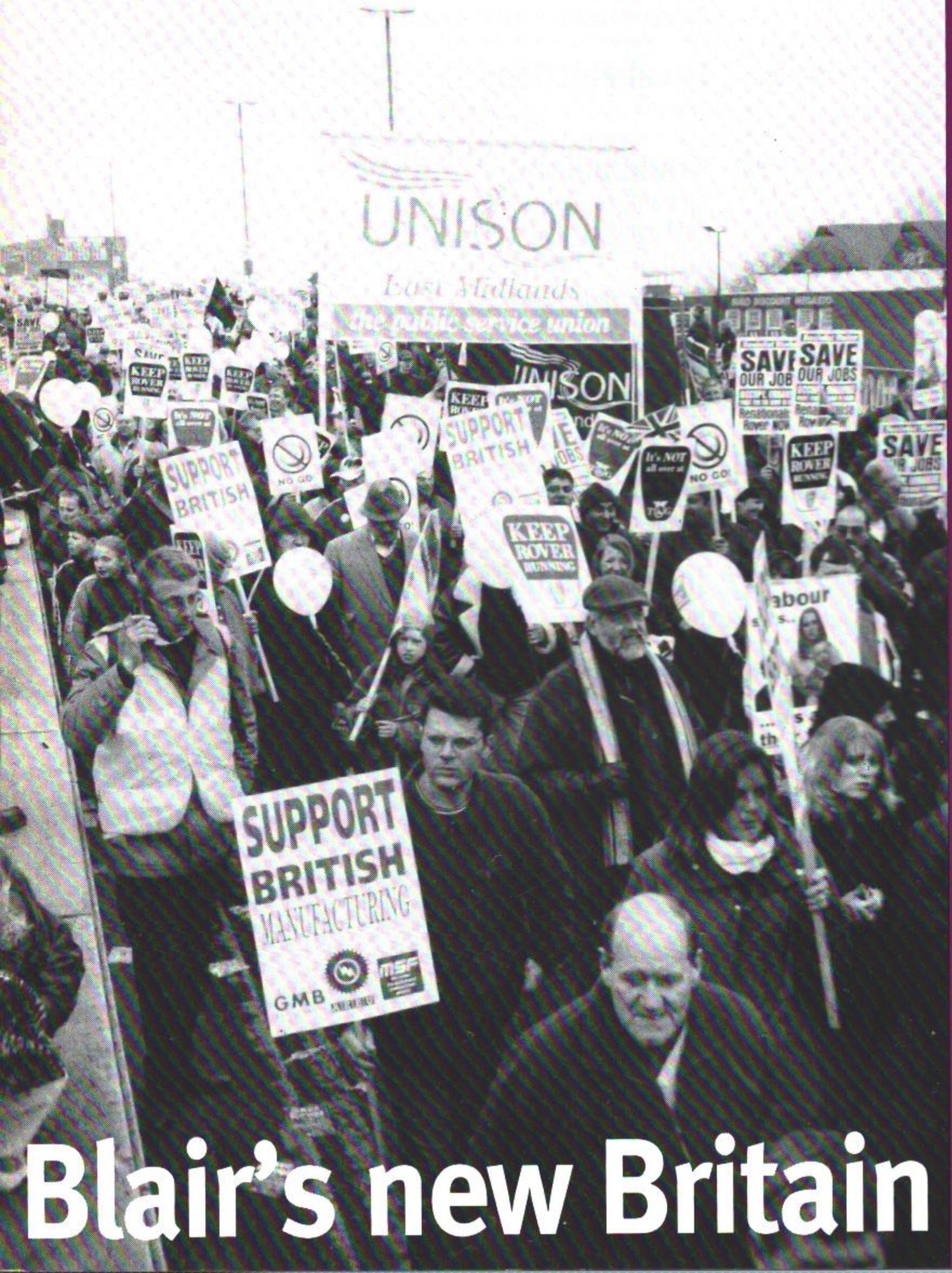
LABOUR LEFT

Briefing

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Blair's new Britain

ROVER

The case for public ownership

LOCAL ELECTIONS

The left and the Labour Party

FIGHTING RACISM

Romany refugees

LABOUR PARTY

NEC elections

TRADE UNIONS

Teachers' pay

LABOUR LEFT Briefing

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

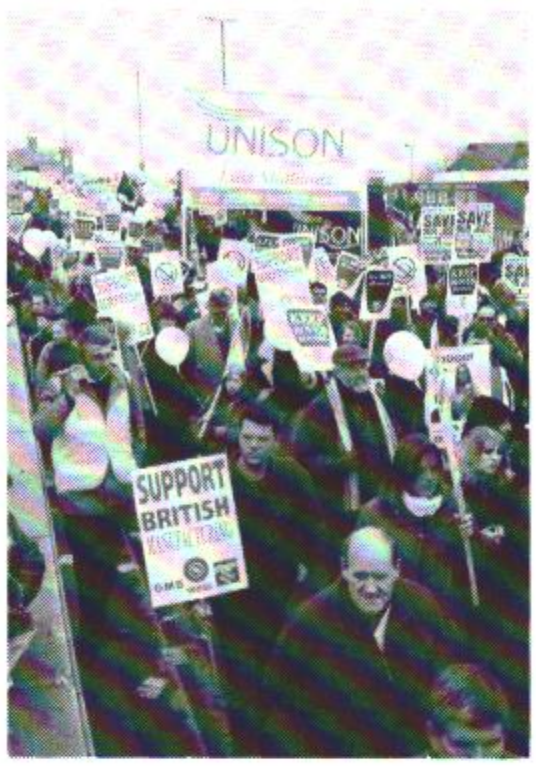
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May 2000

Photo: Dave Statham

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EDITORIAL

Is this why we elected a Labour Government?

Since Gordon Brown's budget, the press has been full of carefully planted stories praising the Chancellor for putting money into education and health and for targeting resources towards the poorest and most needy. The political implications have now begun to sink in. Local education and health authorities have been bypassed with money going direct to schools, hospitals and GPs. This speaks volumes for the contempt New Labour has for any form of local democracy. Worse still, the extra provision for the NHS was tied to Blair taking charge of yet more NHS "efficiency" reforms.

The election of a Labour Government three years ago produced a massive wave of expectation that at long last we had a Government that would do something about our disintegrating public sector, the rotting infrastructure in transport, housing and the disappearing manufacturing sector – as well as reversing the loss of local democratic structures. These expectations have been crushed.

The NHS has continued to lurch from crisis to crisis, with a predictable winter flu epidemic causing almost terminal overload. The education system is in such crisis – turning somersaults to meet new targets and procedures, undermined by local PFI deals and LEA-wide privatisation – that the teaching profession is falling over itself to take early retirement.

And now the Government is allowing key parts of the manufacturing sector to disappear – a helpless bystander as Rover disintegrates, with the threat of more to come at Fords of Dagenham. It has peddled the neo-Liberal myth of its Tory predecessors that governments cannot intervene. So much for Blair's New Britain.

More attacks on jobs, industry and the public sector will follow shortly with the Government's proposals to privatise London's Tube and air traffic control and further private finance initiatives to build hospitals. Yet it still sits on a huge war chest of unspent public money – an affront to all those in greatest need. Like the Tories before them, New Labour is stuck in the gridlock of the Maastricht criteria for a Single Currency – hammering down public spending and social provision while refusing even to consider any extension of public ownership.

Perhaps the very worst from this Government has been the attacks on asylum seekers – restrictions, dispersal, food vouchers – so bad that even Bill Morris, one of its most loyal supporters in the trade union movement, has been moved to condemn it in the most eloquent terms.

Was it for this that we elected a Labour Government? The experience of the last three years has not only eaten away at Labour's core support among the voters, membership of the Labour Party itself is plummeting and one in three constituency parties will not be sending delegates to the charade of Annual Conference this year. How many Party members are canvassing for Labour candidates in the forthcoming local elections?

We have repeatedly argued that New Labour's takeover of the Labour Party has increasingly disenfranchised the labour movement – no longer represented by any of the major parties. The results, potentially devastating for Labour, in the local and especially London elections, will be ample testimony to this. The problem for socialists and labour movement activists is how to resolve this historic crisis of representation.

An historic victory

The political landscape will never be quite the same after May 4th. Ken Livingstone's election as London Mayor will be an historic victory for all those fighting to uphold traditional Labour values and policies and will be a devastating humiliation for New Labour.

This will be a victory for the labour movement and indeed for the majority of the members of the Labour Party itself. For them Ken *is* the Labour candidate – while Dobson is the candidate only of the New Labour tendency, of the control freaks out of control and increasingly out of touch with Labour's core support.

Ken's campaign was a bizarre mixture of the absurd (revolving deputy mayors to include Tories and Liberals and Stephen Norris in charge of London's transport) and the principled (opposition to Tube privatisation, defence of the Irish people and of lesbians and gay men and opposition to capitalism itself). Whatever the weaknesses of the campaign and whatever the limitations of his powers, Ken's election can begin to transform the balance of power in the labour movement in London and beyond. It will be a victory and an opportunity for all of us.

Pensions – restore the link to earnings

Ken Savage, General Secretary Greater London Pensioners Association

We in the pensioners' movement were not overjoyed by Gordon Brown's budget offerings. We had little confidence in this New Labour Government which had offered us a mere 75p per week annual increase – so it was little surprise when Brown's fourth budget proved little different from his previous three and from those of the previous Tory Government.

Fringe benefits, such as an additional £50 cold weather payment for each pensioner household, are welcome but the central problem remains. The basic retirement pension of £67 per week is too low for a fuller life for those in retirement, and in real terms will continue to fall annually so long as it is up-rated each year in line with prices. In 1982, the basic pension was 22.7% of average earnings. Today it has fallen to 15%. It is because of this annual decline that the central demand of the National Pensioners' Movement has to be for the restoration of the pension link to earnings.

Before the General Election we were promised our rightful share of the country's growing resources. This promise has been denied us as our share of the country's wealth is getting smaller each year, while the share of the rich is growing daily.

Means-testing, dating back to the dark days of the soup kitchen and the workhouse is a costly administrative exercise that should be abolished. Pensions should be at a level for all, to enable those in retirement to live in comfort without the indignity of the means test, able to pay their own fuel bills. As a 74 year old woman said on Radio 5 after the budget: "I have paid National Insurance contributions since the 1940s. I am not asking for handouts, I simply want my money back." She spoke for all pensioners; we do not want one off yearly hand outs We demand what is ours by right. The NHS is of equal concern for the older person. Health and community care does not measure up to the needs of pensioners or the disabled.

During the 18 years of Tory governments the social welfare of those most in need was continually cut in the run down of the welfare state – a deliberate cutback on public spending in an exercise of wealth redistribution from the poor and vulnerable to the rich. We had looked and hoped for change in May I997. Four New Labour Government budgets have offered nothing of substance for pensioners.

Government policies are continuing to make life stressful and difficult for the vast majority of those in retirement. They will find it difficult to vote with any conviction at the next general election for policies that are against their interests.

Pensioners must let their MPs know that penny pinching hand outs and a 75p pension increase is too cheap a price to pay for the vote of the generation who gave a life's work to building the economic foundation of this country. Pensioners demand their right to an immediate and substantial increase in the basic pension, together with the restoration of the pension-earnings link. To those of us – termed in the l920s and '30s "the lower orders" – budgets offer nothing of substance and they never have. In millionaires' Britain you will only get what you are prepared to stand up and fight for.

Remember May 5th, 1994!

Six years since the BNP councillor,
voted in by disillusioned Labour voters,
was voted out again.

Don't take the Labour vote for granted!

Poplar and Canning Town
LLB Readers

Greetings to all your readers on May Day from

Ian and Hazel Malcolm-Walker
Joint Chair and Assistant Secretary
Labour Party Disabled Members Group
(in their personal capacities)
01332-370223

MAYDAY! MAYDAY!

Calling all life forms!

RECLAIM THE STREETS assembles on May Day at 11.00 am in Parliament Square for a mass "Guerrilla Gardening" action
Armed with trowels, seeds and imagination, the idea is to garden everywhere and anywhere, reclaiming land which was once ours.
This May Day action is just one of many taking place in London, around the UK and across the planet. Other London events include a three day anti-capitalist conference, City-wide autonomous actions and a very big surprise for the Millennium Dome!

ESCORT THE MAYPOLE!
RESISTANCE IS FERTILE!

Brent Moles for Ken send May Day Greetings to all *LLB* Readers

In a rich man's world

LLB editor David Nicholson has an alternative view of the budget and some suggestions for the fiscally-retentive Chancellor.

The latest budget from the newly self-styled re-distributive Chancellor Gordon Brown has been met with a mixture of confusion, delight and pleas that he must do more from some on the left.

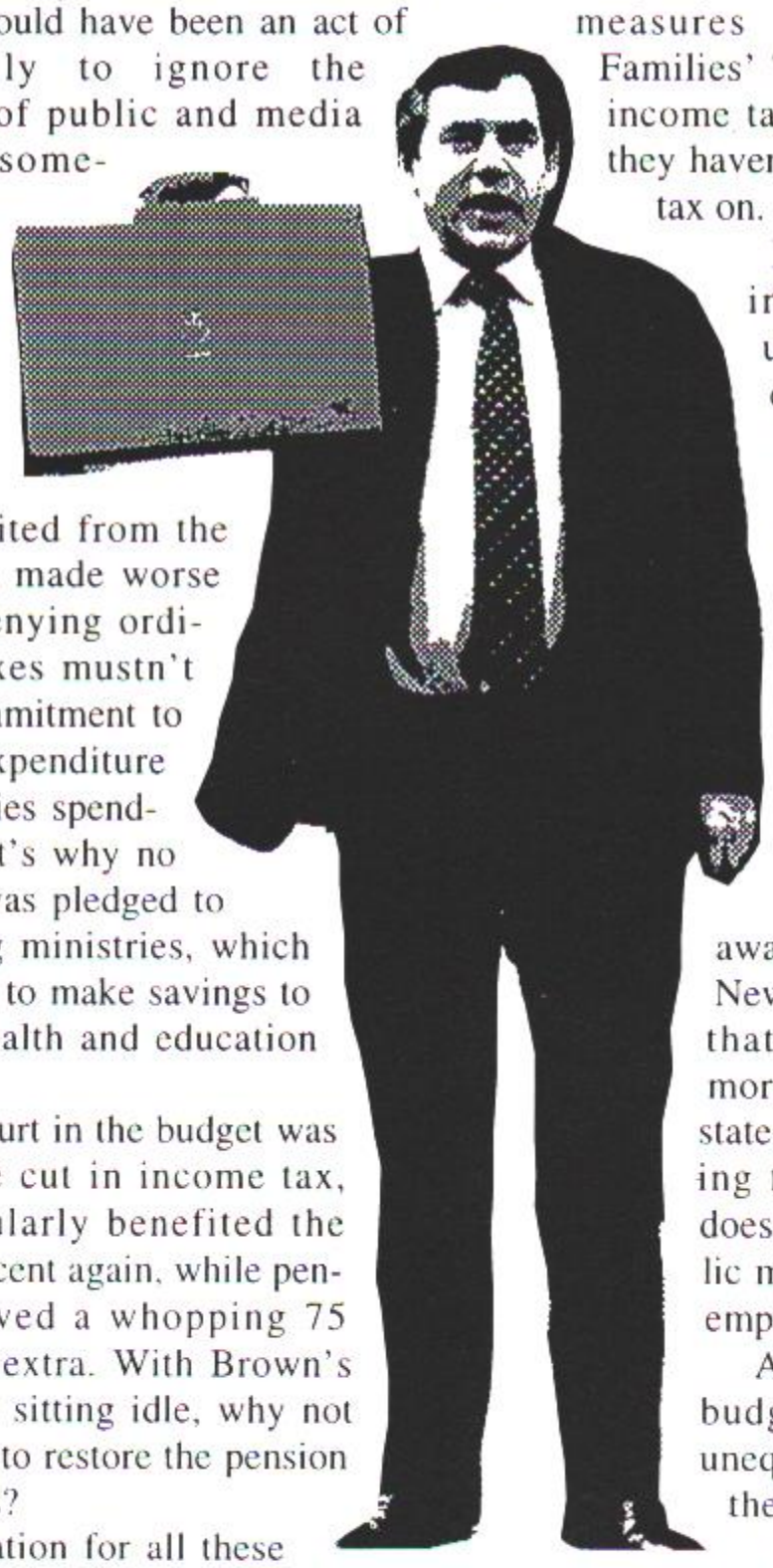
Of course, extra money for the health service and education must be welcomed. It would be a mistake to do otherwise. But in looking favourably at the extra money we must not make the mistake of doing so in an uncritical way.

The reality is that the extra NHS money is already beginning to look paltry as we find out that almost three-quarters of a billion pounds could disappear in a sea of litigation. Health Secretary Alan Milburn has also hinted to the Royal College of Nursing's recent conference that something must be done about the plight of the elderly in care and nursing homes. But to return to the principle that health care is free at the point of delivery for the elderly would cost a cool one billion each year.

