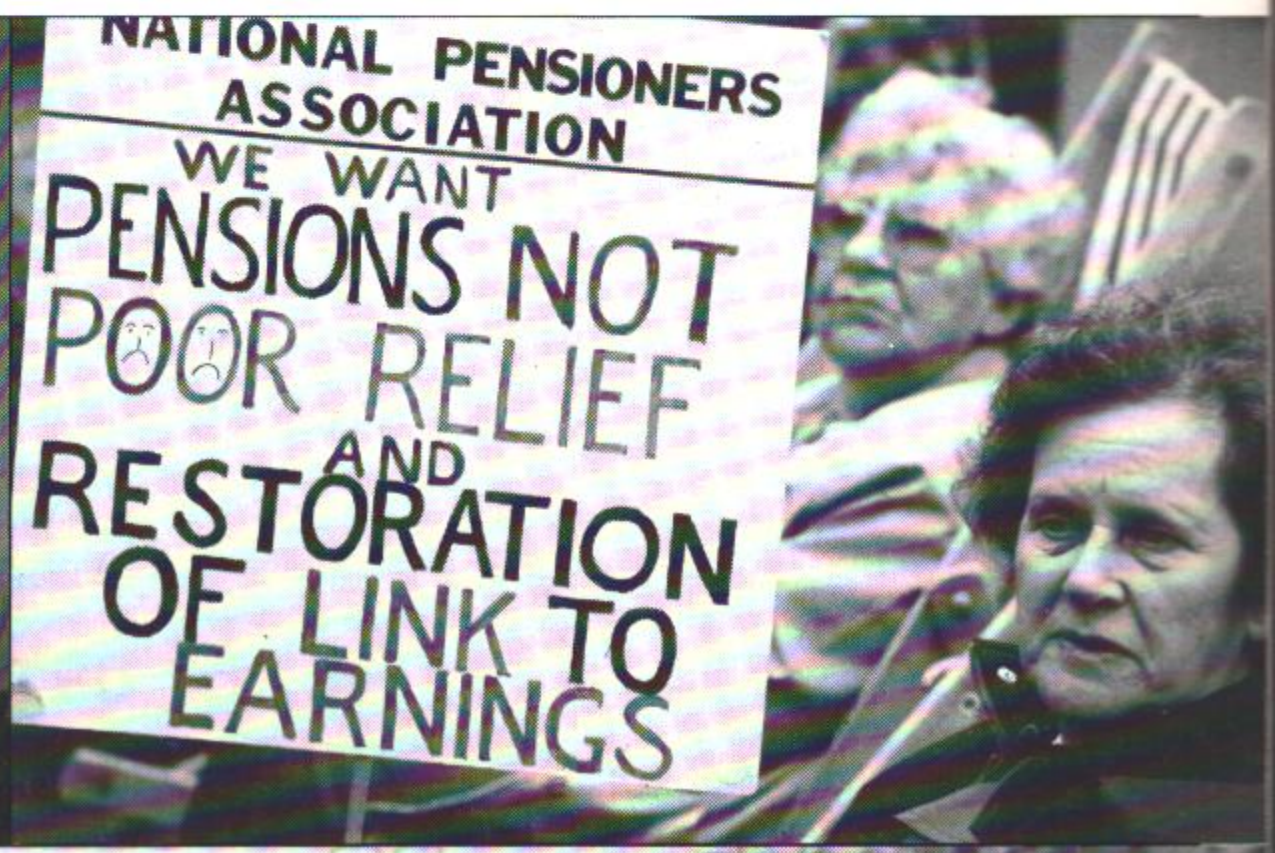
LABOUR LEFT

Briefing

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Crisis? What crisis?

FUEL BLOCKADE
Debate: class allies or enemies?

PENSIONS
Paul Flynn MP — restore the link!

LABOUR PARTY
FBU call to readmit Ken

US ELECTIONS
Greg Palast – no choice for the left

LABOUR LEFT Briefing

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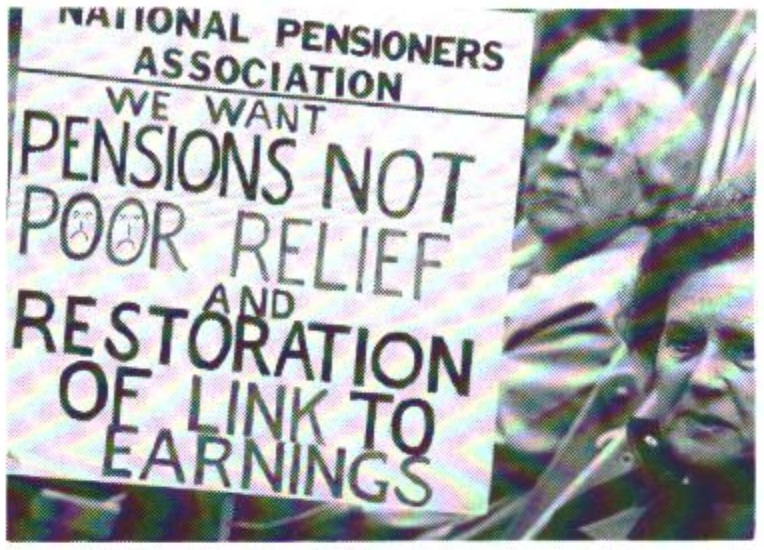
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■ The copy deadline for the next issue of *LLB* is Monday 16th October.



October 2000

Photos: Paul Mattsson

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EDITORIAL

Beyond Brighton

When Tony Blair addresses the Party at Brighton's pre-election jamboree (which should not be dignified by the use of the word "conference"), the usual standing ovation will mask both unease and alienation among many Party members. Blair must sell his programme – and persona – not only to the waiting media, not only to the core and new Labour voters, but also to the very many longstanding and recent Labour members who are no longer inspired to campaign (or in many cases even vote) for Labour.

Party members have been sidelined throughout the first term of New Labour. We have been vote-rigged out of a say in the selection of public representatives – Dennis Canavan, Rhodri Morgan, Ken Livingstone – with disastrous electoral consequences from local government to Euro-elections. We have been marginalised in the new policy-making process. Will New Labour at last see the consequences of their arrogance? While losing 100 seats (the current Millbank prediction) will leave them with a working majority in Parliament, it will not win a majority in the working class strong enough to sustain an effective second term.

To rally the members, Blair will cite Labour's achievements in office. Of course the minimum wage, the removal of most of the heriditary peers from the governing process and some very basic democratic reforms are gains. However, the first term has in no way met the expectations of those euphoric supporters of 1st May 1997, who believed that a Labour Government would bring significant change to their lives.

Blair will warn of the dangers of letting the Tories back in. Of course another Tory Government would be too terrible to contemplate: but given the hopelessly divided Conservative Party of the new millenium, it would take an effort possibly even beyond New Labour to lose office to them (though after the petrol crisis, perhaps not). But is this what we've sunk to: "vote Labour – the lesser evil"?

Far from being desperate to sweep Labour to office, the working class in Britain is now full of disappointed groups who have reason to fight against our Party: public sector workers, the black community, transport workers, students, pensioners... They do have their representatives in the Party: in the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs, on the Party's National Executive, and in the candidacies of Geoff Martin and Loraine Monk for the leadership of the London Party. Their voices may not be heard too often within the official confines of the Brighton Centre, but they are gaining growing resonance in the real world outside Brighton. And they are voices more telling about Labour's prospects for a second term than the utterances of New Labour's fair weather friends in the establishment.

The tragedy of Labour's first term has been that the left has been too divided to galvanise those suffering from New Labour into a more comprehensive battle to reclaim our Party and our unions. If we cannot forge a strong, united left and raise the banner of class politics in the coming months, we shall be ceding control of the campaigning agenda to the Countryside Alliance and the Road Haulage Association for years to come.

Reinstate Ken Livingstone!

The FBU's call to Annual Conference for Ken Livingstone be readmitted to the Labour Party has widespread support throughout the labour movement.

Reinstatement – a second chance for Labour to hold the London mayoralty after Millbank blew it in the selection – would enthuse that majority of Party and union activists who selected Livingstone as we approach the General Election and could begin to reverse the decline in membership and levels of activity.

Ken's enduring popularity with London's electorate remains a sign of Labour's potential support if it rediscovers its traditional values and his reinstatement would be a much-needed vote winner nationally. It would send a message that the damaging control-freakery that helped Labour's opponents in the European, Welsh and GLA elections is behind us. The narrow sectarian faction in Millbank which split Labour in London and lost the election should not be allowed to get in the way of the interests of London and the labour movement – reinstate Ken now!

Troops out of Sierra Leone!

Any lingering doubts that their interference in the Balkans opened a new phase of intervention by western powers under the guise of upholding humanitarian values were dispelled by recent events in Sierra Leone. The killing of twenty-five guerillas by British paratroopers – "the finest solidiers in the world," according to Blair – is a matter of outrage and disgust for socialists. It is small wonder the Party leadership is to drop all references to an ethical foreign policy from its next manifesto.

As before, Britain's military intervention in Sierra Leone's civil conflict has simplistically identified the good guys (the Government) and the bad (the RUF). Never mind that the Government of Sierra Leone itself is a major abuser of human rights, according to Amnesty – nor that British troops have been working alongside unaccountable mercenaries on the ground. It is increasingly clear that this is about returning control of the diamond mines to a local regime beholden to the UK government.

Britain's unilateral operation in Sierra Leone lacks any international mandate or justification. It must be ended immediately.

Seven days in September



Photo: Paul Mattsson

Were the fuel protests organised by "our fiercest class enemies" or our potential allies? We publish some of our supporters' email and other contributions to the debate.

The blockades are organised, maintained and condoned by some of our fiercest class enemies. The farmers and truckers thrived throughout the Thatcher years, and now that their gravy train is being derailed, they are squealing to their friends in the media. The tacit support by the oil corporations clearly shows the true origins of the current difficulties.
Colin Hall

The Scottish Socialist Party backs the protests over high fuel taxes – and demands the tax burden be shifted to the North Sea oil companies. High fuel taxes are not the answer to traffic congestion and pollution. This government has refused to bring the rail network back into public ownership. It has refused to reverse Tory deregulation and privatisation of bus services. It has refused to shift freight from road to rail. High fuel prices hammer the poor. They affect not just petrol prices at the pumps, but lead to higher bus and train fares and higher prices in the supermarkets as transport costs rise. While fuel taxes in the UK are among the highest, North Sea oil companies pay some of the lowest taxes in the world.
Scottish Socialist Party

All sorts of myths are involved, such as it's employers picketing the depots. No doubt there are some, but by and large it's small farmers, owner drivers and small haulage firms. They have widespread support including from some trades unionists like Liverpool bus drivers. So what if it's supported by the reactionary media? There were plenty of union jacks on the Rover demo – did that mean the left didn't support it?

The police are being soft on them. Yes, but since when were we in favour of the police cracking heads? Petrol disputes hit ordinary people. Yes, and so do industrial disputes too. When postal workers strike people don't get their giros. Blunkett has invoked the "Winter of Discontent" as a horror to steer clear of. But many of us actively supported that. The rhetoric coming from the Government is exactly the same as it would be if sections of trades unionists were out.
Pete Firmin

The links with the Countryside Alliance protests should be emphasised. The amazing scenes on television where oil company bosses refused to talk shows their involvement in a conspiracy to sell more petrol by cutting duty. We should call for public ownership of all energy supplies. As for OPEC, the Government has done nothing to protect coal or advance coal liquefaction research, so making OPEC stronger.
Garth Frankland

Blair is paying the price for not having a proper transport policy which would have undercut the support for these actions. The protests have provoked a sophisticated public debate about car use, sustainability and what sort of taxation we want.
Sue Lukes

The blockades are an unlawful attempt to bully the Government into submission. They must not succeed.
TUC General Council

It was an odd protest with oil company executives offering tanker drivers the choice of working or not, and the police providing escorts for demonstrations. The issue of fuel tax is complicated. Undoubtedly the poorest in rural areas and self-employed people are hit hard by it, but it is also a tax on pollution. The Government's preparation of emergency powers to break protests is ominous: such powers would be used against trades unions. A transport system universally available and affordable is vital, as is an understanding of the difficulties of some self-employed people, usually themselves redundant workers who were victims of Tory recessions.
Jeremy Corbyn MP

We should celebrate the gains made in legitimising direct action alternatives to apathy, watching TV, and leaving it all to politicians. Some of those protesting are saying things like "the miners were right". However dodgy the prevailing politics, this really is the people on the move. If the organised working class fails to seize the initiative and provide leadership, then of course others will fill that vacuum. The official TU leadership's policy of backing Blair and urging police brutality against the protesters is an absolute scandal and recipe for disaster.
Chris Knight

The log jamming of fuel supplies has been a "bosses' blockade". For the oil companies, the game is about oil profits not petrol prices. Drivers were told they didn't have to leave the depots; their wages were not suspended; their jobs were not under threat. If the trade unions had organised such a blockade it would have been illegal, and their assets seized. If not, the oil companies would have demanded police and army assistance to smash the dispute. John Monks was right to draw comparisons with events in Chile in 1973, where the CIA financed a lorry drivers' strike to bring the country to a halt, and to overthrow Allende's elected government. The British National Party was involved – they have hauliers and farmers and they want to bring down the Government.

Politically, it has to be said that the era of cheap fossil fuel is at an end. The Government should also now accelerate fuel conversion programmes.
Alan Simpson MP, writing in *Socialist Campaign Group News*.

What have they got to hide?

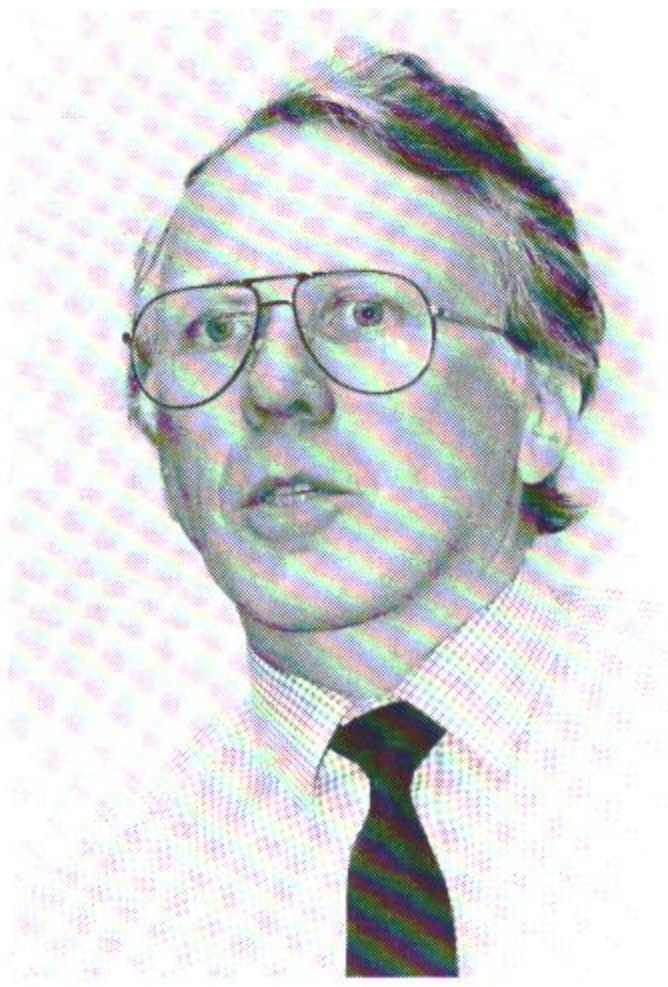
Paul Flynn MP describes how the Government is concealing crucial information that could support the case for restoring the link between state pensions and average earnings.

Open government... freedom of information... such terms mean little when the Government decides that it doesn't want us to know. And one thing it clearly doesn't want us to know is how much spare cash the National Insurance Fund will accumulate over the next five years. We can't be trusted with such knowledge because if we knew the likely size of the surplus we might start thinking of ways of spending it – like restoring the link between the basic state pension and average earnings, which I hope we shall be allowed to debate at Annual Conference (unlike at the National Policy Forum).

