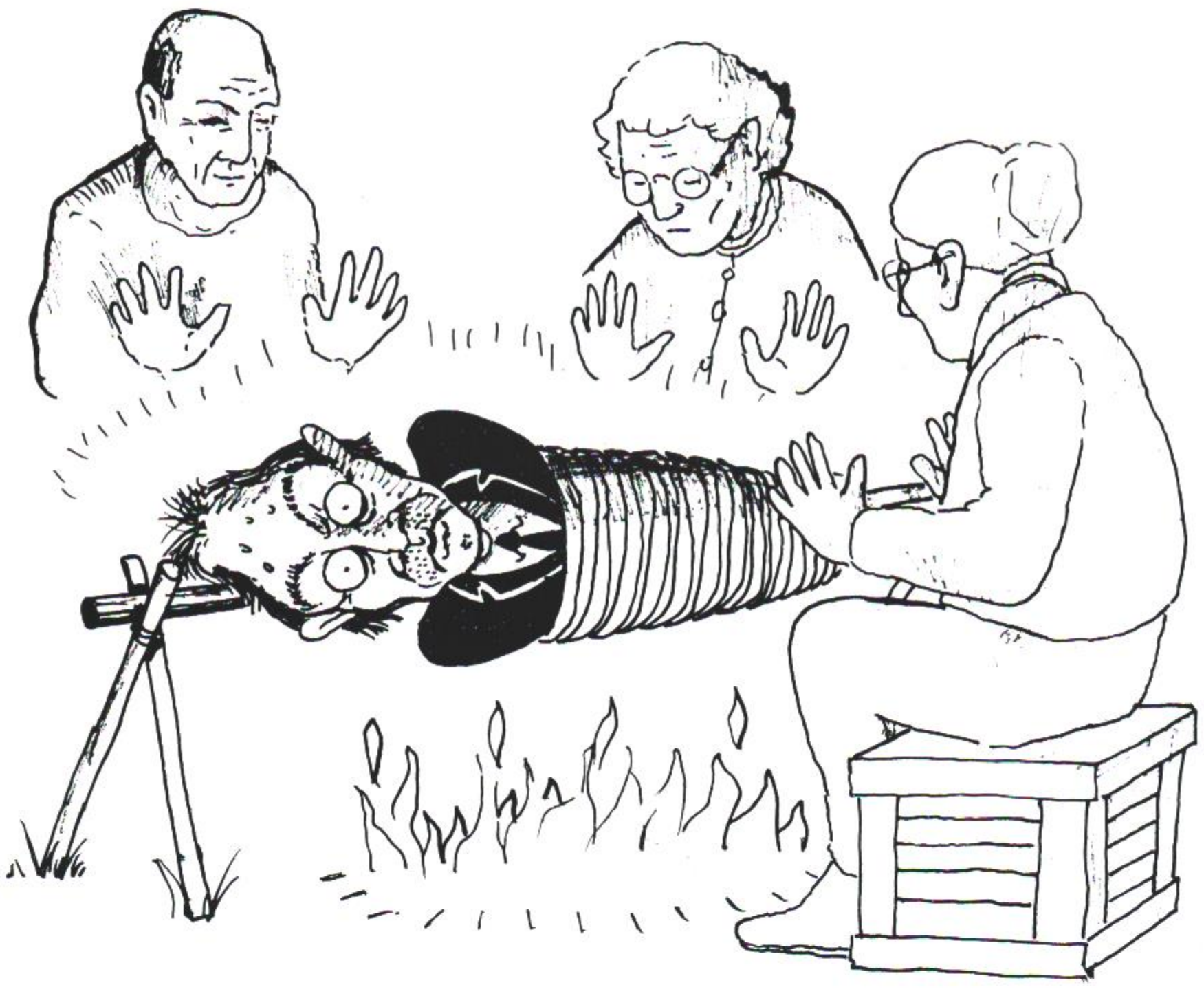
LABOUR LEFT

# Briefing

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## Stuff your winter fuel allowance ...




**INTERNATIONAL**
Palestinian uprising

**LABOUR PARTY**
Geoff Martin for London chair

**ECONOMY**
Paul Flynn – legalise cannabis

**GLOBALISATION**
Monbiot's *Captive State*

**INTERNATIONAL**
Milosovic gets the chop


# Link pensions to earnings!

# LABOUR LEFT Briefing

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**November 2000**

Cartoon: DROS

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EDITORIAL

# Listening to the wrong voices

Tony Blair is "listening". No concrete concessions have been made to the fuel protesters, and the Government, after consultation with the oil companies and the police, claims to be ready should disruption recur. If the protesters' 60-day deadline is adhered to, we can expect more protests by mid-November.

However one characterises these protests, the problems they are posing for the Government are largely of its own making. In a straw poll 94% felt Blair mishandled the crisis and opinion surveys immediately afterwards had Labour trailing behind the Conservatives for the first time in eight years.

The Government is being punished – as it deserves to be – for its failure to bring forward an integrated transport strategy over the last three years. High fuel tax might be more justifiable if public transport were being made a more attractive and affordable alternative. In reality, the decimation of services outside our main metropolitan areas has made private transport a necessity for many. Nor do environmental arguments carry much weight, when not a penny of tax revenues is earmarked for environmental protection.

Above all, the Government is paying the price for continuing the Tories' strategy of high indirect taxation which hits the poor disproportionately. Even the TUC, which called for an end to the blockades, recognised this. A real Labour Government, genuinely 'for the many not the few', might have raised capital gains tax – instead New Labour cut this on the higher rate from 40% to 10%. They might have raised corporation tax – instead they cut it by 3%. They could still raise income tax for higher earners, now 20p in the pound lower than when Thatcher left office ten years ago. Instead they prefer to penalise the less well off.

This is why analogies with truckers' disruption under Allende's Socialist government in Chile in the early 1970s are a bit misleading. Before we rush to defend "our government" against its class enemies, we should acknowledge these differences – such as the role of Lord Marshall, British Airways Chairman, a fierce opponent of higher corporate taxes, and one of Gordon Brown's main advisers on energy tax.

One reason the protests were tacitly supported by so many was the express desire to teach this arrogant Government a lesson. There is widespread alienation across Britain from both New Labour policies – privatisation, underfunding of public services, curtailment of civil liberties – and style. The money lavished on the Dome, the Government's manipulation of the media and double standards on sleaze were singled out time and again by protesters as good reasons for their action.

It's perhaps the character of this campaign that raises most difficulties for socialists. Road hauliers and farmers have not traditionally been allies of the trade union movement and there is ample evidence of collusion in the blockades by the oil companies for their own reasons – any cut in fuel tax could disguise an increase in the wholesale price of petrol – as well as the police. The fact that a movement raising a legitimate grievance is under the leadership of such forces is an indication of the extent to which the workers' movement has been pushed back – and a point of contrast with the anti-poll tax campaign of the late eighties.

One thing is clear: no socialist could support the use of emergency powers or special legislation to defeat the protests and we should campaign vigorously against this. Past experience confirms such measures tend to be kept on the statute book for use against the unions or radical protesters.

There is one solution to the connivance of the oil companies: nationalisation. The Attlee Government took major industries and utilities into public ownership in far more difficult circumstances. Blair's admission that he can't run a major visitor attraction makes a telling contrast. Once again an administration renowned for its "control freakery" has run scared from any meaningful sanction against corporate disruption.

When we criticise the Government for continuing so many of the Tories' policies, this is not because we are innately truculent or oppositionist. It is because chickens are coming home to roost at an amazing rate: Railtrack boss Gerald Corbett admits that privatisation has indeed damaged rail safety; the public has worked out that low income tax is being made up for by rises in indirect taxes that hit the poor hardest; pensioners refuse to be fobbed off with handouts.

A Labour Government that announced it was going to renationalise the railways, invest massively in public transport, reverse the sell-offs in the NHS and education and restore the link between pensions and earnings – that would be a major contribution to winning a second term, and a second term really worth having.

# Hackney on the brink?

John Stewart, Hackney North CLP, reports on the swift local response to the sudden news that Hackney is all but bankrupt.

On 17th October the Borough Treasurer issued a report under Section 114(3) of the 1988 Local Government Finance Act freezing all expenditure until the council agrees spending cuts "in the range of £14.5-22 million". Then all hell broke loose.

Expenditure has been taken out of the hands of elected councillors and all control lies with a panel of five senior council officers. Every bit of council expenditure is to cease except for statutory or contractual commitments. Schools are banned from hiring supply teachers and some headteachers have been told to turn off their fax machines to save paper and warned that they will be told not to buy toilet paper. Social services will limp on, suffering most from the ban on using translation and interpreting services. Elsewhere wages and voluntary sector grants may just stop. Community transport and meals on wheels have stopped already.

There is talk of an initial 1,000 job losses, and doubt whether there's money for the redundancy payments. Staff have been threatened with surcharge if they return phone calls from members of the public. Only life and limb housing repairs will be done. We may lose all but one library and every single local authority nursery.

This follows years of spending cuts, including £13 million cuts last year which caused job losses, cuts in service provision, closure of voluntary groups and bizarre money-saving practices throughout the Council. One example was the waste collection service (an attempt to privatise this was beaten off by unions earlier this year) where expenditure of £200 on a new tyre for a waste truck was refused – so it stayed in the depot and the rubbish stayed on the streets.

Councillors have tried to distance themselves from any responsibility, blaming previous administrations, other political parties, or council officers' incompetent accounting procedures. The Labour Group Leader issued a joint statement with the Tories praising the Labour-Tory coalition running the council and predicting "difficult decisions" ahead to turn the council around. All this has happened without reference to local Labour Party branches or CLPs.

The main responsibility lies with central government which under successive administrations – Thatcher, Major and Blair – have underfunded boroughs like Hackney, while finding money to cut Corporation Tax, bomb Yugoslavia and Iraq, and for the Millennium Dome. The scale of cuts proposed in Hackney is prompting serious debate locally about whether local councils are now anything more than a forum for administering cuts and how socialists and trade unions can work with Labour councillors who appear happy to join with the Tories in passing on cuts.

Two days after the announcement, trade unionists, tenants, teachers and service users came together to plan a fightback. Already two nurseries are being occupied, after management had moved to close them down in the face of Borough instructions that they could no longer buy so much as a pint of milk without written exemption. (Other nurseries have been summarily shut, with parents delivering children in the morning being told this was the nursery's last day.)

More meetings are planned to organise opposition to the cuts and town hall unions are discussing strike action to defend jobs and services. Our demands are for Hackney's councillors to stand with the people and lead a campaign for decent central government funding to halt this crisis. It is not their job to subsidise central government's perverse priorities.

- John Page, Secretary of Hackney UNISON, says: "Now, more than ever, the workforce and the community of Hackney must build a united campaign to defend jobs and services. The Council has declared war on the people of Hackney. We call on all councillors to reject the latest cuts proposals."
- No cuts in jobs or services! Lobby Hackney Council meeting to decide cuts. Called by tenants associations and unions 6.30pm, Monday 6th November. Town Hall steps, Mare Street E8.

**Labour Left Briefing AGM**

*The left, the General Election and beyond*

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

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# Safety concerns threaten PPP

**Matthew Willgress reports:** Ken Livingstone is writing to John Prescott urging that Balfour Beatty be banned from taking part in the PPP for the Tube, after it emerged that it was responsible for line maintenance in the Hatfield area and received a letter from Railtrack months ago saying 82% of faults "have never been rectified, each of which could lead to a derailment."

The Mayor said: "This is a leading member of a consortium bidding for the contract for the partial privatisation of London Underground, the Public Private Partnership (PPP), which creates 30-year contracts which it will be virtually impossible to terminate. The Government must make it clear that such contracts will not be awarded to this consortium." He added, "this new tragedy again demonstrates that public safety cannot be guaranteed where rail systems are privatised."

These calls were backed up by assistant general secretary of the RMT, Bob Crow, at a demonstration of over 200 trade unionists outside Railtrack House, the company's headquarters near Euston on Saturday 21st October. He said, "We believe that Railtrack are running the railways purely on the basis of profit. There should be one company that is interested only in safety and serving the travelling public."

Since Livingstone's statement, a Virgin cross-country express was derailed at Stafford on a broken rail and over 81 other cracked rails have been discovered.

Several motions to GLLP Conference call for scrapping the PPP. This year's Party Conference and National Policy Forum called for the Government only to go ahead "with the best deal for Londoners". These new safety concerns add to the problems emerging from the Hutton Enquiry that Conference also welcomed at the same time. The Government should keep to these words and rethink this potentially devastating policy.

●Additional reporting by Molly Cooper.

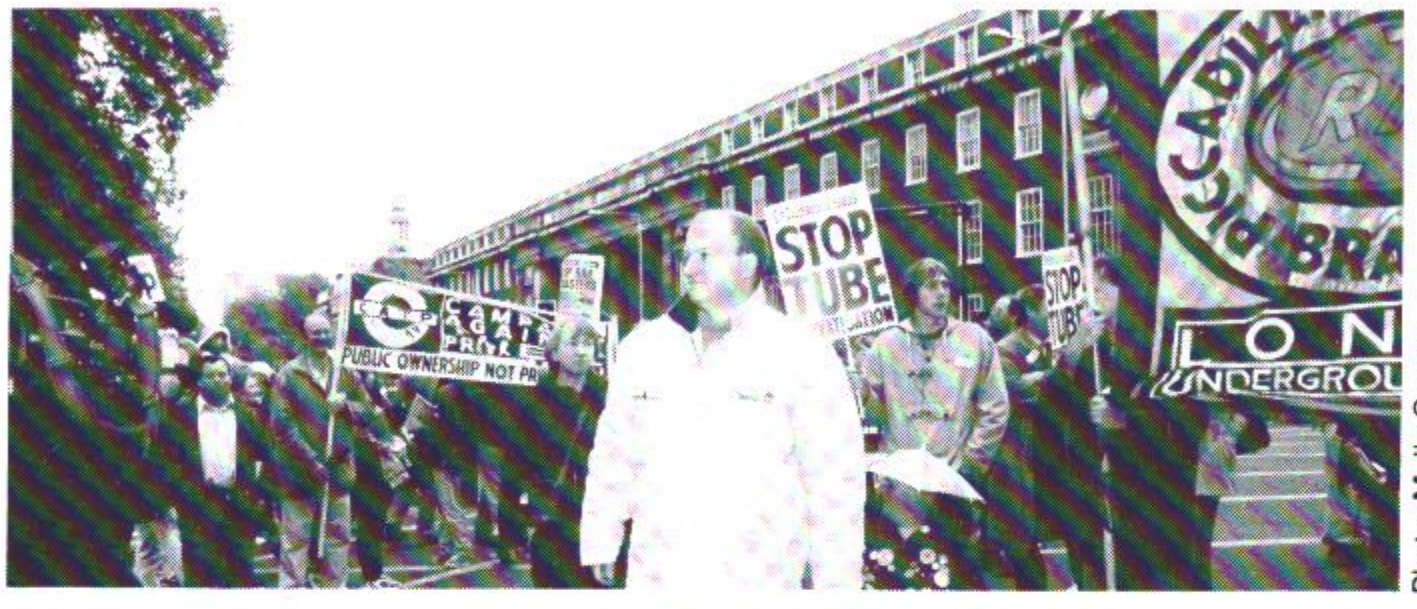



Photo: Molly Cooper

**Bob Crow, Assistant General Secretary RMT, and demonstrators outside Railtrack House block Euston Road, 21st October.**

# Blame Railtrack

Pam Singer investigates who is responsible for safety on the railways.

Maintenance of railway infrastructure falls into two broad categories: planned maintenance and casualty maintenance. In the case of track this involves long-term programmes for track renewal or upgrading (planned) and a continuous programme of day-to-day track maintenance and repair of any problems that arise (casualty).

If Railtrack needs to replace sections of track it must negotiate with the Train Operating Companies (TOC) about possession of the sections of track, partial line closures, alternative services, etc. The Train Operating Companies must then organise alternative temporary timetables and duty rosters for the drivers. It must also deal with passenger inconvenience and complaints. The TOC may then fall short of its target for passenger mileage and punctuality, which will result in contractual wrangles over penalty payments. With a structure based on contracts there is always an issue of whose "fault" it is when targets are not reached.

If, during the course of routine inspections, Railtrack finds that a section of track is sub-standard, something similar should happen. Whether it be emergency rail replacement or the introduction of a temporary speed restriction, Railtrack must inform the TOC, which must then take appropriate measures. With Railtrack being responsible for safety, the TOC would not be able to argue against the work being done.

Procedures are further complicated under the present privatised system in that Railtrack does not actually do the maintenance itself. The planned maintenance is sub-contracted to Jarvis while the casualty maintenance is sub-contracted to Balfour Beatty. So there is another level of mediation before unexpected remedial work is done.

We know from TV interviews with Vernon Hince from the RMT that track inspections that used to be done every night are now done once a week. Balfour Beatty who carried out these inspections informed Railtrack months ago that the track by Hatfield was in a terrible state. At the very least Railtrack should have imposed an immediate emergency speed restriction, but that would have caused them a hassle with the TOC, who could then claim contractual penalty payments because of loss of mileage, revenue, etc. The system has in-built disincentives for carrying out necessary repairs. So Railtrack crossed their fingers and muddled through, with the resulting tragic consequences. Ken Livingstone's present campaign against Balfour Beatty is thus misdirected: Railtrack makes both the safety decisions and the maintenance decisions and, ultimately, bears sole responsibility.

Railtrack seems to have changed its PR approach, with its immediate acceptance of blame and Gerald Corbett's offered resignation. This new approach has baffled the public, who have become inured to Railtrack's usual crass insensitivity. The media have posed two equally stupid questions: "Does Railtrack care?" and "Should Corbett go?". Railtrack is not in the business of "caring", and Corbett did not set up this unwieldy, anti-social privatisation. John Major's Government did. And Tony Blair's Government continues to prop it up.

