

# Socialist

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# OUTLOOK

INSIDE



Crisis in Argentina - page 4

War: a first balance sheet p12-13

Brussels: step forward for Europe's left

Scandal of Blunkett's policies...

# Defend asylum seekers:



John Harris

"We want our future": desperate refugees outside the Sangatte centre

CHRISTMAS DAY'S usual lack of news was broken on this occasion by the story that 500 desperate asylum seekers had tried to leave the Sangatte refugee camp in France, cross the Channel Tunnel, and get to Britain.

This story followed hot on the heels of the death of eight refugees from Turkey, including three children, in a container thought to be bound for Britain - but which actually ended up in Ireland.

It is easy for Bertie Ahern, like his British counterparts, to condemn those who make profits from this obscene traffic in human lives: but it was the creation by the EU countries of a "Fortress Europe", hostile to refugees and immigrants, that has allowed this trade to flourish and grow. The easiest way to end people- trafficking would be to abolish all immigration controls.

These and many other stories obviously illustrate the plight of many fleeing torture and terror in their home countries. But contrary to the lies of many politicians and media hacks, they do not demonstrate that Britain is a "soft touch" but that the rest of Europe is just as illiberal.

Blunkett's new proposals on the treatment of asylum seekers, sold as a 'liberal' turn on the basis of scrapping vouchers, are no such thing (see page 2)

On top of this, the new "anti-terrorist" laws restrict the right to asylum, and all the evidence is that the Home Office is stepping up deportations, regardless of circumstances, in order to meet its arbitrary targets.

All of the evidence is that the Labour government is even more racist and reactionary in its efforts to close the gates against refugees and immigrants than even the Tories before them.

David Blunkett's policies are a kick in the teeth to all those who believe in a tolerant, democratic, multi-cultural, anti-racist Britain. That's why all socialists must redouble the fight against them in 2002.

# Defend democratic rights!

Conference to support asylum seekers - inside, p2





ETUC placards on the march through Brussels, calling for more attention to jobs and less to the launch of the Euro, (which has cost over £5 billion).

## Brussels: an impressive turn-out of Europe's left

Two demonstrations greeted the EU summit in Brussels in December, the last meeting of the European Heads of State before the launch of the Euro.

The first was an 80,000 strong demonstration of the European trade unions on Thursday December 13, and the second a 2,000 strong demonstration of the European left the following day.

The trade union demonstration, called by the European TUC, was protesting at the neo-liberal Europe which is being developed by the EU whilst the demonstration of the radical left called for "global peace and justice" and was in effect an anti-globalisation protest.

The trade union demonstration saw a huge mobilisation in particular from the French CGT, while the Belgian mobilisation was marred by the fact that in a number of sectors time off was negotiated for stewards but other workers were threatened that they would face disciplinary action if they attended.

As usual the official British contingent under the TUC banner illustrated the weakness of British trade unionism in these situations.

Both demonstrations were proof that the war and the war drive have not been successful in heading off the anti-capitalist movement or the capacity of the European unions to mobilise when they decide to do so. The message was loud and clear; the movement has not gone away.

Workers from the Belgian state airline Sabena and Belgian postal workers fighting privatisation not only turned out on Thursday's trade union march but on Friday as well.

Sabena workers who face 12,000 redundancies after the company went bankrupt in October marched in uniform behind a

large model aeroplane with placards demanding "Stop economic terrorism".

The main far-left delegations on the demonstration of the radical left were from the International Socialist Tendency, the international grouping to which the SWP belongs, the Fourth International and the Committee for a Workers International contingent including the Socialist Party from Britain. The IST contingent had a big representation from Britain which travelled on the coaches organised by Globalise Resistance.

The FI contingent was led by the French LCR and the POS/SAP of Belgium. There was a big delegation from the Belgian Maoists (the PTB) but other European Trotskyist groupings such as the LO and the Lambertists were conspicuous by their absence.

The bulk of the demonstration comprised of a multiplicity of NGOs and campaigns including ATTAC groups from several European countries.

On Thursday evening many attended an anti-capitalist forum organised by the Belgium section of the FI with the support of the French LCR and the SWP. Over 1,000 people packed into the hall to hear speakers from the LCR, Rifondazione Comunista, the SWP and the Scottish Socialist Party.

The presence of Rifondazione Communist on the platform was an important development and represents a process in which RC is moving further away from its Stalinist past and closer to the European far left.

Both the demonstration and the meeting were further proof of the increasing co-ordination of the European left, including the far left groupings, in the face of the rightward drift of social democracy.

## Conference called to defend asylum seekers

**Veronica Fagan**

Home Secretary David Blunkett's new proposals on the treatment of asylum seekers, sold as a liberal turn on the basis of scrapping vouchers, are no such thing.

They involve the increased use of detention, and the introduction of a "smart" identification card with the same stigma as vouchers (and possibly the thin end of the wedge for the wider introduction of such cards).

Forced dispersal is retained, and refugees will have even less right to an independent income than at present, because those kept in "holding centres" will only receive food and other essentials if they stay there.

On top of this, the new "anti-terrorist" laws restrict the right to asylum, and all the evidence is that the Home Office is stepping up deportations, regardless of circumstances, in order to meet its arbitrary targets.

The "retreat" on vouchers came after intensive campaigning from local and national campaigns and vir-



tually every national trade union.

That there are many organisations campaigning around the rights of asylum seekers is obviously positive: however the movement has often been weakened by the lack of coordination of the efforts of the different campaigns.

In order to clarify the opposition to Blunkett's proposals and to build joint work between those active

around the issues, a conference is being called for Saturday March 23, 11am-5pm at the Cross Street Chapel, Manchester.

Initial organisers of the conference include the National Civil Rights Movement, the Jewish Socialist Group, Barbed Wire Europe (the coordination of campaigns against the detention centres), the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation campaigns, and the Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers.

The conference is open to all those who want to step up and coordinate activity to defend the rights of asylum seekers.

There will be workshops on different aspects of campaigning, such as detention, dispersal, deportation, organising with asylum seekers and building local campaigns, as well as a final session on building joint work.

Further details of the conference from CDAS, BCM 4289, London WC1N 3XX, or info@defend-asylum.org

## Strong vote for strike on South West Trains

As we go to press RMT members on South West Trains look to be about to start four days of strikes. The dispute is two-fold - over pay and over victimisation of RMT activists.

A three to one ballot result, with an over 70% turnout, shows the strength of feeling of RMT members over pay. The company had offered a 4% pay rise to all non-driving staff - but given drivers an 11% increase.

They argued they needed to give drivers such a rise because of market forces. Whilst the other grades would not begrudge the

drivers their increase they were damned if they were going to be left behind, with the company pleading poverty when it came to their pay award.

Over victimisation, a separate ballot of train crew saw a comfortable majority in favour of action to defend half a dozen activists picked off for disciplinary action by SWT over the last six months.

Key in this dispute is the treatment of Greg Tucker, drivers' rep at Waterloo who was downgraded in August to a position as a ticket collector.

The membership have clearly indicated that they believe that he was targeted for his activism and that he cannot be allowed to be picked off in this way.

It is clear that SWT owners Stagecoach, at the highest level, decided to target Greg Tucker after the successful guards' dispute in the spring of last year.

At that time Greg was a Socialist Alliance candidate in the general election and SWT were embarrassed by the publicity he achieved in his campaign.

Negotiations over the last week have failed to resolve

## RMT General Secretary elections

"There is a real prospect that left wing fundamentalists could hold the top four jobs (in the RMT) by the middle of next year."

Such is the spectre haunting the TUC, in a briefing prepared in their campaign to help the right wing candidate standing against Bob Crow in the election for RMT General Secretary.

Voting gets underway in the next few days, and a campaign is being developed to stop Bob at any cost. Already opening shots have been fired, with the Sun weighing in to attack Bob Crow for failing to support Railtrack workers who might have lost money when their shares became worthless.

That this issue had nothing to do with Bob Crow was of course absolutely irrelevant.

Bob Crow's real crimes, for the TUC and the Sun alike are two-fold - the TUC quotes an "uncompromising attitude towards the Labour Party", and that "he has been associated with around 30 strikes in his ten years in office."

Union activists might point to some faults in the way Bob has handled some of those disputes: occasionally he has appeared to wobble under pressure from the TUC, and the rest of the RMT leadership.

But overall it is clear that Bob needs the support of all on the left in this election. The future of the union is being decided over the next few weeks!

The left had a setback last month when the incumbent (left) RMT President was narrowly beaten by a former President in the annual election for that post.

It is an indication of how tight the battle for General Secretary could be. Every effort must be made to ensure that the result is more positive in the General Secretary election.

the dispute and RMT members are committed to a strong campaign of action.

The four days, Thursday, Friday, Monday and Tuesday, already called for strikes will hit SWT hard - the company reckons it will lose between £2 and £4 million per day in lost revenue.

The government has indicated it is desperate to get the strike called off, with the Transport Minister pressuring the union leadership to do so.

All the more reason why it is vital for socialists to weigh in with their support for the RMT action.



# Blair's New Year pledge: A new war on public services



Dudley strikers fought privatisation of NHS capital: but all Milburn's plans centre on private sector

The new year marks a turning point in the trajectory of Tony Blair's government: the drive towards privatisation and "reform", which was interrupted by the events of September 11 and Blair's frenetic globe-trotting efforts on behalf of George Bush, is to be resumed.

With the military offensive largely complete in Afghanistan, the new Taliban to be combated are seen as public sector workers – and their unions – as they battle to keep public services public, and defend their jobs and hard-won pay and conditions against a renewed Labour onslaught.

Blair's New Year message is that they should brace themselves for a full-scale attack, with 2002 a year of "unprecedented" and "unsettling" changes throughout the public services.

Those first in the cross-wires of Blair's rifle sights are health and education.

No amount of evidence of the failures of privatisation and the free market – most recently the deepening crisis of Railtrack and efforts to prop up the privatised Air Traffic Control system NATS – will deter New Labour's team of zealots from their obsessive drive towards more privatisation, "public-private partnerships" and the ruinously expensive Private Finance Initiative.

This is perhaps clearest of all in the NHS, where the answer to any question asked of Health Secretary Alan Milburn appears to be more private sector involvement.

Last summer's NHS purchase of the bankrupt private Heart Hospital in London has been followed by a renewed drive to send even more NHS patients for treatment in private hospitals, and the decision in December to buy up the entire capacity of a BUPA hospital in Surrey to treat NHS waiting list patients.

To cap it all, Milburn has insisted that he will bring a representative of the tiny private hospital industry onto his "Modernisation Board", giving the private bosses more say on the future of the NHS than they ever had under Thatcher.

"This is not a one-night stand, it's a long-term relationship, and the private sector has got to be involved in the planning," said Milburn, to the obvious delight of the *Daily Telegraph*, which carried an extensive interview with Labour's top privatiser on December 30.

Milburn's arrogant stance on this deliberate snub to the health unions is another warning that many if not all of the promised 20 new Diagnostic and Treatment centres to speed the treatment of NHS waiting list patients are likely to be owned and run by the private sector.

"We need all the capacity we can



What to sell off next? Milburn

get in the NHS, and if the private sector can provide NHS patients with NHS services, then that's a good thing. It means the private sector has got to be involved from the outset," he told the *Telegraph*.

But of course the private sector only has spare capacity because it is so unpopular, with fewer than one person in eight having any private medical insurance cover. Half of its 50,000 beds are running empty; and it can only fill those beds with patients if it recruits – poaches – more nursing and medical staff from the NHS.

The costs of private sector treatment, for the relatively restricted range of elective operations it provides – are also consistently higher than the NHS: BUPA's published scale of charges are all at least 50% higher than the average cost of the same operations within the NHS. For every 10 operations Milburn buys from the private sector, the cash resources for 15 similar operations are drained from the NHS.

And of course any patients who develop more serious complications while in a private hospital will be rapidly dumped back onto the NHS: in 2000 142,000 patients were transferred to the NHS from private hospitals that could not cope, or would not foot the bill for additional treatment.

The government's cuddling up to a private sector that is only interested in pocketing the profits from a greater share of the easiest elective operations, while leaving NHS hospitals to shoulder the burden of all emergency work and all of the costliest specialties, is an all-round disaster for NHS Trusts and health workers.

But Milburn has made clear things can only get worse. With the collapse of national talks aimed at restructuring NHS pay scales (largely because ministers recoiled at the cost of implementing a fairer system) Milburn has now floated the idea of return to the bad old

days of local pay bargaining which developed (and caused chaos) under Thatcher's market-style reforms.

Perhaps the crowning insult to health workers and Labour voters is that after claiming credit for sweeping away the Tory internal market in the NHS back in 1997, Milburn is now talking openly about a new system of "patient choice" which threatens to restore this most divisive aspect of that market system, leaving NHS hospitals to compete once more against each other for patients and market share.

There is no doubt that as a minister who according to the *Telegraph* describes himself as "the last Blairite in the Cabinet", Milburn's relentless drive towards privatisation is backed by Blair. An increasing share of the extra cash being pumped into the NHS by Gordon Brown will be pumped straight out again into the coffers of the private sector.

It is significant in this regard that the Wanless Report, commissioned by Gordon Brown, and hailed by many as an old-Labour style defence of continuing to fund the NHS through taxation, does not discuss how the money is spent, or who is to provide the services is used to buy.

Former banker Wanless in a flawed and partial study makes no analysis of the value for money of using private hospitals to treat NHS patients – or of funding new hospitals through the Private Finance Initiative (PFI).

Ironically, January 2002 is the 40th anniversary of the Tory government's Hospital Plan for England and Wales, which massively increased public sector investment and built a new generation of district general hospitals. Now it is Labour which is progressively privatising the NHS asset base, not least through Private Finance Initiative hospital building programmes, which are likely to increase during 2002.

PFI is also playing an increasing role in the development of new schools, though as in the NHS levels of backlog maintenance have escalated alarmingly – with the latest estimate at £7 billion. Over £750m is required for urgent work to avoid closures of premises – with another £3.1 billion required within two years.

New Labour has spent more on school maintenance, but has directed much of the new money to building additional school places.

But Labour's new Education Bill published in December does not address the issue of resources to

prop up the fabric of school buildings. Instead it is looking at ways in which schools can be further detached from local communities and any democratic accountability, and turned increasingly into businesses run on commercial lines.

Education Secretary Estelle Morris has been keen to tress that schools will be given freedom to apply for exemption from current education law, to implement "innovative schemes" – as long as they are approved by the Secretary of State.

In other words, schools that fit Morris's idea of innovation will be able to disregard the national curriculum, and tear up the national terms covering teachers' pay and conditions. They may prolong the school day, bring in evening or holiday working, and focus on a few specialist areas to the exclusion of others. It seems that nobody need be consulted over these changes apart from the Secretary of State.

Nor is there any guarantee of higher quality education among schools which break free. They may well be encouraged to use more



Morris: her Bill is bigots' charter

classroom assistants to cover over gaps in the teaching workforce – regardless of the wishes of parents or the views of their staff.

Worse, schools will also be urged to form, or invest school resources in new companies to provide services to other schools. Labour's objective is a business model, in which entrepreneurial head teachers begin to coin in profits by selling services such as teaching materials, supply teachers, advisory or specialist teachers, financial management – or even school meals and cleaning services – to less well-provided schools.

How far removed is this from the situation in the USA where private companies such as Edison run schools for profit? And what control, if any, would parents or local councils have over schools which began to make large sums by selling

such services?

The Bill proposes new ways of tackling failing schools ... by allowing them to be taken over by private firms, voluntary organisations, or other "good schools".

Of course this increased freedom to the best-resourced schools to make profits at the expense of the rest does nothing to tackle the underlying difficulty of a two-tier education system in which the clearest predictor of educational success is still social class. Nor does it address the growing shortages of teaching staff.

Of course the more "specialist" schools are encouraged to become, whether on the basis of the subjects they have dropped or included, or on the basis of incorporating more "faith" schools, which select on the basis of religious prejudice, the more the idea of comprehensive education is dismissed.

Of course the Tories, diehard defenders of selective education, have keenly welcomed Morris's call for more faith schools.

While a few Labour backbenchers have expressed reservations, it has been left to the Lib Dems to point out that Morris's vision of faith-based, selective and exclusive education is already up and running in Belfast, where the result is chronic sectarian division.

The divisive and exclusive character of faith schools is underlined by Church of England spokesperson Canon John Hall, who told the BBC:

"The Church intends that its schools offer distinctively Christian education, and are open and inclusive of those who seek such an education."

New Labour's determination to reform education is bigots' charter, and a step backwards ... to an essentially Tory, pro-business agenda, combining more selection with an increase in local powers for entrepreneur heads in conjunction with tightening control at ministerial level.

The last people to be considered in this new ideological war on our most treasured public services are the key players: the health workers and teachers on the one hand, and the patients and pupils on the other.

Public sector unions face a stiff challenge. They called off an increasingly vociferous campaign against privatisation in the aftermath of September 11: but ministers are making it plain that they have used the time to redouble their attack.

It's time for the gloves to come off, and the fight to resume. 2002 will be a test of strength – and it's one the public services have to win against Tony Blair's reactionary gang of privateers.

**2002 will be a test of strength – and it's one the public services have to win against Tony Blair's privateers.**



# Workers must fight Argentine austerity

**Andy Kilmister**

In the same week as the latest stage in the launch of international capital's most important current monetary project, the euro, came a rude reminder of the instability of global capitalism. The economic crisis in Argentina has now led to riots on the street, the resignation of two presidents and the most serious financial crisis in 'emerging markets' for the last three years.

Yet neo-liberal analysts have attempted to shrug off the wider implications of the Argentine crisis. They have argued that the main difference between what is happening now and what happened in Asia, Russia and Brazil in the late 1990s is that the international financial system is now much more stable and able to withstand problems in a particular country.

Currency and debt crises share one fundamental characteristic when looked at from a Marxist standpoint. They are essentially redistributive. They arise from struggles over the distribution of the surplus which has been created in production, through the exploitation of the working class. These struggles take place both between different national capitalist classes and between capital and labour in the countries affected.

This is fairly obvious in the case of debt or credit crises. But it is also true in the case of currency crises. If a currency such as the Argentine peso is devalued, this represents a redistribution to holders of other currencies. Other things being equal, national capitalist classes will want to keep the value of the currencies they hold, normally their 'own', as high as possible, to increase their purchasing power.

However, the instability of the system arises from the fact that such a strategy potentially undercuts the basis of profitability by making domestic production uncompetitive in international markets.

The last two decades have seen an intensification of the severity of both debt and currency crises affecting Asia, Africa and Latin America. In other words conflicts over the distribution of surplus profits between these countries and the imperialist heartlands have become sharper. The fundamental reason for this is the fall in profitability world-wide, which has led to large amounts of mobile money capital searching the globe increasingly desperately for investment opportunities. The phenomenon of 'emerging markets' is an expression of this.

