WELCOME as improved childcare undoubtedly is, it doesn't justify the attack on single parent benefit.

While a package of £300m for after-school care is important, there remains the need for much greater investment in affordable child care provision, available when parents need it - and that isn't just after school.

The package of training for 50,000 young people to become carers also merits close scrutiny - if the Louise Woodward case has taught us anything it is that care of children is a skilled job and needs to be treated as such.

Warming though the increase in cold weather payments for pensioners is, they won't compensate for the real decrease in the value of pensions since the link with earnings was broken.

Gordon Brown's fine words that he is "simply not prepared to allow another winter to go by when pensioners are fearful of turning up their heating because they do not know whether they will have the help they need with their fuel bills" will cut little ice with pensioners' groups campaigning hard to restore that link.

Tony Benn was correct to criticise the Chancellor's mini-budget for having "no element of redistribution". We all know that it won't be company directors that are hit by Brown's pleas against high wage increases, but working people - and even more so those on benefits.

Plans were unveiled for the most substantial overhaul of the welfare state since its introduction, with the welfare to work proposals as the centrepiece.

The abolition of family credit and its replacement with tax credits has already been met with fierce attacks by those who argue that it will lead not only to the overworking of recently-found tax independence for married women, but to money being spent by men rather than on the children for whom it is intended.

In order to mount a serious response to these attacks and others before them on the whole idea of the welfare state it is necessary to understand those who are its enemies.

 Blair's New Labour Government is mounting such a vicious attack on the so-called "dependency culture" it even makes Maggie seem a bit of a liberal. Fees for students is one side of this
Students fight against fees

IN A LIVELY demonstration of over 10,000 on November 24, thousands showed their anger at Labour’s plans to abolish student grants and introduce tuition fees.

The demonstration called "unofficial, but effective," by the Central Federation of Education (CFFE) showed the potential for a mass campaign that could dictate the government’s progress.

Unfortunately, the "New Labour" leadership of NUS is doing all they can to sabotage any campaigning. The NUS claims it has replaced some NUS officers and national demonstrations against tuition fees, it was clear that this was only because they felt they had to be seen to be doing something.

Limiting role

If the NUS hadn’t organised these demonstrations, then students would have been left isolated. At the same time, the NUS leadership did all it could to limit student anger, rather than providing a lead.

On all the regional demos NUS did very little to mobilise students, but did try and control the slogans shouted, and did produce its own placards opposing tuition fees.

But most clearly the demos show that the overwhelming majority of students are opposed to the scrapping of student grants. Whilst the NUS leadership have themselves already benefited from the grant system, they are quite happy to sell it while away before leaving them with years of debt.

Whilst students must demand that the NUS leadership fight for the interest of all students, there is the definite possibility of a leadership out of touch with its membership ever reforming itself — rather, it must be replaced.

November’s CFE demo has shown that there is potential to mobilise students even in the face of the opposition of NUS.

A new, militant student leadership can be built from the bottom up, by building campaigns within colleges, schools and universities and housing the anger that already exists into a mass movement.

To join the CFE write to Helen Grayson, The Union Society, Newcastle University, Newcastle UP 1. Or phone 0958 556 756.

Left prepares to fight in new civil service union

Darren Williams
Branch Secretary, CPSA ONS Newport, personal capacity)

THE SECOND annual conference of ‘Left Unity’ in the CPSA on November 26 was attended by eighty activists.

This will be the last such conference before the merger with the other major civil service union PTC on January 1.

Members voted to accept the merger in October, on terms which had been rejected by both unions’ annual conferences, and which are calculated to entrench the power of the established unions.

The membership had been consistently united about what was on offer, continuing the long series of manoeuvres which strengthened the control of both unions by right-wing cliques exploiting the politics of “business-unionism.”

Within CPSA the left had been weakened by factionalism and an over-reliance on the existing national union elections. The dire need for a strong united fightback against the right has, however, propelled CPSA’s three socialists groups to transform Left Unity from a loose electoral pact into an increasingly cohesive organisation.

This is now to be further strengthened by the addition of the PTC Branch Left, and hopefully the same union’s ‘Unity’ group.

The conference made welcome declarations of intent, passing motions which committed Left Unity to becoming “an active campaigning socialist organisation” and to organise solidarity with workers in struggle. The need for such organisation, capable of providing a fighting leadership for the new union, cannot be in doubt.

Under the Tory government, right-wing “New Realists” union leaders sat on their hands while civil servants faced repeated attacks. There is little sign of any change coming from New Labour, with the continuation of the pay freeze and other Tory policies, and un欢迎 innovations like the New Deal.

The right wing union leadership are as unwilling as ever to organise action to defend members’ interests, preferring instead to focus their attention on their “enemy within” - left-wing activists.

The conference received a report that the bureaucracy is prepared to attack political opponents from Hux Lloyd, the leading “winger” in CPSA for twelve years. Lloyd’s consistent defence of union democracy and support for workers in struggle have made his all-Wales branch a thorn in their side. Periodic attempts to obstruct or silence him have been stepped up over the last year.

In a concerted campaign of harassment, national officials, and their servants at regional and branch level have:

* used stooges at branch level to manufacture complaints against him
* attempted to interfere in branch elections, intimidate activists and take over branch committees
* prevented Lloyd’s branch from voting in sectional elections or taking industrial action
* quietly cancelled his membership of the RMT union, ignoring his repeated attempts to continue payments.

This last plot seems likely to be used to deny that he had been a member for the last year, and to suggest he was some branch officer using facility time under false pretences.

This kind of bullying, the “mysterious union officials”, will apparently be used to encourage management to take disciplinary action against him — the penalty for which could be the loss of his job. This is clearly intended as a warning to others that too can be picked off.

It underlines the need for a Left Unity executive committee strong enough to organise collective resistance to the leadership’s attacks on individuals — one which provides a permanent rallying point for all those who are prepared to challenge management and, if necessary, their own officials.

It is to be hoped that the recent conference is a step towards such an organisation.

Defend Bernie Hynes

Simon Devlin

NOVEMBER’s Socialist Outlook reported on the de-recognition of UNISON activist Bernie Hynes by British Gas.

Since then, Bernie’s branch has passed a resolution (reprinted below) in his defence.

This resolution was duly forwarded to the Secretary of UNISON’s District Committee, but strangely the Secretary appears to have lost the resolution and not included it in the list of branches on the agenda for the meeting on 4 December.

It is clear that at least one UNISON full-timer was complicit in management in Bernie’s de-recognition.

The branch must demand that they will use this opportunely to replace him with a right-wing more acceptable to management and the union bureaucrats.

If the British Gas management think they can get away with choosing who the workforce has to represent them, then this practice will become common place.

All those who believe that the workers themselves should decide who represents them should take the following resolution to their trade union or other organisations.

"This branch/organisation calls upon British Gas Service management, both at Leicester Area Service Centre and at the Gloucester Headquarters, to rescind the de-recognition of Bernie Hynes as a UNISON Staff Representative, and to uphold the rights of trade union facilities to him.

The branch will support UNISON at all levels to campaign to that this de-recognition rescinded and to the restoration of trade union facilities as a matter of urgency. We demand that UNISON use its full legal backing to the Industrial Tribunal application, and that no attempt is made to undermine the application.

We support the decision of the local staff representatives not to replace Bernie Hynes as a staff representative or as the chair of the Joint Committee Staff Side, and call upon the Regional Gas Committee not to replace him on the Service Sector Executive or the Regional Joint Committee Staff Side.

"We call upon the Regional Health and Safety Committee to take up the campaign with particular regard to his de-recognition and the lack of safety representatives”.

Resolutions should be passed:

* British Gas HQ, 30 The Causeway, Staines, Middlesex TW18 1BY
* British Gas Leicester Area Service Centre, PO Box 28, Arnold Centre, Birstall LE3 13Z
* UNISON East Midlands Regional Office, 15 Castle Watson House, Nottingham.
* UNISON Energy Committee, 1 Mablethorpe Place, Lon-don E1
* Bernie Hynes, 15 Walton Street, Leicester, LE2 7LD.
Our motto for Left: cooperate in 98!

A year of two halves...

1997 has not been an easy year for political activities in Britain.

May 1 did see the long awaited defeat of the Tory government - a moment for much celebration. The Women may well Blair's New Labour Party has meant that attacks on working people have continued - just under a different gloss.

Even those who were willing to claim that Blair had moved to the centre showed how reactionary policies as his predecessors have been somewhat taken over by the scale of the continuing assaults. The Bank of England, nationalised by the 1945 Labour government was handed back to the private sector.

The idea of "education, education, education" has been turned into the introduction of fees for schools, the tightening of the handouts, the crisis in the NHS conditions standards. The fifth anniversary of the Health Service next year must be turned into a mammoth campaign to defend its very existence.

Underlying the assaults on public services and working conditions lies not only a general determination to attack the living standards of all the people - by keeping New Labour's commitment to Europe, the Monist Union in place, and the Mastricht Convergence criteria.

As Britain prepares to take over the Presidency of the European Union in the New Year, Blair has made clear that he aims to try to expand the EU political processes that have become a hallmark of western Britain to the rest of Europe.

While existing uncertainty about the benefits of entry into the single currency may have led Gordon Brown to delay the referendum until after the next General Election, it is certainly clear that we will still face the very same austerity measures that would 'fit' the economy for entry.

What must have happened to see the large intake of new women MPs on May 1. But our "sisters" have for the most delivered a proper sure menu - cuts in lone parent benefits, the abolition of family credit, the imprisonment of women for dwindling abortion facilities let alone a strengthening of the laws.

Black people needed 'Operation Black Vote', and turned out to support Labour in the General Election. While there have been some gains with the victory of some anti-deportation cases like the Oborios, and the inquiry into the vicious murder of Stephen Lawrence, the punch up of new laws remain intact.

Not even the devastating benefit cuts for asylum seekers have been reversed, and despite the high profile successes the rate of deportations actually seems to be rising.

Now there is a new racist threat too as a Yorkshire is whipped up against gipsies from the Czech Republic publicising the violence of fascists thugs.

While the National Front managed only a pathetic turn out for Dover there is no doubt that with Labour in government the far right is set to make gains.

Sharp end

Young people in particular have been at the sharp end over recent months. The so-called 'New Deal' for the unemployed is first targeted at those under 26. While opposition to Project Work and the ESA was growing before May, too many have been taken in by Labour's promises in this area.

The reality is that people will have no choice but will either be forced into dead end schemes which mirror the Tories practice or forced on benefits altogether to disappear into the ranks of 'non-people'.

There seems to be increasing recognition amongst at least some sections of the left and some layers of activists that if the Blair bubble is to be burst we had better all work together.

Escaping to college is hardly an option for most when not only have fees been imposed but the crumbling and under-funded colleges already have more students than resources permit.

At the same time Jack Straw is attacking young people on the street, with his notion of imposing curfews and stiffer penalties for young offenders.

Nor will the latest whereby - to make young people pay for Blair's faux pas over Formula One sponsorship by making the sale of cigarettes to under 18s illegal - do anything to save them from this addiction. Instead, illegal will action just as much as they did before May.

Despite these weaknesses, patience may begin to run out before too long. Gordon Brown has stressed the need for wage restraint in his mini-budget but despite his pious words his will fall on deaf ears amongst the fat cats.

Trade unionists especially those in the public sector have had enough and there is a real possibility that action may follow in the spring.

Nor is it likely that the Commission's proposals on the minimum wage will do enough to buy off this anger. Margaret Beckett may have won her battle with shop stewards but there is little likelihood of the minimum wage being set at a decent level without a major campaign around it - one that the bureaucracy show no signs of getting off their knees to lead.

It seems further to be taken for granted that it's OK to exclude young people altogether - what ever happened to the notion of Equal Pay for work of equal value?

