After April 10 show of strength, unions must mount fight against low pay

GET TOUGH with SKINFLINT BOSSES!

APRIL 1 is the first day of Labour’s new minimum wage, of £3.60 an hour.

But as employers groan about paying even this pitiful rate to adult employees (and just £5 for young workers), ministers are already giving them a nod and a wink that firms which break the new law may get away with it.

Stephen Byers, Peter Mandelson’s successor as Trade and Industry secretary, has promised that the legislation will be enforced with a “light touch”.

What does this mean?

The clear implication is that instead of using the weight of the state machine to ensure that tight-fisted employers pay up, more subtle methods may be used to cajole them and persuade them — or nothing at all may be done unless the workers involved are brave enough and sufficiently organised to take the case to court.

It’s no coincidence that the same Stephen Byers also argues that creating wealth (for the employers) is more important than distributing it (to the workers and those who need state benefits).

With ministers like this in charge, it is clear that even the legislation of a minimum wage will not be enough. Unions will have to organise low-paid workers and fight for their rights.

But £3.60 is not a living wage. Three years ago the trade unions were demanding £4.26 as a bottom-line figure, and even then it was clear that it is not enough to guarantee a decent standard of living at the turn of a new century.

Far from settling for the £3.60 figure, low-paid workers need to organise, campaign and fight for more. The trade unions who have given support to the April 10 demonstration for a living wage — but done little or nothing on the ground to build big delegations to march — must be called to order. Other unions have shown even less commitment.

Just as the minimum wage is a scaled-down version of what the unions demanded, so the Fairness at Work legislation, diluted though it is, will give trade unions increased scope to organise and negotiate for improved pay and conditions. These opportunities, after 13 years of defeats and retreats by the trade unions, must be grabbed with both hands.

Here is a real chance to step up the fight for a living wage, relying on the anger and strength in the workplace, not on Blair, Byers and other feeble advocates of “partnership” with low-paying bosses.

There is no doubt that April 10 will be a major show of strength by UNISON and by the forces on the left committed to fight low pay. It will be in the weeks and months after this set-piece of rhetoric that we will be able to judge how serious the union leaders really are about pressing home the fight for a decent living wage for all.
2 SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

Skychef strikers fight on for justice

Adam Hartman

Over 1,000 people marched through Southall in West London on February 7th in a resounding show of labour movement and community support for the 300 LSG Lufthansa Skychef workers sacked on November 20 for taking part in a one-day official strike. The march was joined by workers campaigning for union recognition at a Roati plastics factory in Wembley. The march was addressed by TUC leader John Monks, TGWU chief Bill Morris and high-ranking officials in the regional labour movement, promising their full backing for strikers in what they see as a landmark battle for unionisation of a new generation of workers.

Under the proposals outlined in the government's Fairness at Work Bill, which promises protection from dismissal in the first eight weeks of official strike action, the sackings would have been illegal. Whilst their high-profile support for the strike is very welcome, Monks and Morris are pursuing a flawed strategy which is leading the strikers to defeat. They are insisting on compliance with the anti-union laws which currently permit solidarity action. The laws impose a deathly straightjacket on the union in the dispute because they forbid it from using its trump card - the power of mass solidarity action by TGWU members at Heathrow Airport.

Of course there is no guarantee that the strikers would win if they defied the law. Nor is the victory ruled out if they comply with the law. It is mass support - whether legal or illegal, or a mixture of both - which is the key to victory.

But there is no doubt that the law greatly strengthens the employer's upper hand. As long as they can keep production going, they have the resources to sit out lengthy disputes whilst strikers are on the picket line.

We should not hold ourselves in chalk to unjust laws which curtail the workers' resolve to resist and empower the bosses and shake the unions.

Monks and Morris believe that LSG Lufthansa Skychef is a "bad employer" that can be made to keep the strikers on strike and appeal to "enlightened self-interest."

The strategy is to mobilise pubic and union pressure, particularly at international level, on its parent company Lufthansa and its customers among the big airlines (including Quantas, British, France and American Airlines) to put turn pressure on it to reinstate the strikers and pay them their wages. This is fine as part of a wider strategy including solidarity action, but is inadequate on its own.

This strategy is undermined by workers from Skychef on the picket line.

Susan Moore

AS VOTING in the elections in the RMT for both General Secretary and one of the Assistant General Secretary positions continues, it is clear that incumbent General Secretary Jimmy Knapp has been more than a little shaken by the strength of the campaign in support of left candidates Pat Skorski (for AGS) and Greg Tucker (for DOS). Knapp's own incompetence is being highlighted by serious errors in the AGS ballot. Though the election is run on a Single Transferable Vote, the ballot paper implies that people only have one vote. Calls have been made for the election to be re-run and this is the most likely outcome. The election comes on the heels of a similar disaster - last December's election for an executive member to be re-run after one candidate's election statement was lost.

Over the last weeks there has been a flurry of coverage of the RMT and the national media, aimed at red-baiting the two challengers. In general, it is likely to be in favour of the left; a vote for them can't be wasted if they are worrying their opponents so much.

When the Evening Standard implies that the bosses of privatised rail companies are very worried that Tucker could be elected, it is likely to motivate members to go out and vote for him.

Even if they didn't say it, LUL would be less than enthusiastic about a Pat Skorski victory, given the sterling role he is playing in the fight against privatisation.

As we go to press, it is expected that two more days of strike action will be called for March 21-22.

One story that does need repeating is the alleged, made in the Sunday Times on February 28th and repeated elsewhere, that the candidates are a plot to make Arthur Scargill head of the RMT.

The story sounds too many of the leaders of the RMT executive meetings, but also a comment from Downing Street (so it must be true ...)

What the press doesn't tell you is that the proposal that they have pressed ahead in this way is that a proposal for merger talks between the RMT, UCATT and NUnM had no real resonance among RMT activists when it was made in 1996, and has been dead in the water ever since. So much for objective journalism.

The confidence of the left has been strengthened by this campaign, with all the candidates having spoken at meetings across the country, as they have been given time and support from branches and individuals they might not have been counted on.

This unity and enthusiasm will need to be built on if RMT members are to resist the constant attacks from their employers.

Premier's plans to privatise the Tube have won support for the left.

Student militancy on the rise?

Mark Jansen

OVER THE PAST two decades the National Union of Students have overseen a massive attack on the living conditions of students in Higher Education with the introduction of student grants com pared with wages for minimum wage workers, eventual abolition of student grants.

At the same time there has been an enormous increase in the student population that has been nowhere near matched by resources available to universities.

The government has organised that students under Tony Blair's penny-pinching regime are worse off than they were five years ago under the Tories.

In 1994, David Blunkett in opposition had promised an end to student poverty as a "badge of shame" for the Tories.

The government is wearing the same badge, leaving many students to wonder which party really won a landslide victory in 1997.

Throughout this period Labour Students have maintained a tight control on the leadership of NUS, as they have steered it on a course of peace and acceptance. Out- raged, they even proposed the introduction of fees, long before it was even Labour policy.

This has forced up the level of debt for undergraduates - and the labour left has failed to respond, support from branches and individuals they might not have been counted on.

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Labour's racist hypocrisy

Labour and Tory MPs were falling over themselves to declare their anti-racist credentials at the publication of the report from the Stephen Lawrence inquiry. The Home Secretary, William Hague, the Conservatives have now become 'uncompromising in our desire to see racism driven out of society' whilst Jack Straw has apparently been convinced about 'what it is like to be black in law enforcements today'.

It's an outrage then, that none of this prevented either party from supporting the racist Immigration Bill during its second reading. At least under the Tory government there would have been a handful of left MPs who consistently opposed any new racist legislation the government introduced.

Not one Labour MP voted against the Bill as it passed through the commons at the end of last month: in fact Jeremy Corbyn and Tony Benn were the only two Labour MPs even prepared to abstain. The Asylum and Immigration Bill is a vicious attack on one of the most vulnerable groups in society. These fleeing repression and persecution will find themselves confined to inhuman conditions that have been sent to all parts of the country regardless of their situation. Supporting such structures may have, forced to live a humiliating life on meagre food vouchers, which is expected to be worse than £30 per week.

The Tories will be further buttressed with immigration officers being given police powers of search, entry into property and arrest. There are a higher proportion of members of the NF and the BNP in the immigration service than in any other profession, and they are not even placed under the same constraints that exist through the Police Complaints Authority. Even marriage registrars will be given powers to question whether they consider a marriage to be 'genuine' or not.

Worrying that 'bogus refugees' may try to slip through the net to live a life of luxury on their £30 food vouchers, the government is proposing the establishment of a surveillance net-work that will link the computer systems of the Immigration Service, Registrars, the Benefits Agency and the Prison Service. Labour's proposal to deal with the growing number of asylum seekers is locked up in prison for no one can even calculate how many have sought refuge in racist Britain - is to build more prisons. They will also restrict the right of asylum seekers to appeal against Home Office decisions. Just to make sure that this attractive prospect doesn't work the British will be swamped with economic migrants, New Labour are also making a number of proposals to stop asylum seekers getting here in the first place.

These include new and increased penalties for those who transport people to Britain without documentation, making the number of airline liaison officers both here and abroad, and demanding cash payments when in return for visas.

Contrary to the claims of both Labour and the Tories, rough immigration controls are not part of a strategy to fighting racism in Britain, but a central feature of Britain's institutional racism. Attacking the most vulnerable section of society will simply increase racism overall.

The last few weeks have shown a number of things about the struggle against racism. When the Tories introduced the Immigration and Asylum Bill two years ago, virtually every major trade union gave its paper support in opposing the bill. Now, with a Labour government proposing legislation that is even worse, much of that support has dwindled away. The Labour movement leadership as a whole is far less prepared to challenge Labour and unless it feels under pressure from its rank and file to do something.

Secondly, whilst there is apparently a high tide of anti-racist consciousness, this has as yet been limited only to some aspects of racist Britain.

The anti-racist movement must take the demands of refugees and asylum seekers as central demands of the movement as a whole. The Bill is not likely to become law until next October. The only thing that may make Labour backtrack is if a mass movement demands that Labour drops this racist Bill, as well as campaigning for an end to all immigration controls.

Let's really tax the rich!

This issue of Socialist Outlook goes to press on the eve of Gordon Brown's third budget speech and a wader of speculation over its content.

One area of policy on which he has made no secret of his ambition is child benefit, where he and top civil servants have been seeking a formula through which it could be taxed for those on top incomes. This might raise up to £450 million a year which could then be directed to more worthwhile causes. How could socialists object?

The first objection is that this issue is a gigantic smoke screen designed to create the illusion of Brown as some kind of redistributive Chancellor, taking from the rich and giving to the poor. Nothing could be further from the case: his pledge not to increase from the low levels of taxation inherited from the Tories has already treated a further bonanza for those on top salaries, while squandering the cash available for health, education, pensions, social security and council services.

Brown's approach is no different from that of Trade & Industry Secretary Stephen Byers, who claims that the main issue is no longer to distribute wealth, but simply to create it - in the form of predictable capitalism.

The second point is that if Brown really did want to tax the rich, he should tax all of the rich, and not just well-paid people with children. The richest 50 people in Britain have combined wealth and income of £34 billion - far more than the total wealth of the poorest 5 million.

Besides this grotesque inequality the prospect of slapping a tax on a possible £14.50 per household for a handful of top earners is pitifully small beer. The third point is that by seeking to tax child benefit for the rich, Brown is undermining the concept of a universal benefit, and one of the principles underlying the welfare state.

A benefit which is exclusively targeted at the middle- and less-influential families becomes ever more vulnerable to future erosion and attack.

We have seen this time and again over the years, not least with the cynical run-down in the value of the basic state pension, the miserable level and increasingly vitiating threats attached to benefits for the unemployed, and the way in which local government social services have been subject to years of sustained cash cuts.

The recent Royal Commission on Long Term Care should remind us of the Tory success in shutting off long-term care of the elderly from the NHS (where it was free at point of use, funded from taxation) and social security (where all individuals were entitled to income support) to local government - where it has been subject to means-tested charges.

The argument against scraping these taxes, like the argument for taxing child benefit for top earners, is that a handful of wealthy families would poten-

But the fact is that the separation of the wealthy from the poorest through means-testing seems to marginalise and impoverish the state provision, which has increasingly become a service only for those with no savings or income.

As long as the system continues to depend on means-testing the houses and savings of pensioners, attention is diverted from the need to raise more in general taxation to pump in enough resources to raise the standards of care for all elderly people.

The present government is so reluctant to tax the rich that it seems unlikely to implement even the partial reform called for by the Royal Commission - and scrap the charges for "personal" care in long-stay nursing and residential homes.

Rather than tinkering about with a tax on a handful of rich parents, Brown could do much more by scrapping the ridiculously reactionary ceiling on National Insurance contributions, which gives the top-paid a free ride at the expense of the poorest. This one step could raise an extra £3 billion a year enough to scrap the current charges for continuing care of the elderly and halt the current round of cuts in social services.

And while he's at it, Brown could consider raising the ridiculously low level of employers' contribution to national insurance towards the levels paid by employers in other EU countries. This would raise billions more.

Unfortunately the one thing we can be sure about, as New Labour digs in and the demonstrative Tory opposition further disintegrates, is that the last thing this government wishes to do is tax the rich - and that means that the rest of us have to pay more, for less.
Candidates chosen to fight elections

May 6 day of reckoning for Scottish Socialists

May 6 will be a historic day for Scotland with the first ever elections for a Scottish Parliament and even the press South of the border have been paying some attention to Blair's concerns that he may not get everything his own way once the results are in.

