

The BBC: how independent is the newsroom's future?

Beeb On Trial

The conventional view is that Tebbit has overdone it. In the general hounding of the BBC by this government he broke the rules. He wanted to shoot the fox, but has missed and hit the pack. One of them, Sir William Rees-Mogg, has been heard to utter a few yelps of protest. This is the same Sir William who was making it clear, a few weeks before, that the appointment of his old *Times* crony Marmaduke Hussey on a free transfer from the Murdoch team was the last chance to make the BBC run properly. Now Mr Hussey has had to show that he stands with the BBC in its rebuttal.

It is true that Tebbit went too far. He attacked a particular news report, though he dared not name Kate Adie, who has a special reputation as a tough and dispassionate reporter. The grotesque suggestion that a reporter who happens to be on the spot when a hospital is bombed and children maimed and killed should report this positively has been rightly ridiculed. How positively? A Betjemanesque tone: come friendly bombs and fall on Tripoli? Or the insinuation that these small cadavers are really an elite unit of midget terrorists, neatly zapped by the F1-11s?

The government has had to edge away from Tebbit. It was only the party chairman, they say. Yet lining up behind him to fire the next shot are the second rank of rabid BBC-baiters and publicity junkies in the government. Edwina Currie clutches a dossier on *Casualty*, because it shows the NHS stretched to breaking point by overwork and damaged morale. *Woman's Hour* is said to be next.

One response to all this would be to rest the case on the good sense of public opinion. When asked to add up the Tebbits and credits of BBC coverage only 10% of it sides with the chairman, and the portrayal of the Tories as manipulators of the news becomes more sharply etched with each *Spitting Image*. But that is too complacent by half. What we are seeing now is the attempt to soften up the BBC, as the principal medium of communication not in Tory hands, before an election. If you threaten to shoot the messenger they may be persuaded to alter the news. But let us suppose that the Tories actually win the next election, alone or in coalition with the SDP. How far could they alter the character of the BBC for good? The answer is that they

could. Indeed they already have. The relationship between the Board of Governors and the management has changed; is changing still. Sustained attack wears an institution down. McCarthyism, after all, was dismissed with contempt when it first appeared, yet altered the climate of the times long after the disgrace of the Wisconsin demagogue himself. Pressure and insinuation took their toll. Executives grew weary of defending the controversial. The day came when Ed Murrow himself, who had gone out after McCarthy, was told by his chairman: 'I don't want this constant stomach-ache every time you do a controversial programme'. Murrow replied: 'I'm afraid that's a price you have to be willing to pay. It goes with the job.' The price was too high for Chairman Paley.

What price will be too high for Chairman Hussey? Because of the concentration of editorial responsibility in the BBC the strain at the top is intense. Our best television dramatist is under fire for *The Monocled Mutineer*. *Rough Justice* has been overhauled and humiliated. A *Brass Tacks* on buddy relationships between top Scotland Yard men and criminals is dropped, and reappears on *ITV's World in Action*. The

BBC abandons its case which it originally regarded as 'rock-solid' on ultra-rightists in the Tory Party, with the further embarrassment that the ex-chairman of the Young Conservatives bravely continues with his own defence, even when the plaintiffs try to drop their action against him. Behind it all there is the delayed response to the Peacock Report; the sense that the Corporation is still on the Thatcher hit-list. Therefore it had better behave.

A caponised BBC diminishes British journalism. If the present pressures succeed, internal self-censorship will continue what external McCarthyism has begun. Tebbit has distracted attention from the *Panorama* libel case. But there the BBC comprehensively abandoned its journalists under fire. The Board chose the worst moment to do so. No senior executive resigned in protest, nor said publicly what all said privately. It has been left to the ingenuity of maverick MPs to keep the case under review. Too great a sensitivity to the government of the day, because it can always alter the rules of the game and the money available, makes top executives cautious.

What is needed is a dispensation which saves the best of public service broadcasting from the depredations of this government and any thin-skinned successor. That means devolving editorial control within a pluralised system, and merging the Board and the senior management.

