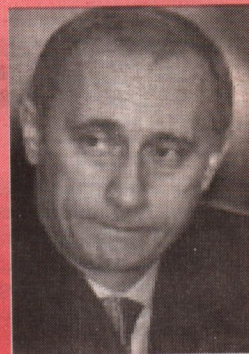


# Socialist

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# OUTLOOK

**INSIDE**  
this  
new  
24-  
page  
issue



**Crisis**  
behind  
Chechnya  
war p12

## As Blair ignores mass Labour votes against tube sell-off ...



# LEFT UNITES TO DEFEND PUBLIC SERVICES

80,000 trade unionists and Labour Party members in London voted for Ken Livingstone's platform of opposition to tube privatisation in London.

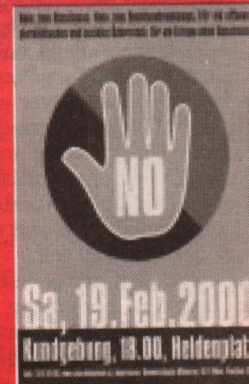
But Tony Blair and the Millbank team took no notice. Instead they engineered a "victory" for Frank Dobson as Labour's Mayoral candidate, and are carrying on regardless.

As we go to press it is not clear whether Ken will stand on some form of independent platform: but whether he does or not, Labour's antics have strengthened the left in London.

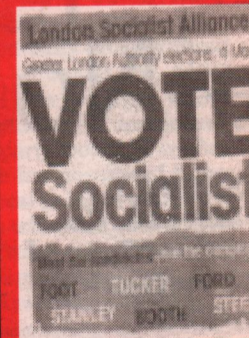
1,000 joined a massive rally in Camden on February 22 to back the London Socialist Alliance slate for the London Assembly. Left organisations are working together as never before.

The platform for united action is a simple one: socialist policies and defence of public services, beginning with the fight against tube privatisation, but also opposing PFI in hospitals, schools and local government - and in defence of jobs and working conditions.

For Livingstone there is only one real choice: either fight the Blair offensive with the rest of the left, or cede in to an ignominious surrender.



**Who let**  
Haider in?  
16-17



**Left unites,**  
p 5 & 10

# Networking against Labour's privatisation plans

**Bob Wood**

AS RECENT events in both Wales and London have convincingly shown, the base of the Labour Party is beginning to rebel against the spin doctoring and control freakery imposed on them by the Millbank Tendency and Downing Street.

Having accepted all the arguments, all the expulsions, all the erosion of democracy within the party, supposedly in the interests of achieving office, traditional Old Labour is now starting to question whether the price demanded has been too high.

They did not join the Party to support the policies being pursued by Blair's government, particularly over privatisation, but in a myriad of other policy areas as well. Whether their essentially disorganised and leaderless rebellion is too little, and too late, only time will tell.

In the meantime the left in the Party is beginning to regroup its depleted forces and in the process is finding some unlikely allies. It was in this context that the Network of Socialist



Giving the left plenty to protest about: Prescott

Campaign Groups recently held its Annual General Meeting in Sheffield.

Responding to criticism that previous AGMs had allowed insufficient time for debate on motions, the organisers had allocated the bulk of the day to discussion of motions submitted by Network supporters, apart from an upbeat introduction from Alan Simpson MP and a contribution from a local woman trade unionist.

The Network established

two key priorities for the coming year.

The central policy issue facing all of us, whether inside or outside the party, is the drive to privatisation, affecting areas as diverse as the London Underground, air traffic control, council housing, and perhaps most bizarrely, local education authority functions in places like Leeds. And not to be forgotten is the plethora of Private Finance Initiative schemes multiplying like

bindweed in health and education. The Network agreed to link up with trade unions and local campaigns in opposing all privatisation proposals.

The second key priority identified by the Network AGM for the coming year is a campaign against the continuing erosion of democracy in the Labour Party.

When the Labour Co-ordinating Committee produced a pamphlet at the 1996 Conference, "New Labour: a stakeholders' party", proposing the abolition of constituency parties, and the replacement of the annual conference by an American style convention-rally, most people thought the proposals to be the unattainable aspiration of a slightly mad fringe group.

However, conference has already been gutted, and the groundwork for the replacement of CLP General Management Committees is currently being laid by a consultation document, "21st Century Party". GMCs will be replaced by forums open to all members in the con-



Less than impressed with Tony Blair's new policies: these students recently occupied London's School of Oriental and African Studies in protest against tuition fees.

stituency, overseen by a small unaccountable Executive.

Masquerading under the usual pretence of "modernisation", these proposals will end the involvement of trade unions at local level (which may well be to the liking of the barons at trade union headquarters), and end the ability of branches to influ-

ence constituency matters.

The AGM consequently agreed to work with the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy in publicising the implications of the proposals to as many party members as possible. To this end, material will be rapidly circulated to all supporters of the Network.

Other topics considered by the meeting included Ireland, the Livingstone campaign and the protests against the Millennium Round of the World Trade Organisation.

On Ireland, a resolution was agreed welcoming the Good Friday agreement, calling for public enquiries into the murders of Robert Hammill and Rosemary Nelson, calling for the dismantling of the RUC, and supporting the aims and objectives of the Friends of Ireland, was perhaps surprisingly, only quite narrowly defeated.

In spite of the loss from the Labour Party of many of the Network's natural supporters, it is clear that the fight to prevent the complete takeover of the party by the Blair machine is not yet over, and that there is still a layer of left-wing activists in the constituencies.

The growing disenchantment with Blair of the old Labour core means that the left is increasingly building alliances to the right, posing the danger of a political drift to the right.

This is reflected in the Centre-Left Grassroots Alliance slate for the NEC, which has been drawn up since the Network's AGM.

The list apparently now contains someone who failed to oppose the witch-hunt against Militant and another who regularly voted as a councillor for cuts in local services.

Nevertheless, nominations for Raghav Ahsan, Ann Black, Rosina McRae, Mark Seddon, Christine Shawcroft and Pete Willsman should be supported. The deadline for nominations is April 7.

## Stop the Blairite steamroller — No to 21st Century Party!

**Matthew Willgress, Co-youth officer of the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups writes (in a personal capacity)**

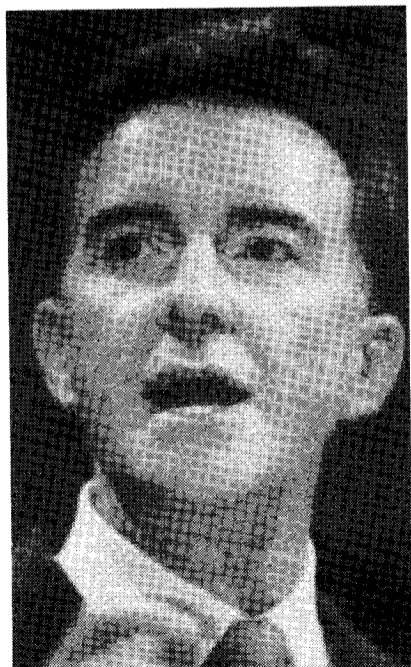
BEING A MEMBER of its exciting National Policy Forum, I take a rather unhealthy interest in all things to do with the Labour Party.

My favourite moan at the moment is the 'consultation' around the 21st Century Party document. Someone in Millbank certainly has a sense of humour.

This document, which supposedly sets out to 'reform and modernise' the Labour Party, is in fact one of the key points in pushing British politics back into the 19th century.

This is the stated aim of leading Blairites who believe the Labour Party was a tragic mistake and want to unite the party with the Liberals. We are in the process of seeing such a shift to the right that even Peter Hain is regarded as something of a dangerous left-winger.

The document itself does a really decent



Redefining away - Mandy

members resigned over the bombing of Iraq. There are likely to be more resignations in London if the government insists on going ahead with privatising the tube.

The pretence that this is really a 'consultation' document is exposed by its 'flagging-up' of Enfield Southgate CLP where the party structures have already been changed.

Also, if one wants to see the true meaning of these 'consultations', it is always better to go straight to the horse's mouth. In this particular case that horse is David Evans - a Millbank

employee.

In an article entitled The New Labour Party: A Vision for Organisational Modernisation Evans is quite clear about the Blairites' intentions. He states that "Representative democracy should as far as possible be abolished in the Party." He then goes on to say "All members are equal, so there is no need for General Committees."

This must have been what good old Mandy meant when he talked about "redefining" activists in Modern Labour magazine - getting rid of them altogether.

However, as Evans' plan involves one all-member AGM a year electing a tiny executive to run the Party as they please for the next year, some members are considerably more equal than others!

Evans is quite blunt about the reasons for this change saying: "it will empower modernising forces within the Party and marginalise 'Old Labour'."

This is the first reason why socialists must oppose these reforms. They make it impossible for any left movement amongst constituency members to be reflected in the Party.

They know from Bevanism and Bennism that a Labour government pursuing reactionary policies leads to a backlash.

Therefore it is a crucial part of the 'project' to destroy the CLPs.

In getting this through Conference the Blairites will need the support of the unions - many of whose leaders would no doubt like to oblige. This is quite ironic, because in destroying

# Livingstone's leap: which way will he jump?



Andrew Ward

**K**en Livingstone won a moral victory in Labour's electoral college, despite one of the worst pieces of gerrymandering ever seen in British politics. Despite all the efforts Frank Dobson only scraped home by 51.53% while Livingstone got 48.47% after Glenda Jackson's second preferences had been divided.

Around 36,000 individual Labour party members voted – giving Livingstone a 60-40 majority in this section. In the trade unions, Livingstone's majority was 72% to 23%. 98% of his votes in this section came from trade unions that held members ballot's while 80% of Dobson's share came from those that refused to do so.

Dobson's majority of 86.5% to 13.5% in the third section where 75 MPs, MEPs and GLA candidates had the same weight as all the individual party members or all the affiliated trade unions was key in delivering the result for him.

Livingstone's vote showed the strength of opposition in both the Labour Party and trade unions both to Blair's policies and to the dead hand of the Millbank mafia.

As Livingstone stated on February 23: "the future of the tube was the defining issue in Labour's selection contest and by backing me, the great majority of party

members made clear their opposition to privatising the underground.

"They simply reflected the overwhelming majority opinion in London. Labour must accept this verdict".

But is clear that despite his lack of democratic mandate, Dobson will not stand aside. Nor have the new Labour hierarchy any intention of altering their commitment to privatising the tube despite Livingstone's calls to turn May 4 into a referendum of this issue. When Dobson made a feeble attempt to silence Livingstone by saying he would hold an inquiry into the best funding method, Millbank slapped him down by pointing out that they determine the manifesto.

Opinion polls are clear that were Livingstone to stand he would stand a very good chance of winning. The majority of Londoners want him as mayor.

Of course opinion on the left of the Labour Party and trade unions is more divided – but there are many who will support him if he gives the lead whether or not they tear up their membership cards.

Livingstone should stand and should announce that he will do so as soon as possible. In fact he has already waited longer than was advisable. It is true that in the first

days after the electoral college votes were announced it made sense to hold back.

This exerted pressure on Dobson and his supporters while allowing Livingstone to take soundings of his. But to wait longer allows the momentum of the result itself to dissipate.

Those who voted for Livingstone in the electoral college are looking for a lead – Livingstone should give it to them by declaring his candidature.

As far as the Greater London Assembly is concerned, Livingstone should be constructing a slate of Labour movement candidates on a platform based on the interests of working people. He should call open meetings of all those who support his candidature, to democratically agree a slate that would run with him.

This would allow existing organisations such as the London Socialist Alliance the chance to argue for their candidates and ideas and take their chance of winning support from this broader forum.

### Nothing to fear

There is no doubt that the majority of those who back Livingstone are trade unionists, party members and other campaigners so the left would have nothing to fear from such a process.

Certainly this process would result in broader layers than currently exist organising around a political alternative to new Labour – and might even produce some high profile candidates.

If Livingstone were to do what some rumours suggest and come up with a slate of business people, ex-Tories and Liberals, this would be a kick in the teeth for those in the Labour movement and campaigns that have supported him. Another possibility would be a mixed slate with some figures the left would support and others that would be much more problematic.

While in either case, socialists should still back a Livingstone candidature for Mayor, a concrete assessment would have to be made as to whether we would support an accompanying slate.

Indeed it would be preferable for Livingstone to stand alone rather than to mix it with representatives of business and bosses.

The worst option of all of course would be if Livingstone bowed to the pressure from Blair and his cronies and decided not to stand. This would be handing victory on a plate to Millbank.

Many people would leave the Labour Party anyway – but they would generally do so without any positive direction in which to move. Their energy would be wasted and the left inside and outside the party would be weaker.

Now he has positioned himself at such a focal point of politics, much hangs on which way Ken decides to leap: forward to help lead a fight-back for public services, or back into a surrender to Blairism.

## UNISON ballot: Dave Prentis scrapes in

The bureaucracy's candidate Dave Prentis has limped to victory in UNISON's General Secretary Elections.

On a pathetically low turnout of 16% he got 125,854 votes, beating the Campaign for a Democratic Fighting UNISON's (CFDU) Roger Bannister who polled 71,021.

Ex-Hillingdon striker Malkiat Bilku supporters totalled 27,785 all.

Bannister, with 32% of votes cast, improved his personal vote from 60,000 in the previous contest against Rodney Bickerstaffe.

Adding Bannister's and Bilku's vote together, the left's showing this time was

42%.

Hopefully the CFDU can find a way of building on the dissatisfaction the result shows for the existing leadership.

Prentis fared much worse than predecessor Bickerstaffe, who polled 155,000.

The contrast is even more telling given that right-winger Peter Hunter, who last time scored 90,000 votes, failed to get enough nominations this time round.

His supporters didn't bother to transfer to Prentis – like the overwhelming majority of UNISON members they failed to register an opinion.

## Unions wait for Ken's signal

### Veronica Fagan

Since the announcement of Dobson's hollow victory in the electoral college to select Labour's candidate for London Mayor, everything within the trade unions is not going Blair's way.

London Regional Transport District Committee of the RMT have pledged support for Livingstone and the London Fire Brigades Union looks set to follow suit.

At the Communication Worker's Union Executive a motion calling on Livingstone not to stand was defeated – and this is certainly not a body with a left majority.

Even the Party's own Trade Union Liaison Committee meeting on February 24 did

not come out as strongly as Millbank would have liked in their support. Chairman Bill Morris called on Livingstone not to leave the party, but there was no ringing endorsement for Frank Dobson.

Millbank has even gone so far as to suggest that trade unions which back Livingstone will not be subject to automatic disaffiliation from the party.

Despite all this evidence of real movement in the base of the labour movement, and some newspapers, including the *Guardian* and the *Evening Standard*, urging Livingstone to stand, other sections of the press claim he has little or no support from Labour's left.

It should be no surprise that Livingstone's supporters who are individual members of the Labour Party are more divided about what he should do.

Unfortunately much of the left in the party is dismissive of the possibility that any candidacy not from the Labour Party could be justified.

Livingstone's own statements during the campaign – many of them completely unnecessary – that he would not stand, and that he would work for whoever won further bolstered this attitude.

The attacks on Party democracy carried out by Blair's clique, together with the disappointment at the

government's failure to deliver on its voters' aspirations, has led to a real degeneration in the level of political debate in many local constituencies.

The depths to which things have sunk was well illustrated at Livingstone's own CLP which discussed what he should do on February 24.

One contributor argued that he should not stand as an independent because it would mean that the CLP no longer got the money he gave them as an MP. Talk about looking at the big picture!

But there can be little doubt that – whatever individuals think – if Livingstone fails to stand it will be a massive blow for the left inside the party as well as outside it.

Millbank will have got its way – and London could end up with a Tory mayor on the back of this demoralisation.

# Lessons of Blair's Welsh setback

*Valleys have given a thumbs down to New Labour*

John Harris



## Cardiff call to action

THE ISSUE of Objective 1 funding is likely to be debated at this year's Wales Labour Party Conference, to be held at the end of March. At least four constituency parties have submitted contemporary resolutions on the subject: Caerffili, Bridgend, The Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff West. The text of the Cardiff West resolution reads:

This conference congratulates the Labour Government on achieving Objective 1 status for West Wales and the valleys. This makes available £1.2 billion of funding over the next six years.

Conference calls on the Government to guarantee that the required public funding will be made available for all Objective 1 projects approved by the European Commission. This money must be over and above that already allocated under the Barnett Formula.

Failure to provide full matched funding will mean that Objective 1 money will not come to Wales, or that money will have to be taken from the Welsh Assembly's existing budget. This will lead to cuts in other publicly funded services, with detrimental effects on the people of Wales and the image of our new Assembly.

We call on Tony Blair and the cabinet to "Listen to Wales" and provide the required additional funds.

Michael is out and Morgan is in!

After weeks of uncertainty and back-room dealings, Alun Michael was forced to resign as First Secretary of the Welsh Assembly by a vote of no confidence supported by the three opposition parties. Rhodri Morgan was selected as Labour's alternative nominee for the post and subsequently appointed by the Assembly. CERI EVANS reports on the background to these events, the shady double-dealing which came to nothing and the implications for Labour in Wales.

**C**oming just a week before the debate on his future, the Ceredigion by-election result was a bitter blow to Alun Michael. All his efforts to bolster his administration and talk-down Labour's disastrous Assembly and Euro election results were reduced to nothing, as Labour slumped to a humiliating fourth place.

Calling the by-election at this time was a political masterstroke by Plaid Cymru's Cynog Dafis – the result turned out to be the final nail in Alun Michael's political coffin.

Even the most thick-skinned and slow-witted of Labour's Assembly Members (AMs) could not fail to understand the implications of the result. According to Carole McKeown, the secretary of Ceredigion CLP, "The message from Ceredigion voters is loud and clear. We, like the rest of Wales, want more socialist policies, with health, education and welfare at the top of the agenda."

### Objective 1

As was reported in the last issue of *Socialist Outlook*, the issue which finally led to Alun Michael's demise was that of matched funding for Objective 1 projects in Wales. The opposition parties gave February 8 as a deadline for Alun Michael to deliver the goods. On the day, Michael tried to prevent a vote of

no confidence being tabled by tendering his resignation in advance. This caused considerable confusion in the Assembly chamber, since only Michael's closest allies in the Labour Party were aware of his cunning plan.

It was only on the insistence of the more far-sighted AMs that the vote of no confidence was eventually tabled and passed. Under the Assembly's rules, this left Alun Michael with no option but to resign.

It has now emerged that Michael hoped to prevent the vote being taken by offering his resignation, and then to win renomination as Labour's candidate for First Secretary.

Unbeknown to him, there was by then a clear majority of Labour Assembly Members in favour of his removal. Out of a group of twenty-eight, Michael was left with five hard-core supporters, with a further eight AMs wavering between supporting him or Rhodri Morgan.

Michael's plan quickly unravelled as it became clear that he would not receive the support of the Labour group. His forced resignation then became permanent, leaving Tony Blair floundering for an explanation as the Tories made the most of his discomfort in Parliament.

It is clear that Blair had full knowledge of Michael's plan and expected him to survive the day – more evidence, if any were needed, of Blair's contempt for the Welsh Assembly and the democracy of his own party in Wales.

### Liberals

The role of the Liberals in these events is particularly interesting. Described by one senior Labour figure as "six characters in search of an author", the Liberal AMs resisted pressure from Charles Kennedy to do a deal with Alun Michael and prop up his administration.

Their refusal was motivated by a desire not only to get rid of Michael but also to continue attacking Labour in the hope of electoral advantage.

Bolstered by their success in winning Cardiff Central in the Assembly elections, the Liberals hope to further capitalise on the unpopularity of Cardiff's Labour council in the next parliamentary and council elections.

Rhodri Morgan's appointment was greeted with enthusiasm throughout Wales. This reflected both relief at the removal of Michael and the expectations raised by the appointment of his successor.

An impromptu party organised by Rhodri's Cardiff West constituency was described by one London journalist as "Blair's nightmare party from hell". Rhodri was quick to make clear

that he would not be Blair's puppet in Wales. He also promised to be a tough negotiator in talks with the Treasury on Objective 1 matched funding. One of his first moves was to appoint leading left-winger Sue Essex to his cabinet. He ruled out a coalition with any party for the time being but would not be drawn on possible developments in the future.

Echoing the call to let a thousand flowers bloom, Rhodri urged Wales to "uncork the Welsh champagne bottle and let it fizz". One of Rhodri's undoubted strengths is his willingness to allow debate and discussion to take place, in sharp contrast to Alun Michael's paranoid and anti-democratic style.

One ominous development is the appointment of Gordon Brown to head an inquest into the events which led to Alun Michael's resignation.

Brown has threatened to "knock heads together", and his intervention may be an opportunity for the more reactionary forces in Welsh Labour to regroup and stage a fightback. Though, as Rhodri said in response, "If he gives us the Objective 1 money he can knock as many heads together as he likes".

### Bonfire of quangos

While analogies have been drawn between Ken Livingstone and Rhodri Morgan, it is important to understand that Rhodri is no left-winger.

He has always been more of a practical than an ideological politician, who earned the respect of the people of Wales by his tenacious exposure of the corruption and ineptitude of Tory quangos such as the Welsh Development Agency.

Rhodri was one of those who promised a "bonfire of the quangos" before the last general election. Now that he has finally achieved a position of power, he will be expected to deliver.

The significance of Rhodri's victory and the setback that this represents for Blair's plans in Wales, lies as much with the current he represents as with the man himself. Rhodri's supporters are a heterogeneous and growing band of Labour supporters who are becoming increasingly disillusioned with Labour in Government.

They are equally unhappy with the politics and practice of Welsh Labour in its local government and trade union strongholds. There is a real desire to break with the bureaucratic and paternalistic mentality which so dominates Welsh Labour.

Rhodri's election can only help to politically clarify this current, as it moves to deal with the real problems and limitations of the Welsh Assembly. This is a pro-

cess with which all Labour left-wingers should enthusiastically and constructively engage.

A lesson in how not to respond has been provided by the Blaenau Gwent constituency of Llew Smith, the only Campaign Group MP in Wales. They voted to oppose a coalition with the Liberals and also to oppose the use of PR in the Assembly elections.

Opposition to a coalition with the Liberals is important, and undoubtedly correct, but opposing PR is a big mistake. Can anyone argue that Labour's problems in the Assembly elections were mainly caused by the PR system?

Can socialists seriously claim that Labour should have won 68% of the seats on the basis of 38% of the vote, as would have occurred under first-past-the-post? If socialism is to regain its democratic credentials, this is not the road to follow.

