Say no Millbank's stitch-up

Stop Tube sell-off: vote for Livingstone!
STOPP: Labour's war on teachers.

Gill Lee, Officer,
Lewisham NUT
(Personal Capacity)

ST OPP, a PACKED conference on Saturday October 9th STOPP (School Teachers Opposed to Performance Pay) was launched. Teachers met to discuss how to oppose the government's "Green Paper", which would damage teamwork, equal opportunities, and damage education. The teaching unions seem set to reach accommodation with the government unless a mass campaign can stop them. The NUT Executive has failed to mount the campaign of publicity and strike action agreed by the union's Annual Conference.

In its evidence to the Review Body the Teachers' Federation said: "Pay must be flexible and pay service needs first. It means challenging outdated assumptions, for example, the idea that 'fair pay' means everybody should get the same increase, or that pay and conditions should be set nationally. The government's proposals are designed to hold down the general level of pay for teachers. Education as a whole will suffer. Teachers who can do so, will increasingly choose to work in schools where targets can be met i.e. schools with a 'better' intake. Schools which have a more working class intake will find it harder to attract teachers whose pay is dependent to 'meet targets' often beyond their control. Not achievable All teachers know that "results" - whether measured by exam results, attendance or any of the other "examplar" measures contained in the government's guidance on the implementation of the green paper - are not achievable by them as individuals. For any one teacher to obtain pay based on performance depends mainly on the intake of the school.

As Nick Davies showed in his recent series of articles for The Guardian, comprehensive education has been completely undermined by Tory educational reforms, continued by Labour, which led to the increasing division of schools by social class. Often criteria mean that schools likely to attain less than average national results (in other words schools with a working class intake), are likely to be labelled as "failing".

While some teachers, despite the huge workload and stress involved, continue to work at schools "under special measures", schools with "internal weaknesses" and schools which have been "fresh started", many others understandably get out and find jobs in schools seen as "easier". By rewarding "successful teachers"'' and CdH Brand's proposals will increasingly divide schools into ones which can attract teachers seen as "successful", while schools in which teachers would find it harder to make ends meet will cease being staffed by newly qualified staff or staff waiting for appointment to "better schools". All this will increase the polarisation of schools and the disadvantage of working class children.

Labour's plans are a major challenge to the pay and conditions of teachers, to the team work that is necessary for teachers to do their jobs; and to the existence of the teachers' unions.

Teachers' pay as a whole will be held back, while only those prepared to submit themselves to the "threshold" appraisal process will gain pay increases.

Given the low level of pay for teachers on the main scale, many teachers will feel they have to apply, despite the quite small increases in pay and the increased workload involved in the new pay scheme. Each of the new performance points will be worth only £800 - £1000, but the government appears willing to throw a lot of money at the scheme in the first year to 'bed it in'. Teachers who go on the fast track programme will be expected to 'make an additional commitment' to the job (attending training in their own time) and 'should be exempted from the working time limits that apply to other classroom teachers'.

This will put pressure on all teachers to work even longer hours each week than the 48 reported in the NUT's own surveys.

The division of the workforce by payment according to results will underline the need for essential for teachers to do their jobs.

Teachers will be more reluctant to take on the difficult pupils and classes, support other colleagues through past or intervention; if they know a colleague is being paid more as a 'good teacher' than they are, pay as well as teachers will lose from this.

The very existence of the teaching unions is also threatened by the green paper. It effectively brings in the individual pay bargaining; strengthens management's ability to decide who merits higher pay (and who is simply a 'disruptive element') - and erodes nationally determined conditions.

ST OPP

c/o Lewisham NUT
Central Town Hall
Lewisham SE1

Support the sacked Skychef workers - don't fly Lufthansa!

Adam Hartman

The 270 sacked Lufthansa Skychef workers at Heathrow Airport are now in the twelfth month of their struggle for reinstatement. The company sacked not only the strikers but also workers who were on leave or sick at the time and who admitted they would have joined the strike if they had been at work. Under new legislation which protects strikers in the first eight weeks of an official strike, the sacking would have been illegal. Having raised expectations that it was willing to settle the dispute on favourable terms, the company then made a derisory offer: a vague possibility of a job at some indeterminate time in the future or a severance payment of £220 for each year of service. Nor surprisingly the workers have rejected this offer. They are now calling for the labour movement to redouble its support for the strike by:

- spreading the boycott of Lufthansa Airlines and using airlines which don't contract their catering to Lufthansa Skycheifs
- supporting the 24 hour picket line (Veggie Road just off the A30 near Hatton Cross tube station)
- making donations to help sustain the strike (cheques payable to the T & G with "Skychef" written on the reverse and sent to T & G Regional Office, "Woodberry", 218 Green Lanes, London N4 2HB). Contact this address for campaign materials.

- writing protests to Lufthansa German Airlines, von Gablenz Str 2-6, 50679 Cologne, Germany.

Boycott Pricecheck shops

The TGWU is calling for a boycott of all shops owned by the London-based Pricecheck chain in a crucial battle for trade union recognition. Wages in the chain are extremely low and the workers' terms and conditions of employment are poor.

The workers have joined the TGWU to fight for better pay and conditions but the owner of the firm is refusing recognition and has victimised workers who have tried to build the union.

A successful lunchtime picket of the firm's Kings Cross store on 13th October brought trade in the shop to a standstill.

For the union to win the fight for recognition, it needs your support.
Return of “Mr PFI” and the Prince of Darkness

Packing the cabinet

TONY BLAIR’s once-postponed reshuffle of ministers has further strengthened the hand of the Cabinet’s privatisers and “modernisers.”

While much of the limelight has been hogged by the return of Peter Mandelson—who will step into the shoes of the floundering Mo Mowlam and try to press-gang the public into allowing a new arrangement into an agreement—we should not lose track of the changes in the Department of Health.

Frank Dobson has been dragged kicking and screaming from the job he had always coveted as Health Secretary, and forced to smile and insist he is not Uncle Albert from Only Fools and Horses, and that he really wants to be mayor of London. And his place has been swiftly taken by the upwardly-mobile former Treasury Secretary Alan Milburn.

In opposition Milburn was until about two weeks ago a member of the right-wing faction—called the “blue” faction—and was a great advocate of private provision in the NHS. He claims to have known how to ask the right questions to smoke out the real crisis building in the NHS and the bureaucratic waste of the market system.

But then Milburn changed sides with other New Labour leaders, he switched from attacking to supporting some of the key elements of the Tory policy. The most conspicuous policy-switch was on the “Private Finance Initiative” (PFI), dreamed up by Kenneth Clarke in 1993 as a means to “privatise the provision of public capital for the sector.”

From steadfastly opposing and exposing the costs of the Tory scheme, New Labour turned full circle to pledge in its Manifesto that it would “make PFI work.”

Major concessions to place the private banks, developers and building firms in PFI consortia were among the first legislative changes pushed through with Blair’s massive majority: and the driving force arguing for PFI was Dobson’s number two—health minister Alan Milburn.

Brushing aside warnings from all sides, Milburn rubber-stamped many of the first wave of PFI schemes in the NHS. 19 PFI-funded hospitals valued at £1.5 billion are now under construction.

These projects will privatise more and more essential services, and funnel millions in profits into the coffers of “private” action—and thus rob the NHS of the scarce revenues of NHS Trusts over the next 60 years.

Although Dobson—at first an “old Labour” critic of PFI—was eventually won over to this “blue” way (and now finds it a millstone around his neck in the mayoral race, in the form of tube privatisation) he has never shown the same passion for it as his minister.

But Milburn played a key role in formulising Labour’s wider health reforms. This set out boldly to replace the wasteful chaos of the Tory “internal market” and re-introduce the idea of GP ‘Funding with a new system.

How do I get out of this Mandelson?

However Labour’s plan preserves the “purchaser/provider split”, tightens cash limits, and gives the NHS— who have always refused to be sated—enemies of the NHS—ever-growing power over the future shape of health services through the endorsement of “Primary Care Groups” (PCGs).

He has thus proved his ruthless determination to hold down NHS spending. Milburn was promoted—to Chief Secretary of the Treasury, where he helped Gordon Brown hold down spending across the whole public sector.

It was from this elevated position that Milburn helped fix the NHS share of public spending for the next three years at a level which means New Labour will increase health spending over the five years 1997-2002 at a lower average level than the Tories did.

Now a growing number of PCGs are facing their first cash deficits. Health authorities and Trusts, too, face the prospect of cutbacks to balance the books (33 London Trusts alone face combined deficits of over £500m). And Milburn is riding back in to take charge, insisting that the pace of “modernisation” must be increased.

However beneath the slick, smooth talk of a New Labour zealot, Alan Milburn has shown himself to be less than confident to argue his case in a wider audience.

He famously refused as health minister to defend the government’s policy of planning the nurses’ pay award on broadcast TV when he discovered he would be shown to have been misled by millions arguing against a nurses’ reverse strike.

Exhausted, under-paid and short-handed, front-line NHS staff will be less than impressed by the arrogant way in which “Mr PFI” has so far viewed their plight.

Perhaps health workers will conside themselves lucky at least they have not been allocated Peter Mandelson, whose noted spin doctors skills are not much use on the wards.

His surprisingly warm welcome from the notorious homophobic Unionist establishment appears to be chiefly a function of Milburn not being Mo Mowlam, and the fact that he obviously carries authority from Tony Blair.

The scope for “outwitting” the impasse over the Good Friday agreement, however, seems to have been largely exhausted by a succession of judges by Blair and Mendelson’s ill-starred predecessor.

The future of the SDLP, and the fortunes of Sinn Fein could be charted by the disappear-

ance of her standing ovation from the faithful at Labour conference.

Even if no progress can be made, Blair can argue that he has put his “best man on the job” of playing the parties to the Good Friday agreement, and just hope that something will turn up, or somebody will sell out.

But Mandelson’s rapid rehabilitation is a major statement of intent in terms of the whole cabinet.

The dwindling remnants of “old” Labour have now almost all been shunted into the siddles of government or dumped altogether, and the decks have been cleared for the dominance of eager advocates of public-private partnership—“modernisation” and the so-called “Third Way.”

Some of these—like the new Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon, have risen without track having shown little more than their total subservience to Blair. At a time when the Paddington disaster has helped focus public opposition to privatisation in public services, this reshuffle could prove a belated step on the road to the end of the bizarre love-affair between Blair and the British electorate.

As High Court judges block guards’ strike

RMT must fight for rail safety!

In a move with far reaching implications for the privatised rail industry the courts have blocked the National Union ofLocomotive Engineers strike called by the RMT.

This was accepted the argument from trains operating companies (TOCs) that any dispute should have to be arbitrated by Railtrack, as the controllers of the Railway safety “Rule Book,” and not with the TOCs, who are bound by the law to implement whatever Railtrack tells them.

While they are appealing the decision, the RMT Executive has agreed to call off the strike.

Despite the protestations of the TOCs that they are merely caught in the middle, the reality is utterly different. The TOCs want to get rid of guards altogether.

In the face of train ticket collectors and buffet managers, “customer care” workers on the trains, who as drivers have a safety role in a dire emergency.

The current guards’ general safety role will fall on the already overwhelmed shoulders of the drivers. To facilitate this change the TOCs met with Railtrack and demanded a Rule change. Railtrack obliged.

While all the rail companies are clearly acting in concert, any attempt by the RMT to defend its members is deemed to be “secondary” and thus a breach of the Tory anti-union laws.

If the RMT leadership fails to fight on this issue, no job on the railways will be safe.

While this issue arose two years ago a fortnight campaign among the RMT membership saw Railtrack forced to back down. But this time round the RMT leadership has been reluctant to defend its members. Only after a strong rank and file campaign amongst train crew was the proposed Rule change taken seriously.

It became clear that industrial action would again have to be on the agenda but little was done to mobilise the membership. Instead the faintest of offers from Railtrack was hailed as a “victory” and ballots were abandoned.

Once again it took a rank and file revolt to convince the RMT leadership they had to act. Ballots were again called, but lit- tle was done to make up the lost ground in order to prepare the membership for any dispute. Despite this Guards voted overwhelmingly for action in most companies.

In the aftermath of Paddington you would have thought the argument for maintaining safety standards was quite clear. But such has been the weakening of the RMT leadership that even this message has been lost.

So now we face a situation where rail workers face job losses and attacks on safety, where the TOCs are claiming to be defending the safety Rules against a union demarcation dispute.

The RMT must now act decisively to regain the momentum. In the light of Paddington Southall and other similar incidents it is no longer enough to be just trying to hold back the TOCs threats, we should be campaigning for the re-introduction of guards on all trains.

As a first step to mobilising the membership the RMT should immediately hold a recall conference of train crew.

There union members could formulate a agenda for change—demands to improve the security of the railways whilst protecting the jobs and conditions of guards and drivers.

On that basis the RMT can enter into a real dialogue with the public on how to best provide a safe railway—through public ownership and control.

The union should be prepared to challenge the anti-union laws if that is what it takes to defend its members. But even if the RMT leadership are not prepared to challenge the law directly then at least they give the chance to provoke a clash with the TOCs on a proper basis.

Time and again over the last few years it has become clear that the RMT has dodged the issues and dodged out of a fight to protect train crew jobs and safety. We have seen the result—worse conditions and a steady loss of jobs. This time round the RMT must respond!
All eyes on Ken as Blair’s gang tightens grip

The man Blair wants to stop... send delegates to local general management committees of the Labour Party. This is what the left has long referred to as the “open valve” between the party and the unions.

Under the rubric of 21st Century Party, this along with local democracy is to be severely neutered. Local committees are to meet no more than once every three months, and their decision-making powers severely limited.

The meetings will cease to be delegated based, and instead will be open to all members, thereby eroding any semblance of democracy in the LP.

The stated motivation for this is clear: the co-option document states: “Our primary duty as a party is to ensure that we stand candidates and that for as long as we do so, every member has the opportunity to vote Labour”. No comment on whether those candidates will still do when they are elected, as the Blair steamroller continues to remake the party as an electoral machine.

This is probably the biggest single “reform” which Blair will have carried out since he started to transform the Labour Party, certainly far more radical than the 1997 reshuffle of the top, middle and rank and file members is concerned.

And potentially there could be significant opposition to it. Unfortunately there is no clear indication of how this will affect the country, because on the basis of consultation on the changes, the NEC will have already implemented its own proposed reforms.

In the run up to June 2000 the consultation will primarily take the form of seeking completed questionnaires from individual party members. This will then be reported to the July NEC who may well then propose rule changes commensurate with this. By the time the proposals get to next year’s conference, delegates will be presented with an effective fait accompli.

Blair’s end-game is to reshape the Labour Party into the first party of the British bourgeoisie. But he has another objective as well. That is to ensure that when the long domino is turned over and the level of direct struggle ends in Britain, any new radicalisation which emerges will not easily translate into mass opposition inside the party.

To begin to reverse this, the left needs a victory. There is a lot riding on the Livingstone challenge and the support it has amongst the electorate in London.

Hague’s revolting Tories

Under the bizarre slogan of the “Common Sense Revolution”, William Hague’s flogging of Tory Party lurched even further to the right at Blackpool. Amongst Hague’s five key pledges was a promise to remove all schools from local authority control, to replace national pay and conditions agreements for teachers, and to get on with the privatisation complete power to set their own admissions policy.

NHS patients were promised that if they were not treated by an agreed nationalised date, the health authority would have to pay to send them elsewhere, possibly the private sector. No estimate was given on what this might cost.