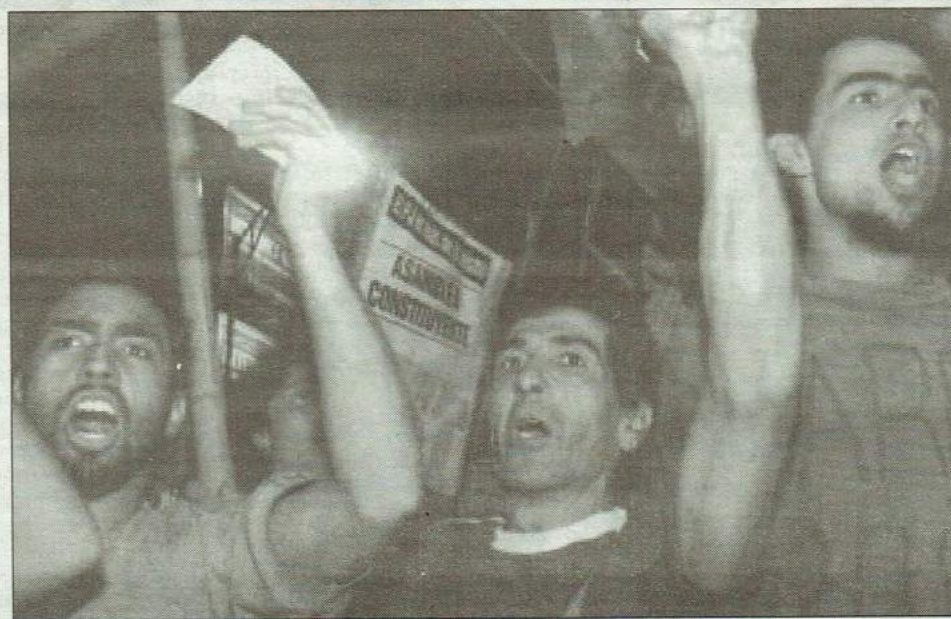
But as the pool of money has grown more and more compared to potential profits, so conflicts over how the profits are to be distributed have increased. The way in which these problems have become apparent has differed from country to country. But two main kinds of crisis can be seen as increasingly typical.

One is a crisis of overconfidence, where capital streams into a country on the basis of an expectation of future profits, which then turns out to be exaggerated. The realisation of this leads to a financial panic and currency collapse. This is to a large degree what happened in Mexico in 1994 and in much of Asia in 1997.

The second kind of crisis is a prolonged struggle over distribution, where domestic and international capitalists cannot agree a common strategy for dividing the spoils. Incompatible approaches lead to capital being unable to impose a vision of how to resolve the crisis and consequently to a paralysis of policy-making. This is what is happening in Argentina at the moment.

The Argentine economy has suffered from very high levels of foreign debt (now valued at around \$125 billion) for two decades. The fundamental cause of this is the underlying weakness of productive activity in the country, which has a small export sector mainly based on exploiting natural resources and primary commodities, and which has to a large degree failed to break into more profitable sectors and markets.

As a result the 'terms of trade' which measure the price of Argentine exports compared to Argentine imports have moved dramatically against the country in recent years. This productive weakness can be traced back to the history of imperialist domination of Argentina over the last century, and to the failed policies of the Argentine capitalist class both under military rule in the 1960s



Angry workers demand a constituent assembly as the Presidents come and go. One who lasted only a few days was Saa (below), who briefly advocated a new currency – and a default on debt payments



and 1970s and under both Radical and Peronist governments since 1982.

The high level of debt has led Argentina to be very vulnerable to conflicts over redistribution of the kind outlined above. The situation for the Argentine government has been made worse by two further factors. First, the Argentine capitalist class is exceptionally skilled in tax evasion, which has led to a constant problem both of declining government revenue and of flows of capital out of the country. Secondly, the nature of the Argentine constitution and the balance of parliamentary power has meant that the federal government cannot impose its will or spending plans on the powerful provinces.

In the 1980s the Radical government under Raul Alfonsín tried to solve these by extracting more from the working class through a series of austerity programmes. But at that time the Argentine trade union movement was relatively strong and confident, after the overthrow of military rule and with the support of the opposition Peronist movement. The austerity measures failed. Endemic inflation resulted as firms tried to safeguard profits through price rises and workers responded by demanding higher wages.

When the Peronists came to power in the 1990s they faced the possibility of hyperinflation which would seriously destabilise capitalism in Argentina. Their answer was to introduce a 'currency board'. The central bank was only allowed by law to print money which was backed up by foreign exchange earnings.

The exchange rate was rigidly fixed against the dollar, enabling domestic capitalists and foreign creditors to be united around a common strategy. Fixed exchange rates would impose discipline on workers, who would realise, it was argued, that wage rises would

price them out of jobs.

They would also safeguard the value of foreign investments in Argentina and thus attract inflows of capital, while ensuring that the debt could be repaid, since the peso would not be in danger of falling against the dollar in such a way that the burden of debt would rise.

This became a springboard for a dramatic assault on the working class under Carlos Menem, with cuts in wages, deregulation and a wholesale privatisation of large parts of the economy. Investment boomed from 1991 to 1998. The economy grew by an average of 6.2 percent through the 1990s. Argentina became feted by the IMF and neo-liberal economists as a model economy.

But the fundamental contradictions of production in Argentina were not solved in any way by the policies of Menem and Domingo Cavallo during this period, and as a result the conflicts which had appeared to be solved were bound to recur.

This is what has happened over the last three years, during which Argentina has been in recession. The immediate cause of the difficulties has been the movement of exchange rates.

Argentina's main trading partners are Brazil and Europe. Following the devaluation of the Brazilian real in January 1999 and the steady fall of the euro, while the dollar remained strong, Argentine exports have become uncompetitive. But this has only acted to uncover deeper problems with the currency board strategy.

As the Argentine economy has weakened, foreign lenders have demanded higher and higher interest rates to compensate for the possibility of a debt default. This has both worsened the recession and led to a fiscal crisis for the Argentine state, which has found it increasingly hard to pay the interest on its debt. Slower growth and higher government deficits have in turn lowered the confidence of international investors in Argentina and led them to demand even higher rates.

The last eighteen months have seen a vicious downward spiral of confidence, with attempted IMF bailouts in November 2000 and August 2001 both failing. The government has desperately tried to shift the burden of debt repayment onto the working class through more austerity

These, and the effects of the recession, have led to the current unrest.

The severity of the crisis has broken the unity between the Argentine capitalist class and foreign investors, and led to sharp conflicts about how it might be resolved. Two main strategies have emerged.

One, favoured by observers like Wolf and Ricardo Hausmann of the Inter-American Development Bank, is to devalue the peso. The advantage of this for the capitalists is that it opens up the possibility of shifting at least part of the burden of solving the crisis onto the mass of the Argentine people. Their real wages and savings would fall in value, as happened in Mexico ten years ago and Asia five years ago.

If it allowed interest rates to fall, Wolf argues, a devaluation could stimulate growth and allow debt payments to continue with a relatively minor rescheduling. The interests of foreign creditors would be safeguarded, at least to some extent. Nearly all the Argentine ruling class now holds its wealth in the form of dollars, so it too could withstand this process.

But devaluation carries with it real problems. The international impact of the failure of the currency board strategy, supported by the IMF, to protect the value of the peso would be dramatic. It would indicate that developing economies would face a stark choice between letting their currencies float and giving up having a national currency at all, as in the 'dollarisation' option adopted by Ecuador and El Salvador.

More seriously, with foreign debt and much domestic debt denominated in dollars, a sharp fall in the exchange rate might well mean financial collapse in Argentina. Popular support for maintaining the exchange rate is still strong and devaluation might provoke further unrest. And productive investors in Argentina would see the value of their profits measured in dollars plummet.

The alternative is to default on the debt. But with 20 percent of publicly-traded emerging market debt accounted for by Argentina, this would have severe effects on international financial markets. It might spark off a crisis of confidence about the ability of other highly indebted countries to pay their debts.

Brazil, where foreign debt is over 300 percent of export earnings, and a higher percentage of GDP than in Argentina, could be affected. It would also raise questions about how the continuing Argentine balance of payments deficit is to be funded.

The Argentine government has vacillated up until now between each of these strategies. The project of introducing a 'third currency', announced in December, is designed to lay the basis for a controlled devaluation of the peso. At the same time they have announced a temporary suspension of debt payments. Yet, the government is itself divided and is also unable to agree a common strategy with international capital. In these circumstances it cannot present a clear way out of the crisis.

The result of this is a situation which in many ways is more problematic for global capitalism than that of 1997 or 1998. The USA, which played a crucial role in resolving crises in developing economies then, is now in recession. The Bush government is unwilling to help Argentina but even if they were willing and able to take action, there is no agreed way forward.

The argument used in Asia that the speculative crises were the result of too little financial deregulation and the close links between banks, industry and the state, cannot be applied to Argentina.

Argentina has adopted precisely the approach prescribed by the IMF and the US for a decade – and is still in crisis. And the Argentine crisis comes after three years of recession and social polarisation, not, as in countries like Indonesia, before the build up of economic discontent.

It also comes at a time when the class struggle has intensified in several neighbouring countries, such as Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador.

How the Argentine crisis is resolved will depend primarily on the Argentine working class, and on its ability to frustrate plans to make it pay for the crisis. But already enough has happened to make the example of Argentina a crucial one for socialists to use in exhibiting the fundamental injustice and instability of the capitalist world economy.



As 'Jack the Knife' takes over ...

# Scottish Executive culled after foot in mouth outbreak

## Gordon Morgan

Henry McLeish's tenure as First Minister of Scotland effectively ended on BBC's Question Time when he was shown to have lied over the sub-letting his constituency office.

Henry tried to stagger on, and offered to repay up to £36,000 wrongly claimed in expenses whilst a Westminster MP.

His fate was sealed when an SSP supporter in Fife Council told Tommy Sheridan that another unreported let existed which could have been arranged by McLeish's wife, an official in Fife.

McLeish changed his arranged speech to Parliament from defiance to resignation.

Public contempt for the Scottish Parliament, MSPs and the Labour Party has increased with the saga over MSPs' expenses, McLeish's lies and evasions, the non-election of McConnell, the sacking of the Executive and MSPs voting themselves large salary rises.

## A Tale of No Debate

Jack McConnell is the third First Minister of Scotland to have been chosen without a Labour Party membership ballot or debate on policies.

The 'blessed' Donald Dewar, Father of the Nation, was Secretary of State when the post of Leader of the Scottish Labour Party was created in the run up to 1997 elections.

The left challenged at that time, but was ritually defeated. With the passing of the Scotland Act there were demands for a debate on policies for the Parliament and re-election of the leader post. These were denied, and Donald was duly elected First Minister as leader of the largest minority in the Parliament.

Dewar's administration is remembered as one of startling incompetence, typified by "Donald's Dome" – the Holyrood Parliament building. He assured voters this would cost only £40 million, but it will end up costing over £300 million.

Dewar's death shocked Scotland. Only 28 days are allowed under the Scotland Act for a replacement leader, and this gave Blair and Brown an excuse for a stitch up.

No nominations were accepted until after the funeral, which meant there would then be no time for a membership-based election. A 'college' system was cobbled together to fast-track the election.

Blair and Brown made it clear they wanted McLeish elected as the continuity 'safe hands' candidate. The timescale prevented a left candidate being discussed, and only Jack McConnell challenged McLeish.

McLeish was elected by a narrow margin, effectively by the paid vote of government ministers.

The Labour left was deter-

mined to have a candidate for the next elections. The main left grouping, the Campaign for Socialism, had enough MSPs to ensure it could nominate a candidate following McLeish's resignation.

Labour's membership were outraged over PPP and Stock Transfers and wanted a full debate where candidates would present their views.

John McAllion had indicated a willingness to stand as standard bearer. But in the event he was only able to attract one other MSP nomination from the Labour ranks instead of the five he required. Jack McConnell was elected unopposed. Debate on policy was avoided.

## Recriminations and Rewards

The Campaign for Socialism is the only significant left grouping within Scottish Labour. Amongst its MSPs were Bill Butler, ex Chair of the CFS, his partner Patricia Ferguson, and Cathy Jamieson deputy Leader of the Scottish Party and prominent critic of Trident and PPP.

At the Campaign for Socialism AGM the weekend following the appointment of McConnell, they were asked to justify not only their refusal to nominate McAllion, but their decision actually to nominate McConnell.

Jamieson in particular was challenged, as she had publicly stated she would not participate in the elections as

she was effectively the presiding officer. No explanations were forthcoming and the meeting ended in anger.

Next day both Jamieson and Ferguson were rewarded with posts in McConnell's new cabinet. The 'left' MSPs appear to have been bought off.

It is clear now that McConnell and the Labour leadership wanted to avoid a debate – and a contested election at all costs.

## The Cull

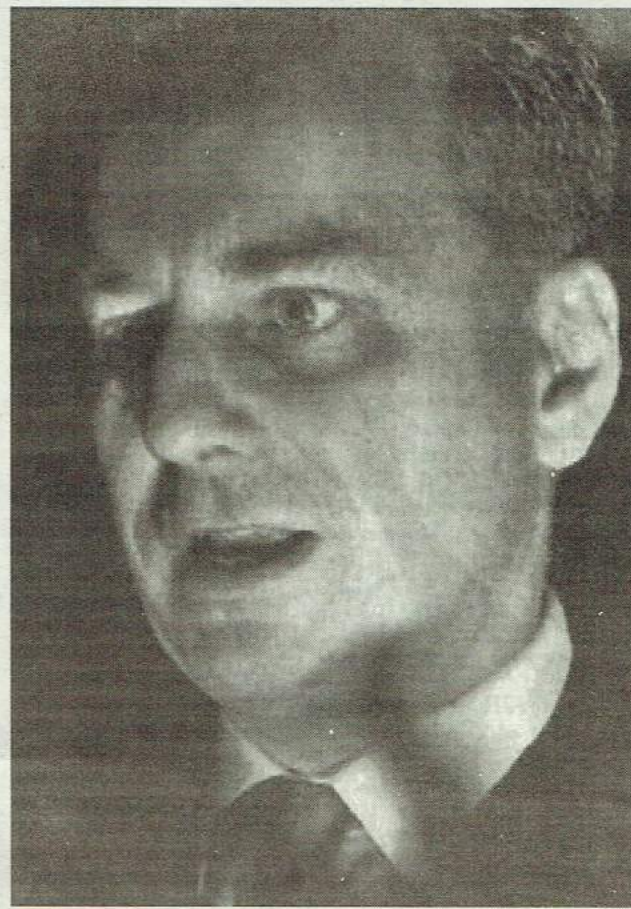
McConnell has been referred to as 'Jack the knife' for some years. I recall in 1987 a Scottish Labour Action AGM being advised by the chair to watch what we said when Jack, then a member, joined us after the Scottish Executive meeting.

Prior to his election he told the press there would be no Night of the Long Knives. In the event he got rid of all the cabinet members bar one – Wendy Alexander his chief rival.

He then added Transport to Wendy's already extensive portfolio, in a move everyone including Wendy accepts is an attempt to make her fail.

Susan Deacon the former Health Minister was offered the Social Justice portfolio, and turned it down. In public she claims pregnancy as the reason, but it is rumoured she would have accepted if she could have ditched the Stock Transfer policy for which she would have been responsible – Jack refused.

The incoming ministers,



He lied about the Long Knives – McConnell

four of whom have till now been identified as on the left, have all endorsed Jack through nominating him – or in Malcolm Chisholm and Wendy Alexander's cases publicly withdrawing their challenge to him.

The outgoing ministers are seething over their treatment and now form a dissident voice on the back bench who have already defeated McConnell over some parliamentary appointments – these outgoing ministers were mainly Gordon Brown supporters.

John McAllion is the only left MSP not compromised by this election process.

## Policies ?

McConnell is on public record as supporting continuance of New Labour policies. This remains the most likely outcome, but with Jack we must watch what he does, not what he says.

As a suspect Nationalist, Jack has recently addressed

the Westminster Labour Group, and vowed to strengthen cooperation between the Scottish and Westminster executives. The next week he changed meeting dates to prevent the head of the Scottish Civil Service attending weekly meetings with Downing Street Civil Service Heads.

Jack appears a more hands-on leader than his predecessors. He feels happy to intervene in disputes such as the ferry strike, without reference to the Minister nominally responsible. The "left" ministers' room for independent initiative seems limited.

As yet there are no policy changes from the new administration. The left in the Labour Party are even more cynical over the direction being taken, and the incorporation of elected lefts into the administration.

The Scottish Socialist Party is holding an open door for socialists who want to leave Labour and join the SSP.

# Successful weekend event boosts Scottish socialists

## Gordon Morgan

The Scottish Socialist Party's education and discussion weekend, Socialism 2001, was attended by over 300 people. This event is becoming the Scottish equivalent of 'Marxism' and included 25 separate discussions on a wide range of political, economic and cultural issues with the theme of Socialism, Internationalism and Peace.

The event opened on the Friday evening with a march and rally on the Friday evening, St Andrews night commemorating the legacy of John Maclean.

There was also a plenary report back from Alan McCoombes' trip to Pakistan and discussions with socialist groups there, and a final rally with speakers from Italy and Britain.

The additional strength given to the SSP through the fact that the SWP are now members was noted by a number of sessions led off by SWP comrades including Chris Bambery, Neil Davidson and Donny Gluckstein.

Non-SSP members also contributed, with Bill Speirs (General Secretary of the Scottish TUC) leading sessions on Palestine and Labour and the Trade Unions.

A large number of those attending were young members or non SSP members including from the SNP, who found the whole event very interesting and educational. The smaller number of SSP activists attending than at previous events is due to the extent of public activity around the war and other

campaigns.

The intention is to ensure that this becomes an annual event and given there are no other events like this in Scotland it plays a unique role in the Scottish Left.

Apart from the plenaries, individuals selected which discussions they attended with each person going to up to five. The following is therefore a sample.

The discussions on Peace and CND turned to a debate between proponents of non-violence against those pointing to lessons of Chile etc. The origins of Labour and the Trade Unions discussions focused on clarifying the difference between Reforms, Action Programmes and Reformism with a separate discussion on the Political Fund.

Two sessions led by Hillel

Tickin and Neil Davidson on the Economic Slump were largely expositions and highlighted the need for further discussion on issues such as the nature of the crisis of overproduction, the arms economy, and inter-imperialist tensions.

The discussions on Internationalism led by Murray Smith and Chris Bambery outlined the practical steps being taken towards left co-operation and joint action.

Chris was critical of the stance taken Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire (French section of the Fourth International) on the war in Afghanistan – a view with which Murray disagreed. However, overall there was surprising agreement on how to strengthen the international effectiveness of the



Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire banner on Brussels demo

left.

The final plenary session was exhilarating. The Italian PRC speaker outlined the success of the Italian Left since Genoa in forging a strong anti war-movement with a substantial trade union component.

John McAllion outlined the isolation he now feels in the Labour Party, arguing that the left have failed to change the Labour Party, and made clear that Socialists like him have to

take hard decisions soon about which party they should really be in!

Tommy Sheridan finished with a call for people to increase their practical support for the SSP; to start the process of preparing for the June 2003 elections with a strengthened apparatus.

He argued that we should aim for a block of not one or two MSPs, but have the target of at least 1 MSP in each of the 8 areas of Scotland.





The Socialist Alliance constitutional conference was held in London on Saturday 1st December, last year, with over 700 members present. ALAN THORNETT reports

# Conference boost for Socialist Alliance

The conference successfully adopted a new constitution – proposed by the International Socialist Group (ISG) the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and five prominent independents – by 345 votes against 311 for all other alternatives.

The new constitution gives Socialist Alliance members full rights to determine policy, elect leadership bodies and select candidates to stand in elections.

It also enshrined rights of freedom of expression and dissent within the Alliance and the right to sell and distribute publications other than those of the Alliance.

