

Socialist

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Outlook

No need for time-wasting "review": our simple prescription can cure ills of cash-starved NHS

Tax the rich: treat the sick!

SWEATING, EXHAUSTED, DANGEROUSLY CLOSE TO COLLAPSE... BUT ENOUGH ABOUT ME



ANOTHER winter – another crisis for the National Health Service as it struggles to cope with increased numbers of emergency medical admissions insufficient beds, staff and cash.

Gordon Brown's attempt to look clever by upholding Tory spending limits on the NHS for the first two years and promising not to increase taxes has come back to haunt New Labour.

To add insult to injury, his 3-year "comprehensive spending review" dressed up a small scale increase in health spending to look far bigger than the actual £3 billion a year increase – hence the claims of a £21 billion handout.

But the net result over Labour's first five years will be to increase NHS spending by only as much as the Tories had averaged in the previous 18 years.

To make matters worse, this will be the first winter in recent memory in which health authorities and Trusts

have been given no extra funding to cope with "winter pressures".

There is no objective reason for a crisis. The winter weather has not been especially severe, and despite desperate efforts by the Chief Medical Officer to spare government blushes by inflating the figures, there is no flu epidemic in England: but it is clear that hospitals lack the resources to deal with increased numbers of emergency admissions.

Thousands of operations have been cancelled as surgical wards fill up with medical cases, and as scarce intensive care unit beds fill up, resulting in long journeys for critically ill patients.

The problem has been compounded by Labour's failure to reverse other damaging Tory policies, which have closed down tens of thousands of front-line hospital beds, trained too few nurses and doctors,

But of course this has not stopped the Tory press from taking full advantage of the



embarrassing crisis in what should be one of Labour's strong issues, predictably plugging the hoary old demand for more charges and private medicine.

They point to health services in Europe which avoid the British disease of waiting lists by spending a much higher share of national wealth on health care – but which also squander much more money in the bureaucratic administration of insurance-based and partly private systems.

Even people who should know better, such as UNISON's would-be General Secretary Dave Prentis, have called for a "fundamental review" of the way the NHS is funded.

Cheapest

But the answer is not complicated at all: the tax-funded model of the NHS is still the cheapest and simplest way of delivering a comprehensive health care system.

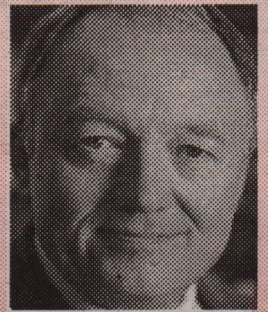
To plug the gaps in care

opened up by 20 years of Tory policies, more money must be put in: and the way to raise this is to tax those who have profited for years from the under-funding of the NHS – the rich and big business.

After years in which governments have effectively taxed the sick to treat the rich, it's time to turn the tables.

But if Blair and co. won't learn this lesson they could yet pay a heavy electoral price for their arrogance.

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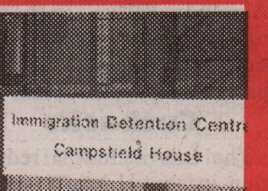
Rattled in SEATTLE

Fighting global capital, Centre pages



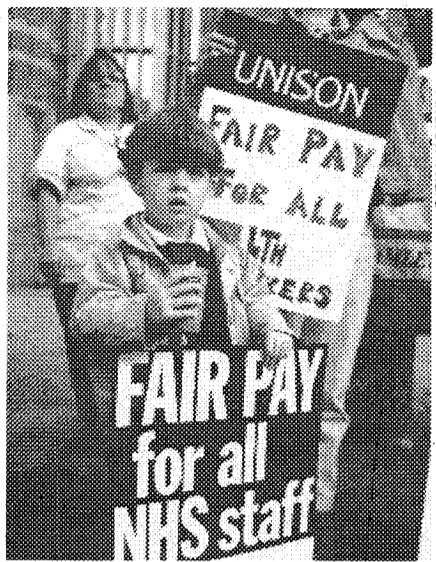
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Andrew Ward

UNISON left unites behind Bannister



Roger Bannister

THOUSANDS of health workers not covered by the professional Pay Review Bodies were fuming last week as UNISON revealed management's latest offer.

The pay talks have dragged on since last April, and while two unions – MSF and AEU had broken ranks and accepted a miserable 3% pay increase (well below the minimum 4.5% paid last year to NHS doctors and nurses) UNISON had been on the verge of balloting members for strike action.

The ballot was suspended pending a new offer – which now turns out to be a 3-year deal giving just 3% for last year, 3.25% for 2000 and a likely 3% for 2001 – guaranteeing the continuation of low pay.

UNISON stewards are now posed with a dilemma: whether to accept the latest deal, or attempt to persuade angry and frustrated members to take action.

Activists in UNISON are gearing up for the campaign to elect a new general secretary. Supporters of the Campaign for a Fighting Democratic UNISON (CFDU) and others on the left, including the SWP, are backing Roger Bannister.

In contrast to the union bureaucracy's candidate, current deputy general secretary Dave Prentis, Roger Bannister plans to be a fighting general secretary on a worker's wage.

The general secretary's salary is £74,000, many times higher than that of most UNISON members.

In return for this, the current union leadership, including Dave Prentis, have all too often failed to defend the wages and terms and conditions of their members

against attacks such as privatisation, cuts, wage freezes.

One example in local government was when the current leadership welcomed the introduction of Best Value (ignoring policy passed at conference on this issue).

Roger Bannister was one of those who warned that without adequate funding for Single Status in local government, it would be used as an excuse to level down, and would be the beginning of the end for national terms and conditions. This has been borne out very clearly – Haringey council is the latest example.

Under the current union leadership, branches have been closed down and individual activists have been suspended/expelled,

for campaigning on lines not liked by the bureaucracy.

In some cases this has left UNISON members without a branch or stewards to fight against management attacks for their interests.

If elected, Roger Bannister will only take a worker's wage. He believes that public services should be run for people not profit, and opposes the pro-privatisation policies of PFI, market testing and Best Value.

He will support those who go on strike in defence of their interests, and campaign for a mini-

mum wage of £5 per hour, with no restrictions.

He also defends self organisation and a woman's right to choose, and opposes the witch-hunt against activists, calling for a lifting of branch suspensions, an end to attacks on activists, and defence of members' rights to organise to change union policies.

Haringey unions fight Labour council's cuts

By Pauline Bradley

"WE CLOSED DOWN the borough!" exclaimed UNISON's Assistant Branch Secretary, Sonya Dakin on December 7.

4,000 angry Council workers closed down Haringey Council in walkouts over attacks on terms and conditions on December 7, 13 and 14.

UNISON, the TGWU and the GMB worked closely together to co-ordinate the action.

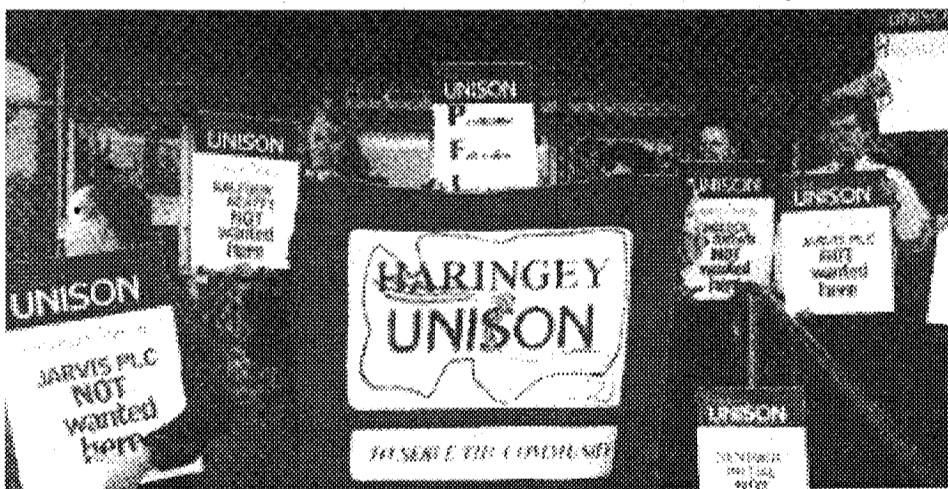
The dispute began with the Single Status agreement to equalise the pay structure, terms and conditions for manual workers and officer grades. Haringey agreed to implement Single Status, but refused to put any money aside to do so, instead trying to use it to make cuts.

Haringey also has an ongoing debt problem with Alexandra Palace – in the red to the tune of over £80 million, and the latest cuts are part of a repayment plan.

Cutbacks

The cuts include a reduction in annual leave, maternity leave and a number of other leave entitlements, ceasing low pay allowance of around £600 a year and moving the pay date.

Also, sick pay would not be paid for the first two days' sickness, reminiscent of a



Management intimidation failed to prevent a solid strike on December 7.

similar attack by Tory council chiefs in Wandsworth, where workers struck in November.

The council also threatened that, if we did not accept these cuts, they would tear up our contracts and make us sign new, worse ones.

The intimidation failed to prevent a solid strike on December 7. All council services were either shut or running on a minimal service, with most schools and all libraries and leisure centres shut.

The lights were out at the Civic Centre. Only a tiny number of senior officials crossed the picket lines outside every building. The press were unable to contact

the Council because press officers were also on strike.

The council made use of its expensive new IT equipment (£24 million worth) to email every employee saying that the unions were lying and the council wasn't agreeing the cuts.

Contradictory

Two emails, one from the leader of the council and the other from the chief executive, contradicted each other. Unions do not have quite the same access to IT equipment.

Managers were also instructed to hold meetings in workplaces to spread their propaganda.

Sadly, after the first day, the GMB held a separate meeting with council officials,

and pulled out of the strike. This appears to be part of an attempt by the GMB officials to take over the local branch. This has backfired though, as rank and file GMB members have joined UNISON or the TGWU.

Despite the GMB's role, the second strike action, on 14 and 15 December, was just as solid, if not more so, than the first.

Police arrived at the Ashleigh Road depot at 4 am to reduce pickets down to 6, so that strike breakers (who by a historical anomaly are Hackney Council employees but also TGWU members), could get into the yard and take the dustcarts out.

There has been widespread support for the strikes,

including other local unions, parents and teachers at schools, and other members of the public, including signatures on petitions, large donations to our hardship funds, collections and participation in meetings and demonstrations.

Labour says no!

Tottenham Constituency Labour Party recently declared opposition to the cuts. Haringey Trades Council organised a public meeting on 9 December in support of the council workers and against privatisation.

UNISON has played a key role in the anti-PFI campaign in local schools, and speakers from the campaign addressed the meeting.

Trade unionists across London (and the rest of the country) recognise the importance of the stand we have taken. Donations and messages of support have come from UNISON branches inside and outside London and from other trade unionists including the NUT, the NUJ and the Liverpool Dockers.

The Council has made some concessions. They have agreed to put £1 million in next year's budget to fund single status. They have not agreed savings on terms and conditions for next year's budget. However, since the strikes began, they have also

issued 145 redundancy notices.

At a UNISON branch meeting on 13 January, a motion was passed agreeing

- to continue our campaign,
- to ballot key workers for all-out indefinite strike action,
- to initiate a levy of all members of 50p to £1 per month to provide financial assistance to key workers,
- to continue with a rolling programme of strike action, starting with a one day strike on the first day of the key workers' action,
- for branch officers to negotiate to avoid compulsory redundancies, and to ensure the withdrawal by the Council of any attempts to introduce changes to our terms and conditions of employment as part of the budget making process for 2000/2001.

Branch officers will report the outcome to members.

So we have made significant gains, and our relationship with the TGWU has been consolidated. Workers' spirits have been lifted. We now feel our strength.

■ Donations and/or messages of support to UNISON, 48 Grand Parade, Green Lanes, Haringay, London N4 1AG. Tel: 0181-211 0558, Fax 0181-880 1429, Minicomb 0181-800 9741.

Spin-doctoring won't cure the NHS

Tony Blair's vague and unexpected promise on the Frost programme to raise British health care spending to the "European average" over the next six years came after the collapse of repeated efforts by Labour's spin doctors to escape from the growing crisis on the state of our hospitals.

Worse, Labour's political line since the 1997 election has been to tinker at the edges of the NHS rather than confronting the real resource problems they inherited from the Tories.

Ministers have promoted expensive but essentially irrelevant gimmicks such as the "NHS Direct" phone service (which some consultants argue has resulted in more people arriving in A&E departments), rubber-stamped costly and controversial schemes for privately-funded (PFI) hospitals which will mean even fewer beds, and pandered to GPs by the establishment of Primary Care Groups while leaving hospital staff outside the NHS planning process.

The pressure on hospitals underlines the folly of the Tory/New Labour line of funnelling huge amounts of cash into primary care (GP) services and giving ever-increased power to GPs in the vague hope that this will result in fewer hospital admissions.

Bed shortage

Far from it: every year since Virginia Bottomley coined the notion of a "primary care-led NHS" more medical patients have been admitted as emergencies to hospitals. With beds in short supply, many of these patients can only be admitted to surgical wards, at the expense of cancelling waiting list operations.

Absolutely all of these



They were warned: Ministers have chosen to ignore health workers and campaigners protesting at the state of the NHS: in Kidderminster Labour councillors lost their seats



problems and bottlenecks which beset the NHS were predicted by campaigners: the Tory policies which led to this collapse of front-line care were one key reason why people voted Labour in 1997, expecting Tony Blair to make a difference.

But two years of Gordon Brown's stingy Tory spending limits, followed by a half-hearted drip-feed of belated extra cash have left health authorities and Trusts facing massive deficits this year and another year of austerity to come.

Now the Tory vultures are circling, scenting the possibility of nudging Blair and his government even further to the right. All claim to be looking for ways of generating extra resources or "lightening the load on the NHS".

But more and more pundits are hoping that having set his face against any tax increases, Blair can be persuaded to turn instead to promote private medical insurance, the rationing of NHS care, and even the introduction of charges on in-patients for meals and "hotel services" while in hos-

pital. Unfortunately many of these ideas appear to fit in with other "New Labour" nostrums of privatisation, "partnership" and "modernisation".

In some ways the situation is reminiscent of the winter of 1987-88, in which a barrage of press headlines on the state of the NHS forced Thatcher to come up with a short-term handout, while instigating her secretive "review" which culminated in the reactionary, market-style reforms of 1991.

Rejected

All of the schemes which are now being recommended to Tony Blair were explored – and ultimately rejected – by Thatcher and the Tory right as they looked for ways of privatising more health care in the late 1980s: they were not politically viable then, and they are not now.

Private medicine remains massively unpopular (still fewer than one person in eight has private cover, most of those through company schemes), expensive, poor value and highly selective in what it will treat, leaving the NHS to cover emergencies,

chronic illness and expensive conditions.

Because most people in hospital beds are elderly and/or poor, imposing charges for treatment or hospital stays involves either costly and complex bureaucracy to administer exemptions, or grotesquely unfair charges on those least able to pay.

One significant difference is that in 1987 Thatcher had just won the election six months earlier, and had a full electoral term left to see through her "reforms".

By contrast the Blair government is already more than half way through its first term, and must find ways to make a difference quickly if it is not to face another similarly bruising winter before the next election.

His pledge on the Frost programme of extra money over the next six years would be more welcome if he had defined how much he meant and told us where it would come from.

European countries spend an average of 8 percent of GDP on health care – but

this average is lower because it includes low-spenders such as Britain, Portugal and Ireland. France spends 9.6 percent and Germany 10.7 percent, compared with 6.8 percent in Britain.

But a much larger share of health spending flows through the private sector in most of Europe compared with Britain, and most of these have complex, insurance-based systems carrying heavy administrative costs.

Cost

Estimates vary as to how much Blair's pledged extra funding would amount to in real terms – or where it would come from.

With British GDP currently running at £900 billion, to reach the European average of 8 percent would imply an increase of around £20 billion on the current annual spend on NHS care and private medicine over the next 6 years.

If it all came from government and went on the NHS it would be the equivalent of 10p on income tax – but this would also raise substantially more than most campaigners believe to be necessary to

enable the British system to cope with the various demands of the 21st century.

The simple step of scrapping the ceiling on National Insurance contributions for the high paid would raise up to £3 billion: increasing the employers' share of National Insurance (currently around 50 percent of the European average) could easily raise billions more.

These steps alone, taxing the rich and big business, would easily provide enough to expand our health services to meet the demands of the new century, end low pay in the NHS, scrap PFI, build new state-funded hospitals, and halt the scandalous means-testing of long-term care for the elderly.

A thriving NHS has always been the best answer to the parasitic claims of the private sector.

This winter's lesson must be that spin doctors cannot compensate for a policy failure on health.

Gordon Brown must be told to open up his war-chest of surplus cash and start the treatment now to revive the NHS.

Epidemic of excuses as NHS can't cope with normal British winter

John Lister

SINCE the new year began, health ministers, backed up by highly dubious figures from the Chief Medical Officer, had been trying to claim that there was an "epidemic" of flu, and "exceptional" pressure on hospital beds.

On closer examination, the CMO's claim of an epidemic rested on figures which showed the incidence of flu in England as a whole to be well below conventional epidemic levels, coupled with the argument that many more people were suffering the symptoms at home without telling their doctors!

On that basis, government could claim any and every day was an "epidemic".

As this effort to massage the figures was reluctantly abandoned, intensive care nurses and consultants questioned the existence of the claimed 100 extra intensive care unit beds

which ministers kept insisting had been provided this winter: it turned out that no more than 30 have actually opened for the 6-month peak period.

Under these pressures and a barrage of hostile Tory press and media coverage listing the cancellation of urgent and waiting list operations and the pressures on hospitals, ministerial credibility was already flagging when Lord Winston's hard-hitting criticisms of Labour's health policies were publicised after his interview with the New Statesman.

Damning

As a close friend of Tony Blair and a respected Labour-supporting IVF consultant, Winston's comments were seen as the most damning evidence so far of the disillusion of many health workers with a government that has maintained the Tory squeeze

on the NHS and only made minor changes to the hated and bureaucratic "internal market" system.

A desperate fire-fighting intervention by Alistair Campbell strong-armed Winston into a feeble retraction of many of his comments, only to trigger more statements from other consultants echoing his original views and condemning him for back-peddalling.

As the week came to an end the *Independent on Sunday* claimed that the long-awaited report of the National Beds Enquiry set up by Frank Dobson in 1998 – and due for publication last year – was being suppressed by ministers embarrassed at its findings.

It is also clear that ministers have blocked the routine publication of figures showing the numbers of available beds and numbers of patients treated in English hospitals –

which should have been published last autumn.

Morale

The morale of health workers struggling to cope while treating patients on trolleys in corridors (or in the case of Northwick Park Hospital recently, in a van in the carpark) for lack of beds is not improved by complacent ministerial assurances that there "is no crisis" and that the NHS is "coping magnificently".

These efforts by ministers and by Millbank's spinners are failing either to stem the tide of hostile press coverage or to resolve the underlying problems confronting the NHS. After being systematically starved of the resources it needs for 20 years it now desperately needs a hefty cash injection.

**Campaign
Against
Tube
Privatisation**

FOLLOWING the government's decision to kick Railtrack out of the running for the subsurface infrastructure company, the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation is to turn the spotlight on to the short-listed bidders for the two deep tube Infrastructure companies.

Railtrack was kicked out because it had become a by-word for the greedy pursuit of profit at the expense of service standards and safety.

But the companies still in the running are similar: big salaries for fat cats, low wages for workers, scandalous safety records. CATP intends to expose these companies and take action against them.

We want to give the government no choice but to dump them the same way that it has had to dump Railtrack.

How you can help:

■ Tell us what you know about these companies. Perhaps you or a friend works for them. Or maybe you can spend some time digging around sources such as public records, news archives, the Internet, court records etc.

■ Once we've compiled the information, help us to expose the profiteers.

■ Take part in protest actions. We will arrange visits to each company, to challenge their fitness to run the Tube's infrastructure. We could organise press stunts, or set dates for mass phoning, faxing and e-mailing. Or deliver our findings to the new Transport Minister, Gus Macdonald.

■ Suggest other campaigning ideas. Perhaps we could persuade Mark Thomas to do a TV programme about these companies. Maybe you have more ideas ...

So who are these companies?

The consortium **Link** is made up of:
Mowlam & co
Fluor Daniel
Alcatel Telecom
Anglia Water
Bombardier Pro Rail

The consortium **Metronet** is made up of:
Adtranz
Balfour Beatty
WS Atkins
Thames Water
Seaboard

The consortium **New Metro Group** is made up of:
Taylor Woodrow (although it has been reported that they have pulled out)
Siemens
Gibb
Mott McDonald
Innis Free

The consortium **TubeRail** is made up of:
Brown and Root
Aistom Transportation Projects
Amec
Tarmac
Carillion

The consortium **Tube Lines** is made up of:
Bechtel Halcro
Amey
Hyder
Jarvis

Please e-mail any ideas to -
JBooth9192@aol.com, or phone 0181 981 8065.

Dig deep to build London's left challenge to Blairism!

**Greg Tucker
(Secretary, London
Socialist Alliance)**

Andrew Wliard

The GLA elections provide the left with a fantastic opportunity to deal a serious blow to New Labour and the Blair project.

The support across London for Ken Livingstone demonstrates there is a significant number of working class people who want to vote for an alternative to New Labour's Tory policies.

The London Socialist Alliance has produced a draft programme addressing the major issues of concern to progressive working class voters on the issues of transport and tube privatisation, the destruction of the environment, welfare state cuts, the growing gap between rich and poor, and the police and racism.

