

Strong moves to a united Ireland?

By John O'Mahony

THE SO-CALLED "Framework for Peace" published by Britain and the Republic of Ireland on 22 February proposes in effect that the two communities in Northern Ireland agree to take major steps towards a United Ireland. This is to be done by way of what might be called "incremental", or "dynamic federalism". The Dublin Government and a new Belfast government, to be set up if the Protestant-Unionist and Catholic-Nationalist politicians in Northern Ireland can agree on it, would be linked together in an all-Ireland structure. Most importantly, this all-Ireland structure would mediate Ireland's connections with the European Union.

At the same time, as a necessary prop and corollary of such an internal Irish arrangement, the "Framework" proposes that Britain and the 26 Counties be tied much more closely together.

All these proposed relationships fit into each other — the internal Northern Ireland one into the all-Ireland framework, and that in turn into a British-Irish framework, like the famous nesting Russian dolls. The biggest "doll" is the European Union.

It is the existence of the EU 'above' both Britain and the 26 County state that makes possible these proposals and the approach they embody. The EU is the largest of the interlocking structures here; and the model for the approach contained in the "Framework" is the EU itself and the way it has developed over the last four decades, knitting previously antagonistic European states together.

That was the approach which lay behind the Anglo-Irish Agreement of November 1985, which gave Dublin a large say in the running of Northern Ireland — though Britain retains all executive power. This, nearly a decade later, is its second instalment. It is the Anglo-Irish Agreement Part Two.

The document says:

"A collective effort is needed to create through agreement and conciliation a new agreement founded on consent, for relationships within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland and between the peoples of these islands."

Both governments "strongly commend" the document "to the parties, the people in the island of Ireland and more widely."

"The two governments will work together with the parties to achieve a com-

prehensive accommodation, the implementation of which would include interlocking and mutually supportive institutions across the three states." (That is: Northern Ireland, the 26 Counties, and Britain).

A new approach is needed: "a balanced accommodation of the differing views of the two main traditions on the constitutional issues..."

"... the two governments agree that such an accommodation will involve an agreed new approach to the traditional constitutional doctrine on both sides."

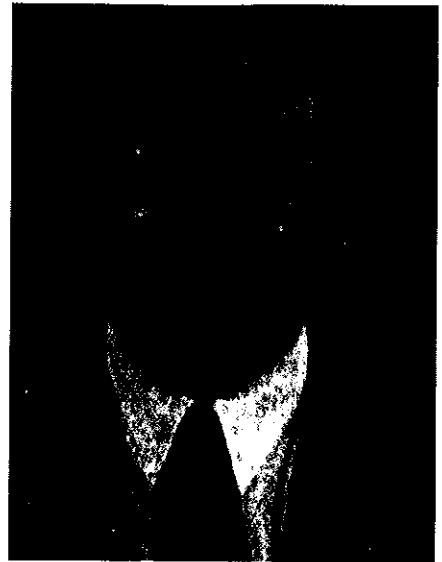
"In their approach to Northern Ireland they will apply the principle of self-determination by the people of Ireland... The British government recognises that it is for the people of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively, and without external impediment, to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a United Ireland if that is their wish; the Irish government accept that the democratic right of self-determination by the people of Ireland as a whole must be achieved and exercised with, and subject to the agreement and consent of, the majority of the people of Northern Ireland..."

"It would be wrong to make any change in the structure of Northern Ireland save with the consent of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland..." If a majority there in the future "wish for and formally consent to" a united Ireland, then the Dublin and London governments will legislate accordingly.

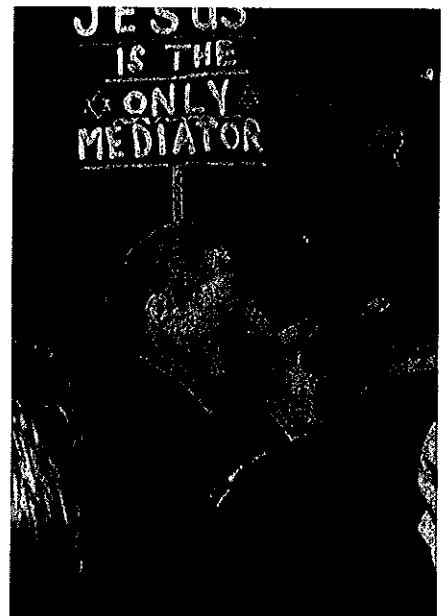
"...the governments acknowledge the need for new arrangements and structures — to reflect the reality of diverse aspirations, to reconcile as fully as possible the rights of both traditions and to promote co-operation between them, so as to foster the process of developing agreement and consensus between all the people of Ireland..."

