Anger as Blair’s team get cosy in millionaire mansions while nurses quit low-pay NHS

The ugly face of New Labour!

PETER MANDELSON and his grubby millionaire chum Geoffrey Robinson may have left Tony Blair’s cabinet, but a foul smell still lingers over the government.

Whether or not there are further cash scandals yet to come, the whole affair has lifted the lid on the reactionary politics of New Labour, with its relentless quest for the favours of the rich, right wing and powerful, at the expense of the working people who voted for them hoping for something different.

While ministers cavort around with union-busting press barons and tycoons, spend holidays in luxurious villas and jet around the world arguing for an extension of Britain’s low-wage, anti-union “flexible labour” policy, millions of workers are struggling to make ends meet on rock-bottom rates of pay, or facing the sack in the latest lurch towards recession.

While Mandelson could go to his wealthy friends and borrow almost ten times his salary for a £400,000 house, ordinary families face growing queues for a dwindling pool of council housing, sky-high prices for private rentals, and the impossibility of paying a mortgage on the government’s pitiful proposed minimum wage.

They call it New Labour: of course it is neither new, nor anything to do with the labour movement. Blair’s team is just the latest bunch of shiftless individuals to have climbed on the back of the labour movement, only to be intoxicated by the illusions of power while being manipulated by the capitalist class into doing their bidding.

The appalling level of attachment of the current government to so many aspects of Thatcherite policy is a direct result of the deliberate moves, led by Mandelson and other “modernisers” to junk any hint of traditional labour movement politics and principles.

Already the question is how far – if at all – Mandelson has really been removed from Blair’s inner circle, and how soon he will be openly welcomed back. But his departure should reopen discussion on what the Labour Party has become, and encourage health workers and others in the public sector and fighting for union rights to get stuck in to a government that will otherwise pay no heed to them, their unions or their demands.
Lockout at Heathrow

David Coen

By December 31, 300 workers for the airline catering company LSG Lufthansa Skychef had been out for 41 days, sacked for daring to strike against new working practices imposed by the German US-owned company.

The workers, all TGWU members (as are the 30,000 or so workers at Heathrow) had two ballots before taking official strike action. On the first day a court injunction prevented them from going ahead.

On the second of four planned one-day strikes 200 were sacked - including those who were on sick leave but who refused to sign new contracts. The workers are demanding re-instatement on their previous pay and conditions. The company has hired agency workers as scabs and is looking to recruit permanent workers to keep going.

The company's video cameras film all that happens at the gate: when strikers photographed scabs the police threatened then with arrest for "invasions".

The sacked workers have been lobbying LSG Lufthansa's main competitors - American Airlines, Quantas and Lufthansa as well as the company's plants at Gatwick, Manchester, Paris and Germany seeking support for their action.

They have the support of the International Transport Workers Federation and have handed out leaflets outside Lufthansa's Piccadilly offices.

The lockout of workers on an official dispute in defense of pay and conditions comes against the background of the departure of Peter Mandelson from the Department of Trade and Industry.

The White Paper on Competitiveness and the mismatched Fairness at Work document both demonstrate Mandelson's pro-management stance but his going will make no difference to Blair's project even if his public preference for the bosses was a bit embarrassing for Blair.

In the name of competitiveness and with the aid of the Tories anti-union laws the Labour leadership seems determined to aid the employers in every possible way, even if it means breaking Labour's connection with the organised labour movement which founded it.

Despite Blair's recent description of himself as a Gladstonian Liberal and publicly distancing himself from the unions, union leaders such as Bill Morris of the TGWU (though it is an official strike and he has appeared on the picket line) apparently believe that they can still make Blair sense and legislate a better deal for workers.

Instead of attempting to mobilise the millions of TGWU members at Heathrow - the only way to win the dispute with an employer who has carefully prepared for this de-reconstruction, Morris is concentrating on secret diplomacy, lobbying Ministers and calling for the human rights of the workers to be respected. It took very determined action, including the willingness of the Shrewsbury building workers to go to jail for breaching Heath's Industrial Relations Act, before piece of anti-union legislation was defeated

The stakes in the LSG Lufthansa dispute are high: should these workers be defeated, not just the pay and conditions of all Heathrow workers but also their right to belong to a union will be under grave threat - which is why all the employers including Blair's friend Bob Aylind of British Airways, will support LSG Lufthansa's efforts to break the union.

24 hour Picket: 9 of a mile down Pangie Lane, off the A30 (near Hatton Cross underground). Wood, snacks and hot drinks would be appreciated.

Donations: LSG Lufthansa Sky Chefs Strike Funds a/c no. 00694099, sort code 20 38 83, C/o TGWU 218 Green Lanes, Finsbury Park, London N4 2HB

MSF witchhunt is hotting up

Pete Firmin

After a protracted period of delay the leadership of MSF has decided to pursue a disciplinary investigation into its London Regional Council.

The issues involved are wholly political: the Regional Council opposed Labour Party policy of a directly-elected mayor for London and asked the General Secretary for local elections seeking financial support from the Regional Council give an indication of support for union policy.

In neither instance is there a breach of the constitution. MSF has no policy on the question of a directly-elected mayor in advance of Regional Council taking its decision, and there is no policy on the question of candidates for local elections.

The preliminary investigating panel has been looking at the issues for several months. On the latter they demanded the attendance of the General Secretary, Hugh McGrillan, and President Joe Michie - but refused them the right to hear the complaints against them, to record proceedings or to have a 'friend' present.

With the full support of the Regional Council at every stage, they refused to attend under these conditions.

It seems that the complaints stem wholly, or in large part, from the Labour Party, no doubt in schools with a tradition of Labour leadership. Terry Ashon, Director of the London Regional Board (i) of the Labour Party and Labour Party vice-national that the Regional Council was a 'storm in the room' of the Regional Council.

This seems to relate primarily to the crime its delegates committed of demanding a vote (!) at the 'consultation conference' the London Labour Party held on the question of London government. Ashston (and, presumably, MSF General Secretary Roger Lyons) do not see unions as autonomous organisations with the right to decide their own policy and argue for or within the Labour Party.

Ashston did not even bother rais-

ing his complaint with the London Regional Board of the Labour Party before writing to MSF.

Now a new panel has been set up to attribute individual responsi-

bility, formulate charges and rec-

ommend punishment to the MSF NEC. Recom-

mended punishment could be anything from suspension of individuals from office to reconstitut-

ion of the Regional Council.

The hearing is likely to take place at the NEC meetings of February 6 or March 13. There will be a demonstration - outside the MSF Head Office whenever this takes place.

MSF Finance and regions elsewhere in the country should pass resolutions demanding an end to this blatant attempt to silence critics of Labour Party policy.

Corporate criminals avoid prosecution

Shaun Cohen

In November 1998 the Health and Safety Commission's Annual Report was launched.

Despite 215 pages, there were no figures pro-

vided in relation to companies and directors being prosecuted.

HSO argues that it cannot publish every enforcement statistic. However, we are told the number of notices issued increased by 11% from 7,444 to 8,152. The number of prosecutions initiated by the HSO increased from 1,490 in 1996/97 to 1,654 in 97/98, of which 77% resulted in a conviction. The average fine per conviction rose from £13,113 to £3,886 - a 20% increase.

So what does the report not tell? First of all it does not indicate how many of the 29,320 major workplace accidents were investigated. The lower the rate of investigation the greater the level of corporate immunity. In 1998/97 the rate of investigation into major workplace injuries was just less than 10%.

Of the 67 blinding, 281 of the 800 serious and 1,578 of the 3,500 minor cases were 'not investigated' - that Fine under the new Health and Safety at Work Act, where the employer or the director of the company is being investigated for a breach of the Act. Here for example, one director was not under arrest as he travelled to the place of work whilst his company, a fire extinguisher manufacturer, was being investigated.

The report is due to be published in January 1999, although it is currently missing from the HSO's website.

The statistician that the HSE's annual report is based on the number of accidents reported and fire extinguishers provided. This is what the report claims is the number of workplace accidents.

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Mandelson's departure - a new beginning?

EDITORIAL

confirmed Mandelson as chair of a British-German think tank and invited him round to Chequers just to show he was as much in favour as ever. Mandelson will be there, advising and manipulating, however long it takes him to get back into the Cabinet.

‘Old Labourites’ have been expressing their hopes that Mandelson’s going will provoke a sea-change. Barbara Castle said she was ‘relieved’ at Mandelson’s departure, and felt sure that Blair would return to Old Labour ways, denying that Blair himself shared Mandelson’s views.

Prescott, seen by Old Labourites as their champion, issued a New Year message, coded to pre-empt accusations of disloyalty, but talking of state intervention, Keynesianism and an end to modernisation (interpreted as a rejection of further cooperation with the Liberal democrats). Blair’s office immediately repudiated any such possibility. Margaret Beattie, however, also seen by many as Old Labour, distanced herself from Prescott.

The press endlessly speculates about who is a ‘real’ old Labourite in cabinet, trying to discern some political differences at the heart of the personal feuds which repeatedly break out, with rival spin doctors briefing against their masters’ reputed enemy. Did Charlie Whelan leak the details of the Mandelson/Robinson loan as a service to Gordon Brown? Do we care?

Blair was quick to replace Mandelson and Robinson with loyalists, even if not of the calibre of Mandelson. In fact, Blair is very much in control of government policy. The Cabinet hardly has a role in determining anything anyway. Speculation that Brown is exactly a close socialist is so wide of the mark as to be laughable.

While he may not be ecstatic about cooperation with the Liberals and electoral reform, isn’t Brown the one that was adamant that this would not be a ‘tax and spend’ government, pledging not to raise income tax and keeping down public spending? Is Prescott, isn’t he the one pushing through the effective privatisation of the ‘London underground’?

And, of course, how could anyone place any confidence in people who have been willing partners in all the policies of the government and the carve-up of the labour movement, but who occasionally try to indicate that they are not real believers by smuggling dark phrases into their speeches?

The fact is that the policies championed by Mandelson and Blair, if not on the ideological underpinning, pervade all departments of government. It will take more than a change of Cabi net, albeit such an important one as Mandelson, to change that. Which isn’t to say that we shouldn’t have heart from Mandelson’s departure and recog nise that it would be unfair to lose his important ally.

But the only way it can be made into something more long-lasting is if the Left use the opportunity to go on the offensive. First, we have to drive home the message that Saddam’s power is unsecure - and fight them accordingly.

Iraq bombing: Clinton’s deadly diversion

THE FOUR-day US bombardment of Iraq was engineered in a criminal and cynical attempt by President Clinton to save himself from impeachment, by intimidating Congress and manipulating patriotic fervour. This is the second time that Clinton has launched a military attack on Iraq to try to save his skin.

He was happy to manipulate Richard Butler, head of UNSCOM into submitting his unconvincing report direct to him, rather than the UNSC. Little wonder previous US puppet, Un Secretary-General Kofi Annan, has been so non-plussed.

But this cynical ruse appears to have failed, and may even be strengthening the resolve of the Republicans to remove him. Those Republicans who stated they could not support his action did so not only because of their deep hatred of the man they believe has usurped their God-given right to the Presidency, but also because their own war aims would be far more through-going than anything envisaged by Desert Fox.

But the Labour government were almost Clinton’s sole allies. They offered uncritical support when the rest of the world saw through the US President’s play. Blair’s role as Clinton’s lap dog marks a further shift to the right in the politics of New Labour.

