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■ The scheduled copy date for the July issue is Monday 12th June and for the September issue is 14th August. Due to technical difficulties, *LLB* may be taking a holiday for one of these issues. In the event of a missed issue, subscribers will receive a credit.



June 2000
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EDITORIAL

Seize the moment!

The sweeping rejection of New Labour in May's elections has brought the Blair Government to a watershed. However much Millbank's official report tries to minimise the damage, the inescapable fact is that the Government has alienated both its natural supporters and its activists, and in the process has jeopardised the prospect of a second term. How could this happen?

Whatever the orchestrated announcements about future spending plans, New Labour is paying the price for sticking to the Tories' budget in its first two years of government and continuing their discredited free market policies. The widespread perception that the Government has failed to deliver is well-founded – schools are being privatised, the wait for hospital treatment is too long, the last vestiges of a publicly-owned transport system are being privatised, and the state pension increases by an insulting 75p a week. At the same time, Labour's foot-soldiers have felt deeply estranged by Blair's xenophobic comments about asylum seekers, Straw's attacks on civil liberties in the draft Prevention of Terrorism Bill and the limitation of trial by jury, the continued support for sanctions against Iraq and the renewal of arms sales to Indonesia. Add to this the rigged selection process for the London mayoral candidate, and the gap between the Party membership and our leaders becomes a fundamental rift.

Ken Livingstone, publicly accused by Tony Blair of making Labour unelectable for a generation, secured a breathtaking personal vote on the strength of rejecting Government policy on Tube privatisation and its manipulative and elitist approach to political representation. However, the sheer extent of the defeat up and down the country demonstrates that disaffection with New Labour is far broader than London voters' massive support for the "disaster for London", as Blair dubbed him.

Livingstone's victory, support for the Greens in London, and the Liberal Democrats' high share of the vote and victory in Romsey are evidence that the electorate is hungry for an alternative to the warmed-over Thatcherism offered by New Labour. Labour was elected in 1997 by voters seeking a real alternative – one of substance over spin, raising a huge question mark over the unpopular policies that are being steamrollered through Parliament and the Party against considerable opposition at all levels. The repackaged economics of the market, where government stands on the sidelines while the global capitalist market determines the future of jobs and industries, will not end the cycle of misery that poverty creates, generation upon generation.

For the mass of rank and file Labour activists, the wake up call has come just in time. Where trial reforms have effectively ended General Committee democracy, where Cabinet secrecy and coalition administrations have ended involvement in local government, with little enthusiasm to attend the rallies which have replaced the Annual, Women's and Youth conferences, the Party has all but ceased to function in many areas. The spontaneous campaign strike of May 2000 is more than a temporary blip: members are telling the Party leadership that the abolition of local democratic structures that involve, encourage and enable activists to identify with their party will destroy the Party, not sustain New Labour. The alienation will be compounded, not diminished, if the *21st century party* reforms are pushed through Conference this year. The leadership needs to heed this call if the decline of constituency and trade union activism is to be arrested in time to mobilise the core vote at the next general election.

The London mayoral selection fiasco drove a wedge between the Party leaders and the unions. In the face of overwhelming support for Livingstone from rank and file union members and regional leaders in the selection ballot and growing disenchantment with the policies of New Labour, many London trade unions, like constituency activists and voters, went "off message" and helped to deliver Livingstone onto the ballot paper and into office. New Labour may rely on the trade union barons not to rock the boat: it cannot take the unconditional support of their members for granted.

To rebuild the Party in London there needs to be accountability. Heads must roll. Heads which don't roll must be axed. The movement which selected Ken Livingstone must demand, with equal fervour, his immediate reinstatement.

Members of the Party should seize the opportunity of reclaiming the Party for the membership, demanding the re-democratisation of our structures and selection processes and a radical shift in policy. Do not imagine that the labour movement outside the Party will stand idly by waiting for us to reclaim the Party. May's low turnouts, the Tories' lurch to the right, the consistent vote for the BNP are danger signals. If we fail to build and unite the forces of the left, it doesn't need a crystal ball to see who will gain from our squandered opportunity.

People who live in class houses shouldn't throw homes

A Housing Green Paper promises yet more privatisation says Jacqui Brown, UNISON Housing Associations branch.

The Government's Green Paper on housing was revealed in all its glory in April. Widely touted as the "most comprehensive review of housing for 23 years", at 130 pages perhaps "wordy" describes it better. Housing professionals like it – they can see something in it for themselves. Campaigning bodies like Shelter have been more cautious in their welcome, but there is still an apparent reluctance to challenge it publicly, perhaps because anything is better than nothing.

Yet it's hard to see the appeal. There are some reforms on homelessness which take us back to the days before the worst Tory excesses of the 1996 Housing Act, but offer few positive advances. The paper continues the move away from councils as major providers of housing (with 474 references to "private" and only 165 to "public"), offering further evidence of this Government's love affair with privatisation.

This year's buzzword is "choice" but close inspection shows a weasel use of words. You can choose your social landlord as long as it's not the council, choose what sort of home to have as long as you can wait indefinitely, and choose to be a homeowner if you're responsible and can afford it. Even the much-hyped help for lower income key workers to buy is a con, with accountants Price Waterhouse Cooper claiming the interest-free loan will probably count as a taxable benefit.

So what does the Green Paper offer? Well, if you were hoping for a crackdown on bad private landlords, forget it. Passing up chances to improve things for private tenants, it promises no return to the "bad old days" of regulated rents and secure tenancies. Making landlords register with the local authority would be too bureaucratic and might put them off. There's even the suggestion of tax incentives to encourage further investment. So those with no chance of getting a public sector tenancy can continue to expect exorbitant rents and risk eviction every six months.

Anyone hoping that council housing would again be seen as something to be proud of rather than an embarrassment will be disappointed. The Government wants 200,000 homes transferred to other landlords every year for the next ten years, although obedient councils who deliver what the Government wants on Best Value may get to retain ownership if control is farmed out to an arms' length management company. No wonder some council housing chiefs welcomed it – they see huge pay rises in the offing, while Housing Association bosses are keen to expand their empires even further.

'Passing up chances to improve things for private tenants, it promises no return to the "bad old days" of regulated rents and secure tenancies'

That selling off council houses to the private sector is a good wheeze is taken as read, whatever council tenants may think (and there have been a number of successful campaigns by tenants' associations to keep council homes in the public sector).

Following years of government-inspired neglect, it will take £19 billion to bring the worst council homes up to an acceptable standard. But despite the billions the Government has salted away, council tenants will carry on being told that if they stay with the council there's no money for desperately needed repairs and improvements. If they agree to go private, fairy godfather bankers will provide. This blinkered refusal to look again at the PSBR rules, which regard borrowing by councils as part of government borrowing, leaves no choice for council tenants. They will continue to be blackmailed into "choosing" another landlord.

And who benefits from these transfers? Well, mostly, not the tenants. They may eventually get improvements, but bankers don't lend money because they're kind, caring people – they do it to make a profit. Generally, after the initial honeymoon when rent increases are restricted, rents go up (on average, housing association rents are at least 10% higher for similar homes). Tenants get less democratic control, fewer rights to pass on their tenancy and it's easier to be evicted if things go wrong. And certainly council workers don't want it, as despite the so-called protection of TUPE they usually suffer worse terms and conditions and less job security. Still, it's nice to know that some people benefit. According to UNISON, in 1999 when 18 stock transfers took place, a whopping £20 million ended up in the pockets of consultants and estate agents.

And what about the choice for people waiting for a tenancy? Like the other choices, this seems to exist only in the empty property of John Prescott's brain. With no real proposals to build any more homes, it's difficult to see how this can work in places like London and the south-east, with a desperate shortage of housing, massive waiting lists and homeless families stuck in bed and breakfast hotels.

This Green Paper offers nothing new, only a continuation of the attacks on council housing started under Thatcher. Where it took the Tories twenty years to reduce the number of council homes by two million, this Government wants to do it in half the time. They must be stopped.

The Green Paper is out for consultation now. Public sector unions, tenants associations and anyone who really cares about a "decent home for all" need to tell this Government that it's time to stop handing over valuable public assets to anyone who'll take them, and put some money back where it belongs to provide decent, well maintained, publicly owned homes for those who need them.

Abortion update

Leonora Lloyd examines the current situation in Ireland and Britain

●**Ireland:** September's green paper, with options ranging from a referendum for a constitutional ban on abortion to a more liberal regime allowing abortions under certain circumstances, has renewed interest in the abortion issue. At least 6,000 women travelled from Ireland to Britain for abortions last year.

●**Northern Ireland:** Last summer, a pregnancy advisory service in Belfast was forced to close after an arson attack caused thousands of pounds worth of damage, following months of intimidation of staff and clients. The 1967 Abortion Act does not apply, though polls show that 79% of people in Northern Ireland believe it should. At least 1,800 women gave Northern Ireland addresses at British abortion clinics last year.

●**Scotland:** Cardinal Winning's "alternative to abortion" fund has helped some 200 women financially (though there is no way of knowing how many had already decided to keep their baby).

●**England and Wales:** Apart from the knee-jerk reaction from the likes of the *Daily Mail*, there was surprisingly little reaction when the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists produced a set of guidelines to reduce bureaucracy and cut waiting times which, if implemented, would go a long way to satisfying many of the demands made by pro-choice campaigners. The guidelines emphasise what a safe procedure modern abortion is, especially early on, and how common it is, with around one in three women experiencing it at some time.

What is needed now is for the Department of Health to adopt the guidelines – but don't hold your breath. Despite the overwhelming support of the public for liberal abortion laws, British legislators seem as reluctant as those in Ireland to come out openly for a better deal for women.

NHS: any answers?

Eddie Tucker urges readers to take up Alan Milburn's invitation and tell him how to run the NHS.

The bizarre system of government by public consultation exercise reached a new peak in May with the launch of Alan Milburn's "Health Consultation".

You can see Milburn's problem. The Government is spending more money on the NHS, but no-one believes them. Too many people are still having operations cancelled, seeing relatives waiting for hours in casualty and having elderly neighbours thrown out of hospital too early as "bed-blockers". All these people, unfortunately for New Labour, have votes.

The "big idea" (and you can just see the lightbulb flashing above the Millbank genius's head) is a public consultation on the NHS budget – or, rather, the remainder of it. The first £600 million of its increased allocation in the recent budget has been swallowed up by existing debts on the ground, and the money waiting to be spent after this consultation totals "less than £1 billion".

Would you trust New Labour with a consultation exercise? The grand "listening to women" exercise of 1998/99 asked women to rank half a dozen statements on the back of a postcard, from which Ministers extrapolated grand statements such as "women's main concern is employment issues". We can expect the health consultation to be more of the same, a choice between five phoney priorities – from "reduce waiting lists further" through "using IT to provide faster services" to "more modern services" (whatever that may mean).

There will be Orwellian Modernisation Action Teams and even focus groups (presumably the same ones that came up with "Frank"). 31st May 2000 will be "referendum day" and leaflets will go to all staff as well as the public and patients (not regarded by the Government as the same thing).

You can see where this is heading. From now on, the public will get the blame for any problems in the NHS, because the public decided the priorities. Consultation is an admirable aim, but the danger, as many health campaigners point out, is that the majority will "vote" for money to the "glamorous" acute specialities and areas such as mental health will be low down the list.

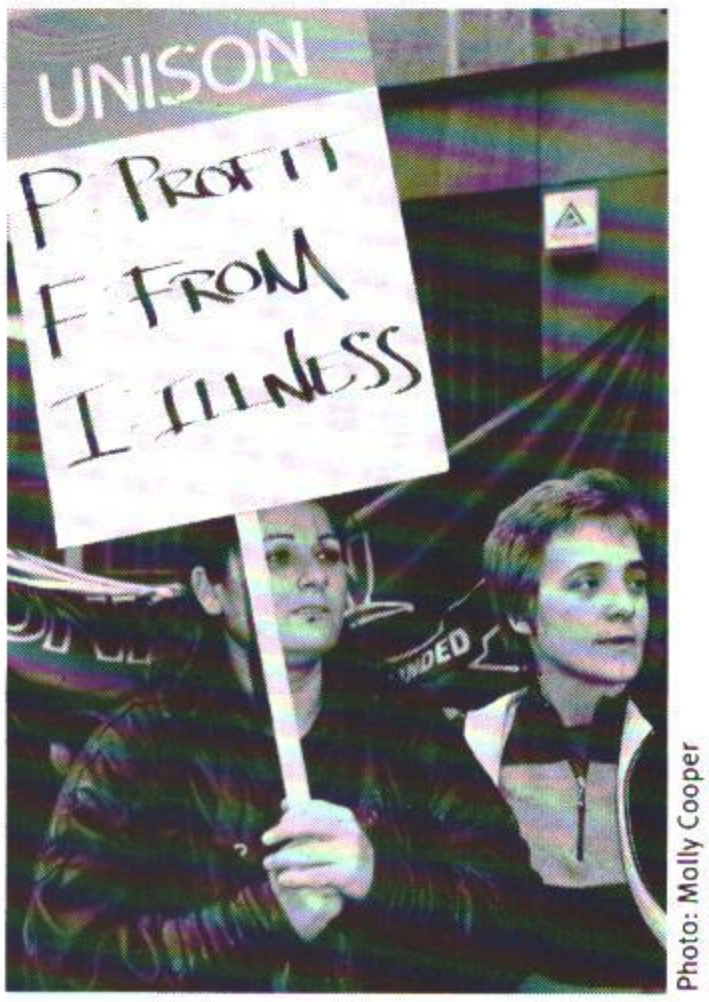


Photo: Molly Cooper

University College Hospital strikers make the point.

What will be next? The Department for Defence asking which countries we should bomb? A Foreign Office ballot on how many troops we should send to Sierra Leone? Well, let's take up the challenge and tell Alan Milburn how to run his health service. Look out for the leaflets and take them to your trade union and Labour Party branch. Try to forward the following suggestions:

•higher taxes to fund the NHS adequately;
•an increase in front line beds;
•an increase in front line staffing;
•an increase in front line mental health services;
•an end to the proliferation of consultations and quangos!

Lesbian & Gay update

Jim Mearns and Peter Purton report:

●TUC Anti-Discrimination Campaign
New postcards to send to MPs are now out. Obtain supplies from your union or via www.tuc.org.uk, email: ppurton@tuc.org.uk, or tel. 020 7467 1271.

●Pride Demo
The TUC hosts the Pride Demo on Saturday 1st July. Bring union banners and assemble at Point C in Hyde Park at 11am, depart noon. Mardi Gras festival in Finsbury Park from 2pm: visit the LCLGR stall in the UTC marquee in the community village.

●Labour Party Policy Forum
The TUC Anti-Discrimination statement has been submitted to the Policy Forum *Democracy & Citizenship* paper, as have union policies from UNISON, CWU and TGWU. The aim is simply to commit the Government to legislate against discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation. Encourage your NPF delegates to support these submissions.

●Section 28 update
Brian Souter has issued ballot papers to every elector in Scotland. The ballot contains two statements: I vote to retain Clause 28, I vote to Repeal Clause 28.

This ballot has no democratic validity, is wrong in principle and is proving to be unrepresentative in practice. It is based on an electoral roll that is 18 months out of date. Ballots have been delivered to the homes of people who have died, while thousands of young people have been ignored. Ballot papers have gone to student halls of residence that are closed for holidays. One car showroom was sent over 150 ballot papers!

Many newspapers have called for the ballot papers to be binned and the Scottish Socialist Party has had public burnings of ballot papers. The result, whatever the turnout, will not be binding on the Scottish Executive who remain fully committed to repeal.



Photo: Molly Cooper

April's march to "save" Rover for the kinder capitalists at Phoenix.

Why Rover's going walkies

Sid Dent examines the economics of the car industry.

The number of people in work in the UK rose from 22 million in the 1980s to over 24 million by the turn of the century. At the same time, the number working in manufacturing fell from just under 5 million to barely 4 million. The fate of the motor industry has attracted particular attention because car workers have historically been well-organised and at times extremely militant – when the magnificent march in support of Rover workers' jobs on 1st April passed the sign to Saltley Gates, some at least must have remembered the support that car workers gave the miners.

The number of jobs in the car industry has declined sharply under New Labour: down from 229,000 in December 1998 to 217,000 by February 2000. This does not reflect fewer cars being produced (a development some might welcome) but rather the effects of new productivity techniques. When Ford's global chief executive flew in to placate Dagenham workers demanding an end to racism from supervisors, he didn't mention that his policies lay behind the pressure which leads to much of the bullying and harassment.

The number of workers at Longbridge fell from 17,500 when BMW took over in 1994 to around 9,000 now. BMW were so desperate to offload Rover that they paid Jon Molton, of asset-strippers Alchemy Partners, over £5 million for working on their abortive bid. The main attraction of Rover to Alchemy was the 430 acre Longbridge site which could have been sold off. Longbridge has the capacity, measured by that of the paint-shops, to produce 400,000 cars a year; in fact production in 1999 was 173,000.

The details of the Phoenix deal are still fairly sketchy, although the expected "less than a thousand" job losses is much better than Alchemy's proposals. However the role of Stephen Byers must be subject to scrutiny. He'd better keep watching BMW. They intend to produce the new Mini at Cowley, but they have already sold Land Rover to Ford and the new Mini is likely to have at least 60% of its parts built outside the UK. The Cowley workforce was already being cut from 3,500 to 3,000 before the Phoenix deal, which includes moving production of the R75 model to Longbridge.

Ford will end car production at Dagenham by 2002. Production is moving to Cologne ostensibly because its facilities are "more flexible", but Ford, with capacity to build 2.25 millions cars annually in Europe but sales last year of only 1.65 million, is cutting hundreds of jobs all over Europe.

