

# Socialist

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# OUTLOOK

# New Labour failures feed right wing revival

WHILE TONY Blair's right wing cabinet colleagues continue to "think the unthinkable" and implement a programme of unpopular right wing policies, they could yet unleash a monster. Several opinion polls now agree that the Tory Party's electoral fortunes, which hit rock bottom in the 1997 General Election and have "flatlined" under William Hague, are showing signs of revival.

Hague's vicious band has not hesitated to exploit any opening offered to them by a New Labour team that has learned nothing from the failures of past Labour governments.

Blair's "partnership" with big business has come at the expense of alienating Labour's core sup-

port, and a widening gulf between rich and poor which feeds resentment. While failing to tackle the root cause of poverty, unemployment, poor housing, educational failure or NHS waiting lists, Blair's team has served to bolster racism and pandered to bigotry.

Jack Straw's reactionary attempts to make the last Tory Home Secretary Michael Howard look like a liberal have included a return to the discredited Tory notion of the "short sharp shock" for young offenders and a barrage of new, brutal attacks on asylum seekers.

The lesson of the last Labour government was that its neglect of the needs and demands of the working class, coupled with the

passivity of the trade union leaders in the face of massive job losses triggered a growth in racist violence and fascist and far right organisations.

It was Labour's failure which opened up the space for Thatcher, who won in 1979 on a platform which included racist claims that the country was being "swamped" by immigrants.

Already we can see grim signs that New Labour is leading us in the same direction.

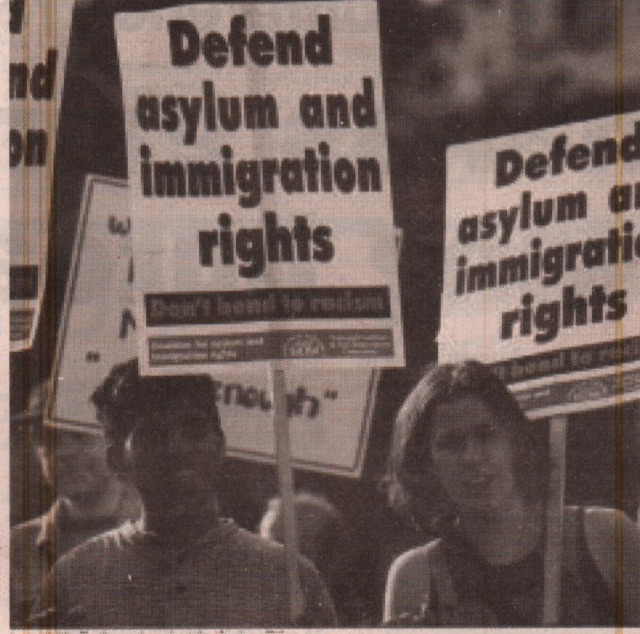
Blair and his Millbank control freaks appear to be counting on fear of a Tory return to win them a second term. They hope workers will obediently rally round and vote Labour next time, no matter how little the government delivers.

The evidence so far is that these tactics are leading to a collapse of Labour's core vote, which in some areas could be enough to let the Tories in.

Our answer has always been that the key is in mobilising the working class to defend its own interests, in resistance to the onslaught on jobs, conditions and the welfare state - precisely the politics put forward by the London Socialist Alliance in the recent elections.

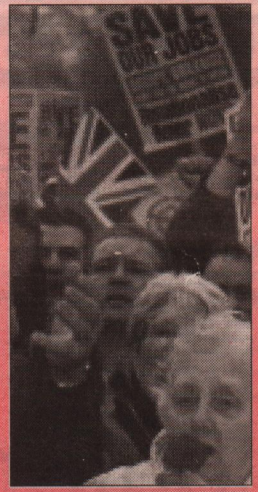
As the calendar counts down to the next general election, the need for a broad based challenge in the unions and across the labour movement to the passive politics of New Labour becomes ever more urgent.

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Andrew Wliard

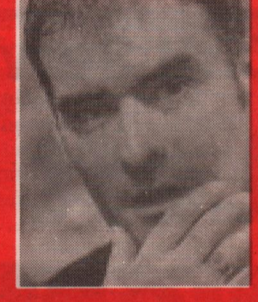
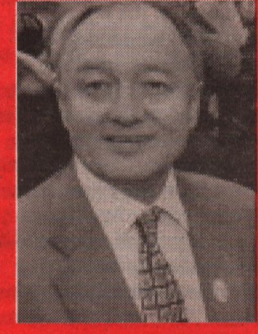
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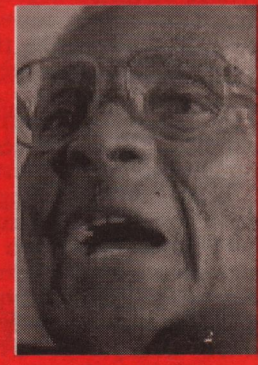
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## Set back for New Labour at MSF conference

### Terry Conway

MSF Conference, like everything else within the union for over recent months was dominated by the question of the proposed merger with the AEEU. Glossy propaganda had been spewed out almost daily to convince union members to support this merger – on terms that would stifle any debate or lay democracy.

Of course what General Secretary Roger Lyons and his supporters kept quiet is the real reason they are so desperate to get their project through. They, with the AEEU's Sir Ken Jackson, have a clear and profoundly reactionary vision – to create a new union on the right – an organisation wedded to partnership with the employers.

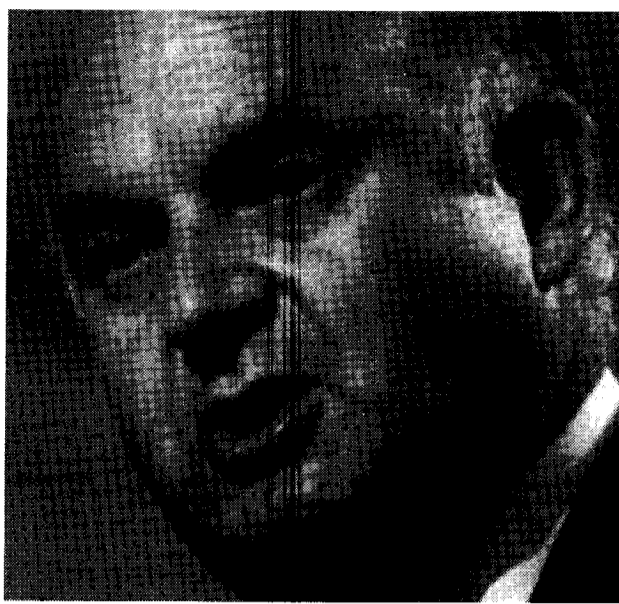
Despite the fact that this very road has led to the disasters at Rover and Ford, Lyons was able to use the Towers deal as a cover from the exposure he might otherwise have faced.

It is in pursuit of this goal that MSF's leadership has carried out a vicious witch hunt against its most vociferous opponents

in the leadership of the London Region of the union – disbarring six former officers from holding any office in the union. While a small victory was won to allow these activists to attend conference as visitors, it was not possible to get the more substantive matters resolved both for technical reasons and because of the need to concentrate the energies of the left on the merger debate itself.

Despite all the resources they have poured into the campaign, and their attempts to silence dissent, the leadership did not get things all their own way. Conference passed a series of policy resolutions against the wishes of the top table – including one hostile to partnership.

While a majority of conference delegates supported a motion arguing in general terms for merger with the AEEU, they then rejected the precise agreement stitched up between the two leaderships. This reflects the fact that many MSF members, particularly in manufacturing, see such a



Back to the drawing board? MSF chief Roger Lyons

merger as having an industrial logic but refuse to accept plans that would undermine the sovereignty of union conferences and hand too much power to the national leadership.

This threw the National Executive into crisis and following a hastily convened meeting they tried to submit an emergency resolution to conference which would allow them to go to a membership ballot on the terms previously agreed with some small nods in the direction of conference wishes.

Rumours were flying round that a failure to agree this proposal could result in a financial crisis and significant staffing cuts.

Despite the atmosphere of panic, conference stood firm and correctly refused to debate the motion on the grounds that it was not an emergency. With bated

breath, as still more rumours emerged by the minute, the left waited to see what the leadership's next manoeuvre would be.

Remarkably they seemed not to have another plan, and indeed it emerged that they had received a letter from Ken Jackson which indicated that he was certainly not prepared to make any further concessions to the left – or to see the merger delayed.

As conference ended it seemed as if the left might have managed to kick this reactionary project into touch – though it seemed unlikely that Lyons would give up so easily.

Subsequently an emergency NEC has been called for mid-June, just before the AEEU's own conference, which was due to tie things up from their point of view. Activists will remain alert to see what they pull out of the bag next.

## Trades Councils conference Campaigners point the way forward

### Glenn Voris Secretary of St Helen's TUC (personal capacity)

This year's Trades Councils conference in May saw 99 delegates debate a range of motions on issues from asylum seekers to privatisation.

This Conference was more open than that of previous years, although some delegates were disappointed but not surprised when the TUC ruled that two of the motions submitted were unacceptable, because they were not on TUC policies.

The campaign to Defend Council Housing gained new support, and many delegates were interested in suggestions that future conferences should combine educational workshops with debates.

The debates on anti-racism and asylum seekers were excellent. Tony Richardson from Oxford TUC described the rabid racist policies of New Labour and the Tories towards asylum seekers locked up in prisons like Campsfield.

In moving the resolution on Housing Transfers, I spoke about building on the experience of the successful campaign in St Helens against transfer and arguing for joint union/tenant campaigns.

The debate about privatisa-

tion was linked to the international attack on welfare state services by the World Trade Organisation, and to the need to link up these struggles internationally.

The refusal of trade union leaders to fight, as shown in their failure to carry out union policies was criticised.

There were only three fringe meetings at the Conference. The official fringe meeting on Trade Unions and the Community was a dull affair. Defend Council Housing and St Helen's TUC organised a well attended joint meeting and gained six new affiliations from Trades Councils.

At *Socialist Outlook's* fringe meeting on 'The Crisis of the Car Industry and the effects on manufacturing', a Rover worker described the massive increases in productivity which have caused the current crisis of over-production.

Delegates agreed to build meetings through Trades Councils, linking up Dagenham/Longbridge workers with those in car component factories, with the aim of co-ordinating action throughout the industry.

Overall, delegates saw a need to change the motion-based format of the conference by including educational workshops.

## Civil Service union conference rejects Blair's agenda

# Left makes gains as PCS right-wing bureaucrats fall out

### Darren Williams

The conference of Britain's main civil service union, has committed the leadership to oppose key elements of the Blair government's programme.

The biennial delegate conference of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), meeting in Blackpool, passed a number of strongly worded motions, opposing New Labour's continuation of Tory policies on privatisation, performance-related pay and delegated negotiations, as well as on current issues of concern like the scapegoating of asylum-seekers.

The National Executive Committee (NEC) has been instructed actively to pursue the return of pay arrangements covering the whole civil service; to launch a long-overdue national campaign against privatisation; and to oppose the government's attempts to drive down levels of sickness absence.

Motions on these and many other issues, moved by left-led branches, were passed by overwhelming majorities, with only token opposition from right-wingers on the

conference floor. This will have caused further embarrassment for the NEC, dominated as it is by two right-wing factions, Membership First and the National Moderate Group.

National elections, concluded just before conference, left the right-wing in control, which means constant pressure from activists will be required to prevent conference decisions being ignored.

### Gains

The main opposition, Left Unity, made modest but significant gains, however – winning one of the four vice-presidencies and a further four seats on the committee.

By contrast, in the first PCS NEC elections in 1998, Left Unity failed to win a single seat. On that occasion it stood a joint slate with the ex-PTC Unity group, a stalwart-led faction.

This time, Unity refused to agree to the terms on offer for a joint slate and the two groups fielded rival candidates for the Executive grades section of the NEC. Left Unity improved its performance, while Unity lost two of the three NEC seats it

had held.

Moreover, Left Unity easily swept the board in the block vote elections conducted at conference, to choose PCS delegations to the TUC and related bodies.

Left Unity should give up attempting to bring Unity, which effectively supported the re-election of Membership First's Peter Donnellan as National President, into a broader alliance. Unity has frequently allied itself with the right-wing and refused to organise members to challenge management's attacks.

Although the left NEC members are a small minority in the 46-member body, they may have some room for manoeuvre, thanks to the worsening of relations between the two right-wing factions, each of which holds nineteen seats.

Personal rivalries have aggravated the slender political differences and Membership First narrowly secured NEC support for a conference motion aimed at ousting the Moderate Joint General Secretary, Barry Reamsbottom.

Former CPSA boss Reamsbottom currently

shares power with John Sheldon, his counterpart in NUCPS and then PTC. Sheldon is about to retire, leaving the reactionary and vindictive Reamsbottom in sole charge.

Under the terms of the merger, he did not have to face re-election because he was within five years of retirement. Conference has now overturned this by agreeing a rule change that brings the election forward to "not later than 31 December 2000".

Membership First have already lined up their candidate, Hugh Lanning, who is currently Assistant General Secretary. Worryingly, it appears that some within Left Unity are willing to allow Lanning a clear run against Reamsbottom, fearing that a left candidate will 'split the vote'.

This is dangerous: Lanning's policies would do no more to advance members' interests than Reamsbottom's. To support his election would make the left complicit in a bureaucratic stitch-up, repeating the mistake made by the CPSA Broad Left in supporting Alistair Graham, who

subsequently turned on them. Socialist activists should fight to ensure than a Left Unity candidate stands.

The Socialist Caucus has made the positive proposal of a Branch Campaign for National Pay. This seeks to address one of the greatest injustices facing civil servants: the increasing divergence of pay and grading systems since national pay ended in 1996, which sees differences of thousands of pounds in the wages of people doing the same work in different departments.

### Strategy

The Campaign's strategy involves lodging equal pay claims with Employment Tribunals – on the basis that the Crown is the employer of all civil servants, and that work of equal value should receive the same reward, whatever the department involved.

This is to be combined with co-ordination of pay claims by branches and Groups in different departments, preparing members for a national strike around the issue. By reaching out to the branches in this way, without waiting for the

national leadership to act, and by concentrating on a concrete issue that concerns all members, the campaign has the potential to begin rebuilding the left.

An emergency motion calling for a conference of members in the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service was carried, despite the fact that the bureaucracy wanted to leave these concerns to an unelected steering committee, with members having no chance for a say until a new merged agency was already in place.

The conference will help to ensure that members' concerns are addressed democratically before it is too late to have any influence; this is all the more important since there are concerns that the government is planning to privatise the new agency.

Whether or not such fears are founded, the concentration of nearly a third of PCS' total membership in a single body is a major development, creating the potential for a strong and militant Group in the forefront of the union's struggles and campaigns. The left must ensure that this potential is fully realised.

# Blair counts cost of capital error

**K**en Livingstone's break with the Labour Party to stand as an independent candidate for Mayor of London represents the most important left split in Labour since the second world war.

His landslide victory is a body blow to Tony Blair and his "New Labour" Government. Blair has lost control of his capital city and a potentially powerful alternative power base to his left has been established.

Livingstone's challenge, the current crisis in manufacturing industry and New Labour's relentless pursuit of Tory policies have reduced Blair to his lowest standing in the polls since he came to office.

However, there are few signs that Ken Livingstone will use his victory to fight for a socialist alternative. Although he gained 55% of the vote, including second preferences, putting him way ahead of the competition, this was achieved despite a generally weak, rightwards moving and populist campaign, which avoided using the word socialist.

He therefore failed to maximise his working class vote as shown by the relatively low turn out for such an important and well publicised election of between 33% and 38%.

Now he is assembling a cross-party administration including rotating the deputy mayorship amongst all four parties in the assembly and making statements to calm the fears of the City of London and big business. He is backing off from a confrontation with the government over its unpopular plans to privatise the

underground system - a key divide in the election.

On the other hand he remains a loose cannon, for example, his statement that, "capitalism kills" did not go down well in the City or Downing Street. His clear expression of support for Ford workers, encouraging them to fight for their jobs is to be welcomed. The potential for confrontation between him and new Labour remains high.

**L**abour should easily have won the mayor election in London, traditionally a Labour stronghold, as well as 11 of the 14 constituency seats in the election to the Greater London Assembly (GLA, based on the 1997 results). But instead they won only six constituency seats. In three of these the fall in Labour's share of the vote was more than 15%.

The number of members was increased by the votes Labour obtained in the GLA top-up list, which brought its total to nine seats, equalling that of the Tories. Labour's overall drop in voter share ranged between 10% and 25%.

This dismal picture for Labour was replicated in local elections across the country where they lost nearly 600 seats, while the Tories gained nearly 600. However, contrary to impression given by swingometers, the Tory vote did not significantly increase. It was the traditional Labour voters who stayed at home in disgust.

Where the result counted more, such as in the Romsey by-election, there was a high turnout of Labour voters who clearly voted tactically

for the Liberal Democrats in order to keep the Tories out. This desire to keep out the Tories, even in a south coast rural Tory area, will probably be repeated in a General Election, to the overall benefit of Labour.

In some parts of the country many voted for a left alternative if they had the opportunity. Independent left and far-left candidates, did very well in these election. The Socialist Party won another Councillor in Coventry - their third, while others received 17% in Newcastle or 30% in Merseyside.

Independent campaigners against the closure of the hospital in the small Midland town of Kidderminster, who last year won 8 seats, this year won 11 out of 15 contested seats, bringing their total to nearly half of the town council, and making them the largest group on the council!

In London, the emergence of a left alternative in the form of the London Socialist Alliance (LSA) made a real difference to the voting pattern.

In the individual constituency section, where there was an average decline of the Labour vote of 15%, the Green Party and the London Socialist Alliance (LSA) received about the same percentage when added together. Despite our criticisms of the Green Party, it is clear that the majority of those who vote for it do so from the left.

In the North East Constituency, Labour was 25% down on 1997, while the combined LSA /Green vote was 22.6%, with the Green Party achieving 15.6% and the LSA 7.0%. In Lambeth & Southwark,



*Laughing all the way to a popular front? Despite his political limitations, Livingstone's victory in the London mayor election is still a blow to Blair*

Labour's candidate got 38% of the votes - 21% down, while the Greens achieved 13.1%, LSA 6.2%, and the Communist League 0.53.

**L**ondon wide, the constituency vote for the Greens and the socialist left totalled 270,000 people (17%), while in the Mayoral vote only 223,000 voted for Frank Dobson - most of Labours traditional vote went to Livingstone of course.

Many traditional Labour voters did not stay at home, but for the first time came out and voted for parties to the left of Labour and of Ken Livingstone.

The message for Blair is clear. Those who voted Labour at the

General Election wanted to see a reversal of the attacks of the Tory years, not a continuation.

But Blair is not listening. Downing Street spin doctors made clear there will be no change of policy - just new packaging.

Blair and his advisors know that most of this core vote will rally to Labour in a General Election to keep out the Tories.

Nevertheless these elections mark the first signs of what could become a significant vote for a left wing alternative to Labour: the challenge before the organisations of the far left is how to follow up on these positive signs whether at local or at national level.

## Labour left divided on lessons of May elections

**Alan Thornett**

The Socialist Campaign Group Network conference on May 21, "After the London Elections" demonstrated both the problems of the left inside the Labour Party and the difficulties involved in bringing together the Labour left to work with socialists outside of the party, such as those involved the London Socialist Alliance.

By the end of the opening platform speeches, which were supposed to analyse the recent elections results particularly in London, the LSA had not been mentioned.

Christine Shawcroft, however, did offer the view that anyone leaving the Labour Party should be shot (metaphorically speaking, she later explained) and called for the devaluation of the pound as a response to the crisis in manufacturing industry.

I intervened to oppose devaluation - pointing out that it would in effect lead to a generalised pay cut and that in any case the issue is more complicated than the employers present it given the importation of materials and components. I also mentioned what seemed to be the unmentionable subject - the LSA - and urged conference participants to be prepared to work and organise both inside and outside of the Labour Party.

Kate Ahrens from Leicester and the Alliance for Worker's Liberty said that the London Labour left had "blown it" during the London elections. The Labour left had suffered enormously over the last few years and now it was even weaker. "We just have to end our sectarianism to those outside the party," she said.

Islington UNISON activist Andrew Berry stressed that "we are in a very weak posi-

tion here. Livingstone got a massive vote and there are only 50 people at this conference".