Opposition with the Labour Party - as been limited. In an unprecedented move MPs were denied a vote in the House of Commons, though it appears 100 would have opposed the attack. Liz Davies and Mark Seddon of the Grass Roots Alliance were active in opposing this murderous assault and other party members have had critical letters published in the press.

The attack on Iraq is a further blow to this devastated country. More cruise missiles will drop on the land during Desert Storm than when the fire power was considerably lower.

Despite pious statements about military targets, it is clear that civilian sites such as oil refineries and television stations have been deliberately attacked. Although casualty figures are not available, it is clear that there have been huge numbers of civilians. Clinton and Blair stated that 10,000 Iraqi deaths would be acceptable.

This is on top of the vicious sanctions, which according to UN figures have led to 1½ million deaths in the past seven years. Having installed, supported and bought Saddam Hussein, western imperialism is now punishing the Iraqi people for failing to remove him.

This onslaught on Iraq is about more than US domestic politics. The underlying causes remain the same as previous imperialist attacks on Iraq: the US drive to retain politi cal control and repudiate any such possibility. Margaret Beattie, however, also seen by many as Old Labour, distanced herself from Prescott.

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Saddam knows that Britain and the US will never back a popular movement to remove him calls for an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the forces from Iraq. Saddam’s power is unsecure - and fight them accordingly.

Our opposition to impeaching Clinton because of his sex life is not at all based on any illusions in him - but rather in our understanding of the US that the Republican party would lead to further dangerous assaults on working people in America, in Iraq and throughout the globe.

At the same time this degenerate and murderous adventure reminds us once again why socialists in the US need so desperately to build their own workers’ party, to lead the long-overdue struggle to replace the bankrupt Democrats and Republicans.
LIVINGSTONE for London Mayor

Neil Murray

The Labour Party NEC has met on January 26 to decide on the list of candidates for London Mayor and Greater London Authority members. Despite criticism of the Glasgow Ken Livingstone for experience of running the Greater London Council Blair and his minions are determined to stop him standing. The poll shows Ken as the only Labour candidate likely to beat anyone the Tories put up (or Richard Branson). The NEC will probably go for the option floated by the Greater London Labour Party Board (executive as was) to set up a vetting panel. This panel is designed with one main aim in mind - to prevent Livingstone getting on the ballot paper.

This is despite the large number of resolutions submitted by union and Labour Party bodies calling for candidates with nominations from 10 per cent of London CLPs to be automatically on the Labour Party ballot paper. Party members would have the right to choose the candidate for mayor from those with this level of support.

The likely leadership manoeuvre flies in the face of the wishes of the 400 odd delegates at Greater London Labour Party conference last June, who passed a resolution for automatic short-listing with only one vote against. The fact that Livingstone is extremely popular not only with Party and union activists but also with the London electorate as a whole only makes things worse for the bureaucracy. The best option for them would be to find a candidate who could beat Livingstone in a ballot. Party members and the whole matter would be closed.

Unfortunately for them, they can't find anyone who could even run Livingstone close.

Not for want of trying. They have floated several candidates, Glenda Jackson, Tony Banks, and Trevor Macdonald, all of whom have been dropped like a ton of bricks when they realised they couldn't make a dent in Livingstone's popularity.

The latest kite to be flown is Pauline Green, MEP, in the hope that she will have some level of publicity in the run up to the European elections in June, but she has an awful lot of ground to make up on Livingstone.

While the Party leadership generally succeeded in carrying the selection process for the Scottish Parliament and European elections (although not without protests), the London Mayor selection has created a lot more fuss.

Elsewhere the hitch-ups took place without too much publicity, but having created the post of a high-profile directly-elected mayor against the wishes of the Party membership, with talk of 'an ambassador for London', it is hardly surprising that the selection process has attracted the media's attention. Blair is now stuck with the problem of trying to prevent a popular, high-profile, candidate from standing.

The media have been running planted stories - probably emanating from Millbank - about the terrible record of the GLC. This hasn't prevented the media also noticing Livingstone's popularity, reporting and running opinion polls showing Londoners (and Party members) support for his right to stand and editorials in surprising places opposing the carve-up.

The type of candidate Blair would really dislike was shown when Robert Aylng, chief executive of British Airways, was floated as a potential candidate. Rather than a hindrance, Aylng's record as a union-basher is obviously an asset as far as Blair is concerned. He may have realised by now that Londoners and London Labour Party members don't feel quite the same way.

So why is Livingstone so unacceptable to Blair? He has expressed his willingness to work with a 'Blairite' deputy leader, and toned down his criticism of the policy of directly-elected mayors outside London. He has, of course, wanted the job. He even claims to have written to Blair making clear that he would not see himself as a focus of opposition to the government.

He has mixed his criticism of the government's economic policy with expressions of loyalty, and now supports Britain's entry into the single European currency.

He has said that he could not repeat the GLC's 'fares fair' policy (when fares were reduced by about 35%) and would not be able to affect the contracts for the semi-privatisation of London underground. His 'manifesto' is quite moderate (though not for Blair).

His proposals for solving London's transport problems include the pedestrianisation of parts of the centre, the re-introduction of conductors on the buses (cutting delays), the reversal of the trend towards short-distance bus routes, improving the level of frequency on rail routes within the capital, and new taxes on car parking.

While pointing out the high level of poverty in large parts of London, proposals to grapple with this are thin on the ground - an appeal to the government to increase public spending in London and to the City Corporation to back a task force with hard cash and a commitment to "make the government's welfare to work programme to get people into real paid employment".

Other proposals include a Greater London development plan, integrated waste disposal across London, air quality targets, protection of the Green Belt and Sites of Special Scientific Interest, community and voluntary sector involvement in all London 'partnerships' and tackling energy waste and fuel poverty. He proposes using the new Police Authority to weed out corrupt and racist police officers, making it a disciplinary offence to refuse to testify against a corrupt or racist colleague in order to do so. He also wants the police to step up the fight against 'petty crime and vandalism'. In the long term he wants to see the GLA become the regional education and health authority and have tax-raising powers.

While all these (and other proposals) would undoubtedly improve life in London (if they got beyond the level of good intentions to concrete reality), this is more an indication of how bad things are than their radical character. They are hardly likely to disturb business in the City of London and there is little that challenges the government.

Livingstone rightly criticises the delay between the referendum on London government (May 1998) and the likely first elections for the mayor and Assembly in 2000. The government has been able to introduce short parliamentary bills on issues such as the Irish 'peace agreement', but it seems determined to delay introduction of the Greater London Authority. There is certainly an urgent need for such an authority, but Blair wants to avoid it becoming a pole of attraction for opposition to the government. Maybe he doesn't want an oppositional fig (or Millbank) even or worse, refusing to do so.

By the middle of 2000 the government's popularity may well have fallen, and since the Assembly will be elected by PR there would be unlikely to be an absolute majority of Labour members. Blair has shown time and again that although the government is committed to devolution of certain powers - some of which Blair would have loved to reneg on if they had been given such strong commitments from previous Labour leaders - the last thing he wants to do is let people get out of control.

So despite power, but move might and main to ensure that such powers are in 'safe' hands. The London mayor should content herself with signing annual contracts and attracting tourists and investment.

If an outright Blairite cannot be found who could secure the job (and Mandelson is now said to have declined the kind offer of losing another election) then either a loyalist who will just do as they are told or a 'businessperson' (Aylng, Branson) who would let the government get on with the real job of governing London. Losing to Jeffrey Archer, who wouldn't upset any applecarters, would be better in Blair's eyes than allowing Livingstone to stand representing, for all his shortcomings, the opposition to his policies and 'project' within the labour movement.

It is for this reason that socialists should support Livingstone in his fight to become Mayor of London. Not only does Socialist Outlook support his right to stand for basic democratic reasons, but we reject his candidacy. Ken Livingstone's victory would be the biggest blow yet to Blair's attack on the labour movement, inflicting a real defeat with repercussions beyond the limitations of his policies.

Blair will not back down on his opposition to Livingstone, whatever Livingstone says or does in his attempts to ingratiating himself. The way to ensure Livingstone's defeat is by mobilising the immense support he enjoys among Party and union activists.

Resolutions in support of his right to stand should just be the beginning; there should be demonstrations of support at the NEC meeting, at any vetting panel meeting and every other opportunity.

Blair and his supporters are only likely to back down if they are made to realise that the consequences of not doing so are worse.
Linking up the left

The Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance is hosting a conference on February 13th (for details see box) designed to draw together local campaigns from around the country. Socialist Outlook is supporting this initiative. We interviewed John Clegg about the conference and the future of the Socialist Alliances.

SO: Why is the Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance organising the conference?
JC: To create a forum and opportunity, where there are active campaigns across the region, to identify common threads. We are looking for a political identity for these campaigns.

SO: How do you see that going forward?
JC: The existing parties offer no remedy so we have to look for a new alternative.

SO: Do you mean at an electoral level?
JC: Campaigning can change some things. Grassroots campaigns can take the opportunity of using elections. For example, the Tameside care workers are thinking of standing because of the way the local Labour Party has let them down.

SO: Do you think that Socialist Alliances should stand in elections?
JC: Individual alliances should stand if they think they have a strong local base and the resources to fight an election.

SO: Will this be a conference for political discussion or will its appeal be much wider?
JC: Political activists are welcome but we are trying to get new people who are involved in community campaigns to come.

There is the beginning of people becoming unhappy with the government; resistance to housing transfers for example; an increasing awareness that when Blair said partnership he meant more privatisation; the aspirations that pensioners or disabled people had are not being met.

SO: What would you like to see coming out of the conference?
JC: We need to set up a practical support network for new emerging campaigns. Each community campaign seems to start from nothing - they should be able to easily contact others with more experience to help them get going.

SO: From this do you want to build national campaigns?
JC: Yes. We recognise that each local campaign is fighting its own immediate battle, but they all relate to the same national political and economic context, in which people purse funds (PFIs) in hospitals, cuts in council budgets.

There is also the issue of democracy. Quangos - such as unchecked health trusts - or, in the future, business consortia, are keeping their power. Ordinary people are losing even more of their little control over decision making.

SO: The Alliances in England have got a bit tied up with structures.
JC: Constitutions are important but not the centre of the universe. Covertly they have been going for six or seven years. They have been successful because of their activities not their rule book. Eventually a constitution will arrive that we are happy with but we shouldn't spend so much time looking for it at the expense of doing anything.

Nationaly we need an issue which all the Alliances can work on in order to draw us together, low pay and the minimum wage has already been suggested. Maybe the TAC 99 Conference will identify such a unifying theme.

Unions and the Labour Party

Time for a challenge!

Neil Murray

MANY UNIONS, particularly those involved in the struggle for education and the civil service, are affiliated to the Labour Party. The current policies of the Labour government, together with the curtailment of the Labour Party democracy, have provoked a debate about what the relationship of the unions to the Labour Party ought to be.

A few on the left have raised the question of affiliating from the Labour Party altogether. Outside of a few branches which have affiliated to the Socialist Party, this has not much been discussed.

What has found more resonance, with majority support at some union conferences, is to question the sponsorship of MPs who do not support the national union policy, and to query whether the unions should continue to put unlimited funds at the disposal of the Labour Party, for elections and in general, when they are attacking union members.

While a majority might be found in a particular union branch, or even at an exceptional conference, to disaffiliate from the Labour Party, it is extremely unlikely that this would find the support of a majority of members of any union at the current time. It would be more likely, if pushed to the wire, to lead to a split in the union, with a radical minority ending up isolated, hardly the best conditions for a fight back.