As Alan Thornett argued last month the only way forward is nationalisation: the capitalist market will not provide jobs, either in the car industry or the production of other more socially useful products.

A tale of two cities

Now he's elected, how will Ken Livingstone perform as Mayor? Steve Wilkinson, London region UNISON, reads the runes.

Ken's support for workers' struggles – Skychefs strikers and Homerton firefighters during the campaign, and Dagenham car workers immediately after the election – shows how a labour movement mayor can change the mood of London politics. Could you imagine Norris making such a play? But Mayor Livingstone will be judged on his performance over the full four years: what are the scenarios in the crystal ball?

Tale one is the nightmare scenario. After losing significant number of seats in the 2001 general election, the Labour Party, now a minority administration, refuses Ken's readmission. High interest rates drive up unemployment, damaging services whilst constraining public expenditure. Huge cost overruns on the Tube see the Government opting for complete privatisation as the only solution and enter talks with Railtrack. The police threaten a boycott of Lee Jasper's independent commission for the investigation of complaints against the police, supported by Frank Dobson, now back in the Cabinet as Home Secretary. In 2003, mayoral hopeful, Richard Branson enters the fray and after a series of by-election defeats in early 2004 the Labour Government move into coalition with the Lib Dems. This inspires a Labour-Liberal coalition on the GLA, which adds to the gridlock between the Mayor and Assembly. Ken, despite his Houdini-like political instincts, reluctantly decides not to stand in the forthcoming mayoral election.

Tale two – Ken gets London moving. Tony Blair admits Ken back into the Party. Labour wins two crucial GLA by-elections and forms a majority administration. The public bond issue has led to significant funding for the modernisation of the Tube and had a beneficial impact on the local economy in London. Major reforms in policing are agreed and trade unionists are appointed to various task forces promoting regional development. Many permanent local jobs are created in the Mayor's environmental action zones and the recycling industry takes off following a major grant from Europe matched with funds from the Government. Overseas visitors to the capital soar as the pound falls and Ken wins a one-member one-vote selection ballot for his second term of office, and the rest as they say is history.

●Register your view about whether Ken should be in or out! Check out the website www.vote.co.uk/ or visit the London Region of UNISON's website at www.unisonlondon.org.uk/ for a link and range of commentary on Ken.

Mayoral election count: how far will rapprochement go?

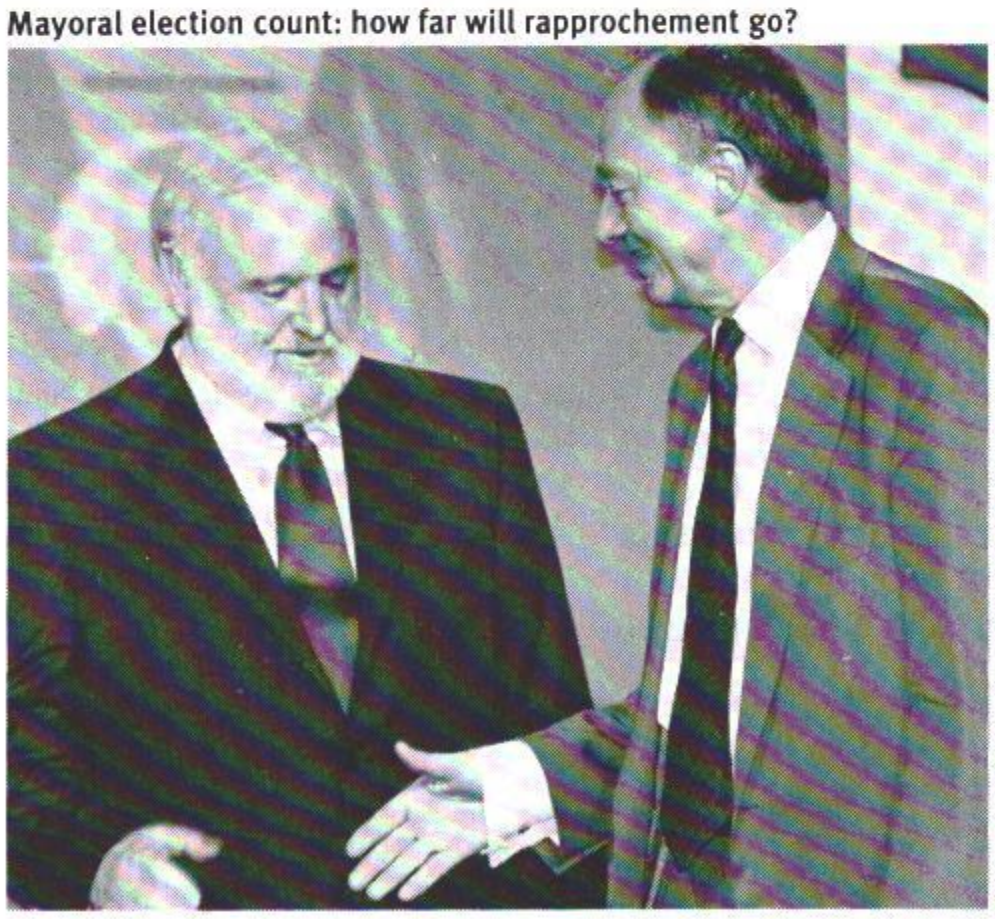


Photo: Paul Mattsson

Down the tube?

A railworker wonders where the Tube goes now.

Ken Livingstone's victory was partly because of his consistent opposition to the Government's unpopular Public Private Partnership right up to polling day.

Despite all the claims that this is a devolving government, the Mayor and Assembly have very limited powers. The Tube stays under Government control and Prescott will not hand it over until the PPP is set up. The Mayor and Assembly will get the costs of PPP and the blame when it fails, but have no power to stop it.

Meanwhile, the PPP has been further delayed, until spring of 2001 at the earliest for the first lines. So we could get through a whole term of government with nothing done to improve the Tube. No wonder Prescott looks troubled!

Ken has launched an independent commission into the funding of the Underground, and there's no harm having another report opposing PPP. However, the suggested chair of the commission, Simon Jenkins, said in the *Evening Standard*: "The Mayor and some of his Assembly colleagues [who? the Labour Group?] have asked myself and others if we think common ground can be found between their vision of the Tube's future and that of the Government." So what's going on, Ken?

Campaigners against Tube privatisation will still be active on three fronts. In the Labour Party, it will be a key issue at the London Regional Conference, planned for November. Public campaigning will also continue, with the RMT holding a rally outside Prescott's Whitehall office soon. And there is still the option of industrial action by Tube workers against PPP's effects on their jobs and conditions.

How can the left unite

London Socialist Alliance supporter Mike Marqusee analyses the vote and ponders where Livingstone and the left will go from here.

In May 1997, Tony Blair declared that he had been elected as New Labour and would govern as New Labour. He can no longer claim that mandate. However you decode the recent election results, one message stands out starkly. Voters up and down the country are heartily sick of New Labour – its policies, its methods and its personnel.

The scale of the voter rejection exceeds the traditional parameters of mid-term unpopularity, and is all the more striking because it comes at a time of general economic growth – the indicator on which government electoral fortunes usually depend. Only 12% of London's registered voters deigned to tick the box for Labour's assembly candidates, and only 4% for Frank Dobson.

Labour kicked off its London campaign with Dobson's "tough on crime, tough on Ken" tirade, and went downhill from there. With the eve of poll adverts linking Livingstone with the "thuggery" of the May Day "riot", it hit rock bottom. Dobson dubbed himself the "pro-police, pro-business" candidate, and none of the Labour assembly candidates veered an iota from this line or from the ministerial attacks on beggars and asylum seekers. It seems likely that these tactics will be repeated in the general election, during which Labour is sure to boast of its tough record on asylum seekers. Socialists in the Labour Party largely sat out the London campaign. Will they do the same in the general election?

One of the ironies of Ken Livingstone's triumph is that he put into practice the kind of "big tent" politics Blair loves to talk about. His majority was assembled from all classes and all sections of society – from the merchant banks to the trade unions, from leafy suburbs to inner city estates. It was, in part, a vote against the New Labour stitch up, an assertion of London's right to choose its own representatives. It was also, for many, a vote for public services, for the poor and the excluded, and for all those ideals abandoned by New Labour. And finally, it was also a vote against politicians and political parties, an expression of the cynical know-nothing anti-politics bred by an over-heated consumer society.

Livingstone's victory feels hugely significant, but exactly what it signifies is unclear. Is it a harbinger of a revival of the Labour left, or of a new politics outside the confines of the Labour Party? Does it help re-establish the socialist presence in British politics, or is it just the Third Way with a London accent?

Once he had declared as an independent, Livingstone attempted to compete with Dobson and Norris for the "pro-business, pro-police" profile. By the end, the only intelligible message emanating from his campaign, conducted almost exclusively through the media, was "vote for Ken". He joined in the mindless fury unleashed on the May Day demonstrators, when he was in a strong position to inject a note of proportion into what passed for public debate. Sure, it might have cost him a few votes. But wasn't Livingstone supposed to offer something better than this New Labour style calculation – "How will it play in the *Daily Mail*?"?

Ken Livingstone has been elected with a mandate to do everything, and nothing in particular – except to stop Tube privatisation. He has set up an inquiry panel, which is likely to reject PPP. Then the ball is in the Government's court. On other issues, his early moves have been welcomed by the Chamber of Commerce – an ominous sign. The single most important power of the new GLA is its role in policing – a role hitherto denied London's elected representatives. It was always Livingstone's handling of the police brief that most worried New Labour. With the appointment of Toby Harris as chair of the new police authority, both Millbank and the Met can rest easy. Effectively, Livingstone has handed back to the Home Office the smidgen of control that Londoners had only just wrested from it.

The appointment of the New Labour millionaire Nicky Gavron as Deputy Mayor is clearly a means to an end – Livingstone's reinstatement in the Labour Party. It should be remembered that Gavron represents precisely the kind of politics to which Londoners have just given a decisive thumbs down. If Livingstone is to retain his popular support, he must attack New Labour and offer an alternative. But if he is to re-enter the Party, he must tone down those attacks and carefully circumscribe the alternative. Even for Ken, squaring this circle may prove difficult.



Photo: Paul Mattsson

Mike Marqusee addresses LSA election rally.

The election campaign for the London Mayor was one of the most widely and sensationally publicised in British history. Yet on 4th May, only 33% of the capital's registered voters bothered to visit the polling stations. There were even lower turnouts elsewhere in the country.

Decreasing voter participation is one of the salient trends of the last decade, and has escalated alarmingly since New Labour took office. Although it affects all social classes, it is among the poor that the trend is most marked. Britain increasingly follows the American pattern: the lower your income is, the less likely you are to vote.

Voter apathy is the inevitable result of the narrowing of political options, the dominance of big business, and the substitution of managerial consensus for ideological debate. Since the mayoral system was always intended to re-enforce that consensus, it is not surprising that, for all the ballyhoo, the majority of voters simply did not care enough about the result to

against New Labour?

use their limited power to influence it.

Among those who did vote, there was a substantial increase in the numbers refusing to support any of the three big parties. In the top-up list ballot, it was one in five; even in the first past the post assembly contests (where there is a disincentive to vote for a small party), it was an average 15%.

The Green Party was the main beneficiary of voter disenchantment with the mainstream, and along with Livingstone, they were the big winners in the capital on 4th May. With 11.1% – 183,910 votes – in the top-up ballot, they now command three seats on the assembly and are effectively London's joint third party. If the Green representatives can use the assembly to project a distinct political identity, they are likely to increase their support and win more seats in council elections.

Unsurprisingly, but distressingly, the BNP vote is on the rise again. 80,000 voters made the BNP mayoral candidate either their first or second preference. On the list they secured 2.8%, rising to 7.1% in City and East. Another ominous portent was the modest success of Ram Gidoomal's Christian People's Alliance, which polled 3.3%. Generously backed by an ethnic faction within the business community, he coupled an emphasis on religious values with attacks on asylum seekers.

Taken together, some 88,000 voters (5.2%) backed one of the left-of-Labour alternatives (London Socialist Alliance, Campaign Against Tube Privatisation, Peter Tatchell, Arthur Scargill, Communist Party). There can be little doubt that the plethora of left options weakens the left vote as a whole; people do not want to have to choose between what are perceived to be competing factions.

Nonetheless, the LSA emerged from the campaign as the most broad-based and dynamic of the electoral forces to the left of Labour in London. I took part in the campaign, and as a veteran of numerous Labour election battles, was impressed by its unity, purpose and flair. For me, the LSA experiment tested two important hypotheses. First, could diverse left groups and individuals collaborate in a serious electoral effort (not a mere propaganda exercise)? Second, could such an effort make a dent at the polls?

The LSA showed that when the left works together, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Election addresses were distributed to 1.5 million households. Two hundred local public meetings were held (more than all the other parties put together). There were street stalls, letters and articles in the local press, a battle bus touring the city, a massive Tube leafleting exercise, and the ubiquitous flyposting. At hustings meetings, LSA candidates effectively harried their New Labour opponents. They staged stunts, joined demonstrations and picket lines, including the one outside the *Daily Mail* in solidarity with asylum seekers.

Where the campaign was most intensively waged, it paid off on polling day. In two constituencies, North East (7%) and Lambeth and Southwark (6.2%), the LSA saved deposits – an exceptional achievement for a previously unheard of grassroots party, without business backing or a celebrity name on the ballot paper, denied an election broadcast or a mailshot. These two constituencies are each the size of Sheffield. Across the inner city working class heartlands, the LSA consistently secured 5% or more. In some wards in Hackney, Islington and Lambeth, the LSA share of the vote was 20%.

So, in my view, the LSA experiment was a success. What the future holds is harder to say. There is a conference for LSA supporters on 11th June at University of London Union. Here, some of the thorny issues of structure and strategy will be thrashed out. But if the LSA is to fulfil its potential, and become a serious electoral force, two things (at least!) are required. First, the left groups currently working in the LSA must continue to place co-operation above factional competition. Further efforts need to be made to involve groups currently outside the LSA. Second, independent activists – trades unionists, anti-racist campaigners and not least those leaving the Labour Party – must provide an essential balance to the groups. From my experience in the London elections, I feel safe in saying that through the LSA they can play a meaningful part in a much-needed public challenge to New Labour and, in the long term, the struggle to resolve the "crisis of representation" in British politics.

Refugee Support Groups picket the *Daily Mail* office, in April: supported by the left, but not by New Labour.



Photo: Paul Mattsson

A memorable defeat

Lee Montgomerie reports from Leeds on the emergence of the Left Alliance as a fighting force.

When BBC *Newsnight* turned up to film the closing hours of Garth Frankland's election campaign in Chapel Allerton the sun was shining, a large team of supporters turned up in their striking Left Alliance t-shirts, the residents in the randomly-chosen street came to their doors and delivered unscripted accolades in support of the man they were calling "the Ken Livingstone of Leeds" and, best of all, the New Labour candidate came tottering down the street, head down, pausing only to deliver a spiteful aside to her rival as she went on her lonely way.

The broadcast, aired after the polls had closed, was the high point of a lively but accident-prone campaign. It was launched in a local park in the midst of a torrential downpour; the weather too bad to even unpack the hot-air balloon procured for the occasion, while ten drenched candidates posed in front of the basket for an unimpressed press photographer. It closed, a few hours after the *Newsnight* filming, with a demonstration that rapidly degenerated into a near-riot when a symbolic gathering with axes and sledgehammers outside a derelict "deathtrap" pub was seen by residents as incitement to a spontaneous attempt at do-it-yourself demolition.

In the event, "the Ken Livingstone of Leeds" won 1,058 votes to New Labour's 2,151, with the Liberal Democrats and Tories trailing in third and fourth. Undaunted, Garth puts his failure down to the twenty years he has spent persuading the residents of Chapel Allerton to vote Labour. He declares that the Left Alliance will win next time. In the neighbouring and socio-economically similar community of Harehills, a rock-solid Labour stronghold had been transformed to a Liberal holding through the campaigns of a disaffected ex-Labour councillor.

New Labour drizzles out

Tony Dale, Manchester Central CLP, reports on the local council elections in Greater Manchester.

Election results in the North West are a serious warning to New Labour from its heartlands that Government policies, particularly on pensions, need to do more to satisfy Labour's core supporters if they are to turn out to vote.

Labour lost control of Rossendale (to the Tories after nine Labour losses) and Oldham (to the Liberal Democrats after five Labour losses, including John Battye, Council leader for the last 15 years).

One of the best results nationwide for Labour was Trafford, Tory as recently as 1995, where Labour defended its overall majority of three despite an unofficial pact between the Tories and the Lib Dems which gave the Tories a clear run at Labour in eight seats. Elsewhere Labour lost some seats but kept control of the councils in other parts of the region.

Many traditional Labour supporters didn't vote. The Green's vote increased, but they failed to make the breakthrough they were hoping for, winning no seats. More worryingly, many disenchanted working class Labour supporters voted Liberal Democrat. The Socialist Labour Party were met with complete indifference in the few seats they fought, scoring from 14 votes to 85 votes. The Socialist Alliance did not put up any candidates.

Millbank may believe that areas like the North West, outside Middle England, can be taken for granted. But these results put a question mark over what will happen in a General Election to Labour seats in Oldham, Stockport, Manchester Gorton, etc.

Reds and Greens can win!

Peter Tatchell says a green-left alliance is the way forward.

In the list section of the London Assembly vote on 4th May, reds and greens won a combined 16.41% of the poll – a sixth of the total turnout. The Green Party polled 11.08%, and 5.33% was won by the London Socialist Alliance, myself, the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation, the Socialist Labour Party and the Communist Party of Britain.

