protests about the fixed electoral college and the exclusion of several unions, together with a members ballot which overwhelmingly backed him, those who had hoped for a spark of rebellion were disappointed.

An all members meeting on 24th February, originally called to discuss the *21st century party* document, had called on Ken to "stay in the Party and fight his corner". A resolution calling for Dobson to stand down was not put to the meeting on the grounds that it would bring Millbank down on us.

The GC meeting on 9th March was hardly less craven. Delegate after delegate, many of whom had never supported Ken but merely learned to live with him, stood up to complain about the election process. Three branches had already passed resolutions calling for Dobson to stand down, and one had even said we should support Ken if he stood as an independent. However, after nearly two hours of debate the right moved a procedural resolution that the motions should not be put to a vote, presumably concerned at the vocal support they had received.

Again the argument was that Millbank would rush in to close the party down. This was accepted: the only resolution remaining was one regretting Ken's decision to go independent and pledging support for the official Party candidate. This might owe at least as much to the right's manoeuvring to fill the parliamentary vacuum left by Ken's decision as to loyalty to Millbank.

Despite these votes all is not rosy for Millbank in Brent East. The borough agent has effectively accepted a very limited campaign for Dobson and the GLA candidates by saying that she will be calling for meetings of volunteers, rather than the usual branch-based campaign. One member announced at the GC that he had already been collecting money for Ken's campaign. Several councillors have made comments supportive of Ken to the media in recent weeks, although they will probably now be persuaded to keep their feelings private. Some members who have not been active in the Party recently have been coming forward to discuss how they can support Ken. Even many of those who voted for the resolution may well sit on their hands during the election campaign and vote for Ken in the privacy of the polling booth.

●Redbridge Councillor Sid Middleburgh told his local paper: "Voting for Ken is the only way of stemming the tide of Blairite trickery and I know other councillors agree with me... I would not even lick a stamp for Frank Dobson's campaign."
●Waltham Forest Vice Chair of Education, Councillor David Blunt, told the *Walthamstow Guardian*, "I have supported the Labour Party since I was 14 and only wish that as a result of this sad and embarrassing debacle the Labour Party will see sense in matters of democracy. If the Labour Party now considers me so dangerous that I must be expelled, well, come on then, make my day. This small sacrifice is insignificant compared with the gravity of the great principle at stake."

Millbank monsters wage class battle

Andy Walker
Former CLP secretary, Ilford South

Watching the antics of New Labour in the London mayoral fix reminds me of my child's pokemòn cards. Like pokemòn, New Labour people are an evolving species. Frank Dobson's use of the Dirty Harry phrase "make my day" indicates that he thinks politics is improved by invoking the rhetoric of violence. The man who sent out the "Red Ken, Red Scum" letter would evolve into a fighting pokemòn, although one with very low hit points.

Trevor Philips is emerging from the business swamp to evolve as a Labour politician dedicated to promoting public services. It may be a slow process as his offspring go to private school. Pokemòn of this calibre, although valued for their flexibility, are not high status.

My favourite Pokemòn is the Wigglytuff: when upset "it will suck in air and inflate itself to an enormous size". This could apply to so many of the New Labour tribe that space prevents me from listing them.

I have now left the Labour Party as I will be displaying Ken posters on my house and canvassing for Ken. I will rejoin in May, as I know Labour offers the best hope for the working class. I don't expect Millbank will return my membership cheque as I know the Party is losing members and they need the money. Once back in the Party I will argue that Ken should also be allowed back.

At one time the ruling class denied us the vote, saying only those with the responsibility of property had the wisdom to vote. Now MPs are given a vote worth a thousand times more than the ordinary members, in an attempt to rob the working class of a candidate who will stick up for them. It's vital that Ken's supporters in the Party are vocal in their support for Ken as a defeat will put back democracy in the Party for years.

Tatchell plans nightmare for Tony!

Peter Tatchell has announced that he will be a candidate for the Greater London Assembly, offering voters "an independent green, left and libertarian voice" and a democratic, socialist alternative to the authoritarianism and conservatism of Blairism, with its appeasement of big business and its collusion with the prejudices of Middle England. Pledging to fight for equality, justice and democracy for everyone in London with the same passion and determination that he has fought for gay human rights, Peter sees a virtue in his independence from the strictures of party whips and spin-doctors. Peter is backing Ken Livingstone for Mayor and believes it is vital for Ken to have left allies like himself in the Assembly.

Peter's manifesto contains detailed commitments on transport, including: four year fares freeze on tubes and buses; no Tube privatisation; rail safety to be enforced by a watchdog independent of Railtrack; funding of improved public transport through bonds, congestion charges for cars in central London, and a tax on company car-parking spaces.

Peter's environmental policies include a pledge to promote renewable energy with an avenue of power-generating windmills on the forecourt of the GLA headquarters, and by cladding the building with solar panels.

On more traditionally socialist areas, Peter's pledges include fighting for a better NHS; affordable housing for all; an end to police racism and homophobia; and he wants the GLA to lead the way on ending low pay by paying a minimum wage of £4.50 an hour and obliging its suppliers to do likewise. Peter has a long list of policies to foster "equality and respect" including parity for women in GLA appointments. Finally, Peter calls for the GLA to be an open body, with live internet coverage of all GLA proceedings and open Community Forums on issues of concern to Londoners.

●To find out more about Peter's candidacy or to volunteer your assistance, email peter@tatchell.freeserve.co.uk. or tel 020-7403 1790. Donations are urgently needed and can be sent, cheques payable to "Tatchell for London", c/o OutRage!, PO Box 17816, London SW14 8WT. Full details on website – www.tatchellforlondon.freeserve.co.uk

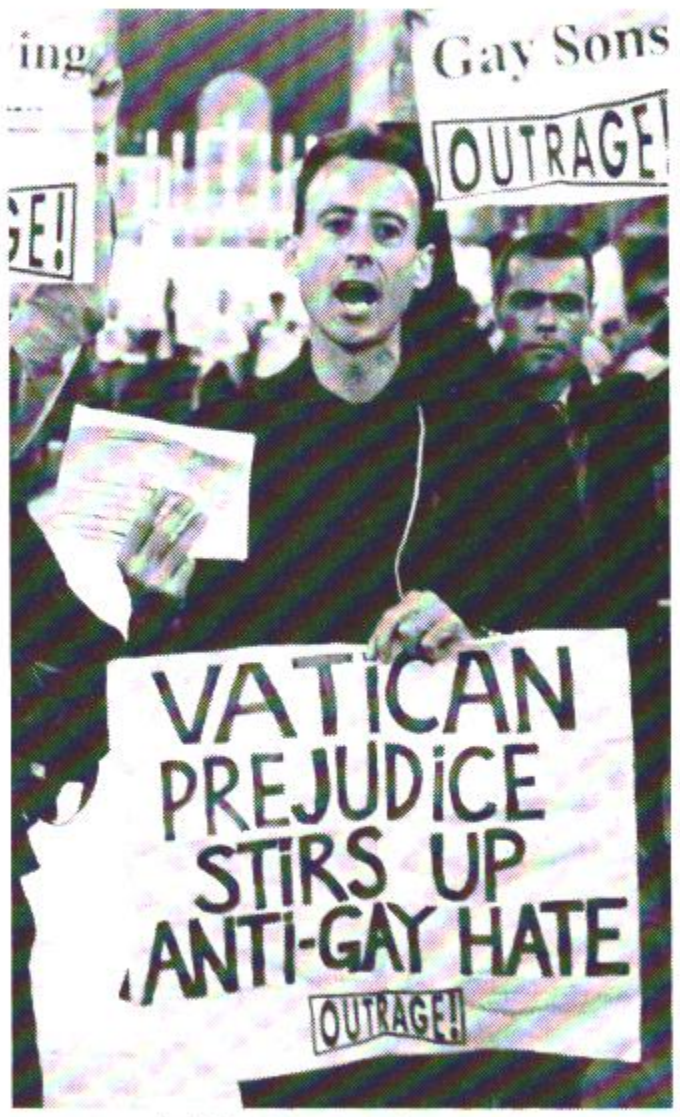


Photo: Paul Mattson

Peter Tatchell: indefatigable campaigner.

Rail runners get in gear

Oliver New, chair of the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation (CATP) and President of RMT London Transport Regional Council, explains why anti-privatisation activists have entered the elections.

Sometime people don't listen to argument and you have fight however you can. That's been our experience in the RMT and why we are always prepared to ballot for industrial action when necessary. So the RMT London Transport Regional Council has been fighting to stop tube privatisation since our sponsored MP first announced it.

At the start of it, it seemed we were on our own. Other rail unions, and parts of our own, defended PPP, or Prescott's Privatisation Proposals. We started leafleting our members and then the public outside stations. We organised pickets of Prescott's offices in Victoria, going so far as deliberately blocking the road. Sadly we are not strong enough to stop London until the Government gives in. Nevertheless we organised strike action on three separate days to force the issue into the public arena, which it did. We also set up the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation to link up with anti-privatisation supporters outside our union. And we have been successful to a point. We have won the argument that PPP is privatisation. The three rail unions officially got together and did some campaigning.

With the London elections coming up, there was no way we would say to our members 'vote Labour and get privatised'. So we decided to stand on the 'list' part of the elections, where all Londoners would see our name. We have a slate of eleven tube workers, including the Secretary, Assistant Secretary and President of our Regional Council, our full time (elected) Divisional Officer, Bobby Law, and several branch secretaries. We have raised money from our members and branches and we're having a go. We are making a protest against the Labour Party which our union help to set up and which is now attacking us. We are also getting out there and talking to the people of London. So far everyone we talk to understands what we're doing and is sympathetic (apart from other people who are standing in the elections, obviously!)

Livingstone standing is brilliant for us, because he has picked up the Tube as the main issue. The Government intends to privatise the Underground infrastructure before letting the Mayor and the GLA take charge of the system. We need everyone's help to stop them.

●April 8th is Tube Fatcat day, when bowler hatted CATP supporters will be out there leafleting Tube passengers. To help in your area ring 020-8571 5019.

A real choice for Londoners

After twenty years active membership of the Labour Party (including a stint as *LLB* editor), Mike Marqusee has left the Party to campaign for the London Socialist Alliance.

For many years now, *LLB* editorials have warned that the changes imposed on the Labour Party were creating a "crisis of representation" in British politics. The reality of that crisis is now plain for nearly all to see, not only in the London elections, but in the record of the New Labour Government.

In recent weeks this Government has launched reactionary attacks on beggars in the streets, people on benefits and asylum seekers. It is actively stripping away basic democratic rights (including trial by jury), channelling wealth to the rich, extending privatisation into transport and education, and presiding over an unprecedented collapse in the NHS. Past Labour governments have done many appalling things, but in its scale and nature the current regime's unprecedented opposition to the interests of its electors demands a different response from socialists.

Over the last decade, while the country's political institutions, including the Labour Party, have been migrating decisively to the right, a substantial swathe of public opinion has been travelling in the opposite direction. Until now, this current of opinion has lacked an effective means of expression at the ballot box. Hence the popular support for Ken Livingstone, who (whether he likes it or not) represents to millions of people the possibility of a political alternative to the left of New Labour.

Of course, there is another side to the Ken groundswell: the post-ideological anti-politics of individual celebrity. Blair and his friends always saw elected big-city mayors as a means of depoliticising the electorate, and though events in London have not gone according to plan, the long-term danger remains.

In this context, the left needs to undertake two tasks simultaneously. First, it should campaign for Livingstone in order to maximise the public expression of discontent with New Labour (something that will strengthen the left both inside and outside the Party). Second, it should try to inject a left political agenda into that campaign and the London elections as a whole.

The most effective way to do that is to take part in the campaign organised by the London Socialist Alliance, which is building support for Ken and for a left slate of trades unionists, community activists and journalists for the Greater London Assembly.

The London elections are a huge democratic exercise, in some respects unprecedented in British history. To offer no credible alternative to the New Labour-Tory consensus, to fail to send out an intelligible message to the London electorate, would be a major omission on the part of socialists, and would reinforce the crisis of representation. If we continue to leave the electoral field to others, the beneficiaries of the reaction against New Labour will be the Lib-Dems, the SNP, Plaid Cymru and, in the end, the Tories and the far right.

Wherever electoral choice is narrowed down, as it is in Britain at the moment, the rich benefit and the poor suffer. Wherever the exercise of the franchise becomes hollow and ineffectual (as it would be in London if the likes of Ken and the LSA were absent from the ballot), apathy and cynicism flourish.

Dobson and the New Labour slate have proudly dubbed themselves the "pro-police, pro-business" choice. They are mounting a poisonous "tough on crime, tough on Ken" scare campaign, scapegoating the poor, dividing Londoners and playing on fear and prejudice. The LSA is working to oppose and expose this campaign. With great respect for those comrades who believe, for perfectly honourable reasons, that it is important to preserve their Party membership, I would suggest that abstention from this particular public contest is simply too high a price to pay.

The LSA has put together a strong list of candidates – Paul Foot, Mark Steel, Greg Tucker, Christine Blower, Jim Stanley, Ian Page, Janine Booth, among others – as well as an impressive roster of supporters, including John Pilger, Mike Mansfield, Sukhdev Reel, Imran Khan, Suresh Grover, Paddy Joe Hill, Ken Loach, Jeremy Hardy and Ricky Tomlinson. Through the media and at local meetings and street stalls, it is changing public perceptions of the coming elections. It is also beginning to attract trade union support, including CWU, FBU and UNISON branches.

It will be easy for comrades to catalogue the weaknesses (some real, some imagined) of the LSA, notably that the principal, but by no means the only, forces backing it are the organised left groups. But coming from *LLB* readers, that would be a self-fulfilling prophecy. The doors to participation in the LSA are wide open, and the candidates' list has not been finalised. The greater the number of Labour left-wingers joining the LSA campaign, the more likely it is to prove effective, electorally and politically, and help us all resolve the crisis of representation.

●Contact the LSA: 0208-981 9243; main.office@londonsocialistalliance.org.uk; www.londonsocialistalliance.org.uk; LSA, PO Box 20492, London SE11 5WL (donations welcome).

LSA benefit

Land and Freedom

film showing
introduced by Ken Loach

Monday 27th March, 7pm
Logan Hall, Institute of Education
Bedford Way, London WC1
Tickets £8/£6.

LSA activists organising meeting
Sunday, 9th April, ULU, Noon-5pm
Details from 020-8981 9243

Women make their own day

International Women's Day was celebrated on 8th March against the backdrop of a call for a worldwide strike of women. If you blinked you may well have missed it, but that is the fault of our media, not of the women in struggle.

The worldwide strike call came from women in Ireland to draw attention to the over $700 billion spent each year on military budgets, while less than $20 billion is spent on the essentials of life: accessible clean water, health, sanitation and basic education.