# Is the gene-ie out of the bottle?

## Ian Malcolm-Walker, Derby North CLP, warns that genetic testing serves wealth, not health.

The mapping of the human genome – our genetic material – raises important, often controversial, questions for all socialists and trade unionists, particularly around issues of disability. Disabled people, trade unionists and socialists are not homogenous groups. What some see as threat, others find a source of hope, while some hold deep moral or religious views.

In June, US and UK academics and US company Celera simultaneously announced that 90% of the 3bn human base pairs had been mapped. It will take another 3 to 5 years to map the other 10%: in other words, 300 million pieces of the jigsaw are still missing. Understanding the function of each gene is another long task, complicated by the fact that many of them are non-genes, ex genes and viral debris. Perhaps only a few percent serve any useful function. We have 97% of our DNA in common with chimpanzees, 50% with yeast and 36% with cabbages.

In any event, the whole thing only determines genuinely inherited characteristics. To believe in a gay gene you must believe not just that we do not choose our sexuality, but that we cannot, because it is genetically pre-determined. You would also have to believe that gay men and lesbians reproduce heterosexually. Otherwise that gene line would long since have expired and humankind would be exclusively straight. No rational scientist would accept such nonsense.

Most disabled activists adhere to the social model of disability. Disability is a consequence of insurmountable barriers rather than impairments. If a wheelchair user cannot get to a meeting on the third floor, it is because there is no lift. People with the same impairments are not necessarily disabled to the same degree. Bill Clinton had no problems accessing aircraft when he was in a wheelchair because of his status.

A recent Government announcement will allow insurance companies to use genetic testing information for Huntingdon's Disease. New Labour is the first Western government to sanction such tests. At least six more tests are in the pipeline. What's next? Loans, pensions and mortgages, which can depend on insurance, are obvious targets and other services could follow.

In a gene test a person's DNA is examined for indications of a predisposition to disease or disorder. A gene can have many mutations, some of which may cause no symptoms, so a positive test does not mean that the person will get the disease. We are still unclear why, of two people with the same disease gene, one manifests the disease, the other stays healthy.

**'Between them a few companies hold several hundred thousand genetic patents on human genes and genetic methodologies'**

Finding out that you may develop a serious condition can be alarming, particularly if you have also seen relatives struck by it. A positive result means that at least one parent has the disease gene, and possibly other relatives too. Genetic testing of foetuses could mean that courts and doctors deny a woman's right to choose to continue a pregnancy.

Genetic testing by employers is still rare in this country and John Edmonds called for a ban just before the TUC Congress. The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) does not cover people with a predisposition to a disease or condition, who have no legal protection against discriminatory employers.

Testing is, however, increasingly common in the USA (although Gore announced plans to ban it in March) where some people have already lost jobs or not been promoted because of their gene status. In 1996, a Georgetown University survey of 332 people with genetic disorders found that 13 had been denied or dismissed from a job. Canada is considering a blanket ban on inward migrants who are asymptomatically HIV. How long before some immigration service or reactionary party demands genetic testing?

The human genome project is about wealth, not health. In the week before the June announcements Celera's stock rose from $18.50 to $138.50. Most of the major biotechnology companies are riding at or near the stock market highs and unlike internet companies many of them are making profits. If genomics works and new drugs are developed, many will only alleviate symptoms or delay death, creating life-long consumers.

As with the everlasting light bulb, big business has no interest in creating cures for anything. Historically, diseases have been eradicated or giant leaps made in public health only where the disease killed the owners of capital as well as those who sell their labour.

Between them a few companies hold several hundred thousand genetic patents on human genes and genetic methodologies. They will cream off billions if and when pharmaceutical companies develop new gene-based drugs and therapies.

Genetically modified humans or even the lesser evil of genetic screening/testing is an issue for all of us, particularly the potential victims. Here in the UK new legislation based on a social model definition of disability must be brought forward urgently to implement Labour's promise of "full and comprehensive civil rights for disabled people".

In the meantime trade unions must demand no negative use of genetic screening in the workplace – while still making use of generally available information to advance health and safety for all.

# Nuclear scandal

Graham Copp
Finchley & Golders Green CLP

In the aftermath of the Kursk tragedy, Britain's own potential nuclear submarine crisis has quietly rumbled on, culminating in the recent recalling of the British fleet of Hunter-Killer submarines. Despite the fact that until recently the story had only minimal coverage in the British press, the presence of the Royal Navy nuclear submarine HMS Tireless in Gibraltar for repairs has been widely criticised both in Gibraltar and Spain.

Since 19th May the submarine has been docked in Gibraltar with a fault in the reactor's cooling system, the nature of which was initially unclear. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) initially claimed that it was a simple welding problem, but the story changed after open disbelief from the Spanish military, and it emerged that the problem was actually a crack in the refrigeration system, which has had to be drained and the reactor shut down.

The Port of Gibraltar was in the Navy's category "Z", meaning it is unfit for the repair of submarines under Navy rules due to insufficient safety measures. The MOD swiftly reclassified the port as being an 'X' berth, and therefore fit for repair work.

The Royal Navy manual, quoted by Spanish environmentalists Ecologistas en Acción, states that a leak from the reactor could affect a 10 km area, which would reach from the present position of Tireless to cover the densely populated areas of Gibraltar, La Linea, Algeciras and San Roque. Scottish CND, on the other hand, believes around a 100 km zone could be contaminated – which would include the major city and tourist area of Málaga.

Despite these obvious dangers, British Labour MPs were quoted in the Gibraltar daily *Panorama* as having told protesting Gibraltarians that, by opposing the repairs, they were being anti-British!




Photo: Molly Cooper

**Demonstrators in Prague, 26th November.**

# Eye-witness in Prague

Steve Myers, Camberwell and Peckham CLP, gives an eye-witness account of 26th September.

In Prague on 26th September (S26), I saw up to 20,000 demonstrators, mainly non-aligned youth, left groups, some with trade union banners, and anarchists from all over western European. This beautiful ornate city, with its cheap accommodation, food and good beer, was host to a meeting of the IMF and World Bank. The 14,000 conference delegates were drawn from the rich and the great from all over the world.

Our demonstrations were extremely colourful. As we approached the Conference the democratic right to protest was denied. We were blocked by armoured trucks, tanks, water cannon, riot police, tear-gas, pepper spray and percussion guns. The bravery and courage of the youth, facing this army at what was for many their first ever demonstration, is what I remember most of Prague. It was deeply moving and holds much hope for the future.

This demonstration was a continuation of a series of events beginning with the City of London on June 18 (J18) 1999. Then followed Seattle, Philadelphia, and, in September, Melbourne and Prague. There were also many smaller protests across the world, mainly in western cities. London and Seattle caught state forces by surprise, and since then there has been brutal repression, with US "specialist advisors" flown in, with mass arrests, torture and, in Prague, rape.

Generally, the youth in Prague were more left than anarchist, so could easily be won to a socialist view of the world. A decade after the Soviet Union's fall, anti-capitalist protests seem to be the new fashion among many youth worldwide, although it has not yet had the impact of the peace movements in the late 1960s and early 70s. Whether this movement will see its France 68, maybe more, is to be seen.

As usual the left groups would not organise together. They gave up leadership to the anarchists, who were paradoxically extremely elitist in their tactics. The IS-SWP, the biggest left contingent, could have taken a lead, but as usual in similar situations, they said that nothing could be done without much larger numbers, which was not the case.

Although we did not surround the Conference, we caused disruption on 26th September. The next and final day was cancelled, as many delegates were unable to walk the Prague streets and had already left for home.

Unlike Seattle and Melbourne, the down side of Prague was that there was little evidence of the organised labour movement or the trade unions. Members of far left groups displayed what trade union banners there were. I helped carry the large bi-lingual International Solidarity with Workers in Russia banner, a banner which created a lot of interest from many of the participants.

However there was a meeting of trade unionists in Prague, and now there are plans to set up a Global Alliance of Anti-Capitalist Trade Unions (GAACTU), to build a powerful labour presence at the next big event, which will probably be Tuesday 1st May 2000 (M1), to organise protests at every big stock exchange in the world. The aim is to integrate this youth movement with trade unions, in the interests of both. For more details of GAACTU, e-mail me at SMye5@aol.com.

# Go Dutch on drugs

British drugs policy is a tragic farce. While one Chief Constable says he would not arrest someone for using cannabis recreationally, desperately sick people are still being dragged through the courts for using cannabis medicinally.

Jealous of Widdecombe's manic rant in Bournemouth, Straw went on to prove that he has also lost touch with reality. Thus those responsible for drug policy in the two main parties seem to have had a Vulcan mind-meld – two brains fused together to form one. Can you tell who is Jack Widdecombe and who is Ann Straw? Or is it the other way around?

The Jack-Ann mind-meld must learn two lessons.

•Lesson one is that prohibition of soft drugs does not reduce use. Since the Misuse of Drugs Act was passed 30 years ago, heroin use has jumped 2,000%, prosecutions have increased tenfold and we consume more cannabis than any other European country.

•Lesson two is that legalisation does not increase use. Decriminalisation and/or legalisation have not encouraged drug use in the Netherlands, parts of South Australia, the USA or in southern Europe. The Dutch use of cannabis is substantially less than ours after 25 years of decriminalisation. Their heroin deaths are a tenth of ours – less than 4 deaths per million population compared with ours of nearly 40.

**'while we arrest and imprison more drug-users than any other country in Europe, all drug use and deaths soar'**

Home Office Minister Charles Clarke has told me in a letter that "the main effect of decriminalisation or legalisation would be an increase in the consumption of drugs." That conclusion is shamelessly evidence-independent.

Over the past year I've been writing a report for the Social Health and Family Affairs Committee of the Council of Europe. One of the principal findings is that decriminalisation of cannabis in Holland has separated the soft and hard drug markets. There, young people can experiment with cannabis safely in five star cafes. They have a choice of strong and mild cannabis and if they wish they can take it without smoking or lacing it with tobacco. Here there is no choice – only the criminal market that also sells hard drugs. While we arrest and imprison more drug-users than any other country in Europe, all drug use and deaths soar.

Prohibition of soft drugs costs lives argues Paul Flynn MP.

The only way to reduce drug harm is to collapse the present irresponsible, armed, illegal market by replacing it with a legal market that can be rigorously policed, regulated and controlled. That is precisely the story of the success of Dutch decriminalisation. While cannabis is openly on sale to adults in controlled conditions, those who sell to under-age youngsters or who also sell hard drugs lose their licences. Under our prohibition system a seller commits the same offence if he sells to a disturbed ten-year-old or to a mature well balanced adult.

Last year, with journalist Matthew Parris, I did a radio programme from the Paulus Kerche in Rotterdam. It was a harrowing experience to witness addicts shooting up in front of us. But the heroin was clean and pure and the surroundings were hygienic. Support and training is at hand to wean addicts off their drugs and into jobs. No such luck here.

In Scotland this summer, 57 families lost loved ones. They were not killed by heroin but by prohibition – indirectly killed by British MPs though our ignorance, prejudice or cowardice. Those 57 young people would almost certainly not have died if they had been living in Holland and had their supplies from licensed Dutch basements. The 57 died from a single batch of heroin that was cut with a silica – deadly when injected. The only market for British addicts is the illegal, criminal one that thinks it's OK to adulterate heroin with a poison to improve their profits.

This Government, like all others for the past 30 years, continues to stumble down the blind alley of prohibition. Unless we change, there will be at least 1,000 avoidable UK heroin deaths in the next ten years.

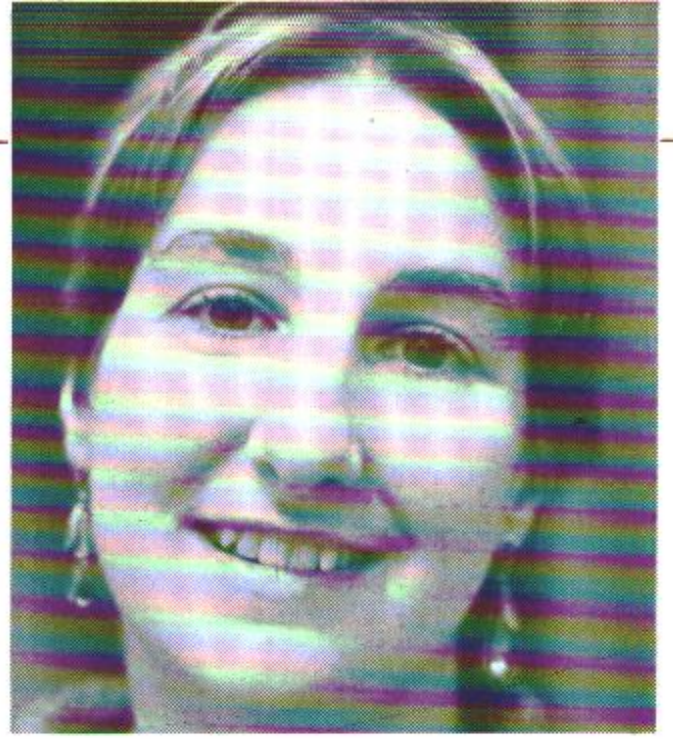
Attempting cheap tabloid scare-mongering on the *Today* programme, Jack Straw railed against cannabis as a cause of cancer. Facile and self-serving, he ignored the medical evidence that cannabis risks are slight. The *Lancet* says "moderate consumption of cannabis has little effect on health." The World Health Organisation confirms that cannabis is less dangerous than alcohol or tobacco, even if it was used the same way. Of course, it is not used to the same extent. It's very unlikely that any cannabis user would smoke the same number of spliffs as a serious tobacco smoker.

**'for 20 years it has not been possible to squeeze a Rizla paper between the drugs policies of Tory and Labour Governments. Now public opinion will force a change'**

Prohibition is the main health threat. Under regulated legalisation, cannabis consumers can freely choose milder forms of cannabis.

For 20 years it has not been possible to squeeze a Rizla paper between the drugs policies of Tory and Labour Governments. Now public opinion will force a change.

Calls for compassion for the users of medicinal cannabis have been spurned or derided. There has been a wilful refusal to consider the proof that prohibition kills and legalisation reduces drug harm. Will Labour continue refusing to change any policy until the *Daily Mail* first gives its approval?



*human rights watch*

# THE LIZ DAVIES COLUMN

With a General Election coming, you might think that the main parties would be trying to court the youth vote. Instead, both New Labour and the Tories are promoting law and order policies which can only alienate the young people whose civil rights are about to be severely restricted.

●Jack Straw's latest proposal is to give local authorities and the police powers to designate curfews on young people aged fifteen or younger in so-called "troubled areas", which are to be identified by postcode. Parents of teenagers who are out after the designated hours will face fines of up to £1,000 and ultimately jail. If their parents are imprisoned, children will be placed in care. The initiative has been condemned by civil liberties campaigners, by the Liberals, and even by the Tories.

Straw's proposals extend the "child curfews" for under-elevens which he initiated in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. When he introduced this Act in Parliament, Straw claimed that curfews would prevent anti-social behaviour such as vandalism by children out at night. This view was not widely shared: the curfew provisions have never been used. A few orders have been made against individual children, but no local authority has adopted Straw's scheme of a blanket curfew against all children under eleven in a designated area.

The civil liberties implications are obvious: why should a teenager who has committed no crime be kept indoors at night? Even the police aren't allowed to detain people speculatively. Why should parents have to detain their offspring – and face criminal conviction, fines and imprisonment if they don't or can't detain someone who really isn't a child any more? How can any parent consider taking an evening job – or even enjoy a social life – if they have a legal responsibility to guarantee that their teenager is home?

There is not even any evidence to suggest that child curfews succeed in curbing child crime in practice: a California study showed that the presence or absence of a child curfew made no difference whatsoever to the crime figures.

Straw's proposals will achieve two things: allowing New Labour to appear "tough on crime" and criminalising young people.

●Strange times we live in, when the unelected House of Lords is the guardian of our civil liberties. The Criminal Justice (Mode of Trial) Bill – abolishing the right of defendants to choose trial by jury – was yet again defeated in the Lords. Jack Straw now has two options: to use the Parliament Act (but is there time before the general election?) or to make this a manifesto commitment for the general election so, if Labour is re-elected, he can claim a mandate to reintroduce the proposals.

Most lawyers and judges are opposed to the "Mode of Trial" Bill. But senior judge Lord Justice Auld, who is reviewing the criminal courts, is likely go even further than Straw and propose that most criminal offences – even serious charges like theft, sexual offences, all kinds of alleged violence – should be tried by magistrates only. Magistrate trials are cheaper, said to be quicker (although most lawyers disagree) and are far more likely to convict. Expect a sudden, enthusiastic amendment from Straw to his own Bill – withdrawing the abolition of the right to choose jury trial in favour of outright abolition of jury trials for most offences. The jury acquittal of the GM crop protesters is just one example of what we could lose if magistrates take over.

●Meanwhile, the Tories have been doing their bit to alienate young people by proposing zero tolerance on cannabis consumption. New Labour remains silent. Only the Liberals have the honesty to advocate a Royal Commission on de-criminalisation. Smoking cannabis is a way of life for many people in today's society – and not an issue for even more. Most voters know that, and so do several Tory front-benchers and not a few Labour MPs. Prohibiting cannabis is no more effective than prohibiting alcohol was in 1920s America. The health risks are no greater than risks from alcohol or tobacco and probably a good deal less – when was the last time you heard of a stoned pub fight (or of a gang of spaced-out teenagers trashing a city centre, for that matter)? A Royal Commission would be a welcome first step: recognising the inevitable and de-criminalising possession of cannabis would make electoral sense, not to mention common sense.

●What right has the Government to pontificate about virginity? Women have the right to choose whether we have sex, whom we have sex with, and how we have sex, as well as the right to control our fertility. Young women make choices not on the basis of a Victorian-values campaign advocating virginity, but informed by non-judgemental sex education. A Government attempt to reduce social security spending on single mothers is no assistance to young women who need accurate information to make their own choices.

