


Socialist *appeal*

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No to NATO war for a socialist federation

Fightback against
the bosses
offensive
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Balkans catastrophe: capitalism means war

Despite all the hand-wringing of the NATO leaders about the desperate plight of the Kosovar refugees, the extensive imperialist destruction of Yugoslavia has made the situation far worse. The relentless bombing campaign, which threatens to throw Yugoslavia back to the Dark Ages, has created enormous instability throughout the Balkans. Hundreds of thousands of refugees have been forced to flee into Macedonia, Albania and other neighbouring countries, creating widespread instability. But this is not the end of the matter. In the eventuality of these countries being drawn into the conflict, it would provoke a full scale Balkan war, with all the horrific consequences that such a war would entail. On top of this, Russia has threatened to intervene, with Yeltsin ominously talking of a new world war.

The hypocrisy of Blair and Clinton is nauseating. Socialists have always opposed Milosevic, and have consistently supported the idea of the Yugoslav working class overthrowing the regime. The American and British imperialists were never interested in the fate of the peoples of the region. They were always so much small change - as are the Kosovar Albanians - in the wake of their intrigues and manoeuvres. When it suited them, the imperialist powers backed Milosevic to the hilt. Not so long ago, he was por-

trayed by the imperialists as the man who could bring peace to the Balkans. He was the main broker behind the Dayton agreement. Now, because he refuses to capitulate to NATO, he is portrayed as some kind of Hitler.

The imperialists are cynically using the terrible plight of the refugees to widen their grip over the Balkans. Only 250 refugees are being allowed into Britain, while immigration laws are being tightened further. Straw justifies this by urging refugees to stay in camps within the region. The Palestinians have been doing this for the last 50 years, with no solution in sight.

Humanitarian

This is no "humanitarian" war as some on the left naively imagine. The imperialist powers are only interested in carving out spheres of influence, markets and sources of raw materials. In this conflict prestige is the major factor, above all the prestige of NATO. According to the Economist, commenting on its 50th Anniversary celebrations, "*since the air strikes against Yugoslavia... the defence club has been fighting for its life.*" (24th April). For retired US general William Odom, unless there is a ground invasion, "*Mr Milosevic will survive and NATO will unravel.*" This they are not prepared to tolerate.

The imperialist powers have enthusiastically supported every bloody dictator-

ship throughout the world. From Suharto, who murdered over a million people with the help of the CIA in 1965, to Pinochet, the Shah of Iran, Mubuto, the Argentinean Junta, Noriega, and Saddam Hussein, to name but a few. They financed and backed the Islamic fundamentalists in Afghanistan, the Contras in Nicaragua, Turkey's ethnic cleansing of the Kurds, and all other counter-revolutionary forces. Imperialism has not changed its spots in this New World Disorder.

From the poodle of US imperialism, "Bomber" Blair has now promoted himself to the role of The War Monger General. On a weekly basis he has telephoned Thatcher, his predecessor in this role, for advice according to the Sunday Times. He has gone further than most in demanding the complete destruction of Yugoslavia. For Blair, the Yugoslavs must be bombed relentlessly. He has now raised the use of ground troops when Milosevic's military has been "degraded" sufficiently.

The question of ground troops has been raised by all kinds of people as a "solution" to the humanitarian disaster. Even the left-wing Tribune has put this idea forward.

Unfortunately, they have not thought anything through. They have not even considered the question of which way forward for the working class throughout the Balkans. This has never entered their heads.

The reason why NATO has concentrated on the air campaign is because they thought that Milosevic, based upon CIA information, would quickly capitulate. They completely miscalculated. If he had capitulated it would have led to his immediate overthrow by his more nationalist partners. He had no alternative but to fight. Rather than weakening Milosevic, the bombing has strengthened him. He is now viewed within Yugoslavia as standing up to NATO aggression.

The imperialists are terrified of committing ground troops as it could easily lead to a blood bath. And they are correct. They are in a catch-22 situation. Bombing alone has never achieved the conquest of a country. Ground troops have always been necessary. But the Americans in particular are haunted by Vietnam, the Lebanon and Somalia, where they were driven out. A land war would mean huge casualties, with TV



screens full of dead soldiers, refugees and civilians. The unity of the NATO powers would begin to fracture. Even now there are divisions, especially with Italy and Greece opposed to ground troops.

According to The Guardian: "the shift from the relatively clinical job of air strikes to the messy business of a land invasion is likely to pose NATO a host of problems." (23/4/99) This must be the understatement of the year!

The imperialists took six months to prepare the assault on Kuwait. They originally estimated that 200,000 troops would be needed to march into Kosovo. Now they are considering 60,000 or so to be ready within three months! They would face 43,000 Yugoslav troops, well trained in guerrilla warfare.

The Balkans is a political and logistical nightmare for NATO. To invade Yugoslavia through Albania would be a death trap, given the mountainous terrain. Both Macedonia and Greece will not allow themselves to be used due to internal opposition and fear of Serb reprisals. To enter from Bosnia, with the Dayton agreement hanging by a thread, would certainly shatter the fragile "stability" there. To invade Montenegro, where the Yugoslav army is based would mean meeting ferocious opposition. The only other way into Yugoslavia is through Bulgaria or Hungary which would mean marching on Belgrade from Vojvodina in the north and dramatically widening the conflict. However, there are 300,000 ethnic Hungarians living in Vojvodina who would be under threat. Understandably there is growing opposition in Hungary - who did not join NATO to do any fighting or get mixed up in such a conflict! Consequently, this is the last thing that NATO wishes to contemplate.

NATO has talked repeatedly of "degrading" the Yugoslav army, but despite thousands of air attacks, they have only destroyed a tiny percentage of Serb tanks. A UN spokeswoman, Lyndall Sachs, believes that faced with ground troops, the Serbs "will probably turn tail and run." She is obviously ignorant of Yugoslav history and grossly underestimates the reserves of opposition that would come to the fore in the event of a foreign invasion of Yugoslavia. It was the partisan forces under Tito during the second world war that bogged down the military might of the Axis powers until they helped Soviet troops liberate Belgrade.

"Yugoslav troops have been trained in guerrilla tactics as a routine part of their military service", states The Guardian article. "They are taught to assume that they would not have command of the air, and must learn to move and fight at night and probably on foot, to

use camouflage, and to set traps for enemy aircraft and helicopters." The article concludes: "That makes them - 'degraded' or not - a formidably dogged opponent... The more the air strikes succeed, the more they could drive Serb forces back into the kind of war for which they were trained a generation ago."

A ground war in Yugoslavia would be a blood bath, with hundreds of thousands of refugees being slaughtered in the process. Such a war would not necessarily be of short duration. On the contrary, a guerrilla war would by its very nature be a protracted one, with mounting casualties. That is why there have been numerous references to a Vietnam scenario. Rather than a solution, it would turn the Balkans into a horrific nightmare, with permanent refugee camps and chronic political and social instability for many years to come.

Class approach

Those on the left of the Labour movement who argue for ground troops have lost their bearings. It shows that without an independent class approach to the question, you can end up in a mess, even supporting imperialism. There is no "moral" or "ethical" foreign policy. This is subterfuge. Foreign policy is the continuation of home policy. The reason why the Blair government grovels after American imperialism is that it pursues pro-capitalist policies at home. The Labour government is still content to supply the Indonesian regime with arms, despite its genocide in East Timor which has claimed the lives of 250,000 people.

"We are all internationalists now", said Blair. But this has nothing to do with working class internationalism and solidarity, and everything to do with imperialist oppression throughout the world.

Working people have more in common with workers in the Balkans than with their own bosses. Imperialism has always sought to play off one people against another in order to secure its interests. That was their classical method in the Balkans. On a capitalist basis there is no solution to this nightmare.

Only class solidarity and the struggle for a socialist federation of the Balkans can offer a way forward. This would mean the overthrow of the pro-capitalist regimes throughout the region which have stoked up nationalism. On that basis, national hatreds can be eliminated and the peoples of the Balkans, including the Kosovar Albanians, can live together in friendship and solidarity.

**No to NATO aggression!
For working class solidarity!
For a socialist federation of the Balkans!**

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20,000 march for a living wage

On Saturday 10th April thousands of trade unionists and young people marched through Newcastle to support Unison's campaign for a living wage. Less than a week later, on Thursday 15th April, a front page article appeared in the Financial Times under the heading 'Companies defy minimum wage law.'

by Stuart McGee

Big business is not satisfied with the pitifully low level that the minimum wage has been set at (£3.60 an hour). Neither are they satisfied with the discrimination against young people (i.e. £3.00 per hour for 18 to 21 year olds and exclusion for anyone under 18).

For many companies, paying outrageously low wages below the legal minimum, fiddles and evasion are on the order of the day.

It had already been widely reported that implementation of the minimum wage will be problematic. John Edmonds, the general secretary of the GMB has pointed out that a team of 115 inspectors to ensure that the minimum wage is implemented is inadequate. There are over two million workplaces in Britain. In these circumstances employers feel confident to use all sorts of subterfuges to avoid paying the minimum wage.

One newspaper report highlighted the fact that Pizza Hut had increased their wages to comply with the legislation but had withdrawn subsistence for cab fares, for those working into the early hours, to recoup their losses.

In another example a cleaning contractor for North West Water has reduced the number of hours cleaners work to ensure that they are on the appropriate hourly rate. However the cleaners are expected to do the same amount of work in less hours.

The report went on to outline ten different ways employers are attempting to avoid incurring extra costs as a result of the minimum wage legislation.

- Replacing older workers with under 18's who are not eligible for the minimum wage.
- Making sure full time workers are under 21 before employing them - the lower rate of £3.00 per hour saves £25 per week per worker.
- Forcing staff to describe one days work as 'voluntary' and/or unpaid.
- Employing staff on a cash in hand basis
- Raising the pay at the expense of staff transport subsidies or interest free travel-card loans.
- Removing free accommodation.
- Cutting hours, leaving the take home pay the same but expecting the same

amount of work in less hours.

- Including tips in the wage rates.
- Sub contracting work to a person who was previously on the payroll - the self employed are exempt from the legislation.
- Just not paying in the hope that the woefully inadequate number of inspectors will not find out.

Some unions are quite rightly preparing legal action against some employers involved in the most flagrant breaches. However it would be disastrous to rely on legal remedies alone.

A massive campaign must be developed of which legal action against this type of employer is only one small part. The Unison demonstration in Newcastle attracted about 20,000 people and could have attracted more. It was a good start to the campaign to get the hourly rate increased and applicable to all. Unison will be calling for a £5.00 per hour rate for all after their conference in June and for a regular uprating system that can be effectively enforced.

While this is a step in the right direction which every trade unionist and young person should support the development of the campaign is of vital importance.

Exposing unscrupulous employers who are breaking the law by paying under the current inadequate rate is an essential part of that campaign. The question of naming and shaming employers who are caught out being involved in these sort of practices is a good strategy that can be taken up by unions nationally regionally and at a branch level. Trades councils and Labour party branches can also play a vital role in this kind of activity.

Highlighting the total hypocrisy of the employers and the legal system in Britain is also an important factor in any such campaign.

This country has the most draconian anti union laws anywhere in the western world. It is very difficult to organise legal industrial action that will be successful. As seen in no end of disputes, as soon as a successful ballot has been held the employers go squealing to the courts for an injunction on some pretext or another to stop industrial action taking place.

Nine times out of ten they are successful in getting an injunction. If unofficial action takes place (like the victorious battle that was waged by the electricians



Letter from Belgrade

in the Jubilee line dispute) the whingeing and whining of the employers about the unions breaking the law is something to behold. Yet when it suits them, like on the question of not paying the minimum wage it is a different story. Where is British justice then to prevent these flagrant breaches and punish the perpetrators? Not surprisingly nowhere. It is down to the trade unions to expose what is going on and to force prosecution. Even then the level of fines are laughable for firms who have made a mint exploiting very low paid workers over a very long period of time. The fine of £7.50 per day for each day that an employer underpays a worker and a maximum fine of £5,000 for giving false information is absolute peanuts to these people. Contrast this to those who have been fined thousands and some even jailed for failure to pay the poll tax or for being involved in illegal industrial action. In 1983 the National Graphical Association was fined £50,000 for contempt of court for failing to call off mass picketing, which the courts had deemed to be illegal because of the anti union laws. This was followed by a further £100,000 fine and the sequestration of the unions assets, followed by further fines of £150,000 and £375,000. It does put the law into perspective.

