

Socialist

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OUTLOOK

- 25% vote for Blair manifesto
- 81% say no to NHS privatisation



**This is no
mandate
to sell off
our services!**

RMT train crew to strike

Greg Tucker - RMT train crew national secretary

RMT train crew have been called out on strike to defend the safety role of train guards. Ballots on all but two of the train companies produced an overwhelming majority of RMT members in favour of industrial action.

Two strike days have been set - June 25 and July 4 - whilst further discussions take place with the train companies.

Since privatisation there have been several attempts to downgrade the safety role of guards. The train companies' priority has been to have guards collect tickets or sell food rather than look after the safety of the train.

Railtrack Safety is responsible for the Rule Book, which regulates all railway workers actions. Whilst formally independent, they have done the bidding of the train companies and rewritten the rules to suit this drive to commercialise the safety aspects of the guards' job.

Now the RMT is demanding they return the rules to the position where the guard is fully in charge of all train safety.

Despite the threat of serious disruption, faced with companies wanting to continually trim safety margins to enhance profits, passengers have shown that they support the rail-workers stance.

This dispute has been much delayed. It was called off eighteen months ago against the wishes of the members, and forced back on after a rank and file revolt. Then ballots were mysteriously messed up so that no action was possible until after the general election. But the RMT membership is clearly committed to winning this dispute.

Train companies realise this and whilst threatening legal action to halt the dispute they have been desperately trying to find individual compromises.

This time round the RMT leadership needs to hold firm until all our demands are met.

Rail union witch-hunt deepens

In the run up to this month's RMT Annual General Meeting the right-wing leadership of the RMT Executive has deepened its attack on the left with an attempt to have this year's President, Phil Boston, removed from office.

Losing on a tied vote they were forced to back down. But they will still be demanding of AGM delegates that they punish LUL RMT Regional Secretary, Pat Sikorski, by barring him from union office for five years.

Phil and Pat's "crime" is that they have been trying to defend the union's democracy. After last year's AGM decided to call for a rerun of the election to one of the Executive places, the Executive refused to implement the decision.

A subsequent Special General Meeting tried to discuss this blatant breach of democracy but the then union President closed down the meeting without debate.

As chair of the Standing Orders Committee, Pat was instructed by delegates to circulate details of all this to RMT Branches. Following

these instructions has led to him now being threatened.

By calling into question the Executive actions, new President, Phil Boston, has himself been threatened.

It is clear that the right are increasingly concerned for the future of the RMT.

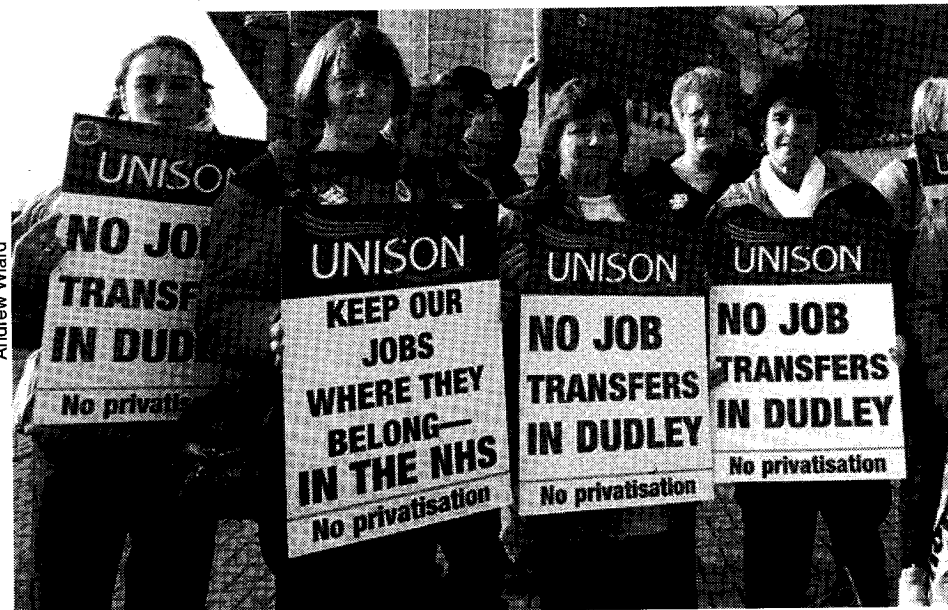
With discontent with new Labour growing, and the membership wanting to see action to defend themselves from the deepening attacks of the private rail and bus companies, they face an uncertain time.

General Secretary Jimmy Knapp is seriously ill and may retire early. Senior Assistant General Secretary Vernon Hince is also in his last term of office.

So the possibility of Crow, Sikorski and others taking over the top positions in the union has to be dealt with. Rather than try to win the arguments the right is resorting to a witch-hunt.

AGM delegates face a simple choice. They should reject the right's agenda, vote to restore union democracy and defend Phil and Pat from further attack.

UNISON's Blairite leaders crack down as the left unites



Fred Leplat (Islington UNISON in a personal capacity)

The agenda for Labour's second term, unveiled during the election campaign, will put the leadership of Britain's largest trade union, UNISON, on the spot at the union's Annual Conference from June 18 in Brighton.

The report from the Institute for Public Policy Research, leaked in *The Guardian*, proposes a dramatic increase in the provision of public services by private contractors in health and schools.

In the NHS, the private sector could provide health and community services for primary care, and in schools, contractors would be able to provide services other than on an emergency basis as is currently the case. Former school standards Minister Estelle Morris repeated this last proposal at the National Association of Head Teachers' conference.

The IPPR report also proposes that the Audit Commission sets "diversity targets" for local authorities to increase the provision of services by private contractors.

The report concludes "who should own the underlying assets in public services is increasingly a second order issue". However numerous opinion polls, including one commissioned by UNISON just before the election, demonstrate that the priorities of new Labour and the electorate are rather different.

Despite this major redrawing of boundaries between the private and public sector, UNISON has remained silent. The leadership calls on members to vote Labour because it has shown that it can manage the economy.

But the New Labour government has not supported any of the key policies of the union. On opposition to pri-

vatation, the fight for a decent living wage, the linking of pensions with earnings, or raising the top rate of income tax, New Labour has ignored UNISON's agenda.

Sidelined

This sidelining of UNISON, like other unions, is happening despite the deep links that it has with the Labour Party.

It has members on the Party's NEC and Maggie Jones, the chair of the Party is also UNISON's Director of Policy and Public Affairs. UNISON financially sup-

ports scores Labour constituencies. Some of these have MPs who, like Jeremy Corbyn, Diane Abbott and John McDonnell, loudly support UNISON's policies. But most of the others are either silent on the issues the union wants to promote, or actively opposed to them.

Critical

Within UNISON, there has usually been quite a critical relationship between most active branches and the (unelected) national officers and the majority of the NEC. Branches have been obliged to fight the national attacks from government on their own, employer by employer.

There is no strategy for a national campaign, including industrial action, against privatisation or low pay.

The Dudley Hospital branch conducted a valiant fight forcing the postponement for 6 months the transfer of NHS support staff to private contractors as part of the deal for a new PFI hospital. They took a series of well-supported days and

weeks of strike action and had deep support in the community. But, on their own they eventually could not stop the transfer.

UNISON's national campaigns such as that for a "Living Wage" or "Positively Public" in defence of public services, have not fired up the enthusiasm of the membership.

Branch stewards and members know that without some very loud criticism of Labour and a program of industrial action, then the Labour government will continue to roll through the programme of privatisations.

Trap

UNISON's national officials are caught in a trap: they do not want to be openly critical of Labour

and therefore cannot envisage actions that could deliver improvements to members.

It is this lack of strategy that is allowing a vacuum to develop at a local and regional level which the left is stepping into and gaining credibility.

It has also encouraged the left to come together and launch a "United Left" combining the forces of the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic UNISON, members of the SWP and other individuals.

The departure of Rodney Bickerstaffe and Rita Donaghy, the two most able and charismatic national figures of the union, has also left the "establishment" of the union in a much weaker position.

The strengthening influence of the left is provoking a paranoid response from the establishment. There is a knee-jerk reaction against motions from left branches.

Local activists are being disciplined, and expelled, on spurious allegations through unjust disciplinary rules. The branch secretary of Bolton is appealing against an expulsion, for amongst other things "misappropriation of funds" because a ballot had to be rerun as a list supplied to the regional office for the first ballot had innocently included retired members.

The re-running of the ballot, which was successful, meant the national union incurred additional costs, and the branch secretary had therefore, in the eyes of the bureaucracy, misappropriated funds!!!

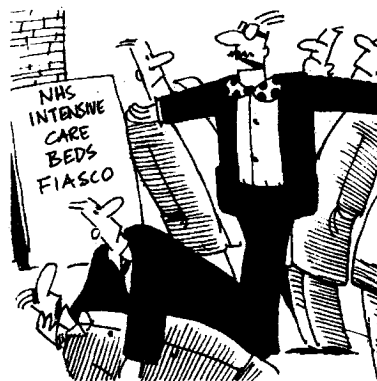
The defensiveness of the establishment is extending to tighter control of minority views in the leading bodies of the union. The May NEC ruled that "collective responsibility" had to be exercised by the NEC.

This means that NEC members cannot represent members facing disciplinary action by the union, or step off the platform to speak against NEC policy.

The tightening of the screw on the left at branch and national level sets in motion a dangerous dynamic similar to that which has occurred in the Labour Party: democracy is extinguished and critics vilified.

A vigorous response must be mounted against the lack of strategy and the attacks on democracy.

The United Left needs to set an example by being open and democratic, develop serious programmes for national campaigns, be the best builder of the union, and the most loyal defender of members and public services.



'Let me through, I'm a Labour spin doctor'

Second term blues

Stand by to repel privateers!

Blair's most coveted prize, a second term with another massive majority, has been secured - with a "landslide" victory on the back of just 25 percent of the electorate.

Blair has completed his cull of ministers, humbling ousted Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, dumping the servile but ineffectual Chris Smith, ignoring the irrelevant Frank Dobson, sacking the tainted Keith Vaz, and promoting the most abject, right wing Blairite hacks - Jack Straw, David Blunkett, Patricia Hewitt, and Estelle Morris.

The new ministerial appointees and those staying in their former posts will gladly pocket thumping pay increases, and then join with MPs from all parties in voting through another huge 11 percent increase in MPs' salaries.

But while millions of Labour voters were persuaded, many against their better judgement, to give Labour the benefit of the doubt and a second term to deliver radical change,

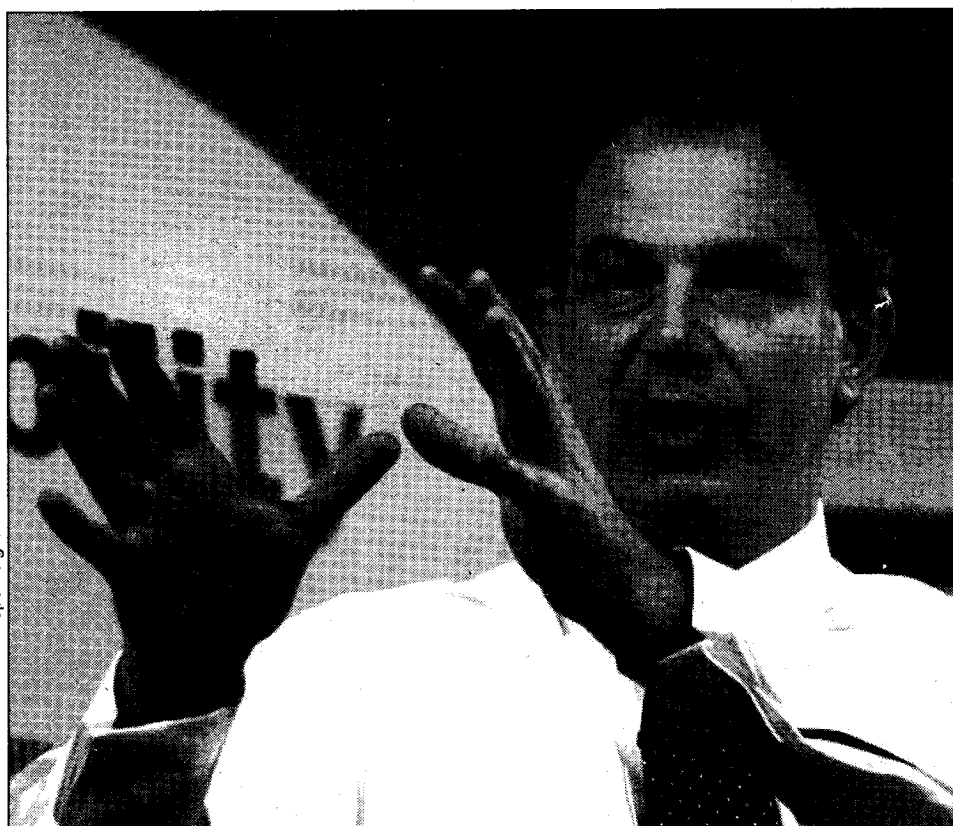
it is unlikely they will be too pleased with the menu of policies that are coming down the line.

The first hints of measures to come centre on a crackdown on price fixing - to help make Britain the "most competitive marketplace in the world".

Blunkett is predicted to be even more right wing a Home Secretary than Jack Straw, and reportedly has plans to get even tougher on asylum seekers and to step up Labour's ill-conceived "war on drugs".

Morris, along with Alan Milburn who remains as Health Secretary, will aim to push through Labour's plans for private firms to run schools and hospitals, while Stephen Byers now at Transport will combine subsidies to private rail operators with privatisation of the London tube - and a new round of road-building!

Already union leaders are doing their best



Report digital

Blair may think he has the entire population in his power: but the votes show otherwise

to emit a menacing growl to frighten Blair off any new wave of privatisation. But the warnings from the GMB's John Edmonds, TGWU leader Bill Morris and UNISON's Dave Prentis sound more like a whimper of dogs wanting to be let back in after four years in the cold.

These 'leaders', who have already been cautioned by TUC chief John Monks not to risk another "winter of discontent", may succeed in holding back strike action: but Blair's second term seems certain to provoke a new, intensified level of debate in the trade union movement over the traditional political link with Labour.

Postal workers have spelled out strict conditions for continued CWU support to Labour, while the fire fighters have changed the rules

to enable support for other parties.

Even UNISON, whose communications chief Maggie Jones is currently chair of New Labour and a dedicated agent of Millbank, felt obliged to register its political displeasure at the government's refusal to compromise with the Dudley Hospital strikers fighting privatisation - and, according to Dave Prentis, cut its election donation to Labour by £250,000.

The fight is now on to match every Labour attack on the public sector and working class with a challenge to its political control in the trade unions, and public campaigns to spell out a socialist alternative.

It may be a second term with a massive majority, but a vigilant, active left can make sure that it is not "business as usual" for the Blairites.

Tories: the unspeakable versus the unelectable

GON, admit it! You secretly wanted Ann Widdecombe to fight for - and win - the Tory leadership, to ensure that the crisis-ridden Party remains for at least another five years in a twilight world of unelectability. We all did.

For socialists, the prospect of total meltdown of the Tory Party as a political vehicle for the aspirations of British capitalism has a real appeal. It is something of a relief to know that it is not just the Labour and trade union movement that is bogged down in a long-running crisis of political leadership.

Not only would a Widdecombe win represent the near extinction of the party that brought us Margaret Thatcher and introduced us to the politics of neo-liberalism, but it would also clear the way for Tony Blair to continue the transformation of New Labour into an open and undisguised party of big business - offering the Socialist Alliance a better chance of winning support in the unions and more disaffected Labour activists.

As we go to press it seems that Widdecombe has thought the better of a doomed challenge and is offering her support to anyone who will stand against front-runner Michael Portillo, the bookies' favourite, and the first to declare himself a candidate.