This May is the thirtieth anniversary of the Equal Pay Act and is marked by new figures showing that across Europe women earn on average three quarters of men's wages. Despite the Government's much trumpeted anti-poverty measures of the minimum wage and the working families tax credit, Britain is second bottom in Europe (only Greece was worse) with women earning just 73.7% of men's wages.

Sex workers went on strike and paraded through the streets of Soho. Masked prostitutes took to the streets in protest against a so-called "clean-up" by Westminster council which wants to evict them from local premises. Despite the schoolboy sniggering in the *Guardian* and the *Times*, the sex workers did draw attention to the problems they would face if forced onto the street – violence from pimps and clients alike, with no recourse to the law. They even managed to get across the fact that prostitutes are mothers, grandmothers and wives who work in the sex industry because it is, for many, the best way they can contribute to the family budget.

The carnival took off in the evening when paraders were joined by the loud drumming of a samba band, sex workers from other parts of London, supporters, fans and friends. Members of the International Union of Sexworkers, The Sexual Freedom Coalition and The English Collective of Prostitutes had helped organize the event. Banners proudly carried read "Soho on Strike. Justice for Sexworkers!" and "Sexworkers of the World Unite!".

Reporting by Edwin Savage and Ana Lopes

MAYDAY! MAYDAY!

Calling all life forms! This is not a protest...

RECLAIM THE STREETS assembles on May Day at 11.00 am in PARLIAMENT SQUARE for a mass "Guerrilla Gardening" action.

Armed with trowels, seeds and imagination, the idea is to garden everywhere and anywhere. Imagine: thousands of gardeners have come to take back what was once ours. We have arrived to transform a symbol of capitalism, to return a plot of land to human use. This May Day action is just one of many taking place in London, around the UK and across the planet. Other London events include a three day anti-capitalist conference, City wide autonomous actions and a very big surprise for the Millennium Dome! For top Guerrilla Gardening tips go to www.primalseeds.org

MAYDAY 2000

A festival of anti-capitalist ideas and action

CONFERENCE

10am-6pm Saturday 29th-Sunday 30th April

For directions to the venue go to Holloway Rd. tube, London N7

Speakers include: Rob Newman, McLibel Two, Chumbawamba, Lorenzo Ervin (ex Black Panther), Reclaim the Streets, Bertell Ollman and Hillel Ticktin (Marxist authors), and activists from around the world.
Topics include: The Seattle protests, GM crops, 21st century capitalism and revolution, Women speak out, Workplace organising, Internet activism.
Plus: film festival, bookfair and much more!
For more information check:
www.freespeech.org/mayday2k
BM Mayday, London WC1N 3XX. Phone 020-8374 5027.

Looking forward to victory in Leeds

Councillor Garth Frankland
Chapeltown, Leeds

I am one of the ten Left Alliance candidates standing in council elections in Leeds this May. As the sitting councillor, I will be defending my record of 20 years of service to the people of Chapel Allerton.

The New Labour candidate standing against me is a former councillor who has already been rejected by the electorate. With only a handful of cronies, she has been reduced to running a Liberal "hole in your road" campaign. Despite her years on the council she has not noticed that New Labour is in charge of road and pavement repairs!

New Labour's record goes from bad to worse. Supporters of the Left Alliance and the Green Party moved a budget amendment to give an £1 million to increase the security and insulation of pensioners' homes by freezing councillors' allowances and cutting down Millennium celebrations. It was voted down by the Labour councillors.

£70 million of receipts from council house sales has been all but swallowed up because of the "negative subsidy" of over £10 million per year of housing benefit and little is left for much needed improvements.

An OFSTED inspection of the local education authority exposed regular inappropriate political interference in education. The Labour Group's response was to spend £10,000 on a spin-doctor and try to hide the failed LEA behind the successes of Leeds schools. Our response was to call for the restoration of a proper education committee supplemented by elected representatives from teachers, school governors, school staff and senior students – voted down by the Labour group.

The Leeds Left Alliance is proud of its record of putting forward positive and practical policies. With this record, we will win!

Section 28: a fight for justice

Jim Mearns, Co-Convenor of UNISON Scotland's Lesbian and Gay Committee, looks at the background to the campaign to repeal Section 28 in Scotland.

In October 1999 Wendy Alexander, Minister for Communities, announced the Scottish Executive's intention to repeal section 2A of the Local Government Act 1986 (popularly known as Section 28) – and set the Executive on a path which has exposed fundamentalist opinions held by some key figures in Scottish public life. She also took a crucial step towards providing justice for lesbians and gay men in Scotland and proved that the Scottish Parliament could be a genuine force for social reform.

Her proposal, subsequently published as part of a formal consultation document *Ethical Standards in Public Life*, provoked an astonishing attack by the *Daily Record* and other tabloids on the Executive and Wendy in particular. Raising the spectre of "gay sex lessons in schools", these papers, together with the "Keep the Clause" campaign, backed by millionaire Brian Souter and the public pronouncements of Cardinal Thomas Winning, have transformed this simple righting of wrong into a battle for the soul of Scotland – a battle the Scottish Executive must win.

Cardinal Winning leapt into print on 6th November, even before the consultation document had been printed. In stating "there are areas in which it is not unjust discrimination to take sexual orientation into account – for example in the placement of children for adoption or foster care, in employment of teachers or sports coaches and in military recruitment", the cardinal presumed that gay teachers or sports coaches could not be trusted with young people. This totally unfounded, despicable accusation subtly links homosexuality to child abuse, when all the evidence points to heterosexual males as by far the main perpetrators of such crimes.

Cardinal Winning's subsequent descriptions of homosexuality as a "disorder" and a "perversion", together with a bigoted, false assertion that it directly shortens life spans, became typical of the views advanced in the debate. But other prominent churchmen and women took different viewpoints. The Moderator of the Church of Scotland expressed personal support for repeal, as did Bishop Richard Holloway of the Episcopalian Church. Members of churches across Scotland made their feelings known on both sides in the letters pages of newspapers. One elderly Catholic priest was so upset by the cardinal's statements that he voluntarily outed himself – an extraordinarily brave and honourable step.

The Scottish School Boards Association (SSBA) entered the fray in January, complaining of a lack of time for consultation – despite the widespread publicity on the document available since mid-November with a deadline for responses of 14th January. While leading individuals within the SSBA became embroiled in launching the "Keep the Clause" campaign, the organisation ultimately withdrew once its full committee had discussed it.

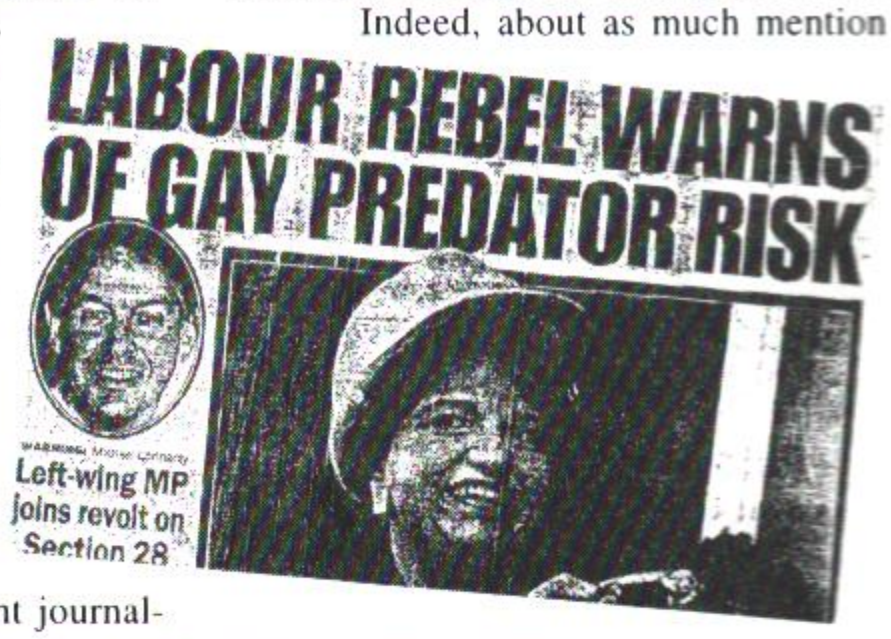
It is to the credit of the Executive and other pro-repeal parties in the Scottish Parliament that the process has not been halted. They have been assisted by excellent journalists like Ian McWhirter and the editors of the *Herald* and *Scotsman* ensuring continuing coverage of the real issues at stake. Thanks are also due to the many individuals who have written to newspapers pointing out the fallacies and injustice in the "Keep the Clause" arguments.

Nobody wants to see "gay sex lessons" in school, least of all Scotland's lesbian and gay communities. Campaigners have repeatedly stated that they wish sex education to be appropriate, sensitive and professionally delivered by those trained to do so. This professionalism should also be applied in other areas of council services (social work, housing, culture and leisure).

The question never answered is how sexuality can be changed by sex education lessons. How many lessons would it take? How many plays, TV shows, newspaper articles would someone have to see before they decided to switch? What is important is that same-sex relationships and families are recognised as having equal validity and that they deserve equal treatment before the law.

The issue of morality has proved difficult for certain religious people to come to terms with, and a sense of proportion is needed. Homosexuality was not mentioned in the ten commandments, nor by Jesus, but appears in a context in the Old Testament which gives it equal billing with hair cutting and eating shellfish.

Indeed, about as much mention is made of masturbation as of homosexuality and while it could be argued that "all men are wankers" it is unlikely that the *Daily Record* or Brian Souter will run a campaign against it.



The Scottish Executive and the pro-repeal parties are fighting for justice. The majority of the Scottish people, when the issue is explained, have shown that they share this desire. Organisations such as the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA), the Scottish TUC, UNISON, the teachers' union EIS, councils across Scotland, leaders of children's charities, parent-teacher association representatives and many other concerned individuals have repeatedly made it clear that they want it. The Scottish lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities desperately need it.

With the repeal of Section 28 we will achieve it.

Market fails on housing

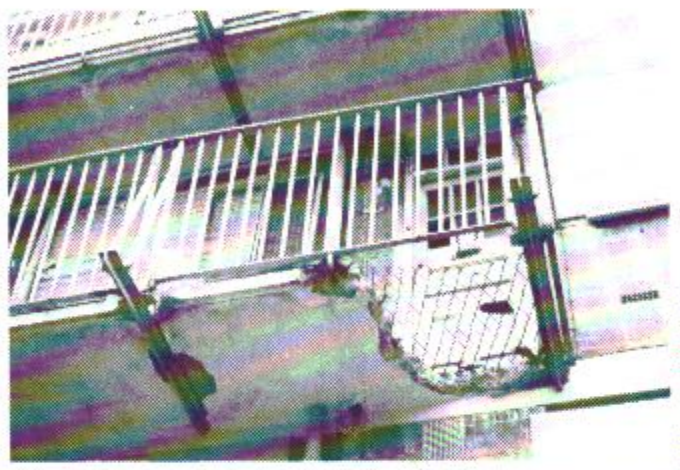


Photo: Phil Maxwell

Government has nothing to say about ill-maintained housing stock.

Housing experts are looking for a government strategy on affordable housing. East London housing activist Terry McGrenera reports.

Affordable housing is rising up the political agenda at the speed of a London house price: fast.

Shelter Director Chris Holmes told the *Housing In London* conference that the homeless charity's own publication *The Dark Side of the Boom* highlighted the fact that "while rising house prices have hit the headlines, the hardship caused by the underlying shortage of affordable homes goes largely unreported."

Holmes said that both the newly elected Mayor and Assembly Members, although they don't have a housing remit, would still play a key role in tackling housing problems, working in partnership with London boroughs. "The Mayor and Assembly will provide a new voice for London and it is up to us all to grasp this opportunity to ensure that everyone living in the capital has access to decent and affordable homes," he said.

London Planning Advisory Committee chair Nicky Gavron said its two recently published reports showed that large housing schemes, with good public transport links, could be developed at higher densities if the needs of people were put before cars and better design principles were applied.

The reports concluded that Greater London could accommodate some 600,000 additional dwellings over the period 1992-2016. But, Gavron said, although both reports were "important contributions" they did not give answers to the affordability issue. "We may be able to accommodate London's housing needs but how are we going to do it?" she asked.

London School of Economics professor of social policy Anne Power challenged the accepted view on affordable housing. She said that some people believed that if more land for housing was released the prices of houses would reduce. In her view this was complete rubbish: "All the evidence from government and planners shows that land is used more carelessly."

South-east England builds at the lowest density in the United Kingdom, which was completely crazy in Power's view. In contrast, London has by far the highest brown field success rate. The East Thames Corridor capacity is twice the size of inner London if the same levels of density were adopted and would house London twice over.

"London has a very high proportion of affordable housing compared to any other capital city in the Western world," Power said. But there are big barriers to break through in order to provide "small, flexible, ready-access accommodation for the huge pool of young, floating labour and families who want to stay in London."

One of the solutions put forward by Professor Power was to double the density in London to 100 dwellings per hectare and for the Government to equalise the incentives between brown and green field sites. "There is a hidden government subsidy of £15,000 to every green field home built," she said. But, apparently, Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott has given a hint to Chancellor Gordon Brown that he should equalise taxes on building by reducing VAT on repairs of old properties to the same as that on new.

It was left to London Housing Federation head Sue Ellenby to put into context the problems that arise from renovation not being carried out on London's ageing housing stock and the lack of affordable housing being provided. With a broad hint to the incoming Mayor she said: "What is essential is that through broad planning strategies, as well as identification of sites, the need for affordable housing development is given the real priority needed."

Chartered Institute of Housing chief executive David Butler said: "Good homes are fundamental to people's prospects for health, education and employment. Clearly the market cannot deliver enough decent homes at prices people can afford. We need a strategy that provides a strong social housing sector and ensures everyone can enjoy a decent home, irrespective of which part of Britain they live."

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What a weedy countryside bill!

Dave Bangs, of The Land is Ours, digs around the roots of the new bill.

The Government's new Countryside and Rights of Way Bill makes some small steps forward by introducing a limited right to roam and improvements in the protection of "Sites of Special Scientific Interest" (SSSI) – some of our top wildlife sites covering about 6% of Britain. It makes a big step backwards, however, in offering landowners and farmers a new, easy route to eliminating troublesome rights of way.

What it does not do is address any of the key issues for the conservation of biodiversity, for the development of a sustainable, healthy agriculture, or for the creation of a democratic countryside with real opportunities for land-based work. Our countryside is increasingly dominated by warring ruling class factions who wish either to plunder it ever more efficiently for the profits of agribusiness, commercial leisure or housing development, or to treat it as a preserved Shangri La of quaint villages, pony paddocks and land cruisers.

