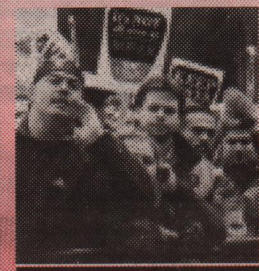


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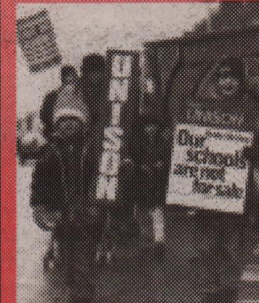
A monthly marxist review. No 36. Summer 2000. 50p

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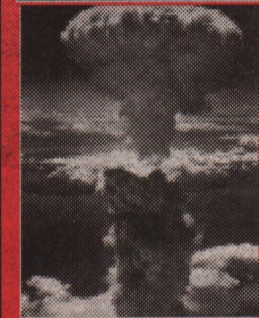
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Stallingrad O'Neill

Dover tragedy as 58 more victims of immigration laws perish in sealed truck

Bitter fruit of Labour's racist laws

HOW DESPERATE must a person be to pay an extortionate sum to climb into the back of a sealed truck in sweltering heat – in the hopes of finding a better life thousands of miles from home?

The grisly discovery of 58 dead Chinese immigrants in a lorry trailer at Dover Docks underlines the extent to which the tough anti-immigration laws imposed by Labour and Tory governments benefit only the gangsters and the racists.

The gangsters make thousands exploiting the misery of desperate people, promising to smuggle them illegally into the heart of "fortress Europe" – and often by exploiting them again when they arrive, as cheap, illegal labour.

The racists rub their hands in glee as a Labour government vies with the Tories to slam the door harder on anyone wishing to come here. They pay for more as Straw and his ghastly Home Office crew strip benefits from asylum seekers, leaving them penniless with a pittance in vouchers, and prepare to build yet more immigration prisons.

The racists are baying for blood, and now Labour has delivered it for them. But already they are baying for more. There is nothing progressive down this road.

By attempting to placate the racists, Labour is playing with fire. Racist violence is growing.

These vicious laws which fuel racism must be scrapped, or more helpless, harmless people will lose their lives in frantic efforts to reach a country they misguidedly see as a beacon of freedom.

● Blood on Straw's hands p2 ● Fighting racism p4

LSA Conference marks major step forward

Greg Tucker

The London Socialist Alliance conference on June 11 marked a positive move forwards in the development of the Alliance.

In the week before, seemed as if it would be a bear garden where all the negative traits of the far-left would re-emerge. But in a generally good-humoured debate clear decisions have been made that will enable the LSA to consolidate its position as the focus for left organisation in London.

That development was highlighted in Tottenham, with the LSA saving its deposit and coming a clear fourth in its first by-election.

It appears that the Socialist Workers Party have accepted that the LSA is not merely an electoral convenience to be opened and shut, as with previous SWP "front" organisations, whenever convenient to them.

And despite their public pronouncements, the Socialist Party have privately recognised that the LSA cannot be ignored or its effectiveness undermined and that, therefore, they have to relate seriously towards it as a factor in future planning of election work.

The rest of the organised left feels that this is an organisation where their role will be recognised and they can play a real part. To this end the number of groups affiliating has expanded, and

organisations that were hostile during the election campaign are now trying to build bridges back to the LSA. And independent individuals are being attracted.

The conference agreed a series of concrete resolutions mapping out campaigning priorities for the LSA and a structure to deliver on them. The LSA is committed to work around defence of asylum seekers, against the privatisation of London Underground, and joining with anti-capitalists mobilising against the WTO summit in Prague in September.

In each case this is tied to a series of practical activities. At the same time the LSA will be taking forward the campaigns it successfully built during the GLA elections, on such issues as the sell off of council housing.

Political funds

In a further development the LSA agreed to deepen its trade union activity, particularly in aiming to break the bureaucratic monopoly on the use of political funds. In each area of work, despite the problems that still exist, this has opened up a new dialogue between existing left groups and currents, which has the potential for making changes far beyond London.

The conference in deciding a new structure pointed a positive way forward to consolidating the LSA's growth. Whilst retaining a "party to

party" consensus system at the top, it also brought a number of independent activists into its steering committee.

Despite initial reluctance from the SWP, it has been possible to win a commitment to building strong local borough Socialist Alliances. The conference has also rejected the approach that sees the Alliance as just an electoral bloc, with areas of London to be divided up into fiefdoms of this or that organisation.

The LSA is now beginning to have a life independent of its constituent parts.

The key to the future is now to get two issues right. On the one hand it is necessary to decide on a medium term electoral strategy. Whilst clearly wanting to stand in appropriate by-elections, whether council or parliamentary, the whole issue of the general election has to be discussed and planned for properly.

Clearly the potential for an England wide campaign exists, but there are immense practical difficulties which need to be overcome, notwithstanding a general political debate about what sort of seats would be fought, and what attitude towards Labour the Alliance should take.

On the other hand the form that local LSA groups take must be sorted out in practice. You cannot have a

purely electoral bloc that only appears at by-elections and general elections. Local alliances need to be involved in regular political campaigning.

They also need to offer a forum for political debate, not to thrash out who is right or wrong on some arcane point of political theory, but to involve its members in an organic development of our political programme.

Whilst some may believe that such a structure will cut across their own "party" work, this is the only guarantee that a healthy LSA can be built.

Potential

Overall, on both these tests, whilst not coming up with all the answers, the LSA conference did mark a step forward and pointed to the potential for a successful resolution of these debates.

This is why the Socialist Party's public view of the conference (*The Socialist*, 16 June) is unhelpful. Privately, leading members of the SP ask that the rest of the left not take these attacks too seriously.

It seems that they are mainly for the consumption of their own membership and contacts, to inoculate them before coming into contact with potentially contagious forces. But nevertheless the SP line is extremely negative.

They quite rightly point



Greg Tucker: all aboard the big red bus for left unity

out the past problems caused by the SWP's "frontism". But they find it impossible to accept that the only way to operate in a new united formation is on an assumption of trust.

Of course, it is entirely possible that the SWP will revert to previous form. Their members have certainly made mistakes over the last few months. So safeguards are necessary. But a united front where you exclude everyone you don't agree with is hardly worthy of its name.

The SP argues that the structure of the LSA allows no rights for local borough alliances, and that they will have no possibility to influence the direction of the LSA.

In fact, the structure developed - a combination of representatives of political groups and a significant number of independent activists - is designed as an interim measure to best allow the development of the LSA at this stage.

It is clear that outside one or two areas, to put borough

representatives onto the central steering committee will just mean to increase the number of SWP members on the committee. Far from broadening the democracy it would merely increase the impact of the SWP. They quite rightly rejected that approach.

Only over time, with the development of the borough groups, will it be possible for them to break free of the local hegemony of one or another organisation. Only then would a full borough based structure become possible.

Scargill

The SP argue that the conference is trying to stifle political expression, potentially suffering "the same fate as Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party", because the SWP voted to ban parties from selling their papers while canvassing. This is compared to proscriptions inside the Labour Party.

They miss the point. If the LSA is to develop, it has to be seen as *more important* than any of its constituent parts. Maybe the stick was bent too far, but independents, not the SWP, wanted to ensure that in going out to campaign for the LSA they weren't just building support for one or other organisation in the alliance.

Weyman Bennett in Tottenham was the LSA candidate, not the SWP's. As a candidate he must be accountable to the LSA, not the SWP. Anything else will hamper our growth.

Common project

It should not be a matter of hiding one's politics but of building a common project.

All this makes the SP's position on the long-term creation of a new mass party of the working class seem hollow at times. They rightly attack the SWP for failing to develop a strategy that goes beyond seeing themselves as the "party".

But at every practical step they balk at any move that does not allow them to concentrate on building themselves as their first objective.

If the Socialist Alliance is to develop, if we are to move forward our objective of a new mass party, an objective which the ISG shares with the SP, then we have to allow the organic development of the LSA to continue.

In that way the stance of the SWP, for all its faults, for all its lack of a strategic overview, was more positively in the direction of the new mass party than the paper positions taken by the SP.

CWU rank and file moves left, and tells Labour ...

Privatisation? No thanks!

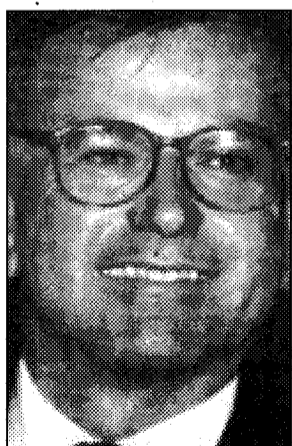
Marian Brain

The CWU conference held at the beginning of June, marked a shift to the left by the rank and file workers. This is a product of the growing insecurity of BT workers who are facing the problems of rationalisation, with the beginnings of falling profit rates.

In response, BT management is trying to subcontract parts out to other companies. 50,000 jobs are potentially threatened with the moves towards rationalisation.

The Post Office is facing the beginnings of serious inroads of finance capital, in preparation for privatisation. Stephen Byers (Trade and Industry secretary) announced when speaking at the CWU conference, that Royal Mail would be able to borrow cash from money markets. This, combined with the moves by the EU commissioners to open competition to post over 50g threatens 50,000 postal jobs.

There is now a serious attempt by the bosses generally to break the strikes of postal workers. Martin



Politely ignored: Byers

Stanley (postal industry regulator) caused uproar on the conference floor when on June 7 he announced that private companies would be brought in to deliver the post.

If the postal regulators do not pull back, this could lead to a major showdown between the postal section of the CWU and the employers.

Leading official John Keggie narrowly avoided a censure motion over a deal which gave postal workers a £38 increase in their basic weekly wages, accompanied by a cut in overtime pay.

The conference agreed to continue the fight against privatisation of the post, and to hold the Labour government to account if it did this. The resolution was as follows: -

"This Conference instructs the incoming National Executive Council that the threat of privatisation in full or in part of the Postal Industry remains a real one. Conference therefore re-iterates its policy to oppose privatisation of any part of our industry.

"Conference further agrees that should this or any future Labour government implement such a programme, then all support for the Labour Party, financial and moral, will be withdrawn forthwith."

This went to a card vote with 148,356 votes for the resolution and 107,178 against. The 1,400 delegates also voted overwhelmingly against a rise in the political levy, which would have raised more than £200,000 for the Labour Party to use in the General Election - a further reflection of the growing anger within the union about a string of government policies.

As Pete Boswell branch secretary of Oxford branch pointed out, to support the increase would effectively endorse the 75p a week rise in pensions and £1000 a year tuition fees.

General Secretary Derek Hodgson and the CWU's leadership had recommended a levy increase, and the decisive no vote followed the speech by Stephen Byers, which had been received politely.

Hodgson started to rant. "You gave him a round of applause, and the minute he turns his back you say you don't believe him!"

The CWU was the first union to be asked to increase the levy and the answer was a resounding "no".

Delegates also rapped the treasurer David Norman for his action against a branch, which had backed Ken Livingstone's campaign for London mayor and the London Socialist Alliance.

As Mark Dolan of London North/North west said to loud applause, "We make the rules, not the general treasurer"

The union also told the 'Milbank tendency' to dump

Jack Straw has blood on his hands

Soon after the horrendous deaths of 58 Chinese refugees, who suffocated to an agonising end in a sealed lorry from the continent, 7,000 people marched in London to demand rights for asylum seekers.

Many more have attended a series of local meetings up and down the country to protest against the racist backlash from media and politicians.

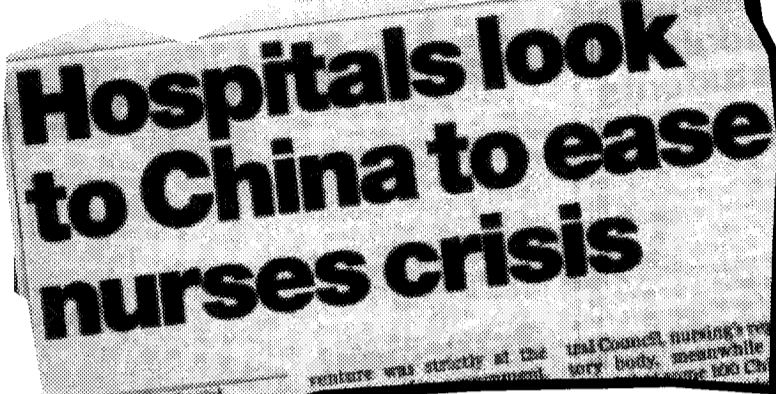
It is hard to imagine greater hypocrisy than that of the politicians who shed crocodile tears for the 58 victims of the recent tragedy, while proceeding to call for tighter laws to deter asylum seekers. Jack Straw said the episode should be "a warning" to any other potential asylum seeker.

It is precisely the existence of these brutal, racist laws which has created the booming trade in human traffic, offering vast profits to unscrupulous gangs who promise to smuggle desperate people through illegally.

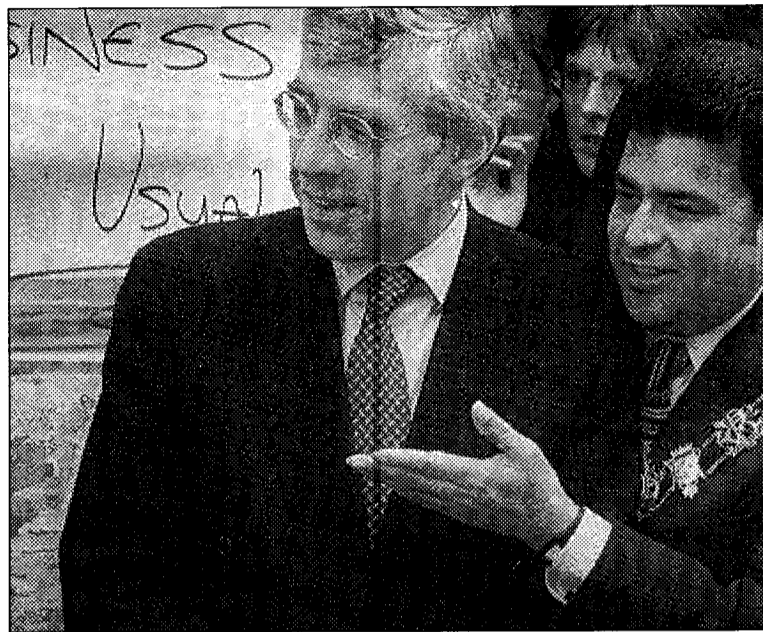
With the issue now constantly in the headlines as Labour and the Tories each strive to seem more hostile to refugees than the other local campaigns are developing in some areas and existing ones being regenerated in others.

All this is vital, because what we are facing is the greatest threat to the right to asylum since the Geneva convention was agreed in 1951.

Home Secretary Jack Straw has gone so far as explicitly to propose at the EU Interior and Justice Ministers meeting in Lisbon earlier in June that the Convention itself should go, attempting to cloak his reactionary stance in the pathetic excuse that Geneva was drafted before mass air travel and was therefore not relevant today. The reality is of course more sinister.



Some Chinese are welcome, apparently, but not others (Guardian May 17). (right) Jack Straw on an excursion to meet black people in Brick Lane



In a world in which the free movement of capital is seen as sacred, the free movement of labour is something different entirely. Human beings, according to the neo-liberal bible, are only allowed to move when this is in the interests of profits – so alongside the immigration clamp-down, bosses scour the world for people with skills which are in short supply, or for which capital feels it is paying too much. These skilled workers are still encouraged to come over here and shore up company profits...

In reality most people who leave their country of origin flee to other poor countries – that is where the greatest number of refugees end up on either a short or long term basis.

Those places already impoverished by the ravages of the World Bank and the IMF somehow manage to find resources to deal with what may be a sudden influx of people fleeing war or natural disaster.

If these refugees receive any financial or material support from international agencies at all, it only for the brief time that the media is

present and is far from sufficient to cover what is spent – let alone what is needed. But you would never know any of this from what the Western media say.

This situation has been further exacerbated by tougher immigration restrictions imposed by wealthy nations. The crackdown in Fortress Europe is mirrored by higher barriers in the United States, Australia and elsewhere.

In February this year, junior Home Office Minister Barbara Roche was party to a scandalous development at the Lome Convention, in which African, Caribbean and Pacific countries (ACPs) were bribed into signing an agreement which will force them into accepting "stateless persons, nationals of other countries and anyone deemed to have entered the European Union illegally."

ostensibly the convention centred on the signing of an £8.5 billion trade agreement between the European Union and the ACPs – but tough clauses had been smuggled into the text without consultation with the ACPs who felt they had no choice

but to agree to it.

None of this had been debated in the European Parliament or in any of the national states. Nor has it been debated since.

These developments highlight the importance of campaigning on these issues on an international basis – which is why initiatives such as the September conference on Barbed Wire Europe called by the Close Campsfield campaign (see page 6) are so important.

To fight Straw's challenge to the Geneva convention, we must recognise that it is a part of a broader onslaught.

Other issues also need to be raised. We need to fight against the outrageous measures already in place such as the voucher system which keep asylum seekers penniless and dependent, and the government's developing plans to disperse them around the country.

We need to support the existing campaigns against detention centres like Campsfield, and move into action when plans come through – as is very likely – to open new ones or expand existing centres.

The UK's Immigration Service has announced plans to speed up the deportation of asylum seekers

after their applications are rejected. It aims to remove nearly 60,000 people a year by 2004, compared to 12,000 this year. The total of deportations is expected to rise to 30,000 between 2001 and 2002, and to 37,000 the following year, then to 57,000 by 2004.

A key part of the new plan for change would see more detention centres built or converted. There are currently around 1,000 detention spaces in the UK for asylum seekers but officials are proposing that 4,000 be created.

We of course reject the fallacious distinction made by the Home Office between detention centres like Campsfield and so-called "reception centres" such as at Oakington in Cambridgeshire.

All those who are held in centres, whatever their title, are detained under the 1971 Immigration Act and have the same lack of rights.

On all these issues and more the mobilisations of the past few weeks have been a positive start – but they need to be developed and extended as a matter of urgency.

No more, Mr NICE guy!

John Lister

WHEN New Labour launched the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) it was promoted as a body that would play a key role in ending the arbitrary system of "rationing by post code" – in which the policies on what types of treatment and drugs the NHS would pay for varied widely from one health authority to the next.

It all sounded reasonable enough – but from the outset campaigners have been concerned that the effect of such rulings by NICE might not be to make treatments more widely available, but rather to impose global rationing and exclusions of controversial or expensive drugs and treatments throughout the whole NHS.

These fears have been exacerbated by the insistence that NICE will base its decisions on so-called "evidence-based medicine" – a system of assessing the effectiveness of drugs and treatments largely by statis-



Given the present health care costs, Mr Frampton, I'm afraid you can't afford to go on living.

tical analysis of randomised control trials, without any real reference to the experiences and views of patients, their advocacy groups and the professionals seeking to deliver front-line services.

There as a stark warning of the dangers of this approach last year when the Royal College of Psychiatrists conducted an investigation into the effectiveness of the new generation of anti-psychotic drugs,

which are widely recognised to offer fewer harmful side-effects than the established, much cheaper drugs, many of which date back to the 1950s.

The RCP report concluded from its statistical calculations that the benefits of the new, more expensive drugs were not great

enough to justify requiring them to be used for all patients.

Unfortunately they had come to this view without asking the views of patients or mental health pressure groups: nor did their report take into account the fact that by generating fewer side-effects the new drugs are more likely to secure voluntary compliance by patients in taking their medication regularly, as opposed to

the widespread problems of persuading patients in the community to take the old-fashioned drugs.

The RCP recommendations have been forwarded to NICE, and as yet do not represent government policy, but it was clear that this is no serious way to assess which treatments should be promoted within the NHS.

One-sided

As if to underline the one-sided approach, we now have an equally outrageous report from NICE itself proposing that patients diagnosed as suffering from muscular sclerosis should not in future be prescribed the expensive drug beta-interferon, despite widespread evidence that it can bring dramatic relief to many who take it.

NICE stresses that the drug can cost £10,000 per patient per year, and argues that for some patients it offers no real benefit. But its ruling that no future MS sufferers should receive it on the NHS would

impose a brutal penalty on those who might respond to treatment – and is a major step towards a national policy of explicit rationing based on price.

Small numbers of people suffer MS: the total bill to the NHS would not be great if all of them received beta interferon, especially if account is taken of the fact that many would then not have to seek treatment in hospitals or more intensive care in the community.

But of course £10,000 a year is well beyond the means of most MS sufferers and their families to pay privately for treatment, and no private insurer will come up with such cash either. If the NICE plan is endorsed by ministers it effectively condemns MS sufferers to years of possibly avoidable pain and discomfort.

And it is clear that the decision hinges not on the effectiveness but on the cost of the drug: were it to cost £10 rather than £10,000 a year there

would have been no debate over whether it should be available to those who might need it.

With Gordon Brown sat on a massive £22 billion windfall from mobile phone franchises and the Treasury bulging with unspent cash, this tight-fisted attempt to decide medical treatment on the criteria of crude accountancy simply reinforces the view that New Labour has no more respect than the Old Tories for the values and collective principles of the NHS.

