LABOUR LEFT

Briefing

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TRADE UNIONS

Mick Rix, Andy Gilchrist, MSF scandal

LABOUR PARTY

Readmit Ken, organise for London Conference

LONDON

A strategy for transport

PAEDOPHILES

Liz Davies on mob rule

FOOTBALL

A fan's last Straw

LABOUR LEFT Briefing

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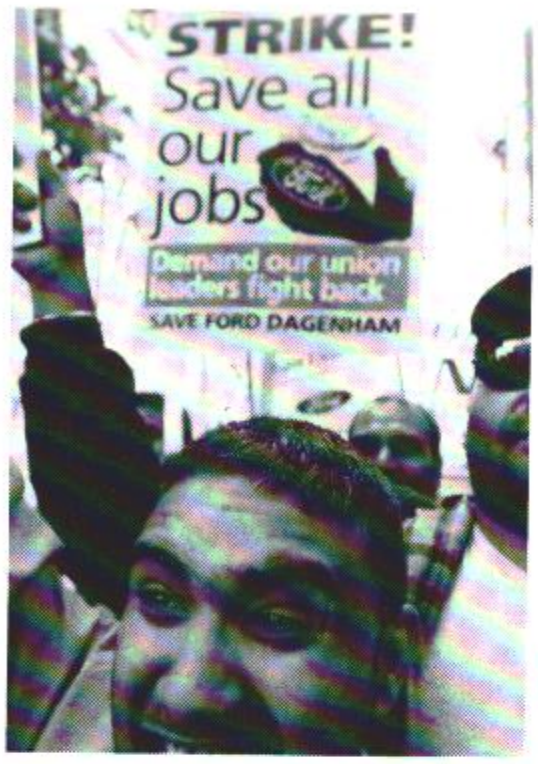
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■ The copy deadline for the next issue of *LLB* is Monday 11th September.



September 2000

Photo: Paul Mattsson

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EDITORIAL

New Labour rule – old Labour methods

The forthcoming TUC and Labour conferences will undoubtedly witness many warm words and greetings between Labour MPs and trade union leaders, and this process of fraternisation can be expected to continue in the run-up to the General Election. Casual observers may be tempted to conclude that New Labour has finally acknowledged the importance of trade unions within the Party: but that would only be half the story. It is not the mass of trade unionists on which New Labour relies, so much as their leaders.

Certainly, while some within the corridors of Millbank still dream of a party modelled on the US Democrats, where big business is in direct command and the unions are reduced to a marginal role, that party does not yet exist in Britain. When the general election is held – in May 2001, or whenever – the trade unions will once more be asked to shoulder the main burden of support, in both financial and organisational terms, for Labour's campaign.

But trade unionists are entitled to ask exactly what benefits they will gain by continuing to provide this level of support. So far, in many areas – notably the minimum wage and manufacturing – Government assistance has been belated, begrudging and inadequate. In other areas, the Government's programme has maintained explicit continuity with Tory policies. The decision to leave the anti-union laws on the statute book has allowed the climate of fear and intimidation to persist within many workplaces, particularly in the private sector. Thus another generation of potential trade unionists remains unorganised and unrecruited, and although the official level of unemployment has now fallen to below what it was when the Tories took office in 1979, there has been no corresponding rise in union membership levels.

Yet, despite the all too obvious flaws in Labour's record in office, most union leaders refuse to use their organisational and financial clout within the Party to fight for their members' interests. Instead, they play their traditional right-wing role, blocking with the Labour leadership against the constituency-based opposition, represented by the Grassroots Alliance. By this means – with some honourable exceptions – they hope to keep their standing with the Blairites and gain sufficient mimimal concessions to keep their members acquiescent.

Hence came the downright treachery of most trade union delegations at Labour's National Policy Forum, where they toed the New Labour line and voted down amendments proposed by Grassroots Alliance supporters, even when these amendments were in line with their own unions' official policies. When the RMT took a stand against the Government's Public Private Partnership scheme for the London Underground, unions such as the CWU and UNISON, whose members face similar threats of privatisation, refused to back them. Likewise, on the Party's National Executive Committee, the Grassroots Alliance candidates elected in the constituency section have repeatedly opposed the leadership but have never received support from the trade unions. In all these cases, the democratic decisions of the union memberships have been at best undermined, and at worst even directly contradicted, by their representatives within the Labour Party.

There is a groundswell of discontent at the grassroots of many unions against present Government policies, which has even led to calls from delegates at the CWU and RMT conferences for their unions to disaffiliate from the Labour Party. This response is understandable, but short-term satisfaction is no substitute for a long-term political strategy. In the absence of another credible mass party, even in embryo, to which the unions could turn, disaffiliation can only be a recipe for allowing the unions to slip into political oblivion – and effectively doing the Blairites' job for them. The task for socialists in the trade unions is to ensure that the unions' political weight is used to express the opposition to Blairism that exists among the ranks of the Party, instead of giving Millbank a blank cheque.

Particularly in the large unions, it will be a formidable challenge to build a network capable of replacing the entrenched union hierarchies with a leadership which will represent the members rather than its own interests. Yet it is essential that this challenge is met successfully. A positive co-operative approach by activists across the movement would make efforts in individual unions that much more effective.

It would be naive to imagine that trade unionists or indeed the working class in general, especially in Scotland and Wales where the nationalists have attracted voters alienated by New Labour, will automatically respond with enthusiasm to the call to re-elect the Blair Government. But few would question that victory for a Hague-led Tory Party would be an unmitigated disaster for working people throughout Britain.

Despite Blair's best efforts, trade unionists who hoped for a change in policy after the last election still expect a Labour Government to deliver at least some tangible improvements. The tragedy is that it is their own leaders who are helping to keep New Labour policies in place. If the union lefts can galvanise this discontent sufficiently to defeat the collusion of our union leaders, they can lead the fight to defeat New Labour and its discredited third way once and for all.

Ten more years?

After five days in-depth public consultation, Health Secretary Alan Milburn revealed New Labour's Ten Year Plan for the NHS. Eddie Tucker makes his diagnosis.

The targets set in the Government's Plan for the NHS have been given a cautious welcome by Party members, trade unions, the Royal College of Nursing and health campaigners. It's such a relief to be going forwards again! Only when you realise that it will still take the best part of a decade to reach standards common across Western Europe, and when you find that the medical targets derive from available money rather than assessment of need, does disappointment kick in again.

Campaigners at London Health Emergency acknowledge that the proposals for 7,000 extra beds were "at the top end of expectations", but want to know if this is a gross or a net figure. LHE points out, as does the British Medical Association (BMA), that current Private Finance Initiatives (PFIs) will bring a massive cut in beds – 5,000 by the BMA's reckoning. Something has to go: the commitment to 7,000 new beds or the obsession with PFI. LHE believes that "the Government's attempt to rescue the NHS from its current crisis will be sacrificed on the altar of PFI" unless a sea change occurs.

One of the most shocking aspects of the Plan is the proposed abolition of Community Health Councils (CHCs). CHCs were never perfect, but they were the first port of call for many worried patients seeking independent examination of their problems. The new "Patient Advocates" will fit more closely into the NHS structure and may not appear to be independent.

The professional associations are cautious. The British Dental Association fears the pledge that everyone will have an NHS dentist will not be met due to lack of funding. Of the £25 million announced for dentistry in the Plan, £20 million had already been announced. The BMA has warned MPs that the standard 48 hours for a non-urgent appointment with a GP will be "difficult to achieve".

Campaigners on the ground are still finding that decent NHS services are a popular and urgent cause. In Wyre Forest, independent health campaigners have now seized control of the local council from the established political parties, sending a clear message to Millbank (and Tory Central Office). In Dudley, strike action continues against privatisation (see *Trade Union Notebook*, page 14). Summit Laundry Services at Basildon & Thurrock NHS Trust have been sacked, fined nearly £300,000, one of the largest ever penalties, and gone into liquidation.

'If New Labour is to live to see the results of its ten year plan, it must first survive this winter'

If New Labour is to live to see the results of its Ten Year Plan, it must first survive this winter. Headlines like those we had last year will hardly be a dynamic launchpad for the General Election. London Health Emergency has called for "instructions to health authorities and trusts to spend what is required to get services up to scratch for this winter with a Government guarantee that it will underwrite these costs."

● London's 999 delays are resulting in up to 500 lives a year being lost. An internal report shows that around 2% of heart attack victims are alive a year later, and admits that a "world class service" would manage 15%. Only 40% of Category A calls are being responded to within 8 minutes. London Health Emergency's Geoff Martin described the figures as "appalling" and called for more resources.

What price education?

Lee Montgomerie reports from Leeds: Leeds Local Education Authority presided over the usual big-city mixture of crumbling school buildings, overcrowded classes, stressed staff and variable performance. Parents were broadly satisfied, exam results were around the national average and not one school had opted out throughout the Tory years despite the inducements.

In February, the Authority failed its OFSTED inspection; Price Waterhouse Coopers rubber-stamped the decision (for £200,000); and the Authority found itself bulldozed into a public-private partnership. Everything currently done by the elected Council will be taken over by a company board of five appointees. The Joint Venture Partnership will keep within budget (Leeds City Council had always spent well above the Standard Spending Assessment) and it will swallow around £3m of education money for its annual management fees.

At the packed inaugural meeting of the Campaign for State Education (CASE), feelings ran high. Speakers described how initial relief at the demise of a hated Tory government had turned to despair as the privatisations accelerated and the demonisation of public servants continued and fury that the new board would not be answerable to the electorate.

Union officers railed at the expense, the waste, the sheer inappropriateness of putting education into the hands of private industry and wondered what had induced Blair and Blunkett to gift the massive assets of the education authority to the private sector. The market in education consultancy and management is the new cash cow, with "edubusiness" outperforming the FTSE100 by 100%.

A traditional Conservative councillor shocked himself by taking sides with reviled trade unionists as he made an impassioned attack on the proposal. Not one Labour councillor stood up to refute him, but then again – not one of them was there.

Save council housing

Jacqui Brown, UNISON Housing Associations branch, reports on the growing resistance to the Government's Green Paper on housing.

Despite public transport being suspended in central London due to bomb alerts, over 300 council tenants and trade unionists from UNISON, UCATT and GMB filled the Westminster Hall and an overflow room on 19th July after lobbying their MPs on the proposals in the Green Paper to privatise council housing.

Initiated by tenants and trade unionists in Southwark, where the Labour Council plans to privatise thousands of homes, delegations came from Doncaster, Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester as well as London. They heard MPs queuing up to attack the Governments' proposals.

An Early Day Motion put down by Jeremy Corbyn and signed by 48 MPs condemns privatisation and calls for proper funding for council housing. It's not just the usual suspects in the Campaign Group who have signed: several MPs clearly feel that New Labour is going too far.

Defend Council Housing, the national body launched in 1998 to fight council housing privatisation, has seen its support soaring in recent months. Until a year ago, local campaigns tended to be fragmented, reacting to threats from councils as they occurred. Now the Green Paper has given the campaign a higher profile, and more public sector unions are taking the issue seriously, as their members' jobs come under threat.

There have been some notable successes in fighting off the privatisers – usually against a background of councils pouring huge sums into glossy campaigns for a Yes vote. Tenants of Wycombe District Council recently rejected transfer plans, whilst South Bedfordshire tenants have delivered the highest vote against transfer for twelve years, with over 70% voting no.

The campaign must be taken into local Labour Parties. As several MPs told the rally on 19th July "this is not just a protest, it's a campaign we can win."

Save council housing lobby of Parliament.



Photo: Paul Mattsson

IT'S DAYLIGHT ROBBERY!

Accounting rules introduced ten years ago by the Tories, and enthusiastically continued by New Labour, allow the Government to cream off any money it regards as "surplus" in councils' Housing Revenue Accounts. This money goes back to Treasury coffers, and is used to subsidise housing benefits for council tenants.

Around 90% of councils lose funding this way. Last year £1.4 billion was creamed off, making £10 billion over the past ten years. And it's not stopping, with another £4 billion likely to go the same way in the next two to three years. This money could have been used to reduce the agreed £19 billion backlog of work needed to bring council homes up to a decent standard. It's no surprise that some tenants finally become demoralised and feel they have no choice but to vote for transfer to other landlords.

All other benefits, even housing benefits for all other tenants, are funded through the taxation system. Only council tenants face this double whammy.

Since New Labour is so fond of targetting benefit "cheats", next time you see one of their freephone hotlines or web site why not tell them who the biggest benefit cheat is: the Treasury.

The Daylight Robbery Campaign was set up to highlight this issue. It calls for: an end to daylight robbery, use council rents to improve council housing; no fiddling the figures to hide the housing heist; share out any surpluses to meet housing needs – use the same formula as for capital receipts. For more information call 020 8981 8386.
www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk

Dispersing the support

Arun Kundnani, National Civil Rights Movements, reports on this autumn's Civil Rights Caravan.

Up and down the country, asylum seekers are facing racist violence and xenophobia. The police in Coventry have told asylum seekers to stay indoors as their protection against racist violence cannot be ensured. In Newcastle asylum seekers have been banned from using local amenities, such as swimming pools, for fear that they may spread disease. In many other parts of Britain, local newspapers and organised far-right groups have launched vicious hate campaigns against asylum seekers.

The Government's clumsily implemented dispersal policy has only increased their isolation and fed the popular xenophobia. In its efforts to appease the tabloid press who have dubbed it "soft" on asylum, the Home Office is about to engage in a huge increase in deportation, detention and dispersal. Britain is following the German model. In turn, the xenophobia directed at asylum seekers is feeding into racism against settled black communities. The hope offered by the Lawrence Inquiry is now a fading memory.

The Campaign Against Racism and Fascism and the National Civil Rights Movement are aiming to tour England in September and October in a Caravan of asylum seekers, black families who have been victims of racism, and their supporters. The Caravan will be visiting asylum seekers in hostels and detention centres and offering support and solidarity. Black families who are living in remote areas and are facing racism will be supported. Public meetings and demonstrations will be held to campaign for the rights of asylum seekers, refugees, undocumented workers, migrants and victims of racist attacks.

The Caravan will begin on 15th September and visit twelve towns and cities in England, culminating in a week of activities in London, leading up to a national demonstration against racism on Saturday 14th October, the anniversary of the disappearance of Ricky Reel.

We are setting up welcoming committees in various parts of the country to coordinate local events as part of the Caravan and are asking local organisations to offer their support. For more information, please contact CARF, BM Box 8784, London WC1N 3XX, tel. 020-7837 1450, fax 0870-052 5899, email info@carf.demon.co.uk

●**Mike Phipps writes:** On 23rd June the Home Office ordered the immediate deportation of all remaining Kosovars who came here as refugees during the 1999 bombing campaign. This is despite mass unemployment in Kosova and appeals to European governments from the authorities there to delay repatriation as the province cannot cope: in the last year the population of the capital Pristina has doubled. Half of the original 4,000 refugees who came to Britain have already returned. Most of the rest have applied for exceptional leave to remain.

NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION

STOP RACIST KILLINGS: FULL RIGHTS FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS

Saturday 14th October, 1pm, Embankment, London

Called by the National Civil Rights Movement.

For more information contact:
NCRM, 14 Featherstone Road, Southall, Middlesex UB2 5AA,
tel. 020-8843 2333, fax 020-8813 9734,

Stop the deportations!

Lee Montgomerie reports from Leeds: **Primrose High School, in a central area of Leeds enriched by successive waves of immigration, was ideal for the children of the first Kosovars to arrive in the UK in April 1999 after Tony Blair's emotional scenes in Macedonia.**

Droves of local people greeted the plane and schoolchildren organised language-free activities like basketball games for the new students. The ethnic Albanian children, routinely denied education back home, exhibited a thirst for learning which delighted teachers. They had a positive effect on the school, although many of them were still traumatised by their experiences.

A year later, the original intake had outlived their leave to remain and their political glamour. They wanted to go home but their villages were still ruined, mined and beset by ethnic violence. Their teachers petitioned Jack Straw, lobbied Hilary Benn MP and wrote to the Refugee Council begging for their stay to be extended, but received no response.

Most of the refugees are now gone, ahead of schedule, preferring to leave in summer with their fares paid and four cubic metres of luggage than to chance leaving in winter with nothing.

The Refugee Council's Rosecourt hostel, into which the Kosovars were decanted prior to deportation, is being investigated for everything from financial corruption to breaches of fire regulations. Official letters were repeatedly held up until it was too late to act.

