

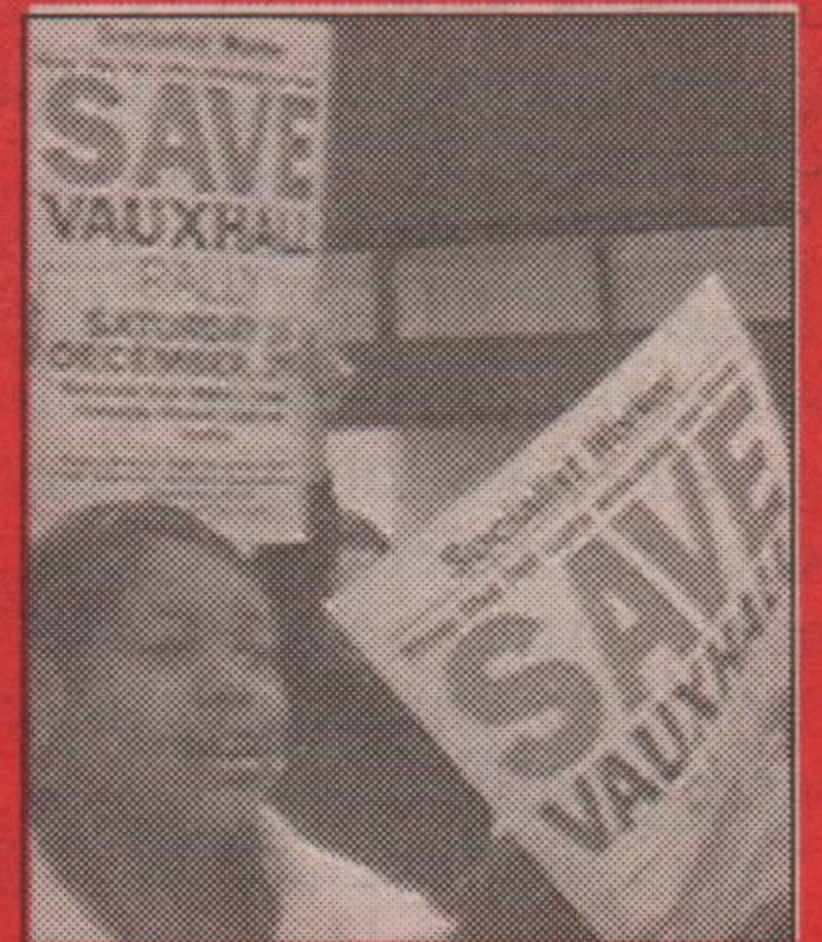
Socialist OUTLOOK

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INSIDE



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VAUXHALL - full article, page 4



<http://www.savevauxhalljobs.org.uk>

Check details of the demonstration and the Day of Action on the Save Vauxhall Jobs web site: <http://www.savevauxhalljobs.org.uk>

FIGHT FOR VAUXHALL JOBS!

OCCUPY LUTON!

The stewards at Luton said in their statement to the work force: "This is our plant. General Motors of Europe have given up their right to call it theirs."
This is a vital fight in defence of jobs not only at this one plant, but throughout GM and its suppliers.
A successful stand here will also help workers in other industries fighting cuts and closures.
That's why it's vital that the Luton demonstration and the European day of action get the fullest support, to get the fight off to a flying start.

International Day of Action January 25

March through Luton Jan 20

Defeat Tube privatisation – and any further contracting out of LUL work

Kiley criticisms of PPP must be handled with care!

Greg Tucker

As we go to press RMT and ASLEF have organised a joint rally with London Mayor Ken Livingstone to further the fight against privatisation of London Underground and to lay the groundwork for a successful ballot for industrial action.

The Executive Committees of the RMT and ASLEF, the two main tube unions, have agreed to ballot their members over safety concerns. A joint letter sent by both unions to their tube membership said,

"We believe that the London Underground shadow running and the proposed Public Private Partnership seriously threaten the health and safety of our members and indeed the travelling public.

"After the tragedies at Southall, Paddington and Hatfield on the mainline railway we are deeply concerned that the same structure will be replicated on the Underground.

"The intensive service levels and narrow margin for error means a breakdown in safety on the tube will have catastrophic consequences for our members and the public....

"Safety is not negotiable and if our demands are not met then both ASLEF and the RMT will be in dispute with these companies....

Unity between ASLEF and RMT is a big step forward. It is important that this is worked at at all levels, not just between Mick Rix and Bob Crow, but that this is followed through in every depot. Disunity in the past has led to a lack of confidence that RMT members alone could be effective.

Whilst this was never true, the change of approach over the last year by ASLEF must be built upon. United action is the one thing the government really fears.

Robert Kiley, the new Commissioner of Transport for London, brought in by Ken Livingstone has made a clear analysis of the government's PPP privatisation plans. He is clear that they do not stack up:

"On the basis of the information made available to me, I have concluded that the basic structure of London Underground's PPP as presently conceived is fatally flawed and will not promote an improvement in the service offered to Londoners.

"At the heart of the case for the PPP is the claim that



The objection to the PPP plan also applies to the privatisation of other parts of the Tube.

"risk" would be transferred to the private sector. However, proponents are never entirely clear as to precisely what this means; i.e., what risks are being transferred and how the transfer is accomplished.

"Any assessment of risk transfer must begin with one inescapable reality: the trains must run. Without a functioning Tube, London itself cannot function. Thus, in a worst case scenario, the Government (or the GLA) will be forced to pay what is necessary to keep the system going.

"This overriding obligation to ensure service means that the entire risk can never be transferred. And when coupled with the absence of provisions for meaningful supervision or contractual enforcement of the Infracos by Transport for London (TfL), it means that the transfer of risk is largely illusory.

"TfL will be forced to assume responsibility, and to

provide the claimed efficiency savings; they in fact will result in higher costs."

But a word of caution is needed – Kiley may have denounced the government's plans. But are his options much better? LUL workers must fight PPP – and be prepared to put a halt to any other plans that threaten their jobs and conditions.

Mr Kiley announced his proposals for the modernisation of London Underground at a meeting chaired by Ken Livingstone. His plan calls for £10 billion in investment over 15 years.

That consists of roughly £6 billion in surplus operating revenues and government grant, £2 billion in partnerships with the private sector and £2 billion in revenue securitisation obligations, which serve the same function as bonds.

As Livingstone pointed out, this has the advantage of

cent of the investment programme will be carried out by the private sector under this plan."

Whatever one's views on the issuing of bonds – and there are good reasons for concern about this method of funding – the proposals to include £2 billion in partnership funding must raise concern.

Yes, some of the objections to the way that the government would fragment control have been dealt with, but it still seems that the private sector will be used to replace existing LUL workers wherever possible.

That was the implication of the earlier Hutton review. Kiley has taken this one stage further. The appearance is given that Livingstone is offering the government a compromise – drop the PPP and I will ensure that the private sector is allowed to participate as much as possible.

Of course, it is true that it will be on different terms. It has always been the case that major new build has been done by outside contract, not by existing LUL staff. But Kiley's proposals include potentially handing over more than just the right to bid for new build contracts. Existing maintenance work will be threatened.

Kiley is no friend of tube workers. His interests lie elsewhere.

Yes we should support his denunciation of the government. We should be working closely with Ken Livingstone as Mayor to fight for proper government funding and for a safe tube system.

But our victory won't be achieved by clever manoeuvres or tactical subterfuges. Only united industrial action against all potential threats will achieve that.

The situation on the main line railway also continues to deteriorate. The RMT is in dispute with every train operating company over the introduction of rules that undermine the safety role of train crew. The RMT Executive should now follow through its plan for a national ballot of all train crew. The prospect of co-ordinated action on safety issues between tube and main line workers must be turned into a reality.

spend what it takes to finish the job. Is this a transfer of risk?

"Because the Infracos are free to ignore the constraints of the contracts without risk of meaningful commercial consequence, the PPP contracts are not effective in transferring the risk of performance failure to the private sector.

"Because they stifle rather than promote competition, the PPP contracts will not

retaining the unified management of the system, the absence of which has produced chaos on the national rail network. But what of his other assertion that, "I believe we have a clear basis for Mr Kiley and the government to work together to produce an outcome which fully involves the private sector.?"

As Kiley points out, "Transport for London fully expects that at least 90 per

Sniping from the Left

By Charlie van Gelderen



WHEN TONY Blair appeared live on Question Time on December 12 the biggest applause came for the demand to take the railways back into public ownership and control. His reply (that ownership was not the issue; that it was all a matter of structure) did not go down well with the audience.

Former SWP member, Lord MacDonald re-affirmed on TV on December 21 that nationalisation was not in the agenda for dealing with the chaos on the railways.

When a woman shouted from the back "The Tories have always looked after their own, But you have not looked after ours!" he replied "I don't intend to be a left-wing Margaret Thatcher." Who ever accused him of being left-wing?

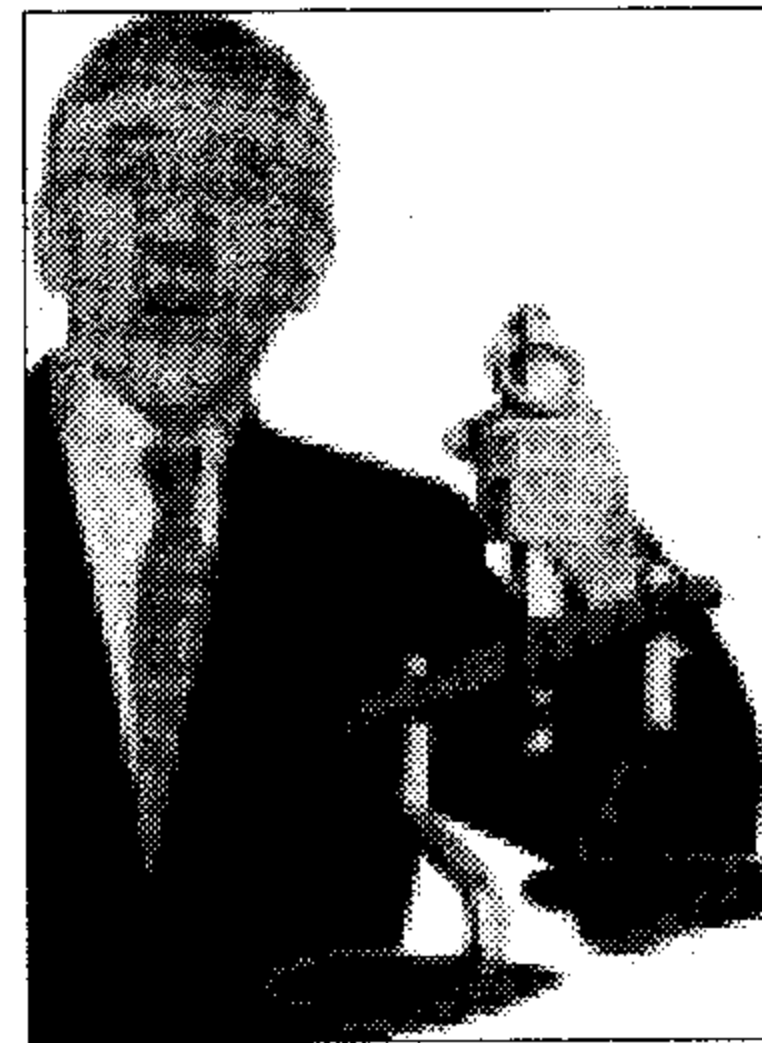
Drug barons

The multinational pharmaceutical giant, Glaxo-Wellcome has now joined its competitors to stop countries in the developing world obtaining life-saving medicines drugs at affordable prices.

The company has blocked the import of cheap copies of one of its anti-AIDS drugs into Ghana. Millions are dying of AIDS in Africa and elsewhere.

This is of no concern to the fat cats in the board rooms. It is not human lives but bigger profits which are their concern.

Sadly, these fat cats have nothing to fear from the New Labour government, despite earlier promises from Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, Stephen Byers.



Justice, anyone?

The DTI has confirmed that there will be no legislation to deal with this scandal, this side of the elections, and when it is dealt with, it will far short of expectations. Blair wants nothing which will mar his cosy relationship with big business.

Fatter cats

As Roger Cowe pointed out in the *Guardian*, the remuneration of plc directors has risen well above that of any other group for more than a decade.

It has been out of line with any relevant indicator, whether that is company profits, share prices, average earnings, or even the pay of managers in the economy as a whole – to say nothing of the miserable pay increases doled out to the workers who produce the wealth.

According to Incomes Data Services, the chief executives of 100 public companies received a 10% increase in basic pay in 1999, plus bonuses and share options. Isn't this what Edward Heath called

Survival of the fittest?

When redundancies are announced, it is usually the least skilled, and therefore lowest paid, workers who are laid off – the very groups who are most vulnerable suffer most.

This is clearly illustrated by the latest World Bank World Development Report, released in September.

The report notes that in this era of globalisation, there has been a huge increase in wealth created. But it also points out that at the same time, the gap between rich and poor has widened, with 2.8 billion people living on just above £1 a day or less.

In other words, the Thatcher/Reagan theories of 'trickle-down', that growth leads to re-distribution, do not work.

Quite the contrary! The result of the policies imposed by the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO have resulted in a 'trickle-UP' – the redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich.

Severed roots

Isn't it strange – or is it? – that all the ministers or ex-ministers concerned with immigration control – Jack Straw, Michael Howard, Barbara Roche, are all descendants of immigrants, or like Peter Hain, an immigrant himself?

Barbara Roche has recently excelled herself by declaring – at Christmas time – that toys are 'frivolous trifles' on which refugees should not waste their precious £36.54 weekly vouchers.

Poor health

John Major proclaimed that his aim was a 'classless society'. Tony Blair prefers an 'inclusive society.' But ours is still very much a class-based society.

This is confirmed – if confirmation was really needed – by the latest study on health inequalities from Barnardo's. This shows that children from the lowest social class are twice as likely to die by the age of 15 as are children from the highest class.

The former are also nine times more likely to die in a house fire and are disproportionately exposed to risk of fatal accidents – the main childhood killer.

And this in the fourth year of the New Labour government!

The study maintains that the only long-term answer is a direct attack on inequalities.

When America sneezes, Blair's spin doctors are no use at all



Gore kept his distance from Clinton – and lost out

SOME of Tony Blair's top spin doctors have made their diagnosis of Al Gore's failure to win the US election, and concluded that it does not automatically question a walk-over Labour win at the next election here.

One of Gore's cardinal errors, according to these readers of entrails, was that his eagerness to distance himself from Clinton and his sleaze-ridden presidency meant that he was not able to cash in on the boom economy which had prevailed in the US throughout the eight years of Clinton's administration.

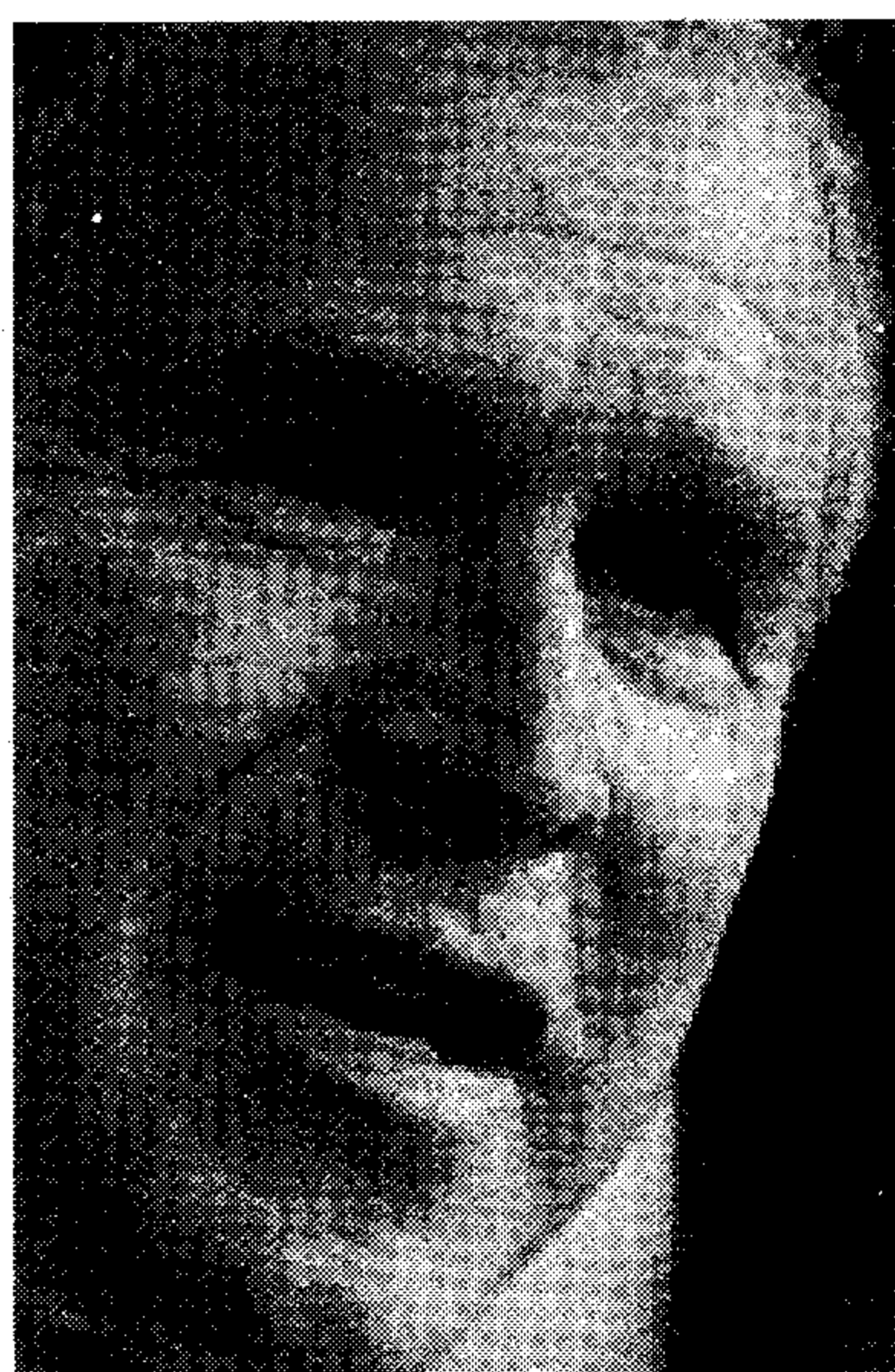
That could never be a problem here, Blair was reassured, because New Labour's stewardship of the capitalist economy is one of their proudest achievements.

But even as these sage words were being written by a high priest of the dark arts, the very economic assumptions on which they were based were being undermined – both in the USA, and to a certain extent in Britain, too.

Even before the protracted saga of the Florida recounts had been concluded, with a panel of five reactionary judges solemnly installing the man with fewest votes as the next President, sharp-eyed observers had spotted that the US economic miracle was coming apart at the seams.

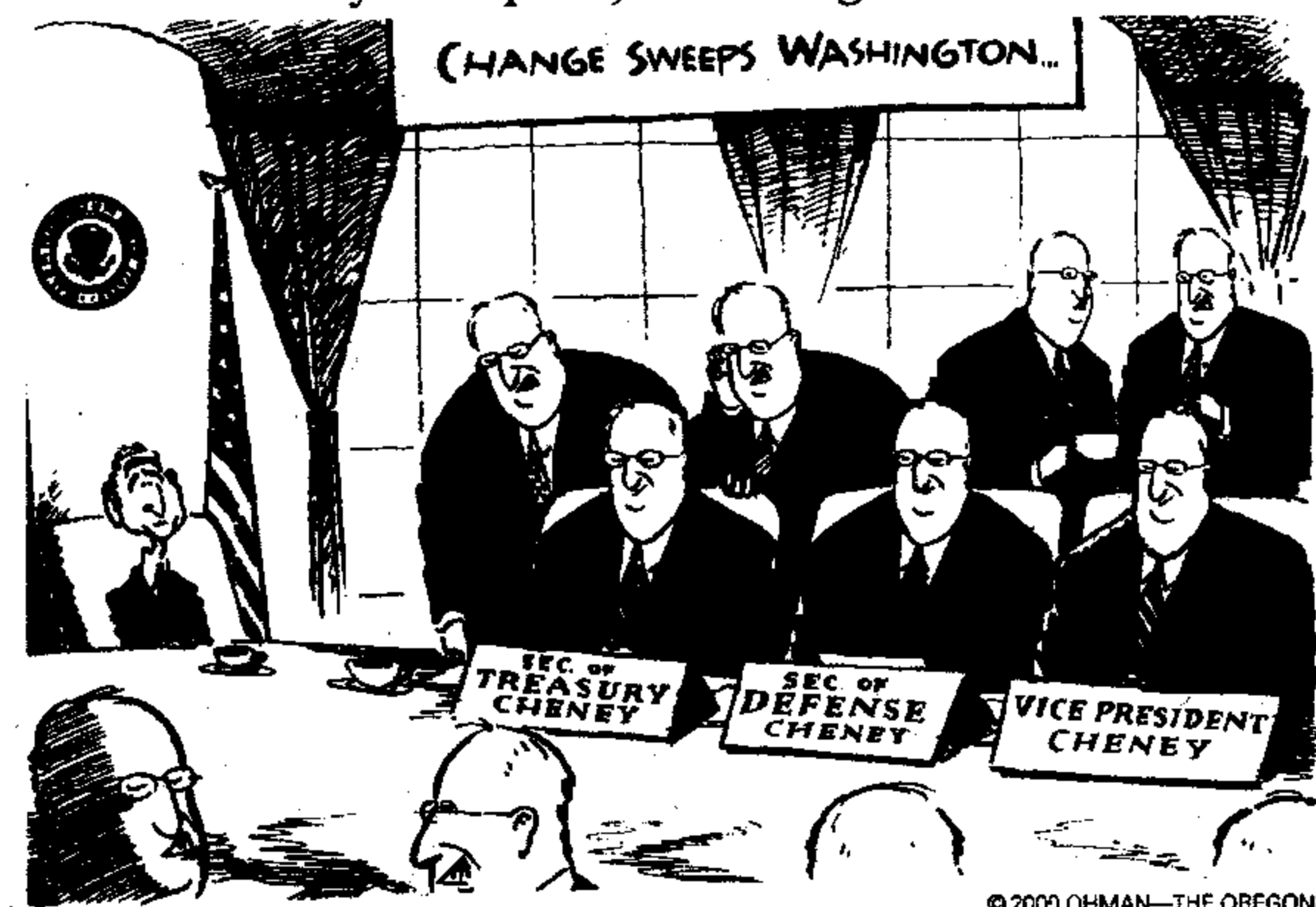
- Economic output in the final quarter of 2000 was only half that of the previous quarter;

- The much-vaunted Nasdaq share index for hi-tech industries was in steep decline, losing 29% of its value over the whole year, and dragging much of Wall Street with



Bush: calling for \$1.3 trillion tax cuts

- Consumer confidence was plunging, after years in which consumer spending has been rising faster than personal income.
- Savings as a percent of income had effectively collapsed, declining



from almost 5% in 1998 to zero at the end of 2000.