While the ageing Tory faithful may see in this and other rolling back of the welfare state, the Conservative Party, arguably the most conservative of the Conservatives’ traditional big business supporters will be green with envy as their Tory Party which has set its face so firmly against the Euro and appears to be flitting with the idea of leaving the EU.

Top Tories facing the plot in Blackpool: the plot in pursuit of the reactionary

Since then Blair has formed a new, and unprecedented, campaigning alliance with Clarke and Heseltine, and with the new leader of the Liberal Democrats in favour of the EU. The alliance is in favour of entry into the single currency “when the time is right” – which in reality is when they judge they can win a referendum on it.

Former Tory Prime Minister Edward Heath, Heinz and Clarke appeared on a high profile platform with Blair, Brown and Cook to say how much they agreed with Tony on all things European - a key success for the Prime Minister in his quest to reshape British politics still further.

It is clear that the political gap between these “one nation” Tories and Blair is minuscule compared with the gulf which exists between them and the Tory leadership. The formation of this alliance has severely exacerbated the deep divide inside the Tory Party which is now verging on a formal split.

The depth of these divisions came out clearly enough at the Tory Party conference, which again moved the Party move sharply to the right. Xenophobia ruled the day, as the main themes were to defend fox hunting, defend the pound, and, when Margaret Thatcher arrived, to defend Chilean dictator Pinochet.

Thatcher was treated to a heroine’s welcome and cheered to the rafters when she told a fringe meeting that all bad things came from Europe and all good things came from the English-speaking nations. Norman Tebbit was able to get up at the conference and say that he felt more at home in the party today than for a very long time.

In reality the Tory Party is being torn apart both by the success of Blairism in colonising the middle ground of British politics, and by its own long-standing divisions over Europe. The result is that the one nation Tories no longer find the Tory Party habitable and feel much closer to Blair and New Labour. What Blair says today about the EU is what they have been saying about it for years.

Blair followed the Labour Party conference with a Cabinet reshuffle which ranked amongst his most significant moves yet. Nothing could have shown his confidence in the direction to bring Mandelson back after only 10 months out of the government and make him a minister. At the same time he cleaned out most of the surviving remnants of Old Labour in the party (such as they were) and established a team modelled almost entirely in his own image. He feels no need to compromise with anyone – and he doesn’t. There have only been the most muted protests at his actions from within the Labour Party, and even the media have strongly approved of his changes, including his resurrection of Mandelson.

And the situation inside the Labour Party is set to get worse for the left, unless a breakthrough can be made with the Livingstone challenge or in fighting the possible deselection of left MPs.

There is reportedly a “hit-list” of key members of the Campaign Group which the Blairites intend to target for removal in the reconciliation process which has just completed its first stage at local level. While it seems so far that all local constituencies have reselected their sitting MPs – including members of the Campaign Group, this is not the final hurdle. They then have to be endorsed by the National Executive.

Since the Executive’s decision will be based on political criteria (i.e. loyalty to the Blairite project) the expectation is that some of them, most likely the key players in the Campaign Group, will be deselected. What the replacement will be from either deselected MPs or their supporters remains to be tested out. There is still a significant and active left in the Labour Party but it is greatly weakened and much of it passive.

And it will not end there. Next year the party is to be reorganised as constituency level, which is the level where the left has traditionally been at its strongest and the level at which the link with the unions has been closest. Local trade unions have had the right to
Defy the fixers - left must back Livingston

Alan Thornett

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en Livingston’s bid to become mayor of London is the best opportunity in years against Blairism since Blair took the leadership of the Labour party back in 1994. The Left must fully support this.

Livingston’s campaign has been transformed by several opinion polls which show that he has massive support amongst Londoneers. An Evening Standard poll on October 15 showed that if Livingstone were the Labour candidate he would trounce Tony Blair, with Lord Archer with 63% of all voters - including 23% of Tory voters.

It also showed that he has the support of 50% of Labour voters in the race and significantly 48% of Tory voters. Dobson could muster only 17% with 16% supporting Glenda Jackson and the PCC, £.

Even more significantly it showed that Livingstone would also win easily against all others if he stood as an independent.

Livingston would get 49% of the vote as against 25% for Archer and 23% for Dobson.

A Mail on Sunday poll showed similar results - except that Dobson fell below 20% in contest with Archer who had fallen. Of course this poll was taken after the new Electoral College had been announced.

The Millbank dirty tricks department has been working overtime but it was seriously weakened by the Mail on Sunday results. Only a couple of days before they had announced their ‘answer’ to the Livingstone problem in the form of an electoral college designed to give Dobson a clear win.

It has three sections each having one third of the vote: one for London MPs, one for London EPs and one for the Welsh and Scottish assemblies, and the Millbank selected candidates for the London Assembly - a total of just 13 people.

This did indeed give Dobson a big advantage. He would be assured of at least 75% of MPs plus a quarter of the EPs. Millbank also recommended that unions cast their votes as a bloc vote for Blair’s man Alan Michael as leader of the Welsh assembly and had shamed into backing the Blairite MSP in the national machinery to be able to turn over this.

Even the GMB, which controversially cast its bloc vote for Blair’s man Alan Michael as leader of the Welsh assembly has been shamed into backing the Blairites in London - though without a recommendation.

In UNISON, the London Politi
cal Committee has recommended support for Livingstone, but it is unclear at time of writing whether the Blairites in the national machinery will be able to overturn this.

Other affiliated unions including TSSA, RMT, ASLEF, UCATT, the Bakers and the CWU have yet to decide. In the CWU it seems likely that the key debate will be whether the vote is in split. The AEEU - whose leader Ken Livingstone has stri

ently would give

dobson an unfair advantage. UNI

Son has already taken a decision to this effect, and will cast a block vote whichever way it goes, although this cannot be defended ional.

As the end of all this a Dobson win is still the most likely outcome, but it is a close-run thing and more of a gamble than was envisaged when Millbank introduced the system.

Other things have gone wrong as well. Trevor Phillips dutifully withdraw from the contest to become Dobson’s running mate, but Glenda Jackson has not been prepared to do the same.

In fact she has denounced Mill

bank for twisting her arm over it. This failure to reduce it to a two horse race means that there will be a split in the Blairite vote. Even if it is only a small split this is an added problem in a close-run contest.

Millbank, therefore, have a big decision to make. Will they take the gamble of defeating Livingstone in the rigged Electoral College - or will they back Livingstone calls the ‘gravy knoll option’ and disqualified in the selection procedure?

The odds may be against this. But they have clearly kept their options open, since the selection panel does not have to announce their short list until November 16. And any

His Master’s Voice: the control may be hand’s-free, but Dobson is clearly Millbank’s chosen man

One thing is certain, to black people, to lesbians and gay men and to disabled people.

And the great divide in this election is the issue of privatisation, particularly following the Paddington rail disaster. Livingstone’s stand against the privatisation of the tube is the basis of much of his support and he has made clear that he intends to make this the central piece of his battle with Dobson.

Unfortunately the left is divided on the issue. The SWP are support-

Livingstone and even the CPGB are doing so.

But the Socialist Party equivo-

cated at their Socialist 99 event and the current edition of the Socialist reports events without taking a position. The AWL have yet to make their position public, but the level of hostility they have dis-

played to Livingstone in the past would make their support unlikely.

Arthur Scargill’s Socialist Labour Party never support anyone other than themselves as a point of principle.

Yet to fail to support Livingstone under today’s conditions would be a big mistake. His challenge is a big opportunity for the left and if it is defeated it will be a defeat for the left.

These divisions (if they continue) could affect the role the London Socialist alliance could play in these events.

Should Livingstone be allowed to stand for the nomination and win it, the left will need to stand a left slate for the Assembly, which will support Livingstone in mayor.

Otherwise Livingstone could be trapped in the same Labour group in the Assembly. If he stand as an independent he may well pro-

duce another slate for the Assembly which the left can unite behind.

If on the other hand he is excluded in the selection procedure or beaten by Dobson in the elec-

toral college and does not stand as an independent then an alternative left candidate for mayor will be needed.
Civil service union chiefs seek ‘partnership’ with New Labour wrecker

Darren Williams, PCS Group Assistant Secretary, Office for National Statistics (personal capacity)

The whole public sector has been in a state of siege for the last two years. The very idea of ‘public service’ has been a target for privatisation, with most of the public sector driven forward by the Thatcher and Major governments, which denied that there was any ‘sphere of life’ which could not be best served by private enterprises obeying the ‘laws’ of the market.

The effects of this ideology are best known in the context of the National Health Service and the education system. But the civil service has not escaped unscathed.

Until the mid-1990s, privatisation of central government services was virtually unknown. Even then, only a few smaller departments, like the Prison Service, the Agency and Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, were sold off in their entirety. This was, however, only a matter of time and cost-reduction.

Throughout the civil service, the ideology and management techniques of private enterprise were introduced. Highly centralised structures were broken up into ever-smaller units, and potentially profitable services could be hived off to private companies. This was initially done through market testing, specific services within departments being put out to tender on a five-year basis.

The new contracts were accompanied by the ending of national collective bargaining on pay and conditions, with each department or sector given responsibility for its own arrangements.

This was a classic ‘dividend and rule’ tactic: it ensured an increase in pay in line with prices in pay and conditions between departments, with staff in nationalised departments being left with little or no muscle and therefore losing out. It made it almost impossible to organise legal industrial action across the whole civil service – in fact, the last time this happened was a one-day strike against market testing on 5 November 1999.

Even market testing’s dismal failure to save money did not dissuade the Tories from pursuing their attack on the civil service, albeit in a slightly modified form. The 1994 government White Paper ‘Paperwork and Change’ spelt out a range of options – ranging from outright privatisation to restructuring – that each department had to consider in order to become ‘efficient’ as possible.

The meaning of ‘efficiency’ was spelt out: the government was threatened with the loss of 32,000 jobs since January 1993 alone, and declared the need to save at least £60,000 more over the next four years. This drive to meet this target proceeded at breakneck speed – both before and after the change of government on 2 May 1997.

New Labour’s policies for the civil service are rooted in the same ideology as those of the Tories. This was shown by the government’s attempt to privatise the Royal Mint (which it has now reluctantly abandoned) – despite the fact that the Mint was designated a ‘museum’ in 1976. It is also evident in the public sector.

It is clearly clear to anyone reading the Cabinet Office document, Better Quality Services, a handbook “on achieving the government’s objectives through competition involving the private sector.”

To the foreword, Public Service Minister, David Clark, states: “What matters in the city...

ment security for members” – is “the need to develop partnership working across the Civil Service.”

A clearer idea of what the bureaucracy means by “partnership” can be gleaned from the July 1999 consultation document, Industrial Partnership: “The broad context of part- nership”, it says, is important, although there are areas of disagreement between union and employers’ sides, the two have shared much work.

The document pays lip-service to the fact that the interests of management and unions are not identical, but draws no meaningful conclusions from this.

A revealing paragraph states: “Clearly a key part of the union’s agenda at departmental/agency level is to minimise outsourcing and ensure stability.”

One of the attractions of the partnership approach is that, if it succeeds in merging together the management and unions agendas, the need for – and hence the drive for – outsourcing could be substantially reduced.”

Translation: “if union reps collaborate with management in ensuring implementation of ‘efficiency savings’ (whatever the impact in jobs, staffing levels, etc.), then the slightly more drastic alternative of privatisation might possibly be avoided”.

Nowhere in the document is there any mention of an alternative approach, even as a fallback, if management should spur the union’s advances. Campaigning, mobilising members, and of course, industrial action, are taboo subjects in the new, modernised union that is PCS.

PCS members’ reaction to this misleadership of has increasingly taken the form of a fight-back, cynicism and abstention from the union’s internal processes. As New Labour continues to break-up and commercialise of the civil service, the need for a change of leadership has never been greater.

But the left is currently in no shape to rise to this challenge. Faces with ever-greater attacks from the government, employers and its ‘own’ side, the Socialist Party-led Left Unity organisation has retreated further into electoralism, pinning all its hopes on winning control of the National Executive Com-

Support for its slate is essential, but is unlikely to be anything but a band-aid to the party. Meanwhile, the Socialist Caulcus, whose politics are more grassroots-oriented, has also declined in numbers and retreated into inactivity, outside the departments where it is strongest (the Employment Service and the Benefits Agency).

Ironically, it is mirroring Left Unity’s own electoral approach of putting all its eggs into one electoral challenge to the Left Unity contending Employment Service Group Executive Com-

The GEC has failed to oppose initiatives like National Traineeships, but an electoral challenge will be meaningless unless it is combined with a coherent approach to organisation and building the left in order to make a real challenge to the bureaucracy across the whole union.

The Socialist Caucus needs urgently to initiate a broad regroupment with other healthy sections of the left, to start this process.”
Why we must renationalise the railways

GREG TUCKER, driver and RMT activist who stood against Jimmy Knapp as General Secretary of the union looks at the issues raised by the Paddington rail crash.

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umted by privatisation is a situation that infuriates most
rail workers.

The answer was always blindly

obviously. For us the question is not 'Can anything improve
Labour accept that our demands for re-nationalisation were based
on real fears for the rail service, not on some dominoic conser-
vation?'

It is not just that the Tories chose the most dangerously com-
plex way possible to privatised the railways.
The over one hundred companies all now involved in the
rail network share one common

goal - to make a profit from the labour of rail workers. To do
so they are all involved in com-

promising safety.

Before the general election Labour was quite happy to recog

nise this.

For the last two years New
Labour has conspired with the "New Royal" to try to hide this
simple truth.
The reality of Prescott and Blair's "Rail Sum-
mits" has been that behind the tough

words for public consumption the rail companies have been

appeased.
The Paddington disaster raises every aspect of the effects of pri-

vatisation and the role of the under-
trained drivers, trains with forty

year old safety systems, track

capacity over-stretched, track lay-

out safety deliberately under-

played and signals left obscured.

A catalogue of failings, each a
direct result of the rail sell-off, to

leading to massive systems fail-

ures.

Drivers, after training short-

ened by their new private employer, find themselves work-

ling longer shifts, with worse con-
ditions. Under pressure to ensure

they catch their trains on time lost

ing the station.

With more practical experience
they might be more con-

fident in resisting the danger-

ous demands.

Trains should be fitted with

more advanced safety protection.

They aren't because the money to
do so was given to lawyers prepa-

ring for privatisation instead.

Diesel fuel, which can cause fatal

conflagration would not be neces-

sary if our railways were fully elec-

trified - as are most lines leaving
London.

This is what happened at

Paddington - and it is a tale that

most rail activists will recognise.

The every area there are hazards

that seem never to be dealt with.

Difficult signals reported time

after time and again. Once an emer-

gency speed restriction imposed

over five years ago to deal with land subsidence that is

only now being repaired. Radio

communications dead spots never

clear up.

Train crew are painfully aware that Railtrack has refused to

invest the necessary resources.
The incidence of signal failures,

poles failures, broken rails, track

circuit failures and the like are

clearly on the increase.

The HSE was publicly forced to intervene

after repeated problems with the

Severn Tunnel, but with less of a

fanfare passengers see the result in

delayed trains as speed restric-

tions crop up all over the country.

There were some initialvara

problems facing the drivers at

Paddington.

The track capacity had been

over-stretched.

Too many trains competing to go in and out of the station.
The solution, increase the line speed.

more trains in. This leaves less
time to react and cre-

ates higher impact speeds.

The track layout was fairly

unique, deliberately designed in

a less than safe way to accommo-

date the Heathrow Express. In

a fatal compromise the unsafe
design appears to have been

accepted on the understanding that

Automatic Train Protection

(ATP) would be operating instead.