The people who had welcomed the Kosovars were refused permission to see them off and are left with a rankling sense of injustice. Primrose Hill staff no longer trust the Home Office, the Refugee Council or MPs and are working to ensure that the next batch of Kosovars, due to leave in October, do not leave before they are ready.

Don't run with the mob

Any self-respecting liberal can criticise vigilante violence and the *News of the World*. Liz Davies, Hackney North & Stoke Newington CLP, introduces a socialist perspective.

The victims of the vigilantes have been arbitrarily selected from information in the *News of the World* which has not always been accurate. Some victims have not been named in the *News of the World*. Others merely share the same name as someone on the paper's hit-list. But even where the mob's target has a conviction for a registered sexual offence, that does not necessarily mean that person is a "paedophile" in the sense that he (or, more unusually, she) has sexually abused a child. Registered sexual offenders can include a gay adult man who had consensual sex with another gay man who was under 21; or a straight young man of 16, who had consensual sex with his 15-year old girlfriend.

The stereotype of paedophiles exploited by the *News of the World* bears little relation to the reality of child sex abuse. Their coverage conjures up a picture of dirty old men hanging around school playgrounds: the reality is that most abuse of children takes place within the family. Many of those who abuse children have been abused themselves as children, which the News of the World cannot acknowledge – breaking a cycle of abuse by intervention into families is far more challenging than calls for someone to be locked up and the key thrown away.

The *News of the World*'s campaign for "Sarah's law" – for the names of registered sexual offenders to be public – is based on an assumption for which there is no evidence. Nobody knows who killed Sarah Payne. Nobody therefore knows whether the murderer has convictions for registered sexual offences or not. If he (or she) has no convictions, how would "Sarah's law" have prevented her terrible murder?

I was struck, reading the liberal newspaper commentators on the Portsmouth mobs, at the level of class hatred they revealed. It was as if the incitement of violence and hatred were not the vigilantes' only crime. They were also guilty of being working-class, of having tattoos, of dressing in lycra. One commentator wrote, with an air of surprise, about a woman's "immaculately clean" house.

The liberal media has also ducked any serious attempt to consider responsibility. Whilst everybody joins in attacking the *News of the World*, there has been no criticism of the local Labour MP who has been supporting the vigilantes. Neither the Tories' call for automatic life sentences for child abusers nor the Government's response (that the Tories are contributing seriously to the debate) has been challenged. Nor has any commentator examined the willingness of both major political parties to whip up fear by creating scapegoats. The Tories and the Government have fallen over each other in the last few months to scapegoat asylum seekers. Before that lone parents were denounced as irresponsible. Teenage burglars are fair game for farmers. All football supporters are routinely tarred with the brush of hooliganism, regardless of the extent of criminal behaviour amongst the supporters.

'In the midst of hysteria over crimes that shock us all, we need to hang on to two truths: that children should be listened to, and that the rule of law must prevail'

Unlike asylum seekers and lone parents, of course, registered sexual offenders have committed crimes (although not all of those crimes involve victims) and some of those crimes are amongst the most horrific in our society. But we need more than a culture of scapegoating to stamp out this crime.

Adults exercise physical power over children, along with social and emotional power. Like domestic violence or rape, assaults on children result not just in physical scars, but also in deep emotional lifelong traumas. As with domestic violence or rape, society has only recently accepted that these crimes do take place, and that they are acts of violence. As with victims of domestic violence or rape, for years children have kept quiet about the crimes perpetrated on them for fear that they will not be believed and in the absence of any public confirmation that what had been done to them was wrong. And as with victims of domestic violence or rape, children internalise the crime and feel ashamed, blaming themselves rather than their abuser. As a society, however, our shock and our sense of horror at child abuse is much greater than it is at domestic violence or rape. The disparity between the adult perpetrator and the child is so much more stark even than that between a rapist and his adult victim.

In the last twenty years, Western society has started to take first physical and then sexual abuse of children seriously. But in our attempts to understand and prevent acts of violence against children, we have too often been caught up in emotion. In 1987, the pendulum swung the other way as parents in Cleveland were considered the victims of doctors too eager to diagnose abuse of children. Nowadays, the authorities are criticised for not announcing the names of sexual offenders publicly.

In the midst of hysteria over crimes that shock us all, we need to hang on to two truths: that children should be listened to, and that the rule of law must prevail. The emotion surrounding the truly dreadful murder of Sarah Payne impedes us from coming to a real understanding of child abuse, and impedes us from taking positive steps to prevent it.

World March of Women

Leonora Lloyd reports: women from all over the world will be marching to the meeting of the World Bank and the IMF on 15th October (*LLB*, July). The purpose is to bring to the attention of the powerful the fact that most women are powerless: 70% of the 4 billion who live in relative poverty and the 1.3 billion who live in absolute poverty are women. The idea of holding a world march came after the Bread and Roses march against poverty in Quebec in 1995.

As part of the build-up for this event, women in Europe will be marching to the European Parliament in Brussels on 14th October. There will be six feeder marches – British women will be leaving Ostend on 11th October to join one of these. All women are welcome. Organisations are urged to publicise the events, particularly those in Europe, among their members, and to help to fund the participants.

Those going on the feeder march from Ostend need to register – contact Ruth on 020-8291 2873 or Ann Marie on 020-7639 5302, from whom leaflets can also be obtained.

In Britain, it is also hoped to have a torchlight vigil in London on the night of 17th October. That is when the climax of this one-off world march takes place, with the presentation of demands to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on United Nations Day for the Elimination of Poverty.

Millions of signatures are being collected to protest against the many ways in which women suffer from violence: domestic and sexual violence; rape in war and in marriage; sexual harassment and racist violence; female genital mutilation; and many other forms.

●For further information, see the web site at www.ffq.ca/marche2000.



Photo: Paul Mattsson

The United Against Prejudice demonstration in celebration of Pride, Leicester, 29th July. For more news about Leicester, including fascist activity against lesbian and gay rights, see page 20.

Equality fight goes on

Baroness Young's massed ranks of gay-hating bigots finally scuppered the Government's plan to repeal Section 28 in England and Wales on 24th July. The result was a surprise to no one. There is anger in the lesbian and gay community at the inept tactics of the Government (beginning the measure on the enemy's ground in the Lords) and at the vain effort to appease the reactionaries with new sex education guidelines (a hotch-potch of sensible things alongside promotion of marriage), and there is concern that the campaign run by Stonewall retreated into "tolerance" rather than equality, and did not establish any accountable or democratic framework to involve other community organisations. The pressing need now is to ensure that Labour makes a manifesto pledge to have another go at the earliest opportunity, basing the case on the simple argument for equality.

●The Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights (LCLGR) is running an email petition on this (lclgr@yahoo.co.uk) and Labour MPs can be pressed to campaign for inclusion of repeal in the manifesto.

In Scotland, Section 2A (the equivalent of Section 28) has been repealed, with the Labour and trade union movement once again at the forefront of the campaign for civil and human rights. The media ensured that a broad range of issues was put before the public, which both gained supporters for the cause and alerted our enemies to some of our priorities.

The campaign has awakened civic and "liberal" Scotland to the level of fundamentalism that lies under the surface in our nation. We need to keep a watch on the fundamentalists' activities and make sure that their campaigns to modify our society from its current secular nature to a more theocratic state are well publicised. This can be achieved by fostering and continuing the many new links forged between MSPs, newly politicised community activists and trade unionists.

●Ministers are ever-so-slowly giving ground on their resistance to introducing lesbian and gay anti-discrimination law. In a debate at the National Policy Forum, union delegates managed to persuade a reluctant Margaret Hodge to concede that statutory protection was needed, although without any time frame. The campaign led by the TUC has had a big impact in recent weeks and will be sustained at Party conference with the LCLGR fringe meeting (Monday 25th September, 6pm at the Brighthelm Centre). TUC postcards for sending to MPs are available free by contacting ppurton@tuc.org.uk, tel 020 7467 1271.

●Reporting by Peter Purton, LCLGR, and Jim Mearns, Co-Convenor, UNISON Scotland's Lesbian & Gay Committee.

A football fan's lament

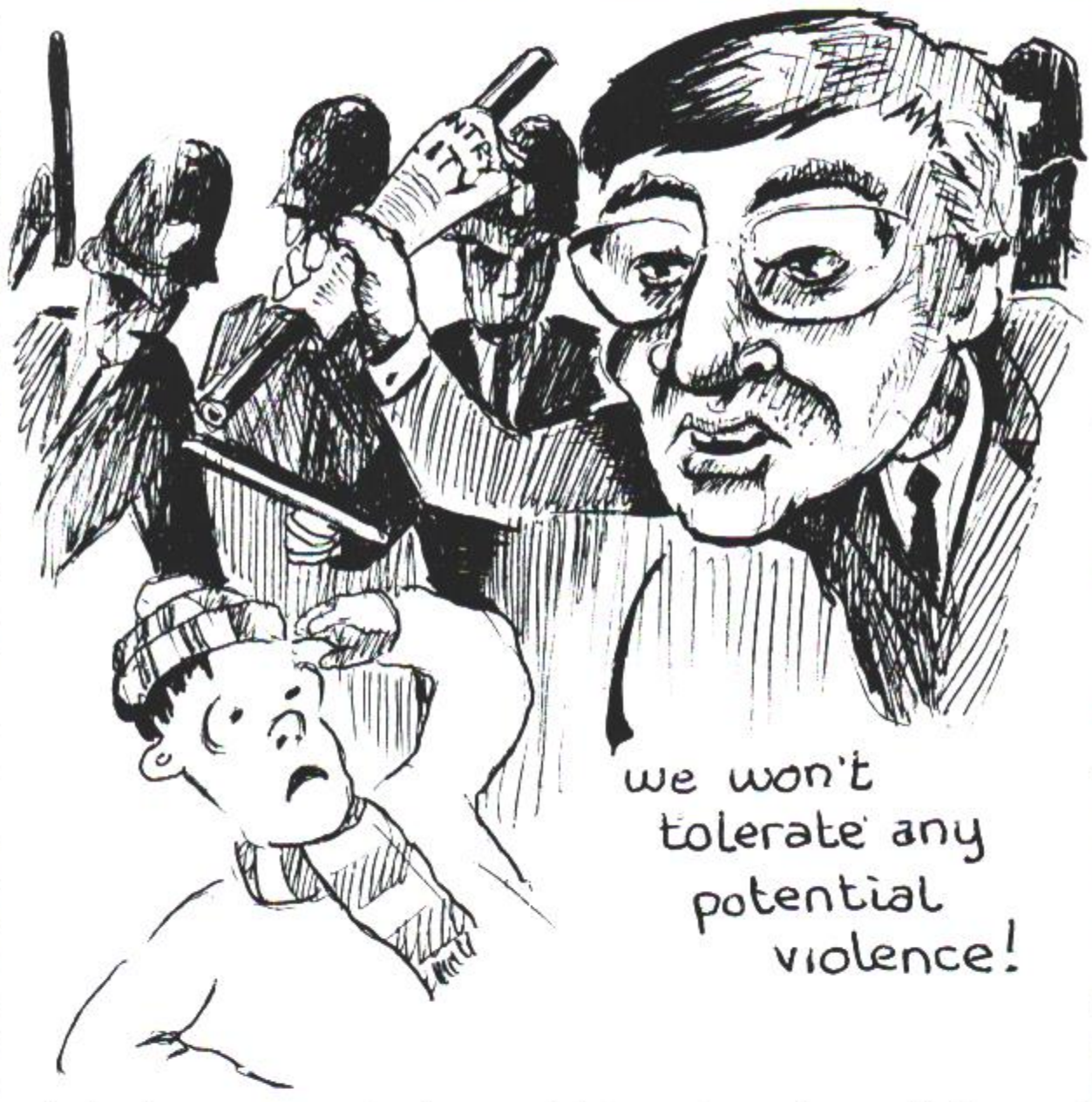
Coventry City fan Joe Rukin says this really is the last Straw.

We've all got potential. According to Jack Straw mine must be hooliganism. I have no convictions – but that doesn't matter. I've been arrested at a match, so I must be a bad 'un. As a Coventry City fan I should have known to be more careful at Villa Park, but I made the mistake of not falling, but stumbling over the kerb outside the turnstiles. Coppers steamed over. "You're pissed, mate." And that was it: nicked.

Despite his insistence, they refused to arrest my dad. We'd both had two pints and he'd been taking heart tablet chasers. But it seems his potential must have been lacking. And before you ask, yes, it was the St Valentine's Day massacre. After years of "You will never beat the Villa" jibes, my only response was that the day we won at Vermin Park, I would be there. I was – in the communal dungeon under the Witton Lane Stand.

In my naivety I asked what test would be carried out to prove I was drunk. None whatsoever. Just my word against a copper who was still outside the ground at 2.55pm. Under Blairlore, that would have cost £100, still with no requirement on police to adequately test – just to act as judge, jury and cashier. Is that the sort of power people who have been shown to be institutionally bigoted will use wisely? You can challenge it afterwards – your word against theirs, with no legal aid. I don't think so.

"Summary justice" Blair called it on *Question Time*. Isn't that how you describe lynch mobs? So convinced were the police of my guilt, I was released without charge, but having a football related arrest must now put me high on the potential hooligan hit list, mustn't it? After all, if you are going to restrict the rights of innocent people, you must have some criteria. How else do you pick out an unconvicted person whom police think might possibly have the potential to become a hooligan? Because that's what we're talking about: the police removing passports of unconvicted people purely on suspicion.



The spin is that Charleroi showed that these measures are needed. The lack of coverage of rioting by Belgians, Dutch, Germans, Italians and over 2,000 Turks may have made you believe Charleroi was the only act of violence in Euro 2000. The shame around the "English Disease", despite a comparative absence of trouble in Euro '96, meant the football hooliganism bill could be made part of the furniture quicker than MFI – exactly the same way scattergun measures came in for Euro 2000. In Charleroi, when there was trouble outside a bar, police had the power to arrest everyone inside. A Swiss and American were arrested for the offensive crime of speaking English. There were 800 English arrests: not one of them with a record! Did they arrest a lot of innocent people? No: quite simply, they were arrested, they were English, so they were guilty.

Why does the Government persist in criminalising innocent people? The Football Hooliganism Bill is the ultimately unthinkable precedent: an end to innocent until proven guilty. What is the next step? The Terrorism Bill reclassifies "ecowarriors" as "terrorists". Add summary justice, no trial by jury, no legal aid, and no freedom of protest. Does that not sound just a little like a police state: a police state with the trustworthy British police?

Despite the lull of the last 20 years, football violence is coming back, just as clubs are cutting the "costly" police presence at games. But, if you haven't noticed, there is a powder keg of social unrest under this country. No matter how much we don't want it, football is one place it will show up. It's not a football problem, it's a society problem.

The problem is society has had the piss taken out of it for far too long. Authorities showing that the contempt is mutual only lights the touch paper. If government insults people's intelligence and treats them like animals, you cannot blame people for having no respect for government and starting to behave more like animals. If Blair had actually been to St James Park, he'd know how the terraces chant to greet incompetent authority: "you don't know what you're doing."

Ken must give a signal



Photo: Molly Cooper

CATP lead the way: protest outside Prescott's office, 21st July 2000.

Dave Welsh, a former London Transport employee and editor of *Tubewatch* magazine, looks at the issues facing the new London government.

The future of London's Underground is the biggest transport problem for Mayor Livingstone and the Assembly. The Government's planned Public Private Partnership (PPP) must be stopped if there is to be a coherent public transport strategy for London over the next ten years – the time needed to rebuild the system after the forcible removal of London Transport from the GLC by Thatcher in 1984. Ten years is also the time it will take to build the proposed Cross-Rail, East London to Croydon and Hackney-Wimbledon lines, outlined by Livingstone as the first major steps in his transport strategy.

Livingstone must give a clear signal to the broad coalition who voted for him. They can be mobilised by calling mass demonstrations against PPP as a springboard for a major campaign. This must include industrial action on the Underground to defend jobs and services from the "scum" eager to take over the Tube. A starting point will be the RMT-sponsored demonstration and lobby of the GLA on 21st October.

While not an easy task, it can be done. In March 1984, all London Transport workers struck for one day to defend GLC control when it was estimated that 12,000 jobs were under threat. Livingstone gave unequivocal support to workers on the eve of the Tory government's LRT bill becoming law, saying, "If you do fight you will have the unqualified backing of the GLC and we will put its resources at your disposal."