●And what right does the Government have to complain about giving cash to beggars? I can think of no worse indictment of the authoritarian nature of New Labour. How can sitting on a pavement for a trickle of 50 pences attract anyone who had other choices? Cash hand-outs by millionaires to Tony Blair's private office are apparently not begging, but responsible fund-raising.

# A stitched up line unravels in time

Sarah Cotterill, Manchester Central CLP, who seconded the pensions composite at Conference, tells the inside story of how the Party machine tried to stop the debate.



Photo: Molly Cooper

**New Labour's problems are not over. Estelle Morris MP, Secretary of State for Education, faced noisy protestors on a recent visit to Waltham Forest. Police escort her into a meeting to discuss privatisating the local education authority. Rumours abound about unsavoury links between the companies who are pitching for the contract and those in the borough who are heading the rush to privatise.**

My CLP sent a contemporary resolution to Conference calling for a substantial rise in the basic state pension and for the pension to be linked to rises in earnings. On the Monday of Conference, in a ballot of the contemporary issues submitted, pensions was voted as one of the four which would be discussed.

The ten or so CLPs, UNISON and the GMB who had all sent resolutions on pensions met up on Monday to discuss a composite. We agreed to a request from Conference Arrangements Committee to delay writing the composite because the NEC was expected to agree a statement on pensions from the Economic Policy Commission the following day. The Economic Policy Commission statement duly included:

- a plan to raise the minimum income guarantee to £90 per week (this ensures a basic minimum income for the very poorest pensioners and is means tested);
- a pension credit from 2003 to give extra money to pensioners with modest savings or small occupational pensions;
- transitional arrangements from 2001-2003 to benefit all pensioners (no details were provided on this).

We met again on Tuesday night to rediscuss the composite in the light of this statement. After a very long discussion, we drew up a composite suggested by the unions which called on the Government to "boost pensioner income by an immediate and substantial increase in the basic state pension and by linking the basic state pension to, for example, average earnings or inflation, whichever is greater." Some of us were concerned that the "for example" weakened the resolution but, to ensure a unified composite, this wording was agreed. It was surprising that five CLPs backed the composite even though their contemporary resolutions did not mention the link to earnings and basically supported the Government position.

We agreed in advance that whoever the mover was, they would not remit the composite unless we won major concessions. Rodney Bickerstaffe (UNISON) was then put forward as the mover. There were two proposals for seconder: me or a delegate from one of the CLPs who did not support the earnings link. We tied on a vote, and then I won on the toss of a coin.

The debate on pensions was on Wednesday afternoon. I woke on Wednesday morning to (unfounded) press rumours that Rodney Bickerstaffe would withdraw the composite. While I was sitting in Conference, the North West Regional Secretary tapped me on the shoulder and said I needed to go with him to another composite meeting. I walked in to a private room in the Metropole Hotel to find myself being introduced to Gordon Brown, Alistair Darling and Ian McCartney, who were meeting the CLP delegates.

I was one of the last to arrive and it was clear that some of the other delegates had been there for an hour or so. One of the two delegates from Poplar and Canning Town had not been invited, perhaps because she was solidly behind the earnings link, while the other delegate clearly wanted to back down.

Gordon Brown tried to persuade us to withdraw the composite. He promised to include some money for all pensioners in the pre-budget speech and said that the new pensioner's credit from 2003 will be assessed on retirement to avoid repeat means testing, and will rise in line with earnings. He promised a nationwide debate on pensions, culminating in a policy forum before Christmas and offered to come to speak to our individual CLPs on the issue.

After the ministers left, UNISON and the GMB arrived. They seemed very angry not to have been invited to the earlier meeting. We took a vote, and the result was eight to five in favour of withdrawing the motion. But five of those eight did not have resolutions supporting the earnings link and so should not really have been involved in the composite. Rodney Bickerstaffe rightly said he would still move the motion. I admire him for that.

Before the debate on the pensions composite, there was a long question and answer session with Alistair Darling, who repeatedly stressed the Government's position of targeting money at the poorest pensioners. In the debate, most of the speakers chosen by the Chair were against the composite, including three CLPs involved in the compositing, yet Tony Benn was not called.

Our pensions composite was passed on a card vote, with 60% in favour. Conference voted that all pensioners should share in the nation's wealth by receiving rises at least in line with those of the working population.

*Building Links: the future of Young Labour*

Sunday 12th November, from 12 noon
ULU, Malet Street
**£2 students/unwaged £4 waged**

Speakers include: Phil Pinder, Chair of Young Labour; Matthew Willgress; Raj Jethwa, TUC Youth Department.
Sponsors include: Labour Reform, *Tribune*, Network of Socialist Campaign Groups, *Labour Left Briefing*

# All pop songs and Union Jacks

John Stewart, delegate from Hackney North & Stoke Newington CLP, assesses Party Conference.

For the first time since the General Election, Labour Party Conference met at a time when Labour was below the Tories in the polls and there was serious talk of not winning a second term. The Conference was, as in previous years, a routine of lengthy ministerial speeches, absurd, over the top, standing ovations, and the Chair ruling that votes were unanimous, in a manner reminiscent of 1930s Russia. Platform plants and leadership sycophants dominated speeches from the podium.

That said, the defeats for the leadership (the first Blair has suffered as leader) on pensions and on rail safety and environmental pollution are significant. While the leadership has gone out of its way to insist it will ignore the votes, it is clear they did everything they could to avoid losing.

The pensions vote was better than expected (see page 10). Sadly, only 36% of CLPs voted for the resolution compared to 84% of unions and other affiliates. As in the 1930s, the trade unions are saving the Labour Party - we can only hope they will continue supporting their own policies within the structures of the Party against the Blairites.

For the first time under the new *Partnership in Power* procedures, minority positions from the National Policy Forum were allowed to be discussed at Conference and seven "alternative positions" were tabled.

Of these, consulting on whether to lower the voting age to 16 and the election of a majority of the new, reformed House of Lords were simple democratic issues. Amazingly they were overwhelmingly defeated by both union and CLP votes.

There were three alternative positions on Education and Employment: extending the New Deal for schools; extending Sure Start; and block grants for education funding. The first two were agreed with NEC support and the third was remitted – allowing the NEC to claim that Conference is not opposed to Government bypassing local education authorities.

There were defeats for the platform on both alternative positions to the Environment, Transport & the Regions document. One called for "the introduction of Automatic Train Protection on all lines at the earliest possible date" rather than the cheaper Train Protection & Warning System and ATP only on high-speed lines. The other called for penalties for directors of companies which pollute the environment. While not grabbing the headlines in the way the pensions vote did later in the week, these were significant defeats for the NEC.




Once again Conference Arrangements Committee censored many important issues. Resolutions from the FBU and several CLPs calling for Ken Livingstone to be re-admitted to the Labour Party were disallowed, as were issues such as nuclear weapons, sanctions against Iraq, Section 28, London Underground, housing stock transfers, bus fares and selection in schools, which were referred to policy commissions.

Elections taken at Conference for various Party positions were a disaster for the centre-left. In 15 contests to elect 35 members of the National Policy Forum (NPF), not a single candidate supported by the Grassroots Alliance won and we lost several key sitting members. Two Blairite MPs were re-elected to the Conference Arrangements Committee with 60% of the vote. Suspicions remain about the role played by regional offices in getting support for Blairite candidates but, even so, these are awful results. It will be hard to do better unless and until NPF elections are conducted by one member, one vote rather than by votes of Conference delegates, so that all Party members can have a say in who makes policy.

The *21st Century Party* consultation on Party structures and selection procedures will continue and rule changes will come up next year. Conference agreed by 82% to increase membership fees for unwaged members by 16% to £7. An amendment from the Socialist Education Association which would have allowed amendments to NPF Reports to be taken at Conference was defeated by 87%-13%.

The day after the pensions vote, Conference was denied another chance to re-assert itself when Bill Morris of the TGWU agreed to remit his union's composite motion opposing vouchers for asylum seekers. The TGWU's original motion had criticised the 1999 Immigration & Asylum Act as serving only to "further alienate, stigmatise and segregate refugees" and specifically opposed the voucher scheme as incompatible with a recent UN Report on eliminating racial discrimination. It was composited with resolutions from five CLPs (Mole Valley, Corby, Knowsley South, Leicester West and Lewisham West) which attacked the Tories' record on asylum and called for the new voucher and dispersal arrangements to be kept under review. The final composite maintained its opposition to the voucher system and could possibly have been won if pushed to a vote. Sadly Morris agreed to remit the composite in return for a promise from the NEC of a review (a commitment already given previously and printed on page 153 of the Policy Forum Report).

So far the indications are that the voucher system will be retained and the only alterations will be that vouchers are paid in smaller denominations so that change can be given. There are echoes of the pensions review promised in 1996 – but look what happened to that!

# The stuff that *Dreams* is made of

## A diary of my first Labour Party Conference, by Matthew Willgress, aged 17 and a quarter.

**SUNDAY**

CLPD rally this morning. Got there over an hour early to hand out leaflets for the *LLB* fringe meeting. Ken denounced international debt and supported pensioners – just what we needed. Rumour that the "re-admit Ken" motions were ruled out of order may be because the TGWU was inclined to support.

Afternoon: pointless debate about *21st Century Party*. Bill Morris made a dire speech about it strengthening the link with the unions – but redeemed himself by saying that wasn't the only link the TGWU was in favour of – he also favoured linking pensions to earnings!

**MONDAY**

Did my Ken groupie act today. At lunch time he made some excellent criticisms of the Government's taxation and economic policy. But he also had something about the City of London that didn't fit in with my crude Marxist background, so I burst out laughing, embarrassing the fellow *LLB* Editorial Board member sitting next to me.



In the evening, at a packed RMT meeting, Ken says he might take the Government to court if it hands over safety to the "bottom of the barrel of the worst scum of British capitalism" and he claps Bob Crow saying the RMT was prepared to take strike action if safety was compromised. With my confidence restored, I feel that I can now renew my "I love Red Ken" Club membership card.

*LLB* meeting after that. The platform was too big and went on a bit! My ego was boosted by Ann Black calling me a "hero of the Underground" for spotting a Millbank cock-up in a policy document on Tube funding. This error has now been corrected, clearly putting me on a par with Ken in campaigning against the PPP! News comes through that the platform has been defeated by the unions on rail safety – apparently the first time for years, with the exception of last year's PFI vote that had to be taken again.

**TUESDAY**

Economy debate: John Edmonds attacked oil companies to great cheers. He'll be calling for the nationalisation of the 200 monopolies next.

Leader's speech – Tony Blair attacked the Tories on asylum but then said we needed to be a party of business and there are some good Tories. Presumably he means those who only wanted to destroy most, not all, of Britain's manufacturing industry.

**WEDNESDAY**

Exciting afternoon with the pensions debate. This was the first time my two fellow Young Labour Left comrades had been into Conference – I hope they realise it was pretty lifeless for much of the rest of the week.

The motion was brilliantly seconded by *LLB* seller Sarah Cotterill. Edmonds was also good – forcefully calling for redistributive taxation. Stuff Ken, I'm joining the Edmonds fan club! I then learn Edmonds has a dodgy position on the euro – the Christine Shawcroft Fan Club may be the only one I can stay in by the end of this week.

Get upset by the way some of the pensions debate was handled. Alistair Darling was given an inordinate amount of time before the debate had even started for a Woganesque "question and answer" session, and a number of speakers tried to blackmail us, saying passing the resolution would disunite the Party and lose the election. Pushing up indirect taxation, sticking to Tory spending plans, ignoring the views of London and Welsh Party members and refusing to listen to pensioners don't disunite the Party, then? The biggest disgrace was the refusal to call Tony Benn, who has given his life to this Party and is about to retire from Parliament. He is worth more than the entire Millbank Tendency put together.

Evening out at the Campaign Group of MPs rally. Tony was the best speaker, although attendance was disappointing. We learned we had won the pensions vote 60 to 40, with a huge majority in the unions. Went out into the rain: no left groups standing outside saying the Labour Party was dead and we should all bugger off and work with them.

**THURSDAY**

Lunch time re-assessment meeting of CLPD and Labour Reform was well attended. I sat next to a fellow EB member whom I was allowing to give me a lift home after he promised not to applaud too loudly when Mandelson was soft on Ulster unionism again. That's the political pluralism that is *LLB*. I told him he'd have to wait for next year to be allowed into Ken's fan club, though.

Forced to go in to see Prescott if I wanted to see Nelson Mandela after him. Prescott attacked Thatcherism. Thatcher got the boot around the time I started junior school, but Prescott is keeping her memory alive by retaining some of her policies, like privatised railways.

Mandela calls for an internationalist response to globalisation and we are all given Union Jacks to wave at the end. Clearly Millbank has no sense of irony. Gabrielle sings *Dreams* and I discover that Dorothy Macedo and Mildred Gordon don't share Millbank's taste in popular music. The left unites in a grand finale, with Graham Copp from Finchley CLP leading us in a rousing version of the Red Flag in the hall outside.

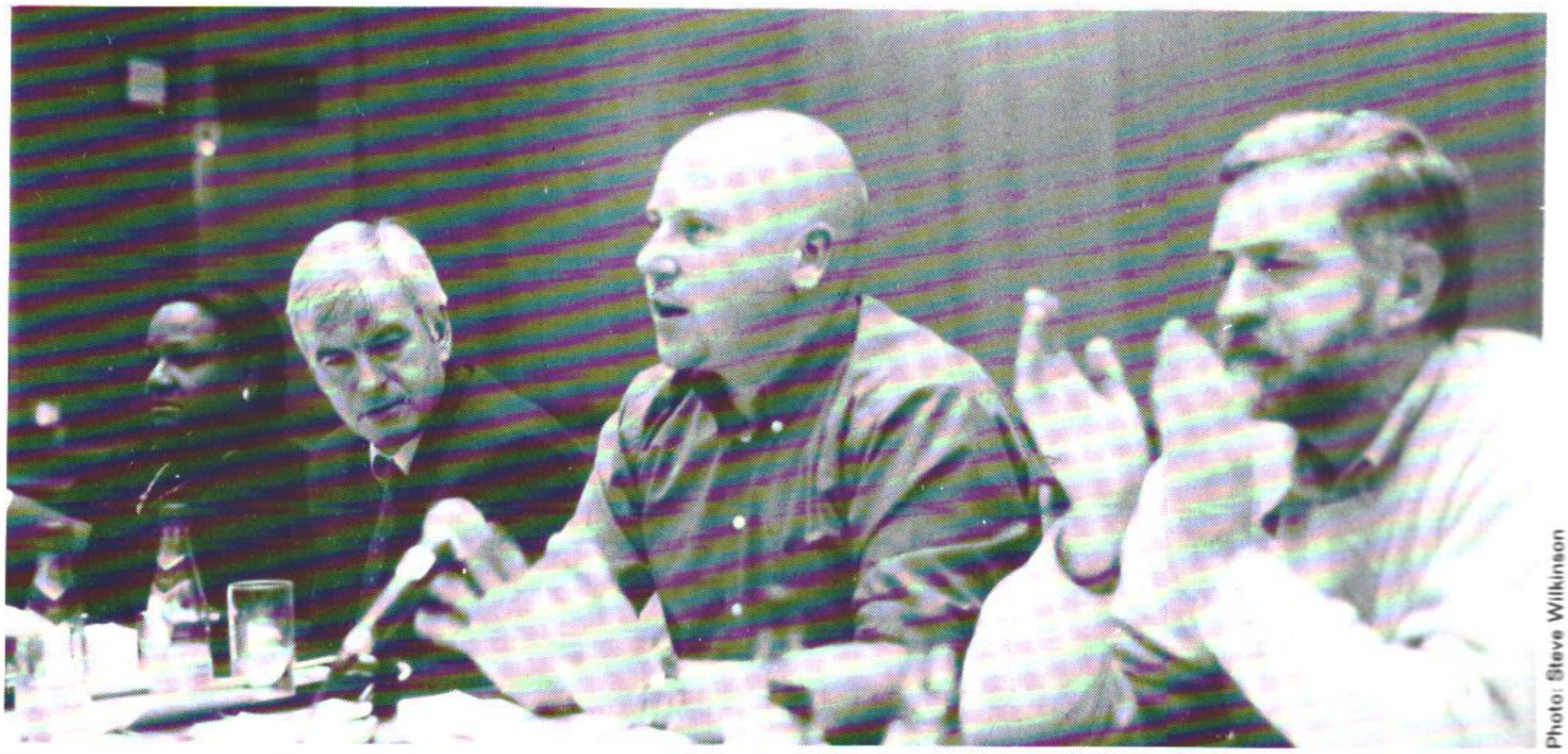


Photo: Steve Wilkinson

Diane Abbott MP, John McDonnell MP, Geoff Martin and Jeremy Corbyn MP share a campaign platform.

# London calling!

## Steve Wilkinson, UNISON London publicity officer, explains why Geoff Martin will make the London Labour Party a fighting machine that can re-establish Labour as the natural party of government in London.

All eyes will be on Geoff Martin, UNISON's candidate in the run up to the Greater London Labour Party (GLLP) Conference on 11th November which, barring a further outbreak of trench warfare on the scale of the Robinson-Mandelson tussle, is the biggest event on the horizon for the Labour Party.

Leading Labour in London is not a task for the meek. Geoff Martin, the convenor of London UNISON, has put himself forward for the post as the candidate who can lift the Party from its recent decline in the European and mayoral polls and regain Labour's grip on its London heartlands. Geoff states we need to end "the Millbank stranglehold on the Party in London, which was a gift to the Tories in the recent GLA elections. What's now required is an injection of real politics if we are to regain London for Labour."

As convenor of the largest trade union and as London Health Emergency's spokesperson for a properly funded and responsive health service in the capital, Geoff's contribution has been vital in a period where the Labour Party has, in the eyes of many voters, lost its ability to speak for their interests.

