LABOUR LEFT

Briefing

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21st century justice!

LONDON MAYOR

Vote Ken Livingstone!

THE SCOTTISH AGENDA

Tommy Sheridan and Cathy Jamieson MSPs

INTERNATIONAL

Ilisu Dam scandal; focus on Pakistan

WORLD TRADE

Chaos in Seattle

LABOUR LEFT Briefing

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

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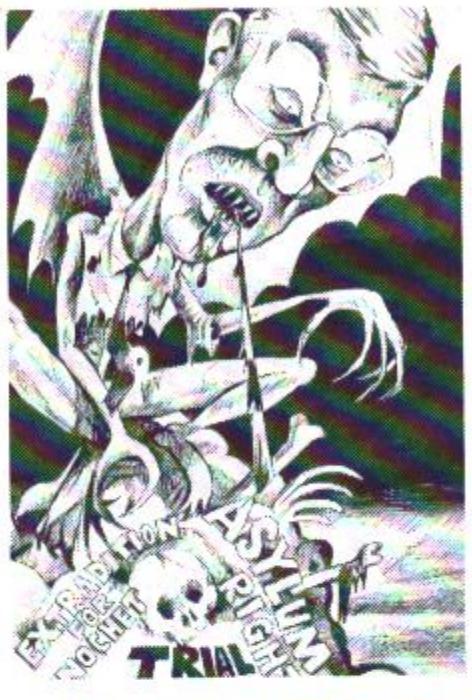
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February 2000

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EDITORIAL

The last Straw

It has not been a good month for Jack Straw. He has firmly established himself as one of the most reactionary Home Secretaries in living memory. His plans to limit trial by jury, his willingness to allow Pinochet to escape trial and return to Chile, his deportation of nazi war criminal Konrad Kaljes enabling him to escape justice and then the Mike Tyson debacle – what kind of record is this for a Labour Home Secretary?

Straw's plans to restrict the right to trial by jury are an attempt to put a price on justice. They are a serious attack on our civil liberties and the proposals have aroused widespread opposition from community groups and most of the legal profession who have quite correctly labelled the Government's plans as socially and racially divisive. One of his motives seems to be the desire to secure higher conviction rates – never mind the consequences for civil liberties. The other justification has been to save money. This is another example of public service cuts and as with New Labour's previous cuts in lone parent benefits and the ending of free education, it is an attack on the social fabric of our society. And all because New Labour will do anything rather than tax the rich to fund our services.

What has also angered labour movement and progressive activists has been Straw's compliant attitude in attempting to allow the blood-stained former dictator Pinochet to escape extradition to Spain, bowing down to the wishes of his nauseating cheerleaders Thatcher, Lamont, *Daily Telegraph* readers, and reactionaries everywhere. We can expect Pinochet to make a remarkable recovery from his supposed illness if he returns to Chile, in the style of former Guinness boss Ernest Saunders. Straw is blowing his best chance to bring an international tyrant to justice – and he must never be allowed to forget it.

Straw's handling of the Mike Tyson episode raises a whole range of disturbing questions. Tyson, a convicted rapist and well-known thug, has been allowed into Britain for no other reason than that his high profile boxing match in Manchester on 29th January will raise millions of pounds for the big business interests who are sponsoring the fight, including Rupert Murdoch's Sky Box Office channel. And this while asylum seekers, with no money or possessions, fleeing persecution from oppressive regimes, are locked up in British jails and denied the right to benefits and left to starve. What kind of message does the welcome for Tyson send to rape and domestic violence victims, or those who misguidedly view Tyson as some sort of role model?

It is hard to see how Straw differs from his Tory predecessor as Home Secretary, the odious Michael Howard. Like Howard he has sought to persecute asylum seekers, and has pursued US style law and order policies of mindlessly locking up offenders, rather than attacking the causes of crime: poverty, unemployment and social deprivation. The recently announced increase in crime figures illustrates the bankruptcy of his approach.

Jack Straw represents probably more starkly than anyone the reactionary authoritarian social conservatism that is at the heart of Tony Blair's New Labour Government. His policies show a disdain for civil liberties and human rights and a lack of humanity and sympathy for the most oppressed and vulnerable in our society – and command little support in the Labour Party. As we start the 21st century, isn't it time we ditched policies that hark back to the 19th?

Vote Ken

If it's been a bad month for Jack Straw spare a thought for the hapless Frank Dobson. The more support he gets from Tony Blair – the stream of anti-Ken invective is never ending – the worse his position becomes. Dobson is looking every inch a loser. The campaign to select Ken Livingstone as Labour candidate for London mayor is growing in strength. As we go to press ballot papers will be sent out within days. We repeat, this is a fight between New Labour and the Labour Party itself – much more is at stake than the London mayor. The tragic underfundng of our public services has once again been exposed by the recent flu epidemic. The fight against privatisation and New Labour's self-imposed straitjacket of Thatcherite economic policies now lies in the balance. London members must campaign, argue and above all else vote for Ken Livingstone. The future direction of the Party depends on it.

Uniting for justice

On 17th January, the Deputy Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police met Jeremy Corbyn MP, Sue Lukes and three people whose loved ones "disappeared" in the hands of the Chilean security services. Sue writes in a personal capacity about the Chile Committee for Justice which she chairs and which organised the delegation.

The announcement of the possible return of Pinochet to Chile took us by surprise. It did, however, occur days before the second round of the Chilean presidential elections, in which the centre-left coalition candidate (a man some called the Chilean Blair) was desperate for votes and keen to show he could be effective internationally. The subsequent week was an exhausting round of organising, legal study, press interviews and co-ordinating representations which has again tested the Committee's resources to the limit.

The Chile Committee for Justice, hastily constituted in October 1998, is a group of Chilean and British people. Many of us have been involved in various kinds of solidarity and human rights activities over the years, especially Jeremy Corbyn (whose help has been indispensable). Aware of the history of sectarianism on the Chilean and British left, we set ourselves two simple aims:

• making sure that the voices of the victims of repression were heard;

• making Pinochet face justice wherever that was possible.

We work with whoever agrees with those two aims.

At our October 1999 conference we reported on: public meetings; speaking tours by Sola Sierra, president of the Association of Relatives of Disappeared Political Prisoners in Chile; visits to the UK by other major political and human rights activists; briefing sessions; information bulletins; press conferences; media events; church services; cultural events. Our email campaign, possibly the first of its kind in British politics, had resulted in tens of thousands of letters from all over the world being sent to Jack Straw (to a home PC!), covering human rights, justice, our need for truth, and the importance of the issues to all.

Regular meetings in a mix of Spanish and English, held in our homes, receive news and discuss the next steps and plan. One activist commented, "the Pinochetistas run on arms sales proceeds, we run on your bean soup". In fact, the committee runs on donations from individuals and organisations (totalling about £11,000 so far, all accounted for monthly in our bulletin), voluntary effort and commitment.

I have felt inspired by some participants in particular: the women who survived the Villa Grimaldi torture centre together, who gave up their privacy, told the story of what had been done to them to the press, and seem to have endless energy and creativity; and Sergio Requena, a witness in the Spanish proceedings that started the extradition, who has mobilised the West Midlands several times over, and secured the commitment of the MSF nationally and locally, so that general secretary Roger Lyons and an MSF sponsored MP went with him to hand in his representations to the Home Office.

The Chile Committee for Justice represents new ways of working for many on the left. Email campaigns, faxing press releases from our homes and chatting on mobiles are made possible by technology. But the shared commitment to the cardinal principle of human rights, replacing the more relativistic approach of twenty years ago, and the emphasis on thinking about and doing "what works" has given us an ability to work together now that we did not have then.

Has this new campaigning had an impact? Certainly, the voices of the victims have been heard at every development in the campaign. Attempts by Pinochet supporters to rewrite history

ACTION CHECKLIST

This resolution, passed by Derby North CLP, can be used as a model for Labour Party and trade union branches

Ask trade unions to make your views known to the Home Secretary

Alternatively if you have a Labour MP, send them the resolution with a letter asking the MP to obtain the Home Secretary's views. Ask your MP to support (or organise!) a delegation to see Jack Straw.

This branch/CLP views with dismay the prospect that Pinochet may escape justice on health grounds. This branch/CLP believes that if there is to be public confidence in the Home Secretary's final decision it is essential that the full evidence justifying it be placed in the public domain for general and peer review.This branch/CLP is particularly angered by the possibility that Pinochet may have feigned a disabling condition and subsequently "do a Saunders".This branch/CLP believes that if Pinochet is not to be extradited, he should immediately be arrested to answer the complaints against him by Chilean refugees in this county and in relation to the torture of Dr Sheila Cassidy, a British citizen.

Send all resolutions to Margaret McDonagh at Millbank and Jack Straw at the Home Office. Copy all resolutions to: Chile Committee for Justice, c/o Praxis, Pott St, London E2; email chilejustice@cwcom, who can also be contacted for speakers, donations, information etc. Please also send copies to Liz Davies and Christine Shawcroft at the *Briefing* office.

have failed, and politicians from all sides have not been able to convince public opinion that business interests are more important than human rights. New generations have learned about what happened in Chile after 1973, and just what the US and their Chilean allies were prepared to do to their opponents. The Pinochet issue became a key divide in British politics: exposing the Tories again as brutal, dishonest and self interested (and cited often as "one of the few reasons to be glad we have a Labour government").

Internationally, the Pinochet campaign has had a huge impact. Indonesian generals cannot come to the UK for medical treatment. Former senior members of the Chilean armed forces have been advised not to leave the country. Human rights abusers must now wonder whether the law will catch up with them one day. In Chile, though, human rights is still pushed aside by most mainstream politicians keen to deal with the "urgent issues" of the economy.

'Attempts by Pinochet supporters to rewrite history have failed, and politicians from all sides have not been able to convince public opinion that business interests are more important than human rights'

The story of human rights in Chilean politics is also the story of the impact of women. It was women who first acted publicly against the Pinochet regime, bravely organising hunger strikes for the disappeared in 1978. The emerging women's movement was able to spearhead the uniting of the opposition to the military in the mid-80s, which eventually enabled the victory in the 1989 referendum which ended Pinochet's rule. But the return of traditional political parties and methods has shoved women and their demands aside. Chile still does not allow divorce, for example. Human rights organisations, and especially the associations of relatives of those disappeared, executed and imprisoned during the repression, have continued to be run and represented largely by women. The spotlight on Pinochet and his crimes has also allowed them to be heard all over the world and to play a new role inside Chile.



Photo: Molly Cooper

Demo to demand Pinochet's extradition to Spain, January 2000

Blair torpedoes Cook's prize policy

Jeremy Corbyn MP writes: Britain's "ethical" foreign policy is now all but dead in the water. Robin Cook's flagship policy has been sunk in the past few weeks by a succession of direct hits from 10 Downing Street.

Just as most people were finishing off their Christmas shopping, Trade and Industry Secretary Stephen Byers let it be known that the Government was "minded" to fund the Turkish government's Ilisu Dam project on the Tigris River (see article, page 23).

The second blow came on January 17th, when the Government backed the lifting of the four month old EU embargo on arms sales to Indonesia. Peace may now have returned to East Timor, but the Indonesian army-backed militias in West Timor are still blocking the return of over 100,000 East Timorese refugees. Elsewhere, Indonesia is aflame with internal conflict and intercommunal violence in places like Aceh, Irian Jaya, West Kalimantan, Ambon and Maluku. These conflicts are fuelled by the Indonesian armed forces, in an attempt to destabilise Indonesia's first democratically elected government in 40 years. Reacting to the decision, an Indonesian cabinet minister warned journalists that the military's strategy is to use EU arms in a creeping coup.

In the same week that arms sales to the Indonesian military were resumed, the Prime Minister personally overruled the Foreign Secretary and gave the go-ahead for the sale of spare parts for Hawk fighter jets to Zimbabwe. President Robert Mugabe's brutal regime is guilty of widespread human rights abuses and his army is pursuing one of the world's bloodiest wars in neighbouring Congo, where his generals are cashing in on the fortunes to be made out of Congo's mining industries and trade in timber and transport.

It was the Prime Minister's decision also to force through the Turkish dam deal despite opposition from the Foreign Office, human rights groups, environmentalists, and even the World Bank. Tony Blair chose instead to listen to the heavy lobbying of Balfour Beatty and the British construction companies eager to grasp the colossal profits which the contract will bring.

Why is the Prime Minister so determined to override Robin Cook? Downing Street argues that if we do not continue to supply arms and do business in our traditional markets, our customers will consider Britain unreliable and go elsewhere. This exposes the real weakness behind Britain's "ethical" foreign policy. It will never be more than rhetoric while our economy is skewed so heavily towards arms production and the profits from the world's second biggest arms trade.

Until the Government seriously addresses the question of diversification from military to civilian manufacturing, British governments will always have blood on their hands and be susceptible to the lobbying of arms companies. If our foreign policy is to be at all ethical, this evil trade must be ended.

Live in peace; make war on arms

Brian Campbell
Sinn Féin

Just when I thought it was safe to write about the new Executive... up pops decommissioning. It is the issue which constantly bedevils the world of real politics.

Of course decommissioning does not just "pop up". It does not suddenly surface every few months as if by magic. Someone has an active hand in forcing this tired old issue from the murky depths and putting it once more into the headlines.

It is as well at this point to recap. Decommissioning – or more accurately, the surrender of IRA weapons – was inserted into the peace process by John Major's Conservative Government at a time when it was desperate to secure Ulster Unionist support to shore up a dwindling majority at Westminster. Before then, in all the years of secret talks with the IRA, it had never been mentioned.

The Ulster Unionists latched onto it with glee. Decommissioning not only represented the surrender of the IRA but, because it was an impossible precondition, it postponed indefinitely the day when all-party negotiations would begin – lest we forget amid the welter of praise for David Trimble in recent months, he and his party broke their backs for years trying to avoid peace talks.

After many twists and turns, and the arrival of new governments in London and Dublin, decommissioning was set aside and negotiations began. Hard bargaining produced a solution: decommissioning should be a voluntary act; a special commission would be set up to handle it; and all parties had a responsibility to create the conditions in which it would happen. The Unionists signed up to that formula. And they have spent every waking moment since reneging on it.

Then the Mitchell Review at the end of the last century (well, it does seem a long time ago) repeated much the same position, with bells and whistles which allowed David Trimble to say he had got enough to form the Executive.

Except – and herein lies our current complication – the Unionist Council which voted on Trimble's proposal, said decommissioning had to happen by the end of January. So, we are back to hopeless Unionist preconditions.

Meanwhile, life goes on. Twelve ministers are going about their business, the guns are silent and everyone outside hardline Unionism, the Conservative Party and the right-wing press is bored with the decommissioning wrangle and can see that it doesn't really matter. What matters is that people are committed to the primacy of politics.

So as the arguments rage, Sinn Féin is pointing out that the Good Friday Agreement also speaks about British guns. It commits the British Government to publish a schedule for demilitarising. So far, nearly two years after the British Government signed that international agreement and lodged it with the United Nations, that schedule has not been published.

In places like South Armagh – the most militarised region in Western Europe – British military activity is as high as it has ever been and building work continues at the various bases and lookout posts.

So, the next time someone grabs you and talks excitedly about decommissioning, don't yawn and walk away. Tell them that it is indeed time for the armed men on the streets to hand in their weapons and their military hardware, just as they agreed to do.

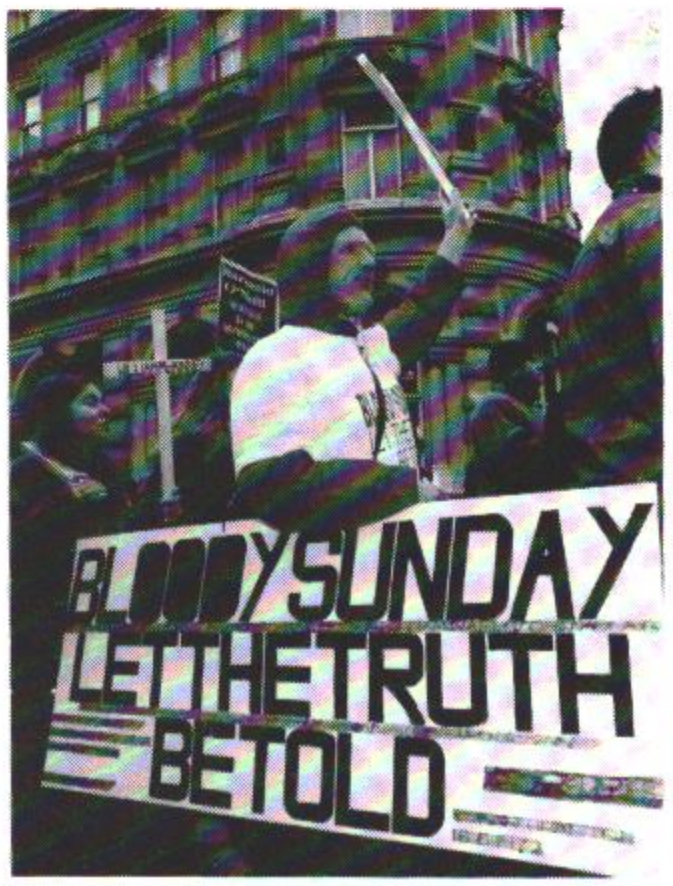


Photo: Molly Cooper

Bloody Sunday demonstration, London, 22nd January 2000.

Mural in Ballymurphy, Belfast. British soldier with the message "off our streets".



