# Labour & Trade Union Review

September-October 1989 No.13

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## THE UNIONS -

## CAN LABOUR MEET THE CHALLENGE?

THE TGWU

Europe and the TUC
Green & Growing?
The Right and Education
UCATT & Self-Employment
Islam and Politeness

plus

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# Beyond the Policy Review

The Policy Review has been an exercise in public relations for electoralist purposes. To say this is not to decry it, merely to call a spade a spade. And Labour has certainly needed a spade to dig itself out of the pit it dug itself in the early 1980s. It is a necessary part of Labour's business to win elections. In order to make Labour electable once more, it was undoubtedly necessary to shed the more outlandish of the policy commitments which the Left saddled the Party with between 1980 and 1983. And it was necessary to do this in a way which carried conviction with the electorate at large, by involving a large number of senior Labour MPs and trade union leaders in the process.

The Policy Review has succeeded in this. The Left's fetish of nationalisation has been convincingly abandoned and appreciable progress (more than many, including us, expected a year ago) has been made towards a responsible defence policy. So far, so good. Moreover, the Review's Final Report, *Meet the Challenge. Make the Change* (hereafter MTCMTC), is in some ways quite an impressive document. A great deal of work and quite a lot of constructive thought have gone into it. There is a lot of waffle in it and plenty of studied vagueness, but there are also many imaginative proposals on particular issues, and as many again which are at least unobjectionable.

But it is not an adequate basis for government. This is not at all a reason for not supporting MTCMTC at Brighton. It is clearly a political necessity that it be emphatically endorsed by this year's Party Conference. But the Policy Review will have served its purpose once this has happened. It would be a great mistake to allow other, more substantial purposes, to be attributed to it. There are two reasons for this.

The first is a short-term and eminently electoralist reason. It is that MTCMTC contains, unavoidably, a lot of suggestions and proposals which could easily be converted into hostages to fortune. The danger of which we warned in our last issue, that of a revival of one-nation Toryism within the Conservative Party at the expense of doctrinaire Thatcherism, is now taking shape. As we anticipated two months ago, a Tory challenge to Thatcher's leadership is now in prospect, and there is renewed Tory pressure to drop the Poll Tax. Whether or not Thatcher remains as leader, Thatcher*ism* may well be on the way out within her party and the government. If so, this will take a lot of the wind out of Labour's sails. And, under Kenneth Baker's chairmanship, we can expect Conservative Central Office to mount a concerted attack on the content of MTCMTC, especially on the financial implications of its proposals and the general question of Labour's fiscal policy.

Such an attack would be all the harder to rebut in so far as the general thrust of MTCMTC is so thoroughly uncontroversial. It will be open to a Conservative Party once more operating visibly on Tory as opposed to Thatcherite assumptions to say that it has no objection in principle to Labour's new approach for the very good reason that there is nothing distinctively socialist about it whatever, and to concentrate its fire, and public attention, on the costing of Labour's proposals in order to cast doubt on Labour's ability to operate this new approach effectively.

For this reason, Labour needs to be flexible; it must be a moving target, not a stationary one. Otherwise it could well lose the initiative to the Tories and find itself on the defensive, obliged to justify its own programme in detail and quite possibly compelled to retreat from aspects of it under Tory pressure. If this were to happen, Labour would cut a very sorry figure indeed.

To avoid this, Labour's leaders need to emphasise that, as Neil Kinnock remarks in his Introduction to MTCMTC, the document is not an election manifesto. They should insist that it has been produced for purposes of debate and clarification of ideas within the Party alone and that the manifesto on which Labour will go to the country and do battle with the Tories remains to be written.

But they should also admit, at any rate to themselves, that this manifesto remains to be thought about. Which brings us to the second, and far more important, reason why the Policy Review should now be quietly forgotten about, as soon as is decently possible.

The vision outlined in MTCMTC is a heavily economist vision, and for that reason an unrealistic vision. It is a vision of a guided market economy. The essential capitalist case is conceded that the dynamism required for growth and ever increasing material prosperity and national economic competitiveness can only come from the self-seeking activism of entrepreneurs operating in free market conditions. But it is suggested that the operation of the market needs to be guided and controlled in several ways: to guarantee the long-term through, for example, state-promoted training schemes and state-induced if not state-financed investment in research and development on a large scale, and to mitigate the socially unjust and divisive and ecologically destructive effects of the unfettered operation of market forces through more funding of social goods and services, measures to tackle unemployment, measures to protect pensioners and the low-paid, measures to promote women and disadvantaged minorities, measures to protect the environment - and measures to restore workers' rights.

In short, Labour intends to rely on the market, while modifying the parameters within which it operates in the interests of long-term growth and social justice and environmental conservation. This has nothing to do with socialism, of

## Debate - Friday 13th October

**Between The Ernest Bevin Society and the Socialist Party of Great Britain**

The Ernest Bevin Society will be defending the proposition "That the 1945 Labour Government was of great benefit to the Working Class".

To be held at Old Chiswick Town Hall, Turnham Green (corner Sutton Court Road), London W4, from 8 to 10 pm.

course, and will no doubt be criticised on that ground by the Left. But this is not the point we are making. The Left's 'socialism' has been such an impoverished, incoherent and intellectually threadbare affair for so long that its criticisms cannot be taken very seriously. Until the Left develops serious and realistic socialist proposals based on solid arguments, Labour's leaders can be expected to pay no attention to it and to continue to put forward programmes for a modified and more congenial version of free-market capitalism. This is what they have tried to do in MTCMTC. The problem is that this programme sounds fine until you start to think about it.

The real objection to MTCMTC is that it lacks a realistic economic strategy, and that it does so because it lacks an adequate conception of British society. It clearly shares with Thatcherism a vision of Britain as a society of pleasure-seeking individualists demanding ever more consumption opportunities, most of which are to be enjoyed in the privacy of their own homes. And, in particular, it clearly assumes that, after ten year's of Thatcher's assaults, the trade union movement no longer needs to be taken seriously into account. Virtually all the references in MTCMTC to "the role of the trade unions" are entirely vague, mere phrase-mongering. Not a single concrete example of this role is given.

This is especially remarkable in the case of the proposals for training, which seem to have assumed the status of a virtual panacea in the minds of Labour's economic strategists. Why should training, even on the scale Labour now envisages, make a major difference to the economy's performance ? It will only do so if the workers respond to the training opportunities on a large scale. But why should they? What inducement will they have? Thatcher's solution has been to coerce workers to retrain as and when necessary by the scourge of unemployment. Labour seems to be relying on personal ambition, the prospect of upward mobility for individuals. But this will affect only a minority, while Labour's strategy appears to presuppose a general and large-scale transformation of Britain's workforce. The idea that this can be achieved without the active and constant involvement of the trade union movement, and without the existence of inducements that go far beyond the prospects of promotion for the few, is an extraordinarily unrealistic one.


# Labour & Trade Union Review

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The fact is that the only inducement which will work for workers in general is the prospect, not of individual promotion to foreman or under-manager, but of greater responsibility as workers for the conduct of the enterprises in which they work. The proposals for training are worthy in themselves, but they lack their indispensable complement, a willingness to promote genuine industrial democracy in earnest.

Instead, what Labour proposes to do in the sphere of industrial relations is merely to restore trade union rights of the traditional kind. And this proposal, which only makes sense as a sop to the conservative trade union leaders, entirely undercuts the rest of Labour's economic strategy. To refuse to have a pay policy when you are Mrs Thatcher and are successfully waging class war against the labour movement is one thing, and entirely coherent. To rule out pay policy when you propose to restore the unions to their old rights and (by reducing unemployment) to their old strength while doing nothing to change their old, unreconstructed, defensive, sectional and irresponsible outlook, is another thing altogether; it is incoherent and absurdly unrealistic. Yet, meaningless phrases about "partnership" etc. apart, this is what Labour proposes to do.

This is the main problem with MTCMTC. There are many secondary ones. Labour's leaders don't need to produce a new revised version of MTCMTC. But they need to do a lot of rethinking. They need to drop those social assumptions which they share with Thatcher, and grasp the nettle of industrial policy firmly and boldly. This is the challenge they must meet and the change they must make.

# Notes on the News

## by Madawc Williams

### The Romance of the Moon

Twenty years ago, an ancient dream was fulfilled - people got to the moon. But, like many romances, the reality proved disappointing. The whole American space enterprise went into a decline from which it has not yet fully recovered.

It's a sad fact that the high-technology dream of space travel came to be seen as hostile to other worthy dreams, such as social justice or an end to world hunger. The world has wealth enough for all of these things. The total cost of the space programme is dwarved by various sorts of personal consumption that previous generations did not need. People in Western Europe and America are perhaps five times as wealthy as they were in 1900 (**The Economist**, August 12, 1989). Most people would be willing to live on a bit less, if they thought that good and useful things were happening in the world at large. By spreading cynicism about the dream of space travel, suggesting that it was somehow at the expense of the poor and needy, the would-be reformers created a general atmosphere of cynicism. Lots of people decided that they'd look after themselves and have fun. Space travel was wound down, but nothing much was done about social justice or world hunger.

There is still a romance about space - a realisation that our Earth is one very tiny part of an extremely large universe. Surveys have shown that a large percentage of the population would be interested in something like the discovery of a new galaxy. The *Voyager* spacecraft's reports on the planet Neptune get a place in news bulletins. And news bulletins are among the most widely watched programmes, beaten only by the most popular of the soap operas. Radicals must learn to *combine* the different sorts of idealism and unselfish feeling. The slogan should be - for a better world *and* a better view of the rest of the universe.

### The right to be foul

Down here on Earth, the problem at the moment is that the British government will not allow the institutions of the EEC to guard the British people from hazards and pollution. Thatcher & Co. want to 'protect' us from the clean beaches and pure water that the other peoples of Europe should soon be enjoying under the new regulations.

(Incidentally, it will be interesting to see if any criminal convictions result from the **Herald of Free Enterprise** business. It has been suggested that the whole Thatcherite 'entrepreneurial' spirit has led to cutting corners wherever it has been applied. Also that car ferries are basically unsafe, considering the risk of collisions in a crowded waterway like the Channel. And that the Department of Transport is not being allowed to publish research that proves this [**Private Eye**, August 18, 1989].)

Can Thatcherism cope with the growing Green element in public opinion? To really cope with global pollution means more internationalism and more state regulation of industry -

# L&TUR £5,000 Appeal: Why we need your money

Anyone involved in left-wing politics soon gets used to continuous demands for cash from various people. But we think we have a better claim than most.

What we're doing is trying to shake up left wing politics - force it to shed some comfortable illusions, and develop a more adventurous as well a more realistic attitude. An attitude that will enable more of the fine old dreams of a just society to be translated into reality. Naturally, it doesn't make us popular. But it has to be done, if future generations of socialists are not to experience the same sort of heart-breaking failures that have been happening since the 1960s.

No one associated with **L&TUR** gets paid anything - except for the printer. Until now we have been able to rely on a special relationship with a printer who gave us a bargain rate. In effect, he was subsidising us out of solidarity, just as all the people who contribute hundreds of hours of unpaid labour time to **L&TUR** have been subsidising it.

Sadly, this arrangement has come to an end. We now have to pay for normal commercial printing and this has doubled our costs. We shall be able to survive on this basis in the short run only by raising the sales price to £1.50 (as from this issue) *and* considerably increasing our sales. We may or may not be able to do the second of these but, in any case, to guarantee our longer term future we need to be able to print **L&TUR** ourselves. Only in this way can we hope to keep costs to a minimum and maintain a reasonable price for the magazine.

We are therefore planning to obtain our own printing equipment, and we estimate that we could do this with £5,000. But neither **L&TUR** nor the **Ernest Bevin Society** have any financial backers. There is only one way in which we can hope to raise this money - from *you*, our readers. If you value what we are doing and want to see us continue the good work, you can help make this possible by sending us a donation - and please make it a substantial one! This is definitely an emergency and we don't have much time to reach our target.

But once we have reached it, with your help, we shall be able to do many things which we haven't had the resources for in the past. As well as the magazine, we could produce pamphlets on a wide range of subjects, developing the ideas put forward in **L&TUR** in greater detail and depth. And we could publish reprints of important articles and essays by earlier socialists and trade unionists which are still relevant to the British labour movement today, but which have been forgotten and allowed to go out of print - things that people need to be told about, and won't get from anyone else but us.

We're in our third year of operations, we've shown that we can develop our thinking, expand our sales network and improve the quality of the magazine. We have managed this without raising the sales price before now, and without asking for money from anyone. But we now need the active support of our readers. We would not be asking for it otherwise. So please send your cheques, large or small, to **Labour & Trade Union Review**, 114 Lordship Road, London N16 0QP...soon.

and Thatcher hates both of these things. They have their own 'green guru', Professor David Pearce. But will they act on his ideas, or just use them as a pretext for doing nothing? And if Thatcher can't make the transition, can the Conservatives manage to dump her and replace her with someone who could? Traditional Tories can be sincerely Green - because something that wrecks the world will clearly hurt the rich as well as the poor. But can traditional Toryism recover control of the Conservative Party?