- Retail sales were falling back, car production and house construction falling, and "dot.com" companies dying or teetering on the edge of collapse.

- Corporate profits were flat, and the number of companies defaulting on bonds was almost four times the 1996 level.

It hadn't really suited anyone to point this out until after the election was over. Gore and the Democrats wanted to let the "feelgood" factor swing voters towards them, while Bush would have been eagerly promoting his call for \$1.3 trillion in tax cuts whatever the state of the economy.

Since the new year began, we have seen the first signs of an open acknowledgement of these problems. The Nasdaq continued downwards, to reach half its value in March 2000.

As discussion developed on the danger of a new recession, a highly publicised half percent cut in the

Federal Reserve interest rate triggered at least a momentary euphoria among nervous stock brokers around the world.

President-elect George 'Dubya' Bush has been quick to wheel back out his all-purpose call for tax cuts as a means to save the

situation, but lingering doubts remain over whether there is any way to avert a slow-down or even a slump in the US economy.

Nor is it just the trendy internet firms and hi-tech companies that are feeling the pinch. In the USA a tide of redundancies, cutbacks and bankruptcies is affecting old-fashioned manufacturing and other industries: cars, steel, construction, railways and retail chains.

Six months ago, virtually nobody had seen this coming: now, as *Time* magazine points out, "the boom's gone on so long, we've forgotten what a recession looks like". And nobody knows whether the corrective cut in interest rate will do the trick, or whether Bush has been doomed to serve the first years of his presidency in a recession.

So what has all this to do with Blair and Britain? Geographically, it may be an island, but the British economy is dependent upon world events.

Many of the factors that have hit the USA are also problems here. The British stock market closed last year ten percent lower than it began for the first time in a decade, dragged down by collapsing new technology and internet stocks. Dot.com firms are going bust, and even British Telecom is struggling to divest itself of a mountain of debts.

But manufacturing industry is also in another sharp decline here, with a pattern not dissimilar to the USA: cars and steel are shedding jobs, along with another old fash-

ioned industry, textiles.

A standstill in the British economy would throw a spanner in the works of Gordon Brown's carefully stage-managed pre-election spending spree on health, education, and other voter-friendly measures.

Unfortunately there is another common factor on each side of the Atlantic: both the British New Labour government and the new US president and his right wing team are wedded to the neo-liberal agenda.

Whatever the economic illness, their answer is another dose of free market capitalism, deregulation, privatisation and a reduction in welfare spending.

As we have seen before, this type of treatment can eventually produce at least the semblance of a recovery – but only at the expense of the jobs and living standards of working people.

Labour's first years in office, like the Clinton administration in the USA, have seen the gap between rich and poor actually widen even during "good times".

The US crisis should remind us that the system itself is anarchic and unstable. It can only maintain profits through the exploitation of the world's working class, kept in check as they are by right wing union leaders and lack of any serious alternative political leadership.

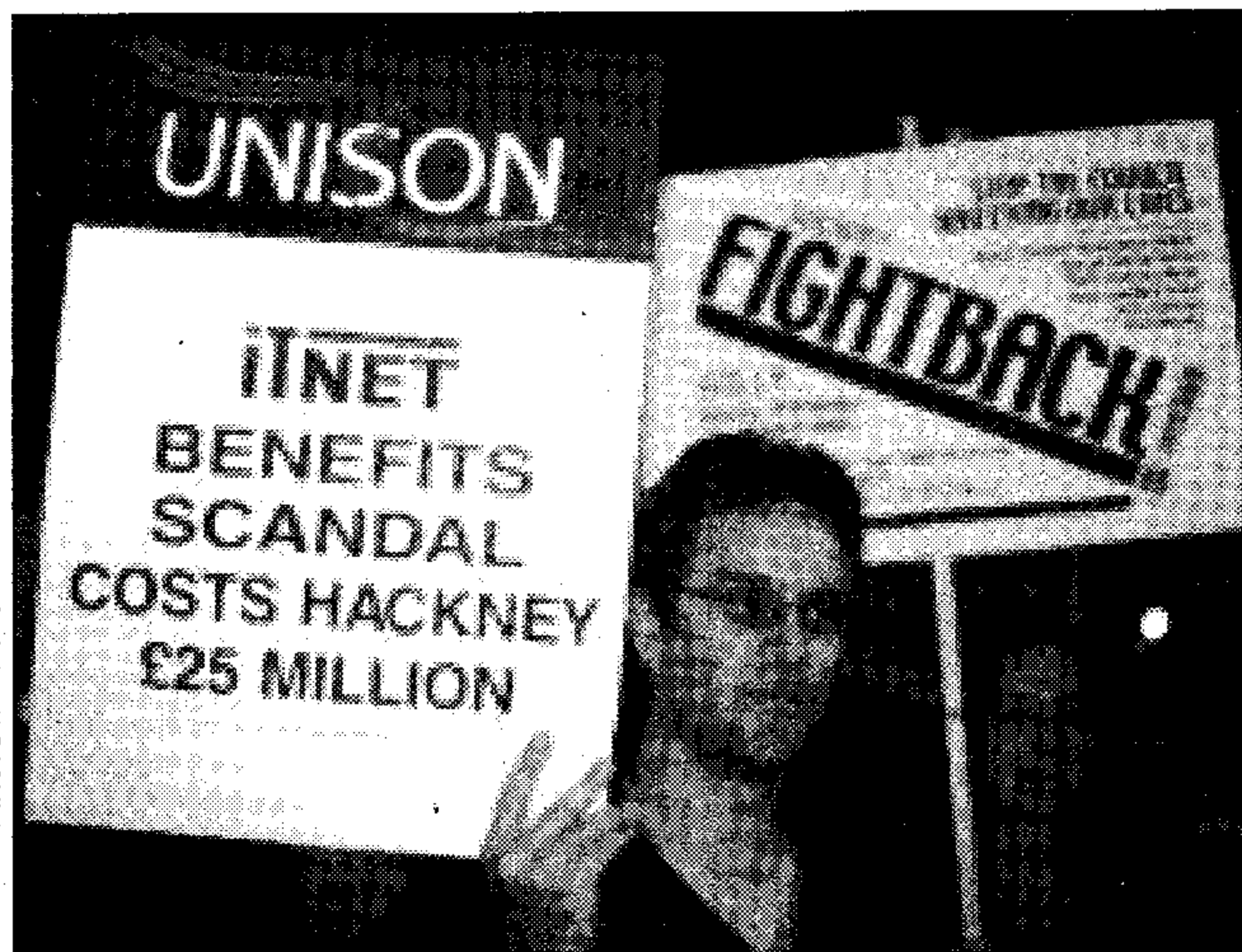
The need for a class struggle left wing in the unions, and a fighting socialist left to challenge the politics of neo-liberalism has never been more urgent.

Hackney staff fight Christmas stuffing

FIVE DAYS before Christmas might not be the time any of us would choose to go on strike, but then workers in the London Borough of Hackney also did not choose the massive package of cuts and privatisation their employers have imposed on them.

The council is in debt to the tune of £76 million, pays £61 million a year in interest payments to the banks it is in debt to (!) and is now making every worker and resident pay for the mess of the council's own making.

Hackney went ahead with the privatisation of its refuse service with the loss of 250 jobs – and unfortunately these workers were then excluded from strike action



Andrew Wiliard

on December 20 by regional officials.

While earlier occupations of two nurseries saved them from closure, the council has subsequently

announced another is to close – even though it has more than 1000 children on its waiting list.

Homecare staff stand to receive a pay cut of up to

£50 per week while gardeners could lose as much as £80.

No wonder the strike on December 20 was absolutely solid in both manual and white collar sections. Many areas had 100% support and even some senior managers (PO7) were out on strike.

The local *Hackney Gazette* wrote its coverage the day before the strike (due to tight deadlines) and was forced to re-write the story the following week in the light of the outstanding support received by the strike call.

Pickets were out from early in the morning and by 9 am the town hall was more or less surrounded. There was a march at lunch time which

ended near the City and a picket of the Town Hall in pouring rain in the evening (it always seems to rain in Hackney!!). Both events were well attended and we received major press coverage.

Unfortunately it seems that management are now determined to raise the stakes. The package agreed on December 20, ironically called a "recovery package" will mean cuts of £4 million before April and £25 million in the following financial year. A further £26 million is scheduled to go in the following 2 years.

The Labour/Tory leadership is considering serving 90 day notices on all staff terminating our contracts and offering re-engagement

on lower terms and conditions.

The council is also threatening to discipline the Unison Branch Secretary, John Page for challenging institutionalised racism (apparently this undermines confidence in the council's internal procedures).

Further action is planned by the unions and as the details of different cuts become clear over the weeks ahead there may be further action from the community, where support also remain strong.

■ To send messages of support or get up to date information about developments in Hackney contact hackney@unisonfree.net or phone 0208 356 4130

Learn lessons of Dagenham

Act now to save Vauxhall jobs!

Jack Johnson

General Motors announced its decision to axe 4,000 jobs across Europe, and to close its Vauxhall car assembly plant in Luton with the loss of 2,200 jobs, on Tuesday December 12th. (The corporation has since announced it is also slashing 15,000 jobs in its US plants).

The following day Vauxhall workers launched a militant and spontaneous occupation Vauxhall's headquarters, Griffin House in Luton. The occupation forced Vauxhall Chairman, Nick Reilly, to come out and try to explain management's decision to close the plant. He got nowhere, and retreated under police protection.

There was another brief but angry occupation the following day. Such actions could hardly have shown more clearly the strong feelings of the work force.

On December 13th workers at General Motors' (GM) Ellesmere Port plant walked out on strike in support of the Luton assembly plant, as did workers at the Luton spare parts warehouse. There was also a spontaneous walk-out at the huge GM Opel plant at Bochum in Germany.

GM were playing a tactical game in Luton - not a new one, but an effective one. They made their announcement of the closure of the plant on December 12 knowing that the plant was about to be closed down for a month - from the 15th of December until the 15th of January.

Management hoped that feelings would evaporate during that period of time.

Their announcement posed workers with the need for an immediate occupation of the plant in advance of the shutdown, which would have been the most effective



action - giving the work force confidence that a fight was going to take place and they would not have to look for individual solutions.

In the event there was not even a mass meeting before the shutdown began.

During the shutdown they set about divide and rule - by issuing letters detailing redundancy payments, obviously hoping that a part of the work force would accept this.

At the same time - in exactly the same way that Ford management announced some new jobs in the Dagenham engine plant after announcing the end of



Police protection for Vauxhall boss Nick Reilly as he tried to explain the closure

car assembly in Dagenham - Vauxhall management revealed the 'creation' of 500 extra jobs in Luton.

500 extra jobs are irrelevant to the situation in Luton, where the knock-on effect of the closure of the assembly plant will create 6,000 job losses in the area.

But it turns out that these 500 jobs have been 'created' by switching the new 4x4 Frontera, which was scheduled for Ellesmere Port, and agreed with the unions, to the IBC van plant in Luton.

This has two effects. It allows management to offer a few alternative jobs in Luton, but it makes Ellesmere Port plant a single model plant, and puts its future directly in jeopardy.

Management hopes that this will create further division, with some of the workers hoping to get these jobs.

Despite the lack of action before the shutdown, it is clear that the convenors and stewards in Vauxhall have responded much more strongly, and have immediately taken a better attitude, than that taken at either Rover or Ford.

One important strength is in seeing the need for a combined-wide action. In Dagenham the vote for action was lost not only by the long delay, and the effects of time, but the fact that the call for strike action was confined to Dagenham rather than seen as a crisis of Ford UK - which was the reality.

There was little prospect that the closure could have been successfully opposed in Dagenham alone.

In Vauxhall, at least for now, it is very a very different situation. The European Works Council has called a one-day strike of GM plants throughout Europe, on the 25th of January.

In a leaflet to the membership the stewards say "This is a European problem", and they would "seek to create a European fight with General Motors of Europe".

They called on the workers to "Reject the package and defend our jobs and our plant". They have also called for them to defend it "by whatever means".

To back this up, a meeting of convenors from of the GM plants in the UK, meeting on January 5th, have called for a national demonstration in Luton on January 20.

This is an important decision, and a big step forward from the Ford situation, where in the six months between the announcement of the Dagenham closure and the workers finally voting, there was only one public action - a lobby of Ford UK HQ.

There needs to be a massive mobilisation for the January 20 demonstration from all over the country. This should start as soon as the Luton plant reopens, with a mass meeting to plan the mobilisation.

This is a fight for the whole working class. If this plant goes, so will component firms and even more jobs. One defeat leads to another.

It is no coincidence that a week after the Rover unions accepted the Phoenix deal, and the loss of thousands of jobs, Ford announced the closure of car production at Dagenham.

Nor is it a coincidence that one week after the vote at Dagenham to accept the closure of the plant, GM announced the closure of Luton.

It is not just that it is easier under British legislation to close British plants: it's because the union leaderships in this country have sabotaged any fight back at every stage.

This must be stopped. Other employers like Nissan/Renault, Corus Steel and Peugeot are waiting in the wings, looking to axe more jobs, not to mention Rover and many component firms.

In motors most companies are moving models into super plants, so that if one model doesn't sell they can concentrate the workers on other models. A single model plant does not give them this flexibility.

This is why Toyota has bucked the trend and increased its UK investment - although with very small increase in the work force (10%) and a 20% increase in production. It is an attempt to fully utilise their present facilities and give them the flexibility they need.

The stewards at Luton said in their statement to the work force: "This is our plant. General Motors of Europe have given up their right to call it theirs."

This is a profound statement, and in contradiction to the local Luton Labour MP, who said that GM had the right to take such decisions - but that they should keep the work force informed!

It is also in contradiction to Stephen Byers, who knew about the closure in advance and withheld it from the unions, and then said only that he would try to help the workers get other jobs.

If GM cannot guarantee these jobs then Vauxhall should be nationalised - as should Fords and Rover: and if there is not the requirement for cars, then the plant should be re-tooled for useful alternative production, such as ambulances or public transport.

This could, with a re-nationalised railway, and bus system, create a proper public transport system. Support the Luton workers.

All out on January 20th, and 25th.

Unions must end concession bargaining

One thing that the decision of General Motors to close its Luton plant has made clear, yet again, is that "concession bargaining" (making concessions on working conditions in exchange for so-called "guarantees" on jobs) is a big mistake, reports JACK JOHNSON.

The employers get all the benefit of the worsening of working conditions - and often still close the plant just the same. The guarantee is not worth the paper it is written on. And each union retreat just encourages the employers to come back for even more.

The 1998 Vauxhall wage

deal gave a small wage increase in exchange for a range of concessions - including the banking of hours in Luton.

This was in exchange for a written guarantee that the Vectra replacement would be made at Luton. This guarantee was confirmed again as recently as three months ago.

The workforce only heard that this agreement had been torn up and the plant was to be closed on the local radio - such was management's attitude to their side of the agreement.

BMW unions gave away major concessions in their attempt to save Longbridge.

This involved the acceptance of the banking of hours and two years of virtually of no wage increase, in return for a 35 hour week.

This deal was implemented straight away, but was so vague that it took a long time to sign.

By the time it was signed, the company was already negotiating with Alchemy to sell Longbridge. But banking hours have remained in place in all three of the broken up components of what was Rover.

Still trying to "save the plant", the Longbridge unions negotiated a return to the 37 hour week, a loss of £32 a week on one regularly used shift system, a cut in relief time, and a cut in sick pay back to 75%.

When this went to the workforce it was dressed up as a £20 wage increase, but only just scraped the vote by about 150 out of 4000.

Phoenix this month are issuing 30% of the shares to the work force. These are almost worthless, since the company doesn't even own the engine plant on site, and if it ever goes into profit, it has to start paying back the £500 million loan from BMW.



Longbridge: after massive concessions, workers get worthless shares

In Swindon, BMW, threatening to sell the plant, persuaded unions to accept a 36 hour week: but is selling the plant anyway.

In Cowley the union leadership has recently recommended a deal that is the worst of the lot. The return of the 37 hour week, the continuation of banking hours, but including unlimited payback of hours on Saturdays. Also conceded are the use of agency workers, at agency rates, new starters on 20% less pay, and monthly pay.

There are also other elements in relation to grading, and, particularly dangerous, an element of performance related pay which will divide workers.

Another money-saving ele-

What kind of Manifesto for Socialist Alliance?

As the Socialist Alliances network gears itself up for the General Election it will need a major debate on its Election Manifesto, which will be agreed at a national conference of on March 10. BOB JENKINS outlines some of the International Socialist Group's suggestions

Political organisations define themselves and are defined by their programme and the corresponding methods they deploy fighting for that programme. The only difference with the alliance is that because it is a new organisation its future development and precise character are not yet fully determined.

Nor do all those involved yet have clear ideas of how they would like to see it evolve.

Whether or not the Socialist Alliance can or should evolve into a new party in the future and the speed it could do this remains controversial. It is dependent as much on circumstances beyond our control, as on our will to take this road.

Some see the Socialist Alliance simply as an electoral united front, and therefore by definition, more or less temporary and federal. Others see the Alliance as a framework for constructing a united revolutionary Marxist party, more or less in the short term.

But the Socialist Alliance needs to win support from those who are breaking from Blairism to the left, who at the present juncture do not wish to go down this road.

Others have their eyes on a much bigger project, seeing the Socialist Alliance as a framework for building a new party to the left of Labour. This widely supported perspective is a response to Blair's take-over of the Labour Party.

The 'Third Way' is not just another right wing project of the labour bureaucracy, but a historically new phenomenon, which explicitly aims to transform the Labour Party into a straight-forward capitalist party. According to some comrades this has already happened.

Each of these perspectives leads to different ideas about what we do now and what kind of manifesto we need. The process of agreeing a platform for the General Election will inevitably involve these big questions.

In the view of the International Socialist Group, the Socialist Alliance today is a united front-type formation, a political alliance of socialist organisations and individuals, with the potential of becoming the focus of a future recomposition of the workers' movement and the oppressed. This will hopefully result in a new workers' party.

While we would in the future fight for such a party to become a revolutionary party, the balance of forces for that to happen does not exist today. However we want to ensure that the steps we now take to build the Alliance do not prejudice such a development in the future.

In this context the type of manifesto we favour is what has been called an 'Action Programme' - nei-



Need for united front: Birmingham campaigners fight sale of residential homes

ther a revolutionary programme nor a minimum programme.

The Manifesto must include a small number of advanced but popularly formulated demands that, if taken up by the mass movement, would challenge the basis of capitalism and the capitalist state - what Trotsky called 'transitional demands'.

The other demands in the platform would be of a minimum type. Such an anti-capitalist programme would correspond to the type of alliance that exists today and also take into account the existing levels of class-consciousness.

If we do not adopt this approach there are a number of dangers. If the Alliance projects itself merely as a collection of campaigns and issues, with a corresponding list of partial or minimum demands, then it will not be seen to offer answers to the big questions confronting society.

These are precisely the issues that many people are more likely to think about at a General Election than at most other times.

One central area we must discuss thoroughly is our governmental approach. We want to challenge the big monopolies and trusts and make inroads into free market capitalism, raising slogans such as "People before profit and the free market!"

Our alternative should be summed up through a governmental slogan such as "For a government based on the workers and oppressed".

For us this is the sort of way we would want to express the traditional trotskyst demand for a workers' government.

Keying in with the question of cuts we could raise the slogan 'For a government that will tax the rich and nationalise the banks' (to pay for hospitals, schools, housing and

an integrated transport system which will soak up unemployment.)

We need to work out a central governmental slogan which will be conjuncturally most appropriate and which can define us in the election.

We can advocate other demands which we believe can guide effective working-class politics, from "open the books" and "work-sharing with no loss of pay," to "workers' control" through to the expropriation of the giant financial institutions and big capitalist companies.

Such an approach eschews a narrow, reformist, parliamentary perspective, while avoiding the trap of ultra-left propagandism. It also promotes the fundamental idea of working-class political representation, which the Blair government has trampled on.

The consequences of this are clear: the need for new political representation, for a new mass workers' party.

There are other considerations in drawing up a manifesto. Many comrades in the Alliance, including ourselves, believe it is still necessary to maintain a united front orientation not only to movements outside the Labour Party but directly in relationship to the Labour Party itself, in practice its left-wing.

Others fail to see the importance of this or reject it, wishing to work only in the unions and social movements.

It is true that the left in the Labour Party has been defeated, but the majority of the working class, including its active vanguard, will still vote Labour in the spring, if only to keep the Tories out. More importantly they still retain illusions in Labour because of their reformist ideas.

We think in this conjuncture that it is important to try and link up with left reformist and class strug-

gle forces that exist and will emerge in the future within what is still a unitary Labour movement.

A united front method where we try to link up with local councillors, ward parties, even a few MPs, to fight for example against the sell-off of council housing, has implications for our manifesto and how it is presented. Without such an orientation the Socialist Alliances will never become a centre of recomposition of the movement.