But despite Portillo's latest unconvincing attempt to ditch his

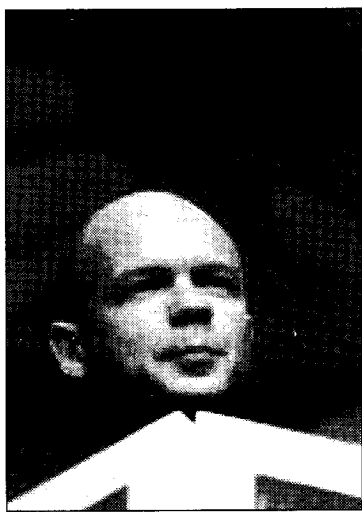


Portillo oozes synthetic sincerity: but who was that bloke on the right?

Thatcherite past and groom himself as a new, "socially inclusive", liberal figure, the Tories are still likely to be faced with the prospect of a Hobson's choice between the unspeakable and the unelectable.

Possible contenders appear to include the bigots' favourite, Iain Duncan Smith, sponsored by Lord Tebbit as a "normal person with a wife and children" in contrast to Portillo's admitted gay past.

A fanatical Eurosceptic Thatcherite, who refused to join John Major's government, and who advocates both little England and



"small state" policies, Duncan Smith would isolate the Tories still further, both from the voters who want improved public services, and from the sections of big business that want Britain to join the Euro.

Another macho challenger thought likely to throw his hat into the ring of the preliminary leadership contest is the little-known former Europe minister David Davis, who appears to have taken naturally to life in shadow politics.

Davis, who raised money to pay his way through university by joining the SAS reservists, has been given the dubious distinction of a glowing endorsement by Alistair Campbell, Tony Blair's Director of

Communications. Campbell has described the obscure, explosives-trained Davis as a D'Artagnan-style figure, "dynamic, serious, clever, tough, and dashing".

Journalists who have worked out who Davis is have not yet been able to identify his political stance, or why he would offer himself as an alternative.

It has even been suggested that Tory party chair Michael Ancram, a languid Scots aristocrat, could come through the middle of the field in the style of Jim Hacker in "Yes, Prime Minister", to play the role of a latter-day Alec Douglas-Home, who led the Tories into their disastrous 1964 election defeat.

But the biggest question of all is whether the only other well-known Tory, former Chancellor Kenneth Clarke, will chance his arm and run as a pro-European alternative, knowing that he is far more popular among the Tory ranks in the constituencies than he is among the fanatically Euro-sceptic ranks of Tory MPs.

Clarke is described as on the "left" of the Conservative Party, but he is the man who brought us the Private Finance Initiative, and the NHS internal market, and as Chancellor tightened the financial screws on health, education and social security. He has never denied an interest in running, but is apparently holding back any decision

until next month, leaving the other hopefuls to sweat it out.

If he were to win the leadership it is certain that the parliamentary Tory party would be convulsed with long-running internecine battles, which will also leave Blair a free hand to strengthen his links with big business.

What is clear from the election results is that as Blair's New Labour Party prepares to mount the campaign to take Britain into the Euro, with the eager support of the biggest multinationals and key sectors of British capitalism, and sets out its stall as the new party of business, the Conservative Party and its ageing membership (average age 64) - have failed to sell Hague's Thatcherite line of xenophobia and implausible tax cuts.

Whoever takes Hague's place in one of the country's least desirable seats vac, the Tories are facing a massive identity crisis.

But as Labour steps in to take over the Tories' historic role, the question is whether the left can sustain and deepen the remarkable unity it achieved in the Socialist Alliance campaign, and continue to project an attractive alternative platform of policies in order to reach out and win far wider layers of trade unionists and Labour supporters, who will increasingly find they have been left behind in Blair's dash to the right.

Active campaigns boost Alliance election effort

Terry Conway

The Socialist Alliance ran a highly dynamic campaign – far outstripping all the other organisations who stood in the General Election in England and Wales.

In a high proportion of constituencies in which the Socialist Alliance stood activists delivered two or even three leaflets through every door, as well as producing the freepost leaflet.

Public meetings were held in the majority of areas, and hundreds of street stalls gave us a high profile. Many local Alliances visited workplaces as well as participating in hustings that were organised by other organisations.

Locally and nationally, the Socialist Alliance participated in a myriad of broader campaigns and showed solidarity with workers in struggle.

We were active in support of postal workers striking against the attacks management meted out to soften them up in advance of privatisation, and on London Underground workers' picket lines.

We were on the streets showing our opposition to Son of Star Wars and the new Terrorism Act and in solidarity with Belgian, French, Spanish and other trade unionists protesting against the closure of Marks and Spencers' European outlets.

Local Socialist Alliance groups were involved in actions in defence of the NHS and education, against the sell off of council housing, in defence of asylum

seekers and in what ever local activity was going on as well as giving local profile to our national policies.

Our election broadcast not only allowed us to get across many of our key political ideas to a wider audience than we would otherwise have done, but also illustrated that our supporters were different from the career politicians of the mainstream parties.

The feedback both from our own supporters and those who phoned in for information subsequently was extraordinarily positive.

We bombarded the media with information about our policies

and activities nationally and locally. It was frustrating that the BBC didn't stick to its own guidelines and give us the coverage they promised – never mind what we merited from the point of view of newsworthiness in a campaign that was usually as dull as ditchwater.

It was particularly irritating that most of the media barons, echoing Millbank's own line, consistently focused on the differences between the SLP and ourselves – despite the absence of Scargill's party from any visible campaigning.

While the Socialist Alliance was not given the serious discussion of our policies and campaigns that was merited, at least in the broadsheets we were mentioned in passing on a number of occasions.

Some of this was a result of paranoia from the Blair leadership which was desperate

to brief against us – but actually succeeded in promoting name recognition for us.

All of this led to hundreds of phone calls, e-mails and letters into the national office as well as many new contacts made on the ground.

Sitting taking calls in the Socialist Alliance office as the Election Broadcast went out and subsequently was exhilarating as well as exhausting. Two thirds of the calls we took were from people who wanted to join up there and then.

A majority of those we spoke to were current or recently departed Labour Party members, furious with the record of the Blair government and the manifesto for the second term.

Many wanted to use the skills they had gained over years of campaigning for the Labour Party to get out an argue for people to support the Socialist Alliance.

Two issues dominated political discussions with callers. A number people supported most of our policies but were not convinced about our stand on asylum seekers.

Sometimes the subsequent discussion seemed productive, but on other occasions stalemate was reached.

While this was initially depressing, on reflection it is not surprising that the weight of the myths and prejudice peddled by the media and the mainstream parties means that one conversation might not be sufficient to undercut the lies.

The answer must be to continue to campaign on



Test of solidarity: Socialist Alliance supporters joined trades unionists from Marks and Spencer branches in France, Belgium and Spain in their march through London – despite the driving rain!

this issue both as the Alliance and through involvement in broader campaigns.

Particularly in the last yendays of the campaign, many wanted to know what our stand was on the question of Europe. It was clear that the Tories' determination bring this issue to centre stage, along with asylum, had an impact on the topics that people wanted to address even though this was not a priority in determining how people voted.

Some were critical of the fact that we had not included our attitude to the single currency in our list of key pledges, although in fairness I don't think anyone could have predicted quite how high profile this debate would become.

Most were convinced when we explained why we opposed the Maastricht convergence criteria, but at the same time distanced ourselves from the "little England" attitude not only of the Tories, but also to some extent of the SLP.

All of this work, nationally and locally meant more political engagement with potential supporters than the other parties even attempted.

And it meant that the Socialist Alliance had to gar-

ner more central resources than it had previously had, as well as persuade activists on the ground to put in an enormous amount of time and effort.

In building on this impressive start for the future, we should learn from some of the things we could have done better.

The logistical effort in producing the national material to the tight timetable we had was enormous – and what suffered was thorough discussion about content.

We didn't engage enough with questions that potential supporters were likely to want answers to. Setting out the Socialist Alliance's own policies is vital – but it is not sufficient.

We should have predicted that there would be a competition to win voters who were breaking from New Labour, and addressed more explicitly the questions that such people wanted answered.

Other than producing one poster stating that the Liberal Democrats supported privatisation – but with nothing to back this up – we didn't challenge the image that Charles Kennedy was able successfully to put forward that his party was a left alternative to New Labour.

Of course many local Alliances took this up through their local activity. In London for example, where the Liberal Democrats were often active campaigning against tube privatisation, we were able to point out that they were supporting privatisation of other services.

But an examination of their record was essentially absent from our national material.

We didn't really deal with the fact that the Greens have a record of winning protest votes. Our manifesto had some positive things to say on the environment, though it needs further development.

Even the priority pledges took up ecological questions

– but in my experience this was not an issue that was actually highlighted on the ground. As well as rectifying these problems, we also need to find ways of engaging with the weaknesses of the Greens' overall platform and their record where they have achieved any influence at local level.

The question of how we responded to the SLP was more difficult, given the fact that the media wanted to bang on about the differences between them and us. We had tried to push for co-operation, but had been met with a blank wall from Scargill.

It is not clear that we could have done very much to shift this situation. But we need to address whether we would have gained from producing something setting out our attitude.

We should look for the future at producing more material which gives details of policy commitments on particular areas or debates with other forces.

A debate surfaced in some areas about the balance between agitation and propaganda.

To what extent was the priority to make sure that every potential voter knew the Socialist Alliance existed, to what extent was it possible and important to debate through the arguments behind the policies – and the record of other parties – with as many people as possible?

This discussion needs to continue, and within the context that while the organisations involved have different practices and traditions, none of us have the blueprint for the most effective way to build the new type of formation that the Socialist Alliance represents, in the particular conditions we find ourselves in today.

There is a commitment from the Executive of the Socialist Alliance to draw together the experiences of best practice in the campaign, and hopefully as well to learn from the weaknesses in order to better prepare us for the future.

Streatham campaign builds firm base

Greg Tucker – SA candidate

Six months ago we were dubious about standing two candidates in Lambeth. Vauxhall was going to be our key target but if things improved we might stand a token candidate in Streatham as well.

In the end we stood in Vauxhall, Streatham and West Norwood as well. And far from being token candidates, the campaigns were a great step forward in building a real base in our community.

Over two thousand people voted for the Alliance across Lambeth (906 in Streatham) and we now have a mailing list of many hundreds who want to get involved with our ongoing activity.

Highlight of the campaign was the front

page of the London *Evening Standard* which asked under a picture of me on a postal workers' picket line – "Where is the rail union official who could be sorting out tomorrow's South West Trains strike? Away picketing for postmen and standing as a far left candidate."

An inside story then detailed my day – starting on a NATFHE picket line, talking to UNISON members, visiting schools before joining the postal picket.

In the end the SWT strike was settled positively in favour of the RMT members and the postal workers got what they wanted.

Our campaign continued to make gains. It is clear that our vote seriously under-represents the support for our views. Rather the drop in the Labour vote of over

four thousand indicates that new Labour's privatisation policies are deeply unpopular.

The decision to stand a candidate has been vindicated. Our task now is to consolidate our gains. We need to be seen as a fighting organisation that stands in elections, rather than an electoral organisation that does some work in between elections.

We aim to launch local campaigns against Labour's second term drive to privatise, and to plan for the future – putting down deeper roots so that we can target seats in next year's council elections.



Greg Tucker

Alliance debates the next steps

Terry Conway

The national executive of the Socialist Alliance held an extremely positive meeting on June 16 to assess the election result and plan for the future.

From the extensive balance sheet discussion, there was overall agreement that the most important thing to come out of the campaign was the strengthening of the Alliance itself. In a situation where new Labour has no mandate to carry through its neo-liberal assault on public services, the Socialist Alliance is determined to play an important role in fighting back at local and national level.

The lead off from Dave Nellist, chair of the Socialist Alliance, was upbeat and was echoed in probably the majority of contributions.

There was some difference of emphasis about how to assess the vote the Socialist Alliance achieved – perhaps not surprising when it had been impossible to set any collective targets during the campaign, leading to some over-optimistic speculation.

Some comrades correctly pointed out that those who were disappointed were often revising upwards their predictions made at the beginning of the campaign.

Other comrades, who had opposed standing so many candidates at the outset, pointed out that it was the scope of the campaign itself which had allowed us to draw in so many people and so much material support.

Other discussions took place on how to better address those who could be won to vote Socialist Alliance in the long term, from the need to address those who see no difference between any of the parties, to those who decided to give Blair one last chance.

There was a feeling that perhaps we didn't respond sharply enough, except through press releases which the media failed to carry, on the shift in the new Labour campaign in the 10 days before the poll to promote themselves as the party that promoted public services.

Many comrades had anecdotes of discussions on stalls, and polling stations with Labour voters who just didn't believe us when we argued that New Labour was committed to privatisation.

But most ended these discussions by saying that these exchanges should be



Alliance condemned Swedish police brutality at Gothenburg

resumed when the record is clear – as Blair's commitment to selling off our services becomes more and more apparent people will remember that it was the Socialist Alliance who campaigned against this.

The Socialist Alliance entered a new phase during the General Election campaign. Now what is necessary is to reshape the organisation so those who have been won to its banner in recent weeks feel that they can have a real input into its decisions.

Initially there seemed to be a difference between the Socialist Party and others about how soon a national conference should be organised. Both Dave Nellist and Clive Heemskirk from the Socialist Party emphasised the need to have a thorough debate on proposals for restructuring the organisation in advance of the conference and to reach as much consensus as possible, which they suggested should mean a late autumn date.

Nellist also explicitly supported the sort of proposals put forward by the SWP's Lindsey German in Socialist Worker as the direction in which the Socialist Alliance needed to move.

This was a very significant development given the fact that the Socialist Party had previously been hostile to any moves to further centralise the Socialist Alliance as a national structure, rather emphasising its federal nature.

This approach was combined with its determination to stand its own candidates in seats which the Alliance had consciously decided not to contest, and very much to control the Socialist Alliance campaigns in many of the areas where it had comrades standing.

All of this, together with the non-attendance of Socialist Party representatives, other than Dave Nellist at national meetings

of the Alliance, had led to speculation that the organisation might pull out completely.

Perhaps the response to the Socialist Alliance campaign has made clear that the only result of them doing so would be to plunge their organisation into a crisis which it would find it hard to recover from.

At the executive itself, it was clear that there was a commitment from all involved to put in the resources necessary to ensure that the national conference was organised in such a way as to allow maximum discussion both in advance and on the day.

In this context, there was agreement to propose the November 3 date to the Liaison committee and to set up a planning committee to develop detailed proposals for the national conference in advance of that meeting.

The meeting also recognised that the executive, which actually has no constitutional status now the election is behind us, has played a very positive role.

It is recommending to the liaison committee on July 14, which will bring together supporters from all local Alliances, that the Executive continues to function on a monthly basis through to the national conference proposed for November 3.

That this recommendation went forward without dissent is a mark of how far things have progressed since last year's conference in Coventry where proposals to create this sort of structure were acrimoniously defeated.

The meeting decided to keep the Socialist Alliance national office open until at least the November conference and set up a fund raising committee to look at the question of financing.

The meeting also agreed a whole series of other proposals ranging from support for a statement opposing police

violence in Gothenburg and support for action against Bush's visit to Chequers next month. Work is also being done to

publish a number of pamphlets – one on privatisation and local government and one on the consequences of European intergration.

Time prevented other discussions developing as much as they were needed on other important issues such as our profile in the trade unions.

There seems to be a general consensus that a conference of supporters in the unions needs to be organised, but so far no flesh has yet been put on these bones. This will be a topic to which future meetings will need urgently to return.

There were only two dissonant interventions in the meeting. The CPGB made a rather muted contribution arguing that the campaign had not sufficiently emphasised "high politics" – by which they presumably meant issues such as abolition of the monarchy!

The Alliance for Workers Liberty unfortunately seemed to want to use the occasion to polemicise about the apparent "low class content" of the campaign.