The veil of secrecy over the Fund's situation is a recent phenomenon. As recently as 11th November 1999, in reply to my parliamentary question, the Treasury revealed that the Fund was expected to have a balance of £15.3 billion in April 2001 and £16.7 billion in April 2002. Although National Insurance is a pay-as-you-go scheme, the Government Actuary recommends that the Fund should hold a contingency reserve of two months' expenditure. But that would still leave it with an additional surplus of nearly £7.4 billion in 2001 and more than £8.4 billion in 2002. An extra £1 increase in the basic pension would cost about £0.5 billion a year

Two months later, in January 2000, the Government Actuary's report on the April benefit uprating (including the 75p increase in the basic pension) showed that the additional surplus was now expected to be £8.8 billion in April 2001. The Treasury reply to another of my questions, on 16th February 2000, predicted that it would be £10.5 billion by April 2002 – over £2 billion more than the previous estimate.

In view of the obvious relevance of these figures to the affordability of restoring the earnings link, I then asked for similar figures for each year up to 2011. It was at that point that someone in Whitehall decided to put a stop to these embarrassing disclosures. In a written answer on 19th April, the Paymaster General, Dawn Primarolo, refused to give the figures on the grounds that, "given the sensitivity of the variables involved, precise forecasts would be misleading."



Pensions Minister Jeff Rooker: sudden silence on the National Insurance fund surplus.

That excuse, however, was undermined by the answer given the previous day by the Pensions Minister, Jeff Rooker, to yet another Paul Flynn question. The question was: by what percentage could the basic pension be increased in April 2000 without reducing the balance of the Fund below the recommended level by April 2002? The answer was 11.8%, but, Rooker explained, the result would be a large shortfall in subsequent years, leading to increases in contribution rates. He illustrated the point by appending a table showing what the Fund's balance would be after the 11.8 % increase, not just in 2002 but in each year up to 2004 – information for which I had not even asked.

My next question was the obvious one: what would the surplus be in each year from 2001-4 if the pension were not increased by 11.8% but simply uprated in line with prices? There could no longer be any rational grounds for withholding that information. Nevertheless, on 23rd May, Rooker refused to provide it: "Precise long-term forecasts of any excess to the Fund reserves would be misleading, given the sensitivity of the differences between forecasts of receipts and expenditure to the variables involved."

The question was immediately re-tabled in a slightly amended form, backed up with a telephone call to Rooker's office, pointing out the absurdity of his position. But once again, on 6th June, Rooker refused to reply. There the matter rested until 19th July, when Barbara Castle moved an amendment to the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Bill in the Lords. Much to her surprise, the Minister, Pat Hollis, accepted the amendment. It requires the Government Actuary to report what would be the effect on the Fund and on contribution rates in each year up to 2005-6, if the basic pension were linked to average earnings. At last, it seemed, we were to be given the facts on which to form a judgement as to whether the earnings link would be affordable, at

Continued on page 6

John Cryer
MP for Hornchurch

Fight for universal benefits, full employment, a decent minimum wage and public ownership!

Continued from page 5

least for the next five years.

When the Bill returned to the Commons on 24th July for approval of the Lords' amendments, however, Jeff Rooker announced, without explanation, that it was "not practical" to produce the Government Actuary's report when Parliament resumes, and that the earliest opportunity to publish it would be in January 2001, when the routine report on the annual uprating is due to appear. By then, the decision on whether to restore the earnings link in 2001 will have been taken and the purpose of the Castle amendment – to influence that decision – will have been thwarted.

Rooker claimed incorrectly that the information was already available from two previous reports by the Government Actuary. This led me to ask why my repeated requests for information about the state of the Fund in 2003-4 had been turned down. The Minister replied that it was open to ask the question again, which I did. The answer, on 27th July, was that the figures would be published in the Government Actuary's report in January 2001. The argument that long-term forecasts would be misleading has been dropped. The figures will be supplied – but not for another six months. Yet the Government already has those figures and could publish them today if it chose to do so.

Where does all this leave us? The decision to keep us waiting another six months for information which was available when first requested is plainly indefensible, but the ministers concerned will not have to face any further questions until the end of October.

The Government Actuary has now been instructed by Parliament to produce a report on the cost of restoring the earnings link. He alone is responsible for carrying out that instruction and deciding how quickly it can be done. He will report to the Social Security Secretary who will then have to decide when the report will be laid before Parliament. If the Social Security Secretary receives the report before October, he can hardly refuse to publish it before the November uprating announcement. A big question now, therefore, is whether the Government Actuary will allow the convenience of the Government to take precedence over his responsibility to Parliament. And the big question for the Party to look at is why the Government is so reluctant to provide the information for a decision on restoring the link.

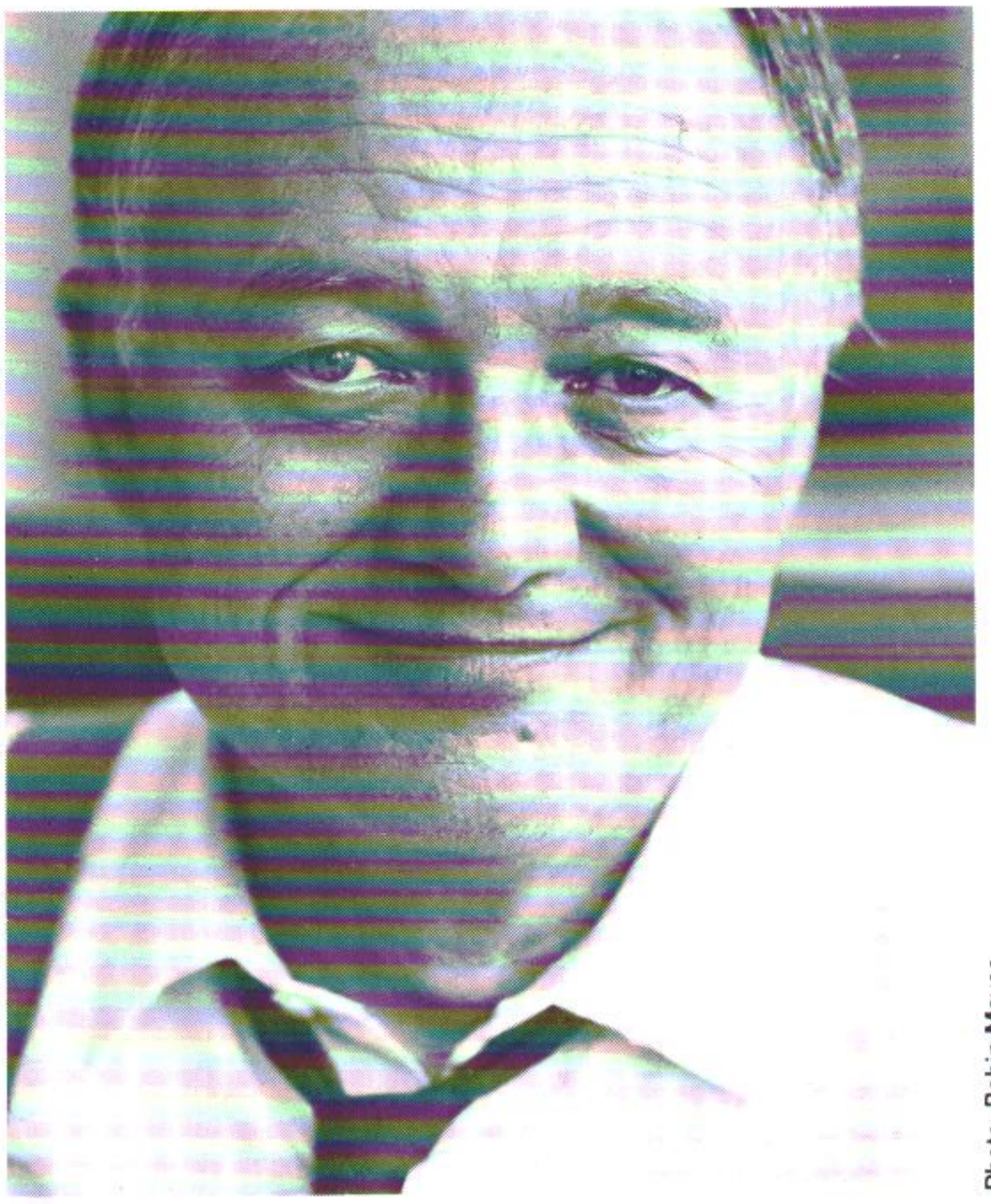


Photo: Robin Mayes

Totally unacceptable!

Ken Livingstone

The prosecution of LUL by the Health & Safety Executive in early September has driven not so much a coach and horses but rather a steaming locomotive through the Government's assurances that safety will be a priority for the Public Private Partnership (PPP) to which it is handing over London's Tube network.

Documents written by Stanley Hart, the Health and Safety Executive's Principal Inspector of Railways, and Keith Beattie, London Underground Limited's own Chief Engineer, which were leaked over the summer, confirmed my worst fears. They revealed that their grave concerns about safety systems arise out of the very "shadow running" arrangements which are preparing for the privatisation.

Hart stated, "There are still too many areas where there is either no proof that the systems work or proof that they are not working." Beattie warned the Transitional Chief Executives Committee in a memorandum dated 14th March 2000, "If matters rest for too long, there is a possibility that a significant fire could occur as a result of poor controls."

By breaking the Tube into three monopolies, each with its own private consortium in charge, the Government is trying to head off the campaign for adequate investment in public transport – after years of chronic underfunding – which the Greater London Assembly should have been leading.

Via the directly elected Mayor, LUL management could have been subjected to a clear line of democratic accountability and we could have changed the monopolistic culture which has allowed it to ride roughshod over its customers. The Government's PPP plans have made the situation worse, not least because it is determined that London's elected representatives will have no say over the PPP contracts by which we shall be legally bound for the next 30 years.

Under the Greater London Authority Act, LUL is required to "consult and co-operate" with London's elected Mayor. I learned of the safety concerns stemming from the privatisation process from the media, along with the rest of the electorate. That is simply not acceptable.

Poor start – must do better

New Labour promised a radical policy on transport. But its Ten Year Transport Plan is timid, claim two leading transport activists.

It was a bad start, with two disastrous early appointments: Gavin Strang as Transport Minister, an amiable veteran who knew a lot about agriculture, but next to nothing about transport; and Baroness Hayman as Minister for Roads and Road Safety, who was more at home at running a hospital trust than a major government department.

There was a brief upturn when, under the guidance of John Prescott, Michael Meacher and Larry Whitty (who had replaced Hayman within a year of the Election), the Transport White Paper was produced. It truly did try to "put the environment at the heart of Government". But Number 10 baulked at its more radical policies and installed Lord Macdonald, who had made a fortune running his media empire in Scotland, as Transport Minister to come up with a plan that was business-friendly.

Macdonald has now delivered his Ten Year Transport Plan. It has its good points: it does attempt to take a strategic, long-term approach; it has come up with real money for the railways; it does encourage local authorities to develop plans that promote public transport, walking and cycling; it confirms that congestion charging is still an option for councils; and it reaffims the importance of improving road safety. But the fact that the CBI Chairman described it as "a monumental victory for the business community" should send warning signs rippling through the labour movement.

The Ten Year Plan confirms that public transport remains with the private sector. The railways will face somewhat tougher regulation than they did under the Tories, but the same fragmented structure stays. Fares remain prohibitively high. The buses fare even worse. They are to get none of the capital investment promised to the railways and regulation, after heavy lobbying by the bus industry, will be light.

The Labour heartlands will feel the timidity of the Government's approach most keenly. Flash new railways and fast new roads are largely irrelevant to socially excluded communities: 37% of bus users come from social classes D and E; children from the poorest homes are five times more likely to be killed on the roads than those from better-off households; older people are most dependent on walking, making the highest proportion of their journeys on foot; most transport in the UK is still inaccessible to many disabled people.

The heartlands require a good network of reliable, affordable and accessible bus services, run to meet the needs of the people rather than merely the profit margins of the operators, and real investment in those most equitable modes, walking and cycling. The Government's recently-announced Urban Bus Challenge, improvements in bus services in remote rural areas, and other schemes are a nod in this direction, but in order to keep business sweet and Middle England content, the real resources have gone elsewhere.

New Government regulations requiring buses and trains to be accessible to disabled people are not fully comprehensive. Buses don't yet have to have visual and audible announcements. No bus that was on the road from the start of the new Millennium will have to be accessible until 2015 and there is no deadline by which rail vehicles have to be accessible. The 10 Year Transport Plan requires all new transport infrastructure projects to be fully accessible, but will disabled people be involved in the planning process? Some accessibility improvements may also be funded from congestion charging revenues, but will everyone whose disability makes it difficult to use public transport be exempted from these charges?

A second term Labour Government must re-order its transport priorities if it is to counter social exclusion (their euphemism for poverty and deprivation). Revenue funding – it used to be called subsidy – is required to provide a decent bus service for all. Bus companies need to be properly regulated, so that local authorities and not the likes of Stagecoach, Arriva and First Bus determine what the local network will look like. Real resources must be provided to create safe and pleasant walking and cycling facilities, with priority given not to the middle-class areas that shout loudest, but to the low-income estates where the need is greatest. Tough accessibility targets for bus and rail companies must be decided democratically and enforced.

This Government, despite its calls to reduce the need for travel, has swallowed the notion that more mobility is an inevitable consequence of economic progress. The losers of this philosophy remain hidden: developing nations whose fertile land is destroyed by global warming; and the poor in Britain, who rarely travel far but who suffer most from the noise, pollution and danger caused by other people's mobility.

The abiding image of Labour's first-term was Tony Blair, high up on the Millenium Wheel last New Year's Eve, shaking hands with his good friend, Bob Ayling, then Chairman of British Airways. Whose hands will Tony choose to shake in his second term?

Sutton & District Socialist Campaign Group

Socialist Greetings to Conference

To join us contact 020 8661 1060

Turning principles into deeds

If the Home Office review on sex offences is enacted, distinctions between sexual orientation will be eliminated from the criminal law. Peter Purton reports.

The Home Office working party has recommended sweeping changes to the law as it affects lesbians and gay men. No doubt the Christian Institute, Baroness Young and others will be up in arms at the proposal that no distinction should be made in the criminal law on grounds of sexual orientation.

This crucial principle is long overdue. In the year 2000, we still have an unequal age of consent (awaiting use of the Parliament Act to override the Lords and achieve equalisation). Gay men are still prosecuted for gross indecency for doing the same things that heterosexuals do legally. Lesbians and gay men can be arrested for kissing in the street. Chatting up someone of the same sex can be a criminal offence. People are still getting off murder charges by claiming the victim had made homosexual advances to them.

European Human Rights law was beginning to chip away at these survivals of Victorian morality. The law defining group gay sex between consenting adults as illegal has been found to be a breach of human rights (at last). Europe also disposed of the ban on homosexuality in the armed forces.

LCLGR's own detailed submission pressing for equality was endorsed by the TUC. The Home Office Working Party listened! The Home Office is being advised to do the right thing by implementing the Working Party's recommendations. The Working Party's report says that it is not the role of the criminal law to interfere to regulate consensual adult sexual behaviour or to "condone or advocate any particular form of sexual behaviour". An unanswerable case has been made for the discriminatory character of existing law and there is no justification for this given the Government's commitment to equality and tolerance. On the basis of an approach that no longer enquires into the sexual orientation of the parties involved in consensual sexual relations, it proposes to repeal all the relevant offences in the 1956 and 1967 Sexual Offences Acts.

This is great. All we need now is for it to be enacted. Since the consultation does not end until March 2001, this presumably waits until a second term Labour Government. Meanwhile the bigots will gird their loins in a last ditch attempt to keep us down.

There is nothing liberal about the recommendations of the Working Party's report *Setting the Boundaries*. They are firm supporters of the abuse of trust proposal that accompanies the equalisation of the age of consent. Doubts have been expressed at the effect of this new law, in particular by teachers who are already regulated by codes of conduct. There are potential iniquities: for example, a straight teacher married to their 17-year old pupil (whatever the wisdom of doing so!) is of course not criminal, but a teacher who has a relationship with a 17-year old of the same sex will go to prison.

A new public order offence dealing with sex in public places is recommended. This is admirably orientation-neutral, and is hedged about with safeguards that should, for example, avoid the deliberate entrapment by police of men who go cottaging. But the weakness lies in the reliance necessarily placed on local police to enforce the law, and on local magistrates to apply it even-handedly to men having sex with men and to straight couples going too far in the bushes. The report says that the Human Rights Act will help iron out these differences. We will see.

- Contact LCLGR, PO Box 306, London N5, lclgr@yahoo.co.uk
- LCLGR strongly supports the TUC campaign for lesbian and gay anti-discrimination law. Copies of the report *Straight Up! Why the law should protect lesbian and gay workers* and of the campaign postcard are available from the TUC on 020 7467 1271, e-mail ppurton@tuc.org.uk.