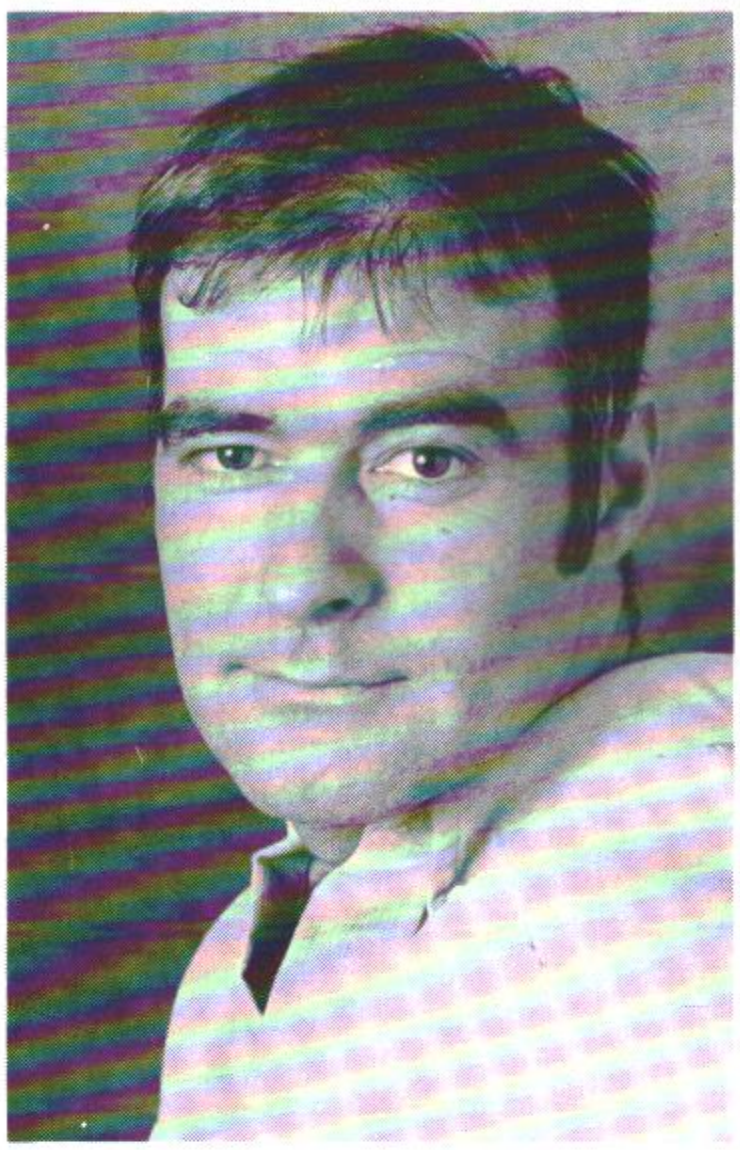
Abolish warrant sales now!

Tommy Sheridan,
Scottish Socialist Party MSP

My Private Members' Bill to abolish poindings and warrant sales in Scotland is a cross party affair sponsored by Labour MSP John McAllion and SNP MSP Alex Neil with support from all of the SNP members of the Scottish Parliament and over 20 Labour SMPs.

Sheriff Officers' right to force entry to a debtor's home and remove their furniture for sale has been part of Scots common law for over 300 years. It seems incredible at the birth of our new century that poindings and warrant sales still remain on the statute book.

There are many powerful economic arguments illustrating the inefficiency of poindings and warrant sales to recover debt, but the most important argument is the moral distaste which all human beings with a social conscience should hold. Surveys show that 99% of debtors wish to pay their debts – they are not "won't pays". A notable, proud, exception to this was the Poll Tax Campaign. A massive show of civil disobedience broke not only the Poll Tax, but Mrs Thatcher. Under the new Council Tax, debt is related to poverty.



Tommy Sheridan MSP

Evidence in respect of the Bill has been submitted to three parliamentary committees: the Justice Committee, the Social Inclusion and Housing Committee and the Local Government Committee. The evidence from the Messengers at Arms Society, representing the Sheriff Officers, was as predictable as it was poor. They make £63 per poinding. Twenty three thousand were carried out in Scotland last year alone, so you can understand their financial interest.

The DSS evidence was illuminating. From April 1997 to October 1999 in Scotland the DSS had 25,000 cases of difficulty in relation to CSA payments, Benefits Agency overpayments or Social Fund Loans not being repaid. A solicitor's letter resulted in two-thirds making repayment arrangements. The remaining 9,000 cases were passed to Sheriff Officers, who issued letters threatening earnings arrestments, inhibition of property and sequestration or poinding and warrant sale. Two thousand were subject to wage arrestments. Others made arrangements to pay, leaving five cases of poindings being considered with only one actual poinding being carried out in two and half years, with no warrant sales. If the threat of poinding and warrant sale was not contained in the Sheriff Officer's letter, the DSS would still have recovered 99% of outstanding debt.

The most damning evidence comes from the anti-poverty network and Citizens' Advice Scotland, illustrating the fear, stress, anxiety and humiliation scores have suffered at the hands of Sheriff Officers. Kait Laughlin read his mother's testimony – she has lived with the fear of warrant sales all her life. "I have never forgotten the day the Sheriff Officers came to poind my furniture for a warrant sale. I was on social security and was paying other debts. I was robbing Peter to pay Paul. It is easy to get into a rut when you have no income coming in. It was not all my fault. My husband was supposed to be paying things. I had to get toys for the children at Christmas and buy clothes out of a warehouse, you see there were no charity shops in those days. I am 78 years old, so you will know the time I have lived in. I cried all night when I knew the next day I would have a warrant sale." She had no one to turn to except the moneylender which put her back in debt. The Sheriffs put debtors' names in the newspaper in those days, which was degrading.

Such testimony moved members of the various committees. There is clearly the mood to consign this intimidation into the dustbin of history where it belongs. Much more needs to be done to reform and improve the whole debt recovery process in Scotland but as a marker for the future the abolition of poindings and warrant sales presents an excellent start. Some councils in Scotland – West Dumbarton for example – already ban poindings and warrant sales. Despite this, they are still recovering more money per head of the population than some of the authorities using poindings and warrant sales. They recover their money through compassionate discussion and understanding with debtors and reaching agreements for reasonable repayment schedules. This has got to be the way forward in the future as far as debt recovery is concerned. Ordinary people need proper assistance and professional advice in relation to managing their debt.

As a socialist, I recognise that the best way to tackle poverty and debt is to change society and deliver genuine socialism in our lifetime. I will continue to campaign for such a fundamental social revolution. In the meantime, however, measures like the abolition of poindings and warrant sales are absolutely essential.

Scotland sets its own agenda



Cathy Jamieson

Cathy Jamieson MSP looks at the issues facing the Scottish Parliament this session.

As a democratic socialist, one of the main reasons why I campaigned for the creation of a Scottish Parliament was my belief that a decentralisation of power could allow ordinary people to hold politicians more accountable and influence decisions affecting their lives. I am therefore pleased to report we are now seeing this in action with several inquiries by parliamentary committees taking evidence from a range of community groups and campaigning organisations.

Parliamentary inquiries that are now underway include ones on community care, domestic violence, special educational needs, housing stock transfers, the future of the Scottish prison service and local economic development. The committees are also taking evidence on the Abolition of Feudal Tenure, which is the first of a number of radical legislative proposals on land reform, the Abolition of Poindings and Warrant Sales, which is a particularly cruel form of debt collection, and the public health implications of telecommunication masts. The inquiry procedures have enabled people representing tenants, local authorities, women's organisations, health patients and a range of campaigning groups to have a direct input into discussions that could ultimately lead to significant changes in Scotland.

The business of the Parliament has also been boosted by MSPs lodging parliamentary motions on a range of issues, including:

- the phasing in of a national concessionary fares scheme covering bus, rail and ferry travel;
- an inquiry to address the scandal of haemophiliac patients contracting Hepatitis C through contaminated blood transfusion;
- the recognition of sign language as an official language and supporting its use in parliamentary sessions;
- action to combat the growing incidence of violence against social workers at work;
- opposition to the privatisation of Air Traffic Control services;
- the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- opposition to Trident and support for the pursuit of a non-nuclear defence strategy;
- a moratorium on the planting of GM food crops;
- support for oil fabrication workers whose jobs are under threat;
- support for the establishment of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.

My motions calling for the cancellation of third world debt and a delay in the implementation of the Asylum and Immigration Act in Scotland are continuing to gather support from other MSPs.

I have now lodged another motion calling for the free provision of sign language and lip reading courses for hearing-impaired people and the encouragement of deaf awareness courses in education and in the workplace to combat discrimination and prejudice.

Parliamentary debates in the past month have covered issues such as land reform, the financial problems encountered by pensioners in Scotland and plans to promote social inclusion and combat poverty. I was able to lead a debate on the important role played by the co-operative and mutual sector when I presented a motion highlighting how co-operative ventures, businesses and credit unions help to empower communities and demonstrated how forms of public ownership develop anti-poverty strategies.

Looking ahead, it is likely that the Scottish Executive's proposals on housing and the recommendations of the *Cubie Report* will be the major issues for consideration. On housing, the Executive is proposing to end the distinction between secure and assured tenancies in Scotland, a move which could provide increased rights for Housing Association tenants and greater protection against eviction. However, there is concern that this will also extend the Right to Buy, given the fact that the previous Tory Government's scheme resulted in a decrease in rented housing stock. While it is important that we do not throw away the opportunity to extend tenant rights, it is also important to support an increase in the availability of rented housing.

The recommendations of *Cubie* are a mixed bag with proposals to defer rather than abolish the payment of tuition fees – a suggestion dismissed as a fudge by some student groups. More positive are the proposed return of some form of student grant through a bursary scheme and the radical proposal, likely to raise hackles in Westminster, that students should receive welfare benefits during holidays. Those of us who want an end to fees, preferring a redistributive approach that helps students from low-income backgrounds, now need to consult with students on how far *Cubie*'s recommendations present a way forward.

Reclaiming the dome

Samba percussionist Chris Knight reports on his recent royal performance and suggests a new use for the Dome.

I had a miserable time on New Year's Eve. Guess where I was? Yes – in the boisterous company of the Queen and Tony Blair inside the Greenwich Millennium Dome. With hundreds of other carnival drummers and dancers, my band – the London School of Samba – had been paid a fair sum to perform on the night.

Lacking any kind of conscience, a contingent of Reclaim the Streets sympathisers among us had voted to collude and take the money. For months, we'd fantasised about occupying and reclaiming the Dome, maybe on May Day 2000. Admittedly, the place would be a well-defended fortress. But any half-decent plan for a bank robbery requires more than brute force: you need inside knowledge. Shouldn't we tag along, get inside the fortress and work out a good plan?

The entrist argument won the day. Gritting our teeth, we resolved to don feathers and G-strings – and dance for New Labour and our Queen. We were all given security passes with our photos on. December was taken up with rehearsals. To practice in the Dome, we were piled into sealed coaches in King's Cross and bussed into the fortress without stopping.

On first entering the vast amphitheatre, we could hardly suppress our excitement: a perfect venue for the People's Parliament! We envisaged the revolutionary proletariat in plenary session in the hours following the insurrection. But such dreams lasted only seconds. Somebody with a megaphone told us to sit down, which we did – for several hours, and then weeks as the powers-that-be sought ways to sanitise and anaesthetise Carnival to render it fit for a Queen.

At one point, we heard we'd have to drum to the National Anthem. Point-blank refusal from the entire band. That particular plan was dropped from the programme. But attempts of this kind – plus endless security searches, time-wasting and suppression – radicalised everyone enormously.



New Year's Eve in the Dome.

The essence of Carnival is joyous transgression. Inside the dome on New Year's Eve, any such spirit was perverted through subordination to the state. Admittedly, our samba performance was sexy and brilliant, injecting life into the dull proceedings in the few minutes allotted to us. But the most hideous sacrilege was when, shortly after midnight, God Save the Queen closed the carnival proceedings almost before they had begun. The dancers and revellers were forced to stand motionless for what seemed an eternity. This living death turned out to be the climax of the whole show. Following the last notes of Britain's tribal monarchist anthem, the sound systems were switched off. Outside, an entire planet may have been rejoicing, but inside we were state prisoners. Our collective feelings of loss and anticlimax were palpable.

Architecturally, the Dome is magnificent. Situated by the water's edge, its crazily tilted minarets thrusting to the corners of the universe, it offers itself as a temple for some future planet-embracing religion. In Tony Blair's vision, this religion comes ready-made. The Dome is a temple to Money. In this sacred space, our future is mapped out for us – our schools to be sponsored by Tesco, our working lives by Manpower, our language and communication by BT. One might have thought that with so much money to spend, our New Labour Government could have allowed just one small space in this vast structure to some alternative voice. But no: Blairism is strictly monotheism.

I think we can make better use of this building. Let's clear out the money-lenders from the temple. Let's make it the People's Parliament, not a monument to Corporate Finance. Let it host a People's Assembly, perhaps to be addressed by the People's Mayor. Under popular control, the Dome could become a national and even international symbol of resistance to political corruption, corporate sponsorship and capitalist globalisation. In the evenings, it would also make a superb dance and entertainment venue. Let's get that whole structure bouncing to some relevant rhythms, reclaiming it as a step toward reclaiming our global future.

Idle dreaming, you may say. But as a disgruntled carnival performer and lifelong labour movement activist, I'd still like to make up for the disappointment of New Year's Eve. I'd like to see life meet fantasy on May 1st. Together, we could really make it One Amazing Day.

● Chris Knight, Reader in Anthropology at the University of East London, can be contacted at c.knight@uel.ac.uk

● STOP PRESS: The TUC is negotiating with the New Millennium Experience Company to run events in the Dome on May 1st. This date will also be a day of trade union alliance-building and anti-capitalist direct action by Reclaim the Streets.

London School of Samba.



PHOTOS: Lionel Sims

What crisis? This crisis!

Helen Weatherley, Staff Side Secretary, Kingston Hospital reports: As one of the experienced E grade staff nurses who will be getting a pay rise of 7.8% this year you might think that I'd be jumping for joy, but in our house there won't be any celebrations.

This Government's approach to health workers' pay is just as divisive as the Tories'. First it was the senior grade nurses who did well. Last year it was the newly qualified D grades. This year it's me and my colleagues, the A and B grade health care assistants at the bottom of the system, whom we increasingly rely on to make the system work –all of which leads to bitterness and division.

It underlines the need for a single pay spine covering all health workers where staff are graded and rewarded according to their contribution to the service. It's the only way to build the kind of unity we so badly need.

Now we hear that the Government is refusing to release extra cash for this year's pay rises and trusts have been told to find the money from within their overall allocations. So we'll have to struggle on trying to provide quality care within cheapskate budgets.

This year's winter crisis was no surprise to NHS workers. We don't have enough beds or staff due to year after year of cost improvement and efficiency savings so as soon as there's any extra pressure from a bit of flu or cold weather, it all falls apart.

If we want quality services, they've got to be paid for, and that means a bit more tax or a further reduction in the quality of care and more nurses leaving the NHS. The public know this but what will it take to force New Labour's hand?

FE: the reality is real estate

Kenneth Bone and David Welsh, members of NATFHE rank and file, reveal the scandal of privatisation in further education.

Opinions change, and no progressive-minded person likes to feel they have joined the ranks of the "forces of conservatism", especially when it comes to education. Back in 1987, a young politician called Tory privatisation policies "the closest thing to legalised political corruption". As recently as the 1994 Labour leadership campaign, the same politician described the Tory Government's obsession with getting rid of publicly-owned assets as "this insane notion". Today, that politician is the chief proponent, not for the selling-off but the giving away of public assets – hospitals, schools and further education colleges – to the corporate business sector through the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and Public Private Partnerships (PPP). Step forward, Tony Blair.

In the FE sector, the process of privatisation began with the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act, when Major's Government removed democratic control of colleges from local education authorities, putting them in the hands of local businessmen. Pay and conditions of lecturers and support staff were progressively undermined. Some 18,000 lecturers were forced out of the profession completely and, ever since, tales of management corruption and victimisation of union representatives regularly come to light. PFI/PPP just continues the process of privatisation – being half privatised is like being half pregnant.

In 1992 Norman Lamont's conceived PFI/PPP as yet another way to inject the free market into public services and as a means of utilising private capital to reduce the necessity for future government borrowing. Capital was to be provided by corporate investors entering into contract with the public sector at the outset of a project. In one form or another, taxpayers would be paying the money back along with additional interest during the lifetime of that contract by having to rent back hitherto publicly-owned assets. The introduction of PFI into local education authorities' capital spending plans, to cover the huge backlog of building repairs, is already the cause of concern among school governors. In Labour-run Haringey the NUT and UNISON are co-ordinating a strong campaign against its implementation.

The lecturers' union, NATFHE, recently passed a resolution opposing the Government's plans to introduce PFI/PPP into the FE sector. But it was left to rank and file members to organise a protest outside London's Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre last July. The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) was making a day-long presentation to sell the potential rewards of

Cuts in the FE sector have been swingeing.