Labour Briefing supporter Mike Phipps intervened to say that in his view things were even worse than they appear. Much of Livingstone's vote was not a vote for the left, and the left was weaker now than before the campaign. He pointed out that more than a half of the constituencies were not sending delegates to this year's Labour conference.

Socialist Outlook supporter Roland Rance intervened to argue that the Labour left should work with the LSA and stressed the need to link more closely to the left in the unions. Marian Brain from Birmingham also stressed the need for common activity between those inside and outside the Labour Party and the trade union left.

Piers Corbyn reiterated his

strong support for the LSA, as a Labour Party member, and argued for work inside and outside of the party. He stressed that if you add the LSA and green vote together it represents a substantial vote to the left of Labour which should be built on.

Maria Exall from the platform then made it clear that she fully supported the LSA, and argued that the results it had achieved were important for the future of the left in London.

Pete Firmin from Brent argued that "we are feeling isolated, but so are the left in many of the unions". On the LSA he said that there are many good activists in the LSA and he is happy to work with them. But he called on the SCGN "not to hitch itself to the LSA".

Worker's Action Richard Price said that the results the LSA had achieved were poor and its meetings not



*LSA campaigners: has Labour left missed the last bus out?*

impressive.

He argued that it was wrong to see the Green vote as to the left of Labour. "It is like a Lib-Dem vote but younger", he said.

Geoff Martin, London regional convenor of UNISON, speaking from the platform in the second session, launched a sustained attack on new Labour.

He criticised the unions for giving large sums of money to the Labour Party for the next election and argued that union money should only be given to sup-

port the campaigns of MPs who were prepared to support the unions - like Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell in London.

A resolution was adopted which dealt mainly with Labour democracy and the abuse of it.

It called for a campaign for the readmission of Ken Livingstone into the party, but conditional on Livingstone maintaining his opposition to any public-private partnership on the tube.

# Renewing the left: the prospects after the London elections

**Alan Thornett**

**T**he election of Ken Livingstone as mayor of London is a huge political blow to new Labour. Blair has lost control of his capital city and a potentially powerful alternative power base has been established but there are few signs that Livingstone intends to capitalise on the situation.

Once it became clear that he could win the election with or without the Labour nomination, Livingstone had a unique opportunity to build an alternative to Blairism. Tens of thousands would have followed him if he had taken that path.

A new party may have been premature, but he could have organised his support as a broad alliance. Instead he called on his supporters to stay inside the Labour Party and appealed for readmission himself – something that is only likely to be achieved by avoiding confrontation with new Labour for an extended period.

The May local elections were a disaster for new Labour. Labour voters stayed away in droves or voted for left alternatives. Left candidates therefore scored impressive results in a number of places – particularly where a track record had been established.

This confirms, once again, that the time has come to stand left candidates against Labour in order to offer an alternative to those socialists who are defecting from it.

New Labour is not just another swing of the social democratic pendulum to the right. Blair's aim is to transform the LP into the principle party of the British bourgeoisie. He is at the leading edge of the neoliberal offensive, embracing the pioneering efforts of Thatcher and Clinton. He was a key driving force in NATO's war in the Balkans, not just backing Clinton but urging him along saying that Britain would send ground troops if the US was prepared to do so.

The Socialist Party is wrong, however, to argue that Labour is already a straight capitalist party. Blair's project is a long way down the road but not there yet. We should vote Labour where there is no credible left alternative and intervene inside the Labour Party where this can be effective and help to maintain a left opposition.

But the time has come to start building a credible left alternative, not only through electoral interventions, but



*A force for the future? Young LSA campaigners get into the spirit of things*

even mainly through them, but with electoral interventions as an important adjunct to other forms of struggle.

## **The LSA and its future**

**I**n London the LSA's results were excellent, with an average of 3.1% in the constituencies and around 50,000 people voting for it overall. But its real significance is to be found in the way it has reinvigorated the left in London and opened up new possibilities for left unity and future campaigning. It has enthused those already active, reactivated many others, and brought new forces forward.

A remarkable level of unity was achieved amongst the far-left organisations involved (the principal exception was the Socialist Party, which equivocated throughout). This unity became an attractive force in itself, starting to break down the sectarianism of the far-left and create a new dynamic.

Crucial to this was the turn of the SWP which had previously stood outside of the developments in Scotland and was only marginally involved in Socialist Alliances in England and Wales. The SWP's decision to make a full commitment to the LSA opened up completely new possibilities.

Every organisation and prominent individual involved drew positive conclusions from the campaign and the results. The LSA, therefore, will not only continue but should be able to maintain the momentum it has achieved. The June 11 conference needs to create a

new structure at the all-London level, lay the basis for a membership structure and for local LSA groups. It needs to establish some clear campaigning priorities as well as preparing for other electoral interventions and for the General Election next year.

But these developments need to go beyond London. The Network of Socialist Alliances (the England and Wales co-ordinating body) needs to be strengthened and alliances built where they do not yet exist.

Then there is the wider issue of left unity. Already there are signs in some unions of the SWP abandoning its previous isolationism. Again this reflects the current opportunities and problems faced by the left and the growing realisation that these cannot be addressed while maintaining past divisions.

There is a wide range of views within the LSA as to how it should develop in the medium term.

Workers Power argue that it should become a revolutionary party more or less immediately. The CPGB has a variant of that position, that the LSA should adopt its full programme.

The AWL call for a new Labour Representation Committee, which seems to be a call for the recreation of old Labour. The Socialist Party call for a new broad party to the left of Labour, although in a rather propagandist way. The SWP appear not to have developed a collective view yet.

We would all like a new revolutionary party to emerge out of the current diverse forces of the LSA, but the political conditions

do not exist for that. What exists – for the first time since the second world war – is the possibility of building something like the Scottish Socialist Party (a small-mass left centrist party) in England, and possibly Wales. To insist that it must be immediately a revolutionary party (as Workers Power do) would be to reduce it back to its Marxist component.

To go beyond this towards something approaching a new mass party, even a left reformist one, would require substantial splits from the LP and its reflection in the trade unions. And given Ken Livingstone's position this is not happening today.

## **Renewing the left across Europe**

**T**hese developments in Britain are part of a Europe-wide phenomenon in which the left has been reshaping and rebuilding itself. The process started after the fall of the Berlin wall, and the break-up of the communist parties. It was given new momentum with the election of Social Democratic governments across the EU during the nineties, eventually embracing 13 of the 15 EU countries.

These governments are committed to the neo-liberal project of radical deregulation. Their programme of privatisation has, in most cases, far exceeded their right-wing predecessors. On a social level too, these parties have implemented right-wing policies including discriminating against refugees and asylum seekers under Fortress Europe and creating the conditions for the re-emergence of the far right.

These has opened up space to the left of Social Democracy in most EU countries – albeit in many diverse ways. Where mass Communist Parties existed and broke up, the fragments have often become a major factor in new developments. In Britain the small CP broke up and has become marginalised and irrelevant to the process.

Diverse formations have emerged such as Rifondazione in Italy, the United Left in Spain, the PDS in Germany, the Left Block in Portugal, the LCR/LO electoral slate in France, the Red/Green Alliance in Denmark, the Anti-capitalist Left in Greece, the Red Electoral Block in Norway and the Scottish Socialist Party. Some are new parties and others are loose electoral

alliances and they have varying degrees of success. Clearly the LCR/LO achievement in establishing a group of Trotskyist MEPs in the European parliament is a major breakthrough.

The Fourth International sees this process of re-composition as a crucial political development for the future of the left. Our sections are active in all the formations that exist and our comrades hold a number of important positions within them.

Fourth International comrades have been elected as MPs for the Red/Green Alliance in Denmark and the Left Block in Portugal. The LCR has two MEPs, Alain Krivine and Rosaline Vachetta, from the LCR/LO slate.

Building such alliances and new parties on a stable and long term basis, however, is politically complex. Our ability to develop the project of Socialist Alliances in England and Wales can only be strengthened by learning lessons from other parts of Europe.

If the far-left in Britain is to be a part of the building of a serious new party to the left of Labour, it has to look at its own fragmentation seriously. A political alternative to Stalinism was established in Britain but its public face was a dozen or more competing organisations.

This has been a turn-off for those who have looked for an alternative to Labourism or Stalinism. Even when the Trotskyist movement in its fragmented form got the issues right, which it repeatedly did, people found the divisions incomprehensible and chose not to get involved.

Fortunately there are signs of change. The far left are talking to each other and there is a growing confidence. But the issue of far-left unity is a very different, even if closely related, matter to the creation of a broad party to the left of Labour.

It is a much longer process and the political basis for it is more rigorous. The level of convergence which has been achieved in the current situation falls far short of that. Working together to build a democratic, pluralistic alternative to New Labour may well provide opportunities for deeper developments.

In any event, this task of building a political alternative to Blair's betrayals offers the best opportunity to shift the balance of forces in our favour that the left has had for a long time – if we pass it by it will not come again for a long time.

# London Socialist Alliance – a positive start

## Greg Tucker – LSA Secretary & list candidate

46,530 people voted for the London Socialist Alliance in the elections to the constituency section of the Greater London Assembly – we averaged 3.1 per cent across the constituencies.

87,859 people voted for the LSA and other socialist candidates in the London wide top up list – 5.3% of the vote. Everywhere in London the LSA was able to engage working people in a real debate about a socialist alternative. But because the socialist vote was divided we did not succeed in having anyone elected.

LSA members are extremely heartened that, in the space of three months, we have been able to build an organisation which delivered three million leaflets, held over two hundred public meetings and was the only organisation which tried to engage in a debate with working people in the elections.

The media spent the whole election campaign fixated on the Mayoral race. But as all the candidates, Livingstone included, ran apolitical “personality” campaigns, at times the exercise had the aspect of a beauty contest.

Because of this it has been argued that you cannot read much into Livingstone's



Conducting a successful campaign

election as he took votes from all quarters, including the Tories. Certainly his campaign “Ken4London” steered clear of most political issues.

Nevertheless the election of Livingstone as Mayor must be seen as a blow to Tony Blair's project. Londoners have clearly rejected new Labour's plans to privatise the underground. Their vote represents a desire to see an end to new Labour's Tory policies.

The Greens did particularly well in the elections, picking up three seats on the top-up list. Their vote was boosted by a positive endorsement from Livingstone. Unfortunately

for the LSA, this helped make a vote for the Greens appear more productive. First time out, the LSA was unable to break through that confidence barrier.

We also lost votes on the top-up list to other socialists – Peter Tatchell, Scargill's SLP, the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation and the CPB (Morning Star). Despite approaches from the LSA they had gone their own way, the split vote costing the left a seat in the Assembly.

More annoying was the high level of mis-voting with 16 per cent spoilt papers. The government had done absolutely nothing to explain

the voting system. With the Mayoral vote you had a first and second preference vote. So many voters thought that the two votes for the Assembly were on the same basis. So instead of voting for the same Party for constituency and top-up list many voted LSA constituency number one and then what they thought was their second preference on the list.

The size of the Nazi vote was a worrying factor. The BNP was able to save its deposit with 47,000 votes. They had been able to capitalise on William Hague's offensive witchhunt against asylum seekers, itself given credence by New Labour's own policies.

Part of the LSA's future activity must now be to join with other anti-racists to stop the Nazis, by mobilising directly against them and by supporting campaigns defending the rights of asylum seekers.

The LSA is keen to discuss its way forward and our conference on June 11 will map out our next steps.

As well as continuing work around our election platform, such as making Livingstone fight the government over the future of the tube and taking up the issues of asylum seekers we need to be part of the fight to defend jobs such as at Dagenham.

# LSA

## Battles to be fought in Labour Party

### Terry Conway

DESPITE Livingstone's own limited political agenda, his victory represents the possibility (but not yet the realisation) of a mass left alternative to Blairism – a potential which he refused to lead when he called on his supporters to stay in the Labour Party. He clearly stated that he wishes to reapply for Labour Party membership (he is now formally expelled).

On his present trajectory he will squander this potential for constructing a left alternative, if allowed to, as he abandons class politics in favour of populist gestures, combined with responsible government and his own version of the ‘third

way’.

Livingstone's explicitly class collaborationist pledge to “unite all of London” and consequently his attempt to unite all the political parties (except those which have anything to do with socialism) in a grand coalition (a popular front) to govern the city are designed to calm the fears of and big business, while smoothing his path back into the Labour Party. This does not necessarily mean it will work in practice, especially given his tendency to speak out off the cuff.

Of course socialists inside and outside the Labour Party should support the demand of Livingstone to be readmitted – as well as other socialists who have

been kicked out – but only on the basis of no compromises with New Labour.

However such a fight is not enough today, and in itself it will achieve little. The main task at hand is to build on the new struggles coming to the fore in the factories and offices, in the colleges, on the housing estates, on the streets and on the terraces.

There is no possibility of major socialist victories against Blair inside the Labour Party in the foreseeable future, but blows can be delivered from outside in struggle.

Left forces in the party should in the short medium term prioritise turning the party outwards to linking up with others fighting outside

the framework of the Labour Party in the TU movement – campaigns and social movements, putting pressure in Livingstone to fight for the interests of the working class.

There is a massive majority against privatisation of the tube. There would be huge support for a campaign to save Fords. That is why the electorate delivered such a blow to New Labour on May 4.

Mobilising around these issues, in defence of asylum seekers and against other privatisations and job losses needs to be the priority of all socialists – inside and outside the Labour Party and regardless of how they voted.



Topping the poll: Cecilia Prosper was the most successful LSA candidate, with over 7 percent in North East London.

Almost certainly we will want to look at standing in any parliamentary or local council by-elections and to prepare for the next General Election.

At the same time we will discuss the best structure that can draw in those who became involved during the campaign and want to play a continuing role.

London wide co-ordination will remain vital but so will organising in the localities.

With local elections elsewhere in England seeing good results for the left – another Socialist Alliance councillor in Coventry for

instance, this is not just an issue for London but must be part of a Britain wide debate.

So LSA supporters are keen to discuss with fellow socialists in England and Wales and with the SSP prospects for united campaigning.

Certainly we are sure that the positive experience in Scotland and our first positive steps in London indicate that thousands of people across Britain can be won over to a socialist alternative.

The positive lessons gained by the comradely collaboration of the different socialist organisations and individuals working together in the

## Step up fight against UNISON witch hunt!

UNISON activists have been outraged by the continuing witch hunt against the left inside the union.

In the last year, the leadership has expelled Roddy Slorach from Glasgow, Candy Udwain and Dave Carr from London's University College Hospital, Faith Ryan from Birmingham and the activists from Newham. Disciplinary hearings are due to take place against eight Sheffield activists.

In early May health service militants Yunus Baksh and Karen Reisman were accused of intimidation and bullying after allegedly calling an NEC member a “witch-hunter”.

They have been told they cannot attend any event where the NEC member is likely to be present. This means they are barred from attending Annual Conference despite being elected delegates, and that Yunus cannot take up his NEC position.

There is of course a common thread – all those who have been disciplined are being punished for actions in defence of member's rights or for expressing political opinions.

This unprecedented wave of expulsions is taking place while national officials are advising branches that they cannot join campaigns opposing these injustices.

The NEC have issued guidelines that would effectively discourage or prevent any campaigning activity. And of course this witch hunt is being orchestrated by officials who are loyal to Millbank whose aim is to isolate and marginalise opposition to New Labour policies within the union.

This issue will be one of the key features of UNISON conference in mid-June which will debate a number of resolutions on this issue.

A major fringe meeting is being organised by a wide range of forces on the left. A similar meeting last year attracted 400. But the campaign needs to go beyond annual conference.

There is now a close working relationship between left activists to defend lay democracy. This should be the opportunity for those who are currently outside the Campaign for a Fighting Democratic UNISON, the broad left in the union to come on board.

Together we can turn CFDU into a force that will reach a wide layer of activists and compel the bureaucracy to back down.

Trade union leaders, 'Guardian' columnists and backbench MPs have been united in the solution they propose for the current crisis in the motor industry and in British industry more generally.

All agree with the employers that the central problem is the high value of the pound and that devaluation is the answer. Some go further and argue for adopting the Euro as quickly as possible – a cause which now seems to unite people as different as Ken Livingstone and Peter Mandelson.

But is this really the way forward for British manufacturing?  
**ANDY KILMISTER reports.**

**T**here is no doubt that a high currency can cause difficulties for capitalists in a particular country. A recent example is the rise in the Swiss franc through most of the 1990s, largely caused by speculators buying it because Switzerland was certain not to enter the single currency.

The result was to plunge the country into recession for several years. Something similar does appear to be happening to British manufacturers now.

More generally, Marxists like Robert Brenner and orthodox economists like Ronald McKinnon and Kenichi Ohno have agreed in seeing the problems of the Japanese and German economies in recent years as caused by American pressure leading to high values for the mark and yen.

The view is that this has made Japanese and German industry uncompetitive and allowed the USA to seize the initiative in key sectors.

But while exchange rates do play a role they are real problems for Marxists in seeing them as central to industrial crisis.

It is important to remember that a fall in currency values means a cut in real wages, as import prices rise. This is especially true since imported inputs will rise in price, so any extra competitiveness has to come from keeping labour costs down.

In this way, trying to boost industry by devaluing means undercutting foreign workers just as much as accepting a wage cut. The main difference is that bringing down the value of the pound would affect all workers equally rather than being concentrated in specific industries, so it is believed to be more acceptable.

Just as important, though, is the fact that in a world of increasingly internation-

# Behind the massacre of manufacturing jobs European business mounts new offensive



alised capital, exchange rates no longer play the role they used to in determining the profitability of individual companies or national industries. If a multinational is investing in Britain a strong pound can raise profits if components are bought more cheaply, say, from Europe.

Those profits will in turn be worth more to the company, since they are denominated in pounds which are more valuable. And since many manufacturing companies now make large proportions of their profits from financial activities, they may have as much interest in keeping currency values high as the financial sector does.

**T**he focus on exchange rates implies that British and European companies are each simply producing at home and then competing against one another in export markets.

It ignores the massive restructuring of European capitalism which is currently taking place and which lies behind the crisis in the motor industry and elsewhere.

This restructuring has several dimensions.

First, there is the huge growth in merger activity. Between 1997 and 1999 the value of European mergers and acquisitions roughly tripled from around \$500 billion to \$1.5 trillion.

More and more of these were hostile takeovers; the \$400 billion worth of such deals since January 1999 is more than four times the combined total for 1990-98.

Key sectors include:

- telecommunications, with the massive takeover of Mannesmann from Germany by Vodafone Air Touch, the largest hostile takeover ever, and the takeover of Telecom Italia by Mannesmann's former partner Olivetti;

**The restructuring of European capital, rather than exchange rates, is the central issue for workers...**

- pharmaceuticals, with the merger by Rhone-Poulenc and Hoechst to form Aventis;

- banking, with numerous large deals in France, Italy, Germany and Spain (although the biggest one between Deutsche and

Dresdner Bank has been abandoned for the time being);

- electricity, where the link between Veba and Viag has created Germany's third largest company;

- and aerospace, where Deutsche Aerospace and Aerospatiale have merged.

The current car industry crisis needs to be seen against the background of the recent links between Nissan and Renault,

Daimler-Benz and Chrysler and Fiat and General Motors.

But corporate restructuring in Europe is not just about mergers. Just as in the USA in the 1980s, merger activity has gone together with *splitting up* companies and impos-

ing harsh financial controls on the remaining parts of the business, backed up by the threat of closure.

An early example of this was Daimler-Benz, which shed a number of divisions after 1995 to concentrate on vehicles, trains and aerospace. Currently, all divisions are required to make a profit of 12 percent on capital or face closure.

Hoechst is selling its chemical and industrial subsidiaries to concentrate on pharmaceuticals. Unilever plans to cut the number of products it sells by 75 percent, and to close a quarter of its factories, with about 10 percent of the workforce set to lose their jobs.

But the company currently serving as a model for European capitalists is Siemens.

Over the last two years Siemens has sold £9 billion worth of businesses, involving a third of the workforce. Each division now is targeted to achieve a return on capital employed of between 8 and 11 percent, with 60 percent of top managers' pay linked to profits.

Its semiconductors division, Infineon, and its electronic components joint venture with Matsushita, Epcos, are being sold off as separate companies. Share prices have risen by more than 50 percent over the last eighteen months.

