LOBBY Labour Party Conference

- Restore the link - Decent pensions
- Welfare not warfare
- A 35 hour week - no loss of pay
- End privatisation and PFI/PPP
- Repeal the anti union laws
- Scrap the Asylum and Immigration Act.

Bournemouth, Sunday Sept 26

Lobby called by: Tariq Ali, John Foster Gen Sec NUJ, Jack Jones, Justice for Ricky Reel campaign, National Coalition of anti-deportation campaigns, Liverpool Dockers, N/NW London CWU, Mark Steel, Jeremy Hardy and other trade unionists and campaigning groups.

Also (all in a personal capacity): Gordon Vassel exec FBU, John Ireland Postal Exec CWU, Christine Blower NUT NEC, Candy Udwin UCLH UNISON.
2 SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

Bid to revive London Socialist Alliance

Greg Tucker, secretary
London Socialist
Advocates

SOCIALISTS in London have agreed to work together to stand for the Greater London Authority elections next year. Representatives from around half a dozen political groups met with independent activists at the beginning of August to discuss whether a Socialist Alliance joint election campaign would be possible. Despite varying emphases, it seemed that there was scope to work together.

The election of the Socialist Party’s Tommy Sheridan showed that with a consistent long-term approach it was possible to build the confidence of working people to vote for a socialist alternative to Labour. Closer to home, the victory of Ian Paget for the Socialist Party in a Lambeth Council by-election in June has shown that with sufficient determination it is possible to tap into the growing disgust with New Labour’s broken promises.

credible

Over the next months the London Socialist Alliance has now to set itself the task of laying the basis for a credible election campaign – developing its political programme, choosing candidates and putting in place local socialists to campaign with them. We need to encourage a broad socialist challenge to Labour.

Some forces at the meeting wanted to immediately move to a formal federal structure - in effect declaring a new party into existence - this was rightly rejected, for a looser form of organisation, designed to ensure that existing organised groups work together on areas where we can agree. The key is not to formalise relations but to build a practical experience of unity in action.

However, to do this means overcoming the problems that became apparent in the run up to the European elections. Hiding behind their bets, the main political organisations, in particular the SWP, refused to engage their membership in building anything practical.

Fright

Whilst they promised forces during the election campaign itself, up to a point this meant that every single thing was to be considered on a leadership level only. When the SWP took fright at the prospect of Arthur Scargill standing in London, their membership could not be blamed if they misinterpreted the whole exercise altogether.

This time round it is important not to repeat the mistakes of the federal movement of the start.

That means every organisation being prepared to work collectively, now – building local groups, including all socialists, through the practical collaboration of existing political organisations and by tapping the talents of independent activists.

Building the lobby of Labour Party conference would be a good first step. That said, the work done in preparation for the abortive Euro-election campaign has laid down basic points of agreement on a political platform.

Where that needs extending is in our relation to green politics and the Green Party in particular. The Greens have already chosen candidates for the GLA elections. It is clear from the Euro-elections that they represent in the eyes of many a serious alternative to the left of Labour.

How compatible with them possible or even desirable? The general feeling of the meeting seemed to be that cooperation would not be possible, but it’s clear that environmental issues are basic to socialist politics.

Our political platform has to raise the simple fact that socialism is possible without respect for the environment in which we live - and that it is the capitalist market system which is the motor force behind the destruction of the environment we are facing today.

Being Socialists means being green, but we argue that trying to be a socialist you cannot be a green.

New Labour has now chosen its candidates for the GLA. Party members were given little choice from a rigid panel.

Almost without exception, its Blairite candidates will support government attacks on the working people of London. These candidates are open to all developments within the Labour Party, as the New Labour offensive continues to drive committed socialists out of Labour’s ranks.

We have to show that there is an alternative. Central to that will be building practical support for all those defending themselves from government attacks.

The LSA agreed to try to work closely with trade unionists fighting privatisation, supporting their campaigns now, but also looking to involve prominent rank and file activists in our campaign, as part of our slate of candidates.

Already inside the RMT, the London Underground Regional Council has indicated that it would consider supporting candidates prepared to endorse RMT policy and keep the tube public.

opportunities

As UNISON members in health and local government come under further attacks and as the government prepares to close down the RMT, opportunities for collaboration must be seized.

Above all the Socialist Alliance needs to put down roots in the communities across London. We cannot pretend to be a new political force if we are not rooted in the communities.

Not as an end in itself but as part of building the fight-back of our class and as a process of rebuilding the left as a political force in Britain.

Bickerstaffe fronts witch-hunt of supporters of UNISON policy

Simon Deville
OUTGOING General Secretary
Rodney Bickerstaffe has written to all UNISON branches, regional and national depart-
ments of the union threatening disciplinary action for using any branch funds or resources to support the upcoming lobby of Labour Party conference.

The lobby has been called to campaign for decent pensions, welfare not warfare, a 35 hour week with no loss of pay and to fight PFI/PPP, full union rights and to scrap the Asylum and Immigration Bill.

In an amazing and daring feat of legal gymnastics, Rodney Bickerstaffe has said that supporting the lobby around these demands – all of which are in line with union policy – would be in breach of the union’s political fund rules and a direct challenge to UNISON Labour Relations (Consolidation Act 1992).

Would not expect to take such a lenient view of any further breaches" by UNISON branches.

‘Alas, many of us might scratch our heads wondering what donations to political parties have got to do with supporting the lobby, earlier on the floor. As an article in Socialist Worker calls for union branches to pledge support for the lobby and to book transport.’

We have been told that this is because the SWP have not held union branches to book transport, and hence booking transport would go straight to their coffers.

The SWP have urged support for UNISON’s April 10 demonstration, against all new plans and other demonstrations correctly backed by the union – but this was not used a reason for seeking to keep UNISON branches sending delegations.

At the 1998 Annual Dele-
gates Conference the bureau-
cracy managed to get a motion banning branch affiliations to the Campaign for a Fighting UNISON by assuring delegates that this did not mean that branches were not allowed to publically campaign around issues of union policy.

Having won that position the union leadership are attempting to move the goalposts even further.

Meanwhile, conference is barred from discussing how the Affiliated Political Fund is used to collate branches of union policy within the Labour Party since even discussing the APF’s role at conference would be in breach of UNISON rules.

It is absolutely clear that if these moves aren’t clearly rejected by the membership then union democracy will disappear in the same way as it has in the Labour Party.

Doug McAvoy re-elected NUT General Secretary

by Keith Sinclair,
President Hull NUT
(personal capacity)

VOTING for the election for General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers for the five-year term 1999-2004 ended at the start of the summer.

Doug McAvoy was re-elected to the post of General Secretary. The results were McAvoy 39,245 and left challenger Chris-

tine Blower 22,183.

The vote was a disappointment for the left in the NUT, which has waged a united and well-organised campaign.

However, the result was not totally surprising. McAvoy had carefully positioned himself against the government on the key issue of Performance Related Pay and appeared, to many, to be willing to lead a serious campaign on the issue at NUT conferences.

The reality has been that there was no strike action in the summer term. A boycott of appraisal has been introduced following a successful ballot.

This ballot has not yet had any major effect partly because most well organised schools have not been participating in appraisal schemes for a number of years.

The real battle is yet to come and will revolve around New Labour’s new appraisal scheme which will be used to try to bring in Performance Related Pay.

The left needs to continue to build the campaigns around Performance Related Pay and participation. We need to remind everyone that the vote for McAvoy was not a vote for the government despite ministers welcoming McAvoy’s victory.

Even McAvoy’s nearest sup-
porters are critical of New

Labour. The left needs to work to connect ordinary teachers of the need to actively take on New Labour and to make them understand the all-to-real possibility of the newly elected General Secretary trying to reach agreement with the government on the basis of some spurious
Unite to challenge Straw’s racism

One doesn’t fit with that romantic image is automatically given the other label of being a thieving, anti-social troublemaker.”

Travellers organisations in Britain and elsewhere have worked hard to build unity across the communities. By law the term gypsy incorporates anyone with a nomadic way of life - not just the Roma, but Scots and Irish travellers as well as new age travellers. These communities have many differences in culture but they face the same discrimination historically and today. It is this common experience of discrimination - of lack of decent sites, harassment by the police, lack of clean water, or access to jobs and to decent education, that has forged this unity. They will not be thrown off course by the racism of people like Jack Straw.

The experience of harassment and stereotyping has strengthened their organisations. Signs in pubs that refuse admission to travellers may seem trivial to those that they don’t exclude, but few would have accepted if it were other ethnic groups that were excluded.

It is pleasing that criticism of Straw’s intervention has not only from travellers’ organisations themselves but also from sections of the black community.

Darcus Howe for example argued that Straw would not have been able to get away with using the spat of shootings by some from the Jamaican community to brand all black people (or all West Indians, or all Jamaicans) as murderers in this post-Lawrence environment.

But Straw and his supporters in Millbank clearly do not understand the unity against racism that is being slowly but surely forged.

The parallels drawn with Enoch Powell’s ‘river of blood’ speech are accurate, despite John Prescott’s flying over Straw. What is most important - particularly to soon after the eruption of racism in Dover - is the effect the speech has on others as it legitimises and reinforces the bigotry of others.

But the power of Straw as an individual should not be downplayed. As Home Secretary he must have been well aware that at the same time as he was making these prejudiced comments, junior minister Mike O’Brien would be asking the Czech government to intervene to reduce the numbers of Roma applying for asylum in this country.

The fight against racism and the fight for a genuine right to asylum are part and parcel of the same battle. The rights of all travellers must be a key aspect of this struggle.

New Labour, old discontent

For the first time since Tony Blair entered Downing Street, staff from the two uniroyal emergency services - fire and ambulances - are ballotting for strike action.

Ambulance crews are furious at the miserable 3 percent pay offer that has been made to the majority of NHS staff other than nurses and professionals.

Fire fighters, many of whom have already been involved in campaigns and localised strikes against budget cuts, station closures, and pay losses even since the new government took office, are also to vote on whether to strike in defiance of their unique national pay agreement.

The FBU deal, won as a result of a bitter 10-week national strike against the Callaghan government, links fire-fighters’ pay to the top quartile of male manual earnings.

Though this formula has brought a few years in which increases were below inflation, the deal has been upheld for two decades throughout the years of Thatcher government.

Only now have Tony Blair’s team of union-bashers decided to question whether the deal is compatible with fire fighters retaining the right to strike.

Home office ministers have begun discussing “further measures” to prevent action by the FBU from disrupting emergency services.

In a letter leaked to the FBU written by then Home Office minister George Howarth the venomous hatred of New Labour for trade unions is unmistakable. He declares “full support” for the employers seeking to undermine the “outmoded and unjustified” conditions won by the fire fighters.

And - having endorsed the confrontational approach of the fire authority bosses - he goes on to castigate the very notion of strike action as a “relief of an old and discredited confrontational approach to industrial relations”.

It is clear that the government is considering going even further with a full-scale military scabbing operation organised by the Callaghan government to make strike action by fire fighters illegal.