All major strikes on the Underground over the last 20 years have, in effect, been political strikes. The 1982 week-long Tube strike involving ASLEF and RMT members was ignited by cuts in services, following the battle between the GLC and the Tory government over fares and subsidies (the Fares Fair policy). The 14 one-day Tube strikes which rocked London in 1989 resulted from LRT's refusal to deliver on OPO (one person operated) rates of pay for Tube train operators: guards were removed from trains to save money and London Underground's "Action Stations" strategy began to remove staff from stations.

Underground workers have a long history of taking action to defend jobs. The vital link between workers and passengers can be provided by the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation (CATP), which brought the transport issue to the fore when it contested eleven seats in the May GLA elections, winning 18,000 votes. Mass leafleting of stations should be a regular feature of the campaign.

During the last 14 years of London Regional Transport, thousands of jobs have disappeared or been restructured and tubeworkers have high expectations about the future under Livingstone. To meet these expectations, Livingstone and the GLA must listen to the workforce, involving it in planning and running the transport system. The first trade union representative on London Transport's governing body, TGWU member John Cliff, who was appointed to the London Passenger Transport Board in 1933, resigned because Herbert Morrison opposed trade union or local authority representation. The second wave of union representation occurred in the 1980s, when the GLC found that the Chair of London Transport, Keith Bright, was in cahoots with Thatcher. The GLC had partial success in countering Bright's policies before it lost control in 1984. Livingstone's appointment of three trade unionists – Jimmy Knapp (RMT), Ollie Jackson (TGWU) and Tony West (ASLEF) – to the Transport for London Board is a useful step in involving the workforce's representatives.

Livingstone must expose what's been happening since 1986. What real progress has been made in safety since the King's Cross fire? Where is the information that London Underground has collected in its surveys of the day-to-day running of the system for at least a decade? How many people have died or been injured since one-person operation was introduced in June 1984? What consequences for passengers and local communities followed de-staffing of stations in the 1990s? Why has London Underground failed to deal with overcrowding and escalator failure, with at least one in six of its 301 escalators out of action? These are some of the issues the Assembly will need to tackle.

In 1984 the GLC's Jobs for A Change newspaper gave a worst-case scenario for the Underground, suggesting parts of the system would be taken over by various banking consortia during the Thatcher years. It clearly did not consider the possibility that this could happen under a Labour Government in 2001. What price Cassandra?

London Region RMT
Lobby the GLA
Central Hall, Westminster
Saturday 21st October

Safety first: take Railtrack back

Mick Rix
General Secretary
ASLEF

Since Thatcher's government introduced the very concept into our political life, there has been no more devastating indictment of privatisation and its consequences than the proceedings of the inquiry into last year's Ladbroke Grove rail disaster, in which two ASLEF members and 29 members of the travelling public died.

Lord Cullen, who is conducting the inquiry, will not make his conclusions as to the specific causes known for some time. But the evidence he has heard has made it crystal clear where the roots of the problem lie – in a fragmented, profit-driven railway, which measures every safety measure against money-making criteria. The inquiry heard of warnings about the track and signalling outside Paddington not acted on by Railtrack – and of train safety systems not installed because they would eat too deeply into shareholders' profits.

Of course, efforts have been made in relation to the Ladbroke Grove disaster – as they were after the Southall crash in 1997 – to pin the whole problem on "human error" by the driver. ASLEF is not alone in rejecting this cynical argument. The relatives of the bereaved and the injured have made it clear that it is those responsible for the running of the railway who need to be called to account.

The Tory privatisation of the railway network could have been designed for a disaster. By splitting up the various functions previously integrated under British Rail (many of which have now been subcontracted still further) and then making all of them run on a profit-seeking basis, it was inevitable that safe operating procedures were going to be relegated in the order of priorities.

The scandal is made still worse by the fact that all the players responsible for Ladbroke Grove, and the general state of the railways, are in receipt of massive taxpayers' subsidies. We're paying the money, but still not getting the safe and efficient railway system we have a right to expect in return.

The key question now is – what is the Government going to do about it? John Prescott recently announced a major increase in funding for the railways over the next ten years. I fully welcome this overdue move. But the money on its own is not enough, particularly as much of it may leak away into shareholders' pockets unless there are stringent controls. A new way of managing the railways is also urgently needed.

ASLEF's view is clear: we want a publicly-owned, publicly-accountable railway. We are not calling for a return to the old British Rail – it will always be associated with decline, and neither passengers nor employees remember it with much fondness. But we do believe that everything, from the industry's deteriorating safety culture, to its numerous "fat cat" enrichment scandals, proves that privatisation does not work. Britain needs a railway in which the passenger, the taxpayer and the employee all have a voice, and in which a democratic government, rather than the market, sets priorities and plans expansion.

The Strategic Rail Authority is supposed to be fulfilling that role. But I remain sceptical about a body staffed by many of the very civil servants who implemented rail privatisation in the first place, and it has shown a marked reluctance to meet and discuss with railway trade unions.

In the end, it must come down to government. I am frankly amazed that Labour should even be considering extending the privatisation experiment to the London Underground. Hopefully, ministers will listen to the voice of Londoners clearly expressed in the mayoral election and will drop the whole idea.

The most straightforward and popular move Labour could make would be to take Railtrack back into public ownership. It could start a revival of the railways, and would also be the simplest way to make train safety the top priority once more. Let no-one say it can't be afforded – with the public subsidies pouring into the industry it could be paid for several times over. And it would be a hit with the voters – Railtrack is a deeply unpopular company.

A second improvement would be to set a definite and unambiguous timetable for the full introduction of Automatic Train Protection (ATP) throughout the network. It is by far the safest train protection system available, yet still the public are being fobbed off with cheaper, second-rate alternatives. Again, when one sees the money being made out of the railways today, cost should not be an issue.

I hope the Government has the courage to take these initiatives, either immediately or straight after the next election. The alternative? Like I said, just read the transcripts of Lord Cullen's inquiry.

Geoff Martin calls for "safety first" at CATP's rally, 21st July 2000. Geoff is standing for chair of the London Party – see page 15.

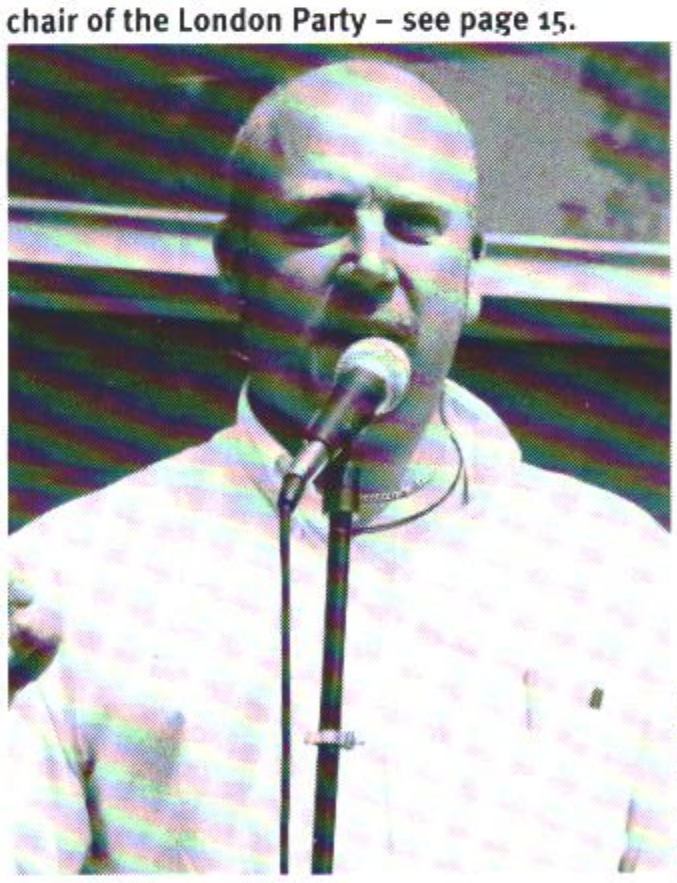


Photo: Molly Cooper

Rethink the link?

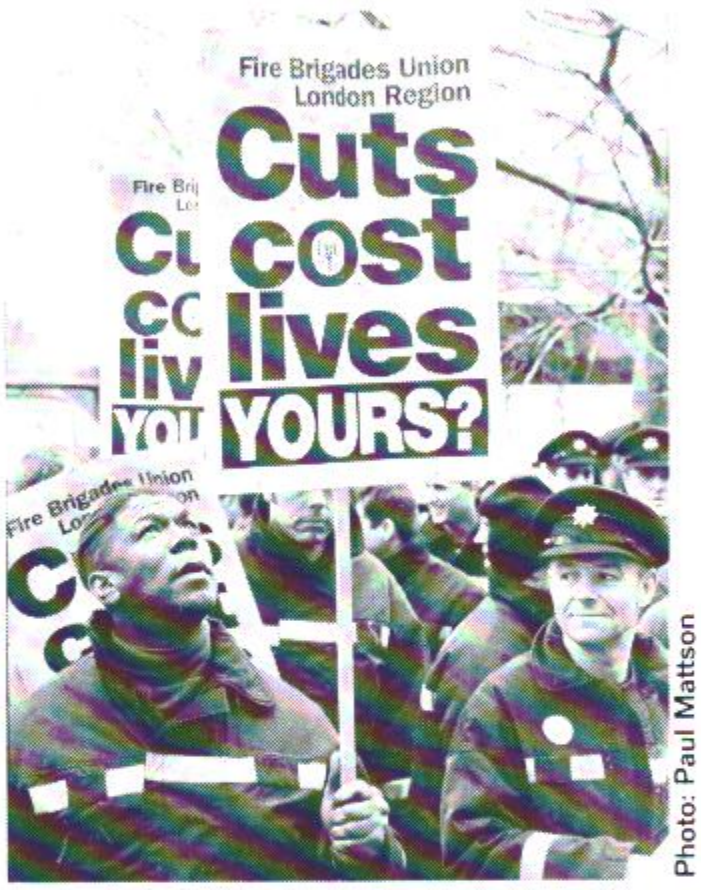


Photo: Paul Mattson

FBU members lobby for jobs and services at LFCDA HQ, before last year's budget.

Elaine Jones (co-ordinator of Reclaim our Rights!) asked Andy Gilchrist, new General Secretary of the Fire Brigades Union, if New Labour wants the trade unions to remain affiliated to the Labour Party.

When Labour was elected with a majority of 170, many of us thought they could do what they like now, as Thatcher did in 1979. They could rip up Tory legislation and put in positive rights for workers. Instead, we get legislation that does nothing to redress the balance. They have said that the provisions in the Employment Relations Act are the only pro-union legislation we are going to get. Labour's law is on the side of the employer, the police and courts.

Tony Blair boasts that these laws leave Britain with the most anti-trade union legislation in Europe: that's nothing to be proud of! That comment was directed at the owners of conglomerates, multinationals and big business. It's bizarre that they think they've got to appease these people with such a large parliamentary majority, but that's what New Labour is doing. It cuts across all their talk of partnership and equality. This isn't social justice. The Government should bring in positive legislation on workers' rights.

Some trade union leaders use the current legislation as an excuse not to do their job. The Essex fire-fighters didn't let the law stop them. In the third strike in 1997-98 they were told they'd be sacked if they didn't return to work on a certain day. The response, right across the country, was that we would walk out if they were sacked. People were prepared to do it. In that situation we can only have one response – back those workers. The right to strike should be a basic human right here, as in the rest of Europe. Legally, the Essex fire-fighters could have been sacked – the law would have been on the employer's side.

We also need the right to take secondary action. It is ridiculous that a London fire-fighter can't legally take solidarity action alongside an Essex fire-fighter to give them support, and the right to picket effectively also needs to be restored. All the anti-trade union laws need repealing. If there is a proper ballot conducted without duress then there should be no right to challenge that strike or get court injunctions. The wishes of its members, not the courts, should determine a union's actions.

In past disputes in London and on Merseyside, fire authorities have spent public money on a campaign to defeat the workers, who were overwhelmingly supported by the public. We'd be in trouble if we misused our money like that. Labour should bring in a law that would stop behaviour like that from employers.

Labour needs to listen to the demands of its supporters, or the debate that the FBU raised at Labour Party Conference in 1998 will re-emerge: at a *Tribune* fringe meeting we called for a comradely and constructive debate looking at the links between the trade unions and the Labour Party. If Labour get re-elected and continues in the current way then there will be a significant call for that debate to happen.

The FBU is still affiliated to the Labour Party despite the difficulty in explaining why we should give the money of, for example, Essex fire-fighters to Labour councillors and MPs who attack us. Though we haven't called for disaffiliation, those of us who worked hard to get Labour elected now wonder whether we actually did win the General Election.

New Labour has made it clear that when there is conflict between workers and employers they are on the side of the employers. You would think from their behaviour that they want the unions out of the Labour Party.

If Labour gets back in with a smaller majority, they may argue that they will have to be careful when introducing new legislation – that they would like to do more but can't. However, we should remember that they have done very little when they have had a huge majority, when they could have done what they liked. We need to demand that Labour repeals the anti-trade union laws and acts in the interests of those who support them, as a popular measure to help win the next General Election. If they don't, the debate about the links between the trade unions and the Labour Party will resurrect itself.

●Reclaim our rights! United campaign to repeal the anti-trade union laws (Chair: Bob Crow; Secretary: John Hendy QC) is supported by 12 national trade unions and over 350 regions, branches and trades councils. Contact them at
PO Box 17556, London EC2Y 8PA
tel. 020-7638 7521
fax 020-7638 7507
email: johnhendyqc@gn.apc.org
website: www.ucratul.labournet.org.

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tel. 0208-985 6597; email briefing@gn.apc.org

MSF members demand the truth

Hugh MacGrillen, former MSF London Regional Council Secretary, reports on the summer's news.

MSF has been convulsed by revelations about the high-spending habits of its General Secretary Roger Lyons. As anger spreads among ordinary members and activists, Lyons is hanging on to his job by a thread. The right-wing's control of the union, including the plan to merge with the AEEU, is threatened by the scandal.

The affair began early in 1999 when the union's number two bureaucrat, John Chowcat, alleged a whole series of financial irregularities by Lyons. These included large-scale fraud involving another official and abuse of expenses claims and credit card facilities. By dint of huge efforts, and with no little help from the union's bankers and accountants and the Certification Officer, the MSF leadership kept the details of the allegations secret. At that time, only two or three people knew what they were. Everyone else, including 95% of the NEC, was kept in the dark. Lyons was exonerated. Chowcat was suspended, then sacked, and when he appealed, given a large payment, at least £250,000, to take himself away. The terms of his severance agreement were also kept secret.

For a time it looked as though the leadership had got away with it. But they did not reckon with the determination of a former employee in the finance department, Marcia Solomon. She had supplied Chowcat with the information on which his allegations were based. She was then off work ill for quite a period and when she returned late last year, was promptly sacked in retribution for her whistle-blowing. She made an application for unfair dismissal to an Employment Tribunal, claiming a breach of the new public interest disclosure legislation. She was backed all the way by the GMB, which organises MSF staff.

By this time details of Lyons' spending habits were beginning to appear in the press, especially the *Guardian*. The disclosures escalated during the Tribunal hearing in July 2000. While the allegation of large scale fraud was unprovable, it was established that Lyons was spending £15,000-£20,000 per year in expenses and on his credit card, on top of his salary of £96,000 per year. While some of this expenditure was justifiable, much of it was questionable and some of it unacceptable by any standard. Lyons had a particular penchant for expensive restaurants, often spending more of MSF's money in an evening than the average family's weekly food bill. Nor was it just evidence of Lyons's extravagance that emerged; much was disclosed about the shambolic nature of MSF's financial records and the unsavoury bullying of staff that goes on at Head Office.

'three-quarters of a million has been paid out to try to prevent MSF members from finding out how their General Secretary spends their money'

MSF settled with Marcia Solomon at a cost of about £200,000 when it became clear they were going to lose the case. It recently cost about £200,000 to buy the silence of another ex-employee who had made other allegations. With the Chowcat payment and the estimated £100,000 spent on the original investigation, three-quarters of a million has been paid out to try to prevent MSF members from finding out how their General Secretary spends their money. That is the real scandal.

All the detailed information was spread around the union by e-mail as well as appearing in the press. The effect was electric. Letters of protest from group and branch officers have poured into Head Office and more than half the regional councils have demanded Lyons resign or at least face a new, independent investigation. There is no doubt that the membership in the workplace is demanding action.