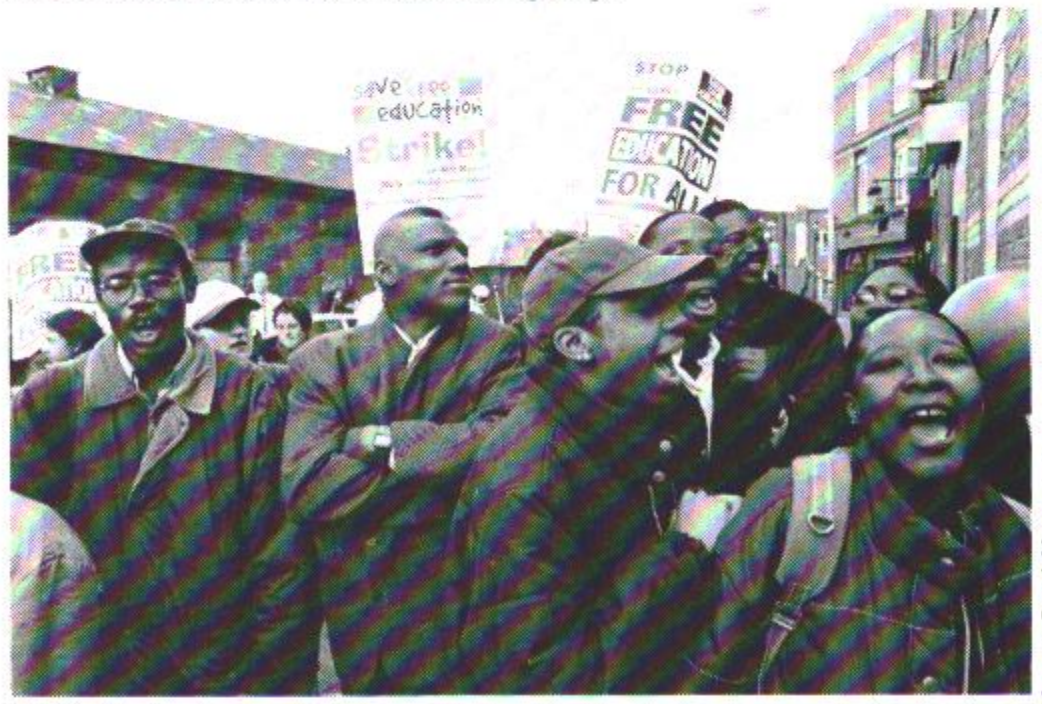


Photo: Paul Mattsson

exploiting the FE sector's capital assets to an audience mainly composed of corporate property developers looking to cherry pick this newly available real estate. Only twenty colleges sent representatives along, while over one hundred private companies were represented. At £195 a ticket, no union representatives could afford to go inside – if they had received an invitation. But the question of FE staff did not figure on the agenda. The protest outside was the only thing that suggested to the property developers that all is not well in the FE sector. It hasn't been for some time.

Inevitably, PFI/PPP schemes will be a more expensive way of providing public services over the long-term, as corporate investors need to show a healthy profit on a regular basis. Such arrangements are expensive to set up and fraught with financial and legal difficulties. Because of this, the Government is prepared to contribute up to £100,000 (if individual colleges will match this sum) to spend on consultants specialising in PFI/PPP deals. This in a sector whose workforce is now officially the most casualised in Britain today. In many colleges most lectures are now on part-time temporary contracts, with no paid holidays and no pension rights. For some reason the morale of the consultants is somewhat higher than that of the teaching staff.

The glossy sales brochure available at the PFI/PPP conference emphasised the abundant opportunities offered to the corporate sector. Developers were understandably attracted by the information that there are 432 FE and tertiary colleges and 77 sixth form colleges with "a combined estate of 9,000,000 square metres valued in college accounts at £4b and a sector turnover of £3.6b." It goes on to say that colleges are now "...able to buy, sell and develop new property assets ... (and) are also able to work with private sector facilities and estate managers to help improve the cost-efficiency and quality of the operation of their estates...". There is no discussion of the implications for staffing levels but you don't have to be Mystic Meg to foresee them. If the FE sector is to be marketed as just so much real estate, its educational function hardly mentioned, then the staff are of less significance than the fixtures and fittings.

The conference was opened by Alan Milburn MP, then Chief Secretary to the Treasury, and closed by George Mudie MP (since fired from his job as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Life-Long Learning). Milburn has now gone to inflict his experience of



Photo: Mark Salmon

Lecturers in Birmingham on strike against new contracts in 1994: since then, casualisation has taken hold completely.

PFI/PPP on the NHS. In between, speakers included experts in USA corporate real estate, the hospitality industry, PFI/PPP consultants, Treasury experts in privatisation, principals of colleges who are totally gung-ho and even a Director of the FEFC, David Russell, who happened to have been Principal Private Secretary to Gillian Shepherd MP and David Hunt MP when they were Tory cabinet ministers.

Unsurprisingly, no one was invited to provide a cautionary note, such as that of the Audit Commission, who were very sceptical of the benefits of PFI/PPP. Such scepticism has been increased recently by the collapse of the financial basis of the PFI-funded Royal Armouries Museum in Leeds. The private developers and the Government's culture department, for all the expensive advice of the consultants, got their sums wrong. The culture department stated that: "we are in the process of looking at the PFI and possibly redefining the package, finding a new financial basis and reviewing the management structure."

However the option of pulling out of the PFI and returning the Royal Armouries to the public sector will not be considered under any circumstances according to the department. And we were told that this was a government of "what works" pragmatism and not Thatcher-like dogmatism. Mark Lawson said of the Leeds Museum debacle, "There were many warnings... that a business venture which was half-driven by greed and half by public service would inevitably struggle because of the conflicting motivations... It's like, to use an appropriately military metaphor, two generals commanding the same army, each with a different idea of acceptable losses."

The Leeds Museum was one of the first PFI projects to get up and running. It is also one of the first to go pear-shaped. What happens if just a small percentage of the many proposed PFI projects in health and education follow suit in, say, five, ten or fifteen years time? What will happen to the vital public services they provide? And once the PFI contracts come to an end, will the colossal capital assets revert to public ownership? At the moment, this remains a very grey area. What if the Tories get back in power some time in the next two decades, with William Hague (or Michael Portillo) very keen to complete the privatisation of the public sector that their lost leader, Mrs Thatcher, began in 1979? In the meantime, they can content themselves with the knowledge that the final stages of the privatisation process are apparently being enthusiastically carried out by the Blair Government.

United for a Labour victory

Direct action can be justified, violence cannot, writes Ken Livingstone, who explains how to unite the London Labour Party.

Anyone reading some of the coverage of the mayoral selection would have thought that I was about to ask the Clash to make "White Riot" my campaign theme tune. It is amazing that even after all these years, the press can still concoct a loony left red scare campaign as easily as they did the week before Labour's ballot papers were issued. A jokey interview I gave to the style magazine the *Face* turned into lurid headlines suggesting that I supported the riots that brought the City of London to a standstill last year.

I also told the *Face* that Jeffrey Archer and I were thinking of coming out and setting up a family, although I notice that this has so far not made it into the pages of the *Daily Mail*.

My views on direct action for political purposes are clear and consistent. Direct action and violence are two quite different things. I have never supported violence for political ends and I am not about to start now. I believe that direct action – whether it is demonstrations or humorous publicity stunts – are a necessary part of living in a free and democratic society. Like most democrats, I would rather live in a society that can live with political protest than one that resorts to repression. But I did not and do not condone riots.

It is in the interests of my opponents to have a final push against my candidacy by raking up lots of loony left headlines from the past and spicing them up with some half-baked new ones. It produces some funny moments. The same week as the "riot" story for example, the *Evening Standard* ran a three-page spread by Peter Kellner who among other things seriously claimed that Peter Mandelson was the architect of the GLC's low fares policy. Soon, no doubt, Peter Kellner will reveal exclusively that Alistair Campbell invented penicillin.

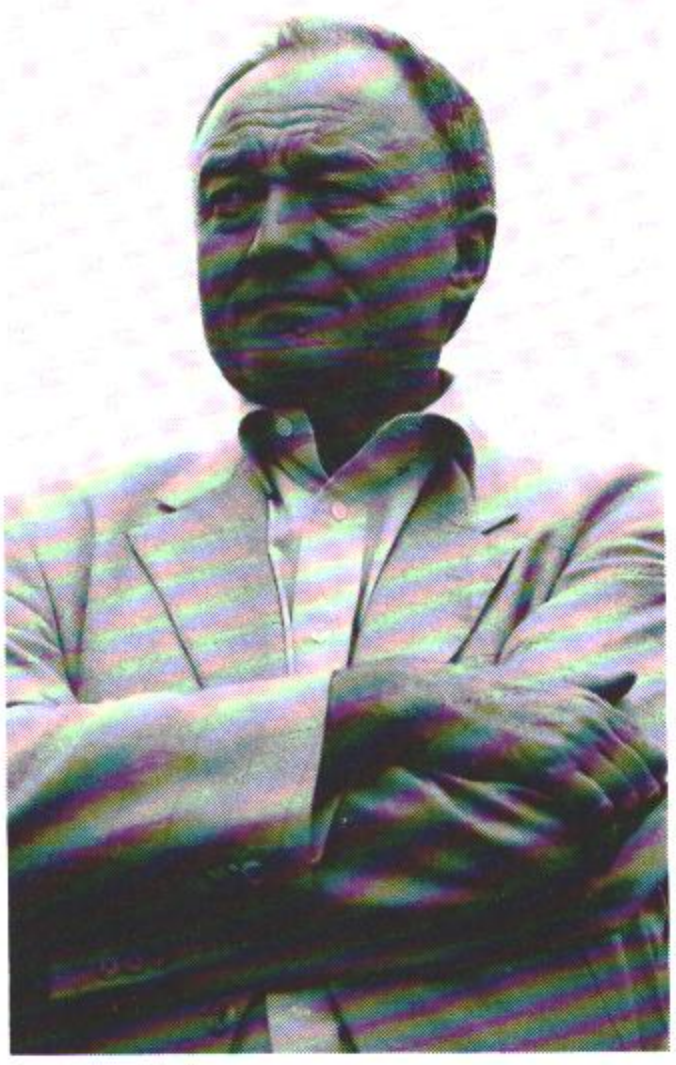


Photo: Paul Mattsson

I suppose it was inevitable that as the ballot approached for Labour's selection for London mayor the debate would become more excitable. But it is important to have a sense of proportion in this debate. I am seeking selection as Labour candidate for London mayor – not Chancellor of the Exchequer or Prime Minister. The powers of the mayor are strictly limited and most definitely do not include such areas as income tax, corporation tax nor the powers of the Bank of England.

When Labour Party members select their candidate and Londoners vote they will do so on the basis of the policy areas on which the mayor and the Greater London Authority have real powers to change their lives not red herrings.

Once the selection is over, the Party will have to turn its energies to an all-out fight to win the election. I believe that the real criterion for party loyalty is that nothing is done between now and the election to assist Labour's electoral opponents.

In reality Tony Blair now accepts the possibility that I will be the Labour candidate for mayor. Senior Labour figures behind the scenes are working out how to handle the delicate shift of position from opposing me in the internal selection ballot, to working with me if I am selected. My approach remains one of doing everything possible to unite the London Labour Party if I am lucky enough to win the Labour ballot. After such a bruising and divisive selection contest, it is essential to mobilise the Labour Party and Londoners behind a united team that can go on to win the election and improve the quality of life for all Londoners.

By common consent Glenda Jackson's conduct during the Labour nomination campaign has won both widespread affection and respect from many Party members who have been impressed by her honesty and forthrightness. More than any other candidate she has emerged from the contest with her reputation enhanced. It is therefore my intention to appoint Glenda Jackson to be my deputy mayor and first chair of the Metropolitan Police Authority.

As Glenda has said throughout her campaign, she has an international reputation which will open doors around the world. As my administration seeks to attract inward investment Glenda will therefore play a major role as a roving ambassador for London, working closely with the inward investment unit of London First to bring jobs to our city. I have made this proposal to Glenda totally unconditionally and it will stand regardless of how she recommends her supporters to cast their second preferences.

This proposal will of course require a minor adjustment to Labour's top up list to the London Assembly. Currently, Frank's nominee for deputy mayor was placed first on Labour's top up list. If I am elected mayor I will ask Labour's vetting panel to respect my choice for deputy and put Glenda Jackson first on Labour's top up list. I believe that would be what most Party members would want. Trevor Phillips, who I will invite to be vice chair of the Metropolitan Police Authority, would therefore occupy the second place with a consequent adjustment down the list.

National support for Ken

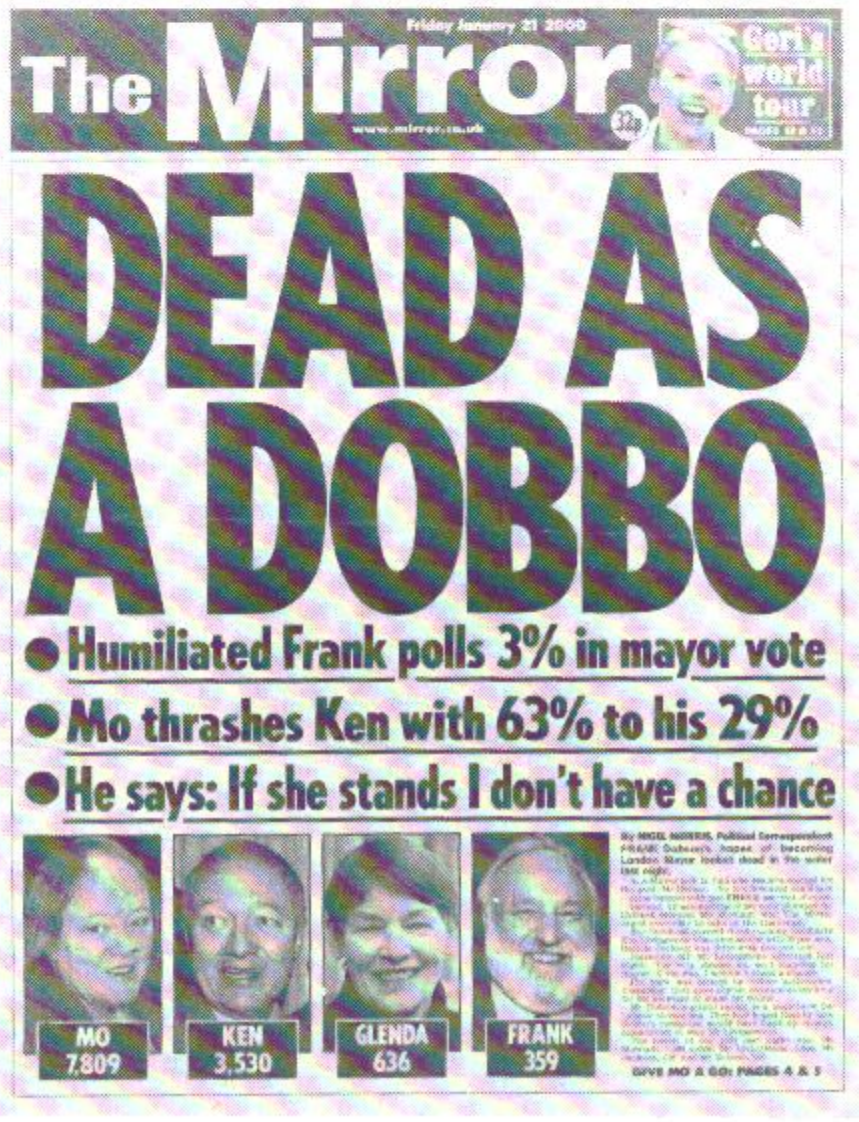
Colin Hall, Leicester East CLP, reports that support for Ken Livingstone is nationwide.

"I really hope he wins," said the woman in the pub. She'd overheard a conversation between myself and an SWP-supporting companion about the activities of the Ken Livingstone campaign in London. At a time when interest in local government elections is at an all-time low, a contest which can capture the imagination of people over 100 miles away is of particular significance.

Like Tony Blair, Ken has demonstrated an ability to appeal to sections of the electorate who would not normally consider themselves as natural Labour supporters. Unlike Blair, he has shown an ability to use that appeal for progressive and not reactionary purposes. This is why he is feared and reviled by the political establishment.

Yet with every squeal he induces from within that establishment, his standing increases still further, and not only in London. Many activists yearning for a Livingstone-type figure to emerge in their own localities are fervently hoping that he can somehow defeat Dobson and provide hope after so many setbacks in recent years.

Many comrades have dropped out of active politics, convinced they can no longer make a difference in the sterile, bleak political landscape created by New Labour. A victory for Ken can convince them to believe again and destroy the myth peddled by Blair, like Thatcher before him, that "there is no alternative".


The Mirror

DEAD AS A DOBBO

- Humiliated Frank polls 3% in mayor vote
- Mo thrashes Ken with 63% to his 29%
- He says: If she stands I don't have a chance

MO 7,809 KEN 3,530 GLENDA 636 FRANK 359

***Daily Mirror*, 21st January, reveals the results of its own polling**

Red Ken – the people's choice

Matthew Willgress, co-youth officer of the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups writes: Anyone doubting the absurdities of the electoral college used in the selection of Labour's candidate for London mayor need only look at the example of John Austin MP. He is entitled to 4 votes in this contest; as well as his vote as a Party member in the constituency section, he has the equivalent of 1000 ordinary members' votes in the section for MPs, MEPs and GLA candidates. His third vote, as a member of the Co-operative Party, has been cast for Dobson in the Affiliated Organisations section without any democratic consultation, and the fourth vote as an MSF member was disallowed when Millbank blocked several unions from participation.

John Austin chaired a 400-strong meeting of the Livingstone For London campaign in Conway Hall on January 6th. The highlight of the evening was the announcement that the TGWU's 50,000 votes in the Electoral College would be cast for Livingstone. In the ballot which had a turnout of 29% (high for a union postal ballot) Ken received 15,858 votes beating Dobson (who came third below Glenda Jackson in the poll) by a ratio of 12 to 1. This remarkable show of Ken's popularity was exceeded in the ballot of RMT members in which Ken received 91%. Like MSF, the RMT is disenfranchised, but this result is significant as it shows that transport workers are overwhelmingly behind Ken and against tube privatisation; transport is the main issue this election is being fought on.

Ken's popularity in the unions seems to be matched in the CLPs. Few MPs have bothered to consult the members; when they have, in Tooting and Hornchurch, Ken received a clear majority with 60% of the vote. This has led to the Dobson camp acknowledging it is going to be "a very closely fought contest" (*Guardian* January 7th). No wonder Frank is looking so miserable and moving from one ridiculous campaign relaunch to another! His latest attempts have been typically ridiculous - campaigning around Ken's position on corporation tax,.even though the mayor doesn't have any responsibilities over this, and issuing a leaflet containing the quote "Red Ken – Red Scum."