One view represented by comrades of 'Workers Liberty' argues that: "We raise the idea of unions dissatisfied with the Millbank machine forming their own Labour Representation Committee, which might take shape initially as a ginger group in the Labour Party (or on its fringes, like the new US Labor Party with the Democratic Party) and later become part of a new mass workers' party."

The ISG is in favour of a fighting unity and building common struggles with militants in the Party and unions.

However, the idea of a new Labour Representation Committee is appropriate only if big ruptures from within the Labour Party and between the Party and the unions are imminent. This seems to us unlikely at present, or in the foreseeable future.

What we can expect is a slow haemorrhaging of members from the LP and the strengthening of the left caucuses in the unions.

It is true that big-business funding, of Blair's party machine has further weakened the ties between the Labour Party and the organised working class, but there is no sign that any major section of the trade union bureaucracy breaking from Blair or the Labour Party.

This is an issue of concern to a small section of the political vanguard, not a central political issue facing the class in the General Election

What we see is a growing class resentment against the Blair government, but as yet little confidence to challenge it - or the employers.

But these are not the only considerations. There is the question of what social forces we wish to address.

Some may want to concentrate on a purely working class/Labour movement campaign, while others also want to attempt to address the anti-capitalist youth radicalising on issues such as globalisation and the ecological crisis.

Some will be more sensitive to defending the gains of the movement since 1968, for example on issues such as women's and black liberation.

Some within the SA have 'economist' tendencies (orientating to daily trade union struggles)

which leads them to underestimate the important new political issues and movements unless they are to be found in the unions. Examples of issues which don't fit this 'economistic' model include the youth radicalisation over the ecological crisis of our planet, pollution and global warming.

This diverse movement involves and influences young working class people, but it is not based in the organised workers' movement.

If the Alliance avoids organising and putting forward demands around these issues it would be a big mistake. The Socialist Alliance would seem old fashioned, unable to reach out to young people.

We need a programme to counter the greenhouse effect, which means that it is necessary to transcend the fossil fuel economy. George Monbiot has called for a complete ban on the use of fossil fuels in five years time! More practically, the SA manifesto should state this to be our objective without giving a time limit.

This means a move away from the car economy. There are probably 500 million cars in the world, and with present trends this will reach 1 billion in twenty years.

The amount of human labour power expended in making, repairing, and insuring cars and in building roads, clearing up after accidents, and footing the health bill due to pollution, is a phenomenal waste of human resources.

We stand not only for a clean, efficient and integrated public transport system, but one which is free and geared to the needs of local communities.

In the longer term we need to re-plan and restructure our cities so that people do not have to move such large distances in their daily life. Should people be paid for the time they take to commute as well?

We want regulatory measures to force manufacturers to make cars cleaner and more fuel efficient. promote faster technological development and possibly things like fitting governors which control car speeds which would reduce accidents and cut pollution.

We are also for energy conversion and serious conservation measures, and for the nationalisation of the petro-chemical industry.

It is of course true that the strategic task is to rebuild the trade unions, re-launch working class struggle and to build a political culture in the working class for its self-emanicipation.

But this requires a break with economism, and necessitates linking up the workers movement with new layers who are struggling now, to build on the new "anti-capitalist" mood burgeoning after the Seattle anti-WTO protest.

This can be a boost to working class consciousness and action, and has to be taken on board by the SA manifesto.

Andrew Wlaid

Welsh coalition sparks rank-and-file backlash

Darren Williams

The Lib-Lab coalition in the National Assembly for Wales, unexpectedly announced in October, has had an uneasy first few months.

The 'Partnership Agreement', which put two Liberal Democrats in Rhodri Morgan's cabinet in an attempt to secure stability for the devolved administration, has been buffeted by the anger of Labour activists who feel betrayed both by the deal and by the manner of its execution.

The coalition was sprung on Labour Assembly Members (AMs) only hours before it was announced to the press, and was effectively a fait d'accompli before it could be ratified by the Welsh Executive Committee – theoretically the party's governing body.

Rhodri Morgan justified the deal as a necessary expedient to attain the stability that had eluded the Assembly during eighteen months of minority government, following Labour's dismal showing in the May 1999 Welsh general election.

Three seats short of an overall majority in the 60-member body, Labour had continually needed to win

the support of at least one other party (usually Plaid Cymru) on an ad hoc basis in order to carry out its programme.

While Rhodri has subsequently painted this as an intolerable pressure, Labour activists expected their government to make the situation work, rather than seek a way out at the expense of tying themselves to a permanent arrangement with another party.

A motion from Islwyn CLP at the 2000 Welsh party conference sought explicitly to prohibit a coalition with the Liberal Democrats. While this reflected the unease of the membership, it was rejected by the conference at the behest of the leadership.

Moreover, a resolution subsequently passed by the Welsh Executive Committee specifically left open the possibility for a deal with the Liberals, while excluding any such arrangement with either Plaid Cymru or the Tories. Nevertheless, the deal came as a shock.

While four AMs reportedly voted against the deal at the crucial Labour group meeting, unease about it was a lot wider.



Rhodri's coalition: the wrong angle for Labour's core supporters

There was particular unhappiness about the award of the single most important portfolio – Economic Development – and the title of Deputy First Minister to Liberal leader Mike German.

As soon as the coalition was announced, German was hit by allegations of financial impropriety connected with his previous job at the Welsh Joint Education Committee

(WJEC).

While these charges seem to have been stoked up by long-term Labour opponents in local government, they have not been definitively dismissed, and could yet force his resignation and jeopardise the whole administration.

The first opportunity for backbench unhappiness to find expression was the elec-

tion of a new Deputy Presiding Officer (DPO – i.e., deputy speaker) following the elevation of Jane Davidson to the cabinet as Education Minister.

Having sacked Rosemary Butler to make way for Davidson, Rhodri had promised her the DPO's job as a consolation prize. When this became clear, AMs – including Labour backbenchers – were disgusted that the First Minister was seeking to dish out an independent, non-party political post not in his gift.

John Marek, the maverick Labour AM and MP for Wrexham, stood in opposition to Butler, to the chagrin of the cabinet and loyalist AMs, but with the support of Plaid Cymru, the Tories and a couple of Labour colleagues, including Ron Davies.

In the event, he won by 28 votes to 27, thereby showing Rhodri that he could not guarantee to get things his own way.

The willingness of backbenchers to stand up to the administration on more substantive political issues has been limited, however.

While seven of them defied the whip on a Tory amendment in favour of PFI (abstaining, instead of voting in favour as they had been instructed), they all fell into line to support a government statement in support of PFI a week later.

Hostility among the rank-and-file membership is beginning to express itself a lot more forcefully, as Rhodri discovered when he undertook a series of meetings with CLP activists, in belated recognition of their concerns about the coalition.

The first meeting, in Newport, was particularly hostile, with every speaker berating the First Minister:

for seeking an easy way out of Labour's minority position at the expense of the party's political independence; for failing to consult the membership about the deal; and for including in the Partnership Agreement a commitment to review electoral systems for local government.

This last concern, reflecting the determination of Labour councillors to defend their beleaguered position against the threat of PR, is the least progressive.

Justified hostility to Lib-Lab coalitionism has been given a more conservative twist by the likes of Llew Smith MP, who is 'left' on social and economic issues, but utterly reactionary on democracy and on the Welsh national question.

The news of the coalition brought Llew, like a vulture scenting fresh carrion, to the scene of the crime, ready to blame the betrayal on the original sins of devolution and PR.

Those, like Llew, who blame Labour's minority position on PR, and see the coalition as an inevitable consequence, are at best misguided and at worst disingenuous. Labour lost 'safe' seats like Islwyn and the Rhondda to Plaid Cymru on a first-past-the-post constituency poll.

Such results undoubtedly reflected hostility both to Blair's control-freakery – imposing Alun Michael on the Welsh party – and more importantly, the general political lurch to the right under Blair.

Plaid's successful appeal to the Welsh electorate on the basis of 'Old Labour' policies meant that there has always been a potential majority in the Assembly – should Labour want it – for progressive measures in the interests of the majority in Wales.

Instead, Plaid's increasing challenge to its hegemony has led Welsh Labour into a tribal hostility towards the 'Nats'. The most reactionary aspect of the coalition is that it reinforces these tendencies, embracing the Liberals as 'partners' while freezing out Plaid as the official opposition.

To his shame, Rhodri recommended the coalition to his party with the claim that it would expose the 'conservative forces' represented by Plaid and the Tories – an outrageous statement, considering that Plaid are clearly to the left of Labour on probably the majority of issues.

Socialists have nothing to gain from the Partnership Agreement. A positive, non-sectarian engagement between left activists in Labour and Plaid Cymru is an essential step towards developing a coherent socialist agenda for Wales.

The rank-and-file needs to begin to make this a reality, at the same time as stepping up opposition to the Lib-Lab project.

The credibility of the Assembly as a popular advance, and the legacy of the Welsh labour movement, are at stake.

By-elections show weakening of Scottish Labour

Campbell MacGregor

Tommy Sheridan, Scottish Socialist Party Member of the Scottish Parliament, spent a week in prison in December.

He was convicted earlier this year for his part in a mass protest against nuclear weapons outside the Trident submarine base at Faslane on the Gareloch (an arm of the Firth of Clyde) on the 14th of February.

He was given the alternative of 14 days imprisonment if he did not pay the fine, which he refused to do on the grounds that nuclear weapons are against international law.

He was invited to speak at an SWP social on the 15th December, and explained that he was going to give himself up at Dumbarton police station in 2 days'



Profiting from Labour weakness: SSP's Sheridan time. With time off for good behaviour, he was able to

speak at an SSP social on the 22nd, where he thanked the hundreds of people around the world who had sent him messages of support during his time in Greenock prison.

Although discussions are continuing, it now seems probable that the SWP in Scotland will join the SSP some time after its conference, which is due to take place in February.

Low turn-out

This follows the recent by-elections in Glasgow Anniesland and Falkirk West, which were marked both by a very low turn-out and the continuing rise of the SSP (7.1% and 5.1% of the vote respectively).

In both elections the Labour Party tried to duck a serious confrontation, refusing to take part in public debates; in Falkirk they even took the absurd decision to

hold the by-election 4 days before Christmas, on the shortest day of the year.

The working class in Scotland is still mainly supporting the Labour Party, but without enthusiasm. This is a sign of the weaknesses of the opposition parties.

Though the SSP is now generally accepted to be Scotland's 5th party, in the central belt I would say that it is now Scotland's 4th party (it has beaten the Liberal Democrats in most council by-elections in Scotland over the past year, and all but one of the Westminster and Scottish by-elections).

The SSP campaigned around the present state of transport in both by-elections. Falkirk has many commuters, as it is mid-way on the main Glasgow-Edinburgh rail line with what used to be fast trains to both cities, but these are

now running more slowly than the steam trains used to.

Nationalise

The SSP leafleted Falkirk High station several times calling for the re-nationalisation of the railways. Anniesland lies under the flight path for Glasgow Airport, a succession of low-flying aircraft is an everyday sight there; the SSP campaigned against the privatisation of air traffic control, since the possibility of another Hatfield in the skies is in many people's minds.

It also campaigned in Falkirk against a hospital closure, and in Anniesland against the sell-off of Glasgow's council housing stock to a housing association. SWP members took part in the SSP's election campaign in both by-elections.

Beginning of the end for
'social partnership' in PCS?

Left victory in main civil service union

Darren Williams

A rank and file socialist candidate, Mark Serwotka, has won the first-ever election for general secretary of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS), beating Blairite full-time official, Hugh Lanning, by 40,740 votes to 33,942.

This a stunning victory, particularly in view of the odds against Serwotka, who stood as an independent socialist against the chosen candidate of the bureaucracy, the serving Assistant General Secretary.

The result exceeded the best expectations of even Serwotka's closest supporters, and vindicated his decision to stand in the face of opposition from the 'official' left, which had wanted to give Lanning a free run against another right wing candidate, incumbent general secretary Barry Reamsbottom.

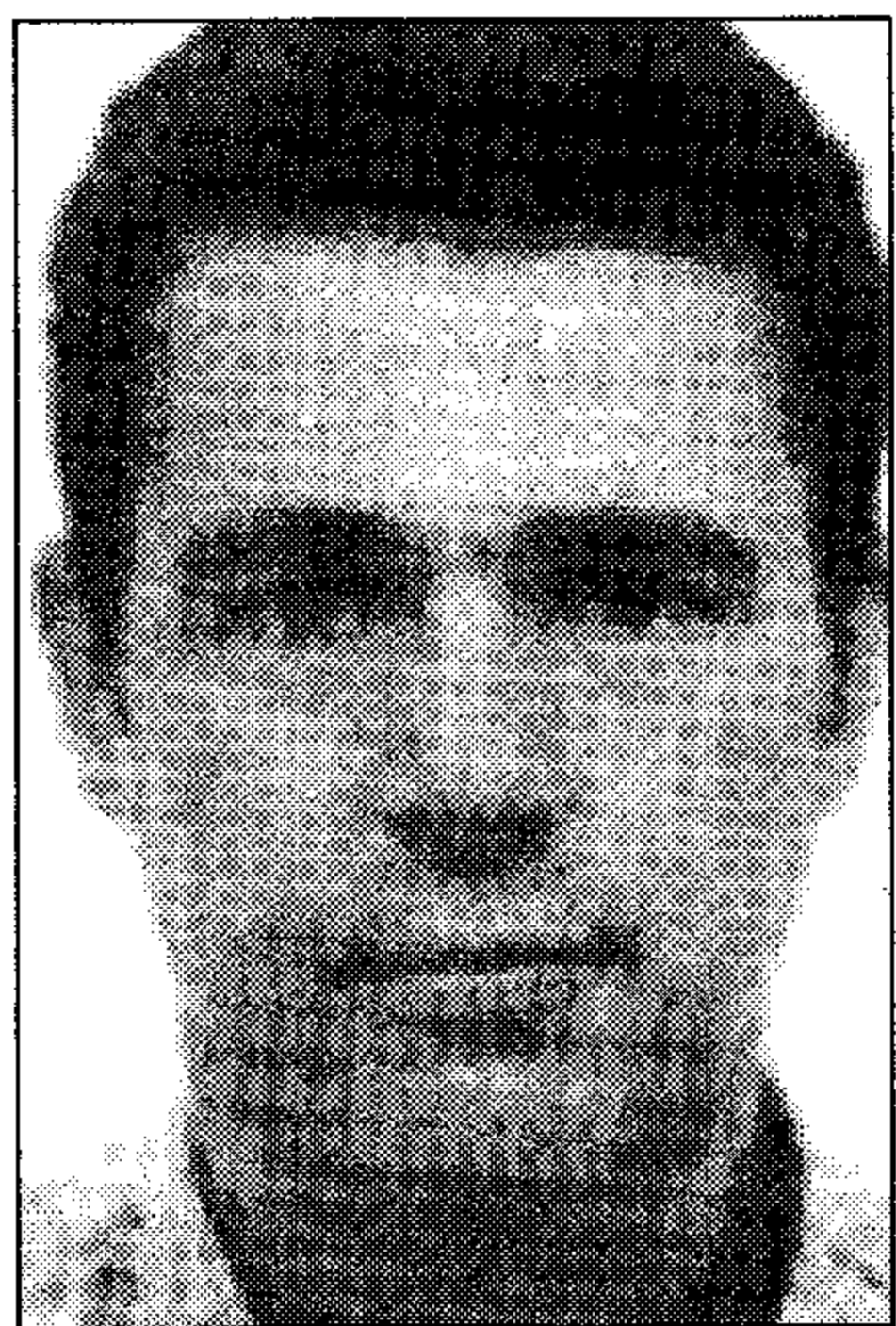
The contest became a straight left-right political fight when Reamsbottom was forced to stand down after failing to obtain sufficient branch nominations to qualify for inclusion on the ballot-paper.

The result puts the 260,000-strong civil service union in an exciting new situation: with a general secretary-elect who is committed to leading a fight against privatisation and performance-related pay, and for the restoration of national collective bargaining.

The significance of Serwotka's victory can only be fully appreciated in the context of government policy and industrial relations in the civil service over more than two decades.

The Thatcher government inherited a highly centralised service with huge, monolithic departments whose top officials remained loyal to a conception of public service that had remained largely unchanged since the Northcote-Trevelyan reforms of the nineteenth century brought the modern civil service into being.

These departments collectively employed a workforce numbering nearly three-quarters of a million, with common pay scales and conditions of service, organised in a number of unions which were based on grade but strong enough to overturn the Callaghan government's



Mark Serwotka

attempts to impose its incomes policy with a nation-wide strike in 1979.

Over the next 18 years, Tory governments mounted an offensive that left this picture transformed beyond recognition.

Each department was broken up into a number of autonomous agencies, run according to business criteria, with managers given ever-greater powers, and charged with making efficiencies by any means necessary.

By 1996, departments and agencies were given responsibility to set their own conditions of service and make their own pay arrangements - provided that these were based on performance-related pay (PRP).

A few agencies, including large chunks of the Ministry of Defence, were sold off to the private sector in their entirety, but almost all undertook the 'outsourcing' of specific functions to private contractors, whether by market testing, PFI or some other arrangement. 250,000 jobs were cut.

This whole process served a dual purpose: firstly, the 'slimming down' of the state, making government services pay for themselves as far as possible; and secondly, breaking a united workforce into smaller and smaller sections with increasingly differentiated pay and conditions, so that the capacity of workers to resist change was overcome.

The response of the unions to this offensive was to denounce each new initiative, but to do little about it in practice. During the 1980s, the largest union, CPSA, was run intermittently by the Militant-led Broad Left and there were a couple of national pay strikes.

After 1988, however, all the unions were run by right-wing 'new realist' leaders who argued that it was necessary to accept the new framework for industrial relations imposed by Thatcher's anti-union laws, and concentrate on lobbying politicians to moderate the worst excesses of government policy.

And while a series of mergers meant that, by 1998 one union - PCS - represented the majority of civil servants, there was no attempt to translate this unity into industrial strength. Instead, the bureaucrats rewrote the constitution so as to make themselves as unaccountable to members as possible.

Any hope that life would become easier under New Labour was swiftly dispelled.

Performance Related Pay (PRP) and the delegation of pay and conditions to departments and agencies stayed. The freeze on the public sector pay remained in place, as did the obligation to consider outsourcing in order to deliver efficiency savings.

The only difference was that now it was argued there was no ideological predisposition in favour of privatisation: only an open process to achieve 'best value'.

Despite the fact that this has still meant thousands of jobs being hived off to the private sector, the leadership of PCS has accepted the government's line uncritically.

Whereas they greeted the Tories' measures such as PFI by warning branches of the dangers and instructing them to organise campaigns (albeit with no support from the centre), they have now become tame propagandists for the New Labour line.

Branches are expected to co-operate enthusiastically with employers in introducing changes in the workplace, as these are now seen in the context of a new regime of 'social partnership' - supposedly the highest form of industrial relations, with a complete harmony of interests between employer and worker.

This line has been codified at the national level by the signing of a Partnership Agreement between the unions and the Cabinet Office. Among other things, this denies the unions the right to oppose government policies sanctified by electoral mandate - even if these threaten the interests of their members!

Mark Serwotka represents a complete break with this



The way it was. PCS must rebuild confidence of members to fight government attacks

legacy.

While others on the left have compromised with the bureaucracy and eschewed strike action in favour of more 'respectable' methods, he has remained true to his working-class background and his socialist beliefs.

An activist from the time he joined the civil service as a teenager, 21 years ago, Mark has led strikes in every branch to which he has belonged. His integrity and commitment have earned the grudging respect even of political opponents.

These are qualities he will need when he assumes the general secretaryship after a year-long handover period. Although the main socialist grouping, Left Unity, performed creditably in the last NEC elections, they have only five seats on the 46-member body, while the two right-wing factions - the Moderates and Membership First - have nineteen seats each (two independents and a Stalinist making up the difference).

The antagonism between the two right-wing factions has enabled Left Unity to hold the balance of power, forming ad hoc majorities on specific issues with one of the other groups (usually Membership First).

Once the Moderates get over their jubilation at Lanning's defeat, however, there is a danger that the two factions will bury their differences, recognising that they have a common interest in holding back Serwotka and working against a resurgence of the left.

It is therefore vital that the left demonstrates the single-mindedness necessary to win a majority in the 2002 NEC elections. The campaign must begin now.

There are a number of lessons to be learnt from Serwotka's victory.

Firstly, many activists -

most notably in the Socialist Party (SP) - have cause for embarrassment over their refusal to support a socialist candidate against the right wing from the outset. Given the SP's enthusiasm for standing candidates in state elections, their timidity here is ironic, to say the least. It is almost certain that this reflects their partial incorporation into bureaucratic machine-politics.

The presence of a handful of their members at HQ as full-time officials is likely to have strengthened the SP's inclination to work for the victory of the comparatively reasonable and inclusive Lanning, over the vindictive Reamsbottom.

By prioritising issues of organisational style over more fundamental questions of political leadership, however, the SP abstained from an opportunity to make the arguments for a change of direction with the membership.

Even had there been no chance of a socialist winning the election, it would still have been worth running, to use the election as an opportunity to address members.

Secondly, it is notable that the turnout in this election was 30% - a small but significant increase on the usual figure. This, coupled with the size of Serwotka's victory, suggests that the membership recognised the importance of this election, and the implications of the political differences between the candidates.

This may, in part, be a reflection of a slightly more militant mood within the working class generally - something that has been indicated by a few recent developments.

But undoubtedly, an important factor was Serwotka's own profile within his department (DSS) and agency (Benefits Agency) and within the civil service generally.

He is respected precisely because he has a record of

fighting on the issues that matter to members, not simply posturing at election times. If the left is to repeat his success, it must lead a consistent fight on the very issues that Mark raised in his campaign: 'partnership', pay, privatisation, democratisation of the union, etc.

Finally, it is not enough simply to condemn the SP and others who have failed to provide a strong lead on this and other issues.