However, vital though this kind of activity is at a ground level there must be a focus for the campaign at a national level.

Unison should put motions down to the TUC and the Labour party conference to keep the issue in the limelight. A national lobby of the Labour party conference should be organised to demonstrate the strength of feeling that exists. Above all a demonstration, in London, next spring should be announced. If built for properly, if turned into a political event with speakers at the end of the demonstration putting over a clear and concise message that the rate should be improved to £5.00 per hour available to all then it is entirely feasible that a huge demonstration, too big for the government to ignore could be organised.

Dear Comrades,

Your Marxist site has inspired me to write to you, in order to show appreciation of your efforts and to appeal for action. I'm glad to see some understanding of situation in the Balkans in "outer world" in these hard days for the people of Yugoslavia. Seeing that Marxism is still fighting its battle in the west gives me a bit of hope and comfort.

Here it looks like Marxism lost the battle; abused to create a totalitarian regime and then cursed as a bad religion and thrown away. But, the final word hasn't been said yet - the cruel process of initial capital accumulation that is taking place in the last few years under the mask of transition from socialism to "democracy", and growing dissatisfaction with the rule of gagster-run parties and "opposition" (participating in exploitation and deception); will eventually rise Marxism from the ashes, because it is the only way to solve the existing antagonisms.

Imperialistic NATO aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) is accelerating the process of devastation of our society, gathering people around Slobodan Milosevic, totalitarian, and the worst ruler in several hundred years history of Serbian people. He participated in breaking the former socialistic Yugoslavia, which was broken into FRY (Serbia and Montenegro), Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Macedonia; and was assisted by bourgeois governments of USA, Germany and other western countries. Now, the same capitalist regimes are giving him excuse (by direct military attack) for silent elimination of free media, intellectuals and any other potential danger to his rule.

There is no perspective for democracy or even survival of Serbian people while the NATO bombs (and now very possible future ground attacks) are destroying economical resources, people's lives and society as a whole. Bombing has allowed Milosevic to conduct state-of-war laws, and to destroy all of his (even potential) opponents, like students, intellectuals, working class movements and others.

If NATO is not stopped as soon as

possible, the devastation of economic and other resources will be so enormous that it take the state back to the 18th century. The ground engagement of NATO will mean total mobilisation, total war and immediate spreading of the conflict all over Balkans and would involve other surrounding countries. Remember, the spark that lit WWI was Austro-Hungarian imperialistic aggression on the same Serbian people that is now defending itself from western imperialism represented by NATO.

My country is not strong enough to resist NATO for a long period of time, though we still have a pretty vital army. Our defeat would open the door for other similar conflicts all over the world. This is why my people are seeking help from all of the proletariat around the world. The greatest help you can give us is by organising mass demonstrations in your country to force your governments to stop. The only way to stop them is to make the regimes unstable, to make them feel endangered.

Please, continue spreading the truth about this war; organize the proletariat - the point is in changing the world, not only in understanding it...your analysis you've sent will be translated and I'll put it on our greatest conferencing system, so the people can see it. I will find more people willing to help to translate your articles.

warm regards from Belgrade, Dragan



Defend Postal Jobs!

Last month an important meeting took place of all CWU branch secretaries representing the postal business in London. This meeting was called to provide a new impetus to the fight to defend postal jobs in London. Every section was facing job losses and that needed to be confronted now.

The management's attack on jobs was not simply about introducing new technology, but centred on a policy of cost-cutting and removing jobs outside of London. Given the threat of massive job losses over the next five years, the meeting decided to promote an on-going campaign to make all London members aware of what is happening.

We have in reality had little support from the national leadership who appear to be reconciled to the inevitability of the losses. Despite this, the London Committee has contacted London Labour MPs for their support, together with the Trades Councils. We are also pushing for a meeting with the London PLP.

It is down to the London CWU branches to mobilise a campaign around this issue. The livelihoods of our members are at stake. The Post Office are looking for greater productivity/flexibility from our members. This will directly affect our jobs and has to be fought all long the line.

Again, the Crown Post offices - a majority are still union organised in the London area - are also facing cut backs with the memorandum being lifted. On the Royal Mail side, any new mail centre in London will not have on-site coding and they are likely to be shifted outside of London, as with the call centres.

We have no alternative but to fight for our jobs. That must be the message taken to all CWU members in London.

Andy Blake
acting branch secretary
CWU London 7
(personal capacity)

RMT grades conference

The background to the 90-strong RMT's Train Crews and Shunting Grades' conference in Ayr last month was the threat posed by restructuring. In particular, there were a number of heated exchanges at conference over the threat to guard's jobs. At the moment there is an attempt by rail bosses to do away with this position as part of a cost-cutting exercise. While RMT leaders in their negotiations with the train companies have got certain "guarantees", delegates were far from reassured.

Since 1997 there have been a series of union strike ballots over the threat to the role and responsibility of guards. The bosses have tried repeatedly to redefine the job, seeking to replace "guard" with "competent person" in the rule book, which, as many delegates pointed out can mean anything.

According to Alex Gordon (Bristol Rail), the assurances from Railtrack "seemed worthless". There had been suggestions he said that management even considered someone doing the guard's job on the way to their work.

• Angie Kay, delegate from Berwick Rail stated that the introduction of driver only operated trains "was to do away

with guards, the objective being to cut costs and reduce staff numbers." There were 600 jobs under threat in her area. The Berwick branch resolution called for a campaign to "expose this ulterior motive". "They are not sticking to the agreement", stated Angie. "Give us a ballot now!" The resolution was passed unanimously.

Throughout the debate there were repeated calls for a strike ballot to be organised. If management are to be forced to retreat then the threat of action, or action itself will be needed. As an example of what can be achieved, delegates referred to the victory on South West Trains, where after a campaign, an 80% majority for industrial action forced the company to withdraw its plans for driver only trains literally overnight. "Two hundred guards' jobs were threatened," said one delegate. "We had no choice but to fight". That seemed to sum up the mood of conference.

Derek Goodliffe
(RMT grades
executive committee,
(personal capacity)

Tube cleaners vote for Action!

Workers who clean London Underground trains have voted to take industrial action in a row over hours.

Thirty members of the GMB are protesting at the introduction of weekend night working, mainly on the Central Line. They claim five workers have been sacked by contractors ISS Transport Services. The company say "only" one has been dismissed.

It is essential that these cowboy contractors are put in their place. These workers must be given the maximum support to get their fellow workers reinstated and fight off the attempt to drive down their terms and conditions.

NUT general secretary election: Campaign for a fighting alternative

Between the 7th and the 28th of June members of the National Union of Teachers will be voting in the General Secretary election in their union. This is clearly one of the most significant elections ever for members of the NUT and for the teaching profession as a whole.

After almost two decades of Tory governments and repeated attacks on teachers it was reasonable to expect the election of the Labour government on May 1st 1997 to be the turning point. Based on Tony Blair's slogan of education, education, education, would it now be the case that education would move towards adequate funding? Adequate funding to reduce class sizes and to properly remunerate teachers through nationally negotiated wage settlements?

Would it be too much to expect a Labour government to start moves to end selection, to reverse the divisive Tory policies that led to grant maintained schools and local management of schools?

Would it be too much to expect a Labour government to start moves towards redeveloping the co-operative rather than the individualistic approach in our schools? The answer is clearly yes, it was too much to expect. Instead of reversing Tory policy, the Labour government is seeking to deepen and extend it in education. The development of education action zones (EAZ's), and the introduction of the private finance initiative (PFI) is nothing more than privatisation through the back door.

Inadequate funding combined with the unacceptable pressure of Ofsted inspections has driven, and is continuing to drive teachers out of the profession.

Inadequate pay ensures that the recruitment crisis continues.

All of these things combine to create a downward spiral as far as teachers self esteem and morale is concerned.

How does the government intend to address these issues? The abolition of Ofsted? The abolition of the pay review body and its replacement with a national negotiating machinery? Above all the sort of cash injection that would enable

teachers pay to be raised to the same level as those in comparable professions?

No, the government green paper on education proposes the most divisive and backward method of all to address the issue - performance related pay (PRP).

Most significantly, this method of payment is cheaper than giving all teachers an adequate pay rise. Instead it gives a rise to the few at the expense of the many based on performance. It is currently, and quite ridiculously proposed that the assessment of performance be based on pupils exam results. However it is the case that whatever criteria is used to establish performance it will be flawed. Even if the criteria of results is amended it can only be replaced with a system based on subjective assessment which is inevitably divisive. Performance related pay in any way, shape, manner or form is totally wrong and will be extremely damaging to the teaching profession and children's education.

The current general secretary Doug McAvoy has been in the post for ten years. Prior to this he had been the deputy general secretary, and had held that post since 1975.

Many activists in the union are deeply concerned at the direction the union has taken under Doug McAvoy in recent years.

Concern in relation to the perceived tendency to look towards deals and compromises rather than standing firm on principled issues.

A perception that the union machinery is misused to only give one side of the debate on major issues like performance related pay, education action zones, and the private finance initiative.

There is a belief amongst activists that the desire to play a "statesman" like role in negotiating with the government will lead to compromises that could have a very damaging effect on the interests of teachers and on the education system as a whole.

There is an alternative, Christine Blower is a teacher working in Hammersmith and Fulham in the behavioural support team in primary schools. She has a long record of trade union

activity at local, regional and national level in the NUT.

As a member of the National Executive Committee she has fought to develop a strategy for improving the employment rights and conditions of service for teachers. She has opposed attempts to reorganise the union and centralise power in the general secretary's hands. She has fought for more democracy at a local level in the NUT.

Christine Blower stands for:

- *Opposition to the governments green paper on education.*
- *A significant pay increase across the board of no less than £1,000 + 10%*
- *Total opposition to performance related pay.*
- *The union to fight to implement the national contract.*
- *For a free comprehensive state education system.*
- *For properly funded schools.*
- *Opposition to education action zones and the private finance initiative*
- *Effective anti racist teaching and equal opportunities for all*
- *The abolition of the Tory anti union laws.*
- *For joint work with other teaching unions and non teaching unions in education.*
- *For a single union for all teachers*
- *For the abolition of Ofsted*
- *The devolvement of responsibility for decision making to a divisional level in the union linked to training and a strengthening of the local union structures.*
- *For all officials including the general secretary to be answerable to the membership through the conference and the executive.*

VOTE FOR CHRISTINE BLOWER

Right wing take city to the brink

The legacy of the "dented shield" approach in local government and the lurch to the right under New Labour has brought Labour to the brink of losing power in Sheffield for only the second time in living memory.

by Ken Pickering

This position deserves close analysis for the route from the once "Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire" to the cutting edge of the enabling authority holds many lessons for the left today.

The left will remember Patrick Jenkin, Thatcher's Secretary for the Environment, laughing at Sheffield for their half-hearted stance over rate capping. For whilst thousands of trade unionists, Labour Party members and large sections of the electorate cheered David Blunkett for standing up to the Thatcher government, inside the Council offices rate demands were already printed ready for posting. Jenkin only too well understood the left wing credentials of his apparent advocate.

Capitulated

The writing was on the wall as one by one the soft left, in councils around the country, capitulated: a new era and a new breed of future Labour ministers were emerging.

We make no apology for tracing Labour's current position to the events of 14 years ago. Following on from the Miners Strike the working class had experienced two major defeats at the hands of the Tories within two years. A strategy to destroy local government, with its strong Labour roots and active trade unions was

succeeding and a decade of entrenchment was to follow.

Under these conditions, thousands of jobs were lost to voluntary redundancy. Services were slashed; conditions eroded - Council workers even took pay cuts on a promise of a better future. That better future lying in the election of a Labour government. "If only we can hold on until we regain power" became the Party's mantra.

But even before New Labour emerged, the blame for crumbling services and job losses was being laid firmly at Labour's door.

These defeats had a tremendous impact on the left. Many grew tired and frustrated and dropped out of politics. Others, looking for short cuts, took a position on the sidelines of the movement. For every one that left the task of those who stayed got that bit harder. We entered a spiral of demoralisation, depletion of activists and further defeats.

The right wing stayed, enjoying the title of Councillor and the ability to blame their own shabby politics on government policies, which they "were powerless to change". Not once did they put themselves at the head of the movement to bring about change. Not once did they stand shoulder to shoulder with the trade unions, in opposition to cuts.

