

# Labour & Trade Union Review

November - December

1995

No. 50

Price £1.50 (IR £1.80)

## British Socialism

## Beckett at Health

## Ireland BT & Murdoch Tax

## Arts Obituaries

## Notes on the News Trade Union Diary

## Editorial

## What Has Happened to British Socialism?

Tony Blair has made Labour electable. So did Neil Kinnock before him. John Smith did not make Labour electable. He did not need to, because he had not made it unelectable. Labour as represented by John Smith just was electable in a matter of fact way, as it had been for two generations before Michael Foot became Party leader.

When a particular tendency within a party gains the leadership of the party and makes it unelectable, the most convincing way to restore electability is not by a volte face conducted by the unelectables, but by a resumption of leadership by the tendency ousted by the unelectables.

John Smith was the natural leader of the Labour Party on its return from the wilderness because he had no responsibility for leading it into the wilderness. He did not need to perform any ideological antics to make himself a credible candidate for the Prime Ministership. He was credible by virtue of his integrity as a right-wing socialist over a quarter of a century. He did not need to bend over backwards from a previous position to show how he had changed. He needed only to stand upright and show that he had not changed.

His death was the greatest tragedy that has befallen the Labour Party. It handed the leadership back to the Kinnock tendency, which felt it could only make the Party electable by destroying it.

### Making Labour Unelectable

The Party was made unelectable by Michael Foot and his donkey jacket, by Neil Kinnock, by David Blunkett, by Margaret Oppenheimer-Hodge, by Harriet Harman, by Patricia Hewitt, etc., etc. - and, of course, by Tony Blair when he was a politician on the make, in circumstances where he would not have made much headway if he had not taken up causes which he now reviles.

Labour was considered electable in 1992. It failed by a whisker to get itself elected. That whisker was said to have been John Smith's proposed budget, when every reasonably well-informed person knew it was a credibility problem connected with Neil Kinnock. Kinnock had jettisoned policies, purged party activists, and dragooned the unions into silence.

The Kinnock of the late eighties had punished those who had taken the Kinnock of the late seventies and early eighties too much in earnest. He confronted the electorate with a party which, if not united in support of a programme, was at least intimidated into connivance with a non-programme.



## Editorial from page 1

But the Party's confidential tests of public opinion told it that the impression made by Kinnock himself was a significant electoral disadvantage. And there was nothing that could be done about that, except after the event to blame the defeat on John Smith's budget.

Having lost two General Elections - the first as a mindless left socialist and the second as a nondescript pragmatist of the right - Kinnock resigned the leadership and went in search of a gravy train. John Smith took over. And as he had genuine credentials as a socialist of the centre, he did not need to forge any.

Then John Smith died, having stabilised the Party on the ground of what in Ernest Bevin's time used to be called right-wing social democracy, and given it a healthy lead in the opinion polls.

There have been two elections since Smith died. Labour won the European election handsomely under the leadership of a sensible left-socialist, Margaret Beckett. And it won the local elections by much the same margin under Blair. There is no ground in truth for the view assiduously circulated by Blair's propaganda apparatus that Blair's substantial opinion poll lead is a specific result of Blair's leadership.

In the year and a half since Blair took over the leadership he has turned the Party upside-down and inside-out. This has been seen as proof of great political skill. It is no such thing. What it proves is that the Party, as a result of wild lunges this way and that over a period of fifteen years, has lost its orientation and its ballast.

It might have regained its inertia over a period of years under John Smith's leadership. Smith's centre of political gravity was located within himself and was consolidated by his whole experience of political life. He was not plagued by the radical itch. But Smith died too soon to have infected the Party with good habits.

## The Death of the Socialist Right

So what was the party that Blair took over? It was a conglomeration of abstract radical fragments - of bankrupt

radical fragments - of radical fragments which had lost all conviction in their convictions and yet were committed to the use of radical language as if they still had convictions. And the right was no less radical than the left, because it had previously been the left.

It was not possible for the conservative socialist right to take over as the leading tendency in the Party when the radical left had taken it to the brink of catastrophe, because the conservative socialist right had been driven out of the Party in the early eighties and had formed the SDP.

John Smith did not become Party leader as leader of a right socialist tendency. There was only John Smith. The tendency which might have come to power with him, and quickly given the Party a conservative socialist orientation, had gone elsewhere.

Radical doctrinaires with a weak sense of reality might break up organic structures. They cannot reassemble them into organic life.

Shirley Williams might now say that she approves of what Blair has done with the Labour Party. She was blackguarded in the early eighties by many of those who are now influential in the Blair leadership. What they are doing now is a tacit admission that she was in the right against them then. But she must know in her bones that Blair's party is not a reconstruction of the party in which she once flourished.

The socialist right that in the early eighties was driven out and vilified (in obscene form in Marxism Today, whose editor is now a power behind New Labour) had no Thatcherite features. The radical left which drove them out has become the right of the Party on the basis of a wholesale adaption to Thatcherism. It could not move right on a conservative basis because its campaign against the conservative socialist right had been all too successful.

## What Is "Radicalism"?

Thatcher radicalised Toryism and caused it to cease to be conservative in any meaningful sense. Major would like to be a conservative, but in the culture of Thatcher Toryism that is crying for the moon. Kinnock quite simply did not know what he was doing with his

scorched earth campaign against his own political origins. But Blair and the ex-Communists who conduct affairs for him are hell-bent on re-making the Labour Party as a party of radical Thatcherism.

What is "radicalism", that it should be the buzz-word of New Labour? It is the ideology of the militant middle class in the mid-19th century, in the era of the Reform Act. It is individualistic liberalism as a social doctrine. It is the fidgety outlook of the Benthamite reformers for whom the fact that an institution or a mode of being had existed for some time was a reason for demolishing it.

When Jack Straw, or Tony Blair, or whoever, said that Clause IV had to go because it was sixty years old and that the British Constitution had to go because it was three hundred years old, that was Bentham speaking from his grave - or from his closet in London University - a century and a half after John Stuart Mill, who was bred on Benthamism, said it wouldn't do, and turned towards socialism.

If Clause IV was the work of a couple of middle class intellectuals - that description of it by the Blair/Communist Party radicals was a travesty, but let it pass - the viewpoint from which they repudiated Clause IV was the viewpoint of the prototype middle class capitalist intellectual. For Bentham, as for Margaret Thatcher, society was a mere function of individualism.

The Tory Party reinvigorated itself after its defeat in the Great Reform struggle by setting up in business against the Benthamism of the Reformers and insisting that social institutions were a precondition of tolerable social existence. The view that society was a function of the struggle of each against all was left to the Liberals. (The Liberal Party committed Britain to the Great War to destroy Germany and the Turkish Empire, for which Britain had no legitimate grounds, and it destroyed itself in that bid for world domination.)

In the 1970s, the Tories made Thatcher their leader and discarded the cultural-political heritage of a century and a half. The Labour Party responded to Thatcherism by going wild. And now

the only way its leaders know how to shape it into something presentable is to remake it on Thatcherite principles.

## Blair's "Communists"

The activity of members of the former Communist Party is very much in evidence in the Blair leadership - and not just in excessive organisational manipulation, e.g. the way that the Chair had tabs on all the delegates to this year's Party Conference and ran the speakers like clockwork.

This may seem surprising in that the ideology of Benthamism is the antithesis of the collectivist ideology of the former Communist Party. But they are only antitheses up to a point. CP collectivism was not functional in Britain. And the CP had no more respect for traditional British institutions than Bentham had.

In the attempts to establish a functional socialist incomes policy the considerable influence of the CP was always on the other side. It was in the forefront of the campaign against Barbara Castle's attempt to consolidate the social position of the unions by bringing them within a framework of law designed in their interest. And in the struggle within the Labour movement over the report of the Bullock Commission it was fanatically opposed to the measure of workers' control advocated by Bullock and Jack Jones, which it denounced as "peoples' capitalism". In its campaign against Bullock it was reunited with its old enemy, Frank Chapple, who had taken it to court years earlier for ballot-rigging in the E.T.U. And it was in tune with Kinnock and most of the Tribune left.

Well, "peoples' capitalism" was warded off, and now the whole shebang have adapted to Thatcherite capitalism - to good, liberal, non-"corporatist" capitalism in which the representatives of the workers are not seduced from the strait and narrow path of simple class antagonism by beer and sandwiches at 10 Downing Street.

## Blair's Contempt

Blair was far less implicated in all that nonsense than his present colleagues. He was not subjectively committed to it. He only mimicked it for career purposes at an early stage in his career. When circumstances changed

## Labour & Trade Union Review

Volume One, Number 50 Nov./Dec. 1995

ISSN 0953-3496

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Editorial - British Socialism                  | 1  |
| Trade Union Diary                              | 5  |
| Letters  | 6  |
| Editorial - "Democracy Now"                    | 7  |
| BT & Murdoch by Michael Craig                  | 9  |
| Film - "Land & Freedom"                        | 11 |
| What Demographic Crisis? by G.M. Williams      | 11 |
| Notes on the News                              | 13 |
| Margaret Beckett at Health by Michael Morrison | 15 |
| Labour Party Front Bench                       | 17 |
| Obituary - Harry Clayden by Stan Newens        | 18 |
| Arts review - by Rolf Flegoff                  | 19 |
| Obituary - Gerry Golden by Pat Murphy          | 19 |

Editor Dave Chapel

Editorial and Subscription Address  
No. 2, Newington Green Mansions,  
Green Lanes, London N16 9BT

Subscriptions (individual): UK £11;  
Europe £13; Rest of World £15  
Rate for institutions etc available on application.  
Back issues available at current prices

he discarded it all as easily as a child discards its milk teeth. He is not now trampling on his own beliefs, beliefs which for years he preached to others.

That is what makes him different from his present colleagues, and gives him such an edge over them that he can disregard them in policy-making.

He does not appear to hold his closest parliamentary colleagues in any high esteem, and he treats what remains of the Left with contempt. And that is very sensible of him. Neither side merits any respect - not the left which still parrots the shibboleths which brought the Party to the brink of disintegration, nor the former Left which is trying to learn new shibboleths to parrot while foisting the blame on others for what they themselves did to the Party.

## "Corporatism"

We looked up a file of Tribune for 1978 to assure ourselves that the views of the intellectual leaders of the Left then were as we remember them.

In 1978 Labour was in office, Tribune was vastly more representative of and influential on Labour opinion than it is now, the proposal of the Bullock Commission that the workers should effectively have 50% representation on the board of directors had been rejected as insufficient, and the great object of left socialism was to prevent incomes policy from becoming an accepted part of the national political scene and to return to free determination of incomes by the market.

The Left was victorious, but victory took the form of Thatcherism. Two



articles in Tribune on April 28, 1978, will show why.

