

Socialist

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OUTLOOK

Union leaders and charities condemn Jack Straw's attacks on asylum seekers

GET TOUGH ON LABOUR'S RACIST LAWS!

At long last the government's appalling treatment of asylum seekers is beginning to provoke serious criticisms.

The voucher system demands that asylum seekers live on an income one third less than other claimants. Yet it is pretty well impossible to survive even on the 'full' amount in new Labour's Britain.

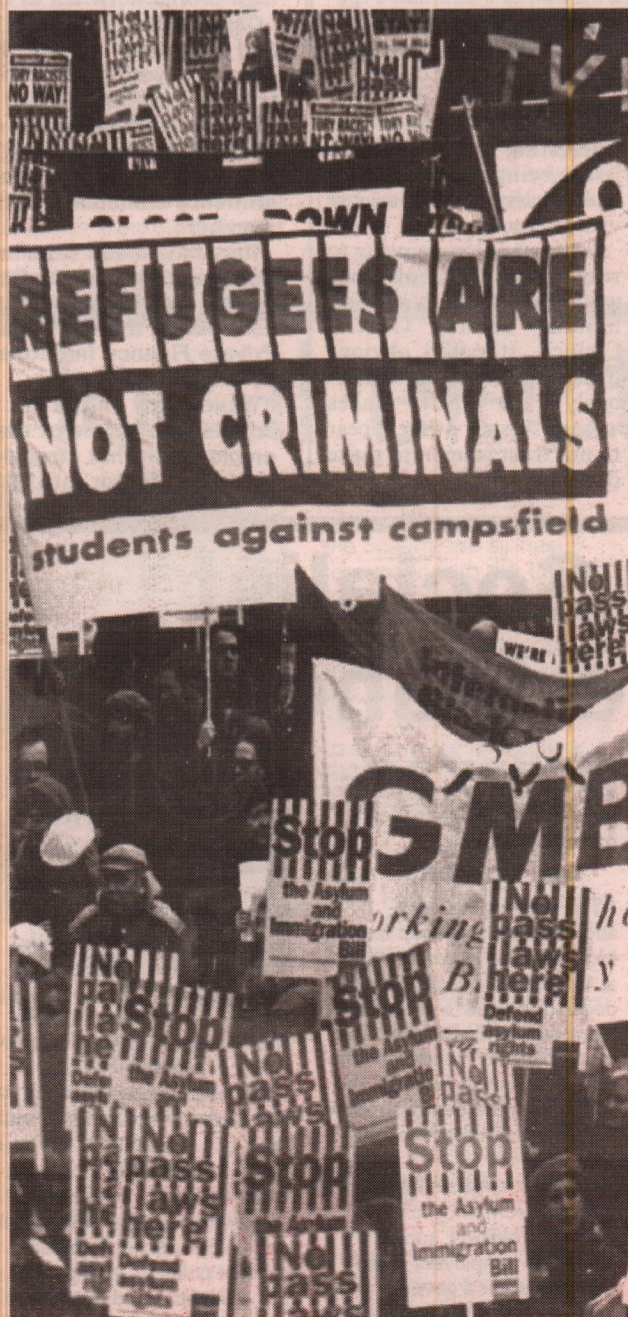
Then there is the further iniquity that shops operating the voucher system don't give change - a system with which which Oxfam have rightly refused to co-operate. It is excellent that other charities are

increasingly backing them.

The decision of Bill Morris, General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union, to speak out against the racist implications of ministerial policies and pronouncements comes not a moment too soon.

Other trade unions, trade unionists, MPs and campaigners should add their weight to his calls.

In particular support should be forthcoming for the demand of the London Socialist Alliance that the TUC call a national demonstration to stop the scapegoating of asylum seekers.



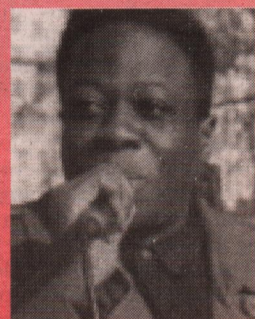
Andrew Ward

Labour movement fought Tory racist laws: it's time to march again

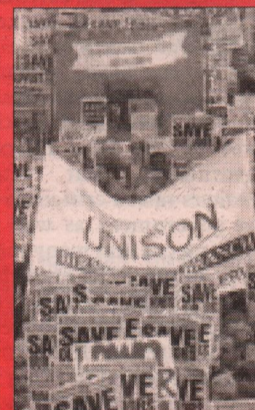
INSIDE



4-page special LSA campaign feature, pages 9-12



Putin's Russia: Enter the dragon, p16-17



Occupy now to save Rover, pages 6-7



Washington protest rattles capitalists p13

Women's TUC Why are women still not trusted to make policy?

Leanne Wood

The main theme of this year's Women's TUC conference was "Fair pay for Women". It is incredible that twenty-five years after the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) was introduced, there are still major pay gaps between men and women.

Full time women employees earn 81 pence for every £1 earned their male equivalents. Part time women earn 60p for every £1.

The conference demanded that employers keep proper records of recruitment, pay and promotion for equal opportunities monitoring. Calls were made for a detailed audit of pay inequalities

There were also calls for a substantial increase in the National Minimum Wage which should be updated annually and linked to earnings. It should also be effectively enforced and extended at the full rate to all workers doing a full time job.

However most debates were uncontroversial. Many motions "welcomed" initiatives by the New Labour government, but often speakers raised criticisms of the government as well as pointing out that many measures do not go far enough.

For example, whilst welcoming the value of thirteen weeks parental leave, one speaker pointed out that in Norway either parent can take a year off with 85% of their pay.

A motion entitled Mainstreaming Equality "welcomed" policies such as the working families tax credit, the national child care strategy, New Deal, and the minimum wage, but

there was criticism of the treatment of same sex couples: and many argued that the legislation did not go far enough.

There was a small internationalist flavour to the conference with motions on rape in South Africa and medical aid for Cuba.

An emergency motion was tabled by the National Union of Journalists, challenging the homophobic reporting of the clause 2A (28) issue in Scotland. The motion argued that such reporting was incitement to hatred.

The proposer pointed out that Stonewall research had showed that out of a sample of 1,000 gay men and lesbians, 77% had been subject to homophobic bullying in schools and that suicide rates were high. This motion was supported unanimously.

The first day of the conference was International Women's Day, but you would never have known it. I attended believing that the conference had been purposefully timed to coincide with March 8 and that a special event would be held to mark it. No such event happened.

As this was my first Women's TUC, and it was interesting to see women's issues being debated from a wide variety of occupational viewpoints.

But it was disappointing to realise that the conference was merely advisory and not binding on the General Council. It raised obvious questions about how seriously the TUC takes women's issues - they appear to not trust women to make decisions.

Defend Sarah Friday - stop bully-boy management!

Terry Conway

The campaign against the summary dismissal of Health and Safety Representative Sarah Friday by her employer South West Trains (SWT) is about to move on to a new stage.

Sarah was sacked on February 15 on trumped up charges - her real 'crime' was being an effective trade unionist.

As Waterloo RMT Branch Secretary Greg Tucker said: "SWT trains say this dispute is about a train being delayed. This is rubbish. They are picking on one individual because she is an effective Health and Safety Representative."

"This dispute is about defending every member from management intimidation and harassment."

The management of South West Trains have attempted to muddy the water. Managing Director Graham Eccles in an interview with the *Evening Standard* on March 27 made the ridiculous claim that Sarah was sacked because she doesn't



like driving trains.

However the lie of this was shown by their own subsequent actions. Before the interim Industrial Tribunal hearing SWT's lawyers offered to settle out of court. They were offering to pay Sarah off if unfair dismissal was dropped.

They were saying to Sarah that if she gave up fighting she would get money. This is not something that profit grabbing employers are likely to do unless they think someone has a case against them

Sarah's union, the RMT has now agreed to ballot all train crew on South West Trains.

As Graham Ashcroft, the local Guards Representative at Guildford said: "This dis-

pute is about the break down of industrial relations across the whole of SWT. It is an issue for all of us - that is we all have to vote Yes for action."

Support is clearly there from key activists in other depots.

John Imm, local Guards rep at Strawberry Hill confidently predicts "Strawberry Hill will give 100% backing in this dispute. We have suffered the same sort of problems. SWT cannot be allowed to treat the RMT in this way."

And as Mick Skiggs from Fratton points out "the reason why the union is extending the strike ballot is that management have sacked a representative - it could be anyone next!"

Defend expelled UNISON activists!

The growing climate of witch-hunt in the "member-led" public sector union UNISON has reached a new peak with the expulsion of two high-profile activists in London.

Candy Udwin is branch secretary and Dave Carr chair of the UCLH Branch covering five central London hospitals. Candy was also recently elected deputy convenor of UNISON's London Region and is a London Socialist Alliance constituency candidate. Both are SWP members.

They have been expelled by a UNISON kangaroo court after treading on the toes of national union officers during the fight against a Private Finance Initiative scheme at UCLH.

While many on the left may have criticisms of some of the tactics employed in that struggle, the overriding factor for UNISON is that



Candy Udwin on the LSA campaign bus after a prolonged court battle with

the employers for the right to take strike action, the UCLH branch won what is accepted as the best deal for staff in any PFI scheme.

The determination of UNISON's New Labour-dominated bureaucracy to witch-hunt and victimise Candy and Dave can only be seen as a determination to prevent any similar struggles to defend NHS services, jobs and conditions.

But the fight is not over yet. Both intend to appeal against the decision, and have not ruled out taking legal action to reverse a cynical stitch-up.

Initial supporters of the campaign to defend Candy and Dave include Tony Benn and UNISON's London convenor Geoff Martin.

The campaign can be contacted c/o Sandy Nicoll, chair SOAS UNISON, University of London, Thornhaugh St, London WC1H 0XG.

Oxford Socialist Alliance launched

Andy Kilmister

Collaboration between socialists in Oxford took a modest but potentially significant step forward with the formation of an Oxford Socialist Alliance (OSA) at a public meeting on March 28.

In attendance were members of the Socialist Workers Party, International Socialist Group and a number of independent activists including two former councillors.

One of these, Jim Merritt, made an interesting contribution about his experience of going through the 'selection process' organised by Millbank for prospective parliamentary candidates.

Needless to say, any hint of socialism was unacceptable in this procedure and Jim was not selected. He reported being

told - a full six months ago - that Ken Livingstone would not get the Labour nomination for mayor of London!

Rover

The meeting was also addressed by two shop stewards from the Rover car plant at Cowley, and unanimously decided to issue a press statement calling for the nationalisation of Rover, solidarity with workers from Longbridge and support for the demonstration in Birmingham the following Saturday.

The final speaker, Martin Gregory from Oxford City Council UNISON, spoke about the employers' offensive against local government workers, using the new "best value" regulations.

At present the OSA is not standing candidates in local

elections, but this is an issue which will be considered actively over the next year along with other campaigning activity.

A major priority will be to link the OSA with the wide range of campaigns currently active in Oxford, particularly the struggle to close Campsfield Detention Centre and opposition to the Private Finance Initiative.

However, simply linking up those already active, while useful, is not enough.

The OSA also has to act as a focus to draw in and involve those who oppose the current system but are not involved in socialist politics - young people, students and the large number of people in Oxford who, disillusioned with Labour, have turned in the past to the Greens as an alternative.

After the London Elections

The Network of Socialist Campaign Groups presents

A LABOUR MOVEMENT CONFERENCE

To discuss how Party and trade union members can build on the anger over the mayoral selection procedure and resist further attacks on Party democracy, the jobs and conditions of trade unionists and public services

SUNDAY 21st May

1pm.-5pm.

University of London Union, Malet Street WC1

Registration, Tea and Coffee from 12.30pm.

SPEAKERS include (in personal capacity): **GEOFF MARTIN** (London Region convenor UNISON), **MARIA EXALL** (CWU NEC) and **CHRISTINE SHAWCROFT** (Labour Party NEC)

* Plenty of time for discussion on what we should do now

Conference called by the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups.

Initial sponsors (in personal capacity) include Liz Davies (Labour Party NEC), Maria Exall, Geoff Martin, Jon Rogers (Secretary, Lambeth local government branch of UNISON), Mick Shaw (Fire Brigades Union NEC and London Region Secretary), Christine Shawcroft and the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs.

Registration: **£5 individuals (£2 unwaged), £10 delegates**

To register, send cheque payable to "Socialist Campaign Group Supporters' Network" to 7 Malam Gardens, London E14 0TB, stating whether you need a brochure or access details.

London elections May 4 Keep up the pressure on Chameleon Ken

Despite the fact that recent opinion polls show a drop in Ken Livingstone's lead, there seems little doubt that he will be elected as Mayor of London on May 4.

Such an outcome should be worked for and welcomed by all socialists despite the many valid criticisms that can justly be made of Livingstone.

The massive press witch hunt over Livingstone's comment that 'capitalism kills' may have had some effect on his showing, but it was always expected that the earlier lead would level out as polling day approached.

Even though Downing Street has issued a statement saying the government will work with whoever is elected, there can be no doubt that a Livingstone victory will be a key defeat for Blairism – the greatest New Labour has so far suffered.

If this is combined by a serious vote for the London Socialist Alliance, whose campaign has been a breath of fresh air in these elections, so much the better.

Despite Livingstone's suggestions that supporters should back either the new Labour candidates or the Greens for the Assembly, the LSA offers the only consistent challenge to new Labour's reactionary policies.

The preferred outcome would of course be for the LSA to get at least one supporter elected to the Greater London Assembly – not an impossible target given the electoral system. But LSA supporters should be pleased so long as it establishes itself as the clear fifth force in this election.

At the same time as organising to support Livingstone – a difficult task given his failure to give a lead, or even produce basic campaign material beyond the glossy posters – the left needs to begin to think beyond the

election itself.

On the one hand there needs to be a response from supporters to Livingstone's disgraceful statement that he intends to appoint a representative from each of the four (sic) main parties as his Deputy for a year in turn.

While Livingstone has long made populist noises a clear statement that he will willingly choose Tories and Liberal Democrats as partners goes far beyond anything he has previously said. He must be forced to withdraw it.

On top of that Livingstone has staked out his Mayoral challenge primarily on the question of tube privatisation.

While we have consistently argued that this is only one of many issues on which New Labour is implementing rotten policies, we do not at all down play the significance of tube privatisation itself.

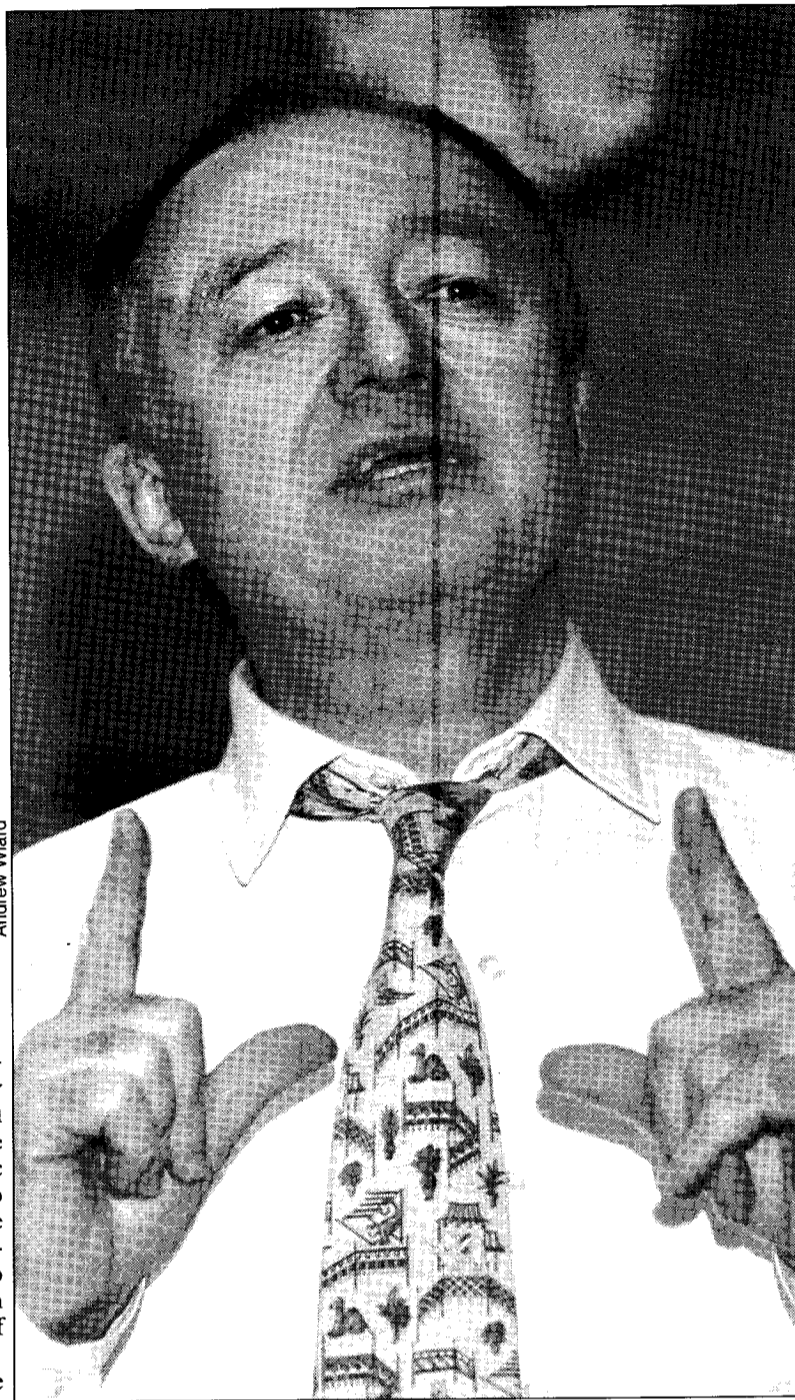
Certainly we also recognise that this is a key basis for Livingstone's massive support amongst voters.

That is why we are particularly concerned that Livingstone has made noises that suggest he may not mount a full frontal challenge to the government on this matter if they do not back down quietly following his election. Such a strategy would result in Blair snatching victory from the jaws on

defeat.