Hopefully, a combination of Ken's popularity and Dobbo's tireless campaigning will ensure a victory for "red scum" in this election and many more in the future!

Another fine mess!

Carol Kay, Dulwich and West Norwood CLP and a Greater Labour Assembly panel member, provides some insight into the selection process.

The Government claimed the GLA membership would be fresh and different yet consensual in every respect. How come, then, that every candidate selected is a member of New Labour and is a current or former councillor? Where is the promised diversity of experience – political, personal and professional – in the selected Labour Group?

To say that the selection process for Labour's GLA candidates did not run smoothly is an understatement. As a forerunner to the hapless mayoral selections, undoubted manipulation was used to get the "right" results.

Things started well. I was sure that everyone wishing to seek selection would be starting out with equal chances in OMOV selections and a guarantee of quality, balance and diversity in the eventual Labour Group. But Clive Soley MP and his team would have sole responsibility for selecting panel members. Following the ballot, they would then appoint people to the top up and reserve lists – rather like the way in which Labour peers are appointed not selected.

As we know, the initial interviews controversially filtered out several left wingers for questionable reasons, like Christine Shawcroft, Theresa Pearce and Lee Jasper, despite an appeals procedure. At this early stage, the candidates' profiles were beginning to converge.

The Panel was announced on 30th April 1999. About a quarter of the candidates were women and a quarter were from black and ethnic minority groups. This apparently reflected the proportions of the original applications. Regulations on canvassing, mailings and the £1,000 spending limit were all violated. The following should give you a flavour of the problems and inequities.

• Due to a lack of information and clarity, many constituencies considered only some CVs and gave conflicting instructions about pre-selection meetings with candidates, etc.

• Candidates were offered mailing lists at £100 per constituency, inevitably some couldn't afford it and some got mailing lists before others. Mine was delayed by the private delivery service Millbank used!

• Some candidates were able to mount extensive telephone campaigns which were never costed.

• Similarly some candidates did mass mailouts – particularly, it seemed, if they were council leaders with town hall resources. Because the constituencies were so large, with around 10,000 members in each, a single mailout cost around £1,600 and some candidates managed this more than once.

I managed to struggle through to the ballot relatively unscathed, which was pretty good given the current propensity for dirty tricks.

I only became really concerned in the last stages, when the top up and reserve lists were chosen. Having received GC nominations from Region 2 (Lambeth and Southwark/Greenwich and Lewisham) and Region 7 (Croydon and Sutton/Bexley and Bromley) I ran in two ballots. I was the runner up in both regions with a total number of votes that should have put me in the running for a place on either the "top up" or reserve list.

Accordingly, I wrote to Clive Soley on 6th September 1999 to confirm my continued interest. I made several points about the relative strength and breadth of my support. He replied saying he had noted the points I made and explained the selection panel would be taking into account ethnicity and gender factors as well as the position in the ballot results.

I heard nothing until I read the results in the *Evening Standard* on 20th October 1999. I immediately wrote again to Clive Soley asking several questions including:

• What were the actual criteria for appointment as the selection panel appeared not to have applied the criteria set out in his earlier letter?

• Why was I not selected?

• Which aspects of my candidacy were unacceptable?

• Why was I left to find out the result via the pages of the *Evening Standard*?

I received a reply from Clive Soley on the 28th October reassuring me that my candidacy was not unacceptable and that I should contact David Wilkinson at the Greater London Labour Party for feedback. I replied on 17th November saying I was neither satisfied with the explanations nor with his failure to address all my questions. As suggested, I copied the letter to David Wilkinson. I have, so far, had no response.

One of the constituencies that selected me has also written to ask why I was not appointed to either list, again with no satisfactory response.

My story just adds to the growing disquiet within the Party membership about increasing centralisation and intolerance. This is not a happy state for the Party to be facing in its centenary year. Importantly, my experience means that it is well nigh impossible for a single individual Party member to put themselves forward for the GLA. What chance has a shift worker or a young mum of ever getting through? Democracy was definitely not well served by the chosen selection procedure. I suggest we re-think the whole thing for next time.

Labour Left Briefing

seeks editor/journalist for part-time employment.
Writing skills, political knowledge, socialist commitment required.

For details contact; Sue Lukes 0171-359 1455;
email: SueLukes@compuserve.com.

Deadline for applications: 22nd February; interviews 2nd March.

Network builds a nucleus

Owen Jones, co-youth officer of the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups, reports on this year's AGM.

On January 15th, the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups held its AGM in Sheffield, uniting leftists of all colours. I was instantly struck by the quality of the debates, the lack of sectarianism, and the display of fact and reality that reassured me that despite our movement's setbacks, we were very much socialists of a new century.

The absence of a restrictive line allowed a wide variety of opinions in debates, something that could allow this Network to form a nucleus for a united left. There is nothing our movement needs more than unity!

The only major problem I had was when concerns were expressed that our backing of Ken for mayor would somehow harm his campaign by allowing the Blairites to continue propagating some form of extremist conspiracy to destroy the Labour Party. Perhaps this was a misinterpretation, but I worried this was a vote of no-confidence in the movement by some comrades.

In the youth caucus we discussed the idea of a radical agenda for youth. Such a programme is a great idea, especially in attracting young people to socialist ideas – or at least a basic structure of one, such as on the minimum wage, democratic rights, education, etc... However, a youth session will need to be organised to outline it.

Dorothy Macedo, chair of the Network, adds: In his keynote address, Alan Simpson MP outlined the issues facing us in the year ahead and particularly the need to link into the massive public concern about issues such as GM foods and the world trade and third world debt campaigns.

We agreed that the most important current issues for the left in the Labour Party are the campaign against the plans to dismantle Party structures, as foreshadowed in the *21st century party* document, and the need to argue against the Government's drive to privatisation. The campaign against the Jenkin proposals, for a decent minimum wage and against the Immigration and Asylum Act were also flagged up.

Sheffield TGWU member Elaine Jones kicked off the afternoon session with an analysis of issues facing women in the unions.

The Network statement *Aims and Beliefs* (our "rolling programme") was amended to update our policies on full employment, pensions and public ownership. The AGM called on the officers to help build and strengthen local SCG groups.

All *LLB* readers should make sure they are on the Network mailing list even if they have no local SCG group. Contact the Network c/o 7 Malam Gardens London E14 0TR or email davelawrencel@compuserve.com.

Reinventing the wheel

Maria Exall reports: After a two year wait London Labour women have had a policy forum! It was on 15th January at Millbank, held jointly with the South East region, and attracted some 50 women (less than half of the number of delegates who used to attend annual London Regional Womens Conferences).

Women GLA candidates had a Q&A session at the Millbank event. But when one delegate asked their position on the Government's PPP for the London Underground, the chair let them off the hook by referring the question to a policy session later in the day! GLA candidates welcomed the *Womens Agenda for the London Mayor and Assembly* as a constructive contribution to the debates leading up to the elections. But Loraine Monk, co-author of the document and vice chair of the London Party, reported that the Acting Regional Director of the GLLP had criticised it.

Despite an unpromising set up, there was much positive policy discussion on the range of newly issued consultation documents. The lack of involvement of trade union women (the unions were not circulated with details of the event) was a shame. That together with the fact that CLP Secretaries had very late notice too calls into question how seriously this event was taken by the Party. Labour women deserve better.

NEC elections update

The Grassroots Alliance (GA) met in London on 11th January to discuss the centre-left slate for the Labour Party NEC elections.

Liz Davies announced her decision not to seek re-election when her term of office ends in September 2000.

The provisional slate consists of sitting NEC members Christine Shawcroft and Mark Seddon plus former NEC member Pete Willsman and the 1999 runner-up Ann Black. A new name is Raghib Ahsan, the former councillor from Birmingham. This leaves one further place to be filled by a woman candidate. A final decision on this will be made at the GA meeting after the NEC on 25th January.

The GA comprises Labour Reform, the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, *Labour Left Briefing*, *SCG News*, the Network of SCGs, the Campaign for Socialism (Scotland), Labour Women's Action Committee and Labour Black Representation Committee and is supported by *Tribune*.

Why the WTO ha

As the world debates the Biodiversity Convention in Montreal, Alan Simpson examines the mess world trade is in.

If I'd had a hat it would have been thrown into the air. News had come through of the collapse of the World Trade Organisation talks in Seattle.

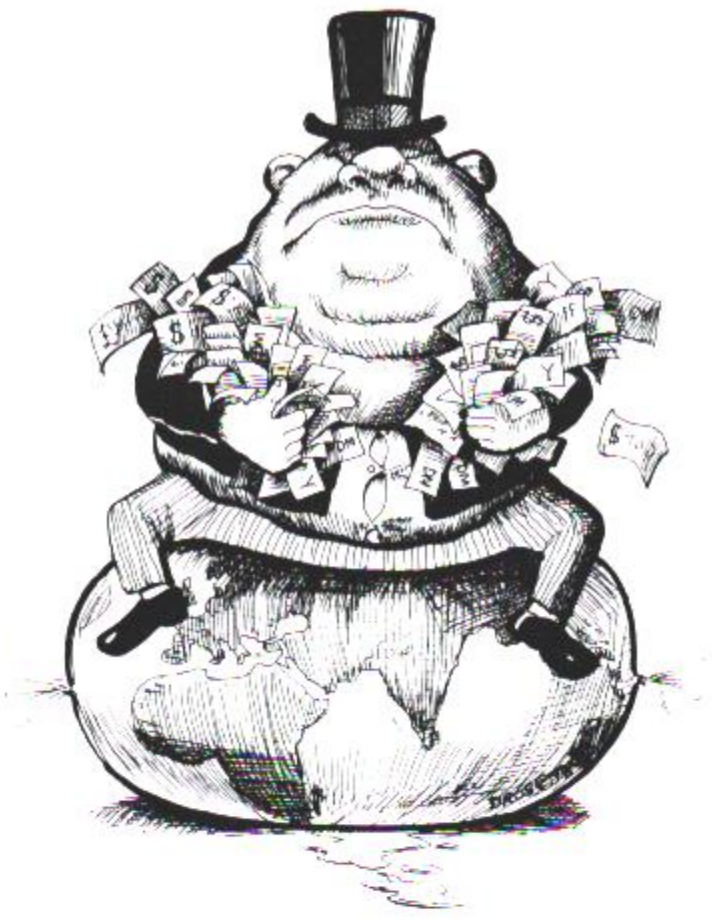
In recent years, an "emperors new clothes" pageant of world leaders and corporate chief executives has saturated the media with shallow but obsessive mantras – globalisation is inevitable, deregulation is desirable, open markets mean progress, free trade is our god and salvation.

It has been inconvenient or tasteless to mention that every ratchet-turn of the neo-liberal agenda transferred power (without responsibility) to global corporations with some of the worst human rights and environmental records on the planet. Equally unwelcome are references to undermining of democratic accountability, widening gaps between rich and poor, trashing of sustainability objectives and recolonisation (by life patenting and acquisition) of the developing world. Such discussion might expose the free trade scam for what it is – a recipe for pushing the twenty-first century down the path from civil democracy to corporate feudalism. But Seattle spilled the beans.

Even before delegations arrived, the plan was running into difficulties. A remarkable coalition of northern NGOs and developing nations scuppered last year's Multilateral Agreement on Investment – a legally binding charter which would have placed shareholders higher up the ladder of creation than citizens. The revolutionary forces of the Women's Institute, the RSPB, churches and consumer movements had joined forces with farmers in the South and agronomists/environmentalists worldwide to derail the GMO bandwagon, which wanted corporate ownership of the food chain. All the pressure for the Seattle round had come from business demands for new sources of monopoly profits. No wonder it spawned an emerging movement that wanted to challenge capitalism and not its trimmings.

Seattle was simply the point at which greed and arrogance overreached itself. Business will no doubt mobilise political leaders to rush around calling for plans to save the WTO. It may be a better time, however, to consider the case for scrapping it.

The indelible images from the Millennium Round were of armed guards, plucked straight from the Dark Side of *Star Wars*, randomly spraying dissenters with tear gas; of southern hemisphere delegations getting no closer to the corporately



sponsored negotiations than the crowds outside; of industrial trade unionists with no jobs treading the same path as third world workers with no rights. These are the constructs of globalisation not its aberrations. It is no more possible for the WTO to address the demands for social or environmental equity than it is to make Jeffrey Archer responsible for truth. It is simply not within the nature of the beast.

In July last year Richard McCormick, vice-president of the International Chamber of Commerce, made the business veto clear. Speaking about the fragility of the globalised trade regime he simply asserted that "its link with labour, its link with the environment could cause a disaster in the trading system." Yet it was the disaster of the absence of such links that prompted the non-corporate world to lay siege to Seattle. The WTO can barely comprehend this, let alone respond to it. So perhaps we had better consider some of the alternatives hitherto dismissed as mere heresies.

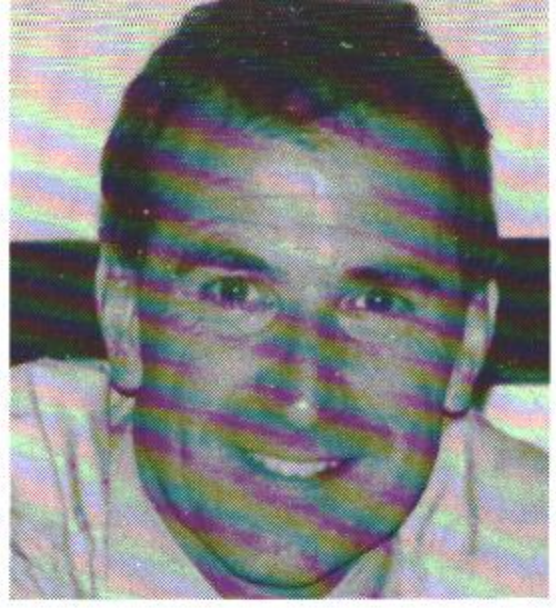
First, the world will find nothing beyond Seattle which is not based on binding rules which constrain transnational corporations (TNCs). Preambles of good intent, social compacts and mission statements about corporate citizenship, died a death outside the conference. Whatever follows will require legal mechanisms which monitor and enforce corporate obligations, build in financial sanctions, permit legal redress in the "home country" courts of TNCs and address the need for a new international framework of anti-trust legislation which prevents corporate dominions from steamrollering over democratic societies.

TNCs currently control over 60% of world trade, with about half of this trade being between themselves. The need for an international trade agenda which reconnects trade to democratic accountability and environmental sustainability is almost indisputable...anywhere in the world beyond the global boardroom. The WTO is not up to the job, but the United Nations might be.

Kofi Anan has been stalked by corporate suitors for the last couple of years, in the hope that the UN would endorse a neo-liberal free trade agenda. The economic power of the corporate lobby, and the relative weakness of the UN, made this an unequal dialogue. Financial rules have to change in order to allow a more sensible balance. Some have argued that simply getting the USA to pay the $1.6 billion it owes the UN would help, but greater dividends may be found in a more wholesale shake up.

The founding intentions behind the United Nations were to make the World Bank (and the IMF) an adjunct to it. In this way, the UN was to have been able to address a development agenda defined by the South itself alongside a human rights agenda which would include us all. Separating the institutions frustrated and distorted this ambition. But the phenomenal technologies which underpin today's global financial systems make the re-connection of global institutions a real possi-

as to go



THE ALAN SIMPSON COLUMN

bility.

Many economists have argued the virtues of a Tobin Tax – the taxation on international currency movements – while conceding the difficulties of any one country introducing it alone. But the World Bank could do it. If industrial economies gave the Bank a year's notice of our intention to cease contributing to the Bank (and the IMF) in favour of the introduction of such a levy, there would be a remarkable flurry of activity. No longer would we be asking domestic taxpayers to bail out international speculators. And World Bank officials, charged with the task of introducing mechanisms which were necessary to pay their own wages, would probably have a scheme in place by the weekend.

There is certainly no shortage of cash for them to play with. Over $3 trillion a day rolls around the world financial markets – a sliver of which would be enough to fund the entirety of UN activities and pay for a development agenda which addressed the needs of the South and the planet. With such security and independence the UN would still be besieged by corporate lobbyists, but it would place the relationship between civil society and corporate society on a different footing. "No representation without taxation; no influence without obligation" may turn out to be the emancipation demands which civil society place in front of corporate capitalism in the 21st century. Only then might we take a more measured view on at least three other globalisation heresies – the virtues of limited markets, stakeholder subsidies and precautionary principles.

Earlier this year I went to India to meet up with those involved in campaigns against GM crops and the corporate patenting of almost anything from trees to turmeric to curry. Farmers wanted Europe to win the fight to say "no" to GM crops because they would then face less pressure to grow what the seed corporations could not sell. In return, they asked for support to prevent US grain surpluses being dumped into their economy, with devastating consequences for their own agriculture.

In Seattle this surfaced as a demand that developing nations should be able to protect their food security and sufficiency. Anyone who thinks this through, in the context of either Kyoto or food safety, soon comes to realise that it has a resonance in the industrial north as much as in the developing south.

Agricultural subsidies per se are not the problem. It is simply that we target them towards the most damaging end of agribusiness rather than the more sustainable variants of agriculture. Even in the US most of the huge tranches of farming communities have been thrown into degrees of rural poverty last seen in the 30s. This is "beggar your neighbour" globalisation when we should be pursuing "repair your planet" investment. It means targeting subsidies towards labour inputs rather than chemical ones. In more robust terms, it would also turn all subsidies going into the private sector into some form of conditional stakeholding.