Certainly socialists should be paying attention as political developments in Scotland are often more advanced than in the rest of this island. The fight against the poll tax, for example, introduced a year early in Scotland, was more militant than in England and Wales.

The debates in the lead up to the Referendum for the Scottish Parliament saw unprecedented co-operation between the left. This laid the basis for the formation of the Scottish Socialist Alliance and the Scottish Socialist Party.

The outrageous decision to ban the name of the later, along with the Scottish Green Party, (see below) in forthcoming elections was taken by the new Registrar of Political Parties, who takes advice from a parliamentary committee dominated by New Labour MPs, apparently including Gwyneth Dunwoody and Gerald Kaufman.

With Labour under real pressure from the SNP, this is a blatant political decision aimed at damaging any challenge to the left. CAMPBELL McQUIGG of Glasgow Kelvin Scottish Socialist Party branch reports:

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ver 100 members attended the first conference of the Scottish Socialist Party on February 21 in Glasgow. The debate was lively but amicable. Conference adopted a 16 point political programme, based on support for an independent socialist Scotland.

In the forthcoming elections for the Scottish parliament there is to be a two-tier system. One set of MPs will be elected under the old-fashioned first past the post system in constituencies with the old Westminster boundaries.

The other tier of seats is to be elected using the list form of proportional representation (PRK) in eight seats, based on previous Euro-constituencies.

Conference decided to contest seats in these elections, taking place on May 6. The SSP’s best chance of winning will be in Glasgow, where Tommy Sheridan will be the number one candidate, and where it needs to increase its vote by 73 per cent from the general election to win a seat.

Labour’s prospective Scottish Prime Minister Donald Dewar faces a stiff fight against the SNP to secure the largest number of Scottish MPs. Labour’s cause has not been helped by !=quot;Junior Flowers,” which has not succeeded in blocking the election of a number of candidates viewed by Milbank as “off-message.”

An electoral pact has been made with the SWP over the first-past-the-post constituency seats and the SWP has decided not to contest the regional seats. Scargill's SLP seem determined to do their own thing, and agreement has not been reached here.

The SSP also decided to stand in the European elections on June 10, with Hugh Kerr, an MEP who has defected from the Labour Party, as number one candidate.

The SSP was formed out of the Scottish Socialist Alliance (SSA). All forces who were involved in the SSA have joined the SSP, and it has picked up a few defectors from the Labour Party (including two Glasgow city councillors) and the SNP. The Scottish Republican Socialist Party has also joined.

The SSP’s largest component, the former Scottish Militant Labour, have survived recent difficulties better than their comrades in England.

They are, though, somewhat detached from the rest of their international tendenc, the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI). They have handed over much of their apparatus to the SSP (including the paper, Scottish Socialist Voice), but have retained a strong separation of their organisation and identity of their own (including a journal in the name of the CWI). Although it is understandable that much of the SSP’s time has been taken up with preparing for elections.

The SSP also needs to develop its intervention into the broader class struggle. This has already included support for some industrial disputes involving Glasgow city council workers, and Kurdish solidarity work.

They also need to relate to developments in the Labour Party. Labour MP Denis Canavan is intending to contest the Scottish elections as an independent.

The selection of Labour candidates for the Scottish elections has not gone well for the Blairites, with several victories for the ex-Labour “soft left.”

The SSP remains fairly diverse. For example, a recent day school on drugs revealed support for decriminalisation, but there were a few dissenters.

There are important differences on Europe. Although there is general agreement on opposing the Maastricht convergence criteria in their present form, a minority supports the single European currency and further European convergence, but on better terms.

The majority remains hostile to convergence. The SSP needs to make its mind up on this issue before the expected referendum on a single European currency.

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Model letter

Allow the Scottish Socialist party and the Scottish Green party to register to contest elections!

We are dismayed by your decision to refuse registration to the above parties. We strongly urge you to reconsider your decision and allow both these parties to register.

1. Both parties believe in Scottish independence. Without having to support this position, it is politically legitimate for these parties to be organised as the “Scottish” Socialist Party and the “Scottish” Green Party.

2. The Socialists are the Scottish Socialist Party and the Scottish Green Party.

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Send copies to:
- Donald Dewar, Scottish Office, New St Andrew's House, Edinburgh, EH1 3TF (Fax 0131 244 2756)
- Tammy Sheridan, Home Secretary, House of Commons, London, SW1
- Scottish Socialist Party, 73 Robertson St, Glasgow G2 (Fax 0141 221 7115 Tel 0141 221 7741)
Stand up for Ken - defend your rights!

Terry Conway
THE LABOUR leadership may be wondering whether they made the right choice in postponing their decision on how to select Labour's candidate for London mayor.

The January NEC was due to discuss setting up a vetting panel as recommended by the London Regional Board to screen nominations in defiance of the overwhelming decision of Jane's London Labour Party Conference that any candidate who received 10 CLP nominations should automatically be shortlisted. But in the end the discussion was put back to the next meeting on March 23.

It may be that the reason for this lies in Millbank's failure to come up with a credible alternative. Various names have been floated: Frank Dobson, Glenda Jackson, Tony Banks, Trevor Phillips, Pauline Green. But there has been little confidence that they could beat Ken either amongst party members or Londoners as a whole.

Any silver of doubt that the manoeuvres are aiming at excluding Ken should be banished by the failure of London's Board even to forward to the NEC one of the recommendations of its own working party. Millbank had claimed that one of the main problems with the Conference decision was that it acted against equal opportunity; self-nomination. And then the vetting panel would lead to better gender and race representation.

Two-tier system

TGWU's Barry Camfield successfully proposed a two-tier system to the working party. Either you could be nominated by CLP's and affiliates or nominate yourself. This is as far as it went with new procedures for Westminster selection, so it is difficult to see the leadership taking any of the recommendations, and all attempts to have it reinstated failed.

In the meantime the Stand Up for Ken campaign is well on the road. A packed meeting of 1500 on February 15 - in the middle of a tube strike - filled Westminster Central Hall to demand the right of democratic selection. The audience contained sizeable delegations from striking tube and UCLH hospital workers and fire fighters organising to defend jobs and services. The turn out far exceeded Ken's own expectations; nominations on the day exceeded 500, and the meeting was moved less than an hour before it advertised starting time when it became clear that the response was so large.

Excitement in the hall was highest in response to calls for Ken's right to stand, and support for workers in struggle was also warmly received. Livingstone got a standing 'hands to work' applause. His proposals for London, for example to return conductors to London buses were popular, but clearly secondary to the key issue of defence of democracy.

In making this distinction the massive audience showed more maturity that that demonstrated by some parts of the left. The Alliance for Workers' Liberty, for example, has stepped up its attacks on Ken's policies and record in recent months.

Socialist Outlook would not stand on the political platform that Ken is putting forward, but we do not support his right to stand but his candidature. We recognise that the success of this campaign would be a real blow to Blair and his reactionary policies for the Labour Party and for the country.

The February meeting would have been the ideal place for further calls for action - those attending were eager to know what the next steps in the campaign should be. A lobby of the NEC on March 23 would have gained wide support for example. Unfortunately that opportunity was lost, and it is to be hoped that further progress can be made in discussing similar proposals at the series of meetings soon to be organised in different parts of London.

In the meantime activists should step up the campaign for resolutions in support of democratic selection in Labour Parties and unions and where possible go beyond this and nominate Ken anyway.

Labour movement bodies should ask for the campaign to take affidavits and call protests outside London Board and NEC meetings where the issue is being discussed. Blair will only back down if we can show it would be more dangerous for him not to do so.

New Labour attack on party democracy

Jim Dye, President, Liverpool TUC
IN MAY 1998 the Liberal Democrats joined their only metropolitan council – in Liverpool. The Labour Party suffered a crushing defeat at the polls.

This defeat was caused by a number of interconnected factors. The right wing Labour Group had imposed years of cuts and redundancies combined with poor council services and the highest Council Tax in the country.

The scale of the defeat prompted the Labour Party NEC to set up a Liverpool Taskforce. It comprises three unelected members (including Richard Arthur, leader of Camden Council) sent to Liverpool with the baton against the Liverpool Labour Party in an attempt to find out what had gone wrong. That cuts and redundancies are the main policies of Blairite councils is fairly obvious.

The Taskforce could not blame the left for the defeat, as it lacked the support necessary to make it effective at the time. In the elections of May 1998, a mere 0.5% of votes were cast for the Liberal Democrats to finish third behind Labour and the Conservatives.

In the November elections left candidates from the SLP and the Socialist Party (including Mahmood) got 521,000 votes that did not split the Labour vote at all. What the Taskforce did focus on, however, was an attack on the 'Old Labour' right wing Labour Group.

Their report makes clear that despite the already decided between Left and Right levels, there will be no more local Party democracy for the Liverpool Party. In future all candidates for local elections will be vetted by an NEC appointed Regional Director, with no rights at all for local wards or CLPs to choose their representatives.

All potential candidates must also swear a loyalty pledge to Blairite New Labour policies, while existing councilors should justify why they are allowed to be reelected. In other words all local accountability will be ended permanently.

The report also makes clear that local trade union branches will play no role whatsoever in the local Party, and that the District Labour Party (as amended for a decade since the witch hunt against the left) will not be allowed to be reformed.

Indeed, activists from both wards and trade union branches will have absolutely no role in this new organisation.

This authoritarian attack on Old Labour within the Liverpool Party sets a dangerous precedent and should be vigorously resisted by all local Labour members.

Right wing helped police Hutton - now they face chop orously opposed by all socialists.

We should not hesitate to block with these right wingers against the New Labour surge, but we need to keep our separate identity as socialists intact.

Above all, we must attempt to rebuild a socialist opposition within the Party that can link with union and community struggles outside it.

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6 SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

Scrap all charges for care of elderly!

John Lister

ALTHOUGH it set the cat among the pigeons by calling for an £1.1 billion investment in providing free nursing care for elderly people, the Royal Commission on Long Term Care has produced an essentially conservative report.

We should of course be grateful for the help it has provided in providing an independent report, which has clearly exposed the tentacles of the old-style control freaks, and one which argues a line that is well "off message" to the Blairites.

But while campaigners and, frighteningly, some older people have broadly welcomed the commission’s recommendations to scrap the bulk of the existing means-tested charges, and the commission’s insistence that the extra cash required should come from general taxation, the report leaves many important questions unasked and unanswered.

Indeed, after 14 months of deliberation, the commission has largely accepted the framework set up by the Thatcher-era government, in which continuing care of the frail elderly is largely provided, albeit through profit-seeking nursing and residential homes.

There is no hint to be found in the report that any alternative systems would provide better quality care for clients or conditions for staff.

The commission clearly did not even consider the levels of profit extracted from this highly exploitative sector, or the changing patterns of ownership, in which large corporations are increasingly cutting up the market. Instead, the commission’s proposals have been eagerly embraced by the Independent Healthcare Association, which represents many private care homes.

No section of the report discusses the glaring inequalities in local provision of nursing and residential home places, which have left many local boroughs and many other city areas finding it almost impossible to secure local places.

The commission also managed to avoid any discussion of the huge variance in levels of "eligibility criteria" drawn up in 1995 by health authorities to limit the entitlement of elderly patients to NHS treatment, making the access to NHS care a lottery based on where you live.

Many of these are draconian, excluding all but the most extremely incapacitated, and cutting NHSC continuing care provision to little more than palliative care.

Nor did the commission question the increasing costs of care, with elderly patients required to pay the bills. NHS staff have closed almost 26,000 "geriatric" beds since 1998 - nearly 46% of the 1983 total. This is part of a general trend, with the government having closed 20% of long-stay beds since 1993, during the implementation of the community care reforms.

Despite the commission’s reluctance to say so, the NHS has no alternative but to continue running services and residential care on offer through social services - and to opt out of the local government system in order to avoid "benchmarking" rate for luxury in the twilight of the Thatcher era. Health Secretary Frank Dobson - who was also the author of the document in question - is now in a position to say that private provision of care, with its "benchmark" rate for luxury in the twilight of the NHS, is the way forward. State pensioners are to be forced to pay for care, with the government hoping that the NHS will fill the gap.

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Frank Dobson knows that to suggest any new extension of the welfare state to Blair or Brown is like promoting atheism in the Vatican.

The government should be urged to act promptly and implement the limited recommendations for free nursing care: but a further, more thoroughgoing inquiry is now needed to fill in some of the gaps left by the Royal Commission.

Among the issues to be addressed are the cost and quality of care in nursing homes, the training of nursing staff, and the possibility of establishing a new body to regulate their work, especially in areas where private sector provision is not available.
Agencies move in on low-paid NHS nurses

**FIGURES** recently obtained by London Health Emergency have exposed the fact that nurses can immediately add at least £50 to their wages by opting to work for an agency rather than directly for the NHS. A sample of rates circulated to staff by an agency called Staffing Enterprise show that an A grade nurse working in intensive care can get a basic rate of £13.30 an hour, compared to the NHS rate of £8.70. With full enhancements some specialities nurses can expect to earn as much as £35 an hour through the agency — twice as much as their NHS colleagues.

