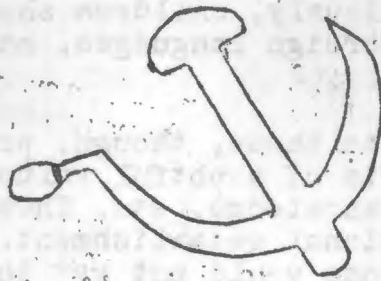


Finsbury Communist



№352 MAY 1994

THE LABOUR PARTY COME TO JUDGMENT

Hostility on the doorstep. Liberal Democrat windowbills going up everywhere. And Islington Council elections on May 5th.

Never mind. Islington's Labour council took Tory Health Secretary to court over the closure of Barts Hospital Accident & Emergency. Finsburians were invited to come to Finsbury library on April 26th and "hear about our challenge to the Health Minister" from local MPs, Chris Smith and Jeremy Corbyn, of course, to vote Labour on May 5th.

Unfortunately, the judges worked at unusual speed. By April 25th, all the council's challenges had been thrown out. Speakers at the meeting did not lack for words, but that was about all. The audience gradually drifted out.

When there were about 50 left, you know who said that it was no use clutching at straws, the City of London may want the Barts site, but not for treating patients. The only language the government understands is thousands of people out on the streets. If people are not out on the streets the government thinks they are satisfied. The Labour Party had been entrusted with the people's votes at the last general election by two to one majorities. What plans had it got to get the people out on the streets?

The above points were received in silence. Wendy, of the Save Barts Campaign, came in from the platform to say that it was no use calling a demonstration if only 50 - 100 people turned up. A sad reflection on Labour Party commitment.

CHARACTER BUILDING AND MEMORY TRAINING

The Minister of Sport has proposed that the teaching of five competitive games be made compulsory in schools, if necessary after school hours.

It is not certain whether a teacher is a professional or a worker. A professional is sometimes defined as somebody who works until the job is finished. Employers trade on this by piling on the workload.

The National Union of Teachers has raised the question of extra pay for teaching competitive sport after hours. If teachers are to be paid for this they should also be paid for running the chess club or the school orchestra or whatever.

Fairly obviously, children should learn the language(s) of the country, foreign languages, mathematics, science and other useful subjects.

Tacked on to these, though, are character building and memory training subjects of doubtful value. Games, English history, Christian religious knowledge, etc. These reflect the current prejudices of the educational establishment. They do change, though. Until fifty years ago one would not get into university without knowing Latin or Greek. These languages might appear long dead to the average person. But they had rare character building, memory training and logical thinking qualities. Classics was the way into the higher civil service. And, of course, a knowledge of Latin enabled one to have a chat with a Roman Catholic priest, should occasion arise.

The strange thing about character building and memory training subjects is how soon the great majority of students drop them and forget what they have had drilled into them. That is, of course, unless they actually like the subjects or there is some chance of using them to make money.

A parallel exists in the ex-socialist countries of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Marxism, of a sort, was drilled into the heads of schoolchildren there morning, noon and night. Yet, at the end of the day, there were precious few Marxists left. And those precious few owe their Marxism, not to their schooling, but to thinking for themselves.

The point is that there is a tendency among young people to rebel. This tendency is soon stifled. But, before this, the young person has rejected much that he or she has been told unless it is either acceptable or useful.

Compulsion should be used sparingly.

THE OLD FOLKS AT HOME

There has recently been a great deal of fuss because some hospitals do not want to treat old people. It is a puzzle why the fuss should arise now. Ever since the National Health Service started hospitals have not wanted old people in, they have given them minimal attention when they are in, and they have tried to get rid of them as soon as possible. Of late, though, they have been leaning on relatives, totally illegally, telling them to take the old folk out and look after them at home or put them in a private fee-charging nursing home.

Relatives have kept their end up by calling ambulances for alleged accidents and emergencies. It is now proposed to foil this by attaching trained paramedics to ambulances. Relatives will now have to take the old folk along to accident and emergency departments, leave them there and refuse to have them back again.

This seems rather heartless. But it is the only way to compel the government to meet its obligations to supply what is, after all, supposed to be an insured benefit.