On the contrary, the only way to defend keeping the tube in public hands is to build a huge mass movement to defend it in the wake of Livingstone's election. He should launch a campaign for a massive demonstration in the autumn – which is now likely to be when the key decisions around tendering are actually made.

However while a demon-



Andrew Wiaard

What colour will Red Ken be after May 4?

stration called by Livingstone himself would be guaranteed mass support, the best way of making this happen is to begin to organise now through trade unions for such a demonstra-

tion to be called. Such a campaign should be supported by all those who oppose tube privatisation – whatever position they are taking in the London Elections.

The "other" local elections

May 4 is not just decision day in London: a round of local elections will take place across the country, and all of the preliminary soundings suggest that Tony Blair and New Labour are likely to suffer more setbacks.

The last time these council seats were contested was in 1996, as John Major's unpopularity mounted, and record gains were notched up by the Labour Party.

While Blair and co were quick to grab the credit, it was obvious even then that there was a large element of anti-Tory voting in the results, leaving the party controlling only a handful of councils at any level in England.

To maintain this high level of support was always going to be a tall order: but party campaign organisers have been warning that the situation could be especially serious as core voters register high levels of demoralisation, and numbers of party activists have nosedived.

The Welsh Assembly elections gave a graphic account of how this could cost Labour control under



Mass anger turned to votes against Labour in Kidderminster

conditions where voters see a credible alternative to vote for to express their opposition to Millbank's hand-picked stooges.

But damage could be done even if there is no alternative on offer. Projections leaked from Millbank show that even if William Hague's dire effort and anonymous team failed to win a single extra vote to the Tories, it is only necessary for 20 per cent of Labour's voters in core constituencies to be so

fed up as not to vote for the bulk of Blair's massive parliamentary majority to be destroyed at the next general election.

A similar groundswell at local authority level, where abstention rates are traditionally extremely high, could create some really embarrassing upsets for New Labour councils, which have been obediently bulldozing through cuts, coupled with such vote-losers as privatisation, PFI and

"Best value schemes".

Throughout many parts of the country the air has resounded with the thuds of Millbank's insipid leaflets being dumped in the bin as ever more activists vote with their feet and opt to sit out the election campaign.

Many councillors are finding that the price of acting as Blair's bag carriers is that they have to carry round their own posters and do their own canvassing as Party supporters fall away.

But being cheesed off with Tony does not necessarily lead to an electoral bonanza for the left: a sufficiently broad and credible platform needs to be constructed before this can develop.

In Scotland the left has been able to launch a successful alternative in the SSP: in Wales, disaffected Labour votes have swung behind the left nationalist politics of Plaid Cymru; now in London we have a first test of the potential for the London Socialist Alliance.

But in much of England such developments are yet to get under way. A few areas will see protest candidacies opposing cuts in hos-

pitals or other public services, and these may well prove an attractive alternative as happened last year in Kidderminster, where over a dozen campaigners against hospital closure were elected to Wyre Forest Council.

Socialists should appraise these campaigns, and determine whether they stand on a progressive platform in seeking to win over Labour voters. The decision on whether to support such candidates is a tactical question in each given set of circumstances.

But where no acceptable left or campaigning alternative has been constructed, the fight must continue within the labour movement.

Socialist Outlook calls — as we have consistently done in previous elections — for a critical vote for Labour candidates in these areas, despite the inadequacies of their programme, and for a fight through the trade unions and the Labour Party for alternative policies around which a genuine challenge can be mounted to the politics of Blairism.

Time for teachers to stand and fight!

Gill Lee

New Labour's rallying call of education, education, education, seems increasingly hollow as the reality of its policies becomes clearer to all involved in the education system.

Many who voted Labour in 1997 are increasingly frustrated a range of educational and other issues.

However, the response of the leadership of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) has consistently been to dampen down teachers' anger rather than risk mobilising the membership against Labour.

This strategy will lead to further worsening of the conditions and pay of teachers and increased polarisation between and within schools. It will also threaten the survival of the union itself.

An alternative leadership needs to be built within the NUT, a leadership which will mobilise the membership in a fight against Performance Related Pay, selection, league tables and testing; and for a truly comprehensive system of state education which can deliver an education service accountable to local communities and based on the interests of the working class.

A year ago members of the so-called "Broad Left" majority leadership of the National Executive told NUT Conference they would fight performance related pay

(PRP) 'on the barricades' if necessary.

Conference was unanimous in opposing PRP, and delegate after delegate denounced the way it would destroy the teamwork which schools rely upon.

They explained that PRP would strengthen the hands of management, who could use it to reward those whose faces fitted best and consolidate a regime of league tables of teachers and schools linked to national testing by rewarding teachers who most concentrated on getting kids through narrow SATs.

PRP also threatens the very existence of the union through the introduction of individualised pay.

The dangers posed by PRP remain the same today - but the Broad Left leadership of the union is refusing to act. A year after Conference voted for it, NUT members are still waiting for the strike action necessary to defeat PRP.

No doubt this year's conference will be told that the will doesn't exist among members for a fight and that delegates who demand action are 'out of touch' with the majority of the membership.

But in fact the leadership have consistently presented a muddled and confused message to member.

For example, the so-called week of action was barely notified to NUT Associations. The leaders are the ones responsible for demobilisation - not the membership.

Failure resolutely to oppose PRP rests on the Broad Left's ambiguous relationship to Labour. While many of the Executive's motions to Conference criticise aspects of Labour policy, the Executive is more afraid of the membership than it is of the government. Anti-Labour rhetoric may be strong, but proposals for action are weak or non-existent.

Perhaps the Broad Left leadership feel that demobilisation is good for the Broad Left, (i.e. right wing), of the union - as shown by the recent National Executive Election results, in which the balance of candidates shifted from 23 -19 for the right, to 26 - 16.

In areas like London where there has been more activity, for example around the STOPP Campaign against PR, candidates from the left wing opposition, the Socialist Teacher Alliance, gained over two thirds of the votes cast.

Perhaps the Broad Left genuinely believe that Labour is so strong that only a policy of making concessions rather than mobilising can be effective. If so, the NUT leadership needs to learn the lessons that

other sectors are already learning very painfully: concession bargaining does not work with employers, or with Blair.

Workers at Rover agreed concession after concession on pay, working hours and productivity because they were told such concessions were the 'only way' to keep the car industry alive and save their jobs. Today the employers' promises are seen to be empty, as car workers across the industry face the sack.

Labour has offered Rover workers nothing, while giving BMW millions of pounds in aid.

The new Labour government is under pressure on a whole number of issues, so more than ever this should be the time for the trade unions to stand and fight.

Nearly a hundred thousand marched in Birmingham to defend the jobs of Rover workers and demand nationalisation. Livingstone is set to win the election for London Mayor against



Blair's candidate; Bill Morris has launched a scathing attack on Labour's racist asylum policies. Labour is increasingly seen to have abandoned its traditional voters who are staying away from the polling booths in droves. The NUT should stand and fight, not hide and squirm.

Sniping from the Left

By Charlie van Gelderen



BRITAIN, according to the Tories and the gutter press, has become a 'soft touch' for 'bogus' refugees.

They are right about Britain being a soft touch - but not for refugees. It is big business which is enjoying the benefits bestowed on them by successive governments, not least by the present Blair administration.

After Gordon Brown's recent budget, capital gains tax was slashed. In 1979 it stood at 52 per cent. Today it has been reduced to 30 per cent. Gordon Brown boasted that this is now 'the lowest rate in the history of British corporation tax, the lowest of any major country in Europe, and the lowest rate of any major industrialised country anywhere, including Japan and the United States'.

It is globalisation, of course, which is the impetus behind this. If the capitalists don't find the financial climate here congenial, they just pack up and take their capital elsewhere.

boasted that he wants to wage war on tax havens. But he has transformed Britain into one of the worst. The City has, of course, welcomed these measures, but they have lobbied actively against cuts in consumer taxes.

Killer facts

KEN LIVINGSTONE is in hot water for saying that global capitalism killed more people in a year annually than Hitler.

This has been interpreted by the press, Frank Dobson and the Tory and Liberal Democrat candidates in the London mayoral elections to say that he was accusing individual capitalists of murder. This is nonsense.

The laws of capitalism, first elaborated by Karl Marx in Capital, operate irrespective of the conscience of company directors or shareholders. Capitalism is the killer, not capitalists.

We only have to look at the history of capitalism since the industrial revolution to realise the havoc it has caused in

human lives. The list is almost endless: deaths in the mines, in Britain and abroad, the slave trade, the colonisation of America - with its slaughter of the entire indigenous peoples - Australia (where, in Tasmania, the aboriginals were hunted like animals to extinction), Africa and Asia.

This is only the beginning. The debts owed to the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), to financial corporations and banks in the capitalist metropolis, have brought and are still responsible for countless deaths and suffering to millions of people.

According to the researcher, Mark Lynas, in a Guardian article on April 13, World Bank reforms are directly responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of people in Zambia. Infant mortality has risen by 25 per cent since 1980; life expectancy has fallen from 54 to 40.

This is a story which can be repeated in almost every part of the 'developing' world. Both the World Bank and the IMF are pursuing policies aimed at extracting concessions which oblige these countries to cut their spending on health, education and social services and to hand them over to foreign corporations.

The aim of these organisations, working for international capital, is not to foster the development of these countries, but to enforce, as they claim, a 'liberal' market economy and to impose economic and political regimes which empower them to steal the incomes of the poor and enrich their capitalist masters.

Ken Livingstone has nothing to apologise for. He could only

have added that Hitler himself was part and parcel of the capitalist death machine.

Who said: "We don't need dangerous and costly Trident and Cruise missiles, which just escalate the nuclear arms race?"
(a) Bill Clinton, (b) Tony Blair or (c) Michael Foot
(See below).

Black and white issue

WE SHOULD NOT be shedding crocodile tears about what is happening in Zimbabwe. Of course the white farmers should not be indiscriminately attacked, though one can hardly blame the attackers. They have waited long enough! Land reform in Zimbabwe, as in the Republic of South Africa, is long overdue. Even if Mugabe is now endorsing it for his own political ends, nothing can justify the inequitable distribution of land in that country with the white elite, 0.6 per cent of the population, owning 70 per cent.

Mugabe's demand that if compensation is to be paid to the white farmers, this should come from Britain, is not that outrageous. How did all that land get into the hands of the whites in the first place?

How much were the original inhabitants of what is now Zimbabwe paid by the first white settlers? If any payment for land was made, it was not to those that lived



there, but to Cecil Rhodes and the British South African Company, established by charter from the British government and over the signature of Her Most Britannic Majesty, Queen Victoria, whose forces conquered the land with machine guns and cannon.

And who broke the land and tilled the soil, who planted and tended the rich tobacco plantations? Certainly not the wealthy white farmers!

Like capitalists everywhere, the white farmers have accumulated wealth by exploiting their workers. White-owned estates are the biggest employers in Zimbabwe. They also pay the lowest wages. Maids earn more than the farm labourers whose toil produces Zimbabwe's wealth. The average pay is 750 Zimbabwean dollars a month (£12).

If the impoverished black peasants of Zimbabwe have not the technical knowledge to manage these huge agri-

cultural enterprises, whose fault was that? It was deliberate policy over more than a century since white rule was established to keep these peasants at subsistence level so that their labour should be available to enrich the white masters and institutional investors.

Unfortunately, the Mugabe regime, instead of embarking on a policy of land reform at the end of the liberation struggle, preferred to share the good life with the whites. It is only now, when he is fighting for his political survival, that he has given his support. Socialists, however, must give unconditional support to the claims of the dispossessed peasants.

As one of the workers said in an interview: "These whites only want to deal with blacks as workers ... If there were any trouble with the war veterans (on the farm where he was working) I don't think any of us would help him (the white farmer)."

Stem the tide of anti-refugee hysteria

Veronica Fagan

It is extremely positive that a head of steam is beginning to build up against the racist treatment of asylum seekers, as Jack Straw continues to vie with Ann Widdecombe as to who can be most hostile to asylum seekers.

Bill Morris' decision to speak out in condemnation of government policies has laid the basis for a much broader campaign than currently exists, especially amongst trade unionists.

Baroness Jay's suggestion that Morris had only spoken out under pressure from TGWU members who feared being fined when asylum seekers were found

in their lorries is completely scurrilous.

The reality is that Morris has begun to understand what anti Asylum Bill campaigners have long pointed out - there is a link between racism against asylum seekers and racism against all black people in Britain whatever their immigration status.

Morris's statement follows a successful picket of the *Evening Standard* and *Daily Mirror* - two of the papers in the forefront of the worst coverage in recent weeks and months by anti racist activists on April 13.

But despite these important steps forward there is great deal more to be done.

anti-asylum face in the forthcoming local elections in the hope of increasing their votes. In the meantime these policies and attitudes can only strengthen the far right and increase the likelihood of racist attacks.

The London Socialist Alliance are right to demand that the TUC call a demonstration against the bi-partisan policy of racist scapegoating and their call should be widely supported..

■ Send your protest to the press:
Evening Standard
 Editor: Max Hastings
 Fax: 020 7937 2648/3193
 e-mail letters@standard.co.uk
 Please send copies of any faxes sent to: 0171-703-3667
 Copies of e-mails to hrmsg@ncadc.demon.co.uk

It is clear that both Labour and the Tories are presenting an

END STATE RACISM



Mumia must live!

THE CAMPAIGN to save the life of black American activist Mumia Abu-Jamal, on death row in a US jail, is reaching a crucial stage.

Judge Yohn could rule on the case any time from the end of April and pressure must be kept up and stepped up for Mumia's release.

There will be a picket of the US embassy on May 13, to coincide with the next international wave of protest.

There will be demos and actions in cities all across the States and elsewhere. The London action is timed to take place after the Ricky Reel protest, and supporters are urged to participate in both.

Saturday May 13th 3.30-5.30 Grosvenor Square London W1

Send a letter like this!

Dear Editor,

I am writing to express my concern at the way your newspaper has covered people seeking asylum in the UK. Your coverage has ranged from the hostile to the hysterical and can only have the effect of giving your readers the impression that the UK is being over-run by people coming to live off the benefits system.

As you know, the numbers of asylum seekers coming to Britain are relatively small compared to other European countries. Per head of population the UK takes fewer asylum seekers than Germany, Ireland, Holland, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Norway.

Britain's asylum regime is amongst the toughest in Western Europe, and the introduction of the voucher and dispersal system, along with increased use of detention centres, will make the lives of those who seek refuge here even harder.

People seeking asylum have fled from horrific persecution, torture, detention or war. They deserve compassion and respect and for their case to be considered on its merits.

Abuse and denigration in your columns will only increase their suffering and make them more liable to assault. Your newspaper's coverage of these issues has given a misleading picture of this very important and sensitive issue and could encourage racism against black people coming to the UK and black people already living here.

I ask you to reconsider the way your newspaper covers these issues. I would be grateful for your views on this matter and any indication of how you expect to cover this issue in the future.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Day of Action for Ricky Reel

Susan Moore

Ricky Reel, like Stephen Lawrence, died following a racist attack. As in the Lawrence case, the attitude of the police has compounded the grief of Ricky's family many times over.

When Ricky, a young Asian man, failed to return home from a night out with friends in late 1997, the police were sure that nothing was wrong - despite the fact that the group had been chased and taunted by racists before Ricky became separated from the others.

It was the family who had to organise searches while the police ignored their pleas for assistance.

Then when Ricky's body was eventually found in the Thames, the police actually informed Ricky's young sister of this fact before her

parents had returned to the house - provoking her to have a serious asthma attack. Does the insensitivity of these people know no bounds?

The Met decided that he must have fallen in the river while urinating. They clung on to a useless piece of supposed evidence - ignoring the fact that when a body has been in the water for days, fastenings do come undone.

But they were above all determined not to accept that Ricky was the victim of a racist attack.

This case, like most other incidents in which black people have been murdered by racists, has been kept alive by the dedication of a small band of supporters; in this case headed up by Ricky's mother Suhkdev.

Even the publication of the Macpherson Report and the ensuing debate around it has done little to improve the situation. Although a Police Complaints report has been drawn up into the handling of this case this has not been released into the public domain. Ricky's mother was shown the report in private only on the

basis that she did not reveal its contents to any one!

The Justice for Ricky Reel Campaign demands that:

- A new police investigation be instigated with an open mind
- The police complaints report should be published
- A public inquiry into this case should be launched.

Justice For Ricky Reel Day Of Action Saturday 13 May 2000, 12-3pm

Picket New Scotland Yard, Broadway, London SW1 Tie a yellow ribbon for Ricky - Don't forget him

There also simultaneous pickets at other police stations around the UK Saturday 13 May. For details, or if you want to organise a picket in your area, please contact the campaign on: 020-8843 2333 / 0956-410773



You get a much better view if you read

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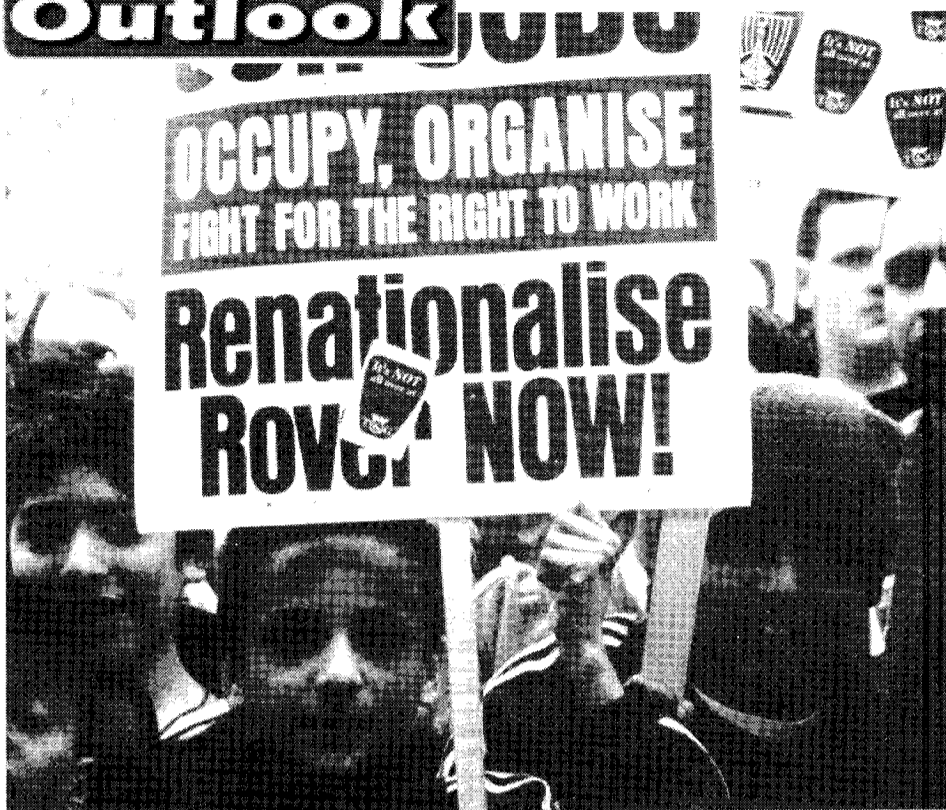
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**Back working class
action, not bosses'
bids!**

Occupy now to save Rover!