Some agencies have even begun to offer nurses some of the "fringe" benefits which previously kept staff in the NHS, including paid sick leave and holiday entitlements. Many staff have already opted to vote with their feet, and have gone over to the agencies blasting a hole in establishment staffing levels, and driving costs through the roof. A recent report to the Royal London Hospitals Trust underlines the impact that the drift of staff towards the agencies is having on the NHS. "A key issue in relation to the Trust's activity performance was the shortage of trained nursing staff and the additional costs of having to employ agency staff. In some specialties nursing staff were leaving the Trust's employ to sign on as agency nurses, as they could earn substantially more than the Trust paid."

The fear is that many more staff are likely to feel this way at this years 4.7% pay award, will join the stampede over to the agencies. LHE has heard of some key units where the entire team of nurses are considering going over to the agency wholesale, with devastating consequences for NHS budgets.

Private health care - still a threat to NHS

By Bob Whale

SEVERAL BIG corporations have just signed up their workforce to BUPA health schemes, including the BSC, Natwest and HSBC. However, the house of finance is not the only business to be growing, in spite of the gathering recession, and BUPA's reported losses on its health insurance department, leaving it reliant on its hospitals to generate a profit. The effect of increased private cover is in theory to remove whole sectors of the workforce from the need to use the NHS except for emergency and GP care.

In practice, of course, people of working age very seldom need to make use of medical insurance cover — which is why the private insurers are so keen to take them on.

For most working age adults, the NHS, as the sole provider of emergency services, remains more important, no matter what their illusions to the contrary.

For many years, BUPA provided health care to the upper classes who could afford to pay to jump the queue and get superior accommodation.

Teachers in the firing line

Meet the challenge: fight the Green Paper

By a delegate to NUT conference

THE VAST majority of teachers are hostile to the proposals contained in the government's Green Paper "Teachers: Meeting the Challenge of Change" which advocates radical changes to the pay and conditions of teachers in England and Wales. The real question is whether the Green Paper should be opposed, but how can it be defeated?

If implemented, the proposals in the Green Paper will alter the pay and conditions of teachers in a fundamental way. The government has tried to link the worsened conditions to improvements in pay.

**Systematic attack**

However the reality is that this year's pay award shows that the Blair government has no intention of rewarding teachers for the difficult job that they do: rather the insulting pay award and the Green Paper are both part of a systematic attack on teachers and their unions.

Education Minister, David Blunkett has already let it be known that he would relish a fight with the main teachers' union, the National Union of Teachers (NUT). The NUT conference over Easter weekend will allow him to attack teachers in the media whilst, no doubt, trying to project a different image to the teachers assembled in Brighton.

The Green Paper proposes the introduction of Performance Related Pay for teachers. Teachers would be subject to appraisal arrangements which would determine whether or not they were granted an annual pay award.

The National Union of Teachers was formed to fight payment by results last century. The arguments that were valid then are equally true to-day. Teaching is a collective activity.

Who can really determine the impact of an individual teacher on the progress of a child? A secondary teacher builds on the work of primary teachers who, in turn, build on the work of those employed in nurseries. A geography teacher's results will partly depend on progress made in English, Maths and Science.

The Green Paper also proposes important structural changes to the teaching force. Teachers will be 'invited' to apply to 'cross the threshold' to achieve a pay rise. Crossing the threshold will mean accepting the right of management to impose extra hours and responsibilities.

The Green Paper argues that most teachers will eventually cross the threshold, however the reality is that the funding available is totally inadequate to deliver the required resources.

The proposals would also divide up teachers in a range of different categories: new teachers, pre and post-service teachers and those in the Leadership Group.

In addition to the impact on teachers, the proposals will have a serious and detrimental effect on education. Teachers in schools in better-off areas and working class schools with strong leadership will be more likely to get pay awards than those in struggling working class schools in the inner-cities. The result will be a further shift of resources away from those areas who need it the most.

There will be a major debate on the Green Paper at NUT conference. What is required is a total rejection of the proposals and a serious fight to back up that rejection.

Currently, the NUT leadership is proposing a lobby of Parliament and an indicative ballot on boycotting appraisal. Both these proposals deserve support, but they are nowhere near enough. There is danger of some on the left not understanding that all official union initiatives need to be supported. Although the lobby does provide a national focus and is really a way of getting publicity, it does give the left some confidence amongst broader layers in the union.

A national should be boycotted, but the chances are that the new appraisal arrangements will be introduced in a manner that avoids an immediate confrontation. In well-organised schools appraisal schemes have not oper-ated for years.

The proposal for national strike action is the key demand. It is the only demand that begins to meet the seriousness of the new situation. What the union leadership is currently offering is too inadequate. However, NUT Chief Doug McAvoy probably believes it might be enough to allow him to appeal radical in the run-up to the General Secretary's election, where he faces a strong challenge from left-winger Christine Blower.

Over the next period the left needs to build the existing union initiatives whilst pointing out their inadequacy. At the same time, we need to continually bring the left together, including serious united left support for Christine Blower's challenge to McAvoy.
After the Lawrence Inquiry

Where now for anti-racism?

Simon Deville

The MacPherson report into the investigation of Stephen Lawrence's murder has brought to the fore the extent of racism in Britain today. For most black people, the inquiry is long overdue, but what is new is that the extent of racism in the police, the judicial system and throughout society should be debated in the national media.

The publication of the report poses fundamental questions for the anti-racist movement: how should it respond to the report and how can the momentum around the inquiry be channelled into combating racism?

It has been clear from the start that the inquiry could not get away with the kind of whitewash that would blame "a few bad apples" in a Police force that is otherwise fairly sound.

However the MacPherson report, whilst being fairly damning in its criticism of the Police, leaves a crucial get-out clause. The report states that there is a "punishing and institutionalised racism" throughout the Metropolitan Police.

It further adds that "There must be an unequivocal acceptance of the extent of racism before it can be addressed." The definition of institutional racism is sufficiently vague to mean that the Police Commissioner Sir Paul Condon was able to agree with it.

Throughout the inquiry Condon defended the actions of the officers involved, and of the internal police inquiry into the investigation that gave them a clear all of being clear. It was only after the official police line became untenable that Condon was forced to admit that the Police have a problem and are not innocent of racism.

The definition of institutional racism as being "upwards" has given the Police an excuse to get off scot free. The fact is that Black people are far more likely to be stopped by the Police, more likely to be arrested, to be taken to court and if convicted, more likely to face a prison sentence than whites.

There is a racism running throughout the Police system - whether individual officers are racist is not the main issue. The view by the Police is that whatever actions they carry out, the force as a whole will do all it can to avoid officers being disciplined or prosecuted.

The Metropolitan Police IS a racist institution despite Jack Straw's claims that Condon has led a fight against racism in the Met.

Condon has alienated many in the black community in his custody, the force as a whole devotes thousands of officers. Whilst getting rid of him would end police racism, it would at least signal that these actions are unacceptable.

The inquiry has brought about a sea-change in the way the British state aims to deal with racism. The state has no specific focus on eradicating racism; a fundamental feature of all advanced capitalist countries.

The 70 recommendations in the report propose a number of measures to improve the way the Police investigate racist incidents, and to improve Police-community relations, and for Local Authorities to develop educational strategies to address racism. Specifically states that the Police powers of stop and search should remain in place and rules out an independent body to monitor the police.

Two specific recommendations that socialists should oppose are the proposal that people could be tried more than once for the same offence, and that people using racist language within their own homes can be prosecuted.

The Metropolitan Police was wide open for the police to keep on putting someone on trial until they got the result they wanted and the second would be impossible to enforce without breaching civil liberties, and is unlikely to be used against black people.

The Leadership may have been competing with the Tories to pledge themselves to fighting institutional racism, but just two weeks earlier, Jack Straw introduced the new points system for Immigration Bill, with the full support of the Tories.

Tony Blair wrote an article in the New Statesman saying how he had met with Colin Powell and had realised how far Britain had to go, compared to the United States.

What he meant by this is that he would like a society where black police are about as prevalent in the military, the Police, the judiciary and the government.

As many previously the USA clearly demonstrates, that does not mean eradicating racism. Police policing, synchings, and the vast bulk of their communities segregated into urban ghettos or desperately poor rural communities in the Southern States is the face of 'civilisation' facing the overwhelming majority of black people in this country. A few black people having leading positions in the state machine and the government is not a substitute for that reality.

What some of the reforms proposed by MacPherson are supposed to do is to try head off a much more uncontrolled and more extensive anti-racist struggle.

The chances of this playing out longer than they were before the inquiry, as many previously uninvolved black people have realised that it is pure chance that their lives have not been touched by tragedies comparable to the Lawrence's. This has been the basis of the unprecedented mobilisation around the Police: the challenge now is to channel that anger and awareness into a real mass movement.

The call for a civil rights movement takes up that opportunity - socialists should have no hesitation in answering the call.

Build a national civil rights movement

Mark Jensen

The Stephen Lawrence inquiry would never have happened at all without the determined campaign led by Doreen and Neville Lawrence. But many more black deaths are still ignored by the police and the media.

Since Stephen Lawrence's death there have been more than 25 racist murders in Britain and many more black deaths in custody. There have been thousands of racist attacks. Racism of harassment and discrimination in every area of black people's lives.

Serious issues have been made a political issue through the existence of community based organisations such as The Monitoring Group (formerly Southall Monitoring Group) and Newham Monitoring Project. Some are now getting welcome coverage in the press after years of deafening silence.

Some of the worst racism however has occurred in areas where there are no such organisations and very often only a very small and isolated black community.

A number of community organisations and anti-racist groups have now come together to call for the building of a national civil rights movement. There has been more need for an organisation that can offer a serious challenge to all levels of racism on a national level.

Many previous organisations have been launched only to become useless talking shops to launch the careers of would-be bureaucrats, or else fronts for one or other organisation. The timing and composition of this conference offers a real opportunity to build something radically different.

Let's seize this opportunity with both hands.
Stooge union bureaucrats deliver vital votes
Blairites complete stitch-up in Wales

By Dafydd Rhys

The recent battle for the Labour leadership in the Welsh Assembly has highlighted the lengths to which Tony Blair will go to retain control over the Welsh Labour Party. Not only has he allowed crackers to sacrifice electoral advantage in the event that Blair’s candidate did win.

The recent contest arose after a “moment of madness” commented on Cllr David Connolly by Ron Davies, the previous Secretary of State for Wales and prospective Assembly leader. Ron secured the almost unanimous support of both the trade union and the local government bureaucracy in the previous contest.

However, the method of his election caused some consternation amongst rank-and-file Labour Party members, a consternation which was further exacerbated by the blatant political vetting of prospective Assembly candidates and the imposition of an English MEP above sitting Welsh MEPs on the party’s Euro list.

Thus, when the new leadership contest was unexpectedly required, the wounds of recent events were still fresh. Anger was further heightened by the decision to reopen the nominations procedure for Assembly candidates, simply to allow Alun Michael to stand. It was therefore much more difficult for the Welsh Executive of the Labour Party to stitch up the result in the same way as previously. Voting by OMOW was introduced in the Labour Party meeting to broaden the base of the elected college and a number of unions declared their intention to consult their members before casting their vote.

Previous to his appointment as Welsh Secretary, Alun Michael, the MP for Cardiff South and Penarth, had not stood, let alone won, in the Welsh Assembly. He played no part whatsoever in the campaign to secure the ‘yes’ vote in September 1997.

He was selected simply because he would unquestioningly carry out the bidding of Tony Blair. Peter Hain, currently a Welsh Office Minister, had also thrown his support behind Alun Michael and became his campaign manager. What little shred of ‘left’ credibility that Hain had retained before this episode has now been swept away by his conduct in this campaign.

Ron Davies was also quick to offer his support for Alun Michael, still mindful of a possible future role in the Welsh Assembly. It is difficult to square this cry with the image that many people in Wales have of Ron Davies - that of a committed ‘advocate of Welsh autonomy and “inclusiveness” politics. While Alun Michael’s campaign was stuffed with ministers and Labour bigwigs, Rhodri Morgan attracted some support, particularly on the basis of his consistent work in exposing the corruption of the quango state in Wales under the Conservatives.

Most of the left-leaning Welsh MPs supported his campaign, as did many left-wing Assembly candidates. A number of prominent academics and dissident members of the Welsh Executive also supported him.

Rhodri’s main campaign slogan was “an Assembly for the people, and not the razzle-dazzle - razzle being a colloquial and derogatory Welsh word for the upper class. While Rhodri stood for the greater autonomy of the Welsh Assembly, the weaknesses of his campaign were very apparent. He placed great stress on the fact that there were no major policy differences between himself and Alun Michael. This position was criticised by many within the Rhodri camp.

Despite his failure to stand on a left platform, it was very clear the case that Rhodri Morgan should have been supported against the candidate imposed by Tony Blair.

After an extended period of campaigning, necessary to provide some kind of profile for Alun Michael in Wales, the result was announced on 20 February. The overall result gave Alun Michael 53 per cent of the vote against Rhodri Morgan’s 47 per cent. The breakdown of the votes for each section of the electoral college were: 64 per cent versus 36 per cent for Alun Michael in the trade unions; 58 per cent versus 42 per cent for Alun Michael among the MPs, MEPs and Assembly candidates; and 65 per cent to 35 per cent for Rhodri Morgan among party members.

The scale of Alun Michael’s victory in the trade union section was ensured by three of the four largest unions in Wales: the TGWU, AEEU and GMB, which together accounted for 17.5 per cent of the overall vote.

None of these unions carried out a comprehensive consultation with members. The AEEU and GMB carried out partial consulations, conducted in such a way as to ensure that the result was achieved.