Such a step, against a TUC-affiliated union which pays a political levy to the Labour Party would in normal circumstances be met by an explosive reaction from other union leaders.

But the public reaction to the leaked letter was almost non-existent, a worrying symptom of the moral collapse of the union bureaucracy before the machinery of New Labour.

FBU leader Ken Cameron, to his credit, has been forthright in condemning the government intervention on the side of the employers “without having the decency to meet the union and find out our point of view.”

Fire fighters have been concerned that the government has been deliberately holding back the looming confrontation over the pay agreement until additional troops could be brought back from Kosovo to carry out a re-run of the 1977 strike-breaking exercise.

However the aged “green goddess” fire appliances are in desperately short supply.

As New Labour sticks the boot into fire fighters, other workers have seen a rise in the number of strike-breaking operations by employers, a direct result of the “winter of discontent” of 1978-79.

Millions of public sector workers finally lost their rag with a Labour government which had slashed back their living standards. Despite the present low tempo of class struggle, it could happen again.
Students join fight against Action Zones

Veronica Fagan
THE LEFT in the National Union of Teachers has campaigned for complete opposition to Action Zones (EAZs) while the Broad Left majority on the Executive has so far successfully countered to this a policy of “constructive engagement”. This fails to recognise that EAZs are a Trojan horse, in which the name of tackling social disadvantage actually enforces inequality while introducing business interests directly into the state education system.

Part of the balance sheet so far is that most hits for EAZs have been formulated in secrecy keeping parents and teachers as much in the dark as possible. This was demonstrated again yet again at the end of last term in the London Borough of Islington where the proposed EAZ will affect 22 schools.

NUT teachers at Ashmount primary school unanimously voted against the proposal and won the support of more than 300 parents who signed a petition in opposition to the scheme, forcing the school’s governors to call a parents’ meeting. Over 100 attended and the opposition was so strong that the school has now pulled out.

However at nearby Yerbury a push by parents for a similar meeting was stopped and it was outlined to them that they would not be considered because of the lack of consultation with them.

Even more scandalously, just after the end of term the Council announced that three primary schools in the borough will close as part of the bid. Parents, teachers and other activists are organising now to ensure maximum opposition when schools return in September.

Hackney walk-out
Molly Cooper reports
Over 300 angry school students walked out of classes at Kingstand school inDistrict at 3.20pm on Tuesday July 20, in protest at the threat to bring in an Education Zone (EAZ) to run their school.

They held an impromptu demo outside the school and occupied the road, Shacklewell Lane, stopping traffic. They demanded every car that approached the demo beep their horn in support of their demands.

They produced a leaflet they had written, which said their school was not for sale. I asked one of the students, Hassan Suppaya, why he had come on the protest. “I think that the EAZs will take away all the chances of getting a well rounded education. If this goes ahead we will lose our Drama, Music and Art classes. They have tried this in other areas and failed, we believe we can stop it here.”

I also spoke to Aavest Jiboo. She said: “I think the protest is very good, the EAZs are not happening in Hampstead, so why should they happen in Hackney.”

The demonstration was supported by some teachers in the school and some members of the local community.

Witch hunt and left talk at AGM:
Mixed signals from RMT

A RIGHT wing offensive at this year’s RMT AGM saw Pat Siko- rski the left candidate in the recent Assistant General Secretary elections, disciplined for supposed breaches of the election rules. Any further “infringement of rules” by Pat in the next three years would automatically result in him being debarred from holding office in the union.

The witchhunt against Pat, led by General Secretary Jimmy Knapp, and former left wings on the national executive, has nothing to do with any breach of rule, and everything to do with the fact that Pat came close to winning and that he successfully exposed their own incompetence in the process.

However, the attack has given succour to forces in the union who want to fundamentally change the direction of the RMT. For them the next battle is now over the election of the other Assistant General Secretary position, currently held by Bob Crow.

A right wing candidate is being heavily pushed because those forces who have had their cosy relations with management upset by industrial disputes over the last few years. Unfortunately Bob Crow’s attitude of sitting on the sidelines has not been helped.

For the first time in the week at the AGM things went in a different direction.

Having centred their attack on Pat Sikorski, the right were unable to counter the pressure from the membership to be seen to be doing something about the crisis caused by privatisation.

As the political situation continues to rise over the way the Labour government has abandoned the railway staffs. In response, the AGM almost unanimously agreed to work with those to the RMT’s left including Tom Harris, Dennis Canavan in the Scottish Parliament who actually belongs to both the RMT and the TSSA.

Within the AGM, Tim Willcox, who is the RMT’s general secretary, again refused to back the railworkers.

At the AGM, Peter Snape MP from the RMT’s parliamentary group, tried to defend the privatisation of the tube. His hollowness alone was sufficient to further antagonise the delegates.

With continuing problems over funding of pension finance – no one wants to take the risk with deep tube lines, and Railtrack is openly considering withdrawing from the tube in the near future, the debate was lost.

On the AGM floor, the RMT leadership has bailed this as a victory and suspended its balloting, but activists remain concerned that the ballot is, at the very least, a tactic to see what the unions want to do about the conclusion if the services go.

It is vital that the RMT leadership are not allowed to let this issue fade away. Branches and activists must apply pressure to ensure that the ballot – of all trainees, not just guards – is reinstated unless Railtrack fully withdraws their proposals.

Time for Solidarity
Hitting the streets this month is Solidarity, a new magazine of news and debate for trade unionists

Tony Blair’s ideological domination of New Labour is matched by the domination of the TUC, under John Monks, by the ideology of “Partnership”. Workers are best served by promoting the interests of their bosses (and against other workers).

Solidarity has set itself the modest aim of providing activists with ammunition in the fight to break the trade union movement from this dead weight.

What we need is a new, fighting democratic trade union movement which responds to the real needs of working people (united against their oppressors).

The first issue includes reports from Canada where workers have been waging a campaign of “illegal” strikes; from Australia examining the rise of the rank and file movement in the Maritime Union; and closing developments in the FBU, PCS, RMT, T&G and UNISON.

Solidarity needs your support – if you want to help, financially, submitting articles for future issues or by selling this one, contact: martin.wicks@btinternet.com

Joint union fight to stop Tube sell-off

At the AGM, Peter Snape MP from the RMT’s parliamentary group, tried to defend the privatisation of the tube. His hollowness alone was sufficient to further antagonise the delegates.

With continuing problems over funding of pension finance – no one wants to take the risk with deep tube lines, and Railtrack is openly considering withdrawing from the talks on the suburban lines (District, Hammersmith & City, Metropolitan, Circle and East London), the government is now faced with a unified front of all three rail unions opposing the privatisation plan.

The TSSA has now switched its policy to opposition, and the three unions have linked up in a joint campaign, launched by a 300-strong joint public meeting.

While the union leaderships want to restrict the campaign to safe lobbying of MPs, their unity has helped revitalise the campaign of street leading and public meetings.

Activists initially targeted the selection process for Labour candidates for the Greater London Assembly. All the hustings were leafletted and all candidates have been asked where they stand on the government’s proposal.

Taking matters a step further, the RMT LUL Regional Council has now made a call for independent candidates who endorse union policy to be supported.

While the TSSA and T&G have not been won to a campaign of strike action, the joint campaign at least marks a step forward from the previous position where the RMT was the only union opposing the government – and made it easier to argue for support among tube workers.

In the spring the initiative was lost when the RMT strikes were called off.

While there were undoubtedly real problems of morale, the RMT leadership decided to retreat rather than confront those problems.

Despite all the hurdles the government faces it remains clear that they will not back down even faced solely with a campaign of lobbying. The task of TSSA activists and their supporters is to use the new joint campaign to overcome the problems of morale and to force the RMT (and ASLEF) leadership to put all industrial action back on the agenda.

The CATP can be contacted on 0181 981 8065 or by e-mail at stlondon@btinternet.com.

Donations should be made payable to CATP c/o John Leach, 47c, Wednesden Street, London E2 9DP.

You can subscribe to the campaign’s e-mail list by visiting http://CATPlistsbot.com
Two flashpoints could spark fight from lifeless TUC

Harry Sloan

A S the TUC heads for what seemed certain to be another soporific and largely irrelevant conference, two issues seem likely to break the consensus of bureaucrats seeking to coexist with the New Labour government.

The first is a straightforward trade union issue: the aggressive drive to convince the Engineering and Electricians union AEEU to squeeze out rival unions and establish reactionary single-union deals in industries outside their usual influence. The most notorious case in point so far is at the Western Mail newspaper in south Wales, where the AEEU, representing a tiny handful of members, is seeking a single-union deal that would exclude any representation for over 100 NUJ journalists and large numbers of print workers.

This has been widely recognised as a grotesque attempt to re-run the union-busting collaboration between what was then the electricians' union BEPTU and Rupert Murdoch's News International, which led to the prolonged Wapping dispute.

For its disingenuous role the BEPTU was expelled from the TUC, and the electricians only managed to get back in through reincarnation in their merger with the AEEU, which has now taken its place as the most craven advocate of "partnership" with the bosses and right wing policies in the trade union movement.

With engineering and manufacturing industries in continued decline, AEEU efforts to muscle in on new sectors at the expense of other TUC unions have not stopped at the print industry, but apparently also include recruitment of brewery workers reading the toes of the impeccably new reality USDAW.

Despite the apparent willingness of the main print union of early British entry to European Monetary Union, despite the fact that two of the TUC's largest affiliates, UNISON and the TGWU, along with several smaller unions, hold the opposite view, and opinion polls show a clear majority of union members are against. Many unions have yet to discuss or vote on the issue.

While Monks seems to accept the acceptance of increased control over the British and European economy by a cabal of unelected bankers on the board of the European Central Bank (ECB) as a logical extension of his commitment to "partnership" with the CBI and British bankers, union members are more wary about the potential cost of EMU in jobs and conditions.

Levels of unemployment are much higher in Germany and other Euroland countries than in Britain, not least as a result of austerity measures designed to shore up eleven countries into compliance with the rigid Maastricht convergence criteria for EMU. Meanwhile the efforts of the ECB to keep the value of the guilder steady against what is rather more than another obstacle to any serious effort to boost economic activity.

Privatisation and PFI are also endemic in Euroland, with the French government having outdone even Thatcher's gang of asset-strippers in the scale of privatisation in the dash to cut back government spending in readiness for the Euro.

W In spite of all the evidence of the ways on which the structures and restrictions of EMU work against the interests of European workers, Monks has been only one of an increasingly vocal band of right wing union bureaucrats urging an early British entry to the single currency.

Until now they have largely been content to grumble in the wings that by not joining the currency in January British business has somehow "missed the boat". This line is similar to that argued by disgraced former EU economics commissioner Yves de Silguy, who recently had the nerve to claim that the failure to enter from day one was a "European tragedy" for the Blair government.

Now it seems that GMB leader John Edmonds will link up with the renegade AEEU to launch a new right wing offensive aimed to commit the TUC to campaigning actively for the single currency.

A fight over the euro at the TUC will put pressure on UNISON's different leadership to defend its conference policy, which until now the union's Millbank-run political staff have contrived to relegate to the background.

