

## Them and Us

Standing in the airport on the way home from the European Parliament at Strasbourg recently I found myself next to a man in a flash waistcoat and smoking a big cigar, who let off a long, slow fart. The body belonged to the former minister for Northern Ireland, Roy Mason, who'd been wandering around the European Parliament with a leading tobacco company. This degenerate little incident is an index not only of men's notorious habit of noisy farting, but of something more important: big corporations take the European Community seriously, they think it is worth canvassing members of the European Parliament. Most of the Left in Britain wouldn't think it worth the time or money.

Mason's visit was connected with something that ought to make us change our mind: the attempts by Scottish MEP Ken Collins and the Euro-Parliament's important environment committee to take 1% of the price paid to tobacco producers through the Common Agricultural Policy and give it to the cancer programme.

How can the traditional anti-market stance of the Left help us understand, not to mention support, such a move? We are still stuck in the slogans of the EC referendum in 1975. Labour Party headquarters and Neil Kinnock have over the past couple of years been quietly re-thinking the EC. Since 1983 the party's policy has shifted from outright opposition to withdrawal as a last option. On a more practical front, working parties are developing between the Labour Party and the German SDP, who these days enjoy a close relationship with the Italian Communist Party.

But this rethinking has barely touched the British Labour Group (BLG) in Strasbourg. Socialist and communist members of the European Parliament remain frustrated and impatient at

the absence of the British Labour Group and the British Left from the attempt to build a European Left.

Isolation from our continental comrades, and ignorance about the mysterious ways of the EC have produced a virtual silence within the British Left about the debates now surrounding the EC's political metamorphosis: the European Communities (Amendment) Bill now making its way through the House of Commons will legislate for the Single European Act adopted by the EC earlier this year. It is not only designed to end restrictions on the movement of people, goods and capital within the 12 member states by 1992, but to give greater powers to the European Parliament and to give the EC the power to intervene in some terms and conditions of employment, foreign policy and the environment.

All the average person knows about the EC derives from some successful Thatcherite table-banging over the cost of Britain's contribution and about food mountains. And yet parts of the Left in Europe, sometimes in alliance with Christian Democrats and Liberals, are trying to match the promotion of the 'single market' with a social strategy.

Some of the most stringent challenges to Thatcherism's employment strategy and Britain's role as a big polluter have come from Europe. Where does that put our traditional opposition to the EC? Hedy d'Ancoma, former Dutch social affairs minister, now an MEP, is worried that the attitude of the BLG leaves the European field to the Tories. The British government 'use the anti-European attitude in the population to withhold things which are important for working people.'

The British Tories have fought hard against social regulation of the market, and many continental Europeans see the Tories and their deregulation strategy as a major threat in the EC. The Italian Independent, Vera Squarcialupi, who is on the Communist Party list, feels,

like many others, that this makes it vital to establish an effective alliance with the BLG, 'But', she adds, 'it is difficult to talk with them on European problems. The SPD and PCI are convinced Europeanists and the BLG are not, we study problems in a European dimension: it is a Europe of capital so we must build a Europe of workers. Nations have no reason to exist any more.'

Heinke Salisch, a member of the SPD group, reminds us that it is the British government which is blocking progressive directives on the environment, on women and the labour market, 'and I'm sure the German government is happy about this. What we can do in this parliament is make sure the people know. I'm opposed to the British Left's attitude. The community is widening. You have to participate in the debate around a new philosophy of the Left in Europe. The BLG is not taking part in that discussion. They're still playing naughty boys and girls. Sometimes you'd like to shake them and say "think!"'

Until recently, the Campaign Group has been the dominant force for 'rejectionism' within the BLG and Richard Balfe, one of the MEPs on the Left, admits that 'the Campaign Group within the BLG has found it difficult to work within the framework of the European socialist group.'

Probably the sole survivor of the Campaign Group's absolute opposition to the EC is Les Huckfield, who no longer even seems to take himself very seriously. 'Nothing that happens here is of the slightest importance for the poor devils I represent,' he said. He's got no time for the rest of the socialist group - the biggest single group in the parliament - 'there's only half a dozen you can talk to,' and anyway, 'the power lies in the picket lines and the demos,' he says.