One of the triumphs of modern capitalism is to have pedalled the myth of the free market. Big business has no interest in free markets. Corporations are obsessed with control and market share. And most international business is only interested in the free market in the sense that subsidies – tax sheltering, relocation grants, capital allowances, land and buildings etc – all come free. When you begin to add up the huge subsidies which currently go into the corporate welfare state, it isn't a matter of whether we should make these conditional on meeting stakeholder obligations. The question is why don't we do so already?

Despite Kyoto, we are heading into the 21st century with a world consuming increasing amounts of fossil fuels in the long distance trans-shipment of goods. These are often produced by workers too poor to purchase the goods themselves, and sold to other workers deemed too costly to produce for themselves. The planet loses out at both ends and the public loses out in the disappearing lines of accountability. If we do not rediscover the virtues of sustainable (and accountable) local and regional markets in the next century, the tidal movements of people will themselves pose as much of a threat to stability as climate change. In that sense, long term viability massively outstrips the importance of any claims for a free market free for all.

Governments, of whatever persuasion, will be forced to make a choice. Is our primary duty to the citizens who elect us or to the shareholders who invest in us? It's no use saying that the two are increasingly the same because they're not. Shareholders depart at the drop of a dividend. Corporations relocate production wherever they can cut production and environmental costs, without losing the right to sell in the highest price market. Societies are the only ones who remain to clear up the mess. Precautionary principles – addressing food security and safety, along with viable domestic markets – are not a threat to sustainable trade but a precondition of it.

Beyond the tear gas stained streets of Seattle there is much to celebrate. The only one who died was TINA. Thatcher, Clinton and their ilk may have sworn their was no alternative but the wires of the Internet are now buzzing with a thousand different ones – all viable agendas which bridge the north-south divide. Globalisation is no longer the only game in town. The global commons are back in the frame. May the force be with them.

Protesters at Euston show solidarity with demonstrators in Seattle.



Photo: Paul Mattsson

TRADE UNION NOTEBOOK

Railtrack Plc has announced that it will not bid to run London's Underground. "Railtrack has decided not to submit a bid for any of the PPP (public private partnerships) on the London Underground," it said in a statement quoted on *Reuters* with its third quarter operating results.

A new dispute is brewing at Ford where the 7,000 salaried staff (engineers, technicians and secretarial/clerical staff) who are members of MSF and TGWU (ACTS) were being balloted for industrial action with the result due in early February. The dispute follows the manual workers settlement, which included an hours reduction. The offer to salaried staff is the same pay increase but no hours reduction for those currently on a 37.5 hour week.

At ITN, members of BECTU and the NUJ have voted for industrial action over new contracts which the company were threatening to impose without agreement. The dispute stems from moves by ITN to launch a 24-hour news channel and new services on the internet; this would require changes to staff scheduling practices with a significant increase in anti-social hours and night working, according to BECTU. The first strike is to be a 24-hour stoppage on 27th January followed by a four-hour strike on 31st January. Both unions recorded 80% majorities for industrial action.

RMT is in dispute with the Docklands Light Railway (DLR) in London over pay. The 200 RMT members have voted for strike action, which was to begin with a one-day strike on 24th January. The company has offered 3% on basic pay plus a 1% unconsolidated increase. This has been rejected as RMT is seeking an improved offer on basic pay.

Staff at the National Association of Citizen Advice Bureaux (NACAB) are in dispute over pay and over 200 members of MSF took a half-day strike on 14th January. This arose from an attempt by NACAB management to impose performance-related pay, which would include the use of unconsolidated increases. Following the strike on 14th January the management agreed to talks at ACAS on 20th January which led to further planned action being suspended.

The Blairite attempt to privatise air traffic control is being resisted by the union representing air traffic controllers and engineers – the IPMS. Gordon Brown announced that 51% of National Air Traffic Services (NATS) – part of the Civil Aviation Authority – was to be sold off. The IPMS argue that "a PPP would take the UK into uncharted territory, with attendant risks which would be the long-term legacy of this move." They draw strong parallels with railway privatisation and its results, such as the carnage at Paddington.

Connex drivers dispute

By a Connex driver: ASLEF train drivers on the two Connex Train Operating Companies in the south-east are to strike for one day a week starting on Tuesday 25th January. They will also be stopping all rest-day working. Members voted 388 to 154 on South Eastern and 378 to 81 on South Central in favour of the action. RMT, which represents some drivers, is balloting its drivers between January 24th and 30th.

The action is because Connex, unlike most other Train Operating Companies, has not met the Unions' claim for a 35 hour week and for all basic pay to be pensionable and because of management's attempts to weaken the role of drivers' union reps and ignore the bargaining procedure.

Since December, many South Central drivers have taken their own decisions to give up rest day working, forcing Connex to cut hundreds of trains each day. Two year ago Connex signed an agreement to end rest-day working by drivers, reduced its training staff, and is now so short of drivers they are unable to keep to the timetable unless drivers work rest days.

The *Croydon Advertiser*, a local paper in one of the biggest centres served by Connex, recently ran a leader slating Connex, calling them "not just a few drivers short of a full service but hundreds of drivers short," and demanding that the franchise for South Central be taken off them.

Complaint hits UNISON front runner

Jon Rogers, Lambeth UNISON branch secretary, reviews his junk mail.

The campaign for UNISON Deputy General Secretary Dave Prentis to succeed Rodney Bickerstaffe as General Secretary has been hit by a formal complaint to the Data Protection Registrar. I know – because I made the complaint.

It began with a letter to my home address, enclosing nice glossy leaflets, asking me as a branch secretary to help get my branch nomination for Mr Prentis. After persistent enquiries, Allan Taylor, UNISON's Assistant General Secretary admitted that union officials had passed computer files of branch secretaries' addresses to Prentis in the autumn.

This action by the Union could have breached trade union law as well as the Data Protection Act – and could still lead to complaints against the Union itself to the Certification Officer. The imaginative Mr Taylor has tried to justify the disclosure on the grounds that all UNISON branch secretaries have given "implied consent" to the disclosure of their personal details to candidates for election. As a branch secretary, I don't think so.

An enquiry to the Office of the Data Protection Registrar revealed that the Elect Dave Prentis Campaign wasn't registered to hold personal data on computer. I asked the campaign whether my name and address was on a computer, or on the back of an envelope. Dave Prentis's leaflets says he wants to hear from UNISON members. I haven't had a reply.

I have therefore made a formal complaint to the Data Protection Registrar. Why bother? Well, it has something to do with not liking hypocrisy and a lot to do with being angry about abuses of power.

UNISON branches who have tried to debate the possibility of supporting members forced to break the Tory anti-union laws have, in recent years, been prevented from even raising the issue at UNISON Conference on the grounds that the Union's rules restrict UNISON to acting within the law. If the leadership that hides behind this nonsense is found to have played fast and loose with the law themselves then their hypocrisy ought to be exposed.

UNISON sees chinks in the links?

Steve Wilkinson, regional publicity officer for Greater London UNISON, reports on the General Secretary elections.

As balloting takes place for the next General Secretary of Britain's largest union UNISON, left wing candidate and Socialist Party member Roger Bannister is calling for a repositioning of the relationship between the Labour Party and UNISON through reform of the rules governing its political fund.

Ken Cameron, General Secretary of the Fire Brigades union, started the debate at the 1999 TUC Congress with a call for the link between Labour and the unions to be broken. While Bannister's critical view stops short of breaking the link, the outcome of the election will – in the third year of the Labour's term in government – be viewed as a barometer of opinion on the relationship between unions and the Labour Party.

Bannister has urged members to put the link with Labour under the microscope. He cites the example of Tameside, where 197 carers were sacked in June 1998 after refusing to accept new terms and conditions. Subsequently Tameside careworkers stood candidates in local elections during the dispute. Labour councillors, who dominated the management board of the Tameside Care Group, won the backing of UNISON and the striking workers failed to gain the support of their own union – a situation Bannister describes as "unsustainable with the Labour Party we have got".

Bannister advocates a "democratisation" of UNISON's Affiliated Political Fund (APF) exclusively used to contribute to election expenses of Labour candidates and the promotion of campaigns for Labour policies. Bannister wants to see the APF structures reformed "so that fund members – regardless of Labour Party membership – are eligible to stand for election and vote at all levels in the fund's political structures, excepting eligibility for selection to UNISON's Labour Party Conference delegation."

Bannister believes contributions to election expenses should be earmarked for candidates who demonstrate their allegiance to UNISON policies. He wants the funding arrangements opened up at the local level "so that on occasions we support candidates of other political parties who support UNISON policies".

On the biggest issue of them all, Bannister proposes a "wider debate" in trade unions as "a big question mark" hangs over how long the link with Labour will last. He believes the key reason the Labour Party hasn't pulled the plug on the unions is the TUC's support for the euro and its gravitas as the largest influential organisation in the country taking a pro-euro stance, which would assist Labour in a referendum campaign.

In his election manifesto Dave Prentis, promoted by *Socialist Campaign Group News*, accuses the other two candidates of being supported, "by one extreme political faction or another." Prentis says that he will, "champion the interests of our members... working to retain and enhance UNISON's influence within society and government so that our voice is heard." However, he makes no critical reference as to whether UNISON pulls its weight and gets the best deal for its members under the current political arrangements with the Labour Party.

To counter accusations that Bannister is banging the drum for the Socialist Party, he states if elected he would seek to achieve consensus: "mobilising support for the issues that I am standing on within the democratic structures of the union"

Bannister gained the support of 67 of the unions nominating bodies against 294 for Dave Prentis and 33 for Malkiat Bilku. The ballot of UNISON's 1.3 million members opened on 21st January and will close on 18th February 2000 with the result out shortly afterwards.

Council update

Disputes continued at two London councils. In Haringey the action was over a threat to holiday entitlement. Members of UNISON and the TGWU took strike action on 15th December and were considering further action unless the Council backed down on its £2.25 million cuts package.

A one-day strike in November against Wandsworth Council's proposals to restrict sick pay drew 127 new members into UNISON, forcing the Council to defer its decision until January. A ballot of 1,300 UNISON members gave a 79 per cent majority for action on a 40% turnout. There will be a one-day strike on 26th January and two days of action on 2nd and 3rd February. The local Trades Council claims there is already evidence that potential job applicants are being deterred by the prospect of having to work or take annual leave while unfit. The Council was due to take a final decision on January 26th.

Haringey strike, December 1999.



Photo: Molly Cooper

Unions to make waves

Unions are demanding a water summit as one in four workers face the sack. Ian Malcolm-Walker, Derby North CLP, reports.

Trade union leaders have called for a water summit to discuss the looming crisis in the industry following recent announcements that waves of job losses are coming.

More than 3,000 job cuts were announced in December by privatised water companies in response to a demand from the industry's regulator to reduce domestic prices. Chris Caufman, national officer of the Transport and General Workers Union, called on Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott to convene a summit involving employers, unions and environmental groups. He added that it was wrong for water companies to finance lower water bills by axing workers.

UNISON General Secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe said: "Water companies are engaging in an unforgivable massacre of jobs in their efforts to save profits." He warned that services to customers could suffer because of the cutbacks.

Environment Minister Michael Meacher said: "I do not believe it is justified now for water companies to impose swingeing job cuts.

"Water companies have made very large profits in recent years. There are other ways they can meet these price limits than redundancies. We should not forget that their profits have been so large that the water industry had to pay more than £1.5 billion in windfall tax."

"Severn Trent alone, which now proposes 1,100 job losses, paid more than £300 million." Meacher told the BBC. He added, "I think employees, trade unions, and members of the public should demand openness and transparency from water companies about the state of their balance sheet."

Meacher warned that the Government would ensure that the companies maintained water quality of the highest level and met health, safety and environmental standards, whatever decisions they took on staffing levels.

But he added: "No one is suggesting the current level of jobs in the industry is sacrosanct for the indefinite future. I've no doubt that those job cuts will continue, gradually in the future as efficiencies continue to grow."

The water companies have blamed the job losses on fierce competition and tough price controls imposed by water regulator Ofwat, which recently announced price controls calling for cuts of around £30 on domestic water bills next year.

The jobs massacre started in early December, beginning with the Severn Trent announcement.

"We really had no option," said chief executive Vic Cocker, yet the company made profits of £226 million on turnover of £748.3 million for the six months to September 1999. Its interim dividend increased by 17p representing an overall 4.2% increase and is set to stay at this year's level for the next five years.

Yorkshire Water added 500 more posts to the great jobs cull, axing nearly a fifth of it's 2,700 strong workforce in the company's core water and sewerage utility at the same time as its shares in Kelda Group, the company's owners, rocketed from 15.5p to 315p.

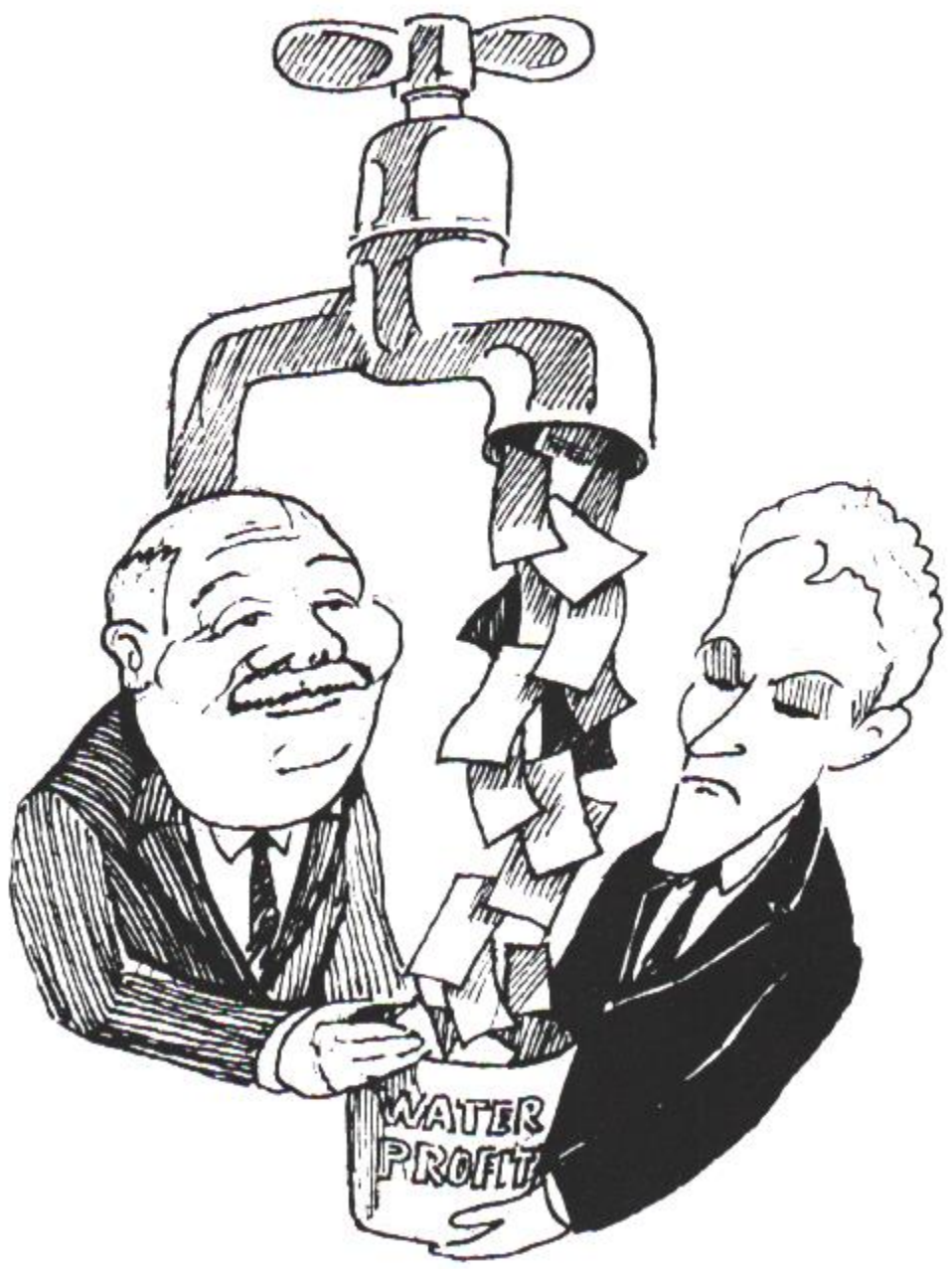
Also, Anglian Water, which pocketed profits of £114.5 million in the six months to September 1999, announced it was cutting 400 jobs, raising fears among analysts that up to 9,000 (one in four) British water industry workers face the sack.

Anglian said it anticipated savings of £40 million per year by 2001/02 from a group restructuring. But UNISON said water companies could not boost profits and lower prices by cutting jobs and then expect service and water quality to remain the same.

Meanwhile Hyder, which operates Welsh Water and electricity company Swalec, said it is to cut 1,000 jobs by April, adding that a third of the cuts have already been agreed with unions, with the rest being made before the end of the current financial year. Its 1999 first-half profits were £73.6 million. Finally, Pennon Group, owners of South West Water announced 200 job cuts.

Other utilities were not left out of the pre-Christmas slaughter. On December 14th neighbouring electricity companies London Electricity (French-owned) and Eastern Group (US-owned) said they planned to merge their electricity distribution networks into a stand-alone joint venture company.

This move will cost 800 jobs, about a quarter of their combined workforces in the monopoly businesses.





THE GEOFF MARTIN COLUMN

● So here we are in the middle of an NHS beds crisis which was about as predictable as the Millenium itself.

The health service was always going to be New Labour's achilles heel – when people are dying because of a lack of intensive care beds, even the best brains in the Millbank bunker find it hard to spin their way out of it.

Mind you, it won't stop them from trying. Just look at poor old Lord Winston. There he was one minute pouring his heart out to the *New Statesman* and the next minute he's hauled up before Big Al Campbell and ordered to bare his arse in Burton's window as penance for his heresy. The barmy thing is that the idiot did it!