It wasn't.

The new track design meant sig-

nals were left obscured. Local

union activists had been camp-

aiging for years to get SN109 made

safe. Buck passing between train operating companies and

Railtrack meant no proper solu-

tion was ever implemented.

With the sun shining directly on

the signal, probably giving a

"phantom aspect", the driver

might never have known he had

passed a signal at danger.

A catalogue of small failings,
each a direct result of the rail sell-

off, leading to a massive systems

failure.

Tinkering now with the safety

chain of command will do little to
correct matters.

New Labour plans to continue the

privatisation process with Air

Traffic Control and London

Underground - making all the

same mistakes again. This

cannot be allowed to continue.

The rail system needs to be

brought back into public owner-

ship immediately - and without

compensation.

Cutting corners - and

risking lives - for profit

Tessa Van Gelderen, a

former RMT activist at

Paddington, comments on

issues at the station.

THE CHANGES that have now

been made to the layout of the track at

Paddington speak volumes.

Piloting some lines one-directional,

changing the signalling, and prevent-

ing trains crossing over in the

Paddington area, are major oper-

ations. This is a clear indication that

the originally signalling and track lay-

out brought in for the minimisation

of the Heathrow express was

ruled, and was done without regard to normal safety standards

required of a railway.

But that was par for the
course for a railway system that

was sold off cheap. Very little cost of any improve-

ments will be passed on to the

passengers and taxpayer.

Railtrack last year made £442 mil-

lion profit, but it did manage to

find £1 million for Research and Devel-

opment. Nice enough research and
development obviously to investigate all
those signals passed at danger.

just enough, probably, to work out

that the cost of bringing in Auto-

matic Train Protection (ATP), rec-

ommended from the Hidden Inquiry

of the 1988 Clapham crash, would

be too high a price to save human

lives.

Privatisation of the railways

brought in changes of uniform

and corporate colours for the train com-

panies, but loss of jobs and worsen-

ing conditions for the staff.

Longer hours, fewer breaks and

targets that include trains arriving on

time, all for profit motives.

The Guardian on 7 October 1999

wrote: "Jonathan Bray (from Save

Our Rails) warns for worried consum-

ers increasing trend towards sub-con-

tracting, which had to led mistakes in signal man and other errors in

track maintenance. And on an

operational level, train companies

were more likely to take short cuts

because of the threat of hefty fines

from the Government.

As a guard and a trade union and a

safety rep for the RMT at Padding-

ton in the lead up to privatisation, I

was involved in a number of safety

issues.

When the track was being re-laid,

overhead lines were introduced for

the first time. Simultaneously, Great

Western started to run trains in and

out of Waterloo that involved the

third rail, which also was not present in the Old Western region.

Management refused guards train-

ning "in situ" for the third rail

because the mock-up at either Read-

ing or Waterloo would have to be

hired from another company. Instead

we went down the road of "sub-con-

tracting" and had a quick multi-choice test after-

wards.

Guards are responsible for the

safety of passengers and other on-

train staff. How are they to remain

safe if necessary? In 1982, when I

was trained at a guard, I spent 5
days at a school just dealing with

elbectrics, and practiced using the

circuit breaker that broke the electric

current on the track itself. An

hour lecture now suffices - and this

had the approval of the HSE.

Many of the changes that have

taken place on the rail network have

adverse implications; the second

second driver on high speed trains;

gaining of the guard's on many suburban services; reducing station

staff; longer hours and fewer breaks

for drivers, and so on. It is no coinci-

dence that these measures reduce

staffing levels, the highest cost for

train operating companies.

At the same time, much of the

work carried out by Railtrack is con-

tracted out, and many ex-BR track

workers find themselves on short-

term contracts, with all the implica-

tions that involves.

The unions should not shy away

from the fact that loss of jobs is an

issue. The dispute with the RMT

guards was about safety; it is about

keeping guards in their operational

role on the train.

The union should have gone fur-

ther and should campaign to put a

guard back on every train - not to
collect fares or pour the tea but to
take responsibility for the train and

the safety of the passengers.

Now that the three train operating

companies have won the case in the

courts by claiming that, while the
dispute is over safety, the guards'

bargaining with Railtrack, this will

have wide-reaching consequences.

By law, guards cannot take indus-

trial action against anyone other than

their employer, so Railtrack (or who-

ever will be responsible for safety)

can make the rules without fear of

opposition.

Of course, if they had had any

regard for safety, the train com-

panies would have supported the role

of guards, against the proposals of

Railtrack, rather than taking the RMT

to court. Their actions show how

much they value human life in com-

parison to profits.

Only then can the much needed invest-

ment in rail safety be properly managed.

Railtrack and the operating companies should be

politicely told - "We have let you
tip off millions every day in prof-

its. Your time is up. Just be thank-

ful we are not asking for any of your ill-gotten gains back."

Unlike the first time round

a new British Rail needs to put rail work-

ers in control of the rail-

ways.

One hundred years ago when

rail workers first raised the demand for nationalisation that

was expected that - those with the real experience of

the system should run it in the

public interest.

Instead, fifty years ago when it was

taken into public ownership it was

still run as if it was a capi-

talism concern. Indeed the old

shareholders did better - their

compensation an improvement on their previous dividends.

Drivers know where signals are

badly sighted. Guards know where track needs better mainte-

nance. We all know where the ser-

vice to passengers needs to improve. Instead of listening to

accountants, it is time rail work-

ers' and public views were heard.

Socialist Outlook 7
**SOCIALIST OUTLOOK**

Nominations are under way for the UNISON general secretary elections. Elkie Dee reports.

ROGER BANNISTER is the left candidate backed by a growing list of CFDU supporters in September, needs 25 branch nominations before the end of November to stand - at time of writing, he has 15.

Bannister's platform is for a Fighting General Secretary on a Worker's Wage. The policies of this election are:

- End low pay - the union should be able to offer £15 an hour, not a penny less, with no exemptions
- For a national fight against closure and privatisation in all their forms - against the Private Finance Initiative, public-private partnership deals like the Mersey
- Campaigning to take back the privatised utilities into public ownership
- Solidarity with and support for workers on strike
- End exploitation of anti-union laws, and if necessary, defiance in defence of members' interests
- Financial support to Labour councillors or MPs whose policies attack members' jobs, wages and pensions, and the opening up of the political field so that union can support candidates who defend members' interests
- Support for the right to self-organisation

- Against all forms of discrimination
- End a woman's right to choose
- Defend the right of members employed by branches and regions to choose their own officials
- An end to all victimisation of union activists - lift the branch suspensions in all cases

He will take the average wage of a UNISON member, not the £74,000 a maximum 36-hour-week election of all full time union officials - on a worker's wage.

The campaign is to link the defence of members' interests with the democratic right for union activists and branches to campaign politically.

The campaign will be in opposition to the current witch-hunt within the union, in which a number of branches have been suspended by UNISON.

The left within the union needs to mobilise the anger of activists and members disappointed by the leadership's failure to defend its members' interests against continued attacks from the government and employers, and offer a new way forward.

It is important that the left within the union can build a united campaign this time, both to maximise support for Roger Bannister and to win people to be part of an alternative to the current leadership.

An important issue in this election is the relationship between the union and the Labour government. The current leadership line is one of cooperation and of downplaying conspicuous conflicts of interest between government policy and members' interests, arguing that UNISON must liaise more with the government.

It is true that members who have lost their jobs or had pay cuts are likely to vote for the current leadership. But this is not the same as saying that the labour government must go if we are to have democratic trade unionism. The only way to deal with this situation is to run a campaign that makes the case for the left, showing that the government is wrong on this and elsewhere.

The aim is to set out an end to each

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**UNISON - Campaign for a Fighting, Democratic General Secretary!**

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**Nurses and health workers need a lead from UNISON in fighting cuts and closures.**

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**Haringey workers say enough is enough!**

Elkie Dee

A UNISON branch plans to ballot members on replacing their employer's plans to sack staff in order to re-engage all on new terms and conditions, including reductions in maternity and sick pay, an increase in the working week, and the closure of staff rights to overtime payments.

The employer has made it clear in all negotiations that this mass sacking of over 600 workers is on the way. Union negotiators feel they are being asked to accept contracts that break national conditions with a gun at their heads.

The branch's general secretary argues that they have to make cuts to deal with a financial crisis.

Welcome to the Labour-controlled London Borough of Haringey in north London. The financial crisis is the result of years of mismanagement, including a debt of over £200 million at Alexandra Palace and a name change as a result of deferred purchase agreements.

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**Worse off**

Almost all workers will be worse off due to barely increased wages, as well as other significant reductions in conditions.

The planned cuts will also have an impact on services in Haringey through reduced local services. Many staff will look for jobs elsewhere, and some will be difficult to replace. Morale will plummet.

And of course, many staff live locally and will lose out twice, suffering worse pay and conditions and worse pensions.

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**SSP extends its reach as Scottish Labour declines**

Gordon Morgan

At the recent South by-election, Labour has scrapped in ahead of the SNP with the Scottish Socialist Party third with 9.5% of the vote. The Tories came in fourth and the Lib Dems in fifth, Labour in the Scottish Parliament, came in sixth and lost their deposit.

There are many things about the result: the collapse of the Labour and Lib Dem vote and the growing showing for the SNP.

In June at the Scottish Parliament elections, Labour got 14,096 votes on a 55.9% poll, in the by-election they got 7,172 just over half of their previous showing.

The SNP vote fell only marginally from 6922 to 6616. The Lib Dems fell from 1982 to 634 - a loss of around a third.

The SNP did not stand as first past the post in June, however, they stood in the Euro elections and polled 647 on a 20.9% poll. This time the vote increased to 1,047, nearly three times the European election result - the percentage increased from 6.7% to 9.5%.

The disenchantment with Labour and the Lib Dems was given the poor image they have presented since setting up the Scottish Parliament. It does however, kill off the myth that somehow voters would return to vote for Labour in Westminster elections.

In fact the collapse in Labour's support has been noticeable in all recent elections. Opinion polls have not captured this collapse to vote Labour and increasingly a

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**Plunging vote: Labour's DViewItem willingness to vote for other parties**

While Labour is being shown up for the wreckers of all of its promises, the Lib Vet has collapsed due to their abandonment of principle. They have ditched their election promises, on tuition fees in order to hang on to power in Holyrood.

The SNP by contrast has had very favourable publicity since June. Tommy Sheridan's clench

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**Important in that for the first time the media have reported the SSP as a force beyond Glasgow and introduced SSP spokespeople. The latest press opinion polls would give a second seat for the SSP in the Hamilton region; more seats could be won elsewhere.

The growth of publicity is being accompanied by a growth in the SSP itself. There are now 50 branches with around 2,000 members, and there is a growing sense of problems over the summer as the central apparatus has remained weak and the focus on branch building. Various conferences are planned to help consolidate the gains in the future.

At the June election, the Socialist Labour Party gained more votes than the SSP. As the time it was felt there was no contest - and the SSP gained substantially more votes than the SNP at the Euro elections.

The SSP has sought to have the SNP in Scotland discuss ways to come into the SSP. Unfortunately the SNP has not responded to these approaches and stood in Hamilton - getting 1.1% of the vote.

The refusal to join forces is despite the internal democracy of the SSP, which would allow more crossovers from the SSP to organise around a separate political platform within the SSP if they wished to do so.

There are already a number of currents within the SSP which organise in this way and circulate their own material. It is time to unify and build the Scottish left around the SSP.
Labour offers no justice for asylum seekers

Susan Moore

The Immigration & Asylum Bill has now almost completed its stages through the House of Lords and the government intend to see it receive Royal Assent by Friday. However, the debate in the House of Lords may have upset their plans.

On the one hand the Lords passed government amendments making the Bill even more draconian, but on the other they threw out the immediate introduction of vouchers to require them to replace cash benefits. Government ministers showed their arrogance and ruthless determinations by tabling last minute amendments to the Bill to allow deportation orders to be issued before an asylum claim is determined.

The amendments will allow the Home Office to issue deportatio orders on Asylum Seekers who made claims from July 1993 but have not yet had their cases heard. The amendment was sent back to the House of Lords by 129 votes to 47. John Stewart, for the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaignants, said: “The Home Office seem determined to deport people as fast as they can. This latest amendment indicates they are prepared to trample all over the traditions of ‘natural justice’ in their determination to kick people out of the UK.”

The Bishop of Southwark, Thomas Butler moved an amendment, which he said would delay the introduction of vouchers until the government had fulfilled its promise to spend up the processing of asylum applications. He argued that it would not be right for asylum seekers to be left to suffer for years on a care package designed for only a few months.

Tony and Liberal Democrat peers joined forces to support the amendment, which was carried by 161 votes to 116, a majority of 45 on October 20. This would mean that asylum seekers would be eligible for existing social security benefits until the government clears the backlog of appeals – which currently stands back as far as the early 1990s.

The government’s target is to process appeals in six months. It may well be that these developments in the upper House will stimulate a belated Labour back- bench revolt when the Bill returns to the Commons in the next couple of weeks.

The Home Secretary, Jack Straw, narrowly averted a rebellion before the summer recess by offering so-called “concessions” to the levels of support made to asylum seekers with children.

In the meantime a member of the Coalition for Asylum and Immigration Rights (CAIR) has gone on a week-long hunger strike in protest against the draconian measures in the Bill. Others will join her on rolling 24 hour hunger strikes. The hunger strike will end at a protest outside Downing Street on Wednesday 27th October.

Further details from: Zrinka Bralo 0171 701 5197
CAIR can be contacted at: NGAC 101 Villa Road, Birmingham B21 1 NH
NAAR 26 Commercial St, London E1 6LS 0/c NGAC
E-mail: cair@ngac.demon.co.uk

Insurer statistics of “New Labour’s” racist policy

- Since coming to power New Labour have deported over 70,000 people
- Enforcement figures for the first 6 months 1999 are up 60% on the same period last year
- Although deportations during the first 6 months of 1999, at 2,859, were slightly (400) fewer than the same period last year, the numbers “refused and removed” were up by over 1,000 at 4,310, compared with the same period in 1998.
- Total deportations were also up 1,510, at 17,205, by August 31 this year 42 asylum seekers had been detained over 1 year, and 576 asylum seekers had been detained between 6 and 12 months.
- A total of well over 200 asylum seekers have been held in prisons throughout each of the first six months of 1999.

Ford strikes learn lessons of Lawrence inquiry

Veronica Fagan

The walk-out by workers at Ford Dagenham over racism demonstrate graphically the extent to which the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry has begun to reshape the political landscape.

On October 6 about 13,000 workers staged a strike in protest at systematic racism and walk outs continued for several days on all shifts. These constituted the most significant industrial action ever taken by British workers against racism. There have been token actions before, but nothing on this scale – and nothing in such a key sector.

Workers went on to vote for a ballot for official strike action, the results of which will be known in the next week.

It is not of course that black workers at the plant have only recently started to suffer from racism abuse and harassment. There is a sorry history going back a long time – and one that can only be partly explained by the strength of fascist organisations in the area.

What has changed in the past Macpherson era is not the discrimination – but the confidence to fight. Union leaders had failed to persuade management to hold a joint inquiry into the implications of the Lawrence Inquiry, despite management’s assertion that they are committed to “Zero tolerance” against racism.

Whatever the consequences of negotiations at Ford as Company President Jac Nasser arrives at the Dagenham plant for discussions, the actions of the workers at Ford will certainly merit – and may even – a place in the history books.