**Shady Spots of Greenery**

The matter of the plans to import polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) sounds like another bit of foolish Thatcherite 'entrepreneurship'. In fact, the matter is nothing like that simple. There have been cowboy companies who take money for 'safe disposal' of waste, and then simply tip it down the drain. But this is something quite different.

Chemicals like PCBs can be dealt with and made safe by people with the right skills. Dangerous chemicals can be changed into chemicals that are safe. To refuse to let them across your frontiers is no solution - if they start to leak, they are quite capable of going all round the world and hurting everyone. The imported PCBs were due to go to a reputable company that could have cleaned them up correctly. But Greenpeace prefered to spread a panic about them. According to an editorial in the magazine **New Scientist**, which has a good reputation for publicising real threats to the environment:

*"Where the Greenpeace stance is less praiseworthy is over the specific question of PCBs.... Long term storage is, frankly, not a sensible answer. Controlled, tightly regulated incineration in properly licensed and meticulously run incinerators is. In private, Greenpeace's campaigners concede this."* (August 19 1989).

The world needs to learn how to think ecologically - to forsee the long-term and world-wide effects of every action. Spreading panics is not the best way to do this. The same dockers who refused to import the PCBs would also probably refuse to sit in the same room as someone who was HIV-positive, even though AIDS is not a disease that can be passed on by breathing the same air. The need is to educate people, not to frighten them.

**Salad (yester)days**

Ever since the Euro-elections, the Green Party have held their place as the third party in the land. The centre parties have not only failed to become credible parties of government - they are being displaced as the major parties of protest.

There is a definite possibility of a permanent re-alignment, with the Green Party absorbing much of the traditional Liberal protest vote and a large chunk of the Bennite left. They have the right qualifications - they are anti-nuclear and anti-EEC, and they make no pretence of being fond of the working class.

If this happened, the Social Democratic Party would probably return to Labour - with or without David Owen. And the Social and Liberal Democrats would have no future at all.

At present, the SLD are considering changing their name again. They may go back to calling themselves the Liberal Party, but they could not go back to being what they once were. The Liberals lost their position as a party of government in the first quarter of the twentieth century. They kept going thereafter as the nice centre party that you could vote for if you didn't feel happy with either left or right. The Thorpe affair did them no good, and the bungling of the alliance with the SDP has probably finished them off.

If the SLD want a new name, I have a constructive suggestion. Let them be the Radical Alternative to Thatcherism and Socialism - RATS for short.

**God not on their side**

When Genghis Khan's Mongols conquered a huge chunk of Asia, they assumed that they had God on their side. So confident were they that they seriously considered destroying the whole population of North China to make way for their superior Mongol way of life. They dropped this plan only when it was pointed out to them that the North Chinese could yield them vast amounts of tribute if left alive. And they were no less ruthless with the Muslims in other parts of their Empire. Muslims found this very confusing - up until then they assumed that God was on *their* side. They had to conclude that it was divine punishment for their religious laxness - and since Genghis Khan's descendants converted to Islam, the faith survived.

Oliver Cromwell was another man who was sure that God was on his side. A middle-aged politician with no military experience, he unexpectedly found that he had a knack of winning battles. He took this to be a sign of Divine Grace. He could be highly practical about the matter - when crossing a river, he told his men to "trust in God and keep your powder dry". But he had a short and ruthless way with people like King Charles, or like the Catholic Irish, who had a different understanding of God's will. Yet his brand of Puritanism collapsed shortly after his death, and no English leader since has been regarded as having reliable support from God.

At present, radical Islamists in Iran and the Lebanon are acting on the assumption that they have God on their side. Thankfully, they are not having the same sort of success as Genghis Khan or Oliver Cromwell. Iran was stopped in the Gulf War, in part thanks to the presence of the US Navy in the Gulf. (Readers of **L&TUR** will recall that I said at the time that it was the crucial issue. Success would strengthen Khomeini's claim to speak for God, and failure would undermine it.)

Moreover, the Muslim Afghan guerillas seem to be getting nowhere in their efforts to overthrow the secular Marxist Afghan government. Plenty of non-Muslims believed that they could do it. Britain pulled out its embassy as the Russian troops left, confident that the regime was doomed. Typical of today's Foreign Office - a wise and knowing smile from people who later turn out to be stupid and ignorant, and too conceited *to learn anything new.*

In the Lebanon, Hizbollah, the 'party of God', is being blamed for not 'being reasonable' and releasing the Western hostages. In fact, the Lebanese Shi'ites were very reasonable and modest people until the Lebanese state started to break up all around them. Flung into an unreasonable situation, it is hardly surprising that they developed politics based on their traditional religious understanding of the world. Their brief success - in particular making the USA dance to their tune just because they held a few non-Lebanese hostages - may have encouraged them to think that they had God on their side. Set-backs like having one of their spiritual leaders kidnapped must have dented this belief.

I suspect that Hizbollah might be reasonable if they were given a

reasonable overall perspective. The media have concentrated on the Lebanon mostly because of the Western hostages. The West would be quite content to leave the Lebanese to kill each other, provided that their own people are safe. There are plenty of Lebanese hostages held by rival Lebanese factions, but who ever mentions them?

Hizbollah continue to use the hostages to defend their own interests. In fact, the less confident they are that they have God on their side, the more they are likely to hang on to mundane sources of strength like Western hostages.

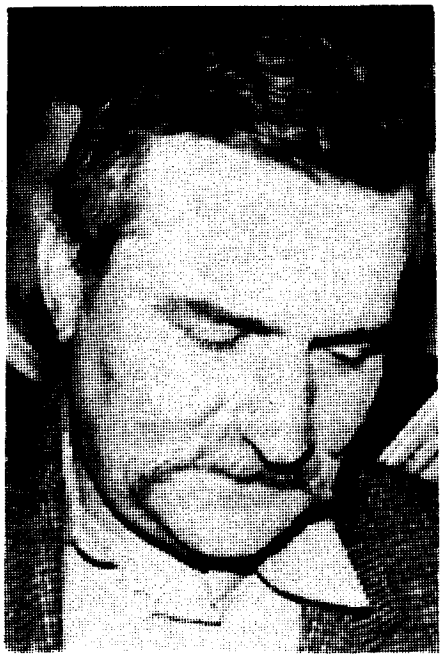
**A Lebanese solution?**

As we go to press, the future of the Lebanon may be being settled by the fighting between the Syrians and the Christians under General Aoun. Then again, it may not. The battle is basically between three varieties of fascism - the Christian Phalange, and the Baathists of Syria and of Iraq. All are fascist in a substantial sense - violent and ruthless nationalists, who derived their ideology from European fascism in the 1930s. All are brutal and obnoxious, but the Iraqi Baaths are probably the most effective of the three. They showed in the Gulf War that they had been able to unite the diverse peoples within their own territory (excluding only the Kurds, an ancient nation who were unlucky enough never to get their own nation-state).

It is the alliance between the Iraqi Baathists and General Aoun, (supported by the Christian Phalange, although he himself is not a Phalangist) that has pushed the Syrians into drastic military action. If the Syrian regime fails to crush Aoun, it may itself fall apart. There has in the past been talk of unity between Syria and Iraq - and Syria was for a short time united with Nasser's Egypt. Given the chance, the Iraqi Baath might be able to take over Syria and the Lebanon as well. The main thing that makes this unlikely is the virtual certainty that the other Arab powers would block it.

The most viable solutions are either a smaller and very sectarian Christian Lebanon, with Syria taking over the rest, or a Syrian take-over of the whole of the Lebanon. Syria does not want the former, and Iraq does not want the latter. Iraq stands ready to stab Syria in the back if it tries to impose its own sort of 'law-and-order' on the warring factions. Other powers also play their own game - although what it is is less clear.

The stalemate may continue, because outside powers prefer stalemate to a settlement that would strengthen some rival power. The one thing that seems definite is that there can be no going back to the confessional power-sharing that once existed. It was not a long-term success - it generated pressures that led to civil war. And there has been a great deal of killing and bitterness since then, far too much for the rival factions ever to be serious partners in government again.



**A nation once again?**

As we go to press, Solidarity are about to form the next government of Poland. They have been Eastern Europe's first successful opposition in the post-war period. I hope that they can go on to be a successful government.

Handling the Russians will be a problem. Poles and Russians have never liked each other. The division goes back to the rival Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox missionaries who converted the Slavs in the 8th and 9th centuries. The Poles tried to prevent the creation of a strong Russian state by the Tsars of Moscow, and that same state eventually joined with Austria and Prussia to partition and absorb Poland in the 18th century. After World War One, Lenin and Trotsky tried to conquer the revived Polish state, but instead lost a chunk of territory with non-Polish inhabitants. In 1939, Stalin grabbed it back while the Nazis took over the rest. After World War Two the Russians hung on to this territory, while putting their own people in charge in Poland. They did give the Poles a chunk of what was then ethnically German territory - East Prussia, including Danzig, now known as Gdansk.

Despite all this, the Solidarity government in Poland will no doubt pretend to like the Russians, and the Russians will pretend to believe them. A much bigger problem is the economy. Something drastic needs to be done, but the people have never been willing to let the Communist Party government do it. Partly because it was painful, and partly because they didn't either trust or respect them. The question is, can Solidarity get the ordinary Poles to accept the sort of austerity that they have always rejected before? Will Solidarity even try, given that it was opposition to such measures that created them? The danger is that Solidarity in Poland will be like the Trade Union movement in Britain in the 1970s - strong enough to stop anyone else governing, but unwilling to run the country properly. I hope that the leaders of Solidarity will be wiser, but I am far from certain that they will be.

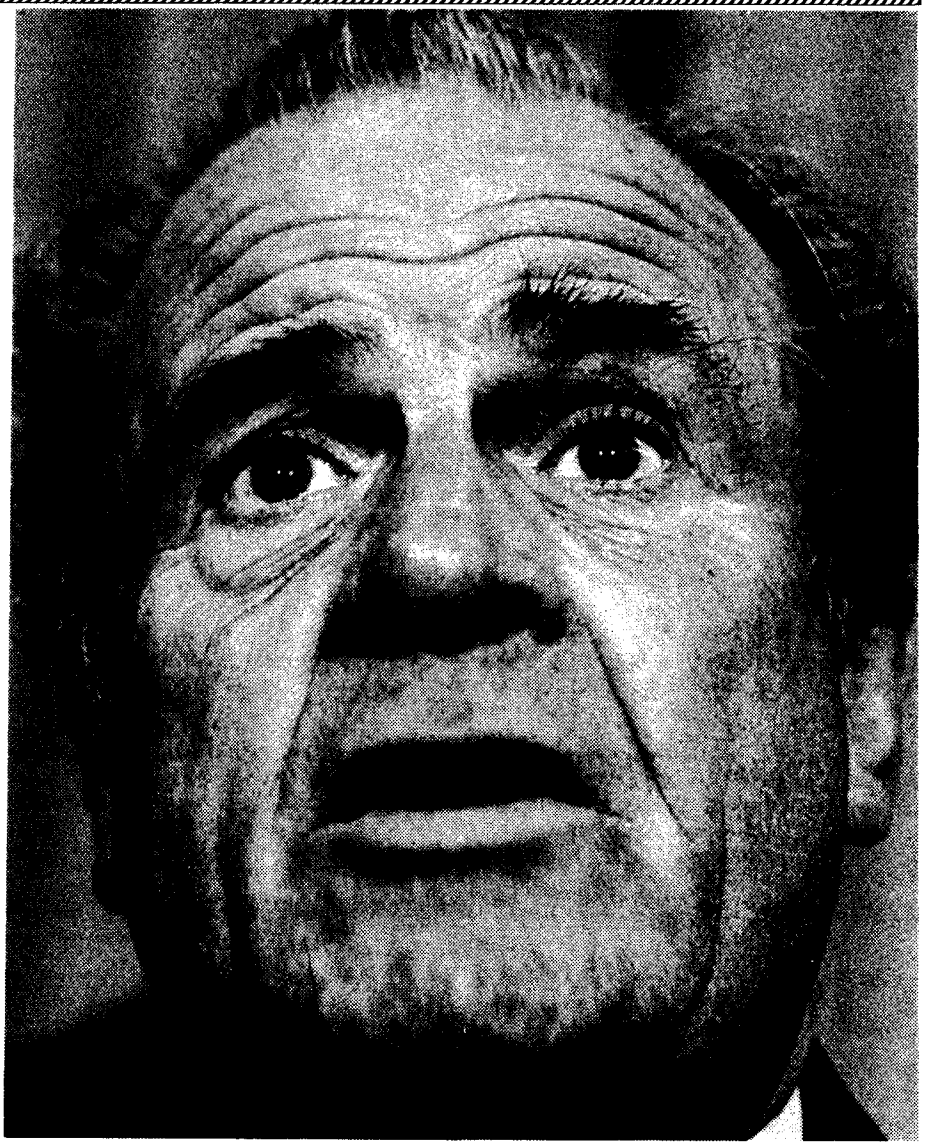
**Thames Disaster**

As I write, details are still emerging about the sinking of the 'Marchioness'. But it does seem that neither captain was blatantly wrong when they both decided to go through the the same arch of Southwark Bridge. Not according to present rules of river navigation.