Currently the left in affiliated unions will get much more support by raising the need for the unions, and their leaderships, to fight for their policies against the Labour leadership.

The record of virtually every national union leader since Labour was elected (and before) has been to refuse to challenge policies which attack their members, but, at most, to make mildly critical, often 'coded' speeches. Their reaction when the union conference or section of the union is more critical is either to sit on the decisions, or to lash out at those making the criticisms.

Thus the union leaders refused to mobilise their members while the government's proposals on union rights were under discussion, instead we see unions employing a lobbying firm, to no effect. When the awful 'Fairness At Work' proposals were published, the union leaders could do no more than say they were 'disappointed'.

The minimum wage, set at a level well below the modern policy of the TUC and nearly every union, brought a similar response. The story can be repeated about public sector pay and many other policies.

No fight

Within Labour Party bodies the picture is the same. Union leaders refuse to advance union policy, whether at conference or on the NEC. A UNISON representative even sat on the commission discussing the level of the minimum wage, and put her name to the final report!

At the 1998 Labour Party conference, union leaders used their block votes to ensure that the only motions discussed and voted on avoided any direct criticism of government policy.

In fact, arguing for disaffiliation at the moment takes the heat off the union leaders, as shown by the fact that some SLF members of the RMT executive refuse to vote on issues regarding the Labour Party, thus allowing Jimmy Knapp to continually avoid any confrontation with the Party leadership.

The response of union leaderships to any threat to this cosy relationship with the Labour Party is indicative of how much they value it. London region UNISON convenor Geoff Martin is facing disciplinary charges for daring to say (in line with London UNISON policy) that the union would not support anti-union candidates for London mayor such as Robert Ayling, chief of British Airways.

The leadership of the London Regional Council of MSPs is under investigation and facing charges for the "crimes" of requiring candidates for local elections who sought union financial support to show some support for union policies and of opposing the policy of a directly elected mayor for London.

Manchester Unison has fought against implementation of RMT conference policy of demanding that sponsored MPs support union policy, particularly over the privatisation of London Underground.

The only national union to seriously question the money it puts into the Labour Party has been the AEEU, but this has been primarily over the employment background of MPs, not their politics, and this at the same time as funding the Blairite slate in Labour's NEC elections.

With union conferences beginning soon, this question will be discussed at many. Rather than disaffiliation, the Left needs to argue for:

• a fight for union policy at every level of the Party, from local Go's to conference and the NEC, with union representatives accountable to union policy;
• no sponsorship of MPs who support anti-union policies;
• no blank cheques for Labour Party funding, instead the money should be used to mobilise the membership for campaigns around union policy.

CAMPAIGNS 99 CONFERENCE

Hosted by Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance

Saturday 13th February, 10am-4pm
Mechanics Institute, Princess Street, Manchester

A conference open to campaigners across all issues - workplace, immigration, deportations, low pay, PFI - as well as socialist, green and trade union organisations.

CAMPAIGNS 99 Conference is a contribution to the growing opposition to free market ideology and to the demands placed on people by global capitalism.

Workshops have been arranged under the broad headings:

Opening Speaker: Dave Nellist, Socialist Councillor in Coventry.

Registration: £5 organisations
£1 unfunded campaigns

Sponsors: Keat, Coventry and Liverpool Socialist Alliances
Scottish Socialist Party, Socialist Outlook, Leeds Independent Labour Network, Mersyside Port shop stewards committee, TOWU 6198 branch, Workers Aid for Bosnia.

Tameside strikers angry at betrayal by Labour at council and government level.
Winter causes chaos in NHS hospital services

20 YEARS of Tory policies have reduced the NHS to a near-permanent crisis at times of peak demand – such as the winter months.

Despite glib assurances from Health Secretary Frank Dobson that enough extra "winter pressures" money has been pumped in to enable the hospitals to cope with anything but "exceptional circumstances", it appears that a relatively small drop in temperature and a flu epidemic are sufficient to trigger chaos in the remaining A&E units.

Not only have emergency patients again been stacked up on trolleys – and even treated in the backs of ambulances in hospital car parks – for lack of sufficient medical beds, but there has been an even sharper crisis in the supply of intensive care beds. On December 30, there were only four ICU beds free in the whole country, while the beginning of January has seen patients from London being ferried as far afield as Portsmouth for treatment, with the nearest other bed being Derby!

The pressure of increased demand on the dwindling numbers of front-line hospital beds has been coupled with a growing shortage of qualified nursing staff to keep the available beds running.

In many areas a combination of demonisation with low-paid levels of NHS pay and the impact of the flu epidemic and winter ailments on nursing staff mean that even hospitals with money to fill the gaps in the profession opened up by increasing numbers of older nurses retiring. Gordon Brown openly assumed a standstill in NHS pay levels as part of his tight-fisted 3-year settlement of NHS finances, making it hard to see any scope to reverse the downward slide in morale, despite Dobson's promise of a "recruitment campaign" and endless forays by NHS bosses to sign up nurses on short-term contracts from Finland, the Philippines and other countries around the world.

Just like their inglorious Tory predecessors, Dobson and his department appear to be devoting far more time and energy to denying the facts and attempting to gag or mislead journalists and conceal the scale of the crisis than they are to finding ways to put things right.

Journalists seeking ministerial comment are now switched through to a "Rebalancing Unit" which at the flick of a switch churns out a stream of pointless facts and figures designed to distract from the story in hand.

A starting point would be to guarantee nurses and other NHS staff a substantial above-inflation pay increase this year and every year for the lifetime of this government, alongside an immediate moratorium on any further bed closures.

Health unions, which have played the pay issue with predictable timidity, must wage a new year offensive on this issue, which is crucial to the future of our NHS.

Dodging reality: Dobson spends his short leave planning the coming NHS year.

Health mergers conceal Bristol cuts agenda

In spring 1997 Avon Health Authority commissioned a report from the Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, which recommended a large, single mental health trust. In February 1998 proposals were put forward to form such a trust from existing mental health services provided, in the main, by general hospital trusts.

This will stretch across the main population centres of Bath, Bristol and Weston-Super-Mare, with an opening remaining to extend it further East towards Swindon.

Presented as an opportunity to provide better services and to ensure that spending on mental health services is defended/fenced, the reality in the run up to April 1, 1999 is some what different. Suddenly large deficits in current budgets amounting to approximately 5 per cent of the total £55 million - were discovered.

In an attempt to balance the budget the favoured approach seems to be widespread job freezes, leading in quite an erratic way to increased pressure on already overstretched staff. Acute beds had already been closed at one Bristol unit in April 1998, elsewhere elderly beds are under threat.

Ironically the Sainsbury Centre has produced a more recent report warning that the rush to form single 'stand alone' mental health trusts is often counter-productive, placing a greater emphasis on front line services.

In the wake of this a further merger has been proposed between Frenchay and Southmead NHS trusts in Bristol, again for April 1999. Glossy documentation has been published outlining perceived benefits in terms of larger specialist staff groups, reduced management costs and increased ability to reduce junior doctors working hours to 56 per week.

The trusts have stressed that there will be no threat to A&E services on either hospital site, previous threats to this are vigorously opposed by local health campaigners.

Cover-up

However, in the current economic context, such re-organisations can, as the experience in mental health highlights, be used as a cover for excessive cutbacks.

Already trade unions in the trusts have found their respective management giving wildly contradictory information about how the merger will affect the support and ancillary services.

Unions have been offered and become involved in extensive negotiations over personnel policies and staff transfer to the new trusts.

Important though this work is there is a danger of activists becoming exhausted in a myriad of committees with the underlying problems of inadequate resources, workers demoralisation and increasing pressure remaining unabated.

Suddenly large deficits in current budgets amounting to approximately 5 per cent of the total £55 million - were discovered.

You think this is cramped - wait until Old Harry gets back from X-ray!

Ted Johns
Our Union needs to change

Greg Tucker, candidate for General Secretary of UNISON, explained the issues he sees facing union members at a recent RMT Branch meeting:

"INDUSTRIALLY, we failed to fight when the Tories privatised BR. Despite Union policy, all that Knapp would do was try to convince a handful of Tory MPs to vote against their government. Not surprisingly this strategy failed.

Since then we have been on the defensive. Jobs lost, conditions under constant attack.

If we are to defend our members we have to address the new issues we face.

Not just the new bosses agendas - but by pressing forward with our own. That was the meaning of this year's Infrastructural dispute.

We have shown when we organise a campaign on our demands our members are prepared to fight.

For this year we have to make a reality of union policy to fight for a shorter working week and a minimum 10 per cent pay increase.

This means more than just waiting in the hope that pressure from members will build up - but going out and organising on the membership.

Giving them the confidence that their actions will not be squandered by a leadership looking for an easy life - but taken forward by one willing to organise whatever is necessary to win.

Politically, we are failing to fight as new Labour privatises LUL.

Despite Union policy, Knapp will not even ask our sponsored MPs to speak up to defend our terms and conditions.

The government might consider re-nationalising the railways has been dropped.

The cost less proposal to return rail franchises to public ownership at the end of their term has disappeared from the New Labour agenda.

We need to reassert our own agenda - to fight for re-nationalisation as the only way to defend rail services; to halt the threat of any further privatisation on London Underground; for action to defend our shipping members from the likes of P&O; and defend our bus members from the rafts imposed with deregulation.

As the anti-union laws continue to be used against us, we cannot be satisfied with the pathetic crumbs thrown our way under "Fairness at Work". This is even more the case now that Mandela has given in even further to the CBI. We have to assert our demands for the total repeal of all the anti-union laws. Together with the rest of the movement we have to build a campaign that forces the government to act to unshackle our trade unions.

Organisationally, we are failing as a Union. Membership is nearly one third what it was when Knapp took office. Finances are stretched to the limit, but other than attacking basic democratic structures little has been done to get grips with the situation.

The financial situation far from being cured has become chronic.

The Union needs to be rebuilt into an organisation capable of defending the membership.

We have to act decisively to direct resources to supporting our grass roots. Our representative and officer structure is arranged as if British Rail was still nationalised.

We have to face reality and build an activist system capable of responding to the pressures of the privatization.

We cannot just assume that transport workers will queue up to join the new trade unions to make the membership to actively recruit and organise.

Every member is an activist an organiser.

Our rank and file have struggling to defend themselves - too often with no lead from the top of the Union.

"Wait and see", and hope our troubles go away has been the order of the day. Our Union needs to change - we need to build a fighting democratic union - with all members united in common cause - with officers prepared to give clear and decisive leadership.

Censorship at a seat of learning

A member of LMU UNISON

Leeds Metropolitan University has stopped the university's UNISON branch from choosing what notices goes up on its noticeboards. In an attempt to pretend that all is as normal, University managers have taken down notices they don't like while leaving up others. This Omniserv IAN campaign is accompanied by the discovery that on an unknown number of occasions the TRU's IAN voice-activated spy cam has been deployed, apparently at both management and particular employees of the University were apparently being targeted, but obviously any member of staff, student or member of the public could be caught, whatever they might be doing.

UNISON branch officers and members were outraged, particularly by the indiscriminate nature of this invasion of privacy. They produced notices to warn about it.

Although the Vice-Chancellor and other officials have admitted that this form of surveillance did take place, they don't want the branch to tell people about it - and demand explanation from all UNISON's noticeboards.

UNISON members and some of their friends have been conducting a hit and run campaign of posting unauthorised notices telling staff and students what they're not allowed to say, and that they're not allowed to say it.