Students organise

Howard Ford reports on lesbian, gay and bisexual campaigning in NUS.

NUS Conference this year created two new positions on its National Executive Committee: one elected by lesbian, gay and bisexual students and one by lesbian and bisexual women. Labour Students, who saw the posts as a threat to their stranglehold over NUS, opposed the move as "greedy", but many delegates chose to break the line, and the long struggle by oppressed groups to have their right to self-organisation and representation recognised within the student movement ended in victory.

The LGB conference that followed was very inward looking, with arguments that we needed to put our own house in order pushing out debate on important topics such as Section 28, the Human Rights Act, anti-racist campaigning and the Government's attack on education funding. The left had success in the committee elections, but unity faded when five left candidates contested two NEC positions!

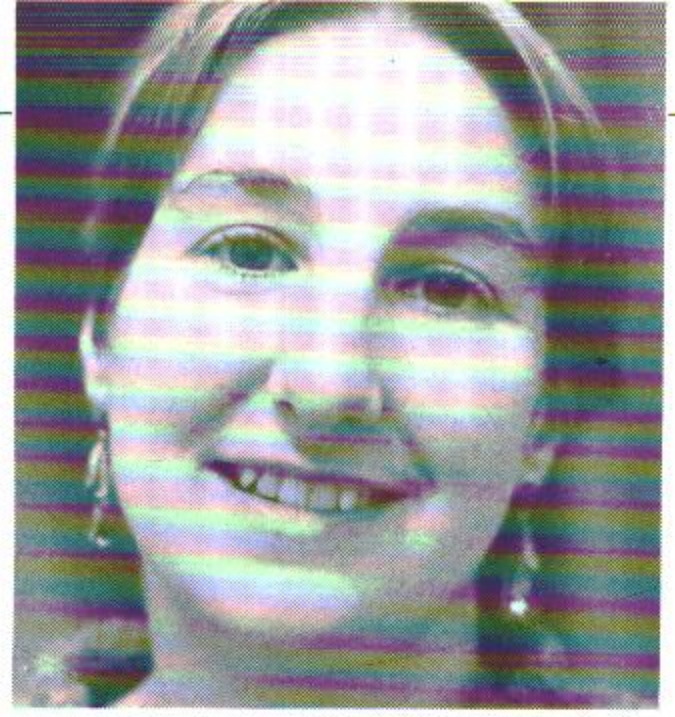
The left must create an active campaign that will inspire people to get involved, in alliance with our supporters in the Black, Asian and Jewish communities and in both the Labour Party and trade unions.

LCLGR Fringe Meeting at Conference

Winning anti-discrimination legislation

Gordon Marsden MP
James Welch, legal director, Liberty
Angela Mason, Stonewall
Shirley Pearce, ex-teacher
Peter Purton, TUC

6-7.30pm Monday 25th September
Brighthelm Centre, Brighton



THE LIZ DAVIES COLUMN

On 2nd October 2000 the relationship between the British state and the people will, as a matter of law, change fundamentally. The enshrining of the European Convention of Human Rights into British law through the Human Rights Act marks an unprecedented departure from traditional British constitutional law. For the first time Britain will have something akin to a written constitution. For the first time individuals will enjoy positive rights rather than the previous position of privileges – generously granted to us by the monarch. For the first time those positive rights can be asserted by any individual in Court. Civil liberties campaigners across the country are celebrating.

What an irony that the Government that has, in its own words, "brought rights home" should also have the shameful distinction of introducing legislation that restricts our human rights!

The Government's assault on human rights attacks so many groups of people: asylum-seekers, football supporters, anyone using email or the internet, anyone supporting legitimate political protest, anyone suspected (with justification or not) of having committed a serious criminal act, anyone with mental health problems. A statistician would be hard-pressed to find many people who do not fall into at least one of those categories.

LLB readers need no convincing that the Asylum Act is a shameful piece of legislation, which humiliates and punishes asylum-seekers for their temerity in claiming asylum from persecution, but it is just part of the Government's arsenal.

The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Bill allows the state – police, customs, immigration, tax, health bodies, local authorities, the security services – to read and intercept electronic communications for various purposes including "any purpose" as specified by the Home Secretary. Jack Straw can chose whose emails he wishes to read. Any complaints can only be made to a tribunal which sits in secret (without the complainant being present). Draconian penalties of up to five years imprisonment apply to whistle-blowers who reveal the existence or content of surveillance.

The Terrorism Bill radically extends the concept of terrorism to include the use or threat of violence against property. Thus GM crops activists are terrorists, as are anti-road campaigners chaining themselves to trees, hunt saboteurs, mass trespassers, supporters of the anti-capitalist demonstrations, environmental protesters across the world, anti-nuclear campaigners damaging fences – the list is endless. Most legitimate political protests have the potential to end up with some kind of damage to property. The Terrorism Bill brands all such protesters not just as criminals but as terrorists. Not only are they subject to imprisonment, but so is anyone attending or speaking at a meeting at which these organisations are also present.

The Football (Disorder) Bill will result in the confiscation of passports, and the banning from football matches, of anyone suspected of having committed a criminal offence (which may, or may not be relevant to behaviour around the match – certain motoring offences committed driving to or from a match could result in a banning order as well as the usual penalties). No football supporter is immune.

These measures criminalise anyone suspected of committing criminal offences. For somebody actually charged with a criminal offence, the Criminal Justice (Mode of Trial) Bill will remove his or her right to be tried by a jury.

As if these abuses of our human rights were not sufficient, the Government muses aloud about locking up (indefinitely, and without a trial) anyone suffering from a personality disorder, encourages the scapegoating of asylum-seekers and travellers, and proposes on the spot fines of £100 for drunkenness. Blair is now floating the withdrawal of the presumption of bail – if you are charged with a minor crime that you did not commit, you face the prospect of custody until you are acquitted.

What these bills have in common, other than being condemned by Liberty and all the other civil liberties groups, is that all of them were introduced in Parliament since the passing of the Human Rights Act. The Human Rights Act requires the Government to certify whether or not a particular bill is compatible with the Convention on Human Rights – unsurprisingly, Jack Straw has certified that all of these bills are compatible. After 2nd October, the Courts can declare that an Act of Parliament is incompatible with the Convention on Human Rights, but they cannot strike down an Act passed with a certificate of compatibility. The restriction on the Courts makes some democratic sense – otherwise unelected judges, rather than elected parliamentarians, would be our legislators.

Lawyers and civil liberties campaigners will be able to use the Human Rights Act to extend human rights and make something of a difference to our lives. However, the campaign against New Labour's intrusions into our human rights must be principally waged on the political, rather than the legal, front. It is MPs (and above all the Parliamentary Labour Party) who, with a few honourable exceptions, have meekly accepted Jack Straw's campaign to criminalise most of us. It is MPs who should be held to account for their interference with our human rights – and that will happen through political protest, and accountability to Labour Party members and to the electorate.

●This is the first of a regular column by Liz Davies on civil liberties and human rights.

Engaging a plural left

John McDonnell MP, Chair of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs, assesses prospects for the General Election.

Labour is approaching the next election with its poll lead under threat, an unprecedented lack of motivation among its members and voters and with large sections of the electorate disinterested in the whole process.

The core Tory vote will turn out because Hague has shifted to the right in order to lift his members' morale and re-motivate the traditional right wing vote at this election. Having consolidated this core vote, he aims to move on to establish a broader coalition of the electorate from the right. My view is that the low turnout of Labour voters could product some curious results, enabling Hague to claim a spurious advance and survive the men in grey suits.

Desperate calls from New Labour's leading clique that the coalition of support for New Labour, which supposedly won the last election, must be reassembled to win the next are an attempt to give substance to the myth of New Labour. The last election was a determined rejection of the Tories by the electorate, not a public avowal of New Labour. New Labour's electoral strategists know this – and that attempts to mobilise voters in support of a mythical New Labour are fruitless. Their approach therefore centres on putting the frighteners on people over the risk of the Tories being elected, and on starting to put forward the policies (public spending and workers' rights) which Labour supporters have traditionally expected from their governments and which this Labour Government has till now failed to deliver, undermining Labour voter turnout.

In some policy areas, such as education, there will be a lurch to the right, reflecting the New Labour clique's enchantment with US political practice and Thatcherite prejudices – and their middle class lifestyle. The higher echelons of New Labour are fixated on the concerns of inner London middle class parents who are agonising over whether to send their children to private or state schools.

The need to appeal to the electorate on the basis of fairly traditional socialist policies demonstrates that despite tight organisational control of Party structures, New Labour has failed dismally to gain any ideological control. Far from winning hearts and minds, any mention of the Third Way is usually a derisory one. New Labour hegemony is a mirage.

The left should play to our strengths to overcome our weaknesses. The New Labour project aims to remodel British politics on the US model of an ideologically neutral rotation of governing political elites: ideology is divisive, destabilising for capital and must be eradicated from the system.

The left has led the ideological debate for centuries. With literacy at its highest level ever and the potential of new technology to deliver direct communication freely as never before, we have the opportunity of launching an open, free ranging and potentially furious debate addressing this new world of global capital, linking its local implications to global analysis.

We must appreciate that there is "a plural left", comprising a vast number of comrades who subscribe to what Noberto Bobbio considered the defining feature of the left: the desire for equality. Engaging in this ideological debate will not only assist in winning the battle of ideas within the Party, but will also contribute to regaining control of the Party's structures by re-activating the left.

No local coalitions!

Hackney councillor Stephen Sartain reports: Local government and democracy was weakened by decades of Tory centralisation which has not been reversed. Our decisions are dictated by central government: what to spend, how to spend it and how to cut it. Local councils are now nothing more than glorified parish councils.

In Hackney's hung council the Labour and Conservative groups are working in alliance. At one time it would have been unthinkable in traditional Labour areas like Hackney for the Labour Party to ally themselves with the party of Thatcher and Hague. The reason they can work together now is that both share very similar policies. The Best Value programme for local government services is in essence a policy for the privatisation of council services. Education policies that place schools and their funding and accountability outside local education authority control are reactionary. This is not what years of opposition to the Tory Government were for and such alliances must be rejected.

Labour councils, especially in deprived areas of the country, need more revenue raising powers and real powers to carry out effective job creation policies. The precondition for this is that the whole ethos of centralised New Labour economic control needs to be abandoned in favour of local economic rejuvenation policies.

We must recreate and sustain an effective public service base in housing, education and social services, providing job opportunities and ensuring democratic accountability of services and equal opportunities in the workplace. Labour councillors must work in closer co-operation with the trade unions and not ignore or feel embarrassed by our traditional allies.

Conference checklists

Annual Conference
CLGA slate: National Policy Forum
London places (elected by delegates): Dorothy Macedo and Kumar Murshid
Conference Arrangements Committee
General section: John Aitken (TGWU), John Cryer MP, Nigel Pearce (NUM), Jenny Rathbone
Constituency section: John Cryer MP, Jenny Rathbone

Greater London Labour Party Conference
Deadline for delegates and nominations for the GLLP board (executive): 20th October. Nominate Geoff Martin for chair and Loraine Monk for vice-chair.
Left Slate for constituency places on the board:
North London: Greta Karpin (Hackney North), Ken Bone (Hornsey & Wood Green)
South and South East London: Ruth Clarke (Erith & Thamesmead), Carol Kay (Dulwich)
North and West London: Graham Copp (Finchley & Golders Green)
Central and East London: Jenny Rathbone (Islington North), Francis Prideaux (Regents Park)
●Millbank's tactic seems to be to downplay the GLLP conference – because Geoff Martin has strong support. Blairites in some CLPs will therefore urge Parties to ignore the conference as a waste of time and money: but this is the first conference since 1998 and the first chance for a decade to elect a new chair.

Young Labour update

●A new Young Labour Left newsletter has been produced. For information and copies contact: younglabourleft@yahoo.co.uk.
●The youth officers of the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups are continuing to co-ordinate drafting a Young People's Agenda over email. The next chance to meet up and discuss how to pursue the initiative will be at the Network AGM on 9th December. Email: yljylf@hotmail.com
●The Fusionet website is run by 15-30 year olds from the trade unions and the Labour Party. The website – www.fusionet.org.uk – tries to represent differing views, with sections for news, events and debates.

Unite the Party: reinstate Ken!

Mick Shaw
FBU Executive Council

The Fire Brigades Union Executive Council, at its meeting on 31st August, unanimously agreed to submit a contemporary motion to Labour Party Conference calling for Ken Livingstone to be readmitted to Labour Party membership. This followed a successful motion from the union's London Region to this year's FBU Annual Conference, calling on the Executive to consider submitting such a motion.

Clearly, there will be need to be other such resolutions, particularly from London constituencies, to get the topic onto the Conference agenda.

It really is time now for the Party to put the fiasco of the London mayoral selection behind it and to look forward to the next General Election, ensuring that the Party in London is united behind a campaign to elect a Labour Government for a second term. The electorate will punish a divided party and one that shows contempt for democracy. If the result of the Greater London Assembly elections were to be replicated at the next General Election, Labour would lose 18 of its current total of 53 London seats.

We should remind ourselves of the outrageous way the mayoral selection was stitched up. A majority of Labour Party members voted for Ken and every trade union that balloted returned majorities for him (in the case of the FBU, 93.9%). Ken's decision to stand as an independent was the only way that Party members, trade unionists and the people of London could vote for the candidate of their choice. It was the votes of MPs, clearly out of touch with rank and file members, and of affiliated organizations which refused to ballot their members, that ensured that the Millbank Tendency's candidate secured the nomination. In the event, Labour's official candidate received a humiliating vote of less than 14%, coming third behind the Tory. A party that treats its own members and the electorate with such contempt does not deserve to win elections.

A swift decision to reinstate Ken and unite the London Party should enable us to bury this damaging episode and look forward to returning a second-term Labour Government at the next election.

Fire Brigades Union
London Region

Readmit Ken Livingstone!

Greetings to conference delegates and visitors
Dorothy Macedo, London NPF candidate

Winning back black support

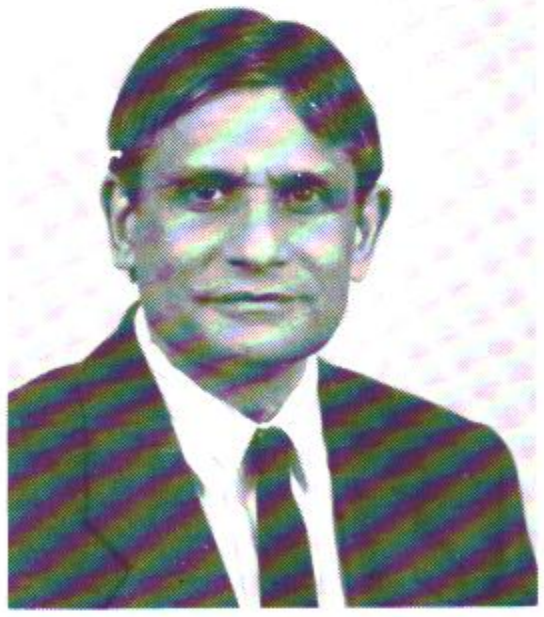
In Birmingham the Labour Party has achieved something quite difficult: it has forfeited the trust of a large part of the black electorate, traditionally its most loyal supporters. Alongside a failure to deliver tangible change on the issues that directly affect these communities, such as housing and health care, the Labour Party has manipulated the democratic process in Birmingham to suit vested interests within the Party. Even the Report of the Birmingham Democracy Commission, a council document issued in June 2000, comments that "Low numbers of political candidates from ethnic minorities are perceived by many to be the result of discriminatory and biased Party selection procedures."

The long-term suspensions of inner-city wards, the biased "verification" of members in the belief that some areas had "too many Pakistanis", and the imposition of more than 20 local government candidates have all worked to favour sitting white MPs and the Blairite leadership of the council. Any chance of black Labour representatives developing into a coherent and organised group has been snuffed out. In a city with an ethnic minority population of at least 25% and a black school-age population of nearly 50%, the black community lacks political clout.

