

Socialist

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OUTLOOK

TB: scourge of the poor!

THE OUTBREAK of tuberculosis (TB) among school children in Leicester has delivered a stark reminder that some of the dreaded killer diseases that used to haunt this country until the 1950s are rife in many parts of the world.

The conditions for the disease are actually worsened by our own "TB" - Tony Blair and his New Labour government, which has become one of the most hard line advocates of "neo-liberal" policies at home and abroad.

Blair recently added his support to a government policy document which upholds the "right" of pharmaceutical companies to coin billions in profits from the sale of patented drugs for fighting diseases like TB and AIDS at inflated prices to debt-ridden Third World countries.

And Labour government policies are encouraging the process of globalisation, which is rapidly creating new pools of poverty and ill health.

TB is above all a disease of the poor. It flourishes in overcrowded, damp, and decrepit housing stock, and among malnourished men, women and children without access to basic medical services.

As public health officials were quick to point out in Leicester, TB can be treated swiftly and effectively with modern antibiotics: but without treatment it can again emerge as a leading cause of incapacity and early death.

The Leicester outbreak is large enough and rare enough in Britain to attract news headlines, though the disease has for several years been making an unwelcome comeback in many deprived inner city areas, notably parts of London and Glasgow.



But this proliferation in Britain is small beer compared with the rampant growth of TB and other avoidable disease on a world scale, as the increasingly globalised economy serves to widen the gap between an ever wealthier minority, and a much larger layer that is sinking ever deeper into the most grinding poverty.

Billions of people eke out an existence on \$2 or less per day. Not only do their living conditions leave them vulnerable to TB, malaria and

other devastating diseases, but they lack the means to buy health care and the drugs they need when they fall ill.

The cost of any form of treatment has been systematically increased by the austerity programmes of the World Bank and IMF, which have tried to limit any health provision in Third World countries to a minimal primary care service, often linked to full recovery of costs through the imposition of charges for drugs and medical care.

Neo-liberal ideologists, aping Margaret Thatcher's famous phrase that "There is no such thing as society", refuse to recognise the importance of social provision of health care, and attempt to force all health provision into a straitjacket of free market economics, in which the poor who suffer the most illness inevitably receive the least health services.

The idea of a concerted international drive to tackle the disease is anathema to Tony Blair's new friends, the bankers and business chiefs who are making big profits from the present system, and who resent any move that would share out their wealth or force them to pay more taxes.

But at Leicester shows, any attempt to eradicate TB in the advanced countries while it remains endemic elsewhere in the world is doomed to failure.

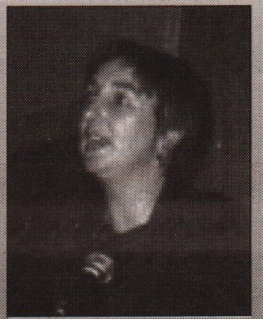
The tabloid press has of course been quick to seize upon the high proportion of children of Asian origin in the Leicester school at the centre of the new British outbreak - although the precise origin of the disease is unknown, and most of the children diagnosed as victims were born (and many vaccinated) in this country.

Once again there is a tacit racist assumption that "foreigners" can be blamed for health problems which in fact start much closer to home, in a system and a government that promote and widen social inequality.

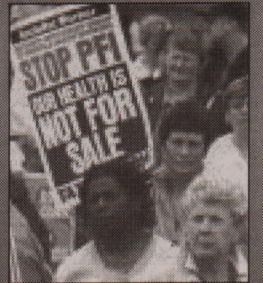
Socialists want to see the back of TB - the scourge of the poor, here and abroad.

Our prescription starts with the maximum support for the Socialist Alliance and Scottish Socialist Party challenge in the coming general election.

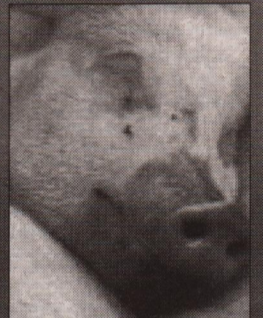
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**Socialist
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Tube workers keep up the pressure

The second day of strike action by Underground workers has been a success. Faced with a rebalot RMT members voted in even bigger numbers for action (over 11 to 1 in favour). And despite the ASLEF leadership pulling out of the dispute the unity built up on the first strike day held up – this time with ASLEF members refusing to cross the RMT picket lines.

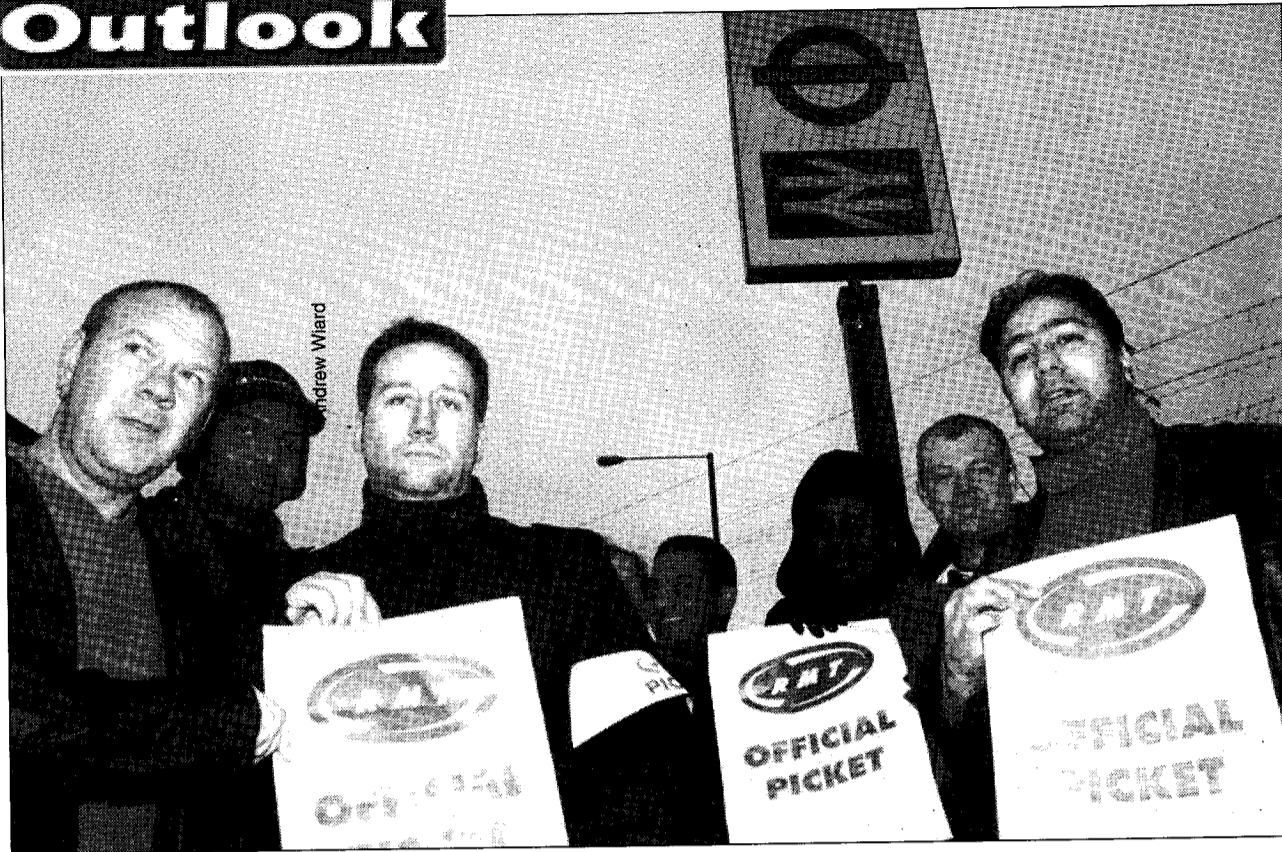
Nevertheless the government seems intent on facing down the action. Prescott and Brown have deliberately scuppered the talks with Livingstone and Kiley that aimed to produce some form of compromise. Even though Kiley's deal contained many suspect elements the decision to now seek judicial review is useful.

Labour wants to get through the general election with its policy intact. To do so they

have had to promise more money to the contract bidders. But it is clear that their proposals are falling apart, with both the Health & Safety Executive and the National Audit Office saying the PPP will not work.

The task now is to keep up the pressure. Strike action alone will not win this dispute. But a combination of industrial action with a sharp political campaign can be successful. We have to ensure that maximum pressure is brought to bear over the next two months.

The RMT (and ASLEF rank and file) are playing their industrial part. In addition the Socialist Alliance showed its support on the picket lines, but now that has to be developed – the broader movement has a duty to respond to back up the tube workers in their political campaigning.



Show of strength: tube workers know they have huge popular support. Only ministers seem to favour PPP

RMT opens witch-hunt

The RMT national executive has launched a major attack on the democracy of the union. It is attempting to have one leading activist, Pat Sikorski, barred from holding any office for five years and also to discipline two others.

That they are doing this to Patrick whilst, as Secretary of the London Underground Regional Council, he is leading the industrial dispute on the tube only adds to the criminal nature of their actions.

Last year, after a tied vote, a right wing member was deemed to have been elected to the RMT national executive. But when this was challenged at the RMT AGM (annual conference) it was decided that the election should be rerun. The national executive contemptuously decided to ignore this decision of the governing body of the union.

At a subsequent special general meeting delegates were naturally furious at this decision.

The Standing Orders Committee, of which Patrick was Secretary, tried to have the matter of the executive decision discussed.

But in a contempt of the rights of the membership, the then union President and Assistant General Secretary, Vernon Hince, closed down the conference without debate.

Condemned

Three quarters of the conference delegates then stayed behind to agree a statement condemning the President and AGS for their actions. As Standing Orders Committee Secretary, Patrick was asked to circulate the statement to Branches.

For this crime, deemed to be "circulating unofficial circulars", Patrick is to be barred from holding office. Appeals from Branches for another special general

meeting to be convened have been ignored, again a flagrant breach of union rules.

The President paid the price of his actions by being defeated in an election at the end of the year.

His replacement, Phil Boston, supports the membership's rights to a democratic union.

He has defended Patrick and is campaigning to get last year's AGM decisions implemented. But in doing so he is being blocked by the union bureaucracy and by the right wing majority on the national executive.

Big issues are at stake here, reaching beyond the wrangle over the election of one place on the national executive.

Undermined

This is about trying to undermine the rank and file fight over privatisation – the fight to stop the tube sell off and the fight to resist the effects of mainline rail privatisation.

It is about trying to stop the growing campaign to free the union's political fund so that we can stop our craven endorsement of a Labour government hell bent on attacking our members.

And it is about ensuring that the left is defeated when Knapp and Hince retire in a year or two's time. The right would rather destroy the union than let the members take control.

We cannot afford to let them get away with this. Already a number of Regional Councils have met to denounce this witch-hunt. At the same time the battle is still raging at a national level with the President trying to defend union democracy.

The RMT left has to ensure that delegates at this year's AGM are left in no doubt of the strength of feeling of the union rank and file on this matter.

Train crew dispute

One year ago the RMT Train Crew Conference demanded that a campaign to defend the

safety role of train crew be relaunched, after the RMT national executive had "settled" the dispute with Railtrack.

The RMT AGM subsequently endorsed this demand for industrial action to defend rail safety.

It would have been hoped that by the time of this year's Conference the issue would have come to a head. Activists

have argued that the mainline dispute should have been co-ordinated with the tube action to place maximum pressure on the rail bosses.

But after further talks with Railtrack Safety and the Association of Train Operating Companies the RMT national executive has yet to call a ballot for action.

Nothing has been done to

resolve the basic issues – ATOC and Railtrack remain committed to undermining the safety role of train crew. The time for talking is long gone.

Delegates to the Train Crew Conference are tired of excuses – we want to have a ballot under way by the time we meet in Glasgow this month.

Teachers must step up class struggle

Gill Lee, ex-President Lewisham NUT, personal capacity

PRIVATISATION, teacher shortages and the progressive undermining of comprehensive education form the background for this year's National Union of Teachers Conference. Members of the union have shown that where there is any call to action, they are ready to respond. Any 'honeymoon' for Tony Blair amongst teachers is over.

But the Broad Left (right wing) leadership of the union have no answers to the crisis facing education.

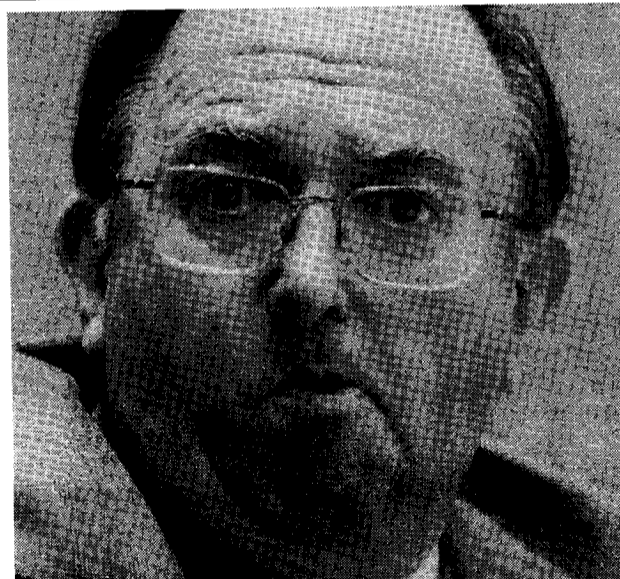
They refused the mandate of last year's conference of a ballot to call strike action against performance related pay.

They have done nothing to prevent the increased privatisation of education through PFIs and the handing of local educational authorities over to profit-making companies such as road builders W.S. Atkins.

In response to the crisis over teacher shortage, the leadership announced no cover 'action' which has been very hard to carry out, and which in any case, was only meant that teachers should not work outside the conditions of their contracts!

Nevertheless, this action has led to the well-publicised sending home of pupils from some schools, generally met with support from parents, and had led to increased demands for strike action for better pay.

The leadership are thought to be planning a rapid sell-out of



Broad – but not so left: NUT General Secretary McAvooy

this very limited no-cover action, simply waiting until conference is over before they can reach a stitch up with the employers.

The NAS-UWT, with a perhaps more compliant membership, has already ended its action; proposing to settle for a deal which would undermine existing contracts and make it cheaper for employers to get already over-worked classroom teachers to do overtime, rather than employ supply teachers.

No answer

This is no solution for the thousands of pupils who spend increasing amounts of their time drawing at the back of another class's room in primaries. In secondaries they are

taught by teachers who are not subject specialists, or who are exhausted trying to cope with the demands of their 'own' teaching – or by a succession of supply teachers.

Teacher shortage has brought increased confidence to teachers. This was shown by the huge London rally around an increased London Allowance, and the support, without a campaign, for the 'cover to contract' action.

But the looming recession could rapidly alter the conditions for struggle. Already the effects of performance related pay are working their way into schools, with teachers increasingly bargaining individually or on a school by school basis for more pay. This is a cultural shift in teaching, where experience

and responsibilities were seen as the only legitimate factors in determining pay.

The mis-leadership of the Broad Left should be counterposed to the role of the left in the union, particularly the Socialist Teachers Alliance, which has fought over the last year to continue the campaign against performance related pay. Left-led associations forced the NUT leadership to call the London pay rally, and showed at Kingsland school in Hackney how a union should act when confronted by the victimisation of its members.

Comprehensive

The STA has also taken forward the arguments in defence of comprehensive education and against privatisation through a number of initiatives and conferences involving broader forces.

The battle between the Broad-left leadership and the real left of the union will be fought out at a conference this Easter which will be even more stage-managed than usual. Ten guest speakers have been invited, including the Tory spokesperson on education, and three Executive priority motions have been tabled.

This will leave very little room on conference floor for the discussion that really needs to be had: how to defend comprehensive education, pay and conditions against a neo-liberal government intent on breaking the collective strength of the union, on privatisation and increased selection and division in education.

Alliance gains strength and confidence

THE SOCIALIST Alliance has continued to make remarkable strides forward over recent weeks. No wonder the BBC has decided we are the foremost of the minor parties.

While the Alliance was ready for expected election on May 3, the postponement until June 7 will undoubtedly allow these processes to continue still further. This increasing strength can be measured at a number of levels:

- New Socialist Alliances are being formed in places where we didn't previously exist.

- Candidates are being selected in areas where activists were not confident that we had the capacity to stand. 88 are in place as we go to press, and the list is still growing.

- Liz Davies' decision to leave the Labour Party and support the Alliance is causing many others to think about following her.

- Local alliances are working better, pulling in new activists.

- At a national level, meetings have been extremely constructive and practical with an amazing degree of consensus.

As a result of all of this we have achieved a relatively high degree of media coverage both nationally and locally, which itself reinforces the positive dynamics.

The Birmingham conference at which the manifesto was adopted was a watershed. Sharp political debate took place over a wide range of policy areas, but in the end there was one question at the heart of most disagreements. The issue that needed to be settled was what kind of organisation are we trying to build.



Delroy Lindo speaks at Haringey rally

Some comrades, particularly members of Workers' Power, the CPGB and RDG, argued that the Socialist Alliance should adopt a full revolutionary programme.

The majority, including the International Socialist Group, SWP and AWL argued that to take this road at this time would cut us off from our potential audience.

It was a difficult issue to grapple with, given the fact that undoubtedly the majority of those present at Birmingham – indeed probably the majority of those currently active in the Alliance at any level – are revolutionary socialists.

The point is not at all that we want to hide our politics, but that the exciting potential of the project lies in our ability to win those breaking from new Labour to

become involved in building a socialist alternative. Many of these people still hold reformist ideas, while many others have not had the opportunity to discuss how the sort of society they want to see can best be achieved.

This is the crucial audience that the Alliance has to reach out to and this needs to be done on the basis of campaigning work as well as electoral profile.

Maturity

Given that the stakes were so high, and the long history of sectarianism on the British left, the degree of maturity and calmness with which the Birmingham conference managed to address these questions was remarkable.

The commitment of those who had argued for a different approach

to the Socialist Alliance itself was also shown by the fact that when the full manifesto was put to the vote at the end of the day only one comrade voted against.

The only negative factor within all these processes is the increasing absence of the Socialist Party, which had less than 20 comrades at the Birmingham conference.

While Socialist Party member and national chair of the Alliance Dave Nellist has played a full and positive role, at the last two national meetings he has been the only member of his organisation present. This pattern is replicated in most local areas, where Socialist Party branches effectively boycott Alliance activities and meetings.

We have argued many times in these pages that it will be the

Socialist Party itself that will pay the price for their sectarianism. As the Socialist Alliance grows ever stronger, this will be even more the case than previously.

Meanwhile the Socialist Alliance is making plans to ensure that the best use is made of the extra time given to us by Blair.

We will be working round a number of key political focuses including:

- Building the CND demonstration outside Downing Street on April 14

- Organising a national day of action against PFI to coincide with the next strike of the Dudley hospital workers

- Campaigning against New Labour's outrageous support for so called "intellectual property rights" of the drug companies.

- Mobilising for the UNISON low pay demonstration in Manchester on April 28

The election broadcast that Ken Loach is putting together will bring to people's living rooms a picture of the breadth of experience, talent and ideas represented by our candidates up and down the country.

In addition we will be preparing to launch our manifesto as a pamphlet which can be sold by activists on the door steps, in campaigns and workplaces and from stalls.

This will give us the opportunity to get across the breadth of issues on which we have something to say and present a vision of a society which is fundamentally different from the profit hungry, poverty ridden Britain which New Labour presides over.

Bush blots the landscape

George W Bush may only have been in office for three months, but he has already left an indelible mark on the landscape, both in the US and on a global scale.

As an oil man born and bred, it was always on the cards that Bush would instinctively side with big business and the corporate polluters. And as a hard-line advocate of the "son of star wars" National Missile Defence system, as well as new spending on long-range bombers and "stealth" warships, his commitment to funnel billions into a new escalation of the arms race was predictable.

But Bush also attracted large-scale sponsorship from energy companies, and this, together with the influence of his Vice President Dick Cheney – another oil man – has also shaped his choice of personnel for the new Republican administration.

Interior Secretary Gale Norton, notorious as a keen defender of the main polluting corporations, has lost no time in opening up formerly



protected wildlife reserves in Alaska for oil exploration.

And George Dubya himself has given a clear indication of his concern for the environment by abandoning any attempt to ratify the limited provisions of the 1997 Kyoto protocol limiting the output of "greenhouse" gases.