Geoff has a great deal to offer the Party. To imagine that his role as UNISON's London convenor is an easy one would be naive. For example, the pensions debate at Annual Conference highlighted how Labour policies often conflict with those of unions like UNISON, where political debate is alive and kicking. In this context, Geoff has not only been able to achieve consensus but focus the minds of union members on actively campaigning within the structures of the Labour Party and movement on a range of strategic issues.

As the union's spokesperson in the mayoral elections, Geoff was hailed by many as speaking for the conscience of the Labour Party, which found itself at odds with public opinion and unable to connect with voters. During the mayoral election, he was the only person able to brave the media circus who could present a positive picture of what devolution and a mayor for London would mean to the electorate without getting caught up in the negative debate about the rights and wrongs of what the Party had got itself into. Geoff not only elevated the credibility of UNISON in the eyes of the public, but also reassured Labour supporters that the Party was there to campaign for and to represent the interests of Labour voters.

Geoff makes no secret of his desire to see Livingstone back in the Party. Following the election of the Mayor and the new structures of the GLA, the post of chair of the London Party is key to uniting the regional and national political frameworks. Indeed, once Livingstone is returned to the fold, having a chair without any connection to Millbank's failed attempt to block him will serve to heal the wounds of the past.

Geoff says: "The broad layers that make up the London labour movement need to reclaim the Labour Party in London." Geoff has the connections to build important working relationships within and beyond the Party. He confirms that London trade unions and affiliated organisations, "have an extremely important role at the constituency and regional level" which he seeks to affirm through "properly accountable democratic processes within the Party framework".

The election of a new London chair is crucial, with the general election firmly on the horizon. Labour needs the likes of Geoff Martin to take the Party forward to electoral success in London.

# Stop the damage!

Mick Shaw
FBU Executive Council

The FBU motion calling for the reinstatement of Ken Livingstone MP as a Party member was not discussed by Annual Conference delegates. Conference Arrangements Committee ruled that it was "not appropriate for discussion" and referred it to the NEC.

The fight to secure Ken's reinstatement and heal the rift caused by the NEC stitch-ups of the London mayoral selection contest still continues. CLPs and affiliated trade union branches should write to the NEC expressing their support for reinstatement. This is not just a London issue: the negative publicity from any attempt by Millbank to further stitch up Party democracy in London will not be welcomed by marginal constituencies starting their General Election campaigns in any part of the country.

The next main focus for the campaign is the London Regional Conference on November 11th. "Reinstate Ken" resolutions have been tabled by the FBU, T&G, MSF, GPMU and seven constituencies. We need to ensure that the resolution is discussed and challenge any attempt to prevent discussion. Delegates also have the opportunity to elect Geoff Martin and Loraine Monk as Chair and Vice-Chair and to improve the composition of the Board.

Despite the manoeuvring going on behind the scenes to keep Ken out and to stop Geoff, we can win at Conference – and begin to stop the damage which the divisive leadership tactics have done to our General Election prospects.

●Please send copies of resolutions passed to NEC members Christine Shawcroft, 7 Malam Gardens, London E14 OTR and Ann Black, 88 Howard Street, Oxford OX4 3BE.

# Keep up the fight

**Dorothy Macedo, Chair of the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups, reports:** There are eleven months to go (at least) till next Party Conference. During this time, various bodies of the Party will be considering items referred to them by the last Party Conference (see report, page 11 for details). The NSCG is calling on Party branches, GCs and on union bodies to keep up the pressure and send off the resolutions below. It may seem a small thing to do, but MPs do take note of their postbags. When you send a resolution, make sure to ask for a response.

**1. Reinstate Livingstone**

Send to NEC, copies to Christine Shawcroft and Ann Black.

This (CLP) notes that resolutions were sent to Annual Conference calling for Ken Livingstone to be allowed to rejoin the LP but that these resolutions were ruled out of order and referred to the NEC. We note that the formal rule is exclusion from membership for five years but we believe the case of Ken Livingstone is a unique one. In the interests of Party unity, and to assist the rebuilding of Labour support in London, we call on NEC to readmit Ken Livingstone to the Labour Party.

**2. Contemporary Resolutions**

Send to Conference Arrangements Committee at Millbank, copies to Christine Shawcroft and Ann Black.

This (CLP) notes that constitutional amendments were sent to Annual Conference calling for CLPs and trade unions to be allowed to prioritise an equal number of contemporary resolutions, and that these were remitted to the CAC to consider as part of the review of Conference procedures. We believe that healthy debate at Conference helps create a stimulating event and makes the Party more attractive to join and support. Therefore we call on the CAC to increase the number of contemporary resolutions at Conference to at least four for CLPs and four for trade unions/affiliates.

**3. Automatic Train Protection**

Send to your own Labour MP, asking him/her to send it to John Prescott, or send to Prescott direct.

This (CLP) notes that the NPF amendment calling for the installation of the Advanced Train Protection (ATP) system on all lines received the overwhelming backing of Annual Conference delegates. In the light of recent train accidents, we call on the Government to implement this immediately in order to regain the confidence of the travelling public.

**4. Environmental Pollution**

Send to: as above.

This (CLP) notes the overwhelming backing of Annual Conference delegates for the NPF minority report calling for company directors to be personally liable for environmental damage caused by their companies. We call on the Government to announce now that a commitment to implement this will be included in the next manifesto.

**5. Vouchers for Asylum Seekers**

Send to Margaret McDonagh at Millback; and to own MP for onward transmission to Barbara Roche MP at the Home Office or to Barbara Roche direct.

This (CLP) notes that the TGWU composite resolution on the voucher system for asylum seekers was remitted to the NEC on the understanding that the voucher system was being reviewed. In the light of the widespread opposition to the voucher system from Party members, trade unions, anti-racist bodies, churches and voluntary organisations, we call on the Government to abolish the voucher system immediately.

## Network of Socialist Campaign Groups AGM

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

**Saturday 9th December 11am-5pm**

Speakers include LP NEC members
Christine Shawcroft and Ann Black

Registration – £15 waged, £5 low-waged and £2 unwaged; onsite creche.

Details from Network of SCGs
7 Malam Gardens London E14 OTR



# THE **ALAN SIMPSON** COLUMN

The trouble with New Labour apparatchiks is not just their absence of humility but their compulsive desire to rewrite history as though they always won. So it was with the pensions debate at Labour Party Conference. Almost before it was announced that Conference had voted for the reconnection between pensions and earnings, the sultans of spin were proclaiming that it wasn't a leadership defeat after all. The line was simple: it was only the union block votes that did it. A majority of constituency delegates (who had suddenly become the "real" people) had voted to leave the choice to our leaders. It was therefore safe to ignore the vote.

Disregarding the fact that the number of CLPs not represented at Conference was considerably greater than Labour's majority in Parliament, this was a remarkably selective reading of Conference processes. There wasn't even a flicker of recognition of all the times the unions have been shoehorned in by New Labour to stop the leadership losing to the votes of constituencies. A card vote is a short time in politics, but we should not be misled about its significance. A machine that can't abide losing an autocue, let alone a debate, was badly shaken.

To coerce the delegates, God had called back his only begotten son from meetings with traders and moneylenders at the temple of World Bank/IMF discussions in Prague. During the debate, divine intervention also ensured that a large number of the faithful were called, repeating the mantra "trust in Tony and Gordon, and all will be well". Throughout, the risen first Lord of the Treasury sat on high, glowering looks which threatened plagues of frogs and boils on those who doubted.

If the gods had spoken, Conference heeded other voices. Eleven million pensioners, and generations of labour movement activists who had held fast to the social insurance principle knew there was another way. The "unaffordability" argument about increasing state pensions falls apart as soon as you look at progressive contributions to the National Insurance (NI) Fund. Removing the upper earnings limit for NI contributions would currently add £3.2bn to the Fund, which at the end of this year will be in surplus by around £16.7bn (twice the level required by the Government actuary). If Labour raised the state pension by £10 a week and reconnected it to rises in earnings, the NI Fund would still be ahead of the actuary's recommended surplus at the end of the decade – without any other tax changes.

In a society where we all expect to live longer we must also expect to pay more into social insurance during our working years. That is why Hague's proposed NI opt-out for the under-30s is such nonsense. It leaves an immediate hole in today's contributions which pay for today's pensions and benefits. It would certainly be a bonanza for the private pensions industry (again) and the richest earners in the land would probably be beneficiaries too. But the rest would be losers.

This is a wonderful chance to define some of the fundamental differences between Labour and the Tories... but only if Labour reconnects itself to the universal principles we set down when founding the welfare state. The increase in means-testing is not only wrong in principle, it doesn't work in practice. The latest figures for pensioner take up of the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) highlight the muddle Gordon has got himself into.

The Government estimated that at least 500,000 pensioners should be entitled to MIG, but don't claim it. Out of the 400,000 letters sent out so far only 21,000 new MIG claims have started. There is a stigma to claiming that Downing Street seems incapable of understanding, along with the resentments and divisions MIG brings with it. Every MP must have experienced the hostility of pensioners whose small works pension takes them just above the MIG threshold Those who saved for retirement now feel they were mugs. If they had known what was in store they'd have spent and had jam today and jam tomorrow.

This is a dangerous message that goes well beyond pensioners. Recent official figures show that people are borrowing to buy goods rather than saving for earnings or pension rights. Yet all the Government's pension calculations depend on the opposite happening.

Britain's spending on the state pension (as a proportion of GDP) is one of the lowest in Europe, and the projections about its increase are lower still. At the moment it takes 4.5% of GDP (and in 2030 it will take 5.5% of GDP). Comparisons with our EU partners are stark:- Denmark 6.8% (10.9% in 2030), Spain 10.0% (14.1%), France 10.6%(13.5%), Germany 11.1% (16.5%), and Sweden 11.8% (15.0%). Many EU countries also face much higher growth rates in the size of their pensioner populations than Britain does.

Beyond this array of figures, the message to send back to Downing Street is simple. Means-testing pensions is a mess for which Labour will be punished. A progressive tax and NI system would fund the restoration of the state pension without rewarding the rich. So Gordon, pay the pensioners. It's their due and it's affordable.

# "The neoliberal consensu

Mike Phipps discusses *Captive State*, an important new book that exposes New Labour's compromised links with big business, with its author George Monbiot.

George Monbiot's latest book is about the phenomenal growth of corporate influence under New Labour. Take the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), heralded as a way of funding hospitals, urban redevelopment and much more, but revealed here as diametrically opposed to what most people want and a rip-off for the taxpayer.

Under local Health Trust plans, Coventry's hospitals, already reduced in number from five to two, are to be replaced by a smaller hospital on a non-central site (more inaccessible for users, but releasing more land for "development" by private companies) with a 20% cut in beds and staff to ensure profitability. Renovation of the existing hospitals was rejected by the Trust as unattractive – that is, too cheap. Instead the new scheme will cost the taxpayer £36m a year for decades to come – most contracts run for thirty years at least, some for sixty, long after the services provided are obsolete.

This is no isolated example. In Edinburgh, four private companies are to receive £990m from a project which if publicly funded would have cost just £180m. Similar deals apply to road building. The Birmingham Northern Relief Road, which John Prescott said would be built "over my dead body", will provide rich pickings for the private sector, despite indications that it will increase rather than cut congestion.

Community redevelopment projects involving private sector cash have led to a host of upmarket developments, often wholly at odds with expressed local needs. Yet while every other EU country allows local people to appeal against council decisions, in Britain only the developers can. Labour originally favoured changing this – now they are opposed. In fact, the relationship with business has strengthened, with government helping the construction lobby pressurise local authorities more effectively.

The PFI scandal without parallel is the Skye Bridge, where the private consortium charges £5.60 for a one-way crossing. This is not to recover costs, already paid for by the Scottish Office, but simply profit. The developers spent just £0.5m but will reap £37m from the tolls over the next eighteen years.

Apart from a short excerpt in *The Guardian* and Dave Aaronovitch rubbishing the book in *The Independent*, media interest in the book has been minimal. I asked George Monbiot if he was surprised.

"I didn't really expect the cocktail circuit to thank me for writing it," he told me. "I realised that in attacking a number of powerful interests – big business, New Labour, government departments, international institutions – I wouldn't be winning many influential friends. But the response from readers has been very good. I've been inundated with letters and calls. People have long suspected the power of big business in Britain is inordinate, but no-one's documented this subversion right across government. There's a real hunger to know what's been happening."

Monbiot also looks at the impact of the big supermarket chains. Many argue their huge influence is due to their popularity, but this overlooks how the rules of the market are consistently skewed in their favour – for example the free parking they enjoy in out-of-town sites compared to high street shops. This of course is subsidised by taxpayers, as are the traffic costs incurred by superstores trucking supplies around the country rather than using local suppliers. Wholesalers lucky enough to be favoured by the big stores face the most draconian rules, and work outsourced to overseas suppliers often breaches local legislation like the minimum wage. The stores' use of loss leaders, for example, selling bread at 8p a loaf – illegal in some EU countries – drives smaller competitors out of business. Meanwhile in poorer areas, where competition is less, the big chains charge up to 69% more for the same goods. I asked Monbiot how we could campaign on this without marginalising ourselves.

"Although most people shop at superstores, I don't think anyone would welcome the grossly undemocratic distortions of government policy they have been able to engineer," he responded. "You might be a shopper one day, and a campaigner against a superstore extension the next – the two roles are not exclusive. My experience is that as soon as people hear how planning permission is bought, suppliers are manipulated and laws are written by the superstores, they object in the strongest terms, whatever their shopping habits."

No book about corporate influence in politics would be complete without covering the headlong rush towards genetically modified foods. Chief villain is the agribusiness giant Monsanto, currently pushing for cattle to be injected with the GM chemical BST, despite major concerns about cancer. The worry here is that if the chemical is declared safe by the UN, it can be forced on other countries under World Trade Organisation rules. Already the WTO is levying over $100m of sanctions on EU countries every year for their failure to import US hormone-injected beef. Only Britain opposed the EU on this.

So far the EU is holding firm on Monsanto's GM chemical. But in Britain, secret tests on the drug began as early as 1985. The milk from the contaminated cattle was sold on the open market, despite health concerns, and today's Ministry of Agriculture still won't discuss these "confidential" trials.

GM trials are not so much about improving food or advancing science as allowing companies to patent genes. An EU directive now allows private companies to own genes – they can even prevent public health tests being carried out, for example for breast cancer, unless

# us is starting to crack"

they are done under licence by the gene-owning company at double the cost.

The international battles around these issues may be familiar, but the role of government departments has not been so widely reported. Is there a tendency, I asked Monbiot, among the bigger environmental groups to focus on easy remote targets like the EU Commission and the WTO, rather than Prescott and Nick Brown?

"I think there's a lot of truth in that," he acknowledged. "We've tended to talk about the impacts of big business on Mexico, or Brazil or India – which is, of course, alarming – while failing to see that exactly the same things (though better disguised) have been happening to us. I've often found when I've argued the case for social justice abroad, people have queued up to congratulate me, but when I call for this at home, the same people denounce me. But the response to *Captive State* suggests people now want to hear what's happening at home, and are deeply troubled when they do."

In the twenty months after the 1997 election, Monsanto met Agriculture Ministry officials 22 times. In the same period the Government's "independent" Advisory Committee approved 160 applications for GM planting and rejected none. Most of its members are employed by biotech companies or are academics funded by them. The level of corporate funding in universities is itself a cause for concern, distorting research priorities (five times as much money is spent in Britain's universities researching oil and gas as on renewable energy) and isolating work that is not favourable to private business. Corporate pressure led Edinburgh University to close its Centre of Human Ecology.

Sponsorship in schools is even more insidious. A US Consumers Union study found 80% of sponsored teaching packs contained "biased or incomplete information" about sponsors' products. Here, we have New Labour's Education Action Zones. Lambeth's is run by Shell (criticised on human rights), Manchester's by its Airport (criticised by environmentalists) and Hull's, Plymouth's and Teeside's partly by arms manufacturer British Aerospace.

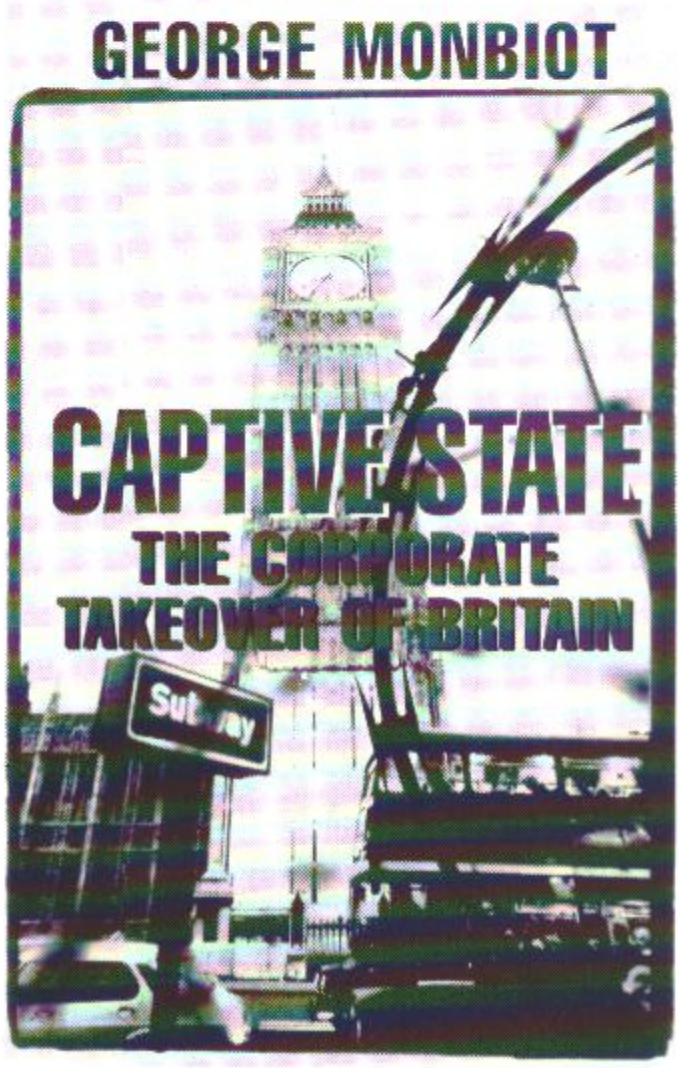
The book provides a lists of dozens of "fat cats" serving on government bodies where conflicts of interest seem manifest: for example, Lord Rogers, architect of Heathrow's Terminal 5, also on the Government's Urban Taskforce aimed at reducing building on greenfield sites; or Sir Robin Biggam, director of British Aerospace, which arms Turkey, also Chairman of the ITC which revoked a Kurdish satellite TV station's licence.

