No need for time-wasting "review": our simple prescription can cure ills of cash-starved NHS

Tax the rich: treat the sick

ANOTHER winter crisis for the National Health Service as it struggles to cope with increased numbers of emergency medical admissions insufficient beds, staff and cash.

Gordon Brown’s attempt to look clever by upholding Tory spending limits on the NHS for the first two years and promising not to increase taxes has come back to haunt New Labour.

To add insult to injury, his 3-year “comprehensive spending review” dressed up a small scale increase in health spending to look far bigger than the actual £3 billion a year increase – hence the claims of a £21 billion handout.

But the net result over Labour’s first five years will be in to increase NHS spending by only as much as the Tories had averaged in the previous 18 years.

To make matters worse, this will be the first winter in recent memory in which health authorities and trusts have been given no extra funding to cope with “winter pressures”.

There is no objective reason for a crisis. The winter weather has not been especially severe, and despite desperate efforts by the Chief Medical Officer to spare government blunders by inflating the figures, there is no flu epidemic in England; but it is clear that hospitals lack the resources to deal with increased numbers of emergency admissions.

Thousands of operations have been cancelled as surgical wards fill up with medical cases, and as scarce intensive care unit beds fill up, resulting in long stretch for critically ill patients.

The problem has been compounded by Labour’s failure to reverse other damaging Tory policies, which have closed down tens of thousands of front-line hospital beds, trained too few nurses and doctors.

But of course this has not stopped the Tory press from taking full advantage of the embarrassing crisis in what should be one of Labour’s strong issues, predictably plugging the hoary old demand for more charges and private medicine.

They point to health services in Europe which avoid the British disease of waiting lists by spending a much higher share of national wealth on health care - but which also squander much more money in the bureaucratic administration of insurance-based and partly private systems.

Even people who should know better, such as UNISON’s would-be General Secretary Dave Prentis, have called for a “fundamental review” of the way the NHS is funded.

Cheapest

But the answer is not complicated at all: the tax-funded model of the NHS is still the cheapest and simplest way of delivering a comprehensive health care system.

To plug the gaps in care opened up by 20 years of Tory policies, more money must be put in - and the way to raise this is to tax those who have profited for years from the under-funding of the NHS - the rich and big business.

After years in which governments have effectively taxed the sick to treat the rich, it’s time to turn the tables.

But if Blair and co. won’t learn this lesson they could yet pay a heavy electoral price for their arrogance.
THOUSANDS of health workers not covered by the professional Pay Review Bodies were firing last week as UNISON revered management’s latest offer. The pay talks have dragged on since last April, and while two unions – MSF and AEU – had broken ranks and accepted a miserable 3% pay increase (well below the minimum 4.2% paid last year to NHS doctors and nurses), UNISON had been on the verge of balloting members for strike action. The ballot was suspended pending a new offer, which now totals out to be a 3% deal giving just 3% for last year, 3.25% for 2000, and a likely 3% for 2001 – guaranteeing the continuation of low pay. UNISON stewards are now poised with a dilemma, to either support the latest offer, to attempt to persuade angry and frustrated members to take action.

Activities in UNISON are gearing up for the campaign to elect a new general secretary. Supporters of the Campaign for a Fighting Democratic UNISON (CFDU) and others on the left, including the SWP, are backing Roger Bannister.

In contrast to the union bureaucracy’s candidate, current deputy general secretary Dave Prentis, Roger Bannister plans to be a fighting general secretary on a worker’s wage.

The General Secretary’s salary is £74,000, many times higher than that of most UNISON members.

In return for this, the current union leadership, including Dave Prentis, have all too often failed to defend the wages and terms and conditions of their members against attacks such as privatization, cuts, wage freezes. One example in local government was when the current leadership welcomed the introduction of Best Value (ignoring policy passed at conference on this issue).

Roger Bannister was one of those who wanted that without adequate funding for Single Status in local government, it would be used as an excuse to freeze, and would be the beginning of the end for national terms and conditions. This has been borne out very clearly – Haringey council is the latest example.

Under the current union leadership, branches have been closed down and individual activists have been suspended/expelled, for campaigning on lines not liked by the bureaucracy.

In some cases this has left UNISON members without a branch or stewards for their interests. If elected, Roger Bannister will only take a worker’s wage. He believes that new members should be run for people not for profit, and opposes the pro-private-vatization policies of PFI, market testing and Best Value.

It was those people who go on strike in defence of their interests, and campaign for a minimum wage of £5 per hour, with no restrictions. He also defends self-organisation and a woman’s right to choose, and opposes the witch hunts against activists, calling for a lifting of branch suspensions, attacks on activists, and defence of members’ rights to organise to change union policies.

Harrogate unions fight Labour council’s cuts

By Pauline Bradley

"CLOSED DOWN the borough!" exclaimed UNISON’s Assistant Branch Secretary Sonya Daniel on December 7.

40 Harrogate council workers closed down Haringey Council in walkouts over attacks on terms and conditions on December 7, 13 and 14.

UNISON, the TGWU and the GMB worked closely together to co-ordinate the action.

The dispute began with the Single Status Agreement to equalise the pay structure, terms and conditions for manual workers and officer grades. Haringey agreed to implement Single Status, but refused to put any money aside to do so, instead trying to use it to make cuts.

Haringey also has an ongoing debt problem with Alexandra Palace – in the red to the tune of over £80 million, and the latest cuts are part of a repayment plan.

Cutbacks

The cuts include a reduction in annual leave, maternity leave and a number of other leave entitlements, ceasing low pay allowance of around £500 a year and moving the pay deal.

Also, sick pay would not be paid for the first two days’ sickness, reminiscent of a similar attack by Tory council chief in Wandsworth, where workers struck in November.

The council also threatened that, if we did not accept these cuts, they would tear up our contracts and make us sign new, worse ones.

The intimidation failed to prevent a solid strike on December 7. All council services were either shut or running on a minimal service, with most schools and all libraries and leisure centres shut.

The lights were out at the Civic Centre. Only a tiny number of senior officials crossed the picket lines outside every building. The press were unable to contact the council because press officers were also on strike.

The council made use of its expensive new IT equipment (24 million pounds) to call every employee saying that the unions were bad and the council wasn’t agreeing the cuts.

Contradictory

Two emails, one from the leader of the council and the other from the chief executive, contradicted each other. Unions do not have the same access to IT equipment.

Managers were also instructed to hold meetings in workplaces to spread their propaganda.

Sadly, after the first day, the GMB held a separate meeting with council officials, and pulled out of the strike. This appears to be part of an attempt by the GMB officials to take over the local branch.

This has backfired though, as rank and file GMB members have joined UNISON or the TGWU.

Despite the GMB’s role, the second strike action, on 14 and 15 December, was just as solid, if not more so, than the first.

Police arrived at the Ashleigh Road depot at 6 am to reduce pickets down to 6, so that strike breakers (who by a historical anomaly are Hackney Council employees but also TGWU members) could get into the yard and take the delivery out.

There has been widespread support for the strikes, including other local unions, parents and teachers at schools, and other members of the public, including signatures on petitions, large demonstrations to our hardship funds, collections and participation in meetings and demonstrations.

Labour says no!

Namanho Constable, Labour Party, recently declared opposition to the cuts. Haringey Trades Council organised a public meeting on 9 December in support of the council workers and against privatization. UNISON has played a key role in the anti-PFI campaign in local schools, and speakers from the campaign addressed the meeting.

Trade unions across London (and the rest of the country) recognise the importance of the stand we have taken. Donations and messages of support have come from other UNISON branches inside and outside London and from other trade unions including the NUT, the NUJ and the Liverpool Dockers.

The Council has made some concessions. They have agreed to put £1 million in next year’s budget to fund single status. They have not agreed savings on terms and conditions for next year’s budget. However, since the strikes began, they have also issued 145 redundancy notices.

At a UNISON branch meeting on 13 January, a motion was passed agreeing to continue our campaign.

- to ballot key workers for all-out indefinite strike action;
- to initiate a levy of all members of 50p to £1 per month to provide financial assistance to key workers;
- to continue with a rolling programme of strike action, starting with a one day strike on the first day of the key workers’ action;
- for branch officers to negotiate to avoid compulsory redundancies, and to ensure the withdrawal by the Council of any attempts to introduce changes to our terms and conditions of employment as part of the budget making process for 2000/2001.

Branch officers will report the outcome to members.

So we have made significant gains, and our ballots for action with the TGWU has been consolidated. Workers’ spirits have been lifted. We now feel our strength.

Donations and/or messages of support to UNISON, 48 Grand Parade, Green Lanes, Harringay, London N4 1AG. Tel: 0181-211 0558, Fax 0181-880 1429, Minicom 0181-880 9741.
Spin-doctoring won’t cure the NHS

Tony Blair’s vague and unexpected promise on the Frest programme to raise British health care spending to an “European average” over the next six years is an appeal to collapse of repeated efforts by Labour’s spin doctors to escape from the growing crisis on the face of our hospitals.

Worse, Labour’s political line since the 1997 election has been to tinker at the edges of the NHS rather than confronting the real resource problems they inherited from the Tories.

Ministers have promoted expensive but essentially irrelevant gimmicks such as the “NHS Direct” phone service, but the ad-hoc charges of the late 1980s and early 1990s have now been replaced by the National Patient Safety Agency which has resulted in serious mismanagement and controversy in the new (PFH) privately-funded hospitals.

But two years of Gordon Brown’s turgid Tony spending review have so far provided no substantial benefits to our NHS. It is clear that the introduction of charges on in-patients for meals and “hotel services” while in hospital. Unfortunately many of these ideas appear to fit with other “New Labour” objectives such as privatisation, “partnership” and “modernisation”.

In some ways the situation is reminiscent of the winter of 1987-88, in which a barrage of press headlines on the state of the NHS forced Thatcher to come up with a short-term handout, while the government’s “review” culminated in the reactionary, market-style reforms of 1991.

Rejected

All of the schemes which are now being recommended to Tony Blair were explored – and ultimately rejected – by Thatcher and the Tory party as they looked for ways of privatising more health care in the late 1980s: they were not politically viable then, and they are not now.