And since broadcasters do make mistakes, and can be arrogant or unmindful of opinions they do not share, there has to be a right of reply mechanism infinitely better than the BBC's current feeble efforts in this sphere.

Unless BBC management tackles these problems it will never address the question of its own long-term survival in a cold political climate. It can only do that by candour and courage. They have to go with the job. ●

Phillip Whitehead

National Opinion Poll

Do you think the Conservative Party is right to try and influence the way the BBC covers news items or should it leave such matters to the BBC governors and managers?

Right 6%
Leave it to governors 88%
Don't know 6%

What do you personally think was Mr Tebbit's main reason for producing the report of BBC bias?

For party political reasons to help the Conservative Party 43%

A real concern for the BBC to be fair and unbiased 17%
A general dislike of the BBC because it is paid from public money 19%
Other answers 2%
Don't know 19%

Questions devised with the Independent Broadcasting Research Unit



Glittering prize for Rita Levi

Brothers At Arms

When leaders of Britain's biggest union, the Transport and General Workers', gather at the start of December for the three-monthly meeting of the union's general executive council, they will all be acutely aware of one pressing point: the long, dark night of the union is not only not over, it's back – with a vengeance.

After some 18 months of blood-letting – internal, but brutally public at the same time – the union looked as though it was regaining some stability when Ron Todd was elected general secretary for the second time, when it about-faced on the government's trade union laws on executive elections, and when the hard-left Walter Greendale was ousted from the presidency.

But the nightmare of those cumulative crises which rent the union at leadership level almost asunder is once again threatening its internal fabric, and its external force. This time, the immediate point at issue looks less weighty – a difference over the replacement for a retiring regional secretary in the union's south-west area. But behind this seemingly innocuous appointment lurks a larger and murkier struggle – one which carries considerable significance for both the TUC and the Labour Party.

Outside the immediate circle of the TGWU leadership, Todd has grown in stature since, and partly because of, his controversial election: within the TUC and the Labour Party, he is now a keynote figure on the Left. Inside the TGWU, things are different. Greendale's replacement as president was Brian Nicholson, a tough London docker. Widely seen as a Todd supporter when he took the top lay job, it has been an open secret in the union for months that he and Todd see eye to eye on very little: indeed, it's said in the union – though publicly de-

The Nerve Factor

Somewhere in scientific discovery lurks an incredible vitality more usually found in sport, politics and rock music. Rita Levi Montalcini, joint winner of the 1986 Nobel prize for medicine, and only the fourth woman ever, clearly has this. Her discovery of Nerve Growth Factor (NGF), a protein which stimulates neural growth, is crucial to our understanding both of how the embryonic nervous system develops.

Yet her original experiments were done under terrible conditions of persecution. Overcoming lengthy paternal opposition, she gained her medical degree in 1936 only to confront the impossibility of Jews holding office in fascist Italy. So she set up a makeshift laboratory in her bedroom, until finally driven underground.

After the war, in America, she and her joint prizewinner, Stanley Cohen, succeeded in identifying NGF as a protein in the late 50s.