They commit themselves to the principle that "institutions and arrangements in Northern Ireland and North/South institutions should afford both communities secure and satisfactory political, administrative and symbolic expression and protection..."

The underlying train of thought about what is happening is made plain on the next passage. The governments "commit themselves to entrenched provisions guaranteeing equitable and effective political



Gerry Adams



Ian Paisley

participation for *whichever community finds itself in a minority position* by reference to the Northern Irish framework, or *the wider Irish framework*" (emphasis added).

Britain "reaffirms" that it will uphold "the democratic wish" of the people of Northern Ireland "for union with Britain or a United Ireland". The British government 'reiterates' — and Dublin concurs — that they "have no selfish strategic or economic

interest in Northern Ireland."

As long as a majority in Northern Ireland want them to, the British Government will administer the Six Counties "even-handedly" vis-a-vis the two communities.

Institutions "should be created that cater adequately for present and future political, social and economic interconnections on the island of Ireland, enabling representatives of the main traditions, north and south, to enter agreed dynamic, new, co-operative and constructive relationships... These institutions should include a north/south body involving Heads of Departments on both sides and duly established and maintained by legislation in both sovereign parliaments."

Linked thus would be the Irish Government and "new democratic institutions in

Northern Ireland, to discharge or oversee delegated executive, harmonising or consultative functions, as appropriate, over a range of matters which the two governments designate" in agreement with the Northern Irish parties.

This body would take on some of the function of an all-Ireland government from the start:

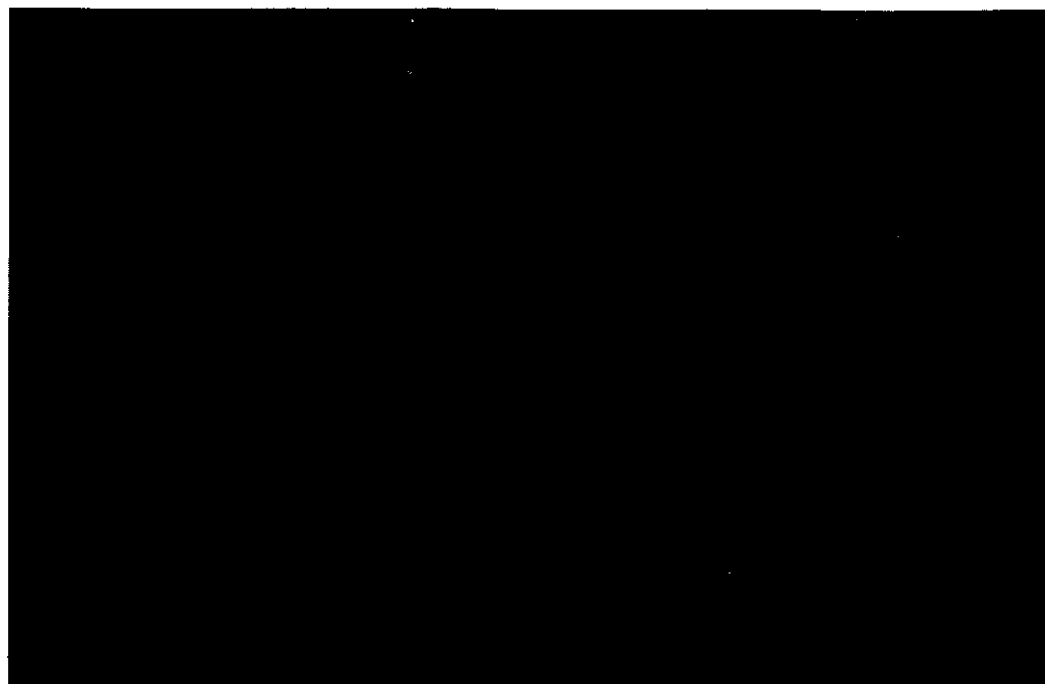
"Any EU matter relevant to the competence of either administration could be raised for consideration in the north/south body. Both Governments agree that the body will have an important role, with their support and co-operation and in consultation with them, in developing on a continuing basis an agreed approach for the whole island in respect of the challenges and opportunities of the EU..."