It is a good framework for the next stage of the development of the SA. What marred the conference, however, – even if it had been widely predicted in advance – was the carefully staged walk-out by the Socialist Party (SP).

Five alternative constitutions were presented to the conference. That proposed by the SWP/ISG and a number of key independents was adopted.

Those proposed by Workers Power and by the CPGB were leftist, and both effectively called for the SA to become a revolutionary party. Pete McClaren, one of the existing officers, put forward another constitution which was essentially the status quo.

The RDG put forward the constitution of the Scottish Socialist Party, in order to propagandise for the SA to become a party on the lines of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP). While the ISG agrees that this should be the long term goal, we did not support putting this proposal at this time, as the Alliance is not yet ready.

Further there were additional problems, given the politics of the RDG, with the way they had amended the framework SSP constitution for use in England.

Then there was the constitution proposed by the Socialist Party – which enshrined the scandalous principle that any six members within a constituency, who formed themselves into a platform, could veto any decision taken, including the selection of candidates.

## Outgrown

A new constitution was badly needed because the existing one had been outgrown by the SA itself and no longer provided structures which best facilitated its development. The motivation for the ISG SWP et al constitution (in the pre-conference bulletin) put it this way:

“We now have a fundamentally different SA to the Alliance that existed even a year ago, and the structure of the SA needs to be changed to take account of these developments. In particular we need a constitution which will ensure that the SA becomes more democratic and inclusive and at the same time is able to provide an effective and coherent national direction”.

That meant not only having a structure which could give effective leadership to the SA but also one which gave more rights to individual non-aligned members of rather than squeezing them out by emphasising the constituent organisations – as the SP proposed.

## New balance

This did not mean eliminating the representation of

the constituent organisations, far from it, but it did involve striking a new balance between them and the independents. This was spelled out in the protocol for the election of the EC which was agreed by the conference along with the ISG/SWP constitution.

Under the protocol each of the principal constituent organisations would continue to be represented but with a predominance of independents. The exact representation of the different organisations would not be predetermined constitutionally but introduced politically during the election process.

The political idea behind this was to be able to relate effectively to the break which is taking place from New Labour. Today this is not taking the form of organised blocks, but of an attrition of individuals.

The SA needs to respond to this and make provision for these individual activists in its ranks. This involves showing them that they will have full rights and influence in an organisation which also contains existing far left organisations. The idea that they would come into local Alliances where minorities could veto majority decisions seems slightly unhinged.

There was not agreement amongst those proposing the successful constitution, on the longer term future of the SA, particularly the idea that the SA should have the perspective of becoming a new



New Alliance chair, Lis Davies

left party like the SSP.

The SWP strongly reject this idea, and it will be an ongoing debate with them. But there was agreement, including with the SWP, that the SA needed to have more of a party structure if it was to attract individual activists breaking from new Labour.

## Loose arrangement

The SP strongly rejected this move towards a party structure, however. Despite their vigorous propagandising for a “new mass workers party” they wanted an alliance which was simply a loose arrangement between existing organisations.

A new mass party was for some future undefined date – and would not be based on the SA. This is an irrational position, which seems to be based more on a sectarian response to the SWP than anything else.

The SP had been making it clear for several weeks that they intended to walk out of the conference if the constitution proposed by the ISG the SWP and others was adopted. This was spelled out with total clarity when Hannah Sell introduced the

SP’s proposed constitution.

The SP would participate in the conference all day (and Dave Nellist would chair it), but they would not accept the decision of conference if it went against them. Therefore, at the point where the voting on amendments was completed, and the SWP/ISG constitution was adopted, they walked out – led by Dave Nellist after a short farewell speech.

The tactics of the Socialist Party during the conference were to demonise the SWP (as an organisation bent on total control of the SA) and to crassly misrepresent the constitution proposed by the SWP the ISG and others as highly centralised and exclusive.

This, along with the direct threat by the SP to walk out, influenced a section of the independents present to vote for the Pete McClaren alternative – which the SP were prepared to go along with.

The SP was also able to capitalise on the fact that the SWP had not maintained the same level of involvement in the Alliance at local level in the post election period – although set against the involvement of the SP in most places this claim does not hold much water.

The sharpest issue behind the debate on the constitution was that of local democracy. In the general election last June the SP insisted on imposing their own candidates in selected constituencies, irrespective of the views of the majority of members of the local SA.

They also produced their own election material in the name of the SP, with their own logo, raised their own independent election fund and contributed nothing at all to the central funds of the SA.

Those who proposed the constitution which was adopted (indeed those who supported all other proposed constitutions others than that of the SP) were not prepared to have that situation repeated in future elections – particularly the imposition of local candidates.

The right of the members of a local SA, at a properly constituted meeting, to take decisions, including the selection of a candidate when necessary, was crucial to democratic functioning.

## Minority veto

Equally the SP were not prepared to accept local democracy of this sort. They insisted on the right of minorities to veto majorities

at local level – something they have the cheek to call “consensus”.

This would leave them in a position to operate in future elections as they did in the general election. The Pete McClaren constitution (backed by the AWL) would have done the same, although in a less effective way. To go through all that again in the next election intervention would have demoralised many in the Alliance.

The SP’s position was not argued honestly, however, but couched in terms of the danger of SWP domination of the SA. Of course there is a danger domination by the SWP since it is so much bigger than all the other far left organisations – including the SP.

The protocol addressed this, however. It is a declaration that all the principal organisations will be represented on the EC, with a predominance of independents. This is backed up by election by slate, which provides for transparency and the opportunity, in the election process, for political balance and other factors to be taken into account.

The principal safeguard against the domination by the SWP, however, is political. At the end of the day there is no adequate technical way, consistent with basic democracy, of preventing an organisation with a numerical majority dominating if they decide to do so.

## Culture

We have to develop a culture in the SA which makes such a domination impossible, or at least, makes those responsible pay a heavy political price.

There is no organisational substitute for this. Any attempt to subvert the right of majority decision at local level is unacceptable.

The Leeds Left Alliance attempted to do this by proposing that not all members of the SWP present could have a vote – despite the fact that they were individually members of the Alliance. The SP were now trying to do the same by minority veto. This is an organisational answer to a political problem – or potential political problem.

The tactic of the SP has been to brand the normal democratic practice of everyone present at a meeting voting as equals as ‘OMOV’ (“one member one vote”). This is a slight of hand designed to associate those





Campaigning on issues such as the war and asylum rights is vital for Socialist Alliance

who advocate local democracy with Neil Kinnock or New Labour.

But Kinnock's OMOV was not people voting as equals in a meeting but the use of the secret ballot to mobilise a passive majority against an activist minority – a very different thing.

The only place where a postal ballot has been used in this way in the SA has ironically been by the Leeds Left Alliance – one of the few local Alliances sympathetic to the SP proposals. We should condemn Kinnockite OMOV as practised by New Labour whilst defending the rights of SA members in local Alliances.

Whilst the adoption of the new constitution is a crucial step forward for the SA, it does not resolve the problem of its future development. – which in the view of the ISG should be towards a party in England on the lines of the SSP in Scotland.

### Risk

Failure to move forward in that direction risks putting a brake on the political development of the Alliance, and in politics failure to move forward is to risk falling back.

The SWP refusal to shift on this creates an ongoing ambiguity on the role of the SA which will not go away. On the other hand the new constitution provides a much better basis for building the SA than the ad hoc situation we had before the conference.

One important way of keeping the SA moving forward, short of becoming a political party, is for the SA to have a well produced and regular publication which it can use to build itself – something which was called for in a resolution tabled by the ISG which was subsequently composed.

This unfortunately was defeated – although it had the support of most of the constituent organisations (other than the SWP which opposed it) and a large number of independents.

Opposition to the committee was moved by Mark Hoskisson of Workers Power. He argued, totally implausibly, that if the majority at the conference did not think the SA is ready to be a party, it cannot be ready to have a publication, which required political coherence.

This is remarkable given that WP think the Alliance IS already ready to be a party – and a revolutionary one at that – and therefore by their own definition it is ready to

have a publication!

It sounded like a tit-for-tat reprisal against those who did not vote for the WP proposal. Either way, the defeat was damaging for the future of the SA.

Hoskisson argued that given the political differences which make up the SA, a publication could only have lowest common denominator politics which would lead nowhere. If it was not this, he said it would be a "tower of Babel", with a patch-work of different views.

It is hard to argue, however, that an organisation which was able to fight an election campaign on a programme as detailed as the SA Manifesto would be unable to produce a publication.

Of course the SA does need to further develop its politics and make them more coherent than is currently the case. But the production of such a publication is probably the most effective way of pushing this forward. At the same time it would have been the best answer possible to the walk out of the SP.

Of course it was the vote of the SWP which ensured the defeat of the resolution on a publication, whilst WP gave it the political rationale. In fact the SWP have not argued that the SA is not sufficiently politically developed to have a publication: they have argued that it does not yet have the structure or the resources.

This ducks the political debate, however, since it is had to see how the resources will be generated until a publication is launched and the problem confronted. Which comes first – the chicken or the egg?

### Independents

An interesting phenomenon which emerged at the conference was that of "organised independents". There was a meeting of about a hundred such independents at lunchtime.

A leaflet entitled "To All Independents" supported the call for an Alliance publication as well as the move towards more of a party structure. It said:

"We want the SA to have its own voice, its own agenda, its own literature, its own campaigns on council housing, civil rights, the war, anti-fascist activity, industrial disputes. We want to see the SA membership decide its own policy as the issues arise".

Overall it was a successful day which took a number of key decisions which are crucial to the further develop-

ment of the SA at this stage.

The decision of the SP to revert to the crudest sectarianism in the worst tradition of the British far left is not the responsibility of the SA and is not a political reflection on it.

The job of the SA is to continue the process of reshaping the English left and challenging its sectarianism – which has been its crucial contribution for the past few years.

With the benefit of hindsight we should conclude that it was absolutely right to take a stand and defend the democracy of the SA despite the danger of a SP walkout. Not only would it have been a concession to far to sacrifice local democracy, and severely damaging to the development of the SA, but would not have resolved the problem of the relationship between the SA and the SP. That will only be resolved when the SP turns away from its sectarian trajectory.

In their resignation statement the SP said that they would seek an electoral pact with the SA in elections. It is important that the SA follows this up and tries to hold them to it, but it could be difficult if they insist on certain constituencies as they did before.

### Membership drive

In the post conference period there has to be a strategy developed for building the SA. This needs to include a vigorous membership drive to develop the membership within the new unified structure, and the SAs own political projects at both the national and local level.

We need to continue to argue for the need for a publication in order to develop the argument for the next time we get the chance to propose it.

The important thing now is how the incoming leadership of the SA (and the constituent organisations) responds to the adoption of the new constitution and structure.

If the SA is allowed to stand still in the next few months (as the SWP allowed it to do over the summer) it will be a problem.

If on the other hand (which fortunately seems to be the case) the SWP and the new leadership responds by driving the SA forward, then a very important advance can be made, even within the constraints of SWP policy of rejecting the move towards a new party.

## Why even RMT chiefs can't be bothered with New Labour

In the run up to the Socialist Alliance Trade Union Conference, Greg Tucker looks at the debate on the political fund that is taking place in the RMT.

Referring back to its historic role in the formation of the Labour Party a century ago, the RMT leadership always held its links with Labour in high regard. Jimmy Knapp was always proud of the deep links between Labour and the union at all levels.

At the top the RMT sponsored half the shadow cabinet and had great expectations of a Labour government. A significant number of union activists had been encouraged to become Labour councillors and at the grass roots the union boasted the highest density of party membership of any trade union.

But in the last few years it has been harder and harder for the union bureaucracy to defend our links with a Labour party that was definitely not listening.

Critical resolutions passed at the last two years RMT conferences have in effect issued a yellow card – the Labour Party has been warned, "don't expect continued union funding unless you start implementing policies in line with our members' needs."

### No U-turn

There is no sign that such a U-turn has taken place. On the one hand the disastrous attempt to privatise London Underground continues.

And the failure to take any steps towards renationalisation of the railways has left members utterly disillusioned. What started with Labour excuses about lack of resources ("Wasn't it more important to invest in hospitals and schools?") hardened into a clear ideological support of the private sector.

This flew in the face of all RMT members' daily experience. Their new bosses were getting very rich running an



increasingly inefficient system with increasing public subsidy.

With subsidy now three times as high as it was before privatisation RMT members were free to ask – wouldn't renationalisation actually save money for schools and hospitals? Such is the disillusionment that the right at last year's conference were reduced to arguing that, despite all its faults, at least Labour was "our" party – what we had to do was fight to change it.

But even this rings hollow in most activists' experience. RMT Labour councillors complain that they have no say at local level in what the party in office does, and cannot be bothered to stand for re-election.

Even the right's candidate for General Secretary admits that he cannot be bothered to attend meetings of Labour's Regional Executive in the south west on which he sits – because it is utterly irrelevant.

Support for Labour has become irrelevant for helping the union in its struggles. Indeed it is clear that in most cases it is now an obstacle.

The RMT left has thrown down the gauntlet over the question of the use of our political fund.

Whilst up to now we have lost resolutions which baldly state the intention to break with Labour, it is inevitable that such sentiments will be expressed with increasing

vigour at successive conferences.

For now, the approach which has found most favour is to argue for the liberation of the union's political fund to be used as the members see best fit in each circumstance – for Labour candidates where individuals will support our policies, for other candidates where they won't.

### Scotland

This has already meant the union conference agreeing to meet with Tommy Sheridan and the SSP to discuss campaigning for renationalisation through the Scottish parliament – Knapp, and now acting GS Vernon Hince, have spent two years battling to ensure this decision is not implemented.

Covert support was given to Ken Livingstone in the GLA elections, and many Branches, no longer able to stomach giving local affiliations to CLPs, have supported independent political campaigning, such as with the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation electoral stand and including supporting the Socialist Alliance, in practice if not officially.

Such local moves need to be deepened. And as the deadline for conference resolutions approaches the formal battle for the future of our links with Labour needs to be uppermost in the minds of activists drawing up campaigning priorities inside the union.

## Socialist Alliance Conference

● The Political Fund - where should it go?

● Stopping privatisation and job cuts

Saturday 16th March,

11am to 4pm

South Camden Community School, Charrington Street, London NW1.

Conference fee £4 waged/£2 unwaged.



# No substance in complaints Socialist Party makes its excuses ... and leaves the Alliance

**Since the Socialist Alliance conference, the Socialist Party have issued a statement, agreed by their Executive Committee on December 7, defending their walkout.**

**This reply by ALAN THORNETT deals with the issues this statement raises which are not covered in the conference report on pages 6-7.**



More constructive times: Dave Nelist in the chair of the Press Conference to launch the Socialist Alliance General Election campaign

The political framework of the Socialist Party's statement is their call for a new mass party of the working class. This is a dubious framework for a number of reasons

The use of the word 'mass' is crucial. Whilst the SP calls for a new mass party it is opposed to the formation of a new party of the left which is not, at this stage, a mass party; for example the Scottish Socialist Party or a party on same lines in England - even though it originally welcomed the formation of the Socialist Labour Party by Arthur Scargill in the mid 1990s.

The statement argues that since the Labour Party has been transformed by Blair into a straight bourgeois party, a new mass party (a reborn Labour Party), will emerge more or less spontaneously from future explosions of working class struggle. Meanwhile there is little the existing left can do to prepare for this or bring it about.

While the Socialist Party are wrong to say that Blair has completed the transformation of the Labour Party they are correct that a crucially important political space has opened up to the left of Labour: that is what the Socialist Alliance is all about.

Where they are wrong is in dismissing the need to prepare for such a situation. The idea that the working class will leap from a situation of no organised alternative to

new Labour to a new mass party is fanciful in the extreme. The preparation smade today in the form of a new organisation of the left may well be crucial to what becomes possible when upsurges of struggle take place and bigger developments become possible.

Future upsurges of struggle in Scotland, for example, would be more likely to draw socialist conclusions with the SSP in existence than without it.

Equally it would be wrong to assume that workers involved in struggle will automatically draw the conclusions that the answer is a new mass socialist party in the absence of an effective, united organisation of the left fighting alongside them.

The advantage of having already in place a broad and democratic socialist party which would not be a reformed Labour Party is obvious.

Today we have the opportunity, in England, to begin to build such an organisation with the development of the SA. The forces already exist for such a party in the form of the existing left organisations and the disaffection that is taking place, and has taken place, with New Labour.

The challenge for the far left today is to be able to respond to this. This means breaking from its sectarian past and building an organisation which can be a point of attraction not just for revolutionary socialists but for those who have not yet embraced revolutionary politics - people who are breaking from New Labour, as individuals or small groups.

It is this challenge which must shape the type of organisation we build today, and it is this challenge which the SP fails with the model of the Socialist Alliance it fought for at the SA conference. This was an alliance of the constituent organisations rather than alliance which emphasises the rights of individual members - making it the least effective way to fill the space to the left of new Labour.

The SP claims that they established Socialist Alliances in the mid-1990s on a federal basis; and then in the last two years the SWP came in, took it over, and centralised the organisation to an unacceptable degree. This is a version of history that is hard to recognise.

After Scargill had excluded the SP from the SLP, they did set up Socialist Alliances in areas like Coventry. But they did not consistently build Socialist Alliances in

areas where they had forces: and even where they did organise, they did so in a way that treated the groups as their own front organisations.

Some local alliances came into being for separate reasons, such as the expulsion of the majority of the Labour Group in Walsall, who set up the Democratic Labour Party there - and affiliated to the Alliance.

At this point, the Socialist Alliance did not really exist as a national organisation with a consistent political or electoral practice.

Things began to change around the time of the European elections in 1999. An attempt was made to establish a London SA for those elections. It foundered when the SWP (who were only partly on board) withdrew when Scargill intervened. The following year, with the SWP fully on board, the LSA stood in the GLA elections.

From then on, and through the general election campaign, the SA became a very different organisation. Local alliances came into being in virtually every area of England. The general election manifesto was by far the most extensive policy statement adopted by the Alliance, and by this stage

the overwhelming majority of the far left were involved.

Therefore claims by the SP that the SWP stole its ball are not only crass and apolitical - they are also historically dubious.

Another central plank of the SP statement is the federalism versus centralisation debate - the idea that the SP originally built the SA on a federal basis, and the SWP have now changed it to a centralised structure. In this the meaning of the words change - with yesterday's federalism becoming today centralisation.

For example when Scargill excluded the SP from the SLP, he did it on the basis that he would not countenance any federalism. By that he meant that he would not have any organised political formations inside the SLP. As he put it "if you want to join the SLP you have to leave any other party you are in first".

The SP were right to reject Scargill's ultimatum, and demand to be allowed inside the SLP as an organisation and that the SLP should have a federal structure. What they rightly demanded then as federal structure is what they are rejecting today as ultra-centralisation.

In fact the new constitution of the SA is far more federal than any constitution the

SLP is likely to have had with the SP in it - after all the SLP was a political party. Today the SP denounces the partial move towards a party structure - even though the political situation is much more advanced that it was then.

The new SA constitution is rightly a move in the direction of a party structure, but that does not mean it is not federal. Its policies are not politically binding on the constituent organisations, which are explicitly given the right of dissent and the right to distribute their own publications.

Membership of the SA for both local Alliances and individuals is on the basis of broad aims, not detailed programme. This is exactly the same as the outgoing constitution.