If all those votes could be united together in a broad electoral alliance, the green left would be the third force in London politics – pushing the Liberal Democrats into fourth place.

There are two lessons to be learnt from the London election: first, unity is strength, and second, a radical, broad-based political alliance to the left of Labour is electorally viable. The priority must now be the construction of a grand alliance of radical, left, alternative and green political forces – including single issue campaigns and groups representing minority communities – along the lines of the successful Alliance 90 coalition in Berlin.

This project will only succeed if the left is willing to broaden its "pure" socialist agenda and share power with other progressive political forces outside the orbit of the traditional left, such as roads protesters, campaigners for the legalisation of cannabis, anti-GM food activists, and organisations fighting on behalf of women, the elderly, lesbians and gay men, black people, and the disabled.

Stay and fight!

Ken Livingstone's election as Mayor of London and the strong Tory vote for the Greater London Assembly (GLA) show that elections in the UK are still a battle between the party of the trade unions and the party of the ruling class, argues John Stewart of Hackney North CLP.

The first point to be made about the May elections was the appallingly low turnout of voters. Those who argued that there was a tremendous build-up of working class militancy which would express itself in voters enthusiastically supporting parties to the left of Labour were wrong: apathy and indifference were the order of the day.

The second point is Ken Livingstone's overwhelming victory. Probably no other politician in the UK could have won such a victory against the established party political machines. That Livingstone is a left-winger and a vocal critic of Blair's attempt to pull the Labour Party further to the right made it even more significant.

The background of course is that Livingstone had a history of thirty years work in the London Labour Party, was very well known, had received 55% support from CLP members and a majority from every trade union that balloted its members, and should have been the official Labour Party candidate. Thousands of Party members and Labour supporters understood this and backed Livingstone overwhelmingly. Instead of a Labour/Tory fight it became a Livingstone/Tory fight, with Labour's official candidate struggling to beat the Liberal Democrat for third place.

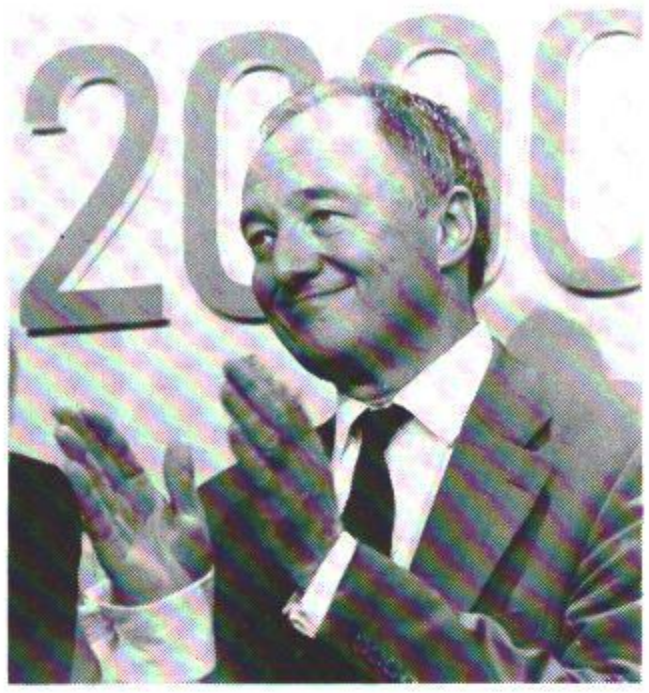


Photo: Paul Mattson

Ken Livingstone at the mayoral election count

As *LLB* argued in May, for most London Labour Party members Ken Livingstone was the Labour candidate while Frank Dobson was merely the candidate of the New Labour tendency. It seems that Millbank understood this better than they let on and there are suspicions that sources close to the Prime Minister briefed the media to support Norris against the official Labour candidate in the final week of the contest. Livingstone's 776,427 votes stopped the Tories winning the London mayoralty.

The results for the GLA showed an alarming increase in the vote for the Tories who got more votes in the GLA constituencies than Labour. The Tories got 29% of the list vote compared to Labour's 30.3% – down from the high point of 49% at the 1997 General Election. This was partly a result of thousands of Labour activists refusing to participate in the campaign due to their disgust at the Millbank machinations on the selection of Labour's candidates. But more importantly, it reflected disillusionment at Labour's perceived continuation of Tory policies over the past three years among both our members and our supporters.

With this level of discontent within the Labour Party and Livingstone's independent candidacy to attach themselves to, some left-wingers felt these were good conditions for socialists standing to the left of the Labour Party to make their mark. For those who believed that the London Socialist Alliance was on the point of some kind of breakthrough the results can only be seen as a dismal failure. In the event the highest vote for any LSA constituency candidate was 7.03% in London North East and they received a derisory 27,073 votes (1.6%) in the list. This compares to 22,862 (1.38%) for Peter Tatchell's one man independent socialist campaign, 17,401 (1.05%) for the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation, 13,690 (0.82%) for Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party and 7,489 (0.45%) for the Communist Party of Britain. In fact the main beneficiary of the discontent in Labour's ranks was the Green Party who got 183,910 votes in the list (11.08%).

The overwhelming evidence offered by the London elections is that working class voters, when they vote, still look to the Labour Party to represent their interests. Elections in the UK are still primarily a battle between the party created by trade unions and the Conservatives. This is unlikely to change in the near future without considerable social convulsions.

In 1992 *LLB* published an excellent little pamphlet *Why Socialists Should Stay in the Labour Party*. Part of the introduction to that pamphlet read: "It's no good comrades in the SWP or others reciting their familiar litany of Labour betrayals to us – we know it better than they do... It ought to be clear that leaving the Labour Party is also to leave the electoral battleground to all the forces that socialists seek to displace in public consciousness... The chimera of an 'independent' socialist party, to the left of Labour... is resurrected every few years only to die an obscure death after a few more... Such an 'independent' party can only be a propaganda party – a talking shop which, in the absence of the discipline imposed by a mass base, will rapidly be torn apart by sectarianism, egotism and triviality". These words remain as true today as they were when they were written.

●Copies of the 1992 *LLB* pamphlet *Why Socialists Should Stay in the Labour Party* can be obtained, at £1.50 (inc postage) per copy, from *LLB* at PO Box 2378 London E5 9QU.

Open the ballots!

Anna Monks (Wimbledon CLP) argues for a level playing field in Party elections.

In elections to public office, regardless of which electoral system is employed, one principle is constant: if you can get the nominations and pay the deposit then your name goes on the ballot paper.

The Labour Party has many internally elected positions, varying in excitement from leader to branch vice-chair, and it has almost as many methods of selecting candidates. Official Labour Party publications which are posted to members do not explain the relevant rules. They do not print out details of elected positions available, nor do they inform members how they can put themselves forward. Deadlines are not fixed in advance, so ordinary members cannot even see an annual pattern for internal elections.

It is left to branch and constituency secretaries to decipher everything from the correspondence they receive and to copy it to and/or explain it all to their members. This is an unfair burden on constituency officers, whatever their politics. The Party is more complex than ever and people are stressed and short of time.

When elections approach, constituency officers are inundated with appeals from individuals asking for their details to be circulated. Some of these are posted to officers' home addresses with pre-printed labels, some are sent to CLP offices and some are handed in at political meetings.

There is no explanation as to why some would-be candidates have officers' details and others do not. There is also no guidance on how much money individuals can spend on gaining nominations. Potential candidates have unequal access to resources and information. Often the people asking us to nominate them are strangers to us. We have no way of knowing whether the information they are circulating is factually correct and complete.

Some positions require the candidate to gain the nomination of their home constituency. This can be a disadvantage: the candidate's politics may differ from the majority on the GC; or the candidate may have recently moved to the constituency and so not be well known locally. And there might be two very good candidates who live in the same constituency!

I suggest that the Party should adopt the nomination system which is good enough for the electorate. At least for the National Executive Committee constituency representatives and the National Policy Forum regional representatives, any Party member of two years standing should be able to get the form from the Labour Party and find a set number of paid-up members to nominate them. There could be rules governing which constituencies they come from but these should not be designed to exclude any member. Potential candidates should not be allowed to produce any literature at this stage and so expenses would be minimal.

Both these elections should be by one-member-one-vote and the rules can be sent out with the ballot papers so that all members are equally well informed. Mass membership participation in the selection of Policy Forum representatives would increase interest and members' perceived stake in the Policy Forum system. It would probably result in longer ballot papers, but I believe it would open up the field, be more democratic and certainly easier to explain to members than the current system.

Women's Conference

Another well-kept Labour Party secret is that this year's Labour women's get-together will be on 23rd to 24th June, in Southport. It is open to all women Party members. This year's conference will probably be the last chance before the Election for Labour women to reinforce the message of the electorate direct to Cabinet members and senior Party officers.
Registration forms should be available from your local Party (otherwise ring Millbank Tower) and are to be returned by 2nd June. Telephone 020-8985 8892 if you want to make contact with other women *LLB* readers before you go.

Take the Party to the cleaners!

Matthew Willgress reviews *Is the Party Over? New Labour & the Politics of Participation* by Paul Richards, a Fabian pamphlet (£6.95).

The main problem with Richards' pamphlet (and the *21st century* consultation document) is that it ignores any political reasons for the problems the Party currently faces. Just blame "old labour" and "their" structures: don't ask if Government policies might be turning off voters and members. Ironically, Richards sees the main threat facing the Party as "the 'New Labour' membership might desert the Party, swinging the Party to 'Old Labour'." We can but hope, I suppose.

Richards recommends the Party turns out into communities, an old idea of the hard left from the early 80s, which Richards supports by quoting Marx and Gramsci, but then his logic begins to unravel. Turning the Labour Party out to the community and into active campaigning bodies is a good thing. However, what Richards proposes isn't: one of his best ideas seems to be that we should organise squads to clean up graffiti. I can see that bringing in a new generation of Labour Party members! "The point is not just to interpret the world but to clean it," is hardly a transitional demand in any language.

Richards wants to keep the trade union link, but also to abolish GCs. He wants large numbers of people to join the Party, yet omits "policy making" from the "core functions of a local Party". In the end, all the modernisers, consultations and reforms have behind them a political aim: staving off the ghost of Old labour and the threat it poses to New Labour.

London Board irons out the problems

Christine Shawcroft ventures through the looking glass at a London Board meeting.

The London Conference in June 1998 voted almost unanimously to ensure that Ken Livingstone would be placed on the shortlist for the London mayoral selection. Strangely the Board members elected at that Conference are not only almost unanimously Dobson supporters, but seem to have convinced themselves that Dobson would win. Everyone else has known for months that Ken Livingstone would be elected Mayor of London. The bookies stopped taking bets on it several weeks before polling day. But for the Board, it came as a nasty shock. An emergency meeting was called to discuss the unexpected problem.

Much of the meeting was spent on the results, particularly for the Assembly. Spoilt ballots came third in some constituencies. It seems that many thousands were invalidated because voters had placed their first and second preference crosses in the same column. So not only do these fancy new voting systems ensure that Labour loses the election, they ensure that we even lose votes that were meant for us.

The GLA Labour Group attended the meeting and took part in a consultation discussion about whether the posts offered by Livingstone should be taken up (which the Group meeting later decided to do). The discussion at the Board ranged from, "Don't have anything to do with that double-crossing poisonous toad," to "Embrace him immediately and let's have him back in the Party by next week." Well, OK, I didn't quite go that far. The most interesting contributions were from union delegates who did not personally support Ken, but said that the Board had to accept that the vast majority of trade unionists in London had done.

Members who favoured co-operation insisted that it should be on Labour terms: we should make it clear that we would be trying to carry out our manifesto. And the absolute sticking point, on which there can be no compromise whatsoever is... our policy on a Public Private Partnership for the Tube! So the issue which lost



Dobson the election, which is opposed by the vast majority of trade unionists in London, and the majority of rank and file Party members, will be defended to the last drop of blood by the London Board!

I was told by John Prescott at the last NEC that PPP for the Tube is London Labour Party policy, which came as quite a surprise to me. Now it seems the Board is also under this impression. We'd better disabuse them of this notion pronto, and if they won't be disabused, don't forget there is a London Conference in the autumn and CLPs will soon be electing delegates and making nominations.

Organising after May 4th

Dorothy Macedo, Chair of the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups, reports: The Network of SCGs organised a meeting on 21st May for London Party members to discuss the way forward in the wake of the London elections.

Fixing the selection process for Labour's candidate for London Mayor was the latest in a series of abuses of Party democracy. Party and union members are not trusted to select the candidates of their choice or influence policy.

The leaders of most of the major unions have helped the Labour leadership to ditch Party democracy and to pursue pro-business policies, despite the fact that these policies often contradict decisions taken by union conferences.

This combination of fixing candidates and favouring big business has now been rejected several times by the electorate.

How do we turn this situation round and ensure that the labour movement carries out the policies its members and supporters want? Party members must liaise with union activists over campaigns against privatisation and cuts in public services, for example.

Key campaigning points identified by the Conference were:

- The defence and extension of democracy. Those elected to labour movement or public office should be accountable. Opposition to proposals arising from the *21st Century party* document which would further erode local democracy or the removal of the input of trade unions into local party decision-making.
- Campaigning for re-admission to the Labour Party of those such as Dennis Canavan and Ken Livingstone who have felt they had to stand against official candidates because of manoeuvres against them.
- Adequately funded public services and opposition to their privatisation. In particular, the need to step up the campaign against the semi-privatisation of the London Underground, the privatisation of air traffic control and the invasion of public services and local government by private finance.
- Plans were made to produce a regular bulletin for Party and union activists to attempt to co-ordinate this activity and organise for a national recall conference in the autumn.

Diary of a CLP secretary



Winter 1998
Attend GC. Surely *Labyrinth* has more sense of direction than this meeting. Decide to do civic duty and stand for Secretary. Have seen training film *Meetings, Bloody Meetings*. Can produce decent agendas.

Attend GC. Annual Meeting. In face of thundering apathy accept grateful thanks of colleagues for agreeing to be Secretary. Start to sort out Labour Party office. Consider calling in Tony Robinson to identify archaeological layers. Try to decipher Labour Party communications. Finally realise all deadlines have passed anyway. Introduce detailed GC agendas. Delegates confused by mass of information. Only fair as CLP post comes by the ton – takes some sorting.

Spring 1998
Local elections. People still in May 1997 mood. Canvassing and leafletting, etc. Thanks to change in Standing Orders at AGM, Resolutions now first item. Meetings perk up as political debate replaces Matters Arising.

Summer 1998
Receiving phone calls from Labour Party organiser in neighbouring CLP. We voted not to have paid official but, being civil by nature, I agree to meet him. Mysterious young man in dark suit comes to lecture me on recruitment drives and policy forums. National Party informs us of new Euro selection procedures. Horror of situation dawns slowly.

Autumn 1998
Attend Labour Party Conference. Spot dark-suited young man, whose job appears to be to watch delegates, make notes and lead clapping after every New Labour speech. In Conference Centre am literally pushed aside by mobile phones with darkly suited young persons attached. Notice they wear different colour ID tags. Grasp the point at last: paid workers far higher up pecking order than elected officers or representatives. Silly me! Constituency jogging along nicely. Meetings quorate. Planning Xmas social. Was ever a Labour Party more contented? Even made a profit on the social.

Winter 1999
Regional Party still not happy with independent attitude. More organisers sent in to buck us up. Do all that is asked.

Spring 1999
Help organise Policy Forum. Run Euro elections. Hard going. Members cross with selection panel decisions. Despite creeping apathy, work hard and am pleased with constituency result.

Summer 1999
Now unravelling GLA selection process. Realise (1) able to understand new rules; (2) social life non-existent. Attend Regional Party meetings. Impressed by number of secretaries with concerns. Not all in the New Labour in-crowd. Party structure does not promote general fraternisation beyond electoral boundaries. Appreciate attempts by Regional Officers to facilitate communication.

Autumn 1999
All going well despite local Council policy problems. Some strong disagreements at GCs but all contained within civil debate. Voting patterns of delegates idiosyncratic (suspect them to be Eurovision Song Contest jurors on quiet). Notice Tony Benn democracy theory working: if no control exercised and full information available, delegates lean to left. Others notice resurgence of left votes at GC. Worse still: GC refuses to support all Council policies. Suspect messages flying around "root out and destroy". Fear serpents about to descend on our suburban Eden. Livingstone says he will stand for Labour nomination. Biggest attendance at EC for years. Mood of excitement grows as politics regain some colour. Mood of optimism retreats as Party invents yet another selection procedure.

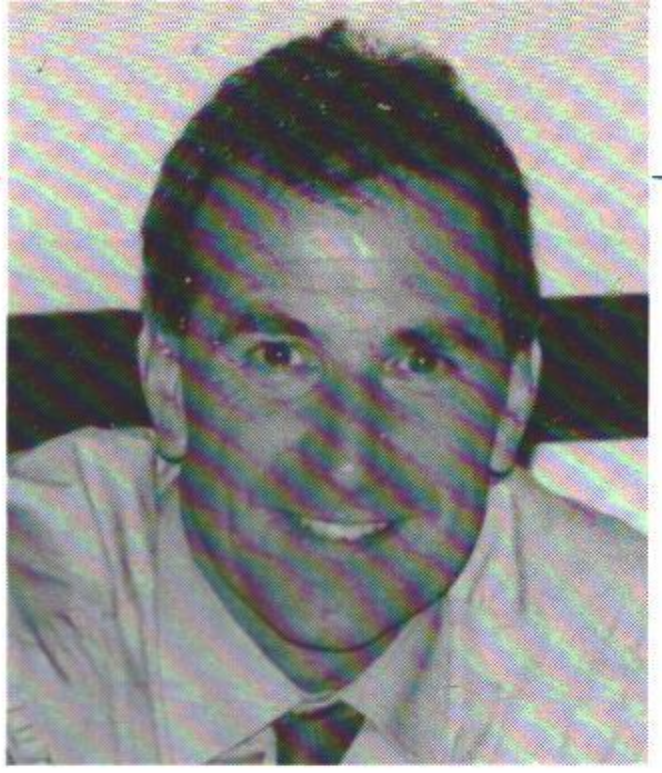
Winter 1999/2000
Feeling of alienation grows as consider PPP, Asylum Bill, attacks on jury system and continuing refusal to renationalise railways. Decide not to stand for secretaryship as thoroughly demotivated. Aware of immense hostility from New Labour types in surrounding parties and unions. Taken aside by so called friends! Foolishly agree to continue.