"Matters designated at the Executive level... would include all EU programmes and initiatives to be implemented on a cross-border or island-wide basis in Ireland, the body itself would be responsible... for the implementation and management of EU policies and proposals on a joint basis..."

You have only to remember how enormous is the weight of the EU in Irish affairs to see what this means.

The proposal is to knit the two parts of Ireland together as the states of Europe were, by way of a thickening web of joint responsibility spreading over the still distinct and separate structures. Britain, Northern Ireland and the 26 counties are, of course, already integrated in the EU structures. If the approach were to succeed then the issues blatantly fudged in the document — for example it talks of self-determination for 'the people of Ireland as a whole', but on the basis of two units, one of them grotesquely artificial and undemocratic — would cease to have explosive importance.

The new all-Ireland structure is thus intended to be a powerful, burgeoning, dynamic body, which will knit Ireland



Belfast: a miracle on the agenda?

together over time, leaving insoluble questions of sovereignty in abeyance — as they were left in abeyance in the early years of the EU.

After Northern Ireland broke down as a viable entity in 1969, ripped apart by the conflict between the two antagonistic communities within it, there were, logically, two possible ways of resolving the hopeless conflict. One was repartition, a more rational division of Ireland, ceding to the Republic large areas of the Six Counties, where Catholics are the majority.

The other logical possibility was that the Six Counties entity would be preserved and would act as the bolt that would eventually pin the UK and that part of Ireland which left it in 1921/22 much more closely together again.

The latter development was going on anyway. The Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement was signed as long ago as 1965. The Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 made Britain and Ireland formal partners, sharing overall responsibility for Northern Ireland. An Anglo-Irish Parliamentary Committee was then set up.

The Framework proposes to go further. "...A standing intergovernmental conference will be maintained, chaired by the designated Irish minister and by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. It would be supported by a permanent Secretariat of civil servants from both governments... The conference will provide a continuing institutional expression for the Irish government's recognised concern and role in relation to Northern Ireland... The Irish government will put forward views and proposals... Determined efforts will be made to resolve any differences between the two governments. The Conference will be the principal instrument for an intensification of the co-operation and partnership between the two governments."

Weaker commitments of this sort were

make in the 1985 Agreement. This is as close to joint rule as you can go without putting the 26 County army in Northern Ireland. It is ironic indeed that one of the big results of the Provisional IRA's 23 year war "for an all-Ireland independent Republic" is this ever closer drawing together of Britain and Ireland.

Whether these plans come to anything or, like so much in the past, create turmoil with no constructive outcome, will be determined by the response of the people of Northern Ireland. Catholics, even Sinn Fein supporters, are pleased with the Framework. Decisive will be the response of the Protestants.

All the leaders of all the Protestant parties denounced the "Framework". Yet, as this is being written, a Channel Four poll in Northern Ireland reports that a big majority of the sympathisers of all the Protestant parties want their leaders to use the document as a basis for discussion. This may indeed be the year of miracles in Northern Ireland!☐

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Schools cuts spark nationwide fightback

By Colin Foster

FOR THE FIRST TIME since the abortive "rate-capping" battle at the tail-end of the miners' strike in 1985, a national movement is taking shape against social-spending cuts.

Over the last ten years there have been many important local campaigns, some of them successful, to save particular hospitals, schools, nurseries, or old people's homes. Groups of public service workers — fire-fighters, ambulances, local government workers — have taken industrial action to defend particular pay and conditions. There has been no concerted national movement.

It was to agitate, educate and organise for such a national movement that the Welfare State Network was launched last year. But a mass national movement was never going to emerge just from appeals and proclamations. It can only come from a strong network of activists linking up with an unplanned grass-roots upsurge.

We have a chance of that now, though maybe only a flickering one. The starting point has been schools cuts. They are still, overall, smaller than health service cuts; but this year, after many years of piecemeal erosion, they have sent a simultaneous shock-wave across a large proportion of Britain's 29,000 state schools. At each school, governors have to make budgets for April — and decide how many teachers

or helpers to sack, how many oversize classes to run, how much vital equipment to do without, how many essential repairs to cancel.

The Tories' "Local Management of Schools" has backfired on them. These governors, unpaid volunteers, are not like Labour councillors, broken-spirited after years of doing the Tories' dirty work and overwhelmed by a corps of permanent officials. Hundreds of them have done what Labour councils have long dismissed as impossibly ultra-left, and defied the government by refusing to cut and setting illegal unbalanced budgets instead.