While the Bill makes (commercially worthless) mountain and moor, as well as heath, down and common, subject to a right to roam, the Government has just ruled out a right to roam over woodland. Yet over vast areas of midland and eastern England, woodland is the only interesting countryside to have survived productivist farming. Similarly, access to riverside and lakesides has been blocked by the massive lobbying of coarse and game fishing interests. The gorgeous chalk rivers of Hampshire and the rushy meres of Cheshire will remain barred to us. In Wales, the feeble Countryside Council for Wales has come out against further increases in access. The approach they are taking to mapping future access areas will exclude all outlying areas of qualifying habitat (such as moor) which are isolated from the main blocks.

The Government has recommended inclusion of coastal land (including both cliffs and foreshore) in a future extension of the right to roam, though much of this already has informal access.

How much access campaigners actually achieve on the ground will depend on the future guerrilla war between them and farmers and landowners over whether particular sites and sub-landscapes qualify as access land. Landowners will argue that small or isolated sites, grassland which has been 'improved; and lost its semi-natural heath or down vegetation, heathland which has grown over to woodland and so on, do not qualify. In many downland landscapes, like those of Wiltshire and Berkshire, we may get very little at all.

On wildlife conservation, the Bill merely addresses some weaknesses of the SSSI system, and has nothing to say about the wider countryside, where the majority of wildlife is. It is long overdue that compulsory purchase powers for SSSIs subject to damage be increased, that English Nature should have powers to prevent landowners damaging sites, that their powers of entry to SSSIs should be increased, and that they should be given increased powers to impose Management Schemes. Yet these measures will not address the fundamental problems even of the SSSI assemblage. Most of the wonderful Pevensey Marshes, in Sussex, are protected by SSSI designation, for example, but these measures will not prevent the subtle but pervading damage caused by changes in the water regime or water borne pollution. And English Nature will not have the resources or the political will to impose the necessary management regime on the nearby Firle Estate, whose neglect of their ancient, species-rich chalk grasslands (those they have not destroyed) has changed much of them into a rank mess of harsh Tor grass with little floristic interest.

The Government has offered no statutory protection to the whole local authority system of designated Local Wildlife Sites (or their equivalent), whose importance is often just as great as the SSSI network. Many Local Wildlife Sites are in urban or urban fringe areas and desperately need management resources and protection against predatory development.

And the wider fabric of landscape features – hedgerows, farmland trees, ponds, uncultivated corners – as well as the value of cultivated land itself – for birds, small mammals, invertebrates, or wasteland plants – is ignored in this Bill. Yet once common and much loved farmland birds, like sparrows, lapwings and skylarks, continue their crashing decline, which signals far broader losses of biodiversity.

We can be sure that the Government will ignore the key issues of land ownership and monopoly, and of a market-driven agriculture, in forcing working people out of land-based employment, and of excluding urban people from their rural heritage. The Government has shied away from even a rudimentary tussle with the cultural power of landowners in its refusal to confront the blood sports issue.

It is down to us – the 90% of folk who live in towns and cities – to defend our wildlife and reclaim our countryside. Let there be 100 Kinder Scouts and Twyford Downs!

Walkers in the Lake District, also known as "an area of agribusiness opportunity" under New Labour.



Photo: Paul Mattsson

Pakistan: an iron fi

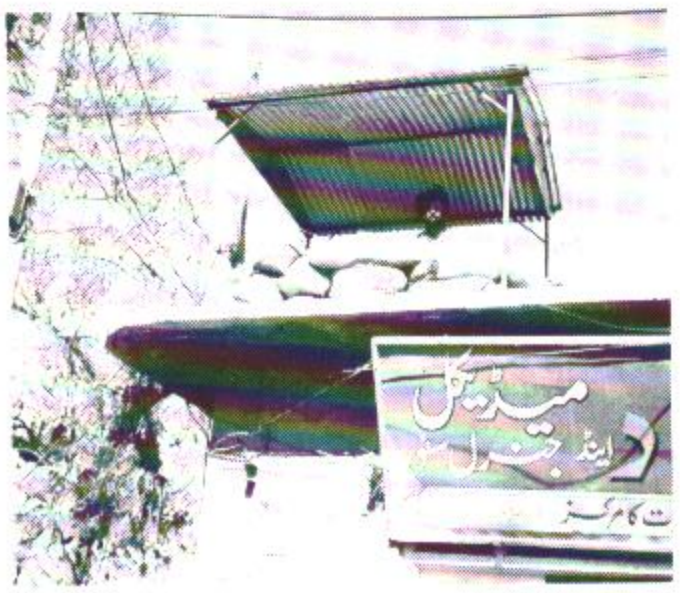
As tension between India and Pakistan rises, the military regime in Pakistan is beginning to show its teeth. Mike Marqusee reports from a recent visit to the sub-continent.

On a rural road in southern Punjab I saw an official government sign sporting a curious message. "My Dear Countrymen, Army will never disappoint you like the past." It was signed: Pervez Musharraf.

Musharraf is the military dictator of Pakistan who, in Blairite-style, has rebranded himself as the country's "Chief Executive". He and his supporters are keen to present the latest army coup as something new and different, and they have proclaimed a wide-ranging agenda of social and political reform. What may be new this time around is not so much the soft sell as the fact that so many of the intelligentsia, as well as part of the NGO leadership, are willing to buy it. Further down the social scale, scepticism is stronger – as indicated by Musharraf's roadside appeal.

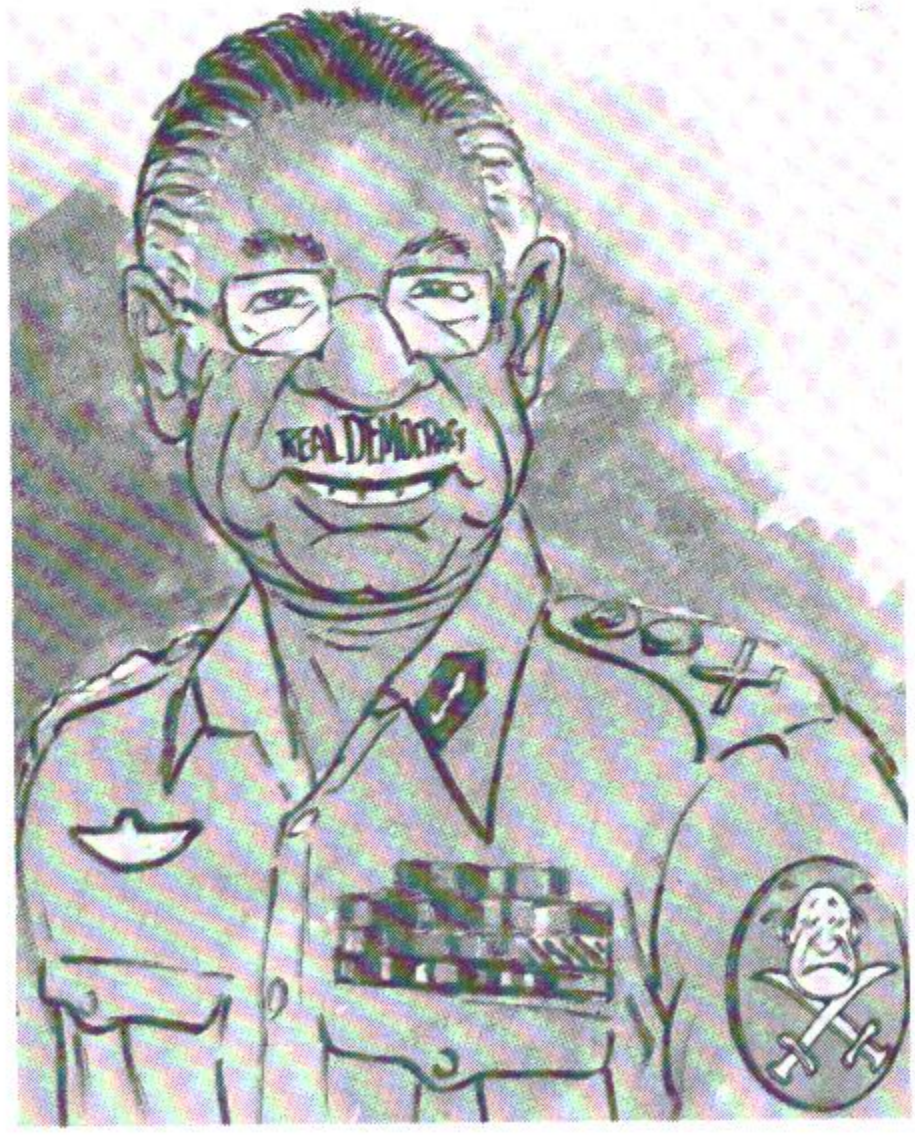
The coup was not staged in defence of the interests of Pakistanis against the increasing lawlessness of the Nawaz Sharif government, but in order to stop Nawaz Sharif from replacing Musharraf as army chief – something Sharif, as the elected prime minister, had every right to do.

Apologists for army rule (not least in the British Foreign Office) cite the notorious corruption of Sharif and other mainstream politicians as justification for the suspension of the constitution. But the deformations in Pakistani politics are not the result of too much but of too little democracy. Even when elected governments have been in office, the military has carefully circumscribed their field of action, and indeed pulled the plug on one after another. Many of the country's chronic problems can be traced to its door. It has funded, promoted and armed the right wing religious factions, has been complicit in the drugs trade, and has siphoned off half the national budget for decades. The culture of patronage and corruption which Musharraf now inveighs against is very much the creation of several decades of army influence.



The army is on constant watch.

Pakistani caricature of Pervez Musharraf, *The Herald*.



Now the military is aiming to micro-manage the whole of Pakistani society. Military officers have been installed at the top levels of a wide variety of institutions, from district and municipal administrations to the railways, the water and power development authority, universities, Pakistan International Airway (PIA), not to mention the cricket board. The army also proposes to institutionalise "economic monitoring" – ostensibly to stem tax evasion – while pursuing the classic IMF "restructuring" agenda: deregulation, privatisation, globalisation. These are the policies broadly pursued by both Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif; the only difference now is that the military can implement the programme without being inhibited by concerns about electoral unpopularity.

In the short run, this has meant increases in furnace oil (a staple commodity), the imposition of a general sales tax, a coming hike in railway fares, and substantial job losses across the public sector. A taste of things to come was seen at a recent protest against "retrenchment" in Karachi, where the army and police baton-charged demonstrators and arrested leaders of two local political parties.

The two major political parties – the Bhutto-led Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Sharif-led Pakistan Muslim League (PML) – are both exhausted and widely distrusted. Initially, apart from the PML, which the army had chucked out, only the Pakistan Labour Party unequivocally denounced the coup. Now that Musharraf has said explicitly that he will never hand over power to either Sharif or Bhutto, and any return to civilian rule has been postponed to the indefinite future, the PPP, the PML, and a number of regionally-based parties are calling for an end to military rule. Imran Khan's Tahriq-I-Insaf has joined the right wing religious parties in calling for "accountability first, then elections". This is echoed by a substantial section of the intelligentsia, who argue that there is no point in a return to democracy

st in a velvet glove

unless the army first cleanses the country of "corrupt politicians."

Accordingly, the army has launched a high-profile "accountability" drive, and has arrested several hundred politicians from the major parties. A determined, impartial and transparent accountability drive is certainly needed in Pakistan – but that is not on offer from the military. Indeed, the military and the judiciary have been explicitly excluded from investigation. Meanwhile, accused politicians are being detained for long periods without charge and when they finally get to court they are assumed guilty until they prove themselves innocent.

These are show trials (the biggest and best publicised being the trial of deposed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif). Although the victims are themselves some of the most rotten exploiters in Pakistani society, trials of this nature will only further brutalise the administration of justice in Pakistan. Following the assassination of Sharif's lawyer, and the recent attempt to charge his wife with high treason, the iron fist inside the velvet glove is becoming ever more apparent.

Musharraf is being promoted, at least in the west, as a liberal secularist, but that counts for little compared to the climate among the top army leadership as a whole. Here the wind is to the right, with hard-line Islamicists rising in the army leadership. Musharraf himself has called for the uniting of all the jihadi groups – armed right wing religious fundamentalists – under one command to prosecute the war against India in Kashmir.

Over the years of the Cold War and the conflict in Afghanistan, the army and the jihadi groups became symbiotically intertwined. In contrast, ordinary Pakistanis, when given the chance, have voted overwhelmingly against fundamentalism (the right wing religious parties have never captured more than 7% in an election). In Pakistan, popular Islamic tradition is secular and tolerant – and acerbically sceptical about the pretensions of the mullahs. That's why the fundamentalist groups and their sponsors in the army focus so heavily on the Kashmir question, which A.R. Rehman, director of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, aptly calls "the-



Development in Pakistan doesn't meet the needs of the masses. In the background: the inevitable Pepsi and Coca Cola adverts.

last refuge of the scoundrel" – in both India and Pakistan.

Since the coup, the base of Pakistani society has been largely quiescent. People are worn down by the cycle of dictatorships and the failures of civilian politicians, not to mention the burdens of nearly a decade of economic recession. The civil society movements are disorientated by the collapse of their leadership, and the trades unions have issued only the most guarded criticisms of military rule. Nonetheless, Pakistani people have a long tradition of resistance to tyrants (they've already overthrown several of them), and it is only a matter of time before that tradition surfaces once again. All the locally-based social activists I spoke to made clear that they regarded the military's designs on Pakistani society as malign. They are now preparing themselves for a long period of struggle.

Frighteningly, time is not on their side. Apart from the Cuban missile crisis, it's unlikely that the human race has ever been closer to experiencing a nuclear war than we are at the moment. Before the Kargil conflict in the summer of 1999, there had never been a serious conventional military war fought directly between two nuclear weapons states. And before the Pakistani coup, there had been a civilian check on the military deployment of nuclear weapons in all the countries which possessed them. In India, the right wing Hindu communalist BJP government is whipping up violent anti-Pakistani sentiment and levelling near daily threats of extermination against its neighbour. This strengthens the Islamic right within the Pakistani army (and the jihadi groups in the streets), which in turns provides a handy justification for the BJP's drive to transform India into a militantly Hindu society.

The two regimes are now inter-locked in a grisly dance of death. However, in both India and Pakistan, the elites tend to read their own brand of strident but insecure national chauvinism into the public at large. Because they are certainly mistaken in this assumption, there is reason to hope that the drive towards nuclear war can be stopped by the challenges bubbling up from below.

●Mike Marqusee is a member of Aaj Kay Naam, a London-based campaign against military rule in Pakistan. Contact Aaj Kay Naam (In the Name of Today) on 0171 813 4508/0181 986 7661, or at aajkaynaam@yahoo.com, www.solidarity.freeserve.co.uk.

Picket for democracy

Pakistan High Commission

Lowndes Square, London SW1

23rd March (Pakistan Day), 12-2pm

Called by Aaj Kay Naam

Letter from America

Here we reproduce extracts from an open letter written by film-maker Michael Moore from the US car town of Flint, following the shooting of a six-year old girl by her classmate last month.