### Implications

Events in Wales have implications for the left across the British state. Those on the left who expected opposition to Blair's right-wing government to take the form of growing protest movements and strike action, particularly in the public sector, have so far been disappointed.

What we have seen is a growing dislocation of British politics, as different patterns of voting develop in Scotland, Wales and parts of England.

This was most clearly illustrated in the Euro elections, which saw the rise of the SNP and Scottish Socialist Party in Scotland, Plaid Cymru in Wales and the Greens and UK Independence Party in the south of England.

Blair's ongoing problems in Wales and Scotland suggest that this trend will continue. It is also likely that Labour's difficulties will predominantly manifest themselves on the political level, at least in the near future.

Of course, these political problems do not simply manifest themselves on the periphery, but also at the very centre of the British state. Labour's problems in London are uncannily similar to those in Wales.

They stem from a broad consciousness among Londoners in opposition to privatisation and in sympathy with the policies of the old GLC, which translates into support for Ken Livingstone.

While Blair is unlikely to be swept out of office by a growing strike wave, he may yet be undone by political problems of his own making.



*Gone and soon to be forgotten: Alun Michael will get no welcome in the hillside*

# 1,000 rally round London's left slate

## Veronica Fagan

A THOUSAND people packed into the Camden Centre on February 22 for a rally organised by the London Socialist Alliance (LSA) to mark the end of the first round of meetings in constituencies across the city in the run up to May's election for the Greater London Assembly.

Around 2,000 people have attended these events in the different boroughs where the LSA will be standing local candidates, as well as contesting the central positions for the Assembly.

Candidates have been selected in many areas and are out and about getting themselves known.

The Alliance has begun to put itself on the map with weekly stalls in many parts of London, and campaigning activity around a whole range of issues. So far it has been relatively easy to get media exposure – the LSA has had more column inches than any other Assembly candidates.



The Camden rally platform included film director Ken Loach (below) and journalist of the decade Paul Foot (left).

It is scarcely surprising that the LSA should be prominent in the defence of Candy Unwin and fellow steward Dave Carr, who are under attack both from UCH management and from their own union UNISON. Candy is the LSA candidate in Camden and Barnet and she is standing against her own personnel manager at UCH – who is the new

Labour nominee.

The LSA has also been out building the rally at Waterloo on February 28 in support of RMT member Sarah Friday, sacked by South West trains for fighting against the unsafe conditions her members work in.

The Branch Secretary of RMT at Waterloo, Greg Tucker, also an LSA candidate said "Our branch was pleased to sponsor the LSA. It is about time we had an organisation that stood up for the concerns of working people not just asking us to

come out every few years to further some politicians career, but helping us campaign here and now. ...."

LSA supporters also participated in the STOPP demonstration and will be marching on March 4 to demand that "Mumia must live". We are clear that while we want votes in this election, what is even more important is to be involved in what resistance is actually taking place on the ground.

The rally itself had a very positive feel with little hint of the usual sectarianism that the British far left is so dogged by.

Pat Stack, in the chair, opened the meeting by explaining the groups that had come together to form the Alliance, while also stressing that the involvement of non-affiliated individuals was key.

Speakers from both the platform and the floor the identified themselves mainly as LSA supporters without seeing the need to identify their particular organisation when there was one.

The way that sectarianism has been such a problem in the movement was explicitly addressed in the contribution from film-maker Ken Loach – and his challenge

met a positive response from Paul Foot, who made the final speech.

Foot, making his first public appearance since his recent illness, was warmly received when he acknowledged the contribution being made to the movement by those outside his own tradition.

## Up-beat

All the speeches were very up-beat and the meeting was clearly united around calling on Livingstone to stand as an independent – or rather as a socialist, as some one argued.

No one wants him to do what the rumour-mills have been suggesting – to put forward a slate with ex-Liberals, Tories and business people. His supporters are in the labour movement, and that is where he should be looking for candidates and allies.

I certainly came away from the meeting energised to do more to make sure the LSA is on the map to stay. There will be weekly stalls in most parts of London from now until the election and plans are being laid for a round of ward based meetings at the end of March.

For further information about how you can get involved contact 0207 928 4213 or main.office@london-socialistalliance.org.uk.

# Rail militant victimised Now who's taking the piss?



Victimised: Sarah Friday

SARAH FRIDAY has worked at Waterloo for 12 years, 10 of them as a train driver. She is an RMT Health and Safety Representative for drivers and Chair of Waterloo RMT.

Following a disciplinary hearing on February 15, she was summarily dismissed by South West Trains. The charges against her were that she delayed a train, failed to notify a Supervisor that she required to use the toilet, and failed to surrender her safety cards!

This arose when Sarah was trying to discuss important Health and Safety issues with her manager during her break – and the manager refused to co-operate. Sarah has been sacked for her trade union activities.

The RMT Executive has agreed to ballot all Traincrew members at Waterloo for strike action. They are demanding Sarah's reinstatement, the dropping of all disciplinary charges against her and that South West Trains address issues of management harassment and intimidation to the satisfaction of union members. Ballot papers will go out on February 29 and a mass rally will take place at the station in her support on February 28.

Terry Conway from Socialist Outlook talked to Sarah about the issues involved

TC: What do you think the general response of management has been on health and safety issues since the Paddington train crash?

SF: I think it's been pretty appalling. Certainly at my own depot, there's been a complete crackdown on individuals rather than looking at problems they might have with training, procedures or because of the long shifts that they work. They've not addressed any of that, but they've really stepped up on disciplinary procedures, with very harsh punishments. I should imagine this is happening more widely.

Now Prescott has done a complete backtrack on promises that were made after Ladbroke Grove about safety responsibilities.

When Prescott was going round after Ladbroke Grove, he promised that there would be protection for whistleblowers. But I've been sacked, not for the ridiculous charges on my charge sheet, but because I've raised a lot of concerns about health and

safety issues, particularly about the working patterns for drivers and the problems that that causes.

TC: Management say in relation to the guards' ballot that they are the ones who are protecting safety, because it's much safer to give drivers responsibility for safety than it is guards. As a driver, what's your response to that?

SF: Well, it's an absolutely ridiculous statement. As a driver, I support the guards in their action, and we were actually balloted as well, as drivers. You know, I would support the guards out of principle anyway.

But as a driver, I also don't want any more work dumped on me. The job is really onerous as it is, let alone having all this extra responsibility placed on us.

The crash at Ladbroke Grove proved that – what do you do when the two drivers are killed? Luckily, there was a guard on one of the trains, and he went to do the protection procedures – that just highlights just how ludicrous all these changes are.

The real reason why the companies want to change

the rulebook is because it makes it much easier for them to bring in driver only trains. That's what this is all about.

TC: Before you were sacked, what was the response of your workmates to the health and safety issues that you were raising with management?

SF: They were very supportive. Drivers in both unions approached me, and a lot of the guys at the depot knew that if they contacted me, then I would pursue issues. They were very concerned – it's really awkward working on the railway, because you're not allowed to speak to the press – that's a sacking offence.

One of the main problems is that we could work seven hours without a break.

We do a lot of high intensive, suburban work, and to try and concentrate for that period of time on the signals is hard. There are some fairly busy sections of track. We're often following right behind another train, so you're going from one yellow signal to another one, and all these signals, so you know, you've

really got to try and keep alert. That is very difficult, because we're working such a long time without having a break.

They saw me as a person that they could approach and I would try to do something about that. We had meetings at the depot, and me and a couple of other drivers met the rail inspectors from the Health and Safety Executive, and we tried to put over the concerns of drivers.

I did a stress survey of drivers about this time last year, producing pretty alarming result. They felt, because I'd done things like that, a completely anonymous survey, that I was someone they could approach, and within the quite narrow parameters I was able to, I would take up their issues.

TC: What's been the response since you've been sacked?

SF: It's been very good. Everyone realises that I've been got on completely trumped up grounds, and that the real reason they went for me was that I was a thorn in management's side.

There was a crackdown at the depot. They put a new manager in last spring – he's been brought in as a really hard man. The depot was seen as being quite well organised, union-wise, and he's made it quite clear what he's there for. There was an unofficial overtime ban last autumn, when he tried to tear up local agreements regarding rostering. No one's under any illusions about what he's there to do.

I'm just one of several key individuals who people realise were under grave threat from this man. They see my case as an attack on their rights at the depot, and to organise industrially within the union.

TC: Have you been getting broader support?

SF: Yes, I've made it my priority to get round to other depots within the South West Trains area. As we're balloting at Waterloo for industrial action, obviously we're looking for some sort of co-operation during the strike from other depots.

I'm also speaking at various different Regional Councils of the RMT and trying to get out to meetings of other union members within the London area. It was very good that at the big rally of the London Socialist Alliance my case was advertised there, and there was propaganda about what happened to me, asking people to come to the rally.

Send letters of support/cheques (marked on back S. Friday Reinstatement Fund) payable to Waterloo RMT c/o 3, Blades House, London SE11 5TW. To contact Sarah to speak at any meetings phone 0171 582 2955 or e-mail gstucker@zoo.co.uk

# Italian lesson as teachers fight PRP

Performance related pay (PRP) for teachers is a key part of Labour's overall plan for education.

Labour want to open education up to the interests of business and to reshape schools as enterprises which produce the kind of workers global capital needs in the Twenty First century.

Teachers have fought successive attempts to fit the curriculum more closely to the needs of capital for example, through the boycott of the SATs.

They are now fighting on an issue which is not simply about the defence of wages and conditions, but also about the very nature of education.

GILL LEE looks at the issues involved.

THE INTRODUCTION of performance related pay has substantially weakened trade unions where it has been introduced.

In the Civil Service, a majority of the workforce say PRP has left them demotivated and demoralised.

At the 1000-strong demonstration and rally organised by STOPP (School Teachers Opposed to Performance Related Pay) on February 12, Michael Rosen, poet and educator, put the case against performance related pay like this:

"It will lead to a permanent sense of injustice, whinging and carping among teachers. New Labour know this. So why are they introducing it? For one reason - to smash the union."

To carry out their plans to restructure education in the interests of big business New Labour needs to weaken the teachers' unions.

Performance Related Pay is a very effective tool in doing so, since it reduces the role of the unions in determining the pay of their members (already substantially weakened through the imposition of pay settlements through the

school teachers' pay Review Body). It also strengthens management.

Not only will teachers' pay be influenced by how well their Head Teacher feels they are doing their job, but, through tying pay to pupils' results it substantially reinforces the importance of results - however narrowly defined by the government.

This may mean teachers focusing on particular groups of pupils whose improvements are key to PRP targets, rather than catering for the differing educational needs of all their pupils.

It means an increased emphasis on those educational goals which are measurable and quantifiable, rather than those which are not (such as ability to work with others; ability to question, and think critically). It ties teachers more closely to New Labour's educational policies and reduces their willingness to mediate these in the interests of their pupils.

PRP is also about blaming teachers for the failures of the educational system.

As Nick Davies' well-researched articles in The Guardian proved, the main

cause of failure in education is poverty, and the main cause of failing schools is an increasingly divided school system in which there are few true comprehensives left.

Schools are increasingly divided into 'sink' schools and those which have a high proportion of their pupils from relatively privileged backgrounds.

PRP will reinforce this divide with teachers increasingly choosing to teach where targets are easier to meet, and 'sink' schools increasingly employing temporary and agency staff. None of this is to the advantage of working class children, or teachers.

The teaching unions have yet to be pushed into decisive action on PRP (the NUT has agreed a boycott of appraisal linked to the performance management part of the PRP proposals). The 1999 Conference of the National Union of Teachers unanimously passed a motion calling for a campaign of action beginning with a one day strike. The majority "broad left" (right wing) National Executive of the Union has however consistently blocked calls to deliver a ballot on



*If she doesn't perform well it's less pay for her teacher*

strike action.

STOPP, influenced by the Socialist Teachers Alliance, has begun a series of demonstrations, pickets and lobbies aimed at putting pressure on the government and the teaching unions.

In Italy, threats of strike action by teachers made the

government retreat on PRP. The fight will be on again at NUT conference at Easter to make sure that a similar course is followed here.

## Labour's election fixers stack odds for grammar schools

# Blunkett's obstacle course for comprehensive campaigners

**Richard Hatcher, Birmingham CASE**

In Ripon, a market town in Yorkshire, parents are campaigning to turn the local grammar school into a comprehensive. It sounds like a news story from the 1960s. But for those parts of the country where the 164 remaining grammar schools exist, it is a battle still to be won.

For example, here in Birmingham we have 8 grammar schools which grossly distort the pattern of education at the expense of working class children. 38% of pupils in Birmingham secondary schools are entitled to free school meals. In the grammar schools the figure is less than 5%. Children from some minority ethnic backgrounds - African-Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi - are heavily under-represented.

The existence of the grammar schools deprives the would-be comprehensive schools of a significant number of the most academically able children. Recent research confirms that the standards achieved by less able children who go to true comprehensive schools are higher than those who go to



comprehensive schools 'created' by grammar schools.

Meanwhile, the most able pupils do just as well in comprehensives as in grammars. In other words, the existence of the grammar schools actually holds down the standards of other schools.

So perhaps the most elementary step one might have expected of a Labour government with a massive majority is that it would complete the long-overdue compre-

hensive reform. If Margaret Thatcher in the 1960s could get rid of most of the grammar schools, surely David Blunkett could finish the job.

"Watch my lips, selection will end" he said at the Labour Party conference just before the general election. But the Blair government didn't legislate the eleven-plus away. Instead it allowed parents to ballot locally.

That doesn't sound too bad, you may say. But the rules

have been designed by the same method which ensured Dobson's victory over Livingstone.

Before a ballot can take place, 20% of parents have to sign a petition calling for it. In Ripon the local campaign has got the signatures and voting is now taking place. But in Birmingham, where there are 8 grammar schools, it means collecting 10,728 signatures - a mammoth task. In Kent, with 39 grammar schools, the figure is even higher.

Compare this with the proposed ballot for changing to an elected mayor. Birmingham and other big cities will be ordered to hold a referendum later this year. No messing about with petitions to trigger a ballot.

For smaller councils, petitions will be needed, but the government has just lowered the threshold from 5% of the electorate to a much smaller figure, to be decided by John Prescott, because they were worried that not enough people would sign it.

But at least everyone has the chance to vote, you may say. Wrong again. The rules are byzantine. Two sets of procedures are in force in

different areas. Under one, the only parents who can vote are those whose children go to primary schools which have sent five or more pupils to grammar schools in the past three years.

This excludes parents at the majority of primary schools in the city (only 127 out of 334 are eligible), as well as all those of secondary school students - but includes parents at private prep schools.

Still, at least local Labour councils can throw their weight behind the campaign can't they?

Well, no. They are strictly forbidden by law from taking a partisan position. You thought that's precisely why we elected them? Ah, that's Old Labour, this is local democracy Millbank-style.

The task is huge, but there are vigorous local campaigns in a number of areas, Ripon, Birmingham and Kent among them. They need help.

■ The national umbrella organisation is CASE, the Campaign for State Education, 158 Durham Rd London SW20 0DG. Website: <http://www.mandolin.demon.co.uk/case.html>

## Faslane fightback

**Campbell McGregor**

The movement against nuclear weapons has been undergoing a revival in Scotland.

Britain's strategic nuclear deterrent is based on missiles launched by Trident submarines, which are sited at Faslane on the Firth of Clyde. There has been a continuous peace camp outside this base since the early 1980s, with sporadic protests over the years.

The area used to be under the control of Dumbarton District Council, which was often sympathetic to the protestors, but the Tory government transferred it to Argyll and Bute Council, who have tried to get the peace camp evicted.

The anti-missiles movement in Scotland was greatly encouraged last year, when a group of women who had damaged some barges in Loch Goil used in the testing submarines were acquitted at Greenock Sheriff's Court, after they argued that nuclear weapons were illegal.

On February 14, 500 protested at Faslane, stopping traffic from entering the base for around 2 hours. 189 were arrested, including socialist MSP Tommy Sheridan. The protestors have been charged with breach of the peace, and a few with resisting arrest; it is expected that they will use the same defence as the Greenock women. Watch this space.

# Missing links in Milburn's beds inquiry

John Lister

**Q: WHEN IS an inquiry not an inquiry?**

**A: When it's a New Labour inquiry!**

That is the simple lesson from the long awaited but ultimately pointless inquiry into the availability of hospital beds in England, commissioned 18 months ago when Frank Dobson was just an ineffectual Health Secretary, and published in the midst of an entirely predictable winter crisis for the NHS.

Dobson asked for the report to be prepared not by any independent or open-minded researcher but by Clive Smee. No, it seems he is not Cap'n Hook's bosun from Peter Pan, but the Department of Health's chief economist, and by implication a man who has been closely involved with the disastrous run-down of hospital beds implemented by successive governments over the last 20 years.

At first sight it might have seemed that the report when it was finally, grudgingly published by ministers, offered sweeping and bold conclusions. It declared that the NHS will need another 4,000 beds in the next three years if it is to cope with the mounting pressure from

emergency admissions and from frail older patients for whom most of the appropriate NHS beds have now closed down.

But on closer examination the findings are rather less than radical.

The 4,000 beds are not what they appear. 2,000 of them are supposed to be "intermediate" beds: these are not hospital beds at all, but nursing home beds - almost all of which are privately run by profit-seeking firms: expanding this sector is a further privatisation of what was part of the NHS.

Indeed Alan Milburn has only recently rubber-stamped the closure of NHS community hospital beds in Oxfordshire, making it clear that this is not the "intermediate" beds Mr Smee is proposing.

This leaves a call for another 2,000 front-line NHS "general and acute" beds over 3 years: surely this is at last recognising the chronic problem of an NHS which cannot cope with any surge in emergency demand?

Well not quite. Because while calling for more beds on the one hand, Mr Smee seems oblivious to the loss of a similar number of beds which is now gathering pace.

The problem is that - whether by design or neglect - it appears that Mr Smee was not asked to include any examination of the likely impact on hospitals of the Private Finance Initiative,



the Tory scheme to get new hospitals funded by private industry and leased back to the NHS. And he did not think to include this in his report.

PFI has become a by-word for bed losses: even those arguing in favour of the costly plan admit that in many cases 25-35% of acute beds will face the axe. The dozen or so PFI schemes already under way could easily wipe out the 2,000 "extra" beds called for by the inquiry.

But neither the phrase nor the initials 'PFI' can be found in the 100-pages of Mr Smee's analysis, which appears to have been concocted in near-paranoid secrecy, with no attempt to seek the views of health unions or user groups.

The other vital missing link in the report is any discussion of how much its proposals would cost, or where the money should come from.

While many of the 25,000 acute beds which have closed

since 1982 have gone as a result of increases in day surgery and shorter lengths of stay in hospital, the closures have been increased by cash pressures on health authorities and Trusts, many of which are again staring down the barrel of deficits this year and next.

Without extra cash allocations, no extra beds will open: instead more will close in the battle to balance the books.

But the cash question also hangs over the so-called "intermediate" beds in nursing homes. First Dobson, now Alan Milburn have maintained a constipated year-long silence over the findings of the Royal Commission on continuing care of the elderly, which recommended that nursing costs in nursing homes should be covered from the NHS - instead of the present means-tested charges administered through social services.

Until this question is answered, the so-called "consultation" on the possible shape of the future NHS in 20 years time is a wasted effort.

Mr Smee put forward three possible - uncosted - variants: "Maintaining current direction", which would require an additional 8,000 acute beds, 7,000 nursing home beds and 15,000 places in residential homes. This option would also need an extra 6,000 GPs, a possible doubling of home help services and a 20 percent increase in district nursing.

"Acute bed focused care", which Mr Smee suggests would need a 25% increase in acute hospital beds along with 7,000 nursing home places and 15,000 residential home places.

The report does not explain why this variant would need so many additional places overall: it would require a 50% increase in home help services, little change in district nursing, and 4,000 extra GPs.

Alternatively, the scheme most likely to tickle the fancy of Alan Milburn is the

so-called "closer to home" option, (more accurately the "back bedroom DIY option") which would slash acute beds by almost ten percent, almost double the number of district nurse contacts, and require an extra 10,000 GPs. This, like the other two options would also require 7,000 extra intermediate beds and 15,000 residential beds.

But because they are run by the private sector for profit, it is impossible to ensure that nursing and residential beds expand in number, or that they are provided where they are most needed.

Whole areas of the country, including most of London, have well below the national average provision of nursing home places. The result is - as a separate report by the National Audit Office has pointed out - that large numbers of frail elderly patients remain stuck in inappropriate acute hospital wards for lack of suitable alternative beds and care.

The NAO estimates that up to 6,000 patients could be stranded in this way at any one time, while hospitals struggle and social service budgets are stretched to breaking point.

The system isn't working. It didn't need 18 months of secretive deliberations in a darkened room to tell us that.

We need a halt to any further bed closures, the abandonment of PFI, and the establishment of NHS nursing home places together with a scrapping of the obscurity of means tested charges if the goal of a comprehensive NHS is to be achieved in the medium term.

This means more cash for revenue, more NHS capital, and an immediate campaign to recruit and train the additional nursing and other professional staff that the NHS will require whatever system is adopted.

Alan "Moderniser" Milburn has helped waste 18 months while things have got worse, and we are now in the second half of this Labour government. If he doesn't get the injection of resources we need, he could be taking the blame in 12 months for another electorally damaging NHS winter crisis.



FLU CRISIS - THE NHS GEARS UP

## Doubts hang over Leeds Left Alliance

Shaun Cohen

THE LEEDS branch of the Left Alliance recently held its AGM. On the positive side the meeting brought together the left in Leeds. Even the SWP were represented. However, the future direction of Left Alliance is uncertain.

A discussion on the local elections in May did not really map out a strategy. Confidence was expressed that there are gains to be made against Labour and the emphasis was put on community type politics.

The recent OFSTED report into Leeds LEA was the subject of lively discussion. The meeting agreed to oppose privatisation, but again a strategy was lacking.

Comrades suggested that many Councillors agreed were unhappy with the way the LEA has been run but they were not prepared to criticise the council leadership.

It was decided that a priority must be campaigning for the re-election of Councillor Garth Frankland in Chapel Allerton ward. Garth resigned the Labour whip in disgust at the continuing rightward swing in the local and British level of the Labour Party. Other than this, no real priorities were set by the group for the year.

The Alliance has high hopes of establishing itself as an alternative to Labour electorally.