That extra spending commitment is already beginning to look a bit mean now isn't it? And that's before the crisis in recruitment and retention of nurses and the poverty wages of ancillary workers in the health service are dealt with.

Also, we mustn't ignore the political cost of these two spending pledges. A large part of the education money is to go direct to schools, bypassing local education authorities and further undermining local democracy. Similarly, Labour has said some of the extra NHS money should go straight to doctors, not via health authorities. Blair has also pledged to oversee yet further bureaucratic changes in NHS structures.

A general election is close at hand and Blair, like the rest of the Labour movement, wants to see Labour re-elected for a second term of office. But the two great issues of concern to a worried electorate are – surprise, surprise – the disrepair of the National Health Service and the decaying and embattled education system. To ignore the self-made crisis in the two key areas of Blair's 1997 election campaign would have been suicidal. With a burgeoning surplus in the chancellor's war chest it would have been an act of political folly to ignore the groundswell of public and media clamour for something to be done about the NHS and education.



But, make no mistake, the crisis was not just inherited from the Tories. It was made worse by the self-denying ordinance that taxes mustn't rise and a commitment to keep public expenditure within the Tories spending plans. That's why no extra money was pledged to other spending ministries, which may well have to make savings to pay for the health and education increases.

What also hurt in the budget was the one pence cut in income tax, which particularly benefited the richest ten per cent again, while pensioners received a whopping 75 pence a week extra. With Brown's budget surplus sitting idle, why not use the budget to restore the pension link to earnings?

The explanation for all these problems is that despite New Labour's obfuscation about Britain's entry to the euro – Brown has repeatedly said that the economic tests set by Labour have to be met before there will be a referendum. By stealth the Maastricht convergence criteria are in reality already being applied.

That self-imposed straitjacket on spending and borrowing means that Brown's budget did nothing to stem the loss of British manufacturing jobs. As jobs disappear from manufacturing and banking, the public knows that the Government is sitting on a huge budget surplus that it could use to help modernise British manufacturing. For workers at Longbridge, and all those dependent on Rover, whose jobs will also be lost if the car company falls, the tinkering with measures like the Working Families' Tax Credit, and falling income tax, will be worthless if they haven't got an income to pay tax on.

Instead of fiscal tinkering Brown could have used the tax system to encourage and reward long term investment and penalise short term, profit-obsessed share dealings that destabilise companies into shedding jobs to pay out excessive share dividends.

Why not increase the minimum wage to take working people away from state benefits? If New Labour really believes that the private sector is more efficient and that the state shouldn't bail out failing firms like Rover, why does it persist in using public money to subsidise those employers that pay so little?

Above all, this was a budget that continued the unequal divide in wealth in the country, which is not disguised by throwing highly conditioned money at the NHS and education. If this was New Labour setting its stall for the next election, then, to paraphrase Neil Kinnock, just who will help the elderly, the poor, the sick, the unemployed and the socially dispossessed?

Discrimination is a labour movement issue

Peter Purton
Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights

Lesbian and gay rights issues – the age of consent and Section 28 – have been in the headlines. Baroness Young marshalled the House of Lords bigots – not just Tories – William Hague has abandoned his veneer of liberalism and Robert Mugabe condemned the British Government as overrun by homosexuals. If only. The Government's record on equality is less than glorious and the crucial legal objective – banning discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation – needs the active involvement of the labour movement.

Ministers have fudged equality commitments secured at Labour Party conferences in the 1980s and 1990s. No one doubts their personal commitment, but the hard fight over the age of consent was because of a deal to prevent the European Court ruling against Britain. New Labour's removal of section 28 includes an unnecessary and potentially dangerous "abuse of trust" clause, potentially criminalising teachers and carers whose conduct is already ruled by professional codes.

Section 28 is being replaced by school guidelines, even though Section 28 does not apply in schools. By introducing the measure in the Lords, the Government cannot invoke the Parliament Act if the new intake of peers is not sufficient to overturn the built-in homophobic majority.

This simultaneously giving and taking away applies in the vital area of anti-discrimination law. In 1999, the TUC and the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights (LCLGR) initiated a campaign to secure such legislation, along the lines of the sex, race and disability discrimination laws. Stonewall and other lesbian, gay and bisexual organisations joined in. One hundred and fifty people, mainly trade unionists, attended a campaign conference in May. Ann Keen MP spoke from the platform and many Labour MPs sent their support.

In response, ministers stated their opposition to discrimination. But instead of a law, they are preparing a voluntary code of practice. Past history shows such measures to be useless but they are worried about the "burden on business".

Massive evidence of discrimination has been presented to the Government. Appalling harassment and abuse leading to breakdowns and people losing jobs and livelihoods are everyday experience for many lesbians, gays and bisexuals. Without legal protection, there is nowhere for them to turn. There has been significant progress with many employers, often secured by unions, but most do not include sexual orientation in their policies, and it is here that a voluntary code will be pointless.

The Government is short-sighted. The European draft directive implementing article 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty is being expedited through the institutions. Although nothing is guaranteed, it is likely that EU states will be required to add sexual orientation to their anti-discrimination laws. The Government supports the directive. In October, the Human Rights Act comes into effect. There will be a rush of cases, including many trying to extend lesbian and gay rights to equal treatment. Why not just bring in an anti-discrimination law?

The LCLGR is pushing for this commitment. Inside the Party, representations have been made to the Democracy and Citizenship policy commission for its inclusion. When their report comes to Party Conference, delegates must stand up on this issue if it has been excluded. The TUC has launched a major publicity drive and wants to "mainstream" the issue in the labour movement while deepening the alliance with the lesbian, gay and bisexual community through a focused involvement in Lesbian and Gay Pride, locally and in London.

For too long, lesbian and gay equality has been left to the community. Heterosexuals, including socialists, have been consistently reluctant to lend an active support. On this issue the door is not just ajar, it is wide open. The Government has no hiding place. With the leading part being played by the TUC, the alliance is already broad. Unions have recognised the potential for recruitment in the community. Socialists, for the most part, have yet to show a willingness to play an active role, while respecting the right of lesbians and gays to lead our own struggle. This campaign is happening now. Help us win it!

- LCLGR is an organisation for lesbians, gays and bisexuals in the labour movement. Full membership is available to lesbians, gay men and bisexuals for £15 waged/£8 low-waged/£3 unwaged; labour movement organisations are welcome to affiliate: £15 for CLP or Trades Council, £5 for branch. Contact LCLGR c/o PO Box 306, London N5. Keep up to date with the anti-discrimination law campaign by visiting the campaigns pages of the TUC website: www.tuc.org.uk

May Day Greetings



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Trade union and campaign banners

Rover – a fight to the death

The only way to rescue the British car industry is by nationalisation, argues Alan Thornett.

A great demonstration – but will it be the start of a fightback? A magnificent 80,000 people demonstrated in Birmingham on April 1st against BMWs plan to sell-off and break-up Rover and close most of Longbridge. It was the biggest trade union demonstration in Britain since the closure of most of the coal industry in 1992.

The tens of thousands of working class families on it – many of them Rover workers – were looking for a militant lead to defend the 50,000 West Midlands jobs at risk, with more at stake in Swindon and Cowley. Unfortunately they got nothing from the trade union dignitaries on the platform – Bill Morris, John Edmonds, Sir Ken Jackson, Roger Lyons and Tony Woodley.

The only speaker who called for direct action – to stop the Mini leaving the factory – got a huge response. He was not a trade union leader but a local historian who had been a prime mover of the demonstration. The others were booed by furious Rover workers who demanded to know what they were going to do. There is now a real danger that the demonstration will be the end of resistance rather than the beginning.

BMW is handing over the Longbridge plant to Alchemy – a firm of unashamed asset-strippers – free of charge and with a cash sweetener of £500 million.

Under the plan, Longbridge will be reduced to a small specialist plant making MG sports cars. The new Mini, the factory for which has already been built at Longbridge, will be moved to Cowley. BMW will sell the Land Rover factory in Solihull to Ford, and keep the Cowley plant to produce the existing Rover 75 model under licence from Alchemy.

Many on the demonstration were calling for the occupation of Longbridge, the only realistic alternative given the large stock of unsold cars. Occupation would stop the plan being implemented and give other threatened car workers a focus to support. It would also provide the basis for an appeal to the BMW unions internationally. After all if BMW can do this to Longbridge, why not Munich?

But it was not just that the trade union leaders had nothing to say. They have supported social partnership in Rover and pushed through the concession bargaining deal in Longbridge. This gave productivity concessions and accepted unsociable shifts in return for guarantees for the future.

At that time, the Government gave BMW £125 million to bail them out. Rover-BMW chair Joachim Milberg said that Longbridge would double its capacity as a result. Stephen Byers declared "I wanted the Longbridge agreement to be one which heralded a new approach to government assistance to industry – a new approach which reflects a long term commitment and not a quick fix."

AEEU leader Sir Ken Jackson claimed the package "heralds a new era."

Tony Woodley was far more cautious, however, saying: "My problems as chief negotiator are far from over – they are only beginning." He had, of course, played a key role in getting the deal through.

The deal compounded the problem by increasing productivity and production capacity and therefore increasing the problem of overcapacity in the industry.

When BMW took over from BAe they said that they needed Rover for economy of scale to ensure the company could survive. If BMW cannot be forced to put a new model into Longbridge, then the campaign for nationalisation must be vigorously pursued and the asset strippers stopped.

But the crisis goes wider than Rover. Ford at Dagenham, which is being run down to a single model single-shift plant, with the existing 10,000 jobs set to be cut by a third, is under serious threat

Last month, Ford announced a sweeping review of its European operations, aimed at cutting overall capacity and Ford of Europe chairman Nick Scheele warned: "I can't guarantee the Dagenham plant won't shut."

And the future of Rolls-Royce is also in the balance. Goodyear tyres in Wolverhampton went on short time last week and management refused to give any assurances for its future. This follows cutbacks and redundancies at other tyre plants in the Midlands.

Potentially this adds up to the greatest blow to manufacturing jobs in Britain since the 1992 pit closures.

BMW is blaming the strength of the pound against the euro for the situation, which clearly is a problem. But there is another agenda. Most of manufacturing industry – as opposed to finance capital – have been keen to get into the eurozone as soon as possible. They thought this would happen soon after the next election, following a referendum.

But the anti-Europe xenophobia whipped up mostly around asylum seekers, with the full support of the Government itself, has increased reactionary opposition to the euro – to a point where no one knows when Britain is likely to join.

Most manufacturing companies either want to concentrate their production outside of Europe altogether – taking advantage of the highest levels of productivity available globally – or they want to be inside the euro zone and avoid currency fluctuations within their main market.

The European Union has resulted in attacks on jobs and services and the Single Currency will deepen this process of rationalisation still further. But currently much of manufacturing industry within Britain sees itself in the worst possible position – inside the EU but outside the Euro.

EU membership has consequences for nationalisation as well. It is permissible to nationalise but not for the Government to put into these companies the money necessary to regenerate them.

We have to demand that the Government nationalises Rover and rejects any restrictions placed on it by the EU.

Don't leave the Party this way

Lachlan Stewart (Hackney North and Stoke Newington CLP) calls on Party members to keep the faith.

Ken Livingstone's decision to stand as an independent candidate has whetted the appetite for all of us who want to see some checks placed on this arrogant and over-centralised Government. A rare victory for the left and the remaining Party democrats should not be sniffed at but, even if Ken himself has stepped outside the Party to do it, this is not an excuse for us to throw in the towel and desert the Labour Party for the London Socialist Alliance. Ken got an overwhelming majority of party votes to justify his decision – the LSA has no such mandate.

The arguments about why socialists should stay in the Labour Party have not changed since the publication of *Briefing*'s booklet of that title produced before the 1992 general election. The Labour Party was in an even worse state then – with Neil Kinnock in charge – than it is now. Admittedly, the experience of government has illustrated exactly how far the Party has been regained by its right wing, but it still retains its essential socialist base.

The link with the unions remains strong – especially outside London. The oppressed and the exploited still vote for and expect much of Labour, albeit with heavy and disappointed hearts. The hard-won right to deselect errant MPs and widen the franchise to elect the Party Leader has been consolidated, albeit with an ever-increasing mechanistic difficulty. The policy forums? Well, the truth is that conference was never really a democratic decision-making body, comrades, was it?

Those who leave the Party will be, as they always have been before, in the minority. Those of us that stay will be weakened by yet more defections, but will also have real cause for hope. The tight grip on the Party by those who prefer spin to principles is finally loosening, as the rigours of government have tested the right and the soft left as much as they have us.

The Scottish and Welsh election results have provided quiet dissenters with the opportunity, one by one, to emerge from the woodwork, while the general distaste for the obnoxious children that run Millbank is becoming universal – support for the Grassroots Alliance is testament to that.

Now, in London, voters can vote safely for a Labour-identified candidate who will not be a loyal lapdog – and they'll back Ken in droves. As a result, the deselection, by vetting panel, of popular Campaign Group MPs is probably off the agenda, at least for now. This is not a resurgence of the left – merely an advance by a very broad coalition, but opportunities for the left in the Party are, at last, arising.

But for the LSA? I think not. I doubt that it is the vehicle for a mass campaigning upsurge. No doubt, with Ken standing it will pick up more votes, on a higher turnout, than otherwise. But it is still already doomed to be a spent force. Its adopted 'leader' has disowned it, it will not win a single Assembly seat – but will likely lose all of its deposits and hand the potential Green seat to a Tory or a Liberal – and it is riddled with the potential for factional infighting.

The most likely scenario is its disintegration into its 57 varieties shortly after the election campaign ends and the recriminations begin. The LSA is not a venture for any serious socialist with a long-term view of political developments.

But it will, of course, be tough to argue for a Labour vote. I have no counter-argument when faced with the cases of asylum seekers, lone parents, Longbridge workers or, indeed, expelled left activists. Yet despite this Government's numerous appalling acts, it's not the new Tory Party, and it's facile to claim that it is so.

Check out, for example, the recent budget, the minimum wage, the extension of early years places, the removal of most hereditary peers, the extra cash for education, the working families tax credit, or the pensioners' fuel allowance. These are not enough, but they are definite improvements. In the coming election, the Labour left will and should do what it has always done – call and argue for a Labour vote (even if it is, again, through gritted teeth). Ken Livingstone is himself doing that much.

Personally, the struggle with my conscience will begin only on election day. With the individual names of Assembly candidates in front of me, I'll face a tough decision and I'll be in that polling booth for quite a while. But then again, it's a secret ballot isn't it?



Photo: Jess Hurd

LSA protesters gatecrash the Labour Party's £600 per head lavish dinner by offering an alternative six pence bowl of lentil and rosemary soup.

Fighting New Labour in Leeds

Lee Montgomerie reports on local election shenanigans in Leeds.

Leeds Left Alliance is contesting ten council seats and a ward by-election in inner Leeds, standing on what they describe as a real Labour ticket of free education, integrated transport, a healthy environment and a decent minimum wage.

Many of those standing were Labour Party stalwarts until machinations by the hierarchy either forced them out or disillusioned them to the extent that they left. "They're as bad as the Tories," is a much-expressed sentiment.

Most prominent among the candidates is Garth Frankland, who spent 19 years as a Labour councillor for Chapel Allerton and emerged unscathed from a Labour Party witchhunt, only to resign last year in disgust at the continuing erosion of internal Labour Party democracy. He joined the Green/Independent group on Leeds City Council.

Garth has recovered from a stroke he suffered at Christmas. His team have been knocking on every door in the neglected Chapeltown district, conscious that by raising the profile of the campaign, he is increasing the turnout and therefore maximising his personal vote. Despite Labour expectations of an automatic high vote, Garth has found a surge of support in an electorate conscious of the political parallels with the London mayoral campaign. Fear of a return of the Tories is still swaying some voters towards New Labour, even in this area of high unemployment, poor transport, lack of amenities and environmental squalor.

Chapel Allerton Branch Labour Party has been suspended for well over three years without explanation, and most of its officers have been expelled for unspecified offences at farcical hearings. Garth was the only one to emerge victorious from one of these kangaroo courts after hundreds of locals turned up to support him. His extensive network of contacts and enormous popularity among the local electorate means that it will be a close-run contest between Leeds Left Alliance and the New Labour candidate Eileen Moxon.

The by-election in the neighbouring ward of Harehills sees three former Labour Party comrades at each other's throats. Left Alliance Green Socialist candidate Jane Young says she would be delighted to get as many as 50 votes, but even that could swing the result in the grudge match between John Clare and Javed Akhtar. Javed, a popular former Labour councillor for Harehills, was acrimoniously deselected in favour of John Clare (a protégé of Leeds East MP George Mudie) and has returned to contest his old seat as a Liberal Democrat.

"Left Alliance gives people a choice," says Jane. "If you're a socialist, it's the only choice."

Anti-racists against the Tube sale

Suresh Grover welcomes the CATP anti-privatisation campaign in the London Assembly and mayoral elections. "The initiative by the London Underground workers to stand for the London elections is excellent, not only because it empowers those who run the Tube but also is the only way to stop the privatisation of a crucial public service.

As anti-racists who want accountability of public authorities we should support the CATP candidates wholeheartedly."