High officials in 'Human Relations' and members of University security have been learning their salaries by going round taping them down.

Before Christmas NATHE, the lecturers' union, was writing to the employers to demand an explanation of what was going on. No action has yet been taken by the Students' Union, although 'Leeds Student' newspaper has covered the story.

With the start of the new term UNISON will undoubtedly be continuing its campaign against this attack on the right of the trade union to organise, and the gross invasion of privacy that preceded it.

Tube strikes banned by High Court: RMT backs down

By a railworker

In a High Court intervention before planned strikes over the New Year weekend, London Underground workers were banned from taking action when a High Court judge granted LUL management an injunction against the RMT.

The judge ruled that the RMT's successful ballot, held in the summer, had effectively expired because of a series of lengthy gaps since action was taken. To affect the ruling penalised the RMT for attempting to further the dispute in negotiation rather than maintaining its strike programme.

Despite an attempt by the left minority on the RMT Executive to call action regardless of the court decision, the RMT agreed to call off the planned strike and will now re-ballot its LUL members. It is important that the ballot is called and action called rapidly - the first LUL workers are due to be handed over to the private sector in February.

Once again the whole question of the RMT's sponsorship of John Prescott and other MPs has been

in whatever way the Union is organised.

With voting in February and March the task now is to make Knapp and Co. pay the price for their failure to organise real resistance to the attacks being made on RMT members from their private factionalism and the New Labour government.
Don't drop fight against Section 28

Mark Lewis
THREE YEARS ago, lesbians and gay men protested vigorously against "Section 28", part of a local government act passed in 1988 by the Thatcher government.

It specifically prohibits local authorities from "promoting homosexuality by teaching or publishing material". At the time it was opposed by Labour, and in Labour's 1997 manifesto abolition was an early promise. So it was with shock and surprise that lesbians and gay men learned that repeal was to be dropped from the 1998 Queen's Speech.

It was even hinted that it might not be abolished at all by the present government.

Section 28 is perhaps unique - it has never been enforced by a court or by the police. Legally, it remains a dead letter, since "promoting" anything is rarely an activity of local government.

Although it refers to teaching, in fact it imposes no duty on schools.

But the Section has been used many times by local authorities to refuse to fund lesbian and gay oriented groups, art centres and so on. In spite of its non-application to schools, it has been used as an excuse to remove any reference to gay or lesbian sexuality in sex education.

Repeal therefore has always been a demand of lesbian and gay campaigning.

So why has abolition been dropped? Lack of parliamentary time has been mentioned, but repeal of this legislation would be very straightforward indeed. Possible blockage by the House of Lords has also been suggested after the Age of Consent debate.

A more likely culprit is the new "family friendly" attitude of the government, coupled with desperate attempts to cover over press exposures of gay ministers.

Another problem is the lack of action on the issue from established campaigns.

Even the activist group Outrage hardly mentions it on its web site, although it does call for repeal.

It is not included in its "Top Three OUTRAGEous Ideas" - evidently the core of Outrage's campaigning demands.

Stonewall has a single paragraph calling for repeal, without any real discussion, on its general page. As far as action is concerned, the Equality Alliance organised a series of small demonstrations last May, but has no permanent organisational core for the minute.

LGCLR has no web page, but integrates repeal with the rest of its legislative proposals. Paradoxically, it is perhaps the least impressed by the Labour government's efforts. It continues to campaign against Section 28 as part of its general activity.

Overall, it appears that much of the lesbian and gay movement is still in the thrall of the government, unable to believe that Blair and Straw (!) are anything other than "friends". We call for the immediate repeal of section 28. Lesbian and gay groups need to come together to organise.

Web sites referred to:
http://www.outrage.cygnus.co.uk/opq.htm
http://www.stonewall.org.uk/general/ front.htm
http://equality-alliance.disseny.org/uk/pr8904305ec28.html

Kent asylum seekers under attack

Simon Deville
SINCE the introduction of the Tory Asylum and Immigration Act in 1996, numerous forces have helped to whip up racism against asylum seekers in Kent.

Whilst the National Front have attempted to make whatever gains they can from this, and plan to make Kent one of their key areas for their European election campaign, the local media have shown a rather marginal increase of racism.

Key to fueling the rise in racism have been government policy, the local and national media, and council officials.

The Kent Asylum and Immigration Act in 1996 placed the burden for supporting asylum seekers away from central government, as the right to Income Support and Housing benefit was withdrawn for all those who didn't apply for asylum immediately on entering Britain.

A legal ruling meant that local authorities should have a responsibility to provide housing, food and other basic necessities under the National Assistance Act, and the Children's Act meaning that much of this financial burden has been placed upon local authorities.

The local media have consequently swerved out rabbis, anti-immigrant bars, and upstairs asylum seekers (and Eastern European Roma specifically) for everything from rises in crime, housing shortages to hospital waiting lists. One paper even carried a story by a local prostitute complaining that her business had suffered as she was being undercut by asylum seekers forced into prostitution.

Kent Today organised a Phone-in poll to ask "should the Roman Gypsies be sent home?" and one newspaper may face prosecution for incitement to racial hatred after printing a letter suggesting that asylum seekers be thrown off the cliffs of Dover.

One of the few voices of dissent came from Labour Councillor (and deputy leader of KCC) Keith Ferrin

"Sadly there is so much hatred around, it wouldn't be at all difficult to staff a concentration camp for asylum seekers in Kent at the moment. Nurses, doctors, union officials, reporters and scores of ordinary people have all passed by on the other side, spitting as they went, in the last two weeks.

"If you are one of them, I would like you to know that I don't want your voice. I'm proud of the job that we have done in Kent to deal with asylum seekers and if anyone doesn't like that, tell them to leave."".

While there may be contradictions in his position, this one Tory has done far more than most Labour councillors have been prepared to do in opposing racism.

The National Front have been given a focus to mobilise around, picketing any temporary accommodation where asylum seekers have been dumped, and organising two national demonstrations (where they were far outnumbered by anti-fascists on each occasion).

Labour's proposals on immigration and asylum will greatly increase this sort of racism, since all housing benefit and income support will be stopped, placing the entire financial burden on local authorities.

At the same time asylum seekers will be dispersed throughout the country, where support services may be minimal, and they will be far more isolated.

Anti racist should not only oppose Labour's new proposals, but also demanding the abolition of the existing racist laws.

Close Campsfield

Campaigners marked the grim 5th Anniversary of the Immigration Prison at Campsfield, near Oxford with a protest outside the gates (below).

Labour ministers have been at least as keen as their Tory predecessors to continue the practice of incarcerating asylum seekers in the privately-run jail, one of a nationally network, holding thousands of innocent refugees.
Strange bedfellows pushing forward "peace process"

John North reports from Belfast

A DEFINING moment in recent Irish history was the massive vote in favour of the British government's proposals for a political settlement. One of the forces delivering this vote was an "independent" non-ministerial campaign before Xmas the campaign publicised its accounts. The details said everything about the nature of the Good Friday settlement. Top contributor was a business enterprise, Soros, followed by Southern capitalists Martin Naughton, who has interests in the North. The campaign was led by Quinn Oliver - seen as representing the conservative commuter sector in the North. At the time of the campaign, it was claimed to be independent of the British, but it has since emerged that they were provided with research and intelligence data by the British government. They say all that needs to be said about the Irish Peace process - established and bankrolled by imperialism, supported by British and Irish capital and fronted by community organisations that have grown up not as a result of struggle but from years of the disbursement of pacification funds by the IRA and the EU. The only basis on which this could be said to progress would be if one were to believe the idea that imperialism had now become a force for good. This is exactly what many supporters of the peace process profess to believe, and it is at the foundation of current republican analysis.

Stepping stone

In this scenario, the cross-border bodies to be set up following the agreement are a stepping stone to a united Ireland. In a transitional period the re-established Dail and assembly will be forced to democratis the Northern Civil Service. This will all happen because imperialism, if not defeated, was at least held in check by the republican military campaign - the evidence being that there is no demand for prior decommunion (the formal surrender of arms) written into the agreement.

Unfortunately these are not ideas that would long survive the light of day in today's harsh debate, so from all sides comes the blind assertion of reform and progress, punctuated by strange silences when the long periods of Republican leaders who at first reluctantly endorsed it are now the only eager defenders of the agreement.

The new stage of the agreement lists ten departments, to be shared out between the parties with two ministerial seats reserved for Sinn Fein. The equality department is nowhere to be seen. In fact the whole structure of the parliament isn't about equality but about sharing sectarian privilege. In any case the British will hold the levers of power in the state.

A new element has been added to the agreement - the other parties have made it crystal clear that the republicans must surrender weapons - and that they must do so before entering government. This demand has meaning but tremendous political significance.

In a carefully choreographed bit of playing this necessity was underlined by the surrender of a few weapons by the LVA, one of the pro-British death squads, immediately following the parties signatures.

Many of the details surrounding the agreement give a clear picture of the actual mechanisms at work and the possibility of conflict and of a new order.

One issue is the extremely volatile mixture of reaction and sectarianism represented by unionism. Even the ten times dilated agreement, which represents 96% of their own demand, was rejected by the unionist Assembly party and had to be taken back for a further tweak to the right. David Trimble had to be awarded the Nobel prize having conceded nothing and available only of jibes at the republicans.

The fact that these are the moderate unionists - and the other 60% are even more reactionary means that there will be a steady rightward drift in the process, one that has operated from the beginning and will continue to operate.

This is unlikely to detangle things as the British have no problems at all in shrugging their shoulders and asking for more concessions from Dublin and the SDLP.

In any case the unionists are already consolidated to many aspects of the agreement - all of them intend to hold on to the Stormont assembly like grim death. UK unionist Bob McCartney lost control of the other ministers of his parliamentary party when he suggested withdrawal.

What is also clear is the growing authority of Dublin and the northern nationalists in heading the nationalist family. It is quite clear that Sinn Fein were kept well out of the loop during negotiations and knew only just as much about the proposals and the level of agreement between Trimble and local nationalist leader Mallon as they were told. Many of Sinn Fein's statements were therefore wildly inaccurate.

It is also significant that it was Dublin that vetoed including agriculture in the cross-border body. It is important to include in something that is meant to ensure a partitionist capital stability based on the status quo.

The Northern SDLP are quite unhappy as their share of the sectarian cake is eaten into, but they will not allow anything to threaten the deal.

Finally there is the stability of the republican base. An IRA convention was held, and refused to agree to the surrender of arms. It appointed a hard-line militarist as leader of the IRA. The suspicion is however that the Adams leadership has seen greater flexibility and that the new leadership stand willing to enforce further concessions from Sinn Fein.

The reality is that the militarists have failed utterly as an opposition, have no alternative programme, have accepted the return of a partitionist assembly and simply represent a sentiment that has to be talked around.

Imperialism won a major victory in May. The fact that the agreement anywhere addressed the causes of conflict means that the nationalist shocks and strains that will always be a feature of it.

The demobilisation of the republican base and the co-option of the labour bureaucracy in support of the deal means that regroupment is likely to be a slow and difficult process in the North.

However much of its stability from the nationalist side rests on the authority of the Irish bourgeoisie - an authority recently achieved on the back of perceptions of a "Celtic Tiger" economy, and likely to face sharp challenges in coming workers in the coming period.
IO SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

The birth of the Euro
Blesses too up against the working class

Alan Thornett

ove it or loathe it, the arrival of the Euro – the single European currency or European Monetary Union (EMU) as it is formally known – is a gigantic event in European politics. It is equal (at least) to the Marshall Plan in the immediate post-war period, or the original launch of the European Economic Community in 1957.