Attend AGM. Eden becomes Hades. New Delegate (a very important person in the Labour Party) criticises GC at his first meeting. Am gobsmacked and very upset. See *21st Century party* writing on the wall.

Spring 2000
Why oh why am I doing this? Have seen *Wicker Man* film: don't trust smiles on anybody's animal mask any more. Scapegoats needed for imminent electoral defeat. Round every corner New Labour waiting to sacrifice old socialists. We must be serial sinners rejecting policies handed down from the Gods.

Attend GC. Amazed to see they've wheeled out some heavy guns to heap public abuse on my head, discarding previously accepted rules of debate. Conclude sadly that most comrades have not got foggiest re what's going on. Accused of stitch up but insulted as would have done a better job if had been sewing. Flattered to be taken so seriously but, flattened by events, finally decide to spend more time with family (any family will do!).

●ADVERT: People with strong stomachs and thick skins needed to protect GCs. Hurry please. Time is running out.



THE **ALAN SIMPSON** COLUMN

Even Ken Livingstone's most devout supporters should pause to put the mayoral celebrations in perspective. They may well claim their man bloodied the nose of machine politics giving the fixers and stitchers a fix of their own, and that Ken saved London from Steve Norris.

Given the resentment at Labour's PPP proposals for the London Underground it is doubtful that, even without Ken in the ring, enough voters would have bothered to turn out for Labour. Rebellious Tories would no doubt have turned to their own "cheeky chappie", and London could have woken up to discover it was another notch on the bedpost of Norris's extra-parliamentary conquests.

Ken's real success may have been to put "democracy" back on the political agenda. But this does not make mayors remotely democratic. The London (and local) elections raise enormous issues about the relationship between people and party; about the rights of local parties to set local priorities, free from the dead hand of centralised control; and about a presumption that new policy directions are as much the prerogative of the grassroots as of the Party HQ. Since an important part of Labour's grassroots is also founded on our links with affiliated trade unions, it will be interesting to see how far this rediscovered "spirit of democracy" makes its way into the labour movement.

Before any unions think of distancing themselves from the Labour Party, this may be a good time to urge them to renew the link rather than replace it. For fear of embarrassing New Labour, trade union leaders have been encouraged not to prioritise union policies within the Party. Indeed, they were asked not to press radical, redistributive policies at all. Trade union representatives on Labour's National Executive thus spent much of the last decade neglecting it as a platform to champion the inclusion of labour movement priorities within the Party's programme. Just ask Dennis Skinner how many times he struggled to get trade union support for their existing union policies when he moved them at the NEC.

Democracy, to be a process that includes us all, must also be reclaimed by us all. It's a challenge as central to the trade unions as to the constituencies and, as a process, requires us to recognise there is as much to be found in what we can renew as in what we must reinvent – which brings me back to mayors and local government.

Mayors are the triumph of personality politics over structural politics. That is why Downing Street has pushed them so hard. Neither mayors nor local cabinet committees take us one step closer to open, accountable and representative democracy.

An early warning of this, for the left, came in the mayoral pronouncement that Britain should seek urgent entry into the European Single Currency if thousands of jobs in the City of London are not to be jeopardised. The City makes its money out of dynamic instability within the capitalist system. Incessant demands for greater deregulation, freedom to exploit, and the right to abandon or evade social cost obligations, are all part of its agenda for speculative survival. The euro challenges none of these fundamentals and merely leads to an anti-democratic, anti-redistributive muddle of its own.

Where is the case showing whether the euro is in London's best interests? Where is the examination of just how many of today's capital movements have taken productive capital formation out of London (or Britain) rather than bringing it in? Where is the counter argument in favour of re-regulating (and taxing) international financial markets? Little is to be gained if the left itself mistakes a mandate to speak up for the capital as a duty to speak out for capital.

At stake here is an issue of democratic accountability rather than personality. Ken understood this as much as anyone during Parliament's debates about the Mayor and the GLA. He was among the Labour MPs who pushed for democratic constraints on mayoral power, including the right to remove the Mayor during a term of office. And this is where our own renewal debate must return to.

A century ago, municipal liberalism was set to provide a springboard for municipal socialism. In Joe Chamberlain's Birmingham, it had pioneered municipal baths, municipal parks, municipal hospitals, transport and the public ownership of utilities. It rooted local democracy in local life and presumed a right to intervene – and to own. Today's local democracy needs a similar boost, particularly following last month's abject turnout levels.

Democracy itself is the loser when the system trails behind *Eastenders* and *Emmerdale*, failing to persuade enough people it was worth five minutes away from the TV in order to cast a vote. To renew democratic credentials, we need to free local government from the constraints of borrowing against their asset base. We must return to presumptions about the right to own in public and in common. We must assume a right to intervene, to put the social market before the free market. And by law, there must be a public right to open-book, open-door democracy to replace today's obsessive partnerships between private capital and even more private councils. What begins as local politics can be written in spades for a national agenda.

All that glitters will never be mayoral. It just gives us a remarkable chance to go in fresh pursuit of the real thing.

Carnival of chaos



Police would not let trade unionists into Trafalgar Square.

Steve Wilkinson, London UNISON publicity officer, reflects on May Day in central London.

Reclaim the Streets often refer to their demonstrations as a carnival against capitalism. On May Day this year the carnival descended into chaos. Many trade unionists like myself, marching from Clerkenwell to Trafalgar Square, aware that Reclaim the Streets (RTS) were in the vicinity, were hoping for an opportunity to unite in a spirit of anti-capitalism and anti-globalisation – on the lines of Washington and Seattle, where unions and radical environmentalists have shared common cause. This opportunity never arose. Our march was halted by a cordon of police in the Strand.

RTS were on the news later that day saying that "a minority element was responsible for the trouble." Did something go wrong? Or was the carnival of chaos a planned mobilisation by RTS to shake the state to its foundations and trigger the fall of the capitalist state as we know it?

There is no comparison between what happened in central London on May 1st and the ugly clashes with the police during the miners' strike. There really seems no serious logic in symbolically smashing up McDonald's and arousing a battalion of riot police – which will play into the hands of the authoritarian tendencies in the state machinery who want further to restrict our right to organise and associate freely. The miners, as trade unionists at Grunwick and Wapping before them, were confronted by the might of the police working as a political arm of the state. They gained public sympathy for the issues they fought on. There will always be a minority element out for trouble, but on May Day the rabble ruled the roost.

Yes, many of us hate McDonald's and what it stands for. But as someone who has had the misfortune of working there myself, I would prefer to see the McLibel case dragging McDonald's through the courts than a smash and grab burger fight which discredits genuine opposition to the capitalist system as mindless thuggery. Subverting McDonald's and the reach of global corporate capitalism will take a lot more than a bun fight in the Mall. Perhaps organising a trade union for fast food workers could be considered: they are part of the low paid and disenfranchised workforce marginalised and exploited by corporate global capitalism.

With Tory anti-union legislation still around, breaking the law has never been off our agenda: it's how you do it that matters. Despite not being able to join up in Trafalgar Square on this occasion, radical green-left unity should remain our aim.



Photo: Paul Mattsson

On the Road t

The London May Day demonstration, long an unparalleled opportunity to see pictures of Stalin in the company of a fair few people who remember him (and may even have been personal friends...), has been saved in recent years by the participation of Turkish and Kurdish contingents.

We gathered on Clerkenwell Green, perhaps a little livelier and more enthusiastic than before: fewer in number than those gathering in Parliament Square, but with an orientation towards the labour movement to feel good about; fewer than the numbers trundling around a large tent in North Greenwich at the behest of John Monks and the TUC, but at least engaged in something that was recognisably making political demands.

A contingent of Rover workers came down from Longbridge to join the march to Trafalgar Square. Unfortunately, the police stopped the march at the end of the Strand, just outside the Square, claiming that trouble had broken out in Whitehall. The march remained static for a considerable period, and after a while people began to drift off.

When eventually the head of the march, with the Rover workers, turned round and went back down the Strand, very few went with them. Some remained, eyeball to eyeball with the police blocking our route. Some had filtered into Trafalgar Square and became enmeshed in the confrontation. Some went off to get a drink.

At the end of the day we had achieved nothing, but since we had done this without either paying homage at an enormous



Photo: Paul Mattsson

to... where?

Jon Rogers (Lambeth UNISON) was part of the London May Day demonstration that failed to reach its destination.

temple to corporate capitalism or risking being beaten up by the Metropolitan Police in order to see McDonald's get its windows put in, we could feel that we were almost certainly ahead on points in the contest for what to do on May Day 2000 in London.

All we need to do next year is combine (some of) the energy and enthusiasm of Reclaim the Streets with (some of) the resources of the TUC and (some of) the politics of the May Day March. Then we can get off the Road to Nowhere.



Photo: Paul Mattsson

Guerilla gardener reveals the plot

Chris Knight, University of East London Samba Band, wakes up the morning after May Day.

I felt terrible. "Mayday Mayhem as Maniacs Mangle Monuments!" screamed my favourite tabloid. Scanning the text, I became increasingly aware of my personal responsibility for desecrating the Cenotaph, trashing McDonald's and apparently sabotaging our Ken's chances of becoming Mayor. As I pieced together the previous day's events, it all made horrible sense.

I had originally favoured occupying the Dome on May Day. Reclaim the Streets were initially enthusiastic, but then doubtful: how would we stop our usual uninvited guests' regular performance, ie simply trashing the whole place? Team up with sympathetic stewards from the TUC? Not a snowball's chance. Stage an orgy with the Sexual Freedom Coalition, signboarded "Sacred Space – Please Remove Your Shoes"? Nice fantasy, but.....

We agreed May Day should not be a protest but an active celebration. We wanted to reconnect with May Day's pagan roots, with a May Pole, garlands, flowers. Capitalist environmental desecration would be answered with fertility, sex, life, and we would try to link up with the May Day trade union demonstration.

No-one wanted a riot. But how could we send out the right signals to stop one? "Guerrilla Gardening" was the incongruous combination of words which sounded just the right note. Such was the plan: but not at the Dome. The biggest McDonald's in Europe, we discovered, was just inside the perimeter. If that got trashed, the cops would let fly and the inevitable riot would be beyond control. Best think of somewhere less vulnerable.....

So on May Day morning a garlanded army of gardeners and fairy-folk wound their way toward Parliament Square, past the newsagents' billboards screaming "Army on Stand-By for London Riot". The leaves, grass and flowers looked lovely in the gentle sunlight. My University Samba Band performed. We settled down for a picnic, and in the distance observed a garlanded May Pole being raised in a field which had earlier been a road...

Then we decided to take a stroll up Whitehall to meet the Rover workers, who were soon to arrive in Trafalgar Square.

Our drumming might attract many of them back to join us in Parliament Square. It would be a glimpse of unity: fertility and labour combined. We left silently, for fear of attracting people in the wrong direction. Once out in the road, however, one snare player just couldn't resist gently tapping. It was an infectious rhythm, and – drummers being drummers – our collective arms soon spontaneously twitched. Before long, the beat was exuberant and we were playing hell for leather. As we passed Downing Street, I happened to take a look behind. Some 4,000 people were jubilantly following us. The rest, as they say, is history...

On our way back into Parliament Square, we passed the Cenotaph, by this stage defaced by persons unknown. Implored by an elderly activist, we observed a minute's silence, a deafening silence, respected by all around until, at the count of 60 seconds, our drums resumed. It was a nice touch, setting the balance right: no to glorifying war, yes to honouring the dead. The media rat-pack were too busy revelling in the smashed glass around McDonald's up the road even to notice. It certainly wouldn't have fitted their story.

The samba band perform the theme from *The Pied Piper*.

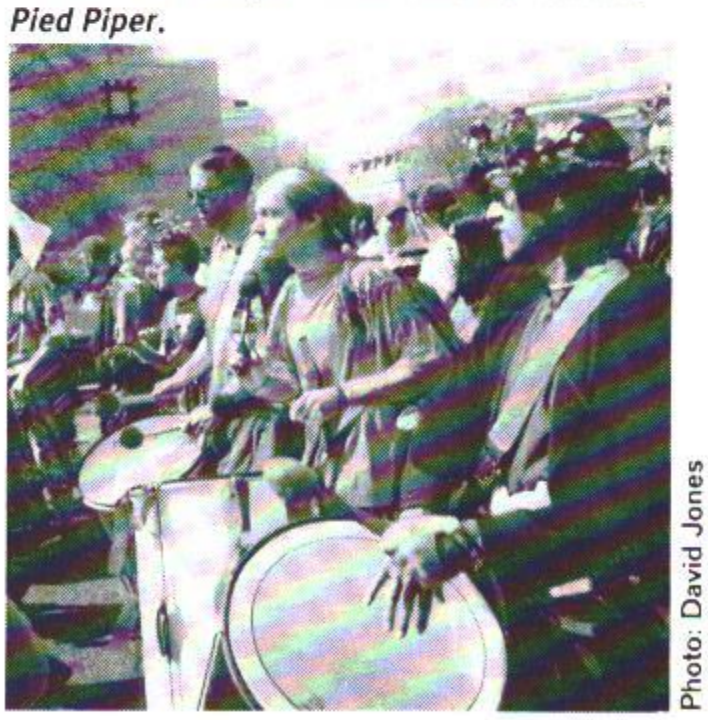


Photo: David Jones

Youth fight globalisation

Roger Burbach writes from Washington DC.

The demonstrations in Washington DC saw the appearance of a new generation of activists dedicated to challenging globalisation. The anti-sweat shop campaign, which is particularly strong on university campuses, fed into this insurgent youth movement. Unlike Seattle, there were few if any divisions between anarchists and the rest of the movement over tactics. While the Washington media sided with the police in playing down police abuses, newspapers from New York to New Delhi carried front page photos of the police clubbing demonstrators.

●Statement from protestors arrested during the IMF protests in Washington in April.

"Over the past five days we have been shuttled through the judicial system. We were denied contact with our lawyers for periods of more than 30 hours; left handcuffed and shackled for up to eight hours; moved up to ten times from cell to cell; denied food for more than 30 hours and water for up to ten hours at a time. Though many of us were soaking wet after Monday's protest, we were refused dry clothing, and left shackled and shivering on very cold floors. Some of us were physically attacked by US marshals; we were thrown against the wall, pepper-sprayed directly in the face, or thrown on the floor and beaten.

The US marshals told us we would be raped, beaten, and given AIDS or murdered by "faggots" and "niggers" once in jail. Though we asked repeatedly for our own lawyers, we were assigned public defenders who acted in the interests of the prosecution. This came after the excessive violence used against peaceful demonstrators in Washington. Police violence included running people over with police motorcycles, clubbing, beating, pepper-spraying, teargassing and trampling with horses."



Photo: Sass Tuffin

Campaigners outside the House of Commons include Paddy Hill and Billy Power, pictured with Susan's daughter, Kathy, and grandson, Alfie.

Free Susan May!

Andy Parr reports on a notorious miscarriage of justice.

Susan May is a Lancashire woman serving a life sentence for a crime she did not commit – the killing of her elderly aunt in March 1992. After a strong campaign, the Criminal Cases Review Commission was persuaded at the end of November last year to refer the case back to the appeal court. Their report has been described by normally cautious solicitor Campbell Malone as "extremely strong". The argument of blood stains containing Susan's prints, described by the trial Judge as the "central plank" of the prosecution case, has been effectively destroyed by the report.

Now begins the lengthy wait, until the autumn or even next year, for the case to be heard by the appeal court. A lengthy backlog of cases exists, including those of Eddie Guilfoyle and Frank Johnson, both of whose cases were referred back before Susan's. Barrister Mike Mansfield, currently engaged in the Bloody Sunday Tribunal, will take a break from Derry to head the appeal.

On 11th May, John McDonnell MP, hosting a meeting on the May case at the House of Commons, called for more pressure to be applied to expedite the case. He also expressed concern at the conditions in which Susan is being held at Newhall Prison near Wakefield.

Victory in Scotland

MSP Tommy Sheridan's bill to abolish warrant sales looks set to become the first Private Member's Bill to be passed by the Scottish Parliament. Despite opposition from the Labour-Liberal executive, Labour members rebelled in large numbers to pass the bill by 70 to 15 with 30 abstentions.

Tommy Sheridan, a member of the Scottish Socialist Party, was himself jailed for four months for his part in protests against Scotland's first attempted Poll Tax warrant sale. Eight years on, the Scottish Parliament now seems certain to end such sales, thus fulfilling a promise first made by the Scottish Labour Party in 1893.

Sheridan commented, "Warrant sales have never been about recovering debt. They have always been used to humiliate, degrade and frighten the poor." His campaign is backed by the Scottish TUC and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

Refugees fighting racism

Paul Field of Europe Roma reports on the ongoing campaign for justice.