There was another prime example of these Gestapo tactics here on our manor. The consultant in charge of the intensive care unit at St George's Hospital in Tooting invited Trevor McDonald and Granada TV into his department to see how bad things were. Within seconds a hit squad from the Department of Health press office emerged from the shadows to disrupt the filming and order the crew off the site.

The public isn't daft. People know that if we want the NHS to deliver a quality service then it's got to be paid for and they know that cutting taxes when the NHS is on its knees is dangerous nonsense. Like rail and tube privatisation this is an issue where all the cards are stacked in favour of the left. We can carve through the New Labour/Thatcherite philosophy of cheapskate services and tax cuts just like George Weah carving through the Spurs defence. Let's get on with it.

' Like rail and tube privatisation [the NHS] is an issue where all the cards are stacked in favour of the left. '

● I see that the Tories and the right wing media are after Mo Mowlam because she may have had the odd blast on the old Bob Hope when she was up at University. Apart from a few moralist freaks like Anne Widdecombe and the Home Secretary, the vast majority of us live in the real world where the odd herbal cigarette is a damn sight more socially acceptable than selling arms to Indonesia.

I was all set to jump to Mo's defence on this one until she admitted that she had once had a puff on the ganja but didn't like it! Get yourself a bit of decent home grown, Mo, and have another blast – it will help you get through all those mind–blowing Cabinet committee meetings.

● I read somewhere that some trendy academic has been having a go at the *Royle Family* because it's a "patronising portrayal of the working class". As Jim would say – "my arse!"

The *Royle Family* is the best thing on the box these days by many a mile and the idea that Ricky Tomlinson, one of the jailed Shrewsbury Pickets and still a hard-left socialist, would fit up his only class is just way off beam.

I think we should try and get the geezer interviewed for *LLB* as soon as possible.

● So, on to London Mayor business. Malcolm McLaren seems to be causing a bit of a stir, which is more of a sad reflection of the state of politics than anything else. McLaren's one great contribution to political debate was the slogan "Never Trust a Hippy" – a reasonable enough position but hardly a solid platform for governing the capital city.

Meanwhile, I see that the latest cheerleader for Dobbo's ropey old campaign is Tony Robinson. Tony R used to be a bit of a lefty but now has his eyes on the luvvie seat on the Party NEC vacated by the laughable Michael Cashman – a man who moved seamlessly from one soap opera (*EastEnders*) to another (New Labour) within the blink of any eye.

Tony Robinson's chief claim to fame was playing Baldrick in *Blackadder*, a dopey gofer bossed around by a greasy, sleazy, money–grabbing git. Great training for Mr Robinson in his aspiration to become a New Labour MP.

● Finally, Man Utd in Brazil – fantastic. They had a miserable time which is great retribution for their efforts, in cahoots with Tony Banks, to wreck the FA Cup.

Hopefully, they will also have killed off England's efforts to get the 2006 World Cup. It will go to South Africa and we can get on with the domestic game which 99% of real football fans are primarily concerned with.

By the way, I'm proud that Chelsea are the first British club to field an entirely internationlist team. Just a shame that we're still playing crap.

Trade Unions, Public Services and the Euro

A hard-hitting new pamphlet by Geoff Martin

Copies from Unit 6, Ivebury Court, 325 Latimer Road, London W10 6RA

Son of Yeltsin soldiers on

Steve Myers, a supporter of International Solidarity with Workers in Russia (ISWoR), assesses whether Vladimir Putin's Presidency will bring any changes.

Many commentators are saying that Vladimir Putin replacing Boris Yeltsin as acting President of Russia, represents a "new millennium turn" in Russia's politics – to a more assertive, nationalistic and militaristic Russia. This is not the case. Putin is the true political son of Yeltsin, just a more sober and more decisive character.

The "turn" took place last summer with the US/UK bombing of Yugoslavia, which the Russian oligarchs interpreted as Anglo-American imperialism making a move for the energy resources of the Caspian and against Russian super-profits. They feared that Russia would be forced down the Yugoslav road – a break-up along the fault lines of its many nationalities; a dismembering into semi-colonies for western imperialisms to fight over. They saw it all as a tactic by the US/UK to prevent any massive European and/or Asian super-imperialist bloc emerging (with Russia centre-stage) which could challenge US rule of the world.

In the Chechen war of 1994-6, many tens of thousands of lives were lost – a third of them children. Today, with no end to the carnage in sight, the catastrophe could be much greater. But this time Putin is masterminding the whole thing – probably including the murderous apartment bombings in Moscow and elsewhere in Russia (the only other possible suspect being the US!) which he immediately took as an excuse to invade Chechnya and put Russia on a nationalist war footing.

The US has been very soft on Russia compared with the European Union, which has a different agenda and interests. The US wants to see the Islamic world (and fundamentalism) and Russia at war for many years to come. The EU wants this fight in its backyard settled quickly, through negotiations. Britain's New Labour Government, trying to straddle the two positions, has been criticised by the Conservative Party leadership for being too hard on Russia!

The present situation in Russia has its roots in the period that led to Yeltsin's era. Gorbachev's *glasnost* opened up discussion, freed up the media and tolerated dissent. *Perestroika* was an attempt to copy the Chinese slow-lane of "economic liberalisation" – of privatisation towards capitalism. This way, it was hoped, the western billionaires could be kept out and a very large section of the "Communist" bureaucracy itself could become the new ruling capitalist class.

But US/UK imperialism wanted more than a slow-lane to capitalism, and with Yeltsin's accession Russia entered almost a decade of fast-lane privatisation. Egged on by the western powers' promises of heaven and earth, of immense investment which never materialised, Yeltsin and his allies dealt brutally with the slow-lane generals.

Indeed, the economic devastation in Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Byelorussia has been worse for the populations than what happened in the years after the 1929 crash in Germany, which then led to Hitler and the Second World War. Unless this feeling of national oppression is understood, there is no way one can understand the temporary popularity of Putin.

Yeltsin's Russia in the 1990s and today is a capitalist state with expansionist aims, in the first instance into its old backyard, whether the people of the former USSR want it or not. We cannot call it imperialist, as there is not any significant export of finance capital yet and, besides, we need to distinguish qualitatively between the role of Russia and that of the US and EU imperialisms, which determine so much of global politics.

During Yeltsin's reign, the left disagreed on how best to characterise the Russian state: semi-colonial, degenerated workers state, moribund workers state, imperialist, fascist, etc. The reality is that the state has been and is capitalist: its leadership, government, courts and the "bodies of armed men" have facilitated the economic restoration of capitalism and the re-introduction of the market.

But it is impossible for Russia to create a western-style capitalism, where the rich can afford to pay for social peace – welfare state, minimum wage, etc. – out of their super-profits. The new capitalist Russia has been born into a world in which productive power already far exceeds the ability of the masses to buy. Who wants to invest in modernising uncompetitive industries when even competitive ones are being forced to downsize, when giant multi-nationals are forced to merge just to be competitive?

Conditions are already over-ripe for a major global catastrophe beyond the crash of 1929. So Putin's promises for greater state intervention in the Russian economy now is no more than a call for a 1930's style New Deal a la Roosevelt. Except that the call is overshadowed by a Frankenstein's monster created by the west – the rise of ultra-nationalism in Russia, the world's second nuclear power. Into this situation enters Putin's war against Chechnya.

Public meeting

STOP RUSSIA'S WAR AGAINST CHECHNYA

Liz Davies (chair) – Labour Party NEC
Jeremy Corbyn – Labour MP
Peter Gowan – editor of *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*
Chris Harman – editor *Socialist Worker*
Lisa Taylor – International Solidarity with Workers in Russia
Bruce Kent – peace campaigner
Thursday 27th January 8pm
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,
London WC1 (Holborn tube)

National March & Rally

STOP RUSSIA'S WAR AGAINST CHECHNYA!

Assemble: 12.00 Saturday 5th February at Tothill Street
(behind Westminster Central Hall
Tubes: Westminster,
St James's Park)
Rally at Trafalgar Square
main speaker: Tony Benn MP

Mounting pressure damns the dam

The Government's business-led decision to fund the building of a major dam in Turkey has devastating consequences – but it can be stopped, argue Liz Knight and Erkan Gok.

"Blair plans to drown Kurd town", the *Independent* announced in a recent front-page headline. Overriding opposition from senior cabinet members and protests world-wide, Tony Blair has insisted that the Department of Trade and Industry provide £200m to ensure the building of the controversial Ilisu Dam in south-east Turkey. At the end of December Trade Secretary Stephen Byers announced he was "minded" to give the go-ahead for the export credit to the UK member of the international construction consortium, Balfour Beatty. This was in spite of Byers' and Robin Cook's own earlier opposition to the plan, and its rejection by the World Bank since it violates that organisation's ethical and environmental codes.

The dam's construction will flood 15 towns and 52 villages, including one of the most ancient towns in the world, Hasankeyf. It will cause the forcible displacement of an estimated 20,000 mainly Kurdish people and affect thousands more. It will also enable Turkey to control downstream water flows to Syria and Iraq.

Construction on the dam, the largest planned hydro-electric project in Turkey, is expected to start this year. The $2 billion project is part of Turkey's Southeastern Anatolia Project, a $32 billion infrastructure development programme envisaging the construction of 22 dams and 19 power plants on the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers and their tributaries.

The Turkish government insists the dams are necessary to provide irrigation and electricity in a country in which demand for power is doubling every nine years. Opponents say there are unexplored alternatives, including reduction in energy losses from the existing grossly inefficient system, and investment in solar and wind power.

The dams programme is as much political as economic, ensuring the destruction of ancient Kurdish homelands and the removal of the Kurds to cities where they can be dispersed and controlled. The dams also give Turkey a mighty weapon against its neighbours, which is why the Ilisu Dam is opposed by the League of Arab States. The CIA has already identified the struggle for water as the most likely cause of war in the region. If Syria continues to "support the PKK" Turkey would "cut off their water" – so said a Turkish government official recently.

On the economic side, the consortium contracted to build the dam anticipates huge profits guaranteed by public money in Britain through the Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD).

The dam is almost unanimously opposed by the local populations. Alongside Kurdish and other human rights organisations, Friends of the Earth within Turkey and internationally have conducted a courageous campaign against the project, describing it as "a disaster for the environment, a tragedy for the Kurdish people, and a threat to peace." The British Government's own recently released reports on Ilisu have themselves been damning.

In endorsing the project Blair does the bidding of both Turkey's extreme right-wing nationalist regime and the construction giant Balfour Beatty – currently being prosecuted for bribery and corruption in connection with another ECGD-supported dam project in Lesotho. However he does nothing to encourage Turkey's rulers to improve political and human rights for their own population – supposedly a condition of December's Helsinki acceptance of Turkey as a candidate for EU membership. Ordinary Turks as well as Kurds and other ethnic minorities suffer under the present regime, as became evident in the state's ineptitude after last year's earthquakes.

The Ilisu Dam scandal is one instance of human rights abuse coinciding with environmental vandalism. Another is the Eurogold project – Eurogold being the international mining consortium planning to develop gold mines across Turkey and in the process pollute whole regions with cyanide. Thousands of Turkish villagers in the historic town of Bergama (the land of Homer) have risked prison and military violence to make their protests. Now on the agenda is the Turkish government's proposal to build its first nuclear power plant – next to a major earthquake fault line in Akkuyu, on the Mediterranean coast. Eighty per cent of local people oppose the plan – but only international pressure can prevent it.

Turkey's Prime Minister, Bulent Ecevit, has recently agreed to wait for the European Court of Human Rights to review PKK leader Ocalan's appeal before sending the case to Parliament – to approve or to commute the death sentence. The regime has shown itself susceptible to pressure on this issue because it is determined that nothing should prevent it from making progress towards EU membership. Pressure can therefore be brought to bear on the regime by European governments, if they are so "minded." Those struggling for elementary social and political justice in Turkey are fighting for a world fit to live in – a cause which belongs to us all.

- Faxes of protest concerning British Government involvement in the Ilisu Dam can be sent to Tony Blair on 0171-925 0918 / 017-930 9572, with copies to Stephen Byers on 20-7215 5675 and to Robin Cook on 0171-839 2417.
- For more information on the Ilisu Dam campaign contact Friends of the Earth, press office on 0171-566 1649 and the Campaign for Human Rights in Turkey on 0171-275 8440.

Anatomy of a coup foretold

The British Government seems to be edging toward renewed dealings with Pakistan's latest crop of military rulers. Arif Azad, of Aaj Kay Naam, a London-based campaign for social justice and human rights in Pakistan, argues that there should be no truck with the despots in uniform.

Much of Pakistan's political history has been dominated by military regimes, with civilian governments periodically allowed in to give the military a breathing space before it launches another assault on democratic rights.

However, the coup of 12th October staged by General Musharraf is different from the previous three coups in its context and timing. Whereas previous coups were actively orchestrated from the US embassy in Islamabad and occurred in the context of the Cold War (during which the Pakistani army was the principal servant of US strategic interests in the region), this coup is entirely indigenous in character and sprang out of the generals' resistance to any squeeze on the military budget and their alarm at a threatened diminution of the army's political role.

The first military coup (led by General Ayub Khan in 1958) established the military's partnership with the US and its hold on the political life of the country. In July 1977, General Zia-ul-Haq imposed martial law on the country on the pretext of deteriorating law and order resulting from foreign-orchestrated civil unrest in the aftermath of 1977 elections. The anti-Bhutto agitation (Zulfikar Ali Bhutto governed as the country's first democratically elected prime minister from 1971-1977) bore all the hallmarks of the CIA-backed truck drivers' strike in Chile in the run-up to Pinochet's seizure of power.

The most recent coup enjoyed no US backing at the blueprint stage – for the simple reason that the Pakistan army is no longer strategically useful to the US. That is why in September 1999 Washington went to extraordinary lengths to distance itself from the initial whispers of a coming coup and categorically stated that such an unconstitutional move would be viewed with disfavour.

Nonetheless, Washington's apparent disfavour was not sufficient to deter the military. Indeed, the roots of the October coup go back to General Zia-ul-Haq's military dictatorship of 1977-88. Since 1988, when party-based parliamentary democracy was formally restored, the army has retained its king-making and veto power over the conduct of civilian administrations, exploiting the infamous eighth constitutional amendment, the creation of Zia-ul-Haq. This amendment empowered the president (in addition to indemnifying the abuses and illegalities of the departing martial law regime) to dismiss prime ministers and close down parliaments in the event of crisis. Since 1988 politically ambitious generals have repeatedly acted in collusion with the president to pack off popularly elected governments who did not fall in line with the generals' whims. Between 1988 and 1997 Pakistan had four (seven, if one includes caretaker administrations) elected governments removed from power largely due to the military's behind the scene manoeuvrings. Manufactured and artificial crises were used to abort each of these governments in its midterm.

However, the going got a bit rough for the generals when in the 1997 general election Nawaz Sharif's Muslim League party won a massive parliamentary majority. On coming to power Sharif's first act was to rein in the generals by striking down the eighth amendment. The all-mighty military top brass, accustomed to bossing about civilian governments, was appalled. In an effort to stamp his control over the army Sharif forced army chief General Jehangir Karamat to resign after he criticised the civilian government and proposed the establishment of a National Security Council to give the army a permanent role in political life.

Karamat's replacement, General Musharraf, showed his Bonapartist tendencies from the word go. In December 1998, he forced the Prime Minister to hand over control of the Water and Power Authority (WAPDA) to the military. Thirty five thousand military personnel were parachuted into the WAPDA, displacing long-term civilian employees and banning trade unions.

The Punjab education department and Karachi Electric Supply Corporation were the next targets. The occupation of these departments represented a desperate attempt by the military elite to get a hand in the national till and thus ensure a flow of revenue at times of economic crisis.

Soon afterwards the new army chief ordered Pakistani irregulars into Kargil in the disputed region of Kashmir. India's energetic military retort coupled with international backing left the Pakistani military strategists high and dry. Nawaz Sharif dashed to Washington to arrange a face-saving withdrawal of a humiliated Pakistan military. The army high command, instead of owning up to a disastrous military mistake, laid the blame of the Kargil fiasco at the door of the civilian government. This further embittered relations between the military and civilian leadership.

At the same time General Musharraf told his corps commanders he would not take his sacking by the prime minister (which in any other democracy is the constitutional prerogative of the prime minister) lying down. On 12th October he overthrew the government by force of arms. Parliament was shut down, the constitution suspended, political leaders put under house arrest and courts forbidden to question the diktat of the new rulers.

Within two weeks of the coup, Musharraf established the National Security Council, a longstanding dream of the generals. The NSC institutionalises the military veto over democratic politicians; it is packed with the four services chiefs and a sprinkling of civilian collaborators.