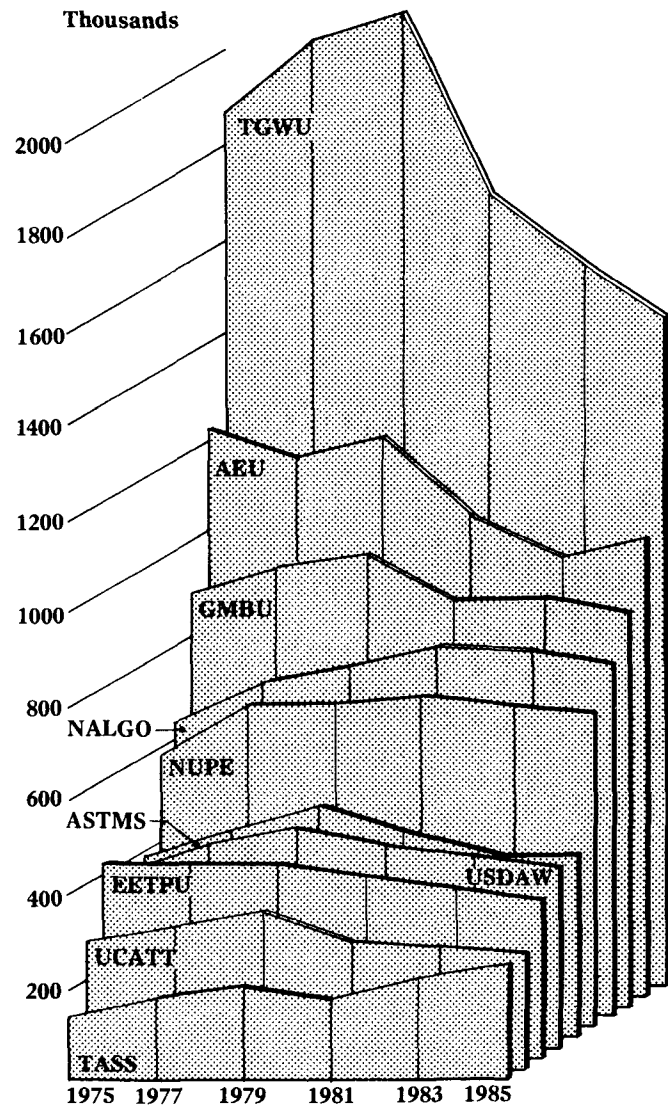
It has taken 30 years for this work to be recognised. Why? Did it simply not fit in with prevailing ideas? Was it because she is a woman? Was it because she was 'foreign'? That seems ridiculous.

Rita Levi Montalcini herself generously attributes this belated interest to recent research suggesting that NGF has clinical uses, particularly in treating degenerative disorders. Still, 30 years is a long time to wait. ●

Deborah Hodgkin

Membership of the 10 largest unions

Source: TUC



11036326 12172508 10082144
11865390 11005984 9580502
Total TUC membership

nied by both – that now they barely speak to each other.

Todd and his supporters have tried to weld a new consensus, attempting to draw together the disparate factions which the bitter divisions of the two general secretaryship elections created. Some of Nicholson's

supporters – who command a majority on the executive – see this as weak-kneed appeasement. They wanted out those who had clustered around Greendale, as well as the man himself: those opposed to them see their tactics now as ruthless, arrogant, trying constantly to

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place their own men in key posts; Nicholson's supporters see it as trying to cleanse the Augean stables of the people they saw as having brought the union to the brink of disaster.

Left- and right-wing labels are confused in all this: Nicholson has little time for Greendale's absolutism, but is no-one's idea of a right-winger either; Todd wants nothing of the blinkered sectionalism of the Left, but equally doesn't want to see scalps being hunted.

Todd is now laying his authority on the line. The right-dominated finance and general purposes committee of the union has twice now voted not to appoint any of the available candidates to the south-west regional job; Todd has taken the initiative of pulling the appointment away from the committee and putting the issue to the December executive.

It's a high risk strategy. On current voting patterns, Todd looks set to be overturned, which would both further weaken his position internally and exacerbate divisions. At a time when some in the TGWU – principally Bill Morris, Todd's deputy, who the Nicholson camp rate not at all – are trying to take the union, at least attitudinally, into new areas such as dealing with a fragmented labour market, further leadership divisions can hardly be helpful to the TGWU's still-dwindling membership.

With the TUC committed to delivering to Labour crucial policies on the economy, and employment law, and Labour in turn committed to delivering them to the electorate, the spectacle of a riven TGWU, the largest affiliate to both bodies, is one to chill the heart of Neil Kinnock, the Labour leader and a TGWU man himself, as the time approaches for the electoral seconds-out call to decide the future of both Labour and the unions. Labour and TUC leaders will be hoping that this time, the TGWU marches properly and in unison towards its long-promised, but still far from achieved new dawn. ●

Philip Bassett

Alien Cash

Five hundred British scientists, including three Nobel laureates and 22 fellows of the Royal Society, have signed a pledge refusing to accept funding from the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI).