"How much more can my hometown take? Isn't it enough that tens of thousands of lives in Flint have been wrecked, destroyed by the greed of General Motors? Isn't it enough that Flint suffers the highest per capita rates of murder, rape and theft in the nation?

I thought there was nothing else left for Flint to go through. I guess I was wrong. I look up at the TV and a helicopter is hovering over a school while the words "Buell Elementary" flash on the screen. Twenty satellite trucks now ring the school, but with all that technology, they cannot find the way to bring you the truth. This is the poorest school district in the county, perhaps in the entire state. 82% of its children live in poverty.

The family of the little boy who killed had been evicted just last week. Homeless and fatherless (his dad is in jail, as 30% of all black men in America will be at some point in their lives), the boy was staying at his uncle's. In the house were guns, as there are in virtually every home in this devastated area. The gun the boy found was not some "junk gun", that Al Gore promises to get rid of. It was a brand name bought at a sporting goods store.

How do McCain and Bush feel this morning? Just seven days prior, McCain's "Straight Talk Express" bus rolled past but it didn't stop. Bush never stopped in Flint either.

We all feel proud they both avoided us. For nearly 30 years there has not been a single Republican representative elected from Flint, another reason for our neglect and punishment. But we're proud of how we've made it almost a crime to support a Republican in Flint, proud we elected the country's first black mayor in the 1960s."

Stop Russia-Expo!

On 19th and 20th April 2000, Russia's business and political elite will gather in London to meet with western financiers and heads of multi-nationals. Alongside architects of privatisation like Chubais, ex-PM Chernomyrdin, the heads of Alfa-Bank, Yukos Oil and Cable and Wireless will be extreme racists like Zhirinovsky and national chauvinist Communist Party leader Zyuganov. President Putin is also likely to attend. British Airways are giving discounts to the 600 delegates – billionaires in many cases – coming from all over the world. The price of one ticket to this event is equivalent to one year's wages of a well-paid Russian worker. All share the same agenda – to complete the privatisation process that has already pauperised Russia.

A decade of free-market privatisation, imposed by the West, has devastated the Russian economy, closing down half of all industry, leaving millions unemployed and millions more owed enormous wage arrears, with many unpaid for over a year. The education, social welfare and health systems are collapsing. Diseases like TB have become endemic. Tens of thousands have had to evacuate northern areas where they lived for decades due to lack of heating fuel, while oil and gas are exported at immense profit to the West. The average life expectancy of a Russian worker is just 56.

STOP RUSSIA-EXPO! in conjunction with International Solidarity with Workers in Russia is co-ordinating a mass demonstration against privatisation, to join hands with anti-racists and anti-fascists and to demonstrate against the killings in Chechnya. Come and join the mass protest!

Demo to STOP RUSSIA-EXPO!

ASSEMBLE 7pm, Wednesday 19th April Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, London SW1, Westminster tube

This demonstration targets the "Gala event" of the Conference, where all the delegates will be present; other actions will be carried out where possible during the 2 day event.

●For more info see the STOP RUSSIA-EXPO! website at http://members.aol.com/ISWoR/english/index.html; phone 07940-915 011; e-mail StopExpo2k@aol.com

Neo-colonialism in Africa

Monthly discussion organised by the African Liberation Support Campaign (London). Last Sunday of every month, 3pm-6pm, Islington African Project, 7a Elthorne Road, off Holloway Road, Archway, London N19. Tel. 020-8749 7179 or 020-8968 0113.

Russian war crimes

Mike Phipps adds: reports that Russian secret services may have planted bombs in Moscow housing estates to justify launching a war against Chechnya have been supported by a recent Channel 4 investigation. *Dispatches* also highlighted the Russian policy of deliberately targeting civilians in the conflict, including prolonged aerial bombardment with internationally banned vacuum bombs.

Eye-witness accounts further suggested that Russian clearance for refugee convoys was given on more than one occasion – including the army's provision of transport – only for the buses to be fired upon by Russian rockets. In one such attack over 360 Chechen civilians were killed.

Vladimir Putin has had personal charge of the war in Chechnya since before he became president designate of Russia. Recently ethical foreign policy supremo Robin Cook shook hands with this war criminal, describing his style as "refreshing" – an attitude confirmed by Tony Blair who hurried to be the first Western leader to hold talks with Putin.

Stark options for Chile

Reynaldo Salgado, a former political prisoner and an activist in the Chile Committee for Justice, examines the consequences of Pinochet's detention in Britain and subsequent return home.

For 16 months we witnessed an extraordinary drama: the unexpected arrest of Chilean senator-for-life Pinochet, an internationally known tyrant, so arrogant that he thought his invulnerability extended outside Chile's borders. His miscalculation helped set a legal precedent that changed international law and the course of events in Chile. His appalling crimes were exposed at various landmark hearings in London. The whole world is now aware of his deeds and a new generation has learned the crimes committed during his 17-year dictatorship.

The positive aspects of the case include the removal of state immunity from former heads of state and the universal jurisdiction for crimes against humanity, such as torture and conspiracy to torture. The Tory Party has been exposed as a friend of dictators and an enemy of international law on human rights.

The case also highlighted problems with the British judicial system, for example, the secrecy surrounding the selection of Law Lords, the lengthy extradition process and the scope of the discretionary powers of the Home Secretary. Furthermore, the Director of Public Prosecution refused to start an investigation under British criminal law, arguing there was no acceptable evidence to prosecute Pinochet in the UK, despite documentation given to the Metropolitan Police.

After insisting that the executive would not interfere with the judicial process, Straw used his discretionary powers to do precisely that. Why did Straw not let the courts in Britain or Spain consider Pinochet's fitness to face trial? There is a strong suspicion that a tripartite agreement between the governments of Spain, Britain and Chile led to Pinochet's release on humanitarian grounds: a convenient way out of the labyrinth, the last chapter of a strategy designed in Chile when it became crystal clear that his future legal battles were likely to be lost.

The British Government was surely acutely aware that, given the situation in Chile, freeing Pinochet would help him avoid justice. Evidence against Pinochet is mounting, but his powerful friends will protect him – and themselves. Since his arrest, the Chilean judiciary has shown some teeth but only a tiny number of human rights violators (54 military staff so far) have been inconvenienced. There are still no answers for the relatives searching for 1,118 people who disappeared during the military regime.

Pinochet's future is uncertain, but his long stay in Britain may have destroyed his plans to be a key player in Chilean politics. Although he avoided a formal trial in Spain, he is a cornered man, whose influence is restricted now to a hard core of supporters.

Human rights activists and the relatives of the victims are bracing themselves for a protracted judicial process. The immediate hurdle is to remove Pinochet's parliamentary immunity. The lawyers representing victims of the Caravan of Death applied to the Court of Appeal. Once it decides, either party can appeal to the Supreme Court. Over 70 lawsuits filed with the courts are being investigated by Judge Juan Guzman, who appears determined to pursue those cases.

Meanwhile, the initiative of the Dialogue Table, aimed at finding the bodies of the disappeared, faces a crisis. Assurances given by Armed Forces representatives to co-operate in the search are no longer credible. The high profile hero's reception at Santiago airport caused unease and embarrassment within the former administration. General Izurieta, the head of the army, confirmed it will continue to support Pinochet "after his unjust and prolonged detention in the UK."

Despite widespread scepticism, the legal mechanisms to prosecute Pinochet exist, although sentence is a different matter. Proposed changes to the Chilean Constitution, however, may grant Pinochet even greater protection.

Pinochet's fate is key to the future of the country. Chile faces a stark option: continue to be dominated by fear and impunity as a way of life or become a real democracy with full respect for human rights.

Bike for Cuba!

Cuba Solidarity Campaign's Ultimate Bike Ride. Departs 22nd April 2000.

Your chance to see the real Cuba and give real solidarity direct to the Cuban people. You pay £200; you raise £1000 in sponsorship.

Contact Rob Miller at CSC, c/o Red Rose Club, 129 Seven Sisters Rd, London N7 7QG; 020-7263 6452; cubasc@gn.apc.org; http://www.poptel.org.uk/cuba-solidarity/index.html

Costa Rica's no bowl of cherries

As part of Central America week, Costa Rican activist Maria Blanco addressed a range of meetings in March to highlight the environmentally destructive activities of Pindeco, a pineapple-growing subsidiary of Delmonte. Such is the damage caused by this company, that farmers, workers, church, indigenous and women's groups have united to form the Front Against Pindeco's Pollution.

Pindeco has been buying up land in Costa Rica at a prodigious rate, so it now has 10,000 hectares in production. This expansion has been accompanied by unregulated extraction from rivers which has contaminated the water supply of several rural communities. The company's use of agrochemicals has also had an impact on health, leading to an increase in skin and respiratory disorders, as well as sterility and congenital malfunctions.

Attempts to form a union at Pindeco have in the past led to instant sackings, so the Front Against Pindeco's Pollution aims to negotiate with the company directly on their concerns. Meanwhile activists here, aware that Sainsburys buy $30,000 worth of pineapples a week from Costa Rica, are seeking to open a second line of pressure.

Recession? What recession?

Fevered share trading in dot com companies and rising oil prices are a recipe for a dose of old fashioned recession in Edwin Savage's view.

Despite the Government's drive to bring information technology to all Britain and the frenzied share speculation in dot com companies, the economy faces the old fashioned prospect of a recession brought on by an oil crisis and Labour's old nemesis, the Organisation of Petrolium Exporting Countries (OPEC).

Tony Blair used the drive to wire Britain up for the internet while in opposition, announcing a deal with British Telecom. The arch moderniser now lambasts BT for not doing more to enable cheaper internet use, but fails to comment on the frenzy driving share values of internet companies ever higher. One dot com with a total turnover of less than one high street branch of Marks and Spencer and making a loss has been valued at a billion pounds in the world of casino values .

Though many people cannot afford a computer, Blair is punting the internet and computing as a brave new world Britain must lead to compete in the global marketplace. While there is some merit in being at the cutting edge of technology, using it to better people's lives, much of the Government's outpourings are New Labour posturing as exponents of modernity. While it is very nice if schools are wired up to the internet, that is very little help if the classrooms are crumbling and teachers are leaving the profession in droves.

Now harsh economic reality looms over Britain, as the price of oil has tripled over the past 12 months, threatening the world economy with recession. Analysts predict a massive tumble in share prices as markets realise that oil prices are threatening to unleash the demon inflation. Factory gate prices are rising faster than inflation, but manufacturers have been unable to pass the increases on to the consumer. Coupled with the high interest rates imposed by the Bank of England, the outlook for jobs and companies is distinctly gloomy.

The edifice of today's global trade has been built on freedom of the market, with the main world trading blocs using the World Trade Organisation to police those states daring to use public subsidies for their industries. Countries using state aid are accused by the United States and the European Union of unfair competition and are crudely whipped back into line.

The neo-liberal architects of today's global economic consensus have eschewed state intervention, using interest rate rises instead to fend off inflationary pressures. The structurally weak British economy is suffering from high levels of unemployment, albeit hidden from the headline claimant count. Further rises in oil prices, coupled with the strength of sterling and high interest rates could well be enough to tip the economy over the edge. What price the dot com boom then as fickle share dealers run for cover, with plunging share prices pushing many of the new internet companies into early extinction?

A modernising, forward-looking Government should be investing in infrastructure. There is a shortage of housing stock and an excess of chronic disrepair. Despite John Prescott's recent house-building pledges, there is little sign that New Labour really wants to get involved in making significant changes to the British economy. A truly modern Government would have invested heavily in the new technology in solar panels. They produce enough power for individual household needs, plus a surplus to feed back into the national grid.

This technology would be socially useful, would kick-start a revival in manufacturing industry and the building trade, and insulate Britain from the problems of over-reliance on oil. Green policies cutting greenhouse gases, creating jobs and conserving energy would be something to boast about as a moderniser. But Blair's Government is characterised by links, sponsorship and dealings with a capitalist class opposed to such socially useful modernisation.

New Labour wants to be remembered as ending the stop-go, boom and bust policies of previous Governments. But wishful thinking that the business cycle and the contradictions of capitalism can be tamed by parroting how prudent the Government is, will not stop external recessionary forces. The growing realisation that OPEC's oil policy is threatening higher inflation has drawn out the usual liberal suspects in the British media. These pundits haven't been slow in concluding that rising inflation could spell pressure for higher wages, as workers demand protection of their living standards.

What price a Blair Government, in its second term of office, provoking a rash of strikes and fuelling discontent with rising unemployment and an incomes policy to fight inflation using workers as the cannon fodder again?

Protesters against New Labour's priorities.



Photo: Phil Maxwell

You don't have to be left-wing to get debarred – it doesn't even help...

Ian Pope, Rochford & Southend East CLP, reports on the victimisation of a local activist.

Like many Party members I have been proud to stand in in past council elections on the Labour platform. Nowadays, however, the Millbank machine takes our loyalty for granted and uses it to keep their supporters in power and suppress dissent.

Labour councillors have been in a power-sharing "Convention" with Liberal Democrats on Southend Council for the last five years, which gives them seats on the Council's Executive Cabinet. The pact is endorsed by Millbank but councillors will not discuss its terms with the local party, causing great animosity.

Party activist Mark Flewitt was one of the most vocal critics of the councillors, arguing for the Labour Group to participate in the Administration on an "issue by issue" basis. Mark represents the mainstream, but non-Blairite, body of Labour Party members. In the 1999 local elections, Mark came within four votes of defeating the sitting Lib-Dem councillor in the Westborough Ward. He was supported by a local group which had been badly let down by the Liberals. When this matter finally came before the Council, Labour members voted with the Liberals, casting doubt on Mark's credibility. The Labour Group and Millbank were irritated when Mark criticised the councillors' actions in the local press.

After branch members selected him again in 2000, Mark was interviewed by the Assessment Panel. They refused to endorse him but gave no reason for this, although he did receive a "strengths and weaknesses" document. He appealed to the regional office, but after receiving neither notification of the grounds for his non-endorsement nor advice as to who would be on the Appeal Panel, he resigned his Party membership rather than go before a kangaroo court.

Local newspapers have been very interested in Mark's deselection and the Regional Director has now accused Mark of denigrating the Party and its democratic procedures by saying that he did not feel that he would receive a fair hearing.

Mark is yet another victim of the New Labour Project.

Cardiff Baywatch

Russell Goodway, Lord Mayor of Cardiff and Leader of the Council, has just received a pay rise to £58,000 a year for a three day week. Seven Labour councillors voted against the rise, one abstained, and all eight were promptly thrown out of the Labour Group. Two Cardiff MPs, Julie Morgan and Jon Owen Jones, urged leniency on the rebels but were ignored.