When George Wright, leader of the TGWU in Wales, was questioned as to why his union was backing Alun Michael, he replied: “because he’s Secretary of State for Wales.” Whoever Tony Blair had selected for the post, he clearly implied, the TGWU would closely support their candidate.

The only major union to conduct an OMOW ballot was UNISON, and the result showed an overwhelming majority in favour of Rhodri Morgan. This pattern was repeated in all the smaller unions which conducted OMOW ballots.

There is now a danger that the backlash against union involvement might be used, quite cynically, by the Blairites to weaken union links after their objective has been achieved. This must be vigorously resisted, though measures to give union members greater control over how their votes are cast in the Labour Party should be supported. Tony Blair and his supporters in Wales went to enormous lengths to ensure the victory of Alun Michael in this contest. It revealed once again the brutality of Blairism in dealing with any opposition within the party, however timid.

Blair had to rely on those bastions of ‘Old Labour’, the very union bureaucrats he had attacked so vigorously in the past, in order to deliver the result.

Opinion polls conducted before the result was announced showed that the Labour Party would lose 10 per cent of its support if Alun Michael was elected rather than Rhodri Morgan.

Thus, Blairism, which was founded on the basis of making every concession to the right necessary to ensure electability, became turned on its head. This loss of electoral support is particularly significant in the case of the Welsh Assembly, since it will be elected with an element of proportionality. One thing is very clear: the future caused by this campaign is only a foretaste of far greater struggles within the Welsh Labour Party once the Assembly is established.

It also shows how the relationship between the Labour Party and the trade unions is not simply a one-way street: events in the Labour Party can have the effect of revitalising and politicising the trade unions.

Following the result, Alun Michael made it very clear in which direction he planned to lead the Assembly. He claimed that Labour’s Assembly manifesto, a vacuous document full of empty phrases, was a solid basis on which to build a new Wales.

He also attacked what he called the “black, negative side of the Welsh political scene, that Labour in Wales should be positive and ‘look to the future’. It is clear that the greater centrism with” within the Labour Party.

The blatant rigging of the election has left many party members in Wales feeling both distrust and anger towards the Labour leadership. This provides the left with a far greater scope for activity than in very many years.

The two main tasks in the coming months will be to try and channel this discontent into an effective campaign to extend democracy within the Welsh Labour Party, and also to encourage a wide-ranging debate on policies for the Welsh Assembly.

Such policies would be in stark contrast to Labour’s existing Assembly manifesto, if they are to serve the vast majority of the people of Wales.
Solidarity with the Kurdish people

"WE STRONGLY condemn the European governments who together with the American administration, are responsible for kidnapping and sending back of the PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan to Turkey. This is a result of the political struggle, practices torture and maintains a legal death penalty.

"The Turkish-American Union, despite its rhetoric and protest,紧盯 its eyes to the situation of the Kurdish people while at the same time using an American-style communication to protect the Kosovar people in the name of liberty and democratic rights. For this reason, the American people defend the powerful American interests in the region have prevailed over human rights and the Convention on Refugees. This cynical policy has provoked violent confrontation, including in the major cities in Europe. It has helped the Turkish regime -- which has over the years tens of thousands of Turkish citizens; human rights activists, trade union and political militants, members of parliament, journalists and artists -- to worsen the oppression of the Kurds.

The struggle in favour of:
- Respect for human rights, including the abolition of the death penalty and the suppression of all anti-democratic laws which prevent freedom of opinion and organisation, and amongst them the so-called "anti-terrorism" laws.
- Amnesty for all political prisoners, Turks and Kurdish.
- The dissolution of all the 'special' war units and the so-called "village militiamen in the Kurdish region.
- The suppression of the "emergency law"; and the possibility for all those who have been chased from their villages to return, with financial compensation for the material damages they have suffered.
- The recognition of the right to self-determination for the Kurdish people.

Why Cook shouldn’t give a dam…

Bankers rush to aid Turkish oppressors

Two countries have had common interests for some time, but their military alliance has just begun. Since Robin Cook has recently green, adding environmental friendliness to foreign policy goals, one might have expected war to be a condemnation of Turkey's behaviour. Instead, we learn that Britain's Department of Trade and Industry is set to actually back the illusory project if it goes ahead by underwriting it to the tune of £200 million for both the human, land and environmental rights of the Kurds.

There are over 30 million Kurds, the majority living in Turkey (around 14 million), the rest mainly in Iraq, Iran and Syria, as well as 1½ million dispersed throughout Europe. Despite having their own history, culture and language, Turkey has never recognised their separate identity, officially calling them "mountain Turks", and their language a deformed Turkish/Persian dialect.

Besides being denied expression through their own language and organisations (Kurdish publications, associations and political parties are continually closed down and banned), the Kurdish areas of the South Coast have always been starved of government funding -- only 10 per cent of the official budget goes to them, although the Kurds constitute over 20 per cent of the population.

As a result, the majority live in poverty in the often barren and mountainous areas of the south-east, and elsewhere, are subject to harsh discrimination and racism, often under the impetus of the fascist Grey Wolves, especially prevalent within the police and the military.

Kurdish resistance to this forced assimilation and underdevelopment was always met with brutal suppression by the state. In 1984, this escalated into a full-scale war, with the newly-formed PKK prepared to take up arms in self-defence.

Since then, 30,000 people have been killed, 5,000 villages destroyed and 3 million people made homeless. Such is the state terrain, genocide and ethnic cleansing of a government about to conduct a show trial which will end with the death penalty for someone who has opposed and organised resistance against it.

Nor is this military offensive confined to the areas of Kurdistan which is within the Turkish state but is an offensive against Kurds in northern Iraq -- the very people in whose name the undeclared imperialist war against Iraq is being fought. Turkey has sent 40,000 troops into southern Kurdistan (northern Iraq) in recent weeks.

While this appears to pursue PKK supporters, the effect is undoubtedly to shore up Turkish control in the region.

This is not a war which only affects the Kurdish areas. In the manner of all dirty wars, its chickens have come home to roost within this monstrous war against society as a whole. The war divides people. While some Turks are infected with the anti-Kurdish chauvinism which governs government policies create and sanction, others are being persuaded for their support and solidarity with the Kurds.

The 1998 Turkish Human Rights Association report records 13,212 detentions, 560 of which resulted in formal arrests, 21 people disappeared, 79 killed by unknown perpetrators, 310 publications confiscated, the premises of 100 political parties, associations and cultural centres raided by police, and 29 journalists and diplomats in prison.

Many of these, both Kurds and Turks, are members and supporters of the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HADEP) which the government regards as a terrorist organisation. HADEP has been described as the fag end of its forerunners.

Since Ocalan's arrest the crack down on dissent has deepened further; there have been many thousands of people arrested in the provinces where Kurds live and in the Kurdish areas of the cities. More than twenty leaders of the KESK teachers' union have been arrested, and there is grave concern for their safety. Crime rates among the police, the extension of police stations, the huge increase in the number of criminal cases involving Kurds and the large number of foreigners who arrive illegally each year.

In addition, the privatisation corruption scandal brought down the ruling Turkish coalition government of Mesut Yilmaz, and early elections are expected this April. Ocalan's capture and trial will certainly fuel the issue during this period to try to weaken, discredit and divide the resistance, and further Turkey's failure to and with this issue, except through repression will surely be questioned, since this has long been its primary basis within the society as a whole.

Favourable treatment

Western support is, as we see, very volatile. Western support for Turkey is conditional on its strategic position between East and West and has therefore always afforded it favourable treatment within its powerful position. Brought into NATO and bolstered by massed arms supplies from the West, Britain especially, Turkey has long acted as the main ally of the US and Israel in domination and control of the Middle East and the Caspian basin. Turkish foreign policy is primarily geared towards gaining access to oil supplies and water resources, or in subduing states and individuals which threaten these interests.

Many of the daily air strikes in the US's present undeclared war on Iraq (over 100 strikes since December) fly from the Incirlik base in Turkey. An additional 2,000 US troops will be deployed in this area as part of the opening up of the Caspian basin oil and gas reserves, which promise enormous rich pickings for multinationals.

The Ocalan and Islus dam affairs, the widespread human rights abuses, the role of the military and the running nose of the Kurdish war all show Turkish society today to be a parody of a democracy where neither fair trials nor free elections are possible. In their unctuous backing and collaboration with the Turkish government, Western governments are condoning savage injustices and allowing Turkey to get away with murder.

For further information about the arrests of trade unionists and the decision of the Turkish-Solidarity Trade Union Committee, 42 Southhall Court, Lady Mar els. Southall, UB2 3SW. Tel: 0171 250 1315, Fax 0171 250 1315.

Send protests to: Emergency Regional Governor tel 01422 228 330/244 3372, Diyarbakir governor tel 01422 228 2388 fax 01422 228 4887.
THE FUNERAL of King Hussein, the west's favourite Arab ruler, was attended by a rogues' gallery of his admirers and allies mourning the man referred to by some Israelis as "our king". In the acres of newspaper deploring his death, the British press, there was scarcely a negative comment. And in the Jordanian press, he was praised and sanctified. Yet Hussein was a man who, for nearly 20 years, was the autocratic ruler of one of the world's poorest countries; a military dictator from a minority tribe - the Hashemites - in a state, the majority of whose population were refugees, ethnically cleansed from their homes and land by a regime with which Hussein collaborated for decades, and with which he hastened to sign a treaty at the earliest possible moment. ROLAND RANCE reports.

The press played on the story of the young Hussein ascending to the throne shortly after the murder of his grandfather on the steps of Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque, and turning to the British army for protection against his enemies. Invariably described as "brave" and "pluck"y, he was portrayed as a rare example of civilisation in a brutal region. The tributes were even full of reports of his "kindness" to Jordan's political prisoners! The truth is that Hussein - like his dynasty and his state - was created by the British to serve imperialist interests in the Middle East.

Following the First World War - in which Britain had recruited Arab tribal leaders to fight against Turkey - with the promise of establishing an Arab kingdom over the whole Middle East - the victorious powers proceeded to carve up and parcel out the territory like a piece of real estate.

Kuwait was created as a British colony in order to deny Iraq access to the sea; Lebanon was established as a French colony, reducing Syria's coastline and denying it the area's major ports, and Palestine was designated a "national home for the Jewish people".

British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour, author of the famous declaration, was candid in his cynicism: "In Palestine we do not propose to consult with the Jews. We propose in the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitant of the country". Hussein's great-grandfather, the Sharif Hussein, proclaimed himself King of Hejaz (the area around Mecca and Medina), but lacked the popular support needed to overthrow Ibn-Saud and expel him. As compensation, Britain imposed Hussein's son Faisal (already thrown out of Syria) as King of Iraq.

I n 1922, Palestine was partitioned for the first time, and Faisal's brother Abdullah was made Emir of Transjordan. (This partition had been accepted by the founders of Israel's ruling Likud. Its central components, the Herut Party, still maintains that "The River Jordan has two banks. One of them is ours. The other one is ours too"). The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (the only state other than Saudi Arabia to be named after its ruling family) was thus established by outsiders, serving a dominant imperial master.

The regime has always been sustained by a British-trained and equipped army; Hussein himself was a pupil at Harrow and Sandhurst. Its economy is based on foreign grants and loans; until the late 1960s, it was brought in up to 70% of the national budget. Unemployment is over 25%, and a quarter of families live in absolute poverty.

The whole history of Jordan has been bound up with that of Palestine. Effectively a British colony for thirty years from the end of World War One, it did not attain even full independence until the end of World War Two.

In the period leading up to the further partition of Palestine and the establishment of the state of Israel, King Abdullah, while publicly proclaiming his support for the Palestinians, was secretly movers instigating Israeli emissaries Golda Meir to discuss the division of the land.

With the creation of Israel, the west of Palestine now occupied by Israel, and the east, the state of Jordan. Revealingly, this annexation was never accepted internationally; only Britain and Pakistan recognised its legitimacy.

As well as acquiring territory, including the religious and tourist centres of Jerusalem and Bethlehem, Jordan gained a new population. The 400,000 inhabitants of Transjordan were joined by some 800,000 Palestinians from the West Bank of the Jordan, and several hundred thousand refugees expelled from their homes fled to the Israeli state.

But, in the absence of any democratic system, power remained in the hands of the tribal leaders of Transjordan, who formed the basis of the regime's power.

In 1951, Abdullah was assassinated by a Palestinian incensed at his collaboration with the British. His son, King Hussein, reportedly succeeded him, but was soon deposed and declared insane after he attempted to depose Jordan from its British alliance and work more closely with Egypt and Syria.

Talal's son Hussein, still a minor, took over in 1953. For the next 46 years, he ruled with an iron fist, only occasionally hidden in a velvet glove.

From the start, he continued the policy of collaboration with Israel, assisting them in preventing Palestinian refugees from crossing the border to return to their fields and homes. Despite this assistance, in 1953 the Hashemites reacted with fury when infiltrators killed three Israelis.

A huge Israeli force crossed into Jordan, and in the village of Qibya dynamited dozens of houses where people were sleeping, killing 66 men, women and children. The commander of this force was the same Ariel Sharon who oversaw the slaughter in the Jenin refugee camps in 1992, and who in 1999 attempted Hussein's funeral as an honourd statesman and guest.

This set the pattern for Israeli-Jordanian relations. The resulting popular discontent in Jordan, among Palestinians and Jordanians alike, led to increased repression. Even the populist step of dismissing the British commander of the Jordanian army did not help Hussein; with the overthrow of the Iraqi monarchy in 1958 he was forced to call in British troops to maintain his regime against massive unrest. The UN propped him up with loans of $50 million a year.