We also have a number of prospective candidates in place.

It is clear that the New Labour honeymoon is well and truly over. The health service "flu" crisis is just the latest of a series of scandals where the lack of substance of New Labour spin has been exposed.

In particular the gerrymandering of the Labour Mayoral selection is proving an education for Londoners in just the same way it was in Wales with their actions over the Welsh Assembly leadership.

Coupled with the green shoots of recovery of industrial struggle — Connex drivers being the latest example of a series of small scale (but growing) industrial disputes where workers have decided they have to take their future in their own hands — the potential for the left to make a mark in the GLA elections cannot be ignored.

Bringing together half a dozen left organisations and a body of independent socialists the LSA has been unique in its high degree of comradesly co-operation.

For those on the left jaded by years of backbiting and sniping between left groups the LSA is a refreshing change — here is a real chance for collaboration to produce results far more than just the sum of the separate parts would suggest.

Clearly problems remain. The government is doing all it can to make our task difficult. Their latest stunt — to withdraw the "freepost" of election material — is designed to hamper grass roots organisation of independent campaigns.



A strong left campaign can tap into the mood of disgust with New Labour policies — like Tube privatisation

Aimed at Ken Livingstone, it builds a massive organisational hurdle. We believe we can overcome it.

Perhaps more serious is the fact that, even with the unity so far built up, there are still likely to be a number of "socialist" or left campaigns standing lists of candidates. The LSA remains committed to the fullest unity.

We are in discussions with a wide range of forces on the left to try to bring everyone together. We hope to be able to convince our potential "opponents" that standing aloof on a sectarian platform would be a mistake.

Over the next few weeks the LSA is organising meetings in

every London borough. We believe it will be possible to draw in many hundreds of those to the left of New Labour who want to see a socialist agenda placed before Londoners in the GLA elections.

We want to tap into the mood of disgust with Blair's machinations. But to make this possible will take money.

With £15,000-plus needed in deposits alone, plus the need to produce literature to go out to an electorate of 5 million, fund raising has to be our number one priority.

While we aim to organise a series of benefits — music, comedy etc. it will be hundreds and

thousands of small donations that will be required if we are to be successful.

This is not just an issue for Londoners. In the same way that the Scottish Socialist Party election results last year marked a massive change in left politics across Britain, we believe the GLA elections, (whilst the GLA is allowed little actual role in the running of London) can have a major impact outside our boundaries.

If you want to help us mount our campaign then we need your financial support.

Make cheques payable to LSA and send to 3 Blades House, SE11 5TW.

London Socialist Alliance
A socialist alternative to Blair's New Labour In London

The Socialist Alliance stands for -

- keeping the tube in public ownership and control
- decent, affordable homes for all
- high quality comprehensive education
- proper investment in our health and emergency services
- Above all we need decent services to meet the needs of Londoners. We oppose all privatisations, including PFI and so called "Best Value". We stand together with all those fighting against cuts in jobs and services.
- jobs with decent wages for all who want to work
- a 35-hour week without loss of pay
- a minimum wage of at least £7 an hour
- and full trade union rights for all
- dignity and decent benefits for the retired and those who cannot work
- restoring benefits and pensions to give a decent standard of living for all
- an end to all discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, nationality, religion, age, disability or sexuality
- streets free from the fear of crime and from harassment by the police
- a world safe from environmental destruction
- We will finance a huge job creation scheme in London of house building, transport restructuring, school and hospital building - by levying a tax on the profits of the banks and finance houses of the City of London.
- We will put people before profit

By supporting the Socialist Alliance you can elect people to the Greater London Assembly who will speak up for workers, the jobless, pensioners and students, and against the bankers, the bosses and the profiteers.

You can speak out against the way New Labour has abandoned many of those who elected it in 1997, in order to serve big business. And you can say you want a government that serves the working class as the Tories serve the rich.

It's time for the left to unite. Join with us!

Alan Thornett

Ken Livingstone's campaign to become London's mayor has created the biggest crisis new Labour has faced since it came to office.

Blair has spared nothing to stop Livingstone. The electoral college was rigged against him, and some of the unions which support him have been cynically barred from voting. Yet every move against him has only increased Livingstone's support.

Everywhere people have had the chance to vote Livingstone has swept the board, whether in the consultative ballot of Labour Party members in Tooting where he scored 66.4% (with Dobson at 23%) or the TGWU ballot where he won 85% (with Dobson third at 6.9%).

The outcome, due in mid-February, is too close to call.

Livingstone commands a staggering 63% support a the London electorate, which looks back positively on the GLC and with hostility to the way it was abolished.

It is this mindboggling level of support, which holds firm whether Livingstone stands as the Labour Party candidate or as an independent, which is at the root of Blair's problem. To exclude Livingstone from the list of nominees Blair not only risked a split in the Labour Party but faced the nightmare of Livingstone winning the mayorship on an independent ticket.

True, Livingstone has insisted that he will not stand as an independent, but ultimately there is nothing to stop him. So Blair's nightmare goes on. It's a unique situation. For the first time in years the left has the right-wing over a barrel and can watch them squirm.

It is an opportunity which places a huge responsibility on Ken Livingstone, since, although it has been created by a conjuncture of political circumstances, he holds the unique position at the centre of it. Therefore what is posed is not simply whether he will be mayor or not.

Representation

There is a crisis of labour representation and an urgent need to reorganise the left into a more effective force – inside and outside of the LP.

For the left the outcome will ultimately be judged on whether the campaign had contributed significantly to resolving these issues; whether it had begun to drag the left out of the decline it has suffered since the mid-1980s, and whether it had start to shape up a political alternative to Blairism.

Big opportunities are rare in politics, particularly for the left, and if they are missed it can be a long wait for the next one

The Livingstone campaign is a rallying point for socialists in the Labour Party who are hostile to the way new Labour has taken over where the Tories left off, and angry at the way Livingstone has been treated in the course of the campaign.

It is a national phenomenon. It is the broadest coalition of anti-Blairite forces seen since new Labour took control of the Party, and it poses the issue of the future of the Labour Party and the future direction of the government.

But the possibilities in the campaign are different depending on the result. If Livingstone wins the selection and becomes the Labour mayor of London, huge opportunities would open up to revitalise and rebuild the Labour left inside the Labour Party.

But this could only be done on the basis of a big political fight with New Labour. It would mean consciously using the mayorship to present a coherent political alternative to Blair. If this was done, people would start rejoining the LP instead of leaving it, and the balance of forces inside the party will be changed to the benefit of the left.

Alternatively if Livingstone is deprived of the nomination and stands and wins as an independent, as he certainly should – since to lose the vote when he enjoys the massive support has could only happen via a corrupt system – even more dramatic developments are posed.

Dobson and Blair might accuse him of sour grapes, but most voters would see him as a

Livingstone campaign key to fighting New Labour

only support either of the other candidates if they won the selection, but he 'would campaign on their behalf'.

And with the issue dear to the selection panel – whether or not he would support a manifesto written by Millbank and with which he did not agree, he has repeatedly said yes!

True he has added the rider that he would support any manifesto 'agreed by the London members'. This could give him a let-out when the London members are given no vote on it. And he would be right, but it is a rather obscure point to make a major stand on.

Rubber stamp

The Blairites will put the manifesto through the London Board for rubber stamping and

will argue that this represents the London membership.

Unfortunately Livingstone has not highlighted the lack of democracy around the adoption of the manifesto and has not called on supporters to make demands around this, again undermining any future break on this issue.

Similarly while he has been correct to concentrate his resources on speaking at meetings for individual Labour Party members, since this is the section of the electoral college in which the vote will be won or lost, he could have done more to reach out to trade unions members.

The campaign is an important opportunity to strengthen the left across the board and all chances should be seized with both hands.

Of course Livingstone is the consummate media performer, and it is a great asset. And his compromising statements could be all bluff designed to tie the selection panel, and Blairism, in knots.

But it was not clever talking which got him onto the ballot paper – it was his mass support. And his supporters support him for his stand he is making, not for his vacillations.

They are supporting him because they want to strike a blow against Blairism, not accommodate to it. He got away with it over the Balkans war because the left itself was split over it, particularly in the LP.

But now is certainly not the time to talk about common ground with the Blairites, it is the time to attack new Labour for its right-wing policies in order to raise the issue of an alternative.

Gamble

Livingstone's decision to accept the terms of the selection panel, with whatever reservations, rather than declare them unacceptable and stand as an independent, was a gamble which he (or we) may yet regret.

That may have been the best time to split and stand as an independent, since he could rightly say that he was not prepared to submit to a corrupt system.

The only rational reason for not splitting at that point was to judge that he had a very good chance of winning the nomination, which unfortunately was not how it looked at that time.

There is already space opening to the left of Labour for a new left-wing party of the working class for the first time for many years. New Labour is losing support in its traditional heartlands, and amongst its traditional supporters.

These forces, along with those who are leaving the LP in disgust, represent a constituency of people on which a new party can be built. It is an important opportunity, but it will not last for ever.

The Livingstone campaign would represent the best opportunity yet to build a new party with a substantial split from the Labour Party rather than bring together diverse forces.

Others would flock to it, particularly if it was built on an open and democratic basis. The left cannot afford to miss out on such an opportunity if it is going to reshape itself.

Meanwhile there are a few more weeks of campaigning and it is important that all the stops are pulled out.



Which way will he go? Livingstone's decisions could affect the future of the whole of the British left

victim of corruption and stand by him.

The scale of what would then be possible would depend on how big the resulting split in the Labour Party was to become – after Livingstone had either been expelled from the party or had resigned.

It is likely to be big. Large numbers are likely to leave in London. It could reach tens of thousands nationally, and the possibility of launching a substantial new party would be posed. In fact with such a following, it is hard to see how the formation of a new party could be avoided.

Bite the bullet

Only the future will tell whether Ken Livingstone is prepared to bite the bullet on either of these alternatives. Defeat could still be snatched from the jaws of victory.

If Livingstone were defeated in the electoral college but failed to run as an independent, the possibilities of campaign would be dissipated and he marginalised as a leader of the

left – and if that happened the left would need to stand a candidate against Dobson.

Alternatively he could win the mayorship and then be incorporated, or semi-incorporated, into the Blair project. The pressure on him to do so would be enormous. Or he might maintain his independence but fail to use the position to present a critique of the government and develop a political alternative. Either way the opportunity would be missed.

If these fears exist, this is due, in part at least, to the way he has conducted himself during the campaign. He has been keen to be seen to be looking for an accommodation with Blair.

He has said many times in TV interviews that he agrees with almost everything new Labour is doing, except tube privatisation. What is going on?

Tube privatisation is a very important dividing line, but not on the basis of support for almost everything else New Labour is doing! He has also stressed that he would not

Tough times in today's 'Satanic Mills'

Marian Brain

Monday November 22 was a day to remember. Almost 4000 members of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) working in 37 Customer Service Centres, stood up to British Telecom and shouted loud and clear, that they want an end to bullying and intimidation on a daily basis.

The strike was over one issue, and that is BT failure to resource its customer centres adequately. BT was not prepared to employ permanent BT people but wanted to continue to use Agency workers.

As part of the drive to increase their massive profits they also wanted to increase the exploitation of its workforce in 150/151 by setting unrealistic and unachievable targets on call handling and selling of goods. They have also increasing use the poor attenders and poor performance procedures as a way of frightening people.

To top it all, in the talks that are going on restructuring the workforce below management, they say that these workers are paid too much, and that they need to be paid the market rate for the job. The fact that many of these workers a multiskilled is just not recognized.

Sweatshop

Working in a Call Centre and Customer Service Centre is like working in a sweat shop, you are tied to the machine just like factory workers are.

In fact you are linked to two pieces of equipment, that monitor everything you do. You are plugged into a telephone system that knows how many calls you have taken and how long you were waiting between calls.

It also monitors how many breaks you have and what for; there is a code for your scheduled VDU break, a different code for going to the toilet etc. Then you are also attached to a PC

If that is not bad enough there are targets, targets for this and that. This includes the number of breaks you have away from your terminal, and you are pressured not to take breaks.

You have so many minutes to take a call and deal with it, you have another target on selling if you work in 150. You have more targets than you know what to do with.

So on a weekly if not daily basis you are spoken to sharply and harassed to meet the call handling target. If you meet that, you are told that the time taken between calls to finish what needs to be done for the last customer that you spoke to is too long.

If you get over that hurdle, you will be told that you haven't sold enough and even the sales targets are broken down into different categories.

So women and men working in these conditions and seeing an ever increasing level of agency working decided enough was enough. They made a stand to say that they were no longer just going to sit and take it - they were going to fight back.

This shows what needs to be done in the ever growing industry, where there are already 200,000 people working in Britain alone.

The picket lines were full of new activists who were not generally seen at union meetings.

Hopefully many of these can be drawn in on an on-going basis to build on the strength of the strike and strengthen workplace organisation to beat back the bullying culture which is intrinsic to new management techniques.

BT call centre workers - the new militants

Pete Cooper

The November strike at the BT call centres was a potentially major step forward to the organisation of call centre workers in Britain.

Call Centres are the fastest growing source of employment in Britain and in much of the developed capitalist world. Estimates vary as to the numbers working in the sector but it is probably about 500,000 or 2 per cent of the workforce: five years ago they hardly existed.

The development of call centres are enabled by advances in telecommunications technology which facilitate cheap national and increasingly international call rates, by and high productivity automated call distribution systems.

Employers have taken advantage of the technology to move work previously carried out locally to greenfield sites in high unemployment areas where they are able to impose sweatshop pay and conditions.

BT call centres handling 150 and 151 residential sales, billing and repair enquiries conform increasingly to the industry norm. But in contrary to most other call centres the majority of staff working in them are members of a recognised trade union,

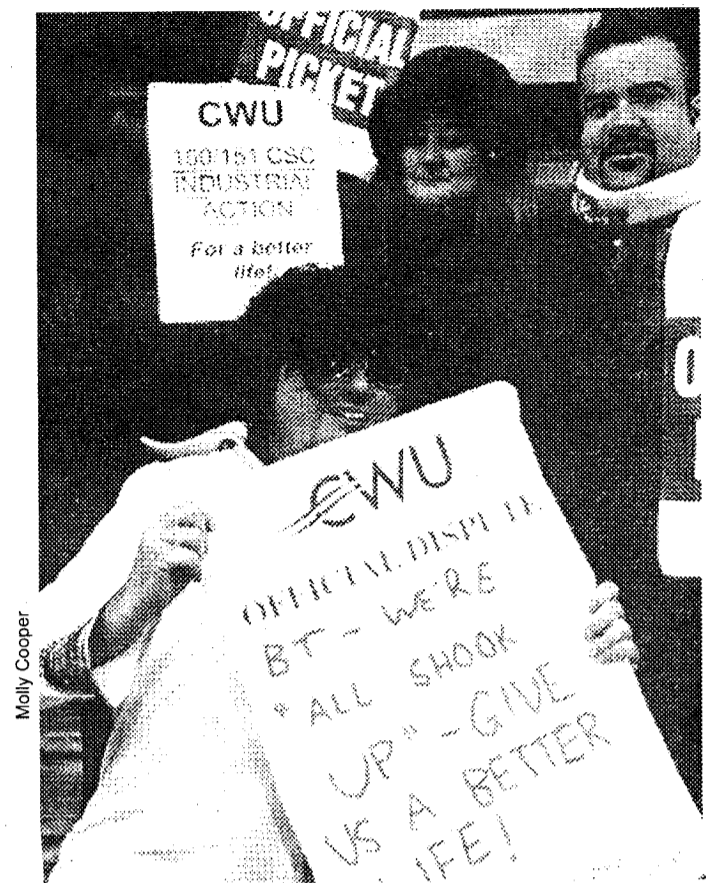
the Communication Workers' Union. Permanent members of staff still retain their pay and conditions negotiated with the union.

Management has sought to avoid their commitments by the massive use of agency staff, needless to say at greatly reduced rates of pay and conditions. It has also applied a hugely repressive regime which has effectively forced large numbers of permanent staff to leave the company through ill-health, stress etc.

The traditionally non-militant Clerical section of the CWU reacted by negotiating a lower starting grade for permanent staff to reduce the differential staff costs in an opportunistic effort to retain membership.

Finally call centre union members decided enough was enough and forced their leadership to ballot them over their reliance on agency staff and management's bullying style. The resultant 81% Yes vote and practically unanimous turnout on November 22 showed the depth of feeling on the issues.

The compromise agreement reached on the eve of the second day of strike action on December 10 to review management practices will probably result in a temporary easing off on the part



Molly Cooper

of management, but the fundamental issues of super exploitation are not going to go away and it is unlikely that this action is going to be the last in the centres.

Underlying management's ruthlessness is the economics of telecommunications in under privatisation. Local telephone networks around the world have always made losses.

The average residential telephone is only used for 11 minutes a day, and the call revenue generated does not and never has covered the cost of providing and maintaining the local network between the telephone exchange and the customer. The solution adopted in most countries was a nationalised monopoly provider with the cost of local calls subsidised by line rentals and the massively higher than cost charges on national and international calls.

These were overwhelmingly business calls which subsidised local residential calls. A privatised BT neither wishes to continue this cross subsidisation, nor is it in fact permitted to do so by

the regulator OfTel.

The pressure to end any element of cross subsidisation has increased with the advent of increasingly fierce competition for the hugely profitable national and international call and data traffic.

BT has increased its line rental and local call charges (for you and me) relative to its other charges, reduced its investment, and reduced its costs by driving up productivity from the workforce in the division - much more so than on other BT divisions.

One of the consequences has been that management has subjected staff to harsh work regimes and disciplinary pressures.

It remains to be seen what effect the contradictory pressures that the growth of the internet and of mobile phones and of the end of BT's monopoly from next year has on the local network, but ever greater competitive pressures and BT's unquenchable thirst for profit almost certainly mean that the December 10 agreement will only be a truce in a long war to come.

Sniping from the Left

By Charlie van Gelderen



Here we go again ...

In July 1945, Labour was voted into power with an overwhelming majority.

The *Manchester Guardian* ascribed Labour's success to revulsion against 25 years of Tory rule.

The Attlee government started off by implementing the main planks in Labour's election manifesto - nationalisation of the railways, coal, gas, electricity, water and above all, the National Health Service which promised free medical care from cradle to grave.

It began to lose working class support when, instead of moving forward by taking over the financial institutes and introducing workers' control in the nationalised industries, Herbert Morrison - Peter Mandelson's granddad - pressed for 'consolidation' and Gaitskell introduced prescription charges.

May 1997 - Labour wins with a landslide. This was mainly a revulsion against Thatcherism.

The 'New Labour' government, under the leadership of Tony Blair, almost immediately placed its election pledges on the back

burner. Blair vied with Brown in singing Thatcher's praises. The New Labour government reneged on its promises to revoke Thatcher's crippling anti-union legislation. It hands over important financial controls - eg interest rates - to the Governors of the Bank of England. New Labour begins to slip in the polls.

Sue Townsend, creator of Adrian Mole, asked why the latest volume of the Mole diaries is called "The Cappuccino Years" replied "It's a metaphor for New Labour - an awful lot of froth and very little coffee".

Question: Who said this? "The denial of social service benefits to asylum seekers is inhumane".

- Michael Howard
- Jack Straw
- The Archbishop of Canterbury (Answer below)

Contrary to general belief, "The Blair Witch

Project" has nothing to do with the anti-Ken Livingstone campaign.

Consistency in American foreign policy

In 1946, Truman's Secretary of State, Cordell Hull: said "Leadership toward a new system of international relationships in trade and other economic affairs will devolve largely upon the United States because of our great economic strength, which should assure us the leadership and responsibility which goes with it primarily for reasons of pure national interests".

"We must continue shaping a global economic system that works for America" - Clinton's Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright.

March 28, 1960:

Dr Verwoerd, the mid-wife of apartheid, two days after the massacre of 56 Africans in Sharpville, peacefully protesting against the Pass Laws,

appealed to the world "to understand that everybody in South Africa believed in justice and right and that all acknowledged the rights of the black man ...

"We intend to do what is just and right as a Christian nation in dealing with the people and fellow-men in this country of ours ... Fairness to each, justice to all."

There must have been hollow laughter in Robben Island when Nelson Mandela and his fellow prisoners heard this on the radio.

Who is being swamped?

Population of Kent - 1,318,000. Number of asylum seekers Kent County Council has responsibility for - 2,200 (0.17 per cent) Dover, recent scene of feverish campaign and National Front activity has 790 people seeking asylum - 0.06 per cent of Dover's population.

(Source: Kent Social Services - September 1999)

Detainees fight back as the government builds new jails for asylum seekers

Italy: new victims of Fortress Europe

from a special correspondent in Italy

FOUR detained immigrants died in a fire in the detention centre in Trapani, Sicily, southern Italy, early in January.

After the fire, a delegation of supporters found that a number of detainees were being held beyond the legal limit of 20 days plus a further 10 days maximum. Several were released at once thanks to pressure from the delegation.

The tragedy exposed a recent verbal agreement between the Italian and Albanian home secretaries to set up immigration detention centres in Albania for would-be immigrants into Italy. The centres were set up to house Kosovan war refugees. The plan is to fill them with Kurds, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, east Europeans, etc. trying to get into Italy.

Any immigrants who arrive illegally at the port of Otranto in the far south-east of Italy will be sent not to their country of origin but to the camps in Albania.

Germany has already set the precedent for detention centres in buffer-zone states with detention centres in Poland, the Ukraine and Lithuania.