There have been some positive changes since the election. The victory of the Scottish and Welsh peoples in their respective referenda is no small step. Blair's back devolution for his own reasons which are completely different from those of principled socialists but this in no way diminishes the victory.

Teeth

Now the vote needs to be built on the ensure that the Assemblies which are to be put into place have real teeth. Especially in Wales where the result was much closer her family have fallen on deaf ears in the British Home Office. The real negotiations on the future of the six-county state are likely to take place when Gerry Adams visits Blair later this month - but unfortunately the Republican movement has few cards to play.

The need to rebuild solidary movements in this country has never been greater. Perhaps there is a glimmer of hope in a different sphere. There seems to be an increasing recognition amongst at least some sections of the left and some layers of activists that if the Blair bubble is to be burst we had better all work together.

Unity is action, while retaining open and comrades debate about differences in ideas is more crucial than ever.

Some inspiration can be gained from developments outside Britain itself. Across Europe over the last twelve months militant strike action and other forms of protest against the effects of European integration have continued.

The huge demonstrations in Amsterdam and Luxembourg were beacons of international solidarity.

And our have been confirmed in Europe. Across the globe, whether with the massive tumult in South Korea early in the year, or the huge demonstration in Prague which scarcely precipitated the fall of the Klaus regime, the working class has won one after another. The end of history is not in sight. The question is rather how we can go forward with renewed determination and unity to ensure that this page is written in our interests.

We need a strengthened offensive against the evils of capitalism, and a renewed vision of a future free from exploitation and oppression.
Labour left must turn outwards

Pete Firmin looks at the tasks facing the Labour Left for the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups

Conference, to be held in London on December 6.

SIX MONTHS INTO THE LABOUR government, the left is now ready to see what that government is doing and the response of the Left so far.

The government has shown clearly that the pre-election move to attack the 'new deal' was a smokescreen. From day one, the priority has been to gain the confidence of the ruling class and to craft policies that appeal to them.

This has meant agreements with big business concerns, all of whom bring with them the suspicion that after years of profitable and ever-existent Blair's seemingly all-conquering 'spin doctors'. Labour's decision to retreat from the coalition gave the Tories the ultimate breach: not only had he got the decision he wanted, but he's even got his money back into the budget.

The reputation of this cash was made much easier in the event of the well-timed arrival on the scene of over-priced burger magnate Robert Ert, whose ability to donate cash to Labour has no doubt increased the fact that his chain of restaurants pays staff as little as £2.98 an hour - well below even the lowest projected figure for a national minimum wage.

Shutting down enormous sums of money may seem to Mr Blair to be a way of attracting free media coverage for his tedious restaurants and piling on more pressure to lower the wages; it certainly appears that the government was already leaning towards a minimum wage closer to his target than to the trade unions. Maybe he guessed this and wanted to make a "heavily weakened" Labour party more viable than they do.

But all the while the government is desperately trying to boost an economy that can't influence - especially if that money is the tens of millions of pounds funneled into Labour coffers over the years by the trade unions.

Given the results of Gordon Brown's latest budget preview, promising to hold down wages while giving away further tax cuts for companies which already pay the lowest rates, Blair has to decide whether or not to keep the tax cuts.

We have had right wing Labour governments before. But Blair has brought in a new kind of right wing - Blairism, and now Jaguar's ex-boss Geoffrey Robinson making controversial efforts to stave off the personal loss on one side as they take out as tax cut.

Peter Shirlow, the man from the Pru, one of the prime culprits in the mis-selling of pensions and of the Tories, has been wheeled in as a government advisor. Frank Field's Cheltenham chums are also hanging round.

And in the background lurks the bearded, grinning figure of the high-flying opportunist Richard Branson, who could yet become the beneficiary of the government's determined moves to impose a directly elected Mayor on an unconvincing London labour movement.

The basic ingredients are there for an ongoing problem of sleaze for as long as the government cling to its attempts to fleece out of exploitative bosses.

But with ministers at right wing and the Blunkett/Ringers gang (now seeking new collaboration with public schools), it is surely no need for the bosses to forego out good money to get the policies they want: they can get them for nothing.

New Labour, a new scandal: but there is a plus side. At least the weakening of the apparent invincibility of the spin doctors and party managers seems to have opened a slight space for left wing critics to speak.

Last week 120 Labour MPs, not all of them on the left, signed a letter opposing the new government's trade union bill. The signatories were not all trade union members. The size of the vote against further stretchers from the Right is a sign of rebellion against a government which wanted this legislation to keep the public off the back burned. Two Commons committees have now denounced the bill that ever it to deal with the real political changes that need to occur after six months of sympathetic drift!

4 LABOUR PARTY

Socialist Outlook

Buddy, can you spare a Bernie?

Harry Sloan looks at the New Sleaze

PREVIOUSLY the sum of £1 million was dreamed to have been "a Bernie" since the row over the donation to the Labour Party by Falklands hero son Tony Blair. The smoke was now Eclectonite, however.

But this may already be out of date. A "smoker" after Planet Hollywood fat cat Robert Earl became the latest top employer to flick through his small change and find a handout for the "people's party".

Amid fresh claims (from no less a source than the authoritative Daily Star) that Blair is contemplating changing the name of the party to the Democratic Party, it seems almost every day brings a new Clinton-style whiff of scandal.

The US administration which appears to offer the finished model for New Labour is plugging ever deeper into a liberal and ridiculously continued public debates on the shape and disposition of the Presidential polls of of course nobody would dream of imaging of course that Smoove and Dope has yet to be lurred from the scriptures lovingly compiled by Mandy Dickson in Paula Jones-type allegations, but those around him may yet be more vulnerable.

Whatever the sexual proclivities of New Labour, and whatever their love of the front bench, the Party has lost no time in cultivating its connection with the phalanx of big business concerns, all of whom bring with them the suspicion that after years of profitable and ever-existent

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Get ready for the day
Blair's bubble bursts

John Nicholson

IT USED TO BE said that there were only two things certain in life – death and taxes. Under Tony Blair, of course, the latter is a little less certain. Actually, the way in which he tried to take over the national mourning for Diana suggests that he is working on the former too.

But let us hazard a guess that Tony's hair is indeed going to shine and go grey and that his waist is indeed going to thicken and go saggy… and that he is going to become subject to mortality despite all his image-makers can do for him. What is going to happen then?

When Blair's Bubble Bursts, where will you be?

The signs are already there. Blair's Labour government is not disapproving its enemies – it never wanted to please us in the first place – but it is disapproving its friends. Look at these comments in the media:

"Blair's parodies "giving". He will be judged by whether he has given in to Thatchernism."

"The growing realisation is that we may soon not be able to look to the Labour Party to represent what we believe."

"Australian politics are known to influence New Labour – so the message is clear. It should prepare to move in the left." What said the above? Not socialists, not "old Labour", not even the Blairites. It was the Daily Telegraph.

No, it was the Editor and Business Editor of the Observer, some of the strongest supporters of Blair in the new "direction" to abandon Clause IV and public ownership and the moulding of the Tories that had unfairly distributed over the last 16 years.

In business circles the same disappointment is forthcoming. European Monetary Union is demanded by Blair's business "partners". So much headway has been made by Blair in enlisting trade union support for his "project" that the trades unions themselves have joined (at TUC level anyway)

in the call for Maastricht's rigid adherence to quantitative criteria to be adopted – with a call of "when do we want them? Now!"

As for the "people", those poor ordinary somethings who Blair was so keen to "include" in a Whitehall open-door approach, look at the pontificating put on the head which Blair gave Blunkett after the latter's speech on education to the Party Conference.

Who can forget the shake of the hand which Blair gave to Gerry Adams, patronisingly elevating him to "human being" status?

Hence Blair's language before the Election: to people who are black, or disabled, or lesbian or gay, he pronounced that these "differences aren't important".

To all those suffering disadvantage generally, he envisaged a society which would be fair to ordinary people. Equality is for all "ordinary" people. Discrimination is "unimportant". Four legs good, two legs better.

But Blair seems up when his erstwhile friends become surprised by his (new?!) directions. Does he understand, he penulously asks, that the Tories are still in Government?

**Treasury**

Don't they understand that the "Treasury" has set those spending limits? One local Labour Party leaflet, in a community with a fair number of middle class parents, advises its readers to "join the Blair Party": they are concerned about tuition fees for higher education, as is the "Treasury" which is so blind to all the difficulties?

The same goes for health. Poor Freshwater has no choice but to live within the government (that's the Tory Government) spending limit. John Prescott, likewise, cannot tackle environmental and transport concerns.

It's the government (that is, the Tory government) which held public inquiries into road schemes and Ruways Extensions and these inquiries were properly held and there's nothing we can do about them.

And the Merseyside dockers should know how hard it is to ask their union leadership (the mighty TGWU) or the government (13% share holders in their employer's companies) for support in their dispute.

The Treasurers of the Labour government and the TUC would be breaking the law. Their hands are tied. There's nothing they can do about it, is there?

(Except of course that if the Tories had won again, taxes would have gone up by now to pay for the economic deficit they had left for their successors.)

Any willingness Clarke and Healey may have had to join a one nation party of left-Tories, New Labour and middle-ground Liberal Democrats, must have gone out of the window – now that they have effectively positioned themselves to the left of Blair.

But a lot of us are not Blair's friends. Dockers, deportees, disadvantaged, disenfranchised, discriminated against... people can't wait for Blair's bubble to burst. We have to help make it happen.

This is because new Labour's new danger is still the same old danger: that the opposition to its sunshine smile and Camelot carry-on will come from the far Right.

To redress the balance, to counter the threat, there is no single right answer. No one has a monopoly of ideas.

Instead there is a compelling argument for developing alliances of forces. Socialists, environmentalists, direct action campaigners, trade unionists, need to join together in new ways of working across the issues and across the regions, to say that there is an alternative (there has always been an alternative) to the free-market madness of Blair and Major, Hague and Thatcher.

This is what the Liverpool dockers have represented, in making links with many non-traditional forces; and this is why their struggle is not old but new. Their struggle is about challenging the globalisation and casualisation of work and workers everywhere, about connecting the environment with the economy, and about raising the standard of human dignity against the oppression of the new capitalists and their "partnership" politics.

Their struggle is all our struggle. Their victory will be all our victory. Morris and Blair could do with remembering that this is where their organisations come from, before they themselves are consigned to the place in history which they seem so eager to de sire.

And we need to put them there, not just sit back and wait for the bubble to burst.

John Nicholson is Convener of the Network of Socialist Alliances in England

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**Mood of co-operation strong as Socialist Alliances link up**

Chris Jones

70 delegates attended the "Blair's Bubble Bursts" meeting in Walsall on November 29. The delegates from a wide range of socialist and green organisations in England, Scotland and Wales exchanged opinions and experiences about their activities and hopes for wider co-operation amongst socialists.

There were sharp disagreements over electoral activity and attitudes to the Labour Party and Labour Left. There, however, did not exist from the comradely spirit of the meeting; nor the concern that existed for developing co-operation and the creation of Socialist Alliances in more towns across Britain.

A small minority felt it was possible to rush towards the creation of a new socialist party and have large scale anti-Labour electoral campaign in the May 1999 local elections.

Nobody disagreed about the need for a new strong party fighting for working class interests. But, however, there was a more critical appreciation of the immense tasks facing socialists in ringing this about.

The strength of the Labour Party within working class politics was under-rated by many. Some delegates' pre-occupation with elections led them away from the central task of challenging the Labour Party and Labour Left. These, however, did not emerge from the comradely spirit of the meeting; nor the concern that existed for developing co-operation and the creation of Socialist Alliances in more towns across Britain.