The new constitution specifically recognises the right of minorities to publicly promote views other than those of the SA if they feel they have to do so. This is clearer than in the old constitution. The only obligation is not to obstruct campaigns decided by the SA.

The relevant clauses are as follows. The first is exactly the same as the out-going constitution, whilst the second is an extension of it:

"B2: The SA is a broad, open, inclusive and flexible organisation, based on voluntary participation. The SA is politically pluralistic and encourages all individuals and perspectives to participate fully in our vision of a socialist society and our way of working as an Alliance. Members of other parties, organisations and groups who join the SA are expected to be able to keep their identity as members of these organisations whilst participating fully within the development of the Alliance.

"C18: Membership of the SA carries an obligation not to obstruct campaigns decided on by the Alliance. We recognise, however, the right of minorities publicly to promote their views. In the event that an organised minority intends to take any action conflicting with a majority decision nationally or locally, that minority should inform the SA at the relevant level of its intention to do so".

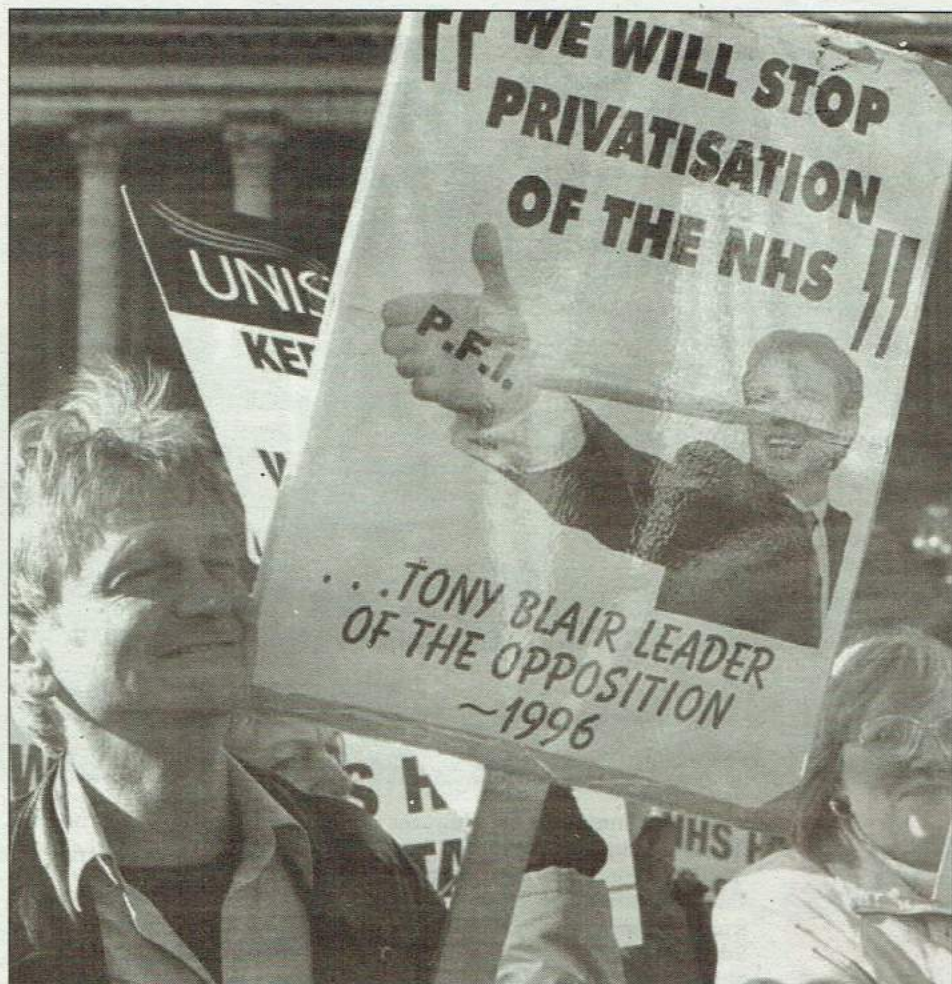
This is a federal structure within the normal usage of the term. The idea that 'the right of minorities publicly to promote their views' represents 'draconian' centralisation has more to do with the mythology spread by the SP than any objective assessment.

Any organisation needs criteria by which to accept or reject individual members or local groups. An individual who acts in an openly sexist, racist or reactionary way should be excluded.

If a local alliance rejects the broad aims of the Alliance, it does not have the right to remain affiliated. The politi-

**"The SP were right to reject Scargill's ultimatum ...  
What they rightly demanded then as federal structure is  
what they are rejecting today as ultra-centralisation"**





## Alliance Executive sets out priorities for 2002 campaign

**The first meeting of the National Executive of the Socialist Alliance was a considerable success: held in Birmingham on the 15th December, it was well attended, with high levels of political discussion and business-like procedures. It bodes well for the future. In particular Liz Davies proved to be an excellent choice to replace Dave Nellist as chairperson of the Alliance. DAVE PACKER reports.**

WITH A DEFT hand Liz Davies steered the meeting in productive directions – sometimes firmly, but without any macho bullying, and with complete transparency. Other officers were provisionally elected.

Everybody was aware great opportunities lay ahead for the Socialist Alliance. This was not only due to the very important Trade Union Conference in March and the May local elections.

There was the real possibility that in the future the left could make a political breakthrough into mainstream politics, independently in its own name and with its own socialist policies, and occupy the space vacated by New Labour and the Blairite love affair with right wing free market capitalism.

The national conference of the Alliance has instituted a new constitution that provided the basis on which we can now move forward to establish ourselves in this space.

We can present ourselves as a serious and credible socialist alternative to New Labour and everything they stand for and pole of attraction for leftward moving workers and activists.

In the first major discussion on general perspectives and the role of the executive, there was a consensus that we must activate the Alliance around several themes; united front type campaigns and events; organisational and financial preparation for the May Elections; and a membership drive.

### Trade union conference

It was agreed that the most important event that local Alliances should build is the Socialist Alliance Trade Union Conference. It was recognised as a potential catalyst for re-launching the Alliance in the next phase of its development. The two main themes of the Conference had already been decided; 'The Political Fund - where should it go?' and 'Stopping privatisation and job cuts'. The conference is for all trade unionists.

There is not much time. It means immediate local campaigning to get TU branches/officers and shop stewards (in

personal capacity if not officially) to sponsor the event and that they send reps/observers and/or come themselves.

There are a number of other issues we can work around, for example, the war. This remains important, although temporarily winding down, but only as preparations are made to target other countries.

The issue of Civil Liberties is also very important in this context. There are significant struggles taking place against privatisation of council housing, under-funding and cuts.

The executive felt it was very important all local Socialist Alliances establish a basic framework and a set of priorities to enable us to realise the full potential of the Socialist Alliance nationally and locally.

As well as distributing campaigning literature on the streets (stalls etc.) and on the big estates, outside workplaces and colleges, we must pay attention in our united front work to establishing long term links with local labour movement bodies.

This also applies to well established campaigns, for example, on asylum seekers. We stressed that the Alliance

temper our ambitions with realism about available resources. We must decide how best to maximise our impact locally.

In our view we should concentrate on a smaller number of wards where we can canvas thoroughly as well as leaflet and therefore make a real impact. Where possible we should come to agreement with other left organisations and potential candidates not to stand against one another.

It was also agreed that we needed a membership drive. The unfortunate decision of the SP to stage an unprovoked walk out during the recent Socialist Alliance Conference had left a hole in the middle of the conference chamber.

### Sectarian

However, in most localities this sectarian decision by the SP to pursue their own narrow party-building interests at the expense of the movement will have little impact.

Sadly, this is because they had not been involved, or because they had mostly withdrawn already. There may be one or two holes locally, but there is plenty of space to build the Socialist Alliance.

cal criteria for deciding these questions remain the same under the new constitution as under the old.

In fact now there is an added safeguard – not only the right to appeal to conference, but the creation of an independent appeals committee. But the Socialist Party statement refers to these powers as "excessive".

In general, the differences between the old constitution and the new are mostly in terms of the decision-making structure and the membership structure – to make it a more efficient and effective organisation.

The huge change in the character of the constitution and minority rights has not taken place, except in the Socialist Party's imagination.

**T**he Socialist Party justifies its walk-out by claiming that the SWP 'imposed this draconian constitution' in order to dominate the Alliance. But what is the evidence for this supposed quest for domination?

Whilst there are infuriating examples of the abuse of local SAs by the SWP, which should and are being challenged, the issue is what is the overall practice of the SWP. There is no evidence that the SWP is setting out to dominate the Alliance – not least because if they tried to build the Socialist Alliance in that way, they would end up as the only ones in it.

The slate for the new Executive elected on December, which was proposed by the SWP and others, has only three SWP members on it – 15 per cent of the membership of the Executive. The Socialist Party predictably dismisses this as window dressing, but it is also a fact – it is what actually happened

The SP statement claims that the rejection by the conference of a proposal for a limitation of 40% of the EC to be members of a single constituent organisation as proof of the intention of the SWP to dominate the EC. I can't say why the SWP voted against this, only why I did.

This was not just because I think that the political balance on the EC at a particular time should be a political decision rather than an arbitrary constitutional norm, but also because I think that 40% is far too high.

None of the organisations in the SA could contemplate taking such a proportion of the EC. Saying that 40% is the limit suggests that maybe 30% would be OK, whilst this would also be excessive. Moreover, once you get down to the kind of percentages it should be – 15 or 20% – it becomes too rigid and proscriptive to have a constitutional limit.

A direct charge made in the statement about the ISG is that we campaigned for the constitution we supported to be adopted unamended.

**T**he SP seem to have missed the fact that we tabled three amendments, two of which went to conference and one of which – on the major issue of the need for a publication of the SA – was rejected. How that amounts to campaigning for the constitution unamended is hard to see.

I intervened into the conference to say that I thought the provision in the ISG/SWP proposed constitution was inadequate on the procedure for new affiliations.

I was loudly heckled by the SP who were shouting "too late now; you should have thought about that before".

But although the Socialist Party have made this a campaigning issue, the old constitution had no more to say on this than the new one.

With such attention to detail, it is no wonder the SP have resorted to a succession of sectarian insults rather measured argument.

There is a difficulty around this question in terms of possible legal problems, but the new Executive should look at this issue again as I urged them to do.

**I**t is not even true, as the statement implies, that the SWP had a majority in the conference. They did not. They had to win other votes to get decisions through. In fact they lost the vote on the establishment of an appeals committee.

In the end it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the SP leadership wanted an exit strategy from the SA, and that they found one.

Their statement repeatedly claims an erosion of minority rights; but what minority rights does the SP want which are not in the constitution, other than the right to unilaterally determine who the candidate will be in their own chosen constituencies – which is what they did in the general election.

Fortunately that was one right that the vast majority in the SA were not prepared to concede.

It is also hard not to see behind the SP's actions a reversion to the crudest sectarianism of the British left. This has led the SP to withdraw from the SA – the most significant development of the British left for decades – and to risk damaging that development and missing the opportunity to reshape the left and fill the space to the left of Labour which they point to.

**"With such attention to detail, it is no wonder the SP have resorted to a succession of sectarian insults rather measured argument"**



With May elections looming, Alliances should choose candidates

must always ensure that we put the interests of the working class first, i.e., never appearing parasitic on the movement (i.e., never putting votes or recruiting members as our first priority).

The May elections are also not far away. The new executive took a first and rather preliminary if wide ranging discussion. There were some differences on the importance of concentrating forces to get best results or the need to establish a broader profile.

The SWP seemed to support the former, and Weekly Worker the latter approach. Some thought we should stand everywhere in London, others in groups of carefully chosen seats. We must avoid the scattergun approach argued Wyman Bennett.

In any event local Alliances need to be discussing now where they want to stand candidates and about selecting them. We need the maximum time to establish credible candidates and this means relating to and supporting local campaigns, raising our profile through street stalls and public meetings etc.

We agree with those who have argued that we should

The main impact of the SP withdrawal from the Alliance is that it damages the serious attempts build a united left in Britain, and will be used against us all by our enemies.

It's clear from the speed with which the anti-war movement has developed and the size it has reached that there are tens of thousands of people whom we could recruit to the Socialist Alliance.

We need to ensure we keep in touch with all our members locally through a local newsletter, email contact, and where necessary ordinary mail.

Members need to be regularly informed about Socialist Alliance activities such as street stalls, monthly and one off public meetings, etc and encouraged to get involved.

The new executive discussed many other things. It was a good start which I think will be sustained.

■ The conference established a unified single membership of the Socialist Alliance. Membership subscription for 2002 is £24 per year waged, £6 unwaged or £2 per month/50p per month.





# Left rallies in Brussels

**Terry Conway**

The 3rd Conference of the European Anti Capitalist Left took place in Brussels on the 12-13 December 2001 in the run up to the Laeken summit of the European Union and the demonstrations that would greet it. I attended the conference of behalf of the Socialist Alliance, which was also represented at the previous conference in Paris in December 2000, though not at the initial conference in Lisbon during the Portuguese presidency of the EU.

The list of participating organisations (see box below) comprises the major political organisations in the countries of western Europe, which are involved in the process of reshaping the left in their own countries.

The types of political developments that led to the emergence of the Socialist Alliance in England are not unique to Britain but part of a broader picture. These conferences provide an opportunity for common discussion amongst organisations that are trying to relate to the political space opened up by the crisis of the traditional mass parties across Europe during the 1990s in which they can learn from each others experiences.

Some countries were not repre-

mented at all, either because no organisation was invited – because none exists which the organisers felt fulfilled the criteria (e.g. Sweden, Greece, Germany) – or because they declined the invitation (Norway, Red Electoral Alliance). This was the first of these conferences that Rifondazione Comunista had attended.

Clearly the political map on the left in each country varies – for example those countries which had mass Communist Parties face a different situation than we do in England. Despite the different traditions and the gaps, there has been a process of reshaping taking place in European politics over the last decade.

The increasing adherence of Social Democratic parties to neo-liberalism has resulted in increasing numbers of those who traditionally looked to them being open to new alternatives and organisations – the process we are familiar with in Britain which led to the rise of the Socialist Alliance.

Communist Parties have also been in turmoil – with some moving over to social democratic positions, others trying to retain the Stalinist model, despite the extent to which it has been discredited. Some currents coming out of this

tradition have tried to develop on a different path – one which questioned at least some aspects of their Stalinist heritage, including the lack of internal democracy and was willing to work with broader forces.

The most important organisation to develop out of this process is undoubtedly Rifondazione Comunista – the Party of Communist Refoundation in Italy – with 90,000 members. The discussion inside this organisation is currently deepening in the run up to its fifth Congress due to take place in the spring.

The anti-globalisation movement has had a profound impact on the organisation, leading to a text from the leadership for the Congress that argues that the party must build itself as an instrument of the movement rather than of the institutions.

The text also explicitly argues that in order to do so, a more thoroughgoing questioning of aspects of the tradition of the Italian Communist Party is necessary.

Where organisations of the revolutionary left have been attuned to these developments across the continent and willing to break with some of their own previous sectarianism, new organisations, parties and fronts have been born some of which have already begun to have significant successes at both electoral and campaigning levels.

It is important that the Socialist Alliance relates to these developments. So far there has not been much collaboration even at a bilateral level with any of the other European organisations. The enthusiasm with which the speaker from Rifondazione was greeted at the December 1 conference shows that there is enthusiasm for these types of links and discussions, and the new Executive should look at how to develop this.

The representation from England – consisting of three different organisations – was not ideal, but

arose for historic reasons. However it is something that should be rectified for future meetings. There should be one single delegation from England through the Socialist Alliance. This should be a pluralist delegation in which different comrades – including the SWP – should have the opportunity to express their own views where the Alliance itself does not have a position. If at all possible the delegation should include a number of key independents on the new Executive.

Inevitably the discussion at the Brussels meeting was dominated by the situation in the aftermath of September 11 and around the war, leading to the adoption of the statement printed here. In general there was a good deal of agreement on the report, given by Francisco Louca of the Left Bloc of Portugal and on the statement which was circulated in draft form in advance of the conference. Louca's report was on similar lines but with more emphasis on economic developments.

There was a general agreement that the ruling class offensive since September 11 had not silenced the anti-globalisation movement – though clearly this would be further tested on the streets of Brussels itself in the following days.

There was discussion on the evolution of the anti-war movement in different countries and its current unevenness. The French comrades argued that the key reason for the weakness of the movement there lay with the role of the Communist Party who were not prepared to break with their Social Democratic partners on the question of the war.

Comrades from the SWP suggested that the single central slogan of Stop the War had been key to the success of the anti-war movement in Britain but the Italians pointed out that the even more successful movement in Italy had two key slogans; No to War, No to Terrorism.

The British Socialist Party played a generally low key role in the proceedings and did not use the opportunity as one might have feared to attack the rest of the British left in the wake of their walk-out from the Socialist

Alliance. They did however state their disagreement with the draft statement on the question of the process of European integration – suggesting that as the economic crisis deepened this would inevitably lead to the rise of nationalism.

There was one major controversy that stood out in these exchanges in which the majority of participants spoke – how to deal with the question of Islamic organisations. In this discussion the meeting was grappling with two difficulties.

Firstly, there were clearly differences of opinion, though none of the participants had the view that has been so contentious in the anti-war movement in England, that fundamentalism is as great a danger to the working class as imperialism itself. However it did seem that the comrades from the Red-Green Alliance in Denmark wanted to stress the reactionary nature of all Islamic movements more than others did.

It is actually quite difficult – and dangerous – to make general and timeless characterisations of organisations which have developed in different social and political contexts in different parts of the world.

I agreed with those who felt that the original draft of the statement could be read as suggesting that all Islamic organisations could be assessed in the same way, and that they never played any progressive role.

The approach suggested by Murray Smith of the Scottish Socialist Party, and subsequently adopted in the final draft was to limit the scope of the statement by making direct reference to organisations like Al-Qaida. The initial draft was also strengthened by the inclusion of the need to fight against Islamophobia.

This and a number of other changes arising out of the discussion strengthened what was already a useful statement around which there was general consensus. The SWP did initially move a further amendment to add in a further formulation at the end of the second last sentence of the third



*Solidarity by post: while British postal workers fight Consignia, European postal workers are also up against an onslaught on the service – and on its name!*

## Who was there

Participants were: the Red Green Alliance (RGA, Denmark), the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), the Socialist Alliance (SA, England), the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party (Britain), the Socialist Party (SP, Netherlands), La Gauche, Luxemburg), the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR, France), the Left Bloc (BdE, Portugal), Espacio Alternativo ("Left Space", Spain), Rifondazione Comunista (Italy), Solidarité-S ("Solidarities", Switzerland, Geneva), the ÖDP ("Party of Solidarity and Liberty") of Turkey, and Plataforma de Izquierda ("Left Platform", Spain) as observers.



paragraph that read "even if in certain circumstances Islam can act as a banner for those fighting oppression". This was subsequently withdrawn when the Danish delegation objected.

This exchange did leave somewhat of a sour taste, particularly because the Danish criticism combined their political disagreement with the new formulation with their irritation that the SWP had not participated in the drafting commission – a combination which seemed to trivialise important political issues.

There was however a real problem, which is why, although I agree with the SWP addition at one level, I think in the end they were right to withdraw and that all the participating organisations should support the statement in its current form. The addition reopened the debate on the characterisation of all Islamic currents – a task which I don't think this conference, with this agenda and time frame was up to – or was necessary for its goals.