● Suresh Grover is Chair of National Civil Rights Movement and campaigner for Stephen Lawrence, Ricky Reel and Michael Menson families

Peace in south Asia – the nuclear threat

Public meeting with

Achin Vanaik and Praful Bidwai
India's leading anti-nuclear campaigners Bruce Kent and Jeremy Corbyn MP

Thursday, 25th May, 7:30pm
Conway Hall, London.

Holborn Tube

Sponsored by London Region CND, Liberation, Aaj Kay Naam

Solidarity in action

Chris Rogers was a Labour Councillor in the London Borough of Hillingdon from 1986 until 1998 and was leader of the Labour council from 1994 until 1997.

"During those twelve years, I, along with others, fought every privatisation whatever it was called – outsourcing, compulsory competitive tendering or housing transfers. Now it is no different whether it is called Working with a Strategic Partner or Public Private Partnership.

"That is why I support the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation standing candidates in the Greater London Assembly election.

"At present I am involved in the fight to stop the privatisation of Air Traffic Control – something the Labour Party once called: 'another daft Tory idea.'

"If you have access to a computer visit our anti-privatisation campaign website – www.safeskies.co.uk – where you can send an email to John Prescott.

"I feel totally betrayed by the Labour Party I worked within for over 20 years and urge all voters to support those candidates who oppose privatisation."

Keeping the *Labour* in *Briefing*

In the last couple of months *LLB* has carried a number of articles from long standing Labour Party members who have decided to leave the Party. Tony Dale, Manchester Central CLP, believes it would be a big mistake to follow their example.

Ken Livingstone's independent candidature for London Mayor has obviously been the catalyst for re-opening the debate on the future of the Labour Party and the viability of a left alternative. In this discussion it is essential that comrades recognise the uniqueness of the London mayoral election.

Never before in the history of the Labour Party has its organisational machine managed to create such a mess. Over the years, Labour Party activists have seen many stitch-ups, but the selection of Labour's London mayoral candidate really does take the biscuit.

Tony Blair and hi acolytes are always saying how important it is to be open and transparent. Well this time the stitch-up was so blatant that it has created a completely new and unique situation. The fix was so open and transparent that Ken Livingstone was in a position to stand against Labour with the tacit or open backing of large sections of the London labour movement. Even Millbank has had to reconcile itself to this situation by sending out the message that Party members who back Livingstone will not be expelled en masse.

The Livingstone mayoral challenge is a one-off situation. You cannot extrapolate from this a model for a new independent left party. Ken Livingstone acknowledges this by urging people to stay in the Labour Party.

A possible scenario is that in a few years time, after the next general election, Livingstone may well be rehabilitated into the Party. This might seem far fetched at present, but when the dust has settled it could be the outcome.

A number of articles in recent *LLB*'s have promoted Socialist Alliances, Left Alliances, the Scottish Socialist Party and so on. I have no problem with *LLB* carrying articles on such formations. The magazine provides an important news service to the labour movement and has a good record of honest non-sectarian coverage of all strands of the labour and socialist movements. If *LLB* failed to report on such developments it would be failing in its responsibilities to its readership. But at the end of the day *LLB* is ***Labour** Left Briefing*.

LLB would not work as anything else except as a journal for and by the Labour left. *LLB*'s future will depend on the fortunes of the Labour left. If the Labour eft withers and dies then so will *LLB*. If the Labour Left revives and grows then so will *LLB*.

I do not doubt the sincerity and commitment of comrades who have had enough of the Labour Party. If they want to leave and involve themselves in other projects I wish them well. But *LLB* needs to maintain its focus as a journal of the Labour left.

Make your vote count on 4th May

PIERS CORBYN REPORTS: After 18 years in the Labour Party I have resigned as CLP Campaign Organiser because of rigged selection processes in the London elections.

I, along with a great many other Labour members and supporters, feel more loyal to what is right than to Party diktat and we will vote for Ken Livingstone, but we worry that GLA members may block Ken's policies.

Under the new voting system, Labour will probably be well represented in the 14 "first past the post" seats and will not be entitled to any top up list seats, so voting Labour on the London Members' list will not count. A vote for the LSA list will be a vote that counts: not voting LSA will mean more Tories and LibDems getting London Member seats.

After 4th May, I hope Ken Livingstone will be readmitted to the Labour Party and the current deep concerns of members will be acted on – before we repeat this fiasco at the General Election.

Email: reclaimtheparty@hotmail.com

Tatchell honours Sylvia Pankhurst

PETER TATCHELL REPORTS: I am proposing a three mile car-free parkway through the heart of London named after Sylvia Pankhurst. This would be a major environmental and recreational gain for the people of London, providing a fitting memorial to one of my heroines, the socialist sufragette Sylvia Pankhurst.

I am standing for the traditional Labour values of social justice that New Labour has abandoned. I am asking Labour supporters to vote for me in the list section of the ballot to show Tony Blair that grassroots members want the Party to return to its core socialist values of public ownership, social equality and redistribution of wealth.

- **Contact Peter's campaign on 020-7494 4751. Send cheques (payable to "Tatchell for London") to: Tatchell for London, Sound, 10 Wardour Street, London W1V 3HG.**

Website: www.tatchell-forlondon.freeserve.co.uk

Labour's socialist roots

Bernie Moss and John Halstead

Generations of historians, whether from the right or left, have tried to deny socialist influence on the British labour movement and Labour Party.

The Cambridge school of Stedman Jones, Biagini and Reid claimed to find a continuous stream of radicalism in 19th century labour more concerned with popular democracy than economic exploitation. They ignored the co-operative socialism that inspired the Grand National – the first trades union confederation in 1833 – and the connection between the democratic suffrage demands of the Chartists and working-class protest.

There is a similar distortion of Labour Party history. Henry Pelling, the authoritative liberal historian, and Ralph Miliband, the influential Marxist, stressed its trade union origins and the Liberal legacy. By forgetting the union link and class membership, which led to the Party's involvement in the mass strikes of 1911-12, 1919-20 and 1926, the broad Marxian left of the 1930s and the rank-and-file strikes of the 1960s and 70s, Miliband branded it irretrievably parliamentary and reformist.

Historians forgot that it was socialists who gave the impetus to the foundation of the Party. They provided its credo of public ownership and transitional programmes of redistribution, converting trade unionists to the cause.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the destruction of Chartism by state repression saw socialist ideas suppressed. But the 1880s saw its revival among the intellectuals of the Social Democratic Federation and Fabian Society, as well as among the new trade unionists going beyond the craft minority to organise labourers and the unskilled. The main centres were London, Scotland and northern manufacturing areas, especially the West Riding of Yorkshire.

Under the leadership of Henry Hyndman, the SDF adopted a revolutionary Marxist programme, but, unlike Marx, it had little faith in trade unions to improve immediate conditions. Fabians Sidney and Beatrice Webb meanwhile developed a gradualist approach to public ownership, including support for trade unions and municipal socialism.

In Scotland, some younger miners' leaders developed a socialist approach to the problems of the industry. Keir Hardie detached himself from Liberalism and his occupation in journalism to become leader of the Ayrshire miners in 1886. This started a career that made him the foremost national advocate of the abolition of private ownership of the means of production and the need for an independent party of labour. Hardie's famous by-election victory in West Ham, London, in 1892, where he successfully split the Liberals and united Radicals and Labour behind him, set the scene for the following year's creation, at Bradford, of the Independent Labour Party.

The SDF played a valuable role in the London unemployed agitation of 1886 and provided key leaders during the successful dock strike of 1889, which ignited trade unionism among the unskilled and prompted the formation of trades councils. But they were sceptical about reform, leaving it to Hardie and the ILP to convert the unions to political independence.

The socialism of the ILP and Labour Party thus owed little to Marxism. It was ethical and practical rather than theoretical and materialist. But unlike the Marxists and Fabians it had a practical sense of working class life and struggles, recognising that in Britain the political organisation for the emancipation of labour had to be based on the unions.

Workers in many localities and industries found Liberal MPs who represented them in Parliament squaring off against them in industrial battles. Suffering from the loss of monopoly in world trade, British employers began taking back wages and conditions granted in more bountiful times. Taking a leaf from United States union-busters, they formed an organisation to provide strike-breakers in 1893. They challenged job control in the engineering lock-out of 1897 and the union right to strike in the Taff Vale decision of 1901, the issue that brought the majority of unions over to the Labour Representation Committee.



The Independent Labour Party council, 1899. From left: J MacDonald, Bruce Glazier, J Burgess, Keir Hardie, J Parker, H Russell Smart, J Penny, Philip Snowden, F Littlewood

Union belief in political independence came gradually but overall represented a class break with Liberalism to open a new socialist horizon. The Trade Union Congress of 1894 voted to exclude trades councils and middle-class delegates in an attempt to thwart the ILP. The breakthrough for the ILP came via the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants. They pushed through a resolution in 1899 calling co-operatives, trade unions, socialists and other class organisations to a conference to discuss labour representation in Parliament.

The foundation of the Labour Representation Committee at Farringdon Hall in 1900 was the beginning of a new party based on a 'practical' socialism that, unlike the dogmatic Marxists, was able to bring the class struggle to Parliament and engage the organised working class.

No blank cheque for Millbank

Jon Rogers, Lambeth UNISON branch secretary, previews the union's 2000 national conference.

UNISON's national delegate conference in June will be an important staging post in the struggle to unravel our own crisis of representation. In the blue corner are those officials loyal to Millbank and hoping for a future of apolitical trade unionism. In the red corner stand those disaffected by the weakness of the union's ability to stand up for the interests of its own members.

In anticipation of the next general election, the union's national executive is proposing to draw up a UNISON manifesto around which the union will campaign. This proposal – which is certain to be agreed – creates the space to argue that UNISON nationally should follow the precedent set by our London Region and put support for the policies of the union ahead of loyalty to Millbank.

A motion from the Leicestershire health branch asks the union to review the way that it seeks to influence the Labour Party through its political fund arrangements. This opens up the important debate about the future of the relationship with Labour often referred to as the 'blank cheque.' The status quo – UNISON provides uncritical support for all Labour candidates regardless of their support for union policies – is not likely to survive long term.

A second flavour of the conference will be outrage at the politically motivated witch-hunt of the organised left – supporters of the Socialist Workers Party in particular. Roddy Slorach in Glasgow and Dave Carr and Candy Udwin in London are the most recent expulsions on the heels of less high profile expulsions in Birmingham and Newham. Liverpool social worker Aidan Pollit is still waiting for his appeal hearing over a year after his expulsion.

The union machine is doing all it can to limit support for the victims of the witch hunt. Most recently, a national official wrote to branches forbidding the use of branch resources to support those being disciplined.

This restrictive interpretation of the union's rules is not likely to be accepted by the rank and file. A sustained effort to tell the wider membership the truth about the expulsions will pose a challenge to our standing orders. Proposed amendments to the union's disciplinary rules and the debate on the right to campaign in UNISON are certain to up the ante.

Increasingly, it is evident that there is considerable scope for the left to organise the great majority of the union which wants to defend public services, increase the minimum wage and improve the conditions of our members. It is therefore welcome and important that a range of left opinion is coming together to organise a large fringe meeting at the beginning of the conference week, drawing together this majority.

The project of galvanising left unity in the face of a leadership wedded to Millbank poses challenges for all involved, as the legacy of mistrust and mutual hostility which has weakened the left for years cannot be overcome in an instant. The Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic UNISON has a particular responsibility, as the only open and democratic left organisation in the union, to contribute constructively to this unity.

Only sectarianism on the left can now prevent major setbacks for the agents of the Millbank tendency in UNISON.

TRADE UNION NOTEBOOK

NUJ says no to euro

The NUJ joined the growing band of trade unions unhappy with the TUC's slavish devotion to the Single Currency.
The journalists' union, at its annual conference in Ireland, also agreed to ballot its members to affiliate to the Cuba Solidarity Campaign.

RMT ballot's for strike action

Following strikes at Waterloo station in south London in March, RMT is balloting all drivers and guards on South West Trains for further action. As last month's *LLB* reported, the dispute arose over the dismissal of Waterloo-based driver and safety rep Sarah Friday for not carrying out a manager's instruction to drive a train while she was at a formal interview with management. South West Trains have given passengers an inflamatory leaflet describing Sarah as "a train driver dismissed...for not doing her job".

Lecturers win new pay offer

Lecturers at universities in Scotland are in dispute over the introduction of new contracts changing their hours and holidays. Four days of strikes and talks involving ACAS have led to a new offer. The action has been suspended.

Miners hit production

At Tower Colliery in South Wales, production was halted for a day after a dispute arose over moving two men from the coalface. An agreement has been reached at the mine, which is owned by the workforce.

Stagecoach halted

500 members of the TGWU at Stagecoach Western Buses in Scotland are continuing action over a pay dispute. Five days of strike action have occurred.

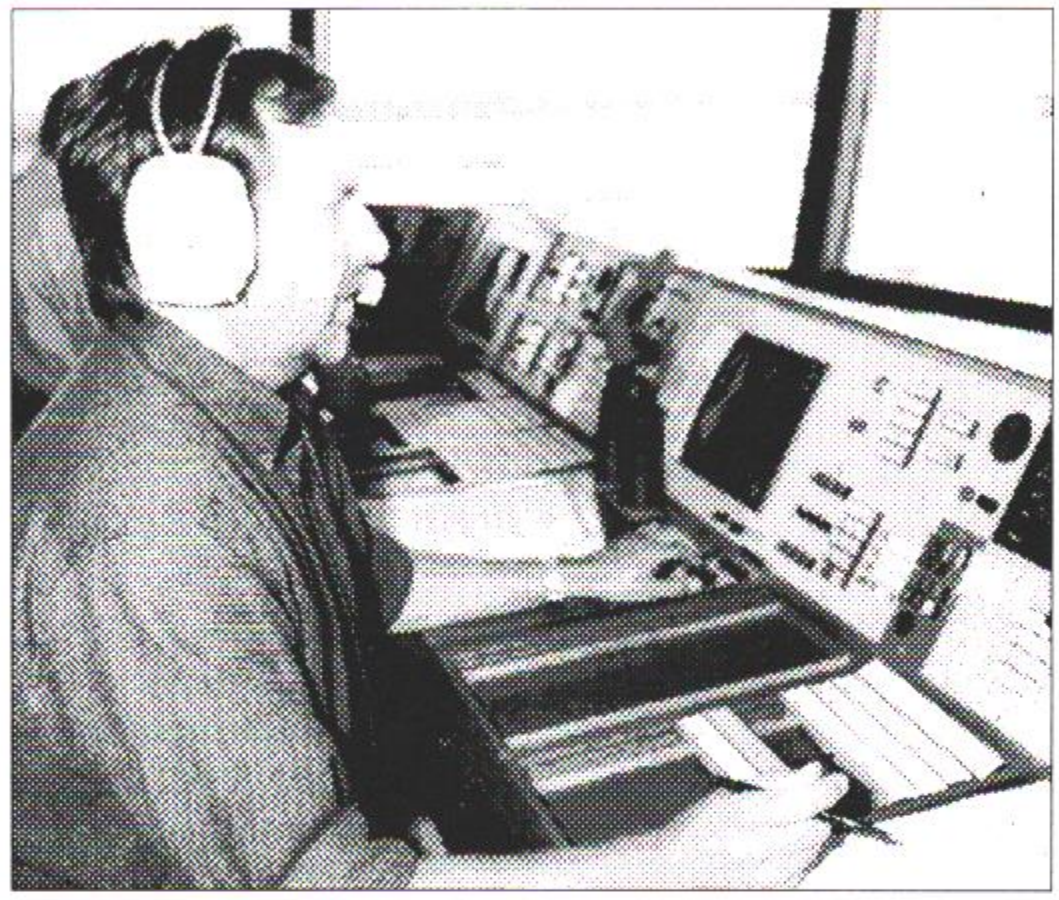
MSF plans Rolls Royce strike

MSF is planning to ballot members at Rolls Royce in Derby and Nottingham on strike action after the company's announcement of 2,000 redundancies.

TV companies hit

A strike by 300 NUJ and BECTU members has hit television coverage at STV and Grampian Television (both part of the Scottish Media Group). The dispute is over a new pay structure that will mean pay cuts or freezes for much of the workforce.

Our air is not for sale



A Public and Commercial Services Union activist from the National Air Traffic Services explains why the unions are threatening strike action.

The Government's refusal to listen to the many voices raised against privatisation of Britain's air traffic control has brought the National Air Traffic Services unions to the brink of industrial action. Ministers have ignored the consistent message spelling out why the NATS trade unions, the airline industry, the pilots' union BALPA, its own backbenchers and the Transport Select Committee have all united in opposition to its headlong rush to privatise air traffic control.

Earlier this year, the Commons Transport Select Committee said in its report into the proposed public-private partnership: "Those that claim that the introduction of private sector disciplines to NATS will encourage the company to become increasingly efficient are unable to suggest how costs might be cut without endangering safety.

"The proposed public-private partnership is fundamentally flawed," and was, the committee noted, "the worst of all possible options."