●David Taggart, Vice-Chair of Hampstead and Highgate CLP, was excluded from standing in a Council by-election after the Camden Local Government Committee implemented the "Project 2000" procedures, a New Labour assessment scheme designed to produce candidates with a "modern" professional profile. London parties have been asked to adopt the procedures for the 2000 elections before the procedures have been discussed or adopted by any organ of the Party.

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for further details see address at top of page 2; copy deadline 12th April

Tobin calculates to bin speculates

Harry Barnes, Labour MP for North East Derbyshire, explains his Early Day Motion calling for a "Tobin Tax".

The recent catastrophe in Mozambique starkly highlighted the underfunding of development and disaster relief. British people were moved by the suffering in Mozambique and were generous. The size and nature of the UK overseas aid budget has changed for the better under this Labour Government. But the scale of the task in Mozambique and the wider imperative of development is enormous and needs far more than what is, or is likely to be, available through overseas aid budgets.

Given that much of the responsibility for the economic subordination of the Third World can be blamed on international currency speculation, should this not become a resource for eradicating poverty and boosting development? The scale of this speculation is enormous –$1.5 trillion a day! Little concerns trade in real goods and services. The lightning speed of financial transactions means that economies can be undermined within minutes.

The idea of a Tobin Tax – a relatively small levy on foreign exchange trading which could dampen currency speculation and raise enormous revenues – is gaining popularity. It's perhaps a perfect Blairite tax that hits few people but benefits many. The tax is named after the Nobel Laureate James Tobin.

There are problems, such as constructing a universal mechanism for collection and distribution to minimise avoidance, but the technology that drives the trade can be used to tax and curb it. Overcoming the real problem – resistance from currency traders – requires an enormous international mobilisation.

●War on Want is running a campaign in the UK, involving letter writing and general publicity work. For information, contact 020-7620 1111 or www.waronwant.org or Harry Barnes MP on harrybarnesmp@parliament.uk.

Disabled Party members organise

Ian Malcolm-Walker charts the progress of the Labour Party Disabled Members Group (LPDMG) and explains how you can get involved.

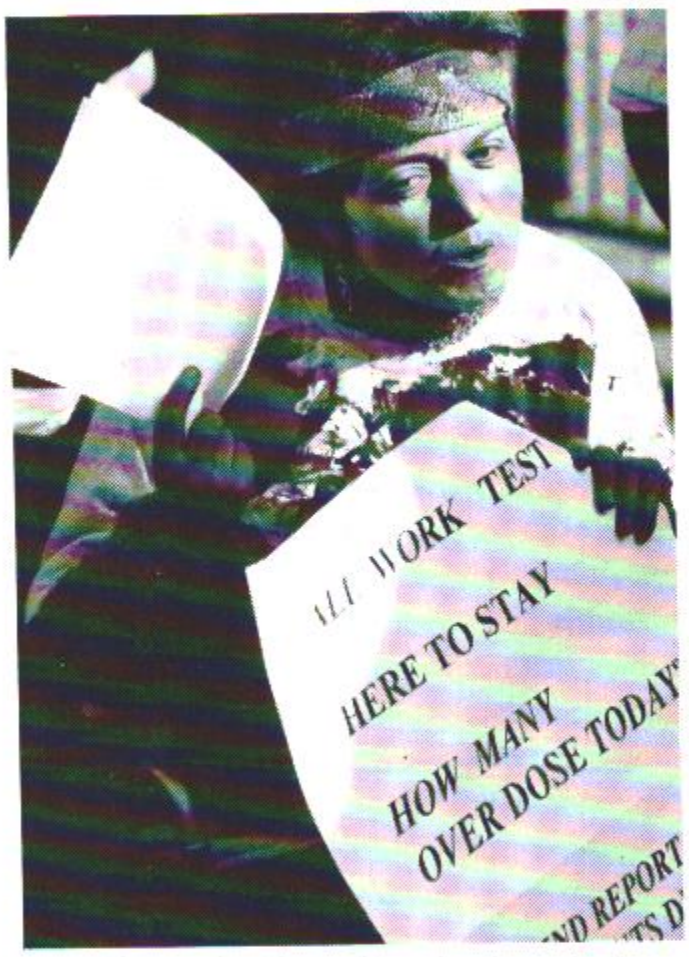


Photo: Paul Mattsson

Disability Action Network protests against New Labour's Welfare Reform Bill. LPDMG are making sure protests are raised inside the Party.

The LPDMG started as an idea when a dozen or so CLPs put in resolutions to the 1994 Party Conference on civil rights for disabled people after the Tories sabotaged Roger Berry's private members' bill. It became a team with some sort of structure when people got together just after Harry Barnes had a similar bill defeated the following year.

Meanwhile thousands of disabled people throughout the country forced the Tories to bring in the Disability Discrimination Act. Among other things this regulated the labour market – though the Act is fundamentally flawed and goes nowhere near far enough.

In 1996, LPDMG had its first AGM and since then has continued to work away behind the scenes. But, like all organisations recently, it has not found life easy. It is an organisation of disabled people within the Labour Party but is open to all. LPDMG needs the support of as many Party members as we can attract. To ensure that LPDMG continues to call for what disabled people actually want, as opposed to what others think we want, only disabled members can be voting members of our committee and vote at the AGM. However, all Party members are entitled and encouraged to join and they are welcome to come to our meetings. Branches, CLPs and trade unions (from national to branch level) are also welcome to affiliate. As soon as we reach 500 members, Millbank will recognise us as a Socialist Society with all the rights that confers.

At our AGM this summer (5th August 2000) we will launch a national disability policy document and we aim to hold a national disability policy forum in Brighton on the Saturday (22nd September 2000) before Conference.

We have had a fringe meeting at every Labour Conference since 1995 and are hoping to have a series of three in Brighton – one on civil rights for disabled people, one on disabled people and the welfare state and one on disabled people and public services.

●For more information contact LPDMG: c/o 12 Edensor Square, Derby DE22 3RQ; tel 01332 370223; email Ian_W_Malcolm_Walker@yahoo.com

So much for ethical foreign policy

The countrywide slump in Labour's popularity among its core supporters was discussed by MPs and Party activists at the annual meeting of Labour Action for Peace in London on 4th March.

Demand more democracy and study how people organised in Seattle to stop the World Trade Organisation plan to control nation states, was Tony Benn's answer. "Clem Attlee had as much charisma as a mouse, but we won the 1945 election because people wanted change. Now young people particularly have environmental awareness, approaching peace and socialism through a recognition that they need control over their destiny."

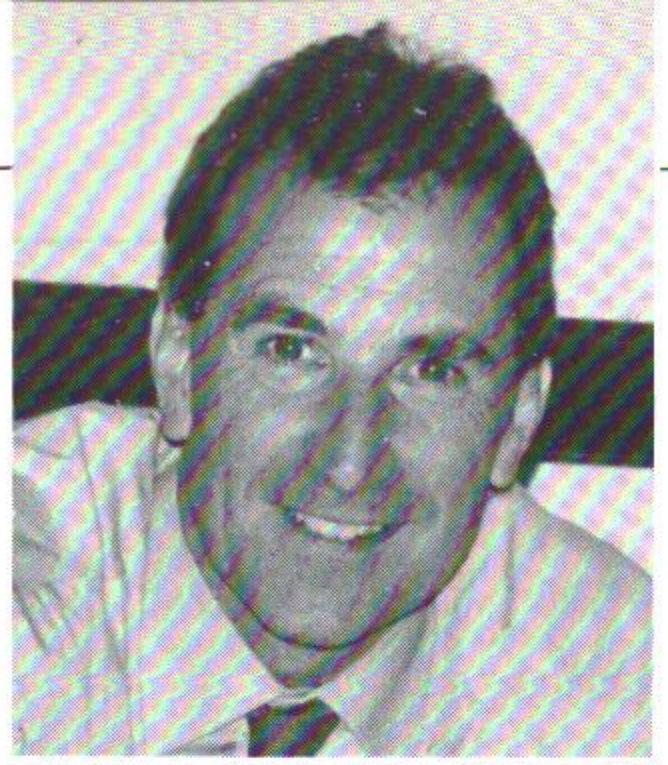
Liz Davies spoke about pressure from the arms trade. When asking why the Indonesian ambassador was among the VIPs invited to annual conference, she was told his was a progressive country where human rights were improving. After the referendum backing independence for East Timor resulted in the genocide of East Timorese by the Indonesian military, she asked the Prime Minister why the British Aerospace contract for 16 Hawk aircraft and much else had not been cancelled in accordance with Robin Cook's "ethical foreign policy" since cancellation could have saved thousands of lives. Blair replied that cancellation would have cost millions of pounds. "There you have the price of the lives of the people of East Timor," said Liz.

Jeremy Corbyn reported that though pressure from the British public and Chilean victims of torture and murder under Pinochet's military junta had failed to bring him to trial, pressure will continue in Chile. The legal precedent ending immunity was a gain, but his release on medical grounds was disgusting and questionable methods were used. Pinochet's refusal to undergo further medical tests requested by Spain, France and Belgium, and his quick exit, were part of a nasty process resulting from the complicity of the British arms industry with the Chilean junta since 1973.

"The peace movement must expose the consequences of arms deals with the most dangerous and most heavily subsidised industry in Britain." The Ministry of Defence demand for money up front before sending five helicopters to Mozambique was "outrageous madness" and would further alienate Labour's core voters.

●To join Labour Action for Peace write to Ron Barden, 33 Booth Lane North, Northampton, NN3 1JQ

●Ten Labour MPs broke the whip to vote against the defence white paper at the end of February: Jeremy Corbyn, Tam Dalyell, Kelvin Hopkins, Alice Mahon, Robert Marshall-Andrews, Bill Michie, Alan Simpson, Dennis Skinner, Llew Smith, John McDonnell (Tony Benn was visiting his wife in hospital).



THE **ALAN SIMPSON** COLUMN

Imagine the outcry there would have been if the Tories had ever tried to prosecute as terrorists those who were involved in the anti-apartheid movement in Britain. Picture too the public demonstrations and Labour's parliamentary challenge to any attempt to imprison people raising funds for Anti-Apartheid or attending their meetings. Yet this is now the framework of the new Terrorism Bill, which Labour is pushing through Parliament.

Appalled? It gets worse. Terrorism is no longer to be seen in terms of a threat to the state or to the secure functioning of civic society. The new definition talks of "the use or threat ... of action which ... involves serious violence against any person or property." Such threats or actions will be defined as terrorism if they are "for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause." So how far will this take us ... into the heartland of almost all of the major labour movement, peace and environmental campaigns of the last 20 years.

The women who got into Hawk aircraft certainly did serious damage to property and, without doubt, did so in pursuit of an ideological cause. Women who regularly tear down fencing at the Menwith Hill US spy station in Yorkshire do the same. All sorts of property was seriously damaged during the miners' strike and at Grunwick, and the protesters who pull up fields of GM crops have this as their expressed intention. All will hold their hands up to the charge that their actions have been ideological or political.

I suspect that even the array of worthy and respectable protesters who sought physically to prevent the veal crate exports of live animals would admit to an ideological or even religious motivation. It would be something to do with the moral economy. Most protesters accept that such actions may well put them in breach of the criminal law, but should this define them as terrorists?

'The Tories have long wanted to make public sector strikes illegal, but to redefine them as acts of terrorism is control freakery gone mad'

In a further elaboration of Labour's new definition of terrorism, the Home Secretary has added a phrase which includes action (or the threat of action) "which creates a serious risk to the health or safety of the public." A number of MPs have already picked up that this could easily be applied to strike action in essential public services. The Tories have long wanted to make public sector strikes illegal, but to redefine them as acts of terrorism is control freakery gone mad.

Suddenly we will find ourselves with huge swathes of social protest or campaign movements, which have been perfectly adequately constrained within civil and criminal law, being subject to the draconian powers of the Terrorism Bill. Raising money (or encouraging others to do so) for such causes becomes an offence, imprisonable for up to 14 years. Knowing someone whom you suspect of fund raising or offering practical support for such causes, and not notifying the police of your suspicions, carries a lesser penalty of imprisonment for only five years. But what does it do to the society we live in? You don't have to go far down this pathway to find yourself in constitutional fascism.

Step back and give yourself a pinch. We are not at a point in time where the threat of terrorism lurks around every corner. Nor do we face crises of competence in civil and criminal law. The stronger case is for less terrorism legislation rather than more. And, fundamentally, there is an overwhelming need to understand that terrorism laws have to be confined to extraordinary circumstance and not to the ordinary. At its root we have to hold on to an understanding that this means threats to the security of open, democratic society and/or of the ability of democratic institutions to function. Other crimes, however heinous, have to be addressed within the criminal law, not sucked into the murky domains of terrorism legislation.

Most countries which have legislation of this sort don't have a presumption to protect property in the way New Labour now proposes. Yet this is what global corporations (particularly the most polluting or environmentally damaging ones) have been pushing for. Capital now demands that environmental protesters be re-defined as environmental terrorists, and that protesters against roads or dams or oil exploitation become eco-terrorists. It is the new terrain of corporate feudalism, where the state steps in to protect the fiefdoms of exploitation they have carved out for themselves.

Societies, stripped of rights in this way, do not sit back quietly and accept. It is a recipe for massive social collisions, where government itself ends up being on trial. The Tories would never have had the nerve to try such an assault on the open society. New Labour will pay a heavy price for doing so.

After Bannister: new steps to climb

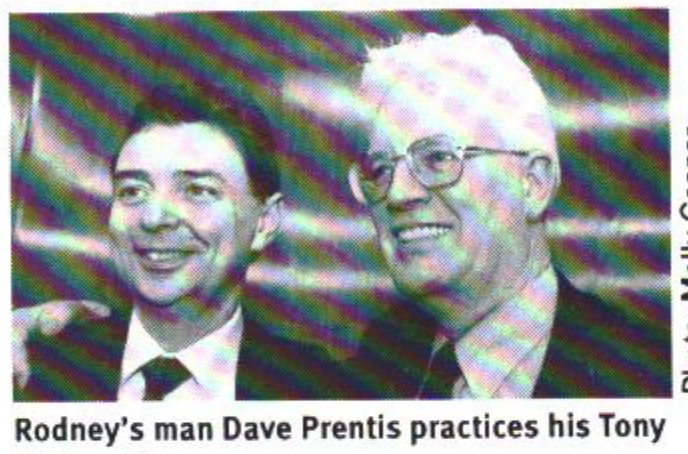


Photo: Molly Cooper

Rodney's man Dave Prentis practices his Tony Blair smile.

Jon Rogers reviews the outcome of the UNISON leadership election.

Left-wing challenger Roger Bannister took a creditable 32% of the vote in the election for UNISON General Secretary. With 12% of the vote going to Hillingdon strike leader Malkiat Bilku, the combined left vote therefore rose to 44% from barely 25% five years before.