Belfast shipyard closure threat

Paul Flannigan

Belfast's Harland & Wolf shipyard is under threat of closure if no new orders can be won before the mid summer.

In recent years the yard has specialised in the building of rigs and vessels for the off-shore oil industry. There is a declining demand in this market and a recent attempt by the Norwegian managers of the yard to tender for a cruise liner the 'Queen Mary Two' failed, leaving in its wake a welter of recrimination.

The yard was privatised and sold to Fred Olsen Industries in 1989. Some 1,800 workers have been handed a ninety day protective redundancy notice, meaning layoffs could begin by the middle of June and be completed in a matter of months.

Pessimism

During the past few months the mood of the workforce has turned from optimism to pessimism. For a while there persisted a belief that the yard would somehow manage to muddle through the looming order book crisis.

The yard has faced crises in the past, and always survived though each time with a reduced workforce. It had been rescued more than once by injections of government subsidy and orders for ships. After losing out on the Cunard liner contract to a French company it was believed that a ministry of defence order would naturally follow.

However even though the government is due to put up for tender several orders for navy vessels, these seem more likely to go to BAE in Glasgow. There is little sign so far that Blair's government is preparing a comprehensive rescue package for Harland's and a cloud of doom now hangs over the yard.

The workers at the shipyard seem unsure as to what

action to take to save their jobs. Reports in the financial press talk of Harland's being close to winning new orders from customers in the United States. Rumours of possible orders have led union officials to play down any talk of mass resistance to closure.

Instead union leaders have drawn up a no strike flexible working time package in the hope that this might assist the company management win new orders. Some workers still believe that management is artificially playing up the prospect of a closure merely to get away with implementing a cost cutting plan for casualisation of the workforce.

At a public meeting organised by the SWP in Belfast about 40 workers turned out to discuss what to do, but unfortunately only one union official from Harland's turned up and he was torn between taking to the streets and supporting the company's efforts to win new orders at the cost of reduced conditions for the workforce.

One interesting fact to emerge from the meeting was that the docks area would be worth tens of millions if sold to private developers.

Clyde struggle

The SWP called for the workers to follow the example set by Clydesiders of 1971 who organised a 'work in' to prevent the cutting of the UCS workforce from 8,500 to 2,500. Others argued that at the time of the USC work-in the Clydeside yard had 14 ships yet to be completed and that Harland's is in a much more precarious position having no more ships to build: militancy might actually hasten the closure.

For the moment lobbying parliament and government seems to be the favoured plan of the union leadership though this could change the closer the closure date gets.

One disappointing feature of the situation so far has been the level of dishonesty in the public debate.

On the one hand some working class nationalists seem positively delighted with the prospect of closure, emphasising nothing else but the yard's infamous sectarian past of Catholic exclusion. The West Belfast nationalist newspaper the Andersonstown News expressed a strong Thatcherite view that the yard should close. On the other hand we have the unions and the left currents acting as if the yard was now a happy workers' island of cross community harmony, overlooking its residual sectarian bar and role as a bastion of working class loyalism.

Unity

The threatened closure of the yard has certainly not united the working class of Belfast in a mass campaign. Any future campaign to save it from closure will certainly not mechanically overcome the deeply entrenched sectarian divisions that exist over political questions.

However a concerted period of workers' struggle to save jobs, combined with an honest discussion and appraisal of the sectarian roots of labour could at least act as a much needed spur to the formation of a new consciousness of class solidarity.

Socialist Democracy supports the call for the saving of the shipyard. We demand an opening of the financial books of Harland's, all relevant information as to the economic status of the company must be made available to the work-force.

We are demanding a workers' buy-out of the company financed by the state, with the future of the yard to be decided by an elected management.

We also insist on an equal right to work without privilege for both Catholic and Protestant alike.

WHAT is happening at Rover? After the initial reaction to the announcement it was to be sold off, there were two positive steps, external to Longbridge.

The first was a meeting of all Rover stewards at Gaydon, on March 21, which decided on a campaign to keep the group together, and at which national officer of the TGWU, Tony Woodley, spoke several times, calling for nationalisation.

The second was the magnificent 80,000 strong demonstration in Birmingham on April 1, which particularly showed local support.

But since then there has been no sign of the planned follow-up demonstration in London, and all talk of nationalisation has been dropped by union leadership speakers.

Instead, having got nowhere with trying to persuade a global car producer to take over Longbridge, Tony Woodley has concentrated on backing a bid led by ex-Rover manager John Towers. It is even reported in some of the papers that the unions are part of the bid.

All Woodley's efforts, and

those of the Joint Negotiating Committee, have now gone in this direction. At the first full meeting of the European Works Council of BMW, on April 13, he called not for action to make BMW backtrack on the sale, or try and get IGG Metall to reverse their position of support for the company, but to ask for more time for the Towers bid to develop. It is reported that Woodley also met the company on his own to support the bid.

The proposal for workers to stand outside BMW dealers and persuade people to put off their purchases, was also seen as a mean to give Towers more time. The unions have even successfully threatened an injunction to delay the Alchemy takeover - again to give more time for the bid.

The problem is that none of the stewards knows what the bid is, and nor do the workforce. Woodley has become a one-man band promoting the Towers consortium. Why is the bid so secret? Does it involve the closure of Cowley, for example? Is it right that a union official who does not even

work for the firm is able to do this in secret? Are the workforce just fodder to pay subs, with no voice in such an issue?

Most importantly, in Longbridge there is total confusion. No action whatsoever has taken place. There have only been two shop stewards' meetings, and no mass meetings.

All the initiatives are in the hands of the company. Eighty per cent of the workforce is laid off for three weeks. The real question is whether they will all return to work?

The first step was to divide the Rover workforce. That's one reason why Solihull was sold to Ford, while Cowley workers were told they were "safe" with the transfer of the mini from Longbridge. This left Swindon facing an undetermined future under BMW, engineering staff allocated all over the place, and Longbridge sold to Alchemy.

Now the company is dividing Longbridge. With Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) legislation, they are saying that about 300 workers on the mini will have the

Strange bedfellows delay action

Derek Robinson, a Communist Party member, was the convenor of Longbridge until in 1979 he was sacked for putting his name to a combine committee leaflet that called for occupations against closures.

The Channel 4 documentary "Rover: the last chance saloon" on April 16, which painted a glowing, exaggerated account of Robinson as a militant firebrand, also demonstrated how his victimisation was cynically set up by management - and pressed home with the energetic support of officials from his own engineering union (now AEEU), notably right wing executive member Ken Cure.

After this we might have expected Robinson to feel vindicated by subsequent events, and to restate now his commitment to occupation in defence of the plant.

Instead Robinson has added his voice to those calling for action to be delayed, and reassuring Rover workers that the union bureaucrats will defend them:

"The union, with which I have had constant contact, have dealt with the situation as best they could. ...

"Strikes and sit-ins are not the issue right now, but such action is on the agenda and is a probability in the future."



John Harris

Commons smokescreen for Byers' inaction

TONY BLAIR has said that although the government could not rescue Rover it would "make sure everyone who lost their job would get personal help in finding another one."

In other words all the rubbish about parliamentary committees "clearing" Stephen Byers, and affirming that he had not known what BMW's plans were, is meaningless.

Even if he had known, the government would have done nothing - except press gang redundant Rover workers into their new, mean, system for the unemployed.

All of the parliamentary antics so far have done nothing but play for time. Byers is backing the Towers bid not because Towers is a personal friend but because it diverts workers away from any kind of independent action, and makes it seem as if Byers himself is doing something to save jobs.

present pathetic begging by union leaders for scraps off the capitalist table. An occupied Longbridge could be the focus of resistance for the 100,000 workers in the midlands and Essex who would be affected by the closure of Longbridge and the threatened closure of Ford's Dagenham plant.

tematic attack on conditions, in which he argued that we had to follow Japan to survive.

It was this document that contained the 'jobs for life' clause, also endorsed by BMW. Clearly, this clause given by the company in exchange for conditions meant nothing.

Others could be asked to support them, and the demand for nationalisation put forward. This could also give hope to the shipyard workers and others facing massive potential job losses.

Towers will doubtless be looking to gain further concessions, seeing how desperate Woodley is. The workers at Cowley will be asked to make sacrifices to get the mini. Meanwhile Ford will use the opportunity to move models between plants to make deals at the expense of Solihull workers.

If no action is taken, then divisions will be sharpened and workers will be fighting each other.

This vision can only be fought by a united struggle, led by Longbridge taking action.

In Cowley, where the shop floor is on a four week layoff, the workers have the impression that all Woodley is worried about is keeping the mini at Longbridge, and that the closure of Cowley would not worry him.

This must be around the call for the nationalisation of Rover and Ford, not to compete in mass car production, in which working conditions are forced down, but to line up with a renationalised railway industry, in the development of a properly planned public transport system, that should be run by the workers and consumers.

In Solihull, workers have been lulled into a false sense of security by the continuing production, and even the continued employment of agency workers.

The major lesson of Rover is that going to the employer cap in hand, as Woodley did in 1998, giving all kinds of shift and productivity concessions does not save jobs, and in fact only worsens conditions for the working class.

- All negotiations and bids must be in the open
- Unions must represent members, not join employers as part of bids
- Occupy Longbridge now
- Unite car workers, end concession bargaining
- Call a demonstration in London
- Nationalise Rover and Dagenham, under the control of the workers.

Now we are going back to the same position, the spiralling down of conditions.

Far from representing salvation for jobs and conditions, John Towers was the man who forced through the 'Rover Tomorrow' document in 1992 - the first major sys-

tematic mass meeting, and the choice of occupation put to the workforce.

If action is taken, it would be a real alternative to the

right to go with their jobs to Cowley, and they have issued them with letters saying they are under BMW.

But they have issued others with letters saying they come under Alchemy, and a further group letters saying that they are multi-branded. These latter must now argue over who is to be their employer. All of this means that they have varying chances of jobs, and varying

amounts of redundancy money. This is classic divide and rule tactics, against which the unions have offered no alternative.

The workers still don't know whether they are in a fight or not. Woodley has already asked BMW about redundancy terms.

The company knows that this will weaken the possibility of getting a fight off the ground. If the workers don't

move to occupy soon, it will be too late, the workforce will be too divided and the moment will have been lost.

There should be an imme-

Open the Books!

Have YOU read it yet?

ALAN THORNETT's gripping account of the fight for jobs and conditions in the Cowley car plant, from the mid 1970s to the 1990s. £10 plus £1.50 post and packing from Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU

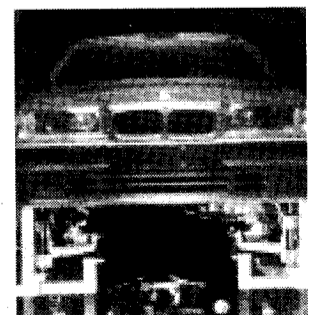
THOUSANDS of Rover workers are laid off, forced to sit and wait without any practical involvement in the fight to defend their jobs.

There is no information available to them, except BMW's claim that they have been losing £2m a day.

Workers don't know any details of what the Alchemy bid entails, except that their track record is of asset-stripping venture capitalists, and thousands would inevitably be made redundant.

We have been told even less about the "alternative" Towers bid - except that it is supposed to mean fewer redundancies than Alchemy, and that it is backed by TGWU chief negotiator Tony Woodley, who claims that "We are actively involved with John Towers."

Why all the secrecy? Who



is demanding things be kept so quiet?

BMW has already touted Rover round all the major car companies, so they already know the financial details. The TGWU leaders appear to know what is happening: even Trade Secretary Stephen Byers seems to know.

So the only people being kept in the dark are the shop stewards and the workers they represent, the people whose jobs are at

stake. Some component workers are already losing their jobs and there are reports that a major Corus steel plant may close.

These "business secrets" have only one purpose: to keep workers divided and prevent them taking action.

The only new facts likely to be exposed in the latest bid is the extent to which BMW itself has already asset-stripped Rover.

The Towers bid apparently asks to keep the mini, which BMW say they intend to produce as their new lower end model, and the R30 (the Longbridge medium car) which BMW planned to build elsewhere as a new BMW 2 series.

If BMW do not take these models away from Longbridge they will not have made any major gains

out of the sale. If they do, the Towers bid cannot be regarded as serious, since Rover could not survive as a volume producer if it were left with only the Rover 75, MG and two other ageing models.

All of this underlines the need for the books of Rover and BMW, and full details of all the bids and their implications for jobs and plant capacity, must be opened up to an elected committee of Rover workers.

Instead of allowing rival capitalists to find new ways of squeezing profits from the workers of a dying firm, Rover should be nationalised.

The Midland Region of MSF has already called for the books to be opened up to scrutiny: make sure all trade union bodies add their voices to the demand.

Labour's weedy countryside Bill panders to landowners

Dave Bangs

The government's new Countryside and Rights of Way Bill takes a few faltering steps forward: it will introduce a limited right to roam and improvements in the protection of "Sites of Special Scientific Interest" – some of our top wildlife sites covering about 6% of Britain.

What fails to do is address any of the key issues: the conservation of biodiversity and cultural landscapes in countryside more generally, the development of a sustainable, healthy agriculture, or the creation of a democratic countryside with real opportunities for land-based work.

It makes a step backwards, indeed, by offering landowners and farmers a new easy route to eliminating troublesome rights of way. All the pressure on our rights of way system is from landowners seeking deletion and diversion of historic routes.

New paths are only created on a permissive basis which does not compromise future land values or development opportunities.

Our countryside is increasingly dominated by warring ruling class factions who wish either to plunder it ever more efficiently for the profits of agribusiness, commercial leisure or housing development, or to treat it as a preserved Shangri La of quaint villages, pony paddocks and land cruisers.

Whilst the Bill makes (commercially worthless) mountain and moor, as well as heath, down and common, subject to a right to roam, there are many constraints built in which will minimise its impact.

A minimum size limit for accessible sites will cut out many heath and downland sites which have been fragmented and eroded by productivism. The use of existing data sets of eligible land, which are palpably inadequate, and conservative definitions of habitat eligibility will hobble access campaigners in argument.

Most importantly, the Bill excludes woodland from the categories of accessible land. Yet over vast areas of midland and eastern England woodland is the only interesting countryside to have survived productivist farming. Furthermore, woodland is one of the most popular landscape types.

In West Sussex this will mean that increases in public access on the western Sussex Downs will be minimal. Similarly, access to riversides and lakesides has been blocked by the massive lobbying of coarse and game fishing interests.

The gorgeous chalk rivers of Hampshire and the rushy meres of Cheshire will remain barred to us. In West Sussex more than 30 km of the River Rother (of national landscape importance) and 20 km of the River Arun between Amberley and Billingshurst (much designated as SSSI) will remain forbidden to the public. Yet the River Rother is almost all within the area of the future South Downs National Park.

In Wales the feeble Countryside Council for Wales has come out against future increases in access. The approach they are taking to mapping access areas under the Bill



Andrew Ward

If the appalling Terrorism Bill goes through, protestors who threaten to destroy, or destroy, GM crops, will be faced with long prison sentences

will exclude all outlying areas of qualifying habitat (such as moor) which are isolated from the main blocks. (Indeed, the cash-strapped CCW has recently had to stop much of its important conservation work, because of a drastic lack of resources. Work on Biodiversity Action Plans has been dropped, because there is no statutory duty on the CCW to deliver these).

The government has recommended inclusion of coastal land (including both cliffs and foreshore) in a fixture extension of the right to roam, though much of this already has informal access. How much access campaigners actually achieve on the ground will depend on the fixture guerrilla war between them and farmers and landowners over whether particular sites qualify.

No doubt, small neighbourhood organisations, urban groups, and groups with a radical programme (like The Land Is Ours) will be excluded from the "Access Forums" to be set up by the (mostly conservative) rural local authorities. In many downland landscapes, for instance, like those of Wiltshire and Berkshire, which we would expect to benefit, we may get very little at all.

On wildlife conservation the Bill merely addresses some weaknesses of the SSSI system, and has nothing to say about the wider countryside, where the majority of wildlife is to be found.

An increase in compulsory purchase powers for SSSIs subject to damage is long overdue, as are powers for English Nature to prevent

site damage by landowners, and increased powers of entry to SSSIs, and that they should be given increased powers to impose Management Schemes. Yet these measures will not address the fundamental problems even of the SSSI assemblage. Most of the wonderful Pevensey Marshes, in Sussex, are protected by SSSI designation, for instance, but these measures will not prevent the subtle but pervading damage caused by changes in the water regime, or water borne pollution.

English Nature will not have the resources or the political will to impose the necessary management regime on the nearby Firlie Estate, whose neglect of their ancient, species-rich chalk grasslands (those they have not destroyed) has changed much of them into a rank mess of harsh Tor Grass with little floristic interest.