At the same time, after last year's failure in the Euro-elections, it seems to be struggling to work out how it should be operating.

## Hiving off jobless

UNION activists in North west England are building a programme of activity to fight privatisation.

They are calling attention to the continuing push to hive off segments of the public sector encouraged by the 'Labour' government.

Threats include the transfer of council services, the search for a vehicle to get rid of more council houses, schemes like the Private Finance Initiative to build new hospitals, Education Action Zones and the threat to replace 'failing' Education Authorities with contractors.

The Blairistas are also struggling to dispose of air traffic control.

One of the most sinister developments is the privatisation of unemployed people through Employment Zones. Services to drive them into work will be run by private companies paid by results. Jobless workers will be bullied for profit and the attainment of targets under the scheme.

Speaking at a meeting in Liverpool to launch a campaign against the zones, a union rep from PCS pointed out that the companies would have an incentive to work with unemployed people who would most easily find jobs, not those who have the greatest difficulty.

An ongoing campaign

against the zones was agreed at the meeting, attended by forces including representatives of several public sector union branches and Liverpool Trades Council.

The trades council is also acting as an organising focus for broader anti-privatisation work. To pool knowledge and information a one day North West conference has been called. This will be held at the Friends Meeting House in Manchester on June 3 2000.

For more details contact Jim Dye (Liverpool TUC) c/o UNISON, 4th Floor Produce Exchange, 8 Victoria Street, Liverpool L2 (Tel: 0151 236 1944).

# Section 28: charter for bigots and bullies

**Francis Clarke**

Anyone viewing the recent repeat of the Channel 4 drama series 'Queer as Folk' will have seen the homophobic bullying of the character Nathan. He is a 15 year old school student who comes out dramatically to his class mates and suffers homophobic bullying as a result.

In fact his experience probably understates the weight of the problem. Systems of bullying and "pecking orders" exist amongst school students, mirroring what happens in society as a whole. It operates at all levels from low-key harassment to out and out violence. This is one of the important routes by which homophobia is reproduced in society.

The government recognises the problem of bullying within the narrow confines of their desire to "improve standards" and the perceived lack of educational achievement of boys. They are concerned when

male students who work hard and show an interest in education are also targets, although much less than boys who dislike sport, are "effeminate" or come out gay, through accident or design. They are not, however, really interested in fighting homophobia.

But in fact bullying is a symptom of the way that schools reproduce the pronuclear family, sexism, male chauvinism and homophobia for society. Only recently recognised has been the role played in this by "peer pressure" - systems of social behaviour maintained amongst children. So bullying is just the tip of the iceberg.

The supremacy of "normality" - heterosexuality, but also misogyny (hatred of women), racism and many other attitudes are at least partly set at school. Section 28 was a response to the challenge that non-judgmental sex education represented to this during the 1980s. "Progressive" educational methods attempt to

educate the "whole child". Amongst other things, it challenged bullying and gang behaviour.

This was too much for the Thatcher government, who began, through the introduction of the national curriculum and other measures, to control teaching and schools increasingly tightly. The introduction of books and cultural events showing gay and lesbian relations in a positive light was the final straw, and the Tories introduced Section 28.

This is an explicitly homophobic measure that has little legal force but introduces plenty of fear amongst teachers who want to challenge homophobic behaviour and especially bullying.

Today's reactionaries, while denying that they are in favour of bullying - or in fact homophobia in most cases - want to retain Section 28 as a means of discouraging schools, teachers and local authorities from challenging homophobia. They

want to retain the supremacy of heterosexual attitudes in schools.

The government, while so far remaining firm on repealing the Section, have responded by adding a clause to the local government bill that repeals Section 28 that marriage (i.e. heterosexuality) will be favoured in sex education. While it would be difficult to give this any teeth, it would give reactionaries and OFSTED another chance to meddle in sex education, already a battleground particularly in educating young women about contraception and how to deal with relationships with men.

In Scotland the battle has been particularly fierce after a vigorous intervention by Catholic Cardinal Winning, supported by Stagecoach millionaire Graham Souter.

While Donald Dewar initially looked like he was going to brazen this out - worried that to give the Catholic Church a veto on any issue was not

very New Labour - in the end it looks like he too is about to cave in and introduce similar regulations.

North and South of the border there has been a refusal to confront the reality that undoubtedly contributes to a much higher suicide rate amongst young lesbians and gay men than amongst their peers.

Meanwhile, the half-reformed Lords have rejected the repeal of Section 28 by the British Parliament (even combined with the sex education reform). Right-wing and religious reaction still has its home amongst the ermine-clad hoards.

Along with other overdue reforms like equalisation of the age of consent (and other issues like banning fox-hunting), the majority of the House of Lords will fight tooth and nail to keep Section 28.

Blame the government,



which has refused to take the bull by the horns and abolish the un-elected House, which remains one of the main bastions of reaction in Britain.

After yet another ballot stitch-up ...

# Civil service union bosses sign away members' rights

**Darren Williams, PCS Group Asst. Secretary, Office for National Statistics (personal capacity)**

MEMBERS of the 250,000-strong Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) have just voted overwhelmingly in favour of an agreement entitled 'Partnership Working in the Civil Service'. The margin was more than 7 to 1.

This document was drawn up by the Cabinet Office with the leaders of the 3 major civil service unions. It aims "to promote a positive relationship between departments and agencies and their Trade Union representatives".

PCS members generally saw only favourable comment on the agreement. The leadership's recommendation was sent out with the ballot.

But does it give civil servants a fairer deal, and more protection of their rights and interests at work?

One element is a pledge to co-operate with efficiency drives initiated by the government and departmental management, looking for "continuous improvement". This phrase comes from the jargon of New Management Techniques, pioneered in Japan and which gradually spread to other countries. It is all



Benefit staff could be among the first to pay the price for PCS capitulation

about enhancing productivity, not the interests of staff.

The agreement commits the unions to "Ensure delivery of the programme of the elected government". It accepts "the overall framework and policies set by government, including confidentiality, financial and other resource requirements set by ministers."

In other words, we are giving up in advance our right to challenge public spending cuts and their consequences - including any further civil service pay freeze - because these are a matter for government policy.

The present government is committed to continuing pay restraint, performance-related pay and 'best value' policies which favour pri-

vatation, outsourcing and market testing. Should the unions go along with these policies simply because they are part of the government's programme? Of course not!

The unions are accountable to their members, and no-one else. What do we get in return? The partnership is "underpinned by a commitment to employment security, good conditions of service meeting or exceeding best employment practice, and fair and equitable treatment." The problem is that this is not translated into clear, measurable targets.

One objective is to "Seek to avoid compulsory redundancies." But which government department *doesn't* claim that it seeks to avoid

compulsory redundancies?

There are slightly more definite commitments to training and equal opportunities, and mobility between departments in preference to redundancies.

But most departments are already have such commitments in their own conditions of service. This agreement imposes no additional legal obligations.

Will closer and earlier involvement in reviews and proposals for change in the Civil Service give the unions more opportunity to protect their members' interests?

On the evidence, it seems more likely that the union leaders will simply be better equipped to act as the government's propaganda arm. They will reassure us

that 'change' in the Civil Service is really a positive opportunity - not the process of continuous upheaval and insecurity that it might seem.

The PCS leadership did its best to ensure that members didn't get to hear critical analysis. Branch activists did not know the date of the ballot until members received their envelopes in the post. The balloting period was less than two weeks, cutting down the opportunity for meaningful debate.

As with every other major initiative launched since (and including) PCS's foundation, a closely-controlled plebiscite has been used to rubber-stamp a decision by the union's right-wing bureaucracy which sacrifices members' interests.

An agreement that applies to all civil service departments nation-wide is being implemented by the very people who (as leaders of PCS' predecessors) allowed the government to abolish national collective bargaining on pay and conditions.

This underlines the necessity for activists to organise to defeat the current leadership in May's biennial delegate conference and NEC elections. Failure will see the union continue in its present guise as a tame staff association which Tony Blair can rely upon to sell his policies to civil servants.

## Move towards national rail strike

RMT members across the country have voted overwhelmingly for strike action in a dispute over rail safety. In a majority of train operating companies train crew are now preparing for one-day strikes later this month.

Last summer Railtrack introduced railway Rule changes which transferred safety responsibilities from guard to driver. Whilst putting extra pressures on the driver the RMT feared that guards would be left with little to do other than collect tickets and sell refreshments.

Railtrack have been trying to get these changes through for some years. Previous attempts had been stopped by a campaign of action by the RMT, but last year the union leadership reacted too slowly and the changes were introduced before action could be mounted. Now the RMT faces a battle to get the changes withdrawn.

Railtrack admitted after the Ladbroke Grove crash that it would have been impossible to introduce their changes in the new context - not least because they gave responsibilities to the drivers, who were killed. The guard is still vital to the safety of the train, not just to the comfort of passengers.

Unfortunately, the RMT leadership, rather than immediately name dates for action, has given the operating companies and Railtrack a week's grace for further talks. RMT members have been waiting a long time to resolve this issue.

A policy of obfuscation and delay by RMT officers has already made it harder to win support. RMT activists will now be pressing for concerted action at the first opportunity.



# Close Rochester - close all detention centres

**Paul Johnstone**

Rochester prison has been the subject of many protests since it was declared a Detention prison in 1995.

On average there are 190 immigration detainees in Rochester. Now the way they are treated by the Prison Service has been condemned by the official Inspectorate of Prisons. The report followed an unannounced inspection last year.

Sir David Ramsbotham said Rochester prison was found in a worse state than when it was last inspected. He questioned the legality of treatment applied to these unconvicted prisoners.

## Drug tests

For example they have been subject to mandatory drug testing, and punishment through prison disciplinary procedures if they fail to co-operate. No legal justification for this could be provided.

This lack of concern for due process extends to the

very fundamentals of the detention of these people - they were not provided with any written explanation as to why they were being detained.

Ramsbotham's report makes clear that this was a wider concern on his part, which had also arisen from inspections of other centres, such as Campsfield in Oxfordshire.

Despite his urging, no coherent set of guidelines, regulations or statutory rules has yet been formulated for all detainees.

When subjected to prison procedures adjudication documents used were only in English, which many of the detainees do not understand.

Induction procedures and documentation were available only in English, although detainees who did not understand them were still required to sign them as if they did.

In general, although many of the detainees speak little or no English, facilities to communicate with them in other languages were

not employed: "remarkably there had been no instances in which the Language Line had been used at Rochester during the past year."

Ramsbotham also criticised the Prison Service for treating detainees as if they were unconvicted prisoners when their needs were markedly different. There was little activity for them and little work, although they needed money to have access to various facilities.

## Hostile

Some staff were clearly hostile, and resented the presence of detainees, although others wished to be able to provide a better regime. Criticism was made of the general regime.

Overall Rochester Prison was dirty. This particularly extended to the toilets used by detainees, and he remarked two cells had been left bloodstained for weeks after incidents in which a detainee cut himself.

These criticisms are official, but the detainees in Rochester have themselves

repeatedly protested the conditions. Numerous suicide attempts, hunger strikes and official complaints have gone unheard. The response of the prison authorities and immigration is forceful removal of the individual to the segregation unit, restrictions under prison regulations without hearing or trial pending removal to another prison.

In some extreme cases individuals have been removed to hospital without their consent so as to shift the prison's responsibility for action and medicalise the problem.

However the campaign outside must continue. The answer is not mild reform and better management of this cruel and degrading treatment but ending it.

As a first step the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns is calling for the closure of Rochester, but all of these centres must go ... and the sooner the better.



Protesters outside the Austrian embassy in London on February 19 in solidarity with the mass demonstration in Vienna (see p 16-17). In Britain state racism is a greater danger today than the far right - but watch out. It was Austrian Social Democracy's support for the EU's Schengen treaty and other racist measures which laid the basis for Haider's ascendancy.

# Straw's laws criminalise people

**Elkie Dee**

THE EFFECT of immigration laws is to criminalise people, simply for being immigrants, migrants, refugees or asylum seekers. It does not matter if they have committed any criminal offence or not.

The Immigration Act authorises detention and imprisonment where there has been no offence, no charges no prosecution and no court intervention.

Reinforcing the image of immigrants as criminals is done in a number of ways:

**Language**  
Under immigration law, immigrants, migrants and refugees are defined as being in the UK "illegally" or "unlawfully". So they are defined as non-persons and outside of the law.

Immigration Officers regularly describe Third World people as "illegals" - with no identity other than being devoid of status in the UK. Those who lose their claim for asylum become "Bogus".

All these definitions are used to criminalise people.

**The Media**

On Saturday February 26 2000 "The Times" ran a story under the headline "Refugees flock to Germany and Britain" written by Stewart Tendler, Crime Correspondent. The story, about Home Office figures released the day before, was that Britain attracts more asylum seekers than any other country in Europe bar



Germany.

The cost to the British taxpayer was also illustrated - Kent County Council reported that dealing with child asylum seekers will cost households an extra £3 next year on council tax. It was suggested that many other councils will follow suit unless the government pledges more money.

The NCADC is calling on people to protest at the presentation of this story in the Times by writing to Peter Stothard, editor of The Times, fax no 0171-782 5046. The Times has labelled 71,160 asylum applicants as criminals by giving the story to their crime reporter.

Please e-mail copies of anything sent to ncadc@ncadc.demon.co.uk.

Contact the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC) for more information by phone: 0121-554 6947, fax: 0870-055 4570, Web site:

## Stop hounding asylum seekers

# No more deaths in detention!

**Stella Pearson**

On January 24, Róbratas Grabys, a 49 year old Lithuanian asylum seeker, was found hanged at Harmondsworth Detention Centre.

Campaigners against Britain's racist asylum and immigration laws believe it was no coincidence that the Home Office had attempted to deport him two days before.

His death was only publicised by a press release from the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns.

The Home Office boasted that it was the first death in a detention centre for 10 years, neglecting to mention the deaths and suicide attempts of asylum seekers

that have taken place in prisons and homes in that time.

Just days before Róbratas died, three detained Roma asylum seekers attempted suicide together by drinking poison.

In January 1999, Dorcas Wanjira arrived in the UK, applied for asylum on landing and was put in detention. After 9 months, she drank a bottle of bleach and was imprisoned in Holloway - she has since been deported.

Kolawole Anthony Ola from Nigeria was arrested on a criminal charge and sent to Belmarsh. At the trial he was completely exonerated, but was kept in Belmarsh awaiting deportation, where he tried to hang himself. He too has now been deported. Kimpua Nsimba from Zaire

committed suicide in Harmondsworth Detention Centre in June 1990.

James Segawa was HIV+ and died in Belmarsh in August 1992, where officials refused to believe he was ill.

Turan Pekoz committed suicide by immolation in Quest House Immigration Centre, Croydon, in March 1993.

Joy Gardner died as a result of asphyxiation by the Extradition Unit of the Metropolitan Police, at home in Hornsey, North London, in front of her son Kwanele Siziba, Joseph Nnalue and Noorjahan Begum all died by falling from their balconies fleeing immigration officers.

Herbert Gabbidon died in the custody of the Walsall Police while they were trying

to deport him back to Jamaica.

Lin Yan-Guang, a Chinese asylum seeker, committed suicide in December 1998.

All these people were remembered at a vigil outside the Home Office, organised by the Coalition for Asylum and Immigration Rights (CAIR), a joint venture by the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC) and the National Assembly Against Racism (NAAR).

People from all around the world faxed protest letters to the Home Office in response to Róbratas' death, and the cruel, inhumane detention policy which brought it about.

For more information, email cair@ncadc.demon.co.uk

**The London Socialist Alliance (LSA) is potentially the most interesting development on the left in Britain since the formation of the Scottish Socialist Party. ALAN THORNETT looks at the issues involved and the role of the Socialist Workers Party.**

# Which way will the SWP jump?

In the past many socialists have been put off long term involvement in organised politics by the divisive sectarianism of the British left – something for which all far-left currents bear a degree of responsibility.

That is why the remarkable unity which has developed in the LSA seems like a breath of fresh air. Suddenly, instead of stressing what divides us, the organisations involved – the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), the Socialist Party (SP), the Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL), Workers Power, the Independent Labour Network (ILN), the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and the International Socialist Group (ISG) – are seeing consensus grow about the best way to get things done.

The most surprising, and important, component of this, given its size and history, is the SWP. This organisation has clearly made a sharp turn outwards, and seems to be involved in an ongoing discussion about what it all means.

Previously the SWP's hallmark has been to take up political campaigns either exclusively in its own name or through organisations which it controlled.

Now it has begun to operate through open united front campaigns and to cooperate and collaborate with the rest of the left.

This important shift in attitude is reflected not just in the SWP's involvement in the LSA but around other campaigns such as that against WTO and in opposition to Russia's war in Chechnya – although in a more partial way. This change has potential consequences for the future shape and strength of the left in Britain.

This change directly reflects current political reality in Britain. Blair's rightward avalanche means that socialists are leaving the Labour Party in increasing numbers. In Labour's traditional heart lands voters are no longer turning out, and many trade unionists are looking for an alternative.

In addition, the introduction of Proportional Representation in a number of elections gives a greater chance for candidates to the left of Labour to actually be elected.

All this has opened up space to the left of Labour. The left cannot afford to miss this opportunity, partic-



ularly given its decline over the past 10 years, a decline which has been uneven but dramatic in absolute terms.

Unfortunately the left has, up to now, been outflanked. Outside of Scotland, this new space has been filled by the Greens and the nationalists – who have positioned themselves to the left of new Labour for that very purpose. Yet most of those dissatisfied with Labour are socialists with a natural affinity to an alternative socialist project.

There is more than one reason for this failure of course, including the lack of a track record by the left in the electoral field. But the principal answer must be the chronic divisions within the left and its inability to put forward an attractive socialist alternative.

People are looking for answers and what they see is splits and divisions. Unity, therefore, is key, since the sum of a united left is much greater than the sum of the constituent parts.

This opening up of space to the left of Labour – which reflects a developing crisis of labour representation – has been developing since the election of Blair as leader of the LP and the defeat of Clause 4.

This was what brought Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party into existence, albeit at a premature stage. Later it led the Militant to change its name to the Socialist Party – with the

aim of developing a broader organisation after they were scandalously denied membership of the SLP by Scargill.

Both of these initiatives foundered. The SLP became a victim of the politics of Scargill and those who aided and abetted him (and should have known better). The SP failed to build a broader organisation and eventually turned back to building itself as a far-left group.

But the SP did continue with the more open relationship with the rest of the left. It continued to lead Socialist Alliances in various parts of England, Scotland and Wales. Most of these were embryonic bodies but represented the green shoots of socialist recomposition in this new situation.

In Scotland the situation was qualitatively different, particularly given the role in the anti-poll tax movement of Scottish Militant Labour's (SML) leading activists, and led to the foundation of the SSP last year with the former SML at the core of it.

Several Alliances stood in the European elections, but in London such an initiative was torpedoed by the decision of the SLP to stand a slate with Scargill. This split the unity of the left and led the LSA (rightly or wrongly) to disband.

But now we are at a new stage. The Blair project, and the disaffection it generates, is more advanced now. The crass gerrymandering in the election of Labour's candidate for Mayor exacerbated

the process.

When the London Socialist Alliance was reformed last year, with the object of standing a slate for the London Assembly it was a qualitatively different body to its predecessor – although it contained most of the same organisations.

This new strength was also due to the attitude of the SWP, which had stayed controversially outside of the Scottish Socialist Alliance and the SSP – and still does.

Perhaps it has learnt the lessons of Scotland in its new attitude in London – certainly it has made a new level of commitment this time round. This has resulted in the rapid development of the campaign with close day-to-day collaboration between the organisations and individuals involved – with the 1,000 strong meeting on February 22 the high point so far.

There, responding to Ken Loach's challenge about how good it was to be on the same platform as an "old state capitalist like Paul Foot", Foot responded by saying that it was about time we got rid of the divisions and sectarian ghettos of the past.

The other very positive feature of the meeting was the way campaigning was strongly projected. The Alliance is not mainly about getting votes, but about posing an active alternative to new Labour – and again the SWP were important in this.

Most of the organisations involved have been on a

learning curve as far as how to work in a campaign like the LSA is concerned. And some of the new non-sectarian ways of working are only being partly achieved.

The SP in particular has got itself into a twist over the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation (CATP) (see p23).

The SP has remained a part of the LSA, and have a candidate, but will only support the LSA candidates at constituency level not on the all-London top-up list.

But it is not just that. It seems likely they would have pulled back anyway, even if the CATP issue has not come up.

They have found it difficult to find a way of building their own organisation in the same way as before at the same time as building Socialist Alliances as well.

But their shift is a problem for everyone. The SP are the second biggest of the far-left organisations, and their full involvement is very important to the LSA.

Most of the organisations involved accept that there have to be new ways of working if the LSA is to be successful. And a lot has been achieved.

On LSA stalls most of the literature is in the name of the Alliance, at LSA meetings most are identifying themselves as Alliance supporters rather than from the component groups.

The SWP has been a part of this shift, although perhaps not all their members have caught on yet. They have a

particular responsibility not to dominate things or impose their own culture as the largest current involved.

And the changes need to go further. The LSA needs to let its hair down a bit. It needs to be open and pluralistic and seen to be so. We need enough organisation to create a democratic forum for discussion, whilst having an open door to new people and new ideas and even new forms of organisation.

The big unanswered question is where is all of this leading. What, for example, will happen to the London Socialist Alliance after the elections?

It is clear that some of the smaller organisations see this as the start of a longer term process; but the SWP has not yet made up its mind.

We hope they will come down in favour of continuing to work with the rest of the left in this new way – and there are positive signs. Certainly they seem to have decided that they want a continued relationship with LSA supporters after May.

But if things started to dissipate after the London Assembly elections it would be a great pity, since the crisis of labour representation won't go away.

The possibility of a new party to the left of Labour, whilst not possible at the present time, could be posed at anytime particularly if there were significant developments in the LP in the form of either expulsions or defections.

The political preparation for such a new party has to take place in advance, given the potentially important role the far left could play within it.

The crucial factor about such a party would be its broad character – a federation in which the existing left organisations could participate with their own politics and publications.

It could not be just a coalition of the far-left: it would have to be broader than that or it would be nothing. And the old sectarian top-down structures, with a guru handing down the message will have to go.

None of this diminishes the role the far-left would have to play in such a party. And given that the anti-Stalinist left is now the mainstream of the far-left the preparation for such a party is an important political task.