Not only does the discredited PPP approach have few supporters outside Millbank, but it is seen as a precursor to a commercial ethic that pays only lip service to safety concerns.

Apparently, sources close to NATS management say that it has been considering offering a preferential service to airlines "paying a little bit extra." Unsurprisingly, British Airways and Lufthansa have admitted being interested in such a two-tier service.

We find it incredible that BA and NATS are considering such plans. We know that such an idea would make a difficult job almost impossible, with the consequent impact on impartiality, service to all and safety.

We have also seen the legislation being considered by the Standing Committee and what is emerging is nothing short of alarming.

The Bill opens up the possibility for the Government shareholding to be reduced to 25 per cent, despite all assurances that they will retain 49 per cent as a safeguard.

The Bill provides for the splitting up of NATS into several separate companies, despite Government recognition that there is a need for NATS to remain one company.

The Bill also allows for the abandonment of PPP in favour of a full flotation of NATS, despite New Labour's assertion that this is not a privatisation.

None of this has done anything to allay the concerns of our members and has increased the numbers of members calling for industrial action.

Many of us have fond memories of a rallying speech at a Labour Party Conference and the declaration that "our air is not for sale." There is no doubt that our members feel a genuine sense of betrayal that the same coterie which vociferously opposed privatisation while in opposition has changed its view.

This Government is prepared to jeopardise the unique expertise of NATS and its safety record to the requirement to increase profit. But NATS is already a net contributor to the national purse and, although there is a need for some one billion pounds investment over the next ten years, the exchequer does receive £700 million each year from the air transport industry.

We have recently launched a website at www.safeskies.co.uk, which gives members of the public the opportunity to email opposition to this privatisation to Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott.

While our members do have real concerns about the safety of the industry there is also no doubt that their future terms and conditions of employment are also an issue. Nothing either the Government or our management has said or done has offered them any grounds for confidence.

The Government has refused to build any protection for the rights of members of the pension scheme into the legislation. This refusal in itself is enough to alarm members. Coupled with the recent refusal by the board to disperse the surplus in the scheme in accordance with the recommendations of the fund's trustees, it has prompted calls for industrial action.

In fact, both NATS's unions have now been directed to ballot for industrial action if members' fears prove justified. I have no doubt that if such a ballot were conducted, then industrial action would follow.

Tony and Caroline Benn send May Day greetings to all *LLB* readers

A sneak's charter

As teachers battle against the introduction of performance related pay, NUT activist Anita Wright asks where all the teachers have gone.

Behind the Labour Government's slogan of "education, education, education" lies a package of sinister policies, which are inflicting further damage on an already fragile system. While we were reading David Blunkett's lips on no more selection, his colleagues in the Department for Education and Employment were already sharpening their knives. Lack of funding, more targets to achieve, greater work load and constant inspections have undermined the morale and enthusiasm of teachers more than Thatcher's Government could ever have dreamt of. The press are full of stories about teachers committing suicide and head teachers walking off the job because of too much stress. Recruitment is at an all time low and burn out at an all time high.

Yet, in the face of massive opposition from teachers, thousands of glossy purple packs urging teachers to sign up for performance related pay have been sent into every school. Head teachers from around the country are being systematically rounded up and force-fed the merits of the scheme by DfEE appointed consultants who themselves doubt the validity of the system.

Despite research undertaken by Dr Ray Richardson of the London School of Economics, which rejects the effectiveness of this method of worker control, the Government is determined to implement its latest proposals before July 2000.

Experienced teachers who have reached the top of the pay scales are being encouraged to break through their current pay threshold and enter the twilight zone of PRP.

Head teachers are being set up as the gatekeepers of this new world, and their capacity to make professional judgements on any teacher who applies will be assessed by a new army of consultants employed by Cambridge Educational Associates.

The time scale requires teachers to get their completed forms on the head's desk by mid-June. Teachers have to prove they have acquired a thorough knowledge of the curriculum, have directly contributed to pupils' progress, played a part in the wider school community and have good professional qualities. The head teacher or senior staff will then judge the applicant, based on classroom observation, test results and past knowledge. Application forms are then sent to CEA who visit the school to discuss a sample of the applications.

Teachers who apply this year will have to wait a further two years to apply again for a further £1,000 increase. New applicants who have reached the top of the scale will be able to apply the following year. The Government has not yet decided how many spine points this threshold scale will have, but it currently allows for teachers to potentially earn a further £5,000 over four years.

The system is open to widespread abuse on all sides. Unscrupulous head teachers will be in a position to hold back the extra money and teachers have no right of appeal. Teachers considering applying might refuse to teach less able children, particularly if they are in a year group due to take national tests. Head teachers' careers are also at risk, if a teacher they confirm to be of the required standard is later found to be unsatisfactory.

No one would argue with the idea of paying good classroom teachers more money and the DfEE consultants estimate that over 90% of experienced teachers will match up to the five performance criteria. This begs the question – why not just pay them the £2,000 without introducing this bureaucratic process? The answer is linked to Government contempt for public sector workers and the drive to keep public spending within the convergence criteria for a single European currency.

The extra money that has been earmarked for PRP is only being centrally funded for two years, after which time the cost will fall to local education authorities – already straitjacketed by centrally imposed spending limits.

The fightback against PRP is beginning to gain momentum, and many schools have already publicly gone on record as not being prepared to touch the scheme. A direct boycott, however, may not be as straightforward as it seems, particularly in schools where there may be some teachers looking to increase their salaries prior to retirement or where the management operates a divide and rule regime. It is vitally important that each school holds a meeting to consider the implications for the whole school community as well as individuals and to ensure that school governors and parents participate in the decisions.

The NUT has applied for a judicial review on the grounds that the Government is attempting to impose substantial new duties on teachers, particularly senior staff who will have to assess their colleagues. If successful this will help delay the implementation of the scheme and provide more time to win support from parents and school governors. The NUT will also decide on what action to take at its Easter conference – this includes an all-out boycott, national demonstration, lobby of Parliament and strike action.

The future of schools and the teaching profession will be irredeemably changed if New Labour gets its way and imposes payment by results.

TRIBUNE

News from the Inside



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

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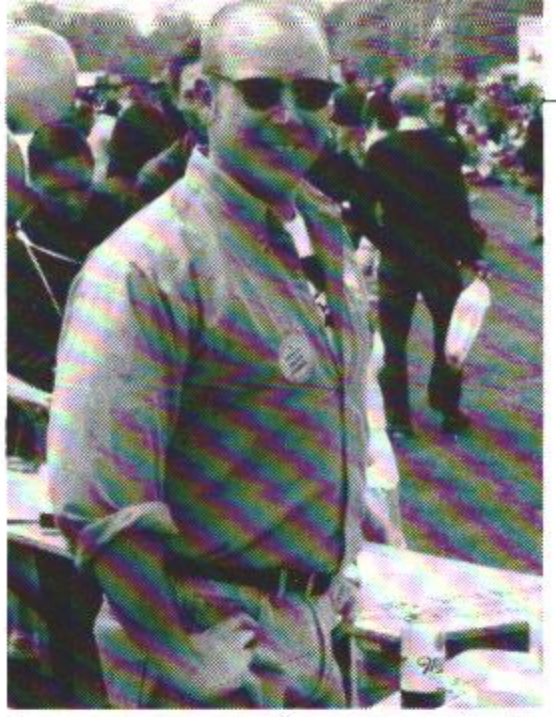
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THE GEOFF MARTIN COLUMN

● I'm writing this on the back end of a chaotic week – 3-1 against Barcelona and then a Wembley win in the FA Cup semi against Newcastle with the prospect of Villa in the last ever cup final under the shadow of the old twin towers.

Sometimes, in my nostalgic moments, I think that I'll be sorry to see the old Wembley go. It's only after paying forty quid to wade through the piss lake under the stands, drink warm lager out of plastic bottles and take in the delightful fragrance of hot dogs of dubious origin (the clue's in the name) that I realise that the sooner they tear the whole dump down the better.

Anyway, I do feel for the old Newcastle fans – with the obvious exception of Blair, whose about as Geordie as polenta and rocket salad. They were good crack from early moring on semi-final day and they don't deserve to lose at Wembley three years in a row and then suffer the ultimate indignity of having the Prime Minister claiming to be one of their hard core supporters. Surely there's only so much pain and humiliation they can be expected to carry?

● I can't let the events in Turkey pass without comment. There was a really good, balanced article in the *Observer* which tracked through the events which led up to the killing of the two Leeds fans and which put the whole sickening episode into context.

I have no doubt that some Leeds fans were provoking the local people that evening and that this left any group of away supporters as fair game in the eyes of the Galatasaray hooligan outfit and probably the police as well.

There was a woman interviewed on the box on her way back from the game who recalled, through tears, her experience of being strip-searched and abused by Turkish police. With Turkey's record on human rights this was no real surprise.

The admirable Alison Pilling from the Football Supporters Association did a fantastic job of putting forward the position of the genuine fan – it's a fact that supporters of English clubs abroad are generally regarded as scum whoever they may be.

I spent one of the most terrifying nights of my life at a Chelsea match in Bruges where summary justice was the order of the day. The same season in Zaragoza we were batton-charged from pillar to post just for fun. This season in Marseille, women, kids and elderly fans were tear-gassed for the crime of trying to help a guy suffering an asthma attack.

I know that campaigning for the human rights of Chelsea supporters would be regarded with contempt in some quarters but if genuine fans are driven away from the game, and particularly from travelling to away matches in Europe, it's just another victory for the nutters.

● We now know that the Leader is going to appear on a pro-Dobbo platform after all. I thought that Frank was telling us all that he wasn't Blair's poodle and was his own man. So why would he suddenly want to pop up in public for a command performance of one man and his dog? None of this makes any sense to me.

The best brains at Millbank have been going flat out to try and smear Ken with left-wing(?) MP Brian Sedgemore operating as HQ spokesperson, cheerleader and chief bottle-washer – either that or we're just witnessing an hysterical remake of Monty Pythons *Life of Brian*. It's certainly got all the necessary comedy ingredients.

Anyway, once the votes are in, the campaign then needs to shift on to getting Ken back into the Party. I want the first elected Mayor of London to be a Labour Mayor. I have no doubt that after a period of time in the sin bin we will have a Labour London Mayor and it will be Ken. After all, if Roger Liddle, a man who left the Labour Party in order to try to destroy it, can smarm his way back into a top position at Downing Street, then surely Ken, who's fighting for traditional Labour values, can come on back home where he belongs.

● The BMW disaster at Rover has been portrayed by some as good evidence of why we should join the European Single Currency. In fact, the opposite is the case. It's European "competition" regulations which have conspired to stop the Government stepping in to save the workers' jobs at Longbridge. If we had joined the euro from day one, as Sir Ken Jackson and John Monks urged us to do, there is no doubt that UK manufacturing would have been plunged into even deeper recession with even greater numbers of jobs sacrificed.

Of course the pound is at an unsustainably high level, but that's got nothing to do with the euro. If the Government stopped relying on the sledgehammer use of interest rates as the only tool to regulate inflation and instead jacked up direct taxes for the rich as the most effective measure of choking off property inflation and demand for luxury goods we could cut interest rates overnight.

It's a fact that workers' jobs across the manufacturing sector are being sacrificed on the altar of the property boom in London and the south east and there's likely to be worse to come. Every fat-cat city bonus fuels the property boom, ratchets up interest rates and throws more workers on the dole.

The answer isn't a single interest rate for Europe set by a bunch of unaccountable bankers. I think there's now a strong case for having differential interest rates across the country. What works for Newcastle probably won't work for London let alone Milan and Madrid. Joining the euro is just another dead end under the complete control of the bankers.

New Labour fails

The British Government is failing asylum seekers fleeing from persecution and racism, argues author and Romany advisor Donald Kenrick.

Romany beggars from Romania hit the news columns with a vengeance some weeks ago, with the third wave of press attacks on Romany Gypsies from Europe.

Four years ago we had organised gangs of pickpockets from Bosnia, then it was the Giro Czechs – who came to London to escape from a Nazi demonstration in Dover and found all doors barred and ended up sleeping on the floor of a community hut on a caravan site.

Now it is Romany women from Romania. We are talking about some 40 women wearing headscarves who are begging on the street. The number includes at least one non-Romany couple from Eastern Europe who are not begging but stealing bank cards and a Home Office agent disguised as a beggar.

Some have tried begging without a child, but, because of their youthful looks and colourful clothes, say they get a lot of men approaching them with what they assume are lewd suggestions. The press condemned another woman for begging with a bundle of rags made up to look like a baby. Begging with a baby is illegal, but begging with a pretend baby is merely deceitful.

But what is the alternative to begging? To sit all day on the bed of a so-called hotel where the heat is turned off from nine in the morning until the evening?

In their own country, these women would be in the market selling wooden spoons, or feathers for decorating horses and getting the occasional donation from a sinner coming from confession – where he or she has been told to say 200 Hail Mary's and give some money to the poor.

Now no asylum seekers are being given permission to work. Under the Tories they could do so after six months. Several thousand refugees (caught between two policies) are still receiving food vouchers and no cash at all from London councils. The only way they can get money for a phone call, a stamp, or a toy for a child is to sell the vouchers at a discount to local people who are buying the £10 vouchers for £9 cash.

Specialist organisations helping Romany refugees have received no public money, while an agency in west London with 800 clients on its books has had its funding cut by ten per cent annually for three years. There is only one centre in inner London that provided anywhere for a small number of Romany asylum seekers to go during the day.

But just what are these Roma asylum seekers escaping from?

One of the worst incidents was in Hadareni, Romania, where 30 houses were burnt down and Gypsies forced to flee to another village in the first of a series of pogroms. These primarily revolved around the sharing out of land from the state farms – a process from which Gypsies have been systematically excluded throughout Eastern Europe.

Few of these Romanies are economic migrants. Recent asylum seekers from Central and Eastern Europe have included a train guard, the local mayor and his wife, a university educated economist, a well known poet from Slovakia and a novelist from Poland.

They are escaping from endemic racism in countries where the word "ciganin" does not mean a nomad – as does Gypsy in the West – but someone with a dark face belonging to a settled community which has traditionally been doing hard manual work for low pay for generations. Czechs and Slovaks talk openly about "blacks."

They are fleeing from what I would call persecution, but what the British Government calls harassment. Home Secretary Jack Straw has even asked the United Nations to change the convention on refugees to exclude anyone who is not persecuted by the state itself. Without waiting for this, he has declared that the skinhead gangs who have killed over 50 Roma cannot be considered "agents of persecution."

The European Union needs to do more to encourage the governments of Eastern Europe to provide work and housing for its Romanies. They also need to set up a workable mechanism by which Gypsies can get redress for attacks, whether by skinheads or police.

To the delight of the media, the streets of London may well be cleansed of Romany beggars as they are dispersed to villages where nobody speaks their language and where there are no immigration lawyers.

But the fact is that Western governments are failing those who come seeking leave to remain until the countries they come from improve the living conditions for what one author has called "the first blacks in Europe."

Public Meeting

7.30 Tuesday 9th May, Grand Committee Room, House of commons, Westminster, SW1.

Europe Roma is an unfunded voluntary organisation for refugees in Britain. Clients include survivors of arson, rape, eviction, death threats and brutal beatings by neo-nazis and police

We welcome all offers of help, skills, equipment and space.
Helpline: 07930 112 712. Contacts: 07790 360 276 or 020 7267 8198.

If you would like to make a donation please make cheques payable to
Asylum Education and Legal Fund
PO Box 14874, London NW1 0WF.

refugees



Amanda Sebestyen spoke to Ladislav Balaz, who is a Romany human rights activist from the Czech Republic seeking asylum.

In 1989, I came home from work and my wife Marta had just seen the Velvet Revolution on television. I said, OK, now we Roma must get organised and I wrote to Vaclav Havel's Civic Forum. A group of us were invited to Prague.

By 1990, our Romani Civic Initiative (ROI) had grown into a large, officially recognised political party. For a long time I kept asking why the government wasn't doing anything while Roma people were being forced to live so badly.

What made you leave your home?

Skinheads attacked and killed my friend Milan Lacko in 1998. The murder was reported in the Channel 4 film, *Gypsies, Beggars and Thieves?* The radio and newspapers interviewed me and I led a march on the police station and spoke to the government on behalf of the Lacko family. Within a week, my home was attacked and surrounded. For a fortnight none of the family dared to leave and I slept in the garden. Then I took refuge with a friend. One hour later the skinheads attacked his house – we still don't know how the information got out.

I rang the government and asked for a bodyguard. They gave me one for just four days. At the end of those four days a letter came. It said: "We'll kill the whole Romany people in 2000, but you and your family first." My lawyer in England has that letter.

How and why did you start Europe Roma?

I started the organisation because I saw how Roma people were living here. Everybody needed help and nobody was doing anything, just looking on. We're now in a very bad situation, with the Government and immigration service giving very short refusals to our asylum seekers and putting them in prison.

Roma people like the organisation because we try to help with everything – solicitor, housing, social services, and detention. We've bailed six asylum seekers out of prison so far. On Thursday mornings, I hold advice sessions at Finsbury Park Homeless Families. I also translate one morning a week for the Kings Cross Homelessness Project. The rest of the time I'm on call from eight in the evening to three in the morning.