The government has offered no statutory protection to the whole local authority system of designated Local Wildlife Sites (or their equivalents), whose importance is often just as great as the SSSI network. Many Local Wildlife Sites are in urban or urban fringe areas and desperately need management resources and protection against predatory development. They are often the most loved areas, and are especially used by children and those with limited mobility.

The wider fabric of landscape features – hedgerows, farmland trees, ponds, uncultivated corners – as well as the value of cultivated land itself for birds, small mammals, invertebrates, or wasteland plants – is ignored in this Bill. Yet once common and much loved farmland

birds, like sparrows, lapwings, and skylarks, continue their crashing decline, which signals far broader losses of biodiversity.

The EU Birds and Habitats Directives both require conservation measures for species and habitats in the wider countryside, and other countries such as the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, require the drawing up of "Action Plans" to save endangered species. No such measures are proposed in the present Bill.

We can be sure that the government will continue to ignore the key issues of land ownership and monopoly, and of a market-driven agriculture, in driving working people out of land-based employment, and of excluding urban people from their rural heritage. The government has shied away from even a rudimentary tussle with the cultural power of landowners in refusing to confront the blood sports issue.

Instead, the government proposes the loosening of planning law to facilitate rural "restructuring" (a key demand of the Country Landowners Association), bungs some small change in the direction of producers, and urges them to respond more closely to their marketing. Indeed, if the appalling Terrorism Bill goes through, protestors who threaten to destroy, or destroy, GM crops, or who use physical force to prevent habitat destruction will be faced with long prison sentences.

In no way are we ever told that the farming crisis affects agriculture differentially – on class lines. It is

farm workers, and workers in allied industries, such as abattoirs, processing and packing plants, and farm suppliers, as well as all small and undercapitalised producers, who will go to the wall. The biggest producers, meanwhile, will continue their crazy intensification, and turn to new and lucrative forms of profit realisation, in leisure and built development.

Whilst we repeatedly hear the painful stories of farmers going out of business, we are not told the stories of farm workers made redundant. Yet the decline of farm workers' jobs is even steeper than that of farm businesses.

In East Sussex, the number of farm workers jobs is now less than that of farmers themselves. And whilst repeated glossy magazine articles tell us of the plucky fight of farmers' wives to take on farm jobs vacated by sacked farm staff, we do not hear of the plight of farm workers' families forced into hardship by redundancy.

Indeed, though it is true that large numbers of farmers are going out of business – ceasing to trade – it is not true that large numbers of them are becoming bankrupt, given that most of them are sitting on large assets in land, whose value remains relatively buoyant.

Ironically, the energy to push for a democratic, sustainable agriculture, and to defend our wildlife and reclaim our countryside, can only come from the 90% of folk who now live in towns and cities. It's up to us to take the land back! Let there be 100 Kinder Scouts and Twyford Downs!

London joins the European fightback

A few extracts from the platform speeches at the LSA's 1,200-strong April 13 rally.

Dave Nellist

"The decision by Ken Livingstone is I think an important turning point in British politics. It will have the effect of loosening the ties by significant sections of working class people to what they thought in the past Labour represented, rather than the reality of what New Labour is today – a party wedded to big business.

"Of course Ken won't pose things in those terms – he won't explain things or draw the conclusions that many of us have done for some time now of the need for a new mass workers' party, one which offers a real socialist alternative and is controlled from the bottom up rather than the top down.

"Ken's likely victory on May 4 will shatter the seemingly iron grip which my former room mate in the House of Commons, Tony Blair, has seemed to have had for the last three years."

Jean Kyso

"I have always been someone who could never keep her mouth shut, and as you know it doesn't do you a lot of good: but it gives you a lot of satisfaction..."

"I feel that the life blood of the working class is haemorrhaging away. This Labour Party is not remotely connected to socialism or anything I have believed in all my life. That's what has driven me back to politics. The London Socialist Alliance is the only party that I could ever really believe in again – so don't let me down."

Alain Krivine

"Across Europe we are confronted with a massive neo-liberal offensive imposing flexibility, the end of full time work, and privatisation of the public sector. In the face of this offensive of the bourgeoisie the so-called traditional left parties are capitulating – in France, Italy and Britain.

Last month at the Intergovernmental Conference in Portugal you could see an axis between Tony Blair and Aznar of Spain. This conference was officially called to discuss social problems but it did nothing in this regard and instead represented a total adaptation to neo-liberalism.

Some people speak about French exceptionalism, but we don't believe in this. It is clear that the Socialist Party in France is forced to use different words from Blair – but if you look underneath the policies are identical.

The one difference between Britain and France is the relationship of forces – fortunately we did not have the experience of Mrs Thatcher, and so the working class is more healthy. In 1995 we had big strikes, and then one month

ago again there were fantastic strikes, for example by teachers which forced the government to replace the Education Minister.

Today there are two questions posed: the issue of social resistance and then matter of political answers. On the question of social resistance we are at the beginning of the beginning of the beginning.

You had the fantastic demonstration in support of Rover in Britain, and you can see in some countries there is the beginning of a new wave of strikes. We should not exaggerate – its only at the beginning but its important.

On a European scale there is the beginning of co-ordination of workers strikes – like you had with Renault around Vilvoorde three years ago.

There has been the beginning of the co-ordination of the unemployed on a European scale with the marches in Amsterdam in 1997 and Cologne in 1999. This year there will be the summit in France and another march.

And on a world scale we can also be optimistic because there was the fantastic experience of the counter-demonstration in Seattle. And then there will be the World March of Women. So we can see that there is a new internationalist consciousness appearing in Europe and in the world.

But if you have the beginning of new social movements, the big problem is that these movements have absolutely no one to represent them. Its clear that the reformist parties in government are absolutely not addressing them. Increasingly the workers and young people are disgusted by their policies.

And now what is new is that in some countries there is the beginning of regroupment of anti-capitalist forces.: In Denmark for example there is the Red Green Alliance in which you have left ecologists,

Trotskyists, and some ex-members of the CP – and they get 10% of the vote in Copenhagen and 5 MPs in the National Parliament as well as one MEP.

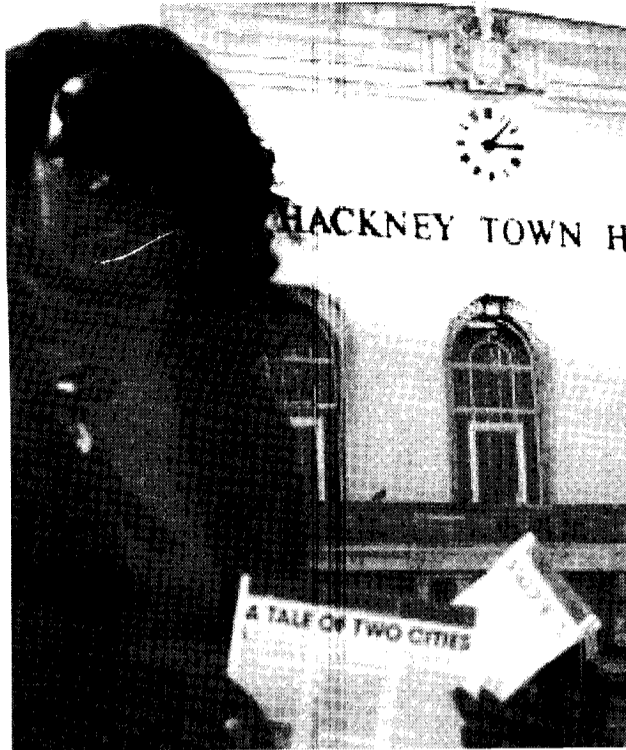
In Portugal one year ago you had the development of the Left Block, with Trotskyists, Maoists

and a wing which left the Communist Party, and this new party got 5-7% in some cities in the elections last year and had two people elected to the Portuguese parliament.

And then you had Scotland, which I think you know better than us: but it is the same experience. People from different traditions, from different origins agree to take responsibility to leave behind the old polemics.

I don't say that these polemics were useless, but many, many people are ready now to fight for an alternative. When there is unity these people feel that there is a new dynamic and they are ready to support it.

That is why a victory for the London Socialist Alliance would be not only important for you but for all of us across Europe.



LSA local candidates Cecelia Prosper and Weyman Bennett on the campaign trail



Steve Eason

London Socialist Alliance steps up campaign

We've got a City to win!

Veronica Fagan

The London Socialist Alliance is surpassing even the most optimistic predictions of its potential as it gears up for the final push in the run up to election day on May 4.

The level of support on the ground has been demonstrated time and again. At a number of hustings LSA candidates have received significant applause while new Labour candidates have been met with uncomfortable silence.

This is not much surprise when you consider that new Labour candidates, hand-picked by Millbank, include such gems as near-millionaire Nicky Gavron and Lord Toby Harris.

In contradistinction the LSA candidates have a real record of struggle especially in the trade union and anti-racist movements, which means they are tuned into the issues ordinary people see as important.

The LSA has maintained a high profile in a number of political campaigns: on the demonstration against closure of Rover, on pickets against the sacking of Sarah Friday, in opposition to the racist treatment of asylum seekers by the press.

On the road with the LSA battle-bus, the cheers and car horn hooting demonstrate the potential support for socialist policies that is out there – so long as we can get our message out to as widely as possible.

That was certainly the emphasis of the Activists



Paul Foot

Conference on April 9, where speaker after speaker stressed the need to step up efforts to get our political ideas across.

As Mark Steel commented, there is not much point in meeting people after the election and discovering they would have voted for us if they had only known about our existence.

At any rate the Alliance seems well on target to distribute two leaflets to 1.5 million households across the city – far more than any of its competitors will do.

This activity is mainly being co-ordinated at ward level, which is squeezing the space for organised political discussion. Despite this it is clear that there is increasing commitment to maintain the Alliance beyond the election itself.

The rally on April 13 was the high point of the campaign so far. More than 1,200 people gathered at Friends Meeting House to listen to an impressive array of speakers.

Not only was this a bigger audience than the previous Central London meeting but was more politically coherent. This was partly because the experience of weeks of joint discussions and activities has begun to give the Alliance its own identity – something that is more than the sum of its parts.

In addition the platform at the rally reached beyond the developments in London itself to discuss similar processes that have been taking place elsewhere.

There were key contributions from MSP Tommy Sheridan of the Scottish Socialist Party, MEP Alain Krivine of the French Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, and Dave Nellist from the Socialist Alliances at national level.

Context

This provided a political context to explain that what is developing through the LSA is part of a process of recomposition taking place across the whole of Europe. It is a response to the bosses' neo-liberal offensive which has been backed so slavishly by the traditional parties of the left.

It was also excellent that Sheridan and Nellist, both from the Socialist Party tradition, spoke so positively and called for support – and active support – for the Alliance. Nellist explicitly claimed the Socialist Party

mantle, and while he did comment on the fact that it was unfortunate that there was "more than one workers' list", it was clear who should be supported.

Of course the LSA as a whole agrees that it would have been better if there could have been a common slate – that is why we fought hard to persuade the Campaign against Tube Privatisation to join with us in these elections. But given the previous studied ambiguity of the Socialist Party on these questions, this was a very welcome intervention.

More contributions from candidates and other supporters illustrated the wealth of talent and experience, as well as the diversity of traditions, that have come together to create the LSA as a new and real political force.

While every muscle will be strained to maximise our impact up to polling day, the prospects for maintaining the political dynamic far beyond this seem brighter than could have been hoped but a few short months ago.

Paul Foot, at the head of the LSA list, made an impressive contribution to close the meeting, in which he paid tribute to Tony Cliff, who had died earlier the same week.

Foot argued that while the title of Cliff's recently completed autobiography – "A world to win" might be a little ambitious as an immediate target, we could certainly make use of it. "A City to win" is not a bad slogan for the remaining weeks of the campaign.

Unity in the fight to change the system

TOMMY SHERIDAN, the first Scottish Socialist Party MSP, has lent his support to the campaign for the London Socialist Alliance. In this speech to a rally of LSA supporters in central London on April 13 he drew out the thinking that led from an alliance of left forces to a party linking a wide range of political views in a common struggle.

It gives me great pleasure to offer the fullest solidarity of the Scottish Socialist Party to the London Socialist Alliance in the forthcoming elections.

We hope this will begin to set a trend that will bring the left and the working class together united around clear unequivocal socialist demands and a socialist programme that bring back on to the political agenda the need for the redistribution of the massive wealth and resources that exist in our country.

We have a problem in relation to socialism in that perhaps we have a great number of socialist parties but not enough socialists. What we have to try to do is to find a way to maximise unity by coming together, working together, building up trust and mutual respect of each and everyone's backgrounds and trends, everyone's talents and energy and what they have to offer

in terms of a new socialist movement.

In Scotland at the end of 1995 we came to the conclusion that if we didn't form something that was able to offer an electoral alternative to the Labour Party then we would lose a generation of young people in particular but also of other workers to nationalism – to the Scottish National Party.

The SNP isn't a right wing force – it's actually left of centre – it's actually much more radical than the Labour Party, although that wouldn't be hard these days.

I think if Ghengis Khan were still alive, he would be more left wing than Blair. We had situations developing where the SNP were picking up support from left-leaning workers, from young people looking for an alternative to the old Tories, and the new Tories in the shape of Labour, and therefore we decided to try to bring groups together.

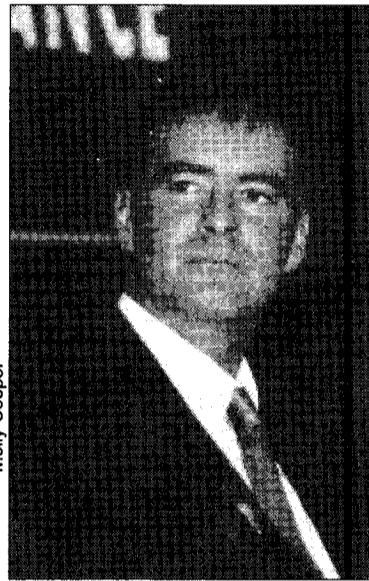
We came from groups like Scottish Militant Labour, the Communist Party of Scotland, radical greens, environmental activists, road protestors, trade unionists; people who were involved in their daily lives in struggling against the social and economic system but who were all doing this separately.

What we tried to do was to tie all of those various ropes together and see if we could have a bigger and a stronger rope.

We tried to do this at the end of 95-96 through forming the Scottish Socialist Alliance and we worked together until the early part of 98. We had our fall outs – we came from different backgrounds – some of us were Trotskyists, some of us were Marxists others were Stalinists, others had a reformist, Labour party background, others a green background: but at the end of the day we managed to find that there was a lot more that united us than divided us.

We found that if our energy was collectively organised we could be much more powerful together than in its separate component parts.

So we built on that and stood in the elections in 1997. We tried to offer an alternative to new Labour's Tory policies in 22 of the 72 seats in Scotland. We were relatively suc-



Tommy Sheridan

cessful and picked up 4-5% in some seats and in Glasgow we got 11 per cent. So it went alright, but what we managed to achieve in course of that campaign was a belief that we could organise together, that we could stay together.

Then of course after the election of Blair there was a huge disappointment, huge disillusionment from workers. Maybe they had been suspicious but hoped that the

Labour Party was going to be different underneath to what it appeared on the surface – that once they got into power they would drop all the right wing rhetoric and they would actually be different. Of course many of us already knew the free market road that they had embraced; already knew that they would let down workers and would embrace the Tory agenda 100%.

We had built up a momentum, so that at the end of 98 we decided that there was actually enough trust, enough respect that we could turn that Alliance into a political party.

We formed the SSP in September 1998 – we brought together all of those various strands and said: let's not have a political party that dictates that there is one way on the high way, let's have a political party that allows the organisation of trends of opinion.

Let's allow platforms to organise, where people feel free to dissent, but let's make sure that we have a united programme that we can all get behind when it come to elections or supporting workers' struggles.

We were formed in September 98 and were faced with elections in May 99. Like yourselves we were ignored – we were the fringe – we had no chance. Unfortunately for

LSA: Socialist Party still in a tangle

Alan Thornett

AFTER MONTHS of vacillation, the Socialist Party (SP) has finally called for a vote for all London Socialist Alliance (LSA) candidates – the additional member list as well as the constituencies.

Previously they had supported the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation for the list, and the LSA in the constituencies. This was an untenable position, since it meant their own member who is an LSA candidate in Lewisham could not support the LSA's additional member list.

The change is a positive step forward, but the Socialist Party's commitment remains partial and grudging. The SP still plays no significant role in LSA activities at the London level and its activity in the constituencies depends on the attitude of its local members. In fact they remain deeply divided on the LSA, and have now launched a series of sectarian attacks on the SWP and by implication on the LSA itself.

The April edition of their magazine *Socialism Today*, far from welcoming the SWP's turn towards collaboration with other sections of the left, launches a huge attack on the role of the SWP in the LSA.

They denounce the SWP's turn to electoral interventions as an 'unprincipled political somersault'. They claim that

the LSA has been taken over by the SWP and its democratic structures obliterated, and warn that it could become an obstacle to the construction of an alternative to Blairism. "The SWP", it says, is "incapable of genuine collaboration with other forces", and sees the LSA as a predatory party building exercise.

Yet at the highly successful LSA rally on April 13, Tommy Sheridan of the SSP (and, like the SP, a member of the Committee for a Workers International) gave enthusiastic support to the LSA – as did Dave Nellist, a leading member of the SP.

The SP itself did not mobilise for the rally and prioritised selling a new pamphlet attacking the SWP outside.

There are bound to be problems in the LSA, given the relative size of the SWP and the danger of parallel structures. But the remarkable thing is the degree of genuine unity that has been achieved.

And yes, the attitude of the SWP in London is not generally replicated. There are trade unions where the SWP have determinedly maintained their divisions with the rest of the left. But none of this invalidates what has happened in London: rather it means that it needs to be built on.

To understand the problems of the SP, which is in quite a serious crisis, it is necessary to

look at how it got to where it is today. Four years ago the SP's predecessor Militant Labour was in the vanguard of developments of the reorganisation of the left.

At the end of the 1980s the Militant Tendency was the biggest of the far-left organisations, and had played a major role in the leadership of the campaign against the poll tax. It recruited heavily out of this and drew the conclusion that it was time to leave the Labour Party and become an open organisation.