As we go to press, about 90 schools in Warwickshire, and others in Oxfordshire, Dorset, Barnsley, and Manchester have drawn up such deficit budgets, and many others elsewhere are considering it.

Under this pressure, Gloucestershire, Shropshire, and Newcastle-on-Tyne are going for unbalanced council budgets. Their budgets are not illegal like the governors', but based on asking the government for "redetermination", that is, for permission to set a higher council tax.

There have been huge demonstrations and meetings in many areas. A national coordination called Fight Against Cuts in Education has been set up, based mainly on parents and governors though not excluding teachers. It has called a national demonstration for 25 March. Local FACE groups are being set up.

There will be many other protests around the end of March. The National Union of Teachers has — stupidly, divisively — refused to back the 25 March demonstration, but instead appealed for one parent, one governor, and one teacher from every school to lobby Parliament on 21 March. On 30 March it has yet another day of action, over Section 11 cuts.

The UNISON public-service union's National Executive voted on 23 February for a day of protest with industrial action, but has yet to set a date. UNISON already has a separate day of action planned for 30 March, over nurses' pay.

Local UNISON or NUT branches in several areas plan one-day strikes for the end of March.

Tory education minister Gillian Shephard has responded by saying that councils can expect no more money for the basic school system, and should instead cut back on plans for (very modest) increases in under-fives provision! (*Times Educational*

Supplement, 24 February)

She is also reported (*Independent*, 20 February) to have told the cabinet to expect a lot of "hell and fury", but only manageable real difficulties.

Unfortunately, the government does have openings to split up and dissipate this emerging anti-cuts movement. "Redetermination" is basically a re-run of the left-Labour councils' failed policy of the early 1980s, when they avoided cuts by raising local taxes (then property rates). The fact that central government has taken over the old business-rate part of council income makes things worse. Council tax is only a small part of councils' income, the rest being set by central government. To make good a five per cent cut in its overall budget, for example, a council is likely to have to increase its council tax by one-third.

"These governors, unpaid volunteers, are not like Labour councillors, broken-spirited after years of doing the Tories' dirty work and overwhelmed by a corps of permanent officials."

That the councils have to demand the government allow them to raise council tax, rather than just doing it, gives the process a colour of defiance. That is important. It opens up possibilities. It is also fraught with weaknesses. The government will control the timing of the "redetermination" appeals. It can deal with councils one by one.

School governors have shown more backbone than the councils, but the councils can — and will be advised by their anxious lawyers that legally they must — override the governors to set a cuts budget.

Some councils may get a slightly higher council tax. Some may shift cuts from education to elsewhere. Some schools may

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Shrewsbury parents and workers demonstrate against the cuts. Photo: John Harris

go through with budgets which are balanced on paper but which in reality will run into deficit (this is the official advice of the National Association of Head Teachers). In such developments, the whole movement could fragment.

The labour movement — the TUC, the public service unions like UNISON and the NUT, the Labour Party — is the only body with the strength and established organisation that could pull the movement together. It should be working closely and sensitively with parents, governors, and other community anti-cuts groups to create an escalating programme of protests, demonstrations and strikes, with the demand for more central government money for local services, to be taken out of the £9 or £10 billion a year which the top ten per cent have gained from tax cuts since 1978-9. Labour councils should join in by setting deficit budgets, declaring that they will refuse to remit PAYE and VAT money to the government until it pays up.

Activists should campaign for maximum coordination and defiance. However, Labour Party leader Tony Blair has already set his face against any battle. He has told Labour councillors not even to try "redetermination", let alone deficit budgets! "The Labour leadership is keen to show responsible government and is determined to avoid the 'loony left' tag being re-attached by the Tories to Labour local authorities". (*Independent*, 20 February). Leave the 'loony leftism' to conservative school governors, says Blair.

Alongside the brushfire movement against school cuts, an important initiative towards concerted labour-movement action

has been taken by Newcastle UNISON. They have done in Newcastle what the unions should do nationally — built close links with other unions, the Labour Party, and community groups, and campaigned systematically. Although Newcastle's cuts this year are actually small compared to other councils', UNISON initiated a huge one-day strike and demonstration on 1 February, and has pushed the council as far as going for "redetermination".