There has been a tendency among those with better politics - notably the Socialist Caucus - to give up on Left Unity, instead of fighting for a better line within it. For all its faults, Left Unity is democratically organised, and with over 600 members, is far the biggest organised faction in the union. It will continue to be the core of the organised left.

Serwotka himself sums up these issues eloquently in his victory message: "Now is the time to fully unite the Left in PCS. I stood in this election because I was disappointed that Left Unity decided not to run a candidate."

"Left Unity is an important grouping in our Union, it should be the natural home for all socialists, and activists who wish to fight back. I call on all those who supported me in this campaign to join Left Unity, particularly the new generation of activists in PCS."

"By making itself more open and accessible to a new generation of activists, and to those who have previously refused to join, Left Unity can become an organising centre to ensure that the policies I fought for in this election can be delivered. It can also ensure that not only do we fight for these policies now, but that we can also go on and win the NEC elections in 2002."

"In order that the Left can urgently begin to discuss these issues I call on Left Unity to arrange a special conference, open to all, to ensure we maximise the new opportunities opened up by my victory."

New NHS cash sucked into private pockets

Harry Sloan

After three years of brutal Tory cash limits had brought mounting chaos to the NHS, Gordon Brown eventually relented in his March 2000 budget, and came forward with substantial new money. NHS spending as a share of Britain's GDP is set to rise by almost 2 percent by 2004 – a £13 billion a year increase on 1999.

But this boost to spending was delayed so long that much of the new money in the first year has been swallowed up in covering debts and bailing out the NHS across the current winter period.

Many health authorities are already looking to stand still or cut services next year, and even those with more than enough money are struggling to find staff they can recruit to enable services to expand.

This is a useful reminder that even the extra cash, belatedly paid out, is by no means a guarantee of New Labour's commitment to a public sector health service.

Instead, the controversial NHS Plan drawn up during the summer by Health Secretary Alan Milburn

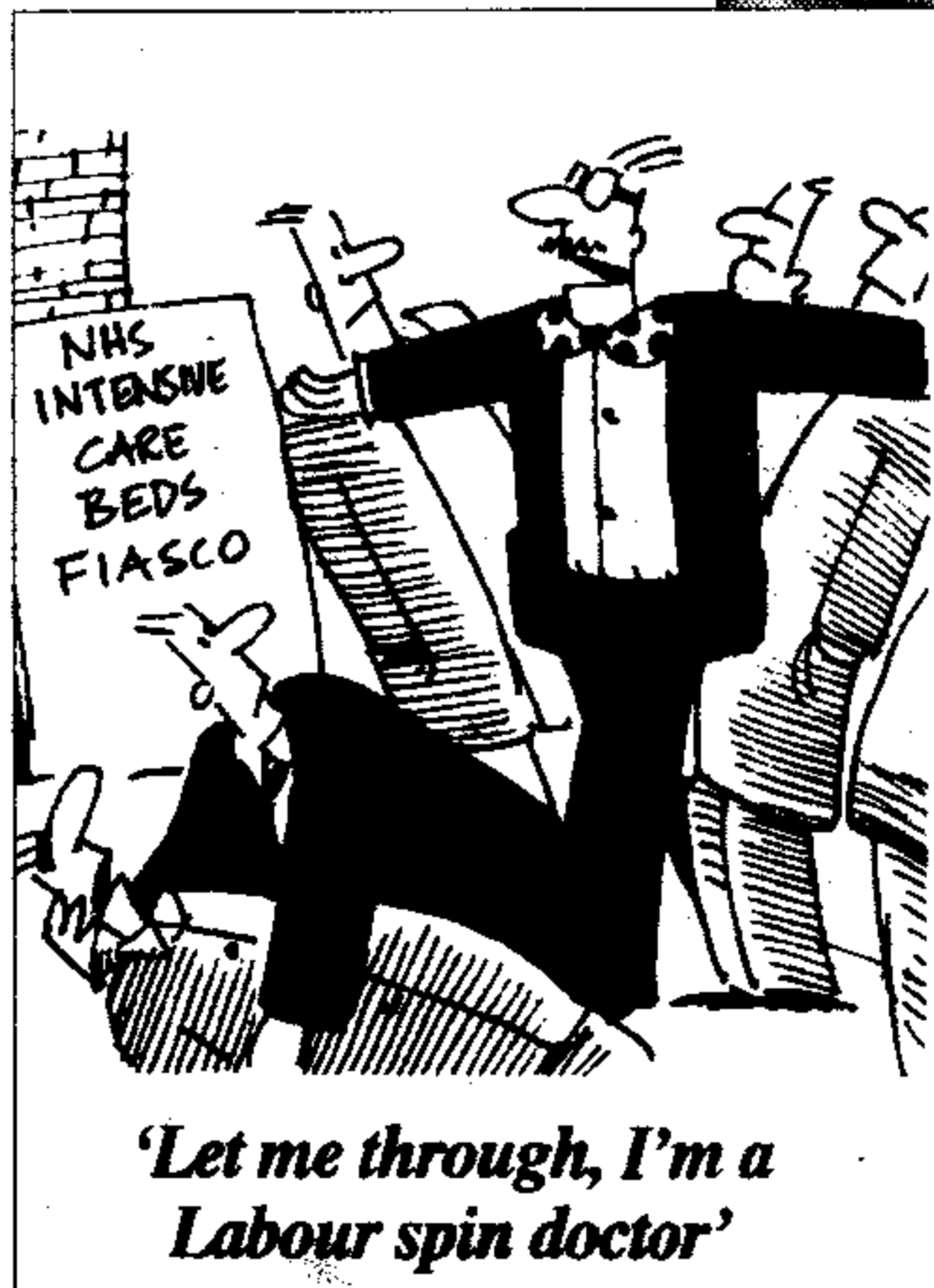
showed Blair's Labour government eagerly shovelling billions from the NHS into the coffers of the private sector, while morale among health workers hits rock bottom.

Labour backbenchers and Health Committee chair David Hinchcliff have become increasingly uneasy over the way the extra NHS cash is being spent, and the de facto privatisation of buildings and areas of care.

A new raft of 16 hospital building schemes to be paid for through the Tories' Private Finance Initiative (PFI) will push the total value of hospitals to be rented by the NHS to a staggering £3.9 billion, with more still to come. Milburn has already invited bids for 18 more new hospital projects, worth another £2.3 billion.

PFI deals lumber local NHS Trusts with an obligation to pay hefty rents and service charges – guaranteeing profits to the private sector – for the next 30 years, while liquidating existing NHS land and property assets.

This bonanza for private sector profiteers follows hard on the heels of Milburn's



controversial "Concordat" with the private medical industry: NHS Trusts which run out of beds to treat waiting list patients will now be expected to fork out the cash to send them for treatment in nearby private hospitals. (Obviously this policy will predominantly apply to the South East, where most private hospitals are.)

This will certainly put a smile on the cheeks of Britain's desperately unpopular and struggling private sector. Even after 21 years of Thatcherite policies have squeezed the NHS and forced up waiting lists, most private hospitals have been jogging along barely half full, for lack of sufficient rich and stupid patients: Milburn's cash injection is just what they wanted. No estimates have been



Andrew Ward

published on how much this half-baked scheme could cost the NHS, but there is no doubt that it is a sure-fire "lose-lose" situation for hard-pressed hospital chiefs.

Not only will the Trusts under the greatest pressure be obliged to find cash from their budgets to line the pockets of the private operators, but they will also see vital staff lured away from front-line jobs in the NHS to do the work.

Milburn even boasted that "the doctors will be NHS doctors, and by and large the nurses will be NHS nurses."

They certainly will: the private sector trains no staff at all, but never scruples to poach nursing and medical staff trained by and for the NHS.

Another aspect of the "Concordat" is supposed to be increased use of private nursing homes for older patients, to relieve pressure on NHS beds across the winter period.

Unfortunately for Milburn this coincides with the first signs of a substantial run-down in nursing home places, as profit-hungry proprietors shut up shop, arguing that they are not being paid enough by social services and health authorities.

The result is likely to be more hospital beds "blocked", and more queues on trolleys.

As the winter begins, a BBC survey showed that around a third of NHS Trusts are expecting to cut or cancel waiting list treatment. Unusually, this time around the main problem is not money, but problems spending the £630m allocated to "winter pressures" after Gordon Brown's budget.

More staff are needed, but pitiful rates of pay have made it increasingly difficult to recruit more nurses.

A miserable 3.2 percent pay offer for most nurses and professional staff in 2001, coupled with an even more miserly deal for most lower-paid NHS support staff, seems to underline the government's refusal to confront the growing problems of attracting and retaining suitable workers to keep services running.

Tony Blair's latest cheap-skate wheeze – a revamped NHS nurse "bank", and the promise of subsidised housing or a feeble £600 a year hand-out to nurses in London and high-cost areas – will be seen as a patronising irrelevance by NHS nurses. They don't want tied cottages: they just want a wage big enough to live on!

PFI schemes should be scrapped at once, and some of Gordon Brown's unspent surplus should be made available as a new pool of NHS capital for a redevelopment of hospitals, mental health and community services.

Existing PFI hospitals must be nationalised and reintegrated with the NHS, along with all of the privatised domestic, laundry, catering and other services, which have been handed over to contractors.

Means-testing for care of the elderly should also be scrapped, and private nursing home chains run by major corporations should be nationalised. Large local nursing homes should also be taken over by the NHS, which, working with local councils – should take back the responsibility for the financing and provision of long-term care for the frail elderly – free at point of use and funded from taxation.

Where necessary the NHS should build or remodel existing buildings to create additional nursing home accommodation.

Dudley strikers: out seven times since August

Dudley strikers battle on

Danny MacIntosh

WHILE families across the country picked out Christmas turkeys, 600-plus Dudley hospital workers were preparing for another round of strike action over Christmas – and beating back attempts by UNISON officials to cook their goose.

In the run-up to the strike UNISON's negotiators recommended a deal to the unions Health Group Executive that would have called off the strike, in return for a 3-month period of "negotiation" on the best way to hand over NHS staff to PFI contractors – coupled with a UNISON pledge to take no action against the outcome of these talks.

Such a deal would have squandered all of the momentum and political impact of the seven rounds of solid strike action by Dudley staff since the summer.

In the event the deal, proposed by government negotiators, was rejected by the strikers, and has now been withdrawn. Strike action restarted on 13 December and lasted over Christmas and the new year.

UNISON's NEC lent its support for a regional day of action called by the union's West Midlands region on 20 December.

The Dudley fight centres on an £80m plan for a new privately-funded (PFI) hospital, which would not only result in a loss of beds, but axe jobs and hand hundreds more NHS support staff over to private contractors.

The tenacious stand by such a large number of UNISON members has put their national officers on the spot, and they have made repeated attempts to end the dispute as the year drew to a close.

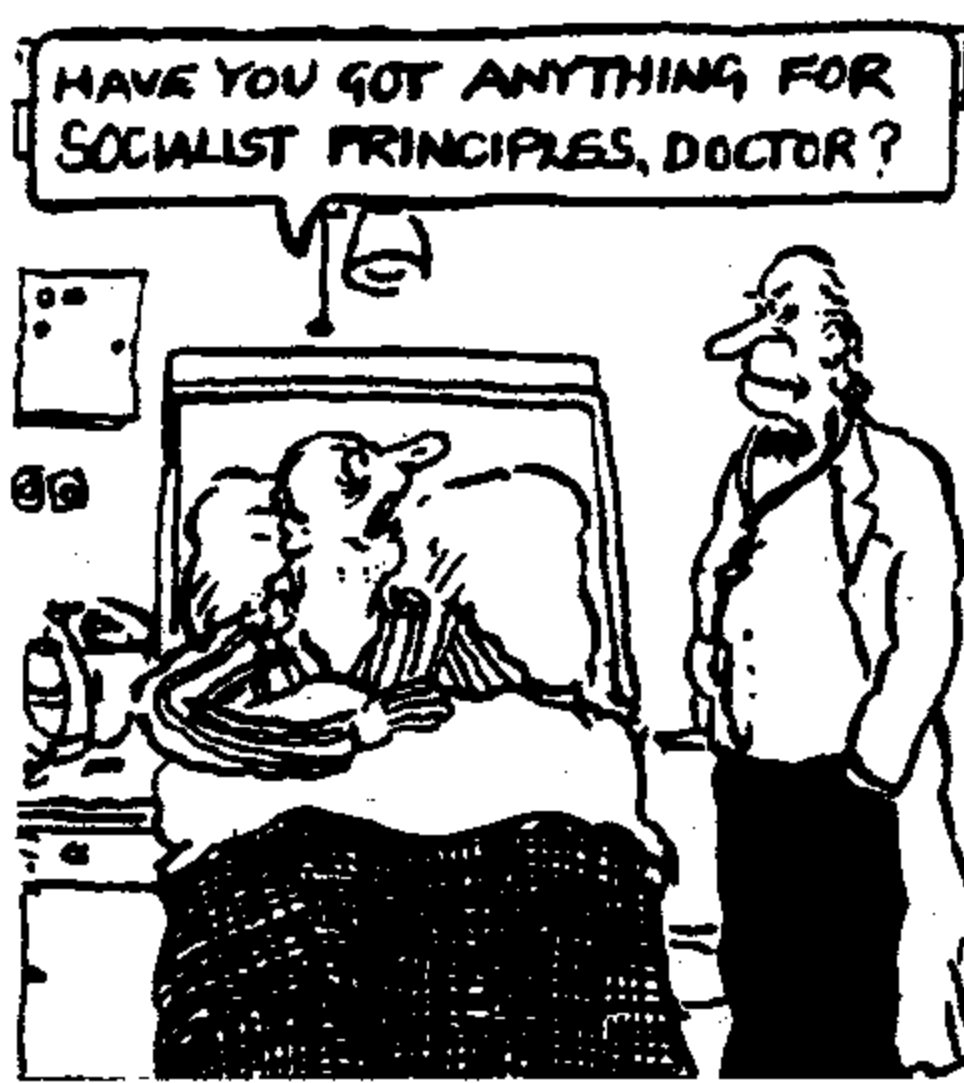
Donations and messages of support should be sent to: UNISON Dudley Group of Hospitals, Union Office, Wordsley Hospital, Stream Road Stourbridge DY8 5QX

McPlan exposes Milburn's muddle

Health service chiefs and Labour ministers in Scotland have insisted for some time that their policies were not just "Alan Milburn in a kilt".

Indeed if you can put that unsavoury image out of your mind, the new proposals embodied in Scotland's new NHS plan – A Plan for Action, A Plan for Change – offer a welcome contrast to the half-baked and reactionary proposals south of the border.

The Scottish plan involves scrapping NHS Trusts, and taking bold steps to eradicate the Tory internal market system. Gone, at a stroke, is the baffling proliferation of Primary Care Groups, Primary Care Trusts, NHS Trusts and health authorities set up by Milburn since 1997 in England. Gone with them are at least 100 pointless "non-executive" quango members. Instead Scotland will see the reintegration of the planning and provision of care under the control of 15 Health Boards,



in a step hailed by UNISON as the "renationalisation of the NHS".

NHS Trusts, pushed out of the loop of decision making by Alan Milburn, and sidelined in favour of extra powers for unaccountable GPs, will have seats on the new health boards, along with local authorities.

There are other gains compared with Milburn's feeble and ineffective structure: while Labour plans to axe the "patients' watchdog" bodies in England, the Community Health Councils, the Scottish plan would retain and even strengthen the equivalent local health councils.

There will be a special expert working group on improving care for the elderly in Scotland. A vital first step towards this will be funding free home care for older people discharged from hospital, and Scotland's First Minister Henry McLeish has even floated the idea of implementing the full proposals of

Labour's Royal Commission on Care of the Elderly, and scrapping means-tested charges for continuing care.

Already questions are being asked as to whether Gordon Brown will allow his Scottish colleagues to spend the extra £110m a year required to implement this policy, which the Treasury has effectively blocked in England.

Of course Scotland's NHS has for many years been better funded than health care south of the border, and waiting lists and maximum waiting times – currently 12 months – are significantly shorter than England (18 months). The new plan would reduce Scotland's maximum wait to just 9 months by 2004.

Of course the plan has its flaws: it could still be much more democratic, and offer a better deal to health workers and patients.

But the Scottish NHS plan is living proof that even a reformist New Labour government could have come up with something better than the abortive health reforms in England, and – along with student fees – it is a good reason to consider emigrating to the north.

Most of the British media hailed the EU's Intergovernmental Conference (IGC), held in Nice from December 9-13, as a failure.

The spin had it that Blair had held the line in maintaining Britain's veto on domestic tax and social security.

The summit had been a shambles, failing on its key objectives.

This was an effective spin, but it was an illusion, reports ALAN THORNETT.

The success of Nice for big capital cannot be measured against its failure to bring tax and social security under Qualified Majority Voting. That was always unlikely at this stage. It is to be re-discussed 2004 anyway, with more determination behind it.

In fact Nice was successful in its principal objectives. It produced a new Treaty of Nice (which requires domestic endorsement) which builds on Maastricht and Amsterdam, and marks another major step towards a European super-state – the central objective of the European ruling class since the Single European Act of the mid-1980s.

The aim is a single economic and political entity under which European capital can more effectively exploit the working class and compete more strongly with Japan and the Pacific rim and the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) dominated by the USA. The stakes, therefore, are high.

The anti-EU *Daily Telegraph* (December 11) assessed Nice this way:

"Make no mistake. Nice is another federal treaty. Listening to the BBC, you might have got the impression that, apart from some wonkery about voting weights, the summit has really turned on Tony Blair's heroic defence of our veto over taxation and social security.

"But, even before the publication of the final text, we know that the summit has seen giant strides towards closer integration in four areas: the establishment of a European military force; the adoption of a European constitution (dressed up as a "Charter of Fundamental rights"); the extension of EU competence into several home affairs matters; and the general removal of the national veto".

The pro-EU *Economist* (December 16) assessed it this way:

"Peer past the verbal sludge and fudge, bad blood and bruised egos, and you can now see – thanks to four days of argument amongst the EU's 15 leaders – an imposing new shape rising on the global stage. ... This is surely a cause for celebration. Whatever its imperfections the Nice summit was a success".

Certainly Nice was the longest and most fraught EU summit yet, with bouts of bare knuckle in-fighting amongst the delegations – all but two of which represented social democratic governments. They were split into two camps, the big countries and the small countries.

But this conflict simply reflected the enormity of the task involved: to prepare the EU for enlargement – a major new stage in the development of the EU – and at the same time continue the process of integration, centralising the EU's decision making processes, and consolidating its institutions.

At stake in Nice was who will be the real decision makers in the EU under enlargement, the first round of which is due in four years time. There was bound to be feathers flying over that.

If EU structures were not reformed, enlargement would shift the balance of power towards the smaller countries by diluting the influence of the biggest and most politically powerful countries. This was unacceptable to the big countries, who have long wanted a major shift in the other direction. And that is exactly what they used Nice, and the preparation for enlargement, to achieve.

Enlargement to the east, unavoidably posed with the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, will expand the EU from 15 to 27 member states. Of the 12 applicant members accepted for negotiations (some in 1997 and others in 1999) 10 are from former Eastern Block countries, plus Malta and Cyprus.

Turkey has been knocking at the door and has been granted applicant status, but it has



EU enlargement plan puts power in the hands of the big countries



In the driving seat: French President Chirac

not been accepted for negotiations. Enlargement on this scale will create an EU stretching from Ireland in the west to Bulgaria in the east, and from Sweden in the north to Malta in the south.

Enlargement will create by far the biggest single trading block in the world, with a population of nearly 500 million – twice the size of the USA. But it's a difficult process, and success is not guaranteed – even given the massive political will behind it.

Nice opened up a critical four year period for the EU – from now until the summer of 2004 – when the first round of applicants – Estonia, Slovenia, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary and Malta – are due to join. A "Super Summit" will then be held (under the Dutch presidency) to promote a "deeper and wider" discussion on the future of the EU – to map out the next stage of integration.

The role of the EU in the global economy

Nice has further strengthened the fundamental character of the EU as a bosses' Europe based on a neo-liberal, privatised, deregulated model, designed to increase the profitability of the employers, increase the power of multi-national capital, maximise flexibility in the work-place, and run down the welfare state.

It is a Europe controlled by unelected bankers and the so-called stability pact, designed to keep government borrowing permanently below the 3% of GDP ceiling set by the Maastricht convergence criteria.

It is a reactionary, anti-working class project, which becomes more reactionary as it moves towards its goal of a federal super state – something it needs if it is going to challenge its main rivals in today's globalised economy.

The US and Japanese ruling classes have advantages which the existing EU, as a glorified trading block with multiple decision making centres, cannot match. Tokyo and Washington dominate and politically lead their power blocks in a way that even a unified Germany cannot do within the EU. They have a single leadership, totally dominant currencies, lower social spending, and multinationals even more powerful than those in Europe.

It is the need to resolve these problems which lies behind the drive for a European super-state.

The successful introduction of the Euro – at the moment uniquely a currency without a state – is a prerequisite to that. But public opinion remains deeply divided on it in most countries of the EU, as can be seen by the recent referendum in Denmark.

But the Euro is not as weak as often argued

– at least its weakness is not chiefly reflected in its current weakness against the pound. That has been created by the strength of the dollar, and is likely to change substantially as the US economy moves towards recession.

The Euro, in any case, cannot be allowed to fail if the possibility of transcending the established nation states and creating a truly European ruling class with its own institutional framework or state is to be a reality.

And it has massive backing behind it. The driving force behind the EU, as well as its neoliberal policies, is the European Round Table of Industrialists. This consists of 47 European based multi-nationals, which include Nestlé, Unilever, GKN, BP, Amoco, Renault, Marconi, ICI, Olivetti, BT, Pilkington and Fiat. They have long shaped the development of the EU behind the scenes.

The EU today is an integral part of an increasingly globalised world economy, which has given a renewed impetus to the formation of large, competing trading blocks and intensified global competition between ever larger multinational companies.