It could also push the issue back into the limelight, and trigger a new round of debate on the implications of the euro within the trade union movement.

Socialists should maintain the line of fighting for maximum solidarity with European workers against the bosses and bankers who are so keen to impose the single currency and the austerity that goes with it.


Builders get tough with PFI bosses

UNITE!

UNITE!, the new journal for Rank & File Transport & File transport workers, is available now.

PRACTICAL Internationalism broke out in South London last month as building workers from countries across Europe, all working on a PFI contract for King's College Hospital in London, took action for back wages for one building gang.

Two hundred workers picketed the hospital site demanding that the main contractor ensure that one section of workers be paid after their subcontract boss had skipped out owing them a total of £2,500.

Some workers were owed up to £2,500, some of the foreign workers being left destitute forced to sleep rough on the streets. As well as British building workers, up to a third of the workers were French, others employed by separate subcontractors included gangs of Latvian, Kosovan, and Portuguese workers.

Organised by the London Joint Sites Committee the strike was 100% solid – all stayed out from work for the day until UCATT officials were able to negotiate an agreement to pay back wages with the main (French) contractor Bouygues.
new death at Stoke Newington nick

Simon Deville
SARAH THOMAS, a 34 year old black woman from Tottenham, was arrested and taken into Stoke Newington Police station in August. After being bailed, only to find that she had suffered a seizure, at which point she was taken to Homerton Hospital - where she died two days later.

Sarah's death is just one in a long line of deaths in police custody and, although, in the weeks following it, the Met have already furiously suggested that another plan may be to prevent any more deaths at all.

Prile London, the non-profit company that has organised the march in the last few years has become very dependent on Mardi Gras, with the other only significant sponsorship coming from UNISON.

It seems more than a little suspicious that this should be taking place when Pride London was about to discuss broadening its base and including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups.

But trade unionists and other activists are determined to fight back. A letter has been submitted to the Home Secretary in the wake of the recent issue of Gay Times signed by members of the TUC Lesbian and Gay Committee for Lesbian and Gay Rights and a number of individual unions challenging these moves.

The signatories state that they will be calling on their organisations to support Pride and that they will be calling on others to do the same.

The maximum possible attendance at the special meeting of company members of Pride (London) that has been called for October 16th - the meeting that will decide the direction of next year's event. Their appeal should be supported.

A meeting is being held that you need to join Pride (London) at least a week before. Send £10 (or 25 nominations) to Pride (London), BCM Box 6097, London WCIN 3XX

A code is not enough!

Veronica Fagan
THERE have been a number of important victories for lesbian and gay people over recent weeks.

United Airlines, the largest airline in the US, has agreed to give the same benefits to the partners of lesbians and gay men as the spouses of married employees currently enjoy.

Closer to home, journalist Anthony O'Connor won damages from his employer and an unprecedented apology from his former employers after they admitted harassment and unfair dismissal in an out of court settlement. Mr O'Connor had been sacked after formally complaining that he had been subjected to homophobic abuse.

Fierce debate has broken out amongst lesbians and gay men over news that the government is considering a draft code of good practice which would offer protection from discrimination in the workplace.

The clear view of campaigners is that anti-discrimination should have been enshrined in the legislation itself but this was not accepted by the government who refused to accept an amendment to the Employment Relations Bill to this effect.

It is at this point that disagreements have arisen with the powerful Stonewall group drawing up a draft code of conduct while the Lesbian and Gay Employment Rights group (LAGER) fears that this will give the government the perfect excuse not to legislate at all.

Is this all very well for Angela Mason of Stonewall to insist that? There is no question in my mind that a voluntary code of conduct is not enough to protect lesbians and gay men. There is an urgent need for legislation before the next election", but she doesn't answer LAGER's charge.

Given the record of this government on lesbian and gay rights - for example the lack of action to abolish Section 28 it seems that a little caution and a lot of campaigning would be well advised.

The TUC is also committed to campaigning for legislation and has published a Charter for Equality.

The TUC's policy officer for Lesbian and Gay rights, Peter Pugh, has written to the employment minister Margaret Hodge making it clear that a code is not good enough.

While it seems very likely that this stance will be backed by the Lesbian and Gay Committee it is important that the debate is taken up more widely across the unions. Protection for lesbian and gay workers against discrimination is a task for the whole movement.

Terry Conway
50 years after the Stonewall riots led to the rebirth of the lesbian and gay movement - a good time to take stock of what we have achieved.

There was a good deal of controversy this year in the run up to lesbian and gay pride in London about the expensive Mardi Gras festival. The Pride march itself was transformed into a parade, and numbers dropped from 100,000 of the 1998 march to 25,000.

In recent years a free festival had been an important component of the Pride celebrations, which had moved on from being small marches of lesbian and gay activists in the early seventies into huge carnivals which continue to raise political ideas and demands but involve far wider sections of the communities than those involved in on-going campaigning.

Defend Pride march

Dave Landau
The Ozbay family have the right to remain in this country. Veil Ozbay said. "We are very pleased and happy. This means a lot to my whole family. Now we have nothing to worry about any more."

The Kurdish Alevi family - Hamid and Huma and their sons, Ali, Yel (16) and Semil (14) fled persecution in Turkey to Northern Cyprus. In Northern Cyprus they faced attack and torture from Turkish soldiers, so they fled again to England. On July 28th they were granted indefinite leave to remain.

Stressful

Despite all our support, it has been a terribly stressful time for the family. Their relief and joy at their victory was tremendous to experience.

Nobody should be forced to go through that worry and pain. It shames New Labour that the threat of deportation was not lifted. New Labour Government took office.

As John Stewart from the Ozbay family campaign said: 'The victory that campaigning does make a difference.

The government's Immigration and Asylum Bill will make the conditions of those who seek asylum in the UK even worse and will increase the need for people to come to our campaign against deportation.'
New Labour policies promote Dover racism

Mark Jansen

Several clashes between asylum seekers and locals in Dover have been used as an excuse to try and whip up racism from a number of sources. The local national media and leading conservative have pounced upon the opportunity to warn of the ‘problems’ of Dover being ‘swamped by immigrants’. In words of a local Conservative, paraphrasing Margaret Thatcher. In particular it is refugees from the Balkans who are being blamed for the ‘civil unrest’. Even those who have attempted to distance themselves from some of the more overt racists, have greatly exaggerated the scale of immigration. Official statistics show 442 (0.4% of the population) refugees living in Dover and around 1,500 (0.1% of the population) in Kent as a whole. Far from the area being swamped, the number of refugees has actually declined in recent years.

It is clear that when immigrants are forced to live on food vouchers, or on incomes way below benefit levels, and with dwindling resources, then there are going to be a number of social problems within immigrant communities.

But the problem lies squarely with the government’s refusal to provide refugees and asylum seekers with even the most basic necessities to live on. Under the Conservatives, many people pinned their hopes on the election of a Labour government to help the plight of those fleeing persecution. Sadly things have gone from bad to worse.

During the process of conducting a war against Serbia, supposedly in the interest of Kosovo refugees, the government was notably in its refusal to allow Kosovans into Britain. In fact many Kosovar children have been locked up in detention centres because they have been unable to prove that they were Kosovans and not Albanians.

Dover protest has already challenged racism against refugees

Victims of Fortress Europe

Wayne Rogers

THE BODIES of two children from Guinea were found frozen to death in the landing gear bay of an AirEuropa flight which was forced to land in Brussels on 2 August. It appears that their bodies had been in the undercarriage for around 10 days, making daily trips between Belgium and Conakry, the capital of Guinea.

The bodies of 14 year old Youkko Leiha and his 15 year old sister, who were not wearing shoes, were sent home in zinc lined coffins following a ceremony attended by the Guinean ambassador and representatives of the Belgian government. Many people have commented that had they arrived alive, they would simply have been deported with no such ceremony.

The death of these two friends would not have even reached public attention were it not for the fact that a letter was found on the body of one of them that addressed "Excellencies, sirs, members and officials of Europe.. we have the honourable pleasure an great confidence to write you this letter to tell you the objective of our voyage and of our suffering, we, the children of Africa. We appeal to your kindness and solidarity to come to the rescue of Africa. the letter goes on "Help us, we are suffering enormously.. we have war, disease, not enough to eat. There are schools, but a great lack of education, of teaching.."

The letter ends up "If you see that we have sacrificed ourselves and lost our lives it is because we suffer too much in Africa and need your help to struggle against poverty and war.. Please excuse us very much for daring to write this letter."

Embarassed

The fact that these two children were prepared to die to deliver this message has embarrassed Belgian government officials into promising more aid for Africa and to circulate the letter to other European governments. The Belgian government has no intention, however of losing the racist immigration controls that mean that people do feel forced to risk their lives trying to enter Europe illegally.

The appeal of these two African children may seem excessive, but at the root of poverty and war throughout Africa lies a legacy of failed European colonisation and of continued imperialist intervention that is bleeding the continent dry. The message is attached with strings that is sent to Africa and elsewhere throughout the third world pays in insignificance compared to the vast wealth that is taken out in debt repayments or as the profits of multina.

Justice for Ricky Reel

Elkie Dee

Police have finally started a new investigation into the death of Ricky Reel in October 1997, nearly two years on.

They have discovered CCTV footage of white youths shouting racist abuse at Ricky and his friends, a group of Irish people who spent a night out, and are now appealing for members of the public who may have any further knowledge or information to come forward. So why has it taken so long for them to look at this footage or to consider it relevant in investigating his death?

Ricky’s mother, Sukhdev Reel, has spent nearly two years speaking to anti-racist and union groups across the country, asking why police failed to investigate Ricky's disappearance and death as a possible racist killing. Mrs Reel, her union branch, the PCS, the Southall Monitoring Group launched the Justice for Ricky Reel Campaign, and this campaign has linked up with others, around deaths at the hands of racists across in police custody.

When Ricky didn’t return home on the night of October 14, 1997, the police explanation of Ricky’s death was that it was a drunken accident - he had fallen into the river while urinating into it. They ignored the reports of the friends who had been with him earlier about being abused and attacked by racists, refused to investigate other theories, and concluded that no further investigation was necessary. As a black lives matter activist hired by the family after the police had refused to look into the matter further found evidence in total contradiction of the police version of events, indicating that Ricky fell into the water backwards and that his bladder was full. He remarked that third party involvement could not be excluded.

The family made a complaint against the police which later was upheld by the Surrey Constabulary and supervised by the Police Complaints Authority - the family have been refused access to the completed report.

Like the Lawrence family before her, Sukhdev Reel is still seeing the truth of what happened to her son, so she can mourn properly. Given that the police force they need to be seen to be doing something - it is good to see that has at least been acknowledged for once.

There’s still a lot of work to do though, both to find out and publicise the truth and to stop deaths at the hands of racist thugs inside and outside the police.
PFI schemes axe more NHS beds

John Lister (London Health Emergency)

More are closing their ears to criticism and ignoring all of the warning signs as they rush headlong to rubber-stamp more hospital building projects financed by the Private Finance Initiative. Another list of six major new hospital developments (totaling £625m) which have been given the green light to finalise deals with private sector consortia was unveiled early in July, covering schemes in Leeds, Oxford, Havering (East London), Portsmouth, Blackburn and Derby.