Disillusionment has given way to a growing anti-Labour trend in local government elections. The black community, in particular those of Pakistani origin, follow both selections and elections very closely, because of the close-knit nature of their community and because of their growing aspiration for some real political influence. (There is still no MP of Pakistani origin in England and Wales.) Blocked by Labour, many have given their support to the new Justice for Kashmir Party, which now has five councillors. The Liberal Democrats have also benefited, coming back from the dead in several inner-city wards, even winning one seat. Voting figures for May 2000 show that candidates independent of the three main parties won substantial support in the inner city wards – on average a third of the total vote.

The Labour Party in Birmingham has a chance in the next few months to regain some of this lost trust. A new parliamentary candidate must be chosen to replace Jeff Rooker (who is standing down) in Perry Barr constituency. Local feeling is that the argument for this to be a black candidate – and very likely Birmingham's first black MP – has probably been won. It is vital that the black community feels this candidate will truly represent their interests and be willing to campaign on the issues that affect them most – on social exclusion, poverty and racism. Equally important is that the selection process itself is seen to be run in a fair and democratic manner: which is already in doubt, with the Party investigating allegations of membership rigging.

Given past experience, any selection which is run by the West Midlands Regional Office will not have the confidence of a large proportion of black members. The Labour Party should hand the running of the Perry Barr selection over to an independent body. Only a black candidate who is a fighter for black interests and seen to be fairly selected will reassure black voters that Labour has finally stopped taking them for granted.



Raghib Ahsan

Former Birmingham Councillor Raghib Ahsan asks how Labour can improve its standing among black voters in Birmingham.

One last Hove!

Our special correspondent reports:

The "S24 Counter-Conference – Our world is not for sale", to be held on Sunday 24th September in Brighton and culminating in a demonstration to Labour Party Conference, has been planned for months. Hove Town Hall was booked well in advance, and a deposit paid. On 31st August, Brighton & Hove Council suddenly informed the organisers that the booking had been cancelled. Embarrassed council officials muttered about "commercial considerations" and "not wanting to offend the Labour Party".

Brighton & Hove Council is a model New Labour council with close links to Millbank. *LLB* readers will recall Millbank's refusal to allow Richard Stanton to put his name onto the local government panel of candidates. Steve Bassam (now Lord Bassam, junior Home Office minister and scourge of asylum-seekers) was the leader of the Council for many years. He was the genius behind Millbank's dirty tricks campaign against the Centre Left Grassroots Alliance in the 1998 NEC elections.

The Counter-Conference is supported by Tony Benn, Jeremy Corbyn, George Monbiot, Susan George, Liz Davies, Mark Thomas, Rob Newman, War on Want, Christian Aid, Jubilee 2000 and the Campaign against the Arms Trade (among many other groups and individuals). Only New Labour would consider interfering with freedom of expression and freedom of assembly in this way. Shamed by an editorial in the *Brighton Argus*, and by letters and faxes pouring in from the Counter-Conference's supporters, the council backed down.

The Counter-Conference is therefore confirmed at Hove Town Hall, on Sunday 24th September from 10.30am to 4pm. Its theme of organising against capitalism and globalism will contrast sharply with the atmosphere inside the Brighton Conference Centre, where Labour Party delegates will be inundated with corporate advertising, big business sponsored receptions and exhibitors including arms manufacturers and environmental abusers.

Defeating the project

Matthew Willgress, co-youth officer of the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups and Eastern region youth representative on the National Policy Forum, outlines the left's job in the run-up to the General Election.

New Labour has one central aim on which all its aspirations rest: to disenfranchise the labour movement. Peter Mandelson's recent assertion that the Party must fight the next election as "New Labour" shows that this conspiracy is still alive in the heads of a section of the Party leadership. However, they have not yet succeeded: the trade union link survives and there are still thousands of Party members who don't support Blairite policies.

At the General Election, a number of left-wing groups will stand candidates against Labour. With a few localised exceptions, such as Glasgow and Coventry, they won't make a major impact and are unlikely to win any seats. The only MPs who will be able to speak out from the left against the New Labour continuation of Tory policies will be those wearing Labour rosettes.

Disillusion with the Government is understandable. 1997 saw a vote for change. Instead, by sticking to Tory spending limits for two years, the hopes of many Labour voters have been dashed. One of the central jobs for socialists in this election must be to ensure that discontent with New Labour doesn't lead to Tory and Lib-Dem candidates defeating Labour MPs who have opposed privatisation and New Labour's attempt to return to nineteenth century Liberalism. The suggestion by the Socialist Party (formerly Militant) that left candidates should stand against Socialist Campaign Group MPs if the Socialist Alliances have support in that area is a bad omen.

Even within the top echelons of the Party, contradictions are emerging. The Comprehensive Spending Review provided the first real increase in public spending since the Government was elected: the boost it gave Labour in the polls shows that those who supported Ken Livingstone had a better understanding of the choices facing Labour than the leadership does.

Many MPs and leading Party members have supported New Labour not because of an ideological commitment to the Third Way, but because they thought it won elections and broadened Labour's support. In fact it has done neither of these very well since 1997. It may be that, like even Peter Kilfoyle before them, these people will start to demand more traditional social democratic policies. Left-wingers within the Labour Party will be able to relate to such developments and can work to maximise support for alternatives to privatisation, welfare reform and other unpopular market-driven policies.

There are some who want to carry on as before, despite the fact that Millbank interference in Wales and London has made New Labour a tarnished brand. Some, it seems, would not even be bothered (as they showed in the GLA elections) if Labour lost large numbers of seats. Such a result could enable them to do what Ashdown's diaries suggest Blair hoped to do after the last General Election – move into coalition government and introduce a form of electoral reform that would allow them to squeeze out Old Labour (left and right) and the union link.

So where does this leave us in terms of campaigning in the run-up to the General Election? We should call for a Labour vote not only for the reasons outlined above, but also because the alternative – a Tory Government – would be a disaster for the labour movement. But at the same time we should also campaign publicly and among Party and union members for alternatives to right-wing Government policies.

Rather than producing a wish list of socialist policies we need to start with the issues where alternative policies have mass support and where opposition already exists. Although the left seems isolated, many of our policies have support from mainstream union and Party members: restoring the link between pensions and earnings, moving away from privatisation/PFIs and re-nationalising the railways. The job of socialists, publications such as *LLB*, and groups such as the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups is to publicise and draw together the broad support for these alternatives, many of which are in fact the policy of major trade unions. This will necessarily involve making broad alliances with people we haven't necessarily seen eye-to-eye with in the past.

This sort of campaigning can emphasise the narrow nature of New Labour. The popularity of the alternatives can further expose the myth that slavish adherence to the New Labour line is necessary to win elections.

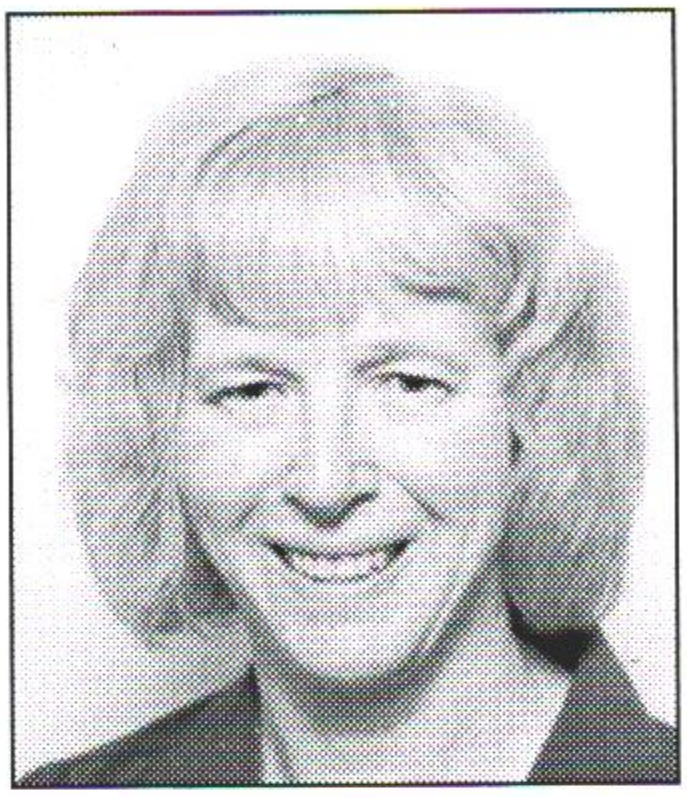
The economy is currently growing steadily, despite heavy job losses in manufacturing, but it can't carry on doing so indefinitely. When the economy does run into problems, the Government will say that we can no longer afford reforms that were granted when times were good. Therefore it is crucial that we work out an alternative economic strategy which would safeguard jobs and public services. The alternative is that the brunt of the downturn will once again be borne by those who are already disadvantaged.

Leicester *LLB* supporters

send greetings to Conference

Repeal Section 28!
No fascists on our streets!

Future perfect?



Ann Black wonders what bearing the Brighton Conference will have on Labour's manifesto and electoral prospects.

This, the last Conference before the election, should be shaping the manifesto. But the programme for the second term will be drawn from task-force reports or elitist wonkathons, not the Collected Works of the National Policy Forum. Alan Milburn made little use of the 1999 Health paper in his root-and-branch review of the NHS, and headline initiatives, from DNA banks to the latest games in local government, come from ministers, not forum flipcharts.

The Forum papers are primarily for internal purposes, for wrapping up contentious issues in advance of Conference. So there will be no debates on comprehensive education, the minimum wage, arms sales, asylum, student support or employment rights. Interestingly this may leave more space than usual for discussion of democracy, outside and inside the Party.

Although the Forum agreed consensus wording on electoral reform, the two sides interpret it differently, and claims and counter-claims will be hurled from opposing trenches on the fringe. I look forward to seeing the "No Way Woy" faction argue against LibDem proposals to tax incomes above £100,000 at 50% and abolish tuition fees. Who do these guys think they are – socialists?

The two most significant choices for Conference are within Democracy and Citizenship. The alternative position on votes at 16 can safely be carried because it promises only consultation. The second, on replacing the House of Lords, is meatier. It would commit Labour to a second chamber where a majority of members is elected; where these members represent the nations and regions; and where all remaining members are appointed by an independent commission and none by political patronage. This is attracting support across the spectrum, and would reclaim Labour as the party of the people, not of cronyism.

But constitutional niceties do not keep our core voters awake at night. Canvassing in early September, I found them generally happy with Labour in government. Any complaints are down-to-earth: uncleared rubbish, petrol prices, crime, and above all, pensions.

Will Conference be allowed to discuss pensions? Every principle of *Partnership in Power* says not. The two-year consultation on welfare ended in 1999 with the National Policy Forum overwhelmingly rejecting the earnings link, and Conference endorsing that rejection. All amendments to this year's Forum were ruled out of order. Contemporary motions are restricted to matters that have arisen since mid-July and are outside the rolling programme.

Belatedly the unions have realised the electoral price, and are seeking to change policy through the device of citing recent figures on pensioner poverty in "contemporary" motions. Last year, privatisation of Air Traffic Control had a more legitimate claim and failed without union muscle. This time the prospect of Bill Morris or Rodney Bickerstaffe moving reference back of the Standing Orders Committee report is clearly concentrating minds in high places.

While everyone hopes they succeed, it is silly to pretend this is new. In future, contemporary motions on *any* subject should be admitted, so past mistakes can be corrected, and unions and constituencies should vote separately on priorities. With only a handful of resolutions chosen for debate, this would not re-create the old Conference by the backdoor.

So Conference will have its moments for those in Brighton. What matters more is the message to the person on the Clapham couch with the remote-control. Few will read the 220-page National Policy Forum report, but they will hear the mood music. Rather than trying to out-tough the Tories on crime and immigration, we should use our hard-won reputation for economic competence to convince voters that next time we will deliver massively on health, public services and social inclusion. They expect nothing less from Labour.

● Ann Black represents South East CLPs on the National Policy Forum, and is Vice-Chair of Labour Reform. She was elected to the NEC this year.

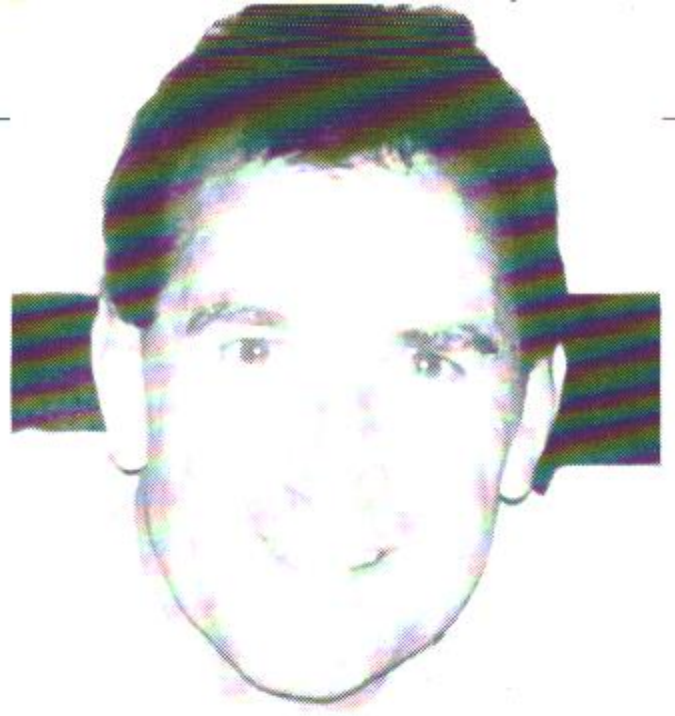
Ann Black
Liz Davies
Mark Seddon
Christine Shawcroft

send greetings to Labour Party Conference

Socialist Campaign Group of MPs

John McDonnell MP, Chair
Alan Simpson MP, Secretary

send greetings to all socialists at Labour Party Conference



THE **ALAN SIMPSON** COLUMN

"We are with you, please be with us."

It was 21st August 1968 when, with these words, Radio Prague informed the world of the shock invasion of Czechoslovakia by 165,000 Warsaw Pact troops and 4,600 tanks. Thirty-two years later, the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and International Finance Corporation are rolling into the streets of Prague for their next globalisation conference. Citizens' movements that have pursued global institutions from Seattle, to Montreal, to Melbourne and now to Prague are likely to put out a similar international plea in opposition to the New World Order.

At the same time, delegates will be arriving at the Labour Party Conference in Brighton. Most will come without the faintest idea of these wider pleas we are being asked to listen to, and almost certainly without the prospect of taking part in the radical debate of alternatives that lay siege to meetings of global elites.

Labour conferences have been reduced to a parading of the anodyne and the adulatory. As a money-spinning event, the cost of meeting spaces pushes towards corporate sponsorship of events, and corporate sponsorship pushes towards a celebration of corporate well being. Mentions of a socialist transformation of society, the redistribution of wealth, the extension of common and public ownership, or of challenging the amorality of markets or multinationals, are no longer sensible subjects for debate. The modern Party dismisses these not as revolutionary ideas, but as expressions of poor taste and judgement, like farting in church. The massed ranks of delegates, flooding out from Conference to receptions are no longer suppressed by tanks and troops, but by Tattinger and tapas.

This year's Conference was almost certainly planned as a pre-election platform to demonstrate confidence, unity and (at last) a public spending round that would genuinely put resources back into the traditional priority areas Labour has stood for. Pensions were going to be a difficulty, yet could be ducked until the Autumn Budget – but no one had counted on the "bosses blockade".

The fuel crisis should have given Labour the chance to say three things.

- The days of cheap petrol are over. The demands of the environment rather than the machinations of OPEC make a shift from fossil fuel dependency the most important challenge that we face. Cutting carbon emissions means not only looking at different energy possibilities but also shifting to more sustainable economic systems.
- Fuel taxes are not needed for the NHS or education, but to finance new public transport infrastructures and the introduction of alternative fuel and energy systems. Labour has been as guilty as our Tory predecessors in using indirect taxes as a cover for the reduction in personal tax rates. A clever sleight of hand does not make for good tax policy or for an honest debate on how we should pay for the social investment society needs. If Labour wants to keep public support alongside public investment we have to have the courage to tell people where taxes are both raised and spent. In this case it means spelling out how pollution taxation is to go directly back into pollution reduction – not to define the motorist as the enemy, but to spell out the ways in which they can be part of the solution rather than part of the problem.
- The role that oil companies have played in the blockade gives Labour the chance to open up the whole question of public subsidies to corporate greed. Shell makes a profit of £26 million a day on oil extraction. Other companies make roughly the same. All rely on huge tax concessions from government. It is a cameo of the new globalisation agenda, where the corporate welfare state has displaced personal welfare programmes in entitlement to public finance.