Globalisation is an integral part of a world increasingly dominated by international capitalist institutions such as the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the World Bank. These institutions are the driving force of the world-wide neo-liberal offensive against the working class, promoting economic and financial deregulation, privatisation and labour flexibility.

The key decisions at Nice

The Nice summit agreed to extend Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) in the Council of Ministers – the law-making body of the EU – into 29 new areas. Currently about two thirds of the Council's decisions are subject to QMV.

Fortunately attempts to make trade, educa-

tion, cultural, and audio-visual services subject to QMV failed. But trade in services and intellectual property rights were brought under OMV. This is a major development. The proposal is to modify Article 133 of the Amsterdam treaty, where QMV already exists for trade in goods, to include trade in services and intellectual property rights.

This could open the door to the liberalisation and deregulation of services throughout the EU within the framework of the World Trade Organisation and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). What could not be achieved in the form of the OECD's Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) can now be smuggled in through via the EU.

Once this change is carried through, multinational and other companies from anywhere within the EU, will be able to bid for local services with no local restrictions or preferences. It will also open the EU to liberalisation in trade in intellectual property rights, including the wider privatisation of natural resources, including human genes, through the patenting process.

The summit also agreed a radical reallocation of votes between the member states on the Council of Ministers, for implementation once the process of enlargement starts.

Under this the biggest four – Germany, France, Italy and the UK – get 30 votes each and Spain 28. After that Holland gets 12, Greece, Belgium and Portugal 11, Sweden and Austria 9, Denmark, Finland and Ireland 7, and Luxembourg 4. Consequently any four of the biggest five can out-vote the rest.

Of the applicant countries Poland will join the big league with 28 votes. Of the rest Rumania will get 13, the Czech Republic and Hungary 11, Slovakia 7, Lithuania 5, and Latvia, Slovenia, Estonia, Cyprus 4 and Malta with 3.

These changes tripled the votes of the big countries, and mean that after expansion the big six will be able to out-vote the other 21 EU member states.

These changes in voting allocation go alongside a change to the "qualified" part of the majority voting – that part which is weighting according to population. Under these changes a vote on the Council of Ministers would have to represent 62% of the EU's population before it is valid.

This gives the big countries considerable clout beyond their voting allocations. It means that any three of them could block a proposal by the rest of the 27. It was the introduction of this rule which persuaded Germany to drop its demand for additional votes to reflect its huge 82 million population.

The weight of the big countries was also increased by changes proposed in the allocation of Commissioners. After 2007 the size of the Commission will be capped at 20, and not all countries will have a commissioner: it will be the smaller countries which lose out.

The allocation of seats in the toothless European Parliament was also changed towards the big powers. Germany gets 99 seats and the other big powers 74. The rest are on a scale down to Malta with 5.

All this caused bitter conflict at the summit. "Stitched up" was the term some of the smaller countries used about it. The Portuguese Prime Minister called it an "institutional coup d'état". Irish premier Bertie Ahern apparently blew his top, seeing it as the end of a veto which had protected Ireland's low business taxes (e.g. 10% corporation tax as against the UK's 30%).

Unprintable

The comments of Wim Kok, the Dutch PM, were said to have been unprintable. Costas Simitis, the Greek PM, accused France (who as the Presidency drafted the proposals) of trying to create a "director of the big countries" – which was exactly what France was trying to do, with the full support of the other big powers of course.

So it was mission accomplished. Power in the EU would now be concentrated in the hands of the biggest and most powerful countries, most importantly Germany, France and the UK the key European imperialist countries, who can run it in their own interests.

The perspective is to create a political leadership which can operate on the basis of its



The protests have followed the process of EU integration around the cities of Europe: above French protestors on the streets of Cologne

own European and global political and imperialist needs. The significance of this development can hardly be overstressed.

The other issue on the agenda at Nice was the proposed Charter of Fundamental Rights. Its provisions fall short of the existing situation in many of the member states, and it does not include key rights such as the right to a job, to housing, to a pension, to a minimum income, or protection against sacking or redundancy.

The significance of the Charter, however, is in its role as a fore-runner of a EU constitution – another essential requirement for the development of the structures of a super-state.

Fortunately, the Charter was blocked from becoming a part of the treaty. Unfortunately

challenge to NATO. It will be there to act on behalf of the USA's principal economic rival.

The US is insisting that a European Rapid Reaction Force does not build up its own military bureaucracy. Fat chance of that!

Chirac explicitly called for the force to have a command structure independent of NATO. William Cohen, the outgoing US Defence Secretary, said that "an ill-conceived EU defence force could reduce NATO to a relic". The Bush administration is not going to soften that line.

Also the relationship between the EU Rapid Reaction Force and NATO is complicated by the fact that not all EU members are members of NATO: Austria, Finland, Ireland and Sweden are not. And not all European members of NATO are members of the EU. Six are not – including Turkey which has the second biggest army in NATO.

Nor can Turkey be ignored, since it is a geopolitical linchpin in Europe, and a powerful member of NATO. Turkey, currently excluded negotiations because of embarrassment over its human rights record, is insisting that it is not frozen out of EU-led military operations either at the planning stage or on the battle field.

The proposal is that Turkey could be a part of any EU-led operation which drew on NATO equipment, but would not if it did not.

Ultimately, however, the Defence Force will be established and developed since it is difficult to have a super-state without an army, and thus the ability to wage war in defence of its own interests. Particularly when it is a super-state which, after enlargement, will have external borders in the east stretching from Lithuania to Belarus, and Ukraine to Turkey and the Balkans.

The conditions the new applicants face when they join

Enlargement will not just change the size of the EU, it will change its social character. Although the EU currently has 62m people living below the poverty line, this will escalate dramatically with enlargement. The richest new applicant, Slovenia, has a stan-

dard of living roughly in line with Portugal – the poorest of the existing members.

David Piachaud (*Guardian* December 1) makes the point:

"At present about 17% of the EU's population is poor, ranging from 9.4% in Denmark to 33.3% in Portugal... Among the candidates in the likely first round of enlargement the average [poverty level] is 69% and among the second-round countries 83%. Full enlargement would almost double the proportion of people living in poverty from 17% to 30% and that poverty would be heavily concentrated – 55% – in the 10 candidate countries".

EU membership will not drag the peoples of the east out of such poverty. It is more likely that the differences will be structured into the expanded EC – with the people of the east providing a cheap labour zone within it.

They will have little chance of tapping into the EU's cohesion fund (currently directed at poor member states) or the regional fund (currently directed at poor regions). Before the new entrants get in to the EU, these funds are likely to be put beyond their reach.

The EU budget has been fixed up to the year 2006. It contained no significant increase in finances to deal with enlargement. Cohesion funding and regional funding were therefore be reassessed in order to deal with enlargement – and the existing member states (Greece, Portugal, Spain and Ireland) and regions (including Wales) currently receiving such funds could also lose out.

Under the current proposals, entitled Agenda 2000, the present five categories of regional assistance will be reduced to three: Objective 1 – the poorest regions, with a GDP less than 75% of the EU average. Objective 2 – industrial and rural areas with unemployment above the EU average. Objective 3 – replaces the EU social fund, aiming to tackle high unemployment, combat poverty, anticipate economic change and promote opportunities for women.

Funding for Agenda 2000 will only be automatic for Objective 1 areas. Areas which lose Objective 1 status are having their funding phased out over six years; those that lose Objective 2 status will have their funding phased out over four years.

The common agricultural (CAP) policy (the biggest single EU spending) may also be changed to the disadvantage of the new appli-



Carving up the votes: Blair (right) and Germany's Chancellor Schroder

this was due to the opposition of Blair, who opposed it from the point of view that it gave too much away to the working class!

He also succeeded in removing from it any reference of the right to strike or protection against unfair dismissal.

The proposed European Rapid Reaction Force was not on the formal agenda at Nice, but it was dealt with just the same. It is linked to the development of a European police force and a European prosecution service.

100,000 personnel (army, navy, air force and special forces) are to be made available, along with 400 aircraft and 100 ships, by the member states to be used under the command of the EU. Germany, Britain and France will provide the bulk of the personnel and equipment.

Its significance, however, is not in the initial size, but in the principal of establishing an EU army. Alain Richard the French defence minister, for example, made it clear that he saw it as the first stage towards a fully-fledged EU army.

Blair, facing jibes from Hague ("if it looks like an elephant and sounds like an elephant", it probably is an elephant"), argued that it is not an EU army, that its components will remain under national control, and it will not challenge NATO or change its role. But that is a difficult line to sustain. Creating an armed force on behalf of a political entity of 500,000 people is clearly a highly strategic decision.

The US is divided on it. It wants to reduce its share of the costs of European "security", but a European armed force is ultimately a



Workers solidarity across Europe: contingents from many countries march to save jobs at Renault

cants. The idea that Poland, with a huge agricultural population, could be brought into the CAP without a major restructuring of EU finances to find the money is excluded.

Detailed criteria have been laid down for the new applicants before they can join. They must have a strong market economy and stable institutions that guarantee democracy, the rule of law and human rights. (That rules a good chunk of the existing members out, including Britain!) And they must have adapted their laws to comply with 35,000 pages of EU legislation (known as *acquis*) and have the ability to implement such legislation.

If this is serious, it is not credible – unless enlargement is put into a completely different time table that the one currently set – and that poses serious political consequences for EU strategists. Much of it however involves subjective judgements, and if those who call the shots want a way round it, they will find one.

If enlargement goes ahead with the current differentials in poverty levels – and that seems inevitable since such differences cannot be redressed in the next four years – the issue of the free movement of people within the EU after enlargement, under the Schengen agreement, will be writ large.

The rich countries of the EU are unlikely to agree to open their borders to the poor people of the east. Some are already talking about being “swamped” after enlargement. Right-wing populists and neo-fascists from Haider in Austria to the Vlaams Blok in Belgium and the Northern League in Italy are whipping up racism around the issue, talking of “hordes” of impoverished people streaming in from the east and taking all the jobs.

In practice the external boundaries of Fortress Europe are likely to remain where they are – between the poor countries of the east and the rich countries of the west. This is not easy but may be justified by some kind of ‘transitional’ arrangement with new conditions written into the treaty which triggers the process of enlargement.

The EU has been developing into a two-tier Europe: those inside the Euro-zone and those outside it. This has been formalised at Nice, with the decision that any eight countries (minimum) can go ahead as an “inner core”. But enlargement creates another tier; the poor countries of the east.

However the final proposals shape up in 2004, one thing is clear enough: the new applicants are going to be offered a very raw deal indeed. And the assumption seems to be that the populations of the applicant countries will accept a raw deal.

This may not be so. It will be true of the governments, but not necessarily the people. It is true that at the present time that a lot of people in the ex-Stalinist states countries are trying to get into the richer west. But these countries have to have a referendum before they can join, and the outcome of that in some countries is not so certain.

In the Czech Republic, for example, support for EU membership has dropped from three quarters to just over a half. It may be that people will want to hold out for a better deal, or that they may have seen more of the realities of the EU as its neo-liberal polices go deeper.

None of the existing members of the EU are likely to hold a referendum on Nice or on enlargement – although some will be under pressure to do so. But Nice has to be ratified by the national Parliaments and there will be opposition around that.

The EU and integrationism have little popular support in many of the member states, apart from the poorest ones which receive cohesion funds. The Danish referendum was a shot across the bows for those who are marching down the road towards a federal super-state – particularly since it rejected entering the single currency in the teeth of opposition from every major political party and all the mainstream media. Nor was the vote based on British Tory-type nationalism, but on a genuine fear of a loss of democratic control.

The need is to build an opposition to the EU and the Euro which rejects completely the nationalist agenda of the Tory right.

We need a position which recognises that to oppose the EU and the single currency is also to defend the working class against the ravages of the neo-liberal offensive and the global economy as it is reflected through the institutions of the EU, which are designed to increase the rate of exploitation and destroy welfare and social provision.



Steps to unite Europe's anti-capitalist left

Greg Tucker

AT THE BEGINNING of December, preparing for the Nice counter-summit the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR, French section of the Fourth International) acted as host to the second European conference of the anti-capitalist left. Around forty representatives of left parties and united left formations from eight countries attended the Paris meeting. Groups from three other states sent apologies.

Building on relationships built at its first meeting in Lisbon, the conference represents a further step forward in bringing together all those across Europe who see the need for a united opposition to capital's plan for Europe and want to struggle for another Europe – as the conference statement put it, “social, democratic, peaceful and based on workers' solidarity – a democratic socialist society”.

The conference delegations essentially brought together the experiences of left unity across Europe – broad united left formations such as the Red Green Alliance from Denmark, the Left Block from Portugal, the Red Electoral Alliance from Norway, and the Socialist Alliance from England, with broad left parties/groups such as the Scottish Socialist Party and Solidarité from Switzerland and far left groups involved in united projects, notably the French LCR and the British SWP.

The Lisbon meeting had essentially been a “getting to know you” gathering. Paris has moved things forward with a useful discussion on the nature of the European Union – from broad principles to the specifics being discussed in Nice. This led to a joint statement being issued.

It is clear that across the con-

tinental of Europe there is a range of positions taken by the left on how you respond to the existence of the EU.

Representatives from some organisations (particularly Britain and northern states) explained that they were part of a “withdrawal” movement in their own countries and that for them the break up of the EU was an option to fight for.

Others argued that for them the EU was an established reality, you had to fight for its radical transformation – not its reform but its replacement by a new truly democratic European unity.

Others, from states currently outside the EU, argued that it would be tactically to their advantage if their state were to be included in the EU. They took the view that, in or out, they were affected by EU policies and the overall effects of globalisation, and that it would be easier to fight these policies from within.

These broad tactical differences did not get in the way of moving forward on what did unite the meeting – an understanding that fighting the policies of European capital needs a united Europe-wide response from the left – “a joint struggle against the actual policies and institutions of the EU”.

Concretely, the conference attacked the new stage in the history of the EU opened up in Nice. It pledged itself to oppose the rise of the EU's military power, represented by the creation of a European armed force.

It opposed the form of expansion to the East, through economic conquest of Eastern Europe, calling instead for voluntary unity of the whole continent through working class solidarity and co-operation. In particular this means fighting for

“the free movement of people... open immigration into the EU and ... the right to full citizenship”.

The meeting noted that EU policy is pushing forward the objectives of the WTO and pledged to oppose the institutional changes that would enhance this process, as part of a rising struggle against the impact of globalisation.

And it opposed the introduction of the “EU Charter of Fundamental Rights”, pointing out that, far from being a progressive statement, this charter is a radical setback, a step backwards from most national

and international legislation which will be used to hold back advances in some states and roll back existing rights in others.

The conference could have discussed much more.

How practically do we actually work together to achieve our objectives? Are the ways we can learn from and build on the cooperation which developed between the British SWP and the French LCR in Nice?

Is there room for joint electoral work at the level of the European Parliament?

What can we do to build active solidarity between workers in struggle?

What are our policies towards existing Europe-wide institutions of the workers' movement, ETUC etc.?

But as French LCR MEP Alain Krivine pointed out at the press conference that closed the meeting, “we are still at the beginning of a process.”

What was agreed was that the debate must continue. It is planned to reconvene in six months in the run up to the Gotenborg summit and in Brussels again six months later. These further discussions must take the process still further forward, looking at these practical issues.

Forward to Genoa!

The main target for the anti capitalist movement after Nice will be the G8 summit in Genoa in July. Certainly that will be the target of the newly formed “Drop the Debt” campaign – one of the initiatives to come out of Jubilee 2000.

But Genoa will be far from the only focus for protest over the months to come.

The World Trade Organisation, international trade ministers and European Union representatives will meet in Geneva in March to try to thrash out the next stage of the General Agreement on Trade in Services, or Gats.

Already the forces of opposition – unions and environmentalists – are mobilising, which is hardly surprising because what lies at stake

under Gats is the prospect of health and education provision throughout Europe being forcibly opened up to the private sector.

In developing countries, Gats will enable overseas companies to supply water, electricity and public transport projects in place of state-controlled monopolies.

Geneva will concentrate on reaching international agreement on which service sectors will be offered for liberalisation – the so-called ‘bottom up approach’.

It is impractical to mobilise seriously for every international meeting, and March is not very far off now.

But trade unionists should attempt to organise some major events in this country to make clear our opposition to this neo-liberal agenda.

Socialist Outlook



LCR contingent clouded in tear gas. (Bottom right) Slovenian marchers

Wednesday 6 December:

Nice Diary

GOT UP before 5am to drive to Luton airport for 6am. It was obvious at check in that this was no standard flight to Nice – four women in front of me who I didn't know definitely looked like demonstrators.

By the time we boarded the plane it was clear that around two thirds of us were going to the march. Someone brought maps of Nice and the programme for the next few days round the plane – it was certainly the first time I'd seen a plane leafleted.

Arrived in Nice and its raining! It was warmer when we left London. We get a couple of cabs to the hotel. Friendly and sympathetic taxi driver tells us that the town is empty – people have been told to get out of the city before we arrive. The streets are deserted – it's a strange feeling..

Arrive at the hotel and book in. Go and get coffee and breakfast and then off to the ATTAC photo call which involves half a dozen people diving into the sea with banners. It's still raining, but it's warmed up, and there seems to be a lot of press. Get some snaps myself.

Wander through the old town, which is picturesque and quiet. Get some lunch, buy an umbrella and head for the demonstration. We think it starts at 2 but meet the head of the march about 3 kilometres from the Assembly point – obviously it started at 1pm.

Walk back to the Assembly point by the side of the demonstration, stopping to draw breath and take photos every so often. It's an extraordinary sight.

Continental demonstrations are so different from those here: virtually everyone carries an individual flag as well as the lead banners for each contingent and then some contingents also have hats or jackets in their union colours as well.

Then there are flares and firecrackers and vans with loud hailers.

There are no police marshalling us, though when we pass the area of the conference centre there are police on every street corner. Only one or two may be visible, but I'm sure there are far more hidden round the cor-



TUC message in Nice: isn't it time they told Tony Blair?

ner in case of any trouble.

Every European country you can think of is represented. Huge contingents from Italy – I reckon more than 10,000 – and from Spain and Portugal, around 5,000 each.

A number of Eastern European countries – Poland, Slovenia, Hungary have contingents that are at least 500 strong. And then there are the French – probably about half of this mammoth demonstration.

By now we have reached the assembly point. The CGT contingent takes more than one and a half hours to pass us, then smaller but still sizeable contingents from the CFTD and FO.

Brits

Oh, did I forget to say anything about the British? Well I did find the TUC contingent – which must have had all of 50 people in it – though there were probably around 500 of us altogether, in different parts of this huge march.

We finally leave the assembly point just after 5pm – more than 4 hours after the march set out – and there are still people behind us. We join the ATTAC contingent, which is several thousand strong, noisy and jubilant. By the time we have been marching for less than 20 minutes the pavements are filling up with demonstrators returning to coaches

and trains.

At one point it is announced that 130,000 people have joined the march. This may be over-optimistic – these estimates usually are – but it is the biggest demonstration I have seen for decades.

And this is a genuinely continent-wide mobilisation. I wish we could import some of this militancy to Britain as we chant "Our world is not for sale"...

Return to the hotel exhausted and fall asleep while my room mate is in the shower.

Out for dinner and then off to a rally at the Convergence Centre. Several thousand people packed into this room. Sadly Jose Bove, star of the Millau demonstration in the summer didn't make it. Hear that a train with 800 Italians has been stopped at the border and not allowed through.

Listen to Christophe Aguiton from ATTAC, Susan George and various others. Meet various people I know – from Britain, but also from France, Holland, Italy and Belgium. Cheers go up when we are told that the caretaker has agreed people can sleep here.

We booked into a hotel because it was not clear up until now that there would be anywhere for people to sleep. The right wing mayor was extremely uncooperative – wouldn't even allow the

don't seem to have the numbers.

Move down a little further and join a bigger group, led by French banner of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire. Communist Rifondazione from Italy and the British SWP are also in this group. After negotiations the SWP move off to block a different road. We stay with the LCR and move into the main street.

There are barricades across the side road down to the conference centre and a line of police in protective gear behind them. We chant and sing but don't make any attempt to approach them. Suddenly I have a strange taste in the back of my throat. It's like fireworks going off, the smell and taste of sulphur but much worse.

I look down the road in the direction that the SWP went off – and discover you can't see more than 20 yards. They are being tear-gassed down there, I realise, as I hear explosions again sounding like fire works. People around me are starting to put on masks, tie scarves around their mouths and where they have them put on goggles.

I check I have my inhaler, worried the gas may provoke an asthma attack. My eyes are smarting and someone comes up and asks me if I need something for them. Presumably they look even worse than they feel! He washes them out with saline and I move back into the



marchers to put up a marquee.

Walk back to the hotel and collapse – its been a long day and there is another one ahead.

Thursday 7 December

Up at 6.30. Supposed to be at the railway station at 7.30 to march to the conference centre. Of course it takes longer than that to get organised.

Leave at 7.30, past rows of police who are massing by now. Buses have already been diverted, so we have to walk some way to the nearest stop. But we have performed a social service – buses are free in Nice today as the municipality is trying to persuade people not to use their cars because of us.

The demonstration has already left. About 8.30 catch up with the first contingent near the conference centre.

The idea was to surround the centre – to make clear our opposition to what is going on. This is why we are taking different side roads. But the police have closed off such a big area that we

plan is to go right round, though the old city and approach the conference centre from the other side. Many people come out onto their balconies or open their windows as we do so – and the majority are supportive. One woman, probably in her 70s was waving and crying when she heard us chant "No Passaran".

Soon we are joined by a third contingent, mainly comprised of Basques, and together we march, shouting and cheering towards the rear of the conference centre – where we are met by yet more police and yet more tear gas....

At this point various people get their heads together, and it was announced that we would have a couple of quick speeches and then disperse. Actually we marched back to the Convergence Centre.

This section of the march had a rather different feel to it than the rest. We were walking away from confrontation, so it seemed. My thoughts (apart from wanting a cup of tea) were that we had made a good show.

Local agent

More people from France should have stayed over. It is frustrating that some of those who mobilised for Prague don't understand that the EU is the local agent of the IMF and the World Bank.