Deputy General Secretary Dave Prentis could only pull out 56% of the vote on a 17% turnout, despite the backing of the great bulk of the union machine and the overwhelming majority of the National Executive Council.

This result, consistent with the performance of left-wing challengers in other recent union elections, is a tribute to the hard work of a number of activists and illustrates both the potential and the limitations of UNISON's left.

The campaign demonstrated the extent of popular support for our policies. Wherever debates and hustings were held, Bannister and his supporters outclassed the establishment's lacklustre campaign.

Buoyed by the unprecedented unity between the main left organisations – the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic UNISON (CFDU) – and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), a wide range of left wingers were drawn into the campaign.

Yet if London Convenor and *LLB* columnist Geoff Martin had pressed ahead with his campaign, and secured the backing of the CFDU, it is highly likely that some of the health service nominations which kept Bilku in the race could have been swung behind a united left candidate and ensured a nail-biting outcome.

The CFDU AGM on 26th March will commence a debate about UNISON's future and that of the left within it. The debate will provide an answer to the question of whether or not the left in UNISON can meet the challenge of keeping our new unity going strong.

UNISON NOTEBOOK

KENT

While Councils covered by national pay negotiations are consulting over a 3% offer, renegade Kent County Council has ended a decade of solo pay offers by bypassing negotiation and imposing a 1.25% pay increase. UNISON branch meetings in late March are discussing balloting for industrial action.

ISLINGTON

An employment tribunal has found Islington Council guilty of racial and sexual discrimination, as well as victimtisation, in dismissing five Islington council housing workers in May 1998. At the time the council was under Labour control. The Liberal Democrats became the largest group in December 1999 after a by-election victory in a previously safe Labour seat.

In a unanimous decision, the tribunal declared: "The treatment of the ... black and ethnic minority females can best be described as shocking... There was a complete lack of sensitivity to equal opportunity and human issues."

At the time of their dismissals, the only political figures in the borough to stand up for the victimised workers were Jeremy Corbyn MP and former councillor Liz Davies.

The sacked workers' campaign was led by Cecilia Prosper, a former UNISON shop steward, and currently the London Socialist Alliance candidate for London North East assembly seat (which includes Islington). Her New Labour opponent is Meg Hillier, one of the Labour councillors who presided over the sackings.

LEICESTERSHIRE

Care workers with Leicestershire County Council have decided to refer their three-month dispute (see *LLB*, March 2000) to the arbitration service, following the intervention of regional officials from union, UNISON. Further strike action has now been suspended.

LEICESTER

Parents, pensioners and children staged a two-hour occupation of Leicester City Council offices following a decision by the authority to close their community centre.

Ross Willmott, Labour leader of the council, defended closure of the Fosse Neighbourhood Centre, together with six libraries, as necessary to switch resources from leisure services to education. But residents, particularly in the areas affected, are not convinced, especially as the city's council tax is to rise by 10.7%. They also condemned the council for failing to enter into dialogue with them about protection of neighbourhood services, particularly those for children and the elderly.

Local ultra-Blairite MP Patricia Hewitt has backed the residents in their fight with the council, praising the centre's successful adult literacy projects. Hewitt, whose Leicester West constituency is considered vulnerable by local Liberal Democrats, expressed her concern at a packed public meeting at the centre and pledged to write to council leaders.

EALING

Joint mass meetings of UNISON and GMB members working for Ealing Council in west London are to consider an April ballot for industrial action in May – possibly to coincide with the mayoral elections. Workers oppose the Labour Council's proposed new contracts which would impose a new pay and grading structure, change working time arrangements and remove any commitment to honour the 1997 Single Status Agreement.

FBU backs suspended firefighters

Mick Shaw
FBU Executive Council Member

Eleven FBU members at Homerton Fire Station in east London were suspended from duty on New Year's Day for refusing to work with anybody breaking the union's ban on overtime working. The FBU has had an overtime ban since 1974 as a way of ensuring that vacancies are filled by recruitment rather than by firefighters working excessive hours.

Fearing a staff shortage over New Year, London Management – who had suspended recruitment for the whole of 1999 – decided to take on the union's overtime ban. From London's 112 fire stations they found 40 volunteers prepared to work overtime.

The union's ban undermined, management then decided to make an example of our members at Homerton, who had refused to work with anybody doing overtime.

What the Brigade did not predict was the reaction from the rest of the workforce. Within a fortnight it was clear that there was overwhelming support for strike action if the Homerton members were sacked. Thousands of other London firefighters began to submit memos to their line managers making clear that they would not work with anybody doing overtime – in effect, saying "suspend me too." Not surprisingly, none was suspended.

Three weeks after the suspensions the 11 members were reinstated. However, they still face disciplinary action and we are now campaigning for the charges to be dropped.

On 4th February, 1,200 London firefighters marched past Homerton Fire Station to a rally at the Hackney Empire, to hear Ken Livingstone give an assurance that, if elected as Mayor, he would resolve the dispute the following day. Throughout February, London firefighters wore badges of support for our Homerton members, in defiance of management instructions.

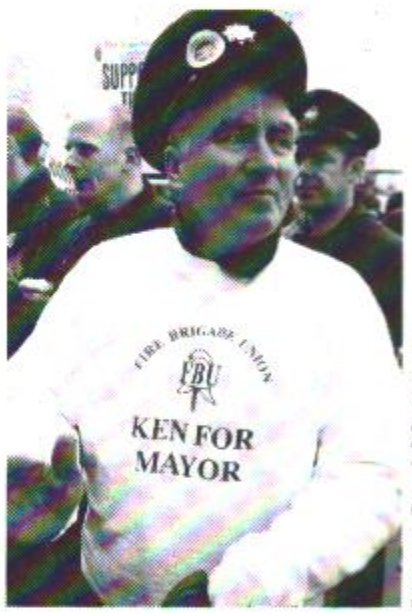


Photo: Paul Mattsson

Disciplinary hearings were organised for 10th March (a speed record – management were clearly feeling the pressure). We marched to Brigade HQ on the day of the hearings and, at another rally, Ken Livingstone repeated his commitment. There are 30 witnesses before the hearings, so the procedure is likely to go on into April.

Management's attempt to break the FBU's overtime ban and victimise loyal union members has backfired on them. Support for the union's overtime ban is now stronger than ever and the 40 "volunteers" now face internal union disciplinary proceedings.

The left needs success in PCS

Mick Loates previews April's Civil Service union elections.

The Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), which represents over 200,000 civil servants, holds its biennial National Executive Committee elections this year. The union was formed from the CPSA (administrative grades) and PTC (executive and support grades). The current NEC is controlled by the ex-PTC group Membership First (aptly known as Me First) and the ex-CPSA Moderates (who are just known as moderates) – both in the thrall of New Labour. Even though pay and terms of conditions are negotiated at departmental level, the NEC is still an important body, as it has the final say in sanctioning any form of industrial action.



Left Unity, a group representing a wide range of socialist opinions, needs to wrest control from the current leadership. Areas of highest priority that Left Unity will campaign on are:

•No more privatisations: both members and the public are sick and tired of these – look at the opposition to privatising Air Traffic Control (see Trade Union Notebook, p26) and the Public Trust Office (last month's *LLB*).

•Restoration of national pay bargaining: the devolution of pay negotiations to individual departments has been a disaster. Why should members in the Benefits Agency start on £10,750 per annum, while members in the Vehicle Inspectorate, doing a similar job, receive £12,236? Meanwhile, Ministry of Defence members start on just £9,798. In the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions you are entitled to 30 days annual leave on entry, compared to only 22 in the Lord Chancellor's Department (LCD). National pay bargaining will give PCS a stronger negotiating position and end the ridiculous waste of having over 100 pay bargaining units.

•Equal opportunities: some 70% of civil servants are women, but this is in no way reflected in the higher grades. In the LCD, white staff have a seven times better chance of promotion than black staff. 7.5% of the economically active population are disabled, yet only 4% of the Civil Service are disabled workers. The union must address these issues.

•A new Civil Service pension scheme is currently being negotiated by the employer. The incoming NEC must ensure they retain a non-contributory pension for low paid members who must not be forced to choose between a half-decent standard of living now and a pension in the future.

A strong election campaign, linked to hard work in the branches, could give Left Unity an opportunity to change our members' working lives.

●Mick Loates is Branch Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department PRFD (Probate and Divorce Registries in London), and a Left Unity candidate in the NEC elections.

Rail safety – no more window dressing

RMT activist Pam Singer reviews Railtrack's record.

The Paddington Rail disaster highlighted a little-known fact – that privatisation of the railways gave Railtrack a central role in ensuring overall railway safety. In 1994 the system required that prospective rail operating companies submit "safety cases" outlining their safety systems and arrangements, designed to weed out fly-by-night operators who might not treat safety seriously. But Railtrack controls the network infrastructure, so Railtrack was left responsible for accepting and "passing" these safety cases. (Fortunately Railtrack's own safety case must be passed by the HSE.)

Safety cases cannot be looked at in isolation from Railtrack's network. Railtrack must be certain that new rolling stock won't damage rails or wreak havoc with signalling systems. But safety cases are very far-reaching and detailed. Besides operational and technical standards, they cover things like staff training and licensing, systems validation – can Railtrack give the thumbs-up on all these issues?

The Rail Safety Policy Review set up after the crash expressed serious concerns about this arrangement, pointing to a lack of clarity in accountability and responsibility, and a lack of confidence that safety issues were demonstrably protected and separated from Railtrack's commercial interests. It said that Railtrack's role as an enforcer of safety standards was unclear, recommending that the HSE have an increased role as an independent safety regulator.

The Review made a number of recommendations, most prominently the establishment of a safety body which is a subsidiary of Railtrack, made up of industry representatives and independents, separate from Railtrack's own operational safety or safety management functions, and from Railtrack's commercial interests. Further, it recommended that the HSE take over the acceptance of railway operator safety cases.

This fell far short of public expectation that safety responsibility would be wrested completely from Railtrack's hands. People felt that John Prescott had gone back on his word to remove Railtrack from the picture. But this misses the point. A network suffering from decades of neglect and under-investment will have safety failings, whoever scrutinises the mountains of paperwork generated by the safety professionals.

Railtrack's regime did not cause the disasters at Clapham, Purley and Kings Cross. But instead of coming to grips with the problems, the profoundly anti-railway Tories aggravated them by rushing through a disastrous privatisation. And the profoundly hypocritical and gutless New Labourites are perpetuating this contemptuous attitude. As long as the railways remain fragmented and in private hands, there is little hope of qualitatively improving the situation. We can look forward to more window dressing.

In the meantime, Lord Cullen is holding an inquiry into safety on the railways. The RMT is making a submission highlighting the importance of the safety role of the guard, which is under threat. The RMT is also making a case for the introduction of Automatic Train Protection to the Davies inquiry, which is looking into this.

The latest incident was an accident at Waterloo, when 30 people were injured when a train operated by South West Trains hit stationary carriages.

TRADE UNION NOTEBOOK

Ford Staff reach agreement

At Fords salaried staff took part in a strike which was planned as the first in a series of actions. The dispute was settled with a deal, approved by a three to one majority, for a 4% increase backdated to 1st November 1999, with inflation-linked increases in 2000 and 2001. Pension improvements and a reduced working week for any salaried staff previously working longer hours were also agreed.

Air Traffic Control

Trade unionists working in the National Air Traffic Services have come up with a novel way to let Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott know the extent of opposition to the planned air traffic control privatisation. They have set up a website at www.safeskies.co.uk that lets visitors to it send an email message direct to Prescott opposing the sell-off that Labour promised while in opposition not to do. It gives lots of arguments with examples from around the world of how air traffic control works, so visit the site and send off your message.

Liverpool Dockers' new address

The Liverpool Dockworkers and the Initiative Factory new address is: The Initiative Factory, 29 Hope Street, Liverpool L1 9BQ (tel: 0151 709 2148, fax: 0151 709 5596, mobile: 0403 259 511/512/513).

FBU Ballot results

The FBU's ballot for a new general secretary after Ken Cameron retires in June resulted in a win for Andy Gilchrist. Andy, currently a national officer, won by 12,709 votes to 10,665 against Mike Fordham, the assistant general secretary.



Photo: Molly Cooper

Safety rep sacked

Railtrack and the operating companies' attitude to safety is demonstrated by the sacking of safety rep Sarah Friday at South West Trains. RMT members voted by five to one for strike action. Sarah was sacked on 15th February for not carrying out a manager's instruction to work on a train – victimised for being an effective safety rep at Waterloo station. Over 150 drivers and guards voted by 5-1 to strike to secure Sarah's full reinstatement, just days after the accident at Waterloo (see above). Strikes were set for 25th and 31st March.



THE GEOFF MARTIN COLUMN

●My apologies if this month's column seems even more disjointed than usual, but I'm trying to write it while keeping one eye on the racing from the Cheltenham Festival.

I'm a bit pushed for something to get my teeth into, but the *LLB* high command has told me that it's the London Mayor – so the London Mayor it is.

●So what's my take on the latest round of shit-stirring and shenanigans? I'll tell you: first, this is the beginning of the end of the New Labour project. I mean it. The wheels are off, they've been exposed for the bunch of frauds that they are, they've been rumbled by the Party and union rank and file – and they know it.

I'll tell you a little story. In a *Today* programme radio van on a cold February morning a key player in the "project" virtually begged me to open up a conduit for contact between the Party machine and the London Labour left. I told him that I might consider it if they were prepared to give a clear signal that they understood the message that the grassroots were sending them and that the only acceptable form of words would be an unequivocal U-turn on the PPP for the tube. I was told it couldn't happen because Brown and the Treasury wouldn't allow it. So that was the end of that.

What it proves is that the confidence of the New Labour elite is shot. And that's why this is no time to walk away from the Party and leave the political collateral and the assets to the small band of hijackers who seized control six years ago. There are the best part of 80,000 Party and union levy payers out there who had their votes corrupted through the electoral college. That's a lot of angry people, many of them experienced activists and political foot soldiers, who have been disengaged by the Millbank machine. All that I have sought to do is act as spokesperson for the disenfranchised majority.

The longer term task is harnessing the potential power of the 80,000, and tens of thousands more across the country, and using it to deliver the killer blow to New Labour. We won't do it through a one-off adventure. Ken himself has rightly told us to stay put and, although the door knockers and envelope stuffers are effectively on strike until May 5th, they aren't piling out the door. Let's hold the line – I don't think that the battle to reclaim the Party is over yet. In fact, it could just be starting.

●Have you picked up on the conflicting signals as to what the Party has in store for anyone who's marked down as disloyal over the Mayor and Assembly? The idea that the greasy-pole merchants who oil the Millbank machine have any concept of loyalty is the funniest thing since Barbara Roche was kebabed by Paxo on *Newsnight*. These people's only loyalty is to themselves – as Mo Mowlam, Harriet Harman, Lord Winston and the other non-people in the New Labour court would secretly testify.