Mood of co-operation strong as Socialist Alliances link up
“Best value” — but whose values?

by Elkie Dee

Labour's election manifesto pledged to "abolish CCT and replace it with a duty to obtain best value".

Compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) has been central to the Terry strategy for privatizing public services and reducing public expenditure through cutting services and jobs and driving down pay and conditions for workers.

Many people hoped that in this area at least, the new Labour government would deliver an improvement. Some hope. "Best Value" could well be worse than CCT. Trade unionist activities in campaigns to defend public services and the welfare need to understand why.

Labour intends to limit public spending. There will be no extra money in the short term for most services, already damaged by so many years of cuts. The Private Finance Initiative (PFI) will be maintained.

Competition

The concept of Best Value maintains an emphasis on open competition and value for money in the public sector. The Blairs' words on the need for a flexible, competitive workforce. CCT is not going to be abolished immediately, but gradually replaced.

The plan is to encourage voluntary competitive tendering (VCT) by councils and other public sector organizations by offering incentives, while entombing Best Value in the legislation. The Local Government Act 1998, made it illegal for councils to take "non-commercial considerations" into account when awarding contracts. Non-commercial considerations include working conditions, employment rights, practices of a tenderer towards existing workers, etc.

This was clearly intended to stop councillors taking account of workers' interests.

The only reform proposed, in a Private Member's Bill from Oona King, is to require contractors to take part in the Welfare to Work scheme!

To understand the context in which best value is being introduced it is worth looking back at Conservative policy on local government. The local government reorganization in the 1990s was based on a monetarist approach to economic management and a view that public spending is basically a passive activity, to be minimized wherever possible.

"Customers"

To impose this vision, people who rely on public services had to be reinvigorated as "customers". Never mind that access to local services isn't simply a matter of looking round the shops and choosing what you want to spend your money on, or that many "customers" of councils don't have any money anyway.

Changes in local government taxation were key to this. While the Poll Tax's unpopularity led to its replacement by Council Tax, the principle of individuals as customers paying for services was successfully introduced, with huge consequences for local government and for the welfare state.

Any public spending can be linked in people's minds with a rise in Council Tax. The unemployed, single mothers, asylum seekers, others who need services and do not directly pay Council Tax, are portrayed as scroungers, not just off the state but off those with jobs.

The interests of Council workers asking for decent wages and conditions are also set against those of local people. This nasty but effective piece of divide and rule has had a real impact.

The Labour government explicitly maintains this principle: "The duty of best value is one that local authorities will owe to local people, both as taxpayers and the customers of local authority services".

Current policy retains the concept of the purchaser-provider split, introduced throughout the public sector in the 1980s to limit public spending. The role of the clients/purchaser is to keep costs down by buying the service as cheaply as possible, while the provider/contractor has to be competitive.

The needs of the working class whether as employees or service users are deprioritized.

The introduction of PFI by the Tories extended privatization. Under PFI the public sector contracts to buy services not assets, and retains a role in the project as client. Far from rejecting PFI, Labour's concern has been to promote and encourage its implementation.

In local government, there had been no major schemes signed up by April 1997, although a number were being developed. Private companies and banks had doubts about the extent of councils' legal powers in relation to projects on the scale of PFI schemes, and Labour's response has been to draw up the Local Government (Contracts) Bill, likely to become law by the end of this year.

Guaranteed profit

This will reassure private investors that Councils do not make deals and guarantees and that they will therefore get their money back and make a profit.

Labour evidently hopes to make PFI an attractive option for delivering "Best Value" in services.

To return to Best Value, what is the reality behind the rhetoric? Policies are still being developed, but statements from Hilary Armstrong, minister for local government, and the pilot projects being drawn up by some local authorities make it quite clear that the emphasis is still on value for money, keeping costs down.

The government's document 'A Framework for Best Value' states that authorities should establish a "corporate view of what they want to achieve and how they perform against both objective indicators and against the aspirations of the local community".

Consultation will be required to review service activity, monitor achievement and publish and report back on their performance. Monitoring and reviews will be audited. The Secretary of State will have powers to intervene.

Reviews will set "targets for improved performance and efficiency" and "identify the means by which these will be achieved. The presumption will be that open consultation will be used unless authorities are able to demonstrate that this is inappropriate.

An emphasis on monitoring and publicizing statistics is already endemic in local government (as in school league tables), CCT monitoring of private sector contractors and in-house Direct Service Organisations (DSOs).

Anyway what are objective indicators? Why measure something which does not exist, and is not therefore subjective?

Success in reducing expenditure and increased demands on local government may be in line with the government's priorities, but measurements of these are not objective indicators.

The published principles of Best Value involve an attempt to put an attractive gloss on government policy, with references to improving the "efficacy and the quality of local services" and "local accountability to the people of this country", when this is in a context of cuts in public spending.

Consultation?

There has been a view put forward that "the public" is central to best value, but this is not clearly defined. Local authorities have struggled for Best Value by setting up consultation procedures, such as surveys of service users, open forums, and talking to residents' associations. But there is no requirement on local authorities to take any notice of the public's expressed views.

As with CCT, a huge workload is created by the need to collect, analyse and present statistics. The trend to cut staff working directly with the public while appointing more managers on both clients and contractor sides looks likely to continue.

Islington Council for example plans to have half its front line staff while appointing Quality Managers. You can't improve the quality of service while cutting the cost.

Like CCT, Best Value will continue to be profitable for the private sector. Money paid for public services is being spent on private companies who have won contracts. They wouldn't get involved if it wasn't profitable.

Public services means that taxpayers' money is being paid to directors and shareholders of companies who deal with street cleaning and rubbish collection for a number of London boroughs.

Competitive tendering, compulsory or voluntary, and Best Value, involves employing consultants to prepare services to be sold off, and commercial law firms to draw up the contracts.

Consultancy firms will be involved in service reviews and monitoring, and the consultants. But principles of Best Value imply a role for private management and therefore a role for intervention where councils have failed to meet performance targets.

The hefty fees paid to these firms will mean money being taken away from service provision: value for money? I don't think so.

Rail workers resist privatization

GREG TUCKER reports on developments in the rail industry

"YOU HAVE to recognise, privatization under Labour is different to privatization under the Tories".

So the RMT Executive were told last month by one of our sponsored MPs. And they may be forgiven for not appreciating the subtleties of this "difference" as John Prescott, himself an RMT member, prepares to sell off London Underground to the highest bidder.

Underground workers are not prepared to see that job pilfered. Already they have forced Prescott to stop the sell off of LUL's Acton Works.

A campaign of regular pickets of the Transport Ministry by Acton Works staff was followed up by a successful ballot for industrial action. The threat of a strike forced Prescott to withdraw the sale.

Now a report by Price Waterhouse sits on his desk. Well publicized, it reflects the view of a massed sell off is planned, leasing and contracting out virtually every existing LUL job.

As far as the RMT is concerned, Acton Works is only a foretaste of the campaign of industrial action we are prepared to launch. We need a publicly owned, publicly controlled LUL.

Elsewhere in the industry, railworkers are going on the offensive. On South West Trains, now owned by Stagecoach, and on Wales & West, guards are being balloted on our demand for a 37 hour week.

SWT also faces a ballot over pay for all staff. Both companies face the threat of strike action before Christmas.

Railworkers are fed up being pushed around by our new "owners". With the Labour government refusing to hear their former pledges to reverse privatization the time has now come to take direct action before destiny lies in other men's hands.

Victims of the squeeze on council budgets: London firefighters protest at threatened cuts to services.
**SOS for our National Health Service!**

**The WELFARE State Network is planning a day of action next spring in defence of the NHS. Part of the preparation for this conference is seeking trade union support for a platform statement, which we are circulating for discussion and feedback as a way forward for the NHS, which can be demanded from the Labour government.**

The latest issue of the WSU's paper *The WELFARE* had a two-page spread setting out detailed proposals from John Lister of London Unison, which we reproduce here in a shorter version of his proposals, and urge readers to back the campaign.

**The Government's allocation for health to the NHS to relieve the looming "winter crisis" is a recognition that more money really is the key to the problem.**

But the new money, ministers insist, is strictly a once-off exercise: it will not be incorporated into next year's budget.

Worse, the government plans to get through the winter peak by reducing services. But the Tories are an emergency-only service. Of course in a growing number of hospitals this is already the case.

Health Secretary Dobson has set up yet another "super-Trojan" of bureaucrats to tour with Trusts telling them how to reduce their waiting lists. But the Tories reduced waiting lists was by spending more money.

Worse, the government is reducing and, funded to ensure they give care all year round, in addition to "peak-time" provision in the winter months.

Running an acute ward costs around £350,000 a year. Opening two extra wards in each of 100 health authorities would cost around £70 million. 250,000 extra patients are "out of movement teams." Waiting list operations cost an average of £1,500 with £400m extra spending on consultants, a net cost of £240m, effectively three to a bed.

The Tories government last year admitted that there was a massive gap in the provision of 24-hour nurses' accommodation to provide continuing care after the closure of the old Victorian asylums -- and are not doing anything about them, but, predictably did nothing to fund it.

**Crowd control**

With psychiatric nursing staff reduced to little more than crowd control on dangerous, overcrowded wards, and all but the most severely disturbed patients excluded from care, new money is urgently needed.

Much of the money saved from closing the old psychiatric hospitals has been channelled into the crowding of the remaining beds and directed to other areas of care. More money to fill the yawning gap must be funded by new government cash.

Department of Health estimates showed that the required 5,000 extra places would cost £500 million in capital to establish, and a further £300m a year to run.

Services for the frail elderly also need urgent attention. Tory policies effectively privatised much of this, with health authorities required to dump the problem onto social services which in turn have become totally reliant on private sector-run nursing homes.

For many pensioners requiring care there is the added misery of means tested charges, which are getting an estimated 40,000 people a year to sell their houses or spend their life savings.

Social service budgets have also been cash-limited, and the growing problem of funding care in private homes is creating a huge backlog of patients awaiting discharge from hospitals.

This year social service budgets are being slashed by over £200m, and the government is not assigning any of its "market imputation" to funding the care of these patients. Health and Social Service departments have closed beds because they need to, but the patients are not monitored, because of a lack of resources.

The NHS must invest in staffing. Paying a decent rate, to protect services is a priority.

**Education under fire in Hackney**

Lizzie Bloom

**EDUCATION in Hackney, one of the poorest boroughs in the country is under fierce attack.**

*Ministers Byers and Barber (the latter Secretary of State for Education) are determined to use the schools, teachers and children as a laboratory for their "naming and shading" policies.*

The borough has already been under the magnifying glass of an schools inspectorate. This report acknowledged that this was one of the most impoverished areas in Western Europe. However they did not then go on to recommend any measures to counteract this such as more resources for the schools in the borough's poor areas.

Judging Hackney by the government's standards is a recognition of an improvement. GSE results have improved "at a rate that is faster than the national average." The few A-C grades Index has reduced from 14 per cent in 1990 to 32 per cent last year.

Byers responded to all of this by sending in the "naming and shading" inspection team in September -- an unprecedented intervention into the affairs of a local authority, to make sure that this was a group that would be under constant pressure to improve. He said it was a "clear signal" to the schools in Hackney to "shift priorities to rising standards in schools in Hackney."

**Telling tales**

This is thatdy is the idea that telling tales about schools of either excellence, the record of other schools or even your own staff is the road to higher morale and a better for the children. Some positive recommendations did come out of the inspection team's report -- such as their acknowledgment that the abolition of the Director of Education's post under the Council and its replacement by a "performance" director is all the better for raising standards.

**The Guardian Education debate that "Naming and Shaming" is a policy and will spread beyond the boundaries of the borough.**

From this, naming and shading teachers is not far off. The White Paper is both an attack on progressive teaching methods and on teachers' working conditions.