Private medicine remains massively unpopular (still fewer than one person in eight has private cover, most of those through company schemes), expensive, poor value and highly selective in what it will treat, leaving the NHS to cover emergencies, chronic illnesses and expensive long-term care.

Because most people in hospital beds are elderly and/or poor, imposing charges for treatment or hospital stay involves either costly and complex bureaucratic systems or grotesquely unfair charges on those least able to pay.

One significant difference is that in 1987 Thatcher had just won the election six months earlier, and had a full electoral term left to see through her “reforms”.

By contrast the Blair government is already more than half way through its first term, and must find ways to make a difference quickly if it is not to face another similarly bruising winter before the next election.

His pledge on the Frest programme of extra money over the next six years would be more welcome if he had defined how much he meant and told us where it would come from.

European countries spend an average of 8 percent of GDP on health care – but this average is lower because it includes low-spenders such as Britain, Portugal and Ireland. France spends 9.6 percent and Germany 10.7 percent, compared with 6.8 percent in Britain.

But a much larger share of health spending flows through the private sector in most of Europe compared with Britain, and most of these have complex, insurer-based schemes that only add to heavy administrative costs.

Cost

Estimates vary as to how much Blair’s pledged extra funding would amount to in real terms – or where it would come from.

With British GDP currently running at 500 billion, to reach the European average of 8 percent would imply an increase of around £120 billion on the current annual spend on NHS care and private medicine over the next 7 years.

If all came from government and went on the NHS it would be the equivalent of a 5p tax – but it would also raise substantially more than most campaigners believe is necessary to enable the British system to cope with the various demands of the 21st century.

The proposal depends on squeezing the ceiling on National Insurance contributions, which would raise the highest paid would raise up to £3 billion: increasing the employers’ share of National Insurance (currently around 50 percent of the European average) could easily raise billions more.

Steps alone, taxing the rich and big business, would easily provide enough to expand our health services to meet the demands of the new century, and low pay in the NHS, scrap PFH, build new state-funded hospitals, and halt the scandalous means-testing of long-term care for the elderly.

A thriving NHS has always been the best answer to the parasitic claims of the private sector.

This winter’s lesson must be that spin doctors cannot compensate for a policy failure on health.

Gordon Brown must be told to open up his war chest on capital gains and basic income tax, and not just to try to boost the NHS by spending the same old timid money.

The NHS is now at the lowest ebb of its existence and has faced a clear and present danger. The government is complacent and its spin doctors are failing to deal with the new facts of life.

Epidemic of excuses as NHS can’t cope with normal British winter

John Lister

Since the new year began, health ministers, backed up by hospital figures from the Chief Medical Officer, had been trying to claim that there was an “epidemic” of flu, and “excess deaths” were due to surgical wards, at the expense of cancelling waiting list operations.

Absolutely all of these problems and bottlenecks which beset the NHS were predicted by campaigners: Tony police when he was up to the collapse of front-line care were one key reason why people voted Labour in 1997, expecting Tony Blair to make a difference.

But two years of Gordon Brown’s turgid Tony spending review have looked at ways of generating extra resources or “lightening the load on the NHS”. But more and more pundits are now seeing that if faced with such an increase, Blair can be persuade to turn instead to privatising more health care and introducing charges on in-patients for meals and “hotel services” while in hospital.

The were they were. Ministers have claimed that health workers and campaign groups met at the request of the NHS in Kildwick, (the National Health Service) launched a small leaflet stating that they believe it is necessary to
Dig deep to build London’s left challenge to Blairism!

Greg Tucker (Secretary, London Socialist Alliance)

The GLA elections provide the left with a fantastic opportunity to deal a serious blow to New Labour and the Blair project.

The support across London for Ken Livingstone demonstrates there is a significant number of working class people who want to vote for an alternative to New Labour’s Tory policies.

The London Socialist Alliance has produced a draft programme addressing the major issues of concern to progressive working class voters on the issues of transport and tube privatisation, the destruction of the environment, welfare state cuts, the growing gap between rich and poor, and the police and racism.

We also have a number of prospective candidates in place.

It is clear that the New Labour honeymoon is well and truly over. The health service “flu” crisis is just the latest of a series of scandals where the lack of substance of New Labour spin has been exposed.

In particular the gerrymandering of the Mayoral election is proving expensive for Londeners in just the same way as it is in Wales with their actions over the Welsh Assembly leader.

Coupled with the green shoots of recovery of industrial struggle – Conases drivers being the latest example of a series of small scale (but growing) industrial disputes where workers have decided they have to fight for their own hands – the potential for the left to make a mark in the GLA elections cannot be ignored.

Bringing together half a dozen left organisations and a body of independent socialists the LSA has built up in its high degree of comradely co-operation.

For those on the left jaded by years of backhoring and sniping between left groups the LSA is a refreshing change – here is a real chance for collaboration to produce results far more than just the sum of the separate parts would suggest.

Clearly problems remain. The government is doing all it can to make our task difficult. Their latest strategy is to withdraw the "freepost" of election material – designed to hamper grass roots organisation of independent campaigns.

A strong left campaign can tap into the mood of disgust with New Labour policies – the Tube privatisation

London Socialist Alliance

A socialist alternative to Blair’s New Labour In London

The Socialist Alliance stands for –

- keeping the tube in public ownership and control
- decent, affordable homes for all
- high quality comprehensive education
- proper investment in our health and emergency services
- no more cuts in public services
- decent wages for all who want to work
- a 25 hour week with real pay
- a minimum wage of at least £7 an hour
- and full trade union rights for all
- ending poverty and decent benefits for the retired and those who cannot work
- restoring benefits and pensions to give a living standard of living for all
- an end to all discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, nationality, religion, age, disability or sexuality
- streets free from the fear of crime and harassment by the police
- a world safe from environmental destruction
- we will finance a huge job creation scheme
- London will get its own London house building, transport restructuring, school and hospital building – by levying a tax on the profits of the banks and finance houses of the City of London.
- we will put people before profit
- by supporting the Socialist Alliance you can elect people to the Greater London Assembly who will speak up for workers, the jobless, pensioners and students, and against the bankers, the bosses and the profiteers.
- you can speak out against the way New Labour has abandoned many of those who elected it in 1997, in order to serve big business. And you can say you want a government that serves the working class as the Tories serve the rich.
- it’s time for the left to unite, join with us!
Livingstone campaign key to fighting New Labour

By Alan Thornett

Keir Starmer's campaign to become London Mayor has created the biggest crisis new Labour has faced since it came to office. Blair has spared nothing to stop Livingstone. The electoral college was rigged against him, and some of the unions which support him have been cynically barred from voting. Yet every move against him has only increased Livingstone's support.

Everywhere people have had the chance to vote Livingstone has swept the board, whether in the consultative ballot of Labour Party members in Tooting where he scored 66.4% (with Dobson at 28%) or the TGWU ballot where he won 85% (with Dobson third at 6.9%).

The outcome, due in mid-February, is too close to call.

Livingstone commands a staggering 63% support in the London electorate, which looks back positively on the GLC and with hostility to the way it was abolished. It is a mindboggling level of support, which holds firm whether Livingstone stands as the Labour Party candidate or as an independent, which is at the root of Blair's problem. To exclude Livingstone from the list of nominees Blair not only risked a split in the Labour Party but faced the nightmare of Livingstone winning the mayoralty on an independent ticket.

True, Livingstone has insisted that he will not stand as an independent, but ultimately there is nothing to stop him. So Blair's nightmare goes on. It's a unique situation. For the first time in years the left has the right-wing over a barrel and can watch them squirm.

It is an opportunity which places a huge responsibility on Ken Livingstone, since, although it has been created by a combination of political circumstances, he holds the supporting weight and acclamation of the left. Thrown at what is a posed is not simply whether he will be mayor or not.

Representation

There is a crisis of labour representation and an urgent need to reorganise the left into a more effective force – inside and outside of the LP.

For the left the outcome will ultimately be judged on whether the campaign had contributed significantly to resolving these issues; whether it had begun to drag the left out of the decline it has suffered since the mid-1980s, and whether it had start to shape up a political alternative to Blairism.

Big opportunities – for parties on the left and as an independent – were missed. There is a very real chance that if a posed is not the time to talk about common ground with the Blairites, it is the time to attack New Labour for its right-wing policies in order to raise the issue of an alternative.

Gamble

Livingstone must accept the terms of the selection panel, with whatever reservations, rather than the unacceptable and stand as an independent, was a gamble which has already regret.

That may have been the best time to split and stand as an independent, since he could right say that he was not prepared to submit to a corrupt system. It was already space opening up to the left for a new left-wing party of the working classes for the first time in many years. New Labour is losing support in its traditional heartlands, and amongst its traditional supporters.

These forces, along with those who are leaving the LP in disgust, represent a consistency of people on which a new party can be built. It is an important opportunity, but it will not last for ever.

The Livingstone campaign would represent the best opportunity for a new party with a substantial split from the Labour Party rather than being together diverse forces.

Would others join, particularly if the LP is left intact, represent a consistency of people on which a new party can be built. It is an important opportunity, but it will not last for ever.

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Tough times in today's 'Satanic' Mills

Marian Brain
Monday, March 23 was a day to remember. Almost 4000 members of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) working in 37 Customer Service Centres, stood up to British Telecom and shouted loud and clear, they were not going to stand being bullied and intimidated on a daily basis.

The workers reported a BT failure to resource its customer centres adequately. BT was not prepared to employ and train BT people but wanted to continue to use Agency workers.

As an outcome of this the Agency's mas- sive profits they also wanted to increase the exploitation of its workers. Agency workers are paid 150/151 by setting out on unachievable targets on call handling and selling of goods. They have no training in handling customers and poor performance procedures as a way of frightening people.

To top it all, in the talks that are going on restructuring the workforce below manage- ment level, BT are saying that the call centre you have taken and how long you were waiting between calls.

