LABOUR LEFT

Briefing

DECEMBER 2000 • £1 WAGED • 50p UNWAGED



RAIL SAFETY
New Labour won't listen

HEALTH
Private sector bonanza

HACKNEY
Diane Abbott MP

LABOUR PARTY
London Conference: inside story

ANTI-RACISM
Scrap the vouchers

TURKEY
End prison torture

One amazing year...

LABOUR LEFT Briefing

Po Box 2378, London, E5 9QU
Telephone: 020 8985 6597
Fax: 020 8985 6785
Email: briefing@gn.apc.org

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

Editorial Board
Graham Bash, Padma Bhatt, Ramen Bhattacharyya, Jacqui Brown, Graham Copp, Mike Cowley, Tony Dale, Liz Davies, Jenny Fisher, Colin Hall, Des Kirkland, Chris Knight, Liz Knight, Leonora Lloyd (Co-Chair), Sue Lukes, Dorothy Macedo (Co-Chair), Ian Malcolm-Walker, Anna Monks, Lee Montgomerie, Steve Myers, Mike Phipps, Bob Pitt, Jon Rogers, Christine Shawcroft, Dave Statham, John Stewart, Eddie Tucker, Steve Wilkinson, Matthew Willgress.

Production Team
Graham Bash, Gary Drostle, Jenny Fisher, Colin Hall, Dave Lewney, Leonora Lloyd, Dorothy Macedo, Mike Phipps, David Pope, Matthew Willgress.

The *LLB* website has been revamped and will be up soon – www.briefing.co.uk . Meanwhile, visit the *LLB* anniversary site – http://members.xoom.com/domain777/index.html

Advertising rates:
Display: full page £175, half-page £100, one third page £75, one sixth page £45, one twelfth page £25.
Lineage: £4.50 per single col cm.

■ The copy deadline for the next issue of *LLB* is Monday 15th January.



December 2000

Cartoon: DROS

AGENDA

4 - 7 News & Views
GLA; transport; housing; NUS march for grants not fees: Student CND; NHS update

8 - 9 Fighting Racism
Satpal Ram; Voucher scheme; Student Assembly Against Racism

10 - 15 Labour Party
Young Labour; GLLP report; Women's Agenda; Ann Black on *21st century party* round two; the Alan Simpson Column

16 - 17 Hackney Council cuts;
Fighting privatisation; Diane Abbott MP

18 - 21 Trade unions
Biwater; MSF; Glenn Kelly ; the Geoff Martin Column

22 - 28 International
US elections – Greg Palast; Liz Davies column; Turkey; Yugoslavia; Middle East; Nice; GATS

29 - 32 Regulars
Reviews; Correspondence; the Christine Shawcroft column

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

Annual subscription (10 issues): £15 ordinary, £20 supporting sub, £30 overseas.
Cheques payable to *Labour Left Briefing*.

Name _____

Address _____

_____ Tel/Fax/Email _____

Donation _____ Total _____

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

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

EDITORIAL

When will they ever learn?

There's nothing like the sight of a General Election on the horizon to concentrate the mind. Now's the time for the Government to trumpet its achievements to Party members and the electorate, before we all go out campaigning and voting again. Now's the time to work up the new manifesto with a series of attractive, socialist policies to inspire us all. And yes, there's a pig flying past the window.

The sorry story of rail transport is a good illustration of just how wrong New Labour's priorities have been. The Hatfield derailment demonstrated once again that the desire for private profit cannot be squared with the need for public safety. There is now widespread anger at the Government for failing to move on from the situation exposed by the Paddington disaster and the Southall Rail Disaster Enquiry.



Instead, there has been an increased subsidy to Railtrack, determined opposition to increasing the public sector stake in the rail network – and a stiff talking to for Railtrack, with a demand that they mend their ways. There is worse to come. Many, including former Transport Minister Gavin Strang, have condemned the proposed partial privatisation of Air Traffic Control for having the potential to create a "Railtrack of the Skies".

The preparations for the Public Private Partnership (PPP) for London Underground have already seen a "deterioration in fire safety" according to the Tube's Chief Engineer. Clutching at straws, John Prescott has argued that the PPP would "help reverse the increase in serious injuries that we have seen on the Tube over the last ten years". Has this man learned nothing from the experience of rail privatisation – a history of fragmentation of the rail industry, cutbacks in maintenance, investment, workers and equipment, all of which have led to less, not more, safety? And the figures from New York, where the Kiley/Livingstone public sector option of a public bond issue was used, show a decline in the number of serious accidents on the subway system – down from 4,480 in 1995 to 3,722 in 1999.

After all the chaos on the railway network, New Labour still refuses to listen to the views of the rail unions and indeed the majority of the population on this issue. Labour Party Conference calls for Automatic Train Protection – New Labour isn't moved. Greater London Labour Party Conference votes four to one against the PPP: New Labour says it makes no difference.

The reason New Labour is not listening is because these facts do not fit in with its own slavish devotion to the market. As world economic growth slows next year, the UK service-based economy will start to struggle, and New Labour will find the market is a cruel mistress. The Government is willing to loosen the purse strings in the run-up to the General Election, but a short-term cash giveaway will not retain the loyalty of an electorate which hoped for something more substantial and long-term.

Even the *Evening Standard* is calling for PPP to be abandoned and Labour Party NEC member Vernon Hince has called for the renationalisation of the railways – but, for New Labour, public ownership is not even on the agenda. If the electorate is ready to agree that transport can be run better under public control, what about water, coal or the other industries privatised by the Tories? New Labour may be the last to recognise it, but Clause IV was right after all!

People's Question Time hits town

RMT member Stuart Watkin, Brent East CLP, watched Ken meet the people: On 24th October, 2,000 people gathered in Westminster Central hall for a Greater London Assembly (GLA) event advertised as the "people's question time" with Mayor Livingstone and all bar one of the GLA's 25 members. The event was billed as Londoners' opportunity to hold Ken and the GLA to account, and with transport first on the agenda the temperature quickly became heated.

Following questions from the floor by members of the RMT, Ken reaffirmed his total opposition to part-privatisation of the Tube. This was met by rapturous applause from the audience. However, when Trevor Phillips (Chair of the London Assembly) was taken to task, he met a less welcoming reception. Challenged by Brian Munro (RMT, Bakerloo branch) as to whether he and the Labour Group supported Ken's position on the Tube, Phillips hummed and hawed, tried to pass the question over, hawed and hummed some more... and announced that he still supported privatisation. This went down like a lead balloon with the audience and Phillips attracted a sustained battery of criticism.

It is always enjoyable to see nonentities like Phillips get a hard time, but there are other reasons why socialists in the Labour Party should join in with this kind of event, even if it's not a formal labour movement meeting. Questions came genuinely from the floor rather than from the primed wannabes that we continually hear at Labour Party rallies and conferences. Also, with Ken out of the Party, members do not have any internal forum to hold him to account.

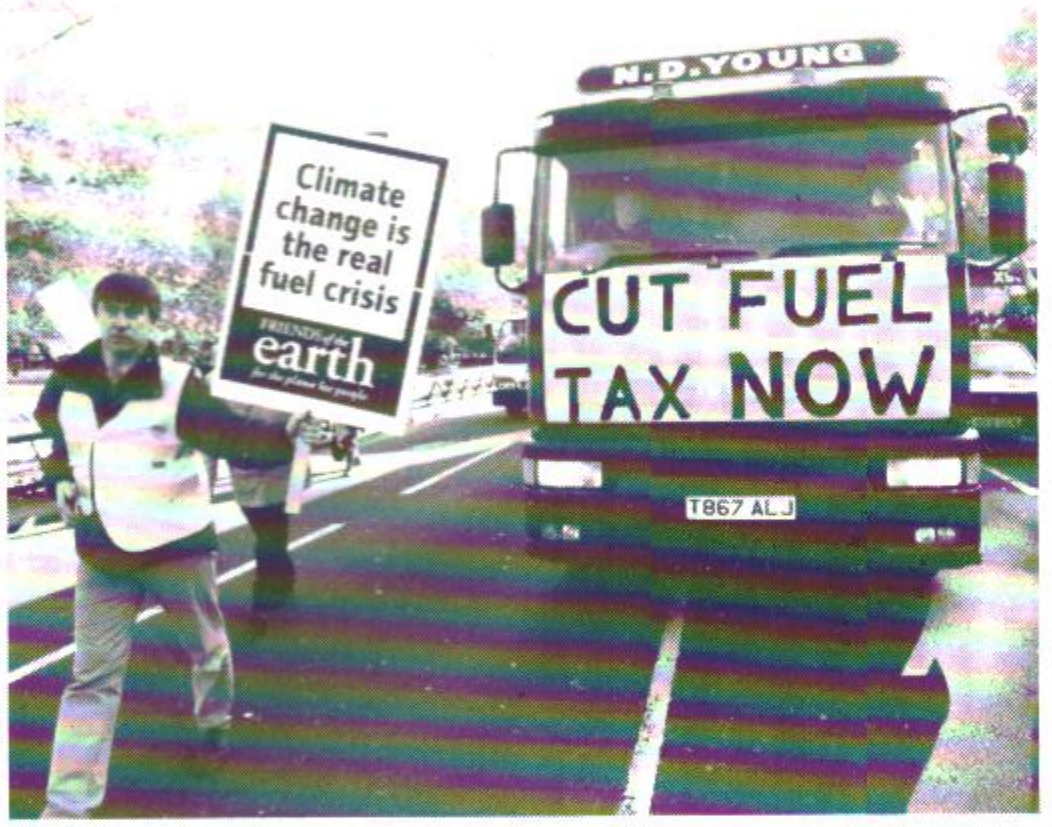


Photo: Paul Mattsson

Friends of the Earth campaigners follow the November fuel protests convoy: two approaches to transport strategy reflected in the Labour Party.

Ken gets into gear

Labour Party National Policy Forum member Matthew Willgress surveys Livingstone's plans for transport in London.

Ken Livingstone has unveiled his draft transport strategy for London. The document will go to the Assembly for consultation before a draft strategy is published for public consultation. A final version will then appear in summer 2001.

Explaining the reasoning behind his plans Ken said: "The only viable strategy, from both a financial and an environmental point of view, is one where passenger transport in central London must primarily be served by public transport, while recognising that the car will remain the primary means of transport in outer London, supplemented by improved public transport. Public transport must be dramatically improved and traffic congestion reduced in central London. This will require the strong and integrated series of measures set out in this strategy. What we are committed to now is basically doubling the rate of investment in our transport system." Spending is to rise to £3.2 billion over the next three years (compared with £1.5bn over the last three).

Proposals contained in the strategy are based around attempting to increase the use of public transport while also aiming for increased efficiency and safety. For the buses, new contracts are proposed to achieve a better service, with more off peak and night bus services. The Mayor is also committed to more conductors and freezing fares, with the introduction of a 70p flat rate charge in 2002 in order to make bus travel more appealing.

To improve the environment people travel in, the strategy plans to create designated areas with 20mph speed limits and argues for the development of a chain of pedestrian routes and cycle lanes.

Ken has made clear that the crisis on the rail network has reinforced his opposition to the break-up of the Tube: "The Government should reconsider its proposal to break up the Underground in the light of what has happened on the railways. The safety risks of fragmenting management control of the Tube are terrifying."

The key to this strategy's success therefore is that the Government ditches its Public Private Partnership (PPP) for the Tube. For example, PPP would scupper the plan to end real term increases in Underground fares. It makes a mockery of devolution that the 30 year PPP contracts will be negotiated by the current management with the GLA having no say.

The rail unions back this assessment. Tony West (ASLEF) recently said, "Control should be with the Mayor. I fervently believe Ken and his commissioner will do an excellent job." John Prescott, however, has been less charitable, saying "commercial information will not be made available to Ken or any guy he brings over from America".

New Labour's on the wrong lines

A Connex driver explains why renationalisation is the only answer for the railways.

October's train derailment at Hatfield on the east coast main line, and the chaos in the rail industry since, have made the failure of rail privatisation public and undeniable.

The accident was caused by the shattering of a rail which was known to be suffering from a defect technically known as "gauge corner cracking". Railtrack has admitted responsibility, but they have not yet answered two vital questions. First: why was the rail not due to be replaced until this November, when Balfour Beatty (who maintain the track on the east coast main line) told Railtrack about the track defect last January? Did they really think that "patch and mend" would keep the track safe all that time? Second: why did they not impose a speed restriction on that section of track, which could have prevented the accident?

Since the crash, the rail network has been severely disrupted by over 600 speed restrictions, often severe and for long distances, where similar problems with rails have been found or suspected. One rail expert, Christian Wolmar, calls this the "the most serious setback for the railways since World War II."

Railtrack has been responsible for a deterioration in the condition of Britain's railway infrastructure. A good measure of track quality is the number of broken rails across the network. In 1994/95 (at privatisation) this was 656. This rose to 739 in 1996; 800 in 1997; and 998 in 1998 – before levelling off at 949 for March 1999 to March 2000. Independent consultants, Booz-Allen, reported last year that the condition of the rail infrastructure (track, signalling, etc.) had grown worse since privatisation, and the Health and Safety Executive had threatened enforcement action against Railtrack over the number of broken rails.

The reason for this deterioration is that Railtrack owns the track, but contracts out the maintenance and renewal (usually to engineering companies such as Balfour Beatty). Being in a monopoly position, Railtrack can force the contractors to undercut each other in order to win the contracts. The main way in which Railtrack has made its profits of over £1 million per day has been through cutting back on the cost of maintenance and investment. In turn, the contractors want to make their cut and do so by cutting back on workers and equipment, and by using sub-contractors in turn. The number of track workers has been cut by half in ten years, track inspections are less frequent, and track replacement has been cut – all of which leads to a less safe railway.

The fragmentation of the industry after privatisation, with over 150 companies involved now, has led to a blame culture in which the different companies fall out when things go wrong. After GNER's train derailed at Hatfield, company boss James Sherwood blamed Railtrack (rightly and pithily) for the hundreds of speed restrictions now in place. He said that "either Railtrack allowed the entire network to deteriorate to an unacceptable level or they have over-reacted to the accident," and suggested that Railtrack could be in breach of its legal obligation to run a safe and reliable rail network. After the implicit criticism of Railtrack in Balfour Beatty's statement that the defect at Hatfield was identified in January, leaks appeared in the press of letters Railtrack had sent to Balfour Beatty severely criticising them for "appalling" standards of work at Leeds and other locations on the east coast main line.

With fragmentation comes the system of penalties, whereby Railtrack pays the train operating companies (such as GNER) for delays they cause, and vice versa – which discourages Railtrack from imposing speed restrictions.

Rail unions and campaigners for a publicly owned railway have been making these points for a long time now. Since Hatfield, there has been a change in the nature of the debate over rail privatisation. Railtrack, some other rail companies, those rail experts who previously defended privatisation and even Tories such as Bernard Jenkin, the Shadow Minister for transport, are now on the defensive and have accepted some of these arguments. Even those who maintain that privatisation can work now accept that some form of "restructuring" of the industry is needed. It is sad that it has taken four (more) deaths to shift them this far, and we hope that argument and campaigning – rather than more accidents – will shift the debate further so that the case for renationalisation becomes unstoppable.

Virtually the only defender of a privatised rail industry now is the New Labour Government. Its response to the post-Hatfield disruption has been to promise more subsidy to the rail industry. Prescott, who always opposed renationalising Railtrack on the grounds that it would cost about £4 billion, has now promised an extra £26 billion over ten years for the rail industry – and not a squeak from Blunkett about arithmetic standards falling in the Cabinet.

After years of underfunding, any new money is welcome – but where will this money go? Railtrack recently announced a 5% rise in dividends to shareholders on the expectation of bigger profits to come.

Now is the time to step up the campaigns for a publicly-owned, publicly accountable rail system – and to do this inside the labour movement as well as outside.

Labour Left Briefing AGM

The left, the General Election and beyond

Speakers: John McDonnell, Jeremy Corbyn, Liz Davies, Christine Shawcroft, Geoff Martin

The Mandela Theatre,
Westminster Kingsway College,
Regents Park Centre,
Longford Street, London NW1
(nearest tubes Warren Street, Great Portland Street)

Saturday November 25th, 10.30-5pm

Admission £3/£2(free to comrades from outside London)

To book creche ring the *LLB* office on 020 8985 6597

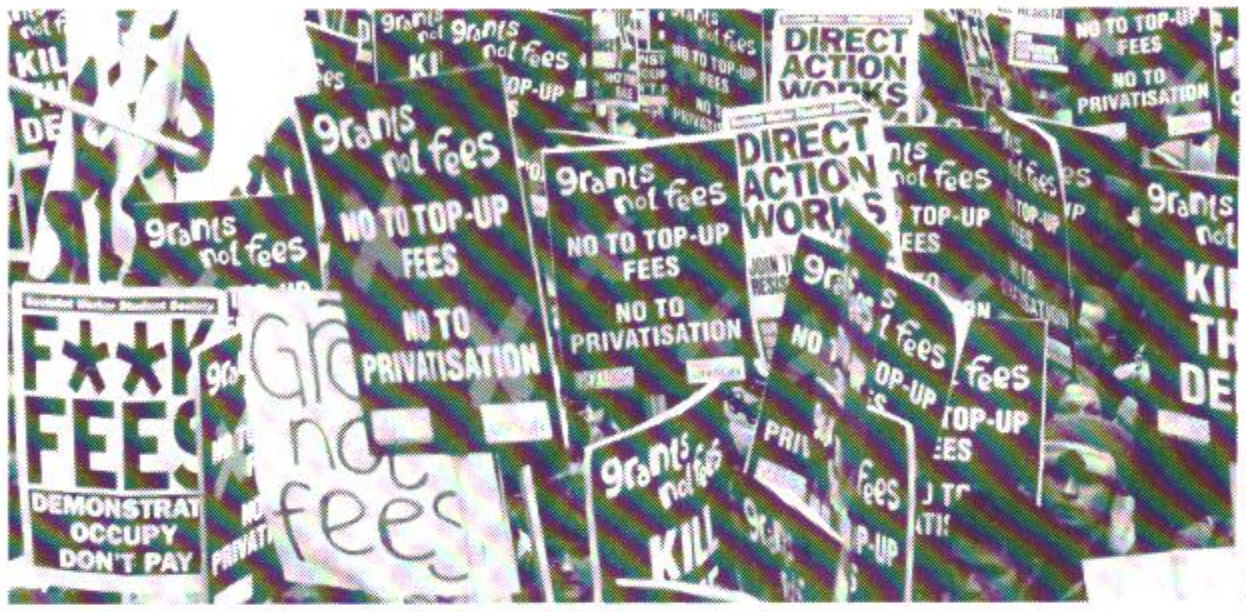
Raise the roof!