As always, the right wing placed the blame on the working class. The problem with council services was not the lack of money; workers were not working hard enough, they were inflexible and over paid.

A new breed of senior managers was brought in. A Chief Executive, schooled in Tory ideology was appointed. Councillors no longer saw themselves having a role in industrial relations - in fact many didn't even believe they had a role in formulating policy.

Trade union facility time was attacked. Union meetings could no longer be held in works time or even, as we have just witnessed in the Housing Benefits dispute, on Council premises in the workers own time. New realism was enforced by the transfer of services to Trusts and more recently privatisation of IT Services, Treasury and Housing Benefits. The preferred model now being the enabling authority first dreamt of by Thatcher's guru Nicholas Ridley.

The May elections could well see the

Liberals take control in Sheffield - a disaster for the working class. Millbank are already preparing their excuses. "Sheffield", they say, "are too associated with the politics of Old Labour".

Many on the left, particularly following the Housing Benefits dispute which has ended with the service being sold off to the outsourcing specialists CSL, feel sickened by the role of the Labour Council in Sheffield. They argue that for this to go ahead, despite overwhelming opposition by the District Labour Party, means there is nothing to choose between Labour and the Liberals.

Nine opposition candidates are now standing in Labour's key seats under the banner of the Socialist Alliance. Their strategy can only lead up a blind alley. They even run the risk of splitting Labour's vote and providing the right wing with the perfect opportunity to deflect criticism should Labour lose control.

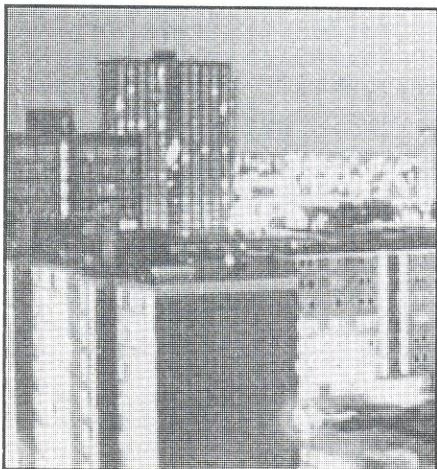
In reality, they are unlikely to win many votes. Their actions may be well meant, but unfortunately, feeling passionately that things should be different does not ensure that they will be.

Arguing

Instead, we have to patiently build our forces by arguing our case at every level in the Labour movement. We have to understand that by ducking those responsibilities during times when the tide seems to be going against us, we turn possible defeats into a certain defeats. And if we were to follow the same logic we would leave the trade unions because of their right wing leaders and set up alternatives. The only problem, as we shall see in these elections, is that people will not follow.

Socialists in Sheffield should stop looking for shortcuts, should concentrate their time in building in all sections of the labour movement. No matter how hard or unpalatable this may seem, to do otherwise will play into the hands of the rightwing.

As Marxists we understand that the right wing only ever see the back end of history. All the conditions for a major politicisation of the working class are now emerging. Under these conditions the Blairites will be swept away. It is the responsibility of the left to prepare for these enormous events.



Strike at Sheffield Housing Benefits

In April 1998 Sheffield's Labour Council privatised Treasury and IT services. The contract, which went to CSL, met little organised opposition.

Whilst APF delegates to the District Labour Party consistently argued against privatisation, the lack of activists and trade union delegates attending these meetings allowed the right to win the vote.

UNISON meanwhile struggled to get a ballot due to the unions fear of complying with trade union legislation.

In July 98 a proposal to privatise Housing Benefits was put to the Party. This time a packed meeting, though still lacking a large left contingent, passed an amendment that called for a twin track approach. CSL were to put a bid together to find £1.2million worth of savings and the workforce were to be given the "opportunity" to match their bid.

In October UNISON delegates again tried to reject this proposal losing by a much smaller majority. In December, the right narrowly won a motion calling for an evaluation period until January following the submission of the bids.

Savings

CSL had failed to make the required savings whilst the in-house team were confident that their bid met all the requirements laid down by the DLP.

Throughout this period the union ran a model campaign. APF members spoke at Labour Party meeting right across the city. The workforce and the Tenants movement constantly lobbied the DLP, signed petitions and wrote letters to Jan Wilson (Labour's Council leader).

Demonstrating the importance of work in the Labour Party, by January the mood in the Party had completely changed. The DLP voted overwhelmingly for a resolution that stated, "This DLP is steadfastly opposed to further outsourcing of Council services".

However, the right wing leadership was determined to press ahead. The group voted for a review of the in-house bid but at the same time to leave CSL firmly in the frame. This review was to

be carried out by the very officers who had been pushing for privatisation of the service and had recommended the CSL bid.

The workforce, who had voted 3-1 for strike action and who felt insulted by this decision when they had done everything asked of them, went on strike.

The council refused to negotiate and three weeks into the strike voted to give the contract to the private company.

Not a single Labour Councillor voted against or even abstained. Instead, they argued that the role of an organisation, opposed to the Labour Party, who have leading positions within Sheffield UNISON, had forced them into a corner.

After five weeks the strikers returned to work, angry, resentful of the Labour Party but with nowhere left to go except negotiate the TUPE transfer.

Reaction

The reaction of many has been to further reject the Labour Party. But this is the easy way out and will bring few if any changes. In reality, if the left had not deserted the Party this whole situation would have been avoided.

We now need to build on the decision of the DLP and hold Councillors to account. Our aim must be to replace them with people who are prepared to fight for socialist policies.

Our ability to unite workers, Labour Party members, Tenants Associations and broad layers of the electorate in opposition to privatisation shows the enormous potential if we pursue a correct approach.

The actions of the Labour Group in Sheffield was a disgrace. The strikers deserved every support in their opposition to privatisation: the biggest threat to public sector workers today. But we must never forget, the class struggle, on which this dispute rests, has never been easy. If it were there would be no need for trade unions or the broader labour movement. We must now learn from this defeat and increase our resolve to relegate the shallow politics of New Labour to the dustbin of history.

Keep the cash coming!

With the war in the Balkans entering a new and more dangerous phase, we have had to move into overdrive to ensure that the ideas of Marxism are heard to the best degree possible. Material has had to be printed and meetings and interventions organised. We have also had to keep our website on the internet up to date as activists and interested workers, youth and students have been accessing it on a daily basis.

On top of this we have had to produce material for the Newcastle low pay demo, the big May Day events, the forthcoming union conferences and so on. All this costs money. Bills have to be paid and costs covered. So we need your support. We have had some excellent donations over the last few weeks, including one of £1000, (which means we have been able to pay off the bill for our new plate making laser printer) but we need to keep it up. Every bit counts, however small, if we are to keep going. We are confident that given the interest in the ideas defended by Socialist Appeal you will not let us down. Send what you can to us at PO Box 2626, London N1 7SQ (Cheques/POs made payable to Socialist Appeal).



Fightback against the bosses offensive

The Camden housing dispute, is the latest in a long line of disputes, at a local, regional and national level that have fallen foul of the anti trade union legislation. At a regional level London underground management used the anti union laws to prevent the RMT from taking action over the new year holiday period on a wages and conditions issue, linked to the privatisation of the London underground. At a national level every trade union activist who was around at the time is aware of how the anti trade union laws were used to help defeat the miners strike of 1984/85.

At this moment in time it would be impossible for a trade union to legally call for national industrial action on an issue like, for example, the low level and discriminatory nature of the minimum wage, or, for example, a one day protest stoppage against the continuing Tory policy of privatizing public services, through the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) or the misnamed Best Value legislation in local government.

There can be little doubt that if a union did call such action the employers would be lining up to get an injunction on the totally spurious grounds that a "legiti-

mate" trade dispute between an employer and their employees did not exist. There can also be little doubt that they would succeed in getting the injunction to prevent the action taking place.

The employment act introduced by the government does nothing to repeal these laws. However there are some progressive aspects of the legislation that could and should be used to maximum effect.

Recognised

For example the CWU members who were sacked at Critchleys for taking strike action to get their union recognised and the TGWU members who were sacked by Skychef Lufthansa for having the audacity to take industrial action in defence of their conditions of service might not have lost their jobs if this legislation had been in place at the time of their disputes.

The new rights for union recognition should be used to maximum effect to unionise previously unorganised workplaces.

If such a campaign was organised it would have to be linked to the issues of the minimum wage, the European working time directive and, in the long term, the most critical issue of all for trade unionists in Britain, the total repeal of the anti union laws.

The fundamental right to take strike action is a basic human right that has been denied to British workers for too long. The consequences of this over almost two decades has been the most horrendous counter revolution on the shop floor.

The old industries that were traditionally well organised like coal, the print, the docks, shipbuilding and steel have either been virtually destroyed as industries or have had union organisation smashed.

The newer industries that have developed or have been extended, in information technology, the financial services sector and the phenomenal development of call centres are as yet unorganised or in the case of the financial services sector are not as well organised as they could be (although this is beginning to change).

The appalling wages and conditions of service of workers employed in these industries should be fertile ground for trade union recruitment if the union leaders knew what they were doing.

While there are always some exceptions to the rule, on the whole the current trade union leadership, wedded to the idea of social partnership and class collaboration as opposed to class struggle, have no idea whatsoever how to recruit.

Recruited

Some of them appear to think that workers can be recruited on the basis of cheap insurance and individual benefits. On the contrary it is a clear and patient explanation of the benefits that collective action can bring coupled with a firm and determined approach that will bring results.

When workers experiences coincide with that fundamental reality, just as in the past, union membership will grow by leaps and bounds. Not only will membership grow, but, it is entirely possible that we could see the rebuilding of the shop stewards movement.

However this is dependent on genuine trade unionists laying the foundations now and organising proper recruitment campaigns now. Union branches, trades councils and shop stewards committees have an enormous role to play in developing such campaigns.



PFI: 'inefficient, short term and disgusting'

"We waited 20 years for a Labour government. We hoped they would deliver a socialist programme or at the very least interventionist policies to ease the attacks on the working class. We were told for 20 years not to rock the boat. Now we're not allowed to debate anything. The PFI will cost Labour votes in next month's elections for the Scottish Parliament," these are the words of a UNISON shop steward and delegate to the STUC Conference in Glasgow.

by Kenny McGuigan

STUC President Ann Middleton summed up the mood of the Conference on day one announcing "I want to record my disgust at PFI. It is inefficient and a short term answer to the long term problem of under-investment in public services."

PFI is undoubtedly the hot potato of the current period. No matter how it is dressed up, the vast majority of workers and their representatives are opposed to it. The political undercurrents are bubbling away. A senior UNISON official in Scotland, Mark Irvine, has resigned from the Labour Party in disgust over PFI, saying he could no longer "defend the indefensible." The Party's treasurer in Scotland, Bob Thompson, who is also a UNISON official describes it as "a running sore."

Delegate after delegate condemned the plans for increasing private funding for public utilities and desperately needed services.

Lukewarm

Scottish Secretary and First Minister elect Donald Dewar was given a lukewarm reception by delegates. Dewar stoutly defended PFI and said, basically, that it was the best the government could offer. "Public / private partnerships have a role," he said.

Mentioning the words "solidarity" and "unity is strength" failed to woo his audience. Indeed at one point Dewar distanced himself from the trade unions saying, "The STUC is an independent organisation and we are independent of that...we have policies that overlap and

we drive for common objectives but there will be occasions when we differ and we all recognise that."

PFI is one. In Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, the 1500 strong branch of UNISON last month sensationally voted to disaffiliate from all the CLPs in the Lothian Region, in protest at PFI. The new Infirmary, being built as a PFI scheme, will cost £180 million to build. It is desperately needed. But under PFI its cost skyrockets. £600 million will be paid to the contractors to build it, and over the 30 year term of the agreement it will cost an estimated £14 billion! And the people who built it will still own it. Health Minister Sam Galbraith has claimed that PFI projects include a "right to buy" clause at the end of the 25 year period. However leading academic Declan Gaffney of University College London argues that this would prove "very expensive." Accountants Chantrey Vellacott DFK estimate that for every £1 billion of spending financed by PFI, the treasury pay £50 million more than if it had borrowed the money directly itself!