It also monitors how many breaks you have and what for; there is a code for your schedule to work out if a different code for going to the toilet etc. Then you are also attached to targets that if that is not bad enough there are targets for this and that. This includes the number of calls you have taken away from your terminal, and you are pressured not to take breaks.

You have so many minutes to take a call and deal with it, you have another target on selling if you work in 15.

Marian Brain

By Charlie van Gelderen

Here we go again...

In July 1945, Labour was voted into power with an overwhelming majority.

The Manchester Guardian described Labour's success as "the most revolutionary victory in British history". The battle of the unions was fought in the general election of 1945.

The Attlee government introduced a series of measures to regulate the economy, including the Nationalisation Act of 1945, which nationalised the coal, steel, and transport industries.

In 1945, Labour won with a landslide.

The 1945 election was a key moment in the history of British trade unionism, as it marked the beginning of a period of significant growth for the TUC and its affiliated unions.

The TUC's organisation and leadership played a crucial role in mobilising workers and ensuring their rights were protected.

Sniping from the Left

by Charlie van Gelderen

It began to lose working class support when, instead of moving forward by taking over the financial and industrial power control in the nationalised industries, Harold Morrison — Peter Mandelson's granddad — pressed for Gossips internationalisation and Gossips introduction of free market.

May 1977 — Labour won with a landslide. This was mainly a revolt against Thatcherism. The New Labour government, under the leadership of Tony Blair, almost immediately placed its election pledges on the back burner. Blair voted with Brown in signing Thatcher's privatisation.

The New Labour government's privatisation of industry continues to this day. The Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher privatised a wide range of state-owned industries, including British Telecom, British Gas, and British Airways.

The Conservative government's privatisation policy was widely condemned at the time, and has been extensively critiqued by socialists and trade unionists.

Who is being swamped?

De Vervoer, the mid-week newspaper, two days after the massacre of 56 African students in Sharpeville, peacefully protesting against the Pass Laws, appealed to the world "to understand that everybody in South Africa believed in justice and freedom and acknowledged the rights of the black man."

"We intend to do what is just and right as a Chris- tian nation in the end."

There must have been hollow laughter in Robben Island when Nel- son Mandela and his fel- low prisoners heard this on the radio.
Detainees fight back as the governmentvens for asylum seekers

Italy: new victims of Fortress Europe

from a special correspondent in Italy

FOUR detained immigrants died in a riot at the detention centre in Trapani, Sicily, southern Italy, early in January. After the fire, a delegation of supporters found that a number of detainees were being held beyond the legal limit of 20 days plus a further 10 days on appeal. Several were released at once thanks to pressure from the Federation of South Asia.

The tragedy exposed a recent verbal agreement between the Italian and Albanian home secretaries to set up immigration detention centres in Albania for would-be immigrants into Italy. The centres were set up to house Kosovar refugees. The plan is to fill them with Kurds, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, east Europeans, etc. to get into Italy.

Any immigrants who arrive illegally at the port of Gorizia in the far southeastern Italy will be sent not to their country of origin but to the camps in Albania.

Germany has already set the precedent of sending would-be immigrants to buffer zones with detention centres in Poland, the Ukraine and Lithuania. This is a relatively new phenomenon in modern Italy, and has come about under pressure from other EU states, Germany and Britain in particular, to "protect" what their policies have regarded as the vulnerable southern borders of Europe.

Winston Silcott; a political prisoner

Paul Hubert

Winston Silcott, rather than the self-styled Augusto Pinochet, has grounds for claiming he is a British political prisoner. He has served the "torture" for a murder of which he maintains his innocence. He has spent 18 years behind bars and there are no indications that his case is being reviewed. When black people fought back against oppressive policing, he was victimised of one of the most disgusting campaigns of racism ever seen in the British media. The conviction was quashed in 1991 when even an appeal judge could see that confession evidence against him had been fabricated. There was no other evidence.

In jail Winston has been labelled a "model prisoner" and praised for community work with young offenders. He has maintained his innocence of the murder of black motorcyclist Anthony Smith in 1984. He was attacked by Smith at a party and says that he was defending himself against a violent criminal, as the law allows. However his trial and conviction came when he had been put in the frame by Blacklock's killing.

Silcott is to receive a £50,000 damages payment from the Metropolitan Police for wrongful arrest and imprisonment in the Blacklock case.

Winston wanted the police to admit publicly they were wrong but the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Sir Paul Condon, did not apolo- gise or admit liability. It has been hinted that he really's got off scot free because the force has a high police morale.

Newspapers have lent support to Blacklock's embittered widow, who finds it difficult to accept that whoever killed her husband might not be behind bars. One of the investigating officers in the case deserted Silcott after even his conviction had been quashed, as the "most evil man I've ever met."

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French scientists shed new light on BSE scandal

Alan Thornett

French scientists have been more interfering in recent months than the hysteria whipped up at the end of last year over the 'beef war', as it became known. The taboos carried rigid, racial, French and German headlines day after day. Some feared they thought, from them, that Britain was on the verge of war with France if not Germany as well.

This led to a boycott of French goods and we were subjected to the disgusting sight of hearths that needed to be brandishing placards with frog's blood on.

Few shooting wars have managed to unite the media around the world and the self-appointed obdurate and obscurantist people around the world in this way. The tabloids churned out racing with their brethren, and the British accepted the French case almost unerringly.

While Britain's farmers, whose policies led to BSE in the first place, initially led on this, new Labour, who could have totally exposed them had they chosen to, decided to back the pack and then it took over.

You searched in vain for the most obvious facts. That, for example, Britain, France, or even Germany, which was banning British beef but virtually the whole world. Fifty-four countries in all.

You would have thought that this was a fairly relevant point to make for papers carrying page after page, day after day, lambasting France for not buying "our beef!"

Ridiculous!

Outside of the EEC, where Britain has used the EU structures, and the political leverage available within it, to push the ridiculous notion that 'British beef is safe' is to waste a handful of countries accept it. These include the Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Hong Kong, Malta and Trinidad and Tobago.

And you can search in vain to find out about the scale of the problem Britain has had. Britain has had 180,000 cases of BSE, that is 99% of all known cases in the world.

In the UK there has been 2,000 cases of BSE. France has had a total of 70 cases and almost certainly one case, all from British export of cattle feed to France.

We are dealing with an incredibly brain disease (BSE) and not cattle and new variant CJD, the human form it takes which has a latency period of somewhere between 10 and 30 years.

This means that no one knows how many people are already infected by this contaminated food going back to the 1980s. In Britain it could be hundreds, it could be thousands, it could be millions. No one knows.

A third of the population are genetically susceptible to it. 44 people have already died in Britain. There have been two deaths in France. It is transmitted by an agent which is impervious to normal methods of controlling infected meat such as cooking.

The Tories, who removed regulations from the cattle industry, must provide proof to slaughter sheep with a dangerous brain disease and hence be to no cattle and this gave the world BSE, get away now free.

Now top French scientists have produced new, and disturbing, evidence on the existence of BSE in cattle under 30 months, and have produced a method of detecting it.

BSE has not been visible detectable below 30 months and therefore (illogically) assumed to be absent. This new evidence would blow the British deaths from last if proves conclusive; as the British case is based on the 30 month period.

More importantly it would expose a huge public health problem in Britain, showing that BSE was still regularly feeding into the British system. French scientists also claim to have evidence that BSE can be transmitted between cattle by physical contact. This exposes the dangers in Britain's refusal, unlike France, to slaughter the whole herd where a BSE case occurs.

They also have found that the disease can be passed on through infected pasture. This requires massive decontamination measures, an issue which the government let alone the press have not even addressed.

It has also been revealed that during the negotiations Britain offered the French government that they would slaughter beef bought from Britain in a single approved abattoir.

This was an implicit admission of French concerns about well documented floating of regulations on the removal of spinal material in British abattoirs.

The implications for the remaining beef enters in Britain are of course horrendous.

Scientists

The French scientists also claim that they have been refused data from a secret experimental BSE infected herd, kept by the British government. Why the secrecy? What has it got to hide?

The credibility and independence of the French scientists' findings is enhanced

Wales must fight for the full Objective

Objective 1 is currently the big area in Welsh policies. Having secured Objective 1 status for the counties and the valleys, from 2000 to 2006, Labour was under pressure to provide funds to match those being allocated by the European Union (EU) under the Objective 1 funds on offer. The objective was to ensure that the valleys and the entire area met EU standards.

The Welsh Assembly is refusing to give any assurance on matched funding ahead of the announcements of the comprehensive spending review, expected next October.

This leaves the very real possibility that money will be cut out of another, already over-stretched parts of the Assembly budget to release matched funding.

In this, Wales would be emulating one of the worst aspects of the Irish experience of EU funding, where cash was diverted from health and social services to business structure and economic development projects.

This approach, of robbing the poor to pay the 'poorest of the poor', is completely unacceptable. The campaigning group Welsh Labour Action and a number of senior Labour figures have already raised their opposition to this course of action. Local Labour parties and trade union branches must begin to add their voices to the protest. Nothing less than full matched funding, over and above the Barnett formula, is acceptable.

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Troubled New Year for Scots Blairites

1999 was a momentous year in Scottish Politics. After decades of campaigning, planning and protes ting a Scottish Parliament was finally established. The election of that Parliament has fundamentally changed Scottish politics. Gordon Morgan explains.

The focus of political discussion is now focussed on Edinburgh not Westminster, which has appeared to many as a surprise Blair and Scottish Westminster MPs.

This sentiment being thought irrelevant and in the lead up to the UK general election, the SNP has launched a high profile campaign explaining why Westminster is important to Scotland.

This fundamental shift in perspective is irreversible, because already the Scottish Parliament has more direct elections of Scottish people than Westminster.

Schools, health, roads, education, economic development are all under the control of Edinburgh. Edinburgh policies and decisions are being held accountable for failings in areas of most importance to people's lives.

Scottish Socialist Party

The SSP has held its founding conference in February 1999. Tommy Sheridan was elected to Parliament in June and by the end of the year the SSP had around 2,000 members, 50 branch committees and an active opinion poll. This political success can be built on. 5% across Scotland could see the SSP win seats in Parliament and would give around 8 MSPs.