They produced a lengthy

assessment of the results and prospects for the Socialist Alliance which, while making some correct points was negative in its overall tone.

They argued for example that the average vote of the Alliance at 1.69% across England and Wales was no higher than the average left vote for many years. They then go on to claim that "it is wrong to take too much comfort from the idea that we were bound to do badly 'first time out'".

Not only is this an incorrect assessment of the vote, but one distortion is then used to justify another. No one in the Socialist Alliance thinks that all we have to do is to stand a second time, without learning any lessons from this first campaign and that things will automatically get better.

Many comrades correctly pointed out that votes lag behind support, but at the same time were keen to debate how to improve things for the future. But the real problem with the AWL's

approach is demonstrated by what comes later in their article, a bludgeoning attack on the SWP over the question of canvassing as well as sniping points about work in the trade unions.

The problem here is not in raising a debate about how the campaign should be conducted, but in apparently being more interested in attacking other organisations than having a real exchange of ideas and experiences.

While the AWL are quick to talk about the sectarianism of others the reality is that part of the prerequisite for having the broad democratic debates we need in the Socialist Alliance and more broadly is to create a culture in which debate is about listening not point scoring.

Despite these problems there can be no doubt that the Socialist Alliance is at an exciting stage of its development and there is a determination from its leadership to use this strength to raise both the battle for socialist ideas and the biggest possible opposition to New Labour's Tory policies.



Report digital

Socialists mount Tyneside challenge

SOCIALIST Alliance campaigns on Tyneside challenged government ministers in two of the safest Labour seats in the country.

In Tyneside North, ISG member Pete Burnett (right) opposing Trade Secretary Stephen Byers, fought on the issues of poverty, job insecurity and New Labour's commitment to privatise EVERYTHING.

More than 40 comrades from the SWP, the Socialist Party, the Labour Party and independents took part in canvassing and leafleting the sprawling constituency. North Tyneside takes in the shipyard workers of Howdon on the banks of the Tyne, the leafy middle class area of Forest Hall, derelict estates at Longbenton, and one-time mining villages on the Northumberland border.

We were able to attract many new supporters from canvassing, and appeals for volunteers at public meetings.



In Tyne Bridge SWP member Sam Robson stood in to replace original candidate Terry Rogers, who died in the early stages of the campaign. His large team of mainly SWP members performed extremely well.

SLP candidate and veteran Stalinist Jimmy Fitzpatrick issued a grotesque leaflet

branding the Alliance as 'loony left' and in a reference to Trotsky's murder urged voters to "reject dead ideas from Mexico". Turnout was dramatically down by 8,000 – a clear rejection of Labour's whip Dave Clelland (since sacked) as well as Newcastle's plans to demolish vast areas of West Newcastle to hand the land over to private enterprise.

The results – 324 for Pete and 485 for Sam did not reflect either the opposition to New Labour or the support for our policies that we found on the campaign.

One indication of this was the number of 'spoiled' votes at the North Tyneside count. Several featured more than one cross – beside Byers and the left candidates, mute witness to popular opposition to Labour's betrayals and a reminder that the process of breaking with Labour is only just beginning.

MSF: first shots fired in second term standoff

MSF conference, the first trade union conference to take place after the Election, demonstrated yet again that New Labour has no mandate for privatisation.

The discussion on the NHS was one of the highlights, and General Secretary Roger Lyons felt under pressure to issue a press statement outlining the union's commitment to defend any member's job threatened by privatisation.

This was in contrast to the pronouncements of AEEU leader Ken Jackson's pronouncements at his own union conference in Blackpool – the union with which MSF is soon going to merge.

Against the advice of the top table, conference passed a resolution opposing privatisation of council housing, with new Cabinet Minister Charles Clarke sitting on the platform.

Clarke was clearly riled enough to deviate from his own text to lecture delegates that they misunder-

stood what privatisation meant.

He claimed that the correct definition was the narrow one of charging for services at the point of delivery – but the response from delegates demonstrated that they were not convinced.

Other victories for the left included the decision to affiliate to the ANL and oppose the sanctions and bombing of Iraq.

Unfortunately despite gaining a majority on 5 occasions, delegates were unable to force a debate on the financial scandals surrounding Roger Lyons, or on the witch-hunts faced by activists in London and Ireland.

Successful meetings organised jointly by the Socialist Alliance and the campaign for a democratic union and by Unity Left together with left activists in the AEEU demonstrated that the left is determined to remain organised and strengthen its campaigning as the forthcoming merger approaches.

Step up union fight!

One of the best pieces of media coverage the Socialist Alliance received during the election campaign was a piece in *The Times* business section detailing the impact we were having in the trade unions.

While some of the "facts" in the piece were not actually correct, what was much more significant was the fact that they felt it was necessary to examine what we had achieved and were planning.

Certainly this year's round of trade union conferences has seen important steps forward for the Socialist Alliance.

The decision of the FBU conference to democratise their political fund is the most signifi-

cant decision, with Socialist Alliance candidates playing a pivotal role. A similar resolution won a third of the votes at CWU conference.

At other conferences the Socialist Alliance was able to hold successful fringe meetings, in some cases convincing new people to become involved in its activities.

All this explains why so many Socialist Alliance supporters think it is now time to hold a conference of supporters active in the trade unions to discuss how the build on our success so far, to plan for next year's conferences and discuss our relationship with existing left formations in the unions.



These sinister "bankers" got the message across to hospital staff at Oxford's Radcliffe Infirmary, underlining the logic of the Private Finance Initiative. Their chants of "Patients out, Profits in!" raised smiles all round, and the lobby was covered on local radio stations.

Oxford Alliance wins new layers of supporters

JOHN LISTER WRITES: I was one of those with greatest reservations about the possibilities of running a successful Socialist Alliance campaign in Oxford East. In the event I became the candidate – and was delighted to find that my fears were unfounded.

During a vigorous campaign we managed to expand the list of Alliance supporters and contacts five-fold from the initial 60 or so, drawing around a wide layer of activists from key trade unions, local campaigns, and a number of long-standing Labour Party members.

Our teams of volunteers, which grew from an initial skeleton crew to mobilise dozens on the streets in the final weekends and evenings before the election, raised (and spent!) well over £4,000, distributed 20,000 copies each of two tabloid campaign newspapers other leaflets and a door to door eve of poll leaflet in addition to the free mailshot to every household.

Our street stalls, loudhailers and campaign "battle wagon", a flatbed truck festooned with posters and balloons, got to parts of Oxford East that were otherwise untouched by campaigners from Labour or other parties, none of which organised meetings or much activity at all.

We hit hard issues: we took on – and got the better of – cabinet minister Andrew Smith in a debate in the local paper over PFI in the NHS, challenged Labour's vicious asylum laws, and

called publicly for decriminalisation of cannabis.

We joined campaigners fighting the privatisation of the County's residential homes for the elderly, backed striking postal workers and college lecturers, student protestors, and the local Globalise Resistance event.

We mounted a spoof "capitalist" lobby of one local hospital, but were stopped by security guards from doing the same outside the John Radcliffe. We made official visits to meet low-paid hospital staff and local fire fighters.

708 votes for me as a candidate came despite 274 votes for the almost invisible Scargillite candidate, who waged no campaign, and 1,500 for the left wing Green Party candidate. These figures underline the prospects for a strengthened fighting left in Oxford as the Alliance goes forward to build on the base we have established.

I can only feel sorry for any socialists left in the local Labour Party, who will have had to sit on their hands during the whole election period, with nothing more political to do than dole out leaflets promoting Tony Blair and Treasury Secretary Andrew Smith.

By contrast Alliance supporters have had some laughs, some cheers, a few beers, and no tears.

We have done far more than huddle together the existing left, and are much stronger now than we could have been if we hadn't stood.

It's a nice way to be proved wrong.

Terry Rodgers 1926-2001

Pete Burnett
LIFELONG socialist, trade union leader and pensioner activist Terry Rodgers collapsed and died on May 10th as he was campaigning as Socialist Alliance candidate for Tyne Bridge.

Born in Scotswood in the west end of Newcastle, Terry worked at Vickers, was radicalised by his experiences in the British Army during National Service in India and became active in the Labour Party.

The 1960s saw a huge transition in Terry's life. He became a draughtsman at Parsons and successfully fought to transform the craft society (AESD) into a fighting union.

Victories

He served on the national executive while achieving nationally important victories in the workplace such as four weeks holiday campaign and attempts by Parsons' management to impose redundancies. With Terry leading the way, members forced their way into the boardroom to throw back their redundancy notices!

Terry always believed that struggle transformed people and that nothing could be achieved by negotiations without struggle.

The high point of militancy at Parsons saw Terry as one of the leaders of successful mass resistance to moves by the then Labour government to close the plant through a merger with GEC.

While touring the region with President Jimmy Carter, Prime Minister Jim Callaghan was embarrassed by a huge demonstration led by Terry and his comrades on the joint union committee.

Convinced from the early 1960s that the Labour Party was 'now the greatest impediment to socialism in Britain', Terry joined the International Socialists, remaining with them and their successor organisation, the Socialist Workers Party for forty years.

Pensioners

After early retirement, Terry immersed himself in the pensioners' movement. He played a major role in shifting the union (now MSF) away from support for New Labour's stakeholder pensions to a policy of support for linking pensions to wages with no means testing.

He welcomed the Socialist Alliance when it was set up, recognising the importance of the anti-capitalist demonstrations and that there was now a growing minority in favour of fundamental political change.

Terry was accepted as an ideal candidate for Tyne Bridge and quickly achieved front-page publicity. He was particularly pleased when he was filmed by Ken Loach for the Socialist Alliance election broadcast. He is greatly missed.

Alliance's Northern exposure

Louise van der Hoeven, Election Agent, Carlisle Socialist Alliance.

When Carlisle Socialist Alliance was set up last October we were initially aiming at standing in the county council elections which also took place in May 2000. We were a very small group and felt that we would not have the resources to make an impact by standing in the General Election.

However, as time went on and the SA became stronger nationally, delegates from Carlisle attended national meetings, and the number of SA candidates standing in the General Election began to grow, we began seriously to reconsider our position. After much debate, we finally decided we were in a position to give people with socialist views a voice in the election, and should not let our misgivings stand in our way.

At this point, we had six members – one ISG, three SWP and two SP.

We chose Paul Wilcox as our candidate. Paul had been the driving force behind the formation of Carlisle Socialist Alliance, and had proved to be an excellent candidate when he stood as a

Socialist Alternative candidate in the 2000 City Council Election, when he received 24.5% of the vote.

Publicly our campaign was launched on a stall that we held on May 1st, to which we invited the local press, who sent down their Political Editor and a photographer.

The press were to be our main instrument of publicity throughout our campaign – we did not have the financial resources for leaflets other than our election address, or enough bodies to canvass effectively.

Paul was his own press agent, and maintained a high level of exposure throughout. We are lucky in Carlisle in that we have a daily local paper, with whom Paul has developed a good relationship and which was happy to give us exposure. We have been told by Anna Chen, the Socialist Alliance national press officer that we seem to have got more press coverage than any other local campaign.

All members contributed to a letters campaign, though some of the best letters that were printed came from supporters that we didn't know we had!

Paul also did interviews with BBC Radio Cumbria, Border Television and CFM.

From the very first day the possibility of us splitting the New Labour vote and letting the Tories in was an issue that was brought up frequently by a lot of people. The Labour Party tried to play on this a good deal despite the fact that our New Labour MP was re-elected in 1997 with a 12,000 majority!

More disappointing was the role played by local RMT activist Craig Johnson, who had been Paul's election agent last year. Craig publicly called on people to vote Labour, appearing in one issue of the local paper with a huge Labour rosette. As the best known left activist in the town, there is no doubt that his decision to attack the Socialist Alliance had an impact on our vote.

Two hustings were arranged where Paul was able to put our policies over in some depth. The first was organised by Age Concern, and all candidates attended, apart from the Legalise Cannabis Alliance candidate (who was invisible throughout the campaign). This was quite a turning point for Paul as it was the first time the other candidates

had had a chance to see what he could do. He did extremely well, winning the audience over, even those who did not share our politics.

The second was arranged by the cathedral, and there was a great deal of controversy when the Tory candidate refused to attend, saying that the bishop who was to be the chair was a supporter of Blair, and therefore biased! On the night the Tory was conspicuously represented by an empty chair.

On the Saturday before the election New Labour and the Tories had stalls and we had a very good stall with seven people on it. We were there for three hours, and spoke to a lot of supporters, both ones we now knew and ones we had never met.

Our campaign has been very successful. Socialism has been given a political profile locally. We have doubled our membership and have people involved between the ages of 19 and 76. We have several supporters who want to become involved in future. We polled 269 votes. We are now looking forward to building on what we have gained during our campaign.

Scottish Socialists treble their vote

Gordon Morgan

The Scottish Socialist Party campaign was the only bright spot in an otherwise exceptionally dull election campaign. Long before the polls it was clear that turnout would be low. In the event 58.1% voted – down 13% on 1997.

As in England there was a high degree of disillusionment with Labour – it is estimated that 9% of the electorate are previous Labour voters who could not bring themselves to vote New Labour and stayed at home.

There were also specifically Scottish factors. Media coverage of the election concentrated on Health, Education and Policing which are devolved matters which are the province of the Scottish Parliament and therefore not directly affected by the UK election. Only 18% of news coverage in Scotland dealt with Scottish issues.

Disillusionment amongst SNP and Labour members was high.

The SNP ran its most right wing campaign ever (still well left of Labour) and seemed to lack a theme. SNP activists were scarce on the ground, Labour equally so. There was a widespread view amongst the SNP that these elections were irrelevant, that they shouldn't be standing for Westminster.

The lack of Scottish coverage also marginalised the SNP more than usual. The result was a fall in the SNP vote even greater than that in the Labour vote. Compared with the 1999 Scottish Elections there was a 7% swing from the SNP to Labour – a result that defied all opinion poll projections.

The Liberals benefited from their UK coverage and were viewed as to the left of Labour. This UK effect appears to have overcome the negative impact of their performance in the Scottish Parliament, and they took 16% – up 3%.

In actual votes they increased by 13,000 over 1997, so perhaps we should only say their vote turned out. They appear to have strengthened in the areas where they were previously strong, taking votes from both Labour and SNP.

The SSP had beaten the Liberals in a series of by-elections in the preceding months. It will be interesting to see if the right wing leaders of the Liberals in the Scottish Parliament can continue to reconcile their actions with the left rhetoric of Kennedy.

The Tories saw their support, already at a low ebb, fall further, down 2% in percentage to 15.6%. Their only bright spot was taking a rural Borders seat in the

heart of Foot and Mouth territory from the SNP as a result of a collapse in SNP votes.

The only party to gain significantly from the election was the SSP which took 3.1% of the Scottish vote – 72,518 votes.

The SSP Campaign

The SSP decision to stand in all Scottish seats was justified. SSP branches now exist and function in every part of Scotland, from the Western Isles, Orkney, the Borders, Argyle as well as Glasgow and the central belt.

This has been the main lasting benefit from the campaign. We have the opportunity to consolidate membership and be involved in every local campaign, to become a real party of the people.

The decisions of the February conference, to stand in all seats, to accept the SWP into membership, to launch a weekly paper, were all successfully carried out. Actioning them placed major strains on the central apparatus and full time staff – who fortunately survived, but need a holiday.

The SWP joined on May 1 just in time for the election campaign. Throughout the campaign the ex SWP members have played a significant role in building the SSP and promoting the *Scottish Socialist Voice*. This has overcome many concerns of those who were sceptical about the SWP's commitment to building the SSP.

The projected launch of *Scottish Socialist Voice* was delayed in practice both by the postponement of the election and last minute distribution problems. But the weekly is now up and running and is available at around 1,000 newsagents throughout Scotland.

Initial print runs were 25,000 and the paper will assist in building even more SSP branches throughout Scotland.