The pledge's organisers argue that Star Wars technology is an obstacle to future disarmament and a threat to existing treaties – including the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty, the 1967 agreement on the militarisation of outer space and the 1962 partial test ban treaty.

They also stress the potentially damaging consequences for British science of participation in SDI research. The terms of the 'Memorandum of Understanding' on Star Wars signed last November by Michael Heseltine are 'secret in perpetuity'; but parts of the memorandum published in the US magazine *Aviation Week and Space Technology* suggest that they include provisions to extend US control over vast swathes of the British information technology industry.

To restrict the transfer of technology – for the US has no intention of allowing the Soviets any access to Star Wars research – British research work would be subject to the extra-territorial application of US laws. For example, the Pentagon would be given the power to decide which British research work should be subject to US security classification.

The boycott campaigners' success will be a further blow to government hopes that British scientists would find a major role in SDI research. Of the \$1.5 billion worth of orders which Heseltine expected would come to Britain only some \$36m has materialised – of which around a third is earmarked for government defence laboratories. Thus far only one university team – at Heriot-Watt University – is acknowledged to be receiving Star Wars funding, for work on optical computers. ●

Jeremy Green

Machel's Legacy

The death of President Samora Machel was a watershed in the Southern African regional war – the horribly logical sequel to the 1984 Nkomati 'peace pact'. South Africa's disinformation machine has predictably been working overtime to blame the crash on external factors which did not exist, such as bad weather, pilot error, crew drunkenness, the Tupolov having outdated equipment etc.

But the authorities' combining of the wreckage for eight hours before informing Maputo about the disaster or aiding the wounded, like their refusal to obey normal international rules and release the black box to the Mozambicans, set the real background for the death of President Samora.

Whatever emerges from the international enquiry, this death symbolises the ruthless determination of South Africa to win its regional war whatever the cost in human, diplomatic or economic terms.

Even before the death of President Samora the last quarter of 1986 saw Mozambique's military and social crisis intensify to the point where the very survival of the Frelimo government was threatened. South Africa, previously content to keep Frelimo in a state of virtual impotence by its economic and military destabilisation, appeared to change tack and to be envisaging an attack on the Mozambican capital Maputo itself, just as the Mozambicans believed it was on the eve of Nkomati.

By mid-October South African commandos had already been infiltrated into the capital, the South African army was in force on the Mozambique border, from Malawi waves of heavily armed Renamo forces were unleashed across the border and took five towns in northern Mozambique.

It was the first time they had made any such attempt to hold population centres. At



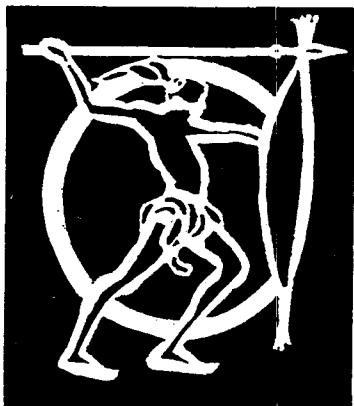
Photo: Frank Spooner Pictures

Machel: Watershed death

a summit in Maputo the front line states presidents forecast imminent open war in the region with Frelimo as the first target. South Africa then openly threatened Mozambique using the excuse of supposed African National Congress guerrillas crossing the border to lay mines.

That the killer bands of Renamo, created by the Rhodesian Special Branch, taken over by South Africa after Zimbabwean independence and still with no political programme and almost no identifiable non-Portuguese leadership, can be promoted to the status of a potential government by a Washington-based lobbying organisation linked to the US administration shows the Reaganite 'low intensity conflict' strategy for the ruthless and cynical genocide which it is – from Nicaragua to Afghanistan.