But I can confirm that word has reached me, through the usual diplomatic channels, that although the machine is running scared of a mass purge, there is a small and select hit list of people who they would like to take out. I am pleased to confirm that my name is on the list. I would have bloody well sued if it wasn't. As Billy Bragg used to sing in The Great Leap Forward, "If Millbank's gotta hit list, I wanna be on it."

●Apparently one of the key tests of disloyalty will be the display of a "Vote Ken" poster in your window. I wondered why there was a car permanently parked outside our house with a 30-something blonde woman, with an Irish name and pair of binoculars peering out of the window.

Unfortunately, our little Katie likes sticking things up with sellotape, and we're always keen to encourage her creativity. Looks like the poor little thing might end up with a lifetime ban from the Labour Party before she's even reached her third birthday.

I'm already preparing to mobilise the massed ranks of Sutton SWP behind the "Defend Katie Martin" campaign. Get your placards ready now!

●I've got to dash now because they're under starters orders for the 3:45. Just time to let you know that there's a new arrival on the way. Another addition to the squad is expected to arrive in mid-October or whenever there's a convenient Chelsea fixture which needs to be interfered with. As Joe used to say:
"London calling at the top of the dial.
And after all this – won't you give me a smile?"

Labour Left Briefing

20th Anniversary Dinner

7.30pm Saturday 29th April

Celebrate with **special guests** and the editorial board

Caxton House
129 St Johns Way, London N19

3 course meal: £15.00/£10.00

Tickets from Leonora Lloyd, 4b Byne Road, London SE26 5JE
Tel. 020-8776 5318, email leelloyd@gn.apc.org

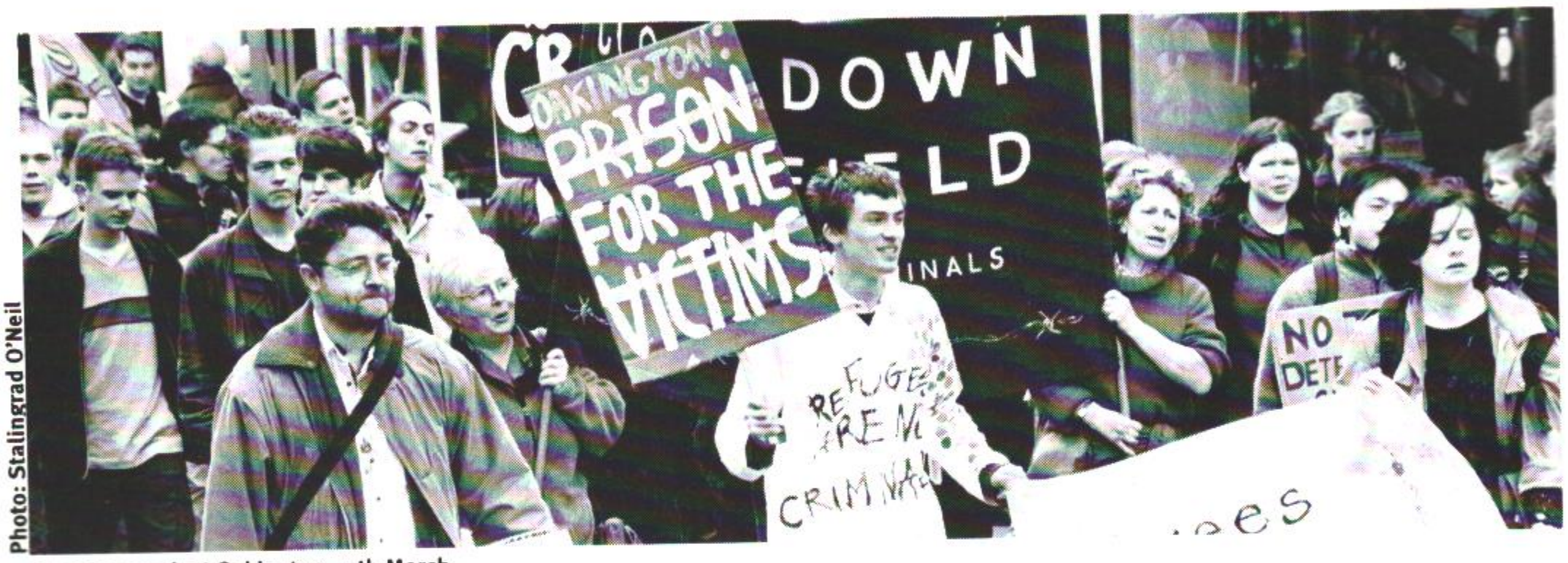


Photo: Stalingrad O'Neil

Marching against Oakington, 11th March.

Refugees – New Labour's scapegoats

Charlie van Gelderen analyses why New Labour has provoked a media furore on asylum seekers.

Over 100 protesters marched through Cambridge city centre on Saturday March 11th to show opposition to the Government's plans to turn the former army barracks at nearby Oakington into a detention centre for 400 asylum seekers. Men, women and children will be imprisoned behind fences and guarded by Group 4, who will run it for private profit.

People from Oxford, London and further joined the demonstration, organised by Cambridgeshire Against Refugee Detention (CARD), to protest that people not suspected of any crimes will be treated as criminals.

It is reminiscent of the detention centres in Northern Ireland, and an outrage against human rights, the like of which the Government is quick to condemn in Iran, Pakistan, etc. The press supports Government plans by generating racist hostility against the refugees, who are portrayed as the white trash of Europe. Eastern Europeans are obviously not the gutter press's only targets, as people from Somalia, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Pakistan all receive their share of race hatred.

People come here not because Britain is the soft touch these papers assert, but because life has become intolerable for them in countries torn by civil war, communal conflict, desperate poverty and/or rampant disease. The statistics fluctuate, depending on the situation in the countries from which the refugees come. In 1990, there were 1,685 from war-torn Angola – last year there were 150. In March 1999, 5,600 people claimed asylum. By April it had gone down to 4,905.

Two decades ago there were 2.5 million refugees in the world. Last year there were 21 million. Kosova alone produced one million – and New Labour played its part in generating that number. Yet the total number of asylum seekers arriving in the UK was only 71,000. Of the 32,000 whose applications have already been considered, 36% were granted refugee status and 11% given exceptional leave to remain.

The Oakington barracks scheme is part of the immigration department's policy to detain more asylum seekers. They cannot claim any benefits, but will have to survive on vouchers worth £36.54 for each adult, plus the £10 cash conceded after a lengthy parliamentary battle.

The latest media crusade targets East European women beggars, with babes in arms, congesting London's tube. This has brought a demand from that doughty defender of civil rights, Ann Widdecombe, that "the asylum seekers should be detained before they go on to the streets to beg." Even the British Transport Police concede that "...it would be reasonable to assume that they (the begging women) consider themselves to be short of money."

The UK receives far fewer asylum applications than most European countries per head of population. Proportionately, Switzerland, Holland, Austria, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Germany and Ireland all receive more applications. Furthermore, in most years since the 1950s, more people have left the UK than have come to live here. The Government's policy does not even make financial sense. According to the Immigration Minister, the cost of imprisoning an asylum seeker is £1,300 per week. Support in the community only costs £140 per week – allowing refugees to work would cost even less.

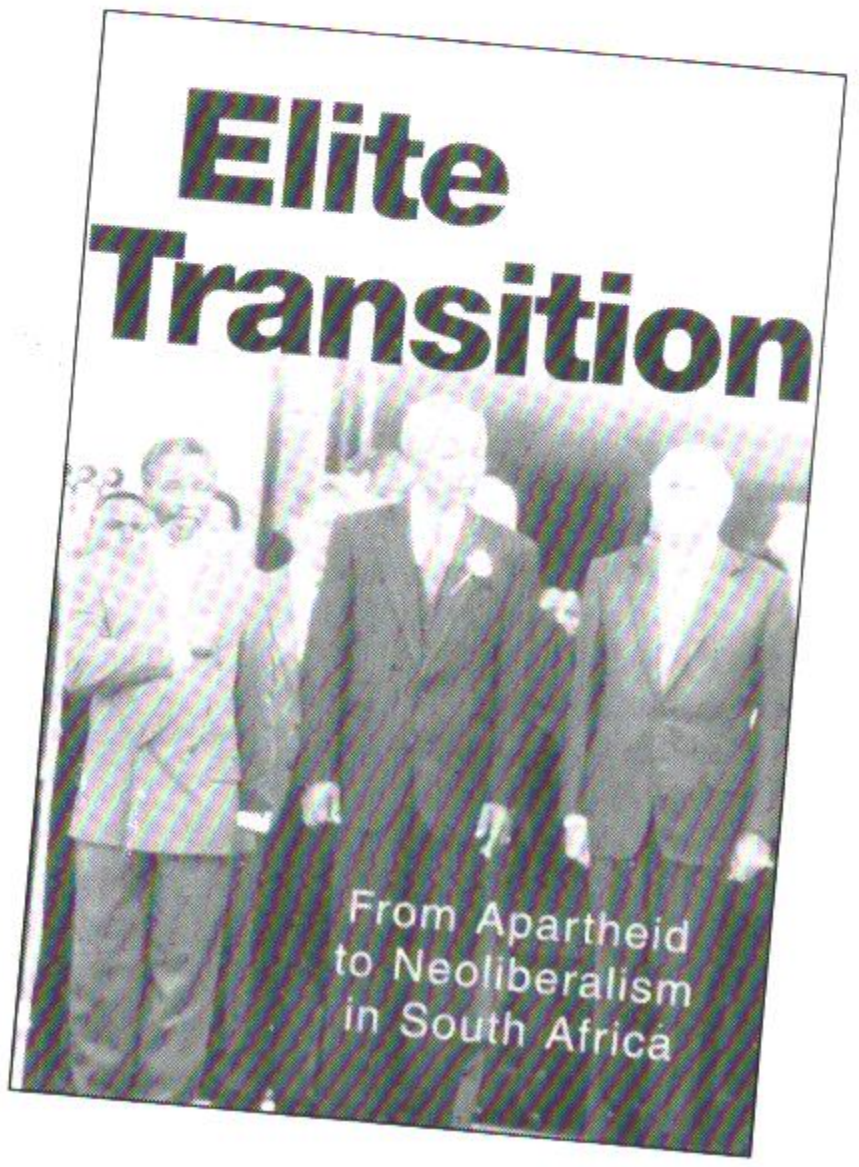
Now this Government, which includes former asylum seekers like Peter Hain, are giving the screw another turn. Firms who have agreed to operate the new voucher scheme have been instructed that no change should be given if goods bought are less than the value of a voucher. The seller, however, will receive the full value of that voucher. New Labour has found another way to pass public subsidy to the private sector.

Women protest

The TUC Women's Conference on 10th March became the first trade union conference to take a stand against the Immigration & Asylum Bill when delegates unanimously agreed a motion from the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy condemning the treatment of asylum seekers coming to the UK. Moving the motion, CSP delegate Lesley Mercer warned that the 1999 Act would lead to "a climate of hate and blame" towards asylum seekers who are already very vulnerable. The conference called for a reversal of the policy of dispersing asylum seekers around the country, an increase in financial support and the abandonment of the voucher system. It also insisted that immigration officers abide by the Gender Guidelines on interviewing female asylum seekers, many of who have been traumatised by experience of rape and violence.

South Africa: what went wrong?

Mike Phipps reviews *Elite Transition: From Apartheid to Neo-liberalism in South Africa*, by Patrick Bond, published by Pluto, price £15.99 pbk.



Why have the aspirations of millions of South Africans for radical change not been met in the six years since an ANC-led government was elected to power? As a former policy adviser to the ANC, Patrick Bond should be well-placed to answer this central question. Unfortunately, by failing to address key flaws in the whole ANC strategy, he provides only part of the answer.

Certainly, there was a campaign of concerted economic and ideological pressure from international lending bodies and big business to sell the attractions of an economy based on competitive exports and the private sector orientation that implied. Bond suggests the priorities should have been redistribution, gearing the economy to more popular consumption, better productive systems in rural areas, a move away from luxury goods and steps to halt capital flight.

But the idea of an inexperienced leadership being blown off course doesn't give the full picture. Bond's thesis is that South Africa's post-apartheid blueprint, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), was never really implemented – indeed, was ignored – by the government. Within weeks of the 1994 election, for example, Housing Minister Joe Slovo announced the government "cannot condone squatting", ignoring the RDP commitment to squatters' rights. Likewise Labour Minister Tito Mboweni wrongly declared the RDP said nothing about nationalisation or the minimum wage.

But as Bond himself concedes, the RDP was strongly influenced by right-wing corporatist ideas on trade, monetary and fiscal policy – including an acceptance of apartheid's foreign debt. Rather than confronting this, the left chose to highlight its "redeeming features": one SACP leader talked of "gradually infusing the RDP with some socialist ideals."

Some hope. The new government's first formal White Paper on the RDP reduced it, in the words of COSATU, the leading union federation, to "no more than a safety net to cushion the impact of job losses and poverty." Even these diluted commitments fell behind schedule. The idea that local authorities would be key institutions for delivering basic services was hampered by the Local Government Transition Act, which had been cobbled together in the closing minutes of the December 1993 constitutional negotiations. This gave such greater voting strength and power of veto to whites that both black electoral turnout and subsequent local authority achievement were poor.

Other policy documents based on the RDP went further, for example by introducing the idea of "buyer affordability" into the provision of basic services such as water.

The results are now evident: the target was to redistribute 30% of land in five years – less than 1% was achieved. Minimum housing standards, subsidised water, publicly owned transport, subsidies for local economic development, nationalisation, the conversion of arms industries – none of this was achieved. All fell to the combined opposition of business, the state bureaucracy and a lack of commitment by ANC leaders.

Housing proved one of the biggest failures, due to the Government's market based approach. More than 650 million rand was paid to financiers and developers for the delivery of goals that were simply not met. Worse, the government disempowered the grassroots by its attack on rent boycotters. The result has been a reproduction – on class more than racial lines – of apartheid-style ghettoes where the new slums were explicitly denied sewage systems, roads or power as a matter of public policy.

Bond tends to blame the global economic framework for some of this, suggesting the ANC drifted with the prevailing tide, the 'Washington consensus' – now discredited in the wake of the South-east Asian meltdown. But this doesn't explain the ANC's "moral surrender" on the decision to repay in full apartheid's $20 billion debt. And, as Bond documents, there was another tide – of grassroots opposition to ANC policies from emergent farmers' organisations over land redistribution, church and welfare groups over child maintenance cuts and above all from the unions over education, privatisation and a host of other issues.

In the face of this evidence, it's hard to accept Bond's conclusion that "crying 'sellout' is disturbingly shallow". Given the overwhelmingly favourable domestic and international conditions, there seems little excuse for the huge gulf between mass expectations and government achievement in post-apartheid South Africa.