**T**hese developments have led to an attack on workers' conditions and trade union rights across the continent. The most dramatic developments have been in Spain where there has been an explosion in the use of temporary contracts.

This so impressed Tony Blair that he proposed to write a joint pamphlet with the Spain's right wing Prime Minister Aznar on the virtues of flexible labour markets in the lead up to the recent Spanish elections.

Intervention by the Socialist International stopped this happening, but Blair and Aznar linked up regardless to push for labour flexibility at the recent EU summit in Lisbon.

In France companies are using the new 35 hour week to push for concessions on wage moderation and weekend shifts. Companies like Asea Brown Boveri have been able to make thousands of workers redundant, even with a rising order book, without significant resistance.

There are two immediate causes for the current restructuring: increased competitive pressures in the product market and changes in the financial markets. But

each of these in turn rests on a number of deeper developments.

Four are particularly important.

Firstly, there is the impact of 'globalisation'. In areas like telecommunications and pharmaceuticals European capital is facing increased competition from the USA. But equally importantly, European companies are restructuring in order to mount their own assault on US and Japanese capital.

In industries like water, power and mobile phones French, German and Scandinavian companies have been buying up American businesses. European companies are increasingly obtaining finance on a global basis.

The restructuring at Daimler-Benz followed it becoming the first German company to obtain a listing on the New York Stock Exchange. Siemens plans a similar listing this year. British and American investors now own more than a third of the stock in the largest French companies.

As this develops the old 'European' model of stable shareholdings, largely controlled by banks, with companies substantially immune from takeovers, is being broken up, and replaced by a more aggressive concentration on shareholders interests. The recent merger between the London and Frankfurt stock exchanges both reflects, and is likely to speed up, this process.

The second development is the introduction of the Euro. While the Euro was formally launched sixteen months ago the current period, before it actually comes into use as a currency, will entail a further rush of frenzied activity as different capitals jockey for position in preparation for a more unified market.

Fixing exchange rates between the different European currencies has encouraged cross-border investment and heightened competition, by removing the risk of currency movements and by making price differences more transparent.

Thirdly, there is the wave of privatisation and deregulation sweeping Europe. Between 1992 and 1998 privatisation proceeds were more than \$60 billion in Italy and around \$50 billion in France and \$45 billion in Spain.

This represents a massive new flow of money on to European stock markets. Deregulation has been especially important in the electricity and telecoms markets where it has led to a surge of cross-border investments.

The next important battle ground for European capital



# Norway: the workers teach the establishment a lesson

**Anders Ekland**

**O**n May 3, 82,000 workers in Norway's private sector went on strike for improved pay and conditions in the biggest action since 1921 which also ended in a defeat for the employers. Now negotiations in the public sector have broken down, and there could be major strike action there too.

Norway is a rich nation, especially thanks to its oil. But the Norwegian capitalists have used the defensive position of the working class in Europe to attack the established rights of the workers. They have tried to build a national consensus on low wage growth, or more precisely – a wage growth that “is in line with our main trading partners” as the official mantra goes.

After a good agreement from the workers point of view in 1998, the state set up a tripartite commission to look at wage-policy. The result was – not surprisingly – that the union leaderships accepted a very low ceiling for wage growth. They claimed that part of the wage increase in 1998 had to be considered as an “up-front” part of the 2000 agreement.

## Golden parachutes - big profits

**H**istorically the differences between average industrial wages and the wages of senior executives in Norway has been relatively low compared to the US and continental Europe. In the nineties, the bourgeoisie has tried to change that, giving themselves generous wage increases, bonuses, and stock-options of all kinds.

Recently there has been a spate of “golden parachute” scandals. The head of the state oil company had to abstain from using his parachute, to calm public opinion. This was also a very special case since the leader of the Norwegian Trade Union Council (LO), Yngve Hågensen is on the board and voted in favour of this golden parachute deal!

Other similar deals have been exposed in the press, the most outrageous being that the Chief Executive of Kvaerner of 16 million Euro. Kvaerner tried to correct this - saying that it was only 8 million Euro – as if that made a huge political difference.

This new culture of greed has also influenced the wages of the top union bureaucrats. The leader of LO in 1998 got a wage increase of over 15,000 Euro! The trade union negotiating delegation on average earned twice as much as the workers they represented!



*While profits have soared it seems that the union leaders have had their backbones removed, promoting a deal that left workers gutted*

Profits have also shown a huge increase since the early nineties, with dividends almost tripling. In addition the tax system was changed in 1992, taxing capital gains less than before.

## A resounding “no” vote

**A**gainst this background it was no surprise that the overwhelmingly majority of union members in the private sector voted no to the very meagre deal that was negotiated in the beginning of April.

Normally wage negotiations happen every second year – but this was to be prolonged to three years! There was increased flexibility. The hourly wage rate was increased by a tiny amount – about 0.1 Euro, or 20 Pfennig, 1/2 French Franc!

Holidays would remain the same this year, one day would be added in 2001 and three more days in 2003!

That sounds OK unless you understand that the fight for a fifth week's holiday started 18 years ago, when the first day was run. So people were not impressed by the speed of introducing the fifth week especially as in Denmark they were striking for the sixth week two years ago!

The union bureaucrats tried to sell this deal to the rank and file but with no success. There was over 60%

participation in the ballot with impressive 64% against the deal. This was the largest no-vote on a national level since WWII. Sixteen of seventeen individual unions taking part had a no-majority.

The no-vote was a political victory for the trade union left, all of them belonging to the two parties to the left of the Labour party, the Socialist Left Party (its left-wing) and the Red Electoral Alliance.

Having recommended acceptance, the trade union leaders make any concrete demands when the deal was voted down, but just said that the employers' had to come up with a new offer.

This passivity made it imperative for the trade union left to formulate a set of demands and organise a strike the leadership did not want. It was very much the left that ran the strike – there was quite a consolidated layer of left trade unionists to the forefront.

There was also important European solidarity especially from transport unions across Scandinavia and from IG Metal in Germany who boycotted the companies where there was action.

The union leadership and the employers organisation did not want a drawn out strike in which they might lose more, so the strike was ended in 8 days, with most of the left's demands won.

The period before the next

negotiations was to be two years as usual (not three). The wage increase was nearly four times higher than previously offered; it was raised from 0.75 kroner to 2.50, the left had demanded 3 kroner. This wage increase was somewhat above the ceiling fixed by the state commission – an important political breakthrough. There were also additional increases for those below the average wage. The fifth holiday week will be introduced one year earlier by getting two more holidays in 2001 and another two in 2002.

On the question of flexibility there was no change, so here the employers won. But it is a general formulation; the concrete implementation is a question of local negotiations, so how this turns out depend to a large degree on the strength of the local unions.

## A warning to the Norwegian establishment

**T**he fact that the trade union leadership was out of touch with the rank and file became very clear. They did not do much to convince the membership that the negotiated result should be accepted but took for granted that they would. The had only contempt for the “Vote No” campaign of the trade union left.

On the other hand, perhaps they were pressured by the “New Labour” government to accept in negotiations a result that they themselves did not believe would be acceptable. When the no-vote happened, they explained it as a reaction to the golden parachutes and the “greed culture”.

But their moral indignation was taken not seriously as the press showed that union representatives on the boards almost without exception had kept silent when the golden parachutes were handed out.

When the trade union membership voted against the deal, the immediate reaction of the employers organisation was to argue that even to have a ballot on such an issue after negotiations was “old-fashioned”.

They pointed out that in several other European countries, e.g. in Sweden, this does not happen any more. But this just made people more angry and convinced them even more that the bosses really needed a teaching a lesson.

What happened was a chain of positive events with important lessons for the future

■ the political/trade union left has substantial support for its ideas and demands – and could achieve more if it was better organised

■ there are strong egalitarian sentiments among trade unionists,

■ to work for active, democratic unions is of paramount importance. It is vital to defend the right to vote on such deals – otherwise the chain will be broken. Without positive collective experiences frustration will build and people might turn to right-wing alternatives.

The fact that young workers experienced the strength of collective action was important. During the strike when the shelves in the supermarkets were empty it became clear to everybody that all the hype about the “new economy” did not change the fact that real “old-fashioned” workers are needed to bake the bread and brew the beer and get them into the shops.

## Public sector – what will happen?

**T**he result of negotiations in the public sector are not clear, but since last autumn especially the teachers' and nurses' unions have had a high profile and demanded substantial increases, as much as 20% over a two-year period.

This had an impact in the September parliamentary elections, in which the Socialist Left Party got a significant increase in its votes – a lot of which were from women in the public sector.

These women are generally more left-wing than males of the same age and income. An example of the combative mood of public employees is that student nurses have refused to work in the hospitals, because they will not accept the low wages and bad working conditions.

This has been hitting the hospitals hard, since these students are vital in making it possible to staff the hospitals in weekends and holidays.

This is a new type of action, since all strikes in the health service has been stopped by government intervention. Given the high oil-prices, the level of wages increases for nurses and teachers is a political question for the Norwegian bourgeoisie. They have to decide whether a tough line or concessions are the best strategy for them in the long run.

One major concern is that giving the public employees more than private sector breaks a “golden rule” that the wage increases in the private sector is the limit for the public sector.

On the other hand they also fear the threat of growing radicalism. The no-vote in the private sector showed that there are limits as to how far they can sell their austerity policies so they may feel the need to make concessions to head off public sector action.

# Union tactics help bosses carve up Rover

# Clutching at straws!

No mass meetings were called at Longbridge throughout the whole closure process. So all the workers could see was the entire local media, the council and their own union and shop stewards, supporting Towers, with only the left saying that they should occupy: this was an uneven battle.

## A Rover worker

All of the capitalist media present a picture of Longbridge having been "saved" on May 8, the day that John Towers announced that he had brought the plant from BMW for £10.

Workers demonstrated outside the plant, drinking champagne, and the ex-policeman, who didn't work in the plant, but wore a John Bull outfit, and a union jack, was again prominent in all the news coverage.

John Hemmings the Liberal councillor, who wants to be mayor of Birmingham, and is a founder of Phoenix was continuously interviewed.

This is a plant with a militant history. How did we reach a point where workers, in large numbers (though not the whole workforce) greet a boss arriving at the largest car factory in the country?

According to Towers, he did a feasibility study into the possible survival of the plant, and showed it to Trade Secretary Stephen Byers, a personal friend, on the weekend BMW announced the sale of Rover (March 18/19).

Then, according to Hemmings, the Phoenix group first met on March 28 - four days before the huge demonstration in Birmingham against the plant closure.

When you now look back at the speeches made on that day you can see why for instance that Tony Woodley, national officer of the TGWU, stressed that whatever happened thousands of jobs would be lost. Woodley knew this because he was in with Phoenix from the beginning: in fact he claims it was him that phoned Towers and persuaded him to front up Phoenix.

There is hot competition among those claiming to have started it all rolling. Stephen Byers has also claimed that he got Towers involved: but no doubt when things turn sour these same people will start to take their distance and

issue disclaimers.

The rumour went around, amongst Rover stewards, that Woodley, who at the original Gaydon conference of all Rover stewards on March 21 had called for nationalisation of Rover, had been ordered by TGWU leader Bill Morris to drop this demand.

But the reality is he was already in with a capitalist 'saving' the company.

So that magnificent demonstration was really about putting pressure on BMW to accept a rival capitalist bid.

When the Phoenix bid became public knowledge, after the Birmingham demonstration, all union efforts were directed towards backing it, and asking BMW to reject the Alchemy bid.

On April 18 all stewards were brought back to a recall meeting of the Gaydon conference.

At this Woodley outlined what he said were the differences between the Alchemy and the Phoenix bids. He said these were the only choices: BMW had offered Rover to large car producers, but all had said they weren't interested. As far as nationalisation was concerned, ministers had said they would not consider it.

Woodley argued that Alchemy did not have the dealers on board, and therefore would not be able to sell many cars. It had also declared it would not try to stay in mass car production. Phoenix on the other hand was led by a "car man", and planned to continue volume production.

This was a distortion: Alchemy had said that they would continue to produce the cars as long as they could sell them, and that they would produce the Rover 75 under licence in Cowley, assess its sales and then if they were good, move it to Longbridge.

So under both plans, all cars were to be produced at Longbridge. The main real difference was that in moving the 75 to Longbridge straight away they would cut down the numbers of immediate redun-



Left wing papers and Union Jacks side by side on the Longbridge demo: union leaders were already lobbying for Phoenix

dancies. (Probably thereby saving on redundancy payouts, as for the first year the redundancy money is relatively high).

As far as the longer term is concerned the crucial fact is that Towers has no replacement for the Rover 25 or 45. BMW had offered to sell the R30, which they had planned for Longbridge, for £800 million, but Towers said he could not afford it.

As the details of the Towers plan have emerged more clearly, his future plans seem to be exactly the same as Alchemy, i.e. producing more sporty MG derivative cars, all of which sell in small numbers.

At the second Gaydon conference, when Woodley was asked by stewards from Longbridge if he had any fallback plans if the Phoenix bid failed he said that he did "not believe in failure". In his view the Longbridge workers were totally reliant on Phoenix.

At the first Gaydon conference Woodley had accepted that all of Rover was united. He had insisted that the plants "could not survive

separately". At that meeting he himself had said that if BMW didn't change their minds, or another major car company take over, then nationalisation was the answer.

He had also said that the next demonstration, after Birmingham, would be in London to fight for this. But by the second stewards' conference he was happily agreeing to divide up the Rover workforce.

Woodley's new line was that BMW needed to sell Solihull, and the 4+4 to Ford in order to give money to whoever took over Longbridge, and therefore Solihull stewards should go away and negotiate their conditions with Fords.

And since BMW would not sell Cowley and the mini to Towers, the Cowley stewards, too, should go and negotiate their conditions with BMW.

As far as Swindon and PowerTrain were concerned, they would start off with BMW, but he hoped would wind up eventually with Towers.

All calls for a demonstration in London were dropped. The call for

the occupation of Longbridge was ignored, as it had been at the original Gaydon conference, and there was no call for any action by the workforce.

This meant that any meaningful pressure for nationalisation was gone, at a time when the situation at Fords was erupting.

Woodley's explanation for this succession of retreats and concessions was that he had to be "realistic". With the union back-peddling so hard it is no wonder that the Longbridge stewards, and their local radio mouthpiece, Karl Chinn, concentrated on lobbying for Phoenix to win.

The workforce at Longbridge was itself totally uninvolved. No mass meetings were called throughout the whole closure process. So all the workers could see was the entire local media, the council and their own union and shop stewards, supporting Towers, with only the left saying that they should occupy: this was an uneven battle.

The Longbridge stewards, and union activists, organised small

## Key to Phoenix plan: saving Labour's electoral bacon

As time goes on, it becomes clear that the main beneficiary of the Towers plan is the Labour Party. Most financial commentators consider that the company will at least survive until after the next general election.

If the Alchemy plan had been instituted then most of the pain would have been immediate and therefore could have had a big effect on Labour's electoral chances.

The major crisis facing the working class in Britain is developments in manufacturing: cars, components, steel, textiles and shipbuilding.

Blair obviously had a choice. The Daily Telegraph



Byers: what did he do? quotes him as saying he resisted calls for nationalisation - but that the government "didn't stand idly by". So what exactly did they do? It would be interesting to know the full involve-

ment of Byers in the process leading to the successful Phoenix bid.

For example, why did the Alchemy bid suddenly fail? Was there government pressure? Alchemy, who got a £5 million sweetener, say that on the final day they noticed a sudden change in BMW's attitude. Officially the argument was over redundancy and pension payments.

But after six months of negotiations, wouldn't venture capitalists have already clarified such a question? And wouldn't BMW have already worked out where they stood?

It transpires that, 10 days prior to the success of the Towers bid, Labour's mil-

lionaire former minister Geoffrey Robinson had become involved. Byers had been involved from the beginning and he did not hide his relief when the Alchemy bid failed.

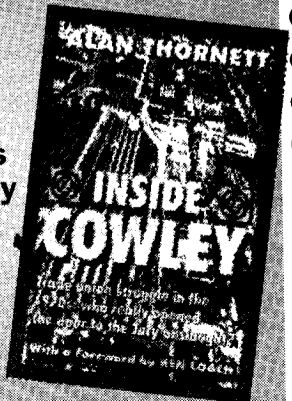
So did the government put pressure on BMW?

These are hard-headed business people. They know that BMW had planned a new model for two years time, having worked out that this would be the viable life span of the Rover 25 and 45.

Towers has no such replacement model but at least his plan keeps the plant open beyond the next general election: then we can expect more major cut-backs to take place.

**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







Towers: already knows how to play union leaders like a violin

events against Alchemy – and for Towers. Only one demonstration was called by the Works committee, at Crofton Park opposite the plant, on April 25. (The Convenor claimed, on May Day, that this was a mass meeting.)

This demonstration was surreal. Apart from the convenor and his deputy welcoming the 2,000 or so people there, the only speaker was Karl Chinn, who spent the whole time getting people to chant “Alchemy out! Towers in!”

The specially prepared placards asked BMW to give Towers time to prepare his bid. They then marched down to the gate, chanting “Towers in!”

Chinn and the works committee then flew to Munich asking for BMW to listen to Towers.

At national level several meetings of the national negotiating committee, led by Woodley, with BMW called for them to accept the Towers bid. The only involvement of the German unions, apart from their representatives on the board voting for the sell-off, took place at this time. They were persuaded to pressurise for the Towers bid.

So when the Alchemy bid failed on April 27 it was not surprising that workers

demonstrated their joy, and when the Towers bid succeeded they also celebrated. This was the only choice that Woodley and their stewards had given them: they were clutching at straws.

Now their problems start. Up to now everything has been obscured from them. This confusion has been added to by the fact that Rover has jumped to the top of the sales league in Britain.

### Prices slashed

This is heavily distorted by the fact that whoever brought Rover would keep the stocks. So BMW in order to get every penny out of the deal, cut prices drastically, selling at a loss because any money raised was a bonus, and would simply reduce the stocks they were giving away. Will these sales continue when prices go back up, and when the firm drops out of the media limelight?

The reality is that in order to continue to sell cheaply Towers will have to cut costs. This is where it is so dangerous for the unions to jump so readily into bed with the boss.

How can the union that has led the workers to cheer for the new boss then resist him when he worsens working conditions? Remember conditions at the major plants usually lead the way

for what happens in other workplaces, so all workers could lose out of this.

Geoffrey Robinson, who was involved in the last days of the talks, said he would expect the workers “as their contribution” to “tear up the rule book”.

Karl Chinn has insisted that Phoenix would have “the most enthusiastic workers in the world.” Is it a job at any cost?

The problems will get worse. But as the plant runs down, how can the union oppose any redundancies? Phoenix will argue that this is just the “reality” of a plant with no new models in an increasingly competitive market.

And what about those workers who are already affected by the present level of rundown, in companies which supply Rover?

Will Rover dealers stay loyal if other companies offer them franchises, and if sales start to decline again?

If Longbridge closes at any future date, this will be a lot harder to fight as the plant is now on its own, and will be owned by a small scale concern.

At the other plants similar problems will occur: Solihull will be on its own against Ford who have shown at Dagenham how ruthless they can be. Cowley will only have one model, the new mini, and will be on their own negotiating with BMW.