Jacqui Brown, UNISON housing association branch, reports: "Build for a mass lobby of Parliament on 24th January." That was the message from George Brumwell, General Secretary of building workers union UCATT to the Defend Council Housing conference in Manchester on 21st October. As well as mobilising his own members, Brumwell called on other unions to throw their weight behind the lobby and pledged financial support for the rally in Central Hall, Westminster. His call to go on the offensive to defend good public housing was welcomed by representatives of 82 tenant groups, trade unions and anti-privatisation campaigns.

Decent, affordable, secure and accountable council housing was once a core principle of the welfare state, but now seems to be considered by the Government as an unaffordable liability. Conditions for housing workers are getting worse, with job losses, cuts in pay and conditions, and apprenticeships and proper training a thing of the past.

With the transfer of Birmingham's housing looking increasingly doubtful, tenants in Glasgow organising a major demonstration on 2nd December, and more unions committing themselves to opposition, confidence is growing. Many more councils are facing organised opposition from campaigns of tenants supported by council trade unions. Piers Corbyn from Southwark, where a wholesale transfer is being resisted, suggested it was time to turn the Government's attack on housing rights on its head. "If the Government really wants to offer people real housing choice, they should offer private tenants the opportunity to become council tenants."

It's nonsense to say the Government can't afford council housing. Millions of council tenants and trade unionists could be organised into as potent a force as the pensioners' movement: now is the time to organise this force, as we head towards the General Election.



NUS "grants, not fees" demo.

Photo: Molly Cooper

Ken says ditch the fees

Labour Student Policy Forum member Matthew McGregor reports on the NUS demo.

Government policy is failing students. Numbers are rising, but access is narrowing, hardship is increasing and the door has been opened for elitist university chiefs to adopt top up fees. This was the message of the 15,000 students from all over the country who marched through London on 15th November to demonstrate for "Grants Not Fees".

This was the first year that NUS has sponsored a demonstration under the banner of "Grants Not Fees", and only happened after intense pressure from the grassroots. It came as students attempted to step up the campaign against top-up fees – if universities can charge the market price for degrees, higher education is effectively privatised.

The day was a great success. The rally in Kennington Park was addressed by Paul Mackney, General Secretary of NATFHE, Owain James, NUS president, and by Mayor of London Ken Livingstone, who told students that they needed to make sure MPs knew that it is essential that grants are reintroduced and that NUS needed to acknowledge their failure to stop the introduction of fees. Students should raise this campaign within the Labour Party and prepare for the debate at NUS conference.

Student CND relaunched

Neil Foster, Sheffield Labour Club, reports: **Student CND was relaunched at Sheffield University on 21st October. 70 student activists from all over the country, but especially from Sheffield, started on a high note with a message of support from NUS president Owain James.**

Speakers including Dave Knight, Helen John (one of the founders of the Greenham Common Peace Camp) and Dick Withecombe (Committee for Peace in the Balkans). Workshops discussions covered the National Missile Defence system, the role of women in the peace movement and the international, domestic and environmental impact of nuclear weapons.

Chair of CND Dave Knight warned that Yorkshire has a central role in maintaining the National Missile Defence Shield (NMD) – which offers no protection and contravenes the crucial 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty – because of US military sites at Fylingdales and Menwith Hill.

Jeremy Corbyn MP referred to the report of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee on NMD, which expressed "anxiety about the potentially destabilising impact of the USA's plans to deploy a system of national missile defence." He added that the United Nations' student conference condemned NMD and that Secretary General Kofi Annan has said that "it could well lead to a new arms race." Corbyn urged the British Government to take a lead in nuclear disarmament and argued that the best way of doing this would be to join other countries in refusing to participate in the United States' aggressive plans.

●Contact: studentcnd@yahoo.com for more details.

Thoroughly Modern Millie goes private

John Lister
London Health Emergency

New details of the controversial plans drawn up during the summer by Health Secretary Alan Milburn reveal a Labour Government eagerly shovelling billions from the NHS into the coffers of the private sector, while morale among health workers hits rock bottom.

Labour backbenchers and Health Committee chair David Hinchcliff have become increasingly uneasy over the way the extra NHS cash is being spent, and the de facto privatisation of buildings and areas of care.

A new raft of 16 privately-financed (PFI) hospital building schemes, just announced, will push the total value of hospitals to be rented by the NHS to a staggering £3.9 billion, with more still to come. Milburn has already invited bids for 18 more new hospital projects, worth another £2.3 billion.

PFI deals lumber local NHS Trusts with an obligation to pay hefty rents and service charges – guaranteeing profits to the private sector – for the next 30 years, while liquidating existing NHS land and property assets.

This bonanza for private sector profiteers follows hard on the heels of Milburn's controversial "Concordat" with the private medical industry: NHS Trusts which run out of beds to treat waiting list patients will now be expected to fork out the cash to send them for treatment in nearby private hospitals. (Obviously this policy will predominantly apply to the South East, where most private hospitals are.)

This will certainly put a smile on the face of Britain's desperately unpopular and struggling private sector. Even after 21 years of Thatcherite policies have squeezed the NHS and forced up waiting lists, most private hospitals have been jogging along barely half full, for lack of sufficient rich and stupid patients: Milburn's cash injection is just what they wanted.

No estimates have been published on how much this half-baked scheme could cost the NHS, but there is no doubt that it is a sure-fire "lose-lose" situation for hard-pressed hospital chiefs. Not only will the Trusts under the greatest pressure be obliged to find cash from their budgets to line the pockets of the private operators, but they will also see vital staff lured away from front-line jobs in the NHS to do the work.

Milburn even boasted that "the doctors will be NHS doctors, and by and large the nurses will be NHS nurses." They certainly will: the private sector trains no staff at all, but never scruples to poach nursing and medical staff trained by and for the NHS.

Another aspect of the "Concordat" is supposed to be increased use of private nursing homes for older patients, to relieve pressure on NHS beds across the winter period. Unfortunately for Milburn this coincides with the first signs of a substantial run-down in nursing home places, as profit-hungry proprietors shut up shop, arguing that they are not paid enough by social services and health authorities. The result is likely to be more hospital beds "blocked", and more queues on trolleys.

As the winter begins, a BBC survey has found that around a third of NHS Trusts are expecting to cut or cancel waiting list treatment. Unusually, this time around the main problem is not money, but problems spending the £630m allocated to "winter pressures" after Gordon Brown's budget.

More staff are needed, but pitiful rates of pay have made it increasingly difficult to recruit more nurses. Tony Blair's latest (RCN-sponsored) cheapskate wheeze – a revamped NHS nurse "bank", and the promise of subsidised housing or a feeble £600 a year hand-out to nurses in London and high-cost areas – will be seen as a patronising irrelevance by NHS nurses. They don't want tied cottages: they just want a wage big enough to live on!

Just a few months ago Jack Straw unveiled a massive £6,000 a year accommodation allowance for police officers in London. It doesn't take a genius to work out which section of workers New

●Students at St Bartholmew's School of Nursing and Midwifery are being evicted from their hospital accommodation when the building closes on 31st March 2001. A small amount of alternative accommodation is being offered at a rent of £320 per month. Student bursaries are £470 per month.
Student nurses work on the wards and in college for 37.5 hours per week. Their pay is equivalent to £2.60 per hour – below the minimum wage. Many students have to take on additional part-time work, though the college discourages this.
●For further information contact Alice Dawney, UNISON representative, on tel. 020-7535 2100, email standrews_defence@yahoo.co.uk

Below: protesting student nurses sleep outside the Department of Health, 15th November.

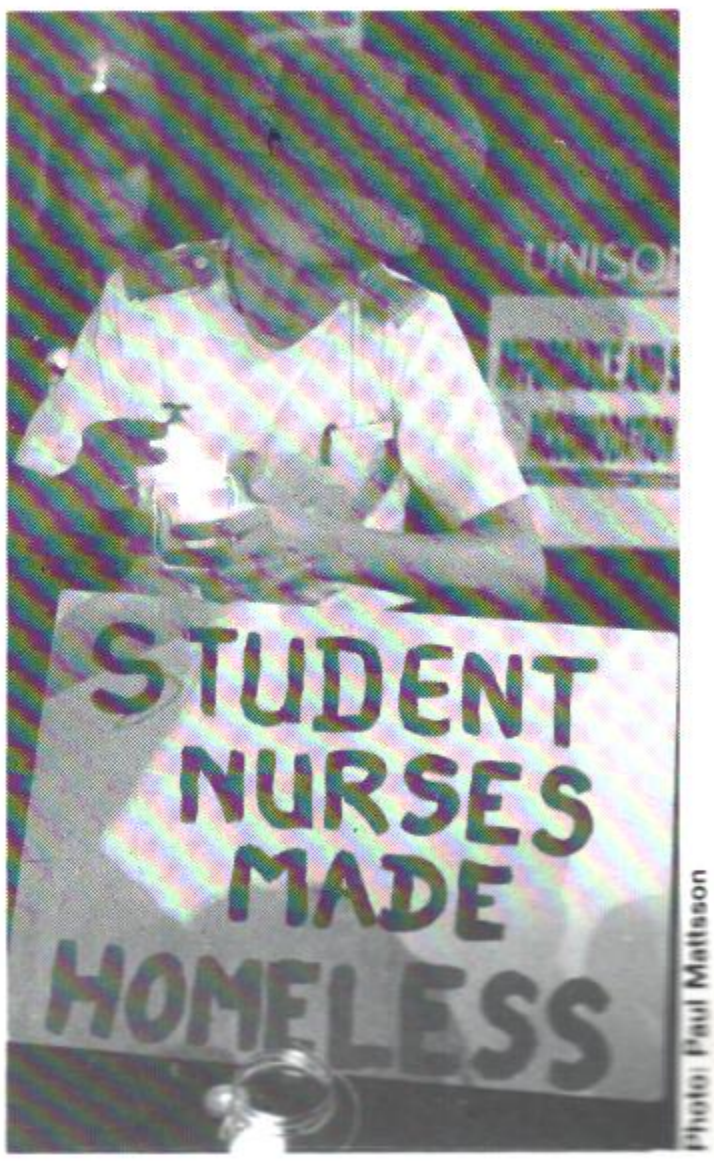


Photo: Paul Mattsson

George and Evelyn must stay!

John Stewart reports: Cameroonian asylum seeker George Ekontang has finally heard from the Home Office about his asylum claim. After two years of representations from his solicitor and supporters, the Home Office has turned down George's application and refused to consider allowing him and his wife Evelyn to stay on compassionate grounds.

George and Evelyn were active in the opposition Social Democratic Front in Cameroon. After being arrested for his political activities in 1992, George managed to escape and he and Evelyn came to the UK in 1993. He has now been working and paying taxes here for six years as well as contributing to the welfare of the Cameroonian community in exile in this country.

George has provided evidence of his high profile as a member of the Cameroonian opposition, including numerous press cuttings showing that he is still of interest to government supporters. In August 1995 the British Ambassador to Cameroon confirmed the authenticity of this evidence. He also recommended that the Home Office refuse the application as: "granting political asylum to certain individuals would set an undesirable precedent". It is shocking that a British diplomat should seek to prejudice George and Evelyn's case in this way.

George is now campaigning against the threat of deportation. Please help him by writing to the Home Office quoting H.O. reference E118479 asking the Immigration Minister to reconsider her decision in George and Evelyn's case and to allow them to remain in the UK.



Photo: Paul Mattsson

"Free Satpal Ram!" protestors reach Downing Street, 6th November.

Self Defence is no offence: free Satpal Ram!

On 16th November, the fourteenth anniversary of the attack on Satpal Ram, John McDonnell MP joined a delegation of lawyers, musicians and members of Satpal's family at Downing Street to hand in a petition calling for Satpal's immediate release. Musician Apache Indian stated: "I just cannot believe that Satpal is still in prison for defending himself against racists all those years ago. Don't be fooled, racism is still there – but it's far more subtle".

Satpal's supporters organised solidarity events in cities around the world, including Paris, Rome, San Francisco, Tokyo and Toronto. Letters were handed into British embassies and consulates expressing concern at Satpal's continued imprisonment. The letters called for Satpal's immediate release, and an inquiry into the trial which convicted him and his treatment within the prison system.

Over 50,000 people have signed the petition in support of Satpal, including the *Eastern Eye* Newspaper Campaign, MPs Chris Mullin, John McDonnell, Helen Jackson and Keith Vaz and GLA Chairman Trevor Phillips. High profile supporters, including Asian Dub Foundation, Apache Indian, Primal Scream, Massive Attack, and Chumbawumba, have pledged support as well as Irvine Welsh, Sean Hughes, Lord Waheed Alli, Imran Khan, Mark Thomas, DJ Annie Nightingale, Benjamin Zephaniah, and footballer Shaka Hislop.

In 1986 Satpal Ram was attacked in a Birmingham restaurant by a gang of six white men who racially abused him. During the ensuing fight one of his attackers was fatally wounded. Satpal was convicted of murder and a ten-year tariff was set by the courts – subsequently increased by the then Home Secretary to 11 years. Retired Chief Justice, Lord Lane, advised that this intervention, among many other disturbing factors, was wrong as it amounted to political interference. Fourteen years later Satpal remains in prison. After years of campaigning his case has been heard by the Parole Board and a decision is expected shortly.

●For more information contact: Free Satpal Ram Campaign (London), PO Box 30091, London SE1 1WP, tel. 07947 595367, email: SatpalRam@satpalram.connectfree.uk.com



Photo: Paul Mattsson

Cuts in Hackney disproportionately affect black service users and workers. Full story – pages 16,17

Voucher review going nowhere?

John Stewart, National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, urges us not to forget asylum seekers.

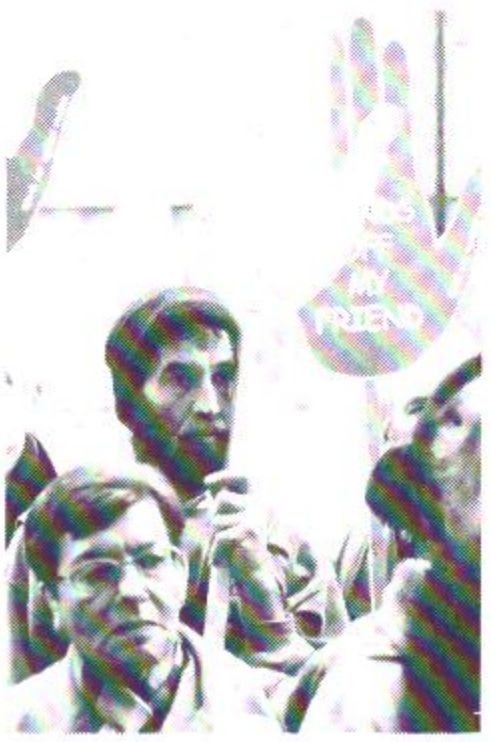
The Government's promised review of vouchers for asylum seekers seems to be going nowhere. A review was originally promised back at the National Policy Forum in July and this pledge was used by Bill Morris as his excuse to remit the TGWU's resolution to Labour Party Conference calling for the abolition of the whole voucher system. Two months on, no progress seems to have been made.

Labour Party members should ask their MPs to find out what has happened to the review. Specifically they should ask: when will it start; where will it be held; who is conducting it; the exact terms of reference of the review; and whether interested parties, including asylum seekers who have to use the damn things, will be able to give written or oral evidence.

CLPs should send resolutions direct to the Immigration Minister, Barbara Roche MP, at the Home Office, calling on the Government to abolish the voucher system and to reinstate social security benefits and the right to seek employment for asylum seekers.

So far the signs are that the review, if it takes place at all, will happen behind closed doors away from the eyes of anyone beyond the Home Office. Indications are that the only concessions on offer will be smaller denomination vouchers worth 10p so that asylum seekers can receive change up to the value of 9p. The question that has to be asked is: what's happened to Bill Morris? Why is he so silent? What has he been offered?

Meanwhile it has been announced that the Scottish Parliament is to hold an inquiry into the treatment of asylum seekers living in Scotland. MSPs on the Social Inclusion Committee received a submission from the Scottish Refugee Council, Amnesty International and Scottish churches calling for an end to vouchers. An interim report may be published before Christmas.



"Hands around the Home Office" protest over asylum laws, 4th November.

Photo: Molly Cooper

LLB readers who are especially keen to press the Government on this issue could use some of the following arguments against vouchers.

- Vouchers punish and humiliate those who have already suffered persecution. Last year over half of those claiming asylum were allowed to stay.
- Vouchers encourage racism and hatred of foreigners by singling out people who look different, and signalling that those who use them are undeserving and unwanted.
- Vouchers are more expensive for the authorities to administer than cash. At the same time they provide support well below the poverty line (£36.54 per week for single people).
- Extremely rich supermarkets are benefiting from vouchers at the expense of destitute asylum seekers by keeping any change due from the vouchers.
- Vouchers will not, as the Home Office hoped, deter claims for asylum. There is no evidence that asylum seekers risk their lives to leave their homes and travel thousands of miles in order to claim British benefits. Vouchers do not deter: they just make the lives of those using them even harder.