Both the Tories and Labour have been caught up in the imposition of this structural adjustment programme about how we view the priorities of modern governance. None of it is remotely connected to traditional Labour values or the reconstruction of civil society.

In Prague, the formal agenda hijacks the word "sustainable", applying it to profits and investment rather than environment and society. Behind the façade, the momentum is still driven by corporate greed. Debt write off in the South will be in exchange for wholesale acquisition of primary resources and industries. In the North, it is about the systematic transfer of public resources and services into private hands. The protestors outside the Prague Conference know the scam is going on and know too that they have an alternative – sustainable, internationalist, inclusive and equitable. But the alternative represents a profound challenge to the power of corporate capital that occupies their landscape.

In 1968, Kamila Mouckova was a newsreader on Czech TV. For weeks after the Soviet occupation she and fellow journalists ran clandestine broadcasts from a nuclear fallout shelter beneath an electronics factory. The troops could not locate them because the broadcasters had tapped into the tram system and were using it as a giant antenna. Now protestors have the World Wide Web and (as the fuel blockade demonstrated) a huge network of mobile phones and CB radios.

In Prague, the counter conference will be sending out its alternatives across the ether and the Internet. There is nothing the Free Trade Pact countries can do to stop this. The question for Brighton is, will anyone be listening?

Neither Bush nor Gore

Michael Albert reports: Many on the left of the US Democratic Party argue that voting for Green Party Presidential candidate and longstanding anti-corporate campaigner Ralph Nader could take vital votes from Gore and allow Bush to win. The most important impact of the Nader campaign will be changing the political climate in the country by energising the left. Take the cases most often bandied about: the President's appointment of Supreme Court Justices, taxes, police violence, abortion, and government interventionism. The issue isn't whether Bush's preferred agenda for each of these policy areas would be sufficiently worse than Gore's. Of course it would be. The issue is, if lots of people throughout the country support and vote for Nader, thereby awakening not only hope but also organisational clout and commitment, will either Gore or Bush be as able to pursue their full agendas on these issues?

In other words, the real choice is Gore winning without Nader getting lots of support and therefore with a typically un-aroused populace that will allow him to pursue his full corporate agenda nearly unopposed, versus Bush (or maybe still Gore) winning but with Nader getting lots of support and therefore with a highly aroused sector of the populace ready to fight.

The lesser evil argument stacks the deck against third party politics by simply ruling out the whole reason for Nader's campaign, and thus its real value. The discussion assumes that nothing substantial can ever be accomplished electorally unless it occurs by some kind of overnight miracle that wins all things sought in one swoop. But in reality, every vote for Nader is likely to be a step forward, another person likely to continue dissenting beyond election day, whereas every vote for Gore seems like it will enlarge resignation.

●This is an edited version of an article from Znet to which Michael Albert is a regular contributor.

Big Al's clas

Gregory Palast reports on the US Vice President's apparent move to the left.

"They're for the powerful – big tobacco, big oil, the big polluters – and we're for the people!" Arthur Scargill? Eugene Debs? Wrong again, punters, it was Al Gore, Vice-President of the Corporate States of America, accepting the Democratic Party's nomination for President of the Free World.

The Democratic Party is damn lucky to have such an unscrupulous, unprincipled candidate as Gore. From his eat-the-rich speech, it would be hard tell this is the very same Al Gore who, at the demand of the big drug companies, personally muscled South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki to prevent his breaking Glaxo-Wellcome's patent lock on anti-AIDS medicine AZT.

And this is the same Al Gore who forced the Chinese to permit mass marketing of American cigarettes in return for the White House's silence on China's torture of dissidents.

Like Clinton, Gore has no principles which constrain him from using the ultimate weapon to restore his drowning campaign: the truth. He knows damn well that most Americans are itching for class war. And so he's not ashamed to raise the red banner even if he doesn't believe one word leaving his lips.

Class war in the USA? When was that declared? You thought America was an economic powerhouse where 40% of families own shares. But that means 60% don't. 53% of working Americans lack any private pension; virtually no one has full medical insurance and 42 million have no health insurance at all. Gore has picked up the drumbeat of American working people's fear: two cars in the garage and one illness away from bankruptcy.

Rising share prices are the solid evidence of the largest shift in US wealth in the century. Between 1983 and 1997, 85.5% of the vaunted increase in America's wealth was captured by the nation's richest 1%. In that time, total national income rocketed – of which 80% of America's families received nothing. Something called "America" is booming economically, but 220 million Americans

Nader's pied pipe

By Gregory Palast: **Ralph Nader could win the upcoming Presidential elections... for George W. Bush. Despite the frightening spectre of a President Dubya, Ralph's got my vote, if only because I can't pull the lever for Al Gore, the man who personally convinced Bill Clinton to end children's right to food stamps.**

Nader promises an on-going anti-corporate movement that will last beyond the vote on 7th November, but he just doesn't deliver. He's too busy making fun of Gore and Bush to bother with the tough work of building a permanent membership platform. Nader barely acknowledges the Greens; he just rides their nomination like an electoral surfboard.

I don't get it. If ever I loved a man, it's Ralph. He's launched over a hundred organisations which have turned American politics on its head. But my love cannot speak its name to those in the trenches – union organisers, teachers scared witless over Bush's plan to privatise schools, African-Americans – who don't have the luxury of spending their vote on a protest ticket to nowhere.

For Americans who dissent from the New World Order, Nader's our Pied Piper – but I truly don't know if he's chasing the rats out of US politics or just leading our children away into the forest of political oblivion.

ss war

know that doesn't include them. Gore speaks to their envy and anguish.

Does Che Gore-vara mean what he says? Of course not. While Gore's pale green book on the environment *Earth In The Balance* gets loads of coverage, no-one mentions *Re-inventing Government*, co-authored with the government-hating guru Philip K. Howard, which contains enough free-market blather to receive Baroness Maggie's drooling approval.

No matter. For progressive Old Democrats, Gore's craven two-facedness is a blessing. That's because Gore, unlike Blair, makes love to his left, even as he does business's bidding. A President Gore will hand the Old Dems little gifts: a higher minimum wage and National Labor Relations Board appointees who will keep the tiny remains of America's union movement on life support.

The left shouldn't kid itself about Gore. He may have waved the bloody shirt of class war, but he stays well clear of its battles – most glaringly, the uprising against globalisation that occurred within miles of the Democratic convention, in San Diego, California. This summer, San Diego become the first city to adopt a British-style free market in electricity, and the results were predictable. Electricity prices shot up 164% in one year. Enraged consumers refused to pay their light bills.

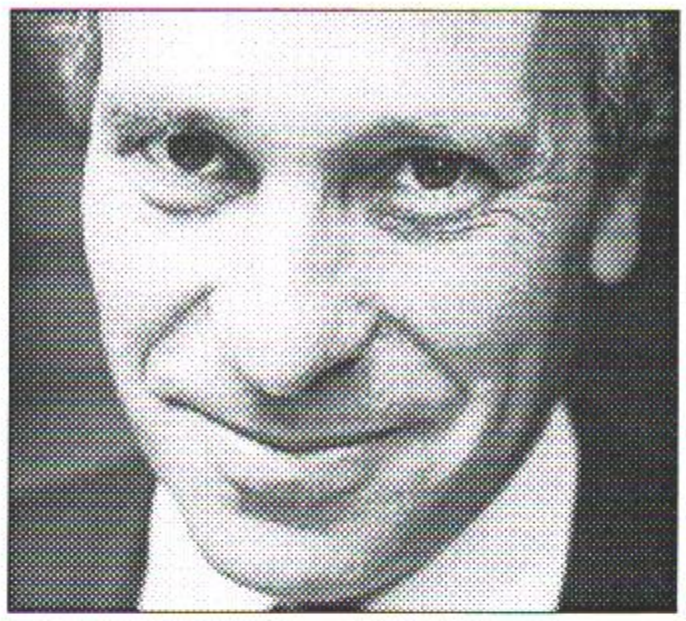


Photo: Harry Barden

Greg Palast

On this Gore had nothing to say. That's because Gore pushed to demolish American states' traditional system of putting tight caps on utility prices and profits. One of the biggest winners of the deregulation bonanza was Entergy International of Little Rock, Arkansas.

These generous Good Ol' Boys paid $100,000 to Hillary Clinton's former law partner, Webster Hubbell, just after his conviction for fraud in 1994. Hubbell chose a well-paid stay in prison over testifying about Hillary's legal fees.

Where's a progressive to turn? "Dubya" Bush also backed the fleecing of California electricity consumers. And who controls the California power trade? Enron, Bush's number one campaign donor – which leaves Americans with that nauseous feeling we are stuck with a choice between Tweedledum and Tweedledumber. But then, what did you expect from the best democracy money can buy?

●Palast's column Inside Corporate America appears fortnightly in the *Observer* and his investigative reports on BBC2's *Newsnight*.

Mark Thomas and Greg Palast

Secrets and Lies

Tuesday 26th September, 7pm

At the Socialist Campaign Group Fringe Meeting
Labour Party Conference, Brighthelm Centre, Brighton

Greg Palast

Dr. Bankenstein's Monsters:
IMF & World Bank in the New World Order

Sunday 24th September, 1.30pm

S24 Counter-Conference, Hove Town Hall, Brighton

Gore. Blimey.

Bernie Moss reports: Gore's surge in the polls after a move to the left has important implications for New Labour's election strategy.

Blair's and Gore's responses to the "compassionate" conservatives they both face in forthcoming elections have been remarkably similar: loosen the purse strings for health and education. Strangely enough, the turnabout has been much more pronounced in free enterprise America. In the UK, the Comprehensive Spending Review increased spending for health, education and transport, but delivered this via private-public partnerships. Increased expenditure of £42 billion over 4 years will barely bring public spending back to a level relative to 1996.

Gore is focusing his campaign on working families. Renewing the campaign for universal health care that Clinton abandoned, he has pledged to cover prescription drugs for seniors and care for all children. He has promised the greatest increase of federal aid to education (notably pre-schooling) since the war, and tax credits for childcare, education and pensions. He said he would to take on the powerful forces of big business, namely the oil, tobacco, and drug companies and came out firmly against the partial privatisation of education and social security advocated by Bush.

The success of Gore's move to the left confounded the pundits. But he faces a serious challenge from the left by corporation-buster Ralph Nader (who was polling as high as 10% in the critical state of California) as well as the radicalisation of American unions, who joined the fray in Seattle against global capitalism. Gore is capitalising on this – can Blair?

●Bernie Moss's book *The Single European Currency in National Perspective* is published by Macmillan.

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Saturday 21st October 2000
9:30am - 1pm

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Fight back against GATS

Mike Phipps reports on a new menace to poorer countries: Finance ministers from the richest countries continue to backtrack on debt relief for the poorest. Last year's G8 summit in Cologne set a target of 25 countries for debt relief by the end of this year. This year's Okinawa summit admitted that only nine so far were getting relief and revised the target down to twenty.

Failure to privatise is one of the main pretexts for delaying debt relief, for example in Honduras which has not yet privatised its electricity sector. Zambia is required to sell off its copper mines – at a loss – and Mozambique had to privatise its cashew nut industry which left many people unemployed.

In Bolivia earlier this year, the selling off of the water industry resulted in prices so crippling they sparked mass protests. Those on the minimum wage saw nearly half their budget eaten up by water bills. Even collecting rainwater in rooftop tanks became illegal without a permit. Hundreds of thousands protested in Cochabamba in April and six people were killed in clashes with government forces, but the protest was successful – water was renationalised.

Now the World Trade Organisation plans to speed up privatisation of key services. The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), currently under discussion, aims to prevent government provision of key services on the grounds that they breach WTO rules on free competition. With the World Water Forum earlier this year declaring water was not a human right, this key service could be one of the main targets.

Both the US and the EU back GATS but campaigners will recognise the striking similarity between it and the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) from two years ago. Both undermine the sovereignty of national governments, by forcing them to allow foreign companies access to key services regardless of the social or environmental consequences. But the MAI was defeated by a massive campaign of pressure groups and civil society. GATS needs to be given the same treatment.

●For more information, contact the World Development Movement, 25 Beehive Place, London SW9 7QR; website: www.wdm.org.uk

Lyons feels the strain

Hugh MacGrillen, former MSF London Regional Council Secretary, reports.

Scandal-ridden MSF General Secretary Roger Lyons is still clinging to office but he and his dwindling band of supporters face increasing pressure on a number of fronts. He faces continuing criticism for his misuse of union funds and property. As well as the regular stories in the national media, there is now a website (www.rogerlyons.com) dedicated to exposing his misconduct. Members are now taking to the streets, as shown by a recent successful lobby of an NEC meeting. Though Lyons has retained the support of the NEC for the time being, there is no doubt that both are feeling the strain.

A new factor has emerged with the onset of another financial crisis. Severe cuts in expenditure are in the offing with the prospect of significant redundancies. Unlike most other major unions, MSF has not managed to stem membership losses and expenditure has moved ahead of income. Despite extensive recruitment of new organisers in recent years, there are shortages in some key areas. This has resulted in some NHS members moving over to UNISON.



Photo: Jess Hurd

Members lobby MSF NEC.

If there is now to be a general cutback, as seems inevitable, it will impact on the ability to hold on to existing members.

The MSF leadership's way out of the problems, the merger with the AEEU, is looking increasingly problematic. The AEEU is not prepared to agree to the terms stipulated by the MSF Conference. Lyons and his associates are trying to get round this obstacle by persuading a special conference in November to give way on the points at issue. This will follow a consultative poll of the membership in October. The likely outcome is too close to call at this moment but there is an increasing chance of Lyons being defeated. If that happens then the credibility of a right-wing leadership of a major trade union would have collapsed totally.

TRADE UNION NOTEBOOK

●Benjamin Perl, the owner of the Foframe company, lives in a £1 million house in Hendon and pays his workers £4.29 per hour – well below the negotiated rate in the industry. Workers went on strike on 3rd May. Perl refused to attend talks at ACAS and sacked the workers. Messages of support and donations to Huntingdon Strike Fund, GMB, Ground Floor, 396/398, Dunstable Road, LUTON LU4 8JT

●This year's TUC Congress reaffirmed its committment to lesbian and gay equality in law and the workplace, offering full support for the TUC Campaign for Anti-Discrimination Legislation for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. An emergency motion from the CWU condemned the House of Lords for blocking legislation to repeal Section 28.

MSF
the union for skilled and professional people

London MSF Regional Council

We call on Labour to oppose the introduction of private interests in London Underground

Glenn Sutherland, Acting President
Tom Harding, Acting Secretary

Labour helps union-busters



Photo: Molly Cooper

Glenn Kelly addresses supporters outside Bromley Civic Centre.

New Labour says it has improved trade union rights at work. Barbie Lindsay says companies still have little to lose from sacking union activists.

Last year, a new manager started to change our working conditions. Tea breaks were taken away, computer operators had only half an hour away from the screen each day, and doing unpaid overtime at home became the norm.

Just before Christmas we met people from UCATT. Five of us joined at first: then more. One of the women reached 60 and was told she had to stop work. We knew she should be able to work till 65. I was elected shop steward and went with her to see management. We then told the warehouse manager he would have to contact the union to discuss the situation. This was how management found out about the union and straight away they started intimidating people to find out who was in the union.

'people are afraid to join because they are afraid of losing their jobs. The tribunal just helped back up the employers'

The next morning one young lad was locked in the portacabin, physically threatened and told to name the union members. Once released, he came straight to the union. Next the manager dismissed me – because of my attitude, he said, even though I had worked there for nine years without even a warning.

The union put in for unfair dismissal and a two day hearing was set for April. Three days before the hearing, the company presented a 60 page document and six witnesses. The evidence was too late, but the tribunal still let them present it. They gave evidence for the whole two days and the tribunal didn't reconvene until June. We were told we could only give evidence about the sacking and were not allowed to counter the bad attitude charges.

The tribunal agreed I'd been dismissed for trade union activity, but they then took 25% off the final settlement because of the contributory factor of my bad attitude, even though I wasn't allowed to counter those arguments. But the mandatory special award you used to get if dismissed for trade union activity has been abolished by the Labour Government. Under the previous legislation I would have received £36-40,000. Instead the tribunal awarded only £4,500.

After the first hearing, two other members were dismissed for trade union activity – the young lad who was physically threatened (who has claimed for constructive dismissal) and another woman who started the union (who has just settled a claim out of court). The woman of 60 was made redundant in the end, even though they are now employing two men to do her job. All the trade union members were picked on. Some left after intimidation, and there are only two union members still there.