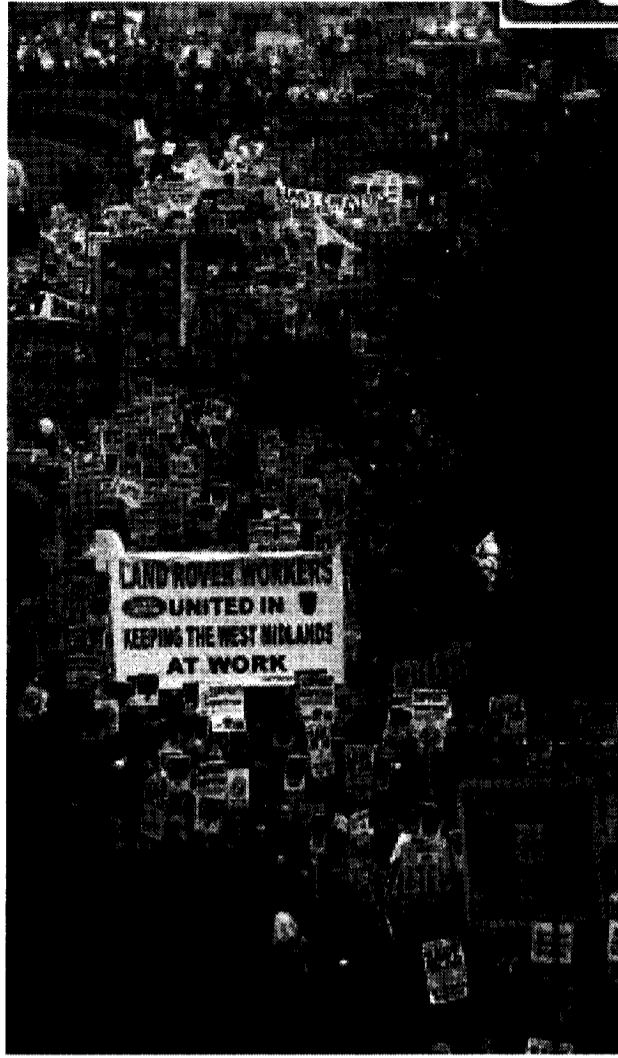
Immediate moves need to be made to form links by workers nationally and internationally to break the fragmentation created by the union leadership’s approach.

The lessons should be taken by the Ford workers straight away. You need to occupy immediately, don’t let union officials put off decisions until it is too late.

Call for unity with your European plants calling for work sharing.

Call a national demonstration in London demanding nationalisation.

United we can fight back: divided we wind up pleading for a benevolent capitalist to bail us out.



Andrew Wiant

The Longbridge march: who remembered the component workers whose jobs are also at stake in the Midlands and beyond?

## What about component workers?

The workers at Longbridge have had no vote on the deal that could affect their future, but at least they could try to influence events through their stewards.

But what about the component workers, whose jobs are also at stake?

Ford have announced that

they are going to buy more components for the Land Rover plant at Solihull from Europe, and some models will have to share the same components as their Maverick and Explorer models.

Phoenix, too, have said they will switch to component suppliers in Europe.

Many workers in the component industry have already been made redundant. Already there have been 600 job losses at Fort Dunlop in Birmingham, but more jobs can be expected to go, among steel producers and in the many smaller companies that supply Rover.

They are usually in the same unions as the Rover and Ford workers, and they are situated all over the UK. But even though the unions kept saying that ten times as many component workers are affected as direct car plant workers, they have had no say whatsoever – they are hidden workers.

The main unions should call an emergency conference of all car and component workers to discuss this crisis.

This should be the forerunner of such a conference on a European scale. The centre-piece of such a conference should be an end to concession bargaining, that is putting more and more out of work. Available work should be shared across the plants.

If such conferences were held, then car workers could put themselves at the forefront of developing a nationalised public transport system.

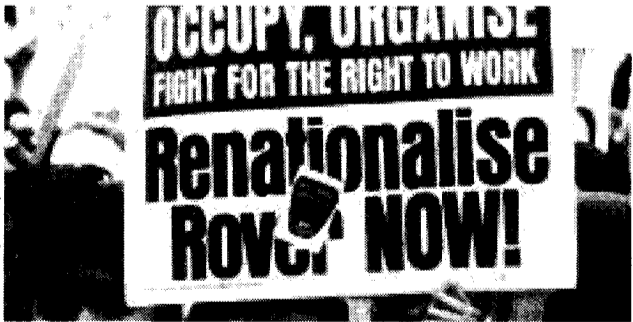
## So who really profits from the Towers Bid?

Much of the bid is still hazy. What is clear is that hardly any new money is involved. The American bank that has stumped up £200 million has the stock as collateral: but what interest rate are they charging?

BMW gave £75 million as a donation and an interest free 50 year loan of £500 million. This latter is spread over three years, no doubt so that BMW can get tax advantages out of it.

(They have sold Land Rover from a company on the Isle of Man, saving themselves £70 million).

But who has put money in? Apart from the famous £10, it appears that each of the 6 founders – Towers, Hemmings, Nick Stephenson from Lola cars, Mayflower, John Edwards and another dealer – has put in £100,000. Is this £600,000 really the only new money? Towers has talked about the



Molly Cooper

workers acquiring one third of the equity in Phoenix. But how will they get it?

Will they have to pay cash for shares? Or does he perhaps expect them to carry out the suggestion of BMW UK’s boss Werner Samaans, that they pay by working unpaid overtime?

Another percentage will go to the dealers.

So what percentage of Phoenix will remain with the six founders? If anything is left to sell off at the end, what percentage of the assets will they receive?

For that matter, what salaries are they paying themselves?

They have already appointed a Manufacturing Director, Chris Bowen for Longbridge, and they are now looking for a Managing Director.

At that point the founders will just be the board of directors, and go back to their other businesses.

No doubt they will continue to get a salary for being on the board. But whatever reward they receive, it will basically be for having carried out the negotiations.

Scottish Socialist Party

# The rise of a new socialist party

On 6 May 1999 Tommy Sheridan, head of the Scottish Socialist Party list in Glasgow, was elected as a Member of the first Scottish Parliament for three centuries.

This electoral breakthrough put the SSP, created only a few months earlier, at the forefront of the political scene. But the roots of the new party are much deeper.

**FRANCIS CURRAN and MURRAY SMITH,** International coordinators of the SSP, explored what happened in an article for *Inprecor*, French language magazine of the Fourth International. Below we print an edited version.

By introducing the poll tax in 1989, Margaret Thatcher made a double error. Until then she had attacked the workers' movement sector by sector, choosing her terrain, beating, one after another, steel workers, print workers, left wing councils and, as her pièce de résistance, the miners.

But then she tried to impose a new local tax which hit everybody and made the most impoverished pay the same as the rich. This provoked a mass movement which smashed the poll tax and contributed powerfully to her downfall.

Her second error was to first introduce this tax in Scotland, a part of Britain where her government had never commanded a majority and where the workers' movement had strong traditions of struggle.

This is not the place to repeat the history of the mass mobilisations which defeated the poll tax, the sole victory of the British workers' movement in a period of heavy defeats. But this was crucial in the genesis of the SSP.

In Scotland the anti-poll tax movement rapidly achieved great breadth. The Scottish section of Militant, which later became the main component of the SSP, played the leading role, defending the strategy of refusing to pay the poll tax combined with mass mobilisations and

direct action.

A wide network of local committees developed, federated at a national level, with Militant's Tommy Sheridan as the main spokesperson.

But, while Militant played a dominant role, this struggle also saw real unity, bringing together far left militants, Trotskyist and libertarians, alongside Labour party members, trade unionists, Communist party members, Nationalists and many coming into political activity for the first time.

It forged collaboration between forces from diverse backgrounds and began to change ways of behaving and thinking.

## Scottish Militant Labour leaves the Labour Party

Following this campaign and the normalisation of the Labour Party under the iron hand of Neil Kinnock, Scottish Militant left the Labour Party in 1992 (a year before comrades in England) to create an independent organisation: Scottish Militant Labour.

Profiting from the authority gained in the campaign against the Poll Tax, especially in working class areas of Glasgow, SML scored the first electoral success of the far left in Scotland, securing the election of several municipal and regional councillors in Glasgow.

The most spectacular suc-

cess was Tommy Sheridan's election to Glasgow city council when serving a six month jail sentence for trying to stop a warrant sale of a poll tax non-payer - the medieval seizure of furniture of so called debtors.

In 1992 Thatcher's successor John Major had won the General Election. In Scotland his victory created double disappointment.

We were condemned to five more years of Tory by the Tories and Labour's defeat, set back the perspective of establishing an autonomous Scottish Parliament. This strengthened nationalist consciousness linked to social demands.

The lurch to the right of the LP, begun under Kinnock, continued under the brief reign of John Smith, who died in 1994, and was extended under Tony Blair.

The Scottish National Party, a bourgeois nationalist party with a petit-bourgeois leadership and a popular base, was trying, with some success, to develop a left wing profile to attract the votes of disappointed Labour voters.

On the Left the idea was growing that it was necessary to try to create a socialist alternative to Blair's New Labour. The potential was demonstrated anew by the success of Tommy Sheridan in the European elections in 1994, where he scored 7.5 percent in the whole of Glasgow.

It would have been very easy for SML to fall into self-proclaimed triumphalism. But the organisation understood that it couldn't form an alternative by itself; it was necessary to work to try to create a united, pluralist anti-capitalist force.

## Struggles and debates on the Left

In the early 1990s Socialist Forums began as annual meetings organised jointly by the Socialist Movement (SSM, left Labour), the Liberation current (SNP left) and the Communist Party of Scotland (one of the fragments born out of the explosion of the CPGB).

In 1994, for the first time, representatives of SML participated. Subsequently they accepted an offer to jointly organise the 1995 forum. Alan McCombes, in the name of SML, publicly launched the idea of an electoral bloc, a Socialist Alliance, to contest the first elections for the Scottish Parliament, a perspective which was gaining credence given the universally expected victory of the LP in the next legislative elections.

The following year were marked by new struggles: the strike at Timex in Dundee, the campaign against water privatisation. In 1994-95 the campaign against the Criminal Justice Act was characterised by mass, illegal demonstrations.

Although the law was adopted it has never been used against militant ecologist advocates of direct action, as was expected.

In a campaign against the building of a motorway in south Glasgow, militants of traditional left encountered radical ecologist militants, some of whom subsequently became part of the Socialist Alliance and then the SSP.

## A lost opportunity

The idea of a Socialist Alliance was making some headway, though with reservations in the SSM where a section of its supporters remained in the Labour Party and even more so in the Liberation current, which was entirely integrated into the SNP.

Things accelerated, how-

ever, thanks to the intervention of Arthur Scargill who left the LP and in November 1995 announced his intention to launch a new party.

This interested a number of political forces in Scotland, as it did in England, and could have been the opportunity to create a new, pluralist socialist party. Unfortunately Scargill's ultra-centralist, authoritarian, even Stalinist conceptions - wasted this potential, with the result that his party, the Socialist Labour Party, is today reduced to a shadow of itself.

It is only today, five years later, that one can begin to see in London the outline of a new English radical left.

In Scotland discussions between Scargill and the organisations from the Forum foundered on two points.

He rejected pluralism, the entry into the new party of organised political currents (he especially wanted to bar the Militant and SWP). And Scargill refused to contemplate an autonomous section of the party in Scotland.

By his inflexible attitude Scargill made, unwittingly, his sole contribution to the emergence of a new political force. The notion that he was going, no matter what, to launch his own party, including in Scotland accelerated the launch of the Scottish Socialist Alliance in February 1996.

## The Scottish Socialist Alliance

What did this new SSA represent at the moment of its birth? SML joined, as an organised current. The Socialist Movement also joined, some members remaining in the LP.

Liberation didn't join as a current though many left-wing militants from the SNP joined either then or later. The CPS also opted not to join, though a number of its members and officials did so, including its General Secretary Bill Bonnar.

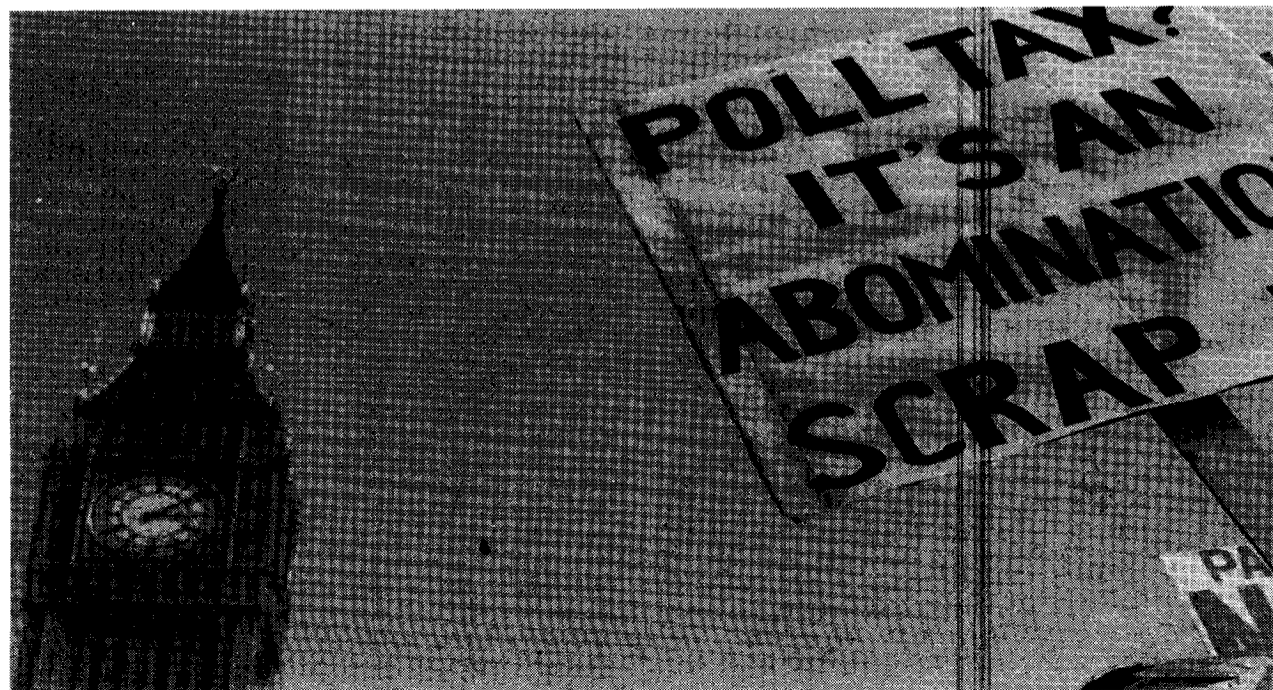
There were also several small far left groups as well as independents from a wide range of social movements such as Rosie Kane, the leading figure in the radical ecologist movement.

Making the link between ecology and the anti-capitalist struggle, one of the slo-



The fight against the Poll Tax came sooner and stayed stronger in Scotland

John Harris



of the Alliance, and the SSP was 'If you want to be Green, you have to be Red'.

In the two and half years of its existence the SSA had between 400 and 500 members. It was essentially limited to the cities of Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee, with a rather weak structure.

The weight of SML was overwhelming compared to other forces. To create a climate of trust it had been decided that no current should have more than 40 percent of leadership positions. An indication of the road covered in two years is that no-one felt it necessary to maintain this rule at the launch of the SSP.

The Alliance had considerable impact both in struggles, notably defence of public services, and on the electoral terrain. It organised support for Liverpool dockers and in November-December 1996 played an important role in building support for the Glaciers strike, the first factory occupation in Scotland for ten years.

This fight was successful, causing the General Secretary of the STUC to claim that it was 'the most significant victory for the trade union movement since the occupation of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders in 1972'. Some of the leaders of the occupation joined the SSA.

In the British Parliamentary elections in May 1997 the SSA stood in 16 seats, including all those in Glasgow. In an election marked by a Labour landslide, the SSA gained a respectable score and established credibility for the future.

This marked a turning point in Scottish political life, not just because of the

the profoundly democratic aspirations of the Scottish people to control their own destiny.

Historically this aspiration has always been championed more by the left and the workers' movement than by the right, and today support for independence is stronger among the working class and youth.

It is, therefore, natural to fuse this democratic aspiration with the aspiration for social transformation. In this fusion is found the key to every project for emancipation in Scotland.

### A new Party

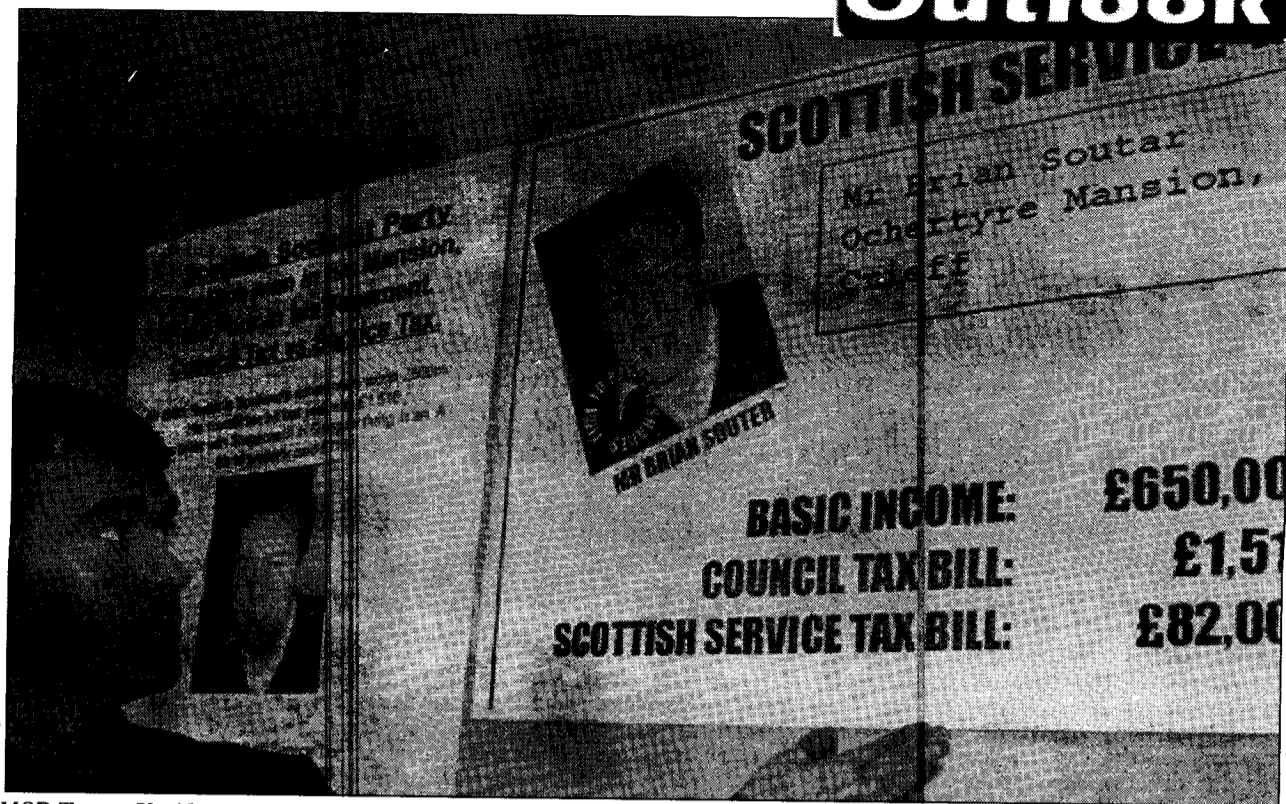
The SSP was launched in September 1998. SML transferred its apparatus and offices to the new party. Its journal *Scottish Socialist Voice* became that of the SSP.

The creation of the party built on the experience of the SSA but was also a break - it was a qualitative step. The party was to bring together much more important forces than those of the Alliance, to become a real political alternative to New Labour and the Nationalists.

In the discussions before the launch of the SSP the question had been posed: where will the forces for a new party come? Did they really exist? The proof of the pudding was in the eating, the only way of seeing if these forces existed was to create the party.

The party was a success. Immediately it had a qualitatively different impact than the Alliance; at a mass level the launch of a party was understood as proof of seriousness.

Those who look to us demand, and demand forcefully, that the SSP 'must not



MSP Tommy Sheridan promoting the Service Tax, the SSP's challenge to the regressive Tory Council Tax

On a historical scale it is true that important questions will not be decided by mass action not elections. But today elections are an excellent way of carrying out political activity, making our ideas known on a mass scale.

There is no contradiction with struggles - elections and struggles complement each other.

### Electoral breakthrough

The new party began to attract an influx of new supporters and to create new branches beyond the geographical base of the SSA. The first electoral test was in a European by-election in north-east Scotland.

In unfavourable territory, covering the cities of Dundee and Aberdeen but also some of the richest agricultural land in Europe, the SSP obtained 2,500 votes, more than 2 percent. It was a modest result but sufficient to establish credibility.

After the first SSP conference in February 1999, energies were focused on the preparation of the first Scottish legislative elections in May 1999, which coincided with local elections. The electoral campaign merged with the work of building the SSP. The party increased from 600-800 members in February to pass 1,000 in April.

We presented lists in each of the eight regions of the country, including in those where the party didn't exist. That allowed the running of a national campaign and gave every elector in Scotland the chance to vote SSP.