Though Bush has famously questioned the science behind Kyoto and complained at the extra costs it would impose on the US, his defenders point out with some justification that this is not so much a change of

policy as a recognition of political reality in the USA. Indeed the Kyoto proposal for a minimal 5% reduction from 1992 pollution levels by 2012 would not have passed through Congress under Clinton, and would never get through the current Congress elected last year.

But one obvious change of direction on the environment is the administration's reversal of Clinton's belated attempt last year to restrict levels of arsenic in drinking water from a hefty 50 parts

per billion to the European and WHO standard of 10.

The direction of the Bush administration is consistent, rapid and direct: it is moving swiftly towards new, massive deregulation of big business, an enormous \$1.6 trillion tax cut – worth an average \$55,000 a year for the wealthiest one percent, and just a few hundred dollars for most working people – and a new escalation of military spending.

Threat

Bush's attempts to justify the NMD programme and a new arms race needed more of a credible "threat" than the hobbled and humiliated Russian Federation, the old remote enemy of Iraq, and the marginal "rogue" state of North Korea, with whom the US has now ended peace talks.

That's why the administration has been keen to crank up the tension with the Chinese government over the spy plane which collided with a Chinese fighter.

The probability of such a

clash had been increased by the intensified US military surveillance of China from space, by air, by sea, and even using spy bases in Mongolia, after Bush's team decided to classify China as a "competitor" rather than a "partner".

The refusal of the Chinese to bend the knee to the world's only superpower has helped Bush and his defence and state department team to build up a stronger imaginary "threat" as justification for their own aggressive policies.

The protests against the new missiles are gathering pace, not least in Britain, where CND is mounting a major demonstration on the Easter weekend.

But those who argue that Bush's hawkish and brutal neo-liberal policies justify a line of supporting the Democrats as a "lesser evil" have short memories and rather blinkered vision.

Onslaught

The NMD programme began under Clinton, while

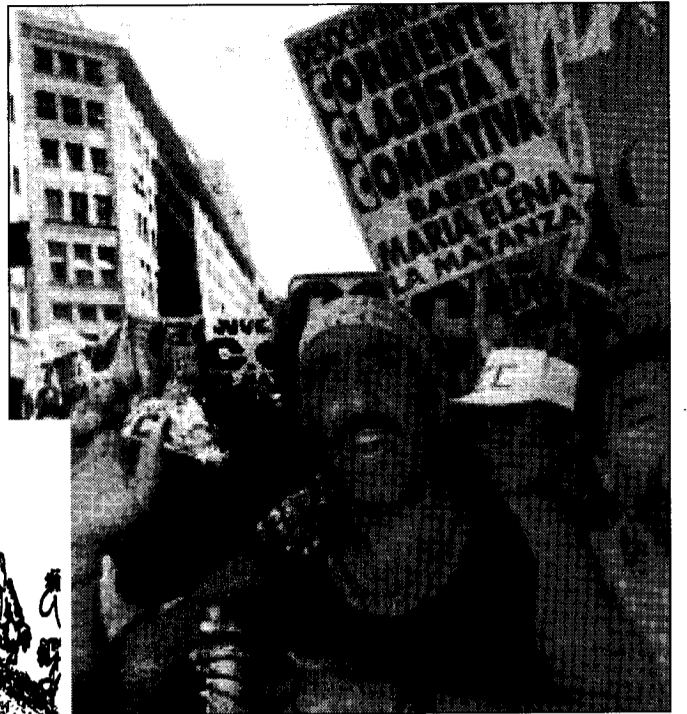
eight years of Democrat administration also served to push through neo-liberal policies including a massive onslaught on social security.

Although Clinton and others paid lip-service to Kyoto and environmental issues, the administration delivered little if anything in practical policy terms.

Widespread disillusion in the Democrats among ordinary working people who had naively expected better was a major factor in the close-run, highly dubious election that eventually enabled Bush to take office on a small minority of the popular vote.

Rather than hankering fondly for a return of the Democrats – who have largely disappeared as a coherent political opposition in the last three months – US workers and socialists should be giving more urgent attention to building campaigns of resistance and a genuine political alternative to the twin parties of capital, which have been allowed to share power (and cynically reward their sponsors) for far

Doubts linger over world economy



Argentine workers less than impressed with globalisation

Andy Kilmister.

In its issue of March 24 the *Economist* talked openly in the leading article of the possibility of "the new world economy's first recession". Over the last few months the fall in stock markets has spread from the USA to Europe and elsewhere, and from the high-tech sector to the rest of the economy.

Many US companies are slashing employment and close to 200,000 manufacturing jobs are expected to go in Britain this year. How serious are these problems for global capitalism? Is the world on the edge of recession or not?

The problems that the world economy now faces result directly from the experience of the last decade and the strategies followed by capital during this period. In *Socialist Outlook* we have argued for some time that the global economic turbulence of the late 1990s needed to be seen as the product of a number of separate, but interlinked, developments.

Three in particular were especially important;

- the long-term stagnation of the Japanese economy,
- the speculative bubble in the USA

■ and the turmoil in international financial markets leading to continual currency crises in developing economies.

The nightmare for the capitalist class has been the possibility that these three developments might fuse together into a generalised crisis, which would destabilise the rest of the world, in particular the fragile project of the euro.

Such a development seemed possible in 1997 and 1998, but did not occur at that time. The reason was the decision of the US government and central bank to keep the American boom going at all costs, even if this meant encouraging further speculation.

The funds which flowed out of East and South East Asia at this time largely went to the USA. The US policy of a strong dollar allowed for some economic recovery in Europe as the euro fell in value and for an export boom in Asia which gradually pulled much of the region away from recession.

The financial markets regained some confidence, on the expectation that the US would act to avoid any global meltdown. As a result the currency crises in Russia in 1998 and Brazil in 1999 each had only localised impact, although regionally their effects were severe.

What is different now? Most obviously, the USA is no longer in a position to play the role it did in 1998. For the US to continue to take in the amount of imports from the rest of the world that it has done over the last few years requires the continuation of the American consumer boom.

This appears less and less likely as

US citizens' wealth falls with the decline in the stock market and the rise in unemployment there.

Also, the US no longer appears as safe a destination for investment funds as it did previously. The result is a panic in the financial markets. Investors in regions like South East Asia are faced both by a decline in exports from the area as the US economy slows, and by a shortage of other places to take their money to.

In such circumstance each capitalist will try to act as quickly as possible to safeguard their funds, but the result of all acting in this way can easily trigger a crisis.

The first country among the so-called emerging markets to suffer from this mood has been Turkey. Here a process of financial liberalisation similar to that undergone by East and South East Asia in the 1990s has had the same effect of encouraging speculative investment. At the same time the underlying profit rate has not justified the speculation.

The realisation of this by the markets sparked a collapse of the currency. But the worries for international capital are centred more in the Asian economies and in Latin America than in Turkey.

The concern of observers like *The Economist* over the last two years has been that the Asian economies did not restructure themselves in a free-market direction as much as had been hoped after 1997.

The strength of the US expansion meant that South Korea, Thailand and Malaysia could start growing again without wiping out large amounts of unprofitable capital, on the basis of a massive upsurge in exports to the US.

But this has left such countries tremendously vulnerable to any prolonged downturn in the American economy. As a result, there is the possibility of the combination of such a downturn with a renewed financial panic in Asia.

In Latin America, the dependence on exports to the US is much less. But the strains arising from any currency turbulence are felt regionally.

When the Brazilian real was devalued in 1999 this placed tremendous strains on the Mercosur trading bloc of Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay. Now the country under scrutiny is Argentina.

With the economy in recession for almost three years now, and



threats of a debt default current, the Argentinian government has acted to raise tariffs on consumer goods. This has sparked a major dispute within Mercosur.

A currency crisis in Argentina would be especially significant because of the system used for fixing the exchange rate in that country. Argentina is the largest of a number of countries who use what is known as a 'currency board'. This ties the amount of money in circulation to the level of foreign exchange reserves.

This has come to be seen in many circles in recent years as a way of avoiding the contradictions expressed in foreign exchange crises.

If the government is prevented by law from expanding the money supply, then the markets will be confident the currency will maintain its value and there should be no crisis.

However, this depends on the willingness of capitalists and workers in such countries to endure unlimited periods of recession in order to defend the value of the currency.

If the value of the Argentinian currency does plummet, then the credibility of currency boards will be shaken severely. This could cause another round of panic on the international financial markets.

It would also present a major political dilemma for governments in developing economies. The choice would be posed starkly of either letting currencies rise or fall with the market or of actually adopting the currency of an imperialist country, notably the dollar.

Such 'dollarisation' has been discussed more and more in the last few years amongst elites in Latin

America and elsewhere as a way of integrating the region into the project of globalisation. But the potential of such a project for raising the level of class struggle has been shown dramatically over the last year in Ecuador.

The possibility then of a decline in the US economy coinciding with another period of instability in the international financial markets cannot be ruled out.

In addition to this, there are continuing problems in the Japanese economy. Over the last few years Japan has appeared a number of times to be beginning to grow again. Such rises in production though have never been sustained for more than a short period.

The central problem is that all attempts at growth in Japan have been dependent on a massive increase in government borrowing. Such borrowing now stands at around 8 percent of GDP. The strategy has been to solve a crisis of overproduction by soaking up commodities through government purchases, in the absence of an upturn in private consumption and investment.

The problem here is that Japanese firms and workers recognise very well that this debt will eventually have to be repaid and that they are likely to face higher taxes and cuts in public expenditure in the future. Their response has been to increase their levels of savings.

This has been encouraged even more by falling prices, which have brought the interest rate in Japan down to a level of zero. In such circumstances it makes sense to delay purchases into the future. The more the government spends, the more the rest of the country holds back on spending and the greater the deficit has to become.

Two questions emerge from this situation which are important for socialists in Britain. First, how likely is it that these separate problems will actually come together to create a global crisis? Second, what will be the impact of these developments on Britain?

It is clear that the dangers of a world economic crisis are now greater than at any time since 1997 and 1998. How likely such a crisis is to develop, however, depends on a number of factors which are difficult to predict.

Most importantly, it is not clear how successful the strategy of the US federal reserve in trying to boost the American economy through interest rate cuts will be.

Neither is it clear whether international financial investors will react in the same way now as they did in 1997. Much also depends on whether the EU economies or Japan are able to take up some of the slack left by US developments through an increase in their rates of growth.

What we can say, however, is that the strategies adopted by capital to try to avoid economic crisis now are bound to store up further problems for the future. The US is encouraging further borrowing through interest rate cuts at a time when debt is already at record levels.

The Japanese government budget deficit is moving towards a level which will be unsustainable in the long run. And with previous 'success stories' like Argentina facing problems in maintaining currency values, the range of options open to developing nations is narrowing drastically.

Some have argued that the direct effect of such developments on Britain will be limited. It has been pointed out that Germany exports more proportionately to the USA than the UK does. But this ignores two factors.

Firstly, the effects of the increased internationalisation of capital mean that indirect effects of global unrest are likely to be more important than direct effects. If the Asian economies run into difficulties, for example, as a result of a US slowdown, then this will rebound on Britain.

Secondly, the linkages between Britain and the USA are much more through foreign investment than through trade. A decline in the value of British investments abroad, coupled with financial instability affecting the City of London, will cause serious problems for British capital.

It is impossible to predict how serious the current difficulties faced by global capitalism will be. But whatever the eventual outcome, these developments offer a wealth of opportunities for socialists to argue their case.

It will be much more difficult over the next few years to argue that the market can solve the problems facing humanity than it has been recently.

And in such circumstances it becomes both more possible and more important to argue the contrary; that central to the problems facing the world today is the role of the market and its destructive effects.

PCS left must build on Serwotka victory

Darren Williams

These are exciting times for socialists in the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS).

The year 2000, which had seen a gradual upturn in the fortunes of the PCS left and signs of a new militancy among its membership, ended spectacularly with the election of the socialist candidate, Mark Serwotka, as general secretary.

There now exists the best opportunity in more than a decade to ensure that civil servants have a union that is run democratically and is willing to fight to defend their interests.

On April 21, activists will attend a special conference called, at Serwotka's behest, by Left Unity to discuss how to build the left and organise effective campaigns on pay, privatisation and all the other issues that matter to PCS's membership.

The conference will have to address the experience of defeat during the 1980s and 1990s, years in which the left was increasingly excluded from power while the right-wing leadership allowed Tory governments to 'reform' the civil service to the detriment of workers' interests.

The creation of PCS in 1998 with a rulebook that institutionalised bureau-

cratic power, seemed to guarantee the indefinite continuation of control from the top down by officials like general secretary, Barry Reamsbottom and his National Moderate Group. An enthusiastic advocate of Blair's policy of 'social partnership', Reamsbottom refused to lead campaigns against the Tory privatisation policies that have continued seamlessly under New Labour.

Unwilling to campaign for a return to civil service-wide pay deals based on cost of living increases rather than performance pay, Reamsbottom even vetoed strike action in those departments where members felt confident enough to take on their own management.

Splits in the ruling right-wing coalition led to the general secretary election being brought forward and to Reamsbottom's withdrawal as a candidate for lack of support and in exchange for being allowed to continue in office until May 2002 and to remain an official until he reaches retirement age.

In the ensuing election, rank-and-file left winger, Mark Serwotka, was the surprise winner over Blairite full-timer, Hugh Lanning. Left Unity's decision to support Lanning against Reamsbottom - believing

that no socialist candidate could win - was utterly discredited by Serwotka's convincing victory.

Although Left Unity swung behind Serwotka after Reamsbottom pulled out, its dominant faction, the Socialist Party (SP) has refused to accept that it was wrong to abstain from the contest in the first place, and has continued to criticise Serwotka for risking a split in the 'anti-Reamsbottom vote'. This sequence of events has meant that a sharp debate is likely on April 21 over the left's tactics in its efforts to build on the election victory and turn PCS into a fighting, democratic union.

At one extreme in this debate are the Socialist Party and their fellow-travellers, as well as the remnants of the soft-left Broad Left 84 faction. These have a record of prioritising elections over campaigning, and of using positions in the bureaucracy from which they can exert subtle influence.

They point to the presence on the National Executive Committee (NEC) of five Left Unity members, holding the balance of power between the two fratricidal right-wing factions, to support their arguments. They claim that without their negotiations with the

Membership First group, there would have been no early election for Serwotka to win.

They sometimes seem to forget, however, that the left can only triumph in the long-term through the active involvement of members in campaigns that bring palpable results in terms of better pay and conditions.

Serwotka won on a higher turnout than is usual in union elections, suggesting that a layer of members who are normally apathetic saw the outcome of this election as significant enough to make their voting worthwhile. Part of the reason for this must surely be Serwotka's record as a serious branch and departmental activist who has consistently led campaigns and strikes - and got results.

Even before his election, there were signs of an upturn in militancy, with a sharp increase in strike ballots. In most cases, a vote for action itself led management to make further concessions, but the Crown Prosecution Service saw a two-day strike that led to a significantly improved pay offer and a massive boost in recruitment to the union.

This militancy, which assisted Serwotka's victory, is in turn being boosted by the profile of the new general



PCS must recapture past militancy of its predecessor, the CPSA

secretary-elect.

The forces that made up Serwotka's campaign - under the banner, 'PCS Must Fight Back' - understand better than the Left Unity leadership the central importance of serious campaigns on the key issues, mobilising the membership. The vindication of their support for a left candidacy has left them looking far more credible and in touch with members than the SP et al.

Some elements of this campaign - pre-eminently, Socialist Caucus supporters in the Employment Service, who have been expelled from Left Unity - have drawn the conclusion that Left Unity is finished as a credible force and that PCS Must Fight Back should itself become a permanent organisation and take up the leadership of the

left.

This neglects the fact that Left Unity retains considerable support among the most active and politically conscious layers of the union, that it is a genuinely democratic organisation with a long and comparatively honourable record. To seek to discard this legacy in order to build an alternative organisation is both sectarian and unrealistic.

A far more positive approach is that argued by Serwotka himself and the SWP, and also previously in *Socialist Outlook*: that the healthiest forces should challenge the bureaucratic methods of the present Left Unity leadership and in so doing strive to build Left Unity into a stronger, more campaigns-oriented organisation.

Sniping from the Left

By Charlie van Gelderen



New Labour's achievements

As the general election looms nearer, voters will soon be enticed by posters, all over the country, boasting the government's successes. Here are a few examples:

● Britain lags far behind the rest of Europe in applying the Equal Pay Act, which requires women to be paid the same rates for the same job as men.

Women working full time earn an average of 82 per cent of men's full time hourly earnings.

Women working part-time got less than two-thirds of male full-time hourly wages.

The Equal Opportunities Commission in its recently issued report, JUST PAY, concludes that the long-term consequences of the pay gap

are poverty, social exclusion, inadequate pensions.

● Britain has the highest prison population in Europe, a telling commentary on the success of Jack Straw's tough on crime; tough on the causes of crime policy. London is also the crime capital of Europe.

But Straw wants to deal with this by building more prisons and incarcerating more people. This, despite the fact that official statistics show that most crimes are committed by previously convicted people.

The Chief Inspector of Prisons, has described prisons like Brixton and the Stoke Heath young offenders' institution as "hell holes."

Blair and Spraws's response to this is 2,500 more prison places and locking up more unconvicted children as old as twelve. Some of us

remember the outcry when Stalin decreed the imprisonment of 12-year olds.

When Tony Blair removed Clause 4 from Labour's platform, he removed the only effective weapon for reducing crime.

● Building on the success of the privatised railways - the highest accident rate in Europe - New Labour will proceed with the privatisation of Airways control and the London Underground. Anything the Tories can do we can do better.

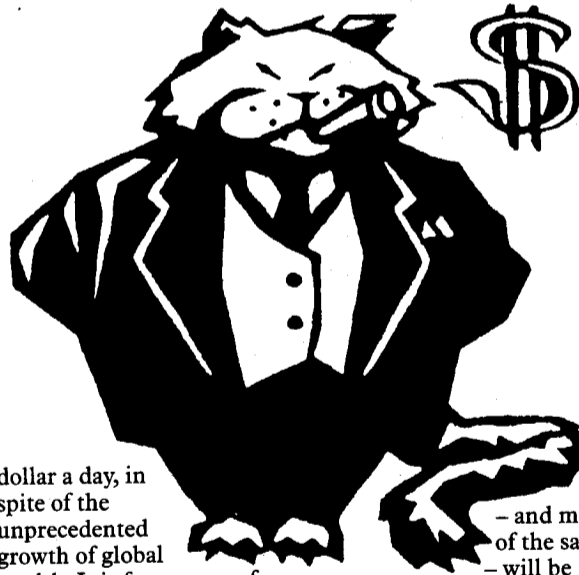
● Education, Education, Education. Having been so successful with Chris Woodhead, New Labour will now be looking for another Conservative as head of education watchdog, Ofsted.

Woodhead's policies, supported by Blair and Blunkett, have contributed to today's situation, which has made it difficult to recruit sufficient teachers.

To make up for this, the government is recruiting teachers from overseas, depriving less developed countries of sorely needed resources. This is, probably, to make up for the failure of the debt redemption programmes.

The South African Development Community (SADC) is suffocating under a huge external debt burden of more than \$79 million.

In sub-Saharan Africa, nearly 50 per cent of the people subsist on less than a



dollar a day, in spite of the unprecedented growth of global wealth. It is from some of these countries, such as Zambia, that teachers are being recruited.

And not only teachers - nurses too! "The crisis in Britain and other rich countries is depleting the supply of nurses in the Third World", according to Dr. Naseema Al-Gasseer, senior scientist of the World Health Organisation, for nursing and midwifery. ... Nurses and midwives play pivotal roles in providing essential services to the poor and marginalised populations."

Perhaps this is all part of New Labour's ethical foreign policy?

● Don't forget! It is New Labour which gave Old Age Pensioners that munificent 75p a week increase last year. Vote New Labour and all

this - and more of the same - will be given unto you for another four glorious years!

Even fatter cats with new Labour

In order to preserve the government's business friendly image, the government will do nothing to stop the scandal of soaring boardroom pay, which has repeatedly risen by more than the increases they handed out to their staffs.

Incomes Data Services found that chief executives of the top 100 public companies received a 10% increase in basic pay last year - that is before bonuses and share packages are added. After all, if these incomes

are curbed, where will the £5000+ cheques into New Labour's coffers come from?

Silent guns

Not all Israelis share Barak and Sharon's enthusiasm for killing Palestinians. The Israeli army has been hit by an unprecedented wave of disobedience. Scores of soldiers have refused to serve in areas which have seen the worse violence during the intifada.