Students speak out

Neil Foster, Sheffield District Labour Party Youth Officer, reports on the Student Assembly Against Racism conference

At a time when an atmosphere of xenophobia, discrimination and racism has been whipped up against asylum seekers, this conference, called by the Student Assembly Against Racism, was more than welcome. The event was well attended by students from across the country and widely supported by a coalition of student groups, including NUS Black Students' Committee, National Black Students' Alliance, Student Action for Refugees and People and Planet.

High profile speakers, including Lee Jasper, Richard Stone, Milena Buyum, Kumar Murshid, and Denis Fernando attacked the Asylum and Immigration Act, setting it in the international context of both debt and war. The Government's use of detention and vouchers for asylum seekers was thoroughly condemned, as were Government and opposition attempts, before the May elections, to out-do each other in an attempt to pander to prejudice and to be the toughest on asylum seekers.

Other speakers outlined the many different ways that recent legislation attacks asylum seekers and their rights, often in contravention of the 1951 Geneva Convention. The Government should restore asylum rights by ending the voucher system, designated accommodation and forced dispersal schemes.

There were several interactive workshops with positive discussion about how students can take the defence of asylum seekers forward. Threatened with deportation, several asylum seekers outlined the harrowing obstacles placed between themselves and both dignity and safety by this draconian act.

All speakers welcomed the "Speak Out Against Racism – Defend Asylum Seekers" campaign. The day ended on a high note with Lee Jasper giving a powerful message that students could play a key role within the anti-racist struggle.

Going forwards with no "Progress"

Matthew Willgress, Peterborough CLP, reports on a conference of Young Labour (YL) and Labour Students (LS) members.

LLB was among the sponsors of November's "Building Links" Conference on the future of Young Labour, in light of the inactivity of the Party's youth wing. Around forty people attended, although a Millbank boycott meant that there were no visible supporters of "Labour Involve" or "Progress"! Speakers covered a broad range of views and the meeting was divided into three sessions: Party democracy, policies for a second term and the way forward.

Dawn Campbell, Vice Chair of LS, spoke about two main democratic deficits which were holding back the organisation. The first was that it was not organised on the same basis as other affiliated organisations, which can assist those who wish to avoid broad consultation and participation by ordinary members. For example, LS had delegates to September's Party Conference who cast a mini-block vote, but we do not know how they voted. They don't seem to have been elected but were there because they were officers.

The issue of procedural complaints also raises problems, as these go to a Party worker rather than the Steering Committee, which restricts LS's autonomy. Another problem was the lack of adequate women's representation: for five years there has been a general trend to have a male Chair and for two of the three sabbaticals to be men. It was pointed out from the floor that this was a broader problem for the Party and had led to unpopular, ill-advised policies such as the cut in lone parent benefit.

In the session on policy, Phil Pinder (the first elected Chair of Young Labour) talked about possible campaigns for Young Labour to raise its profile: he wanted campaigns (perhaps for permanently continuing the Low Pay Commission, for example) that could unite different wings. His ideas did however raise some controversy and debate. Replying to the suggestion of a campaign for abolishing the differential rates of the minimum wage, he said this would probably offend the powers that be in the Party, and (perhaps a better point) that it should come from the unions first. In reply it was pointed out that surely the Party's youth wing should be able to take an independent, campaigning stand on such issues and that it is TUC policy after all.

There was also some discussion following the contribution of a Student Assembly Against Racism supporter about the failure of LS to sign the "Speak out against racism; defend asylum seekers" campaign statement which the NUS has signed and is basically in line with LS policy.

The way forward session developed these themes further with Raj Jethwa (TUC youth officer) speaking of the importance of the union link. Brendan Cox (LS chair) agreed there was a need to campaign for democratic change and for the re-vitalisation of YL and LS, arguing the status quo was "unacceptable." Rachel Garnham (Hackney North CLP) added that she felt there was consensus around the need for "more inclusive structures that can involve more people."

Personally, I felt it was a successful conference and was pleased to see the broad consensus emerging on issues such as black, lesbian and gay and women's representation, and the need to unite with campaigns on social issues such as those against racism. It is certainly untrue that all members of YL and LS are Millbank clones despite some people's attempts to achieve that! I hope that we can keep up the pressure and improve the situation in Young Labour from a policy forum every two years and perhaps even get an elected National Committee!

Fighting PPP

Matthew Willgress writes: The message coming from GLLP Conference was clearly summed up by the Mayor: "Everything from the election result to Hatfield to the appointment of Kiley has undermined the PPP." The views of delegates on this issue were shown by the good attendance at the rail unions' lunchtime fringe meeting.

Tony West of ASLEF argued the PPP was an unpopular re-run of the "mess in the rail industry." Livingstone noted that the Lib Dems may run as "Liberal Democrats - against Tube privatisation" at the election; the PPP will lose Labour votes.

The contracts the firms will sign are a joke the Mayor argued, "they will give private monopolies a whip hand over Londoners" and "a licence to print money" with performance targets set at 95% of current levels. The case against the PPP was overwhelming and endorsed by the Conference that afternoon.

In the light of the GLLP's decision Ken Livingstone urged the Government to step back:"As I have looked at this, I've been guided by an old Chinese saying, 'It does not matter whether the cat is black or white as long as it catches the mice.'

There have been four major independent studies: by the London School of Economics, University College London, the Institute for Public Policy Research and the Industrial Society. All have found serious flaws in the proposals.

Following the Hatfield tragedy, the London Labour Party has made its views clear. Like most Londoners, Party members say that the Government plan to break up the system will make it less safe and less efficient. This approach has produced tragedy and chaos on the national rail network. It will be even more dangerous on the Tube where the margin for error is far narrower."



Photo: Paul Mattsson

London Regional leaders hold an inspiring event: (L to R), Sharon Spellar, Loraine Monk, Jim Fitzpatrick MP (leading the dancing), Tony Banks MP, David Wilkinson.

No pop songs or Union Jacks

Delegates John Stewart, Hackney North CLP, and Dorothy Macedo, UNISON, report on London Conference.

After asserting themselves against the platform in the pensions debate at Annual Conference, the trade unions led the drive against the Blairites at the Greater London Labour Party Conference on 11th November.

Conference began not with the threatened video (thankfully this never materialised) but with a challenge to the chair by the FBU over the ruling out of order of every contemporary resolution. This was carried, but not by the necessary two-thirds majority. However, the trade unions flexed their muscles to force a debate on three emergency resolutions. The leadership had wanted to refer all resolutions to the various workshops so avoiding any debates or votes on the floor of Conference and effectively reducing the Conference to the status of a policy forum.

The RMT's emergency resolution, calling for the Public Private Partnership (PPP) for the Tube to be withdrawn and for London Underground to be "retained as a unified, integrated, wholly publicly owned railway", was carried overwhelmingly on a show of hands.

The emergency resolution from Regents Park CLP, supported by TSSA, endorsing "a bond-financed solution which keeps London's Tube in the public sector" won by a large majority. A third emergency resolution from the CWU on threatened job losses at BT was also passed.

The workshop on Party organisation was run by Ken Clark and David Wilkinson from the GLLP office while Trevor Phillips sat at the back. After a spirited debate on whether Ken Livingstone should be readmitted to the Party, participants insisted on a vote which was 45 to 26 in favour of Ken's readmission. Amazingly there were six abstentions – you have to worry about some people.

In the workshop on London's social and cultural agenda, ably chaired and facilitated by GLA Members Val Shawcross and Jennette Arnold, there was no attempt to stop votes being taken. The workshop went on to support resolutions in favour of: public investment and against privatisation; legislating against age discrimination; fluoridation of London's drinking water; and a moratorium on any further housing stock transfers to private companies.

The election of Chris Robbins as chair of the London Party with 60.1% of the overall vote is clearly a setback. *LLB* columnist Geoff Martin won a majority (56.4%) in the trade unions and almost one in four (23.4%) of the CLPs. Any notion that the Party machine was neutral in the contest was dispelled when hysterical cheering erupted from supposedly impartial Party staff when their man went to make his acceptance speech. Some good socialists were elected to the London Board from both the CLP and trade union sections and the coming General Election may force some of the other, previously less independent minded, representatives to support policies wanted by the majority of Party members and affiliates.

Conference atrocities

•The delegate from Hayes & Harlington (John McDonnell's constituency) was ill and didn't attend – but someone collected the Hayes ballot paper and voted!

•UCATT rang the GLLP office the day before Conference and were assured they could attend and vote despite registering late. But when their delegation turned up they were told that as they had not registered in time they could not vote, thus depriving Geoff Martin of their 10,000 votes.

•Graham Copp (Finchley & Golders Green) was told his nomination for the North West division of the CLP section of the GLLP Board had not been received.

•Dorothy Macedo's name was missing from the initial list of nominees for the board in the trade union section. After UNISON protested her name was reinstated – Graham Copp's wasn't.

•Greta Karpin was nominated in the North East division of the CLP section (where she would have been elected automatically as the only woman nominated) but the ballot paper had mysteriously transferred Hackney North to the Central division (where she would not be).

•A new rule had been discovered to the effect that each CLP section had to elect one woman and one man, rather than, as the rule states "two delegates, one of whom must be a woman". So two left women standing in South & South East division, were in effect standing against each other. Strangely, this interpretation did not extend to the election for the National Policy Forum where Loraine Monk and Maggie Cosin were elected.

•Albert Booth, a left candidate for the NPF, was supported by UNISON among others. UNISON's vote is worth 80,000. But he only got 53,505 votes!

All those in favour? All against?



Photo: Molly Cooper

Nursing, still seen as "women's work", offers poverty pay (see page 7).

Shirley Haines, a Labour Party member for over 37 years, reflects on 20 years of political activism in local and Westminster elections.

My first experience of overt discrimination was at the Yorkshire Regional Labour Conference in the late 1970s, moving a resolution on women's rights, I was heckled by a group of Hull delegates who said that I had "more than my rights" by being there.

In 1980 I was selected for a non-winnable ward in the North Yorkshire County Council elections. This was to be a practice run to gain election experience. What I did not expect was to win, even if it was only by 26 votes. Once the euphoria had worn off, reality dawned: I also had a full time job and a family.

I was soon seen as a threat to the political aspirations of some of the key male "comrades" due to my success at attracting media coverage. I came into conflict with the North Yorkshire Labour Group Leader in 1983 when we were both shortlisted for Selby constituency and I won. Labour was clearly not going to win the seat but it was good experience and at least I did not lose my deposit.

In 1984 I was selected as the Euro candidate for York. I was a regular visitor to the pit picket lines and Miners' Support Groups and a committed member of CND. The Labour Party prescribed "media training" to prevent me embarrassing the Party with my controversial opinions. In spite of this I still came second.

Capitalising on this experience, I fought the parliamentary by-election in Ryedale in 1986. The campaign was taken over by Walworth Road spin-doctors, who ordered yet more media training. I did commit a few gaffes, such as saying a future Labour Government would end private education, but on the whole we got good press coverage. The *Observer* reported that "admirable Shirley Haines, a local health visitor [is a] doughty campaigner". Even the Tory candidate Neil Balfour said "you've got to give it to Shirley, she's got style". The campaign was one of positive comradeship and showed that the Labour Party was ready for victory in 1987. After the election I received letters of congratulations from many MPs who were sure that I would soon be joining them at Westminster.

I was certain that this experience would help me secure a safe or marginal constituency for the 1987 General Election. After several near misses, I was finally selected for the marginal seat of Stockport. My slogan was "put a nurse in Parliament". Although I did not get elected, the Tory majority was cut from 6,000 to 2,000.

In 1991 I tried for York again. It turned out to be a very unpleasant experience; I failed to be selected and by then it was too late to go back to Stockport, so I was left without a seat to fight.

As I was now working as a health visitor in Leeds it seemed sensible to move. Once settled I started exploring the possibility of a council seat. I ousted the sitting councillor and was elected to Leeds City Council in May 1991, only to discover that it was a den of hidden agendas, with several aspiring parliamentary candidates who were terrified of anyone who might be a threat. I was told by the leader to keep quiet as "my reputation had come before me". Although I chaired several committees, I was never given the opportunity to utilise my experience.

My final downfall came in 1997 when I challenged the twice-failed male candidate for the parliamentary seat of Elmet, where I was a councillor. The campaign against me was vicious and personally and politically damaging. There were false allegations, which I have never been allowed to refute, and motions of censure. One of my opponent's colleagues accused me of "going for his job".

All the male Leeds aspirants are now MPs and enjoying their new, though in some cases temporary, power. It cannot be coincidence that I have been rejected as a magistrate and as a member of the Health Trust and Health Authority.

May 7th 1999 was the beginning of a new life. This was my 60th birthday; I was studying for a degree in Art History at the University of Leeds, and I was about to be blessed with my first grandchild. I was finally retiring from electoral politics and relieved to have escaped the fate of being associated with the sycophantic Blair Babes.

Network of Socialist Campaign Groups AGM

Kingsway Princeton College,
Sidmouth Street WC1 (near Kings Cross)

Saturday 9th December, 11am-5pm.

Speakers include LP NEC members Christine Shawcroft and Ann Black.

Resolutions on asylum seekers, council housing, youth, trade unions.

Registration is £15 waged, £5 low-waged and £2 unwaged (includes annual membership); pre-registration needed for onsite creche.

Details from Network of SCGs,
7 Malam Gardens, London E14 0TR.

Women move up the agenda

Ruth Clarke, Erith & Thamesmead CLP, reports on the Women for London Conference.

The Women for London conference on 28th October, attended by almost a hundred labour movement women, was significant in several ways. It was the result of a collaboration between an informal group of Labour Party and trade union women, backed by resources from the Southern & Eastern Region TUC. It demonstrated that women wanted a space in which to discuss the issues that affect us as women and as political activists. The active participation of the women members of the Greater London Assembly Labour Group indicated a sensitivity to the need for a dialogue with, if not accountability to, the women who worked to get them elected.

Back in the summer of 1999 a small group of Labour Party women produced *The Women's Agenda for the Mayor and Assembly* in an attempt to highlight some of the policies that would have a particular impact on women in the capital. We were concerned that the "mainstreaming" of policies for women would downgrade the issues. *The Women's Agenda* was widely circulated and well received by many Labour MPs and Greater London Assembly candidates.

This summer, as the London Mayor appointed women's advisers to his Cabinet and policy team and Labour Group member Nicky Gavron became his first deputy, we decided to organise the conference, in co-operation with members of the SERTUC Women's Rights Committee, to help maintain the momentum.

In the opening session of the conference GMB President Mary Turner spoke about the difficulties faced by low-paid women workers in part-time jobs. London Assembly Member Samantha Heath looked forward to a more equal balance between improved public transport and essential car use in the capital. She had been won over to congestion charging, but still saw the public-private partnership (PPP) as the only viable means of improving the Underground.

Writer and columnist Joan Smith complained that London had been created by men with scant regard for women's needs or safety. Labour women no longer had an effective say in policy making, according to former Regional Board member Nadine Finch. With the demise of the women's organisation under *Partnership in Power*, collective accountability had ceased and Labour women in public office simply represented themselves.

In the afternoon, SERTUC Vice-President Anita Halpin traced the growth in unorganised part-time women's work following the decline in the 1960s of London's manufacturing base. Women needed to be included in plans for economic regeneration, and the unions needed to organise in the leisure, clothing and catering industries, where they suffered disproportionately.

As a black woman London Assembly Member Jennette Arnold had found it hard to engage in the political process. She hoped for acknowledgement of the often invisible contribution made by black women to the life of the capital, sensitivity to their diversity but recognition of their shared needs.

Anni Marjoram, policy adviser to the Mayor, explained that the GLA would not directly provide services for women but would work to ensure that our priorities were addressed in strategic policy development. Consultative papers on the economy, transport and spatial development would be circulated shortly, and women's views would be sought at an annual women's conference, probably in March. Deputy Mayor Nicky Gavron was conscious that the media had great expectations of the Assembly. A constructive working relationship was developing with the Mayor, and she was satisfied that he was committed to the women's cause.

The workshops were focused and practical, giving an overview of the issues, then encouraging participants to network and campaign. The first series dealt with (GLA) policy areas, including women and work, education, housing, domestic violence, leisure and culture, transport and environment, and public services. The second addressed women's participation and democracy issues, including racial justice, the criminal justice system, women's participation in politics, and Labour Party democracy.

The conference was part of an ongoing campaign for women's inclusion in policy making. The conference report will be widely circulated and policy makers will be invited to consider and act on its recommendations.

The Greater London Assembly is sympathetic to women's needs and it is building structures to ensure our voices are heard. The executive Mayor and scrutinising Assembly are widely perceived as Labour controlled. Improved services for women should also bring electoral benefits to Labour.

Within the Party the restructuring of the NEC and *Partnership in Power* have led to a downgrading of democratic structures and of women's collective accountability. Members, and particularly women members, are dropping out, and major reductions are anticipated in women's representation on borough councils and in Parliament. *The 21st century party* consultation is continuing (see page 14) until March and its continuing threat to Party democracy should be opposed at all costs. Local parties should encourage the provision of women only space and collective working. The Regional Board needs to take responsibility for developing an effective dialogue between Party members and the GLA Labour Group. Women members of the Board, who constitute the Regional Women's Committee, need to develop structures that ensure that the women's agenda is articulated and advanced.

●Copies of the conference report will be available upon request. Please ring 020 8854 4957.