There's plenty to campaign about here, so how did Monbiot assess prospects, especially as in Britain there has not really been the kind of link-up between young anti-corporate activists and the organised trade union movement that we saw in Seattle?

"I was at a conference in September where trade unionists and young anti-corporate campaigners pledged their support to each other's causes. These alliances are beginning to happen. Rank and file members I meet are increasingly disillusioned with their unions' support for New Labour and are keen to build alliances outside their traditional political bases. Direct activists are recognising there's a gulf between political protest and political change, and they need help if it's going to be bridged.

"As the two main parties offer ever less choice to voters, as backbench MPs are either crushed or co-opted, people see we can't leave political change to our representatives alone. We must strike ever wider alliances, recognising that threats to workers, consumers and the environment emerge from common causes. Once people see how effectively corporations have infiltrated government, they start to become politically active – it's hard not to when you realise the threat to democracy.

"Travelling around the country researching *Captive State*, I saw a massive appetite for a real engagement in public life," he went on. "People are finding it ever harder to see why planning decisions should not be made by their own communities, or why international decisions should be taken by gov-




ernments without reference to either parliament or people.

"This is one of the most exciting times Britain's seen in the past 50 years. Juries are refusing to convict people charged with pulling up GM crops or damaging Hawk jets or Trident submarines. The two main parties are concentrating on the concerns of a small number of target voters and powerful institutions, effectively disenfranchising the rest of us. People are ready for serious political change – we just have to find the means of voicing it effectively.

"Globally, it's astonishing how effective a few people can be: the defeat of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment was a genuine victory for internationalism. The neoliberal consensus is beginning to crack, if not yet crumble. We need to show there are credible alternatives. Once our ideas are widely transmitted, it's hard to see how they can be forced back into the bag."

●George Monbiot's *Captive State: The Corporate Takeover of Britain* is published by Macmillan, price £12.99.

# After the fall of Milosovic

## Geoff Ryan, Brent East CLP, writes about the recent upheavals in Serbia.

According to comedian Jeremy Hardy (*Guardian*, 7th October) "Whatever happens in the next days and weeks, one would have to be a granite-hearted Stalinist not to be uplifted watching the people of Belgrade dance in the streets." Spot on. The fact that Blair, Clinton et al also welcomed Milosevic's defeat is totally irrelevant.

What happened throughout Serbia on 4th October was striking confirmation of Lenin's dictum that a revolutionary situation develops when the old regime can no longer carry on in the old way and the masses are no longer prepared to be ruled in the old way.

The entry onto the scene by the organised working class was decisive. It encouraged the leaders of the opposition to believe they could win and, more importantly, undermined the willingness of Milosevic's security forces to take repressive action. Support for Milosevic evaporated within a few hours. Hence the revolution was virtually bloodless.

Workers have continued to take decisive action, summarily dismissing Milosevic appointees in senior management positions and beginning to exercise control over their workplaces. This is a big step forward which will weaken Milosevic's attempts at a comeback.

However, workers exercising control of factories is hardly likely to be welcomed in Western capitals. Within a few days the coalition based around Vojislav Kostunica was also denouncing such measures while the extreme right-wing leader Vojislav Seselj demanded strikes and factory occupations be crushed. Serb workers will need to stand firm if the potential gains they have made are not to be lost.

It is too early to predict Milosevic's fate. He has announced his intention to step down from politics, but has not ruled out returning to political activity at some time. It is unlikely he will succeed in returning to power in the immediate future. His repressive apparatus has shown little enthusiasm for crushing street protests and is clearly divided. An attempted coup would see even greater numbers of Serbs on strike and on the streets.

Whether or not Kostunica will be pressed into handing over Milosevic to the Hague war crimes tribunal is not yet clear. In fact there are conflicting messages from the West. The recent EU summit in Biarritz agreed an emergency package for Serbia but tied future aid to co-operation with the tribunal. At the same time there are continuing reports that many Western leaders are prepared to postpone action against Milosevic to the indefinite future.

Kostunica is right to criticise NATO's brutal war against Serbia and right, so far at least, in not handing over Milosevic to Western governments who hypocritically maintain their right to do as they see fit throughout the globe. However, Milosevic should certainly go on trial for his crimes.

The Serbian people are having to come to terms with crimes committed in their name. That includes understanding the reactionary nature of Serb nationalism. It means recognising that many of those who now wish to demonise Milosevic also bear heavy responsibility for the crimes of the regime. A real settling of accounts would demonstrate the complicity of large parts of the new leadership and the Orthodox church hierarchy in crimes committed by the Serbian state. Neither the new leadership nor Western governments would want to allow this.

We should be under no illusions about the nature of the majority of opposition parties. Under the current display of unity lurk massive disagreements and vicious personal rivalries and ambitions. Kostunica won the election precisely because he was a relative nonentity who had stood apart from most of the infighting. Nor had he ever been a supporter of Milosevic. His modest living standards set him apart not only from Milosevic and his corrupt cronies, but also from most of the other opposition leaders. The extent to which Kostunica will be able to maintain power against the intrigues of his erstwhile supporters is very open to question.

The main programmatic difference is that on the most important issues the opposition leaders' positions are even more nationalist than Milosevic. For them Milosevic's major crime was losing wars, not starting them. The massive corruption of the regime and ostentatious flaunting of wealth made military defeats harder to bear. Even Otpor, undoubtedly one of the better organisations which draws most of its support from young people, is by no means immune to Serb chauvinism. It recently accepted as a member former Milosevic ally Dobrica Cosic. Cosic, ex-President of rump Yugoslavia, coined the well known aphorism that Serbia wins in wars but loses in peacetime.

Anti-nationalist organisations are very small and, for the moment, without serious influence. Their politics are very confused. Women in Black, for example, characterise the Milosevic regime as "fascist" or even "Turbo-fascist", whatever that may mean.

The political weakness of the opposition is clear if we contrast developments in Croatia and Serbia. For the past 15 years the situation in Serbia has been marked by the complete collapse of the leadership of the League of Communists of Serbia into Serbian nationalism. The leaders of the League of Communists of Croatia supported Croatian independence but also maintained criticisms of the Croatian chauvinism of Franjo Tudjman. In particular they opposed Tudjman's brutal aggression against Bosnia, a stance

***"During the NATO war, we worked four shifts, including Sundays, and the government called us heroes. I was here and saw the missiles flying over my head. Now the government calls us enemies. But we are victims. Their victims."***

**Dragen Micandinovic, a striker at a coal mine in Serbia, quoted in the *New York Times***

# – what next?

supported by Croatia's independent trade unions. In Serbia the autonomous unions are extremely weak.

Opposition to Tudjman also came from within his own party, the HDZ. The current President of Croatia, Stipe Mesic, was one of the founders of the HDZ but broke completely with Tudjman over war in Bosnia.

Criticism of Tudjman's nationalism from the former Communist leaders and sections of the HDZ found strong echoes among large numbers of Croats, especially Croatian workers. That is why Ivica Racan, former leader of the League of Communists of Croatia, is now Prime Minister and Mesic is President. Moreover, Racan and Mesic have not been averse to taking action against those responsible for war crimes in Bosnia. The sacking of seven Croatian generals is only the latest in a series of moves against those responsible for implementing Tudjman's policies.

In Serbia the collapse of both the League of Communists and the official trade unions into support for Serb nationalism meant there could be virtually no challenge from the left. The left in Serbia became primarily identified with Mira Markovic's JUL (United Yugoslav Left), part of Milosevic's coalition.

Nonetheless, without the strikes throughout Serbia the overthrow of Milosevic would have been much more difficult, if not impossible. But if they now recognise that the interests of workers are the same throughout the Balkans, they will come up against Serbia's new rulers.

Potential conflicts exist over Kosova and Montenegro, perhaps also Vojvodina, as well as relations with Bosnia. For many of the new rulers of Serbia hostility to Montenegrin and Kosovar independence is a point of principle. Although it is possible that the change in regime in Belgrade will weaken support for independence in Montenegro – and that is not certain – it is clear that elections later this month in Kosova will show the Albanian majority want their own state.

Kostunica's government will oppose any further break-up of the Yugoslav state, with the full backing of Western governments, who are also hostile to Montenegrin and Kosovar independence. We can expect to see massive pressure by the West on Montenegrins and Kosovars to remain within Yugoslavia.

Again there is a crucial difference with Croatia. Regional movements played an important role in the fight against Tudjman, particularly in Dalmatia and Istria. The Dalmatian movement is almost totally Croat: in Istria it involves the small Italian community, though it has wide support among Istrian Croats. The Istrian movement attempts to build throughout the whole peninsular, developing an Istrian regional consciousness which includes Slovenes, Italians (both in Italy and Croatia) as well as Croats and promotes equality of all the peoples of Istria.

Such regional movements are not currently possible in Serbia because any moves to greater autonomy, including independence, for Montenegro, Kosova or Vojvodina (with its large Hungarian minority) come into conflict with Serb nationalism. Conflicts take on a national, rather than purely regional, dimension.

Nor is it likely that Kostunica's government will abandon support for the Bosnian Serb Republic. Much of the opposition, including Kostunica himself, was united in hostility to the abandonment of the Bosnian Serb leadership at Dayton, when the West still saw Milosevic as the best guarantor of stability in the region. Again this contrasts badly with the refusal of the Croatian government to support separatist demands by sections of Bosnian Croats.

Support for the right of Kosova and Montenegro to independence, if they choose that road, is in the interests of Serb workers and working-class unity – as is abandonment of the reactionary Serb entity in Bosnia and its reintegration in a unitary, multi-ethnic Bosnia.

Failure to distance themselves from Serbian nationalism will seriously weaken the tremendous potential Serb workers have already shown to transform dramatically the situation throughout the Balkans.

**By Noam Chomsky:** Publicly the Clinton-Blair administrations are gloating over the outcome in Yugoslavia. But some see the outcome of the election as an unpleasant shock to the Clinton administration, pointing out that Kostunica has denounced the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia last year as criminal and the International Criminal Tribunal on Yugoslavia as "an American tribunal – not a court, but a political instrument."

In the British press, some prominent (and bitterly anti-Milosevic) correspondents have pointed out that "it was not the bombing, the sanctions and the posturing of NATO politicians" that got rid of Milosevic. Rather "he was toppled by a self-inflicted, democratic miscalculation," and if anything his fall was impeded by Western intervention: "NATO's actions escalated the nastiness, prolonged the resolution and increased the cost. Mr Cook should stop rewriting history. They did not topple Mr Milosevic. They merely blocked the Danube and sent Serb politics back to the Dark Ages of autocracy. It was not sanctions that induced the army to switch sides; generals did well from the black market." (Simon Jenkins, *Times*, 7th October). Serb dissidents are saying pretty much the same thing. In a fairly typical comment on BBC, a Belgrade university student said: "We did it on our own. Please do not help us again with your bombs."

These comments are on target. What happened was a very impressive demonstration of popular mobilisation and courage. The removal of the brutal and corrupt regimes of Serbia and Croatia is an important step forward for the region, and the mass movements in Serbia – miners, students, innumerable others – merit great admiration, and provide an inspiring example of what united and dedicated people can achieve.

But ridding the country of Milosevic doesn't in itself herald a final victory for the people of Serbia, who are responsible for the achievement. The US and Europe will doubtless continue their efforts to incorporate Serbia along with the rest of the Balkans into the Western-run neoliberal system, with the likely effects of undermining independent economic development and functioning democracy, and harming a good part of the population, with the countries expected to provide cheap human and material resources and markets and investment opportunities, subordinated to Western power interests.

●This article appeared in Znet.

# "All victims of the occupation"

**Adam Keller reports from Israel:** yesterday, there was a lynching in Ramallah, costing two lives. It was quite clearly a lynching. Anybody living in the Old South of America would have recognised it as such.

Four days ago, there was a pogrom in Nazareth, perpetrated by a Jewish mob upon Arabs and costing two lives. It was quite clearly a pogrom. Anybody living in Czarist Russia would have recognised it as such.

So far for similarities and symmetry, and no further. For Israelis and Palestinians are two manifestly unequal entities. There is a weak side and an enormously stronger one, oppressor and oppressed. There is a country possessing the strongest military force in the Middle East, including a full arsenal of nuclear bombs, and there is a people whose armament consisted until recently of stones and which has now acquired some handguns. There is a country which has been sovereign for fifty-two years, a prosperous country which is part of the industrialised West – and there is a people who have been dispossessed and oppressed, given hope and put down again during these fifty-two years, who are striving with unimaginable sacrifice for the right to be free in at least a fragment of their homeland.

There is an ugly occupation which is very much alive more than seven years after that handshake on the White House lawn which was supposed to bring it to an end. It has a brutalising and dehumanising effect on all that it touches. It manifests itself in land confiscation and settlement extension, house demolition and humiliating searches at checkpoints. This week it manifests itself in bombing towns which have no means of defending themselves, and in tanks placing a tight siege on a helpless civilian population.

It is the occupation which is the culprit. The victims – the Israelis and the much more numerous Palestinians – are all victims of the occupation. There is no assurance that the hatred will disappear with the end of occupation, but we can be certain that occupation's continuation will lead to increasing hatred.

## Implement international law

Human Rights lawyer Pierre Makhlouf reports: **the recent uprising has again exposed the inequities of an occupied people negotiating their fundamental rights with a military occupier, especially when arbitrated by the USA which is wholly committed to supporting the occupier. Clinton has condemned Yasser Arafat for refusing an Israeli "compromise" over occupied East Jerusalem and threatened to transfer the US Embassy to Jerusalem, effectively recognising the illegal annexation of the Eastern half of the city. He confirmed the belief in most of the Arab world that the US cannot be trusted.**

**International law recognises Israel as the military occupier of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. These were not under Israeli control before they were conquered through military action in 1967. The Arab world argued Israel attacked them, and Israel argues it carried out a pre-emptive military strike. Yet when Iraq invaded Kuwait the discussion was not over whether Iraq had reason to conquer Kuwait. The conflict that ensued was based on the single premise that no land can be taken by any state in violation of international law.**

**Palestinians realise the mockery made of international law. Their experience has established that they will only be allowed to live in peace if they accept Israeli gains made through occupation. Ceasefires and negotiations may bring a respite, but the only solution is Israeli withdrawal from all the land it occupies illegally.**

## Jewish Socialists' Group Statement

The Jewish Socialists' Group is glad to join those calling for an end to acts of violence on both sides; for example the shooting of unarmed demonstrators and children by Israeli soldiers and police, pogroms against Arabs in Nazareth and Tel Aviv; and the killing of the Israeli army reservists in Ramallah.

The current unrest in Israel and Palestine points to the failure of the peace process, initiated in Oslo, to lead to real confidence or trust. The occupation is to blame; it leads to land confiscation, settlement extension, house demolition, uprooting of orchards and humiliating searches at checkpoints, and, in the last weeks, to helicopter gunships bombing towns which have no means of defending themselves, and tanks besieging a helpless civilian population.

The Jewish Socialists' Group has a long record of supporting a just solution to the Israel Palestine conflict. We support unconditionally the independence and national right to self determination, including statehood, of both the Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs. We believe each can be fulfilled without prejudice to the rights of the other. Jerusalem should be the capital of both Israel and the Palestinian state.

We condemn the military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and the denial of basic human and civil rights to Palestinians. We call for the removal of Jewish settlements from territories occupied in 1967.

We believe that Israel ought to belong to all its citizens: Jews and Arabs, Ashkenazim and Sephardim, women and men and secular and religious people. We condemn discrimination against Arabs within Israel, both citizens and non-citizens, in land ownership, employment, education and access to welfare benefits. We support socialist and labour movement and peace forces within Israel striving for socialism and against war.

Israel claims it is acting on behalf of Jews worldwide. As Jews in the diaspora we wish to add our voices to those calling for an end to the occupation and for a just peace for both Israel and Palestine.

# No more apartheid!

Roland Rance, former editor of *News from Within* and *Return* magazine, looks at recent events in Palestine.

The Palestinian Uprising of October 2000, which has left over 100 Palestinians dead and thousands injured, has been dubbed the Al-Aqsa Intifada. The spark that ignited the anger was the provocative visit of Israeli general Ariel Sharon, with a bodyguard of thousands of troops, to the Haram al-Sharif, or Noble Sanctuary, in Jerusalem. But this alone does not explain the extent of the uprising and anger, which is born of frustration at the continuing occupation, despite the much vaunted "peace process".

Ordinary Palestinians have seen through the con-trick perpetrated in 1993, which is why the attempt to reassert this process with the Sharm al-Sheikh agreement, brokered by the CIA, is unlikely to succeed.

A glance at the map is enough to show that the "Palestinian Autonomy" is in reality a patchwork of isolated cantons, cut off from each other, with no control over their borders, surrounded by Israeli settlements which control most of the arable land and water. In Gaza 42% of the land area is allocated to 20 Israeli settlements with a population of 6000. 58% serves 1.2 million Palestinians, most of whom live in refugee camps. Palestinians see that settlement has accelerated since Oslo. In particular the Jerusalem Metropolitan area has been expanded, and now effectively cuts the West Bank in half. 200,000 Jews, many of them recent immigrants from the former USSR, have been settled there.