Israel's continuing raids, and its threats against Egypt, led to the 1967 war. In the first hours, Israel demolished the Egyptian and Syrian air forces, and made deep advances into Egypt. Hussein was originally attempted to keep his army out of the war. The monarchy feverishly persuaded that exaggerated Egyptian and Syrian claims of victories were true (possibly as a result of Israeli manipulation of radio signals), and attacked across the border. This led to a lightning Israeli attack which succeeded in bringing the whole of Palestine under Israeli control.

Hussein lost the only economically productive part of his kingdom, which was forced to absorb thousands of thou-

sand of refugees, expelled at gunpoint by Israel's chief of staff, Yitzhak Rabin - who Hussein later had awarded as "a man of peace" after his assassination in 1995.

Palestinian armed resistance to Israel, which had started on a small scale in the mid-1960s, developed rapidly after 1967. In line with its usual practice, Israel responded massively and disproportionately, killing hundreds of Jordanians and Palestinians in cross border raids, and repeatedly destroying the main irrigation channels.

Hussein took the hint, and in the notorious 'Black September' of 1970 he launched his own brutal attack against the PLO and other Palestinian groups. So vicious was the Jordanian offensive that many guerrillas forced the Jordan to surrender to the Israelis rather than fall into the hands of Hussein's security forces. The PLO's front line against Israel was destroyed, and Hussein had again shown where his true interest lay.

As the PLO turned from military to diplomatic tactics, it gained increasing Arab and international support. At the Rabat summit of 1974, Arab leaders recognised the PLO as the "sole legitimate representative" of the Palestinian people, effectively reaffirming their long-standing refusal to accept the Jordanian annexation of the West Bank.

This, and its subsequent endorsement by the UN, led to Hussein officially renouncing his claim to the West Bank, and his recognition of the PLO.

T he Palestinian Intifada posed a challenge to Jordanian citizens, as well as Palestinians (now 60% of Jordan's population), rioted and demanded economic as well as political reforms. True to form, Hussein repressed the riots and then made limited reforms.

But his image as a benign ruler is misleading. A 1998 report by Amnesty International notes that "several detainees have died in police cells of "beating by different security services". Shortly before his death, Hussein replaced his brother as King with his son as designated heir. Jordan has neither free elections, nor a recognised line of royal succession.

With a twenty year military career, including leading the Jordanian special forces, the new King Abdullah II is well placed to continue Hussein's repressive apparatus. There is unlikely to be any change of policy towards Israel, nor any political opening in Jordan.

Jordan is an artificial and unviable state, the playing field of more powerful neighbours. It owes its creation to the needs of British imperial policy, and its continued existence to its willingness to act as a client of other states.

It can only continue to exist as a military dictatorship, answerable to the demands of its masters and not those of its people.

For the people of Jordan, possibly even more clearly than for others in the Arab world, the way forward is through the struggle of a socialist federation of the Middle East.
UN pulls out to let Angola fire resume

The United Nations peacekeeping force withdrew from Angola on March 3, apparently at the insistence of the Angolan Government. The United Nations is only inclined to leave countries if their policies have been defeated or successful. So what is the story in Angola? PETER STEVENS investigates.

Socialist Outlook has always campaigned against UN interventions. We do not believe their presence will benefit the workers and peasants of affected countries. Their involvement is only to buttress imperialism's interests.

So what was the imperial interest which took these troops to Angola and why are they acquiescing in their departure? A brief history is necessary.

Angola achieved independence from Portugal in 1975. This independence was achieved primarily because of the collapse of the Salazar dictatorship in Portugal in 1974, under pressure of wars of independence in all its colonies. At this point the liberation struggle in Angola was at a stalemate.

The Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) had been forced to fight not only the Portuguese but also the rival (SADF) which was directly involved in Angola. This led to a decisive but unexpected outcome - SADF was defeated by the Cuban army.

This defeat, particularly when combined with the collapse of the USSR and the ongoing struggle further south, caused imperialism to enforce a new political order in its allies in the region.

Namibian independence, majority rule in South Africa, ceasefire in Mozambique (where the South African backed Renamo has been terrorizing and destabilising), lastly, peace accords in Angola.

It was the need to stabilise this new political order that led to UN troops being sent to Angola to police these accords.

This has been a no easy process. There were two ceasefires and elections, in 1991 and 1994, and many outbreaks of fighting. The Lusaka protocol in 1994 involved new ceasefires and elections (UNITA won a third of the seats in the new assembly and several government ministers) and the arrival of UN peacekeepers.

- Imperialism was interested in the exploitation of the rich diamond and oil wealth of Angola. Undermining popular revolution was no longer top of the agenda (the MPLA had declared itself no longer Marxist in 1990).

- Stability was a necessity.

Today the situation has shifted, not in terms of imperialism's goals, but the means by which it thinks they can best be achieved. A new 'new order' is emerging in southern Africa resulting from the genocide in Rwanda and the overthrow of Mobutu in Zaire.

The Congo is a vast disappointed country. If it collapses into chaos this will be a major threat to stability across Southern Africa. Mobutu was the US's principal ally in the region. After apartheid South Africa: to lose him was of great significance. The US wishes to see a new government safely controlling the country. The only one on offer at the moment is that of new President Kabila.

The Angolan government is willing militarily to prop up Kabila. This is specifically to prevent UNITA, and a group fighting for independence for the oil rich Angolan region of Cabinda, from using the Congo as a base.

This gives the Angolan government a usefulness to US interests. Firstly as an ally of Kabila, and secondly as the defender of the US oil companies with interests in the Cabinda region.

The UN is willing to withdraw its forces because it wants to redraw the line in Angola. Nobody thinks that the Angolan government will be able to destroy UNITA. But they do believe that the oil wealth of the government is far greater than the diamond wealth of UNITA.

This should result in UNITA's areas of control being reduced. The removal of the peacekeepers enables this fighting to take place.

At the same time the UN is maintaining its "humanitarian" operations (good PR), tightening sanctions against UNITA's arms suppliers and diamond smuggling and declaring its willingness to facilitate new negotiations.

Protests call for cancellation of apartheid debt

Charlie van Gelderen

PRE-ELECTION budgets always try to please every one. South African Finance Minister Tony 
Manuel's last budget before this year's general election is no excep-
tion.

It has met with the approval of the Chamber of Mines and the South African Chamber of Business who welcome especially the cut-
ting of corporation tax from 35% to 30%.

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) gave more muted approval. The inclu-
sion of the top three COSATU officials in the ANC's election list, with the probable loss of ministerial posts in Mbeki's first government may have made some contribution to this favourable judgement.

COSATU expressed concern with the revision in the budget of the need for public service cuts and the decrease in company taxa-
tion, the cost of which could be transferred to the poor in future. It also opposed the continued emphasis on exchange control lib-
eralisation. This, of course, is a requirement of the World Bank and the IMF for their support of South Africa's economy.

Outside the chamber, parliament on Budget day there were other voices. A protest organised by Jubilee 2000 was held in the par-
gament not to repay debts incurred by its apartheid predecessor. Jubilee 2000 is part of an Interna-
tional campaign aimed at scraping the debts of developing countries. National Organiser of Jubilee 2000 said South Africa's debt stood at R45 billion (R9.63 = $1).

"A significant proportion of this money is paid to organisations like the World Bank and the Interna-
tional Monetary Fund, while people living in rural areas are robbed of sustainable development.

The government was paying debts which should have been settled by the previous government. It is unable to create jobs as such a huge amount of money is used to repay the debt. Swiss and German banks, who had benefited under the previous government, should consider paying reparation to the victims of apartheid."

As the Finance Minister began his speech in the National Assembly, the protesters outside chanted "Down with apartheid debt, down!"

I2 SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

IF YOU LIKED VIETNAM, YOU'LL LOVE THIS ONE!

PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY HENRY KISSINGER
STARRING THE CIA, AT A COST OF MILLIONS!

TOP SECRET

The Angolan struggle becomes a new flashpoint of the Cold War
All buses stop in Sweden!

Peter Lindgren

In Sweden, 16,000 bus drivers all over the country have been on strike since February 23. This national dispute is rooted in privatization and neoliberal policy. Although Kommunalförbundet, the union of public employees, demands a pay increase of more than three percent instead of the one percent offered by the employers, working hours are more than doubled.

"There are two main problems" explains Anders Vettemark, a bus driver and member of the Socialist Party (Swedish section of the Fourth International), and member of Kommunalförbundet's national negotiating committee. "Firstly, the working hours can make it difficult to start a family. In the morning, there are one or two breaks during the day and leave work at 10 pm. Here our union manages shifts of less than twelve hours, a very reasonable demand. Secondly, the number of breaks can be up to five hours. That's why so many drivers say the strike is true to go to the toilet!" Privatization of the publicly-owned local bus services in Swedish cities started in 1989. The companies that offered to run the buses mostly cheaply won the franchise. Competition was very tough, and bidding for the contracts used long working hours to cut costs.

"We have a chance to win this system-instigated strike," says Anders Vettemark, "but this is also the reason why the drivers are so solid behind the strike." Swedes is the largest company with 30 percent of the national market. Swedes was privatized in the mid-eighties and sold to the infamous multinational Stagecoach. Stagecoach, formed in Perth, Scotland at 1980, is clearly a union-busting company. As late as December 1998 Stagecoach faced a four week strike in New Zealand due to its union-busting. On the highly organized Swedish labour market, strike breaking is not allowed during legal strikes. No one, not even conservatives, promotes strike breaking here. And Swedes' new owners have never tried any union busting towards their employees. But the strikers still face problems. Around ten percent of the workforce are not in the union and thus the one receives nothing from strike funds. Swedes pays every non-member who reports for work each day their full salary, although they do not have to work. As the strikers only get 80 percent of their wages, non-union members are better off.

Vettemark finds this "irritating." Swedish legislation still reflects the power of the Swedish workers movement. Union membership is the highest in the world, 84 percent of the working force. Since state appointed mediators have no right to force any of the parties in a conflict to sign an agreement, the strike might be a long one. Both sides have funds for a long fight. The employers' costs will be covered by the national employers' association SFAA.

"I think the decisive factor will be the reaction of the general public," says Anders Vettemark. "That's why it is so important for us to launch a campaign aimed at the public, explaining our motives. I am promoting a campaign to collect signatures amongst the public, demanding that the employers sign an agreement acceptable to the union."

A poll on the first day of the strike showed that 83 percent of the public support the strike. Vettemark explains "Many, many are expecting that the problems as us in our jobs, it's not just public sector workers who have suffered during these last neoliberal years. But our strike causes obvious problems for the public. We have to take that seriously."

This strike is the most important one this decade in Sweden. Perhaps the union leaders were not too happy about launching a national strike, but it is not easy to stamp out a strike with such a high level of support by signing a conciliation agreement. The strike was joined by the further 1,000 drivers on March 6.

Clearly, the outcome of this strike is important not just for the bus drivers (and their passengers). It will set a precedent for future workers' struggles in Sweden.

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Blair heads to Euroland

Alan Thornett

Tony Blair has at last abandoned his famed 'wait and see' stance over the Euro. He has begun the government campaign to win the vote in a referendum which is likely to be held soon after the next election assuming Labour win it, which looks like the only outcome at the present time.

Preparations for Britain's entry into Euroland are now going full steam ahead, with the aim not only of ensuring that Britain can qualify economically and will be technically prepared, but also to present a virtual fait accompli to voters by the time of the referendum.

The preparation involves full compliance with the terms of the job-cutting stability pact, which both regulates the Eurozone and controls further entry into it. Blair is also aware that the political mood has been swinging in his direction, not least in the leadership of the trade unions, where the TUC has consolidated its position of full support for the Euro and the stability pact.

There is an urgent need to stop up the campaigns in the unions and the Labour Party against the Euro and its social consequences. This must be done on a working class agenda and on an internationalist basis, totally separated from the Tory right and the little Englander nationalism who want to save the pound. This is important, not least because of the mass street protests reportedly being planned by the Tory right for next year in the run-up to a referendum. That a principled internationalist campaign can be built has been shown by the Euronationalist campaigns around the EU summits in Amsterdam, Luxembourg, and Cardiff, and now the campaign for Cologne.

Meanwhile we are told that the launch of the Euro has been "highly successful". Some would say "so was the Titanic" - the problem was that it hit as whacking great iceberg not long afterwards.

Already city forecasters predict that the Euro, dragged down above all by the growing economic problems in Germany, may fall below the US dollar in value by the end of the year - an event which would have huge political consequences, not least for Blair's referendum.

It is already clear from the first two months (in which it has lost over 6 percent of its starting value) that the fiscal straight-jacket the Euro imposes on the economies of the Eurozone will tend to pull the single currency project apart. All this makes the mass protests to be held in Cologne at the end of May and the beginning of June even more important.

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Cologne 99

International demonstration, May 29

The European Marches (organiser of the mass demonstration in Amsterdam in 97) is calling another major protest (50,000 or more) in Cologne in June to coincide with the Heads of Government Summit of the EU under the German presidency. Marchers will set out from every region of Germany and from other European cities including Prague, Luxembourg and Paris, to converge on Cologne for the demo. There will be a (1,000 strong) march from Bruges. Unionism against European unemployment, job insecurity, social exclusion and poverty are growing. The demands will be:

* A guaranteed job for all, and a decent standard of living.
* For an immediate massive reduction of working hours, coordinated on a European level, without loss of wages or purchasing power.
* Opposition to compulsory part-time work, child labour, and social dumping.
* Opposition to the enrichment of the minority and the impoverishment of the majority.
* Yes to the redistribution of wealth.
* Opposition to all forms of exclusion and discrimination, including those based on gender or race, to the full right of asylum for the persecuted.
* Defend the welfare state. Yes to social rights in all areas (housing, education, health etc.) with the necessary funding.