It's been claimed that it is quite common for boats on the river to save a little time and money by taking short cuts. And it's hard to blame the captains who do it, when they're pressurised to cut costs and 'be economic'. If rules are not strictly enforced - and the whole trend of Thatcherim has been for less rules and less enforcement - then people will take chances. They will do things that are only slightly dangerous, safe except in exceptional circumstances, things you get away with 99 times out of 100. Eventually, of course, someone finds the exception that proves the need for the rule.

# Trade Union Diary

## by Dave Chapel



### The dock strike fiasco

When he called off the dock strike, Ron Todd announced at a press conference that the failure of the strike proved that so long as Tory union legislation was in force disputes could not be won. Thanks a lot, Ron! We must all do the bidding of the employers and the government for at least the next two or three years. Luckily Jimmy Knapp and other union leaders are unaware of this great truth.

Ending the Dock Labour Scheme was an act of spite by a government whose support was flagging and which imagined that union bashing in itself was something the public enjoyed watching. There is no evidence that the Scheme contributed to 'inefficiency' in the ports - indeed, as in other industries with 'jobs for life' clauses, like mining and the railways, the employers have had no difficulty in cutting the workforce and increasing productivity. The Scheme did give the unions a great say in the ports but, having an ideological hang-up about industrial democracy, the unions never used this great say.

Having said that, once the government decided to abolish the Scheme, there was nothing the union could do about it and there was little it could do about replacing it with a negotiated national agreement. But the dockers clearly wanted to express their anger and, in the absence of an alternative from the leadership, they wanted a strike. The legality of such a strike was decided in the courts and the House of Lords.

I think it is fair to say that the T&G leadership was not only surprised but disappointed to discover that the courts found in their favour. This, of course, proves the opposite of Todd's contention above. Tory legislation had little or no effect. The big factors were the individual acceptance by dockers of redundancy payments and the protection of future redundancy entitlements by avoiding the sack. One could say that the workers were bought off. But people work for *money*.

The manner in which the strike was ended also left a lot to be desired. A union executive meeting called for the purpose of boosting a flagging dispute decided to end it without reference to the dockers. That will leave a bitter taste. Given that dockers were already returning to work in greater and greater numbers, a quick ballot would probably have ended the dispute with some honour intact. It would also have given the union a little time in which to work out a strategy for the local level bargaining which was now inevitable.

### National and local bargaining

I would like to add a word here about national and local pay bargaining. National pay bargaining has become a nasty phrase in government propaganda. In the same way that they pretend that 'jobs for life' means more and more employees doing nothing, this implies that national agreements mean all employees regardless of location or circumstances get the same money. It means nothing of the kind. It never has.

It does mean that relativities are at least partially decided by representatives of *all* the workers. It means that local peculiarities (such as London weighting) are taken account of, but are enforced by the strength of the union *as a whole*. It also means that a sense of responsibility is induced in union negotiators insofar as they have to make decisions about the uneven distribution of pay *within* the ranks of their own members.

In the early and mid-1970s, along with others now involved in **L&TUR**, I advocated that this process should go a step further and that unions should be involved in strategic decisions governing pay for all workers at the level of the TUC. I remember during one of the nurses' disputes, the NUM leadership offered to strike on behalf of the nurses. This came to nothing and indeed would have been an unreasonable burden to put onto miners. But there was an awareness that a responsibility for each group of workers lay with the rest of us.

The opportunity for advancing to this level of strategic negotiations existed with the Tripartite Talks under the Heath government in 1972. That opportunity was turned down. But if the TUC and the unions had taken it, they could have decided the entire national wage structure - and that would have been real power and real responsibility. And in the nature of things real power over and responsibility

for most other aspects of national economic strategy would not have been far behind.

I therefore advocate *greater* development of national bargaining and the consequent greater social responsibility of organised labour. The Tories take exactly the opposite position. They wish to *weaken* collective responsibility. Margaret Thatcher, in an interview with **Woman's Own**, announced that "there is no such thing as society". There is. But it is her aim to destroy society, to destroy those feelings and institutions of mutual support that come more or less naturally to the people of this country.

At the level of pay she would abolish national bargaining in favour of local bargaining - but only with a view to replacing local bargaining with *individual* 'bargaining'. We are all selfish atoms, in her view: only the fittest will survive because only the fittest deserve to survive.

**Something warm at last**

However, the world of trade unionism is not all doom and gloom, or Thatcher's policies, or Ron Todd. Congratulations Jimmy Knapp! We needed a good win. As I said earlier, the government had the notion that the public liked a good bit of union bashing. The public was fed up with the state of things in 1979 and for nearly ten years didn't trust Labour to run the country. It supported what it saw as some unpleasant medicine dished out by the Tories.

The Tories assumed therefore that the public had become Thatcherite. Some of the public had; they can usually be found thumping BR staff on a Friday evening at Waterloo station or vomitting champagne all over their £500 suits. But most people retained their sense of decency and their sense of fair play.

Knapp is a rough diamond and the press initially had a field day. This was obviously some Glasgow thug who would give them even more fun than Ron Todd. The trouble is that most people are working class, and most working class people are a bit rough around the edges themselves. They had no problems about Jimmy Knapp. It would all depend on what he did and said. Well, he gave a lot of people a day off every week during the best weather we've had for years. Then he went on the box every night to explain himself. And he explained himself very well.

He pointed out that in pursuit of pre-privatisation profits BR was not investing either in the rail system or in its workforce. A great many TV viewers were shocked at what a rail worker had to live on. Indeed, to live at all he had to work all hours to the obvious detriment of safety. Proof: one rail disaster after another. (On a personal note, I remember a number of years ago going to Willesden depot in response to an advertisement for a labouring job. The money wasn't great but it wasn't bad either. Then the foreman casually said, "of course, that's for a 70-hour week." And I doubt if things have improved.)

Jimmy Knapp comes across as a dour Scot. The po-faced hard man who would strike at the drop of a hat. The trade union dinosaur so beloved of Tory propagandists. You could see they thought all their birthdays had come together. But the Tories are now on an ideological helter-skelter. They get further from the people every day. The public took a great shine indeed to Jimmy Knapp.

And it didn't end there. The London Underground got a similar pay increase. And then came NALGO. This column is not NALGO's greatest admirer. Its apparent obsession with rainbow politics is a positive pain in the arse. But I have to concede that its recent dispute was conducted with considerable skill and a minimum of disruption. And in all three disputes (but of particular importance at BR and in the Town Halls) the bargaining structures remained intact.

**An industrial strategy for Labour**

Contrary to what Ron Todd believes, the unions are not hamstrung by Tory legislation - though, as I've said before in this column, we could do without some of the more vindictive measures that the government is proposing. It does look as though the unions are getting their act together and are increasingly winning the sympathy of the public.

This is just a start. There has also got to be a political strategy. What is the Labour Party going to do? What is it going to offer the voters at the next election? There has been a policy review. This has been useful in knocking a few heads together and reversing the trend towards disintegration in the Party. But it does not provide a strategy for government.

Industrial policy was what defeated the last Labour government. This has never been properly acknowledged. And there is not yet any new strategy for industrial policy. The last Labour government (abetted by many trade union leaders, such as Frank Chapple, Arthur Scargill and Hugh Scanlon) rejected any national industrial policy, rejected industrial democracy and opted for the free operation of market forces in industrial relations. They opted for industrial Thatcherism and it wan't long before it was followed by *political* Thatcherism.

Industry is no longer concentrated behind the four walls of a company where a strike was a matter between employer and employed. The working class is no longer a downtrodden, disorganised, powerless and divided class. Engels's prediction that the working class *has but to will* a change for it to happen has long been true. But many union and Party leaders cling to old ways with disastrous consequences.

Our real and potential strength must be acknowledged. We no longer have to concede - as Scargill and Scanlon conceded - 'management's right to manage'. We no longer have to fear getting involved with the running and the organisation of production and services and distribution on the grounds that there is some all-powerful class of capitalists which will 'incorporate' us and corrupt us.

Labour has to have an industrial strategy which involves the working class, which gives us real and continuing power over our lives, which makes us responsible for economic decisions, not as a means of taking the blame but as an acknowledgement of our stake - the greatest stake - in the economic life of the country.

Labour has to have an industrial strategy which covers pay bargaining, which acknowledges that disputes which are settled by confrontation now almost always hit the entire working class, which permits power and responsibility to be devolved to the workforce through various forms of industrial democracy. The alternative is continued acknowledgement of bourgeois hegemony, Thatcherite industrial relations and another ten years in the wilderness for the Labour Party.

On the evidence so far, it will be difficult getting this message across to the Labour Party. This is not because of a lack of varying degrees of support in the Party for such a strategy. It is because of a terror of anything to do with unions. "Keep your head down or they will get you a bad name" seems to be the strategy of the leadership at the moment (with perhaps the exception of John Prescott).

But the trade unions, in spite of Thatcher, are a fact of life - an immensely important fact of life. A political party fails to take account of them at its peril.

**The TGWU: from Bevin to Todd**

One thing the recent spate of strikes has brought out clearly is the need for high calibre trade union leadership. Here it is interesting to compare Knapp and Todd. Both are old school. Both are leftwing. Knapp is excellent and Todd is, to put it mildly, somewhat less than excellent. Tradition has a lot to do with this.

Listening to Ron Todd, one could be forgiven for believing that the TGWU was formed in the late 1950s by Frank Cousins. For instance, on the nuclear weapons question, Todd goes on and on about his union's traditional unilateralist position. And in a sense Todd is right.

Of course, the T&G was formed in the 1920s by Ernest Bevin. He built it up to become the largest and strongest independent trade union *in the world*. He brought together in a cohesive whole such disparate groups as busmen, dockers, lorry drivers, power workers, car workers, etc. He was the only coherent leader in the 1926 General Strike. He forced the replacement as party leader of George Lansbury by Attlee in 1935 and prepared the labour movement for its leading role in the war against fascism.

*As a union leader* he was brought into the War Cabinet and was the effective ruler of Britain for the duration. (Churchill concerned himself mainly with military matters and foreign affairs.) He used his powers as Minister of Labour to put the organised working class at the centre of things during the war and instituted many of the reforms he had advocated as a union leader. He prepared the ground for what was the effective socialist transformation of Britain after the war (including the guarantee of 'jobs for life' for dockers and others).

In 1920 as the leader of the dockers he made a major contribution to saving the Russian Revolution by stopping arms supplies to the Bolsheviks' enemies (the"Hands Off Russia" campaign). But he never believed that the methods used to transform a backward Czarist society into a modern state were applicable to transforming an advanced bourgeois democracy into a social democracy.

He therefore opposed the Communist Party in Britain. And when the USSR began exporting its system around Europe on tanks after the War, he persuaded a very reluctant United States to join him in setting up NATO, in order to provide the guarantee of security which the devastated countries of western Europe needed if they were to rebuild a future for themselves as democracies. But he never trusted the Americans to provide a nuclear umbrella for Europe (unlike many in the current Labour leadership, who wish to rely completely on the US.) So he supported the development of an independent British deterrent.

Bevin therefore made many enemies. When he routed the pacifists from the Labour leadership on the eve of World War II, he was roundly hated. But the war he anticipated actually happened, and criticism became a backroom and irrational affair. The Communists hated him for keeping the Soviet Union at bay, but also had to dress up their hatred. After his death in 1951, criticism of Bevin could not be rational, so publicly he was written out of history (and history was increasingly being produced by members and fellow-travellers of the CP). Privately, dark things were whispered about him with a nod and wink by his detractors.

As the long period of Tory rule after 1951 got under way, the Labour movement was again taken over by people who lived in ideology and who hated Bevin. Frank Cousins became General Secretary of the T&G and the history of the union as far as Ron Todd is concerned began.

(There was an interlude of reality and vigour under Jack Jones. But this proved to be merely an intermission, and did not manage to reverse the decline of the union. It is interesting that one major achievement of this time was a revision of the docks agreement to take account of containerisation - the Jones-Aldington agreement of 1972.)

Bevin got his socialism from the Social Democratic Federation - the first Marxist grouping in Britain - and developed his political outlook in the course of his practical experience of leading workers' struggles. He was quite unideological. And he was a brilliant and enormously successful trade union leader. Cousins was very "right-on" on the ideological front, and a lousy union leader - witness the fiasco of the 1958 London bus strike. (How many union leaders contrived to lead their members to disaster in the full-employment days of the 1950s?)

Following the Jack Jones interlude the union was run (if that is the word for it) by Moss Evans. My main memory of Evans was a joke doing the rounds of Transport House when he was there: *Question:* what did Mickey Mouse get for Christmas? *Answer:* a Moss Evans watch. I suppose the transition from Jones's pragmatism to a renewed ideological purity required a period of calm emptyness and disintegration.

Then Cousins was reincarnated in the person of Ron Todd, and the rest you know. □

Letter to the Editor

## The AEU-EETPU Merger

Dear Sir,

I am writing with regard to the piece in **Trade Union Diary** in the July/August edition, in particular the piece regarding the merger which is not up to the usual high standards of your journal. In particular it manages to merge two issues; one is the election or appointment of officials, the other is the question of whether Communists should be allowed to hold office in the Union. The author should have seen from the press that the Executive in our Union tried to change the rule at our conference and were in fact overturned by a backlash from the floor of conference.