The SSP platform is a clear identification with the fight against poverty and our engagement in popular struggle. Labour has abandoned Socialism, the SSP has adamantly pursued Socialism.

Tension between Westminster and Holyrood

We have had immediate turf wars between Donald Dewar (First Minister - Scottish Parliament) and John Reid (Secretary of State for Scotland) who speaks for Scotland. Dewar won.

This is symptomatic of the likely outcome if a substantial policy or funding clash occurs. It is trying to head this off by setting up joint committees to liaise on policy overlaps between devolved and retained powers.

While Labour in power they will prevent open conflict. More important is the fact that there is a unified civil service with close daily liaison between Treasury and Scottish Finance Ministers.

The potential for conflict is real. Essentially the Treasury controls Scottish spending and has no 2 years total English expenditure on Health. Hence, Education is set to rise by around 2%, but in Scotland under the Barnett formula it is set to fall by 2%.

Meanwhile the SNP pursues to be able to deliver the Terminology that Scotland raises more in taxes than it spends.

Parliament vs Executive

After a slow start, the Parliament is finding its feet.

Unlike Westminster, Holyrood was designed to have a strong committee structure and committees are calling ministers to regular account. Ministers have reacted against that and have tried to restrict the committees – it will be interesting to see how members stand against the executive.

On being informed a minister was acting under powers delegated from the British government to the Scottish government rather than the parliament, the committee passed a "negative instrument" returning the powers to the Parliament and forcing the minister to comply with their wishes.

Committees have the power to initiate legislation independent of the government although this has not yet been used.

Having the whole Parliament take responsibility and challenge the executive strengthens democracy and encourages people to place demands on their representatives.

Pressures on New Labour

Labour worked out most Left candidates are decamping to Holyrood. Blairites to the executive on a straight new Labour programme. The SNP is planning to win seats in Holyrood and a third party effort is planned.

Labour has no overall majority and only a small majority with the Liberals. Because of a widespread view they are only in government for the salaries, Liberals have been attacked in the press and need to separate themselves from Labour. Tuition fees in higher education are the key divide.

Labour stood in June on a platform of retention of fees while the Liberals stood on the sole platform of abolishing fees. Labour appeared unwilling to compromise and the fall of the Government seemed likely. A committee chaired by Cubie looked into HE funding.

The second report has recommended the abolition of fees, but a deferred payment by students of the same amount after graduation. Repayments would only commence when students were earning over £25,000 a year. Cubie also recommended reintroducing grants for poor students.

Having clearly stated they were against deferred payments, the Liberals are not yet off the hook. They are trying to portray this a Graduate Tax and seizing on the reorganisation of grants as a way to argue that they are better off. They take the package as a whole.

They are still likely to pay an electorial price, and the government still could too. Labour for its part is looking for some kind of deal, which would include housing associations. Labour would then be satisfied. After all tuition fees are abolished and its policy has not changed.

Clearly this does not meet our aspirations for abolition of fees and restoring full grants. But the £25,000 threshold does mean that most graduates will never pay tuition fees and some will get grants. So after arguing for improvements, if Labour are satisfied this is not a win.

Parliament needs that different policies can be adopted in Scotland although English and Welsh students will take note.

Jointing the rebraille alliance of MSPs.

Expectations are that the parliament will positively act on Scotland's housing problems. The SNP demand will be more fiscal powers, or at least more money, for Scotland.

In general people will take the view that policy set locally is more democratic. There is a one-way process of power transfer: from Westminster to Holyrood. It is not reversible. Over time the devolution service is unlikely to save the UK.

Tuition Fees

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Parliament needs that different policies can be adopted in Scotland although English and Welsh students will take note.

Labour leader Donald Dewar (above) is laying the plot ... opening up new possibilities for the SSP.

Labour structural problems

Labour are destroying their own patronage base in Scotland. If schools and hospitals are removed from council control what is the role of local government? They are also pledged to introduce PR for local government, which whilst it is desirable on democratic grounds and welcomed by the SSP would remove many existing Labour councillors. But councillors and their families are the core of active workers for Labour in Scotland.

The Scottish party has limited freedom of movement over funding. In England raising taxes was not used as an alternative at the polls, but in Scotland the SNP argued for a tax rise and they will demand more money from England. Labour is still tied to Gordon Brown's purse strings.

The SSP and Parliament

The SSP Bill to abolish Warrant Sales is proceeding through committees with considerable success. This is a key issue which was highlighted during the anti-Poll Tax campaign and which developed in Scotland south of the border.

Tommy Sheridan has been able to cross examine representatives of the Sheriffs Officers as to how they defended this barbaric practice which affects over 26,000 poor people each year.

Although Labour can delay the passage of this bill, it is almost inconceivable that they can oppose it openly. It would split Labour if they did. Its passage, as one of the first pieces of legislation of the Parliament, will be a huge boost to the SSP.

The SSP is emerging as the natural spokesperson for anti-poverty campaigns and pensioner's groups. Sheridan is frequently invited to current affairs debates with ministers on TV, radio and at conferences.

In Parliament there is a loose alliance of the 3 independents, Tommy, Stewart Cochrane and Robin Harper (the Green MSP). There is also dialogue with left SNP MSPs.

Although the SNP was the electoral success in June, present performances of the campaign work of SSP and its predecessor the Scottish Socialist Alliance. This has continued, especially over housing transfers and PFI. Ultimately SSP and their focus comes from this work in the localities.

It is attracting support from the traditional base of Labour: tenants groups and workers, pensioners, the poor and low paid.

Building the SSP is the key urgent task for Socialists in Scotland.
The collapse of the World Trade Organisation summit in Seattle at the end of last year was a major setback for the advocates of Thatcherite "neo-liberal" policies in the US and Europe. Not only were the objectives they hoped to achieve at the WTO's so-called "Millennium Round" not achieved: the spotlight of the world's media began to focus on areas of government policy which are seldom if ever publicly discussed. Pete Cooper and John Lister weigh up the issues.

**The anger of the free marketeers**

"It is hard to say which was worse: watching the militant disciples parade their ignorance through the streets of Seattle, or listening to their lame-brained governments respond to the arguments." (The Economist)

"If you are a Salvadoran mother desperate to feed your family or a Chinese teenager with no local job prospects, that 'swapsheet' and 'exploitation' might look more and more like opportunity." (Wall Street Journal)

"The ragged coalition of protesters at Seattle use the language of socialism but have no agenda of their own. The '30' protesters accuse the WTO of helping 'the exploitation of our plant and its people by the global capitalist system'. Instead they demanded 'alternative social and economic structures based on cooperation, ecological sustainability, and grassroots democracy', which sounds like the Communist Manifesto job rewritten by Christopher Robin. (...)"

("... In the end, the WTO is on the side of the angels. It is what the world's need most..."

(Andrew Marr, Independent on Sunday)

**Expected failure**

The failure of the round was widely anticipated, which explains the notable absence of world leaders at Seattle. But it also means that world agricultural policies are not being implemented. Agriculture, Services, and TRIPS for example are already being negotiated, and the US is not expected to negotiate as a potential export area. The WTO agenda on these issues is to work on trade, so that services of course is of course closely linked to agenda of the privatization and deregulation of financial and telecommunications.

**Short shrift**

WTO Labour has been one of the most hotly debated and averted of the agenda. The US and Europe are pushing for labour standards to be included in the agreement, but the US and European representatives want the WTO to be bound by law to have a say in determining labour standards. The US and Europe are pushing for labour standards to be included in the agreement, but the US and European representatives want the WTO to be bound by law to have a say in determining labour standards.
The British government's position is out- and-out rejection of all the main issues, and anything it is to the right of the US government.

Blair's government is opposed to the EU position on subsidies for EU agriculture. And while it gives only reluctant support to the US position on core labour standards this is not out of solidarity with the third world. The latter's position was driven by the US because they potentially constitute a barrier to free trade. New Labour argues that the issues should be delegated to the forthcoming International Labour Organisation (ILO).

**The International Labour Organisation (ILO)**

The main labour movement body internationally is the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), which began in the cold war and is still heavily dominated by the US labour movement and its allies, notably the TUC. Its general secretary is right wing former A&U leader Bill Jordan.

Generally speaking the ICFTU supports the neo-liberal agenda, but calls for the WTO in consultation with the ILO to impose core labour standards as a condition of access to markets. These standards are the ILO core standards adopted in a Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work in January 2000:

- freedom of association;
- the right to collective bargaining;
- the right to organize and bargain collectively, and child labour;
- abolition of discrimination in employment.

The Declaration's supporters don't often mention that it is hedged around with caveats about the rights not affecting the competitive position of countries, which effectively nullify its impact.

Unfortunately sections of the left such as the Merseyside observers, in accordance with their system of alliances with the "left" international labour bureaucracy, take the same position. They claim that the imposition of core labour standards is not an attempt to price third world industries out of world markets, since they make no reference to labour costs as such.

Nevertheless power to discriminate against such industries and countries would be handed over to unelected international institutions (WTO, ILO) and trade bureaucrats, whose concerns and interests lie altogether elsewhere.

The majority of Third World governments are opposed to the issues of labour and environmental standards being referred to world trade. They argue that this would be no more than (not very well) disguised protectionism by the "developed" world and its labour leaders.

Of course the position of most third world governments is in turn merely the protection of their "own" capitalist right to exploit their own populations. However NGOs and most genuinely independent trade unions in the third world generally take the same position.

They say that the issues of trade union rights should be dealt with not by means of international trade regulation, but through building up independent labour movements in each country, and by international solidarity with those movements in the face of repressive governments. This is the position of the ILO.

The WTO and similar organisations, which take their decisions behind closed doors, with no reference to trade unions or any input from the country concerned, are heavily dominated by the imperialist nations and would use the clause act as partial judge and executor on behalf of the imperialist corporations.

In fact no country in the world passes the tests - not least the last of the British anti-union laws violate ILO conventions. There are three million child labourers in Britain, mostly illegal, and many more in the USA. On that logic the WTO should take action against Britain and the USA.