Newcastle UNISON has also campaigned inside the union for concerted national action at the end of March. And they have a perspective which goes beyond the next couple of months. They are making links with other branches and in other unions to advocate a rolling programme of action across the summer, building up to a huge protest round Budget Day in November, to demand the restoration of social spending.

The focus on Budget Day creates the possibility of a much wider movement. No longer will we be trying to fend off the implications in one school of council cuts, or in one council or hospital of central government cuts which have already been pushed through some months earlier. We will go for the root — the central government cuts.

Labour Parties previously battered into submission by the councillors' argument that they have no alternative but to implement cuts as humanely as possible, unless they can overthrow the government, can be rallied by this new perspective. Round unions and Labour Parties, hundreds of community groups can be drawn into protests.

The Tory government is weaker than

ever. This anti-cuts movement could be the beginning of its downfall. ☐

● Contact: FACE, c/o Bob Jelley, St Giles Middle School, Exhall, Warwickshire, or 0203 453832; Newcastle UNISON, Newcastle Civic Centre, or 091-232 8520 x 6980; Welfare State Network, c/o Southwark TUSU, 42 Braganza St, London SE17, or 071-639 5068.

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The lesson of the animal rights protests:

"If the law is wrong, disobey it!"

By Wayne Nicholls

AT A MEETING in Liverpool about Clause Four of the Labour Party, miners' leader Arthur Scargill was asked: "What is the significance of Clause Four for animal welfare?"

At first glance this seems a strange question. The young animal-rights activists and blue-rinse pensioners blocking the path of veal transporters in Essex and Sussex seem a million miles away from the debate in the labour movement about renationalisation and common ownership. Indeed, many commentators on the veal protests (and a large proportion of those taking part) have made a virtue out of its cross-class appeal. "I see my animal rights campaigning as linked to, and part of, my ideas of socialism," one campaigner told me last week, "but there are lots of others who wouldn't agree with me."

This kind of Popular Front approach has made the veal protesters (initially) much more popular with the media — so much more approachable than striking miners or rail workers, so much more photogenic than anti-road activists. But the signs are that the tide is being turned against them.

Letters and articles are beginning to appear distancing the 'real' animal welfare people from the 'rent-a-mob' youth, accused of provoking trouble. Interestingly such views are not finding much support those who have seen at first-hand who the real "rent-a-mob thugs" are: baton-wielding riot police are a wholly new phenomenon for the residents of Brightlingsea.

But in its own way the police violence is an equal threat to the fragile alliance between young animal rights militants and the Tory-voting compassion brigade. Like the shifting media angles, it promises to open up unbridgeable divides in the campaign, as protesters are forced to confront questions about the rule of law, the role of the police, and the state.

And this is where Arthur Scargill's answer fits into the picture. In many ways, he said, the veal protesters should be an inspiration to the labour movement. "We must re-assert the principle, which they have carried into action, of defiance. If the law is wrong, we should not obey it!"

There is no doubt that the news of Scargill's support for them will distress some of the protesters. But it is fundamental for them to realise that if they are to win their battle they are going to have to confront, and face down, the state. That is a task in which, as the miners know only too well, it is crucial to have the right people on your side.

In this case, as in all others where con-



Popular Fronts won't beat the police. Photo: John Harris

fronting the state is concerned, the right people are not the mythical 'middle England' so lauded by the liberal press and so sought after by Tony Blair's New Labour. The right people are the workers themselves — in transport, in farming, in shipping. They are the only people who in defiance of the state, can halt the veal trade.

Which brings us back to Clause Four. The framework for such an alliance must be the principles of common ownership, popular administration and democratic control of industry — farming, freight and shipping. Both workers and protesters have plenty to gain from such common owner-

ship, as do the animals themselves, who I firmly believe would be treated much less cruelly if the profit-motive for cruelty were removed. The only ones to lose out will be those who make profits now — the exploiters of both animals and humans. Socialists in the labour movement should not ignore the demands of the animal rights campaigners. Rather we should be explaining to them that only socialism offers them the prospect of achieving their goal.

Capitalism is cruelty erected into a social system. To fight effectively for compassion for animals, we must first fight for compassion between people. ☐

Mandela's government attacks the working class

By Bobby Navarro

THE SOUTH AFRICAN Parliament reopened on 17 February amid heavy security. Nelson Mandela used his opening speech to spell out who he saw as the main threat to the ANC-led "Government of National Unity" — the black working class.

He accused a tiny minority of wanting to ferment unrest and instability in the country and he specifically referred to those parties who were involved in labour unrest as being responsible.