21st century – the Party continues

Labour Party National Executive Committee member Ann Black explains a new Party consultation exercise.

At this year's Party Conference the NEC report on the *21st century party* consultation proposed further discussion on Party structure and invited fresh comments on external and internal selections.

On Party structures it was clear that, because our over-riding priority is to win a second term, no headlong rush to change is proposed. Much of this section of the report consists of quotations from the consultation. There is little support for scrapping representative structures or the union link, and branches and constituencies will continue as the basic units for the time being.

After the election there will be a development programme in three phases:
•reviewing all constituency and branch organisation and preparing campaign and development plans;
•implementing these plans;
•evaluating the results.

Alongside this, pilot projects will provide more detailed feedback, including work with women, youth, black and Asian members, and trade unions.

Submissions also called for improvements in the policy-making process, by increasing genuine grassroots influence. In July the General Secretary promised a wide-ranging evaluation of the forum process, and details are awaited.



The second part of the document covered selection of Party candidates and election to internal posts. There have been previous consultations on choosing candidates for external office, and most members favour clear, overarching principles agreed in advance.

Key proposals include:
•reducing the qualifying period for participation from 12 months membership in the relevant area to six months national Party membership;
•no requirement for Westminster candidates to be on the parliamentary panel before selection;
•looking at changing the law to allow all-women shortlists or other methods of improving representation of women and ethnic minorities;
•electoral colleges for national, Scottish and Welsh leaders, and leaders of English regions such as London (Parliament/Assembly members would have one-third of the votes, and candidates would be vetted by selection boards before one-member-one-vote ballots; unions and other affiliates would be required to ballot their members and cast their vote proportional to the results);
•choosing candidates for directly-elected mayors by one member, one vote of the individual membership, after shortlisting by selection boards (Sir Jeremy Beecham has proposed an alternative, based on electoral colleges);
•ranking candidate lists for Euro-elections by one-member-one- vote (perhaps in a process combined with initial selection, because two postal ballots would be expensive).

The key difficulty is the undermining of one member, one vote democracy by prior vetting to restrict the candidates among whom members can choose, and excessive use of the NEC's power to remove short-listing from local parties. By-elections from Uxbridge onwards cast doubt over the competence of NEC panels to judge local circumstances and membership motivation, and maximise electoral success.

Election to internal Party office, in contrast, has not been discussed before, and rule changes may be pushed through Annual Conference next autumn without grassroots support, or even awareness. Proposals include:
•electing the NEC and the Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC) for two years rather than one;
•adding the Chairs of the Scottish and Welsh Parties to the NEC as ex officio non-voting members;
•filling casual vacancies for National Policy Forum (NPF) through regional boards.

Criteria for change are listed as: equal opportunity for involvement; extended terms of office to increase effectiveness and fit with the policy-making process; and administrative efficiency and economy. Critically, democracy and accountability – which should be the primary considerations – are not mentioned.

The argument that two-year terms would align committee service with the policy-making cycle does not hold up. The rolling programme lasts for three years, and the concurrent review of the NPF may alter its timescale. It is daft to adjust internal elections to a process that may itself change. And the statement that CLP representatives "find it difficult to keep up" is frankly insulting to the members who elected us.

Instead we should look at why votes cast in NEC elections fell by over 50% in three years, and consider a consistent timetable, with nominations closing in mid-June and elections in July/August. Falling Conference attendance undermines the legitimacy of NPF constituency representatives, some of whom were elected by fewer than one-third of the CLPs in their region. Similar concerns affect the CAC and the National Constitutional Committee (NCC), both now elected at Conference.

By agreeing the NEC response to the *21st century party* exercise, Conference agreed to further consultation. The paper on selections was posted to CLP secretaries before Conference and delegates received a copy, but it has not been re-circulated. The deadline for submissions is 31st March, leaving little time for discussion before all other activity is eclipsed by branch and GC AGMs and preparations for a May election. So dig it out, read it, and respond.

●Please send copies of your submissions to Ann Black, 88 Howard Street, Oxford OX4 3BE.



THE **ALAN SIMPSON** COLUMN

Gordon Brown's pre-budget report was almost a classic definition of the distinction between cleverness and wisdom. No one was in any doubt about how clever it was: a brief scan across the expressions on the Tory benches showed that – it was like looking at the extended family of "the Glums". No one had the heart to play chase with a Chancellor who appeared to have shot every fox they had.

Brown could still play the Tories at their own game – low personal tax rates, cuts and concessions to business costs and taxes, trumping Tory promises to the hauliers... and having something significant to throw to pensioners. It was hard to see where they might attack him and their decision to condemn the statement as a "post-budget report" was probably the only line they could pursue. As there had been enough leaks of Brown's intentions to have flooded the Medway towns and most of Yorkshire, Downing Street had their response well ready: the markets were left untroubled by the pre-budget package.

The same clever stage-management that thrilled the Labour benches had also given the press and the financial markets enough snippetts to keep everyone happy. I have no doubt this will give the Party enough to fight the next election on and deliver a second term. It is not to be sniffed at. But we shouldn't get carried away into believing it offers long term answers to problems which will not go away. The payments to pensioners and hauliers amount to about £4bn – slightly less than the higher tax revenues coming into the Chancellor, above projections for this year. But each of the commitments has serious flaws.

For pensioners, the extra cash going into state pensions for the next two years is a recognition of just how powerful their campaigns have been. Pensioners know this is a victory, but a partial one... and they'll be back. In his statement, Brown made it clear that the pension increases are transitional. In year three, the increase falls to £1.50. Once the system of pension credits and minimum pension guarantees comes in, the state pension will be shoved to the margins.

This is still the big break with Labour's post-war reforms which founded the welfare state on universal principles – underpinned by an unashamed commitment to the framework of national insurance contributions. The generation that turned its back on the pernicious and divisive nature of the means test will now be asked to love it under Labour. It will not wash. Labour will get no credit for pensioner tax credits. In an increasingly complex system of targeting (means testing) the backlash of contradictions at the margins – who gets ruled in and who gets ruled out – will far outweigh any credit. When this penny finally drops, the pensioners will be back, looking for scalps rather than spin.

The same can't be said for hauliers, who have been quite rightly seen off for other reasons. But the fuel concessions offered them made no great environmental sense. It was clever of

'The generation that turned its back on the pernicious and divisive nature of the means test will now be asked to love it under Labour'

Brown to offer cuts in the price of a fuel hardly anyone had heard of, but low-sulphur fuels do not reduce carbon emissions. It takes us no nearer to a shift into non-polluting technologies which must replace today's dependence on fossil fuels.

Global warming may not have been an issue when 4 million people were displaced in Mozambique or 15 million in Bangladesh, but when York and the Medway towns were flooded we suddenly had a global issue on our hands. Britain will need to cut carbon emissions by 60% just to stabilise the mess we are in. We had a chance to give a real lead on this, when the public were knee deep in the problems, and we ducked it.

More fundamentally, we ducked the reality of New Labour's failed love affair with the private sector. For all that we woo them, for all the gifts of public goods we shower at their feet (from air traffic control, to public utilities, to health and housing), big business simply cheats on us. It takes the dowries and runs off elsewhere. In the last year, the growth in business investment in Britain has shrunk from 7.5% to 1.75%. Most of this was based on a growth in world trade which is likely to slow this year. The pre-budget report itself predicts that Britain's current trade deficit in goods and services will be over £110 billion by the middle of the next Parliament. At some point the case for direct public investment and direct public ownership will come back for debate.

It was a scheming old spin-master and manipulator of another generation who said that, in an advanced industrial economy, public sector investment is the engine of economic growth. We may not like to admit it, but on this Harold Wilson was probably right.

People's represent New Labour's boot

●"The people of Hackney are witnessing the local dismantling of the welfare state built up by the Labour Party. It is impossible to explain how the Labour-Tory coalition together can be carrying through policies which began under Mrs Thatcher. Only by organising the largest number of people in the borough to make their views known can the Council and the Government be forced to change what they are doing."
Tony Benn MP

●"Here is corporate takeover happening right in front of our eyes. What's happening in Hackney today will be national in the near future. We are seeing the total reorganisation of local government, health and education authorities so that they have shadow corporate structures. This means they are organised and managed on business lines and the way in which their funds are distributed follows business priorities. Pay attention to what is happening in Hackney because after them it is you."
George Monbiot

Privatising education

Christine Fraser reports: Rejoicing at the departure of Chris Woodhead was silenced in Hackney when one the OFSTED chief's last acts was to condemn Hackney for lack of improvement since it was first deemed to be failing three years ago. Education Secretary David Blunkett was stung into immediate action, announcing that education services would be taken over and run with business involvement.

Mick Regan, secretary of Hackney Teachers Association, the borough's NUT group, responded immediately by dismissing the market place solution: "What we need is more control over the local education authority, not privatisation.

As *LLB* goes to press, teachers' unions are meeting to consider strike action.

Diane Abbott, MP for Hackney North & Stoke Newington, believes that the Labour-Tory Council's cuts will have devastating consequences for the people of Hackney.

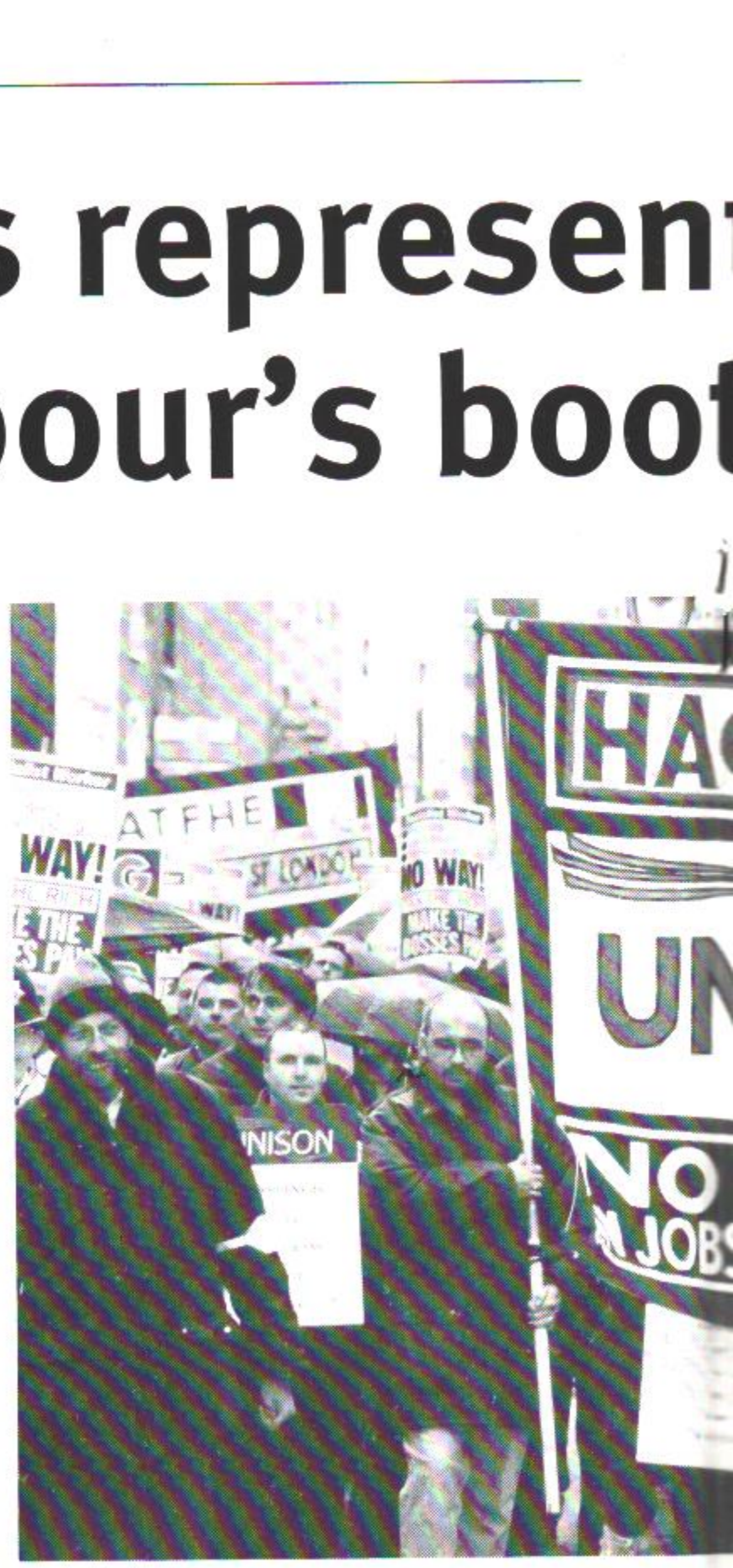
Hackney is facing bankruptcy. The consequences will be brutal for one of the poorest areas in the country.

The cuts agreed by councillors in early November – £4.5 million this financial year and £18 million in the next – are just the beginning. Hackney's overspend could be as much as £22 million in this year alone, and officers have made it clear there will have to be further and deeper cuts as soon as possible. It is already clear that there are going to be large-scale redundancies, increases in charges for things like nurseries and home care for the elderly, and the closures of facilities like play centres and after-school sports clubs.

The Council claims that it will protect key services. But in housing, neighbourhood offices will be closed, staff numbers will be slashed and the estate cleaning budget will be cut by nearly £750,000. All this is taking place in a borough with one of the highest number of people in council housing and the largest number of deprived estates in the country.

Hackney has one of the youngest populations in London with large numbers of big families, and the highest number of single mothers in the country. Yet the Council wants to cut the early years budget by at least three quarters of a million pounds. It is also proposing to alter the terms and conditions of thousands of workers. In a further sinister move, the Audit Commission has hinted heavily that Hackney could raise further millions by asset sales.

All of this comes after three years of a Labour Government which has cut



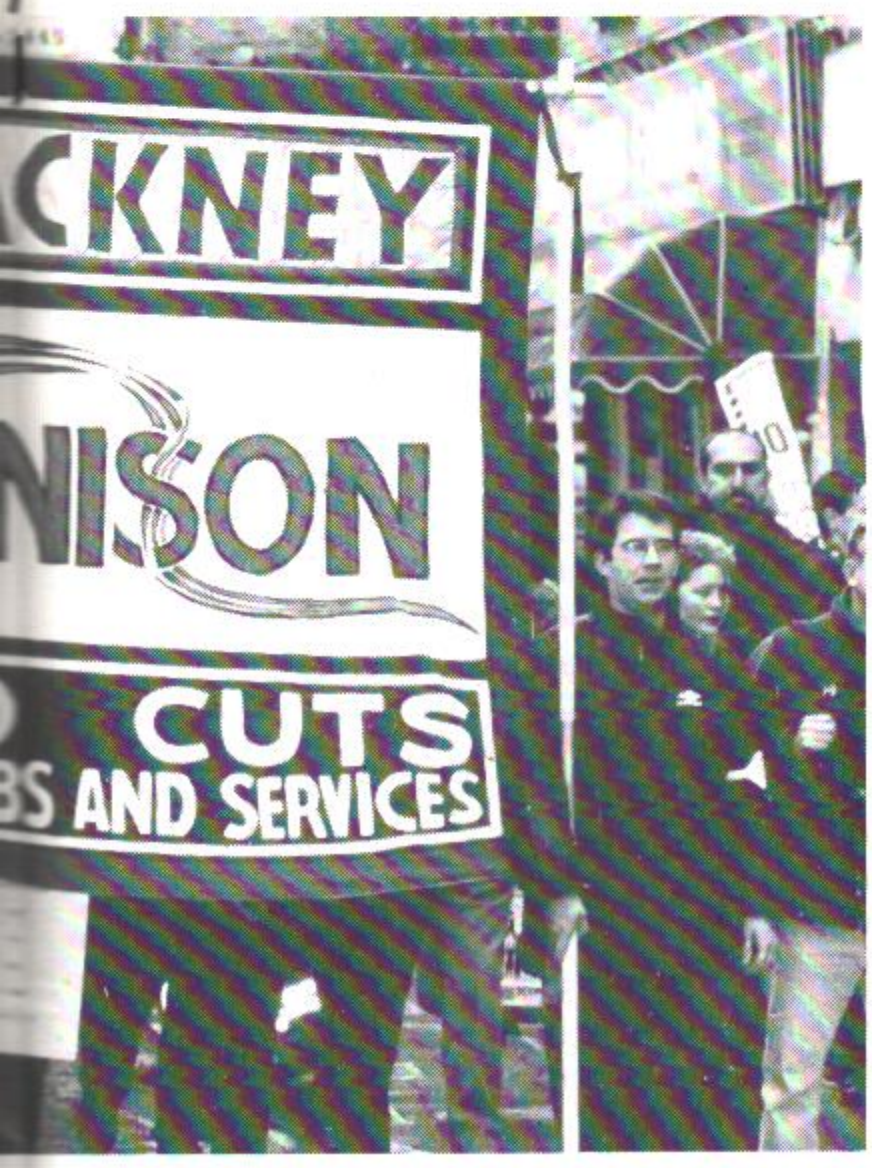
Campaigners march through Hackney to lobby the Council.

overall public spending. This is a disaster for inner city areas like Hackney where the public sector – the Council and the health service – is the largest single employer. Instead of providing the money to renovate Hackney estates and build the thousands of council houses needed, the Government is continuing the Tory policy of pressuring the Council to sell off its estates. The Government's response to Hackney's problems has been to demand cuts and to maintain the pressure to privatise services, although it has now announced that it will allow Hackney to borrow more money (as if increasing Hackney's debt burden is the way out of its financial problems...).

Councillors must decide whether they are there to represent the people of Hackney or whether they are simply there to put out New Labour's message of the week. It is cruel and unfair that the people of Hackney should suffer because of the past incompetence of officers and members. The cuts pro-

tatives or tboys?