We were really surprised at what happened. We thought we'd be safe if we joined a union, but we weren't. Now people are afraid to join because they are afraid of losing their jobs. The tribunal just helped back up the employers.

There's still no right to reinstatement. New Labour says that the Employment Relations Act has improved trade union rights, but how can you get 51% of the workforce to join the union if employers can sack you so easily? There isn't any fairness at work.

●Barbie Lindsay worked at a company called Pick-a-Pack, part of General Contracting UK. She was speaking to Elaine Jones, Organiser of Reclaim Our Rights!

Glenn fights charges

On 11th September a large group of supporters lobbied the Bromley Council meeting which discussed disciplinary charges against UNISON branch secretary Glenn Kelly (reported in last month's *LLB*).

The lobby was not only attended by branch members and other trade unionists, but also by service users who were protesting at the way in which the council was trying to victimise Glenn for fighting cuts in their vital services. Glenn's suspension had been lifted shortly before the meeting and cuts in posts have now been deferred.

On 5th October, Glenn faces two disciplinary charges at Bromley Civic Centre – misrepresenting the council's postion in union literature and holding a meeting with tenants (not legitimate union activity). He could be sacked. There will be protest outside the Centre (near Bromley South train station) assembling from 9.30am.

●For further information contact Kathy Smith, Bromley UNISON branch chair, on kathmick.smith@cwctv.net.

Trade union shame at NPF

The trade union vote was split at the last meeting of Labour's National Policy Forum in Exeter. Elaine Jones reports.

The GPMU amendment to the Industry, Agriculture & Culture policy document fell only a handful of votes short of being sent to Conference as a Minority Report. The amendment was based on TUC policy for improvements to the Employment Relations Act, including:

•improving recognition rights (such as extending them to the 5 million workers in small firms, getting rid of the 40% turnout requirement in ballots);

•improvements in policies such as paid parental leave, and increases in maternity pay;

•improvements in line with ILO conventions (including limited rights to take solidarity action).

These improvements were vehemently opposed by unions such as CWU, T&G, and MSF – unions which have policy to repeal the anti-union laws and for positive rights that go far further than these modest demands.

On the scale of sell-outs, this is a big and shameful one. The vote may have been part of a backroom deal, but the benefits of it are neither significant or obvious. What has been gained? The Industry, Agriculture & Culture final document gives no clues. Some trade union leaders clearly prefer to prioritise New Labour orthodoxy over their members' interests.

The Policy Forum procedure, done behind closed doors, is less democratic and inclusive than policy-making before. If union delegates had stuck together, we could have had a debate at Conference on how to improve conditions at work. Now we have vacuous assurances that mean less than nothing to ordinary workers and will never be vote winners.

At the United Campaign's fringe meeting at this year's TUC Congress, GPMU General Secretary Tony Dubbins said that the net result of the National Policy Forum was a backward step in the campaign for positive union rights for working people. Instead, New Labour's campaign to neutralise any impetus for more rights by limiting progress to the "partnership agenda" has been boosted.

●Elaine Jones is the Organiser of Reclaim Our Rights! The United Campaign for the Repeal of the Anti-Union Laws.

RECLAIM OUR RIGHTS

SPECIAL MILLENNIUM EDITION!

UNITED CAMPAIGN TO REPEAL THE ANTI-TRADE UNION LAWS

In Britain, as Tony Blair has boasted, our laws are **'the most restrictive on trade unions in the western world.'** Despite the introduction of the Employment Relations Act our legal system is stacked against the trade union movement and stops us from taking action to defend our members.

Making Labour Listen!

A Day of Discussion and Debate on how we repeal the anti-union laws

Saturday 21st October, 12-5pm

NATFHE Head Office,
27 Britannia Street,
near Kings Cross, London

Opening speakers: Andy Gilchrist FBU, Mary Turner National President GMB, Joe Marino BFAWU, Geoff Bagnall CATU, Tony Woodley TGWU, Mark Serwotka PCS, Colin Greer GMB FoFrames dispute

Privatisation – how the law is used to stop workers taking action against the privatisation of services.
Speakers: Bob Crow RMT, Dudley Hospital workers, Geoff Martin UNISON, John Moloney PCS, CWU Rep North/North West London CWU postal branch, TSSA representative.

The implementation of the Employment Relations Act – recognition deals, union busting companies from USA.
Speakers: John Foster NUJ, ASLEF representative, Carolyn Jones IER, Barbie Lindsay UCATT – sacked for trying to set up a union branch.

Why the British Government continues to breach human rights and why we need positive rights at work
Speakers: John Hendy QC, Tony Dubbins GPMU, Arthur Scargill NUM, Alan Gibson Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers, Elaine Jones Campaign Co-ordinator

Organised by the United Campaign to Repeal the Anti-Trade Union Laws. For more details contact Elaine Jones on 0114 283 0890, email elaineunitedcamp@totalise.co.uk

No PFI in Dudley!

Councillor Steven Cox, Dudley South CLP reports on the Dudley strike (in a personal capacity).

Over a month into the dispute between UNISON and Dudley NHS trust, the strike is still solid and has won mass backing from trade unionists and the public. It is now officially the biggest and most sustained dispute in NHS history.

The dispute is over Private Finance Initiative (PFI) plans to transfer 600 non-clinical staff to a private consortium led by Summit Healthcare, which would result in workers losing NHS collective bargaining and pension rights and in an overall reduction of 70 beds.

A poll in the *Dudley News* in early September indicated 80% support for UNISON's stance. Money and messages of support have come in from across the country and internationally – for instance, Finnish public sector workers donated £1,000 to the strike fund.

So far there have been three stoppages of two, four and seven days, with a seven day strike starting as *LLB* went to press. The strikers deserve the support of the entire trade union movement. It was gratifying to hear Rodney Bickerstaffe condemning Dudley NHS trust plans in his speech to TUC Congress. Pressure needs to be put on Alan Milburn to implement Government policy made last year, which allows for staff to remain public sector workers even if PFI capital projects go ahead.

Support Dudley healthworkers in their campaign to stay in the NHS and against the privatisation of our health services!

- Demonstration Saturday 23rd September. Assemble midday, Corbett Hospital Stourbridge. Please bring delegations with banners.
- Financial support: please send donations payable to UNISON Dudley Group of Hospitals and messages of support to UNISON Dudley Group of Hospitals, Union Offices, Wordsley Hospital, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY8 5QX, tel/fax 01384 244350.



Photo: Paul Mattsson

Health workers make their point at August's demonstration in support of the strike.

Keep scum contractors off our Tube!

Oliver New, RMT London Transport Regional Council and Campaign Against Tube Privatisation, reports.

Tubeworkers are calling for a demonstration outside the offices of Balfour Beatty, one of the firms trying to get their mitts on London Underground. Balfour Beatty have been in the news for other things lately. They were on Ken Livingstone's list of shamed contractors, read out at the 700 strong anti-Tube privatisation rally a few weeks ago. They have been targeted by Turkish and Kurdish protesters for their plans to make money from flooding villages and damaging the environment by rearranging water supplies in the interest of local fat cats. And they were recently fined after their tunnel collapsed as they were building the Heathrow-Paddington express.

Rail unions have organised a fringe meeting at the Labour Party Conference on 25th September to press home these points. Mayor Ken is the main speaker. By then it is likely that the Will Hutton report on PPP will have been published, which is expected to produce yet more devastating criticism of the PPP plans. We hope that Labour Party members will take every chance to hammer home these points during the Conference and demand that all London Labour representatives disassociate themselves from the Tube privatisation plans.

LUL has been dismantled and packaged up for sale. The infrastructure has been divided into three, ready to be sold to the three highest bidders. Now every time LUL operates a train it will involve accountants and solicitors working out who has to pay what to whom for use of train, track, buildings and maintenance.

Bidding will be by consortiums of companies, each of them putting in money and offering management experience – not to run a public service, but to cut costs, sub-contract and even asset-strip.

- Ken Livingstone on London's Tube: see page 6.

Keep scum contractors off our Tube!

Picket Balfour Beatty

1 Angel Square, Torrens St

(Angel Tube)

11am Saturday 21st October

Day of action

Leaflet the Tube and Lobby the GLA's first "open time" for Londoners Listen to London! No more Paddingtons! Cancel PPP

9.30am Tuesday 24th October

The Emmanuel Centre, 9-23 Marsham St

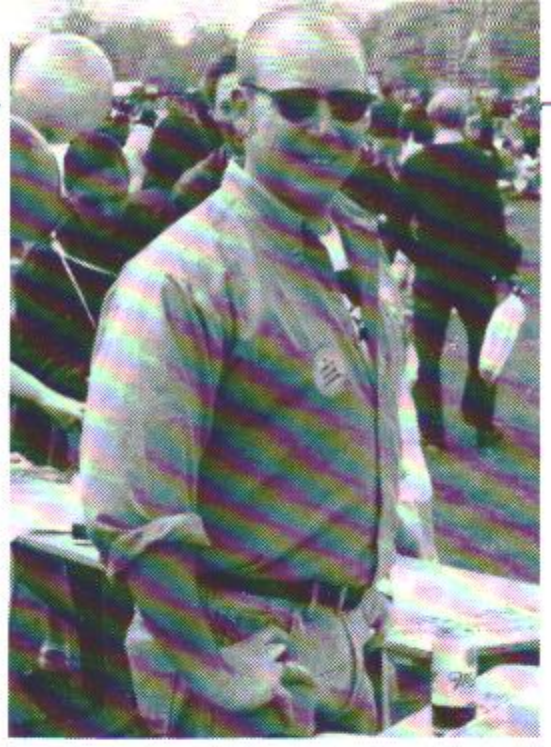
(Westminster or Pimlico Tube)

TRADE UNION NOTEBOOK

●Hackney Council has backed down from privatising waste disposal services following action by refuse collectors and street cleaners. Last month we reported that the New Labour Council had contracted the service to Serviceteam, who sought 40 redundancies. Serviceteam has pulled out and the staff will stay with the council. Further industrial action has been suspended.

●Scottish local authority workers in UNISON held a further one-day strike on 20th September after talks in which the employers refused to increase their offer of a 2.5% pay increase – lower than the increase secured for similar staff in England and Wales. UNISON is now balloting for indefinite action among key members, which will probably include finance staff who collect money owed to councils. The Scottish Finance Minister is due to address the Scottish Parliament on the issue of future local government settlements and UNISON plans a demonstration in Edinburgh to coincide with the event.

●The GPMU is organising to defend six sacked trade union members at Floplast in Bobbing, Kent. Over 50% of the workforce has joined the union but the sackings come before recognition has been achieved and, doubtless, in an attempt by management to avoid it (see Barbie Lindsay's story, page 20). The union had been campaigning against poor working conditions. Picketing takes place at 6.30am, 2.30pm and 10.30pm every day: contact the GPMU office on 01795 423993 or 078 999 21205 for details and to obtain copies of the union petition for reinstatement of the Floplast 6.



THE GEOFF MARTIN COLUMN

●By the time that you get to read this you should know who the runners and riders are for the post of Chair of the London Labour Party. One thing's for sure, it's going to come down to a straight choice between myself and a Millbank stooge. Despite all the speculation it won't pan out any other way and it suits me down to the ground.

You would have thought that the wannabes and greasers who operate at the various levels within the Millbank food chain might have learnt something from their spectacular handling of the London mayoral election. Apparently not. I've just come off the blower to the powers that be trying to secure a copy of the Party mailing lists which have been placed at the disposal of my opponents. And why haven't the lists been faxed over? Because "the fax machine is broken". And this is supposed to be the most sophisticated political operation in Western Europe?

There was never any serious doubt that the Millbank Tendency would want to get their grubby little prints all over the contest for the leadership of the London Party and they haven't wasted any time. Of course, it means that the labour movement in London is faced with a very real choice. If you want more of the same, if you want to continue with the Millbank stranglehold over London Labour then you vote for Robbins – the Millbank candidate. If you want a real change and an accountable and inclusive leadership committed to a vibrant, campaigning Party then you vote Martin/Monk. It couldn't be more clear cut.

Anyway, the campaign is going well, although a recent constituency meeting in north London took a strange turn when one member of the audience turned his back on me as I began to speak and shook his head for the entire duration of my contribution. I was going to stop and ask the bloke if this performance was supposed to throw me and if so, he was wasting his time. I can get that kind of response to my words of wisdom indoors any night of the week.

●This panic on the streets over the fuel blockade had my old man digging out the ration coupons that were issued by the government back in the seventies. He was daring me to take them down to Tesco's to see how far I'd get.

Some of the scenes from the distribution depots have been extraordinary. I find it very hard to believe that the police and government response would have so low key if trade unions had been organising the blockade.

●Thanks to everyone who has passed on their best wishes for the impending arrival of Martin junior number two. Most of the work on the house is now finished and the only outstanding business is the negotiations for the exclusive picture rights with *Hello* magazine.

The Chief Executive at Kingston Hospital has confirmed that the security arrangements are in place to cope with the expected media frenzy and all the estimated arrival times coincide nicely with the *LLB* fringe at Party Conference.

The maternity unit at Kingston is to all intents and purposes a UNISON closed shop so the kiddie is set to be delivered by the local branch secretary and chair who are both midwives. It's either that or bring Bick back with me from Brighton.

See all that rubbish from Madonna about how she wouldn't have her baby in London because the maternity services are crap? The services may be under intense pressure but our members saw it as a direct pop at their professional integrity. Take it from me, it's not a wise move to upset a UNISON midwife even if you are a multi-millionaire international celebrity.

I don't always like Julie Burchill's ramblings but I loved her theory about how Guy Ritchie, Director of Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels and Madonna's bloke, got his scar falling off his pony and onto his silver spoon.

Have the Danes Saved our Bacon?
a euro-critical conference

sponsored by Trade Unions against the Single Currency, the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs and the Green Party

10am-4.30pm Saturday 7th October

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1
FREE ADMISSION

Timed to follow the Danish referendum of 28th September in which voters are expected to deliver a rebuff to the faltering euro, this conference will give a labour and green dimension to the national campaign against the Single Currency, which has so far been dominated by the right. This conference will lead the debate away from nationalist rhetoric towards key issues of jobs, growth, public services, democracy and sustainability.

Morning: The Meaning of the Danish Referendum
Ole Krarup MEP – Danish People's Movement
John Cryer MP – Socialist Campaign Group
Caroline Lucas MEP – Green Party
Geoff Martin – London Convenor UNISON, candidate for Chair of the London Labour Party

Mid-Day Workshops

Afternoon: Where Now for the EU?
Marianne Erikkson MEP – Swedish Left Party
Tony Benn MP – Socialist Campaign Group
Dave Knight – Chair, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
Larry Elliott – Economics Editor, *The Guardian*
Doug Nichols – General Secretary, Community and Youth Workers Union

THE SINGLE EUROPEAN CURRENCY IN NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE: A COMMUNITY IN CRISIS? Published by Palgrave, a Macmillan imprint

Edited by Bernard H. Moss and Jonathan Michie

This is the first serious study of the EU and Single Currency from a labour movement perspective. It brings together the analyses of political economists, a European historian, and Bill Morris of the TGWU. This critique of the euro project and its impact on economic well-being and democratic government is likely to become the standard alternative reference on European integration.

PB: 0-333-79293-9 £15.99 **available at the conference**, from your bookshop or Macmillan, tel. 01256 329242 or e-mail mdl@macmillan.co.uk.

When fascists fall out...

Brian Campbell
Sinn Fein

Members of the English left must have felt a sense of horrible familiarity this summer when they saw the news coverage of loyalist support for the Orange Order at Drumcree. Johnny Adair and his Ulster Defence Association (UDA) colleagues from the lower Shankill area of Belfast had clearly employed the same image consultant as those England supporters who fought so publicly at Euro 2000. "Designer fascists" with the same haircuts and baseball caps, the same designer gear, the same muscle-bound machismo – even, for some, the same tattoos.

It's not surprising, really. Johnny Adair, after all, began his adult life as a member of the National Front and aped his friends in England by leading clashes at local soccer matches and music events in Belfast. He and the UDA have maintained close links with English fascists since that time.

Today Johhny Adair is back in jail, having had his release as part of the Good Friday Agreement rescinded by Peter Mandelson, following the start of a feud between the UDA and the UVF in the lower Shankill. Mandelson said that Adair was centrally involved in the events leading up to the feud.