In the month of May, Roma refugees have been brutally attacked in Middlesbrough, Manchester, Dover and Enfield. That the racist thugs felt brave enough to carry out such attacks in broad daylight owes much to the official seal of approval given to their hatred of the Roma as press, ministers and opposition each tried to outbid one another in their abuse of Gypsies. Barbara Roche's description of Roma beggars on the Tube as "vile" should be seen as what it is: incitement to racial hatred.

On 9th May, over 100 people packed the House of Common's Grand Committee Room to demand justice for Roma refugees. Jeremy Corbyn MP slammed the Government's appalling record on refugees. Donald Kenrick pointed out that Straw's refusal to recognise civil violence as persecution, and hence as grounds for granting refugee status, would have meant sending back Jews who fled Nazi pogroms in the thirties.

The Home Office has not granted a single Roma refugee status on arrival. But cases have been won at appeal when the racism of police, magistrates and local authorities in Eastern Europe is documented in detail and their denial of any rights to the Roma, or protection for them from racist attacks, is revealed.

Members of the Scuka family, who are currently appealing to the Home Office against its decision to deport them to the Czech Republic, spoke of the constant skinhead attacks they suffered for years, and assaults on their children at school. In one incident, their 14 year old daughter's wrist was broken by an older boy because she was "black". Roma children are 25 times more likely to be sent to special schools, and suffer constant discrimination from teachers and other students within mainstream education, a fate that the Scukas fear awaits their children.

Ladislav Balaz spoke movingly of his struggle to bring the neo-Nazi murderers of his friend to justice – it is one of thirty such murders still unpunished.

Jeremy Hardy warned that the racist language used by "liberal" journalists to describe the Roma was creating the conditions for more Steven Lawrences. Suresh Grover proved the point, recounting some of the cases of violence against refugees that have come to the attention of the National Civil Rights Movement.



Photo: Molly Cooper

Protest at the Czech embassy, May 2000.

On 13th May, Roma refugees and human rights activists demonstrated outside the Czech embassy against the Czech Republic's abusive treatment of the Roma. This coincided with a vigil by Roma in the Czech Republic to commemorate Lety Memorial Day. Lety was the concentration camp in which nearly all the Czech Roma were either murdered or sent on to Auschwitz to meet their death (most Czech Roma today are descended from Slovak families). The Czech government has consistently refused to let the site of the camp be used as a memorial to the Roma Holocaust. A pig farm has been built there instead.

Roma activists see this as a symbolic denial of even minimal rights or respect from a government that in 1991 changed the citizenship laws, leaving 20,000 Roma stateless, stripping them of their votes, civil and welfare rights. Present at the London demonstration was Frantisek Gabco. He was among Roma activists leading a demonstration in Usti nad Ladem who dismantled a wall that had been built by the local authority to segregate the Roma community from the rest of the town. They then presented the Mayor with fragments of the wall. In response, police rebuilt the wall at 3am under the protection of armed guards and Gabco and others became targets for police and fascist violence.

●Contact: Europe Roma on 01322-272 059/0794-764 7798; Scuka Family Campaign, 01642-211 117.

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South African winter hots up

Sean Coyne reports from Johannesburg on the successful COSATU stayaway and its implications.

To be honest, everyone was surprised. The scale of the mobilisation shocked the bosses, silenced the government and thrilled the trade union rank and file. Around four million workers – more than double COSATU's membership – took part in a national strike against job cuts and rising unemployment.

In the run-up to the national strike by COSATU, the media claimed turn-out would be low, that workers understood that mass protests were part of the past and that more harm than good would result by frightening away investment capital. The government too went into denial. But what the government and the bosses failed to grasp was that this was essentially a political strike. Those taking action did not naively believe that their action in itself would create jobs. But they did know that unless the government changed course, challenged capital instead of trying to seduce and placate it, and used its popular mandate to campaign for socially useful public works projects instead of dismantling public infrastructure, transformation could not be advanced.

In the run-up to the mass action, COSATU General Secretary Zwelinthini Vavi, in sharp contrast to his counterparts elsewhere in the world, was upbeat throughout. Judging the pulse of the movement more accurately than most, he refused to bend to pressure to moderate the federation's demands and to limit the mobilisation to symbolic actions. He also raised the heretical spectre of limiting COSATU's role in the upcoming ANC municipal election campaign if the ANC did not listen to workers' demands. He emphasised the importance of challenging capital, he offered convincing arguments against any watering down of protective labour legislation and, perhaps more importantly, he re-emphasised the importance of socialist policies to tackle the crisis.

The General Secretary of the Communist Party followed suit. He took the platform at provincial rallies and union gatherings up and down the country. To great acclaim, he condemned the obsession with privatisation, the absence of a class approach to the crisis, and urged the largest possible mobilisation. As a result, he is now one of the most popular speakers in the workers' movement, and the Communist Party is enjoying something of a revival.

A few days before the action, the General Secretary of the ANC himself came out in favour of the strike – declaring at a rally, to the horror of many in parliament, the media, and the Cabinet, that the enemy was capitalism!

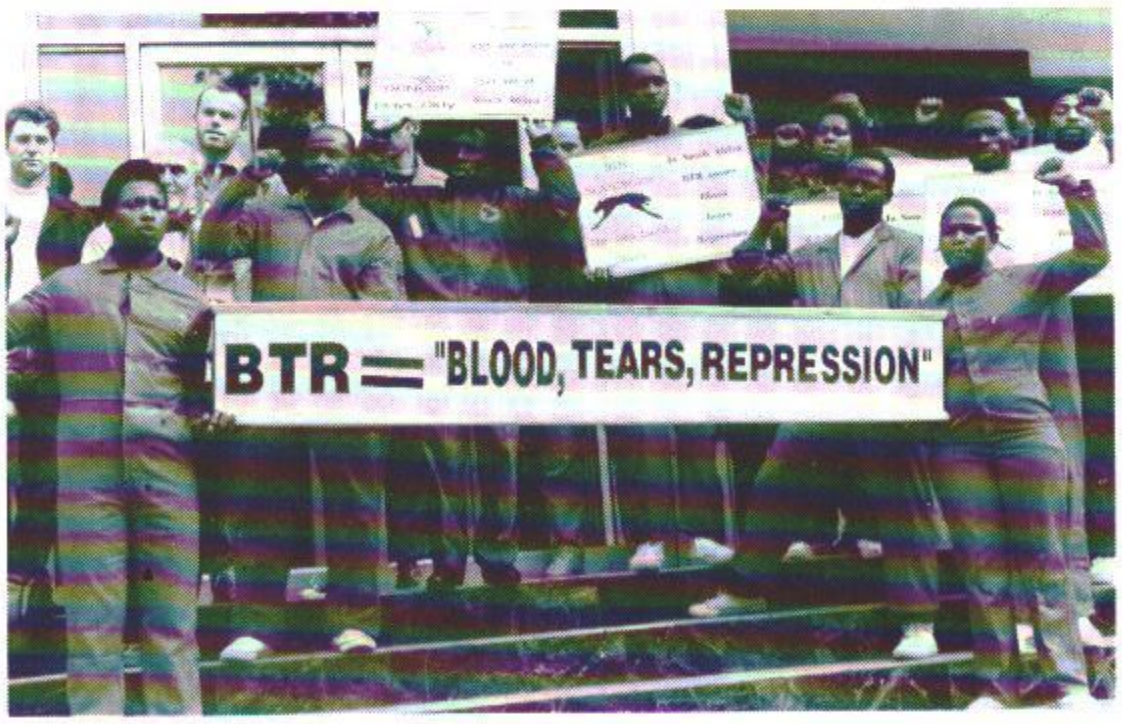
The marches themselves were simply joyous affairs. Workers sang, danced, made jokes, embraced each other, and basked in their power in a way that used to characterise the militant and inspirational South African workers' movement of the eighties. In Joburg alone, 150,000 marchers were warmly received into the city by onlookers.

After the strike, the employers' organisation publicly admitted that it had not taken job creation seriously despite its promises, and immediately offered high level talks. Government ministers reiterated the need for full consultation and agreement before privatisation programmes were implemented, and those who had spoken out against the strike were noticeably circumspect. Sixty-seven per cent of the population said that they supported COSATU's stayaway.

But there are no illusions. A golden opportunity was lost by the other two major union federations failing to join the campaign. NACTU was essentially quiet, and FEDUSA more or less agreed with the government that the march would not create jobs. Now, two weeks later, after intense talks, COSATU has said that the bosses are still not serious, and that the government must deliver, not in five years time, not when the "markets allow", but immediately. Plans to lay off public sector workers must be scrapped, living wage levels must be agreed and implemented, and plans for building the social infrastructure must be acted upon.

Instead of simply using the mass action as a backcloth for talks, COSATU leaders say that more mass action is on the cards to make the bosses and government move further. The working class of South Africa is ready for action, and is once again centre stage. The next COSATU congress takes place in August, one month before municipal elections are scheduled to take place, and the clock is ticking.

Within ANC circles, there is a frantic re-think underway. Many ANC MPs have voiced concern about the disjuncture between traditional ANC supporters and the Government. A majority of ANC branches are in a dreadful state of collapse. Membership is less than a third of what it was at the time of the last election. Without the backing of COSATU and its considerable organising cadre on the ground, it's unlikely that the ANC could retain the level of electoral support it achieved in the general election. At this stage there are no real electoral alternatives to the ANC, and the biggest fear is that a de-politicisation will take place, leading to abstention – bad news for the fledgling democracy which has inspired the rest of the continent.



South African workers have long fought international capital

Defending democracy in Sierra Leone

John Fisher gives a first-hand account of how the country's trade unions helped turn the tide against the barbarous rebels of Foday Sankoh.

In recent weeks the conflict in Sierra Leone has flared up again with the real threat of another savage attack by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) led by Foday Sankoh, recently captured. Many in Freetown would like him executed.

In January 1999 there was unbelievable carnage in the capital with the entry of the rebels and their allies of the former Sierra Leone Army (SLA) which had joined forces in the aftermath of the May 1997 coup led by Major Johnny Paul Koroma (who had been sprung from jail where he was awaiting trial for his involvement in an earlier coup attempt). Over 6,000 people – many of them young children – were killed and thousands had hands, legs, arms and ears chopped off.

The other side of these bizarre events was that the perpetrators were often child soldiers as young as seven, often drugged with "cocaine plasters" (faces cut, cocaine put in the wound and a plaster applied). Large numbers of women and girls were raped and many were abducted. Several thousand are still unaccounted for and presumed dead or acting as "wives" to their captors.

It is therefore no surprise that when I was there in early May, rumours of the rebels approaching from the east of Freetown were sending shivers down many spines. The situation seems to have stabilised thanks to the presence of British paratroopers, although it's hard to admit it. The Sierra Leone Labour Congress (SLLC), with whom I was working, issued a statement calling on the British to send fighting troops, drawing the conclusion that if the British did not, then the SLLC would regard this as an act of gross anti-Africanism.

What has given rise to the terrible situation prevailing for most of the last ten years? As Basil Davidson explains in *The Black Man's Burden* (1992), the imposition of nation states by the colonial powers bore no relationship to Africa's history – "They did not want a flag for the people they wanted bread for the people!" They are still waiting forty years later, as successive ruling elites have usurped power and robbed a richly endowed land of its considerable mineral resources. It was against this background and a rapidly worsening economy during the 1980s that unemployment gave rise to large scale youth disaffection.

Corporal Sankoh and associates were able to attract some of these elements with anti-government rhetoric. Almost from the start reports came in of the RUF robbing, killing and raping. Add to this the increasing demoralisation of the army – badly paid, if at all – and very soon there developed the phenomenon of "sobels" – soldier-rebels, to the extent that it was often difficult to distinguish between the two forces.

'Over 6,ooo people – many of them young children – were killed and thousands had hands, legs, arms and ears chopped off'

Due to the pressure of civil society, led by the SLLC, and the strings-attached aid from the IMF, elections were held in 1996, when the current President Kabbah was elected. Eight months after the election Koroma seized power.

Despite his overthrow in 1998, for the last three years the RUF have controlled the diamond fields of the eastern province. Like Unita in Mozambique they have traded diamonds for arms. There is also growing evidence of diamond smuggling and drug trafficking, both heavily associated with Charles Taylor's Liberia. He has supported the RUF throughout, partly in revenge for the Sierra Leone government harbouring his rivals and supporting the Nigerian-led ECOMOG forces who attempted to restore some stability to Liberia in the early 1990s.

In July last year, after the Nigerians had for the second time in two years wrested control of Freetown from the RUF, the Lome Peace Accord was signed. In return for agreeing to disarm, the RUF would have five ministerial or deputy ministerial seats in government, including the vice-presidency, and control of diamond and mineral resources! True, there was no prospect of defeating the RUF, who were estimated to control 70% of the country, hence these extraordinary terms. Since then disarmament has gone very slowly with the RUF giving up hardly any arms and continuing to control the diamond fields.

The latest turn of events was therefore entirely foreseeable. Fortunately the SLLC takes its role as defender of democracy very seriously and issued a statement condemning the capture of UN troops and instructing Sankoh to release them immediately. When Sankoh denied all knowledge they called for the demonstration to his house which tragically resulted in at least 19 deaths but also galvanised everyone in Freetown. If the country is to stand a chance, then the British and other UN forces should stay there and do the job. If anyone ever deserved our unequivocal support it is the people of Sierra Leone and particularly the trade unionists who lead by example.

●John Fisher was working for the Commonwealth Trades Union Council on a civic education project funded by Comic Relief and involving the Sierra Leone Labour Congress before he was airlifted out.

Ocalan and the Kurdish question: where now?

Erkan Gok of the Campaign for Human Rights in Turkey argues that class unity between Kurdish and Turkish workers is the only way forward.

"My call to lay down arms and leave Turkey is not a tactical but a strategic call... to show our goodwill I call on PKK activists to come to Turkey with arms to secure the democratic republic ... I must live to realise peace ... a democratic unity will strengthen the Republic. It will move us towards becoming a greater state..."

Despite this call for activists to join with the Turkish army to fight the rebels, Abdullah Ocalan, the PKK chief captured last year and tried on terrorism charges in December, was sentenced to death. This sentence awaits review by the European Court of Human Rights.

With the PKK's military campaign in Turkey over, Ocalan has urged they be brought into the legal arena and that its name be changed to omit the word "Kurdistan". But martial law remains in force in the Kurdish regions, and arbitrary arrests continue – including that of HADEP (Kurdish Party) leaders and three elected mayors (later released). In March, the Kurdish spring festival was banned in Istanbul and Malatya, although allowed for the first time in years in Diynurbakir in the Kurdish area. The regime's token concessions are overshadowed by the reality of exile and oppression for the vast majority of Kurds.

For the last ten years, the PKK has worked hard to promote the Kurdish cause in Europe as well as in Turkey and to be accepted as its legitimate voice. They are still the prime movers in the European "Free Ocalan" campaigns. But if, as Ocalan now says, "there is no Kurdish problem", why did Kurds fight, go to prison, endure torture or die? Has their leader disowned the central aims of the movement – or is his apparent turnaround actually a continuation by other means of a long-standing policy?

The state's official line is also that "there is no Kurdish problem" – only a terrorist problem, supported by organisations with ties abroad. In court, Ocalan did what the state required – defending, in his own words, the Turkish state's "Kurdish thesis" and attacking Turkey's so-called "enemies" abroad: Iran, Syria, Greece, Southern Cyprus, etc. Ocalan has served his purpose for the regime and will not be executed, not least because the Turkish government is seeking approval for EU membership.

Mirroring the state's view that the problem is the "PKK-Ocalan problem", the PKK have long defined Kurdish rights as a question of political rights primarily for themselves and Ocalan – the leader who has now issued his surrender call. Turkish ruling classes want Ocalan to remain "leader" to ensure that the PKK, the forces around it and the Kurdish people are fully drawn into the system. That is the real thinking behind the events in court.

After the military coup of 1980, the PKK emerged in 1984 to defend peasants with armed struggle. In 1986 the workers became involved. Though united by common demands for land, jobs and freedom, the PKK failed to integrate with the mass movement that included Turkish workers, becoming increasingly narrow in its aims. The state encouraged this split and the PKK's attempts to form electoral alliances through its legal part (HEP, now HADEP) failed. From 1991, thousands died, villages were destroyed, many were forced into the cities, and parliamentary representatives were imprisoned. After Ocalan's escape to Syria, the PKK campaigned for his asylum application and, after his capture, against his execution.

The PKK has combined an elitist armed strategy with dubious electoral alliances, instead of building on the struggles of the ordinary people who have shouldered the main burden of sacrifices. Since the mid-90s, the Kurdish people realised that ordinary Turkish people have been subjected to the same attacks. Last year's earthquake was a hideous demonstration of the state's indifference to its people, of whatever ethnic origin. Kurds and Turkish workers took part together in recent strikes and demonstrations – against privatisation, for trade union rights, etc. Organised workers are weakening the grip of the state and fascist terror by their determined defence of workers' and democratic rights and their refusal to rise to provocation.

The national question can only be resolved if opposition to imperialism is rooted in class struggle, building the widest possible democratic unity. The fight is against the regime and its system, which serves global capitalism, sacrificing the interests of ordinary Turks and Kurds to US and European interests.

The task now is to rebuild the Kurdish struggle on this basis. Those supporting the Kurdish cause must demand the abolition of emergency rule in the south-eastern provinces, and for the right of those millions of Kurds driven by the army from their homes to return in peace and safety if they so wish. Compensation must be provided, and homes and jobs elsewhere for those not wanting to return. This is an essential first step and should be our first demand. International solidarity remains essential to this struggle.

●Contact the Campaign for Human Rights in Turkey: tel 020-7275 8440; www.daymer.org/humanr; email humanrights@daymer.org .