This was the first election to introduce proportional representation, even partially. 56 members of the new Scottish Parliament were elected under proportional representation at a regional level and 73 in first past the post constituencies.

The SSP stood in 18 con-

stituencies, making an agreement with the SWP who stood in 4.

At a national level the SSP won 2 per cent of the votes (46,000) and its score of 7.5 per cent in Glasgow allowed the election of Tommy Sheridan.

But the celebrations in Glasgow were tempered by bad news. Scargill's party gained 55,000 votes, beating the SSP in every region apart from Glasgow and the West. SSP members were incredulous.

The SLP was very weak in Scotland and had been quasi-invisible during the campaign. Confusion of names, the fame of Scargill?

Happily speculation didn't last long. The European elections in June provided a bigger test. The SSP rose to 4 per cent, beating the SLP, whose vote fell to 0.95 per cent, in every constituency. Thanks, to a large measure, to the election of Tommy Sheridan the SSP had established itself as the socialist alternative to the left of Labour.

The subsequent year has been crucial for consolidating the SSP. Its second conference in February 2000 reflected the growth of the party and a strengthening of its political cohesion.

Apart from the ex-SML, which has become the International Socialist Movement, the main organised political force is the Communist Republican Network, a far left current. But the majority of new members have no other affiliation than the SSP. At the moment there is no organised current that one could call reformist.

Electoral successes continue, with 10 per cent in the Hamilton by-election in September 1999 and 4 per cent in Ayr in March 2000. The latest opinion polls give us 5 per cent of votes nationally, 13 per cent in Glasgow and 11 per cent in the Central region, which would give us 3 deputies in the Scottish Parliament.

Tommy Sheridan writes a weekly column in the *Daily Record*, the main daily paper in Scotland with a readership of 2 million (out of a population of 5 million).

With 2000 members and more than 50 branches

across the country, and its electoral audience, the SSP has enormous responsibilities.

We have the opportunity to build a party which can present itself as a credible alternative to Labour and the Nationalists. Only the SWP and the remnants of the SLP and CP remain outside.

We address ourselves to those who still vote, reluctantly, for the LP, those who don't vote and those who support the SNP. The later is ahead of Labour in the polls and split between the need to be seen as to the left of Labour and as a viable manager of the interests of big capital in an independent Scotland.

### A party with a project for society

The SSP has established our image as a party which daily fights to defend the working class. We are, above all, for a rupture with capitalism, for socialism. There is no place today for yet another party which accepts capitalism as a barrier that cannot be passed.

We struggle against neoliberal policies but without sowing the illusion that the LP could return to a Keynesian golden age and restore the Welfare State.

While we fight on concrete issues alongside workers who remain in this party, we call on them to join us in building the socialist alternative.

We also fight for the trade unions to break their political and financial links with Labour - links which are more and more being called into question anyway.

But we must be more than 'the party of opposition'. We are opposed to privatisations, against handouts for the bosses, against flexibility and deregulation. We defend public services and the rights and gains of workers. But every serious political force must present itself through a positive project.

We work to define what socialism today could be after the double setback of Stalinism and Social Democracy, how it is possible to break with capitalism in the epoch of globalisation.

We are preparing a book, due out in November in which we will present our

critique of capitalism and our thoughts on Socialism for the 21st Century, seeking to strip bare the mechanisms of capital and show the possibility of a society based on the satisfaction of human needs. The publication of this book will give the opportunity to open a far ranging debate.

We also try to put forward solutions to concrete problems. One of the central questions among youth is drugs. We propose the legalisation of cannabis and decriminalisation of other drugs. Our policy was presented in a book by our spokesperson on this issue, *Drugs and the Party Line* by Kevin Williamson.

We have put forward a proposal for a Scottish Service Tax - a system of local taxes, based on strongly progressive measures which would lead to a significant redistribution from rich to poor.

It would also give the local councils extra revenue, giving them a margin for manoeuvre in relation to central government, allowing them to carry out policies in the interests of the population.

Tommy Sheridan's Bill in the Scottish Parliament to 'Abolish Poindings and Warrant Sales' was carried at its first by a massive majority of 79 to 15 with 30 abstentions. This was despite desperate opposition from the Labour-Lib Democratic executive, which has now been left in tatters after a full-scale Labour back-bench rebellion - a massive victory for the SSP even though the bill still has two stages to go through.

The SSP tries to act within the concrete conditions of Scotland but we do not neglect the international dimension. We see the SSP as part of the recomposition of the workers' movement internationally.

We therefore see it as very important to reinforce links between the new anti-capitalist formations which are being created, especially in Europe.

It is in that spirit that we participated at the meeting of a number of these formations in Lisbon last March and look forward to strengthening this type of collaboration.



May 2000: Engineering workers occupy the Kooerner Energy engineering plant in Clydebank, supported by campaigners outside

defeat of the Tories but also because devolution would lead to the creation of an autonomous Parliament in Scotland.

Political life in Scotland became more and more national, distinct from that in England. A referendum in September 1997 broadly approved the autonomy project proposed by Blair, opening the way to the creation of a Scottish Parliament.

The SSA had taken an decision which positioned it well in this new political framework: in favour of an independent socialist Scotland. This became its identity card and later that of the SSP.

Scottish nationalism is only marginally characterised by a crude anti-English sentiment. It is rather more the expression of

be a party like the others'. The SSP draws a line between ourselves and the world of scandals and bribery.

Our candidates stand as workers' representatives who will live on workers' wages. Tommy Sheridan only takes half his salary, giving the rest to the party and various organisations.

Our profile is important: we proclaim our socialism and put forward proposals which meet the needs of the majority in the here and now. It is crucial to be involved in struggles, small and large, and not simply disappear when there are no elections.

We reject leftist platitudes that 'elections aren't our terrain, our terrain is struggles'.

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# Sierra Leone: tragic victim of globalisation

**Bob Wood**

GLOBALISATION is fraying at the edges. For evidence, look no further than Africa. Look at the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, look at the Congo, look at Angola or the Sudan. Or look at the unhappy country of Sierra Leone.

The British press, reporting on the recent renewal of conflict in the West African state has presented us with a simple counterposition. The constitutional, elected government of President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah is faced by a rebellion led by the pathologically criminal Foday Sankoh.

The only activity of the rebels is to rape and terrorise, and they specialise in random acts of mutilation and torture. The truth, as always, is more complicated, though scarcely more comforting.

Since it gained independence in 1961, Sierra Leone has been systematically pillaged by an alliance of western mining companies and corrupt local politicians.

The country is rich in mineral resources, particularly diamonds, now said to be funding the rebellion, but also iron ore, aluminium and titanium, the latter obtained through shallow mining of laterite, leaving vast areas in the south of the country environmentally sterile and useless for farming.

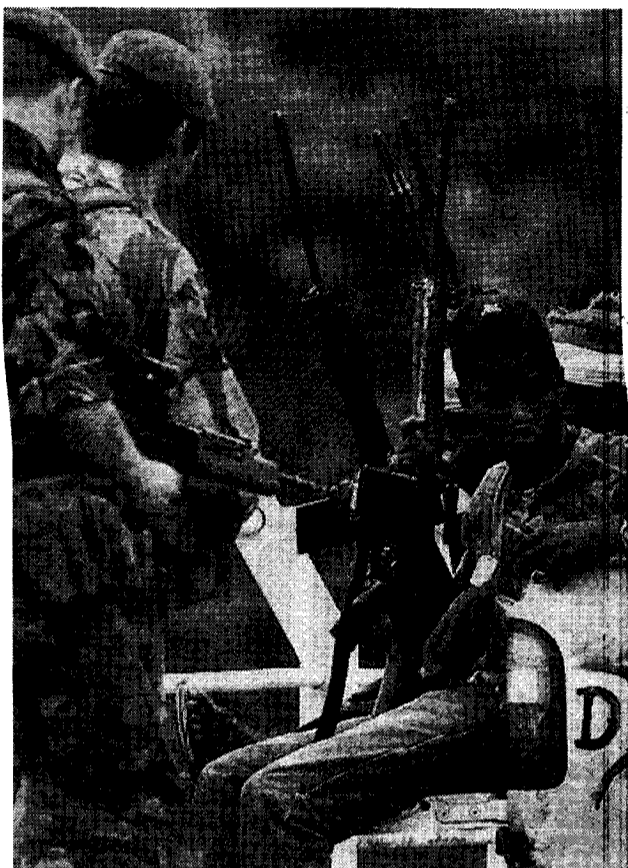
The profits from mining have all gone to line the pockets of mining company shareholders, merchants or local politicians, milking the state.

## Corruption

The extent of this corruption can perhaps best be judged from the activities of Jamil Sahid Mohammed, the Afro-Lebanese crony of the late President, Siaka Stevens. Although he was not an elected politician, in addition to controlling both the diamond and fishing industries, Mohammed attended Cabinet meetings and influenced political appointments.

At the same time, the President's secretary was busy selling civil service appointments, for example an aspiring district officer might have to pay several thousand pounds on initial appointment, and then regular monthly payments for the privilege of retaining the job. Little imagination is required to understand who ultimately paid the cost of these bribes.

Since independence in 1961, the politics of Sierra Leone have been largely influenced by conflict for spoils between the elites of three main groups – the Mende in the south of the country, the Temne in the north, and the Krio, descendants of freed slaves, in the



*British paras prop up government troops and vicious pro-government militias, armed with Foreign Office help.*

Freetown peninsula. These ethnic conflicts have often subdued, but of course never entirely over-ridden class conflict.

After independence, the country was ruled successively by the Margai brothers from the Mende south, leaders of the SLPP (Sierra Leone People's Party), with the APC (All People's Congress) in opposition. Siaka Stevens, the leader of the APC took office in 1968, following disputed elections and a short-lived military intervention.

Stevens had been a trade union leader on the railways, and although he came from the north was not a Temne but from the smaller Limba tribe. Ruling first as Prime Minister, then as President of a one-party state, Stevens turned the moderate corruption of the Margai period into full-blown kleptocracy.

## Successor

He was followed in 1985 by his chosen successor, Joseph Momoh, leader of the armed forces. Momoh was if anything even more corrupt than Stevens, and was eventually overthrown in 1992 by a group of junior officers under Valentine Strasser. These officers were concerned about the conduct of the war against the rebels which had by then begun.

The origins of the rebel organisation, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), can be traced back to the sixties and early seventies, a period of worldwide radicalisation. It came from the coalescence of student radicals and marginalised, disaffected and socially excluded elements in Freetown, of the

kind that Marx and Engels dubbed the lumpenproletariat.

## Radical influence

These circles were influenced by Guevara and Castro, books like Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, and to a limited extent by Lenin and Marx too. Serious disturbances took place on the campus of Fourah Bay College (the University of Sierra Leone in Freetown) in 1977, spreading to involve school students as well.

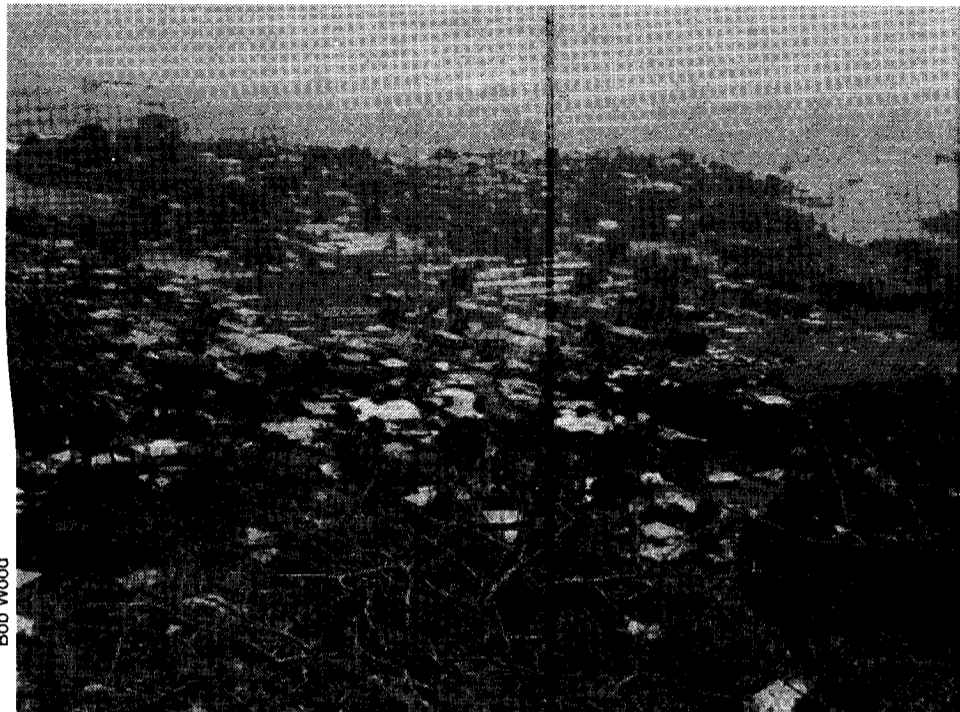
By the 1980s student groups were being influenced by Pan-Africanism, and by the ideas in Colonel Qaddafi's Green Book. Talk of revolution was in the air, and the students adopted anti-imperialist slogans.

In 1985 forty-one students were expelled from Fourah Bay College for alleged Libyan links. These were undoubtedly trumped-up charges, for without evidence, the authorities said that the students had intended to allow their rooms to be used by Libyan mercenaries during the vacation! The president of the Student Union, Alie Kabba, was arrested and detained for several months.

## Libya

But even if the detailed charge was spurious, the students were definitely interested in Libya, for thirty-five of them went there two years later, in 1987, for military training. With this group was Foday Sankoh, now the leader of the RUF.

Sankoh had first achieved notoriety when as Corporal Sankoh he had taken part in an abortive coup against the Stevens regime, for which he



*Happier times: a bird's eye view of Freetown before the civil war erupted*

was jailed in the early seventies.

When the first small group of guerrillas entered Sierra Leone in March 1991, many of these students had dropped out, leaving a greater preponderance of lumpen elements in the leadership of the RUF. It is certainly the case that the ideology of the RUF has become more confused, and marginal to its activities as time has passed. But they still have a residual politics.

In their statement to the talks which resulted in the Lome peace agreement in July last year, the RUF said: "After the past eight years of our liberation struggle, which we commenced with reluctance, it is now crystal clear that our conflict is essentially socio-political and cannot be resolved by military means but through genuine negotiation."

## Programme

Their totally unrealistic political programme, promulgated at these talks, called for self-reliance and a gradual reduction in foreign assistance, but at the same time free education up to secondary level and free primary health care.

It is not surprising that they have sometimes been compared with Peru's Shining Path guerrillas, or even the Khmer Rouge.

What does the lumpenproletariat represent socially? The term was coined by Marx to describe all those on the margins of society, those who have fallen out or dropped out.

In writing about the peasant wars in sixteenth century Germany, Engels said:

"The lumpenproletariat is generally speaking a phenomenon more or less developed in all phases of society to date ... people without a definite occupation and a stable domicile ... In wartime some of these

tramps joined the armies, others begged their way across the countryside, and others eked out a meagre living in the towns ..."

Later he wrote: "The lump leads his fist for a few talers to fight out the spats among the bourgeoisie, nobility and police."

The Communist Manifesto was perhaps even less kind: "The lumpenproletariat, this passive putrefaction of the lowest strata of the old society, is here and there swept up into the movement of the proletarian revolution (but) in accordance with all its condition of life, it is more apt to sell itself to reactionary intrigues."

And finally, in writing about the role of Louis Bonaparte in the Paris of 1848, Marx said that he was the "chief of the lumpenproletariat ... who recognises in this scum, offal, refuse of all classes, the only class upon which he can base himself unconditionally."

This is not to say that lumpen elements are only to be found in the RUF. Political thuggery, making use of the poor and dispossessed of Freetown, has a long and inglorious history in Sierra Leone, dating back to the sixties. Some police methods, involving beating suspects rather than using more subtle forensic techniques, can be traced back to the colonial period. Human rights abuses, including mutilation, torture and summary execution have been practised by both sides in the civil war.

## Pressure

The government has generally been less culpable than the rebels, but probably only because it is more beholden to international opinion.

The most recent testimony to the government's behaviour is the way in which the recently captured

and wounded Foday Sankoh was paraded naked through the streets of Freetown.

What of the future? The intervention of the UN, and now British forces, has been no more helpful in resolving the crisis in this poverty-stricken and war-torn country than the previous campaign by Nigerian-led West African forces. Whatever the origins of the civil war, it is clear that since 1997, its shape has changed.

The alliance formed then between parts of the Sierra Leone Army and the RUF has consolidated the hold of the rebels over the northern part of the country. The map showing the areas held by the rebels is almost entirely the same as the areas where the Temnes live.

## Pipedream

By the same token, the areas controlled by the government are the Mende areas. Any prospect of completely defeating the rebels is a pipedream, although as long as the government can hold Freetown, with international military assistance, the rebels can be contained.

New political structures must be found – possibly some type of federal arrangement, with powers devolved to the regions. The Kabbah government was elected using a closed list system, similar to the European elections in this country, leaving the political elites in the parties to pick their representatives.

And one of the reasons why the most recent peace agreement broke down may well have been the failure to implement one of its clauses – the holding of local elections.

What remains certain is that none of the imperialist countries largely responsible for the current state of Sierra Leone can be trusted to find an ethical solution.

## Dave Bangs

The rabid racism of the British press response to the land occupations in Zimbabwe has all but obscured the appalling injustice of white dominance over the land there.

One in four Zimbabwean adults are dying of AIDS, starved of drugs or medical care.

IMF imposed cutbacks caused a 40 per cent rise in the number of mothers dying in childbirth.

Between 20,000 and 40,000 minority tribespeople died in Mugabe's genocide of the Ndebele uprising of the 1980s.

Yet it is the deaths of 3 white farmers that the British press mourns.

In the 15 year war of liberation from 1965-1980, it was those white farmers who were the main enemy. For those black nationalist guerrillas crossing back over the border, struggling through the bush, it was those white farmers who they fronted up to - with their Special Forces, razor wire, dogs and guns.

For all the thuggery and manipulation of the ZANU attacks on the opposition MDC, here in the ex-colonial country, we should not forget the symbolism of the use of the war veterans to lead the land occupations. The reclamation of the lands stolen by the whites is unfinished business of the war of liberation.

In a political game replete with symbolism, it is not by chance that the ZANU veteran gangs should have attacked farmers like Martin Olds, ex-fighter in the white supremacist counter-insurgency Grey Scouts, who even called his farm Compensation (how sick can you get?).

## Violence

For us as socialists, the clamour over the land occupations raises many basic issues. The Land is Ours circulated a statement denouncing white domination but arguing that "none of this justifies violent seizures in today's climate".

But what is today's climate? Is the reality of class rule fundamentally different today than it was when Irish farmers burned out British absentee landlords 80 years ago?

Whether poor landless folk in Zimbabwe are facing up to white farmers or the mandarins of Mugabe's IMF backed regime, they will find that the realities of ruling class violence everywhere confront them.