Of course the standards would inevitably be only selectively applied. Would the WTO raise tariffs against Nike subsidiaries or suppliers using child labour on the same basis as a third world based competitor? To pose the question is to know the answer. Advocates of labour standards like Bill Clinton or the TUC don't expect them to be used against US or European multinational.

As a commentary for Filipino socialists put it, "Clinton's agenda on these issues is hypocritical and a double-bladed weapon, intended to give the WTO extra powers in micro-managing the economies of the third world nations, in addition to the "free trade" it is not really free at all. 30% of world trade is now intra-corporate. This system is therefore subject to private and quantity decisions made by ever more dominant monopolistic corporations, and are determined by such considerations as differential rates of taxation, arbitrary location of factories and currency speculation, political egoism, etc.

There is no question here of genuine competition from non-governmental bodies such as the WTO, ILO, TUC, or ICFTU. Rather it is a large number of buyers and sellers - as in any mechanical economic theory.

The issue of economic, social, political and increasingly military equality, or rather the unequal position of the Third World in the international trade. Since the modern epoch of imperialism the lack of equality in these relations has meant that semi-colonial countries have been consigned to the role of producers of internationa.

Under the WTO'spanels - which sit in judgement on trade disputes and have the power to overrule elected governments - are made up of unscrupulous individuals whose names are not disclosed. They only meet in secret session, and hear no outside witnesses.

Once a WTO panel finds - against a country and imposes sanctions, these can only be lifted by a unanimous vote of all member countries - including the one which laid down the regulations.

Under the WTO's new 'international court of justice', national laws are all regarded as "barriers to trade".

Under WTO rules no country is allowed to use genetically modified organisms. Any country refusing to import products on grounds of health and safety has to provide scientific proof.

Many of these activities are increasingly explicitly anti-capitalist, a trend which will have been enormously boosted by the Seattle events. Socialists should support them, by passing pious resolutions in labour movement bodies, but by helping them build genuine unity around the key issues.

The Thatcher/Reagan neo-liberal offensive has been vigorously pursued for over two decades, and is now fully supported and deepened by Blair, especially within the EU. For the last two years there has been little trade union opposition or Labour left opposition, a serious attempt at a coherent alternative.

The lack of any real movement against implementation by the EU in the UK is because Britain has been a real weakness in mounting opposition to the acquis.

However there are grounds for renewed optimism in the future. The acquis has been growing rapidly in recent years, and drew in a new layer of activists.

The task now is to win these issues are further popularised and used as a way of building a serious current which is not "anti-capitalist", but which goes on explicitly to embrace a socialist, internationalist agenda.
**Campaigners discuss British follow-on from Seattle**

Adam Hartman

AROUND 150 people from many different organisations and parts of the country gathered in London on January 15 to reflect on the highly successful global protests against the World Trade Organisation meeting in Seattle.

The meeting considered how to develop anti-WTO campaigns in the US and European Union, in spite of their setback in Seattle, to push ahead with the further liberalisation of trade in the markets of the South.

Barry Coates of the World Development Movement, Chris Keene of the Green Party and Colin Hines, an anti-globalisation economist, kicked off the discussion. Attendees at the meeting were organisations as diverse as the Green Party, Green Left, the Conference of Socialist Economists, anti-Nestle group the Asbestos Campaign, the Socialist Workers Party and Reclaim the Streets.

The meeting recognised that, with the WTO sidelined for the time being, it was necessary to confront all the institutions and mechanisms which are being used to promote the neoliberal agenda, not least the flagging Transatlantic Economic Partnership as well as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

It was felt that it was necessary to raise much wider public awareness about how organisations like the WTO work and whose interests they serve, and to exploit the lie that free trade works to everyone's benefit.

A representative of the Asbestos campaign explained that a decision was expected imminently from the WTO's appeals procedure on Canada's appeal against the EU ban on asbestos. The campaign will be organising a picket of Canada House in the event of the appeal being upheld. The meeting also agreed that we should demand that the government refuse to comply with such a decision.

It was also necessary not simply to oppose neoliberalism but also to propose an alternative vision of the world economy, in which trade would respect the environment and serve the needs of communities rather than the interests of multinational corporations.

Tom Wengraf from the British supporters of Le Monde Diplomatique, who spoke in support of a 'Robin Tax' on international currency transactions, and outlined plans to launch a British branch of ATTAC, the international Robin tax campaign.

A key part of the discussion was on the question of bourgeois labour standards. John Swift from Coventry TUC argued that that the international labour movement cannot support demands for labour standards to be incorporated into the WTO. Labour standards would be incorporated in a protectionist way by rich countries against poor countries whose only competitive advantage in the world market is cheap labour.

The only way to achieve the implementation of labour standards is to use the tried and true tactics of class struggle and international solidarity. A resolution along these lines from Coventry Trades Council is being moved through the structures of the trade union movement and will hopefully be voted on at this year's TUC.

There was some discussion about whether or not a more formal structure should be set up from the meeting and what its role should be.

Should it function as a network for exchanging information and for supporting each other's actions, or take on the role of planning and coordinating activities? There was concern that such a committee should not be set up without consultation with the initiatives of other organisations, for example in planning for May Day. It was agreed to set up an open committee which would organise a all-day meeting in mid March.

The meeting discussed future actions, including:

- a meeting on Saturday February 19 to debate the launch a British branch of ATTAC campaign (Action for a Robin Tax on Capital)
- a protest outside Canada House if the WTO rules in favour of Canada's attempt to overturn the EU ban on asbestos imports. In particular the meeting supported the call to build for a massive day of action against capitalism on May Day.
- for further information contact Campaign against the Millennium Round c/o 16a Lambert Rd, London SW2 5BD 0171 738 3054 peter@nestoreapers.com

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**Join the defence of the Nestlé 16**

SIXTEEN people protesting against the WTO conference in Seattle on November 30 were arrested in Halifax, Yorkshire, during a protest at a Nestlé factory.

They have been charged with 'statutory conspiracy' under section 11(1) of the Criminal Law Act 1977 that they 'conspired together with other persons to commit burglary'.

Their next court appearance is on Tuesday February 22 at Halifax Magistrates Court. Harrison Road, Halifax and supporters are asked to turn out from 9.30.

These arrests came from a wide selection of organisations and of home. They came from Calderdale, West Yorkshire, Leeds, Nottingam and Exeter.

On Tuesday November 30 at 9am about 50 people entered the Nestlé factory, climbed on the roof and up a chimney to unfurl banners aimed at the WTO. The main banner read, 'PEOPLE AND PLANET BEFORE PROFIT'.

The police called and 16 demonstrators arrested. Even the Prosecution solicitor said at their first court hearing on Tuesday 7 December that the charge was 'over the top', and now the police had to supply the evidence for February 22.

The charge seems ludicrous when you consider 50 people turned up in broad daylight with massive banners proclaiming their arrival at the Nestlé factory.

But if you consider what happened the following day, when Jack Straw announced some of the protesters were out for burglary, with a mini-number of 3 months for anyone found guilty for a third offence of burglary, then perhaps the 'over the top' charge may not not been too unreasonable to the police.

The protesters handed out the following leaflet to Nestlé workers, many of whom dipped and cheered on the demonstrators – the leaflet explained why Nestlé is an important target for anti-WTO campaigners.

At first side in large print: "It's time to stop the World Take Over those nice people and planet before profit."

Second side, small print: "Trade ministers from around the world are gathering in Seattle today to worship at the high altar of global capitalism - the World Trade Organisation. The transnational corporations are pulling the strings to set up a world in which the power of big money reigns supreme."

"As president of the International Chamber of Commerce, Nestle supreme Helmut Maurer used his influence to push for greater trade liberalisation - that's why we are staging our protest at the Nestle factory today."

"The grey men of the WTO regularly pass binding judgements which outlaw any attempts to protect the environment, improve health, promote animal welfare or help poorer nations."

"An EU ban on hormone injected beef from the US was ruled illegal by "US laws on cleaner petrol fell foul of complaints by Venezuela."

"The US was not allowed to ban shrimp caught in ways which killed turtles."

"The EU was prevented from providing preferential treatment to impoverished Caribbean farmers."

"We say enough is enough. It's time to put forward an alternative vision - a society which puts people and planet before profits."

Send messages of support to The Nestlé 16 18 Broughton Street HEBDEN BRIDGE West Yorkshire HX7 8YR or telephone 01422 847116 for more details (ask for Penny or Billy).

Support the campaign with a donation by writing out cheques to 'Biscuits' and sending to the above address.

Purchase photos of the protest at Nestlé showing protestors on the roof with banner - one photo costs £1 plus tax A5 envelope, 3 photos for £5 post free send to the above address with cheques to 'Biscuits'.
THE ELECTION results in Croatia on January 3 mark a major sea change: not just for Croatia but for the Balkans as a whole. But you would hardly understand this from the scant coverage in the British media, reports Geoff Ryan.

THE ELECTIONS resulted in victory for the SDP (Social Demo- crats) and the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) in Zagreb, making them the two largest forces in the Croatian Parliament. Although their victory was not unexpected, it was still a surprise. The coalition won 71 seats compared to only 40 for the HDZ.

The most likely outcome is a coalition of the HDZ - HSLS bloc with a smaller opposition alliance which won 24 seats. Between them these two blocs will hold over two thirds of the seats in the lower house.

Nowhere are they likely to have the support of the five representa- tives of national minorities. Serbs, Hungarians and Croats elected one representative each. Czechs and Slovaks share one representa- tive while Germans, Austrians, Jews, Ruthenians and Ukrainians also share one representative each. The far-right coalition of the HSP (Croatian Party of Rights) and the HSG (Croatian Democratic Union) won 4 seats, polling particularly strongly in Slavonia.

The decisive defeat of the HDZ follows the death of President Tid- man, killed in a car accident on December 10 1999.

Tudjman's death did not produce any sympathy vote to halt the declining popularity of the HDZ - it merely postponed the electoral defeat for a few weeks. Presidential elections are scheduled for January 24, though the two round system means the winner is unlikely to be known until February.