And article by "Joe England" on "The road to 'bargained corporatism'" is very much in tune with the Left ideology of the time. It sets out three possible forms of industrial relations: liberalism, voluntary collectivism, and compulsory collectivism.

Compulsory collectivism was "corporatism", a word that was much in use. Corporatism was said to be fascism. And the Left was, of course, against fascism.

The Tribune article says: "Compulsory collectivism is a system in which unions and employers become incorporated into the decision-making machinery of the state, bargaining is replaced by legal regulation, and trade union recruitment is enforced by a legally compulsory closed shop. In this extreme form it has never existed in Britain - but elements appeared during the two world wars and have increasingly done so since the mid sixties... Industrial relations are regulated by law to a far greater extent than ever before; and Parliament is often required to do no more than ratify deals made between the government and corporate interests such as the TUC and the CBI"

### The Bevanite Legacy

This line of criticism follows consistently from the Bevanite orientation which became dominant in the Labour Party in the course of the fifties and remained dominant until well into the Thatcher era - and the changes enacted by Kinnock between the 1987 and 1992 elections and by Blair since the death of John Smith are right-wing variations on the Bevanite view.

During the 2nd World War Bevan was continuously attacking the Party leadership for its conduct of home affairs in the wartime coalition, and accusing it of setting Britain on the road to corporatism and fascism even while it was fighting fascism abroad. Ernie Bevan was particularly singled out for attack.

Bevan was the leader of one of the great corporate interests in Britain - the Transport & General Workers' Union. In 1940 he became a senior Cabinet Minister.

And after he became a Cabinet Minister he became a Member of Parliament. His extensive experience of Britain's public life as the most effective of Labour leaders in the country during the First World War and the twenty year inter-war period, had not led him to conclude that everything worthwhile that was done, was done because Parliament willed it and made arrangements to bring it about. As a trade union leader he was accustomed to making deals between corporate interests in civil society which had implications for the lives of millions of people, and for the structure of society, without asking the leave of Parliament.

And when he entered Parliament as a Cabinet Minister he did not lose his sense of proportion about it. This infuriated Bevan, who had become an extremist Parliamentarian. And the words used in Tribune in 1978 are straight out of Bevan's wartime criticism of Bevin: Parliament was required to do no more than ratify deals made between the Government and corporate interests.

### Leninism & Liberalism

Bevan's criticism of Bevin implied an extreme form of liberalism: society as autonomous individuals in an organic relationship with Parliament as their nucleus, and without the intermediary bodies of civil society functioning between the individual and Parliament.

Leninism was a kind of variation on extreme liberalism because it too saw the individual existing in a direct relationship with the state and did not allow for the functioning of corporate bodies in civil society. While the left liberal socialist did not, of course, formally approve of all that went on in the Leninist world, there was in practice a latent complicity between the two.

They had fought against fascism together. And they agreed that fascism was "corporatism". And during the generation after the war one often came across the notion that Britain was letting itself be drawn into a process of creeping fascism.

(It is interesting to note that the worst "offenders" in the Communist Party were those who made the transition most easily to Thatcherism. Others operated genuinely through the medium of civil society. And we are glad of the

opportunity to publish a tribute to one old Communist, Harry Clayden, former President of the Co-op, who sadly died in September.)

None of this was brought clearly to light and analysed. After all Britain's political culture is "empirical" and doesn't do such things. But these half-thought notions existed on all sides and exerted a powerful influence, like bugs in the bowels. And because of them the "empirical" socialism of Britain made a real mess of itself.

### The Institute for Workers' Control

Ken Coates was a power in the land in those days. He had the resources of the Bertrand Russell Foundation at his disposal. He had made his name synonymous with Workers' Control and was at the centre of the Institute for Workers' Control. And he was one of the main writers for Tribune.

And he exerted all his influence against the workers' control proposals of the Bullock Commission. In the same issue of Tribune cited above he had an article entitled "After Bullock: Jack Jones' vision eclipsed". It was a review of a couple of books, one of which was Conflict or Cooperation by J. Elliot. Coates had this to say:

"In a very real sense this is the story of the blazing forth, and then the eclipse, of Jack Jones' vision of industrial democracy...

"In my opinion, but not in Elliot's, it also shows how he got taken for a ride by a group of political radicals who shared none of his fundamental priorities, and who, in complete distinction from Jack Jones himself, seem to have seen slogans about industrial democracy as a means of stopping any shift of power in the factories, rather than a way of starting it...

"...the Bullock Report exists now mainly for the bibliographies and libraries where it will sit alongside many earlier, now largely ignored, would-be reforming blue-books. Procrastination, dilution and straight-forward funk have comfortably shelved it for the next while, and when we next get industrial democracy back on to a live agenda it will probably be by way of renewed Chartist demonstrations rather than projected

Reform Bills."

The "group of political radicals" mentioned by Coates can only have been us. We were the only socialist group supporting Bullock as a functional measure of workers' control which had the immeasurable advantage over all other schemes that it was the proposal of a Royal Commission.

And because we supported Bullock we were treated with profound hostility by its socialist opponents, who seemed happy enough with their alignment with free-market capitalists. We were described as "corporatists" and suspected of being crypto-fascists. And we had many bitter disputes with Coates over Bullock at meetings of the Institute for Workers' Control.

"Political radicals", i.e. Benthamite capitalists, we were not. We were socialists in the tradition of Ernest Bevin. And we were convinced that the enormous trade union power could not continue to be used negatively and disruptively. Either it would be harnessed to the management of industry (and become part of the structure things like the reforms of the 1945 Government) or it would bring into existence against itself a force capable of subverting it.

(The idea that the working class was being ripened as subjective negativity and at some critical conjuncture would confront "the system" as pure negativity and precipitate a mortal cataclysm out of which would emerge a kind of socialism which was neither corporatist nor totalitarianism, but which for the time being was inconceivable, was widely hinted at twenty years ago. Needless to say, it didn't happen. Mrs. Thatcher happened.)

### We Can't Run Away

Socialism now appears to be dead in the Labour Party in Britain. It was not killed by Tony Blair.

British socialism has found refuge in European capitalism. In the seventies we were one of the very few socialist groups who supported British entry into Europe.

The general opinion was that Europe was a capitalist conspiracy and that membership would be destructive of British socialism. But British socialism was brought to heel by the anti-European element of British

capitalism. And now the stark truth is that the capitalism of European Christian Democracy is more effectively social than British socialism. But while Europe may be a pleasant refuge for British socialists who calculated political affairs very badly a generation ago, we cannot see Europe as the saviour of socialism in Britain.

Serious politics is still the domestic politics within each of the component states of the EU, and will remain so for a considerable time.

If socialism is to become an effective force in British political life once more there must be some understanding of how it was that in the period of the last Labour Government the Left in the moment of its greatest influence, went so badly wrong.

(P.S. It was interesting to see in Tribune, on the eve of Thatcherism, periodical articles, usually by Ken Coates, demanding a reduction of the trade union presence in the Labour Party.)

## Trade Union Diary

by Dave Chapel

### The Ashington Miners' Picnic

No doubt the irony was lost on most of those listening to the main speaker at this year's Miner's Picnic in Ashington, Northumberland. But not on John McCormack, former leader of Wansbeck District Council.

Ashington is at the heart of what was once the thriving Northumberland coalfield. Within the last two centuries the town has grown from a population of forty before there was coal, to become a large mining town, proud of its working-class traditions. The spirit of the place is perhaps exemplified by one of its best known sons - Bobby Charlton.

Each year the Miners' Picnic commences in the morning with a contest between the brass bands of the area. Then together they accompany the citizens in a parade to the Woodburn Colliery, now a museum, where there is a fairground for the children, a beer tent and a marquee where you can hear the speakers.

This year the main speaker was Arthur Scargill. He reported that the NUM was unable to get an agreement with the private owners of Ellington Pit, the last remaining coal mine in the region. He contrasted the weekly wage rates with the much higher rates that the union had recently agreed with a certain Tower Colliery. The differences were striking.

Listening with an ironic smile on his face was John McCormack.

His term as leader of the Council had been during the period when Ellington was being privatised.

At the time he had proposed that the Council should provide help for a co-operative buy-out. But this was opposed by the NUM faction on the hundred per cent Labour Council, and they subsequently deposed him as leader.

Arthur Scargill has always been against workers' control and co-operatives, and the policy of the NUM on these matters reflects his opinions.

The one thing Arthur failed to mention in his speech was that Tower Colliery in Wales is a workers' co-operative. It was only rescued from privatisation at very short notice by the prompt action of the miners there, under the inspired leadership of an old-fashioned Communist by the name of Tyrone O'Sullivan.

### Another Fine Mess...

Arthur Scargill was in action again at the Labour Party Conference. It was vintage Scargill as he spoke in favour of retaining the traditional Clause Four. In other words it was another freak show.

The reason the matter was "debated" at all, was that the NUM took the Labour Party to court with the aim of getting a decision that the Special Conference that ratified Tony Blair's Clause Four had acted illegally.

The Labour leadership clearly accepted that they had acted unlawfully by their willingness to strike a deal with



Scargill. The deal was that the NUM would drop its action in return for the matter being reopened at the Annual Conference. Scargill agreed.

The result was a farce. There was no debate. Scargill was simply given the opportunity to provide some entertainment for the delegates. Had he gone ahead with his action and succeeded, Tony Blair would have had to

start again from scratch. There would then be a real and meaningful debate.

I do not think that Mr. Scargill behaved as he did out of any kind of fear of New Labour. He is quite simply the most useless leader ever to emerge in our movement. And the ironic thing is that he could only come to power in the period and atmosphere when our movement was dominated by the

mindless left of the (Old) Kinnock variety.

It is little wonder that Tony Blair got his way during the Clause Four campaign, when those leading the defence of Clause Four not only didn't have the wit at least to keep Scargill in his box for a while, but made him President of the official campaign.

## Letters

Dear Dave,

The analysis in your editorial in the latest issue coincides very much with my own. However, your proposed solution: "The only way of stopping this project is for MPs to make it clear that they will not tolerate what New Labour is up to and they will vote against him in Parliament to frustrate it both this side of the election and on the other side should Labour win." seems to me very naive. Any Labour MP that made such an undertaking would lose the whip and would probably be deselected. So if that really is 'the only way' to stop the Blair project then we've had it.

A striking thing about the criticism of Blair so far is that it has been so timid and inconsequential. Blair just seems to brush it aside and move on regardless. The media, naturally, are giving him an uncritical run. It is a measure of the state of our trade union and labour movement that he has been able to get away with so much in such a short time. Who is going to stop Blair? Can anyone? Are we seeing the end of the Labour Party as we have known it?

