As Blair ignores mass Labour votes against tube sell-off ...

LEFT UNITES TO DEFEND PUBLIC SERVICES

80,000 trade unionists and Labour Party members in London voted for Ken Livingstone's platform of opposition to tube privatisation in London.

But Tony Blair and the Millbank team took no notice. Instead they engineered a "victory" for Frank Dobson as Labour's Mayoral candidate, and are carrying on regardless.

As we go to press it is not clear whether Ken will stand on some form of independent platform: but whether he does or not, Labour's antics have strengthened the left in London.

1,000 joined a massive rally in Camden on February 23 to back the London Socialist Alliance slate for the London Assembly. Left organisations are working together as never before.

The platform for united action is a simple one: socialist policies and defence of public services, beginning with the fight against tube privatisation, but also opposing PFI in hospitals, schools and local government – and in defence of jobs and working conditions.

For Livingstone there is only one real choice: either fight the Blair offensive with the rest of the left, or cave in to an ignominious surrender.
Networking against Labour’s privatisation plans

Bob Wood

AS RECENT events in both Wales and London have convincingly shown, the base of the Labour Party is beginning to rebel against the spin doctoring and control freakery imposed on them by the Millbank Tendencys and Downing Street. Rejection accepted all the arguments, all the expulsions, all the erosion of democracy within the party, supposedly in the interests of achieving office, traditional Old Labour is now starting to question whether the whole thing has not been done to such an extent that it has been as much the reform of the Labour Party as the admission of democracy within the party.

They did not join the Party to support the policies being pursued by Blair’s government, particularly the privatisation, but in a myriad of other policies as well. Whether their essentially disorganised and leaderless rebellion is too little, too late, only time will tell.

In the meantime the left in the Party is beginning to re-group its depleted forces and in the process is finding some unlikely allies. It was in this context that the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups recently held its Annual General Meeting in Sheffield. Responding to criticism that previous AGMs had allowed insufficient time for debate on motions, the organisers had allocated the bulk of the day to discussion of motions submitted by Network supporters, apart from an upbeat introduction from Alan Simpson MP and a contribution from a local woman trade unionists.

The Network established two key priorities for the coming year. The central policy issue facing all of us, whether inside or outside the party, is the drive to privatisation, affecting areas as diverse as the London Underground, air traffic control, council housing, and perhaps most obviously, local education authority functions in inner London, and not to be forgotten is the plethora of Private Finance Initiative schemes multiplying like b Hodgdon in health and education. The Network agreed to bring pressure to trade unions and local campaigns in opposing all privatisation proposals.

The second key priority identified by the Network AGM for the coming year was a campaign against the continuing erosion of democracy in the Labour Party. When the Labour Co-ordinating Committee produced a pamphlet at the 1996 Conference, "New Labour: a stakeholders’ policy", proposing the abolition of the constituency parties, and the replacement of the annual conference by a American style convention-cum-rally, many people thought the proposal would be the unanswerable solution of a slightly mad fit-ting group. However, this conference has already been gutted, and the groundwork for the replacement of CLP General Management Committees is already being laid by a consultation document, "21st Century Planning". GMGs will have their arguments by forums open to all members in the constituencies, overseen by a small unaccountable Executive.

Less than impressed by Tony Blair’s new policy, these students recently occupied London’s School of Oriental and African Studies and toppled the statue of Henry KISSINGER. The students were protesting against the US involvement in Iraq.

Matthew Willgress

CO-DIRECTOR OF THE NETWORK OF SOCIALIST
CAMPAIGN GROUPS

BEING A MEMBER of its exciting National Policy Forum, one can hardly understand the unity interest in all things to do with the Labour Party.

My favourite mood at the moment is the ‘consultation’ around the 21st Century Party document. Some based in its certainty has a sense of humour. The document, which supposedly sets out to 'reform and modernise' the Labour Party, is in fact one of the key points in pushing British politics back to the 19th century. This is the stated aim of some Labour members who believe the Blair Party was a great achievement and want to unite the party with the Liberals. We are in the process of seeing such a shift in the argument that even Peter Hain is regarded as a dangerous radical.

Redefining away — Mandy

members resigned over the bombing of Iraq. There are likely to be more resignations in London if the government on security on going ahead with privatizations is its policy. The pretext that this is really a 'consultation' document is exposed by its flagging of Enfield Southgate CLP where the party structures have already been changed.

Also, if one wants to see the true meaning of these consultations, it is always better to go straight to the horse’s mouth. In this particular case that is Mandy Evans, a Milbank employee.

In an article entitled The New Labour Party: A Vision for Organisational Modernisation Evans is quite clear about the Blairstonions’ intentions. He states that “Representative democracy should be as far as possible be abolished in the Party.” He then goes on to say “All members are equal, so there is no need for General Committees.”

This must have been what good old Mandy meant when he talked about "more accountability in Modern Labour magazine — get the members together.

However, even as Evans’ plan involves an all-member AGM a year electing a tiny executive to run the Party as they please for the next year, some members are considerably more equal than others! Evans is quite blunt about the reasons for this change saying, "it will empower modernising forces within the Party and marginalise 'Old Labour'. This is the first reason why some people oppose these reforms. They make it impossible for any left movement amongst constituency members to be reflected in the Party. They know from Bevanism and Bennism that a Labour government pursuing reac- tionary policies leads to a political death spiral.