Nor is it the only place that the Lawrence inquiry has been taken up by trade unionists. In the Employment Service for example, PCS activists in the Socialist Caucus in London have circulated the report around workplaces and a new black and minority ethnic caucus has been set up.

Demands include an investigation into the low number of black and minority ethnic managers, with such workers stuck lower down the grades for considerably longer than their white colleagues. Returning to Ford, another interesting point is raised. In the current political situation, where industrial action remains at a very low level, it is noteworthy that it is on an issue like the racism that workers feel able to take unofficial action.

While the dead hand of the union leaderships has been able to ensure no action takes place on key questions of wages and conditions, this is harder on issues that the unions have traditionally ignored, such as racism.

Black workers, while their level of unionisation is usually higher than that of white workers, have rarely been incorporated into union structures. This means that when they do move into action they are less likely to be bound by conservatism rules than their white colleagues.

JUSTICE for Ricky Reel! The belated inquest into the killing of Asian teenager Ricky Reel, who died in 1997, begins on November 1. This comes after a long fight by Ricky’s mother Sukhdev (above), family and many supporters for a proper police investigation of what appears to be a racist murder.
When any "accident" could mean catastrophe

Roland Rance

WITHIN DAYS of the recent nuclear accident at Tokaimura in Japan, worried workers at the previously secret Rolls Royce nuclear power plant in Derby contacted CND to warn of the danger of a similar criticality accident there.

The Nuclear Installations Inspectorate inspectors a revelation: earlier this year criticality procedures, particularly emergency and evacuation plans, at the Mildura plant. Roland Rance looks at the issues at stake for all of us.

The Tokaimura incident is yet another example of the inability of a profit-led industry to deliver safe working and environmental practices. For reasons not yet clear, workers brought together more than seven times the permitted quantity of enriched uranium, setting off an uncontrolled chain reaction.

Unbelievably, they were not wearing protective clothing, and carried the uranium in simple buckets. Although radiation levels approached 15,000 times normal, were later recorded two kilometres from the site, warnings were not issued to local residents for several hours.

Directors of JCO, the company which runs the site, accepted formal responsibility, but attempted to pin the blame on the workers, claiming that they had breached safety regulations.

The likelihood is that inadequately-trained workers, operating new systems, and under pressure from managers to improve efficiency and profitability, simply cut corners and ignored - if they ever knew - the safety regulations.

The fact is that it is impossible to claim human error, which has been the cause of most previous nuclear accidents. Green cotton was issued to a fraction of hundreds of such accidents. They explain that at Chernobyl in 1986, technicians were apparently carrying out unauthorised experiments which led to the disaster there. In 1975, technicians seeking the cause of a power failure at Browns Ferry, in Alabama, crawled under the reactor with lighted candles, and set light to the reactor's safety,
Takeover by bankers' favourite generals

Crackdown in Pakistan

Terry Conway
IN PAKISTAN on October 12, the army under the leadership of General Pervez Musharraf took over control of the country. This followed the Muslim League administration of Nawaz Sharif. Sharif was placed under house arrest, along with most of his government, and their bank accounts frozen. Only the President, Waqar Ahmad, escaped this fate.

While many in the west reacted with surprise to the coup, in Pakistan there was less surprise. After all the country has been ruled by Generals for nearly half its short life.

When Nawaz Sharif was elected in April 1997 after the dismissal of Benazir Bhutto of the Pakistan People's Party under suspicion of corruption, he was very popular. Bhutto was fixed £3 million last April after her conviction and remains outside the country.

Though Sharif had been in power before, and was himself under the shadow of corruption, Benazir had become so hated that there was a willingness to give him another opportunity.

His actions since then have completely squandered that good will - it is evidenced by the fact that there have been no mobilisations against his dismissal.

When Musharraf first took over, he did not declare martial law and indeed his statements were very unclear as to what long-term arrangements he intended to put in place.

For several days he was in frantic discussion with civilians and military leaders seemingly attempted to find someone who was prepared to give him a power to rule.

This attempt was not motivated by any concern for the rights of the people of Pakistan, but by something much more important.

Though the country is in debt and the economy in tatters, it is the response of the IMF and the Americans that is concerned about. The Karachi stock exchange had fallen by 95 when it re-opened after the coup.

On the other hand Musharraf must have been fully aware that the US had become increasingly unhappy with Sharif's performance.

The state of the economy concerned them deeply, while developments in India have increasingly opened up the possibility that it was there they should look for their strongest alliances in the subcontinent. The strong shift in American imperialism's traditional allegiances had become very clear during the recent war over Kashmir.

Finally on October 14, two days after the coup the General declared a state of emergency - but not martial law. He assumed the title of "chief executive" in place of the "chief minister" of the previous government.

While Pakistan was suspended from the Commonwealth on October 16 and Britain has suspended economic aid, major financial sanctions have not been imposed. Indeed Bill Clinton commented on the General's pronouncements in an extremely mused way:

"A lot of what he said on the substance, including the conciliatory tone towards India, I thought was quite good. But I was disappointed there was no commitment to a timetable to move towards democracy, and I hope that will be forthcoming."

Yet again American imperialism has demonstrated the real extent of its commitment to democracy.

Coup de grace for a discredited premier

Farooq Tariq, General Secretary of the Labour Party, Pakistan reports from Lahore

The troops took over the important buildings in the capital, Islamabad, in the evening of October 12, after the state-owned electronic media announced Musharraf's dismissal of the government.

Sharif was completely taken by surprise. He ordered his air force to remove Musharraf from his post as army chief apparently prepared for a military coup.

In his first televised address, Musharraf said that everyone was aware of the importance and certainty that the country had gone through under Sharif. "Not only have all the institutions been played around with, and systematically destroyed, the economy too is in a state of collapse," he said.

"Despite all my advice, they tried to interfere with the armed forces, the last remaining viable institution in which all of you take so much pride and look up to, at all times, for the stability, unity and integrity of our beloved country."

This is the usual demagogy of a military ruler - but at that point it was still not clear what Musharraf's long-term plans for the country were.

The military coup was apparently provoked by the announce- ment of the dismissal of the General by Sharif. Only one week earlier, the Nawaz Government had promoted the General to Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff Committee. The General and his military leaders blamed some senior military officers who were known as Nawaz Sharif supporters. In retaliation, the Prime Minister tried to dismiss the general.

This may have been the immediate excuse for the military intervention, the Pakistan military are deeply rooted in the present economic crisis in Pakistan and its political effects. Further it is part of the aftermath of the Kargil dispute with India over Kashmir. The military have angrily attempted to present the Sharif government to blame them for Pak- istan's defeat in the dispute with India over Kashmir. The price of wheat and the Islamic fundamentalists have instead blamed Sharif for the debacle, because he caved in to United States pressure to withdraw from Kargil.

The military have rescheduled the country's IMF loans, the Nawaz Sharif Government recently blamed the Tal-iban government in Afghanistan for "terrorist activities inside Pakistan." This is a surprising U-turn.

Pakistan is one of the only coun- tries in the world, which has for- mally recognised the Taliban government. The Pakistani military have actively supported the Taliban's takeover of Kabul and other parts of Afghanistan. Sharif was hoping that this U-turn would help the renegotiation of loans with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). But it was not appreciated by the various religious currents within the Pakistani state.

The economy is in absolute tatters. The government's attempt to introduce a general sales tax was successfully opposed by the Linea Saeed Benazir and by the currency over the control of the armed forces of Pakistan.

In the face of this protest, the government ignored IMF instructions, withdrew the GST and introduced a new tax.

Further, cotton growers across the country were demanding an increase in cotton prices, a commodity which accounts for 70% of the country's exports. The powerful All Pakistan Textile Manufacturer's Association was opposed to this.

On October 10, a nation-wide protest of peasants and cotton growers blocked all of Pakistan's main roads for hours; there have been many other massive demonstrations.

All these developments exposed the extremely unpopular nature of the government and the remarkable change in the country's politics.

At the beginning of 1997, Sharif won the general election with 40% of the vote and secured a two-thirds majority in the national assembly.

Nawaz erreys for his lost power and influence

Sharif wanted to rule like a Moghul empire. He had a telephone help-line installed, on which he took callers' complaints. After listening for a minute, he would announce what action he would take. Television would broadcast the story and the impression would be given that justice had been done in seconds.

But despite its demagogy, the coup succeeded, not only with the people, the army and his reli- gious constituency, but also with his international backers.

Sharif was unable to implement the IMF's three-stage programme of privatization and the main public services, including the railways, telecommunications and electricity. He even got into a fight with those power companies contracted by the previous government of Benazir Bhutto government to build the power generation plants.

These contracts allowed the power companies to sell this electricity at a price above the international competitive rate. The energy multinationals bribed the Benazir government to accept this deal.

Yet again in this coup, the military didn't have their share in these kickbacks, so were rather hostile to the deal. In the end, the government under an interim government of Nawaz to seek a compromise with the power companies.

The nuclear tests and the military incursion into Kashmir also drew (hypothetical) US condemnation, while the defeat in Kash- mir strengthened the hand of the military against him.

Sharif's government was weak, isolated and unstable. As a result, the military's take-over was not met with any resistance from the masses. There was instead a sense of confusion and, to some extent, a sense of relief. But the program of the Generals is clear - the speedy implementation of the IMF programme at the expense of the people.

The military take-over is yet another setback for the left and trade union movement in Pak- istan.

The Labour Party Pakistan has issued a statement (see over) opposing the military take-over and has demanded the immediate announcement of general elections and the return of workers and peasants.
Military raid PLP office

ON OCTOBER 21 a truck load of military men turned up at the offices of the Pakistan Trade Union Resource Centre where the weekly paper of the PLP, Mazdoor Juddhish, is published. They arrested the printing workers, complaining that the paper did not support the military. They took away copies of the paper as well as a copy of a new book, "Preparations For Flight," written by Allan Ahl. PLP veterans, who had been invited to attend the meeting.

As the non-union press release from the PLP notes this raid is an attack on press freedom despite the promise of Chief Executive General Pervez Musharraf in his first address that this would be respected.

The First issue of the weekly "Mazdoor Juddhish" appeared on 9th October with the caption "No to Martial Law" and the appeal to the working classes to join the struggle against the military dictatorship. The paper has been in print for more than 30 years. The paper is now facing serious difficulties due to the military crackdown in the late 1980s.

The Left's vote of confidence in the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) has been tested again. In the recent elections, the PPP won 23 seats, down from 35 in 1998 and 37 in 1996. This is the second time that the PPP has failed to win a majority in the National Assembly.

The Left's share of the vote remained constant, at around 47%, but the total vote cast declined, as many voters refused to vote. In many parts of the country, voters are afraid to vote for the Left, in which the Left has been marginalised.

The Left has learned nothing from the disastrous elections with "progressive" bourgeois candidates and in the 1998 elections in South Asia. The elections were seen as a test of the Left's ability to provide a viable alternative to the military regime. The Left did not fare well, winning only 23 seats in the National Assembly.

The Left has not been able to develop a clear and coherent strategy for the election campaign. The Left has been divided and fragmented, with different factions supporting different candidates. This has weakened the Left's chances of winning.

The Left has also been undermined by corruption and mismanagement. The Left has been accused of corruption and mismanagement, and this has eroded the Left's support among the working class.

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Epic struggle for health and safety at Hema Chemicals

Kunal Chattopadhyay and Rohit Prajapati

From December 11 1998 until last month just under 250 workers at the Hema Chemical plant in Gujarat, India were on strike to end to the life-threatening and unsafe conditions in the factory. While the strike has now ended because the union no longer had the financial resources to support the workers, the battle to make the Indian Union (Rudra Workers’ Union) strong and to organise workers remains.

Trade unionism in India is split up extensively into two lines. Every political party has its own party-controlled union whose leaders are not accountable to the ordinary workers. Union leaders are rarely workers or sacked workers - instead they are usually Party members.

The leaders carry out negotiations without keeping most workers involved or informed. Settlements are very often signed in English - which very few workers speak. Trade union members are aware of the limits of the type of deals struck behind their backs. Settlements hailed as victories are later found to contain - or end up as - a set back to the or to exclude casual workers.

In the instance of Gujarat, where the Vku is active, this is further complicated by three factors. Even reformist-led unions like the AFLC (led by the Communist Party of India) and the CITU (led by the Communist Party of India Maoist) are weak. On the other hand, Gandhian ideology is strong.

According to Mahatma Gandhi, the most important ignored class member leader of the freedom movement, the capitalists are not an exploiting class but only people who hold the social wealth in trust, so that class struggle is never the way to settle disputes between workers and the bourgeoisie.

The final factor is the strength of the Bharatiya Janata Party and its trade union wing in the province. The BJP is dedicated to establishing that there is no class, no class identity, but the key identity is the Hindu identity. Since the labour minister of Gujarat hails from Baroda, he therefore takes special care to fight against class struggle alternatives when they emerge.

The Vakdars Kamdar Union was established a quarter century ago, when a group of workers of a failed private company, 'Kamar' (presently supported by the government), went on strike. The union was formed by the factors of the Vku. The Indian Section of the Fourth International, decided that they were good enough to create a new union.

Thus it was the Vku which started the union movement in the province. The Vku is an independent union which is not affiliated to any other union.

The VKU adhered from the beginning to the principles of working class democracy. The large majority of trade union leaders have been workers or sacked workers. Negotiations have been open, and based on militant struggle.

Regular trade union schools have been organised to ensure that the political education of the members is real, and that no external bureaucracy can use them to control or over all processes of union work.

The result was, that after an initially difficult period, the VKU began to win the confidence of the workers.

The VKU has been a narrow craft union, not one interested only in getting wage rise. It has been active in a wide range of issues like the Narmanda Dachan and Akkara strikers in the steel industry, trials of the big dams over the river Narmanda which threatens violence with the Blacks, the fight for women’s rights movement, and movements of rural workers and poor peasants. VKU activists have also, in the last few years, made new contacts well beyond Baroda. For instance, in Akkara, the VKU has organized its members in the Chemical Industrial complex in the province, VKU activists joined hands with local activists in the struggle against stereo pesticides and against the uptake of a new chemical. A key demand was the introduction of minimum wages for the chemical workers, for in this industry there was none set in Gujarat. Another was the struggle for health and safety. Though there are a number of existing laws, like the Factories Act of 1948, and though the Government of India has signed a number of ILO conventions, in practice health and safety issues are rarely addressed in India. Even in industries where for more skilled workers are recruited, like the nuclear power industry, the Indian establishment claims that Western norms are unnecessarily tight.

As for the chemical industry of Gujarat, even in industries where acid is routinely used, proper gloves are not always issued. The Anklenwar Rachae (Save Anklenwar) movement initiated by local workers with the collaboration of the VKU took up such issues. All this has made the VKU a special target of the rulers and the provincial Bjp government.

It is in this context that the struggle at Hema Chemicals becomes so important. In trying to smash the strike, not only the owners of this particular factory, but the government, are showing their determination to finish off the union.

The Hema Chemical factory was established in 1965 and manufactures potassium and sodium dichromate, basic chromium sulphate, and other chromium-based chemicals. Chromium is used widely in alloy and metal plating; and dichromates form the raw material for a number of chemicals used as wood preservatives, for the manufacture of coloured glass, glass, in tanneries, for pigments for lithography and so on.