Economically, the sheer size of the zone the new currency represents – France, Luxembourg, Austria, Germany, Belgium, Finland, Holland, Holland, Italy, Ireland, and Portugal – instantly makes the Euro a super-currency second only to the dollar, and a major new player in the world market, probably as a reserve currency.

Politically, the launch of the Euro is the biggest single step yet towards a European super-state – the project favoured by the most powerful sections of the European bourgeoisie when faced with increasing competition from Japan and North America. The most important factor at that time was Japan, with its USA relative in the doldrums.

The Single European Act of 1986 was designed precisely to challenge what was then Japanese pre-eminence in the world econony. It marked the transition from what had been until then a mainly economic project of a common market or customs union (aimed largely at avoiding further European wars) towards the highly political project of the European Union, and eventually a super-state.

EMU was the core provision contained in the Maastricht Treaty signed in 1992. It would take away the ability of individual nation states to fix interest rates, the most important fiscal lever available to them.

The Maastricht Treaty also contained provisions for a common foreign and defence policy and elements of social policy under the Social Chapter.

Other features of a nation state – such as the European Court of Justice were already in place, and others such as a common immigration and asylum policy (under the Schengen Agreement) were soon developed after the introduction of the Maastricht Treaty.

1992 was also the year Britain and Italy were blown out of the EMU's predecessor, the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM). The ERM was a halfway house between the previous free movement of European currencies and their locking together under EMU.

The demise of the ERM demonstrated just how difficult it would be to maintain the stability of a single currency which straddled a multiplicity of diverse economies across Europe. And the Euro comes to Europe at a time when there are 20 million unemployed inside the EU and 50 million people living below the poverty line, much of this a direct result of jobs losses caused by preparation for the Euro.

The Maastricht treaty's answer to the question of stability was the qualification clauses for membership of the single currency, the so-called "convergence criteria". This placed a strict limit (of 3% of Gross Domestic Product) on government borrowing, along with restrictions on balance of trade deficits in relation to GDP levels. It imposed an economic framework which put the Europe of Maastricht firmly within the neoliberal agenda of the USA, the IMF and the World Bank.

Maastricht, therefore, was not only an attempt by the European bourgeoisie to compete more effectively with rival power blocks in the world (where only the biggest and strongest can survive) but triggered a major attack on the European working class as austerity measures were introduced to meet the criteria. The various European welfare systems - now regarded by the European bourgeoisie as a luxury which could no longer be afforded - were the main target in these attacks.

The response of the European working class to these attacks was the biggest round of struggles which Europe has seen for a decades, with general strikes in a series of countries – Belgium, France, Spain, Italy and Greece. At the end of 1996 France saw the biggest general strike wave since 1968, and the Juppé government fell as a result.

Britain remained the exception in this (with a Finance Minister at all-time low after the defeat of the 1980s) but in country after country, the measures designed to meet the Maastricht criteria were met with strikes and other forms of mass action from blockades by farmers and lobby drivers, to strikes by seafarers and bank workers.

In some cases austerity plans were pushed back.


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French unemployed force Jospin into fresh concessions
New Year of struggle for benefits

Christophe Agitonu

ASSIVE mobilisations of the French unemployed movement were built during the winter of 1997-8. They involved occupations of many administrative offices dealing with unemployed workers. There was widespread media coverage, and the campaign dominated the front pages of the newspapers and made prime time news on television throughout France.

The conflict calmed down when Prime Minister Lionel Jospin himself came on television to announce a £20m to be distributed to those in urgent need.

In July, a new law on Social Exclusion was before the National Assembly.

Unemployment associations and social rights organisations were largely in a tent outside, with television monitors showing the proceedings. A growing feeling was one of utter frustration, of having suffered a terrible deception, and that nothing had changed.

Winter has come early this year. Already people have died of cold, including a family that died from hypothermia due to inadequate help with food and housing. This Year the unemployment associa-

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i was against this back-ground that the European Marches were able to mobilise 56,000 people against the social effects of EMU in Amsterdam in June 1997. It was the first truly international demonstration of its kind – with an internationalised attack being met with an internationalised response.

International solidarity was on the agenda, and Renault workers staged cross border protests and strikes.

The Maastricht treaty and EMU, however, were bruised but not beaten by these actions, and by the middle of 1998 11 of the 15 EU countries had qualified (by a combination of austerity and creative accounting) to join the launch of the single currency on January 1st 1999.

The Euro, in the form of notes and coins, will not, of course, come into use until January 2002. But it will not be a "virtual currency" says some of the sceptics. From day one all the mechanisms of EMU will operate. The countries participating states will be permanently locked together, and the collective interest rate set by the unelected members of the new European Central Bank (ECB), set up last year. In reality it will be the 10 currencies destined for absorption which will be the vir-
tual currencies for the next three years, with their values tied unalterably to the Euro. The Euro will exist from day one as a major trading currency in electronic transactions. It will be an electronic currency for three years but no less powerful for it. And the introduction of the Euro will make financial transactions within the EU cheaper and easier. This will create big problems for member states not in the first wave - Britain, Denmark, Sweden and Greece. Big sectors of commerce will trade in the Euro irrespective of whether it exists in the physical form of a currency. Those left outside the Eurozone will see economic activity gravitate towards what will be the undisputed core sector of the European economy. They will be the worst of all worlds - from a European capitalist point of view - subject to the continuing convergence criteria (continuing for those not yet in), but devoid of influence and the economic advantages of membership.

Membership of the EU is not inevitable, even for a capitalist point of view. But the half in half out situation is a big business nightmare. If the Euro maintains any kind of stability pressure will mount on the remaining four to join - and do what is necessary to do it.

The big question, of course, is whether the Euro will remain stable, given the recent turbulence of world markets and the continuing severe crisis in key sectors of the world economy. Today's currency wars are a form of capitalism is not so much from Japan, which has lost out to the USA in shaping the world to its own ends, but in a deep slump, but to the USA which has regained its dominance.

How the crisis impacts on Europe and the USA over the next year, therefore, will determine how the Euro survives its current challenges. If Japan's challenge will be the rash of the others to join.

At the same time the arrival of the Euro and the restructuring of the European economy, which has been under way since the arrival of the Maastricht Treaty, through mergers, takeovers, and the strengthening of the domination of the multi-national corporations.

Whilst at the present time most EU countries have some involvement in the production of most goods and services across Europe, there is no reason why this should be the case under EMU. Why should such things be duplicated when the degree of protection given by the existence of individual currencies is gone and the single market complete? The strongest will survive, the weakest will go to the wall. Production and services will be rationalised, and jobs will go.

The current battles for control between European telecommunications companies are a case in point. From the logic of the EU (even more the Euro-zone) a monopoly makes no sense. This may be good news for big corporations who want to maximise their profits, but bad news for the working class in terms of wage levels, job losses, and unemployment.

All these objectives, however, depend on the stability of the Euro in short and medium term in international markets. The plan is that this will be achieved by theSnake Pact (the form the convergence criteria takes once EMU is in) under which government borrowing and inflation levels will hopefully be controlled. But this is easier said than done.

Beyond that the stability of the Euro is based on the huge assumption that the institutions of the EU can bring about a harmonisation of the economies of the member states - from the biggest and strongest like Germany and France to the smallest and weakest like Ireland and Greece - to the extent that a single monetary policy can be imposed on them by the city of suppliers ranks makes no sense. This may be good news for big corporations who want to maximise their profits, but bad news for the working class in terms of wage levels, job losses, and unemployment.

Already the international economic crisis has split the bourgeois over how to resolve it. One section, led by in Japan and the Asia Pacific economies (and supported by billionaire speculator George Soros) is pressing for a return to more regulation and for Neo-Keynesian measures to stimulate the economies. They argue that the raw unregulated market is a recipe for disaster. The other section, led by the USA, sees more neoliberalism as the answer. It is an unresolved debate. But it has its reflection in Europe, with the election of social democratic governments in most of the countries of the EU - in particular the arrival of Schroeder in Germany and Jospin in France. They are both pressing for some kind of neo-Keynesian inflation, despite the economic realities of Europe under Maastricht. The brief of the European Central Bank is to ensure low inflation as its number one objective, regardless of the impact this will have on jobs and working class living standards.

 Fortunately, Tony Blair remains committed to entering the single currency as soon as he can be sure of winning a referendum, despite his continuing attachment to the Atlantic Alliance and his resulting craven support for the Clinton administration demonstrated so clearly recently in the US.

In this he will get the full support of the TUC and most of the trade union leaders. The TUC has led the pack as an enthusiastic proponent of the whole European project, hoping that a few crumbs from the European table will compensate for the total lack of fight against the governments and employers offensive in this country. The AEEU has even announced that workers can now pay their dues in Euros!

Yet the EU is a vicious anti-working class institution, aimed at increasing the rate of exploitation and destroying welfare provision won by the working class in the post-war period. The responsibility of the left in Britain to fight for clarity on this issue is obvious - particularly in the unions and in the Labour Party.
Five years after Chiapas rebellion

National Union of Workers (UNT)
A promise unfulfilled

The UNT itself recognizes that it has so far failed to lead the broad upsurge of the working class which it proposed a year ago. The UNT Convention's basic document noted, "A year since its birth, the UNT is now an obligatory reference within the national panorama. Nevertheless, the federation still needs internal control and solidarity. We must work to build a more aware and educated civil society, to supervise the growth of its membership, material and human resources, as well as a forward motion in its political profile."

Various pundits noted that the UNT has yet to establish a national headquarters, has lost all of its leadership, and has yet won inclusion in the government's tripartite boards, and has not succeeded in getting the government to establish either the new salary structure or the national registry of unions and contracts that it has advocated. But those are just the tips of its problems. Or rather that is the wrong checklist...

Augustin Rodriguez, one of the three leaders of the UNT, told the press, "We reaffirm all the objectives that we have proposed, we should be self-critical, we have not succeeded in making the UNT into the great fighting front for the most general demands of the Mexican workers."

That remark comes closer to the heart of the matter. Asked how he would evaluate the UNT, Rodriguez said, "on a scale of 10, I give it an 8." Some would say that is a bit of a limerine.

The founding of the UNT represented an important and progressive development in Mexico. At its founding, the UNT brought together both former "official" or state-controlled unions and independent unions that had previously challenged the hegemony of the Congress of Labor (CT) and the whole "corporative" union structure dominated by the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM). Subsequently the UNT was involved in massive labor demonstrations, and in March 25 against government cut-backs and privatization, and another on May Day, the international labor day.

But so far, the UNT has failed to take the lead in turning organized labor into a leader of the broad social and political movement to challenge the Mexican deep economic and social problems.

The UNT leadership's own economic programs and their failure to escape the disastrous economic situation in Mexico. In the last decade the UNT has had to deal with the extreme poverty rose from 20 million to 30 million. Unemploy-
Hit Mexican oppressors where it hurts most!

The Zapataista Action Project and the Mexico Support Group are calling for urgent support for the following Early Day motion as part of the campaign of International solidarity with the Zapataistas. Trade with the European Union is increasingly important to the Mexican state and the measure to demilitarisation of Chiapas needs to be raised within this context.