Health unions, campaigners and the wider labour movement should step up the pressure on Labour MPs to have this recommendation dropped, and demand a fundamental change in NICE's terms of reference to ensure that its brief is to widen and open up access to the best treatment, rather than to ration care and restrict NHS patients to the cheapest – and often nastiest – drugs and treatment.

Unite to campaign against racist laws

Terry Conway

The launch of the Campaign to Defend Asylum seekers is wholeheartedly welcomed by Socialist Outlook as it should be by all socialists and anti-racists.

It is clear that the fight against racism and in defence of asylum seekers needed to be stepped up in response not only to the racist propaganda of recent months, but to the real assaults on the human rights of refugees that are accompanying them.

The demands of the campaign set out these key issues
Asylum seekers must have the right to work

Asylum seekers must have the right to income support

Abolish Detention centres
Defend the 1951 Geneva Convention on human Rights

Scrap the Voucher system
No to dispersal
Full legal rights and representation

Scrap the Asylum and Immigration Act

Given the scale of the offensive, and the currently divided state of the anti-racist movement, the launch of specific campaign was correct. It should be easier for existing organisations to work under a common umbrella in response to a renewed attack. Existing organisations have their own priorities – and are often over stretched in carrying them out.

New energy was needed – from people who are committed to anti-racism but have not made it a particular priority – especially from the trade union movement. Others needed to be won to

anti-racist arguments which answer the filth peddled in the media.

All of this leads to the conclusion that to set up a new initiative to Defend asylum seekers is part of a long tradition of united front campaigns to respond to specific attacks that this paper has always supported.

Many of the meetings and other activities which have happened over the last few weeks have begun to answer that challenge. From the packed meeting of 1200 in the Camden Centre in Central London, to smaller meetings in local community centres speakers from a range of refugee groups have given moving illustrations of the types of conditions from which people are trying to escape. Time and again the British arms trade has been

indicted as a major contributor to the number of asylum seekers world wide. The right to economic migration has also been defended – and rightly challenging the notion that death through starvation is acceptable while death through torture isn't. All of this has been very positive

But a number of difficulties remain.

At the centre of this campaign is the Socialist Worker's Party, the biggest organisation on the far left in Britain – and therefore one with a particular responsibility. It is positive that SWP moved to instigate the campaign and that they have made it clear that they see it as an ongoing project.

In many parts of the country the SWP has no particular record of anti-racist campaigning – yet they insisted on having speakers on platforms in the name of their organisation while no other left organisation was offered similar facilities.

This type of behaviour is not the way to build a united front; placing preconditions and ultimatums on other forces will prevent the campaign winning the breadth of support its demands actually have.

Then there is the question of organising local activity. In many places there was no attempt to build on successful public meetings by setting up a local campaign in which all activists could



The fight for asylum must include closing detention centres

come together and decide on the best ways of gathering support – whether for the petition, the demonstration or any other issue. Instead where public activity has been organised in many places it has happened through SWP structures.

The key decision so far – other than the creation of the campaign itself – was the calling of the June 24 demonstration. That decision was essentially made by the SWP – against the advice of some anti-racists who were discussed with who rightly thought that a slower build up was likely to produce better results.

In the event the turn creditable – though doubtless influenced by the deaths in Dover in the days before. But with longer lead in time it would have been possible to build support beyond the far left who dominated the occasion. National demonstrations are usually seen as the culmination of a campaign rather than something to be organised in less than a month.

Many in the anti-racist movement fear that what is on offer is a repeat of the Anti-Nazi League – a great idea but one which has never

had a structure in which non-SWP members could influence decisions or activity.

Essentially such democracy is not a luxury – it is a precondition for involving broad layers of activists. Within the anti-racist movement this is an issue of particular importance given the long legacy of top down structures.

During the Greater London Assembly elections and since in its work in the London Socialist Alliance, the SWP began to work more constructively with the rest of the left.

That break was also deepened by the positive responses and challenges it received from others involved. It also seems that the same dynamic has affected their attitude to work in some trade unions.

If the campaign to defend asylum seekers is to carry out the job it so desperately needed to do, then that too needs to be built on an inclusive and democratic basis.

The lives and human rights of asylum seekers are at stake – the left and anti-racist movement needs to find new ways of working to defeat this racist tide.

Scandal of Angel Heights

The case of the Angel Heights Seven – while it contains its own particular lessons and outrages – also raises many of the issues being faced by asylum seekers who are being forcibly dispersed under new Labour's racist Asylum and immigration regime.

The unsafe and unsanitary accommodation and lack of support faced by those who are being dispersed are key issues that campaigners need to take up.

Between May 10 and June 2, seven Asylum seekers who were living at Angel Heights Hostel, Newcastle-upon-Tyne were imprisoned without bail after a number of incidents following their complaints about the notorious conditions they live in within the hostel. Six of the accused are Iraqi Kurds and one is Iranian.

The refugees were dispersed by Kent County Council to Angel Heights in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Kent County Council were paying the cost of their accommodation.

On Wednesday May 10 2000, asylum seekers at the hostel staged a protest. This followed other attempts to have their inhuman conditions rectified – including 2 days of hunger strike in March over the fact that they are not allowed to have visitors and kept under curfew. Indeed their position is little different from that of people in detention centres – while their landlord rakes in an enormous profit.

Management at the hostel claimed 40 windows were broken and furniture and crockery destroyed. This has been denied by the asylum seekers saying only one table was broken.

This too has echoes of the situation at Campsfield – where detainees were blamed for damage carried out by Group 4 employees. Also, as campaign-

ers pointed out, if these offences were alleged of people who were not asylum seekers there is no doubt they would have received bail.

When the asylum seekers initially complained about their living conditions they were advised to elect representatives to liaise about the problems.

However, one representative was then asked to let all asylum seekers know their meagre weekly allowance was being cut from £7 per week to just £5. The justification for this was that there had been damage to the hostel in the past.

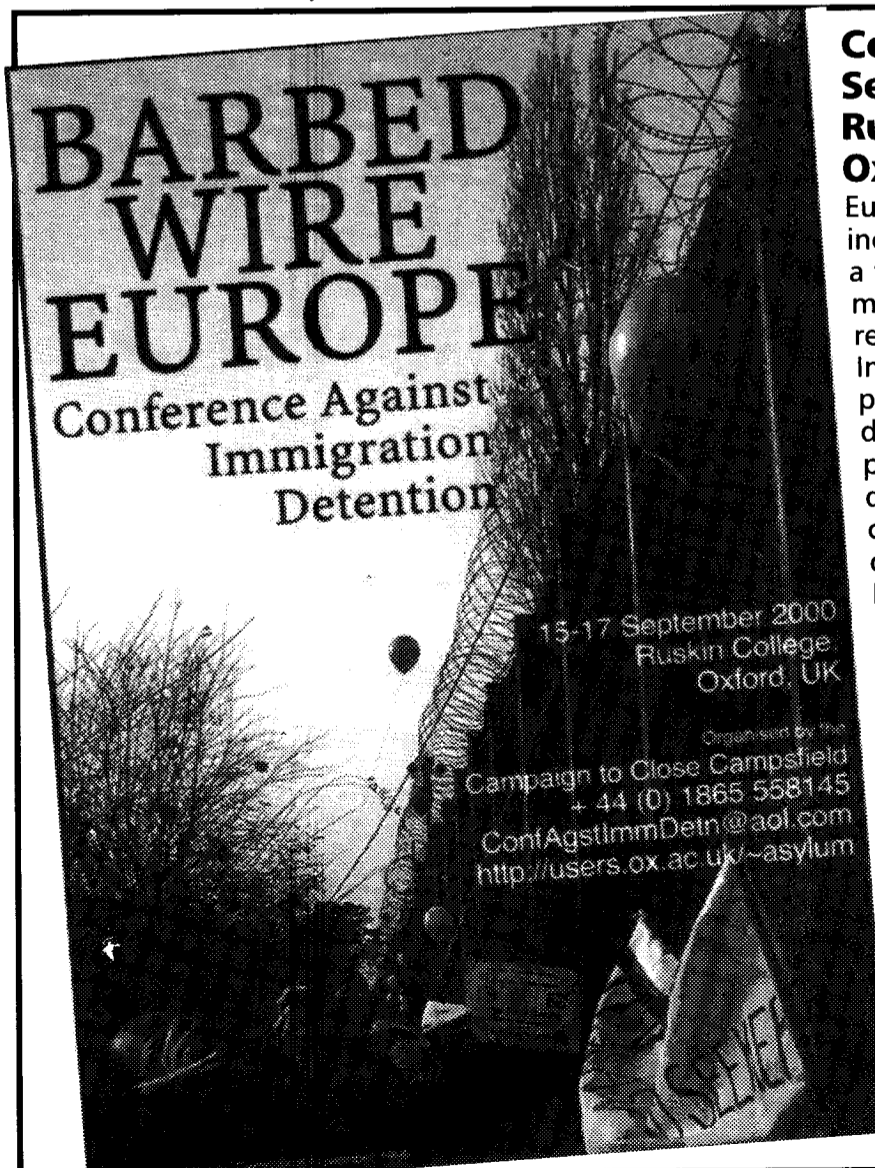
No one knew who was supposed to have caused the breakages, but all of the refugees were to be charged regardless. The refugees' representative, who was asked to tell the others about the decrease in their money, was upset by this and was alleged to have threatened members of staff – an allegation he denies. He was then given a warning letter. But because of the language barrier this was misunderstood to be an eviction notice, which caused further intense anger. As a result the police were called.

While this was happening, another group of the refugees were outside the hostel with another of their elected leaders. A staff member asked a representative to request that the refugees go back inside, which he attempted to do. However, a member of the police wrongly interpreted this to be inciting violence! This then led to the seven being arrested.

This situation has led to the development of a strong campaign in the Newcastle area in defence of the asylum seekers, which together with action from supporters across the country, was successful in getting the seven released on bail

before their case was heard.

Kent County Council restored support to them – but they have been moved to another town – so weakening the links built up with local activists. Meanwhile the behaviour of the authorities at Angel Heights needs to remain under scrutiny so that the cycle does not repeat itself.



**Conference
September 15-17
Ruskin College,
Oxford**

European governments are increasingly using detention as a way of criminalising, marginalising and deporting refugees and other migrants. Immigration detention promotes racism. Immigration detention has removed the presumption of freedom as detainees have to prove their case for freedom. Their loss is ours.

Detention centres are multiplying, but so is resistance. This is the third European conference against immigration detention organised by the growing network of campaigns against them. Places should be booked as soon as possible as they are limited and certainly by August 14th

Ring +44 (0) 1865 558145
ConfAgstImmDetn@aol.com

New Alliance fights its first by-election in Labour's "rotten borough"

LSA – here to stay!

The London Socialist Alliance (LSA) achieved a remarkable result in its first ever parliamentary by-election in Bernie Grant's old seat of Tottenham on June 22 and saved its deposit.. LSA candidate Weyman Bennett, came fourth – polling ten per cent of the collapsing New Labour vote and a third of the discredited Tories' result, reports Veronica Fagan.

The LSA vote was 5.4% with 885 votes, ahead of the Greens, UKIP, Independent Conservative and Reform 2000 Anti-VAT.

To beat the Greens – and decisively – is especially significant, as it was clear in both the European and Greater London Assembly elections that many looking for a left alternative to new Labour's Tory policies voted Green.

While David Lammy held the seat for new Labour, he can have little to smile about in terms of the 15 per cent swing against his Party. He may claim in his acceptance speech that "the heartlands of Tottenham are safe in the hands of new Labour", but this was not the verdict of many traditional Labour voters.

The swing against new Labour did not benefit the Tories, who were unable to recover from their 1997 low showing in the constituency. As in the Romsey by-election, the rightward lurch of the Tories under William Hague did not play well in front of the electorate.

The Liberal Democrats made a last minute surge to double their previous showing in Tottenham with a last minute leaflet that this was a two horse race between them



Weyman Bennett

and Lammy. Their supporters applauded Weyman Bennett's speech when he spoke out against privatisation and in support of asylum seekers, though other aspects of their campaign were much more reactionary.

True, Weyman Bennett stood in the Haringey and Enfield constituency then, so he had some recognition already in the by-election, even amongst those who didn't already know him as a long time campaigner against

clear from canvass returns that New Labour would have difficulty in getting the vote out, the effort was stepped up. Photo-opportunities were arranged with Cherie Booth and Mo Mowlam, and workers from Millbank stepped up their involvement.

will be voting for the London Socialist Alliance's candidate, Weyman Bennett."

The subsequent leaflet produced by the LSA – which was distributed to about half the homes in the constituency within 48 hours undoubtedly had a positive impact on the numbers of people who voted for Weyman.

But Rosamund Grant is not exceptional in being fed up with new Labour's performance both in Tottenham and in government. Many other long term Labour supporters are increasingly looking for an alternative. A layer left the Labour Party to support the LSA in the GLA elections – and a far greater number remained party members but voted for us. The Tottenham campaign saw a repeat of this experience, proving that it was not just dependent on the Livingstone slip stream.

The LSA worked hard throughout the short three week campaign focusing on campaigning against privatisation particularly in education and libraries and in defence of asylum seekers. Many lessons have been learnt from this first by-election which will stand us in good stead for future contests.

The greatest challenge will be to fully involve LSA supporters beyond the ranks of the existing far left. That is why it will be crucial in the weeks and months ahead to carry through the decisions of the recent LSA conference to relaunch the LSA as a membership organisation and build fully functioning local groups.

Commenting on the result a smiling Weyman Bennett said: "I am thrilled we've achieved this excellent result so early in the LSA's exist-

tence. Voters are clearly hostile to New Labour and their Tory policies.

"We don't want the privatisation of our hospitals and schools which Lammy wants to foist on Tottenham, as he made clear in his pro-privatisation speech last night. He's only a poor boy made good because, like me, he had a decent education and welfare system to depend on which New Labour seems intent on dismantling."

"The LSA also raised the subject of asylum seekers, which Lammy has evaded throughout the campaign. The low turnout of 25.5 per cent, the third lowest since the war, is a threat to democracy. The 16,466 votes cast is pitifully smaller than Bernie Grant's entire majority in 1997.

"And with fewer than nine thousand votes in a Labour stronghold, out of a 64,000 strong electorate, if this is repeated across the country, New Labour is in deep trouble. The LSA has only just begun. We're not going away. We've raised the flag of socialism in Tottenham and I hope that Bernie Grant would have been proud to see it."

New Labour's hatred of political debate was demonstrated yet again in an outrageous manner after the declaration of the result, when Haringey councillor and ex-Mayor Sheila Peacock threatened an LSA supporter to come outside so she could "give him a good slapping". The supporter in question had merely responded to David Lammy's acceptance speech by pointing out that in fact new Labour's vote had collapsed.

This disgraceful behaviour follows racist comments made by another new Labour councillor earlier in the campaign and demonstrates their political bankruptcy.

Acting returning officer David Warwick threatened the LSA election agent that he will bill her for LSA fly-posting. The LSA is already taking legal advice on a private prosecution of Haringey senior officers who abused council funds for partisan purposes – and we have witnesses.

Council workers in cash-strapped Haringey were instructed to tear down LSA posters as soon as they went up. Weyman Bennett pointed out, "The Labour council pleads poverty when it comes to cleaning the streets of Haringey and yet they can get to every lamp-post in the borough within hours of our placards going up. I noticed they left all the commercial fly-posting and the New Labour placards. This is one rotten boroughs story which will run and run."

How 25 percent of Tottenham voted

Party	Candidate	Votes	Percentage
Labour	David Lammy	8785	(53.51% -17.77%)
Liberal Democrats	Duncan Hames	3139	(19.12% - 8.34%)
Conservative	Jane Ellison	2,630	(16.04% - 0.34%)
London Socialist Alliance	Weyman Bennett	885	(5.39%)
Greens	Peter Budge	606	(3.69% - 0.88%)
Reform 2000 AntiVAT	Erol Basarik	177	(1.08%)
UK Independence Party	Ashwin Tanna	177	(1.08%)
Ind Conservative	Derek de Braam	177	(1.08%)

For the LSA this result compares very favourably with those of other similar formations across Europe, including the Scottish Socialist Party at such an early stage in its existence. The LSA really came together in a serious fashion last autumn to prepare for the Greater London Assembly elections, where it polled well, saving two constituency deposits and averaged 3.1 per cent across the London constituencies.

But the Tottenham by-election was a greater challenge.

racism and for workers' rights.

But in the GLA elections, following the stitch up of Livingstone by the new Labour hierarchy, there was an effective strike of Labour party members. Nor did any of the other parties have an effective campaign.

The media concentrated on the Mayoral election – the Assembly received virtually no mention other than in London's Evening Standard. So the LSA were in many places the only people out campaigning: many people in Tottenham and across London told us ours were the only leaflets they had seen.

In the Tottenham bye-election the situation was very different. While there were undoubtedly Labour Party members who were less than enthusiastic about the fact that Blairite David Lammy was selected against Sharon Grant, he won a formally democratic contest.

While some Labour Party members stayed at home, or did the bare minimum, in protest either against Lammy, new Labour's policies or both, the party machine was certainly in operation in this election.

In the last few days of the campaign, when it became

Stop Imprisoning Refugees!

Protest outside
Harmondsworth Detention Centre
Saturday 15th July
12.00 - 1.45 pm
Bring banners and whistles

Harmondsworth Detention Centre is north of Heathrow on the A4, Colnbrook By-Pass. Take the U3 bus from Heathrow or 81 bus from the stop opposite Hounslow West tube station.

Called by Close Down
Harmondsworth Campaign 0208
571 5019 and National Civil Rights
Movement 0208 843 2333

"With fewer than nine thousand votes in a Labour stronghold, out of a 64,000 strong electorate, if this is repeated across the country, New Labour is in deep trouble."

Uniting the trade union left is key to halt the decline

Alan Thornett

The left did well in some of this year's trade union conferences. In the NUT the vote was won for a ballot over performance related pay (PRP). In the postal and telecom union CWU the left defeated the platform over the funding of the Labour Party. The civil service union PCS at its conference instructed the NEC to launch a fight to restore national pay bargaining and launch a campaign against privatisation. And the left has done well in some of the elections as well. Dave Rix ousted Adams in 1998 in the train drivers' union ASLEF. Greg Tucker got a good vote against Jimmy Knapp for general secretary last year in the main rail union, the RMT. Roger Banister polled well for general secretary of Britain's biggest union, the public sector UNISON. In smaller unions such the

FBU, RMT, ASLEF, the Bakers' Union, the NUJ and the NUM the left has remained relatively strong. The Fire Brigades Union have had a number of strikes (Essex for example) and strike ballots. Despite these positive developments, however, winning conference votes is one thing, but getting union leaders, who were opposed to them in the first place, to carry them out is another matter. The NUT NEC has set aside conference policy on PRP, and the union faces a damaging defeat as a result. And the widely-held view on the left that higher levels of trade union struggle would emerge after new Labour had been elected to office has not happened. In fact the situation is now worse. The catastrophic decline of union membership experienced during the 1980s has also continued. The slight upturn recently seems to be more as a result of the fall in

unemployment (distorted as the figures might be) than any efforts by the TUC or its much vaunted Organising Academy. Strike levels in Britain also remain at an all-time low with only minor fluctuations. 1999 ranked with 1997 as having the lowest number of strikes since records began in the 1880s. All this has meant that, in sector after sector, the ability of the employers to force through their requirements - from mass redundancies to a range of new management techniques aimed at squeezing more out of the work force - remain untouched. There have, however, been opportunities recently to start to turn this around by clocking up some victories. The most important was around BMW's decision to break up Rover, and the huge working class demonstration in Birmingham which turned out on April 1 to

defend Longbridge. It was clear, at the huge rally at the end, that any militant proposal from the platform would have got a massive response - even the occupation of parts of the Longbridge site. Such a traumatic event could have been the start of a wider fight back in defence of jobs manufacturing jobs. All this was disastrously diverted into hopeless choice between two sets of venture capitalists. In a smaller way the lobby of the Ford UK offices in Kensington on June 22 by over 700 Ford Dagenham workers (during working hours) in opposition to the closure of the PTA also demonstrated the possibility of generating resistance there, with similar potential consequences. The harsh reality, however, is that unless key opportunities like these are grasped and built on it is very difficult to make the breakthrough needed.