The European Marches are appealing to the peoples of Europe, to associatives, trade unions and social forces, to make May 29 1999 a massive day of mobilisation.

The current plan is to have a British delegation on one (or more) of the marches in Europe and organise protests for May 29.

Organisations and individuals wishing to be a part of such a mobilisation, under the name of Cologne 99, should fill in and post the form now.

---

The form:

I live in a way to be a part of the mobilisation for the marches and demonstration in Cologne on May 29.

Please send me all information about the campaign as it develops, along with information as to how I can be involved. I enclose a donation to help start the campaign.

Name
Phone
Address
Cheques: Cologne 99

Send to: Cologne 99, c/o Leeds TUC Centre, 88 North St, LEEDS LS1 7PN

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Left unity in French elections

LO and LCR link up to form “100% left” slate

Across Europe today in every country except Ireland and Greece, Social Democratic governments are in power. While this achievement for social democracy is a result of the crisis and defeats of the right wing parties, these governments continue to apply austerity policies, albeit in new clothes. This situation opens up more space for left re-organisation of the left of these traditional working class parties. France’s largest far-left groups have united for the European elections in June. Opinion polls show 5-6% support for the list led by AN4 2UJ (L’OCP) and Arlette Laguiller (LO). 3000 people packed into the launch meeting for the campaign on February 5 at the Mutualité in Paris. Laure Favieres spoke to Alan Clarke about the project

LO: What are the main challenges for this common list? AK: To make visible, electorally, a current of opinion which is already present in the social sphere: the current of French opinion which is against the right-wing parties, against the far-right, and also against the policies of the current, “pluristic left” government.

This current has been present in social struggles since 1995. But on the political front, it has remained marginal – apart from the respectable vote which Arlette Laguiller won in the last presidential elections, and a good score for our two organisations in the regional elections in early 1998.

LO: The opinion polls give you

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eight per cent support

AK: Let’s be prudent about these opinion polls. The only important question is whether we pass the 5 per cent barrier, the minimum to take any seats in the European parliament.

That would be the first time that a vote for the far left would seem useful and credible, rather than a protest vote.

Make no mistake, if we get more than 5 per cent, it will be a real event, both in France and at the European level. To the left of the institutional parties there will at last be a credible force which renews the anti-capitalist and neoliberal policies being applied across Europe, by governments of left and right.

A good score will also be a warning to the employers, and to the “pluristic left” government. Their obedience to the laws of the market will cost them something!

LO: Communist Party leader Robert Hue says the LO-LCR list seeks to weaken his Party.

AK: Our campaign isn’t aimed against the Communist Party as such. But it is certainly aimed against that party’s current leadership.

The fundamental goal of our list is to organise a front of all those who are ready to resist the right and the far right – these are our major enemies.

We are obliged to oppose the policies of the “pluristic left” government, in which the Communist Party participates. Their government refuses to respond to the attacks from emplowiers. On the contrary, it goes along with them.

The top of the Communist Party participates in government, but the base of the party is often present alongside us in social mobilisations against those policies. That party’s balancing act cannot last for long. That’s why the CP is in crisis.

Many voters, or former voters for the Communist Party feel more attracted to the LO-LCR policies than to those of Robert Hue. Good!

LO: LO and LCR are not new parties. Why is this list sudden?

AK: Everyone on the left knows about the differences between the parties, particularly concerning the type of organisation we want to build, and the way our militants should implement “the line” on a day to day basis.

This isn’t some politicians’ agreement which covers up those differences. But there are clearly enough common points for us to collaborate in these elections.

We urgently need an alternative to Maastricht Europe, with its 20 million unemployed, its 1 million poor, the expansion of part time and unstable contracts, its anti-trade union and anti-democratic policies. Instead of a monetary union, on financial criteria, we want a social Europe, based on social criteria.

LO and LCR faced an exceptional situation. We needed to act, and act together, to show that there is an alternative to the “pluristic left” government, and that left politicians can and should implement social and democratic policies. Instead of a monopolistic contract, on financial criteria, we want a social Europe, based on social criteria.

LO: How is the campaign progressing?

AK: It is too early to tell for sure, but there is a continuous, positive, expressive echo from these around us, and from our own supporters. This campaign isn’t the last chance. But supporters perceive this as a “Francky union list,” but as the only non-governmentalist, anti-capitalist left option. “100% left”, some call it.

People who have not voted LO and LCR in the past should now see this list as a useful tool. Some are already helping us with posters, meetings, leaflets.

LO: Who are the candidates?

AK: Our list of candidates reflects our various struggles. Most of our candidates are women, including 8 of the first 10 positions.

Our candidates come from all walks of life, including immigrants, and two candidates active in other countries of the European Union.

LO: Why should anyone vote for the LO-LCR list?

AK: To show that the balance of forces is changing, that there is a radical, anti-capitalist wing of the movement which has no confidence in the “pluristic left” govern-

To demand a job, a roof, health, education. To reject nationalism and the Europe which is being built above us. The more votes we get, the less people will be discouraged about defending themselves.

These elections are a step towards the construction of a new anti-capitalist force which will not be confined to the far left, but will attract anti-capitalist militants currently working in the Communist and Socialist parties or the Greens, as well as the much larger group of people who are sceptical about all the parties, and concentrate their energies on the trade union movement, single issue campaigns and voluntary sector activities.

A good vote will enable us to send deputies to the European Parliament, and an institution without any power, but we can use the credibility of parliamen-
tary status to gain information, and get media coverage when we denounce the secret structures of the Europe which is being planned for us.

We will use our positions as a tribune for the social movement, and use the resources at our disposal to build those movements.

In voting for us, people are voting for a permanent force which will not be confined to the far left, but will attract anti-capitalist militants currently working in the Communist and Socialist parties or the Greens, as well as the much larger group of people who are sceptical about all the parties, and concentrate their energies on the trade union movement, single issue campaigns and voluntary sector activities.

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SLMS

Solid support for campaign in the LCR

The LCR spent several months debating the joint list with LO, culminating in a national conference on January 16. The common list was approved by 75% per cent, and the motion on how the campaign would be organised was approved by 76% per cent. Motion rejecting the common list received 1.8% per cent of the vote. Four percent of delegates supported a third option, which would have concentrated more on the LCR’s own European project.

Participation in the preparatory meetings for this congress was high by LCR standards, with 13% more comrades than participated in the last regular congress. This reflects a significant growth in the membership of the organisation over the last 12 months.

In a separate congress the same weekend, LO supporters also approved the common list. Their vote was virtually unanimous.

(from Rouge, 4 February 1999)
Lift the sanctions! Stop the silent war against Iraq!

While there has been no declaration of war against Iraq since the bombings earlier in the year - cynically timed to delay Clinton's impeachment hearings - there is no doubt that the Iraqi people are being subjected to a prolonged military offensive, safe for imperialist interests not the people who live there. Whether unclear whether these Kurdish leaders will accept the deal, it certainly seems that imperialism is prepared to consider redrawning the map of the Middle East yet again.

Unfortunately protests against this barbaric offensive have been extremely muted - as if bombs without a declaration kill less people than if they have been announced.

Serious effort needs to be put into to ensure the maximum possible turn out for the demonstration against sanctions on April 19 - the only national day for opposition to imperialism's crimes against the Iraqi people.

New beginnings for the Portuguese Left

Many socialists in Britain have eagerly been watching the progress of the French left as the slate put forward for the European Elections by the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire (LCR) and Lutte Ouvrière (LO) is getting an impressive showing in the opinion polls (see facing page). Rather less is known about developments in other European countries.

Terry Conway from Socialist Outlook talked to João-Carlos Louçã of the PCD-Portugal Left Section of the Fourth International.

SO: Tell us about your plans for making an impact in the forthcoming European elections.

J-C: We have formed a new block, Bloco de Esquerda (Left Bloc), together with two other groups, to stand candidates not only in the European elections in June but in the Parliamentary elections that will take place in October.

The Left Bloc in this project are ourselves (the PCD) the UDP an organisation of Maoist origin and Poltica XXI, a group of ex-CP intellectuals.

The organisations involved have a roots in society. For example PCD leader Manuel Graça is General Secretary of the “Workers” Trade Union, and the PCD and UDP are active across the leather-working and clothing unions. The PCD is also involved in the national leadership of the teachers’ union, the biggest union in Portugal.

The UDP has had a Member of Parliament previously. Up till 1983 they had a member elected in their own name, and between 1983-1985 they had a member elected on the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) list. Under the slogan “Beginning Again” the Bloco proclaims that it is time “to remake the left, and begin again.” To combat the negative effects of globalisation, with its traumas of misery and injustice. To struggle for a Europe able to build a future based on the best elements of its history; a Europe which values all its identities, be they national, class, immigrant or pluri-cultural.

The initiative has already attracted considerable interest. Among the “independents” who have signed up are the historian Fernando Rosas, composer Jose Mario Brother and the writer and active feminist Melice Ribeiro Santos. Despite the encouraging number of individual members, militants of the three founding groups are still the base of the Left Bloc. The exception to this is the approval by the congresses of the three organisations in January.

SO: Has this development happened suddenly, or is it something you have been discussing for a long time?

J-C: All the forces involved have worked within the PCD. Specifically on a number of key campaigns; for example in the referendum opposing Maastricht and the referendum in support of women’s abortion rights.

The trade off they suggest is that the oil will be privatised in exchange for some supposed measure of independence.

In practice this will be little different from the current supposed safe havens - which the allies are seeking - for imperialist interests not the people who live there.

Whiether unclear whether these Kurdish leaders will accept the deal, it certainly seems that imperialism is prepared to consider redrawning the map of the Middle East yet again.

The PSD has also stood on common election platforms with Poltica XXI in municipal elections in Lisbon and Oporto which won three per cent of votes and elected a councilor.

The three organisations are convinced that we must bring into politics all those who are excluded or marginalised.

It is high time for all those who identify with the essence of what we are saying to come together in a new project which will be capable of carrying forward strong and credible projects for democracy and socialism. For the PSD “Such a project is a long-standing idea. Many independent militants have long been convinced of the need for an electoral viable alternative.”

“People have wanted the intervention of organised militants to be directed towards concretising a political and cultural force representative of an alternative current in the Portuguese left. But what is now is the decision to assume the responsibility and the risk of doing so. It is time now to do it.”

SO: What do you see as the main purpose of the Block?

What impact do you expect to have?

J-C: We are not just standing in order to get elected. We also see the formation as a way of intervenning into the internel debate going on inside the PCP. This debate is between a tendency tending to social-democratisation, defending an "alternative of power" that wants to negociate a governmental programme and places in that government with the socialists, and another tendency - more to the left - that still wants to build a social and political alternative.

We reject that the PCP is still unable to understand the complex of Portuguese society today. This process of the Party from presenting itself as a party which wants to break with the current society.

We have said that we want to bring together all those who want to build an alternative to Social Democracy, and that the PCP is central to this. But their reaction to the Block has been hysterical - they still think that they are the alternative alone. This is despite their recent setbacks. They won only 11 per cent of the vote in the local elections and only 9 deputies in the last General Election.

Impact on CP
We have already had an impact on them, even before the campaign has started properly. The PCP has been organising a series of meetings across the country on various topics, including on the future of the left.

They organised a meeting in Coimbra on this theme last May and invited Fernando Rosas, the block’s main spokesperson, as well as others who support us. They did not invite a single representative of the Socialist Party.

While these meetings had in principle been agreed to by the whole PCP, subsequent developments underlined what we already thought about the tensions in that organisation.

A further meeting on the same lines, with the same platform had been planned for Lisbon. But following the Coimbra meeting the CP leadership manoeuvred time and again, postponing the meeting several times and then eventually organising it at short notice to try to minimise its impact.

Finally, the debate took place at the beginning of February, with the PCP’s leadership having justifying taking its distance from the project of the Left Bloc and its support for “institutional work” at the level of European institutions.

SO: What are the next key steps in the campaign?

J-C: There is much to be done. We have already agreed who will lead the lists; Miguel Portas of Poltica XXI for the European elections and a candidate chosen by the PCD for the elections in Oporto. But other candidates still have to be chosen.

The next step is registering the Left Bloc as a legal political party. That means collecting five thousand signatures, each of which has to be accompanied by a list of supporting paper work. This is a time-consuming and expensive challenge but it will be good practice for the European elections in June, and parliamentary elections in October.

The local meetings to present the Left Bloc have had, so far, a very big impact. They have attracted many people including a significant number of left militants - even from the PCP - that hasn’t been organised for many years.

The intention of the Block is to bring together many more people than the forces of the 3 organisations that started it. This is working - so far - because we are having success in getting together different generations of social activists.

For these people and for the left in general, the Left Bloc represents not only a new hope, but also something completely new in terms of the left recomposition.
Free Mumia Abu-Jamal!

Mumia Abu-Jamal is the first class struggle prisoner to face execution in the United States of America since the Rosenbergs, more than 45 years ago. His conviction in the 1981 slaying of a Philadelphia, Pennsylvania police officer was the result of a frame-up in which the police, prosecutors, and the judge at his trial all played a role.