Having a weekly paper increased the tempo of activity of branches during the election and allows on going up to date coverage of disputes in a time scale that allows support initiatives.

Having achieved a weekly paper, the SSP intend it to be maintained and strengthened in the future and steps have been taken to increase the number of full time journalists.

Despite standing in every seat, the SSP was excluded from most of the BBC and STV coverage. At several BBC election shows this was raised to increasing fury of BBC floor managers.

One explanation they gave – that the SSP held no Westminster seats in Scotland – was immediately responded to by the Tory

spokesperson, who asked the BBC why he was included as the Tories had no Scottish seats either!

The campaign took off with the Party Political Broadcast – a short play on Privatisation. This was followed by the Election leaflet which was delivered to every house in Scotland.

Suddenly the phones wouldn't stop ringing. Over 300 calls a day for 2 weeks came in to the Glasgow office. Several thousand copies of the manifesto were issued, at least 30 central applications to join each day. It is estimated that including the SWP, over 1,000 joined during the campaign.

If this is consolidated, it would give the SSP a membership of over 3,000. Already some branches are considering splitting into smaller areas.

In the last week of the campaign, 2 SSP candidates took to the platform on BBC Question Time wearing gags to emphasise the lack of coverage. Finally the SSP was given a slot on BBC radio to put its position and Tommy Sheridan was given a 20 minute slot on STV.

Challenging a media gag works, and did no harm to our image.

Results

The SSP had very little money with which to fight the campaign and received very little coverage. Most of its branches were weak and had never fought a campaign – the 1999 Scottish Campaign was token in much of Scotland.

More than both of these factors, the UK nature of the campaign, the general apathy about the election and the fact that we were upfront about not winning any seats made this a difficult campaign. In 1999 we were able to galvanise voters in Glasgow with the belief we could get Tommy Sheridan elected.

Despite this we launched the campaign with the objective of getting 100,000 votes in Scotland. This was based on us sitting at 5% in opinion polls for the Scottish parliament.

At the start of the General Election campaign the SSP was showing 2% in opinion polls for the Westminster election. The objective was to convince people who were considering voting for us at Hollywood to actually vote for us now. Our opinion rating increased as the election progressed with one poll giving us 4% – the actual result was 3.1% 72,500.

There was some initial disappointment at not reaching

100,000, though my own predictions had started at 60,000 but in the last days I thought we would reach 80,000. Nevertheless given our resources this was an excellent result.

In the 1997 election the SSA stood in 10 Glasgow seats and 6 others and took 9,457 votes. In 1999 the SSP took 25,000 votes in the first ballot across Scotland and 39,000 in the second ballot. Compared with 1999 we have tripled our vote.

I would anticipate a significant rise in our support in the second set of elections for the Scottish Parliament – a 5% SSP vote across Scotland in 2003 is a viable target.

One caveat is that in 1999 the SLP got slightly more votes than the SSP. These votes have now switched to the SSP.

Whilst intentions differ it appears that those who voted

SSP or SLP in 1999 as a protest in the second ballot are now willing to vote for the SSP at all times.

Between now and 2003 we

must hope to win the votes of the 9% ex Labour voters and large numbers of disillusioned SNP voters to vote Socialist.



Putting the Politics into Protest

A day of discussion on resisting global capitalism and the relevance of revolutionary marxism to the struggle, with speakers from across Europe
June 30 12.00-6pm

University of London Union,
Malet St, WC1
speakers include:

■ Flavia Agnelli

A leading member of the Fourth International in Italy and active in the youth organisation of Rifondazione Comunista – *Giovani Comunisti*. Flavia will speak on Berlusconi's recent election victory, the fightback against neoliberalism in Italy and preparation for Genoa.

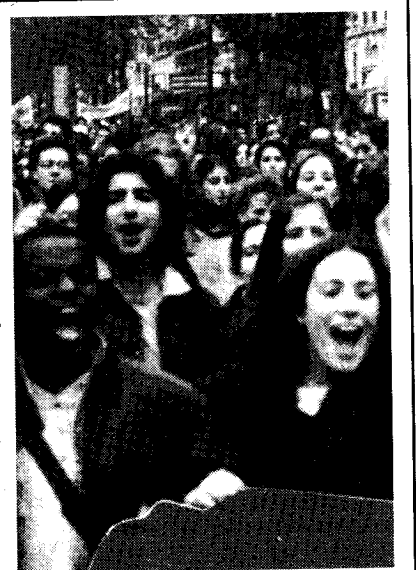
■ Francois Duval

From the Political Bureau of the Ligue Communiste Revolutionaire, speaking on the resistance movement in France and the experience of ATTAC – campaign for the Tobin tax – a key part of the French anti-globalisation movement.

■ Hugo

Albuquerque

Leading student activist of the PSR – Portuguese section of the Fourth



International also active in the Left Bloc – a new political party which had two MPs elected in 2000. Hugo will talk about resistance amongst youth and students

■ Greg Tucker

Socialist Alliance candidate in Streatham, South London and leading member of the ISG on strategies for resistance.

■ Terry Conway

Leading member of ISG on the development of capitalist globalisation

■ Martin Empson

from *Globalise Resistance* on building resistance in Britain and internationally.

Tickets £6/£3 concessions available on the door, or from PO Box 1109 London N4 2UU. Phone 020 880-07460 or e-mail outlook@gn.apc.org

New Labour: a government with no mandate

Alan Thornett

By the kind permission of Britain's grossly undemocratic electoral system new Labour won a 'landslide victory' in the general election. This bizarre result was achieved with the support of just 42% of those who voted and a mere 25% of those entitled to vote. Labour's vote went down by nearly 3 million from the 1997 election.

The turnout was 59%, the lowest since 1918 with a huge 41% of those on the electoral register abstaining from voting. There are many others, not on the electoral register, who do not even appear in the statistics. A disproportionate number of these are young and black and poor.

Less than one in five of the population of voting age voted for new Labour in this election.

Some 'landslide' then. By any rational view Blair does not have a mandate to do anything, not even form a government, but in terms of the British electoral system he is the most powerful Prime Minister since Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s.

The result was also achieved by shifting the electoral base of the Labour Party towards middle England. Blair was elected with fewer votes from the working class and more from the middle class than any previous Labour government. The biggest abstention was from the traditional Labour strongholds.

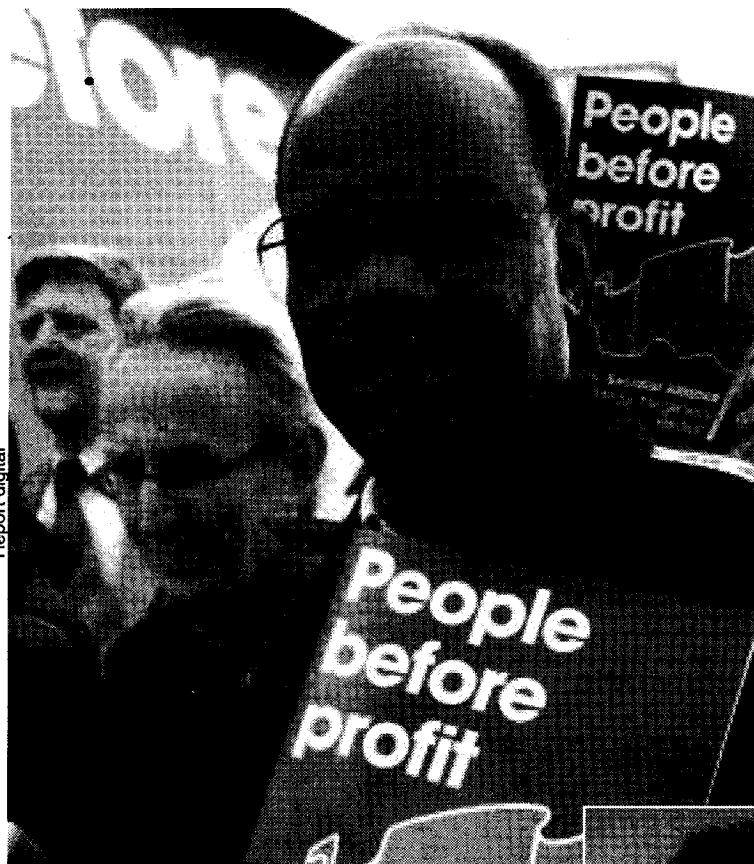
The *Evening Standard* of June 14 has shown graphically how this was reflected in London:

"Over the last 10 years, Labour's popularity has grown sharply among suburban middle class voters. This is the main reason why it holds seats it never did before. However, last week's vote contains a message that should terrify Tony Blair. He has lost hundreds of thousands of Labour's traditional supporters in the capital's poorest inner-city seats".

The article goes on to list ten traditional Tory seats where the Labour support has gone up massively and 10 traditional Labour seats where Labour's support has fallen dramatically.

The traditional Tory seats include Harrow West where Labour's percentage support across the electorate has gone up from 17.7% in 1992 to 31.5% today. In Enfield Southgate, won dramatically by Stephen Twigg for New Labour against Portillo in 1997, Labour's level of support was 20% in 1992 and 32% in 2001, while in Tory held Brent North it has shifted from 23% to 34% over the same period.

As far as traditional Labour seats go, the article points out that in the East London seat of Bethnal Green and Bow, Labour's support has fallen from 36.5% in 1992 to 24.5%



Report digital

today. In Chris Smith's seat of Islington South and Finsbury Labour's support shrank from 36.5% of the electorate in 1992 to 24.5% today. And in Lewisham Deptford it has dropped from 40% to 30%. Changes of this kind are replicated across the country.

The result is a government of the centre, based on a huge middle class vote - which had been Blair's aim since he was elected leader - and increasingly representing the mainstream of British capital.

It is a 'big tent' which has colonised the so-called 'centre ground' of British politics, driven the Tories from it, and sent them into near melt-down. Blair has stolen the Tory mantle of being the main party of big business.

The Tories could hardly be in a worse situation. William Hague has resigned as leader, and the leadership contest, which is already under way, is wracked by historic divisions over the EU. Blair had little real opposition in the last parliament: but he will have far less in this one.

Blair, of course, claims that the election has given him a massive mandate for change. This means the second term is going to be far more reactionary than the first.

New Labour represents the radical rightist edge of European Social Democracy and is the clearest exponent of the neo-liberal global project. Blair has already made it clear that he will push the neo-liberal agenda of global capitalism forward with even greater vigour this time.

And the new attack on the public sector, which is planned, is already being spelled out in some detail. The private sector is to be brought directly into the management of hospitals.

The other major services - health, education, transport and housing - are to be restructured as well with, as Blair puts it, 'no ideological constraints'.

All this will, of course, be totally ideologically driven - and the ideology is that of 'the market'. The result will be a massive new round of privatisation and deregulation.

At the same time the shifting of the hard-liner David Blunket to the Home Office will ensure the victimisation and scapegoating of asylum seekers will continue and increase.

So state racism - the backbone of racism in British society - is to continue in full force despite the shocking result in Oldham where the fascist BNP scored an average of 15% across two constituencies after whipping up hatred and conflict and provoking a fight-back by the Asian community.

The issue of how to win a majority in a referendum on the single currency may prove to be the most difficult issue the new government

will have to face. During the election campaign Blair began to make the case for joining the Euro, but now we have had the rejection of the Nice treaty by the Irish electorate so things are not so clear. New Labour is split on the timing of entry while there is a big section of British capital which expects the new government to use its election victory to go in as soon as possible.

So what did the left achieve in the election, and what are the prospects now for building an alternative to Blairism in Britain?

One thing is clear, the decision of the Socialist Alliance to make a major intervention into this election was absolutely vindicated both by the campaign and by the result.

The urgency of such an intervention was dictated not just by the march to the right of the Blairites, but by the space that this was opening to their left. This space - represented by disaffected LP members and voters - needed to be filled and it needed to be filled by a socialist alternative.



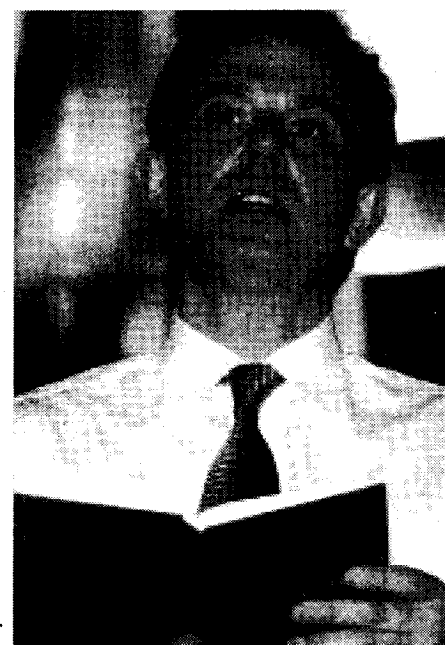
(Top) Dagenham Alliance candidate Berlyne Hamilton; (above) Mark Steel joins campaigners in St Helens

The idea - promoted by the media - that all abstention is 'apathy' is nonsense. Many people abstained because they could see little difference between what the two main parties were saying and did not want to vote on a 'lesser evil' basis.

Many of these are people who have understandably lost faith in political parties and the political system. Some of them are particularly alienated and are unable to see how the current major parties and the system of government relates to them.

Even many of those who protest against global capitalism see no point in participating in elections on this sort. We have to show them that there is no contradiction between campaigning for your politics in an election and demonstrating on the streets in Seattle or Genoa. Both are important to building a national and international alternative.

The protest vote which was divided, inevitably, between



The Reverend T Blair sings a hymn from the book of free market ideology for public sector workers who haven't a prayer under New Labour

abstention (the biggest number) and voting for the Liberal Democrats (who are historically the junior party of British capital and who were well to the left of Labour), the Greens, who also ran a left campaign, and the two socialist alternatives: the Socialist Alliance (SA) and the Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party (SLP).

The Liberal Democrats took the biggest part of the protest vote and increased their representation in Parliament. They also benefited from tactical voting - people voting to keep the Tories out whether that means voting Labour or Liberal Democrat in a particular constituency.

This growth in Lib Dem support also shows a weakening of the idea of working class independence from the traditional bourgeois parties.

The Greens had their best ever result in a general election scoring an average of 2.25% in the 145 constituencies in which they stood. Their best constituency vote was 9.3%. This was the first time the Greens had saved a deposit in a Westminster election: they did not save any in 1997.

They achieved this result despite a poor profile in the campaign and weak campaigns in most areas. Their best results were in London where they benefited from Ken Livingstone's endorsement during the Greater London Assembly election last year.

As far as the left is concerned the biggest achievement was the result won by the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) - which had merged with the SWP in Scotland in May and went into the election as the first united socialist organisation in Scotland for many years.

The SSP won an average of 3.1% across all 72 constituencies in Scotland, with its highest scores in Glasgow including 9.98% in the best Glasgow constituency.

It achieved a total vote of 72,500 and saved ten deposits. The SLP stood in a few Scottish seats but were marginalised by the SSP vote. This result puts the SSP in a strong position to win more seats in the next elections for the Scottish Parliament - which are held under proportional representation.

This achievement represents a big step forward for socialist renewal, not just in Scotland but in the whole of Britain. The SSP remains the model to be followed.

The socialist vote in England and Wales was split between the Socialist Alliance, which was standing for the first time, and the SLP, which stood in the last election in 1997.

The Alliance polled better than the SLP, but only just. The Alliance polled a total of 55,635 votes in the 93 constituencies in which it stood in England, with an average of 1.75%. It saved two deposits with

There is no contradiction between campaigning for your politics in an election and demonstrating on the streets in Seattle or Genoa. Both are important to building a national and international alternative.



Handing in nomination papers in Lambeth: former council leader Joan Twelves (left) endorsed Teresa Bennett's campaign in Vauxhall, while Greg Tucker (Streatham) was backed by comedian Jeremy Hardy (right)

scores of 7% and 6.8%.