But in the end it would have been extremely difficult to mobilise the sort of numbers needed to stop the conference – the relationship of forces just isn't there. To have actually stopped the conference we would probably have needed ten times more people.

I heard a sound behind me, turned and saw that someone had just thrown a brick through a plate glass window. I wondered if this was an agent provocateur – it seemed such a foolish thing to do.

The police don't appear and we return to the Convergence Centre for more speeches. The acoustics are poor and there is no translation at this point, so I don't follow everything. People are starting to leave to return to their coaches and go home.

Then some of the anarchists grab the mike to say someone has been arrested and we should all go to the police station. But there are dwindling numbers and it seems like the anarchists are spoiling for a fight – for the sake of it.

So most of us decide not to go. A few hundred people set off for the police station. I later hear that I was right – this degenerates into lengthy battles with the police – which then of course are what get media coverage overshadowing the sustained tear-gassing we have experienced.

There are now so few people left that we abandon the meeting and go off in search of lunch. Afterwards we make a quick visit to the old harbour then return to the airport and home. I'm exhausted but it has been a very worthwhile two days.

Forward to Genoa!

Terry Conway

As later becomes clear, the

The silence of the Us

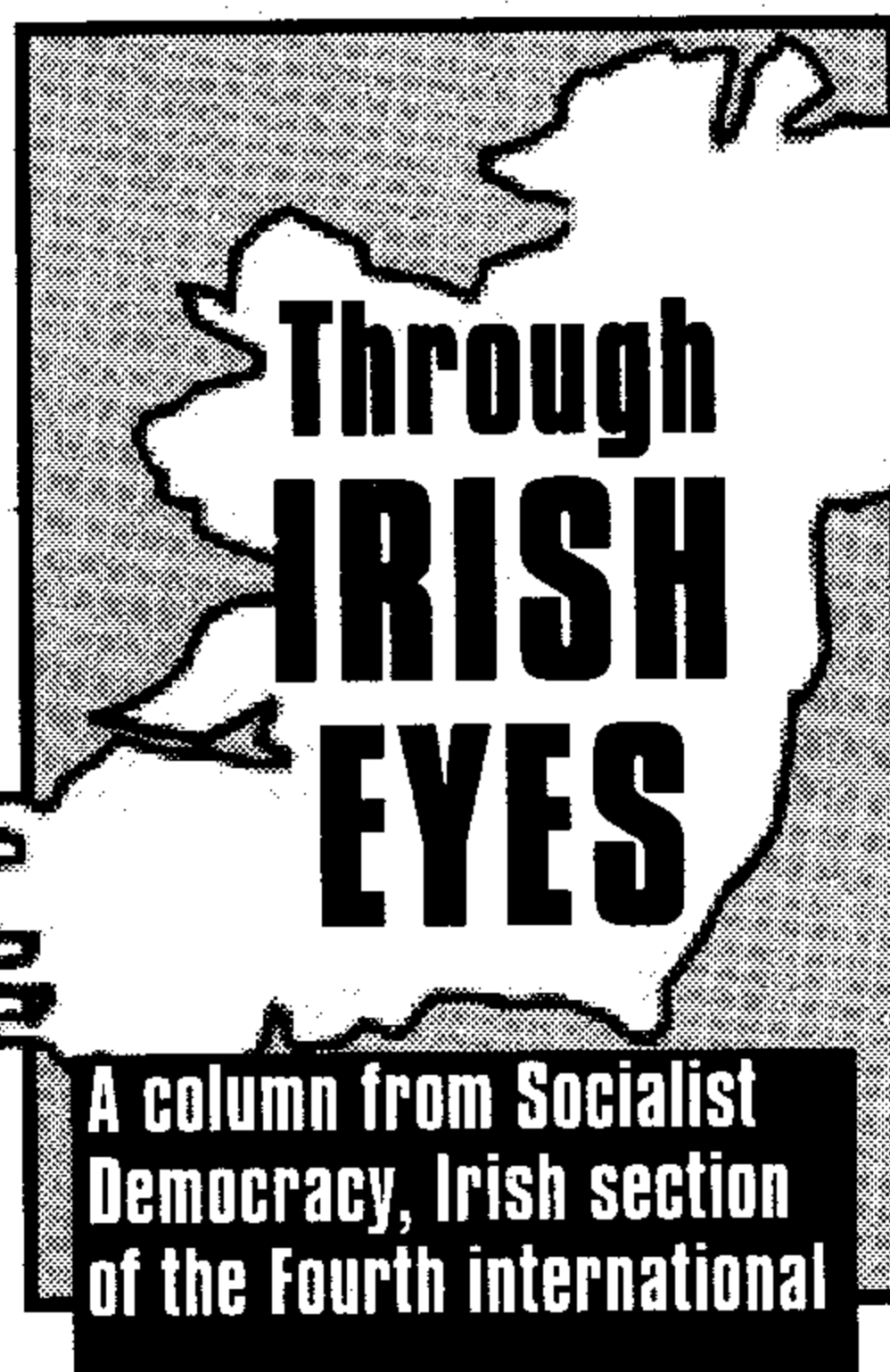
John North

Analysis of developments in the Good Friday agreement in Ireland depend as much on observing what is not said as in observing what is said.

Right now the dog that is not barking is the unionist dog. The reason is quite simple. Despite great inventiveness in describing themselves as victims, the unionists are finding great difficulty in finding anything to complain about.

The Good Friday agreement itself represented a massive victory – Republican defeat, restabilisation of the sectarian state in the north, the return of the regional Stormont assembly and the insertion of an undemocratic unionist veto at the heart of political life in both parts of Ireland.

The gains since then have been immense. It has been established that the agreement is itself subordinate to overall British control, subject to suspension at the



whim of the British secretary of state. Within this unionism is dominant. Trimble is able to ban Sinn Fein members from cross-border meetings and effectively put selective parts of the agreement into cold storage. The Patten commissions proposals for a wide-ranging if largely cosmetic reform of the RUC have in essence

been reduced to a proposal to change the name, with the hint of background influence for nationalist politicians in the police boards.

The British and Unionists are united with the support of the nationalists in asserting that the physical surrender of the republicans in the near future is a central component of the agreement.

It's in this context that the IRA new year statement "committed to resolving the arms issue" must be seen. The statement in reality indicates a willingness to go ahead with the destruction of the IRA arms while looking for further concessions to justify the humiliation to their supporters.

In a familiar pattern the republicans call for progress on policing, ignoring the fact that that issue has now been resolved in the sense that the original Patten deal is no longer on offer. They have in fact rowed behind



Trimble: his opponents appear to be running out of things to complain about

the 'nationalist family' of the SDLP and Dublin government in attempts to win a little more from the British in the implementation of the new arrangements.

What's left is the unimplemented British promise to end the mass occupation of South Armagh. The IRA call on Blair to take direct responsibility for "demilitarisation". This is just a variation of a familiar cry about "secureocrats".

This insane theory holds that a small group of civil servants and intelligence operatives are acting against the interests of the British state and that they are able to block these interests.

What is involved in the theory is simply the collapse of republicanism into bourgeois

nationalism.

Nationalist ideology ignores all Irish history and claims that Britain's "real" interest is peace in Ireland and that nationalist lobbying can persuade them to act reasonably.

Nationalist Ireland has done its lobbying. Now New Labour is laying down the law in a statement indicating that negotiation on the RUC is finished. It's time for the SDLP and Dublin to support the RUC, for the nationalists to take their place on the police boards and for Sinn Fein to keep quiet.

Haggling on South Armagh will of course bring some concessions, but nowhere near enough to obscure British victory and Republican defeat.

The republicans could of course reject the whole deal – but how often have their supporters waited for that? The continued harassment of political opponents in the republican writers group is an indication of where the movement is going.

The new Northern Ireland will swim into view. There will be pockets of patronage for the catholic bourgeoisie, but overall it will look strikingly like the old British colony.

Questions will remain. Will the unionists tolerate even a tame Sinn Fein in government? What will happen when the nationalist workers find they are not included in the brave new world? These are questions for a new resistance – not for the old.

No national question in South of Ireland? Left stumbles in search of unity

Joe Craig

A meeting of nearly 100 people was held in Dublin on 25th November to discuss the possibility of socialist unity in Ireland. Called by an ad hoc group of independent socialists its clear purpose was to emulate the progress made in Britain, particularly by the London Socialist Alliance (LSA).

The meeting started with reports from Greg Tucker of the LSA, Francois Vercammen of the Fourth International and Jo Harvie of the Scottish Socialist Party, all relating the experience of their own unity initiatives.

The real debate was left for the second session, which dealt with the situation in Ireland. Mick O'Reilly of the ATGWU emphasised the problem of social partnership between the unions, bosses and government and concentrated his attention in the political sphere on the unions relationship to the Irish Labour Party.

However it was the question of unity on the far left that dominated the discus-

sion. The speaker from the Irish SWP, Richard Boyd Barrett, called for the creation of an electoral alliance on the lines of that being created in Britain. This was required because political conditions had changed. The defeats of the 1980s had given way to a new radicalisation, occurring across Europe from the French public sector strikes in 1995 and now evidenced through the anti-capitalist protests in Seattle and Prague etc.

This was reflected in Ireland through the weakening of two key pillars of conservatism, Fianna Fail and the Catholic Church, both rocked by scandal.

The booming economy had witnessed a renewed level of strike activity, which reflected deepening class division and created potential for the left. A rather bare political platform was mentioned but it was later stated that this was open for debate.

The Socialist Party speaker, Stephen Boyd, also dealt with the rising level of workers action and what he called the final betrayal of social democracy which could no longer be regarded as working class parties.

The revolutionary left was

disoriented; much of it having abandoned the project of building a revolutionary party. What was required was 'a new mass working class party.'

He argued that the successes of the Socialist Alliances were exaggerated. The LSA and SSP were not the start of building mass working class parties.

The SSP was reformist and did not represent anything in advance of the Socialist Party in Ireland which has its own TD (MP). Although the SSP has more members the Irish SP was a revolutionary marxist party. The lack of a national question in England and southern Ireland (!) meant that the same development had not taken place as had in Scotland.

Boyd rejected an electoral alliance because unity with the SWP would not have an impact on the working class and there were no tested candidates. The SWP had no base and his advice to the rest of the left was to follow the SP example and build one.

While agreeing to a non-aggression pact and not ruling out an alliance in the future he rejected one now.

The Irish working class would either by-pass such an alliance and build its own mass party or the SP would become that party. In the next election, expected next year, the task for the working class was election of a second SP TD.

The meeting had clearly been based on the unity of the SWP and SP and many of the independents involved could not accept the arguments of the SP in rejecting unity.

One of the organisers rated the two organisations pretty even in terms of influence, while others noted the united activity that sometimes took place in other work – so why not elections?

A united left would self-evidently be stronger than a divided one. It was argued that the SP had now taken the sectarian approach previously adopted by the SWP.

Despite lip service to the idea that electoralism was to be avoided there was little discussion of programme and a clear note of impatience that steps towards unity had to be made in order to address an upcoming general election.

Socialist Democracy



Bertie Ahern would love to see the opponents of partnership stay

argued that the starting point had to be the tasks facing the working class at the present time and that this clearly made a nonsense of the SP analysis that this reduced itself to a second SP TD.

These tasks clearly required explicit opposition to social partnership and the Good Friday Agreement. We supported creation of an alliance and recorded our previous active support in the election of the SP TD.

We argued however that the alliance had to be democratic, and that this would mean a clear break with existing practices on the left.

One task immediately presented to the gathering was to oppose the attempted cen-

sorship of the Republican Writers Group in Belfast and all those present were called upon to support a petition to Sinn Fein opposing its intimidation of two RWG supporters.

No agreement on unity was achieved. Socialist Democracy argued for a series of forums to discuss the idea further, and the organisers promised to consider the outcome and come back to those attending the meeting.

The key however lies with the SWP. Will it go forward with an alliance despite the SP rejection?

On what political basis will this take place? And how will any alliance function to ensure the fullest democracy?

Dirty Deal in Pakistan: both will pay the price

Military let Nawaz off the hook

Farooq Tariq, General Secretary Labour Party Pakistan

In a dramatic political move, Ex Prime Minister, Mian Nawaz Sharif has been allowed to leave Pakistan by the military regime to proceed to Saudi Arabia with 19 family members. He had been sentenced to 21 years in prison on the charge of hijacking a plane on October 12 1999.

The deal between military and Nawaz Sharif and his sudden departure from Pakistan raises many serious questions about the nature of the ruling classes of Pakistan, the future of the Muslim League, the effects on the Alliance for Restoration of Democracy (ARD) and above all on the future of the military regime.

Who will gain what out of this move?

Both the parties, it seemed had been working on this formula for sometime. Both must have drawn their own conclusions on the likely outcome. Both the military and Sharif would have been thinking of their political or physical advantages from their own capitalist class point of view.

But what concerns us is what effect this move will have on the politics of the working class? What necessary conclusions do we have to draw from these dirty tactics on both sides?

There is nothing "humanitarian" in this episode, as has been claimed by general Rashid Quereshi, the chief spokesman of the military regime. The decision is nothing to do with the deteriorating "health" of Nawaz Sharif for which the military have shown no concern during the past year.

The decision is an outrightly political one – on a class basis. Both the parties have taken safe refuge, external or internal, through this unprecedented outrageous deal.

The Nawaz camp has played dirty capitalist tactics, first by joining the ARD last week and hosting the first meeting of ARD at their supporters house in Rawalpindi.

By joining ARD alongside with Pakistan Peoples Party, the Muslim League pressurised the military regime to come to a deal which they must have been offering for sometime.

The military spokesman confirmed that "for some time" the Chief Executive General Pervaiz Musharaf had been receiving requests and applications from Sharif family to go abroad for "medical treatment".

The fundamental reason for the military regime to let Nawaz off the hook is not any request of clemency or intervention by the Saudi Prince, as has been claimed by the Pakistani media.

It was the potential power of ARD to launch a mass movement that terrified the military regime. And so the core commanders agreed to what was unthinkable few months before.

Primarily, the decision to let Nawaz Sharif go into exile represents a retreat of a weakening military government. In fact this is its second decisive retreat during the last few months.

Earlier, the military regime had to abandon its plan to build the controversial Kala Bagh Dam. The construction of the dam was opposed by the three nationalities in the area, Sindhi, Baluchi and Pushtoons, on the ground that it will deprive them

from its share of water from river Sind.

The military regime has earned tremendous hatred from the masses by bowing to the conditions imposed by the IMF and World Bank. That meant a large-scale retrenchment of public sector and unprecedented price rises.

The military has lost what it had gained in terms of "a sense of relief" felt by the masses when it overthrew the unpopular authoritarian kingdom of Nawaz Sharif in October 99.

They have learned the hard way the realities of running a crisis ridden declining economy. The release of an installment of the IMF loan last week only allowed the regime to draw a quick breath when they heard of the formation of the new alliance.

The military had been building its case against Nawaz Sharif as a corrupt leader who had looted and plundered the wealth of the state in an unprecedented manner. The so-called accountability process had produced thousands of pages proving the corruption of Nawaz's family. In one such case he was sentenced to seven-years imprisonment.

The whole justification for the military takeover was that the ruling Muslim League had brought the country to near collapse economically.

Nawaz was "the criminal" among the whole range of "criminal politicians" according to the military propaganda. But a weakened military regime sought an internal refuge by getting rid of its main enemy by pardoning his sins and sending him abroad.

By this action, the whole process of accountability has become a cruel joke. It was, and will be seen as, a tactic to prolong the military regime.

It was a bitter fact already that those "corrupt" leaders of the Muslim League who advocated a compromise with the regime were never touched by the National Bureau of Accountability. But those who were in the Nawaz camp were arrested, and cases of corruption and malpractices were registered against them.

It seems that Nawaz Sharif will pay even a heavier price than the military regime. Until yesterday he had been boasting of a life long fight for the restoration of democracy. His wife Kalsoom led a



Nawaz: he was under arrest, but the military feared the consequences of punishing his crimes

bitter struggle to kick out of the party those who had suggested a compromise with the military regime.

The main contradiction with their opponents in the Shujaat clique was on the question of an alliance with PPP. Kalsoom Nawaz boasted that an alliance with PPP would help to bring the struggle for democracy closer. "This is to launch a mass movement against the regime," she said several times.

Nawaz Sharif was in jail for over a year. The military was becoming more unpopular day by day. The formation of ARD had raised the hopes of many as the only alternative to the military regime. A momentum was building up for a confrontation with the regime.

The sudden capitulation of Nawaz Sharif will give the military some more breathing space. But it is he and his Muslim League that will bear the burden of unpopularity more than anyone else.

The Muslim League is a traditional conservative party of the rich in Pakistan. It has a long history of compromises with every ruling class and military regime.

Right from the British imperialism to the present day military regime, the Muslim League has kept its uninterrupted record of compromises and reconciliation instead of fighting back.

The capitulation of Nawaz Sharif has once again exposed the real nature of the capitalist politicians in the colonial countries.

They cannot put a real fight for people's rights. They cannot play any progressive role in achieving the goals of modernisation of the society.

They have not yet been able to end feudalism or achieve democratic rights, industrialisation or a national unity in the real sense.

They are totally dependent on the mercy of imperialism and – in the case of Pakistan – on the army. Those who had hoped against hope that the capitalist class could sometime play a progressive role have been disappointed again and again.

Leon Trotsky argued in his Theory of Permanent Revolution that the Russian capitalist class, because of its late entry onto the stage of history, was too weak economically and politically, too much tied to the old land relations and too subservient to its stronger international competitors to lead the revolution in Russia.

This argument is a thousand times more correct in the case of Pakistan and other ex colonial countries.

The examples of Bhutto, Benazir and now Nawaz Sharif underline this historic conclusion that the ruling class is unable to solve any of the basic problems of the working class. Instead they pave the way for brutal military regimes to take over power again and again.

"Do not trust the rich politician," will be the main lesson that the working class must learn once again through this whole drama.

The working class has to build a party of the workers by themselves. No one else can create and build a mass party that is capable of fighting the ongoing military control of the state.

In the days to come, the military will be boasting that any politician who will dare to fight against them will be subjected to such humiliation as Nawaz has undergone through this deal.

"No one can challenge the supremacy of military" will be the main lesson that military will want us to learn. But dirty deals by rich, corrupt politicians cannot strengthen the military. Objective conditions will

determine their fate. Subjective factors cannot alter the path of history.

The weak economy, with no prospect of picking up, will make sure that, despite the betrayal of Nawaz Sharif, the military regime will not last long.

It cannot repeat the history of decades of military rulers, of General Ayub Khan in the Sixties or Zia ul Haq in the Eighties.

The dirty deal has improved the life of Nawaz's family and the military regime, while the lives of millions who spend their days in utmost poverty remains unchanged. This fact will remain the crucial deciding factor when we have to discuss the future of the military regime.

The deal is a temporary blow for the recently formed ARD. But it will pick up some support if the PPP does not repeat history.

Benazir Bhutto's husband, Asif Zardari, has been in jail for four years. If the PPP make the same dirty deal for his release as was made over Nawaz, it could lose another opportunity to regain some of its lost support in the days to come.

The Labour Party Pakistan has opposed the military regime from day one. We will continue our campaign for the restoration of democracy linking it with the need to change the capitalist system with a genuine democratic socialism.

Visit our website: www.labourpakistan.org

21 Years of Workers Struggle

On January 4, the paper Mazdoor Jeddoujhd ("Workers Struggle") celebrated 21 years of publication.

Workers Struggle was first published in 1980 from Amsterdam as a six monthly paper in Urdu and English, then going monthly during 1984.

During the military dictatorship of Zia Ul Haq it became the largest opposition paper in exile. When martial law was lifted in 1986, the Struggle started its publication from Pakistan as a book series. In 1989, it became a monthly, and then in 1997 took the important step of becoming a weekly.

Today the paper appears only in Urdu.

You can subscribe for 260 Rupees annually within Pakistan, or abroad \$50. Please send your cheques and drafts on the name of Weekly Mazdoor Jeddoujhd Sufi Mansion, 7- Egerton Road Lahore Pakistan.

Left notches up election victories

LOCAL ELECTIONS were held in Pakistan on December 31 in the first of four phases covering four provinces. The other phases will take place over the next six months.

It was controversial within the Labour Party Pakistan as to what attitude they should take to these elections. Does standing candidates for structures set up by the military legitimise their rule?

Should they use this opportunity to spread their political base to wider layers? After a long debate the majority decided to participate.

They stood 50 candidates in only two provinces, Punjab and Sindh. In Lahore, home town of the Bhutto family, 12 of their candidates were elected. In Faisalabad, a town in Punjab, a comrade was elected who is also a union leader from a sugar factory of the town.

Other results are still awaited, but what has been achieved thus far is a major step forward for the LPP.

West digs in behind Serb nationalists

Geoff Ryan

As expected the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) coalition easily won the December 23 elections, with 176 seats in the 250 member Serbian Parliament and 64 percent of the popular vote. This gives DOS more than the two-thirds majority needed to enact constitutional changes in Serbia.

Milosevic's Socialist Party won 37 seats (14%), the far right Radical Party of Vojislav Seselj got 23 (9%) and the Serbian Unity Party (founded by Arkan) won 14 (5%).

The Yugoslav Left, headed by Mirjana Markovic, won less than the 5% needed for representation in Parliament.

The election campaign was very low-key, and only 58 percent of the 6.5 million electorate turned up at the polls. Moreover, despite the scale of their electoral defeat, Milosevic's Socialist Party remains the largest group in Parliament.

This will take on considerable significance when the 18 member DOS coalition breaks up – and it is certainly a question of *when*, and not if the motley coalition, united only by hostility to Milosevic, falls apart.

Less than a week after its election victory, the government was faced by protests and demonstrations over its handling of the worst-ever energy crisis. Blackouts have hit schools, factories and hospitals, as well as homes, which have been left without electricity for between 8 and 18 hours a day.