Yours sincerely,  
Martin Spellman

[Thank you for your letter. I suppose we were into the "what if" school of politics! If Clare Short had told Mr. Blair to get stuffed instead of getting a dressing down. Or if John Prescott had refused to be exiled to Australia. Or if Robin Cook had refused to be moved from Trade & Industry. Or if David Blunkett (and Alistair Campbell) had said that Labour Party policy on education was more important than the snobbish inclinations of the Blair family. What could Blair have done? A Shadow Cabinet full of members without portfolio?

Unfortunately none of them had the guts to burst the bubble. Our hope that even one of them might have stood on principle was naive. I cannot argue with you there. Your analysis of the criticism of Blair being "timid and inconsequential" is generally correct. The tragedy is that those who oppose New Labour think that it is all-powerful - whereas it is really a mirage - but a mirage believed by people thirsting for power to the extent that they have lost sight of principle. Ed.]

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear Comrades,

I note with interest Chris Winch's article in your July-August issue on **Socialism Has a Future**. This puts the case admirably for a response to the influence of Thatcherism and for re-stating the long run necessity of

socialism and collective/public intervention in the economy after this period when Blairism has swept all before it.

No doubt I could quibble with this or that aspect of the piece, but the progressive yet pragmatic stance which Winch adopts is clearly what we need. Judging by the correspondence columns of say the *New Statesman* and *Tribune*, there is a broad swathe who are not wedded to traditional 'hard left' impossibilism yet don't want Labour to abandon all distinctive and meaningful politics in its urge to win the election. After all, this is a period when the essential nastiness and incompetence of free market capitalism should be clearer than ever.

However, as the saying goes, 'what is to be done?' There are plenty of diffuse critics around and more-or-less left wing publications (I have a long term involvement in the *Chartist* project, for my sins!) But does anything unite the new 'left' (which could include Hattersley!) apart from dislike of the current leadership course? What of the low profile 'What's Left' initiative, associated with Peter Hain et al, and its apparently modest criticisms?

The present course is arguably disastrous from many points of view, including ironically the overall 'national interest', while a huge ideological gap exists on the left of public debate now that the Liberals are on paper the most left of the main parties. I suggest socialists need to put aside point scoring and disagreements over serious but arguably 'secondary' issues (Ireland, women's quotas, P.R., single currency, etc.) and link with the more *compos mentis* trade union forces to develop a sane left alternative to the hegemony of free marketism.

What does L.&T.U.R. have to propose as practical steps forward?

comradely,  
Martin Cook

[Thanks for your letter. Chris Winch is editing a book provisionally entitled **What Is Socialism** for the Bevin Society. Any suggestions from you or any other reader would, I'm sure, be most welcome. Uniting the Left at present I feel is well nigh impossible. It was the policies and actions of the Left which more than anything else brought about the coming to power of Thatcherism - especially in the areas of industrial relations and Europe. It was quite clear during the Clause Four debate that old attitudes haven't changed much. (Though they have changed somewhat in the trade union movement, and I think you are quite right in seeing the unions as the likely source of a "sane left alternative" - but has that not always been the case?) The political left is going to have to come to terms with its own past if it is ever going to change its ways. That is why this magazine spends so much time and space analysing what went on in the seventies and early eighties. Ed.]

## Editorial

# "Democracy Now"

Two years ago we began a report of a Democracy Now fringe meeting at the 1993 Labour Party Conference as follows:

*"Democracy Now held a fringe meeting at the Labour Party Conference in Brighton. It was held on the Tuesday evening at 5.30 PM. For fifteen years previously the Campaign for Labour Representation (CLR) fringe meeting was held at precisely that time. Kate Hoey and Nick Raynsford, co-leaders of Democracy Now, had previously appeared on the platform of CLR fringe meetings, as had the Chair of this Democracy Now meeting, Maggie Cosin. There is therefore no room for doubt that the Democracy Now meeting was deliberately organised to clash with the CLR meeting, with the object of driving the CLR out of business."*

*"The message was that Democracy Now was taking over from the CLR. But the takeover was conducted in a manner that could only have been intended to give the greatest possible affront to the people who, as the CLR, had over fifteen years succeeded in putting party organisation in Northern Ireland on the Labour agenda. And all the speakers on the Democracy Now platform engaged in an elaborate pretence that the CLR had never existed and that the issue had originated with Democracy Now two years ago."*

*"Insofar as any explanation or justification was given of this procedure - a procedure strongly reminiscent of the way Leninist parties took over from social democratic parties and resistance movements in Eastern European 1945-6 - it was that the amateurs of the CLR might have done worthy things in earlier years, but the time had now come for professionals to take over and lead the movement to rapid success. But we have heard no explanation from the professionals of why it made sense, when taking over from the CLR, to make such efforts to humiliate or enrage people who had devoted 17 years of their lives to the campaign, instead of conciliating them and*

*trying to bring as many as possible of them along with the new departure."*

*"The high-handed manner in which Democracy Now dealt with the CLR is justified only by success. And immediate success is what Kate Hoey promised various Labour groups in Northern Ireland if they would disown the CLR and declare their support for Democracy Now. But in the event Democracy Now only achieved 'overwhelming defeat', as the Conference chairman described it, on a show of hands. (The CLR had succeeded in getting the issue debated at two Party Conferences. On the first occasion it got a reference back, and on the second, two years ago, it gained half a million votes on a card vote.)"*

Kate Hoey, the founder of Democracy Now concluded her speech as follows:

*"There's no doubt we will lose the vote tomorrow. But there will be a card vote... And I'm confident that by this time next year we will win that issue and will give the people of Northern Ireland the right to take part in a democratic party and join the Labour Party."*

But there was not a card vote in 1993. The motion was dismissed on a

show of hands. Success did not come in 1994. And in 1995 not a single Constituency Party submitted a motion to Conference on the issue.

Since this was a predictable result of the way Hoey and Nick Raynsford went about things (and Harry Barnes, who has become a third "co-Chair"), we assume they are not dissatisfied with it. We took it from the start that their sabotage of the CLR had a purely Unionist purpose, and that their object was not to develop cross-community Labour politics in Northern Ireland on the basis of the Party's policy, but to form a Unionist lobby group within the Labour Party in the hope of changing party policy.

Hoey has been very active in Northern Ireland politics this year, but not in connection with Labour politics. She conducted a high-profile media campaign in support of the "United Kingdom Unionist" candidate in the North Down by-election, who stood against the Unionist Party candidate on an ultra-Unionist platform. And she has become a regular participant in the domestic affairs of the 'Unionist Family'.

A fourth Labour MP, Michael Connarty (Falkirk East) has recently come out for Democracy Now. (It claims to consist of 50 MPs, but only these four have been in evidence. The others are a mere list of names.)

Connarty was in Belfast this Summer, taking part in the formation of an "Ulster Unionist Labour Group" as a subordinate organisation of the Ulster Unionist Party. The Party functionary in control of this group is Chris M'Gimpsey, who has been Secretary of the Unionist Party. The Unionist Labour Group has no more to do with Socialism than the Trade Union group in the Tory Party.

The Democracy Now fringe meeting last year was a dismal affair. In an attempt to liven things up this year, the meeting took the form of a debate with Clive Soley and Jeremy Corbyn, but the attendance was much the same as last year—40 to 50. Connarty and Alan Johnson spoke for Democracy Now. We



give below a verbatim account of Connarty's speech, in which he asserts that the CLR is a "splinter group" of Democracy Now. (If you're going to tell one, tell a big one!) He refers to a CLR Bulletin distributed to delegates with detailed information of Hoey's Unionist activities and a reference to his own activity in support of the Unionist Party. He also refers to a body called Labour In Northern Ireland. No such group has ever been seen in actual politics in Northern Ireland, though an occasional letter to the papers appears in its name, signed by Dr. Boyd ("Ulster Will Fight") Black.

#### Speech By Michael Connarty MP

at Democracy Now meeting, 2nd October, 1995

I am probably the last person that anyone should ask if you want to have some erudite debate about who signed which document on which day and what sub-clause was agreed after a struggle or a sectarian coup by another group, because I have not really taken that approach to Northern Ireland politics.

I have come to this recently because having been for a long time just someone who supported at various different times Troops Out and a United Ireland—I lost family blown up in pub bombings, but I can tell you now that they were not bombs planted by the IRA, but by other people. I had a certain prejudice four or five years ago which said that the solution was to have a United Ireland and anything from the mainland was an interference. I remember sitting at a trade union—TUIUI, I can't remember what it even stands for now—thinking: I've been here before, I've been around this circle so often, in a great groove in the paths of history; we're not going anywhere; we have to think in a new way about Northern Ireland.

I was influenced by going to other countries and looking at how they were taking the struggle from armed struggle into a peaceful settlement and were trying to build a nation. I was involved in the Palestinian people's movement. I've been in Central America, etc. And I've come to the conclusion, because it's basically a democratic solution to the

problems that face the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland, Southern Ireland and Europe; that for me one element was missing. And that was that one of the major organised parties, democratic forces within these nations, was not able to organise in a certain section of the country.

Now, I'm not saying we should necessarily go and organise and take the argument that far. But when I discovered that there were people who had been in the Labour Party who had the Labour Party perspective, who had the democratic socialist perspective, who went to Northern Ireland for work reasons or other reasons, and had their money sent back to them by the Walworth Road apparatchiks, I found that just so unrecognisable in a definition of the democratic forces that should have been playing and influencing the solutions to what was happening in Southern Ireland and Northern Ireland, that I looked around for an organisation that might actually offer a step forward there and introduce that element, the one that has influenced my life and the life of all the people that have taken a democratic socialist road and a Labour way in all the politics in both Britain and Europe, that should be offered to the people of Northern Ireland as well as those everywhere else in Europe - and that was the right to join a major force for democratic socialist change. And I think that is the Labour Party. So the debate for me becomes—that's my reasoning—that that element should be there available to people. The 'Why not?'

Why not? I think it's because basically the Why not? is because people have other agendas. They have other agendas, other than the allowing the people in Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland to come to a solution based upon a democratic socialist analysis. They argue about 1913 and the arrangement then with the trade union movement and the Labour Party should be allowed to organise on an all-Ireland basis. That is not relevant to me because it's quite clear that it has not been a constructive contribution. It has not influenced the politics of Northern Ireland to any great extent.

The other argument would be that basically—to me the other agenda is that there is a sectarian argument. And though I recognise that there is a history of the sectarianism and the traditions in Northern Ireland, I find it very difficult—I said that in a meeting I spoke at in Northern Ireland—I find it very difficult to give credibility to an agenda set by religious persuasion and by sectarian divisions upon that basis. So I don't think the sectarian agenda is a worthy, weighty argument against the idea of introducing into Northern Ireland the politics of the Labour Party. I do happen to think, and it may be said that I'm naive here, that the weight of the history of the Labour movement, the weight of the history of people in socialist movements fighting in a democratic socialist struggle, would have a major effect on the sectarian politics of Northern Ireland, would have an effect on every issue in Northern Ireland, not just in the social and economic movement, but also in the field of how they view the Border and how they view the relationship between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom, and how they view the relationship between Southern Ireland and Northern Ireland. And unless we allow that to get in there in that argument, that weight of argument, that traditional analysis to be in the debate in Northern Ireland, I don't think we will ever make any progress in reality.