The violence between the two loyalist groups has continued and is in many ways a classic case of how right wing groups degenerate. The story involves disputes over territory, a desire to increase profit from drug dealing and the fallout from the ending of the Protestant working class's position of supremacy. The story also involves British military intelligence, who in the 1980s used the sectarian killers of the UDA as part of its counter-insurgency strategy.

It is not difficult to see how a fascist-inspired group could gain strength in the Lower Shankill. Faced with a growing and confident Catholic population in Belfast and the decline of traditional industries like the shipyard, together with a peace settlement based on equality and parity of esteem, the loyalist working class is finding it difficult to come to terms with the new politics.

The UDA in particular has exploited that mood of disaffection. Formed out of the many loyalist vigilante gangs in the early 1970s, the organisation is made up of a loose federation of "brigade" areas, each exercising autonomy. UDA members have long been involved in crime, with personal enrichment the motivation. The drug scene has been an area of lucrative business for them and a number of their leaders live in palatial houses and enjoy a lavish lifestyle.

This criminal activity and gangsterism led to an internal power struggle in the UDA in the 1980s which saw the emergence of a new, younger, more clearly fascist leadership. It was this leadership which was sustained and supported by British intelligence. In one of the great scandals at the heart of Britain's war in Ireland, the intelligence services played the UDA like a puppet, pulling the strings by supplying their agent Brian Nelson (the UDA's director of intelligence) with information on republicans and others. This information was used to kill Pat Finucane and many others. It was state-sponsored murder and it revitalised the UDA.

Their criminal activities expanded and there was a half-hearted move into politics with the Ulster Democratic Party. The UDP failed to win any seats in the new Assembly and many of the UDA leadership seem to have given up on making political gains. By contrast, the political party of the Ulster Volunteer Force, the Progressive Unionist Party, has ambitions to become the main representatives of working class unionists. Hence the conflict between the two groups.

The UDA, with anti-peace process sentiments and a desire to dominate loyalist areas in order to maintain their drug-dealing activities, have moved against their main loyalist rivals. In areas like the Lower Shankill, the PUP is now fighting for its political life. They cannot hope to fulfill their political ambitions if their members are liable to be killed or driven from their homes.

For nationalists, the current situation is very dangerous. Loyalist feuds in the past have ended with the various groups proving their loyalist credentials by murdering Catholics. In the longer term there are obvious dangers in having a large part of loyalism opposed to the peace process. It is a lost ideology with no clear grasp of what it wants or where it wants to go. And as it turns in on itself, content only in its anti-Catholic fascism, the future is bleak for those who will inevitably be its victims.

Sinn Fein
Labour Party Conference
Fringe Meeting
Working for Irish unity
Wednesday 27th September 1pm
Dudley Hotel, Landsdown Place
(10 minutes from Conference centre)
Speakers: Gerry Kelly MLA, North Belfast, Sinn Fein
Cllr Arthur Morgan, Louth, Sinn Fein
Joan O'Connor, Director Sinn Fein International Department

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Family Party goes too well?

Charles Arthur of the Haiti Support Group analyses the contested election victory of Jean-Bertrand Aristide's Lavalas Family Party.

Elections in May, June and July returned a huge victory for former President Aristide's new populist Lavalas Family Party. According to the official results, the Lavalas Family won 18 out of 19 Senate seats (the other went to an independent), 72 out of the 82 seats for the lower Chamber of Deputies, 80 of the 115 town mayoralties, and 321 of 485 rural and town councils.

However, the legitimacy of the triumph was called into question when an Organisation of American States monitoring mission announced that the wrong method had been used to calculate the first-round Senate results and opposition parties boycotted the second round run-off elections. With the Haitian Government refusing to submit to international pressure to recalculate the Senate results, the United States and Canada have threatened to withhold bilateral aid and the European Union to suspend its development programme.

The first-round elections on 21st May had passed off surprisingly well. Voters turned out in force – over 60% of those registered – and there was little of the predicted violence. Both international and local observers gave the elections a clean bill of health, save for a few minor irregularities on the day, and some chaotic scenes at numerous vote-counting offices in the days that followed.

Aristide's party was undoubtedly by far the most popular with the voters. Its victory owed much to the mobilising efforts of young Lavalas Family activists across the country and to the continuing popularity of Aristide himself. In contrast to the other parties contesting the election, it actually had a coherent political campaign. While the Lavalas Family promised better education, support for agricultural production and improved security, its opponents offered voters little more than their virulent hatred of Aristide.

The electorate deserted the Struggling People's Organisation (OPL), the main winner in the last general elections in 1995, in spectacular fashion. The OPL had led the government in 1996/97 and enjoyed a majority in the Parliament until its mandate expired in 1999. For this reason, most of its former supporters negatively associated it with years of misgovernment.

The much-hyped social democratic Espace de Concertation coalition enjoyed the attentions of the international media, and the support of French backers – two parties in the coalition are members of the Second (Socialist) International and have close ties with the governing French Socialist Party. However, foreign friends were not enough to persuade significant numbers of Haitian voters that this group was anything other than a bunch of visionless opportunists.

The only opposition group to come out of the election with more support was the new Mochrena party – a creation of the increasingly prominent right-wing Protestant evangelical churches in Haiti. Unlike the other opposition parties, which are detached from the ordinary people, Mochrena enjoys genuine support.

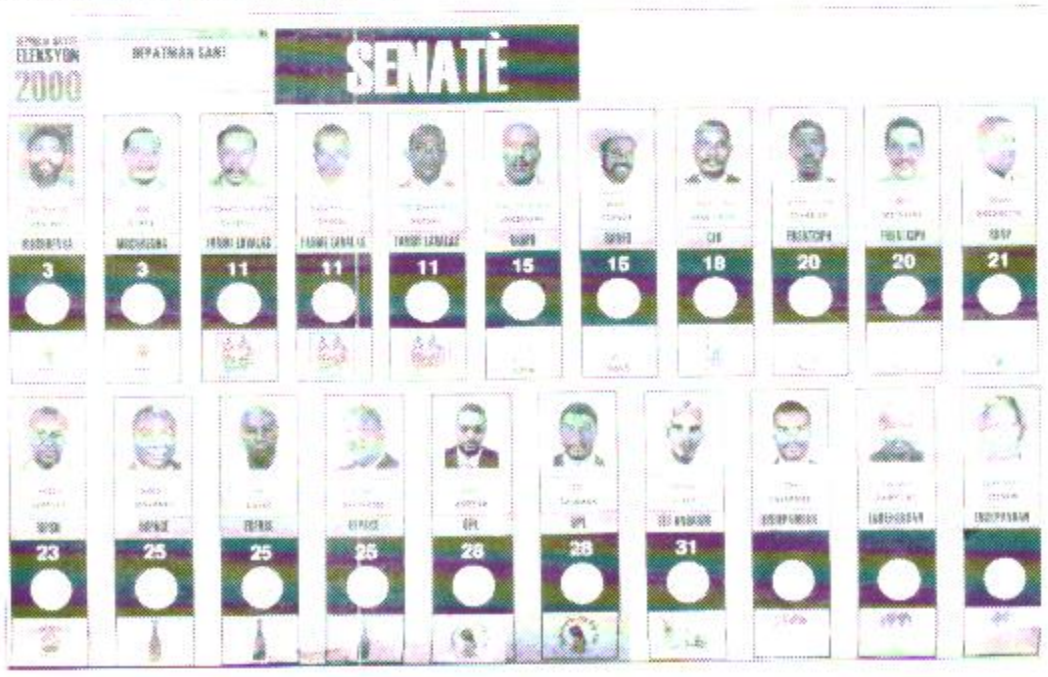
Despite the Lavalas Family election victory, the question mark over the results remains, and an uncertain future beckons. On one side there is the Lavalas Family, which claims that there was nothing wrong with the elections and is now preparing for Aristide's candidacy in Presidential elections in November. Brushing aside all criticism, the Lavalas Family's elected representatives took their seats in the new Parliament in late August. On the other side are the opposition parties, united in calling for completely new elections, and the main foreign powers with interests in Haiti, seemingly unsure whether to recognise the new Lavalas Family government or not.

● The Haitian Union of Marnier-Lapostelle Workers has won a partial victory in its year-long dispute with the French manufacturers of the Grand Marnier liqueur. The union, representing some 300 workers at the Marnier-Lapostelle orange plantation in northern Haiti, enlisted the support of international solidarity organisations in its attempt to win wage increases and improved conditions. British organisations the Haiti Support Group and War on Want, together with France's Reseau-Solidarite and Collectif Haiti de France, and the US Campaign for Labor Rights and International Labor Rights Fund, asked their supporters to send letters and emails to the Marnier-Lapostelle head office in Paris in support of the union's demands.

In late July, Marnier-Lapostelle agreed to 50% wage increases for plantation day labourers and orange pickers. They will now earn $4.75 a day, and 36 cents per case of oranges, respectively (there are 250 oranges in each case). The wage rate for those who peel the oranges, and improvements in primitive working conditions, are subject to further negotiations.

● For further information see the Haiti Support Group web site at http://www.gn.apc.org/haitisupport

A ballot paper for the Central Plateau department: 21 candidates contest three senate places.



Nicaragua in crisis

Mike Phipps reports: The Western aid going to Colombia stands in sharp contrast with allocations to other countries in the region. In 1998, in the wake of the devastation caused by Hurricane Mitch, the EU allocated £180 million for reconstruction in Central America. Two years later, inefficiency and bureaucracy have meant that not a single project has yet been funded, nor a single victim helped.

Meanwhile multinationals continue to plunder the region. In some areas, despite huge annual rainfalls, fresh water is becoming scarce as a result of deforestation by Asian logging companies. Now the Nicaraguan Government is proposing to follow the lead of Costa Rica and El Salvador and sell off huge areas of forest as "carbon credits" to industrial countries. This is permitted under the Kyoto Environmental Protocol in 1997 – a US-inspired scam to prevent industrialised nations from having to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

Meanwhile Nicaragua faces a huge crisis in its main agricultural export, coffee, due partly to falling prices but also to the closure of the National Development Bank. The UN has warned that Nicaragua may face a serious famine in the near future due to drought threatening basic food crops. The state-run agency for food distribution that might have stabilised matters is being privatised as a condition of the country's agreements with the World Bank and IMF.

Exploitation and repression continue in the free trade zones. A Taiwanese company was fined recently for keeping 34 workers in their factory for more than 24 hours, with no rest and very little food, on compulsory overtime on pain of dismissal. This is one of the unreported aspects of globalisation.

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Behind the Plan Colombia

Why are Western governments so keen to provide over $1 billion in military aid to Latin America's most repressive regime? Mike Phipps, Brent South CLP, reports.

Reports of human rights abuses continue to pour in from Colombia on virtually a daily basis. One shocking incident reported recently was the killing of six children between the ages of six and twelve on a school nature trip by the Colombian army. The government's version of the massacre – children caught in crossfire between the military and rebel forces – looks far-fetched in the absence of any other casualties.

It is this same military which will be prime beneficiaries of the US-sponsored Plan Colombia, Britain's contribution to which is £150 million. The Plan is being sold to the world on the basis of stepping up the war on drugs. In practice, it will target only that part of the coca trade which funds the left-wing guerrillas of the FARC, who control an area of the country the size of Switzerland. The drugs trade managed covertly by the army and right-wing paramilitaries linked to them is not likely to be affected. In this context, Clinton's recent assurances about not getting involved in Colombia's civil conflict ring hollow.

The Plan is excellent news for US corporations. Lockheed Martin will get $68 million in contracts for supplying radar systems. The same company coincidentally sponsored a recent poll which showed the Democrats lagging behind the Republicans in public perception in being "tough on drugs", which may have persuaded the Administration to back the package.

There are big pickings in the future too. The Occidental Petroleum Company wants to exploit the 1.5 billion barrels of oil estimated to lie beneath the land of the U'wa, an indigenous people in northern Colombia, who have struggled for eight years to protect their homeland. In the last US presidential election the oil giant gave the Democratic Party and linked causes over $0.5 million and Al Gore himself has family stock in the company worth $1million.

Human rights groups are united in their opposition to the Plan. Colombia is now estimated to be the most dangerous country in the world for trades unionists, with kidnapping and killings by paramilitaries routine. More than ten million Colombians now live abroad after fifty years of political violence. Environmentalists too are alarmed about the proposed use of biological warfare to destroy coca plants, with knock-on contamination of rivers leading to poisoning of human and animal life.

The imperialist nature of the Plan was underlined when the Colombian Congress came to debate it: the only version available was in English, which many deputies don't speak. Colombia is expected to contribute $4 billion to the Plan from its crisis-ridden finances.

The Plan makes Colombia the world's third largest recipient of US military aid. Worryingly, the usual human rights guarantees on such aid were waived at Clinton's insistence. Critics see the level of US commitment to Colombia as comparable to its military build-up in Vietnam in the early 1960s. That the Labour Government is also centrally involved should be a campaigning focus for all socialists here.

Jeremy Corbyn MP
Islington North

Link pensions and minimum wage to earnings!

Campaign internationally for redistribution of wealth!

Deportations increase

John Stewart, Hackney North CLP, looks at the grim news.

In contrast to the impression given by the media, the Tories and even some Labour MPs, more people are being deported from the UK, at a faster rate, than ever before. Latest Home Office figures show there were 645 deportations, and 3,195 people refused and removed at port of entry, in July alone. Over 26,000 people were deported or removed from the UK in the first seven months of this year – up 28% on the same period for 1999 and a 50% increase on the record of the Tories.

In addition, over 1,000 people are now being held in detention centres and prisons around the country solely under Immigration Act powers. These are people who have neither committed, nor been charged with, any crime. Their only offence is to come to the UK seeking a life free from persecution, war or poverty.

The Home Office records 1,037 detainees at the end of July, including 187 at Campsfield, 153 at Haslar and 111 at Tinsley House. The new detention centre at Lindholme, near Doncaster, enters the statistics for the first time with 56 detainees but figures for those held in police cells or at the Oakington detention centre near Cambridge are not given. Over 10,000 migrants and asylum seekers are detained in the UK every year.

With figures so high, campaigners are adopting new tactics to fight individual cases. Recent months have seen increasing use in Britain of the "German tactic" of attempting to stop deportations being carried out by protesting against the airlines carrying deportees. In some circumstances this has included boarding aircraft with deportees on board and preventing them from taking off.

In July, activists from the anti-prison group CAGE succeeded in preventing the deportation of Salim Rambo from the Congo by forcing a BA plane at Heathrow to abandon take-off. CAGE activists managed to persuade passengers on the flight to stand up in their seats before take-off and protest at the deportation. The captain of the flight refused to take off until Salim and a protester had left the plane.

In another case, in August, the Bristol Asylum Seekers Campaign picketed the British Airways check-in desk at Gatwick to protest at the planned deportation of Amanj Gafor from Iraq on a BA flight. BA objected to the protest and called airport security who chased activists around the airport, including forcing the door open on an activist using the toilet, and arrested protesters under airport bylaws. One witness reported "a scene where protesters were being dragged away despite no apparent signs of provocation, and television crews were blocked by airport staff from filming." Amanj was eventually deported by boat on 13th August.

The airport protests are a regular feature of anti-deportation campaigning in Germany where activists from Kein Mensch ist Illegal (No one is illegal) have regularly targeted Lufthansa and, to a lesser extent, in Holland (KLM) and in Belgium (Sabena). In Britain this new tactic appears to be gaining support: already immigration lawyers are examining the wording of the 1963 Tokyo Agreement which regulates legal responsibilities on aircraft, links are being made with trade unions representing airport workers and pilots associations, and activists are appealing for people to donate "air miles" to allow protesters to board planes and refuse to remain seated for take-off until deported refugees are removed from the plane.

●More info from National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns: 0121 554 6947,www.ncadc.demon.co.uk

TRIBUNE

News from the Inside



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

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***Labour Left Briefing* AGM**

The left, the General Election and beyond

The Mandela Theatre,
Westminster Kingsway College,
Regent's Park Centre
Longford Street,
London NW1

November 25th, 10.30-5pm

(nearest tubes
Warren Street,
Great Portland Street)

Time for truth



Mike Phipps reviews *Unfinished business: state killings and the quest for truth* by Bill Rolston, published by Beyond the Pale, price £12.99.