Hundreds of serving soldiers have requested transfers from the West Bank and the Gaza strip or have refused reserve duty. Thousands have opted out by dodging the compulsory military service.

Regal generosity

In a fanfare of publicity, His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales announced that he was donating £500,000 to help the rural communities end the distress and misery caused by the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease.

Of course it wasn't his own money. It came from charitable organisations with which he is connected.

But the royal munificence does not end there. His estate agents are sending out rent demands to his tenants, many of them stricken by the epidemic, to the tune of £2.3 million.

How Labour flogged off Leeds education



Leeds Local Education Authority no longer exists. The education service in the city is run by Education Leeds, an unelected and only partially accountable "arms-length" company. BOB WOODS explains how this came about.

In its drive to develop a free market in education, the new Labour government has selected Leeds, the second largest authority in the country, as a flagship for its policy. The intention is to end the direct provision of education by national or local government, and to develop both a national market in education and a thriving British education industry that can compete in world markets. The state will buy the education it requires on the market.

The Blair government has never explained or acknowledged its sudden conversion to privatisation since it took office. The current emphasis on the private sector, and the contribution that it can supposedly make in the public domain is starkly at odds with what Labour said in opposition to Thatcher and Major.

But this conversion is not irrational. Behind it lies the policies of the World Trade Organisation, and the 1994 General Agreement on Trade in Services.

Under the GATS agreement, countries are committed to the progressive liberalisation of trade in services. Perhaps the most obvious services are education, health and tourism, but since the agreement does not define services, the possibilities are almost endless.

Britain is already one of the largest exporters of education in the world, and British business stands to benefit enormously as the education market is gradually opened up under GATS.

First of all, though, a private British education industry must be built up which can take advantage of the new international market. And this is the purpose of the public-private initiatives that the government is now encouraging. What is happening now in Leeds is the model for the future of education, and other services as well.

In early February 2000, Ofsted published a highly critical and damaging report on the Local Education Authority of Leeds City Council.

Although the report acknowledged that Leeds had a higher proportion of successful primary schools than the national average, and that progress was being made under a new Director of Education, it concluded that 'given the sheer volume, depth and range of the authority's failings, this inspection has little confidence in the LEA's



Andrew Ward

Read his lips: it's privatisation, privatisation, privatisation!

capacity to respond fully to the government's agenda within an acceptable timescale.'

The report also complained of a history of 'political interference' in the functioning of the LEA.

In fact, the performance of the LEA in Leeds has been better than many other authorities in several respects, as the report itself acknowledges. The score for A-Level results is above the national average and 'has been rising for the last six years'. Test results at the ages of seven and fourteen are above average.

More is spent on education in total than central government requires: 'The City Council's expenditure on education has been consistently above its SSA'. 85.2% of the Local Schools Budget was delegated in 1999/2000, compared with the government target of 80% by 2000/2001, and 'central administration costs are £44 per pupil, well within the Secretary of State's target of £65'.

The report also notes that: 'The LEA has been successful in recent years in reducing the rate of permanent exclusions and in 1998 it was broadly in line with the national average. There has been a further significant reduction in permanent exclusions since then'.

Moreover, Leeds is in the forefront when it comes to both early

years provision and the integration of children with special needs into schools. On the provision for special education, the report recognised 'the authority's good intentions in recent years' and that as a result 'fewer pupils attend its special schools as a proportion of its school population than nationally'. The report also refers to strengths in IT, behaviour and numeracy.

Probably the most remarkable aspect of the report is the extent to which it acknowledges the recent improvements in the LEA, or rather its success in responding to the criteria laid down by central government.

As the report says: 'The LEA has now had a new permanent Director for one year' who 'has laid out a clear vision for the future and has encouraged a fresh approach' and has 'reorganised the Education Department along very sensible lines.' The Director has also 'set out his priorities for the education service clearly and has won widespread support from schools for his new strategic approach'.

The report even states that: 'Many of the weaknesses noted in this report have already been recognized by elected Members, senior and middle managers and developments are taking place.' Given the report's own evidence, it is difficult to see how the inspection team reached its conclusion that the LEA's 'weakness of provision extends almost consistently across

all of its core responsibilities?'

Comparison with other local authorities is also revealing. In 1999, Leeds outperformed Islington, Sheffield, Hull, Liverpool and Hackney on several key indicators of student performance, including examination results.

Although the report claimed that schools in the city were highly critical of the services provided by the LEA, head teachers were actually disturbed by what they perceived as the one-sided nature of the report.

When Estelle Morris, the Schools Minister, spoke to primary and secondary heads in Leeds Civic Hall shortly after the report had been published, the chair of the Secondary Heads Association said: 'It was clear that the majority of heads were in support of the local authority. There were criticisms in the report. But where there is praise it is faint and where there is criticism it is harsh to the degree that it gives an extreme view.'

The decline in the performance of Leeds LEA must have been extremely rapid. When Leeds were applying for Education Action Zone status in July 1998, David Blunkett said that 'Leeds would be a very welcome bidder indeed', and he praised the 'excellent work' done by Leeds schools and the education authority.

Following the Ofsted report, the DfEE and the Council, acting together, appointed the consultants PricewaterhouseCoopers to consider what should be done next. Their work is said to have cost Leeds in excess of £200,000. When the report appeared after a consultation period of four months, the conclusions reached by the consultants were little different from the original Ofsted assessment.

'Our review confirmed Ofsted's criticism that fundamental weaknesses in the strategic management of the LEA exist' the report said.

It continued: 'Collectively the agenda for change is a formidable one, which we believe requires a whole service response that will only be achieved with sustained and dynamic leadership. We conclude that the scale and scope of the agenda for change is such that we do not believe the current LEA in-house service delivery mechanism has the capacity to bring about the fundamental and rapid change required in a time-frame which is acceptable'.

Like Ofsted, PricewaterhouseCoopers had chosen to ignore the evidence about the overall performance of Leeds in comparison with other LEAs, and the strides that had been made since the appoint-

ment of a new Director. With this mindset, it is difficult to see how any LEA in the country could have come through unscathed.

The report ranked various options in a highly subjective procedure. Total outsourcing of the services provided by the LEA - effectively the complete privatisation of the authority - scored the highest number of points. A public-private partnership (a joint venture company) scored almost as highly. The status quo was on this occasion at least considered as an option, but appeared well down the list.

PricewaterhouseCooper recommended the setting up of a Joint Venture Company (JVC), jointly controlled in a 50-50 partnership by Leeds City Council and a private sector partner. Unsurprisingly Estelle Morris endorsed this choice in June. The chair of the new company was named in October as Peter Ridsdale, until then known only as the chairman of Leeds Sporting plc, the owners of Leeds United.

Fittingly, Estelle Morris met the heads of Leeds schools in the conference centre at the Leeds United ground at Elland Road, and announced her decision, repeating the now familiar mantra that no change was not an option.

The response was less than enthusiastic. The chair of Leeds Primary Heads Association said: 'This isn't what the primary heads asked for. We asked for continuity and stability. At the end of the day we are part of an experiment...'

The secretary of the PHA was even more outspoken: 'Similar experiments in London have already received bad coverage. We are very concerned about what is going to happen in the interim. There could be a lack of direction, confusion and inconsistency.' He added: 'Councillors are accountable through the ballot box. The Joint Venture Company needs to be just as accountable.'

A shortlist of potential private sector partners was announced last November: Capita (who have been far from successful in running housing benefit in Lambeth, with over 500 complaints to the ombudsman in a single year), W S Atkins (best known as an engineering consultancy), and Serco (who include in their diverse interests holding the contract for Doncaster Prison).

The choice of partner had been due at the end of January 2001 but was delayed, amid reports that councillors, heads, governors and trade union representatives had all been far less than impressed by the presentations made by all three of the prospective candidates.

In the interim, the Leader of the Council and all the Leeds MPs (all Labour) were said to be discreetly lobbying the DfEE for a more acceptable partnership with another local authority, perhaps Birmingham or Lancashire.

After a year of uncertainty, and on the precise anniversary of the original Ofsted report, the government finally ditched the Joint Venture Company in favour of an 'Arms Length' Company to be known as Education Leeds.

The new company is fully owned

by the City Council, but still with Peter Ridsdale of Leeds United in charge, and still employing Capita as consultants. The change altered the form but not the substance of the arrangement.

Capita were the successful bidders – they already have extensive interests in schools computer information management systems. Capita appointed two members to the board of Education Leeds, both until now senior officers at Newham Council in London, the Director and Deputy Director respectively.

Serco's unsuccessful bid was led by Bedfordshire County Council's Director of Education. It is clear that the private sector obtains its educational expertise largely by poaching from the public sector.

In early March, the Chief Executive of Education Leeds was named as Chris Edwards, acting Director of Education in York. The new company started work in April this year, when staff formerly employed by the LEA were transferred.

The campaign to prevent any loss of democracy or accountability in the education service, whether it involved an element of privatisation or not, has been led throughout by the Leeds Campaign for the Advancement of State Education (CASE). The *Yorkshire Evening Post* also provided very strong support for the campaign, giving extensive coverage to the issues and arguments over the proposals.

The Labour Party in the city holds more than three-quarters of the seats on the City Council and has generally been hostile to the removal of the education service from direct control by the council. But this opposition has often been tempered to an extent by feelings of loyalty to Westminster. Clear divisions have emerged between the Party at large in the city and the Labour Group on the Council.

Leeds CASE was launched in June 2000 and public sector trade unions whose members are affected by the proposals have provided the backbone of the campaign. Led by UNISON, the campaign has also had a significant input from both the main teaching unions, the NUT and the NASUWT.

Governors, parents and others have also played a role. The campaign has been determined, sustained and persistent over a period of many months, with public meetings, lobbies, demonstrations, street stalls, leafleting and many other activities.

The central CASE argument was that education should continue to be controlled, however imperfectly, by the people of Leeds through the mechanism of the ballot box. Any attempt to reduce the accountability of elected representatives for the education service should be resisted. Any suggestion that the private sector is somehow by definition more efficient has been relatively easy to rebut, given the state of the railways.

CASE has also questioned the cost of the exercise. In addition to the costs involved in setting up the new arrangement, the council will have to maintain a parallel structure to monitor the performance of the new company.

Fees or profits earned by the private sector partners will clearly not be available to be spent on education. The likely cost overall has been estimated at in the region of £750,000. In addition, given the involvement of local authority trade unions, CASE has also been concerned with the impact on the pay and conditions of a group of



workers.

Understandably perhaps, the campaign has been less successful in setting what is happening in Leeds in the wider context of a potential global market in education, and the government's well-hidden determination to ensure that UK business is strongly placed to benefit from this market. It could also be argued that CASE would have benefited from linking up to a greater extent with the opposition inside the Labour Party.

In July, shortly after Estelle Morris had opted for a Joint Venture Company, the Leeds District Labour Party, after a heated debate, resolved to call for the retention of the management of education by the City Council, support for the CASE campaign and a city-wide referendum on the issue. It also called for the Labour Group on the council to publicly oppose the government's proposals. Although this had little apparent effect, it did indicate the strength of opinion within the party.

When an adjournment debate on the issue took place in the House of Commons in July 2000, all the Leeds MPs expressed doubts about the way in which the DfEE was dealing with Leeds LEA, albeit with varying degrees of fervour.

Leading off in the debate, George Mudie (Leeds East) asked rhetorically why Ofsted and the DfEE had singled out Leeds:

'It is one of the biggest Labour authorities, and there is a feeling that everyone would take notice if Leeds were made an example of. It is that type of syndrome. If the Minister reads the press, she will discover that the mood in Leeds has become worse as the saga has developed. The authority may not be perfect, but the grotesque picture painted by Ofsted does no service to anyone, unless the political agenda is to destroy local education authorities.'

He asked the Minister whether she thought 'that Leeds children...should be experimented with by handing over their education to an untried body?'

Another local MP took up the issue of democracy. Harold Best (Leeds North-West) said that 'the people of Leeds want their children's education back in the control of their elected representatives. The suggestion that it would take five to seven years for the required management skills to be instituted,

and therefore before the return of control and management of the educational system to the city's elected representatives' was not acceptable.

Estelle Morris' rather unhelpful and unilluminating reply was worthy of George W Bush. She referred to George Mudie's contribution and said that he had 'talked about Leeds ... in an interesting way, and he meant some praise by saying that its schools were average. That is not good enough for Leeds. It is capable of better than average.'

She added: 'The argument in Leeds is not about the public versus the private sector, but about forging a new relationship between the best of Leeds LEA with something new that it currently lacks.'

Following the marginal concession that the JVC would be replaced by an arms length company, George Mudie, who is a former leader of the council, complained that a council which had seen off Margaret Thatcher should have no difficulty with Estelle Morris.

The Council's preference for a partnership with another local authority was roundly ignored, but their opposition and the opposition within the party have never been

translated into votes in the council chamber.

In a last ditch attempt to head off the arms-length company and retain education services in-house, the Lord Mayor, Bernard Atha, offered to lead a delegation to Blunkett 'if the people of Leeds want me to'. A barrage of letters in the local evening press urged him to do so, and so did the District Labour Party.

The board of Education Leeds met for the first time at the beginning of April behind closed doors. Afterwards, with unintentional irony, chairman of the board Peter Ridsdale promised a new culture of openness and transparency.

In its report in February 2000, Ofsted wrote of the 'government's agenda' and the need for the LEA to respond to it. Unfortunately, the government's agenda appears to have more to do with the needs of British business rather than public education and the defence of the comprehensive ideal.

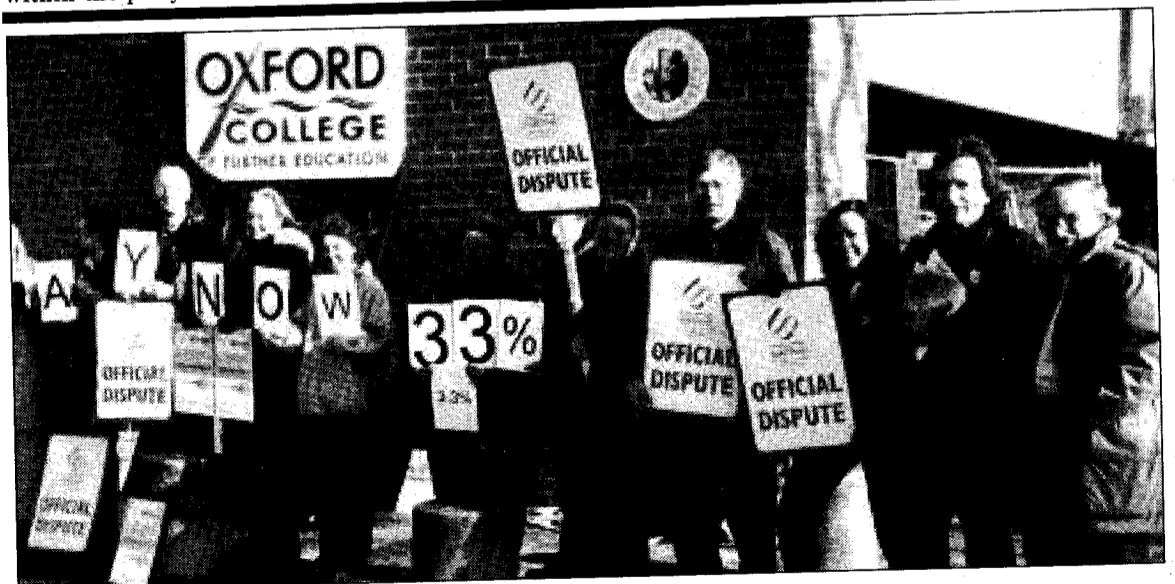
As Minister for Trade and Industry in 1998, Peter Mandelson issued a consultation paper to industry, whose purpose was to 'encourage views on the important

negotiations on international trade in services ... Within the European Community we will be drawing up request lists country-by-country and sector-by-sector. These negotiating priorities must reflect UK business priorities.'

Why has Leeds been chosen for this experiment? Part of the answer may be that it is the second largest LEA. Secondly, although its performance is better than Sheffield or Hull, it does not have a cabinet minister to embarrass.

The last word should perhaps go to an editorial in the *Yorkshire Evening Post*: 'This snub to Leeds is nothing less than an outrageous affront to democracy which divorces us all from the right to take a part in our children's education. And if this untested experiment fails they will be the ones to pay the price.'

● The above is an amended and updated version of an article due to appear in the journal *Education and Social Justice*. An annual subscription for personal subscribers costs £25, and can be obtained from Barbara Wiggins, Trentham Books Ltd, Westview House, 734 London Rd, Oakhill, Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 5NP.



Walk-out over college pay freeze

Lecturers at Oxford College of Further Education staged a one-day protest strike on April 3 after the College's Board refused to offer the nationally agreed 3.3% pay increase for the last financial year.

A massive majority of the NATFHE members among the full-time lecturing staff voted for the action, which forced the cancellation of all lessons for the day, and many joined a cheerful and confident picket line.

The hard line from Oxford College management – one of only a handful of Colleges not to honour the national pay deal – flows from the reforms pushed through by the Tories, which made each FE College responsible for balancing its own budget each year.

Among those on the picket line was the Socialist Alliance candidate for Oxford East, John Lister, who teaches journalism part-time at the College.

Socialist Outlook



Janine Booth

Islington Alliance getting well sorted

Terry Conway, Secretary Islington Socialist Alliance, personal capacity

ISLINGTON Socialist Alliance has spent the last couple of weeks building the campaign to defend our local sorting office, under threat of closure with 1300 local jobs to go.

At the same time as leafleting about our own plans for standing against Minister for the Dome Chris Smith, we have been putting out the CWU leaflet against the closure through as many doors as possible.

Any such job loss would be a priority for a local alliance, especially in an area like ours where the rate of unemployment is already above the national average.

But it is even more important given the fact that the CWU branch involved gave money to the Socialist Alliance during last year's Greater London Assembly elections and had to fight all the way through to the union's national conference to regain control of their funds as a consequence.

The highlight of the campaign so far was the public meeting held on March 28 by the postal workers which was attended by 150 people, including delegations from local NUT, UNISON and FBU branches as well as large numbers of CWU members and a sizeable

number of local residents who would be affected by the closure.

Janine Booth, the Socialist Alliance candidate for Islington South addressed the meeting as did Jeremy Corbyn, Labour MP for Islington North who has been working hard to oppose the Post Office's proposals.

Cabinet Minister Chris Smith was apparently otherwise engaged, and the meeting clearly agreed with Janine who wondered what other engagement could be more important than fighting to defend 1300 jobs in your own constituency.

Smith apparently agrees with his Cabinet colleagues, who claim that what the Post Office (perhaps I should call them by their new title, Consignia?) does is not the government's business.

The meeting was also pleased to hear Executive member Dave Wall state that the union would support strike action if management refused to back down and make the investment needed to build a new office in the North London area and retain all the current jobs.

The next stage of the campaign will be a local demonstration in late May. The Islington Socialist Alliance intends to make sure we remain at the heart of this vital campaign to defend jobs and services.

Hove: fighting them on the beaches

The Socialist Alliance election campaign in Hove is in full swing, with a wide range, and a growing number, of people involved.

We have campaigned around rail privatisation with hundreds of local people signing the petition in support of the early day motion from Tony Benn calling for renationalisation.

Local Blairite MP Ivor Caplin is not surprisingly the only Labour MP in the area not to have signed the petition.

Candidate Andy Richards, a *Socialist Outlook* supporter, has spoken at meetings organized by the World Development Movement and Friends of the Earth, along with candidates

from other parties.

The response to the ideas put forward by the Socialist Alliance has been tremendous. People are singularly unimpressed with New Labour and the Tories are practically invisible.

Andy says "what is striking is the marvellous spirit of unity within the SA - there seems to be a real commitment make it successful as a socialist alternative to New Labour."

Activists are currently distributing a leaflet to every household in Hove and there are street stalls every Saturday both there and in central Brighton.



Haringey platform: Weyman Bennett, Imran Khan, Anna Gluckstein, Tariq Ali, Louise Christian

Campaigning in Cumbria

Paul Wilcox

The Socialist Alliance in Carlisle, which involves comrades from the Socialist Party, the SWP and the ISG as well as independents, is facing different conditions going into the General Election campaign from those familiar to most readers of *Socialist Outlook*.

The foot and mouth crisis has hit Cumbria hard - there are more confirmed cases of the disease here than in any other area of the country. The epidemic is having disastrous consequences on the people of Cumbria.