**MEXICO Early Day motion no.1610 (in Hansard 28 July 1998)**

**Sponsored by MPs Jeremy Corbyn, Kevin Livingstone, Kevin McNamara, Norman Godman, Michael Clapham**

This House is deeply concerned about developments in Mexico, and the continuing human rights abuses there. It notes with dismay the murder in Mexico last week of a Zapatista leader, and the growing number of indigenous people who have been killed in Mexico in the past year. This is an international concern, and Mexico has a duty to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all its citizens.

Mexico's human rights record is unacceptable, and the Mexican government must take immediate action to address these issues. The continued presence of foreign troops in Chiapas is unacceptable, and the United Nations should be allowed to deploy a peacekeeping force to monitor the situation. The Mexican government must also respect the rights of all its citizens, including the indigenous peoples of the region.

The government in Mexico must also provide assistance from the USA and armed forces from Britain. On the contrary, the Mexican government is seeking to demonstrate that NAFTA can be used by foreign investors to exploit the human and natural resources of Chiapas, e.g. by privatizing the land for agriculture and mining. This is partly why the Mexican government has been so reluctant to implement the San Andres Accords, which were signed in 1996.

The government needs urgent intervention to prevent the conflict from escalating. The US and UK must pressure Mexico to comply with the terms of the San Andres Accords and to respect the rights of all its citizens. The international community must also stand up to the Mexican government and demand an end to human rights abuses in Chiapas.

The government or Mexican troops should not be present in the USA and armed forces from Britain. On the contrary, the Mexican government is seeking to demonstrate that NAFTA can be used by foreign investors to exploit the human and natural resources of Chiapas, e.g. by privatizing the land for agriculture and mining. This is partly why the Mexican government has been so reluctant to implement the San Andres Accords, which were signed in 1996.

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For background information about the conflict in Chiapas, see the Zapatista Challenge website http://www.zapatistachallenge.org

For any queries about promoting the motion itself, you may contact Steve Hogan in the office of Jeremy Corbyn MP tel: 0171-219 3545, hogan@parliament.uk
Justice for Muna!

Elkie Dee

Muna Abu Jamal, a radical Black journalist on Death Row in Pennsyl-

vania whose case Socialist Outlook

has previously covered, faces possible execution this year.

His appeal and request for a new trial were both denied, he requested by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court on October 29. His lawyer, Leonardee, states that all Muna's rights of appeal against the sentence could be exhausted by May 1999.

The State Governor, Thomas Ridge, has promised to sign and issue a new death warrant on Muna as soon as his appeal was denied. He issued his announcement one's intentions before the outcome of a court case, is there.

If Ridge does not sign, the head of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections is not sign the warrant and issue a date for execution and carry it out within 30 days. Once

the death warrant is signed, Muna will immediately be moved back into isolation to await the execution or a new stay.

In waging his life or death cam-
paign, Muna has maintained the principle of not working with estava. An American TV company, ABC, was making a documentary of his case, and finally seen a team to speak to the man himself. At this time, though, ABC had locked out its pro-
duction employees, who had been seeking union recognition for 18 months. When a member of the group was arrested at the prison, Abu Jamal turned them away.

As he was being denied, Muna Abu Jamal is a political prisoner. A for-
er Black Panther and MOVE activist, and as a token of the Philadelphia police department and criminal justice system, he has spent 17 years on Death Row, spending framed for the murder of a Philadelphia police officer. His execution would be the ultimate punishment for his analysis and criticism of the legal system in his own city and nationally, for being racist and for being financially and politically corrupt.

He has expressed his conviction that capitalism forms the basis of the legal system, and against his execution he has issued a warning to the politicians of the blatantly racist state and national legal system, but on a political campaign. His supporters need to convince the state that the execution of a political prisoner is too high to pay, and that it would lead in a loss of credibility for the legal system.

Demonstrations and concerts are being organised in the US. His sup-
porters are issuing a call to protest and win people to united action in his defence through labour movement, move-
ment organisations, churches and schools, self-organised black groups, opponents of the death penalty, human rights campaigners and appeals to public opinion. Activists in other coun-
tries are also taking up this issue, for example, by demonstrating outside US embassies.

On December 17 1998, a resolution was passed in the European Parliament calling for the abolition of the death penalty by all the states in the US and around the world, and highlighting the facts of Muna Abu Jamal's case.

In London, there are open meet-
ings every Wednesday at 56 Crompton Street, London SE17 (Nearest Tube Elephant and Cas-
tle), with the intention of pulling together a UK campaign.

Arafat surrender cannot salvage doomed “peace” deal

Roland Rance

THE WYE peace accord between Israel and the Palestinian Autor-

ity, signed amid much ballyhoo just a few weeks ago, has finally collapsed and the Israeli govern-
ment with it.

This fundamental difference will make this the miserable situation of the Palestinians under Israeli occupation and in the Palestinian Authority, and to the prospects for a settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

The Wye Accord was actually little more than a timetable for implementation of commitments which Israel had made long before.

Even so, Israeli PM Netanyahu objected right up to the last minute, and virtually had to be forced by Clinton to sign the docu-
ment. But Netanyahu's resis-
tance of the Oslo agreements, which he opposed in the PM Rabin signed them five years ago. This is not because he has be-
come convinced of the need for Palestinian rights, but, as a cynical and realistic politician and Rabin supporter, that the Oslo process, and the recruitment of Arafat and his Fatah, are a losing proposition in the repression of the Palestinians, best guarantees the continuation of this situation and its benefits for Israel.

This cynicism can also be seen in the recent appointment of Ariel Sharon, the Butcher of Beirut, as Israel's Foreign Minis-
ter, in an attempt to reassure the messianic right that the Greater Israel project is in safe hands.

True to form, Sharon's immediate response to the Wye Accord was to call on Israeli settlers to grab every available hilltop, and estab-
lish settlements.

In the days following this speech, hundreds of dunams of Palestinian land were seized by settlers. Further roads are being built, linking these settlements and by-passing Palestinian vil-

ages and towns. The patchwork of Palestinian bantustans in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is being even further divided and isolated.

According to Tikhova Honig-Parnas, of the Alternative Information Centre in Jerusalem, "The Palestinians will certainly be given a state, but they will not have independence."

Among the new elements in the Wye Accord was the establish-
ment of joint Israeli-Palestine Israelis' arbitration commissions. Arafat agreed - even demanded - that the US be repre-
sented on these com-
missions by the US government.

Arafat agreed even demanded that the US be repre-
sented on these com-
missions by the US government.

In accord with the US, the PA has conceded that, if the US supports the Israeli government on the interpretation of the agree-
ment, the PA should have the final say.

The agreement called for the PA to prevent "violence." This has been interpreted by Arafat as a green light for censorship. The increasing restrictions on the press have led to a journalist's scores and arrests. Sev-

eral television stations were closed down for reporting Palest-
inian opposition to the US-British air strikes against Iraq.

A further humiliation heaped on the Palestinians by the PA is the PLO repeal articles of their Covenant, which is anti-Zionism. In fact, this was done several years ago, although the validity of the meeting was challenged by the Palestinian left.

This time, Arafat was unable even to convene a quorate meet-
ing. In methods apparently learned from the "New Labour" style of decision-making, the applause for Arafat's speech was declared to constitute approval for the necessary constitutional reform.

Meanwhile, Arafat's opponents gathered in a little-reported meeting in Damascus to reaffirm support for the original PLO charter. This represents probably the final demise of the PLO as a credible organisation, though as yet nothing has been established to replace it.

In one of the few Israeli com-
mitments, Netanyahu promised to begin the release of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails. Arafat did not bother to specify which prisoners; when the Likud right, Netanyahu's opponents, need to respond.

Arafat's ineffectiveness was on display with the Hamas.

Despite all these clear benefits for Israel, Netanyahu was still unable to reach a deal within his coalition to support the agreement. He has been hang-
ing on to power through the tacit support of the Labour opposi-
tion, which fully supports Wye. Most Labour politicians recog-
nise this agreement, and the ear-
erly Oslo accord, as a continu-
utation of Labour's historic policy, first expressed in the 1968 Alon Plan, for maximising territory under Israeli rule, while reducing the number of Palestinian sub-
jects. Among Alon's closest politi-
cal allies at the time were Rabin and Sharon.

But Netanyahu's balancing act has now come to an end, and he has called fresh elections for May. He will be challenged from the right by Binyamin Rabin, son of the former PM, who opposes any conces-
sions to the Palestini-

ans.

Within his Likud party, Jerusalem mayor Ehud Olmert is threatening to challenge Netanyahu. Former Justice Minister Dan Meridor plans to stand as a Likud moderate.

A new centre party is being set up, but is already squabbling over its candidate, Lapid and Labour leader (and former Chief-
of-Staff) Ehud Barak - who has stated that he will remain in the settler's "till the end of time" - could also face a challenge within his own party.

Israel's electoral system, in which the Knesset and the Prime Minister are elected separately, exacerbates the coun-
try's religious and secular-
ian political map.

Although the religious par-

ties are unlikely to put up a candidate for PM, they expect to in-
fluence the coalition represent-

ation in the Knesset. This would enable them to raise the price for support of any gov-

ernment towards the promul-

gation of therological legislation and in financial support for their institutions.

Other groups seeking increased representa-
tion will be Russian immigrants, who now form about 20 per cent of the Jewish popula-
tion, and the largely Middle Eastern shun dwellers, whose champion David Levi resigned as Foreign Minister ear-
ly this year.

Even if the Labour Party were to win the elections, little would change.

With a slight change in style, and less personal animosity, Barak would be able to block Arafat and chest the Palestinians more easily and successfully than Netanyahu. The policy would remain the same, and Palestinian who believe that Barak is the lesser evil will be greatly disap-

We can be sure that Netanyahu will make the Palestinians pay whatever price he feels necessary in order to win in May.

The PA has con-

cluded that the CIA should have the final say.

We can be sure that Netanyahu will make the Palestinians pay whatever price he feels necessary in order to win in May.

We can be sure that Netanyahu will make the Palestinians pay whatever price he feels necessary in order to win in May.
"Free the workers - jail the bankers" 

Paul Flannigan

More and more potential for mass conflict is building up within southern Irish society. Increasing numbers of working class people feel alienated by the gross social inequalities and moral hypocities.

Workers are questioned for the first time in their history what the economy is doing to them, and are beginning to realise that they are not getting a deserved share of the new wealth. By contrasting their minimum conditions and life never had it so good. It is impossible to avoid noticing their conspicuous consumption of luxuries, the town centres populated with dozens of new bars, restaurants and wine bars especially tailored to their tastes.

Since 1987, the percentage of national income going to profits has risen by 10 per cent. More than 50 new factories and large plants have opened in Dublin in the last five years. Consumer spending has risen from less than €14 billion in 1988 to over €27 billion in 1997. The number of new car registrations has gone up from 68,000 in 1992 to 150,000 this year.

This year's Irish Central Bank economic report is forecasting 9 per cent growth rate for this year and 7 per cent for the year after. Interestingly though, in a generally very optimistic report, one threat to healthy profits is singled out - possible wage inflation.

The report notes that several factors including a falling official unemployment rate now down to 7 per cent, skill shortages in key sectors, increasing unfilled vacancies, the expectation of the introduction of a legal minimum wage, rising rents and the so-called "feel good factor" could combine to raise workers' expectations and spark a wage-push inflation.

The report noted that the 2.3 per cent pay restraint rule agreed between government and the unions under the "Partnership Two Thousand" arrangement is already being breached, the average pay rise in manufacturing is now running at 6 per cent, and at 14 per cent in the booming building sector.