The SLP scored 54,880 votes in England in the 104 constituencies they stood in and saved one deposit. This means that the Alliance averaged 598 votes per constituency and the SLP 504. The SLP also stood in 10 seats in Scotland, where in most cases it scored badly against the SSP vote. Its average vote in Scotland was just 261.

In Wales the SA scored lower than in England with an average in the six seats contested of 376. Plaid Cymru did a lot worse than expected.

The Socialist Alliance's best constituency votes were 7% in Coventry followed by 6.4% in St Helens in Lancashire where Tory Shaun Woodward was parachuted into the safe seat just before the election was called.

The strength of the Coventry vote reflected long term campaigning and electoral intervention by ex-Labour MP and current councillor Dave Nellist.

On average London polled best for the Alliance, reflecting last years intervention into the London Assembly election. It scored: 4.6% in Hackney, 4.3% in Deptford, 3.7% in Tottenham, and 3.1% in Holborn and St Pancras. Apart from the two seats where deposits were saved, the best results outside London were 3.8% in Nottingham and 3.5% in Manchester Withington.

The result means that there were 180,000 votes for far left candidates (including the SSP), which is unique in a post-war British election. It is triple the left vote in the 1997 election.

But the fact that the left was seen as divided in England and Wales despite the remarkable degree of unity achieved by the SA in the run up to the election remains a problem - and the SLP continues to reject all proposals for any kind of unity.

The SLP did not campaign in the election very much outside of Hartlepool where Arthur Scargill was standing against the arch-Blairite Peter Mandelson. In most places the SLP was no more than a name on the ballot paper - in some constituencies the candidate did not appear at all during the campaign!

The SLP has disintegrated over the past few years as it consolidated its Stalinist politics and the dominance of the Stalin Society within it. In 1997, its heyday, it had several thousand members. By the time of this election various rounds of disputes and expulsions had reduced it to a few hundred. It largely relied on its name recognition from previous elections and Scargill's reputation and resources. It had an election broadcast as did the SA.

The Alliance in contrast ran a

remarkable, high profile campaign in almost every constituency in which it stood. Most constituencies had public meetings and rallies and millions of leaflets were delivered by hand.

Most constituencies delivered at least one leaflet by hand (an average constituency is about 40,000 households) and many of them up to three. Stalls were held in the high streets and all kinds of campaigns and activities undertaken.

The average score the Alliance achieved was lower than some of the SA activists expected. But it has to be looked at objectively. It was the first time it had stood outside of London and its results are equal to those the SSP achieved in its first electoral challenge.

But it is also clear that the situation had not matured enough for workers in large number to vote for a radical class struggle party. It is clear that when the time came to vote many of those considering voting for the SA failed to do so.

Also, in the first-past-the-post system, the vote is only about who will form the next government. Under that system there seems little point voting for small parties because they cannot possibly win representation.

Others decided to give new Labour a second chance - which was the pitch of new Labour propaganda in the final days of the campaign. Nonetheless, it was also the best far-left result in the post-war period, better than the Communist Party scored in 1950 when it stood 100 candidates.

But the fact is we were not able to fill the space to the left of Labour in the course of one election campaign. The conditions had not yet matured enough for those breaking from Labour to vote for a radical left alternative, despite our very effective campaigning.

At this stage most disaffected and politically disenfranchised people primarily expressed themselves in the election by abstention. Protest voting and tactical voting did occur, especially with the Liberal Democrats, but also with the Greens.

This may well be different next time, when the full extent of New Labour's second term has been seen and there is a deepening polarisation against the government. The SA has now established itself as an ongoing campaigning organisation which is not just there during elections.

Meanwhile the SA brought the argument for socialism in front of millions of people at a time when the left inside the LP has declined dramatically, and had no profile in the election whatsoever.

The importance of projecting a socialist alternative can be seen in the rise of the far right BNP in some places, partly generated by the situation they have whipped up in Oldham.

Our campaign put the SA on the map and built an organisation out of an election campaign - a factor which is decisive in the longer term. It established active organisations in every constituency in which it stood.

The result shows that although we were unable to attract the main protest vote there is a growing minority of people who are looking for a socialist alternative and were prepared to register this in the election. This can only increase in the next period.

The SA has also had a major impact in the unions in the short time it has existed.

The left in a number of unions are discussing unity as a direct response to the SA, and the fire fighters union FBU has been the first to decide to change its rules to allow it to give money to parties standing against Labour. To discuss these issues the SA has decided to hold a trade union conference in the autumn.

During the course of the SA's high profile and energetic campaign, it more than doubled the number of activists involved in the Socialist Alliance.

In particular, it drew in a steady stream of former Labour party activists, exceeding 60 former Labour councillors and many hundreds of former party members by polling day.

It also received strong backing at the trade union conferences which have taken place over recent months, both through debates on conference floor and through organising fringe meetings.

Obviously the SA will need to learn from the campaign and assess its strengths and weaknesses.

For example, while the Socialist Alliance had policies on environmental issues these were not highlighted in much of the work done on the streets. In order to challenge the strength of the vote for the Greens, this needs to change.

Meanwhile the Alliance has already launched the fight against new Labour's second term.

On the weekend after the election when the major parties went back to business as usual, Socialist Alliance activists returned to the streets. SA stalls and leafleters were out in force.

The message was clear. New Labour's plans to introduce private profit into the heart of the NHS and other public services must and can be stopped.

The re-emergence of the far right and the rise of racist violence must and can be resisted. The Socialist Alliance intends to be a key part of

Lesson of Oldham vote

Mobilise to fight racist threat

Susan Moore

Many labour movement activists were shocked by the strong showing made by the fascist British National Party particularly in Oldham - an average of 15% across two constituencies.

The major responsibility for this appalling situation lies with the vicious racism, particularly aimed against asylum seekers, promoted by both the Tory and New Labour Parties throughout the election campaign.

Both Blair and Hague claimed that asylum was a legitimate subject for debate and had nothing to do with racism. This is a complete nonsense - their policies and rhetoric not only give succour to the fascists electorally, but also lead to the rise in racist attacks that we have also seen in recent weeks.

Phil Woolas, who retained Oldham East and Saddleworth for Labour claimed that the BNP were able to exploit a situation where none of the political parties "wanted to make race the issue". In fact it was Labour and the Tories who created the space that the fascists were able to fill.

Against the background of this racist rhetoric from the two major parties, which the media also promoted, attacks on the right of black communities to organise and defend themselves also came to the fore. When the Asian community in Lidget Green in Bradford responded to racist attacks on Easter Sunday, they were portrayed as the culprits.

In Oldham, when a white man was attacked by Asian youths, this was claimed as 'racist', by both the press and police chiefs, despite the fact that the victim's family said they didn't believe there was any such motive. Headlines about supposed "no go" areas for white people predominated.

When Combat 18 thugs attacked anti-fascist campaigners in Oldham and the Asian community organised to defend themselves, it was the community not the fascists that were criticised.

In both Oldham and Bradford - as in many other places - there is a deep issue of police racism. Eyewitness reports from Oldham give graphic examples of racist abuse aimed at black youth on the streets from officers.

Segregated

The long standing housing policy of Oldham council has also led to one of the most deeply segregated communities in Britain.

We need to challenge the trivialising of racism that is taking place in these reports. Racism, like sexism and homophobia is based on the power structures and material privileges that exist in capitalist society. Black people can be prejudiced - but they can't be racist.

The left needs to find ways to promote these discussions and to argue for the right of communities to defend themselves.

Long before these events in Oldham, the BNP had adopted a dif-

ferent strategy in this election from the one both they and the National Front have generally adopted.

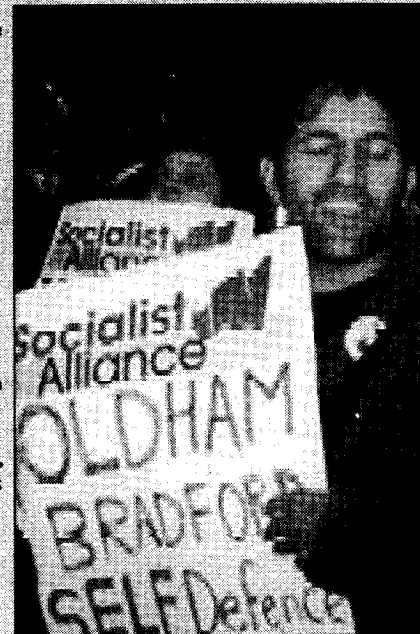
They stood in fewer seats in this election than in 1997, hoping that fewer would mean better results. The BNP and National Front (NF) contested 38 seats and got 49,669 votes. The number of seats four years ago was 84, with 49,377 votes.

The did not make a national breakthrough. They have retreated in places where they had put huge effort, and where they had met organised opposition.

The NF got only 0.9 percent and 0.6 percent in seats around Margate in Kent, where it has repeatedly marched against asylum seekers. And the BNP has been pushed back in Tower Hamlets and South Newham in east London.

Its total vote and percentage share were down in the two constituencies where they did best in 1997 - Bethnal Green & Bow, and Poplar & Canning Town.

It would be wrong to draw the conclusion that those who voted for



the BNP in Oldham and elsewhere are all committed fascists. In a situation where working class voters feel abandoned by the major parties, the possibility of fascist parties gaining credibility is strong.

Many Socialist Alliance activists pointed this out in arguing for a strong general election challenge - if the left did not put forward an alternative, the right would.

More than that however, there is clearly a need to step up both antifascist and anti-racist campaigning. At MSF's recent conference, there was no doubt that the size of the BNP vote in Oldham was a key factor in determining delegates' strong support for affiliation to the Anti-Nazi League.

But it was also the reason behind the call made by Dave Nellist, and supported by the platform, to call on the TUC to organise a major anti-racist demonstration in Oldham.

This demand will also be taken up at UNISON's forthcoming conference, and should be raised by every trade unionist, antiracist campaigner and socialist.

Keep private hands off our NHS!

John Lister

The scale and scope of New Labour's ambitions to privatise sectors of the health service have caused dismay among even relatively conservative elements – *Guardian* columnists, the TUC, the Royal College of Nursing.

The *Guardian's* editorial column headlined "Last Days of the NHS..." on May 29, warning that:

"A Labour government which fought the last election promising to end the Tories' internal market in health, is now proposing to go one step worse: creating a sharp-elbowed competitive system involving both private and public health systems. ... Labour plans to make more use of the private sector than the Tories ever dared contemplate."

The comment flowed from the publication in the same issue of the leaked, controversial proposals of the Blairite Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR).

The IPPR called for private companies to run NHS hospitals – but these plans go only slightly further than Labour's manifesto pledges to set up new surgical units "managed by the NHS or the private sector", and to "use spare capacity in private sector hospitals treating NHS patients free of charge..."

Labour ministers have become totally hooked on the ideology of the free market and the private sector. They cling to the argument that care will still be delivered to the patient free of charge at point of use, but every new stage of Labour policy involves transforming the NHS from a publicly owned, publicly provided service into little more than a pool of cash to be used to buy services from a lengthening list of private sector providers.

The use of private sector beds for NHS patients has doubled since Alan Milburn signed the "Concordat" with the private medical firms last autumn. Private hospitals with over half of their beds usually empty are understandably keen to whip up more lucrative work from overstressed, under-bedded NHS hospitals.

But of course an expansion of private sector care would require additional nursing and other qualified staff – all of whom are trained, at public expense, by the NHS.

The wacky logic of New Labour's fixation with the private sector will mean poaching even more nurses from under-staffed NHS hospitals ... to treat NHS patients in private hospitals.

Of course there is no evidence that the private sector delivers better quality or even more efficiency than the public sector. Leading health care analysts have pointed to the increased administrative costs involved in expanding private medicine – in the USA privately managed hospitals spend a massive 34% of their budget on administration compared with just 12% in the NHS.

And there are real doubts over the quality of private health care, despite the fact that in Britain the private sector refuses to get involved in any emergency services, and simply "cherry picks" the most simple operations and procedures.

If anything goes wrong in a private hospital, there is often no alternative but to transfer the patient to an NHS hospital with the facilities for cope with emergency situations.

"Suddenly you realise what Labour is actually advocating. They, and not the Tories, are seeking a mandate on June 7 to do what the Conservatives never dared: to introduce private companies into the inner sanctum of the public realm, the NHS and state schools."

Jonathan Freedland, *The Guardian*, May 23.

While 800,000 elective operations were carried out in private hospitals in the UK last year, a massive 141,618 patients were admitted from the private sector for NHS treatment.

But the private sector as a whole has already driven a massive wedge into health and social care.

The IPPR underlined the fact that already 40 percent of NHS hospital support services are provided by private contractors, while 40 percent of spending on personal social services also goes to the private sector, most of it to nursing and residential homes.

The privatisation of long-term care for the elderly was accelerated by the Tory "community care" reforms of 1991, and has continued with the closure of most NHS geriatric beds: 70 percent of all long term beds are now in the private sector. 40 percent of NHS geriatric beds have closed since 1991, with another 2,500 closed since Blair was elected.

Labour's much-vaunted hospital building programme is almost entirely funded by private sector cash through the Private Finance Initiative, delivering a thumping 12%-plus annual return to investors – at the expense of NHS budgets for patient care.

PFI schemes already under way are predicted to add up to a massive £7 billion of private investment by 2007, costing NHS Trusts £2.1 billion a year in rental payments for these new, privately-owned hospitals.

Most early PFI schemes slashed numbers of front-line acute beds by 20-40 percent. One example is the plan under way in Worcester, which involves a loss of around 30% of acute beds across the county, and triggered the closure of most in-patient care at Kidderminster Hospital. Popular local anger at this has now lost Labour the Wyre Forest constituency to hospital campaigner Richard Taylor.

Stung by widespread criticism of PFI as a destroyer of beds at a time when Labour's own National Beds Inquiry found that more beds were required, Milburn has said that future PFI plans must at least maintain existing bed numbers.

The result of this has been that the cost of new, revised PFI hospital plans has been spiralling ever higher, creating long-term problems for the Trusts in meeting their monthly rental payments.

Ministers had previously argued that clinical staff (doctors, nurses and other professionals) would not be transferred to private contractors under PFI deals, as has happened



Dudley strikers: their victory came after the strike, and will benefit others

to non-clinical support staff in the first wave of PFI hospitals. But if new "health factories" are built and managed by the private sector, as the manifesto proposes, it seems certain that the clinical staff there will be private sector employees.

Since the election a new deal between ministers and health unions has been trumpeted, covering hospitals faced with PFI.

The government has now agreed that non-clinical staff in these hospitals should not be transferred to private contractors, but remain NHS employees. This was exactly what the Dudley Hospital strikers had demanded – and been refused – throughout their long battle over PFI. It is now clear that they won the concession for others, even though they couldn't get it for themselves.

UNISON has declared this latest deal a victory, but insisted that it will continue to oppose PFI as poor value for money.

But the new policy will only apply to PFI deals that have not yet been signed – and will have no relevance to the tens of thousands of hospital support staff who are already employed by private contractors.

It is not yet clear whether the private firms bidding for PFI deals will be prepared to forego the additional profit stream which they have drawn from the provision of support services: excluding these services may simply mean that they bump up the monthly rent they charge for use of the new hospital.

Another important area of privatisation needs to be noted.

The Health and Social Care Act rushed through the Commons just before the election includes provision for a new private limited company NHS LIFT, which will be given the task of investing in new premises to be leased to GPs and primary care services.

Milburn has talked of this injecting £1 billion into primary care over four years – but only £175m of this will be government money, the rest coming from the profit-seeking private sector.

As this scheme takes effect it will not only be showpiece hospitals but local health centres and surgeries that begin pumping cash from the NHS budget into the banks and big business.

But the same new legislation also sets up Care Trusts, which will cover both social services and health care, and play a key role in the provision of "intermediate care" which is a central theme of the NHS Plan.

While all NHS treatment has since 1948 been available free at point of use, social services have always been subject to means-tested charges, and the scale of these charges have increased as successive governments have imposed tighter cash limits.