Now I've been to other organisations. I've been attacked I notice—they say that success is when you get a splinter group—it says Labour Committee for Representation, or the Resurrection Committee or whatever it calls itself—a sort of sectarian split from Democracy Now. So we must be making a bit of progress, because you're not a real party, a real movement, until you've had sectarian divisions (Nervous laughter...). I went and spoke at a Labour in Northern Ireland meeting. It was a week after the Downing St. Declaration. We spent two and a half hours discussing economic problems facing Northern Ireland and Labour's economic policy. The Border wasn't mentioned once. Nor was any question of sectarianism mentioned. It was a very, very fruitful meeting. It was a

meeting at which you could have been basically in any other major cities round about Europe or even the world, debating and discussing real problems that faced people, other than the things caused by sectarian divisions on the question of the Border. People might say that it unrealistic. But to me it was not unrealistic. People there couldn't debate these issues in those terms.

I went and spoke at the launch conference of the Ulster Unionist Labour Group. Despite what's implied the Trade Union Review and what the LCR [sic] pamphlet says, it was not a question of jumping into bed with the Ulster Unionists, but it was in fact welcoming in the Ulster Unionist Party - it had recognised that people like Chris M'Gimpsey and others had always held a democratic socialist analysis, and that that was relevant to the politics of the future of Northern Ireland.

And the element that is missing in all this as far as I am concerned is he right to go and join the Labour party. And how it develops after this is fluid, very fluid. It's not a prescription that we would organise like we organised in the Labour Party in the mainland. It's not saying that there would be branches, or it would be a Northern Ireland Labour Party, or it would be different from the Labour Party, or a sister party of the party in the United Kingdom. That is a possibility. There's nothing that says you can only have one sister party. The SDLP have claimed to be a sister party of the Labour Party. There's no reason why we can't have others. In other countries there several socialist parties that are affiliated to the International. And they don't exclude each other. They're both— or sometimes three— recognised by the International. So to me it's about membership and a pluralist agenda, entering an element into Northern Ireland politics of the politics of Europe and the United Kingdom, which is positive. Why shouldn't the people who want that really pluralist agenda in Northern Ireland also be allowed to join the party? I have to think that the argument for not allowing people to be in the Labour party in Northern Ireland is simple. It is a British agenda. Its an agenda dictated by the United Kingdom majority in Scotland, England and

Wales, not dictated by the people in Northern Ireland, but dictated by the people of another sectarian or political agenda that does not give the people of Northern Ireland the freedom that we have. And that is the freedom to choose the party, to choose the political forces

that we are in tune with, and to work with, and to allow it to flow into the politics of the country. If that is allowed in the rest of the United Kingdom why can it not be allowed in Northern Ireland?

## The Great BT/Murdoch Stitch-Up

by Michael Craig

About 10 years ago it was a widely held view that natural monopoly represented an important market failure. It would be absurd to have two independent railway companies building tracks beside each other simply because in other areas of economic activity competition is a widely used mechanism for motivating organisations. It would also be absurd to have two independent telecommunications companies building optical fibre cables beside each other.

Tony Blair announced in his conference speech that a Labour government will permit BT to install optical fibre cables and enter the home entertainment market. Some people call this the information superhighway. In Germany it is the infobahn. Naturally the, mainly American, cable companies in this market are unhappy.

But from a technological point of view the sensible thing would have been the Conference like pulling a rabbit out of a hat.

Despite the extensive debate on the subject of the utilities, Labour Party policy is not completely clear. One thing is fairly certain though, the Labour Party is not going to renationalise BT - a motion at the conference to bring all the privatised utilities back into public ownership was heavily defeated, as was an attempt by Scargill raise the old Clause 4 from the dead.

The announcement came as a surprise to all but a small number of people who were involved in the deal. It is not clear to me that the deal fits in with Labour policy on the privatised utilities. Still less does it fit into a wider ideological framework, e.g. the new Clause 4 of the Constitution which was formally incorporated at the Brighton Conference.

Blair's first year was dominated by the removal of Clause 4. The privatised utilities were continually under attack from Labour. Clearly they believe this to be one of the most important domestic policy issues. In that case it seems odd that such a crucial policy was negotiated in haste without public consultation and announced as a stunt at

The connection of every school, hospital, college and library will therefore not be done by an agency of the state but by a private companies - the leaders of which were referred to in the same Conference speech as "robber barons".

Although the Labour Party is not in favour of an incomes policy which may cap the salaries of these 'robber barons' they have been the subject of an extensive campaign in the last 18 months to the point where Cedric Brown, Chairman of British Gas, is apparently the most hated man in



Britain.

If this deal with Blair goes through I think it unlikely that BT's head robber baron, Sir Iain Vallance, will see his already sizable salary fall much.

Blair's initial position on the utilities seemed to be that whatever the Tories succeeded in privatising by the time he becomes Prime Minister would remain in private hands. This provides the Tories with an incentive to hurry up with the quite staggeringly insane rail privatisation programme, confident that political courage is in short supply on the Opposition benches.

But then having been taunted by Paddy Ashdown into matching the Liberals' commitment to renationalise the railways, the formula which appeared at the conference was that they will retain "public ownership and public accountability". Meacher seemed to be encouraged by this and advised potential bidders for franchises that they would be buying "a pig-in-a-poke".

Blair refused to use the word "nationalisation" though. It was also not used in the motion on the railways debated when Parliament met again after the recess. Will contracts made with franchise holders be reneged upon? The railways could be both in "public ownership" and damagingly fragmented.

New Labour are of course practical and pragmatic people! The main argument for not renationalising the utilities is that the country "can't afford it". It is unfortunate that monopoly profits are being extracted by very lucky civil servants on the basis of selling life's necessities but we must be realistic at the moment!

Added to this argument is that ownership doesn't matter much anyway and that what is important is to have a sympathetic regulator. This is of course a cop-out which pretends that political choices don't have to be made. Nevertheless given the importance which New Labour attach to the Regulator, it seems strange that Oftel were not informed of the BT deal which represents a massive shake-up of the industry.

However New Labour's stance is not merely impotence stemming from tax phobia combined with a fatalistic acceptance of the market in areas that were previously socially owned. They are *enthusiastic* about the market.

New Clause 4 says "we work for a dynamic economy, serving the public interest, in which the enterprise of the market and the rigour of competition are joined with the forces of partnership and co-operation". They believe it is an important way to protect consumer interests. (They rarely dwell on the fact that those consumer interests are often protected via massive job losses.)

In his speech Tony Blair said he wanted to "move to full and effective competition in the telecommunications market by 2002". And yet Blair's biggest announcement was a massive boost to one of the world's largest private companies enabling them to dominate one of the most lucrative markets of the brave new technological age.

The Tories had gone to some trouble to try and introduce competition and it's not easy in situations of natural monopoly. No wonder Lord Tebbit was pleased. (It seems a bit pathetic that despite his status as an elder statesman for Thatcherism he makes no attempt to disguise the fact that it's all just a very old fashioned attempt to secure monopoly profits for private gain.)

So has New Labour gone back to corporatism in some way? I thought the whole point of the new Clause 4 was that it was meant to clear up confusion about what Labour's true intentions are.

But New Labour is also supposed to be in favour of business. Before the Conference began Blair did a tour of business leaders. He had breakfast with them and told them that he doesn't offer trade unions any favours (he merely offers privatised utilities favours). Are the business community really going to be pleased with this latest development?

The cable companies invested millions of pounds on the basis of statements of what the legislative environment would be until the early years of the next century. Without consultation Blair is proposing to renege on this. This seems to me to offend the principles of contract and may well be open to judicial review as a result. Is it an example of how casually small businesses can expect to be treated under a Blair government?

Even if the deal with BT is at odds with the wider approach that New Labour wishes to take, it could be justified on its own merits. But there are

several reasons for thinking that viewed narrowly as a business deal it is a pretty poor one.

The details were agreed by Jonathan Powell, an unelected advisor to Blair and brother of Charles Powell, Thatcher's foreign policy advisor. It's pretty clear what BT got out of it. Access to the domestic entertainment market.

What the public got was : (1) something which is already being done, i.e. the cable companies were already linking up schools and libraries; (2) something which cost in the words of a previous Labour Party policy document on the superhighway a "marginal" amount. For it was only a concession on the installation costs not on the provision of the information or entertainment.

(In fact it is a common practice in the computer industry for example to sell the initial hardware very cheaply in order to provide further outlets for your software.) The Daily Mail observed "BT have taken Blair and company to the cleaners".

Or have they? Another theory is that Blair is getting something more than just a cheap cable link-up. He is getting something which he believes to be very valuable indeed - the goodwill of Rupert Murdoch.

Blair addressed a meeting of News Corporation executives on Haymen Island in the Summer. He also held private talks with Murdoch at which the BT deal may have been discussed. Murdoch has been trying to establish a link with BT for several years. He fears his monopolistic grip on the British satellite market may be less valuable when cable takes off.

Since 1993 BT has had a 20% stake in an American telecommunications company called MCI. MCI paid £1.25 billion for a 13.5% stake in Murdoch's company, News Corporation. It would be very valuable to Murdoch to have a cable outlet for his film and television interests. It remains to be seen what stance Murdoch's newspapers take at the next election and what progress he can make on entering the cable market in Britain.

Many people were inspired by Tony Blair's vision of a New Britain. A young Britain. But inside the

Conference New Labour was renting space for stalls to privatised water companies for thousands of pounds. On the Conference platform Tony was announcing that the business of government in New Britain is to trade the public interest in exchange for favours from a private company. I don't find that very inspiring.

## Film Review

### Land and Freedom

The underlying message of Ken Loach's latest film 'Land and Freedom' is that the working class is always betrayed by its leaders. Although the theme is the Spanish Civil War, when thousands of young British and Irish men went to fight on the side of the anti-fascists, we are not told about the war itself or its causes.

There is one illuminating scene, however, when members of the POUM militia and villagers discuss the principles of the collectivisation of land and tenant-farming. But even here we are reminded that the real issue at stake is leadership of the peasant and working classes, and how Stalinism, in particular, is a betrayal of all to which these classes aspire.

Loach brings out, although not quite convincingly or clearly enough, the turmoil within and between sections of workers. His sympathies, however, are with the POUM, the Trotskyist workers' militia, against the Communist International Brigade. Interestingly, the anarchists receive barely a mention.