Stalingsrad O'Neill

Blairite UNISON leaders upholding Millbank's line have been witch-hunting left activists in branches like Birmingham (above)

But the problem is not just industrial and organisational, it is political. It is rooted in the political evolution of the TUC and the leaders of the main unions since the defeats of the 1980s (in which they also played a decisive role), and the relationship they have now forged with new Labour in office. After the defeats of the 80s they refused to capitalise on either the anti-poll tax revolt or the upsurge of anger against the new round of Tory pit closures in 1992. Even the rise in strike levels across Europe in the mid-90s, triggered by the preparation by various European governments for the single currency, had no reflection in Britain. After being elected to office, New Labour consciously capitalised on this weakness by launching a series of attacks on the working class through its maintenance of Tory spending limits, its implementation of the fiscal criteria for the single currency, and the deregulation and privatisation which went along with Blair's enthusiastic endorsement of the neo-liberal agenda of the American right. The trade union leaders not only backed new Labour to the hilt, but their damaging new realism of the eighties and early 90s evolved into the even more pernicious idea of "social partnership". This was codified by the TUC at its 1997 Congress by the adoption of Partners for Progress - a decision which enshrined the idea of a "social partnership" with the employers. This represented the TUC's definitive accommodation to neoliberalism. Social partnership represents the idea of the identity of interest between the employers and the workers and sees the solution for the workers as ensuring the success of the employers. At that same Congress resolutions calling for the repeal of all Tory anti-union laws to be dropped and a list of "realistic" demands adopted which included the statutory right of union recognition, a national minimum wage, the implementation of the EU's social chapter, the protection of all workers from day one of employment, and the restoration of union rights at the government's GCHQ Cheltenham spy centre. But if the TUC leaders thought this was going to cut any ice with new Labour they were disappointed. New

Labour relentlessly forged a new relationship with the employers, which quickly became qualitatively different to that of any previous Labour government. In fact within a year of Labour taking office a big section of the employers were seeing it as the best representative of British capital. When new Labour's trade union legislation emerged, in the form of the Trade Union Bill, it was the expected damp squib. The EU's social chapter was to be adopted, surprise surprise, and the unions were recognised at Cheltenham - such as they were by that time. The minimum wage was introduced, but at a pathetic £3.60 for an adult (£3.00 for young people) and the union recognition provisions were dimly weak: workplaces of over 21 (a restriction which excludes 5m workers) could ballot for recognition, but would have to get a positive vote from 40% of the total work force to win it. Far from reversing Tory privatisation measures, new Labour extended them dramatically. This led to proposals to privatise Air Traffic Control, the introduction of Education Action Zones, the introduction of the Private Finance Initiative into the NHS, and many other such schemes. A similar "Public-Private Partnership" (PPP) was also proposed as the means of financing the London Tube system. Compulsory competitive tendering in the public sector was replaced by 'Best Value'. And as far as pay was concerned, Tony Blair started to say that even the idea of a regular pay review was in contradiction to the idea of a social partnership. Despite this, the TUC leadership (and the leaders of the main unions) not only remained loyal to new Labour, but protected it where necessary. Tenacious strikes resisting attacks from the employers by staff at Magnet kitchens, Hillingdon Hospital, the Tameside care workers, and Sky Chefs, were either refused recognition or given official support but denied the real backing they needed if they were to have a chance of winning. Even the remarkable fighting spirit of the Liverpool dockers, with huge international support (although far less in Britain of course) got nothing out of the election of new Labour. And the union leaders have been quick to witch hunt those fighting for socialist policies or challenging their right-wing agenda. The resistance which did

UNISON leaders win vote to continue witch hunt

Fred Leplat, CFDU Treasurer (in a personal capacity)

At what could be UNISON's last conference before the general election, the National Executive took a line more openly critical of the government, in particular over privatisation and taxation - while opposing all calls for action. At the same NEC speakers took every opportunity to denounce the left. The left was able to maintain its level of support and avoided the trap of responding to the "red-baiting". Rodney Bickerstaffe's retirement and news that his elected successor Dave Prentis was unable to attend as he is receiving cancer treatment also dominated this conference. The critical tone towards the New Labour government was particularly evident in the local government conference. Jean Geldart, chair of the local government executive, said, "the government is doing nothing to make up the ravages of the Tory years. It's a dire situation". The local government executive moved a very long resolution on Best Value, recognising that it encouraged privatisation - while last year the executive opposed an amendment which described Best Value as being worse than the Tories' Compulsion Competitive Tendering. However in the main conference the NEC attempted to stage manage the debates, and viciously attacked the left in a manner not seen since



Low Pay is a UNISON "priority" - but not for action

UNISON's formation in 1995. The first major debate was around a composite, which expressed concern at new guidelines on internal democracy. The Standing Orders Committee allowed a wrecking amendment onto the agenda, which welcomed the guidelines. Unfortunately, this amendment was eventually adopted with a third of the conference voting against. The attacks on democracy and expulsion of left activists by the leadership mobilised a wide layer of delegates to attend meeting on the Tuesday night. 400 delegates heard SWP member Yunus Baksh of Newcastle Health, Geoff Martin of London UNISON, NEC member and CFDU supporter Roger Bannister, and Liz Davies, member of the Labour Party NEC. Liz reported that no UNISON member on the Labour Party NEC has submitted resolutions critical of the government or voted for those in line

with the union's policy. Organising this meeting has contributed to the left working more closely together. This should culminate in the formation of a united left caucus that would have a greater impact than the sum of its parts. However in order to be successful, this new left will have to be wider than just an amalgamation of the SWP and the CFDU - there must be a campaign to involve independent socialists and those from the CP tradition. A resolution calling for a review of the general and the affiliated political funds was defeated. But speakers from the floor who argued that the union should only fund those Labour Party candidates who supported UNISON's policies were warmly welcomed. The NEC supported a motion on public services in which it undertook to be "openly critical of government policy and actions which conflict with UNISON's own

agenda", to produce a manifesto for public services in the run-up to the general election, and encourage branches to take action against privatisation. Unfortunately, conference rejected calls for the union to organise nationally co-ordinated industrial action against the government's national attacks. In a rare victory, a motion from Nottingham City was adopted calling for renationalisation of the privatised utilities with compensation only on the basis of proven need. In a resolution on taxation initiated by the NEC, conference agreed to call for the raising of the higher rate of taxation to 50% and corporation tax at 33%, and levying a "Tobin" tax on currency trading. The Living Wage, (a minimum wage at half-male median earnings), will remain a high priority for UNISON, with "national and regional public mobilisation". But calls for a national demonstration and a lobby of the Labour conference were lost. For the third year running, a debate on a rule change for internal union disciplinary procedures ended a stalemate. The procedures proposed by the left obtained more than 50% of the card vote, unlike those backed by the NEC, but failed to achieve the two-thirds required. As the week progressed, the NEC became less vitriolic in its attacks. Rodney Bickerstaffe even made a conciliatory farewell speech in which he recognised that the left was part of the union!



Rail unions, especially RMT have waged battles – some, but not all have been successful

emerge was very important of course. As well as the strikes listed above a range of other localised disputes took place such as the recent occupation at Kvaerner on Clyde Bank, there has been resistance to PFI at UCH hospital in central London, and various disputes on the railways, including the recent strikes in defence of Sarah Friday. They did not, however, alter the overall situation.

This month, Labour's Employment Act eventually came into force, leaving the main bulk of Tory anti-union laws in place.

New Labour has the mid-term shakes, and suffered a humiliating defeat with the election of Ken Livingstone as mayor of London. But the trade union leaders remain loyal to Blair's project – or at least they remain loyal to his government, and will do anything necessary to keep it in office and get it reelected.

In these conditions the way the trade union left – dramatically weakened by the decline of the shop stewards' movement since the mid 1980s – organises itself assumes great importance.

The key problem has been that of unity, or the lack of it. Socialist Outlook has long advocated, and taken initiatives towards, the idea of cross-union left structures in order to generalise experiences, spread solidarity and help develop an ideological struggle against the right-wing.

In the end this argument has always fallen on stony ground. And the reasons are clear enough. The problem of unity has remained unresolved within many of the individual unions, and if there was no real grasp of the problems posed by that then the idea of cross-union organisation would not have much urgency.

Today, however, an important new opportunity to start to end some of the divisions of the trade union left has presented itself.

It comes out of the same political imperative which is producing new levels of unity in the fields of electoral interventions (and to a certain extent in campaigns on social issues) – the realisation that neither the problems nor the opportunities

presented can be confronted without overcoming the divisions of the past.

This is the case whether what is involved is filling the space opening up to the left of new Labour and building an alternation to Blairism, or conducting successful campaigns in the unions against social partnership or ensuring the implementation of conference resolutions.

In short the impetus towards unity that led to the formation of the Socialist Alliances needs to be applied at the level of the trade unions as well. All those who are opposed to the neo-liberal offensive and the way the trade union leaderships kowtow to it need to be part of a united fight back.

Fortunately this is beginning to happen. Most importantly the SWP seems to be ending its isolationism within the trade union left and promoting unity in a



number of unions. This remains uneven but it is potentially of great importance.

The SWP took the initiative for a joint public meeting with the rest of the left at PCS conference. In UNISON the SWP has proposed the unification of the left, and formation of a united left organisation. A joint left fringe meeting was held which attracted 400 delegates. There is a perspective of forming a new organisation in the autumn.

Perhaps even more significantly the SWP have, in recent days, taken the first steps towards uniting the left in the NUT – a left which ended up split three ways when the SWP walked out of the Socialist Teachers Alliance some years ago.

Unity is not an easy process after years of division, but the benefits of uniting the left in several major unions are enormous. There is a great responsibility on all sectors of the left to ensure that this opportunity is taken and built on.

The union with the most strikes in recent years has been the CWU, many of them unofficial and illegal. This year's conference saw a

strong challenge by the left particularly on the issue of the privatisation of the postal service and the affiliation to and funding of the Labour party – an issue coming increasingly to the fore in the unions as the Blairites move ever further the right, posing the need for an alternative to Labour at the political level.

CWU delegates voted that if new Labour privatises any part of the post office, the union will withdraw "all financial and moral support to the Labour Party" – which seems close to disaffiliation.

CWU General Secretary Hodgson had said he was appalled that the resolution was even on the agenda. The following day this was underlined by a vote not to increase financial support to Labour at the present time. The conference also overturned action taken against North London postal workers for giving financial support to Ken Livingstone and to the London Socialist Alliance.

There is clearly an increasing reluctance of unions to continue to bankroll Labour whilst its ministers are attacking their members. As well as the discussion within the CWU, there have been serious debates within the FBU and RMT.

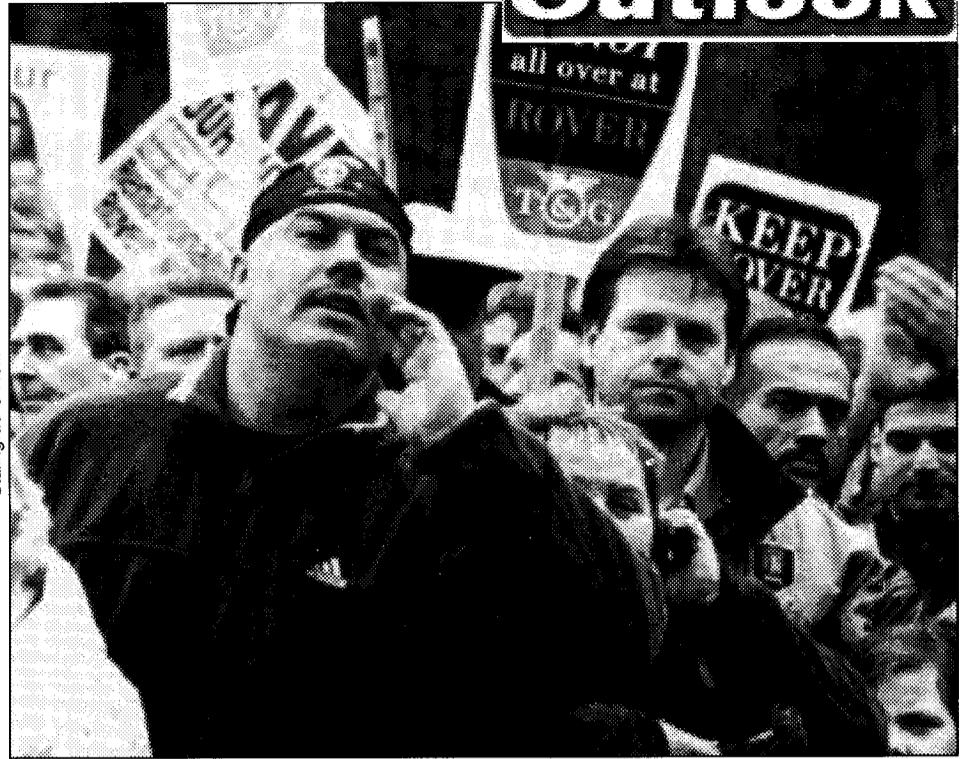
Socialists need to support moves to liberate the political funds from bureaucratic rules which prevent support for those to the left of new Labour acting in defence of trade union policies, while funding Blairite candidates who are attacking their jobs, conditions and services.

One idea being raised is that money should be allocated on the basis of a vote of trade union members – far more democratic than the current system.

Obviously the current lack of any organised political alternative to new Labour means that disaffiliation from the Labour Party at this stage would neither be practical nor correct.

But given Livingstone's election as Mayor of London, and following the election of the Scottish Socialist Party's Tommy Sheridan and Dennis Canavan as an independent to the Scottish Parliament, the idea that there can be credible candidates to the left of Labour is much easier to argue than would have been the case previously.

Given Blair's trajectory, this debate will become increasingly important over the next few years.



Thousands marched to save the Longbridge plant: but since then there has been no fight at the top

RMT leaders ignore warning signals

Greg Tucker

"NOTHING short of a nightmare" is the only way to describe Jimmy Knapp's week at the RMT Annual General Meeting.

On virtually every industrial issue the AGM rejected the Union leadership's strategy and demanded a concerted campaign of action. And on the big issue of the use of the Union's Political Fund, Knapp's position on Labour Party affiliation survived by only 28 votes to 20.

To round off the week, it was discovered that the bureaucracy had deliberately kept off the Agenda a series of Rule change amendments proposed by left Branches. The left controlled Standing Orders Committee rescued the amendments, which will now be debated at a special conference later this year.

One issue dominates RMT discussions – privatisation.

At the political level members are disgusted that the Labour government has not only refused to re-nationalise the rail companies – a policy which could be implemented for free as rail franchises come up for re-tendering – but also wants to sell off London Underground. This has propelled forward a discussion on how the union uses its political fund.

In a passionate debate speaker after speaker called for an end to the one-sided relation with Labour – we give them money – they do what they want.

A hundred years after Thomas Steele of the Doncaster Branch of the RMT's forerunner union the ASRS set in motion the formation of the Labour Representation Committee, delegates demanded a discussion throughout the union on our future.

We wanted this to conclude with a special General Meeting that could decide to liberate our political fund and use it to support candidates and campaigns more in tune with our objectives.

Whilst the right were silent in the debate, the vote was

narrowly lost 20-28. What was clear though was that this is a discussion that will not go away. Left delegates pledged to set up a new "Campaign for an

Independent Political Fund".

It took Thomas Steele and his colleagues in the ILP ten years to break the ASRS from supporting the Liberals. From the debate at this year's AGM, the left in the union is confident that change will come to break the RMT from New Labour liberalism.

At the industrial level members have to fight to overcome the effects of privatisation – on jobs and conditions, but particularly as it effects rail safety. In a



Oh what a week that was for Mr Knapp and co.

series of debates, delegates affirmed their anger at the way the Union leadership has deliberately underplayed the effects of privatisation on safety and has tried to channel our response into official tri-partite discussions behind closed doors.

Campaign

Instead delegates called for a serious public campaign on a series of safety-related issues, up to and including the launching of industrial action.

Delegates were disgusted at the way the Executive had called off action earlier in the year over the role and responsibility of train guards. Overturning the Executive decision they called for an immediate re-ballot of all guards.

In response to the Southall and Ladbroke Grove crashes it was agreed to demand the

immediate introduction of the full Automatic Train Protection system – as first promised a decade ago by the Tories.

John Prescott had stood at Ladbroke Grove and echoed the previous Tory response – "money is no object" – and then sat down with Railtrack and agreed to introduce the cheap (and nasty) option of the Train Protection Warning System – a system which would not prevent many higher speed accidents. The union is now pledged to industrial action if ATP is not forthcoming.

After Ladbroke Grove the public was overwhelmingly in favour of re-nationalisation of the railway to enforce rail safety standards.

But rather than mobilise this support, Knapp and the union leadership have failed to act publicly. Instead they have become integrated into a series of government inspired "Rail Summits" and "Safety Task Forces", sitting down with the rail bosses for cosy discussions on how to work together to improve safety.

Whilst still wanting the Union to argue its case in the official crash enquiries delegates overwhelmingly rejected this approach.

Instead members demanded a forthright campaign of public action, demonstrations, rallies and the like, which not only highlight the need for investment in safety, but also make clear the link between lax safety and the drive for profit.

All of these political and industrial discussions come together with the privatisation of London Underground. The AGM pledged its support for the London Transport Regional Council called demonstration to be held outside John Prescott's office on July 21.

The RMT is pledged to organise to mobilise the widest possible support from our members and the broader movement. Everybody should be putting this important date in their diary.

Is Labour set to privatise more health care?

John Lister

NO SOONER had the curtains closed on the government's ludicrous jamboree of "consultation" on the future of the NHS than ministers began raising the expected two-fingered salute to the views of health workers and Labour's core supporters.

First came the conscious leaking of proposals to increase the use of private hospitals and nursing home beds by the NHS.

The fact that the nurses, doctors and other professional staff working in private hospitals have all been expensively trained by the NHS – only to be lured away to work in better-resourced and less stressful circumstances, for the benefit of a tiny minority – appears to have passed by relentless "moderniser" Alan Milburn.

Private hospitals have large numbers of beds vacant at any one time – because private medical insurance is still massively unpopular, and recognised as poor value by all but a handful of the population: just one person in eight is covered by a private medical scheme.

Nevertheless, Milburn's watchword, like that of so

many of his cabinet colleagues, is "private sector, good: public sector bad". Rather than do what most people want, and restore and develop the NHS, he seeks the answers elsewhere.

The impact of draining more cash from the limited budgets of NHS hospitals into the coffers of the parasitic, profit-hungry private sector is obvious: even more vital staff would be poached from front-line NHS Trusts, creating an even sharper crisis on the wards and in hard-pressed A&E units.

Widening gaps

The lack of qualified staff would widen the gaps in NHS provision. And NHS Trusts that fail would face further financial penalties and loss of even more work to the private sector. A vicious cycle would be established.

But the position is also being worsened by the wave of new hospitals being funded under Milburn's favourite Tory policy, the Private Finance Initiative.

This not only funnels tens of millions of NHS cash into the wallets of private sector shareholders, but is also driving through a massive

reduction in provision of NHS hospital beds.

As PFI hospitals come on stream, the first call on the dwindling stock of NHS beds they offer will be to treat emergency cases – for whom private medicine has no facilities to offer, and no wish to get involved. There will be little space available to treat patients from the waiting list.

So if the New Labour scheme is carried through, a large slice of Gordon Brown's extra cash for the NHS will pass straight through to private hospitals – in contracts to treat a growing share of elective (waiting list) cases.

To make matters worse, the other main strand of government policy appears to be to stress the need to expand numbers of "intermediate" hospital beds as a means of responding to the growing shortages exposed by the recent National Beds Inquiry.

The so-called "closer to home" strategy (more accurately the "do-it-yourself" strategy, leaving the care of patients in the hands of relatives at home) was one of the three possible solutions pro-



Birmingham campaigners oppose a PFI scheme which would squeeze two hospitals into one

If the New Labour scheme is carried through, a large slice of Gordon Brown's extra cash for the NHS will pass straight through to private hospitals – in contracts to treat a growing share of elective (waiting list) cases.

posed to resolve the shortfall of up to 4,000 acute beds as identified in the deeply flawed and blinkered inquiry.

But the vast majority of the "intermediate" beds referred to in the Inquiry report are nursing home beds, all of them owned and run by the private sector – almost all of them for profit.

Any increased reliance on these nursing home places as a way to speed the discharge of older patients from hospital beds would run into serious problems.

Not only would the government be obliged to pump even more NHS money into another part of the private sector, but the policy would depend upon the willingness

of the private nursing home chains to expand in areas where hospitals are under the greatest pressure.

Years of experience have shown that the private sector builds nursing homes not in response to the needs of health and social services, but in response to the pressures of the market.

Whole areas of the country where property prices are higher are already desperately short of nursing home provision – notably Greater London, which has less than a third of the English average provision of nursing home places.

There is no sign that the private owners will change their policy – unless Alan Milburn is planning to offer

an even larger share of the NHS budget to bribe them into the necessary investment.

The results of the NHS "census" have not yet been published: but it is a sure bet that few if any of those who dutifully posted back their questionnaires to the Department of Health were asking New Labour to pump Gordon Brown's belated billions into expanding the grasping private sector, as now seems likely to be the case when the so called "national plan" for the NHS is unveiled in July.

Instead of contracting out even more crucial services to the private sector, the NHS should be looking to invest in expanded capacity to ensure that it can again offer a comprehensive service.

This should include building NHS nursing homes to offer continuing care for the frail elderly, and an end to PFI, with hospitals publicly funded and large enough to sustain both emergency and waiting list services.

WHO comes out against market reforms

John Lister

THE RECENT World Health Organisation Report 2000 hit the headlines in Britain with its controversial "ranking" system of health care systems, in which the UK's National Health service came 18th.

There are grounds to question the basis of a comparison which puts the universally admired and egalitarian Cuban health care system (39th) well below Britain, and two places lower on the scale than the universally reviled US system.