The new Act will mean that the cost of nursing care will be provided free of charge, but government guidance urges the NHS to remodel services, with the effect that more and more care will potentially be subject to means-tested charges.

The Department of Health circular on intermediate care says that the first episode of care will be free at point of use, and "typi-

cally last no more than six weeks." But further episodes of care should be much shorter, and user charges will apply to the housing and living costs of "personal care".

Huge question marks hang over the definition of "personal care", which potentially covers many of the tasks of daily living. And for the first time a health service body, the Care Trust, will have to decide on the imposition of charges for care.

Meanwhile the whole structure of continuing care services is under threat as private home operators vote with their feet, closing and selling off nursing and residential homes because they can't make enough profit from social service placements which are subject to rigid limits on the weekly fees paid for each placement.

Many home operators were paying such abysmal wages that they were hit hard by Labour's minimum wage legislation. A recent King's Fund report shows that up to a million care home workers are being expected to care for elderly patients on £5 an hour or less.

Two thirds of them have no relevant qualifications.

Even poverty wages have not enabled many operators to make big enough profits, and 15,000 care homes closed last year, leaving a mounting crisis in many localities, as frail elderly patients remain in front-line hospital beds for lack of nursing home places to care for them.

In Birmingham alone more than 200 patients are believed to be in the city's hospital beds after cuts in council care for elderly people discharged from hospital.

All the evidence suggests that Labour voters supported Blair despite, and not at all because of Labour's plans for privatising health and social care. A poll by Rasmussen Research for the Independent at the end of May showed that even if the NHS paid all the costs of care, only 19 percent thought private companies should run health services, while a massive 81 percent were against.

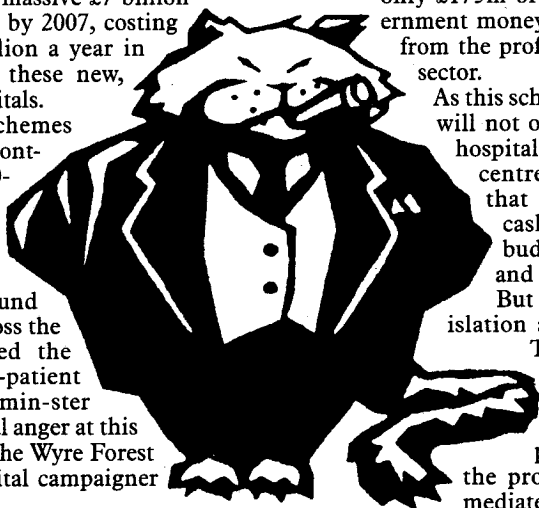
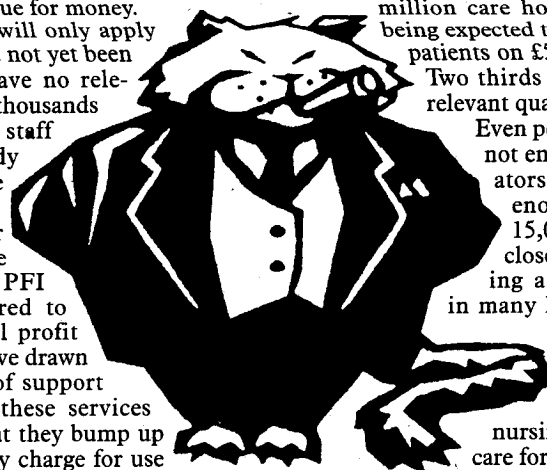
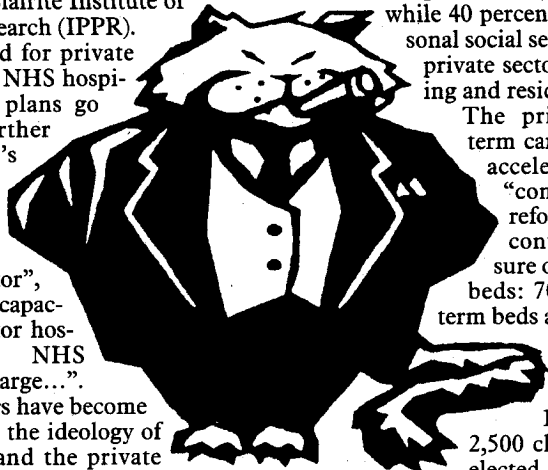
A similar result emerged from a survey conducted for UNISON just two days before the election, and the union has correctly stepped up its "Positively Public" campaign in opposition to further privatisation and PFI. Even the normally docile Royal College of Nursing, which has previously remained largely indifferent to privatisation and PFI joined the NHS academics and professionals and the trade unions warning of the implications of Labour's plans.

Bill Morris of the TGWU, Roger Lyons of MSF and John Edmonds of the GMB have joined the chorus of union leaders trying to warn Blair off his drive to privatise: but they have not been willing to pledge action to challenge a new onslaught by New Labour.

The mood of union leaders is perhaps best summed up by TUC leader John Monks, who is clearly worried that some of these union leaders may find themselves propelled into action in the same way as the rail and postal unions, creating the biggest clash so far with New Labour.

Monks even invoked the spectre of another "winter of discontent" – in his effort to persuade union bosses to cool their rhetoric.

It's up to activists within the unions and campaigners defending our public services to ensure that every inroad by the private sector is challenged. Ministers have been forced into retreats on a number of issues: they can be forced back again.



Neo-liberalism on the rocks

Chris Jones

Brazil is embroiled in a major political crisis. The current government of Cardoso is desperate to achieve two things – to maintain a stable neo-liberal economic policy and prevent a victory for Lula of the Workers Party (PT) in next years presidential election.

But years of comparative stability could well be coming to an end. The roots of the crisis go a long way back and relate to long term unresolved problems.

President Cardoso has been in office for seven years. He came to power on the basis of an economic recovery package which he had formulated as Finance Minister under the previous administration. This package has been largely successful and has resulted in sustained (if limited) growth for business, and affluence for the middle class.

This provided the basis for Cardoso's clear victory over Lula in the 1998 election. A new currency had been stabilised, ending years of monetary and inflationary chaos, and regular industrial growth had been achieved.

This economic programme enabled Cardoso to hold together a parliamentary bloc of three of the four main bourgeois parties, which collectively overwhelm the legislature. The PT, the largest opposition party, has half the seats of the smallest of these parties. And some of the opposition is to the right of the government.

But now this political and economic settlement appears to be unwinding. Why? What are the pressures pulling it apart?

Firstly, there are growing regional economic problems. It could be argued that the MERCOSUR trading block of Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Bolivia has collapsed.

From Brazil's point of view this organisation served two main purposes. It provided a regional market as a bedrock for economic growth, and with Brazil as its leader it was adding to Brazil's influence as regional leader.

Some economists always argued that it was never going to succeed. Be that as may be, but the rise of the Free Trade Area of America (FTAA) as a central plank of US strategy in the region is the political fact behind MERCOSUR's problems.

The US has been able to capitalise on Argentina's on-going financial crisis to disrupt MERCOSUR. The Argentine currency is now tied to the US dollar and its debt crisis has been temporarily relieved by a US supported restructuring. A bilateral trade deal between the US and Chile has drawn Chile away from MERCOSUR.



And then the lights went out ... Brazilians protest at energy rationing

The US is acutely aware that Brazil is potentially strong enough to frustrate some of its regional domination objectives. It is probably no coincidence, given the threat that the FTAA poses to European Union trade in the region, that Tony Blair is on his way to Brasilia in August.

At the same time as these regional economic problems, the Brazilian energy industry has gone into crisis. Crudely this is due to lack of water in the country's hydro-electric schemes.

To avoid periods of power cuts, industry and domestic consumers are being given consumption targets, with financial inducements and the threat of cut offs, to induce action. If the target of between a 15% and 25% reduction for industry is to be achieved it is hard to see how a fall in economic growth can be avoided.

However, as much as there is a water shortage in the economically key south and south east, the lack of investment after the industry was deregulated is seen as the root cause of the problem and the government is taking the blame for lack of planning.

Its planned boost to energy supply, power plants driven by Bolivian gas, won't be functioning for four years. The energy and MERCOSUR crises have caused the currency to lose 20% of its value in six months.

Additionally, the surcharge system being introduced to cut domes-

tic consumption threatens the affluent middle class with enormous bill increases and cut offs. As these people are the basis of the political settlement this is a very dangerous strategy.

One state governor is saying he will not implement the policy, some softening has already taken place and a string of legal actions are in the courts. At present the middle class is achieving its targets but many don't expect this to last. Cardoso will take the blame even if he is successful.

The continuing rise of the workers, peasants and indigenous movements threaten the bourgeoisie's neo-liberal project. We are not on the verge of some pre-revolutionary crisis, but there is a high level of popular mobilisation and the PT's electoral strategy is continuing to make progress.

The PT has been very successful recently in heading up popular revulsion at the continuing revelations of corruption at the highest levels of government, and the demand for a major parliamentary investigation.

One of the problems for this bourgeois democracy is that the workers and peasants are chronically under represented in the legislature, which in and of itself poses an extra-parliamentary threat to the existing settlement.

The PT (and its linked trades union confederation, CUT) emerged at the end of the seventies from the struggles for democracy

and workers and peasants rights as the military dictatorship went into decline.

It has remained the leading left party since. Within the PT itself there are a range of different currents and strategies for change – which merit more discussion than is possible in this article.

The PT is not the only opposition party, there are a whole array of 'left' opposition parties including various Communist Parties and populist and socialist parties with much longer histories.

However the PT is currently the most dynamic left force and the popularity of Lula, its presidential candidate, is far wider than the party's base. He currently heads the presidential opinion polls – though interestingly, in the Federal District, the only state he won in 1998, he is well behind the Popular Socialist Party's (successor to the Brazilian Communist Party) candidate.

Cardoso has just made a move to contain market worries about the threat of the PT winning the presidency. He has played down the threat by saying they are very responsible in the states and municipalities which they control (which is true), and he would be willing to go into coalition with them.

While this may just be politicking, he could be working on sections of the PT. The rest of the left in Brasilia is already refusing to support the PT Senate candidate as being too far to the right, and he is

talking about winning votes in the centre.

Mario Covas, recently deceased ex-governor of Sao Paulo state, and co-founder of the Social Democratic Party with Cardoso, supported the PT for the mayoralty of Sao Paulo city last year.

Brazil's bourgeoisie is riddled with geographic, economic, party and personal rivalries. After the economy (and as a result of his success there) Cardoso's greatest success has been the creating and holding together of the bourgeois bloc in the parliament.

All the bourgeois parties have their roots in the 'official' pro-government and opposition parties of the military regime (1964-88). Cardoso's Social Democratic party was a split from the 'opposition' after the end of the dictatorship.

Ever since independence in 1823 Brazilian politics have been dominated by attempts to overcome regional rivalry and separatism and create a national politics. Barring Communists and Fascists there were no national parties until 1945.

Local bosses and their often corrupt entourages still maintain control over 'their' legally quite autonomous states. Transfers between political parties, as politicians follow power and money, are frequent.

Power and wealth are a lucrative chicken and egg story for those at the top. The current corruption scandals, which have prevented the Senate from functioning for months, are entirely due to rivals falling out and pointing the finger at each other. The original row was over who would chair the Senate!

While Cardoso has now been able to name his own party's candidate for next year's election, he is far from sure of reuniting his ruling bloc around him.

The state governor who won't implement the energy rules might stand. The leaderships of both the other main parties are considering their own candidacies, and to put it mildly, openly hate each other.

Next year's elections, particularly the presidential, are affecting all the current administration's calculations. Will they be able to rectify the power supply industry in time? Can Cardoso use his weakening authority to put together a stable bourgeois succession?

The corrupt squabbling in the Senate is potentially discrediting the existing bourgeois leaders. Can new 'honest' faces be found?

The corrupt nature of Brazilian politics is threatening the neo-liberal project. The Liberal Front leader, in his speech announcing his enforced resignation from the Senate, accused Cardoso of accepting corruption at all levels in Government.

The vast majority of the population see honesty as the main prerequisite of any new President. Can the bourgeoisie find such a candidate? We will see.

Power plants driven by Bolivian gas won't be functioning for four years. The energy and MERCOSUR crises have caused the currency to lose 20% of its value in six months.

Scandal of growing 3rd world debt burden

Susan Moore

Third world debt kills 19,000 children a day in Africa, while their governments spend \$37m per day just on debt servicing.

This is one of the key reasons why so many people across the world have joined anti-globalisation protests over the last couple of years. But despite the huge profile given to the issue particularly during last year, what has actually been achieved at a level that will improve people's daily lives is sadly limited.

The World Development report of the World Bank itself for 1999/2000 showed that the external debt of developing countries stood at nearly \$3000 billion, almost double what it was in 1990 and on a steeply rising curve.

These figures amount to a debt of over \$400 for every man, woman and child in the countries of the South – in a situation where in the poorest countries average income is less than \$1 per day.

In six of the eight years between 1990 and 1997, developing countries paid out more in debt servicing than they received in new money. There was a total transfer from poor countries to rich countries of \$77 billion during this period.

Today in Ethiopia 100,000 children die from easily preventable diseases, while debt repayments are four times higher than spending on health. In Tanzania, 40% of people die before they reach 40, debt repayments exceed health spending six times over.

Nor is the problem of debt only an issue in Africa.



Mexican protestors burn a huge effigy of President Vicente Fox as battles erupt over new austerity measures

Brazil spends 75.5% of government revenue on debt servicing and only 34.5% of its expenditure on social services. Guatemala spends 57.8% on debt and 38.4% on public services.

An embarrassing report published in April of this year by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, casts a dark shadow over their own much trumpeted Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative launched in 1996.

So far, the HIPC initiative is reducing debt service payments for 22 countries by just one-quarter on average, leaving the majority of countries spending more on debt than they currently spend on health. Only one country,

Uganda, has had actual debt cancellation.

Now even the architects of this package show little confidence that this will provide an end to the debt crisis for even the countries involved – never mind those excluded.

The paper "The Challenge of Maintaining Long-Term External Debt Sustainability" has finally emerged after a number of rewrites, and confirms debt campaigners' concerns that HIPC does not reduce debt to a low enough level.

Debt campaigners have long argued that the 150% debt-to-exports level underpinning the HIPC initiative is based on precarious projections of export growth. For the 22 countries to get HIPC relief so far, the World Bank and IMF use predictions for export growth of

above 6 per cent.

This report admits for the first time that original export growth predictions were overly optimistic. The report shows how if exports grow more realistically at an average of 4.2%, in line with 1990 - 1999 levels, debt levels will have risen above the declared "sustainability threshold" to 160 per cent by 2005, reaching around 180 per cent by 2015.

Three of these countries, Bolivia, Malawi and Niger, will not reach the 150 per cent threshold in the first place because of export growth rate volatility.

Three further countries (Burkina Faso, Rwanda and Tanzania) are not predicted to reach the 150 per cent level until the medium term, because of anticipated new borrowing.

Even for countries that do reach the 150% level, the report acknowledges that the HIV/AIDS emergency in many African HIPCs will mean that debt levels will soon rise. "Longer-term growth prospects can be undermined by natural disasters, war, or health threats such as the AIDS epidemic in such cases, in the absence of adequate grant financing, external indebtedness may need to rise to accommodate the financing of reconstruction and rehabilitation."

But despite the fact that this report was published before the Washington DC meeting this spring, no new initiatives were forthcoming. And while the decision of some governments to cancel some bilateral debt is welcome, the real issue is the role of the IMF and World Bank.

Campaigners will again be pressing this issue at the G8 summit in Genoa in July, but it is unfortunate that many of the mainstream organisations involved seem to focus their energies on making appeals to right wing politicians.

The Italian organisation, Cancel the Debt has organised a celebrity football match to co-incide with Berlusconi's inauguration. It used a video of rock star Bono to call on the Prime Minister to use the Genoa summit to inaugurate a "new deal" on debt in which 100% debt cancellation will be agreed by the IMF and the World Bank.