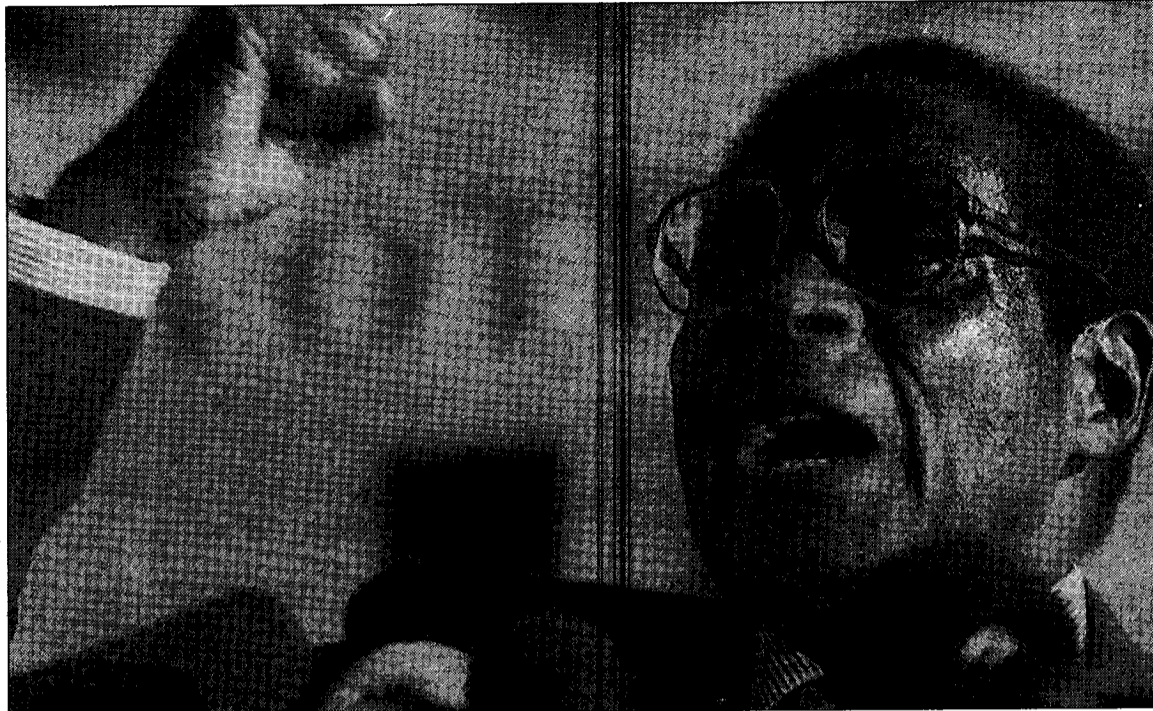
When the anarchist workers of the Spanish latifundia rose against their pro-fascist landlords in 1936, or when the French serfs of the medieval jacqueries painted the night sky red with the flames of burning chateaux, they did so only after endless years of cruel repression.

The horror of the British media at the violence of the land occupations is primarily a horror of the class violence of the dispossessed. We can argue that this violence was needlessly cruel, that it often attacked other poor black people, or that it served the purposes of the corrupt ruling party. But it is its character as a threat to white property and international investment that chills the British media.

## The British connection

Many of the big media shareholders and establishment tycoons may well have more personal reasons for their horror of the killing of white farmers.

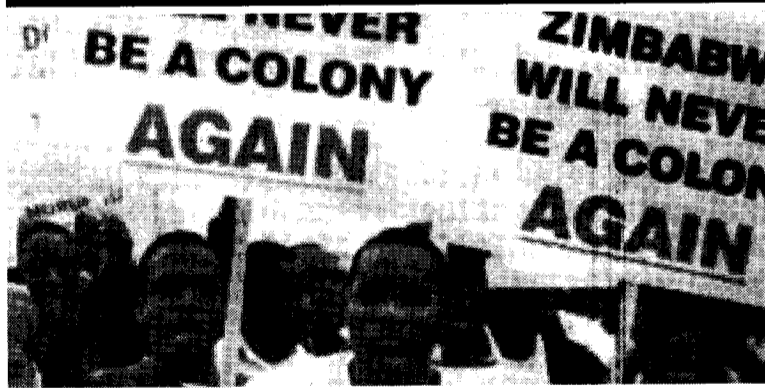
Members of the House of Lords, newspaper barons and others with big British landholdings also own huge estates in Zimbabwe. In Brighton, the *Evening Argus* has been giving free publicity to the notorious and frightening landlord and convicted arsonist Nicholas



Cynically milking the maximum electoral advantage from a real problem: Mugabe

After stealing almost everything else ...

# Zimbabwe - whites steal the show



Hoogstraten, who has a million acre holding in Zimbabwe and close links with the Mugabe regime, going back to the 1960s when he funded ZANU in the war of liberation.

## The role of the state

Time and again the media have contrasted the 'lawlessness' of the armed land occupation with the urgent need to return to the rule of law. The independence of the Zimbabwean judiciary has been praised. The need for due legal process in the takeover of land, the consent of the seller and proper compensation have been stressed.

Yet whom has this judicial independence served? Any radical land reform at the time of independence was scuppered by the pro-imperialist terms of the Lancaster House settlement, which guaranteed that no expropriation of the land should take place until at least 1990.

Of course, Mugabe should have challenged the terms of this settlement, which institutionalised a continuing political role for the white settlers and business owners

and the continuance of their property rights. But to do so would have brought him squarely into confrontation with imperialism, and that he was not prepared to do.

All the main judgements of the Zimbabwean judiciary in the post Lancaster House period have supported the property rights of the whites.

The process of extracting land from them for poor rural blacks has been confined to quasi-commercial sale, mostly of marginal land, which has then tended to fall into the hands of Mugabe's cronies.

The rule of law and the independence of the judiciary have been a major block on social progress in Zimbabwe, because it means the rule of bourgeois law and the independence of the bourgeois state. Law is not neutral.

It serves the dominant class. It is Mugabe's implied threat to the independence of the bourgeois state that frightens European commentators most, not the prospect of legal, gradualist land reform - or even squatter violence.

As *The Economist* (22 April) said, "deplorable as it is, the violence ... is not, in itself, the main cause for concern. Nor are the calls for land reform... The sinister feature, rather, is the president's role in the current campaign... The president says, 'This is not a problem that can be corrected by the courts.' He thereby lends his support to mob rule."

If the wider needs of their class rule dictate, then the bourgeois state can take very radical action.

In the crisis of the Second World War, the British state took over vast tracts of private land for war production, war facilities and for military training.

Stately homes were temporarily (and sometimes permanently) expropriated and private ornamental parks unceremoniously ploughed. Farmers who did not comply with local state directions were expelled from their land.

What capitalist investment must have, however, is stability. And even a whiff of the self-activity and rebellion of the poor will send such investors off and away.

## The Mugabe regime and the MDC

Driven by the pressure of imperialism, the Mugabe regime is desperate. All the vicious cut-backs of the IMF-born Economic Structural Adjustment Programme, with its end to food subsidies, abolition of the minimum wage and massive rises in the price of basic goods have not recreated the high growth rates of the first years of independence.

Huge strike movements of state

and industrial workers, uprisings in the townships, demonstrations and student protests have mobilised the poor.

Yet the growth of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) has taken the course so often followed by new opposition movements in the years since the fall of the Stalinist regimes discredited their version of socialism.

Although born out of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions and mobilising large sections of the poor, the MDC was soon captured by business interests.

Democratic in its rhetoric, the MDC is neo-liberal in its programme, calling for all state-owned companies to be privatised in two years, for central bank autonomy, and a 100-day IMF-style stabilisation. No wonder it has been joined by the ranks of white farmers.

## A real land reform

The British government has linked the process of land reform to the re-establishment of the rule of law and an end to the compulsory purchase of white-owned land. There is concurrence with the Mugabe regime that the reform should be confined to around 1500 of the 4500 white-owned farms, and to the purchase of those "farms which are voluntarily offered for sale".

Yet despite the heavy ZANU orchestration, it is difficult to conceive that the process of land occupation does not already involve the spontaneous activity of many poor and landless folk who merely wish to take advantage of these new opportunities.

That is how it should be. Genuine land reform does not require the consent of the landlord or their compensation. It is merely a return of what has previously been stolen to its rightful owners.

It proceeds in response to local needs and results from the self-activity of the landless themselves. It would be criminal to spend a penny on compensating the expropriated farmers in an economy where the average income has dropped to £279 per year.

Of course, the continuing presence of the white ex-farm owners in the capacity of skilled farm workers (if they have such skills) would be undoubtedly useful to the farm sector. It would be fascinating to see how many stayed, in such circumstances.

And of course, the Mugabe regime should not themselves benefit from the process of redistribution.

The Land is Ours calls for an Independent Arbitration Board fully representative of the landless people to oversee the process of reform.

It calls for British financial aid for land redistribution to be consistent with the aims of local democratic accountability and to take into account the needs of indigenous, tribal and nomadic people, and for it to be ensured that priority for the best agricultural land is given to the landless of Zimbabwe to be managed sustainably, taking into account environmental considerations.

Britain's promise of a mere additional £36 million of conditional aid to fund this process is paltry.

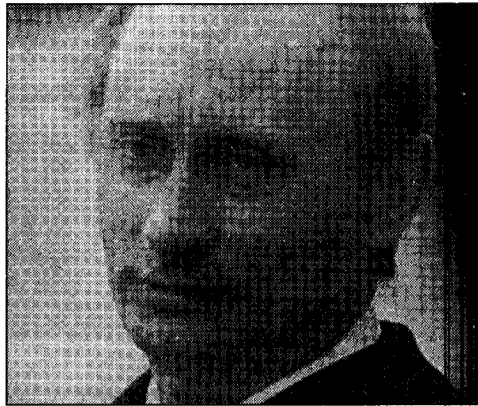
As George Monbiot says in the *Guardian*, "our debt to the people of Zimbabwe runs into billions".

The problems of Zimbabwe are not primarily the problems of local corruption and commandism. They are the legacy of more than a century of imperialism. The comfort and wealth of Britain is built on the super-exploitation of Zimbabwe and other neo-colonial states.

Our first duty is to repay our debt for the suffering of the black population of Zimbabwe.

The land is theirs!

## Russian challenge to Chechnya slaughter



The Chechnya war was key to Putin's election

### Sheila Malone

Recent issues of *Socialist Outlook* have taken a detailed look at Russia and its war in Chechnya.

The catastrophic economic situation, increasing political centralisation and tightening control of the media have all helped to ensure the present success of new strongman in the Kremlin, Vladimir Putin. But there is opposition to his policies, both in Russia and elsewhere.

Recently, supporters of Workers Aid and the Campaign to Stop the War in Chechnya invited fellow-activists in Moscow to Britain to build solidarity.

We are publishing the statement and appeal in the latest issue of *Chechlovestvost (Humanity)*, a small, left, anti-fascist paper published in Moscow, which opposes the war against Chechnya.

Its editor, Vladimir Kvotkov, was able to share experiences and ideas at meetings with British anti-war and labour movement activists, on a visit here in May. There was much common ground in discussions of the reasons behind the war and its outcome.

There was also interest in the broader, albeit small, anti-war movement in Russia, such as the liberal human rights organisations

like Memorial and the Soldiers' Mothers' Comm-itees, and in the small demonstrations which have taken place in Moscow.

The May Day demonstrations and meetings with trade unionists here (London Region UNISON has passed a resolution opposing the war) led to discussions about trade unions in Russia and the difficulties in combating the influence of workers' leaders who have chauvinistically backed the war.

In this they offer no alternative to right wing and pro-fascist ideologies and forces, but give them credibility.

On Russia's future under Putin, Vladimir had this to say at a meeting in Camden, central London:

Putin is a protégé of Yeltsin. We all know monopoly oligarchy capitalism has its servants, including the big ones. He (Putin) is just a representative of these financial oligarchies, he's been put there by them and they pull the strings.

They give the orders, they pay the money, and they have the mass media to keep people believing what they want them to believe.

As for Putin's practical activities, we know about his pursuit of the war. Then it is to bring in and install his Petersburg clan and his KGB people in the Kremlin. Why? Because in our coun-

try capitalism is directly connected with the criminals - these are clans fighting amongst themselves, financial/industrial groups and also territorial groups, eg the Sverdlovsk clan of Yeltsin, the Leningrad clan of Putin, Chubais etc.

And there is also the increasing role of the army, police and special forces under Putin.

A memorial plaque to Andropov, a previous KGB leader and ruler of the Soviet Union, has just been placed on the walls of the Lubyanka (secret police headquarters). He was perhaps the harshest persecutor of human rights organisations.

As for the economic side of Putinism, just before the recent presidential elections, he brought in some economic measures which were very popular, e.g. pensions up from \$20 to \$24 per month, a 10 per cent wage increase for teachers as well as populist talk about destroying the oligarchy.

But this was all hot air: they are still there - Beresovski, Businski etc. In fact, Putin has no new economic policies. And the media just carries on scapegoating the "blacks" (Caucasians).

Perhaps there are more parallels between Russia and Britain than we might have thought.

A call to help the victims of Russian imperialism.

## Solidarity Against War!

Moscow March 2000

From the editorial board of the Russian anti-fascist newspaper *Chelovechnost (Humanity)*

To all organisations of working-class people, left political organisations, all those who have an internationalist and humanitarian outlook.

THE BLOODY war that Russia's rulers have unleashed in north Caucasus, aimed at subjugating the Chechen people - who never voluntarily accepted that they were part of the Tsarist or Stalinist empires, or the Yeltsin "federation" - has already been going on for six months.

Tens of thousands have been killed or maimed, masses of people have been driven into exile and towns and villages reduced to ruins. This is the price being paid for the political and economic ambitions of the Russian ruling class bent on reinforcing and redoubling its dominance.

Despite the official propaganda claims, this war has nothing to do with fighting terrorism or "rooting out fundamentalism". On the contrary, the federal armed forces, ravaging and burning everything in their way, push Chechnya down the path to armed revenge - and, by forcing it economically and socially back to the middle

ages, create the very conditions for reactionary radical-Islamic political forces to gain influence. The military action, which is no more nor less than genocide against the people of Chechnya, is accompanied by a growth of authoritarianism in Russia itself. The attacks on freedom of speech, the inflammation of hysterical great-power chauvinism, the growing political designs of the military-police apparatus - all this is a real threat to the civil society taking shape in Russia and, above all, to the independent movement of working people that forms the basis of that society.

The ruling circles who today sanction mass murder of civilians, tortures and beatings in concentration camps and the "disappear-

ance" of people the regime disapproves of could tomorrow use the same methods against movements of social protest.

All the political groupings of the Russian ruling class - from the "communists", who dream of returning to the days of Stalin's empire, to the liberals, whose demagogy about human rights amounts to empty words - have united in support of the colonial adventure in Chechnya.

Only a small number of left-wing and human rights groups, who demand the immediate withdrawal of the army of occupation from Chechnya and the right for its people to decide their own future independently, have been consistent in their opposition to the barbaric military onslaught.

In February 2000 two left groupings, the Praxis centre and the editors of the anti-fas-



cist newspaper *Chelovechnost (Humanity)*, set up an action group in Moscow with the aim of starting a campaign of practical solidarity for the victims of the Chechnya war.

This group has already begun the collection of material and financial aid for refugees from Chechnya, who have lost their homes, their property and their basic human rights.

We address to all organisations of working-class

people, left political organisations, all those who have an internationalist and humanitarian outlook a call to help the victims of Russian imperialism.

They must know that they are not alone, that the international workers' movement is staying true to the traditions of international solidarity and struggle for the liberation of the oppressed and is on their side!

**The Praxis centre**

**Editorial board of the antifascist newspaper *Chelovechnost***

- Contact us on; fax (095)2926511, write Box 385 at top of fax
- Postal address: 127434 Moscow, Box 32.

# Milosevic cracks down, as Bosnian cities vote to boot out nationalists

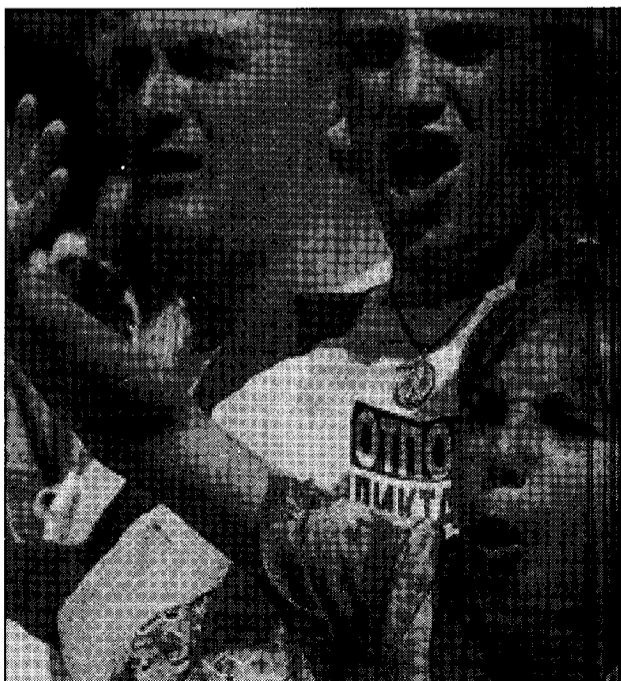
### Geoff Ryan

SERBIAN boss Slobodan Milosevic has seized on the murder in Novi Sad of Bosko Perosevic, head of the Vojvodina provincial government, to launch a massive crack down on the opposition.

Claims by the regime that the man arrested for the murder was linked to the opposition Otpor (Resistance) movement have been strongly denied. There is much suspicion that the murder was, in fact, engineered by the ruling Socialist Party itself.

Attacks on the opposition have not been restricted to arrest of supporters. The sole opposition TV station, Studio B, was shut down before being reopened by Milosevic supporters. Radio B2-92, Radio Pancevo and the student radio Indeks have also been closed down, as has *Blic*, the newspaper with the highest circulation in Yugoslavia.

Milosevic now has effective control of the media in the lead up to local and federal elections at the end of the year. Protests against the closures



Young and old alike: these Serbian protestors hate Milosevic

have been broken up by riot police.

Nevertheless the various opposition parties are still calling for daily demonstrations in all the major cities. It is too

early to say how successful they will be.

Unfortunately past experience shows the political and organisational weaknesses of all the opposition parties, as well

as personal vanities of some of the leading figures, make Milosevic's survival a distinct possibility.

Elsewhere in former-Yugoslavia there has been a limited move away from nationalist politics - most markedly among the Muslim population of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

As the Muslims were the chief victims of wars of aggression by both Serbia and Croatia this is a very welcome development. It confirms our analysis during the war in Bosnia that defence of a united, independent Bosnia-Herzegovina was essential for allowing the development of an alternative to the nationalist agenda.

In local elections on April 8, the main Muslim party, Alija Izetbegovic's Party of Democratic Action (SDA), was utterly routed in larger towns by the Social Democratic Party, the successor to the former Communist Party.

Sarajevo, Zenica and Tuzla are among the cities won by the SDP. SDP leader Zlatko Lagumdžija pledged that refugees of all ethnic groups

would be welcome to return to their homes in cities run by the Social Democrats.

The pro-capitalist, pro-western policies of the SDP are clearly not ones we would support. Nevertheless, as with the earlier victory of the former Communist Party in Croatia, the SDP victory in Bosnia is an important step in breaking the hold of nationalist politics over large sections of the population.

Moreover, the fact that the SDP vote was strongest in the main towns and cities confirms that the working class will lead opposition to national oppression.

However, the break from purely nationalist politics is far less developed in Croat and Serb-controlled regions of the country. The Serb Democratic Party (SDS) won 52 out of 61 municipalities in the Republika Srpska, the Serb-controlled half of Bosnia that was 'ethnically cleansed' of most Croats and Muslims.

The SDS vote was swollen by the exclusion from the elections of the extreme right-wing nationalist Serb Radical Party.

The elections were generally a disaster for the three parties comprising the ruling coalition, Sloga. Former Bosnian Serb president Biljana Plavsic's Serb People's Alliance (SNS) saw its support halved, while the Socialist Party (SPRS) also fared poorly, notably in Banja Luka.

However, Prime Minister Milorad Dodik's Party of Independent Social-Democrats (SNSD) increased its vote. Dodik's tiny party began the elections as the smallest, but yet fared better than either of its coalition partners.

In Croat areas the nationalist HDZ improved on its 1997 position, winning elections in all the municipalities where it was previously in power, as well as in Usora previously held by the New Democratic Initiative.

This contrasts dramatically with the situation in Croatia itself where the HDZ was heavily defeated.

Continued support for the HDZ in Herzegovina may well encourage the SDP government in Croatia to withdraw the right to vote in Croatian elections from Croats living abroad.

# Norway: the workers teach the establishment a lesson

**Anders Ekland**

**O**n May 3, 82,000 workers in Norway's private sector went on strike for improved pay and conditions in the biggest action since 1921 which also ended in a defeat for the employers. Now negotiations in the public sector have broken down, and there could be major strike action there too.

Norway is a rich nation, especially thanks to its oil. But the Norwegian capitalists have used the defensive position of the working class in Europe to attack the established rights of the workers. They have tried to build a national consensus on low wage growth, or more precisely – a wage growth that “is in line with our main trading partners” as the official mantra goes.

After a good agreement from the workers point of view in 1998, the state set up a tripartite commission to look at wage-policy. The result was – not surprisingly – that the union leaderships accepted a very low ceiling for wage growth. They claimed that part of the wage increase in 1998 had to be considered as an “up-front” part of the 2000 agreement.