**Sickness**

The problem is further compounded in Hackney by another attack on primary school teachers. Schools have been told they are very good at managing sickness (which translated means they don't force teachers to come in when they should be in bed because they are ill.)

As a result it is now proposed that instead of getting money from a central pool to cover staff on long-term sick, schools will have to manage their own cover budgets.

This may sound fine -- but what it means in practice is that once a school has someone on long-term sick the money will run out very quickly and no more cover can be found.

This new attack must be resisted by teachers, parents and governors.

Hackney Teachers Association have an alternative perspective on the situation. They are planning their own report "Hackney Schools speak for themselves", which will show that what is needed is not naming and shaming but more resources to provide the standard of education that all Hackney's children deserve.

However insufficient resources are being devoted to this campaign -- a recent lobby of MPs was greeted with only a few odd head-nods. Teachers were appalled at the way the image of Hackney was being presented as a strong and confident critical analysis of New Labour's project in Education.

This is needed at a national level -- but in Hackney the need is more urgent.**
Victory for Onibiyi family

Mark Jansen

THE ONIBIYI family were told by the Home Office last month that they had finally won their struggle against deportation. They had lived in Britain since 1964 and were granted permanent residence in 1978. But because Abdul spent over 2 years working in Nigeria he lost his right to permanent residence. Abdul had been active in the pro-democracy movement in Nigeria and was quite clearly under threat from the dictatorship. He was deported to Nigeria in October 1995, where he was arrested and beaten.

When his son Ade was deported, the Nigerian government offered him a safe haven rather than see him face the same fate as Abdul. The Nigerian government sent fictitious reports that Abdul was not in detention and was living happily in Nigeria. They attacked the Onibiyi family as being traitors, and even sent representatives to Ade’s hearing.

Gratefully, Tory Home Office minister Anne Widdecombe used these reports from the Nigerian dictatorship to support her claim that the Onibiyi family were not under threat.

Six months

Whilst in opposition, Labour opposed the Tories on this case. However, since the General Election the family have had to endure the months in which Joyce and their two children Tolu and Yemi also faced the threat of deportation.

The government could have stepped in to lift the threat and allow Abdul and Ade back into Britain.

Thousands of others are facing similar threats. The main reason that the Onibiyi family have at last been successful is that there has been a high profile campaign demanding justice for them.

The government are only likely to adopt immigration policies any different to the Tories if they face a mass campaign demanding change.

Now is the time to start piling on type of pressure.

Fascists fail to mobilise in Dover

Simon Deville

FOLLOWING the recent anti-gypsy racism expressed throughout the media, and from Dover council, the fascist National Front called a demonstration hoping to tap in to this sentiment.

The racist Asylum and Immigration Act has meant that many people fleeing persecution will not be entitled to state benefits, though local authorities have a legal responsibility under the Children’s Act and the National Assistance Act to provide basic necessities such as food, shelter and clothing.

Rather than demand that central government provides resources, the council has instead tried to discourage Eastern European Romanies from fleeing persecution in the first place. The national media has been almost unanimously in supporting this racist approach.

Against this background the NF obviously expected to be able to build upon local racist sentiment. The few hundred of only 60 on its demonstration showed that it had badly miscalculated. The counter-mobilisation(s) of around 300 anti-fascists was a brilliant success in comparison.

The NF were forced to march two hours earlier than planned, with police escorting them back to their coaches. To compound the humiliation, they were forced to abandon their rally at the end of the march.

The anti-fascist mobilisation was extremely useful, with a group of around 150 marching from the town centre to the port (where the fascist march was taking place), breaking through police lines on a number of occasions.

Many local youth joined the anti-fascists as they marched through the town.

Despite the success of the counter-mobilisation, the left showed itself to be hopelessly divided.

Had the fascists been more successful in their mobilisation, this could have proved disastrous.

The Anti-Nazi League held its own demonstration of around 50, whilst Anti-Fascist Action, eager to "do the business" kept away from either demonstration, and were kept by police in the pub that they met up in until after the fascists had left.

The main bulk of the anti-fascists met at a rally centrally organised by Youth Against Racism in Europe (YRE) and the National Assembly Against Racism (NAAR).

Around two thirds of those at the rally were in neither organisation and decided to march to the port where the NF where. Both the YRE and NAAR remained at the rally, presumably to deliver speeches to each other.

Dangerous divisions

Anti-fascist cannot afford this level of disorganisation and divisions when faced with fascist thugs. The chaotic and pitiful nature of the fascist mobilisation meant that it didn’t really matter this time.

We cannot, however, rely on such poor turn-outs from the far right. The fascists are likely to grow as more and more people become frustrated by their social exclusion and disillusioned in New Labour.

It is essential that the left is able not only to provide a political alternative, it must also be able to physically counter the threat of far-right thugs in a disciplined and unified way.
Fighting unemployment – while union bureaucrats act the goat

Glenn Voirs, Secretary of St. Helens TUC (personal capacity)

St HELENS TUC and its Re-sources Centre have been building a local campaign to resist the Job Seekers Allowance and Project Work.

Our organisations were key to the successful campaign around the European Marches against Unemployment, Job insecurity and Social Exclusion in Britain.

In October we held a successful public meeting on "Stuff the JSA and Smash Project Work" This was followed by a protest inside the local job centre by 15 activists.

3 goats accompanied us, giving a novel twist to the action and underlining our argument. "You must be kidding if you think we're going to take these jobs that are on offer!" Some of these pay less than £1.50 per hour.

The peaceful protest surprised staff. It was seen as a burden by our presence. We explained to them why we were protesting and made a special appeal to them to attach goats.

We know we need to unite the trade unions and the unemployed on these issues. Management were extremely angry, especially as some of the staff were asking commingling with the protesters – and even steering the goats.

Both the local newspapers were present and took photographs and did interviews which were printed the next week. We gained a lot of good publicity and now we have an active unemployed action group.

The Regional secretary of the Civil Union PTC wrote to me a week later and viciously attacked our actions. The letter started with, "direct action – invasion of the job centre" and was later followed with, "all you achieved was to alienate my members from your expressed cause by the intimidatory nature of your presence".

He was obviously worried by our successful action and was trying to police the trade union movement.

Rather than castigate us by intimidating us and photocopying his letter and together with photocopies of the press cuttings sent them out at the next meeting of the NW TUC Regional.

I raised the debate on the issue and there was a sharp discussion.

The chair ended by saying that if their should be greater communication with the unions when we take these sort of actions. Bascally, the argument had been won.

Since then Jason Stoss, a leading Euro communist and the NW Regional officer of the CPSA has written a hysterical letter on the same subject.

He ended by saying "perhaps you should think of building any more puerile gestures". He attended the NUTW meeting and had the last laugh during the debate as he didn't have the bottle to argue his corner.

Stoss is the Assistant Secretary of the second biggest CPSA branch in the country, and has also sent a similary letter to a delegate to the Merseyside Association of TUCs who defended me at the meeting.

These attacks were raised at the next meeting of the Merseyside committee and debated.

The Association agreed to write to Jason Stoss telling him to stop this witchunting.

This saga is obviously set to continue with further attacks and debates on the North West TUC. We need to keep plugging away and trying to force the bureaucracy to take up a serious fight against mass unemployment.

The bosses are happy to use the fear of job losses to divide those in work from those on benefit and to help prevent strike action.

The St Helens Unemployed Action Group has stepped up its campaign and is planning a protest inside the local Project Work office with the support of local TUC leaders, Liverpool Dockers and local pensioners group.

Our message to Blair and the TUC is that in this situation it is unacceptable. We demand a no-war with a no-loss of jobs. We demand an end to the threat of job losses in Liverpool and the whole country and an end to the threat of national wage cuts and an end to dole labour schemes.

What future for Lesbian and Gay Law Reform under Blair?

William Craig and Peter Purton

THE IMPORTANCE of the struggle for Lesbian and Gay liberation has not diminished since the election of the new government.

Decisions of the European court are likely to put pressure on for at least limited reforms. However, both the weaknesses of what is proposed and the vagueness of the timeframe lead to big problems about achieving legal equality within the lifetime of this parliament.

* The proposal to reduce the age of consent for gay men from 18 to 16 is of itself one big weakness, it is proposed as an amendment to the existing 1967 law which has major repressive elements to it.

* The key phrase in the existing act is "Consenting adults in private" which therefore means sexual between men is only legal within these constraints. Technically it is illegal for two men to have sex in a 'hotel room', let alone any more "public" place. This will remain in the new law, which means carte blanche for the police to pursue gay men for "coupling".

* Pensions: for age-related offenses under the act will make anyone technically guilty of pedophilia, with all the repressive consequences that the government intends.

The legal position of gay sex as a "Tort" will apparently remain. So will older laws about Gross Indecency (the law used to prosecute Oscar Wilde). It should be noted that the Stonewall-backed European Court case has been dropped in the expectation that law reform is imminent.

* There are no proposals to equalise the rights of lesbians and gay men to have/adopt/foster children, although there are signs that the new government may be a bit more pragmatic than the last.

* There are no proposals around equalising partnership rights or non-discrimination legislation, although the European Court decision on the Lisa Grant case is expected to be favourable.

* There is no proposal (and the government has explicitly rejected this) to remove discrimination in the armed forces.

* However, there is a European Court decision pending and the latest information is that this is likely to succeed. This could have the interesting effect of trampping the government between the rock of the Euro Court and the hard place of the military hierarchy over reform of MOD rules.

* A favourable decision could result in massive compensation claims. This and the Lisa Grant case would also encourage the introduction of anti-discrimination legislation.

* Arguing for this reform must be accompanied by debate the role of the armed forces in general. Socialists are always wary of arguing for any sort of reform within liberal forces. We are for their abolition as they are fundamentally part of the system of oppression of working people.

* Peter Tatchell has an interesting article about the Law Reform (it is also on their web site at http://www.labournet.org/16). This article is not to introduce the age of consent reform, or to repeal Section 28. It has all been left out of the Private Members' Bill, or to an amendment to another bill. The government has made it clear in any case that only a free vote will be called. On Section 28, there is doubt: whether the government in fact intends to repeal this at all.

* Stonewall has been spearheading the law reform campaign, but this has been mostly done by behind-the-scenes-lobbying. Weaknesses in the reform proposals have not been brought out.

* The Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights has also been involved. LEGGB has been pushing hard on Section 28 and for maximum law reform in general. While it has also been lobbying, it has been raising law reform through their campaigning at Labour Party conferences and pushing its manifestos. Recently it has resolved the long debate over admission of bisexuals as members (they are encouraged to join!) and it has produced strong contributions and support to its campaigning work.

* The LQCGB - they can be reached at PO Box 306, Longdor Nd.
As Blair clings to Clinton’s coat-tails

‘New’ Labour apes the old Cold Warriors

Geoff Ryan

DURING recent weeks as the United States has threatened military action against Iraq we have witnessed the spectacle of New Labour straining every muscle to back this warmongering.

It is hardly surprising that Tony Blair has been Clinton’s strongest supporter. Since 1945 the foreign policy of Labour governments has been closely tied to that of the United States. The supposedly radical, reforming Labour government of 1945-50 was the foremost champion of NATO.

All Blair’s proclamations of ‘New’ Labour are revealed for what they are: merely a continuation of subservience to the political and military needs of the strongest capitalist power, the United States.

This is shown in the way the break-up of the temporary coalition against Saddam Hussein—which was put together at the time of the Gulf War—has been followed by support for Saddam’s rule and the policies of the United Nations resolutions requiring the Iraqi regime to allow inspectors to inspect suspected sites for the development of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. These resolutions are simply “victims’ justice”.