Immigration is a relatively new phenomenon in modern Italy, and has come about under pressure from other EU states, Germany and Britain in particular, to "protect" what their social democratic leaders regard as the vulnerable southern borders of Europe.

**Bill MacKeith
(President, Oxford
Trades Council,
personal capacity)**

Two detainees from India started the latest rooftop protest at Campsfield immigration prison (near Oxford) on 14 November: one had been held 15, the other 11 months. During the day 18 other Indians joined them on the roof. None was subsequently victimised.

Two weeks later, some 300 people were at the "Six Years Too Long" demonstration outside Campsfield on November 27 to mark six years to the day of campaigning by detainees and supporters since the detention centre opened.

They came from Manchester, Newcastle, Bradford, Leeds, Birmingham, Bristol, Coventry, Swindon, Kent, Cambridge, Stafford, Sheffield, Nottingham, Norwich, London and Oxford – a great show of solidarity and determination.

There was a lot of music, noise and chants. Balloons and paper planes carrying messages were sent over the 20-foot-high razor-wire-topped fence.

Anderson Loa from Ivorian Relief Support Group spoke. There was a big CAGE contingent (against the current prison, police station and detention centre construction programme), and others from Hackney Migrants Group, Campaign Against Institutional Racism in Oxfordshire, and messages from FASTI (Federation of Associations in Support of Immigrant Workers) in France, and Winchester Action Group for Asylum Seekers.

Bolts securing the fence had been welded on, and all 190 detainees were locked inside dur-

ing the 2-hour protest. There was a heavy police presence including four mounted police: they filmed everyone, and at one point demonstrators banging the fence were charged and thrown to the ground but no one was arrested.

On 3 January, a week after the regular monthly demonstration at Campsfield, the Cardiff Red Choir performed a concert of socialist and solidarity songs inside Campsfield, to the delight of detainees and choir alike.

Harmondsworth

Campaigners held a Christmas picket outside Harmondsworth detention centre near London's Heathrow airport. Raised Voices Choir led singing of protest songs.

Two weeks earlier, local Labour MP and Campaign Group member John Macdonnell spoke at the Close Harmondsworth Campaign's public meeting in Ealing Town Hall.

Harmondsworth (capacity 90 people) is due to be replaced soon by a purpose-built prison for the innocent ("detention centre") at nearby Feltham/Hatton Cross.

Harmondsworth Campaign contact: 0181 571 5019 - evenings

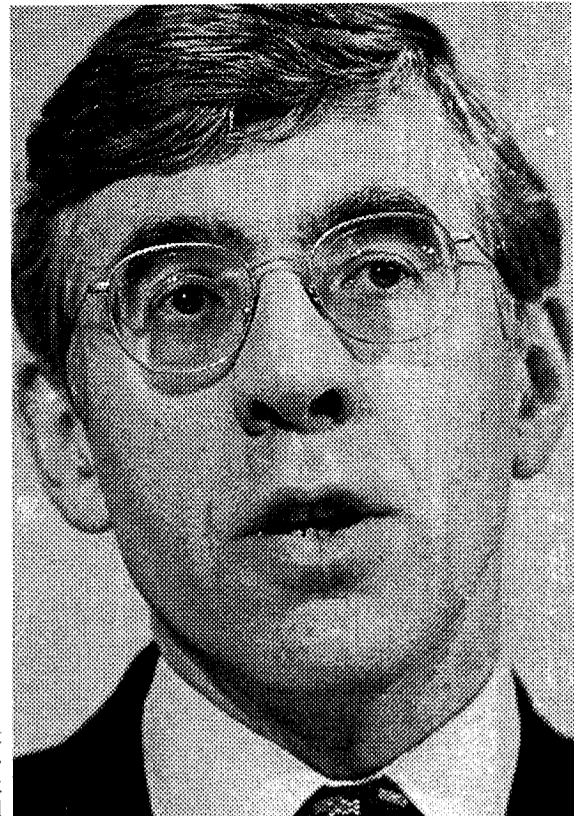
Oakington

On January 15 the full meeting of South Cambridgeshire District Council was lobbied as it met to rubber-stamp a sub-committee's go-ahead to the Home Office to turn part of nearby Oakington army camp into a "reception centre" to detain up to 400 children, women and men.

Group 4 have got the contract to run it, and are running recruitment days at Gonville Hotel later in January.

The Home Office has said Oakington detainees will be: all people seeking political asylum who

Only fascist dictators get any leniency from Jack Straw and New Labour



arrive without papers "clandestinely" at Dover, and all asylum seekers who enter "legitimately" at Stanstead airport.

(Oakington Campaign contact 01223 457047 days)

Liverpool council opposes "floatel" detention centre

Shortly before Christmas the Home Office said it was considering proposals from Securicor Custodial Services, another private profiteer from injustice, to incarcerate up to 250 innocent asylum seekers on two "floatels" in Liverpool harbour. The City Council opposes the plan. (The barges are among 10 "floatels" owned by Bibby Line; one is a prison ship in Weymouth harbour under the name HMP Wear.)

Perhaps the barges are intended to be the "new detention centre in the north" referred to in a government announcement last summer?

In the same July statement the imminent closure was announced of HMP Aldington, near Folkestone in Kent, pending its conversion into an immigration detention centre.

(Other main places of detention in the UK are HMP Rochester, Kent (two designated detention wings holding a total of 170), HMP Haslar, Gosport, Portsmouth (100), and Tinsley "House" detention centre by Gatwick airport (140).)

Victory for Campsfield Nine

Ghanaian detainee John Quaquah, is one of the nine West African Campsfield detainees acquitted in

June 1999 of riot charges arising

from the August 20 1998 mass protest at Campsfield.

The trial was closed by the prosecution barrister after his key evidence – from Group 4 guards – was exposed by the defence lawyers to be false.

John Quaquah (along with the others of the Nine) then sought damages from Group 4 and the Home Office for malicious prosecution. The Home Office served him with a deportation order. (Nearly all the other eight have either refugee status or "leave to remain.")

In December the High Court quashed the deportation order. The judge based his decision on Article 6 of the European Convention of Human Rights, the procedures of the new Civil Procedure Rules, and the recent ruling on bias in the Pinochet case.

John Quaquah had the right to stay in order properly to prepare his case against the Home Office, the very body that had sought to deport him, and against Group 4.

The next step in the Campsfield Nine's long fight for justice depends on a High Court decision on the latest attempt by the Home Office and Group 4 to escape the consequences of their actions.

Both seek to be "struck out" of John Quaquah's case on the basis that "it was Group 4, not us" (Home Office) and "it was an employee who provided the flawed evidence, not us" (Group 4).

There will be a lobby of the High Court on 23 March from 9.30am.

(Close Campsfield and Campsfield Nine Defence campaign contacts 01865 558145 / 557282 / 726804)

Winston Silcott; a political prisoner

Paul Hubert

WINSTON SILCOTT, rather than the self-pitying Augusto Pinochet, has grounds for claiming he is a British political prisoner. He has served the 'tariff' for a murder of which he maintains his innocence.

Yet there continues to be a campaign to keep him inside for doing something else although the British courts recognised years ago that there was no evidence that he did it.

Silcott was convicted for the 1985 killing of PC Blakelock during the Broadwater Farm uprising in north London,

when young black people fought back against oppressive policing. He was subjected to one of the most disgusting campaigns of racism ever seen in the British media. The conviction was quashed in 1991 when even an appeal judge could see that confession evidence against him had been fabricated. There was no other evidence.

In jail Winston has been labelled a 'model prisoner' and praised for community work with young offenders. He has maintained his innocence of the murder of boxer Anthony Smith in 1984.

He was attacked by Smith at

a party and says that he was defending himself with reasonable force, as the law allows. However his trial and conviction came when he had been put in the frame for Blakelock's killing.

Silcott is to receive a £50,000 damages payment from the Metropolitan Police for wrongful arrest and imprisonment in the Blakelock case. However, as with cases such as the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four, police officers involved and others find it hard to accept it when the Appeal Court finds a lack of evidence to support a conviction. It has been

hinted that really he's got off on a technicality.

Newspapers have lent support to Blakelock's embittered widow, who finds it difficult to accept that whoever killed her husband might not be behind bars. One of the investigating officers in the Blakelock case described Silcott, even after his conviction had been quashed, as 'the most evil man I've ever met'.

Winston wanted the police to admit publicly they were wrong but the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Sir Paul Condon, did not apologise or admit liability after the

recent settlement. He had to settle for admissions made by their lawyers in court.

Glenn Smyth of the Metropolitan Police Federation recently went out of his way to welcome a parole board decision not to move Silcott to open prison despite favourable reports. His lawyers requested this as a precursor to release, now that he has served 14 years in the Smith case.

Silcott sees the parole board's ruling as a 'political' decision linked to police pressure over the overturned Blakelock conviction. The next review of his case will be

in February 2001.

Meanwhile the next generation of unjust convictions is in preparation. The Tory government shifted the balance of advantage in pre-trial disclosure in serious cases back to the prosecution.

Home Secretary Jack Straw is preparing to cut rights to opt for a jury trial. And the number of police officers disciplined, prosecuted or convicted of abuses like the ones Silcott suffered in the Blakelock case remain pitifully small.

French scientists shed new light on BSE scandal

Alan Thornett

Few things have been more infuriating in recent months than the hysteria whipped up at the end of last year over the 'beef war', as it became known.

The tabloids carried rabid, racist, anti-French and anti-German headlines day after day. You would have thought, from them, that Britain was on the verge of war with France if not Germany as well.

This led to a boycott of French goods and we were subjected to the disgusting sight of farmers at the ports brandishing placards with frogs on them.

Few shooting wars have managed to unite the media around a xenophobia and obscurantist platform so completely as this has. While the tabloids churned out racist filth the broadsheets accepted the British case almost uncritically.

Whilst the Tories, whose policies led to BSE in the first place, initially led on this, new Labour, who could have totally exposed them had they chosen to, joined the pack and then took it over.

You searched in vain for the most obvious facts. That, for example, it was not just France, or even Germany, which was banning British

beef but virtually the whole world. Fifty four countries in fact.

You would have thought that this was a fairly relevant point to make for papers carrying page after page, day after day, lambasting France for not buying "our" beef!

Ridiculous

Outside of the EU - where Britain has used the EU structures, and the political leverage available within it, to push the ridiculous notion that 'British beef is safe' only a handful of countries accept it. These include the Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Hong Kong, Malta and Trinidad and Tobago.

And you can search in vain to find out about the scale of the problem Britain. Britain has had 180,000 cases of BSE, that is over 99% of all known cases in the world.

It still has over 2,000 cases of BSE a year. France has had a total of 70 cases and almost every one can be traced to British export of cattle food or livestock.

We are dealing with an incurable brain disease (BSE in cattle and new variant CJD, the human form it takes) which has an incubation period of somewhere between 10 and 30 years.

This means that no one knows how many people are currently incubating it from contaminated food going back to the 1980s. In Britain

it could be hundreds, it could be thousands, it could be millions. No one knows.

A third of the population are genetically susceptible to it. 44 people have already died in Britain. There have been three deaths from BSE in France.

It is transmitted by an agent which is impervious to normal methods of controlling infected food, such as cooking.

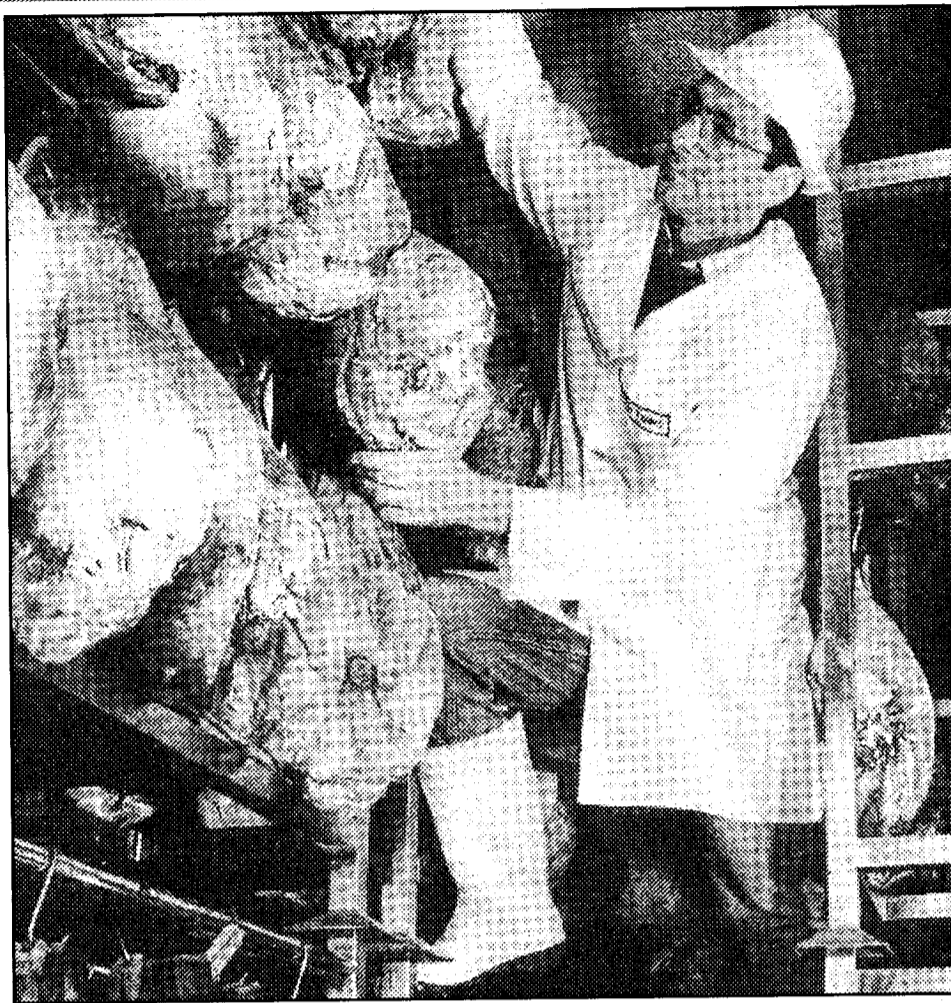
But none of this is the issue in the media. The issue is that 'the frogs' won't buy our beef, and it is about time they were told that they had to.

The Tories, who removed regulations from the cattle feed industry, and allowed sheep with a dangerous brain disease to be fed to cattle and thus gave the world BSE, get away scot free.

Now top French scientists have produced new, and disturbing, evidence on the existence of BSE in cattle under 30 months, and have perfected a method of detecting it.

BSE has not been hitherto detectable below 30 months and therefore (illogically) assumed to be absent. This new evidence would blow the British case apart if it proves conclusive; as the British case is based on the 30 month factor.

More importantly it would expose a huge public health



problem in Britain, showing that BSE was still regularly in the food chain.

French scientists also claim to have evidence that BSE can be transmitted between cattle by physical contact. This exposes the dangers in Britain's refusal, unlike France, to slaughter the whole herd where a BSE case arises.

They have also found that the disease can be passed on through infected pasture. This requires massive decontamination measures, an issue which the government let alone the press have not even addressed.

It has also been revealed that during the negotiations Britain offered the French government that they would slaughter beef bought from

Britain in a single approved abattoir.

This is an implicit admission of French concerns about well documented flouting of regulations on the removal of spinal material in British abattoirs.

The implications for the remaining beef eaters in Britain are of course horrendous.

Scientists

The French scientists also claim that they have been refused data from a secret experimental BSE infected herd, kept by the British government. Why the secrecy? What has it got to hide?

The credibility and independence of the French scientists' findings is enhanced

by the fact that the Ministry of Agriculture is resisting implementation of measures such as testing young cattle for BSE, no doubt for fear of what they might find out.

The French government, under massive pressure of scientific and public opinion, is absolutely right to ban British beef, and they are absolutely right to challenge the decision of the EU to lift the ban.

It was a decision taken on the basis of political and commercial pressure, rather than food safety, and should hold no validity at all.

Meanwhile the tabloids in Britain have spread their own disease: a new level of reactionary xenophobia, an anti-Europe backlash that will not easily go away.

Wales must fight for the full Objective

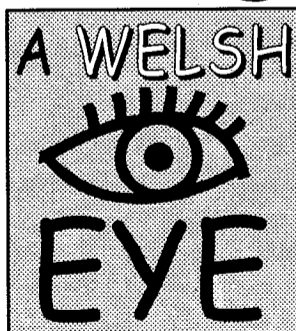
Objective 1 is currently the big issue in Welsh politics. Having secured Objective 1 status for West Wales and the valleys, from 2000 to 2006, Labour is under pressure to provide funds to match those being allocated by Brussels.

If this funding is not announced in the final Assembly budget on February 8, the three opposition parties have threatened to vote together on a motion of no confidence in Assembly first secretary Alun Michael. Under the Assembly rules, Michael will be obliged to resign.

So what is all the fuss about?

Objective 1 status is awarded by the European Union (EU) to those regions whose Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is less than 75 per cent of the EU average.

By dividing Wales on an East-West basis, rather than the traditional North-South



divide, then all of the western seaboard and the South Wales valleys qualify.

This reflects a very real growth in inequality between those areas and more prosperous parts such as Cardiff and Newport in the south and Flintshire and Wrexham in the north.

A report written in support of Wales' Objective 1 application by Kevin Morgan and Adam Price highlighted the depth of social problems in what they called 'The Other Wales'.

In terms not only of GDP but of other, more socially sensitive indices, such as

economic activity levels and household incomes, then the west and the valleys are falling behind.

In their words: 'Wales is the poorest part of Great Britain [and] the west contains what can properly be called "the poorest of the poor".'

But securing Objective 1 status was only half the battle, as many people now realise. In order to fully utilise the available funds, the British government, or in this case the Welsh Assembly, must provide matched funding.

With £1.2 billion allocated to Wales over six years, the Assembly will have to find between £0.5 and £1 billion of additional funding.

At present, the block grant allocated to the Welsh Assembly is allocated according to the Barnett formula. The Treasury has made it very clear that there will be no automatic increase in this amount to meet the needs of Objective 1.

Tony Blair's man Alun Michael won't promise matched funding



The Labour administration is refusing to give any assurances on matched funding ahead of the announcements on the comprehensive spending review, expected next October.

This leaves the very real possibility that money will be cut from other, already over-stretched parts of the Assembly budget to release matched funds.

In this, Wales would be emulating one of the worst aspects of the Irish experience of EU funding, where cash was diverted from health and social spending to finance infrastructure and economic development projects.

This approach, of robbing the poor to pay the 'poorest of the poor', is completely unacceptable. The campaigning group Welsh Labour Action and a number of senior Labour figures have already raised their opposition to this course of action.

Local Labour parties and trade union branches must

begin to add their voices to the protest. Nothing less than full matched funding, over and above the Barnett formula, is acceptable.

At the same time, it is important not to overplay the significance of Objective 1 money, not to foster illusions in what the money can achieve.

Plaid Cymru have made great political capital out of matched funding, and justifiably so. But they have also talked of a 'Euro cash bonanza' and a 'once in a lifetime chance to transform the Welsh economy'.

Objective 1 is not a cash bonanza, amounting to some £350 million a year compared to the Assembly budget of over £8 billion. Such a quantity is not sufficient to

address the long term social and economic problems in Wales.

While maximum unity is required in demanding full matched funding, the debate on Objective 1 must not deflect from the very necessary discussion on developing truly redistributive social and economic policies for Wales.

The Welsh Assembly does not have the power to implement such policies: this does not mean that it shouldn't talk about them.

● *The Other Wales - the case for Objective 1* by Kevin Morgan and Adam Price is available from the IWA, Ty Oldfield, Llantrisant Road, Cardiff CF5 2YQ, for £11.50 including postage and packing.

Troubled New Year for Scots Blairites

1999 was a momentous year in Scottish Politics. After decades of campaigning, planning and protesting a Scottish Parliament was finally established. The election of that Parliament has fundamentally changed Scottish politics. GORDON MORGAN explains:

The focus of political discussion is now focused on Edinburgh not Westminster. This appears to have surprised Blair and Scottish Westminster MPs.

They worried about being thought irrelevant and in the lead up to the UK general election will launch a high profile campaign explaining why Westminster is important to Scotland.

This fundamental shift in perspective is irreversible, because already the Scottish Parliament has more direct effect on Scottish people than Westminster.

Schools, houses, roads, health, economic development are under the control of Edinburgh. Edinburgh politicians can be and are beginning to be held accountable for failings in areas of most importance to people's lives.

Scottish Socialist Party

The SSP held its founding conference in February 1999. Tommy Sheridan was elected to Parliament in June and by the end of the year the SSP had around 2,000 members, 50 branches and 5% of the vote in opinion polls. This political success can be built on. 5% across Scotland could give 2 or 3 MSPs, 7% would give around 8 MSPs.

The basis of our impact is a clear identification with the fight against poverty and our engagement in popular struggles. New Labour has abandoned Socialism, the SSP has adopted it. Socialism is still popular.

Tension between Westminster and Holyrood

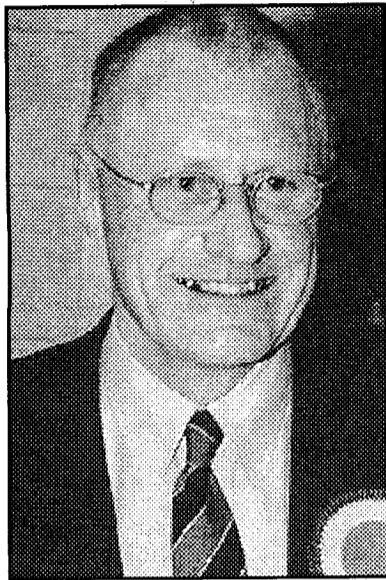
We have had immediate turf wars between Donald Dewar (First Minister - Scottish Parliament) and John Reid (Scottish Secretary) over who speaks for Scotland. Dewar won.