In the course of this turn it suffered a damaging split and its membership collapsed from something like 8,000 to more like 2,000.

LSA

Most left organisations declined or stagnated during the 1990s, but the Militant Tendency's demise was the most dramatic, almost catastrophic in its scale.

The SWP did not decline in the same way. It maintained a membership of around 3-4,000 during that period, and now found itself the biggest organisation of the far-left.

It had benefited from its insular character (which tended to

protect it from outside events), a strong and dynamic central cadre, and the way it (incredibly) capitalised on the fall of the Berlin Wall as a 'vindication' of its theory of state capitalism.

Although its theoretical basis was completely wrong, the conclusions it drew over the fall of the wall gave it a confidence which other sections of the left did not have – particularly those with illusions in Stalinism.

The CPGB broke up and went into sharp decline.

Militant Labour focused on the need to construct a political alternative to Blairism after the abolition of Clause 4 in October 95 and stabilised around this turn. The first initiative, however, came from Scargill. He resigned from the Labour Party soon after the abolition and proposed the formation of the SLP which was launched on May Day 1996.

Scargill decreed that there would be "no federalism". Anyone who was in an existing left organisation would have to leave it first if they were to join the SLP. Those approved by Scargill, however, were allowed in regardless, particularly Stalinist fragments.

Militant Labour, in particular, fought hard to join, but it was rejected by Scargill, who would not compromise on the exclusive character of the SLP.

Militant Labour's response to this rebuff was to seek to

change itself into a broader party – to try to be what the SLP refused to be. This was an important and welcome initiative.

It was at this point that Militant Labour changed its name to the Socialist Party, although the rationale for this was hard to fathom, particularly since the existing name was well known.

But some of the politics behind it were certainly flawed. The SP developed the view that Blair had achieved his goal and the Labour Party was now a straight bourgeois party.

This wrong analysis made the call for a broader party leftist in character, and limited what it could achieve, particularly amongst those breaking from new Labour. In any event, the political conditions for the construction of a new party to the left of Labour were still underdeveloped.

The reaction of the SP to this failure was to retrench and wait for a new and more fruitful period. This began to open up divisions in the SP which remain unresolved today and as a result the retrenchment was only partially carried through.

During its turn outwards the SP had played a key role in establishing Socialist Alliances in various parts of England, Scotland and Wales. The retrenchment created a contradiction in the attitude of the

SP to the alliances, and some deprioritisation, but they remained the main force involved.

The most important alliance was the Scottish Socialist Alliance (SSA). This had developed a real strength and with Scottish Militant Labour (SML) at its core. SML never accepted the retrenchment.

The introduction of devolution and the partial introduction of PR became a factor as well, since it would transform the electoral prospects for small parties. Most of the far-left, including the SWP had not stood in elections for decades, but now – as a result of both this and the consolidation of Blairism – the line began to change in favour of electoral interventions. This in itself has had an impact on the way the left campaigns and organises.

When the London Socialist Alliance was launched for the European elections last year, the SWP became involved.

Their commitment seemed only partial, and the SP took the leading role, but it was a significant development. But the LSA withdrew from the contest after the decision of the SLP to stand a rival slate headed by Scargill, so the possibilities remained untested.

The Scottish Socialist Party was launched in the run-up to the elections for the new Scottish Parliament, and after a wide consultation on the

those faint hearts in the media we managed to break a few hearts as far as new Labour was concerned. Across the whole of Scotland this new party managed to take 2% of the total Scottish vote.

Some of you may say 2% is not very much and you would be right it is not very much. But then the SNP was formed in 1936 and between 1936 and 1964 it never recorded more than 1% of the total Scottish vote.

It took it 30 years until 1966 where it actually got 2% of the vote when it had the breakthrough in the Hamilton South by-election – and to go on from there to where it is now where it regularly gets 20 and sometimes 30% of the vote.

Here was a political party that wasn't a year old, and it managed to secure 2% of the vote.

We stood in first past the post seats as well – in my own seat of Glasgow Pollock we managed not to take 2% – we took 22% – we nearly won that seat.

In Glasgow we won 8% of the vote – we won the sixth Glasgow list seat to get the first socialist elected to the Scottish Parliament.

We managed to show that that small political party with honesty and integrity, linked to a radical socialist programme for which it was bold enough to argue, could achieve success.

A month later in June we had the European elections – many of you will easily forget them – but the SSP went from 2% to 4% across Scotland.

Last year we had the Hamilton South by-election where we Robertson had to go off to NATO – he used to be a CND member and is now the warmonger general.

The SSP polled 10%. We are told there is a four party system in Scotland – we are part of the “fringe” – but we came third in that seat; we beat the Tories and Liberals.

Last month in Ayr – which has

100 years tradition of returning Tories apart from the exception of 1997 – it's one of those rare seats in Scotland – we stood and took 4.5% and beat the Liberals – we got twice their vote.

Tonight in Hamilton there's a council by election, where I'm confidently predicting we'll be third or second and in two weeks time there's another in Edinburgh, where I predict a similar result.

A new political force is being built, on the basis first of all of an Alliance, and now of an organised political party. Brothers and sisters, it's not for me from Scotland to offer prescriptions or tablets of wisdom to socialists in London or anywhere else, but I certainly hope that the road that we have travelled is a road that you will also travel.

Through working together, through building up mutual trust and respect, hopefully a new political party will be formed on the basis of that activity. One thing I'm absolutely certain of is that we need an alternative for ordinary men and women to the right wing shenanigans of new Labour, of Blair and everything they represent.

In the little time I have it's difficult to give you a flavour of the political activity in Scotland. The SSP has not just been built through standing in elections – but on the basis of assisting workers in dispute, whether they be council workers in the social work departments taking strike action or post office workers or the private sector who have occupied factories.

We have stood against the construction of new roads through communities, and against housing sell-offs. In other words it's a party that has been constructed not just in elections but in action as well. I would hope the Alliance in London adopts the philosophy that elections are not in any way a substitute for the class struggle but a complement to the class struggle.

We have a political party in



LSA candidates Danny Wright and Theresa Bennett with young helper on Westminster Bridge

Scotland made up of people who are Marxists like ourselves but also people from different political backgrounds: but the common philosophy that runs through that party is the need to change the system, to tackle the horrible and obscene inequality of wealth and power that exists in our country.

Brothers and sisters I hope that each and every one of you will get involved in this campaign, involved in the construction, not just in London but in every part of England and Wales, of a viable credible alternative to new Labour – that has got to be the target.

The Office of National Statistics has just announced what we knew

anyway. The rich are officially getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. After three years of new Labour we now have the top 20% with a larger share and the bottom 20% with a smaller share of wealth.

Brothers and sisters isn't it about time for change? I would argue with every single one of you: for the sake of our pensioners, for the sake of our children, for the sake of our low paid workers, we need a socialist alternative that argues for decent wages, for a shorter working week, for increased public and social control of our industries.

The sketch of Rory Bremner says it very well – it should be compulsory viewing – he's the best politi-

cian on the TV. Two of his mates are in the pub and one says “My car got stolen the other night” “Oh, that's terrible” “It's even worse than that – the guy that stole it knocked the door last night and he offered to sell it back to me.” “But that's theft!” he says. “No, that's privatisation!”

Brothers and sisters is it not time that we took back what is rightfully ours – our telecoms and our transport and our utilities?

Then, when we get the momentum, we can carry on to take over the banks and insurance companies and the rest of industry – because we can run them a darned sight better than the spivs in the city.



Scottish left. It comprised the Scottish Socialist Movement, the Scottish Communist Party, and SML – which dissolved its apparatus into it. This was highly controversial with the SP leadership in London.

The SSP achieved a major breakthrough when Tommy Sheridan was elected to the Scottish Parliament. It has grown rapidly to a membership of 2,000 in 53 branches throughout Scotland – a significant left force in a population of just 5 million. It gets a high media profile in Scotland and is currently registering 6% in the opinion polls, which would give three SMPs if there was an election now.

When the London Socialist Alliance was relaunched last August to contest the elections for the Greater London Assembly, it was under radically different political conditions to those which existed first time round. Labour had suffered disastrous results in the Euro elections, the local elections, and in the elections for the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly.

The message was absolutely

clear. As new Labour moved further to the right, millions of traditional Labour voters were deserting it. Some were voting for the nationalist parties (in Scotland and Wales), or the greens and even the Liberal Democrats: others were not voting at all.

The role of the SWP was also different. After a few months they transformed their level of commitment and began to mobilise their organisation behind the LSA. This created a new situation.

SWP shift

For years the SWP's hallmark has been to take up political campaigns either in its own name or through organisations it controlled. Now it has begun to co-operate and collaborate with the rest of the left. This shift was reflected not only through the LSA but in other campaigns such as that against the WTO and in opposition to Russia's war in Chechnya – although in a more partial way.

But as the SWP increased its commitment, this exacerbated the contradictions in the Socialist Party's position, and it took a more of a back seat.

This remains a problem for the LSA and for the development of an alternative to Blairism. The more the SP distances itself from the LSA, the more it compounds the problem of the relative weight of the SWP within it.

No one can guarantee that the SWP will not simply pull out at a future date and denounce those it has been working with – in the way the SP is doing at the moment.

But that is not a rational reading of the current situation. The signs are of a growing commitment of the SWP to the LSA, including a post election conference to discuss the way forward. And there seem to be differing views in the SWP on the issue of a new party to the left of Labour.

In any case the political imperative behind the LSA is not the good will of its component parts but the objective need for an alternative to new Labour, something which cannot be achieved if the left carries on in the old way. And one thing we can be sure of is that if we don't test out the possibilities of unity in this situation



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A reply to Workers Power

Where next for LSA

after May elections?

A debate has been developing within the LSA, and beyond, as to how it should develop after the elections on May 6th.

Workers Power, one of the components of the LSA, has published a contribution on this question in its paper which suggests that the LSA should be transformed into a revolutionary party in the short term. Anything else, it implies, would be a defeat. This is an important debate, to which ALAN THORNETT replies.

Workers Power says it "will argue for the new party to be revolutionary – in programme and in practice; not a return to old Labour, a toothless talking shop, or a bunch of revolutionaries hiding behind a reformist facade."

They also claim that *Socialist Outlook* "just want an open-ended alliance of reformists, revolutionists and greens."

Nothing could be further from the truth, of course. We very much want a new mass revolutionary party to be reshaped out of the current recomposition which is taking place on the left.

But to want something is not enough to create it. And to pretend that a revolutionary party can spring fully formed from the LSA as the next stage of development (with or without some discussions) is left propagandism.

Such a development would need a much more radicalised political situation, and far higher levels of class struggle than we have at the present time – as well as well as a further development among the forces of the political vanguard.

It is widely accepted within the LSA that, as new Labour alienates its traditional supporters, and moves ever further to the right, the construction of a political alternative to new Labour is not only urgently needed but increasingly possible.

This view has been strengthened by the remarkable success that the LSA has achieved so far, the degree of unity already forged, and the positive experience of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP).

It is already clear that – provided the LSA does not receive a derisory vote in the elections (which seems unlikely, but the election is an unknown quantity) – there is a growing commitment to maintain the LSA after May 6.

The constituent organisations increasingly agree it should continue both as campaigning alliance and also to undertake future electoral interventions, either in by-elections like Tottenham or in next year's general election.

One of the issues under debate is whether the ultimate objective should be a new party of the working class to the left of Labour. The Socialist Party as well Workers Power and the ISG have such a perspective.

The SWP, however, has traditionally presented itself as the more-or-less fully formed alternative, and this is an ingrained obstacle they will have to overcome – although they do show an increasing commitment to maintaining the LSA after May.



LSA battle bus has found wide support, but a mass party needs a bigger bandwagon effect

Of course the prospects of a new party would be far more advanced if Livingstone had been prepared to launch it. The support he enjoys is potentially a major opportunity to rebuild the left, and puts a big responsibility on him given that the opportunity is in his hands.

If he were to organise his support on the left he would get a huge response, whatever form it took – an alliance, a party, or whatever. Tens of thousands would immediately join up.

Such a party would have to be democratic, have a federal structure and be pluralistic. In other words it must be inclusive of those sections of the left who want to be a part of it – with the full right of dissent, of internal debate, and of publication.

Unfortunately Livingstone ruled this out from the moment he announced his decision to stand. He pledged that he would not form a new party as a first principle.

Although his own membership of the LP was immediately suspended he called on his supporters to stay in the LP, saying that he would fight to get back into it in the future! This decision represents a massive missed opportunity to reshape British politics.

Given Livingstone's position, what should

be possible after the May elections will be to consolidate the LSA and formalise some of its structures: but it will remain an *alliance* – based on important elements of an action programme.

Certainly the objective political conditions do exist for a new party of the working class – for the first time since the war in fact: but that does not resolve the problem of how or when it can be created or exactly what it could be.

The diversity of the left forces which have come around the LSA, and the legacy of years of often bitter sectarian rivalry, dictate that a protracted period of political development, preparation and confidence building is necessary before such a party can be formed on a stable basis.

The negative experience of Arthur Scargill's premature, bureaucratic and sectarian Socialist Labour Party must never be forgotten.

Furthermore, any serious new party of the left will have to be much more than just a reorganisation of the existing far left. It has to involve substantial splits from the LP and the reflection of this in the trade unions.

Such a split is in fact posed by Ken Livingstone's candidacy, despite his own position.

However the conditions may mean that any split may now well take the form of an attri-

tion of members rather than a dramatic rupture. The problem of what comes next is posed just the same.

It is going to require a longer period of discussion, joint experience and confidence-building before a significant new party could be launched to reach out to these forces, since there is clearly not yet agreement on what the political character of such a party is likely to be – and this is a crucial factor.

To demand – as do Workers Power – that a new party be something which it cannot be in the current conditions is to risk aborting a process which could lead to further positive development in the future.

And it is to take a sectarian attitude to those forces who are breaking from new Labour at the present time.

We are talking of a relatively small but significant new development (perhaps a few tens of thousands). This is still not a mass party, but more like the SSP. Nevertheless an organisation on this scale could begin to regroup the left and lay the basis for (hopefully) bigger developments at a later stage.

Workers Power for example denounce the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) for not being a revolutionary party at the point it was formed: This they say "is the cardinal question, because the wrong answers can lead – as they have done in Scotland – to the creation of a smaller left-reformist party (the SSP) instead of a revolutionary one".

But the SSP is not left social democratic. It is a small-mass centrist party, with a sizeable revolutionary grouping – the former Scottish Militant Labour – at its core. And the idea that it *could* be a revolutionary party at this stage is to misunderstand both what is possible and the dynamics of its development.

Of course the SSP could evolve in a left social democratic direction. The nature of a centrism is that it could go either way. But this is a highly premature conclusion to reach, since the signs are very much to the contrary. Its future depends on its evolution in the next period.

In our view the SSP even within its existing terms and limitations is a major gain for the working class.

Whether it becomes a revolutionary party at some time in the future will depend both on the political situation in Scotland and the way that revolutionaries within it organise and conduct themselves.

It is the same with the LSA. What is most likely to emerge, after a period of preparation, is not a new revolutionary party, but a new centrist party.

This would nevertheless represent an important gain for the working class in this period. It would not be what we would advocate or prefer, but we would welcome it and seek to be a part of it. The issue would be how the far-left organisations should relate to it and build it – and how they should work in order to win it to a revolutionary perspective at a later.

This is not a new debate with Workers Power, of course. They argued that even the LSA as it exists today should be a revolutionary organisation with a revolutionary programme.

They complain that: "The LSA rejected a revolutionary programme in favour of its current manifesto". This, again, is classic left propagandism.

We say that it was correct that the LSA did not adopt a revolutionary programme. Had it done it would not be the success it is today. It adopted the key elements of an action programme and it can develop through the experience of implementing this in practice.

Progress on Tobin tax

Pete Cooper

AROUND the world and in Britain the international campaign for the "Tobin tax" on foreign currency transactions continues to make rapid progress.

Because of the massive volume of foreign currency speculation, currently running at \$3 trillion a day, Tobin could raise an estimated \$150bn revenue, depending on the rate at which it was levied. This could be used for massive aid to the poor countries of the south.

Its supporters also see it as reducing the volume of currency speculation, and its damaging effects on vulnerable third world economies by making much of it unprofitable.

A world parliamentary appeal was launched at an 11 April Washington press conference to mark the first presentation of a pro-Tobin tax resolution by US Congress member Peter DeFazio. The press conference was also attended by Labour MEP Glyn Ford.

The tax is already supported by the Canadian and Finnish Parliaments. 100 Brazilian MPs have recently voted to support it.

In Britain the Commons motion from Harry Barnes MP has now been signed by nearly 100 MPs. The Liberal Democrats are set to adopt Tobin as official policy.

This astonishing growth in support for Tobin amongst liberal and left legislators is the outcome of a number of different factors – such as increasing pressure of campaigns against third world debt and third world poverty, and concern over the increased instability of neo-liberal capitalism illustrated by the current world stock market crash.

The objective of the world campaign is to gain 1,000 signatures of MPs from 5 continents and to get the tax on the agenda of national parliaments, of the International Monetary Fund, and the G7 group of the world's richest countries.

In Europe a meeting has been called for the 27-28 June in Brussels of members of national parliaments in support of Tobin.

A successful world campaign will give the lie to those who argue that Tobin would be impossible to implement because currency transactions would be moved offshore. Labour MEPs have recently helped vote down resolutions calling for an end to tax havens such as Jersey and the Isle of Man.

In Britain War on Want has been running a very successful campaign for Tobin, gaining the support for example of the TUC and UNISON. Tobin tax supporters in Britain are planning a major conference in the autumn to plan a campaign.

Only a mass campaign which gains the active support of civil society, including trade unions, NGOs, and campaigning anti-globalisation organisations can begin to put real pressure on Brown and Blair and force them to break with their slavish support for the City's right to retain its huge speculative profits.



Washington protests rattle capitalists

Chris Jones

The fact that protesters in Washington caused some disruption of the International Monetary Fund/World Bank meeting on April 16 shows that the Seattle experience can be repeated. While the meeting itself went ahead, some of the Ministers, including France's Fabius, were unable to reach it through the blockade.