So far Lyons and his clique have held out. Lyons issued a statement in early August that he would not resign. He also received a vote of confidence from a special NEC meeting of 26-1. But the NEC was obliged to give the go-ahead for a new investigation that will have some elements of independence. There will be another press barrage in late August with new revelations. A further damaging tribunal case is in the pipeline. It is likely that prominent labour movement figures will distance themselves from Lyons – *Tribune* has already called for his resignation – and membership activity will increase rather than decline.

The MSF right is frightened that the affair will affect their plan to merge with the AEEU. A special Conference has been called for 11th November to try to get approval for a membership ballot on the merger. This was always a high-risk strategy by the right-wing. If there are demands for the Lyons' situation to be discussed at that Conference, and there will be such demands, their prospects of success will diminish even more. The only way to end the furore quickly would be to dump Lyons now and they appear to have decided not to do that.

However, the longer it runs, the more information on goings-on at the top and mismanagement will become public. All of this presents the left in the union with its best opportunity for a decade.

TRADE UNION NOTEBOOK

●As we go to press, eleven GMB members on strike at Foframe of Huntingdon since 3rd May are facing the sack. A simple pay claim of 4% on a basic hourly rate of £4.29 (against an industry average of £7.59) has led to the longest running strike in Britain. Send messages of support and donations to Huntingdon Strike Fund, GMB, Ground Floor, 396/398 Dunstable Road, Luton LU4 8JT.

●Bus travel in the north has been disrupted. Nearly 2,000 drivers at First Bus garages in Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham and Wigan and 800 drivers working for Arriva in the North-east are striking over a pay claim, while 650 drivers for Ribble Bus in Lancashire are also in dispute over pay.

●A threatened strike by NATFHE members at Woolwich and Greenwich college forced management to withdraw plans to replace 600 part-time lecturers with agency staff from Education Lecturing Services and come up with a new package which retains direct employment for the part-timers, who make up 85% of lecturing staff at the college. Meanwhile, fellow NATFHE members at Sheffield College are facing management plans for 186 redundancies by 9th October. The redundancies, 11% of the workforce, are proposed to remedy the college's financial crisis which the NATFHE branch describes as "a result of poor strategic management over several years". The branch sees the current attack as part of a wider move against lecturing staff terms and conditions nationally, which is often hidden away in a "restructuring" exercise: their ballot for industrial action closes on 1st September. The branch has 600 members, and will need financial support if action goes ahead. For further information or to send messages of support and/or donations, contact Jon Cowley, NATFHE, Sheffield College, Castle Centre, Granville Road, Sheffield S2 2RL, tel. 0114-260 2691, www.sheffcol.natfhe.org.

●UNISON members at Ealing Council in west London have brought their own rolling programme of strikes into line with action in Scotland (see above). The next action on 29th August will close six day care centres and strikes in other social services establishments are to follow. UNISON members meet again in September and are likely to agree to ballot manual and school staff to join the action. The action is against the New Labour Council which has attempted to introduce new contracts which adversely affect pay, grading and working time structures. Strikers are in particular need of donations: contact Ealing UNISON, 4 Longfield Avenue, Ealing, London W5 2UQ.

●Hackney Council has joined in the New Labour assault on local government workers by privatising refuse collection. Contractors Serviceteam want 46 staff redundancies. 300 refuse collectors and street cleaners were balloted by UNISON, the TGWU and the GMB and 94% voted for action. Two day strikes were to be held on 24/25th August and 30th/31st August to augment the overtime ban already in operation. An all-out strike will start from 4th September, leaving 190,000 residents without refuse collection if the redundancy threats are not withdrawn.

●Scotland is about to see the biggest dispute in local government for years, after UNISON, the TGWU and the GMB rejected a 2.5% pay offer on behalf of 250,000 staff – lower than that offered to similar workers in England and Wales. The three unions proceeded to ballot, with UNISON having already returned a vote of 56% *in favour of a one day strike on* 29th August to be followed by a two day and then a three day strike. Joe Di Paola, UNISON's Scottish Organiser for local government, said "this ballot was caused by the intransigence of the Scottish employers. Despite knowing they could afford to pay a proper rise to their staff, they have attempted to blackmail them into accepting a further lowering of their pay compared with their equivalents in the private sector, and to workers elsewhere in the public sector". Watch out for the results of the TGWU and GMB ballots, due as we go to press.

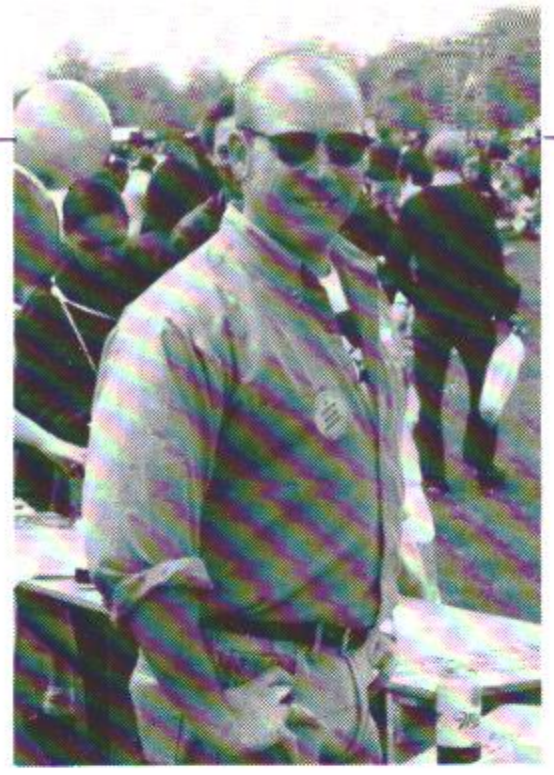
●At the Dudley Group of Hospitals, UNISON members are taking strike action against the threat to 550 staff whose jobs are to be transferred to Summit Healthcare as part of an £80 million PFI scheme. Two days of strike action in early August, involving over 400 members in well organised and successful picketing action (and not involving any of the ten scabs!), were followed by a four day strike starting on 15th August. The action has been absolutely solid and they are receiving considerable support from the public and other UNISON members. A local demonstration was supported by nearby UNISON *branches, local workplaces* and at least one local Labour Party. There have been rumours that an increasingly harassed looking Chief Executive has been seeking an urgent meeting with health ministers. For speakers, messages of support and donations, contact: Union Offices, Wordsley Hospital, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY8 5QX, tel/fax 01384-244 350. (See page 4 for Eddie Tucker's report on the Government's new Ten Year Plan for the NHS.)

●London Region UNISON is supporting an Employment Tribunal claim against Camden Council, which has just dismissed Sacha Maharaj on trumped up charges of theft. Sacha has worked for Camden for 17 years and happens also to be UNISON Equal Opportunities Officer and Convenor of the Black Workers' Group and steward. The allegations, which remain uninvestigated, led to Sacha being dismissed by a manager who had been accused of condoning racist behaviour in an incident which led to the Council making a considerable payment to one of its employees, whom Sacha had represented.

East Midlands UNISON joined the march to save Rover earlier this year. Now Dudley hospitals (see report) are receiving support from local car workers.



Photo: Dave Statham



THE GEOFF MARTIN COLUMN

●On 31st July Bromley Council suspended UNISON branch secretary Glenn Kelly for writing to tenants in sheltered accommodation for the elderly in support of their right to keep current Night Waking staff and for agreeing to visit a number of tenants (at their request) in their own flats – which the Council does not even own. Both tenants and staff in sheltered housing are appalled that management want to delete the Night Waking staff, leaving tenants to rely on the rapid response alarm service – in effect, deleting 24 hour cover. Many tenants chose sheltered accommodation because of the cover it offered, and there are countless examples of the Night Waking system saving hours of individual suffering and even lives. Management have told them they can no longer afford this "privilege" service.

The UNISON campaign to keep the Night Waking service has embarrassed the Council, which is trying to ban tenants and relatives from having any contact with Glenn. There are signs the Council may be adopting alternative tactics to implement their cuts, by piloting the new scheme in some areas rather than adopting it wholesale from the start. A decision is due at a Council meeting on 11th September.

Over the years, Glenn has fought tirelessly for the members in Bromley, including the Higher Education members at Ravensbourne College and against privatisation of services. He has already been victimised twice for his work in protecting jobs and services. This time he has been told that he can have no contact with any Council employee, client or relative, even if it is in his own time and not on Council premises.

●Bromley Branch is asking people to fax Bromley's Director of Social Services and or Chair of Social Services Committee on 0208 290 0608 expressing their outrage at this suspension, with copies to Kathy Smith, Bromley Branch Chair, on kathmick.smith@cwctv.net.

●The London Labour Party biennial meeting has now been set for 11th November and, in order to avoid any further confusion and misunderstanding, I am can confirm that I am definitely running for Chair.

I've heard that rumours have been spread by some of the Millbankers suggesting that I wouldn't be able to secure the UNISON nomination. In fact, the UNISON London Political Committee met at the end of July and voted unanimously to put me forward for Chair and Loraine Monk for Vice Chair.

Now that all of that is cleared out of the way we can get on with the real business of mapping out a way forward for the London Labour Party. The name of the organisation has been dragged through the mud over the past two years, and our core supporters and activists have been driven back to the telly and the sofa by the Millbank interference over the Mayor and the GLA.

At the biennial meeting in November we've got the chance to draw a line under the damaging shenanigans which have dominated London Labour politics since we last met in 1998. My candidacy offers an opportunity to make that clear break and send out a signal to the tens of thousands of people that we desperately need back on board that it's safe to come home.

What we're looking at here is a campaign for the trade union and the Party rank and file to reclaim the London Labour Party. But of course that campaign cannot be divorced from an urgent need to fill the policy vacuum which has succeeded in disengaging core voters across whole swathes of the capital (and beyond).

The widespread opposition to the Public Private Partnership on the Tube, which extends across the broad church of the London labour movement, must be taken seriously by the Government and it's the job of the London Party to ensure that the message is received loud and clear before we do ourselves any more damage. For too long the deep felt views of Labour in London have been ignored and corrupted – now is the time to call a halt and start moving forward.

It's no secret that I want to see Ken back in the Party, partly because it would right a wrong, but also because I want to see a Labour London Mayor whose first line of accountability is to the London labour movement. There are massive issues that the Party need to be working with Ken on, not least the threat to manufacturing jobs, the future of London's public services and the attempts to redefine deprivation calculations which would drain essential funding away from the capital. My election as Chair would reinforce the opportunities for co-operation with the Mayor's office.

I'm really up for this job and I'll make no bones about it: as well as jacking up enthusiasm for a campaigning London Labour Party which can beat the Tories back to where they belong, I will also have no hesitation in blowing aside efforts to siphon off core Labour votes to the minor protest parties.

This year's London Labour Conference is probably the last chance we'll get for many years to reclaim the Party in the capital. I know that some *LLB* readers will say that it just ain't worth the effort. I think that they're wrong and I'm going to prove it.

●I've spent the best part of the last month working on an extension to the house to clear a bit of space for the new arrival whose current ETA is the middle of October. I've been trying to do as much of the work as possible myself which has left me knackered out. I think I could do with a year back on the tools just to get fit again and the way that London Health Emergency's funding is looking at the moment I may have no choice in the matter! Anyway, the current odds are on the baby pitching up early with Helen going into Labour half way through the *LLB* fringe meeting at Conference a hot favourite. Otherwise, just look out for a major Chelsea fixture anywhere around that time.

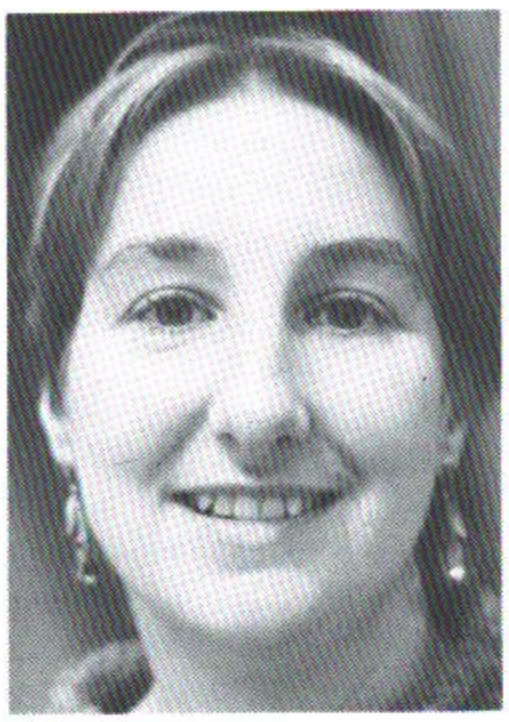
Oh Jimmy, Jimmy! Jimmy, Jimmy, Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink!

Millbank spinning slowly, slowly

Labour Party NEC member Liz Davies reports on July's meeting.

In the face of consistent opposition to its dictatorial style, Millbank has decided that the best way of further restricting Party democracy – and thus the expression of that opposition – is to move forward slowly.

Advance papers for July's National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting included proposals to restrict Westminster selections to members of a pre-vetted panel and to hold the current annual NEC elections every other year. By the time of the meeting, wiser counsel had prevailed behind the scenes and at least some lessons had been learned from the Rhodri Morgan and Livingstone affairs. The tabled paper adopted the longstanding Grassroots Alliance proposal that all future electoral college selections would require trade unions to ballot their members and apportion their votes. Curtailing NEC elections was deferred for a year, and will go out to consultation (although Margaret McDonagh let slip the political motivation behind the proposal when she criticised the NEC constituency section for being "radical and volatile"). Millbank backed down completely on a definitive Westminster panel (panels for local government and European selections will continue). One member, one vote will be used in European selections, not just to select the candidates but also to determine ranking on the list.


Liz Davies

The report on the *21st century party* consultation, introduced as the words of Party members rather than of Millbank, consisted of selected quotes from the responses (the responses as a whole were not made available). The report stopped short of recommending the immediate abolition of general committees – indicating that the majority of responses had been opposed to abolition – and the report proposes yet a further period of consultation and pilot projects to take place after the General Election. Millbank is not deterred: decision-making at general committees is to be abolished by stealth.

The Prime Minister's report revealed the General Election strategy. We were told of the importance of winning not just a second term but also a third one. There was a nod towards the disillusion of the Party members, but the problem was seen – as usual – as a failure to communicate the Government's message to them, rather than genuine disillusion with New Labour in office. With a straight face, Blair told us that the Government was "the most successful centre-left government in a hundred years". Clement Attlee's portrait didn't blink an eye.

Questions to the Prime Minister included Dennis Skinner arguing for the front-loading of public spending, not just in key seats but also in the heartlands. Mark Seddon asked the Prime Minister to condemn the *News of the World* campaign and vigilante movements (which he agreed to do). I pressed the case for the cancellation of Third World debt and both Diana Jeuda and I argued for repeal of Section 28 before the general election. The Prime Minister (supported by Michael Cashman) made it clear that the repeal of section 28 would be removed from the Local Government Bill, for fear of jeopardising the Bill, and would not be pressed on immediate plans to reintroduce repeal.

●See LCLGR on Section 28: page 8.

Promises,

Ann Black rolls her sleeves up for a year on the NEC.

I'd like to thank everyone for their support in the National Executive Committee (NEC) elections and to pay tribute to Liz, Mark, Cathy and Pete for keeping us informed through the last two years. Christine and I will carry on their work, and as Millbank will not be allowed to shred Mark's election address in future, we expect him back soon.

With an election looming it must be pledge-card time, so here are five commitments for my first year on the NEC.

Winning a second term. This is the absolute priority. Influencing a Party without power is pointless, and the Tories can always be worse. Labour's union laws may seem timid half-measures: Hague would repeal them. We must not be deflected by the Party's apparent dislike of its own members. We all know good Labour MPs within canvassing distance who need our help to keep their seats.

Improving accountability. Keeping in touch with 300,000-plus electors is difficult, especially against official pressure for Trappism. Postal reporting is expensive and inefficient, so I will e-mail accounts within two weeks of meetings to everyone who sends an address to ablack@brookes.ac.uk (please pass this on to your branch, constituency and fellow members). We hope to write to any CLP paying a minimum subscription of £5 (payable to CLGA at 157 North Street, Luton, Bedfordshire LU2 7QH).


Ann Black

Increasing participation. Three years of *Partnership in Power* have halved the votes cast in NEC ballots. The first National Policy Forum elections attracted five candidates for every place: this year 13 people will be elected unopposed and vacancies will remain. Forum elections are at Conference, so in the 200 non-

attending constituencies members will have no connection with their "representatives".