All this implies that the very encouraging developments

which are taking place around the LSA and other campaigns must be built on and developed. Far from disbanding the LSA in May, we should develop it further and make it the basis of further initiatives. After all it seems that the General Election is not that far away.

And most important of all for the development of a real alternative to new Labour is that the new ability of the left to engage in united action is preserved and developed.

And the role the SWP decides to play in such a process is probably the biggest single factor in its success.

**Is there a 'New' Economy – or just the same old system dressed**

**Andy Kilmister**

# A net gain for capitalism?

**E**ver since the beginning of capitalism the ruling class has dreamt of abolishing booms and slumps in the economy. In the late 1960s economists earnestly debated whether the business cycle was obsolete.

The last two years have seen a revival of this kind of thinking in the United States, which has now spread to Britain. The first two months of this year have seen a massive media hype around the concept of the 'New Economy'.

The Financial Times recently ran a five part series on 'The End of Economics' at the same time as The Economist had a lengthy central feature on 'E-Commerce'. Meanwhile papers like The Guardian are packed with features on the latest youthful internet millionaires.

European stock markets are now following the US example of the last two years and booming on the basis of information technology shares.

Is this just a passing frenzy, or does it signify anything important about the changes taking place in global capitalism?

The most detailed examination of this kind of question in the Marxist tradition is the theory of long waves developed by Ernest Mandel in his book *Late Capitalism and a number of other writings*. Mandel attempts to analyse key turning points which laid the basis for sustained upswings or downturns in capitalist development lasting for a period of some 25 years.

The current hype about the internet and the new economy is essentially based on the idea that such developments could mean the start of a new upswing of a long wave. This would bring an end to the downturn in the world economy, characterised by slow growth, periodic deep recessions and weak credit-based booms, which has lasted since 1973.

A new 'long boom', which could be compared with that from 1948 to 1973, would justify the stock market fever and bring sustained increases in profitability.

But Mandel's central point about such upswings is that they cannot depend on one factor alone. Rather, as Marx wrote in the 'Grundrisse', "the concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations".

Any attempt to ground a new long wave on technological developments alone is doomed to fail. Such developments have to be seen in interaction with the state of class struggle, the uneven development of different sec-

tors of the economy, imperialism and international economic relations, and so on.

However, the more sophisticated advocates of the 'new economy' idea do recognise this. Their argument is not that a long boom will be based solely on technology but that, particularly in the USA, a number of other factors have come together in the last two decades which now provide the context for technological developments to be translated into lasting capitalist expansion.

Chief among these factors are the strength of the employers' offensive in the workplace and its effect on trade unions, the increase in international competition repre-

senting the long run trend of the internet.

Even within the general area of information technology there are important differences between changes in computer-based information transfer and in telecommunications, although the two are becoming increasingly linked. The initial growth of massive computer software companies like Microsoft was entirely unrelated to the internet, the importance of which Bill Gates recognised rather slowly.

However, while capitalism is developing a wide range of technologies, it is the internet which is really central to the current claims about a new economy. So far, while

there have been a number of radical analyses of the positive and negative potential of the internet, there has been very little written from a Marxist perspective about where it is located within capitalist business.



sented by 'globalisation', the deregulation of large sectors of the economy, particularly finance, and the attack on the welfare state.

**T**his current of opinion, which is clearly highly influential with Tony Blair and the Labour leadership, goes on to argue not just that these factors provide the opportunity for a technology-based upswing in the USA, but also that they are necessary for Europe and Japan to share in this upswing. The new economy thesis is an important element in the world-wide push for neo-liberalism.

But can current technological developments provide the basis for a new long wave? It is important to be clear about the different kinds of technology involved. Areas like biotechnology may well be more

important in the long run than the internet.

There seem to be three main areas where the internet is playing a role.

First, there is the use of IT internally within companies as a way of restructuring. This can involve production itself, but also as in the case of Unilever's recent plans, purchasing, marketing and after-sales service. The result in this case is projected to be job losses of 10 per cent and factory closures of over a quarter, world-wide.

Secondly, there is the use of the internet as a way of distributing products and services to consumers. The industries mainly affected by this so far are banking and finance, retailing and the media. Others may follow though, for instance education.

Thirdly, there are a range of companies which actually make profits from providing the infrastructure which allows the internet to func-

tion. These range from the big internet service providers which allow access to the net, down to small start-up companies which provide distinctive kinds of software which increase the possibilities open to net users.

In addition to this there is an argument that, simply by providing information more easily to consumers and competitors, the growth of the internet will increase competition and that this will keep inflation down and allow longer periods of growth.

Most of the "new economy" hype is concentrated on the second kind of company. Yet this is exactly the area where the long-term effects of the internet on capitalist expansion are likely to be weakest.

There are two main groups of companies here; those which charge for their products on the net, which tend to be relatively established and often large, and those which do not. The internet is clearly an important new channel of distribution for some products. This is especially true for those things which can actually be delivered over the net, notably music through the MP3 software, and financial services. Tickets for travel and cultural events are also a natural area for IT. The occasional bright idea like that behind Lastminute.com can bring profits.

**B**ut while this will reshape certain industries it is likely to remain limited in extent. Booksellers were the first to exploit IT for retailing, and it seemed a natural product – easy to ship, and with great advantages resulting from being able to list a wide range of products on your site. But companies like Amazon.com have still made no profits.

The cost of delivering, and the discounts needed to encourage buyers to wait for delivery, have wiped out the effect of growing market share. And other products are much less well-suited to this approach.

A share index of the 15 biggest online retailers in the USA calculated by the magazine USA Today fell 31 per cent between November and the beginning of February. Other online retailers have done worse. Shares in eToys fell 45 per cent in a month, Value America is sacking half

its workforce and Beyond.com is laying off 20 per cent of staff and leaving the consumer market, with shares down 80 per cent.

The basis of the large number of consumer based internet companies which do not charge is even shakier. Guardian profiles of their founders are always noticeably reticent on one basic point – how they will make any money! In fact, in nearly every case it is through selling advertising space.

The idea is that if enough people are seen to be visiting the site then advertisers will be keen to pay for a space on it. Yet recent reports are decidedly down beat about the

group of companies, those based on making the internet itself work?

These have been compared to the railway companies of the nineteenth century. But there is an important difference. The process of competition is much sharper. Simply providing net access is not going to provide sustained profits into the future. This is what lies behind the recent merger between America Online (AOL) and Time Warner.

**W**hile this was widely seen as a tribute to the power of the internet, The Economist correctly reported it as the reverse. AOL realised that its future profitability depended on being able to offer not just

access but also 'content'. And such content is increasingly under the control of the big media multinationals. Increasingly we can expect to see them merge with internet companies, transforming that part of the 'new economy' into simply an alternative distribution channel for corporate entertainment.

The real substance behind the new economy hype lies with the first aspect of the internet, the use of it as a further element in the restructuring of capitalism. It remains unclear just how significant it is in this regard.

On the one hand it is true that manufacturing productivity growth in the USA is now rapid by historical standards – up 6.4% per cent last year, the fastest growth since the early 1970s. But this may not last.

It has also been bought at the expense of a huge rise in investment, largely funded by foreign capital. This means that the rate of profit remains relatively low. It is too early to say whether IT will lead to a continuing rise in the rate of profit. But with 80 per cent of global 'e-commerce' transactions last year between businesses rather than linking businesses with consumers, this is the area that socialists need to analyse if we are to get a picture of what is new about the 'new economy'.

And while that remains the case, the speculative share bubble based on the internet, and the record US consumer borrowing which has followed it, are more likely to lead to the same old credit-fuelled capitalist crisis which we have seen over the last two decades than to a new golden age.



**As Russia's leaders  
falter, fumble, and fail ...**

# The crisis behind war in Chechnya



Man with a plan - Putin

**After the capture of Grozny, Russia's brutal war against the Chechen people continues in the southern mountains in even more difficult terrain against a guerrilla army of national liberation. While the siege of Grozny was approaching its successful conclusion, President Boris Yeltsin, after nearly ten years in power, suddenly stepped down in favour of his protégé. It is appropriate at this juncture that socialists re-assess what is going on in the ex-Soviet Union, and ask: What kind of society is being created by the "free market" and "Shock Therapy"? Here DAVE PACKER discusses some of the issues.**

**The Dauphin takes power**

**N**o sooner had Boris Yeltsin dramatically resigned as President of the Russian Federation - on the last day of the millennium - than the Russian Dauphin, Vladimir Putin, moved quickly into the Kremlin to secure his inheritance.

Clearly an element in Yeltsin's decision to step aside was the extraordinary good showing in December's Duma (parliamentary) elections by Unity, the so-called 'Bear' coalition, which was endorsed by the popular Putin, gaining 23.32% of the vote (64 seats).

The success of Unity, and Putin's spectacular rise in popularity, which still stands at around 75%, can be put down entirely to the stage-managed and politically convenient war in Chechnya - he is seen as a strong man and main architect of the war. It can also be put down to the fact that in the run up to voting, Russian TV and media mounted an extended campaign in favour of Unity.

Unity, had been hurriedly thrown together only a few months before the elections in a desperate attempt to defend Yeltsin 'family' interests, by cynically benefiting from the kudos derived from the bloody Chechen war.

Another right wing block, the neo-liberal Union of Right Forces, led by former prime minister Sergei Kiriyenko, and including Anatoly Chubais and Yegor Gaidar, achieved only 8.52% (24 seats) despite the fact that they, along with the Unity gang and the IMF, are the main architects of "economic genocide".

The vote of Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), the largest party in the Duma, managed to hold up, raising its share by two percent to 24.29% (67 seats), although its other allied par-

ties, the Agrarian Party and Popular Rule, failed to break the 5% threshold to win any seats!

Significantly, an alliance between Unity and the Union of Right Forces, together with defectors from Fatherland/All Russia to Unity, will mean that the CPRF will no longer be able to dictate in the Duma.

A 13.33% vote (37 seats), was also disappointing for Fatherland/All Russia, a so-called 'centre-left' bloc, headed by Moscow's mayor Yuriy Luzhkov and former prime minister Yevgeniy Primakov. They seem to have lost millions of voters to Unity.

The ultra nationalist Zhirinovskiy Bloc received only 5.98% (17 seats); and the liberal, Yabloko also received 5.98% (16 seats). Many other coalitions did not reach the 5% to gain any seats.

Half of the lower house of the Duma was elected on the party list system and half on the basis of individual mandate constituencies.

When the figures are combined with the so-called independent candidates standing in the 225 seat single constituency section, the final composition of the Duma, after wheeling and dealing will be different.

The distribution of seats will look something like the following: The CPRF will get 150-160 seats; Unity: 120-130; Fatherland/All Russia: 65-70; Union of Right Forces: 30; Yabloko: 25; Zhirinovskiy Bloc: 18.

Vladimir Putin, a poker faced ex-KGB operative, should have a smile on his face. With Grozny now in Russian hands and his defence minister Igor Sergeev claiming the war is nearly over, the linked successes on the military and political fronts make him the most likely winner in the March Presidential elections.

There is no challenger in sight.

Putin had been plucked from relative obscurity by his patron to be groomed as Prime Minister and subsequently heir apparent. He is a man in a hurry, with policies geared to electioneering for the Presidency. It therefore came as no surprise when, after hardly warming his new seat in the Kremlin, he rushed off to the front-line in Gudermes near Grozny to give out ornamental hunting knives to Russian officers in the new year day awards.

The trip



was a coldly calculated gesture to further reap the kudos and to ensure the confidence of the military - the power of last resort in Russia.

Putin vowed to the TV cameras that he would "crush the terrorists" and halt "the break-up of the Russian Federation."

According to The Observer (2/1/2000), at about the same time as Putin was in Gudermes giving out the awards, his other big backer and a third element in his rise to power, the media mogul and Kremlin crony, Boris Berezovsky, was usher-

ing in the new millennium with a ball at the Bolshoi costing \$1,500 per head! His TV station was one of those on the air showing Putin live giving out the new year awards.

Shortly after his visit to Chechnya Putin was obliged to make one of the pay-offs. He signed a new presidential decree guaranteeing Yeltsin and his family immunity from prosecution for corruption (and probably from official

investiga-

Yeltsin and Putin stand at the head of a near-gangster state with a criminal mafia its most dreaded export.

It has been estimated (Fitch IBCA) that between 1993 and 1998 an enormous \$130 billion has flowed out of Russia legally and illegally. A single mafia/businessman, Sergei Mickailov, stands accused of laundering \$10bn of IMF money through the bank of New York - which alone is equivalent to a staggering 40% of Russian government spending.

Most of the IMF's \$25 billion sent to Russia since 1992 has been laundered back into western banks.

International investigators in Moscow, Geneva, London and New York, who were soon on the trail of the IMF/World Bank's lost billions kept coming across the names of Yeltsin's political cronies and members of his family.

Hence the necessity to ensure the succession and his immunity. (See December, 1999

*Socialist Outlook*)

Everybody knows that organised crime is linked to the state bureaucracy. In his New Year Address to the nation Putin stated, probably tongue in cheek, that, "it will be some time before we can appreciate how much this man [Yeltsin] did for Russia."

However, Putin is not just a puppet. He has a programme which promises to make Russia powerful again - a country that "the people and the army can be proud." He lays emphasis on a powerful centralised state, on patriotism and on 'collectivism'.

He told the assembled military at the new year awards in Gudermes that the war; "is not just about restoring honour and dignity to the country. No, this is about more serious things. This is

Meanwhile Kremlin officials were searching for a new country dacha for Yeltsin just outside Moscow. This was part of the deal, as was a large pension, official car, bodyguards and attendance by top medical experts.

**T**he Yeltsin camp created Putin to be their protector - and they have plenty to fear. The failing ex-President and his cronies have their hands so deeply in the till that it could be said that

about how to bring the end of the break-up of Russia. That is your fundamental goal."

Putin has been reported as saying that; "To the Russian a strong state is not an anomaly ... It is the source and guarantor of order, the initiator and main power behind all changes."

The Yeltsin regime had already effectively ended the 'partnership for peace' and begun to rebuild its alliance with China and other major third world countries while increasingly adopting a confrontational stance towards NATO.

In mid-January a Presidential decree (No 24) effected a shift in Russia's defence doctrine by placing the armed forces in a higher state of combat readiness and new more aggressive ground rules for the use of nuclear weapons and promising a 60% increase in the defence budget.

It is not surprising therefore that Western commentators are a bit concerned about what Putin represents; is he a pragmatic, pro-west, pro-market reformer like Yeltsin, i.e., a pro-capitalist neo-liberal? Or is he, as the growing consensus seems to suggest, a strongman who will pursue Russian national interests ruthlessly - albeit in a capitalist framework?

In my view he is likely to move in the latter direction. However, the construction of a national capitalism which can survive and thrive, will rely heavily on the state apparatus and on resources taxed and robbed from the socialised 'collectivist' sector.

Some of this damage created by Yeltsin/IMF "Shock Therapy", which failed to create a viable free market but has wrecked the command economy, will have to be reversed. But a turn towards creating a national capitalism based primarily on internal resources will be a brutal business requiring a strong centralised state based on a reliable army and a cohesive nationalist, even xenophobic ideology.

Such a course will of necessity be a harsh capitalist bonapartism - an authoritarian regime which is able to smash working class resistance, both passive and active, in order to finally carry through the bourgeois counterrevolution.

If such a regime became stabilised, it could in the future constitute a kind of fascistic state capitalism in Eurasia, with imperialist aims. This will pose the danger of war, for example, in the scramble for oil in the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea regions.

To fully understand what Putin may become, we must analyse the options open to him.

## The road to capitalist restoration

The roots of the Russian crisis are usually traced back to the collapse of Stalinism which followed on the heels of Gorbachev's failed attempt, through his policies of glasnost and perestroika,

to reform the decayed bureaucratic Stalinists system and the stagnant command economy it had created.

In fact the counterrevolution we witness today is merely the catastrophic last act, which has been played out since the rise of Stalin himself and his consolidation of bureaucratic rule in the 1920s.

Gorbachev's reforms opened the floodgates of discontent and undermined the principle of compulsion on which the bureaucratic command economy relied. The Stalinist system soon began to unravel.

As Trotsky decades before predicted would happen, the dominant sections of the bureaucracy who had always looked after their own material interests first, opted for private property and capitalist restoration.

However, there was no democratic mechanism for deciding how this should be done (or whether it should be done), or who would most benefit from it (i.e., which layers of the bureaucracy). The Soviet Union started to fracture and splinter, particularly after the fall of the Berlin wall and the demise of the Warsaw Pact.

In 1990 Yeltsin the radical reformer was elected speaker in parliament, while Gorbachev began to falter and equivocate about the consequences of the course of action he had adopted.

On 20th August 1991, sections of the so-called old guard - those bureaucrats and generals who wanted a different process of restoration, one more in tune with national interests (i.e., their interests) rather than foreign interests - half-heartedly attempted a coup.

They seized Gorbachev in the Crimea and sought Yeltsin's resignation. Yeltsin



War - Money - War

rejected their demand and boldly drove down to the centre of the city and stood on a tank in front of the world's media and denounced the plotters and declared himself the government. Because they had not gathered enough military of popular support, the coup-makers immediately gave in.

After the failure of the coup, the USSR disintegrated. Trotsky had rightly called the Soviet Union a "prison house of nations", and this analysis was confirmed by the tumultuous rise of powerful nationalist movements in diverse Republics.



Continuing Russian politics by other means: Russian troops stand guard in newly-occupied Chechnya

Led by the Ukraine, they succeeded one by one. This partial and qualified victory of the masses in struggles for national self-determination was undoubtedly a step forward for democratic rights, but was not without its contradictions. Independence was achieved under right wing nationalist leaderships, not socialist ones.

Gorbachev was finished too. He was released after the coup, but was then humiliated in the parliament by Yeltsin, who ousted him. The man of the hour was unambiguously in favour of the restoration of capitalism and adopted the neo-liberal IMF plan of radical marketisation plus lucrative aid. The policy soon became known as "shock therapy."

State planning mechanisms were dismantled, stock exchanges set up and privatisations embarked upon.

Partial privatisations, fake purchases, the distribution of vouchers/coupons, and other schemes were launched in order to kick-start the capitalist market economy - all were to fail. They producing only a relatively small capitalist sector of 'cherry picked' industries, which ran parallel to the disintegrated socialised command economy.

Thing went from bad to worse for the population as well as the economy. Other diverse sections of the old guard who opposed the neo-liberal excesses of the new government again attempted a coup with the seizure of the White House. Yeltsin called in the army and shelled them into submission. These were the 'heroic' days of the Yeltsin regime.

On so called, 'Black Tuesday', 11 October, 1994, the rouble lost over a fifth of its value in one day. This was followed by a total budget crisis, with the state unable

to pay its wages or collect its taxes.

1994 also saw the beginning if the first war in Chechnya, while in 1995, Yeltsin's heart began to fail with two heart attacks. From then on, inertia, gangsterism and corruption became increasingly widespread and flagrant.

Establishing his political grip on society was one thing, restoring capitalism was not so easy; and the economy went from bad to worse. "Shock Therapy" led to a catastrophic fall in industrial output. Because of the semi-disintegration of the state apparatus, Yeltsin from the beginning failed to get any grip on the state finances, while social and economic chaos and mafia-like crime grew rampant.

Only about 60% of taxes had been collected in the first half of 1996 and already the state owed a huge £3 billion in back wages. Also, by 1996 wages had plummeted to half of their 1990 levels, and millions - according to the Wall Street Journal between 20% and 30% - lived in abject poverty. Since then the situation has deteriorated further.

Yeltsin started to back away from the full implementation neo-liberal programme, although not publicly. The traditional fear the bureaucratic robbers have of the working class had begun to take effect.

There had already been actions taken by miners and teachers among others, demanding back wages, or else. The fear of a social explosion was reinforced in the summer of 1996 when over 100,000 Ukrainian miners struck over the back-pay issue. However, it was too late: the economy was in ruins, and the violent kleptocracy was giving birth to a mutant gangster capitalism.

During the 1990's the old 'reformed' Communist Party (CPRF) consolidated a significant base among the lower ranks of the old Stalinist bureaucracy and sections of the organised working class.

It stood at the head of the Peoples Patriotic Alliance, which is a coalition of rightist, nationalist forces.

During the elections in 1996 Zyuganov, its current leader, who was himself a lower ranking bureaucrat, made it clear that his election would not threaten business (as the CPRF made clear in the December, 1999 elections). The CPRF rejects neo-liberalism, but only offers the workers a nationalist state capitalism and a strong state.

Despite Yeltsin's sometimes eccentric Bonapartist methods, political rifts and confrontations continued to undermine his government. The Western media claims never to have understood what the ruthless power struggles in Russia were all about, putting it down to the Russian character and its inability to get to grips with democracy.

The repeated plans and articles of faith; the succession of hand picked Prime Ministers with intentions to implement the IMF plans and restore the capitalist system, faltered, fumbled and finally failed. These failures had profound political reasons and were not due to Yeltsin's clowning.

The big question remained: how to engineer a social counterrevolution, consolidate a new hegemonic ruling class, with all its social consequences, in the face of one of the largest working classes in the world, which had made a social revolution and had a standard of living closer to western Europe than to the Third World?

In 1998 the crisis of the Russian economy reached catastrophic proportions. A fall in the price of oil on the world market, mainly due to the growing crisis of the East Asian tiger economies, triggered in August of that year a catastrophic collapse of the rouble and general economic activity.

Russia defaulted on its debt-repayment to the IMF. This in turn contributed to the growing world financial crisis at that time. The collapse of the debt market in August happened even

though the International Monetary Fund had just begun payments to Russia from one of the largest economic "rescue" packages in history.

Boris Kagarlitsky writes about the central role of the IMF in the Russian Crisis.

"Russia has in general followed the instructions of the IMF and other international financial institutions. ... the IMF has accepted and supported economic policies of the Russian government, while the Russian government has accepted the basic principles and advice of the IMF decision-makers.

**ВОЙНА**  
Нужна  
**ВЫБОРЫ-99**  
ТОЛЬКО  
**ПОЛИТИКАМ**

Only politicians need war!

"These decisions resulted in the current chaos which has not only led to the total collapse of the Russian economy, something unprecedented in peace time, but also is bringing the whole world economy closer to recession. ... Along with the devaluation ... the crash marked the definitive failure of the key strategies that the IMF and major world governments." [Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, No. 61, 1998]

The price of oil has increased over the past year, easing the pressure on the Russian economy to some extent, but little has changed as far as its underlying problems are concerned. Although the economy which we see today has many of the surface appearances and paraphernalia of capitalism, it is without the substance.