The farming community is in a sharp decline and the knock on effects on tourism and the local economy can't be underestimated. Cumbria has three main industries - farming, tourism and BNFL.

We have already seen the effects of Thatcher's policies in our now extinct mining industry and steel works. This process is still continuing under a so-called Labour government. Profit was put before people in both the mining and steel industry, and now the profit motive is having a disastrous effect on the farming industry.

The dithering of Nick Brown and Tony Blair on the issue of culling or vaccinations has caused widespread anger at the Labour government, especially in Cumbria.

Socialists can't ignore the issue of farming and agriculture. Many working class communities live in these areas. Over 70% of Britain is used for agriculture. 50 years ago 1 million workers were employed in the industry (excluding farmers) but now it is down to just under 200,000.

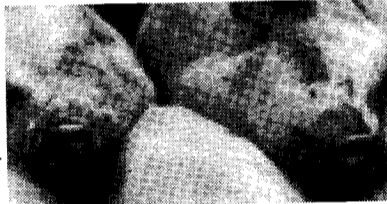
Many on the right, such as the NFU are calling for smaller farms to link up together to form "farming co-operatives". But their idea of co-ops are far from the same as ours. They are to run strictly for profit and under the control of the farmers and not the workers they employ.

Today five million people in Britain suffer from extreme poverty. A study by Breadline Europe says they

suffer "severe deprivation of human needs" including lack of food, safe drinking water, health, shelter, and education. Over 40% of lone parents with one child get under £163 a week.

The report says, "the UK has become the special case of Europe"

New Labour tells us that things are getting better: but profits are being put



before basic human needs.

Not a week goes by when we are told that our food is unsafe to eat or our National Health Service is so under funded that waiting lists are getting longer not shorter as we were promised by Tony Blair.

Education is not just a basic human need it is a necessity. But New Labour have taken away the student grant and charged us for our education. It's easy enough for Tony Blair to call our schools "Bog Standard" - he and other cabinet ministers went to public schools.

Last year in the Local Elections (Carlisle City

Council, Botcherby Ward) I was the Socialist Alternative candidate (Socialist Party). We were helped in the campaign by the SWP Carlisle branch and by individual trade unionists.

I had worked closely with the SWP in the Coalition against the war in the Balkans, which was set up in 1999 by the CND, Socialist Party, SWP and Carlisle & District Trades Council. This co-operation with other left activists helped build our election campaign a year later.

The seat we stood in was one of Carlisle's largest council estates, which in 1999 had been won by the Tories (all three seats). In fact many people told us that they voted Tory to get the Labour Party out (the Liberal Democrats did not stand in 1999).

Anger had erupted in 1998 when the Labour-led council tried to put up the pensioners' bus pass. This was opposed by trade unionists, youth and pensioner activists. Labour lost control of the city in 1999 after 20 years of domination.

We go into the forthcoming general election with no illusions about winning. Our task is to put socialist ideas back on the agenda.

Pumping out the message in Pompey

Roger Welch

PORTSMOUTH Socialist Alliance was set up in January through the combined initiative of the local SWP and a number of independent socialists including myself.

In February, John Molyneux, a leading SWP member and very well known and established activist in the city, was elected as our parliamentary candidate and I was elected as his election agent.

Since that time we have moved to holding weekly open meetings and leafletting and petitioning in the main shopping centres on Saturdays.

There are positive overlaps between Portsmouth SA and other campaigns such as

People and Planet and the local campaign in defence of asylum seekers. The SA is also supported by a number of Iraqi Kurdish comrades who regularly participate in our meetings and activities.

The main focus of our activities has become the demand for the renationalisation of the railway system.

Station protest

This has mainly centred on use of the railway unions' petition but this was followed up yesterday evening (Monday April 20) with a protest at the main railway station.

We 'occupied' the station for a good half an hour with placards and slogans demanding renationalisation and, unsurprisingly, were well received by the

Double whammy for Haringey

Haringey Socialist Alliance held a highly impressive meeting on March 21 to launch its campaign in the two constituencies of Hornsey and Wood Green and Tottenham.

250 people packed into Wood Green Labour Club to hear the local candidates Weyman Bennett (Tottenham) and Louise Christian (Hornsey and Wood Green), who were joined on the platform by Tariq Ali, Delroy Lindo and Imran Khan.

It was unfortunate that in the end RMT Deputy General Secretary Secretary Bob Crow had to send his apologies as union business in Russia prevented his attendance, but this did have one interesting side effect - there were no white men on the platform!

A key strength of both candidates lies in their commitment to the anti-racist struggle. Weyman has a long history of involvement in local campaigns, and more recently has been heavily involved in the campaign by Roger Sylvester's family to demand a public inquiry into his murder by Tottenham police.

Radical lawyer Louise Christian, in a powerful speech, explained that she felt honoured to have been chosen to stand against Barbara Roche, who has been responsible for developing and implementing so much of new Labour's disgraceful attacks on asylum seekers. Other than Jack Straw, she told me afterwards, there's no one she would rather stand against.

Louise also spoke about the effects of rail privatisation on people's lives - drawing on her work on the Southall and Ladbroke Grove Inquiries into rail crashes there which cost so many lives in the relentless search for profit.

This inspiring evening demonstrated once again that the Socialist Alliance is bringing into activity whole layers of people who are ignored by conventional politics.

majority of passengers coming off trains.

However, there were rather fewer of these than anticipated, as if to prove our point (not that it needs proving) all the trains from London were subject to significant delays.

And this was on the day when it was announced that the private profiteers who own South West Trains have been given the contract to run our trains for years to come!

Now that the election has been postponed our main task is to ensure we do not lose momentum by using the extra time to take our campaigns and demands into the wider community and build the vote for the Socialist Alliance on June 7.

Reds rock Boateng in Harlesden

Adam Hartman

SOCIALISTS in North West London are mounting a challenge to Home Office minister and Brent South MP Paul Boateng.

Mick McDonnell, a campaigner for tenant rights on the Stonebridge estate in Harlesden, is standing as the Socialist Alliance candidate. His candidacy will give a voice to the thousands of working class people who feel abandoned by New Labour, and who face mounting uncertainty in many areas of their lives – in housing, jobs, education and health.

Stonebridge is being knocked down and rebuilt in a huge redevelopment and "community regeneration" scheme run by a Housing Action Trust.

The HAT will own and manage the new properties. Residents will face higher rents and less secure tenancies. There will not be enough new homes to rehouse all the residents.

We are campaigning to defend council housing, freeze rents, uphold tenants' rights and pump in the necessary resources to upgrade the housing stock and provide decent facilities for residents.

The threatened closure of Willesden High School and its reopening as a City Academy specialising in sport, with the aid of a £2 million "donation" by sports marketing tycoon Frank Lowe, spells more uncertainty for parents in south Brent already suffering from the chronic under-resourcing of education in the borough.

Handed from local authority control to a private foundation the school will be free to select 10% of its pupils and attack teachers' pay and conditions.

What about the local kids who lose out to the selected 10%? What about those who would rather specialise in

music or art? What about the other schools which will lose out under this two-tier system?

We say stop the privatisation of Willesden High School! Defend comprehensive education! No to selection! Stop the underfunding which is failing our kids!

Uncertainty also hangs over the local Central Middlesex Hospital with the possibility of specialist in-patient services being moved further afield to Northwick Park in Harrow.

The area has seen a rise in crime and "gun culture". New Labour promised to be tough on the causes of crime. But it's policies have widened the gap between rich and poor, increased job insecurity and continued to run down education and youth services. Young people need a decent environment to grow up in and a future to look forward to!

Boateng's "answer" to crime is to build more prisons, and his "solution" to failing prisons is to privatise them. As Minister for Prisons he must answer for the shocking conditions in Britain's jails and young offenders' institutions.

We call for public investment to upgrade Britain's jails, for the humane treatment of prisoners and for full support and rehabilitation on release.

Boateng must also share responsibility for the government's racist treatment and scapegoating of asylum seekers who are a significant part of the local community. We are working together with Labour Party members and Greens to support asylum seekers, to challenge the racism they are facing from the government and media and to break down hostility from within the community.

We are determined to make our mark in the election and in the battles to come. We're not going away!

"Cash for canapes"

Oxford Socialist Alliance hit local press and radio headlines with this picket of a fund-raising dinner organised by Oxford East Labour Party, to which local chief executives were invited to meet cabinet minister Andrew Smith – at £65 per head!

A rival Curry Night for trade unionists and socialists organised by the Alliance on April 6 attracted over 50 key union and campaign activists and raised over £100 for the campaign.



Southwark goes for the double

Jane Kelly

SOUTHWARK Socialist Alliance, which now has nearly 100 paid up members, has two candidates standing in the general election.

In Camberwell and Peckham, (Harriet Harman's seat), John Mulrenan, long term UNISON activist (and once Harriet Harman's agent) is standing, while in Dulwich and West Norwood, Brian Kelly is standing against New Labour minister, Tessa Jowell.

Brian Kelly has a long trade union and Labour Party record, having been a member of the POEU then its successor the CWU. He was also chair of Dulwich Labour Party and a Labour councillor.

The Southwark Alliance is now divided into two weekly meetings, one for each constituency, but with officers meeting weekly to keep an overview of the campaigns.

The whole the Camberwell and Peckham constituency has been leafleted, and we are starting to get results from this with people writing and phoning in, wanting to join and help with the

campaign. Fundraising is also going well, with £1200 profit made on a hugely successful social last week.

Collaboration between the component parts of the Alliance is working well. A joint Southwark Trades Council and ANL sponsored march took place on April 7 against the NF march in Bermondsey.

Southwark Trades Council also called a meeting on privatisation, sponsored by the Alliance, where Simon Hughes, Liberal Democrat MP for Bermondsey and North Southwark, Kingsley Abrahms, prospective Labour Parliamentary candidate for the same constituency and John Mulrenan all spoke about the effects of privatisation on services in the area.

The debate was undoubtedly won by John, who raised the level of politics in the meeting by a combined analysis of the project of the WTO and globalisation and detailed knowledge of its effects in Southwark.

We are now looking forward to building on these successes.

Campaigning – Bristol fashion

Huge cuts in secondary education have resulted from the fake referendum on Council tax levels carried out by Bristol's Labour council as a cover for their reactionary plans. Teachers set up an organisation called Save Our Schools which has been supported by the Bristol Socialist Alliance. The NUT are threatening a strike.

Meanwhile parents at Gay Elms and Whitehouse schools successfully prevented proposed closures with a campaign of demonstrations, pickets and petitions. The campaign involved all the political parties including Bristol Socialist Alliance. PPC Brian Drummond praised the parents saying that people count and action makes the difference.

The war is not yet won as a recent Ofsted report called for the closure of the schools and others in the Bristol area. An advisory quango has been set up which could let the ruling Labour Group off the hook by allowing Labour to pass on the responsibility to the quango.

The campaign to defend asylum seekers in Bristol is strong. Bristol Socialist Alliance together with many others has demonstrated outside Tesco

calling for an end to the voucher system. The Bristol CDAS have also highlighted the use of charter flights to transport asylum seekers out of the country with pickets of British Airways and focused on the profits being made from the persecution of asylum seekers.

In Bristol West, Brian Drummond spoke at a hustings organised by CDAS along with the Tories, the Liberals, the Green Party and the SLP. Only Labour failed to send a representative.

Brian Drummond attacked the society which allows the free flow of capital but not people. He called for the end to the criminalisation of asylum seekers through the use of detention centres and prisons.

On April 7 we performed street theatre. Campaigns organiser, Pete Weardon disguised as Tony Blair to debate with Brian Drummond on the outcome of four years of Labour rule. The debate took place on a ladder.

On April 11 we will leaflet the bus queues in the City Centre calling for a proper public service transport system in south Bristol. We will examine the profits of First Bus – and call for nationalisation.

Left branches out in Waltham Forest

Roland Rance

After a slow start, the SA campaign in Leyton and Wanstead is picking up support, particularly from voters furious at the local council's education policies.

SA candidate Sally Labern, an activist in the local parents' education campaign, will be standing against Labour MP Harry Cohen, who, although he entered parliament as a left-wing supporter of the Campaign Group, has moved steadily closer to New Labour.

The main local issue is the scandal over the proposed privatisation of education services.

Already controversial, this made national headlines when it was revealed that

one of the two preferred bidders, the Tribal group, had bought the company currently running Waltham Forest's education services and advising the council on the sell-off.

They had offered large cash bonuses to the advisers if its bid was accepted.

Although the one remaining bidder, Nord Anglia, has been found guilty of racism in its management of education services in neighbouring Hackney, Waltham Forest council refused to cancel the bidding process.

The anger of parents, teachers and other education workers has led to mounting support for the challenge to New Labour. The campaign is also

strengthening the local Socialist Alliance, which is developing close links with local unions and the Trades Council.

Activists hope that this will lead to a strong challenge to New Labour in next year's council elections.

One complication, however, is the fact that the Socialist Party is standing a local UNISON activist, Simon Donovan, against Neil Gerrard, the left Labour MP for Walthamstow.

While many Labour Party members in Leyton and Wanstead are expected to vote for the SA candidate, many SA members in Walthamstow will vote Labour rather than for the Socialist Party.

NEW!

This ISG pamphlet is a contribution to the debate within the Socialist Alliance on the policies needed to challenge New Labour and unite a broad movement of the left.

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“There is no hope of changing the Party back to the values that most Labour Party members believe in”

Veronica Fagan from Socialist Outlook talked to LIZ DAVIES about her book (reviewed opposite), and the political choices that had emerged for her during and since its writing.

SO: One of the things that struck me reading the book, is that because it is written, in a certain sense as a chronology, it's difficult to distinguish between the slow drip of the realisation you came to that this isn't what I joined the party for and break points.

LD: I suppose it was much more of a slow drip than one break point. When we were elected to the NEC in 1998, I had very low expectations. I knew that Millbank were capable of dirty tricks, and I also knew that the Grassroots Alliance – holding four seats out of the 33 – were never going to win any votes against the leadership.

But it would be fair to say that Millbank's behaviour exceeded even my low expectations. The first meeting was spent discussing Millbank's "code of conduct"; prohibiting us from speaking to the press – dubbed by the media a "gagging clause". At the second meeting, they moved next business to prevent us even discussing our motion condemning the bombing of Iraq.

Then at the National Policy Forum in July 1999, the Grassroots Alliance was hoping that we could ally with some of the trade unions in order to achieve a few amendments on minority positions – such as restoring the link between pensions and earnings, lifting the cap on national insurance contributions, defending housing benefit, opposition to PFI.

Instead, Millbank wanted everyone to withdraw amendments so that they would not even be voted on by the National Policy Forum, let alone Conference. The trade unions went along with Millbank's manoeuvres, withdrawing all their motions in favour of a mean-



Misunderstood: Prescott

ingless intention to conduct a "review on welfare" and voting down the Grassroots Alliance motions.

It became clear by then that, despite the policies of the trade unions, their representatives were more interested in supporting Millbank than arguing for their own policies and there was no possibility of any middle ground developing on the NEC.



It also became clear to me that the decision-making structures in the Party – which had been created in order to restrict democracy in the first place – were hopelessly manipulated by Millbank and there was no possibility of any dissenting voices being heard through those structures.

As far as government policies were concerned, like many on the Labour left, I did not have high expectations of the New Labour government in May 1997.

But I did not expect an assault on lone parents, the scapegoating of asylum seekers, the attempts to restrict trial by jury – none of which were in the manifesto.

SO: You talk about Christmas 99 being a key time, but you don't say very much about the

dilemmas you were grappling with?

LD: I was trying to decide whether to stand for the NEC for a third term. We were in the middle of the Livingstone saga. The Asylum Bill had been passed by Parliament six months earlier with only seven Labour MPs voting against.

I was beginning to feel that I could not necessarily support New Labour at the ballot box. I was very clear that if Livingstone ran as an independent, I wanted to support him.

It seemed wrong to put myself forward to Party members to stand for the leadership body of the Party when I did not feel committed to the Party any longer.

And the reason why I did not feel committed was because this was a Party now dominated by New Labour – it was not the Labour Party that I had originally joined.

SO: You mention that you did not vote for Dobson in the London Mayor election and that your partner put a Socialist Alliance poster in the window at this time, but you do not say very much about the Socialist Alliance.

LD: Yet your public act of leaving the Labour Party was combined with a declaration of support for the Socialist Alliance. What I don't get from the book is how much your decision to support the Alliance is a negative against new Labour, and how much it is a positive choice

LD: I took three separate decisions at probably three separate times. I wanted to come off the NEC – I had a

mandate to stay on the NEC for the term of office which ended in October 2000, but I wanted then to come off it, take a deep breath, and make some political decisions.

Having come off the NEC, I had some time to think and what became clear to me was that, for reasons that I explain in the book, the Labour Party had qualitatively changed as a result of New Labour and was no longer the Party I had joined.

My experience on the NEC had led me to conclude that there was no hope of changing the Party back to the values that most Labour Party members believe in – the decision-making structures were entirely manipulated by Millbank to prevent that.

As a result, I felt that I could not support New Labour at the ballot box and that seemed fairly conclusively to mean that I should not continue as a member of the Party.

The third decision was to support the Socialist Alliance and it's been the imminence of the general election that has crystallised that question for me.

As it happens, because I live in Hackney North, I will be voting for Dianne Abbot, one of the few remaining left Labour MPs and someone for whom I have a good deal of respect.

But in the neighbouring constituency of Hornsey and Wood Green the choice between Socialist Alliance candidate Louise Christian and Barbara Roche is one of the most straightforward in British political history. There is no doubt in my mind I would vote for Louise Christian.



SO: Towards the end of the book you talk about the thinness, the lack of energy in the Labour Left, but you don't say very much about how you think that has come about.

LD: The book is intended as an exposure of New Labour,

not a study of the Labour left. But obviously I've been part of the Labour left for years and there can be no disputing that the Labour left has declined.



SO: But what do you think are the major factors in the decline of the Labour Left?

LD: The Labour left started to be beaten back under Kinnock, but there's no doubt that New Labour has made it impossible for the Labour left to function. When they barred me from standing for Parliament, that sent a message to the Labour left not even to try to put candidates forward.

The left used to play its part in the decision-making structures of the Party – so New Labour closed those down. The only opportunity for Labour left voices to be heard are the annual NEC elections. Even those elections are largely symbolic since they cannot affect the balance of power on the NEC, but Millbank resent them so much that they are now proposing to reduce the frequency of NEC elections.

The Labour left has declined in influence, but also in numbers. Lots of good socialists have left the Labour Party in recent years. In the last few months, I've been struck by how low the expectations of the Labour left have become.

It seems to have lost its ability to be shocked by the wickedness of New Labour, because it spends so much time watching New Labour up close – and I think that's another reason for its decline.

SO: Do you think what has happened in local government has had an effect on the strength of the Labour Left? Because the book is written about your experience on the NEC you don't say much about your experience as a councillor.

LD: At the end of the book,

I contrast my experience in Islington in 1993, when I was involved in the campaign to occupy and save two nurseries from closure, with the recent crisis in Hackney.

The point about the nursery occupation is that the campaign, working both inside and outside the Labour Party, managed to win and persuade the Labour councillors to overturn their original decision to close the nurseries.

It took a strategy of public campaigning – the occupations, leaflets, petitioning on the streets etc – with using the Party's democratic structures to put pressure on the councillors.

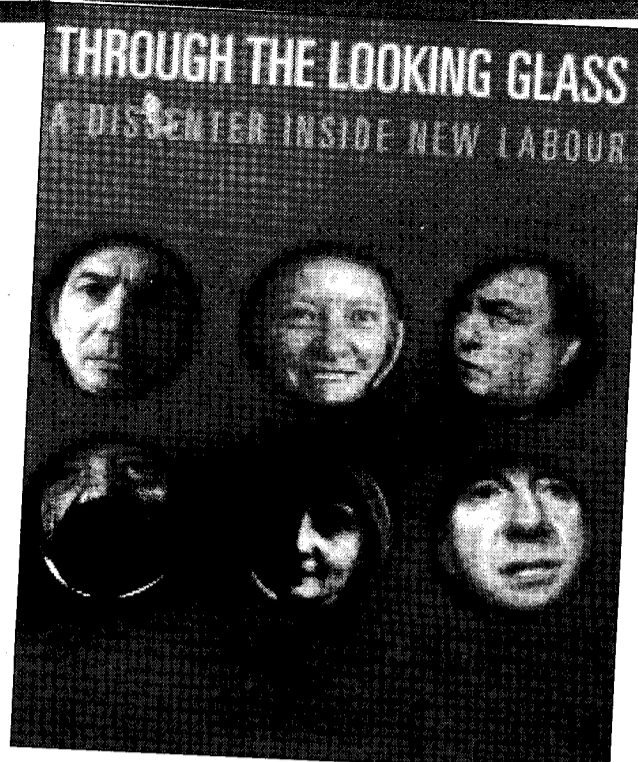
One shouldn't be too nostalgic – there were plenty of campaigns at that time using those methods that didn't succeed, but that one did and as a result one nursery was re-opened.