Other items subsequently discussed included a report from Alain Krivine of the LCR on the attack on democratic rights, which was debated in the European Parliament in Strasbourg on the first day of the conference.

Many of the repressive measures being debated now where under consideration before September 11, but this provided governments with a welcome opportunity to step up their implementation. Key to the proposals is a common definition of terrorism (see statement) which would threaten the whole labour movement e.g. it would make the occupation of public places illegal.

The other thread, which was apparent both in Krivine's report and in subsequent contributions from participants, was the link between these so-called anti-terrorist measures and attacks on asylum seekers and refugees.

The item concluded with an agreement to co-ordinate campaigning on this question amongst the participants and other forces in their countries.

Alan McCoombes of the Scottish Socialist Party reported in powerful detail on his recent trip to Pakistan and Afghanistan and appealed to organisations to support the Afghani Workers Solidarity campaign (see page 16).

The meeting decided to organise its 4th Conference in Madrid during Spain's presidency of the EU in the summer.

The Socialist Alliance needs to discuss its participation in the conference well in advance, as well as finding other ways of linking up with similar organisations across Europe.



For the third time in ten years, imperialism is at war. After the unfinished war (for oil) against Iraq and the "humanitarian" intervention in the Balkans, the United States is bombarding Afghanistan, one of the poorest countries on earth, pretending in doing so to "eradicate terrorism worldwide".

"Self-defence", "humanitarianism", "western civilisation", "the democratic model" or "crusade": all are used as excuses.

They cannot hide their basic objective: restore a strong authority on a region with abounding raw materials, wealth, and opportunities for trade and investment. People is assassinated, whole populations terrorized, governments and movements subdued or eliminated without restraints to obtain it.

We unambiguously condemn the September 11th attacks as an act of mass terror against the civilian population.

The project of reactionary Islamic organisations like Al-Qaida is to establish a theocratic, totalitarian and oppressive society. They have used terrorist means to contest the control of foreign multinationals over the immense richness of the region.

But they don't struggle for the liberation and welfare of their people. This condemnation must be accompanied by a denunciation of all racist and islamophobic campaigns.

This new imperialist war is the direct result of the advent of global capitalism, with its deepening and shattering contradictions.

This brutal war will not lead to a lasting peace. On the contrary, from Afghan-istan, again under the control of the war lords, to Palestine, where Israel's State terrorism has its hands free- this war can only lead to new wars. It is up to the Afghan people to decide its own destiny.

The European Union, which is itself a motor of globalisation, is in full complicity with the US government.

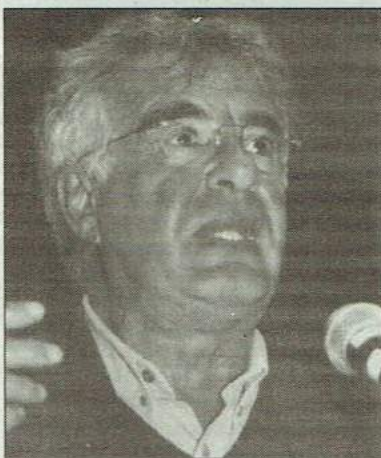
After some initial hesitations, it is participating in the war with its own objectives as a secondary imperialist power: to appear close to the US, the only superpower in charge of the global "new" world order; to hold on its position inside the triad (US, Japan, Europe); to enlarge its zone of influence, supporting its multinationals in the conquest of new areas for trade and investment; to get its share of the final war-booty.

In this battle, the EU attempts to develop a more "humanitarian" and "peaceful" profile, and to take its own political-diplomatic initiatives.

It tries to build on the unpopularity of the US and its war adventurism that threatens to extent the theatre of war to Iraq, Somalia, Syria, Lebanon,

## Conference of European Anti capitalist Left

Brussels, 12-13 December 2001



Alain Krivine

and even Palestine, and across the Ocean, to Columbia.

And on the fears of "wild" immigration from Eastern Europe. Finally the EU tries to profit from the general feeling of insecurity to build popular support for its new "euromilitarist" policy.

Without this, the EU will never manage to impose the "necessary sacrifices" upon the working class to pay for the "armed arm" of its dreams.

We oppose NATO as well as any European army. We are also against the rising militarism in the member-States.

The terrorist attack of September 11th and the imperialist war have given a big impetus to the state building policies of the EU.

In spite of all its inner contradictions, there is a real danger that the EU will develop a supranational tool for reinforced cooperation in the service of the European bourgeoisies and the multinational companies.

First of all, cohesion between the big three member states of the EU is advancing. Germany has managed to break its biggest political taboo. For the first time since 1945 its army has been sent to fight on a foreign battlefield. It helps Germany to collaborate with France and Britain, without inhibitions, to build the European Rapid Deployment Force.

With renewed prestige as a "war

leader", Blair is encouraged openly by foreign and British big capital to take Britain into the Monetary Union (euro, ECB). If the launching of the euro in the European Continent is successful next January, the EU will reach a new stage.

At the same time, old obstacles are now being overcome: police coordination between the member States (Europol) with enlarged powers; creation of a common "border police"; a European judicial system (public prosecutor's office, "search and arrest warrant", harmonisation of penalties).

Here comes the Europe of repression! Never was the lie of a social Europe so flagrant!

Taking advantage of the war, the EU has launched the biggest attack on democratic rights and liberties since the second world war.

Under the pretext of the terrorist threat, it aims at preventing any form of radical action by the popular and working classes, any social and political struggle to change the economic, social political structures of society, even if it is supported by a majority of the population!

Indeed, "terrorist offences" will be all those "...intentionally committed by an individual or a group against one or more countries, their institutions or people, with the aim of intimidating them a seriously altering or destroying the political, economic, or social structures of those countries."

And one becomes a "terrorist group" being "...more than two persons, acting in concert to commit the terrorist offences...", i.e. any political party, trade union section, antiracist association, feminist group, and everyone of its members can be jailed from 2 to 20 years!

The purpose is to discourage people from the onset to fight against the evils of this system, and to out-law the organisations that defend the fundamental right of self determination and contest the capitalist order.

This "state of emergency" looms upon the labour and social movements and their struggles.

A radical rightwing government will find in these laws a complete tool kit for repression that a left government might not dear to use.

Once more, war has created a splitting line: once more, social democracy (supported by the Greens in some countries) has done the dirty work, especially in the key countries of the EU: Blair, Schröder, Jospin!

The ruling classes, the financial-industrial capitalists understand clearly that their full scale offensive will meet with opposition and resistance.

One of the objectives of this global state of war is to stifle the movement against capitalist globalisation, to destroy its offensive spirit and prevent its impact on the broader labour and social movement.

But it didn't succeed in stopping the mobilisations: more than 100.000 workers, trade unionists and youth contested the EU Summit in Brussels.

The second World Social Forum in Porto Alegre will offer a mass platform for deepening the critique of capitalism and for launching on a world scale a new wave of struggles and mobilisations.

Without abandoning its own aims and organisational forms, the movement against globalisation represents an important lever in support of the international anti war movement, as imperialism, headed by the American government, tries to impose a state of emergency worldwide.

In the tread of a recession that seems exceptionally severe, the capitalist classes have reinforced their anti social offensive since September, with massive lay-offs, attacks against the welfare system, new privatisations of the public services, more flexibility and stress on the work floor. It is without doubt a "second" war –social and economical- against the working class and its organisations.

We want to contribute to build a powerful and united riposte in order to transform popular anger and discontent into a conscious struggle against the bosses and capitalism itself.

As part of the anti capitalist Left in Europe, we draw on this renewed capitalist offensive the conviction that capitalism is a catastrophe provoking wars, insecurity, egoism, misery and barbarism.

If peace, security, solidarity, equality and happiness have to be won, we must prevent the harmful policies of Big Capital.

There is no other alternative than a socialist and democratic society, based on sustainable development, without exploitation of labour and oppression of women, a socialism from below, based on self-management! (13.12.2001)



# The 'war on terror' – a preliminary balance sheet

Paul Clarke

The US 'war on terror' represents a determined attempt to push world politics to the right under US hegemony, and to deliver harsh blows against all the main opponents of the US at home and abroad. The political-military offensive of the Bush team, targets in particular the global justice movement, the third world, the European Union and opponents at home, including the Democrats in Congress. It also aims to help the US achieve key US political and economic targets – economically the absolute domination of the US corporations and US world leadership politically.

Now, for the first time since the end of the Cold War, since September 11 the US project has an overarching ideology, the 'war against terrorism'. It represents an ambitious new stage, an attempt to politically wipe out all opposition to the US world leadership campaign, and to secure for decades ahead the 'new world order' which Bush senior talked about at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Iraq war.

Ideologically, the war on terrorism is an increasingly open and blatant espousal of imperialism, leading some observers (like Professor Niall Ferguson) to argue that the US should openly declare that only US domination – virtual US world government – can make things work for capitalism. A more 'multilateral' version of this has been proclaimed by Tony Blair, whose Labour Party conference speech in October espoused a new vision of the 'white man's burden', the duty of the West to rule and civilise the backward natives.

Any balance sheet of how far the US has succeeded in its objectives since September 11 must be extremely provisional. When the Bush-Cheney team declare that this will be a prolonged campaign, they mean it. The next year will provide important new tests of strength between the US and its political opponents which will make the picture clearer. But already certain trends are clear.

America has – predictably – succeeded in its military objectives of destroying the Taliban regime and the Al Qaida network, although not – at the time of writing – in capturing or killing Osama Bin Laden.

The relative ease of this victory, and the low US 'body count', has strengthened the Pentagon 'hawks' and weakened the more cautious camp around Colin Powell in the State Department. This makes new short-term attacks on other states much more likely, in turn making the building and extension of the world peace movement vital.



Victor in the world's most one-sided war: Bush is now looking for other vulnerable targets to further reassert US military dominance

The alliance which the US built around the attack on Afghanistan has largely survived intact, with spectacular results in relation to Russia, but it is now clear that this will probably not survive the extension of the campaign to an assault on Iraq, Yemen, Somalia or Sudan. The US understands this – and basically doesn't care.

At the Doha World Trade Organisation meeting in November the US succeeded in getting through its main agenda, the launching of a new round of talks about liberalising world trade, the first such negotiations since the end of the Uruguay round of the GATT talks in 1994. But substantial problems remain, particularly opposition in the US Congress.

Any US attempt to diplomatically resist Ariel Sharon's ploy of making Israel's anti-Palestinian war part of the 'war on terrorism' has now dropped out of sight; and the occasional Bush-Blair talk of a Palestinian state is clearly a cover for allowing the Israelis to do what they want.

Numerous governments have responded enthusiastically to the US offer to add their domestic opponents to the list of terrorists against whom the 'international community' is waging war, including Turkey, India, the Philippines and Spain; but none more gratefully than Vladimir Putin, who has seen his genocide in Chechnya sanctified as part of the 'war on terrorism'.

And the EU governments in particular have backed the attack on democratic rights, which has its most outrageous expression in the mass detentions without trial in the US, and the new anti-terrorism law in the UK.

The evidence so far is that the

global justice movement has not been decisively thrown back, and indeed its existence has contributed to the rapid building of a mass anti-war movement, the centre of which is Italy and Britain. However, for the moment, North America is the one possible exception to this assessment.

## The War

The US unleashed the full range of its arsenal against Afghanistan, with predictably murderous results. Bombs used against the Taliban have been of equal destructive capacity to tactical nuclear weapons, although of course without the radioactive fallout. Thousands have been massacred as a result. Professor Marc Herold of the University of New Hampshire has calculated, by cross-referencing all the reports of civilian deaths, that 3500 civilians have died under the US bombardment – probably more than died on September 11th.

Thousands more fighters have died, and it is clear that the US has given the green light to anti-Taliban forces to kill non-Afghan prisoners (mainly from Arab countries and Pakistan). US and British 'special forces' have directed these massacres, most notoriously after the battles of Kunduz and Kandahar. In both cases about 400 fighters are known to have been slaughtered.

After the battle for Kandahar up to 100 prisoners died while being transported in sealed containers.

As in Iraq and Kosovo the US victory has been based on the massive use of airpower, with minimal commitment of US ground forces, and a



Defeated Taliban prisoners brace themselves for torture and US "justice"

consequently low 'body count' of US dead, although it is probably several times more than the 10 or so reported in the press.

Even if the total of US dead were 100, historically this is a minuscule level of casualties. This in turn has created a militarist euphoria in Washington, with immediate consequences for extending the war to other 'rogue states'. (1)

## Hawks in the ascendancy

This has sharply changed the balance of power between the 'hawks' around Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld (and his even more trigger-happy deputy Paul Wolfowitz), and the more cautious Secretary of State Colin Powell. Of course, the different positions of these two camps are only different tactical options; but it's clear that the lead person now in White House deliberations is Rumsfeld, and that Powell is marginalised – at least for the moment (2).

That means we can expect the conclusion of the war in Afghanistan to be followed more or less directly by attacks on other 'rogue states'. This is especially so since the US had made it clear that it is not interested in any post-war peace-keeping or 'nation-building' role, which will be left to the British and the UN.

Whether or not Bush starts with Somalia, Yemen or Sudan, the prime target is of course Iraq. Probably the US will try to 'liberate' a major Iraqi city, or a corner of the country, and proclaim an anti-Saddam government from there.

This means that a major war with Iraq, with incalculable consequences in terms of casualties and material damage, is now virtually certain sometime in the next year, maybe much sooner. As the *Daily Mirror* has reported at length, both the Iraqi military and the civilian population have been preparing for this war since soon after September 11th. As we discuss below, this poses immense responsibilities on the anti-war movement.

The pre-existing alliance in support of the Afghanistan war will collapse with the launch of a new war in the Gulf. Basically the US doesn't care. Rumsfeld has declared "the war must determine the alliance, not the alliance the war". In other words, we alone decide the war, and build a new alliance from there. Which wars we fight are not up for discussion with any of our temporary or permanent allies.

Afghanistan has taught them that they are in an immensely powerful position, and can get de facto com-

licity with their war aims from the most important Arab countries – Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan – even if Syria's al-Assad will make the predictable critical noises. The rulers of the three above-mentioned states are all clients of the United States, and the Saudi royal family is dependent on the formidable US military presence in that country to guarantee its very survival.

Of course US action in the Gulf will be opposed by the Arab 'street' – the popular masses. But again, the examples of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia during the Afghanistan war have taught the Bush administration that this opposition means little if it doesn't directly threaten the stability of the states concerned.

Richard Perle, a former member of the Reagan administrations, popularly known as the 'Prince of Darkness', and very close to Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz, put it bluntly on BBC TV's *Newsnight*: "This is not a war about hearts and minds, this is a war to defend the US. We don't care about the Arab street".

More uncertain and serious will be the consequences of the extension of the war for the European 'allies'. It is an open secret that Tony Blair is doubtful about attacking Iraq, and probably the other major European states – particularly France – will be opposed.

However, come the actual war Tony Blair will get into line. Already Jack Straw, has 'warned' Saddam that he must re-admit 'weapons inspectors' or 'face the consequences' – a clear sign of preparations for a change of line in London. And the other European leaders, again with the partial exception of the French, are probably too deeply compromised by their cowardly support for the 'war on terror' so far to frontally oppose the US over Iraq.

## Trade Wars

At the Doha (Qatar) World Trade Organisation meeting in November, the US got the main part of what it wanted – the opening of a new round of trade 'liberalisation' talks – even if it had to make some concessions to third world countries, mainly on the issue of the manufacture of a limited number of cheap generic medicines, for example anti-retrovirals for combating AIDS. However, despite the Bush administration getting its way at Doha, it has major problems with this issue in the US Congress.

Bush wants to 'fast track' new free trade agreements, without detailed and lengthy discussion and approval by the House of Representatives. Bush has the ambition to have a new Free Trade Area of the Americas – NAFTA extended to the whole of Latin America – in place before he leaves office, and certainly on the way to being implemented before the next presidential election. This may be a 'pet project' of Bush's, but it also



represents a significant part of the US's economic-political strategy – absolute hegemony over the Americas – which is not of course counterposed to fighting for hegemony everywhere else.

The problem is that while NAFTA has been an overwhelming success for most US corporations involved in the maquiladora industries along the Mexican frontier, and the large agribusiness corporations, it has adversely affected some traditional industries, particularly textiles, steel and Florida agriculture, where jobs have been lost.

Democrats (and some Republicans) in the House representing these areas have tried to resist the extension of free trade to the rest of Latin America by demanding that new agreements incorporate minimum labour and environmental standards. In this they are supported by an alliance which includes important trade union leaders and some environmental groups.

Naturally the Bush regime is against these minimum standards: in a first vote in the House on December 7 the administration won by just one vote, a sign of further close battles to come. Further battles with the Congressional Democrats are developing over the country's energy crisis, and the package of economic stimulus measures which Bush wants to help overcome the recession.

## Russia and Star Wars

The speed with which Vladimir Putin aligned Russia with the 'war on terrorism' surprised many, and probably the United States itself. His stance is reflected in his decision to give the go-ahead to the stationing of US special forces in Uzbekistan, and his mild reaction to the widely forecast US decision to pull out of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (3), in preparation for the new 'Son of Star Wars' programme.

Putin would be an idiot to believe Bush's claim that the anti-missile proposals are not aimed at Russia (although correct to believe that the main target is China). But Putin's role in the 'alliance against terrorism' represents absolutely fundamental strategic choices for the Russian leadership.

Putin has decided to go for an explicit relationship of neo-colonial dependency with the United States, a logical course for the mafia-bourgeois and comprador strata which he represents.

Putin will be co-operative on numerous fronts - understanding about missile defence, co-operative on helping to disrupt OPEC attempts to put up the world price of oil, non-disruptive about bringing the Baltic states in NATO and helpful in ensuring that Europeans don't monopolise Russia's exports of energy (although Russia will be the main supplier of natural gas to Western Europe in the coming years), and helping to ensure US access to Central Asian oil and gas supplies.

In return Putin gets three things. The US and Europeans will keep quiet about the continued genocidal state terrorism in Chechnya; Russia will be 'consulted' about major NATO decisions; and the Bush administration will try to help re-start the flow of inward investment, abruptly stopped when the rouble collapsed in 1998.

Putin may feel that the stabilisation of the Russian economy since 1998, and the trend towards small economic growth, will aid this process. But the economic recession in the US and Europe will not.

Overall of course the US will gain

much more than Russia. But from the point of view of a pro-capitalist government in Moscow, and its super-rich and middle class supporters, mainly in the western Russian cities, what more can they gain from trying to play a hard nationalist line, or confronting the US on a range of foreign policy issues?

## Palestine

To ensure support from Arab states, in the immediate aftermath of September 11 the Bush regime, echoed by Tony Blair, made verbal gestures in the direction of the need for a Palestinian state. It seemed that Bush was embarrassed by Sharon's attempt to climb aboard the anti-terrorist bandwagon, and British government spokespeople stressed the differences between the conflicts in Palestine and Afghanistan. Part of this stance was the rejection by Bush of Paul Wolfowitz's plan to attack Hizbullah camps in the Syrian-controlled Beq'aa valley in Lebanon.

Now the implicitly critical position in relation to Israel has gone completely, and Bush is content to talk about Hamas in the same breath as Osama Bin Laden, simply echoing Ariel Sharon.