Two more years of costly negotiations will follow before building begins on these schemes in 2001. 37 new hospital projects have now been agreed in principle, with 17 of them currently under construction – all but four of these funded by PFI.

Tony Blair has joined Alan Milburn and other ministers in claiming that the combined package of PFI schemes, costing a massive £31 billion, represent the "biggest hospital building programme for the NHS" – ignoring the fact that previous NHS hospital building was financed by government cash, and created new users for the health service rather than long-term debts. But even as the bulldozers and cranes swing into action, the storm of scepticism and opposition is increasing.

Doctors’ leaders in the BMA are warning that ministers are unleashing the “largest acute hospital closure programme” ever to hit the health service:

○ the all-party Commons Health select committee has called for a halt to new PFI projects while the true costs are evaluated;
○ the NHS Confederation, representing the trusts and boards, has expressed its reservations at the cost and complexity of PFI deals in the history of the NHS;
○ Community Health Councils, the patients’ watchdog bodies, have also voted overwhelmingly at their 1999 national conference to oppose PFI;
○ the National Audit Office has warned that the first PFI hospital to be completed, Dartford & Gravesham, will fall short of the promised savings;
○ academics are warning that PFI deals can only claim to represent value for money by fudging the figures and leaning on government subsidies;
○ building firms and others in PFI consortia are boasting of the fat profits they expect to coin in from these projects over the next 30-60 years;
○ and campaigners across the country are protesting that PFI deals will result in hospitals moving to remote greenfield sites, and leave local services desperately short of front-line beds.

Sceptical of the facts to government ministers that a review of the PFI process, set up by Health Minister Alan Milburn before he departed for the Treasury, has been shelved by his successor John Denham, while many Trusts embroiled in PFI schemes are hiding vital information hospitals in a form of “commercial confidentiality”.

No free care for elderly

Dobbsy sticks to Tory means-test

AFTER six months of constipated silence, Health Secretary Frank Dobson has opted to overrule the findings of the Royal Commission on Care of the Elderly. Pensions groups and charities are furious that he has opted to maintain the system of means-tested charges for nursing home care introduced by the Tories in 1993.

Thatcher’s government saw the possibility of forcing a growing number of patients to pay for their own care, by switching responsibility for continuing care from the NHS (not treatment is free at point of use) to local authorities.

The Royal Commission – set up following a pledge in the 1997 election campaign – had recommended that all nursing care for frail elderly patients should be paid for by the NHS, at a cost of an extra £1.3bn a year.

This is the amount now being paid by individual nursing home residents, plus the cost of selling their houses and liquidating their life savings.

Labour MPs and councillors from the outset supported the Tories “community care” reforms, first proposed by Sainsbury boss Sir Roy Griffiths in 1988, which extended the system of means-tested charges as a way of cutting government spending.

But the implementation of the new system from 1993 led to an estimated 40,000 older people being sold by elderly people to pay nursing home charges.

Victor new “eligibility criteria” from 1996 enabled health authorities to slash back their provision of NHS continuing care beds for the frail elderly, and helped generate a groundswell of anger.

Tory ministers were already under pressure from older voters in the run-up to the election, where Labour hinted that a Labour Commission would lead to a change of policy.

Two years later it is clear that Dobson will seek only the most timid changes, deferring for up to five years any instruction for elderly patients to sell their homes in order to pay for their care.

Coupled with the refusal to amend new state pension, and the restrictions on prescriptions for Viagra, Dobson has compounded New Labour’s policy of sticking the boot into the elderly, while leaving the profits of the private sector untouched.

Big firms line up to fleece the NHS

Building firms, banks, business consultants and other PFI hangers-on are eagerly anticipating a golden prize of profits as the first hospital schemes take shape.

A recent investigation in the Health Service Journal showed building contractors “expecting returns of up to 20 per cent a year on the equity stakes they hold in the private companies” as the hospital building is complete and Trusts start paying up for the use of the new buildings.

Consultancy firms, too – architects, engineers and surveyors – are pocketing above average fees for work on PFI schemes. And once the building is finished, maintaining the buildings will deliver considerable, guaranteed profits of up to 7 per cent for firms holding service contracts.

As the HSJ article points out: “There is a huge opportunity for the construction industry losing interest in PFI hospitals.” (Profits for Industry, HSJ 13 May).

A recent SMJ article pointed out that shareholders in PFI schemes can expect returns of up to 15-25 percent a year, and went on to explain how low prices are achieved for the companies in PFI consortia.

The new Greenwich Hospital scheme, for example, assumes that risks worth a massive £20m are being transferred to the private sector. But for the consortium of Meridian, the firm launching the bond issue to fund the deal, claimed that the contract was structured so that “few risks inherent in the project are retained” by the company.

A detailed study commissioned by UNISON of one Full Business Case, for North Durham Acute Hospitals Trust, revealed the extent to which some PFI deals rig the figures to make the case for private funding.

The new Duthyburn hospital represents a reduction in beds compared with the original 1991 plan for a publically-funded hospital, and will treat 7 percent fewer inpatients than the present level, while using more than ten percent of its qualified nurses.

“Despite an investment of £69m, announcement specie in the private sector of over £12m a year for 30 years, subsidies from central government for a 40-year period, a saving of the NHS property, not a single extra patient will be treated in five years.”

Downing for the 21st Century, by Declan Gaffney and Alison Pollack, published by UNISON.
Socialist Outlook 9

Turkish regime compiles quake horror

Susan Moore

The earthquake in Turkey has been described as one of the worst disasters in recent memory. The death toll has reached thousands, and repairs and aid are still ongoing. The Turkish government's response has been criticized for its slow pace and lack of preparedness.

Appeal from Day-Mer Turkish and Kurdish Community Solidarity Centre

The Turkish government has shown itself to have reacted irresponsibly once again, leaving its citizens to deal with the situation on their own. Thousands of people were left alone in the rescue work, cops as they dug up tons of debris with their bare hands. As time goes by, hope for the rescue of these trapped is fading away.

In other areas, thousands of people died, lost or injured. Hundreds of thousands are affected materially as well. Past experience indicates that those people will receive no aid and no compensation.

There has been very little state co-ordinated rescue work, and almost all of this has been concentrated on the navy base in Gokova, while the ordinary people in much of the area have received no aid. The government has failed to address the real needs of the people in need.

Please make your cheques payable to Day-Mer
Moore 2 and send them to Day-Mer, Turkish and Kur
dish Community Centre, Former Library, Howard Road, London N16 8PR.

If you are able to donate goods please also bring them to the above address between 10 am and 7 pm any weekday. Any help you can give, big or small, will make a real difference to those in need. We thank you for your support. This appeal is endorsed by Day-Mer Turk
ish and Kurdish Community Solidarity Centre.

Nursing a grievance

Nursing staff in Quebec and several Canadian provinces have been embroiled in a succession of bitter strikes, in defiance of union laws. The most sustained action was the month-long strike by Quebec nurses, which began on June 26 and was wound up by the leadership of the 22-union Quebec Federation of Nurses with a sell-out deal which left nurses facing individual penalties as high as $7,000. 47,500 nurses had backed the walk-out, demanding a pay increase of 15 percent over 3 years, and a 10 percent pay adjustment to move towards parity with teachers and social workers.

Nurses' anger was fuelled by more than the cuts alone, however, and there were demands for the filling of a growing number of nursing vacancies, and for much of the rising tide of overtime worked by health staff to be cut.

However, the QFN leadership did succeed in demobilizing the action by imposing a suspension of the strike for a "truce" period while their proposed deal was put to the vote, and the strike suffered a body-blow when staff at the well-organised Sacré Coeur Hospital in Montreal received notice of rank and file militancy - were led back to work even after voting against the sell-out.

But just as the elitist nursing union leaders refused to build any broader alliance against the government, leaders of Quebec's other public sector trade unions deliberately held back from giving any practical support or solidarity - despite a general recognition that defeat for the nurses would set back the prospects of any public sector workers challenging the 5 percent pay limit.

The Quebec nurses ensured that throughout the strike emergency cover - equivalent to weekend staffing levels - was provided to deal with emergency admissions, Intensive Therapy Unit patients, maternity cases and dialysis services.

Similar tactics were employed earlier in the year by striking nurses in Saskatchewan, who also defied anti-union laws, risking possible jail sentences for contempt of court, fighting to demand action to deal with mass staff shortages and parity with nursing staff in other Canadian provinces.

In what is almost like a dress rehearsal for the bigger Quebec strike two years later, 5,400 nurses were left deliberately isolated by other public sector unions, including the Service Employees International Union which scandalously postponed a strike by 10,000 healthcare workers.

Nurses have also been in dispute in Mani
toba and Newfoundland, and have compelled the govern
ment in Ontario to spend an extra $37.5m on an extra 10,000 nurses.

But the impact of the sell-in on Quebec could have been much wider and lasting consequences.

Press pundits and union officials had been playing up the possible "broadening" of confrontation involving 400,000 public sector workers challenging the 5% pay limit.

90 percent of the Quebec Federation of Labour's 55,000 public sector members had voted for strike action if necessary to win a bigger piece of the pie - despite having been running at 3 percent. Nurses were lining up to follow health and social workers.

Now that the nurses have been cynically hung out to dry by com
promise, as the trade union bureaucracies, the chances of sustained and united action must be bleak.

That is just what the union leaders and the Parti Quebecois wanted to see.
One dam thing after another...

One of the issues that the ecology movement is battling is a number of different parts of the globe is that of huge dam systems - like those of the Narmada or the Ili, which we deal with in more detail below. To some extent this development represents a partial success for green campaigners, as hydroelectric power is often posed as a cleaner alternative to nuclear power. Indeed the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions has led to orders to reduce electricity consumption altogether in some parts of the world - for example in the US President Clinton has called for the federal government to reduce its energy use by 35 percent by 2010.

In June in Washington the National Hydropower Association criticised Clinton for leaving hydropower out of an executive order designed to reduce government greenhouse gas emissions by requiring more use of renewable power.

"Not only is hydropower undisputedly a renewable energy source by any standard definition, it is our nation's oldest and most significant renewable energy source (that) is essentially infinite," the trade group said in a letter to Clinton.

The request comes as the administration is under pressure on the question of existing dams - some of which have already been removed and others of which campaigners are arguing should be because of their profoundly negative effects on fragile eco-systems.

But the questions posed by dams, particularly the huge systems consisting of many individual dams over an extended length of one or more major rivers pose far broader questions than many in advanced capitalist countries often think of as environmental questions.

Particularly on the left there is a conservative tendency to think of human beings as the species affected by social questions, and ecology as the study of what happens to other animals and plants.

The politics of dams shows that such a separation can't be meaningfully made. The construction of huge dams has already caused the displacement of millions of people and the destruction of their homes and livelihoods.

This has often affected communities of ethnic groups who are discriminated against, often the first peoples of the planet.