Making a habit of bad faith

Brian Campbell
Sinn Fein

I wrote last month about the "side letter" from Tony Blair to the Unionists after the end of the negotiations which produced the Good Friday Agreement. It was the start of the British Government's constant reassurance of Unionists in a bid to save David Trimble's leadership. Paradoxically, it only served to strengthen the anti-Agreement forces.

Now, following the latest round of negotiations, Blair has done it again, only this time his reassurance is accompanied by concrete concessions which may prove very damaging to the peace process in the long term. "Concessions" to Unionists weaken the terms of equality legislation and prevent accountable and acceptable policing. Tony Blair has bolstered those right wing forces which want to preserve the status quo of Unionist supremacy.

Take the new policing service. The headline news has been that the name and symbols will be decided next year by Peter Mandelson (or whoever takes his place). Those are important issues – for a new policing service to command wide acceptance it cannot operate under symbols of the British crown – but more far-reaching will be the extent of accountability of the new service. Chris Patten, on whose report the new service is based, insisted that full accountability was vital. But now, under Unionist pressure, the British Government has severely weakened that accountability. For example, power to investigate the police will ultimately lie with the British Secretary of State.

In effect, the Labour Government has operated to a Unionist agenda which seeks to hold back progress on equality and human rights. It is an entirely reactionary stance and it is in bad faith.

So, what should they have done? Quite simply, they should have told the Unionists: an agreement has been reached and we are going to implement it in full. They should have said there were to be no concessions outside that agreement. And they should have been proactive in selling the agreement as being in the best interests of the unionist community.

Instead, Labour has no such strategic outlook. The search for next week's headlines is the relentless engine of policy. The Government has no analysis of the deep-rooted systemic sectarianism at the heart of the Six County state and which the Good Friday Agreement – if implemented in good faith – will attempt to tackle.

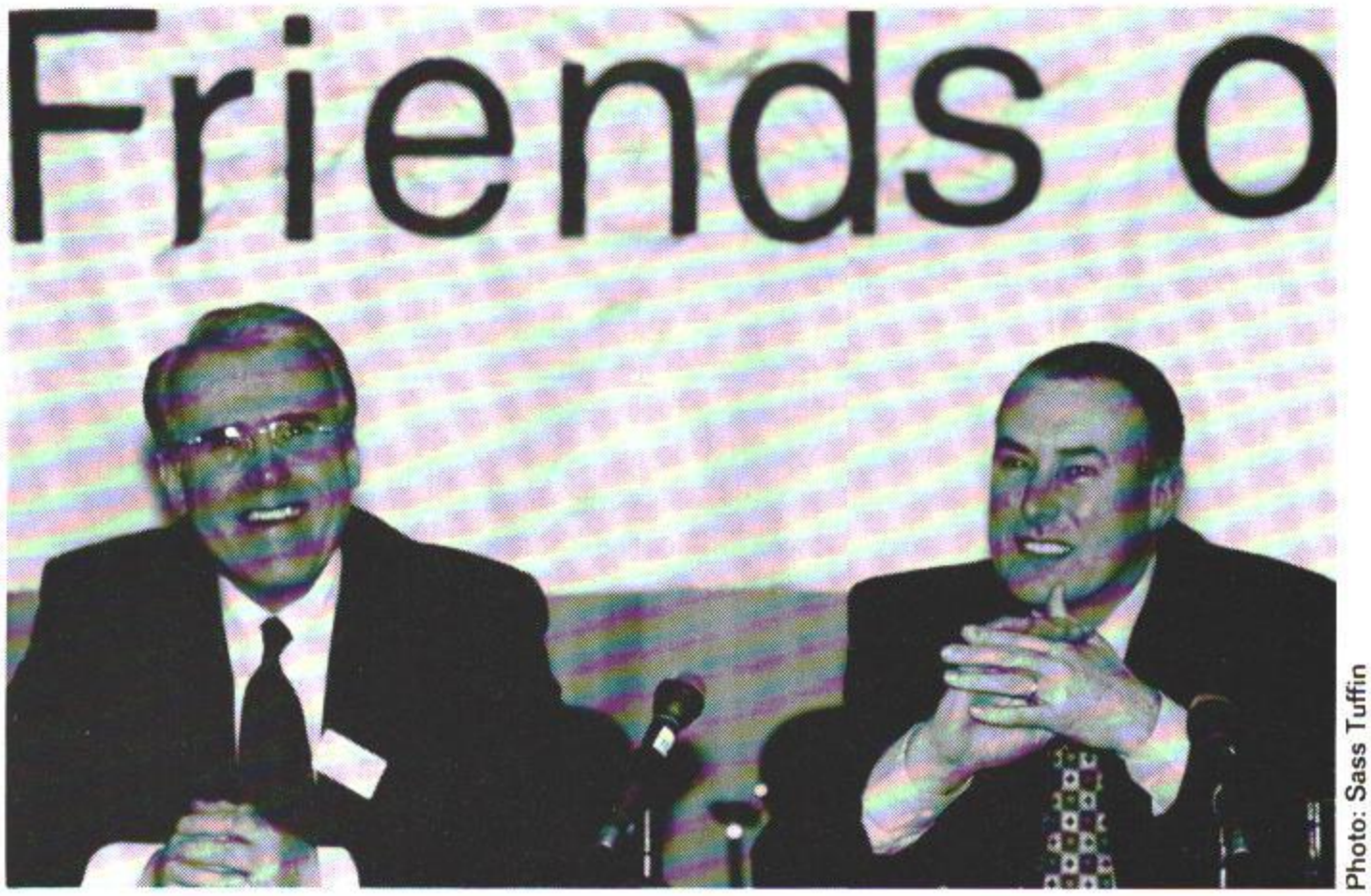


Photo: Sass Tuffin

The "Making the Good Friday Agreement work" conference, April, in London. Mitchel McLaughlin, Chair of Sinn Fein, (right) joins a broad platform.

The historic IRA statement alluded to that systemic sectarianism. The IRA said, in effect, that if there was equality and if the changes in the Agreement were implemented irreversibly, that would begin to tackle the causes of conflict and there would be no need for weapons. It is such a self-evident analysis – and one which held out the prospect of peace with justice – that you would think that the very last thing that Blair and Mandelson would do would be to unpick the Agreement at the behest of the Unionists. But that is exactly what they did.

New Labour is accused of being all style and no content. That is completely untrue. They could never be accused of having style.

Yugoslav health crisis

Over a year after the bombing stopped, some 500,000 people in Yugoslavia desperately need humanitarian aid. While more than £56 million has been donated by the British public to charities dealing with Kosova, less than 1% of this sum is earmarked for Yugoslavia. Yet 300,000 children are showing signs of severe psychological trauma as a result of war. Hospitals cannot repair bomb-damaged equipment. Mass unemployment created by the Western embargo has brought a fall in family incomes and an increase in childhood diseases. US military leaders now admit they ran out of military targets after two weeks of bombing and turned to "third phase targets", including hospitals. The country is also an ecological disaster area, its natural water supply contaminated with radioactive depleted uranium from NATO warheads.

●Contact Anglo-Yugoslav Medical Aid, a charity seeking to raise money and support to tackle these problems, PO Box 20088, London NW2 6FH.

Readmit Ken call from FBU

Mick Shaw, FBU Executive Council, reports on FBU Conference.

Our annual conference this May in Bridlington was an emotional occasion. We were saying farewell to General Secretary Ken Cameron after twenty years in office.

During that time, he ensured that the union's voice was always raised in support of progressive causes, helping to maintain our position on the left of the labour movement – he will not be offered a peerage! His successor Andy Gilchrist should uphold that tradition.

The conference's major debate was on the independent inquiry into industrial relations in the fire service. The Government announced this inquiry, conducted by Professor Frank Birchill, after the union opposed attempts by fire service employers to tear up our national agreement. It was designed to avert a national fire service strike.

Some delegates expressed reservations with the revised disputes procedure that the inquiry recommended. But the fact that it rejected any attempt to ban our right to strike, plus the fact that our national agreement remains intact, represents a considerable achievement by the union.

Dissatisfaction with New Labour was apparent during debates on the minimum wage, Private Finance Initiatives and "best value".

London delegates reported on Ken Livingstone's successful election campaign, proving claims that New Labour was the only alternative to the Tories were clearly untrue. Conference unanimously passed an emergency resolution, with Executive Council support, calling for the union to consider submitting a motion to this year's Labour Party Conference urging immediate readmission to Party membership for Ken. I hope the FBU will be one of a number of unions making the same call.

Delegates ask for change

Maureen Madden, USDAW broad left member, reports on USDAW conference.

USDAW's Millennium Conference in April was, as usual, stage managed. This created dismay among many delegates. The first debate – on Europe – was fronted by a panel of pro-Europeans, including one from the CBI. During every debate, General Secretary Bill Connor or the Assistant General Secretary responded with the official position. This was in addition to a booklet showing the EC's position on every motion. Those opposed to union policy, like the sweetheart deal with Tesco, got short shrift from the leadership.

The Government was represented by Treasury Minister Andrew Smith, who aroused delegates' anger because he gave them no opportunity to question him or to make any comments. Delegates wanted to democratise links with Labour. Other issues that aroused conference were pensions and the minimum wage.

There was a Labour Party-trade union links fringe meeting at which speaker Nigel Griffiths MP was accompanied by a Millbank minder. Delegates at that meeting, as at a Broad Left fringe, wanted more from both the Party and their union. I stood as the left's candidate for President last year, receiving 43% of the vote despite incumbent Marge Carey's tour of the country supported by the union bureaucracy. Delegates felt that this was a good basis for building the left as a serious force in the union. They wanted changes in union structures to enable members to direct policy and to be able to hold officers accountable.

During conference, the gulf between members and leadership was obvious, and the broad left feels confident about filling this vacuum.

Contact: USDAW Broad Left, c/o M. Madden, 103 Park Road, Wallsend, Tyne & Wear NE28 7LP.

NUT Conference 2000

Monica Gillingham reports from NUT Conference.

Delegates to NUT Conference arrived in Harrogate full of misgivings that the leadership was going to sabotage effective resistance to performance related pay (PRP). The union had already missed an opportunity to ballot members on a boycott of training days for teachers and heads on PRP. Every member of the union had been mailed the week before Conference telling them that there was no contradiction between applying to participate in the scheme and being against it at the same time! The mailing urged members not to be swayed by any troublemakers who told them different.

All newly elected officers of the union had declared against PRP. Yet the debates at Conference were ill-tempered and full of red-baiting and attacks on the "loony left" that had become out of fashion in recent years. On Saturday, it looked as if the debate had been talked out but, unfortunately for the leadership, the press reported that the vote had been "delayed". A modern trade union may disappoint its members, but not the press. The debate went ahead: those arguing that the members would not strike against such a determined Government clashing with those who thought the Government was vulnerable and would settle for peace if faced with serious, disruptive opposition organised by a determined union. In the end, the motion for a one day strike was carried by around 23,000 votes – just small enough to enable the General Secretary to reject the decision.

The Lyons King sees pride rocked

Hugh MacGrillen, suspended secretary of London Region MSF, reports on MSF National Conference.

A big wheel fell off the Blair wagon at the MSF conference in May. Delegates blocked the headlong rush towards merger with the AEEU, leaving General Secretary Roger Lyons's leadership in deep crisis on several fronts. The MSF-AEEU merger is a major part of Blair's strategy to create a huge pro-social partnership, pro-euro trade union that would deliver for New Labour on key elements of its economic strategy.

But MSF activists did not go along with the plan. There were three main groupings in the conference: the largest was the anti-merger group but not much smaller was the pro-merger group. The third was a group of delegates who wanted both the merger and a democratic structure for the new union. However untenable this position might be in the long run, given the undemocratic nature of the AEEU, this was the one that triumphed in the conference. One of two motions finally adopted set stiff merger terms, tying Lyons' hands on how to achieve them. The other expressed a broadly favourable pro-merger outlook without defining a further course of action.

This provoked a sharp reaction from AEEU General Secretary Ken Jackson who wrote almost immediately, "It is with great regret that this decision (ie the MSF conference resolution) jeopardises the merger and unless you can indicate a clear way forward, I can only assume that discussions will cease."

MSF's leadership could find no way out of the crisis while conference was still on. But an emergency NEC meeting has been summoned for early June to try to rescue the situation. Various bureaucratic adventures have been mooted but it is quite possible that something will be tried on. This would raise political tension in MSF to new peaks, with a real chance of the union fragmenting and the virtual certainty of the merger issue being precipitated into the courts.

Lyons is going to become very familiar with legal proceedings over the next months. Indeed within a few days of the conference he suffered a stunning setback in the High Court. This concerned a long running attempt by the union's leadership to victimise a branch secretary who got out of line, finally involving a bid to wreck the union's internal appeals machinery that affords a strong element of grass-roots justice. That bid failed in the High Court at a cost of at least £20,000.

There are at least three other legal proceedings up and running. Two of these involve sackings of employees caught up in the scandals of financial misconduct at the very top of the union. So far there has been a successful cover-up but over the next few months a great deal of information may enter the public domain. There will be hard questions to answer – not just for the MSF leadership but also associated lawyers and accountants and even for the state officials who police trade unions.

To this needs to be added the latest developments in the victimisation of lay officials in London. Last November, three officers were suspended in the row over London MSF's exclusion from the Labour Party's electoral college for the choice of candidate for London Mayor. Now these three have been further punished and their successors have also been suspended. It appears that the intention was to exclude some key people from the annual conference and to smash up the London Region that has consistently opposed the national leadership. The suspended six have massive backing in London (one recently topped the polls in elections for the NEC) and widespread support throughout the union. There will now be a major struggle to resist these further attempts at victimisation and this issue may also end up in the courts.

The Lyons leadership is beset by huge industrial and political problems. Not just in the car industry, but in finance and pharmaceuticals it has to respond to capitalist restructuring, putting tens of thousands of jobs on the line. It has no positive answer to any of these situations and has collapsed under the pressure, lashing out at its critics within the union. This has generated a serious leadership crisis and there are undoubtedly going to be major upheavals within a matter of months.

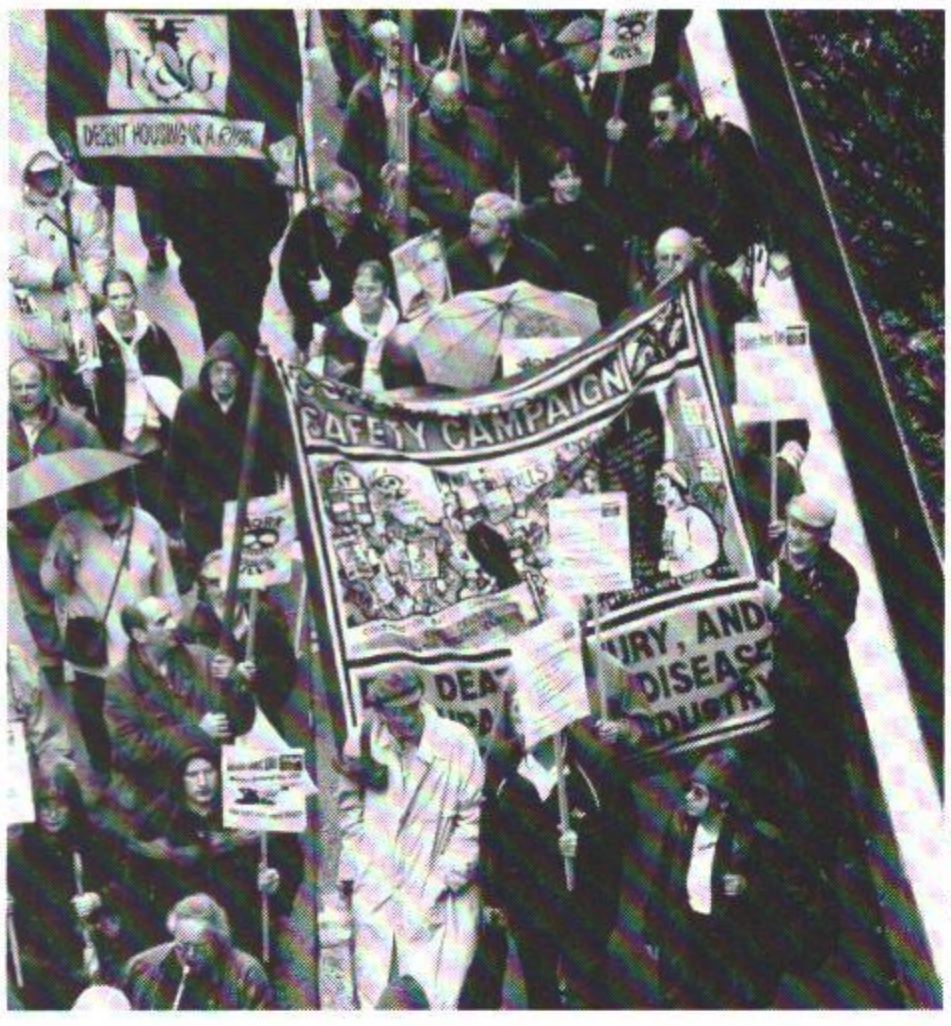


Photo: Sass Tuffin

The Construction Safety Campaign marked Workers Memorial Day on 28th April with a march from MSF HQ to the Health & Safety Executive. Contact CSC at PO Box 23844, London SE15 3WR. Roger Lyons attended: but two weeks later at Conference he was accepting the capitalist priorities which put workers at risk.

Witch-hunt stepped up

Lambeth UNISON branch secretary Jon Rogers calls for left unity to beat off the leadership offensive.