South Africa has always hit out at its weakest neighbours in its own moments of greatest stress. The threat of international economic sanctions was one key to the timing of the apparent decision to move decisively against Frelimo. In addition, the Zim-



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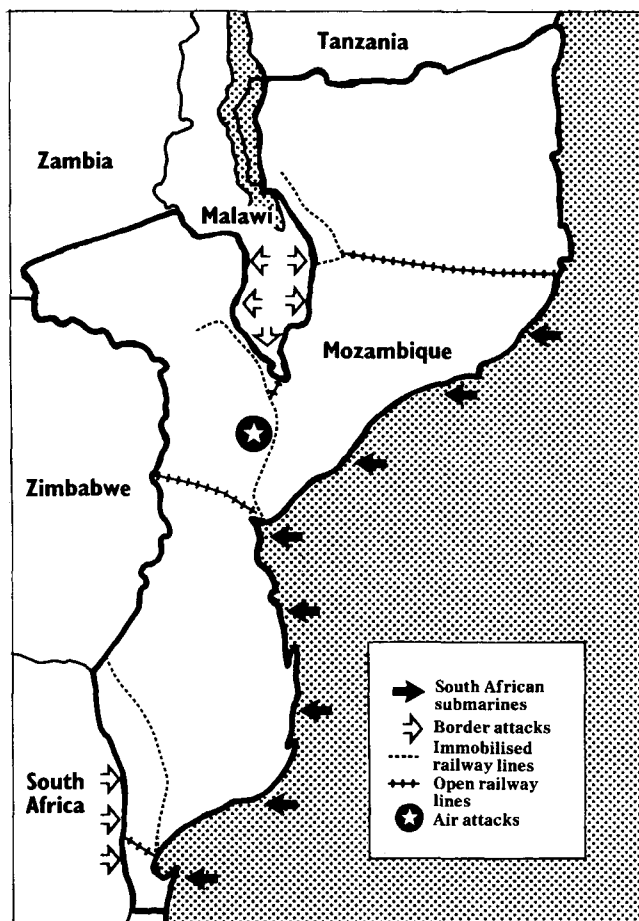
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Biting the Vote



Mozambique: weakened by war and communications breakdown

babwean troops guarding the Beira road and rail corridor between Zimbabwe and the Indian Ocean port have been successful in demonstrating the South Africa's economic muscle to control all regional transport routes is not assured.

Then the squeezing of Lesotho to change its government by a coup last January proved to South Africa that this kind of virtual bantustan disguised as an independent state can be a way round Western investment bans inside South Africa itself. (Lesotho's Highland Water Scheme to be financed by the EEC and other major donors will mainly benefit the industry of South Africa's Vaal triangle.)

If Frelimo could be crushed and a client of Pretoria's installed, Mozambique would be even more useful in sanctions busting. For instance its ports could export South African coal under its own label and even South African

steel disguised as having come down the Beira corridor from Zimbabwe, Namibia, Swaziland, Mauritius, Malawi and The Comoros are already far advanced in the South African sanctions busting plans.

This short-term need of Pretoria's is part of the double perspective in the 'low intensity conflict' strategy against Mozambique. For Pretoria's Western allies there is a longer-term calculation of the role of pliable neighbour states in exerting maximum leverage on a future South African regime. The US, Britain and Israel currently make enormous covert use of Malawi and Zaire against, respectively, Mozambique and Angola. This is the pattern for the future use of the states bordering South Africa - from Namibia to Mozambique - against a future nationalist government in Pretoria. ●

Victoria Brittain

With its decision to abandon abstentionism in the Irish parliament, the Dail, Sinn Fein last month laid the foundations for a long-term political campaign with implications far beyond the IRA's present military objectives.

The prelude to the decision was a long-running, often bitter dispute between the pro and anti-abstentionist tendencies in Sinn Fein. The decision was almost made at last year's conference, but the move failed to achieve the necessary two-thirds majority to overturn what was to many Republicans a central part of their creed.

In effect the change means the party has removed a major obstacle to winning mass support in the South. Who backed the change and why tells us a great deal about it. Moves to drop abstentionism were led by the younger Northern leadership, former Long Kesh prisoners Gerry Adams, Danny Morrison and Martin McGuinness. It is a curious paradox that those most vociferously in favour of more political activity are Republicans at the centre of the Northern military battleground.