Palestinian anger is directed in the first place against the Israeli occupation and settlers. But it is also being directed against the Palestine Authority. This regime, with its villas and limousines and its countless security forces, is perceived as viciously policing the Palestinian people.

Indeed it was in order to relieve Israel of part of the embarrassment of the direct day-to-day rule over a hostile population, that the PLO leadership was allowed to return from exile and establish authority in part of the 1967-occupied territories. Israeli PM Rabin, in one of his moments of alcoholic clarity, commented that the PLO would be able to rule "Bli bagatz u-bli Betzelem" – ie, without the High Court of Justice, and human rights activists, both of which had partially succeeded in limiting the scope of Israeli arbitrary rule. There are in Palestine both a High Court, and several dedicated and consistent human rights organisations, but the PA ignores them.

A significant aspect of this uprising was the widespread participation of Palestinian citizens of Israel. They were motivated not just by solidarity with their compatriots suffering under occupation; they were also protesting at growing attacks on their rights, which is another aspect of the framework of apartheid which Israel is imposing. During the uprising, Palestinian communities in the state of Israel have suffered loss of electricity, phone and other services, as Jewish workers were reluctant to enter Palestinian areas. This highlights the failure of utility companies to employ Palestinians, who comprise 20% of the citizens of Israel. The Electric Company has 15,000 employees: just six are Arabs.

Palestinian citizens of Israel are also concerned at the suggestion that some of their towns might be transferred to the Bantustans which Israel is attempting to establish. This "ethnic cleansing" proposal is motivated by fear of a growing Palestinian community with full democratic rights in the state of Israel. It follows several months of racist incitement against Palestinians by the Galilee police chief, Alik Ron, leading to prosecution threats against several Palestinian Knesset members.

Although the police opened fire with live ammunition on Palestinian citizens who protested peacefully by blocking a major trunk road, they took no action when Israeli Jewish mobs carried out a pogrom, burning Palestinian mosques and homes. It became clear that, when Israel refers to itself as the state of the Jewish people, the meaning is that non-Jews are not welcome, let alone equal citizens.

This uprising represents a new stage in the Palestinian struggle against Zionism. The Oslo process has comprehensively failed. Palestinians are no longer willing to moderate their demands, in return for empty words from Israel. Across the world, Palestinian refugees, the children and grandchildren of those expelled in 1948, are reasserting their right to return. Palestinians under occupation demand immediate withdrawal of all armed Israeli forces and settlers. Palestinian citizens of Israel increasingly identify themselves as part of a single Palestinian people.

Even some Israeli policy-makers recognise this change; a former Security Service head has stated that Israel has only two options: "to became a state without any Jewish characteristic, or to became an Apartheid state." For most Israelis, the first option is even more unthinkable than the second. Our task is to clarify this choice, and to support those Palestinians and Israelis who are taking steps towards building a new anti-apartheid movement.

●Roland Rance is a regular contributor to *Socialist Outlook*.

**Protestors at the Israeli embassy, 21st October. Protests continue every Saturday from 3pm.**




Photo: Molly Cooper

# Back to the future?

What alternatives to neoliberalism and the World Trade Organisation should we be proposing? Caroline Dumonteil reports from Paris on divergent trends in the anti-globalisation movement.

Despite their apparent newly-found commitment to relieving poverty, the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) still believe that removing trade barriers is essential. Corporations should be able to move in and out of countries at will; use local resources without regard to national policies; employ whoever they want; and repatriate their profits before moving out. State support for services such as education and health, national transport systems or basic utilities are seen as anti-competitive. Only services related to state security would be protected.

Some anti-globalisation campaigners attack these organisations, the multinationals and third world poverty and describe themselves as "anti-capitalist" – but are they really on the left in practice?

France, for example, where the word solidarity retains its ideological force, promotes the "solidarity economy", which even has its own minister. This includes all kinds of work whose main aim is not profit. Yet despite the emphasis on "participation" and "reciprocity", it remains part of the larger economy.

Another attempt to subvert the dominant dog-eat-dog world of the market is fair trade. Well-motivated groups in rich countries purchase mainly food items from poorer countries according to strict criteria of environmental sustainability and good labour practices. Designed to protect small producers by guaranteeing them a fair share of the profit, it also renders them dependent on the willingness of wealthier consumers to pay more for their good consciences. Yet it cannot escape broader economic forces and the downward pressures on primary product prices.

Fair trade is criticised as being export-led by an influential section of the anti-globalisation lobby who argue in favour of localising economies. Trade, it says, should only take place locally. Since the word local is used for anything from "community" to "sustainable region" or even to "geographical grouping of countries", it covers anything from small groups living off the land to the European Union. Notably absent is any mention of the locus of political control, essential to enforce the prohibition of unnecessary imports. The present system, decried for using the overpowering control of the state, would be replaced by control by the people as the only way to introduce sustainable policies, protect the environment and increase diversity.

This model is unthinkingly based on food production alone: we must all live on what is "locally" produced (within 20, 200 or 2,000 miles)? It is in fact a world of petty commodity producers (or merry peasants), growing crops in an ideal climate and selling excess produce in picturesque local markets. It condemns producers to technological backwardness, relying ultimately on the self-exploitation of family labour: when times are hard, belts are tightened and work hours lengthen, as some UK farmers know too well.

Those living in harsh climates would return to monotonous diets – just sealmeat or potatoes, and goodbye to peppers and tomatoes, sun-dried or not! At the market, alongside carrots, would growers exchange locally-produced computer chips and pharmaceuticals made by the artisans in the next village? Core members of this movement do actually describe themselves as Luddites, but claim they are not reactionary. They do not aim to put the clock back, they say, because their system will provide new forms of job security. However the model really springs from a romanticised vision of the past.

Though its proponents attack corporations for imposing unwanted technologies, they think science itself is dangerous because it is "reductionist" and not "holistic". To return the world to the right path we must obey the laws of nature, living in "natural" communities of families (where women stay home bearing children). Despite its rhetoric about democracy, the model is profoundly anti-democratic, anti-humanitarian and anti-modern, undermining all the struggles of past centuries to establish basic human rights. Not only would environmental protection be enforced using local power rather than international agreements, careful reading reveals scary phrases about democracy being achieved through participating in production, a form of workfare. This is not merely a reactionary position, but a highly authoritarian one. Unfortunately its proponents are one of the main sources of funding for anti-GMO and anti-globalisation groups.

This group also holds a reformist position on the World Trade Organisation, which aims to secure universal acceptance for all multilateral trade agreements and to stop trade questions being dealt with in any UN forum. But others engaged in this battle, myself included, want the WTO abolished and trade and development policies to be inextricably linked. According to this view, rather than go backwards, the global economy should be built on all the rights that have been gained and are expressed in the UN charters – on human rights, social development, work and social protection, the environment, women's rights and cultural identity. In short, the economy should serve the people, not vice versa.

# UNISON NOTEBOOK

The strike by 600 workers at Dudley Group of Hospitals has now completed a fifth round, making it one of the biggest and longest strikes in the history of the NHS. The strike action, against proposals to sell the hospitals in a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) deal, remains solid and has attracted 80% support in local opinion polls.

At the end of October UNISON's industrial action committee approved a further ten days of strike action. The first signs of a crack in management's position came when the Trust recently offered a round of voluntary redundancies before the sell-off. This was rejected outright and strikers have called for an escalation of the dispute to indefinite strike action if the Trust does not back down after the ten days just agreed. This is a dispute which can be won with support from the wider labour movement.

- Demonstration: Saturday November 4th, assemble at Stourbridge Town Hall from 12.30pm; rally at the Town Hall following the march at approximately 2pm.
- Send donations (cheques payable to UNISON Dudley Group of Hospitals) to UNISON Union Offices, Wordsley Hospital, Stourbridge West Midlands, DY8 5QX.

**UNISON activists have called a conference in Birmingham on 25th November to discuss amendments to the Union's disciplinary rules.**

**At UNISON Conference this year, proposals from Liverpool and Leeds UNISON branches won more support than the NEC proposals. The Birmingham Conference will enable union members to reach a consensus. The Conference is to take place at the United Servicemen's Club, Gough Street, Birmingham (five minutes walk from the railway station) from 11am until 4pm. All UNISON activists are welcome to attend.**

- **In forthcoming by-elections for the union's National Executive all left-wingers are pulling behind the following candidates: Yunus Bakhsh (Northern Region); Fiona Monkman (London Region); Janet Noble (Additional Members Seat).**




Photo: Paul Mattsson

Biwater workers lobby Department of Trade & Industry, September 2000.

# Save jobs at Biwater!

## Harry Barnes MP reports on the campaign to save jobs at Biwater.

Seven hundred jobs are at risk at the Biwater pipe manufacturing works in Clay Cross. Biwater has a clear record of profitability, contributes significantly to UK exports and also provides for the movement of desperately needed water supplies in the Third World. The reason for the threatened closure is that Biwater was taken over by the French multinational company, Saint-Gobain, which owns 600 companies in 42 countries. Within an hour of the takeover Saint-Gobain announced that it would close the Clay Cross plant.

The Biwater works were a rival to Saint-Gobain's own pipe manufacturing division and were bought out to eliminate a competitor, capture its order book, transfer some of its plant and machinery and asset strip what was left over. Most of the 700 workers, including ex-miners, live within five miles of the works and they fear that the job losses and knock-on effects on suppliers will devastate their community, which already suffers chronic unemployment.

There is a well-organised and frenetic campaign – with marches, mass meetings and deputations to the top brass – to reverse the closure. There have been several high-level meetings with the Trade and Industry Secretary Stephen Byers and the office of the European Union's competition commissioner.

Stephen Byers has referred the original acceptance of the takeover back to the Office of Fair Trading on the basis of the campaign's dossier showing that the works are viable. A possible next step would be for the matter to be referred to the competition commission which has the power to halt the closure.

Thanks to the East Midlands MEP, Philip Whitehead, the European Union is investigating whether Saint-Gobain has abused its dominant market position in pipe manufacturing. French trade unions in Paris have also taken up the cudgels on behalf of the Clay Cross workers.

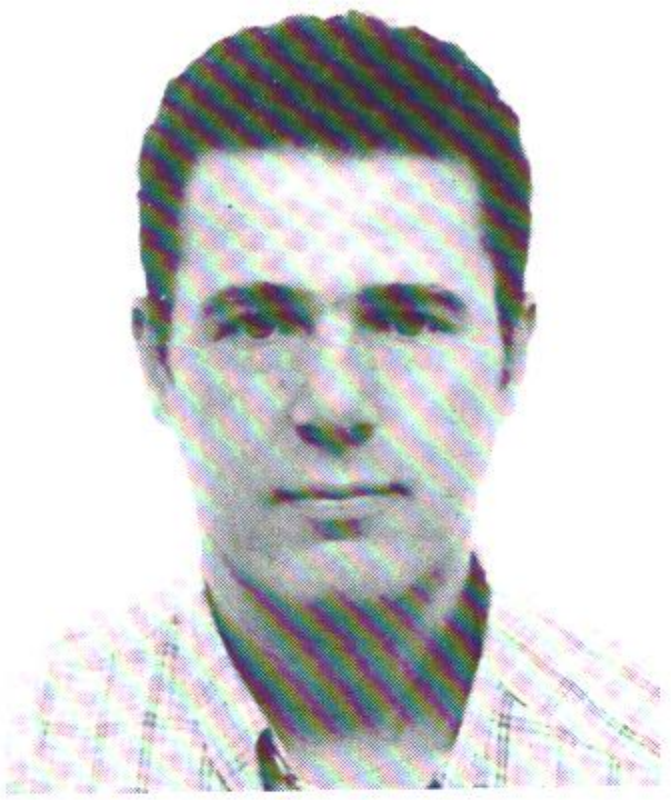
At the end of the day, it will be a question of which is the more powerful – the British Government and the European Union or Saint-Gobain, a leading economic power in the global market. It would be a sad day for the forces of democracy if the Clay Cross workers and their community don't win.

- On 26th October members of the Biwater Women's Action group and Biwater shop floor workers will be travelling to London for a range of activities, including handing in a protest letter at the DTI and a taking a petition to 10 Downing Street accompanied by Harry Barnes MP, Dennis Skinner MP and Tony Benn MP. Afterwards they will march on to the Houses of Parliament.
- Send letters of support to The Union Office, Biwater Industries, Clay Cross, Chesterfield, Derbyshire or email shoey@talker21.com.

# Vote For Mark Serwotka!

## A socialist candidate for General Secretary of the PCS sets out his stall.

The Public And Commercial Services Union (PCS), with 230,000 members in the Civil Service and over 20,000 more in the private sector, is holding its first election for the post of General Secretary. This election offers socialists an excellent opportunity to advocate the policies required for their union to fight back against the attacks PCS members face, as well as putting the union at the forefront of campaigns on issues like the welfare state, public spending, asylum seekers, the minimum wage, and repeal of the anti union laws.



My opponent in this election, Hugh Lanning, is a well-paid, right-wing union official who represents the right-wing faction in the union. Currently an Assistant General Secretary, he advocates an employer-dependent partnership approach to the problems we face, rather than effective representation of members' interests.

I am standing in this election as a low paid civil servant. I have worked in the Benefits Agency for 21 years. I am currently Branch Secretary of the DSS Sheffield Branch and have a record of leading strikes and campaigns in the union which illustrate my belief that the union should be led on the basis of high levels of membership, with leaders who are prepared to advocate industrial action to further our legitimate demands. I am advocating a national campaign against privatisation, a return to national pay bargaining and an attack on low pay (many of our members have to claim state benefits to supplement wages as low as £8,500 per year). I am also calling for a campaign to abolish performance-related pay, an end to the institutional discrimination that exists in the Civil Service, and the robust use of legal action to challenge many of the unacceptable actions we are subjected to: in short, a transformation of the union, making effective representation of member's interests its principal purpose.

This election therefore offers a stark choice: keep in power right-wing union bureaucrats who have run the union for years and done nothing to mobilise the power of the union to defend its members, or vote for a socialist who will advocate high-profile campaigns and mobilisation of the membership to defend and improve our terms and conditions.

●**Our trade union correspondent adds:** just before nominations closed, with current General Secretary Barry Reamsbottom rumoured to be well short of the qualifying hurdle of 50 branch nominations, came the extraordinary news that Reamsbottom is to take early retirement rather than continue in the race. Mark Serwotka has news of over 70 branch nominations with Blairite Hugh Lanning, backed by the Membership First group, set to be his only opponent with a roughly similar number of nominations. The "National Moderate Group", who seem to be without a candidate, had previously attacked Membership First for being part of a "cabal consisting of Troskyites and old-style Communists". Will they now eat their words and back Lanning to try to stop Mark Serwotka?

## ANOTHER UNISON NOTEBOOK

Over 100 supporters of Glenn Kelly, Bromley UNISON Branch Secretary, lobbied the Council offices on 5th October, keeping up the pressure since the last lobby by service users, union members and the public on 11th September.

Glenn, who is being disciplined for campaigning in support of retaining 24 hour staff cover in homes for the elderly, said: "The whole process I am involved in smacks of curtailing the right to freedom of speech for trade unionists working in defence of public services and those who benefit from them".

●Send messages of support to Glen on email glenn.kelly@talk21.com

The tide continues to turn against the expulsion of activists within UNISON. Over 100 NEC members, Regional Council and Branch officers in the London Region of UNISON have signed a declaration in support of Candy Unwin and Dave Carr whose appeal against expulsion started on 9th October. Jean Geldart and Kevin O'Brien from UNISON's NEC, and Geoff Martin, London Regional Convenor, have agreed to appear as witnesses on their behalf.

Candy Unwin, Deputy London Regional Convenor and Branch Secretary at UCL Hospitals, and Dave Carr, ULCH Branch Chair, were expelled for their role in the strike last year over the introduction of a Private Finance Initiative in their hospitals. But their appeal coincides with growing momentum in the strike action demanding that staff stay in the NHS at Dudley Group of Hospitals.

The political witch-hunt within UNISON has seen the expulsion of socialists in Glasgow and Birmingham, and disciplinary action continuing in the suspended Sheffield branch. But with the biggest strike in UNISON's history in Scotland and several branch actions against cuts and privatisation, the union is finding it hard to push through the expulsions. Candy and Dave's appeal was adjourned to further dates in November and December.

# French spirit reaches Dagenham

Rod Finlayson, Shop Steward 1/1107 TGWU Branch Committee at Ford Dagenham, reports on events.

Eight months ago it was announced that the Dagenham Assembly Plant would close by the end of 2002, ending Ford car assembly in Britain. With this announcement, management ripped up two written agreements, including a recent guarantee that Dagenham would be a lead plant in the next generation of Fiestas.

Initially, the devastating announcement was met by shopfloor demoralisation and union-versus-union conflict, some of it highlighting institutional racism in the plant. Management thought they had done enough to buy off resistance, offering enhanced redundancy money, stirring up local conflicts and refusing to address racism even while engaging in public relations about their diversity and equal opportunity policies. Against this background, the Ford truck fleet featured in negative television coverage.

The truth is that these drivers became totally disillusioned with the compromises made by their union leaders and turned in on themselves, following the old dockers' practice of employing "family and friends only" and consequently ended in a racist position. The official unions didn't attempt to find workers' solutions to workers' problems. Instead, they retreated to the employers and state in the form of the employment tribunals – ignoring the fact that the company had stirred it all up in the first place.

Rising above all these problems and reflecting both the "French Spirit" and the new mood spreading across the British working class, the unions and all Dagenham Estate shop stewards, white collar representatives, engineers and supervisors convened on September 18th and reached a unanimous decision: "that the joint trade unions conduct a ballot for industrial action, in accordance with the relevant legislation. This to be preceded by mass meetings of the membership".