The production process involves crushing chromite ore into small pieces and then roasting it after mixing with soda ash or lime. The ore is then cooled and the dichromate is extracted. Unit 1 of Hema Chemicals manufactures the dichromate, while Unit 2 crushes and roasts the ore. Both units employ a little over 120 workers. In both units the health of the workers is at stake. Dichromate is hexavalent chromium, a human carcinogen. It also causes chemical rhinitis, chronic pharyngitis, and nasal perforation. It is known to cause lung cancer, skin ulcers, perforation of ear drums, damage to the respiratory tract, kidney damage, and allergic dermatitis.

Chronic acid mist has a history of causing acute and chronic diseases and negatively affecting the lungs and skin. The workers at the Hema Chemicals have fallen prey to all of these.

A comprehensive medical examination by the Certifying Surgeon of the Factory Inspector’s office of Vavodara found 45 workers to be suffering from nasal perforation, while 23 were found to be suffering from forms of dermatitis.

The two of workers had to be amputated following secondary infection and gangrene. One of them also suffers from hydroperniosis due to damage to the kidneys. The company violates most labour legislation. The chromium level at the factory is not monitored. As per the schedule of the Factories Act, TUL for chromium is 0.05 mg per litre. The technology employed by the management is highly unsafe. In one of the units owned by the same management, the Shaste Chemicals run by the same unit, workers were discharged in December 1996 killed four workers.

Concerned over health and safety, and as part of its strategy of fighting against the current trend of flouting health and safety norms in the name of liberalisation and competitiveness of Indian industry, the union had been agitating over these issues for a considerable period.

After being repeatedly prodded by the workers, the Factories Inspectorate filed a number of complaints against the company for violation of provisions of the Factory Act. But the government never carried out systematic follow-ups, something not surprising for a ruling class that often sees the government as less than champions to Save the Tiger. And this emboldened the workers to carry out greater repression on the workers. Even the medical people employed by the government in the Employees Insurance Commission have been training the workers to discharge their duties, by not providing proper diagnosis and treatment, or even forcing the workers to file compensation claims.

Finally came an arbitrary wage deduction from last year. The workers refused to processo the order from the court, the management simply decided to ignore the order. It was at this juncture that the workers decided that a strike is the only weapon likely to succeed. Thus it came about that workers had to wage a bitter battle to implement laws.

The Indian government has done little to improve the enforcement of health and safety laws or protect factory workers since the Bhopal disaster 15 years ago. Over 2,500 people were killed in the city in Madhya Pradesh, central India and 100,000 left homeless after a cloud of poisonous gas was released from the US-owned Union Carbide plant.

The government of Gujarat made it clear where it stood. Neither Labour Commissioner, nor Factories Inspector, nor any other department, put any pressure on the management to comply with the law. Instead, on May 1, 1999, the government declared the strike illegal.

Using the government order, management brought the workers to court, where they were slapped with a fine and filed false charges against many workers.

Despite this and other incidents of intimidi- ation, the workers continued to stand firm, carrying on with the strike, and under the threat of facing prosecution.

Rural workers and poor peasants had so far contributed significant amounts, but for them, the strike was more than just to bear the burdens of maintaining close to 250 workers and their families. So the strike was called off, even as legal challenges were launched against the company.

Though the union does not believe that a bourgeois court will by itself do much for the working class, it filed a case against the government.

(a) The court should quash the order declaring the strike illegal.

(b) The company should be compelled to the government to implement the Health and Safety laws.

(c) The internal environment of the plants should be improved, and workers in this period should be paid full wages even though the plants will remain closed.

The workers are now doing a great deal. Some of the striking workers have not been taken back, and nearly two dozen of these are in need of serious medical treatment.

In order to continue the struggle politically, VKU and Inquilabi Communist Sangathan (Indian Section of the Fourth International) have decided to contest three industrial area seats in the forthcoming municipal elections in Gujarat. For this, too, funds are required. Unless health and safety are made the general demand of all political parties, all this will not be waged seriously.

Send protest messages to the Chief Minister of Gujarat [fax +91-2712-212100], The Chairman, National Human Rights Commission [fax +91-11-3340016 or 3366557], and the Hema Chemicals Industries [91-265-380129], with a copy to us by e-mail at WRIGHT@WORLDNET or Fax +91-265-412499.

Financial aid is needed to sustain the sacked workers, and to provide them with medical care. Given the degree of newspa- per coverage of this strike, these workers will not find it easy to get jobs elsewhere. The financial aid is therefore particularly urgent. Cheques payable to VKU should be sent to Hema Chemical Workers’ appeal, c/o PO Box 1109, London N4, 2AA.
West Papua: British profiteers plunder Indonesian colony

Adam Hartman

The directors of British mining giant, Rio Tinto, must be looking forward to many years of exploiting West Papua's gold and copper resources following the recent election of Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid and Vice-President Megawati Sukarnoputri. With East Timor gaining independence, these "moderate democrats" are committed to preventing any further reduction in the territory under Indonesian rule.

The profitable relationship in West Papua between Indonesian occupation and corporate exploitation, which began in 1963, is set to continue.

Indonesia and the multinationals: a special relationship

Rio Tinto has a large stake in the mine set up and operated by the US-based company Freeport McMoran. It is the largest mine in the world, producing the world's largest output of gold (2.8 million ounces in 1996) and second largest output of copper. In recent years the mine has expanded significantly, with most of the new investment coming from Rio Tinto, giving it a 40 per cent share of output produced in 1998.

Dating back to 1967, the mine has depended on the patronage of the Indonesian authorities, whichocy voluntarily extended it for its prosperity. Using terror to subvert the people to Indonesian rule and take control of their land, the colonial government dicked off concessions to mining and logging companies.

The Freeport mine was built on land seized without compensation from the Asmat tribe. To make way for the mine and for the company town built to house the workers brought in from Indonesia, up to 40,000 people were evicted and forced to start a new life in unfamiliar surroundings. More land was swallowed as the mine expanded.

The mine has caused widespread environmental damage. In 1993 it was dumping about 95 per cent of the tonnage it processed into the river used locally for drinking water. Local people complained that outbreaks of skin disease and diarrhoea were caused by this.

Indonesia was seen as the most reliable force to keep West Papua in line pollution. In 1997 the authorities accepted that the river was undrinkable. Sedimentation from these wastes has caused the river to flood the plain used to grow sago, the staple crop. In 1997 a village was buried under mud and tailings from the mine forcing eighty families to be relocated.

The company has tried to clean up its image, claiming that it looks after local people by providing health, education, and employment.

In 1996 it announced a $16 million fund for tribal groups around the mine. But the mine provides relatively few jobs for local people: only 1,500 out of the 12,000 workers in 1993 were Papuan.

Throughout its existence the mine has been a focus for protests against the Indonesian occupation and the depredations of foreign corporations.

The company has worked closely with the Indonesian army, which has committed atrocities in the surrounding area. In 1994 the Indonesian press reported a massacre of 120 people after a West Papuan "flag-waving" ceremony in a village 20 km from the mine.

In 1995 a Catholic bishop, Mgr H.F.M. Munganhoff, reported that civilians were held and sometimes tortured on company facilities.

Imperialism and West Papua: a history of betrayal

Like Indonesia, West Papua (the western half of Papua, called New Guinea by the Europeans) was a Dutch colony. However its Melanesian inhabitants in the East (now Papua New Guinea) have cultural affinities with their neighbours, and shared with them the desire for a single independent state.

After Indonesia gained independence in 1949, the Dutch remained in West Papua and Australasia ruled in the east. The two powers eventually agreed to independence, but when Indonesia objected, the Dutch handed over West Papua to the United Nations.

West Papua became a victim of scheming by the United States at the height of the Cold War. Anxious to make Indonesia a key ally of the US, as well as to curb the growing influence of Indonesia's communist movement, the Kennedy administration lobbyed vigorously in the UN in support of Indonesia's claim to West Papua.

They dismissed the aspirations of "some 700,000 Papuans living in the Stone Age" in racist terms. As a result in 1963 the UN allowed Indonesia to West Papua, on condition that a "full and free referendum" was held. US companies were of course rewarded handsomely for their government's support for Indonesia's claim to West Papua with a generous share of the fruits of this resource-rich colony, not to mention a market for US-made weapons needed to quell dissent.

The Indonesian army waged a brutal campaign to stamp out the movement for independence, rounding up and killing those active in the political life of the territory and bombing villages which resisted.

As Papuans were forced to live in the forests to take up arms, the army began a full-scale counter-insurgency war, with Britain and France as well as the US providing the goods.

By 1969 the Indonesians were ready to hold their "referendum", which resulted in the "Act of Free Choice" rubber-stamping Indonesia's rule. The army picked 1,025 men to vote, with President Suharto making it clear that a vote for independence would be counted as treason.

To control the population the authorities have used a combination of repression, causing at least 100,000 deaths since 1965, transmigration and resettlement of the local population in "model villages".

Tens of thousands of Indonesians have been brought over from Java and other densely-populated provinces to occupy land taken from local people, in a programme financed by the World Bank and implemented by British and Canadian development consultants.

The settlers have often been abandoned without infrastructure, state support or knowledge of local conditions. Migrants have had to work in the mines, pulp mills, plantations and fish farms set up on prime land or coastal waters by Indonesian and other foreign investors.

In common with Indonesia, every square metre of forest in West Papua has been parcelled out in concessions to logging and mining companies.

Indonesia is currently losing two per cent of its forest every year. West Papua's forest, including the Lorentz National Park, home to seven Papuan tribes and incredibly rich in its biodiversity and range of habitats, is under threat.

In spite of the repression, the Papuans have not extinguished the people's spirit of resistance or their desire to take back control of their land and to win their freedom. A guerrilla movement, the OPM (Free Papua Movement) is active, and there is widespread civilian resistance to Indonesian rule.

It is vital that we in Britain expose and challenge the role of British and other foreign companies in plundering West Papua's natural resources.

The British government and the "international community" have been complicit in covering up the crimes, which have been and are still being committed in that territory. We must champion the West Papuan struggle for freedom.

For further information contact:

- PASPOL - the Indonesian Human Rights Campaign, 111 Northwood Road, Thornton Heath, CR7 0EH, Tel:0181 771 2994, website: www.gen.apc.org/paspol
- PARTIZANS - People Against Rio Tinto and its Subsidiaries, 218 Liverpool Road, London N1
Anger erupts as Indonesian MPs opt for "liberal" Islam

Veronica Fagan

On October 20, Abdurrahman Wahid, the chairman of the Indonesian Muslim association Nahdlatul Ulama, was elected president of Indonesia, defeating Megawati Sukarnoputri, chairperson of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P). Wahid defeated Megawati by 60 votes in the 700 member People’s Consultative Assembly (MPR).

Wahid’s election followed the rejection of Megawati’s presidential bid by Habibe’s "accountability" speech the previous day by the Assembly by a narrow majority of 33 votes. His party, the ruling Golkar decided to allow a free vote on the question after it became clear that the major papers of the Indonesian ruling coalition were won by Wahid.

Following this defeat, Habibe withdrew his nomination for President. Golkar did not in the end put forward another candidate for President. Despite his failure to secure a majority, he presented the MPR with clear evidence that the majority of the MPR members were willing to accept him as leader.

A massive mobilisation and the results of the referendum held on August 30 made it absolutely clear to thousands of supporters of the choice of the East Timorese people for independence. This was the only possible through the mobilisations and the pressure of international public opinion, by all the movements in the last few weeks. In the spirit of international solidarity tens of thousands took action concrete as a way to stop the slaughter and took to the streets in protest. This forced the most powerful of the imperialist governments in the world, especially the United States — as well as the UN — to take a distance from the Indonesian generals whom they have been supporting for decades.

Wahid took Nahdlatul Ulama out of politics in 1980s and distanced NU from the Suharto regime. For almost a decade, Wahid fought a struggle of a liberal democratic, developing ties with Western academics and NGOs.

In 1990 he accepted the position of chair of the Democratic Forum, a loose talk shop of intellectuals loosely associated with the defunct Socialists Party of Indonesia, a conservaive social democratic institution. The Democratic Forum remained inactive and ineffective. At the same time, Wahid developed a close relationship with the bourgeoisie generally. He also cultivated a posture of supporting a more liberal, tolerant Islam. He advocated a de-Islamisation of daily language and ceremony.

However, the NU remained a bastion of medieval religious practice, a police state and the guidelines for the ulama and the cruder forms of superstition remain dominant. His reputation as a liberal, espically among democracy movements, begins to slowly decline in 1996, when the anti-dictatorship struggle began to turn militant. He urged Megawati’s PDI-P not to take a confrontational stance against Suharto after 1998. He even deposed her as head of the PDI.

As anti-Suharto sentiment gathered momentum in the period before the May 1997 elections, Wahid actively campaigned for Golkar. He became the personal escort and champion of Indonesia’s most corrupt politician, Suharto’s daughter, Titiek.

In May 1998, when the student mobilisations were near to bringing Suharto down, Wahid sat beside Suharto in the presidential palace as the dictator tried to sell himself as a leader who could implement reform. When the anti-dictatorship move- ment was at its height, he spent most of his time fighting lability to the old order. It became increas-

ingly obvious that he was primarily motivated by a fear of “people’s power”. He sought a smooth transition to a post-Suharto period which would not threaten a political system that has ruled out of politics.

Despite Megawati’s election as vice-president it is clear that the new government remains in the Suharto mould. Megawati herself should not be seen as a radical despite her huge popular support — at one point she argued against the referendum vote for independence.

This solidarity movement shows once more that the mobilisation is the strength through which the course of events can be changed. That is the most important lesson that the East Timor events can teach us in our global struggle against injustice: we have to demand and create a new politics of solidarity, of popular action, of lived democracy.

That is also why we have the responsibility to continue the struggle for freedom for East Timor. The presence of the UN-mandated forces in the country should not and cannot be a substitute for this task of solidarity.

The East Timorese people are suffering from lack of supplies and medical and humanitarian assistance. The killing are still there, having applied a policy of scorched earth, forced deporta-

tions of thousands of Timorese and physical elimination of the population. The resistance, of the National Council of the Timorese Resistance (CNRT) and of the Front for the Liberation of East Timor (the FALINTIL, guerrillas) who nevertheless are still fighting back.

In fact, the massacres were the consequence of an agreement to continue the control of the Indonesian army with the aim of maintaining a goodwill relationship between ‘imperialist’ countries and the Indonesian ruling clique. The Fourth International demands the immediate withdrawal of the UN-mandated forces. The UN-mandated forces must guarantee the safety of return of the hundreds of thousands of refugees who have been excluded to the East Timor moun-
tains and also those that were deported to other Indonesian terri- tories, the leaders and representa- tives of the East Timorese resistance, as well as Commander Xanana Gusmao.

The UN-mandated forces must also guarantee the immediate dis- armament of the civil militias that have been created and backed by the Indonesian army, and the arrest of all its leaders. East Timor must be judged for all the massacres, murders and deportations that they are responsible for, if they are committing.

At the same time, the countries that have supported the Indonesia government must also respon- sibly support the reconstruction of East Timor, for all the destruct- ion and suffering imposed on this people.

The Fourth International can- not accept any eventual position of the UN-mandated forces on the ground that means the disarm- ment of the FALINTIL. If it is a question of respecting the popular will, then Inter should not be part of the composition of the National Council of Timorese Resistance and recognise the role of the FALINTIL as the sole legitimate armed force to secure the security of the territory of East Timor.

We absolutely reject any idea of partition imposed on the majority of the people.