This was a direct reference to the Workers' List Party/WOSA.

Continued strikes and demonstrations amongst black workers over the summer are clearly putting pressure on the Government of National Unity (GNU). The recent split between Mandela and De Klerk however seems to have been forgotten. Mandela used rhetoric his predecessor would have been pleased with — referring to a "small minority in our midst which wears the mask of anarchy" seeking to "impose chaos on society". This drew warm applause from National Party members.

The failure of the GNU to deliver on its election pledges, preferring to protect the profits of big business, has been providing an audience for socialist groups like WOSA and seems set to be reflected in further unrest and protests. For instance many voters are not refusing to register for the projected October local elections.

As long as this situation continues, the GNU will attack the left. But Mandela is playing a dangerous game. Sleaze and corruption scandals are already undermining Mandela's claim that there "is no big bag of money" — it is just in the wrong hands.

The fight for Clause Four

By Gerry Bates

THE FIGHT to keep Clause Four of Labour's constitution received a major boost at the end of February when the London regional conference of the party voted by 59% to 41% to retain the clause which formally commits the party to "secure for the workers... the common ownership of the means of production..."

The London conference was the first representative party gathering since last year's national conference voted to re-affirm Clause Four, just 48 hours after Blair had announced his intention to abolish it.

This sets the scene for the other regional conferences, especially the Scottish gathering, where support for Clause Four is likely to be strong.

Blair's roadshow is visibly running out of steam. One recent Blair event in Bristol saw less than a third of the audience joining a standing ovation for wonderboy. The Birmingham consultation meeting attracted perhaps half the crowd who turned up recently to hear Arthur Scargill speak in defence of Clause Four.

Many prominent right wingers have spo-

ken out against the undemocratic way in which the so-called "consultation" is taking place. These include hard-line, old-fashioned right-wingers like Austin Mitchell MP and even some self-confessed 'modernisers' like Rosina Macrae, a sponsor of Blair's New Clause Four campaign and a member of the Scottish Labour Party executive, who declared: "I regard myself very much as a moderniser, but I'm very concerned by the leadership's handling of this. There has been no debate and the leaders of the party are trying to blackmail the membership into supporting them."

The left is winning the battle of ideas hands down. The right-wing motions at London Regional conference conspicuously contained no reference to Blair's "competitive, dynamic, market economy" but, instead promised a new Clause Four with "common ownership, including public ownership, co-ops... and other forms... held by the community and workforce".

This bodes well for the left because in the final stage of the argument it will be impossible for the right to duck the question that so far they have conspicuously avoided: "How do you make the capitalist market economy operate in the interests of work-

ing-class people?"

Unfortunately, battles in the workers' movement do not take place on a "level playing field". Blair has huge forces on his side from way beyond the labour movement.

The media, the parliamentary Labour Party elite, the upper echelons of the trade union apparatus, and the Labour Party's internal machine are all firmly in Blair's camp, and doing everything they can to ensure a victory "by any means necessary".

Victories for the pro-Clause Four campaign have been deliberately kept out of the media, even the so-called quality papers. For instance, Barry Clement, *Independent* labour editor, described the fact that the RMT had come out for Clause Four as "not a story". This is John Prescott's own union, and the organisation at the forefront of the battle to defeat rail privatisation, Labour's supposed number one campaigning priority!

Meanwhile the same paper made the launch of the "New Clause Four campaign", which has the backing of no CLPs and no trade unions, its front-page lead!

When Robin Cook made a statement backing Blair, all the papers reported it as a "conversion" although Cook had supported Blair all along.

The exclusion of pro-Clause-Four voices from the media makes the leadership's refusal to give pro-Clause-Four voices any real access to the party's own consultation process even more disgusting.

The cynicism of the union bureaucracy is best summed up by the prominent official in the public sector union UNISON who said that the decision on whether to send the 1994 or 1995 union delegation to the special conference on 29 April depended entirely on whether the 1995 elections produced more left wingers on the delegation than in 1994. As we have always said, the fight for Labour Party democracy and trade union democracy are inseparable.

The final stage of the Clause Four battle will see a fight to the finish in key unions like UNISON, CWU (the new communication union), MSF, the technicians' union, and the shopworkers' USDAW, as well as a battle in the constituencies. The left needs to defend the collective decision-making process of General Committees against the leadership's plans for loyalty ballots, and insist that any all-member ballot includes question like "Do you want to retain Clause Four as it stands?"