Fight job cuts and privatisation!



L, 6th November. Photo: Paul Mattsson

posed will damage services at a time when social services are collapsing, our housing management is among the worst in London and housing benefit is in chaos. I do not believe that Hackney can sustain cuts on the scale proposed.

Councillors and officers seem proud that at least they have avoided Government commissioners coming in and running Hackney. I am not clear that the cuts that Government commissioners would impose would be any worse than the current cuts package.

And at least if the Government stepped in to run Hackney directly it would have to take responsibility for maintaining a decent level of services – instead of which the Government demands further and deeper cuts without having to face up to the human consequences.

Worst of all: Labour councillors have chosen to take political responsibility for these cuts. The electoral consequences, both at a parliamentary and a local level, could be disastrous.

Following the cuts agreed by the Labour-Tory coalition running Hackney Council, many of our members face either privatisation or the complete closure of their departments. Vital services are threatened. Transport for the elderly, disabled and children is being cut. Council gardeners face wage cuts of £80 per week, home care workers £40 per week. We would expect Tory councillors to support proposals that cut services and attack our members' pay and conditions, but the behaviour of the New Labour Group of councillors is sickening. Not only did they vote for these proposals, but they even voted against allowing the trade unions to address the Council before the decision was made.

The regular sight of vandalised and burnt out cars and rubbish on Hackney's streets is not the fault of street cleaners, who want to provide a proper service. They are prevented from doing so by incompetent managers, unelected officials and councillors who aren't prepared to fight for decent services. Nine of the Council's 40-strong fleet of dust carts are currently off the road because there is no money for minor repairs.

The number of council buses used to take elderly people from their homes to day care centres has been reduced from 15 to one.

People visiting the housing benefit office are forced to wait for hours to see anyone and a simple renewal claim can take months to deal with. Meanwhile tenants are being threatened with eviction from their homes. There are now nearly 65,000 outstanding claims – 17,000 have been outstanding for more than four months. To bring the housing benefit service back in-house would cost between £2.5–5 million, but there is no extra Government money being offered for this. Yet in order to push through the privatisation of refuse collection and street cleansing the Government is willing to offer an £8 million sweetener.

The recent Audit Commission Report on Hackney's finance crisis clearly shows the poverty that exists in the borough. Hackney already has one of the worst lev-

Brian Debus, Chair of Hackney UNISON, rejects the Council's priorities.

els of unemployment in the country at 14.7%. Of the 1,370 most deprived estates in the country, 112 were in Hackney. Almost 50% of all households rely on the local authority for their housing needs. 30% of all residents scrape by on less than £5,000 per year while almost 60% have to survive on less than £10,000. Yet the main culprit wielding the axe of cuts and redundancies, new Managing Director Max Caller, takes home £150,000.

A joint shop stewards meeting representing all Hackney's unions met on 9th November and called a day of action on Wednesday 29th November, the date of the next full Council meeting. All the council unions have called ballots for an official strike on 18th December but, due to the anti-union laws, the ballot results won't be known until 11th December.

The trade unions are also backing a community conference of council unions, tenants associations and community groups who are affected by the cuts. This will take place at 12 noon on Sunday 3rd December at Chats Palace, Brooksbys Walk, London E9.

● Further information on the conference or on the union fight against cuts and privatisation from Hackney UNISON, Netil House, 1-7 Westgate Street, London E8.

● In November's *LLB*, an article entitled *Hackney on the brink?* was credited to John Stewart, although much of the reporting came from John Page. We apologise for the resulting confusion.

Hackney anti-cuts demonstration

11.30am Saturday 25th November

Stoke Newington Common
London N16

Byers fiddles while Biwater burns



Photo: Paul Mattsson

Biwater campaigners lobbied the Department of Trade and Industry in September, but the DTI is still protecting the new French owners of Biwaters.

Ian Malcolm-Walker, Derby North CLP, reports on New Labour double-dealing surrounding Biwater.

On 4th September, within minutes of the takeover of pipe manufacturers Biwater by French company Saint-Gobain, it was announced that the works would close at the beginning of December with the loss of 700 jobs. Since 75% of those workers (many of them ex-pit workers) live within five miles of the plant, that would devastate the local community.

Local MP Harry Barnes told a debate in Westminster Hall on 1st November, "The response was immediate. Everyone combined to fight the threatened closure: the workers, the General, Municipal and Boilermakers union, local councils, elected representatives and the whole of the local community, including a highly active women's support group."

At Labour Party Conference, Stephen Byers Trade Minister told delegates, "When there is real pressure and difficulties in areas like textiles, coal and steel and in specific plants like Biwater in Clay Cross...we must not stand to one side. We won't walk away."

The Fair Trading Act 1973, which governs takeovers, gives Byers the duty to consider not only "competition" issues but the effect on jobs and exports. The Office of Fair Trading knew of Saint-Gobain's plans, but kept that information from Byers as it was "commercially confidential".

Dennis Skinner told Byers straight that, "If I were the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, I would not want the OFT to pull the wool over my eyes. I would say, 'Look here. I'm the gaffer. I'm the boss in this Department and I'll refer this to the Competition Commission. Never mind about those tinpot civil servants who took the decision."

Alan Johnson, former CWU general secretary and now a DTI junior minister, told Barnes and Skinner that, "The Director General of Fair Trading concluded that the information was not material... the new information did not rebut the evidence for a lack of significant competition concerns considered by the then director."

On 2nd and 9th November Harry Barnes pushed Margaret Beckett for a debate. The next week, he asked Blair to act. Both said they would speak to Byers. Yet on 16th November, Byers was asked if he would refer the Biwater take-over to the Competition Commission and gave a holding answer: he would reply as soon as possible. 150 workers were due to be sacked the next day! Harry Barnes responded: "Stephen Byers' answer is deeply disappointing. It's one of the latest points at which action could be taken. The first wave of redundancies is imminent. He will not be forgiven for imitating Nero and fiddling whilst Rome burns."

During this period, the number of signatures to Harry Barnes's Early Day Motion number 1084 doubled to over 200, representing two thirds of all Labour MPs eligible to sign EDMs.

French trade union, the CGT, has now warned Harry Barnes that Saint-Gobain's take-over of Biwater (Clay Cross) Ltd is tied in with the capture of a licence Biwater held for pipe manufacturing in India. This seems to be confirmed by offers of jobs to certain specialists at Biwater which would involve them relocating to India. The CGT is now concerned that pipe manufacturing in France may also be transferred to India.

●Send letters of support to The Union Office, Biwater Industries, Clay Cross, Chesterfield, Derbyshire or email shoey@talker21.com.

Dudley strikers make history

UNISON members at Dudley Group of Hospitals have taken 42 days of strike action to stay in the NHS. This is the longest running hospital strike action in the history of the NHS.

Further strike action and activities include a lobby of local MP Ross Cranston at Dudley Library at 4.30pm on Friday 1st December. On Saturday 2nd December at 11am there will be a demonstration in Darlington, the constituency of Alan Milburn MP, Secretary of State for Health. Coaches leave Dudley from 6.30am.

The local UNISON branch is also planning other activities throughout the second half of November, including rallies at each site. It is also calling for UNISON to hold a national day of action in support of Dudley on 20th December. UNISON's Industrial Action Committee was due to consider this dispute as *LLB* went to press.

●Please send donations, cheques payable to UNISON Dudley Group of Hospitals, and messages of support to UNISON Dudley Group of Hospitals, Wordsley Hospital, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY8 5QX. Tel/fax 01384-244 350, email dghunison@ic24.net.

London Underground Ltd has begun to remove fire extinguishers from passenger carriages. Now only drivers will have direct access to fire extinguishers. The company reported it had taken the decision because the threat of vandalism is now greater than the risk of fire breaking out. Trade unions and passenger bodies have expressed doubts about the decision, which has been supported by that well-know stalwart of rail safety, the Health & Safety Executive's railway inspectorate.

Big tanks rumble over the left

Hugh MacGrillen, former MSF London Regional Council Secretary, reports on the MSF leadership's attempt to merge the union with the AEEU.

Anti-merger campaigners in MSF pledged to continue their opposition to amalgamation with the AEEU after a special union conference gave the NEC the go-ahead to hold a membership ballot on the merger.

After an unprecedented effort by the MSF leadership with the help of the union's employees, distributing oceans of misleading glossy literature, carrying out a spurious poll of members and holding the conference in what many activists saw as a breach of the union's rules, some 40% of the delegates still rejected the NEC's demands.

The membership ballot necessary if the merger is to proceed will probably take place early next year. While the result is not a foregone conclusion, it is more than likely to approve the merger. If the leadership's intentions are then fulfilled, a three-year integration process will lead to the emergence of a centrally controlled, right-wing dominated union.

The significance of this development should not be underestimated. Two of the most rotten strands in the trade union movement will come together to promote the most reactionary aspects of New Labour. There will be full-scale collaboration with employers, involving poaching from other unions, partnership and sweetheart deals, and disruption of workplace organisation. The internal regime will be distinguished by sleaze and witch-hunts, with a crack-down on the left as a priority.

That, at any rate, is what will happen if the right-wing dreams are turned into reality. But it is not likely to prove as simple as that. The MSF leadership in particular has now expended all of its political capital. Lame-duck General Secretary Roger Lyons was not allowed to speak at the special conference, for fear of the damage he might do, and was booed by delegates whenever his face appeared on the big screen behind the platform. The loss of political credibility has been deepened by the revelations of sleazy practices and by the anti-democratic methods used to push the merger project forward.

In these circumstances, the leadership now has to deal with an urgent financial crisis, largely of its own making. Cuts of up to15% in expenditure have to be implemented and this can only be done by pushing through substantial redundancies. The AEEU is unlikely to come to the rescue on this, being unwilling to squander its own resources on MSF ineptitude.

In addition, both MSF and the AEEU will continue to lose members through the erosion of employment in manufacturing industry. There are no more than 700,000 paying members in the joint union at present and this number will continue to decline in the next period. The leadership is going to have a tough job to keep the extravagant promises of improved services flowing out of the merger. On the MSF side, there will be problems in retaining the existing membership, given the extent of disillusion and the fact that practically everyone outside manufacturing has another union to join.

The left has many lessons to learn from the struggle over the merger so far. One is that we could have defeated it if we had been completely united. But one section broke away and supported the leadership and their contribution was important in securing the outcome of the special conference. These were the old guard supporters of one union in the engineering industry who found it impossible to understand that circumstances have changed and that this is no longer a progressive demand in the situation we face. It might be argued that this was Stalinism's final gift to the right-wing of the labour movement. At any rate, one hopes that this is their last contribution.

The other crucial point is that the left must improve its capacity for mass campaigning. Far too many people have found a niche in run-down bits of the union organisation and have given up the battle to reach out to the membership. When faced with a large-scale effort by the bureaucracy to sway membership opinion, they were unable to counteract it. It has to be appreciated that messing about in the apparatus without a mass base is no longer a viable political option.

The left in MSF must now assess the situation urgently and reach out to our co-thinkers in the AEEU. The result of the special conference in undoubtedly a setback but it is not the end of the story and we have to continue our struggle against the scheming to merge the unions.

London Region MSF members lobby the MSF NEC, as democracy in MSF is weakened even before the merger.



Photo: Jess Hurd

TRADE UNION NOTEBOOK

●All 7,000 workers at Ford's Dagenham plant are being consulted on possible strike action as part of the continuing action to keep the car assembly operation open. A series of mass meetings of the workforce was followed by a strike ballot during the second half of November. The result of the ballot is due as we go to press and could give the go-ahead for strike action to begin by 7th December.

●A Merseyside New Labour council is mounting an attack on staff pay and working conditions. UNISON and the GMB have been told by Knowsley Council that from February 2001 all new starters and anyone promoted will have to work 37 hours a week, compared with the current 35 hours. This has provoked fury within the Council workforce, and a ballot for strike action is now due.

●Continuing victimisation by Post Office management has now led to a strike ballot in Edinburgh. CWU members described attempts to impose disciplinary action on an individual postal worker as "the latest in a long list of unacceptable incidents".

●Cuts in staffing levels among West London Benefits Agency staff are to lead to a ballot for strike action. PCS members at offices in Acton and Notting Hill, which serve over 98,000 people a year, want 35 more staff to ensure they can provide an adequate service to claimants. Instead DSS management have indicated that more jobs at the offices are to go. The union point out that the Benefit Fraud Investigations Service is so well funded that it is unable to spend all its budget, while those staff helping claimants face intolerable pressure because of budget cuts.

●UNISON members in Scotland have rejected the latest pay offer by local government employers by a margin of over two to one. More than 600 members in 20 local authorities are now on indefinite strike, with all members in Scotland asked to take part in a one-day strike as part of efforts to step up the campaign.

●Attempts to cut the pay of gardeners tending war graves have now been referred to an inquiry to be chaired by Baroness Brenda Dean. The TGWU, the union representing the workers, welcomed the setting up of the inquiry but stressed the need for a swift resolution of the dispute.

●The dispute at Foframe of Huntingdon, currently the longest in Britain, is now entering its eighth month. The ten workers fighting for an increase in their hourly rate of £4.29 need your support. Send donations to Huntingdon Strike Fund, GMB, 396/398 Dunstable Road, Luton LU4 8JT.

●With work about to begin on the immensely expensive new Wembley Stadium, look out for disputes between the management and workforce. With the notoriously abrasive Ken Bates of Chelsea heading the outfit, plus the involvement of managers whose comments on industrial relations include "we don't want any of those electricians from the Jubilee Line Extension", sparks are certain to fly!

●The Office Committee at Rolls-Royce Ansty reacted swiftly on 10th November to the threatened relocation of marine business to Bristol and potential job losses to Canada. Their statement expressed disappointment that Rolls-Royce had decided to react to short-term business difficulties in this way and stated their intention to "oppose it with every means at our disposal". The Committee will be seeking support for alternatives, "working together with other trade unions, community groups, local and national government in order to achieve this". The union will oppose any compulsory redundancies and intends to ballot for industrial action if these are threatened. The union has requested the immediate cessation of sub-contracting in the energy businesses in accordance with existing agreements and refused co-operation with any transfer of work. It is seeking domestic and international trade union support. For further information contact: Amanda Richards, Secretary MSF Energy businesses Ansty, tel. 0247 6624 4885; email: amanda.richards@rolls-royce.com.

Glenn wins!

Attempts by senior managers at Bromley Council, South London, to victimise UNISON branch secretary Glenn Kelly have been knocked back. Glenn faced disciplinary charges of gross misconduct, which could have led to his dismissal, as a result of a campaign against proposed cuts in emergency services to elderly people in Sheltered Housing in the borough. Following extensive local publicity and lobbies of the disciplinary hearings, Glenn has been given a first disciplinary warning.

Glenn said: "For this charge, which was supposed to be gross misconduct, I was... given a first written warning. The lion roars and gives birth to a mouse. I would like to thank everyone who sent a letter of protest and supported or attended one of the many lobbies. The fact that they felt they could only get away with this level of penalty is an indication of our success." The case will now go to an Employment Tribunal.

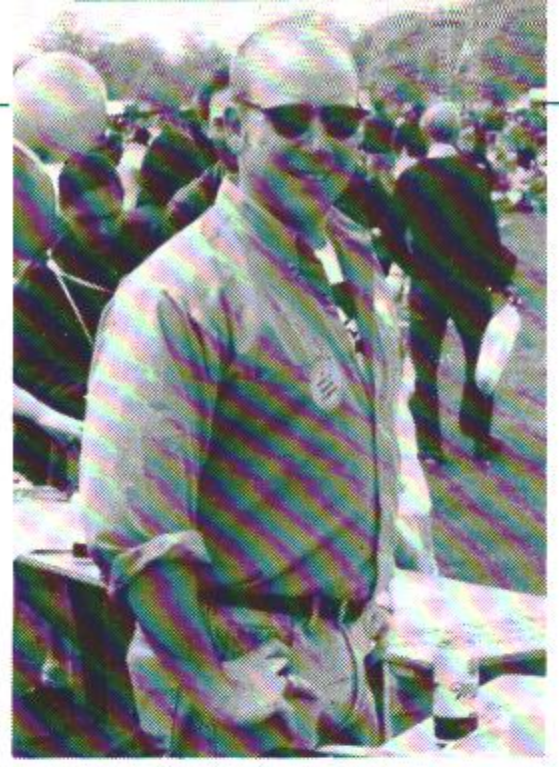
Control freaks clampdown

A small clique of UNISON national officials, with the tacit support of a majority of the National Executive Council (NEC), are leading a clampdown on activity by union branches.

●Activists from the Kirklees and Lewisham branches are under disciplinary investigation by the Union for organising a conference to discuss conditions of service for UNISON members in schools.

●A national circular says that branches must not support the 25th November conference called by a number of branches to discuss the Union's disciplinary rules "in order to protect the democracy of the Union". Lambeth Branch Secretary Jon Rogers, one of the organisers of the event, commented, "I don't know whether this use of language is Orwellian or Kafkaesque, but it's certainly daft."

The confrontation on this particular issue has now been postponed, as the Disciplinary Rules Conference has had to be delayed so that UNISON activists can support the demonstration on 25th November called by the Hackney branch (see pages 16 and 17).



THE GEOFF MARTIN COLUMN

●I realised that I was going to have a tough job on my hands at the London Labour Conference when I got half way into town and realised that I'd forgotten to put my lucky pants on.

The day started with a live confrontation on the *Today* programme with former SWP flying picket Jim Fitzpatrick. Jim decided that he didn't want to discuss politics and chose instead to use up precious seconds of air time slagging off Chelsea and accusing me of being scared of travelling to deepest East London. Strange that, bearing in mind that my mum is from West Ham and my old man's from Stepney!