Sharon's government is engaged in a plan to militarily, economically, politically and psychologically crush the Palestinians. The hundreds dead from military attacks and assassinations are just one part of an overall tightening of repression aimed at creating a general atmosphere of fear and demoralisation.

The second-rate Bantustan plan of the Oslo agreement has been replaced by a "semi-autonomy together with occupation-by-consent" notion. The Palestinians, if they agree to keep quiet and give up the struggle, can administer tiny isolated fragments of land, but constantly supervised by the Israeli military.

There is nil possibility of the young generation of Palestinians ever accepting this, and every prospect of Israeli repression strengthening the grip of Hamas and other Islamist groups. On the horizon is the terrifying possibility of an all-out pogrom, to drive the Palestinians out of West Bank for ever.

## War on Civil Liberties

In the United States basic civil liberties have been thrown in the dustbin. Between 600 and 1000 people have been detained without trial, often without access to lawyers, frequently beaten and abused, for being terrorism 'suspects'. In this hysterical atmosphere there is now serious discussion in Congress and beyond about the reintroduction of torture as a legitimate means of getting information. The US will establish military tribunals, presided over by top generals, with the power to impose the death sentence, to try terrorist suspects.

All resistance – previously strong from big business and the banks – to total FBI and CIA access to Internet communications and encryption keys has collapsed. The big Internet service providers have indicated they are already co-operating with the intelligence agencies to monitor internet traffic.

The EU countries have agreed a Europe-wide arrest warrant to target 'terrorism' and 'organised crime', despite the comic opposition of the Italian government who wanted financial crimes and cor-



Another young Palestinian victim of Israeli terror is carried off for treatment

are also a tremendous vindication of the project of the party of Communist Refoundation, which has been a key political factor in the mass demonstrations from Genoa onwards.

In Europe in general, but also in the United States, the anti-war feeling has been fostered by the left and left-liberal intelligentsia, which refuses to go away. In the English-speaking countries there has been an outpouring of anti-war writing; in Britain this has found an important echo in the mass circulation press.

But in the United States, the mass media has been all but unanimous, a reflection of the much more difficult situation for the global justice and anti-war movement in North America. This was perhaps shown in the size of the demonstration outside the IMF-World Bank meeting in Ottawa – just 5000 – although the appalling weather conditions that day makes it difficult to judge.

One thing is certain. If the United States moves on to attack Iraq, the anti-war movement will explode in size.

There are other indicators that the global justice and other popular movements have not been collapsed by the aftermath of September 11; the December 1 demonstration of 350,000 students in Madrid has already been mentioned; the 80,000 trade unionists who demonstrated at the European summit in Brussels on December 13; and the 25,000 anti-capitalist globalisation protesters who demonstrated in Brussels the day after.

But the popular movement is now going to have to answer some searching questions: most particularly, can a really mass anti-war movement be built to respond to an attack on Iraq, and break the pro-war consensus at an international level?

## Notes

1. Although the US government should pay heed to Naomi Klein's article 'Game Over', which two days after the September 11 attacks pointed out that the US casualties were not on the field of battle, but in the Twin Towers and the Pentagon.

2. A detailed account of the infighting in the Bush administration can be found in 'Powell loses power over Pentagon', Julian Bolger, Guardian Dec 11 [www.guardianunlimited.co.uk](http://www.guardianunlimited.co.uk) - see archive.

3. Bush will have no problem getting fast track through the Senate however. For information on this see [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com).

4. The ABM treaty didn't ban all anti-missile missiles, but allowed both the USA and USSR to have two such systems, one to protect its capital and the other to protect its main ICBM site.



Northern Alliance fighters have been given license to kill non-Afghan Taliban

ruption excluded!

Britain's new anti-terrorism law is implementing powers to prevent people travelling to other European countries to attend any political, sporting, social or other event which it deems dangerous to public security.

The one positive feature in this situation is the indication by European governments that they will refuse to extradite to the United States anyone who could face the death sentence there.

## Global justice movement not defeated

An anti-war movement has been built in record time. In Italy giant mobilisations have taken place, with maybe 250,000 people on the march from Assisi to Perugia and over 100,000 people in Rome in November, dwarfing the simultaneous pro-war demonstration called by Berlusconi. In London, 75,000

demonstrated on November 18, including strong contingents from the trade unions and thousands of students; this latter demonstration was called by a coalition led by the far left and had the fingerprints of the main socialist organisations all over it, a symbol of the attempts by the extreme left to occupy the vacuum left by the collapse of the Labour left and the disappearance of the Communist Party.

These mobilisations show a lot of things. Tariq Ali, a leader of the anti-Vietnam war movement in the 1960s, said at the Socialist Alliance conference in London on December 1, "What we are seeing with the global justice movement and the building of the anti-war movement in record time is the knocking at the door of a new generation".

The mass involvement of young people, in Genoa in July, in the amazing 350,000-strong student demonstration in Madrid on December 1 and in the anti-war protests is an enormously positive feature of the present crisis.

In Italy, while the mobilisations are probably fed by mass opposition to the Berlusconi regime, they



# Israelis step up terror campaign

**Roland Rance**

Israel's petty humiliation of Palestinian president Yassir Arafat in preventing him from attending Christmas midnight mass in Bethlehem symbolises the definitive end of the "peace process" started in Oslo in 1993.

Regardless of our views on Arafat's politics, and on the nature of the Palestine Authority, we must condemn unreservedly this gratuitous insult to the Palestinian people, whose leader has been treated like a naughty child confined to his room.

Israeli PM Ariel Sharon has never made a secret of his contempt for Arafat and his disdain for the entire "peace process".

Even the right-wing press in Israel is now questioning his motives and the purpose of his provocations.

Following the assassination of a senior Hamas leader at the end of November, the military correspondent of the best-selling daily *Yediot Aharonot* wrote:

"whoever decided upon the liquidation of Abu Hanoud knew in advance what would be the price. The subject was extensively discussed both

by Israel's military echelon and its political one, before it was decided to carry out the liquidation".

And indeed, within days Hamas breached the unspoken agreement with Arafat and carried out an attack on Israeli bus, killing ten Israeli settlers. Sharon seized the opportunity to stage a series of brutal raids into the PA-controlled areas, and to impose an ever tighter siege on Palestinians.

It is hard, even for mainstream Israeli journalists, to avoid the conclusion that Sharon is deliberately provoking Palestinian attacks. As many have noted, Sharon repeatedly insists that he will not permit any negotiations with Arafat until there have been seven days without Palestinian attacks.

Invariably, after three or four days have passed without any attacks, Israel carries out a spectacular raid or assassination, leading to the inevitable retaliation and the end of hopes for talks to restart.

However, it would be a mistake to conclude from this that the Oslo process has failed.

In dividing the Palestinian people, discrediting the

PLO, and disarming the national struggle for the past eight years, Oslo has fulfilled precisely the purpose intended by its Israeli sponsors, murdered PM Yitzhak Rabin and current foreign minister Shimon Peres.

As Rabin notoriously commented, Arafat would be able to govern the Palestinians "without the High Court of Justice and without the civil rights groups", both of which have acted as a significant, if limited, restraint on Israel's freedom of action.

Believing that such an approach would better enable Israel, through a Palestinian proxy, to rule the occupied territories, Rabin was prepared to make minor concessions to the Palestinians.

Even Rabin, however, constantly failed or refused to meet his commitments and ignored deadlines. Sharon rejected Rabin's approach from the start, and has acted to bury the remains of the Oslo process.

Foreign minister Peres, who remains committed to Oslo, has made threatening noises, but has stayed in the government and taken no



Blair grovels to Sharon as Israelis cash in on September 11

action to restrain Sharon.

In any case, he would be unlikely to attract support from his Labour Party, which has just elected the right-wing defence minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, rather than the more moderate Knesset speaker Avram Burg, as its leader.

In an apparent attempt to bolster his macho image, Peres (one of the few leading Israeli politicians not to have served in the army) has broken the taboo on discussion of nuclear issues to reveal what everybody already knew.

As director of the defence ministry in the 1950s, he personally established Israel's nuclear weapons pro-

gramme, as well as negotiating the collusion with Britain and France in the 1956 Suez War.

Another revealing insight into Israel's decision-making process came from a recent newspaper article on the collapse of negotiations between Arafat and former Israeli PM Ehud Barak in January 2001.

Israeli apologists assert (without any evidence) that Arafat rejected Barak's "generous" offer. But *Ha'Aretz* quotes US conflict resolution expert Professor David Metz, who has been interviewing key figures in the negotiations:

"Barak told Metz that he had decided to stop the talks 'because there was a terror attack that day.'

"Metz: 'Sorry, I checked, there was no attack that day.' Barak: 'So maybe it followed a belligerent speech of Arafat'. Metz: 'I checked, there was no speech at all'. Barak lost patience: 'Okay, what difference does it make anyway. The talks had to be stopped and that's all'." (*Ha'Aretz*, 27 December).

Like Sharon, Barak (the only member of Rabin's cabinet) sought any opportunity to renege on Israel's side of the deal and to humiliate Arafat.

The past eight years of the Oslo process have enabled Israel to consolidate its control over the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, establishing what activist Jeff Halper, of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, has referred to as its "matrix of control" over the occupied territories.

The key elements of this are massive military actions, a campaign of attrition, creating irreversible facts on the ground, establishing a parallel system of laws, delaying tactics and deligitimising the Palestinian Authority.

As Halper notes, 60% of the land of the West Bank, and 60% of Gaza, are now under the control of some 400,000 settlers in 200 illegal settlements. This is complemented by the construction of 450 kilometres of highways and "bypass" roads, for the exclusive use of Israelis.

Other Israeli tactics include house demolitions, land expropriation, permanent closure and prolonged curfews, restrictions on freedom

of movement, induced impoverishment, economic warfare of various kinds (such as clearing agricultural fields, uprooting thousands of olive and fruit trees, prohibiting harvests, confiscating livestock and preventing the marketing of produce), and bureaucratic harassment.

This apartheid regime is the reality of the Oslo "peace" process. It is also, as Israeli activists have noted, the essence of the "two-state" solution proposed by much of the Zionist left - one dominant state ruling a subordinate population through the co-option of a corrupted and compliant local leadership.

Sharon is still attempting to implement the project outlined published by the World Zionist Organisation in 1982 under the title "A Strategic Plan for Israel in the 80s".

This document, which was the political background to Sharon's invasion of Lebanon in June 1982, calls for "the liquidation of Jordan under the present regime and the transfer of power to the Palestinian majority ... it is not possible to go on living in this country in the present situation without separating the two nations, the Arabs to Jordan and the Jews to areas west of the river".

The essential difference between this project and "two states for two nations" project of the Zionist left is the location of the border between the master and slave states, not the nature of these states and their relationship.

In the face of this strategy of division and domination, the PLO and the Islamist groups have signally failed to articulate a strategic response.

Nor has any coherent strategy or leadership as yet developed from the Palestinian uprising. The uprising, however, does show the difficulty which Israel would face in attempting to move to the next stage of this strategy - the systematic uprooting of Palestinian communities.

It is now clear that the approach initiated at Oslo by Rabin, Arafat and Peres has failed. The task now, for the Palestinian and Israeli left, is to develop a strategy which recognises the common interest and future of the peoples of Palestine, and shows the way towards unity rather than apartheid.

# Is Iraq next in US firing line?

**Harry Sloan**

Encouraged by their almost casualty-free victory over the Taliban, and egged on by the Israeli Zionists, it seems that the tight-knit gang of foreign policy and military hawks around George Bush are now preparing for war against Iraq.

Economic sanctions, coupled with systematic bombing of Iraqi targets by US and British jets, have of course continued ever since the end of the Gulf War - taking a horrendous toll of the lives and health of Iraqi children and poorer families.

But the survival of Saddam's dictatorship and its ruthless efficiency in crushing any signs of internal dissent remain a constant irritant to Washington, and Bush junior is clearly seeking a pretext to go back and finish the job which his father was persuaded to leave incomplete.

US strategists at the time, with the backing of Colin Powell chair of the joint chiefs of staff, believed it was more important to maintain the integrity of Iraq as a state than to overturn Saddam at the risk of a fragmentation that could destabilise the region.

And subsequent debates on whether to oust Saddam have until recently become

mired in the complex problem of finding an alternative regime that would satisfy either the US or the increasingly jittery Arab despots on whom imperialist strategy in the area depends.

Potential anti-Saddam leaders appear to be either too positive about democracy (anathema to the Saudis, Kuwaitis and others), too soiled with past crimes, too corrupt, too strongly connected with specific minorities within Iraq (Kurds, Shia Muslims) - or a combination of these problems.

But the US policy in Afghanistan, of simply blitzing the old regime into submission, and allowing the various domestic factions to sort out a new regime for which the US takes no responsibility, seems to herald a new attitude to Iraq - in which the main objective would be to eradicate Saddam and his Baathist regime, leaving open the issue of what would take its place, and even whether the borders of Iraq may be redrawn altogether.

The questionable strength and political allegiance of some of Saddam's domestic opposition, coupled with the ease of victory achieved through massive air bombardment in Afghanistan,

have for some even revived suggestions for a full-scale US invasion of Iraq, to install a puppet regime.

So with the Afghan war winding down to a seek-and-destroy operation against the vanished Taliban leadership (with occasional massacres and US bombing fiascos), it seems a decision has been made in principle to shift the offensive towards Iraq.

US Defence Secretary Rumsfeld, one of the leading "hawks", said just before the Christmas holiday that the alliance should "prepare now for the next war" - and denied that the target would be Somalia.

More than 20,000 US troops have been moved to Qatar and Kuwait, in easy striking distance of Iraq. The headquarters of the US 3rd Army, which led the Gulf War, has also moved to Qatar.

Complaints from supporters of Secretary of State Colin Powell, that an attack on Iraq would smash the alliance pieced together for the Afghan war, have been brushed aside by hawks, who argue that the US could defeat Saddam with support only from bases in Turkey.



However most scenarios also point to a key role being played by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. At present most nearby Arab states - Jordan, Syria, Egypt and the Saudis have opposed an attack on Saddam. But none of these seems to be in a position to obstruct a determined US effort.

Meanwhile since November a stream of former Iraqi generals and torture chiefs have been flown at State Department expense to the US, for discussions on how best to oust Saddam, and which of them, if any, could be useful allies or figureheads in a new regime.

One thing is clear: the threat of a new war is intensified by the victory in Afghanistan: and those caught defenceless between the pincers of Saddam and the Pentagon will once again be the working people and children of Iraq.

Blair's endorsement of a new war is being taken for granted in Washington: it is vital to build an anti-war movement big enough to head off another round of mass slaughter by warmongers like Bush.



# India, Pakistan workers must challenge war hysteria

**Farooq Tariq, General secretary Labour Party Pakistan**

**T**he Bush "war on terrorism" has taken a new turn. It is possible that a real war could erupt between the two nuclear powers, Pakistan and India. This would not be the one way traffic as was the case in the US-Afghanistan war.

It would be the sort of war not seen by the world for many years, full of blood on both sides. Minor border clashes have already taken place, and the air forces of both countries are on high alert. There have been reports of massive army presence on both sides of the border.

The spokespersons of both governments are speaking the same language of war. The Indian Ambassador has been recalled, and the "Friendship" bus service and four times weekly train between Delhi and Lahore have been suspended by the Indian government.

(The Vajpai and Nawaz Sharif governments met in Lahore in 1998 and afterwards initiated the bus service as a token gesture of their newly-found friendship. The bus service was not even suspended during the 28-day Kargil war between India and Pakistan during June 1998).

This is in response to a terrorist attack on Indian parliament on December 13, which was in session at the time, in which 14 were killed. The Indian government claimed that this was an attempt by the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan to wipe out the whole political leadership of India.

The attackers failed in their attempt to enter the parliament building, and were intercepted outside the building by Indian guards. Six of them were killed on the spot, plus the five terrorists.

The Pakistan government and media have with their usual demagoguery tried to blame the Indian Intelligence service RAW, accusing it of engineering a plot against Pakistan. They claim that India will use this attack as an excuse to call on the international community to declare Pakistan a state harbouring terrorism.

The military spokesman of



Indian troops fight to keep control over Kashmir (left) but Pakistan is equally willing to use guns to uphold its claims (above right)



Pakistan warned India of dire consequences if Pakistan is attacked militarily. There were hysterical calls by India's mainstream media to take action - not in words but in real actions against the Pakistani state, to 'teach them a lesson'.

The Indian prime minister Vajpai has declared that all options are open to the Indian government, beginning with diplomatic efforts, but then discussing the possibilities of other options.

Pakistan's General Musharraf, on a five day visit to China at the time, branded the Indian response as an arrogant knee-jerk reaction.

The Pakistani newspapers reported on December 23 that the Indian government is also calling for the scrapping of the Indus Water Treaty and the suspension of over flight facilities to Pakistani civilian planes.

**T**he Indus Water Treaty of 1960 governs the distribution of water from the Indus River and its tributaries between India and Pakistan. If this treaty were scrapped, it would not only bring starvation to the Punjab and Sind Province of Pakistan, but to Pakistan as whole and Afghanistan.

Both provinces are heavily dependent on canal irrigation systems drawing from these rivers. Because of the ongoing climate changes there have been a drought conditions for the last many years in arid areas of Punjab. The food requirements of Pakistan are mainly met from the canal-irrigated areas of Punjab and Sind, which also constitute over 80 percent of total population of Pakistan.

The governments of both India and Pakistan are on a road to disaster. It is likely that the both governments will go further than eco-

nomical and other sanctions against each other. These are the first steps on the road to a real war.

The two countries have gone to war several times in the past. The last limited war was in 1998.

The crazy politicians of India and military regime of Pakistan were on the same side with the "international community" during the Afghan-American war. Now they both blame each other for harbouring terrorists in the shape of armed religious fundamentalists on the question of Kashmir.

They want to take the American road to score their points. War is the only solution: that is the conclusion these mad rulers are drawing after the events of last three months.

The American war on Afghanistan has brought no peace or no relief from the so-called terrorists. On the contrary, it has increased the danger of the world peace. The world is closer to a nuclear war than ever before in history.

With the threat of a new war between India and Pakistan, all the claims of the US imperialism have been proved false. They claimed that bombing Afghanistan and taking the power out of the hands of Taliban would help to curb the menace of terrorism.

The attack on the Indian parliament, the failed suicide attack on an airliner on 23rd December, the killing of the brother of Interior minister of Pakistan on 22nd December at Karachi and the ongoing armed conflict in Palestine all show that terrorism cannot be stopped by state sponsored terrorism.

US may have "won"; the war and may be very pleased by the Taliban's departure from power, but the dangers of terrorist attacks have not gone.

Instead the US promoted the philosophy of war and war politics. Nor does the departure of the Taliban mean an end of religious fanaticism. According to one survey, published today by Pakistani press, despite the fact that the Taliban have not lived up to their promise to fight till the end, they still enjoy the support of 43 percent of Pakistan population.

The other bitter reality is that none of the Taliban's main leadership have been arrested or killed, despite the rain of bombs on their main bases. It has emerged now that Taliban left power with the full consent of the American backed Hamid Karzai, with the promise that none of them will be arrested or killed. Karzai has so far fulfilled his promise.

The main reason could be the ethnic conflict within Afghanistan, in which Karzai still wants the support of Pushtun Taliban, in case he runs into problems with other Uzbek, Hazara and Tajik nationalist leaders.