Recently resumed Russian gas supplies have been insufficient to head off the crisis. People protested by turning over rubbish bins and using them as barricades on tram lines forcing traffic to a standstill. Traffic lights were out as well, due to the blackouts.

The new government also faces major difficulties in its relations with the other component of Yugoslavia, Montenegro. In fact the victory of DOS has hastened, rather than prevented, the final break-up of Yugoslavia.

The government of Montenegro demanded, and received, the sacking of several senior Yugoslav military officials based in the republic as well as the pro-Serbian 7th Battalion.

Freed from the threat of military intervention, Montenegrin president Milo Djukanovic then stepped up calls for independence. At the end of December, his government endorsed a plan that would give it greater

autonomy from Serbia.

The proposal envisages Yugoslavia as a loose union of Serbia and Montenegro, each with their own seat in the United Nations, but with a common army, monetary and financial policies.

Four ministers from the People's Party walked out of the ruling coalition in Montenegro in opposition to the proposals, reflecting the deep divisions in Montenegro over the issue of independence.

However, it is still likely that the plan will be endorsed by the Montenegrin parliament.

Montenegro plans to propose the deal to Serbian representatives by mid-January.

If the talks with Serbia fail, and this seems likely, as Serbian President Vojislav Kostunica and Prime Minister designate Zoran Djindjic are opposed to Montenegrin independence, president Djukanovic will hold an independence referendum by mid 2001.

Serbian obstruction would almost certainly increase the numbers of Montenegrins in favour of independence.

The issue of Montenegrin independence does not just affect relations between the two republics. Zoran Djindjic certainly recognises



Playing to the nationalist gallery – and suiting imperialist interests: Kostunica

that Montenegrin independence would almost certainly result in the loss of Serbia's claim to restore its sovereignty in Kosova.

And Kosovan independence would increase demands by the majority Albanian population in the Preshevo Valley area of southern Serbia for the region to be reunited with Kosova.

Increased clashes between Albanian guerrillas and Serb police led Djindjic to visit the Kosova border along with Yugoslavia's top general, Nebojsa Pavkovic.

Part of Djindjic's strategy is to use the international support enjoyed by the new government to persuade NATO forces to crack down on Albanian militants. Current evidence suggests he has met with some success.

However, this a high risk strategy for both the Serbian government and western governments who, with the partial exception of the United States, remain hostile to independence for Kosova and Montenegro.

There are limits on the extent to which NATO

troops can intervene against Albanian guerrillas in the border region without encountering hostility in Kosova itself.

Yet the current dynamic of most western governments is clearly to favour Serbia. This can be seen in the new rules drawn up for the November elections in Bosnia by the head of the OCSE mission, Robert Barry.

While the institutions of the Croat-Muslim Federation have to reflect the multi-ethnic nature of Bosnia-Herzegovina, this does not apply in Republika Srpska.

For example, while the President and Vice-President of the Federation may not be of the same ethnic group, in RS no such requirement exists. Serbs can, and do, hold both posts.

The result of the changes was to convince many Bosnians that western governments would be willing to allow RS to secede from Bosnia and join Serbia.

Not surprisingly, therefore,

the elections in RS were won by the hard-line nationalists of the Serb Democratic Party (SDS) founded by Radovan Karadzic – a victory welcomed by Kostunica and Djindjic who see the SDS as their natural allies.

Equally unsurprisingly, in Croat areas the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) was able to use apparent western support for the secession of RS to push its own claims for secession and unity with Croatia.

Only in Muslim areas, and particularly urban areas, was there an increase in support for parties supporting a united, multi-ethnic Bosnia. This continues a trend we noted in previous Bosnian elections.

The continued dominance of nationalist parties in RS and among Bosnia's Croats is a direct result of western policies towards Bosnia since Dayton, which accept the de facto partition of B-H.

As western governments turn more and more towards Kostunica and Djindjic, any pretence of supporting a multi-ethnic Bosnia is likely to disappear.

South African unions join battle against privatisation

Charlie van Gelderen

THERE HAS been little or no mention in the British media of the Global Privatisation Summit which started in Cape Town on December 1.

The summit was hosted by South Africa's Minister of Finance, Trevor Manuel and Minister of Local Government, Sydney Mufamadi.

Also attending were privatisation ministers from 14 countries, as well as international financiers such as the Bank of America, European Investment Bank and Commonwealth Bank of Australia.

These financial institutions have one thing in common – they will only loan money to local governments if they promise to privatise.

Also present was the

Development Bank of Southern Africa. This bank refused to lend money to the South African town, Nelspruit, to upgrade its water superstructure, but then lent a British multinational R150 million to privatise the water.

This summit has aroused the ire of the South African trade unions, especially the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) who has expressed its disgust that only international consultants which advise on privatisation, such as Price Waterhouse Coopers, KPMG and Investec, have been invited to address the summit.

Milked

SAMWU points out that consultants have already milked South African municipalities of well over R200 million in the last two years

– money which was desperately needed to maintain services.

The union believes that the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), which was introduced in Britain by the Conservative government in the early 1990s, and is now central to New Labour's public sector strategy, has no relevance at all to South Africa and the developing world. "The PFI mechanism seriously undermines delivery of free basic services", said SAMWU General Secretary, Roger Ronnie.

PFI in Britain has already been rejected by public sector unions and the TUC.

Under PFI, private companies take over services for as long as 60 years. Instead of the municipalities borrowing money to finance services, they are forced, under PFI to pay a hefty annual fee to the private company.

Under PFI, the future provision of public services is determined by what the private consortium wants rather than what the public needs.

The lengthy contracts mean that councillors, the elected representatives of the people, lose control completely of any influence they have over service delivery. After elections, entire councils can be replaced, but service delivery remains tied into a contract.

International experience shows that PFI projects profit from paying lower wages than council employers, and by cutting back on health and safety standards.

There are many examples of PFI contracts failing to meet their obligations. Here in Britain there were huge delays in processing passports after Siemens failed to provide a functioning com-

puter system, leading to huge queues – and more expensive passports.

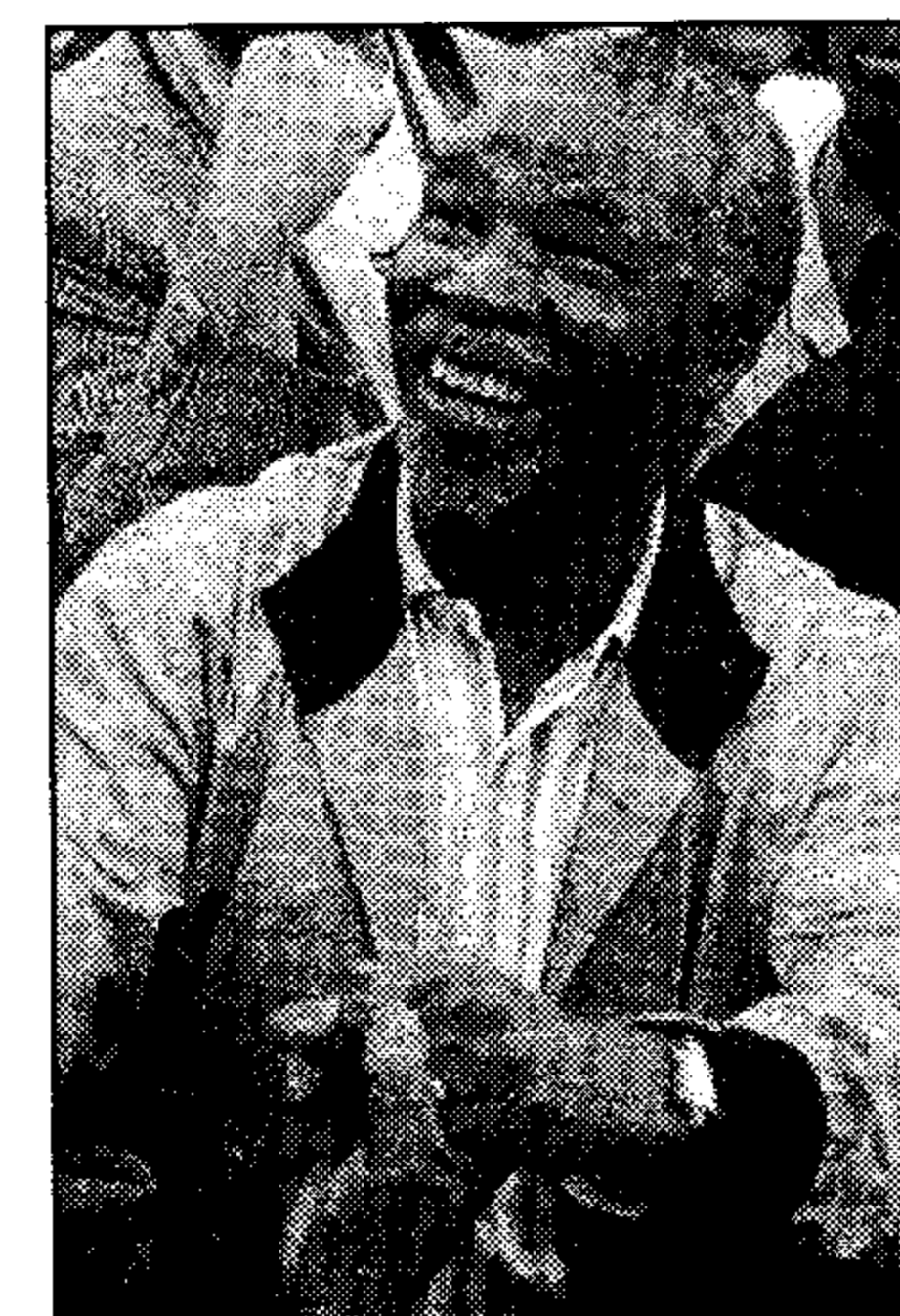
Buy now, pay later

The cost of PFI arises from the "buy now pay later" financing of projects.

The long term costs of PFI are much higher than in public financed projects because of the high setting-up costs, higher levels of interest that the company pays private banks on loans, lengthy negotiations involving solicitors and consultants and, of course, the profit margin which must be built into the cost of the service.

PFI consortia demand an excessive rate of over 20% on their investment.

SAMWU and other South African trade unions are particularly incensed because ANC ministers are hosting this summit during elections



Mbeki's privatisation policy is angering ANC's union support

when ordinary people are voting or councillors, who are supposed to be the ones deciding with the community on service delivery.

The newly elected councillors, hemmed in by PFI contracts, will be as powerless as their predecessors to act in the best interest of the electors.

SAMWU organised a protest march to coincide with the opening of the summit – marching against privatisation and job insecurity, enlisting in the world-wide struggle with the millions of workers who have lost their jobs through these plans.

Vicious crackdown on political prisoners

Turkish regime shows its true colours

During the week of December 19-26, 10,000 Turkish soldiers violently occupied 48 prisons to end two months of hunger strikes and "death fasts" by hundreds of political prisoners.

Operation "Return to Life" left at least 31 prisoners and two soldiers dead. Eight prisoners reportedly "disappeared," and at least 426 were wounded. 1,005 prisoners have been transferred to F-type cells. VERONICA FAGAN reports.

The hunger strikers were protesting the state's plan to transfer them from large wards to US-style "F-type" cells holding one to three occupants. The armed operation supposedly aimed to "rescue" members of illegal, radical left organisations from "forced" starvation at the hands of their leaders. But the numbers of people on hunger strike has risen since the raids.

The government argues that their decision to replace the ward-based prison system with F-type cells was justified because of the need to end the collective life of left wing political organisations in the prison, which had supposedly become uncontrollable.

F-type prisons, modeled after the US prison system, have little or no shared social space, and would break up the social networks that political prisoners in Turkey have traditionally relied upon to make prison life bearable.

Human rights groups, left-wing parties, the Turkish Medical Association (TTB), the Union of Turkish Bars (TBB) and the Association of Engineers and Architects (TMMOB) have spoken strongly against the harsh design of F-type prisons.

A joint report of the TTB, TBB and TMMOB concluded that F-type prisons are geared to break prisoners psychologically through isolation.

Turkish prisons fail to meet international standards and regularly implement extrajudicial punishment. Since 1980, political prisoners have regularly protested against poor conditions through numerous hunger strikes, death fasts and riots.

Between 1980-95, 460 prisoners died from torture, armed operations, lack of medical care or death fasts. 27 prisoners have died from death fasts since 1980, 12 in 1996 alone.

The government has responded to their demands with armed opera-

tions before resulting in 27 more prisoner deaths in the last five years. The security forces' use of excessive force during these operations is well-documented by human rights groups, but no one has been charged with these crimes

Political prisoners themselves warned that if the new prisons were built, prison guard brutality would increase in isolated cells without witnesses. The hunger strike began because despite this extensive opposition, the government decided to build the new jails anyway, on the pretext of implementing the prison "reform" that all observers agree is urgently needed in Turkey.

The hunger strikers, all members or supporters of radical left organisations, demanded either abolition of F-type prisons or their redesign under the supervision of TTB, TBB and TMMOB. They called for prosecution of perpetrators of previous prison massacres and medical care for ailing prisoners who had survived previous armed operations and death fasts. After a month, the hunger strike became a death fast.

On the strike's 55th day, the Ministry of Justice finally announced postponement of the F-type transfer pending an agreement with the strikers, but would not sign a document mandating the professional organisations' approval of redesigned prisons.

Based on their previous experiences, the prisoners did not trust the Ministry without a written agreement.

Refusing to negotiate further, the government launched 'Operation Return to Life' few days later. The Minister of Interior Affairs admitted that the operation had been planned a year in advance, and right after the operation, hundreds of prisoners - including several conducting death fasts - were transferred to completed F-type prisons.

Lawyers who visited F-type prisons in Sincan and Edirne recently said that death-fasting inmates had been left to die in their cells, some exposed to torture. Prison hearing systems did not work, they said, reporting meetings with shivering prisoners wearing sheets.

They estimated the operation's real death toll at well over 40.

Human rights groups suspect security forces using firebombs during the operation. According to the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, some bodies were buried without being identified, and other deceased prisoners' families and lawyers were not admitted to the autopsies.

As many prisoners are in critical condition with burns and other injuries, and others are continuing

death fasts, the death toll from Operation Return to Life will likely increase.

The government is now looking for ways to "forcibly treat" the hunger strikers, in clear violation of international medical ethics, which prohibit medical interventions without the patient's consent.

Operation Return to Life reflects Turkey's deeper political crisis, as the country bids for membership in the European Union. The states of the EU are friendly to Turkey, but worry that its appalling human rights record would give them a bad name. Consequently they demand, in public at least, that Turkey clean up its act.

In 1999, the EU officially approved Turkey's candidacy for membership, a piece of news that was enthusiastically received in Turkey. In October 2000, the EU publicised its requirements from Turkey to start the official membership process.

Turkey was supposed to prepare its own national programme, taking the EU demands into account.

Although the requirements of EU membership were well-known from the beginning, and despite the popularity of EU membership as an idea, the mere discussion of concrete steps to fulfill the requirements shifted powerful sectors of the state from a cooperative position to a defensive, paranoid and isolationist position.

The constitution of Turkey, adopted during the military junta of 1980-83, established the "supervisory" role of the military over the political system. One of the requirements of October 2000 was that this should go.

A further condition is native-language media and education for all Turkish citizens, including Kurds.

The conflict and tension in Turkish Kurdistan region has decreased considerably over recent months. The kidnapping of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan and the death sentence passed against him dealt a major blow to the Kurdish national struggle.



Solidarity with prison protestors. 3,000, mainly from the Turkish left marched through north London on December 23 in protest at the military crackdown

Turkey to make even the small democratic changes required to get into the European club.

Several other recent events point to hard-line resistance to democratisation. In November 2000, several thousand police held illegal demonstrations to protest at the killings of two officers - and to demand that the government include officers convicted of applying torture in the amnesty bill that came into effect this week, releasing 20,000 non-striking prisoners.

Businessmen called upon the military to intervene in Turkey's "sudden" economic crisis. Shortly thereafter, the government signed an additional agreement with the IMF, bringing all key economic policies in line with its neoliberal demands.

Turkish troops have once again crossed the Iraqi border to pursue PKK forces that have been observing a unilateral ceasefire for over a year.

Operation Return to Life was not confined to prisons: hundreds of civilians demonstrating against the prison invasions were detained daily, and harassment of human rights organisations and legal socialist parties increased.

Turkey has long regarded itself as part of the "civilised" Western world - for example it has loudly trumpeted its secular constitution. But while military rule formally ended in 1983, its political heritage has continued. The continuation of the military constitution is merely the most obvious sign of this.

The concrete demands for EU membership have sharpened the polarisation between those weak forces who want to move away from this legacy just far enough to reap the economic and political benefits they believe they will get from Turkish membership, and those who believe the tiny price this would cost is far too high.

Operation Return to Life once again demonstrated the strength of the latter.

(Based on information from MERIP Press Information Note 42, "Turkey's Operation Return to Life," by Murat Paker, December 29, 2000.)

For more information on F-type prisons, see the Human Rights Watch report on small isolation prisons in Turkey: <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/turkey/>

For background on human rights in Turkey, see the Human Rights Watch 2001 report: <http://www.hrw.org/wr2k1/europe/turkey.html>

Ocalan's decision, after his capture but before his stage-managed trial, to order the organisation to withdraw its armed forces from Turkey borders and change its strategy to legal, political struggle has compounded this set back.

It is clear that the only reason Ocalan's death sentence, currently under review at the European Court of Human Rights, has not been carried out is because of pressure from the EU.

But Turkey's response to what seems a very moderate suggestion for the right to media in their own language for the Kurdish people, demonstrates clearly the depth of hostility of the state to even basic human rights for the Kurds.

The third condition for EU admission, the only one to have received media coverage in Britain, is the commencement of constructive negotiations with Greece and Cyprus over those countries' longstanding disputes with Turkey.

The military, and the ultra-nationalist party MHP in the coalition government, decry the EU requirements as an attack on Turkish national unity, and even an alliance with the PKK.

Most of the other major political parties and the Turkish media express similar views, though less intensely. Previously allied sectors of the state have come into open conflict.

For the first time in history, the military and the National Intelligence Agency publicly disagreed - over the use of the Kurdish language in the media. But since the mainstream political parties lack the political will for an open confrontation with the military and ultra-right, and since superficial changes in Turkey's political system will not be enough to qualify Turkey for EU membership, the EU negotiations are at a standstill.

Operation "Return to Life" therefore has to be understood in this broader political context, as yet a further demonstration of the inability of "modernising" forces in

Caught between Intifada and hard-line Israelis

No easy way out for Arafat

The Al-Aqsa Intifada has entered its fourth month, and the on-again, off-again US-sponsored peace talks show no sign of leading to an early resolution of the conflict, reports ROLAND RANCE.



Israeli troops take aim

Since the uprising started on 29 September, over 300 Palestinians have been killed, and more than 10,000 injured. As a proportion of overall population, this would be equivalent to some 6000 deaths, and 200,000 injuries, over the same three-month period in Britain. Several hundred of the injured, who have been shot in the eyes or spine, have been blinded or are likely to remain permanently incapacitated, possibly paraplegic.

The human and economic cost is immense, particularly for an impoverished society like Palestine.

Despite this appalling suffering, there is little sign that Palestinians want to end the uprising; nor does it seem that they would support any deal arranged by Arafat which compromised on essential issues.

At the beginning of November, researchers at Birzeit University conducted a major opinion poll* in the occupied territories. 75% of those polled supported the continuation of the Intifada, even though 30% expected it to continue for months, and a further 24% thought it would continue for years.

The popular pressure against a sell-out deal is clear from the fact that 91.5% replied that they did not believe that peace was possible between Palestinians and Israelis without Israeli recognition of the Palestinian right to return.

Hamas has threatened to carry out an armed struggle against Arafat and the Palestinian Authority (PA) if they sign any deal which does not include Israeli withdrawal from Jerusalem, the dismantlement of Israeli settlements, and the return of refugees, and it is likely that sections of Arafat's own Fatah would support this.

The issue of return is now seen to be the most contentious of those dividing Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Diplomats and academics

have produced several sophisticated formulae regarding sovereignty over parts of Jerusalem, the status of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, road links between different parts of Palestine, border controls and many other questions.

No form of words can bridge the gap between the near-universal Palestinian demand for the right of some 3 million refugees to return to the homes from which they, or their parents and grandparents, were evicted in 1948, and the adamant Israeli refusal even to accept responsibility for their situation, let alone to do anything about it.

In recent years, a new generation of Israeli historians has shown definitively the truth of the left analysis of the events of 1948. There was never a realistic Arab threat to the new Jewish state.

Israel's leaders did not accept the 1947 UN partition plan, but manoeuvred to undermine it and expand the borders of the state. There was collusion between Israel and Jordan to carve up the West Bank and prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Israel deliberately, as a matter of policy, expelled 750,000 to 900,000 Palestinians from their homes and across the borders.

Despite this, the Israeli government continues to place responsibility for the Palestinian refugee problem on the Arab states, and argues that to allow them to return would undermine Israel's existence as a Jewish state.

Although on other issues Israel appears to have made concessions, closer inspection reveals that there is more spin than substance. For instance, although Barak has reportedly offered to return 95% of the occupied territories to the Palestinians, the real issue is, 95% of what?

Greater Jerusalem, which has already absorbed large

parts of the West Bank, is not on offer. Land already acquired by Israel – as much as one third of the West Bank – is to be “leased” to Israel, and other areas will not be returned.

The Palestinian negotiators have not been allowed to see a map of Israel's proposals, but face demands to agree them regardless.

The Palestinian struggle, meanwhile, is increasingly assuming the character of a low-intensity war, rather than a mass civil uprising. Writing in the Israeli daily *Ha'Aretz*, respected journalist Amira Hass – the only occupied territories correspondent actually to live in the occupied territories – notes the ineffectiveness of the Palestine Authority.

He points out: “During the first few weeks of the present Intifada, veterans of the first Intifada and members of NGOs, who (and this is no coincidence) belong to the Palestinian left, said that this Intifada should be an unarmed popular struggle, as was the case with the first Intifada.