Privatised medicine in the USA squanders over 14% of the country's gigantic national wealth, but leaves a massive 40 million Americans without health insurance and means that family illness is the biggest single cause of personal bankruptcy in the US. If the measure were spending it should be higher: if it were access for the whole population, we might expect the US to be far further down the list.

Five tiny and comparatively prosperous European states (San Marino, Andorra, Malta, Monaco and Luxembourg) with a combined population of a few London boroughs can be found in the top 16 of 191 countries. One factor which

boosts them – and forces down the UK ranking – is the comparative extent of health inequalities between rich and poor, which is seen as a continuing problem in Britain (especially since the comparisons are all based on 1997 figures – at the culmination of 18 years of Thatcherite policies).

The politicians and media have eagerly debated the extent to which this latest league table shows the NHS in a positive or negative light (with Health Secretary Alan Milburn stepping in to bask ridiculously in the reflected glory of Tory government health policies, declaring the report to be "a ringing endorsement of the principles of the NHS").

Certainly if there were bonus points to be won for rhetoric about social exclusion and bridging the health divide, the New Labour government might claw a few places higher up the table, though it will be some time before the extra cash belatedly allocated to the NHS in Gordon Brown's March budget makes any tangible difference to services.

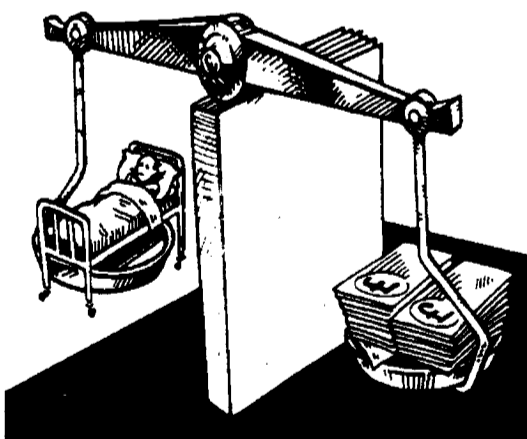
The WHO's ranking order does not exactly mirror spending patterns: the expensive German health care system which has also delivered some of Europe's

highest technology medicine and lowest waiting lists, ranks a lowly 25th.

However most of the larger countries which are ranked above Britain (France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece and Netherlands) do spend a higher share of national wealth on health care than the British government. The Italian and Spanish systems are based on a similar tax-funded model to that of our own NHS before the rigid imposition of cash limits.

But other parts of the WHO report are in many ways politically more interesting, containing as they do a marked shift of policy against the growing global trend towards market-style "reforms" to health care systems.

It makes the point that private insurance schemes respond to "demand rather than needs" and seek to safeguard profits and minimise risk by excluding those most likely to need health care – especially those most likely to need expensive treatments. This, argues the



WHO "maximises people's exposure to financial risk ... or to catastrophic health loss". (p59).

Attempts to hold down health spending by rationing care inevitably run into severe political problems, and depend on "the acceptance and support of providers and consumers". As Labour ministers are discovering with their efforts to ration the use of beta-interferon (see this page) this level of acceptance is hard to obtain.

Sharing risk

Chapter five of the report discusses ways of sharing the risk in the funding of health care, and endorses the view that funding from general taxation – the NHS model – is in many ways

ideal as a means of separating contributions to the system from the use of health services.

But it points out that to fund health care from general taxation "demands an excellent tax or contribution collecting agency."

This is usually associated with a largely formal economy, whereas in developing countries the informal sector is often predominant." (p98)

The WHO goes on to point out that the systems of "co-payments" or charges for treatment favoured by agencies such as the World Bank and the IMF serve to ration the use of care "but does not have the effect of rationalising its demand by consumers". "Using user charges indiscriminately will indiscriminately reduce demand, hurting the poor in particular". (p99)

Against the stock Tory and free-market argument that health care is simply a bottomless pit of demand, the WHO insists that "Free-of-charge services do not translate automatically into unjustified over-use of services." Indeed there may still be a number of hidden costs

for the poor, including time lost from work, transport costs and the price of medicines even when care is nominally "free".

The Report examines a number of examples in which the "pool" of resources for health care treatment has been reduced by introducing competition between different insurance schemes.

It argues that "in fragmented systems it is not the number of pools and purchasers that matters, but that many of them are too small".

If the Thatcherite logic is pursued to its ultimate, and health care is regarded as a matter to be financed not by society but by each individual and his/her family, then "each individual constitutes a pool and thus has to pay for services".

All of this may seem self evident to socialists: but the stand taken in this WHO report will strengthen the hand of those resisting the tide of market-driven reforms and privatisation which are being actively promoted by the US government and global bodies up to and including the World Trade Organisation as a "one size fits all" reactionary panacea for health systems in the developing countries.

One year on: the highs and lows of the Scottish Parliament

High points

May 6 1999 – Parliamentary Elections held under form of PR. Labour largest party, no overall majority. Tommy Sheridan SSP, Ross Harper, Greens and Dennis Canavan, Independent, elected.

May 13 1999 – Parliament reconvened after gap since 1707. Picture of Tommy's clenched fist affirmation to "Her Majesty's Heirs and Accessories" printed worldwide.

Tuition Fees and Student Grants. Commission of Enquiry set up and recommended abolition of college fees, and introduction of type of Graduate Tax, also reintroduction limited form of Grants. Government decided to abolish fees for students but set level at which ex students pay Graduate tax at £10,000 per annum not £25,000 as recommended. This is still a matter of political divide and figure could be revised.

Warrant Sales. The Parliament allows each member to raise two Bills each session. The first member's bill to be presented, to complete committee and be voted on by the Parliament was Tommy Sheridan's Act to abolish warrant sales and poindings.

This is of enormous significance as 28,000 poindings were carried out on the poor last year in Scotland. It has long been seen as a form of intimidation of the poor and gives rise to loan sharks and racketeering. The executive opposed abolition but a back bench revolt by Labour MSPs forced a climbdown. It was widely reported as the day the Parliament found its own voice.

Section 28 (2A). Labour attempted to carry out its manifesto commitment to repeal Section 2A preventing local Authorities "promoting" Homosexuality.

The Bill to repeal met opposition from some reactionaries on its back bench as well as the Catholic church. Most serious opposition came from Brian Souter of Stagecoach who organised a referendum on the issue. Souter who was a major funder of the SNP, forced wobbles in the SNP leadership and a few amendments in the statutory guidance. The measure to repeal however, went ahead, and on June 21 2000 the reactionary legislation – Section 2A was repealed in Scotland.

Parliamentary Committees. Every MSP is on at least one parliamentary committee (Sheridan is on the Equal Opportunities committee).

Although their effectiveness varies, these committees are the biggest extension of democracy instigated by the parliament. Any organisation can make representations to the Parliament and on the key issues under discussion, the campaign organisations are directly questioned by the committee and their responses recorded in the parliamentary record available on the Internet.

During evidence taking, each of the 3 or 4 committees has interviewed 3 or 4 organisations a week – sometimes for 12 to 15 weeks. Committees are not part of the executive and are designed to call it to account, they can initiate legislation themselves. (see Stock transfer)

Low Points of Parliament

May 19 1999 – Lib Dems included in coalition executive. Accused of sell out over Tuition Fees in return for Government limos.

PR – wrangles between Labour first past post MSPs and list MSPs over level of expenses. This was part of an on-going reaction against PR.

First past post MPs in Labour had fought internal election and public election, and resent the top up list candidates. It was eventually agreed all MSPs got same expenses and salaries. Westminster MPs are now complaining about MSPs poaching constituency complaints – they feel undervalued.

Site of Parliament. There was a clash between the executive and parliament over the site of Parliament and the cost of proposed new building. The traditional site of the Royal High School which had temporarily housed the parliament to 1707 was rejected by Donald Dewar as a Nationalist shibboleth.

The new site at Holyrood is running years late with costs spiralling. Executive members complain they didn't enter politics to run building contracts!



The extra rights embodied in the Scottish Parliament were hard-won by years of campaigning

"The structures of the parliament are much better than Westminster"

Gordon Morgan for Socialist Outlook talked to Scottish Socialist Party MSP Tommy Sheridan about his assessment of the Scottish Parliament over the last year

SO: How well has the Scottish Parliament lived up to your expectations?

TS: It has brought decision making in the areas within its powers, including health, housing and education, under democratic scrutiny. This is a major advance.

People are more conscious of decisions being made in these areas, decision making is under the microscope and MSPs can be made accountable. Previously the Secretary of State for Scotland would take decisions by dictat and no one could influence them. This is a positive democratic advance.

As expected, in some areas, like Social Security, Tax and Finance, the Parliament does not have delegated powers. Although we knew that before the Parliament was set up, it restricts what can be done. We keep pushing this fact and make the case for more powers. The SSP is in favour of Independence and seeks additional powers for the Parliament.

SO: What are the obstacles to introducing progressive social measures?

TS: The biggest obstacle is the absence of powers over the economy, finance, social services, employment legislation. These are barriers which force us to fight over a slice of the cake rather than directly fight to expand the public sector.

The other obstacle is the centre ground consensus adopted by the main parties, that is all parties except Dennis Canavan, the Greens and the SSP.

The leadership of the other parties accept in the main the existing social and economic conditions.

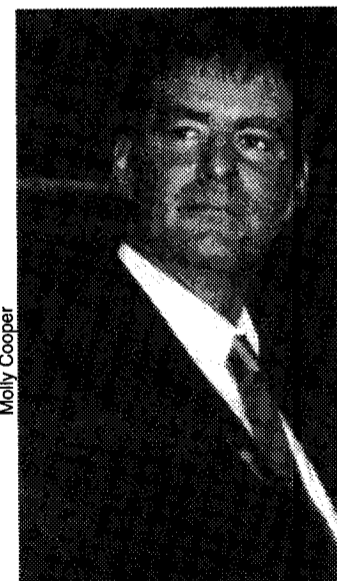
This is a major problem as it means progressive social measures must be introduced against the wishes of these party machines.

Warrant Sales was a clear example where the SNP had supported repeal and Labour conferences for many years had stood immovable in its opposition to continuing warrant sales. Yet in Parliament Labour and Liberals leaders and the Executive as a whole fought against repeal.

That position could have held had only the SNP opposed, however, because of the SSP's long struggle on this issue particularly around the Poll Tax, Labour backbenchers felt threatened in their heartlands.

Because parties like the SSP were able to campaign outside parliament individual MPs knew they were spotlighted. They could not hold the line without paying a price. This led to the PLP revolt and the

vote to repeal Warrant Sales. This campaign shows how the political obstacles can be overcome.



Tommy Sheridan

SO: How does Parliamentary work interact with campaigns and political action?

TS: MSPs are much more publicly accountable. The structures of the parliament are much better than Westminster although they are still a restricted form of democracy.

Thus the Parliamentary committee structure takes representations direct from the public. Campaigning organisations can directly put their views to MSPs.

Thus on Warrant Sales three separate committees heard evidence. Some Labour MSPs serving on these committees were fairly ignorant of the real-

ity of Warrant Sales.

Despite the official Labour conference opposition they were initially confused on the issue and willing to back the leadership.

In the course of the committee hearings they changed their opinion to firm opposition based on the first hand evidence they heard.

SO: Has having the Parliament assisted the Left in general and the SSP in particular?

TS: Yes. The PR system has enabled minority parties to make a breakthrough. The SSP has made advances and will be much stronger entering the elections the next time.

Despite the fact that Labour in Scotland is no different from Labour at Westminster, the context of political debate is different.

The centre of gravity is further left than at Westminster. In Westminster Labour is under attack from Hague to their right. Although the SNP has moved to the right, they still present themselves as to the left of New Labour.

Thus Labour in Holyrood is under attack from the Left. This has forced them to adopt a more traditional left profile than New Labour in England.

Some Labour MSPs like John McAllion openly criticise the executive from the Left, not the Right.

This affects the mindset of each Labour MSP. It has opened doors more and created a climate for left politics to get a hearing.

What of England if Britain is broken up?

David Coen reviews *After Britain: New Labour and the Return of Scotland*, by Tom Nairn (Granta Books 2000)

"NO SURRENDER to the IRA" was the rallying cry of patriotic England fans, assailed on all sides by foreigners and particularly the Belgian police at Euro 2000.

Under the banners of the Union Jack and the Cross of St. George they fought and fell, often dead drunk, in the bars and squares of Brussels. The country for which they made a last desperate stand was hard to figure out. For them 'English' meant British. The battle cries on the streets outside were matched inside the stadiums as "true" football supporters roared out Rule Britannia alongside God Save the Queen. The weighty burden of preserving Britain fell apparently to the England football team.

Tom Nairn, who in 1977 published "The Break-up of Britain", returns to this theme in "After Britain". He sets his critique of Blair's tepid fake radicalism in the context of the end of the Cold War and the growing momentum towards western European Union.

Now living in Roscommon in the west of Ireland, Nairn sees the 1998 Stormont Agreement as "a managed breakdown of the former United Kingdom." He doubts the durability of the "Peace Process".

Blair's constitutional radicalism was just rhetoric: he never seriously challenged the "undefeated anachronistic (British) state" but instead capitulated to the backward looking Britishness espoused by the Unionists and their kith and kin in Britain.

Accordingly, England, Scotland and Wales need to be "liberated from Britain", freed from the dead hand of Britishness and its "backward looking core- Monarchy, imperial Sovereignty and a kind of spiritual racism".

In spite of the near 30-year war in Ireland Nairn claims "the decisive step ... in unmaking the United Kingdom must lie in establishing a different relationship with the Scots".

Incorporated

The Scottish state was incorporated rather than destroyed by the 1707 Act of Union. The Treaty of Union was an agreement between equal states rather than the elimination of the Scottish state, and a "satisfied people could not forget itself". Thus devolution/independence is not an episode of anti-colonial struggle but "the recovery of collective will by an already constituted nation..."

The new "civic nationalism" which will emerge from the re-joining of the Scottish state and nation will apparently offer a model for the resolution of other regional and national differences within the European Union.

Nairn has long since abandoned Marxism, and is critical of the British Labour Party both for its attempts to bind the crumbling state together and its more recent failure to modernise it. Citing its failure to reform the House of Lords and its cringing populist royalism around the death of Diana Spencer, he argues New Labour's grand rhetorical claims are merely an attempt to disguise its spineless failure to act.

Its fake solution is "corporate populism" in which "its apparatus of consumers and 'stakeholders' mimics democracy, substituting brand loyalty and ordinariness for hope and glory". From this flows its authoritarian



The shape of things to come? England "fans" mouthing fascist slogans and stuck in xenophobic time-warp

and centralising instincts; the more Britain appears to fragment and disintegrate, the more desperately do the Blairites demand conformity, discipline and centralisation within New Labour and without.

Nairn considers that this ultimately doomed attempt to hang on to the British ancien regime represses the voice of the country "which has not spoken yet" – England.

Devolution poses the question of England. For Nairn "there is no available formula for post-British England" and here we get a glimpse of the beastie that haunts the edges of his nightmares for it is none other than the "uncertain and uncontrollable ... English nationalism" expressed as Euro-scepticism: "the conjunction of neo-liberalism and Britain's great power past".

The possibility that "popular heartland resentment at decline and loss further aggravated by failure or marginalisation" could lead to unthinkable political developments must be headed off by timely constitutional reform.

Modern national identity

The reason for Scotland's importance in unmaking Britain is that it apparently offers a vision of a modern national identity "within the prevailing temper of a European polity in formation".

This new-found national identity however is not one 'tainted' by the anti-colonial struggles – "it has been civic demands and action which have brought about the return of the Scottish parliament – not ethnic assertiveness associated with violence exclusion or discrimination".

While there are dangers of an upsurge in anti-English ethnic nationalism, Scottish nationalism is more "modern" and outward looking.

Nairn has great faith in a written constitution to provide legitimation for the new state instead of the "pre-democratic" 1998 Scotland Act or the unwritten, monarchical constitution of Britain. He quotes a declara-

tion by Vaclav Havel: "Union must turn to the written word".

This belief in the written Word has parallels in the fundamentalist Christianity which surely also forms part of the Scottish "identity". The Havel quote identifies Nairn with those East European writers who felt that their literary assaults on Stalinism were vindicated by its collapse in 1989. In the end this is idealism: the Word or the Constitution are always subject to interpretation, and their meanings reflect the prevailing relations of power.

Nairn's preference for civic action and his not well concealed anti-statism place him more in the tradition of liberal thinkers such as his Scottish antecedent Adam Smith, who created classical political economy from his observation of simple commodity production.

He is therefore closer to the neo-liberals he criticises (and indeed to Tony Blair) than perhaps he imagines. True free marketers are not opposed to European Union per se: they oppose state intervention against the interests of capital. Nairn's "European polity" with its written legal codes and appearance of openness is being created, like the nation states which he believes it is replacing, by the concentration of west European capital as a more useful weapon in the battle for global markets.

Well-meaning explanations of the EU as an attempt to avoid a repeat of the two ruinous wars or as the production of a process of modernisation brought about by greater travel and communication between countries obscure this basic fact.

For all its faults, After Britain raises several key questions for socialists.

The British left is very suspicious (rightly) of Union Jack-waving British nationalism. At the same time, this has led it to concede patriotism to the right, even if their efforts to mobilise around it have been laughable: John Major's nostalgia for an England of "elderly maidens cycling to matins" and "warm beer" certainly wouldn't ring a bell with Brixton

Tories – if the species still exists.

Blair's "re-branded" modern, post imperial Cool Britannia flopped with the Millennium Dome. And then there are the football fans who seem to have no language to support their team other than the symbols and anthems of empire.

Divisions and false unity

The left variant of all embracing Britishness is to deny autonomy to national formations within the British state on the grounds that these divide the working class.

Thus, having British-based unions organise in Ireland was defended on the basis that they represented a degree of working class unity, which only sectarians would seek to break, when on the contrary, they represented not an equal and voluntary alliance of workers but a subordination of workers of different nations within the British state.

To return to Nairn's enthusiasm for the redefinition of Britishness in the Stormont Agreement and the proposal to set up a Council of the Isles, this is something which while we might agree on the principle, the fact is that the Council of the Isles is not based on the freely

given democratic consent of the nations within the British State (and outside) but is imposed by the British as part of the attempt to stabilise the undemocratic Six County State which it imposed on Ireland by force in 1921.

Related to this is the question of whether the left favours the break-up of the British State. Clearly, imperialism and the British ruling class in particular would be weakened by such a development, even if in the short run it sowed illusions in national capital among the working class.

The danger of this could be exaggerated: is it the case that working class Scots are voting for the SNP because they have any illusions in them? More likely it is because of Blair's openly Thatcherite policies.

Liberal transnationals?

And then there is the EU. Some on the left think the EU is the only practical option for progressive politics if the choice is between the narrow bigotry of domestic capital and the apparently more liberal transnational variety.

Nairn himself is in this category, as are many trade union leaders. The problem with this argument is that big European capitalism feels no need to make concessions – and the outcome will be a trade union bureaucracy further tied in to the Euro ruling class.

Calling for a united socialist Europe while building links with workers organisations in Europe would be much preferable to neo-liberalism in its localist or pan European versions.

Finally, Nairn is wrong in believing that Scotland will be the catalyst for change in the British state. "Civic nationalism" is far too compromised to challenge the oldest imperialist state in the world.

Only the mass action which has occasionally occurred in Ireland over the past 30 years can accomplish the task. To quote Bernadette McAliskey – who borrowed the phrase from somewhere: "Freedom only comes if you take it".

Row over Scottish council housing sell-off

Gordon Morgan

THE FIRST serious split in a Scottish Parliamentary committee has occurred over the issue of Housing Stock Transfer. On 21st June the SNP members of the committee walked out, and are threatening a minority report.

The Housing and Social Inclusion Committee of the parliament has been considering the issue of housing stock transfer since September 1999. Literally thousands of pages of evidence have been presented, most of it critical of the Executive's proposals to support the transfer of all council housing stock to Housing Associations, and to extend tenants' right to buy to Housing Associations.

The committee comprises Labour, SNP, Tory and Liberal MSPs, and a consensus report had been agreed at the previous meeting. A report has to be produced by July 3. But on June 19 the Labour chair of the committee presented over 70 amendments, which the SNP claim were designed to remove criticism of the executive and also distorted some of the evidence presented.

The Labour MSP John McAllion remained in the committee. However, he has previously publicly threatened to lead a revolt against extending the right to buy, and is vehemently critical of stock transfers which have directly led to good stock being demolished in his Dundee constituency. His stance will be critical over the coming weeks.

Massive debts

Glasgow council housing has debts of £800 million, the highest rents in the country and some of the poorest condition stock. It is estimated it will cost over £1000 million to bring the stock up to standard.

Due to Tory legislation, not yet repealed, the Council is unable to invest in the stock. Other councils such as Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen are in similar, though less extreme, positions.

A campaign has run for years for the debt to be transferred to central government. Labour however, insisted after taking power at Westminster that this would breach Public Sector Borrowing Requirement guidelines, and undermine Gordon Brown's reputation for financial prudence.