There is a particularly poignant moment where the POUM are told by members of the International Brigade that their leaders are betraying them and they are ordered to lay down their arms. This is Loach telling us loud and clear that the working class can trust no one but its collective self.

Dave Carr, the young

Liverpudlian card-carrying member of the Communist Party, initially joins the POUM, switches to the International Brigade, and then rejoins his POUM comrades. Carr finds the whole thing very confusing and in a moment's rage tears up his Party card in one last act of

defiance.

He survives the war, dies, and is buried at home in Liverpool with some of his mementos. The most significant being a (red) handkerchief of earth from the land he fought so valiantly to liberate. [D.B.]

## What Demographic Crisis?

The phony statistics that are being used to attack welfare in the Labour Party as well as the Tories

by Gwydion M. Williams

Britain in the 1990s is richer than ever before - and also growing faster than in the days of Victorian 'greatness'. Britain's population has increased very little over the last few decades. Therefore there is more wealth per head than ever before. Therefore there should be no problem at all supporting a growing number of pensioners.

What's the problem then? Why is there supposed to be some massive 'demographic crisis' which makes it impossible for the growing numbers of old people to be supported by the working population?

When there is a vast scarcity of jobs for people of working age, when several million of them are left unwanted and unemployed, why do people say that the burden of the non-working old upon the working young is becoming intolerable?

Actually, it's not really about a burden on the society. A richer society can quite easily share the growing pot of wealth between both workers and non-workers. It is all about a burden on the rich, who can not rid themselves of any more social obligations except by pushing ordinary old people into poverty.

The whole policy of don't-tax-don't-spend has helped the rich and harmed everyone else. This is not quite the picture you get in the media - but after all, who owns the media? What sort of salaries are given to the famous commentators on whose word the public relies?

In fact tax-and-spend worked, in terms of giving ordinary people far more take-home pay than they had ever had

before. And if a smaller but richer working population has to pay more tax to keep life decent in an increasingly rich country, is that a problem?

If you pay 25% tax on £16,000, you are very much better off than someone a few generations back who may perhaps have paid 5% on the equivalent of £8,000. In the one case you take home £12,000, in the other only £7,600. It all works well - until you start listening to right-wing demagogues who claims the government is robbing you, wasting your money and denying you the cash that is yours by right.

In the United States of America, the working mainstream were very willing to believe the right-wing demagogues. And the working mainstream have made no net gains since the break-up of Keynesianism in the mid-1970s. It is not just that the poor have got poorer - though they have.

The vast bulk of the society, all of the blue-collar and white-collar workers who thought they ran the society, their



level of income has stood still. Replacing tax-and-spend with don't-tax-don't-spend had been to the benefit of just a small upper crust, America's one million millionaires and all of their hangers-on.

Britons are not such dopes. Only the poorest ten per cent have really done badly under Thatcher and Major. Depending on which measure you use, the very poor have either gone down slightly or gone up a little. For certain, the working mainstream have continued to prosper. The top ten per cent have not had such a feast as they have had in the USA.

This is not to say that the system has been fair. The working mainstream have got slightly less of the national income than they'd have got with fair shares for all. They'd be distinctly better off if tax-and-spend had been continued. But the gap is not so bad and ordinary people have not done so badly. There is merely a growing but not very deep-seated discontent with the Tories.

People are coming to understand that any idiot can be radical, but most radical new ideas simply do not work. The radicalism of the 1945 Labour government *did* work, proving the basic soundness of socialist ideas. The radicalism of Thatcher has been useless, curing none of the problems she thought she could solve, proving the utter worthlessness of "neo-Liberalism" and New Right *Laissez-Faire*.

The New Right are genuinely baffled at the failure of their policies. In the second decade of their power, growth is slower than it was under Keynesianism. And traditional society continues to fall apart.

The second of these developments probably does not bother the real brains of the New Right, the people whose private lives never were very conventional, the people who first advocated job cuts and welfare cuts as a way to restore traditional morality. At the level of social policies, the real brains of the New Right treated their traditional-minded allies as complete idiots. And have not so far been proved wrong.

But what of the economy? If the market is the source of wealth and if state expenditure is no more than a burden on the productive economy, why is it that everyone outside of East Asia

is doing worse than when Keynesianism ruled the roost? If capitalism is good for everyone, why is not more capitalism even better? Even the real brains of the New Right can make no sense of that.

The trouble is, the New Right will slide quietly between two quite different definitions of capitalism. In order to prove capitalism's merits, the term is used very broadly. 'Capitalism' is taken to include any sort of commercial society, including the semi-state and highly regulated economies that have flourished in West Europe since the 1950s.

But the merit of 'capitalism' in this very broad sense is then transferred to a very narrow abstract New Right definition of capitalism. The world of the 'bean-counters', as some industrialists like to call the money men who spoil their good ideas. A system of coldblooded rational selfishness regulated by cost accountants.

By a piece of jiggery-pokery, the very success of Keynesian economics was used as an excuse for demolishing it. Its success was taken to prove the merits of 'capitalism'. But then its failure to live up to the ideals of bean-counter capitalism was used as an excuse for breaking it up.

I do not accuse the New Right of actually knowing what they were doing. Their policies do not make much sense unless they actually believed their own teachings. They believed their own nonsense, and hung on to it no matter how much things go wrong.

And even many people in the Labour party get confused between the broad and narrow interpretations of 'capitalism'. (The error goes right back to Karl Marx, which is why some of the ex-Communists can sound knowledgeable but actually understand nothing.)

There is no doubt that the Keynesian state-regulation system needed a good shake-up in the 1970s. But it should have been a grand spring-cleaning for what had been the most economically successful system in the whole of human history. There should not have been a mad destruction of useful forms in favour of older less successful alternatives.

Britain's Victorian greatness was based on the fact that it had let commerce take priority over its human

values - which is why Victorian values are now just an historic curiosity. Yet even so, Victorian Britain never averaged as much as 2% annual GDP growth.

Britain in the 'disastrous' epoch of 1950-1975 grew twice as fast as Victorian Britain had managed. If it had not been for the success of the Victorians in disrupting the rest of the world and compelling many foreign countries to become super-efficient commercial societies, the epoch of 1950-1975 would indeed have made us 'mightier yet'.

Britain in the 19th century insisted that foreign countries could not carry on as they had previously lived. Britain demanded that they adapt themselves to commerce and industry. In the 20th century, a whole host of societies did do exactly that. And it turned out that other nations besides the British could be very successful as industrialists, able to learn from Britain's errors and take many short-cuts.

Victorian 'greatness' was based on running a one-horse race, a condition that cannot possibly be recreated. But though this small island will never again be a self-sufficient world power, there is no reason why we cannot live good and happy lives. No reason why increasing wealth should make so many people poorer and less well cared for.

Ancient societies required most people to work, including children and the old. About half of the children died in infancy, and there were not many old people. Modern society can produce more and more wealth with fewer and fewer workers. This ought to be a blessing, not a curse.

More wealth from fewer workers has in some ways been a curse, because Britain since the mid-1970s has ceased to function as a society.

A society will redistribute surplus wealth from those who are doing well to those who are in need. It will make sure that old people, whose work laid the foundations for the current prosperity, continue to get their fair share as members of the society. It will recognise that children and teenagers are the future, to be looked after according to their needs and gifts rather than according to the wealth of their parents.

But in a global economy, is it necessary to go on treating Britain as a society? In substance, this ceased to

happen under Margaret Thatcher. Several months back, I described it as "*saluting the flag while sawing down the flagpole*". Interestingly enough, Tony Blair in his recent grand speech at the Labour Party Conference spoke of Tories waving the fabric of the flag while destroying the fabric of society - are some of the Bevin Society's ideas getting through to unexpected places?

Whatever about that, the substantial point is that rich people can perhaps do well by ignoring the rest of society, breaking the links by running down the state and abolishing common social property.

The whole revolt against taxes has been a revolt against being part of a society. Cain's complaint - 'am I my brother's keeper' - has become a widespread sentiment.

"A friend in need is a damn nuisance" went the 1960s graffiti. Under a gloss of patriotism and traditional values, Thatcherism has been a fulfilment of the worst and most selfish aspect of 1960s 'counter-culture'.

Rich old people living off their legal ownership of things that other people need in their ordinary lives are seen as public benefactors. Poor old people living off state pensions are seen as a species of horrible parasite. That's the sort of malignant nonsense that the New Right have been spreading.

In terms of the whole economy, ownership does not create any wealth. If you acquire property and live off it after you retire, this is not different in principle from paying tax while you work and then getting a pension at retirement age. Except that the first system is random and unpredictable, and also favours the rich at the expense of the poor.

'One pensioner - one bullet' is the only scheme that would actually ease the 'demographic crisis'. If it is assumed that old people are to be kept alive and treated decently, they have to get their cut of the growing wealth created by a shrinking workforce. And there is no difference in principle between forcing employed people to buy private pensions and taxing them to pay for state pensions.

It could be that a different presentation would make tax for pensions more palatable. You could send people nicely

printed certificates showing the share in the national wealth that they had acquired by being good tax-payers.

You could even offer special awards or cash prizes to anyone who volunteered to pay extra. Giving people an occasional tax-free month might also be popular - instead of cutting tax by 10%, give them a one in twenty chance of being free of tax that month.

Absurd? Life is often absurd. Thatcherism was absurd until a few determined people pushed it through. So if Blair & Co. are still looking for big and radical ideas, here is one that they could try.

One would no doubt have to give the option of dull invariable taxes to those

who insisted on it. But since most people now want excitement and unpredictability, the necessary process of public taxes must move with the times. It would cost little and would probably make a lot of people very happy - checking one's monthly deductions would be a source of excitement instead of irritation. Also one could dish out all sorts of zero-cost rewards, CBE's and the occasional knighthood.

Jazzing up the tax system has a lot to recommend it - we can not allow the Tories be the only people to play on human weaknesses. But the basic logic and success of Labour's traditions must never be forgotten.

## Notes on the News

by Gwydion M. Williams

### BT - a sensible natural monopoly

Mother Nature took rather more than two thousand million years to get as far as the jellyfish. Three or four million years to turn an ape into a human. Humans needed only a few thousand years to transform a host of rather dull little natural species into superior crops and food animals and interesting pets and beautiful shrubs and flowers. Natural selection and 'survival of the fittest' is by no means as clever as its advocates think.

British Telecom is a natural monopoly. No one would want to have several different incompatible phones in their house. Competition in telecommunications is a product of pure Tory dogmatism, convinced that nothing can be *allowed* to run well without private profit. Market rivalry has to be imposed even when it is likely to do more harm than good.