Not only are the Kurds threatened by the Ilisu, but not only have millions of tribal peoples been dispossessed in India, but in Labrador, Canada the Inuit people fought against the plans to expand the Churchill Falls system which sold electricity cheaply to the north-eastern United States.

Already a lot of their land has been lost by an earlier system built in the 1970s for which they never received the compensation promised. Now they have managed to stop the new process until a meaningful consultation takes place.

In Vietnam 103,000 people, including ethnic minorities will be relocated to build a reservoir for a giant hydro-electric power plant in Son La province, a remote area in mountainous north-western Vietnam.

"Building the Son La power plant is a 1,000-year dream of the ethnic minorities there," Han Dan, mouthpiece of the ruling Communist Party, claimed in a lengthy article.

Some of these projects also pose questions of control of water supplies over vast areas with political ramifications beyond the state boundaries.

Water from the Tigris and the Euphrates is key to the economies of countries of the Middle East far beyond Turkey. The prospect of wars for water is not an idle speculation as the prospect of serious drought increases.

Meanwhile, these projects are aimed at expanding into new markets where current electricity cannot reach. For example, less than 15 percent of the kingdom's 22 million people, among the poorest in the world, have access to electricity.

U.S. energy giant Enron International has applied for a license to study the possibility of building a hydro-electric dam on Nepal's Karnali river, which could export electricity to neighbouring India and China.

One of the successes of campaigning on this issue has been that many multilateral bodies including the World Bank have become very suspicious of such projects and refused to fund them as a result of better small hydro-electric projects that minimise the impact on local people and the environment.

This means that loan guarantees for these schemes usually come from governments in Western Europe and the US.

This puts an important responsibility on activists here to ensure that our governments are not funding schemes that will devastate the lives of so many people.

As the government announces the sites for next year's farm-size trials for GM foods, Veronica Fadan examines some of the issues posed by the debate on genetic modification.

A socialist I am in favour of scientific progress. But I guess in the last twenty years, I - along with many other people - have become more aware that I need to examine what that statement really means in the context of the real world we live in.

It's a world in which research and development into new areas of science are driven by the hunt for greater profits rather than to end human suffering or enhance the quality of our lives. That also means that short term gains in terms of profit come before long term needs in terms of resources - so corporations and governments are prepared to destroy whole eco-systems that have taken thousands of years to build up, like rain forests.

It's a world in which basic precautions in terms of health and safety are thrown to the wind in this quest - at the ghastly stories about what happened at Porton Down which came out in the press recently remind us all too graphically.

Similarly while I am not qualified to assess the evidence on how BSE became CJD, it is clear that diseases are jumping the species barrier and this is something that needs to worry us all - certainly it threatens us all.

And if the government's own Food Safety advisory Committee is telling us that the high use of antibiotics for farm animals is something that needs to be stopped, then there must be evidence of this.

The Committee, reporting in August, expresses concern about the use of synthetic antibiotics that are used in humans to both control disease and salmonellas and the use of growth promoters.

Our response to all of this should not be a Luddite, anti-progressive one. Rather it needs to ensure that the demand that investment and enquiry is driven by the real needs of people.

To ensure that this what happens...

Villagers refuse to be flooded out by profiteers

Susan Moore

IT IS ONLY in the last few months that people in the west are likely to have heard about the Narmada river valley project since novelist Arundhati Roy became involved in the campaign against it.

Roy, whose book The God Of Small Things won the Booker Prize in 1997, joined the fight by writing an essay in an Indian magazine, later republished in the west, attacking big dams for displacing 50 million tribal people in India in the past 50 years.

The essay "The Greater Common Good" aroused so much fury in the area of the projected dams that Congress Party youth made a bonfire of it, as well as threatening those who stocked it.

The project consists of over 3000 cascading dams costing £6,4 billion along the 1300 km river. The project seen as a symbol of progress by the governments of the states directly affected: Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

They claim that the project will provide cheap drinking water. Certainly there is a demand for electricity from large farmers and industrialists in the region who put their thirst for profit way above the lives of the people whose homes will be destroyed.

But the campaign against the dams did not start with Roy's intervention. For 14 years the project has been dogged with controversy because of its threat to the environment and to the many tribal people who will be displaced by it. In the late 1980s the World Bank was forced to withdraw support because of the strength of local campaigning. Then work on the last dam, in Kuri, was suspended in January 1995 following a court order on a petition filed by environmentalist Medha Patkar's Free Narmada movement (NBA) alleging large-scale illegalities in the area where the dams are
the reasons to be fearful

peas, ordinary people have to have control of where the money goes, and real and accessible information about the results of that research.

Again one of the horrifying aspects of the Portion Down story was the fact that those who ‘volunteered’ for the experiments had no information about what was going on.

So what does all of this mean in terms of the debate on genetic modification? Firstly we need to separate the question of modification in medicine and agriculture. In terms of medicine I think that the key question is ensuring that trials take place in an open and extensive manner.

There is no doubt in my mind that if we are able to find cures for diseases through this process then it is one we should support — but that we need to have the confidence that this won’t lead to side effects that could be as or more dangerous than the original problem.

But most of the controversy over genetic modification has concentrated around the question of farming. Here there are a whole range of questions that need to be addressed.

Firstly there is the issue that has had least exposure — what is driving the development in the first place. Firms like Monsanto have tried to claim that GM methods of monoculture — which rob all the goodness from fertile farmland and leave it barren in a relatively short period of time — have replaced methods of crop rotation practised successfully for centuries.

The destruction of our forests, the building of massive dams have laid waste vast tracts of land in which communities once lived. The seas have been polluted and overfished through the use of industrial trawlers that decimate fish stocks much more quickly than they can be replaced, under-cutting the livelihoods of many rural communities.

None of this is to argue that life for small farmers, fishers or artisans in these traditional communities is utopian. This is not our vision of what we want everyone to live — where life is fragile, disease rife, poverty endemic.

But what capitalism is doing today is destroying this and replacing it with nothing in terms of these communities. Across the third world these are the people who are forced increasingly into cities where there are no houses for them to live in, no jobs to do, not health or education systems. This is simply the motor force behind the street children in the cities of Latin America, Africa, Asia.

Genetic modification will make this process even more extreme. Power will be concentrated in even fewer hands at the expense of even greater numbers who will be dispossessed and destroyed. Instead of saving the seed from one year’s yield to plant for the next, farmers will be compelled to buy new seed at inflated prices — prices that they will not be able to afford. That is why there is so much opposition to genetically modified crops from small farmers across the third world.

The trials are being paid for by you and me, as taxpayers, rather than by the corporations.

That is why all socialists should stand with them in opposing these developments. There are of course other issues too, issues that have had rather more airing in the media here. It is true that once genetically modified crops are grown outside a laboratory environment it is extremely likely that this will cause cross-contamination of other plants — including of organic crops.

The danger here is that this cross-contamination will make it impossible to really tell what the effects of genetic modification are, as there will not be any comparators outside a laboratory situation.

But the government tells us that these trials are necessary if we are not test out the implications of this technology, so that must be right mustn’t it?

They never point out that it would be perfectly possible — if costly — to construct huge laboratories in which the tests could take place which mirrored all the conditions of the natural environment, but didn’t pose the same risks.

But that would undercut the profits of giants like Monsanto if they had to pay for it — and that’s another point. The powers that be are also less likely to say in the case of modern agriculture that farmers should be paid for by you and me, as taxpayers, rather than by the corporations who will benefit from their outcome.

All in all then, while I have some reluctance to support the tactics of those who trample GM fields (because at first glance their attitude seems so rational) in the context of the world we live in GM foods will not bring positive benefits to anyone other than the multinationals.

That’s probably another good reason for changing the world.
Scandal of squeeze on AIDS treatment

Charlie van Gelderen

Cudrift's sudden and unex- pected death is a major blow for the women's movement. She was a strong voice in the fight against AIDS in South Africa. She was a powerful advocate for the rights of women and girls. She was a leader in the struggle against HIV/AIDS. She was a fighter. She was a warrior. And she will be missed.

This is the first prominent African to come out.

Cameron: “The South African government is under pressure to reconsider their stance on AIDS treatment. This is a major blow for the women's movement. She was a strong voice in the fight against AIDS in South Africa. She was a powerful advocate for the rights of women and girls. She was a leader in the struggle against HIV/AIDS. She was a fighter. She was a warrior. And she will be missed. Cameron is the first prominent African to come out.”

South Africa fights AIDS — and US drug profiteers

Tendai Biti

Despite the cuts about “partnership”, profits come before patients

subjects that are still taboo in some of the rural areas, you have problems when you go around trying to teach people. “In these cases where our health department came up with the Medical Amendment Act, looking at the production of generic medicine, and what is called ‘parallel import’ as well as ‘forced licensing’. All these practices, in our understanding, are within the World Trade Organization regulations and the clause that deals with ‘intellectual property’. Our aim here was to make medicine accessible to our poor people. If companies like Glaxo, for example, were producing certain medicines abroad and selling them cheaper in Canada than they were selling them in South Africa, our minister should be able to order these medicines from Canada, which is a parallel import. And if people had patent rights to certain medicines, and either were not producing them or producing them expensive in South Africa, our minister had a right to ask other companies to produce them cheaper. In terms of originality, if people were prescribing these expensive medicines, the health minister and the doctor and the patient had the right to go and get the cheaper medicine. These were some of the elements of this act that allowed our minister and our doctors to do that. The pharmacists saw red. Their argument was that it was going to be piracy. And it’s not true. Their other argument was that we were going against TRIPS (the World Trade Organization’s rules on intellectual property rights), and that is not true. But the American government came fully behind these pharmacists.

The truth of the matter is that it is profits that they are defending. So the lives of people are less valuable than the profits that these big pharmaceuticals are going to be making in South Africa.

And now we are being taken to the Constitutional Court by the pharmacists backed by the American government. We have not been able to implement the Medical Amendment Act.

Many of our people are in danger of dying because of a lack of access to cheaper medications. We are not dealing with only South Africa. It is a continental problem. Zimbabwe next door is in crisis. So any alternative access to cheaper medicines would benefit not only South Africa but the continent. But we are being denied that. If the United States government supports these blackmail tactics and those processes and programmes that we think in our country would work for our people, then let us begin. But we are not being given that opportunity by either the US government or the pharmacists.

LAST APRIL, the South African judge and human rights advocate, Alison O’Dwyer, who was a prominent figure in the gay community, was targeted. She was forced to leave her position due to threats to her life. The United Nations Human Rights Committee was not able to intervene to protect her.

Not satisfied with trying to bomb the world into compliance with American interests, the US also has no compunction in threaten- ing human lives if profits are threatened.

South Africa, with its 3.5 million cases of people who are HIV+ has the most explosive epidemic in the world, according to the AIDS Consortium, part of the AIDS Treatment Action Campaign. There are between 1500 – 2000 new cases a day. - a very high percentage of those affected are young women under 25.

To combat this scourge, the South African government plans to source cheaper AIDS treatment drugs, such as AZT. South African legislation in the shape of the Medical Amendment Act allows for compulsory licensing, ie, allowing the manufacturing of generic forms of expensive AIDS drugs despite patents being held in another com- pany if this would be in the national interests of the country.