This is symptomatic of the likely outcome if a substantial policy or funding clash occurs. Labour is trying to head this off by setting up Joint committees to liaise on policy overlaps between devolved and retained powers.

Whilst Labour is in power they will prevent open conflict. More important is the fact that there is a unified civil service with close daily links between Treasury and Scottish Finance officers.

The potential for conflict is real. Essentially the Treasury controls Scottish expenditure. Over the next 2 years total English expenditure on Health and Education is set to rise by around 2%, but in Scotland under the Barnett formula it is set to fall by 2%.

Meanwhile the SNP purports to be able to show on Treasury figures that Scotland raises more in taxes than is spent.



Joining the rebel alliance of MSPs: Denis Canavan

Expectations are that the parliament will positively act on Scotland's social problems, the main SNP demand will be more fiscal powers, or at least more money, for Scotland.

In general people will take the view that policy set locally is more democratic. There is a one-way process of power transfer: from Westminster to Holyrood. It is not reversible. Over time even the civil service is unlikely to save the UK.

Tuition Fees

Labour has no overall majority and only a small majority with the Liberals. Because of a widespread view they are only in government for the salaries, Liberals have been attacked in the press and need to separate themselves from Labour. Tuition fees in higher education are the key divide.

Labour stood in June on a platform of retention of fees while the Liberals stood on the sole platform of abolishing fees. Labour appeared unwilling to compromise and the fall of the Government seemed likely. A committee chaired by Cubie looked into HE funding.

The Cubie report has recommended the abolition of fees, but a deferred payment by students of the same amount after graduation. Repayments would only commence when students were earning over £25,000 a year. Cubie also recommends reintroducing grants for poor students.

Having clearly stated they were against deferred payments, the Liberals are not yet off the hook. They are trying to portray this a Graduate Tax and seizing on the reintroduction of grants as a way to argue that they should 'take the package as a whole'.

They are still likely to pay an electoral price, and the government still could too. Labour for its part is looking to find the £70 million required: after all tuition fees are not abolished and its policy has not changed.

Clearly this does not meet our aspirations for abolition of fees and restoring full grants. But the £25,000 threshold does mean that most graduates will never pay tuition fees and some will get grants. So after arguing for improvements, if the choice is this or no change, the SSP is unlikely to vote against it.

This demonstrates that different policies can be adopted in Scotland although English and Welsh students will take notice.

Parliament vs Executive

After a slow start, the Parliament is finding its feet.

Unlike Westminster, Holyrood was designed to have a strong committee structure and committees are calling ministers to regular account.

Ministers have reacted against that and tried to restrict the committees - this failed. Even Labour committee members stood against the executive.

On being informed a minister was acting under powers delegated from the British government to the Scottish government rather than the parliament, the committee passed a "negative instrument" returning the powers to the Parliament and forcing the minister to comply with their wishes.

Committees have the power to initiate legislation independent of the government although this has not yet been used.

Having the whole Parliament take responsibility and challenge the executive strengthens democracy and encourages people to place demands on their representatives.

Pressures on New Labour

Labour weeded out most Left candidates and elected a largely young group of Blairites to the executive on a straight new Labour programme. Unfortunately the policies aren't working and the spin is threadbare. On Health, Susan Deacon keeps saying everything is fine whilst beds are full and no operations carried out. Little money is available as staff morale sinks.

At Edinburgh Royal Infirmary a new PFI hospital has been built with fewer beds, fewer staff facilities and less available funding. Criticism from nurses, BMA and others is set to reach Parliament and could jeopardise future PPP deals.

On Education, even before the election Labour was defeated by teachers over major changes to conditions and over the time-tabling of examination changes.

A basic antagonism between the minister Sam Galbraith and teachers seems to be developing, despite increasing recognition that the new courses are ill resourced.

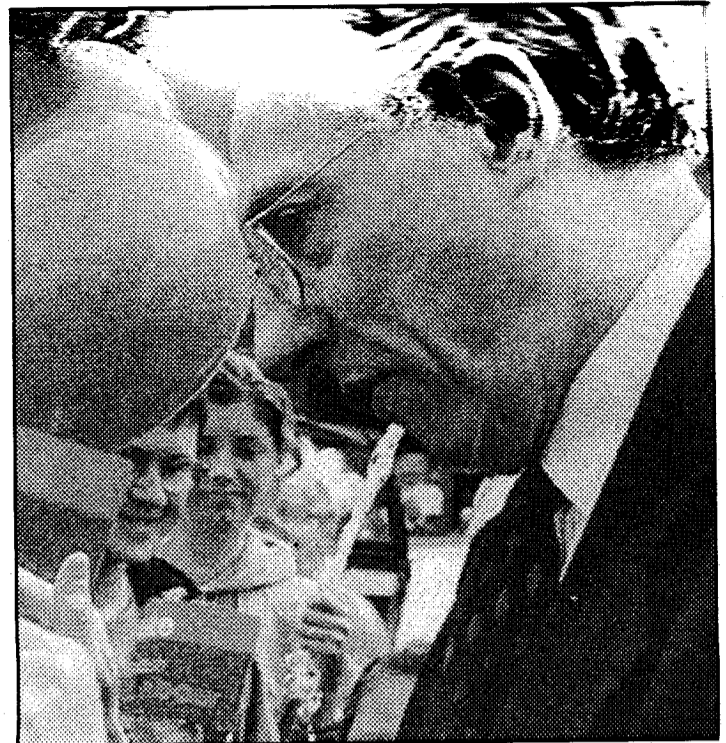
There is a rush to push through PPP deals to refurbish schools. Glasgow is set to sign the largest PPP contract in Britain for all its secondary schools over 30 years.

This will change employment of all most non teaching staff as well as Council DLO staff. Despite scant consultation and little information on costs, this will be pushed through in February. Campaigning against this involves staff and parents and it will be questioned in Parliament.

Wendy Alexander seems determined to change the mix of housing by removing council managed housing and promoting the Right to Buy. She wants to transfer 80,000 of Glasgow's stock to housing associations and extend the Right to Buy to them.

As housing professionals, the unions and tenants associations have attacked the proposal on cost grounds, she has played down the cost increases. Now she is being attacked by the Council of Mortgage Lenders, who point out that without increased subsidy they won't lend and some Housing Associations could go bust.

As Alexander is one of the archi-



Labour leader Donald Dewar (above) is losing the plot ... opening up new possibilities for the SSP

pects of this project and indeed of the manifesto, it is difficult for her to change, but she is facing prospect of being caught out over sums not adding up.

Labour structural problems

Labour are destroying their own patronage base in Scotland. If schools and houses are removed from council control what is the role of local government? They are also pledged to introduce PR for local government, which whilst it is desirable on democratic grounds and welcomed by the SSP, would remove many existing Labour councillors. But councillors and their families are the core of active workers for Labour in Scotland.

The Scottish party has limited freedom of movement over funding. In England raising taxes was not argued as an alternative at the polls, but in Scotland the SNP argued for a tax rise and they will demand more money from England. Labour is still tied to Gordon Brown's purse strings.

The SSP and Parliament

The SSP Bill to abolish Warrant Sales is proceeding through committee. This is a key issue which was highlighted during the anti-Poll Tax campaign, which was much more developed in Scotland than south of the border.

Tommy Sheridan has been able to cross examine representatives of the Sheriffs Officers as to how they defend this barbaric practice which affects over 20,000 poor people each year.

Although Labour can delay the passage of this bill, it is almost inconceivable that they can oppose it openly. It would split Labour if they did. Its passage, as one of the first pieces of legislation of the Parliament, will be a huge boost to the SSP.

The SSP is emerging as the natural spokesperson for anti-poverty campaigners and pensioners' groups. Sheridan is frequently invited to current affairs debates with ministers on TV, radio and at conferences.

In Parliament there is a loose alliance of the 3 independents, Tommy, Denis Canavan and Robin Harper (the Green MSP). There is also dialogue with left SNP MSPs.

Although the major boost to the SSP was the electoral success in June, a precondition was the consistent campaign work of SSP and its predecessor the Scottish Socialist Alliance.

This has continued, especially over housing transfers and PFI. Ultimately the SSP credibility and focus comes from this work in the localities.

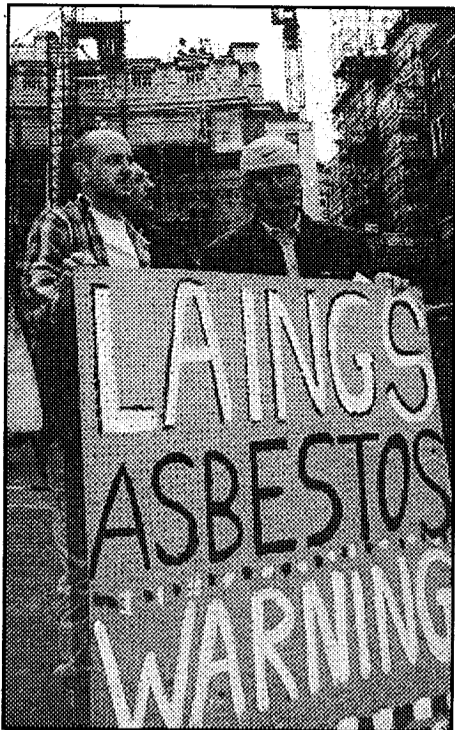
It is attracting support from the traditional base of Labour: tenants groups, union committees, pensioners, the poor and low paid.

Building the SSP is the key urgent task for Socialists in Scotland.

SSP platform

Whilst the debates at its forthcoming conference will develop many detailed policies, the Scottish Socialist Party is beginning to engage in the key policy discussions which will reshape Scotland. Its present focus can be summarised as:

- poverty has grown under new Labour - End it.
- defend public sector, public services, trade unions and civil liberties
- against fat cats, sleaze and cronyism
- against Trident, NATO and capitalism.



Molly Cooper

WTO rules could even make it illegal to ban asbestos imports on safety grounds!

The anger of the free marketeers

"It is hard to say which was worse: watching the militant dunces parade their ignorance through the streets of Seattle, or listening to their lame-brained governments respond to the 'arguments'."

(The Economist)

"If you are a Salvadoran mother desperate to feed your family or a Chinese teenager with no local job prospects, that 'sweatshop' and 'exploitation' might look more and more like opportunity."

(Wall Street Journal)

"The ragged coalition of protesters at Seattle use the language of socialism but have no agenda of their own. The 'n30' protesters accuse the WTO of helping 'the exploitation of our plant and its people by the global capitalist system'. Instead they demanded 'alternative social and economic structures based on cooperation, ecological sustainability, and grassroots democracy', which sounds like the Communist Manifesto rewritten by Christopher Robin. (...)

(...) In the end, the WTO is on the side of the angels. It is what the world's poor need most..."

(Andrew Marr, Independent on Sunday)

Rattled in Seattle!

The collapse of the World Trade Organisation summit in Seattle at the end of last year was a major setback for the advocates of Thatcherite "neo-liberal" policies in the USA and Europe. Not only were the objectives they hoped to achieve at the WTO's so-called "Millennium Round" not achieved: the spotlight of the world's media began to focus on areas of government policy which are seldom if ever publicly discussed. Pete Cooper and John Lister weigh up the issues.

New Labour has been revealed as a co-conspirator with the US State Department and other imperialist governments in promoting the global agenda of big business.

Delegates from third world countries which stood to lose most from the new round of trade liberalisation going ahead – and with serious objections to WTO plans on issues such as free trade in agriculture, services, and trade-related intellectual property rights – resisted the massive pressure placed on them to sign up.

Their resistance was made easier by the divisions between the main imperialist counties, notably the differences over agriculture between the EU, Japan and the USA.

There was further trouble when Bill Clinton insisted on the inclusion of new standards dealing with labour and environmental issues.

But the shambles became a collapse under pressure from the vocal and visible opposition to the process mounted by demonstrators in Seattle and worldwide. There were mass mobilisations across the globe, but above all in the US and in Europe (notably in France). Delegates from third world countries admitted to being encouraged to resist US government bullying by the mobilisations they saw in the streets.

The course of the demonstrations, which linked up many different and contradictory campaigns – including anti-poverty campaigners, unemployment activists, third worldist non-governmental organisations (NGOs), feminists, trade unionists, peasants, and direct action elements – has been extensively chronicled and analysed.

As many bourgeois commentators delighted in pointing out, the demands for labour and environmental standards supported by trade union bodies (the world-wide ICFTU, the American AFL-CIO and the British TUC) amounted to a (not very thinly) disguised protectionism.

These policies were in contradiction to the positions adopted by many (but not all) NGOs: they argue that such issues are not appropriate for inclusion in world trade negotiations.

However there was a real and rapid convergence amongst the protesters in the course of the



Blair: backs WTO "liberalisation"

demonstrations, both in terms of understanding, solutions, and methods.

There were many reports of demonstrating US steelworkers, for example, proclaiming with other protesters their new understanding of the common anti-corporate (if not yet anti-capitalist) basis of their opposition to the WTO.

This rise in the level of consciousness and change of orientation should not of course be overstated. There is certainly no sign of the major western trade union leaders shifting their positions on these issues.

The Seattle debacle was not neo-liberalism's first major political defeat. That was the defeat of the reactionary Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) in 1998. But what Seattle did above all – in a way that the MAI defeat did not – was to spotlight and expose the global aspirations of neo-liberalism and the imperialist countries on the world public stage.

What next?

Despite the setback, the US and EU are not letting the grass grow under their feet: nor have they changed their objectives one iota.

The US government's main priorities are:

- * The elimination of agricultural subsidies and tariffs, especially those of the EU and Japan. In this they are supported by other agricultural exporting countries such as Canada, Australia and Argentina.

- * The liberalisation of trade in services including health and education is also high on their agenda.

- * They also want to enforce Trade related intellectual property rights (TRIPS) which would uphold US-style patenting laws world wide, and would prevent

countries such as India manufacturing cheap generic medicines.

- * The USA wants to beat back restrictions on Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) and technical barriers to trade: they want the WTO to be judge and jury on health and safety matters such as beef hormones.

- * Labour standards. It is not clear whether this forms part of the US core agenda or whether it is Clinton paying lip service to the US protectionist lobby, including organised labour. It has been suggested that WTO negotiations on this issue may be delayed until after this year's US Presidential elections when the issue can be safely dropped.

The EU agenda is substantially the same, with the exception of agriculture and culture.

It may come as some surprise to realise how eager European governments appear to be to open up their "public" services such as health and education (multi-billion industries) to the intervention of US corporations.

But the EU, enthusiastically supported by the British government, is equally keen to expand this as a potential export area. The WTO agenda on these public services is of course closely linked to agenda of the privatisation and schemes such as the Private Finance Initiative, both domestically and internationally.

Short shrift

New Labour has become the most avid proponent of this extension of the free market, and one-time "left" minister Clare Short the most shameless in arguing for it.

She has even claimed that opening up public services to competitive tender in Third World countries would be a "blow against corruption"! (Short fails to mention, of course, the huge corruption which would inevitably ensue from multinational firms bribing poorly paid state officials in these countries to award these lucrative contracts).

Agriculture remains a contentious area, since the changes the US wants from the WTO would mean the end of small farming in Europe and Japan, not to mention in large swathes of the 3rd world, under the onslaught of cheap (subsidised) exports from the US and the Cairns group of agricultural exporting countries.

The EU itself is divided on this issue. The projected expansion of the EU into Eastern Europe signifies the beginning of the end of the Common Agricultural Policy, which was never designed to support the mass of small farmers of those countries. But there are real political problems in many key EU countries in deciding how fast agricultural subsidies can be abandoned in the west.

GMOs and TRIPS will still be high on both EU and the US

agendas, after a humiliating climb-down by EU environment ministers present, including Michael Meacher. They refused to allow a US proposal for a WTO working group on biotechnology and to negotiate on reducing protections for forests – despite the fact that the European Commission had earlier agreed to support it.

While there is more agreement than dissent between the USA and the EU, it is not entirely clear yet how these governments intend to achieve their ends.

Expected failure

The failure of the round was widely anticipated, which explains the notable absence of world leaders at Seattle. But it also means that some alternative contingency plans are already being implemented.

Agriculture, Services, and TRIPS for example are permanent items on the WTO agenda and are therefore not excluded from negotiation by the failure of the Millennium Round. Indeed negotiations are due to start on these issues in January 2000.

But other mechanisms are being utilised to carry through the EU-US agenda.

According to George Monbiot in the *Guardian*, one of these will be the Transatlantic Economic Partnership (TEP) whose advocates include representatives of the leading European multinationals, grouped in the 'European Round Table', which has for years played a key role in shaping EU policies.

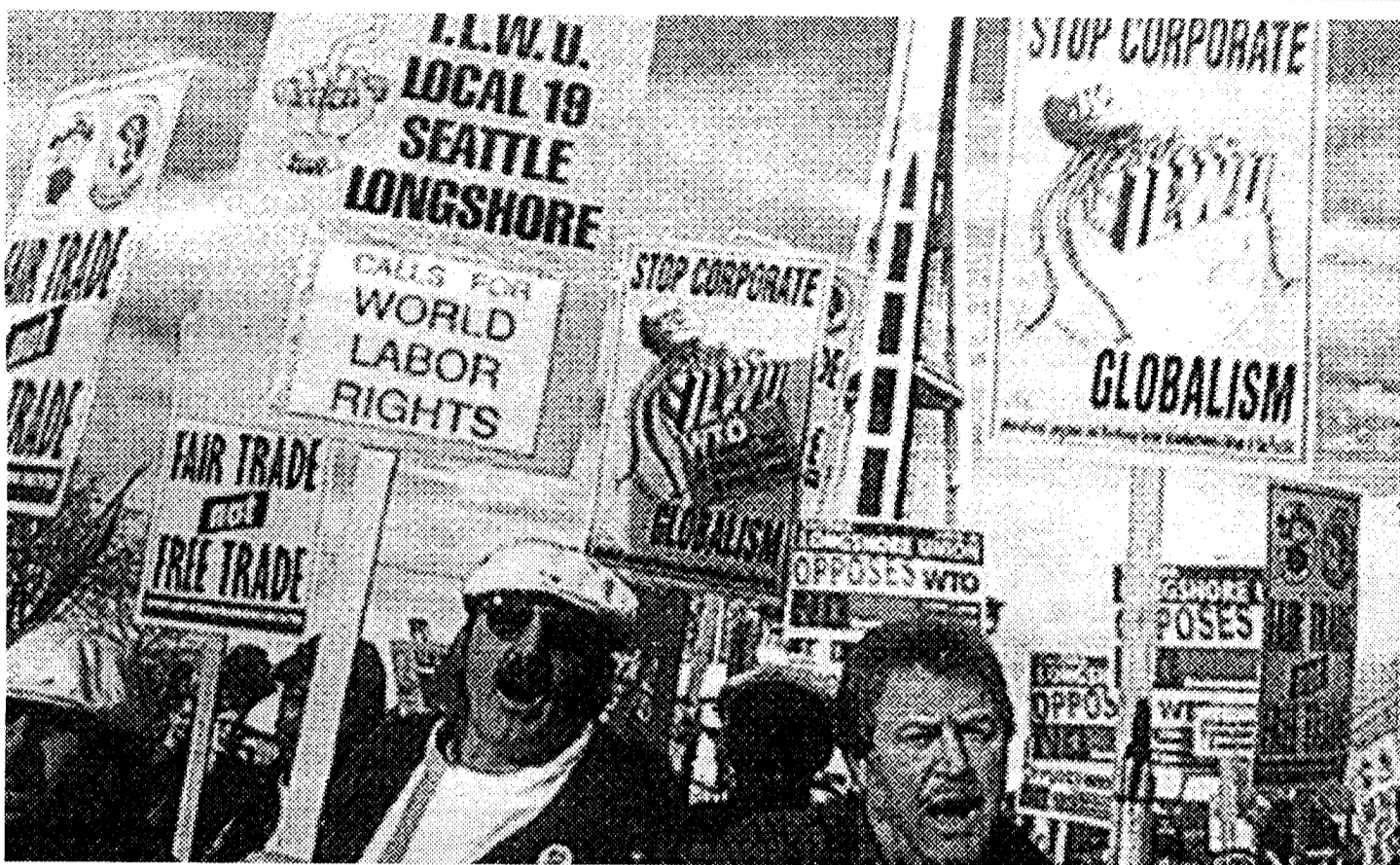
The TEP agenda is to form a single transatlantic free-trade area with the North Atlantic Free Trade Area (NAFTA), which includes the USA, Canada, and Mexico. NAFTA in turn is also extending its reach into the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean. Additionally the US Congress last year carried legislation effectively creating a free trade area with most of Africa.

So if this agenda is carried through, a free trade area would be created comprising Europe, North and South America, and Africa, without any involvement of the WTO's structure and processes.

In addition, following a WTO ruling against India, major bilateral treaties have been recently concluded between the US and India reducing import tariffs on food, textiles and consumer goods. Similar deals have been struck between the US and China, as part of bringing China into the WTO.

Under WTO rules "most favoured nation status", and "national treatment" mean that the terms negotiated by the US with these giant countries apply to all 135 WTO member states.