It is interesting to point out that one of the arguments used by some of the speakers against the change was that it was only being brought in, they felt, to facilitate the amalgamation with the AEU; as they didn't want the amalgamation, they didn't want the change either. Furthermore, it was jointly agreed by the two unions that the ban would not form part of the rules of the new union.

A quite separate issue is the question of election or appointment of officials, and I think if you look at the practice in the vast majority of the trade union movement, more favours the system currently operated by the EETPU rather than that of the AEU. Indeed, a number of their Executive Members understand the considerable advantage for the organisation of appointment. If you look at the actual decision made by the AEU National Committee, you will see that it doesn't want to change anything in the existing AEU practice, which has been their weakness in negotiating not just with ourselves but with the whole host of unions right the way across the political spectrum.

Yours fraternally,

John F Spellar
National Officer
EETPU,

August 1, 1989.

# The TUC and Europe

## by Dermod Ranaghan

It now appears that after ten years of Thatcher the TUC is at last able to offer trade unionists some reason for its existence . The TUC's response to the Single European Act has been thoughtful and provocative. Their initial report, **Europe 1992: maximising the benefits, mini- misingthe costs,** was published in August 1988 and marked a shift in the thinking on Europe. Up until then, the Conservatives had dominated the debate on the UK's response to the intended deregulation of European markets and capital movement implied in the act. 1992, it appeared, was of concern only to business and while greater prosperity was assured it was of no consequence to the rest of us.

The TUC report, followed by the delegates' enthusiastic response to the much publicised speech by Jacques Delors, the President of the European Commission, at the 1988 TUC congress, have marked a considerable change in thinking. In his speech Delors emphasised the social dimension of 1992, which constituted the main subject of the TUC report. In particular, he stressed the need for guaranteed social rights, including the right to be covered by collective bargaining, workers' participation in industry and the right to life-long education.

Thatcher reacted swiftly to this perceived threat from Europe to her glorious counter-revolution. She began to make noises about not having socialism by the backdoor and so forth. She had failed to realise that the social dimension of the Single European Act was fundamental to the participation of EEC members such as Holland and Germany. They were not prepared to lose jobs to countries which had less exacting standards of health and safety, lower social security levels and weaker worker-participation schemes - all of which would mean short-term profits for companies able to invest and disinvest rapidly. In addition, the philosophy underlying the Act was to produce a harmonisation of standards as well as to increase the potential growth and wealth of the community, not just business.

However, it was not the fear of backdoor socialism or interfering with the markings on cigarette packets which put Thatcher on the defensive over Europe, but the possibility of losing control over monetary policy - and hence fiscal policy - through pressure to participate in the European Monetary System.

**Thumbs up for controls: Delors wants to avoid market chaos**

(This is the same reason given by the Labour Party in the late 1940s and early 1950s when attempts were made to co-operate in the production and distribution of iron and coal. It was said then that surrender of sovereignty to supranational authority whose aims and ideologies were very different would prevent the establishment of socialism in Britain. Bevin's view was different. A European, he realised that eventually there would be moves towards European integration. But when he was Foreign Secretary he knew that this process would take a log time and believed that it was necessary to begin by developing cooperation between the member states of Europe, rather than set up ambitious political and bureaucratic structures at the Europena level in advance of underlying social realities.)

The European Monetary System, like the old Bretton Woods system, is designed to protect those countries involved from the wilder fluctuations of the international money markets and to provide a base from which predictions of future exchange rates may be made. Currencies within the EMS are given a fixed rate in relation to all other currencies within the system. All currencies are allowed to fluctuate within a small range either side of their fixed levels, measured in terms of the ECU (Europe Community Unit). When the variation becomes too great, loans are available to enable them quickly to return to the standard level.

The pegging of exchange rates within the EMS has become more useful as the growing volume of trade between the member states produces much greater demands for other currencies. Future capital investment in industrial plant etc. is not threatened by the possibility of currency changes wiping out any future profits. As trade within the community becomes more open, fluctuations between currencies, if not linked by some method such as the EMS, will become much more frequent with billions of pounds (or francs, deutchmarks etc.) moving between countries every day. If this was allowed to continue unchecked, predicting exchange rates would become like selecting random numbers on an electronic calculator.

However, the establishment of fixed exchange rates between the members of the community involves the various governments surrendering their right to make independent monetary policy. It is

this which frightens Thatcher, much more than the social dimension which, as was pointed out in **L&TUR No. 12** (Trade Union diary), is not exactly the most revolutionary programme ever put forward in Europe. Control over the money supply and hard-nosed monetarism, together with a very strong desire to remain in control of as much as she possibly can, means Thatcher will be forever suspicious of calls to join the EMS, whatever the benefits might be. No nasty Europeans will dictate to her what sort of policies could benefit us.

The TUC is not showing the same reluctance. In its progress report published in August this year, it welcomed the Delors Report on Economic and Monetary Union, which calls for the eventual establishment of a central European banking system, centrally controlled monetary policy and a common European currency.

The report is, however, justifiably cautious about entry to the system without further consideration of the consequences for economic union, a question which appears to have been rather ignored during the discussions on monetary union. In particular, it is concerned about the role of local and national authorities' policy making, the consequences for collective bargaining and full employment policy .

If coordinated monetary policy is to be the way of the future, then demand-led economic policies will obviously have to take a back seat. Governments will be less able to implement policies of higher government spending when required, either for local economic or political reasons. The surrender of monetary policy decision-making to a supra-national authority means that taxation levels will eventually become determined by the authority which determines the monetary policy. The distribution of those taxes, too, will be determined by that authority. Although this is not addressed directly in the report, great emphasis is placed on the need for greater examination of how regional problems can be tackled without threatening the cohesion which monetary union could bring. The lack of a solid regional structure in the UK is seen as a possible disadvantage in the future.

Collective bargaining and industrial relations will become much more international as comparisons will increasingly be made with foreign firms and industries. The TUC report points out that comparisons are already being made between the rates of pay of management around the continent, and this must naturally lead to comparisons between workers' wages. The TUC has put great emphasis on the social dimension which is due to be incorporated into European law. It would seem more likely, however, that the real advantages for trade unions will be their expertise in collective bargaining procedures and cooperation through the ETUC rather than through a social charter. This would lead to a more feasible levelling-up of economic and social standards through the community than through legislated standards which are much more vulnerable to erosion and evasion.

It is obvious from the report, however, that the TUC has taken the initiative from both the Conservatives and the Labour Party. Much work remains to be done but, as contacts are developed with European trade unions and as support in Britain grows for greater European involvement, the TUC has everything to play for. Could this provide a basis for its own renaissance?

# Why the Miners lost, and how they could have won

The defeat of the 1984-1985 miners' strike was taken as a sign that Thatcherism had become all-powerful. Since then, some unions have won major strikes (although others have lost them) and Thatcherism looks to be on the slide.

Back in 1984 and 1985, we said that the defeat of the strike was due to bad tactics and folly. Also that Scargill & Co. had created the situation by rejecting workers control in the Mining industry when Tony Benn had both the power and the desire to give it to them.

We hadn't set up **Labour & Trade Union Review** in those days, but we did produce pamphlets. And some of them are still available:

| | |
|---|---|
| **The Miners Debate Workers Control.** | 75p |
| **Thinking About the Miner's Strike** | 75p |
| **The Pit Strike in Perspective** | £1 |
| **Tribune and the Miners' strike** | £1 |

Also **Bullock A-Z**, a guide to the report of the Committee of Inquiry on Industrial Democracy. Produced in 1979 by Athol Books and the North London Workers Control Group £1

All five pamphets £4

Prices include package and postage.

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Details will be announced in our next issue.

# Self-employment in the Building Industry

**by Peter Tobin**

**Peter Tobin is Regional Organiser for UCATT for Norfolk and part of Suffolk. He writes here in a personal capacity.**

This article is a response to the comments made by Dave Chapel *(Trade Union Diary, L&TUR No. 4, October-December 1987)* welcoming UCATT's change in policy towards the self-employed at its biennial conference last year, and praising those officials who in his view had pre-empted the change and were already recruiting from amongst self-employed building workers.

I am a full-time official for UCATT and I have broadly supported the Executive Committee's strategy in attempting to bring 'subbies' under the remit of the Working Rules of the National Joint Council for the Building Industry (NJCBI) which are agreed between, principally, ourselves for the operatives and the Building Employers Confederation (BEC).

My point in writing is to sound a note of caution about the difficulties our negotiators face in getting, from as reactionary and destructive a bunch of employers as you could hope to meet, terms that *all* our existing members can live with. (I refer mainly to those directly employed under the Working Rules Agreement (WRA) who feel themselves to be the industrial 'Cinderellas' in terms of wages and workload compared to the 'loadsamoney' subby.) It would also be as well not to be too dewy-eyed as to their recruitment in the present sitution.

### Growth in Self-Employment

There is, in fact, some indication that self-employment figures are peaking; a combination of factors account for this. In the immediate economic climate of high mortgage rates there has been a slump in the private housing sector, which is particularly well suited to this form of employment (i.e. repeated units ideal for small group production) and this has led to labour shedding. At a general level there is some evidence that the employers are finding that the system they encouraged and promoted is actually inhibiting their control of labour and prices; the best example of this was shown at Canary Walk in London where subbies, exploiting a shortfall of skills and the demand for greater output, chased labour rates up on almost a weekly basis. In this respect it ought to be noted that the talks between ourselves and the employers regarding the 'legitimisation' of the self-employed under a sub-committee of the NJCBI began at the employer's instigation in October 1987.

However this may be, there can be no disguising the extent to which the system has developed. Estimates vary but it is conceded that between 50 and 60 per cent of those presently working in the industry are self-employed. Not surprisingly the last ten years has seen the most dramatic expansion in the figures: from 137,000 tax exemption certificates being issued in 1979 to over 400,000 last year with maybe 100,000 to 200,000 on 30 per cent emergency tax deduction. (By the nature of this group it is hard to give precise figures.) In the same period the number of firms registered has risen from approximately 90,000 to around 140,000. It seems an extraordinary amount but it reflects the fragmentation of an industry which ranges from a giant like Laings constructing Sizewell B to a jobbing carpenter working from the back of a van.

The fact remains, then, that, even if another '714 certificate' was never applied for, any union seriously concerned with organising the industry would have to address the question. And this has to be done in a positive frame of mind, seeing self-employment as, for the most part, a tax status, with the individual in that category still having to sell his labour power to an employer as a member of the working class. The previous approach of seeing them as employers' 'Trojan Horses' and attempting to roll back the system has unquestionably failed. Those who shout for that sort of struggle to continue largely do so within the hermetic conference confine and are generally drawn from the ranks of woodentop leftism grouped around **Morning Star** and similar eccentric groupuscules. Certainly they do articulate a residual bitterness, alluded to earlier, but they have as much chance of mobilising forces for any decisive action as a one-legged man in an arsekicking contest. A thinking through of the problem was therefore long overdue.

Let me make it clear that none of us want a two-tier system of employment in our industry. Given its nomadic casual nature it is hard to organise anyway, but with sites split between operatives on vastly different wages and conditions, an identity of interests - a prerequisite for organisation and representation - is rendered difficult. In this respect (and setting aside the headbangers' approach) I would give credit to UCATT's Executive Committee for coming up with a more subtle and considered position which, succintly put, has asked the employers to close the wages gap between the directly employed and the self-employed. (The present craftsman's rate is a breathtakingly low £110 per 39 hour week, with the unfortunate labourer on even less; a subby will double, treble, or even quadruple that.) On the other hand, UCATT wants the advantages of holiday pay, wet time, guaranteed week and other provisions contined within the WRA extended to the self-employed. The eventual aim would be to ultimately reduce the difference between the two groups to the method by which they pay their tax.

It would appear that, however subtle this approach may be, the BEC has seen some of the dangers for themselves inherent in such a course. Whatever the difficulties self-employment presents them in terms of the shortfall of skills it exacerbates, the vagaries of price and orderly completion, none of these

outweigh the advantages of having a large group of operatives to whom one has no employment responsibilities - other than health and safty laws which make no distinction - and who can be blown out for whatever reason suits. Hence they have got cold feet and negotiations on this and indeed the wages structures of the industry have been stymied while we argue over this year's wage claim.

Having described the phenmenon, albeit sketchily, and the present state of play, I should like to turn now to why so many have chosen this form of employment.

**Reasons for self-employment**

Simply put, the main reason is financial: it is the only way for many to take home half-way decent money. At the rates of pay described above, even with overtime and what bonuses there are, they cannot afford to be directly employed. This is especially true of the younger tradesman just or not long out of his time *(apprenticeship, Ed.)* For him the advantages of employment do not amount to a row of beans concerned as he will be with setting himself up with a family, a home, a car and the general appurtenances of modern life. It is a fact that many who remain in direct employment cannot afford to get a mortgage on even the lower cost housing that they are actually building! (And remember we don't build council houses now.) In short, the majority of those who go self-employed do so because there is a financial pistol pointed at their head. You could practically draw a graph between the growth in their numbers and the decline in the value of real wages of the directly employed - this year's pay claim for that group estimates that they would need a 20 per cent increase to put them where they were in 1979.