Readers' Poll

The shortlist for the Order of the Newt, awarded to those winning the most votes for Ken Livingstone, has been announced.

1. Frank Dobson
From "I will not be standing" to "Go on Make My Day", the choice is yours.

2. Jeremy Paxman
For finding not one, but two Home Office ministers – Paul Boateng and Barbara Roche – with time on their hands to rubbish Ken on *Newsnight* and win him another sackful of votes. How many businesses will pull out of London if Ken wins, Barbara? How many? And which of you were happy to serve under Ken at the GLC? Oh, BOTH of you...

3. Philip Gould
For announcing Dobbo should win votes by shaving his beard off the same week that Keith Flett's Beard Liberation Front gave Dobbo the Beardie of the Year award. For being possibly the flimsiest of flimsy straw graspers in the history of weak wheat products.

4. Margaret McDonagh
For just being Margaret. For promising Downing Street she could deliver the London selection for Dobbo (well, she didn't say at what cost). For getting it so wrong from Uxbridge in the first month of the Government, to Scotland, Wales and the Euro Lists, right through to today.

5. The Voters of Ayr
For giving New Labour a bloody nose just weeks before the mayoralty election.

6. The MSF Official
For emailing a request for "sound" people to get tickets for BBC *Question Time* on the Mayor and "cheer and jeer" in the right places to.....Ken's assistant.

7. Nick Raynsford
For promising in Parliament that Labour's selection would be "one member, one vote".

8. Nick Raynsford again
For issuing a leaflet announcing his mayoral candidacy headed "Time to Get Serious" just four days before he withdrew from the race.

9. Sir Ken Jackson
For his services to trade union democracy. Frank Chapple is alive and well and living at Hayes Court.

10. Richard Balfe MEP
For saying one reason he was voting for Dobbo was because his was the only literature he had received through the post. And for not seeing the irony in this.

Please send in your votes, with reasons, for anyone on the shortlist or who has not yet declared their intention to stand. The deadline for receipt of ballots is 10th April and the winners of first, second and third places will be published in next month's *LLB*. Please mark your envelope "ordinary *LLB* reader", "TU section" (votes only accepted if you consult everyone in your household first), or "member, *LLB* Editorial Board and Cats Collective" (each counted @ 1,000 votes). We're working on the prizes, but tea for two in the Mayor's parlour seems a good one.

PERISCOPE

Hypocrite of the month

Bowing to consumer pressure, the management of the staff cafeteria at **Monsanto**'s UK headquarters have banned genetically modified food from the menu. Monsanto meanwhile continues to foist GM crops on farmers across the developing world – recently it was caught running tests of GM cotton in Zimbabwe, despite a ban by the government.

Classic predictions of our time

After barely three months, BBC political correspondent **Paul Rowley** is already a leading contender as the worst pundit of the year. When asked about the chances of **Ken Livingstone** standing as an independent candidate for London Mayor, Rowley replied "It's about as likely as **Stan Collymore** [notorious striker with Leicester City FC] being made head of Leicestershire Fire Authority."

Welsh wisdom

Alun Michael's words to the Labour Party Conference in September must be coming back to haunt him: "The Assembly is working. It's working well... No hiccups, no mistakes. Just getting down to the business of running Wales. I'm proud that we are doing things differently in Wales." Well, it was different all right.

£2k 4 2k!

Political events – and not just in London – are creating a thirst for information on the left: the ammunition with which to fight for the sort of society and the kind of Party that we want. To do that takes money (yes this is a financial appeal).

But it is also a political appeal. Millbank has an army of press people and the Government has a formidable machine. The mainstream press spends more on booze-ups on one day at party conferences than we spend in a year.

The *LLB* EB is moving towards appointing a new editor (our magazine having been produced for the last few editions by the efforts of a handful of hard pressed individuals) and to put the resources in place to make that appointment financially secure and to provide the cash for the tasks that may arise in the months ahead.

A comprehensive fundraising strategy will take time to generate regular income, which is why we are starting off with 2k 4 2000. The object is straightforward: to put in place by May Day an additional income or additional promises of £2,000 for this year. Cheques should be made payable to *Labour Left Briefing* and sent to PO Box 2378, London E5 9QU.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

"I think Ken will stand and I think he'll win."

Former Cabinet Minister **Frank Field**, showing unusual astuteness, GMTV, February 2000.

"The Liberal, Susan Kramer, was nice, but kept saying: 'I'm a banker,' as though it were a good thing."

Jeremy Hardy, *Guardian*, February 2000.

"Despite polls placing his support at 13%, compared with Ken's 68%, Dobson still says 'I'm going to win outright, and won't need second preference votes.' He must think that, because he won the last ballot with less than a quarter of the votes, the same rules will apply in this one."

Mark Steel, *Independent*, March 2000.

"Another strange tactic employed by the Dobson camp is to wheel out Neil Kinnock as a supporter. If you felt you wanted advice on winning elections, would the name 'Neil Kinnock' really be the first to spring to mind? Maybe this is an act of kindness on the part of the Dobson team, who felt that Neil would feel nostalgically at home in a campaign 55% behind in the polls."

Mark Steel, *Independent*, March 2000

"The leaders of the London RMT are a collection of Trots."

Frank Dobson doing his bit for the Labour-union link, press conference, March 2000.

"Unwittingly Mrs Thatcher did Labour a favour when she abolished the GLC. Not long before this happened, I visited County Hall ... Believe me, I was taken aback by the number of scruffs – I use the term advisedly – being given the run of its hallowed halls."

Eddie McDonnell, *Co-op News*, February 2000.

Yep, that was us, but hardly a reason for abolition, Eddie.

Correspondence

Please keep your letters short and send them to *Labour Left Briefing*, PO Box 2378, London E5 9QU.

For Blair and his New Labour coterie the issues at the centre of Ken Livingstone's attempt to become Labour's candidate for Mayor of London – keeping public services under public ownership and labour movement democracy – are something they would rather see expunged from the Party all together.

They and their tame national union officials suffered a major defeat in the selection battle, although not as serious as if Ken had won through against the odds. The issues involved are so important that the Blairites are prepared to risk losing the Mayor and GLA elections and possibly a lot more. They would rather Livingstone won as an independent than concede defeat within the Party. That's why we have to continue to call on Dobson to stand down in favour of Ken and for Ken's reinstatement.

However, the defeat inflicted on New Labour in the ballot will be eroded by time and the ruthlessness of the New Labour machine if the left in the unions and Party do not attempt to maintain the momentum and build on it.

There are simple answers to this situation. One is to assume that the battle is already won, that things will simply "work their way through" to victories at Conference, etc. The other is to walk away from the battle in the Labour Party assuming that unions will follow and that a chapter in the development of the British labour movement (ie, the Labour Party) is closed.

Unfortunately, in this case the simple answers are wrong. Without positive initiatives from the left the Blairites and union leaders will reassert their control in the Party and among their unruly members. But walking away will have the same effect, even if the left outside the Labour Party is stronger. At most a few branches of a few unions would consistently support that far left, while the national officials had even freer rein to give Blair their support.

Those who want to capitalise on the ballot results and build a real fightback need to discuss urgently what we can do assert rank and file control over the labour movement and its policies.

Pete Firmin,
Brent East CLP

All socialists and democrats in the Labour Party should welcome Ken Livingstone's decision to stand as an independent in the London mayorality election. Frank Dobson did not win the contest for Labour's candidate – the figures show that Livingstone was the clear winner. Dobson has been appointed by a small and disproportionate elective clique above the wishes of 75% of the individual electors.

London Labour members should do all they can – openly and unashamedly for preference, anonymously or pseudonymously if necessary – to promote Livingstone's candidature while at the same time staying within the Party and fighting what remains of the socialist corner.

If we organise well we can deliver a much-needed bloody nose to the metropolitan elite on their home turf and in their chosen showpiece contest.

Paul Daintry
Chingford and Woodford Green CLP

In last month's *LLB* Hugh Kerr wrote an account of the progress of the Scottish Socialist Party. In my opinion, the greatest problem with the SSP's politics is its attitude to the Labour Party and consequently the trade unions. For example, in a report of the recent SSP national conference of trade unionists in 11th February's *Action For Solidarity* (if you can call 30 people national – it is worth comparing this to the numbers that attended Ken Livingstone's recent meetings in London when considering leaving the Labour Party) – the SSP's industrial organiser mapped out "a strategy for union disaffiliation from the Labour Party." Later this argument against campaigning for the unions to struggle against Blairism inside the Party was taken to its logical conclusion: "Given that union bureaucrats could not be made to fight, why bother remaining in the unions at all? Would it not be necessary..," suggested some speakers from the floor, to break away from the bureaucratised unions and create new ones?"

This kind of politics is not realistic in all of Scotland let alone elsewhere. Comrade Kerr flags up the Socialist Alliances as a force for progress. Whilst they may be able in certain places to win the odd local government seat as a result of a very low turn-out or as a by-product of a struggle of socialists inside the Labour Party, Welsh (and other) comrades (who have achieved much in the Welsh Labour Party recently and can achieve more – see Ceri Evans in last month's *LLB*) can make what they will out of the following result in the Aberavon constituency. Here the Socialist Alliance candidate polled below Captain Beany, a man who gets off by lying in a bath of cold baked beans! So I suggest that we ignore Hugh's advice and keep the "Labour" in *LLB*!

Matthew Willgress,
Peterborough CLP.

I'm currently battling with Millbank over the new rule that if you are an elected member of the Labour Party you must pay your subscription by direct debit.

Apparently, I am now someone who is the great unwashed, a credit leper, socially excluded and therefore supposed to be helped by the Labour Party, ie, I cannot get a bank account (due to a default registered against me in my student/severe illness/redundancy from job era). I cannot get a loan. I cannot get a mortgage. It's a pain but there was nothing I could do about it. *C'est la vie*. I work round it.

But I am now told that I cannot be an elected member unless paying by DD (passed at last years Conference?). If I got elected, say, at the next council elections, or if by some miracle I became an MP in 2001 (I am on the parliamentary panel), what would they do? Throw me out of the Party for not paying by DD? No doubt if I was an MP a bank would suddenly love me, but not if I'm a lowly councillor.

Do other people have views on this? Do you know of other members in a similar position?

Lynn Wyeth
Leicester South CLP

Geoff Martin quite rightly expressed due indignation at The Clash being placed behind the Stranglers in Channel Four's Punk Top Ten (*LLB*, March). But, Geoff, your dismissal of the purveyors of such classics as "Something better change" as "sexist old farts" is completely over the top. Ken Livingstone himself was a strong supporter of "the men in black" and he understood that "Peaches", far from being sexist, was in fact a critical self-effacing song about stereotypical male attitudes to women.

John Perry, "hanging around" in Battersea and Wandsworth

I was about to let my subscription to *LLB* lapse, when I received the new edition with its 20th anniversary special supplement. It is good to see you haven't lost your political commitment to fighting not just against capitalism, but for socialism. My subscription form will be in the post tomorrow.

Alexander Ismail,
Oxford



THE LIZ DAVIES COLUMN

●Ken Livingstone's independent candidature should be no surprise to anyone. It was New Labour, not Ken, who engineered the current situation. London Labour Party members are now in the same impossible position as Party members in Falkirk West or in Wales – saddled with a candidate who does not command the support or respect of the majority of Labour voters.

New Labour needs to learn some lessons, and fast. Where there has been an undignified and undemocratic fix in the selection contest, Party activists go on strike and refuse to work, and Labour voters stay at home or cast their vote for other parties.

Ken Livingstone commands the support of a majority of Labour Party members, a majority of Labour voters and the majority of Londoners. By all accounts, he will win on 4th May. It is still not too late for Frank Dobson to accept that Londoners want Ken as Mayor – and would prefer Ken to be a Labour Mayor – and to step down.

●Having been caught out in a flagrant fix, New Labour is icing a very unsavoury cake by running a reactionary scare campaign in London. Dobson emphasises the fear of crime that restricts many of us. But he fails to mention the other side of the coin: the poverty and social divisions that give rise to crime, and the police racism towards both the victims of crime and those whom the police stereotype as possible villains. Worse yet, Dobson tries to pry the voters away from Livingstone by painting him as "soft on criminals" and playing on fears and divisions. The attack on Romanian asylum-seekers begging in London made by an illiberal judge gave the Tory tabloids a pretext to whip up a campaign of bigotry and hate, and New Labour instantly followed suit with a "zero tolerance" initiative on beggars. I was shocked by the argument made by Paul Boateng, whose family sought safe haven here from Ghana when he was a child, that asylum-seekers who beg are not part of "our culture".

When I was a child, it was rare to see beggars on the street – and when they did appear, the general response was one of pity, not fear. But during the 1980s beggars did indeed become part of our culture. They were one of the most visible symptoms of the destructiveness of the Thatcher years. As welfare benefits were cut, as access to social housing decreased, as mass unemployment became a fixture of our economy, and as people were encouraged to take on debts they could not afford, the streets of London and other cities filled up with people for whom Thatcher's dream had gone wrong. In this regard, as in so many others, New Labour has continued Thatcherite policies.

The economics are simple. If people are provided with vouchers at less than income support levels, if they are denied the chance to work, if their housing is second-rate and insecure, some will always be desperate enough to beg. In my book, begging is such a humiliating and painful experience that anyone who begs must be desperate. It may be that behind some of the beggars are parasitic criminal operators. The answer to that is to track down the pimps, not imprison the beggars. And the humane and effective response to begging is to change the conditions that give rise to it. We have to provide a safe haven to asylum seekers, to treat them as we treat any other member of our population, and to allow them the same access to benefits as the rest of us.

●Congratulations to those 29 Labour MPs who voted against the restrictions on trial by jury. But Jack Straw appears to have learnt nothing from his defeat in the Lords. He remains insistent that the right to choose trial by jury must go, despite media opinion, legal opinion, and the growing concerns of the public. The Bill has been modified slightly following defeat in the Lords. The effect of a criminal conviction on a defendant's reputation will no longer be relevant to the magistrates' decision as to whether or not he or she should receive a jury trial. This is not nearly good enough. The impact will be to ensure that even fewer people will receive the privilege of a jury trial. *New Law Journal* described the revised bill as even "meaner" than the original version. I hope Labour MPs will wake up for the third reading and repel this assault on our basic civil rights.

Centre Left Grassroots Alliance NEC slate













The annual NEC elections are upon us. Please make every effort to ensure a massive vote for all the Grassroots Alliance candidates: Raghib Ahsan, Ann Black, Rosina McCrae, Mark Seddon, Christine Shawcroft and Pete Willsman. Given recent events, I am confident they will build on the excellent results we achieved in the last two years.

Inside: Christine Shawcroft writes, page 7.

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