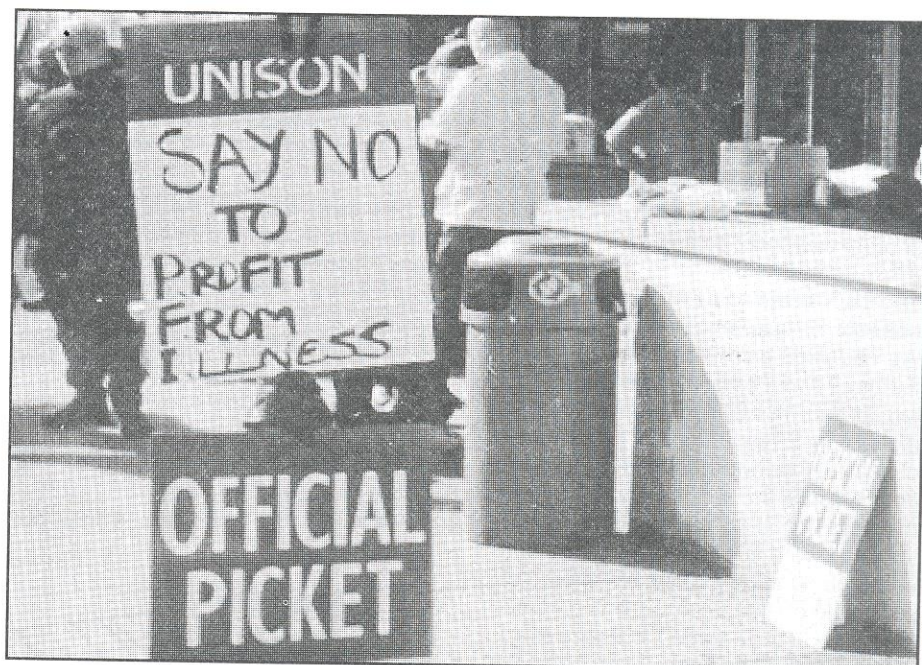
On other issues, a motion from the T&G calling for regulation of the bus industry "to avoid the worst excesses of unrestrained competition" was passed along with a motion calling for the rail-

ways to be returned to public ownership as lives were being put at risk, as profits take priority and accountants are running the industry.

Health and safety is a major question too. Pam Viney of EIS said that teaching was becoming more and more dangerous and that more than 4500 teachers were assaulted last year, while two actually died. Louise Goldsack of the Lothian Scottish Secondary Teachers Association said that 239 of its members reported being victims of assault, 10% up on the previous year.

Accidents

In general the HSE claim that 60% of accidents in the workplace go unreported. In 1998 2000 accidents were reported and there were 38 deaths in Scotland alone. Various speakers mentioned the increased workload and poor staffing levels and Gillian Evans of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists was applauded when she pinpointed the causes of violence in the workplace, "Stress levels have never been higher," she said. "Walkie talkies and panic buttons are well and good, but unless staff numbers were not increased there would not be the desired effect."



Camden Housing: strike over workload

Unison members in the rehousing section in the London borough of Camden have been involved in a long running dispute with the council. Industrial action and court action have already taken place and at the time of writing another ballot was taking place for an all out indefinite strike. Socialist Appeal spoke to Phil Rose the Unison convener who is leading the strike.

What are the issues that gave rise to this dispute?

I started work in this department seven years ago and at that time there were 34 employees in the rehousing section. Since that time the numbers have been whittled down to 24. The final straw came when they wanted to delete another 2 posts.

This is a difficult and stressful job, we allocate all council property except sheltered. We also allocate to the private sector although originally we did not deal with the homeless. This involved numerous visits and on top of this we have to do our own administration.

Since the housing act came into effect in 1996 things got worse. Its effect was to transfer responsibility for housing homeless people to us. This dramatically increased our workload. We were now supposed to visit everyone that applied.

So what did you do?

The staff complained and the management promised us a workload review. However they made it clear from the outset that there would be no extra money put in. The review never materialised and the next thing we knew they were announcing that there was going to be another two posts deleted.

The staff seem to have been very reasonable throughout this process.

We had been but the announcement of the other two jobs going was pushing it too far and we decided to ballot for industrial action. Even then back in November of last year we were being ultra reasonable. Despite the fact that there had been a successful ballot, and despite the fact that they were still maintaining that there would be no extra money, we offered to put a hold on the strike while they done the review if they agreed to freeze the deletion of the two posts. They threw that

back in our faces and that really was the final straw.

Was everyone in the union?

When they announced the 2 job losses there were 22 of us in the union. When we moved to the ballot one of the other two joined up. When the first day of strike action took place the other one joined up and came out on strike.

What were the tactics of the strike?

Originally we wanted to come out on all out indefinite strike until we won. However the union official persuaded us that the best thing to do was to come out for a week and then come out on indefinite strike if that failed to move them.

When did this all take place?

We finished the ballot in February and the vote was announced at 17-2 out of 23 members at that time. We actually came out on strike on 9th March

Was it solid?

Yes, as I have already said even the non union member came out after half a day joined the union and the strike. On that basis because no-one scabbed and because we ended up with more people on strike than we started with you could say we were 104.3% solid.

Did the weeks action have an effect on the management?

No because knowing we were only out for a defined period all they had to do was to sit it out.

So how long was you back for before you came out on indefinite strike?

It was meant to be a week but there were complications. The union officials tried to convince us that we should now move to two weeks of action at a time. We knew this would be a disaster and therefore argued to maintain the position of an all out strike. Eventually they relented but what it meant was that we had been back to work for two weeks before we came out again and this had a very damaging consequence.

What consequences?

We were due to come out on strike again on 30th March instead of the 23rd.

The management had been threatening to take out a court injunction to prevent this

On what grounds?

They said that we hadn't given notice of the second stage of the action. The advice we got from the union solicitors was that it wasn't necessary. We came out on strike on 30th March, but, on the 31st the management went to court and changed their line of argument. It is a technicality, evidently the union (and by that they mistakenly mean the union officials and not the members) has to call its members out. Evidently because the union hadn't formerly called it within the necessary notice period the second stage of our action couldn't go ahead

So what is happening now?

The union is considering an appeal but they do have to be careful because clearly this has wider implications. However as far as we are concerned we have had to go back to work but we are currently balloting for all out action which is what we should have done in the first place.

As Socialist Appeal was going to print Phil Rose contacted us with the result of the ballot. It had been 10 to 9 in favour of going on all out strike. Although there had been a majority for action the closeness of the vote indicated that the action would not have been solid. Under these circumstances Phil informed us that a decision had reluctantly been taken not to proceed with the action.

We suggested that this could be seen as the latest in a long list of setbacks suffered by a group of workers involved in struggle as a result of a vicious employer using the anti union laws combined with a less than effective and determined response from the trade union leadership.

Phil Rose agreed totally and added that anything that could be done to highlight this fact would be appreciated.

Left confused over NATO bombing

War like all great events places all organisations and policies under the microscope. The attitude of the Labour leaders in relation to the Balkans will come as no surprise to socialists in the labour movement. Robin Cook's pledge of creating an ethical foreign policy didn't survive the sale of arms to Indonesia, now in Kosovo all talk of humanitarianism means slavishly following the lead of the US.

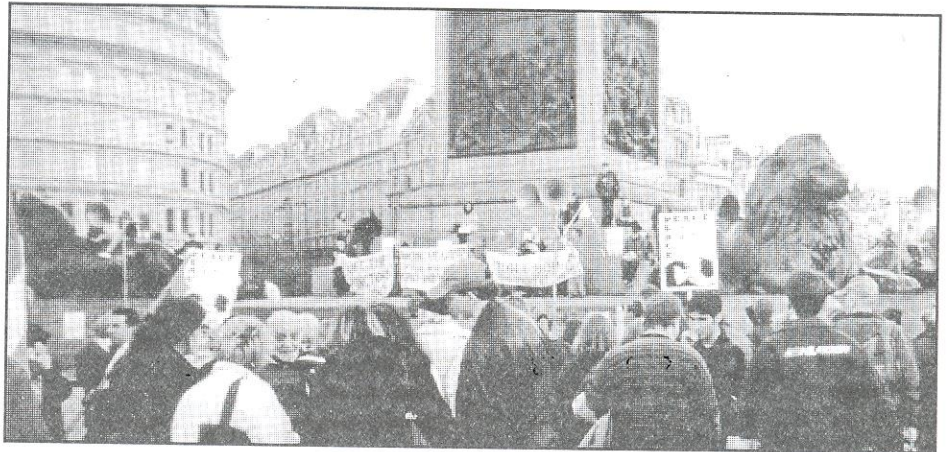
by Phil Mitchinson

If the attitude of the Blairites is predictable the left in the Labour Party are utterly confused. The Campaign Group News (April 1999) presents us with a neutral non-headline "NATO bombs Yugoslavia" and points out that "left wing MPs took different positions on NATO bombing." Inside we can take our pick from six articles, three in support of the NATO bombing and three against. The paper itself, takes no particular "official" line. This is a graphic illustration that those who depart from a class analysis will soon find themselves lost at sea.

Alice Mahon correctly points out that "it is NATO and NATO countries who will be responsible for every death caused by their bombs." Tony Benn goes even further pointing out that the bombing has made the position of the refugees far worse and strengthened the position of Milosevic. He goes on "Can anyone name any war in history fought for humanitarian purposes...Of course not. War is about power, for the control of countries and resources." Pointing to the hypocrisy of the British government arming Indonesia to repress the people of East Timor, and the role of imperialism in breaking up Yugoslavia, Benn goes a lot further than most on the left.

Weakness

The weakness of those on the left who oppose the bombing is that their only alternative is to appeal to the United Nations. However it was the UN's disunity that prevented it from acting as a fig leaf for imperialist intervention in the first place. They support neither Milosevic nor NATO, but rather than adopting a class approach they appeal to some abstract, non-existent, independent UN. All this in the name of a practical solution. In reality there is nothing more utopian than the argument of Alice Mahon that "we should get the United Nations in and start a peace confer-



ence...We should make the KLA and the Serbs sit around a table."

Ken Livingstone meanwhile proudly boasts that he was the first along with Thatcher to demand a bombing campaign against Milosevic. Seeking to justify his approval for this imperialist aggression, Livingstone informs us that the integrity of the former Yugoslavia was not worth defending since it was an artificial state created by imperialism! This artificial state it seems was kept afloat simply by the strength of personality of Tito - "a great statesman". Similarly it was destroyed by the self seeking nationalism of Milosevic. No-one can deny the role played by individuals in history, but this is akin to blaming the monstrosity of fascism on Hitler alone. Sure enough Livingstone, like many in the media, draw parallels between Milosevic and Hitler. This is meant to stir us into supporting military intervention. The Marxists in the Labour Party have consistently opposed Milosevic, which is more than can be said for those in the British and US governments who until a month ago described him as the saviour of peace in the Balkans.

"It is the duty" Livingstone argues, "of the nations that have the military power to protect individual communities from systematic genocide by evil regimes." There is not one shred of socialism in such a position. It is the duty of socialists everywhere to expose the role of NATO for what it is, to explain that imperialism never acted in the interests of workers or any oppressed people.

Tribune meanwhile has been content to play the role of mouthpiece for Blair. Their criticism of NATO consists of urging them to invade: "It is time that the bombing raids were replaced by preparations for a

land invasion of Kosovo, while continuing to seek every possibility for a negotiated settlement." (Tribune 23/4/99) The role of diplomat is to be played by the Russians, yet their position on the Balkans is opposed to the US. Their opposition to the bombing campaign is what has disabled the UN. All this rampant militarism we are informed is in the interests of "support for Kosovar self-determination," which they argue is "utterly consistent with (Tribune's) internationalist traditions."

Internationalism

There is not one shred of internationalism in supporting an imperialist bombing campaign or invasion. What self determination the Kosovars would have in a NATO protectorate - i.e. colony - is hard to see. Socialists must of course support the right of the Kosovars to self determination, but that has never meant automatic support for a struggle for independence. Independence in these circumstances can only lead to a Balkan war or worse. How can that be in the interests of the working class anywhere? The only way the Kosovars and all the other peoples of the Balkans can achieve their democratic right to self determination will be through the successful struggle for socialism internationally, and for a democratic, socialist federation of the Balkans in particular.

To end the atrocities which have spread across the Balkans the workers can trust only their own strength, their own solidarity, and their own organisations. The future of all oppressed peoples on the planet rests with the struggle for a socialist transformation of society internationally. That is the task which should unite the working class of all nationalities. It is the only practical policy.