In the run up to UNISON's National Delegate Conference the political witch-hunt has moved up a gear with a disciplinary investigation into allegations against two leading Socialist Workers Party activists, Yunus Bakhsh from Newcastle and Karen Reissmann from Manchester. This attack comes on the back of the expulsions of Roddy Slorach in Glasgow, Candy Udwin and Dave Carr in London, and a number of left wingers (by no means all in the SWP) in Birmingham and Newham.

A small clique of full-time officials (many of whom, bizarrely, are reputed to be former Maoists) has been leading a deliberate attack on leading SWP activists who they describe as "parasites" on the union. The idea that some of the most senior national officials of the union could see anyone else in this light at least proves that they have some sense of irony.

Regrettably the SWP has in the past isolated themselves organisationally from the rest of the left, which may have contributed to their current vulnerability. Welcome discussions are now taking place to create a united left organisation for all those who want a union which protects its members before its relationship with Millbank.

Any UNISON activist with an ounce of democratic sentiment ought to be able to see that the issue is not whether one supports the SWP, but whether one supports the right to dissent and to organise for minority and opposition views within the union. The witch-hunt poses a real challenge to influential members and associates of the Communist Party of Britain (CPB) who need to decide whether they can remember the lessons of McCarthyite witch-hunting, or whether they will allow a historic antipathy to "trots" to obscure the dangers of the current climate in UNISON.

As *LLB* goes to press, UNISON Conference Standing Orders Committee is considering whether branches may composite a motion in support of democracy in the union and the right to campaign from the individual motions on the order paper. Whatever is decided, the debate on democracy in the union will once again be one of the most important of the week.

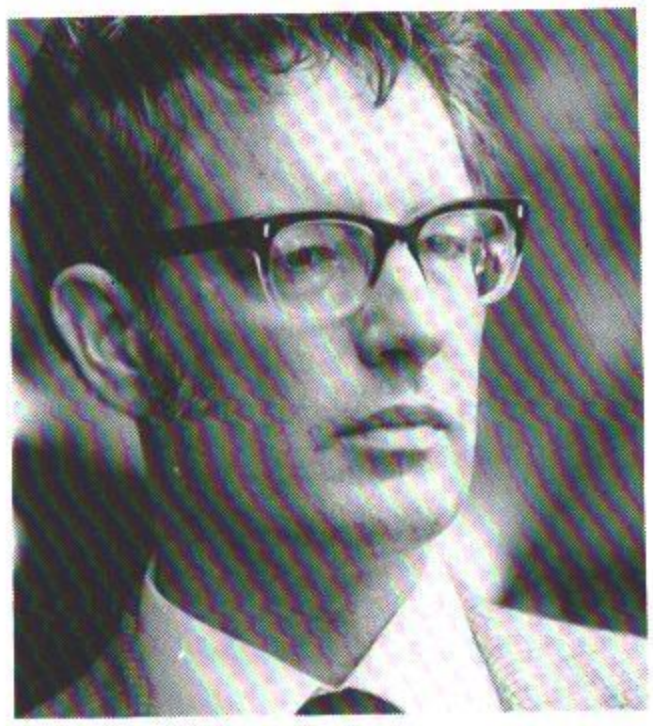


Photo: John Harris

The way we were...see farewell to Rodney p.30

UNISON APF paranoia

UNISON APF members have been reading the left press. Our mole in Bournemouth reports.

The Forum (conference) of the UNISON Affiliated Political Fund (APF) took place in Bournemouth from 15th to 17th May. On 16th May, a request was made from the platform for delegates to the full UNISON conference in Bournemouth in June to stay behind at the end of business to chat about the APF presence at the conference. It soon became apparent that the get-together had been called to organise a counter-offensive against the threat of disruption.

National Affiliated Political Committee (NAPC) member Frank Hont knew there was going to be trouble at the conference – because Jon Rogers, in the May issue of *Labour Left Briefing*, had called for support for a resolution from Leicestershire Health branch. This subversive resolution asks that the union review its political fund arrangements, specifically whether UNISON should continue to give uncritical support to all Labour candidates regardless of their support for UNISON policies. Also involved in this fiendish conspiracy are the SWP (natch).

Hont also warned us that an article in *Workers Power* states that the conference will be a "battleground". He asked APF members to speak from the floor: regional convenors will compile a list of volunteers and help can be provided to write the speeches. With a bit of luck it can be arranged for the dreaded resolution to fall off the end of the agenda on the Friday afternoon.

Other NAPC members backed Hont up. Dave Anderson warned that the plotters aim to use UNISON'S internal democracy to destabilise the union's links with the Labour Party. Anne Picking, who will be chairing the conference, wanted to be sure we clapped her decisions. Tony Jones said the only way to influence the Labour Party was from within.

In case anyone thought what was planned was a bit underhand, we were assured that we were only doing what "they" do. Libby Tucker (newly elected to the APF Standing Orders Committee) said she knew this was true as she is on one of "their" mailing lists – she reported that she dutifully passes whatever she receives to the proper authorities.

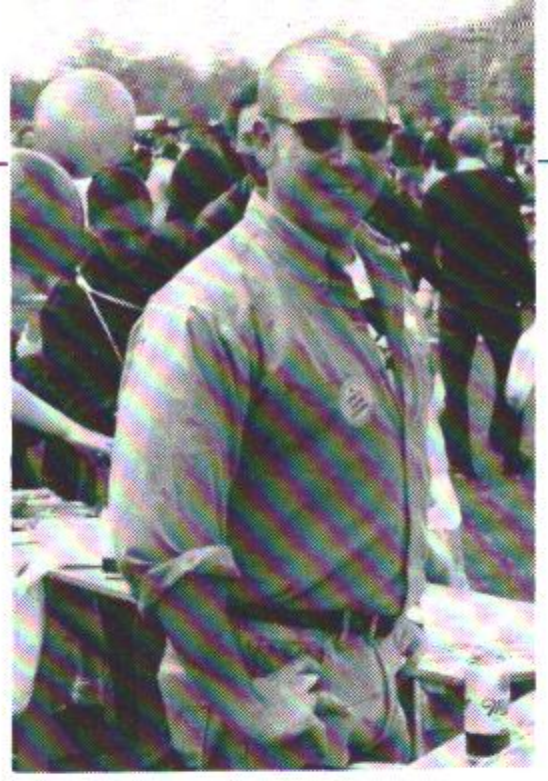
TRADE UNION NOTEBOOK

●Train driver Sarah Friday has been awarded £16,000 by an employment tribunal following her dismissal by South West Trains, but reinstatement was not ordered. RMT leader Jimmy Knapp said the settlement would be a deterrent – South West Trains said it was "a price worth paying". The ballot of drivers and guards for strike action to support her was lost. As we went to press, RMT members at London's Waterloo Station were considering their next move.

●At the Rolls Royce plants at Hucknall and Derby in the East Midlands, the likelihood of action over the loss of 2,000 jobs has receded as many workers have opted for voluntary redundancy.

●Unions at London Underground have rejected a two-year deal worth 4% this year and RPI plus 0.5% (or 3%, if greater) for 2001. The unions are seeking a settlement comparable with the Docklands Light Railway of 7.1%. ACAS has been asked to help on annual leave and the move to the 35-hour week (management's offer of a maximum rostered working week of 37.5 hours by April 2001 was rejected).

●The dispute between Skychef and the TGWU is finally over. The company, part of the Lufthansa group, sacked some 270 members of the union after a one-day strike. The workers maintained a picket line at Heathrow where the company prepares airline meals. Workers are being offered reinstatement or compensation. TGWU General Secretary Bill Morris welcomed the settlement in only his second intervention in the course of the 18 month dispute.



THE GEOFF MARTIN COLUMN

●So the Labour fiasco in London has juddered to its logical conclusion – Ken comfortably elected as Mayor and the Tories taking a majority of the popular vote for the GLA. Of course, all of this was entirely predictable from the moment that Millbank decided to corrupt the decision of the 1998 London Labour Conference on a process for selecting a mayoral candidate. From that point, every act by the HQ in respect of the London elections simply eroded Labour's core support even further.

It's now as clear as you like that if Ken hadn't had the bottle to run for Mayor after the fix of the electoral college, Norris would have beaten Dobson and we'd have woken up to the nightmare of a Tory mayor in the capital.

While we're at it, I don't buy all this crap about Norris being some sort of liberal, semi-detached from the heart of the Tory Party. He's a sharp operator who said one thing to the wider London public while his people were peddling the usual filth down on the doorstep. From the New Labour side, it takes some doing to lose in Camden – but then that's what happens when you select candidates with a history of union-busting.

●We're now a few weeks on and I've just about got the taste out of my mouth of what must be the filthiest Labour campaign in the hundred years of the Party. Norris, and even the Nazis, must have been laughing up their sleeves as Millbank resorted to a sequence of negative press ads against Ken which culminated in the shameful attempt to blame him for the anarchist desecration of the Cenotaph. It was noticeable that the more hysterical the Dobson campaign became, the lower his vote sank and the more it boosted Norris.

The name of the Labour Party in London has been dragged through the mud over the past two years. Although some people might think that it's a bit of a laugh, they need to wise up to the potential implications of Labour's core support staying at home in front of the box. We can't sit back and watch as London becomes a Tory town. It would hurt our people a damn sight more than it would hurt Trevor Phillips.

I'm up for this Reclaim the Party initiative launched by Piers Corbyn and there's no doubt that such a campaign needs high-profile trade union involvement. What do you want us to do, Piers?

●I have no doubt that Ken will be back in the Party after a few months in the sin bin. I reckon that at least a dozen seats in London at the next election will hinge on whether Ken's in or out of the fold and that this will be enough to focus the opinions of all but the hardest nosed hawks at Millbank. Anyway, if we can offer career opportunities on the front bench to bored ex-Tory MP's, surely we can open up the door to one of our own?

●And finally... who's going to take responsibility for the carnage inside the London Labour Party? The Regional Chair, Jim Fitzpatrick, has his sticky prints all over the fix against Ken and the disastrous Dobbo campaign. The word was that Jim was going to knock it on the head at the May London Labour Board meeting and there were press reports that Blair was going to give him a junior minister's job to reward his "loyalty". Hey presto, come the Board meeting, Jim's had the electrodes on his goolies again and announces that he's sticking around.

The London Labour Party Conference is scheduled to meet in November. Jim Fitz has lost the confidence of the London labour movement and must go. We need a complete change at the top if we're going to convince the activists and the electorate that the lessons have been learnt and that we're going to move forward.

I've been approached by a number of trade unionists, Party activists and MPs to give it a shot. I'm prepared to take it on, on the basis of building a real consensus, free from the poisonous grip of Millbank, which can get us into shape for the next election.

Mind you, don't hold your breath. I have it on good authority that if there's any prospect of me taking the London Labour Chair there won't be a London Labour Conference this year... nothing but the same old story!

Where are the true Marxists?



Bernie Moss finds some controversial answers by looking back at 100 years of Labour history.

Socialists on the left of the Labour Party (*LLB*, Nov & Dec 1999) are again debating whether to stay in or out. The timing seems wrong-headed when Livingstone's victory has ruined Blair's credibility and opened members' ears to questioning voices. The derisory result of the London Socialist Alliance in the elections should deter fantasies of constructing a left alternative out of warring Trotskyist and Stalinist sects.

The debate is usually conducted around practicalities: who has better links to trade unions, working-class communities and voters, more media visibility and parliamentary and local representation? These are important considerations in the calculus of mass action, but the debaters usually assume that the eventual goal is a revolutionary party or faction, more theoretically Marxist than the existing Labour left. They forget that Marx and Engels often worked within the framework of social democracy, believing that one concrete step forward was often more valuable than theoretical righteousness.

The Labour Party centenary is a good time to take stock of who the real Marxists are. It is well known that Marxism had negligible influence on the formation of the party whose roots were more ethical, Liberal and simply trade unionist than those of the Social Democratic Federation. That did not prevent the party from being socialist in aim and in its union and parliamentary activity, action scorned by official Marxists who wanted all or nothing. Early Labour MPs proposed laws with socialist content that would achieve redistribution to the working class, which is more than the official Marxists thought possible.

It was because of this practical activity that Karl Kautsky welcomed Labour into the Second International in 1908 despite its hopelessly non-theoretical approach. Its ethical socialism did not stop sections of it from taking a courageous stance against the war in 1914 – unlike its Marxist counterparts on the continent. While its leaders certainly did not stoke up class war like the syndicalists, it could not avoid participating in the strike waves of 1911-12, 1919-20 and 1926, and in rank and file movements in the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1930s and post-war years the Labour left worked closely on the industrial front with Communists.

The Communists had qualities Labour lacked. Their concern for political education and strategy meant action on many fronts – political and industrial – was co-ordinated. The Labour left could sometimes look to friendly union leaders for support, but never mobilise rank and filers. Lacking conscious direction and a co-ordinated approach, the Bennite left proved to be easy pickings for the right-wing modernisers of the 1980s. The Blairites succeeded because they were able to put their media skills in the service of a coherent strategy.

Yet there was one area where the Labour left was in advance of official Marxists. It was the insistence that reforms bring immediate benefit to the working class while making progressively greater inroads on capitalist ownership and control. Though no friend of labour, Keynes discovered that the iron laws of supply and demand were more flexible than either the classical or Marxist economists supposed. A major step was taken by the ILP in 1926 when it proposed minimum wages, social benefits, industrial subsidies and re-organisation, bank nationalisation and credit expansion in order to raise purchasing power and stimulate growth in a cumulative process of economic socialisation.

Like Marxists, Labour realised that significant reforms mobilising the working class were unsustainable without ever-increasing public ownership and control. But coming from a non-revolutionary tradition, while understanding the transition would need tremendous struggle (Stafford Cripps talked in 1933 of emergency powers to coerce the capitalists), they hoped it would not involve violence and civil war. It was to this progressive scenario of socialisation that Labour returned in the 1970s after the impasse of the Wilson government with the idea of an alternative economic strategy.

Labour, in short, never shared the catastrophic vision of impoverishment, breakdown, and civil war that was Marx's most potent legacy. In the era of democratic revolutions when European societies were ruled by narrow elites like Britain in 1848, France in 1871 or Russia in 1917, such a scenario was relevant. But in the year that Marx praised the Commune for the violent overthrow of the Bonapartist state, he recognised the possibility of peaceful take-over through the half-reformed British parliament. While one can never exclude catastrophe in our own times, the advocacy of revolution as the only way forward is a sure path to political oblivion.

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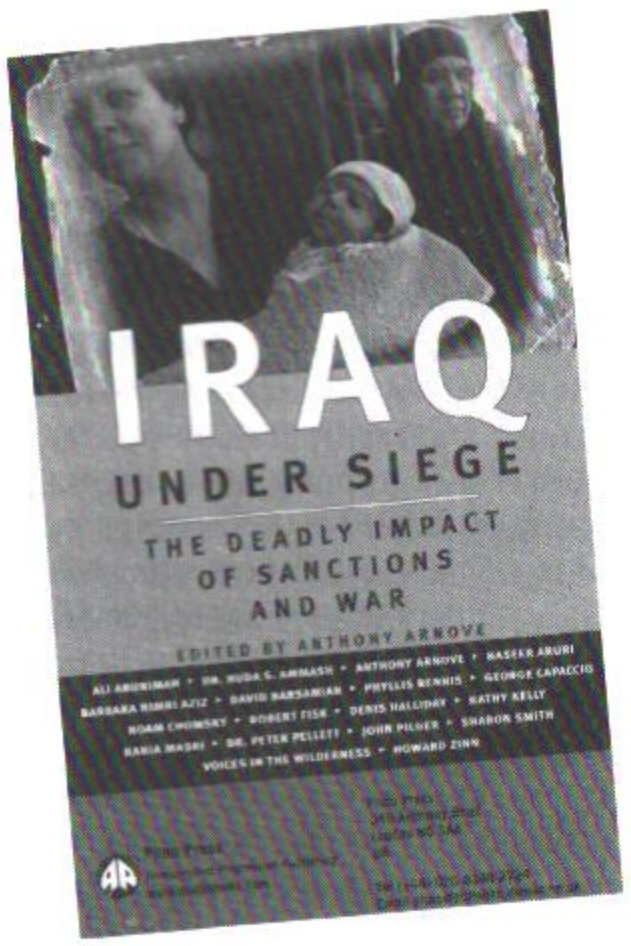
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"State-sanctioned mass murder"

Mike Phipps reviews *Iraq under Siege* edited by Anthony Arnove, published by Pluto, price £10.99 pbk

For the last year and a half, Britain and the US have been unilaterally bombing Iraq virtually every other day. By the end of 1999, 6,000 sorties had dropped 1,800 bombs in the longest US air campaign since Vietnam.



Yet so routine has this bombardment become that it rarely makes the media, let alone the front pages. One rare exception was in October 1999 when the US Air Force announced the future development of "defter" laser-guided concrete bombs for dropping near populated areas – apparently a "good news" story.

This book documents the compliance of the Western press, with a few honourable exceptions, in downplaying the effects of bombing and sanctions. Mainstream sources give you no idea that 300 tons of radioactive depleted uranium is still scattered across Gulf War battlefields, or of the devastation of agriculture due to sanctions, or the spread of preventable diseases, exacerbated by poor diet and contaminated water, as a result of the West's bombing of sewage treatment plants.

Sanctions are estimated to have caused the deaths of half a million children – about which US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright notoriously commented "the price is worth it." The UN Sanctions Committee, which must approve all contacts with Iraq, votes in secret and every country has the right of veto – a fact which undermines the rhetoric of democracy that is invariably invoked when the West's treatment of Iraq is questioned.