The most likely result will be a power split between Drago Tudjman, leader of the HDZ and HSLS and Tomislav Grbic, one of the opposition leaders. Grbic's identification with opposition to some of the more virulent nationalist policies of the Tudjman government and this may stand him in good stead.

Reduced powers

Whoever wins the presidential election, however, the powers of the Presidency are likely to be reduced. The automatic methods developed by Tudjman will certainly be instigated.

The election was a major triumph for Vlaha Racic, leader of the SDP and former leader of the League of Communists of Croatia.

It was a demonstration of the power of the Social Democrats, led by Vlade Bograd, who won the first free elections in Croatia in 1990.

The victory was also a sign that the nation is ready for a change in leadership.

The SDP (and even more so the HDZ) is no longer a pro-market. The new government will try to improve Croatia's relations with the west, with a view to seeking membership of the European Union.

More importantly yet, the new government will try to improve Croatia's relations with the west, with a view to seeking membership of the European Union.

The SDP, for its part, will attempt to introduce social policies to deflect the impact of the market.

Such moves would likely win the support of the IDS-DDI (Italian Democratic Parliament) which is virtually the only force in Istria, with support amongst both the Croats and Italian communities.

Most importantly yet, the new gov- ernment is likely to jettison much of the Croatian chauvinism that marked the Tudjman era. This will change Croatia's relations with its Serb neighbours. There are already signs that Serbs who fled Croatia during the war are planning to return.

The election result has been warmly welcomed in Bosnia where the former HDZ regime was able to mobilise sections of the Croat pop- ulation in support of its dream of Greater Croatia, with disastrous consequences.

This may well be the last election in Croatia in which Bosnia Croats have the right to vote. The Croatian diaspora may also be deprived of the right to vote in future elections. Since they have consistently voted for the HDZ (95 per cent in some esti- mates) this will have longer term implications for future election results.

The death of Tudjman brought no real sympathy vote for the SDP. But the HDZ, with its nationalist leadership, is likely to benefit from a loss of support for the opposition.

The weakness of the new govern- ment is undoubtedly in support for capitalism and its desire to enter the EU. Croatian workers, of what- ever nationality, will have to take action to defend themselves against pro-market policies.

Nevertheless the election victory of the SDS-DPS (Social Democratic Party) and the DSHS (Social Democratic Party) means that the system of proportional representation will continue for the time being.

The SDP will no longer be able to form a coalition government with the HDZ (95 per cent in some esti- mate). This will have long term implications for future election results.

The new government will be led by Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic, who was previously a member of the SDP and has been a close associate of President Tudjman.

The new government will try to improve Croatia's relations with the west, with a view to seeking membership of the European Union.

Division

The new regime will certainly be less influenced by hard-line nation- alists from Hercegovina. As a result encouragement for the continued division of Bosnia is likely to come to an end and the Croats community in Bosnia will be encouraged to participate in Bosnian politics, rather than being an arm of the Croatian state intervening in Bosnia on behalf of Zagreb.

The Tudjman regime systemati- cally refused to hand over Croats accused of war crimes. This too will almost certainly change.

The change in regime will also have a deep impact in Serbia. No doubt the Milosevic regime will demand resignation as an Ustasha, just as it did even before the war. However this is much less credi- ble than was the case with Tudji- man, though even in a broader sense far from the truth.

Tudjman was certainly an autocratic Finian, nationalist who frequently apologised for the Ustase state, but the extent of the imag- ination did not actually reintroduce a fascist state.

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Division

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The Tudjman regime systemati- cally refused to hand over Croats accused of war crimes. This too will almost certainly change.

The change in regime will also have a deep impact in Serbia. No doubt the Milosevic regime will demand resignation as an Ustasha, just as it did even before the war. However this is much less credi- ble than was the case with Tudji- man, though even in a broader sense far from the truth.

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The weakness of the new govern-
A different vision for the new century

"Our model of socialism, contrary to what many opponents of Marxism contend, promises neither paradise on earth nor the millennium. We have no illusions about a 'society without conflict' or an 'end of history'. We know very well that hundreds of problems will remain unsolved for centuries - and many new ones will emerge. We are indeed very modest people, with quite modest goals. All we want to do is solve those half dozen or so problems resulting from the incongruity between the technical and scientific capacities of the human species on the one hand and the system of production for private profit on the other. There is no mystery about what these problems are: hunger, physical misery, social and economic inequality, war, inequality between men and women and between different nationalities and races, exploitation of the labour of others, political repression, social decay, and increased violence. All these obstacles to the self-realisation of the human personality can be eliminated through the overthrow of the existing relations of production and the political structures that uphold them. All the myriad of other problems, and the future ones that will undoubtedly arise, we make no claim to solve. But these half dozen or so problems have cost the lives of hundreds of millions of people over centuries and have made the lives of thousands of millions of others miserable beyond description. A victorious struggle for socialism can be the seminal contribution to human progress, and it is for this reason that the fight for these goals, modest as they are, is the crucial human endeavour of our age."

(Ernest Mandel, 1979)
Socialist Outlook

Balkan wars

Croatia was now led by Franjo Tudiman. He was a Croatian national who was nominated by the Croatian nationalist leader, Vlatko Mrkonjic, who was a member of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) party. Tudiman was supported by the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) and the Croatian People's Party (HSP). The war in Croatia was a conflict between Croatia and Serbia, with Serbia supporting the Bosnian Serbs, and Croatia supporting the Croats. The war was fought between 1991 and 1995.

Preparations were far more advanced in Slovenia than in Croatia. The Slovenian army was under the command of the Slovenian army. Two days after the declaration of the JNA, the Slovenian army mobilized and went to war. The JNA was a loyal and disciplined army, but the Slovenian army was not. This resulted in a series of battles between the two armies.

In September 1991, Serb forces carried out the first ethnic cleansing of the war in the Krajina region of Croatia. They burned down villages and killed civilians. This was the beginning of the Krajina war, which lasted until 1995. The war ended with a peace agreement in 1995.

Slovenia declared independence on June 25, 1991. The JNA invaded Slovenia and tried to put down the rebellion. This led to a series of battles between the JNA and the Slovenian army. The JNA was forced to withdraw after 10 days of fighting. The conflict ended with a peace agreement in 1991.

In January 1992, the JNA invaded Croatia and began a series of battles. The JNA was supported by the Bosnian Serbs, while the Croats were supported by the Croatian army. The war lasted until 1995. The war ended with a peace agreement in 1995.

In November 1991, the Serb leader Slobodan Milosevic announced that he would not recognize the new state of Slovenia. This led to a series of battles between the JNA and the Slovenian army. The JNA was supported by the Bosnian Serbs, while the Croats were supported by the Croatian army. The war lasted until 1995. The war ended with a peace agreement in 1995.

In March 1991, Sarajevo was a city in war. The war in Sarajevo was a conflict between the Bosnian Serbs and the Bosnian Muslims. The war lasted until 1995. The war ended with a peace agreement in 1995.

What is not in doubt is that the war was a conflict between the two sides, the Bosnian Serbs and the Bosnian Muslims. The war lasted until 1995. The war ended with a peace agreement in 1995.

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The Anatomy of New Labour's Welsh fiasco

Labour's share of the vote was reduced to only 36 per cent, compared to 56 per cent in the 1997 General Election. Labour was 29 of 60 Assembly seats and had to form a minority administration in the country, which up until then was seen as a bastion of Labour support.

Edging explained "Our analysis shows very clearly that the biggest swings from Labour to Plaid Cymru were in the South Wales valleys constituencies which make up Labour's traditional heartland. Local factors may have had some influence in the Rhondda and Ebbw but this does not explain the huge swings across the whole of the South Wales valleys."

Over violence of the RUC was coupled with covert deals with loyalist paramilitaries

The Committee: Political Assassination in Northern Ireland by Sean McPhelimy, Roberts Rhinehart (Colorado) 1999.

Reviewed by David Coen

The ALLEGATIONS in McPhelimy's book are not new. An Amnesty International report of June 1983 on the shooting dead of six unarmed people towards the end of 1982 condemned the RUC for falsifying and concealing crucial information.

In 1983, the then Deputy Chief Constable of Manchester, John Stalker, attempted to investigate the killings but was obstructed at every turn and eventually forced to resign in the face of a forced attempt to frame-up alleged criminal connections.

Despite Amnesty and United Nations pressure, the British Government refused (in 1987) to promulgate these responsible, or publish the findings of the Stalker/Sampson enquiry on the "grounds of national security" and "public interest" considerations.

At the centre of all these allegations were the RUC Headquarters Mobile Support Units (HMSU) which operated under the control of the RUC "Chief Branch" and alongside MI5.

McPhelimy's book, based on his 1991 Channel 4 documentary, claims to have detailed information on those who politically guided the killings of two notorious loyalist killers, Robin Jackson and Billy Wright.

The connection between the Committee, (or the Ulster Loyalist Central Coordinating Committee, to give it its full title), made up of between 50 and 60 prominent Unionists and the RUC was the so-called Inner Force, a group of disgruntled RUC officers who favoured a stepping up of the war against the IRA.

According to McPhelimy, the Inner Force comprised about one third of the entire RUC and was organised in every division across the Six Counties.

Helping hand

There had been lots of evidence of RUC and the British Army passing information to Loyalist killers, McPhelimy goes further and claims that the Committee and Inner Force were effectively targeted Republicans and assisted the Loyalists in carrying out the killings.

The strategy of the Inner Circle was, in the words of a senior RUC officer, to "kill the fish that poison the water", that is, kill Republican "hawks" like Alex Maskey and Martin McGuinness while attempting to turn informers against them by killing some in retaliation for IRA killing.

Not the Loyalists over-concerned about their targets: if finding an IRA member was a tad difficult then any Nationalists or Catholics would do. In fact, the "any Tag will do" approach might even be better in generating terror among neutral.

The evidence of this policy were to be found in the Foreign and Northern Ireland Offices who, according to the same source, "deliberately wanted to bring the doves of Sinn Fein to the negotiating table."

If terrorism was narrowly defined as the use of violence for political ends then without doubt this was terrorism.