The act also allows for the importation of drugs from cheaper sources.

This has aroused the anger of the powerful drug lobby in the United States, which is pushing for the protection of intellectual property rights. It is urging the US government to threaten sanctions if South Africa goes ahead with plans for cheaper drugs.

Not satisfied with trying to bomb the world into compliance with American interests, the US also has no compunction in threaten- ing human lives if profits are threatened.

Cameron, has a long association with the UN Commission on women's rights and the UN's high-level meeting on the promotion of human rights and the rule of law. She was a prominent figure in the gay community, who was targeted by the South African government due to threats to her life. The United Nations Human Rights Committee was not able to intervene to protect her.

Cameron confirmed publicly that he is living with AIDS. Cameron was a known figure in the gay community, who was targeted by the South African government due to threats to her life. The United Nations Human Rights Committee was not able to intervene to protect her.

They don’t say “even though you are a white gay man, we are very glad you have come out...” They’re saying you’re an African and that’s why your coming out matters... They have claimed me as an African, they have claimed my act as a South African act in this particular epidemic.

He tells the story of Gugu Dlamini, a woman from a town ship near Durban, who spoke pub- licly on World AIDS Day last year and was stoned to death less than three weeks later.

He believes that if more people were able to come out, that the negative attitudes that led to her murder would change. "It only by
Yeltsin plays for high stakes in new PM swap

Alan Thornett

Boris Yeltsin has several major problems as next year's presidential election creeps closer, as far as determining how he will run for re-election. The overarching problem is the economy. He has been unable to resolve the economic crisis in Russia which brought the economy close to meltdown at this time last year.

The situation faced by Russia was part of a global crisis centered in South East Asia and Japan and which threatened to precipitate a world-wide slump. The ruble went into free-fall after a rapid drop in production in the Tiger economies resulted in a drop in the world price of oil - one of Russia's principal exports.

Since that time, the worst case scenario has not developed world-wide: the line was held, principally in the USA - at the cost of a grossly over-valued stock exchange. How long that situation can continue is a matter of speculation but at some stage it will readjust, and major instability is likely to return to world markets.

Meanwhile things stabilised a bit in Russia, but nothing was resolved - and no one has much idea how to solve it. Yeltsin wants to push economic reforms forward as quickly as possible but in practice reestablishing capitalism in Russia is a long term uphill task.

The laws of capitalism are hardly present in big swathes of the economy and many industries, as well as individual people, survive by barter and the black market. Meanwhile gangster capitalism dominates the smaller profitable sectors of society.

Then there are those who are organizing against Yeltsin, aiming to take the presidency. The most significant of these is the new Fatherson Movement initiated by the mayor of Moscow, Yury Luzhkov. This organisation has just been joined by former prime minister Yevgeny Primakov - sacked by Yeltsin at an earlier stage and a popular politician in the country. They launched the Fatherson Movement publicly at a conference on August 21.

As an illustration as to how to combat this new formation, stay in office, and ensure the succession led Yeltsin to sack yet another prime minister last week, this time Sergei Stepashin (who had only been in office three months), and threaten to dissolve the parliament if he did not endorse his new nominee for the job.

This was the faceless former KGB agent Vladimir Putin, notable only for his loyalty and subservience to Yeltsin and his inner circle. Russians were left in little doubt that what was involved was a move by Yeltsin's inner circle to line up an elecalbe candidate for next year's presidential elections when Yeltsin introduced Putin not only as his nominee for Prime Minister, but also as his chosen successor! Nothing very subtle about that.

It is not only for political reasons that Yeltsin is determined to have a loyalist follow him into the presidency, but fear of moves against both him and his inner circle for corruption whilst in office.

Serious allegations of corruption have been made against both Yeltsin and his supporters. It seems that investigators in Geneva may be about to track down Yeltsin's personal fortune which has been laundered through Swiss bank accounts. This is dangerous stuff when at the present time Russian law does not provide immunity for ex-presidents.

But it is not just this mess and the intractable problems of the economy which will face both Yeltsin's new Prime Minister and his successor as president next year.

The disastrous war in Chechnya has now been followed by a war in Dagestan where a rebel army is demanding independence. It is led by Shamil Basayev - a general who caused them great problem in Chechnya.

The situation is now developing into a full scale war and is soaking up resources the Russian government simply doesn't have. To prevent the demoralisation which arose from the Chechnya war, the army is using only volunteers, paid at enhanced rates. But, like Chechnya, this may also be a war Russia is unable to win outright, despite its military superiority.

There is speculation, however, that Putin may have an answer to some of these problems, at least the elections and the corruption - a state of emergency. This could be called over the crisis in Dagestan.

It could be kept in force for some time and used to postpone the elections until Yeltsin judged that he would be better placed to get a supporter in office.

What happens in these political shenanigans the poverty, the uncertainty and precarious state of the Russian economy will continue. All contenders for government and presidency - including the Communist Party opposition - are committed to marketisation and reform. The only thing which divides them is how to attempt to implement it.

It is not difficult to see that the new Fatherson Movement has little to offer. They announced that their top priority, should they be elected, is to ensure that Russia has a new flag! "Without such a new symbol," they said, "it will be impossible to get the economy right!"

Meanwhile the problems of the economy are of staggering proportions. Information emerging from the an investigation by international law authorities in New York have shed some light on the scale of the activities of the Russian mafia and the extent to which these are integrated into business and banking at every level.

Some mafia bosses now own banks, and are therefore able to integrate their mafia business with "legitimate business" in a much more complete way.

Serious allegations of corruption have been made against both Yeltsin and his supporters.

Was this what they mean by “market reform?”
Religious cult banned as it recruits Chinese Party members

New crackdown on dissidence

Zhang Kai

High-handed repression of the Falun Gong, a spiritual movement in China, has been conducted since late July, with the organisation being labelled as illegal and all its propaganda, books, practice or activities being banned.

This signals the most serious crackdown on dissidence throughout the country since the June Fourth crackdown in 1989.

The People's Daily, in its July 24 editorial, explained that “this is a severe ideological and political struggle, pertinent to the fundamental beliefs of us communists, pertinent to the fundamental ideological basis of the solidarity of the people of the whole country, and pertinent to the future and destiny of our Party and the state.”

The question at issue here is not whether this is an exaggeration of the influence of Falun Gong, but how this reveals the gross fear of the CCP leadership towards what is destabilising its rule and probably bringing about “the end of the Party and the state.”

It is reported that Falun Gong activities began in 1992 and spread quickly in the span of a few years. Different versions give the number of practitioners of Falun Gong from tens of millions to 100 million. Li Boyu, Deputy Minister of Civil Affairs, quoted a figure of around 2 million.

At the same time, the government report of the Falun Gong organisation needed a pretty extensive network, with 39 headquarters in the provincial capitals or major municipalities of the autonomous regions, over 1,000 support stations in counties and cities all over the country, and over 28,000 venues of practice.

The government has waged a propaganda war against Falun Gong, denouncing it for its illegal and violent activities and harmful effects. There are many allegations, but here are just two examples.

The authorities allege that from April 1998 to July 1999, there were 19 cases in which crowds gathered to “berserking and attack” government offices and propaganda institutions.

Another alleging is that Li Hongzhi, the founder of Falun Gong, amassed wealth equivalent to US$135,000 in 1993 and 1994 through selling Falun Gong cassettes and inciting the Falun Gong practice.

From the official allegations, it may be surmised that the Falun Gong is seen as a threat because it is not a religion that the CCP feels it can control and control. On the contrary, CCP members and even high-ranking officials have been recruited into the ranks of Falun Gong.

What the CCP cannot tolerate is that on April 25 this year, without any warning, over 10,000 practitioners of Falun Gong “beseiged” Zhongnanhai to demand recognition of its legality. The Falun Gong leaders and representatives, according to the Reuters report of July 25, were current or retired high-ranking officials.

It is difficult to tell the size of the Falun Gong membership among CCP members and cadres.

It was reported that in Shijiazhuang, Hebei Province, 1,200 current or retired cadres above the rank of department chief were under house arrest in the suburbs to learn and study Party central documents, and in the next phase, 3,000 rank-and-file Party members and cadres were withdrawn from Falun Gong sect. The popularity of Falun Gong shows the extent of general social polarization, unemployment, disillusionment and accumulating grievances.

The high-handed repression drives Falun Gong underground and antagonizes it.

In Hanzhou city, 100 members of the 2nd Party applied to hold a commemorative gathering in a public park. The application was rejected, and about 20 people were arrested; still about 50 people gathered in the pavilion of the park for the commemoration.

In Sichuan Province, 45 dissidents, against the warning of the authorities, conducted a hunger strike at home and held a candlelight vigil. In Liaoning Province, 100 dissidents jointly applied to hold a candlelight vigil on June 4th.

In Hong Kong which was returned to China's sovereignty after July 1997, which still remains the only place in China where a candlelight vigil can be held in public, the 10th anniversary drew an impressive crowd.

In the gathering, chants of “Rehabilitate the 1989 Demo-
Opposition to Slobodan Milosevic's increasingly beleaguered regime has continued to grow both within Serbia itself and in the remaining parts of the rump "Yugoslavia". The next issue of Socialist Outlook will carry a full assessment of the situation after the war.

Fitting reward for stooge without scruples

Lord Robertson of Kosovo

Harry Sloan

T MAY have left thousands dead, industries and transport links in ruins and a deadly legacy of exploded cluster bombs and radioactive shells, bomb-casings and bullets scattered across a polluted landscape, but the NATO bombing of Serbia has been good for one man: George (now Lord) Robertson. The Defence Secretary whose endless willingness to excuse NATO's blundering attacks on embassies, trains, coaches and other civilian targets matched even that of NATO's PR chief Jamie Shea, is said to have had a "good war".

So good was his performance for the imperialist alliance that he has now won unanimous election as NATO's Secretary General, where he can oversee more and bigger bombing campaigns into the new millennium.

Robertson's appointment is further evidence of the way in which Tony Blair's New Labour party is pushing back all of the conventional boundaries and replicating itself as a born-again Conservative Party.

Of course he is far from the first Labour politician eagerly to embrace the imperialist goals and objectives of the NATO alliance, which was founded to fight communism in the midst of the Cold War 50 years ago, with eager support from Labour's then Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin.

But he is the first British Labour politician to take charge of a 19-country alliance – an area of interest and involvement normally regarded as the preserve of the Tory right and retired military top brass.

NATO has traditionally been the means through which the USA has set out to keep its European "allies" on board as it escalated its attempts to assert military control on a global level. Under the banner of loyalty to NATO British Labour governments have connived at the stationing of US nuclear submarines, long-distance nuclear bombers and more recently Cruise missiles in bases in England and Scotland.

In return, NATO has cultivated a loyal right wing layer of trade union bureaucrats and Labour politicians for whom the goals of containing communism and supporting the US notion of "democracy" outweighed any notional commitment to socialism or internationalism.

George Robertson was certainly never troubled by any socialist principles. Born into what is politely termed "a police family", he has always opposed unilateral nuclear disarmament, and has not shed a shred of radicalism to conceal in his political past.