They believe that to seriously advance their campaign in the North the party must overcome its credibility gap of being, in electoral terms, an exclusively Northern entity. It commands the support of some 40% of the Northern Catholic population, yet - according to opinion polls - only 2-3% of voters in the Republic. A party that seeks to unite the country under a Republican socialist flag is not going to get far, they argue, while representing just one corner of it.

Opposition to the change came mainly from older members more strongly wedded to the party's history of not taking part in 'partitionist' assemblies. Since they walked out of the conference hall last month their support seems to have followed a similar pattern.

The branches claiming to

support the new small splinter group, Republican Sinn Fein, are few and mainly in the west of Ireland. The vast bulk of the Sinn Fein following seems to have stayed put. US support from Noraid - always a more conservative tribe - has been put under pressure, but will probably be won back.

The decision to go into the Dail if elected does not mean that the party will immediately have any great presence there. Partly as a move to heal the wounds of the split, Sinn Fein leaders have been stressing that they may not win any. This clever line of argument has been heard in the North since 1983, where it helped elicit helpful gasps of surprise from the media when the party exceeded their moderate stated electoral targets.

Going into the Dail will allow the party to plant its Northern seed in new ground. The key to its success since the electoral plan began with the 1981 hunger strikes and the election of Bobby Sands has been to



Photo: Derek Speirs/Report

Sinn Fein walkout

organise and recruit among the vast reservoir of young unemployed, most of whom had not bothered to vote at all.

There is no shortage of such constituents in the South. With 18% unemployment there, it is on a par with the highest in the EEC. In some areas it's over 30%. In this light the 2% opinion poll support is deceptive - Sinn Fein has barely begun to work on its most fertile pastures in the Republic. ●

Alan Murdoch

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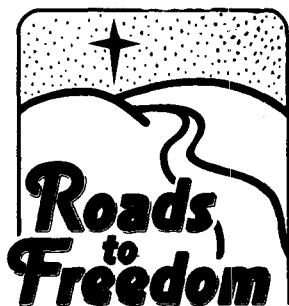
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Another Sad Story

Now the Jarrow Crusaders are back home on Tyneside and thus ends another sad episode in the politics of the 1980s. They were decent folk who deserved better. One of the most generously publicised public demonstrations against unemployment attracted about 1000 people in Trafalgar Square. Why was it one of the smallest demonstrations to enjoy one of the biggest galleries of labour movement stars? Rarely can such a well-endowed effort have been so irrelevant.

Without detracting from the sheer energy of the marchers it has to be said that the 1986 Jarrow Crusade wasn't a crusade. It was an event, in the absence of a crusade.

Unemployment has beggared the imagination of most of the labour movement, left it with no strategy, ideas, energy, no commitment to a *crusade* on either the future of work or the fate of the wageless.

We saw people from Jarrow with the imprimatur of the General Municipal and Boilermakers on their anoraks (as if they were footballers) so we could all see that the GMB was doing something about it. The labour movement, or rather bits of it, threw some money at the march, but the labour movement, including the GMB, haven't thrown their hearts or their minds at unemployment or the unemployed.

I can hear protests already, 'hang on we've done this and that...' Well that's true, but it is only a bit of this and that, and the trouble is that when it comes to work that's the territory of the trade union movement, and if it doesn't do anything then its weight and power gets in the way.

The first Jarrow Crusade in 1936 was, of course, one of many. And it is salutary to reflect on why it is Jarrow we remember above all.

No doubt one of the major reasons was that it was a

Labour march (although it was shunned by the Labour Party and TUC leaders). Elderly people in Jarrow recall the Labour Party taking political power in the town almost like some people remember their wedding day, it was *their* own party.

The National Unemployed Workers Movement had already been organising Hunger Marches from the distressed areas with an insurgent spirit never expressed on the Jarrow Crusade, and with demands which were political where Jarrow's were parochial — though in terms of Jarrow's history, such an initiative was innovative and arresting.