I emphasise this to offset any glib conclusion regarding the expansion of the so-called 'enterprise culture'. That sort of codology, however well-suited to the hairdresser and 'Hamburger Heaven' sector is not a workable proposition where larger-scale industrial cooperation is required. Admittedly, there is a large entrepreneurial stratum in the industry but, arising from its historical diversification and fragmentation mentioned earlier, it has always been a feature; 'Thatcherism' has not unlocked any hitherto suppressed capitalist urges. In fact, if you go beyond the simple-minded rhetoric of Tory ideologues and the half-baked initiatives of the DTI, it can be shown that the tax advantages - while still attractive - are not as great as they were. This reflects the continuing concern of the Treasury at the loss of revenue and the growth of a massive black economy of which the building industry forms a large component.

Thus, building workers who go 'self-employed', for the most part, do not become capitalists. Self-employment as practice is illusory and as a term is contradictory. What occurs is a quantitative change in the way the capital/labour relationship is mediated.

**How the system works**

What happens is that the main contractor subcontracts the work and the risk out to a sub-contractor who then organises the necessary labour for a particular trade, or in some instances for a range of following trades. Operatives agree their price, either a piece or price work element or, more commonly now, a day-work rate, and work under the direction of the effective middleman or 'gangmaster'. The latter's reward for directing their work and for negotiating the prices with the main contractor is the difference between those prices and what he passes on to the operative. In most instances he is a proto-capitalist. Although he does sign a proper contract regarding the work which commits him to certain obligations, such as conforming to the Working Rules of the industry in respect, for example, of the payment of Holiday Stamps, having a safety policy, etc., the core of the contract is his ability to bring the job in on time and within the price.

It is fair to say that the peripheral aspects referred to above are not enforced by the main contractor, *unless* they are brought to his attention. By virtue of being officers of the Working Rule Agreement, Trade Union officials have the ability under the grievance procedure to register complaints through line management up to local, regional and national panels. (It is one of the contradictions of our industry that, for all its anarchic tendencies, it does have a very sophisticated mechanism for the avoidance of official disputes. The panels are half Trade Union and half BEC employers and their decisions are enforced.)

This situation gives the official the leverage ultimately to make a sub-contractor comply with the rules. I say 'ultimately' because what can happen in many instances is that the subbie puts some or all of his operatives into union membership and in fact may even pay their contributions. In return he might be left alone in relation to some or all of his obligations. A properly trained subbie will regard this as like a levy in the same way as he regards the 2.5 per cent Construction Industry Training Board levy that the main contractor puts the bite on him for (although the union's power is not of course underpinned by statute). Some resent or are ignorant of these unwritten rules, and in these cases the official will seek the assistance of the main contractor in bringing them

into line. Mostly the main contractor will take positive steps to do so because in particular they will be respondents at any panel applied for by the union and under National Working Rule 26 it is their responsibility to ensure that everyone on their site is employed under industry rules - however they are employed. In a general sense they do so on the principle that they would rather have the union inside the tent pissing out than outside the tent pissing in.

In some areas, especially the metropolitan ones, this can form the principle avenue for recruitment as self-employment is the dominant method of operation. And make no mistake about it, more than any other comparable union, UCATT has to keep recruiting in an industry of nomads in order to stand still, let alone grow. (Most of us know that Sisyphus was in the building game but I would go further than that - in my opinion he was the first UCATT official!) Our Executive Committee has a keen strategic grasp of the maxim that membership equals revenue and, through a mixture of exhortation and cajolery, transmits this awareness to all officials of the union. So the pressure and the necessity to recruit in any situation is there. On management contract sites this can come down to 'doing deals with subbies'.

Now while the lash of necessity is there in the short term it is not a satisfactory way for a trade union to operate in the long term. For a start you can see how such a system is open to cynical abuse by *all* concerned; 'doing a deal' could involve lounging around in well cut suits , 'knife and forking it' on semi-permanent carouse. Just as 'Loadsamoney' is a reflection of a certain type of subbie, he can find his echo in the 'Loadsamembers' Trade Union official who works on Al Capone's motto "You get much farther with kind words and a gun than with kind words alone". This, of course, is anecdotal as most officials do retain a trade union integrity within what can be a fairly corrupt milieu. The point is that the system itself is rotten and open to exploitation by the unscrupulous.

From a principled trade union position the system is problematical because it can still leave the operative at the mercy of his employer. Admittedly, in a very key area, that of legal support from the union in pursuing accident claims, etc, it works. (UCATT is *very* good in this respect.) But where does the operative stand in relation to day-to-day industrial matters with a employer who could be paying his dues as a form of 'Danegeld' to the union?

To return to my opening comments; UCATT is right, within given parameters, to pursue a strategy which aims at bringing the self-employed under the protection of the Working Rules. At present they are in limbo and excluded from that protection. Yet 90 per cent of them work under a 'master/servant' relationship and therefore require an independent organisation that will represent them effectively in every aspect of their working lives.

So the Executive Committee was right to seize the opportunity of negotiations with the employers on the question and it was right to clear the decks for a change by steering such a policy through its conference. Whatever the difficulties there is no alternative. We tried in the 1950s and 1960s to confront the issue head on and we failed. I believe those pursuing the present course are in fact pursuing the same aims we had then: the bettering of the lot of *all* building workers. Whatever way you look at it, and whatever way he is employed, the building worker is getting a raw deal in some way. You can go through the list, wages, holidays, sick scheme, pensions, safety, welfare, job security, protective clothing, etc. and you will find that they are well below the standards which ought to exist in such a large and vital industry. An improvement of those standards in not inevitable; it can only be obtained on the basis of maximum possible unity of all building workers. Leftist critics of the present course seem to have forgotten that Marx wrote 'Workers of the world unite", not "Some workers ....".

## Labour & Trade Union Review on sale

**Labour & Trade Union Review** is now on sale in a growing number of bookshops which stock leftwing political literature, namely

**Belfast.** *J P Gardener's Bookshop,* 70 Botanic Avenue, Belfast.

**Birmingham.** *The Birmingham Bookshop,* 565 Bristol Road, Birmingham.

**Brighton.** *The Public House Bookshop,* Little Preston Street, Brighton. *The Lanes Newsagent,* The Lanes, Brighton.

**Cork (Eire).** *The Quay Co-op.*

**Derry.** *Bookworm Community Bookshop,* 16 Bishop Street, Derry.

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# Green & Growing

## by Madawc Williams

There is said to be a cunning strategem for catching a monkey. You put grain in a jar that is itself fastened by a rope. The monkey will put its hand in the jar and grab a handful of grain. But it will find the neck of the jar too narrow to withdraw its hand. You can then come with a net and catch the beast, secure in the knowledge that it will not have enough sense to let go of the grain in order to free its hand and get away. It wants the grain. It wants to escape. It wants to escape more than it wants the grain. But a monkey can't work out that giving up the grain is the only way to preserve itself.

Industrial civilization is in a similar bind. Securing our long-term future shouldn't involve anything as drastic as zero economic growth or encouraging the population to shrink. Pollutants can be made safe *at a price*. And the price is not an impossible one. If states gave the long-term future of the planet the same weight as they give the possibility of losing a war with some rival state, there would be no problem and no need for a 'green' movement. But each interest group wants to save the planet with the least loss to its own interests.

Had 19th century capitalism decided to cure pollution, it could have done so and continued to produce a modern industrial society. Had history gone that way, we might today be a couple of decades less advanced, with maybe only half the present national wealth. But what's the hurry? The earth is good for maybe another hundred million years, if we don't mess it up. Human beings go back maybe two million - it depends what you define as human. Agriculture and cities go back 20,000 years, maybe less. Industrial civilisation maybe 200 years. There's plenty of time to fulfil the whole of human potential without messing up the planet we live on. The *only* habitable planet we know of, and just possibly the only habitable planet in the universe.

Some of the worst forms of pollution were indeed dealt with in the previous century. We take it for granted that pure clean water is available to all, and that human beings do not defecate in the street. But in Europe, this was only really established as the norm in the 19th century. The history of industrial civilization involves increasingly high standards of cleanliness, as much as it involves problems from new sorts of waste and filth. As each type of problem is solved, a new one pops up.

(The damage to the Ozone layer might end soon. Someone has found a cheap safe way to pressurise aerosols with nitrogen, the gas that makes up four-fifths of the air that we breathe [**New Scientist,** July 22, page 33]. With luck this will soon go into production, although the damage already done will not heal quickly.)

'Green' politics are not really a new matter, simply an intensification of ideas and feelings that have been about for a long time.

### The wit and wisdom of the Green Party

The Green Party people are fond of saying that since the world is finite, unlimited economic growth is *obviously* not possible. They are quite wrong. Unlimited pollution, energy use and consumption of raw materials are obviously not possible. But these things are not the same as economic growth, even though they have often gone together.

Industrial civilisations were maturing. There was a shift of emphasis from *more* to *better*. Modern televisions or cars use no more resources that did those of the early 1970s. They are however much more efficient. Computers are an even more remarkable case. Something that would have filled a large room in the 1970s can now sit on the top of a desk, and will soon be small enough to put in your pocket.

Green Party ideology is a re-hash of the **Limits to Growth** thesis of the **Club of Rome** of the early 1970s. They built an economic model full of naive assumptions, and found that the model had a tendency to crash. They assumed that the real world must follow their model, unless something drastic were done. In fact, the real world was much more stable than they supposed. Their scare tactics proved counter-productive. When it was found that things were nothing like as bad as the **Club of Rome** had said, people used this as an excuse to push aside the awkward matter of long-term pollution.

The notion of cutting arms expenditure to boost spending on pollution control is rubbish. These are two quite separate issues. The present world situation does indeed suggest that we can cut back on arms. But even if it did not, the need to clean up the world would be exactly the same.

Britain was definitely wrong not to have spent more or re-armament in the 1930s, when thinking people could see that Hitler could only be stopped by warfare. But they were also wrong not to have done more about pollution in those days. If they'd started then, we wouldn't now have a problem.

The Green Party has an odd attitude to population. They say it must be curbed, or even reduced. This is a hold-over from older attitudes. There was a time when the prophets of doom were saying that population was bound to surge up for ever, until a final catastrophic crash. It is now generally accepted that it will stabilize some time in the next century, at about ten billion. Since the present population is about 4.5 billion, this seems an acceptable figure. In any case, we have little choice but to accept it, unless we want to get really uncivilised. Murdering female babies would be a highly effective way of curbing population; the key factor is the number of potential mothers. But who could argue for such a thing? The Green Party do not, of course. In fact they simply *demand* that population be curbed at below the civilized stable point, without saying how this is to be done. At best, this is foolish and impractical.

Green Party politics are a silly mish-mash. They hold that Britain is overpopulated - we need to lose some 20 million people, somehow. But they have no idea how. They call for a decentralised world, and have no mechanism for stopping some of the decentralised groups from breeding or polluting in an unacceptably non-Green manner.

The Green Parties in Western Europe are intent on breaking up the Common Market. They would dismantle the one really useful international state structure that people have managed to put together. They hate it because it does not perfectly match their ideal. Rather than work to make it better, they plan to demolish it in the hope that something

better would emerge. Naturally, they say that once they have done this, they will create a new and much better form of internationalism. Lots of people have said that, and failed. Getting serious practical co-operation between a diversity of different peoples is no simple matter, and it is remarkable that the EEC has achieved as much as it has. In point of fact, it is rational for any one human group to be as selfish as the rest of the world will allow. Some groups will be idealistic, most even - but never all. The EEC is useful as a body with the power to make sure that everyone behaves.

If the Greens ever achieved great power, they might find that pushing Humpty Dumpty off the wall is much easier than putting him together again.

**Far-sighted people?**

Jonathon Porritt is one of the leading figures of the Green Party (as well as Director of Friends of the Earth). His book **Seeing Green** was written in 1984, and has an introduction from Petra Kelly of the West German Green Party. And it is remarkable for how badly it misread the way the world was going. He assumed that OPEC would be able to keep the oil price high. He assumed that multilateral disarmament would not get anywhere. He missed the two key issues of the damage to the Ozone layer and the Greenhouse effect. The former he mentioned only as an after-effect of a nuclear holocaust, even though the real threat from CFCs had been talked about in some circles for a number of years. On the latter he says:

*"When fossil fuels are burned, carbon dioxide is released into the atmosphere. There's no technological fix that can do anything about this.... $CO_2$ concentrations will have doubled by the middle of the next century. This may well trigger off the 'greenhouse effect..."* (Page 41 Basil Blackwell paperback, reprinted in 1989.)

In fact, the possibility that the Greenhouse Effect might *already be operating* had been debated in some circles over the past few decades. The question is not an simple one. It is a matter or sorting out long-term changes in the weather from short-term fluctuations. There is a suspicion that we would now be entering another ice age, had it not been for industrialism changing things via the Greenhouse Effect. But the fear is that that warming will be excessive - and that the odd weather of the last few years has indeed been the first installment of a major shift to a warmer world with new patterns of climate.