During the 30-year conflict in the north of Ireland, state forces killed 357 people, of whom 294 were killed by the British army. Most were civilians, overwhelmingly Catholics. 1972, the year of Bloody Sunday, was the worst year when nearly one-quarter of all killings were perpetrated by state forces.

These killings, and particularly those who have campaigned over them, are the focus of this book – from Bloody Sunday to the child plastic bullet victims of the early 1980s, to the allegedly deliberate assassination of republican activists, to the murder of Robert Hammill in 1997, kicked to death by a loyalist mob while four police officers sat in an armed Land Rover fifteen yards away.

The book includes the 1974 Dublin and Monaghan car bombings when 33 people were killed indiscriminately by loyalist terrorists, allegedly with the collusion of British intelligence according to a subsequent TV documentary, as part of a concerted plan to wreck the Sunningdale power-sharing agreement. Other killings by loyalists would also suggest involvement by British intelligence personnel, for example that of lawyer Pat Finucane in 1989.

Much of the book covers the abuse and hostility grieving relatives encountered from the authorities when they tried to get answers about the killings. Where court hearings occurred, official pressure on witnesses and other attempts to obstruct justice seem routine. Family members of those killed were often threatened or taunted by army or police personnel on the street. For example, after the SAS pumped over 600 bullets into eight IRA members – and two innocent civilians – in an ambush in May 1987, a UDR patrol drove round Catholic estates with a banner reading "eight nil".

Even more than the deaths themselves, the most powerful sections of the book detail how formerly politically inexperienced relatives persevered doggedly in their pursuit of justice, often in the face of official indifference and obstruction. One conclusion that emerges is the need for a Truth Commission, a key feature in the peace processes in South Africa, Guatemala and elsewhere, so there can be a full recognition and accounting of what was done, and a new beginning signalled. As long as the British Government denies its own role in the war and fraudulently presents itself as an even-handed upholder of law and order, that goal seems remote.

Conversations with an internationalist

Mike Phipps reviews *Confronting Empire* by Eqbal Ahmad, published by Pluto, price £10.99 pbk.

The life and work of Eqbal Ahmad deserve to be better known. Born in a village in Bihar, India in 1933 or 1934, he migrated to Pakistan during Partition. He served briefly as an officer in the Pakistan army, studied at Princeton and in the early 1960s lived in North Africa and worked with Frantz Fanon in the Algerian National Liberation Front. Back in the US, he organised the first teach-in in protest against the Vietnam War – earlier he had helped organise the first speaking engagement of Malcolm X at a non-black institution. In 1971 he was indicted with others on charges of conspiracy to kidnap Nixon's Secretary of State Kissinger – the jury declared a mistrial. He was a prolific writer and activist until his untimely death last year.

The interviews conducted here by David Barsamian cover a range of topics – Indian politics, the US left and most interestingly the growing US military presence in Saudi Arabia and its local repercussions. But of most importance are the discussions on the Middle East, particularly Ahmad's several attempts to persuade PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat to change strategy. Ahmad's experiences in Algeria convinced him that the tactic of armed struggle exacted a high price on those who waged it. He suggested in meetings with PLO leaders in the 1960s that instead they should pursue a strategy of morally isolating Israel by exposing the contradiction between the ideals behind its foundation and its treatment of Palestinians in practice. He argued for Martin Luther King-style non-violent mass action among Palestinians and an orientation by the leadership towards influencing US civil society. Again in the early 1980s, he advised Arafat to recognise the principle of Israel and open a discussion about the minimum boundaries for a Palestinian state.

Sadly all this fell on deaf ears. The PLO leadership degenerated into thuggish collaboration. Ahmad's conclusions are echoed in Edward Said's Introduction: that Arafat squandered the moral legitimacy of opposing new Israeli settlements in fruitless street battles and self-wounding general strikes rather than mass mobilisations. The result is that the Palestinian Authority has no real control over land, resources or infrastructure and is reduced to running a series of bantustans.

Audrey Wise (1932-2000)

Former MP and MEP Stan Newens remembers his lifelong comrade Audrey Wise MP.

Audrey Wise was born in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, the only child of committed socialist parents. Even at school she stood up for her own views, and when she moved to Tottenham, working as a shorthand typist, she was soon involved in left wing activity. At 21, she was elected a Labour councillor.

Audrey married Johnny Wise, an engineer, who became a leading shop steward at ENV in Willesden — a hub of left wing trade unionism. When they moved to Ipswich his record was leaked and he had to leave engineering. Audrey became a saleswoman – and joined USDAW.

Audrey's father, a Labour councillor, refused on principle to allow council officers to inspect his council house, as required of tenants at that time. For this he was evicted by Ipswich's Labour Council. The family moved to Coventry (and later on to Stafford).

By this time, Audrey had established herself in Coventry CND, an opponent of the war in Vietnam and a committed Labour Party activist. She won the seat of Coventry South East in the February 1974 General Election.

In the House of Commons, she joined the Tribune Group and flouted the Labour Whip to oppose arms expenditure and to object to Labour's prices and incomes policy. In 1977, she joined with Jeff Rooker MP to promote the Rooker-Wise amendment, which upset the Labour budget by increasing personal tax allowances by an estimated £450 million.

Audrey was an assiduous constituency MP, campaigning on issues such as ending the testing of cosmetics on animals. However, she lost her seat in the 1979 general election and lost Woolwich to John Cartwright, who had defected to the SDP, in 1983, before returning to the House of Commons as the Member for Preston in 1987. In 1981 she had won a seat on the Labour Party National Executive Committee.

She was a member of the Council of the Institute for Workers Control and wrote a pamphlet on the role of women in industry. She was a regular speaker at meetings of Labour Action For Peace and she was very active in solidarity work alongside those fighting tyranny in Chile, Nicaragua and developing countries across the globe. In 1975 she went to Portugal and wrote a pamphlet, *Eye Witness In Revolutionary Portugal*, urging support for the left.



Photo: John Harris

Audrey Wise in full flow: Socialist Campaign Group of MPs conference, 1992.

From 1991 to 1997 she was President of USDAW and took on all comers (sometimes including the Union's officials) to better shop workers' conditions and to support left wing causes. Audrey had been an active trade unionist all her adult life, even being arrested on the picket lines in the Grunwick dispute in 1977.

She was not, however, some sort of iron lady in reverse. She always retained her charm and was a sensitive, thoughtful person who never ceased to think of ordinary folk. On the House of Commons Select Committee on Health, she sought to improve conditions for expectant and nursing mothers and had considerable success. She opposed this Government's cuts in benefits for single mothers and for disabled people.

Audrey was devoted to her parents, her children and her grandchildren – and her gardening. She was a dedicated socialist, who will be sadly missed in her community, in the Party, among women and above all in her family. She is survived by her husband, Johnny, her daughter Valerie, son Ian and by four grandchildren.

Jeremy Corbyn adds: As the procession, accompanied by the Red Rose Band, left the Guildhall on our way to the church, the centre of Preston stopped for Audrey's funeral.

Brilliantly organised, her funeral encompassed Audrey's life: an ever expert eye for detail, time for everybody and a combination of her interests. She was a union woman all her life who was feared by the USDAW leadership (they once put private detectives on her trail to try to prove she wasn't working in the industry) and a brilliant campaigner for women's health.

A galaxy of speakers, introduced and linked by Audrey's daughter, Valerie Wise, described Audrey's life and famed ability to go into enormous detail – and her dry wit. While in the USA on a health delegation, Audrey met tobacco executives. She sweetly told them she had never met international drug barons before. So many snippets of a full life, with many mentions of compost and free range chickens, kept the packed church in rapture.

Audrey was a dedicated parliamentarian, who saw it as a pulpit, not an end in itself. Her internationalism shone through all the time. A peace campaigner representing Preston with its aircraft factories, Audrey was a strong supporter of the famous Lucas Aerospace shop stewards arms conversion plan and later a fierce opponent of selling Hawks to Indonesia.

Our traditions of popular imagination and protest are a vital ingredient of struggle and hope. Music of *Jerusalem*, *Union Maid* and *We Shall Overcome* concluded the public event. Later, in the crematorium, *Solidarity Forever* and the *Red Flag* said our final goodbye to a genuine socialist who was a true friend to us all.

Correspondence

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

The central distinctive feature of the socialist left's opposition to Britain joining the Single Currency is the loss of economic national sovereignty which would be available to a socialist minded government in Britain.

While this may well be the case, the chance of New Labour or of any other future government being converted to socialism is extremely low. If we follow Messrs. Burkitt and Moss, the labour left will effectively be joining forces with Conservative nationalistic and chauvenistic europhobes in their 'save the pound' campaign. Surely, a strong anti-Euro campaign bolsters the far right while achieving nothing for socialist purposes.

The left should passively support a Single Currency while calling for social accountability of the ECB at European level (however distant such a prospect might be). The energy and resources of socialists are cruelly limited and can be deployed more effectively in other struggles.

Peter Bowing
Budapest

So, does Geoff Martin believe that Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink is worth more than 90 nurses (*LLB*, September)? Possibly even more to the point: what do UNISON members in London think? Geoff can answer in his column, Helen may like to respond separately!

Dave Statham
Brent

Ilford South CLP has a modernising constitutional amendment for debate at Conference allowing a Labour leader to be challenged while Prime Minister, providing at least 25% of the PLP support a challenge. The current constitution does not allow any such challenge.

The Tories do allow such a challenge and it arguably won them a general election by enabling them to oust Thatcher.

Any delegates who would like to assist our delegate in canvassing for support at Conference, please contact me at andy.walker@talk21.com or phone 020 8590 7739 and I will pass your name on to our delegate.

Andy Walker
Ilford

PERISCOPE

Robbo follows in Dobbo's footsteps

When Jimmy "Fitz" Fitzpatrick, Frank Dobson's campaign manager for the London Mayoral selection, fell on his sword and announced he would not stand again as chair of the London Labour Party, readers will have wondered idly who Millbank would find to contest the empty stool Fitz left behind him. Where was there a Millbank stooge, experienced in standing in London-wide ballots, with time on his hands?

Frank Dobson has never categorically denied that he has an interest in being chair of the London Labour Party – so it can't be him, then.

The Millbank mafia, fresh from their experiences in hiding the NEC elections in two holiday weeks in May, seem to be downplaying the London conference. Plan B, to be operated if any delegates do manage to turn up, is a classic Millbank arithmetic problem: no fewer than two "stop Geoff Martin" candidates have come forward. The first, Chris Robbins, has been UNISON's Political Fund Tsar in London since Noah's ark and is "the most inefficient union bureaucrat in the metropolis" according to any UNISON rank and file activist who's ever dealt with him. Robbins's glossy publicity (which reveals a striking phsyical resemblance to Frank Dobson) makes his agenda clear. He starts professing that his new ambition comes because he has "the experience London needs", but soon goes on to warn, "Our Party (...) does not need a chairperson who makes promises they cannot deliver, represent [sic] sectional interests and fuels damaging disunity." The other candidate rumoured to be in the fray is Shahid Malik, Millbank stooge on the National Executive Committee. Malik's publicity has yet to be seen in London: maybe he is busy elsewhere? The Birmingham Post's coverage of the fighting to take over from the retiring Geoff Rooker may provide a clue: "Names put forward for Perry Bar include Mr Shahid Malik", they say (11th September). Perhaps Michael Cashman, a London Party member who was awarded a Euro-seat in the Midlands after two years' service on the Millbank NEC slate, has been a shining example?

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

"How could I be against New Labour, because, after all, it's what the SDP came into existence to create... In fact there's hardly an innovative policy New Labour espouses that wasn't advocated by the SDP between 1981 and 1990."
Lord David Owen, YouGov.com website interview, 29 August 2000 .

"There are forces at work to rid Labour of ageing activists, particularly those with an industrial background. It's called New Labour."
Charles Gordon, Labour Leader of Glasgow City Council, quoted in Scottish Socialist Voice, 25th August 2000

"On 1 May 1997 the voters turned away from 18 years of naked self-interest, and the Government is showing them that they made a mistake. They trooped into the polling-booth with visions of a shiny new health service, an end to poverty, equality between all peoples of this island, efficient public transport and possibily anti-gravity hats. What they got was the Dome, Machiavellian conniving on an unheard-of scale, smug, unelected baroness Jay and baby Leo."
Alexei Sayle, writing in the Independent.

"...the most intimidating statistic of the year: 'more people have voted in the Big Brother ejections than in the European elections'."
The Independent, 16.09.00

"It may not be the empire-spanning force it once was. But say what you like about the British army – it can still beat the daylights out of a posse of untrained and half-starved drug addled teenagers when required."
Guardian Diary, 12.9.00



THE CHRISTINE SHAWCROFT COLUMN

In my many years as a Labour activist, I have occasionally got involved in the odd argument or two. It just seems to happen from time to time – often after an obdurate right winger has turned round and said, "Ah but, Nye Bevan said that the language of priorities is the religion of socialism." Now Bevan may well have come out with this *bon mot* at some time or other, but somehow I doubt that he actually meant, "And therefore I am in favour of this library /day nursery/ old people's home being closed by the Labour Council," which is what my opponents are usually arguing for.

● If the language of priorities is the religion of socialism, it seems to be the religion of Conservatism as well. Successive governments have demonstrated a sense of financial priorities which verge on the totally inexplicable. Arms spending is sacrosanct when the health service has to beg for every penny. Long before spending on the Millennium Dome began to approach £850 million, it was estimated that for the same sum of money the London Underground could be made completely accessible for people with disabilities – and women with small children in buggies. With the repeated handouts swallowed up by the Dome, we could have made London transport accessible three or four times over. There must be something in the political mind that sees a large empty tent as prestigious, but disabled access or brand new schools and hospitals as boringly humdrum. Surely the focus groups don't agree.

● When I've gone to speak at meetings on the NEC campaign trail, I've been challenged on the cost of taking the privatised utilities back into public ownership. Even in the wake of the Paddington disaster, some Party members are still prepared to argue that we can't afford a safe, accountable, publicly owned transport system. Saving lives, it seems, is just not cost effective. But taking lives, in the Balkans for example, is a humanitarian act – and hang the expense!

We were originally told by John Prescott at Conference that we couldn't renationalise the railways in the first two years of the Labour Government because of keeping to Tory spending limits. He added that surely we wouldn't want him to give huge sums to City fat cats by buying back the railways – which was an argument against ever taking them back into public ownership of course, and so it has proved.

Now that the Government is awash with money, I was told at the National Policy Forum that the only way to attract the investment needed for the railways was to keep them in the private sector. Yet you can only attract investment if the investors can make huge profits. If the railways had been this profitable, they wouldn't have been nationalised in the first place. Huge profits can only be made by sacking workers, cutting their benefits, taking shortcuts on safety – and we're back at Paddington again. Underfunded public transport services are unable to compete in an age of mass car ownership, unless the price of petrol is massively increased. Which would be political suicide. Just ask a focus group. Or a lorry driver.

'With the repeated handouts swallowed up by the Dome, we could have made London transport accessible three or four times over'

● The same thinking lies behind the mania for Private Finance Initiatives. The evidence is mounting about what a bad deal these schemes are. In Derby, two hospitals are to be demolished, one of them comparatively modern, to make way for a PFI hospital with fewer beds in an inaccessible part of the city. But this makes sense because the present hospitals stand on prime development land, so the PFI investors can make their killing on luxury flats. The plans for a PFI hospital in Kidderminster will deprive nearby Worcester of facilities – and, as ever, the new hospital will have fewer beds that the present hospitals. The new Darent Valley hospital has 75 fewer beds than the Dartford and Gravesend hospitals it is replacing. Routine surgery has been cancelled because vital equipment is not working properly.

There are many, many examples like these. But at the National Policy Forum, anti-PFI amendments were voted down on the assurance that schemes are all examined on their merits, so those that don't present good value will not proceed. Further, we were told, we have to stick with the principle of the PFIs because it's the only way to attract the investment. Margaret McDonagh told me at the last NEC that in their first year members are ineffective and unable to understand what is going on. Maybe I don't. And maybe she can explain to me how a school or hospital can generate the kind of profits that will attract City fat cats to invest in it.

● At Annual Conference, the policy documents that are agreed will set the basis for the manifesto. Feeling in the Party is running strongly against privatisation and PFI (despite the tiny but vociferous "Let's profit from death" minority). We have to give voice to the strength of opinion in the Party, as we did last year. Organise in your Constituency Labour Party and trade union delegation to refer back the relevant paragraphs of the Economic Policy report on PFI.

See you in Brighton!

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