The Flemish socialist Marijke von Hemeldonk, while admiring the British MEPs' rugged roots in their constituencies is depressed by the spectacle of 'people making a

lot of noise in corridors but not in committee. During the miners' strike British MEPs were collecting money, but they weren't there when the economic committee was discussing a report from the coal committee and they didn't intervene in the budget. This is bad behaviour.'

Bad behaviour sometimes extends to nationalist contempt for other nationalities as if the trouble with Europe is that it is full of foreigners.

Ken Collins reckons that 'much of what has passed for left-wing policy on Europe has just been nationalism masquerading.' But already some MEPs on the Left feel that the BLG ought to come clean about the need to change the emphasis and tone of the Left's interventions. Stan Newens asks himself, 'how can I be for a nuclear-free Europe and not come here and talk about it?'

Carole Tongue, who is busy on the women's committee and also in establishing trade union links between workers in her East London constituency and trade unionists across Europe, says 'things don't stand still, and the party hasn't evolved its ideas while the EC has been evolving. The European Right is using the worst aspects of the Treaty of Rome. Capital is organised at the international level, but where has the labour movement been at the European level?'

She adds: 'The environment is the paradigm, the nuclear cloud knows no borders, pollution renders national sovereignty obsolete. Knee-jerk anti-marketeters are fighting the wrong battle because the Right are in there shaping the agenda. We should use the European Community for our networks. The structures of the EC aren't right, the Treaty of Rome isn't right, but the level is right.'

We need a major new debate on the British Left about the EC, not just in the quiet corridors of Walworth Road, but among all of us, and not just about what we used to think, but about what we need to do now. ●  
*Beatrix Campbell*



## Electoral Concerns

Far more than the SDP, the Communist Party has become the party for people who believe themselves above the messy business of politics and in particular that of actually winning votes. Incapable of winning themselves, they seek to tell others how to do it. The problem of this approach is amply illustrated by the recent article by Grahl and Rowthorn (MT, Nov) (GR).

Contrary to GR's assertion that our target of 1m off the dole in two years was kept as modest as possible, I believe that it is an ambitious but credible target. If it proves easy to hit as they infer, then of course we shall better it. What do they suggest our motive would be for not wanting to reduce unemployment by the maximum possible? But all they offer is criticism of our target rather than electorally attractive and economically feasible policies to beat it. Similarly they devote much space to the absence of an incomes policy – particularly a virtual freeze on the top 50% – but do not describe the practicalities of how it might work.

Turning to their criticism of our tax proposals, do they believe that significantly higher taxes on the middle income groups would improve or diminish our chances of winning votes from those floaters unable to make up their minds between

ourselves and the Alliance or Tories?

In any case I'm not convinced that shortage of cash is the major constraint on policy in the short run. It is lack of capacity and skilled labour and the horrendous balance of payments constraint we shall inherit from the Conservatives. The Conservatives project in excess of £20 billion in unallocated resources over the next three years. On top of this Labour could probably spend an extra £6-7 billion financed by borrowing, an extra £3.6 billion financed from tax increases on the rich, and an extra £3-4 billion from repatriated funds channelled via the NIB; it could also utilise extra resources saved by reducing unemployment and shifting to a non-nuclear defence policy.

GR do not mention that our anti-poverty and redistribution package includes the introduction of independent taxation and the reallocation of £4.4 billion saved from ending the married man's allowance. Taken with our other tax and benefit proposals, our minimum wage and our employment policies, this represents a massive, radical and feasible assault on poverty within the early years of a Labour government. ●

*Doug Jones, Economic Assistant to Roy Hattersley*

## Incomes Policy

John Grahl and Bob Rowthorn's unanswerable argument for redistribution and incomes policy is like a breath of fresh air cutting through the stale evasions and excuses that have stifled serious discussion on the Left in this area for so long. Let's hope it's not too late for a Labour government elected at the next general election.