There are many reasons for the crash in engagement. Instead of tackling them, Millbank wants to slash members' rights further, with NEC elections every two years, and NPF elections every four years. Next year's NEC campaign will be simple: vote Grassroots Alliance if you ever want to vote again.

Supporting evolution, not revolution. I will only support changes to Party organisation if they will increase membership, motivation and involvement. The world may not care if turnout in NEC elections plummets, but those responsible cannot be allowed to inflict similar damage on Labour's campaigning strength.

Policy-making systems need objective evaluation. Local forums have seen participation decline as initially enthusiastic members now feel that no one listens. Overwhelming support for re-indexing the state pension to earnings is ignored. Many members have asked me to take up policy issues on the NEC, because they find the National Policy Forum inaccessible or unresponsive.



The Policy Commissions remain mysterious. I am told that they rarely meet, that they do not see what constituencies send to them, or that they see it but ignore it. We need basic accountability: dates of meetings, attendance, minutes. Currently they constitute more of a barrier than a bridge between members and the Forum.

Building consensus. I have received a great deal of advice since May, offered in good faith and much appreciated. It seems that Grassroots Alliance arguments – particularly on Party democracy – win private support from many quarters. I hope that where agreement exists it can be acknowledged, not disavowed because of old factional prejudice. After all, we are all on the same side.

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

promises

Always look on the Bright(on) side

NEC member Christine Shawcroft looks forward to Annual Conference. Honestly.

This year's Annual Conference will set the agenda for the forthcoming General Election manifesto. Campaigns on the key issues of concern to Labour's disappointed core supporters – pensions, PFI, public ownership of the railways and privatisation of the Tube – have been building up a head of steam for some time, which boiled over into amendments to the National Policy Forum documents taken at Exeter (see report, page 18).



Christine Shawcroft

Stung by press accusations that last year's Forum was an undemocratic vetting shop designed to sanitise the Conference agenda, various Party spokespersons have been insisting that there must be votes on Policy Forum papers this year to validate the whole policy process. And there will be votes – on such burning topics to Labour heartlands as lowering the voting age to 16 and on looking into the possibility of a fully elected second chamber. Several of these groundbreaking "vote" events will be on whether to call for reviews of things, or looking into the possibility of doing something. As such they could easily have been nodded through by the various Policy Commissions – but there had to be votes at Conference to show we're democratic, so here they are. Yawn, and you'll miss them.

At the May NEC, several members commented on the fact that the lack of index linking of pensions and the derisory 75p rise had cost us hundreds of council seats. Yet amendments to the pensions section of the economic policy document were ruled out of order. We are told that there will be a statement on pensions at Conference. Now it may be that the leadership will take this opportunity to concede the issue of index linking now that the House of Commons Select Committee on Social Security is demanding it. Or it may be more fudge and "we know what's best for pensioners" – in which case, as there will be no opportunities to amend the statement, we shall have to organise to reject it.

Getting the other issues back onto the agenda will be more difficult. There was some confusion last year about whether reference back on PFI paragraphs of the Economic Policy document was out of order solely because it was a first year document. This year it is a final year document, so we may want to try moving reference back of certain paragraphs again. It was also made clear that Policy Forum documents can be amended by contemporary resolutions. The trick, of course, is to make sure that they are accepted by the CAC as contemporary. Various model resolutions are circulating – make sure they refer to something that happened after the NPF, or they'll be ruled out of order on the grounds that they are not contemporary.

It is vital to mandate delegates to support the Grassroots Alliance slate for CAC and regional NPF seats. Last year, rules about not distributing literature in the conference hall were broken. Millbank candidates for positions were taken around the delegates' briefings and called to speak during Conference debates. We need to make sure that delegates are not swayed by this kind of thing and have a clear idea of who they should be voting for, and why.

Grassroots come close

Matthew Willgress, Eastern CLPs youth representative on the National Policy Forum, reports on Exeter's meeting: The National Policy Forum (NPF) met in July to discuss and vote on amendments to policy documents that will now go on to Conference.

After two days of compromise and negotiation, by the final day most of the amendments outstanding were the Grassroots Alliance's, with the RMT/TSSA and GPMU also staying firm on certain issues. Pensions amendments were ruled out of order on the grounds that it was discussed last year – although as a response to the anger of union delegates, we have been promised a debate at Conference.

The amendment opposing the Government's public-private partnership for the London Tube was just three votes short of the 35 needed to go to Conference as a minority position. It would have done so had UNISON and the TGWU not failed to vote for it. However, the pressure of the close vote saw a modification in the wording of the document and the resulting ambiguity leaves room for further campaigning.

The most successful Grassroots Alliance amendments were scrapping Trident (28 votes) and renationalising the railways (29). Gordon Prentice reached a similar total with his amendment calling for an elected second chamber. Seven minority positions will go to Conference but these will be on minimal differences with Government policy, the most "radical" being an enquiry into introducing votes at 16 at some point in the future!

Not all is lost – there is at least some space within this system to make advances. But if we are to have real successes then union members will have to organise to ensure they have delegates who will vote for union policies.

Readmit Ken now!

Bob Pitt, Holborn & St Pancras CLP, reports on the campaign to get Ken Livingstone back into the Labour Party.

A "Re-admit Ken" campaign has been launched with the objective of reversing Ken Livingstone's expulsion from the Labour Party which followed his decision to stand as an independent candidate for London Mayor. The stated aim of the campaign is to heal the divisions in the Labour Party arising from the mayoral fiasco and unify the Party in the run-up to the General Election.

The Re-admit Ken campaign stresses that this is not an issue restricted to London. The exhibition of control freakery over the selection of Labour's mayoral candidate, repeating as it did the contemptuous attitude towards democracy shown during the selection of candidates for the European Parliament, the Scottish Parliament and the election of the Welsh Party leader, has done serious damage to the Party's standing throughout the country. To restore Ken to Party membership would send a clear message to the electorate that these self-defeating methods have been renounced.

Broad support exists within the Party for the campaign's objective, with such varied figures as Diane Abbott, John McDonnell, Glenda Jackson, Austin Mitchell, Mo Mowlam and Lewisham Mayor Dave Sullivan having declared themselves in favour of Ken's readmission.

The model resolution proposed by the Re-admit Ken campaign reads simply: "This CLP/trade union branch, etc., calls for Ken Livingstone to be accepted back into Labour Party membership."

The campaign is asking Labour Party members to do the following.

•Ask your Constituency Labour Party (CLP) to move a contemporary resolution to Labour Party Conference calling for Ken's readmission (the deadline for contemporary resolutions for Labour Party Conference is 15th September).

•In London, ask your CLP to move a resolution to the Greater London Labour Party Conference calling for Ken's readmission (the deadline to submit a resolution to the Greater London Labour Party Conference is 22nd September).

•Send a copy of any resolution your Party or union agrees to the Labour Party National Executive Committee and to the Readmit Ken campaign.

•Write to your Labour Member of Parliament and NEC members asking them to support Ken's readmission. Send copies of your resolutions to *LLB* at PO Box 2378 and we will pass them on to Christine Shawcroft and Ann Black.

•Subscribe to the Readmit Ken campaign newsletter so that you can receive further information. Send a cheque/postal order for £3, made out to "Readmit Ken", to PO Box 20052 London NW2 5ZH. For more information email mail@readmitken.fsnet.co.uk.

New statistics reveal that poverty actually increased in the first three years of the Blair Government and the number of homeless families rose by nearly half. Half a million more people fell below the poverty line, bringing the number of people living in households on less than half the average income to 18% of the population.

Pensioners accounted for 80% of the increase. Meanwhile the incomes of the rich grew three times as fast as those of the poor in the same period.



Photo: Molly Cooper

Protesters at their latest target, Merrill Lynch, whose wholly owned subsidiary, NY Nominees, owns 8.5 million shares in HLS.

Paws for thought?

Molly Cooper reports: **New Labour received a pre-election donation of £1 million from the Political Animal Lobby, which holds pension funds in Phillips and Drew, which in turn had shares in animal-experimenters Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS). Following pressure from animal rights protesters, Phillips and Drew have offloaded their 11% stake in HLS – and their shares have tumbled from 10p to 1p.**

In June, HLS broker WestLB Pamure resigned as shareholders, and the Royal Bank of Scotland refused to renew HLS's £24m overdraft facility. Due to sustained pressure on shareholders from protesters, HLS is now having to refinance a deal with privately owned US investment firm FHP. HLS could sell some of its research centres to FHP and then lease them back on 20-25 year agreements.

Shares in HLS are unchanged at 8.75p and stock continues to decline from a 365p high in the mid 1990s. Animal protesters continue to campaign – New Labour had better not count on financial support from the animal lobby much longer.

Capital decisions

Dorothy Macedo, Finchley and Golders Green CLP, looks forward to a crucial Greater London Labour Party Conference.

The GLLP will hold its first conference since 1998 on 11th November at Stratford Town Hall. It will be the London Labour Party's first chance to discuss the fallout from the GLA election fiasco and our last chance to discuss the forthcoming General Election.

Resolutions are invited on five topics – transport for London; London's environment; regeneration in London; London's community services; social inclusion – plus any contemporary issue. Delegates will be balloted to choose which two contemporary resolutions to take. The deadline for resolutions is 22nd September, so time is short.

The conference will also elect a new GLLP board. The Board is the Local Government Committee for the Greater London Assembly (GLA) Labour Group and as such is the only way the Labour GLA councillors can be accountable to the London Party.

The deadline for nominations and delegates is 20th October. CLPs have two delegates for the first 500 members plus one delegate for each subsequent 500 members or part thereof. Fifty percent of each delegation must be women. If the number of delegates is uneven a rotation system applies: if a CLP sends two men and one woman this time, then they must send two women and one man next time, for example.

It is impossible to over-emphasise the importance of getting good left delegates to this conference: the whole tenor of the Party, in London and beyond, will depend on what happens on 11th November. We have a real opportunity to elect a board and officers to reunite the Party in the wake of the electoral debacle of last May. We also have the chance to pass resolutions that express the demand to readmit Ken Livingstone to the Party and the overwhelming opposition of Party members to the PPP scheme for London Underground.

London Party members must make sure local meetings are held to elect and mandate delegates and send in resolutions before the deadlines.

MODEL RESOLUTIONS

Contemporary issues:

Re-admit Ken

This GLLP meeting calls for Ken Livingstone to be accepted back into Labour Party membership.

London Mayoral Elections

This GLLP meeting notes that in this year's London mayoral election the winning candidate's large majority among London voters reflected the very large majority which he had already won in Labour's own selection procedure among both individual Party members and levy-payers in the affiliated organisations.

The decision not to let him stand as official Labour candidate denied the Labour Party an important electoral victory and gave unwarranted encouragement to our political opponents.

In the interests of Party unity this GLLP meeting now calls on the NEC to change selection procedures to ensure that Labour Party members and affiliates are never again denied the right to determine who Labour's mayoral candidate shall be.

21st century party

This GLLP meeting is concerned that the further *21st century party* consultation may be used as a basis for proposing that constituency General Committees be downgraded or even abolished. This GLLP meeting values the right of GCs to speak for the Labour Party locally and also values the right of affiliated branches to send delegates and resolutions to GCs.

ELECTIONS

The left candidate for chair is Geoff Martin: Geoff is the convenor of London UNISON, director of London Health Emergency and of course an *LLB* columnist. The left candidate for vice-chair is Loraine Monk.

Left candidates for the constituency places are Dorothy Macedo and Robin Laney (North & West London), Ken Bone and Greta Karpin (North & East), Christine Shawcroft and Francis Prideaux (Central) and Paul Tyler and Anna Monks (South & South East).

Another city lost by Labour

Labour control of Leicester City Council was effectively ended in June after 21 years. Colin Hall, Chair Leicester East CLP, analyses the reasons why.

Amid angry cries of "Scabs!" and "Traitors!" from the public gallery, Leicester City Council's meeting of 22nd June marked the end of Labour control of the Authority. Eight Labour members, to the fury of their colleagues and many onlookers, repeatedly voted against their own Group in alliance with the Tories and Liberal Democrats, thus overturning Labour's four seat majority.

Although Labour retains control of all eight seats in the new cabinet, which will take effect from September, all decisions in the council will be subject to an opposition veto, which will be wielded on a regular basis. The authority is now to all intents and purposes under no overall control.

Less than five years ago, Labour's control of the city seemed unassailable. Under open, inclusive leadership, and with 45 of the 56 council seats, the Party had virtually complete control of the local political agenda and used its power to mobilise public opinion against the discredited Tory government of the time.

The election of Peter Soulsby as Leader in December 1995 was the turning point. Key council services fell into neglect, while a vicious and squalid campaign of witch-hunts and personal vendettas was waged against certain council members and officers. This campaign strengthened Soulsby's position in the short-term, but five seats were lost in the 1996 elections, and Labour votes were significantly reduced in many of the seats retained.

Nevertheless, Leicester emerged during the following three years as a beacon Blairite borough. The authority became subservient to every twist and turn that emanated from Millbank and subsequently Whitehall, even when services and community facilities were placed under threat as a result. Any protest from the Party, council staff, or the community was treated with contempt by the council hierarchy.

The council closed six secondary schools last year in a desperate (and unsuccessful) attempt to avoid condemnation by OFSTED, in spite of massive and concerted public opposition in the affected areas – several of which wrought revenge on their Labour councillors at the first opportunity by voting them out of office. Although Soulsby was forced to step down from the Leader's post, the damage had been done.

Soulsby's knighthood in the 1998-99 New Year's honours list reflected the esteem in which he was held by Millbank and Downing Street. Both will have been mortified to see him emerge as the leader of the rebel faction, especially as his period of leadership of the council had been chiefly distinguished by a Ceausescu-like belief in the inviolability of Labour Group decisions.

The catalyst for the recent rebellion was a dispute over whether or not to allocate chairs of scrutiny panels to minority parties. Not least because he has benefitted substantially in both political and financial support (the Leader's post is one of the highest-paid in Britain) from the loyalty of the Labour Group in the past, the reasons for Soulsby's desire to split the Group on an issue of negligible public interest remain unclear. Many observers suspect his latest actions, the latest in a disturbingly long line of acts of destructive self-seeking megalomania, have been inspired by watching *Big Brother*, and are now referring to him as Peter "Nick Bateman" Soulsby.

The leadership of the authority has recently been at the mercy of the increasingly belligerent local media, which have been influential in securing a number of humiliating policy reversals. This has caused a collapse in the morale of local Party members, already uneasy at political and organisational changes being pressed by Millbank. In common with many other areas, branch organisation is at its lowest level in decades and even constituency meetings struggle to attract a quorum. The opposition parties have been unable fully to exploit Labour's present difficulties as they are also experiencing internal problems.

Public disaffection with the authority remains high. Ethnic tensions have also increased, with campaigns against attempts to provide accommodation for asylum seekers and an increase in the level of racist attacks. Ominously, the National Front have been seen on the city's streets for the first time in many years. Ultra-left groups have little success in attracting significant public support.

The events of the past five years have not reflected well on New Labour. The situation may not yet be irretrievable, but the impetus needed to reverse Labour's decline is not yet apparent.

The National Front's finest gather to taunt Leicester's Pride activity – the United Against Prejudice march held on 29th July 2000.
See page 8 for demo picture.