What was your own experience arriving in Britain?

We came to the UK in August 1998. For two and a half months we had no money at all, but our Jamaican neighbour helped us. We've been moved three times to different temporary housing or bed and breakfast accomodation. We were told that our present move would be for two weeks but now the council says we'll be there indefinitely.

Now my cousin has moved here. He was one of my bodyguards in Orlova and was targeted by the skinheads after I left. He has a statement from the European Roma Rights Centre proving the attack, but when he had his interview with UK Immigration they gave him temporary admission for just six months.

What about your case? You're the leading Roma political refugee, a test case for all the other Roma. Surely you should get full asylum?

We've been here for two years and the Home Office has not replied at all to my asylum case. Recently, I spoke on BBC television news. Within hours, the Immigration Service had contacted my solicitor.

We are worried because not one Czech Roma case has been granted asylum – just three people have got leave to remain, after long, drawn out appeals.

Now the new Asylum Act is making it harder for refugees on appeal to live. If the British Government sends me back to the Czech Republic, it is as good as killing me and my family.

Tough on asylum, tough on Scotland

Cathy Jamieson MSP talks to *LLB* about her campaign against the Asylum and Immigration Act in the Scottish Parliament.

To highlight the potential problems for Scottish legislation, policy and practice in relation to asylum seekers, I tabled a motion in the Scottish Parliament. It attracted cross-party support from 50 of the Parliament's 129 MSPs and was welcomed by organisations campaigning on behalf of refugees in Scotland. As the Campaign gathered momentum, a petition was launched jointly by Action of Churches Together in Scotland, Amnesty International and the Scottish Refugee Council.

My primary concern was to highlight the plight of refugees and asylum seekers, and I will continue to work with colleagues on this issue. But in a wider context, the debate has shown that there are a number of areas where Westminster and Holyrood reponsibilities overlap and further clarification is needed. The Act effectively amends a number of pieces of Scottish legislation relating to housing, health, social work and mental health, without any debate in the Scottish Parliament which has devolved responsibility for these areas.

A Members' Debate, which is really the only course open to back bench MSPs to raise issues, has now taken place on my motion. Although no votes are taken on such debates, the Scottish Executive is required to respond, and it is therefore possible to influence policy and practice. During the debate I raised concerns about the proposed voucher scheme and the reported plans to use a French company, with no previous history of administering such a scheme, as the contractor. I also asked the Minister to consider putting back the implementation date of the dispersal scheme until we could be assured that all elements were in place. The Minister's response was that this was unnecessary, as adequate plans were in place.

However, the dispersal programme is now underway, with the first groups of asylum seekers having arrived in Glasgow. Despite careful preparations by the City Council, problems have emerged, with an apparent lack of communication between the Home Office and the Council resulting in a number of people being returned to England. There has also sadly, been evidence of an upsurge in racist abuse and activity by the BNP, leading to local black and refugee support groups setting up public meetings to counter the misinformation being circulated.

I hope that MSPs will continue to join in the campaign for decent support for asylum seekers – and for Scotland to have real control over its own affairs.



Photo: Paul Mattsson

Refugee's support group pickets outside the *Daily Mail* Building, 13th April.

Fighting Labour's racists

TGWU General Secretary Bill Morris has become the latest public figure to speak out against the tirade of abuse directed at asylum seekers by the media and politicians: Writing for *The Independent* on April 14th Morris criticised Government policy on asylum seekers, financial bonds for overseas visitors from south Asia, and the limitation of trial by jury, as all having detrimental effects on black people. He was particularly scathing of the language used when discussing asylum seekers, insisting that "by heralding measure after measure to stop people entering Britain, the Home Office has given life to the racists."

In the same week the TUC executive condemned politicians and media outlets who have "encouraged racist attitudes towards asylum seekers". General Secretary John Monks put out a statement criticising those who use inaccurate language "clearly designed to stir up prejudice". This follows concerns voiced by the UNHCR representative in London and the Commission for Racial Equality.

Labour movement activists should continue to pressure their trade union and Labour Party leaders to speak out against the hysteria that has been whipped up against asylum seekers over the past couple of months. A good start could be made by Labour Party members in Wood Green who should ask their local MP, Home Office Minister Barbara Roche, to apologise for describing Romany women from Eastern Europe who beg as "vile".

May Day Greetings from Des Kirkland Editorial Board Member

May Day Greetings from Dorothy Macedo Grassroots Alliance candidate for NPF

A funny thing happened on the way to the Forum

Ann Black looks forward to July's National Policy Forum and October's Annual Conference.

In July, the National Policy Forum will finalise the last tranche of policy before the general election. Members have deliberated, and forests of flipcharts have been fed into Mission Control. Formal consultation has closed. Now it is time to help your representatives reflect constituency views within the Forum.

The policy commissions will send revised drafts to National Policy Forum members around 23rd May and we can submit amendments up to 9th June. The Forum meets on 7th/9th July to decide what goes forward to Annual Conference, including any choices within documents.

Readers will recall that last year no alternative positions were permitted. The official line was that none were necessary, since all was sweetness and consensus bar a few extremist headbangers. The spin was perfect. Look, the Forum is democratic: we allow votes. But look, only six people forced divisions and only 16 out of 90 members gave them the time of day.

But reality has intruded since then. Policies rejected by MPs, unions and careerists continue to haunt the Government. Devalued pensions still cause dissatisfaction in the Commons and in the country. Blair-appointed peers lead the fight to keep trial by jury in the Lords. The Forum's health paper left us defenceless against the winter bed crisis, staffing shortages and record numbers buying private operations. If Party opinion is crushed with union deals and the payroll vote, instead of won over by logic and principle, who will go out and convince the punters?

So will this year be different? Forum members are uneasy that we promised new choices and we have not delivered. But the problem is not actually about minority positions. It is about majority positions which are unacceptable to the Government – ending selection in schools, taking public ownership of Railtrack, banning dodgy arms sales, dropping privatisation of air traffic control. Therefore they cannot be debated at Conference.

Serious economic issues may also be sidestepped. Many will gain from the Working Families' Tax Credit, but, if the national minimum wage drifts down in value, other people's taxes will carry on subsidising bad employers. And if top tax rates above 40% are a disincentive to work, withdrawing WFTC at 55 pence in the pound cannot really "make work pay." So the minimum wage should be indexed to average earnings, with real rises whenever prudent and tax rates for the lowest-paid should not exceed those for millionaires.

Personally I am persuaded that the basic state pension is not a panacea, because people with breaks in employment do not get even this pittance. But the Minimum Income Guarantee is not paid to pensioners with savings and though the budget doubled the claw back threshhold to £6,000, this is less than a month's pay for a Cabinet member. In addition 750,000 eligible pensioners do not claim the MIG. Instead of red tape and awareness campaigns, automatic payment recouped through tax would allow more money to be spent on heat and food. And perhaps the Government could pay benefit arrears where due, instead of banking the unclaimed millions.

Above all we need to restore a sense of the common good, instead of setting the dispossessed against each other. Poisonous dynamics are developing, with pensioners blaming asylum-seekers for their penury, Labour trapped between principle and populism and the Tories rubbing their hands and waiting. But the National Policy Forum, charged with strategic thinking and the big picture, has not discovered themes to unite our fracturing society. I don't have the answers, but I think we are looking in the wrong place.

My guess is that only one amendment stands a chance. *The Democracy and Citizenship* paper reaffirms Labour's commitment to a referendum on the voting system for the Commons. The AEEU and their allies may move to delete this, and the Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform is mobilising to defeat them in the Forum. They believe, rightly, that it will be easier to stop an amendment here than to win at conference, where the block vote is stronger and MPs have no voice.

This poses a dilemma for people who support both electoral reform and the sovereignty of Conference. Should we use anti-democratic means to block the promise of democracy, or let Conference have the final say and risk losing the public right to decide?

I hope I am wrong and this year's Conference will have real debate between real alternatives. There are dozens of potential choices within the papers. With the extended timescale we may be able to consult on amendments before the Forum and go in with more than our gut feelings to guide us. I will again argue for mainstream positions, remembering always Tony Blair's reminder that Labour fails when it loses touch with the Party and with the people.

● Ann Black represents South East CLPs on the National Policy Forum, is a candidate for the National Executive Committee (Constituency Section) and is vice-chair of Labour Reform.

Socialist Greetings from Matthew Willgress, email yljylf@hotmail.com National Policy Forum, Eastern Region CLP (youth)
For a universal minimum wage of £5 per hour

Network to win!

By Christine Shawcroft, Member, Labour Party NEC

When the Party leadership was trying to stop Ken Livingstone being selected as Labour's candidate for London Mayor, it was not only trampling on members' democratic rights to select the individual of their choice but also on our rights to see policies agreed by the overwhelming majority of Party and trade union members going into the manifesto. Sadly, most union bosses have supported the leadership over the stitch up of the selection process.

Control freakery got us nowhere in Falkirk West, or Wales, and it won't in London – but things are set to get worse. New Labour intends to cement its rule by introducing the *21st century party* proposals this autumn, eroding local policy making and stopping the input of trade union branches into CLP organisation. This coincides with implementation of the unpopular policies of privatisation of the London Tube, PFI across the public sector and the privatisation of air traffic control. What a way to approach a General Election!

This will be the first labour movement conference after Ken Livingstone's election as London Mayor. Individual Party and affiliated members will be discussing how we can fight the attacks on democracy and policy and rescue the Party's electoral fortunes.

After the London Elections:

The Network of Socialist Campaign Groups presents

A Labour Movement Conference

Sunday 21st May; 12.30pm to 5.00pm

University of London Union, Malet Street WC1

Speakers include Geoff Martin, Christine Shawcroft and Maria Exall

Conference sponsors include: Socialist Campaign Group of MPs, Liz Davies, Labour Party NEC; Maria Exall, CWU NEC; Christine Shawcroft, Labour Party NEC; Geoff Martin, Convenor, London UNISON; Mick Shaw, FBU NEC and London Region Secretary. (individual sponsors in personal capacities)

Registration: £5 individuals (£2 unwaged); £10 delegates

To register, send cheque (payable to Socialist Campaign Group Supporters' Network) to 7 Malam Gardens, London E14 0TR, indicating whether you require creche or access details.

That's another fine stitch-up they've got us into

Dorothy Macedo, chair of the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups, unravels the threads of New Labour's NEC stitch-up.

In April Tony Blair told the media he had learned his lesson over the interference in the Welsh leadership election. No doubt he will be shocked to learn that the message has not reached Millbank, where the control freaks have struck again.

In January, Perry Barr General Committee (GC) nominated Raghib Ahsan as a candidate for the CLP section of the National Executive Committee (NEC). Raghib needed this nomination from his own CLP to qualify for the ballot. The CLP AGM in February only dealt with AGM business. No notices were sent out for the March GC and members were told the meeting had been postponed for a week. It never took place.

On 28th March CLP chair Councillor Keith Linnecor told Raghib that the CLP secretary Joyce Wright had resigned but that Raghib's nomination papers would be dealt with as soon as an acting secretary was appointed. On 31st March, the Executive Committee (EC) appointed Glenys Foley acting secretary and the chair handed Raghib's papers to her. Throughout this time, no one had questioned Raghib's nomination.

On 4th April Glenys Foley informed the treasurer that the regional office had ruled that the January GC meeting was inquorate and Raghib's nomination was thus not valid. Subsequent attempts by the chair and Raghib to talk to Ms Foley failed because she refused to open the door.

The chair decided to uphold the January GC's nomination. He signed duplicate forms which were delivered to Millbank on 6th April by Party member William Challis. The Conference Unit was too busy for anyone to meet him. Somebody from another office came and interrogated William for half an hour before promising to pass the forms to the Conference Unit. That evening Raghib received a hand delivered letter at 11pm, signed by Andrew Sharp, the Group Head of Party Services, stating that his nomination was not accepted on the grounds that the meeting which nominated him was inquorate.

Councillor Linnecor confirmed that the meeting had met the 25% quorum. The list of GC delegates currently sent notices contains 69 names, at least one of whom is more than 15 months in arrears and therefore not eligible to be on the GC. 17 members attended the meeting, though two did not sign in.

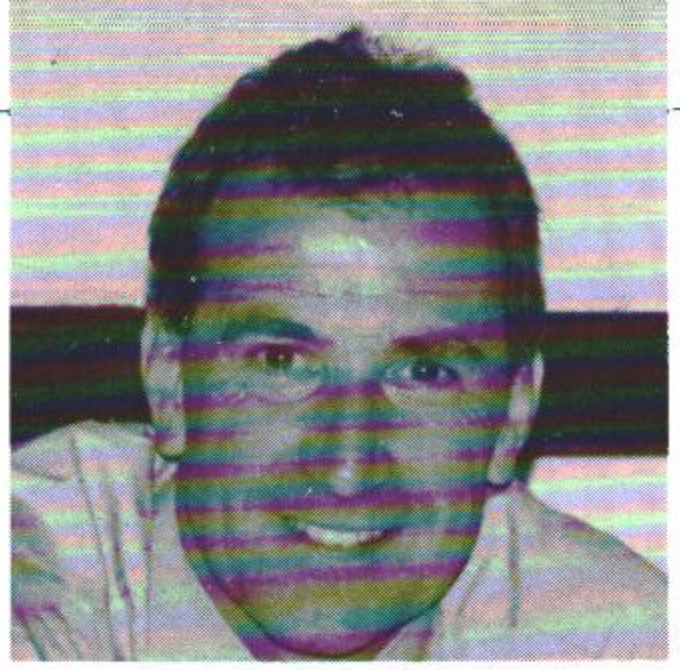
Sharp's letter claimed that Millbank had been informed that Perry Barr CLP did not want to make a nomination. Only the EC on 31st March could have decided this. Both the chair and the treasurer, who attended the meeting, say it didn't.

Raghib contacted Millbank to clarify who the valid delegates to Perry Barr GC are. Lists were faxed to and fro, but then Millbank produced its trump card: a list of union GC delegates, quite a few of whom had not been heard of before. Millbank said they could back up these delegates with documentation from their unions.

Our most effective reply to this disgraceful episode will be a massive vote in the NEC elections for the remaining five Grassroots Alliance candidates.

Centre Left Grassroots Alliance slate for the NEC:

Ann Black
Rosina McCrae
Mark Seddon
Christine Shawcroft
Pete Willsman



THE ALAN SIMPSON COLUMN

Give Stephen Byers a break. The minister is currently being chased by a frothing pack of Tory dogs all purporting to bark for Rover. In truth, the Tories are simply barking. The chronology of deceit and disconnection is not the central issue. The more important point is could it have made a ha'porth of difference if the minister had been told?

The tragedy of Rover is that it lays bare the absence of any strategic vision of where manufacturing fits within today's British economy. This is a vacuum Labour inherited rather than created, but it is one we have failed to fill. Driven by Thatcherite free-market dogma, successive governments developed new rules of industrial disengagement. Fearful of the risk of picking a loser, Labour has lost the confidence and the will to intervene – so we just raise our hands and weep.

For the 100,000 people who turned out in the Birmingham protest at Rover's abandonment this is no use at all. They can see as well as anyone that Ford at Dagenham will be next. Honda has already announced production cuts and the Boss Group – a UK subsidiary of German lift-truck makers – hangs perilously in the balance. The challenge to government – on the streets, in the press and (soon) in the polling booths – is what do we have to say other than that markets must do what they will and societies must live with the consequences.

Fundamentally, it is a challenge to today's orthodoxies about the supremacy of markets and the management of economic stability.

No one should doubt that there is a crisis of overproduction in the car industry. It is a microcosm of the global picture in which virtually every sector of production suffers from structural over-capacity. At one level this is simply bizarre. We live in a world able to produce more goods than we can consume. Yet we have not defined this as an opportunity to produce on more sustainable terms, to distribute more equitably and to work in more civilised conditions. Instead it is the pretext for a dog-eat-dog race to strip production from areas with employment and environmental rights and shift it to areas with none.

'Fearful of the risk of picking a loser, Labour has lost the confidence and the will to intervene – so we just raise our hands and weep'

There hasn't been a single manufacturing plant closure where the Government has stepped in with a PPP. Such partnerships are reserved only for the transfer of public assets into private hands. You can see the game just as easily in Harland and Wolff's loss of shipbuilding contracts and British Steel orders. For it is a rigged game with crooked dealers and dodgy cards.

The first of these comes from an overvalued pound which, this year, has traded between 3.15 and 3.25 Deutschmarks – massively more than the rate at which we were forced to jump our of the Exchange Rate Mechanism. Its real trading rate should be around DM 2.50. That is the "export tax" being paid by every British exporter. Worse is to follow.

An overvalued pound is propped up by excessive interest rates. Every producer pays in their cost of capital or trading overdraft. Everyone with a mortgage or credit debt pays it too. The cheeky part is that we pay this form of hidden taxation to the banks not the Chancellor. Every one per cent interest rise takes £7 billion out of consumer pockets and transfers it into banking profits. Over the last ten years this has given bank shareholders £12.96 for every £1 invested – five per cent a year more than the "equivalent risk" shares in the stock market.