This total lack of any scruple or internationalist sentiment stood Robertson in good stead during the Kosovo conflict. It enabled him to act as the most craven apologist for the US bombardment, even while other NATO governments – notably Greece, Italy France and Germany – expressed growing levels of concern and tried behind the scenes to avoid any further escalation of the bombing.

The brownie points he scored for this have clearly been the decisive factor in winning over Washington support for Robertson's appointment to a post which in recent years has been held by a token European as a means of distracting attention from the overwhelming level of US control.

Interestingly, the outgoing NATO secretary general, Javier Solana, is set to become the EU's commissioner dealing with defence issues.

This, coupled with Robertson's elevation, will further strengthen US military influence within the EU, and serve to counter any trend towards a weakening of the Atlantic alliance.

The Kosovo bombing showed the extent to which the US, with British government complicity, was ready and able to ride roughshod over the expressed policy decisions of the other NATO countries. From the beginning there were strict limits on the range of targets which the 19 NATO countries agreed should be "legitimate" targets for bombs and missiles. In particular there was no agreement to allow the bombing of "Phase Three" targets such as power stations and buildings in central Belgrade linked to Milosevic's state machinery. In theory any decision to escalate to this level required a unanimous vote from all 19 NATO members.

But on March 30 Solana together with supreme commander General Wesley Clark and General Naumann told NATO ambassadors that the original phased plan had been discarded - challenging anyone to disagree. Immediately afterwards NATO bombers struck Milosevic's presidential palace, the party HQ and Serbian TV stations.

Robertson has clearly convinced his US sponsors that he is the man to front up similar aggressive behaviour, and not a man troubled by the toll of civilian casualties that result from striking obvious civilian targets.

Nor did he ever give credence to the key delusion of some on the left who went along with the NATO bombing – that the war was being waged to free the people of Kosovo. In every interview Robertson was adamant that Kosovo would not be independent, and that the KLA would be disarmed as soon as the conflict ended.

Now, as a new round of ethnic cleansing begins under the passive gaze of the "peacekeepers", the similarities between the NATO intervention in Kosovo and the 1969 British army intervention in the north of Ireland become even more striking.

As the mayhem continues, Mr Robertson is one of the few to emerge smiling from the rubble. Sounding like a Miss World contestant, Robertson claimed as news of his impending appointment leaked that his objective was to work for "world peace".

But his discreet commitment to the capitalist system and to its most vicious defenders – the US government – means that Robertson is likely to be a figurehead for further imperialist military aggression for years to come.

East Timor goes to polls

The East Timorese are to vote on the issue of independence from Indonesia in a referendum on August 30. The choice they are offered is either independence or autonomy under Indonesian sovereignty.

Supporters of independence for East Timor face several obstacles. Many independence activists remain in exile. Anti-independence militias trained by the Indonesian army are actively intimidating the electorate, while the police turn a blind eye.

If the vote is for independence, it will be at least 3 months before this can be ratified by the Indonesian parliament. This parliament is likely to be dominated by a nationalist party whose leader, Megawati Sukarnoputri, has threatened to override the referendum result if she is elected.

The UN has organised the registration of voters and the referendum ballot, but has indicated that it will pull out after the referendum unless the Indonesian state maintains security.

In other words, the UN is afraid to stay in East Timor for this period, while of course, the majority of East Timorese have no choice.
Peace process crash confuses republicans, unites orange forces

John Mc Anulty.
The "crash" of the Irish peace process saw the unionists assert yet again the demand for unconditional surrender by republicans, and this exposed the fundamental contradictions at the root of the process.

Nationalist workers suddenly saw that the unionists were not a misunderstood culture but a gang of sectarian bigots asserting once again an agenda of domination no different from their traditional programme.

The republican leadership, who have based their whole peace strategy on the belief that British imperialism was now going to play a progressive role in Ireland, saw British PM Blair drive a coach and four through the structure of the peace process to accommodate Unionism.

Republicans who have been told time and again by the leadership that they would be judged by their pledge never to surrender arms, "not a bullet, not an ounce (of explosive)", suddenly heard of a "cessationist" in the republican policy which would lead to a timetable for the total surrender of weapons and an initial handover within days of an executive being formed.

Anthony (see article opposite) explains the problem well. Militants kept their eye on the backwater as the baby -- opposition to Stormont, the unionist veto and the British occupation were all thrown away.

The peace "crash" has united the unionist party, at least temporarily, behind Trimble's leadership in restating, more firmly than ever, a rejection of the deal as it was originally formulated on Good Friday.

Of course, despite the "crash" the peace process marches forward.

Pacification

The peace process will continue because it is central to British strategy in Ireland. What is new is that it will now be more clearly seen for what it is -- a process of pacification -- and the question of resistance will be more clearly posed.

Opponents of the agreement have a window of opportunity if they can physically unite and organise in action around questions of equality and republicism not addressed by process and if they can evolve an alternative political vision for the Irish working class.

Anthony explains how the point for any new mobilisation must be the primacy of politics, in the context of the peace process, democratic methods of political organisation and walking to oppose it and a programme of action counterposed to the surrender that offers a convincing way forward.

The first question that will confront such a movement is the question of defence in the face of the marches and the persistent (and often ignored) terror campaign by loyalists, involving "ethnic cleansing" and murder with the collusion of the state forces.

It has to expose the responsibility of the British and state forces and the unionists.

Instead of building new state institutions we should be tearing them down, calling on nationalist to get out of Stormont and to replace the government between Dublin and the British, asserting the right of communities to determine their own future.

Socialist Democracy believes that to succeed the resistance movement has to go beyond republicanism and support working class demands. The only coherent identity beyond the "two traditions" claptrap is membership of the Irish working class. That identity is not provided by the trade unions or existing political parties.

Both the trade unions and the "left" parties define workers' unity as deferring to loyalism and promoting social partnership with the bosses.

Alongside a movement for the complete defeat of democratic rights, militant should build a revolutionary party of the working class to challenge the influence of loyalism, the attacks of capitalism and the betrayals of the trade union leaderships.

For those who have been with the illusions of militarism the only available weapon to counter the force of imperialism is the potential strength of the Irish working class and the politics of socialism.

"Peace" deal turns back the clock

Bernadette McAliskey

IN 1992 the British government secured a peace agreement in Ireland. Partition created two 'states' - an Irish nationalist Free State within the Dominion and a constituent sub-state within the United Kingdom.

In the event of it not working, the British government retained a fall-safe mechanism for "pulling the plug", and returning authority to London.

After 50 years of systematic human and civil rights abuses, one party rule, pogroms, sporadic armed interventions, an unbroken state of emergency, and the imposition of military rule, the British government finally thought it appropriate to implement the fall-safe mechanism in 1972. The Northern Ireland Parliament at Stormont was abolished in an afternoon.

Unionists demanded that the 'democratic deficit' be remedied, and exercise of power returned to the devolved administration at Stormont. The British government insisted it was their duty to do so, but that the price of devolution was to remedy the 'democratic deficit' which excluded non-unions from sharing in the exercise of such power and authority as the British saw fit to devolve.

The IRA, by way of response, and on that basis, the first position papers on a Northern Ireland settlement were drafted and prepared. Successive British governments have consistently adhered to the 1972 position paper put forward by the government of the day. The 1972-74 positions of the other relevant players were as follows:

The Irish government and the SDLP supported the power-sharing concept, with the creation of North-South bodies to facilitate social and economic interaction. They were supported in this position by the British government.

The unionists rejected the concept, insisting that, in addition to greater and faster powers to the Union, there was a need for power-sharing as a "democratization of Ulster", and an opportunity to develop a fully-fledged power-sharing concept. Any deviation from unionist rule was a concession, in their gift alone.

The 'Official' republican movement and the Communist party supported power-sharing as a way of "democratization of Ulster", and an opportunity to develop an alternative power-sharing concept. The small anti-imperialist 'left' group supported power-sharing as a way of reducing the interest of both Catholic and Protestant workers in the power-sharing deal. The small anti-imperialist 'left' group supported power-sharing as a way of reducing the interest of both Catholic and Protestant workers in the power-sharing deal. The small anti-imperialist 'left' group supported power-sharing as a way of reducing the interest of both Catholic and Protestant workers in the power-sharing deal.

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Another victory for Unionism

Anthony McIntyre

The joke doing the rounds among republican cynics while the Sinn Fein leadership was involved in the latest bout of sniping up Stornoway was "What time do you think they will call it off?"

It was nothing more than a criticism as the vast majority of republicans firmly support the republican leadership. But such facetious barbs have emerged in an atmosphere of unease and hesitancy. And the feeling on the ground in west Belfast on Friday was no longer one of outright confidence that that leadership integrity would not disappear in the vortex of decommissioning.

If the proposals announced by Blair and Ahern are carried, unionism will have achieved a major victory. Not only will republicans be consigned to administrative British rule for the foreseeable future, the acceptance by them of the principle of decommissioning has served to legitimise and criminalise the previous republican resistance to that rule.

It also elevates to a higher moral plane the British state weaponry. Basically, republicans are being told that the weapons used by Francis Hughes, the deceased hunger striker, to kill a member of the British SAS death squad are con-

minated in a manner which the weapons used to slaughter the innocent of Bloody Sunday and the victims of shoot-to-kill are not.

Sinn Fein played it that of 'never, but will' by encouraging unionism to hold out for a better deal. Many positions previously held have been abandoned in spite of 'never, never, never, ad infinitum'.

Unionists learned the only never is "never listen to what the Sinn Fein leadership says it will never do". And this helped sustain it throughout the recent months of ping-pong pressure as each side in the dispute was probed for some sign of weakness.

Why should unionists blink first when experience shows that Sinn Fein always do? Now we are beginning to see what the Good Friday agreement really meant. Despite repeated promises of no decommissioning, Sinn Fein now accepts that decommissioning as part of the agreement is valid.

Republican activists were not told this at the time when they were asked to support the Sinn Fein leadership endorsement of that agreement. People who ventured the opinion that the process might lead to decommissioning were utterly dismissed and ridiculed.

David's insecurity

Tommy McKeown

IT IS indeed a sign of an insecure man when he uses both a belt and a pair of braces to keep his trousers up. But if this is so, it looks a fair bet that First Minister Trimble is now also fastening a safety pin through his shirt tail and pants for good measure.

Apart from chronic insecurities, there seems to be no other explanation why he continues to refuse the prize that is currently on offer to him. The Good Friday Agreement has not only guaranteed fundamental unionist tenets. It has also gained for them the endorsement of an All-Ireland referendum, presidential approval in London and Dublin and a super-majority of the main nationalist parties in Northern Ireland.

Unionists have been resoundingly successful in having the constitutional issue settled to their satisfaction. So much so that Tony Blair was moved recently to express his amazement at the thrust to the union is hardly mentioned any longer.

The reality is that all parties in favour of the Agreement accept that the Northern Irish status quo can no longer be maintained unless there is a majority in the area vote otherwise. That this arrangement was endorsed by the electorate in the referendum who take office in Stornoway. Accepting administrative positions of state allows government to function. In contrast, the iron law of revolution is to destroy the state apparatus.