Over at Stratford Town Hall the day got off to a predictable start with news that the UCATT delegation weren't going to be allowed to vote. They had registered late but had been assured by the London Labour regional office that it wouldn't be a problem and would be sorted out on the day. That was before the regional office had found out that UCATT would be voting Martin. Why that came as a surprise beats the shit out of me and calls into question just how highly tuned the political antennae of the big brains in the GLLP really are. Understandably, the UCATT troops walked out in disgust.

After that we descended into the murky twilight world inhabited by only the most hard core of fixers. The delegate from Hayes and Harlingdon, a left wing stronghold, couldn't make the conference through sickness but one of the sharp-eyed tellers spotted that their vote had been cast in the delegate's absence for the right wing ticket. This was X-rated stuff but you've got to admire the sheer brass neck of the Blairites to pull such a stunt when Hayes MP John McDonnell was actually present in the hall. The delegate from Chingford, another Martin CLP, then informed me that he had been personally lobbied by "neutral" London Region Director David Wilkinson to switch his vote. Luckily, Chingford weren't playing ball but how many others buckled under heavy manners from the machine? When the London Office beamed a little bit of Palm Beach, Florida into Stratford, E15 for the day, it was just a shame they forgot to bring along the sunshine.

Once the order papers were circulated I was surprised to see that my nomination from Ilford South had been scrubbed. Apparently, someone within the machine had decided that the GC meeting that took the decision had been inquorate. Never mind that a full selection box of nominations for Robbins from across the capital had been taken at gatherings, grouplets and couplings of dubious provenance.

But we shouldn't forget that all of the other results on the day reflected well on the left. The challenge to the conference arrangements from the FBU over the agenda was carried but Jimmy boy had cobbled it together as a "Chair's Ruling" which meant that we would have needed two thirds which was never a real prospect.

The RMT motion opposing the Public Private Partnership (PPP) arrangements for the London Tube made it onto the agenda and was carried by a whacking four to one. Top result: but when I read in the paper afterwards that Millbank was "relaxed" about the vote, the alarm bells started ringing. When Millbankers say they are "relaxed" about something, it means that they are going to ignore it. We need to turn up the pressure to make sure that the policy is implemented.

At the end of the PPP debate Loraine Monk, who was in the Chair, had to put up with some whinging little Blairite complaining that she had rigged the speakers. The fact that Loraine had deliberately sought out speakers against the RMT motion was lost on this little hero of the workers' movement. It was hardly Loraine's fault that the one pro-PPPer she could find made the kind of ranting, raving and incoherent contribution that was guaranteed to deliver victory to the Tube unions.

I was delighted that Loraine won the vice-chair unopposed and that so many good comrades were elected onto the Board with her. You can bet your boots that if there's the slightest prospect that the machine will start losing votes at future Board meetings they will move to shut it down.

Finally, I want to thank all the people who supported my campaign – particularly the comrades who helped out with the organisation. You know who you are and all I can say is that our day will come.

I want everyone to stay put in the Party and I would urge those who have left to rejoin the ranks. The battle for the heart and soul of London Labour is not over yet.

I can now get back to concentrating on my union work: first and foremost with UNISON members in London, and particularly the row that's going on down in Hackney and the fight for a decent health service. I'll also be continuing to work closely with the Tube unions on the campaign against PPP and for renationalising the railways.

Anyone at Stratford Town Hall on 11th November who stuck it out till the death will have seen the Blairites gloating at their victory. But don't forget, what goes around comes around. To misquote the Bobby Fuller Four, and Joe Strummer, "I fought the machine and the machine won."

Voting with the alligators

US journalist Greg Palast reports from the swamp.

Wipe that grin off your face. This is Britain's finest hour of self-congratulations, chuckling over your big, dumb American cousins handling democracy like a 3-year-old dumping a bowl of noodle soup on his head. Such delicious condescension from a people with an unelected second chamber made up of genetic fossils.

Well, before you get too pleased with yourself, just remember this. President-elect Dubya may be two cards short of a full deck, but he knows Britain is an island somewhere off the Irish coast where he can stick his Star Wars radar and no one named Tiny Blair is going to tell him no.

Up to this point, your PM has been taking orders from Clinton which he can pretend are his own Third Way ideas with an Arkansas accent. But with Bush, the gloves are off and the New World Order's claws will be bared for all to see. The only difference between Britain and Bolivia is that, when it comes to US absorption of privatised industries and diktat over foreign policy, the Bolivians are more likely to resist.

Last I heard, Ralph Nader's borrowed a wig and dress and was seen heading for the Canadian border. Let's hope the American left comes up with a better plan than fiddling while Washington burns. "No logo" is hardly "Workers of the World Unite."

After I watched the alligators voting in Florida, I broke down, asking Jack Straw for political asylum. Could I become a British citizen? But Jack reminded me that there *are* no citizens in Britain, only subjects. As Al Gore would say, you just can't win.

●Greg's column appears fortnightly in the *Observer*'s Business Section. Gregory.palast@guardian.co.uk

Q&A on the US elections

Did Nader cost Gore?
It would be ridiculous to blame Gore's poor showing primarily on Nader. There were too many other more powerful factors contributing to it, including Gore's own lacklustre campaign, voting error, and outright voter manipulation and fraud.

Did Gore Cost Nader?
If Gore had done his job well, or even if his campaign had been more forthright about its victory margins in the major Democratic states rather than scaring folks silly in all states – Nader would have gotten 5%. Gore's weakness caused large numbers of potential Naderites to vote against Nader even where doing so wasn't needed to beat Bush.

What does the outcome say about US political views?
Little new. We knew Gore and Bush would be close. We knew that roughly twice as many folks would not vote. We also knew the Greens would wind up the third largest party.

What does the election say about left activism?
For getting votes, money matters. Money determines how many people even know that you exist, not to mention what you favour. It determines whether you are sufficiently visible to inspire not only respect, but belief that you can win, which is crucial for holding votes. For communicating content, media matters. Shutting Nader out of the debates was anti-democratic and locked the door on the visibility needed to win 5%.*

What election reforms make sense?
There is likely to be a massive call for reconsidering the role of the Electoral College. That's good – and some people might reasonably wonder why anyone should willingly accept as president someone who got beat in the popular election, much less who also only won the electoral college due to mistakes, manipulation, or outright tampering. But even more important, once the door is open to election reform, what else should we seek? Instant Run-off Voting, where voters rank candidates in order of preference. Also: Proportional Representation – getting away from the winner takes all principle which leaves minorities unrepresented. Lastly: campaign financing reform – perhaps federal funding of all elections, with a special tax on corporations to foot the bill.

*Editor's note: Nader's 15,000-strong rally in Madison Square Gardens was not reported in the *New York Times* and some newspapers even censored his anti-corporate advertisements.

●This is an edited version of an article by Michael Albert from Znet.

Nine of out ten Florida voters who expressed a preference managed to spot the difference ...





human rights watch

THE LIZ DAVIES COLUMN

On their records on human rights, as with so much else of their policies, you can't fit a cigarette paper between Al Gore and George Bush Jr.

Bush's enthusiasm for the death penalty is well known: Texas (where, as Governor, Bush has the responsibility of confirming or commuting executions) has the highest number of executions in the United States. Bush revealed his dedication to duty during the campaign when he described the death penalty as applying to those convicts who are "... innocent... I mean – guilty."

But Gore is also a strident supporter of the death penalty – as, indeed, are most mainstream American politicians – and has willingly used it against his opponents in the past. During the Democratic primaries in 1988 Gore used the Willie Horton case against Michael Dukakis, which did not win Gore the Democratic nomination, but certainly gave George Bush (senior) the green light to run a racist, right-wing series of adverts accusing Dukakis of being soft on crime.

Not a peep comes from either candidate about improving tangible civil liberties in a country both would describe as "the land of the free".

- What about allowing convicted criminals who have served their sentences or their probation the right to vote? Ironically, if Gore loses Florida by a knife-edge, the votes of half a million ex-felons, excluded from the franchise by state law, might have saved him.
- What about decent funding for public defending, so that defendants facing the death penalty if they are convicted don't have to watch their low-paid, low-valued public defender falling asleep in Court?
- What about removing prisons from private corporations; ridding prisons of the routine rapes, beatings and gang-fights that are inflicted on prisoners by both the warders and other prisoners alike?
- What about regulating the police, so that the beating of Rodney King and the death of Amadon Diallo (an unarmed man shot 41 times by New York cops) need never happen again?
- Above all, when will a mainstream politician engage with the horrifying statistic that in several US cities one third of all young black men are in jail, on probation or awaiting trial? Although African Americans are only 13% of the total US population, half of all prisoners are black. It is no surprise that many black activists see the crime fighting policies of both main parties as outright racism.

The "lesser of two evils" argument has been tearing the American left apart, but what greater evil is Gore supposed to prevent?

- There is no reason to believe that either would balk at bombing small countries for the sake of domestic political gain. When asked at a public meeting to justify the deaths of five thousand Iraqi children per month from sanctions, Gore laughed.
- Gore's famous environmental credentials look rather tarnished against his record of being on the wrong side on every major environmental decision the Clinton-Gore administration took. In 1993, having promised to clean up the Everglades, Clinton and Gore gave in to the sugar barons and the real estate industry and failed to push through their clean up bill. His promise in 1992 that a Democratic administration would kill the world's largest hazardous waste incinerator in Ohio was no sooner said than broken (indeed Gore had issued instructions to give the incinerator a permit before he and Clinton had even been sworn into office in January 1993). Gore promised to save the spotted owl in Oregon – but its ancient forest habitat continues to be destroyed at a rate which will make it extinct within a decade. Salmon runs are endangered by Gore's commitment to maintain dams in the Snake River in Oregon. Whatever else he's done, Gore's not been pitching for the fish and fowl vote.
- Gore plays up welfare politics, but the current administration approved the Republican welfare bill introducing vouchers instead of cash, depriving immigrants of services – sound familiar? He has no plans to improve access to health care – and he has been caught up to his neck in the Clinton campaign finance scandals of recent years.
- For some of the American left, the deciding factor has been Gore's support for a woman's right to choose. In practical terms, (if Gore keeps to his word, which cannot be taken for granted – until 1998 Gore voted for anti-abortion laws) if a vacancy arises in the Supreme Court President Gore would not appoint an anti-abortionist to it whereas President Bush might. At some unspecified time, that appointment might wield the casting vote on a test-case restricting abortion rights. I am a passionate defender of abortion rights, but is this tenuous argument a justification for voting for a man who breaks his promises; goes in to bat for big business against the interests of the working class, the environment, and the rest of the world; enthusiastically supports the death penalty... and will continue the White House policy of dropping bombs elsewhere in the world on a whim?

As I write, the world waits to see who will be its most powerful citizen. The closeness of the vote and the uncertainty of the result are an apposite reflection of the close political values that Bush and Gore articulate. Nader is a breath of fresh air. Congratulations to the 2.7 million Americans who voted for him.

End torture in Turkish prisons!

Erkan Gok of Daymer describes the resistance to the torture and isolation used in prisons in Turkey, where constitutional protection is literally paper thin.

Turkey has a constitution based on that of post-revolution France. On paper, it is one of the most democratic in the world: legislative power resides in parliament, executive power in the presidency, and judicial power in the law courts. But the National Security Council (MGK), run by the generals, usurps all these powers at will.

In the 1980s the army assumed direct rule, dissolved parliament and imprisoned the party leaders and parliamentarians. Thousands were arrested, 517 sentenced to death and 49 hanged. 300 others were assassinated in the streets. 171 detainees died under torture. Workers were sacked. Passport applications were refused but 30,000 escaped from Turkey illegally as political refugees. Many were stripped of citizenship rights. Trade unions, associations and parties were closed down. Teachers, university lecturers and judges were sacked. 300 journalists were attacked physically by fascists and the police: three were killed.

Now Turkey has apparently been returned to parliamentary rule, but this has been by permission of the National Security Council – which remains, with its powers intact. Currently, Turkish political parties, including Kurdish and left parties, are debating whether European Union membership will make Turkey more democratic. But democracy cannot be imported. Furthermore, democracy is not about electing the President every four years or electing MPs from two or three more or less identical parties.

America and Europe are selling the Turkish state military equipment, especially tanks and helicopters, while demanding guarantees that it should not be used to attack human rights. Are they selling us baskets of flowers to give to the people?

During the last 15 years the Turkish state privatised state-owned public services. Adequate education and health services are available only to those with money. 60% of the state budget is spent on defence and the regime rules ever more openly by terror.

Only a tiny elite is happy with and benefiting from the system. In the months of October and November, there were large-scale demonstrations against a 10% wage increase in face of a 70-80% rate of inflation – the result of Turkey's economy being controlled by the IMF and the World Bank. Opponents are labelled as terrorists and there are 10,000 political prisoners today in Turkey.

New "F-type" prisons with isolation cells being introduced for political prisoners have two aims: to make it easier to torture and kill the main political leaders; and to break the solidarity and morale of all prisoners, rendering them so damaged physically and/or psychologically that on release they cannot fight back. Under European and Turkish law, isolation cells should be used only to punish prisoners breaking discipline, with a legal limit of 30 days confinement. The authorities now plan to hold prisoners in isolation cells indefinitely. A prison guard has commented: "The isolation cell is like an operating theatre, and solitude is the surgeon's knife." Personality itself is destroyed by it.

Increasingly brutal raids by security and army personnel on political prisoners terrorise and injure inmates. In Burdur Prison earlier this year, Veli Sacilik lost his arm through an attack by the army using a bulldozer. He is now in an isolation cell. The army's excuse for bulldozing and wounding sixty prisoners was that they were looking for an escape tunnel. Injured and sick prisoners have since been denied adequate medical treatment. One of these is a young woman, Filiz Gulkokuer, suffering from a form of anaemia which is fatal without treatment, whose lawyer's repeated applications for her removal to hospital have been refused.

Protest flood threatens dam

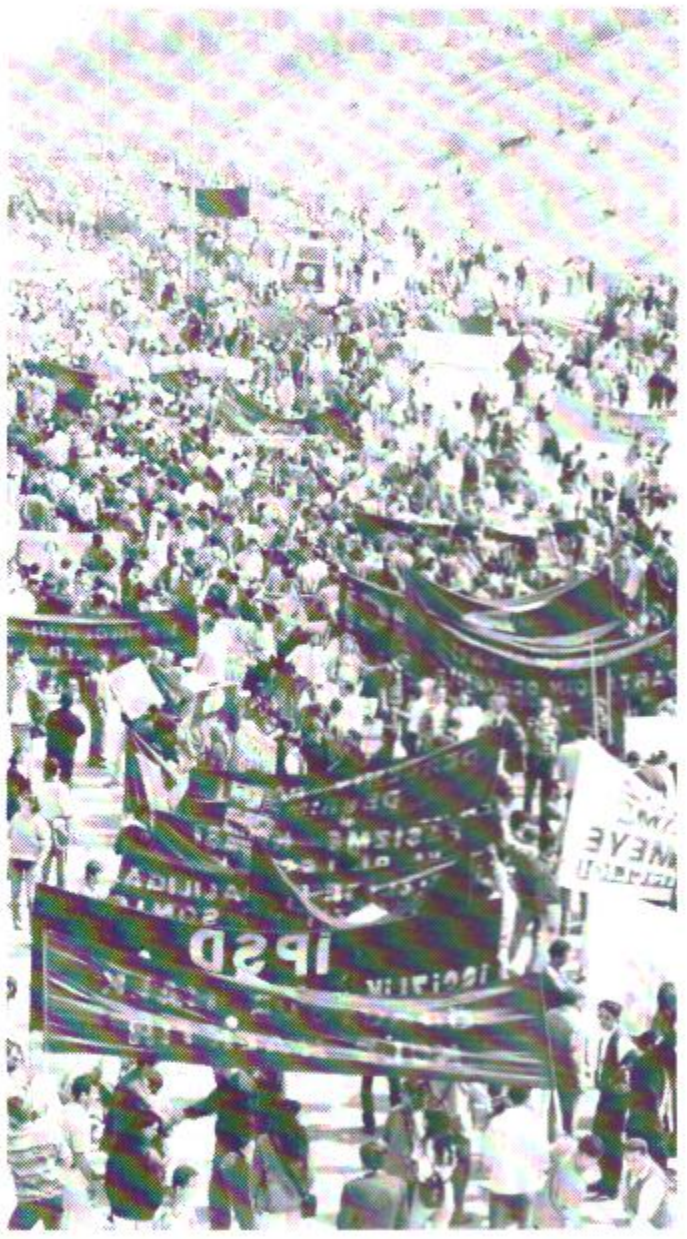
World-wide condemnation of the Ilisu Dam project in Turkey, which would drown one of the world's oldest towns and displace nearly 8,000 mainly Kurdish people, is growing. The final report of the World Commission on Dams gives guidelines for dam-building which would be contravened if the Ilisu Dam goes ahead. The report demands that dam-building should conform to internationally acceptable ethical and environmental codes. Tony Blair is under increasing pressure, now even from some of his own Cabinet members, to withdraw the proposed export credit guarantee to Balfour Beatty. The Swedish construction giant Skansa has pulled out of the deal. This is an issue where international campaigning, by Friends of the Earth and others, has had a real result.

●Contact: Ilisu Dam Campaign: e-mail: iiisu@gn.apc.org

Protest against the Ilisu dam, 30th October, Westminster.



Photo: Paul Mattsson



Kurdish and Turkish workers celebrate May Day in Istanbul in 1999: but the right to protest is dependent on the Security Council's agreement.

Nobody should be imprisoned for their political views. We demand amnesty for all political prisoners. We are fighting for an end to inequality and exploitation for humanity as a whole. Human rights are indivisible. The crime of injustice must be laid at capitalism's door: it is the capitalist system which is the enemy of humanity.