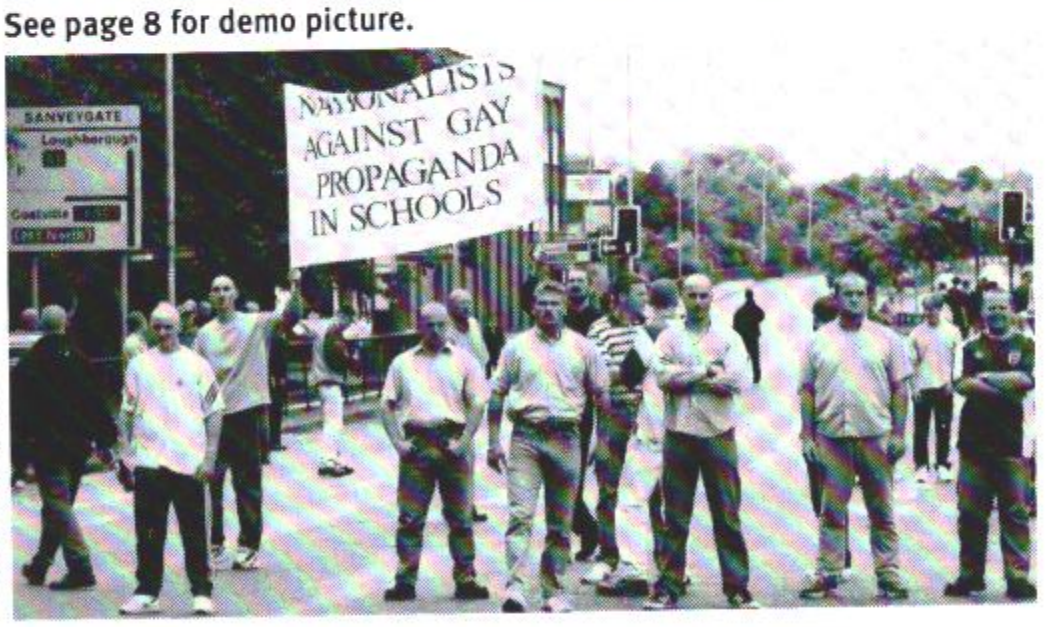
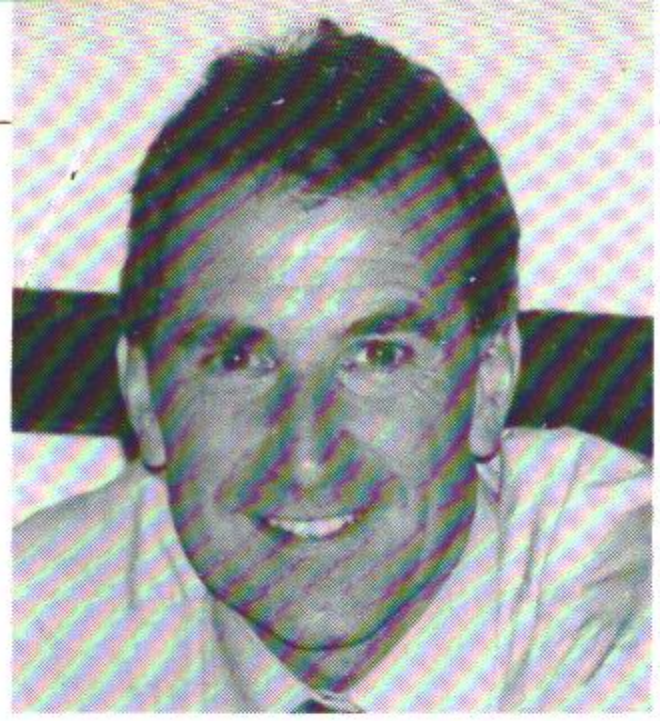


Photo: Paul Mattsson



THE **ALAN SIMPSON** COLUMN

When the smoke finally cleared after the fireworks and celebrations surrounding the Chancellor's Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) announcement, we were bound to get to the more serious questions of what it actually meant. It would be easy to get trapped within the cynicism of observing that, as a proportion of GDP, this only takes Labour back to the figure we inherited when we came into office. This may be a sobering point to return to, but the starting ground for the left should be more upbeat and analytical.

There is no doubt that Gordon Brown used the CSR to put significant extra spending into public services. The 5% increase (above inflation) for education over the next three years is not to be sniffed at; nor is the doubling of investment in public transport to over £6 billion a year. And the real-terms increase in NHS spending of over 6% widens the gap between how Labour will pay for health care and how the Tories would. These increases bring Labour back to the starting line of income redistribution but not anywhere close to the finishing tape. The extra commitments in public spending and public investment are still part of the repair work after the Tory "wasteland" years and ought to be set (and celebrated) in that context.

In many ways the politics behind the CSR is as important as the cash. There was not even a mention of "New Labour" in the statement. The "project" has been knocked sideways in the catalogue of disasters from the Welsh and European elections to London's Mayor and council elections across the country. In Philip Gould-speak, New Labour has become an unsaleable commodity. Middle England does not trust it and heartland Labour loathes it. Despite unassailable leads in opinion polling it has become as hard to get Labour voters to vote for New Labour as it has been to get Party members to work for it. So New Labour has been consigned to a quiet and ignominious death.

Gordon had to produce a "spend the tax" statement. Was this a payback to the middle of Middle England or a "come back" to the heart of the heartlands? Who knows? The only clear message was that panic was beginning to run through the ranks and the CSR had at least to be dressed up as a return to more recognisable and traditional Labour programmes. But the problems Labour is going to run into will come from the contradictions in the Chancellor's package rather than the spin which surrounded it.

Meeting NHS targets will be as constrained by our continuing attachment to PFI schemes as by the salami-slicing legacy of Tory cuts in spending and training. It isn't just that PFI schemes will cost us more. By design, they also require bed reductions just to make them look presentable in current cost terms. In education, the extra £40,000 going to individual primary schools and up to £70,000 for secondary schools is a welcome boost, although the insistence on paying schools direct and bypassing LEAs is worrying and there will still be a crisis in two years' time when schools have to fund the divisive performance related pay scheme. But the real poisoned chalice was reserved for housing.

'Meeting NHS targets will be as constrained by our continuing attachment to PFI schemes as by the salami-slicing legacy of Tory cuts in spending and training'

Local authorities are to be allowed to build social housing for new tenants provided they sell off the old ones. Obligatory stock transfers will go beyond Thatcher's wildest, contempt-driven, dreams for disposing of council housing. Her cunning plan of bribes and compulsory ballots fell apart when tenants voted not to go from the municipal fold. Now tenants will have no choice. They will be sold on as chattels to the designated buyers, in a trade in human cargo not seen since the days of Wilberforce. There are already rumblings of resistance emerging to confront this plan, and every self-respecting local authority will stand well clear of the "who is to blame?" question.

The question itself will raise its head right in the middle of the coming general election campaign. Any increase in a heartlands vote that it provokes will almost certainly be an anti-Labour one. The challenge to the left is to construct a campaign coalition – between tenants, trade unions and local authorities – which argues for a new national housing strategy: the right to build for tomorrow's tenants without having to sell off today's. The Chancellor has more than enough cash in his back pocket to do this.

And, talking of cash, the one huge item delayed until the November Budget is pensions. Gordon has kept enough cash to one side to meet a huge boost to the state pension, enough even to meet Age Concern's demands for a £90 basic. Between now and November we must remind the Chancellor that today's pensioners were the generation who gave us the state pension, who turned their backs on means testing, who opted for universal provision backed by social insurance and progressive taxation. With or without an election, they will not settle for less.

This is the starting line that the CSR has brought us back to. The key question now is, when the starter's gun fires in November, which way will we run?

Stay with "wait and see"

Bernie Moss examines the current Government position on the Single Currency.

Whatever reservations the left may have about this Government's overall European policy, especially with regard to its direction (opening markets and deregulating labour) and its motivation (Thatcherite ideas and electoral opportunism), we should give backing to one key element – its effective wait and see stance on the euro.

That support is needed to combat the propaganda offensive that has been launched on two fronts: in government by Peter Mandelson, Stephen Byers and Robin Cook; and in the unions by Ken Jackson of the AEEU, and John Edmonds of the GMB. Taking advantage of the crisis in manufacturing caused by an overvalued pound, they have urged the Government to begin its pro-euro campaign before the General Election, orchestrating a series of leaks in which Japanese businessmen complain of the overvalued pound and recommend entry to the euro as a possible solution.

The lowering of the exchange rate, an urgent necessity, has nothing to do with the euro, which if it had worked was designed to have a high rate. The enthusiasts do not tell us the rate at which Britain should join. The present rate would decimate British industry, while a lower rate would require a favourable vote from all the other members and would create havoc with the Government's anti-inflationary policy.

The enthusiasts realise that unless they crank up the propaganda machine soon there is no chance of winning a referendum. A poll done in September 1999 by the pro-euro group Britain in Europe – and leaked in the Gould-Greenberg memo – confirms that public opinion is solidly eurosceptic, with only 23% strongly supporting entry and a large majority firmly opposed. What perturbs the enthusiasts further is to find that opinion is divided on Europe, with a majority favouring more independence for Britain.

'The enthusiasts realise that unless they crank up the propaganda machine soon there is no chance of winning a referendum'

EU leaders cannot risk admitting a member with such an anti-European majority. The only way Blair can see winning a referendum is by sabre rattling (he mentions possible action in Africa in another leaked memo) and if the euro and his European policy are a stunning success.

Neither of the last two conditions is remotely likely. The EU gives every sign of losing its way in political and social paralysis, satisfying nobody's desires. Blair has been disappointed to discover that however much spin he gives to summit communiqués, he is able to make little headway in deregulating intractable welfare states on the continent.

The best performing country in Europe – in football as in nearly everything else – is France, which is the most regulated country and has the most socialist government in Europe. The euro-enthusiasts in the British labour movement, who sold their souls to Jacques Delors, have found his promises of an EU social dimension unfulfilled. There have been no major social initiatives since his departure, which is not surprising given that the aim of the single market and currency is to put downward pressure on wages, living conditions, taxes and social expenditures.

The weakness of the euro, which has lost one quarter of its initial value vis-a-vis the dollar, is not only a token of the perceived strength of the American economy (a share market illusion) but of the constitutional incapacity of a stateless currency, controlled by an unaccountable central bank, to regulate fifteen different economies and restore confidence. One cannot have a single currency without a corresponding state authority, which is one reason why EuroKeynesians in France and elsewhere have suggested setting up an economic government and why German foreign minister Joschka Fischer and French president Jacques Chirac have proposed a new federalist constitution for the "pioneering" states. The proposals mark a break from the traditional Monnet method of European construction by small economic steps and stealth.

The proposals have caused new divisions, confusion and muddle in Europe, which can only strengthen the argument in Britain against entry. The proposals were opposed not only by Britain and the other non-pioneering states, but by the French government itself, which is anxious to put together a minimal series of institutional reforms in preparation for enlargement at the Nice summit in December. The question of admitting the much poorer states of the East to membership is likely to open up an even bigger can of worms.

Blair's euro policy rests on his interpretation of economic convergence and job performance criteria that strictly speaking can never be met. The criteria give him maximum flexibility in deciding whether to propose a referendum after the next election. Unless there is a miraculous transformation in EU countries and British public opinion, he will have to disappoint his friends and stay out of the euro. Given the euroenthusiasm that reigns among some sections of the Government, party and unions, this wait and see policy is the best the left can hope for.

●Bernie is author of *The Single European Currency in National Perspective* (Macmillan), and the forthcoming *Re-thinking Monetarism in the European Union: Economics, Ideas, Politics* (Macmillan).

Catastrophe beckons

Brian Burkitt, Senior Lecturer in Economics, University of Bradford and Pudsey CLP, warns against New Labour attempts to adopt the euro.

Why was Gordon Brown prepared to incur the wrath of Labour supporters by not giving pensioners more than 75p a week increase this year? And why is he proposing to spend most of the proceeds from his £22 million mobile phone licence windfall on reducing the national debt? The explanation in both cases is simple: Brown and the rest of the Government are well aware that, without restrictions on welfare payments and controls on the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement, Britain would stand precious little chance of being allowed to enter the European Single Currency, even if public opinion backed this move.

Is New Labour justified in turning these criteria into articles of faith? For the left ever to support economic and monetary union (EMU), three important conditions would need to be met. First, it would have to be confident that a uniform EU-wide policy possesses a better chance of delivering full employment and greater prosperity than one in which the UK Government adjusts monetary policy to suit its own economy's needs. If it were the case that national economic sovereignty is an anachronism in an era of global markets and that only large trading blocs can survive, an argument for entering the euro (albeit not a left-wing one) exists.

However, the experience during the past decade suggests otherwise. During its 1990 to 1992 membership of the exchange rate mechanism (ERM), British unemployment doubled to three million when its economic policy was dictated by the need to keep the value of sterling within a 6% band against the deutschmark. Yet, after 16th September 1992, when the Tory government was forced to leave the ERM in an act of fatal humiliation, UK interest rates were cut from 10% to 6% within four months, whilst the pound fell in value by 15%. The result was an economic recovery that made Britain the second best performing economy in the Group of Seven after the USA. The evidence demonstrates that governments surrender economic autonomy at their peril. Moreover, countries with strong trading links do not require a single currency to sustain them –witness the USA and Canada, Australia and New Zealand, Argentina and Brazil.

Second, can a party of the left contemplate accepting a system of economic governance that short-circuits the democratic process? EMU monetary policy is dictated by the European Central Bank, which is unelected, unaccountable and secretive, totally at odds with Labour's history of opposing arbitrary power. By joining the euro, citizens lose the right to manage their economy or to choose their economic priorities. They are forced to accept objectives established by treaties, while political processes are determined by people they do not even elect or call to account. Moreover, the left has traditionally been suspicious of economic structures that provide even greater power and influence for big business, yet the driving force behind EMU is multinational capital, which relishes the prospect of using the Single Currency to unravel European social democracy.

'The fundamental loss of democratic accountability is imposed before any decision is made about membership of the Single Currency'

Furthermore, it is not widely appreciated that, although Britain enjoys an opt-out from the euro itself (stage three of EMU), it is already locked into stages one and two. These compel the UK to devise its economic policy to meet the arbitrary financial objectives established by Article 104c (2) of the Maastricht Treaty. In effect, a government, democratically chosen by the British people, is legally constrained in how it manages the economy in the interest of its citizens. The fundamental loss of democratic accountability is imposed before any decision is made about membership of the Single Currency!

Finally, will the Single Currency insulate the EU against the excesses of US capitalism or will it be the catalyst for the destruction of European social democracy? The former is the great hope of those in the Labour Party who believe that the euro can return the EU to its "golden age" of the social market. However, it was not US free marketers who have undermined EU social democracy, but the bankers and politicians who have spent fifteen years pursuing deflationary policies in pursuit of EMU. The European social welfare model began to unravel when the focus of economic policy changed from being expansionary to being contractionary. From experiencing lower levels of joblessness than the USA since 1995 the EU has become the developed world's industrial blackspot.

Instead of being the model for twenty-first century economics, EMU is based on 1950s Cold War rhetoric, the 1960s passion for "big is beautiful" and 1970s monetarist paranoia about inflation. Europe, to coin a phrase, is not working. EMU will result in workers in depressed areas being faced with the same hard choice as that in the 1930s – take a pay cut or go on the dole. Even the spin-doctors will have trouble selling that. If Britain joined the Single Currency, its freedom for economic policy manoeuvre would be still more tightly constrained. That is clearly a strategic option to avoid.

South America update

●Commenting on the decision of the Chilean courts to remove General Pinochet's immunity from prosecution, author Ariel Dorfman wrote:

But whatever happens to the general's transitory body, there is one lesson we can draw from his defeat, a lesson I hope we (and not just we Chileans) have learned. The past does not, after all, die as easily as some people in power may have reckoned. While there is one person left alive, somewhere in the world, one person alive and brave enough, who will record and revive those who gave their lives fighting for freedom, those victims will not be wiped out.

This is the lesson offered by the punishment of Pinochet: sometimes we have to shout very loud that our injustices do not have to be eternal. Sometimes we have to have the courage to imagine a different future. Sometimes we have to dream the impossible, to ask the impossible. Maybe History is listening to us. Maybe History will respond.

●On 29th June the Government awarded a CMG to Viscount Montgomery of Alamein "for services to UK-Latin American relations". Along with Thatcher and Lamont, Montgomery was a staunch supporter of Chilean dictator Pinochet during his brief detention here. This must be the new "ethical foreign policy" and "people's honours" then.

●On 20th June it was reported that the Government is to contribute £150 million to the "Plan Colombia", the $1 billion US package ostensibly aimed at resourcing the "war on drugs". Much of the funding will go to the Colombian military, believed to have been responsible for many of Colombia's 402 massacres last year and deeply involved in narco-trafficking themselves. Three years ago the Labour Government took the precaution of imposing visa restrictions on potential Colombian asylum seekers.



Photo: Paul Mattsson

Oleg Shein on his tour of Europe: see report opposite.

End of Putin's honeymoon!

Steve Myers of ISWOR asseses Putin's current standing in Russia.

Putin came to power in Russia on a wave of a public longing for someone the very opposite of Yeltsin. Putin was Action Man; defender of Great Russians against the Moscow apartment bombs (certainly carried out under his own order); leader of the Chechen War (which was to be over by the end of the Presidential elections last May); fighter for the Russian Fatherland!