The mass arrest of over 600 people on the eve of the meetings, and the mass mobilisations of state forces, shows that the US regime is very wary of the developing situation.

The fact that major events for US imperialism, on its own territory, have faced disruption by the home population threatens the regime in a way not seen since the anti-Vietnam war movement. The struggle of the Vietnamese and that movement's success affected US pol-

icy for decades, a similar impact this time round could be more significant.

The consequences of structural adjustments and other IMF/World Bank policies have regularly been protested against and resisted by movements of workers and peasants throughout the world.

These have never received the resounding active support of mass movements in the imperialist states.

Partially this situation has changed because of the impact within the US of some of imperialist's policies but it has also changed because of a change of political consciousness by the activists involved.

The mobilisation in Washington marks the consolidation of a movement in the US at a higher political level. Since the anti-Vietnam war movement US 'civil society' has campaigned on a wide range of sin-

gle issues. Nicaragua, Hispanic immigration, environment, Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) and third world debt are among the issues that have featured.

In Seattle, and now Washington, a coalition of over 50 organisations and networks has found a unifying target, and have shown they are a force to be reckoned with. The target is the main arm of imperialist economic policy – the IMF/World Bank/WTO. The single issues are now clearly seen as interlinked and requiring global resolution.

The movement in the US is divided on important questions such as whether these institutions should be reformed or abolished in order to create an economically fairer world. But, it is united in opposing the injustice that does exist and sees it as a direct and deliberate result of US government policy.

The fact that official, if inac-

tive, support can be won from the AFL/CIO trade union centre is a sign that serious links into the organised working class can be made – and another worrying development for the government.

The divisions that exist between the imperialist states; and the divisions between imperialism and the bulk of the third world on the future plans of the WTO created the room for success at Seattle.

The successful resistance to the Multilateral Agreement on Investment three years ago helped to build the confidence of the opposition movement.

The mobilisations in Washington will show imperialism that Seattle was not just a flash in the pan. How the 'democracies' respond will depend on the tempo of protest continuing around all their meetings and manoeuvres.

Bangkok Appeal to the people of the world

Last December's events in Seattle have changed the balance of forces between the social movements opposed to globalisation and the G7 leaders, governments, corporations and global economic institutions, including the IMF, World Bank and WTO, that drive the globalisation project.

Seattle gave expression to the growing international rejection of this new form of exploitation that violates on a massive scale peoples' human rights including, social, economic, cultural, environmental, political and democratic rights.

Seattle showed that we are able to unite against this global project. Our challenge now is to continue our resistance, and deepen the debate amongst ourselves in order to articulate and promote

common alternatives.

In that regard, we need to improve our capacity for mobilisation at a national and international level, and to strengthen international co-operation.

We therefore appeal to all social movements, north and south, to fight for the cancellation of all debt of developing countries which in the judgement of civil society is illegitimate, immoral or unpayable; to end the IMF's structural adjustment policies in

indebted nations;

to call for a moratorium on any new negotiations that would increase the power and scope of the WTO,

to exclude from the jurisdiction of the WTO such issues as peasant agriculture, social services, and intellectual property claims; and to impose controls and taxes on capital.

We call on social movements to mobilise in large numbers and unite against globalisation wherever world

leaders gather and meet. In particular we call on movements to focus on two main forthcoming events.

First, on the UN General Assembly Social Summit Review in Geneva on 22 - 25th June, 1999. On this occasion, we will assemble to organise the debate, discussion and articulation of our alternatives; and also to prepare for a mass mobilisation in New York in September 5-6, 2000.

This will be the Summit of World Leaders in New York, on the occasion of the UN's Millennium General Assembly on 6-9 September. Simultaneous actions will be organised around the world.

We also call for support for mobilisation at the following events:

Meeting of the Asian Development Bank in

Thailand, 6-7th May.

The meeting of APEC 6-8th May,

The Beijing +5 Review in New York, 5-9 June

The Africa- EU Summit in Cairo on 27th June.

Demonstrations in the run-up to the G7 Global Summit, where there will be an international Jubilee 2000 conference and actions for debt cancellation; in particular demonstrations outside Japanese embassies over this period, as Japan is the chair of the G7 this year.

Demonstrations in support of the anti-US bases campaign in Okinawa

In the week of the G7 Summit, 21-23 July, 2000.

Demonstrations at the World Bank/IMF events in Prague 26-28th September.

The Women's March in New York on 17th October,

2000.

ASEM People's Forum in Seoul, 17-19 October.

The Dakar anti-debt African meeting, from 11th to 17th December, 2000

Signatories include the following International Networks and Organizations:

Agencia Latino Americana de Informacion (ALAI)

Committee for the Cancellation of the Third World Debt (CADTM)

Focus on the Global South International South Group Network (ISGN)

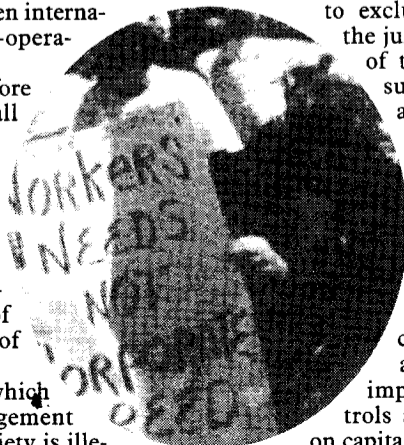
Kairos Europa

Opération Spéciale de Promotion du Monde du Handicap (O.S.P.M.H)

Servicio Paz y Justicia en America Latina

Via Campesina and from Britain, Jubilee 2000

Coalition, UK.



Greek elections PASOK wins again as left is split

**Tassos
Anastasiadis**

Four years of austerity does not seem to have been sufficient for Greek workers to get rid of the social-democratic government (PASOK) in the country's recent elections.

PASOK – which has been in government for more than a decade saw its vote increase from 41.5% at the General Election four years ago and 33% in last year's Euroelections last year to 44 per cent this time round. This was because for many people the key issue was to prevent the return of the right.

But it was only just sufficient for that: For the first time, New Democracy, the major Greek capitalist party, united all the right (liberals and populists), with the exception of two small far right groups that only scraped up a few thousand votes.

New Democracy tried to capitalise on the social discontent that has been growing against the neo-liberal policies of PASOK. They got just one percentage less than PASOK (43% this time from 38% four years ago and 36% last year).

The left continues to attract the majority of the electoral body (55%). In a broad sense we have to count PASOK, the governmental party, as part of the left because of its relationship with the unions. So the political division right-left which is the deformed expression of class divisions remains constantly polarised to the left.

But it is almost exclusively PASOK that has benefited from this polarisation so far. The Stalinist Communist party of Greece (KKE), which had reached nearly 9% last year in the Euro-elections saw its percentage reduced to 5.5%, even less than it was four years ago.

Coalition

Synaspismos (a coalition of progressive and Euro-communist forces) also fared badly. It lost a great number of votes (3.2%, while it had 5.1% four years ago) and just managed to enter parliament. It only achieved this because of a coalition with part of the far left and an ecology party.

DIKKI, a party which was formed from the left wing of the PASOK didn't reach the necessary 3% for representation in parliament. The three organizations of the far left which were represented in these elections (two Maoist plus a splinter group of KKE) managed only a total of 20,000 votes.

The programs of PASOK and ND overlap on many issues. Both support the integration of Greece in the European economic and monetary union and the austerity policies that flow from

the Stability Pact

A modernist fraction of the bourgeoisie wants the opportunity to penetrate the Balkans and Turkey business-wise, which presupposes the use of the Greek state machine for economic and ideological support and not as a political or war machine.

This division of strategy in the Greek bourgeoisie (nationalists versus modernists) is a constant in recent Greek politics and is reflected within both the main parties. Social-democratic Prime Minister Simitis has been rather effective in managing the modernist direction. ND may be more risky, as it could be more sensitive to pressures from the far right.

One of the central themes of ND's campaign was against the influx of immigrants, essentially Albanians, who are considered as a necessary workforce by a great number of employers in the cities and the countryside.

The new PASOK government will find it difficult to carry through its austerity policies – which was one of the reasons for these premature elections. It needs to carry through the privatisation and dismantling of the public pensions system and the rethinking of the last radical education reform.

Workers will resist in a context in which even their vote will be transformed to its opposite! The necessity to conform to EU policy, cultivated also by ND, is the principal problem that the workers have to face. The elections did not change this.

OKDE, the Greek section of the 4th International, had appealed for votes for any of the left parties (except for PASOK), to reinforce the self confidence of the workers movement. Unfortunately this did not happen.

Alternative

The main difficulty is that no credible alternative actually exists. It is true that the KKE has a serious organisational capability and opposes the government on the question of the Euro. But it does so from a nationalist standpoint which pushes it into alliances with reactionary forces. For this reason an old union leader of KKE refused publicly to participate in the electoral campaign of this party.

Synaspismos is too compliant on European policy and a fraction of its members basically want to merge with their great social-democratic (and governmental) friend, PASOK.

Efforts to form a united front by the far left, the women's movements and by local campaigners are developing but cannot yet pose a credible political alternative. Without a doubt this is one of the lessons to be learnt from these elections. Has the left the ability to learn?



Two years on, Gerry Adams and co are still looking to Blair to deliver, while the British seek mainly to placate the unionists

Two years after Good Friday deal

Republicans rue slim pickings from a bare bones agreement

John McAnulty

THE SECOND anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement in Ireland brings with it the realisation that, in the words of one supporter, "it has all the aerodynamics of a flying brick".

The suspension of most of the structures of the agreement after only a few short weeks no longer looks like a temporary glitch.. It is becoming clearer as time goes on that neither London nor Dublin have any clear plan of action in place.

The best that could be expected from their point of view or would be a cobbled together agreement that would prove highly unstable or, more likely, that the fractured agreement will sail through its second anniversary and through the May 22 deadline for arms surrender by the republicans.

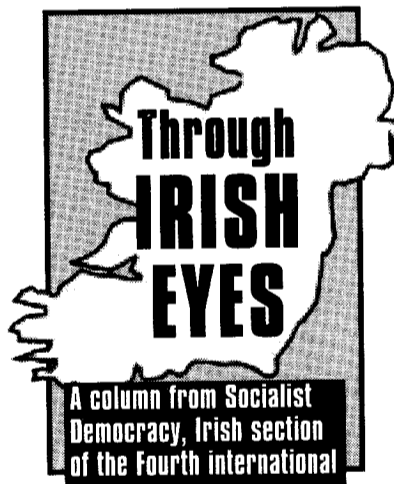
The collapse has been presented as a failure by republicans to hand over arms. It is true that many people, including many republican supporters, believed that the Sinn Fein leadership had agreed to such a handover, but to focus on this is to ignore the role of the unionists.

The reality is that the agreement fell to the right. As first Minister Trimble recently announced, decommissioning of arms as an element of the good Friday agreement was a political impossibility. The decommissioning demand became a rallying cry for the unionist right, a way in which they could express their opposition to any diminution of their sectarian privilege.

The persistent growth of reaction has led to the British partially collapsing the institutions set up by the process. The unionist response has been to look for further concessions, especially the retention of that name RUC (Royal Ulster Constabulary) for the local sectarian police force.

So what now? We are entering a new period where the majority of the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement are not operating, but the agreement remains overwhelmingly dominant politically.

What we have now is a bare bones Good Friday agreement. What remains is British rule, sectarianism and repression and patronage and clientelism. Without government structures to dis-



The RUC are awarded the George Cross, and their sectarian history is endorsed by the British Prime Minister and the Queen.

Prime Minister Blair hints that police reductions will be reversed if there is a security threat. All this feeds further reaction, with Trimble surviving a leadership vote by the skin of his teeth and an anti-agreement candidate selected as the unionist candidate in a Westminster by-election.

Any deal done now must concede to loyalist reaction, and this will make it almost impossible for the Sinn Fein leadership to endorse it.

Meanwhile Sinn Fein continues to proclaim victory. They do this in the same way that other defeated forces do, by constantly redefining their goals. Success is now defined as Sinn Fein becoming a large reformist nationalist party in government in both parts of Ireland.

To this end their recent Ard Fheis had the hilarious sight of a debate about coalition with capitalist parties in the South. As if a party whose main demand is coalition with the unionist party in colonial administration in the North would balk at a coalition with the main capitalist party that it has been in bed with throughout the evolution of the peace process!

The process here is a familiar one. The handpicked delegates have long passed the point where they could offer any serious opposition to the leadership. They still feel sentiment for the good old days and need to be talked around. The decision to hold a delegate conference is in practice acceptance of coalition.

The problem here for the Sinn Fein leadership is that bare bone process which excludes them from government in the North makes their claims of victory implausible and leaves them open to the criticism of former leading activists like Brendan Hughes – that they have abandoned the programme of republicanism and gone into alliance with local gombeen capitalists who have a long history of exploiting republican prisoners.

The long sleep of the peace process is over, but there is a long road yet to travel.

guise this reality there is a growing layer of cynicism.

As Brendan Hughes points out in *Fourthwrite* (opposite), a few have gained and moved on, while working class republicans are left behind.

Examples of the emptiness of the reform process are indicated by the Saville enquiry into Bloody Sunday, which kicked off with a series of smears against Sinn Fein leader Martin McGuinness.

Reports have been published about the reform of criminal justice which were mainly about incorporating middle class Catholics more firmly into the state administration and providing a back door to incorporate former republicans through community justice schemes. The whole network of laws representing colonial repression are to remain.

The British remain without any real threat. Their rule is unchallenged, yet there is an essential instability that threatens long-term danger. In the short term their task is to save Trimble.

The main weapon they have historically deployed against the unionist right is appeasement. The row about the RUC is a good example of this.

The right wing demand that the name RUC be retained. The British, having little to offer nationalism other than a change in name, refuse.

They then attempt to appease by offering everything else to the right.

New magazine launched

IN MARCH a new magazine called *Fourthwrite* was launched in Dublin by the Irish Republican Writers Group. This group is made of former republican prisoners and includes such figures as Tommy McKearney who was on the first hunger strike in 1981.

According to the magazine editorial they aim to be open and honest in their discussions and will publish articles of interest even if they are in profound disagreement with the contents of the articles.

This is already in evidence in the first issue which carries two articles from a unionist perspective. "The purpose is to facilitate discussion and analysis of republican ideas. Of primary interest are those ideas which deal with strategic matters and which address the question 'what is to be done?'"

Not surprisingly many of the articles deal with the thorny issue of the peace process and the current republican leadership.

At the public meeting in Dublin where the magazine was given its second launch, Tommy McKearney accused the Sinn Fein leadership of having abandoned their programme and settled for managing the British administration in Ireland. Likewise Anthony McIntyre pointed out that what the current leadership have gained could have been obtained at any point in the last thirty years. It was not what they had gone to jail for, it was not what the struggle had been about. The struggle was always about more than bums on parliamentary seats and nice suits.

The sharp criticism levelled at the Sinn Fein leadership has caused some controversy: nowhere is this more evident than in the storm surrounding the interview carried out with Brendan Hughes.

Hughes is a former commander of the IRA in Belfast and also the former o/c of the republican prisoners, a position he stepped down from to lead the 1980 hunger strike.

The interview caused a run on the magazine which had to go into a second print run, much to the surprise of those involved. Hughes is widely respected in republican circles and his criticisms have hurt the Sinn Fein leadership, prompting Danny Morrison to write a long review entitled *Too Forthright*.

Although much can be said of the positive impact of a group of ex-prisoners expressing opposition to the peace process through *Fourthwrite*, the magazine is to be found wanting on the subject of socialism. Not one mention of it is made, although will be hopefully overcome in future issues.

At the launch Tommy McKearney accepted that there was a need to enter into dialogue not just with protestants but also with the southern working class who have also been led up the garden path by an undemocratic bureaucracy which has stifled debate over its role in the administration of southern capitalism.

Hopefully *Fourthwrite* will take up the challenge presented by addressing the needs of southern workers and raising the issue of socialism as a way forward for anti-imperialists north and south.

Those who wish to contact *Fourthwrite* can write to *Fourthwrite*, PO BOX 31, Belfast BT12 7EE or Mackers1@cableol.co.uk. Web site: <http://homepage.eircom.net/~repwrite>



The armed struggle has not delivered people's politics or revolution to the nationalist fighters, and some veterans are now speaking out

Interview with Brendan Hughes "A few republicans have slotted themselves into comfortable positions and left the rest of us behind"

ANTHONY MCINTYRE interviewed BRENDAN HUGHES, former IRA leader in Belfast and OC of republican prisoners throughout much of the Blanket Protest in Long Kesh, for the first issue of *Fourthwrite*.

Q: After such long term involvement in the republican struggle do you feel a sense of satisfaction at the way things have turned out?

A: No. I do not feel any satisfaction whatsoever. All the questions raised in the course of this struggle have not been answered and the republican struggle has not been concluded. We were naive ever to have expected the Brits to get on the boat and go. But the things that we cherished such as a thirty-two county democratic socialist republic are no longer mentioned.

Q: The former republican prisoner Tommy Gorman in the Andersonstown News bewails the absence of radical republicanism and has questioned if it was all worth it. What is your view?

A: Let me answer it this way. When I came out from jail in 1986 having spent more than twelve years there I found work on a building site on the Falls Road. Some of the people I thought I was fighting for were now seeking to exploit me. I recalled my father telling me stories about earlier campaigns when republicans such as Billy McKee came out from jail and were employed by Eastwoods for peanuts.

And there I was decades later digging holes for the same peanuts.

Q: But there are many who feel it was worth it.

A: True. But amongst their number are those who have big houses and guaranteed incomes. Of course it was worth it for them. I recall going to the Republican movement and asking that it highlight the exploitative cowboy builders on the Falls Road who were squeezing the republican poor for profit. The movement censored me and refused to allow me to speak. Once they published a piece that I wrote – or should I say did not write, as the thing was so heavily censored as to be totally unrecognisable from the article I actually wrote.