The truck fleet was a leading force in arriving at this decision. On the morning of the meeting, the Assembly Plant walked out on a two-hour warning stoppage. This crystallised the new mood of the workforce and shocked management. The strikers were accused of "unconstitutional and illegal action" in letters which met with the contempt they deserved.

Earlier in the summer, representatives of the Ford workforce had met Tony Blair at Downing Street. Blair had expressed sympathy but "couldn't interfere in business decisions". The same representatives then lobbied the GLA, where the Chairman of Ford UK, Ian McCallister, was speaking. The Blairites remained silent while the Tories cheered McCallister. Then came the French lorry drivers' action, taken up in Britain and culminating in the week-long fuel crisis.

One result on the shopfloor was a new-found faith in direct action. At a fringe meeting during Labour Party conference, all the general secretaries of the four main unions – John Edmonds of the GMBU, Roger Lyons of MSF, Bill Morris of the TGWU, and Ken Jackson of the AEEU – reported that their executives were ready to support strike action by the Ford workforce "if that is their decision". The convenor of the Assembly Plant, Ron Doyle, and of the Body Plant, Mike Hedgecroft, gave the speeches of their lives.

As we came out of this meeting, by an unbelievable coincidence, Tony Blair happened to be passing by with his security men. He went over to the two Ford convenors, ignoring all the well-known officials and said, "I know you two, don't I?" They reminded him of the Downing Street lobby at which he had said he couldn't help. The new, "listening" Blair now sounded more sympathetic: "I wish you luck; keep me informed of how things are going."



Photo: Paul Mattsson

**Fords workers consider the closure announcement earlier this year.**

Following this, a Ford branch delegate spoke at the "Stop the Biwaters Closure" march and rally in Chesterfield (see report, page 23). At the Ford fringe meeting during Labour Party Conference, John Edmonds himself is rumoured to have raised the possibility of "French tactics" – including occupation – to keep Biwaters' machinery from being moved to France. Ford's Dagenham representatives are in close communication and are taking a keen interest.

In a press statement released on 29th September, Ford management warned that industrial action would result in the withdrawal of all investment and closure of the Dagenham estate including the engine plant. If Ford Company President Jack Nasser keeps his threats the way he keeps his agreements, we've little to worry about. Apart from that, he might recall that in 1988, it took us just three days to halt Ford production throughout Europe. Ford workers have a long history of punching holes in governments, whether Tory or Labour. Tony Blair should watch this space.

# Safety is what-amount?

Diana Udall, RMT Trainstaff representative, reports on a recent victory on train safety.

"Safety is paramount." This is what London Underground always says when speaking publicly. A recently published report from an Employment Tribunal concludes otherwise.

In the days when all Tube trains had guards, both the driver and guard would check the train and close the doors manually before going into a siding. At busy stations there were usually station staff to assist as well. After the introduction of one person operation (OPO), it was deemed sufficient to announce over the public address "all change" three times, close the doors from the driving cab and proceed into the siding – apologising to any frightened and angry passengers whom you might, and often did, have taken there with you.

Trainstaff representatives had brought the potential risks to the attention of management on numerous occasions:

- the driver could be assaulted by an angry passenger;
- malicious accusations could be made against the driver;
- the passengers could be at risk if they decided to try to walk out of the train.

LUL's argument was that these risks were small and therefore acceptable. They seem to have forgotten about public relations and being more "customer focussed".

In 1998 the Central Line management were under pressure to cut down on delays. I, along with a few other drivers, had always insisted on safety grounds to check all trains manually before going into the sidings. The delays at Liverpool Street were cause primarily by lack of station staff. I was given several warnings by my manager, and told that if I did not comply with the written procedure I could be sent for a formal disciplinary hearing. They also carried out a risk assessment, which concluded that it was more risky to close the train doors manually than to take passengers into the sidings. What a load of nonsense!

In February 2000 there was a fatal accident to a passenger. Her Majesty's Railway Inspectorate issued a prohibition notice on the procedure to LUL, which were forced to check all trains manually. LUL appealed against the prohibition notice and I was asked to appear as a witness for HMRI.

At the hearing it was clear to me that most of LUL's arguments centred around risk versus cost. In my evidence I stated that there very many instances of passengers being overcarried into sidings – often these were tourists, people whose first language was not English and who didn't understand the announcements. LUL disputed this, claiming that they had no record of anyone being carried into sidings.

The eventual report comments on LUL's poor record keeping, passengers being put at risk, and standards not being maintained, which illustrates that LUL's assurances on safety are not worth the paper they are written on. Privatisation would just make matters worse.

- The Campaign Against Tube Privatisation meets at 7.30pm on the second Tuesday of the month near Euston. Ring 020 8533 1477 for venue and further information. Subscribe to CATP-subscibe@listbot.com

## TRADE UNION NOTEBOOK

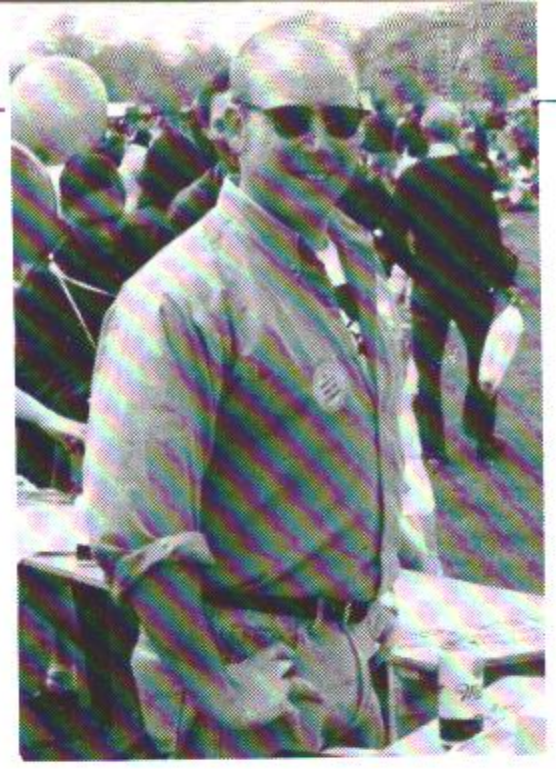
- Action by UNISON members in Scotland has been suspended while the union consults members over a new two year deal put forward by management. The offer is for a 2% increase backdated to 1st April 2000 and a further 1% from October 2000, together with a 3% increase from 1st February 2001. Union negotiators are recommending rejection to members, and only narrowly voted not to reject the offer outright themselves. A one day strike on 20th September was well supported by 70,000 UNISON members. A march and rally in Edinburgh was attended by 5,000 and 1,000 marched in Aberdeen. The results of consultation of UNISON, TGWU and GMB members were due as *LLB* went to press.

- More than 60,000 UNISON members in higher education are balloting for strike action following a pay offer of 3% for staff and 4% for manual workers – a deal which would award lowest paid workers just 16p per hour more. The move to ballot comes after 83% of members favoured industrial action in a branch consultation. Employers have also retreated from national bargaining on pay and conditions.

- Government plans to introduce joint control rooms for the emergency services have been undermined by events in Cleveland, one of three pilot areas for the scheme. Following resistance from firefighters, the Fire Authority has abandoned the project. Pilot schemes in Wiltshire and Gloucestershire continue.

- Thirty-seven members of the GPMU are still fighting for union recognition and reinstatement of six staff sacked for joining a union at the FloPlast plastic piping company in Bobbing, Kent. Strikes every Wednesday. Contact the GPMU office on 01795-423 993 or 078 999 21205 for information.

- The dispute at Foframe of Huntingdon is now the longest running dispute in Britain. The ten GMB members have been striking for a 4% pay rise since 3rd May. Their hourly rate of £4.29, below the industry minimum, brings them 10p per unit for frames which retail at £13.50. Donations should be sent to "Huntingdon Strike Fund" at GMB 396/398 Dunstable Road, Luton, Beds LU4 8JT.



# THE GEOFF MARTIN COLUMN

●The one date that I hadn't bargained on as being a cert for the arrival of our new baby was the final deadline for my *LLB* column – more fool me. If this month's ramblings are even more garbled than usual then you'll know why.

Joanna Elizabeth Martin arrived in fine form at 3pm on 16th October at a healthy 7 pounds 11 ounces. How anyone can deliver the best part of eight pounds of baby naturally on the strength of just a couple of paracetamol is beyond the comprehension of a mere man like me. But that's what Helen did, and my admiration for her courage and strength knows no limits. It puts into perspective the insignificance of the trials and tribulations of dealing with some of the Millbank pond life (but more of that later).

And if I needed any encouragement to step up the fight for a decent pay rise for the midwives, porters, receptionists and cleaners who were so brilliant to my family, then I came out of Kingston Hospital this morning with it in bundles.

●A new survey by my colleagues at the Battersea and Wandsworth TUC has laid bare the full extent of the gap in pay between the staff slogging it out in the NHS, local government and the rest of the public services and the average earnings in the private sector.

Average pay in London has now risen to more than 29 grand and yet an E grade staff nurse starts on just over £17,000. Is it any wonder that one in six nursing posts in London are unfilled? It's just a surprise that the rate's not higher.

Mind you, the vacancy rates in Social Services put even the nursing crisis in the shade and when I talk to our members working in social care and hear about the stress and violence they are expected to endure day in and day out it amazes me that anyone sticks it out.

The police in the Capital recently copped a £6,000 London accommodation allowance. If it's good enough for the police it should be good enough for the rest of London's public sector.

And while we're at it, if the police always go out and about in twos, why is it considered acceptable for community psychiatric nurses, social workers and community midwives to have to knock on the same doors on their tod? Local authorities and the NHS expect their staff to run the constant risk of assault in return for poverty pay, and then wonder why they end up with a staffing crisis. The stuffed shirts who shuffle the figures around on the balance sheets could do with a bit of harsh reality rammed down their throats.

●If anyone wants to check out exactly who could end up being responsible for letting the Tories back into power, look no further than the row between Geoffrey Robinson and Mandelson.

Don't think it's just a minor spat – it goes right to the core of the vanity, self-serving and arrogance that is at the heart of the rotting corpse of the New Labour project. I've always argued that the alliance which spawned New Labour was a loose coalition, devoid of principle, whose sole objective was personal advancement. The inevitable conclusion will be an acrimonious collapse. As the foundation stones of the Labour Party have been battered to bits since the death of John Smith, there's little left to fall back on.

If the political gains of the 1997 election result are frittered away by the likes of Mandelson and Robinson, the real pain will be felt by the people who need a Labour Government the most. If the Tories clawed their way back in by default, it won't hurt the corporate lobbyists who buy their way into centre stage at the Labour Conference these days, but it will certainly hurt the poor, pensioners, public service workers and asylum seekers.

●I really wish that members of both the Cabinet and the Shadow Cabinet would stop revealing their dope smoking habits from their university days. Nothing is more likely to turn kids on to harder drugs than the knowledge that boring old bastards like Tim Yeo used to bang up the odd number. They should stop it now before they give the old Bob Hope a bad name.

And I'll tell you this, anyone who says that they had a blast on a traditional three skinner but didn't enjoy it is either lying through their teeth or was sold a bag of hedge clippings by a street-wise kid engaged in a little bit of wealth redistribution.

●Finally, the London Labour Party. The forces of oppression are going full tilt to gut the agenda of any meaningful business but I reckon that they've badly underestimated the mood of the Party in the capital. We want to discuss issues like Ken Livingstone's readmission into the Party and the PPP on the Tube, and it's contemptible to argue that these are not legitimate London Labour conference agenda items.

The Milosevic tendency has laid out the battle lines, but the forces of democracy are preparing to descend on Stratford Town Hall on 11th November. Maybe I'll see you there.

## Terry Harrison 1951-2000

Terry Harrison's funeral was packed with his family, friends and members of the National Union of Miners. The branch banner of the Kellingley NUM graced the front of the church with its sharp message that the working class could only obtain the benefits of its labour by destroying capitalism.

This was a message that Terry had fought for throughout his too brief life. He was the President of the NUM at Kellingly Pit – the"Big K" – and a former Chair of Wakefield District and of Hemsworth Labour Parties. He would have been the MP for Hemsworth, but for the Labour Party leadership's undemocratic by-election selection procedures. Always loyal to the movement, Terry turned out to work in the by- election.

Terry worked with supporters of *Labour Briefing* and members of the Workers Socialist League to build support for the miners' strike, helping to form the link between Hull and Castleford, and always stood by the sacked and victimised miners after the dispute. When Terry found that women were not getting food parcels from the union despite being NUM members, he queued up at the local "TASS" office to ensure they got what they deserved for their hard work in the strike. It's been said that "Thatcher defeated the miners" but she didn't beat Terry or his life long mates.

Terry was a keen supporter of Castleford Rugby and, more recently, of Barnsley Football Club, where he was a joint season ticket holder with his youngest son Neal. He was Vice Chair of Havercroft Parish Council and a school governor, the driving force of Havercroft and Ryhill Sports Centre, and the secretary, treasurer and leading organizer of the annual World Peace Gala.

People were attracted to Terry by his strong personality. He was an honest man who said his opinion in a non-offensive way. He never put anyone down either to their face or otherwise. Above all he would help whenever he could. He was genuinely interested in both local and wider politics and would invest his valuable time into whatever he thought might make a difference.

Terry will be remembered as a good man and a very sincere man, a caring father and a trustworthy true friend.

**Alan Wassell and Garth Frankland**

# Geoff Sheridan

I first met Geoff Sheridan when we both worked for *Socialist Challenge* in the late 1970s. He was the professional journalist and trade unionist seeking decent pay and conditions, while I was the Iron Chancellor in charge of the money, saying we couldn't afford it!

Geoff was a great journalist, wielding his feared green biro to edit out vast chunks of political jargon, asking quizzically: "Do you want people to read this?" He wrote many famous pieces for the *Guardian* and the *Mirror* on issues such as the night cleaners' campaign and William Tyndale school and in 1977 he broke the story about the then British Leyland boss, Sir Richard Dobson, taped making racist remarks during an after-dinner speech, which led to Dobson's resignation.

When the *Sun* greeted the arrival of the Ugandan Asians at Gatwick with a barrage of bigotry, Geoff set up the Campaign Against Racism in the Media. It drew up good practice codes of conduct and challenged journalists to recognise their responsibilities on race issues. Later, Geoff also helped found the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom.

He then helped to mastermind the successful launch of the Labour Party's magazine *New Socialist*, which organised the famous televised debate between the Labour Party deputy leadership candidates, Tony Benn and Denis Healey. *New Socialist* out-sold every magazine on the left and Geoff was immensely proud that it even made a profit. During the 1980s Geoff supported and occasionally wrote for *Labour Briefing*.

In 1987 Geoff went to work for Hackney Council, to help fight the privatisation of council services threatened by the Tories' CCT legislation. In his own words: "My arrival in local government in Hackney a decade ago at the dawn of CCT was a miserable affair. My boss took up my foolish offer to do business planning for vehicle maintenance. It turned out that records of vehicle repair were on scraps of paper. The accountant told me to get lost". Despite those problems, Geoff succeeded in helping the council staff to win the tender and to keep their jobs.

Geoff had a love/hate relationship with Hackney – he was born there, loved the people, and knew they deserved better; but he hated the incompetence and the lack of imagination within the council. Geoff could get really excited about projects at work: we'd go to lunch and I wouldn't get a word in edgeways while he waxed lyrical.

Geoff's passionate belief in humanity and justice, and his fascination with people was reflected in his style of friendships. He was always there for you, warm and compassionate. With some people, you don't realise just how much you appreciated them until they're gone.

**Davy Jones**


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# Evil but not omnipotent

**Mike Phipps** reviews *Globalization*, by Robert Went, published by Pluto, price £12.99 pbk.

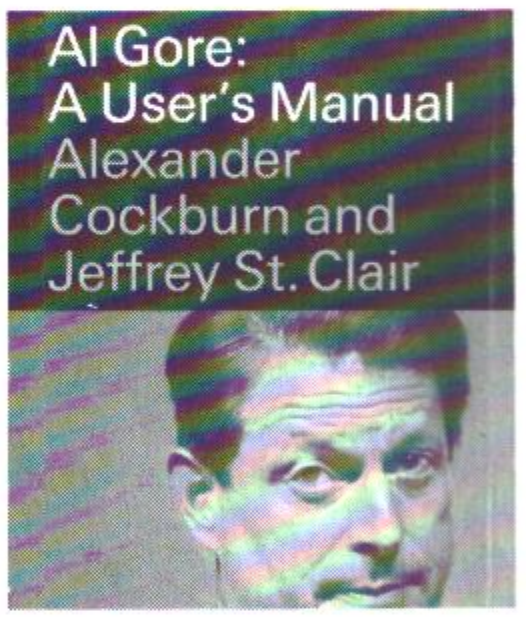
Robert Went's monograph is one of the most succinct critiques of globalisation you're likely to see. To summarise: globalisation is bad because it leads to a dictatorship of the financial markets; a 'race to the bottom' in regulations; wages and conditions; the privatisation of essential services; increasing migration; a weakening of the social position of women; ecological damage; a democratic deficit; a commodification of daily life and growing social inequality (in 1960 the richest 20% of the world received in income thirty times more than the poorest 20% – today it's 82 times as much).

But globalisation is also over-exaggerated, too often the alibi for politicians' cowardice. The Maastricht convergence criteria, for example, are frequently cited by EU finance ministers as the justification for austerity measures, but it was they who set them in the first place. Globalisation as an abstraction is invariably the pretext for governments ceding more sovereignty to unaccountable bodies, such as the World Trade Organisation, but this is a deliberate policy choice, not an historical inevitability.

The recent defeat of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment and the mass protests at Seattle last year indicate a growing resistance to these deceptions. Even *Business Week*, in an article headlined 'The Seattle Protesters Got It Right', noted, "The world's leading governments forgot they are elected not only to advance the interests of multinational corporations but also those of citizens."