No to NATO war: for a socialist federation

With every passing day the beat of the war drums gets louder. The pages of the newspapers, the television screens and radio broadcasts pour out a flood of propaganda aimed at whipping up a mood of bellicose hysteria. What intention lies behind this barrage? Only to blunt the minds and sensibilities of the populations of the countries of the North Atlantic alliance to that critical point where civilised men and women are prepared to accept the spectacle of a new and bloody eruption of the killing machine called NATO, and which, this time, will mean the shedding of blood not only by Kosovars and Serbs, but by French, British and American soldiers.

by Ted Grant and Alan Woods

The descent into war has exposed the essentially reactionary nature of the dismemberment of Yugoslavia and the hollowness, in the given context, of the slogan of so-called self-determination, which merely acts as a fig-leaf for the rallying of the most reactionary elements and the interference of imperialism in the lives of

the peoples. As throughout the history of the Balkans, behind each chauvinist clique stands one imperialist power or another. The sufferings of small peoples are just so much small change in the diplomacy of imperialism, and behind all the hypocritical talk of humanitarian and peacekeeping missions lies cynical calculation and self-interest.

War propaganda

US imperialism has no interest in the fate of the Albanian Kosovars, other than as raw material for war propaganda. But Washington is certainly interested in the outcome of the conflict in the Balkans. As the guardian of world imperialism, it feared that the conflict between the Kosovars and Belgrade would lead to the destabilisation of the whole region, leading to the break-up of Macedonia and a general Balkan war, involving not just Serbia and Albania, but also Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey. An all-out war in the Balkans would be a catastrophe. In particular, the prospect of war between two NATO member states, Greece and Turkey, horrified them.

The astonishing insolence of US imperialism was shown by the demands

made on Belgrade at the Rambouillet Conference. Basically, they amounted to the demand that a sovereign state, Yugoslavia, should allow its territory to be occupied by foreign troops (a NATO "peacekeeping" force). Such a demand is without precedent. It would only make sense after a defeat in war. Then, of course, the defeated country is obliged to accept foreign occupation. But to demand such a thing without a war (and, to this day, NATO has never formally even declared war on Yugoslavia!) is absolutely incredible. There is no way that Milosevic—or any other government in Belgrade—could have accepted such humiliating terms. To imagine such a thing was to display the most abysmal ignorance of the history, culture and psychology of the Serbian people. When Belgrade turned down these impositions, the immediate response of Washington was: "Accept our terms, or we will bomb you!" Such a threat had to be carried into practice, or NATO would have stood exposed to the entire world as a paper tiger.

Far from being the product of a cunning and far-sighted plan, the decision to bomb Yugoslavia, while publicly ruling out the use of ground troops was stupid and light-minded in the extreme. Clinton and his advisers thought nothing out, understood nothing, anticipated nothing. They seriously imagined that Milosevic, after a few raids, would wave the white flag. Apparently, this was the advice given to the President by the CIA. Like Joshua, who caused the walls of Jericho to tumble with a single blast on the trumpets, they would use their smart bombs and missiles to impose their will, with no risk of any NATO casualties. The experience of Iraq has taught these people nothing! One month later, Slobodan Milosevic is still firmly in place and shows no sign of capitulating.

Bombing has failed

NATO is celebrating its 50th anniversary with a humiliating defeat staring it in the face. That is why they are not only continuing the bombing but stepping it up. If they were to stop now, it would mean



Italy: First strike against the war

reports that the Americans are training KLA fighters. However, the reports make no mention of the numbers involved, and these will undoubtedly be too small to play anything but a symbolic and propaganda role.

So we are back to square one. A land invasion of Yugoslavia will represent a terrible blood bath, in which American and British troops will take most of the losses. Such a conflict could last a long time, and there is no guarantee that NATO would win. Henry Kissinger, in his submission to the Senate Armed Forces Committee said that he would never have gone into Kosovo, but having gone in, they must see it through. He warned that there would be "significant casualties" in a ground invasion, but that the real worry would be the losses sustained in a guerrilla war which would follow.

Scenario

This is not a very attractive scenario. Once they start thinking about it, they may have second thoughts. But so far they have thought nothing out. From the beginning they have made one blunder after another. Thus far, Milosevic has made better calculations than Clinton and Blair. But sooner or later reality will begin to dawn on even the thickest heads. It is possible that Washington may seek some kind of deal, probably using the services of Moscow. The imperialists may have to swallow their pride and accept a compromise. First, however, they will flatten Yugoslavia, then look to the Russians to sort something out which they can sign. They may even agree to put some money in to help reconstruction in Kosovo. After all, it would be cheaper than a war, and US companies will get the contracts.

Of course, in any such deal, the Kosovars will have to be sacrificed. These, in any case, were always expendable from the standpoint of imperialism. When Senator Inhofe was asked what would happen to them, he replied laconically: "I don't know." It was left to us to add the missing sub-clause, which really sums up Washington's attitude: "And I don't care."

War is the acid test of all political tendencies. The position taken by the

On 3rd April 100,000 people marched in a demonstration in Rome against the NATO bombing campaign in Yugoslavia. A week later another demonstration of over 50,000 took place. There is a lot of opposition to the NATO bombing among the workers and youth in Italy in spite of the government's support.

by *Fernando D'Alessandro*

There was a demonstration about 3,000 strong at the Aviano air base in Northern Italy. This is one of the bases the NATO warplanes are using. The demonstration was brutally attacked by the police who waded into the demonstrators with truncheons and fired tear-gas canisters.

There is widespread opposition to the bombing among the students, but even more important have been the developments in the labour movement. On Thursday, 22nd April, over 600 shop stewards gathered in the Milan CGIL trade union headquarters to take part in a national assembly called by forty factory councils. The meeting called on the national leadership of the three main trade union federations (CGIL, CISL and UIL) to organise a general strike against the war. They also decided to organise a series of mass meetings in the factories on the question.

What happened in the town of Massa, in Tuscany, is an indication of how the movement could develop. The official unions, CGIL, CISL and UIL, organised a four hour provincial general strike on 19th April. This was the first serious strike action called by the trade unions against the war. The national leadership seems less prepared to organise a serious movement, but the pressure could build up, especially if ground troops are sent in.

The number of people on the demonstration was 5,000. A large number of school teachers were there with a banner that had had some lines from a Bertold Brecht poem: "Among the vanquished the poor people went hungry, among the victors the poor people went hungry." Prior to the demonstration teachers and students had organised meetings in the schools on the war.

Apart from the teachers there were also blue collar workers from the factories, government workers, the pensioners union, the railway workers and the workers from the marble quarries of Carrara. Significantly, there was also a delegation on the demonstration from the SIULP (the police trade union!).

All this took place despite attempts on the part of the PDS (Party of the Democratic Left, one of the two parties that emerged from the split in the old Communist Party back in 1991) leaders to convince workers not to take part in the strike. As the provincial secretary of the CISL pointed out, "In taking this decision [to call the strike] I believe that the trade union movement has remained faithful to its traditions."

The PDS led government is using all its energies to convince the workers and youth of Italy that the bombing is for a just cause, but as the bombing intensifies, and especially if ground troops are sent in, opposition will grow.

The strike in Massa may just be the beginning.



right wing reformist leaders is no surprise. Schroeder, Jospin, and above all Blair, have become the most enthusiastic cheer leaders of US imperialism and NATO. The tendency of right reformism is only an expression of the pressures of big business in the ranks of the labour movement. War is only the continuation of politics by other means. At home, the labour leaders represent the interests of the banks and big monopolies. Abroad they stand for the interests of imperialism—especially US imperialism. Moreover, they tend to be far more servile in following the dictates of big business and imperialism than the ordinary bourgeois politicians.

Restrain

The new breed of right wing parvenus like Blair are even worse than the old Labour leaders. In all probability, Callaghan or Wilson would have attempted to quietly restrain Clinton, warn him of the consequences of going to war. But Blair is greedy for the plaudits of the reactionaries and anxious to prove his credentials as a loyal servant of America and a fearless representative of imperialism. Just as at home he is fearless when attacking single mothers and disabled people, while bowing and scraping to the City of London, so on the world stage he struts about, beating his chest and telling the President of the USA to stand firm.

against a small Balkan country. Even the other NATO leaders are embarrassed by the strident warmongering tone—and sheer stupidity—of this man.

In Britain, at the moment, there is general confusion. What opposition to the war exists is weak and mainly of a muddled and pacifist character. The supposedly left Tribune group is for the war. Michael Foot calls it the “most just war in history” (!) Ken Livingstone demands ground troops. These so-called lefts and former pacifists are the worst warmongers. Even the left wing Campaign Group is split 50:50 on the war. To his credit, Tony Benn has come out clearly against the war, but he does so on a pacifist basis, calling for the involvement of the (dis) United Nations. Tony Benn is the most courageous and sincere of the Labour Left in Britain. But appeals to so-called international law and the UN can solve nothing, and only serve to confuse the issue. Solon the Great, the author of the Athenian Constitution, once said: “The Law is like a spider’s web; the small are caught and the great tear it up.” All talk of international law, peace, morality and the rest of it is consigned to the dustbin the moment the vital interests of the big imperialist powers come into play. All serious questions are solved by force, and the final expression of force in international politics is war. One may disapprove of

this fact, but it remains a fact nonetheless. And to deny the facts is to deceive the people.

Where the vital interests of Imperialism are concerned, so-called international law is meaningless. The fact that Yugoslavia is very far from the North Atlantic, that Yugoslavia has not threatened the security or territorial integrity of any NATO state, and that, to this day, NATO has not declared war against Yugoslavia—these are just so many irrelevant details to Washington and London. Every day some new excuse is found, some new pretext produced to justify the one-sided onslaught on what was supposed to be a sovereign country. The hapless Kofi Annan looks on impotently. Despite all the tearful pleas of the middle-class pacifists and left reformists, the comically misnamed United Nations is powerless to resolve any question where the vital interests of the big powers are involved. The United Nations are treated with a well-deserved contempt by the USA and its partners in crime, who just swept it aside as a man would brush aside an irritating mosquito.

A socialist policy the only alternative

There is no solution to the problem of the Balkans on a capitalist basis. Those who try to find such a solution, those who abandon the class standpoint under the pretext of allegedly defending the right of self-determination of the Kosovars, inevitably fall into a reactionary position. The KLA relies completely on US imperialism. In practice, it has become an instrument of US imperialism in the Balkans. Hence, concretely, the demand for self-determination for Kosovo in the given context signifies—and can only signify—the establishment of a US protectorate in what was part of the territory of Yugoslavia.

Some so-called Marxists have defended the bombing of Yugoslavia on the grounds of self-determination for the Kosovars. We have the spectacle of some of the sects, shouting “arm the KLA” demonstrating alongside Albanians carrying NATO flags. Others who also call themselves Marxists have called, not for an independent Kosovo, but for a socialist independent Kosovo. This is really amusing. In the given circumstances, an independent Kosovo could only be brought



about on American bayonets, and as an American imperialist protectorate. (The Albanian Kosovars themselves understand this very well, which is why they demonstrate with NATO flags, and demand that NATO bombs and invades Yugoslavia). But, say these wiseacres, this must have a socialist character! Such an idea would have the NATO strategists helpless with laughter, if only they bothered to read such stuff, which we doubt very much. We repeat. To abandon the class standpoint, no matter how you twist and turn, will land you in the camp of reaction.

Betrayed

In any case, it is clear that the Kosovars will be betrayed by Washington the moment it realises that the price of establishing a protectorate is far greater than was supposed. The Kosovars, having been cynically used by the imperialists for their own purposes, will be thrown aside like a dirty rag the moment they are no longer useful. The only slogan that can meet the needs, not only of the Kosovars, but of all the peoples of the Balkans is the slogan of a Socialist Federation of the Balkans. Only by overthrowing the reactionary chauvinist cliques which have plunged the region into war and misery can the conditions be established for the establishment of a democratic socialist regime that alone could guarantee the rights of all the peoples, including the right to self-determination.

Throughout history the demand for self-determination has been used, not only by revolutionaries, but also by reactionaries and imperialists to justify the dismemberment of states and cloak their aggressive intentions. It is necessary to distinguish in any given situation what is progressive and what is reactionary. In the given situation, considered concretely, the demand for so-called self determination for the Kosovars has been filled with a reactionary content. Not to see this elementary fact is to fall into a reactionary position and act, in practice, as the cheerleaders of US imperialism.

We are for the fullest autonomy for the Kosovars within Yugoslavia. At the moment that is the most they can achieve. Only a revolution can bring about the necessary conditions for the real social and national emancipation of the Kosovars and all other Balkan peoples. The only

demand that can solve the problem is the demand for a Socialist Federation of the Balkans. This slogan is getting an echo, even now, on the Balkans.