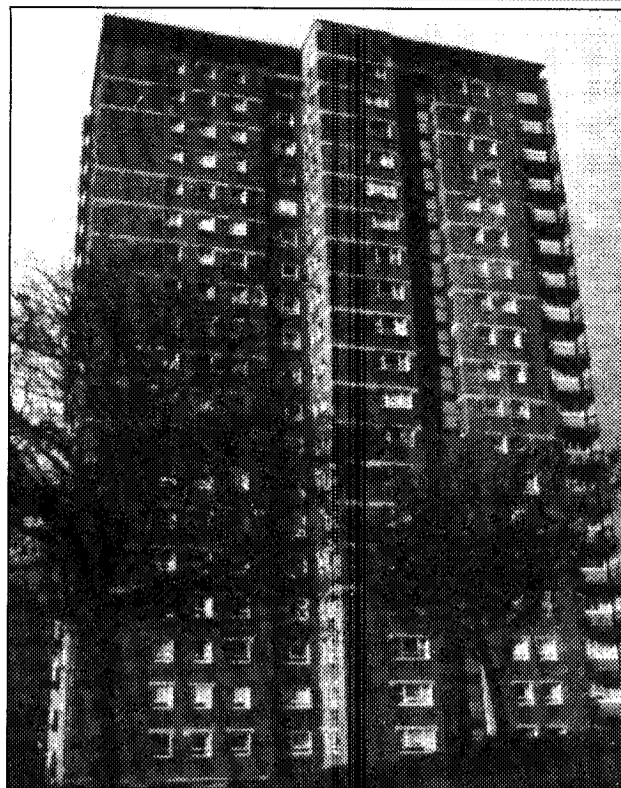
The counter argument – that under ERDF rules as applied throughout Europe (as opposed to arbitrary PSBR rules) housing investment does not count against government borrowing – has never been acknowledged by the government or Scottish Executive.

Labour devised a plan before the Scottish elections to transfer the housing stock to a separately managed Glasgow Housing Association, in return for the debt being transferred to the Scottish Parliament.

This would allow the Association to borrow the funds required.

Several million was spent on consultants' reports, which were in turn scrutinised by trade union-sponsored consultants. After much discussion most unions and the STUC came out in opposition to stock transfer.

The SNP also adopted a critical position and in



Towering fiasco: multi-storey blocks would lose value in 30 years

general has been critical of all PFI and PPP schemes.

Following the Scottish Elections, the minister for Communities appeared to endorse the plan, whilst introducing new complications. She wanted to bring the stock under control of Community Housing Associations and extending the right to buy. The issue of whether the debt would in fact be taken over has also been left open.

The campaign against

The scheme as currently proposed appears unviable.

The proposal to fund £1,600 million investment over 10 years by borrowing against rents might just be attractive to investors over a 30 year period.

But it becomes too risky if right to buy is extended to new tenants, and still less if the stock is split over many housing associations.

Around 20,000 dwellings are multistories which would have no value at the end of 30 years and cannot justify investment, so they will be scheduled for demolition by private financiers.

The unions estimate that if the council retained the stock it would save £200 million in VAT on repairs and over £400 million in management and additional interest costs.

If the Scottish Executive paid the interest and service on the existing debt – around £100 million per annum – the stock could be brought up to standard within 10 years with no further borrowing.

With the proposed scheme, after 10 years debts of over a further £600 million would have arisen. This could only be paid by raised rents.

A vigorous correspondence in the *Herald* has effectively won the argument at an intellectual level. Most unions and even the UNISON

Affiliated Political Fund now oppose the proposals.

Briefings have been held for many MSPs and MPs as well as councillors.

Thousands of leaflets have been given out, and meetings held with tenants' associations, SSP and Labour Party meetings. A further study has been commissioned by UNISON into the full report of the Executive's consultants, to remove the final fig leaf from their arguments.

The Parliamentary committee are in possession of the same information as the unions. It was believed their report would be critical of the Executive's actions.

Indeed within the last two weeks the minister announced that her Housing Bill which was expected in February would now not be published till the Autumn. A climbdown could have been in prospect.

Unfortunately the minister has tied herself too closely to the proposals and has been lying about the amount of cash the government will supply, and about the long term intentions for the stock.

A vote in favour was passed by Glasgow council – based on a summary which misinformed councillors.

Vilification

The story keeps changing. Having lost the argument, there is now a campaign of vilification of the opposition describing them as "a small group of stewards", "the usual suspects" – this to describe amongst others the STUC!

Ultimately the tenants have to vote on proposals. The danger is the government is feeding them a pack of lies and distortions. The stance of the committee thus becomes vital.

Heavy pressure has been brought on Labour members to fall in line. Clearly the chair has buckled to pressure.

The SNP will force a divide. The stance of Labour members like John McAllion is vital. If he stands firm, a repeat of the executive defeat on Warrant Sales is possible.

Whatever happens will be critical not only for stock transfers in Scotland, but throughout the UK and for the future of other PPP type deals.

Unionists and nationalists unite ... but only against abortion

Paul Flannigan

Some people will be glad to learn the good news that there is a lot more to the new devolved Northern Ireland assembly than just sectarian squabbling.

However they might be a little less happy when they hear what it is that is so uniting nationalist and unionist members.

Not so long ago, when Mo Mowlam was nearing the end of her sentence as secretary of state she let it slip that new Labour was toying with the idea of extending the 1967 Abortion Act to cover the six counties.

Every year around 1500 women travel to England to have an abortion. They are not entitled to any NHS help, and so are forced to pay private clinics in England to carry out the procedure.

allowing the destruction of 5.3 million healthy children. This from a party that fights like hell to 'keep Ulster British'

Speaking on behalf of the SDLP Joe Hendron said that while as a doctor he was sympathetic to the plight of the many teenage girls, who found themselves pregnant, he still supported the motion, as he believed 'that babies were genetically complete at conception.'

On behalf of Sinn Fein Mitchell McLaughlin said that his party also opposed the extension of the Act, 'but the problem of unplanned pregnancy and the inconsistent approach of different doctors must be addressed in a comprehensive manner with a multi-agency approach. It is an indictment of our society that so many women are choosing abortion.'

We have

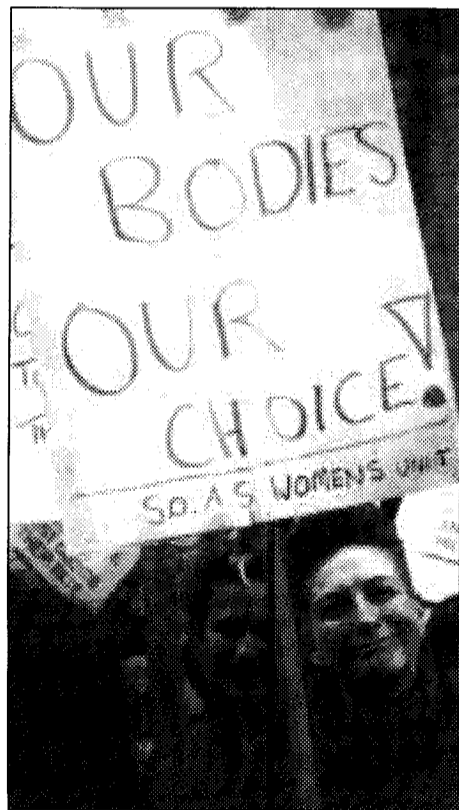
heard from the unionists and the nationalists, what of the self-styled 'non-sectarians and middle of the road types' The Alliance party speaker S. Close said that abortion was an issue that went to the very heart of society 'it was about the snuffing out of human life.'

The Women's Coalition speaker, 'a party set up by women for women', put forward an amendment calling for the issue to be left undecided until a health committee of the Assembly could consult with experts: 'the current

legal situation is a mess and needs reviewing.' It remained unclear as to whether the Women's Coalition was for or against the extension of the Act. The amendment to postpone a vote was rejected by 43 votes to 15.

The vote in the Assembly had been primed by a very ferocious anti-abortion pressure group called Precious Life which specialises in intimidation. Precious Life, which has also recently been active in Scotland, now plans to start picketing clinics in towns like Liverpool, which carry out abortions on women from Northern Ireland.

Watch this space for more reports from the Assembly on the flourishing Unionist and Nationalist unity.

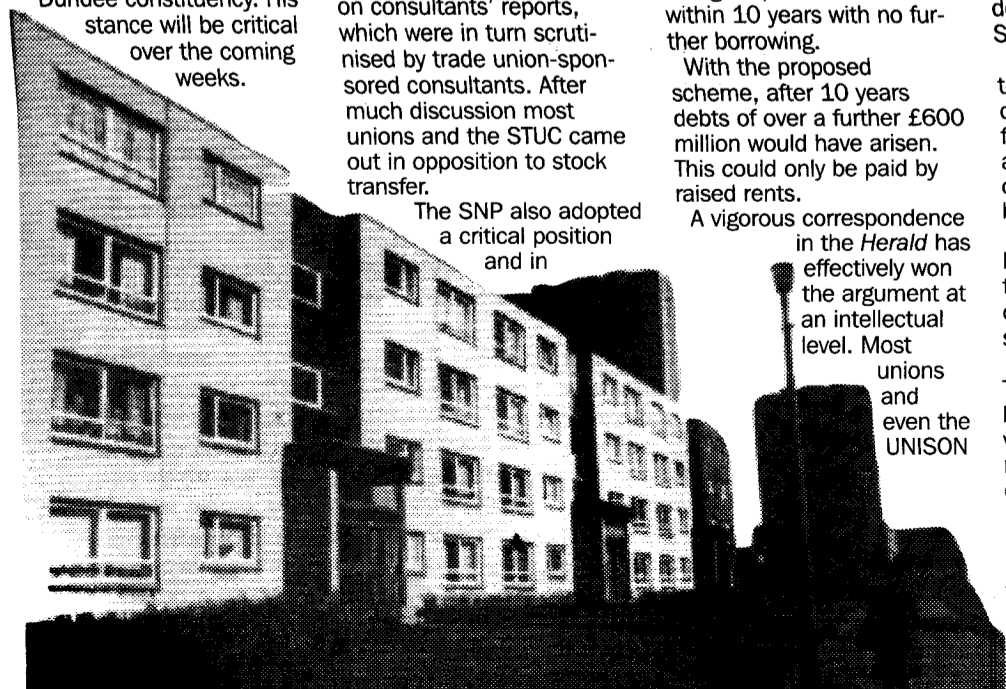


The bigots' consensus also reaches south of the border: pro-choice campaigners picketing Irish embassy in London in 1992

Many working class women who would prefer to have an abortion don't do so because of the costs involved.

On June 20, the recently reconvened Assembly moved to try and ensure that the 1967 Act is not extended to cover Northern Ireland.. The motion was proposed by a member of Paisley's DUP party, but was supported by just about every one else.

Jim Wells introduced his motion by claiming that the 1967 Act had allowed 'abortion the norm' in the rest of Britain and that putting down a marker now would ensure that 'this legalised carnage would not be permitted in Northern Ireland'. Mr Wells claimed that the British government had sanctioned a 'holocaust' by



Trimble and the myth of moderate Unionism

John North

The hidden centre-piece of the Good Friday agreement is Unionist leader David Trimble.

The agreement has the enthusiastic support of Irish capitalism, and Sinn Fein offer firm support as junior partners, but it not they who serve as the base of British rule in Ireland, but the right-wing unionists. And it is from the right that the Irish settlement still faces serious threats.

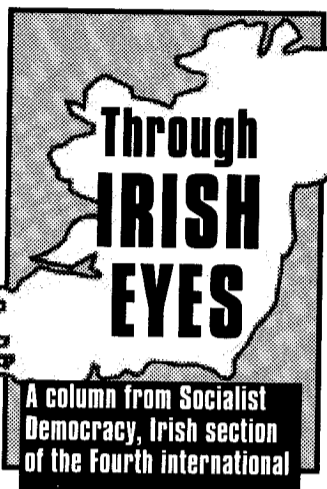
The weakness of the British strategy is that it assumes a 50% "moderate unionist" base. Yet at every test this majority crumbles. Even under massive British pressure, David Trimble only just survived a challenge to his leadership from the far right.

The majority for a resumption of the Stormont executive was even more humiliatingly close, even when the unionists were given a series of changes which made it painfully clear that not even the limited promises by the Patten commission to change the local sectarian police, the Royal Ulster Constabulary, would be honoured.

They were also given private assurance that the Union Jack, long a local symbol of sectarian domination, would retain its position as the official flag of the state.

Downhill

Things have not a lot worse since then. Unionist grandee and Trimble supporter Lady Hermon was defeated in a unionist selec-



tion meeting in North Down. David Burnside, ultra-right reactionary and former leading figure in British Airways, won the South Antrim selection.

On the ground the UFF has been gradually moving away from the agreement, and giving background support to the LVF in its shooting war with the UVF. This has escalated into a war of the flags between the UDA and UVF, where each side claims a loyalist area as its own.

The UDA has been winning the battle for support and its front organisation, the UFF, has been issuing blood-curdling threats to re-launch the random sectarian killing of Catholic workers.

Worst of all was the fate of efforts by the British and Trimble to solve the Drumcree issue. The idea was that the Orange Order would speak to the Parades commission. Up until now they have spoken to no-one, insisting on their undiluted



A balancing act with his more right wing supporters: Trimble

sectarian privilege to walk where they like and intimidate local Catholics.

Speaking to the commission directly, rather than through their legal representatives, would establish their moderation and win them swift passage. Unfortunately for Trimble the sectarians not only threw out the proposal, they also kicked out the small group of grandees who had suggested the "compromise".

The Orange right are now gearing up for war at Drumcree. It's Catch-22 for Trimble. If the far right win, he's finished - but it is also hard to see how the Trimble minority could survive the infighting that would follow defeat.

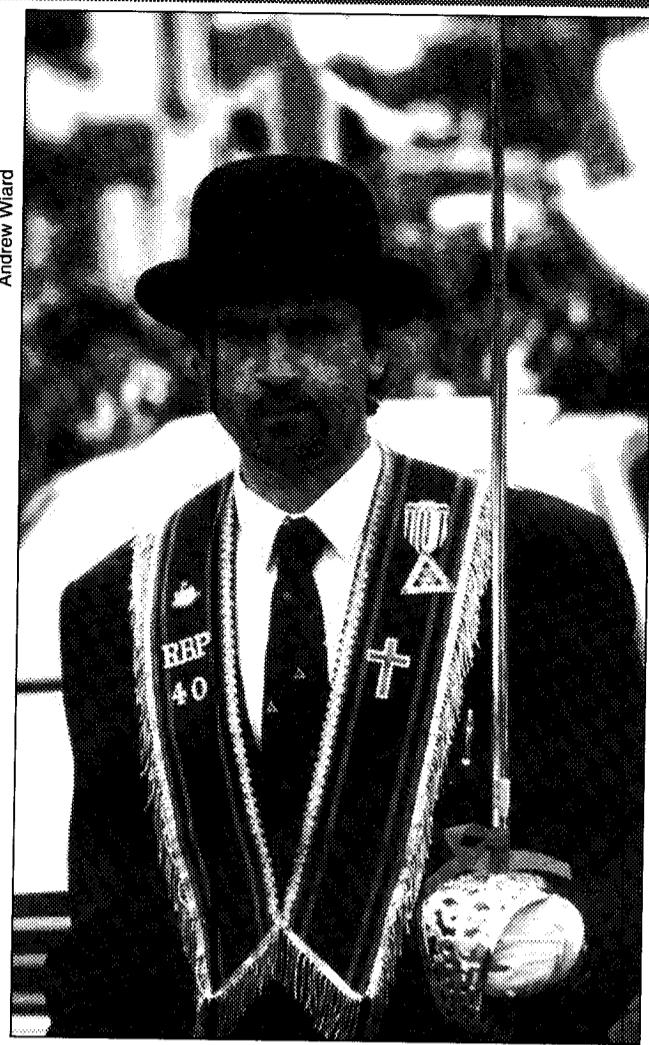
In a desperate attempt a survival he recently launched a new group, "Reunion" in the hope of

recruiting more representatives of the Unionist bourgeoisie into the party.

"Britishness" of the North

It's not only Trimble and the British that have a problem. The strategy of the Dublin capitalists is to support Trimble and save the agreement. To that end they acquiesced to the changes in the Patten report and secret concessions on flags and emblems that effectively ripped up the Good Friday Agreement.

Brian Cowan, the Dublin Foreign Affairs minister, signalled this immediately after the re-establishment of Stormont by saying that it was unrealistic to expect changes in the "Britishness" of the North and that not every section could expect to get what they wanted in the



Drumcree will be another test for the Trimble wing

dispute about flags and emblems.

Even more interesting were the signals sent out by Sinn Fein. They could "not advise" nationalists to join the new RUC, said Gerry Adams. In other words they saw the Good Friday agreement disappear before their eyes, but instead of walking away they agreed to become the loyal opposition, lobbying the British for some concessions in their favour.

Trimble "moderation"

One sort of difficulty is based on the pressure on the Trimble wing of unionism. A much more fundamental problem is posed by the fact that there is no "moderate" wing to unionism.

It is after all Trimble who convinced the British that

even the vacuous Patten report was too much and would have to be effectively reversed. It is the Trimble wing that would have delivered a triumphal march at Drumcree. It was the Trimble wing that stymied Sinn Fein in recent Mayoral election in Belfast by rushing from Stormont to vote for Paisleyite arch-bigot Sammy Wilson.

The British are finding a policy based on unionist moderation uncomfortable. Nor is Irish capital at all comfortable with the situation.

But Gerry Kelly, struck from behind by an RUC baton as they force yet another Orange march through nationalist areas, can stand as a metaphor for Sinn Fein in finding it most uncomfortable of all.

A new left voice in the Dail

Joe Craig

Ireland has a new left wing voice in the Dail after the election of Seamus Healy from the local Workers and Unemployed Action Group in the Tipperary South by-election.

Healy topped the poll after nearly doubling his share of the vote from the 1997 general election and after the ruling Fianna Fail vote underwent an unprecedented collapse. It was the worst by-election result for the party in the history of the state, and one of its leaders was forced to confess that the fall by over 14 per cent was 'huge'.

Corruption had been 'at the core of this by-election' Healy insisted, and the vote took place just after yet another scandal had rocked the southern establishment.

The latest affair is really the sting in the tail of events going back to 1996 when a working class woman was killed by a well connected architect, Phillip

Sheedy, while the latter was drunk and driving at high speed, showing 'recklessness of an extraordinary degree.'

He was sentenced to four years in jail despite one judge, Cyril Kelly, attempting to get the trial judge to realise that Sheedy was a 'graduate' from a good family and would be in a position to compensate the dead woman's family.

Review

A year later a solicitor unconnected to the case got a phone call from a senior court official telling him that judge Kelly was waiting to review the case (although only the original trial judge was supposed to be able to do this) and asking when an application for review going to be made.

This intervention was made after Sheedy's sister apparently bumped into a Supreme Court judge, Hugh O'Flaherty, in the street and asked him if anything could be done about the case. O'Flaherty told the court official to get the case relisted -

and sure enough it came before judge Cyril Kelly, who freed Sheedy in proceedings lasting only a few moments, in which no submissions were made by any lawyer, and while the only state solicitor at the court was on a phone call.

As soon as Sheedy appeared in court the judge expressed concern for his mental health on the basis of a psychological report that didn't exist, and which Kelly subsequently tried to add to the file.

When the shit hit the fan, a judicial inquiry into the affair was set up - but not unexpectedly failed to get to the bottom of it, and failed in particular to reveal collusion between Kelly and O'Flaherty. O'Flaherty refused to answer questions from the Dail about the affair and resigned rather than face the impeachment proceedings that were being forced on the government.

It might have joined the ranks of all the other scandals that have hit the headlines but for the fact that Fianna Fail, which

12 months earlier had threatened to impeach him, nominated O'Flaherty to the £147,000 a year post of vice-president of the European Investment Bank.

Having failed to explain his behaviour, his apologists among government ministers claimed his intervention was prompted by purely humanitarian motives. Unfortunately the tidal wave of public anger forced O'Flaherty into a radio interview where he explicitly rejected this but failed to explain himself.

Soon forget

Public anger was further inflamed when the Tanaiste, Mary Harney, from the supposedly squeaky clean Progressive Democrat coalition partner, claimed the public would forget about it all in a matter of months.

There had been some grounds for this confidence. Until very recently opinion polls had not shown dramatic falls in the government's popu-

larity and even the most recent had not predicted the collapse that the by-election has produced. Commentators are now saying that this latest scandal is the last straw that will break the camel's back and that a general election is on the way in the autumn.

Unfortunately the choices that will be before Irish workers at that election will be dire. There is no state wide left alternative as existed in Tipperary South, and the left victory there is the culmination of hard local work going back over fifteen years.

The Workers and Unemployed Action Group has seven representatives on local authorities but is a purely local phenomenon. There is nowhere else where the left has this implantation and only a few other constituencies have a credible left candidate.

A strategy of simply copying this victory is therefore not on. Not that this is a search for short cuts. There will be no alternative to patient work at

local level, but a simple concentration on this work would be a collapse into the worst sort of electoralism that would have severe effects on the politics of any left force attempting such an approach.

Lead

This puts more responsibility on the new TD and the Socialist Party's existing TD, Joe Higgins, to take the lead in posing a new way forward for the left.