If redistribution is to be achieved by consent, through taxation and incomes policy, the economic, moral and political case must be argued and become widely understood and accepted. Unfortunately the Left has historically argued the case against, thus reinforcing the narrow sectionalist consciousness that is such an obstacle to solidaristic class action.

As John and Bob remind us, a problem common to the last Labour government's social contract and the present Labour Party's national economic

assessment is that neither was preceded by discussion involving more than a handful of those who would have to carry them out and/or be affected by them.

The language of incomes policy is that of priorities and planning. It has often, though not always, been used to buttress the existing distribution of income, wealth and power. But it need not be. Socialists cannot opt out of discussion over priorities nor run away from the need for planning. Only by arguing for the priorities that reflect our values and political judgement, by making the case for the redistribution of political and economic power needed to make possible the planned achievement of these priorities, can we help create the conditions in which a Labour government would have the popular support necessary to carry through its redistributive and modernising policies. ●

*Pat Devine, Manchester*

## Girls and YTS

Cynthia Cockburn (MT, Dec) makes some crucial points relevant to the effort to improve occupational possibilities for girls, and illustrates the dilemma experienced by those struggling to implement change at the practical level.

It is becoming a truism to say that young people are asked to make decisions about their educational and occupational future which will have far reaching implications at a point when they are attempting to establish their sexual identity. They experience an ideological and material bombardment, in which they themselves play a part, pushing them into traditional patterns of gender relations.

With little contrary pressure from any source, and gender divisions in work so dramatic, it is very easy for sexual identity to be mapped onto occupational destiny.

Easy but not inevitable. The buck of responsibility for gender stereotyping is passed to and fro between individuals in different institutions, but all contribute to the process, and there are strong arguments that the school contributes more than most. Education becomes a critical

intervention point to effect change in gender expectations and full use must be made of this potential.

We can also question the view that girls' stereotyped choices are a response to the realities of their situation and the labour market. It is a macro level explanation (these are the jobs for which they are destined in general and statistical terms) which underlies both the interpretation of such choices as realistic, and the choices themselves. But the specific work suggested is frequently unrealistic given the actual demands of the labour market; there is after all a limit to the number of hairdressers, air hostesses and nurses which can be absorbed. And changing technology is squeezing the favoured secretarial and clerical fields.

Careers advice is most frequently too little too late, and girls are left to make decisions in an informational vacuum into which ready-made traditionally-oriented messages from peer group, media, family and school rush. That vacuum could be filled with information, advice and support for non-stereotyped choices. ●  
*Janet Holland, London*

## YTS Campaigning

Since the introduction of Youth Training Schemes, trade unions have campaigned locally and nationally to achieve a better deal for YTS trainees. This has centred upon securing a 'topping-up' allowance. A campaign on sex-stereotyping would offer the opportunity to make some interesting and radical demands of YTS. We could campaign around the strategies that Cynthia Cockburn suggests – single sex schemes, assertiveness training, and self defence classes.

To 'move from equality of opportunity to similarity of outcome and achievement' will require a co-ordinated and concerted commitment by all agencies who are involved with YTS.

I recently spoke to a group of YTS supervisors about

## Identity Problem

As an unrepentant adherent to traditional marxism, as one who believes that class is critical and that gender, colour, sexual orientation etc are all peripheral to political struggle, and that alliances, popular fronts (or call them what you will) between the

sex-stereotyping and discrimination: attendance was half that anticipated by the course organiser, who felt that the training option on equal opportunities was not taken seriously enough. One supervisor explained how difficult it was to raise the aspirations of trainees, when they felt the schools, and careers officers, regarded the schemes themselves as second best.

Challenging sex-stereotyping will require more than a single option on an MSC training programme. A beginning would be a proper induction course on the MSC equal opportunities guidelines for YTS. What is urgently needed is a broad based campaign which not only seeks to improve the allowance paid to trainees, but to transform the training given. ●  
*Julie Lawrence, Brighton*

Labour movement and the SDP are treachery to the working class, I would be grateful if, through your letters column, I might stress that I am *not* the Alex Wood listed on your sponsorship page. ●  
*Alex Wood, Edinburgh District Council*