At the moment, the Serbian working class is disoriented by the war. The internationalist elements will be in a small minority. But that will change.

The opposition to Milosevic is only temporarily muted because of the war, but later on there will be a massive reaction against the regime which combined a pro-capitalist policy of privatisation and the enrichment of the elite with chauvinist poison that has dragged the Serbian people into a bloody morass. The masses will understand that the policies pursued by Milosevic have led them from one disaster to another. After the war, there will be a growing realisation that along this road only new catastrophes are possible. The idea of a socialist federation will be the more readily assimilated because, for all its faults, the old Yugoslavia was much better than the present nightmare. The first need is for a real socialist policy and a radical break with capitalism, privatisation and the so-called free market which spells misery for the masses and enrichment for the few.

Internationalist

Socialist Appeal is proud of the stand we have taken on the Balkans question. Not one of the other tendencies approach the war from a class point of view. Only the Marxist tendency has held a firm class position on the Balkans from the very first. Seven years ago we explained the whole process and predicted the outcome. We have stood firm in defence of a consistent internationalist line, when all other trends capitulated to nationalism in one form or another. In a war, that tendency that has clear ideas and is willing to fight against the stream stands to gain most. We are the only tendency with correct theory, tactics and orientation. In the new situation the audience for the ideas of Marxism and internationalism will grow.

Spanish students against NATO

Thousands of students participated yesterday (April 20th) in Spain in a national day of action against the bombing of Yugoslavia. The protest was called by the Students Union (Sindicato de Estudiantes). The students participated in meetings in the schools to discuss a resolution drafted by the Students Union opposing NATO's intervention against Yugoslavia and proposing a Socialist Federation of the Balkans with full democratic rights for all nationalities as the only way forward for the people of the Balkans.

Under the slogan of "Not a bullet, not a soldier, not a cent for the imperialist war" hundreds of students also participated in rallies all over Spain. At the moment of writing this information is still coming in, but we can already report that 1,500 students participated in the rally in Madrid, 500 in Barcelona, 400 in Tarragona, 100 in Seville, 150 in Granada, 150 in Malaga, 50 in Vitoria and similar numbers in Guadalajara, Marbella and Aviles.

The Students Union is calling for the setting up of anti-war committees in every school and faculty to organise opposition to NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia, which as they say "is not for humanitarian reasons and will not solve any of the problems of the people of the Balkans"

The Spanish Students Union has a proud record of struggle and a long history of internationalism and anti-imperialism having organised in the past campaigns in solidarity with the struggle of workers and youth in South Africa (during the apartheid regime), with the Palestinian intifada, with the Mexican youth, and is now organising a speaking tour with an Indonesian socialist in solidarity with the Indonesian revolution.

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'Collateral damage' and the workers of the Zastava factory

As the failure of NATO's bombing campaign in Yugoslavia becomes increasingly clear, the number of civilian casualties of this so-called "precision bombing" grows. Yesterday, (Monday April 12) at least ten people were killed and 16 injured after a Nato missile hit a passenger train as it crossed a bridge in south-east Serbia. According to a Press Association wire "reporters taken to the scene by Yugoslav authorities described scattered human limbs, smashed rail carriages and the stench of burning flesh." Western military officials said that the target was a rail bridge above a river that the train "happened to be on at the time."

This is just another example of the cynicism of NATO generals who have set out to flatten Yugoslavia without caring about civilian casualties or as they are called in military speak "collateral damage". It seems that the train just "happened to be" on the bridge at the time. So much for the "extraordinary measures to avoid collateral casualties" which NATO claims to have taken.

Last week NATO tried to blame the Serb forces for the destruction in Pristina.

In a bitterly outrageous twist, NATO's slimy "spin doctors" suggested that "Serb forces themselves blew up the town." (CNN 99/04/09). Later on Air Commodore, David Wilby, Nato's military spokesman, was forced to change his version and described the bomb, which hit a residential area in Pristina, as having apparently been "seduced off the target"(!). We could even accept that one of these "smart bombs" failed to hit its target, but "seduced off the target"!!?

There are many examples of NATO's bombs hitting hospitals, residential areas, people's backyards, etc. This is also a reflection of the frustration of Western generals about the failure of their campaign.

NATO missile

Last Saturday (April 10th) more than 120 workers from the Zastava car factory in Kragujevac were wounded by one of NATO's missiles. Was that another "mistake"? Did they "seduce" the missile to the factory? Far from it. The workers at the Zastava factory had publicly announced in a communiqué that they would be occupying the site:

"At the shift end, even at the alarm

sound, the Zastava workers did not leave their workshops, but remained to protect with their bodies what provides for their and their families' living, that which they have built in years-long honest work in order to provide for their better future."

They published that statement on March 27th almost two full weeks before NATO's attack. To avoid any confusion they even made known their exact location: "Herewith we advise you that also henceforth, as long as the war operations go on, we shall remain within the factory area of 305 hectares, at 44° N and 20° E." That was therefore not a mistake, an unfortunate error, but a deliberate act of aggression which could have caused the death of many of the 35,000 workers who usually work at Zastava.

But the bombing of this factory, the biggest in Kragujevac, is even more significant because of the militant traditions of its workers who two and a half years ago were involved in a bitter strike to save their jobs during which they raised the idea of self-management of the factory. This is what we said then:

"The discontent of the working class was revealed by the strikes which have occurred on and off for the last twelve months, including health workers, tractor workers and even the employees of the law courts. The most important strike was that of the big Zastava car and small arms factory in Kragujevac last September. The workers' slogan at the beginning was "We want jobs and bread," but later became "Serbia, raise your head!" This reflects a growing understanding that the workers' problems can only be solved by a fundamental change in Serbian society. But this does not signify a counter-revolutionary trend, but quite the opposite direction, as reflected in the article "Strike at Kragujevac: the Price of Hesitation" which appeared in *Ekonomska Politika* on 23rd of September 1996:

"There is a danger, and it must be said, that this worker rebellion will be described as a 'movement in the opposite direction.' Slogans like 'We are Zastava,' 'The factory is ours' and the like evoke the deep-seated view of the self-management platform. The return of the economy

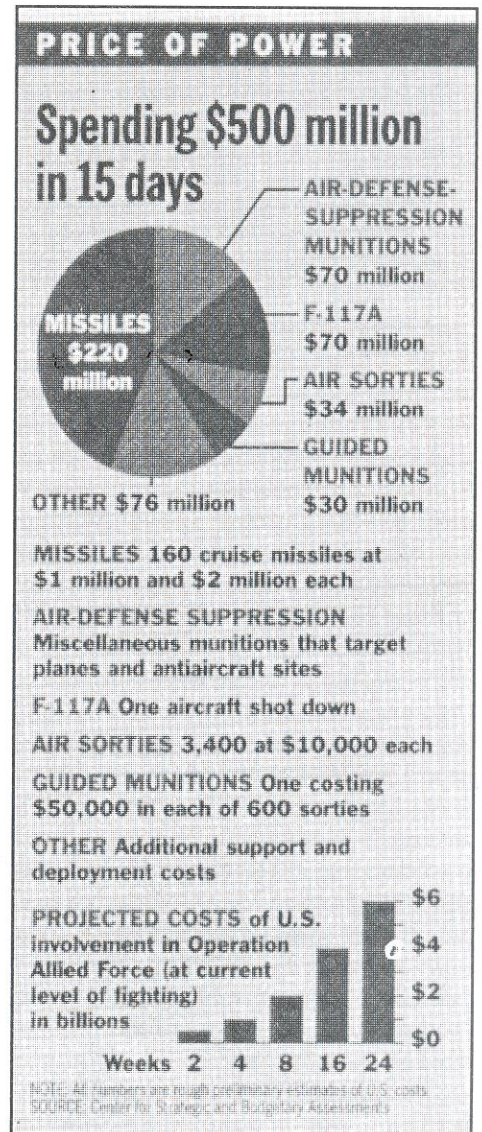
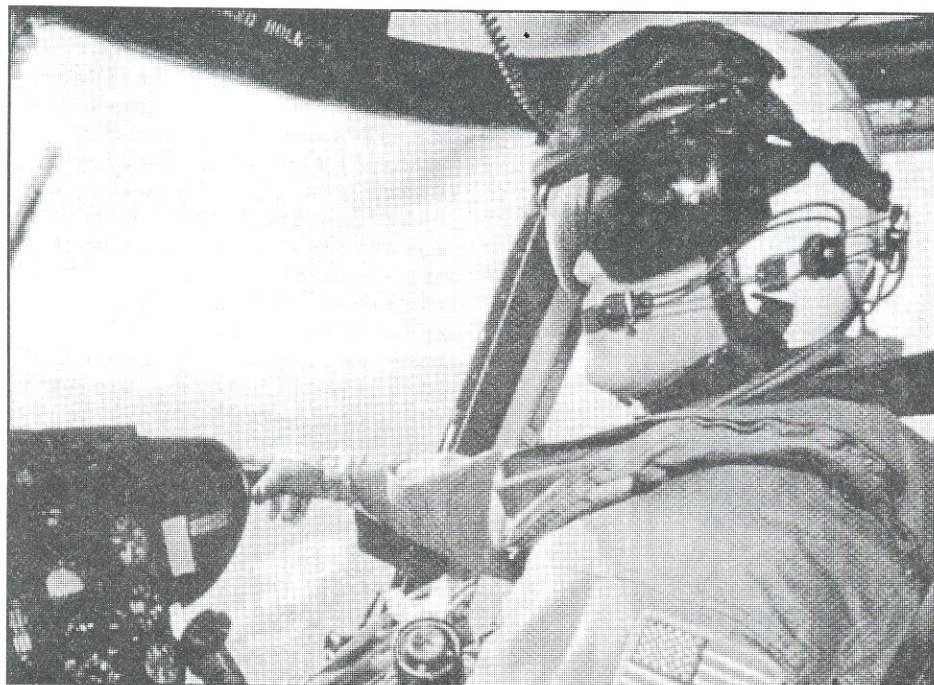


to self-management and Kardeljism could, if taken superficially, get the workers' demands dismissed. The fiercest slogan of self-management socialism, 'Factories to the workers!' - while it may be the highest reach of a utopia - remained with the 'energy potential which changes the world.' The destruction of socialism throughout the Eastern bloc with all its consequences was impressive enough to remove any illusion about the possibility of turning back the clock. However, the sinking to these slogans on the part of the workers in Kragujevac reveals something else: It is actually an attempt to disqualify the environment constituting the economic system and those who have declared themselves to be its custodians, in order to get on a road which leads to a definitive surmounting of the crisis.' (Ekonomska Politika September 23rd, 1996) "These words are significant. The author is clearly a pro-capitalist economist, who is hostile to the workers' class slogans, which he regards as retrograde ("a movement in the opposite direction"). The workers are indeed seeking a way out of the crisis, but they approach it from the class point of view of the proletariat. Behind the demand for workers' self-management ("The factory is ours") is the correct idea that the only way out of the economic chaos is by the workers taking the running of industry and

society into their own hands." ("Serbia: Democracy or Counter-revolution" Alan Woods, London 9/1/97, <http://www.marxist.com/Europe/Serbia.html>)

These are the workers now being bombed by NATO. Are these targets also approved by Tony Blair and George Robertson who recently said they gave the green light to "all targets of the bombing campaign"? That would not surprise us at all. The last thing these "humanitarian" gentlemen want is a working class opposition to Milosevic. At the time of the mass demonstrations against Milosevic two years ago the Marxists already warned that there was nothing progressive about the leaders of that movement. We insisted that the removal of Milosevic's pro-capitalist regime was the task of the Yugoslav workers themselves. Two years after the leaders of the then "democratic" (read pro-capitalist) opposition are in Milosevic's government (including Vuk Draskovic) and NATO is bombing the Zastava workers who fought under the slogan "The factory is ours". Hardly surprising.

In the meantime Tony Blair insisted: "We will carry on, we will carry on pounding day after day until our objectives are secured".