The first task would be to build resistance to social partnership that has shackled the workers movement to the requirements of Ireland's Celtic Tiger economy.

So far The Socialist Party have simply used Higgins as a means to build their own organisation, with limited results, but this is an evasion of responsibility.

Whether the new TDs are up to the task of staking out a new way forward for the left is the question to be posed by all socialists in Ireland today.

Grim choices for Syria's new regime

Roland Rance

The sudden death of Syrian President Hafez al-Assad has left the Syrian regime in disarray, and strengthens Israel's hand in the dangerous game being played between the two states.

Whether this leads to a war, or to the imposition of a US-backed "peace" treaty depends largely on whether Assad's son Bashar can swiftly establish his authority in the first dynastic republic in the Middle East, and on the arrogance of Israel's trigger-happy generals.

In either case, the outcome is likely to bring little satisfaction to Syria's population, struggling under poverty and authoritarian dictatorship

Delay

The confusion of the regime is demonstrated by the delay in announcing Assad's death, the implications of which were being discussed by Israel, and by the Syrian opposition, several days before it was officially confirmed.

During this time, preparations were made to amend the constitution to reduce the minimum age for a president to 34 (coincidentally, Bashar's age), and to neutralise the expected opposition from Hafez al-Assad's brother, the former Vice

President Rifaat al-Assad, in exile in Paris since 1984.

Although sudden, Assad's death was not totally unexpected, and key players had already been jostling for position. Less than a month before, Mahmoud al-Zoubi, who had been prime minister for thirteen years until dismissed earlier this year in a power struggle with Bashar, died in mysterious circumstances.

Triumvirate

According to Syrian dissident sources, the real seat of power is the triumvirate of Vice-President Abd al-Halim Khaddam, Chief of Staff Mustafa Tlas, and Foreign Minister Farouq al-Shara, who see Bashar's succession as the best way to maintain the regime.

Assad's legacy is an impoverished state, tens of thousands of political prisoners, a corrupt administration, and a cowed, divided, and demoralised opposition. Syria has few natural resources.

40% of the population are farmers, dependent on inadequate water, which is becoming increasingly polluted from oil refineries, and is threatened by the proposed Ilisu dam on the Euphrates in Turkey.

The oil is running out, while it is believed that huge sums from the oil refining industry are pocketed by the

clique around Assad

This is a situation which Israel will gleefully exploit. Most Israeli press reports welcomed Assad's death, recognising him as Israel's only serious foe after the peace deals with Egypt and Jordan, the withdrawal from Lebanon, and the cooption and neutralisation of Arafat and the PLO. "We shed no tears", crowed popular daily Yediot Ahronot.

Barak's government, now rid of its "left" Meretz partner, can be expected to push for a favourable settlement of the conflict with Syria. There are increasing signs that, despite all of his rhetoric, Barak has no intention of withdrawing from the Golan Heights, occupied in 1967.

Expansion of the Qatrin industrial zone, and the allocation of thousands of acres to agricultural settlements, and the approval of thousands of new homes for settlers, all indicate Israel's intention to remain on the Heights.

Settlers

The Jewish population of the area already exceeds the remaining Syrian Arabs (most of whom were expelled in 1967); the new homes suggest an increase of some 60% in the next few years. Unlike in the West Bank, most of these settlers are secular;



Celebrations at Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon appear not just premature but missing the point

many consider themselves on the left. Indeed, some of them are affiliated to the former Marxist Hashomer Hatzair movement, now subsumed into Meretz.

They make a significant contribution to Israel's economy; in particular, most of the drinkable wine produced by, and exported from, Israel, comes from the Golan.

Water

The area is also rich in water resources, with most of the headwaters of the Jordan, which provides a large proportion of Israel's domestic and exported water.

Last year, after an effective campaign, Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream pulled out of a deal to use Golan water in its products.

Although Israel justifies its continuing occupation on security grounds, the real reason is the control of these resources.

The Golan in Syrian hands would pose no real military threat to Israel. Recent reports suggest that, if Israel were forced to withdraw, they would insist that Golan is not merely demilitarised, but surrounded on the Syrian side by a cordon of nuclear mines.

Israel is also demanding new high tech military

equipment from the US, in order to threaten Damascus - which is only some 40 miles from Israel's northern border.

Israeli leaders are clear about their intentions towards Syria. Two days after the withdrawal from Lebanon, deputy defence minister Ephraim Sneh told Israel Radio: "The withdrawal from Lebanon is only a stage in the realization of the general plan, which is to use Israel's military might to achieve its political goals regarding Syria;

"We stand now in one of the critical moments of the war with Syria, where the hatred towards Israel is stamped in its blood, and therefore it rendered endless help in weapons and armaments to the Hizbulla.

"Yesterday a difficult and dangerous reality was created, (the pull out and the collapse of SLA), but this is only temporary, because it is only one phase of the war.

"It is a situation which will be amended in the near future, (not immediately), if not with the aid of the international community, then by force - great force. The circumstances in which we can use all our military might have not yet arisen."

This clear threat has been repeated less explicitly by other leading figures: either Bashar al-Assad voluntarily makes "peace" on Israel's terms, or we will force him to do so.

Nobel prize

Many western commentators, and some Syrian activists, hope and believe that Bashar will ease the authoritarian regime imposed by his father, reach a genuine agreement with Israel, and open Syria to western investment. Clinton, hoping for a Nobel peace prize and desperate for a last foreign policy success before he steps down, will be pushing for such a solution.

But, even if Bashar was able and inclined to cooperate, this would be disastrous for Syria, whose fragile economy would be devastated by western intervention.

Barak, meanwhile, in pawn to the religious parties, and with his military background ("the most decorated soldier in Israel's history", as his followers are fond of repeating), will see no reason to make any concessions.

In the absence of a popular regime, capable of mobilising the masses, the choice for Syrians is either surrender, or war and defeat.

Sniping from the Left

By Charlie van Gelderen



Where does South Africa's ANC government go for advice about the best way to privatise those sections of the economy that are still nationalised?

It sends Ian Phillips, a leading member of the South African Communist Party and special adviser to Public Enterprises Minister, Jeff Radebe, to China.

They want, says Comrade Phillips, to exchange ideas around the concept of restructuring. "We are sharing experiences." They are also privatising operations.

Still state controlled and now the subject of privatisation projects are telecommu-

nications and the energy sector. An announcement on privatisation is to be announced in a policy document soon.

Hooked on high prices

The UK's largest pharmaceutical company, Norton Healthcare, has threatened to stop production rather than submit to health secretary Alan Milburn's proposed price cap on generic drugs, ie non-label drugs. The price of these rose sharply after Milburn instructed hospitals to switch from expensive

brand name drugs to cheaper generic.

The Norton Healthcare boss is rather annoyed about this and probably regards it as a gross act of ingratitude.

He expected better of the government after donating £100,000 to Labour Party funds in 1999 and a further £10,000 to Frank Dobson's London mayoral election campaign.

While on this subject, the drug giant SmithKline Beecham has withdrawn the Urabe vaccine in the UK because of life threatening side effects.

The vaccine has been shown to be linked to meningitis. Their nobility is limited, though. SmithKline Beecham is continuing to export the drugs for sale in Argentina, Chile, Haiti, Honduras, Lebanon, Macedonia and former Yugoslavia.

Hats off to Lord Roy?

Sniping from the Left is grateful to Roy Hattersley, who in his Guardian column exposed the deputy prime



The real Keir Hardie

minister's preposterous claim that "the values that motivated Keir Hardie" are the same ones that motivated Tony Blair" for the arrant nonsense it is.

Keir Hardie was no revolutionary marxist, but unlike Blair, he did not hesitate to call himself a socialist.

Tony Blair's proudest boast is that he got rid of Clause Four. Keir Hardie considered that "the increasing burden which private ownership of land and capital is imposing on the useful members of the community, the poverty, destitution and general moral and physical deterioration resulting from a competitive system."

This was Hardie's first speech after he became the first Labour member of parliament. Hardie wanted to abolish this system. Tony Blair nourishes it.

When the Victorian House of Commons sent congratulations to the Duke of York (later King George V), Keir Hardie observed that "the life of one Welsh miner is of greater commercial and moral value than the whole royal crown put together from the royal grandmamma down..."

Like Roy Hattersley, this column is waiting impatiently for Tony Blair's view on the occasion of the Queen Mother's 100th birthday in July.

But Keir Hardie would also have asked Roy Hattersley a pertinent question: "What on earth are you doing in the House of Lords?"

Private reservations

If Gordon Brown and his fellow ministers are really concerned about the preferential entry from private schools to the elite universities, why do they not do

something about it?

They could start by abolishing the charity status of schools like Eton and Harrow. Every year more than £60 million is pocketed by these schools out of tax payers' money.

Children in private schools account for 7 per cent of those in school but, if nothing changes, they will go on to fill half the places available in Oxbridge, and from there they will go on to fill all the more prestigious posts in the civil service, the judiciary and the armed forces, and of course in the universities as well, thus completing the circle of privilege.

Can we expect the necessary changes from this government which has abolished free entry to higher education? From Paul Boateng, Lord Falconer, Baroness Symons and other ministers who have sent their children to private schools?

Can we, indeed, expect the end of any selection in education, as once promised by David Blunkett, when the prime minister himself takes advantage of the selection system for his own children? Keir Hardie, indeed!

Terry Conway for Socialist Outlook interviewed leading Indian anti-nuclear campaigners Achin Vanaik and Praful Bidwal during their recent visit to London.

Their book *New Nukes: India, Pakistan and Global Disarmament* is newly published by Signal Books at £12.99.

(Nuclear) testing times in India and Pakistan

South Asia on a short fuse

SO: It seemed at the end of the cold war that the nuclear question was not so important any more. What happened?

PB: There were positive developments: a new kind of movement emerged on nuclear disarmament, not just around arms control. Nuclear weapons were reduced from 70,000-100,000 at the peak around 30,000.

Tactical nuclear weapons were removed from warships, even though this was not formalised by treaty. Three countries abandoned nuclear weapons; Byelorussia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, while South Africa, Brazil and Argentina pulled back from threshold status. Two nuclear weapons free zones were set up: through the Bangkok treaty of South East Asia and the treaty of Pelindaba in Africa.

These were positive developments but in the last two or three years things have almost ground to a halt.

You had a series of negative developments: in 1995 there was an indefinite extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, then there was the expansion of NATO, then of course the India/Pakistan tests.

If there was to be one simple one line answer as to why this has happened it is that after the end of the cold war, in the game of nations, the United States has emerged as the unrivalled dominant power.

What you now have in the US is the emergence of a strong, aggressive unilateralist, isolationist approach which says: "we're the top dog and nobody else can rival us. To justify the retention of nuclear weapons they invent all sorts of rogue states.

Now the crucial issue, apart from the US senate non-ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) is the whole question of the National Ballistic Missile Defence. This is justified with rhetoric—we want to make the United States of America safe in this particular way and we're going to go ahead—we don't care what other countries want whether its Russia or the Chinese or anybody else. Behind this is a deeper ambition of trying to control space—the United States is now dominant and pretty sure of dominance for the future—and space is also a domain that it wants to move towards. That's the kind of political perspective I think is driving the situation.

SO: There is some debate about how much the Indian/Pakistan tests came out of a continuity of Indian policy and how much they represented a rupture. Your book details the slow evolution of a build up of pressure in the context of which the rupture eventually took place. Could the tests as only have happened under a BJP government? Are the two things intrinsically linked?

AV: Its hard to speculate about what might have been—I think its more productive to say that there was both continuity and a rupture.

There was continuity in the preparations. From the 60s onwards India started to acquire a nuclear weapons capability and then to upgrade. Capability was established and demonstrated in May 1974 when India conducted its first nuclear test. However they claimed, disingenuously, that this was "a peaceful explosion".

Way back in the 50s, India built a nuclear reactor called Sirus—the Canada/India research reactor. This was funded partly by the US who donated the heavy water—and the Canadians designed it. The Indian government signed an agreement with Canada and the US which said that the products of Sirus would only be used for peaceful purposes.

But then, against this agreement, they used the product in the 1974 tests which is why they claimed it was a "peaceful" test. However having acquired this capability they didn't peruse further testing, nor did they say they were going to make the bomb.

In part the continuity can be explained by the very logic of acquiring a nuclear weapons capability. But it is also due to the temptation of successive Indian governments to seek a better bargain within the global nuclear order. This was accompanied by the growing hold of a certain type of nationalism on India society, especially on the Indian elite, through much of the 80s and certainly the 90s.

In this period you saw a marked right ward shift in Indian society and politics under the neo-liberal economic policies and structural adjustment programmes dictated by the World Bank and the IMF which was gladly accepted by the Indian bourgeoisie as its own agenda. The elite in India began to see itself more and more through a northern prism. It wanted to join the club of major powers and saw nuclear weapons as a short cut.

The rupture lies of 1998 in two things.

First a clear break at the level of policy—for 50 years before 1998, India rejected the idea that any nation, any state could acquire security through nuclear weapons. It made a powerful plea before the International Court of Justice as late as 1995 and again before the conference on disarmament in 1996 saying that India is opposed to nuclear weapons because they don't give security—ever. Nuclear deterrence was described as an abhorrent doctrine that is strategically irrational.

Between 74-98, the policy followed was that of nuclear ambiguity—along with active preparations. To move from that ambiguity to exercise of the nuclear option was a rupture. India announced that was developing a fully fledged weapons programme—that it was proceeding to acquire a minimal nuclear deter-



The conflict over Kashmir remains an ever-present threat to the uneasy peace

rent—a small nuclear arsenal with all the command and control systems and all the paraphernalia that goes with it.

The BJP was eager to conduct tests as soon as it acquired power. In the book we point out that in 1996 the BJP came to power for 13 days. It was in a hopeless minority in Parliament and no single party was willing to support it—it was quite clear that the government would collapse.

And yet the BJP's own leadership confirmed later that it had ordered nuclear tests even within that short period—in fact the tests were meant to coincide with the vote of confidence in the government in the lower house. This just shows the utter cynicism of that party. In fact these tests didn't take place because the Department of Atomic Energy wasn't ready with all the preparations.

The second time around that the BJP came to power and within a few days of Vajpayee forming the government he ordered the tests, again before he won a vote of confidence. Again it was not a forgone conclusion that he would win because in 1998 there was a minority government which fell within a year or so. We know that the tests were conducted without any consultation with the foreign policy or defence establishments—there was no question of any strategic defence review. The army and the services chiefs were not even told about the tests until two days before they took place. The Home Minister and the Defence Minister were kept in the dark until May 11—the day of the first round of tests.

The BJP have a peculiar obsession with nuclear weapons. The party and its predecessor—the Jan Sangh have demanded the bomb ever since the early 50s. The Jan Sangh in its very first manifesto demanded that India crossed the nuclear threshold. Of course this had nothing to do with the security environment because Chinas nuclear tests didn't take place till 1964.

So you have both a continuity of

preparation but also a rupture at the doctrinal and political level.

SO: When the tests took place, the only images we saw in the British media, was of the small minority of the elite celebrating. What was the response on the ground? Were people shocked that the BJP moved so quickly?

PB: The initial image that that was broadcast all over the world of people dancing in the streets of New Delhi and Lahore was profoundly misleading—a CNN-driven image which is sensationalist. That same week many more people protested against the test than celebrated.

People shouldn't have been shocked but many were. After all the BJP promised that if they ever came to power they would go ahead and do it. I suppose people have still not got a handle on the nature of the BJP and if you live outside it even more difficult to understand. Perhaps one way for an audience in the West to understand what is happening in India is to try to understand that what we are talking about with the BJP and the forces behind it, is that this party we have in power is worse than Jorge Haider's Freedom Party.

What you saw in the media represented a minority of the urban elite but for most people in India nuclear weapons is not an issue that touches them directly in their every day life. Not long after the tests there was a poll that showed that 45% had not even heard about them.

In so far as there was support for the tests, apart from this minority, it was passive support. If you don't have a clear idea of what you think then you take a lead from those you have some respect for. Given that all the parties apart from sections of Congress and the left said the tests were good then this is bound to have a major impact.

But opposition has been growing. There were demonstrations in 35-40 cities in protest. Last year you had the development of a major mass movement called the National Alliance of Peoples Movement

(NAPM): an alliance of all kinds of groups some of which have a truly mass base. These include the movement against the Narmada dam and the National Union of Fishworkers with around 8 million members.

In the parliamentary debates that followed the tests in 1998 more than 2/3 of those that spoke opposed the tests—criticised the BJP for imposing its own minority sectarian agenda on the nation. And the BJP had only 23% of the vote so it doesn't represent anything like a large consensus of a broad cross section of public opinion. Its base is confined largely to the North of the country and mainly to the upper and middle castes of Indian society not to the plebeian masses where it has no particular appeal. Its a very elitist and hierarchically minded religious sectarian right-wing party which has never come anywhere near the Tories for example in terms of its voting base in relatively large chunk of the population.

There were elections for 4 state legislatures soon after the tests and the BJP made those elections into a referendum. It lost those elections very badly with unprecedentedly high margins—so if it was a referendum the verdict was clear.

SO: I don't want to get into a detailed discussion either about the nature of the BJP or of Haider's Freedom Party, but the comparison is telling. Certainly if people in Europe though that Haider had his finger on the nuclear button they would see that as far more central to their political agenda. People need to understand that the BJP is precisely in that position.

AV: What I have been saying for the last couple of years is that while Haider only speaks, the BJP does. And in some ways that's even worse because while Haider might apologise for Nazism the BJP are practising in its own way an agenda for ethnic cleansing and communal polarisation in Indian politics and that's what its attacks on religious minorities including Christians are all about.

If Haider decided to do that I think he would face more than the sort of boycott he faces today.

SO: Can you give a flavour of how the movement has developed on the ground?

PB: The NAPM, together with many other organisations, organised a three month march from Pokharan—the village near where the test site was—to a place of Buddhist pilgrimage more than 1000 miles away in the east of India.

Every day there were people marching—sometimes 20 sometimes 200—for three months—and that gives you an indication of the kind of movement. This autumn we will have a national convention at

which 80-100 groups will be represented – a more organised opposition is beginning to stir.

There are two different types of groups involved in the Indian movement. Firstly there are those that have a specific focus against nuclear weapons and also against nuclear energy – many of the groups which are against nuclear energy are grass roots organisations concerned with the victims of radiation exposure to uranium mining in central India.

Like everywhere else all over the world when you are talking about uranium mining it's always the indigenous people whether its Australia with the Aborigines, whether it's the United States of America and native Americans or whether it's the tribals in India – they are the ones that are affected. It's their areas where the mining takes place – these are the areas where the reactor leakages happen so this in one type of group.

Then you have a whole other series of groups focused on different issues ; women's issues, civil liberties issues, development issues which also see the importance of taking up the nuclear issue.

What we are trying to do is move towards a national network of all types of different groups – and this is a significant development. We should be realistic and realise that at this stage we will be cant alter government policies on the nuclear question – instead we are attacking the legitimisation of those policies by the government. When we become bigger and stronger then we hope to be able to move on and challenge the basis of the policies themselves.

Since then we've seen much more opposition and I would say that a very large proportion of people in the liberal intellegensia are opposed to the tests. So Arundhati Roy, the Booker prize winner, wrote a very good powerful peace

SO: I was surprised that the Indian government used China as an excuse for the tests. I expected them to use the Pakistan/Kashmir card.. So what was the China card about - does this say something about how India is trying to position itself in particular in relation to the US?

AV: You have to understand the motivation for crossing of the nuclear threshold. In the book we argue that this lacked any strategic rationale. India's strategic environment had not deteriorated – it faced no threat which needed a radical change in its defence posture leave alone the embrace of nuclear deterrence.

It was essentially a search for glory and prestige – however false and flimsy that prestige might be – at the international level with the acquisition of the capacity to kill millions of people at one time.

India's leaders see nuclear weapons as a major currency of power – in fact they are not very effective. Because there was no real security rationale the Indian government tried to rationalise its nuclear weapons acquisition by creating a threat and that is why it had to name China and Pakistan.

The first public rationale given by the Prime Minister of India of the tests was not given to the Indian people but to Clinton. On the first day of the tests he wrote a letter naming China and Pakistan and so-called nuclear collaboration between the two which is of a very limited, episodic kind – it does not involve a relationship of a close alliance.

By naming China, India courted hostility from a neighbour with whom its relations had improved very significantly. India and China signed two agreements in 1993 and 1996 for peace and tranquillity on their disputed border which would have allowed the demobilisation of 100,000 troops.

Improvement in relations with China was almost the break through of the 90s: so wantonly naming and chiding China as a threat India invited Chinese hostility.

There is an essential contradiction. By getting into an arms race with

China India will actually be degrading its own security and bringing renewed economic ruin upon itself. China is 30 years ahead as a nuclear missile power – its economy is three times bigger than India's and growing faster. It would be economically disastrous for India to get into a nuclear arms race with China.

But India had very few choices but to cloak its nuclear ambition in this whole threat from China bogey. This is because Pakistan, which India also cited, made 7 proposals for defusing the nuclear tension between itself and India during the 80s and 90s and India rejected each of these as dishonest, insincere and inadequate.