In Hackney in 2000 – 2001, the Council (run by a Labour-Tory coalition) is privatising its services, attacking the terms and conditions of the workforce, closing nurseries and old people's centres – and there's a serious trade union and community campaign opposing these measures.

But the campaign isn't heard within Hackney Labour Party. There was an attempt by the Hackney left, including myself, to raise the issue at Hackney North Labour Party General Committee meeting – but a motion that was written to appeal to the broadest possible alliance, urging reconsideration of the cuts, was smashed out of sight by the Blairites.

That taught me that the strategy by which I had always worked – public campaigning and raising the issue within the Party at the same time – no longer applied and that if the cuts are to be defeated, that will only happen through the public campaign. It won't happen inside the Labour Party.

SO: Earlier, you referred to the Socialist Alliance as a party and obviously in electoral terms that is what it is. I don't know how much you are aware that there are elements of a debate within the Alliance about whether the long term project is





Liz (left) looks less than delighted at winning a second term on the NEC in 1998

actually to form a party in reality as well as in law.

Many of us would see the model of the Scottish Socialist Party as the sort of model we would be interested in. I wondered if you had given this any thought?

LD: Watching the Socialist Alliance, until recently from the outside, I've been struck by what appears to be a new understanding on the left – that not everyone has to agree with every dot and comma in order to be able to work around a common programme.

I've been impressed by the various election results, by the strength and diversity of the candidates and by the broad alliance that it represented.

I'm aware that sometimes there are differences within the Socialist Alliance – and that those differences are resolved democratically. That's a refreshing contrast to New Labour.

I've also been struck by the number of people who have left the Labour Party – either recently or over the last few years – who are now involved in supporting the Socialist Alliance.

I don't have any prescriptions for how the Alliance should develop. The most important task is to obtain a decent vote at the general election that will confirm our position on the electoral map.

Having seen many of the candidates speaking or campaigning, and seen the real enthusiasm that there is in the Socialist Alliance for getting the socialist message out to the electorate, I'm convinced the Alliance represents a new and exciting alternative.



Crystallised reflections

Through the Looking Glass
by Liz Davies
(Verso 2001, £15)
Reviewed by TERRY CONWAY

Through the Looking Glass has achieved more exposure than most writers manage after publishing for years, not least because the *Guardian* ran major extracts of the book two days running. The reason that paper was prepared to cover the book, as well as the story of author Liz Davies's resignation from the Labour Party and support for the Socialist Alliance so extensively was nothing to do with support for the principled politics clearly demonstrated in this work.

In fact the *Guardian* has often gone out of its way to rubbish Liz Davies's politics but at the same time they know that their readers have followed her story more closely. Its ironical that the law of the market should occasionally stand the left in good stead but this time it did – even though the first day's extracts were incredibly badly edited.

Hopefully the taste given to *Guardian* readers from these brief snippets will convince many to go out and buy the whole thing. The full menu is definitely to be recommended.

As Liz Davies says in our interview with her, *Through the Looking Glass* sets out to expose the machinations of new Labour. It certainly succeeds in that goal and does so in an accessible, vivid style – building up the total picture through a series of incisive cameos, which impacted on this reader despite the fact that there was little in the book that I wasn't already familiar with. Liz manages to make all the

characters real, whether they are friend, foe or somewhere in between.

This is most memorable of course when she breaks with received wisdom. Her analysis of John Prescott for example gently undermines the popular myth that the man is a bumbling fool and an unwilling prisoner of his leader.

Instead Liz shows that often it was Prescott who was chosen to argue the Blairite line inside the party precisely because he was not seen as an outsider in the way that Blair's coterie is.



Having assumed the role, he carried it out through the use of coherent arguments. Conversely she shows Blair, portrayed in the media in the image he has created for himself as Mr Cool, being riled on more than one occasion.

What is less clear to those readers who haven't encountered Liz herself except through these pages, it is portrait of the author.

Few people in my experience use the same style when they are speaking as when they are writing. Liz Davies does – and it is a style with a good deal to commend it.

Not only do the people come to life, but the political implications of the actions depicted are drawn out in a gloriously understated style. From the dedication to Tony Benn "For speaking truth to power" through the concluding pages which illustrate the paucity of

today's Labour Left by contrasting it with the vivacity of the anti-globalisation movement, we are in no doubt of the viewpoint of this chronicler.

What emerges from these pages is a clear demonstration not only of the lengths the party machine goes to stifle even the mildest dissent, but their craven dedication to further the interests of big business and the rich, regardless of the cost to their own supporters.

Of course this is a story familiar to most readers of this paper – but hearing it again in such clear ringing tones certainly reinforced my anger and strengthened my determination to fight it yet more vigorously.

It is true that some of the heart-rending moments that led Liz to finally decide to resign from the party that she had worked for and in all her adult life don't appear to the full extent they could.

I suspect the reasons for this are two-fold.

Firstly both Liz herself and the book are enormously generous to those she has worked with but disagreed with.

The second, as Liz states in the interview, is that the purpose of the book is to chronicle the rise of New Labour, not to talk about the strengths and weaknesses of the opposition to it.

This book is a valuable asset to anyone who wants to understand the rise of Blairism in order to fight it more effectively. Liz Davies has done the left a great service in writing it.

More than that, by continuing to commit herself to struggling for socialism, she is continuing to lend her insights and passion to a movement which is today developing in exciting new directions.

An Alliance programme to reach layers of workers – or to isolate the left?

Dave Packer

According to Peter Manson in *Weekly Worker* (March 15th) the CPGB took on the role of leading the "revolutionary bloc" at the Socialist Alliance conference in Birmingham.

In a classic sectarian fashion, their cabal attempted to foist on to the Conference their version of a 'revolutionary programme' and tried to fast-track the SA, towards becoming a revolutionary party. This of course would have and cut off the Alliance, not only from the mass of the working class but the broad worker's vanguard

It was premature to try to impose such a programme. It revealed a scant understanding of what the Socialist Alliance is today, and of the method of the united front that is involved here.

The Socialist Alliance brings together diverse left wing currents and individuals united in struggle against the capitalist offensive and the Blair government. It is a united front of a special type, which bears within it the dynamic potentiality to become a new workers party.

This emergent party must by definition be based on the class struggle, must be democratic and – if it is to provide a socialist answer – must at some point adopt a revolutionary platform.

To understand what is needed at any point is to understand a process, which in turn requires an understanding of the dialectic.

Ultra-left

A revolutionary party will be brought into being through a complex process of revolutionary intervention, regroupment of revolutionaries and of the wider recomposition of the workers movement. The Socialist Alliance can play an important part in this process as long as we don't let the ultra-left sectarians wreck it.

The majority at the conference were falsely accused of hiding our politics – even worse of not telling the truth to the workers. This is of course the stock in trade of the sectarian.

You cannot build a broad united movement in struggle on the basis of a full revolutionary programme, except in a pre-revolutionary or revolutionary situation.

This clearly does not exist today. Or does it? *Weekly Worker* certainly suggest this when they write, "The necessity for workers' militia must form an essential part of a Bolshevik minimum – i.e., immediate programme."

These demands are certainly part of a full revolutionary programme, but as agitational demands they are appropriate in this form only in a pre-revolutionary crisis.

As I argued in my speech at conference, we should put forward

demands such as "Self-defence is no offence" – a slogan which has now fortunately been incorporated into the SA Manifesto. But it is only at the highest levels of class struggle that the highest form of the united front, built on demands for workers' councils (or soviets) and workers' militias is appropriate.

Nobody at the conference said, "we don't always have to tell the truth (to the workers)" as the *Weekly Worker* claimed. To paraphrase Lenin, there is a time for propaganda which can explain many ideas, including the full programme of revolutionaries and there is a time for agitation, which explains a few ideas, but which are more tailored to the current levels of consciousness.

Absurd

We should not attempt to force the whole of our version of the truth, down the throats of the workers every time they move into action – this can only isolate us

It's frankly absurd for *Weekly Worker* to write: "that by definition the only programme to 'challenge capitalism' is a revolutionary one."

The whole premise of the united front is that reformist workers can move into struggle against capitalism, sometimes to high level of mobilisation, without being revolutionaries. We can build unity in action on a whole range of anti-capitalist demands included in the Socialist Alliance programme.

This programme represents a frontal challenge to capitalism in today's conditions. It challenges capitalist property rights, ownership, control and management and confronts free market with planning and control.

It proposes to tax and expropriate the rich and big business. It challenges the capitalist logic of globalisation and the destruction of the environment, and vigorously promotes the independent class struggle of the workers nationally and internationally.

Weekly Worker reached new depths in reporting that I called for more resources for the police. In fact I repeated one of the slogans we used in Peckham in the context of the murder of Damilola Taylor: "No to more policing, more resources for the community."

Anyone who knows me or the ISG would have understood the point I was making here.

Weekly Worker have made a long and difficult attempt to break out of their Stalinist past, and have in many respects succeeded. This is to be welcomed, but the old baggage still weighs heavy.

It often leads them to falsify opponents' positions – which ends up being a slide back to those sectarian methods of the past.

Learning lessons from Socialist Alliance

The SWP awakes

Greg Tucker

"The Socialist Workers Party is experiencing a massive break from the experiences which have shaped our members over the last two decades," writes Chris Bambery in the latest issue of *Socialist Review*. He argues that a new radicalisation means that it is necessary for the SWP to break with its relatively isolated branch and paper sale method and turn outward – to build the Socialist Alliance, harking back to the IS/SWP experience of the 1970s.

Certainly it has been obvious to the whole of the left that over the recent past the SWP has been undergoing major changes, most graphically demonstrated by its new open relationship with other left groups and individuals within the Socialist Alliance, but with other manifestations as well.

Over the last two years, a slow change has been taking place at the top of the SWP, first tentatively with the campaign against the war in the Balkans, picking up confidence with the turn to the London Socialist Alliance last year, and now finding full expression with the Socialist Alliance general election campaign. A thorough-going attempt to change the practice of the organisation as a whole is now underway.

The political basis of this development has been given clear expression in two recent keynote articles, by John Rees in *International Socialism* and in a piece on the SWP website from Alex Callinicos, written to explain the split with the SWP's sister organisation in the United States, the ISO.

Turning point

For both Callinicos and Rees, the anti-globalisation demonstration in Seattle is the key, a turning point in the class struggle, legitimising direct action and providing a new language – anti-capitalism.

Whilst the Fourth International would highlight some of the precursors to Seattle, and the role that revolutionaries had in starting the process – with the Euro-marches in Amsterdam and Cologne, and the growth of campaigns for the Tobin Tax such as ATTAC, nevertheless we agree that a new cycle of protest has clearly broken out.

In turn a new anti-capitalist mood is developing. John Rees correctly points out that what is new about the current wave of demonstrations and campaigns is that they identify the capitalist system as the enemy. Rather than fighting in isolation around specific issues, those questions have become starting points from which to rapidly move on to identifying the real source of the problem.

Alex Callinicos identifies two further developments – the growth of new political milieus such as the



Greg Tucker speaking at the April 3 London rally of the Socialist Alliance

ATTAC movement, and the development of new critiques of capitalism from such as Naomi Klein, Susan George and Walden Bello.

Win to socialism

That they have recognised these developments is to be welcomed. What is even more important is that – almost alone with the Fourth International amongst the revolutionary left – they want to fight to win this broad contradictory current to develop a more coherent socialist consciousness.

At the same time Rees understands that, as social democratic leaderships adopt the neo-liberal economic orthodoxy, the space for traditional reformist consciousness narrows – and an increasing minority of left reformists are forced to draw more left wing conclusions – and turn to the anti-capitalist movement.

Thus the anti-capitalist movement takes on an importance far greater than its current size would suggest – "as a house where those breaking from reformism to the left and revolutionaries can co-operate".

Both Rees and Callinicos promote this argument subtly. For them it is the movement's potential and symbolic role that is important. But it is apparent that others in the SWP have inflated the real numbers that have been involved – "bending the stick" – to create an imaginary movement that is not actually there.

In the late 70s the "downturn" theory was used to explain away the SWP's inability to politically overcome the hold of left reformist Stalinism inside the trade union movement. For some it is clear that the "upturn" theory is now to be used to reorient the SWP without critically examining the errors of analysis of their past.

Within the Socialist Alliance, and more generally on the left, there is sharp debate on the nature of Blairism. If New Labour is now neo-liberal, has the Labour Party fundamentally changed its nature? John Rees has a more sophisticated analysis compared for example to those in the Socialist Party who argue that Labour is now irredeemably bourgeois.

Labour in government has pushed forward an agenda that has left many working people worse off than they were under the Tories. Its programme has included elements, like tube privatisation, that even Margaret Thatcher balked at.

In this context the gut reaction – and at many levels a healthy one – is to argue that this party is now one totally alien to our class. Rees argues that, however right wing Blair is, he is no worse than his political ancestors.

However naked new Labour is in its espousal of capitalist policies, in practice it is no different to any previous Labour government in practice. Despite all the business donations now flowing into Labour's coffers, Blair remains reliant on its financial links with the trade unions.

While perhaps we would go further in believing that Blair intends ultimately to break with Labour's working class base, we would agree with Rees' conclusion that New Labour is still as Lenin described it a "capitalist workers party" and that therefore our electoral slogan must be "Vote socialist where you can, vote Labour where you must".

Reformism in crisis

With a worsening economic situation developing, the crisis in reformism will deepen. How should revolutionaries react? John Rees points out that there are no quick fixes. It will take a long time to erode the influence of reformism – but the possibilities are stronger than for a long time.

In the trade unions the issue of independence of action is vital. The union bureaucracies have so far been able to turn back what developing mood exists, closing ranks behind "their" government. But there is a growing politicised left in the trade union movement. Rees correctly identifies the need to build a new rank and file move-



Andrew Wlard

SWP: moving beyond branch building and paper sales

ment independent of ties to Labour.

But whilst he is right to stress that socialists, revolutionary or not, must be at the core of this movement he fails to spell out what forms of organisation are necessary. In the past the SWP's view of rank and file organisation has led to them building "party"-controlled currents in opposition to genuine broad left movements.

Suspicion

They were right to attack the rotten electoral blocs run by the Stalinists and others: but independent activists were rightly suspicious of movements that appeared to be subordinate to the whims of specific parties.

Part of the recent development of the SWP has been for their trade union militants to become involved with other broad left currents. Whilst this has varied from union to union there are positive signs of a new approach.

We need to build truly inclusive organisations that are not in the control of one or another faction, where all experiences are respected. The collaboration in the Socialist Alliance has shown such inclusivity is possible.

Secondly, Rees calls for joint work with the new activists moving into political activity in order to rebuild the left. Employing the notion of the united front is essential for this, we are told. The united front is not some manoeuvre to expose the vacillation of reformism. It is not through differentiation inside the united front that revolutionaries will win recruits.

Rees calls on revolutionaries to "show in practice that their methods of struggle are superior". But that said, the frame of reference is still unclear. Callinicos in his article talks of the "systematic use of the united front approach" having been "stumbled on...more or less

empirically" by the SWP during the Balkan War campaign, and then developed in the London Socialist Alliance GLA election campaign. He also argues that "the success of initiatives such as Globalise Resistance have depended critically on the diverse range of political views represented both in building for them and in the actual conferences themselves".

It is true that the SWP has changed dramatically in its relations to the rest of the left. But this has been partial and contradictory. Some campaigns have remained as SWP-led affairs where other organised currents are only barely tolerated.

That this is no longer the norm is to be welcomed. However fact that the initial shift took place empirically means that its theoretical implications have not been fully worked through by the organisation as a whole – nor its practical consequences taken to their consistent conclusion.

Open debate

Of course, the SWP – and indeed other revolutionaries – are entitled to feel that their strategy and tactics are the best line of march in any particular arena. But there needs to be an open battle to decide the line of march, fully involving all those committed to that campaign.

Only through open democratic structures and full collaboration can lessons actually be learnt and these new forces won over.

Of course, this leaves campaigns open to factional intervention by others. And it is clear that in the past the SWP has not been alone in wanting to close off "their" campaigns for fear of disruptive intervention from sectarians. But these problems have to be fought politically rather than through bureaucratic manoeuvre.

The SWP also have to recognise that in so far as their 'turn' remains incomplete, some others on the left will hark back to the bad old days when they insulated themselves from other currents and ideas. While such backward looking thinking is not the most constructive approach today, the basis for it is completely understandable. In the end, the SWP itself has the

"Talking to ordinary SWP members, it is clear that the organisation is serious about making a change. But at the same time, for many, this is entering uncharted waters."



Since Nice events, SWP has collaborated with FI French section

means to prove such forces wrong, by applying the united front method in a consistent manner.

It is on the electoral terrain, through their involvement in the Socialist Alliance, that the SWP have made the greatest changes in their ideas and practice.

It is clear that their view of the Alliance is going through a long process of development. Having decided to support the LSA GLA campaign, the SWP threw its full weight behind the project. But at that stage it still appeared that the intervention could as easily be stopped after the election if things were not an immediate success.

A new party?

In the Rees article the Alliance is described as a "united front of a particular kind... uniting left reformist activists and revolutionaries in a common campaign around a minimum programme". Whilst this is now seen as a long-term structure, it is not a "party".

But in recent issues of *Socialist Review* a debate has been opened up which raises the possibility of allowing the Alliance to develop into a working class party in which revolutionaries would be a minority.

The possibility would exist of the SWP operating as a tendency inside such a party as they are proposing to do when they join the Scottish Socialist Party on May Day.

These ideas all represent a potential break with past practice. Certainly the experience of the last year has confounded those who assumed that the SWP's project in the LSA was to mount a rapid raid on the left.

In order to see through this deepening analysis, the SWP must change the culture of its own organisation. To this end Rees raises the Gramscian concept of the party member as "organic intellectual".

Instead of paper-sellers, maintaining "the verities of socialist politics to relatively small audiences" he calls on revolutionaries to agitate and organise on a wider scale, building "an organic relationship to the best militants in the class, whether or not we expect them to become SWP members".

Uncharted

Talking to ordinary SWP members, it is clear that the organisation is serious about making a change. But at the same time, for many, this is entering uncharted waters.

It remains to be seen whether this can develop beyond a set of basic formulations used to centralise the organisation around a specific leadership team. That is the charge of the ISO, the SWP's US co-thinkers from whom the SWP have recently broken.

Callinicos makes great play of the need to be prepared to make a fundamental turn in an organisation when it is deemed necessary. "Adapt or die" is the message. He accuses the ISO of failing to react quickly and thoroughly enough to

the new line.

Despite being the most important other member of the International Socialist Tendency, the SWP's loose international current, it seems that the SWP would rather lose comrades than allow them to drag back the movement.

And herein lie two fundamental problems. On the one hand Callinicos argues that the SWP should not be prepared to allow the development of permanent destructive factionalism, which he claims was the fate of the Fourth International in the 1970s.

On the other hand he continues to argue that it is premature to "launch an international organisation with its own leadership and discipline before the development of the kind of mass working class radicalisation that made it possible for the Bolsheviks to make the Communist International a major pole of attraction".

For all the problems of the 1970s, and the subsequent degeneration of the American SWP in the 1980s, it is just not true to say that the FI ceased to be an effective political forum.

Freedom to organise

On the contrary, without freedom of debate it would have been impossible to correct such mistakes that were made. Full freedom of criticism and internal organisation are the only guarantee of the long-term survival of revolutionary organisation - in national parties and internationally.

And though clearly the conditions that produced the Communist International will lead to the formation of new international relations superceding the Fourth International as currently organised, the attempt to build an International in the here and now is the only way to ensure the development of the revolutionary movement.

The FI has always believed that it is necessary for our individual sections to have full freedom to develop their own line of march, tailored to the specific conditions of their own local political situation. But international collaboration and debate are vital for the healthiness of those sections. It is ironic that the SWP's loose tendency seems to have a heavier hand than the FI world party.