The crash made it clear to the whole world that the restoration of capitalism in Russia had not only stalled again, but had never got seriously off the ground.

**(To be concluded next month)**

# Why Putin picked up Russia's left-over war

**As more and more evidence comes out that Russia has been responsible for war crimes in its determination to deny self-determination to the people of Chechnya, ALAN THORNETT looks at the issues behind the war.**

**R**ussia's current war in Chechnya is a leftover from the old Soviet Union, which became a "prison house of nations" par excellence.

The USSR consisted of 14 Union Republics, which theoretically had independence up to the right to secede, and 20 Autonomous Republics which did not.

Although the rights of the Union Republics was a sick joke in USSR under Stalinist control, once the USSR broke up, things changed dramatically.

A massive vote for independence in the Ukraine (and a crisis over the seizure of the USSR's Baltic fleet) resulted in thirteen Union Republics gaining their independence. The result was the formation of the Russian Federation inside a newly created CIS – a loose and unstable formation dominated (to the extent it could be dominated) by Russia.

Socialist Outlook not only supported the right of all the republics to secede but backed their decision to do so when this was what was democratically decided. We felt that in the concrete conditions there was no other option to exercise real self determination – despite our criticisms of many of the leaderships' involved

The only Autonomous Republic which refused to be incorporated into the Russian Federation at that time was Chechnya.

In the autumn of 1991, a few months after the August failed coup and the effective collapse of the USSR (and at the time the Union Republics, led by the Ukraine, were demanding independence) the Grozny Supreme Soviet was stormed and Dudayev took power.

Ingushetia, which had been a part of the Autonomous Republic of Chechnya, was not involved. It broke away from Chechnya and voted to remain a part of the Russian Federation.

Dudayev himself was a rather batty former Soviet air force general who commanded a wing of Soviet nuclear bombers in Estonia. It was a mark of the weakness of the Chechen national movement that Dudayev, who was a product of the Soviet system and decorated for outstanding service in Afghanistan, so rapidly became the leader of this movement.

In the event Moscow did not at this point oppose the Chechen revolution. In fact Dudayev phoned Khasbulatov, who was a Chechen and Speaker of the Russian Parliament (the first Chechnyan to hold such a position) to ask him if the tanks would be sent in from the Federal barracks. He was told no. However, Khasbulatov quickly became an opponent of the Dudayev regime, and moved a resolution in the Russian Parliament declaring it invalid. After that Chechnya was regarded by Russia as an unacceptable rogue state, and Dudayev was to be removed as soon as possible.

**W**hy Chechnya was so different from the other Autonomous Republics is a complex question, but there are some obvious factors. The Chechens were brutally oppressed by the Stalinised USSR – as they had been under the Tsarist Empire. The national oppression of the Chechens under Stalin was extreme.

There was a massacre of Chechens in the late 1930s and in 1944 the entire Chechen nation of half a million was, along with the Ingushetes, transported at a few hours notice by Stalin lorries and cattle trucks to Kazakstan. There they stayed in wretched conditions until they were rehabilitated by Khrushchev in 1957. A quarter of them died in the process.

But they were not alone in suffering this fate. Many of the populations of the republics of the north Caucasus were transported in the same way: the Karachais, the Kalmyks, the Balkars, the Meskhetians. All were accused by Stalin of being pro-German.

But the deportation of the Chechens was



the most brutal treatment of an entire nation carried out in that region at that time. After the deportations, Chechnya ceased to exist and its territory was divided up between other republics.

In addition, discrimination against the Chechens continued throughout the post-war Soviet period. This was particularly extreme in employment and higher education. Most of the skilled and professional jobs on Grozny, and most of the best housing, as well as the party apparatus, was occupied by Russians, who were about a third of the population.

The early moves by Russia to end the Chechen rebellion failed, mainly because they were ham-fisted and underestimated the scale of the task. Consequently Russia did not launch a full invasion until the end of 1994. Yeltsin had other preoccupations before then.

Chechnya under Dudayev from 1991 until 1994 was as unstable and mafia-ridden as Russia itself, possibly more so. Presidential elections were held in October 1992 and Dudayev won 85% of the vote. Independence from Moscow was declared a month later.

Politically Chechnya was an independent state: it had made a clear declaration of independence. But in practical terms it was a

strange set-up; there were no border controls, no Chechen passports, and no real state apparatus. Dudayev himself travelled abroad on a Russian passport.

Moscow imposed a trade embargo, but continued to purchase oil from Chechnya – much of it siphoned by Chechens out of Russia's own pipeline! And the Grozny football team played in the Russian league.

**A**ll the post-Soviet governments in the former Autonomous Republics were comprised of former Soviet bureaucrats transformed into nationalist and Islamist regimes of various sorts. Chechnya was no different: the leaders began to grow beards and present themselves as Islamic.

There are various views as to why Chechnya was not supported by the other Autonomous Republics, particularly those in the north Caucasus: Dagestan, Kabardin-Balkar and North Ossetia. Certainly these had much more pro-Moscow regimes from the outset, but there also seems to be a demographic element as well, in that Chechnya is the only one with a national majority.

Eventually Russia invaded Chechnya at the end of 1994. By this time the Dudayev regime had degenerated, its popularity was at an all

time low, and Chechnya was falling apart. Yeltsin was certainly getting impatient that it still existed as a separate state. Khasbulatov was no longer in the Kremlin.

Russian Presidential elections were approaching and Yeltsin's popularity was at 10% and Russian nationalist demagogue Zhirinovskiy was breathing down his neck. The person who could solve the Chechnya "problem" could be the next president of Russia.

There were also geopolitical problems. Although the Grozny oil field was running out and its refineries antiquated, the pipe line from which runs from Baku on the Caspian to Novorossiysk on the Black Sea through Grozny remains strategically important. New oil fields being opened in the Caspian would give it added importance since the existing pipeline through Grozny would be the cheapest way to get the oil through.

In February 1994 Khasbulatov returned to Chechnya, an event which led to proposals for negotiations between Dudayev and Yeltsin. This was forestalled by an assassination attempt against Dudayev.

The first Russian attack on Grozny during the summer failed as did a coup against Dudayev. But hard liners were taking over in the Kremlin around Yeltsin and all-out war eventually came in November.

In the end, the Russian army was disastrously defeated, after Grozny had fallen to them only to be retaken by the Chechens. An ad hoc army from a country with a population of less than a million defeated the army of the Russian Federation with a population of 150 million. This compounded the fragile political situation inside Russia and added to the existing demoralisation of the Russian army.

**A**fter its victory over Russia, however, Chechnya continued as before – although it was even more fragmented than previously. It was still a type of free trade zone through which all kinds of trade, most of it illegal, could find its way into the Russian Federation.

Dudayev himself was assassinated soon after the end of the war by an air to ground missile which hit his car, presumably from a Russian aircraft at high altitude.

The next invasion of Chechnya, as we know, came in 1999. It took place in the wake of the NATO war in the Balkans and under different political conditions than in 1994. Some of the reasons for the new war were the same as in 1994, and some were different.

The main factors were:

■ This was partly an anti-NATO war. It was a response to NATO's war in the Balkans and the humiliation which Moscow felt during and after that war. This was compounded by NATO's eastward expansion which had been angering the Yeltsin regime for several years, but had now come to fruition and had been a factor of the Balkans conflict.

■ There was an attempt to rebuild the morale and offensive ability of the Russian army. The Generals had been opposed to the invasion of Chechnya in 1994 but in 1999 they were fully behind it.

■ Yeltsin wanted to whip up great Russian chauvinism, which had weakened during the collapse of the USSR. The 1994 defeat by the Chechens had been a particular blow – honour needed to be restored.

■ The war against Chechnya is also aimed at the other Autonomous Republics. Although at the moment there do not seem to be any moves to independence elsewhere, it is always useful to send a warning shot across their bows to make clear the consequences if such tendencies did develop.

■ As in 1994, the war was motivated partly for internal political reasons. So far at least it has been useful for distracting attention from the dire economic situation in Russia itself.

Yeltsin wanted to ensure the victory of his nominee Putin in the forthcoming Presidential election. Nevertheless it is not clear that the elections – which have already been brought forward to March – will take place in an atmosphere favourable to Putin.

Certainly there has been increased reporting inside Russia of the number of casualties at the front, and the Mother's movement has been growing in strength.

The fall of Grozny took longer than Moscow hoped, and even now the fighting is not over.

This war may drag on for some time, and its repercussions inside and outside Russia are not yet determined.

The situation in the Middle East is more critical than for many years. Negotiations between Israel and Syria over the Golan Heights have stalled, Israel has launched another vicious attack on Lebanon, and the final stage of the Israel-Palestinian discussions looks set to lead to a sell-out which will be rejected by the majority of Palestinians. Roland Rance reports.



The increasingly close cooperation between Israel and Turkey, including

an agreement to share water diverted from Syria and Iraq after the completion of the Ilisu dam, threatens further bitter resource conflicts and wars.

The Golan Heights, occupied by Israel in the course of the 1967 war, are small in area, but of immense symbolic importance for both Israel and Syria.

It would be impossible for any Syrian regime to contemplate an agreement which left Israel in occupation of Syrian territory barely 35 miles from Damascus.

For ailing President Hafez el-Assad, keen to secure a smooth transfer of power to his son, the return of the Golan is an urgent issue, and he has seemed willing to compromise on other issues. For instance, he has agreed to discuss the future of the north west bank of the Sea of Galilee, the only part of Palestine under Syrian rule after 1948, which was also seized by Israel in 1967.

Israel, on the other hand, has rejected a full withdrawal from Golan, offering at best "redeployment of forces", without any removal of Israeli settlements. Opinion polls in Israel show that 60% of voters would oppose withdrawal in the promised referendum on the question.

Meanwhile, in the course of the negotiations, Israel has been conducting a large-scale military exercise simulating war with Syria. Israel's recent attack in Lebanon, following the apparent collapse of negotiations with Syria, is the latest act in a proxy war which Lebanon's neighbours have been fighting there for over twenty years.

Since Israel first occupied South Lebanon, in 1978, several thousand Lebanese and Palestinians have been killed, and the country's infrastructure devastated over and over again. In the raids this February, Israel destroyed three major power stations, effectively cutting virtually off all electricity in Lebanon. It is not expected that power will be restored until April at the earliest.

## Water fuels new war danger

Israel justified this attack by arguing that Hizballah forces in Lebanon had killed Israeli soldiers, thus breaching earlier agreements between the sides.

This argument was supported by US Secretary of State Madeline Albright, who referred to Hizballah as "enemies of peace". What this claim ignores is that the targets of Hizballah attacks were part of the 1000 strong Israeli force which has been in illegal occupation of South Lebanon since 1978.

Despite constant Israeli provocation, Hizballah has

generally refrained from firing across the border at civilians in Israel's northern towns and villages. For example, on 16 December, Israel shelled a Lebanese schoolyard during break, injuring dozens of children. Under US pressure, Syria instructed Hizballah not to respond by shelling Israel.

However, Israel's casualties in Lebanon (although insignificant compared to the suffering of the Lebanese and Palestinians) are becoming domestically insupportable, and a movement is growing in Israel for withdrawal from Lebanon.

Prime Minister Ehud Barak was elected last year after pledging to bring the troops home.

In order to do this, he needs to establish that he can control the area without a direct military presence. With the growing disarray of Israel's allies in the so-called South Lebanon Army, and the death in an ambush late last year of their deputy commander, Israel will be forced to rely on continuing Syrian restraint.

But without movement in the stalled negotiations, and an Israeli commitment to return the Golan Heights, Assad has no reason to give

Israel any undertakings to control Hizballah.

In this situation, Israel faces two options: negotiate with Syria and return the Golan, or go to war with Syria and force its compliance with Israel's retention of the Golan, and its control over Hizballah in Lebanon. According to some activists in Israel, all the signs are that Barak is tending towards the latter option.

During January, it was announced that scores of new homes were being built for settlers in the Golan, that several new water wells will be drilled (diverting aquifer water from Syria to Israel), and that a temporary bridge will be replaced by a permanent one - hardly the behaviour of an occupier planning to leave.

Professor Tanya Reinhart of Tel-Aviv University claims that Assad has indeed been threatened with what she terms "a Kosovo style war ... Israel will withdraw temporarily from Lebanon, and then, with the first incident or missile (that could easily be provoked), the Western world, led by the US, will stand behind the peace-seeking Israel, when it attacks Syria, and will lend its air-force umbrella to this new mission of peace" (Yediot Aharonot, 16 December 1999).

Israel, meanwhile, is seeking to augment its fleet of US-built Apache helicopters, used almost daily in its attacks in Lebanon.

According to the New York Times, "Air Force officers say their bombing raids against Hizballah guerrilla targets would be more effective and pose less risk to crews if they could use the newer Longbow Apaches" (3 February 2000).

Although Barak cultivates an image as a peace-maker, his own history belies this.

Like his mentor, former PM Yitzhak Rabin, he is

close to Likud leader Ariel Sharon, Defence Minister during the 1982 invasion of Lebanon. Following the Kahan report into the massacres in the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps, Sharon was forced to resign.

The inquiry found that he had systematically lied to and misled the cabinet as to his war aims and the situation in Lebanon (though it did not ask whether the cabinet had deliberately allowed itself to be misled, in order to disclaim some responsibility).

But Sharon was not alone in his duplicity. One of his officers was Barak, then a

Colonel, who not only shared Sharon's war aims but wanted to go further and to attack Syria directly.

In a memo in March 1982, he proposed that this be prepared secretly through military exercises, whose real goal should be concealed from both the government and the army high command. (This memo was published in *HaAretz* on 8 January 1999, and "not denied" by Barak).

Barak's 1982 proposal was not pursued at the time because the expected Israeli losses would have been heavy. But now, following the lessons of the Gulf and Kosova wars, it appears more feasible. In this light, it is ominous that the Cabinet

has authorised PM Barak to order military operations personally, without consultation.

Barak has now declared an "Exceptional Situation" in northern Israel, allowing him to suspend civil rights and order residents to remain in their shelters. The alliance between Israel and Turkey puts double pressure on Syria, which still has an outstanding border dispute with Turkey over the Antioch area, carved out of Syria when it gained its independence in 1925.

Joint military manoeuvres have demonstrated that any part of Syria (and Iraq) is within reach of the combined military resources of Israel and Turkey. The controversial proposed Ilisu dam, which will control the flow of the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, threatens to leave both Syria and Iraq dependent on Turkey for their water resources.

Control of water has been responsible for previous wars in the Middle East, notably Israel's ongoing occupation of Lebanon. It is also one factor in Israel's reluctance to leave the occupied West Bank.

In addition to all the other reasons to oppose this dam (flooding of Kurdish villages, forced resettlement of Kurds, destruction of Kurdish heritage, environmental devastation), the effects on the wider Middle East situation must be considered.

Activists in Israel are beginning to mobilise against a possible war with Syria.

We must support them, and demand:

- Immediate, complete and unconditional Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon;
- Return of the Golan Heights to Syria and dismantlement of all Israeli settlements;
- An end to military supplies to Israel and Turkey;
- No British government money for the Ilisu dam.

## Call for solidarity with Mexican students

**Paul Johnstone**

Students from Mexico's largest university UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) have been conducting a militant defence of free higher education since April 1999. They now face a paramilitary response.

In early February their occupation of the UNAM was ended by a hybrid force of soldiers and police which made almost 1000 arrests in clearing the campus. The campaign began with an IMF-sponsored attack on public education by President Ernesto Zedillo. He proposed to introduce fees for higher education. An earlier 'reform' attacked the right of all graduates from secondary education to progress to university.

The strike committee also demanded a democratic internal regime in the University and an end to

sanctions against UNAM students, teachers and workers who were participating in the strike. They demanded breaking of the links between UNAM and CENEVAL (a private body which sets the entry and evaluation tests).

The first round of the repression came as activists from the struggle connected their cause with other issues. In December, more than 600 activists from the Consejo General de Huelga (a student united front) rallied in front of the American embassy in Mexico city. The speakers demanded the release of Mumia Abu Jamal, and expressed their solidarity with workers, students and ecologists' demonstrations protesting against the meeting of the World Trade Organisation in Seattle.

A contingent of armed granaderos (Mexico city paratroopers) guarding the embassy charged when

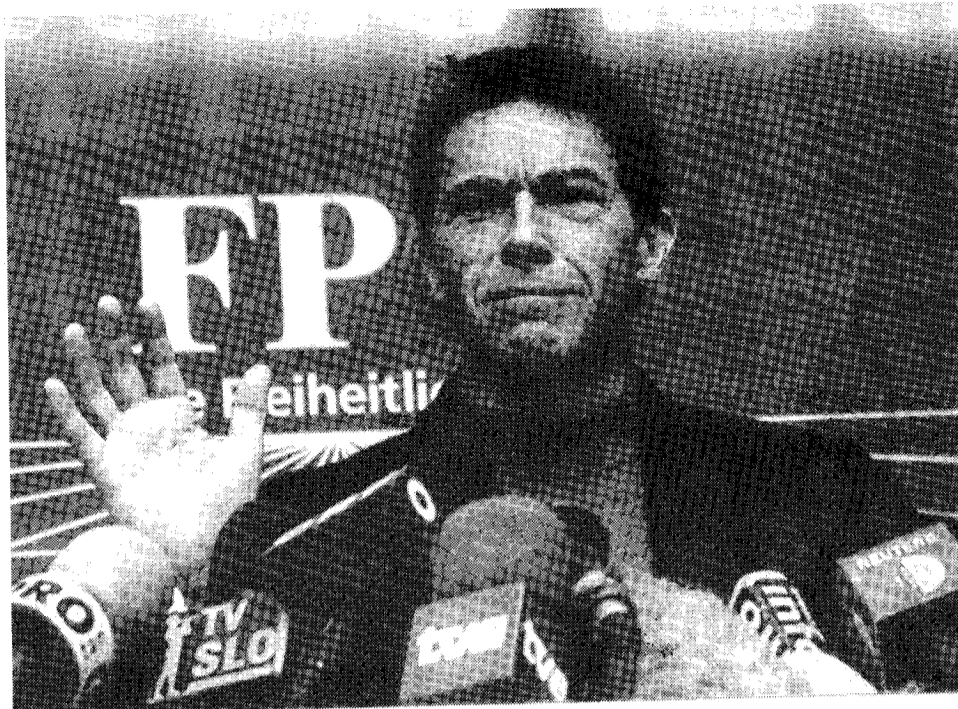
had been a completely peaceful rally. The crowd was beaten, including some reporters in attendance, and some 98 activists arrested. Six students were taken to hospital.

The major parties fighting the forthcoming presidential election are agreed on ending the protest and 'reforming' higher education. The latest gambit is a one-sided ballot intended to destroy the legitimacy of the protest movement. Meanwhile many of the student activists remain in jail or face charges including terrorism.

As the Mexican Workers Revolutionary Party (PRT) says in appealing for help, "This is a country where being poor, indian or complaining are crimes against the state".

The PRT and other far left organisations involved are calling for worldwide support from every social and political

# Who let in Jorg Haider?



**The recent inclusion of Jorg Haider's Freedom Party in Austria's coalition government has been met by mass protests on the streets of Vienna and other Austrian cities.**

**As protests continue around the world at this increased influence of the far right, WALTER SCHULTZ from Die Linke, Austrian paper supporting the Fourth International, reports from Vienna.**

## Platform for a World against Racism

We do not feel obliged to claim Austria's "innocence". The would be government does not have the support of the majority of Austria's population.

We have no reason to claim Haider is "just another" populist. He is not. He is a populist that uses xenophobia, racism and the denial of the Holocaust.

The major threat is not the increase of direct violence against minorities. The major threat is the signal that far right agitation and action is not only OK but earns you a place in government. As opportunism is one of the most prominent features of the "Austrian mentality", this is a severe political danger.

We have reason to be afraid of

- the final end of refugee or integration policies
- increasing xenophobia, racism and even antisemitism, because Austria has never faced its past and now people have governmental legitimization for such attitudes
- law and order policies instead of co-operative strategies to deal with crime and conflict
- abolition of progressive women's policies (e.g. the post of the minister for women's affairs will be cancelled and replaced by an extended family ministry)
- severe restrictions to freedom of art, especially where it puts a finger on the state of the Austrian society (already, in Carinthia, artists are faced with political limitations to their work)
- restrictions to the freedom of press, because subsidies for critical media products will most certainly be cut down.

We don't know yet what to do about it. We need both your solidarity and your ongoing criticism. don't stop looking at our country.

Vienna, February 2000

**L**ast October there were parliamentary elections in Austria. For the first time in the last 30 years it wasn't clear that Social Democracy would have the majority in the government or that the Chancellor would be a Social Democrat.

The Social Democrats got 33% and the Freedom Party of Jorg Haider got 27%. The Austrian People's Party, the party of Wolfgang Schussel who is now Chancellor, also got 27% with only a few dozen votes less than the Freedom Party. The Greens got around 9%.

In this situation nobody believed that that the Freedom Party would end up in government. Everybody in Austria thought that there would be lengthy negotiations between the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats but that in the end they would form a coalition.

In November there was a big demonstration in Vienna of 70,000 people, particularly young people, something that is unusual in Austrian politics, but there were also many

trade unionists with one single demand "No Coalition with Racism". This was posed above all as a signal to the Social Democrats not to negotiate with Haider's Party.

There were secret negotiations between the Austrian People's Party and the Freedom Party because Chancellor Schussel said that it was not possible to agree a common platform with the Social Democrats so instead he would negotiate with the Freedom Party. From this point of view what has happened is the responsibility of Schussel's Peoples Party.

**F**rom this moment on there were spontaneous demonstrations throughout Austria, mostly of young people and students who came out into the streets to protest.

The demonstration on the day when the government was formed was also very spontaneous - the organisations of the far left were not the leaders of this movement.

On Saturday February 12 there were 20,000 in Vienna and several thousands in other Austria cities. Then there was the massive demonstration in Vienna on February 19 with 300,000 people which was preceded by actions by students.

The mass demonstration was organised by committees of the

far left and also committees of artists and other democratic personalities. But the Social Democratic Party and the trade unions also called on their members to protest.

At the same time there were actions of solidarity in many other European cities. Now the movement has said there will be weekly protests every Thursday night.

In order to understand what has happened you need to know something about the specifics of Austrian history.