## Golden parachutes - big profits

**H**istorically the differences between average industrial wages and the wages of senior executives in Norway has been relatively low compared to the US and continental Europe. In the nineties, the bourgeoisie has tried to change that, giving themselves generous wage increases, bonuses, and stock-options of all kinds.

Recently there has been a spate of “golden parachute” scandals. The head of the state oil company had to abstain from using his parachute, to calm public opinion. This was also a very special case since the leader of the Norwegian Trade Union Council (LO), Yngve Hågensen is on the board and voted in favour of this golden parachute deal!

Other similar deals have been exposed in the press, the most outrageous being that the Chief Executive of Kvaerner of 16 million Euro. Kvaerner tried to correct this - saying that it was only 8 million Euro – as if that made a huge political difference.

This new culture of greed has also influenced the wages of the top union bureaucrats. The leader of LO in 1998 got a wage increase of over 15,000 Euro! The trade union negotiating delegation on average earned twice as much as the workers they represented!



*While profits have soared it seems that the union leaders have had their backbones removed, promoting a deal that left workers gutted*

Profits have also shown a huge increase since the early nineties, with dividends almost tripling. In addition the tax system was changed in 1992, taxing capital gains less than before.

## A resounding “no” vote

**A**gainst this background it was no surprise that the overwhelmingly majority of union members in the private sector voted no to the very meagre deal that was negotiated in the beginning of April.

Normally wage negotiations happen every second year – but this was to be prolonged to three years! There was increased flexibility. The hourly wage rate was increased by a tiny amount – about 0.1 Euro, or 20 Pfennig, 1/2 French Franc!

Holidays would remain the same this year, one day would be added in 2001 and three more days in 2003!

That sounds OK unless you understand that the fight for a fifth week's holiday started 18 years ago, when the first day was run. So people were not impressed by the speed of introducing the fifth week especially as in Denmark they were striking for the sixth week two years ago!

The union bureaucrats tried to sell this deal to the rank and file but with no success. There was over 60%

participation in the ballot with impressive 64% against the deal. This was the largest no-vote on a national level since WWII. Sixteen of seventeen individual unions taking part had a no-majority.

The no-vote was a political victory for the trade union left, all of them belonging to the two parties to the left of the Labour party, the Socialist Left Party (its left-wing) and the Red Electoral Alliance.

Having recommended acceptance, the trade union leaders make any concrete demands when the deal was voted down, but just said that the employers' had to come up with a new offer.

This passivity made it imperative for the trade union left to formulate a set of demands and organise a strike the leadership did not want. It was very much the left that ran the strike – there was quite a consolidated layer of left trade unionists to the forefront.

There was also important European solidarity especially from transport unions across Scandinavia and from IG Metal in Germany who boycotted the companies where there was action.

The union leadership and the employers organisation did not want a drawn out strike in which they might lose more, so the strike was ended in 8 days, with most of the left's demands won.

The period before the next

negotiations was to be two years as usual (not three). The wage increase was nearly four times higher than previously offered; it was raised from 0.75 kroner to 2.50, the left had demanded 3 kroner. This wage increase was somewhat above the ceiling fixed by the state commission – an important political breakthrough. There were also additional increases for those below the average wage. The fifth holiday week will be introduced one year earlier by getting two more holidays in 2001 and another two in 2002.

On the question of flexibility there was no change, so here the employers won. But it is a general formulation; the concrete implementation is a question of local negotiations, so how this turns out depend to a large degree on the strength of the local unions.

## A warning to the Norwegian establishment

**T**he fact that the trade union leadership was out of touch with the rank and file became very clear. They did not do much to convince the membership that the negotiated result should be accepted but took for granted that they would. They had only contempt for the “Vote No” campaign of the trade union left.

On the other hand, perhaps they were pressured by the “New Labour” government to accept in negotiations a result that they themselves did not believe would be acceptable. When the no-vote happened, they explained it as a reaction to the golden parachutes and the “greed culture”.

But their moral indignation was taken not seriously as the press showed that union representatives on the boards almost without exception had kept silent when the golden parachutes were handed out.

When the trade union membership voted against the deal, the immediate reaction of the employers organisation was to argue that even to have a ballot on such an issue after negotiations was “old-fashioned”.

They pointed out that in several other European countries, e.g. in Sweden, this does not happen any more. But this just made people more angry and convinced them even more than the bosses really needed a teaching a lesson.

What happened was a chain of positive events with important lessons for the future

■ the political/trade union left has substantial support for its ideas and demands – and could achieve more if it was better organised

■ there are strong egalitarian sentiments among trade unionists,

■ to work for active, democratic unions is of paramount importance. It is vital to defend the right to vote on such deals – otherwise the chain will be broken. Without positive collective experiences frustration will build and people might turn to right-wing alternatives.

The fact that young workers experienced the strength of collective action was important. During the strike when the shelves in the supermarkets were empty it became clear to everybody that all the hype about the “new economy” did not change the fact that real “old-fashioned” workers are needed to bake the bread and brew the beer and get them into the shops.

## Public sector – what will happen?

**T**he result of negotiations in the public sector are not clear, but since last autumn especially the teachers' and nurses' unions have had a high profile and demanded substantial increases, as much as 20% over a two-year period.

This had an impact in the September parliamentary elections, in which the Socialist Left Party got a significant increase in its votes – a lot of which were from women in the public sector.

These women are generally more left-wing than males of the same age and income. An example of the combative mood of public employees is that student nurses have refused to work in the hospitals, because they will not accept the low wages and bad working conditions.

This has been hitting the hospitals hard, since these students are vital in making it possible to staff the hospitals in weekends and holidays.

This is a new type of action, since all strikes in the health service has been stopped by government intervention. Given the high oil-prices, the level of wages increases for nurses and teachers is a political question for the Norwegian bourgeoisie. They have to decide whether a tough line or concessions are the best strategy for them in the long run.

One major concern is that giving the public employees more than private sector breaks a “golden rule” that the wage increases in the private sector is the limit for the public sector.

On the other hand they also fear the threat of growing radicalism. The no-vote in the private sector showed that there are limits as to how far they can sell their austerity policies so they may feel the need to make concessions to head off public sector action.

# “Bottom line? There is no bottom line!”



Still calling the shots: Trimble (above) is keeping up the pressure on Adams (below) and Sinn Fein even after IRA's climbdown

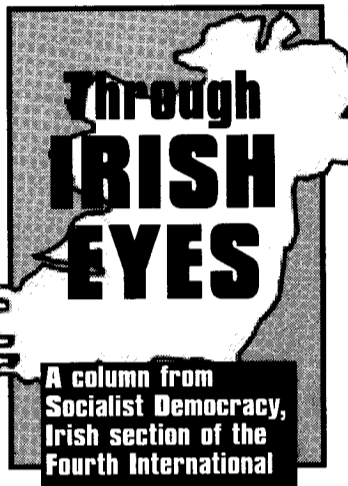
**John North**

“Bottom line? There is no bottom line!” those were the words of one unhappy republican dissident after witnessing the historic attempt of the republican leadership to conciliate the British and unionists with what amounted to final surrender and the subsequent response of their opponents.

The latest twist in the tale of the Good Friday Agreement came on May 6 with a statement from the British and Irish governments. This promised to reinstate the elements of the Good Friday agreement, restore the Stormont executive, implement the Patten report on policing and reduce the military occupation of areas like South Armagh as long as the IRA was perceived not to offer any threat.

In step with the government announcement, and coming immediately afterwards, was an IRA statement indicating that as a confidence building measure the contents of arms dumps would be open to inspection. There really is no doubt that this represents the surrender of the IRA. No sane guerrilla leader would consider sitting an arms dump that had been inspected in this fashion. Even the movement of the inspectors would be so high profile as to clearly identify the position of the dumps.

The complexity of the agreement is meant to satisfy

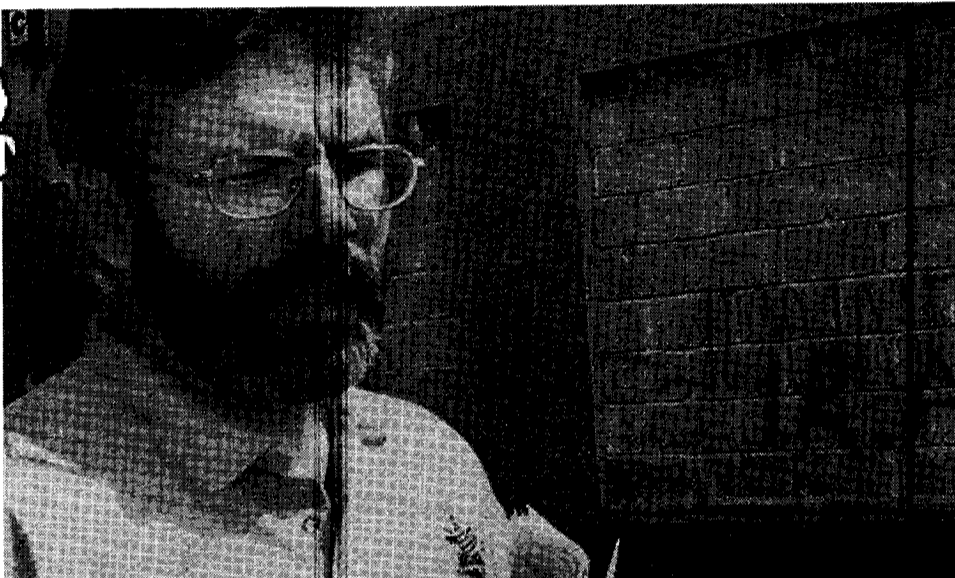


a militarist rank and file who continue to miss the point that it is the politics of the surrender and humiliation of republicanism that is important to imperialism and not what happens to a few weapons.

Even more significant were the concessions on which the republicans based their surrender. The idea that the Stormont executive represented any sort of stepping stone to a united Ireland is long gone. British demilitarisation is not a concession – they would automatically reduce troop levels in the event of their victory.

The Patten report is so far from reform that the republican leadership had never been able to endorse it. It amounts to a plan of modernisation, a promise to recruit more Catholics and a change of name.

This statement is also sig-



nificant because it so clearly refutes all the protests of republicans following the collapsing of the executive by the British. The British remain in charge, the agreement is dependant on republican surrender and the unionist veto remains also.

The republicans, having said firmly once again that this was their bottom line, watched slack-jawed as the unionists exercised their veto and the bottom line fell through the floor. As SDLP deputy premier Seamus Mallon bitterly commented, for two years the problem had been decommissioning but half an hour after it was solved two new problems arose.

These problems were unionist demands that the RUC retain its name and that

the Union Jack remain as a badge of sectarian dominance. The British give way at once, reserving for the British Secretary of State decisions on the RUC name and on the British flag.

### Comfort letter

They also issued a “comfort letter” to unionist leader Trimble indicating that they would cancel the deal at any sign of resistance from Republicans.

Behind the IRA statement is the fanciful belief that they're equal partners with Irish capitalism and that they are both in alliance with the British to bring unionism to heel.

This is a total misreading of British strategy and of the interests of Irish capital.

Any objective assessment would make clear that for the

British stability in Ireland equals partition and continued sectarian privilege for unionism. Irish capital has very few demands beyond stability and in any case has no intention of coming into conflict with the British.

Now the republican leadership has no choice. The agreement has to work, because it's only by claiming victory that the extent of their defeat can be disguised. Yet again they have united with nationalists, this time to rescue Trimble and the moderate unionists, with whom they say they can do business, from the far right.

Yet again this bears no correspondence to reality. It was Trimble and the so-called moderates who have led all the assaults on the Good Friday agreement.

Another unstated assumption of republican strategy is that this will all end if the executive is relaunched. Yet the events of the past weeks make it clear that the British will remain in charge. The main objective of British strategy will be to preserve their unionist base around Trimble.

Trimble's main strategy will be to demonstrate that he can secure the lions' share of sectarian privilege and preserve partition indefinitely.

Just to underline reality the PUP, the supposed voice of “Protestant socialism” (in reality the voice of the UVF) was discovered to be listed as the owners of offices stocked with an arsenal of weapons.

This did not rate as an issue because the British and their allies are not interested – after all, they armed the UVF in the first place!

Two RUC men were jailed for a sectarian beating that they tried to cover up by framing their victim. The police complaints body decided that no action would be taken against RUC members who threatened human rights lawyer Rosemary Nelson shortly before her murder.

The key figure in the whole debacle is the 25% of republican supporters who declared their opposition to the deal in an opinion poll. The task of socialists is to break those workers from Sinn Fein and win them to a socialist opposition.

## Anger as majority vote for Harland deal

It looks as if the twin cranes of Samson and Goliath will continue to stand over the Belfast skyline for a few more years. Management has announced that Harland and Wolff has won a conditional £400 million contract with a Norwegian company for four roll-pack ferries. However the workforce is not exactly jumping for joy. Most of Harland's workers believe they have been taken for a ride by the management and union officials.

At a freight unions meeting on May 9, only 35 votes separated the 'no' from the 'yes' vote relating to a 'final man-

agement offer' which involved a massive erosion of workers terms and conditions. The offer was in fact an undisguised act of intimidation of the workforce.

### Closure threat

Workers were told they could accept the new terms and conditions or Harland's management would turn down the new offer of work and close down the yard.

Union officials had to work extremely hard to sell the deal to a hall of deeply alienated workers maintaining that the company would not sign a prospective £400 contract with

a Norwegian customer without a yes vote to the restructuring plan.

In the end the vote came out as 424 in favour and 389 against.

Some 1,800 staff at the shipyard were living under a 90 day redundancy notice.

To save the company, the workforce has had to accept around 350 redundancies, a no-strike agreement, a pay freeze for three years with a basic wage of £310 per week and a short-time working week when ever the management believes it to be necessary for survival.

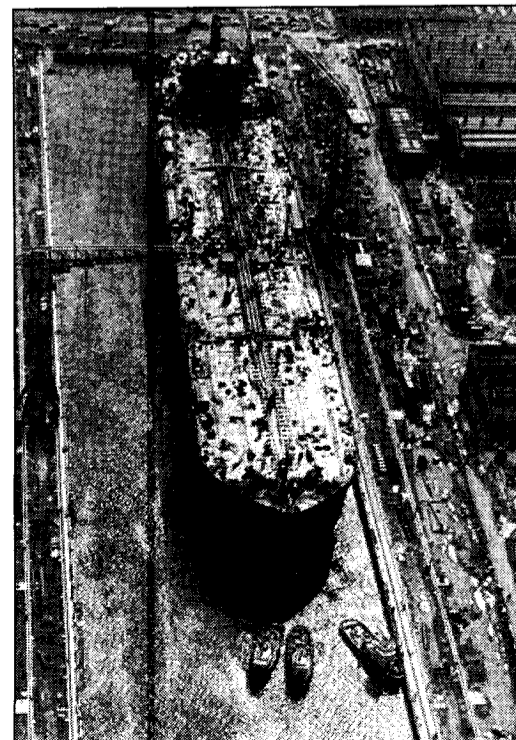
George Matchett, an official with the GMB welcomed the yes vote on behalf of the unions.

### Sell out

However dozens of workers stormed out of the meeting complaining of a 'sell-out' and a 'rigged vote'.

Several workers interviewed after the vote said that they would now start looking for a new job rather than accept the latest terms and conditions.

The cold draft of alienation will continue to blow through the shipyard for a little while longer.



Harland in its heyday



# RUC disgraces itself again

**Paul Flannigan**

A concerted campaign is underway to deceive the British public as to the real nature of the RUC. It is being prompted by Downing street and being orchestrated primarily by the Tory press.

The Blair government recently awarded the George Cross to the RUC, the highest and rarest mark of distinction for bravery the British State can endow. A foundation with financial bursaries in tribute to the courage of the RUC is also to be established. The Daily Telegraph has been vociferous in its opposition to the token proposals of reform outlined in the Patten report.

It can hardly be surprising then that in the middle of their 'Save the RUC Campaign,' the Daily Telegraph would not be in a hurry to report some unsavoury RUC news from Belfast.

The Independent, the Daily Mail, Daily Express and The Times all joined with their friends in the Telegraph in 'overlooking' last week's 'sensational story' concerning the conviction of RUC officers for serious sectarian crimes.

Two RUC officers were handed jail terms by a crown court in Belfast on May 10 for beating up and attempting to frame a young Catholic man. Two other officers and a British soldier were given suspended sentences for coniving in the act.

Lots of people have reminded 21 year old Bernard Gribben how lucky he is to be free to walk the streets after his encounter with a typical RUC patrol. The sardonic joke in West Belfast says that he was 'the one that got away'.

It is best to let Bernard describe his own ordeal, it all began in February 1998:

"I came out of the GAA club in Ardoyne and went to buy a burger. An RUC officer came over to me and said we have been watching you this past hour throwing bottles at RUC patrols.

"There was nothing I could say to him, I mean I had just come out of the GAA club. He threw me into the back of the jeep. As soon as the doors were closed it started. An officer started hitting me saying "what is your name, you Fenian bastard?"

"He hit me with a baton on the back of the head, and on the mouth. He punched me on the face and kept screaming at me "you Fenian bastard".

"He saw I was wearing a Celtic top and he shouts "he's fucking wearing a Celtic top". He ripped it off and hit me on my bare back.

"Then he pushed his baton up into my face and said "we'll get the LVF to shoot you. We'll drop you off on the Shankill Road".

"It was then that I thought I might not get out of this alive. When I was brought to

Antrim Road police station I was relieved even though by that time I was covered in blood. I was then charged with disorderly behaviour and with assaulting a police officer."

Days later the charges against Bernard were suddenly dropped. It turned out that one officer out of the five present, Andrew Lea had an attack of conscience and reported to his superior that the charges against Bernard were entirely fabricated.

An internal RUC investigation was launched and Bernard's solicitor decided to pursue an assault charge.

Then one September morning a different set of RUC officers turned up looking for Bernard. "It was Sunday morning. I was sleeping. My brother woke me to say that the police were at the door looking for me. I came down and they told me they were going to search the house for explosives. They went up to the attic and came back with a coffee jar bomb."

Bernard and his brother were then charged with terrorist offences and then held in custody to await trial. After spending three months in custody yet again the charges against Bernard and his brother were mysteriously dropped.

Bernard's solicitor concluded that the explosive charges were simply a crude RUC attempt to get Bernard to drop his assault claim against them.

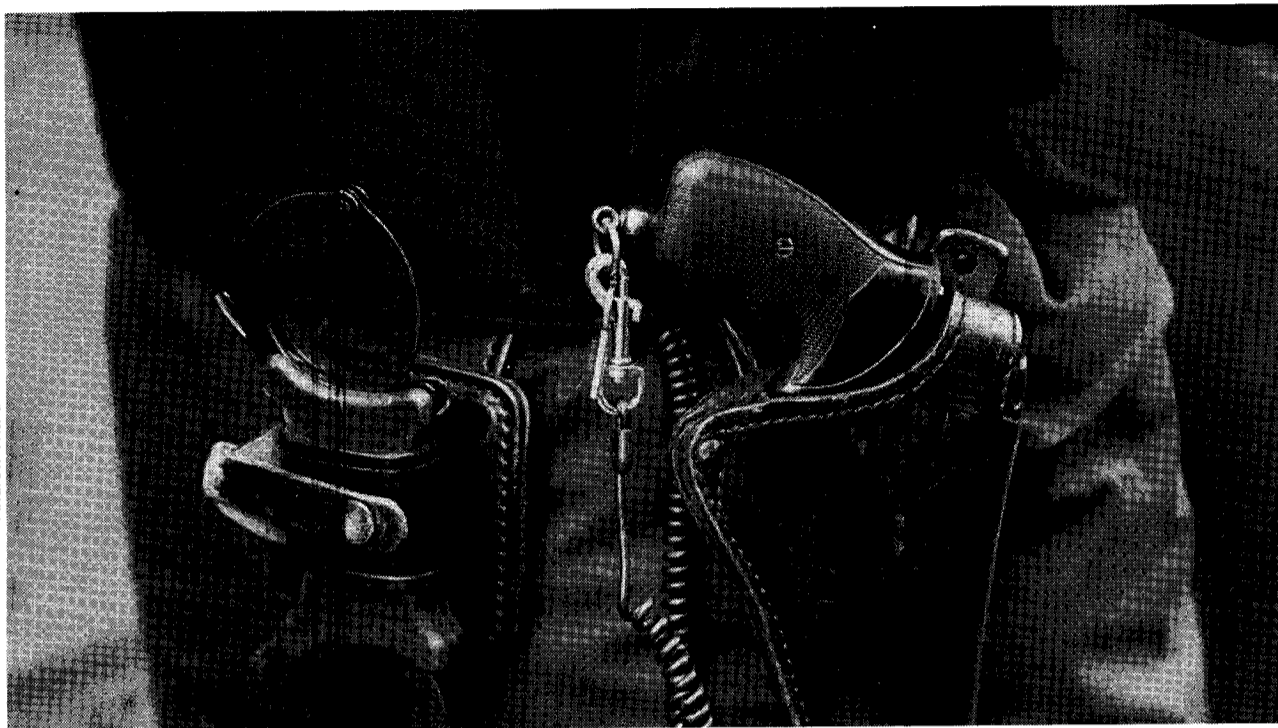
He pressed on successfully and won the claim in the Crown court last week. Given the clear evidence from constable Lea the judge said he had no alternative but to send two RUC officers to prison for assault and hand down two suspended sentences to two others for perverting the course of justice.