Despite these caveats, the turn by the SWP outlined by Callinicos and Rees is to be warmly welcomed. The experience of collaboration in the Socialist Alliance has been a positive one.

In campaigns and in the trade unions there are the beginnings of new healthier joint activity. At an international level, despite the odd jibe, the work, for instance in Nice between the SWP and the LCR, and now in building for Genoa indicates new possibilities emerging.

The turn by the SWP is an opportunity which must be embraced.

Scottish Socialists step up electoral challenge

Gordon Morgan

The Scottish Socialist Party Conference in February decided to stand in every seat in Scotland at the forthcoming General Election. There are 72 seats in Scotland and everyone realised this was a major commitment. Conference accepted a Financial Report that committed the Party to raise £100,000 to meet the costs involved.

Although the regressive first past the post election system will prevent the SSP gaining any seats, it will save its deposit in a large number of seats.

The party has set itself a target of 5% of the vote across Scotland; 100,000 positive votes based on around a 50% turnout. Whilst it has been polling above this level for the Scottish Parliament consistently for the last year, polls for the Westminster Parliament have lagged behind at between 2% and 3%.

Achieving 5% will mean convincing everyone who has voted SSP in recent elections to do so at the General Election.

This election will therefore be a test and an opportunity for the Party.

Most members are new to politics and have not participated in an election campaign before. The lessons from organising this election will prove invaluable in two years time for the Scottish Parliament contest, where we have real possibilities of electing between 3 and 6 members thus transforming our influence in and ability to defend the working class.

The initial organisation of the campaign has been successful. Candidates have been selected in all seats. Around £45,000 has been raised or pledged to date - enough for the deposits and for the election leaflet which will be sent to around 1.5 million homes.

The SSP will be entitled to at least 1 political broadcast and preparation for this is underway with SSP member and director Peter Mullin helping with production. The Scottish Parliament Party Political Broadcast had a major role in our success in the elections to the Scottish Parliament, which resulted in the election of Tommy Sheridan to the Parliament and won many new members to our organisation.

Scottish Socialist Voice goes weekly

Within the next few weeks the SSP paper *Scottish Socialist Voice* will become a weekly. For the last 2 years the Voice has

been produced fortnightly. It has been sold through subscribers and the copies sold by the party membership.

Now a deal has been reached with distributors to deliver the Voice to around 1,000 newsagents throughout Scotland. This will involve some changes to the format (think Private Eye) with a magazine format and picture front page. The shop price will be £1 - though the price on the street may differ.

In the run up to the election, using commercial distribution channels will allow us to reach a wider audience, recruit members and extend our influence.

Having a weekly paper and extended distribution will enable the Voice to reach the parts of Scotland other journals don't reach.

SWP to join SSP

To make Mayday 2001 truly historic, the SWP in Scotland has agreed to join the SSP on that date.

Discussions have been ongoing since October



SSP conference: Tommy Sheridan and Alan Green

disagree with this - although the overwhelming majority support this position and it is one of its points of distinction within the Scottish left.

Whilst the SSP has around 2,000 members and the SWP around 200, this will be much more than an arithmetic strengthening of the SSP. The SWP represent a distinct tradition within British politics. Whilst their ideological distinctiveness on issues such as State Capitalism have become blurred since the collapse of Stalinism, they embody a group of cadre who have great experience in organising campaigns and responding to workers struggles.

'Shop a Dealer' had been tried before by the *Evening Times* a few years ago - to no lasting impact. With drug deaths at record levels in Strathclyde and police chiefs and all drug agencies close to saying the games up, the *Record* relaunched this discredited campaign.

First Labour were blackmailed into supporting the populist say no to drugs campaign - easily done given their lack of convictions. Then the *Record* noticed the SSP had a distinct line: No to drugs hypocrisy; legalise cannabis; decriminalise drug possession; free doctors to prescribe heroin if required; remove the profit from drugs. Indeed "Legalise Cannabis" is one of the



2000 and whilst there was a willingness on both sides for the SWP to join the SSP, formal endorsement was required from both sets of members. In addition discussions had to be concluded on membership norms, integration of campaigns etc.

Within the last few days these have concluded and Scottish members of the SWP will formally join the SSP on May 1.

Amongst the more contentious issues was how SWP members in the SSP would sell Socialist Worker. The SSP conference decided that the norm should be that Socialist Voice should be sold publicly by all members and that other papers including Socialist Worker should only be sold to SSP members.

This is a norm, not a condition of membership and other groups already within the SSP disagree with this line.

The SWP stated that they disagreed with several of the positions of the SSP, most notably the line on an Independent Socialist Scotland. This was not considered a problem as other groups within the SSP also

The SSP whilst it has a core of such cadre is stretched by the need to respond to every issue in Parliament and locally throughout Scotland.

Hopefully this new injection of cadre will dramatically increase the SSP's organisational effectiveness and increase its strength. This could be a significant step in building the SSP as a workers party.

A Drug War

The *Scottish Daily Record* had welcomed Tommy Sheridan's election and given him a column in the paper. At this time the editor of the *Record*, whilst broadly supporting Labour had been critical of New Labour and of Blair's Tory policies.

With a change of editor this has changed. *Record* circulation has fallen, and the editorial line is Labour best thing since sliced bread.

First to go was Tommy's column - the fee for this has always gone to keep open a Community Hall in Pollock which the Council tried to close. The *Record* decided it needed an issue to boost its circulation and found drugs.

SSP's main posters.

Suddenly the *Record* attacks on Tommy as "Working Class Zero", "Dopey Tommy" and so on were front page. The SSP responded vigorously, and defended their position and called a demonstration at the same time as the *Record*'s "Say no to Drugs" march.

A public demo was banned by the Council but a Rally was then called.

The bastion of the reputable press in Scotland the *Herald*, for the first time carried a half page explaining the SSP drugs policy in a favourable stance and pointing out that a majority of SNP MSPs and no few from Labour privately supported this.

On the day around 20,000 turned up at the *Record* march. Most had no view other than terror at what the current policy is doing to working class communities. At the SSP rally, which was full, around 300 discussed how to take the profit from the dealers through legalisation and prescription.

Drugs will remain one of the SSP's lead policies during the election.

S African union slams "water imperialism"

Charlie van Gelderen

The South African Municipal Workers Union (Samwu), has condemned the privatisation of water supplies in Johannesburg by one of the world's worst multinational companies, the French-owned Suez-Lyonnaise.

This privatisation took place when the residents of the Johannesburg township, Alexandra, were being forcibly removed from their homes, adjoining the Jukskei river, to areas where there are no services. This is not what they expected when they voted in the recent local elections, when they were promised clean water.

The company's only response to the threat of cholera in Alexandra, was to check up on the few chemical toilets in the area. They showed no evidence that they would install even basic taps even though when they won the contract they had promised to "improve services rendered" to customers.

The track record of Suez-Lyonnaise is abominable. They have drastically increased water charges in every city where they operate.

In Paris, water is privatised in a 'partnership' between the city and the company. Auditors have been brought

in to investigate excessive prices. In a preliminary report, they have come to the conclusion that the administrative, legal and financial arrangements are "characterised by an absence of financial transparency."

The report estimates that the company's true profit margin is two-and-a-half times the official reported figure.

In Santiago, Chile, water supply was taken over by Suez-Lyonnaise in 1999. They appoint 4 out of 7 directors to the board, giving them a guaranteed management control, despite holding only 42% of the shares. The state guarantees them a profit margin of 33%.

In Grenoble, France, a former mayor and a senior executive of Lyonnaise-des-Eaux (now Suez Lyonnaise), have both been jailed for receiving and giving bribes to award the water contract.

Rostock, in Germany contracted out its water and sewage system to Eurowasser (owned 50% by Lyonnaise-des-Eaux) for 25 years. Two years after privatisation, water charges were increased by 24% and sewage levels by 30%.

In South Africa itself there are other examples of water privatisation.

The experience in Fort Beaufort, in the Eastern Cape, with Suez-Lyonnaise's South African subsidiary,

WSSA, was that a secrecy clause has been built into the contract, preventing any member of the public getting a sight of it without the explicit approval of the company

"...the document contained herein has been developed exclusively by the operator (WSSA) and shall not be disclosed to third parties without the written approval of the operator."

The privatisation of water, like that of so many other services across the Third World, generally takes place under the dictat of the World Bank.

In more than 12 African countries, water privatisation has been among the conditions for getting loans from the bank.

In Benin, Tanzania, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, and Rwanda water privatisation must be completed by the end of this year in order for governments to qualify for loans.

IMF programme

The irony is that this is taking place under the International Monetary Fund's new programme -



Bangladesh has too much of the wrong kind of water: but privatisation just makes matters worse

inappropriately named Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF)!

More than 5 million people, most of them children die every year as a result of illnesses caused from drinking unclean water. In Ghana only 36 per cent of the rural population have access to safe water and 11 per cent have adequate sanitation.

In poor areas of the capital, Accra, families are paying almost half the daily wage for 10 buckets of water. In Angola, there is an agreement that water prices should rise regularly so that

the company delivering water can make a "reasonable profit".

In South Africa today, cholera infections are approaching 70,000. In the last month alone in both Cape Town and Johannesburg, thousands of people have been disconnected from water they could not afford to buy.

Even workers with secure full time jobs are being forced to choose between food, electricity and water.

This is why it is an outrage that on this year's World Water Day, March 22, the

United Nations chose the theme "Water and Health", but failed to highlight any of these grim realities. This job was left to the activists.

In Auckland, New Zealand protestors certainly took to the streets highlighting the hundreds of families that have been disconnected since water privatisation in that country.

SAMWU called for the day to be declared a day of mourning for the millions who are sick and dying as a result of water poverty and infected supply.

The weak show their strength

Brian Anglo,

For nearly two months, over 260 Pakistanis, 180 Bangladeshis, 140 Indians and about 300 Moroccans, together with smaller numbers of West Africans and East Europeans, have made front page news in Spain.

On January 20, just two days before a draconian new Immigration Act which threatened them with immediate deportation was due to come into force, these so-called "illegal" immigrants occupied a church in the centre of Barcelona and straight away went on hunger strike. The movement soon spread to another nine churches in the city.

Having tried demonstrations, rallies and a host of other protest actions without getting any response from the authorities to their simple demand for "papers", i.e. a permit giving them the chance to work in this country, feeling socially isolated but not wanting to let down all the people at home who had invested their hopes and considerable amounts of money in them, they decided in desperation to resort to this more drastic and dramatic form of struggle.

The impact was enormous. The blanket media coverage was for once

sympathetic and attracted a huge amount of support and solidarity to those in the sit-ins. Public opinion was won over and the government, which had hitherto regarded them as "non-persons" and refused even to acknowledge their existence, was forced to sit down and negotiate with them.

More than this, in direct defiance of the new Act, which forbids "undocumented" foreigners to take part in meetings, demonstrations or strikes, this spirited group of migrant workers were overtly breaking the law on all these counts with absolute impunity.

However there was no quick and easy victory to be had against this right-wing, authoritarian Spanish government with a comfortable parliamentary majority and just one year into its second term office. It tried every trick in the book to derail and divide the movement, but at every turn was met by the steadfast unity and determination of the protesters.

They were helped by a series of mass public demonstrations and rallies staged by a broad-based support committee. These mobilisations were highly successful, despite the obstructionist and diversionary tactics of the major trade unions and nominally left

political parties who made their backing conditional on the immigrants putting an end to the hunger strike - the one weapon that had been left to them after they had been ignored and abandoned by these very organisations!

After a tense and gruelling fortnight, the hunger-strikers managed to wring an agreement out of the government. But as this was couched in rather general terms, they maintained the sit-ins while a team of lawyers under their instructions thrashed out the actual details with the government's legal experts until the wording was to their satisfaction.

Eventually, after 47 days which, together with smaller actions in other parts of Spain, brought the plight of foreign workers to centre stage of the political scene, the hundreds of participants in the sit-ins streamed out of the main church in a mood of euphoria after a packed mass meeting... and marched straight to the central government offices in Barcelona to show that they were still as militant and united as ever.

This exemplary struggle has had the virtue of demonstrating yet again that where there is a will to resist the dictates of unjust governments and an



exploitative economic system, resistance is always possible, even by those in the apparently weakest positions and in the most difficult situations.

It is all the more remarkable for having taken place during a period when major political and social struggles have been virtually absent from Spain.

Another related aspect of this fight, which captured the imagination of tens of thousands of Catalan and Spanish citizens, is the way it confirms that ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances are capable of the most extraordinary feats.

For among these heroic hunger strikers there were practically no political activists, no hardened trade unionists, no seasoned campaigners, no experienced organisers, "merely" ordinary people prepared to stand up for their rights.

This struggle could never have achieved as much as it did without the unity of all those at its heart. And in

this sense, one of the most notable features was the close co-operation and good relations among the Bangladeshis, Indians and Pakistanis, who were not the slightest bit interested in whether or not their respective governments were on good terms, but only that they were determined to get along well with each other.

Although it has now shifted to a new phase, the struggle is by no means over. The main task in the immediate future is to maintain pressure on the government to ensure that it keeps to the agreement.

However, whatever the outcome, these valiant workers and their supporters have made a lasting impression on society at large and changed the way the immigration issue will be approached from now on.

Barcelona, 19 March 2001

The arrest of Slobodan Milosevic comes at a time of growing tensions throughout former Yugoslavia. In the last few weeks there have been armed clashes in Macedonia. The Dayton accords, which supposedly brought peace to Bosnia, are being torn up by sections of the Croat community. Later this month elections in Montenegro will probably decide on whether or not to secede from what remains of Yugoslavia.

All of these issues are inextricably linked. They are a product of the wave of Serb nationalism unleashed by Milosevic in the late 1980s which led to the violent break-up of Yugoslavia. They are also the results of imperialist intervention region, intervention which has led to new crises arising. Geoff Ryan explains.

The arrest of Milosevic

Socialist Outlook has consistently argued that the Greater Serbia policy pursued by Milosevic was the major cause of the violent break-up of Yugoslavia. There is no doubt that Milosevic bears the main responsibility for the wars that have led to so much death and destruction.

Consequently we have always been in favour of the overthrow of Milosevic, his arrest and trial. Just as we welcomed Milosevic's overthrow last year, we now welcome his arrest and investigation pending trial.

Milosevic was overthrown by the workers of Serbia. They are the people most fit to judge him.

The rebuilding of unity between working people throughout the Balkans necessitates the Serbian working class coming to terms with Milosevic's crimes. That requires recognising that Milosevic's main crime was not losing wars but starting them.

Milosevic should certainly be indicted for corruption, embezzlement and enriching himself and his family and cronies. He should also be charged with the murder and attempted murder of his political opponents. However, this is not enough.

If the Serbian working class is to come to terms with the past it has to break with the destructive national chauvinism unleashed by Milosevic. That means recognising that although Serbia was a victim of Milosevic it was by no means the major victim. A real settling of accounts with Milosevic means he must also face trial for war crimes in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosova.

Does that mean Milosevic should be handed over to the War Crimes Tribunal in the Hague? We certainly do not demand it. We utterly oppose any attempts by western powers to bully the Yugoslav government into handing over Milosevic.

In particular we condemn the cynical hypocrisy of the United States since both Democrat and Republican administrations have made absolutely clear that there is no chance an American soldier accused of war crimes would ever be handed over to the Hague.

However, if the Yugoslav government did freely decide to hand over Milosevic I certainly wouldn't advocate taking to the streets to oppose it. The present governments of Croatia and Bosnia have handed over Croats and Bosnian Muslims to face charges at the Hague. In fact the current Yugoslav government recently handed over Milomir Stakic, the former mayor of the Bosnian town of Prijedor.

Divisions

The arrest of Stakic sharpened divisions between Yugoslav President Kostunica and Serbian Prime Minister Djindjic, with the former opposing extradition and reaffirming that Milosevic will never be handed over.

In any case the central issue is not where Milosevic should be tried, but that he should be tried for war crimes. However, as a Serb human rights worker recently told the *Guardian's* Martin Woollacott 'half of the present government should be in the courtroom at the Hague'.

The imperialist powers and Yugoslav politicians want to put all the blame on Milosevic. This allows them to cover up their own responsibilities in aiding and abetting his crimes against the people of former



Kostunica: Milosevic may be behind bars, but another nationalist has taken his place.

New pieces in Balkan puzzle

Yugoslavia. Milosevic should certainly be in the dock – but large numbers of western and Yugoslav politicians should be standing alongside him.

Macedonia

The 'Macedonia Question' was a major issue for imperialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was also a central concern for NATO and western governments as Yugoslavia disintegrated.

Between 1945 and 1989 it was also the subject of heated arguments between the 'socialist' governments of Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. Today its continued existence is threatened, with recent armed clashes between the Macedonian army and the Albanian minority.

The current state called Macedonia was created as one of the Republics of Yugoslavia in 1945. In royalist Yugoslavia it was part of Serbia, and is still regarded as 'South Serbia' by many Serb nationalists.

However, the republic did not include the whole of the geographical area of Macedonia which was split between Vardar Macedonia (the former Yugoslav republic), Pirin Macedonia (south western Bulgaria) and Aegean Macedonia (northern Greece) – as well as a small part in Albania.

Challenged

Bulgarian and Greek nationalists, including the Stalinist varieties, have always challenged the legitimacy of an independent Macedonian nation, insisting that Macedonians were 'really' Bulgarian or Greek. Hence the insistence by Greek governments on the absurd name of Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The disintegration of Yugoslavia also threatened the disintegration of Macedonia, with Bulgaria and Greece making territorial claims. Bulgarian and Greek offers of support to the government of Macedonia should not be allowed to obscure their own designs on the territory (or their own mistreatment of national minorities).

The possibility of war between Greece and Turkey, both members of NATO, was a major cause of anxiety in western capitals in the early 1990s. It also informs current western hostility to the recent Albanian guerrilla struggle.

Albanians make up about one third of the population of the Macedonian state. They have been discriminated against in terms of jobs, education, language and other basic democratic rights.

The situation of Albanians in Macedonia is by no means the same as in Kosova under Milosevic. An Albanian party participates in government while another is in (legal) opposition. However, that does not mean the Albanians (and, for that matter, other national minorities in Macedonia) are not

subject to national oppression.

Socialist Outlook has always championed the right of people to self-determination. That includes the right to independence. We argue that borders are not sacrosanct. At the same time we insist on the need to guarantee full and equal rights to all national minorities.

Although we defend the right of nations to independence and, where necessary, redraw boundaries to unite a nation in a single state, we do not usually advocate it.

In the real world, especially in such a multi-national region as the Balkans, there can be no ethnically homogenous states. Attempts to unite all Croats, Albanians, Hungarians etc in a single state will almost certainly involve, at best, massive transfers of people. In reality it will mean war and 'ethnic cleansing'.

It is also clear that any attempt to force one third of the population of a state to remain against their wishes can only be accomplished by large scale repression. If the majority of the Albanian population of Macedonia want to secede and unite with Kosova we support their right to do so. This includes the right to unite the majority of the Albanian people in a single state. Macedonian socialists have a duty to insist on the right to self-determination, including independence, of the Albanian minority.

However, it is by no means clear that a majority of Albanians in Macedonia do, in fact, want to secede. Even the National Liberation Army has spoken mainly about equal rights for Albanians within Macedonia, rather than independence. Albanian Socialists in Macedonia should argue for equal rights for Albanians and other national minorities, including rights to autonomy, as well as a huge expansion of democratic rights for the whole population.

Recent events in Macedonia are a spin off from the war in Kosova. The refusal of the imperialist powers to countenance independence for Kosova has increased frustrations among Albanians throughout the region which are currently being fought out in Macedonia.

Same initials

In Albania both the National Liberation Army and Kosova Liberation Army are known by the same initials: UCK. This is no coincidence. Many of the fighters with the NLA fought in the KLA and many, though by no means all, are Kosovars. Most probably the majority of former KLA activists come from sections which lost out in the post-war power struggle among the different factions of the KLA.

They appear to have believed that if they could provoke the Macedonian army into massive repression this would swing the majority of Albanians behind independence and bring western pressure on the

"Although we defend the right of nations to independence and, where necessary, redraw boundaries to unite a nation in a single state, we do not usually advocate it."

Macedonian government. They did not understand that imperialism intervened in Kosova not because they cared about the fate of Albanians but because Milosevic was no longer the best guarantor of stability in the region.

Hopefully the haste with which western governments have declared their hostility to Albanian separatism in Macedonia will help disabuse them of their illusions in imperialism.