Does anyone seriously believe that Tony Blair would allow UN inspectors unfettered access to Porton Down and other British weapons establishments—wherever the United Nations resolutions called for it? Would Bill Clinton allow the UN to monitor the US nuclear programme? Not a chance!

Only Iraq is subject to such measures.

Withdrawn

It was the UN — under American pressure — that withheld all its inspection team. They were not forced out by Saddam’s forces.

If Clinton and Blair were serious about simply reversing the Iraq government to comply with UN resolutions there was a simple solution — call Saddam’s bluff and replace the US inspectors with non-Americans.

Why should the US be allowed to insist that its personnel have an automatic right to be included in UN inspections?

We are, of course, arguing that the UN has no right to impose such sanctions on Iraq and submit its military capabilities to UN inspection. We reject this totally. Sanctions only hit the Iraqi people, who bear the brunt of Saddam Hussein’s brutality. Control over Iraqi weapons establishments is victors’ justice.

The Gulf War did not bring about a New World Order: it simply worsened, as we argued at the time, the old imperialist order.

This is confirmed by the way in which the US government responded to the recent crisis. Clinton, followed faithfully by Blair, was not interested in finding a peaceful solution.

The main aim was to reassure the right of imperialist states to do what they want with impunity; semi-colonial states must do as they are told. Clinton’s bellicose rhetoric also helped divert attention briefly from Whitewater, Paula Jones and other pressing domestic problems.

Hence neither Blair nor Clinton has demanded sanctions — let alone made military threats — against Turkey, even though Turkish troops have occupied areas of Iraqi Kurdistan as far as the Iranian border.

At the very time Clinton has been threatening war with Iraq, Turkish planes have been constantly violating Iraqi air space.

Kurds repressed

But the Turkish government is, after all, a member of NATO and can, therefore, do whatever it likes — so long as it doesn’t clash with US interests. And everyone knows that Kurds are only oppressed by Saddam Hussein — so Turkey’s brutal war against its own Kurdish population can be passed over in silence.

NOR have there been any demands for the ending of the Indonesian military occupation of East Timor. Robin Cook’s supposedly ‘ethical’ foreign policy doesn’t even stretch as far as vetting contracts for military hardware signed under the Tony government.

The use of these weapons to maintain the illegal occupation of East Timor and to crush the rising opposition in Indonesia is of far less concern than defence of capitalist business practices.

While the US and British governments have demanded access to Iraqi military installations, they have made no such demands in relation to Israel’s nuclear weapons sites. Nor have they protested about the continued detention of Mordechai Vanunu whose ‘crime’ was to reveal to the world the extent of Israel’s secret nuclear programme.

Subsequently Vanunu was hounded from London on shipments kidnapped by Israeli agents, drugged and bungled on to a plane, smuggled into Israel and given a long jail sentence. Presumably Robin Cook considers openly pro-Palestinian rhetoric.

The support of the Chinese Stalinists for the Gulf War was always conditional and even more so were they now pursuing capitalist policies in parts of China, they say, have to distance themselves to some extent from the US — especially if they are to retain any attraction in the so-called Third World.

The current crisis has also allowed Moscow to reassert itself as a major player on the world stage.

The Europeans also wanted to include Rumania and Slovenia. American opposition was partly over costs but was also an assertion of American predominance.

Further differences exist over control of the various sub-sections in Europe. The Europeans demanded the Naples command: Washington was opposed because it would have meant running the risk of losing influence in the alliances in its most decisive strategic sector, the Mediterranean.

Independent line

Moreover, France and Germany are looking increasingly to further European military integration — as evidenced by the Franco-German agreement signed at Nuremberg in 1996. Euroarmortec — a grouping of air and naval forces set up in the same year by France, Italy, Spain and Portugal — shows further inclinations towards European independence.

None of these moves immediately challenge the existence of NATO: nor do they pose a threat to American dominance. And they certainly don’t remove the threat to American imperialism poses to the overwhelming majority of the world’s population.

They are manifestations of growing imperialist rivalry, particularly in relation to who is going to dominate Europe.

But they do reflect real and growing tensions within the Atlantic Alliance between the US and the major European states, which find an expression in European caution towards the US.

Significantly, for all his pro-European rhetoric, Tony Blair has like his predecessors tied himself firmly to the coat-tails of the US President on these matters.

Would Bill Clinton allow the UN to monitor the US nuclear programme? Not a chance! Only Iraq is subject to such measures.
Exploiting two-faced western policies

How DOES Israel get away with it?

Roland Rance

SEVEN YEARS after the Gulf War Bill Clinton's attempt to repeat the international coalition's agreement to the US plan to attack Iraq has met with near complete failure, with only Britain and Israel offering wholehearted support. Even Saudi Arabia has been reluctant to sign up for the US adventure. Why has the US been unable to repeat its 1990 diplomatic and political triumph in 1997?

This 'Pax Americana', however, has not lasted long. Despite the near integration of some regions into the western economy, the collapse of the eastern bloc has not brought many of the hoped-for gains. The break-up of Yugoslavia and the first Gulf War has shown that even in Europe the "New World Order" is unstable and unreliable.

Unravelling

The pinnacle of US diplomatic success, the Middle East "Peace Agreement", is unravelling fast, threatening a calamity for US policy and its allies in the region. Meanwhile, the UN sanctions against Iraq have led directly to the death through malnutrition or lack of necessary medical care of over one million Iraqi civilians, more than half of them children.

In the USA, the USA managed to buy the support of most Arab regimes with the implied promise of a comprehensive peace agreement, Israeli withdrawal from all territories occupied in 1967, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

Even at the time, it seemed unlikely that the Israeli government would be willing to comply with these promises.

But President Bush and Secretary of State James Baker were able to convince the feudal monarchs, military dictators and venal politicians heading most Arab states to join the anti-Iraq coalition, while persuading Israel (with some difficulty) that its interests would be best served by exercising restraint and not openly interfering in the war.

This balancing act could not last long, particularly without some real movement by Is- rael towards meeting Palestinian demands and Arab expectations. By a combination of careful diplomacy, political pressure and material rewards, Bush and then Bill Clinton managed to bring about the famous Washington meeting and the Oslo accords between Isra- eli FM Yitzhak Rabin and PLO leader Yasser Arafat. As a result of this agreement, Rabin - a former war criminal - and Arafat shared the Nobel Peace Prize with the main architect of the agreement, Shimon Peres.

Although many observers agree with Social Out- look that there was little substance to these agreements, which merely confirmed and legitimised Israeli rule over the whole of Palestine, this view was not shared in Israel.

Most Israelis believed that the agreements would necessarily lead to the end in an inde- pendent Palestinian state, Israeli society was split down the middle over whether to accept or reject this prospect.

Denounced

Opposition leader Binyamin Netanyah led the chorus of denunciation of Rabin as a traitor; the incitement and fevered atmosphere eventually led to Rabin's assassination by right-wing racist fanatic Yigal Amir on 4 November 1995.

The controversy over responsibility for Rabin's assassination continues. New evi- dence shows that a Shia Bet double agent, Avishai Raviv, incited Amir, while passing on information about the plot which was never acted on. The government argues that the failure to prevent the assassination was due to incomp- etence; the right insists that there was a top- level conspiracy, and that Netanyahu's dema- gogic speeches against the agreement played little part in creating the environment for the assassination.

Rabin's successor Peres, although person- ally committed to the agreements, was widely distrusted in Israel as, in Rabin's own words, an "incoherent schemer". In a vain attempt to establish his nationalist credentials during a closely-fought election campaign, Peres or- dered the invasion of Lebanon, in the course of which over 100 civilians were killed while seeking refuge in a UN base.

This failed to win him nationalist support, while alienating many Palestinian citizens of Israel who might otherwise have voted for him, and Netanyahu was elected Prime Min- ister in 1996.

Netanyahu - a product of American busi- ness schools - believes that he has stronger support in Congress than Clinton himself for his foreign policy. Since the Washington and Oslo accords. In rejecting and subverting the few concessions necessary to give a sem- blance of substance to these agreements, he has revealed their essential hollowness.

This has weakened not only Yasser Arafat, whose control of events in the 1967-occupied territories has grown ever shakier, but also the whole network of alliances and clients estab- lished by previous Israeli governments.

Seven years ago, Arab rulers were able to personalise the rhetoric and anger, to their peo- ple, that the defeat of Iraq and its military re- moval from Kuwait would lead to the removal of Israel from the 1967-occupied territories.

This belief is now demonstrably false. It has become evident that the US encum- bers occupation of territory by force, oppresses of civilians, arbitrary arrests, mur- der and massacre of civilians, while Israeli's recent use of an unknown biological or chemical weapon against a Hamas activist in Jordan has been just one of the many.

Palestinian children continue to die from Israeli "rubber bullets", civilians are still poi- oned by Israeli "nerve gas" and the occupation of Palestine, Syria and Leba- non. Iraq's housing of UN resolutions is as nothing compared to Israel's record.

Only this week, Israel is celebrating the fif- tith anniversary of UN resolution 51, by which Palestine was partitioned. But even this resolution, on which Israel bases its inter- national relations with Israel and the UN, is implemented, with Israel seizing far more land than it was allocated while uprooting the ma- jority of the Palestinian inhabitants.

War-plunder

Israel, of course, has never been threatened with a UN-sanctioned attack to force it to dis- mantle its war-plunder, nor with any threats to enforce even minimal respect for the situa- tion of civilians living under its military rule.

This is not only due to the lack of a cohesive, realistic and simplistic analysts do, that Israel controls western foreign policy - which is also supported by both Israelis and Arab leaders - ignores the reality of US strate- gic interests in the Middle East.

Israel is by far the biggest recipient of US overseas aid, receiving over $3 billion a year. It also receives almost unlimited US political and diplomatic backing, despite occasional critical noises. This level of support is not bought by political lobbying or by donations to presidential campaigns.

Ultimately it seems that the only way to support Is- rael, no amount of money or pressure could gain this support. The truth is that the contin- ued existence of Israel as a major military power, whose interests conflict with those of its neighbours, and which threatens the stability of every regime in the region, is a corner-stone of the US strategic approach to the Middle East.

Unless the US is prepared to support Is- rael, no amount of money or pressure could gain this support. The truth is that the contin- ued existence of Israel as a major military power, whose interests conflict with those of its neighbours, and which threatens the sta- bility of every regime in the region, is a corner-stone of the US strategic approach to the Middle East.

Those who deny or ignore this fundamental reality can never hope to develop a strategy for Palestinian liberation, for an end to the sanctions against Iraq, or for the replacement of the rotten regimes in nearly every Arab state.

The urgent need is posed for the development of a revolutionary strategy in the Arab world, which will challenge the power and independence for the peoples of the Middle East through a struggle against both western impe- rialism and its local political and economic al- lies and clients.

"The truth is that the continued existence of Israel as a major military power, whose interests conflict with those of its neighbours, and which threatens the stability of every regime in the region, is a corner-stone of the US strategic approach to the Middle East."

Obvious to "peace" deals and protest at home or abroad, the Israeli land-grab forges ahead.
Fighting Thatcherite austerity drive…

Czechs bounce back.

As we go to press, the resignation of Czech Prime Minister Gustav H. H. Koudelka has been announced, along with much of his cabinet, amid a major financial scandal stemming from the country's privatization programme. This article, from our special correspondent in the Czech Republic, HALKA KUDUKova sets the background to the developing political crisis.

On November 8 more than 600,000 people from the length and breadth of the Czech lands took to the streets of Prague. With a population of 10 million, this is proportionately equivalent to around 350,000 in London. People have had enough of the government and its policies of the past five years. There is no longer any "ra-ra, give us capitalism". People have begun to wise up.