He summed up saying that he could find no motive for the disgraceful police behaviour other than blind sectarian hatred. The jail sentences of the RUC officers are the first of its kind.

Bernard Gribben publicly thanked officer Lea saying "if not for him it would have been me who ended up in jail." However he was less fulsome in his comments on the RUC as a whole, he declared that the best he could say about them was that "they are 75 per cent rotten and sectarian and 25 percent OK."

Bernard was lucky that one police officer refused to go along with the usual sectarian routine - countless others have not been so fortunate.

Bernard's story is just one more everyday reason why nothing else than the disbanding of the RUC will do. Bernard is set to leave northern Ireland soon, fearing another RUC frame-up: "Since this started my life has been a nightmare."



Still armed and dangerous: the RUC has a long and ignoble record as a sectarian force, which the loyalists want to continue

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# Sniping from the Left

By Charlie van Gelderen



## Man of straw

HAS Jack Straw fallen victim to his campaign to outdo the Tories racism? Is he really beginning to believe all the rubbish about 'bogus' refugees?

On May 9, he shared a platform in Church House in London, with the bogus social scientist Charles Murray, best known for his book *The Bell Curve*. This argues that black people are genetically more stupid than whites. The book is a best seller with white racists, delighted to have their prejudices 'scientifically' verified.

Next he will probably search for some proof that Romanians also have genetic defects and that non lilly-white Anglo-Saxons are inferior species, justifying plans to put them into concentration camps.

## An ethnic Foreign Policy?

British troops went to Sierra Leone to help evacuate British and other EU citizens from that troubled country.

Edward Floode was born in South Glamorgan in October 1975. He has a birth certificate to prove this.

When he went to the evacuation centre in Freetown, hoping to join the other evacuees, he was turned away. He had no passport.

He was a child when his mother returned from Britain to Sierra Leone and was on her British passport. Since then he had no need for it.

He has a brother in London and an aunt working for the probation service. So why can he not be evacuated?

Sorry, said the British official in charge of the evacuation, nothing doing. Not only did he have no passport, he was black.

## Missing the point

The violence in the May Day anti-capitalist demonstration in London, may have shocked some people. But there is increasing violence that also stimulated latent anti-capitalist feelings. This has been strengthened by the actions of BMW and Ford.

A letter in the *Daily Express* read: "I am baffled by the number of people who have on the one hand slammed the May Day anti-capitalist protestors as mindless thugs, and on the other hand complained about the threatened closure at Rover and now the MOD



Gunship over Sierra Leone. British forces are back in black Africa - but protecting only white people and western interests

decision to have boots made in Brazil.

"These are both excellent examples of global capitalism at work, the very thing which many of those present ... were protesting against."

## Black and white issue

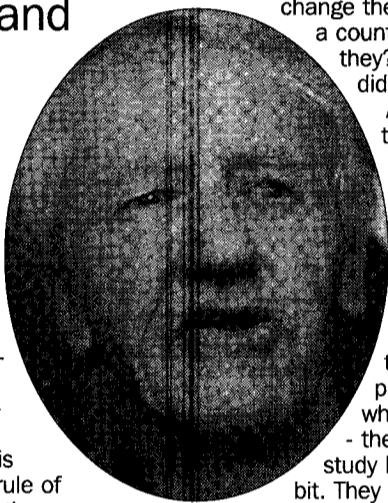
Horror of horror! The black peasants in Zimbabwe are occupying white-owned farms and demanding the land without compensation.

Surely this is against the 'rule of law'? Ah, but there is an historic precedent. When Cecil Rhodes' Pioneer Column took possession of what is today Bulawayo, they called it Occupation Day.

And from there they went on to seize whole of Matebeleland and Mashonaland, called it

Rhodesia, and then crossed the Zambezi to seize more territory, which they called Northern Rhodesia. There was no mention of compensation.

On his death bed Rhodes whispered 'they can't change the name of a country, can they?' Little did he know!



Back in the news: white Rhodesia's UDI leader Ian Smith

As for those who are horrified by the violence which accompanies some of the occupation of white farms - they should study history a bit. They don't have to delve too far into the past - only twenty years.

When the first elections took place after what was then Southern Rhodesia, in 1980 British-appointed pro-consul, Lord Soames, who was supposed to be neutral, did all he could to prevent Mugabe's

Zanu-PF from taking power.

He turned a blind eye when gangs of black thugs, known as 'auxiliaries', who were loyal to the puppet black prime minister, Bishop Abel Muzorewa, subjected the Shona villages where the bulk of Mugabe's supporters lived, to a reign of terror.

Mugabe's motives may be opportunist - a desperate attempt to stave off an impending electoral defeat. This does not do away with the just demand for a re-distribution of the land. As for compensation - most of the white farmers have done exceedingly well out of their occupation of these lands for nearly a century.

The re-distribution of land is an issue which affects the whole of post-colonial Africa. Already there have been repercussions in Kenya, where landless families invaded two white-owned farms.

While most of the white farmers gave up their land voluntarily after independence in 1963, the few farms which are still white owned, are some of the biggest in the country and this remains a highly sensi-

tive issue.

Stephen Ndichu, who is leading the campaign for land re-distribution, says, "...when they (the whites) took our land they gave us trouble and did not pay for it. Now we are saying it should be given back to the ancestral owners."

## Polls apart

The most recent public opinion polls show a rapidly narrowing gap between Tories and Labour.

Perhaps there is a simple explanation. When the electorate see the New Labour government vying to outdo the Tories with racist immigration laws, crime and punishment, insulting pensioners with a degrading 75p a week rise, etc, they are probably thinking "If we are going to have Tory policies anyway, we may as well have a Tory government to administer it."

Perhaps even Tony Blair will eventually come to realise that sucking up to big business and ignoring traditional Labour supporters is no guarantee of the second term he so obviously craves.

# 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 2UU**, and we'll be in touch.

# A Marxist view of world history

**Chris Harman: A People's History of the World Bookmarks Publications, £15.99.**

**Reviewed by Geoff Ryan**

Chris Harman's book is of tremendous value to all socialists. In nearly 700 pages he gives a wide ranging picture of the development of human societies from the earliest times up to the present day.

Harman's work is a thoroughly Marxist interpretation; basing itself on the methods of historical materialism in the Communist Manifesto, continuing the analysis of Marx and Engels for a further 150 years.

The title of Harman's book reminded me of A.L. Morton's A People's History of England. Harman, however, avoids the vulgar interpretations of Marxism and the crude economic determinism that sometimes emerge in this latter work.

He understands the importance of ideology and the battle for ideas. He devotes chapters to the rise of Christianity and of Islam, paying serious attention to ideological and theological disputes within these religions.

He also recognises the importance of art and culture within human development: numerous writers, painters and musicians make an appearance, as Chris tries to set their works within the context of the changing nature of the societies they inhabit.

A People's History of the World is a serious piece of academic scholarship. Harman makes use of the best available historiography, even when written by non-Marxists. For example, the important contributions to our understanding of feudalism by Marc Bloch and Georges Duby are freely admitted. Chris is clearly aware of the writings of Cyril Mango, a leading scholar of Byzantium, and of Fernand Braudel. Numerous Biblical references show a serious attitude to his interpretation of Christianity.

## Avoiding Euro-centrism

The greatest strength of Harman's work is that he avoids the Euro-centric approach all too typical of western writers, Marxist and non-Marxist. He devotes considerable space to examining social, economic and political developments in China, India, Persia, South and Central America, Africa and the Arab world.

He shows that by comparison Europe remained an extremely backward region, on the fringes of the Eurasian land mass, until less than one thousand years ago.

When Harman does turn to European history he deals seriously with some aspects that have long been ignored or forgotten in Marxist writings. His explanation of the causes of the Thirty Years War and its importance for European political development is possibly the best I have ever read.

Harman's chapter on Jacobinism outside France is also outstanding, demonstrating how the ideas of the French Revolution could rapidly spread beyond the boundaries of France – indeed, even of Europe, as sections on Haiti and Latin America make clear.

He is also very clear that capitalism produced modern slavery and, associated with it, racism – rather than the other way around.

Because Harman's work is of such vast scope he has clearly had to make hard choices about what to exclude. Everyone will no doubt have suggestions for topics that could have been included.

Inevitably there are also interpretations within the book with which I would dis-

agree – though many may simply be the product of the necessary simplification Harman has had to make.

Chris recognises, for example, the important contribution to the development of vernacular literature of Dante – but fails to point out that in order to justify his use of the vernacular Dante had to write his major work on the subject (*De Vulgari Eloquentia*) in Latin.

Chris also neglects the political content of Dante's writings. The *Comedia* is not simply a religious work, it is also highly political – a fact that has not escaped the notice of virtually every right-wing movement in Italy, where spurious use has frequently been made of Dante's writings to justify revanchism, imperial delusions and oppression of the Slav population of Istria.

Some disagreements are patently obvious: the theory of State Capitalism to explain the rise of Stalinism or the analysis of the break-up of Yugoslavia are areas where *Socialist Worker* and *Socialist Outlook* have long standing differences. There is little point in reiterating them. I will confine criticisms to a few areas.

While Martin Luther King is given a mention, Malcolm X is completely absent. This seems to me an astonishing omission, given that it is only a few years since the SWP was organising meetings about Malcolm in every place they have members.

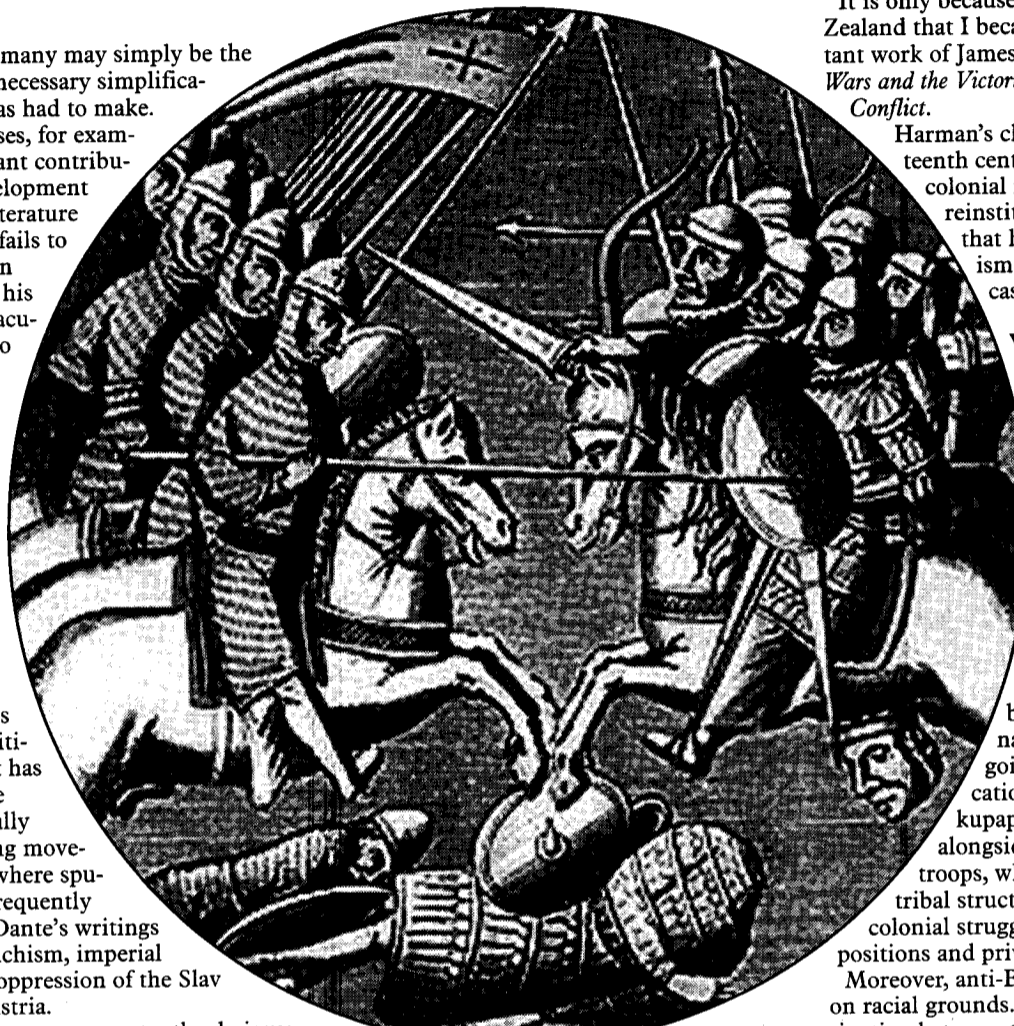
Harman's analysis of the Second World War is markedly inferior to that of Ernest Mandel, who understood that this conflict contained within it a whole series of different wars, some of which Marxists supported as progressive, others they opposed as imperialist. In fairness, however, Mandel developed his analysis in a whole book (*The Meaning of the Second World War*) whereas Chris has only a chapter in which to outline his views.

## Christianity

As noted above Chris devotes a chapter to the rise of Christianity. Robin Blackburn, in a friendly review in *International Socialism*, has already suggested that Harman underestimates the importance of the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman empire for its growth. I would go further.

Although Chris shows how, once established, the Christian hierarchy rapidly began to suppress dissenters within its own ranks, he underestimates the level of intolerance in Christianity even before it became the official religion.

Christianity never wanted tolerance, or even parity, within Roman society. It wanted the suppression of all non-Christian religions, since it saw itself as having a monopoly of truth. This extended beyond the theological field to cover many areas of Roman life.



*Christians fight Muslims at Ascalon in 1099: which side was the most eager to be martyrs?*

For example, the baths of Rome and other cities were seen as immoral and Christians demanded their closure. This hardly endeared them to large sections of Roman society.

Moreover, many Christians deliberately invited persecution, fuelled both by their own moral certainty and a desire to be with God in heaven. This latter desire sometimes finds a reflection today amongst some groups of Islamic militants but it originated in the Christian world view.

## Missing continent

Although Chris's work is decidedly non-Euro centric, he virtually omits an entire continent: Australasia. Hence there is no mention of New Zealand being the first country in the world in which women won the right to vote on equal terms with men – in 1893, over 30 years before Britain, half a century before France and over 75 years before Switzerland.

Nor is there any analysis of why the Australian labour movement began to form their own party over a decade before similar developments in Britain. The Labor Party was in government (admittedly in coalition) as early as 1891 in New South Wales.

Nor does Chris consider why opposition to nuclear weapons is supported by virtually every party in New Zealand, including the conservative National Party.

In fact the small amount he does write about Australasia is somewhat confusing. His single reference to the spread of the Polynesians to Easter Island and New Zealand (p.15) is in the chapter on the Neolithic 'revolution'. The Maori did not reach Aotearoa until about one thousand years ago.

What is missing, moreover, is a recognition of the scale of this achievement. The Polynesians were clearly able to navigate vast distances across the Pacific and commu-

nicate with others for them to be able to follow, since they arrived in several waves. They are not all descendents of the passengers in a single boat that arrived in Aotearoa by accident.

Yet 500 years after the arrival of the Maori in Aotearoa, European sailors still tended to hug the shores of the Mediterranean rather than risk open water.

Chris also ignores Maori struggles against imperial rule, though this is hardly surprising as, until very recently, they have either been totally ignored in both New Zealand and Britain or, if mentioned, grossly distorted.

It is only because I recently visited New Zealand that I became aware of the important work of James Belich *The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict*.

Harman's claim (p.449) that nineteenth century rebellions against colonial rule were attempts to reinstitute the sort of societies that had given way to imperialism is only partly true in the case of New Zealand.

The 1845-46 Northern War certainly included elements of this: Maori leaders Hone Heke and Kawiti attempted to uphold the rights of Maori chiefs against attempts by representatives of the British government to impose its authority.

But this was not entirely the case in the 1860s where those who fought the British were beginning to develop a national consciousness, going beyond tribal identification. Indeed it was the kupapa, those Maori who fought alongside imperial and colonial troops, who wanted to preserve old tribal structures and who saw anti-colonial struggles as a threat to their positions and privileges.

Moreover, anti-British Maori did not fight on racial grounds. They usually made a distinction between the Pakeha (European settlers) and the British government: they did not seek to expel white settlers.

The British army was, in fact, unable to defeat Maori resistance despite massive superiority in numbers (at least five-to-one, often much greater) and was withdrawn: a not insignificant achievement for part-time warriors, who frequently had to abandon campaigns to work on their land.

Maori resistance was finally defeated primarily by other Maori – who often fought for their own ends rather than those of the colonial rulers. Maori resistance continued, sporadically, until 1916 – the year of the Easter rebellion in Ireland which Chris sees as the first of the modern national struggles.

One of the reasons the Maori were able to resist so long was their superb grasp of military matters – a subject that Marxists tend to ignore (Engels and Trotsky are notable exceptions).

## Vulnerable

They understood they were unable to defeat British troops in open combat, even though that was their traditional method of warfare. They also realised that traditional pa (forts) were vulnerable to being surrounded or, since many were on the coast, at risk from naval bombardment.

They therefore developed new types of pa with elaborate systems of trenches and underground anti-artillery bunkers. This important Maori contribution to military strategy developed, seventy years later, into the horrors of the Western Front, though with an important difference.

The Maori designed their modern pa to allow them to withdraw when they could no longer easily be held: 'civilised' Europeans inflicted slaughter on one another for four years rather than cede an inch of ground.

These criticisms are not meant in any negative way. Hopefully, if Chris decides to update his work, he will incorporate them. In my view they would make what is an already very impressive book even better.

# Socialist

A monthly marxist review. No 35. June 2000. 50p

# OUTLOOK

## Sierra Leone: No British solution!

BRITISH military involvement in the former colony of Sierra Leone is gradually escalating, and with it the danger of a long-term British role in propping up the corrupt and unstable regime there.

Despite the initial denials and prevarications of ministers it is increasingly obvious that the paratroopers allegedly sent in to secure the rapid evacuation of British citizens are digging in for a much longer stay.

Massive naval and air reinforcements have been dispatched, and British military advisors are now reportedly playing a key role in coordinating the war effort of the Kabbah regime against the RUF, part of which appears to have included the capture of rebel

leader Foday Sankoh.

This military adventure does not even pretend to be conducted under the banner of the United Nations or any international authority: the UN forces in Sierra Leone (mainly from black African countries) have been left to their own devices while the British military pursues the government's undeclared political agenda.

Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon has now admitted that the government is contemplating a long-term plan to "stabilise" Sierra Leone, which would involve a continued supply of arms and military advisors.

This amounts to a covert recolonisation of the country, and represents a potentially open-

ended commitment to fight each and any challenger to the Sierra Leone government for the foreseeable future.

As our article (page 12) explains, a key component of the crisis that is wracking the country flows from its dependent status and the cynical meddling of British and other imperialist powers.

Far from offering a long-term solution, Britain is part of the problem.

Labour ministers, who appear to have learned nothing and forgotten nothing from the reactionary foreign policy of previous Labour governments, could be on the slippery slope to another mini-Vietnam style debacle.

They must be stopped.



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