Porritt, for all his Green talk, underestimated the danger quite as badly as any of our political leaders. He says: *"In the meantime, our reserves of coal should see us through for the next 250 years or so"*. (Ibid, p176.) If things are as bad as many experts suspect, we can not afford to do any such thing. The burning of fossil fuel may have to be reduced drastically. (But Porritt is wrong to say that there is no 'technological fix': there are many. One is to plant trees, which grow by taking carbon dioxide out of the air and fixing it in their tissues.)

Porritt and people like him blandly assert that in their Utopia, everything will be perfect. They propose a new and totally untested system, and assume that it will work without a hitch. They ignore the fact that every human society has exploited its environment as heavly as it thought it could get away with. Most of them have not got away with it, in the long run. Most of the lands which supported ancient civilizations are much less fertile than they used to be.

**Safe and static?**

It is foolish to assume that a static economy would be a stable economy. Pre-industrial civilisations tended to change little from century to century. They might get a bit richer, or a bit poorer, but their use of the land and its resources did not greatly change. Nevertheless, some of them were highly destructive in the long run. Huge areas of the Mediterranean coastline and the Middle East were once much more fertile than they are now. Irrigation in Mesopotamia, the area where civilisation first flourished, slowly but surely destroyed the soil's fertility.

As far back as we can trace, people have been disrupting their environment. Though the matter is complex and sometimes disputed, people looking at the fossil record have noted that a hugh number of large and medium-sized mammals went extinct at about the time that primative human hunters began to spread. And the North American Indians may have done as much as the white men to destroy that continent's buffalo and similar wildlife. (It is definite that we think of as the traditional Red Indian way of life was actually fairly new. Before Columbus, there were no horses in the New World. The hunting and horse-riding tribes of the prairies were not necessarily in harmony with their environment.)

The people of Easter Island are a clear example of a stable but self-destructive society. A few months back, their probable history was traced by **Horizon** on BBC2. The pre-European settlers arrived on a well-wooded island, very suited to their needs. Over the centuries, they developed an interest in carving huge stone statues, the famous 'stone heads' that have attracted such interest over the years. They could have carried on doing so indefinitely - or at least until the Europeans arrived - had they only taken care to preserve their trees. Regrettably, they did not. They cut them down and did not replant. In due course their culture crashed. By the time that Europeans discovered them, they were living at a much lower level on a treeless island, and the stone statues were mysterious relics of a more prosperous past. Between times, they had also made a local sea-bird the centre of a cult, and driven it to extinction by collecting its eggs.

**Handling the farmers**

Green Party people tend to be middle-class people living in big cities, who find both industry and farming dirty, confusing and alien. They use the real problem of pollution as a pretext for trying to kill off other ways of life. Even when they do live in the countryside, I've found that they tend to be ignorant and arrogant, not taking into account the farmers and farm labourers whose work keeps the land alive. They may say that they protest at modern distortions of traditional agriculture. But I wonder how they'd react to such traditional practices as castrating sheep, or cutting a pig's throat and hanging it up alive so that the blood will drain out and leave the meat in good condition?

Serious left-wing Green politics would involve teaming up with the farmers. It's hardly possible to do anything on the land except in co-operation with them. The last person to try it anywhere in the world was Joseph Stalin, and Soviet agriculture has not yet recovered. In any case, we can be quite confident that no one will try an 'anti-Kulak' campaign in Western Europe. Even the self-styled Hard Left are not remotely that hard.

Since you have to co-operate with the

farmers, you might as well be polite to them. They tend to be very decent people at a personal level. They were told that they must go all out to produce food. The previous generation of doomsters were predicting inevitable world famine. Farmers did what they were asked, they produced a great deal more food. It is wrong to blame them now forecasts have changed and priorities have shifted.

Farmers control the land - or rather, each farmer controls his or her own bit of land. Make it in their interests to conserve wildlife, and it will be conserved. We can afford to grow rather less food - provided only that the Greenhouse Effect does not upset everything. Assuming that the change in the world's weather will produce as many winners as losers, we should ask farmers to produce less food and conserve more natural beauty. Initiate a subsidy for rare butterflies, and you will soon find them produced in profusion.

This is a society where almost everyone else expects to be paid well for doing the right thing. Farmers are not going to be unselfish, to provide a nice weekend in the country for people who are well-paid and selfish in their city offices during the working week. We must change the system of subsidies so that rare songbirds and bright wild flowers pay better than turnips or barley.

But Green Party people do not think in that way. Most of them are pig-ignorant about the actual countryside. They are middle-class city dwellers. They have the typical city-dwellers' view of the countryside - they look at a landscape that people have worked to tame for centuries, and think that the people who maintain it are spoiling it.

Green Party notions actually involve a fairly basic rejection of life, and an ignorance of the natural world.

### The zero-damage economy

Zero-growth is a false aim. The true target should be *zero damage*. That is to say, you make sure that the economy doesn't use up anything that can't be replaced, or destroy anything that it would be better to keep.

Since everyone shares the same atmosphere, since all the waters of the world flow into each other, only a *global* solution is possible. In practice, this will mean national governments getting together and agreeing to act for the common good. It is crazy to pressurise Third World countries to repay huge debts, so that they are pushed into destroying their rain forests and the like for short-term gain. Debt-for-rainforest swaps have occurred on a small scale; they should be encouraged.

Labour should pledge itself to work for a world-wide zero-damage economy. If it means slower economic growth, then that is the price that must be paid for long-term survival. (Only an idiot would saw off the branch he was sitting on, because he could get a good price for the wood.) I am confident that the absurdities of the Green Party will be pointed out at the next election - assuming they hold their place as the third party in British politics. But Labour needs something definite to set against them. Not general talk about conservation, which has gone on for years while things have got worse. But a specific and realistic long-term goal - a modestly growing economy that can survive on this planet for an indefinite future.

## The Bevin Society

### Aims and Purposes

***The Bevin Society was set up several years ago, but lapsed as individual members became involved in other matters -- including setting up Labour & Trade Union Review. It has now been re-founded by some of its original members, and given a clearer statement of aims and objectives. We reproduce them here.***

The aim of the Bevin Society is to develop a programme for the Labour Party that will make possible a comprehensive collectivist reform as the framework for a more widely based individualism.

The Bevin Society is essentially a development from a group in the Institute for Workers' Control which actually supported workers' control when it was a possibility of immediate practical politics: when it was proposed as a radical economic reform by the Bullock Committee.

The leadership of the Institute for Workers Control opposed the Bullock proposals on woolly ideological grounds, as did Neil Kinnock and most of the trade union leaders.

#### The 'right to manage'

The "right of management to manage" was the conservative cry of both the left and right of the Labour movement, as well as of the budding Thatcherites. But 'management' is not a detached element operating between capital and labour. Management must be an agency of capital or an agency of labour.

Conservatism, or the continuation of the status quo, was not a practical possibility in the seventies. Labour had grown too powerful to enable the existing arrangements to continue. Both the leaders and the militants of the Labour movement lived in a fool's paradise, believing that the trade union movement could refuse to become the basis of management and yet retain the power to paralyse the management based on capital.

The status quo was doomed. The only question was whether Labour would become the basis of management, or trade union power would be weakened so

that a management based on capital would again be effective. When the leaders of the Labour movement declined to enact a radical reform in the Labour interest, it was only a matter of time before a radical reaction restored the managerial power of capital.

#### The lost chance

If the Bullock Report had been adopted by the Labour movement it is likely that it would have become a watershed in British history comparable to the Beveridge Report (which established the Welfare State). It would have altered the framework of economics and politics, and opened up an array of new and stimulating conflicts and contradictions.

Because the Bullock Report was rejected by Labour, the Labour movement has ever since been disoriented in the face of successful capitalist reaction.

#### A static socialism

There were reasons of petty vested interest involved in the rejection of the Bullock Report. But much more important than these was the essentially static character of socialist ideology of all varieties in the movement. Socialism was a vaguely imagined eternal harmony, a secularised version of the state of affairs following the Day of Judgement. Some dreamed of a Leninist revolution as the means by which it would be established, while others imagined a systematic scheme of reform through social engineering. The Bullock Report was equally unacceptable to both because it was obviously not a recipe for eternal harmony.

A similar approach would have led to the rejection of the Beveridge Report in the 1940s. And there were those on the left as well as the right who rejected it.

#### Recovering the dynamic

But the Labour outlook in those days was not confined to visionary dreams of a final condition of things, and to empty rhetoric following from those visions. Ernest Bevin and Clement Attlee were determined to enact the practical reforms of the day, and to develop through its conflicts while leaving eternal harmony to the metaphysicians.

The Labour movement is now in the doldrums because during the past two generations it has not developed out of the experience of that group of effective reformers who transformed the conditions of working class life when they came to power -- and who came to power because they had impressed society with their capacity for radical and realistic reform.

The Bevin Society intends to regain for the present generation the experience of the Bevin-Attlee era, and to develop out of it a capacity for thought and action in place of the slogan and the gesture which are now the stock-in-trade of the Labour leadership.

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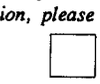
***The Bevin Society is at present running on a fairly informal*** ad-hoc ***basis. If you'd like to see something established on a more formal basis, or if you'd just like a discussion, please contact us.***



# Educational Reform: Does the Right have all the best tunes?

## by Christopher Winch

The **Centre for Policy Studies** (hereafter **CPS**) is a right wing 'think tank' founded by Sir Keith Joseph and Margaret Thatcher some fifteen years ago. It has recently published a series of pamphlets on education which in some ways are at odds with the policy effects of the 1988 Education Reform Act. I wish to look particularly at Oliver Letwin's *The Aims of Schooling: the importance of grounding* as a clue to the thinking of the Thatcherite right on education in order to see if the left can learn anything from it. The other pamphlets I shall consider are *Correct Core* by Sheila Lawlor and *English our English* by John Marenbon.

All three pamphlets are well written and well thought out and contain penetrating criticisms of some of the educational orthodoxies in this country which are also, by implication, criticisms of this government, to the extent that its educational policy, particularly in the matter of the content and range of the national curriculum, has involved a surrender to 'progressive' educational orthodoxy. At the same time, the refusal of Letwin and his colleagues to take seriously any of the views of people professionally involved in education gives the CPS's educational vision a stunted appearance.

It is my belief that socialists can live with many of the criticisms of current educational fashion and practice made by Letwin and his colleagues and yet adhere to distinctive educational aims which can and will raise the aspirations of many who now see education as having little to offer them.

### What is education?

Talking about the aims of education in a speculative way is a dangerous business; one is apt to end up talking high-flown nonsense, which is what many liberal educators succeed in doing. What is called 'education' is best seen as a series of practices, more or less systematic, designed to develop the knowledge, understanding and skill of people in a vast range of different activities. Since these practices are so varied in their nature and designed for different purposes, there is little point in trying to produce a definition of an educated person which would be completely satisfactory. A better strategy would be to ask what would be a desirable outcome of each of the various activities that go under the umbrella heading of 'education'.

Letwin belongs to the school of thought which sees an educated person as having almost mystical qualities; for him, being educated means having

*"an understanding that no knowledge is complete, that one does not and cannot in any ultimate sense have 'the whole answer' to any complicated question. And we recognise, with this, a certain intellectual tact, a sense of how to approach a new set of ideas, a certain capacity to feel at home in the world of thought"* (p.9).

While this is fine as a description of the ideal outcome of a certain kind of education, it will not do to define an educated person in these terms and then expect that such a definition will cover all that we call 'education'. Letwin is in danger of acting like Humpty Dumpty and making words mean just what he wants them to mean. The use of terms like 'education' and 'educated' is complicated and unsystematic and little will be gained by trying to produce a neat definition which corresponds to one's own preferences. Letwin jeers at civil servants for producing a hold-all definition which tries to cover all that people mean by 'education', calling it a *"grandiloquent but entirely incoherent melange"*. At least they, unlike him, have tried to take account of reality in giving an account of education. Letwin acknowledges the elitist nature of his own definition in the following passage:

*"The real trouble is that this highly desirable condition of being an educated person is not, and could never be, the aim or result of schooling for most people at most schools. It depends too heavily on fortunate circumstances"* (p.9).

The "fortunate circumstances" presumably will obtain most readily at one or more of the country's old established independent schools. Fortunately, this is not all that Letwin and his colleagues have to say about education and it is the least interesting part. Having given his mystical definition of education, Letwin goes on to argue that the only absolute duty that schools have is to provide children with a 'grounding': that is, basic literacy, numeracy, and an acquaintance with the main scientific knowledge of the age - curiously, they do not include historical and geographical knowledge in their account - which will allow them to take their places as independent members of a liberal democratic society (pp.10-11). What a grounding looks like is spelled out in more detail in Sheila Lawlors's pamphlet *Correct Core*.

Grounding, basic education or whatever you wish to call it, is fundamental, not just to being an independent member of society, but to being educated in any sense at all. The charge of the CPS is that schools are failing in their duty to provide children with a grounding and that the introduction of a national curriculum will make them more, not less, likely to fail in that duty. It is to the fairness of these charges and the relevance of the national curriculum to them that we must now turn.