Murder

The fact that the British, not for the first time in Ireland (or indeed elsewhere) erected a system of sectarian murder for their own ends should make those "socialists" who believe in the civilising/peacekeeping role of the British State pause for thought.

In 1989 the British government set up yet another enquiry into the relationship between Loyalists and the "Security Forces" under John Stevens, which again the RUC attempted to block.

However Stevens did arrest Brian Nelson, a double agent for British intelligence, within the loyalist Ulster Defence Association. After trial, several months later, Nel- son admitted to helping Loyalists to kill Nationalists, but Stevens could not use his evidence at the time of the enquiry apparently because it was sub-judice. Stevens' report was that despite some individual cases of collusion, the RUC was impartial and professional.

But what it missed was the report as yet another whitewash and the period since is littered with evidence of the large number of files on Republicans and Nationalists which have been passed to the Loyalists.

RUC threats

But the RUC did not just operate behind the scenes of Loyalist terror. Belfast solicitor Pat Finucane was repeatedly threatened by the RUC before he was killed. John Stalker in his book records an RUC man telling him "the solicitor (Pat Finucane) is an IRA man who represents IRA men is worse than an IRA man."

The pattern of RUC threats was repeated before the killing of Rosemary Nelson.

But unlike Pat Finucane, she did not have a Tony Munster (Douglas Hogg) up in the House of Commons to pressure the British, Brian Nelson's evidence to John Stevens and more recent evidence given by a Loyalist gunman William Stone to Ed Moloney of the Dublin Sunday Tribune regarding the killing of Pat Finucane.

Stone said he provided the weapon, and forewarned his Special Branch handlers of the attack on Finucane. The intelligence for the attack was provided by Brian Nelson.

The transcript

The RUC attempted to get Moloney jailed for refusing to hand over the transcript of the interview, which they claimed to need in order to investigate Stone's claims. This was exactly the same procedure used against McPhelimy, even though at that stage revealing the identity of his source would have resulted in the source being killed.

The threat of injunction and long legal proceedings effectively stifled discussions of the issues raised, namely the overwhelming evidence that the British government was running death squads in Ireland and generally conducting a campaign of terror against nationalists.

The degree to which this was successful in forcing the Republican to call a cease-fire and participate in the "peace" process is difficult to judge, but it was undoubtedly a contributor.

Their implications for future British strategy are also questionable. The British have scored some modest successes. They have drawn Sinn Fein into running the state they hitherto were attempting to smash, and got them to accept in practice the Six County status in return for vague promises on "equality agenda" and reform of the RUC rather than in disbandment.

"Traditions"

More importantly, by accepting the sectarian headcount which is the basis of the "power-sharing Executive", Republicans are explicitly accepting the British claim that the problem in Ireland is the conflict between two "traditions" rather than Britain's historic attempt to control the whole island.

In the end the future of the Stormont Agreement will come down to fairly practical questions. Are Nationalists willing to surrender their weapons and entrust their security to the RUC?

How will Sinn Fein react if Tony Blair delivers its apparent promise to the Orange- men and requests of the RUC, if necessary, smash a path for them down the Garvaghy Road?

Time was when the answer from Sinn Fein would have been obvious. That margin of creeping doubt is the degree to which the British have succeeded. The Nationalists and Republicans on the Garvaghy and Ormeau Roads will have other ideas.
Most socialists are now used to hearing the question, "do we need to be red to be green?" and to confidently answering "yes". And most greens are used to using their sharp antennae to detect the complacency and patronage which often lies behind that answer, argues DAVE BANGS.

Too often, the socialist response makes greens feel like women and gay people and blacks were made to feel so often in the sixties, when socialists responded to their new-found confidence by telling them that they must not break the unity of the class struggle.

Yes, for all the too-common triviality of the socialist claim, it is still blindingly obvious that capitalism cannot give us a sustainable society. Capitalism is unplanned. It proceeds by gigantic, chaotic pulses of economic activity, followed by destructive contraction and retreat. It produces only under the imperative of profit. (Not global, long term profit, but present profit for every competing unit of capital).

Everything is a potential object of profit: nature, our bodies, our sky, our air, our earth, our love, our anguishes, our needs. Capitalism is blind to what it produces: dust bins, cars, cruise missiles, GM crops, or (for that matter) organic food - provided it is profiable.

Its destructive wastfulness can only be ameliorated post facto. For you cannot anticipate - plan - for problems if the system's most basic tenets are competition, commercial sercercy, profit maximisation and private appropriation.

But these trums are not enough. For how can we persuade people that there is a finite limit to what we can consume when we have already passed the sustainable levels of depletion and exploitation of so many resources? There are already too many cars in the richest capitalist societies. Our air, our aquifers are already too polluted. Wastecity is already massively depleted, such that many economies are on the edge of scarcely viable.

How can we persuade better off workers and poorer off workers who can only dream of another country, another foreign holiday, another twist of the ratchet of gross overconsumption just means our children will inherit a polluted wasteland.

Well ... that last question also contains the kernel of the answer needed.

For it is our alienation as workers, as producers, that makes us choose the endless round of consumption. It is the stifling of our creativity, the stedum, the lack of control, the squashing of our personalities, the endless repetition in our working lives, that drives us towards compulsive entertainment and endless expensive purchases to satisfy much deeper frustrated needs.

In a world in which driving our car can be the most complex, skilful and powerful thing we do in our lives, then why would we want to use a bus or train?

Capitalism has to sell you to survive. Our alienation drives us to seek for the answer we need.

It is a devil's bar-work. As Alan Robson, Emeritus Professor of the United States in his wonderful book The Self Managed Environment, (1979) tells us:

"It is a remarkable tribute to the success of the capitalist structure and its dominant values that millions are willing to sacrifice double the time needed for a reasonable livable working day, if the surplus time is rewarded by commodities and services which were not felt as mass needs even a few decades before".

The corollary of this is that "technological harmony cannot be achieved as long as the producers lack control over their working life, for the substitute satisfactions required to escape them will be of an environmentally destructive kind."

The fight in the workplace against the tyranny of capitalist management, "the dictatorship of capital" - lies at the root of the fight for a sustainable society. It is a battle for the workplace.

But all the workers are not yet ready to take on the burden of the struggle, which is why the labour movement needs to be "self-managed" and "self-management" needs to be the centre of the struggle.

But where, in this dangerous period of defeat and retreat for the working class movement, can we find the examples to inspire us?

Just recall the famous "Green Bans" which shocked Australian developers and capitalist politicians 25 years ago.

The Builders Labourers Federation, in New South Wales, responding to pleas from threatened communities, instigated a ban on "Green Bans" from 1971 to 1975 against the destruction of bushland and against anti-social building projects which damaged working class areas and destroyed environmental assets.

Leded by a militi- rance and (false ) communist leadership, the building work- ers took advantage of full employment and a construc- tion boom to push the developer to the wall. Over 40 Green Bans were imposed by the BLF alone, and the bul- doster drivers union was involved as well. Work on productive projects was simply and effectively blocked.

Clear rank and file democracy in the union, with concilia- tion of space and frequent union meetings, held on any counter attack by union bureaucrats for 4 years.

These alliances were made with environmentalists, middle class activists, and militant local groups. In the end, it was the victory of the right wing fed- eral union leadership over the local rank and file union officials - by brutal force - that caused the dismantling of the green bans - not the direct victory of the employers.

Here in Britain, in 1976, the 13 unions at Lucas Aerospace, organising a 14,000 strong workforce in the city from Birmingham to London and Herfordshire to Bury and surrounded a 1,000 page "Combine Plan" which proposed the production of socially responsible products instead of the military and space hardware of the multinationals was won.

The unions painstakingly created unity between skilled and unskilled workers, craft workers, and separately trained engineers.

They drew up a list of 130 products that the fact- ories ought to be making, from skydiving machines and equipment for china doll kits, to a diesel electric, low pol- lution car, and an energy conserving low pol- lution heat pump.

They devised products for the third world countries, and used appropriate technology.

On each of the 17 Lucas Aerospace sites, product proposals were thrashed out by shop stewards' committees, and later by project groups, and were widely discussed in the workforce.

Like the Sydney builders, their labourers, they were faced not only with the resistance of the employers, but by the bureaucratic trade union leadership and the Labour Party (then in power), who offered vaguely radical words but refused to endorse or resource their Plan.

The Plan was pro- voked by the threat of mass redundancies as government orders dried up. As such, it contained the most basic trade union defence function with a far sighted but practi- cal plan to break out of the confines of the capitalist market and to become accountable to real popular needs and oppressed groups.

It took several years of manoeuvring by government and employers for the power of this huge self-management initiative to become marginalised, and its mem- ory still resonates today.

And we should not forget that the great advances of Taylorism and Fordism in the development of mass production lines, were made only after prolonged and unions struggles with the workforce for many years. Their success, in the end, was only won when massive wage increases were offered with which workers could satisfy consumption dreams. The devil's bargain was made.

The Trade Union ignore the struggle in the workplace, regarding it - in some post-Fordist sense - as a lower order place where the working class has power (if indeed, they accept the notion of class politics at all). But the direct action of the green movement, led by militiants of Earth First and Reclaim the Streets, and other groupings, seeks close links with trade unions in struggle.

In doing so they move far more consciously towards an understanding that it is cap- italism which must be replaced, not some vague "alternative", on the same planet called industrialism.

Of course, in some final sense, we all - rich and poor - suffer from its unmitigated effects of consumer capital- ism. But in the developed world many rich and selfish people benefit deeply from pillaging the Third World's selfless and genocidal wars in order to give up those privileges.

It is the working class - the class of all those who produce - whose alienation contains the antidote to this system: but while this class may also hold the keys to the new world.

It is in the fight against alienation and powerlessness in the workplace, the fight for collective self-management, that we will build the vision of alter- natives - satisfactions of human community and cre- ative effort, nec- essity against the devil's bargain of consumer capitalism.

At Seattle, the labour unions joined with third world reps, anti-globalisation, anti-drug, and environmental activists in a car- rnel included against this nightmare world.