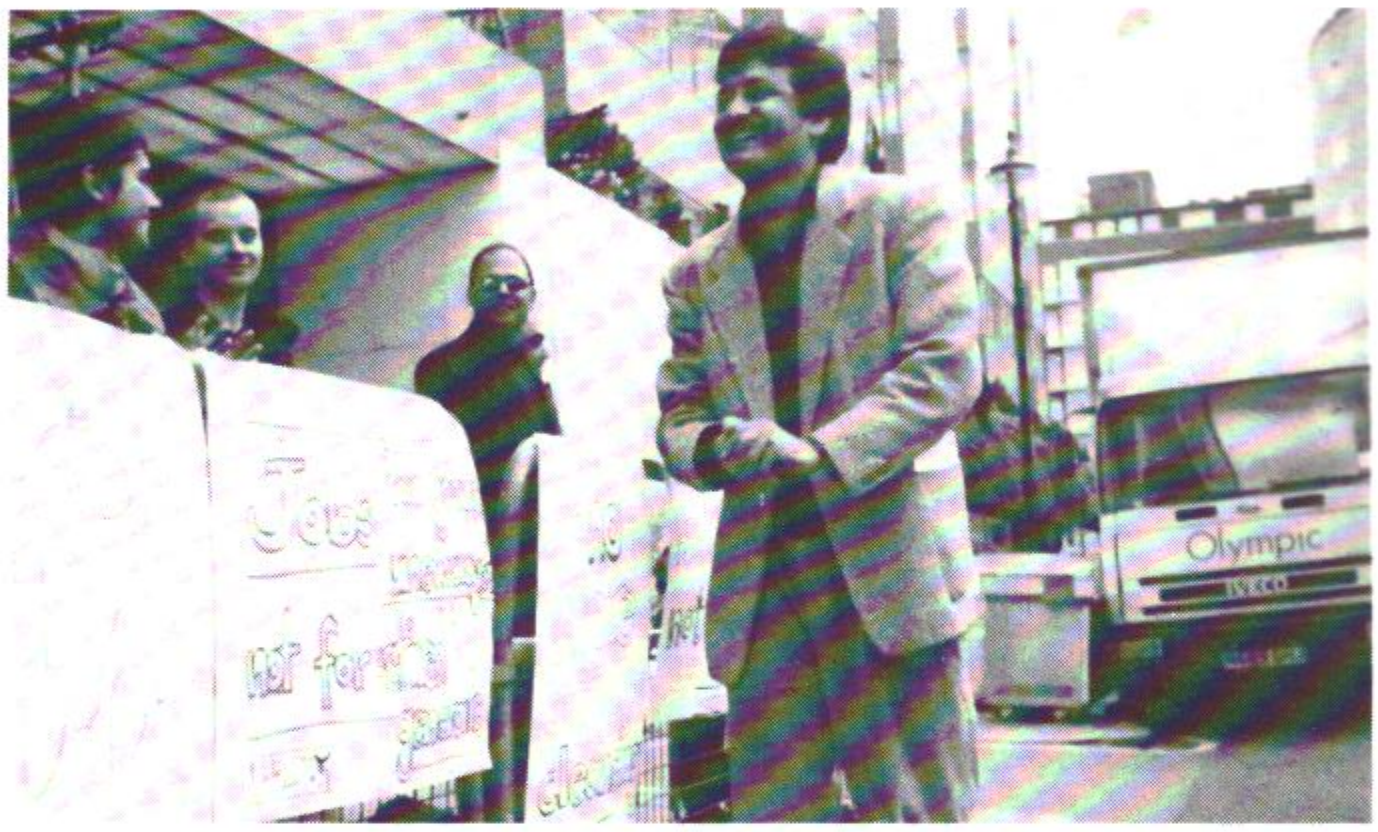
A drama, too familiar to Pakistan watchers, is now being re-enacted. A massive dirty tricks campaign against politicians is underway. The deposed Prime Minister is being forced through the humiliation of kangaroo justice in an anti-terrorism court whose jurisdiction does not cover the trumped up charge of treason for which he is being tried. A publicity-driven "accountability drive" – which excludes military men from its jurisdiction – is in full spate.

The only solution to recurrent military coups is to nurture civil society and a culture of basic human rights. Since partition the state apparatus that was shaped to the institutional needs of the army has accumulated immense coercive powers; these are used to suppress any murmurs of protest from civil society. One reason why generals feel emboldened to stage military coups is because none of them has ever been brought to book. In Pakistan's entire history no uniformed man has ever been prosecuted for human rights abuses. Even the break-up of Pakistan, wholly attributable to years of martial law and military defeat, failed to induce a clamour for accountability of the "fat and flabby generals" (Bhutto's phrase).

The only way out of the crisis is to restore the country to a democratic path. Pakistan is suffering from the ill effects not of "corrupt politicians", as the western media would have it, but of insufficient democracy, which may also prove the only last remaining hope of keeping Pakistan in one piece.

Under previous military regimes Pakistan has seen dismemberment, secession, increasing poverty and colossal human rights abuses. This belies the military's claim that it is the only institution that can keep the country together and bring prosperity. On the contrary, it is not until the country is freed from the military grip once and for all that the construction of a stable, prosperous and just Pakistan can begin in earnest.

● Aaj Kay Naam is a London-based organisation campaigning for social justice, democracy, and human rights in Pakistan. For further details contact us at aajkaynaam@yahoo.com; website at www.solidarity.freeserve.co.uk; tel. 0171- 813 4508



London picket against militarisation of Pakistan March 1999.

The charge-sheet of history

1947	Birth of Pakistan as a result of partition of sub-continent.
1958	General Ayub Khan stages first military coup to forestall growing demands for democracy. Pakistan army entrenches itself inside state apparatus and becomes a pawn in the US strategic calculations. Ayub Khan declares that "Democracy is unsuitable for a hot country like Pakistan. It is only suitable for cold climates."
1969	Ayub is swept out of power as a result of a popular protest movement.
1969-71	General Yahya Khan takes over as second martial law administrator. Pakistan army suffers a humiliating defeat at the hands of India. He presides over the break-up of Pakistan (East Pakistan becomes Bangladesh). Z.A. Bhutto becomes first elected Prime Minister of Pakistan.
1977	Third martial law regime imposed by General Zia-ul-Haq. Bhutto hanged in 1979. Military dictator embarks on 'Islamisation' of society. Military intelligence acquires unaccountable power over the life of the nation. Ethnic and religious sectarianism takes root as Zia-ul-Haq pursues 'divide and rule' policy.
1983	Zia-ul-Haq bloodily puts down pro-democracy movement in Sind province, killing more than one thousand people.
1988	Zia dies in air crash along with the US ambassador to Pakistan. Democracy is restored. Military continues to hold the reins through the eighth constitutional amendment.
1988-97	Military top brass, in collusion with the president, aborts four elected governments in mid-term by using powers in the eighth amendment.
1997	Nawaz Sharif elected with massive majority, removes eighth amendment.
1999	Army takes over WAPDA, Karachi electric corporation and Punjab education department. Army chief General Musharraf plans ill-starred Kargil operation. Army forced into humiliating retreat.
12/10/99	Army chief illegally seizes power and puts all politicians under house arrest.

Reviving a class approach to history

Bernie Moss, author of *The Origins of the French Labour Movement* and former Professor of History at the New School for Social Research, introduces a series on Labour Party history.

Britain has a rich heritage of working class and labour history. Fabians Sidney and Beatrice Webb wrote the first serious history of trade unionism. Guild socialist GDH Cole and Raymond Postgate published the first history from below, *The Common People* in 1938 and Cole also wrote a masterful multi-volume history of socialist thought. While liberal historian Henry Pelling denounced the Marxists, he wrote a detailed account of the origins of the Labour Party suffused with class. Royden Harrison wrote a judicious account of the transition years from Chartism to socialism that did not ignore the spectre of revolution.

In the 1940s and 50s the Communist Historians Group put Marxist historical understanding on the map. *The Making of the English Working Class* by EP Thompson, while poorly theorised, was acclaimed as a great historical masterpiece while Eric Hobsbawm became renowned world-wide for his economically-oriented trilogy of the nineteenth-century. A new generation of socialist scholars, often identified with the new left and feminism, continued their work through the 1970s expanding domains of inquiry to work, social life and women. Histories of the Labour Party were legion. Britain became world famous for its explorations into labour history.

In the past two decades, conservative reaction in Britain, as elsewhere, has obliterated much of this heritage. The very revolutionary New Left was often more interested in abstruse theorising than in practical labour politics. The old Communists, whose work was always constrained by party discipline and the Cold War, ignored the rise of the Labour left. Concluding that the "forward march had been halted", many defected to modernist and even "Blairite" politics. Thatcherism threw fear and despair into many former radical scholars, who abandoned class approaches. Those remaining in the struggle had little time for serious history.

New Labour could take advantage of this void to break with the past. Blair was not afraid to declare that breaking with liberalism and forming a separate Labour Party based on class was a mistake. Rewriting history is much easier than remaking it, so a new school of Cambridge historians excised the class dimension from British history. Borrowing the post-modernists' obsession with language and discourse, they argued for the continuity and dominance of liberal conceptions in nineteenth-century working-class representation. Blair's arguments were not identical to those of the Cambridge academics, but both repudiated class as a political and historical force.

History is important to activists because it memorialises those who have gone in the past and helps to explain the present. A class analysis might concede that the composition of the working class in job, race and gender terms has changed over time, necessitating new approaches and organisations. It would also want to show how the perception of class in the past conditions present-day politics and social consciousness.

For example, if most British people feel, unlike Americans, that they are working-class, it has something to do with the fact that a hundred years ago three quarters of the active population were manual workers and that the Labour Party came to represent them. The class heritage spills over to non-manual workers in our society. The Labour Party became a class party because liberalism proved incapable of satisfying working-class demands in an increasingly polarised society.

Blair believes a labour party is no longer needed because we are all middle-class. But structural and political factors that produced the Labour Party in 1900 still operate today: poverty and social inequality at the highest levels since the Victorian era, an increasingly competitive global economy putting severe pressure on jobs, wages and conditions, a government believing in Victorian nostrums of free trade, competitive markets, education and self-help. If history is any influence and example, we need Labour more than ever.

The aim of this series is to present a critique of the "liberal school" and to revive the class approach to labour history for activists, with brief essays written by historians Neville Kirk, Royden Harrison, Caroline Benn, John Halstead and Sheila Rowbotham covering the Chartists (1832-1848), liberal accommodation (1850-1880), the formation of the Labour Party, Keir Hardie's legacy, and women in the Party. New research and insight will assist the reinterpretation of older sources such as Pelling and Duncan Tanner, who showed the pressures of class breaking through the liberal surface of party and trade union without daring to use the word.

The process of transformation from Liberalism to Labour was slow, uneven and mixed, while the new Labourist tradition, incorporating liberal and old trade unionist elements, was quite distinctive from both American progressivism and Marxist-based Social Democracy in Europe. The Labour Party cannot be treated as a mistake because the forces breaking apart liberalism were profoundly based and overwhelming; one can quibble about the speed and uniformity of change, but the economically-driven direction of change, accelerated by World War I, was relentless leaving no doubt about the outcome.

- A brief centennial history of the Party including these essays edited by Bernie will be published later this year.

The struggle for working class independence

Neville Kirk
Professor of History
Manchester Metropolitan University

A crucial feature underlying the formation of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900, which became the Labour Party in 1906, was the growing feeling among late nineteenth-century labour activists that their movement required a more independent presence within Parliament in order to achieve the stated goal of the famous 1899 Plymouth TUC of "a better representation of the interests of labour in the House of Commons."

During the 1890s many factors contributed to organised labour's new found spirit of independence. These included: the spread of trade unionism among the unskilled; growth of a more homogeneous working class; mounting anti-union sentiments among establishment figures; the socialist revival; growing dissatisfaction with the ability of Conservatives and Liberals to satisfy the "labour interest" and the perceived dominance of the two main parties by "too many landlords and capitalists, and too few to represent their own principles and wants."

The commitment of the 1900 Labour Representation Conference to the formation in the House of Commons of "a distinct Labour Group ... who shall have their own Whips and agree upon their policy" signified an important departure from the labour movement's post-Chartist commitments to non-partisan lobbying of Parliament, accommodation to the two-party structure and particularly strong links with Liberalism. Pre-1914, the Parliamentary Labour Party co-operated closely with the Liberals. Organised labour's embrace of political independence, by support for the Labour Party, was limited and uneven – large sections retained allegiance to Conservatism and Liberalism.

Recent revisionist liberal historians have questioned the influences that socialism and class unity have had on workers. They have denied any qualitative leaps in working class politics and consciousness leading to the formation of the Labour Party. It is clear, however, that the birth and development of the Labour Party were heavily influenced by enhanced feelings of independence and class solidarity. A similar class-based conclusion must be drawn from the experiences of workers and their protest movements during the turbulent years between the First Reform Act of 1832 and Parliament's rejection of the Chartist's third petition in 1848. Between these years more ordinary people were involved in a rich variety of radical causes and protests than at any other time in modern British history. Popular dissatisfaction, anger and desire for fundamental change were produced by the combined effects of the Industrial Revolution, democratic political revolutions in France and the US, counter-revolutionary impulses and measures of Britain's rulers and cultural apartheid imposed on the emerging working class by landowners and industrialists alike.

Popular radicalism embraced campaigns for Factory Reform, repeal of the hated New Poor Law, trade unions of the general and more exclusive variety, millenarian movements, Owenite experiments in community-building, education and co-operation, campaigning for a cheap radical press, rural and industrial unrest, and monster demonstrations involving tens, even hundreds of thousands of people.

The Chartists dominated popular radicalism during this period. Seeking to achieve economic and social justice, and a more democratic, co-operative and civilised society by manhood suffrage and radical legislation, Chartism touched around two or three million out of a total adult population in 1841 of about ten million, representing the flowering of that process of working class consciousness charted by Thompson.

There were important instances of inter-class radical co-operation between 1832 and 1848 by the "productive" middle and working classes against "unproductive" aristocratic landlords and the tax-eating, corrupt state. Socialism had very limited appeal pre-Chartism. Yet the absence of Marxism did not signify the absence of class.

As conclusively demonstrated by Dorothy Thompson and other historians, the perceived and articulated economic, political, social, cultural and ideological grievances of the people during this period, especially during Chartism, induced profound feelings of class. There emerged an impressive identity of interest in seemingly disparate groups of working people, and a profound opposition to the felt exploitation of the people by landed aristocracy, the millocracy and representatives of the state machinery. As with the LRC and the Labour Party – indeed, far more so – it was the political, economic, ideological and cultural experiences of class which firmly moulded the independent character of Chartism as a mass political movement and its refusal to throw in its lot with, or become a junior partner of, middle-class radicalism. As an independent, class-based movement, Chartism does not fit into the picture of a tradition of inter-class radicalism portrayed by liberal revisionism.

Chartism did not die in 1848. It continued as a much weakened, if often independent and newly social-democratic movement, to 1858. But divisions within its ranks, failure of the political option to bring its promised rewards, the steadfastness of the propertied classes and the state in the face of Chartist physical force and the increasing success of the representatives of the state machinery in employing a judicious mixture of coercion and concessions in relation to popular grievances and demands, greatly undermined Chartism's former mass appeal.

During the mid-Victorian years organised labour achieved an unprecedented stake in British society. Unlike the Chartists, the thoughts of mid-Victorian labour leaders revolved far less around a revolving of the whole system than around short-term and incremental gain by means of the virtues of sound collective organisation and the cultivation of respectable habits and virtues.

Don't desert the Party

Continuing the debate on the crisis of representation, Jeff Slee replies to Mike Marqusee's contribution in the last issue of *LLB*.

Mike Marqusee (*LLB*, December 1999) and others who argue that we should leave the Labour Party and campaign against them at the next general election, are wrong.

Mike argues we can't support a Labour election campaign based on its record in government. True – the question Mike should answer is: at which election in Labour's history could he have happily defended Labour's record or manifesto? If he can't think of examples, then what has changed to make him reconsider being in the Party?

What does Mike say we should have done in the 1979 election? It is difficult to argue the present Labour Government's record is worse than the 1974-79 Government's. Yet, if socialists had left the Labour Party in 1977-78, then the battle for the future of the labour movement, from 1979 to 1983 – including the deputy leadership election of 1982 – would never have happened. Socialists don't stay in the Labour Party because of its record or policies, so Labour's policies in government shouldn't cause us to re-think our attitude to the Party.

The dilemma Mike poses still has to be answered. What do we do in the next general election? In the run-up to the 1979 general election, some socialists launched a Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory. They argued for a vote for Labour not on the basis of Labour's record or manifesto, but on the basis of socialist policies which supporters of our campaign (including several CLPs and Labour candidates) argued for within the labour movement up to, through and beyond that election.

Another problem with Mike's suggestion that *LLB* readers leave the Labour Party, is that British labour history is littered with small groups of socialists who left the Labour Party, and become irrelevant sects, from the SDF a century ago to Scargill's SLP today. What, for example, has become of Militant?

Mike says that only by challenging Labour at elections can we provide an alternative to the Blairites. However, if people want to vote for a party to the left of Labour, they already have plenty of choice: the SLP, the Communist Party of Britain, the WRP and the SPGB all stood candidates in 1997. Few electors voted for them because most voters would rather vote for a New Labour candidate with a chance of winning than a candidate with better politics but no chance of winning.

There is a real alternative to the Blairites within the labour movement of socialists campaigning for left politics. Tens of thousands of London trade unionists have just had a chance to vote for a socialist alternative to the Blairites – in the selection of Labour's mayoral candidate for London. This opportunity was not won by those outside the Labour Party, but by those still battling inside. Those who leave the Labour Party are abandoning the challenge being made against the leadership and strengthening the Blairites' grip on the Labour Party.

There are three criteria by which we should judge whether to be in the Labour Party, or whether to set up a rival socialist (or, as Mike suggests, social democratic) party. Labour's record isn't one of them. First is Labour's trade union link. As long as we have one trade union movement, with one political party firmly linked to it, then Labour is the channel through which working-class politics can flow through to the parliamentary arena. Anyone contemplating setting up a rival socialist party must consider challenging Labour, not only by building a mass-membership party and competing in elections, but also by competing with the Labour Party for the trade union link.

Second is the first-past-the-post electoral system. This protects Labour's position as the only alternative government to the Tories. Most people to whom socialists appeal vote Labour because of class identification and to keep the Tories out. Almost every electoral challenge to Labour – even in safe Labour areas – has foundered on this obstacle.

Third is the ability to argue effectively for our politics within the Labour Party. Despite expulsions and CLP closures, in most of the Party we can argue our politics without being expelled. And despite Policy Forums and the taming of Conference, political debate still exists in the Party. It is too early yet to see whether it is still possible to win policy arguments against the leadership within this system.