### The Right's critique of British education

The main criticism of post-war British education by Letwin and Co. can be summed up in the phrase 'the best is the enemy of the good'. In aiming at a romantic conception of a liberal education for all, the education service has neglected its basic, absolute duty to provide a grounding for all pupils and it has done this because it has thought, mistakenly, that a grounding does not matter and that a liberal education can be given without a grounding. A further charge, made particularly by Lawlor in *Correct Core*, is that, in attempting to make the National Curriculum go beyond grounding or basic education, the government is repeating the mistakes of the past and, in giving power to educational 'experts' to draw up the curriculum, it is likely to compound rather than reduce these mistakes.

These are serious charges and there is a great deal of substance in them. In

particular, Letwin makes use of the work of the Assessment Peformance Unit (APU), set up by the last Labour government, to demonstrate how low standards of literacy have fallen in secondary education. There is no doubt that the idea of providing all pupils with a grounding or basic education has come under attack in the last twenty or thirty years. A major part of the reason for this has been the lack of any national consensus on what is to be taught, which has left the field wide open to the propagators of notions of 'creativity'.

Creativity is held to be something that we all have (particularly when we are children) until it is crushed out of us by an oppressive school system. In order to avoid this happening, non-creative disciplined activity must be dispensed with in favour of activities that promote creativity (which, incidentally, is rarely if ever defined in a satisfactory way). This has meant that all those activities which have depended on discipline, routine and rote learning have come under particular attack from the progressives precisely because they stifle creativity. From this follows the attack on the teaching of spelling, grammatical knowledge and number facts such as the multiplication tables, together with basic historical and geographical knowledge, which form the foundation of any education.

What the 'progressives' have never realised and probably would not wish to understand is that any creative activity worthy of the name cannot be a matter of undirected impulses dictated by the whim of the individual, but must be measurable by certain standards of quality. In order to achieve that quality in mathematics, writing, art, science or any other area of the curriculum, a basis of skill and knowledge has to be provided, as have habits of sellf-discipline, persistence and self-criticism. None of these can be achieved with any confidence without a certain degree of rote learning and sytematic practice.

Nor have the progressives given up their struggle; having seen off, in large parts of the country, the learning of spelling, grammar, basic number facts, the study of good literature and the learning of basic historical and geographical knowledge, they are now concentrating their fire on the systematic teaching of reading and writing (in favour of these 'emerging' through spontaneous activity) and demanding the abolition of basic teaching equipment such as desks and blackboards (on the grounds that these put up 'artificial barriers' between teachers and children).

These pressures have been particularly strong in the primary sector, which has to a large extent, but by no means completely, resisted them. The situation has become so bad in the last few years that it would be disastrous if the influence of the 'progressives' was not reduced drastically. The most effective way, in general terms, is through the implementation of a national curriculum.

**L&TUR** agrees with Letwin *et al.* that basic education is an absolute priority for any school and that the failure to provide it is inexcusable. Incidentally, we see eye to eye on this matter with certain figures on the left wing of the Labour Party. Paul Boateng, MP for Brent South, has spoken recently of the betrayal of children by the application of progressive ideology:

*"Black parents are bloody angry. They feel and I feel we have been betrayed by the education system. The sort of attitudes that deny the importance of excellence and academic rigour are a betrayal of black children. Those who, for some wishy-washy, upper-class or sentimental or ideological reason, think you must deny the importance of academic excellence to achieve equality do black children and all working class children a tremendous disservice. I know my own children are threatened by this."* (**The Independent**, April 4, 1989, page 6).

Very often, those children who live in working-class areas are the most vulnerable to the 'progressives'. Knowing that they cannot force their ideas on schools in middle-class areas where outraged protests would occur immediately if it was thought that the education of children was being damaged, they have tended to target schools in areas where parents are less confident about protesting about things they do not like going on in the schools.

Being pro- or anti- 'progressive' about education is not a straight left-right political issue. Education *is* a political issue, however, and the Labour Party needs to be very sensitive to any innovations which can help or hinder the advancement of working-class educational opportunity. Education reform should be judged on that criterion. In particular, Labour needs to be very wary of the siren voices of the educational establishment, particularly its academic end, despite their traditional association with leftish and liberal causes. Educational positions need to be judged in terms of whether they are cogently argued, rely on good evidence and receive a degree of support from outside the ranks of the

professionals.

There are two questions which need to be considered in relation to the policy documents of CPS. First, should a National Curriculum aim only to provide a grounding? Second, if it should do more, what exactly should this extra element be? First of all, let us look at the evidence provided by Letwin that schools are failing to provide many of their pupils with a grounding. Letwin makes use of the APU data on children's literacy, giving examples of appalling, ungrammatical writing done by fifteen-year-olds, which is nevertheless rated as 'average' for the age range. Bad as these examples are, and a horrible indictment of wasted years of secondary schooling as they seem to be, we really need to take a look at the APU data on eleven-year-olds as well in order to get a true picture of what is going on in our schools and what may be going wrong in them.

When we look at this, a somewhat different picture emerges; the standard is by no means marvellous, but work rated at the same grades for eleven-year-olds compares well with the work of fifteen-year-olds rated at the same grade. My own experience of working in a primary school in a variety of areas in the North of England also bears this out. Most primary teachers would be indignant at being served up with the standard of work that the fifteen-year-olds sampled by the APU produced. The 'progressives' have certainly done a deal of damage in primary education, but they have not been able to dislodge a hard core of stubbornly traditional teaching, which very often goes on with a 'progressive' top dressing so as to satisfy the local authority advisers and other hangers-on of the education system who wish to introduce half-baked innovations so as to further their own careers. Primary school teachers have something else going for them; they are able to teach relatively motivated and enthusiastic pupils up to the age of eleven. After that, motivation seems to fall away for many pupils and they cease to care about the work they do and care more about what their contemporaries think of them. Letwin's examples of fifteen-year-old writing are the work of young people who could not care one way or the other whether they are communicating effectively in the written word.

It appears, then, that there are two related problems with which a national educational reform should be capable of dealing. One is that of providing a good basic education for all pupils. The second is that of providing them with a challenging and relevant extension of their abilities which will be of use both to them and to society in their later lives.

It is fairly clear that the first is being achieved (just) at primary level in most cases, but that the gains then fall away at secondary level. This is not necessarily a criticism of the teachers who work in such a system but of the ideology and curriculum within which they teach. To the extent that both primary and secondary teachers have been willing accomplices to the introduction of 'progressivism', they have been making a rod for their own backs as well as for many pupils, perhaps nearly half. That is a great wrong which the Education Reform Act is not necessarily going to deal with.

### What is going wrong with educational reform?

The Education Reform Act is a very ambitious but hasty piece of legislation. The National Curriculum is only part of it, the introduction of assessment and market forces into education is the other aspect. Because it has been introduced in such a hasty way, but also with such high ambitions, it is being botched to a large extent by the very people it was intended to circumvent, the dreaded 'educationists'. John Marenbon, in a third CPS pamphlet, *English our English*, describes what has been happening very well:

*"There is a common tendency for government to look to experts for guidance about specialised matters. It is questionable whether such expert advice can ever be free from fashionable or political bias, even where the subject is apparently scientific or technical. To look in this way to experts for advice about the teaching of a subject such as English is unquestionably to invite confusion. The experts can merely provide theories, and information collected and interpreted in the light of those theories.* They *are not to be blamed for following the theories which have happened to be prevalent in learned circles (although their partiality to every fashionable folly should not, perhaps, go without censure); but rather those who endorsed their recommendations as if they were readily observable fact or indisputable scientific knowledge."* (p. 39)

Marenbon goes on to describe the political dangers of pursuing curricular innovation with the aid of the 'experts' it was intended to circumvent as follows:

*"Ministers of government, preoccupied with the external politics of education, have repeatedly been defeated in the more important internal politics of what is taught and how: defeated by an enemy they do not recognise, in a battle they do not know they are fighting."* (p. 40)

In many cases, it has not been quite so bad, but not much less so. Baker has recognised the enemy and tried to fight it, but has been hamstrung by his own tight timetable. Once committed to his 'experts', he could not afford to let them resign *en masse* before their work was completed, as this would make a mess of the electoral timetable which dictates that a glossy new curriculum be in place before the next election.

### What should be taught?

The core curriculum proposed by Sheila Lawlor would give pupils many of the elements of a good grounding or basic education. It is evident that many of her recommendations will not appear in the National Curriculum, for example the learning of grammatical terms in English. In other respects, her version of the curriculum is very much less ambitious than the actual national curriculum. Primary science merits a paragraph, for example, rather than the page upon page of different scientific concepts that appear in the working party documents.

The CPS core curriculum has the great merit of being practical and commonsensical. The omission of history and geography is surprising; basic knowledge of where we are, where we came from and our main institutions seems to be a necessary condition of understanding the world around us. In this area, primary schools are not doing a terribly good job, but it is one that they should be well equipped to do with good curricular guidance. It remains to be seen what Baker's (or MacGregor's) working parties will finally come up with in this area.

When we turn to the National Curriculum itself, the terms 'practical' and 'commonsensical' are less easily applied. Many elements of basic education are there, but some are not, for example the specification of knowledge of grammar that pupils should have at various ages.

Instead they are offered some woolly and irrelevant socio-linguistics. It is ironic that the Black Paper author Brian Cox should be the chairman of one of the committees which has been most comprehensively 'got at' by the educational establishment. This incident has shown quite clearly the dangers of an over-hasty and amateurish approach to the design of a curriculum and means that the job will have to be done again, piecemeal, over the coming years.

More worrying still is the inclusion of a detailed science and technology curriculum in the primary years. There is nothing wrong with this in itself. This journal has advocated better technical education in the past and will continue to do so. The fact is, however, that this country does not have the human resources to deliver a comprehensive scientific and technological curriculum at the primary level and will be hard pressed to do so at the secondary level. No amount of in-service training of teachers who are not knowledgeable or confident about science and technology is going to make them more so unless they go away and do GCSE, A Level or degree level science and technology, and no government is going to pay for that. There is a danger that science and technology, taught rigidly and without confidence or enthusiasm at the primary level, will kill off pupil enthusiasm at secondary school.

The inclusion of a modern language in the curriculum up to the age of sixteen for all pupils is likewise a foolish mistake. This country has the greatest difficulty in motivating pupils to learn foreign languages. That difficulty will not be overcome by making reluctant teenagers learn one for two more years than they already do, from staff who are not properly qualified to teach it. However, the greatest lost opportunity is the failure to provide a wider range of curricula from the age of thirteen or fourteen onwards, when a good basic education and shared cultural knowledge should already have been achieved. It is not surprising that so many children allow their literacy and numeracy to die away when they have nothing much to apply them to that would interest them in a practical sense. The provision of high grade, high prestige technical, scientific, commercial, aesthetic and artistic education in specialist schools and colleges with their own strands of the national curriculum would be the most effective way of dealing with the problems that Letwin outlines in his pamphlet. The City Technology Colleges are a step in the right direction but a pitifully inadequate one, and they will be too restricted by a single national curriculum to do the job they were set up to do properly.

One final point about the CPS pamphlets. There is much that is admirable in them. Consider the following passage in *Correct Core* for example:

*"Teaching should not be a form of salesmanship; and pupils will not necessarily learn through games and puzzles or without hard and conscious effort. Very many things in life - at school and later - including the acquisition of knowledge, require effort and concentration. Unless pupils are trained to concentrate and make the effort to master knowledge they will suffer in two ways: they will not necessarily master the required information and they will not become trained to cope with the demands of adult life."* (p.19)

While all this is very true and needs to be emphasised, it is still the case that education at all ages needs to be enjoyable and varied. Giving enjoyment and variety is not incompatible with giving children a good basic education. So concerned are the CPS authors with 'grounding' that they at times lose sight of other possibilities. For example, one practical way of seeing the point of writing effectively (and hence using spelling and grammar to good effect) is to practise writing in a variety of different styles from an early age. Marenbon, however, complains that tests of reading or writing assignments that require pupils to put a case in a persuasive or cogent way, or which require them to handle and reclassify information and draw conclusions from it, merge into tests of general intelligence and are thus beyond the scope of English teaching and its assessment (*English our English*, p.15).

This revealing comment suggests that the CPS may have an agenda, not expressed outright in any of the pamphlets, which relies on another, now unfashionable, educational orthodoxy, namely that of general intelligence. This orthodoxy, of pseudo-scientific origins (in psychology), formed the intellectual justification for selection at eleven into grammar and secondary modern schools. It would be ironic if the CPS were to plump for one bogus ideology (the cult of general intelligence) in place of another (the cult of creativity), the practical consequences of both being ones both they and we are concerned to avoid, namely the wasting of opportunities for those children with a practical, artistic or technical rather than a theoretical or academic bent, that we continue to allow to occur.