Even the malign cross-border institutions should be reassuring to the thinking unionist. A frontier can hardly be threatened by something designed to function because of its existence. After all, that strategy of 'never, but will' genuinely encour-aged unionism to hold out for a better deal. Many positions previously held have been abandoned in spite of 'never, never, never, ad infinitum'.

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In a bid to shield the reality from the grass-roots, the daily statements of the past 2 years was manufactured by a leading mem-

ber of Sinn Fein, who informed his audience that, while not treasonous, it remained possible to view the Good Friday agreement as a transition to a transition.

Which, by logical extension, meant that the week before Good Friday constituted a transition to a transition to a transition. Perhaps now the audience will be told that last week's outcome, while a transition away from a transition to a transition, is still endowed with transitory potential nonetheless.

One would imagine that this sort of nonsense could only have a limited shelf life. It has been carried on for the week. Like the pickpocket who tells his victim while he robs him "your personal security is brilliant", Sinn Fein told the republican grassroots they were the most politicised people in western Europe while republicanism was stripped away in front of their very eyes.

In this sense, the decommissioning issue actually assisted Sinn Fein. The people were told if they could not follow the complexities and intricacies nor persecute the underemployed youth into the no-go areas, then watch the ball of decommissioning. Trust the process became reduced to that one issue.

Therein now lies the problem for Sinn Fein. Having thrown the baby out it now needs to get rid of the bathwater. But in the process of decertifying its base, it has depicted the bathwater as the baby. And the base is reluctant to let it go.

The unionists may yet snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. It would be nice if they did.

But ultimately a partitionist administration is their baby. And the likelihood remains that in the future this paper will be reviewing the book by a Sinn Fein cabinet minister My fight for a reformed Stornoway.
Marching in a time-warp

John North

Thirty years on from the Civil rights movement in the North of Ireland, one might be forgiven for a sense of deja vu all over again at the sight of the RUC baton-wielding demonstrators on the Ormeau road. The bizarre sense of life in a time warp is compounded when the demonstrators are arrested in dawn raids and charged with demanding civil rights on a public highway and sitting obstructively in a public place.

And these are actions by the same force that watched Robert Hamill beaten to death before their eyes in the centre of Portadown, and who have been willing to turn a blind eye to countless sectarian assaults by the orange mob during the demonstrations at the Great Northern and at the Harryville church in Ballymena. The Ormeau Road demonstrators were beaten when they protested the decision by the parades commission to allow a sectarian parade by the Apprentice Boys to proceed through the area.

This followed a declaration by the commission of a policy of "you talk, you walk."...

Scotland's grim legacy of bigotry and sectarianism

EVEN BEFORE composer James MacMillan made his well publicised attack on Catholic bigotry in Scotland the issue had had some media exposure south of the border. In particular controversy over the behaviour of several prominent Rangers supporters had aroused discussion on the topic.

CAMPBELL MCGRREGOR reports:

OPPONITION to the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland is a long history, with the first recorded instance back to 1568. The Church of Scotland has had a long history of divisions between the various denominations, with the Church of England having had a long history of divisions between the various denominations.

However, in the past 200 years the issue has been dominated by the large immigration of Irish Catholics into the industrial towns of the central belt, although some groups of Irish Catholics have been immigrants from Lithuania and the Catholic enclaves in the Highlands.

Some Northern Irish Protestants have also migrated to Scotland, bringing with them the traditions and attitudes of that community. A significant role was played by shipyard workers from the immediate pre-WWII period. The issue of Catholicism in Scotland is a long history, with the first recorded instance back to 1568. The Church of Scotland has had a long history of divisions between the various denominations, with the Church of England having had a long history of divisions between the various denominations.

Racial abuse

Particularly controversial is the song "Billy Boys" which includes the line "We're up to our knees in the eighties blood, surrender or you'll die" ("Fenian" is used as a term of racial abuse for a Catholic). Anti-Catholic bigotry has been promoted not only through the Orange Order itself but through Protestant publications such as the Protests and Exposures newspaper, especially Rangers FC.

Although always seen as a Protestant team, Rangers did not have a rigid ban on Catholic players until WWI, and it has recently come to light that they played two Catholics by mistake in the 1950s. During the seventies some supporters who tried to get onto the board of directors were blocked because they had been involved in Catholicism, even though she had been dead for 20 years.

Players who married Catholics were squeezed out, and everyone knew that their occasional claim that Rangers did not have a ban on Catholics was a bare faced lie. One possible apocalyptic story is that Tommy Docherty, the leading Celtic and Scotland player, was not signed by Rangers because he had what sounded like a Catholic name, even though he was really a Protestant who had supported Rangers as a boy.

Credit certainly goes to current manager Graham Souness for ending this ban, but he could not change the whole ethos of the club single-handed.

What surprised some people about Donald Findlay's recent episode was not that anti-Catholic songs were sung, but that this was done by not a few mindless bigots who did not know any better, but by an educated man, one of Scotland's leading lawyers.

MacMillan has done his part to give support by bringing this discussion into the open - hopefully discussion will lead to better ideas as to how to challenge this legacy of sectarianism.

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Still waiting for change

Still waiting for change
Socialist Outlook

Some questions of policy

I greatly enjoyed reading your paper, although I have a few criticisms and questions about your analyses and positions:

The Headline

"Three Wheels on his Wagon" juxtaposed with a photo of Blair playing the bongos could be perceived by some as having racist overtones. I know that this was definitely not intended. I've found that socialists have to be extremely careful about humour - it is easily taken the wrong way. A simple, apologetic headline would make your paper easier to sell on demos etc. (I know you are running out of print run figures, but I'm sure your deadlines week after week are easier said than done!)

Attitude to former workers' parties

Articles in your paper seemed to be wrote in different directions - praise for the Scottish Socialist Party and for the Loyalist victory in the Euro election, as well as acclaims for the left success in Labour NEC elections. Which way do you see socialists going forward in the next decade - building inside the Labour Party or building an alternative to it? Surely at some point soon you will need to choose.

France

What do you think of the CWI suggestions that the LFT/LCR should unite to form a new Workers' Party (with full rights of factions) now that they have demonstrated the existence of a political and electoral base for the marxist left? Full congratulations are due, by the way, to Alain Krivine and the other Trotskyists elected as MEPs - I hope that their success will be built on and not dismantled.

National Question/Balkan War

Socialist Action correctly identified NATO's aims in this war as imperialist.

Socialist Outlook correctly defended the rights of Kosovar Albanians to self-determination.

With one group calling for critical support for "Yugoslavia" and another calling for the annihilation of the KLA, a very serious problem emerges for the 4th Internationale.

Had there been sections of these groups in Kosovo and Serbia then socialists loyal to the same Internationale could literally have been at war with one another. How has this situation come about, and is it sustainable?

What do you think about the CWI call for non-sectarian workers and peasants' militias to defend all communities from attack by NATO/JNA/KLA etc.? Has the recent massacre of 12 Serbian farmers by the KLA made your organisation reconsider its position on this bourgeois nationalist group?

I think that is enough questions for one letter!

As you may have guessed, I support the CWI, Socialist Party's positions on the issues I have mentioned - but I think it is a lesson of Trotsky's life and death that socialists always be willing to give and accept criticism and to think independently at times when there is time to do so.

In this spirit I look forward to reading your answers to my questions, and no doubt, to your criticisms of the CWI!

Max Neill

Write to me on any topic at PO Box 1109 London N4 2UU

Befriending Blair and his political project - not bongos, bongo-playing, or bongo-players of any colour or description.

We assume Max's reference to "Socialist Action" is to the ramp right wing organisation of that name in Britain. They long ago severed their former links with the Fourth International.

For more answers to the remaining questions, keep reading Socialist Outlook!

No easy escape from hard Labour

I WRITE this letter following the excellent meeting with Alain Krivine in London, and the relaunch of the Socialist Alliance, in which Socialist Outlook participated.

We are not against the idea of a socialist alliance in that I am for free discussion and debate on the left as well as co-operation in action. I am not for making a fetish about electoral alliances which are supposed to "challenge Labour".

In this country class struggle is at a low ebb. This is inevitably reflected in the Labour Party, which is as right wing as it has ever been. Blair's project is in essence an attempt to fuse the party with the Liberals, in effect to change a bourgeois workers' party into an out and out bourgeois party.

To leave Labour now or try and stay in whilst standing candidates against Labour, is aiding Blair in this task, and the latter gives him a chance to cleanse the Party of the entire active left. If he succeeded in this, it would set back the British working class 100 years. Meanwhile, all these ideas of "left parties" are futile anyway. This is party due to the securitarianism of the SLP and the SWP, and also due to the disintegration of the Socialist Party.

However, the main reasons are that the majority of workers still look to Labour as their party, and secondly that the Labour left (as Pete Firmin pointed out in July's paper) is still a major force. Indeed, the £5,000 or so votes for Liz Davies means that the Labour left is still bigger than the combined membership of the entire left.

The only successful electoral challenge to Labour throughout Britain would have to include at least the Labour left and probably some of the "centre" also. It would also have to have a real base in the trade unions. However, socialists shouldn't at this stage encourage a split, as if the Left was split it should be on the basis of an upsurge in the class struggle and a radicalisation of the masses, not during a historically low point. Even then it should be over an issue important to the working class. Comrades shouldn't forget Trotsky's criticisms of the ILP in the 1930s, when he called a party of 100,000 with firm roots in the working class a "sect" because they refused to orientate towards Labour.

Will Matthews (Cambridgeshire)

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West Herts campaign halts massive bed cuts

Campaighners fighting to defend Watford General and Hemel Hempstead Hospitals have notched up a massive victory. Months of protests, lobbying, petitioning and pressure have helped persuade Health Minister John Denham to throw out a health authority plan to replace the two hospitals with a new, much smaller, hospital on a greenfield site financed through the Private Finance Initiative.

Health union UNISON has been actively involved from the outset in broad based and vocal campaigns that have united local communities against the health chiefs' plans, which involved a massive reduction of over a third of the local hospital beds, and meant longer and more difficult journeys for treatment for the majority of people.

Tens of thousands of signatures had been accumulated on petitions, and hundreds of people from a wide range of local bodies have attended rallies and public meetings to defend their hospitals against a determined attack from a health authority seeking not only to rationalise services but also to cut spending in order to balance the books.

The SW Herts Community Health Council also formally objected to the scheme which was the decisive factor in ensuring the plan had to be referred to ministers for decision.

John Denham's rejection of the health authority plan is coupled with a statement that Accident and Emergency services should remain at both hospitals "for the foreseeable future", and an instruction to the HA not to pursue plans for a possible greenfield site.

At a point where the bulldozer of rationalisation and the PFI machine seemed unstoppable, the West Hertfordshire victory should encourage hospital campaigners elsewhere to stand their ground and fight on: if you don't fight, you can't win!

No to PFI! Defend the NHS and public services!
Lobby Labour Party Conference, Bournemouth, Sept 26