Some of the cowboy builders had influence with movement members. Whether true or not, there were many whispers doing the rounds that these members were taking backhanders and so on. In any event this led to a vicious circle in which money created power, which in turn created corruption and then greed for more money. Dozens of ex-prisoners are exploited by these firms. They run the black economy of West Belfast simply to make profit and not out of a sense of helping others.

Q: Is the future bleak?

A: People are demoralised and disillusioned. Many are tired but it would still be possible to pull enough together to first question what has happened and then to try to change things.

Q: But has Sinn Fein

not been sucked so far into the system that any salvaging of the republican project must now look a very daunting task?

A: While I am not pushing for any military response, our past has shown that all is never lost. In 1972 we had to break the truce in order to avoid being sucked in. In 1975 the British came at us again. And from prison through the Brownie articles written by Gerry Adams we warned the IRA that it was being sucked in.

We broke the British on that but it took hard work. And now they are at it again. And it will be even harder this time. Think of all the lives that could have been saved had we accepted the 1975 truce. That alone would have justified acceptance. We fought on and for what? – what we rejected in 1975

Q: What do you feel when you read that Michael Oatley (formerly of MI6) expresses support for the Sinn Fein leadership, and that David Goodall, who helped negotiate the Anglo Irish Agreement in 1985 said recently that it is all going almost exactly according to plan?

A: These are the comments of men supremely confident that they have it all sewn up. What we hammered into each other time after time in jail was that a central part of Brit counter insurgency strategy was to mould leaderships whom they could deal with.

So I get so demoralised when I read about this. I

look at South Africa and I look at here and I see that the only change has been in appearances. No real change has occurred. A few republicans have slotted themselves into comfortable positions and left the rest of us behind.

Q: Has the nationalist middle class been the real beneficiary of the armed struggle?

A: Well, it has not been republicans – apart from those republicans eager to join that class.

Q: It seems that the social dimension is your real concern regarding republican direction?

A: No. There is much more than that. It has been the futility of it all. From a nationalist perspective alone what we have now we could have had at any time in the last twenty-five years. But even nationalist demands don't seem to matter any more. And in the process we have lost much of our honesty, sincerity and comradeship.

Q: But could it not be argued that this developed because people are war weary?

A: In 1969 we had a naive enthusiasm about what we wanted. Now in 1999 we have no enthusiasm. And it is not because people are war weary – they are politics weary. The same old lies regurgitated week in week out. With the war politics had some substance. Now it has none.

The political process has created a class of professional liars and unfortunately it contains many republicans. But I still think that potential exists to bring about

something different. And I speak not just about our own community but about the loyalist community also. Ex-prisoners from both and not the politicians can effect some radical change.

Q: Do you sense any radical potential amongst loyalist ex-prisoners?

A: Yes. Very much so. Not only are they much better than the old regime, they have experienced through their own struggle the brutality, hypocrisy and corruption of the regime against which republicans fought for so long.

Q: What are your views on the Good Friday Agreement?

A: What is it? Have we agreed to the British staying in the six counties? If we listen to Francie Molloy that is what republicans have signed up to. The only advantage is that unionism has changed. The landed gentry has been smashed but only because of the war, not the Good Friday Agreement. Overall, the facade has been cleaned up but the bone structure remains the same. The state we set out to smash still exists. Look at the RUC for example.

Q: Do you sense that Sinn Fein is going to settle for something like disband Ronnie Flanagan?

A: Would it really surprise you?

Q: Do you sense that the republican leadership fears or despises democratic republicanism?

A: The response to democratic republicanism has always been pleas to stay within the army line. Even doing this interview with you generates a reluctance within me. The republican leadership has always exploited our loyalty.

Q: What do you say to those people who are unhappy but are pulled the other way by feelings of loyalty?

A: Examine their consciences. Take a good look at what is going on. If they agree – OK. If not, then speak out.

Does President Putin represent the last act of the Stalinist counterrevolution? Enter the Dragon!

In Part I of this article (issue 33) DAVE PACKER discussed the seamless transfer of power from President Yeltsin to his chosen protégé Vladimir Putin, since elected President of the Russian Federation.

Yeltsin established his political grip on society with relative ease, but this was not the same as restoring capitalism, which proved far more difficult.

The IMF-endorsed "shock therapy" which Yeltsin tried to implement led inevitably to social and economic chaos and a catastrophic collapse in industrial output – the biggest economic collapse in peacetime – while mafia-like crime grew rampant and the state became increasingly dislocated.

As Tony Blair and other western leaders cynically pay homage to the new strong man in the Kremlin, "their man" President Putin, the Russian crisis deepens and the final act of the Stalinist counterrevolution approaches its climax.

Reactionary Russian chauvinism has been whipped up by Putin and the pro-capitalist elite as a political weapon, especially over the Chechen war. However, this weapon is aimed not just against the Chechen people fighting for self-determination, but is also a dagger pointed at the heart of the Russian working class.

Nationalism in Russia today is a powerful ideological force in the hands of the pro-capitalist political elite which cuts across the underlying class polarisation which is taking place, dividing and confusing the masses.

Unfortunately, many of those who claim to speak for the working class, such as the leadership of the so-called Communist Party, have also played the nationalist card and supported the slaughter in Chechnya.

The restoration of capitalism under Yeltsin was at an impasse. By August 1998 the social, economic and political crisis reached catastrophic proportions with a collapse of the rouble and a default on Russia's debt-repayment to the IMF. This in turn contributed to the growing world financial crisis at that time.

Yeltsin's failures over ten years to fully restore a viable and stable capitalist system had profound socio-political reasons and were not due to Yeltsin's drunken clowning or the unfathomable "Russian soul", as is sometimes suggested by the



Two of a kind? Authoritarian Blair with new-found friend Putin.

Western media. Nor is it all down to a misapplication of free market policies pursued by the IMF, as billionaire speculator George Soros claims.

Rather, as Marx explained, it is not possible to lay hold of the existing state apparatus, and fundamentally change/overthrow an existing social system and mode of production.

Revolution or counterrevolution is required, which means the destruction of the old state apparatus – which in Russia today has nearly been achieved – and the creation of a new state power. The disintegration and dislocation of the Russian state is not the same as its total destruction.

Petr Aven, president of Alfa, Russia's biggest and most successful private bank, esteemed economist and a former Russian trade minister, understands this crucial issue. He supported Putin in the presidential elections and publicly argues that the new President must end the chaos by using totalitarian methods.

First, Putin must assemble a reliable military force out of the ruins of the old state apparatus. He suggests that the regime should be modelled on that of Augusto Pinochet.

In a recent interview he said: "Pinochet tried to enforce obedience to the law, and sometimes that's difficult for a country. Sometimes you need to use force. The only role of the state is to use force when needed."

And again: "The only way ahead is for fast liberal reforms (more "shock therapy" – DP), building public support for that path but also using totalitarian force to achieve that. Russia has no other choice." (*The Guardian*, 31.3.00)

Putin's chief economic adviser German Gref also insists that they

will make the transition to a normal market system, "in the shortest possible time." Putin, Gref and Aven understand that this requires the closure of thousands of enterprises and the sacking of millions of workers – this would make the Great Depression look small beer.

This was why Yeltsin pulled back from the brink and looked foolish and compromised. The bureaucracy knows that the working class would be kicked into violent resistance if such a brutal, counterrevolutionary policy was adopted.

But can the former Red Army be relied upon to impose the will of the emergent, and still narrowly based, capitalist class? Putin will first have to construct a reliable military force which is entirely loyal to the President. This is the symbolic meaning of his New Year's Day visit to the army in Chechnya the day after Yeltsin's resignation.

However, Putin will have noted the important increase in votes for the Communist Party, his main opponent in the March Presidential elections. Despite a lacklustre campaign they reached 30%, making the CP by far the largest party.

Despite its mainly working class vote, the Communist Party remains a Stalinist party, putting a nationalist and pro-capitalist policy. However it is not a pro IMF/neo-liberal party, and it has campaigned against the corrupt theft of national assets.

This is why important sections of the working class support it. Nonetheless, it is not a party of political revolution and socialism which is the only fundamental choice which would meet the needs of the working class.

The first part of this article (issue 33) maintained that the economy we saw in Yeltsin's Russia had many of the surface appearances and paraphernalia of capitalism,

but was mostly without the substance. More than any other event, the 1998 crash made this clear. The restoration of capitalism in Russia had not only stalled, but had hardly got off the ground.

"Economic genocide" and the failure of the IMF policy.

Today, IMF "shock therapy" is seen by ordinary Russians as little more than "economic genocide." Overall, the shock tactics have led to a massive decline in GDP, stagnation and partial functioning of whole industries, indebtedness, collapse of welfare, etc.

While this has made the few in the political elite enormously rich, the international bourgeoisie have increasingly perceived the Russian "transition" as a bottomless pit, and the economy a 'basket case.'

Western bankers lost \$20 billion in the 1998 debt default alone. The crash caused imports of consumer goods, mainly for the bureaucrats and capitalists, to fall drastically (50% of all consumer goods were imported before August, 1998). Boris Kagalitsky writes:

"The policies of the IMF were based on the assumption that a stronger currency automatically leads to a stronger economy. The currency should be strengthened at whatever price, including the decline of production, the impoverishment of the population and even the disappearance of most basic services in the spheres of health care, education and social security." [*Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, No. 61, 1998]

Although it is claimed that 50% of GDP is now privatised, the form of this is often little more than a 'juridical formality', a distribution of vouchers which excluded outsiders, making the workers and managers the direct or collective owners.

This did not lead to restructuring of the undercapitalised enterprise collectives, just mass under-employment rather than mass unemployment. The law of value still does not generally operate in the Russian economy, where barter is the order of the day.

However, after the 1998 crash, increasing numbers of unpaid workers were forced to sell their enterprise vouchers, mainly to the management, and between August 1998 and April 1999 real unemployment rose by 30%, while wages continued to fall by approximately 40%, despite a small economic recovery.

Nonetheless, there is a widespread survival of companies and industries (ie thousands of factories) which would not survive in a genuine capitalist market operating according to the laws of value: in capitalist terms they are bankrupt. Nor do the privatisations include all the big industrial sectors, parts of which remain state property.

Eventually, if the working class can't assert their control and management, the law of value will assert itself: but in the meantime, the existence of the socialised sector is crucial for subsidising the much smaller capitalist sector with cheap raw materials, fuel, transport, engineering, metal work, and so on.

Moreover, the competitive pricing of exported commodities is in effect due to subsidies from the state, through payments to workers in kind, state benefits such as low cost housing, cheap transport and health care, etc, which are hidden costs of production and reproduction not added to the prices of goods sold on the world market. It is a combination of this factor and the devaluation of the rouble which has created the recently announced \$30 billion "trade surplus" (*The Economist*, Feb 19-25, 2000)

Nor do the figures include the huge black market or the widespread private/personal subsistence production of food. It is estimated that a staggering 50% of all internal trade is now barter. The result is that large parts of these 'new market economies' are small scale and by-pass taxation.

At the root of the problem for the neo-liberals is low investment and a slow rate of capital accumulation. Investment in Russia is chronically low even compared with East Europe.

Prior to 1998 there was a snowballing in the number of banks to more than 500, however, most were involved in speculation rather than investment and many went bust when the rouble collapsed and Russia defaulted, in August, 1998. In Russia investment in industry stands at about \$50 per head of population compared to \$2,700 per head in Hungary.

A rapid restoration of capitalism in Russia requires a massive injection of capital, as occurred in East Germany, only on an impossibly larger scale.

Loans from Western banks and the World bank/IMF are crucial but not enough.

Indeed many of these loans have been directed not towards investment in infrastructure or industry

The Communist Party is not a party of political revolution and socialism, which is the only fundamental choice which would meet the needs of the working class.

but mostly embezzled and laundered back into Western bank accounts belonging to the mafia barons. The result has been a net outflow of capital. Much of the profit from socialised heavy industries, which are still functioning, also ends up in foreign bank accounts.

Foreign buy-outs have not been without their difficulties either. An example is the large Vyborg Paper and Cellulose Mill bought out by British investor Alcem UK in 1997. The plant's 2,100 workers, fearing massive layoffs and saying they were owed more than \$8 million in back wages, occupied the plant.

They posted their own armed guards, organised a democratic strike committee to operate the plant, and fought for eighteen months to keep out the new owners. They ran the plant under workers' management and used the profits to feed their families.

The workers gained wide and active solidarity from local and regional working class organisations, and even managed to block the highway running from Helsinki to St Petersburg to attract attention to their struggle.

In the autumn of 1999, when the strike committee was planning to block the railway line, the authorities acted by organising a dawn raid by special heavily armed riot police which resulted in a shoot-out. This time the state won, and occupied the plant, but the struggle continues.

This struggle not only illustrates a high level of solidarity and combativity with advanced experiences of democratic workers' control and management, but the use of special armed forces, the kind that Putin will need to carry forward the counter-revolution.

Last but not least, the agricultural sector continues to operate essentially on the basis of state-owned collective farms. Agriculture has been even more resistant even to formal privatisation than industry – since even with tractors, small family-operated plots of land would be far less efficient than the giant mechanised collective farms. However, when the machinery wears out, if it can't be replaced, there will be a retreat into smaller peasant holdings.

The human cost of "shock therapy"

In all the countries of the former Warsaw Pact, to a greater or lesser extent, women, children, the disabled, refugees and pensioners have been especially devastated by the neo-liberal offensive and the "shock therapy".

A UN Development Programme report (Summer 1999) provides some stunning figures, and confirms the picture that can be gleaned from occasional reports in publications like the *Financial Times* and the *Economist*. It claims that the economic transition and upheavals of the 1990s;

"have been calamitous for a vast swathe of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Leading to widespread poverty, alarming falls in life expectancy, widening inequalities between the sexes, falling investment in education, the collapse of public health and the spread of disease, crime, nationalist violence and suicide."

It shows how these countries have been pushed into a "Great Depression," plunging, "more than 100 million people into poverty with many millions more hovering precariously above subsistence." It cites World Bank figures showing that in 1989 about 14 million people in the former communist bloc lived on less than \$4 a day.

By the mid-1990s that number had risen to about 147 million. After the Crash in August 1998 the numbers falling below the poverty

line shot up to about 40%. Poverty is endemic while malnutrition affects millions.

The number of pregnant Russian women suffering anaemia trebled between 1989 and 1994, while in Moldova between 20 and 50 per cent of children had rickets from a lack of Vitamin A.

The state's inability to pay wages or benefits on a regular basis has been a major cause of poverty. In 1992 alone, after the first year of "shock therapy", real wages fell, due mainly to wage cuts and inflation, by over one third and average personal consumption had fallen by over 40%.

This situation got much worse with inflation at the end of the 1990s reaching about 2,500%. By 1998 wage arrears in Ukraine and Russia amounted to more than 4 per cent of GDP. This is the good news – in Kazakhstan they are estimated to amount to some 40 per cent of GDP.

The UN report shows that there is a widening inequality in wealth and incomes. This is exacerbated by hyper-inflation, which tends especially to affect the food prices. Between 1991 and 1996, food prices in Armenia rose by 24,000%, whereas non-food items rose by only 7.800%. The weakest in society, pensioners, the disabled, single mothers, have been exposed to the most acute financial difficulties, by losing access to benefits.

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, there has been a decline in life expectancy almost across the whole region, with falls of at least four years in countries such as Russia. Average male life expectancy is now only 58! Several million people have not survived the 1990s who would have done if the life expectancy levels had been maintained.

Between 1991 and 1994 infant mortality increased by nearly 15% and things are much worse today. Accompanying these developments is a grim rise in suicide.

Tuberculosis and other diseases have returned as big killers, especially in the former Soviet Union. AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases are also spreading rapidly.

Women have increasingly been pushed out of public life and out of the workplace – inequality between the sexes is growing. Violence against women has also risen with physical abuse from spouses becoming more noticeable and more women are falling victim to crime.

Women desperate to find employment have found themselves forced into prostitution both within their region and by organised crime networks in western Europe.

There is a dramatic deterioration of education, due to sharp falls in spending on schools and universities. Almost everywhere enrolment and attendance rates, especially at pre-primary schools have fallen.

In the former Soviet Union, more than 30,000 pre-school facilities were closed between 1991 and 1995. Overcrowding, dilapidation, lack of heating, underpaid teachers and a lack of health checks have also taken their toll.

Underlying all this social deprivation is the economic melt-down caused by forced marketisation. Banker Petr Aven advises Putin that even more cuts in welfare and social provision are necessary if capitalism is to be restored. The spectre of a most brutal and untrammelled capitalism haunts the region.



Stalin (shown here on right with Churchill and US President Truman at Yalta post-war summit) used vicious police repression of Soviet working class as base to strike deals with imperialism.

The nature of the Russian Federation today

The conclusion of this analysis is that the Russian Federation contains a peculiar combination of property ownership; social property, and private property, including corrupt accumulation.

Despite the growth of private enterprise and the market system, neither the bulk of production and distribution nor labour is dominated by the law of the market or the law of value. Also, debt, wages and taxes are regularly not paid, and there is a process of de-monetarisation and a widespread system of barter.

A majority of workers in industries such as extraction, transport, manufacturing, even many service industries such as health, still have

offensive and the IMF's project.

Paradoxically, the difficulties in restoring capitalism are due to the social strength and the traditional fear of the working class by the bureaucracy, while at the same time the reason restoration has made such advances is due to the political and organisational weakness (compared to the generation of 1917) of the working class.

Although, unlike in a capitalist society, the struggle of the workers always becomes directly political struggle, there is no major political party representing the interests of the working class. The crisis of leadership is profound.

The fact that the Russian Federation has a rabidly pro-capitalist government dedicated to the restoration of capitalism is not the only factor in determining the class character of the state.

For Marxists, government is not synonymous with the state (although it is part of it), which is a distinct apparatus for the enforcement of class rule.

Nor does the existence of an embryonic capitalist class mean that it is the ruling class – even if its representatives are in the government. That the picture looks bleak and counterrevolution is gathering strength is undeniable, but so far it lacks the social weight, or adequate alternative state structures, or the accumulated capital to carry it through.