Jarrow Crusade's spirit was resolute but respectable, it gathered an extraordinary community coalition which included Tories and clerics, and as Jarrow historian Frank Ennis has shown its tone was determined by its sponsorship by the local Labour council. That made it an apolitical, civic rather than a class march.

Ironic, says Ennis, that the march should have been a town event when women, who constituted a majority of the Jarrow population, were excluded from it. During the summer planning stage, three women councillors argued that women should be allowed to go. 'It's women who have had to bear the brunt,' said Councillor Mrs Robinson. But they were defeated. 'We do not want women in this. It is the job for the man', said one of the principal organisers Councillor Riley. And so women were banned.

The Jarrow experience is important not only because it reveals the depths of women's subordination within the labour movement, but because it reveals much about the meaning of unemployment we have inherited from the 1930s; the image of men hanging around the streets derives from the sexual division of labour within the home. Ennis's work provides an important corrective to that gendered image. Unemployed men left their homes as if they were em-

ployed, which reinforced women's confinement to work within the home.

Unemployment involved no redistribution of unpaid domestic work between men and women, Jarrow had never offered large-scale industrial work to women. But 'women always had to work, outside the home as well as in it. It didn't work the other way round,' says Ennis. Politics became part of the 'work' of the unemployed men and the Labour Party, too, was their work, and according to Ennis it thus became a 'mass men's Labour Party.' The campaign was by men, the object was work for men.

A strategy for political action around unemployment which is based on a nostalgic celebration of the Jarrow Crusade inevitably carries, albeit unconsciously, the mark of gender. It calls up the crisis of *men's unemployment*, a crisis which was not only a function of wagelessness but of patriarchy, of the impossibility of men either sharing their own waged work with women before the crisis, or themselves sharing the unpaid work of women in the home during it.

Yet redistribution of unpaid work and the reform of men is *still* not on the labour movement's agenda. The movement has neither intervened against the tradition of the family wage, which assumed male breadwinners and female housewives, nor has it helped to generate a culture in which men might share responsibility for housework, for children, in other words for life beyond the wage packet.

Meanwhile the trade unions in the rest of Europe are deep into strategic contemplation of a reduction of working time, and as well as thinking about what future work will look like, they're thinking about what future working time might look like too. Are we, meanwhile, to remain stuck in the old distinction between full-time (male) and part-time (female)?

Nostalgic gestures like the Crusade and the People's March for Jobs also repeat archaic forms of political ac-

tion that exclude most women, and certainly most mothers. They're still men's marches really, and so they can't help reveal the crisis of wagelessness among women and children. And when participation in politics needs to be maximised, they are sure to minimise it.

The romance of the Jarrow nostalgia also encourages doomed fantasies about what a 'productive' Britain would look like. I was talking to my brother about this late one night in one of our meaningful-life conversations. What could be done, I asked him. He used to be a fitter. He looked at his hands, 'they're an answer. I made locomotives and cranes, and people like me used to build ships and tractors, what you're looking at feeds people, mends bicycles, makes books; delouses people...'

We both wept, of course, because we knew it wasn't the answer. But he was right when he said: 'Those marchers came from Jarrow and everybody says isn't the world awful and aren't these people wonderful, which they are, but it's all an excuse for doing nothing. Nothing is nudging its nose into that area of politics other than trade union barons shipping a bit of money into the Jarrow Crusade.'

This reveals a stillness where there ought to be a busy civil society. Millions of people were moved to support Live Aid and Sport Aid, millions probably *did* something to support the coal communities, it wasn't the state, or the government or even the Labour Party (which may be able to govern but isn't capable of organising a decent demo). Civil society is a shadowy space, but it's where we all live. It was within civil society that those millions were moved to act for and with people who needed them, whether in Ethiopia or Easington. But the unemployed?

I don't know what the answer is and I don't know anyone who does, and perhaps if nothing else the Jarrow Crusade is a reminder that it's time we did. ●
Beatrix Campbell