The Fourth International equally cannot accept the idea that the forces under UN mandate should be used as a force to guarantee the maintenance of capitalist interests in East Timor as, for example, with regard to the oil of the Timorese sea, which is today under the control of the Indonesian and Australian states, through a shameful agreement signed between the two countries.

The Fourth International will continue to denounce the death sentence for the mass killings, the crimes against humanity commits in Indonesia and other oppressed territories within Indonesia.

The Fourth International con- sider these are the minimum conditions for the beginning of the process of reconstruction of this new country and stands in solidarity with the East Timorese.

At the same time, we will con- tinue solidarity with all the pro- gressive forces that struggle for liberation in Indonesia and other oppressed territories within Indonesia.

The Fourth International re- gards the present situation in East Timor, the presence of the UN-mandated forces, the large amount of international public opinion on the UN-mandated forces, the violent brutalities committed by the Indonesian army, and the suffering of the whole population, as a threat to the world.

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Stop the WTO! Millennium Round!

Ruthless in Seattle!

On 30 November representatives of 334 member governments of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) will be gathering in Seattle USA to discuss a Millennium Round of trade negotiations. The outcome of these discussions will profoundly affect the living standards, job conditions, security of, and social provision for the majority of the world’s population, reports PETE COOPER.

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) is the enforcer of international trade agreements. It is an undemocratic and unconstitutional body that will limit the right and ability of governments to regulate currency speculation, investment in land, factories and services. WTO would stop governments considering as investment criteria the record of companies and countries on human rights, labour and the environment.

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Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) are currently under negotiation in WTO and would mean that India producing cheap food and medicines not conforming to US style patent laws would not be able to sell which was which.

Agriculture, Intellectual Property Rights, and Services are high on the US list of priorities, since these are industries in which US trans-national corporations are dominant.

The US and a number of other US food-exporting countries want to stop the subsidisation of food production, particularly in the EU and Japan. Small farmers everywhere, especially in developing countries would be hardest hit. The US would also subsidise its own agri-businesses.

The US also wants prohibition of gene-banks of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) crops and seeds; the precedent for this has been set by the EU beef hormone ban mentioned above.

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Serbians count cost of NATO’s blitz

Geoff Ryan

Serbia is now the poorest country in Europe. 40,000 landmines and 10,000 unexploded bombs have still to be cleared. This is addition to the still unknown damage to health and the environment from depleted uranium.

In fact both NATO and the Milosevic regime either ignore or underestimate the real consequences of the war in the Balkans on the environment and the health of hundreds of thousands, maybe millions, of people living in Balkans.

For example, eight tons of highly toxic mercury has gone into the Danube, but little has been done to warn people of the dangers this poses. 44 per cent of Serbia’s industrial capacity has been lost as a result of NATO’s deliberate targeting of the civilian infrastructure. Serbia’s poverty, along with economic sanctions, restricts its ability to clean up the Danube of bridges destroyed by NATO. This threatens to cause a huge build up of ice which will result in lost crops and income for Serbia but Hungary and Croatia, which are at risk of large scale flooding.

Millions of Serbs will face the coming winter with no heating. A European Union plan to supply heating oil to the opposition-held cities of Nis and Pirot has been abandoned. No opposition politician turned up to the recent EU meeting in Luxembourg. Serbs, even though the EU was prepared to supply transport from Serbia, thereby breaking its own economic blockade.

This was hardly surprising, since the EU demanded that, in return for oil, opposition leaders must publicly commit themselves to the extradiction of Milosevic to the War Crimes Tribunal at The Hague. In any case the EU was only offering about €3 million of oil – about half the amount spent on bombing a single bridge over the Danube.

Even this very limited offer was unacceptable to the United States, which is opposed to any lifting of sanctions. At the same time the US has demanded that European members of Nato should shoulder more of the burden of running the alliance – while opposing any moves by the European states that could lead to them acting independently of NATO.

Although protests against Milosevic continue in Serbia, the regime is not seriously threatened. Vuk Draskovic, leader of the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO), has joined opposition protests after a supposed attempt to kill him in a road crash. In fact even some of the opposition are rather sceptical about whether or not there was an assassination attempt.

Zoran Djindjic of the Democratic Party accepts Draskovic’s version of events – but only in order to claim that he too has been the target of assassination attempts.

The weakness of the opposition is not simply the intense personal rivalry between Draskovic and Djindjic. It cannot agree on any political and economic programme, let alone one that could win support among decisive sections of the working class.

It is hampered by its own nationalistic past. Draskovic was a member of Milosevic’s government until he was sacked during the war. Djindjic supported Radovan Karadzic when Milosevic decided to abandon the Bosnian Serbs. As late as January of this year Djindjic denounced the opening of an American government office in Pristina as an attack on Yugoslav sovereignty.

The opposition is torn between denouncing Milosevic for being a nationalist and for not being nationalist enough. In addition it cannot openly appear to be siding with western forces responsible for the destruction of Serbia. Hence the decision to boycott the Luxembourg EU meeting. It also cannot rely on much support from the military – many of whom are rather fearful that the overthrow of Milosevic would see them too facing extradition to The Hague.

In Kosovo, Serbs and Roma continue to be threatened by sections of the Albanian majority. Some of the attacks are clearly carried out by former soldiers of the Kosovo Liberation Army, despite public statements by KLA leaders opposing such attacks.

Attacks have also taken place on United Nations officials, including the murder of a Bulgarian official because he was Serbian and of a Serb interpreter.

Clashes have also taken place between former KLA units and Nato troops, in particular in the divided town of Mitrovica. These clashes express very contradictory developments.

On the one hand they demonstrate an awareness that Nato is not going to act in the interests of the Kosovars. This was made clear recently by US deputy Secretary of State Sobe Talbott who reiterated US opposition to an independent Kosovo, insisting that it must remain part of Yugoslavia.

The de facto division of Mitrovica is clearly perceived as not being in the interests of Kosovo. This is given added weight because the important industrial complex of Trepa lies in the Serb zone to the north of the city. Kosovar miners are campaigning to take back control of their mines, which are at present occupied by Nato troops.

Attempts to resettle the city and bring Trepa under Kosovar control, in the face of Nato opposition, are positive and should be supported. But attempts to resettle the whole city are likely to lead to more conflict.

On the other hand the clashes also reveal hostility to the remaining Serb population, which is a totally negative factor. Socialists have to argue against attempts to drive out, let alone murder, the Serb and Roma populations.

However, we should also not lose a sense of proportion. We have to recognize that Albanian hostility to Serbs and Roma is largely the result of ten years of brutal oppression of the Albanian Kosovars by the Milosevic regime. Many of those on the British Left who eagerly denounce attacks on Serbs were remarkably silent about Milosevic’s treatment of the Albanian population.

Equally, while socialists should support the Kosovars against Serbia and participate in campaigns to bring relief to the millions of Serbs threatened with starvation this winter we should not ignore the crimes of Milosevic.

Certainly Nato has inflicted tremendous damage on the health service in Serbia. We support the campaign for medical aid to Yugoslavia. But we also recognize that the Milosevic regime was prepared to inflict similar hardships on the peoples of former Yugoslavia.

When the Serbian army withdrew from Kosovo, for example, it took with it every piece of medical equipment it could carry. Although the opposition in Serbia remains weak, the situation in Croatia is much more positive. There is a real chance that opposition parties will win the forthcoming elections.

And in early October Dinko Sajak, the former commander of the Second World War murder camp at Jasenovac, was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment. The successful conviction of this mass murderer took place despite attempts by Croatian President Tudjman to play down the brutality of Jasenovac.

Serbs, Jews and Croats all gave evidence against him. Tudjman may not have been happy about the outcome but the fact that the trial took place, let alone the verdict and sentence, suggests that those who insist there will be no light wing ruler in Europe since Franco are very wide of the mark. Such a trial would have been inconceivable in France’s Spain.

Mitrovica: where even the hospital needs treatment

Franziska

MITROVICA has one hospital, on the Serb-dominated north side of town. Early one Monday morning I took the bus which brings all the Albanian staff over to the hospital. Kfor is not here.

Lucy, no Serb stonewel ked us that day. At the gate of the hospital, our bags were searched by French troops.

Inside the Serb staff gathered for their usual morning demonstration. Doctors were cheering giving speeches about not leaving their positions and demanding Albanians – both patients and staff – leave the hospital. The former is not true.

Flutura Mustafa explains that it is only the third week the Albanians have been allowed in the building at all. Before the Serbs let them back in, they built a door in the stairs to the 2nd floor. They lock themselves and all the equipment behind it.

The first floor just has some desks and chairs and an old X-ray machine left, not even one single bed. The staff sit drinking coffee and smoking – what else can they do any way?

Later the ambulance brings three patients. One is a mother with her two-year old son. She has a hand full of glass splinters.

The Serbs had attached the ambulance again, smashing the last window left.

Where things are more serious they have to send patients to Pristina – not in an ambulance, they have to take public transport if they have no-one to drive them.
Debate. How far from a secular Irish state?

Dear comrades...

I think your article on the European elections (Socialist Outlook No. 26) exaggerated the danger of the Dána result.

Dana won the last seat in the poorest and most backward part of Ireland — hardly a plausibly for sweeping back the secular gains of the last 20 years. It’s the imagination of the far right whose slogan is “Back to the past”.

Candidates with similar politics got minority votes in all other areas. The issues of the election were mainly economic and about neutrality. There is a widespread concern about Ireland being frog-marched into NATO’s Pacific Command.

Both Greens — who are the Left to the Left of most Greens in Europe — kept their seats. McKenna and Ahern are far more Left than the Labour Party. And moreover they are willing to stick their necks out on “unpopular” issues.

I sympathise with the description of the Free State as a confessional state. It is basically a bourgeois state with religious deformations, a dotted line of the War of Independence. To call it confessional is to put it at the same level as the Orange statute and in essence play into the hands of those who think that Irish Nationalism is just as reactionary as Orangeism.

Amongst the outstanding secular struggles to be won is of course abortion from which the main parties are running scared.

For example, Mildred Fox, a government-supporting independent, states she wants a decision in 6 months by Ahern on a referendum. Why not now?

Or does Plainden want virtue, but (like St Augustine) “love before marriage?”

Ivana Bacik has begun a coalition of pro-Abortion forces. In my opinion a victory by that right will prove Pyrrhic, because the vote for Abortion will be shown as growing significantly. Like the divorce debate, the trend is one way — towards secularism. In stating that I am not calling for passivity but for optimism. We must campaign for secular education in the schools. Mind you, the religious orders are pulling out of many schools as they do not have the members to even provide head teachers. The refusal of some schools to install the Stay Safe sex education program is an issue.

On medicine in general; the influence and control of the religious orders through private Ethics committees must be combated. Here again no one outside the mad right opposes contraception.

As I write this I hope for a real debate on the situation and the tasks issuing from it. I am glad to know that Socialist Democracy is opposed to the Good Friday Agreement and also opposes a return to military elitism by sections of the Republican movement.

Fraternally, Jim Monaghan

Socialist Democracy replies

Jim Monaghan’s criticism of our analysis of the European elections raises some interesting points.

On the supposed left wing nature of the Green Party, Jim states that the Green Party in Ireland is to the left of most green parties in Europe. This is more a story description of the Green Party in Europe than a story about the Irish Green Party.

In fact, the course that Patricia McKenna is quite left wing by current standards. The same however, could not be said of Naoli Ahern (in the recent clash over the new Irish commissioner they took contrary positions).

Even if she could be described as left wing, it is in part irrelevant. Neither of the successful green candidates fought on a left wing programme. They did not fight in opposition to Maasstricht, and opposed FFPP in terms of the need to strengthen the United Nations and not against all imperialism, but against one imperialism that people were calling “UN peacekeepers”.

They were a bit like the little and were helped in their re-election by the decision of the main bourgeois parties to field two candidates when it was obvious to everyone that none of them stood much chance of getting more than 2 percent.

The Greens eventually held their seats with a lower percentage of the vote than the last time round.

However, there was greater surprise over Jim’s evaluation of the Dána victory. Yes, it is true that Dana won in one of the poorer areas much noted for its social conservatism.

But does this not mean that the forces of the right are not regrouping? They are — and the Dana victory is a great boost for them around which they hope to mobilise. Since Dana’s victory we have already seen the appearance of the Green Paper on Abortion.

It must always be borne in mind that people like Ivana Bacik didn’t push for the Green Paper, the Catholic right did, because they feel they will win.

Progressive forces have been calling instead for legislation to implement the Venice X case. It has been a long held position on the Irish Left that the Free state was a confessional state. Most socialists held the position that partition led to the setting up of two states, one an orange sectarian state and the other a catholic confessional state, described by James Connolly as a "carnival of reaction". Jim claims that this is not so — or at least that it is no longer so.

The Catholic Church was an all powerful institution in Ireland whose writ ran large even in modern Ireland. One need only look at the 1983 abortion referendum to know this or even their role in the fight for a reactionary New Irish Parliament.

Winds of change

However, Jim claims that the Catholic Church has only lost some battles it has not been defeated and still wields considerable power in health and education.

The fall in numbers joining religious orders has slowed and now schools now often employ lay principals. This fall is due to a number of factors, one of which is the growing trend towards secular attitudes.

Another is the growth of capitalism in Ireland, the economy and a general increase in materialistic concerns. In other words, I still want a Catholic Ireland but let some else do the dirty work.

However, it is precisely in education that the power of the church is felt. Despite recruiting falling numbers of teachers, the ethos of schools formerly run by the clergy continues to be Catholic and the state has introduced new legislation to ensure that rule of the hierarchy continues.

With this support from the state the church has managed to exclude teachers from new laws on discrimination in order to protect the ethos of such schools and their stronghold on them. Gay teachers, single parents or people who otherwise fail to comply with the religious ethos of schools in their private lives will not be covered by the anti discrimination legislation.

This is why we call it a confessional state. If the state govern- ment has handed over the control of state functions to the Catholic Church and pays them to do so.

Not defeated

The Catholic Church as we have pointed out has not been defeated despite all the trends and some advances made. The nature of a state is not dependent on the trends and swings in the mood of the population.

It continues to be confessional until the confessional forces are defeated in some way a capitalist state does not cease to be capitalist just because there has been an increase in secular influence and advances made by the working class.

It takes much more for that to happen. The working class must organise and fight the capitalists and defeat them. Where are the forces fighting the Catholic Church? Running scared of the backwash of despair and apathyWhere was the decisive defeat of the Church? Nowhere.

To describe the Freestate as a confessional state does not play into the hands of those who would claim Irish nationalism to be as equally reactionary as Orangeism.

The Freestate represented the defeat of revolutionary nationalism in Ireland not its victory. Also as socialists we defend the anti imperialist nature of the principal demands of nationalism, i.e. a United Independent Ireland.

Reactionary elements of the programme of nationalism are only our concern in that we fight categorically against them and oppose them at every turn. We have always fought against them — and have found ourselves on opposite sides of the fence to Sinn Fein in the 1985 abortion referendum.

We opposed it outright because of the attack it represented on women. If you fudged the issue, claiming in a Magill interview that as they didn’t recognise the Freestate constitution they couldn’t take a position on the extending it. They were in fact afraid of their own support in areas not unlike that “backward” area Jim mentioned.

Lastly, we are surprised that Jim is glad to know that we are opposed to the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) and attempts by militarists to block the implementation of the armed struggle.

We have always opposed militarists as an option for the working class or indeed for nationalists, and as an organisation we are alone in describing the GFA as a defeat.

The Agreement has no positive aspects (as the SVP would claim, for instance an opportunity for non sectarian politics), nor indeed is it in the interest of working and solidarity as the Socialist Party would claim.