1649: Britain's first socialists

There has been considerable interest this year in noting 1999 as being the 350th anniversary of the execution of Charles I. Again we have been invited to feel great sorrow at this very "un-British" act of disposing of our monarch whose only crime, evidently, was to be a bit stubborn. Such twaddle as this belongs with the old school textbook fictions of the English Civil War as being a conflict between cheery whimsical Cavaliers and grim-faced, puritanical Roundheads.

by Steve Jones

The bourgeoisie are quite happy with this interpretation because, by treating the conflict as some sort of mad aberration, it avoids the issue of what it really was—a struggle by one social order to overthrow another. In this case a struggle of those who would in time become the capitalist class against the old feudal forces of the King, the upper gentry and the other mediaeval relics who, through church and royal court, controlled the state. In essence it was a revolutionary struggle which changed fundamentally the balance of class forces within society.

It is not the purpose of this article to

provide a general analysis or history of the 17th Century English Civil War, or English Revolution as it should more correctly be described, but rather to look at two specific events whose anniversaries have also fallen, along with King Charles' head, this year. They involve two groups who have largely been airbrushed out of history—the Levellers and the True Diggers, more commonly known as the Diggers. The so-called last stand of the Levellers at Burford and the establishment of the Diggers' colony at St. George's Hill, Walton-on-Thames both took place 350 years ago this year and deserve to be remembered by all in the Labour and trade union movement.

Before continuing, it is important for socialists to recognise and defend the standing of these groups as part of our history and our movement. In recent years there has been a tendency for various anarchist and new-age traveller groups to seek to adopt the Diggers, in particular, for their own. This is a travesty, the Levellers and the Diggers were comprised of men and women of the 17th Century seeking to look forward from their own position, limited only by the conventions and attitudes of the time rather than any desire to idealise the conditions they lived in. They would have laughed at the efforts of various groups today to copy or mimic them - looking backward rather than forward.

We should also note the efforts of various right wing so-called libertarian groups who seek to adopt the Levellers especially. They see the statements and actions of some of the Leveller leaders in particular (for example on free trade) as supporting their view of the need for unrestricted capitalism, free to exploit and plunder at will. Of course the Levellers were a broad based organisation who incorporated many strands of thought across the political spectrum. Unlike the Diggers they were primarily concerned with political reforms but they also in time came to take up social and economic issues and reforms. Some of their ranks later merged into the new middle classes but as an organisation they have nothing in common with those modern day apologists for reaction who now seek to make use of them for entirely different purposes.

So who were these Levellers? Bourgeois historians looking at this period

THE Declaration and Standard

Of the Levellers of England;
Delivered in a Speech to his Excellency the Lord Gen. Fairfax,
on Friday last at White-Hall, by Mr. Everard, a late Member of the
Army, and his Prophetic in reference hereunto; shewing what will
befall the Nobility and Gentry of this Nation, by their submitting to
Community; With their invitation and promise unto the people, and
their proceedings in Windsor park, Oarlands park, and severall other
places; also, the Examination and confession of the said Mr. Everard
before his Excellency, the manner of his deportment with his Hacon,
and his severall speeches and expressions, when he was commanded
to put it off. Together with a List of the severall Regiments of Horse
and Foot that have call'd Lots to go for Ireland.



Imprinted at London, for G. Laurinjon, April 23. 1649.

tend to emphasise the roles and actions of the main players in the conflict; Cromwell, Charles I, the opposing generals and so on. They have tended to argue that most people in England were not involved, did not care about the struggles and in fact stayed well out of it. In other words it was just a conflict formed from a division of - and just involving - the ruling classes. This is true up to a point but to deny the part played by countless thousands of other people from all walks of life would be an injustice. Not only did they fight and die in what was a particularly bloody conflict, many were also profoundly affected and/or politically inspired. Indeed the England of the mid 17th century was an England awash with pamphlets and tracts reflecting the ferment taking place within all levels of society. The Levellers (and later the Diggers) were just one expression of this.

Alliance

They were formed in 1645 as an initially informal alliance of agitators, based around the Radical Independent Party of John Lilburne, as a reaction to the attempts of the more conservative Presbyterian elements in parliament to impose their views. They go down as one of the first organised political movements in history which elected officers and collected membership subscriptions. Lilburne, a Lieutenant-Colonel in the army who resigned his commission over the Presbyterians' attempts to force all officers to sign a Solemn League and Covenant, was joined by William Walwyn and Richard Overton. Their demands for religious and political freedoms were in direct conflict to the more conservative side of the parliamentary forces who feared the radicalism of the forces below them, particularly in the army.

Before continuing it is critical to understand the importance attached to religious questions in the 17th Century. Religion was very much at the centre of peoples lives. Heaven and hell were as real to them as roads and TVs are to us. This was a time when many not only believed in what the Christian religion taught them but also believed in the powers of magic, strange forces and apparitions. Witch trials increased greatly during this period as people sought an explanation for the great convulsions taking place. Given the central role of religion it was inevitable

that the question of religious rights would be taken very seriously indeed. The material and religious causes commingled inseparably, to quote Trotsky, who studied the period with reference to his history of the Russian Revolution. Political arguments, as we shall see, would often be posed in religious terms, examples from the Bible would be used as comparisons to current and historical events and it would be often used to back opposing arguments and positions. For example, it was common to talk of *"the Egyptian bondage"*, or *"the Babylonian yoke"*, both as an allusion to the belief that all our rights had been taken away from us by the Norman conquest but also as a means of identify the exploitation of the poor by the rich and powerful.

With the ending of the first phase of the civil war in March of 1647, the parliamentary army was left in a state of turmoil with agitator representatives (reflecting the rank and file) raising demands for democratic reform and religious freedom. A great representative meeting of the army took place in Putney from October 28th to November 11th, at which the direction society should go in was debated. The representatives were split between Lilburne's supporters, now called the Levellers, and the more conservative elements around the senior officers, or Grandees as they were known. The Levellers were defeated in the vote, having presented their programme 'The Agreement Of The People', and the debates were terminated by Cromwell with the delegates being returned to their regiments.

However Cromwell was still having to travel a middle path between the radical elements within the army and the conservative Presbyterians, who he feared still wished to compromise with the now imprisoned King. With the escape of the King the civil war entered its second phase. Throughout 1648 the political ferment continued as the Kings forces were defeated and the monarch rearrested. The harvest had failed and the economy was in crisis. In the end, despite talks of compromise between the Levellers and the Grandees, Cromwell moved decisively to consolidate power. In December of 1648, Presbyterian MPs were barred from the House of Commons ('Prides Purge') and the King was tried and executed the following January for treason. Having

defeated the threat from the right, Cromwell moved to crush the threat from the Left. The Leveller programme had been rejected again at the Whitehall debates, held from December 14th 1648 to January 13th, 1649 and Cromwell felt confident enough to act.

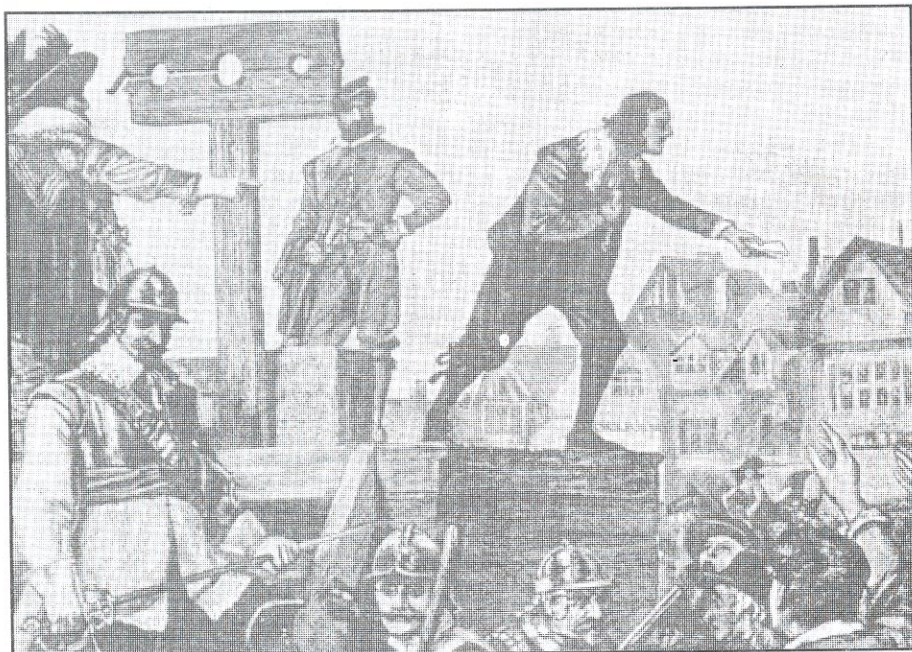
In February, the Grandees banned the right of soldiers to present petitions, an act which earned opposition from the Leveller leaders, especially since unlike today petitions actually meant something and had to be taken seriously by parliament. In *"England's New Chains Discovered"*, Lilburne attacked the arbitrary powers of the Grandees and the new Council Of State which had assumed executive authority under Cromwell. The Council responded to this on March 28th by arresting Lilburne and the other Leveller leaders for treason. Having arrested them, the Council had to decide what to do with them. Some argued for the death penalty but other were fearful of the reaction from the masses. With good reason.

Within four days of the arrest, a petition was presented to the House of Commons, signed by 10,000 people, demanding a fair trial. A series of demonstrations took place, including one of several hundred women who only dispersed after the Speaker of the Commons personally assured them that the prisoners would be given fair trials.

Rebellion

In the army too, rebellion was starting to show its head. Opposition was growing to the conflict in Ireland and several hundred troops refused to go to fight. However, democracy in the army had been virtually eliminated. A mutiny in London in April over pay was defeated and its Leveller leader, Robert Lockyer, executed. He died showing no sign of fear and thousands attended his funeral, dressed in the sea-green colours of the Levellers, including many from the army.

The Levellers called for the army to once again elect delegates and not to move from their posts. In May Leveller soldiers in Aylesbury and Banbury mutinied and forces refused to go beyond Salisbury which they had reached on May 1st. At Banbury, a character called William Thompson, leading a Leveller force of over 300 troops and civilians, issued a manifesto calling for political and



economic reforms to abolish poverty and injustice as well as the release of the Leveller leaders—or else! Although the Banbury force was broken up, Thompson was able to battle through and escape. Cromwell now had to be careful, many of the troops he assembled at Hyde Park to deal with the mutinous forces at Salisbury, themselves wore Leveller colours on their uniforms. Cromwell made concessions stating that arrears in pay would be made good and political reform implemented. He also made overtures of negotiation to the Salisbury regiment to stop them linking up with other troops. This was a delaying tactic.

On the 14th of May, Cromwell's force of 2,000 caught up with the mutineers who were now billeted in the village of Burford. Overnight they were defeated with virtually no resistance, 350 were captured and 500 escaped never to rally again. Three of the arrested soldiers were sentenced to death and they were shot in the Churchyard at Burford. They died, like Robert Lockyer, bravely, refusing to refute their cause and ideals. It was a critical blow in determining the balance of forces.

The Leveller leaders in prison continued with their struggle, writing and releasing the remarkable manifesto, the third edition of *'The Agreement of The People'*, but were clearly starting to feel the pres-

sure. Deserted by their supporters in parliament and with their forces in the army now defeated, the situation seemed hopeless. Destroyed by personal tragedy, Lilburne was a broken man and he was allowed to leave prison during the hours of daylight. However conflict reemerged in the army, as well as in society (including a demonstration of 5,000 miners) and new mutinies took place, including one of Leveller soldiers in Oxford in September. Lilburne and the others rallied again with new spirit.

Draconian laws were passed in October to restrict the right to publish and in effect seeking to totally control everything that was printed. A campaign was launched by the government to politically crush the Levellers and in October, Lilburne was finally, after much delay, brought to trial on the charge of treason. Lilburne's defence was brilliant and had the prosecution tied up in knots, as he made one defence after another. It was too much for the jury who, when called to give its verdict, declared not guilty. Apparently throughout the City, church bells were rung and bonfires lit in celebration. The other Leveller leaders were released from prison during November. But it was not to be the start of a new dawn for the Levellers. Their forces declined and many of their leaders left politics or continued to struggle but this

time as isolated individuals. The establishment retrenched themselves, fearful of the revolutionary forces they had unleashed in their struggle for power against the King and what he represented, and in time would reestablish the Monarchy, albeit on their terms now. Lilburne himself was rearrested and tried several times on various charges. He spent his last years physically much weakened and converted to Quakerism, but ironically with a pension of 40s a week granted to him by a guilty feeling Cromwell, and died on August 29th 1657. He was buried in London at Moorfields.