The result on 29 April is still too close to call. But what we do know is that a fight-back on the scale of that organised by the "Defend Clause Four Campaign" was never supposed to happen. ☐

● Contact: "Defend Clause Four" c/o the NUM, 2 Huddersfield Road, Barnsley S70 2LS. Phone: 0171-708 0511.

Rail union backs Clause Four

By Alan Pottage, RMT National Executive Scottish Area

THE NATIONAL Executive of the rail workers and sea farers, RMT met on Friday 3 February to clarify the union's position regarding the Labour leadership's attempt to ditch Clause Four.

As a result of the resolution passed at our AGM last year, which called for a 'return to public ownership or control as appropriate' it was decided to add this wording to Clause Four. This was understandable given the lack of a strong and clear commitment from the Leader and Deputy Leader to take the rail industry back into common ownership if the Tories succeed in their pathetic privatisation attempt.

The RMT supports the 'Defend Clause Four, Defend Socialism' campaign and it is hoped that all of our active members will re-double their energies to defend Clause Four in the remaining weeks of the campaign. It really is a tragedy that our activists are having to concern themselves with ensuring that the Labour Party does not shunt its socialist principles into a dead-end siding instead of concentrating on the battle against privatisation.

RMT rail members are facing absolute

turmoil at the workplace due to the madness of privatisation. Given the massive public support for the rail industry to remain in public ownership one would have thought that a clear commitment from Tony Blair, in accordance with policy, to re-nationalise our industry if privatised, would be enough to deter the private vampires from sticking their fangs into the arteries of our industry. Such a declaration would undoubtedly deter even the greediest of private speculators from trying to make a fast buck on the backs of our lowly paid members. But instead of driving a socialist stake through this vampire's heart, the 'dump Clause Four' camp are attempting to bury our most effective campaign weapons alongside their own principles.

One thing for sure is that the 'Defend Clause Four' campaign has already achieved a notable victory regardless of the decision at the special conference: it has successfully united and inspired a large section of socialists who form the backbone of the Labour Party. I think it was Arthur Scargill who said at the fringe meeting in Blackpool, following Tony Blair's speech, that it was absolute nonsense to be organising several different meetings to defend Clause Four on the same night instead of uniting in a non-sectarian fashion and maximising the effectiveness of the one big campaign, a campaign with one common cause.

The diary of a Clause Four activist

By Roland Tretchet

THE "Defend Socialism, Defend Clause Four" campaign has organised rallies up and down the country attended by tens of thousands of people.

The level of commitment to the cause of the working class and the active, burning hatred of capitalism I have encountered among broad layers of party and trade union activists has been a revelation.

I've lost count of the number of times I've seen women old enough to be my grandma tear into pompous right-wing MPs and student politicians in a way that the posturing "r-r-r-revolutionaries" could never manage.

"I was born in the same year as Clause Four [1918] and I can tell you things haven't got better, they've got worse!... Capitalism was wrong then and it's wrong now". That is my favourite so far.

And that was from someone who in the internal battles of the early '80s would have been described as a "traditional Labour Party member", and thus as a right-winger.

This basic gut-socialism is not restricted to the older members though. It is particularly well developed in the trade unions, especially among the active shop stewards, workplace reps and branch officers, the women and men who, to most members, are "the union".

I was particularly struck by a debate in which joint general secretaries of the newly-formed Communications Workers' Union (CWU), Tony Young and Alan Johnson, took on Jeremy Corbyn MP and Tom Rigby from the Defend Clause Four Campaign. The meeting was hosted by the CWU's South London Political Committee.

Of the 60 people in the audience nearly half spoke. Not one single word was said in support of Blair! This was an audience of trade unionists who are socialists because they have experienced working in a privatised monopoly, BT or fighting a vicious anti-union management offensive in the Post Office.

What did their leaders have to say? Asked repeatedly if he could, Tony Young could not point us to one serious difference between the Blairite's "consultative" document and the "the Limehouse Declaration", the founding statement of the SDP. Young had One Big Idea: "Blair is the leader of the Labour Party. We support the Labour Party. Therefore we support Tony Blair."

Then Alan Johnson turned up, the sweetest smelling and best manicured trade union leader in Britain!