So the major imperialist blocks are already pursuing their economic policy agendas using a multi-track approach.



The British government's position is out-and-out reactionary on all the main issues; if anything it is to the right of the US government.

Blair's government is opposed to the EU position on subsidies for EU agriculture. And while it gives only reluctant support to the US position on core labour standards this is not out of solidarity with the third world, but because they potentially constitute a barrier to free trade. New Labour argues that the issues should be delegated to the toothless International Labour Organisation (ILO).

The International Labour Movement

The main labour movement body internationally is the International Congress of Free Trade Unions (ICTFU), which began in the cold war and is still heavily dominated by the US labour movement and its allies, notably the TUC. Its general secretary is right wing former AEU leader Bill Jordan.

Generally speaking the ICTFU supports the neo-liberal agenda, but calls for the WTO in consultation with the ILO to impose core labour standards as a condition of access to markets. These standards are the ILO core standards adopted in a Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work in June 1998:

- * freedom of association;
- * the right to collective bargaining;
- * elimination of forced labour and child labour;
- * elimination of discrimination in employment.

The Declaration's supporters don't often mention that it is hedged around with caveats about the above rights not affecting the competitive position of countries, which effectively nullify its impact.

Unfortunately sections of the left such as the *Morning Star* supporters, in accordance with their system of alliances with the "left" international labour bureaucracy, take the same position. They claim that the imposition of labour standards is not an attempt to price third world industries out of world markets, since they make no reference to labour costs as such.

Nevertheless power to discriminate against such industries and countries would be handed over to unelected international WTO trade bureaucrats, whose concerns and interests lie altogether elsewhere.

The majority of Third World governments are opposed to the issues of labour and/or environmental standards being linked to world trade. They argue that this would be no more than (not very well) disguised protectionism by the "developed" world and its labour movements.

Of course the position of most third world governments is in turn merely the protection of their "own" capitalists' right to exploit their own populations. However NGOs and most genuinely independent trade unionists in the third world generally take the same position.

They say that the issues of trade union rights should be dealt with not by means of international trade regulation, but through

building up independent labour movements within those countries, and by international solidarity with those movements in the face of repressive governments. This is the position which socialists should take.

The WTO and similar organisations, which take their decisions behind closed doors, with no reference to trade unionists or anyone from the countries concerned, are heavily dominated by the imperialist nations and would use the clause act as partial judge and jury on behalf of the imperialist corporations.

In fact no country in the world passes the four tests – certainly not the last one. The *British* anti-union laws violate ILO conventions. There are three million child labourers in Britain, mostly illegal, and many more in the USA. On that logic the WTO should take out sanctions against Britain and the USA.

Of course the standards would inevitably be only selectively applied. Would the WTO raise tariffs against Nike subsidiaries or suppliers using child labour on the same basis as a third world based competitor? To pose the question is to know the answer.

Advocates of labour standards like Bill Clinton or the TUC don't expect them to be used against US or European multinationals. As a commentary by Filipino socialists put it, "Clinton's agenda on these issues is hypocritical and a double-bladed weapon, intended to give the WTO extra powers in micro-managing the economies of third world nations, in addition to what the IMF and the World Bank have already been doing."

On the issue of "free trade", socialists defend the right of oppressed countries to impose tariffs and/or subsidies while we oppose protectionism in the advanced capitalist countries and above all of our own ruling class.

Such protectionism, as we saw in Seattle, merely seeks to draw in workers and their organisations behind nationalist, "anti-foreign" sentiment and policies. The result is a nationalist cross-class bloc, such as that between the US labour unions and Pat Buchanan and the Republican right, or British Stalinists and left reformists with the Tory right on the issue of the euro.

"Free trade" is not really free at all. 30% of world trade is now intra-corporate. This component is therefore subject to price and quantity decisions made by ever more dominant monopolistic corporations, and are often determined by such considerations as differential rates of taxation, arbitrary location of manufacture, capital and currency speculation, political boycotts etc.

There is no question here of genuine competition arising from transactions between a large number of buyers and sellers – as in neoclassical economic theory.

The issue of economic, social, political and increasingly military equality, or rather the lack of it, is central to the issue of free trade. Since before the modern epoch of imperialism the lack of equality in these relations has meant that semi-colonial countries have been consigned to the role of producers of international primary products and of cheap labour.

It has been the latter role which has taken on more importance in the last twenty years – in South East Asia for example. But as the SE Asian crisis demonstrated, such develop-

ment is unstable and fraught with peril.

The basic relationship has not changed over the last century, with the countries in which the vast majority of humanity lives lacking access to the capital which alone would enable them to break out of the cycle of under development.

The imperialist dominated WTO and other agencies are effectively making a bad situation worse for the peoples of these countries by denying them any possibility of the slightest economic and political autonomy which would allow either significant productive capital accumulation and/or redistribution of meagre surpluses through public services.

The position which socialists would take within the dominated countries is of course entirely different, fighting for the socialisation of industries and against giving subsidies to their "own" feeble ruling classes via tariff and other barriers.

Campaigning against the WTO

The British labour movement is divided between the New Labour supporters of out and out free trade, and the majority of the trade union bureaucracy, which supports linking core labour standards to market access.

Unfortunately because the labour standards supporters rely on international agencies such as the WTO and the ILO, they have no wish to mobilise round these issues, apart from endless rounds of international meetings which pass solemn and worthy resolutions for a better world.

Nor are they willing to upset the Blairite apple-cart on this or any other issue.

The main forces which are active on globalisation and the WTO are a network of NGOs, green activists including the Green Party, and Reclaim the Streets.

Latterly the SWP has become active, but it remains to be seen what form this takes and how long this lasts.

These forces have a myriad of ideologies, which range from liberalism to anarchism. For example the World Development Movement, which plays an influential role in the MAI coalition, concentrates on lobbying governments and political parties.

It professed itself both pleased and disappointed with the outcome of Seattle: disappointed because they appear to genuinely believe that it could have had a positive outcome for world development, and (here they have a point) for fear of something even worse, such as for example, US bilateral deals.

Other forces such as RTS have few such illusions and constitute a radical wing of the movement. However their ultra left ideology and methods make united mobilisations difficult, despite their developing orientation to workers in struggle, such as the Liverpool dockers and more recently the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation.

There is also a whole network of independent activists mainly locally organised around green and development issues, such as the Nestle activists, and Schnooze.

The main distinguishing feature of these groups is that they are above all into (mainly

WTO: a secretive, reactionary rich nation's club

Nearly 30 of the WTO's 134 member countries are too poor to have a representative based at its headquarters in Geneva, while the US delegations number hundreds.

The WTO's panels – which sit in judgement on trade disputes and have the power to overrule elected governments – are made up of unelected "experts", whose names are not disclosed. They only meet in secret session, and hear no outside witnesses.

Once a WTO panel finds against a country and imposes sanctions, these can only be lifted by a unanimous vote of all member countries – including the one which laid the complaint!

Under the WTO's new 'international court of justice', national laws are all regarded as "barriers to trade".

Under WTO rules no country is allowed to ban genetically modified organisms. Any country refusing to import products on grounds of health and safety has to provide scientific proof.

non-violent) direct action, sometimes quite spectacular, such as the occupation of the London Eye and of Nestle's Halifax factory.

It is easy to criticise their lack of viable strategies, but this is to miss the point, which is that these layers are fighting the most important developments in world capitalism, neo-liberal globalisation and its consequences, at a time when practically nobody else is.

Many of these activists are increasingly explicitly anti-capitalist, a trend which will have been enormously boosted by the Seattle events. Socialists should support them, not by passing pious resolutions in labour movement bodies, but by helping them build genuine united fronts on the key issues.

The Thatcherite/Reaganite neo-liberal offensive has been vigorously pursued for over two decades, and is now fully supported and deepened by Blair, especially within the EU. For the last 15 years there has been little trade union opposition or Labour left opposition, let alone any serious attempt at a coherent alternative.

The lack of any real movement against unemployment and job insecurity in Britain has been a real weakness in mounting opposition to globalisation.

However there are grounds for renewed optimism in the aftermath of the battle of Seattle. The events put fundamental questions of exploitation and the workings of capitalism and imperialism on the news agenda, and drew in a new layer of activists.

The task now is to ensure that the issues are further popularised and used as a way of building a serious current which is not just "anti-capitalist", but which goes on explicitly to embrace a socialist, internationalist agenda.

Campaigners discuss British follow-on from Seattle

Adam Hartman

AROUND 150 people from many different organisations and parts of the country gathered in London on January 15 to reflect on the hugely successful global protests against the World Trade Organisation meeting in Seattle.

The meeting considered how campaigns should develop against attempts by the US and European Union, in spite of their setback at Seattle, to push ahead with the further liberalisation of trade in the markets of the South.

Barry Coates of the World Development Movement, Chris Keene of the Green Party and Colin Hines, an anti-globalisation economist kicked off the discussion.

Attending the meeting were organisations as diverse as the Green Party, Green Left, the Conference of Socialist Economists, anti-Nestle activists, the Asbestos campaign, the Socialist Workers' Party and Reclaim the Streets.

The meeting recognised that, with the WTO sidelined for the time being, it was necessary to confront all the institutions and mechanisms which are being used to promote the neoliberal agenda, not least the fledgling Transatlantic Economic Partnership as well as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

It was felt that it was necessary to raise much wider public awareness about how organisations like the WTO work and whose interests they serve, and to explode the lie that free trade works to everyone's benefit.

A representative of the Asbestos campaign explained that a decision was expected imminently from the WTO's appeals procedure on Canada's appeal against the EU ban on asbestos. The campaign will be organising a picket of Canada House in the event of the appeal being upheld.

The meeting also agreed that we should demand that the government refuse to comply with such a deci-

sion. It was also necessary not simply to oppose neo-liberalism but also to propose an alternative vision of the world economy, in which trade would respect the environment and serve the needs of communities rather than the interests of multinational corporations.

Tom Wengraf from the British supporters of *Le Monde Diplomatique* spoke in support of a 'Tobin tax' on international currency transactions, and outlined plans to launch a British branch of ATTAC, the international Tobin tax campaign.

A key part of the discussion was on the question of labour standards. John Swift from Coventry TUC argued that that the international labour movement should not support demands for labour standards to be incorporated into the WTO.

Labour standards would be used in a protectionist way by rich countries against poor countries whose only competitive advantage in



Staingrad O'Neill



the world market is cheap labour.

The only way to achieve the implementation of labour standards is to use the tried and true tactics of class struggle and international solidarity. A resolution along these lines from Coventry Trades Council is being moved through the structures of the trade union movement and will hopefully be voted on at this year's TUC.

There was some discussion about whether or not a more formal structure should be set up from the meeting and what its role should be.

Should it function as a network for exchanging information and for support-

ing each other's actions, or take on the role of planning and co-ordinating activities?

There was concern that such a committee should not cut across or take over the initiatives of other organisations, for example in planning for May Day. It was agreed to set up an open committee which would organise a all day meeting in mid March

The meeting discussed future actions, including:-

- the court case on Tuesday February 22 of 16 activists charged with burglary following their protest against Nestle (see box) in Halifax on November 30. As well as the support needed at the court itself, protests will also be organised

against Nestle at least in London and hopefully in other places.

- a meeting on Saturday February 19 to debate the launch a British branch of the ATTAC campaign (Action for a Tobin Tax on Capital).

- a protest outside Canada House if the WTO rules in favour of Canada's attempt to overturn the EU ban on asbestos imports.

In particular the meeting supported the call to build for a massive day of action against capitalism on May Day.

- For further information contact Campaign against the Millennium Round c/o 16a Lambert Rd, London SW2 5BD 0171 738 3054 petercooper@btinternet.com

Join the defence of the Nestle 16

SIXTEEN people protesting against the WTO conference in Seattle on November 30 were arrested in Halifax, Yorkshire, during a protest at a Nestle factory.

They have been charged with 'Statutory conspiracy' under section 1(1) of the Criminal Law Act 1977 in that "they conspired together with other persons to commit burglary".

Their next court appearance is on Tuesday February, 22 at Halifax Magistrates Court, Harrison Road, Halifax and supporters are asked to turn out from 9.30am..

Those arrested come from a wide selection of organisations and of none. They come from Calderdale, Sheffield, Manchester, Leeds, Nottingham and Colne.

On Tuesday November 30 at 9am about 50 people entered the Nestle factory, climbed on the roof and up a chimney to unfurl banners

aimed at the WTO. The main banner read, 'PEOPLE AND PLANET BEFORE PROFIT'.

The police were called and 16 demonstrators arrested. Even the Prosecution solicitor said at their first court hearing on Tuesday 7 December that the charge was 'over the top', and now the police had to supply the evidence for February 22.

The charge seems ludicrous when you consider 50 people turned up in broad daylight with massive banners proclaiming their arrival at the Nestle factory.

But if you consider what happened the following day, when Jack Straw announced 'three strikes and you are out' for burglary, with a minimum prison sentence of 3 months for anyone found guilty for a third offence of burglary, then perhaps the 'over the top' charge may seem pretty reasonable to the police!

The protesters handed out the following leaflet to Nestle workers, many of whom clapped and cheered on the demonstrators) - The leaflet explained why Nestle is an important target for anti-WTO campaigners.

A5 first side in large print
"It's time to stop the World Take Over and put people and planet before profit."

Second side, small print:
"Trade ministers from around the world are gathering in Seattle today to worship at the high altar of global capitalism - the World Trade Organisation.

The transnational corporations are pulling the strings to set up a world in which the power of big money reigns supreme.

"As president of the International Chamber of Commerce, Nestle supreme Helmut Maucher used his influence to push for greater trade liberalisation - that's why we are staging our protest at the Nestle factory today.

"The grey men of the WTO regularly pass binding judgements which outlaw any attempts to protect the environment, improve health, promote animal welfare or help poorer nations.

"An EU ban on hormone injected beef from the US was ruled illegal.

"US laws on cleaner petrol fell foul of complaints by Venezuela.

"The US was not allowed to ban shrimp caught in ways which killed turtles.

"The EU was prevented from providing preferential treatment to impoverished Caribbean farmers.

"We say enough is enough. It's

time to put forward an alternative vision - a society which puts people and planet before profit".

■ Send messages of support to
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or telephone 01422 844710 for more details (ask for Penny or Billy).

Support the campaign with a donation by writing out cheques to 'Biscuits' and sending to the above address.

Purchase photos of the protest at Nestle showing protesters on the roof with banner - one photo costs £1 plus sae A5 envelope, or 5 photos for £5 post free send to the above address with cheques to 'Biscuits'.

THE ELECTION results in Croatia on January 3 mark a major sea change: not just for Croatia but for the Balkans as a whole. But you would hardly understand this from the scant coverage in the British media, reports Geoff Ryan.

THE ELECTIONS resulted in victory for the SDP (Social Democratic Party – the former League of Communists of Croatia) and HSL (Croatian Social Liberal Party) coalition.

Although their victory was not unexpected the margin certainly was. The coalition won 71 seats compared to only 40 for the HDZ. Yet a few days before polling the ruling HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union) was expecting to salvage sufficient votes to form part of a coalition government. Now there is no chance of that.

The most likely outcome is a coalition of the SDP – HSL bloc with a smaller opposition alliance which won 24 seats. Between them these two blocs will hold over two thirds of the seats in the lower house.

Moreover they are likely to have the support of the five representatives of national minorities. (Serbs, Hungarians and Italians elected one representative each. Czechs and Slovaks share one representative while Germans, Austrians, Jews, Ruthenians and Ukrainians also have a single representative).

The far-right coalition of the HSP (Croatian Party of Rights) and the HKDU (Croatian Christian Democratic Union) won 4 seats, polling particularly strongly in Slavonia.

The decisive defeat of the HDZ follows the death of President Tudjman, head of the HDZ, on December 10 1999.

Tudjman's death did not produce any sympathy vote to halt the

Poll defeat for Croatian right

declining popularity of the HDZ – it merely postponed the electoral defeat for a few weeks. Presidential elections are scheduled for January 24, though the two round system means the outcome is unlikely to be known until February.

The most likely result will be a run off between Drazen Budisa, leader of the HSL and HDZ candidate Mate Granic. Granic was identified with opposition to some of the more virulent nationalist policies of the Tudjman regime, and this may stand him in good stead.

Reduced powers

Whoever wins the Presidential election, however, the powers of the Presidency are likely to be reduced. The autocratic methods developed by Tudjman will certainly be curtailed.

The election was a major triumph for Ivica Racan, leader of the SDP and former leader of the League of Communists of Croatia.

It was Racan, contrary to many myths on the British left, who took the first steps towards independence for Croatia. Under his leadership the former Stalinists have

reconstituted themselves as a social democratic formation.

The SDP (and even more so the HSL) are pro-market. The new government will try to improve Croatia's relations with the west, with a view to seeking membership of the European Union.

There will certainly be no attempt to socialise the Croatian economy. However, the SDP will probably attempt to introduce social policies to offset aspects of the impact of the market.

Such moves would likely win the support of the IDS-DDI (Istrian Democratic Parliament) which is the dominant force in Istria, with support amongst both the Croat and Italian communities.

Most importantly the new government is likely to jettison much of the Croat chauvinism that marked the Tudjman era. This will change Croatia's relations with its Serb population. There are already signs that Serbs who fled Croatia during the war are planning to return.

The election result has been warmly welcomed in Bosnia where the former HDZ regime was able to

mobilise sections of the Croat population in support of its dream of Greater Croatia, with disastrous consequences.

This may well be the last election in Croatia in which Bosnian Croats have the right to vote. The Croatian diaspora may also be deprived of the right to vote in future elections. Since they have consistently voted HDZ (95 percent in some estimates) this will have longer term implications for future election results.

Division

The new regime will certainly be less influenced by hard-line nationalists from Hercegovina. As a result encouragement for the continued division of Mostar is likely to come to an end and the Croat community in Bosnia will be encouraged to participate in Bosnian politics, rather than being an arm of the Croatian state intervening in Bosnia on behalf of Zagreb.

The Tudjman regime systematically refused to hand over Croats accused of war crimes. This too will almost certainly change.

The change in regime will also have a deep impact in Serbia. No

doubt the Milosevic regime will denounce Racan as an Ustasha, just as it did even before the war.

However this is much less credible than was the case with Tudjman, though even in his case it was far from the truth.

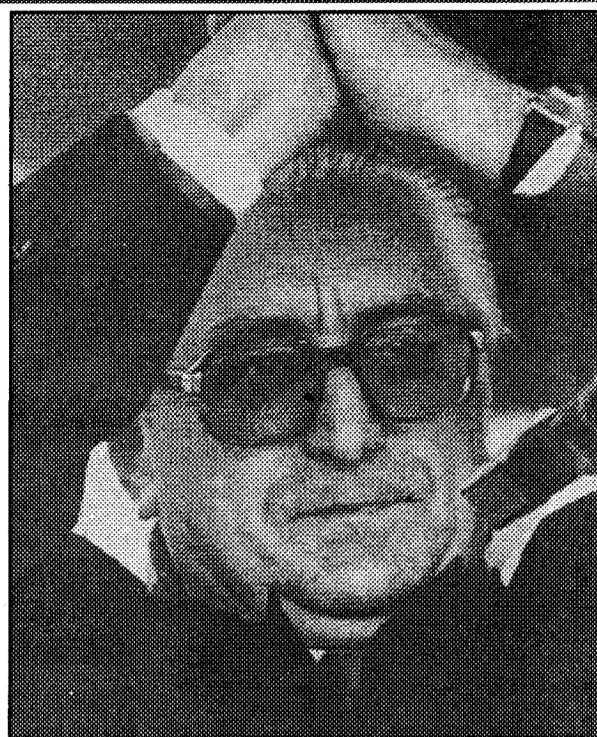
Tudjman was certainly an autocratic, Croatian nationalist who frequently apologised for the Ustasha state, but by no stretch of the imagination did he actually reintroduce a fascist state.

The weakness of the new government is undoubtedly its support for capitalism and its desire to enter the EU. Croatian workers, of whatever nationality, will have to take action to defend themselves against pro-market policies.

Nevertheless the election victory of the SDP does open up enormous possibilities throughout the region. The hold of nationalist politics is significantly weakened. In particular the position of Milosevic is much less secure.

That is a step forward for all the workers of the Balkans.

■ The above figures, based on a trawl through internet sites, are provisional.



The death of Tudjman brought no real sympathy vote

Ethics talk ditched as Labour backs Turkish dam project

Paul Hubert

Just before Christmas, word was released that Trade Secretary Stephen Byers intended to give British government support to the Ilisu dam project in Turkey. Apparently he has support from Tony Blair.

Much was made of New Labour's 'ethical foreign policy, when it came to power. This project shows once again that brave words seem to have little impact in practice.

Construction on the 1200MW Ilisu dam, the largest planned hydroelectric project in Turkey, is due to start in 2000 and is expected to take 7-8 years.

Rivers

It is located on the Tigris river in Turkish Kurdistan, 65km upstream from the Syrian and Iraqi borders. The £2 billion project is part of Turkey's South-eastern

Anatolia Project (Turkish initials 'GAP'). GAP is a \$32 billion infrastructure development programme that envisages the construction of 22 dams and 19 power plants on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and their tributaries.

The location makes the scheme highly controversial. Turkey has long denied the existence of the Kurds as a separate nation. Abdullah Ocalan, leader of a Kurdish insurgent organisation, the PKK, was recently sentenced to death and though the death sentence has been commuted this is to curry favour with Turkey's otherwise embarrassed Western allies rather than out of concern for human rights.