As an award-winning Black journal- 33 the first class struggle prisoner to face execution in the United States of America since the Rosenbergs, more than 45 years ago. His conviction in the 1981 slaying of a Philadelphia, Pennsylvania police officer was the result of a frame-up in which the police, prosecutors, and the judge at his trial all played a role.

As an award-winning Black journal- nast. Mumia had gained the enmity of Philadelphia’s ruling circles for his exposure of their race, and for his consistent support to the struggles of the poor, the oppressed, and the dis- posed. This is work he has pur- sued even while on Pennsylvania’s death row for the last 17 years. It has earned Mumia the title, “Voice of the Voce- nates.”

Mumia’s case focuses a clear spotlight on a number of troubling issues regarding the criminal justice system in the U.S.A. It is one of the few cases that has received world-wide public scrutiny, because Mumia Abu-Jamal has become a symbol of the bereaved tradition of the death penalty. Both the death penalty and the criminal justice system more broadly reflect the deep racism which permeates every aspect of life in that country.

Four of every ten people on death row in the U.S. are Black, while they constitute only eleven percent of the general population. In the last 20 years, the prison population of the United States has expanded six-fold, and it is still rising.

The US now has a greater per- centage of its population behind bars than South Africa did at the height of apartheid. And that prison population consists disproportionately of Blacks and other people of colour.

In addition to Mumia there are scores of political prisoners in U.S. jails—people who have been imprisoned not only for any real or imagined criminal acts, but because they are committed to fighting for and to oppression in the USA, and against that coun- try’s interference in the affairs of other peoples throughout the world.

Last October, ignoring over- whelming evidence of misconduct at its original trial and a large body of evidence that has since emerged to cast an even greater doubt about the legitimacy of its verdict, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court turned down Mumia’s appeal for a new trial.

This creates an emergency situa- tion in his case. Without a favourable intervention by the fed- eral courts (something which is far too long since Mumia could be exe- cuted within a year. In truth, as Mumia, his family and his supporters all state, his fate rests with our collec- tive capacity to make the price of his political murder too high for the ruling pow- er of the world.

What happens to Mumia AbuJ- jamal will have substantial repur- poses. Already his case has generated substantial protests in the US and around the world.

Major mobilisations are sched- uled to take place on April 24 in Philadelphia, and in Europe, as well as internationally. We call on all members and supporters of the Fourth International, all supporters of liberation throughout the world, and all those who simply believe in elementary justice and human rights, to do everything possible to participate in and support these efforts.

Stop the Execution of Mumia AbuJ- jamal!

Mumia must receive a new trial now!

In the US contact: International Concerned Family and Friends to Free Mumia Abu Jamal 215 476 8812 or The Mobilization to Free Mumia Abu Jammal 415 821 0459 or Fax 415 821 0166

(Resolution adopted by Interna- tional Executive Committee of the Fourth International, February 1999)

In Ireland, the evidence of the routine involvement of the RUC in sectarian killings is only indifference.

Through Irish Eyes

A column from Socialist Democracy, Ireland, on the Fourth International

Endgame for Irish pacification process

John North

THE FEBRUARY vote at the Stormont Assembly to endorse new structures of par- tition for the island made a mockery of the endgame for imperialism’s cur- rent plans on imposing stability and smothering the Irish ques- tion for now.

It is becoming harder and harder to hide the true nature of the settlement.

A familiar cycle, acted out at each stage of the pacification pro- cess, was repeated again. The republicans cling desperately to last month’s bottom line. Their allies in the nationalist family joined with the British and Unionists in moving line even further to the right.

A new status quo emerged, even more reactionary than before. What causes a special shudder in Republican ranks is that the issue was absolutely fundamental for the movement — the surrender of any hope that a united Ireland will ever be replaced by Micky Mouse committees like inland waterways and food safety.

The sectarian bear pit of Stormont looms larger than ever but all the structures that were sup- posed to transform it are fading away.

Issues of identity will be the special concern of the proposed PM — ‘David Trim- ble’ A super-quotago, the Civic forum, will be set up.

Nominations to the forum would come from business, voluntary and community, trade union, church, arts and sports groups, as well as victim’s organisations.

The British will control not only the Stormont regime but also a thoroughly artificial and depend- ent civic society. The whole envelope will be cheapened and the expense of services like Health and Education.

The old illusion is summed up by the laughable expectation that Chris Parry, Tony Trim- bles, will pro- nounce any funda- mental reform of the RUC. Hardly a day goes by with- out news of a new attack against the force — allegations that won’t be enough.

We will receive no explana- tion as to why RUC members stood by while demoralisation can be seen in Robert Hamill was beaten to death by a loyalist mob.

There will be no answer to our involvement in the murder of lawyer Pat Finucane — the local legal structures refuse, despite overwhelming evidence, to support calls for a proper investigation on the part of human rights organisations.

Even statements by prominent loyalist paramilitaries that they were flooded with documentation from state forces identifying tar- gets are simply brushd aside despite overwhelming evidence.

In Britain evidence of police racism in the investigation of Stephen Lawrence’s death has caused outrage. In Ireland evi- dence of the routine involvement of the RUC in sectarian killings produces only indifference. Nothing could make the reality of the pacification process clearer.

What is unveiled is always neg- ative. The RUC are to continue the use of plastic bullets. Plans to cut down the number of arms in civilian ( ie Unionist) hands are to be shelved.

Any army demilitarisation has gone into reverse as they step up activity in border areas. The British have failed to do their obligation to protect nationalist civilians in the Creggagh Road.

Secessionist intimidation is pre- sented as cultural difference and residents are under constant pres- sure to bow in to the British bogeymen and allow the British off the hook.

Sinn Fein feel they are protected by the formal wording of the agreement and by the secret assurances they have received. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The February vote at Stormont moved the process into the endgame. Its final operation depends only on secretary of state Mowlam and on British interests.

Britain wants Sinn Fein in to help bolster a really quite fragile process, but on Britain’s terms. The British are in a position to help.

The only issue is the amount of leeway they have in timing and format.

The choices are presented quite starkly. They can wear suits in the Forum and trade with the victims of the sort of witchhunt they are involved in or they can help the British to buttress a new political order in Northern Ireland.

Robert Hamill was beaten to death by a loyalist mob.

In the North of Ireland there is growing uncertainty. Limited accommodation to Loyalism does not produce conciliation. The Loyalists move even more sharply to the right and demand further concessions.

The British are determined to keep their Belfast base but find they have less and less to offer nationalist workers, who gain nothing from the process and face new structures of repression.

As growing disillusion comes to fruition we wait to see if that is not tagged on to the interests of a core of capitalist supporters of the nationalist family nor sent up the dead end of saving the “peace” process.

Socialists must provide a class alternative that can fight both nationalism and the forces of imperialism.
Paul Flanagan.

These days the Irish political scene is spiced with rumour and scandal. The infamy of the lifestyle of Dublin’s criminal fraternity has been replaced on the front pages by the more conspicuous lifestyles of the politicians.

Almost everyone is now ready to believe that most politicians are up to their armpits in bribe and corruption, taking kickbacks from businessmen for services rendered. A drip-drip flow of news emanating from two public tribunals confirms many of the prejudices working class people harbour about their politicians. The proceedings bring into the open the tip of Irish capitalism’s unseenly underworld.

The Moriarity Tribunal was set up in September 1997 primarily to investigate the financial affairs of Charles Haughey, leader of Fianna Fáil between 1979 and 1992 and twice Taoiseach. In order to detail any payments made directly to him during any period in office Haughey has taken over the title previously held by Martin Cahill as the country’s most illustrious crook. Though many legal restrictions prevent us from talking through information has emerged to expose and taint much of what passes for normal political practice in the land of saints and scholars.

The current leadership of Fianna Fáil is increasingly worried about what sludge might eventually come out from under the cover of the waters they have made for themselves.

For years there was speculation about how Charlie Haughey lived a lifestyle more fitted to a Saudi prince than a mere politician. Some imagined he had made it big in business investment before he became Fianna Fáil leader. This turns out to be untrue. The truth is he has been making it for decades. Charlie’s luxurious lifestyle was paid for by an assortment of means and sources directly or indirectly of political leaders Haughey’s morals were the creation of peers and associates.

The revelation that Haughey was a kept man came about after a family dispute between his son Dunne and his ex-wife in 1994 as to who should control the family’s silver. The family owning the silver was a domi¬nating strand, and are notorious for treating their workers like dirt.

In the course of fighting an action by other family members to have him ousted from the Dunnes Stores, Ben Dunne instructed his solicitor to reveal that his client had gifted Haughey some £250,000 in 1984 (£1.1 million). The payments were made secretly via a sham fund set up by the Dunnes on the Isle of Man under the name of Ansbacher.

If this is illegal, but when they have been on the books, account books are, of course, such huge amounts and made out to such perversely characteristic characters like Dunne, then suspicions are aroused. Even worse, Fianna Fáil supporters are liable for tax inspection and should have been declared to the Inland Revenue.

A little at a time, pieces from Haughey’s financial past are being unearthed. Ireland’s domi¬nating politician over the past two decades was receiving large dona¬tions from several business sources.

He had a bagman called Des Traynor, chairman of a private bank in Dublin which controlled flows of money in and out of the Ansbacher account. It was suggested during the tribunal that the account contained upwards of £105 million. Lucky for Haughey and the rest of his ‘firm’, Traynor is now dead, and the Ansbacher account escaped the most direct and probably proper legal inspection.

Last week representatives of Ireland’s biggest bank AIB came before the tribunal and shed some light on their relationship with Haughey. Back in 1979, they explained, the bank agreed to write off a Haughey debt of £450,000. The bank’s view was that Haughey had in fact owed the bank £1.4m. When Charlie refused to give up his cheque books he warned the bank that he could become ‘a troublesome adversary’. What raised eyebrows most was that Haughey had been allowed to build up this debt without offering any collateral.

He had been bourgeois about £12,000 a year for years to finance his champagne lifestyle. Traynor had partly alleviated Haughey’s debt by repairing the bank by a £750,000 lump sum pro¬ferred by some mysterious donor. It seems that there is even more material yet to be uncovered.

Another inquiry, the Flood trib¬unal, is pulling other leading Fianna Failers into the slurry and even threatens the present Fianna Fáil-led coalition government headed by Haughey’s most favoured son Bertie. Set up in late 1997, it is examin¬ing allegations of payments to politicians pertaining to Dublin planning decisions after Fianna Fail big boss Ray Burke was forced to resign his post as For¬eign Minister.

Burke allegedly received £60,000 from James Gogarty in June 1987 acting on behalf of two building developers JMSE and Fitzwillion plc.

When he was a leading city councillor and his chairman in 1985, Burke pushed through controversial rezoning schemes favourable to certain developers. Rumours are rife that Burke is seeking immunity in return for singing freely about corruption in high places. For a long time Burke was a central fund-raiser for Fianna Fail.

The story emerged after the 81 year old Gogarty went to the press because he was refused a satisfactory pension from his employers. Gogarty also alleges that a former senior Dublin Corporation official and Fianna Fáil supporter George Redmond received thousands in kickbacks from developers.

Redmond denied this, but in a dramatic twist last week was arrested by police at Dublin air¬port as he arrived back from the Isle of Man carrying more than £300,000. It is believed that Red¬mond was desperately attempting to deposit some of his ill-gotten gains in a bank on the island—yet another twist, devel¬oper Tom Gogarty now says he will give evidence that he paid Fianna Fáil EU commissioner Padraig Flynn £350,000 in 1988 to smooth the way for a development around Bachelors Walk on the north side of the Liffey.

The immediate question is whether the present Fianna Fail led government can survive. So far the coalition partners are stay¬ing on board hoping that Ahern himself is clean. The opposition parties also have reason to fear a spring cleaning of the political system. The most righteous of Haughey opponents, Fianna Fáil’s Gerry FitzGerald also had large personal debts written off by the AIB under the chairman¬ship of Peter Sutherland, a close political friend and associate.

Ahern may not manage to keep himself out of the slurry. His closest political friend and confidante is building developer Joe Burke, whose name keeps cropping up.

Burke’s name surfaced again recently when Tom Gogarty spoke of meetings with Ahern in the late 1980’s and claimed that he had spoken to him about mak¬ing a £250,000 donation to Fianna Fail and to Flynn. Gogarty claims that Ahern had advised him to work through his constituency manager Burke about it.

Ahern was apparently advising him to meet his fixer to find out what favours he might expect for a party donation. Who knows. Bertie may yet take a dive!

Despite everything, most media criticism of the politicians is weak and misdi¬rected. It is directed solely at them, accusing them of lacking personal integrity. There is little or no criticism of the capitalists who offer bribes and little investigation into what they gain from handing marked brown envelopes to politicians.

All the newspaper editorialists expressed their contempt for Haughey, a man who had the audacity to leak off businessmen and bankers for so long. But did the capitalists not get anything in return?

Implicit in some of the letters presented to the Moriarity trib¬unal is the suggestion that they were not just the innocent vic¬tims of Haughey’s threats. Haughey was permitted to run a miasma of bad business he ‘might be a man of influence in the future’. The bankers had an abiding suspicion that the Haughey, they called them KB’s or key business influences.

What kind of child are the politicians for the AIB? In a testament to the Moriarity trib¬unal, a senior chairman of AIB, indicated that Haughey and Fitzgerald were men of great influence whose prices would be delighted to assist.

Clearly politicians of various stripes have helped the AIB and Fianna Fail’s most profitable company. They pushed through its takeover of smaller banks, and supported the bankers during the national banks strike. They rescued the AIB’s secret account has held £355 million of tax payers money.