Gearóid Ó Loingsigh for Socialist Democracy

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Under Blair's beady eye

ANATOLE France once wrote, "Everybody is equal under the law. The law permits anyone to sleep anywhere. Anyone could have dinner with Tony Blair at Bournemouth. A skilled nurse training would only have to save his or her total income for 5/16 weeks for the necessary £350. A worker on minimum pay would have to work 135 hours to save that.

"Marxism is dead." How often have we heard this repeated? Who were those who feared the millennial in a poll run by BBC News Online - Karl Marx, ahead of God? No, it was Blair.

What was the essence of Marx's thinking? His friend and collaborator Engels summed it up at Marx's graveside: "Marx was, before all else, a revolutionary. His real mission in life was to conspire, in one way or another, to overthrow the capitalist society... Fighting was his element."

Those who worry today about the weakness of the revolutionary movement should take heart from this quote from Francis Wheen's recent biography of Karl Marx: "Social reforms are never carried out by the weakness of the strong but always by the strength of the weak."

Tony Blair's modernisation of the Labour Party is beginning, more and more, to resemble Stalin's "de-bolshevisation" of the CPSU. First, pack the party conference with faithful acolytes. Not able to despatch critics and opponents to the Outer Hebrides, selection procedures are rigged - how truly the favoured respond.

Just as in the Soviet congresses, every speaker paid tribute to the "great Stalin", so nearly every minute a new group of MPs, speaking from the platform in Bournemouth, made absolutely sure they remembered to refer to the inspired leadership of Tony Blair.

How long will it be until, like Stalin, Blair takes out his watch to time the obligatory standing ovation?

Those at present enjoying the patronage of No 10 should not be too complacent. When he made his rise to power, Stalin's closest associates were Zinoviev and Kamenev. They did not save themselves from gnominy and death, however, and the same fate may await them.

New death warrant signed as flight goes on for Mumia

GOVERNOR Thomas Ridge of Pennsylvania has signed a new warrant for "the execution by lethal injection of Mumia Abu-Jamal of Philadelphia."

The execution date is set for December 4, but this is likely to be held up by further legal action.

Ridge's action, the second he has taken this step, followed the refusal of the U.S. Supreme Court to consider Mumia's appeal claiming that he was denied a fair trial.

He argued that he was wrongly stripped of his right to reach sentence followed the 1981 shooting death of Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner. The officer had pulled over Abu-Jamal's brother in a traffic stop. Mumia, then driving a taxi, apparently passed by, spotted Faulkner questioning his brother, and stopped.

Police arrived on the scene reported that they found the fatally injured Faulkner on the ground, shot at close range in the face, and Mumia lying nearby, wounded by a bullet from the officer's gun. His gun, with five spent shells, was also found.

However witnesses who reported seeing another person flying the scene claim to have been threatened by the police.

Some have never been called while others have testified elsewhere that they were coerced by police to change their testimony.

It is also argued that ballistics and pathology evidence is inconsistent; that Mumia's trial lawyer selected by the court failed properly to defend the case; that police planted evidence; and that the judge displayed bias and hostility.

State challenges were consistently used to get rid of black members of the jury panel.

Within two days of the signing of Mumia's death warrant demonstrations were organized across the U.S., with the largest outpourings in San Francisco where 4,000 people marched and rallied, and in Philadelphia where similar numbers demonstrated.

Demonstrations that had been set for the "Day After" the signing of a death war rant took place in scores of U.S. cities including Chicago, New York, Portland, Seattle, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., Minneapolis, and others.

Several hundreds of Abu-Jamal supporters instantly took to the streets in these cities, restating their commitment to broaden the struggle to new sectors of the U.S. population. 300 demonstrated in Paris.

U.S. figures including Rev. Jesse Jackson, the Congressional Black Caucus, Noam Chomsky, actor Weather Harrelson, and many others issued statements calling for a new trial.

Campaigners are also active in Britain, with regular meetings in London. It has also been a highly national rally in Trafalgar Square on November 6 at 2pm. Contact them by e-mail at muminia@calnet.org, or the web page on http://www.muminia.org/mbc/muminia.


c- email: alerts@muminia.org

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Why Irish union bosses hope to sell out national nurses' strike

THOUSANDS of Irish nurses took to the streets of Dublin on October 21 in one of the most significant industrial disputes for many years.

On one side are the fat cats of the "Celtic tiger", besmirched by scandal which involves the entire economic and political establishment.

The former premier, Charlie Haughey, stands accused of wholesale robbery of the public purse. The Aisbhecher scandal involves offshore accounts which connect much of Irish banking in a criminal conspiracy.

Facing them stand 27,000 nurses, representing a public sector workforce which has been subjected to years of wage austerity, and facing a process of privatisation, cutbacks and hospital closures. The nurses have overwhelming public support.

The result should be open and shut. There is however another element to the equation which seems to go almost unnoticed - that is the Irish trade union leadership.

The truth is that the years of austerity were the result of a series of sectional understandings between government, business and the trade unions. The trade union leadership supported and enforced the austerity.

It is not surprising that the same leadership is now working openly to betray the nurses: what does require explanation is the cloak of invisibility that leaves the majority of the working class blind to their activities.

There is really no mystery about what has been happening. The government has been standing by a Labour Court ruling issued within the terms of the partnership agreements, that restricted pay awards to the nurses.

In the run-up to the strike Barry Cowan, Health Minister, said "If the nursing unions really commit themselves to social partnership, there's a whole range of possibilities open to them to pursue their agenda."

Bertie Ahern said: "We have proposals to move this on, but that will only be with collective agreement."

Almost immediately Des Geraghy, vice-president of the nursing union SIPTU, was in contact with the government to begin negotiation process which, because it was designed to stay within the partnership agreements, could not meet the nurses' demands.

On Wednesday the Irish TUC (ICTU) leadership met and informed the nurses' leadership that they had their support if and only if - they were prepared to stay with within the framework agreed.

As the nurses' leaders entered talks with the government, they issued a statement which significantly did not include any mention of increments, the central demand of nurses looking for a decent wage.

The stage is set for minor concessions by the government, leaving room for the trade union leadership to call off the strike action.

Yet even if this happens the nurses' strike will have been significant. Irish workers see massive private wealth and widespread public corruption. They are now looking for a share of the cake, while government and big business know that the recipe for the cake is starvation wages for the working class.

Their chief weakness is blindness to the activities of the trade union leaders, a blindness shared by the majority of the Irish left. That blindness won't last. The long sleep of the Irish working class is coming to an end.
The key role of South African unions

The Trade Union Left and the Birth of a New South Africa, by Claude Jacquin, (Notebooks for Study & Research, IRE). £4 including p&P from Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109 London N4 2UU.

Recent Notebooks for Study and Research have focussed on different aspects of a world in the process of globalisation: its effects on women; the ideology and reality of new production systems; and the role of the IMF, World Bank and World Trade Organisation.

The latest Notebook looks at the social and political impact of these changes on a particular country: South Africa.

During the 1960s and 1970s, a new working-class generation took shape in South Africa under the impact of rapid industrial growth, just as in Brazil, though on a smaller scale, several industrial sectors took off thanks to the investment of mining profits or simply because of foreign investment. As this development occurred, the black working class mushroomed as a result, the new wave of industrialisation in the Third World contributed to the greatest political and social mobilisations in South African history, of which the trade-union movement was one of the central driving forces.

This period saw the emergence of a particularly interesting national working-class current: the current that was behind the foundation of the trade-union federation FOSATU (Federation of South African Trade Unions) in 1979. The author of this Notebook, Claude Jacquin, covered South African events during this period for the fortnightly International Viewpoint under the pseudonym Peter Blumer, and carried out research and studies during ten visits to South Africa between 1982 and 1992. Jacquin calls the core group that founded and led FOSATU “the independent trade-union Left”.

He shows that it was one of the most noteworthy political/trade-union tendencies of the period beginning in the mid-1970s and ending at the beginning of the 1990s, the period covered by this study. It emerged and developed in close relation with the structural changes that appeared in South Africa as early as the mid-1970s. Through a study of this trade-union current, Jacquin simultaneously follows the political, social and economic changes that ultimately brought an end to the apartheid system as it had existed until the early 1990s. Indeed, the current partially changed its initial project and then went on to play a role in negotiating the reform of South African society.

Unions and politics

In describing this evolution, Jacquin raises two questions: the first concerning trade-union practice in a society and a world undergoing dramatic changes; the second concerning the link between trade unionism and politics in the very specific context of apartheid’s social structure and later of post-apartheid South Africa.

The changes in South African society were of a contradictory nature, Jacquin contends. The main issue raised for the Left was how to combine “democratic” emancipation and social liberation: what the specific, political and ideological contribution could be of trade-union currents organised fundamentally at the level of single firms. In fact, a fusion between national liberation and social liberation does not only require a certain level of economic and social development, he shows. Nor does it simply depend on the objective existence of a social force in whose interests such a double liberation would be. It necessitates as well a certain number of initiatives, challenges and political projects. It cannot happen without organised forces that prove able to push through the spontaneous social dynamic. Jacquin describes the many obstacles that emerged to block this road. The world political environment in the mid-1990s was no longer propitious for radicalising programmes.

Neo-liberalism was all the rage; strategic doubts infiltrated the ranks of the most radical. Above all, South Africa’s complex social formation meant that any organised socialist project would necessarily confront other currents identifying with national liberation alone and pure democratic reconstruction. There was no open motorway to the post-capitalist promised land; a new society was not going to be “objectively” or spontaneously ushered in by the social reality of proletarian development.

The way to a new society had to be charted, promoted and built, not just preached. But all the forces, trade-union or political, that made the attempt ultimately failed, for a multitude of reasons that this study tries to show.

This failure does not make the current ANC government’s choice for neo-liberal management of South African society any more “realistic” — this choice is very remote from any idea of “national democratic revolution” put forward as an alternative to socialism in the debates of the 1980s.

This pamphlet should contribute to lively debates both in South Africa and internationally.

The new regime ushered in with the election of Mandela (above) and inherited by Thabo Mbeki was shaped by trade union struggles against apartheid capitalism
50 years after revolution: Chinese workers fight privatisation

Zhong Kai

IT IS half a century since the Chinese revolution and victory and the People's Republic of China was set up. With the changes it brought it the relations of production and in class relations, the economy acquired possibilities for rapid growth.

According to official statistics, China's GDP rose from 67.9 billion yuan (RMD) in 1952 to 7,953.5 billion yuan in 1996, an average annual growth rate of 7.7 percent, which was higher than the average annual growth rate of 3 percent in the world as a whole. This figure has been the pride of the Chinese government.

The most rapid growth took place in the last decade. Up to 1978, the GDP was only 86.2 billion yuan, which means that under Mao Zedong's leadership, in 26 years including the ideological excesses of production during the Great Leap Forward, the peoples' movements and the Cultural Revolution, the GDP had increased by only about four times from a very low starting point.

It is in 1987 that GDP crossed 1 trillion yuan, a two-fold increase in 9 years. And then from 1987 to 1990 in 3 years, the GDP rose by 6.3 times.

Private sector

However, such a rapid increase in the gross domestic product (GDP) was not the result of the rapid development of the state-owned economy. For instance, the total industrial output of 1996 and 1997, the state-owned economy comprised 28.5 percent and 25.5 percent respectively, whereas the private economy constituted 71.5 percent and 71.5 percent respectively.

This rapid economic growth was at the expense of major political concessions on the road to gradual capitalist restoration. In the March 1999 National People's Congress (NPC) when the Constitution was revised, the question of the independence of the individual economy, formerly regarded as playing a "supplementary role", had been strengthened to the extent of being an "important component in the socialist market economy".

Recently, the Standing Committee of the NPC endorsed the "Law on Individual Owned Enterprises", which aimed to encourage and safeguard the development of private economic units. The official figures showed by the end of 1998, registered individually owned enterprises amounted to 442,000. There were about 33.2 million self-employed industrial and commercial enterprises, some of which were registered as individually owned enterprises.

With China treading the path towards capitalism, social polarisation and increased gap between the rich and the poor have become more acute.

In the early years of the Reform, "Ten-thousand Yuen Households" was once the term used to describe the nouveau rich. In later years, over a hundred "Hundred-Million Yuen Households" had emerged. A recent report states that "currently savings in China amounts to almost 6 trillion yuan, very seriously concentrated in the hands of 15-106% of high income households" (NCNA, 30 March 1999).

The deposits of these high income households amounted to 4 to 5 trillion yuan, which was more than half the GDP for 1998 and four or five times of the annual GDP.

But at the other end of the scale, although productivity has risen, unemployment and layoffs are the rule of the day. The Minister of Chinese Labour and Social Security reported to the Standing Committee of the NPC in August that in the first half of 1999, temporary layoffs in state-owned enterprises amounted to 7.42 million workers, of which 5.4 million had not been allocated a new job. Each temporarily laid-off worker received a living allowance of 170 yuan a month. For those enterprises in some areas did not manage to distribute this money even manage some of money in time. A sum of 3.37 billion yuan was still owed to pensioners and redundant workers.

Crises of the state-owned economy

The Chinese bureaucracy has deprived workers of their power to be master of the enterprise; and to democratically operate and manage them. With control in the hands of a small minority of greedy and incompetent managers, inefficiency and low productivity have become a feature of the enterprises. This is why the long period of calls for reform. However, these reforms have mainly been in vain. At the end of 1997, a total of 6,599 (39.1%) state-owned enterprises were in debt. The net deficit was 29.3 billion yuan in 1997, and 55.8 billion yuan in 1998. About 80% of state-owned enterprises are in debt.

However, if they are all allowed to go bankrupt, the repercussions on bank loans and general savings from the people, and on the already vulnerable economic system, will certainly cause serious problems of social stability. This is one major reason why the Communist Party of China (CCP) has been reluctantly forced to push through such bankruptcies.

It must also be noted that state-owned enterprises still operate the primary postion in terms of large and medium scale enterprises with 70 percent and 64 percent respectively.

President Jiang Zemin, in his speech commemorating the 78th anniversary of the formation of the CCP stressed that state-owned enterprises amounted to 8 trillion yuan, forming the prime basis of the national economy.

He warned of the greed of "some comrades" who attempted to use their political power to secure state assets, arguing that if state assets were not contained, state assets would eventually disappear.

This speech indicated that the CCP leaders are still compelled to give lip service to Marxism and socialism, and that the McCartan of the revolution in terms of labour, social welfare and anti-capitalist ideology cannot be easily removed.

The discontent and protest growing amongst workers has erected a strong pressure on the leaders, serving as a basis for the abortive capitalist restoration in China.

The Chinese proletarian, both on the political and economic plane, is becoming conscious of its economic and actual interest, do not support the privatisation of state-owned enter-

Mandels after Auschwitz, by Enzo Traverso £11.99, paperbac 160pages, Pluto Press

THE LATEST of the Notebooks for Study and Research from the same just published by Pluto Press

Traverso was a pre-eminent modern genocide. If racial hatred was its first cause, its execution required a 'rationality' typical of total war.

Errnest Mandel, writing in an afterword to the first edition of Abraham Lees's book The Jewish Question wrote of the slaughter of five million by the Nazis: "The human right to live and to be free may not be conceived concretely the meaning of this number".