Even a basic education at the primary level may not survive years of perceived irrelevance at the secondary level. But that is no reason for restricting the primary curriculum to mechanical learning. Teaching children to read and write in a variety of ways as well as mastering the basic literary skills of spelling, punctuation, handwriting and grammar, is something that primary teachers can be reasonably trained to do. Similarly, they can be trained to teach children to put mathematical knowledge to practical use. It will not do just to throw up one's hands after teaching the 'basics' and let 'general intelligence' take over. Low aspirations lie down that road as well, and the aim of providing a basic education is put in jeopardy if the hard won knowledge is not used by the children in ways that are seen by them to be useful and even enjoyable.

It is a sad comment on the cynicism of Thatcher's government that even after an important reform, they have not succeeded in either putting a satisfactory basic education in place or providing an appropriate variety of secondary educational opportunities for all children. The battle over the national curriculum will continue for many years as the consequences of the current legislation unfold. A contribution to the political debate from all sections of the trade union movement would be very welcome. It is their members who have to train and work with school-leavers and they should have some ideas on what is working and what is not working in the schools. We hear a great deal of opinionated comment from directors and industralists about the state of our schooling. Some contribution from those in the offices and on the shop floors is now overdue.

References: Oliver Letwin, *The Aims of Schooling: the importance of grounding;* Sheila Lawlor, *Correct Core*; John Marenbon, *English our English*; all three available from the Centre for Policy Studies, 8 Wilfred Street, London SW1 6PL, price £3.90 each.

# Latitudinarianism and the revolt of Islam

**by Peter Brooke**

I have a number of disagreements with points made in the various articles on the Salman Rushdie affair in the last issue of **L&TUR**, which I think threw less light on this very interesting incident than it could have done.

In particular I disagree

1) with Brendan Clifford's contention that the right to blaspheme is a fundamental principle of British culture since the Glorious Revolution;
2) with his further argument that unbelief played an important role in British culture and that conscious unbelievers deliberately used the idea of religious toleration to sap the force of religious belief;
3) with Eamon Dyas' view (in an otherwise excellent article that was particularly good on the state of mind represented by Rushdie himself) that the real villains of the piece are lefty multiculturalists who raised impossible expectations among devout Muslims, as if at the present point in time devout Muslims hadn't proved themselves perfectly capable of causing lots of mischief on their own initiative;
4) with Muhammed Biqar's contention that Khomeini had no choice in pronouncing the death sentence against Rushdie and consequently no political motives for doing so (also, though he may be forgiven as a partisan, with his view that Khomeini equals Islam);
5) with Madawc Williams when he says that what particularly offends Muslims is that the career of Muhammed should be treated as a normal and explicable historical phenomenon. I'm not suggesting that strict Muslims do not find this offensive but they have been living with it for a long time and Rushdie's book is not an example of it.

Related to that, I also disagree with the insistence of both Madawc Williams and Brendan Clifford that the literary merit of the book is of no importance. On the contrary, it is precisely because it is so badly written that it has been chosen as an object of attack. The original purpose of the campaign was to define Muslims as a people whose interests are in fundamental contradiction with those of British society. Almost the whole of the British literary, political, cultural establishment (even including the **L&TUR**) has lined up in defence of a piece of incoherent and inconsequential gibberish whose only point of interest is that it insults the Muslim faith; this has undoubtedly strengthened the hands of the Muslim militants, as they knew it would.

So that the most important point made in the last **L&TUR** was made, albeit in a different context, by Graham Dalton: that the people who stirred up this agitation knew what they were about, and, though they may have disagreements as to the value of Khomeini's intervention, they have reason to be pleased with the results of their efforts.

To return, as the **L&TUR** does so often these days, to the Glorious Revolution. It was not unbelief or even scepticism that triumphed in the Glorious Revolution (or, more definitively, with the Hanoverian succession) but *latitudinarianism*. Latitudinarianism is the view that there is no human authority in religious matters. The Bible is the only authority but it requires interpretation and no human interpretation has any authority over the conscience. The Roman Catholic Church believed that its interpretations were divinely sanctioned; a section of the Church of England believed the same. Both were suppressed by the latitudinarians. English - as opposed to Scottish - Presbyterianism had long since abandoned its pretentions in this field and contributed greatly to the development of the latitudinarian argument, as did sections of Dutch and Swiss Calvinism.

It is easy to see how someone from a Catholic background could confuse latitudinarianism with unbelief (though Clifford himself has explained the matter very well elsewhere in an article on the interesting Ulster champion of orthodoxy and religious toleration, in the now defunct **Belfast Magazine**). But latitudinarianism was a *religious* idea, promoted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries through powerfully developed theological arguments. And although the latitudinarians were prepared to put up with a limited amount of heresy, they had no patience with blasphemy. I think I am right in saying that it was after the Glorious Revolution that blasphemy laws appear on the statute book for the first time. And the package included the death sentence for impugning the doctrine of the Trinity, which is bad news for militant Muslims who are very fond of ridiculing the doctrine of the Trinity, which is impugned with considerable vigour in the Koran.

Clifford rightly says that since the eighteenth century the principle which has broadly prevailed in relations between God and man in England has been that of politeness. *But politeness precludes blasphemy.* Unbelief and blasphemy are endemic to French culture but not to English culture, at least not until recently. Monty Python's **Life of Brian** might mark a change in this respect. I don't myself regard it as a change for the better.

(It is, however, interesting to note that the makers of the **Life of Brian** defended it by saying that it was not a satire on Jesus but on Hollywood epics; and that the defenders of Rushdie's book have tried to persuade us that the passages about 'Mahound' are not about Muhammed but are just surrealist fantasies - not about anything at all, really. Which is probably right, but is not much of a justification.)

Eamon Dyas quotes Macaulay as saying that he saw it as his duty to punish anyone who defiled a Muslim temple. According to Dyas this is because Britain was responsible for governing lots of Muslims throughout the Empire; it was a necessary part of Imperialist policy. I think, on the contrary, that Macaulay was expressing the view, intrinsic to English latitudinarian culture, that it is improper to offend people's religious sensibilities. And Macaulay is the author of numerous articles which touch on religious matters in an external, objective and critical fashion. He could easily distinguish between a seriously argued criticism of a religious idea and an offensive gesture. It is the inability to see this distinction that so seriously flawed the last **L&TUR**'s coverage of this issue (and showed, incidentally, that it was not written by people from the English latitudinarian tradition).

There is nothing very outrageous about Muslims demanding that their religious beliefs should be protected from gratuitous insult - though a demand to be protected against heretical ideas or against serious analysis on a basis of unbelief would be another matter. There is thus nothing very outrageous about this demand being supported by Muslim councillors who represent Muslim constituents who are concerned about this issue. That is their job: to represent their constituents.

And I am not aware that the right to blaspheme is a fundamental principle of the Labour Party - which, when it took power after the war, did not rush to abolish the Lord Chamberlain's office or to repeal the blasphemy laws. The idea

that liberty of expression is absolute and embraces blasphemy and pornography is very recent, perhaps dating back to the **Oz** trial - which **Oz** lost. Almost my first political engagement was in defence of **Oz** and I find it quite moving to see the ideals of the swinging sixties confused with the ideals of the Glorious Revolution.

I am not arguing that the blasphemy laws *should* be extended to embrace Muslims, merely that it is a perfectly proper matter for political debate. If large numbers of Muslims feel strongly on the matter, and if British political society is incapable of taking the idea on board and debating it seriously then British society has lost a great deal of the flexibility and responsivness that is supposed to be its great virtue.

Now of course it may be said - and I have said it - that the real motive of the agitators is to isolate and alienate Muslims from the rest of British society. But which is more likely to encourage this isolation? An absolute refusal to take Muslim concerns seriously? Or a willingness to debate them with the kind of respect and - to put it no higher - curiosity - that characterises the best latitudinarians (Macaulay for example) in their attitude towards religious ideas they personally find distastful or odd?

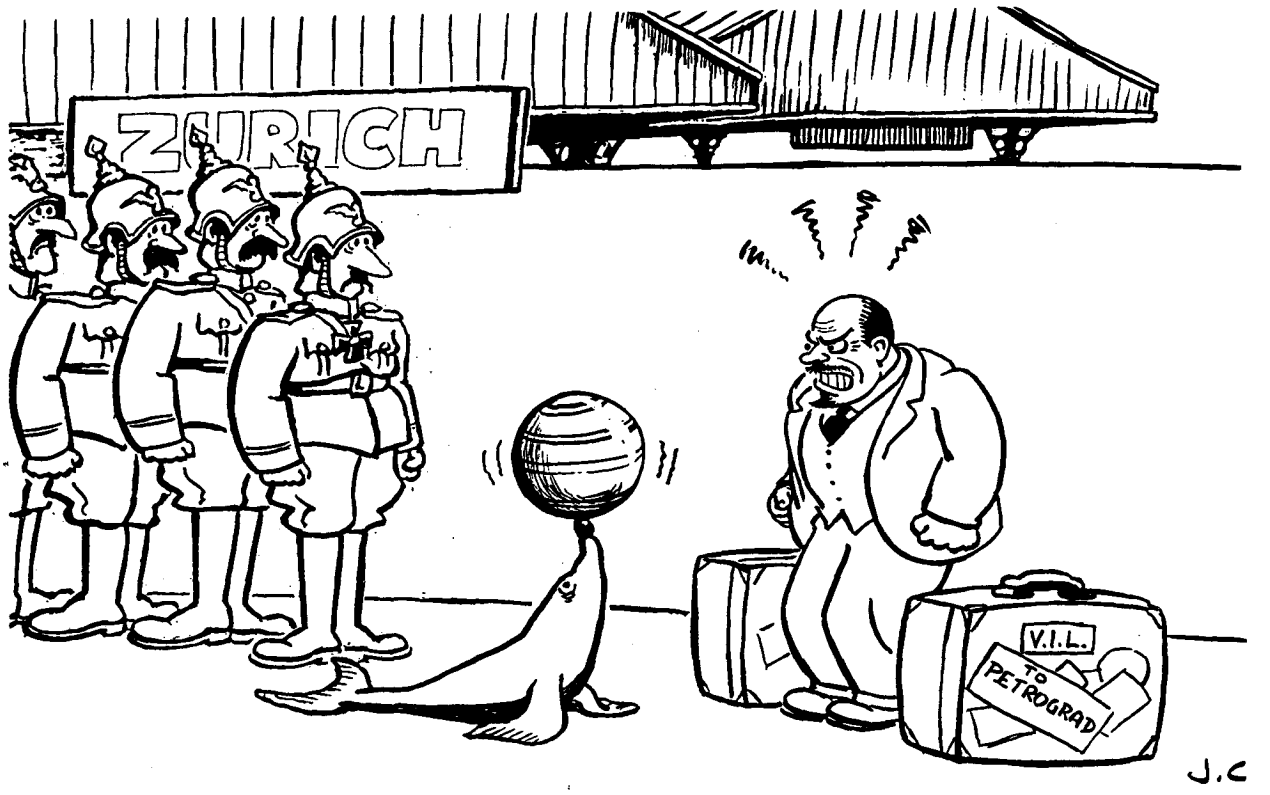
Unfortunately, government is now, as never before, conducted by real unbelievers on both sides of the House. And shallow people who are indifferent to theological questions cannot begin to understand the mind of those who base their lives on the assumption that they are subject to the judgement of God. Consequently they are incompetent to debate religious matters, which is why the present Muslim agitation will not generate the rich and fruitful debate it would have generated in the nineteenth century. That is, a debate in which, even if they lost their case, Muslims would have a chance to influence our society (presumably in the direction of greater respect for God, for our parents and for the virtues of sobriety and chastity) and would in turn be influenced by whatever values our present day British society has left (drugs and sex and rock'n'roll).

The idea that Muslims might have something to offer *us* is apparently unthinkable to the writers for **L&TUR** (Mr Biqar apart), though the much maligned Ray Honeyford recently showed he grasped the point in an excellent article in the **Daily Mail** on the Muslim demand for separate schools, which came down against the demand after giving very compelling arguments for it.

All that is the traditional British way of dealing with such problems, not the dogmatic attachment to free expression promulgated by the **L&TUR**. That modern British society is incapable of acting like that is not to our credit, though of course Khomeini's death sentence has - probably deliberately - made it that much more difficult.

One very serious flaw in the **L&TURs** thinking is the view expressed by Brendan Clifford that Islam is incapable of change. There is no space to develop the case here but Islam has changed constantly in its 1300 year history. Khomeini himself is the product of a school of thought that only came to prominence in the eighteenth century. The term 'Ayatollah' was virtually unknown prior to the nineteenth century. Khomeini's life has been a battle against the havoc - as he sees it - wrought by Western latitudinarianism in Muslim religious thought. And it happens that the central idea of latitudinarianism - that no human interpretations of the sacred text have any compelling authority - is very widespread in Sunni Islam.

My impression is that present day Islam is much more intellectually lively and flexible than present day British secularism, which is moribund. It is not the Muslims' inability to assume us that is alarming, but our unprecedented inability to assume them.




**You bloody fools - I said I wanted a sealed train!**

# Index to L&TUR Nos.1-12

Note: this Index includes all feature articles and editorials and the more substantial items which have appeared in *Notes on the News* and *Trade Union Diary*. Minor items in these two columns have been omitted.