**T**he strategy of the US in Afghanistan could be compared with its strategy just after their victory in the Gulf War. US imperialism helped the defeated Saddam to remain in power and helped him to curb the popular uprising of Shia Muslims.

At that time, the US wanted to stop another Iran: now they have bowed to Afghanistan's internal conflicts and contradictions. But this strategy has not helped to curb the religious fundamentalists.

Despite the fact, that Pakistan's military regime helped the Americans in their war efforts, religious fundamentalist groups are openly organising in Pakistan. None of their camps have been closed, nor have they been banned from their recruitment of unemployed working class youth. It is business as usual. But it can not go very long.

The military regime has to change its policy towards these so-called Mujahidin organisations that are eager to go for an all out war with the Indian government.

The Indian government's social base rests on Hindu chauvinism. It needs excuses like this to whip up the

Hindi nationalism, and that is precisely what it is doing now.

It is not a war against terrorism. If that were the case, India would not indulge in gross violation of human rights in Kashmir.

The Kashmiris want independence. The religious fundamentalists want to turn this national struggle into a religious struggle. Part of ISI of Pakistan is helping these religious fundamentalists to achieve this goal.

General Musharraf is in a particularly difficult position. He has publicly defended the Kashmir policy many times. He had to leave the much-publicised Agra Summit in August this year for this very reason, because Indian Prime Minister Vajpai would not accept the centrality of Kashmir issue.

Vajpai offered to open the borders, more trade relations and other economic measures to bring the two countries closer to each other. But Musharraf rejected all these offers and insisted point blank that until the Kashmir issue is resolved, there will be no long lasting friendship.

The Indian ruling class under Vajpai would not accept any solution of Kashmir that will hurt their social basis. So they refused and the Agra Summit failed.

Only a month later, after 11th September, General Musharraf made a U turn in its policy of supporting the Taliban, and decided to side with Americans. It was another contradiction by Musharraf regime: on one side they were helping the Kashmir Mujahidin in their holy war against Indian occupation of Kashmir; on the other, they were supporting Americans against the Taliban.

**W**ho carried out the latest attack on the Indian parliament? India says it was Muslim fundamentalists from Lashkar Tayaba (Holy Army) and Jaish Mohammed (Prophet Mohammed's Army). General Musharraf has asked for proof. This is like when the Taliban were asked for proof before handing Osama bin Laden to the Americans.

After the war in Afghanistan, the morality of providing proof on any incident has become irrelevant.

The working class in Pakistan and India has to act, and act decisively in the present situation. They have to reject the excuses of their rulers in moving towards a war.

There is no excuse to start a war. Workers have to say no to war, yes to peace. The need for a peace movement in the Indian subcontinent is far greater at present than any other time in history.

The real losers in a war between India and Pakistan will be ordinary citizens of both countries. They have to pay the price of the war. The rich and the capitalists will make money out of war while workers will pay not only dearly with cash but with their lives as well. They have no safe place or any money to leave the country.

**T**he Indian and Pakistan economies annually generate no more than \$400 per capita. Together they have almost one fifth of the world population, and more than 70 percent of the world's poor.

The economic impact of a war would be disastrous for both. Pakistan's economy, ruined by the Afghan war is already on the verge of economic collapse, despite all the claims of international help. A war between India and Pakistan will roll back the standard of living of the masses to an unprecedented level.

But war has become a real possibility. It can only be avoided if General Musharraf makes another U turn on his policy towards Kashmir. If he does not, he may lose power - and his life as well. No ruler of Pakistan has voluntarily left power.

The Indian ruling class is all out for war. Border clashes can quickly spread all over the borders.

American imperialism may not be in favour of such a war, but the circumstances may be out of their control. They have created a mess by attacking on Afghanistan.

A strong peace movement on both sides can have a decisive influence to challenge the war hysteria. Labour Party Pakistan will be in the forefront and will initiate this peace movement in Pakistan.



# Afghan Workers Solidarity Campaign

**Shoaib Bhatti,  
Organiser, Afghan  
Workers Solidarity  
Campaign,  
(Central Chairman  
Labour Party  
Pakistan)**

The Labour Party Pakistan in close association with the Afghan Labour Revolutionary Organisation has decided to launch an Afghan Workers Solidarity Campaign.

The idea to start this campaign was discussed during the visit of Alan McCombes of the Scottish Socialist Party. The SSP has already decided to actively support this campaign.

LPP and ALRO are appealing to all the international Left and trade union movement to sup-

port this campaign.

The main aim of this campaign is to help the Afghan workers in their struggle to survive. It will collect and bring every day necessities to the Afghan workers on emergency basis, help which will be distributed inside Afghanistan and also in refugee camps in Pakistan.

It will help to strengthen the progressive organisations of the Afghan workers. The suppression by the religious fundamentalists of all democratic and human rights in Afghanistan over the years has left the organisation of the Left and progressive forces in a weak position.

Many lost their lives for the cause of socialism in Afghanistan. Others have been underground or in exile. Their

families have been tortured and some sentenced to death by the religious fundamentalist.

To help the Afghan left and progressive forces in their struggle to survive and promote their organisations needs active international support.

## Monthly paper

The LPP has been promoting the Afghan Left for some years. It now has a plan to produce a monthly paper in Pushtun language to help the Afghan left in the promotion of their ideas and strategy.

The LPP has already started collecting clothes, medicine, blankets, shoes and other everyday food items to be distributed among Afghan refugees through the ALRO and other Afghan left groups.

What you can do?

Sponsor the AWSC formally by paying the initial amount of \$ 300 for the organisations and \$100 for individuals. Send donations via the Scottish Socialist Party, Afghanistan Solidarity Appeal, c/o 73 Robertson St, Glasgow G2 8QD. Make cheques payable to 'Afghanistan Appeal'.

If you have time and money to travel, please come to Pakistan to help build this campaign. We need volunteers from abroad to help this campaign. Please contact us immediately for this.

**Email:**  
labourparty@gmx.net  
**Website:** www.labourpakistan.org  
**Tel:** 92 42 6315162,  
6301685  
**Education Foundation**  
40 Abbot Road Lahore.

# Right wing takes charge in Denmark

## Aage Skovrind

The big winner in Danish national and local elections on November 20 was the Liberal Party led by Anders Fogh Rasmussen. For the first time since 1924, Social Democracy is not the biggest political force.

For many voters, elections were a choice between the old - worn-out - Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen and the new Anders Fogh Rasmussen.

The outcome of the election was no surprise since all opinion polls since late 1998 pointed to an historical setback for Social Democracy.



Ousted: Poul Rasmussen (right) goes - to be replaced by another Rasmussen

At that time the party - together with the bourgeois opposition - reduced the right to a retirement pension at the age of 60. Early retirement now requires a private saving for 25 years, i.e. beginning at the age of 35.

Social Democratic support dropped from 36% in the March 98 elections to below 20% and has only slowly recovered since then, standing at 29% in the recent elections.

The victory of the right wing parties does not necessarily mean a turn to the right by the voters. During the election campaign, Liberals as well as the Peoples Party pretended to be the best defenders of the welfare system, particularly health and care of the elderly.

The bourgeois parties they had any intentions of cutting the welfare system but stressed the importance of 'free choice', 'personal freedom' and 'human care'.

In Aarhus, the second city, and several other cities across the country, government will shift to the Liberals.

At national level, Liberals will establish a government with the Conservatives, supported by the second winner, the populist and anti-immigration Peoples Party which succeeded in putting the "problem" of immigration and illegal immigrants on the agenda of all major parties.

Political life will polarise significantly and break a tradition of governing with the support of small centre parties. The upcoming government will be pure right.

Times will be harder for unemployed, poor people and - particularly - refugees and immigrants. Environmental protection will be sacrificed in favour of corporate profits. Danish donations to international aid programs will be reduced.

Profiting from a general economic upturn, unemployment has been reduced significantly during nine years of Social Democratic rule.

Consequently, very important restrictions of the right to unemployment benefits have

been passed in Parliament without serious mass-scale implications.

With a new recession, this will change and make it impossible for the government to fulfil its welfare promises.

The four key Liberal election

## Ireland: here comes the recession

# Crouching Tiger: hidden redundancy

**Kevin Keating &  
Joe Craig**

In the South of Ireland, November 2001 recorded the largest monthly increase in unemployment on record, accompanied by a fall in manufacturing output of 7.1% in the third quarter of the year.

This has affected tax revenues to such an extent that a forecasted surplus of £2.5bn turned into a deficit.

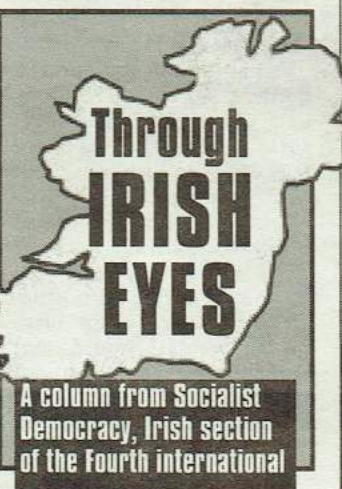
One-off measures in the budget have only postponed public spending cuts and/or tax increases until after the election. From being the world's fastest growing, the Irish State is now widely reported as the world's most rapidly slowing economy.

This means an escalation in attacks on working class living standards required to restore profitability to capitalist enterprises. It is an escalation the working class is ill prepared to resist.

The left has criticised the failure of many working people to grab their share of the booming economy and has repeatedly called for strike action in pursuit of higher wages as the way forward.

This was inadequate during the boom and will be even less useful now. Recessionary conditions will be less forgiving of poor strategies but may also compel a reckoning with the central issues.

The most important task facing workers during the boom was to use relatively favourable economic conditions as an aid to challenge their trade union leaders so that they were able both to



A column from Socialist Democracy, Irish section of the Fourth International

make gains during the boom and be in a better position to defend themselves during the inevitable downturn.

The task was essentially political because the trade union leaders as a group have swallowed whole the neo-liberal agenda that has been advanced by the State and employers.

## Aer Lingus

Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in Aer Lingus. The workers are faced with over 2,000 redundancies, a wage freeze and a marked deterioration in their conditions. All this before the airline is sold off to the private sector where its future is anyone's guess. The response of the trade union leaders is not to close the airport through industrial action, easily possible as witnessed in the Ryanair dispute in 1998, but to demand 30% of the airline for employee share ownership instead of the 14.9% on offer.



Grin and bear it: Bertie Ahern

Privatisation is seen as the solution - not the problem!

The fact that workers are being asked to sell their pay and conditions for more and more of less and less goes without challenge. In fact the privatisation agenda goes back a long way to the original break-up of the company into different components including TEAM, airports and Aer Lingus itself.

The strategy of diversification under state ownership in order to survive was abandoned and the result is the remains of the company being picked over by multinational capital.

The reason now given for withholding state aid is that EU rules forbid it. What a sick joke. The whole Irish State is founded on subsidising private investment, including millions of pounds given each year in hand outs to multinationals through grants and tax concessions.

And after all didn't the

Irish people reject the dictates of the EU bureaucracy in the Nice referendum anyway?

## Militancy

Six months ago the left was applauding the rash of strikes at Aer Lingus and the move of some workers from SIPTU to MANDATE. At the time we described it as similar to moving the deck chairs on the Titanic. So it has proved.

The union bureaucracy was unchallenged and remains firmly in control. It does no more than appear on television bleating about saving a national asset and being ridiculed and humiliated by Ryanair's Michael O'Leary.

The Aer Lingus workers now face the same future as those of Eircom where Sir Anthony O'Reilly has declared that he will replace existing workers on civil service terms and conditions with flexible part time employees.

There is of course another alternative. It means rejecting the existing union leaders and rejecting pursuit of an increased share of a privatised and increasingly helpless company.

It means industrial action demanding full state investment to keep the company viable and workers control of the company so that it is kept out of the hands of the so-called "experts".

These are the sort of people who, for example, could think of nothing better to do with Telecom Eirann than split it up and sell it off - at a loss to everyone but themselves.



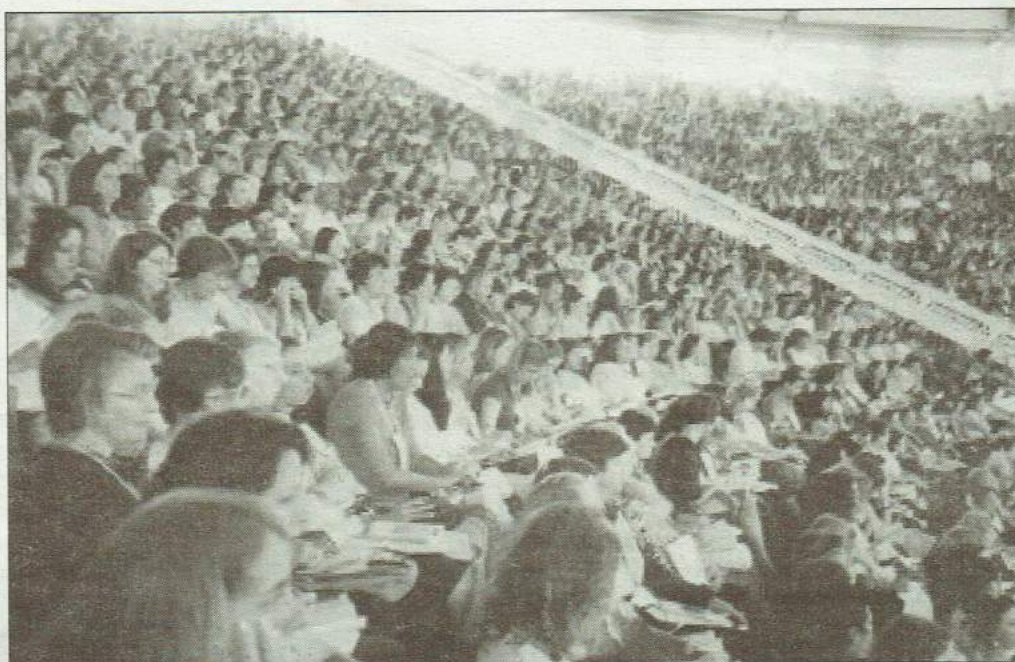
## The World Education Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil

**Richard Hatcher**

This was a conference on education like no other. 17,000 people took part during four days in October – teachers, students, parents, educationists, activists, from all over Latin America and some from beyond.

Plenary sessions filled the massive indoor sports stadium, and over 200 workshops and special sessions took place, with over 780 talks given. And midway through the conference we all spilled out of the stadium to join a mass march and demonstration with trade unionists and farmers against neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism in education was the theme of the conference. Speakers from all over Latin America, and some from beyond, described their



*Bigger than the average debate on education: part of the proceedings at Porto Alegre*

common experiences of cuts in education spending, privatisation, attacks on equality, business management methods, and the dominance of economic interests over educational. This is the daily effect of the policies promoted by the IMF and the World Bank and implemented by national governments.

But this was not just a conference of critiques. Speakers counterposed their own alternative vision that 'another school is possible', a vision rooted in the rich experiences of real struggles for a just and democratic education in Latin American countries.

The Forum was organised by the state govern-

ment of Rio Grande do Sul (RS), in the south of Brazil, and the city council of Porto Alegre, a city of 1.3 million which is the state capital. Both are governed by the Workers Party (the PT).

In January 2001 they organised the World Social Forum, attended by 10,000 people, in opposition to the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos. The WSF decided to follow it with the World Education Forum because education is central both to capitalist globalisation and to the struggle against it.

A conference like this would be inconceivable in Europe at present. There is simply nothing like the same level of political consciousness and activity, outside and in education.

The level of networking, and even of shared information, among the left in education across national – and language – boundaries in Europe is very low. And of course there is no equivalent to the PT governments of Porto Alegre and RS (in which Democracia Socialista, the current of Fourth International supporters, is particularly influential).

That makes us all the more vulnerable to the neoliberal agenda that the EC is committed to and European governments are adopting, – led by our own. A first step, however modest, towards a cross-European response is urgently needed.

(The WEF website is [www.forummundialdeeducacao.com.br](http://www.forummundialdeeducacao.com.br))

# Radical democracy in education in Brazil

**Richard Hatcher**

PORTO ALEGRE has become famous for its radical democratic Participatory Budget (PB) process. Over the past 12 years decisions about the city's budget priorities have been made through an annual process of local and city-wide meetings. This successful experiment in direct democracy has now been extended to the whole state, with a population of 10 million.

In 1999, the first year of the Participatory Budget process at state level, 190,000 people took part in the meetings. In 2000, 281,000 people participated in 670 local assemblies. The number of participants in 2001, the third year, is 378,000.

What is less well-known is that, in the field of education, the state government, again building on the experience of Porto Alegre, has instituted an equally successful process of popular democratic policy-making in education based, like the PB, on local and regional mass meetings, called the 'School Constituency' (Constituinte Escolar).

The principles of the School Constituency are:

- Education as a right of all citizens, with particular emphasis on the situation of those who throughout history have been denied this right, not having access to school or being excluded from it.

- Popular participation as a method of management of public policy in the field of education, stimulating and guaranteeing the conditions for the collective construction of the education we want.

- Dialogue as an ethical-existential principle of a humanist project based on solidarity, which respects differences and the plurality of visions of the world, while also being critical and proactive in the face of social inequalities and injustices.

- Radicalisation of Democracy as the strategic objective of a government of the left, committed to the interests of the majority, the popular classes, stimulating co-management of the public sphere as a step towards popular sovereignty and control over the state.

- Utopia as a motivating vision of the education and the school we want, and also of the project of socio-economic development which is both possible and necessary for the great majority of the excluded and the exploited in the capitalist system. Utopia as the motor force, driving forward the society we want to build.

The process of the School Constituency, organised in five stages, was launched by the State Department of Education in April 1999,

followed by regional launch meetings and the election of school and regional coordinating committees.

From May to November 1999 problems and good practice at the local level were analysed, resulting in the identification of 25 key issues.

From December 1999 to June 2000 these issues were explored in-depth and briefing papers produced on each, drawing on educationists such as Paulo Freire. From June to August 2000 a Draft Text based on these discussions was debated and amended in 191 municipal or micro-regional conferences, involving 60,000 people.

The conferences resulted in a revised Draft Text which was the basis of 31 Regional Pre-Conferences with about 9000 people elected as delegates from the municipal or micro-regional pre-conferences.

Finally, a further revised version of the Draft Text was discussed at the State Conference by 3,500 delegates elected from the Regional conferences, organised into 100 working groups. At the end, all the proposals were voted on.

In the final stage of the School Constituency, which began in September 2000 and is still continuing, the principles and policies agreed on are being translated into action plans at the local level.

### The Three Dimensions of the Democratisation of Education

The three dimensions of PT education policy are:

- the democratisation of access,
- the democratisation of knowledge, and
- the democratisation of management.

The democratisation of access means education for all, through a range of policies from expanding provision from pre-school to adult literacy and education projects for youth and adult workers.

The democratisation of knowledge to enable learning for all means remaking the curriculum – how it is organised, taught and evaluated – to make it meaningful to the whole community.

The key to this is the creation of democratic power relations, within the school and in its relations with the community, establishing a broad process of participation in order to rethink the curriculum.

At school level, the main mechanism of the democratisation of management is the elected School Council, composed of representatives



*A different agenda for education: Tony Blair with Brazil's President Cardoso*

of all the sectors of the school community – parents, students, teachers and other school workers – with deliberative powers. The school principal and vice-principal are directly elected for periods of three years.