In 1981, the revenue commis¬sioners discovered that the bank was operating at 8,760 non-resi¬dent illegal accounts containing a billion pounds in undeclared income. This was flushed up until 1987, but recent leaks to the press have caused the tribunal’s radical investigation. The tribunals are severely restricted as to what they can investigate. The all parliamen¬tary committee that insti¬tuted the Moriarty tribunal disgracefully restricted the inves¬tigation into the AIB accounts. Their payments made directly to Haughey.

This was on grounds of protect¬ing the AIB, but they also express more secrets about account that need to see the light of day. For example, the idea of banks of secrecy and confidentiality,

In April the outgoing chairman of the revenue commission¬ners disclosed to a closed session of the tribunal that he was under the impression that the tax amnesty introduced by Fianna Fail and Labour in 1979 covered individuals to the value of a billion pounds.

He estimated that Irish institu¬tions were waging a war worth mil¬lion in off-shore tax saving accounts. Even this disclosure is subject to a statutory secrecy clause and had to be leaked to the Tribune.

On the left like Socialist Worker have called for politi¬cians to be sent to jail for tak¬ing bribes. This is inadequate. Work¬ers need to know just how much is being kept secret from them about the real wealth in the Irish economy.

The Transitional Programme drafted by the Labour Party in 1938 states that “the abo¬lition of business secrets is the first step toward real workers control over industry.”

“Workers no less than capital¬ists must have the right to know the secrets of the factories, of the trust, of whole branches of industry, of the new companies characterised by the mixture of capital and State. First and foremost the (banks, heavy industry) companies and, in general, the great trans¬port should be placed under a magnifying glass.”

This could only be the first step to this end.

Keeping his head above the slurry! Bertie Ahern may yet have some explaining to do.
Kosova threatened on all sides

Geoff Ryan

The failure of the Albanian delegation to sign an agreement at the recent Geneva 'peace talks' created consternation among western leaders. The US, in particular, has used the period leading up to new talks on March 15 to put massive pressure on the Kosova Albanians.

Former Republican Presidential candidate Bob Dole is currently meeting with leaders of the Kosova Albanian delegation in Macedonia, after the Milosevic government refused him a visa for Kosova. Dole's trip has the backing of President Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Dole will be accompanied by a senior State Department official, Jim Goldberg, and a delegation from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. O'Brien is taking him with a document read by the White House. This is a three-year interim period of autonomy for the Kosova, now a province of Serbia, and the withdrawal of Serbian forces and the establishment of a rebel Kosova Liberation Army.

Dole will no doubt be making it clear that he has switched his support for Kosova independence and that continued support for the Kosova Liberation Army at Rambouillet is dependent on the KLA leadership doing what it is told. The General will, no doubt, warn of serious consequences for the KLA if it does not cease any of the Albanian attacks.

Dole is largely pushing at an open door as KLA leaders have indicated a willingness to accept the terms of Rambouillet. However, most of its spokespeople are clear on the condition that the moment Dole's visit is ensured, they will not be seen to have caved into Western conditions.

While Dole is in Macedonia, Madeleine Albright is proposing to go to Kosova to visit NATO headquarters. She will remind some of the less gung-ho leaders in NATO that they too are expected to do whatever they are told by the US. If the US decides to launch a further assault against Serbia then the Europeans will have to follow suit. Europeans who are expected to provide the bulk of NATO troops in Kosova, as envisaged by the Rambouillet plan.

The possibility of air strikes to force a few concessions will also be raised by US special envoy Richard Holbrooke, who plans to visit Milosevic in Belgrade in the near future - only in Kosova has the KLA been bullied into accepting American demands.

While this diplomatic activity is going on Milosevic has been stepping up military activity in Kosova. Serb local troops have recently shelled KLA positions in village of the Mitrivci and have opened fire on Serbian aircraft. Hundreds of Albanians fled from villages along the border to escape this mass in the municipality of Vushtrri while residents of a number of neighboring communities in Mitrovica spent the night out, fearful of a Serbian attack.

Fighting has also taken place in Gjakova, Klina and in the border villages of Reka e Keke region, along the Kosova-Albanian border. Westerners have been aware of any Serb troop movements in many parts of Kosova.

Milosevic's military build up is not necessarily contrary to American plans for 'stability' in the Balkans under American leadership. In many ways it strengthens the diplomatic activity.

Dole is there to get the Albanians to drop their demand for independence and disarm. Without the KLA the Kosova would be totally at Milosevic's mercy - hence the need for NATO to protect them. Although US politicians may deplore the current Serbian offensive it does, nevertheless, reinforce this point.

Holbrooke, meanwhile, will try to convince Milosevic that his best interests are served by allowing NATO troops to ensure Kosova remains part of Serbia. Allright will add the threat of military action to make Milosevic more pliable - but also to demonstrate what could happen to the KLA if it refuses to play the US game.

Westerners, aware how much Milosevic very much but he still remains central to plans for the region. Given the most important Serbian opposition politicians are now in government of NATO interests will be to disrupt all those who continue to struggle for independence. By denying independence to Kosova, and showing they will use military force, NATO will also step Albanian minorities in other states demanding independence for themselves.

Sections of the KLA leadership appear to be ready to accept the real aims of NATO. Splits have been developing. Adem Demaci, who spent 28 years in Yugoslav prisons for pro-Albanian activities, has recently resigned as political spokesperson for the KLA in protest against the willingness of sections of the leadership to abandon the demand for independence.

Western leaders have publicly acknowledged Demaci's resignation since they considered him a main obstacle to their attempts to oppose a solution on the Kosova issue. Demaci had refused to take part in and recognize the outcome of the Rambouillet talks.

It remains to be seen whether Demaci and others opposed to any sell-out on independence will organise against the current civil and military leadership. Certainly this is essential.

But any movement will also have to be prepared to oppose the machinations of the west and to understand that if NATO troops do enter Kosova, main target will be those forces still fighting for Kosova independence.

Genetically modified foods

Are you swallowing the government's line?

Paul Radhische

GENETICALLY-modified food products could have been on your table today. After the recent controversy about the issue you probably care more about this than before.

Two months ago Socialist Outlook wrote: "Despite the fact that having not been interested in food, there are powerful reasons to expect food issues to become more immediate.

Of course we could claim the credit, but perhaps this is a good moment to step back. There has been considerable debate about whether Dr Arpad Puszta's potatoes were poisonous to his rats, and if so whether this has any relevance to the food you may find yourself eating.

Most lay people can make little judgement about such claims, except when there is a dispute even about what research has been conducted. What can we and do judge is the system of regulation of food production which can allow the feeding of rendered cattle to herbivorous cattle and the BSE crisis is us.

Defenders of the process of assessing new products depict the whole process as rational and innocent. Derek Burke, chair of the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes from 1988 to 1997, wrote: "In the nine years I chaired the committee, no political or commercial pressures were put on us. Only once was I lobbied by a company, and the lobbying had no effect at all on the committee's decision."

In the words of James Watson, one of the discoverers of DNA, "You should only have a moratorium when there is a possibility of harm that you can quantify."

As with, say, exposure to nuclear radiation from leaks, the promise is that all is well, with thefallback that something can be done about it if the future is not.

University professors who belong to various unions try to offer reassurance but fail to convince. Universities feel financially repressed, and in disciplines in natural science especially, success is measured as much by the ability to raise research grants and establish linkages with commercial interests as any other criterion.

For individual scientists, there is also the possibility that convenient and salable research work will lead to a better paid job heading a better-funded research unit within a big company. Many of those who have been in the government's 'advisory committees' have already been down this path as they make the way to the top of their field.

Controversy has been raging in the press about experimental maize and potatoes in Britain. Meanwhile one of the British government's activities has been aligning with the US government at talks in Colombia to water down proposed controls on the international trade in GM products, especially as it affects soyas and maize.

The argument is about 'free trade' but what this means principally is the opportunity for big firms like Monsanto to get their produce into all corners of the world market. Resistance in countries like India is based on the fear that if farmers do not longer collect seed from their own crops, but have to pay the supplier every year, many will not survive. They will also have no security if new crops fail because of unexpected problems.

Any Labour MPs who can make it into the government have already proved their willingness to sell any principles they used to have. Labour ministers speak of the 'public interest' and putting the public first.

The British government has been aligning with the US government at talks in Colombia to water down proposed controls on the international trade in GM products, especially as it affects soya and maize. The argument is about 'free trade', but what this means principally is the opportunity for big firms like Monsanto to get their produce into all corners of the world market. Resistance in countries like India is based on the fear that if farmers do not longer collect seed from their own crops, but have to pay the supplier every year,
Beyond “Goodies” and “Baddies”

I READ with interest Michael Calvert’s letter in your February 1999 Socialist Outlook entitled “Time to Get Good Guys Together”. This is what I think. Though not agreeing that there is as much demonisation and low activity as he thinks at present, I do agree that the time is ripe for initiatives to be taken over the reunification of the socialist movement locally and internationally on a genuinely working class progressive basis. The question remains, how? Bro Calvert’s example of the 1986 Symposium on Hungary 1956 was a very good one, I think. However, the whole thing should be broadened to embrace all the lefts of the Marxist and Socialist movement worldwide. An open historical commission should be set up in order to work towards the definite target of producing a sourcebook which would be published in several languages (French, English, Spanish) in order to reach as broad a readership as possible among all the international working class movements. We could call the book something like the “Protestant’s Historical Guide to Action”. What do Socialist Outlook readers think? After 1905, the Bolsheviks under Lenin produced similar symposiums and for a time, with help from worker-intellectuals like Maxim Gorky, once planned to produce a workers’ encyclopaedia. Such volumes were actually produced by some British socialists, and also, I think, by militants of the CNT in Spain in the same period.

Work towards a handy one-volume guidebook on our movement’s history, involving people from all strands of genuine socialist opinion – not only Trotskyite Marxisms – can only be of help to all of us, especially working class militancy.

I know that there are many even among the various “Stalinist” organisations who want to know more about how and why, for example, the USSR collapsed, or why Vietnam’s Ho Chi Minh retained a high regard for the “Trotskyists” leader Ta Thu Tu all his life. What was GOMB in Spain? What was the significance of the original Socialist Labor Party in the USA and its British counterparts only this century? Who were Liu Piao and Ch’en Tu-hsiu in China? Antonio Gramsci and Amadeo Bordiga in Italy? What was Allemanst socialism in 19th century France? What books did James Conolly write and where can you find them now? There are so many vital questions people need guidance on.

Invitations should be sent out for an open historical conference of socialists as soon as possible (to be held this year or at latest, next year), with a view to setting up a general historical commission. We have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Why doesn’t Socialist Outlook take a lead, for example, in this regard? I am sure that it could attract millions of people into socialism through its pages. Someone has to.

Steve Metcalfe
President Lancaster TUC
Chair Lancaster RMT

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MARCH BEGAN with Tony Blair insisting that European unions and “socialist” parties should follow his lead and embrace the values of capitalism, in the same way as the Democrats in the USA, which he regarded as a beacon of economic achievement.

Within days this beacon of unregulated capitalist enterprise was being the first shots in a trade war against the European Union, with the clear objective of further boosting the profits and monopoly market share of its banana exporters, at the expense of bankruptcies for banana producers in Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific (ACP).

It may seem like a storm in a custard bowl, but the “banana split” is a crucial test of strength between two of the world’s three major imperialism trading blocs – a test in which the EU has already surrendered crucial legal ground.

The EU says Caribbean banana producers account for only 3% of world banana exports and represent only 7% of the EU market – their only outlet. The relatively small amounts of money involved however mean the difference between survival and collapse for the ACP exporters. Since many of these are former colonies of the leading EU nations, their potential collapse is an embarrassment – not least to Blair, whose government has voiced rare criticism of the US administration.

But US multinationals, notably Dole Food Company and Chiquita Brands International, which give money to both US political parties, and dominate the market in bananas from Latin America, want to wipe out even this small pocket of competition.

In launching this offensive and preparing a wide-ranging onslaught designed to force genetically-modified and hormonally-altered American foodstuffs onto the plates of sceptical Europeans, the US has been quick to make use of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the shadowy group of Geneva-based civil servants who now lead the global fight for “free trade”.

In February, the leader in genetically modified food crops, US giant Monsanto, arrogantly declared that it would take legal action to overturn any measures by the EU or European governments to limit the distribution of these foods. More test cases, involving US beef containing growth hormones (banned in Europe for ten years) and milk products are due to pit EU governments against the might of US imperialism later this year.

By signing up for the “liberalisation” of world trade, surrendering any right to take independent action, and establishing an new world arbiter in the form of the WTO, EU governments have left themselves without a legal leg to stand on in banning these US exports – even where public opinion is hostile and public health issues are concerned.

The WTO was due to pronounce on the long-running banana issue on April 12.

So certain is the US that the WTO will do its bidding, Washington has preempted the ruling and announced its own package of retaliatory sanctions against a random list of European exports to the US, which will face drastic increases in import tariffs.

Socialists will not back any of the governments involved, all of which have connived to subordinate the interests of working people to the profits of big business and exploit the commodity-exporting countries of the “third world”.

The WTO, like the treaty which established it, was only ever a device to secure further monopoly control of world trade, and should be scrapped.

Trade unions and community campaigners must urgently discuss a policy to halt the production and distribution of potentially harmful foodstuffs churned out by multinational agribusiness.

GM food debate: pl8. Cologne demo: pl3