That international alliance of working people worldwide is the key to the future of green worker struggle.
The bitter fruits of Oslo peace

Roland Rance

ASSASSINATED Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, the architect of the Oslo agreement, was characteristically blunt when he explained his support for transferring power of the Palestinians under Israeli occupation from the Israeli army to the PLO. Yasser Arafat, he explained, would be able to control the Palestinians because he would rule without restraint - without the High Court (which had ensured a modicum of respect for the rule of law) and without international supervision and aid. When the human rights groups (which had struggled to ensure that human rights were respected despite the military occupation) became more vocal, he said, the Palestinian Authority, in alliance with its Israeli and US sponsors, would forcibly silence it. Respected Palestinian human rights organisations which previously made it clear that they would try to prevent the power struggle were thereafter silent or boycotted.

In addition to this, the Palestinian Authority has followed a horrifying policy of corruption, humiliation and exploitation of the Palestinian people, as the Oslo agreement was a trading of the homeland for the all-out renunciation of the PA. The president of the PNA has widely been accused of being responsible for power struggles among the Israeli authorities and the Palestinian people.

Dr. Adel Samara

When Ramallah was put under PA control, many Palestinians visited the jail where Israelis had tortured them. I did not. I was not sure that I would not be arrested again - in the same place where I had sat as a prisoner five times. Now it has happened. Once more, in the voices that have been silenced, I have heard the voice of myself in Ramallah jail - and not as a guest of honor.

In response to the Manifesto of the Twenty, the PA appeared panic-stricken. It is strange enough to arrest people for voicing their political and social ideas. The PA, however, had an even more dangerous mistake when it pushed its supporters to demonstrate on the streets of Ramallah in that "loyal" jail, and the result was the presence of masked youths shot in the air.

The next day Mr. Mubarak AlHamdani, the Palestine Legislative Council (PLC), was shot in the face. The Palestinian Secret Service gave a beating to PLC member Abdul Jalil Safadi. Let us respect the evidence - that the PA itself did not order the attack. In the United States, by allowing the shooting at its demonstration, the PA encourages its supporters to take the law in their own hands.

Afadat - and friends

The PA's extreme reaction was counterproductive, giving our Manifesto much more publicity than it would otherwise have had. What could have been an isolated action by twenty people has become the centre of public discussion. The PA's supposed victory in the pages of Syrian propaganda, although none of us respect any current Arab regime. Activists on the Palestinian Left refrained from taking an unanimous stand on the matter. We tried to make it clear that some of us were merely seeking attention or trying to pressure the PA to silence us by giving us just. I still strongly believe that if a revolutionary Palestinian wants to be independent, he or she must never be bound materially to the regime. In its ways, such a danger does not exist: even the PA cannot take the part of a blacklisted as a Marxist/nationalist. Given the losses that should be drawn from the events surrounding the appearance of the Manifesto: First, in the course of taking power in the Territories, the Palestinian leadership failed to make the transition from military to political organisation. In the PA, in addition, the old military mentality. It must be changed. However, this change is a matter of the PA itself. We do not need a PA, as a regime, that needs to prove its competence to the people - not vice-versa.

As a corollary, our Palestinian people must realise that the national struggle cannot be limited to the military level. The Manifesto is a small step toward diverting the struggle for liberty to its full social, political and economic aspects.

Lessons from Bayan AlIshein (The Petition of the Twenty)
Which way is PUP moving?

While I would agree that the recent Socialist Outlook weekend school was on the whole a worthwhile event (ISO 10), the handling of the Irish discussion did give concern to some of us, and in particular the involvement of Billy Hutchison, officially leader of the Progressive Unionist Party and officially you the paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force. Hutchison made some incredible statements, e.g. he claimed that the civil rights movement in the 60s had been "brought into a campaign for Catholic rights", and that traditionally Protestants had been pressured into taking low-paid jobs while unemployed Catholics were being forced to leave.

He described himself as a "Carsonite Unionist", and voraciously by claiming that the reason conscription was never imposed on Northern Ireland was because so many volunteered.

Interestingly, he did come close to admitting that the "Red Hand Commandos" had been involved in the collaboration in the past, and that the "Red Hand Commandos" were their pseudonym.

I feel that the PUP is not a serious socialist development, but has some potential to develop towards fascism.

Campbell McGregor, Glasgow Kelvin SSP

Will Yeltsin’s gamble pay off?

Veronica Fagan

WHEN BORIS Yeltsin made his New Year's Eve announcement that he was standing down in favour of his apparent Putin, the British press claimed that this was a complete surprise to everyone. Well this scenario is more confidence in the extent to which the various respondents had been seriously following the situation either in Moscow or Chechnya.

It is true that for years roughly 10 months Yeltsin had hung tenaciously on to power despite being a physical and political wreck. But the best chance Yeltsin had to ensure that he could hand over the reins of power to his chosen successor came precisely at this moment.

The recent parliamentary elections saw a relatively strong showing for the "Bolsheviks put together by Yeltsin’s supporters. But whether this would be enough to ensure the election of Putin as their presidential candidate is much less certain. All after all, they received less than 25 per cent of the vote while only 50 per cent is necessary to elect the President.

Moreover the coalition itself was cobbled together with a coherent programme or common goals - such as the sequencing of its members.

If the political or economic situation begins to unravel further there is no guarantee that the coalition will remain intact - particularly if Putin himself is under fire and his Presidential aspirations no longer seem a certainty.

The real point that Yeltsin made his dramatic announcement, the brutal war in Chechnya remained popular, bolstered both by the Russian chauvinism that is one of the bitter legacies of Stalinism, and by the media black-out as to what is actually happening on the ground.

This resulted in high opinion poll showings for Vladimir Putin, very much seen as the architect of this war.

But now Putin is in power and the cracks are already beginning to show. Chechnya is not going to rise and it becomes more difficult to hide these from the Russian public.

There is certainly overwhelming that he has brought the presidential election forward from its June date to March 26.

Whether this will be soon enough remains to be seen. Stories are breaking of him and his manoeuvres to put together a number of Chechen villages. In other areas it is claimed that underpaid officers had stopped attacks in return for financial rewards.

Stories of serious levels of desertion are beginning to circulate. So much for the morale of the Russian troops.

Russia has recognised which way the wind is blowing by making a speech on January 15 in which he sought to lower the expectations of the Russian people over the war against Chechnya. He has admitted that mistakes have been made, and not only by his predecessors, but, unlike Yeltsin, has offered no deadline for victory.

"Stop the war!"

The war will go on "step by step" he said. When it ends "will depend on military expediency".

Breaking this is preparing for the possibility that the, the will be unable to completely subordinate Chechnya for a second time round this decade remains to be seen. It is certainly not clear that the sort of agreement that was agreed at the end of the last Chechen war would again be acceptable in Georgia.

Economy

Now Putin’s concerns restricted to the situation in Chechnya. The economic situation in Russia itself remains a major problem.

There is no doubt that the major political forces in Russia are deeply committed to maintaining and privatisation. Theirs is the only one of restoring, which the economic model of the Russian people over the war against Chechnya. He has admitted that mistakes have been made, and not only by his predecessors, but, unlike Yeltsin, has offered no deadline for victory.

Nothing will change in this sense.

But if the war in Chechnya goes sour, more attention will be paid at home to the desperate situation of people in war and home and whether they can continue to believe politicians who year in year out have promised them a share in the supposed glitter of capitalism while their real situation becomes worse and worse.

NAFE HQ, Britannia St, London WC1 10-4pm
National Demonstration in London in support of Mumia Abu-jamal

Sunday 27

Campaign for a Demo-

stration against - which way forward for UNISON? 10.30-4pm for details)

Thurday 23

Lobby of the High Court in support of
Campfield Nine, 9.30 am
Chechens defy Russian war machine

Yeltsin's gamble: see inside, p19

3,000. With the savage, indiscriminate and continuous bombing of the capital Grozny and other Chechen towns, civilian casualties must be still higher. At the beginning of the war an estimated 50,000 people were still trapped in the besieged and devastated city, without food, water, electricity or fuel supplies. Despite Russian claims of safe corridors to allow them out, very few have managed to escape the relentless bombardment. Fleeing refugees have also been subjected to a diktat from Moscow branding all Chechen males between 16-60 years suspected terrorists and therefore liable to detention.

Guerrilla tactics

Chechen fighters are suffering fewer losses in battle, mainly because not only are they using superior tactics in defending their towns but also, at the same time, enticing the Russians into a guerrilla war in the mountains of the South. In fact, this is the scenario the Russians most hoped to avoid, with its echoes of their disastrous and for them humiliating defeat by the Chechens in 1994-96. "Putin's War", as it has been dubbed by the Russian press, was supposed instead to boost the popularity of the new "tough on terrorists" president at home.

At the same time, it was to rehabilitate Russia's standing in the outside world as a still powerful military and political power able to maintain the unity of the federation and to police its own spheres of influence. This after the West's expansion of NATO to include the former Soviet satellites of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic and its war against Yugoslavia, during which Russia was marginalised.

If Russia loses control of Chechnya, it also loses control of the present and vitally important oil pipeline from the Caspian. Here again, the USA has been planning to cut Russia out by proposing a new pipeline to go instead through Turkey. At the start of the war, some Chechens, disillusioned with the present Grozny regime and dreading more bloodshed, were resigning themselves to Russian occupation. Now the brutality of the invaders has turned the majority against them, and more and more are once again joining the guerillas.

Mothers

In Russia, protest against this present war has previously been small. Now, the anti-war movement has re-emerged, including such groups as the Soldiers' Mothers' Committees, who are currently claiming a death toll of over 5,000 Russian soldiers, with another 6,000 wounded. (In the 1994-96 war Russian women organised and linked up with Chechen women to find their missing sons and call for an end to the conflict.)

The Russian media has also begun to criticise the growing casualties and apparent blunders of the military, and politicians such as Yeltsin and Zyuganov have voiced criticisms. Internationally, London, Warsaw, Madrid, Paris and Berlin have all seen protests against the war, and opposition continues to grow.