Went has a good list of remedies – financial regulation, cancellation of Third World Debt, a break with export-led growth, sustainable production, income and work redistribution. Unfortunately, however, there is too little connection made between these worthy ideas and the campaigns of the actual movement in this brief study.

# The real Al Gore




**Mike Phipps** reviews *Al Gore: a user's manual*, by Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair, published by Verso, price £16.

"Al Gore distils in his single person the disrepair of liberalism in America today." From its opening sentence, this book charts the hypocrisy of the Democratic presidential contender. On the environment, civil rights and nuclear weapons, Gore said one thing in public, did the opposite in practice and later denied it. His anti-abortion stance earned him an 84% rating from the 'right to life' movement; later he claimed he'd always been pro-choice. Gore is also a fantasist, claiming ludicrously to have invented the Internet and sponsored a tax credit that was actually passed two years before he entered Congress.

Profiting from the extensive contacts acquired by his politician father, Al Junior was first elected in 1976 on positions of opposition to handgun registration, abortion and homosexuality and support for arms spending and mandatory minimum sentences for criminals. In Congress he became a close friend of arch-rightwinger Newt Gingrich and supported Reagan's invasion of the small Caribbean island of Grenada and funding of the terrorist contras in their destabilisation of the elected government of Nicaragua.

Despite allegations of 'woodenness', Gore is in fact a dirty campaigner. Having fared poorly in the early stages of his 1988 presidential bid, he stayed in the race specifically to pour money into negative attacks on Jesse Jackson, racialising the contest and giving ammunition to the Republicans. He subsequently worked hand in hand with right-wing Christian fundamentalists on the issue of obscene rock lyrics.

Chosen as Clinton's running mate in 1992, he elbowed his way into becoming one of the most powerful Vice-presidents ever, and pulling Clinton's administration to the right, personally bringing David Gergen, an ex-Reagan staffer, into a key position.

Despite the opposition of 795 out of 800 environmental groups in the US, Gore the so-called environmentalist lobbied hard for the North American Free Trade Agreement. Its ecological impact in Mexico alone – seven million tons of toxic waste illegally dumped – adds to a catalogue of broken promises on green issues. One authoritative campaigner concluded: "Gore and Clinton have done more harm to the environment than Reagan and Bush combined."

Gore next took charge of the 'Reinventing government' initiative, slashing and privatising projects and weakening affirmative action. This did little to stop the real financial excesses of federal government and probably worsened them – in 1998 the Pentagon made $2.3 trillion of book-keeping errors.

Gore urged Clinton to sign into law the Republicans' 1996 Welfare Reform, predicted to push 2.6 million people further into poverty. He pressed for wider police powers and longer jail sentences. Even his image of moral probity was tarnished by involvement in campaign finance scandals.

Given Clinton's inexperience, Gore had major influence over foreign policy, promoting the bombing of Iraq and other unilateral action. The global implications of a Gore presidency were signalled earlier this year in a speech calling for quicker interventions, less diplomacy and more firepower against 'rogue states' – namely, anyone that fails to bend to Uncle Sam's will.

This excellent book provides the factual ammunition needed to demonstrate the bankruptcy of supporting Gore as the 'lesser evil', and maps out what we can expect in future from one of the biggest charlatans in US politics.

# PERISCOPE

## New Labour, new funeral

At the end of **Donald Dewar**'s funeral, folk fiddler Ally Bain played a medley. As the coffin was being carried out he played *A man's a man for all that* written by Rabbie Burns at the time of the French Revolution. He followed this with *Jerusalem* (Blake was a socialist and not an English nationalist) as the congregation left. As the cortege pulled away viewers of the live broadcast were treated to the sight of the British establishment – from Prince Charles to Tony Blair – standing to the strains of *The Internationale*. Alas, miracles do happen – or spin doctors still spin – because by the time the cortege moved off on the evening news it was back to *A man's a man for all that*.

## Ooops. A Daisley.

**Q:** How can you get 261 votes at a meeting of 159 people?
**A:** When it's the **Brent East reselection** meeting, and 159 members turn up to find there's 102 postal votes already in.
**Q:** Who scored fewer votes than Lewisham Councillor Miriam Iloghalu (11), CWU Broad Left member Gerry Ryan (12), former Brent Councillor Jan Etienne (16) and GMB National President Mary Turner (77)?
**A:** Shahid Malik, whose popularity flopped from the 30,000 votes pulled in by the Millbank ticket for this year's NEC elections to... 6. This poor showing is probably because cde. Malik sent apologies to the meeting, so no one knew who he was – unlike the NEC elections (when nobody knew who he was).
**Q:** Given New Labour's commitment to a representative Parliamentary Labour Party, open to women and black people: who won?
**A:** A white man. It's Brent Council Leader, **Paul Daisley** (139).
**Q:** Is that the Paul Daisley who since the selection process started has been calling for more rights for asylum seekers?
**A:** Yes. And it's the same Paul Daisley who, after Ken had been reselected as PPC for Brent East and before Ken stood for Mayor, sent Brent refugees to live in Hastings, because "there was nowhere nearer" to house them.
**Q:** Is this the same Paul Daisley who has called for Ken Livingstone's reinstatement to the Party?
**A:** Yes. He has called for this quite openly, ever since the reselection process was re-opened.

## Co-op kerfuffle

The New Labour new Chair of the Co-op Party, **Gareth Thomas MP**, had his knuckles rapped at the Co-op's annual conference. First Thomas declared a reference back vote on Party organisation lost, despite it clearly being carried (against the platform's wishes). He called a card vote when there was an outcry, and the card vote was carried.

The conference then criticised the actions of its South London branch which refused to ballot its members over **Ken Livingstone**'s candidacy as Labour candidate for Mayor (branch chair Kathryn 'Enver' Smith cast its block vote of 50,000 decisively for Dobbo). Alun Michael continued his losing streak when his attempt to remove the Co-op Women's Guild from the Party's NEC as part of his "modernisation" proposals was defeated. *LLB* contributor Cathy Jamieson MSP successfully moved a resolution in favour of First Past the Post.

Meanwhile the Co-op Commission's review of its raison d'etre is being fronted by Alan Donnelly, the former Co-op sponsored MEP who did a runner from Strasbourg last year.

## Worms turn?

**Margaret McDonagh**'s eventful reign as Millbank Supremo could be about to come under attack from a new source... the loyal minions themselves.
Apparently full time organisers out and about in the country are balloting over their latest pay claim as *LLB* goes to press. Their spokesperson told *LLB*, "Oh my God, don't tell her my name. Oh no, oh no! Go away!" before hanging up.

## Two hundred of our dinosaurs are missing

Security was taken very seriously at **Labour Party Conference** in Brighton. Applications for a visitors ticket required more personal information than an application form for MI5 and even the NEC had a full presentation, with a Q&A session on contingency plans to deal with attendees who hurt their wrists.

So much for planning. Attendance at the start of Conference was so poor that stewards were desperately ushering visitors down from the balcony and into the delegates' seats in the Conference hall. By the end of Conference, it was worse, with visitors without even balcony tickets being frogmarched in from the coffee bar. Even exhibitors from the various business stands were forced to sit beaming in rows and pretend they were part of the Labour Party. Sorry, did we say "pretend"?

## Fifth column

The **Young Fabians** fulfilled our worst fears at Labour Party Conference by holding meetings sponsored by... *The Sunday Telegraph*. At least we know whose side they're on now.

## Survival tactics?

Does the **Institute for Public Policy Research** (Tony Blair's favourite think-tank) know something about Labour Party members that the rest of us don't? Its card, given to delegates at Conference had a list of useful numbers that delegates may need during their week in Brighton - taxis, doctors, the train station and Alcoholics Anonymous!

## Two fingers to Winston

Former Islington Councillor **James Winston**, he who had a few problems with the law and his housing benefit, has reappeared – organising the "Northern Ireland Event" at Labour Party Conference. It was breakfast with James and his friends: Kate Hoey MP, Alan Johnson MP, Lord Fitt and the other dodgy characters lobbying for Labour to set up in the six counties – quite enough to put you off your Frosties.

## Renew, relaunch, resign

Another Labour Conference, another right-wing relaunch. Obviously unimpressed with *Progress*, mad moderniser **Phil Woodford** (favourite hate: Labour Party activists) has teamed up, according to *Tribune*, with our old friend **Paul Richards**, disgraced LLM lobbyist and Keith Hill's assistant Paul Simpson to form "Labour Involve". "Second Term", an umbrella formed by some of the same names and launched in similar circumstances, appears to have been about as popular as Frank Dobson and has presumably been wound up.
Meanwhile, *LLB*'s editorial board is booking a coach to Lewes to campaign for comrade Richards, as he takes on sitting Lib Dem MP Norman Baker at the General Election (or was that a monocycle?).

# Correspondence

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

The film *Billy Eliot* is a blatant attack on the working class. Miners striking to protect their jobs, communities, homes, livelihoods, families and way of life are portrayed not as heroes but as boorish, loutish oafs.

The boy Billy is portrayed as a hero for turning his back on his class and going over to the bourgeoisie.

His father is shown as a homophobic brute only achieving a sympathetic portrayal when he starts to scab, to betray his mates and his entire class, to raise the money so that his son can continue in his fantasy of becoming a prancing idiot pandering to the snobbish pretensions of the bourgeoisie.

The boy's ballet teacher is played by Julie Walters, notorious for her first film part in *Educating Rita* as a snobbish, stuck-up little cow who is ashamed of her working class origins, who regards her building-worker husband as a boorish oaf, and who seeks to find "a better song to sing" by adopting the pretentious postures of the bourgeoisie.

This film is nothing but an attack on the culture and values of the working class; it represents class treason and snobbery as virtues and solidarity as the preserve of "Neanderthals" and "dinosaurs"; it is no surprise that it gets its highest praise from those sections of the gutter press responsible for the most vicious, vituperative slanders perpetrated against the miners, and which said that the miners should accept their redundancy with gratitude and accused the men who refused to lie down and die of "standing in the way of progress".

All workers should picket every cinema where this farrago is being shown or at the very least boycott them and go to the video shop and get out something by Ken Loach instead; I recommend *Riff Raff* and *Hidden Agenda*.

**Keith Ackermann**
**Tilbury, Essex**

The speed of recent events both at home and abroad got me thinking. How can it be that a docile and unorganised mass, ie the petrol protestors, or an actively suppressed group such as the people of Serbia, can move into struggle so quickly?

Undoubtedly the speed of modern communications, ie the internet and mobile phones, played a part in the Europe-wide fuel crisis – but surely not to the same extent in Serbia.

Then I turned to all that *LLB* has published over 18 months or so about the crisis of representation and could see no reason why a similar logic could not or should not apply elsewhere as well as in Britain. It was Gramsci would introduced the concept of legitimacy into modern Marxist thought.

Once Milosevic lost legitimacy, events moved very fast – as they did in other Eastern European countries a decade before. The right crowed then about the end of history and such bunk. The more recent examples, such as the overthrow of Suharto's croney capitalism in Indonesia or the pivotal role of miners and other organised workers in the fall of Milosovic and his cronies in Serbia, give them less to crow about.

In Britain and abroad there is a culture of discontent, and that augurs well for those who want to change the world rather than merely observe it.

**Ian Malcolm-Walker**
**Derby**

Blair's Conference speech makes clear that he has no political core and the left should stop giving him the benefit of the doubt and recognise him for the traitor he is. There are eleven solid reasons why I can't vote Labour while he is there:

- he wants the universal pension to wither away;
- he ended free education;
- he prefers indirect taxation to direct taxation;
- he has widened the gap between rich and poor;
- he prefers means testing to universal benefits;
- he has armed oppressive regimes and used cluster bombs;
- he has finished off public ownership;
- he is eroding trial by jury;
- he has undermined comprehensive education;
- he has done nothing to cure homelessness;
- he has treated immigrants disgracefully.

These are all Tory policies and they make the conflict between the two main parties absurd.

**Bob Spooner**
**Leeds**

Donald Dewar was an open supporter of lesbian and gay rights. He supported the equal age of consent at Westminster but more significantly he was a prime mover behind the repeal of section 28 in Scotland. He described Section 28 as a stain on our society and his support for repeal was vital in the Labour Group and in the Parliament. In his speech to Labour Party Conference he explicitly mentioned how hard the fight had been and that it was a matter of pride for Scotland that Section 28 had been repealed. He was an honourable and decent man and Scotland's lesbian and gay community, like the wider Scottish community, will miss his presence and influence.

**Jim Mearns**
**Glasgow**

I do not wish to join in the eulogising of Donald Dewar. He was a staunch right winger, supported expulsions, opposed non-payment of the Poll Tax, and was loyal to Blair (though more to the Party than the project).

I met Donald Dewar twice, at meetings of Glasgow University Labour Club. Both times, our members gave him such a hard time, over counter-demonstrating against the fascists and with our support for Clause IV, that he politely declined to donate any money to the Club.

However, his death provoked an outpouring of grief from ordinary people, who feel that somebody of substance has been lost. What did this dour, intellectual right winger represent that so many politicians and commentators should line up to honour his legacy?

There is the Scottish sense of civic pride: one of our own, regardless of his politics, has been taken from the body politic. There is a fear that perhaps Dewar was an irreplaceable weave in the fabric of Scottish devolution, and that without him the whole project might unravel. Perhaps we are nostalgic for an imagined time of integrity in public life, which Dewar has come to represent.

**Mike Cowley**
**Edinburgh**

## ANY OTHER BUSINESS

"There's no secret about the fact that I was opposed to a direct switch from Tories to Labour. But I could see the argument about the Tories having got to the end of the road for the time being and it wasn't such a dramatic change to support Blair."

**Trevor Kavanagh**, Political Editor of the *Sun* on Rupert Murdoch's decision to back Blair rather than Major in 1997

*Guardian Media*, Monday 2nd October 2000.



# THE CHRISTINE SHAWCROFT COLUMN

Recently I went for a demonstration of the Labour.contact computerised canvassing system. A very helpful, capable young lady showed me how it works and what it can do. It is a very impressive system which I would recommend to anybody. I asked at one point if you could code up weak Labour voters, as my canvassing recently has turned up whole categories of weak Labour voters – disappointed members, voted Labour last time but never again, etc. "Oh yes, you can do that," she said. "The whole system is based on that. There are no firm Labour voters anymore."

"I beg your pardon?" I said.

"We have to base all our new canvassing and recording systems on the fact that there are only weak Labour voters now," she confirmed.

Now, I have to ask how, three years after a Labour landslide, we can possibly have arrived at a situation where you can't be sure of anyone voting Labour? *LLB* gets blamed for a great deal, including the weather and global warming, but even so I'm sure it can't be us. The New Labour leadership have surely got to look to their policies and activities and ask themselves what responsibility they have.

I don't think the fall in our support is simply because we promised the index linking of pensions to average earnings in opposition and then refused to carry it out in government. The public are used to politicians doing things like that. They may even expect it. The problem is that when the economy is doing well, and the Government boasts about how much money is being given to pensioners in terms of free TV licences and winter fuel allowances, pensioners and public think: well, if you've got so much money and you're already giving us all these things we didn't ask for, why don't you give us what we do want? Refusal begins to look like stubborn denial that they were wrong.

The leadership seems to think that if it ignores the issue long enough it will go away. The whole National Policy Forum process, with its two year documents and ignored submissions seems to have been designed to bore campaigners to death with a diet of non-voting forums, doggedly reconvened until a demand runs out of steam. How much money has it wasted on reviews, reviews of the review, the welfare policy document, holding a welfare policy review, referring Conference decisions to an autumn policy review? And where is the promised autumn policy review? Why doesn't it stop holding reviews and give the pensioners what they deserve? It's only what a previous Labour Government gave – a Government which really was strapped for cash, unlike this one.

But no matter how the leadership tries to run away from it, the pensions campaign keeps on coming up behind them, as September's events in Brighton showed. Ironically, the last minute wrangling at Annual Conference could all have been avoided if the pensions amendments had been debated at the Exeter National Policy Forum and not ruled out of order. Instead, a trade union revolt on the Conference Arrangements

**'no matter how the leadership tries to run away from it, the pensions campaign keeps on coming up behind them'**

Committee led to the pensions resolutions winning the ballot for contemporary resolutions – and three NEC meetings in one day to deal with the crisis. First, the NEC was told that UNISON wished to reconsider their composite, which was not true. We were then told that there would be a re-compositing meeting for all delegates. This was also untrue. When delegates were finally called to a meeting, it turned out to be a meeting to put pressure on Rodney Bickerstaffe to remit, not one to discuss the composite.

The NEC was still in crisis meeting as the afternoon session of Conference was due to start. Margaret Wall had to be sent back in to chair it, and luminaries were rounded up to sit on the platform, so that no one would notice that the rest of the NEC was otherwise engaged. Eventually the NEC decided, by 18 votes to eight, that if the resolution was not remitted they would recommend a vote against.

There was even a question and answer session, chaired by Michael Cashman, with Alastair Darling given forty minutes to put his points over – a last minute change to Conference procedure agreed by no official body. The questions were planted, the standing ovations faked. And still they lost the vote!

The opportunity to turn round public opinion, to go forward together and make eleven million pensioners very happy was thrown away. Instead we have acres of newsprint about a defeat for the Government – and Gordon Brown announcing that he will be ignoring the vote before you can say "earnings related". It's because he will be listening to the community, apparently. Yet we all know that if he'd been listening to the community, we wouldn't be in this mess.

One Party member spent Conference week on holiday in the Lake District with 1,000 fellow pensioners. Several holidaymakers who had voted Labour all their lives or just last time were intending to vote Tory next time – not for love of Hague, but to "teach Tony Blair a lesson". How long before a new computer system is brought in which doesn't need to have a space for recording Labour voters at all?

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