11th November was the twenty-first day of a nationwide hunger strike by prisoners in Turkey against isolation cells. Their relatives, intellectuals, artists, trade unionists, socialists and some political parties have set up a committee supporting the prisoners with their own hunger strike from outside. Some of the prisoners, already ill or injured, are close to death.

We reject isolation cells everywhere. We believe that international solidarity is now more important than ever, and we call on the British working class and ordinary people to continue giving their support in the struggle against torture and isolation cells.

- Please fax your protests to:

-President: 00 90 312 427 1330
-Prime Minister: 00 90 312 418 5743
-Justice Minister: 00 90 312 417 3854
-Home Secretary: 00 90 312 418 1795.

- Please send copies to Campaign for Human Rights in Turkey, e-mail: campaign@daymer.org

Shaky start for Kostunica

Geoff Ryan, Brent East CLP, looks at developments since the overthrow of Milosevic.

The last issue of *LLB* welcomed the overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic but warned against the nationalist agenda of Yugoslav President Vojislav Kostunica and his allies. In general the picture remains far from rosy.

There have been some positive developments since Kostunica came to power. The freeing of jailed Kosova Albanian human rights activist Flora Brovina and Serbian journalist Miroslav Filipovic is welcome, but even Milosevic had begun to free some Kosovar activists.

However, relations with Montenegro have worsened. Far from damping down demands for Montenegrin independence, the overthrow of Milosevic has encouraged them. The Montenegrin government recently adopted the German mark as its official currency – as an interim measure before replacing it not with the Yugoslav dinar but the euro. Montenegrin president Milo Djukanovic has declared in favour of entry into NATO.

Kostunica knows he can resist Montenegrin demands because he has the backing of the West. When Milosevic was in power, Western governments ignored Djukanovic's past support for him and encouraged aspirations to independence. Now Milosevic has gone, Djukanovic – despite all his pathetic grovelling – is to be put firmly in his place. The entry of Yugoslavia into the United Nations, hastily arranged by US envoy Richard Holbrooke, was designed precisely to head off independence for Montenegro.

Kostunica has done nothing to suggest he is in favour of the reunification of Bosnia. His first visit to Bosnia was to Trebinje in the Republika Srpska (Serb Republic) entity, where he attended a reburial service for the rabidly nationalist and anti-communist poet Jovan Ducic who died in the United States in 1943 – two years before Tito came to power! This visit was organised by Mirko Sarovic of the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS), the party founded by Radovan Karadzic. It took place at the end of a week of attacks in Brcko on Muslims by Serb students who were demanding educational apartheid. Brcko is the only town in Bosnia that is part of both the Muslim-Croat federation and Republika Srpska.

After the recent parliamentary elections, in which the SDS made big gains, it seems likely that Sarovic will be the new president of Republika Srpska. Kostunica's visit no doubt helped to boost the SDS vote.

Relations with Kosova became even more strained after Kostunica called for the cancellation of municipal elections. He was ignored by the overwhelming majority of Kosova Albanians who saw the elections as a referendum on independence. The elections resulted in victory for the "moderate" Ibrahim Rugova over former KLA leader Hashim Thaci. However, Rugova's victory does not imply a lessening of independence demands in Kosova. After all Rugova declared independence from Serbia in the 1990s and was elected president of an independent Kosova until side-lined during last year's war.

Kostunica has said he is willing to discuss with Rugova but has so far made no concessions on independence. Both Kostunica and Zoran Djindjic have called for the sending of Serbian troops to Kosova, as allowed under UN Resolution 1244. At the moment, however, Kostunica cannot rely totally on the West to back him. There is a very real split between the US and European members of NATO, with Richard Holbrooke advocating possible independence for Kosova and the Europeans implacably opposed. This split was clear in the recent elections, with the US backing Thaci while European governments endorsed Rugova. How far this split will go we cannot predict – not least because of the current uncertainty surrounding the US presidential election.

Kostunica's actions so far have done nothing to improve relations between the states of former Yugoslavia. They are a continuation of war by other means.

Left gains in Brazil

Mike Phipps, Brent South CLP, reports: In a major blow to the neoliberal government of President Cardoso, the Brazilian Workers Party (PT) won 13 out of 16 contests for city mayor in second round voting on 29th October. The PT now controls six out of 26 state capitals, including Brazil's largest city, Sao Paulo, where anti-corruption campaigner Marta Suplicy beat a populist Conservative with 58% of the vote.

Cardoso's policies of privatisation, repression in the countryside, speculative urban development and unemployment have done nothing for city dwellers, their numbers swollen by mass migration from rural areas. 17 million people live in Sao Paulo alone, stretching infrastructure to the limit, and crime is endemic to the struggle for existence, with 1,000 murders every month. Mayor Suplicy may struggle to make an impact in her four year term.

Left revival in Nicaragua

Meanwhile in Managua, capital of Nicaragua, Sandinista Herty Lewites was elected mayor, ending a decade of control by the Liberals, who govern nationally. Lewites, a businessman who runs an amusement park, cuts a different figure from the armed revolutionaries who came to power in a popular insurrection in 1979. He left the party in the 1990s for the Sandinista Renewal Movement but later rejoined.

Former President Daniel Ortega, who ruled Nicaragua from 1979 to 1990, hailed the victory as the start of his party's comeback. The Sandinistas also won the major cities in 12 out of 17 departments, including Esteli and Leon – a complete reversal of the poor results in 1990 and 1996.

A state of siege

Noam Chomsky examines Israel's latest "solution" to the Middle East conflict.

The primary innovation of Barak's new plan is that the US-Israeli demands are to be imposed by direct force instead of coercive diplomacy, and in a harsher form, to punish the victims who refused to concede politely. The outlines are in basic accord with policies established informally in 1968 and variants that have been proposed since. The policies have not only been proposed, but implemented, with the support of the US.

Barak's plan is a particularly harsh version of familiar US-Israeli rejectionism. It calls for terminating electricity, water, telecommunications, and other services that are doled out in meagre rations to the Palestinian population, who are now under virtual siege.

Independent development was ruthlessly barred by the military regime from 1967, leaving people destitute and dependent, a process that has worsened considerably during the US-run "Oslo process". One reason is the "closures" regularly instituted, most brutally by the more dovish Labour-based governments. As journalist Amira Hass states: this policy was initiated by the Rabin government "years before Hamas had planned suicide attacks and has been perfected over the years, especially since the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority." An efficient mechanism of strangulation and control, closure has been accompanied by the import of an essential commodity to replace the cheap and exploited Palestinian labour on which the economy relies: illegal immigrants from around the world, many of them victims of globalisation. Surviving in misery and without rights, they are regularly described as a virtual slave labour force in the Israeli press. The current Barak proposal is to extend this program.

Seven years after the Declaration of Principles in September 1993 – which foretold this outcome for anyone who chose to see – Israel has "security and administrative control" of most of the West Bank and 20% of the Gaza Strip. It has been able "to double the number of settlers in 10 years, to enlarge the settlements, to continue its discriminatory policy of cutting back water quotas for three million Palestinians, to prevent Palestinian development in most of the area of the West Bank, and to seal an entire nation into restricted areas, imprisoned in a network of bypass roads meant for Jews only. During these days of strict internal restriction of movement in the West Bank, one can see how carefully each road was planned. So that 200,000 Jews have freedom of movement, about three million Palestinians are locked into their Bantustans until they submit to Israeli demands. The bloodbath that has been going on for three weeks is the natural outcome of seven years of lying and deception, just as the first Intifada was the natural outcome of direct Israeli occupation."

●Edited from Znet.

A statement of concerned Jews against Israeli repression has been officially launched by Marta Romer, Barbara Bloch, Marsha Rosengarten, Yael Oren Kahn, Roland Rance and is available at the following web site address: http://www.PetitionOnline.com/JvO1/petition.html.

They invite all Jews who support it to endorse it and circulate it further to anyone who might have interest in it. The statement ends:

We urge Israel to uphold the human rights of Palestinians by:

•immediate, total and unconditional withdrawal from all of the territories taken by force and occupied in 1967

•recognition of the Palestinian right to national self-determination, to return and to compensation, and the implementation of steps towards the realization of this right,

•abolition of all discriminatory laws, and the introduction of full legal equality between Jews and non-Jews,

•redistribution of resources and a massive programme of international aid to rehabilitate Palestinian communities.

Only an approach based on these elements stands any chance of leading to the conditions for a just peace in the region.



Photo: Molly Cooper

Demonstration to oppose Israeli attacks on Palestinians, London, 14th October.

What future for peace?

Ghada Karmi, a leader of the Palestinian Community Association in the UK and an Associate Fellow at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, explains recent events

On 23rd October, Israeli Prime Minster Barak announced that Israel was taking a "time out" from the peace process, confirming what had already become evident in the preceding few weeks of violence between Israel and the Palestinians.

The 1993 Oslo Process, with its benefits for Israel and which would never have been negotiated by a strong Palestinian leadership, had been tolerated by most Palestinians because they saw it as the pathway to an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital. So long as the process finally achieved that goal, then the loss of 78% of old Mandate Palestine, as well as the humiliations and depredations of the last seven years could be tolerated. This fact, conveniently obscured by a gushing Western mythology of "reconciliation", is fundamental to understanding the current events. It was when the Palestinians discovered the true outline of the coming agreement at the Camp David talks last July that they erupted.

They learned that the state they would get would be far from independent, its borders controlled by Israel, lacking the major part of East Jerusalem and even its religious sites. Not only had Israel taken pre-1967 Palestine – which no Palestinian can forgive or forget – it was also trying to take land from the remnant left after 1967. The Palestinian economy, already in dire straits, would be even more dependent on Israel, and Palestinian natural resources would remain under Israeli control. All the waiting had been for nothing – the backlash was inevitable.

Opposition leader Ariel Sharon's provocative visit to the Haram al-Sharif (Temple Mount) on 28th September was not the cause but the trigger for the subsequent explosion.

It is pent-up fury at Israeli occupation and arrogance that drives Palestinian youths to risk their lives against live ammunition daily. And it is questionable whether Mr Arafat or any of his aides, who were also taken by surprise at the explosion, is in control of the situation. No popular revolution in history has ever been stage-managed.

The draconian Israeli response so far has been counter-productive. Palestinians have now bloodily demonstrated that the Oslo model for sharing – an inequitable division of land and resources that massively favours Israel, backed by a partisan US – is futile and will be resisted. They will now demand no less than a fully independent state on all of the post-1967 territories with East Jerusalem as its capital.

They should be supported. Israel, which had a historic opportunity in 1993 to reach an undreamed of settlement with the very people it had dispossessed has, through its insensitivity and lack of vision, lost it.

●This is an edited version of an article which first appeared in *BBC Online*.

Conference backs renovation

Graham Copp reports: The sixth conference of the Spanish United Left (IU) in Madrid in October re-endorsed the programme of this political-social movement, including a 35 hour week, opposition to NATO membership, self determination for the Basque Country and renegotiation of the Euro's Stability and Growth Pact.

The three-day conference was dominated by the election of the new Co-ordinator General, effectively the leader of the coalition. The main two candidates were Francisco Frutos, General Secretary of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE), and Gaspar Llamazares, a deputy from Asturias. Gaspar Llamazares was elected after winning 32 seats on the Federal Committee (the body which elects the Leader) against 30 for Frutos and 13 for the third, "critical" candidacy of Nines Maestro.

Llamazares's victory breaks the PCE domination of the past. While the PCE remains by far the biggest and most influential element of the coalition (all three candidates are members of the PCE), it proved unable to railroad its candidate through the conference.

Llamazares, opposed by the PCE apparatus, assembled a grouping of more independent elements of the PCE and a broad mixture of minority groups, ranging from the remnants of the left social-democratic Tercera Via and the PASOC to Trotskyist groupings such as Espacio Alternativo. Llamazares stood for pluralism and willingness to re-engage with those who have become disillusioned with IU, whereas Frutos represented those who expelled a large chunk of the activist base and saw the popular support halve in four years.

The whole process has been divisive, but the IU emerges stronger. In the first month of his leadership, Llamazares has managed to broaden his support and offers IU a good chance of maintaining its political position within the Spanish electoral system, which is set up to favour two main political parties and smaller regional ones.

Not very Nice

By Don Rocinante: The forthcoming EU intergovernmental conference (IGC) in Nice is tabling some dangerous proposals, in particular, extending the mandate of the little-known "Article 133 Committee" which is composed of members of the European Commission and EU member states.

The proposed changes to Article 133 of the Treaty of the European Community would extend the European Commission's negotiating mandate to cover not just trade in goods, but also investment, services and intellectual property rights. Also planned is a change to voting procedures on trade and investment so that unanimity is no longer required and the Commission has the sole negotiating competence, thus preventing national governments vetoing trade deals not in their interest. The proposals include an explicit agreement allowing the Commission to represent the EU and its members in the World Trade Organisation.

None of these proposals is acceptable, given the EU's recent track record on trade and investment liberalisation. EU Trade Commissioners Leon Brittan and Pascal Lamy have been the driving force behind the proposal for a new round of trade negotiations in the WTO, despite strong opposition. At Seattle last year they negotiated acceptance of biotechnology proposals from the USA which had been rejected by Environment Minister Michael Meacher and other member states. If these proposed procedures had been in place in 1998, the Multilateral Agreement on Investment could not have been killed off by France.

The secrecy of the European Committee that deals with EU trade policy is also of great concern. Even European MPs are largely unaware of this Committee's activities and there has been no public debate about the proposed changes. Anti-globalisation activists are calling for the widest possible campaign against these dangerous proposals.

GATSastrophe!

World Development Movement campaigners are alarmed at a major new threat to public services worldwide. Mike Phipps, Brent South CLP, reports.

Current negotiations at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) are set to pressurise governments around the world to privatise services irreversibly. The GATS, agreed at the WTO in 1994, aims to remove any restrictions on service delivery that are considered "barriers to trade", including in education and health care.

The WTO GATS identifies 160 sectors, most of which are dominated by big business. For example, National Grid delivers electricity in Zambia, Anglian Water supplies water in Chile and Thames Water has contracts in Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia. For these companies, government regulations restrain their activities and ultimately reduce profit – and must go.

GATS is also a key priority for the UK Government, which wants services markets liberalised around the world because it is one of the world's top services exporters, second only to the US.

The signing of the 1994 agreement passed almost unnoticed. Government commitments under GATS are effectively irreversible. These new negotiations have the potential to restructure radically the role of government world-wide. Should governments be able to demand that foreign building contractors use locally trained architects or oblige tour companies to use local caterers? According to the GATS national treatment rule the answer is no. Should a government be allowed – for social or conservation reasons – to limit the number of golf courses being developed in an area? Under the GATS market access rules the answer is no. Governments cannot limit the number of service suppliers operating in designated sectors.

More than 1,400 mistakes have already been registered in existing GATS commitments. The complexity of the GATS is an extra problem for developing countries who have very few negotiators in Geneva and often lack technical experts in international trade law.

American promoters of GATS are trying to convince European governments to relinquish protection over public sectors and focus on the export interests of their service corporations. But private suppliers do not necessarily deliver the services that people want or need. In 1995, water privatisation in Puerto Rico meant poor communities went without water while US military bases and tourist resorts enjoyed an unlimited supply. In Argentina, a French company was granted a 30-year contract to deliver water to a rural province. While water rates doubled, the water supplied "turned brown".

Popular protests have resulted. In Costa Rica, huge demonstrations took place in March 2000 against the privatisation of the country's energy and telecommunications sector. In Indonesia, there have been mass strikes calling for the government to end contracts with private water companies. In Bolivia a successful general strike in Cochahamba reversed the privatisation of the water supply. The UK Government argues that non-commercial public services will be exempt because they are government-provided. However, almost all public services could be considered to be in competition with other suppliers. In the UK, state-run schools and universities compete with private enterprises at every level, making the whole UK education system potentially subject to GATS disciplines.

The GATS will ensure that some of the world's poorest countries cannot reverse World Bank and International Monetary Fund Structural Adjustment Programmes, although many governments have responded to popular protests. In the year 2000 alone, there have been over 50 protests world-wide against IMF and World Bank privatisation packages involving over one million demonstrators. The WTO will extend the liberalisation process that these other institutions have started.

● Information from the World Development Movement, 25 Beehive Place, London SW9 7QR.

New from Chomsky

No land, no peace

Mike Phipps reviews *Rogue States*, by Noam Chomsky, published by Pluto, price £10.99.

International law is now broken more regularly by the US than at any time previously, observes Chomsky in this latest collection of articles. Vietnam, Iraq, the Balkans all come under scrutiny – East Timor too, described by one US policymaker as "a speedbump on the road to dealing with Jakarta". Current investigations into last year's mass killings there by Indonesian paramilitaries are described by UN officials as "an absolute joke, a complete whitewash." Chomsky shows how this is part of a broader US strategy to render the UN ineffective, pliantly supported in this by New Labour.

With $1 billion in US aid now pledged to the Colombian military, the White House is drawing the same conclusion there as from conflicts in East Timor and Turkey: arm the killers. The "Plan Colombia", aimed at curbing the country's "narco-guerrillas", is all the more implausible given the Colombian military's own deep involvement in the cocaine trade, not to mention large scale human rights abuses.