The New Right sheep continue to bleat 'market good, planning bad'. But their ideas are rubbish, and it is good that Labour is rejecting them. Let British Telecom be a natural monopoly. Rely on a mixture of good feeling and pride to ensure that they provide an ever better service to the public.

### Bravehearts

Nice cinema, shame about the history. Hollywood's version of William Wallace's story doesn't even grasp the difference between Gaelic-speaking Highlanders and Lowland Scots. The ancestors of most of the Lowlanders settled at the same time as the Anglo-Saxons and always had their own version of English.

Scotland was anarchic for most of its history. The Norman-Scottish heirs of Robert the Bruce had to face just as many rebellions as the Norman-English kings who briefly tried to take over Scotland. And Edward the Second was far from being the camp weakling that **Braveheart** makes him. He married Isabella of France *after* he became king. Their first son, the future Edward III, was born six years after Wallace's execution.

Strong but stupid, this first non-Welsh Prince of Wales certainly preferred his own sex. But there is no reason to doubt that he could 'do the necessary' to ensure the continuity of his dynasty. (Unlike Richard the Lionheart, a splendid and successful warrior, but apparently unable to come to terms with women.)

Robert the Bruce was merely one of a



number of barons who took the opportunity to revolt against central power when Edward the Second turned out to be a rather stupid King with an unconventional private life. But Bruce could give his cause some legitimacy by reviving the Kingship of Scotland, strengthening his position when he removed his main rival by murdering him in a church.

He did manage to tap into some very early feelings of Scottish identity, but it was never very strong in his day. And the Highlanders seem to have seen him as being no less of an outsider than the Norman/English.

In a small way, Wallace did represent peasant resistance to knightly oppression. But much less definitely than the Swiss, hardly more than the English and Welsh longbowmen who slaughtered the French chivalry on behalf of successive English kings. Nothing like the self-governing Swiss cantons ever emerged. Still, **Braveheart** is a good film, well worth a look if your taste runs to battles.

### Racing racists

It has always been obvious that people of West African ancestry were somehow very well suited to short-distance racing. As Roger Banister pointed out back in September, they have a dominance in short sprints that does not apply to longer distances. And it is a matter that needs to be thought about.

Sadly, there was little thought and a lot of dogmatism. In the liberal world-view, no one has any business being different from anyone else. That at least is the official creed - some characters gave themselves away by saying that black people were being portrayed as 'animal' if we accept Banister's analysis.

All of us are animal as well as human, and there is nothing more or less animal about superior speed over 100 meters rather than 1500 meters. You will just find that a top-level 100 meters race is almost all black, while a 1500 meter event is a mix of all shapes and colours.

### Rule of Law (1) - Knightmares

Biasing juries has always been a monopoly reserved for lawyers. If court cases were decided on simple points of fact, no one would need to pay huge sums for fancy lawyers, the law would have become a humdrum proletarianized profession like teaching.

So Judge Roger Sanders obviously had to take firm action after the press had said rather too much about the alleged misdeeds of Geoff Knights. He let the accused go.

Those not versed in the law may wonder at the logic of letting a perhaps-guilty man go free, without punishment and also without the chance to clear his name. To look at it that way is to miss the point. The judicial system is not there to let society sort out injustice and resolve disputes. It is there as a feeding-ground for lawyers. Its basically irrational and arbitrary nature must always be upheld.

### Rule of Law (2) - Gibraltar

Back in January of this year, I said that the Tories had an attitude of "Innocent even if proven guilty". I had not expected to see it demonstrated quite so blatantly quite so soon.

From the first, it was hard to understand why three IRA people were simply gunned down without warning after they had been well spotted, surrounded and outnumbered. It was contrary to both civil and military norms, the customs of civilised conflict.

Shooting those people was also pretty damn stupid. Killing them rather than capturing them turned a minor success into a major set-back.

People will fight for as long as they see their cause as both winable and just. Arbitrary shootings that are then defended with blatant lies do not make the rival army any less secure in its own self-image. It encourages their view of themselves as brave resistors against arbitrary power.

*Extreme* brutality can perhaps destroy guerrilla armies - that has been shown in several countries in Latin America. But strange meanderings between liberalism and brutality only make the British authorities look contemptible.

A mildly hostile judgment by a well-respected and independent court could have been just shrugged off. But "innocent even if proven guilty" is not just a pose. It seems to be essential to the self-image of the present government, no matter what the damage to impartial and effective international law.

### Rule of Law (3) - O J Simpson

When a woman is murdered, the reason is likely to be one or the 'Three Rs' - rape, robbery or revenge. Since there was no rape or robbery when O. J. Simpson's ex-wife was stabbed to death, he was always bound to be the prime suspect. But was there ever really enough evidence to convict him?

The 'trail of blood' was just a little bit too good to be true. A glove that dripped blood seven hours after the killing should have made someone a candidate for canonisation, if it was real. All in all, I'd say the jury were quite right to decide that the evidence probably was not good enough to convict before the Los Angeles police began to 'improve' it.

O. J. probably did do it. But there is an old formula that it is better to let ten guilty men walk free than to convict one innocent. This probably saved him. If law dropped the pretentious claim to be establishing truth, if it accepted the modest goal of punishing only when strong evidence existed, it would be doing a better job. Someone who is most likely guilty must be left alone if the evidence is not strong enough.

Q. Are you a member of the Los Angeles Police Department? A. I must respectfully decline to answer on the grounds that I might incriminate myself. A police force that constantly ignores its own rules should be treated as just another street-gang, which is how the jury did indeed treat them.

There is also the clear and blatant polarisation of American society. Afro-Americans have *never* been accepted as part of it, in a culture that was racist from its very beginnings. The famous American melting-pot was not supposed to include any blacks.

But - unlike South Africa a few years back - there was also no solid legal

basis for excluding them. And while the Republican Party go on pandering to racism so as to push out the Democrats from their Southern White heartland, there will be no solutions.

### Rule of Law (4) - Evil Deeds, Good News

When it comes to 'national security' - some minor facts that the enemy probably know already - the courts are very ready to clamp down and silence the media. But protecting the remaining dignity of the dead is another matter. The West case is a media event, and no details will be left unreported.

The unfortunate girls who spent their last hours as objects of sexual exploitation will get a repeat dose now that they have been dug up again and brought into the judicial system. The only substantive issue is whether Rosemary West could somehow not have known all of what her husband was up to. It's hard to see how, but that is the *only* matter that really needs examining. Instead, we are bound to get every last unpleasant detail.

'Open justice' made sense when it was a question of letting the local community know how its own disputes had been resolved. But with the rise of mass media, certain sorts of criminal trials have always served as soft-core pornography - or often not-so-soft, as with torture and murder.

No good purpose is served, but it does give a lot of lawyers a lot of publicity. A nation that bans many minor and harmless forms of sexual explicitness will give the widest possible circulation to something very much less healthy.

### Former Soviet Union Bad News is No News

- "These new figures would mean that Russia's GDP shrank by a third between 1990 and 1994, and not - as official figures have hitherto indicated - by almost a half". (*The Economist*, 7th October 95)

How many news commentaries have you seen that tell of how the former Soviet Empire has lost maybe half of its total wealth? How many people venture to explain how they have been going downhill fast thanks to all of the nice wealth-creating market reforms that

they have been carrying through?

Even if it is only one-third, this is still a quite astonishing collapse. And since a 'new class' of corrupt big spenders has emerged at the same time as the former Soviet Union got poorer, life for ordinary people must have got very bad indeed.

Where do you hear about this? Unless you delve into the **Finance and Economics** section of *The Economist*, you may not grasp just what has been done to the losing side in the Cold War.

The latest polls indicate that the Russians have very little intention of re-electing Yeltsin. Even less of choosing Solzhenitsyn, who would win

no more than 5% if he ventured to stand for President. Some fairly authoritarian character from the old ex-Soviet establishment is the likely choice of Russia's voters. And who can blame them?

### Cable confusion

Glancing at my paper, chock full of dozens of strange channels featuring obscure programs, I thought I saw "Come Dancing, On the Bed with Paula, Cagney and Lacey".

It actually turned out to be three separate successive programs. I think.

## Margaret Beckett and the Labour Party's health proposals

by Michael Morrison

**The leader of the National Association of Fundholding Practices, Dr. Rhidian Morris, said recently "What doctors don't like is being told by a government that they can or cannot do something". He threatened that his members would withdraw from the National Health Service if Labour insists on its proposals to phase out fundholding.**

**It is vital for the future of the health service that doctors remain under social control. It is already too late for the much of the dental profession. Threats such as this should be resisted vigorously.**

**In mid-September Margaret Beckett addressed the annual conference of the NHS Trust Federation. She declared that trusts would be "renationalised". Currently the state does not own the assets of trusts (over 90% of all hospitals). She was repeatedly heckled and jeered. However she refused to apologise for her remarks.**

This is particularly striking because, despite massive poll leads, New Labour's ultra-cautious approach seeks to avoid annoying anyone (unless they are trade unionists, beggars, single mothers or members of the much neglected working class).

The hostility which Beckett faced is in itself an indication of the enormous cultural change which the health service has undergone. The achievement of Labour's foundation of the National Health Service was that it succeeded in

bringing the medical profession, who were initially reluctant, along with them.

After about 40 years of a health service which was free at the point of access the public service ethic was so entrenched that the Tories' health care reforms were initially greeted with hostility. In the last 6 years the mood has changed, partly as a result of the financial inducements offered to GPs, so that there is significant opposition to a return to the status quo ante.



To talk of the health service being privatised as Labour have done is an emotive term and slightly misleading.

*The principle of a health service which is free at the point of consumption has not yet been challenged. However the Tories' reforms have deliberately undermined the NHS in numerous ways:*

- health care is no longer always rationed on the basis of clinical need. If you are going to get sick don't do it towards the end of the financial year. Make sure that your illness is both serious and urgently requiring treatment rather than merely serious - then you can be treated out of casualty budgets which are much more difficult to cap. Make sure that your GP is a fundholder. That way your "provider" will look judge your clinical needs much more favourably. Make sure you don't live in a region which has explicitly banned a whole variety of treatments because of the pressures of "market forces".

- The Scottish Office has just approved a tender for Stonehaven, an NHS hospital which will be privately built and run. Many health service capital projects have been seriously delayed because of Treasury demands that private sector finance must be sought.

- There have always been private wards in NHS hospitals. (They were part of the settlement which persuaded a reluctant medical profession to cooperate in the establishment of the NHS ). However these have increased dramatically since the commercialisation of the health service began as Trusts seek new ways of raising income.

- The expansion of private health insurance is undermining the principle of universal health care. BUPA launched a scheme in mid-October to enable people to see a GP at a time of their choice. "There are no losers", said BUPA's marketing director. He would, being a spokesman for the middle class queue jumpers.