To make democratisation viable, it is not enough to democratise the school. It is also necessary to democratise the State educational administration, replacing bureaucratic, fragmented, top-down and centralised functioning by an interdisciplinary, horizontal and decentralised dynamic.

Lucia Camini, the State Secretary of Education, explains the thinking behind the School Constituency.

"We live in a society that holds exclusion as a rule, in which democracy is reduced to electing representatives who work out, decide and implement public policies.

"Education policies are, traditionally, designed in offices and passed to schools through packages with formulae and pedagogical manuals to be implemented.

"Reversing this practice, the State Department of Education in Rio Grande do Sul launched the School Constituency as a movement for constructing educational policy.

"In the construction of the Popular Democratic School, process and result, content and form, are deeply interconnected. We will only build up a popular school through the direct participation of all the people involved in the educational process.

"With the School Constituency movement, we are recovering the real sense of democracy – 'the people's government'. We are 'handing

over the school to those who make the school happen' and changing the State Public Education into a truly public education."

### Participatory democracy as an educational process

For the PT, the direct democracy of the Participatory Budget and School Constituency processes is itself a crucial educational experience by which working people become the agents, not the objects, of history.

"In this workers' struggle for their rights, in their organisation and mobilisation we find a new kind of relationship between education and the construction of the human being. [...] ...the exercise of demands and social struggle are in themselves educative processes for the effective construction of transformative historical individuals.

"You do not educate people to form individuals; the formation of individuals takes place through actions and movements developed in the popular struggle.

"The struggle itself for education, for the right to go to school and for changes in its role and the way in which they develop their work, for example, the exercise of this right of demanding rights, creates in the individual a new vision of society, new relations among them, a political culture where workers identify themselves effectively as individuals who are transforming and constructing history."

Of course, this experiment in radical popular democracy is not without problems and difficulties, in a national context of a government committed to a neoliberal agenda.

But the level of popular support for it is growing, as demonstrated by the numbers participating, as well as by the re-election over 12 years of the PT council in Porto Alegre and their victory in the state election.

Here in Britain our experience in education is the exact opposite – the steady erosion of any popular influence, as local authorities become little more than government puppets, private companies move in, teachers are bound by government dictates, and local communities remain powerless.

Up to now the left has had little to offer in terms of an alternative popular democratic vision to authoritarian managerialism. Porto Alegre and Rio Grande do Sul show a future worth fighting for.

*(All quotes in this article come from Principles and Directives for State Public Education, Government of Rio Grande do Sul, 2000, translation by RH)*



# Gains for growing Canadian left at NDP Convention

**Barry Weisleder**

**W**innipeg in late November was a bit like *A Tale of Two Cities*. I'm not referring to the snow storm that punctuated a week of unusually mild weather. I'm talking about 'the best of times and the worst of times'.

Hundreds of activists converged on the federal NDP convention hoping for change. It was a big convention, very visibly working class in composition. There were 1500 NDP members, new and not so new, as well as non-party activists. The possibility of openness and innovation was in the air.

But there was bitter disappointment for many new activists. Instead of renewal, they saw a party leadership bent on retaining control.

One assessment of the convention is that the NDP establishment carried the day. They got their 'renewal package' endorsed. They got a modified OMOV system for electing the Leader in future. And their slate captured almost all Executive and Council positions.

But the victory of the establishment came at a price.

The media headlines screamed "NDP Fends Off Challengers" and "NDP shuns left turn". What does this mean?

The "challenge" that the leadership had to fend off came from the largest, most vocal and most radical opposition at an NDP federal convention in thirty years. The NDP establishment retained control, but they were shaken nonetheless. They know that the struggle is far from over, and bigger battles are just ahead.

**P**olitically, what did the leadership get out of the convention? The *Toronto Star* summed up the situation well with a Nov. 27 editorial titled: "Where are the NDP's progressive ideas?"

The *Star* argued that leader Alexa McDonough emerged from the convention "still in charge of her fractious flock", but that:

"She did not cite a single new policy thrust. She did not talk about building affordable housing or closing the gap between rich and poor or reaching out to the world's most desperate people..."

"She did not speak up for ethnic minorities who feel threatened by Ottawa's security clampdown. She did not give voters a glimpse of a better Canada."

Canadian Auto Workers President Buzz Hargrove pointed out in a media interview that Alexa's anti-war position was muted at convention in favour of pro-American sentimentality.

Today working people face a situation where this country and the entire capitalist world are in recession. The US is leading an unlimited war of aggression. What has the NDP said about jobs, peace and democracy, except that the govern-



*Cows driven mad by globalisation and the Free Trade Area of the Americas protested at last year's Quebec summit: but they could join other anti-capitalists and the left within the NDP in the fight for a new party of the working class.*

ment should spend more of the recent federal surplus?

What about a shorter work week, without loss of pay and benefits? What about proposing a break with the global corporate trade deals (on the eve of the sell-off of Ontario Hydro, which would be irreversible under NAFTA)?

What about demanding major government intervention to redistribute wealth, to provide housing, to restore public services and to democratise the economy?

Despite the absence of these policies at the top, there is now a movement of activists within the NDP fighting for such policies at the bottom. This is Alexa's nightmare, and our hope.

At times, Socialist Caucus members, New Politics Initiative (NPI) supporters, and Canadian Auto Workers Union delegates worked together at the convention. But we had different goals and expectations.

The CAW had a resolution calling for a new name, a new manifesto and a special leadership convention within six months.

The NPI concentrated on one issue, a new party process, and presented it in a compromise form that NPI leaders thought could win.

**T**he Socialist Caucus, with the support of over 100 delegates, was battling for democratic principles and socialist policies. We didn't expect to win any elections, or to convert the NDP to socialism. We predicted that the agenda would be tightly controlled and that rank and file opinions calling for radical change in the direction of the NDP would be ignored. Unfortunately, we were right.

Based on our expectations, we

tried to challenge the agenda, to open up more time for the 'new party' debate, and limit the general discussion on renewal because that's not where decisions would be made. We tried to get some of our eleven Socialist Caucus resolutions to the floor, resolutions that had the support of up to 18 local associations and unions across the country.

We moved amendments to establishment motions, and challenged the chair when the chair tried to prevent democratic debate. An SC member from Edmonton, Mimi Williams, upset the chair on Sunday morning by correctly insisting on a gender balanced speakers' list. That's how speaking lists are organized at SC conferences - alas, not yet in the NDP.

**W**e advised NPI leaders on floor strategy and how to lobby for policy priorities. We gave up one of

our speakers to the NPI in the 'new party' debate, and we refrained from moving a referral to the Burnaby-Douglas 'compromise' resolution at the request of the NPI. We urged the NPI to lobby for higher priority for this resolution, which helped to move it from fourth to second place - crucial to ensuring it was debated.

The SC and NPI folks at convention collaborated, although not that openly. But SC and NPI positions on the 'new party' issue are not identical. The NPI proposed that the NDP launch a process leading to the formation of a "new progressive" political party. The Socialist Caucus supports that initiative, but argues that the new party should be a "labour-based, socialist" party.

The 'compromise' resolution asked the NDP Federal Council to recommend a new party to the next

convention in 2003, to be followed by a membership referendum. It was defeated, but got 37% of the votes.

The next day, SC candidates for Leader and other senior Executive positions received from 12% to 20% of the votes, even though over 400 delegates were absent from the convention and the balloting process.

Had a few more disappointed NPI supporters returned to vote on Sunday morning, they probably would have bumped up the vote of SC candidate for Leader, Marcel Hatch, who got 120 votes to 645 for incumbent Alexa McDonough. Nearly half of the SC team of candidates were gay and lesbian people, which has to be a first in the federal NDP.

The Socialist Caucus campaigned on a radical socialist platform, calling for social ownership of the banks and big business, under workers' and community control. SC leaders presented socialist ideas to a cross-country television and radio audience.

NPI gatherings were larger than SC meetings, and they injected some excitement into an otherwise stiff convention. But the NPI had its weaknesses too; NPI preoccupation with the single idea of a 'new party' played into the hands of the party establishment.

It made it easier for the brass to appeal to party 'loyalism' and to mobilise a majority of delegates against the initiative, which they distorted by calling it a proposal to "dissolve the NDP".

The SC argued for a 'labour-based, socialist party' to be organised by a representative committee of currents both inside and outside the NDP. This appealed to delegates who want change but who are reluctant to embark on an uncertain process towards an unknown

political entity. The debate on NDP Renewal preceded the 'new party' discussion. The result was adoption of a resolution that calls for another round of 'renewal' discussion meetings across the country.

The resolution gives to Federal Council the power to implement the recommendations of the Renewal Report, subject to the motions adopted by the convention. This includes approval of OMOV, plus 25% for labour, as well as a referral motion which would put the NDP on record as favouring an end to corporate and union financial contributions to political parties.

Both policies, modified OMOV, and the equation of union and corporate political donations, are major setbacks for the left, undermining the remnants of collective democracy inside the NDP and weakening the party's ties to the labour movement.

But not all was gloom at Winnipeg. Aside from the strong socialist presence in many debates, seen by tens of thousands via television, small policy victories were won by the left too. Convention adopted an SC resolution making it NDP federal policy to oppose public funding for private or religion-based schools - but it was only debated after a successful procedural floor fight.

Another amendment by the SC to a resolution on airports, calling for re-nationalisation of Air Canada, was also successful following a similar wrangle with the chair and a lively debate.

Following the convention, Party officials crowded about their success in withstanding the challenge.

It is easy to be demoralised by such a convention. So why are most SC comrades not demoralised? Because we did not expect to turn the NDP sharply to the left at this convention, suddenly.

We are building a socialist movement to do that, and it is now stronger across the NDP and across the country.

We say to our friends in the CAW, in the NPI, in the anti-poverty and in the social justice movements that we now have a unique opportunity.

**T**he crisis of the NDP is not going to disappear. Neither will the party disappear. The NDP remains the only mass working class political party in North America. But the party leadership shows no sign that it is capable of moving forward. The membership that defends Blairism and the status quo is declining.

But the left has been rejuvenated inside the NDP. More activists are recognising the need for a political party, for an electoral component of the struggle for a Workers' Agenda.

They are turning their attention to what socialists and 'new party' proponents have been able to do inside the NDP in just a few months. If the anti-capitalist left can get involved now, the tables would turn on the party establishment.

Recruiting to the NDP may not be easy. But it's a hell of a lot easier than starting a new party without any agreement on a programme for a new party, and without any funds or social base.

Re-building the left is what we need to do alright - but we need to do it inside the working class institutions where it counts, inside the unions and the NDP.

So, what's next for the Left? In part, the answer will flow from the question: will the NPI stay and fight in the NDP? The SC certainly will. We cannot afford to abandon our class.



# If you tolerate this, your children will be next



Fighting fascism: Republican front line in the fight for Madrid

**"The Spanish Civil War: Dreams and Nightmares." Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum, South London, until 28 April 2002. Admission Free.**

**Reviewed by Andrew Kennedy**

The slogan above, a call for international anti-fascist solidarity, recently provided the title and chorus for a single by the Manic Street Preachers. The text originally featured in a Spanish Civil War propaganda poster, designed to mobilise outrage at the bombing of Madrid by Fascist planes. A copy of this poster is in the current exhibition at the Imperial War Museum. Meanwhile, aerial bombardment of civilians by imperialist warmongers once again features (sporadically) in the news.

It is always entertaining to watch the contortions that non-Marxist historians have to perform when narrating the Spanish Civil War, forced as they are to contemplate the spectacle of left-wingers fighting for freedom and democracy. However, this exhibition is perhaps as true to the facts as could be achieved in the context of a bourgeois institution committed to its particular version of "balance" and "objectivity".

To their credit, the organisers have pretty clearly favoured the Republic and those who fought for it. This positioning has been made easier, of course, by the perceived collapse of the Communist project post-1989, so that the short-lived Spanish Republic becomes a gallant, albeit tragic, episode in the onward march of a "democracy" that is non-class-specific, and the Civil War becomes implicitly associated with the subsequent world war of "democracies" against fascism.

Ironically, this is not so far from the Popular Frontist position of the Communist Parties for most of the thirties and forties.

The Spanish Civil War began in 1936 as a coup by right-wing army officers, led by Franco and backed by the Catholic Church, Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, against a left-liberal Popular Front government that had just been democratically elected. Although one-third of Spain was swiftly conquered by the rebels, in Republican areas a social dynamic developed which included land seizures by peasants and elements of workers' control in the larger industrial cities.

As in the Russian Revolution, the combination of a militant working class of recent origin, a downtrodden peasantry and the presence of oppressed nationalities within the state (particularly, here, Basques and Catalans) contributed to the creation of a potent insurrectionary cocktail.



However, the degeneration of the Communist Parties under Stalin meant that in Spain, unlike in Russia in 1917, decisive revolutionary leadership was lacking. The forces calling for restraint included middle-class Left Republicans, moderate Socialists and the Communist Party. Those at least notionally in favour of a more radical orientation included the Left Socialists, anarchists, and the small, anti-Stalinist, Marxist United Workers' Party (POUM).<sup>1</sup>

Early on in the exhibition an inscription reads: "The Republican war effort was undermined by divisions between those whose first aim was to win the war, and those who wanted to make social revolution". Although superficially fair, this statement actually counterposes the winning of the Civil War to the social revolution, when in fact those on in favour of the latter thought that social revolution would make it possible to win the war, since it would be easier to ask workers and peasants to fight for a government that was unequivocally in their interests, and easier to generate international solidarity for that fight.

Belatedly, the USSR weighed in with military assistance in order to counteract the aid given to the rebels by the Fascist powers. However, as another label correctly states: "Moscow, seeking alliances with the West against Germany, put its weight behind a centralised war effort and the stifling of the Revolution".

The Republican government, it should be said, collaborated with Moscow in this counter-revolutionary strategy, partly in a desperate effort to convince Britain, France and America of the need to abandon their non-interventionist stance. The Republic eventually

succumbed in early 1939.

It is not entirely fruitless to speculate about what might have been. At one point an inscription reads: "Fearing that a left-wing Spain might become a Soviet satellite, the Western democracies put class prejudices before strategic interests." In one sense, perhaps, this seems quite a reasonable proposition. For one thing, if Britain and America had supported the Spanish Government against Italy and Germany, a less isolated Stalin would probably not have gone through with the pact with Hitler of 1940.

However, there would have been grave dangers for British imperialism in pursuing such a step. Germany was further ahead in the arms race than Britain in 1936-8, for example, compared to 1939.

More importantly, perhaps, victory in Spain would have strengthened the left, including its radical wing, throughout Europe as well as strengthening the position of the USSR. A Europe-wide war, of a more overt class character than the conflict that was actually to take place, might have been necessary in order to repress those forces.

The statement quoted above therefore misleadingly counterposes "class prejudices", which are supposedly incidental, to "strategic interests", which apparently have nothing to do with class.

These criticisms aside, the exhibition brings together an impressive and moving assemblage of posters, photographs, documents, letters, personal effects of combatants and films, as well as multi-million pound works of art by Dali, Picasso<sup>2</sup>, Magritte and Miro, among others.

For me, as an art historian, it was rather refreshing to find that the expensive modernist artwork was generally much less striking than

the other material. Of course (lest I should be accused of philistinism), many of the propaganda posters owed much to modernist devices such as bold simplification, strong diagonal-based compositions and bright colour.

Also, the poems and quotations from poems acquired extra potency in the context of the other artefacts, images and texts. And, given the recent formation in this country of Artists Against the War, it was interesting to see one of the Neville Chamberlain masks worn by English Surrealists at a London anti-fascist demonstration in 1938.<sup>3</sup>

For those who missed real acknowledgement in the recent Surrealist exhibition of the reactionary power of the pre-war Catholic Church, there were some instructive images and objects here. A Nationalist propaganda poster, which would make Bush and Berlusconi drool, carries the message (in Spanish): "First Crusade: Spain the Spiritual Reference Point of the World": in the image the shadow of the cross (made up of the first two words of the slogan) falls ominously across the globe.

A nearby photograph, meanwhile, shows Catholic priests standing next to rebel army officers and giving the Fascist salute. This helps to put in context the photograph of the aftermath of an attack on a convent in Barcelona, in which the dessicated corpses of nuns have been theatrically exposed on the convent steps amidst the fragments of their coffins – a case of Catalan anarchists preserving some of the worst aspects of Jacobin iconoclastic traditions, perhaps.

A good deal of the exhibition space is given to the contribution

of the International Brigades. It is estimated that between 35-45,000 volunteers served in the International Brigades and that one-fifth of these were killed. The French supplied a quarter of all Brigade members, with the next most numerous contingents being supplied by Germans and Americans.

It was salutary to reflect on some lines by the British poet Cecil Day-Lewis: "It was not fraud or foolishness / Glory, revenge, or pay: / We came because our open eyes / Could see no other way."

The evocation of such clear-sightedness and determination here is sobering. It is a long time since socialists in the West have been called upon to make such sacrifices.

A list of names at the end is headed "Roll of Honour: British Volunteers". There seems to have been a coyness about making it clear that all those listed were International Brigade members. A call to the museum elicited the information that this was indeed the case, and that thankfully no names of Fascist volunteers from these islands were included, which would of course have been an insult.

It is worth pointing out, though, that many of the Irish volunteers (several of whom are mentioned in Christy Moore's song "Viva La Quinta Brigada" and a number of whom were Republicans) might have taken umbrage at being listed as British combatants.

The display, although quite extensive, is discreetly staged in a cramped little corner of the Imperial War Museum and is very much subordinated to the permanent First and Second World Warfest of planes, guns and tanks in the main hall.

On the day I went (just before New Year) it would have been nice to have seen a few more of the dads drag their kids away from the exciting war-toys and into an exhibition which has the potential to promote reflection on the causes of war and how to resist it.

1 See Trotsky's writings on Spain, plus an excellent contemporary account, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain*, by an American Trotskyist journalist, Felix Morrow (Pathfinder Press, out of print). George Orwell fought with the POUM militia in Aragon, as he recounts in *Homage to Catalonia*. Ken Loach's film *Land and Freedom* is partly based on Orwell's narrative.

2 The Picasso painting, entitled *Weeping Woman*, is related to his famous *Guernica*, which was apparently too fragile to travel from Madrid to this exhibition.

3 On anti-fascist activity by British artists, see Robert Radford, *Art for a Purpose: the Artists' International Association 1933-1953*, Winchester School of Art Press, 1987.

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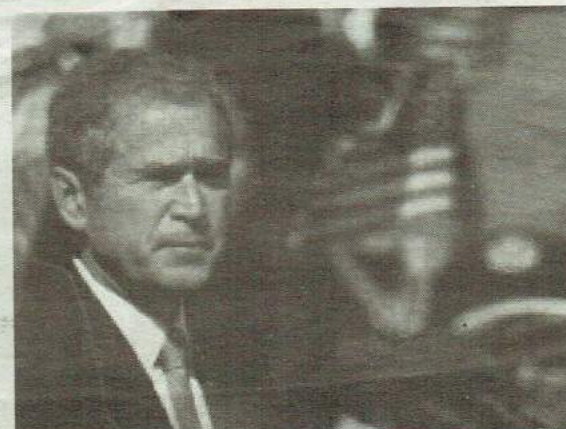


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