The Turkish military has destroyed villages and moved populations in Kurdistan many times before. In this context the GAP looks like a continuation of

war and repression by 'economic development'.

Any effect on the flow and ecology of the river will also cross international borders. The effect in Iraq could be devastating, while Syria also has an interest. (It will not have escaped the notice of Syrians that their state also has a dispute with Israel over water in territory occupied in 1967, even if Mr Byers is not interested).

Repression

However although Turkey has a bad record for repression of the Kurds, trade unions and the left, it has a good record in helping out the NATO powers in its wars in Iraq and Kosovo. It belongs to NATO and is standing on the doorstep of the European Union, hoping to be invited in.

British construction company Balfour Beatty is part of a multinational consortium hoping to build the dam. It is seeking a £200

million export credit for it from the UK Export Credits Guarantee Department. Two reports commissioned by the DTI have been released. Byers announced conditional approval:

"I have carefully considered both reports and I am minded to grant export credit. This will be conditional on the Turkish authorities agreeing to address the concerns we have about the environmental and the social impact of the project" he stated.

However the official reports are actually damning of the project.

No consultation

They make clear that: local people are against the dam; no consultation has taken place with them; serious doubts hang over compensation; and that major environmental impacts have yet to be addressed.

Balfour Beatty has stated that the dam will displace

12-16,000 people.

But official documents obtained by a KHRP delegation to the region suggest that at least 25,000 will be affected, and the DTI reports appear to suggest the numbers could be up to 36,000.

No plans

No resettlement plans have been drawn up although the project design was approved by the then military government in 1982. There are fears of further human rights abuses during relocation.

The DTI environmental report identifies three environmental impacts "which may be significant and which are not adequately addressed by studies to date."

These include effects downstream, the loss of river species, and "environmental impacts from associated and secondary developments." The reports

complain that data-gathering is severely constrained by "restricted access to some of the affected area due to local security issues".

However the enthusiasm of US and now British government leaders for the project shows that concern about repression, the destruction of historic sites and the environmental impact count for little.

A better flavour of their concerns comes from the US Consul in Adana, Stuart E. Jones enthusing about "opportunities to strengthen trade and friendly relations with Turkey, especially with the South-eastern region".

He predicts "big opportunities for US business circles in many fields including agriculture, food, textile, energy and mining". He looks forward to friendly relations between the two countries.

With support like that, how could Mr Byers refuse?

A different vision for the new century

"Our 'model' of socialism, contrary to what many opponents of Marxism contend, promises neither paradise on earth nor the millennium.

We have no illusions about a 'society without conflict' or an 'end of history'.

We know very well that hundreds of problems will remain unsolved for centuries – and many new ones will emerge.

We are indeed very modest people, with quite modest goals.

All we want to do is solve those half dozen or so problems resulting from the incongruity between the technical and scientific capacities of the human species on the one hand and the system of production for private profit on the other.

There is no mystery about what these problems are: hunger, physical misery, social and economic inequality, war, inequality between men and women and between different nationalities and races, exploitation of the labour of others, political repression, socially organised violence.

All these obstacles to the self realisation of the human personality can be eliminated through the overturn of the existing relations of production and the political structures that uphold them.

All the myriad of other problems, and the future ones that will undoubtedly arise, we make no claim to solve.

But these half dozen or so problems have cost the lives of hundreds of millions of people over centuries and have made the lives of thousands of millions of others miserable beyond description.

A victorious struggle for socialism would make a seminal contribution to human progress, and it is for this reason that the fight for these goals, modest as they are, is the crucial human endeavour of our age."

(Ernest Mandel, 1979)

Marxism versus campism

a reply
to
Socialist
Action

Socialist Action supporters were influential last year in the Campaign for Peace in the Balkans, the principal campaign in Britain against NATO's war on Belgrade. Their campist view of the world strengthened the Campaign's pro-Serb bias, which in turn narrowed the appeal of its anti-war mobilisations. Those, including Socialist Outlook, who opposed Milosevic's war in Kosova as well as NATO's war against Serbia, were denounced as pro-NATO. The December edition of Socialist Action is devoted to the war and the political debates around it. Here ALAN THORNETT takes up some of the debates raised.

The central theme of the articles in Socialist Action (SA) is to present Milosevic as the protector of some kind of actually existing socialism, and Serbia as constituting "the chief obstacle to the capitalist break-up of Yugoslavia".

The Yugoslav federation, it insists, was broken up principally by imperialist intervention.

In particular the economic conditions imposed by the IMF in the mid-1980s (around the repayment of loans taken in the 1970s) and the decision of the two wealthiest republics, Slovenia and Croatia, "in coordination with German imperialism", to secede from Yugoslavia in order to "stop subsidising the poorest parts of the federation" were supposedly decisive.

These factors, it argues, along with the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, were behind the break-up, rather than the regime's own political degeneration, or the rise of Great Serbian Nationalism within it – which it presents as an invention of western media.

Once Slovenia and Croatia had opted for independence, it says, it was "natural" for Serb minorities within Croatia and Bosnia to "rebel" in the way they did. But what is the truth?

Obviously, imperialism will always seek to intervene into non-capitalist states and attempt to restore capitalism. It has done so since 1917. But this does not, in itself, tell us much.

Would Yugoslavia have held together if imperialism had not intervened? That would be to suggest that Yugoslavia had been a healthy socialist state free from the social, economic and political paralysis which brought down Stalinism in Eastern Europe and the USSR – which it was not.

Of course the collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe and the USSR was a factor in the break-up of Yugoslavia – imperialism no longer needed its unity against the Warsaw Pact – as were economic conditions. But were these the decisive factors involved?

Were the "rebellions" of the Serb minorities in Croatia and Bosnia a "natural process", or were they fomented by Great Serb Nationalism and then planned and organised by Serb nationalists – political and paramilitary – in order to pursue Milosevic's vision of a Greater Serbia?



Serbian aggression fuelled nationalism in ex-Yugoslavia

Was German imperialism the decisive driving force behind the session of Slovenia and Croatia or did it pursue its own interests in a process which had a separate dynamic? This is what we have to look at.

Rewriting history

The infamous assertion that it was the recognition of Croatia and Slovenia by the EC which led to the break-up of Yugoslavia, and the Croatian and Bosnian wars, is something SA shares with other sections of the left. It has been repeated until accepted as fact. But it is simply not true. SA present it this way:

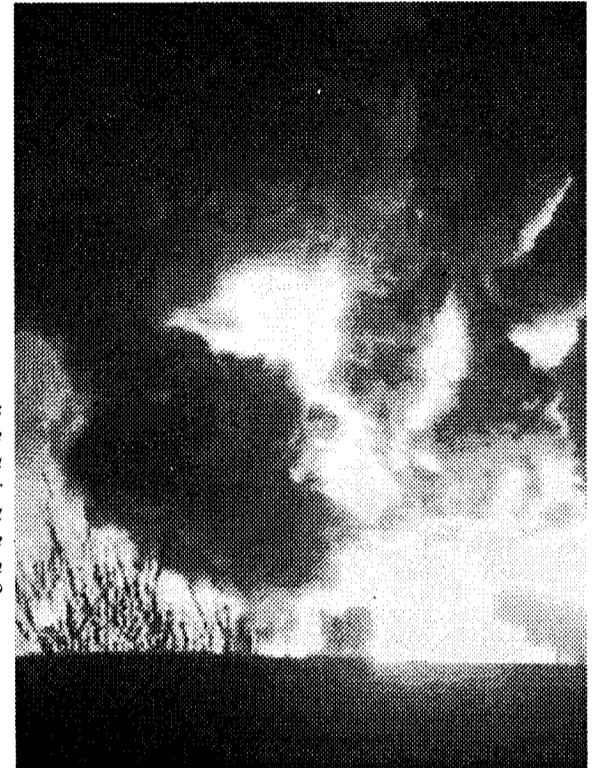
"Although Croatia, with its 11% Serbian population did not comply with the EC's criteria for respect of minority rights, Germany pressured the EC into recognition of its independence, and thereby precipitated the break-up which led to war, first in Croatia and then in Bosnia"

Yet EC recognition of Croatia and Slovenia came almost a year after the start of war in the region. It came a long time after the invasion of Slovenia and Croatia by Serbian forces. It came after the fall of Vukovar and the siege of Dubrovnik.

It came after the bulk of Serbian territorial objectives in Croatia had been achieved. Most significantly, it came after the political dye was cast on the unity of Yugoslavia.

Other myths about the region are prevalent on the left, in particular that the nationalities of the Balkans are incorrigible warring factions historically pro-

NATO bombs wreak terrible damage in Serbia during the war over Kosova: but was the whole situation just an imperialist plot?



grammed for conflict with each other.

Again the reality is different. Neither nationalism or religion were strong in Yugoslavia until nationalism was stoked up during the 1980s by Greater Serb nationalists.

1974 constitution torn up

After Tito's death it was clear that Yugoslavia, which already had problems, could not be held together by force. There had to be a guarantee against the rise of the strongest power, Serbia, back to the dominant position it held in pre-war Yugoslavia.

The federation could only be held together by increased socialist democracy and a strengthening, not a weakening, of the 1974 constitution.

This constitution had devolved power and autonomy to the constituent Republics: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia, and to the autonomous provinces – Kosova and Vojvodina (which remained a part of Serbia).

It defined Yugoslavia as a multi-national state in which no single nationality could claim a majority, and it became the basis on which the Federation coexisted.

Yet within a year this coexistence was under challenge from the rise of Serb nationalism. In 1981 force was used in Kosova against demonstrators calling for the status of a Federal Republic to tackle its economic backwardness. In 1984 intellectuals were put on trial for taking part in debating societies. Serb intellectuals, who were collapsing into nationalism, collected 50,000 signatures calling for a crackdown in Kosova and more Serb control of the Province.

In 1987, party boss and nationalist demagogue, Slobodan Milo-

sevic addressed a huge rally of Serbs in Kosova (his infamous "no one should dare to beat you" speech) and came away as Serb leader-in-waiting.

In 1989 Kosovan and Vojvodinan deputies were pressed into ratifying new constitutional arrangements which abolished their rights as Autonomous Provinces.

Belgrade was tearing up the constitutional basis on which Yugoslavia rested, ironically in the name of the unity of the federation. The aim of Serb nationalism was to reverse the advances of the 1974 constitution, which was now under fierce attack, in favour of a highly centralised state, dominated by Serbia.

Soon afterwards Milosevic was endorsed as president of Serbia. He pledged to reunite a Serbia which had been divided by the 1974 constitution. The stronger Serb nationalism became, the less other nationalities were prepared to stay within the Federation.

This is not to "demonise Milosevic" as SA suggest. It is to present history as it happened.

Worse, SA actually defends the crushing of Kosovan and Vojvodinan autonomy as "logical" since Serbs were "under-represented under the 1974 constitution".

Descent into war

Once Kosova and Vojvodina were swallowed up, resistance to the Greater Serbia project fell to Slovenia and Croatia. They responded by offering Serbia a compromise within a Yugoslav framework. This was rejected by Milosevic, as were all subsequent similar proposals.

In December 1990 Slovenia held a referendum which overwhelmingly favoured secession. Slovenia would now increasingly drag Croatia with it towards independence.

Croatia was now led by Franjo Tudjman. He was a Croatian nationalist and second-string regional dictator, later to hang his crimes on his hands. But he was not a fascist, as SA suggest, running an Ustashe regime.

He had won power after the Croatian CP opted for a first-past-the-post electoral system for the multi-party elections. Had they chosen PR they would have been in power themselves – which would have militated against the whipping up of nationalism in the region, to some extent, and probably altered the course of events.

On March 15 1991 the Krajina Serbs, in a so-called spontaneous move, and led by Serb nationalist (and Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) leader) Milan Babic, took over the Krajina region of Croatia by force and declared it independent.

They named it the Autonomous Province of Krajina (later Republika Srpska Krajina). They had the backing of Milosevic and were armed and supported by the Yugoslav National Army (JNA). It was a hammer blow to the unity of Yugoslavia and a huge challenge to Croatia.

No army

Tudjman had no army to resist the JNA and sought to stabilise the situation by diplomacy. He, in any case, had his own agenda for carving up the region (in effect Bosnia) in favour of a Greater Croatia once he was pushed towards independence.

SA defends Milosevic's Krajina operation this way: "In Croatia, it [Milosevic's regime] upheld the right to autonomy of the Serbian minority and the federal army was deployed to defend the Serb enclaves against the new Croatian military, until the point where EU and US sanctions pressurised Milosevic to agree to the deployment of UN forces in the disputed areas"

Two weeks later, at the end of March 1991, Milosevic and Tudjman met in secret. They concluded that Yugoslavia was now effectively finished, and that three, or more, successor states would eventually emerge.

The issue was how they would each carve out their own ethnic states to the detriment of Bosnia. Later, EC mediator Lord Carrington, after meetings with Milosevic and Tudjman, made the same point: "When I first talked to Presidents Milosevic and Tudjman, it was quite clear that both of them had a solution which was mutually satisfactory – which was that they were going to carve up Bosnia between them".

In April 1991 Milosevic recognised the Krajina Serbs. Soon after that the ultra-nationalist Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadzic called for "an armed force of the Serbian People" to be set up throughout "the Serb lands of Yugoslavia".

Undeclared war

There was now an undeclared war between Serbian forces and Croatia, although Tudjman remained reluctant to recognise it given the gross military imbalance. But Serbian forces were in occupation of a quarter of Croatia, and expanding.

On May 3, Tudjman publicly warned of the likelihood of all-out war with Serbia. It would be a war which would have little to do with defending the rights of Croatian Serbs (the 200,000 Serbs living in Zagreb were ignored) and everything to do with grabbing Croatian territory and undermining its right to independence.

Invasion, war, and ethnic cleansing

On May 25 1991 Slovenia and Croatia simultaneously declared independence, although practical

preparations were far more advanced in Slovenia than in Croatia. The EC called for the unity of Yugoslavia.

Two days after the declaration the JNA invaded Slovenia. They were forced to withdraw after 10 days by international pressure and surprisingly strong Slovenian resistance – leaving Slovenia as an independent state. Ultimately Slovenia could not have defeated the JNA, but Milosevic had little interest in Slovenia since it had a negligible Serb population.

In August 1991 Serb forces carried out the first ethnic cleaning of the war in the Krajina village of Kijevo – which had a Croat population surrounded by Serb-held territory. Soon after Babic announced that the Krajina Serb paramilitary forces had fused with the JNA. The Serbian front line now stretched South from Gospic, north to Karlovac – 30 kilometres south of Zagreb – eastwards to Pakrac and to the Eastern Slavonian city of Vukovar on the Danube.

In early September 1991 Vukovar – 43.7% Croat and 37.4% Serb – was shelled by Serbian irregulars with heavy weapons supplied by the JNA. Tudjman responded by laying siege to JNA barracks across Croatia. On September 19 a JNA force, with a hundred tanks and other heavy weapons, left Belgrade bound for Vukovar.

Within days Vukovar was under siege and heavy bombardment. On October 1 1991 the JNA attacked and laid siege to the port city of Dubrovnik on Croatia's Adriatic coast. Dubrovnik was 82.5% Croat and just 6.7% Serb.

Vukovar fell a month later. It was reduced to rubble after weeks of hand-to-hand fighting. Over 500 Croats were killed and nearly 2,000 wounded. Surviving Croats retreated in disarray. After this the JNA turned its guns on Osijek to repeat the process.

By the end of November 1991 Serb forces had achieved most of their objectives. Milosevic now favoured a cease-fire and UN intervention, which he calculated would freeze current battle lines to his advantage and protect Serbs in the rest of Croatia.

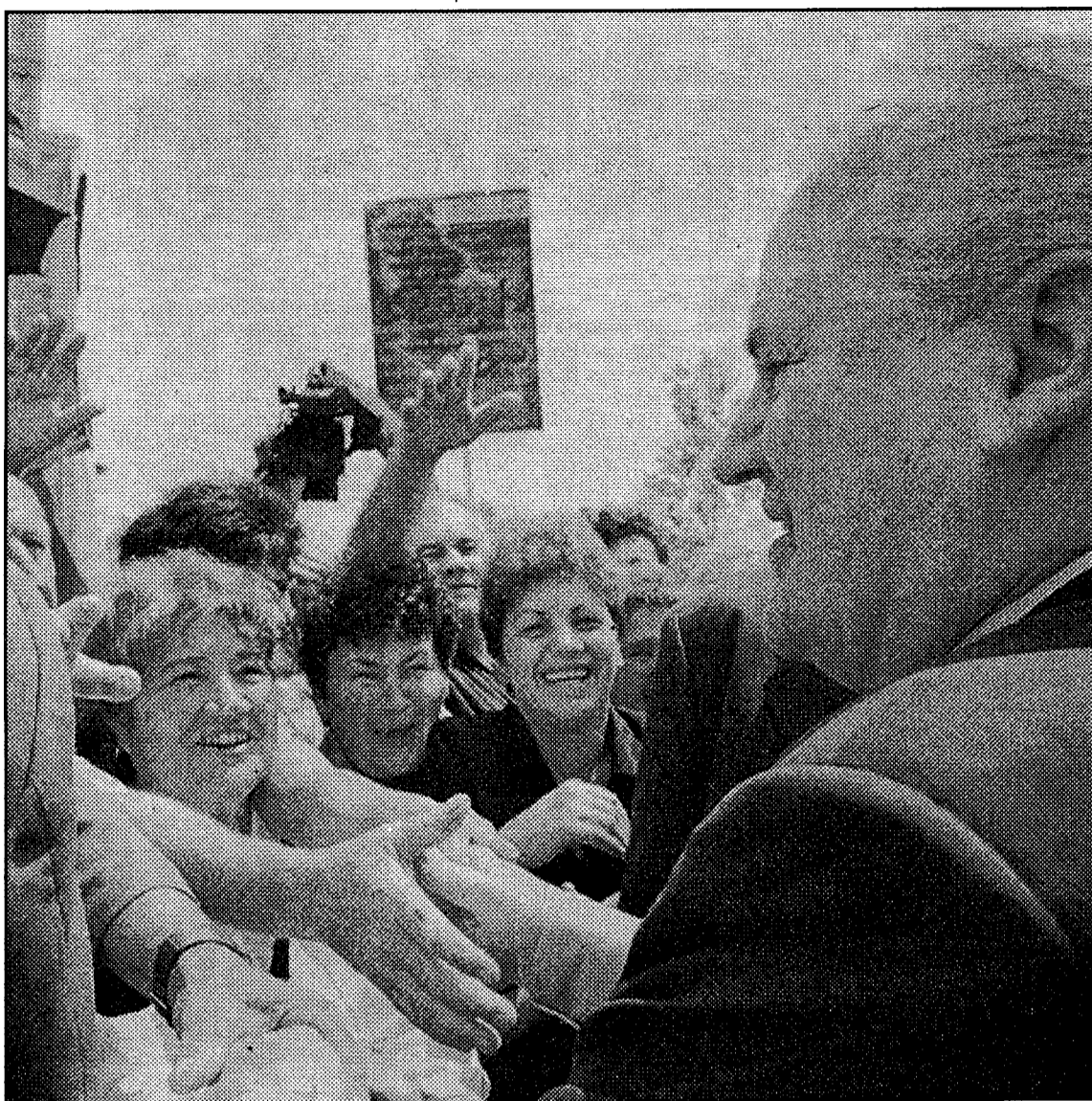
Borisav Jovic, the representative of Serbia on the Federal Presidency, put it this way: "At this point the war in Croatia was under control in the sense that all the Serb territories were under our control, all that is except Central Slavonia. Slobodan and I, after many conversations, decided now was the time to get the UN troops into Croatia to protect the Serbs there."

"We saw the danger – when Croatia would be recognised, which we realised would happen, the JNA would be regarded as a foreign army invading another country. So we had better get the UN troops in early to protect the Serbs".

Croatia had now lost a third of its territory to Serbian forces and there were half a million Croatian refugees. In early in December Tudjman visited Bonn to meet Kohl and Genscher to seek EC recognition of Croatia. Germany had recently changed its policy on this and he got strong support. A week later Genscher announced that if the EC did not recognise Croatia and Slovenia Germany would do so independently.

The Bosnian war

At the end of December 1991 Bosnia-Herzegovina decided to seek independence. It was either that or being a part of a Greater Serbia, which was unacceptable, particularly given events in Croatia. Macedonia took the same position. On January 7 1992 the EC agreed to recognise Croatia and Slovenia, from April 6 1992, but not Macedonia or Bosnia.



Serbian boss Milosevic: his regime exploits nationalism and chauvinism

On March 1 1992 Serb paramilitaries erected barricades in Sarajevo, dividing the city. A month later the war began in earnest. The Bosnian town of Zvornik, is east of Tuzla on Drina river, on the Croatia-Serbia border. Next day it was stormed by combined JNA and Serb paramilitary units led by Arkan. Muslims were massacred and those who escaped driven out. Chetnik politician and paramilitary unit commander Vojislav Seselj later said that the operation had been planned well in advance in Belgrade.

For three years Bosnia was carved up by first Serbian and then Croatian nationalists. Although Croatian nationalism, or its crimes, could not be directly compared to Serb nationalism (of which it was also a victim), it conducted a bloody war against Bosnia just the same.

Sarajevo and other Bosnian cities were bombed into rubble and their inhabitants starved out. Europe saw its first genocide since world war two, as Bosnian Muslims were driven out of their homes by massacre, rape, and terror.