In her brief period at health Margaret Beckett substantially hardened Labour's stance on the NHS. The last policy document on the subject, *Renewing the NHS*, was swamped by coverage of John Major's resignation.

It contained a commitment to phase out GP fundholding and a commitment

to end the internal market. Beckett announced details of this plan on the *Today* programme.

By 1.00 pm that day Blair appeared on the radio attempting to complicate things and to weaken these policy commitments. This process of not supporting his own Shadow Minister continued.

*Stephen Dorrell the new Health Secretary commented following the NHS Trust conference mentioned above: "We have the Labour leader saying one thing and his Health spokesman saying precisely the opposite".*

Whatever flexibility Kinnock had on other areas of politics he retained a strong emotional commitment to the NHS. It appears that Blair does not share this. His behaviour demonstrated a refusal to be tied down to opposing the detail of any Tory policy if he could avoid it.

I am assuming he is not actually in favour of the internal market. In the brittle atmosphere of the Blair Labour Party it may be significant that Beckett pointedly refuses to call the party of which she is a member *New Labour*.

These tensions have now resulted in Beckett's demotion from health to trade and industry despite the fact that she topped the Shadow Cabinet poll.

Beckett has been further humiliated by the spin which has been put on the move which was recorded in several of the papers in these terms: "She (Beckett) will now work closely with the Shadow Chancellor, Gordon Brown."

Is Trade and Industry now an outpost of the Treasury? The *Guardian* did not comment on the coincidence of her success in the poll and her demotion. Instead, in its editorial it complained that "too many MPs vote on the basis of regional or union loyalties".

In other words that there is still some politics going on. The editorial went on to say "Mr. Blair will be forgiven for ignoring the whole pantomime (Shadow Cabinet elections) if and when he gets the chance". I bet Alastair Campbell is pleased with that day's work.

Margaret Beckett has been replaced by Harriet Harman. Her vote in the Shadow Cabinet elections dropped significantly. She was promoted. This was her reward

for her success as Employment spokeswoman.

"Success" is defined as how conference is judged by the media. She was indeed fortunate that the proposer was so spineless that he withdrew the motion on a minimum wage not because this issue which they judged to be crucially important was resolved but because of a technicality in the drafting of the composite. Her real achievement is to take one of the very few genuinely socialist proposals which the Labour Party has not yet abandoned and severely curtail its effectiveness.

*A minimum wage may be a question of economics and of legislation. But it is also a moral issue.*

Low paying employers should be made to feel ashamed of themselves. Harman's determination to refuse to be committed to any figure, even a relatively low one, sends out signals that the Labour Party is embarrassed by its own policy. Why should any poor employer take any notice.

Her record in the last year does not bode well for the health job. There are major elements in the business community, particularly those that have contacts with the Continent, who were supportive of a minimum wage.

And yet she still pursued an extremely cautious line. As I have shown above there are major elements of the health sector who are opposed to changes to fundholding and Trust Status. What will Harman's reaction be to being heckled I wonder? Is the principle of care being rationed by clinical need worth defending?

Meanwhile Dorrell, in his short period as Health Secretary has signalled a new approach. He has said that rows over the structure of the NHS were "yesterday's subject". (This mirrors the consolidating approach which Gillian Shepherd has been taking at education). He has recognised (as had Redwood when he was Welsh Secretary ) the absurd paper chase which the "internal market" created.

Armies of administrators send bills and reminders back and forth for things which used to be called patients but are now called "finished consultant episodes". Each side's lawyers try to be cleverer than the other side's lawyer in a process known as "competition". Nurses

are sacked which is a thing called "efficiency".

The savings are used to lease cars for the expanding middle managers to drive to lots of conferences all over the country which is a thing called "proper incentives".

Using language which Tony Blair wouldn't dare use lest Middle England became upset Dorrell has said "Managers who aren't delivering value for money ought to be quaking in their boots". Let us hope that Harman can at least keep up with Dorrell in his revisionism about the "internal market". There have also been more ominous developments.

*Eric Caines, previously the head of NHS personnel said melodramatically "The NHS as a publicly funded, free at the point of access service is to all intents and purposes gone forever".*

The Healthcare 2000 report into the future funding of the health service, funded by the pharmaceutical industry, was published last month. Its Chairman Sir Duncan Nichols argued that for the health service to survive more people would have to pay for private care. Three months after the inquiry began he joined the Board of BUPA.

Reaction to this report included a bizarre situation in which Stephen Dorrell defended tax-funded universally available health care and Patricia Hewitt, a leading figure in Kinnock's office, a member of the Nicholls Commission who works for Andersen Consulting, was defending the conclusions of the report.

Harman and Hewitt were both lawyers in the Council for Civil Liberties (now Liberty). Harman named Hewitt as her "person of the year" following the latter's role in the Borrie Report. It is likely and extremely worrying that Harman will become a mouthpiece for Hewitt.

Scaremongering over the age of the population is being used to undermine the principle of universality. The fact that a universal system is cheaper overall than one based on private insurance is apparent to anyone who compares the British and American models. The same argument applies with the social security system in general.

As we pointed out at the time it was Blairites on the Borrie Commission

who were advocating targeting of benefits while Peter Lilley made the case for universal social security provision.

Could this be what Blair meant when he said to Sir David English of Associated Newspapers: "Well, we all agree the welfare state has got to be radically reformed. Who's going to do it? You may find I am the only one who has the will to do it."

## Labour Party Front Bench

|                                   |   |                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|--|
| Leader                            | Tony Blair  | Northern Ireland                  | Marjorie Mowlam*<br>Tony Worthington<br>Jim Dowd<br>Eric Illsley   |
| Deputy Leader                     | John Prescott   | Overseas Development              | Joan Lester*<br>George Foulkes   |
| Duchy of Lancaster                | Derek Foster<br>Richard Caborn<br>Peter Mandleson   | Scotland                          | George Robertson*<br>John McFall<br>John McAllion<br>Helen Liddell   |
| Defence                           | David Clark*<br>John Reid<br>Paul Murphy<br>John Spellar  | Social Security                   | Chris Smith*<br>Keith Bradley<br>John Denham<br>Malcolm Wicks  |
| Disabled                          | Tom Clark*<br>Gordon McMaster   | Trade & Industry                  | Margaret Beckett*<br>Adam Ingram<br>Stuart Bell<br>Nigel Griffiths<br>John Battle<br>Kim Howells<br>Geoff Hoon<br>Barbara Roche  |
| Education & Employment            | David Blunkett*<br>Bryan Davies<br>Peter Kilfoyle<br>Stephen Byers<br>Estelle Morris<br>Michael Meacher*<br>Ian McCartney | Transport                         | Clare Short*<br>Brian Wilson<br>Graham Allen   |
| (Employment)                      |   | Treasury & Economic Affairs       | Gordon Brown*<br>Alistair Darling<br>Dawn Primarolo<br>Mike O'Brien<br>Andrew Smith  |
| Environment & London              | Frank Dobson*<br>Hilary Armstrong<br>Nick Raynsford<br>Keith Vaz<br>Joan Ruddock  | (Chief Secretary to the Treasury) |  |
| (Environmental Protection)        |   | Wales                             | Ron Davies*<br>Win Griffiths<br>Rhodri Morgan  |
| Food, Agriculture & Rural Affairs | Gavin Straig*<br>Elliot Morley<br>Llin Golding  | Women                             | Tessa Jowell   |
| Foreign Affairs                   | Robin Cook*<br>Joyce Quin<br>Tony Lloyd<br>Derek Fatchett   | Chief Whip<br>Deputy Whips        | Donald Dewar<br>Don Dixon<br>Nick Brown<br>George Mudie<br>Dennis Turner<br>John Cummings<br>Joe Benton<br>Jon Owen Jones<br>Eric Clarke<br>Bob Ainsworth<br>Eric Martlew<br>Janet Anderson<br>David Clelland<br>Ann Coffey<br>Peter Hain<br>Jane Kennedy<br>Greg Pope<br>Bridget Prentice |
| Health                            | Harriet Harman*<br>Henry McLeish<br>Kevin Barron<br>Alan Milburn  | Pairing Whip<br>Whips             |  |
| Home Affairs                      | Jack Straw*<br>Alun Michael<br>Doug Henderson<br>George Howarth   |                                   |  |
| Law Officer                       | John Morris   |                                   |  |
| Leader of the House               | Ann Taylor*<br>Jeff Rooker  |                                   |  |
| Lord Chancellor's Department      | Paul Boateng  |                                   |  |
| National Heritage                 | Jack Cunningham<br>Mark Fisher<br>Tom Pendry<br>Lewis Moonie  |                                   |  |

(\* denotes elected member of the Shadow Cabinet)



## Obituary

### Harry Clayden

Address by Stan Newens at the Funeral of Harry Clayden (1905-95), at Southend Crematorium on 5th October 1995

We have come together here today to commemorate the life of Harry Clayden, who died, some ten days ago, at the age of ninety.

Harry was a man of quite exceptional qualities who devoted himself, throughout the whole of his working life, to the service of his fellow men and women. In his day, he won the respect of immense numbers of people - many no longer with us - whose lives were touched by his work.

His family and friends can justly take pride in the great contribution, which he made to the community, in which he lived and worked and the causes to which he directed his efforts.

Born in Fulham, in the early years of this century, the son of a driver of horse drawn dray, he had the misfortune to lose his father when he was only nine years of age. This inevitably imposed straitened circumstances on a working class family and Harry was forced to help out doing odd jobs and leaving school early to supplement the family income.

Strangely enough, it was the contact with a socialist cobbler, which one of these jobs gave him, that influenced his outlook and shaped what ultimately became his life's purpose. Having obtained employment with the Home and Colonial Stores, he joined the Young Communist League in 1922, when he was only seventeen years of age and he became a member of a trade union.

By the time he took a job with the London Co-operative Society - then only 4 years old in 1924 - he was already committed to the cause of working class emancipation.

In the London Society and the Co-operative wing of the Labour movement, he found his life's work and it was an immense contribution, which he made, in this area.

Quite early on, he supported the efforts of the trade unions to field a panel of candidates to represent the employees on the LCS Board. Later on, he became a candidate himself and, after very great efforts, he was elected, in 1937.

From then onwards, until his retirement, the Society was the major cause in his working life. He served a total of 34 years on the Board completing his time as President, from 1964 to 1971.

All his years of public activity were years of endeavour and struggle but, this was especially the case in the 1950s, when the Society encountered immense problems, as the result of unprecedented competition.

Harry was a key figure in creating a coalition of

forces - later the 1960 Committee - which eventually took over control and equipped the Society to stand up to the new competitive conditions. Without his effort and his leadership, this may never have been possible and it is sad that later problems made it impossible to realise all the hopes which he originally had.