Increasing militancy

Workers are beginning to take up the new wave of working class conflict.

In November train drivers brought the network to a standstill. A group of striking busmen forced the company to concede a €1,530 bonus plus a 7 per cent pay rise. 98 per cent of Dublin's fire fighters voted for strike action if the Corporation went ahead with a productivity plan. Disputes are daily breaking out in the hospitals, mainly against the vicious programme of cuts.

The leadership of the civil service union (CSPE) has been forced by rank and file pressure to convene a national conference to reconsider the union's commitment to Partnership Two Thousand.

To date the most intense bout of militancy has occurred within the building industry. Ireland has the fastest growing building sector in the EU: €7 billion invested in 1996. The industry has trebled in size since 1988; it now employs 100,000.

Despite this year's pay rises for skilled workers, in reality the terms and conditions faced by the majority of building workers have worsened over the period of the boom.

This year alone, 18 workers have been killed on the sites, and scores more seriously injured. When a worker dies as a result of a safety lapse, the maximum that can be awarded to his family is a contractor's €1,000.

According to a union representative it's cheaper for a developer not to put up a proper safety structure and just keep paying €300 or €1,000 every time someone gets killed, and that's what has been happening.

Last year a high court judge called the biggest developer of luxury departments in the country, Zoe Developments, "a disgrace to the construction industry.

Recently two building workers were sent to prison in a fight against the disorderly exploitative contracting out scheme. This is a scheme, recently developed by the main building employers to cut costs by employing workers only indirectly by small contractors or telephone agents.

Usually the worker starts as an employee of a major contractor, but within a few weeks he is told that if he wants to keep working he should re-register with a subcontractor or even as self-employed.

Union officials estimate that as many as 200 employees have adopted the scheme, which has been integrated into the building industry.

The picketing began in late August after O'Connor's began subcontracting work to a "subbie", E. Moran Ltd. On the day of the men's court appearance, hundreds of building workers downed tools and blocked O'Connor's factories from the court, in protest at the lack of a real fight for the "subbies."

Simultaneous solidarity protests by building workers occurred in Limerick, Waterford, Cork and Kilkenny. All the solidarity action was illegal and went against the advice of the Union leadership, which condemned both the original action and the solidarity activity.

When the men were sent down for contempt of court, hundreds of workers brought traffic to a standstill on Dublin's O'Connell Street to a halt. Late that evening there were clashes between the police inside Mountjoy prison. When the two men have now surged their contempt of court, the struggle to end the exploitation on the sites is set to become more intense.

Workers in Dublin are currently picketing three Sites against the victimisation of two shop stewards. A small rank and file group is effectively arguing for action beyond the control of the union bureaucracy.

New period

It seems that a new period of deepening class conflict is developing in southern Ireland. A comely future with the type of social partnership arrangements favoured by the bureaucracy is looking unlikely.

The ideology of the prosperous Celtic Tiger has raised material expectations. Thousands of workers are fed up seeing the bosses getting rich and arrogant on the back of their continued hardship. A new radicalism is emerging.

While the state is boasting of its biggest-ever current account financial surplus, over a billion in the black, at the same time it is cutting back on public spending on health and personal services.

A few weeks ago an IMF directors report on Ireland warned the Irish government not to start digging into its budget surplus, maintaining that the state treasury will need large fiscal reserves to enable it to manoeuvre within the new single currency regime.

At the time major row broke out at Galway Hospital over the state's refusal to spend any of its surplus to prevent the closure of two viral wards.

Most staff at the hospital attended an angry protest meeting to fight the cuts. Nurses are already on a week to rule and threatening a national stoppage.

We in Socialist Democracy need to start orientating our activities towards developing our programme, strategy and tactics to anticipate a new period of rising class militancy in the south. It would be a mistake to sit around and hope that a progressive development against peace process or within Sinn Fein.

In fact in the new period Sinn Fein looks set to become a drag on the development of a socialist class consciousness.

During the same week that workers in Dublin were involved in a stand off with the bosses and their political party Fianna Fail, Sinn Fein was launching its economic plan for West Belfast.

Incredibly Bertie Ahern, the leader of Fianna Fail, was invited up on the Falls Road to pre-empt the plan alongside Gerry Adams.

Nobodys present bothered to point out that the owners of Cromptons and Sinks, two of the worst exploiters of Dublin's building workers, are well known financial and political supporters of Sinn Fein. No one remarked that Fianna Fail ever did for southern Irish workers.

Sinn Fein's idea for a deepened partnership with Fianna Fail is taking it in exactly the wrong direction - what Irish workers will be looking for politically as well as industrial solutions for their discontent.

Socialist Outlook 15
Workers waited for a lead that never came

AS THE Law Lords ponderously debate once more whether there are grounds for refusing to extradite Chile's former dictator Pinochet to face trial in Spain, there are continued reminders of the scale of his crimes against Spanish and other workers during his bloody rule. But the focus on Pinochet should not be allowed to divert socialists from an assessment of the current Chilean workers' movement and Popular Unity government he set out to smash.

Here we carry extensive extracts from Chile: Lessons of the Count for the Tenth Congress of the same name by the International Marxist Group.

ON SEPTEMBER 11 1973 the Chilean army carried out the coup d'etat that ended Allende's government. This disastrous move was planned for the preceding two and a half years.

The Popular Unity government was overthrown and its President, Salvador Allende, was shot dead in his room at the Palacio Triana, a large section of which was destroyed by artillery and aerial bombardment.

The "Chilean road" had come to an end. New names had been added to the list of former class martyrs in Latin America.

Reformism of a new type: Allende's experiment

The election of the Popu
lar Front as an important step forward by large sections of the working class. The programme of the UP was without doubt confused (particularly on the co-existence of the public and private sectors). Nonetheless, it transcended the reformism of (Edén Pastora's) disavowed Popular Front. The UP pledged to create a new Chile, to nationalise all foreign capital and foreign companies, to extend the Agrarian Reform of 1933, and to lay the basis for the creation of a new apparatus of state control over the working class. Briefly, the UP saw the creation of the mechanism of the process of the transition to socialism.

So the Popular Unity was a classical Popular Front as existed in Chile, France and Spain in the 1930s, or so we were told.

A Popular Front embodies the collaboration between a working class party (or parties) and a party or parties of the bourgeoisie, and is a tactic of the bourgeoisie to contain the rise of the mass movement and keep a grip on working class parties. This was how the bourgeoisie conceived of the Chilean Popular Front in the Thirties.

Allende himself (old Regs Debussy, Conversations p118) "We consciously entered into a coalition in order to be the left wing of the system - the capitalist system, that is. By contrast, today, as our programme shows, we are struggling to change the system itself from below, for a socialist revolution, a total, scientific, Marxist socialism".

The point made by Allende is essential. Thus the central aim of the UP was socialism, whereas the Popular Fronts of the Thirties were pledged essentially to combat fascism together with important sections of the bourgeoisie, and remained completely within the ideological and political framework of bourgeois democracy. The UP, in its own words, if anything, a reformist united front dominated by two large working class parties. Even if there had not been a single grouping of bourgeois or petty-bourgeois origin in the UP there is nothing to indicate that its policies would have been different in any way.

The second important point to grasp about the UP is that the Chilean CP was a restraining force within it, and that the SP was well to the left of the UP on virtually every political question. This fact becomes rather decisive in understanding why the UP was not in a position to contain the mass movement, or to seek any solution (as the bourgeoisie would have liked), or even to outlive the MIR (Movement of the Revolutionary Left) in any way.

In the absence of a strong left wing political force it is quite clear that the CP would have irredeemably dragged the UP to the right and ultimately brought the Christian Democrats into the coalition, which would have made it a classical front dominated by the bourgeoisie in which the Stalinist movement specified.

The Chilean Socialist Party was founded in 1933 by Salvador Allende and a group of students. It was from the beginning a party which was dominated by its commitment to Marxism. "The Party adheres to Marxism as the method for a revolutionary change and recognises the class struggle as the motive force of history." The SP has always seen it as its function that the Chilean CP (which was then going through an ultra-left phase in accordance with the turn initiated by the Stalinist bureaucracy in Moscow) was incapable of responding to the needs of the Chilean proletariat.

The CP represented an attempt to build a working-class party based on Marxism, but not under the domination of the Stalinised Third International.

The SP resulted, different from traditional social-democratic parties, and Allende specifically stated in 1970 that the SP had nothing to do with "certain self-styled socialist parties in Europe". Thus the SP never aligned itself with the Second International (it was the Radical Party which was the Chilean section of the Second International). Allende's life was much more open, and many SP militants in the Thirties (including Allende) were opposed to Stalinism as such.

Although the Popular Unity formally committed to Marxism, the SP had no real strategy for the seizure of power in 1970. The UP was dependent on the Christian Democrat Peña's troops burning vandalised of their UP campaigns. But the CP had never been so important in the Popular Unity government. It was these measures in particular which colonial bourgeoisie that the UP was not going to restrict its take-overs by obvious annexationist tactics in the copper mines, but was challenging the main capitalist sector of the bourgeoisie as well.

Imperialism is prepared to tolerate a certain measure of nationalisation provided that compensation is guaranteed, but to return it sooner or later by the prestige gained by the government carrying out the nationalisation of the UP. To do so would have meant that the bourgeoisie would have lost its support in the colonial empire. It was a measure in particular which colonial bourgeoisie that the UP was not going to restrict its take-overs by obvious annexationist tactics in the copper mines, but was challenging the main capitalist sector of the bourgeoisie as well.

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ANC weighed down by apartheid debts

Charlie van Gelderen

As SOUTH Africa prepares for the second round of General election, it is still grappling with problems left by the previous regime. In its desperate efforts to perpetuate white rule, the apartheid regime had employed massive resources both human and natural. The country is still burdened with the foreign debt accumulated by the apartheid government mainly for the purchase of armaments. It used these weapons of destruction both to suppress internal opposition and for a series of foreign wars against Mozambique and Angola.

The foreign debt was about $20 billion in 1993. But because of the Rand’s devaluation against the dollar, the burden of the dollar’s decline against hard currencies such as the Deutschmark, the franc and the yen, the debt has greatly increased in size and is currently at a short of R90 billion. (There are 9.45 Rands to 1 sterling.)

To appreciate what this means to the many millions still deprived of the basic necessities of life — work, land, homes, clean water, electricity, and health care, one has to look at the relation of the debt to the total GDP. The total national budget for 1997/8 was R16.6 billion.

In short, the R90 billion debt represents about half of the government’s annual income and with the devaluation, it would be spending in the ensuing year. The interest on the total government debts mostly incurred under apartheid is R3.5 billion, the second largest expenditure under the budget.

Another burden inherited by the ANC headed government is the swollen size of the civil service. Part of the so-called ‘sunshine clauses’ drawn up by the Communist Party leader, Joe Slovo, to ensure a peaceful transition to “democratic rule,” was that there would be no dismissals of public servants — mainly, of course, whites.

But places had also to be found for thousands of black supporters of the new political order.

The result, inevitably, was a bloated civil service, estimated at 1.1 million, imposing a heavy cost on public expenditure. Of these, some 55,000 were regarded as unskilled or semi-skilled, thanks largely to the revolutionary schoolings they received under Verwoerd’s notorious South Education Act — Education for Barbarism as Tabatha called it.