One of the most direct ways of tackling both of these would be by issuing £20 billion through government bonds and to strengthen foreign currency reserves by buying Eurasia. The pound would fall against the euro, interest rates would fall but exports would rise and the balance of payments deficit would reduce. In itself this may not be enough to save Rover, but it would provide the capital for production partnerships that the country needs. If Germany can intervene to protect strategic industries/companies, then so could Britain. The horror for New Labour is that this reopens the case for public and common ownership.

Before the last election, I remember seeing a billboard poster which, for one wistful moment, I thought was Labour's. It was of Carl Lewis's legs, poised to sprint, but wearing high-heeled shoes. Below, the caption simply read: "Power is nothing without control." That is what we are finding out in government.

If this is too difficult and government wants to remain at arms length then put money in via industry unions or the tax favouring of stakeholder co-operatives. Require banks to have regional structures with at least 25% investment within the regional economy. To avoid a consumer boom as interest rates fall, raise reserve requirements. This provides the Chancellor with even more interest free reserves which can be used for direct public investment. For every £1 the Chancellor pulled back from private credit spending he can increase public spending by £2 without causing a panic about inflation.

Do this, and we would still have to re-plan a production future for UK manufacturing, not to replicate shortcomings of the past but to re-design parameters for the future based on equity, efficiency, innovation and sustainability. If we can say this as we re-invest in health why can't we say it for manufacturing?

Faced with such a challenge, Parliament has become the dog that will not bark. And these are the bones of political contention that, for the moment, we are afraid to bite.

Bernie Grant: his own man

Jeremy Corbyn pays tribute to a friend and comrade.

I first met Bernie in the long hot summer of 1976, when I was a Haringey councillor and NUPE official. We went to a demonstration together – the first of many. Our last meeting was in Parliament. Bernie asked the Prime Minister to issue an apology for slavery and reparations for colonialism.

Bernie was the opposite of his media image. He was cussedly individual in his views but always warm and exciting. When I spoke at his fiftieth birthday party I said that nobody knew Bernie until they had a big row with him. His enormous grin showed he loved debate and controversy.

Bernie's entry into Labour left politics of the 1970s via the WRP and the then Union of Postal Workers was a breath of fresh air. He brought together lots of strands. An educated Guyanan, he represented the aspirations of the 1960s Caribbean migrants. He also spoke for urban black youth and on Haringey Council he lectured the Labour Group and officers on their plight, needs and aspirations. He also gave expression to the sense of deep injustice felt by African and southern countries towards the West.

Nobody was attacked more fiercely than Bernie after the 1985 Broadwater Farm riot. In the sweating minds of pre-Wapping Fleet Street, he was seen as the cause of all the trouble. But in the 1986 election, as Leader of Haringey Council, he was swept back into office with a thumping majority. The people, black and white, had spoken. Afterwards he did get money into Broadwater Farm and in many ways helped change the culture of Haringey.

Before being elected to the Commons Bernie quizzed me at length about procedures and then later appeared to blame me for the arcane conservatism of Westminster! However, he did love the grand occasion. His entry after the 1987 election, in full African dress (just as the grey suits were gaining the upper hand in the Labour Party), was more than memorable.

My favourite memory of Bernie comes from 1977, when we were two of the four organisers of the rally to stop the National Front marching through Wood Green. The Labour Party and the Government asked us to call it off; the police claimed they could not prevent the NF marching and the received wisdom was that we were all mad. Our rally took place, was a huge success and the first real challenge to that racist offensive. Later, the NF were stopped in Lewisham and were soon in retreat. In organising the march, Bernie would talk and consult, but on the basic principle he would not negotiate. He was right.

His last years were beset by the pain and stress of illness and the frustration on his face was palpable; he wanted to be part of it all but on many occasions could not be.

Life in Westminster changes people. Bernie changed and occasionally we would argue and he would say that some of us were too awkward and too difficult and that progress was being made. But then Bernie loved to argue.

I will miss Bernie for his warmth and humour, for his zest for life and its complications and for his ability to enjoy it through all that. Thanks Bernie for always being yourself.

Mike Marqusee adds: In the 1980s in the wake of the Broadwater Farm rebellion in 1985, Bernie Grant became the pet hate-figure of every racist in the country, and his office and home were inundated with threats and obscenities. It was not only that Bernie was black, left-wing and opinionated; he had committed the cardinal sin of speaking up, without apology, for his constituents – the impoverished, police-harassed black youth of Tottenham – at a time when they were being reviled as a menace to civilisation.

Media comment following Bernie's tragic death tended to treat his famous comment on Broadwater Farm, that the "police got a bloody good hiding," as an extremist outburst which he had somehow managed to live down. But his stand was brave and honest, and gave a political voice to people otherwise excluded from the political process.

Bernie fashioned his own maverick mixture of black nationalism and socialism, Third Worldism and localism. He embodied the complex political experiences of a generation of black people in Britain, as well as their often frustrating relationship to the labour movement. It is unjmaginable that he would be permitted to stand as a Labour candidate if he was entering the Party today.

TONY CLIFF

The death of Tony Cliff removes one of the last of a remarkable generation of revolutionary socialists who came to political maturity through the Trotskyist movement in the late 1930s and 1940s. Cliff emerged from the wartime Revolutionary Communist Party to lead the Socialist Review Group. This transmogrified into the International Socialists during the radicalism of the 1960s and emerged in the 1970s as the Socialist Workers Party, the largest British current far left group.

Born Ygael Gluckstein in 1917 in Palestine, Cliff was radicalised by his revulsion against the treatment of Palestinian Arabs at the hands of the Zionists. After a brief flirtation with the Communist Party, Cliff was profoundly shaped by Trotsky's critique both of Stalinism and of the growing menace of the Nazis. In post-war Britain he was one of the first in the RCP to realise that capitalism had not entered its long awaited "final crisis." He launched on a major theoretical project designed to show the role of arms spending in stabilising the system. However he will probably best be remembered for his theory of State Capitalism. By seeking to root the Stalinist bureaucracy in a state capitalist economic system, Cliff severed links with orthodox Trotskyists who still held to one of various doctrines claiming that the Soviet Union (and its satellites) were species of "workers' states."

The explosion in membership of the IS in the 1960s briefly promised much. During those years Cliff began to espouse a more orthodox "Leninism" abandoning some of his earlier enthusiasm for the ideas of Rosa Luxemburg opposing democratic centralism. A succession of splits in the IS led to the exodus of many militants but also resulted in the creation of the SWP. While formally committed to democratic centralism, the party's centralism seems to many far more obvious than its internal democracy.

Cliff was a beguiling companion with a sense of humour rare among dedicated revolutionary leaders. To those who agreed with him he was charm incarnate. To those who broke with him politically he was an inflexible and none too principled faction fighter.

Despite the SWPs involvement in the London Socialist Alliance slate, Cliff had few illusions that the electoral road would be an easy one for the party.

Throughout his long political life Cliff remained a principled socialist and will be fondly remembered even by those who came to disagree fundamentally with him.

Hugh Kerr and John Palmer.

In search of democracy in Iran

Jamshid Ahmadi, Assistant General Secretary of the Committee for the Defence of the Iranian People's Rights describes the growing popular challenge to the forces of fundamentalism.

In February, the international media reported on the result of the parliamentary elections in Iran, when the most reactionary faction within the theocratic state was dealt a severe blow. The media's interest was partly due to the fact that after more than two decades there were clear signs that a serious popular challenge to the authority of the fundamentalist forces governing Iran was imminent.

Although the conditions under which the elections were held were anything but democratic, all progressive opposition forces advocating democracy and social change were united in the belief that the results of the election could hasten the demise of dictatorship in the country. By ensuring that women, young people and workers were mobilised around the main demands of democratisation, rule of law and social justice, the pro- reform forces ensured the participation of 60 per cent of the electorate.

The electoral campaign and the disastrous results for the reactionary forces have sharpened the conflict between the reformist faction and the ultra conservative faction devoted to further Islamisation of the country. As many as 75 per cent of the seats contested were claimed by pro- reform forces. The three top candidates in the Tehran constituency were not clergy - a significant fact. Of more significance was the fact that the second and third candidates were the sister and brother of well known critics of the theocracy, both serving prison sentences for their outspoken criticism.

Even more important, was the defeat of former president Hashemi- Rafsanjani, one of the main pillars of the Islamic regime since its inception. Rafsanjani hoped to win easily and then secure the powerful position of the speaker of parliament for the conservative forces. He polled disastrously and even with all ballot rigging in his favour came thirtieth in Tehran.

The election results mean that the conservative faction lost control of parliament. A heated debate is now underway about how to progress the struggle for change taking account of the results of the election and the massive endorsement of the pro- reform agenda.

Progressive, radical and working class forces are working hard to keep the momentum of the reform movement. They point to its explosive potential - it was the overwhelming support of youth and women which guaranteed Khatami's election to the presidency in May 1997 and upset the regime's calculations during the municipal elections in February 1999.

But the reactionary forces still maintain strategic powers to stop the reform process. The constitution has entrusted unrivalled powers to the Velayeh-e-Faghih, supreme religious leader, who enjoys powers to dismiss the president, dissolve parliament and reject any legislation which he - or his appointed Council of Guardians of the Constitution - deem not to be compatible with Islamic principles. The CGC is a deeply conservative body dominated by clergy and installed to block any legislation it considers incompatible with the outdated views of the fundamentalist faction. The CGC supersedes the legislative assembly, while the Council for the Expediency of state decrees, which is under the control of Rafsanjani, checks the powers of the executive. All this implies that the movement for freedom and democracy in Iran has only entered the initial stages of the struggle towards ousting the Velayate Faghih regime. It cannot expect to have reached its goals merely by defeating the reactionary forces in the presidential, municipal and parliamentary elections.

Iranian progressives argue that having tested its popular base and support, the reform movement should now challenge the constitutional basis of the ruling theocracy and call for the complete separation of the state and religious institutions. They point out that unless a new and democratic constitution is adopted, all recent electoral successes could be reversed.

The regime's attempts to derail the pro-reform movement are not limited to traditional methods of censorship, arrest and torture. It is now well established that the regime's secret services have been behind scores of assassinations.

In November and December 1998 two leaders of the opposition Nation Party of Iran and three writers were murdered. Subsequent inquiries revealed that the murders were planned and executed from within the Ministry of Intelligence. Although a deputy minister was arrested, he was found dead in his cell. In March this year Saeid Hajjarian, the editor of a pro reform popular daily and member of Tehran Municipal Council, was assassinated.

There is every indication that if the regime tries to block the present process of democratisation, there will be a violent reaction.

The Iranian people have a clear desire for democratisation, but realise that real democratic renewal isn't possible without breaking with the theocracy. International solidarity with those campaigning for democratic reform in Iran is vitally important.

Messages of solidarity aand requests for information should be sent to: CODIR, B.M.CODIR, London, WC1N 3XX

Paternalistic aid... or genuine solidarity?

Mike Phipps questions the growing influence of aid agencies and NGOs in the affairs of poorer countries.

Not long ago I was talking with some comrades from Nicaragua about the issue of corruption – specifically the financial corruption that has so damaged the reputation in recent years of the Sandinistas, who were in power for 11 years after the 1979 Revolution. One of them made the valid point that this problem had been considerably exacerbated in the 1980s by well-meaning western solidarity organisations. Keen to show their support for the Revolution, many went to Nicaragua doling out money and resources with scarcely any accounting process. This helped create a framework in which financial favours and self-interest could flourish.

The discussion moved on to other aspects of 'paternalistic solidarity'. One Nicaraguan cited the case of a highly committed aid worker who built a fresh water course and pump to provide drinking water for an entire village and rose at 4 am every day to turn on the supply. A great feat – but one which served only to strengthen the community's dependence: how difficult would it have been to show the villagers how to run their own supply?

Making the mental leap from providing charitable good works to empowering communities can be tricky, especially for western internationalists who might face criticism rather than grateful thanks for their efforts. But it encapsulates the difference between paternalistic aid and genuine solidarity.

These examples point to far broader concerns. With the decline of the mass solidarity campaigns of a generation ago, the members, budgets and scope of western NGOs doing 'Third World' aid work have grown enormously. Oxfam, for example, has an annual budget of £98 million, around a quarter of which comes from the British government or the EU. As poorer countries, at the behest of IMF structural adjustment programmes, cut back on core state functions – the provision of health, education and basic social services – NGOs stepped into the breach with projects to meet essential needs. Positive though much of this work may be, it is undermined by a lack of accountability not only to the people who are being helped, but often to the NGOs' western funders.

Recent footage of the flooding disaster in Mozambique presented the all too familiar picture of reporters asking (invariably white) unelected aid workers 'What do these people need?' Ordinary Mozambicans, presumed incapable of speaking for themselves, looked on as passive victims.

As elsewhere in politics, a lack of accountability can lead to a misuse of power. Alex de Waal describes in his book Famine Crimes how NGOs have increasingly asserted their right of access to disaster areas, overriding the national sovereignty of the state in question, and then demanded military protection for their activities. Before the disastrous US-led invasion of Somalia in 1992 under UN auspices, some US aid agencies called openly for military intervention. In one notorious incident of the subsequent operation, a UN helicopter gunship opened fire on a crowd of civilians, killing sixty. Latin America too is increasingly the focus of a number of dubious US faith-based agencies which are little better than modern missionaries.

Here the extraordinary enthusiasm of campaigns like Jubilee 2000 for New Labour's very limited debt relief for highly indebted countries smacks of a political accommodation. Perhaps it is only natural for charities and campaigns that were completely cold-shouldered by Tory governments to seek more constructive engagement with Labour. But this may have more to do with the tussle for grants and influence in relation to competitor NGOs than expressing the interests of those they seek to help. The fact is not a cent of Britain's debt relief will be seen in countries like Nicaragua, where its impact will be negligible.

Much more worrying is the support given to the recent military coup in Pakistan by significant western NGOs. This is despite considerable (if little reported) opposition from local community organisations, trades unions and other parts of civil society. Without wishing to denigrate the valuable work done by many NGOs, isn't it time that these burgeoning empires were subject to greater democratic accountability?

Matthew Willgress explains how NATO has helped cheat Kosovar miners.

A group of Kosovar miners were first locked out from work under orders from the Belgrade regime in 1990 when the Serbians nationalised their mines. This nationalisation was not done on the basis of an attempt to overcome capitalism, but was a precursor to privatisation and re-introduction of Western style capitalist modes of production.

The mines had been social (as opposed to state) property. But the Milosevic-led regime had already started to try and undo the post-war gains made by the Yugoslav people by stripping the Kosovars of some of their previous rights. This plan for the mines was part of this process. Despite their protests and appeals for international solidarity, the miners remained locked out until the withdrawal of Serb state forces following last year's NATO bombing.

From the entry of NATO troops until December, the miners – workers and former managers – were denied access, presumably as NATO and the United Nations pondered questions of ownership and wanted to prevent the workers asserting their claims to ownership through actual control. Despite posing as liberators, NATO was hardly going to allow social ownership to prosper in a state it occupied, especially with private companies eyeing up investment possibilities.

Indeed, one of the conditions of the Rambouillet Treaty used as an ultimatum before the bombing of Serbia last year was that Kosova would operate as a "free-market" economy. Then in December 1999, former miners were allowed re-entry to the mine but only on conditions of no pay, insurance and welfare and under acceptance that questions of ownership remain to be settled. The miners' union in association with former directors have drawn up plans to resume production. But of course they have no money. The role of NATO, which formerly claimed that Milosevic was a man they could do business with, is clear. They will only act in favour of the Kosvar people when it helps their own interests. For more info see www.workersaid.org http://www.workersaid.org

Pakistan: repression and protest

Farooq Sulehria of the Labour Party of Pakistan reports on the military regime's crackdown on dissent.

Soldiers and police raided the houses and offices of Labour Party of Pakistan (LPP) leaders on 22nd March. The raids were carried out after the LPP had organised a demonstration in front of the US Consulate in Lahore in opposition to President Clinton's visit.

Three days earlier the government had announced a ban on political parties and strikes. The military dictator, who calls himself "Chief Executive," told the press that the ban was imposed because of the Clinton visit.

In India there were hundreds of demonstrations against the Clinton visit. In Bangladesh, there were militant demonstrations by students. But in Pakistan opposition was muted, despite massive opposition to US imperialism, because of the atmosphere of repression.

In Lahore, some 50 demonstrators carried placards saying, *Clinton Go Back*, *Killer Clinton*, *Killer of Iraqi children* and chanted slogans against US imperialism. No arrests were made at the demonstration itself, probably because of the presence of international media covering the event.

However, a few hours later, police tried to arrest LPP leaders Farooq Tariq, Shoaib Bhatti and Zafar Awan. All three evaded arrest and have since gone underground.

During the raid on Farooq Tariq's house, hundreds of military and police circled the area. They entered the house by force despite the protests of Shahnaz Iqbal, partner of Tariq, who was alone with her six-year-old daughter. They then took a neighbour into custody and forced him to point out the houses of all the LPP members in the area.