Three quarters of Bosnia's territory was occupied by either Serbian or Croatian forces. The war left a quarter of a million dead and three million Bosnian refugees. After Bosnia had turned the tide on the battlefield in 1995 it was overtaken by Dayton and turned into a UN protectorate which has resolved nothing.

Many justified criticisms can be made against the Bosnian regime. But the idea that it was no different to those of Milosevic or Tudjman is preposterous. Bosnia was by far the most multi-ethnic and multi-cultural of the Yugoslav republics, and had remained so even after the first multi-party elections resulted in the victory of ethnically based parties.

For Bosnia this was a war of survival but also a war in defence of a multi-ethnic society. Although pushed back, Bosnia's multi-ethnicity survived throughout the war. There were Serbs and Croats at every level of the Bosnian state and military, 10% of the army was Serb or Croat, and there were 50,000 Serbs and 30,000 Croats in Bosnian

Sarajevo throughout the siege.

So what were the origins of the conflict? It is self-evident that the EC's recognition of Croatia and Slovenia did not start the wars against those states, because it came after them. But what about Bosnia?

By the time Croatia and Slovenia were recognised, the logic of war against Bosnia by Serbia was already overwhelming. Radovan Karadzic had declared the so-called Serb Autonomous Areas of Bosnia nine months earlier in the summer of 1991.

The Bosnian Serbs voted for independence from Bosnia, and their own state, in November 1991. Serb deputies had already walked out of the Bosnian parliament and formed their own parliament. The dye was well and truly cast by the spring of 1992 and Bosnia was faced with an impossible choice; stay inside Yugoslavia on Milosevic's terms or seek independence.

In the end EC recognition of Croatia and Slovenia were an excuse for a war which had been prepared for a long time and designed to greater Bosnia up in favour of a Greater Serbia.

Fomented

Revolt was fomented in the Serb areas, and then used as the basis for war in order to expand the areas held. That process did not rely on the EC since it was certain, at some stage, to lead to the independence of Bosnia as it had in Croatia.

And it is worth reflecting that in nearly 5 years of warfare in Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia not a single military action took place on the soil of Serbia.

Was the fact that Croatia and Slovenia were the most wealthy of the Republics a factor in their moves towards independence? Yes.

But whether it was the decisive factor is another matter. Whether the course of events would have been significantly different if they had not been the most wealthy republics is also doubtful.

After all Kosova and Macedonia were the most impoverished regions of Yugoslavia and they both sought independence. That is because independence was principally a political issue, not an economic one.

What is not in doubt is that the delicate balance which had been achieved between the nations of Yugoslavia, under the 1974 constitution, began to be undermined by the rise of Serb nationalism.

Once the possibility of independence, as an alternative, was demonstrated in Eastern Europe by the fall of Stalinism, it would be very hard to keep the federation together. The only way was more democratic rights and real national autonomy – and that was not on offer.

Yes, imperialism did intervene, although it was divided over its goals. Yes, it did make advances and extend its influence in the region. Yes, Germany did want to become the dominant power in the region. But imperialism was still not the initiator of the crisis in Yugoslavia and did not ultimately determine the course of events.

The Stalinist legacy in the region, and the core of the bureaucracy which turned to nationalism in the most powerful nation of the Federation, was far more important.

In fact, for the imperialists to have engineered the break-up of Yugoslavia they would first to have planned for the break-up of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the Stalinist regimes throughout Eastern Europe.

But the overthrow of those regimes was overwhelmingly the result of popular protest within the states themselves – once the green light had been given by Gorbachev's unwillingness to use military force to impose Stalinist control.

The huge popular explosions, and the rapidity with which they spread, took all the main imperialist powers completely by surprise. Probably not even Ronald Reagan would claim to have actively brought about the fall of the Stalinist regimes, even if his policies did exacerbate their crisis.

Socialist Action would probably disagree.

But by exaggerating the power and influence of imperialism, their political line also serves to apologise for the nationalist crimes and Stalinism of the Milosevic regime.



Andrew Ward

Truth about death squads that preceded Irish 'peace'

Overt violence of the RUC was coupled with covert deals with loyalist paramilitaries

The Committee: Political Assassination in Northern Ireland by Sean McPhilemy, Roberts Rhinehart (Colorado) 1999.

Reviewed by David Coen

THE ALLEGATIONS in McPhilemy's book are not new. An Amnesty International report of June 1988 on the shooting dead of six unarmed people towards the end of 1982 condemned the RUC for falsifying and con-

cealing crucial information. In 1984, the then Deputy Chief Constable of Manchester, John Stalker, attempted to investigate the killings but was obstructed at every turn and eventually forced to resign in the face of a farcical attempted frame-up for alleged criminal connections.

Despite Amnesty and United Nations pressure, the British Government refused (in 1987) to prosecute those responsible, or publish the findings of the Stalker/Sampson enquiry on the grounds of "national security" and "public interest" considerations. At the centre of these allegations were the RUC Headquarters Mobile Support Units (HMSU) which operated under the control of the RUC Special Branch and alongside MIS.

McPhilemy's book, based on his 1991 Channel 4 documentary, claims to have detailed information on those who politically guided the killings of two notorious loyalist killers, Robin Jackson and Billy Wright.

The connection between the Committee, (or the Ulster Loyalist Central Coordinating Committee, to give it its full title), made up

of between 50 and 60 prominent Unionists and the RUC was the so-called Inner Force, a group of disgruntled RUC officers who favoured a stepping up of the war against the IRA.

According to McPhilemy, the Inner Force comprised about one third of the RUC and was organised in every division across the Six Counties.

Helping hand

There had been lots of evidence of RUC and the British Army passing information to Loyalist killers, McPhilemy goes further and claims that the Committee and the Inner Force actively targeted Republicans - and assisted the Loyalists in carrying out the killings.

The strategy of the Inner Circle was, in the words of a senior RUC officer, to "kill the fish and poison the water", that is kill Republican "hawks" like Alex Maskey and Martin McGuinness while attempting to turn nationalists against them by killing some in retaliation for every IRA killing.

Nor were the Loyalists over-concerned about their targets: if finding an IRA member was a tad difficult then any Nationalists or Catholics would do. In fact, the "any Taig will do" approach might even be better in generating terror among nationalists.

The roots of this policy were to be found in the Foreign and Northern Ireland Offices who, according to the same source, "desperately wanted to bring the doves of Sinn Fein to the negotiating table."

If terrorism is latterly defined as the use of violence for political ends then without doubt this was terrorism.

Murder

The fact that the British, not for the first time in Ireland (or indeed elsewhere) deliberately fostered sectarian murder for their own ends should make those "socialists" who believe in the civilising/peacekeeping role of the British State pause for thought.

In 1989 the British government set up yet another enquiry into collusion between Loyalists and the "Security Forces" under John Stevens, which again the RUC attempted to block.

However Stevens did arrest Brian Nelson, a double agent for British intelligence within the loyalist Ulster Defence Association. At his trial, several months later, Nelson admitted to helping Loyalists to kill Nationalists, but Stevens could not use his evidence at the time of the enquiry apparently because it was sub-judice. Steven's report was that despite some individual cases of collusion, the RUC was impartial and professional.

Nationalists viewed the report as yet another whitewash and the period since is littered with evidence of the large number of files on Republicans and Nationalists which have been passed to the Loyalists.

RUC threats

But the RUC did not just operate behind the scenes of Loyalist terror. Belfast solicitor Pat Finucane was repeatedly threatened by the RUC before he was killed. John Stalker in his book records an RUC man telling him "the solicitor (Pat Finucane) is an IRA man - any man who represents IRA men is worse than an IRA man"

The pattern of RUC threats was repeated before the killing of Rosemary Nelson though unlike Pat Finucane, she did not have a Tory Minister (Douglas Hogg) get up in the House of Commons and claim that "there are, in the province, a number of solicitors who are unduly sympathetic to the cause of the IRA".

The use of the legal process as a gag is common to McPhilemy's book (which cannot be distributed in Britain), Brian Nelson's evidence to John Stevens and more recently to an interview given by a Loyalist gunman William Stobie to Ed Moloney of the Dublin *Sunday Tribune* regarding the killing of Pat Finucane.

Stobie said he provided the weapon, and forewarned his Special Branch handlers of the attack on Finucane. The intelligence for the attack was provided by Brian Nelson.

Transcript

The RUC attempted to get Moloney jailed for refusing to hand over the transcript of the interview, which they claimed to need in order to investigate Stobie's claims. This was exactly the same procedure used against McPhilemy, even though at that stage revealing the identity of his source would have resulted in the source being killed.

The threat of injunction and long legal proceedings effectively stifled discussions of the issues raised, namely the overwhelming evidence that the British government was running death squads in Ireland and generally conducting a campaign of terror against nationalists.

The degree to which this was successful in forcing the Republicans to call a cease-fire and participate in the "peace" process is difficult to judge, but it was undoubtedly a contributor.

Their implications for future British strategy are also not clear. The British have scored some modest successes. They have drawn Sinn Fein into running the state they hitherto were attempting to smash, and got them to accept in practice the Six County statelet in return for vague promises on "equality agenda" and reform of the RUC rather than its disbandment.

"Traditions"

More importantly, by accepting the sectarian headcount which is the basis of the "power-sharing Executive", Republicans are explicitly accepting the British claim that the problem in Ireland is the conflict between two "traditions" rather than Britain's historic attempt to control the whole island.

In the end the future of the Stormont Agreement will come down to fairly practical questions. Are Nationalists willing to surrender their weapons and entrust their security to the RUC?

How will Sinn Fein react if Tony Blair delivers his apparent promise to the Orangemen and requests that the RUC, if necessary, smash a path for them down the Garvaghy Road?

Time was when the answer from Sinn Fein would have been obvious. That margin of creeping doubt is the degree to which the British have succeeded. The Nationalists and Republicans on the Garvaghy and Ormeau Roads will have other ideas.

The Anatomy of New Labour's Welsh fiasco

LABOUR in London are in danger of repeating the mistakes of Welsh Labour, unless the lessons of the disastrous leadership contests in Wales are learned.

Ceri Evans, co-author of a Welsh Labour Action report claims that senior figures in the Wales Labour Party have failed to confront the facts and guilty of myth-making on a grand scale, in relation to last year's Welsh Assembly and European election results.

The reports, "Swings and Roundabouts - what really happened on May 6th" tries to look beyond the spin and explain what really happened.

Evans explains "Our analysis shows very clearly that the biggest swings from Labour to Plaid Cymru were in the South Wales valley constituencies which make up Labour's traditional heartlands. Local factors may have had some influence in the Rhondda and Islwyn but this does not explain the huge swings across the whole of the South Wales valleys"



Michael: a sure-fire vote-loser

Labour's share of the vote was reduced to only 38 per cent, compared to 55 per cent in the 1997 General Election. Labour won 29 of 60 Assembly seats and had to form a minority administration in a country, which up until then was seen as a bastion of Labour support.

He explained that the swings should be understood as a result of two factors. The first was the undemocratic manoeuvres which led to the imposition of Alun Michael on the Welsh Labour Party.

The second factor was that voters saw what was being done by the Labour government and did not like it.

"This is why hundreds of thousands of Welsh Labour voters did not vote in the Assembly and Euro elections and why tens of thousands of them switched to Plaid Cymru."

■ The Welsh Labour Action report, **Swings and Roundabouts - What Really Happened on May 6** by Ceri Evans and Ed George is available for £1.50 plus 50p P&P from WLA, 94A Wyndham Crescent, Riverside, Cardiff, CF1 9EF.

Green politics, self management — and socialism

Most socialists are now used to hearing the question, "do we need to be red to be green?" and to confidently answering "yes". And most greens are used to using their sharp antennae to detect the complacency and patronage which often lies behind that answer, argues DAVE BANGS.

Too often, the socialist response makes greens feel like women and gay people and blacks were made to feel so often in the sixties, when socialists responded to their new-found confidence by telling them that they must not break the unity of the class struggle.

Yet, for all the too-common triteness of the socialist claim it is still blindingly obvious that capitalism cannot give us a sustainable society. Capitalism is unplanned. It proceeds by gigantic, chaotic pulses of economic activity, followed by destructive contraction and retreat. It produces only under the imperative of profit. (Not global, long term profit, but present profit for every competing unit of capital).

Everything is a potential object of profit: nature, our bodies, our sky, our air, our earth, our loves, our anguishes, our needs. Capitalism is blind to what it produces: Mars bars, cars, cruise missiles, GM crops, or (for that matter) organic food — provided it is profitable.

Its destructive wastefulness can only be ameliorated post facto. For you cannot anticipate — plan — for problems if the system's most basic tenets are competition, commercial secrecy, profit maximisation and private appropriation.

But these truisms are not enough. For how can we persuade people that there is a finite limit to what we can consume when we have already passed the sustainable levels of depletion and exploitation of so many resources? There are already too many cars in the richest capitalist states. Our waters, our air, our aquifers are already too polluted. Biodiversity is already massively depleted, such that many ecosystems are extinct or scarcely viable.

How can we persuade better off workers (and worse off workers who can only dream!) that another car, another foreign holiday, another twist of the ratchet of gross out consumerism just means our children will

inherit a polluted wasteland.

Well ... that last question also contains the kernel of the answer we need.

For it is our alienation as workers, as producers, that makes us choose the endless round of consumption. It is the stifling of our creativity, the tedium, the lack of control, the squashing of our personalities, the endless repetition in our working lives, that drives us towards compulsive entertainment, and endless expensive purchases, to satisfy much deeper frustrated needs.

In a world in which driving our car may be the most complex, skilful and powerful thing we do in our lives, then why would we want to use a bus or train?

Capitalism needs to sell to survive. And our alienation drives us to need to purchase in order to feel good. It is a devil's bargain. As Alan Roberts remarked of the United States (in his wonderful book *The Self Managing Environment*, 1979):

"It is a remarkable tribute to the success of the consumerist structure and its dominant values that millions are willing to sacrifice double the time needed for a reasonable livelihood, when the surplus time is rewarded by commodities and services which were not felt as mass needs even a few decades before".

The corollary of this is that "ecological harmony cannot be achieved as long as the producers lack control over their working life, for the substitute satisfactions required to "appease" them will be of an environmentally destructive kind."

The fight in the workplace against the tyranny of capitalist management "the dictatorship of capital" — lies at the root of the fight for a sustainable society. "It is that exploited, alienated and relatively powerless period, the working day, which reduces us to settling for commodity satisfaction in our 'free time'".

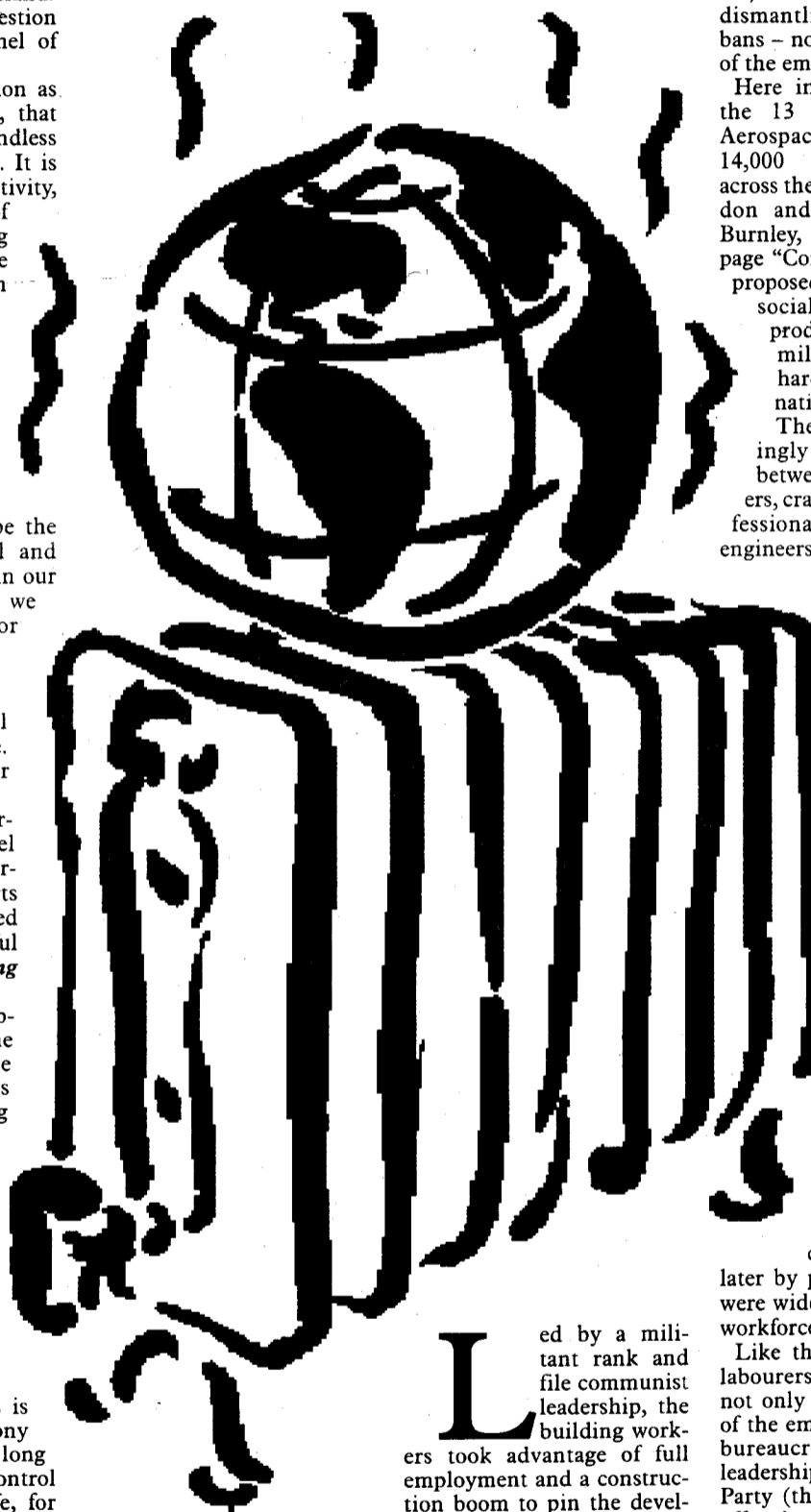
The fight for self-management for all producers lies at the heart of both socialism and green politics. It is not just part of the solution. It is its centre.

But where, in this desper-

ate period of defeat and retreat for the working class movement, can we find the examples to inspire us?

Just recall the famous "Green Bans" which shocked Australian developers and capitalist politicians 25 years ago.

The Builders Labourers Federation, in New South Wales, responding to pleas from threatened communities, instigated a series of Green Bans from 1971 to 1975 against the destruction of bushland and against social building projects which damaged working class areas and destroyed environmental assets.



led by a militant rank and file communist leadership, the building workers took advantage of full employment and a construction boom to pin the developers to the wall. Over 40 Green Bans were imposed by the BLF alone, and the bulldozer drivers' union was involved as well. Work on destructive projects was simply and effectively blocked.

Clear rank and file democracy in the union, with rotation of office and frequent mass meetings, held off any counter attack by union bureaucrats for 4 years.

Vital alliances were made with environmentalists, middle class activists, and militant neighbourhood groups. In the end, it was the victory of the right wing federal union leadership over the local rank and file union officials — by brutal force

majeure — that caused the dismantling of the green bans — not the direct victory of the employers.

Here in Britain, in 1976, the 13 unions at Lucas Aerospace, organising a 14,000 strong workforce across the country from London and Hertfordshire to Burnley, researched a 1000 page "Combine Plan" which proposed the production of socially responsible products instead of the military and space hardware of the multinational was known.

The unions painstakingly created unity between unskilled workers, craft workers, and professionally trained engineers.

They drew up a list of 150 products that the factories ought to be making, from kidney machines and equipment for spina bifida kids, to a diesel electric, low pollution car, and an energy conserving low pollution heat pump.

They devised products for third world countries, and used appropriate technology.

On each of the 17 Lucas Aerospace sites, proposals were thrashed out by shop stewards' committees, and

later by project groups, and were widely discussed in the workforce.

Like the Sydney builders' labourers, they were faced not only with the resistance of the employers, but by the bureaucratic trade union leaderships and the Labour Party (then in power), who offered vaguely radical words but refused to endorse or resource their Plan.

The Plan was provoked by the threat of mass redundancies as government

orders dried up. As such, it combined the most basic trade union defence function with a far sighted but practical plan to break out of the constraints of the capitalist market and to become accountable to real popular needs and oppressed groups.

It took several years of manoeuvring by government and employers for the power of this huge self-management initiative to be

marginalised, and its memory still resonates today.

And we should not forget that the great advances of Taylorism and Fordism in the development of fast, mass production lines, were made only after prolonged and intense struggles with the workforce over many years. Their success, in the end, was only won when massive wage increases were offered with which workers could satisfy consumption dreams. The devil's bargain was made.

The Green Party ignore the struggle in the workplace, regarding it — in some post-Fordist sense — as no longer a place where the working class has power (if indeed, they accept the notion of class politics at all). But the direct action of the green movement, led by militants of Earth First and Reclaim the Streets, and other groupings, seeks closer and closer links with trade unionists in struggle.

In doing so they move far more consistently towards an understanding that it is capitalism which must be replaced, not some vague anti social phenomenon called industrialism.

Of course, in some final sense, we all — not just workers — suffer from the monstrous effects of consumer capitalism, but — in the real world — many rich and selfish people benefit deeply from pillaging our world, and will wage bloody and genocidal wars rather than give up those privileges.