Radical

Although the Levellers were clearly the predominant radical political movement of the English revolution they were not the only ones. So let's turn to look at the other anniversary in question and consider the New Levellers or Diggers as they are generally known.

The economic convulsions of the 17th century had not only affected the equilibrium between the old feudal orders and the new ranks of landowners and merchants, who would form the core of the two opposing sides in the conflict, they had also greatly disturbed the masses below them. The ending of serfdom (which had all but disappeared by the fifteenth century) and the resultant decline of the old mediaeval feudal bonds between master and servant, had created a new layer of unattached "masterless men" who moved around from place to place, landless and crushed by the greed of the rich and wealthy. Many of these would end up in the now expanding cities and would in time form the first layers of the nascent working class. Others roamed the countryside, virtually as vagabonds. However land had been, and was continuing to be enclosed, by the landowning ruling classes. The old rights of common land were under attack just as an ever increasing number of people were in desperate need of it. In the political turmoil of 17th Century England, the conditions were ripe for the ideas of the Diggers.

The Diggers were just one of a number of groups who sought to take action over the question of land. That we remember this particular group above others is primarily down not only to their courage and idealism but also because they had a voice to express themselves in

the form of Gerrard Winstanley. And what a voice! In his works can be found some of the most beautifully argued writings for what we would now recognise as socialism in the English language. Born in 1609, he was evidently not uneducated, having had a grammar school education. By the end of the civil war, employed to look after cattle, he had the time both to think and to write. As stated above they were primarily written in a very religious style (he had started to embrace a form of mystic pantheism), using the Bible, but the meaning was clear. Winstanley argued that the fall of man came not at the Garden of Eden but rather when Cain fought Abel over who owned what. For Winstanley, the belief that all must live equally under the rule of The Great Creator Reason (as he came to term God) in the Common Treasury, which is earth, was fundamental. Initially, he was concerned primarily with expressing his religious thoughts alone but as 1648 came to an end he began to think about politics. His work, *"The New Law Of Righteousness"* (published in January 1649) has been called the Communist Manifesto of its day and clearly outlines, once you 'translate' his meanings from the religious, the need for a new society. He had also had contact with the Leveller groups in the Chiltern and Thames Valley areas and had assisted them in their writings. Enthused by the revolutionary ferment of the times and enraged by the wastage of the land by their new owners, Winstanley decided to take action.

Labourers

On April 1st 1649, he joined a band of poor labourers, barely a dozen in all, led by one William Everard in occupying a plot of waste land at St George's Hill outside London. They began to dig upon it (hence the name) and to operate as a commune, building huts and planting, all working as equals in an attempt to show how society could and should be. They were to be one of a number of such Digger communes established during this period. According to Brian Manning in *'Aristocrats, Plebeians and Revolution in England'* (Pluto Press, 1996, page 116): "...communes appeared in ten or so places, including... Enfield in Middlesex, and Wellingborough in Northamptonshire..." and also at nearby St Margaret's Hill.

Many of these communes did not last long, their histories and fates unrecorded. But the commune at St George's Hill lasted for nearly a year, standing up against hardship and pressure from outside as the local landowners sought to crush this threat to their wealth. The original leader, Everard, did not stay long (although the numbers on the site grew to 50 or so) and left to join—as fate would have it—the Leveller mutiny making its last stand at Burford, but Winstanley stayed on. He became their voice against the attacks of the local landowners and the army.

Organised groups of thugs were dispatched to break up the commune but the Diggers stood their ground and repaired the damage caused. The army was reluctant to get involved but the local gentry pressed them for action. A joint attack by the army and local landowners in June caused serious damage but with great effort they were able to carry on. The strength of their ideas, and the belief that the time would soon come when all would abandon private property and join them, maintained their spirits. Efforts were made to stop the Diggers from selling wood and funds had to be raised by appeals for donations from sources throughout the country.

The landowners did not go away however and set about using the law, which then as now was heavily weighted in favour of the rich, to try and remove the commune. The Diggers were forced to move their site to unenclosed land attached to nearby Cobham manor but the pressure from the landowners did not relent. The Diggers were isolated and subject to constant attack. The courts pressed the army to finally evict the Diggers and destroy their site and having done so the commune was dispersed in March of 1650. Winstanley continued to write and in late 1651 summarised his views in a document called *"The Law Of Freedom."* Here he clearly outlined his belief in the need for a communist society in which all was commonly owned and used for the benefit of all based on their needs. He attacked the church and defended secularism in all things. Written long before the Industrial revolution—and obviously therefore recognising the concerns of the time—it is one of the earliest examples of what we would now call socialist thought. Little is known of Winstanley's fate thereafter and his death

has not been recorded.

There is one postscript to this story which we should note. Nowadays the site of the Diggers commune is home to one of the most wealthy and exclusive private housing estates in the country. A number of demonstrators have occupied the open land on the estate seeking to force the tenants to allow a monument to Winstanley and the Diggers to be erected. Needless to say they have refused and, as I write, are seeking to get the demonstrators ejected, monument and all.

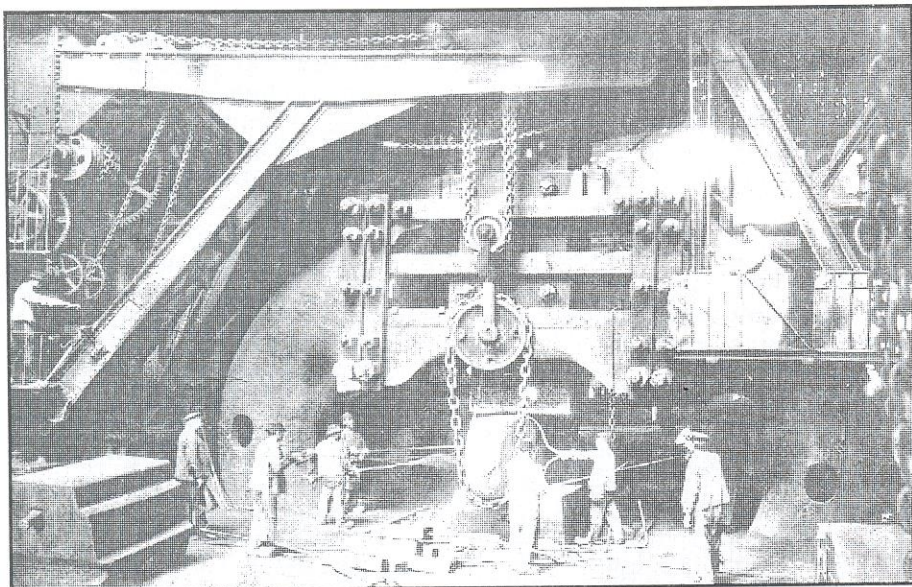
The Diggers have been called religious pacifists or proto-hippies (indeed the name was adopted by one such group in 1960s San Francisco), depending on your point of view, but they were neither. Winstanley often talked of the need for struggle, physical if need be, against the class enemy. To quote Brian Manning again: *"The aim of the Diggers was not to opt out of society but to revolutionise it"* (op. Cit. Page 116).

Convictions

The Levellers at Burford and the Diggers at Cobham showed what ordinary people were prepared to do if required by the strength of their convictions. What would the likes of Winstanley have been able to do if they had been able to draw on the forces of the mighty proletariat created by the growth of capital and organised in the ranks of the Labour and trade union movement? Lilburne, Winstanley and the others were men (and women, since they too were involved) before their time. Their sacrifice and courage should reinforce us in the belief that not only can society be changed but that there has always been and always will be people prepared to do it.

Gerald Winstanley: *"Wherever there is a people... united by a common community of livelihood into oneness. It will become the strongest land in the world: for they will be as one man to defend their inheritance... when the earth becomes a common treasury again, as it must... then the enmity of all lands will cease, and none shall dare to seek domination over others..."*

And now introducing... Marx



This is actually a reissue of the *Marx For Beginners* book, complete with a new title (and a rise in coverprice), by Ruis, which was first published in the mid 1970s and has generally remained in print on and off ever since then. Indeed it has spawned a whole series of similar style books from the same publisher covering a wide variety of subjects, generally aspects of history, politics or philosophy but also art, literature etc. You suspect that they would have liked to have renamed the book *Marx For Dummies*, but copyright on the franchise title would prevent that. No matter anyway, this is not a book for dummies.

The method which this book uses is such an obvious one that it was surprising that no-one thought to use it before (although many have tried it since). Combining cartoons and other images with a large dollop of humour this book attempts to present an overall summary of what Marxism is, and why, in a way which can be easy understood, particularly by someone who has not come across Marxist material before.

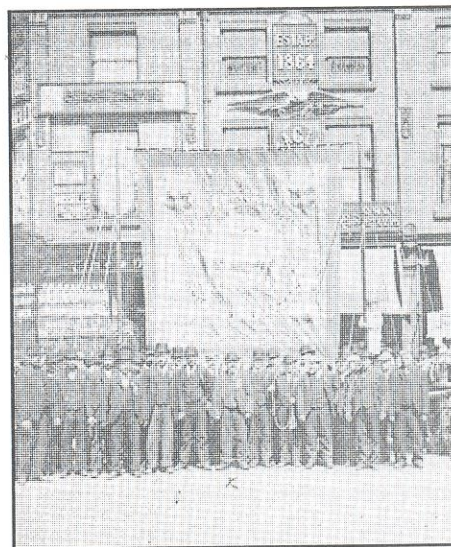
Starting with an overview of Marx's life it goes on to look at the roots of his ideas with a review of how philosophy developed prior to Marx. We are led to the point where Marx takes up the philosophical issues and states: "philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."

From here we look at the philosophy of Marx, Marxist economics and historical materialism. Showing these three questions as branches of the same tree is a very good way of reminding us of how these various ideas are interlinked and dependent on each other. Finally the book looks at how Marxist ideas have affected the world and why workers have struggled to implement them. The final words are left to Lenin as he states: ".... *The teaching of Marx is all-powerful because it is true. It is complete and harmonious, providing men with a consistent view of the universe, which cannot be reconciled with any superstition, any reaction, any defence of bourgeois oppression. It is the lawful successor of the best that has been created by humanity...*" (from '3 sources and 3 component parts of Marxism', 1913).

The book, which has not been updated from the 70s, nevertheless is an excellent introduction to the basic concepts of Marxist ideas and Marx himself. It comes complete with a very useful glossary of terms and people and a rather less useful guide to further reading. Snobs may not like this book but anyone wanting to find a good starting point could do worse than buy this book. A word of warning however. As the book proceeds it finds itself having to compromise its principles rather by printing ever larger chunks of text from the writings of Marx etc. This is unavoidable —at the end of the day there can be no real shortcuts to gaining a full

understanding of Marxism other than to read the actual writings themselves. A study of the *Communist Manifesto* (available in a number of editions, including one from Socialist Appeal at £1.30 per copy including postage) is essential, to be followed by a review of all the key writings. These are generally available in pamphlet form and also in the *Marx/Engels selected works* in one volume, published by Lawrence & Wishart. Readers interested in developing their understanding of the concepts which underpin Marxist philosophy should also look at part one of Wellred's book "Reason in Revolt" (an advert for which appears elsewhere in this journal), which looks at this. It is essential that anyone wishing to gain an understanding of what is happening in the world, and what needs to be done to change it, remembers that books like this are not the last word but rather a launching point into the rich treasury of scientific socialism which Marx with Engels developed and which has been added to by Lenin, Trotsky and the other defenders of Marxism up to and including the present day. As the book's backcover states, "great thinkers like Marx do not go away. Soon enough, he will be rediscovered..." We agree and if books like this help others to at least consider this issue then its republishing, under what ever title they like, has been worthwhile.

**Introducing Marx
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role of Lenin as its principal guiding force.

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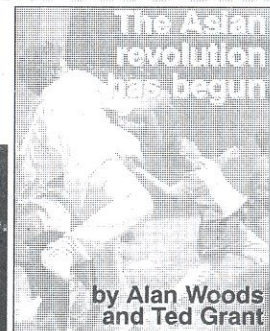
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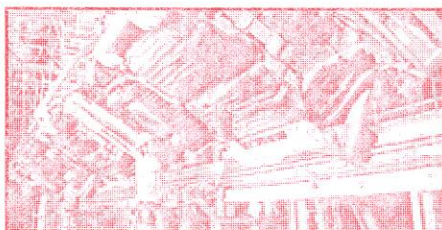
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