If the Blairites carry through their project – to end Labour's union links, create a dominant centre party or coalition, and stifle internal democracy (and they are still a long way from this) – then setting up a rival party becomes necessary. There are several possible future directions for the labour movement. We will have to keep under review our relationship to the Labour Party. For now, there should be no question of leaving.

I realise that this contribution is written with reference to the labour movement in England. There are interesting developments in Wales and, particularly, in Scotland, with the Scottish Parliament elected by PR and the Scottish Socialist Party which I haven't had space to deal with.

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Globalisation can still be stopped!

Mike Phipps reviews *The Twilight of Globalisation* by Boris Kagarlitsky the second volume of his Recasting Marxism trilogy, published by Pluto, price £12.99 pbk.

Large corporations now have bigger budgets than many small countries and despite their lack of accountability can play a critical role in their development. New global institutions like the IMF or WTO have their own agenda too, very different from the limited regulatory role they were established with, effectively telling states what to do. So are the effects of globalisation now unstoppable?

The answer Kagarlitsky gives is a very definite no. "The popular argument about 'the importance of the state' in globalised capitalism is not only wrong but deeply dishonest," he writes in the Preface. Not only is this line a politician's excuse for capitulating to global capitalism: it actually masks the use made of state institutions by multinational companies, for example with deregulation, which is itself a form of state intervention, albeit perverted. Equally such bodies are very keen to establish a global capital market but exert no such pressure for a world labour market, so national borders stay closed. In their eyes workers are objects, simply labour resources, as passive and immutable as iron ore. But in any case there are plenty of states that have ignored the neoliberal orthodoxy and used state intervention to pursue their own goals (Japan and China for example).

It is now a truism that the failings of both post-war social democracy and the bureaucratised economies of the Soviet bloc have made the left much more uncertain about the role of the state. Many now reject nationalisation and seek alternatives, such as co-operatives, to the rule of capital. Kagarlitsky is highly critical of these approaches, which either function within and according to the rules of capitalism, or else are hopelessly utopian in their intricacy. He argues it is first necessary to change the balance of forces, by simple and crude nationalisation if necessary. But this is not the end of the process, simply a requisite stage for breaking the power of capital. Failure to go beyond this led to the collapse of the Soviet system, but much was achieved in the meantime, even in isolated Cuba. This thesis can be proved negatively too: the recent privatisation of state enterprises in Russia was accompanied by catastrophic declines in efficiency, technology and productivity. Regionalisation of state property – rather than de-nationalisation – is now looking more attractive.

The central importance of the state to resisting the effects of globalisation explain neoliberalism's hostility to all forms of state participation in the economy. But it may also account for the fact that the US, among others, increasingly favour the political disintegration of once-strong states, because smaller emergent nations cannot easily conduct independent politics and have to turn to "Big Brother" for help.

Controversially, Kagarlitky argues that socialists should be wary of supporting the break-up of former Soviet and eastern European federations. Comparing this process to colonial liberation may be misguided, as it neglects the fact that anti-colonial movements were driven by the masses demanding civil rights, whereas in many cases in the former USSR, the initiative for fragmentation came from Moscow. Chechenya however is an exception to these processes. Socialists should therefore avoid being formalistic on national self-determination – there is not just one solution because there is not just one national question. We should go beyond the politics of nationalism by arguing for multiculturalism and multinational federations.

Kagarlitsky's thesis is that capitalism internationally is reproducing all the contradictions and vices of bureaucratic centralisation which led to the downfall of the Soviet system – surely a sign of imminent catastrophe? Meanwhile democracy is increasingly transformed into an intervention of elites, an oligarchy, who use it simply as a means to legitimise their power. Gradually mainstream political debate becomes meaningless, corruption and betrayal the norm and citizenship a limited privilege. In the face of this, the left must wake up to the need for a radical democratic transformation of the state, realising the anti-capitalist potential of democracy and using it to forge new institutions. Part Three of Kagarlitsky's trilogy is eagerly awaited!

Guatemalan genocide

Mike Phipps reviews *Guatemala: Never Again!*, the Official report of the Human Rights Office, Archdiocese of Guatemala, published by Latin American Books, price £9.99.

"Without asking a single question, the soldiers tied them up inside the house. They poured gasoline on the house and lit it. They all perished in the fire, including a child about two years old. My mother, sister, brother-in-law and their three children were all massacred."

This book makes grim reading. 6,500 personal testimonies document over 400 massacres and the death or disappearance of 200,000 in the CIA-backed war waged by the Guatemalan army against its people over a 36-year period up to 1996. Mass rape and sexual torture, including that of children, was common. But the report, published here for the first time in English, also documents the bravery of the families of the victims who fought for justice and recognition of the genocide committed against them.



PERISCOPE

Ms Moffatt on GM Tuffet?

Who says New Labour MPs are afraid of taking controversial decisions? Just as Government ministers were announcing a block on commercial GM production for three years, **Laura Moffatt**, MP for Crawley, invited MPs to a meeting on "Progress in Xenotransplantation" sponsored by **Novartis Pharmaceuticals**, GM food producers and lobbyists. For the bravest of those MPs attending, "lunch will be served".

Wrong again Dave (part 23)

Independent columnist **Dave Aaronovitch** must have thought his birthday had come early – Ken Livingstone's backing of the bill to ban hunting gave Pink Dave a chance to attack a socialist and oppose a ban on hunting all in one article. The apologist for foxhunting claimed that urban people didn't care about the issue, flying in the face of every opinion poll and a TV programme that tried the same tack when **Jeremy Corbyn** MP introduced a bill to ban deer hunting. Every Islington resident it interviewed came out in support of Jeremy's Bill.

Partners in Crime

Millbank has been running an advert for a new member of staff to run the *Partnership in Power* project. Does the fact that it's only a six month contract say something about poor employment practices or that we've only got six months of the "partnership" left before Blair goes in with the Lib-Dems?

New Times they are a changin'

The **Communist Party** has finally ceased to be. The Eurocommunists who decided the way forward was not a party but more of a wake (**Democratic Left**) saw their membership plummet from 4,600 in the days of the CP to 800 today. They have now shut up shop and become the New Times Network. The project has been endorsed by Blairite schemers such as Twiggy, Baron Sawyer and *Labour Renewal*.

Bye bye bye

Labour MEP leaders **Pauline Green** and **Alan Donnelly** have both already resigned with the new European Parliament less than six months old. Donnelly said his sudden resignation was due to the travel...presumably the same travel he has undertaken ever since his first election. Party insiders' bets are evenly matched between a fat-cat job and a scandal. Joining the exodus is **Ian Welsh**, who won the Scottish Parliament seat of Ayr by just 25 votes last May. Hands up everyone who thinks Labour will hold the seat at the by-election.

Tickets please

Cherie Booth's excuse for not buying a train ticket when she was fined recently? She only had Portuguese escudos in her purse. Unbelievable? Not if you've ever tried to get a drink out of a Labour Euro-MEP – "Sorry, I've only got foreign money...".

Eurotrash

Richard Balfe says one reason for his voting for **Dobbo** is that Frank was the only person he received campaign literature from in December. If you believe the *Sunday Times*, that's probably because Dobson's the only one Balfe had sent the London Labour Party membership list to. Meanwhile, Richard will presumably cast his votes – the equivalent of around 1,000 Party members – from his home in... Cambridgeshire.

Bailing out the Dome

To the rescue of the Millennium Dome, rumoured to be on the verge of announcing mass redundancies if attendance levels continue to slump below expectations, rides the TUC, with a booking for its Mayday Millennium festival. At this rate, those attending the celebration of workers' rights could be facing a picket line in front of a May Day scabfest.

Rumor has it that **Reclaim the Streets** will be mounting a May Day protest at the dome and may even save the the TUC's bacon by making the whole event unworkable.

If anyone sees TUC supremo **John Monks** standing outside the Dome with a dog on a string, it's likely the TUC has entered a new era in its political alliances.

Topsy-turvy

Tony Blair has warned London Labour Party members against returning the Party to the 80s. He remembers the 80s: canvassing in Islington, when Labour was totally unelectable because of its loony left image.

That would be the 1980s, when Islington was a Labour Council, presumably. How unlike today, when – three years into a New Labour Government – Islington's gone Lib-Dem.

Baaaa!

Jack Straw has dismissed opponents of his moves to restrict access to jury trials as "woolly Liberals from Hampstead". Are the sheep on the Heath flocking to join **Charles Kennedy**?

Santa, why are you glowing?

In a fit of community spirit, the **Dounreay** nuclear waste reprocessing outfit donated the infrastructure for a local voluntary sector group to run a Santa's grotto in Thurso town centre. By the time 1,500 children had visited in the run-up to Christmas, it was revealed the construction was actually three large transport containers, which had been used to store nuclear waste on the atomic site.

Mr Sean McGlennon, 40, a former professional clown, was appointed in September to join the four-person unit that aims to ensure that the atomic site in Caithness gets a "balanced" coverage in the media.

He had previously worked for Friends of the Earth (Scotland) under the Government's Training for Work scheme, helping to market its now-defunct magazine *Safe Energy*.

On Christmas Eve, he received a "Dear Sean" letter from an understandably overheated management.
Beth Taylor, head of corporate communications at the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, told the *Scotsman*, "As things stand he has not been formally dismissed."

Labour Left Briefing

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Correspondence

December's *LLB* clearly and succinctly highlighted the current leadership's attempts to impose its choice of Labour candidate in the election for London Mayor. While I was reading my copy, it occurred to me that the rigged electoral college could be countered in one simple way.

I do not see why a motion cannot be passed by each London CLP requesting that their sitting MP abstain from their "680+" MP's vote if the CLP is confident that most of its members do not favour the MP's choice of candidate. If the MP is a member of the London Labour Party then s/he can exercise her/his choice like the rest of us mere mortals – as an individual member. If the MP ignores this request, the CLP membership can take that into account around re-selection time.

This reinforces grassroots influence and proves to our worried leader that, should poor old Ken (that frighteningly radical extremist) go off on a tangent if he becomes mayor, the good old Party 'foot soldiers' will be able to keep him in check within the framework of our cherished democratic process. Is this too naïve a concept?

Mike Law
Custom House, East London

The Government's decision not to uprate the shameful £3.60 an hour minimum wage is a betrayal of low paid workers. As well as supporting the UNISON – inspired Living Wage Campaign, Labour Party members and trade unionists ought to make sure that their organisations are protesting this outrage.

The following model resolution could be used in labour movement organisations and copied to MPs:

This branch/CLP welcomes the fact that the Government introduced a statutory minimum wage in 1999. However we deplore the fact that the minimum wage is not to be uprated from £3.60 an hour with effect from 1st April 2000.

While welcoming the principle of a minimum wage, we believe that the present rate of the minimum wage is too low, and support the demand of many trade unions that it should be raised to at least £5 an hour.

We do not accept that our economy cannot provide a decent level of income for all employees. Poverty pay is not acceptable in the twenty first century.

At the very least the minimum wage – at whatever rate – should be uprated annually in line with the increase in average earnings. If this is not done then there will be no guarantee that low paid workers will share in any general increase in living standards.

Jon Rogers
Lambeth local government branch of UNISON

The Home Secretary has let into the country a vicious rapist, who openly boasts of having beaten his ex-wife, "on humanitarian grounds". Why? So he could try to cause brain damage to another man and create profits for media moguls by participating in the "sport" of boxing.

This action, which makes a nonsense of Government policy on domestic violence and zero tolerance, convinces me that the Home Secretary is a like a kipper fillet – two faced, gutless, and no backbone.

Straw sanctioned his entry after Jimmy Wray MP leaned on Blair at Prime Ministers Questions. Can it be inferred from the silence from all those women Labour MPs elected for the first time in 1997 that they are prepared to tolerate even a violent rapist in order to keep Millbank happy?

Hazel Malcolm-Walker
Derby

Mrs Thatcher changed British policies. Instead of putting these policies into reverse, Blair has embraced them with enthusiasm and extended them. In other words, we have the most conservative government the country has ever known. No wonder it enjoys the broad support of the media.

Blair has comprehensively betrayed everything that the early socialists believed in and that distinguished them from the Liberals. Party leaders in the past have betrayed one of their Party's principles, but Blair has made a clean sweep of everything socialists hold dear. This is why people like me have stopped voting Labour. It is not from apathy: it's from despair.

Bob Spooner
Leeds

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

"New Labour has to be more than a ruthless electoral machine and efficient call centre. It has to be a political party of values and ideals."
Peter Mandelson MP, *Modern Labour*, Dec 1999. Quite.

"We must continually re-invent ourselves by redefining what it means to be an "activist" and "member" of the Party."
Prepare to be "re-defined" out of existence. Peter Mandelson again, *Modern Labour*, Dec 1999.

"Pubs are the 'people's parliaments' and the ability to talk and debate is vital..."
Roger Protz, *CAMRA*, Dec 1999.

"When he saw me, the blood drained from his face. He looked bewildered, angry and lost. His eyes were casting around desperately in search of his minders, but they were nowhere to be seen. I walked over and offered to shake his hand. He refused."
Peter Tatchell of OutRage! on Michael Portillo, whom he had just spotted canvassing alone during the Kensington by-election campaign.

"You are a horrible little man... You cannot harm me. Go away."
Michael Portillo of Peter Tatchell following their meeting and just before his minders reappeared and escorted him to a waiting car.

"I know that it is outwith the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister, but I should like him to assure the House that there will be a fair and just decision regarding the entry to Britain by Michael Tyson.
I am appalled by the way that the four candidates for London mayor have used Mike Tyson as a political whipping-boy, and I am concerned regarding the economic effect that it will have on hoteliers and the service industry in Manchester."
James Wray MP (Glasgow, Baillieston), *Hansard*, 12th January 2000, col 271.



THE LIZ DAVIES COLUMN

● Anyone charged with a crime that they did not commit would prefer a trial by his or her peers, randomly chosen, than by magistrates, who are overwhelmingly white, middle-class and often case-hardened. Enter (stage right) Jack Straw's latest bright idea – take away the right to choose trial by jury in the vast majority of serious criminal offences, including actual bodily harm, theft, burglary, possession or supply of drugs, and indecent assault. Straw has dismissed the general chorus of opposition as "woolly Hampstead liberals" or fat-cat lawyers. In fact, his proposals would create more work for lawyers, conducting appeals on a point of law against magistrates' decisions, despite which all the bodies representing lawyers oppose the measure.

There is undisputed evidence that magistrates are more likely to convict than juries are. That does not necessarily mean (as Straw appears to believe) that juries are soft-hearted. Jurors usually have more experience of the world than magistrates and are more likely to be sceptical about police evidence. Fewer jury trials can only increase the numbers of miscarriages of justice as defendants encounter magisterial prejudices on class and race. One of the factors that magistrates will consider when deciding if someone should receive a jury trial is the effect of a criminal conviction on his or her reputation. This means that magistrates are more likely to allow a white middle-class professional the privilege of a trial by jury than a black and/or working-class defendant charged with exactly the same offence. In addition, research shows that black defendants in particular prefer to be tried by juries rather than magistrates. Straw's response is that there is no evidence that magistrates are directly racist. Such a glib response hardly squares with the lessons on institutional racism and the black community's perception of the criminal justice system that should have been learnt from the Lawrence Inquiry.

In opposition, Straw responded to similar proposals from Michael Howard by saying: "If a Member of Parliament were charged . . . would they not insist on being tried by a jury? Why should others be denied that right of election?" Now he says he has changed his mind.

Straw is a barrister and it is not unusual in the legal profession to argue both sides of an argument. However, it is unheard of for a Home Secretary to engage in such a *volte face* and quite so quickly. At the NEC on 23rd November 1999, I asked the Prime Minister if he would reconsider restricting trial by jury. He replied that the right to choose jury trial was being abused. These proposals need to be opposed vigorously. If the House of Lords can rebel, so can the labour movement.

● Much of November's NEC was taken up with skirmishes over the selection process for Mayor for London. Christine Shawcroft began by suggesting to the Prime Minister that he was in breach of the code of conduct by attacking Ken Livingstone publicly. She seemed to have touched a nerve! In his reply, the Prime Minister talked at length about how he had a duty to intervene to prevent a return to the early 80s. Michael Cashman volunteered that he was unapologetic about attacking Ken Livingstone, who (he claimed) had been responsible for Section 28.

I obtained Margaret McDonagh's confirmation that only constituency and not the eleven top-up list Greater London Assembly candidates had a vote in the MPs' section of the electoral college. There was general disaffection – not just from the left – with the mailshots and telephone canvassing from the Dobson campaign. McDonagh gave the NEC a categorical assurance that neither Millbank nor the regional Party had released membership lists to any candidate. *Panorama* reported two weeks later that the Dobson campaign had obtained the lists after a specific phone call either to McDonagh or to the Head of Operations. I hope Margaret was watching.

A paper headed *Making the NEC work better* was tabled. It proposes another code of conduct to restrict debate at NEC meetings ("there should not be a presumption of speaking rights on every issue") and questions to the Prime Minister ("the debate following the contribution by the Leader should be restricted to the key issues facing the Government and the Party"). It seemed to be expected that this paper would be nodded through and there was some surprise when I wanted to speak against it. It has now been put off to the next NEC at the end of January. It seems that the Millbank Tendency, having failed to stop the membership from electing the Grassroots Alliance, now wants to silence our voices.

● I shall not be putting my name forward for re-election to the NEC this year. My decision is for purely personal reasons and I will do everything I can to support the Grassroots Alliance slate. I intend to make full use of my remaining term of office (up to October 2000) and both on the NEC and in the future I will continue to campaign against New Labour's links with big business and play my part in all the other campaigns in which I am involved.

Many thanks to all those *LLB* readers who worked in the NEC elections in 1998 and 1999, and will continue to do so in 2000.

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