### Anti-Semitism

Firstly, anti-Semitism is an element of Austrian politics that goes back to the 15th Century. The Catholic church had strong anti-Semitic elements and the Christian Social Party at the beginning 20th century also had an anti-Semitic ideology.

In November 1938 when the Nazis carried out the pogroms called Christnacht the Viennese participated enthusiastically and in fact the Nazi leaders had to put an end to the riots to stop the whole city being burnt down.

**THIS IS NOT MY AUSTRIA.**  
PLEASE DO NOT SUPPORT THE CURRENT AUSTRIAN GOVERNMENT.

During the Second Republic, after 1945, Austria was once more independent and anti-Semitism did not disappear. There was no de-Nazification in Austria - there were no official measures - no educational measures against Nazism.

There were thousands and thousands of Nazis - not the leaders but people who participated in this movement and nobody worried about it.

Austria was occupied by the Allies and in only a few weeks the liberation from Nazism changed into occupation. Each of the occupying powers had their specific characteristics:

In the French zone for example there were French officers who failed to act against anti-Semitism. The mayors of Tyrol and Vorarlberg in the West prevented Jewish survivors returning home and they were supported in this by these officers.

In the British zone in the south, partisans, mainly members of the Austrian CP who were Slovenes came into conflict with the British occupiers. Of course this was the time the cold war was beginning. So in both the French and British zones it was not at all the ex-Nazis that were considered the enemies by the occupying armies but the

Slovenes.

The US zone in the centre of Austria was the centre of influence of intellectuals, teachers and high school students etc and they accepted "little nazis" i.e. those who had not been leaders and tried to convince them of the value of American style democracy.

In the Soviet zone in the North, things were quite complicated. Officially there was a sort of anti-fascism, coloured by Stalinism, and there were bureaucratic measures against the Nazis but since the Soviet troops were feared by the local population the antifascism taught by this army did not go very deep.

There were also political kidnappings and other crimes against Trotskyists and left wing independents in the Soviet zone so they were seen as an occupying force. The majority of Austrians living under soviet occupation saw them as the new enemy so discussions about Nazism or the crimes that

committed were displaced.

Before 1938 there was a Jewish population of 180,000 in Vienna and at the end of the war there were only 6500. They formed a political milieu - many of them were from a bourgeois background but with liberal and tolerant ideas.

Almost all the Communist Party activists from the pre-war period had been killed, they had been in the concentration camps. Many left-wing social democrats had also died in the camps. So a whole political current was missing - there was no left wing or liberal current that was interested in talking about Nazism or anti-Semitism.

**A**fter 1945 the Christian Socialists created a new party - the Austrian People's Party. In this period the CP was getting 15% of the vote - but all the Austrian parties agreed on a consensus which said that Austria was the first victim of Hitler and of nazism.

On the basis of this, it was not necessary to talk about what had happened or the crimes of the Austrian Nazis.

The period after 45 was one in which people tried to rebuild capitalism. All the parties, including the Communists tried to win former Nazis to vote for them and ignored the question of de-Nazification.

The Freedom Party played a particular role in this process which I will return to later. During the 1950s and 1960s anti-Semitism was less visible - but it still existed "under the skin". It could be found in the bistros and cafes in anti-Semitic jokes and this was not just perpetuated by the right but also Social Democrats that had a certain electorate and activists who were anti-Semitic.

In 1986 there was Kurt Waldheim's election campaign, and this was the first time that there was public discussion of the past relationship with Nazism.

During the campaign young socialists and intellectuals discovered that he had played a role in an army unit in Thessalonika in Greece where Jews were deported - even if it was not clear whether his role had been very active.

And Waldheim's response to this - again an Austrian specificity - was to

say, "I only did my duty". That's very Austrian - because the people in power say what should be done and Austrians do it.

This view is common to all parties including Social Democracy.

After the Waldheim campaign, Austria was no longer the same as before. You had young intellectuals and historians who began to investigate the Nazi crimes and the role of Austrian Nazis.

For the first time there was an open discussion which was covered in the media and this influenced many people - particularly young people. It also meant that there was more of an international spotlight on Austria than previously.

### Xenophobia

Before the First World War, Austria was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire under the Habsburgs monarchy. This territory was much bigger than today's Austria and those who spoke German were only a small minority.

There are historians and economists who say that this monarchy functioned a bit like the system of centre and periphery of colonial empire. There were immense tensions between the different ethnic and national groups and this was one of the reasons why this state did not survive.

Amongst the German speaking population of the Empire there was a good deal of prejudice against the others - against





Serbs, Czechs, whatever. At the time there was a sort of bourgeois liberal circle which discussed whether the Habsburg monarchy was the model of a multi-ethnic society but the Czechs for example always responded that it was not a multi-ethnic state but a prison of peoples."

In the 50s and 60s the Social Democrats encouraged migration by workers from Yugoslavia and Turkey but they did not take any measures to integrate them – they were only interested in their labour power. This attitude was also prevalent in the mainly Social Democratic trade unions.

**I**n 1993 the Freedom Party tried to breathe on the coals of xenophobia by organising a plebiscite under the slogan "Austrians First" with ten points which were openly xenophobic and racist.

Jörg Haider came to the attention of the media at this time and he said our goal is to get 1.5 million signatures. He claimed that this was not against foreigners but for Austria and the Austrians.

This led to the rebirth of an anti-racist movement. There was a massive demonstration of 300,000 people in Vienna and links were made which built on what had been done at the time of Waldheim in the 1980s. These were broad committees involving liberal opinion formers as well as the left. The effect was a defeat of the FPÖ: only 470,000 people signed the plebiscite.

The problem was that in the 1990s you had the Schengen accord and the Social Democratic policy was in favour of more and more restrictive laws.

There have been social democratic ministers of the Interior for more than 30 years and the last Social Democratic Minister of the Interior, Karl Schlogl is hated by the far left and the anti-racist movement. He is the one that drafted the worst laws based on Schengen and encouraged police action against immigrants.

These were years in which Social Democrats had the majority within the government and Schlogl was Minister of the Interior it was at that moment that police killed a young Nigerian immigrant by taping his mouth so that he suffocated. And Haider always said that Schlogl was his man in the government.

So you can see that xenophobia and anti-Semitism is not at all something limited to the far right in Austria but is to be found in all the political parties with the exception of the Green party. And Social Democracy has

a particular responsibility for the rise of the Freedom Party in the way that it has pandered to anti-Semitism and racism.

### The Freedom Party

The Party was founded in 1947 under the patronage of the Allies as a party for the Nazis. It was an attempt to bring together former Nazis and integrate them into a democratic parliamentary system.

The Social Democrats were very much in favour of this party being created and supported it until the 1970s because they said that this would divide the big bourgeoisie into two different parties.

They were afraid of the situation that, as in pre-war Austria in which class struggles were very tense because on the one hand you had a very strong and militant Social Democracy and on the other hand only the Christian Democrats.

In the first 40 years after its foundation the Freedom Party ceased to be the party of ex-Nazis but it still had ex-SSers in it and people like that who were leaders of this party.

**T**here was a previous coalition between the Freedom Party and Social Democracy in the 1970s and 80s with former SSers and Nazis in it. This was the time when a new head of the party Norbert Steger wanted to turn it into a new right neo-liberal party but he was unable to stabilise this because in Austrian society there is not the space for such a project – you don't have large layers that are bourgeois and right wing but at the same time tolerant and liberal.

In 1986 there was a real putsch inside the Freedom Party at their Congress and Jörg Haider became head of the Party. What he did afterwards was marginalise and expel the old Nazis and that is why he can say, as Chancellor Kohl also used to say that they were all born after the National Socialist era, so how could they be Nazis?

Haider also marginalised all the "experts" who were right wingers but who were experts whether on politics or economics or what ever. So those who shape the Freedom Party today you could say are Jörg Haider and a group of yuppies who are racist and right wing and neo-liberal but who don't have any particular political profile.

And the only thing that is important for their careers in the Freedom Party is that they are ready to do anything Haider says.

The Freedom Party doesn't have stable party structures. It only has 30,000 – 40,000 members and they are not organised. There are full timers and a few leaders in small towns but there is no real organisation at the base.

Part of the Austrian left says that Haider has only been able to do what he has done not because of party organisation but because he has had a good deal of exposure in the media. This is not completely false. The Freedom Party electorate is very young – the average is under 40 years old and 40% are workers. The media portray the Freedom Party as a working class party today!

The Freedom Party received a large number of protest votes in these recent elections because during the 1980s and 90s there was a very very stable system of social partners between the Social Democrats and the People's Party.

**H**aider successfully portrayed himself as the answer to this monolithic bloc, as a voice for change.

When it was announced that there would be a coalition between the Peoples Party and the Freedom Party this was a big shock. A big part of Haider's electorate did not want this.

There were many interviews in the media that said that Haider is good because he is aggressive – he will tell the people up there what is what – but we don't want him to be Chancellor, we don't want him to be in the government.

Since the Freedom Party entered government, there have been new opinion polls and Haider's party has lost several points. The Social Democratic Party is stable, and the Greens almost doubled their showing with now 16-18%. Support for the Peoples Party has fallen dramatically.

What is happening is a radicalisation of the electorate. The Peoples Party can no longer claim to be the bourgeois party – the Freedom Party is now a major bourgeois party and those who voted for Haider who are from the working class who are former Social Democrats they are being driven away from the shock of the whole thing.

The programme of the Freedom Party is very far from being a Nazi programme. Its economic programme is a radical neo-liberal programme – a Thatcherite programme and others ele-

ments are different from Nazism. The party is not supported by capital either in Austria or internationally.

And Austrian capitalism is very dependent on outside support so the stock market fell sharply after this government came to office: some people were afraid there would be a stock market crash.

**T**he Freedom Party rules out violence or fascist methods in this period – they are focused on growing through elections.

But despite the fact that we do not see the Freedom Party today as a fascist party, it would be a huge error if their participation in government was accepted, if they were seen as a normal democratic party.

That is why in Austria, as in other places such as France, Flanders and Italy where we have seen a resurgence of the Far Right, mass mobilisations against these parties and the ideas that feed them are so key.

That is also why it is positive that there are calls to break diplomatic links with Austria from abroad – though the motives of the governments of the European Union are suspect when they themselves are carrying out the policies that fuel this development.

But the acceptance of Haider as a normal politician would reinforce the authoritarian, racist and xenophobic tendencies throughout Austrian society.

The strategy of the Freedom Party today is to have is to make themselves acceptable in our living rooms and this is the biggest danger of all.

To the international community

## Declaration of the Austrian antiracist movement

IN THIS MOMENT of Austrian history we are deeply concerned with the political developments in our country. For more than 10 years, many NGOs, initiatives and smaller parties have tried to change the Austrian racist reality without success. In the new millennium, Austria still is not a democracy but a national democracy.

More than 10 % of our population is systematically denied all political rights and participation, often for decades, they are left with the status of "foreigners".

Even in the trade-unions, there are no equal voting rights for all workers and employees. This system, guaranteeing equality not to human beings but to citizens only, is unique in Europe.

Since a democratic system has been imposed on Austria after World War II, not only the conservatives and the right wing, but also the governing Social Democrats fortified this system of nationalistic and racist segregation and exclusion.

This lack of balance in the political system led to the growth in support for a party that is openly promoting a revision of Nazi history, using racism as an effective political tool due to the lack of a countervailing power.

Even the killing of Marcus Omofuma during his deportation on May 1st 1999 did not lead to any antiracist measures. On the contrary, police action, especially against people with African background, increased drastically.

Charles O., major activist, writer and poet from Nigeria, was even accused of being a drug-boss and imprisoned for 3 months, before he had to be released due to complete lack of evidence and major charges were dropped.

Nevertheless these practices led to significant intimidation of the Black communities in their political campaigning.

Under such unfair conditions of criminalisation and the lack of democratic rights, we welcome initiatives from the side of the international community that put pressure on Austrian representatives.

Austria is facing a drastic swing to the right. With a right-conservative government things will even get worse for people discriminated on grounds of racism, including the Jewish minority, as well as for people discriminated on the grounds of sexual orientation, sexual identity or on the grounds of being physically handicapped.

For some years now, Austria is known in the European Union for its attempts to radically alter the politics towards a dismantling of the Geneva Convention and the denial of asylum for refugees.

Austria has become the home-base for right-wing policies, threatening emancipatory movements all over Europe.

Therefore it is in the self-interest of all democratic powers in Europe to try to reverse the political currents in Austria.

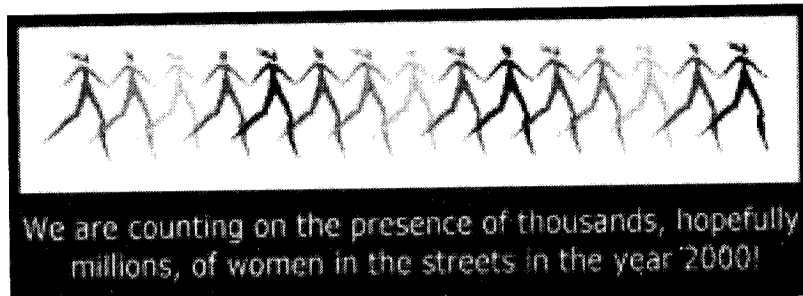
We want to encourage all international steps in this direction, hoping that the European Union at least has learned from history, while the official Austria has not.

Under any government to come, Austria should finally change towards a fair democratic system which includes the right to vote for all permanent inhabitants, in which there is an anti-discrimination-law with respective enforcement, in which immigrants are not treated as enemies and in which human rights are really respected.

**Platform for a world without racism Vienna, 1.2.2000**



# World March of Women The countdown begins!



More than 60 women, including 40 delegates from all over the globe, met in Montreal, Canada, from November 3-7 last year to put the finishing touches to plans for the World March of Women in the Year 2000, around 17 demands.

Their aims of the work session were to put together plans for mobilisations and actions under way around the international campaign leading up to the March; decide the nature and details of international actions; report on progress in the campaign for the 17 international demands; and finally, to increase women's sense of involvement in the project and encourage everyone to carry on.

At this successful meeting, women from five continents were able to weave together bonds of solidarity to strengthen them in their common struggle against poverty and violence against women.

Since the beginning, the values (or principles) underlying the project have been

clear:

- leadership in the hands of women, especially grass-roots women
- recognition of the diversity of the women's movement
- agreement to the goals and action plan of the World March
- autonomy of participating groups and countries in terms of their own March organisation
- non-violence
- above all, that the march belongs to women in every region of the world – at this meeting, the last principle became a concrete reality

In Montreal, New York, Geneva and other major cities, March 8 2000 is the official launch date of the World March and the start of a global signature campaign in support of our 17 world demands. Between March 8,



and October 17, 2000, millions of signed cards will be sent to the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan.

On October 15 2000, there will be a mass demonstration in Washington DC organised by the American women's movement. This will be joined by international representatives concerned by the disastrous impact on women of the policies of the

International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. International representatives hope to meet the presidents of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, to present them with the demands of women from all over the world.

On October 17 2000, a demo is planned through the streets of New York to the world headquarters of the United Nations. International representatives hope to meet with the Secretary General. The campaign has already sent a letter requesting this. They have also asked for time on the agenda of the UN General Assembly that same day.

There are now over 3000 groups from 143 countries participating in the World March.

In addition, there are 65 national coordinating bodies currently planning March activities. Some world

regions are also developing plans at a regional level.

The huge diversity of women's movements and groups is readily apparent, as is the variety in forms of struggle against the universal problems of poverty and violence against women.

### Petition

A petition in support of the demands of the march has been set up, with a goal of 10 million signatures.

Women are putting their imaginations to work to come up with creative ideas publicity.

Both because of the cost involved in producing the paper cards or petitions, and the desire to communicate a particular message, some groups plan to invite women to sign symbolic objects such as Nike shoe laces or electronic parts (Philippines), "Dothies" a piece of men's clothing (India and Bangladesh), a quilt, etc.

### Act on October 17

Around the world at the same time, the plan is to act in unison on October 17 2000, and to call on participating groups to organise a one-hour action (local, regional or national).

Many groups participating in the World March have received an invitation to take part in a global women's strike on March 8 2000.

In the invitation, it is stated that the activities of the World March of Women are being combined with the international strike. This information is inaccurate.

The World March organisation received a letter from groups organising the strike and replied that since the two projects (World March and global strike) are proposing actions on March 8 2000, the organisers should keep in touch with one another.

The global strike is not one of the planned actions of the World March. Naturally, this does not exclude groups participating in the March from associating themselves with the strike action, if they so desire.

### Contact:

World March of Women, Fédération des femmes du Québec, 110 rue Ste-Thérèse, #307 Montréal, Québec, CANADA H2Y 1E6. Telephone: (1) 514-395-1196, Fax: (1) 514-395-1224, email: marche2000@ffq.qc.ca

## Statement of Solidarity

# US Navy out of Vieques!

WE ARE profoundly troubled by the situation imposed on the people of the Puerto Rican island of Vieques due to the presence of the U.S. Navy and its activities on the island. For the last fifty years, the

U.S. Navy has occupied more than three quarters of the territory of Vieques. This they have done, not only without consulting the people of Vieques, but in fact, against the will of the people of both

Vieques and the rest of Puerto Rico.

Since then, the U.S. Navy and its allies in NATO have used Vieques as a stage for military manoeuvres. For more than five decades the U.S. Navy has bombarded the waters and land of Vieques and has installed a huge arsenal on its territory.

This has had and still has terrible effects on the ecology, the health, the economic and cultural development and the archaeological heritage of the people of Vieques. Vieques has no peace and the survival of its people is in danger.

However, Vieques has not resigned itself to its own disappearance. For decades, sectors of Puerto Rican society have resisted the presence of the Navy and its effects.

In April 1999, a Navy plane dropped two bombs which

The statement below was passed by the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International at its February 2000 meeting and was also supported by many of the constituent organisations of the FI.

The need to maintain control in the Puerto Rican island of Vieques has become even more important for US imperialism since its handing back of the Panama Canal not only in terms of its influence in the Caribbean itself but also as launching pad to quell any 'trouble' in Latin America.

As we go to press activity in the protest camps is hotting up – send messages of support to <herzig@caribe.net>

missed their target and caused the death of David Sanes, a resident of Vieques. His death has provoked an explosion of indignation among the Puerto Rican people.

Since that moment, the movement against the U.S. Navy presence has grown to include all the political, social, religious sectors, as well as the labour movement.

Hundreds of demonstrators have set up camps in the areas controlled by the Navy. Their presence there has made it impossible for the Navy to renew its bombing exercises.

The demonstrations have taken on such a magnitude that the President of the U.S., William J. Clinton, has been forced to name a special commission to study the situation. The Navy persists in its intention to continue occupying Vieques.

Faced with this dramatic example of colonial imposition, militarism, misuse of resources, and disdain for human life and for nature, we express

our full solidarity with the struggle of the people of Vieques for demilitarisation, the return of the land to the people, the clean-up of its environment, development and peace.

The struggle for Vieques is our struggle because this struggle is not just about Vieques. This is a struggle for the dignity of our peoples, for the self-determination of



Parting shot at Central America: Clinton

Caribbean nations, for the protection of the environment, for demilitarisation and to ensure that the material wealth generated by the people may be used for the benefit of the people.

We demand that the government of the USA and its military allies respect the will of the people of Vieques and Puerto Rico and turn over the lands in Vieques that were

**The Real Irish Peace Process**  
available (£6 plus 70p p&p) from Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109 London N4 2UU

# WTO can seriously damage your health!

**John Lister**

**A**fter the headline-grabbing clashes outside its Seattle summit last December, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has become a byword for the expanded power of grasping multinational corporations.

But few realise the extent to which the WTO is also seeking to intervene to shape policies of member governments on health care and education.

The WTO's objective is to sweep away any restriction to the brute forces of the free market, reinforcing the dependence and subordination of the "developing" economies, and opening up the world as a free-fire zone for the monopolies.

At Seattle this strategy ran into sustained opposition from some Third World governments as well as campaigners representing the poor, unemployed and environmental issues.

But behind the scenes debates on the extent to which a new global market in health and social services could be opened up had been running for over a year, and continue in the corridors of the WTO.

A Background Note from the WTO Secretariat set out some of the key issues in September 1998. For the leading lights of global Thatcherism there are two distinct elements about health care spending which concern them:

In the developed economies, with the exception of the USA, health spending is largely government spending, or financed through compulsory insurance schemes. For neo-liberal fundamentalists this represents an unwelcome increase in taxation or overhead costs, restricting competitiveness.

While they attempt to restrict or reduce this "burden", the WTO also wants to open up potential new markets - and promote the role of the private sector. This means examining the extent to which the dominant role of government spending serves to subsidise public sector hospitals and services, making it more difficult for international capital to compete and build up its stake in what is a massive world-wide health industry.

Health care is certainly a massive global industry, but also one of the most starkly unequal. By the mid 1990s the top 29 countries, grouped in the OECD, spent a total of \$2 trillion (\$2,000 billion) a year on health. This was 90% of total world health expenditure, leaving the majority of the world's population (among them many of the inhabitants of Latin America, Africa, the

Indian sub-continent and much of the rest of Asia) to share the remaining 10%.

Some of the least developed countries spend as little as \$5 per head per year on health care, compared with \$3,500 in the USA.

In these countries there is little short or medium term prospect of substantial profits to be made exploiting the need for health care - with the obvious exception of pharmaceutical monopolies. These firms look to WTO regulations to help preserve their rip-off prices and prevent any Third World countries producing medicines more cheaply.

However the WTO does look eagerly towards a number of countries - including Chile, Brazil, Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland - which are "decentralising and/or commercialising the health sector in a bid to contain cost pressures". These we are told "may offer interesting business prospects".

**M**eanwhile in the Third World the OECD, together with the IMF, the World Bank and other global organisations have concentrated on foisting their dogmatic nostrums of market-led "reforms" to hold down state spending and ensure the future of the private sector.

The WTO document urges member states to discuss how best to ensure that "ongoing reforms in national health systems are mutually supportive and whenever relevant, market-based."

Standard market-style solutions being shamelessly foisted onto Third World countries by international agencies include the privatisation of some or all of their hospitals to promote "competition", the privatisation of hospital support services, and the imposition of cash limits and efficiency targets (including reduced length of stay in hospital) to squeeze down spending in the state sector, as well as hospital closures and rationalisation.