It is the working class — the class of those of us who produce — whose alienation continuously reinforces the system: but this same class also holds the keys to the new world.

It is in the fight against that alienation and powerlessness in the workplace, the fight for control, and ultimately for self management, that we will build the vision of alternative satisfactions, of human community and creative effort, necessary to break the devil's bargain of consumer capitalism.

At Seattle, the labour unions joined with third world campaigners, western anti-debt groups, and environmental activists in a carnival of revolt against this nightmare world.

That embryonic alliance of working people worldwide is the key to the future of green politics. WE WANT CONTROL! WE WANT OUR WORLD BACK before those bastards turn it into a toxic pig's trough!

**The homeland
calls us!**

HURT BY what transpires on the land of Palestine with the weakening and disparagement of the people together with the forgoing of their rights, we, as ordinary people driven by our national identification and concern, address you on behalf of working together to correct the situation we have arrived at.

After the Oslo agreements, the Palestinian leadership spoke of a state with Jerusalem as its capital, the return of the refugees and the displaced, the dismantling of settlements, the liberation of prisoners, and the preparing of the economic groundwork to become the Singapore of the entire region. Some were deceived, and celebrated in the streets by what they claimed was victory.

Yet, after six years of Oslo, more lands are robbed while settlements expand, the conspiring against the issue of refugees accelerates behind the scenes, and Palestinian jails close their doors on our own sons and daughters.

Jerusalem has not returned, and Singapore has not arrived. The people have been divided into two groupings: the select who rule and steal, and the majority which complains and searches for someone to save it.

It is a frightening sequence of deception and lies which will be deeply harmful and ruinous in the final settlement negotiations.

In addition to this, the Palestinian Authority has followed a horrifying policy of corruption, humiliation and exploitation of the Palestinian people, as though the Oslo agreement was a trading of the homeland for the affluence of the corrupted in the Palestinian Authority.

The president of the PNA has widely opened the doors for opportunists to spread corruption throughout the Palestinian community.

Economic conditions have deteriorated, community relations have weakened and moral and ethical standards have loosened. Health, education and judiciary institutions have been brought to ruin.

The danger bell must sound in every village, city and refugee camp, in every bend and corner, and even in every shop, house and office. The homeland is being sold and the people are being let down and crushed.

Let us stand together against this tyranny and corruption. The injustice can only be stopped by the collective efforts of the deprived. And the oppressor can only be stopped by the tenacity of believers in change.

**The bitter fruits
of Oslo peace**

Roland Rance

ASSASSINATED Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, the architect of the Oslo agreement, was characteristically blunt when he explained his support for transferring policing of the Palestinians under Israeli occupation from the Israeli army to the PLO.

Yasser Arafat, he explained, would be able to control the Palestinians because he would rule without restraint – without the High Court (which had ensured a modicum of respect for the rule of law) and without the human rights groups (which had struggled to ensure that human rights were respected despite the military occupation).

It becomes ever clearer that the Palestinian Authority, in alliance with its Israeli and US sponsors, is admirably fulfilling the role which Rabin allocated it.

Respected Palestinian human rights organisations which previously worked to expose the crimes of Israeli occupation, now devote an increasing proportion of their time to opposing the offences of the PA.

Under pressure from Israel, the PA has harassed and repressed Islamist and leftist groups, showing little regard for any legal constraints. Lawyers, civil rights workers and journalists have also suffered from the arbitrary brutality of the dozens of independent Palestinian security agencies.

In many cases, the Palestinian courts have ordered the release of people arbitrarily arrested but the prisoners remain in prison. The Attorney General resigned over 18 months ago, in protest



It's not just the Israeli Zionists who are denying Palestinians democratic rights

at the refusal of security forces to carry out his orders.

In 1997, the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) called for the resignation of all of Arafat's ministers, following an investigation into corruption; none has resigned. Tales of corruption abound; it has become clear that many officials see the PA as a temporary money-making scam rather than a state-in-waiting.

Palace

At the pinnacle of this system is Arafat himself, with his palace in Gaza and his slush fund in an Israeli bank. Ironically, this fund,

based on a levy on all goods entering or leaving the PA areas, has been set up in order to enable Arafat, if expelled by the Palestinian masses, to set up an Israeli-backed government in exile and to wage a struggle to return.

Popular discontent at this situation came to a head at the end of November, with the publication of a declaration by twenty prominent Palestinian leftists – academics and political activists, including nine members of the PLC.

Other signatories included Basam Shaka'a, former mayor of

Nablus who lost both of his legs in a bomb attack by Israeli terrorists in 1980; Ahmed Qatamesh, released from an Israeli prison last year after more than five years internment without trial; and Marxist economist Adel Samara.

Arafat's response was to order the arrest of nine of the signatories, and to place two under house arrest.

The nine PLC members were threatened with the loss of their parliamentary immunity, and two of them – including 68-year-old former agriculture minister Abdel Jawad Salah – were severely beaten by members of the Palestine security forces.

The arrests drew widespread attention to the original statement, and to its complaints against the practices of the PA.

Several hundred Palestinians, including many who have not previously publicly criticised Arafat's regime, signed a statement calling for the immediate release of the detainees and concluding: "the agreements so far signed with Israel have utterly failed to secure Palestinian rights or to stop the continued assault on the Palestinian people from without."

"Palestinian national aspirations cannot be achieved in the absence of a fully democratic and open political system and no agreements signed with Israel will be legitimate unless they represent a genuine, broad-based national consensus.

"Hence, new free and fair elections are an urgent requirement."

All of the prisoners have now been released on bail. But the threat of prosecution, and of violence from the authorities, remains.

As Adel Samara concludes in a letter to Socialist Outlook, the Palestinian democratic opposition is weak. The task of building a genuine Palestinian left, which is the only way to lead to the liberation of Palestine from Israeli military, political and economic occupation, is more urgent than ever.

**Lessons from Bayan Al-Ishrein
(The Petition of the Twenty)**

Dr. Adel Samara

When Ramallah was put under PA control, many Palestinians visited the jail where Israelis had tortured them. I did not. I was not sure that I would not be arrested again – in the same place where I had sat as a prisoner five times between 1963-1978.

Now it has happened. Once more, in late November this year, I found myself in Ramallah jail – and not as a guest of honor.

In its response to the Manifesto of the Twenty, the PA appeared panicky-stricken. It is strange enough to arrest people for voicing their political and social ideas. The PA, however, made an even more dangerous mistake when it pushed its supporters to demonstrate on its behalf in the centre of Ramallah. In that "loyalist" demonstration, dozens of masked youth shot in the air.

The next day Dr. Mu'awiyya Al-Masri, a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), was shot in the leg. A few days later, the Palestinian Secret Security gave a beating to PLC member Abdel Jawad Saleh. Let us suppose – against the evidence – that the PA itself did not order the attacks. Even so, by allowing reckless shooting at its demonstration, the PA encourages its supporters to take the law in their own hands.



Arafat – and friend

The PA's extreme reaction was counterproductive, giving our Manifesto much more publicity than it would otherwise have had. What could have been an isolated action by twenty personalities became the centre of public discussion.

PA officials claimed we were the pawns of Syrian propaganda, although none of us respect any current Arab regime. Activists on the Palestinian Left refrained from taking an unambigu-

ous stand on the matter. Instead, they aired the notion that some of us were merely seeking attention or trying to pressure the PA to silence us by giving us posts. I strongly believe that if a revolutionary intellectual wants to stay independent, he or she must never be bound materially to the regime. In my case, such a danger does not exist: even the Palestinian academic world has black-listed me as a Marxist/nationalist.

Certain lessons should be drawn from the events surrounding the appearance of the Manifesto:

First: In the course of taking power in the Territories, the Palestinian leadership had to make the transition from military body to political organisation. The PA, nonetheless, clings to the old military mentality. It must come to understand, however, that unlike military cadres, our society in the West Bank and Gaza does not depend upon it for a livelihood. We are not an item on a payroll. Accordingly, it is the PA, as a regime, that needs to prove its competence to the people – not vice-versa.

As a corollary: our Palestinian people must realise that the national struggle cannot be limited to the military level. The Manifesto is a small

step toward diverting the struggle for liberty to its full social, political and economic aspects.

Second: Much criticism has been directed toward the twenty signers from those who support the Manifesto. Some note that more people should have had the chance to sign. This is correct. It is a bitter fact, however, that the Manifesto was launched by a mere twenty individuals because the Palestinian opposition is so weak. A handful of people did the job of the political parties.

Third: We must confront our socio-economic realities. Economically dependent regimes, like the PA, do not find it necessary to breed democracy and basic liberties, whereas a modern developed economy can scarcely keep growing without them.

In weak, under-industrialised nations, the regime tends to use tyranny in order to mask its economic incompetence.

Given a lack of civil and democratic rights, other subjective factors can help fill the need, such as an active intelligentsia, an opposition press, and education. The Manifesto was an attempt to introduce such a factor. Our efforts will remain straws in the wind, however, until there are strong opposition parties to back them up.

Which way is PUP moving?

While I would agree that the recent Scottish Socialist Party weekend school was on the whole a worthwhile event (SO 30), the handling of the Irish discussion did give concern to some SSP members, and in particular the involvement of Billy Hutchison, officially leader of the Progressive Unionist Party and unofficially leader of the paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force.

Hutchison made some incredible statements, e.g. he claimed that the civil rights movement in the 60s had been "hijacked into a campaign for Catholic rights", and that traditionally Protestants had been pressurised into taking low-paid jobs while

unemployed Catholics were better off.

He described himself as a "Carsonite Unionist", and rewrote history by claiming that the reason conscription was never extended to Northern Ireland was because so many volunteered.

Interestingly, he did come close to admitting that the UVF had had security force collaboration in the past, and that the "Red Hand Commandos" were their pseudonym.

I feel that the PUP is not a serious socialist development, but has some potential to develop towards fascism.

**Campbell McGregor,
Glasgow Kelvin SSP**



Writeback

We welcome readers' letters on any topic. Letters over 400 words may be cut for space reasons.

Write to Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU. email: outlook@gn.apc.org

Will Yeltsin's gamble pay off?

Veronica Fagan
WHEN BORIS Yeltsin made his New Year's Eve announcement that he was standing down in favour of his apparent Putin, the British press claimed that this was a complete surprise to everyone. Well this scarcely inspires confidence in the extent to which the various correspondents had been seriously following the situation either in Moscow or Chechnya.

It is true that for years rather than months Yeltsin had hung tenaciously on to power despite being a physical and political wreck. But the best chance that Yeltsin had to ensure he could hand over the reins of power to his chosen successor came precisely at this moment.

The recent parliamentary elections saw a relatively strong showing for the "Bear" coalition put together by Yeltsin's supporters. But whether this would be enough to ensure the election of Putin as their presidential candidate is much less certain. After all, they received less than 25 per cent of the vote while 50 per cent is necessary to elect the President.

Moreover the coalition itself was cobbled together without a coherent programme or common goals - other than the promotion of its members.

If the political or economic situation begins to unravel further there is no guarantee that the coalition will remain intact - particularly if Putin himself is under fire and his Presidential aspirations no longer seem a certainty.

At the moment that Yeltsin made his dramatic announcement, the brutal war in Chechnya remained popular, bolstered both by the Great Russian chauvinism that is one of the bitter legacies of Stalinism, and by the media black-out as to what is actually happening on the ground.

This resulted in high opin-

ion poll showings for Vladimir Putin, very much seen as the architect of this war.

But now Putin is well aware that the cracks are already beginning to show as war casualties rise and it becomes more difficult to hide these from the Russian public.

That is certainly why he has brought the Presidential election forward from its June date to March 26.

Whether this will be soon enough remains to be seen. Stories are breaking as we go

to press that Russian military commanders have accepted cash bribes of £3,500 - and a wide screen television - in return for not bombing a number of Chechen villages. In other areas it is claimed that underpaid officers had stopped attacks in return for food!

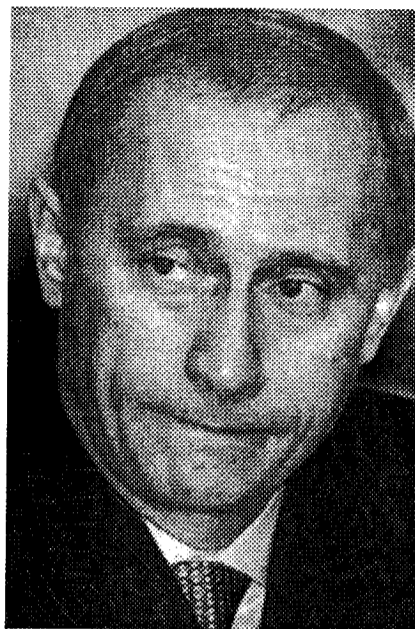
Stories of serious levels of desertion are beginning to circulate. So much for the morale of the Russian troops.

Putin has recognised which way the wind is blowing by making a speech on January 15 in which he sought to lower the expectations of the Russian people over the war against Chechnya. He has admitted that mistakes have been made, and not only by his predecessor and, unlike Yeltsin, has offered no deadline for victory.

"Step by step"

The war will go on "step by step" he said. When it end "will depend on military expediency".

Whether this is preparing for the possibility that Russia will be unable to completely subordinate Chechnya for a second time round this decade remains to be seen. It



Was Putin put in at the right time?

is certainly not clear that the sort of non-solution that was agreed at the end of the last Chechen war would again be acceptable in Grozny.

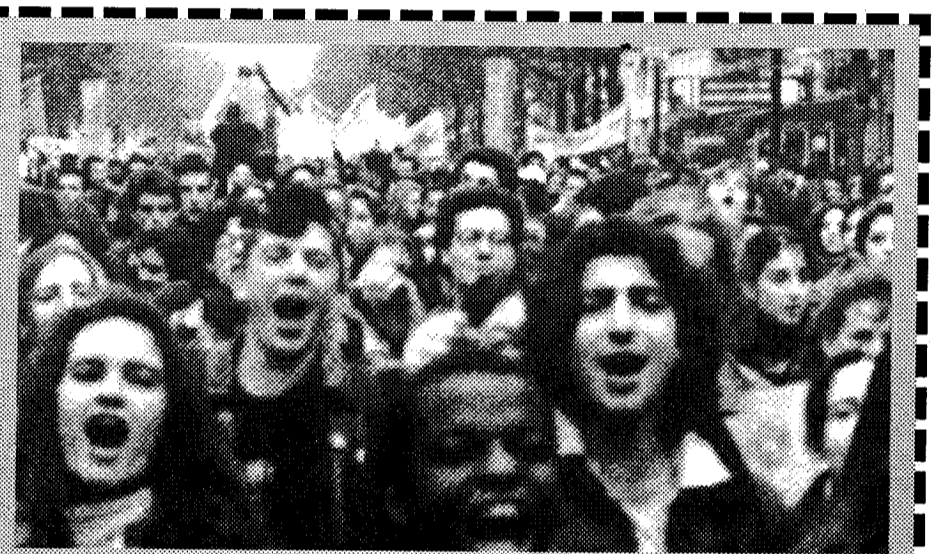
Economy

Nor are Putin's concerns restricted to the situation in Chechnya. The economic situation in Russia itself remains a major problem.

There is no doubt that the major political forces in Russia are deeply committed to marketisation and privatisation - they differ only on the tactics of how quickly it is possible to carry this out without risking a serious back lash from the Russian working class.

Much of the other jockeying is about which political formation promises the biggest slice of the cake to which particular individual.

But if the war in Chechnya goes sour, more attention will be paid at home to the desperate situation of people at home and whether they will continue to believe politicians who year in year out have promised them a share in the supposed glitter of capitalism while their real situation becomes worse and worse



Socialist OUTLOOK

Where we stand

IN THE NINETIES, millions of women and men have taken part in mobilisations against the evils of capitalism and the bureaucratic dictatorships. This reflects the fact that humanity face widening dangers. Ecological, military, social and economic devastation faces millions of people.

Many more people recognise the barbaric nature of capitalism. In a situation where the inability of the social democratic and communist parties to provide socialist solutions is becoming clearer, the task of creating new leaderships remains ahead.

Socialist Outlook is written and sold by socialists committed to this struggle. We are the British supporters of the world-wide marxist organisation, the Fourth International. We stand for the revolutionary transformation of society and a pluralist, socialist democracy world wide.

The overall goal which we pursue is the emancipation of all human beings from every form of exploitation, oppression, alienation and violence.

Socialism must be under the control of ordinary people, democratic, pluralist, multi-party, feminist, ecologist, anti-militarist and internationalist. It must abolish wage slavery and national oppression.

The working class is the backbone of unity among all the exploited and oppressed. The working class and its allies must uncompromisingly fight against capitalism and for a clear programme of action in order to gradually acquire the experience and consciousness needed to defeat capitalism at the decisive moment of crisis.

The movements of women, lesbians and gay men, and black people to fight their particular forms of oppression make an essential contribution to the struggle for a different society. They are organised around the principle "None so fit to break the chains as those who wear them".

The whole working class needs to fully commit itself to these struggles. Furthermore we fight for a strategic alliance between workers and these organisations - an alliance which respects their legitimate autonomy.

By building simultaneously revolutionary organisations in each country and a revolutionary international, we aim to guide and encompass the global interests of the workers and oppressed. By building a united struggle against exploitation and oppression we aim to ensure the survival of the human race. If you think this is worth fighting for, and you like what you read in *Socialist Outlook*, why not join us? Drop a line to us at **PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU**, and we'll be in touch.

What's On

January

Saturday 22

Bloody Sunday March, 12 noon, Whitehall Place, London.

National Civil Rights Movement Conference Sheffield

All London March Against Racist Police Frame-up and Murder, Tottenham Assemble 12.00 noon Wood Green Common (Wood Green Tube Station)

Wednesday 27

Public meeting on Chechnya 7.30pm, Conway Hall, London Tony Benn, Chris Har-

man, Liz Davies, Peter Gowan

February

Wednesday 2

Public Debate: How can we save the planet? Speakers Dave Bangs (Socialist Outlook) and Green Party speaker, 7.30pm, Oxford Town Hall, St Aldates

Saturday 5

Demonstration against Russian aggression in Chechnya, Central London

Saturday 26

Conference against Privatisation called by Greenwich UNISON & 20 other branches

NATFE HQ, Britannia St, London WCI 10-4pm

National Demonstration in London in support of Mumia Abu-Jamal

Sunday 27

Campaign for a Democratic UNISON Conference - which way forward for UNISON?, 10.30-4pm, London (phone Fred on 0181 455 5805 for details)

March

Thursday 23

Lobby of the High Court in support of the Campsfield Nine, 9.30 am

Socialist

A monthly marxist review. No 31. February 2000. 50p

Outlook

Chechens defy Russian war machine



A lone survivor walks the shattered streets of Grozny

Sheila Malone

JUST BEFORE Christmas, Russian generals and politicians alike were predicting a sharp, swift end to the war against Chechnya by the New Year. Now, four months into the conflict, their forces have become bogged down.

Both military and civilian casualties are mounting, army morale has plummeted, and the Chechens

Yeltsin's gamble: see inside, p19

are staging successful counter attacks.

The official figures for Russian soldiers killed so far is 600, but the anti war movement there puts it at over

3,000.

With the savage, indiscriminate and continuous bombing of the capital Grozny and other Chechen towns, civilian casualties must be

still higher.

At the beginning of the war an estimated 50,000 people were still trapped in the besieged and devastated city, without food, water, electricity or fuel supplies. Despite Russian claims of safe corridors to allow them out, very few have managed to escape the relentless bombardment.

Fleeing refugees have also

been subjected to a diktat from Moscow branding all Chechen males between 10-60 years suspected terrorists and therefore liable to detention.

Guerrilla tactics

Chechen fighters are sustaining fewer losses in battle, mainly because not only are they using superior tactics in defending their towns but are, at the same time, enticing the Russians into a guerrilla war in the mountains of the South.

In fact, this is the scenario the Russians most hoped to avoid, with its echoes of their disastrous and for them humiliating defeat by the Chechens in 1994-96.

"Putin's War", as it has been dubbed by the Russian press, was supposed instead to boost the popularity of the new "tough on terrorists" president at home.

At the same time, it was to rehabilitate Russia's standing in the outside world as a still powerful military and political power, able to maintain the unity of the Federation and to police its own spheres of influence.

This after the West's expansion of NATO to include the former Soviet satellites of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic and its war against Yugoslavia, during which Russia was marginalised.

If Russia loses control of Chechnya, it also loses control of the present and vitally important oil pipeline

from the Caspian. Here again, the USA has been planning to cut Russia out by proposing a new pipeline to go instead through Turkey.

At the start of the war, some Chechens, disillusioned with the present Grozny regime and dreading more bloodshed, were resigning themselves to Russian occupation. Now the brutality of the invaders has turned the majority against them, and more and more are once again joining the guerrillas.

Mothers

In Russia, protest against this present war has previously been small. Now, the anti-war movement has re-emerged, including such groups as the Soldiers' Mothers' Committees, who are currently claiming a death toll of over 5,000 Russian soldiers, with another 6,000 wounded.

(In the 1994-96 war Russian women organised and linked up with Chechen women to find their missing sons and call for an end to the conflict).

The Russian media has also begun to criticise the growing casualties and apparent blunders of the military, and politicians such as Yavlinski and Zyuganov have voiced criticisms.

Internationally, London, Warsaw, Madrid, Paris and Beirut have all seen protests against the war, and opposition continues to grow.

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