Of course there is nothing wrong with using well known media figures to promote political campaigns, or in making appeals to government's however right wing. But there is a danger, which has been illustrated time and again in the movement for

debt cancellation of relying on the largesse of politicians who are promoting neo-liberalism in their own countries to oppose it elsewhere.

The existence of debt in the Third World is not some immoral deviation from an otherwise fair and equitable capitalist system – it is one of the clearest and most brutal illustrations.

Debt has been used as a stick by the international capitalist institutions of the IMF and the World Bank for over 30 years to force countries to introduce austerity packages that force up prices and devastate what few services exist.

The production of goods for exports has been privileged over the production of what people need to survive. Often this has resulted in ecological degradation as mono-cultures of cash crops have replaced traditionally mixed agriculture. Poverty, disease and death have inevitably followed.

Since 1985, this has been formalised under the so-called Baker plan. Introduced by the US Secretary of State James Baker, this plan deepened the control of the international institutions on impoverished countries by ensuring that the conditions for future loans depended on further privatisation and deregulation.

The balance sheet has not only been huge lay-offs in the public sector and the removal of subsidies on basic food-stuffs but yet again the occasion for further profits. This time private banks were able to siphon off more than \$178 billion between 1984 and 1990 alone.

Amongst many activists campaigning against debt, particularly young people, there is an openness to understanding that this is more than a moral abhorrence but an integral part of the determination of capitalism to put profit before people.

As neo-liberal policies are carried out across the globe, resulting in increasing gaps between rich and poor not only in the poorest countries but in the richest as well, the opportunity to demonstrate that profit as the motor force of capitalism is what needs to be opposed has never been more possible – or more necessary.

The left needs to dialogue with and learn from the new generation of activists that is mobilising around these issues, both by taking to the streets in international protests but also by making sure that organisations like the Socialist Alliance also take up their concerns and give them a voice.

A car worker elected to the Italian Senate

As a result of the Italian elections on May 13, three senators were elected from the Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC). Gigi Malabarba was one of them. Gigi is one of the leaders of Bandiera Rossa (Italian supporters of the Fourth International in the PRC) and the Party of Communist Refoundation.

Gigi began working at Alfa Romeo in Milan in the early 1970s and participated in the fierce workers' struggles which took place at this factory, firstly against privatisation and then against the closure carried out by the new bosses, Fiat.

Gigi was among the founders of the radical trade union confederation Sin-Cobas, of which he is currently the spokesperson, and with this union he has recently organised the anti-globalisation struggles in Italy and the European Marches against unemployment.

Flavia D'Angeli interviewed him for *International Viewpoint*.
How do you explain your election? Did you expect it or was it a surprise?

Any prediction seemed very difficult in advance. I only know we waged a good campaign at local and national level, stressing the importance of social struggles and electing participants in the world of labour to Parliament.

In my neighbourhood, the Party seems to have won a lot of votes.

In any case my election is essentially due to the good result for the Party overall, we got 5% and in the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies we were the only party outside of the two centre-left and centre-right coalitions to go beyond the 4% barrier necessary to have people elected.

What will be your role in Parliament, in relation to your trade union responsibilities?

It is obvious that the election of a worker, probably the only one in the whole parliament, must signify a strong commitment to the struggles in the workplaces, which moreover seem to be reviving recently in Italy.

I also consider it very important to give a voice to the anti-globalisation mobilisations that represent a growing part of the population, above all youth, in revolt against neo-liberal policies.

These same policies are at the heart of the programme of Berlusconi and his government and for this reason I think that the anti-globalisation movement should be the heart of our social and political opposition, starting from the demonstrations in July in Genoa.

Riot police attack right to protest

Gothenburg has not been the only example of state attacks on anti-globalisation protestors. We print this account of police tactics in Australia against a peaceful local action, adapted from a report from Andrew Fernandez which appears on the No Sweat web site.



Melbourne: Riot-trained police attack Nike protest

More than 250 police and tens of horses violently attacked protestors outside the Nike superstore on June 1, the tenth Friday running in which nearly 300 people gathered to highlight Nike's exploitation of child labour, slave wages and anti-union attacks.

The police contingent included 200 members of the Force Response Unit, established by the Kennett Liberal government to break strikes and smash campaigns against their policies.

The FRU have been responsible for the baton charge of picketers protesting against the closure of Richmond Secondary College in 1993 and the controversial and deadly pressure point tactics used against many anti-globalisation demonstrators in Melbourne last autumn resulting in over 400 hundred injured.

On Friday, as protestors assembled, it became clear that we could expect something different than on previous weeks. Two ambulances and television crews (tipped off by police) were present on the scene.

Brawler vans

Round the corner to the north and south of the protest, brawler vans (used for mass arrests) and busloads of police were parked and waiting for the signal to attack.

About thirty minutes after protestors formed a symbolic blockade of NIKE, allowing shoppers in and out at either end of the picket lines), the Police gave their first warning for the crowd to disperse.

By the time of the second warning protestors had agreed to move on. However

just as protestors had broken their blockade lines and were assembling to march off, the police moved in with force.

Police attacked indiscriminately, harassing and attacking shoppers, commuters and protestors alike, and forcing the crowd onto the street. The police continued to move in on protestors and the general public who were doing nothing but standing on street corners.

They attacked anyone with a megaphone, violently seizing the equipment from them. They then proceeded to make arrests while periodically charging in waves at demonstrators who were either trying to observe those being arrested or make their way to the other side of the street.

Meanwhile passers-by looked on in horror at the sheer thuggery and brutality of the Victoria Police.

In the end five protestors were arrested and charged with "besetting a premises" - law that has been used against union picketers in the past.

The anti-NIKE 5 were forced to sign a bail condition stating that they would not return to the Central Business District (basically the entire city area!).

Once again NIKE has shown that it cares more about profits than child labour, slave wages, union rights and peoples well being.

Three hours of extra trading is obviously worth a few cracked skulls. And once again the police have shown whose side they are really on.

However despite the vio-

lent attack, nearly 200 protestors regrouped and held an emergency meeting at which it was unanimously agreed to keep the protests going and to build them bigger and bigger.

All were quick to recognise that the response by Nike and the Police were a direct result of the impact the protests were having. The mood was clearly one of defiance and determination to carry on.

The campaign is now attempting to win massive union and community support for continuing mass action against Nike.

For more information about the campaign internationally, go to:

No Sweat (UK)
<http://www.nosweat.org.uk/>
No sweat! was launched in November 2000 as a campaign against sweatshop labour, both overseas and in the UK.

Panorama had earlier screened an expose of Gap and Nike, two huge rich multinational companies that are building a name as ruthless exploiters of child and sweated labour.

Indonesian cops break up solidarity conference

On the afternoon of June 8, the Asia Pacific Labour Solidarity Conference on Neoliberalism in Sawangan south of Jakarta, organised by the Indonesian Centre for Reform and Social Emancipation (INCREASE), was violently broken up by Indonesian secret police and their right-wing militia thugs.

32 foreign participants, and the five year old child of one, were loaded onto police trucks and cars to be driven to the central Jakarta police station. There they were detained without charge by police intelligence and their passports removed. 8 Indonesian participants were also arrested and the whereabouts of some of them is still not clear.

Thugs

The police left the conference site mindful that the machete- and sickle-wielding militia thugs had stayed behind.

At approximately 7pm they launched an attack on the remaining Indonesian participants, who had to run for

their lives. A number were injured and two people were hospitalised, one requiring emergency surgery for a slashed artery.

The question of so called "visa violations" was used as an excuse used by the police intelligence to close down the conference. The Indonesian immigration authorities have stated that the foreign participants using a short stay pass were entitled to attend seminars and did not breach any laws.

According to Mursanuddin Gani, a senior official for the Director General for Immigration, who was quoted in the June 11 Jakarta Post, the police acted on their own.

"The police could have contacted our office prior to raid, but as far as I know there was no notification ... If they [the foreigners] really violated immigration laws, why were they released? ... The police can only summons the organisers of the seminar for questioning, not necessarily question the foreigners."

Gani pointed out in the

same interview that foreigners visiting Indonesia for special events like conferences and business meetings were eligible for the visa-on-arrival facility, the same visa obtained by the Australian participants at the INCREASE conference.

One of the participants, Farooq Tariq from the Labour Party Pakistan, was singled out for particularly repressive treatment by the authorities.

Deportation

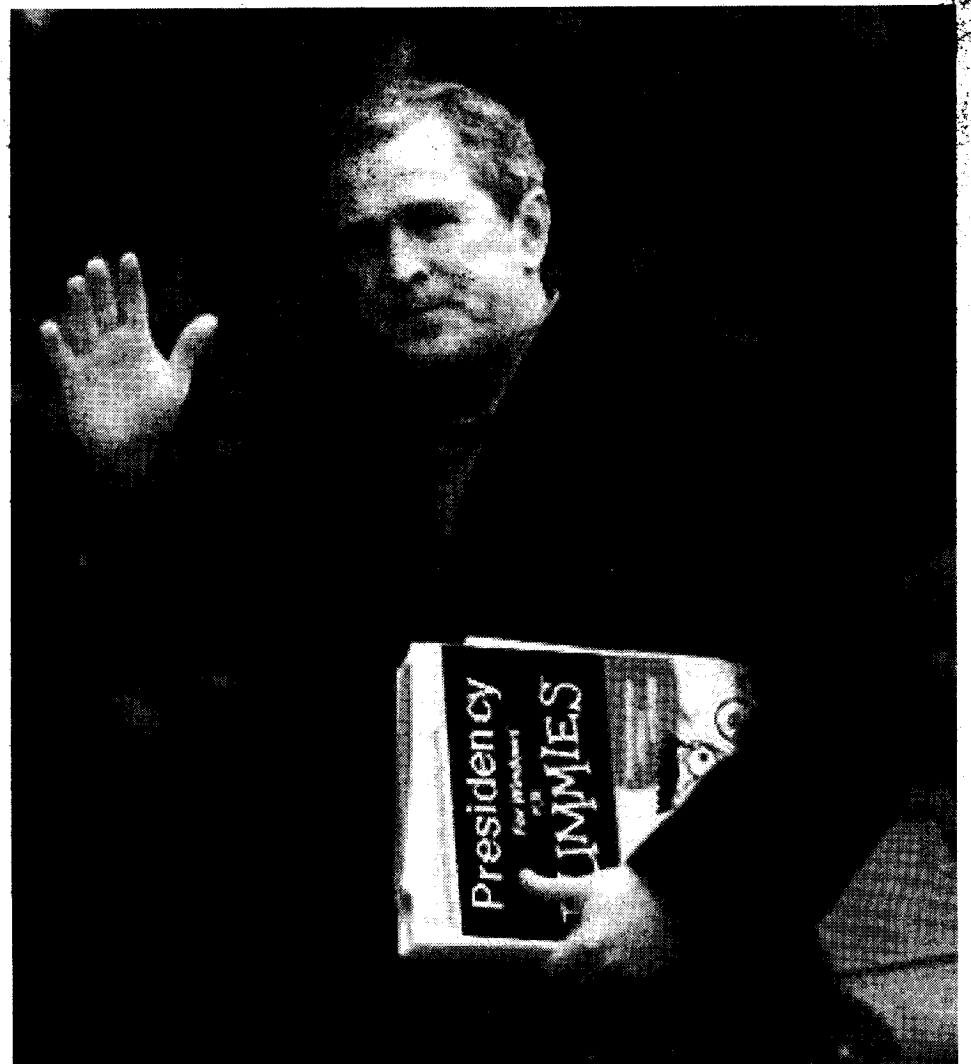
He was asked to leave the country within four days and had a stamp of deportation put on his passport. This behaviour is particularly dangerous given the repression meted out to Tariq by the military regime in his own country.

As he pointed out at a subsequent press conference, the decision to deport him shows "the colonial mentality of the Indonesian authorities" and puts his life further in danger.

Tariq told The Jakarta Post that he felt he was being discriminated against. "This is

cerns. There are highly unstable states that are developing nuclear capabilities. We have got to look at all the different ways, including defence systems, that we can deal with that threat".

This is the same Prime Minister that has refused a debate in the House of Commons on the issue of NMD. Blair is happier to talk to the media in support of George W than allow MPs to discuss his support for this mad-cap scheme, which will lead to an escalation of the arms race. Anti-nuclear campaigners are stepping up efforts to highlight the dangers involved including in preparation for the US President's planned visit to Britain next month.



Blair welcomes Dubya

George W Bush's first visit to Europe since taking office was greeted by strident protests from Spain through Belgium to Sweden with defence of the environment and opposition to National Missile Defence topping the agenda.

Media reports were mixed as to whether the President had had any success in persuading NATO allies that his "son of Star Wars" plans should be supported. Certainly it was clear that as opposition built here in Britain, with 18 union General Secretaries demanding opposition to the scheme, Tony Blair continues to be America's closest ally

The Prime Minister praised an "articulate" (!!) Mr Bush, and went on: "We understand, and indeed share the American con-

cerns. There are highly unstable states that are developing nuclear capabilities. We have got to look at all the different ways, including defence systems, that we can deal with that threat".

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It is also reminiscent of the actions carried out by the Indonesian armed forces in collaboration with militia thugs in East Timor in 1999 and by similar groups in Indonesia against the democratic forces.

Protests took place in response to this undemocratic outrage in many Australian cities and also in a number of places in the United States. Support was also received from a rally of striking dock workers in South Carolina on June 10, and a message of support was read at the protest rally to greet George Bush in Madrid.

Messages of support should be sent to asiect@asiect.org

Good Friday Agreement - here comes the crisis

John North

In the aftermath of the Westminster and local government elections in the North of Ireland, that much overused word, crisis, can now be said to apply to the Good Friday agreement.

The word that dared not speak its name during the election campaign was the word Sunningdale. This was Britain's last full scale attempt to stabilise its Northern colony.

In 1974 the British co-opted the Catholic middle class and southern Irish capital into support for a power sharing executive that would stabilise partition. The result was a massive reactionary backlash of unionist bigotry and sectarian intolerance.

An unfortunately timed Westminster election led to the return of eleven out of twelve seats to anti-agreement unionists. Sunningdale, as far as the British were concerned, was dead from this point on, although it took armed rebellion by the loyalists to finally bury it.

The British learned their lesson. The current attempt at stability has two important changes.

There are fewer concessions to nationalists in the Good Friday agreement, and those that there are focus on a share of sectarian privi-

lege within the northern state rather than on any real cross-border dimension.

The British are also willing to press ahead in the face of opposition from "extreme" unionism (not such a radical change when we consider that David Trimble is seen as a moderate).

This was enough to slow down the mobilisation of unionist reaction, but not enough to stop it. The elections saw Ian Paisley's DUP come within a few percentage points of replacing David Trimble's UUP as the main unionist party.

We can add to that the section of the UUP that stood on an anti-agreement platform and out-did most Trimble loyalists in votes. This gives a convincing unionist majority against the agreement.

In principle British strategy around the Good Friday agreement has failed. This principle will shortly turn into practice when David Trimble applies his usual defence, that is of placing himself at the head of the reaction and adopting their demands. In this case the demand is for the unconditional surrender of the republican weapons or his resignation as first minister and the collapse of the executive.

When we consider that the other big story of the elections was the



Trimble: once more into confrontation

rise of Sinn Fein and its overtaking of the SDLP as the main nationalist party, it would appear that it might be impossible for the British to square the circle.

Yet what must be born in mind is that we are facing instability rather than opposition. The Good Friday agreement remains extremely popular, especially among nationalists, and the rise of Sinn Fein is specifically based on their support for the agreement and their adoption of the policies of the of the SDLP.

Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest, at least in Belfast, abstention by some traditional republican supporters which was more than made up for by their capture of a growing middle class vote. In the long run their new supporters expect them to make further concessions on the arms issue and they have a great deal of freedom to do so.