LPP headquarters and the offices of the weekly *Mazdoor Jeddojuhd* have also been raided several times and are now under police surveillance.

The crackdown came after the LPP succeeded in holding a demonstration in defiance of the ban on political activities. LPP leaders declared that they would not abide by the law, which is in violation of basic human rights.

Human Rights Commission of Pakistan general secretary Hina Jelani condemned the raids and has offered full legal support to the LPP.

May Day Greetings
from Leonora Lloyd
to fellow trade union tutors
and other NATFHE readers
everywhere

Labour Left Briefing
20th Anniversary Dinner
7.30pm Saturday
29th April
Celebrate with **special guests**
and the editorial board
Caxton House
129 St Johns Way, London
N19
3 course meal: £15.00/£10.00
Tickets from Leonora Lloyd, 4b Byne Road, London SE26 5JE.
Tel. 020-8776 5318, email
leelloyd@gn.apc.org

Aaj Kay Naam, the British-based campaign against military rule in Pakistan, staged a picket of the Pakistani High Commission in London on Pakistan Day, 23rd March. Demonstrators chanted "Army out! Civilians in!" and "No civilian cleansing!" as dignitaries rolled up in diplomatic limousines.

The picket was joined by Jeremy Corbyn MP, who commented: "The whole history of military regimes, in Pakistan and elsewhere, should serve as a warning to humanity. There must be a swift return to civilian and constitutional rule."

Arif Azad, one of the picket organisers, explained: "Since the military coup of 12th October, Pakistan's constitution and elected bodies have remained suspended, leading political figures are in detention, and the judiciary has been forced to swear a new oath of loyalty to the provisional military order. The military is flooding every civil institution with military monitors and retired generals." He added: "The only answer to Pakistan's problems is more democracy, not less. We intend to keep up our work to strip the facade from the military dictatorship."

Aaj Kay Naam also released the text of an open letter signed by more than 50 human rights activists, writers and academics. "We call on Western governments to make unequivocally clear to Pakistan's military rulers that there must be a swift return to authentic civilian government and an end to all abuses of human rights," the letter declared. "Unless the pressure on the regime is stepped up, by both governments and non-governmental organisations, military rule will be extended indefinitely, and it will be impossible even to begin the construction of a democratic and stable Pakistan."

Signatories to the letter included Jeremy Corbyn MP, Alan Simpson MP, Lynne Jones MP, Dr Amjad Ayub (LPP), Neil Belton (author), Maggie Bowden (Liberation), Mary Breading (Institute for War and Peace Reporting), Liz Davies, Alex de Waal (Justice Africa), Ursula Owen and Michael Griffin (Index On Censorship), Suresh Grover, Abdul and Joyce Onibiyo, John Pilger (journalist), John Rees (SWP) and A Sivanandan.

Contact: aajkaynaam@yahoo.com; www.solidarity.freeserve.co.uk

Nursing Unionism in its decline

Brian Cambell
Sinn Fein

As the Irish peace process once more threatens to expire it is as well to consider the role of the biggest player in that process. That player has control of the largest armed force and more power to influence events than all of the other participants put together. Of course, in the often *Alice in Wonderland* world of the peace process, this player insists it is neutral; merely an arbitrator whose role is to help the other groups work out their problems.

That player is the British Government. In press statements and interviews its language is almost always passive. The only active words are to urge and implore others to reach agreement. No hint that it might have any control over events or that it might be responsible for the mess that the peace process is currently in.

It is perhaps too much to expect this Government to have an honest appraisal of its record in the peace process. They could start with Tony Blair's letter of assurance to the Unionists immediately after the Good Friday Agreement was concluded. Here was a hard-fought agreement which had been negotiated over many months following years of trying to get those negotiations started. What does Tony Blair do? He gives a letter to one party in the negotiations dealing with central issues which had just been agreed. The cleverly crafted letter was designed to assure Unionists that he would act if their interpretation of the agreement did not prove to be accurate.

It was a fatal mistake which altered the entire dynamic of the peace process. Instead of insisting on the integrity of what had been agreed, Tony Blair set about trying to shore up David Trimble's leadership. And from that point the British Government's policy in Ireland has been led up the cul-de-sac of saving Trimble. It has had the opposite effect to that intended. Trimble's position is weaker now than it was after the signing of the Agreement and his opponents have been emboldened by their seeming ability to make Blair dance to their tune. They know that any hint of strains within Unionism are met with a new panic from Downing Street about what is needed to save Trimble.

And naturally Trimble has himself taken advantage of this by trying to win further concessions from the British Government. Only last week Peter Mandelson hinted that the new police service will wear the British crown on their badge, a symbolic concession to Unionists which threatens to destroy any perceived impartiality of the new force.

There are those who argue that Blair and Mandelson have had to support Trimble in this way because without him the Agreement is doomed. That is a nonsense. Not only has their policy made Trimble's opponents stronger but it has made Unionist supporters of the Agreement weaker. Civil society – trade unions, church groups, community groups and others – have all along supported the Agreement. A policy which stood foursquare with them on the basis of the primacy of the Agreement would have strengthened the hand of those within political unionism who wanted to see it work. By appealing over the heads of the Unionist Party the anti-Agreement forces could have been marginalised.

As it is, by jumping from one Unionist crisis to another, the British Government finds itself with no idea how to proceed and with Trimble critically wounded by the latest leadership challenge.

So where do we go from here? Quite simply, no-one knows. There is a growing feeling that we have seen the end of the Good Friday Agreement. When Peter Mandelson collapsed the political institutions at the behest of Unionists he effectively killed it off. He talks now as if it were nothing to do with him.

The irony is that when we come to negotiate a new Agreement it will not be as favourable to Unionists. They are fractured and their political strength is diminishing. Blair and Mandelson, by adopting a strategy to save the Unionist leadership, may in fact have done them no favours at all.

Abortion US-style

Leonora Lloyd reports.

In the United States, abortion is one of the few issues separating Presidential candidates Gore and Bush. Bush has nowhere to go: if he goes soft on abortion, he loses his most important and noisiest backers, the religious fundamentalists. Gore knows that, despite the noise, pro-choice is an election winner, especially among women voters – those voters who won it for Clinton eight years ago.

There have been some strange anomalies in recent law changes, however. Last September Congress passed the Unborn Victims of Violence Act, giving a fertilised egg the same rights as women. Anyone causing the death of a fetus by assaulting a pregnant woman can be prosecuted for murder. Since the law came in, one man has been convicted for such a murder – but up to 100 women have been arrested. The parents of a 13 year old girl who suffered a stillbirth were arrested for failing "to get proper care for the fetus" and a woman who had a miscarriage was charged with homicide.

In February, an amendment to the Bankruptcy Code was passed preventing those violating the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act (FACE) from declaring bankruptcy to avoid paying financial damages to abortion providers (a tactic regularly used by anti-abortion campaigners). While some forms of violence against clinics declined in 1999, arson attacks and bomb and anthrax threats increased. Providers of abortion services continued to be routinely harassed at work and home.

Abortion has even featured in debate on the US's falling crime rate. Scholars Steven Levitt and John Donahue compared falling crime rates with the same state's abortion rates after 1973 and found crime rates fell significantly more (by 15%) where states had high abortion rates.

President 'Pinochet' Putin

Russian President Putin is already on the road towards dictatorship and suppression of the workers' movement, warns Steve Myers.

At the end of March the head of Russia's largest bank Alfa, Petr Aven, told *The Guardian* that Russia needs Putin to come down with the iron-fist of dictatorship in order to suppress the workers' movement and all opposition to fast-track Thatcherisation of the economy.

"I am a supporter of Pinochet – a politician who produced results for his country – I see a parallel. The only way ahead is for fast liberal reforms, building public support for that path but also using totalitarian force to achieve that."

But ex-secret service boss Putin had already embarked some way down this road before the 26th March election – widely believed to have been rigged.

The context was a vigorous 18-month upsurge in worker militancy with workers winning a number of key strikes and occupations. Nearly a decade of Western-led privatisation has seen living conditions for most become abysmal.

Millions of Russian workers have received no cash payment for months and wage arrears of a year or more are commonplace. People have been forced to survive by barter, begging and prostitution. The numbers of AIDS cases has soared and tuberculosis is now an epidemic. Many would starve if not for the tiny amounts of food they have been able to grow themselves. The average life expectancy, once near Western levels, is now 56 years.

The rouble crash of 1998 halved workers' already bad living standards overnight. The anger that had already begun to express itself in a wave of strikes and mass blockades of railways reached fever pitch.

That autumn, many millions participated in a general strike. Meanwhile, workers faced with mass redundancy in some towns, such as Vyborg and Yasnogorsk, seized their enterprises, expelling management and running production themselves.

The internal repressive apparatus was inadequate to deal with all this. Last summer, Yasnogorsk workers won unprecedented gains after their long militant occupation. Vyborg paper-manufacturing workers expelled armed strike-breaking militias from their mill.

When Putin became Prime Minister in late 1999, he immediately set about restructuring and merging different secret services still under his command.

After elected worker-delegates from over 400 major enterprises across the Kusbass, the single biggest industrial area of the world, met to discuss the idea of organising widespread take-overs of factories, Putin forced through laws allowing the police and military to seal off any section or region of Russia.

Of course these measures were insufficient, so Putin played his ace, launching the Chechen war. The event that triggered it in the popular mind, the murder of 300 Russians in terrorist bombings, has since been shown to almost certainly be the work of Putin and the Kremlin.

Over the last year in *LLB*, I have referred to various younger union leaders and militants at the forefront of these struggles. Union branches and left groups have come together to form the Movement for a Workers Party, in close connection with militant union Defence or Zaschita.

In the run-up to the presidential election, Putin moved to stamp out dissent. Anti-war protesters were arrested. Movement for a Workers Party and Zaschita activists were singled out for repression. In Kirov, Sergei Salnikov and Maksim Karpikov were victimised for distributing leaflets telling people not to vote for Putin.

In the aftermath of the election, the repression is clearly set to accelerate. On 5th April a local councillor and co-chair of Bashkortostan Zaschita, Aleksei Rybalko, was beaten unconscious by police and thrown out of their vehicle.

But perhaps the most devastating blow of all was Putin's decision to force through the Labour Code by May. This will render unions toothless, forcing all workers to sign individual short-term contracts with their continuation at the employer's discretion. The working week will be increased to 56 hours, with many workers' rights, enjoyed for decades, abolished or drastically reduced.

Zaschita and Oleg Shein, the Duma's sole militant deputy, have called for a mass campaign of resistance to the Labour Code, even greater than the 1998 rail wars. Shein argues that this will be the only way to stop Putin from fulfilling Aven's wish for a Pinochet state. We must give such a mass campaign our solidarity and channel our support through groups like the Movement for a Workers Party and Zaschita, who have actively fought against ultra-nationalism and racism, the card Putin played in using the Chechen war to derail workers' struggle.

Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov supported Putin's war and every one of Yeltsin's neo-liberal budgets over the years. In many towns and regions Communist governors regularly join with the ruling oligarchy in repressing workers' struggles. Nevertheless, the 30% vote for Zyuganov in the Presidential elections – possibly 35-40% without rigging – provides evidence that there is widespread opposition to Putin.

For more details see International Solidarity with Workers in Russia at: http://www.members.aol.com/ISWoR/english/index.html

International Solidarity with Workers in Russia sends May Day greetings to *Labour Left Briefing* and its socialist readers. 'Pinochet' Putin has begun his repression of the progressive wing of the workers' movement! If fascism gets hold of Russia it will domino first into Europe then wider. We need help urgently!
http://members.aol.com/ISWoR/english/index.html
ISWoR@aol.com
07940 915 011

Prawn farming gives pause for thought

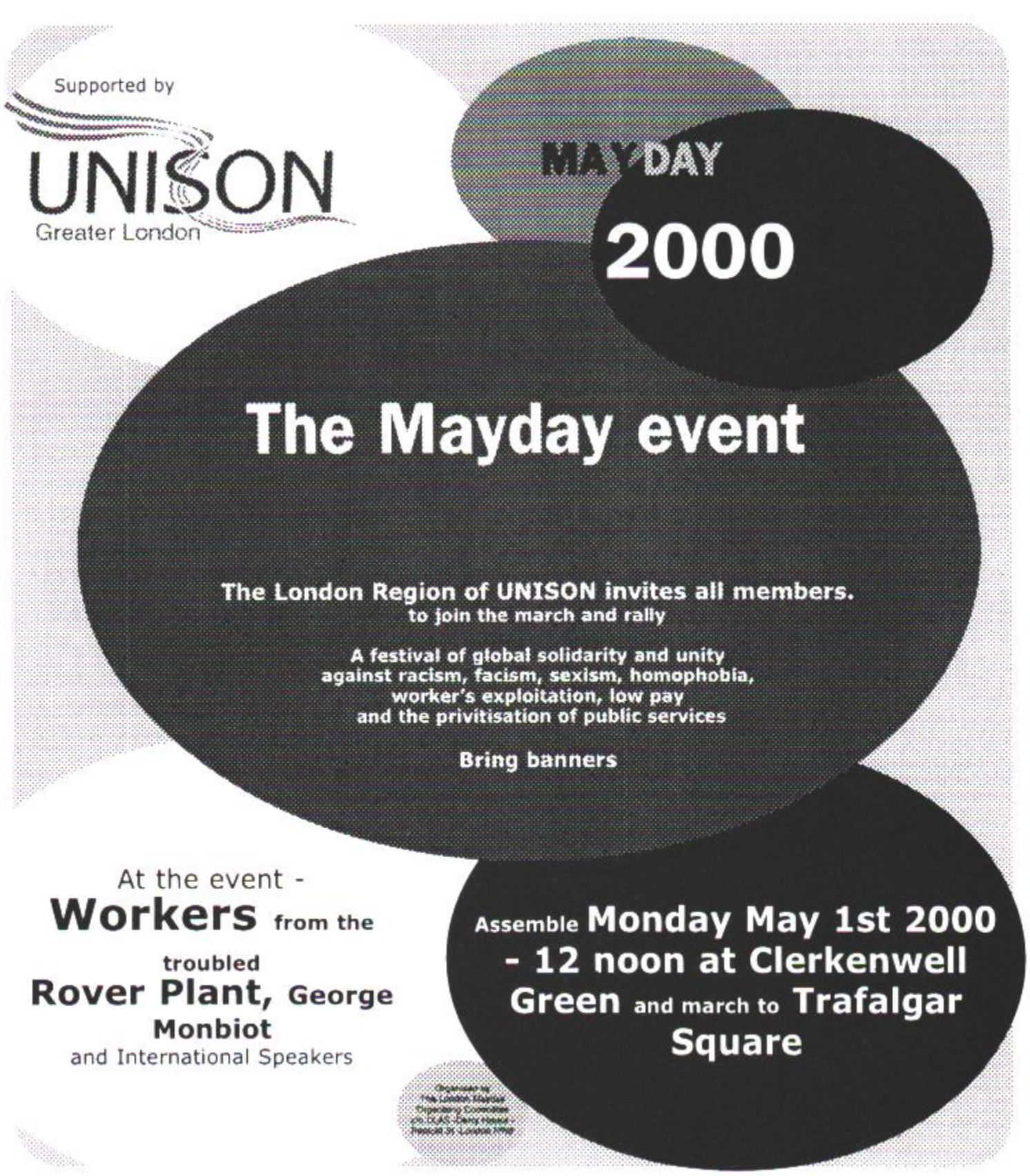
Mike Phipps reviews *The Globalized Woman* by Christa Wichterich, published by Zed Books, price £13.95 paperback.

Next time you tuck into a prawn cocktail, spare a thought for how it arrived on your plate. Prawn farming is big business these days in East Africa and the Indian subcontinent, with small farmers routinely being pushed off their land to make way for the profiteers. In Tamil Nadu alone, nearly 1,000 aquacultural installations – mostly unlicensed – have sprung up, generating an income of 2.8 bn rupees. Unfortunately, the ecological damage caused by these centres amounts to 4.2 bn rupees. In neighbouring Andhra Pradesh, 10,000 tonnes less rice a year – enough to feed 10,000 families – are being produced as a result of prawn farming for export. In Bangladesh too, the use of damaging chemicals to sustain this industry has caused a 30% drop in rice production. Prawn farming leaves coastal areas poisoned and local drinking water supplies contaminated. 2.5 kilos of imported feed is required for every kilo of prawns produced, and after eight years, contamination is so great the farms must be abandoned.

The impact of prawn farming on food security is just one of the fascinating details in a book which explores how women especially bear the brunt of globalisation in poorer countries. Despite the fact that globally women own hardly any land, 75% of agricultural labour in Africa is performed by women. The international economic order, in which $47 bn of agricultural subsidies are available to EU farmers while IMF programmes require poorer countries to end food subsidies, impacts directly on women's roles as family providers.

Globalisation has also forced women into the most exploitative jobs – the notorious system of physical punishments inflicted on women workers in Vietnamese sweatshops that supply the US giant Nike is documented here. At the same time as women are drawn into the western world of work, they face a fundamentalist religious backlash in many countries against education or any public roles.