President Nelson Mandela, Public Service Minister, Zola Skwlekwa, and Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, all threatened to sack thousands of public servants, but this met with strong resistance and often with strike action from the Public Servants’ Association (PSA, the Civil Service trade union).

Many of the workers threatened with job losses were based in the former so-called homelands, where work is scarce. The government fears that to throw these thousands of surplus employees on to a labour market which could not find them jobs would lead to increased unrest. Such a development would not be desirable in an election year.

The government is already concerned about the marked apathy about the forthcoming elections. This is likely to stand in stark contrast to the overwhelming enthusiasm in the first post-apartheid election which swept the ANC and its allies into power.

As a consequence an agreement has been made with the PSA that there would be re-employment within the public sector, and training schemes to develop the skills of the workers.

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Food matters!

By ???

MORE PEOPLE are eating better in the world than ever before. In these circumstances it is perhaps not surprising that in Britain and many other countries, food is a political topic of limited importance.

For example, much of the controversy about the Common Agricultural Policy has been about subsidies and tariffs, and not particularly about food as such.

Some of the scares about food safety in Britain have been so intense that eating has seemed more dangerous than ever before. Yet there are more choices about how, what and where to eat, and an industry of 'food pornography' to stimulate the jaded palate and get the goods whisking out of the shop and onto your shelves.

There is a well-established view in the British left that an interest in issues of food is a self-indulgent one. This was most notoriously stated by George Orwell in *The Road to Wigan Pier*: "One sometimes gets the impression that the mere words 'Socialism' and 'Communism' draw towards them with magnetic force every fruit-juice drinker, nudist, san- dall-wearer, see-maniac, Quaker, 'Nature Cure' quack, pacifist and feminist in England."

Orwell's view was not without truth. It could still be said today that there are "cranky" vegetarians with a dispoothing attitude to what other people eat. It is also true that there are animal lovers who will deploy the most militant tactics against experimental laboratories or the shipping of live cattle but who show little interest in the struggles of other human beings against oppression.

Despite such reasons for not being interested in food, there are powerful reasons to expect food to become more important. They are already a matter of 'life and death' for hundreds of millions of people, especially in Africa.

Although more people are eating well than ever before, there are also more people one bad harvest away from starvation than at any time in history.

Between 1959 and 1990, the world's population increased from 3.5 billion to over 5 billion people. By 2025, United Nations projections suggest it could be 8.5 billion. Much of the expected growth will take place in those areas which already have the most difficulty with food supply, such as Africa.

"Regressive" commentators say that there is enough food in the world now to feed everyone, and that starvation is a dream. Some of the most optimist say that the growth in population can be maintained over the next 25 years so that a population of 8.5 billion can be maintained.

There are a number of problems with this view. One is that it rests on assurances that new technical solutions can be found to allow the output of food to grow faster than ever before. Enormous growth in the past falsified the expectations of the Malthusians in the 19th century or of the Club of Rome in the 1970s. Yet it is far from certain that we can be self-sufficient. Food problems are likely to increase, not decrease, in the near future.

Cornflakes in the raw. It all looks idyllic: but how many nasty chemicals and modified genes lurk beneath the surface?

The tractor enables work to be done with a fraction of the time and effort. However they demand respectively a small surplus and a large surplus followed by a flow to market sufficient to replace the tool or service the machine.

Such changes therefore increase the pressure to produce for wider markets rather than for local ones or for subsistence. Capitalist food producers are not ultimately interested in feeding people. The scandal of the campaign to get motorists in poor semi-colonial countries to use formula baby milk, regardless of suitability or affordability, is an extreme case of this.

Farmers switching to cash crops may face growing beans to ship halfway round the world to sell in your supermarket the next day, or cut flowers or tobacco if those are more viable. If agricultural labourers in nearby villages or the slums of growing cities cannot afford to buy food at prices in competition with producers for Europe or North America, that's too bad.

Generally the major food companies are reckless about environmental costs, except so far as they cause bad publicity. The sustainability of particular methods is a secondary issue.

Although it is likely that some of the opposition to genetically modified food is exaggerated, the centre that the companies using it are careless of some of the consequences is justified.

One striking example of this is the characteristic of the changes which confront us so far as the so-called "terminator" gene, currently in development. Improved varieties of plant (with higher yields or other characteristics) will grow normally, but produce seed which will not germinate. Farmers will have to buy new seed every year rather than collecting their own. Some generic manipulation may lead to unforeseen side-effects. These might include transfer to other species or species, destruction or proliferation of particular feeders in the field, and effects on people who eat them.

More certainly, the genetic diversity of varieties will be reduced even further, and the production of seed for commercial use will be in the hands of a few multinational companies. Clearly the aim of companies like Monsanto is also to tie seed more closely to other products, like herbicides and pesticides.

The challenge to socialism is to find ways of addressing these issues which don't simply morally tell working-class people that they should be prepared to spend more on good quality food. There are genuine issues about choice, and the control ordinary people have over what they eat. There are democratic questions about how monopolistic food companies buy the ear of government - or even have representatives on boards like, for example, David Sainsbury. Issues of safety affect not only the quality of food but also the conditions of those who work in the industries.

Capitalism's reckless anarchy threatens the continuity of supply. The use of new techniques may pose new hazards to the environment. Billions of workers in the debt-ridden countries of the so-called 'Third World' may have to handle some of the dangers that have been exported. They face an uncertain livelihood, and may lack income and land for decent food for themselves.

The merits of a planned economy rather than hoping that the market will sort things out are not so hard to see when the issues about the staples of life are so big.
Confused on Israel

YOUR ARTICLE on Israel is a prime example of the confusion (the confusion lies it tells itself. You state "The Zionism state since 1948 has continued to defend and uphold the imperialist position" line, but what about the facts? It is a lie to portray Zionism as a monolithic bloc. For example, debates in the early years of Israel's establishment in Mapat were around whether to have a neutral policy vis-a-vis the Western and the Eastern Bloc, or a policy more sympathetic to the Soviet Union. The Mapam group itself was more pro-Soviet. Union and because of this its two 'factious' Hashomer and Abudz Ha'zavoda won half the votes in the Histadrut convention elections in 1946. There was an undeniable threat of civil war should the Histadrut be split on these lines. Why did pro-Soviet become less attractive? Was it because Israel was an imperialist creation? Or is it the war of anti-Semitism that swept through Eastern Europe from 1946 and then again with explicit pro-Soviet backing the Prague and then Czech show the left has about Israel — and the other parties? On the issue of Czechoslovakia it is well known that the Communist international imperialism gave Israel vital military aid in the 1948 war of survival. These arms transactions continued to 1951 - again is this the behaviour of a USA 'imperialist' entity?

As late as 1953 when the soviet backed the Arab bloc, Israel considered submitting a formal request for Soviet weapons. Which country supplied Israel with over 80% of her oil consumption 1953-56 in the USA. Even in late 1955 when the Egyptian Czech arms deal had taken place, Israeli declined to publicly align itself militarily with anti-Soviet defence arrangements - again doubt you see this as a clear manoeuvre on the part of an imperialist puppet?

The gradual abandonment of non-alignment in the 1950s was due to several elements. Soviet backing of the Arab cause, decline of Mapam and partly as a result of the Arab nation's boycott of Israel, growing economic dependence on the West. The idea that Israel was a creation of imperialism is just not true.

Your instigation that the 1948 war was a war of aggression on Israel's part is just pure fabrication! The reality is much more complex. What we should ask is: why is it that the citizens of Israel should have done in the face of the Egyptian/Arab/Jordanian/Syrian/A LA regime attack? What was the situation in 1945-47 do you think the mood in imperialist Israel was for more conflict? Strangely enough you are silent on the attitude of the Arabs towards Jews who tried in the 1939-45 period to flee Nazi terror, or does

PFI is a threat to support staff

Although both articles on the use of PFI in schools in the December issue contained useful information, they missed the point that the main threat to jobs as result of PFI is to support staff working in schools — not teachers. Teachers are the majority of the workforce in schools. It is the main part-time female workforce that employs librarians, cleaners, lunchtime assistants, school meals workers and so on. The majority of these assistents that represent the majority.

It is this workforce that will be transferred to a private company as result of PFI — not teachers, who remain formally employed by the Education Authority. In Southampton, the Labour controlled council is proposing to transfer three secondary schools to the private sector as part of a PFI bid to provide more school places. Over a hundred jobs are at risk, including those of support workers directly employed by the schools and grounds maintenance, building and other maintenance workers employed by the council's Direct Service Organisation. To date, only UNISON is opposing this privatisation. Any campaign against PFI must involve parents, school governors and teachers. But it must start from the point that the main threat to jobs is directed at support workers, not teachers.

Best wishes, Mike Tucker, Secretary Southampton District Branch Unison

WHAT'S ON

January
Sat 23/Sun 24
Euromarch assizes, Cologne, Saturday 30

February
Tuesday 2
London Reclaim Our Rights Rally, Granary Buildings, House of Commons, 7pm. Speakers include Tony Benn and Arthur Scargill.

Saturday
13
Campaigns 99 National Conference, Time for United Action, Hosted by Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance. 10a.m.-1p.m., Manchester, 12 noon, Clerkenwell Green, London.

March
Saturday
1
Union Rights day march, Assemble 12 noon, Clerkenwell Green, London.

April
Saturday 10
National Demonstration to defend asylum and immigration rights, Assemble 12 noon, Embankment, London SW1.

May
Saturday 1
Union Rights day march, Assemble 12 noon, Clerkenwell Green, London.

June
Saturday 5
Cologne demonstration at European summit.

WASHINGTON:
April 10, UNISON's national demonstration for a living minimum wage, Newcastle.

NEWCASTLE:
April 10, UNISON's national demonstration for a living minimum wage, Newcastle.

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You are about to be Euro’d!

The Media hype over the City slickers having to work over the New Year bank holidays to set up the systems for the launch of the Euro in world markets from January 4 should have given us all a clue.

Whether the new currency rises from its initial 70p valuation, or falls, the City of London, the banks and the big employers stand to make a packet buying, selling and speculating with a new global currency.

But while the bankers will pocket any profits, the costs of the exercise will fall fair and square on the working class in the EU countries - beginning with the eleven nations which have joined the Euro, handing over key economic decisions to an unelected board of bankers.

Regardless of the impact on jobs, living standards and welfare services, the priority of the new European Central Bank is to guarantee the value of the currency and control inflation. The result is likely to be a continued squeeze on welfare and public spending, while European bosses celebrate their new freedoms by indulging in a new round of rationalisation.

But the effects do not stop there. Britain’s New Labour government has barely concealed its eagerness to join the new currency, and is softening up public opinion in readiness.

To some extent our economy has already been “Euro’d”, as two Gordon Brown budgets have rigidly enforced the Maastricht criteria, squeezing public spending and promoting the ruinously expensive Private Finance Initiative in the NHS, education and other public services.

For Tony Blair’s team, there is an extra attraction in moving swiftly towards monetary union. Not only could they link up British and European capital, and please many of their existing business backers, but they could steal a march on William Hague’s befuddled Tory Party, which has now painted itself firmly into a corner by rejecting EMU for the indefinite future.

As growing sections of British business make clear their ambition to join the Euro, this could mean that Blair could establish new Labour as the political wing of a sizeable section of previous Tory sponsors - and as a result cut himself even further adrift from Labour’s trade union roots.

Whichever way you look, the Euro brings serious new threats to the working class movement throughout the continent. The need for an internationalist, socialist fightback has never been greater.

Hard currency means hard labour for EU workers!