The turning point came with the government's currency flotation crisis in May (an automatic, automatic, whopper devaluation of 15 per cent) and subsequent austerity package, which included huge tax increases on workers and lower and middle-tier professionals. As it has to this up to pay for the massive flood damage in early summer. The underlying factor is the huge trade imbalances, which has grown unremittently since mid-1993 - standing at over $3 billion for the past year alone.

The government also imposed certain import restrictions. These, however, were quickly abandoned in response to outcry and heavy lobbying.

Significantly, the top directors and managers are finding that the Stalinist bureaucrats have turned born-again capitalists, who are now slamming their beloved Koudelka across the government's economically minimal pro-export policies.

These are mainly due to an ideological ultra-f细致 for classical free marketism and thus minimal state 'interference' in the economy - including support for exports.

On the one side this is an aspect of the international's total recency to the EU and on the other, pleadings to multinationals for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) - "the Czech Republic is safe for your cash - look there is no state interference, and we have the workers under control!"

As a result of the devaluation and trade figures revelation in May, the government's ideological No. 2, Foreign Trade Minister, was chosen as sacrificial lamb (or skiing goat). Since then, several ministers. have gone down like ninjas, with Miroslav Janousek, the new finance minister, being one of the few to have survived.

The government's call to arms was effective, with prices rising by 34 per cent in the first quarter of 1994, and the central bank losing control over its monetary policy. Inflation is set to continue, with the central bank's target rate of 15 per cent being exceeded by early 1995.

The government's new austerity programme, which includes cuts in social benefits and increased taxes, has been met with widespread opposition from workers and students.

The government's plans to privatize state-owned industries and reduce public spending have also been met with resistance, with protests and strikes becoming more common.

The Czechs have shown a strong commitment to maintaining their socialist heritage and their desire to continue with a socialist economy.

In contrast, the government's policies have been met with little support, with unemployment rising and living standards declining.

As a result, the government has faced a strong backlash, with protests and strikes becoming more common. The Czechs have shown a strong commitment to maintaining their socialist heritage and their desire to continue with a socialist economy.

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East Asia financial crisis deepens

The wheels come off!

Andrè Milnister

THE BANKRUPTCY of Yamaichi Securities, the fourth largest Japanese stock exchange broker and the third largest in Tokyo, is a major crisis. The collapse of the once mighty financial giant, along with the near collapse of second largest financial giant, Asahi Securities, and the seventh largest, had failed. The view that Japanese capitalism represents a way forward for the United States and Europe seems even more distant.

At the same time South Korea, Japan's biggest customer in economic policy and structure in the region, is now being bailed out by the largest IMF loan in history. The tough conditions likely to be attached to this loan are expected to push the South Korean economy into recession next year, which will further weaken the dm and increase its reliance on the dollar.

In the wake of these crises, the region has been hit by a wave of mergers and acquisitions in the financial sector. This has been fueled by the desire of Japanese companies to diversify their exposure to domestic markets and to take advantage of the lower valuations in other countries.

However, Japan was by no means unique in facing such developments at this time. In fact, many banks in this period also built up a mass of risky corporate and household debt, debt held in Scandinavian banks, as well as Australia and other countries.

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However, Japan was by no means unique in facing such developments at this time. In fact, many banks in this period also built up a mass of risky corporate and household debt, debt held in Scandinavian banks, as well as Australia and other countries.

The main reasons why the problems have been so difficult to resolve are:

- In a capitalist economy, they are essentially two ways of dealing with a financial crisis. One is to allow the weakest part of the financial sector to collapse.
- The automatic effects of the collapse of the financial sector on the real economy creates a vicious cycle that can, if not resolved, lead to a collapse of the financial system itself.

These are now being bailed out to the tune of $20 billion of public money, effectively doing nothing to deal with the root cause of the problem.

In the USA in the 1980s both methods were used to deal with the developments in the banking system. The banks were allowed to fail, leading to a massive wave of merger activity in the sector which has fundamentally reshaped the US financial landscape and is still continuing.

On the other hand, the US government has had to bail out the Savings and Loans industry (similar to British building societies) at the cost of about $150 billion in present day money. The combination of both these strategies has been to dramatically increase profitability in US banking.

The government has also been bailed out as a result of the crisis and has a dramatic impact on the financial system itself. In a country like Japan where savings rates are very high as a result of low wage growth and pension provision, the anger at financial institutions which have received government money is considerable. The situation is similar in the UK and other countries where financial institutions have received government money.

In theory this could allow an eventual resolution of the crisis. But the costs of this will be very severe and not restricted to the financial sector. A market-based approach to this kind of structural change, with associated levels of bankruptcy and business failure, will mean the end of the kind of partnership between industry, finance and the state which has typified Japanese capitalism over the last thirty years.

One by one no means ruled out that the government will back away from such a consequence and will shift back towards its former inclination or towards an attempt to rescue the failing institutions. Whatever decision is made, the potential for conflict within Japan over who should bear the cost of the crisis is obvious and the scope for alternative views of the future direction of Japanese society greater than for many years.

The South Korean case is in many ways similar to that in Japan, but has some important differences. The speculative boom in South Korea was more short lived than that in Japan, only lasting through 1994 and 1995.

However, while in Japan the large manufacturing companies retained largely immune to the worst excesses of financial speculation this was not the case in South Korea. Bad debt in Korea is not restricted to finance and property companies but goes right to the heart of some of the major manufacturing groups, or chaebols.

The IMF is likely to insist on re-structuring the chaebols and closing large numbers of banks. This will not simply mean higher taxes but also a major onslaught on job security, working conditions and wages. At the same time the South Korea trade union movement remains the most assertive and well organised in East and South East Asia.

It would be wrong to see the financial crises in East Asia as the end of capitalism in the region. That will not come through developments in the financial sector alone.

But they may well mean the end of a certain kind of capitalism - a kind that has both been fearlessly exploitative and has also been taken to be a model by many in the USA and Britain, including some who see themselves as being on the left.

The space opened up by the failure of this model and the need for the ruling class in these countries to manage a traumatic and complex change is bound to open up space for socialist ideas and activities.

The extent to which such ideas are put into action and can affect the resolution of the East Asian crisis will be important for left wing forces not just in Asia but throughout the world.
David Coen

Tony Blair will meet Gerry Adams on December 11 for the real talks of the "peace" process.

Remember that? Back in September the media were full of the resignations of the Unionists led by David Trimble as to whether they would even enter talks. Blair has said must reach a conclusion by May next year at the latest.

The outline of the deal Blair will attempt to sell to Adams has been clear for a long time: a devolved government in Belfast, a clean-up of the sectarian state - Mowlam's proposals on the RUC are part of gameplan - and a parliamentary All Ireland Committee to deal with issues of common interest, for example, tourism and cross border development.

In return for this, Dublin will give up its "claim" to the Six Counties under Articles 2 and 3 of its constitution. The only argument is over the powers of the All Ireland Committee - the Unionists are opposed to it having any power, because that would look like a step towards reunification.

Weaker position

Adams' position is much weaker than that of the previous negotiators - the 1993 delegation led by Michael Collins. Despite the war-like noises coming from any number of Republican politicians, the vast majority realise that the 1993 deal is unattainable.

In a way Adams' weakness is also his strength. Whatever the outcome of the talks, his party will not be in the movement are not a serious threat because they have no strategy even if they are unable to bring the IRA back into it.

He will, no doubt, try to appeal to Blair's "moderating" instincts and sense of justice. He will ask for serious reform of the Northern State and for "parity of esteem" for Nationalists within it, mentioning the chaos which would follow a breakdown of the "peace" process, and support of his position he will cite Bertie Ahern and Bill Clinton.

How will they sell Blair's line to the purifiers? Sinn Fein vice-president Martin McGuinness does not mean the same as true to the base of the movement or indeed the majority of nationalists in Ireland.

The Republican leadership may well be willing to settle for a revamped British Army. As the economic crisis in the South threatened to capsize the peace process which followed the election of Sinn Fein, the Dublin ruling class and the British tried to save the "moderate" middle class posing as unionists with Dublin as the protectors of Northern nationalists.

The RUC was reformed in 1985 under the threat of the mass movement. Blair will not move in 1997 because there is no equivalent movement, and the threat to return to war does not put the same menace to the ruling class in Ireland or Britain.

Blair wants to modernise and thereby destroy the IRA and the RUC without abolishing it. He will remove the worst excesses of the sectarian regime and for as long as it lasts the changes will be cosmetic.

The Republican leadership has a choice. It's not between capitulation or a return to war, but between modernising and capitalising on the whole process which destroyed all of it's chances to return to the same old ways.

Socialism will not come about in Ireland or Britain without the defeat of the ruling classes and the break-up of the British state which sustains them.

The real “Peace” talks ...

in Downing Street

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Trade union leaders float myths over single currency

Alan Thornett
NO SUCH THING as a free lunch is how Thorntot from the European Monetary Union
inside the trade union movement in Britain?

Those attending the conference on European Monetary Uni-
on the South East Region of the TUC on No-
ember 29 were offered free en-
try, a fat package of literature and a sumptuous free lunch. It
turned out that the conference was funded by the EU.
The group's open letter to the TUC, but that was not the case. The event, which was pre-
vented as a "debate" only pre-
tected by a group of speakers from the trade union movement, particularly those 
who were out of control by the TUC.

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Edmonds: "We don't want EMU? Not for a minute or two, we've only just eaten one" was, however, doing a very good job on behalf of the Neuer
Council. There was little opportunity for those in the audience of 100
people (probably about a third) who were expected to EMU to 
be treated as "alternative" rather than to point out that the two concepts - full
employment and the single cur-
tact - are mutually exclusive. The experience underlines the

Workers gatecrash EU’s Luxembourg “jobs” jamboree

Alan Thornett
50,000 demonstrators, over

The Luxembourg march of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) at the Euro-

The European marchers mobilised a delegation of several thousand
Onto the demonstration, including a bus-load organised by the campaign

The aircraft were protesting

The Luxembourg "jobs summit" was called by the Amsterdam Inter-
governmental Conference last June under pressure from the mass dem-
emonstration of unemployeed people
organised at the culmination of the European marches.

Huge turn-out

The big trade union contingents

The marchers also flew in

With twice as many as expected, the trade union delegations lined up Luxembourg

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IG FEATURE

Socialist Outlook

50 years of the NHS Act

Why we should still value Bevan’s flawed legacy

John Stammers

RATIONING is on the agenda as the NHS enters its 50th anniversary in 1998.

So deep have Tory cash limits bitten into health authority budgets that increasing numbers are openly discussing which types of treatment and care should no longer be funded by the NHS. In West Hertfordshire, health chiefs suggest that “vain and expensive” treatments should be given low priority, implying that local people should make sure they only contract illnesses which are common and cheap.

This type of austerity on health spending in the midst of what we are told is a booming economy is a farcical echo of the genuine economic hardship that prevailed 50 years ago when the post-war British economy was still restricted by general rationing of consumer goods, and rationed back to the USA.

New Labour’s determination to tighten the knot on the Tory financial straitjacket is in stark contrast with the radicalism which led to the formation of the NHS: and there are already grounds to fear that the long-promised White Paper on the reform of the bureaucratic chaos of the Tory internal market system will fall far short of the necessary bold steps to undo the damage done.

The post-war reforms set out to sweep away the anomalies of the Liberal Party’s insurance-based scheme of 1911, which had only covered individual workers and not their dependent partners or children. Hospital treatment was excluded from the scheme, as was childbirth.

Labour’s plans, driven forward by Aneurin Bevan as the new Health Minister, went further than the proposals which suggested a comprehensive health care system should be available to all, whether at home or in hospital. Bevan went two further steps: he nationalised the network of voluntary and municipal hospitals, and established a system which for the first time offered comprehensive health services free to all at point of need, regardless of age or income. There was no weekly stamp to pay, and no qualifying period.