Things are starting to go badly wrong for this would-be Bonapartist. First, fierce opposition by the Zaschita union to the new draconian Labour Code forced Putin to postpone forcing the new laws through the Duma before the summer recess. Second, his attempts to discipline the regions have set the leading oligarchs, the biggest business men, against him, along with their media empires. The Chechen guerillas then gained important victories against Putin's army in Chechnya. Finally, the new Moscow Pushkin underpass bomb went off in early August – and much media speculation and certain regional bosses blamed the Kremlin.

By mid-August when the Kursk submarine with over 100 submariners aboard sank in the Barents Sea, Putin remained in his holiday sunbathing gear on the Black Sea and refused Western help until long after it could have been useful. It is hypocritical of the West to spend so much time blaming Putin for this, when, just two weeks earlier the US had declined help from Russia to provide heavy planes to help put out raging forest fires in several states. The Cold War has not gone away.

It has also become widely known that Putin's "revolution" in Russia has resulted in having the same Cabinet, the same old ministers and their advisors as with Yeltsin. The Russian people, quite rightly, feel conned.

A Sheining example

Korean workers protest

Oleg Shein, the only Marxist member of the Russian Duma, toured Europe this summer. Steve Myers of International Solidarity with Workers in Russia reports.

Oleg Shein is co-Chair of the only real trade union in Russia, Zaschita (or Defence); co-chair of the only genuine workers party, the Movement for a Workers Party; and is the only Marxist Deputy (MP) elected to the Duma (parliament) last December. If in Britain we think we have it bad with only a handful of genuine pro-worker colleagues in parliament, in Russia it is much worse!

Oleg spent July and August on a speaking tour of Europe organised by the London based International Solidarity with Workers in Russia. Oleg spoke to several meetings in London and went on to Liverpool, Glasgow, Hull and Coventry. His tour continued to Paris and Bordeaux in France; Barcelona in Spain; Genoa in Italy; and the three main industrial cities in Finland: Helsinki, Tampere and Turku.

It has taken a decade since the collapse of Stalinism for a new generation of worker-leaders, comrades like Oleg, to take decisive leadership of class struggle away from the former Communist Party (pro-boss) unions and away from the so-called Independent Unions financed by the CIA and AFL-CIO. They have done this in fighting the new draconian anti-union laws that Putin wants to pass in the Duma this autumn – a set of laws far worse than Thatcher implemented in 18 years.

On the tour, Oleg interspersed his speaking meetings with giving interviews to several left-wing newspapers and meeting with various trade union and left leaders across Europe. I know his fondest memories, however, are meeting with Jimmy Nolan and Micky Tighe of the famous Liverpool Dockers. As Oleg is the international representative for the Zaschita union, very positive links are now being set up between the Liverpool and Russian dockers and the new radical International Dockers Council.

Oleg was also impressed with the meeting in Glasgow, organised by the Scottish Socialist Party with ISWoR, which resulted in serious interest in building relations between the SSP and the Movement for a Workers Party.

I was fortunate enough to co-ordinate the tour for ISWoR, and to drive Oleg around Western Europe. The comradeship between Oleg and myself deepened and we became good friends. This was based upon relating to working class needs as a whole, but also on an anti-sectarian relationship to all left organisationss.

My only criticism of this new generation of Russian comrades is that while in words they all agree with constantly challenging racism, nationalism, sexism and sexual oppression, not enough comrades vigilantly act on these questions. But they have chosen to work with us, the comrades who constantly harass them on these questions, and they have embarked upon a learning process. There is no question in my mind, that our Russian comrades are leading the way in Europe, in the building of a new European Workers Party.

Plans are now afoot for ISWoR to organise a Shein tour of Germany next Spring, and for a tour of Canada and the US next Summer.

●Contact International Solidarity with Workers in Russia at Box R, 46 Denmark Hill, London SE5 8RZ, tel. 020-7733 9622, ISWOR@aol.com.

At 4am on 29th June more than 3,000 riot police stormed the Lotte Hotel Seoul to drag out 1,000 striking workers. The Lotte Hotel Workers Union had been on strike since 9th June demanding a 17% wage increase, permanent status, a 40 hour week and an extension of retirement age. The Hotel was the focus of the world's media when it was used as the main press centre for the south-north Korea Summit between President Kim Dae Jung and Chairperson Kim Jong Il.

Police fired tear gas into the rooms where striking workers were sleeping. 70 workers were injured and ten pregnant women workers were brutally dragged out by the riot police. Seven union leaders were formally charged and detained. One of the vice-presidents of the union escaped being captured by police by hiding in an air vent duct for more than nine hours.

Police attacks continued when riot police stormed the National Health Insurance Corporation building where more than 1,600 workers were holding a sit-in strike as part of a collective bargaining campaign. At 3 am on 1st July, more than 3,000 police stormed the building breaking down doors and windows, firing tear gas, to drag away the striking workers. The arrested workers were held in 20 police stations around Seoul, which only hours before were the "home" for striking Lotte workers.

The Korean Congress of Trades Unions organised immediate protest actions and decided to explore the possibility of a boycott of all Lotte services and products in Korea and elsewhere. Japan-based Lotte operates a number of luxury department stores, hotels, and beverage and biscuit manufacturing companies.

"Peace Process" prospects

Noam Chomsky examines the issues at the failed Middle East summit at Camp David.

Any discussion of what is referred to as a "peace process" – whether the one recently seen at Camp David or any other – should keep in mind the operative meaning of the phrase: by definition, the "peace process" is whatever strategy the US government happens to be pursuing. Having grasped that essential principle, one can understand that a peace process can be advanced by Washington's clearly proclaimed efforts to undermine peace. To illustrate, in January 1988 the press reported Secretary of State George Shultz's "peace trip" to Central America under the headline "Latin Peace Trip by Shultz Planned". In fact, the "peace mission" was a last-ditch effort to block peace and mobilise Congress to support the unlawful use of force for which the US had recently been condemned by the World Court.

The record of the "peace process" in the Middle East has been similar, though even more extreme. From 1971 the US has been virtually alone in the international arena in barring a negotiated diplomatic settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict: the "peace process" is the record of these developments. Throughout the several weeks of deliberations, it was regularly reported that the main stumbling block is Jerusalem. But what is Jerusalem?

When Israel conquered the West Bank in June 1967, it annexed Jerusalem – not in a very polite fashion. For example, it was recently revealed in Israel that the destruction of the Arab Mughrabi neighbourhood near the Wailing Wall on 10th June was done with such haste that an unknown number of Palestinians were buried in the ruins left by the bulldozers. Israel quickly tripled the borders of the city. Subsequent development programmes, pursued with little variation by all governments, aimed to extend the borders of "greater Jerusalem" well beyond. Current Israeli maps show the territory to be annexed around the greatly expanded "Jerusalem" extends in all directions.

The intensive construction and settlement projects of the past years have been designed to create facts that would lead to this permanent settlement. That has been the clear commitment of the successive governments since the first Oslo agreement of September 1993. Contrary to much commentary, the official doves (Rabin, Peres, Barak) have been at least as faithfully dedicated to this project as the much-condemned Netanyahu. In February the Israeli press reported that the number of building starts increased by almost one-third from 1998 (Netanyahu) to the current year (Barak). An analysis by Israeli correspondent Nadav Shragai reveals that only a small fraction of the lands assigned to the settlements are actually used for agricultural or other purposes. For Ma'ale Adumim, for example, the lands assigned to it are 16 times the area used, and similar proportions hold elsewhere. Palestinians have brought petitions to the Israeli High Court opposing the expansion of Ma'ale Adumim, but they have been rejected. The projects have been carried out thanks to the benevolence of US taxpayers, by a variety of creative devices to overcome the fact that US aid is officially barred for these purposes.

'Contrary to much commentary, the official doves (Rabin, Peres, Barak) have been at least as faithfully dedicated to this project as the much-condemned Netanyahu'

The intended result is that an eventual Palestinian state would consist of four cantons on the West Bank: Jericho; the southern canton extending as far as Abu Dis (the new Arab "Jerusalem"); a northern canton including the Palestinian cities of Nablus, Jenin, and Tulkarm; and a central canton including Ramallah. The cantons are completely surrounded by territory to be annexed to Israel. The areas of Palestinian population concentration are to be under Palestinian administration, an adaptation of the traditional colonial pattern that is the only sensible outcome as far as Israel and the US are concerned. The plans for the Gaza Strip, a fifth canton, are uncertain: Israel might relinquish it, or might maintain the southern coastal region and another salient virtually dividing the Strip below Gaza City.

These outlines are consistent with the proposals that have been put forth since 1968, when Israel adopted the Allon plan, never presented formally but apparently intended to incorporate about 40% of the West Bank within Israel. Since then specific plans have been proposed by the ultra-right General Sharon, the Labor Party, and others. They are fairly similar in conception and outline. The basic principle is that the useable territory within the West Bank, and crucial resources (primarily water), will remain under Israeli control, but the population will be controlled by a Palestinian client regime, which is expected to be corrupt, barbaric and compliant. The Palestinian-administered cantons can then provide cheap and easily exploitable labour for the Israeli economy.

It is possible to imagine "creative" schemes that would finesse the issues concerning the religious sites and the administration of Palestinian neighbourhoods of Jerusalem. But the more fundamental problems lie elsewhere. It is not at all clear that they can be sensibly resolved within the framework of nation-states that has been imposed throughout much of the world by Western conquest and domination, with murderous consequences within Europe and beyond.



Photo: Ippy D/Peace News

Protestors against sanctions.

Children pay the price

Gabriel Carlyle of Voices in the Wilderness reports on sanctions against Iraq.

On 7th August, protestors marked the tenth anniversary of what one US Congress member has described as "infanticide masquerading as policy" – United Nations economic sanctions on Iraq.

In Britain, over 300 people converged on the Foreign Office, with some 100 staging a "die-in", completely blocking Whitehall for half an hour and shutting down the Foreign Office side for two hours. Sponsors of the event ranged from Alan Simpson MP to the Archbishop of Wales; Green MEP Caroline Lucas was among those risking arrest. The day before, one of the protestors had scaled the London Eye to unfurl a banner. In Washington 104 people were arrested at a protest outside the White House.

Over the last decade of sanctions, child mortality in Iraq has more than doubled. Hundreds of thousands of children have died who would have lived, had sanctions been lifted after the Gulf War which left Iraq in a state of "near apocalyptic destruction" according to a UN mission to the country. The crisis stems from the devastation of Iraq's economy and what the World Food Programme describes as the "massive deterioration in basic infrastructure" since the war, which has hampered provision of clean drinking water and harmed sanitation.

Sanctions ban all imports to Iraq except food, medicines and supplies for "essential civilian needs". All exports are prohibited except for oil sold through the UN oil-for-food programme. Since January 1997, Iraq has been able to purchase a limited amount of humanitarian supplies under this programme. However, the UN allocates 33% of the proceeds of these oil sales to war reparations and, as Human Rights Watch has recently observed, "an emergency commodity assistance programme... no matter how well funded or well run, cannot reverse the devastating consequences of war and then ten years of virtual shut-down of Iraq's economy."

The last two UN aid officials to run the programme in Iraq, Denis Halliday and Hans von Sponeck, both resigned in protest over the sanctions. According to von Sponeck "the way out is to lift the [economic] embargo, and de-link the disarmament discussion from the humanitarian discussion".

The US and British governments have never accepted any responsibility for the suffering in Iraq and have consistently lied about the issues involved. Fortunately a growing number of people in Britain are waking up to the truth and taking action to bring this grotesque policy to an end.

●Contact Voices in the Wilderness, 16b Cherwell Street, Oxford OX4 1BG, tel. 01865-243 232, email voices@viwuk.freeserve.co.uk

Abortion update USA

Leonora Lloyd reports: One of the few things that separate the Democrats and Republicans in America is abortion – one of the most important political issues in that country along with the economy, gun legislation and defence. One of the problems of a possible Republican win is that the make-up of the Supreme Court would change. George Bush has promised that will happen if he becomes President and given the age of some of the current court, this is not an idle threat.

At the moment, the Supreme Court still defends the decision in Roe -v- Wade that gave women the right to choose. Recently, it struck down a ban on "partial-birth abortion" in Nebraska, because it is an unconstitutional violation of Roe -v- Wade.

This method of reducing the number of fetuses which can result from fertility treatment is not only the safest method of abortion but can also be the only way to guarantee that at least some babies are born alive and well. In the UK, a case is being brought on behalf of two children born with disabilities after partial birth abortion was not performed.

Of course, the right to choose is meaningless if it is financially beyond the means of a particular woman. A twelve year old is suing the state of Mississippi because it refused to pay for her abortion after she was raped. In that state, only women whose lives are at risk are allowed free abortions.

The Supreme Court has consistently failed to ensure that all women without the means to pay can obtain abortions and the legislature, dominated by Republicans for many years, has also blocked attempts to improve the situation.

Turkish workers call for solidarity

Recent press reports indicate that the British Government may be set to pull out of the project to build the Ilisu dam on the Tigris River in south east Turkey. This dam would displace 25,000 mainly Kurdish people; destroy Hasankeyf, one of the oldest cities in the world; and could provoke water wars with downstream Syria and Iraq.

Britain's Export Credit Guarantee Department (ECGD) had planned to underwrite the UK construction giant Balfour Beatty's involvement in the dam to the tune of $200 million of taxpayers' money. In July, the International Development Committee in Parliament reported that, "the Ilisu Dam was from the outset conceived and planned in contravention of international standards, and it still does not comply. For that reason ECGD cover should not be given."

As we go to press there has been no formal announcement renouncing support for the dam, and the campaign against it will continue. Contact: Ilisu Dam Campaign: email:ilisu@gn.apc.org

●In Turkey, ten trade unions have recently lost their collective bargaining rights due to the enforcement of restrictive criteria originally imposed after the 1980 military coup d'etat. Some 500,000 workers have been effectively de-unionised as a result. Among those affected is TUMTIS, the Transport and General Workers Confederation. International labour organisations have made formal protests to the Turkish Ministry of Labour, pointing out that Turkey should comply with the standards of Convention 98 of the ILO, to which Turkey is a signatory and which guarantees the right to collective bargaining. TUMTIS has appealed to unions in Britain and internationally to register protests with the Turkish Ministry of Labour. For further information, contact TGWU North East London Textile Workers Branch, e-mail: campaign@daymer.org

●Cemal Cakmak, aged 34, is a political prisoner first arrested in 1992, who now awaits the death penalty after years of grotesque torture which has left him partially paralysed. In the 1999 Ulucanlar Prison massacre Cemal was nailed through the leg, beaten, had his scalp pulled with pliers, and was left for dead. Recovering consciousness, he was then sent through a series of other prisons where he suffered further beatings. He is now going blind. His family have applied on numerous occasions to the Ministry of Justice for their son to be given medical treatment. For further information and to send protests to Turkey, contact the Campaign for Human Rights in Turkey:
email: campaign@daymer.org

●Reports from Day-Mer. See contact details in the reports.

Community unites against racism

As we go to press, the Day-Mer Turkish and Kurdish Community Centre is holding its eleventh annual festival. The event takes place in Hackney against a background of rising anti-asylum seeker propaganda and the virtual collapse of the local textile industry – where many members of the Turkish/Kurdish refugee community have traditionally found work.

Day-Mer, known for its support of workers' struggles in Britain, most famously perhaps that of the Liverpool Dockers, keeps the Festival alive as part of the process of building links between different communities and struggles. The Festival theme this year was "Against Racism and Unemployment."

Events included music and dance in Clissold Park on 19th August; panel discussions on racism and unemployment and on the workers' movement and socialism; and a concert at the Hackney Empire. Festival sponsors included the TGWU, the Refugee Council, *Labour Left Briefing* and the SLP, among others, and organisers hoped to attract more than a thousand people.

For more information about the festival and Day-Mer's other activities, contact Day-Mer on 020-7275-8440; email: info@daymer.org.

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Finkelstein's confusion loses the plot

Sue Lukes reviews *The Holocaust Industry* by Norman G. Finkelstein, published by Verso, price £16.

When a socialist publisher gets extracts from its latest book published in a national daily, provoking debate and controversy, maybe we should be pleased. When the publicity extends to adulatory reviews on Nazi websites worldwide maybe we should worry.

Norman Finkelstein's book, launched during a world gathering of holocaust survivors and their children in London, was marketed as showing how Jewish organisations "ruthlessly extracted" compensation from European governments to "fill their coffers". The author, son of survivors of the holocaust, is an angry man.

Immediately after 1945, the German government paid minimal compensation to some survivors and children of those murdered: Finkelstein's mother received $3,500. Survivors – thousands from the camps, slave labourers, children rescued by Kindertransport, those who escaped, hid or fled – were expected to get on with their lives. Little was known, and less discussed, about the long term effects of witnessing and suffering such appalling abuses. The holocaust was an embarrassment to people and governments that had known what was happening, refused to do anything and closed their doors to refugees.