It was only prepared to talk nuclear weapons restraint and elimination within a global framework. It refused to discuss "regional" questions – though of course it was regional questions and supposed threats that they then cited when conducting the tests.

Now India and Pakistan have both become much more insecure because of nuclearisation. Far from



"India and Pakistan went to war last year over Kashmir– one year after the tests. They exchanged 13 nuclear threats and counter threats during this conflict – it was a very close call."

promoting sobriety and maturity as some apologists of nuclear weapons have argued, the effect has been the opposite.

India and Pakistan went to war last year over Kashmir– one year after the tests. It was the fourth undeclared war between them. 40,000 troops were involved and 2000 combatants were killed.

India and Pakistan exchanged 13 nuclear threats and counter threats during this conflict– it was a very close call. This shows that it would be suicidal for them to cross the threshold through the deployment of nuclear weapons.

India has got into this relationship of strategic rivalry with China which is the now the country most upset by India's nuclear weapons acquisition.

France and Russia have more or less dropped their opposition although they are signatories to a strong Security Council Resolution 1172 passed in June 1998. The US has accommodated India and Pakistan into the nuclear club as de facto junior members and Britain of course has followed this line.

But China remains unreconciled – so you have the dangerous scenario not just of nuclear rivalry across the sub continent but within the Asian region as a whole.

If the US goes ahead with Ballistic Missile Defence this would have a serious knock on effect on China. China has 20 nuclear weapons that are capable of reaching the USA and these could be neutralised with a very primitive version of the missile defence system that the United States is unfortunately planning – these 20 missiles can be intercepted so China feels extremely vulnera-

ble.

If this happens China is expected to build up its own nuclear arsenal. Then India could get sucked into an arms race with China which is absolutely ruinous and that could be a huge set back for Indian society as well as for the cause of International nuclear disarmament.

After the end of the cold war people high up in both the US and India began talking about the importance of moving towards a strategic partnership between the two countries. The problem is not that these views are insincere but of there is asymmetry of power between the two countries.

The Indians are arguing that the US should worry about is China as its main opponent and that India could be an important of counterweight.

Over Pakistan, they complain that the US gives Pakistan too much attention and pleads that India is more important – its a bigger market – a bigger power.

After all Pakistan is an Islamic country and we are not – so you should pay the minimum price for a better relationship with us by dropping your close collaboration with Pakistan.

But the US won't decide their perspectives because of what the Indians. All the lip service they pay to India is just rhetoric. India is not a significant world power – its not even the major power in the region – in fact nuclearisation has provided some sort of equalisation between itself and Pakistan.

And despite the pressure of the right wing Republicans, the US is engaged in an existing relationship

of great complexity with the Chinese, which it is not about to sacrifice simply because India says – look we can be a counterweight. The Trade bill and what just happened with that is an indication of this – after all the Chinese market is far more important than the Indian.

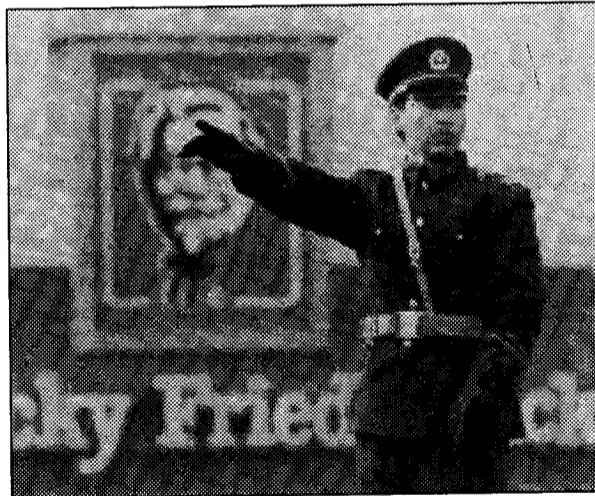
Whether the Americans decide to jettison Pakistan will be determined by their views on Pakistan's continued relevance vis a vis central Asia and the strategically crucial Middle East. Any reassessment will be brought about by a change in the US's needs not by the spin of the Indian elite. India still has to prove itself – it still has to make the grade. It is true that Clinton's recent visit suggested a shift in terms of both these countries but we need to recognise the open ended character of this.

There is a possibility of a shift in US policy but it depends on a whole series of factors. At this stage you can't make a clear assessment of the overall trend.

If US/China relations significantly deteriorated then it's a different situation. If the Taiwanese demanded independence and this was backed by the US this would have an impact.

If the US felt that Pakistan was becoming too Talibanised, too Islamised – and this jeopardises its role in the Middle East – then there is some chance that what the Indian elite want could happen. But none of it is certain.

What is clear is that the US will decide whether there is a reassessment – and India is obviously not the most important factor that they have to take into account.



US policy is geared to expansion of markets in China

on "The Bomb and I".

Behind the BJP's nuclear nationalism and nuclear obsession is the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) which is an organisation going back to the 20s with a totally and overtly fascist makeup. Its leaders are self confessed admirers of Hitler and Mussolini and of authoritarianism as a political ideology. The RSS controls the BJP ideologically, organisationally and in terms of its political agenda. The RSS's slogan has been "unite the Hindus and militarise Hindu society" and what better way of militarisation than the bomb.

The bomb is the most adequate, the most developed, symbol of a particular kind of macho, aggressive, bellicose, Hindu communal anti Muslim nationalism. There is a broad constituency of opinion in India that opposes that kind of nationalism as well the significant current of opinion that opposes nuclear weapons so there is a potential for much larger scale mobilisations than we have seen so far.

THE LABOUR government has gone much further even than the Tories in inviting business into the schools.

For many of these big companies, Labour's invitation is an opportunity to polish up their corporate image, engage in 'cause-related' marketing, or tie schools more closely to their future workforce needs.

But there is a growing sector of private companies whose business is to take over the provision of state education services for profit. Business is booming. Since 1996 their shares have risen by three times as much as those of the top 100 plcs.

This is not just New Labour's 'Third Way'. It is part of the international neo-liberal agenda. The opening up of state education systems to private companies to trade in services was one aim of the recent World Trade Organisation talks in Seattle. It is a key element in the education policy of the European Commission.

The expanding opportunities for the private sector take a number of forms:

- Providing schools and facilities
- Selling education management services
- Running schools
- Commodifying teaching and learning.

RICHARD HATCHER, a member of the Socialist Teachers Alliance in Birmingham and co-editor of the journal *Education and Social Justice* explores the issues socialists need to address in combating this concerted attack.

Schools under New Labour

Getting down to business

A test-bed for Labour's public-private vision is Education Action Zones, a Labour initiative to raise education standards in schools in socially disadvantaged areas. There are now 67. One of the features of the EAZs is that they are required to have business 'partners'.

They include major international companies such as ICI, Barclays Bank, Colgate Palmolive, John Laing Construction, Kellogg's, Tesco, McDonald's, Shell, Tate and Lyle, American Express, British Aerospace and Rolls Royce. Particularly prominent are information technology companies, including some of the biggest names: IBM, Bull Information Services, British Telecom, and Research Machines.

They are joined by a new but expanding edubusiness sector - companies such as Nord Anglia and Arthur Andersen aiming to contract-out education management and other services from schools and local authorities.

The EAZ policy assigns several roles to business. Firstly, it is expected to provide money and resources. Zones receive an extra £750,000 a year from government.

They are expected to find an additional £250,000 a year from their business 'partners' (often in kind, for example, supplying computers, or management training, or mentoring for pupils).

The reasons behind this are several: it reduces state spending on education; encourages schools to be entrepreneurial in seeking funding for themselves; and brings schools and business closer together, with the aim of increasing the influence of business agendas.

The second role is to take part in managing the Zone. Zones are run by a new form of local governance, Action Forums, separate from and not accountable to LEAs, which bring together a variety of participants, including the business 'partners'.

Thirdly, to influence the content of education. The partnership with business is intended to make schools more responsive to business agendas. Schools are encouraged to adopt a work-related curriculum and to develop employability skills which will be attractive to employers.

And finally, to apply business methods and expertise to the management of schools. What this means in practice is illustrated by the programme of a conference in March 2000 of the Education Action Zone Network.

Workshops at the conference included: 'What businesses can bring to EAZs'; 'Business links for ICT solutions', with RM (Research Machines); 'Business solutions to educational challenges', with British Aerospace; 'Classrooms in companies and companies in classrooms'; and 'Leadership Challenge - how business solutions developed by Rolls Royce are being used to bring about change in schools'.



Do school kids need teachers any more, or can they just sit in front of computers?

Providing schools and facilities

Under the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) the private sector finances the construction or renovation of school buildings, the provision of equipment and the operation of facilities, and is repaid by the state over a period of time (25-35 years) for their use.

Each PFI project is structured around a specially created company typically combining the construction company, financial institutions and a facilities management company. The largest PFI school project is the refurbishment of all 29 secondary schools in Glasgow at a cost of £220 million.

Privatisation of national government education services

It was the last Conservative government which led the way by privatising school inspections. They are carried out by teams who bid for contracts from Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education). Some are LEA advisers, but the majority of these teams are private companies, some of which carry out hundreds of inspections a year for profit.

The most recent new business opportunity at national level concerns performance-related pay (PRP) for teachers, which the government is now introducing. The contract to develop it was awarded to Hay McBer, an international management consultancy company.

They were paid £4 million to identify the competencies by which teachers could be assessed. Then another private company, Cambridge Education Associates, was awarded a five-year contract, worth up to £100 million, to employ 3000 or so assessors to over-

see heads' assessments of staff, and to assess the heads' own performance.

Management services for LEAs

Under Labour, LEAs have been made subject to inspection by Ofsted. A number of LEAs have failed - Hackney, Islington, Liverpool, Sheffield, Leeds, Rotherham, Waltham Forest and Bradford (all areas of high social disadvantage).

The remedy imposed by government in all but one of these cases is the handing over of some or all of LEA services to private companies. This is not just an option in 'failing LEAs'. In April 2000 the policy of 'Best Value' came into force, whereby local councils are obliged to consider privatisation as an option for their service provision.

The list of government-approved providers includes new specialised education-for-profit companies and a number of corporate giants moving into the education market, including Group 4 the security company and Serco, which runs the UK's air defence warning system against missile attack.

As an example let us take Islington, the first LEA to be privatised. After a critical Ofsted report on the LEA the government sent in Price Waterhouse Coopers, a management consultancy company, to prepare a contract (at a cost of £260,000) for privatising the LEA's services.

The contract, for 7 years at £11.5 million a year, was awarded (again) to Cambridge Education Associates, who will be responsible for personnel and payroll matters, school inspections and school improvement, governor support and special education needs. The contract is subject to tough targets and penalties set by government, and to a cap on profits of £600,000 a year.

Running schools

The most controversial aspect of private sector involvement in education has been the proposal that private companies might directly run state schools. This is already the case with several hundred schools in the US. It has now begun in the UK. In 1998 Surrey LEA invited companies to bid for the contract to run a 'failing' comprehensive school, King's Manor in Guildford.

The contract was won by 3 E's Enterprises Ltd, a private company set up as the commercial arm of Kingshurst City Technology College near Birmingham. It now plans to start a network of colleges, taking over failing schools. Meanwhile, Surrey is looking for a private company to take over another comprehensive school.

The most recent government policy initiative facilitating the privatisation of state schools, announced in March this year, is to set up City Academies to replace existing 'failing' schools.

They will be directly funded by the government, by-passing LEAs, and given the status of 'independent' - i.e. private - schools, so they will lie outside the legislative framework which governs other state-maintained schools. This includes complete freedom to devise the curriculum.

The government wants them to be run by businesses, churches or voluntary bodies. Sponsors must pay 20% of the capital costs, but ownership of the land and buildings of the existing state school, currently the property of the local council, will be transferred to them.

Around 10 will open next year. So far Boots the chemists and Reg Vardy, who owns a large chain of car dealers, have expressed an interest in sponsoring City Academies.

Technology and teaching

For education business, the Holy Grail is the transformation of the core business of schools, the teaching and learning process itself, into a tradeable commodity. It is the Internet which provides the technology to realise this vision. John T Chambers, CEO of Cisco Systems, one of the largest of the global Internet companies, believes that 'the next big killer application for the Internet is going to be education.'

Education over the Internet is going to be so big it is going to make e-mail usage look like a rounding error.' The vision has been embraced by European business and European politicians.

The EU is now committed to connecting all schools to the Internet. In the UK the Department for Education and Employment (DFEE) is spending £700 million on connecting all 30,000 schools to the Internet by 2002, with a further £230 million on training teachers to use the new technology, all by private companies.

All teachers recognise that ICT is a revolutionary tool in the classroom, capable of motivating pupils, of opening up access to new sources of knowledge, of communicating across the globe, and of developing skills for later life. But there are a number of additional reasons for the enthusiasm of business and political leaders for the Internet in schools.

First, it is a huge 'public-private partnership' which opens up a vast market for IT companies. This is vital in order to achieve a sufficiently large customer base, among schools and parents, to support a viable European IT industry, which massive state spending on IT in schools is being used to subsidise.

Secondly, the Internet is a vehicle for advertisers to reach the increasingly important child and youth markets. Schools can deliver a captive audience of potential consumers. This is controversial in the British context, but that could change.

Schools which are short of funding may find offers of business funding hard to resist, as they have in the US, where, for example, the ZapMe Corporation provides schools with free computers and high-speed Internet access in exchange for a school's agreement to place its 13-19 year old students before a portal laden with advertisements for a certain number of hours each day. The portal provides access to selected sites while ZapMe collects a fee for delivering a generation of young consumers to its advertisers.

IT is also attractive to governments because it can save money on teachers. In the words of Margaret Hodge, School Standards Minister: 'we should be thinking of employing fewer teachers, not more. In a few years, I believe, some classes will not be led by a fully trained teacher. If pupils are working from lessons on the Internet, a trained classroom assistant may be as useful as a teacher.' (*New Statesman* 22 May 1998).

The fourth and most far-reaching attraction to business of the Internet in schools is its potential to transform teaching and learning into a commodity, as some universities have begun to do.

Pilot projects are already under way in schools in the UK. For example, Sun Microsystems has formed a partnership with 7 other companies and a comprehensive school in Cambridge which is developing school-produced material for commercial publication on the Internet.

At this stage the commercial companies see it as a non-profit-making pilot to test products and business arrangements, but it would be naïve to think that their interests will continue to be charitable, and at that point commercial and educational interests can diverge.

One issue that is posed, as it has been already for university teachers in the US, is that of intellectual property rights in teachers' work. Another is the risk to teachers' jobs.

The transformation of schooling by the Internet needs careful ideological preparation. The Labour government and the IT companies are currently engaged in a massive propaganda campaign to sell the National Grid for Learning to teachers and the wider public, principally by portraying it as the essential passport both to higher standards of attainment in the classroom and to employability in the knowledge economy. What is omitted is the role of commercial interests in the initiative.

Earning from learning - a difficult business

The construction of a new education market on terrain which has traditionally belonged to the state, providing schooling as a public service, is not an easy business. For business, the problem is how to transform the provision of a service into the sale of profitable commodities.

For government, the problem is more complicated. Firstly, contrary to the views of the extreme neo-liberal current, education is too important for government to leave it to the market. Government has to ensure a school system which meets the general needs of capitalist reproduction of future workers, citizens and families, not just the specific interests of the education-for-profit sector.



Campaigners protest against PFI in Haringey's schools: building an alliance to fight back can raise some complex issues of policy

This entails a degree of centralised government control over the school system which may place unwelcome constraints on the operations of private companies. For example, Arthur Andersen, an international management company with close links with the Labour government, withdrew from the Islington LEA bid because it did not guarantee enough profit security, because of the performance clauses and penalties.

And there is no guarantee that private companies can solve problems of education performance which have proved intractable under public provision.

Secondly, the level of public funding of the school system may leave little scope for private profit. The American schools-for-profit company Edison, which runs 79 schools in the US, has investigated the UK market and has decided to withdraw, saying that it can't make enough profit.

Ironically, one reason is the low level of state spending on English schools, which is 25% less than even the poorest US school district.

(Moves into this potential market may come from another direction, Britain's existing private school sector. These take 7% of school pupils and mainly serve a relatively wealthy elite. In a speech in May at an Independent Schools Council conference, Phil Collins, director of the Social Market Foundation, urged private schools to widen access and lower prices, as in the US. 'Five to six years from now, it is feasible to imagine one third of schools being run by private companies'.)

Thirdly, professional and public opinion remains obstinately attached to the idea of education as

a publicly-provided service.

So what is taking place in the UK at present is a process of commodification of schooling through pragmatic incremental policy development, designed to satisfy simultaneously the objectives of government education targets, low state spending, private profit, professional compliance and public support.

What is emerging in the foreseeable future is not the wholesale marketisation of schooling but the construction of a new settlement between commercial and state interests whose final shape is not yet clear but which is dominated by business agendas and which includes the large-scale opening up of public provision to private profit by some of the most powerful business interests on the planet.

This is the most fundamental challenge to public schooling since its inception over 100 years ago. The quasi-privatisation of schooling poses five specific threats.

* A threat to the funding of education

Business is in the education business to take more money out than they put in. PFI is a good example - the overall cost is more, not less.

* A threat to local democracy

LEAs and school governing bodies are not exactly models of democracy, but they are still much too interfering for edubusiness's taste.

In taking over King's Manor school, the 3 E's company insisted that it would nominate 12 of the 21 school governors. Leeds, the most recent and largest LEA to be privatised, will be run by a new board comprising two representatives of the company which wins the fran-

chise, two LEA officers, and a chairperson approved by David Blunkett - but no places for elected councillors.

* A threat to equality

The introduction of market forces into public services tends to reinforce patterns of inequality.

For example, some pupils are more profitable than others, and education-for-profit companies will prefer to cherry-pick their clientele.

* A threat to the content of education

The more business penetrates the schools the more it will tend to make them conform to business interests.

Let me give a symbolic example from universities in the US, where Nike heavily sponsors sports facilities. It has just announced that it will withdraw sponsorship from universities associated with campaigns to investigate working conditions in factories in third world countries where Nike products are made.

* A threat to the teaching and learning process

Particularly the role of information technology. Technology is not neutral, it tends to impose its own rhythms.

Internet-based teaching lends itself to the individualised acquisition of knowledge and competences, but not to collective dialogue which relates new knowledge to the learner's meanings and experiences.

How should we respond?

There are no easy answers. It has to

be acknowledged that business claims to offer answers to the real problems of public education and the real concerns of teachers, parents and school students - low funding, low motivation, low attainment, lack of relevance of the classroom to the real world.

The existing system is experienced by many as unequal and bureaucratic. Three things follow.

Firstly, we can't simply base ourselves on a defence of the existing system.

Secondly, it is not necessarily self-evident to many teachers and parents that every encroachment of business should be opposed.

Thirdly, business cannot simply be excluded from schooling. Some of the things business offers have a dual character - the Internet is an obvious example.

So the crucial questions are ones of boundaries and of power. What do we want from business and what don't we want? And how can we ensure that we get what we want from business on our terms, not those of business?

Some boundaries are easier to draw, if not to maintain:

- * No to private companies running schools or LEAs.

- * No to business management methods in the schools - of which the cutting edge is performance pay for teachers, designed to ensure their compliance with business-style schooling.

- * No to business sponsorship and advertising - the state, not business, should fund education, and schools should not be a market for advertisers.

But others are more difficult:

- * What should happen to LEAs? Should we call for no business involvement at all, or only under effective democratic control - and if so how can that be exercised?

- * What about information technology?

What set of demands would provide a basis for IT on educational terms, and not just those compatible with the interests of Microsoft and British Telecom?

These are urgent issues for the whole labour movement to resolve. Perhaps the forthcoming conference of the NUT on privatisation and schools on November 21 will give a lead.

Some further reading:

Hatcher R (1998) *Profiting from Schools: Business and Education Action Zones*, Education and Social Justice 1 (1) 9-16.
 Hatcher R and Hirt N (1999) *The business agenda behind Labour's education policy*. In Allen M, Benn C, Chitty C, Cole M, Hatcher R, Hirt N and Rikowski G, Business, Business, Business: New Labour's Education Policy, London: Falmer Press.
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 Noble D (1998) *The Regime of Technology in Education*. In Beyer L E and Apple M W (eds) *The Curriculum: Problems, Politics and Possibilities* (2nd edition). New York: State University of New York Press.
 Selwyn N (1999) *A Grid over Troubled Waters? The Role of the National Grid for Learning in UK Schooling*, Forum 41 (3) 98-100.

Exploring the work of Ernest Mandel

The Legacy of Ernest Mandel, edited by Gilbert Achcar, Verso – London

Reviewed by Charlie van Gelderen

Enzo Traverso called Ernest Mandel "... the last great figure of post-war classical Marxism" and this is a characterisation with which few of the contributors to this book will quarrel.

The contributions are not uncritical, and that is how Mandel would have wanted it. If there is any criticism of the book itself it is that there is not a specific tribute to his work as a militant of the Fourth International, although that it referred to in passing.