There have also been substantial shifts within the DUP. In practice they have had to acknowledge the potential for gains in power and sectarian privilege from the new Stormont regime, and they want to keep it going. Their policy has gradually shifted from a demand for the destruction of the agreement to a demand that it be amended to exclude Sinn Fein.

If there is no shift on weapons by the Provos, the most likely outcome now is the suspension of the Stormont executive with the retention of some of the mechanisms of the Parliament and the refashioned statelet.

There will be a protracted battle to stabilise the agreement, which will hang around the desire of the DUP to retain the gains that it has made and their gut sectarian reaction to the presence of Catholics in the government.

Both Sinn Fein and the DUP will appeal to the British and point to the mandate from the elections. What must not be forgotten is that it is the British who actually hold the power.

Their position is defence of the good Friday agreement, but the agreement today is not the agreement was signed: it has moved persistently to the right and will move further.

It now includes the new RUC without even the gloss of many of the "reforms" proposed by the Patten report, a new and more lethal plastic bullet at their disposal, clear indications that the much-vaunted cross-border elements of the agreement are meaningless, and a low-intensity loyalist war that includes persistent "ethnic cleansing" of Catholics and appears to be largely invisible to the British and the media.

If the agreement falls to the right, the conclusion will be that the British were too demanding of unionism, and the next attempt at settlement will be even more reactionary.

What this election shows is how reactionary the agreement already is. The shift from SDLP to Sinn Fein and from the UUP to the DUP could have been predicted from the structure of the agreement itself.

The structures of the agreement demand a sectarian vote and reward the most vocal defenders of community rights, where "community" is defined in sectarian terms. The traditional parties lost out, with the Alliance party committing suicide in order to shore up the pro agreement vote within the unionist community.

Those who claimed to be the thrusting voices of a new class politics reborn by the agreement, like the loyalist PUP and the pro-imperialist Women's Coalition, saw sharp falls except were their most prominent spokespeople where standing.

What was shown up most cruelly of all was the lack of any real opposition. The republican dissidents were unable to mount any serious challenge and were reduced to a 'spoil your vote' campaign around one of their prisoners in West Belfast.

Even the "military" challenges by the various armed organisations were shown to be clearly bankrupt. The left did not step in, with the SWP running a "red-green" campaign marked mainly by a breathtaking opportunism, a programme to the right of the SDLP and a determination to stay within the Good Friday agreement and not raise it as an issue in the election even when challenged to do so.

This is all the more inexcusable because the sectarian competition that the Good Friday agreement promotes extends to the terms of the agreement itself and builds in a persistent instability.

The main strength of the deal comes from the absolute weakness of the opposition. Building an effective opposition depends on the left breaking from a tradition of chronic economism and/or those republicans concerned with opposing the agreement actively organising a political opposition.

The enormous obstacles in the way of such tasks should not be underestimated, but what the elections show is that the longer the task is left the more difficult it will get.

INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST GROUP

Globalise the Struggle



Fourth International International Youth Summer Camp July 22-28 near Rome



For young people who are going to Genoa to protest against the G8 summit and also want the opportunity to find out about revolutionary ideas by meeting with young socialists across Europe, the Fourth International's Youth Summer Camp is the ideal place to be.

Hundreds of young people come together for a week of political discussion and debate, but there will also be plenty of time to chat informally and have a good time at the camp, near Rome.

The theme of this year's camp is "Against Capitalist globalisation, globalise our struggles". Forums and workshops on a whole range of related themes will give people the chance to discuss the new movement that has developed from Seattle onwards and what lessons and questions this poses for revolutionary socialists.

The cost of the camp will be around £250 which will cover transport to Genoa, transfer to the camp and food for the week. Come and join us!

I am interested in coming to the camp

Name _____

Address _____

E mail _____

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Please send this form to PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU or e mail the information to outlook@gn.apc.org

Nice vote not so nice for Irish bosses

The shock of the Irish No! to the Nice Treaty is an indication of the undemocratic nature of the European Union perspective of enlargement and restructuring, and also of the potential difficulties that may face Irish capital in its relationship with its own working class.

What it does not yet represent is a serious challenge to either Irish or European capital from the Irish working class. By and large the working class were not to the fore in the campaign, while those formally charged with representing the workers – the social democrats and the trade union bosses – were to the fore in calling for a YES vote.

There are a number of reasons for this setback. Previous votes in European referenda had always involved substantial bribery of the population, with the promise of billions in subsidies. An overall weakness of current European strategy is that enlargement does not offer the possibility of any substantial funds being available to win support for the proposals in the smaller states.

There was a wide spectrum of opposition to the Treaty, with many different reasons for that opposition, stretching from concerns about abortion on the part of the far right, to opposition from the left to the privatisation and deregulation clauses buried in the Treaty.

The centre ground was taken up by Sinn Fein, the Greens and neutrality groups which supported the EU but wanted to oppose proposals for a rapid reaction force and Irish membership of such a force. This disparate opposition were able to draw out their support and ensure a no vote on a very low overall turnout of only 34.79%.

No campaign

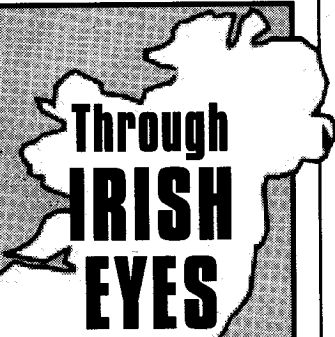
Two other factors are worthy of mention. The first was a monumental strategic error on the part of the government forces. They foolishly decided not to mount a yes campaign.

The rationale was that all of the forces leading Irish society supported the YES call, and simple statements of support without going into detail would allow the measure to slip through without any real debate.

One of the reasons this didn't work is because a whole series of recent scandals have led to widespread public distrust of politicians.

The dramatic impact of the NO vote, when it came, was amplified by the fact that European capital had managed to avoid a vote in every other country.

In theory the Irish vote brought the whole process to



A column from Socialist Democracy, Irish section of the Fourth International

a complete standstill. The European reaction did little in the short time to defuse Irish opposition. They arrogantly brushed aside the vote. Democracy is only respected when it produces the right answer, and it is quite clear that the Irish will shortly be called upon to think again.

So what has been won is not victory but the opportunity for a real debate on Europe and a chance for the left to build itself and put forward socialist policies.



Ooops! Ahern and co didn't even campaign

The outline of government strategy is already visible. Their first step will be to detach some sections of the opposition – either the right, with the promise of a referendum on abortion, or the centre with some meaningless formulation about neutrality which will be negated by the Treaty itself.

The other element of government strategy will simply be to mount a campaign. The fact that business, government, parliamentary opposition and the trade union leadership all support YES should ensure victory for them.

From this viewpoint the strategy of the left should also be clear. It is to assert a working class alternative, and mount a determined opposition to a trade union leadership that openly supports the Nice Treaty's calls for privatisation and deregulation, and is now ready to lend itself to a new campaign to overthrow a democratic result.

One urgent task is to bring figures from the European working class to Dublin to demonstrate in practice that an alternative does exist, and that it will come from the workers' movement.

No case for voting Labour

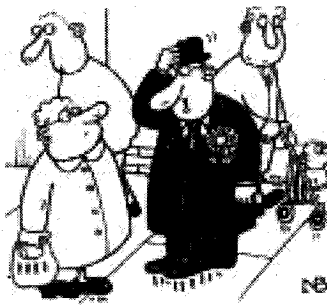
AS A MEMBER of Oxford Socialist Alliance I have started reading Socialist Outlook again, and I would like to make two connected points on the future of the Alliance.

Firstly, while not disagreeing with the main points of your May editorial (SO 45), I can't imagine voting Labour, even with a credible left candidate like Jeremy Corbyn.

At the last General Election I couldn't bring myself to vote for Andrew Smith, and under the "first past the post" system I didn't think it was worth voting for anybody else.

If I lived in Oxford West and Abingdon constituency I would probably vote for the Green candidate Mike Woodin, since I agree with Red Pepper that he is a credible left candidate. Incidentally I did vote in the European elections for Caroline Lucas of the Green Party, who recently said "I believe that the greatest potential for change happens precisely as a result of a creative interface between inner and extra-parliamentary activity." Perhaps this explains why I could vote for her but not have much time for the Green Party.

My point is that while understanding your reasons for a highly critical vote for Labour "where you must", surely, if only for the long-term future of the Alliance it would be better to abstain (or vote for the best available candidate)?



"I don't represent any party – just like annoying people."

In this election a lot of people will vote Labour for the wrong reasons. We need to convince them there is a real alternative. However I would argue there are even more people who have never voted (let alone voted Labour) who we need to convince, and if we are perceived as little more than "left Labour" ourselves, we could turn away more than we win.

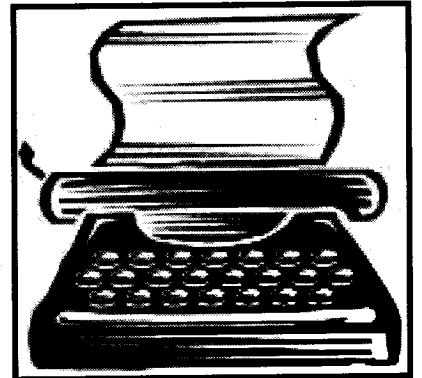
The article that stood out for me in May's SO was Jason Travis' contribution on the future of the Socialist Alliance.

I have always seen the capacity for serious and open debate as a strength rather than a weakness.

In the long term the future must be with the "thousands of anti-capitalist youth ... who can be won to radical politics."

Veronica Fagan's response holds up the Scottish Socialist Party as a model, with which I wholeheartedly agree. I don't claim to know much about Trotskyist orthodoxy, but I do know a bit about labour history. This election gives us the ideal chance to start building a real alternative, but it is also a learning process.

I feel it should be stressed that the key to the future of the Socialist Alliance lies within the trade union movement. I have recently joined the print union GPMU, and I will continue to speak out (and organise) within it for the Socialist Alliance. Unions like the RMT, CWU, the



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

FBU and now apparently UNISON are beginning to challenge (and democratise) the unions' link with Labour. In the GPMU I will try to argue for disaffiliation from the Labour Party and support for the Socialist Alliance.

I think that after the election, while uniting with anti-capitalist struggles locally and internationally, we should concentrate on democratising the trade union movement rather than encouraging mass defections from the Labour Party.

To quote Terry Conway "We need to recognise that we will build a stronger movement if we are able to listen to and address people's personal concerns as well as their political aspirations."

Those of us who know our history and learn from experience will unite to build the future.

Andy Gibbons, Oxford

Report unfair to Workers Action

The May issue of Socialist Outlook and your website contain a report of the debate on April 22 between left supporters and opponents of the Socialist Alliance.

It is good to see such debate finally reaching the pages of those papers which support the Socialist Alliance, but this makes it all the more of a shame that Alan Thornett so grossly misrepresents the views put forward.

Before I go on to what Thornett writes, it is also possible to caricature by omission. A large chunk of my contribution in the debate was devoted to the question of the trade unions, including the attitude of the Socialist Alliance to the union-Labour Party link.

Thornett chose not to respond to this in the debate, nor to mention it in his report. Of course, this all adds to his ability to represent me as only concerned with what is going on in the structures of the Labour Party.

Thornett attacks me for saying that the Labour government's policies are little different from those of previous Labour governments, saying "this is a standard argument among those insisting that work in the LP has to remain the principal tactic." Well, it is also a position taken by the

main component of the Socialist Alliances, the SWP. If anything, I would argue that the SWP overstate the case. Thornett does not refute this argument, merely goes on to talk of how Blair has changed the rules of the Party, which is not in dispute.

Thornett's central argument of course is that "there are now two defining political issues which the left in Britain has to address - and will pay a heavy price if it fails to do so. One is the anti-globalisation movement, the other the "emergence" of the Socialist Alliance in England and the SSP in Scotland.

Since the whole debate was devoted to the question of the Socialist Alliance it is hard to see how Thornett thinks he can get away with saying Workers' Action fails to address it.

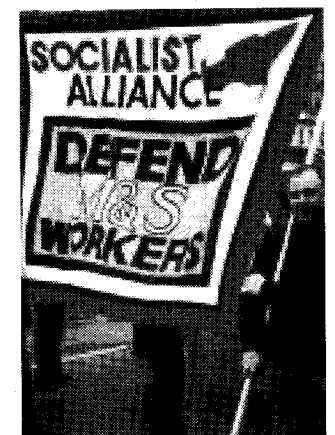
But, of course, that is not what he means. He means you are doomed unless you see the Socialist Alliance as a positive development, and we are beyond the pale because we refuse to accept this.

Thornett claimed in the debate that the Socialist Alliance provides a better mechanism for undermining the domination of the Labour Party over working class politics in Britain, but did not go on to say how. I made the point strongly (both in debate and my summary) that the Socialist Alliance's attitude to campaigning pointed in precisely the opposite direction.

With a few notable and honourable exceptions the attitude of the Alliance has been to say "we have a campaign on issue x, come and join us".

This is the reverse of what is needed. Far from talking simply of work in the structures of the Labour Party, I pointed out that we have built up the Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers in Brent with affiliations not only from trades unions and the Socialist Alliance, but also the Green party, a Constituency Labour Party and several Labour Party branches (including one in Boateng's constituency).

It would be good to know of where Outlook supporters



have been involved in building up such a campaign. This cannot be done if you start from a "join the SA campaign" standpoint. This approach to campaigning is effectively straight out of Stalinism's third period, with its "united front from below".

Debate involves taking your opponent's arguments seriously and refuting them. Outlook fails this test abysmally when it chooses to portray those on the left who don't agree with the Socialist Alliance as "waiting for something to happen".

If Thornett doesn't know better, other Outlook supporters certainly do. After the Alliance's rather pathetic performance in the election, maybe it is time for them to do some rethinking.

Pete Firmin, Brent

Socialism on the internet

Socialist Outlook web site: www.labournet.org.uk/so
International Socialist Group: www.3bh.org.uk/ISG

Socialist

A monthly marxist review. No 46. June 2001. 50p

OUTLOOK

Defend the right to protest!

Riot police confront anti-capitalists in Prague. Repression has increased as capitalists scour the world for a safe place to debate ways of increasing their profits



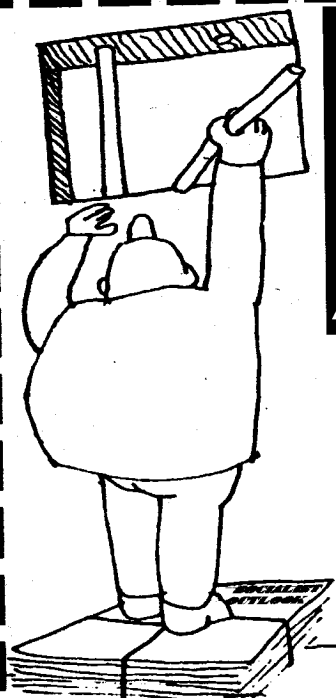
Swedish police fired live bullets at anti-capitalist protestors outside the EU summit in Gothenburg. One demonstrator was so badly injured that CNN subsequently reported he had died, though this was later withdrawn. While it was a relief to hear later from a surgeon involved that he may pull through, this does not minimise the crimes of the police.

Eye witness reports make clear that the police had been provoking demonstrators right from the beginning – surrounding the Convergence Centre so that people had to come out through a cordon, arresting large numbers of people, and throwing

them out of the city itself. This is part of a pattern of increased repression faced by activists organising against globalisation across the world (see p13)

Politicians including Tony Blair have not condemned police brutality and attempted murder in Gothenburg but turned on those who resist the iniquities of the system.

Now the Italian authorities seem determined to use this as an excuse to tighten the ring of steel around Genoa and prevent us expressing our demands. The labour movement must oppose this in the strongest terms possible.



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