Bosnia

From the beginning of the war in Bosnia *Socialist Outlook* supported Bosnian independence. We did not take the view that all parties involved in the war were equally bad but argued for defence of Bosnia against Serbian and Croatian aggression.

Bosnia was a multi-national state and its government, (whatever our many criticisms of it), continually defended its multi-national and multi-ethnic nature.

We therefore opposed the Dayton Accord because it gave de facto recognition to the partition of Bosnia along ethnic lines. Far from reducing national conflicts, Dayton institutionalised them.

In the Republika Srpska the hard-line nationalists of the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) associated with Radovan Karadzic have received the backing of Yugoslav President Vojislav Kostunica – proof that simply removing Milosevic was never going to be enough to end Serb nationalism.

This had an impact in the Muslim-Croat Federation where the Croat nationalist HDZ (the party of ex-President Tudjman) is now attempting to resurrect Tudjman's vision of a Croat mini-state that would become part of Croatia.

Large numbers of Croats have responded to their call to leave posts in the army, police and government services. In the divided city of Mostar, clashes have taken place between HDZ supporters and Bosnian and UN police, backed by NATO troops. The HDZ opposed government forces taking over the Hercegovacka Banka – widely believed to have been used by the HDZ to finance its secessionist campaign.

The HDZ has consistently refused to end the division of Mostar and has maintained parallel institutions to those of the Federation. Despite paying lip service to the Muslim-Croat Federation, it has continued Tudjman's plans for the carving up of Bosnia between Croatia and Serbia.

However, there is now a crucial difference: the post-Tudjman government is opposed to the creation of a Croat mini-state in Bosnia. The Croatian government welcomed the seizure of the Mostar bank and has supported the removal of HDZ leader Ante Jelavic and other Croat officials from the Bosnian government. This contrasts with Kostunica's continued support for the SDS in the Serb entity.

There has been a reversal in the relationship between Croatia and the Bosnian Croats. Tudjman used his position in Croatia to influence events in Bosnia, the Bosnian Croat leadership are now trying to influence events in Croatia. In February a 100,000 strong demonstration organised by the HDZ protested against the warrant issued by the Croatian government for the arrest of Major General, Mirko Norac – the highest ranking army officer to be indicted for war crimes. Along with four others, he is charged with ordering and participating in the massacre of at least 24 Serb civilians in October 1991.

This brings us back to Milosevic. The willingness of the government of Croatia to recognise war crimes committed in the name of Croatian nationalism and to deal with the perpetrators is in marked contrast to the failure so far of the Serbian authorities to recognise the responsibility of Serbian nationalism for the brutal wars in ex-Yugoslavia.

Moreover, events in Bosnia show that although we always support the right to self-determination we do not always support demands for independence, especially when they are primarily designed to prevent the continued existence of another state.

We support the right of Croats in Bosnia to full and equal rights, including national rights. Croats, and all the other nationalities of Bosnia, should have considerable autonomy. However, we would only support their right to secede from Bosnia if the level of national oppression was such that there was absolutely no possible alternative.

That is clearly not the situation at present. Nor is it the situation of the Macedonian Albanians.

Strategic rethink offers new space for Palestinian left

As many commentators have noted, one feature which distinguishes the current Palestinian uprising from the earlier Intifada is the relative speed with which it has moved beyond mass demonstrations to a state of low-intensity warfare with the Israeli occupation.

Most of these commentators, however, have failed – whether wilfully, or through lack of understanding – to account for this differing development.
ROLAND RANCE reports.

The first Intifada, started in 1987, and which was finally brought to an end with the 1983 Oslo accords. It erupted when Palestinian anger at 20 years of Israeli military occupation, and at the failure of the Arab states to act effectively to bring this to an end, reached boiling point.

Thousands of Palestinian youth, many of them who had spent their entire lives under the occupation, took to the streets in mass demonstrations. Very quickly, popular committees were established across the country, and the Unified National Leadership was established.

The parties of the Palestinian left, particularly the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, played a crucial role in these developments.

Of particular importance was the experience gained from the prison struggles of the 1970s and 80s, where activists from different factions had learned to work together to force concessions from the Israeli authorities.

Graduates of the prison system – a majority of the young men in the occupied territories – had gone through a process of intensive politicisation; many of them had learned Hebrew, studied Marxism, and organised successful struggles while in prison. They formed the backbone of the community

and political organisations in the occupied territories, and ultimately of the Unified National Leadership of the Intifada.

The slogan of this Intifada was not, as earlier protesters had chanted, “We support the PLO”, but “We ARE the PLO”. This represented not only an increased willingness to defy the Israeli authorities, but a challenge to the PLO leadership in exile.

A new leadership, with political experience and mass popular support, untainted by the whiff of corruption associated with the PLO in exile, was also a threat to the unpopular and reactionary regimes across the Arab world. A wave of popular revolts, from Jordan to Morocco, threatened the interests of imperialism’s client states, as well as those of both Israel and the PLO in exile.

With the return of the PLO to the Occupied Territories following the Oslo accords, a new element was introduced into this volatile situation.

Over the years of exile, the PLO had developed a largely military structure and practice. Following the expulsion from Jordan in “Black September” of 1970, the PLO had in effect renounced the strategy of revolutionary struggle across the Arab world, for, one of alliance with Arab régimes for a confrontation with Israel.

While Palestinians living directly under Israeli mili-

tary occupation had focussed on the daily struggle against the brutalities and indignities of Israeli rule, leading to involvement in mass struggles, the PLO in exile developed increasingly into a proto-state, with responsibility for thousands of refugees and a burgeoning security apparatus.

When Arafat returned from exile, he brought with him many thousands of trained soldiers, organised into several rival militias.

One of the few specific commitments in the Oslo accords was that the Palestine Authority would have a “strong police force”. This was in line with Rabin’s understanding that the PLO, operating, as he put it, “Without the High Court and without civil rights groups”, would be better able to police the Palestinian people on Israel’s behalf, than could be done through a continuation of the open military occupation.

Faithful to these expectations, Arafat has over the past seven years built a regime in the occupied territories characterised by corruption, arbitrariness, and contempt for civil rights. *Socialist Outlook* has frequently published articles about the harassment of trade unions, independent media and other democratic bodies, by the Arafat regime. Almost all of these groups were led by the cadre which developed during the first Intifada.

This repression was a necessary part – indeed, a precondition – of the ongoing negotiations between the PA and Israel. Israel was unwilling to make any substantive improvement to the miserable conditions of the Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem.

While continuing with its policy of illegal land expropriation and settlement, Israel constantly demanded that the PA contain dissent, suppress hostile media, and act ruthlessly against suspected Islamic or leftist activists.

At the same time, the PA was unable to stand aside from the growing popular discontent caused by Israel’s ongoing military occupation.

When, as in 1987, this discontent flared into open revolt, the PA was faced with a dilemma: To allow the development of a genuine revolutionary struggle, as in the first Intifada, would reveal its own total irrelevance.

It would be totally incapable of leading such a struggle, having little conception of mass struggle, and even less public credibility as a revolutionary leadership. But it would have been equally impossible to ignore the uprising, allow Israel to suppress it, and carry on negotiating as though nothing untoward were happening.

Socialist Outlook has previously quoted the words of journalist Amira Hass: “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).

Socialist Outlook recognises the right of an oppressed people to struggle in any way necessary against their oppressor.

We specifically recognise the right of the Palestinian people to take up arms and engage in an armed struggle against the Israeli occupier. However, we do not necessarily believe that this is the correct response in any given situation.

In the present uprising in the occupied territories, the turn to a military struggle has had several unfortunate effects.

It has demobilised the mass of the Palestinian people,

who cannot take an active part in such a struggle.

It has substituted a military command structure and secrecy for a mass, open and democratic struggle.

And it has allowed Israel to claim that Arab society is inherently violent (as former Israeli PM Netanyahu frequently remarked to American critics “We live in a violent neighbourhood”).

Palestinians can never win their struggle alone, and they will not be able to shame the compromised Arab régimes into a renewed military confrontation with Israel.

Over recent weeks, it has become clear that many Palestinian activists are increasingly recognising the force of such arguments. Respected figures, such as Gaza psychiatrist and human rights activist Dr Eyad Sarraj, have called for a return to mass civil resistance.

The first signs of this have been seen in the mass marches in Ramallah and Bir Zeit, in which Palestinians (assisted by Israeli activists) filled in the trenches dug by the Israeli army to isolate Bir Zeit from the surrounding towns.

Although no weapons were carried in this march, Israeli troops opened fire, injuring Dr Hanan Ashrawi, a leading Palestinian academic and activist. Several articles in the Palestinian press confirm that a strategic rethink is taking place.

Such a development would open new opportunities for the Palestinian left, and for the cadres of the first Intifada, which have experience in conducting and leading such a struggle.

The development of popular committees, the rebuilding of a fighting and democratic leadership, and the involvement of the mass of the Palestinian people under occupation in the struggle against Israeli military rule, pose a greater threat to Israel, and its corrupt allies, than the continuation of a low-intensity military campaign.

Such a development would also pose new responsibilities for the solidarity movement in the west.

We must develop links with these committees and expressions of Palestinian civil society, and provide the political and material support which they will need to build a mass base for such a challenge to Israel’s continuing occupation.



Ten transnationals in search of a profit

Marco Espvall

"How can you be against the future?" an acquaintance asked me a few weeks ago when we were discussing genetic technology. He could not understand how anyone could oppose genetically manipulated crops.

My friend had read in a popular-scientific publication that the new biotechniques could revolutionise agriculture and eliminate starvation in the whole world.

He said that the real problem lay with the control of the genetic food industry by a few profit hungry monopolies, and he proposed instead democratic control of the new techniques.

He thinks that demands such as a five-year moratorium on cultivation, sale and patenting of genetically modified plants, put forward by many campaigners are reactionary and an expression of hostility towards new techniques.

I do not agree.

I think that genetic modification must be put into context. Genetic modification is not a neutral technique that can be used in a constructive or destructive way.

It is more than that.

When issues as important as these are concerned, a principle of caution must be applied. We should not do things if their consequences cannot be foreseen.

The discharge of genetically modified organisms into the environment is an enormous experiment, which can have endless consequences.

Endless?

Yes. As opposed to other kinds of pollution - oil, or even radioactivity - genes do not become weaker over time. Genes form the living organism, which then reproduces itself, from one generation to another.

With this in the back of my head I become terrified when thinking about the tomato purée made out of Zeneca's genetically modified tomatoes, the first GM product to reach the English market.

The tomato stays 'fresh' longer, but contains genes from a bacterium which is resistant to antibiotics. The genes are so-called marker-genes which are used within the genetic modification industry to indicate that the genetic transmission has been successful.

The markers are necessary in the laboratory stage but not in the end-product. It is possible to remove the genes but the companies have not bothered to address this problem.

Theoretically, it is not impossible that the resistance to antibiotics of the marker-genes can be spread to bacteria in the intestines of humans as they eat the tomatoes.

Zeneca's tomato is just one of many examples.

The issue of genetic food is not only about biology. In the long run it will also have social consequences.

Today about ten multinational companies control the market for genetically

Genetic monopolisation



Andrew Wigd

If you go down to the woods today, you'd better go in protective gear ...

modified food. This can have enormous repercussions for farmers, as this development threatens to turn their status into one of serfdom. The farmers will be forced to buy both the seeds and the insecticides from one and the same company.

But isn't this necessary? What if the proponents of genetic foods are correct?

Imagine if it is possible to multiply the yields of crops such as rice or wheat with the new technique. Is it not worth the sacrifice of the farmers in order to eliminate world starvation?

This question is the wrong one to ask. The problem is not lack of food. Already

today is it possible to feed the whole world's population if the resources were distributed equally.

The problem is the absence of justice. The solution is not new supercrops. This is shown for example by the experiences from the so-called Green Revolution of the 1970s, when bio-chemical fertilisers and profitable grains were introduced into underdeveloped countries.

Today more people are hungry than before the green revolution. The number of crops that are being planted - for example different kinds of rice in India - have been significantly reduced.

This means that the effects

of disease and bad harvests are much more serious than when there was greater diversity.

Powerful companies during the 1970s used their influence to tie the granting of credit from, for instance, the World Bank, to the use of their own seeds.

Similar pressures are exacted today by the genetic industry. Genetic modification is simply not the answer to the problem, and definitely not the future, at least not the future I want to live in.

The struggle for a just and ecologically sustainable future can only be fought by people - not genes.

What is genetic modification?

Genetic modification, GM, is a manipulation of the hereditary factors of living organisms in a technical, not natural, way.

In most cases some parts of the genetic material of one organism is transferred into the hereditary factor of another organism. Sometimes the hereditary factors of one organism are taken out, changed, and then put back again.

The technique makes it possible to transfer different attributes between species of plants and animals, which could not be combined in a natural way.

Why do companies want to genetically modify our food?

The food market is enormously large and thereby very tempting to those seeking more and more profits.

One 'advantage' with GM-techniques is that modified crops and animals, even certain genetic lines can be patented. The ability to patent gives the companies power and possibilities of profits that conventional plant refinement and animal breeding cannot offer.

Which companies are involved?

Monsanto (USA), Pioneer (USA), Novartis (Switzerland) and Astra/Zeneca (Sweden/Great Britain) as well as a number of large chemical and seeds companies.

In Sweden the LRF-owned Svalöf-Weibull is one such company. In the spring 1999 the German chemistry giant Basf became one influential partner in Svalöf-Weibull with 40 per cent of the shares. One affiliate has applied for permission to cultivate GM-potato for industrial use.

The plants that have been manipulated up to now are foremost soya, corn, potato, sugar beet, rape, tobacco and tomato.

Genetically modified food in the shops?

The first GM-food in the food stores was a tomato which was to stay fresh longer and which it was possible to pick when it had matured and acquired more flavour.

For some reason all of them have been turned into purée. The purée has been marketed in Britain but nowhere else in the EU.

Thus far mainly soya beans and soya-based products are genetically modified.

Lecithin is one soya-product which is included in about 60 per cent of the ready-made food and semi-manufactured products that exist on the Swedish market.

Even Tofu-cheese which is not branded to say so can be made out of genetically modified soya. Some breweries use GM-yeast (produced in a closed process) to brew beer.

So how can we avoid genetically modified food?

No-one knows. Products are only marked if the food 'significantly differs' from conventional products, or if the product contains a live GM-organism (raw corn, nuts, potato, whole fruit, etc.).

No such products exist today on the Swedish market.

(from the Swedish Trotskyist paper *Internationalen*. Translation: Linn Hjort)

The old RUC makes a comeback

John Mc Anulty

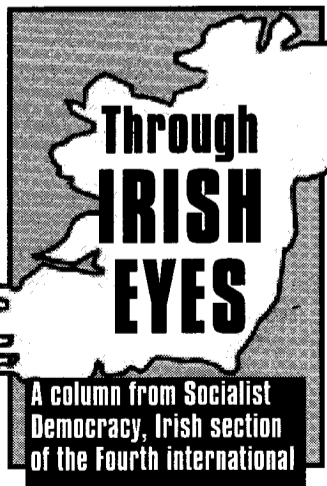
As with so much around the Good Friday Agreement, what is not included in the debate around the RUC is as significant as what is.

What is excluded is the traditional demands of socialists and republicans, demands supported by the vast majority of Irish workers, demands that by themselves are far from revolutionary and simply add up to a demand for democracy; They are:

- Disband the sectarian RUC!
- Repeal repressive legislation!
- End Diplock Courts!

From this standpoint the elements of the Good Friday agreement dealing with the police - the Patton Report - never even began to deal with the issues of democracy and human rights.

Rather than the reality of RUC repression and sectarianism what Patton addressed



was "perceptions". Disbandment was ruled out. Instead the focus was:

- RUC emblems
- Independent investigation and monitoring
- Shared control (with a hint that former IRA members would be co-opted to the new force)
- Local boards giving

small-scale influence

- 50% recruitment from the Catholic community
- Overall Patton held out the promise of sharing out patronage and control.

As with the Good Friday Agreement as a whole, the ignoble goal of a shared sectarian privilege in running the police proved an illusion - there would, after all, be no point in sectarian privilege if it were shared out evenly.

After two police bills, the cold light of reality shows what looks suspiciously like the old RUC.

The British retain absolute control, unfettered by the decorative committees they have set up.

The state will retain the right to suppress investigations it doesn't want.

What is left is a new uniform, the expectation that nationalist politicians who climb on board will be able to fix speeding tickets and a promise that recruitment

will be 50% Catholic.

Of course, if the RUC were to eventually become 50% Catholic it would be a different force, but to get to that promised land you are asked to support the actually existing RUC.

It is totally implausible to suggest that a savage bigoted force, able to resist reform now, will not subvert this last hurdle.

The Sinn Fein leadership have demanded that the policing debate be reopened, but the reality is that its over and we are now well into implementation. Secretary of State Reid has announced that the new structures will be up and running by September.

The recruitment campaign has begun. New staff have been appointed to the RUC leadership. The new police board had been delayed - but it has the certainty of nationalist support.

Dublin expresses impa-

tience that the "new" force is not up and running. Seamus Mallon states "certainty" that the SDLP will support it. Even the self-proclaimed progressives of the Women's Coalition come out of the closet to support the RUC.

A sectarian state needs a sectarian police force to preserve it. That's what the new RUC recruiting ads are saying with their slogan "Reflecting the community". That's what the senior partners in the nationalist family are saying too.

What workers need to defend themselves is a policy of unremitting opposition to the sectarian state, the sectarian police force. Above all they need to defend themselves against the forces supporting the Good Friday agreement - those seeking ways to ameliorate sectarianism and imperialism rather than smash them.



John Harris

Foot and mouth: the debate rages To vaccinate? ...

Dave Bangs

The council estate at Bevendean, Brighton, lies in the bottom of a steep-sided Downland valley, surrounded, on the slopes above, by the bare fields of Upper Bevendean Farm.

As some of the heaviest rains for a thousand years poured and poured last October, the autumn-ploughed, sodden valley sides shed their soil in a nightmare sludge, flooding and burying the ground floors of all homes below up to 4 feet deep in mud.

5 months later many of these homes are still empty. No financial liability hit the farmer. No loss of tenancy.

This February, as the foot and mouth outbreak spread, Brighton Council's Countryside Rangers, paid for by these same residents scurried around the valleyside footpaths posting notices banning them from further access across that farm. And being kind folk (and not wanting to risk £50 fines), they obey. For surely the farmer's business is at risk?

Such is the tremendous cultural weight that farmers and landowners still possess. They have their own government ministry. Their trade association, the National Farmers Union has the ear of the Prime Minister.

This weight has been used to push through a massive, militarized, campaign of livestock slaughter which has denuded some of our most hard-pressed farming districts of livestock lovingly built up over decades, and even centuries. Even rare breeds have not been spared.

For the NFU and MAFF mandarins assumed, as always, that this was their countryside, to do with as they pleased.

The shire County Councils, the RSPB, the National Trust and the Wildlife Trusts - huge land-owners themselves - are desperate not to offend the rural ruling class.

The Environment Agency, the statutory body set up to protect the environment, banned all countryside visits by its staff!

The government let a simple measure to ban the old rural ruling class cruelty of fox hunting fail in the House of Lords, but two lads caught with air rifles in a Swindon Country Park were fined £500 each for breaking the foot and mouth regulations!

The laid-off workers of Cumbria and the besieged livestock farmers, had to take the matter into their own hands and demonstrate to Blair and Nick Brown that they were not just bit-players in MAFF's cold-hearted power-play.

Foot and mouth is a disease which has disproportionately affected the weakest, the most hard pressed of Britain's farm businesses. It is the sheep and beef producing westerly uplands, where farmers are often living at income support levels on marginal holdings entirely dependent on subsidies, that are most threatened.

Yet whilst the output-related subsidy system pushes these farmers to damage moorland and mountain ecosystems by overgraz-

ing, it still fails to provide them with a decent living. And now it imposes indiscriminate mass slaughter on their flocks and herds.

Foot and mouth is an economic disease. It is not the symptoms of the disease which cause such grief. This is not BSE, cattle plague, or swine fever. This is an illness directly comparable to flu.

The animals suffer. They lose condition. They go off their food. Sometimes the young and weak die. But most recover. Animal marketing has only to be postponed for some weeks.

It is the archaic methods of dealing with the disease, not the disease itself which bring the horrors of mass slaughter, incineration and burial, rural siege and personal despair.

The cure is far worse. Many farming systems, from the Kenyan Masai to the Duke of Westminster's Cheshire estate, have proven that common sense disinfection and hygiene can cure this disease in a matter of weeks.