As Gilbert Achcar writes in his introduction, "He was one of those few men and women in the history of the socialist movement who were able to combine untiring activities of a revolutionary with a body of intellectual work..."

Some of the contributors to this volume were, at one time, members of the Fourth International. They were drawn into its ranks in 1968, during a rising revolutionary wave. When this revolutionary tide receded, they rapidly withdrew back to their academic and literary activities.

But not Ernest Mandel. To paraphrase Marx, his position was that it was no longer enough for academics to analyse and dissect the political and economic world, they must actively engage in changing it.

For Mandel, his immense and unparalleled

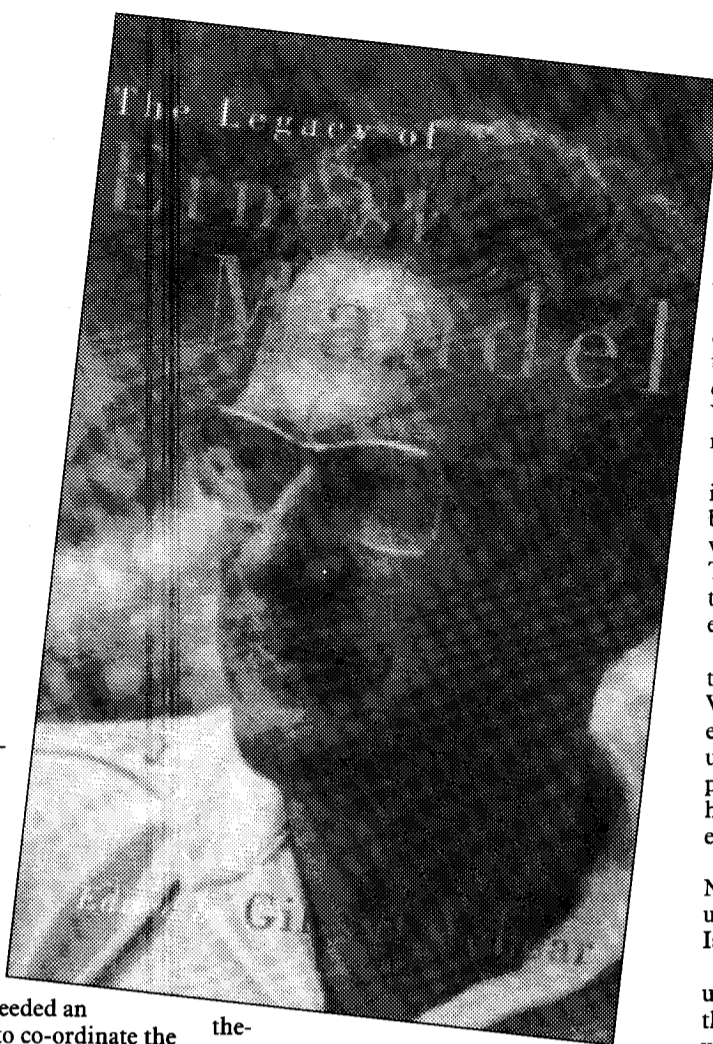
theoretical and literary output was part of what he regarded as his main purpose in life – building and strengthening the Fourth International. If anyone was Trotsky's heir, it was Ernest Mandel. He was firm in his conviction that to combat international capital, the working class needed an international organisation to co-ordinate the struggle and give it guidance where necessary.

Marxism had been distorted – primarily by the revisionism of Stalinism but also by a variety of philosophic interpretations. "As a result Marxism and particularly Marxist political economy became sclerotic, incapable of understanding the forms acquired by capitalism in the second half of the twentieth century" (Albarracin and Montes in their contribution on Mandel's *Late Capitalism*).

More than anyone else, Mandel, basing himself "on the methodology and fundamental categories used by Marx" developed Marxism for the second half of the century.

With his *Late Capitalism*, he "erected a bridge to connect the origins of Marxism to its subsequent evolution, placing economics at the centre of the analysis and recovering the fundamental categories of Marx's political economy to explain the evolution and present state of capitalism".

The book contains noteworthy analysis of Mandel's development of the 'long wave'



the rapidity with which they collapsed in 1989-91.

"Bureaucratic rule in these countries was not overthrown by either the working class or imperialism, but imploded as a result of chronic economic stagnation. Not surprisingly, the social formations that emerged... have yet to make a successful transition to capitalism."

This position is reinforced in Catherine Samary's contribution on Mandel's views on the transition to socialism, although she does stress that there was, in the Soviet Union, a real sociological trend towards reproduction of the bureaucracy.

This was reinforced under Brezhnev when, increasingly, sons and daughters of the bureaucracy had a better chance to go to university and become bureaucrats than others. There was, Samary maintains, a dynamic for the bureaucracy to establish itself as a class even if it did not succeed.

Norman Geras disagrees with Mandel on the historical importance of the Holocaust. Whereas Geras sees the Holocaust, the deliberate extermination of an entire race, as unique, Mandel maintained that it "has only pushed to paroxysm the barbarism of the habitual methods of imperialism in our epoch".

Enzo Traverso, in his "Understanding the Nazi Genocide" supports Geras on the uniqueness of the Final Solution, as did Isaac Deutscher.

Anyone who seeks a shortcut towards an understanding of Marxism can do no better than to turn to Mandel's *Why I am a Marxist*, which, thankfully, is included in this volume. I cannot end this review without quoting from it, the text I believe to be Ernest Mandel's Testament:

"... I am a Marxist because only Marxism makes it possible to keep believing in humanity and its future without self-deception – despite all the terrible experiences of the twentieth century, despite Auschwitz and Hiroshima, despite famine in the 'Third World' and the threat of nuclear annihilation.

"Marxism teaches us to take a positive attitude towards life and human beings and to love them without a false gloss, without illusions, in full awareness of the never-ending difficulties and unavoidable setbacks in the millions of years which it has taken our species to develop from ape-like creatures to global investigators and stormers of heaven..

"To conquer conscious control over its social existence has today become a matter of life and death for this species. In the end it will succeed in realizing the noblest of all its aspirations: the construction of a humane, classless, non-violent world socialism."

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 world-wide marxist organisation, the Fourth International. We stand for the revolutionary transformation of society and a pluralist socialist democracy world wide.

The overall goal which we pursue is the emancipation of all human beings from

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 2JU, and we'll be in touch.

Liberal democracy offers no solution to Indonesian crisis

"It is not commonly understood that there is a programme of reform, and my view is that the government needs to be underpinned in that programme of reform."

**Foreign Office
Minister John Battle**

Adam Hartman

When Abdurrahman Wahid was elected president of Indonesia in October last year the British government hailed a new era of democracy and stability in the world's fourth most populous country.

Defending Britain's support for the resumption of arms sales from European Union countries to Indonesia in January (which were suspended in September following the army-orchestrated pogroms in East Timor), Foreign Office Minister John Battle said "it is not commonly understood that there is a programme of reform, and my view is that the government needs to be underpinned in that programme of reform."

Yet two years after the downfall of Suharto, Indonesia remains a country wracked by national and ethnic conflict, an economy in crisis, mass poverty, and a military which continues to mete out repression with impunity and to cast a shadow over the reform process.

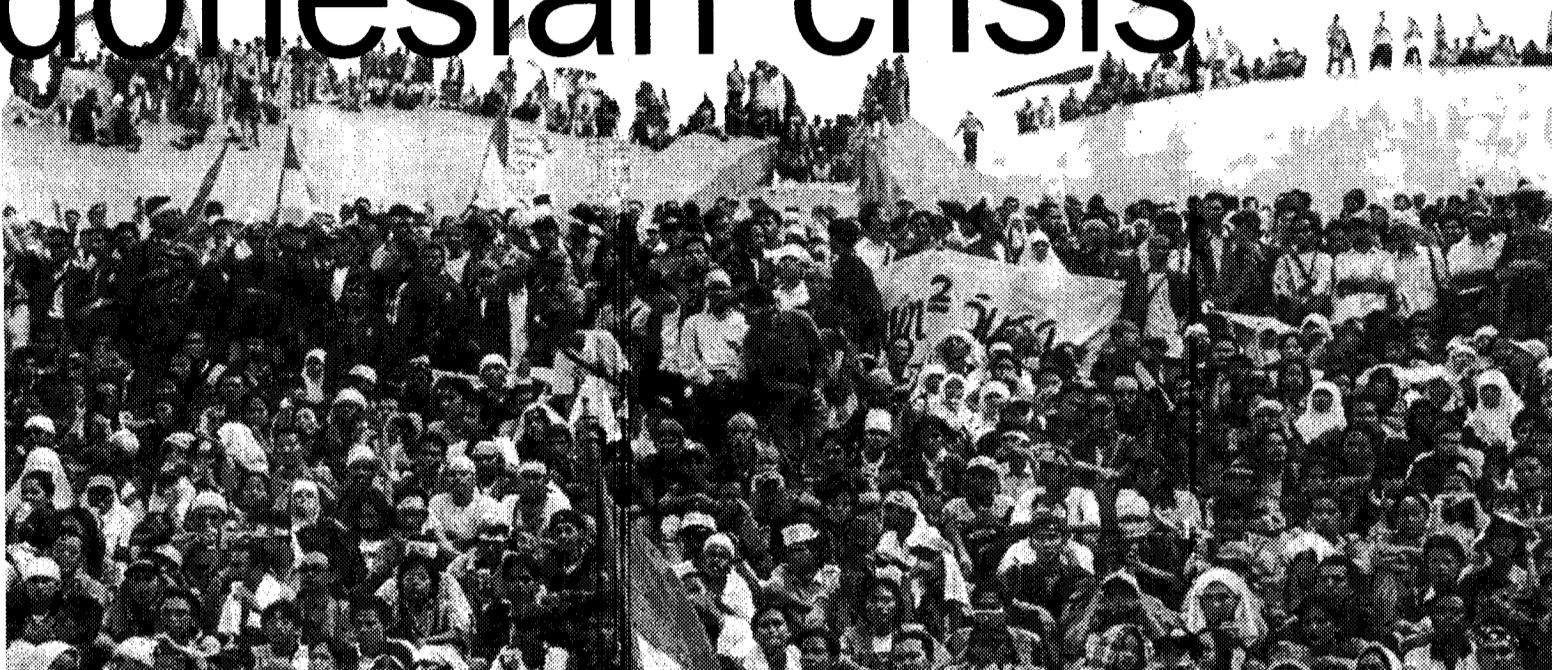
In February Tony Blair declared support for the territorial integrity of Indonesia, carrying on the traditional policy of past Labour and Tory governments of conniving in Indonesia's deeply unpopular rule over territories desiring independence, notably West Papua (bordering Papua New Guinea) and Aceh (Indonesia's northernmost province).

When the Dutch pulled out of West Papua in 1962 they promised the population a vote on its future under UN auspices. Instead Indonesia moved in, and in 1969 formally incorporated West Papua under the "Act of Free Choice" in which 1,025 Papuans hand-picked by the authorities "voted" at gunpoint to integrate with Indonesia. Since then the Indonesian army has used brutal repression against the rebel Free Papua Movement (OPM) and against any popular manifestation of support for independence.

For 500 years Aceh was an inde-



British guns are helping this "democratic process"



The Indonesian masses came on the scene at the fall of Suharto, but the government is still under the influence of the military and western governments

pendent sultanate, which did not come under Dutch rule until the 1870s, long after the rest of Indonesia. After World War Two the Acehnese took part in Indonesia's struggle for independence and agreed to join the new republic on condition that its autonomy was respected.

But the central government broke its promises. Under Suharto, revenues from Aceh's abundant natural resources supplied 20% of Indonesia's annual budget - with only 1% reinvested in the province, leaving it impoverished and underdeveloped.

Multinational companies have plundered Aceh, cutting off people's access to land and natural resources, polluting their environment and denying them jobs.

Since the 1950s these conditions have fostered periodic rebellions. The Free Aceh movement (GAM) emerged in the 1970s. In 1989 the authorities designating Aceh a military operations area (DOM).

Human rights violations soared in the 1990s with an estimated 3,000 civilians killed, 3,850 disappearances, over 4,500 cases of torture and nearly 200 rapes. 90,000 people have been forced to flee their homes.

The fall of Suharto gave rise to hopes that the authorities would loosen their grip and seek a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Encouraged by the example of East Timor huge numbers have taken to the streets to demand a referendum on independence.

The response of the authorities has apparently been contradictory.

On the one hand the DOM was lifted in 1998 and (seriously flawed) judicial proceedings have been launched against low-ranking troops accused of human rights violations.

On the other hand the army and security forces intensified their reign of terror against the population through 1999 and up to April this year and the authorities refuse to contemplate independence.

In May GAM and the army agreed a ceasefire. The government said

that it would allow a referendum on autonomy but not independence.

Meanwhile violence between Christians and Muslims in the Maluku islands in eastern Indonesia has escalated to a point where the two communities are becoming increasingly segregated.

Around 4,000 people have been killed in North Maluku in the past nine months. The fighting is all the more tragic because the two communities had lived together peacefully and developed systems of mutual aid and conflict resolution. Decades of central control have undermined these local systems and the economic crisis has undermined each community's sense of security.

There is evidence to suggest that the conflict has been exacerbated by "dark forces" within the army linked to the ousted Suharto regime in a bid to destabilise the government and, some suspect, prepare the ground for a coup.

Similar "dark forces" are widely suspected to have been behind violence in 1998 against the Chinese minority. Islam is the religion of the majority in Indonesia. It seems that these "dark forces" are trying to manipulate the population by playing on anxieties amongst the Muslim majority.

The Indonesian press has whipped up feeling against Christians, alleging a Christian campaign to obliterate Muslims in Maluku. Senior Muslim politicians including the "moderate" Amien Rais have addressed mass rallies in Jakarta where some have called for a "holy war".

A paramilitary group dedicated to fighting this holy war has been recruited and trained in a camp in West Java.

In May 2,000 members of this group arrived in Maluku, where they were welcomed by a local governor and military commander. They are believed to be responsible for the attacks on three Christian villages in late May in which at least 75 people were killed. In the current climate there is a serious danger of religious conflict spreading to other parts of Indonesia.

Indonesia's economy is still reeling from the currency crash which spread through South East Asia in 1997. The crash greatly increased Indonesia's foreign debt burden and led to a sharp fall in per capita income.

The working class has borne the brunt of the crisis through unemployment and the 'shock therapy' prescribed by the IMF, which included the removal of subsidies on essential goods.

The measures favoured by the Wahid government offer no way out of this crisis.

The main goal of British (and other imperialist countries') policy towards Indonesia has been to engineer stability through a carefully managed transition to liberal democracy, in order to create a secure and profitable market for British multinational companies.

Preserving Indonesia's territorial integrity is a key part of this stability - Britain fears that independence for Aceh and West Papua would destabilise the region.

The problem for the imperialist countries is that the economic and political policies which it is supporting in Indonesia actually increase instability. This is where the arms trade comes in.

The supply of arms tools, up the Indonesian military to preserve order through force.

Government ministers may shed crocodile tears over the loss of jobs at British Aerospace and fret over the loss of votes in Labour's heartlands. But the government's main reason for supporting the arms trade is not to save jobs.

It is to project Britain's influence on the world stage and to help maintain order wherever British commercial interests are involved.

■ TAPOL, the Indonesian Human Right Campaign, has been used as the main source for information in this article. Their website is at www.gn.apc.org/tapol.

Next issue

■ The next (September) issue of *Socialist Outlook* will be produced in the final two weeks of August.

■ Letters and feature articles are welcome and should arrive at our office by August 15.

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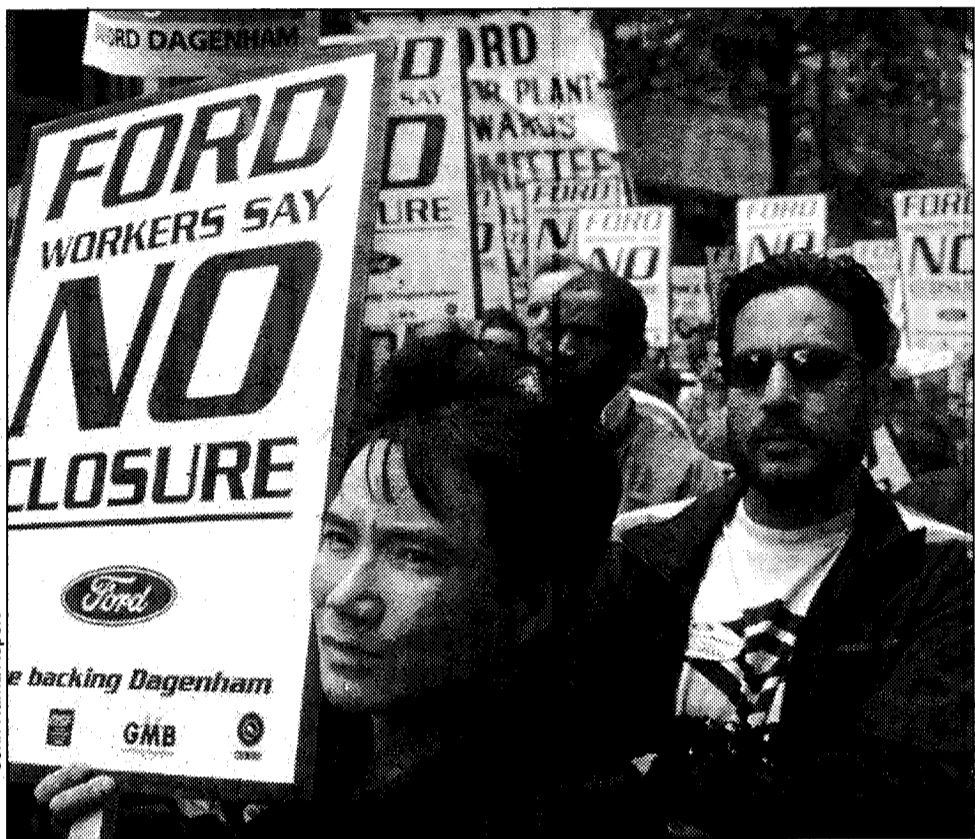


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OUTLOOK

Strike to save Ford jobs!



John Harris/Report

On Thursday June 22nd 700 workers from Ford's Dagenham plant arrived in a fleet of coaches to demonstrate outside of the Ford UK head office in Kensington. They were protesting against the decision of Ford management to end car production in Dagenham and transfer the new Fiesta to Germany.

Most of the workers were from the Dagenham Paint Trim and Assembly (PTA) plant which is the site faced with closure. There were also workers and stewards from the engine plant which, according to Ford management, is staying open, at the present time. It is a policy of divide and rule.

700 was seen as a good turn out, given that it was a working day and took place against management pressure not to leave the plant and the possibility of disciplinary action being taken against those who did. It should

provide the basis for action to be stepped up.

Tony Woodley, the TGWU national official for the car industry, spoke to the demonstrators before going in to meet management and present them with the trade unions official rejection of Fords closure proposals.

He attacked Ford management over the closure but he was not talking about stepping up the action. He said that there will be a ballot for strike action if necessary but that this will not take place until the current round of redundancies - those resulting from the reduction of the PTA from two shifts to one not the proposed closure - have been completed.

He went on to say that after this demonstration, and the lobby of parliament by Ford workers due to take place on Wednesday June 28th, there will "be a lull in the campaign"

until the ballot takes place! There were murmurs of "what campaign?" given that there have not yet been mass meetings inside the plant, and this was the first action of any kind which had taken place.

The problem is that time is on the side of Ford management, and the longer it takes to get resistance off the ground the more difficult it will be.

Already there has been a collapse of the shop stewards committee in the PTA, with 20 shop stewards, including the convenor, taking redundancy in the current round of cut-backs.

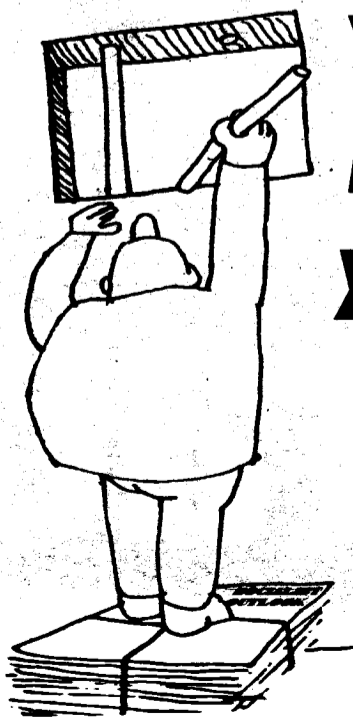
It is a difficult situation, but the turnout and the militancy of Thursday's demonstration shows that there is a solid body of workers prepared to make a stand if a lead is given. New stewards need to be elected and the shop

stewards movement made to function.

But if this is to come about the momentum needs to be kept up. A national demonstration in London led by thousands of Ford workers, would get a huge response from the London as the Birmingham demonstration against the closure of Longbridge did on April 1. It could help to galvanise the situation and lead up to a successful ballot for action.

The crucial steps must be:

- Mass meetings at Dagenham to involve the workforce and keep it fully informed.
- A national demonstration in London, against the closure.
- A ballot for strike at Dagenham against the closure.
- Supporting action from the other Ford plants.



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