“These individuals failed in this attempt ... Members of the Fatah movement – the backbone of a regime that, in the course of seven years, has been unable to improve the living standards of the residents of the PA – tried to restore its past legitimisation as a national liberation movement.

“However, they preferred to do so by focusing on the ‘militarisation’ of the Intifada – the opening up of safety valves and the use of

firearms, which immediately erased the popular-civic character of this uprising” (*Ha'Aretz* 27 December 2000).

This seizure of the initiative contributes to the further weakening of the elements of Palestinian “civil society”, which over the past seven years have faced the combined onslaught of both the Israeli occupation and the corrupt PA regime. *Socialist Outlook* has regularly noted the arrest and harassment by the PA of Palestinian activists, such as members of the teachers' union and supporters of last year's “democracy statement”.

This militarisation of the conflict is a further stage in the ongoing power struggle within Palestinian society, with both Hamas and Fatah militants exploiting popular discontent in an attempt to succeed the ailing Arafat, but cautious about the potential revolutionary forces.

In Israel, meanwhile, Barak, in a desperate move, has resigned as Prime Minister and prompted a new election. In order to preempt former PM Netanyahu, who according to polls would easily beat him, Barak has ensured that the election for PM takes place before the dissolution of the Knesset, thus disbaring Netanyahu from standing.

The only other candidate



London protestors denounce the latest round of Israeli violence

will be Likud leader Ariel Sharon, reviled by Palestinians and liberal Israelis alike as the man responsible for the 1982 Sabra and Shatilla massacre, and for many other acts of mass murder and anti-Arab brutality.

In the last election, over 90% of the Arab vote went to Barak; this far exceeded his margin of victory over Netanyahu. This time, however, it is unlikely that he will get more than a handful of Arab votes.

Although some Israeli liberals argue that Sharon would be even worse than Barak, many argue that this choice between two generals is no choice at all, and plan not to vote, or to spoil their ballot papers. Some activists have called for a write-in vote for Mordechai Vanunu, Israel's nuclear prisoner of conscience.

Clinton is pushing for an agreement before he leaves office on January 20, while Barak hopes to achieve some sort of deal before the election on February 6. In this situation, and with rising opposition among the Palestinians to a sell-out, Arafat has little reason to make concessions.

But the failure to build a

mass popular resistance, and the attack on Palestinian grassroots institutions, leaves the Palestinians with no real strategy to defeat the occupation.

The likely collapse of the “peace process”, and the election of Sharon, will represent a terminal blow for the strategy followed by the PLO, Israel and the US alike for the past ten years.

Although Hamas is gaining support, this does not seem to be reflected in Palestinian political attitudes.

The Birzeit poll found that 85% of those asked supported equality between women and men, and 87% favoured equality between Muslims and Christians.

The voices rejecting an imperialist settlement, and insisting on the need to struggle for a unitary, democratic and secular Palestine are again being heard. Revolutionaries in the Middle East face the responsibility of offering a new leadership and strategy for the nascent mass struggle.

* The complete poll can be found at <http://www.birzeit.edu/dsp/surv2/index.html> > www.birzeit.edu/dsp/surv2/index.html



ON THE TENTH anniversary of the Gulf War, the best hope for the imperialists to oust him was that Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein had contracted an incurable disease. Meanwhile top UN envoys have now added weight to the allegations that the systematic bombing of Iraq by British and US warplanes has already killed well over 100 civilians, with many more injured. Labour ministers have studiously avoided attempting to justify this barbaric, illegal onslaught, which runs alongside continued economic sanctions.

Said offers more insights than answers

The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After Edward Said, Granta, £15

Reviewed by Susan Moore

When I heard Edward Said's new book had been published, I rushed to Bookmarks to get a copy – only to find they had sold out. As Palestine's second Intifada was gathering pace back in November and the Israeli war machine was increasing its deathly response, I was far from the only activist who wanted to see what he had to say. Finally getting my hands on the book a couple of weeks later and reading it rapidly I was far from disappointed.

This volume of essays published in the Arab press between May 1995 and January 1999 reflects both the strengths and weaknesses of their author's political positions.

His sharp critique of the Arafat leadership and the corruption at the heart of the Palestinian Authority is built up through a catalogue of examples told in incisive language. This viewpoint is one that desperately needs a wider support if the struggle for self-determination for the Palestinian people is to advance.

Aspects that were new to me included the way that the West Bank is of far more strategic importance to the Israelis than Gaza. While I was conscious that the period since Oslo had meant

a deterioration in the conditions of the Palestinians in the Territories, the detail in which Said deals with this brings the reality home very strikingly.

Also noteworthy is his insistence that the Palestinians must understand the effects of the Holocaust on Jews – and on the need to differentiate between Zionism and the Jews. Nor does he fall into the trap, while criticising the strategy of Hamas, of failing to understand what its appeal can be particularly amongst the youth.

My favourite essay is probably the one where he goes to visit his son "On visiting Wadie", in which similar points made in the other pieces are recounted through the interaction between individuals he makes live on the page.

As Saleh Jaber charts, in a review of two of Said's previous books in *International Viewpoint* in March 1996, it was the Washington agreement signed between Israel and the PLO in September 1993 which led to a sharp radicalisation in Said's positions.

Before that time Said, was best known for his academic work as the author of books such as *Culture and Imperialism*. From 1977-91 he was a member of the Palestine National Council, albeit a not uncritical one. But it was only after he left the Council that he made public the basis of his disagreements.

In Said's first book after the 1993 agreement, *Peace*

and Its Discontents: Gaza - Jericho 1993-1995 (Vintage, London 1995, £6.99) he explains that the agreement is a sell out of Palestine national interests.

Writing of Arafat's "Vichy government" he argues "He has now established a formidable network of hangers-on, sycophants, commission agents, spies and informers through Fateh, his non-ideological and tribal organisation" ... "his employees plus their dependants give him an impressive network of about 350,000 dependants. If you add to that the number of prospective seekers of employment, businessmen and unscrupulous speculators who must go through Arafat to get projects approved, the number almost doubles."

This is accurate and vivid material, but its impact, and that of companion descriptions in "The End of the Peace Process" are undercut to some extent by the weakness of what follows. Said's attempts to explain why the Fateh leadership and Arafat in particular have ended up creating Bantustans are extremely thin.

On page after page of both books, he focuses on Arafat "technical incompetence" rather than trying to analyse where the political strategy he rightly criticises comes from.

He points out the astounding fact that the PLO has gone into negotiations with Israel without their own maps – particularly given that these exchanges involve



Arafat's collaboration with imperialism flows from more than just personal incompetence

detailed territorial debates. But to imply that these shortcomings are at the root of the leadership's bankruptcy is more problematic.

This reluctance to deal with the core problem about Arafat and Fateh is less surprising when looked at in the context of Said's own history. In 1982 after the debacle in Beirut, he wrote a piece in the *New York Times* entitled "Solidly behind Arafat" in which he argues that though Arafat's leadership was "endlessly problematic" ... "he was always open and personally incorruptible" and that "his commitment to his people and cause had no limits". It certainly seems from the tone of what he has written subsequent to 1993 that part of Said's failure to address the substantive errors of strategy stem from the fact that today he tends to personalise the problem as being down to the individual defects of Arafat and his cronies.

In a number of places in "The End of the Peace

Process" Said touches on the context of globalisation which has led to the multiplicity of pacification processes over recent years: not just in the Middle East but in Ireland, in Central America and elsewhere.

In the Introduction, for example, he says "...one of the intended effects of Oslo, in effect to depoliticise Palestinian society and set it squarely within the main current of American-style globalisation, where the market is king, everything else irrelevant or marginal."

But the promise of this early introduction is not followed through elsewhere. The next time he deals with the global economy it is to focus on the extent to which the independent media has become more constrained – a true enough statement but not the central problem.

Nor is the problem only analytical – Said is also short on solutions. In the conclusion of "Modernity, Information and Governance", Said poses the problem as follows.

"There is no other way of

achieving the minimum goals of a decent live without also translating ourselves from a primitive to a modern condition in which for the first time our leaders are directly accountable to the people"

Of course he is completely right that democratic accountability would be an enormous step forward for the Palestinian struggle. But why should their horizons be confined to that of minimum goals?

In "Reflections on the role of the Private Sector", he points out that "the Palestinian Authority – like other such bodies in the Third World – has decided that its allies are businessmen and its enemies are nongovernmental organisations i.e. the institutions that make possible a genuine civil society. It is in opposing this situation that efforts should be placed, and not in unrestrained private investment.

"In other words the real requirements for development is not simply capital but also an awakened social consciousness and a serious interest in national civil institutions".

Again Said, like many intellectuals who identify themselves with the anti-capitalist movement (who have somewhat of a different trajectory to the activist wing of the self same movement) seems to imply there was a golden age of democratic capitalism in which the market was less tyrannical. This he suggests is what the Palestinian people should aspire to.

In the end however it is not Said who must bear the responsibility for the fact that he does not understand that the only way forward for the Palestinian people is the road of permanent revolution.

It is rather the failures of the far left in the region which mean that minds as sharply incisive as his are not more often won to perspectives which seek to do more than just survive.

Mapping the environmental crisis

Our Ecological Footprint - reducing human impact on the Earth, Mathis Wackernagel and William Rees (1995) New Society Publishers (British Columbia)

Reviewed by Paul Hubert

The concept of the ecological footprint explains the hidden impact of production and consumption on the world. Human activities require land to supply the raw materials used, for the activities themselves to occur and to absorb the waste generated.

Capitalists frequently set out to externalise many of these costs. For example,

uranium mining to provide the raw material for 'clean' nuclear power results in poisoning of watercourses and large expanses of land.

The generation of power also generates large quantities of waste, some of which leaks into the environment and what is contained must be safeguarded for hundreds of years.

This book sets out to serve as a textbook for 'ecological footprint analysis', explaining the basis for calculating the footprint of particular activities and making the use of it more robust and scientific.

However it is not a scientific monograph but tries to make the ideas explained accessible. This is motivated by the belief that something can and must be done. As William Rees says in the preface:

"On a finite planet, at human carrying capacity, a society driven mainly by selfish individualism has all the potential for sustainability of a collection of angry scorpions in a bottle."

This is done in a number of ways, particularly in the section optimistically entitled 'Fun with Footprints'. Telling comparisons are made about everyday items, many using humorous line drawings.

Tomatoes

For example, a diagram compares the land equivalent of the resources needed to produce tomatoes intensively with fertilizers and heating in a commercial greenhouse and the apparently extensive open-field alternative.

The former is shown to

need 10 to 20 times more land, contrary to appearances.

Any activist interested in trying to bring ecological concerns into their thinking about capitalist society and economics will find some useful insights and tools in this book. Unfortunately where it falls down is where many readers will want to start.

Wackernagel and Rees recognise that the implication of changing current trends is that unprecedented social and economic change will be required.

They also point out the enormous inequalities in the world and that some proposed remedies (e.g. greater efficiency in production, 'zero-emission' cars) could actually worsen the problem of sustainability.

Obituary John Archer

The death of John Archer on December 23, at the age of 91, removed from the political scene the oldest, still active Trotskyist in Britain.

I first met John in 1936. He and his wife, Mary, were living in Leeds at the time and he had come to London for a meeting of the Revolutionary Socialist Group (RSG), the Trotskyist grouplet who were working inside the Labour Party as the Militant Group. He was, along with Harber, Margaret Johns and myself, among the earliest supporters of the 'entrism tactic' which Trotsky advocated. We were joined shortly after by Starkey Jackson and Leigh-Davies.

As always, John was an enthusiastic and optimistic revolutionary. I remember him entertaining us with a song at a social in Margaret Johns' flat, with a refrain which went:

"When the revolution comes,
When the revolution comes,
It's coming fast, our turn at last,

The social revolution."
The revolution did not come as fast as John, and most of us at the time, anticipated, but John certainly spent the rest of his long life, striving to bring it

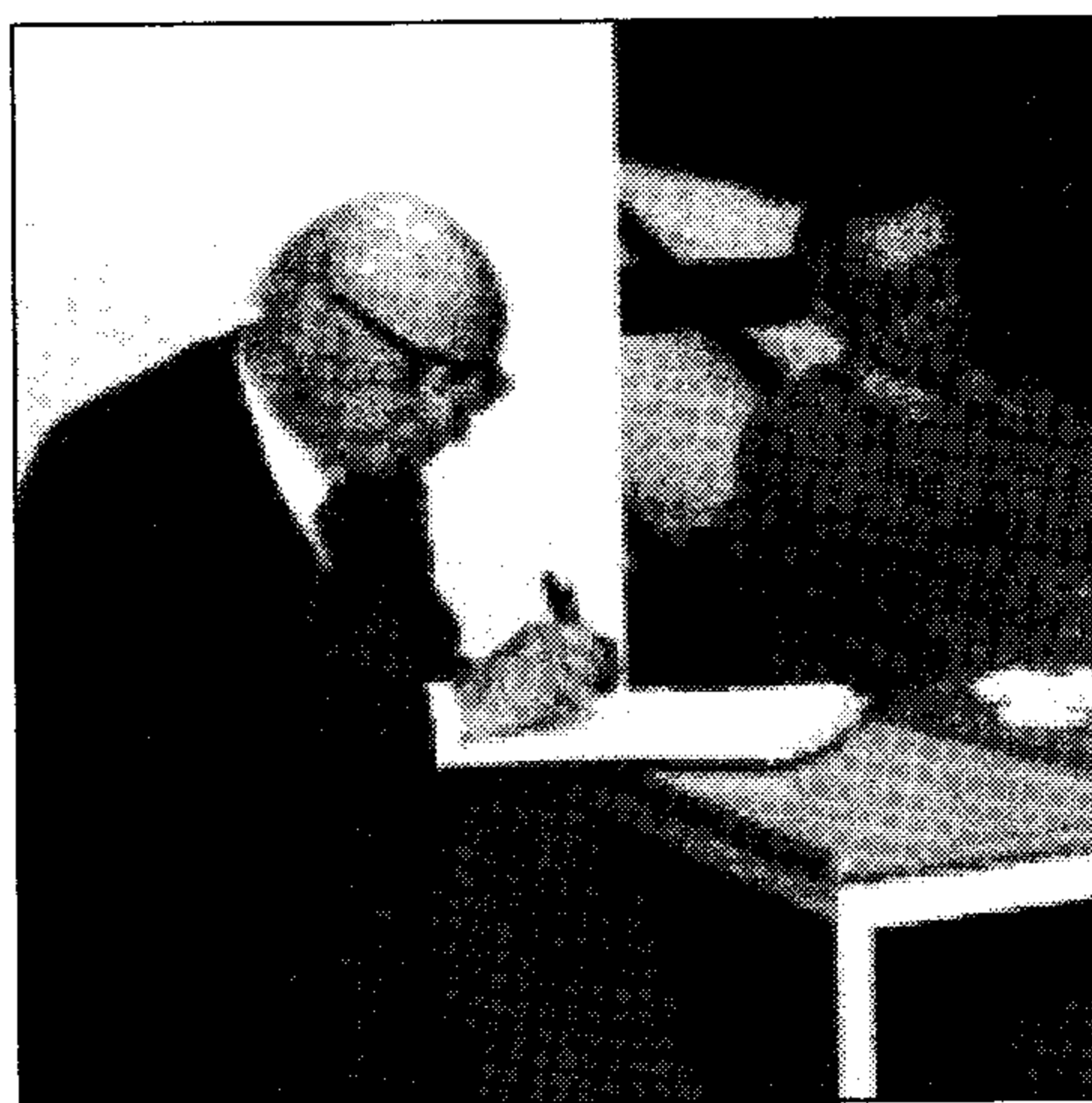
about.

John's political life is almost a blueprint of why the Trotskyist movement never became a viable force in Britain, or, indeed, anywhere else.

After the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) was wound up in the 1950s, he went with the rump of the RCP into the Healy group, then known as the Club, later the Socialist Labour League (SLL), then the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP). Unfortunately, I cannot state that he always took the right road.

I hoped, after the expulsion of Alan Thornett and his supporters from the WRP in 1974, that John would return to the Fourth International (United Secretariat).

But instead he chose to align himself to almost every little group that opposed the unification of the Trotskyist forces within the Lambert/Demassot Organising Committee 'for the Reconstruction of the FI'; the Moreno 'Centre for Reconstructing the FI - and I don't know what other groups, all hell-bent on 'reconstructing the FI', rather than working inside it and trying to correct any errors



Critical support: John Archer (writing) and Bill Hunter were among the veteran Trotskyists celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Fourth International in London, 1999.

they conceived.

It is these splits and fissions, usually about obscure, almost theological differences, which have kept the Trotskyist movement so small and politically insignificant, despite the correctness of most of its political positions.

John also had an almost abiding faith in the 'entrism tactic.' This tactic, as we conceived it in the 1930s, was based on two propositions: that the decline of capitalism would lead to a left turn in the ranks of the Labour Party; and that Stalinism in the Soviet Union and the Comintern would be overthrown by a social revolution of the working class.

There was a left swing in the Labour Party, but it went to Nye Bevan and not to the Militant Group. The latest turn to the left went to Tony Benn. John Archer never steeled himself to face these facts.

I salute his memory as a permanent revolutionary in every sense of that word, and one who I was proud to call comrade.

Charlie van Gelderen

An ally against Healy

Alan Thornett

I FIRST met John Archer in 1974, when we were conducting a faction fight inside Gerry Healy's WRP, which eventually got us expelled in the December of that year.

We had been getting help from the Bulletin Group, and had drafted a document, but needed to get it typed. John's name was given to me, and I took the manuscript to his house in London, where he typed it up on stencils for us.

Sitting here with a word processor and sending in the text by email reminds me again how much the world has changed since then. Not that a word processor would have made conducting a faction fight against Healy any more pleasant an experience, which is why we needed all the help we could get.

At the end of the 1980s/early 90s I was in the same organisation as John again, after the regroupment between the ISG and the SLG. Unfortunately he left us after a short time to form a small group in solidarity with the Lambertists, which, I think, is where his main political loyalties had been for a long period of time.

The last time I saw him was when he spoke at the event we organised a couple of years ago around the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Fourth International.

As you know he spoke along with Charlie van Gelderen, Bill Hunter and Harry Ratner on the history of the movement, and it was all fascinating stuff.

Obviously John and I have not always seen eye to eye. But the contribution he has made to the movement over a very long period of time has clearly been of great value.

The workers' movement will be the poorer without him, although, of course, it can draw strength from the legacy he has left behind.



Why US left should have voted for Nader

In my view, many socialists in the USA were right to vote critically for Ralph Nader, the Green candidate, as president.

Of course we should build a mass workers' party in the USA. However, a revolutionary electoral policy should be comprehensible at the level of the masses.

Here in Britain, we support replacing the Labour Party with a revolutionary party, but we are sometimes faced with fringe candidates standing on a formally revolutionary platform, but who in practice have not even united much of the far left.

We have rightly decided that these candidates are not relevant at the level of the masses, so we can safely ignore them and call for a Labour vote.

While I would very much have preferred it if there

had been a serious socialist or labour candidate for US president, given that there was not, it was not unprincipled to vote for a radical petty bourgeois candidate like Nader.

There were candidates from e.g. the Socialist Workers Party and the World Workers Party, but these were very marginal, the former got around 1% of Nader's vote.

Can you imagine Gore supporters bothering to condemn the SWP for splitting the anti-Bush vote? Nader was in a different ball game, scoring 10% of the vote in Alaska, and actually won in the town of Fairfield, Maine.

Campbell MacGregor Glasgow

Socialism on the web

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

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 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.

Socialist Outlook

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 es-

sential 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.

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Socialist

A monthly marxist review. No 41. January 2001. 50p

OUTLOOK

As unions hold back on funding, millionaires step in to bail out Blair

PARTY FOR SALE!

THE LATEST revelations of a series of hefty £2m donations to the Labour Party are just another symptom of the way the Party has been hijacked by Tony Blair's "modernisers" and is happily breaking free from its links with the unions and its working class base.

Of course Labour has often had its less savoury backers: who can forget the portly figure of Robert Maxwell, who would routinely double the collection at Labour conference and make other token gestures to keep his influence with Labour's leaders?

Geoffrey Robinson was by no means the first millionaire to sit as a Labour minister.

But Blair's government has gone further than ever before in explicitly courting support from big business and the ultra-wealthy. And by no means all of their donations have been returned in the way that Bernie Ecclestone's £1m had to be refunded in a storm of controversy.

This year's Labour conference exhibition had more stalls from big firms than did the increasingly unelectable and europhobic Tories.

And the wealthy feel confident that Tony Blair will use their money to help people



Rich enough to interest Tony and his pals: Lord Hamlyn

like them stay rich. They might not be overtly buying specific policies, but the pressure their donations tacitly apply helps steer Blair's government ever further from any radical reform or socialist agenda.

The millionaires have certainly had a good deal from New Labour: taxes on top earners remain as low as under Thatcher, taxes on business have been held down, privatisation and speculation continue unfettered, and Thatcher's anti-union laws hold workers in check and help keep profits rolling in.

Which raises the obvious question: just what has New Labour done to merit the millions it still receives from the unions?

Last autumn several of the

larger unions decided to hold back on payments towards Labour's electoral war-chest, seeking some sign that Blair's team was at least prepared to listen to some of their concerns.

Instead Labour has carried on regardless, forcing through more privatisation, PFI schemes, and holding down public sector pay.

Isn't it time Millbank-dominated unions like UNISON were forced to carry out a value for money audit on the effectiveness of handing over millions from low-paid members' subs - to back a government that has consistently kicked them in the teeth?

Blair's answer to the unions is simply to raise two contemptuous fingers: he knows that less than a dozen millionaires would be easily enough to stomp up the £15m which Jack Straw is about to impose as a spending limit for the next General Election.

With friends like these, New Labour can shut its eyes and ears to the workers' movement.

The unions can't outbid the millionaires: only by challenging Labour's policies can they fight to win back control of the party, built by the unions to represent workers - not the rich.



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