STALIN SOCIETY ANNOUNCEMENT

Sunday May 29th Ivor will do a 20 minute lead-in to a discussion

on "Contemporary Problems: the Stalin approach".
Maximum audience participation invited. All welcome
2pm - 5pm at the Kings Cross Neighbourhood Centre, 51 Argyle Street,
London WC1N. Near Kings Cross Underground.
Put the date in your diary now.

DECLINE AND FALL OF THE CO-OP

Our local Cooperative and Labour Member of the European Parliament, Stan Newens, was at Marx House on April 11th trying to stir up interest in the Co-op. He gave a fairly good historical account of cooperation and cooperatives. When it came to today, however, all he could do was urge people to keep the faith in an apparently hopeless situation. Perhaps the younger generation might succeed where we had not.

Cooperatives began by members buying goods collectively and selling them to their members. The difference between the selling price and the cost price, less expenses, was recorded and paid as a flat rate dividend to each individual member, proportional to how much he or she had spent in total over a period. This was an effortless method of saving. Candidates for the board of a cooperative society had to have spent a prescribed minimum.

Originally, dividends were high. A Durham miners' co-op at the beginning of the century used to sell the goods off the back of a lorry. It paid 4/6 (22½p) in the £ to members. Within living memory, dividends were as high as 2/- (10p) in the £. Thirty years ago, London Cooperative Society's divi went down to 4d (1½p) in the £. Any saving from shopping at the Co-op is now negligible.

Working class people are not going to bother about negligible savings, even if the Co-op has a progressive history as long as your arm. Or even if it provides free packets of tea, jelly and custard powder for those attending the quarterly meetings.

As member participation was reduced to negligible proportions, and the boards were elected by handfuls of people, Co-op management no longer needed to listen to what the members or the boards had to say. It became a law unto itself. Sometimes this was successful. More often it was not. Co-op stores became quiet gloomy places. Many were closed down. Others found that the best way to avoid alienating the public was by dumping the Co-op logo. Quarterly meeting places became less in number.

However, the Co-ops still did, and do, have a certain amount of money available for board expenses and political and educational committee purposes. This was well worth squabbling over between various political groups. A certain tiny amount of interest in the Co-op has been maintained to this day.

It appears that the Co-op Party is now going to absorb the Co-op political committee money and resources. The Co-op Party is indistinguishable from the Labour Party, except that it is smaller and rather more difficult to join.

Certain people at Stan Newens' meeting drew parallels between what has happened in the Co-op and what has happened in the ex-socialist countries. They are not far wrong at that.

THE TAIL THAT WAGS THE UNDERDOG

Readers will have divined that we maintain that a very substantial portion of the living standards of the British people depends on looting the Third World.

The ruling class will not, however, permit the system to slither into decay. Everything will be patched up until it can be patched up no more. Things may even get better before they, suddenly, get much worse. The loot could be drying up by then as well.

Under these circumstances everything will depend on our productive working class, those who produce food, clothing and shelter, the means of production of food, clothing and shelter, or something which may be exchanged for same.

Hence our emphasis on the productive working class, an emphasis which some middle class comrades do not like. For years, people from the middle and upper classes have told the working class what to do. No class gives up power voluntarily.

GIVE THE MONEY BACK

As privatisation of coal and rail rears its ugly head, the question arises of what should be done with the two bloated pension funds.

It is agreed that the coal and rail industries are both under-capitalised. Yet here are these vast funds which were built up out of the contributions of miners, railwaymen and their employers at the expense of the industries. They should both be made available for capital investment in coal and rail. They could pay for a coal marketing scheme, coal desulphuring plants and the Channel Tunnel rail link and still have plenty left to pay the pensioners.

MOVEMENT NEWS

"The guidelines section entitled WHO CAN ATTEND THE TUC BLACK WORKERS CONFERENCE, said that delegates can be either black or white" (Morning Star, April 16th 1994).

NEWS FROM THE ISLE OF DOGS

A British nationalist councillor was elected in 1993 in Millwall, Isle of Dogs. As council election day on May 5th approaches local residents are getting loads of reading material. The Anti-Racist Alliance is busy. Socialist Workers Party branches are spending half their time working for Labour in their own neighbourhoods, and half working for Labour on the Isle of Dogs, telling people not to vote "nazi".

The BNP election address goes on about "British values" whatever that may mean. It is rather cunningly worded. For example, "We have all seen the spate of increasing crime, drug dealing, and anti-social behaviour in areas like the East End. Complaints are often described as 'racism'".

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