Recently, that has changed. The UK will have its first holocaust commemoration day on 27th January 2001. Many US states have one already. Museums dedicated to commemoration, education or information have been established worldwide. Why now? Finkelstein's answer concerns the changing relationships of Israel, the US, Zionism and the American Jewish community. By the last, he means essentially the self-proclaimed leadership of this community: rabbis of minority sects, businessmen, right wing politicians, not the hundreds of thousands of secular Jews like himself, who neither elect nor acknowledge these leaders. Finkelstein believes that the holocaust "industry" is essentially a creation of Zionism, a way of bolstering a particular view of Judaism.

This is a very partial truth. Two other factors are as important: the lives of those affected and new ways of understanding identity. Renewed Jewish interest in the holocaust is reflected by a similar interest among Roma (the demand for the Lety death camp to be made a monument, the annual commemorations of Roma dead at Auschwitz), gays and lesbians (the success of the play *Bent*) and disabled people. Most of this is nothing to do with compensation or reparation, but about identity and rescuing memory.

'The holocaust was an embarrassment to people and governments that had known what was happening, refused to do anything and closed their doors to refugees'

Personal factors are also very important. Survivors are ageing and dying; their children have to care for them and deal with the effects of the holocaust. Women, as carers and as those who pass on history to their children, are working out new meanings and relationships as a result, while the "leaders" that Finkelstein quotes are almost exclusively men. His critique of their lack of accountability, representativity and even ethics is sound and echoed by many in the community and is much the same as that made by any community against self-appointed leaderships (do black Britons feel adequately represented by Lord Ali and Paul Boateng?).

The book focuses on "the shakedown": the pursuit of legal claims against governments. It denounces them as "the main fomenter of anti-Semitism in Europe". He details many of the claims, but denounces them all. Sometimes he is right, often not. He regards the Swiss banks as essentially innocent victims of blackmail, yet it is precisely their secrecy that enables dirty money to be hidden and heirs of those killed by the Nazis to be denied access to their money. Finkelstein is outraged that a boycott of these banks was called before a commission had reported. Why? We boycotted South Africa for decades, and that is how we got a Truth Commission. Finkelstein claims, disingenuously, that no-one has received a penny; yet that is because the courts have not yet released the money.

Other claims are for individual property, many of them enabled by the fall of Stalinism. Many survivors couldn't get possessions back, even after new governments had been installed, because of the climate of anti-Semitism. After 1990, those who lost property to the communist governments (because they were expropriated as too rich or right wing) were to be compensated, but Jews who lost to the Nazis and their local supporters were not. These are the claims he alleges foment anti-Semitism, because they may be against poor governments or people. Yet anti-Semitism clearly existed before the claims and in places where no claims are made. It was, for example, provoked by the Eichman trial as well: one survivor recalls the terror when the trial started and a Jewish girl in Argentina was abducted on the way to school, tortured and cut with a swastika. Keeping quiet is not an adequate response.

Anti-Semitism is problematic, however, for Finkelstein. He decries it being described as a "strictly irrational Gentile loathing of Jews" as that precludes "the possibility that animus towards the Jews might be grounded in a real conflict of interest" – a confusion compounded by Finkelstein in debate when he says Palestinians have a "real basis" for anti-Semitism. Anti-Zionism, yes. To confuse this with attacks on Jews simply for being Jews is dangerous, racist and wrong.

South Asia's new militarism

Mike Phipps reviews *New Nukes* by Praful Bidwai and Achin Vanaik, published by Signal books, price £12.99.

Last year's fresh outbreak of hostilities between India and Pakistan over Kashmir had special significance as the only largescale conventional land-air conflict between two nuclear powers. Worse, during five weeks of crisis, Indian and Pakistani leaders exchanged nuclear threats thirteen times. Not since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis has there been such aggressive brinkmanship – yet this seems to be the hallmark of South Asia's nuclearisation.

The new militarism is more alarming when one remembers that only five years ago India pleaded before the World Court that nuclear weapons were illegal and incompatible with international humanitarian law. How times change! The "new nukes" have contributed to a decisive regional escalation of tensions not just between these two rivals but involving China and other powers in the subcontinent.

The authors argue powerfully against the new policy. India spends three times as much on defence as on health, social security and education put together – in a country where 450 million are illiterate and 500 million live in poverty. Eleven billion rupees are being spent on an underground command centre – more than is committed to tackling the drought affecting half of India's states. The environmental consequences of nuclear testing include damaged housing and wells, and dire health costs, with cancers up as much as 300% in test areas.

There is excellent analysis here of the internal and external politics of the region, but the book attempts much more: an attack on the whole philosophy of nuclear deterrence, of practical value to peace campaigners everywhere. Britain is singled out for its lamentable failure to pursue a disarmament agenda internationally – largely thanks to the rise of New Labour and the burial of long-held policies on peace.

For the authors, "nuclear deterrence marks a moral firebreak" and is used to justify any atrocity in the pursuit of war. Achin Vanaik developed this when the authors spoke in London recently, talking of how the discourse of nuclear deterrence distorts language, humanising the inhuman, desensitising people and spreading a moral indifference that makes tolerable the most horrific barbarities – what Primo Levi called the "banality of evil". This needs emphasising, as it is the Marxist left particularly, of all the constituents that make up anti-nuclear campaigns, that have often been the most ethically underdeveloped or ambivalent, many viewing the nuclearisation of the USSR or China with "unruffled complacency".

This powerful book comes with a heartfelt Introduction from Booker Prizewinner Arundhati Roy and can be obtained from Signal Books, Third Floor, 9 Park End Street, Oxford, OX1 1HH, tel 01865 724856.

Mercenaries incorporated

Mike Phipps reviews *Private Warriors* by Ken Silverstein, published by Verso, price £16.

This year, ten years after the Cold War ended, the USA will spend $268 billion on defence – four times more than Russia, eight times more than China. It will build the B2 bomber, designed to penetrate the defences of the Soviet Union, a country that no longer exists, each costing over $2.5 billion. Meanwhile the Pentagon has no room to store its old weapons systems: tanks have been given to allies or dumped in the sea.

US politicians' generosity to the military-industrial complex reciprocates the handsome donations of the main arms manufacturers to candidates for office – $22m in 1998. Pork barrelling too is important: in 1998 Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott added $1.5 billion to the defence budget to pay for an assault ship the Pentagon hadn't even asked for, to be built in Lott's home state. Now a new dimension is emerging: the influence of former generals and ex-government bureaucrats heading private companies that train armies and lobby the US government, with a material interest in war and conflict – private warriors.

These military companies, effectively mercenaries, work closely with the Pentagon, just as the Foreign Office here colluded with Sandline International in Sierra Leone. This is especially true for covert missions like Reagan's illegal "Iran-contra" operation, where profits on arms sales to Iran were laundered to fund anti-government terrorists in revolutionary Nicaragua. One such company, Dyncorp, is reported to be engaged in counter-insurgency against left-wing guerrillas in Colombia, profiting from a huge military aid package from the Clinton Administration.

Alexander Haig, as President Nixon's advisor, was intimately involved in America's plotting against the elected Allende Government in Chile, overthrown by a coup in 1973. As Secretary of State under Reagan, he gained further notoriety when he told a Congressional Committee that four American nuns who were raped and shot in the back of the head in El Salvador "may have tried to run a roadblock." Since leaving government, he has made a fortune as a consultant to those seeking to influence US foreign policy. In 1993 he even worked as an advisor for the unreconstructed Stalinist regime of Turkmenistan. He is more at home, however, opening doors for US business to right-wing authoritarian regimes such as Singapore and Indonesia.

Silverstein's investigative book uncovers many characters, some with extremely shady pasts, who have influenced US defence policy.

Correspondence

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

There was a good attendance at July's Winning for Labour Democratic Socialism Conference. It was good to be in the company of fellow Labour Party and trade union lefts and the conference was an example of how many good socialists remain in the Party.

Generally, we received a "buzz" from interesting platform speakers and discussions in workshops on crucial issues such as Party democracy, fighting racism, and unions and the Labour Party. The last was particularly impressive. Chris Rogers of the Air Traffic Controllers union spoke about the disgraceful U-turn from the previous Party policy of "Our air is not for sale". John McDonnell's speech was also well received – he called for organising broad lefts in the unions and linking that up with the fightback in the Party, including electing delegates who will defend union policy at policy forums and Annual Conference. Speakers from the floor elaborated on this point.

However, there were a couple of ways in which the conference could have been improved. First, I think it could have been bigger if it had been linked up with the re-admit Ken issue and the best things (such as exposing the "worst scum of British capitalism" who want to buy the Tube) being done at the GLA. Second, I felt more concrete proposals and ways of organising the people who were at the conference could have been promoted – to varying degrees people I spoke to were left thinking "what will happen between now and next year's conference?"

Although it was a worthwhile day, I feel next time more could be done to organise the rank and file support for the Campaign Group of MPs and the broader opposition to New Labour that exists amongst Party members.

Matthew Willgress
Peterborough CLP

Despite the changes made in the Labour Party, the unions are still the real power in it. The Party is still the political wing of the labour movement, including the Co-op. The problem is that the unions are using their power in the wrong way. They mostly either support or do not oppose Blair. That has to be changed, as Peter Firmin says (*LLB*, July) by organising in the unions. In doing that, wouldn't it be useful if readers of *LLB* knew who other readers of *LLB* are in their unions so that they could work together?

David Harris
Brighton

PERISCOPE

Credit where credit's due

£5 million of spending cuts by the new Liberal Council in Islington has got the Labour opposition chafing at the bit. "Many of the cuts they claim to have identified were our cuts," protests Labour leader **Mary Creagh**. So that's all right then.

Fabian junkets

The **Young Fabians** have always had an odd relationship with socialism but their current series of Embassy/High Commission receptions is stretching many people's patience. The Danish Embassy in June, fair enough – but why Singapore in July and Ethiopia in future? Perhaps the Burmese Embassy was busy...

Amess; a total mess

Award for the least tactful politician of the last Parliamentary session must go to Southend Tory chicken-runner **David Amess**. He dedicated his recent Warm Homes Bill to the "memory of my former colleague, Michael Colvin and his wife Nichola. They died in dreadful circumstances." They certainly did. They burnt to death in their house: a really warm home.

Pip pip

Perhaps the worst aspect of all the New Labour leaks has been the opportunity for the press to run profiles on **Philip "Pip" Gould**, not so much the Sultan of Spin as the Pillock of the Polls. His leaked memos, which funnily enough always seem to show him in the best light, are matched only by his famous sad comments. The best so far is, "they could drop a fucking nuclear bomb on me and I wouldn't give up working for a modernising, electable Labour Party." Blast!

Party privateers

The close relationship between privatisers and ministers has long been of concern. Perhaps the worst example of New Labour cuddling up to the forces of a quick buck are in the DETR, where junior minister **Bev Hughes** and colleagues "continue to have contact with the New Local Government Network about aspects of our local government modernising agenda" including "addressing conferences organised by them." The NLG Network is, of course, sponsored by notorious privateers like **Serviceteam** and **Onyx**. Meanwhile Ms Hughes' intervention into redrawing ward boundaries for Greenwich's 2002 council elections for has produced a massive cut of 11 councillors.

Steep Hill fine

A New Labour flunky was finally caught out under the Data Protection Act for abusing Labour's membership lists. Not connected with *Progress* magazine this time, it was London Minister **Keith Hill** who lobbied local members to vote the Millbank way in the Party's 1998 NEC elections. It presumably didn't cost Hill a penny at the time as the envelopes arrived franked "AEEU", but it cost him a £200 fine plus £500 costs in court and, to cap it all, Party members elected four members of the Grassroots Alliance to the NEC that year.

Fans' eye view

Footie fans hoping for some support from rich Premiership managers in their battle for cheaper ticket prices need to look further than Aston Villa's **John Gregory**. Asked if real fans are being forced out of the game by rising prices, the people's John replied, "Football used to be available to everyone but maybe admission prices were too cheap." No wonder he manages the 'Villains'.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

"I begin with an apology for arriving late. I was attending the puppy show of the Blankney foxhounds..."
Douglas Hogg MP, opening his speech opposing the Bill to ban fur farming, which he described as an "odious little bill". Parliament, 28th June.

"I disagree with him, although it would be wrong not to say that as he was speaking, the words 'little' and 'odious' were in my mind."
Ian Cawsey MP on Hogg's remarks, Parliament, 28th June.

"Being democratic does not necessarily mean having elections."
Junior Minister Paddy Topping's contribution to the House of Lords debate (and to rewriting the dictionary), Parliament, 19th June.



THE CATHY JAMIESON GUEST COLUMN

Equality was a key principle on which the Scottish Parliament was founded. With the many women elected, hopes were high for real improvements to be made, but a critical look at the issue of gender equality shows that there is still some way to go.

From the beginning, women have been subjected to far closer scrutiny than our male counterparts. Women Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) have found themselves subjected to disgraceful attacks from some male colleagues, with our previous work records and political involvement dismissed as irrelevant.

The three women occupying Cabinet positions in the Scottish Executive have been subjected to continuous criticism of their style and priorities. The Health Minister was attacked for focussing on the need for proper sex education as part of the plan to tackle teenage pregnancies; the Communities Minister was pilloried for the abolition of Clause 28; and the Transport and Environment Minister has been routinely criticised for her approach.

Consistently criticism has focussed not on policy detail, nor on taking the debate forward, but instead on the fact that these are female politicians, with the implication that they are less experienced and competent than their male colleagues.

A Scottish Sunday newspaper supplement has awarded female MSPs marks for their performance, based on their speeches in the Chamber, appearance and presentation – needless to say we await the equivalent analysis of our male colleagues with interest!

The Parliament was hailed as leading the way in "family friendly" practices, but it has not really gone very far down that road. While working hours are indeed much better than in Westminster, with sittings between 9.30 am and 5.30 pm with only occasional extensions, Committee commitments and involvement in cross party groups, plus constituency work, do not fall into place quite so neatly.

The continuing lack of crèche or child care facilities is not just a problem for MSPs and staff in the Parliament, but also for people from community organisations and the voluntary sector coming to give evidence at Committees or participate in Cross Party Groups. When a scheme of allowances was introduced, allowing witnesses giving evidence to Committees to claim expenses, backbenchers had to overturn the recommendation from the all male Corporate Body to ensure that childcare allowances were set at a realistic level.

Working together, female MSPs have had an influence on the way things are done and ensured an emphasis on issues that have been given little time in other settings. The Cross Party Women's Group (CPWG), established in conjunction with the Equal Opportunities Commission, scrutinises all legislative proposals for gender and equality impact and has prioritised a number of issues for action:

- a family-friendly parliament with accessible, affordable childcare;
- effective mainstreaming of sex equality in the major bills on Housing, Transport and Judicial Appointments;
- promoting positive actions to increase the representation of women in public and political life at all levels in Scotland.

The CPWG recently reviewed progress on mainstreaming gender equality into the policy making and legislative processes. It concluded: "much still had to be done to fully integrate gender impact" and that commitment to mainstream equality "had not been a feature of the first year." Notable exceptions were: recognition of same sex couples in the Adults with Incapacities Bill; an amendment to include annual reporting on equal opportunities in the Education Bill; and guidance from the Finance Committee to other committees on assessing equalities issues in all proposals they are considering as part of the Budget Process.

"...women in my constituency are still having difficulty finding well paid work, and temporary contracts and shift patterns which don't fit school hours are common."

What we do in Parliament can help provide a useful mirror to the real world. The women in my constituency are still having difficulty finding well paid work, and temporary contracts and shift patterns which don't fit school hours are common. They face real problems with lack of access to affordable public transport. They worry about the effects of drugs in their local communities. They have concerns about food safety, child protection and housing. They want the chance to take up the increasing number of educational opportunities, but need financial support for this.

Despite forming the backbone of community groups, self help groups and voluntary organisations across Scotland, women continue to be under-represented in appointments to the public bodies that run local and national services.

They have a wealth of experience, knowledge and enthusiasm to make a difference in their local communities, but they don't see "politics" as for them.

The real task for the Scottish Parliament is to address the inequalities that they face and ensure we make a tangible difference to their lives. Only when we have done this will we be able to claim progress.

●Cathy Jamieson is a Member of the Scottish Parliament for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley and is our guest columnist this month.

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