A contribution here by Noam Chomsky nails the hackneyed lie that the US is punishing a tyrant for crimes against his own people. In fact US aid to Iraq increased after Saddam's gas attacks against the Kurds – possibly because Israel favoured the crushing of Kurdish aspirations for independence in order to prevent the opening of a land corridor between its arch-enemies Syria and Iran. Likewise, the no-fly zone in northern Iraq has little to do with Kurdish human rights: Turkey's frequent aerial bombing raids across the border against Iraq's Kurds are not a violation of the policy in western eyes.

US policymakers admit they are not really concerned about democracy. One former National Security Council official said: "Our policy is to get rid of Saddam, not his regime." Iraq's control of 11% of the world's oil may explain the US's real motives. Chomsky suggests that in an oil glut, it suits the US to keep Iraqi oil off the market. He quotes one US ex-official as saying when the price of oil goes up to $30 a barrel, Saddam Hussein will turn into Mother Teresa. Meanwhile the US continues to bomb – including economic targets such as oil refineries. Washington now admits using UNSCOM personnel to spy and collect data on the whereabouts of these installations for military strikes.

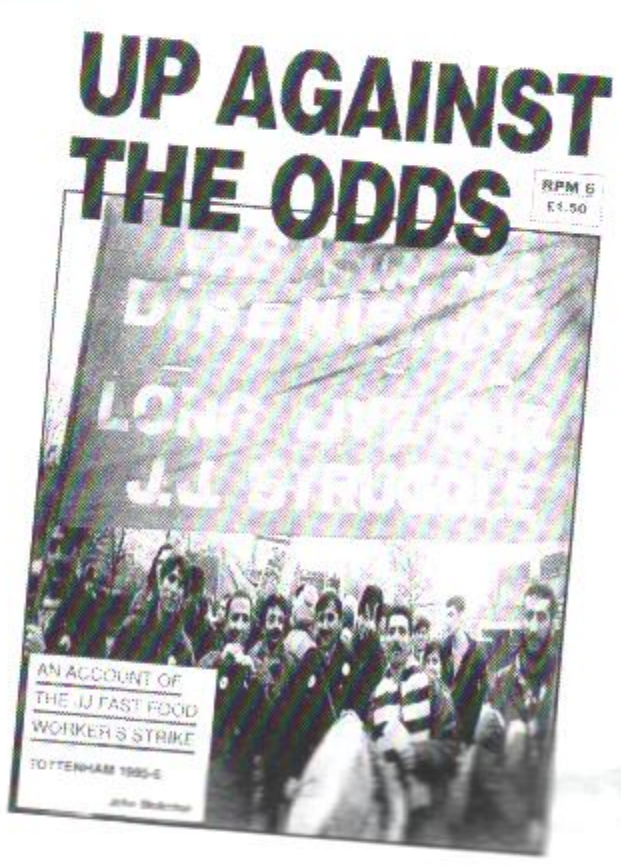
The book concludes with calls for action. An appeal signed by Chomsky, Edward Said, Angela Davis and others declares: "This is not foreign policy – it is state-sanctioned mass murder."

Up against the odds

John Stewart reviews *Up Against the Odds: An Account of the JJ Fast Food Workers Strike* by John McArthur, £1.50 from Revolutions per Minute BCM Box 3328 London WC1N 3XX.

This new pamphlet tells the story of the 45 Turkish and Kurdish workers sacked in October 1995 from JJ Fast Foods Distribution Company in North London after attempting to join the TGWU. It details the ups and downs of their four month dispute, how they held together against attempts to divide them on racial and political lines, the violent attacks on them by both Turkish nationalist groups and the police, and how the strikers eventually fought their former boss to a standstill.

Sharply critical of both the TGWU officials and the intervention of British and Turkish left groups, the pamphlet is an informed account written by a member of the JJ Strike Support Group. With over 50,000 Turkish and Kurdish speaking people in North London working in industries with appalling conditions and no union representation, this pamphlet should help build a greater understanding between migrant workers and activists in the British labour movement. Why not take copies to sell at your union branch?



PERISCOPE

Ayr today, gone tomorrow

The **UK Independence Party** surprised their dwindling band of loyal fans in the Ayr by-election by canvassing in a Citroen – with Irish number plates!

Sectioned

The response to the Keep the Clause freepost campaign in defence of Section 28 in Scotland has been so good that it has had to be withdrawn. Stagecoach multi-millionaire **Brian Souter**, known for once singing the Red Flag at the Scottish TUC, was receiving useful items such as telephone directories so he could phone the public direct and a mattress to rest on between campaign outings. He also received some bricks, which will undoubtedly come in handy for walling himself away from progress.

Reserved seats

The **Scottish Labour Party Conference** saw the usual rows of "reserved seats" which Scottish Parliament members and ministers presumed were set out for them. Nope, these were the seats bought by big business tycoons who had shelled out £250 for the privilege of hearing Tony Blair speak and having breakfast with Donald Dour.

Lord Sawyer of Big Business

Lord Tom Sawyer, former General Secretary of the Labour Party BM (Before Margaret), has appeared in a new, lucrative guise as "Visiting Professor" at Cranfield School of Management. Sawyer has moved from addressing Labour Party Young Socialists' conferences to addressing the business school at the Reform Club on "Politics and Management: The Making of New Labour" – just two weeks after New Labour achieved less than 14% of the vote in the London mayoral election. The finger buffet reception seemed the appropriate place to give comrade – sorry, Lord – Sawyer the finger. And by the way, when did Millbank lose its "Investors in People" award?

Hain past his best?

We are told that one of the few rising stars in the New Labour Government is **Peter Hain**, but do his new-found fans remember his speech to the LSE in 1984? "The judiciary acts as the 'Conservative Party in court' and the next Labour Government must not tolerate this... Ability, youth and radicalism should be the main qualifications for Labour appointments to the bench, not age and conservatism as is now the case." Are you listening, Derry Irvine?

Blunkett attacks leadership in selection row

David Blunkett has come out against the Party leadership interfering in local Party selection contests. He wrote, "It is therefore not only unacceptable but positively damaging to the Labour Party that confidence in both the proper selection procedure and the working of the Party should be undermined by the leadership." He further attacks "gross interference by outside agencies such as the President of the AEEU". Before Ken's mayoral team get too excited, this was in fact a press cutting on the Sheffield selection of 1982.

Sectarian Scargill

A correspondent to the *Independent* wrote, "You quote **Arthur Scargill**: 'I wouldn't support Livingstone if he was running for Mayor of Toytown'. Sorry Dobbo, that is the ultimate commendation. The 'Vote Ken' poster goes up in my window."

Frankly appalling

Millbank's much heralded open-plan office policy has enabled wider sight than first intended of **Dobbo**'s election strategy paper (which of course was not being run by Millbank at all). The so-called elections strategy team rejected a first option to recommend that Labour supporters cast their second preference vote for Norris "to keep Ken out" in favour of the eventual recommendation: to advise Labour supporters not to exercise their second preference at all. This same meeting also decided on the "change 'Dobbo' to 'Frank'" strategy. Oh well, better than organising an office "fantasy pin the tail on the donkey" league.

Byrnt out

Writing to the *Evening Standard*, Colin Byrne of Shandwick Public Affairs, lobbyists to the stars, took up the redhead theme in the mayoral election by reminding Dobbo of one redhead who helped him on his way – **Neil Kinnock**. How sad that Colin, formerly Mandleson's gofer at Walworth Road, took the opportunity to namedrop by describing Kinnock as "your friend and mine". With friends like those, Colin...

Building a mass party?

On the evening of 4th May, Andy Walker went to his local party office to re-join Labour after campaigning for Ken during the mayoral elections. **Chris Robbins**, Labour's GLA candidate, happened to be there.

Instead of welcoming Andy, and his money, back into the Party, Chris said that the Party was not like a "number 8 bus" (you get on and off as you wish). Chris told Andy to "stop wasting his time" and "piss off". Clearly, Chris was under pressure on that evening, but perhaps it was just as well he lost, as if elected he would have had more difficult situations to cope with than people wanting to give him money. *Periscope* would be delighted to hear of any other examples of the New Labour method for unifying the Party.

No more Mr Nice Guy

Rodney Bickerstaffe made his farewell speech to the Forum (annual conference) of the UNISON Affiliated Political Fund (APF) in Bournemouth on 16th May. Discarding his "good bloke" persona, he brandished a copy of Trotsky's pamphlet *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International* and asked "are there any Trots here?" (muffled cries of "Yes" were heard).

He then read out the passage about union officials ("careerists and timeservers") and said this exemplified what he was against. This went down well with an audience in which careerists and timeservers were overrepresented and where most of the rest hadn't the faintest idea what he was on about – apart from the obvious implication that being a Trot was a Bad Thing.

The actual message throughout the Forum was that the Government has done some good things and, unlike the previous administration, was in dialogue with the unions – but that it still needed to be put straight about things it had got wrong like PFI/PPP, the level of the minimum wage and the underfunding of public services. So it was bizarre to see a normally moderate union general secretary behaving like an amateur witch-hunter. The normal trend is for retired labour movement leaders to rediscover their socialist consciences: Rodney seems to be travelling in the opposite direction. We can only hope he feels better soon.

Correspondence

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

Nick Long's letter (*LLB*, May 2000) was just the latest in a long line of Labour left obituaries which seem to have been written on a regular basis from 1983 onwards. Like all its predecessors, it suffers from one slight flaw – namely that the subject to which it refers is still alive and kicking!

Contary to his assertion, my relationship with the Labour Party could hardly be described as "till death us do part" – especially given my involvement with this publication. Nevertheless, given the continued absence of a viable alternative (as the results of the elections on 4th May illustrated in fairly graphic terms), Labour remains the most likely vehicle for social change, and continues to retain the allegiances of the vast majority of working-class voters and activists alike. In these circumstances, therefore, to write off the Party is to write off the class.

Nick cites examples of union branches in London, Scotland and elsewhere seeking to give support for socialist alternatives. Yet any serious current study of the trade union movement would conclude it is every much as beset by the dead hands of bureaucracy and careerism as the Labour Party. The struggles in both wings of the movement go hand in hand. Attempts to opt out of either are not only a mistake, but serve to weaken the forces of resistance to the onslaught of New Labour and its big business allies.

Finally, as I predicted in a recent issue of *LLB*, the Tories have exploited Millbank's many misjudgments to stage a resurgence of support. If, as Nick acknowledges, the forthcoming general election could be a close run thing, does he really suggest socialists can remain neutral in the battle with Hague, Widdecombe and Portillo?

Colin Hall
Chair, Leicester East CLP

Surely there is an alternative to re-admitting Ken Livingstone and hoping that the Labour AMs and the Labour Government can work with him, on the one hand, and opposing him at the next mayoral election, getting stuffed (again), and then finding it harder to work with him afterwards, on the other hand ("the cost of Livingstone…" etc). Call it a "Third Way", if you must.

Livingstone stands as an independent, but with Labour Party support, and no Labour candidate standing against him.

This, after all, is what we did in Tatton at the last General Election. Peter Mandelson actually claimed it was his idea, but don't let that put you off. Anyway, it wasn't, as it was what the Irish Labour Party (and the Workers' Party) had already done in 1990 when they supported Mary Robinson as Irish President. Mary Robinson was a former (unsuccessful) Labour candidate, but had left the Irish Labour Party five years before. Both were successful.

Of course, ultimately it should be up to the London Labour Party members who our candidate should be. But supporting an independent candidate should certainly be an option on the ballot. If that option wins, we back Ken and don't have a Labour candidate, as such. If someone else wins, they are our candidate.

I am not suggesting that we should always consider supporting an independent. I am generally against it. But these are unusual circumstances, and this might be the best way.

John Morgan
Carshalton

The reporting of the International Women's Day events by Ana Lopes and Edwin Savage is misleading (*LLB*, April 2000).

The Global Women's Strike was called by the International Wages for Housework Campaign (WFH) after women in Ireland called a national strike. Women in 62 countries took part – from housewives in Argentina to students and cleaners in Spain, rural women in Ghana, India and the Philippines, and domestic workers in Peru – demanding that all women's work, starting with unwaged caring work and other unrecognised work, be valued.

In London, the strike was launched at 11am by Soho sex workers with the English Collective of Prostitutes. Its central event in Islington was attended by over 400 women from all walks of life. The article reports correctly that "masked prostitutes took to the streets in protest against a so-called 'clean-up' by Westminster council which wants to evict them."

The march through Soho and following press conference, got wide national and international coverage. Although one article was drenched in "schoolboy sniggering", all reporting was sympathetic and supported women's right to live and work in Soho. We are continuing our mobilisation against Westminster's sexist discrimination.

We asked Ms Lopes, who attended one of our weekly strike meetings, whether her samba band would support the strike. She said that the band was made up of anthropology students and they were only interested in getting sex workers to their Carnival.

Contrary to your report, the Carnival was not part of the strike. The banners "Soho on Strike" and "Justice for sex workers" were displayed at the march in the morning, not at the Carnival in the evening. By conflating the two events, Ms Lopes uses the strike in which prostitute women played a major part, to give credibility to her unrelated event. The "objects" of her anthropology studies have a word for this – pimping.

To continue the pressure for the strike demands and to prepare for an even bigger strike in 2001, WFH holds a weekly protest picket, the Women's Wednesdays in Whitehall, opposite Downing Street 1-2 pm. All are welcome.

Power to the sisters.

Cari Mitchell
English Collective of Prostitutes

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

"Other products call themselves 'New' to boost flagging sales but they don't announce that the old product was crap. Labour's management does."
Austin Mitchell MP, *Tribune*, 5th May 2000.

"'New' Labour is seen as a sect so twisty it cannot even lie straight... Livingstone may be a lying, cynical calculating bastard. What politician is not? But he is our lying, cynical calculating bastard. And now he's London's too."
Gloria Das, *Tribune*, 5th May 2000.

"'This has been a disaster for William Hague,' ran an email from Millbank to Labour MPs after the local and London elections. This magnificently on-message message was greeted with hilarity by almost everyone who received it. But it's a sign of terminal decadence in any institution, I suspect, when instead of just lying to us – we expect that – they think they can get away with lying to themselves."
Simon Hoggart, the *Guardian*, 13th May 2000.



THE LIZ DAVIES COLUMN

When Burnley Trades Council invited me to speak at their annual May Day festival, I was honoured and immediately accepted. My mother had been brought up in Burnley, I used to visit my grandmother there, and my aunt still lives there.

It was an eerie experience speaking in Townley Park, where I played as a child. Burnley has always been a Labour town, and my family was part of the local labour movement. My grandfather was a member of the NUM and the Labour Party. A cousin had spent many years as a Labour councillor and served as Mayor. They used to say that Labour could put up a donkey for election and still win.

Today the town is a casualty of the long decline of manufacturing industry. There are no large employers left. Unemployment is high. Young people move away. The housing problem here is an abundance of empty properties of little market value and no people to live in them. There is a substantial Asian population, recruited in the 1970s to work in the textile industry, now hit by unemployment and poverty just as much as the white community. The BNP regard the town as fertile recruiting ground and were standing two candidates in the local elections.

Thinking through ideas for my speech, I was conscious that I had been invited because I was a critic of New Labour, but also that the Party was in the middle of an election campaign. I was worried that the strong criticisms of New Labour that I felt bound to make – especially on May Day – would upset traditional Labour voters facing a test at the polls.

I shouldn't have worried. The audience was in no mood for soft soap about New Labour's record in office. The two biggest cheers came when the Chair (the local GMB convenor) announced that the police had had to close Parliament Square because of the size of the anti-capitalist demonstration and when Gordon Prentice MP (from Pendle, an adjacent constituency) said that he would vote against the privatisation of air traffic control.

'The New Labour project is cracking apart. The spontaneous election campaign strike of Party members across London and nationally has shaken Millbank. So have the appalling results.'

Peter Pike, MP for Burnley, gave a rather defensive speech encouraging people to vote Labour, but acknowledging the disappointment felt by many Labour members and voters. Bruce Kent said that a government had to be judged by how it treated the poor and the vulnerable, and on that score New Labour had failed the test. I got a cheer when I attacked the Government's treatment of asylum-seekers and called for the defeat of the BNP.

Talking to Party members at the event, it was hard to find anyone who was not positively incensed by the Government's performance on pensions, benefits, public spending, the NHS, foreign policy, Ken Livingstone, etc. One long-standing Party member, himself dependent on incapacity benefit, was so alienated that he was breaking the habit of a lifetime and voting Liberal.

On 4th May, Labour lost control of Burnley Council. It was one defeat among many, in all regions of the country.

At the National Executive Committee, I listen to the Prime Minister warn us that Labour should not fall into the trap of counterposing "the Labour heartlands" to "Middle England". He tells us that what's good for Middle England is also good for the heartlands. He fails to understand – or simply doesn't care – that Labour's heartlands have simply not felt the benefit of a Labour Government. Nobody expected miracles, but after eighteen years of the Tories, they hoped for some redistribution of wealth and some improvement in public services. Instead, they see the gap between rich and poor widening and essential services disintegrating.

The New Labour project is cracking apart. The spontaneous election campaign strike of Party members across London and nationally has shaken Millbank. So have the appalling results. Labour voters are staying at home or voting for alternatives. From the spin emanating from Downing Street and Millbank, it seems that New Labour has understood that Labour voters are disappointed, and that there is now a real threat to Labour at the ballot box. But they still seem to think this is a matter of presentation, not policy. New Labour remains ideologically committed to promoting big business – hence the privatisation of air traffic control – and to a conservative social policy focused on a variety of scapegoats (lone parents, criminal youth, asylum seekers).

People are not stupid. They know that a 75p per week increase in the state pension – less than one per cent – is an insult, and no amount of spin can alter that. Either the Government changes direction (and fast), or the Party faces further defeats at the ballot-box and further alienation among members and voters.

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