A parallel can be drawn with the overthrow of the

English Commonwealth and the restoration of Charles II in 1660, or with the fall of the French Republic and the restoration of the Bourbons in 1820, neither of which led to a feudal counterrevolution (whatever were the subjective ideas in the heads of the reactionary monarchists) – this was Proudhon's mistake.

As Marx explained these royal houses became capitalist monarchies: conservative regimes composed of feudalists and aristocrats but based on capitalist states and a predominantly capitalist mode of production.

In the last analysis, our understanding of the process of counterrevolution underway in the Russian Federation must be influenced by our understanding of the class character of the state, and its structures including the army.

The social class which holds state power (which is distinct from governmental power) is the not the embryonic capitalist class or its

lieutenants in the mafia. The working class remains in that position through the mechanism of the multi-millioned remnants of Stalinist bureaucracy (a parasitic layer of the workers' movement – not of the capitalist class).

This is true even though, for the most part, the foremost ambition in life for these bureaucrats is to become capitalists – and a minority of them already have become capitalists, albeit often in an illegal, gangsterised form.

In this Marxist sense outlined above, and despite appearances to the contrary, Russia can't really be called a capitalist state. The Russian Federation at the turn of the millennium is a hybrid social formation undergoing a capitalist mutation.

This counterrevolution is being driven forward by the dominant sections of the old state bureaucracy which attempts to transform itself into a new capitalist class by looting the socialised sectors.

Russia is a transitional society in reverse gear, with parallel and competing modes of production. The economy of Russia, along with most of the countries of the ex-USSR, is no longer a planned socialised economy, yet neither is it predominantly subject to the law of value or integrated into the world market.

To call these states transitional or hybrid societies is true but avoids the crucial issue for revolutionaries; the class nature of the state (which has to be overthrown, "smashed").

A society cannot just evolve from one social system to another, it requires huge and violent ruptures – (counter)revolutions which overthrow the existing state forms and bring the construction of new ones. It is in this sense that Russia remains essentially a collapsed, degenerated workers state.

There has never been an established capitalist state without a hegemonic, stable capitalist class, which by making the revolution (or counterrevolution) constructs a new capitalist state machinery in its image.

However, we can be sure that capitalism and a capitalist state will be restored if the masses do not intervene to stop it. The steady destruction of socialised property and the consolidation of the market, can only lead to the extreme impoverishment and social atomisation of the masses.

This is laying the basis for a counterrevolutionary dictatorship. Enter the Dragon! Vladimir Putin could be that ruthless leader the counterrevolution has been waiting for.



Russian soldiers survey Chechnyan ruins from the top of a tank

jobs – of a kind, although unemployment is steadily rising. Most manufacturing enterprises are on part time and wages are in arrears, however, company shops, housing, even nurseries, often still exist.

To some extent this maintains the social weight of the working class in society. However, it also maintains the old corporate, paternalist structure which ties the workers to the management who run the enterprises, in so far as they function. The same managers often cream off some of the surplus for their own ends. Corruption is endemic.

Although more than 50% of enterprises are formally privatised, it is clear that non-capitalist social relations continue to predominate in a decayed form because capitalist social relations have not replaced them to become the dominant mode of production. Such a system of transition in reverse can't be stabilised for long, but it does reflect the failure so far of the neo-liberal

FIGHT for the Fourth International

Vol 1. No 1-11, 1936-1937) The Marxist Group. **FIGHT** (VOL. 1, NO 1-4, 1938)

Revolutionary Socialist League, S.L. Publications Goteborg, Sweden.

Reviewed by Charlie van Gelderen

FOR ANYONE who is interested in the history of the Trotskyist movement in Britain, these publications are invaluable. As the very useful preface by Al Richardson makes clear, the movement was pervaded with sectarian fissures and splits. The main issue was whether the still tiny but growing Trotskyists should work within the ILP, the Labour Party, or set up an independent party.

Contest over this strategy went right back to the first Trotskyist group in Britain, the so-called Balham Group, led by Reg Groves, Hugo Dewar and Harry Wicks. They opposed Trotsky's call on them to enter the centrist ILP which was then moving to the left, proclaiming the principle of an independent revolutionary proletarian party.

Trotsky poured scorn on this, reminding them that not only were they not a revolutionary party, they were hardly a propaganda group. While the majority, under the leadership of Bert Matlow, entered the ILP and set up the Marxist Group, Groves and his supporters entered the Labour Party and the Labour League of Youth soon afterwards, and Groves stood as Labour Party candidate for Aylesbury in he 1936

Lessons from British Trotskyism in the 30s



In full flow. Trotsky is filmed speaking in Copenhagen in 1932

General Election.

Within the Marxist Group, a struggle commenced about the tactics to be pursued. Some, including Harber and Margaret Johns, were already working inside the Labour Party round the journals *Militant* and *Youth Militant*. This had the full support of Trotsky. Inside the Marxist Group, Matlow led the campaign for entry into the Labour Party; while Cooper and Ballard wanted to remain inside the ILP.

CLR James, who was in contact with the ultra leftists, Oehler, Field and Weisbord in the United

States, was now won over to the conception that independence of a revolutionary organisation was a matter of principle.

Despite these differences, which undoubtedly had a stifling effect on the growth of Trotskyism in Britain, these journals present a panoramic view of the movement in the turbulent years of the 1930s.

The bloody struggle in Spain, revolution and counter-revolution, is fully covered. Here also differences developed. James took a far more favourable view of the centrist POUM at the

start of the civil war than Trotsky and the International Secretariat. The second issue of *FIGHT* asserted that POUM "alone in Spain was advocating the socialist revolution," and "had issued many correct slogans."

There were also differences on China, where Trotsky called for the full support for the Chinese in the struggle against Japan, James described Chiang Kai-Shek as a British puppet, and called for his overthrow.

The very first issue of *FIGHT* carried a special supplement on the first of

the Moscow Trials and the start of Stalin's campaign to liquidate the leadership of the Bolshevik Party. Throughout its brief existence *FIGHT* carried on the fight against the Stalinist lies and led the campaign in defence of Leon Trotsky.

Degeneration

While the Stalinist press praised the new, Stalinist constitution of the USSR (1936), as the "most democratic constitution in the world" (Pat Sloan in *Russia Today*), *FIGHT* published Trotsky's analysis, which defines it as "a stage in the

degeneration of the workers' state."

This article is also useful because it answers the question whether the Soviet Union was still a workers' state, and why we defended it:

"The USSR is a state which is supported upon the property relations created by a proletarian revolution and ruled by a labour bureaucracy in the interests of the new privileged strata. The Soviet Union can be called a workers' state in approximately the same way - despite the tremendous qualitative differences - as a trade union ruled and betrayed by opportunists, i.e. the agents of Capital can be called a workers' organisation.

"In the same way as revolutionaries defend every trade union, even the most reformist, from the class enemies, so the parties of the Fourth International defend the USSR from the blows of Imperialism without one moment ceasing to struggle against the reactionary Stalinist apparatus..."

It is very tempting to quote further from the rich material in these publications - the exposure of the lies of the Moscow Trials; the deception of the Popular Front; the support of the colonial revolution; the defence of the Spanish working class, not only against Franco but also against the Stalinist and Social Democratic betrayals; the fight against Fascism; laying the foundations for a new revolutionary party - the British section of the Fourth International.

It is all here, a rich tapestry of the history of the working class in the turbulent thirties. Get it if you can: and if you can't afford it, get your branch and your local library to buy it.

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

Socialist Outlook



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 2UJ**, and we'll be in touch.

Tony Cliff – a personal reminiscence

Charlie van Gelderen

I FIRST MET Tony Cliff shortly after his arrival from Palestine in September 1946. As Ygael Gluckstein, he was already well known in Trotskyist circles through his penetrating Marxist analysis of the situation in what we in those days referred to as the Middle East, a geographical conception of that territory between the Western imperialist powers (Britain, France, the Netherlands) and their possessions in the Far East.

Not without some justification, Jock Haston, then a leader of British Trotskyists, spoke of him as 'the Lenin of the Middle East'.

At that time, I was living with my wife and daughter in a two roomed flat in Ladbroke Grove, London, sharing a kitchen and bathroom.

Cliff and his South African born wife, Chanie, came for a meal with us. When Tony saw the 'opulence' in which we were living, he exclaimed, 'So much room for only three people. In Palestine there would be at least two families living in such space. Chanie and I will be moving in on Monday.' That is just what they did.

He was living with me when the debate about the class nature of the Soviet Union opened in the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), the British section of the Fourth International.

The question was raised by Jock Haston, supported by Ted Grant, at the conference of the RCP in 1946. The International Secretariat asked Cliff to take up the cudgels in defence of the traditional position of the International, that the Soviet Union was a workers' state, albeit with bureaucratic deformations.

I still remember vividly Cliff saying 'The Old Man [Trotsky] is not yet cold in his grave and already they want to renege on his teachings'.

He took time off from active political work to go to the British Museum Reading Room. 'I will destroy them!' he said to me before disappearing.

I think he spent about six weeks to two months in this intellectual retreat. During that period the discussion in the RCP continued and we eventually came to the conclusion that not only was the USSR still a deformed workers' state, but that this appellation also applied to those countries which came under Soviet domination and where the economy was restructured to assimilate to that of the Soviet Union.

When Tony emerged from his self-imposed exile, one of his first meetings was with Ted Grant. 'You are quite right, Ted, the Soviet Union cannot be defined as a workers' state. It is state capitalism'.

He then elaborated his conclusions in the biggest internal bulletin ever produced by the RCP. It was reprinted in a special edition of Workers International News and subsequently published as *Russia – A Marxist Analysis*. The State Capitalist Tendency was born.

History has pronounced judgement on Cliff's theories. In my view, the manner of the collapse of the Soviet Union proves him wrong. But this is still open to argument.

I salute Tony Cliff for his tremendous contributions to Marxist theory and, despite episodes like the Korean War, his loyalty to the working class and his lifelong battle for international socialism.

Tony Cliff - a leading figure on British Left

Alan Thornett

Tony Cliff, who died on Sunday April 9 at the age of 82, was a major figure of the far-left in Britain and internationally. He built an organisation in Britain, which during the 1990s, has been by far the biggest on the far-left.

Whilst I have had a range of disagreements with his politics and analysis the contribution he made to revolutionary politics in Britain was clearly substantial. His energy and integrity will be greatly missed and the workers' movement will be the poorer without him.

I first met Tony Cliff nearly 40 years ago when I was a young shop steward in the car industry in Oxford and still a member of the Communist Party, even if a dissident one. There were two Trotskyist organisations in Oxford at the time the Socialist Labour League (SLL) and the International Socialists (IS).

The SLL was a growing organisation which had won the leadership of the Labour Party's youth organisation the Young Socialists, and was recruiting young people in quite large numbers and had an impressive trade union intervention in some parts of industry. The IS was a much smaller organisation seeking to build itself a base in industry. The major problems with the SLL's internal regime were not apparent to us at that time.

My growing interest in Trotskyism, along with other militants from the car industry, was triggered by contact with a group of SLL students in the University.

In the same period we had a discussion with Tony Cliff as well. He came and addressed a group of us from the car plants. We were unconvinced by Cliff's rank and file politics, and IS's consequent reluctance to take positions in the trade unions and shop stewards movement.

Support

Of course it was key to build support amongst the rank-and-file. But to build only amongst the rank and file, and as a result leave key leadership positions in the hands of the right-wing to be used against the rank-and-file never made sense to us.

The other issue of disagreement was on the theory of 'state capitalism'. Tony Cliff had long rejected Trotsky's analysis of the Soviet Union as a degenerated workers' state, set out in *Revolution Betrayed*, in favour of the idea that it had been state capitalist from some point in the second half of the 1920s.

We proposed a debate between Tony Cliff and SLL leader Gerry Healy on the issue, but in

the end it took place with Healy and a local member of the IS.

Our decision to join the SLL a couple of years later was based on our rejection of Tony Cliff's two key ideas, rank and fileism and state capitalism.

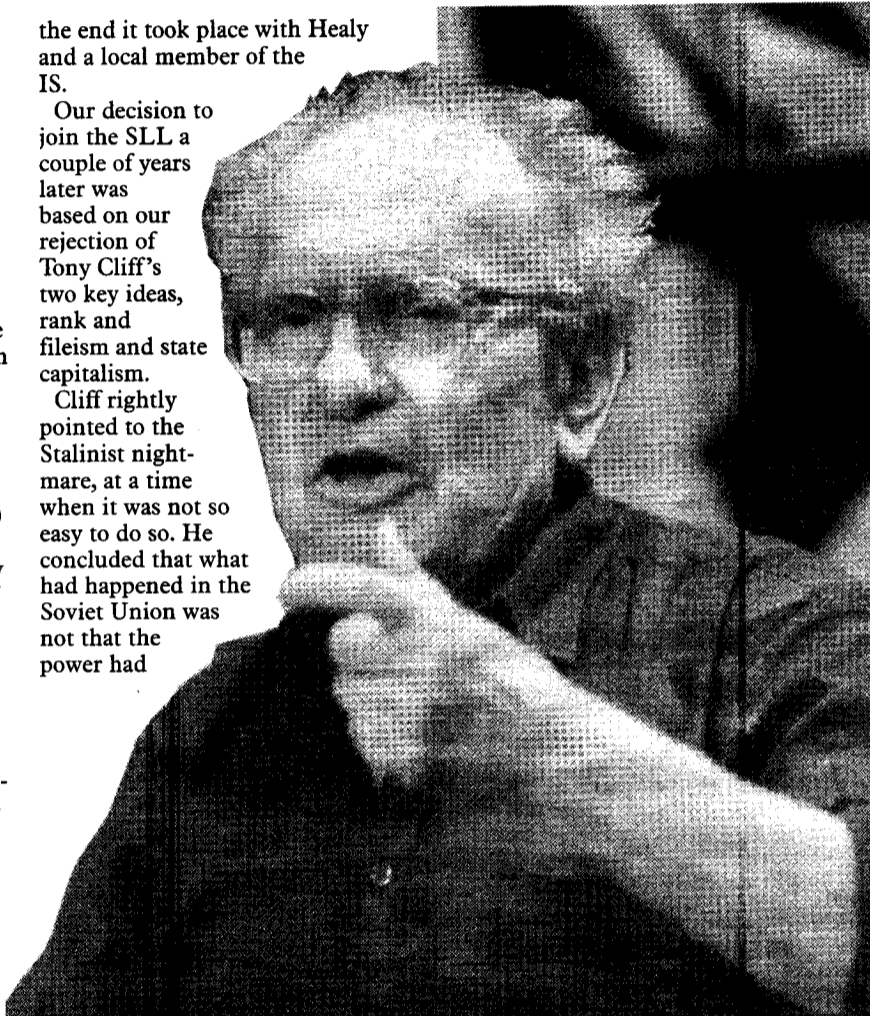
Cliff rightly pointed to the Stalinist nightmare, at a time when it was not so easy to do so. He concluded that what had happened in the Soviet Union was not that the power had

been taken from the working class by a counter revolutionary bureaucracy on the basis of existing property relations, but that the mode of production had changed back to a form of capitalism - state capitalism. The bureaucracy were now a new ruling class extracting surplus value and accumulating capital as capitalism does.

This led him to conclude that there was nothing at all to defend in the USSR and that it was as much an imperialist power as the USA. The practical application of this theory came when he took a position of neutrality in the Korean war, but it is a position which was not carried through consistently.

The IS/SWP was not neutral in the Vietnam war but correctly opposed US imperialism and later developed a more consistent anti-imperialist position whilst maintaining its 'Neither Washington nor Moscow' slogan.

Tony Cliff saw the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the USSR and the Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe as a massive vindication of the theory of state capitalism. This view was shared by the SWP as a whole, and it gave them confidence at a time when the Communist Parties went into free fall in many countries including Britain and sections of the far left drew pessimistic conclusions out of these events.



at all.

Of course Russia and the other ex-USSR countries have rabidly pro-capitalist governments. And they have an emerging comprador capitalist class. But whilst that represents the existence of a capitalist market in parts of the economy, non-capitalist social relations continue to predominate.

Collectivised property relations have been broken up and dislocated, but capitalist social relations have not been established to replace them as the dominant mode of production.

Governments exist which defend capitalist social relations of production but lack the political or economic conditions to make them a reality. And the social layer in power remain a bureaucracy, even if their foremost ambition in life is to become cap-

italists - and many of them already have albeit of the gangster variety.

Wherever you stand on state capitalism the relevance of the debate is diminishing in today's world. And the political situation Tony Cliff leaves behind today is very different to that which prevailed during much of his time building the IS and the SWP in Britain.

Political alternative

Whilst the defeats of the 1980s hang over the workers' movement, and the level of strikes remains at an all time low, a real possibility of building a political alternative to Blairism and to reshape the left is beginning to present itself.

Stalinism has fragmented and its influence has declined: the far left has a greater weight within the left as a whole.

It is to his great credit that Tony Cliff recognised these changes and emerging opportunities in the last months of his life, and fully backed the London Socialist Alliance.

The organisation he built, regarded by many as insular for a very long time, has partly opened itself up to a dialogue, joint work, and collaboration with other sections of the far left. It would be a tribute to him for this to continue towards the construction of an effective alternative to the rightward march of new Labour.

The SWP was unencumbered by the events because it regarded those regimes as capitalist anyway. Nothing had changed, and this confidence gave SWP members an advantage.

But you did not have to be a state capitalist to be unencumbered by the fall of the wall. The problem was for those who had attributed something progressive to Stalinism.

Trotsky characterised Stalinism as a counter revolutionary force on a world scale. But he also argued that whilst control of societies by the working class had been destroyed, the mode of production had not been changed. He therefore called for a political revolution to overturn a parasitic bureaucracy, not social revolution to overturn a capitalist bourgeoisie.

Confirmation

In my view it is this analysis of Trotsky's which was confirmed so convincingly by the collapse of the USSR, not the theory of state capitalism.

This is shown in the immense problems encountered in re-capitalising the Russian economy. Even 10 years later the capitalist mode of production does not predominate in the former Soviet Union. Most of the population survives by various forms of barter and individual subsistence production: many still have no contact with the market

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