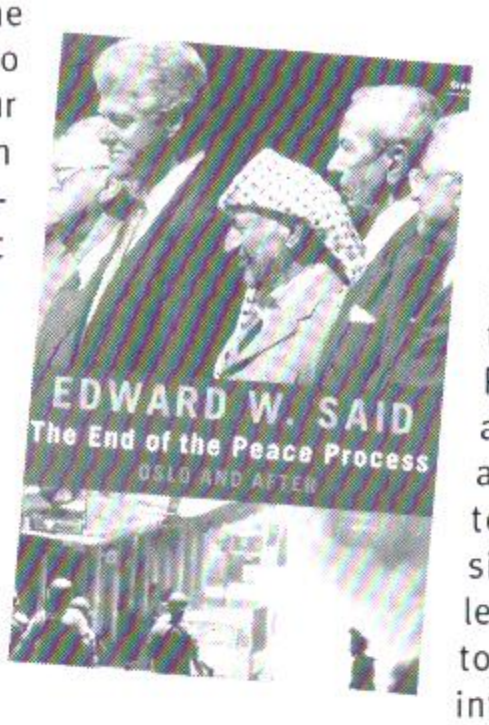
To those who see an incoherence in US foreign policy given its selective attitude to human rights, international law and peacekeeping, Chomsky points out a remarkable consistency: different administrations have unfailingly met the needs of US capitalism and its military-industrial complex.

In its wide range across the politics and economics of diverse countries, *Rogue States* makes an excellent introduction to Chomsky's thinking and an ideal Christmas present – treat yourself!

Mike Phipps reviews *The End of the Peace Process*, by Edward Said, published by Granta, price £15.

When the Barak Government recently called "time out" on the peace process after the shooting by Israeli forces of over 120 Palestinians, it was tempting to ask "what peace process?" As Edward Said reminds us in this collection of articles, the Middle East accounts for 60% of world arms sales, leading to a high level of militarisation of both Arab and Israeli society, with democratic freedoms abrogated and education and agriculture in decline.

Said is disliked by many liberal Zionists – Jonathan Freedland in the *Guardian* for one – for not being grateful for the peace process, but as he points out here, there are too many Palestinian refugees (four million) and too much apartheid to make such tinkerings acceptable. The West Bank remains divided into a series of quasi-Bantustans or reservations separated by Israeli roads. This helps fulfil the Zionist dream of giving Palestinians control of their own municipal services but not the land. West Bank towns can be closed at will and all commercial traffic is controlled by Israel, giving it effective control of the Palestinian economy. Israel has the power to veto Palestinian legislation, candidates and voters for the Palestinian authority.



Behind all the rhetoric, the central issue remains land. Illegal Israeli settlements have increased 50% since the Oslo accords and the Palestinians are the victims. Said writes of the "helplessness one feels listening to a young man who has spent fifteen years working as an illegal day labourer in Israel in order to save up money to build a little house for his family, only to discover one day upon returning from work that the house has been reduced to a pile of rubble, flattened by an Israeli bulldozer with everything still inside the house." Why is it, he asks, that any Jew anywhere has the theoretical right of return, but the Palestinians have none at all?

Said eloquently condemns Israeli leaders and US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, whom he accuses of behaving like a "macho thug". But he is also highly critical of the professional class of Palestinians who have adapted to the deteriorating situation. Above all he singles out the corrupt Arafat leadership that "has tried to forget its own people's tragic history in order to accommodate their American and Israeli mentors". The combination of repression – torture and imprisonment of Palestinian dissidents – and incompetence – such as his not reading the full text of the agreement he signed with Israel – parallels that of the worst dictators. $40m a month flows into Arafat's coffers, much of it used to finance the 90,000 loyalists who work in 17 separate security forces (including naval security!) and run mafia-like operations, skimming money off local businesses.

Said offers personal insights into Israeli leaders too, such as Netanyahu who would debate Said on TV only from a separate studio and who demanded a change of seats when he found he was sitting in front of Said on a plane – this when Netanyahu was Israel's UN Representative.

Many of the articles here are addressed to the Arab world. Said demands an end to the inhumanity in Arab public life that replicates that of colonialism. He calls on Palestinians to go beyond addressing just policymakers and start publicly challenging the whole moral legitimacy of Zionism in a similar way to anti-apartheid campaigners.

Correspondence

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

I am appalled by your simplistic and distinctly ungreen editorial on the fuel crisis. This whole area of policy is not just about taxation strategy – it is about the environment.

Many people may regard "private transport (as) a necessity", but for the third of households who do not own a car, plus the many non-drivers (disproportionately the poor and women), public transport fares have rocketed, while the cost of car use has stayed constant for 20 years. Reducing fuel duty can be no policy for a socialist government.

Cutting fuel duty by nearly 3%, as advocated in *Socialist Campaign Group News*, in The *Independent* by Ken Livingstone and, by implication, in *LLB*, is little different to the Tory Party. However, SERA has pointed out that the 3p cut would save:

•a pensioner driving a 1200cc Ford Fiesta 3,000 miles a year: £9.99;

•a family with an 1800cc Ford Focus driving 10,000 miles a year: £36.71;

•a high income earner driving a Range Rover 30,000 miles a year: £195.00.

SERA suggests instead three bands of vehicle excise duty, which would see the said pensioner save £50 rather than the "redistributive" Tory saving of £10 which you appear to advocate.

In any case, any supposed regressive aspect of fuel duty is nothing compared with the regressive effects of climate change, which would hit the poorest in the developing world most. Even the pro-car AA has admitted a 10% increase in the cost of fuel leads to a 6-8% reduction in fuel use. Meanwhile, increases in fuel duty between 1996 and 1999 are estimated to have produced annual carbon savings of between one and 2.5 million tonnes by 2010. This was completely ignored by your editorial, which went off at a tangent about taxation policy which, though I agree with it, is largely irrelevant, because on general taxation policy the Government is wrong, but on the specifics of fuel duty they were right.

The £1.26 billion needed to cut fuel duty would be better (and more redistributively) spent reducing the indirect tax of high bus and train fares.

Daniel Blaney
Billericay

Who does Gordon Brown think he is kidding? He announces 3p off the duty on a form of petrol no one can buy and thinks that will assuage the anger of ordinary workers who are being taxed with no regard to their income. Note it is 3p off the duty and is likely to go straight into the pockets of the oil companies.

In the week before the pre-budget, Shell announced an 80% increase in profits from soaring oil prices. They are pocketing £25m per day. They get their oil out of the North Sea virtually without any tax or royalties. BP did even better and doubled its profits for the first nine months of 2000 as its earnings exceeded £6,500m – around twice the cost of running the Department of Social Security.

Let those who have the broadest backs bear the greatest burden. Yet Gordon would have none of it:

"It has been put to me that North Sea oil companies earning higher profits from higher oil prices should be subject to special taxes, but I can tell the House that I am determined not to make short-term decisions based on short-term factors." In plain language, he told those who wanted to tax the rich to sod off.

Yet these are the same oil companies who have conned successive governments into special tax concessions with a threat to extract oil elsewhere and sob stories about the low price of oil. It's time to make their pips squeak and use the money to invest in proper environmental control measures and affordable, accessible and frequent public transport for all.

Ian Malcolm-Walker
Derby North

Keith Ackermann's attack on the film *Billy Elliott* was like Dave Spart from *Private Eye*. It sounded humourless, misguided and irrelevant. It read like a middle class reviewer slumming it. As a miner's grandson and feisty prole, I've got to correct a few inaccuracies.

First, the film is a true story, so how is it a "fantasy"? It is not a blatant attack on the working class, but a realistic look at both the reactionary elements and subversive elements that exist within that community.

Billy does not turn his back on his class – he just takes a different career path. He remains proud of his people right until the end. Is ballet class betrayal? The police, not the miners, are shown as boorish oafs – the miners emerge showing all the best working class values: a sense of humour, solidarity, loyalty, and honour. In fact, Billy mocks the ballet teacher's right wing husband for his anti-strike propaganda. Billy's dad doesn't "scab": he crosses the picket line, but turns back when he realises his mistake.

All workers should go and see this film, not picket it as Keith Ackermann suggests. It shows that working class people can rise above red-neck reactionary *Sun* reader status and through struggle achieve their dreams. The most intelligent people in life are socialists and this film is about expanding minds and enjoying culture. Admittedly it's not as good as Ken Loach's *Riff Raff* or *Brassed Off*, but it's a damn good film which explodes a few stereotypes.

Paul Wellings
Chelmsford

Matthew Willgress is too harsh (*The stuff that Dreams is made of*, November *LLB*) in his criticism of the unnamed Editorial Board member and delegate to Labour Party Conference who applauded Peter Mandelson's speech. Doesn't Matthew realise that the tedium

TRIBUNE

News from the Inside



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

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

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

❑ Please send me details of annual subscriptions by Direct Debit

Name.....

Address.....

.....Postcode.....

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

of endless on-message utterances from Blairite toadies can reduce event the most hardened socialist to a near comatose state? In these circumstances, it is only too easy to be misled when fellow delegates erupt into cheers and clapping, without realising exactly whom it is one is applauding.

I only hope that the lift home atoned slightly and accelerated any membership application for the Ken Livingstone fan club.

John Stewart
Hackney, London

The balanced statement by the Jewish Socialist Group (JSG) in the November *LLB* on the present mini-war in Israel/Palestine contrasts sharply with the one-sided viewpoint by Roland Rance on the page opposite.

The JSG states it "supports unconditionally the independence and national right of self-determination, including statehood, of both Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs; each can be fulfilled without prejudice to the rights of the other; [we] call for the removal of Jewish settlements from the territories occupied in 1967; we support the socialist and labour movement and peace forces within Israel striving for socialism and against war".

However, with many more words, Roland comments only on Israeli state crimes, about "ethnic cleansing", etc,; but offers no labour, class or socialist approach to the situation, calling merely for "a new anti-apartheid movement".

The left tradition, of putting national questions first and of equating the very different South Africa and Ireland struggles with Palestine/Israel, is wrong. Socialists can learn from James Connolly whose famous book in its title alone *Labour & Ireland* puts Labour, class struggle, first, arguing that for real peace and unity, labour should lead the national liberation struggle. However, on this small plot of land where global contradictions seem to concentrate, there exists a double tragedy of two historically oppressed and heroic peoples, of two rights to self-determination, not one.

Jews went to Palestine before, during and after World War II in a desperate search for some sort of life, not to oppress Palestinians. The West closed its borders to Jewish refugees beyond a small quota, and still does today, as Jews flee anti-Semitism in the ex-USSR. The truer founders of Israel were global anti-Semites and Hitler, not Zionists and Ben-Gurion. After that, two historically downtrodden peoples were caught up in a double-tragedy not of their making, ever more subject to the ultra-nationalism of their rulers and religious fundamentalism on both sides. The weakness of the international labour and socialist movement during and since that time is to blame for the continued reaction on all sides. In that sense we are to blame, comrade Roland, not Jews!

Steve Myers
Camberwell & Peckham CLP

By what logic does Geoff Ryan believe (as he apparently does) that Bosnian Serbs' wish to be part of Serbia, rather than Bosnia, is wrong, but that Kosovar Albanians' wish to be part of Albania, rather than Yugoslavia, is right?

As regards Kosovo, one can ask: is it right in principle that when people migrate from country A to country B, they can claim independence for that part of country B? Such action is strongly resented by the indigenous population (Israel and the six counties of Ireland being topical examples) and understandably so. If people migrate, they should do so with the intention of sharing their new country on a basis of equality with the indigenous population, not with the intention of dividing it. The KLA aims not only to divide Kosovo from the rest of Yugoslavia but to cleanse it of all non-Albanians.

Bosnia is a different situation. Bosnia was not, and is not, a country. It was an administrative region of Yugoslavia. Inter-ethnic peace in Bosnia was the result of the Yugoslav, not Bosnian, constitution. On the break-up of Yugoslavia, it is not clear why the Serbian part of Bosnia should be part of a new country of Bosnia rather than of Serbia – except to satisfy the divide and rule policy of NATO.

Alan Leadbetter
Stoke-on-Trent

Most of the scare stories being peddled around Hackney will be seen for what they are once the crisis is over. The crisis in Hackney is founded on a very deep malaise in many local authorities where successive administrations have placed their faith in managers and a mixed economy of public services and the private sector. The opportunities for corruption and inefficiencies are multiplied by weak politicians.

In Hackney, a hung council since 1996 has destroyed an already remote administration. Every year, a false budget has been approved. Every year a mid-year crisis is announced and managers offer up a selection of cuts in front line services and rent, service charges and tax increases. Councillors recoil from some of the more stupid cuts, but were never presented with the necessary reductions in empires that privatisation and the inexorable reduction in services required. Thus directorates are stuffed with well paid officers and consultants. 300 mobile phones were issued with no operational justification and an army of (more expensive) temporary staff was employed to plug the gaps caused by previous cuts, making the financial loss worse.

Each year, the Council struggled on with vast debts and covered that up with the sale of land and buildings, borrowing and creative accounting. Over four years, an estimated £8 million was surreptitiously transferred from the housing revenue account to the general fund, to reduce the burden on the middle class and business.

Councillors do bear responsibility. They believed in self-serving managers and failed over 30 years as a Labour administration to move towards more workers' control and better procedures. They also failed to work with community groups and activists to bring solutions to age old problems of poverty, overcrowding and environmental decay.

If the left is to ally itself with workers and residents to seek solutions, we have to make ourselves available to debate what went wrong and what can be done to move towards a local government that represents the people of Hackney and not just those with their place on the gravy train.

John Calderon
Hackney South CLP

Mr. Paul Richards: an apology

In the November edition of *LLB* we described Mr Paul Richards, Labour's PPC for Lewes, as "a disgraced former LLM lobbyist". This has no basis in fact whatever, and was the result of a last minute error on our part. We confirm that Paul Richards is not a lobbyist, nor has he been disgraced, nor has he ever worked for LLM. We are happy to put the record straight, and to apologise to Mr Richards for any inconvenience caused by this untrue statement.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

"As social democrats our concern is not simply to organise to get Party representatives elected to Parliament."
Labour Party Assistant General Secretary **David Evans** finally turning Labour into the SDP Mark II, *Progress*, Autumn 2000.



THE CHRISTINE SHAWCROFT COLUMN

As regular readers will remember, I wasn't initially allowed on any NEC sub committees on the grounds that I was too new and inexperienced. What a difference a year makes: I've now been put on the Joint Local Government Committee (JLGC). This body brings together NEC members; Government representatives, including David Blunkett, Stephen Byers, George Howarth and Henry McLeish; Muriel Barker and Graham Lane from the Association of Labour Councillors (ALC); Ian Swithenbank, Joan Taylor and Harry Jones from the Local Government Association (LGA); and Norman Murray from the Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA).

Imagine my surprise at finding, at my first meeting on 13th November, that the most left wing people there were... Labour Party staff. Well, apart from me, of course. The ALC representatives proposed that there be discussions on moving to a four year term of office for Labour group leaders – to ensure stability, you understand. It was left to staff to point out that if things went wrong and a group lost confidence in the leader, there would currently be no mechanism under the Rules to get rid of him or her.

All the local government representatives were quite happy with the progress of legislation to ensure small councillor cabals meet behind closed doors. Is this really ALC and LGA policy? I'm not allowed to be a councillor any more, so I really wouldn't know, but I'm assured by the Labour Campaign for Open Local Government that there is considerable disquiet the length and breadth of the country.

At the request of comrades in Northamptonshire, I raised the matter of their regional office's interference in the drawing up of the panel for county council selections. I was assured that regional offices have discretion to take over where they are not satisfied that the panel is being put together in a spirit of independence. I know this. The key question is: what are the criteria by which regional offices decide that a Local Government Committee (LGC) or District Labour Party (DLP) is not being independent? One measly example was given: intervention may be justified if it was felt that the whole thing was being controlled by sitting councillors. Well, that's fair enough, but no one suggested this has happened in Northampton. I was promised an email setting out the reasons behind the Northamptonshire decision, but at the time of writing I haven't received it. It seems to be taking as long to pull the list of criteria out of the files of "guidance which all local parties should have as a matter of course" as it would have done to write it from scratch after I had asked for it.

Several members of the JLGC expressed great satisfaction at the way panels have improved the calibre of local authority candidates, given that many previous longstanding councillors were not up to the job, as local government has changed so much. Hilary Armstrong said that panellists in her area had expressed amazement at how sitting councillors had no understanding of equal opportunities. These people will all have to be removed from the panel, of course.

I refrained from joining in on my experiences of panel making in Tower Hamlets, on which I could bore for England, but I do find this idea of failing people on equal opportunities interesting. Who is to say that the LGC or DLP cliques running the interviews know anything about equal opps? You don't have to get onto a panel or pass any kind of written or verbal test to start ruling out branch nominations. Maybe the branches who selected these councillors should have to pass a test in equal opps?

I have known people who worked as equal opportunities officers for other authorities (one had even written their policy) "fail" on equal opps. In Tower Hamlets (sorry) a Bangladeshi ex-councillor who was the equal opportunities officer for his professional association "failed" equal opportunities – although after an appeal he was reinstated to the panel after the majority of the selections had taken place. Like so much ('life experience', 'vision statement') it's just become another charge that no one can defend themselves against, because it can mean anything the interview panel wants it to.

Candidates who passed panel interviews for the last local authority elections, and are thus full to bursting with commitment to equal opportunities, life experience and representational skills and whose vision statements are as bright and shiny as a new coin, are busily privatising council services that even the Tories wouldn't have dreamt of touching. Perhaps they should have been tested on whether they understood basic financial information. Haringey agreed a "cost neutral" Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme in 1998. The original report commended the deal because 1% more school leavers would get a job, yielding a net benefit to the Exchequer of £4.8 million. A report in June this year stated that due to their underestimating contractor charges, there would now have to be a Council contribution of almost £14 million.

I don't have the space to detail the failings, and costs, of PFI schemes in schools and hospitals across the land. But if the panel interviewing process is leading wards to select candidates who go on to support such crazy schemes, maybe they should think about asking different questions.

I am indebted to Tower Hamlets UNISON for providing me with figures, and look forward to UNISON officer Chris Robbins leading the fight against PFI across London in his capacity as newly elected Chair of the Greater London Labour Party.

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