Governments are also being urged to make a wholesale switch of government resources from hospitals to primary health care, which according to the World Bank and World Health Organisation offers the most cost-effective and low-cost treatment.

But there remains a difference of opinion between the World Bank and the WHO over the imposition of new charges for health care or medicines, especially in the poorest countries. While the WHO recognises charges as an obstacle to access to services for the poorest and most vulnerable, and is openly sceptical about the value of market-style

reforms, the Bank is a gung-ho advocate of both.

Back in 1987 the Bank included increased cost-recovery as part of its agenda for health care in developing countries. Its apologists now argue aggressively in favour of charges - as an "egalitarian" measure. They claim that so-called "cost sharing" or "co-payment" systems are more equitable because they "charge those [the well-to-do] who make most use of services ... channelling subsidies to those least able to pay!"

A key factor has to be the tightening of the financial regime in hospitals to ensure that nobody gets away without paying. "A patient account should be opened immediately on admission. ... This means striving to collect a cash deposit early in the patient stay and to settle bills before patients leave the premises".

Perhaps more advantageous from the Bank's standpoint is the fact that imposing user fees for government funded services "fosters greater competition between private and public providers" and lays the basis for the imposition of health insurance schemes which can further cut government spending.

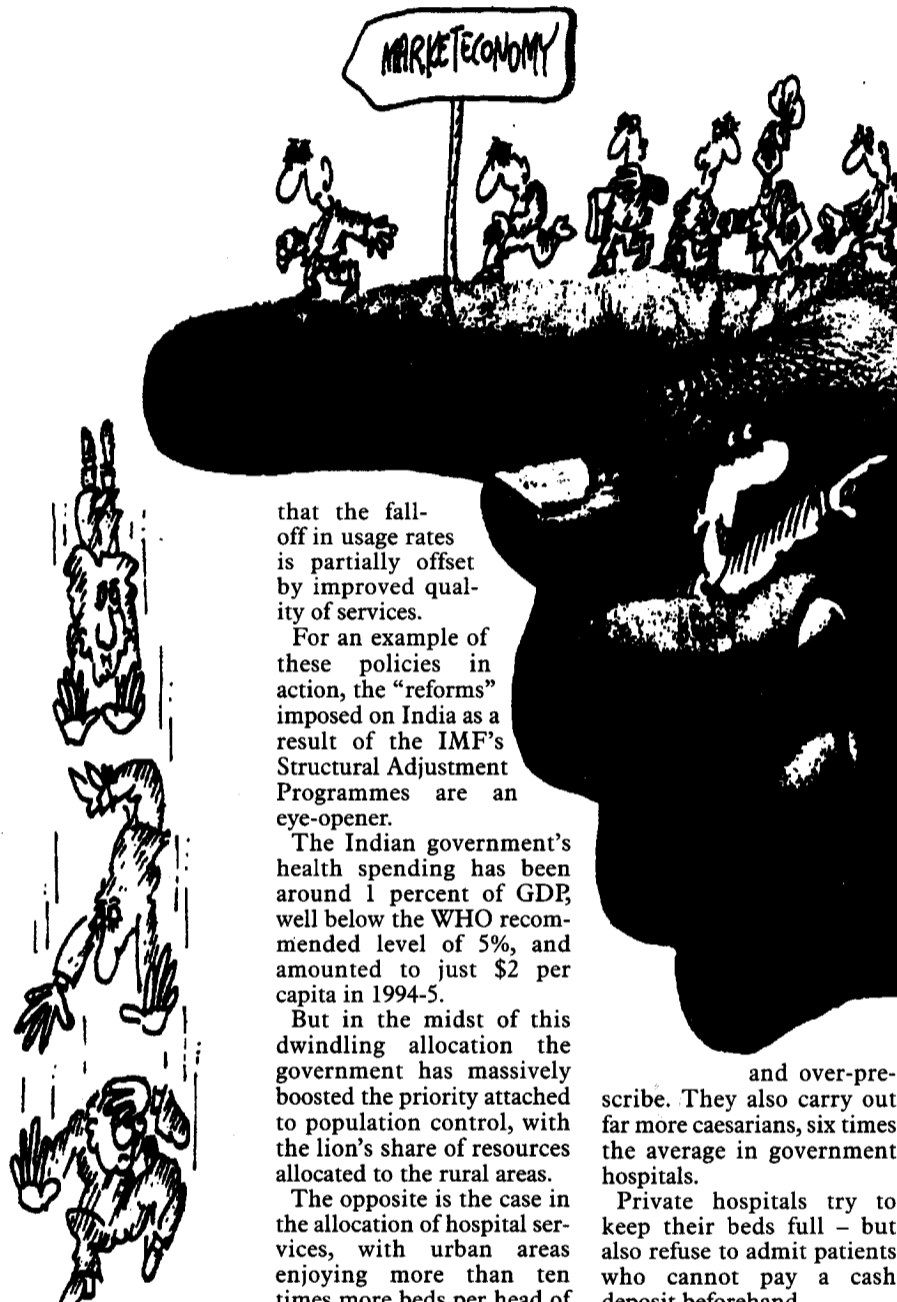
One World Bank pamphlet explains that:

"Countries cannot jump into self-financing health insurance schemes without first passing the hurdle of imposing user fees in government facilities, especially hospitals. The reason is simply that when people have the option of obtaining health services at zero or low cost they are unlikely to have much incentive to pay insurance premiums to cover unexpected health hazards."

Indeed if some services are available free of charge "How can the private sector expand and compete under such circumstances?" The ideal combination for achieving the market-based strategic model is a combination of high fees for hospital and other treatment - to scare people into an "affordable" insurance scheme.

**F**or those most determined to remodel Third World services on a market model, even the lack of money is no objection: "Rural insurance is more difficult, but hardly impossible. Farm income from cash crops provide an obvious source from which to capture funds for health insurance."

Health services come a poor second to the balance sheet in these plans and calculations. The alien logic of the free market appears almost quaint when it seeks to discuss which services - if any - should be subsidised in the public interest:



that the fall-off in usage rates is partially offset by improved quality of services.

For an example of these policies in action, the "reforms" imposed on India as a result of the IMF's Structural Adjustment Programmes are an eye-opener.

The Indian government's health spending has been around 1 percent of GDP, well below the WHO recommended level of 5%, and amounted to just \$2 per capita in 1994-5.

But in the midst of this dwindling allocation the government has massively boosted the priority attached to population control, with the lion's share of resources allocated to the rural areas.

The opposite is the case in the allocation of hospital services, with urban areas enjoying more than ten times more beds per head of population than the rural areas.

The government abdication of the provision of services has left the private sector maximum scope in the countryside: indeed private sector health spending is four times larger than government spending as a share of GDP.

**I**n place of raising the money needed for health services through taxation, the Indian government has resorted to World Bank and other international loans and the imposition of user charges.

Meanwhile the private sector can get government help to set up clinics, hospitals and diagnostic services, and 70% of newly-qualified doctors trained at public expense proceed to work immediately in the booming private sector: many of these then leave the country to practise abroad.

This burgeoning of the largely unregulated private sector brings with it many of the distortions and problems encountered in the privatised US health system. Private hospitals carry out unnecessary operations, redundant tests, overcharge

and over-prescribe. They also carry out far more caesarians, six times the average in government hospitals.

Private hospitals try to keep their beds full - but also refuse to admit patients who cannot pay a cash deposit beforehand.

The prevalence of patient charges predictably generates the greatest burden on the poorest households. While the upper classes spend around 4 percent of their income on health care, the lower middle classes can spend 8-10%, while surveys have shown some on the lowest income spending 14% on health.

The market system isn't working for them: nor is it delivering affordable accessible health care for the poor and oppressed elsewhere in Asia, in Africa or in Latin America.

But there are no grounds for complacency anywhere. The WTO debates and the OECD and other initiatives should remind us that market-style methods, including "Build Operate Transfer" (known here as the Private Finance Initiative) are already alive and kicking in our NHS and in most advanced countries.

And the debate over user fees, far from being resolved, keeps coming back with each increase in pressure on under-funded health services. Health workers and those who value comprehensive health care services need to back the fight against the WTO and its initiatives.

# A bad agreement won't bring good government!

## Statement from supporters of the Fourth International in Barcelona.

The agreement reached by the leadership of the PSOE (Spanish Socialist Party) and IU (United Left) has rocked the pre electoral scene in the Spanish State. The process of negotiation made headlines in the press.

The United Left had found its place 'under the sun' after a period of sombre perspectives following on from the EU elections.

The spokespersons for the right wing Partido Popular dusted off slogans from earlier times in order to frighten the centrist wing of the PSOE's electorate. They claimed that this was a 'social communist agreement'. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Successive opinion polls had predicted the defeat of the Socialist Party, if it ran on its own ticket. This was in the context of prolonged social demobilisation and because their programme was not capable of animating and mobilising the working class. Faced with this prospect, the Socialist Party leadership went into negotiations with IU.

Apart from their less than honourable intentions, this also signalled a change in the traditional sectarian attitude of the PSOE towards the United Left.

The willingness of the IU leadership to negotiate has also meant the suppression of their old sectarian attitudes. In the first phase of the process there was little to object to.

There was a tug of war between the Socialist Party proposal that the United



Izquierda Unida boss Julio Anguita

Left withdraw its lists from those constituencies where they could not win to concentrate the vote and the counter proposal from IU to organise electoral coalitions in these areas. This diverted public attention from an essential part of the negotiations: the programme, its nature and content.

The eleven point agreement, under the headings of employment, economic pol-

icy, autonomous region policy, foreign policy, security and terrorism, signifies a break with the programme passed by the IU's national conference and with the public line given until now.

The other points such as education, pensions, health and social welfare, monetary policy are clearly insufficient. We deal in a more detailed manner with the most controversial points.

### A) Employment:

The formula used to reduce the working week to 35 hours is the same one put forward by the leadership of the PSOE and CC.OO (second largest union) and which has to date produced no results.

It relies on the willingness of the bosses to negotiate! They didn't even consider the French model, despite its limits and contradictions. This is a kick in the teeth for more than 700,000 people who supported the mobilisations for a 35 hour law without concessions.

They haven't set out any measures to eliminate job insecurity in the workplace or even to modify the current legislation governing work contracts which is completely favourable to the bosses. IU has also abandoned its demand for the suppression of the temping agencies.

Experience shows, that after successive measures already agreed with the unions in the context of enormous job insecurity, which affects one third of the working population, and the high unemployment rate, there are no conditions to make these proposals effective.

### B) Economic Policy:

Here, there are a number of progressive sounding general statements, but the agreement is based upon the 'compliance with budgetary agreements made in the framework of Monetary and Economic Union'.

This adds up to an acceptance of the austerity and anti social policies of stability pact which arise from the economic policies imposed by the EU.

### C) Autonomous Regions Policy:

There is no mechanism which allows citizens of the different nationalities to decide on the changes to the state, whether these would be in a federalist direction or other equally legitimate options such as confederation or independence. In a nutshell, the right to self determination is denied.

Instead the agreement continues to rely on the model of authoritarian leadership to resolve the contradictions in the existing state.

This makes a lasting democratic solution to the various national conflicts more difficult, particularly in the Basque Country. This is another abandonment of the previous programme of the United Left.

### D) Foreign Policy:

This section of the text is headed 'Commitment to our international undertakings in the areas of defence and security'. This says it all!

The undertakings referred to are those of the Spanish State which we have seen in recent years such as the logistical support given to the bombardment of Iraq and the bombing of Kosova and Serbia (Who is next?). This is yet another break by the United left with their programme - a tragic one.

### E) Terrorism:

On this question the United Left has lined up behind the intransigent and centralist position of the PSOE.

They have lost all the credibility gained at the time of the Lizarra Accords [NB: the accords were the framework in which all the political parties in the Basque country came together to agree a negotiated settlement - Ed] as a political democratic force committed to a peaceful and just solution to the national question.

In overall terms this is a programme in which women are hardly mentioned, and where the environmental measures are extremely limited - there is not even a timetable for the closure of all the nuclear power stations.

There is little which is in solidarity with the peoples crushed by external debt.

In general the social commitments are insufficient - and will not be carried out in any case, due to the economic and financial policies which will be applied.

In other words this is a programme which is insufficiently feminist, green, social or in solidarity with those in struggle. This programme is not a bit alternative - it is anything but radical left and nationalist.

The agreement is a governmental accord for the PSOE and IU if they gain a parliamentary majority. The justifications and explications which surround the agreement, that it is a 'programme of minimum demands', that 'each side can defend what it believes convenient from their respective programmes' are worth little faced with a programme for government.

Experience shows how the logic of the internal functioning of government works, the mechanisms of solidarity and discipline, interests which develop that weigh down and anchor seats and wills.

All of this takes place in an

unfavourable climate which is unlikely to change in the short term - there are few social mobilisations and the Socialist Party will gain far more seats than IU.

This is an agreement reached at the top, without the participation and involvement of the affiliates of both organisations and ignoring the social needs of the majority in the Spanish State.

The agreement will be useless in the face of grave political crises, it will not motivate and mobilise workers, women and youth in a sustained manner.

It will not even be easy to generate the desired electoral mobilisation behind this agreement. The idea of the 'useful vote' and the increase in abstention amongst the left will be negative for IU.

The agreement destroys the United Left's credibility as an independent

political force critical of the capitalist system. If this agreement manages to bring IU into government it will become a prisoner and will be held responsible for the management of the old policies of the existing order.

For the *Collectiu per una Esquerra Alternativa* (Fourth International) this agreement was *not* the only possible outcome of the process. Another type of agreement was possible, taking into account the lack of time and the circumstances.

That agreement should have been to get the right wing party out of government

The PSOE and IU should have committed themselves to giving their vote to the best positioned left candidate, in this case the PSOE, in order to gain the Presidency.

It should also have included a serious and rigorous commitment after the elections to open a dialogue with the social and citizens movements to promote unity in action and mobilise in favour of the most urgent social and political demands.

In any event it should have maintained the independence of the United Left from the actions of the government, exercising control from the Parliament and society at large, with its hands, heart and head completely free.

February 5, 2000

*Collectiu per una Esquerra Alternativa (IV International)*

**You've seen some articles: now buy the magazine!**

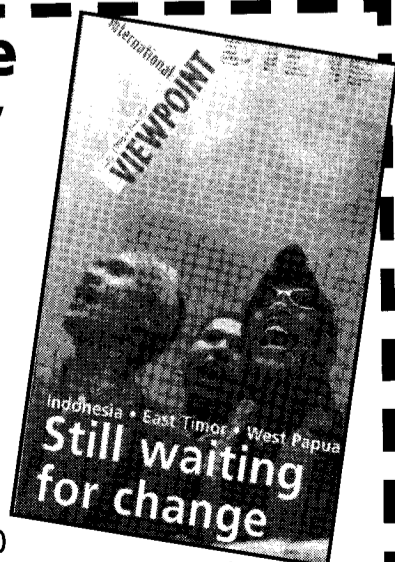
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## Ending the Nightmare

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**John North**

**T**he collapse of the Stormont executive in the North of Ireland by the British on February 11 strongly refutes the claim that the Good Friday agreement is a solution to the question of Irish independence.

The following arguments were put forward for the agreement:

- the referendum in support of the Good Friday agreement held in both partitioned Irish states represented an exercise of self-determination
- the agreement replaced both the Irish constitutional claim and the British Government of Ireland Act in a new historic compromise
- the compromise would remove the unionist veto
- the new dispensation was guaranteed by a nationalist family, involving republicans and Irish capitalists and supported by the authority of US Imperialism.

This claim of a final, successful decolonisation was played up in the agreement's final implementation. The joke at the setting up of the new Stormont executive was that Mandelson, the British Secretary of State, was signing his way into unemployment as he signed the legal instrument setting it up.

Eight weeks later, this "unemployed" representative of the British state, with a stroke of the pen, was able to wipe out all the institutions of a supposedly independent local democracy. A whole series of agreements and institutions supposed to be jointly controlled by the Irish government and enshrined in international law were wiped out in the same instant.

Mandelson was able to decide which elements of the Good Friday agreement would be suspended, and which, like prisoner release and changes to the RUC would continue to operate.

The British responded to criticism by pleading necessity - of which they alone were the judges.

The political process in Ireland is a settlement imposed by Britain where the British retain all the rights due to an imperialist power. To understand the process we need to ask what are the goals of British strategy.

The British needed to prevent the looming resignation of unionist first minister David Trimble. This resignation was in fact a pre-planned suicide note in the form of a letter given to the unionist party, to ensure that disarmament by the IRA, not a component of the Good Friday agreement, would become a condition for unionists to participate.

Britain needs to ensure that unionism remains the leading force in a society still dominated by sectarianism. This provides a base for British military occupation, which in turn guarantees capitalist stability on the island of Ireland. Really, no other explanation can be advanced to explain 30 years of war, billions in expenditure and the energy and determination expended on the present agreement.

The British do not want simply to recreate the old Stormont regime that collapsed so completely. They needed to keep the support of the Irish government and the local Catholic middle class by sharing out some sectarian privilege.

This provoked a split among unionists. Trimble argues that they must reluctantly go along with the British plans, pocket the immense gains made by reaction, and fight tooth and nail within the new structures to nullify any restriction of their sectarian privilege. Others argue that the risk is too great and that the North can only continue as a sectarian society if unionism has unrestricted privilege.

**B**ritish support has given Trimble greatly increased authority. He immediately pushed for further gains, indicating that any new agreement will have to be brought back to the unionist council, where it will be linked with attempts to veto changes in the name and uniform of the RUC.

The British, by excluding the RUC from the suspension, hope to maintain enough of an appearance of change to retain nationalist support, while enabling Trimble to argue that preventing the changes is beyond his powers and that unionists cannot afford to refuse the further concessions to reaction that he hopes to gain.

Nowhere in this debate is there any conception of a non-sectarian or democratised North. What we are seeing is therefore not some minor hiccup, but a sharp shift to the



Calling the shots: Trimble

## Mandelson spells it out: Irish "Peace" deal means British rule!

right, as required by the British strategy. It is time to turn off the organ music and remind everyone that a coalition government including Sinn Fein and the unionists is simply not stable. Either Sinn Fein has to go or they must be so neutered and humiliated that even the unionists no longer object to their presence.

Irish capitalists know this too. Their role is to plead with the British, to assure them that they also represent a secure and stable base for British rule, to pressure Sinn Fein for further concessions and final surrender while at the same time trying to ensure that they stay inside the tent as loyal footsoldiers for Irish capitalism.

The thought that Sinn Fein hesitation was threatening the deal brought a series of vicious attacks down on their heads. Seamus Mallon, nationalist deputy leader in the Stormont assembly, accused the republicans of 'playing ducks and drakes with the two governments, the rest of the political parties on the island of Ireland and all those who voted for the GFA.'

Nationalist pressure was successful. Despite claims of ignorance by Mandelson, it's quite clear that the IRA took a further step to the right and put a new offer on the table, which was immediately rejected by the British.

The triumph of the reaction is not the whole story.

There has been growing unease and division at the base of the republican movement. A round of the British military forces in south Armagh did not take place. They could not endorse the Patten report on the RUC or find within it any real reform. The equality agenda for desecrating local institutions has been slow to appear. Capitulation on the question of Orange marches is expected to continue.

The operation of the local assembly was too obviously republican ministers adminis-

ing policies already decided by Britain. Political decisions were solemnly announced that had been in preparation by British civil servants for months before the assembly was established. Not only were they bogus, they were also decisions to the right of Sinn Fein policy.

So Martin McGuinness declared his opposition to educational selection while heading a department operating such a policy. Health minister Bairbre De Bruin announced the closure of a local maternity unit based on a reorganisation involving the Private Finance Initiative.

The all-Ireland bodies were so obviously powerless that even Sinn Fein no longer mention them as stepping stones to a united Ireland, instead focussing on their own chances of major electoral success on both sides of the border.

Because republicanism is essentially a militarist ideology, militants focussed on guns. As long as weapons were not surrendered they would accept the word of the leadership.

The question of weapons goes deeper than this. In the week following the suspension of Stormont the British army lost weapons involved in the Bloody Sunday massacre.

New calls were issued by international Human Rights bodies for an investigation of British and RUC involvement in the murder of a solicitor, Pat Finucane, and a bloody feud broke out between loyalist paramilitaries.

Militants note wryly that even a series of killings by loyalists provokes no crisis in the peace process. These forces were used to launch the pogrom that began the present troubles, and to run the death squads in collusion with the state ever since.

So the question becomes: do we accept the assertion that the peace process means an end to these threats and that republicans should

support IRA disarmament? The answer is no: and this poses serious difficulties for the republican leadership.

A few hours before the suspension, republican leaders already showed signs that they might be prepared to retreat to the right - frantic efforts were made to produce a second de Chastelain report indicating that they would agree to a timetable for the surrender of weapons as part of the implementation process, although not on the receiving end of an ultimatum from the unionists.

Following the suspension of the executive, the IRA withdrew all previous offers and withdrew from the decommissioning body. Yet Gerry Adams maintains that 'Our objective is - and the objective of the two governments should be - the putting back in place of the institutions as soon as possible.'

The republicans are now under greater pressure than ever, with no alternative to the Good Friday process and with no realistic hope of resuming an armed campaign whose failure has always been the best justification for the peace process. When asked if there was a plan B, one leading republican replied that plan B was to make plan A work.

**W**hen negotiations were still ongoing the republicans focused their attention on "unionist blackmail". With its breakdown, they have begun to speak more sharply of the overall British responsibility and to propose street protest. If that political message was to be amplified then a new political strategy might at last begin to emerge.

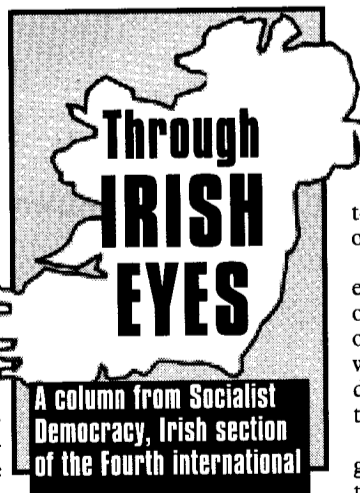
If British strategy is not peace and withdrawal, then what is it? And how did the republican leadership get it so badly wrong?

To break from their current strategy the republicans would have to break from their erstwhile friends in the "nationalist family", who are now calling for their immediate surrender.