Making a dramatic entrance stage left, Johnson apologised for being late. He had, he told us, come straight from the High Court, where the CWU had been fined for an official walk out Johnson had tried to stop. The judge, he said, had asked him what

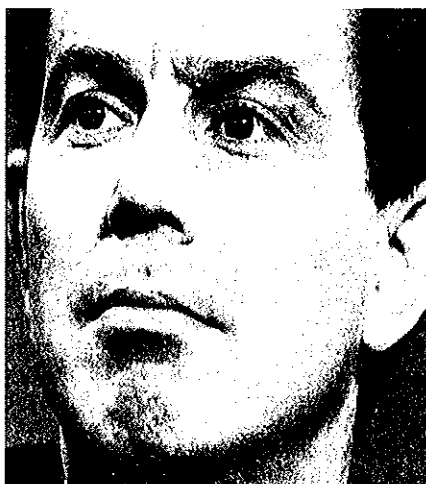
the total assets of the union were. A voice near me cracked: "It depends on whether you count your Armani suits!"

Johnson fared no better than Young.

Johnson's main "argument" was: "Clause Four doesn't mention social justice". If the claim to "secure for the workers... the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof on the basis of common ownership" is not a demand for social justice, what is?

The really interesting thing was that neither General Secretary even tried to convince the union activists. They simply told them that they (the people who hold the union together) were "dinosaurs", that the CWU was going to hold a postal ballot on Blair's proposal, and that Blair would win. The union members may give him a rude surprise!

Outside of a big strike I have never seen the gulf between the rank and file and the leadership of the unions thrown into such sharp relief.



Blair and his coterie do not know how to talk to the labour movement

This CWU meeting also provided one small example of the way the Labour Party and the unions are part of one organically-related, unitary labour movement. A postal worker explained how after speaking at a Labour ward on a local dispute he was convinced by the ward about Clause Four.

Back in the constituencies, I've also been impressed by the way many so-called "ordinary" party members have a far deeper and broader grasp of socialist ideas, and of the history of the labour movement, than many professional politicians. The right wing's ignorance of these matters impresses nobody.

My favourite is Harriet Harman's declaration that "I don't really know very much about the history of the labour movement", followed by a bizarre attack on the suffragettes. "Women's rights weren't really an issue in the first part of the century." So what do you know about, Harriet?

A large part of the Blairite case is made up of pseudo-radical, pretended concern for oppressed groups not mentioned in Clause Four! The argument usually goes something like this: Clause Four doesn't include blacks, women, pensioners, lesbians and gays, children, students, the disabled, the environment or — and I really have heard this — animals. It is, of course, all completely beside the point.

That's the big problem for the Blairites. They can't convince people with sound-bites and red herrings, so they rely on the "loyalty" argument. Some of them try to convince people that capitalism is a good thing!

I have heard lots of right-wingers aggressively ask the rhetorical question:

"Do you really want to nationalise Marks and Spencer?" only to be answered with a resounding "yes!" from the audience.

The "loyalty" issue is a problem for the left. "Loyalty" is important in the labour movement and Blair is Party leader. However, when we point out that Blair could simply add to Clause Four rather than abolishing it, people can see that Blair is demanding not only loyalty but the power of a political dictator over the Labour Party.

"Right" and "left" are not always what they seem in the Labour Party. A recent Fabian Society debate saw Shadow Home Secretary Jack Straw reduced to heckling his audience — yes an audience of respectable Fabians! — when they refused to accept the idiocy that "common ownership" can only mean 1945 style bureaucratic nationalisation. Straw lost his rag, revealing another of the so-called modernisers' weaknesses.

They are so used to talking to media people who agree with them that they are not very good at arguing with real labour movement people who consider themselves socialists. The "modernisers" tend to underestimate the level of political sophistication amongst Labour Party members and to find their basic honesty and straightforwardness well nigh incomprehensible.

Take for instance Ken Loach's pro-Clause-Four video.

Walworth Road launched a nasty dirty tricks campaign against it.

Loach was "exposed" by Walworth Road. His Labour Party membership had lapsed. He therefore had "no right" to take part in the debate. The silly snobs at the Late Show joined in the rubbish exercise. All to no avail.

An article by Loach in the next day's Guardian produced 400 inquiries from CLPs about the video — in just one day!

Win or lose on 29 April, Blair's problem is that despite the position of the leadership, the Labour Party and its affiliated unions still contain thousands of socialist activists. They may not yet be revolutionaries but, certainly they don't like capitalism. They don't like Blair very much either now. ☐