Christa Wichterich's book unearths a rich seam of material, but more importantly discusses the strategies of women's movements across the world in confronting the iniquities of the neoliberal world order.



Kosova and the silent pro-war liberals

Mike Phipps reviews *Masters of the Universe* by Tariq Ali, published by Verso, price £15 paperback.

One year after NATO's war in the Balkans, the media have lost interest. Pro-war liberal defenders of multi-culturalism have fallen silent. Today it is the winners who preside over ethnic cleansing in Kosova of Serbs, Romanies and Jews.

This was the war fought ostensibly on humanitarian grounds. Of course, wars are rarely about such lofty concerns, although it is interesting to see how often humanitarian principles form part of the rhetorical justification for them. Former US National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski now boasts that he conceived President Carter's "human rights" doctrine as "the best way to destabilise the Soviet Union." The 1990-1 Gulf War was waged on grounds of justice and rights, allowing international affairs to become, in Peter Gowan's words, "a depoliticised process of crime and judicial punishment." In fact, humanitarian interventionism has a far longer pedigree, forming part of the Liberal imperialist rationale for the Boer War.

This collection of essays on the NATO war against Yugoslavia looks at the background to the conflict and examines whether the rhetoric of Blair and others about a new "moral purpose" in foreign policy marks a real shift in the thinking of Western elites. What Blair's outpourings can't bridge, however, is the gap between the allegedly worthy ends and the barbaric means (random civilian bombing with radioactive cluster bombs). Humanitarian concerns are similarly absent from British and EU dealings with Turkey, a NATO member whose continued massacres of its Kurdish population are routinely overlooked. Once again it is duplicity that characterises Western policy, and it is this, I think, which makes Tariq Ali's insistent references to NATO's "human rights fundamentalism" not especially useful.

Still, there's an excellent article from Michel Chossudovsky on the impact of economic reforms and the accumulation of wealth by the ex-communist nomenklatura in Albania. There, IMF-dictated policies ruined rural credit, leading to a collapse from food self-sufficiency in 1988 to less than half the level of production six years later. Industry was liquidated, health and education services destroyed by a World Bank "cost recovery" programme and the banking sector infiltrated by huge mafia money-laundering operations. Washington continued to praise the regime even as its criminal ties became stronger and more public.

The significance of this case study? The same recipe is being applied to "post-conflict" Kosova: the installation of a state system with links to organised crime – Europe's first "narco-democracy," under NATO control. Since this prescient essay was written, recent press reports confirm that Kosova is far and away Europe's leading centre for international criminal networks and drug trafficking. Some "moral purpose!"

Stopping capitalism

Matthew Willgress reviews *The Young Person's Guide to the Global Crisis – and the Alternative* by Michael Barratt Brown, published by Spokesman Books, price £9 paperback.

This useful book shows that the ideas of Blairism and social-partnership are the ideas of big business and points out that the economics of globalisation and the neo-liberal offensive are considered now as common sense. False assumptions like "full employment must mean high inflation" and the idea that public ownership is always ineffective and inherently bureaucratic are exposed.

For millions throughout the world, Rosa Luxemburg's words of "socialism or barbarism" are a living reality and Barratt Brown examines the recent crises in South-East Asia, Russia and Latin America.

The author promotes an "emergency programme" as an attempt to deal with the effects of the crisis where it has already struck and prevent it from spreading.

These demands, which the international labour movement should back, include a Tobin Tax on currency dealing, redistribution and a policy aimed at job creation. Barratt Brown argues that the "world crisis is a crisis of unequal development. The neglect of social concerns is not just a moral, but an economic question."

But how we do this is where I disagree with the author. He correctly recognises that our ultimate aim is the overthrow of capitalism, but seems to have some illusions in progressive possibilities for capitalist institutions like the EU. This does not stop him correctly pointing out change will not "come from the top down." The task of socialists is to be the link between "a wide range of separate forces – trade unions, organisations of the unemployed ... and campaigning groups of all sorts."

Barratt Brown concludes that "it is the great challenge of our time to build that alliance."

PERISCOPE

Steve Thirty-Pieces-of-Silver

Steve Pound, the MP who switched his Mayoral support from Glenda Jackson to Dobbo after his constituency party backed Ken, was forced to make an apology to the Commons when he named the wrong Tory MP as the one who called Blair a "liar" in a heated debate. Following his grovelling apology, he went on to describe Ken's own apology to Parliament for failure to declare income as "the most grudging apology" since Emperor Hirohito's. Rent-a-gob Steve really does appear to be losing it.

Co-op row continues

The Co-op Party continues to be blown apart by the row over its block vote for Dobbo cast by **Kathryn "Enver" Smith**. Greenwich Co-op Party members have called on Smith and the South London Co-op Council officers to stand down after a one-member one-vote ballot in Greenwich which backed Ken was ignored by Smith in favour of her own "consultation" of Greenwich members – on a much lower turnout this private consultation backed Dobbo. Council member Pete Willsman was refused access to the "consultation" papers. Meanwhile, no-one appears to be tying up the actual number of Co-op Party members in South London – reported in *Co-op News* as 400 – with the fact that they had an affiliated vote of 50,000, on a par with the largest trade unions.

Lords-a-leaping

Suspicion about the future reform of the Lords continues as Tony put another 19 cronies into the Lords, including some former triple-barrelled hereditaries who failed to be re-elected to the "interim" House. Word in the TGWU is of continued disquiet at the top, not from New Labour's policies, but at an honour to a former AEEU man, **Bill Jordan**, who literally becomes a union baron, while poor old **Bill Morris** isn't even knighted. Rumours are that proposals for second-stage reform won't even feature in Labour's next manifesto.

Paternity leave

Poor old **John Prescott**. Just when the public transportationally-challenged one thought that he may become acting PM, he had to open his big gob in Wales and frighten Blair.
Prescott told the Wales/Cymru Labour Party Conference that Labour had to heed the lessons of the Tories: "First they lost their activists, then they lost their councillors, then they lost their MPs and, finally, they lost government." Prescient words maybe, but the boss won't like the sideswipe at Millbank's kindergarten tactics.

Change of heart

You would be forgiven for thinking that a list of those backing **Tony Benn**'s deputy leadership campaign in 1981 would have been a good base for identifying supporters of Livingstone's campaign. Alongside one of his campaign organisers, Richard Balfe MEP, were Joan Ruddock, Paul Boateng, Harriet Harman, Kate Hoey and Tony Banks, all of whom voted for Dobbo. Banksy was last seen phone canvassing for Dobbo's selection on one of his rare visits to this country.

Two Jags is now Two Jobs

Those of you who worked hard to get a representative of the people in Parliament and who could happily live on £46,000 pa plus flat and expenses, may be surprised at the number of **Labour MPs** with second incomes - not just from directorships, but from actual jobs.
All the following are also drawing their full Parliamentary salary:
Legal profession - Douglas Alexander, Gerry Bermingham, Stuart Bell, Keith Darvill, Denzil Davies, Alan Hurst, David Kidney, Bob Marshall-Andrews, John Morris, Paul Stinchcombe, Gareth Thomas (Clwyd West).
Medical - Dr Howard Stoate.
Consultancy - Barbara Follett, Michael Foster (Hastings & Rye), Barry Gardiner, Derek Wyatt.
Next time you're asked to give up your spare time to get them re-elected, suggest they give up their second job.

Lonely

Meanwhile, the battle for saddest MP has to be between Southend Tory **David Amess**, a paid adviser to the Caravan Club, and Scottish MP **Russell Brown**, who has a free season ticket at Queen of the South FC. He can't even say he goes to the football to meet lots of constituents.

£2k 4 2k!

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

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

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

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

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

"This may sound like a revolutionary sentiment to the House, but the land belongs to us all"

Gordon Prentice MP, Commons debate on Right to Roam, 20th March 2000.

"The yawning affinity gap between New Labour and its traditional support is waiting to be filled by a realignment of left forces. Unless that happens, then we may witness our democracy perish in apathy and resentment.

Former Labour MEP **Alex Smith** who has joined another former MEP Henry McCubbin in supporting the Scottish Socialist Party.

Correspondence

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

Perhaps it's clearly obvious from the Anthropology Department at the University of East London, but from Berlin I fail to see any rational point to the *The Tube Will Not Be Privatised* Labour stickers, ("not") intended to be stuck over New Labour election posters.

Now it may well be appropriate for socialists to stay in the Labour Party and fight though I am not convinced that this strategy alone will be much use but to produce stickers stating that Labour will not be selling off the London Underground is pure madness. The policy *is* to sell off the Tube in one way or another and claiming that black is white and vice-versa is just lying.

Perhaps Chris Knight has a wider range of "Labour" stickers in the pipeline? *End immigration controls* for example, or why not produce some leaflets at the next general election reprinting some of Barking MP Margaret Hodge's more left-wing speeches or articles from the early eighties to distribute around the UEL halls of residence, in order to win "Labour" some more votes? *LLB* readers, why not do something a bit more useful and get hold of the London Socialist Alliance stickers against the Tube sell off and help our people – workers and socialists, not millionaires or Lords – get a few more votes.

Matt Heaney,
Berlin, Germany

In the last few days, the Tory and New Labour-friendly press have been up in arms as their campaign to stop the people's choice becoming Mayor reaches new heights.

There was outrage at Ken Livingstone's comment that some drugs such as cannabis should be de-criminalised. The Tory media and New Labour couldn't believe this. Yet all Ken was doing was pointing out a truth obvious to most people – the Tory "tough on drugs" policy, continued since 1997, has been an abject failure in the terms it set itself.

Is it not about time to discuss other options rationally? Could it be that noticing the popularity of soft-drug decrininalisation among the public, those advocates of a "tough on all drugs" policy are worried that they could well lose the argument, therefore preferring to resort to abstract moralising and preaching?

Livingstone's second extreme position was simply stating a fact – millions of people do die each year due to third world debt and the IMF/WTO imposed economic system. Worried that a figure of Ken's popularity and profile could actually expose the extent of the problems caused by the New World Order, they once again resorted to mud-slinging and scare-mongering. These are the actions of people who are losing the arguments on these issues and who have nothing positive or constructive to say.

And New Labour wonder why they are losing popularity in the polls!

Matthew Willgress
Peterborough CLP

Matthew Willgress and Colin Hall (April *LLB*) clearly belong to the "my party right or wrong" school of socialists in their attitude to the Labour Party. Both these socialist comrades will only be carried out of the Labour Party in a pine box! They share the view of Christine Shawcroft that any socialist who voluntary leaves the Labour Party should be shot. Perhaps their position has more to do with wanting to remain big fish in a rapidly shrinking pool.

The reality is that the space for socialists to fight back inside the Labour Party is being reduced further. The news that Raghib Ahsan has been blocked for the forthcoming Labour Party NEC elections by right wing forces inside his Birmingham Labour Party, coupled with news that over a one third of CLPs are declining to send a delegate to their national "convention", is further proof that many Labour Party activists and members are giving up the fight.

Socialists who have embarked on building a new party to the left of Labour in Scotland are correct to argue as trade unionists that unions should support political organisations and candidates in sympathy with trade union policy. If this means trade unions giving their members' hard earned dues to the SSP and not the corpo rate sponsored Labour Party, so be it.

There are no signs that the leaderships of the large trade unions have any intention of using their muscle to link up with the left to even slow down, let alone halt, the rightward drift of the Labour Party. They are all quite content to accept the limited gains of the continuation of the "check off", the minimum wage, union recognition and a stemming of the loss of members. Hence their support for further mergers and reduced democracy.

The reality, perhaps difficult to spot from outside the East Midlands, is that in an uneven and limited fashion in growing pockets across the country a series of left formations are beginning. These developments are arising out of suspensions of Labour Party and trade union branches, deselections, imposed candidates, campaigns to defend council housing, libraries, community centres, allotments, public services and local hospitals. The pace of this advance is likely to take a further step forward this May. Across the country thousands of votes will be cast for socialists seeking to build a credible alternative to the Labour Party. Over the years as the Labour Party moves further to the right and links up with the Liberal Democrats these forces can only grow.

The prospect of PR in local elections assisting in this process, first in Scotland, is on the agenda. The more limited PR introduced in Wales saw the main beneficiaries of disillusionment being Welsh Nationalists.

The next election, perhaps only a year away is likely to be much closer than many think. Matthew and Tim will be voting for their ultra loyal obsequious Blairite MPs. In Lewisham socialists will be able to vote for representatives who have chosen to put forward socialist principles. I do however have hope, as even my AWL neighbours, steadfast Labour loyalists until recently, now have a poster up in their window supporting socialist councillor Ian Page for the London Assembly!

Nick Long
Co-ordinator Greenwich & Lewisham SA

If any need remained for evidence of the suppression of dissent in the new Labour Party, the banning of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy literature from the Wales Labour Party conference in Llandudno was ample proof.

The requirement to gather official approval to place information on empty seats during the lunch break had not occurred to me, but the dispersal was halted by a steward. Curiously, he was still dressed in red – next year's colour must surely be beige.

I was directed to the standing orders committee for my official endorsement, which was not forthcoming, but my request resulted in a lambasting from the stage formally disapproving of my "stroppiness." Furthermore, my attempt to leave strategically placed piles of literature for interested persons to take was also disallowed. I retired defeated by the anti-democratic forces.

Still, I did attend a meeting by Campaigning for Your Franchise on the Labour Executive, an allied group where MPs Jon Owen Jones and Julie Morgan, among others, spoke. More might be heard of this organisation under the shock headline: "Democratic Group Gain Access To Conference."

Billy Blundell
Bethesda, Gwynedd



THE LIZ DAVIES COLUMN

●The March NEC was dominated by the London Mayor issue, although there was a determined attempt by Millbank to avoid mentioning Ken Livingstone's name.

Over the previous weeks, many London constituency parties and trade unions had passed motions urging Dobson to stand down, and calling on the NEC to endorse Livingstone as the Labour candidate. Millbank, of course, refused to circulate the motions, so I took along some copies.

Referring to the motions and the massive discontent within the London Party, I asked the Prime Minister if he would do the honourable thing, even at this late date, and save Labour from a debacle. I pointed out that Dobson's selection was widely perceived as a shabby fix and that the choice of the majority of London Party members and trade unionists had been ignored. He replied that the "honourable thing" would have been for "the other candidate" to accept the result.

We were treated to a presentation on the London campaign by Jim Fitzpatrick MP and David Evans – Assistant General Secretary and the man who recommended that the Labour Party should be more Marks and Spencers than Only Fools and Horses, shortly before M&S went into crisis. Again, no mention of the unusual occurrence in a British election of an independent candidate who appears to be the front-runner. The discussion was pretty much business as usual, which, under the circumstances, was somewhat surreal.

I proposed a motion, seconded by Christine Shawcroft and Mark Seddon, that in future selection contests where an electoral college is used, trade unions should be required to ballot their members (as in the 1994 leadership election) and that there should be a review of the weighted votes held by elected representatives.

We thought that the motion was all about moving forward after the fiascos in Wales and London, but we were told that we were at best naive, at worse, mischievous. I was asked if the motion could be referred to the *21st century party* consultation (what its relevance is to the future of GCs is beyond me). I refused and the motion was defeated by 22 votes to 3 (Christine, Mark and myself – Dennis Skinner had to leave before the vote).

The vote was followed by ten minutes of confusion. Despite having opposed the motion, some members of the NEC still wanted to refer it to the *21st century party*. There is an awareness that the Party is in crisis, and that a signal is needed to reassure the grass-roots, but a stubborn unwillingness to grasp the nettle. The chair ruled that the motion had fallen, and could not be referred for consultation.

●Christine Shawcroft, supported by some trade union representatives, asked the Prime Minister and Gordon Brown (who came along to discuss the budget) about the impact of the strong pound on the tens of thousands of jobs at risk in the car industry. In response, both Blair and Brown said that they were working to limit the damage but would not countenance intervening to lower the level of the pound or interest rates. So exactly how they intended to limit the damage remained unclear.

●During their 18 years in government, the Tories asset-stripped public sector housing through "right to buy" and abolished effective rent controls and security of tenure in the private sector. We all know the result – chronic homelessness and a scarcity of affordable homes to rent. Now the Government has published its long-awaited Green Paper on Housing – and what's on offer appears to be yet more of the same.

The proposals are to increase transfers of Council homes from the public sector to housing associations, and to increase Council rents to housing association or even private sector levels. Tenants who receive housing benefit will be subject to "incentives to work". There are no extra resources for public housing. Private landlords will continue to be able to charge market rents and to evict tenants after six months.

A Labour Government worthy of the name would bring back rent controls and security of tenure in the private sector. The housing benefit bill – which pours billions into landlords' pockets – would decrease immediately. A real Labour Government would also return to subsidising Council rents, not increase them to "take account of property values". And a real Labour Government would pass one very simple piece of legislation requiring that all rented property should be fit for human habitation.

This Green Paper ducks all the challenges, and what's worse, looks set to step up the pace of the Thatcherite onslaught on public housing.

May Day Greetings

from
Liz Davies
Mark Seddon
and
Christine Shawcroft

Labour Party NEC members

Vote for the Grassroots Alliance slate

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