At the time, aged 22, Mandel cautioned against seeing the genocide of the Jews as a unique crime, points out Traverso. By the time of his later writings Mandel's "point of view had changed and his analysis had become much more nuanced. Parallel to his critique of Eurocentric approaches that isolate Auschwitz from racism and colonial oppression, Mandel rejected the mythical cult of the Holocaust. The Jewish genocide must be treated historically; its specificity can only be seen clearly on the basis of a more analytical approach of a comparative type. This drawing out of the evolution of Mandel's thought is only one of the many valuable things about this impressive work."

Dialogue

Traverso sustains a dialogue with writings on the Shoah by many other authors, such as the critical and heretical Marxism of Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt School, which grasped late capitalism's 'pent-up capacity for destructive upheavals exacerbated by bureaucratic organisation and advanced technology.

After Auschwitz, Hiroshima and the gulag, the old warning slogan - socialism or barbarism - formulated by European Marxists at the beginning of twentieth century needs to be seriously reviewed.

The choice we face today is no longer between the progress of civilisation and a fall into ancient savagery, but between socialism conceived as a new civilisation and the destruction of humanised life in China today.

Historical view of the Holocaust

One of the ghastliest chapters of this history - and one to be studied and learned from - is the浩的 treatment of the Jews in Germany and France during the Holocaust. The Jews were systematically exterminated by the Nazi regime, with the ultimate aim of creating a "pure" Aryan society. The Nazis believed that through their brutal actions, they could exterminate a whole race and create a world free of all racial impurities.

However, this genocidal campaign was not without its victims. Indeed, the Holocaust claimed the lives of millions of innocent people, including Jews, homosexuals, disabled people, and political dissidents. The Nazis sought to eliminate these groups from the 'Aryan' master race, believing that they were inferior and therefore unworthy of existence.

Despite the atrocities committed, the Holocaust serves as a stark reminder of the human capacity for evil and the importance of standing up against such atrocities. It is through education and remembrance that we can prevent such tragedies from happening again. The Holocaust is a historical event that should never be forgotten, and its lessons must be applied to contemporary issues to prevent similar atrocities from recurring.
Boer War – 100 years on ...

British imperialism's dirty secret

The 3-year war between Britain and the Boer Republics in 1899 shaped South African politics for a century. Until very recently it has been largely neglected in Britain – perhaps because it reveals the barbarous nature of British imperialism clearly. GEOFF RYAN explains.

During the war a quarter of all Boers involved were fighting on the side of the British, a number of English speaking white South Africans sided with the Boers.

The Boer War was even less the 'White Man's War' claimed by both sides. South Africa's Black population fought on both sides. Women, Black and White, were also involved. On the Boer side a few women fought as commandos, while large numbers died in concentration camps. Many Boer and African women were raped.

Responsibility for the war lay overwhelmingly with British imperialism. It was deliberately engineered by the British South Africa Company (headed by Cecil Rhodes, Colonel Secretary Joseph Chamberlain and British High Commissioner in Cape Colony, Chamberlain, had turned ardent imperialist in the hope of acquiring soil by annexing the Transvaal.

The disarming German raid was an unofficial invasion of the Transvaal. But it was not simply a mad adventure. It was part of a process that made war between Britain and the Boer Republics virtually inevitable. Central for Britain was the discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand in 1885. The Transvaal's new found wealth meant the Cape's previous economic dominance was rapidly eclipsed. The Transvaal could not only resist British attempts at incorporation in a Cape dominated federation, but also threaten to incorporate the Cape in a Boer republic.

This threatened Britain's position in South Africa, more importantly, its control of the sea, vital for the security of India. Gold revenues enabled the Transvaal to pay for completion of a railway to the Portuguese-held Delagoa Bay (modern Maputo in Mozambique), providing an independent route to the sea. This enabled the Transvaal to embark on a war with the Cape railways during the 1890s, which helped precipitate the war.

The Transvaal's economic backwardness, its citizens' narrow and parochial outlook, and the geology of the Johannesburg gold fields meant that the economic potential of the Witwatersrand could only be fully exploited by foreign mining firms. Only then were they able to raise the large-scale capital required to extract the gold. Foremost in this were men who had experience in the recently discovered diamond fields at Kimberley, the most important of whom was Cecil Rhodes.

Uitlanders flocked to the gold fields around the small town of Johannesburg and transformed it into a sprawling mass of shabby towns full of bars and brothels. Such developments were at odds with the strict Calvinist ideology of many of the mainly rural Boers. Their President Paul Kruger saw Johannesburg as 'an evil place full of evil people'. Religious fundamentalism was accompanied by virulent racism.

The Uitlanders rapidly outnumbered the Boers on the Rand, though they remained a minority in the Transvaal as a whole. The response of Boer leaders was to deny the Uitlanders voting rights. Their attitude hardened after Kruger made a rare visit to Johannesburg in 1894 and was met by a hostile demonstration.

After the arrival of Sir Alfred Milner in Cape Town as High Commissioner in 1897, the issue of British suzerainty was again raised. The British refused to negotiate seriously with Kruger, even when he offered more than either the Uitlanders or British were demanding.

When the Boers opened the fighting in October 1899 the British were badly prepared. They assumed that the Boers would put up some spirited resistance but would then be easily beaten. The Boers outnumbered British troops by four to one - although 85,000 reinforcements were on their way.

Despite a British victory at Elandslaagte, by the end of November LADYSMITH AND MANCHESTER had been besieged. Attempts to relieve the siege of Ladysmith and Kimberley proved disastrous. Eventually it would require 450,000 soldiers (including volunteers from Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) to win this 'small' war.

The belief that 'it will all be over by Christmas' was not just the echo of the First World War. In the early stages of the war the Boers made effective use of trenches. When British troops launched full scale attacks they were cut down.

The last set-piece battle took place in August 1900. By then both Boer capital cities, Bloemfontein and Pretoria, had been captured. Yet the war continued for another two years, now as guerrilla warfare.

The British employed brutal tactics to end it. In order to isolate the Boer guerrillas, farms were burned, crops destroyed, animals slaughtered. These policies made it difficult for guerrillas to operate.

Boer soldiers often went hungry and found it difficult to obtain fresh horses - a necessity for the war. On occasions they were virtually without clothes, reduced to improvising with sacks. Desperate Boer commanders put on the uniforms of captured British soldiers despite a proclamation by Kruger that any Boer wearing British uniform would be executed. This proclamation was rigorously carried out.

Two years earlier in Cuba the Spanish had built concentration camps. The British adopted this tactic - tens of thousands of Boer women and children were forced into them. Because of the appalling conditions 25,000 died - a tenth of the entire Boer population. The conditions were probably not deliberately harsh. British army hospitals were equally bad inside; medical and nursing skills were largely lacking. British soldiers died from disease than in combat. People died because of ignorance of the effects of overcrowding large numbers of people in unhygienic surroundings. But their suffering also reflected cruel indifference.

Today, British imperialism shows rather greater concern for the well-being of its armed forces. Its attitude to its 'enemies' remains just as callous, as the people of Yugoslavia or Iraq can testify.

After an international outcry conditions inside the camps improved. Moreover, the internment of women and children slowed the shipment of Boer recruits to the British.

The British therefore adopted a different tactic. The Boer women were forced to stay on the farms and be left on the veld, pressurising men to abandon the guerrilla struggle to take care of them.

The perilous situation of women on the veld was an important factor in persuading some Boers to switch sides.

These and other tactics brought the brutal might of the British Empire to bear on the Boers and gradually wore them down. Command units in Cape Colony and the Orange Free State were able to continue activity, but those of the Transvaal rapidly became ineffective and demoralised. It was this which brought the Transvaal that eventually won the war for Britain.

However the real losers were not the Boers but the Black population. Both sides had profited equally in the struggle. For example, Black African men provided the major role in the defence of Mafeking, armed by Baden Powell. He later cynically lied to the Boers and forced them to retreat away from the first sound of fighting.

At least as many Africans in Boer died in Boer concentration camps, and probably far more. They were denied tents to shelter them from the harsh South African climate, unlike Boer women and children.

But all this has been obliterated from history until very recently. British and Boers may have gone to war with each other but neither was prepared to contemplate Black Africans having any control over South Africa. White solidarity counted for more than the rights.

In the treaty that ended the war, Britain paid $3 million pounds to Boer farmers for the destruction of their land, houses and animals. It contained provisions for self government for the Boer Republics within a unified South African state, within a short period of time. The voting rights of Blacks would be left to these republics. So much for the British government claim that they had gone to war in the first place because of the undeclared nature of voting rights in the Boer republics!

By 1910 Britain had established the Union of South Africa. This safeguarded British strategic and economic interests and ensured White domination. The Boers were able to retain control over the Transvaal and Orange Free State and make significant gains throughout the colony. The Black population was still ruled by both English and Afrikander for another 50 years.

The Boer War was a major challenge to the developing Labour movement in Britain. The Boer leadership were thoroughly reactionary racist and religious bigots. Lives of British soldiers were at risk. Imperialism was still seen as a good thing by large sections of the population, especially the middle class. So how did Labour leaders acquit themselves?

The middle class graduates of the Fabian Society at first took a position of abstaining from the war - they eventually supported it. But Independent Labour Party leader Keir Hardie and other Socialist leaders opposed the war, alongside large numbers of trade unionists at home. They were later nullified by the Boers, despite the physical violence their stand attracted.

In his own rather confused way, Keir Hardie understood that a defeat for the Boers was in the interests of the world working class. But if Tony Blair had been Prime Minister, then no doubt he would have liked Paul Wolf to say of Iraq what they said of the Boers and refused any economic aid to Boer farmers until they elected a government he approved of - and whose undying allegiance to imperialism!
Who should get the guns?

SINCE MY last letter (SO 27) I have been scouring the pages of your paper for an answer to my questions, but find little illumination there. In particular, you seem to have gone silent about your attitude to the KLA.

Surely now it is clear that the slogan "Arm the KLA" was wrong. Any arms sent to the KLA would have been used in one of three ways:  
- Returned meekly to NATO's occupying force  
- Used for ethnic cleansing of Serbs  
- Used to police the Kosovar population

The one thing they would not have been used for would be the national liberation of Kosovo.

On the question of East Timor, your slogan is "Arm the Liberation Front", by which I assume you mean Falintil, but arms supplied to Falintil would not have been used at all. While the military and TNI were carrying out their slaughter, the communities were defenceless because Falintil had obeyed UN instructions to remain in separate zones.

Xanana Gusmao ordered his troops not to take any action that might be interpreted as starting a civil war.

In fact, while his people were being slaughtered, Gusmao was on the phone to western governments and multinationals telling them he would honour all existing contracts and property relations.

In both areas the CWI called for arms to be sent to the communities so that communities could organise their own defence. The CWI was confident that ordinary workers and peasants would instinctively put these weapons to better use than their "political leaders" ever could.

Surely there is enough tragic evidence to show that bourgeois national movements fail their people. They fail to defend them when they are attacked, they fail to return land to the peasants or nationalise industry, they accommodate themselves to the wishes of imperialism and ultimately become the policemen of their people rather than their liberators.

- this is a road that has been trodden by Tasser Arafat, Gerry Adams and countless other nationalist leaders, particularly since the collapse of Stalinism.

Socialists in this country need to encourage the building of an independent socialist working class movement worldwide rather than see legitimate national liberation movements led into a blind alley by their bourgeois nationalist leaders.

Max Neil, Preston

See page 17. Max's slogan neatly avoids defining which "community" and which section of workers and peasants would be armed. He will return to this debate in future issues of Socialist Outlook.

No magic cure for British left's sectarian disease

Will Matthews in SO 27 makes some serious points recommending socialists to stay in the Labour Party.

Although I left the party a few years ago to do more fruitful work outside, I can't condemn those who do solid work in the party.

How can I miss? I try to justify his choice by recalling that Trotsky, in the mid-1930s, called the Independent Labour Party a sect even when it had 100,000 members.

He seems to suggest that, so long as socialists are few in number, we will become a sect if we vote outside the Labour Party. The ILP was not a sect because it had "just" 100,000 members.

Many workers and socialist organisations, including Trotsky's, had fewer members at that time-as today-but were less sectarian. In fact, the ILP was a sect despite its numbers.

Even Trotsky couldn't solve problem of sectarianism on British left

Because it has a mistaken attitude toward the Communist and Labour parties and towards the working class as a whole, it turned away from a line of march that could have united the workers' movement in campaigning against fascism and war.

Being inside the Labour Party does not prevent the development of such a sect-like mentality, as some of the Trotskyists currents in the Labour Party have proven in the years since then.

However political life in the Labour Party, for both the right and the left, is presently greatly enriched from the independent socialist mobilisation of the working class, the unemployed and the radical youth.

Currents outside the party have, in ways that reflect their modest size, found ways to try to move close to the best of those in struggle or who are radicalising: through the lobby of Labour Party conferences, by turning socialist and green organisations in the direction of campaigning and by winning people to non-sectarian and revolutionary socialism.

Such activity protects socialists from sectarian degeneration far more than any party ever.


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"Let them eat shit!"

THE REVELATION that manufacturers of animal feed in France have used waste including sludge from septic tanks and effluent from animal carcases to bulk up their product is just the latest evidence that the drive for profit is incompatible with public health and safety.

The scandal was recently uncovered by German television, which pointed out that the revolting sewage residues were being added to feed for pigs and chickens.

It follows on the massive scare over the level of highly toxic dioxin in animal feed in Belgium, which has led to an international ban on Belgian meat and dairy products.

Some countries have already banned all European farm produce, and others are now likely to follow suit.

Far from making the "polluter pay", the cost of each scandal is carried by governments, while the prime culprits - grasping farmers and food industry firms - escape scot-free, and the filthy abattoirs pick up increased subsidies for slaughtering infected livestock.

Taxpayers in Belgium are to foot the bill for a $160m handout to farmers whose produce has been destroyed, and as much as $660m more is likely to be paid out in further subsidies over the next seven years to Belgian producers of polluted food.

It turns out that the Belgian authorities knew at least six months ago that animal feed was being contaminated with dioxin, but tried to keep it quiet.

In Britain the cost of compensation payments arising from the BSE scandal, arising from feeding cattle with material adulterated with the ground up brains of sheep, runs into billions.

The BSE scandal was worst in Britain because of the deregulation of the feed industry by the Thatcher government - eagerly exploited by grasping feed manufacturers eager to pocket an extra profit - and by the lack of any real controls over the quality of food on the market.

The development of genetically modified corn, tomatoes, soya and other vegetables, and the massive use by farmers of suspect weedkillers, insecticides and fertilisers means there is little refuge even for vegetarians from the systematic poisoners of agribusiness.

We can see from the cynical attitude of the rail operators, whose priority is not safety but forcing train guards to clip tickets and sell teas, that human life weighs light - if at all - in the scales compared with the profits of major corporations.

While Blair and his ilk prate about "partnership" with big business, these vivid examples remind us that the interests of working people and the profit-seekers are completely counterposed.

British and other Western capitalists don't care if workers in the Third World eat at all - as long as they keep providing cheap labour and raw materials, and their governments keep paying interest on ancient loans.

And as they tack in to banquets of the finest foods available, bosses have no reason to worry about the quality of food ordinary people find in supermarkets - as long as they keep buying and boosting the profits of Tesco, Sainsbury's and the food manufacturers.

A Labour government worth the name would be working with experts and the trade union movement to set up a full-scale and independent inquiry into the pollution of the food chain.

All the firms and farms found to be in breach of basic standards should not be subsidised, but nationalised, without compensation, and run under workers' control and expert scrutiny.

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- Rail safety p3 and p7
- Indian strike for health & safety - p13