Harry was always a very popular figure among his fellow employees and he is still remembered as an extremely effective manager of the LCS shop in Southall. Only last week Sid Bidwell, former Member of Parliament in his constituency, was recalling his service there.

When Harry became President of the LCS, in 1964, he became a national figure in the movement. He served on the Board of the Co-operative Wholesale Society and the Co-operative Press. He led for the London Society at national meetings.

He never, however, forgot those with whom he had worked or the background from which he had sprung. Humility was an outstanding feature of his personality and remained so, despite his success and very real achievements.

Throughout his life Harry was a socialist and a communist. Loyalty was one of his cardinal qualities and he always backed the cause of working class emancipation in Britain and abroad. He led a dedicated life.

Yet he was also a family man who was dedicated to his children, his mother, his brother and sisters and their families and of course, to his beloved wife, Netta. When tragedy struck, during the Second World War, in the shape of a direct hit by a bomb on the air raid shelter, in which members of his family were taking refuge, killing his mother and other close relatives, he adopted and brought up his four year old orphaned niece, who survived, as his own child.

It was a source of great sadness to him that his wife, Netta, did not live to enjoy with him the years of retirement but Harry bore his great loss with immense dignity and fortitude.

At this time, our sincere good wishes and our compassion go out to all who were close to him as family members, who supported him in his later years.

Harry lived a full life. He spurned material advancement in pursuit of the ideals which motivated his whole being.

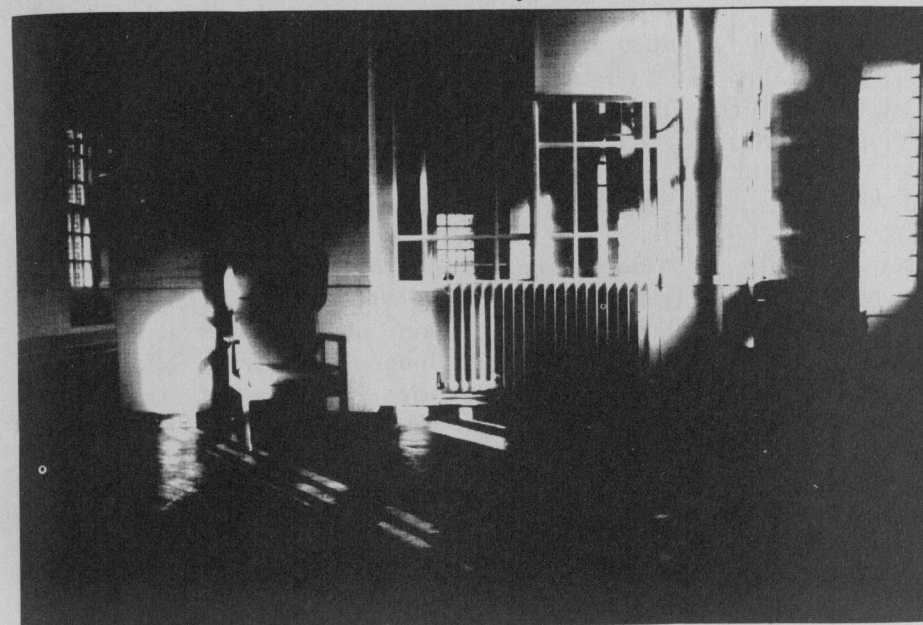
At this time of sadness and parting, we pay our tribute and express our respects and affection but we should remember his example and recognise that we can best create a memorial to him by continuing to work for the ideals and objectives which were embodied in his life of dedication, of love for others and of service.

[Stan Newens was Labour MP for both Chingford and for Harlow. He is now Labour MEP for London Central]

## Society's Odd Cousin

by Rolf Flegoff

(A review of *Breakdown*, an exhibition of poems and photographs by Steve Powell and Bob Clayden currently on at Southend Central Library)



*Breakdown* is a powerful exhibition of poems and photographs which I discovered in Southend Library in October.

The quality of both poems and photographs is exceptional but the impact of the two together amounts to something else.

Both artists were part of the community of a mental hospital which

is now deceased.

This is their epitaph - to Runwell Hospital in Essex.

Bob Clayden the photographer was maintenance fitter and shop steward there for twenty years. He earned his living ensuring everything kept working; an appropriate eye to register its decay.

Steve Powell, the poet spent time

### Empty Ward

In the sun drenched empty ward,  
There is a chair,  
Sat on and slept-in once,  
Because it was there,  
The whole ethos of care.  
The staff looked on,  
Like pupils watching the master,  
What can we do to help,  
Sorting out practical problems,  
Where society failed.

The bugs have gone,  
Unlike the patients,  
Who are there in spirit,  
Like the medicated sunlight,  
Injecting its way across,  
But now they're on the street,  
Getting under politicians' feet.

there as a schizophrenic patient.

His poems speak for the people that once lived there, now only a memory, and lament the loss of emotional security, now that the cost cutting "care in the community" policy has been introduced and hospital is closed.

*Breakdown* of emotional life, breakdown of the building and breakdown of the Health Service reinforce each other to produce a powerful statement. This exhibition deserves to be widely seen and hopefully will find more venues after its current exhibition has finished at Southend Library.

## Obituary

### Gerry Golden

(1922-1995)

An Appreciation by Pat Murphy

I first met Gerry Golden in London in the early 1960s. He was a convenor for the Electrical Trades Union in Shepperton Film Studios. He was active in the trade union movement and had been a member of the British Communist Party. He had emigrated from Dublin to Britain via Canada in the early 1950s, having served ten years in the Irish army.

He, and some industrial members of the Party, had tried to put a stop to ballot rigging in the ETU before it was exposed and put a stop to in the High Court on the instigation of Frank Chapple and Les Cannon. The Party branches which were dominated by middle class elements were not interested in discussing the

matter, never mind doing something about it. Gerry left the party but did not identify with the new leadership of the ETU, which he regarded as opportunist.

Gerry had an internationalist outlook on life and rejected narrow Catholic nationalism which dominated Irish society in the 1940s and 1950s. He was a founder member of the Irish Communist Organisation in 1964. He believed in history and the class struggle which propelled it forward. However, his views were philosophical and he disdained or rejected most, and eventually all, of the contemporary left wing radical organisations operating in Britain. In latter years he joined the British Labour Party.

He continued to express his strongly held political convictions which he circulated amongst friends or contributed articles to journals of organisations with which he disagreed. He was a regular speaker from the floor at meetings or conferences on contemporary politics.



From the late 1970s he was afflicted with arthritis which progressively robbed him of his military bearing and eventually severely restricted the use of his limbs. With his mobility limited he read a great deal and retained a lively interest in contemporary politics.

The collapse of socialism in the East and the decline of Social Democracy in the West probably disconcerted him, as it does many of us, but he still believed that the welfare of workers - employed and unemployed - still constituted the criterion for evaluating any society. In a situation where many institutions have crumbled or have been severely dented, he looked for signs of new emerging structures which could be of benefit to workers.

A few years ago he struggled up the steps of the Larkin Unemployed Centre - a trade union sponsored organisation, on the North Strand in Dublin, to inspect the place. It provides welfare rights information, training and support for the self-employed, and co-operatives, job clubs and

counselling.

It also campaigns to have a statutory right to work put on the political agenda. Gerry approved, and one of his last acts was to make an ethical investment in the Centre.

Given time, he would no doubt have identified other new emerging structures and developments which taken together, would reflect the Labour interest in the modern political and social world.

Gerry was buried in the family plot in Shankill, Co. Dublin. He will be missed by his friends for his stimulating mind and his good humour.

[Pat Murphy was for many years an Irish Transport & General Workers' Union shop steward at the Unidare group of companies in Finglas, Dublin. He was along with Gerry Golden and others, one of the founders of the Irish Communist Organisation. He now works at the Larkin Unemployed Centre in Dublin].

## Clare Short

This magazine was never much in sympathy with the views of Clare Short in her left wing days. But we always had the feeling that whatever the disagreements, we were dealing with a person who behaved out of principle, a straight person. Either we were wrong and Miss Short was yet another careerist who sailed with the left wing wind when it was blowing towards power and then jumped ship after the Blair coup, or she has more recently decided to sell her soul for the chance to be a (very) minor Government Minister.

It was very clever of Mr. Blair to give her the Shadow Transport job. Gone are the days when the former John Prescott could hammer the Tories as a socialist, as trains crashed, planes fell out of the skies, and dreadful things happened to ferries operated by the closest friends of Mrs. Thatcher. Miss Short's brief was to play the left winger justifying New Labour's *equivocation* over rail privatisation.

But he excelled himself by giving her the task of getting Conference to ratify the rejection of Liz Davies as the Parliamentary Candidate for Leeds North. She was not allowed to carry out this task in a straightforward manner but was required to do it in the deceitful manner that has become the hallmark of the Blair way of doing things.

Liz Davies was rejected because

Margaret Hodge wanted revenge. When Hodge turned her coat in Islington, Liz Davies refused to go along with her and stood against her for the leadership of the Labour Group. Liz Davies followed Neil Kinnock's exhortations to oppose the Poll Tax, while Margaret Hodge became its most ardent collector.

Hodge boasted that her Council jailed more Poll Tax avoiders than any other Council. She attacked the local police for not helping her to track down and prosecute those that did not pay! (The police reluctance was understandable. They had never had to pay rates. So paying the Poll Tax was not something they felt too happy about.)

The first charge against Davies was that she went against the Party line in Islington. That charge was true. She continued to oppose the Poll Tax. But refusing to obey the whip's instructions on a matter of conscience is acceptable in all parties, and most Labour leaders - let alone local Councillors - have done so.

The second charge was that she did not tell the Leeds North selection committee that she had been sentenced to a jail term for not paying her Poll Tax, on principle. This charge was untrue. She had been completely frank about the matter.

Clare Short ignored the actual charges against Liz Davies in her speech to

Conference. She concentrated on Liz Davies association with the left wing Labour Briefing group. Briefing is, admittedly, a bit off the wall. But in recent times it has been almost Centrist in its opposition to Tony Blair's lurch to the right. It is supported by MPs and local Councillors. And association with it is certainly no grounds for disbarment from office.

Short's speech demonised Briefing, in much the same way that she herself has been demonised in the past. And this was sufficient to sway the majority of the pre-selected evangelical zealots on the floor of the Conference.

Tony was pleased - temporarily. Short forgot her role as ideological slave a few weeks later. She effectively told David Frost that she might favour the legalisation of cannabis. The Party hierarchy said that this was against Party policy. (This was a lie. The Labour Party has no policy on the matter.)

Short said that she was free to express her views because the Labour Party was not run by a dictator. Within hours, after seeing Tony Blair, she made a grovelling apology for embarrassing the leadership and promised to stick to her brief in the future.

It would be interesting to now ask her if she still thinks that the Labour Party is not run by a dictator!