The biggest beneficiaries of the new NHS, which was eventually launched in July 1948, were working class women and children, who had not been covered by National Health Insurance.

As one GP, Julian Tudor Hart, has commented: “A huge backlog of gynaecological surgery was shifted in the 1950s, the accumulated discomfort and misery of the neglected pre-war generations of working class mothers.

But although the new NHS was overwhelmingly popular, it had its disadventantages. Winston Churchill led the Tory Party through the lobbies to oppose each of the Act’s three Reading s and again in February 1948 to oppose its implementation.

Bevan ridiculed the Tory complaints that the new NHS would effectively wipe out the voluntary sector by eliminating the need to raise money through charitable donations and fund day: “I have always felt a shudder of repulsion when I have seen nurses who ought to be at their work going about the streets collecting money for the hospitals.”

The only voluntary part of the hospital service destroyed by the Bill is the necessity to sell flags and to collect money. Honourable Members opposite, as they represent the party of property, always imagine that the only voluntary act which has any sanctity behind it is the writing of a cheque.

Rather more difficult an obstacle to be confronted was that of the British Medical Association (BMA), which at that time was heavily dominated by GPs. They (falsely) accused him of attempting to impose a full-time salaried service although he had been persuading early on to abandon that long-standing objection of the Socialist Medical Association in favour of a compromise formula in which GPs would remain “independent contractors”.

Bevan’s early moves to placate the BMA, which included offering a lavish £65m compensation in return for ending the buying and selling of GP practices, could not make much headway against those like Dr Alfred Cox who denounced the new NHS as “uncommonly like the first step, and a big one, towards National Socialism as practised in Germany.”

The BMA stuck to its guns, demanding the government drop or revise basic elements of the legislation.

The BMA’s opposition was becoming divided: some the Royal Colleges swung in favour of the Bill; a majority of medical students indicated that they were willing to work in the new service; and the new salary scale offered hospital doctors more than had ever been available before the war.

In February 1948 Bevan arranged for a further Commons debate to endorse the new Act. In his speech he listed some of the concessions he had made to the BMA, which included the provision of private “pay beds” in NHS hospitals; and allowing GPs and consultants to have private patients.

Bevan also made a prophetic observation on the value of the new system for middle class families: “There is nothing that destroys the family budget of the professional worker more than heavy hospital bills and doctors’ bills.”

Ironically, subsequent investigations on the widening “health divide” between rich and poor have shown that the more prosperous, articulate and relatively healthy middle classes have been more successful than the poor in gaining access to NHS services.

Bevan had won the public debate: opinion polls showed 69% in favour of the new NHS and only 39% against. Despite BMA polls in late May 1948 opposing the Act, medical resistance crumbled when the government forged ahead regardless.

By September 1948 93% of the population (395 million people) had signed up. 18,000 GPs signed up in the first year. They wrote 187 million prescriptions. 85 million patients received dental treatment, and over 5 million were prescribed spectacles — with ophthalmic

continued space for private medicine, which re-emerged from almost total eclipse in 1948 to mount a fresh expansion from the 1970s onwards. NHS pay beds are now seen by private health firms as a cheap and profitable option, and the problem of NHS consultants exploiting the time constraint imposed by “moonlighting” in the private sector lingers on.

The vested interest of the status of GPs, too remains as difficult to destroy as ever. In 1948 the last Tory government deliberately soaked up fresh divisions by its promotion of GP Fundholding (which pumped extra cash and resources into the larger practices, effectively creating a two-tier NHS and the obscure notion of “primary care led NHS” as a pretext for cutting hospital budgets) which seems likely to be a feature of the White Paper.

The structure of the NHS was also seriously deficient. Bevan opposed the election of local or regional health authorities, arguing that they had been the key to the minister answerable in Parliament. The opposition view was argued by Herbert Morrison, who argued for continuity to be handed to local government, warning that the new quango boards of apprentices would be “mere creatures of the ministry, with no vital- ity of their own.” In fact many of the old hospital boards of government simply stepped into appointed positions in the new NHS, creating an inglorious tradition of unaccountability which continues to this day.

The buildings, too, were seriously inadequate. Bevan nationalised 3,500 hospitals with 1.75 million beds. But almost half of them were already 50 years old, and 20% had been built before 1861. 80% of GP surgeries were still in buildings 50 years old or more.

The new NHS had no plan and no resources to develop or replace them. The 1950s — mostly under Tory rule — saw the slowest growth in hospital building for over 100 years. Only in the decade 1962-1972 was serious capital injected into the NHS, until the Heath government slammed on the brakes.

The NHS Act committed the government for the imposition of charges for some aspects of the service. Bevan’s resignation when Labour introduced charges for spectacles and dentistry in 1951.

The Tories went with prescription charges, and these three areas have seen a massive escalation of fees under Thatcher and Major governments. Prescriptions have risen from 20p per item in 1979 to £5.65 today, with New Labour allegedly checking out the chances of flat fees, charging pre-1948 pensioners and others currently exempt.

The Tory years have seen the NHS eroded through the effective privatisation of much continuing work.

The Tories have also succeeded in getting Labour to implement New Labour’s White Paper Initiative, allowing private firms to build, own and run NHS hospitals for profits.

The NHS has suffered the imposition of “market” style financial pressures and cash limits, by the government’s ‘rationalising’, first through the ever-rising waiting list, and now through the plans of health authorities to re-negotiate existing contracts.

But rumours of the death of the NHS have been massively exaggerated. Even with its flaws, the deal secured by Nye Bevan in those years of austerity is a historic gain stronger than any of today’s timid Blairismo. 50 years on, the main threat to today’s NHS no longer comes from the Tories: the fight to save it is still on. Bevan had won the public debate: opinion polls showed 69% in favour of the new NHS and only 39% against. Despite BMA efforts, medical resistance crumbled when the government forged ahead regardless.
Dramatic truth

"Welcome to Sarajevo", directed by Michael Winterbottom

Reviewed by Tim Johnson

THIS LATEST film from Michael Winterbottom of "Jude" fame does not aim to offer a solution, or even any political direction, to the war in Bosnia. What it sets out to do is show the effects of the war on the people of Sarajevo, and of the journalists covering it. In this it is far better than any other that this reviewer has seen.

Like many films of its type it suffers from being made from the standpoint of an outsider, the journalist.

When asked why he had not made it from the standpoint of a Sarajevan, the scriptwriter, Frank Cottrell Boyce, said that he was opposed to the way that films dealt with the effects of the Vietnam war on Americans, but that he could only get finance for a "compromise".

Thus the story is about journalists, who were continuously in danger, and their relationship with Bosnians.

It is based on a book by Michael Nicholson who is played excellently by Stephen Dillane. One wonders whether the makers were pressurised into taking Woody Allen as a crowd-puller, as he looks out of place.

In reply to criticisms that have been made of its historical accuracy, Boyce said that he had reasons for changing the order of events, in order to show effects. For example he shows a convoy carrying children away from Sarajevo. He also shows an earlier convoy as having been bombed, thus killing two children. In reality this took place later, but he wanted to show the danger the children were in.

In other words he was not interested in total historical accuracy, but on trying to display reality.

This is not a made up film, nor is it a straight documentary, but it is dealing with what really happened, and is still happening. It shows the brutality of the Serbian Chetniks as war; documentary film, of the death camps for example, is effortlessly woven in.

It shows the dark side of the besieged: The gangster elements, "how could you afford such a car?" says a small girl, the prostitution: "where did you get your American cigarettes?" asks a mother.

Much of this was obviously enhanced by the presence of reporters, and the UN forces, as sources of petrol and cigarettes and so on.

Despite the fact that as one of the Bosnians says "the siege is everything", people still manage to be positive, to make a feast out of three eggs, to plan and hold a concert, to try to continue some normality in their lives. But the whole film is about the way the war is destroying their lives, and how the world looks on.

We see the cynicism of Western leaders; criticising Karadzic, then sitting down with him. The refusal of humanitarian aid to orphans is another example. What is not dealt with however is the UN embargo on arms for the Bosnian Government forces, at a time when the Serb nationalists had all the heavy weapons.

The western media reporters are shown as vultures. The problems for the reporters themselves are shown when they start to care about the people massacred, or the orphans. The editors, and the producers don't care.

On the day of one of the massacres the main news headline was of the break up of the Duke and Duchess of York. Reviewing the film in the Observer, John Sweeney says that paper, for which he reported, didn't carry a single word from him in the week that Pergle's toe sucking story broke, and 3000 shells landed on Sarajevo.

What makes this a great film is how real the reactions of the people are. The father who gets news of his son in a camp, gives the reporter a drink, and a piece of pie. Afterwards when he is on his own he breaks down.

This is the reality; these orphans exist, their parents have been exterminated. One can only come out of this film angry. It is a film that must be seen.

As socialists we felt we had an answer, to end the arms embargo on Bosnia, to fight for class unity, and working class solidarity actions throughout Europe. But the problem was always complex and difficult. This film shows the question in as dramatic form as you will see.

Put Socialist Outlook on your Gift List!

IT'S the end of another busy year: December is the month in which most of us are under pressure to dig deep into our pockets to give generously to those nearest and dearest. But while you're at it, why not spare a thought for political principles - and add Socialist Outlook to your list for a gift?

Over the last year we've done plenty to deserve your support and respect. We and our readers have been deeply involved in the European wide campaign against unemployment, cuts and social exclusion.

We were central to organising the British leg of the European Marches, building for the Amsterdam demonstration and getting people to last month's demonstration in Luxemburg.

Through this work we have deepened our links with workers in struggle, particularly with the Liverpool Dockers, the sacked Magnet workers and the courageous Hillington women.

We have strengthened our involvement in unemployed action groups and activity against the JSA, Project Work and Labour's misnamed 'New Deal'.

All this work must go on. In 1998 we will need resources to build a demonstration and counter-summit to take place in Cardiff at the time of the intergovernmental Conference in July.

Without help from you, our readers, we will not be able to give this crucial mobilisation the person-power or publicity it needs.

Despite our heavy involvement in this campaign, we have not neglected other areas of activity.

We have fought cuts and closures in the NHS, social services and local government.

We have supported and built the campaigns of students against tuition fees, and of women fighting for the defence and extension of abortion provision.

We have been involved in campaigns against the racist policing of the black community and for justice for victims of racist attacks.

We have fought for the closure of detention centres in which asylum seekers fleeing persecution in their countries of origin have been imprisoned and brutalised.

We have fought for class struggle policies, action and leadership within the trade unions. We have been relentless critics of Blair's New Labour policies.

We have sought co-operation with other socialists and activists to strengthen our common fight and win new forces to our causes. We have tried to struggle against the sectarianism on the left which so often dissuades new militants from any sustained involvement.

We have done all this and more on the shoestring budget on which the left always operates. Sadly we have no Bernie Ecclestone to offer us £1 millions a time.

Our policies don't tend to attract millionaires, but we depend solely on the generosity of ordinary working people, often low-paid, some unemployed.

We desperately need to upgrade our equipment so that we can produce better publicity material around the issues we are working on.

We need to boost our travel budget so that we can better resource some of our smaller groups of supporters. We also need money to refurbish our building which needs some major repairs. If you like what we do and are interested in what we say, then please consider sending us a donation - however large or small. Cheques should be made payable to Socialist Outlook and sent to PO Box 1109, London N4 2AA and marked 'Xmas appeal'.

Even better, why not consider making us a regular monthly donation? Standing order forms are available from your Socialist Outlook seller, or from the above address.
Ken Loach assesses Thornett’s new book

Who controls the past controls the future

LAST MONTH we carried a review of Alan Thornett’s forthcoming book Inside Cowley, which will be published on January 8. In this we reprise the foreword that Ken Loach has written to the book.