Masai herdsmen routinely infect their cattle to raise their immune levels. The Duke of Westminster (who won exemption from the mass slaughter policy in the 1923 outbreak) was showing and selling stock which had suffered foot and mouth at the Royal Show the following year.

This outbreak is not a result of intensive systems. It is not, by and large, the rich agribusinesses which are suffering. But it is the growth of mass motorway livestock trading which has spread the disease so widely, and it is the needs of international exporters which have dictated the mass slaughter policy.

There is no proof that walkers have presently spread the disease. In terms of movement restrictions, it would be more rational to close the motorway system than the pedestrian right of way.

The major agricultural county of Cambridgeshire has resisted closing its footpath system, except where paths cross pasture land.

It was wealthy and influential breeders who dictated the slaughter policy 130 years ago. And it is the needs of the export trade which dictate its continuance today. Yet our export trade does not even reach the level of imports of the same meat products; total exports of lamb for example only equal 82% of their imports.

No serious scientific assessment of the loss of productivity caused by the disease has been done for 130 years. The appalling cure has come to be equated with the disease itself. It is a myth that the biological features of the disease have dictated its management. On the contrary, it is the atavistic orthodoxy of 'the NFU and MAFF that have brought about this catastrophe.

The sheer scale of the farming disaster has forced an increasingly strident ruling class reassessment of the social, economic & cultural role of agriculture.

The *Independent*, the *Observer* and the *Guardian* all carry heavy criticism not just of the slaughter policy, but of agribusiness and

MAFF, in general. Sometimes, sotto voce, the *Telegraph* joins in. Even some of the mainstream farming press (like the *Farmers Guardian*) sympathetically trail critiques of dominant ideas within the farming sector.

Yet much of the reassessment by people like Abigail Woods is confused, insensitive and even vicious. It ranges from calls to comprehensively abandon agriculture, to celebrating the loss of farm jobs, to calls for massive conversion to organic production and for industry "restructuring" - a euphemism for further business concentration, job losses and the destruction of small farms.

Everywhere, on all sides, the issues of tenure, of ownership, are ignored. Farmers are treated as though their interests are always the same. No distinction is made between a sheep farmer on 100 acres of damp valley land in Wales, and a Jaguar-driving barley baron from Norfolk on his 1000 acres who runs this desert on a workforce that couldn't have run 200 acres 100 years ago.

We need a real debate on the future agriculture - not Blair's cosmetic version

We need more people working the land, not less, both for the sake of people and of the landscape itself. The option of involvement in food production corresponds to a basic need for integration with natural processes in us all.

It is no surprise that as the option of paid work in farming has been destroyed gardening and countryside activities have grown to outweigh all other leisure pursuits. People don't want long hours of back-breaking work at poverty wages but they do want to work the land.

One of the worst features of capitalism, commented on by the earliest socialists, is the ruthless alienation from nature and natural processes which its concentrated destructive productive processes brought.

A socialist society without the option of land-based work is inconceivable.

The landscape desperately needs more labour. Our richest landscapes and ecosystems were created by human labour and management systems.

Now they have been replaced with giant machines needing huge, uniform spaces to operate, whose fabrication contains the alienated labour of thousands of line workers, quarrymen, technicians and drivers.

Livestock farming and pastoral systems are essential even above the obvious reasons of meat, hide and wool production. Many cultural landscapes are the direct product of pastoral systems. Hedgerows, moors, downs, heaths and meadows are all the product of grazing systems. Without grazing many of our richest ecosystems would simply disappear.

The price of abandoning livestock farming will be the extinction not just of many species, but of whole communities of species.

Alternative systems, such as organic farming, are no solution without dealing with the

social relations of production. Converts to organic farming include huge arable producers, who have already ruthlessly destroyed their farm landscapes, but wish to escape huge agrochemical bills.

Organic farming, with greater direct labour inputs, often brings poverty wages which make conventional agribusiness seem generous. Organic farming brings its own sources of pollution, which brings new dangers to wildlife. Organic systems can be as land hungry, as conventional systems.

Small scale farming is no solution. The conditions of life on the 'family farm' are amongst the most backward of any sector, with deep isolation, patriarchal industrial relations, poor living conditions, and poverty wages. Hereditary farming is no more to be celebrated than hereditary monarchy or hereditary shelf stacking.

Farming should be subsidised only where it makes a social contribution. Low intensity grazing or coppice woodland management, for instance, make vital landscape and wildlife contributions in addition to their productivity.

At present the richest 21% of farmers attract 80% of subsidy. Capitalist subsidy furthers environmental degradation and the consolidation of agribusiness

The neo-liberal world trade system wrecks both Third World peasant economies and the British countryside. Local, protected production, for local markets must be the basis of sustainable food production.

The countryside belongs to everyone. Farmers contribute only 1% of output but control 80% of the area of Britain. Food production is very much a minority element in the rural economy and farming is just one part now of a long food production process.

Farm machinery workers, seedsmen, packers, processors, fertiliser manufacturers, drivers, retailers, abattoir workers are all part of the process though their work gives them no access to the land.

And access to nature must be at the centre of all dreams of socialist self fulfillment.

So how do we fight our way out of this crisis?

- The barbaric cull must be stopped and the vaccination option implemented. The logic of mass livestock slaughter is a horrific overkill to reach globally insignificant economic and political ends.

- Lift the rural siege, even if this means the naturalisation of foot and mouth. MAFF/NFU have done to public access what the Countryside Alliance just dream of - they have shut us up in our 'concrete jungles'.

- Guarantee all farm income at the level of the average wage. We must end the bleed of farming jobs, end the hopelessness of small and marginal farmers. We must tax and expropriate the rich to pay for this.

- Offer workers the option of socialisation of failing rural businesses with guaranteed jobs and income.

Rural workers should not pay for the MAFF/NFU generated catastrophe.

- Create a whole new animal welfare regime

- Ban intensive systems and long distance livestock transport

- Turn the foot and mouth crisis into a crisis for the MAFF/NFU system

Sussex genetiX action showed the way when its demonstrations and other actions forced a local farmer to abandon GM trials for fear of foot and mouth contamination. This prompted a national farmers' campaign to abandon GM trials for the duration of the outbreak.

- Demand the socialisation of the land and all food production under democratic control of workers and all countryside users

Supermarket workers share the poverty wages of the farming industry. Both have an interest in ending the productivity regime of agribusiness, the hamster wheel of just-in-time production and its consumerist public face.

Only when the need for healthy food production is balanced democratically with the need for land based work, biodiversity, conservation and multiple recreational uses will we see an open harmonious and egalitarian countryside.

It is only 15 years since Frank Dobson raised the demand for socialisation of the land. Lloyd George campaigned for it all his political career. The farm workers union bore this policy on its masthead.

Now it is up to a new generation of activists to realise our vision for a socially owned, democratic countryside - The land is ours!

... or to continue the slaughter?

Alan Thornett

I COULDN'T quite believe it when I saw George Monbiot's Guardian article (March 29th) entitled "Foot and mouth is a good thing". Monbiot argues that the disease should be allowed to become endemic in Britain, and that the real job of MAFF should be to ensure that this happens as soon as possible.

He quotes a Masai cattle herder in sub-Saharan Africa, where animal welfare understandably takes on a different perspective than in rich countries, to argue that endemic FMD can be lived with.

Monbiot is against anything which might result in FMD's eradication. He says: "if the vaccination programme is successful, then, as an urgent strategic priority, the government should reinfest the country forthwith". This would not be difficult, since FMD is amongst the most contagious diseases known to science.

His 'rationale' for this bizarre view is that it would 'encourage farmers to develop local markets for their produce' since it would make meat exports impossible and meat exports are unnecessary.

Meat exports may well be unnecessary in a rational world, but the idea that the way to end it is to deliberately introduce human health and animal welfare problems into the domestic meat supply is off the wall.

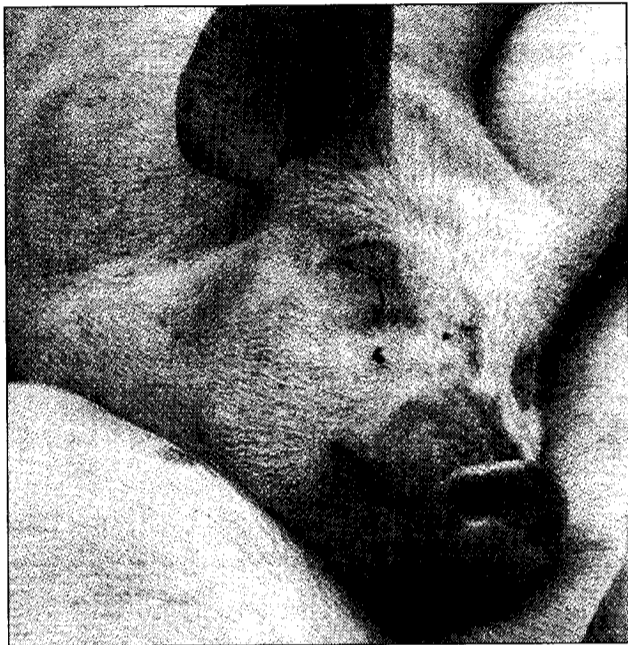
Animal welfare

Monbiot accepts that his policy would have implications for animal welfare and that it would reduce meat and milk production, since disease-ridden animals would be thinner and would produce less milk. The answer he says would be to cull out the worst affected animals and let the rest live with it.

But he ignores the suffering which would become routine and does not say how a cull of the worst affected could be carried out amongst the vast numbers of wild-life (mostly various species of deer) which would inevitably become infected once the disease was endemic.

It is an ill-informed argument which seeks to minimise the effects of the disease on the individual animal and minimises the general effects on animal welfare of endemic FMD - although he does not go as far as some on the left who bizarrely argue that FMD is like a mild dose of flu.

In fact the effects of FMD on different species is quite different. Cattle get the disease much more severely than pigs or sheep. A recent graphic description by a ministry vet of



a cow's tongue coming away in his hand as he tried to examine it was convincing. The lesions at the base of its tongue were so deep that the tongue was severed from the head.

Monbiot also seems to assume that humans cannot catch FMD, but this is not true. People can be infected through skin wounds or the oral mucous through handling diseased stock, contact with the virus in a laboratory, or by drinking non-pasturised infected milk - though not by eating meat from infected animals.

The human infection is temporary and mild, but why is Monbiot so keen to minimise the problem of disease in food production?

Vaccination is the answer to FMD advocated by much of the left. There are two issues involved here: the use of vaccination to help to control an outbreak and the routine ongoing use of vaccination of all susceptible animals to prevent the disease (a huge 57m in the case of Britain). In Holland vaccination is being used as a rapid reaction (fire-break) policy, the vaccinated animals are then killed as soon as possible.

The effectiveness of vaccination is controversial. There are 40 strains of the virus on top of the virulent type O Asiatic strain involved in the present outbreak, and they mutate freely with new strains regularly emerging.

Not effective

But vaccination is not 100 per cent effective even within the right strain since some animals excrete it.

Therefore if an FMD outbreak occurs some animals will still get it and it will probably get into the wild life which cannot be vaccinated. Vaccination against FMD does not involve just one jab, but has to be repeated every six months

Potential human health problems involved seem to be ignored.

FMD is endemic in many third world countries where neither slaughter or vaccination are economically feasible since any method of prevention or eradication is hugely expensive.

Most of the rich parts of the world - North America, Australia, New Zealand, the EU and Scandinavia - have kept it out by strict regulation of food and agriculture which have to be in place against a range of deadly diseases transmittable to humans.

When it has arisen they have eradicated it by slaughter. This seems to be the most effective policy. The USA last had a case over 70 years ago in 1929. Canada had its last case in 1952. In Britain the last outbreak was in 1967.

No evidence

The case for the ongoing use of an unreliable vaccine over long periods of time is not strong. Vaccination was tried in some European countries but there it effectiveness cannot be evaluated since there is no evidence that the disease was imported during that time.

As George Monbiot points out there is a commercial case against vaccination since it results in an export ban. But there is also a food safety element - the fact that consumers want as many diseases as possible kept out of the food they eat, and many do not want to consume animals infected or vaccinated with FMD.

The issue therefore is to keep FMD out. And what makes Britain vulnerable today is the deregulation of both the farming and food production and importation. Britain is vulnerable to a range of diseases in farmyard animals - particularly BSE, FMD and swine fever. It is also vulnerable to a wide range of diseases dangerous to

humans.

The problem lies in the systematic deregulation of farming and the intensification of agriculture. The increasing commodification of animals, particularly sheep, means they are shuttled around the country in vast numbers (1.3m a month) in a market which produces nothing - except profit for the dealers.

The closure of slaughter houses, and therefore longer travelling distances to slaughter, is also an issue - although many of the smaller houses were closed because they were spreading BSE. Again the absence of strict regulation was the key issue.

Stress on animals increases their susceptibility to disease, whether from travel or intensive farming methods. The numbers of government vets have been drastically reduced in recent years, along with all other government services, thus when something happens there is no one there to deal with it.

Despite the seriousness of this outbreak there has to be a sense of proportion. This imminence of a general election has shaped perceptions of this outbreak from the start.

Sensationalist

Apart from the sensationalism of the British media, the Tories have played it up to the full. They are facing defeat whether the election was May or June it was and is their one last chance of a breakthrough. Unfortunately for them it has not worked, and their unconvincing hype has actually increased Labour's lead.

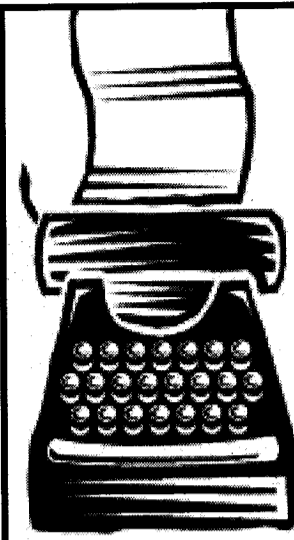
Much of the media coverage has been grotesque; concentrating on emotive images. Language such as 'funeral pyres' and 'killing fields' gives the impression of a war zone making it look as if the farming industry was about to be wiped out - and compounds the problems of the tourist industry.

In fact it has taken six weeks for the number of animals slaughtered to contain FMD to reach the 500,000 normally slaughtered each week for food production.

The main victims of this outbreak of course are many of the small farmers who were facing a severe crisis before FMD came along.

It is not just the aftermath of BSE but the high value of the pound, the globalisation of food production and the power of the supermarkets which are driving many out of the industry or deeper into penury.

Socialists must demand the reorganisation of farming on a completely new and sustainable basis. (See SO 43)



Writeback

We welcome readers' letters on any topic. Letters over 400 words may be cut for space reasons.

Write to Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU.
email: outlook@gn.apc.org

Life blood - leeches from poor

The government report into pharmaceutical industry competitiveness rejects cheaper drugs for developing countries: stating categorically that "patents are the lifeblood" of the industry. Prime Minister Blair endorses this: "the UK must offer a supportive business environment".

How telling. No such supportive environment is offered people seeking refuge here. No such concern is offered for the "lifeblood" of "patients", such as those living with HIV in the developing world.

Even Oxfam, which has rightly campaigned against the voucher system and for affordable health drugs for all, is taken aback at this "government capitulation to big business".

But this is what happens when a task force investigating an industry is stuffed full of the very multi-nationals whose activities need regulating. Membership of the 12 person task force is



listed by the government as including: Astra Zeneca, Glaxo Wellcome, SmithKline Beecham, Novartis, MSD, and ABPI President and Director General; also Lord Sainsbury; Minister for Science and Innovation

In doing so, Government abandons governing. It gives encouragement to the greed of the few rather than meeting the needs of the many.

Public health is not safe in private hands.

**John Nicholson,
Manchester**

Outlook line is right on Good Friday deal

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK is to be congratulated on its genuine commitment to socialist internationalism, in particular the way that, unlike the vast majority of the British marxist left, it takes up the question of Ireland.

It alone stood rock solid in its support for the Irish freedom movement and opposition to the Good Friday agreement through those lean post-Omagh years.

I am especially pleased to see

SO condemn the recent violent intimidation orchestrated by Provisional Sinn Fein against republican opponents of the Good Friday agreement.

I reckon that Socialist Democracy (Ireland) can genuinely claim the right to be the historical continuity of that marxist-leninist tradition established in Ireland by James Connolly, in those far off heady days of the early 20th century.

**Steve Woodling,
Newcastle upon Tyne**

Socialism on the internet

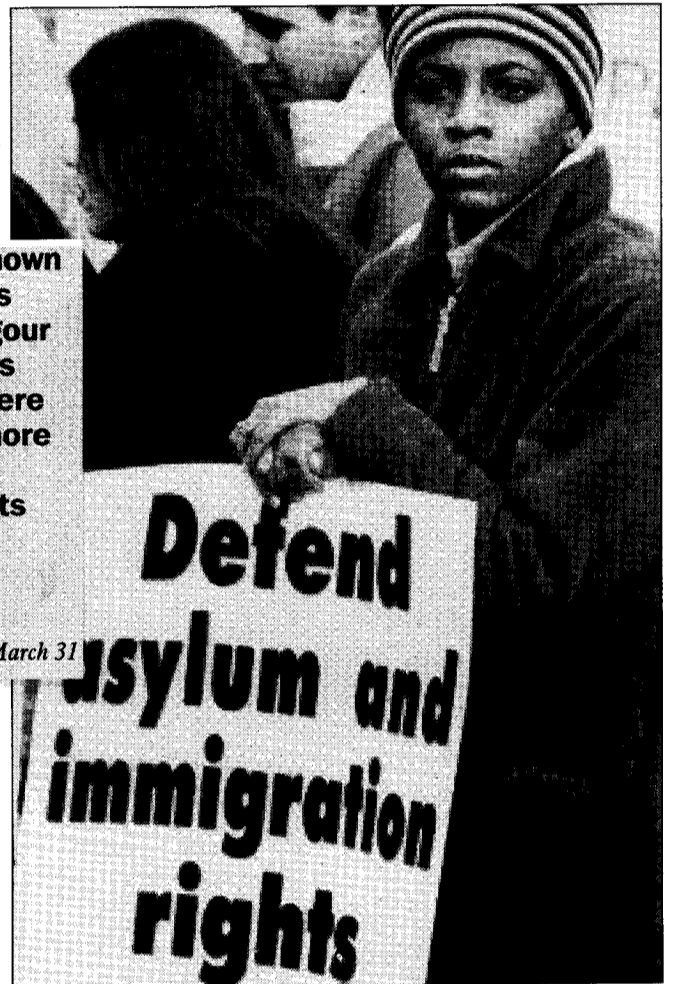
Socialist Outlook web site:
www.labournet.org.uk/so
International Socialist Group:
www.3bh.org.uk/ISG

Socialist

A monthly marxist review. No 44. April 2001. 50p

OUTLOOK

Wacker guilty: but Labour stands accused in Chinese immigrant tragedy



"History has shown that immigrants bring ideas, vigour and ambition as well as their mere labour. ... As more countries are finding, migrants have a benign effect on rich economies."

The Economist, March 31

Victims of racist laws!

Dutch lorry driver Perry Wacker was sentenced to 14 years for his role in the deaths of 58 Chinese "illegal immigrants" who suffocated on the crossing from Zeebrugge to Dover last June.

Wacker and other gangsters who exploit the misery of poor and vulnerable people around the world deserve no sympathy: but neither does the system that allows them to make huge sums from the trade in human beings.

If it were not illegal for all but the smallest number of refugees and immigrants to come to Britain and other countries in "Fortress Europe", there would be no space for criminal gangs to charge desperate and impoverished people thousands of pounds for smuggling them in.

But of course it has suited New Labour – even more than other EU governments – to play up to backwardness and racism by maintaining and strengthening the racist laws against immigrants and asylum seekers. Ironically, the

only reason Wacker's unfortunate passengers found any sympathy was by dying in tragic circumstances: had they been found alive they would have been departed without a thought.

Home Office minister Barbara Roche, Labour's answer to Ann Widdecombe, proudly boasts that this government deports more people than any previous government. The government that so eagerly promotes free movement of capital is soft on racism and soft on the causes of racism, using almost any excuse to whip up hostility to asylum seekers.

Ministers were even happy to let false rumours circulate blaming foot and mouth disease on illegal meat imports to Chinese restaurants.

Locking up Wacker won't prevent similar tragedies in the future: to do that we must campaign for open borders and the scrapping of all immigration restrictions.



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