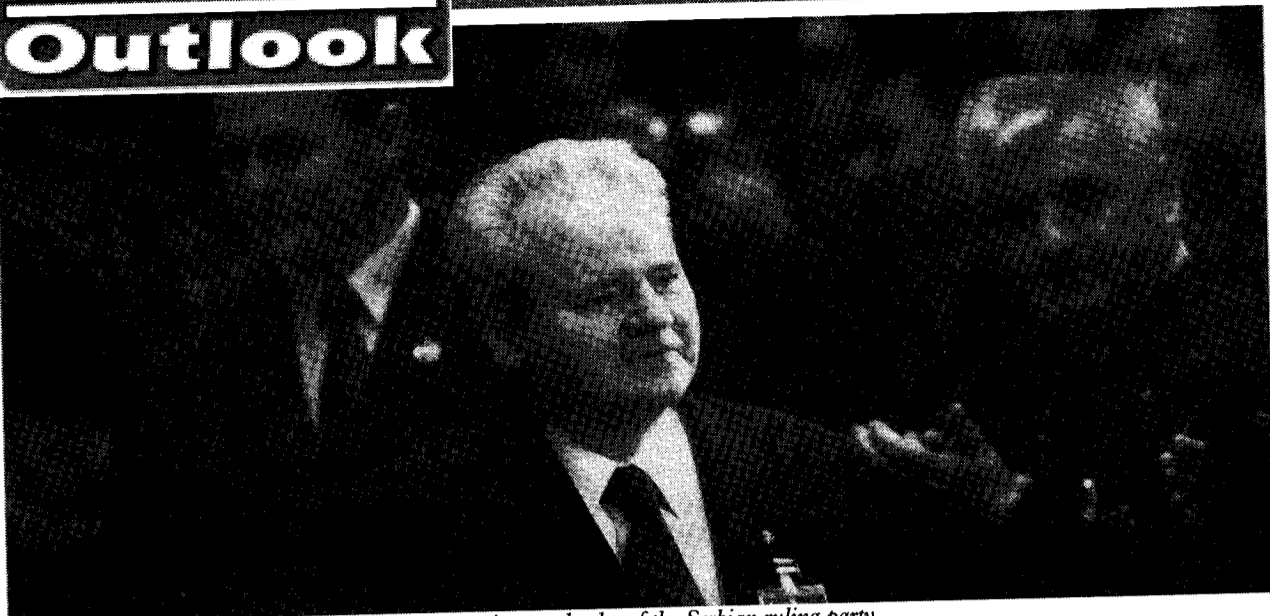
They are still a long way from doing this. A mass protest strategy would need to convince supporters that they were not simply cannon fodder in a game of secret diplomacy, and in practice would find itself in conflict with the "nationalist family", who will demand immediate demobilisation.

The majority of working people in Ireland will continue to support the peace process, given its endorsement by the Irish State, mass media and capital and the absence of any sizeable left opposition, particularly as the alternative - presented so starkly by the republican militarist opposition in recent bombings - is another violent campaign with no hope of victory.

The present instability and the present confusion of the republican leadership does offer at least the prospect of a decline in the use of secret diplomacy, the regroupment of militants sceptical of the nationalist family and the rebirth of opposition based on a principled democratic and socialist viewpoint, one which states clearly that democracy in Ireland depends not on British good intentions but on British withdrawal.



## Socialist Outlook



Surviving: Milosevic wins a unanimous vote to continue as leader of the Serbian ruling party

# New weighty analysis of Balkan history

*The Balkans 1804-1999: Nationalism, War and The Great Powers*, by Misha Glenny, Granta Books; £25.

Reviewed by GEOFF RYAN

MISHA Glenny's latest work is a wide-ranging historical analysis of nearly two centuries of Balkan history.

In no sense of the term is it light reading. The hardback edition weighs nearly three pounds: reading in bed is not recommended! But as Kosova once again returns to the headlines, as Kosovars increasingly protest the partition of Mitrovica it offers important insights that were lacking in much of the anti-war movement.

It is widely said in the west that the peoples of the Balkans have indulged in vicious ethnic hatred for centuries. Glenny totally destroys that belief. He also shows that when ethnic hatreds have erupted, it has usually been the result of imperialist intervention in the region.

However Glenny's analysis is a long way removed from the rather crude notions put forward by much of the left. He attempts to show the complexities of the relationship between imperialism and the Balkans.

For example, efforts during the Tanzimat period (mid-19th century) to reform the Ottoman empire led to conflicts in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The nature of those conflicts was complex.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina many of the Muslim landlords organised opposition to the reformist Sultan in Istanbul, since their privileges were under threat. The Sultanate was supported by both Muslim and Serb peasants. Similar examples of unity among the different national and ethnic groups can be found throughout Balkan history.

Glenny recognises that the people of the Balkans are not merely puppets of imperialism: they also have their own agendas and sometimes, under nationalist leaderships, this can lead to conflicts between them.

Hence, having expelled Turkey from most of Europe, the victorious Balkan states immediately fought among themselves, with Greece and Serbia taking large chunks of Bulgarian territory.

Imperialism, despite its protestations of horror, has encouraged ethnic cleansing.

The most brutal example is the massive exchanges of population between Greece and Turkey in the early 1920s after attempts by Greece and Italy, backed by the major powers, to seize huge tracts of the infant Turkish state

culminated in military disaster.

Perhaps the main strength of Glenny's book is his understanding of the conflict between rural and urban society. Far from being resolved by the various Stalinist regimes in the region after 1945, this problem was exacerbated by the heavy-handed manner in which the regimes attempted to subjugate the large peasant population. Ceausescu's Romania is the most brutal example but was by no means untypical, even if the lavish western support for Ceausescu was totally untypical.

Certainly the analysis given by Glenny of the nature of the conflicts in former Yugoslavia as the revenge of the countryside on the city is the best I have ever read.

This is an absolutely crucial point,



largely ignored in most writings on the wars, and one that still needs to be developed. Because Glenny rejects a simplistic notion of imperialist intervention, he is able to distinguish between different ways in which imperialism has contributed to ethnic conflicts.

Hence he understands that, in contrast to most Balkan crises during the 20th century, the recent wars in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosova were not caused by direct imperialist intervention – though later imperialist policy may have made the situation worse.

He recognises that the central causes lay within the undemocratic nature of the Titoist state and the relationship between Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia in the break-up of the state during the 1980s. Again this is a vastly more accurate analysis than can be found on much of the British left.

### Weaknesses

Nevertheless, there are some weaknesses. In particular Glenny underestimates the importance of the role of Slovenia in the break-up, concentrating on Serbo-Croatian relations. He emphasises the cynical deal between Milosevic and Croatian leader Tudjman to carve up Bosnia but underplays the equally cynical deal between Milosevic and Slovene President Kucan to allow Slovenia to leave Yugoslavia.

Of course, the central issue as to whether or not the Yugoslav federation would continue revolved

around relations between Serbia and Croatia, the two strongest republics. However, once Slovenia was able to secede that immediately affected Serbo-Croat relations, ensuring that Croatia was more likely to follow Slovenia's lead.

By emphasising Croatia's role, Glenny inadvertently gives much greater importance to the role of Franjo Tudjman – a particular *bête noire* for Glenny – than he deserves. Most Croatian opponents of Tudjman, by contrast, have rightly pointed out that despite Tudjman's claims to have led Croatia to independence he was largely dragged along behind the Slovenes.

Glenny is also completely silent on the worst case of ethnic cleansing from Yugoslavia before the recent wars: the expulsion of the Italian population between 1945 and 1955. Although the figures are hotly debated, perhaps as many as 350,000 Italians left Croatia and Slovenia in that period. By no means all were fascist sympathisers. Many Italians in Croatia and Slovenia fought alongside the Yugoslav Partisans and formed Italian brigades.

Certainly the left has also failed to mention this criminal act by the Tito regime, perhaps through a misguided belief that Tito represented a real alternative to Stalinism. Although the majority of Italian Communists in Croatia and Slovenia did side with Stalin during the 1948 split with Tito – that is by no means justification for the left to have remained silent for so long.

Despite these criticisms, this is the first attempt to look at the Balkans as a whole since Barbara Jelavich's two volume *History of the Balkans* published in 1983. It is a serious historical study of immense value to those who want to understand the complex dynamics of the Balkans and the relationship to imperialism.

It is certainly a damning indictment of imperialist intervention and a defence of the Balkan peoples against current notions that they are all blood-thirsty monsters. But neither does it prettify the various Balkan regimes throughout history.

It also damns the nationalist politics pursued by most Balkan regimes (including the Stalinist regimes) which have also contributed to ethnic violence.

And by insisting on the failure of the Stalinist regimes to solve agrarian problems, thereby leaving the peasantry open to nationalist rhetoric with all its murderous consequences, Misha Glenny has made an extremely important contribution to our understanding of the nature of the wars in former Yugoslavia.

## Chomsky exposes imperialist humbug

*The New Military Humanism: Lessons From Kosovo*, Noam Chomsky. Pluto Press.

Reviewed by Geoff Ryan.

FOR MUCH of this book Chomsky attempts to refute the claims of NATO leaders to have been acting on humanitarian impulses in Kosovo. He does so by accepting, at least for the sake of argument, the claims put forward by Clinton and Blair that the end of the Cold War means that the West can now act solely on high moral principles. Hence Chomsky tries to keep his arguments to the last ten years.

He demonstrates that far from having changed their policies during this period, the major imperialist powers continue in the same old ways. He shows that the level of murder in Colombia in the year before NATO's Balkan war (2,000) was almost exactly the same as in Kosova in the same period. The number of displaced persons was also eerily similar in both countries (2-300,000).

Chomsky also draws attention to the lack of western criticism of the Turkish military's brutal war against the Kurds. He does not, however, see the very different attitudes of the west towards repression by the Colombian and Turkish military and its offensive against Serbia as examples of double standards. On the contrary, he argues they reflect a single standard – what is in the interests of (primarily) US imperialism.

It is not that western leaders are unaware of political repression in Colombia or Kurdistan (or East Timor). Nor are they simply unable to intervene everywhere at once, as some liberal apologists for the Balkan war have tried to claim.

The reality is that in Colombia military violence against the civilian population is sanctioned and orchestrated by US imperialism.

War against the Kurds is waged by a Turkish state which is a member of NATO with the full support of its partners. The left needs to step up its campaign against the brutality in Kurdistan by denouncing it as NATO's war against the Kurds.

One of the strengths of Chomsky's book is that he does not shrink from denouncing the crimes of Milosevic. He is fully aware that the Serbian regime was guilty of 'ethnic cleansing' in Kosova and of brutal repression of the Albanian majority.

Although he uses the term 'Kosovo' throughout he is at least aware that there are

strong reasons for using the lesser known Albanian spelling Kosova. This is in marked contrast to many critics of NATO's Balkan war who continue to deny that the Albanian population was in any way subject to repression.

By recognising the brutal nature of Serbian domination Chomsky strengthens his critique of NATO policy. He shows that western leaders were fully aware that by launching the bombing campaign Milosevic would step up the expulsion of Albanians.

Yet they went ahead without making any provision for the vast numbers of refugees they knew the bombing campaign would cause. Subsequent attempts to deny this are simply lies.

Chomsky also takes apart the notion of 'the international community'. The vast majority of the world is excluded from this 'international community'. It is merely an attempt by the west to hide imperialist ambitions.

Moreover, as he demonstrates, the claims by this 'international community' to be acting to uphold international law and justice is fraudulent. Only two countries in the world have rejected a World Court judgement: one is Iran, the other the United States.

### Veto

Moreover the USA is the only state to have vetoed a UN Security Council motion calling on all states to obey international law. In fact the United States frequently refuses to sign international treaties that its government does not consider to be in the national interests of the USA.

'It wouldn't do' to mention such matters, Chomsky remarks, quoting from the preface to George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. In his preface Orwell pointed out that in supposedly free societies 'Unpopular ideas can be silenced and inconvenient facts kept dark, without any need for any official ban'. Censorship is largely voluntary, based on shared interests.

The reference to Orwell is highly ironic. As Chomsky points out, the preface to *Animal Farm* has been published in only one edition of the book – and then over 30 years after it was first written, only to be very quickly withdrawn.

Orwell would certainly be totally unsurprised by the ease with which the western media simply ignore such inconvenient facts as the appalling record of the United States in particular in supporting brutal oppression throughout the world – not just before the end of the Cold War but all through the last decade.

# Don't let unity go down the tube!

**Greg Tucker, ISG member of the LSA steering committee**

WORKERS International Press has been circulating widely an "open letter" to Socialist Outlook on the Greater London Assembly elections.

They have argued that it is sectarian for socialists to unite in the London Socialist Alliance. Rather, they say, we should fall in behind the leadership of the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation.

In this they have, of late, been encouraged by the Socialist Party, who, for their own internal reasons, have given critical support for the CATP standing in the GLA list section, whilst themselves standing as part of the LSA in the constituency based section.

WIP correctly point out that, one hundred years after the formation of the Labour Party, workers again need to address the burning need for a new party of the working class. For them, such a party cannot be based on an alliance of left groups.

It can only come out of a mass movement encompassing broad expressions of discontent and action with the working class at its head.

Concretely they argue, what better way to challenge every reactionary policy of the government - than to support the CATP?

The new party, we agree we need, will be built though a dialectical combination of political debate amongst the left and reaching out to link up with the actual existing mass movement. It will not be



*There's more to fighting Blair than tube privatisation*

built by artificially tailoring one's politics to what you believe to be the limits of part of that mass movement.

Unfortunately, that is precisely what the WIP and the (politically experienced) leadership of the CATP have set out to do.

From the start the LSA has tried to work with the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation. Long before the CATP had considered whether to stand in the elections, the CATP were invited to take part in the LSA discussions.

### Link up

Indeed all the original moves taken within the London Underground RMT and CATP concerning standing in the elections were on the basis of the possibility of a link up with the LSA. Discussions that were being had with other forces on the left of the workers movement were originally in that framework.

Only later did it become clear that some members of the CATP wanted to leave their options open. It was argued that the membership

of the RMT was not ready to embrace working with far-left organisations, and that the focus of the election had to be clearly the issue of tube privatisation.

Repeated attempts to reach a compromise that would allow the CATP its political independence but stop the problem of opposing slates emerging eventually came to nothing.

Whilst the LSA was prepared to be flexible about (formally registered) electoral names, proposing for instance that we call ourselves the "Campaign Against Tube Privatisation - Socialist Alliance", and then having in practice two separate campaigns, the CATP leadership would not accept any position which associated the CATP with the left. Our task was to work under their direction.

To make matters worse, and in order to justify their position on the primacy of tube privatisation the CATP has cut itself even further off. Firstly, it decided that it would be a mistake to raise any other political issues whatsoever.

So it agreed that it could not oppose the anti-union laws. Neither would it take a position on racism - until black tube workers complained and it agreed to take up how racism affected tube workers and passengers!

Secondly, it decided that its candidates would have to be drawn solely from the ranks of RMT tube workers. Rather than using the election campaign to reach out to broader political forces, the dynamic of their stance has been to cut themselves off more and more. Only the most die-hard tube groupies are now to be allowed into the bunker.

All this has meant that the CATP has found itself turning its back on campaigning, failing to capitalise on the real debate about tube funding whilst not able to build the electoral front it needs to cope with the task of getting its message across to the five million London electorate.

Workers International Press put forward three arguments. Firstly that a socialist programme cannot be drawn up by committees of socialist groups, only derived and developed in the actual experiences of the working class.

Secondly, that the possession of a socialist programme is no guarantee against sectarianism. For that you need to understand a groups relationship to the working class. And thirdly, any socialist group worthy of the name would not be competing with workers but would be assisting them.

In practice the LSA programme, drawn up by committee, is now developing. It is the CATP that has cut itself off from the actual experience

of the working class. The LSA has been able to reach out to campaigns against police violence, against council house sell-offs, against hospital cuts and privatisation and the effects of rail privatisation, drawing in independent activists and enriching our understanding.

The CATP has found itself tailoring its own policies on tube privatisation, on funding by bonds for instance, in order to maintain a link with the debate put forward by Ken Livingstone.

Whilst the LSA, through its activity, is breaking down barriers, the CATP leadership is becoming more entrenched. After a first round of public meetings, which have attracted around two thousand people, and united street stalls across London which have signed up large numbers of volunteers, a real shared experience between left currents and independent socialists is making things possible which would have been impossible for any one group, even the largest.

Despite our differing theoretical starting points, we have been able to reach new collective understandings.

### Pessimistic

The CATP leadership on the other hand seems to be profoundly pessimistic, even of the views of its own RMT base. There is a real sense in which the election work is a substitute for building an industrial campaign.

The LUL RMT leaders know that industrial action will be necessary in the very near future if privatisation is to be halted, but worry that morale is too low to sustain it.

At the same time they believe their members will not be able to understand that what is happening to their jobs is part of the same attack on hospital workers, school workers, etc., etc. Rather than wage a struggle to convince their membership to link up with others in action they have closed ranks.

This might be understandable if we were talking about a raw, newly formed, work-

ers' leadership. We are not. The core of the RMT leadership has many years of experience as part of the far-left. They are imposing their personal desire to be free from the restraints that come with working with others upon their members.

Some of them may be doing this honestly, from a syndicalist perspective of what is best for tube workers.

### Cynical

It is hard to escape the suspicion that some are doing this from a cynical perspective of becoming part of a new, independent electoral block around Livingstone. Possession of positions in a mass movement is no guarantee against sectarianism.

We want to assist the fight by tube workers against privatisation. The CATP has made this impossible, without harming the LSA's work with others in struggle.

We cannot accept that we cut ourselves off from these developments, however important the tube is. Neither can we accept the cynical position of the Socialist Party, who seem to have endorsed the CATP because they want to work in a field in which they can be the major political organisation, rather than throw themselves fully into the LSA, where they have to "compete" with the SWP.

Above all, the socialists leading the CATP are not assisting the RMT membership by their stance.

There is still time for them to recognise that their election campaign, far from being an historic break from Labour, is helping no-one, especially their own members. A campaign no-one notices and a derisory vote will only sow even deeper demoralisation, throwing away the advantages they now have with opinion polls showing overwhelming support for keeping the tube in public hands.

The socialists in the CATP should not fear the possibilities of working with the rest of the left, we can all gain if they decide to do so.

## Socialist OUTLOOK

# Where we stand

AS A NEW CENTURY BEGINS, the battles of the last century remain to be won. millions of women and men are taking part in mobilisations against the evils of capitalism and the bureaucratic dictatorships. This reflects the fact that humanity face widening dangers. Ecological, military, social and economic devastation faces millions of people.

Many more people recognise the barbaric

nature of capitalism. In a situation where the inability of the social democratic and communist parties to provide socialist solutions is becoming clearer, the task of creating new leaderships remains ahead.

**Socialist Outlook** is written and sold by socialists committed to this struggle. We are the British supporters of the worldwide marxist organisation, the Fourth International. We stand for the revolutionary transformation of society and a pluralist, socialist democracy world wide.

The overall goal which we pursue is the emancipation of all human beings from every form of exploitation, oppression, alienation and violence.

Socialism must be under the control of ordinary people, democratic, pluralist, multi-party, feminist, ecologist, anti-militarist and internationalist. It must abolish wage slavery and national oppression.

The working class is the backbone of unity among all the exploited and oppressed. The working class and its allies



must uncompromisingly fight against capitalism and for a clear programme of action in order to gradually acquire the experience and consciousness needed to defeat capitalism at the decisive moment of crisis.

The movements of women, lesbians and gay men, and black people to fight their particular forms of oppression make an essential contribution to the struggle for a different society. They are organised around the principle "None so fit to break the chains as those who wear them".

The whole working class needs to fully commit itself to these struggles. Furthermore we fight for a strategic alliance

between workers and these organisations - an alliance which respects their legitimate autonomy.

By building simultaneously revolutionary organisations in each country and a revolutionary International, we aim to guide and encompass the global interests of the workers and oppressed.

By building a united struggle against exploitation and oppression we aim to ensure the survival of the human race. If you think this is worth fighting for, and you like what you read in *Socialist Outlook*, why not join us? Drop a line to us at **PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU**, and we'll be in

# Socialist

A monthly marxist review. No 32. March 2000. 50p

# OUTLOOK

## Scandal as Labour "minded to" sign up for environmental disaster in Kurdistan

# Lies, Dam Lies – and no **Water fuels war danger – inside p 15** statistics!



Andrew Ward

Byers beware: campaigners have spotted shameful deal

PRESSURE is mounting on Trade Secretary Stephen Byers after he revealed that he is "minded" to grant £200m in export guarantees for the construction of the controversial Ilisu dam in Kurdistan.

As Roland Rance reports (p15) this Turkish government project is a potential flashpoint for war in the Middle East: but it is also an environmental and human disaster waiting to happen.

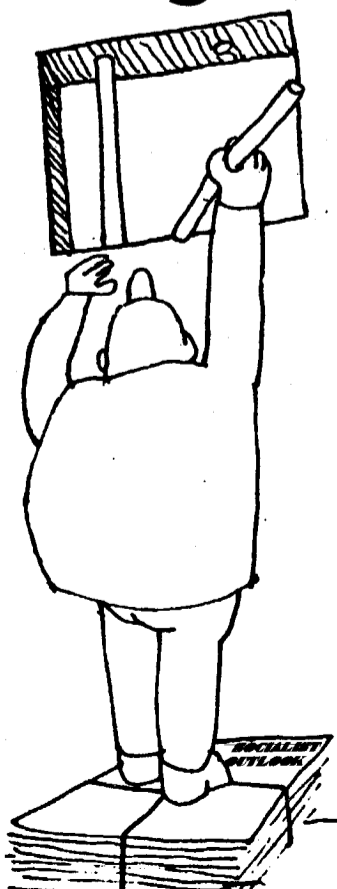
Friends of the Earth and other campaigners point out the despite New Labour's much vaunted "ethical" foreign policy, Byers has ignored detailed evidence of the destruction the dam would cause, and not even insisted that an environmental impact report be produced before making his decision.

For its part, the Turkish government, secure in its status as a NATO ally, has not bothered even to go through the motions of pretending that it will rehouse or in any way compensate the 20,000 Kurdish people whose homes and land would be flooded as a result of the scheme.

British firms and EU multinationals are of course among the would-be contractors for this vast and lucrative project, and their influence appears to count for more with Mr Byers than the needs and rights of the oppressed Kurdish people.

The final decision has yet to be taken, however, and the fight must be stepped up to avert yet another crime being committed by New Labour on the global stage.

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