We do so not only because we want to persuade our readers to buy the book, but because Loach’s words deserve reprinting in their own right.

In the last week the Foreign Office has withdrawn its offer to print a biography of Loach in its own words as a representative of the British film industry. This is perhaps no surprise when these words pointed out Loach’s twin struggle against the evils of Stalinism and social democracy.

What the Foreign Office discards we are happy to publish.

"WHO CONTROLS the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past." George Orwell’s oft-quoted axiom was never more appropriate.

From time immemorial we have told one another stories which we believe to be true. That there is a substantial minority of people who have little or no interest in the unfolding of events, or who choose to ignore the linkages which have grown from the present to the past, that those who have little or no interest in the unfolding of events, or who choose to ignore the linkages which have grown from the present to the past, is not surprising. But the idea that those who control the present can control the past is more worrying.

The market is omnipotent and it will work, or can be made to work, for the benefit of all. Those who control the present, the large industrial companies and their political allies, will make sure that the market will work for their benefit. Wars of liberation are fought by terrorists. Until their leaders do as they are told, when they are released from prison and become statesmen.

As I write, it is the anniversary of Russia’s October Revolution. The sound-bite histories on the news programmes reduce that huge event to a mere blip in the progress of "freedom".

French lorry drivers are on strike. We are told nothing of its cause, nor is there any suggestion that drivers across Europe may face similar problems and might show solidarity with the strike. The only issue is that "our" lorry drivers are the cause.

So, on a grander scale, the Spanish Civil War was seen by Labour politicians as making difficulties for British shipping.

It was in this tradition that Alan Thornett was described as a "mole" by the Daily Mail for his efforts as a union activist. An unrepresentative group of strike-breakers were congratulated by Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson.

Fortunately, there are those who will swim against the tide. The workers’ struggle has always produced those who will lead it, and those who will rejoin it. Alan Thornett has done both.

I first met Alan in the late 1960s, at meetings of the Socialist Labour League (S.L.L.). After a long period of Conservative government, it had become apparent that Wilson’s Labour Party would make no significant changes.

Many people were looking for a party that would address the contemporary situation in the light of a historical process and provide a leadership for current struggles. The S.L.L. was good on the former but woefully inadequate on the latter.

Nevertheless, for a few years there was a strong sense of what was possible. There was an education in political history that marked all those who took part.

Clarity

Amongst the groups who were most active were workers from British Leyland, in particular from Cowley in Oxford. Alan was prominent in this company. A dark-haired, compact figure, he spoke to the point with clarity and precision.

He had, and has, that ability often denied to academics and intellectuals, of an eloquence that comes from clear thinking and simple language. An argument is built up from a concrete situation that is immediately recognisable, and the audience is taken, step by irreducible step, to the conclusion the speaker intends.

In his book, Alan has captured the details of the industrial struggles of the 1970s and 1980s. It shows how we came to exchange the possibility of secure jobs for casual labour.

That in itself is shown to illustrate the fundamental flaw that runs through society like a geological fault line: the essential, unyielding and inevitable conflict between employers and those who sell their labour.

It is a conflict fought out in thousands of workplaces day after day, on building sites, in dockyards, mines and on the factory floor, at airports, on railways, even in broadcasting studios and on newspapers.

Whatever a product is made or transported, or a service provided, someone is thinking about cutting labour costs and somewhere else is wondering how long this job will last.

The detail of that struggle, the day-to-day struggle fought over, or at the back, the changing balance of forces, the tactical ingenuity, the weaknesses and strengths of comrades and adversary, all this has rarely been captured with such precision as in this story.

It should be in the list read on the reading list of every course in modern history, politics or media studies.

The principles that are the guiding and political work are expressed in a document by which we made in 1984.

The film of a Question of Leadership was prevented from being broadcast by an alliance of his political opponents, but his words stand as a witness to lifeline’s struggle.

The film concerned a familiar theme, the failure of unions to understand and represent the interests of working people: "I think it’s perfectly possible to have socialism," said Alan, "in other words a socialist economy in which we get rid of the employers, in which production takes place for need and not for profit and at the same time to have a democratic structure in which those from below can control those at the top.

"That’s why I’m a socialist. If I didn’t believe that, I wouldn’t have struggled all my life for socialism.

"How do we get it? Now the point is, it’s connected with the other question: How does the working class develop its consciousness? When it is in struggle trying to defend its conditions, improve its conditions and therefore pit itself against the employers and the government.

"How do you achieve socialism? It seems to me that if you don’t have a policy in which you can confront the evils of capitalism, which is mass unemployment, falling standards of living, wars and so on... if you haven’t got policies that can confront capitalism and you don’t follow those policies and fight every day to defend the working class, then there’s no way you’re going to achieve socialism, because it’s in the course of that fight that you’re going to create from the working class the people that can achieve socialism.

"And if they are continually sold out and continually dispersed and they’re never allowed to unite, never allowed to get at the main enemy, never allowed to get at the government, never allowed to seriously get at the employers, then you can’t create the conditions in which you can end capitalism and establish socialism."

However the economies of the world evolve, and the fashionable jargon of politics changes, this underlying truth remains.

OUT JAN 8!

INSIDE COWLEY

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IN THE NINETIES millions of women and men have taken part in mobilisations against the evils of capitalism and the bureaucratic dictatorships. This reflects the fact that humanity faces widening dangers. Ecological, militarisation, social and economic devastation faces millions of people.

Many more people recognise the barbaric nature of capitalism. In a situation where the inabilty of the social democratic and communist parties to provide socialist solutions is becoming clearer the task of creating new leasderships remains ahead.

Socialist Outlook is written by socialists committed to this struggle. We are the British supporters of the worldwide marxist organisation, the Fourth International. We stand for the revolutionary transformation of society and a pluralist, socialist democracy world wide.

The overall goll which we pursue is the emcapacitation of all human beings from every form of exploitation, occupation, alienation and violence. Socialism must be under the control of ordinary people, democratic, pluralist, multi-party, feminist, ecologist, anti- militarist and internationalist. It must abolish wage slavery and national oppression.

The working class is the backbone of unity among all the exploited and oppressed. The working class and its allies must uncompromisingly fight against capitalism and for a clear programme of action in order gradually to acquire the experience and consciousness needed to defeat capitalism at the decisive moment of crisis.

The movements of women, lesbians and gay men and black people to fight their particular forms of oppression make an essential contribution to the struggle for a different society. They are organised around the principle "None so fit to break the chains as those who wear them".

The whole working class needs to fully commit itself to these struggles. Furthermore we fight for a strategic alliance between workers and these organisations which respect their legitimate autonomy.

By simultaneously building revolutionary organisations in each country and a revolutionary International we aim to guide and encompass the global interests of the workers and oppressed. By building a united struggle against exploitation and oppression we aim to ensure the survival of the human race.

Stop locking up asylum seekers!

Close Harmondsworth Detention Centre!

Picket Saturday 13th December 1997, 11.30am-1.30pm
BRING Christmas Gifts for the detainees: soap, phone cards and pre-paid air mail letters.

The picket will take place outside the detention centre on the Colnebrook By-pass (A4). Transport: Bus 81 from Hounslow West tube or Bus U3 from Heathrow Airport bus stop.

Last year all of the 90 detainees received something from the picket thanks to the generosity of supporters. This gesture of solidarity was very much appreciated.

Please bring these gifts along to the picket or send cheques to reach us before the picket indicating whether donations are for gifts to the inmates or donation/affiliation to our Campaign.

Mail should be made out to Stough Trades Council, and sent to the Campaign c/o 10, Endleigh Rd, Southall, Middlesex UB2 8QL.

WHAT'S ON

Saturday Dec 6


Campaign for a Fighting Democratic UNISON conference, 10-4, South Camden Community School, Charrington St., London NW1.

Open meeting for supporters of the Euromarch, 1pm, Bread and Roses pub, 68 Capham Manor St, London SW4 (Capham Common Capham North tube stations).

National Abortion Campaign AGM 1pm - 5pm. The Print House 18 Atlantic Street, London E8 3DL.

Saturday Dec 13

Picket of Harmondsworth Detention Centre, Colnebrook by-pass (A4), 11.30am, 1-3pm. Bring Christmas gifts for the detainees: soap, phone cards and pre-paid air mail letters.

Saturday 10 January

Welfare State Network Steering Committee, Birmingham.

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As Labour’s cuts slash single parent benefit
Get tough on Harman — and on the causes of Harman!

1997 will be remembered as the year that Tony Blair’s new Labour Party finally ditched any commitment to the welfare state and to the poorest people in society. Time and again we have been told that increasing benefit rates will not help those living in poverty. Instead we are supposed to believe that cuts in benefits – or even their complete withdrawal — are in the interests of those affected!

Such a twisted sense of humour will be no consolation to single parents seeing their benefits axed or to people with disabilities who are being threatened. Disabled people have been increasingly squeezed by draconian rules and tests for incapacity benefit. Now plans are being explored to time-limit that benefit to 13 weeks or to tax disability living allowance (DLA) and attendance allowance.

The most ‘radical’ suggestion is that DLA will be abolished all together and the £4.4 billion budget passed to local authorities to spend on community care for disabled people. Lorna Reith, Director of the Disability Alliance has reacted to the rumours that benefits will be taxed by asking: “Is a government with a manifesto commitment not to raise taxes going to break it first by taxing disabled people?”

Some commentators have noticed that as opposition to these measures has mounted, Harriet Harman has been coming in for a fair amount of stick. Unfair, some of her defenders have cried, Frank Field doesn’t get this kind of flack – why pick on poor (?) Harriet. Actually it’s a fiction that Field has escaped criticism for his own assaults on the welfare state.

Any government with such a huge majority cannot with any credibility claim that its hands are tied.

Unusual as it is for this paper to argue this however, Field does have one quality which marks him out from boss Harman. Field’s hideous opposition to decent public services and his scapegoating of those at the bottom of society is not a new approach. He is implementing today in government the very ideas he put forward (to the delight of Thatcher and others) when the Tories were in office, and when he himself was not in favour with the Labour Party hierarchy. Harman, in contrast, criticised the cuts to lone parent benefits as recently as April of this year – when the Tories proposed them.

Then she said “The abolition of (One Parent Benefit) will make working lone mothers worse off and discourage work among this group. Lone Parent Premium recognises that lone parents face additional costs in bringing up their children…” She was right.

Now she is in office, singing a different tune, her crocodile tears for the hard choices she is being “forced” to make by the spending limits laid down by her predecessors cut no ice with anyone, let alone those driven further into poverty by her assault.

Any government with such a huge majority cannot with any credibility claim that its hands are tied. Any individual who acts in such a callous and two-faced way cannot claim any integrity.

Of course Harman has not done a complete about-turn. She sent her children to grant-maintained and grammar schools long before the General Election. In October last year she refused to make a commitment to increase pensions in line with inflation.

This prioritising of privilege over principle marked her out to those who were paying attention as someone who could not be trusted.

She has long been a dedicated supporter not only of Tony Blair but of Chancellor Gordon Brown, whose proposals to abolish family credit in the mini-budget deepen her own assault on women.

It seems that opposition to the assault on lone parent benefit is mounting within the Parliamentary Labour Party. Pressure needs to be mounted to ensure those MPs who are rightly hostile stick to their guns and vote against the government.

They must not be intimidated into abstaining, as many critics have done on other attacks such as the imposition of tuition fees.

What happens in Westminster will not however be decisive. A massive campaigning effort must be mounted to stop these attacks on women and disabled people. Trade unions and Labour parties must do far more than pass critical resolutions.

We need a programme of imaginative action on the streets that can involve the greatest number of people.

These attacks must be halted, and the sentiment of working people to defend the Welfare State given a coherent voice. If Harman feels insulted in the crossfire, she has only herself to blame.