Therefore it is a crucial part of the project to destroy the CLPs. In getting through this the Blairstonions will need the support of the unions many of whose leaders would no doubt like to obey. This is quite ironic, because in destroying the GCs the union link would be severely weakened on a local level, making it much easier to implement a further step in the Project by breaking any remaining ties with the unions.

Amongst the groups opposing these reforms are CLP and the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups. The task of organising opposition to Blairism in the unions and the Labour party together has never been so important. For the Left to let sectional divides get in the way of such a fight would be sheer lunacy.

"The Network of Socialist Campaign Groups are currently writing a program on the issues facing young people today. For more information contact Matthew on HYPERLINK "mailto:myg2507y@netcom.com" myg2507y@netcom.com or Owen Jones on HYPERLINK "mailto:owen.jones@ultralmail.co.uk" owen.jones@ultralmail.co.uk.

Stop the Blairite steamroller — No to 21st Century Party!
Livingstone's leap: which way will he jump?

K

en Livingstone won a moral victory in his showdown with the Labour Party over the ballot of his candidates in the London elections. The Labour Party was divided on the issue, with some members supporting Livingstone and others opposing him. Livingstone's supporters made clear their opposition to privatising the underground and nationalising the industry.

"They simply reflected the overwhelming majority of London. Labour must accept this verdict".

But it is clear that despite their lack of democratic mandate, Livingstone will not stand aside. Not have the necessary Labour hierarchy any intention of altering their commitment to privatisation if tube despite Livingstone's calls to turn May to 21, 1983. 98 of him in this section came from trade unions that held members' ballots while 80% of Dobson's came from those that refused to do so.

Dobson's majority of 46.5% to 13.5% in the third section where 75 MPs, MEPs and GLA candidates had the same weight as all the affiliated party members or all the affiliated trade unions was key in delivering the result for him.

Livingstone's vote showed the strength of opposition in both the Labour Party and trade unions both of which had lost members to Blair's policies and to the dead hand of the Millbank mafia.

As Livingstone stated on February 21, the result was a clear mandate of the people. The majority of Londoners want him as mayor.

Of course opinion on the left of the Labour Party and trade unions is more divided - but there are many who will support him if he gives the lead whether or not they tear up their membership cards.

Livingstone should stand and fight and should encourage that he will do so as soon as possible. In fact he has already waited longer than was advisable. It is true that in the first days after the electoral college votes were announced it made Labour back.

This exerted pressure on Labour MPs to support Livingstone and in allowing Livingstone to take soundings of his. But to wait longer allows the momentum of the result itself to dissipate.

Those who voted for Livingstone in the electoral college are looking for a lead - Livingstone should give it to them by declaring his candidacy now.

As far as the Greater London Assembly is concerned, Labour would be constructing a slate of Labour movement candidates on a platform based on the interests of working people. He should call open meetings of all those who support his candidacy, to democratically agree a slate that would run with him.

This would allow existing organisations such as the London Socialist Alliance the chance to argue for their candidates and ideas and take their chance of winning support from this broader forum.

Nothing to lose

This is the reason that the majority of those who back Livingstone are trade unionists and other campaigners so the left would have nothing to fear from such a process.

Certainly this process would result in broader layers than currently exist organising around a political alternative to new Labour - and might even produce some high profile candidates.

If Labour were to do what some surely suggest and come up with a slate of business people, ex-Tories and Liberals, this would be a kick in the teeth for those in the Labour movement and campaigns that have supported him. Another possibility would be a mixed slate with some figures the left would support and others that would be much more problematic.

While in either case, socialists should still back a Livingstone candidature for Mayor, a concrete assessment would have to be made as to whether we would support an accompanying slate.

Indeed it would be preferable for Livingstone to stand alone rather than mix it with representatives of business and bosses.

The worst option of all of course would be if Livingstone bowed to the pressure from Blair and his cronies and decided not to stand. This would be handing victory on a plate to Millbank.

Many people would leave the Labour Party anyway - but they would generally do so without any positive direction in which to move. Their energy would be wasted and the left inside and outside the party would be weaker.

Now he has positioned himself as such a focal point of politics, much hangs on which way Ken decides to leap: forward to help lead a fight for public services, or back into a surrender to Blairism.

UNISON ballot: Dave Prentis scrapes in

The bureaucracy's candidate Dave Prentis has limped to victory on the General Secretary Elections. On the canvassing front, UNISON's (CFU) Roger Beckett, who polled 137,821, was declared the winner.

Ex-Millbank activist Mike Duff, who polled 277,815, was declared a loser.

The contrast is even more telling given that right-wing candidates who last time scored 90,000 votes got even more nominations this time round.

It is possible that some of the candidates in the left will be tempted to run as independents.

The key to this is the nature of the election and the level of support available to candidates.

The elections have yet to be completed, but the result seems clear.

It is clear that the left will not be able to win the election on its own.

UNIONS wait for Ken's signal

The bureaucracy's candidate Dave Prentis has limped to victory on the General Secretary Elections.

Dave Prentis's campaign has been marked by a lack of enthusiasm and a failure to mobilise the rank and file.

The bureaucracy's candidate Dave Prentis has limped to victory on the General Secretary Elections.
Lessons of Blair's Welsh setback

Cardiff call to action

THE ISSUE of Objective 1 funding is likely to be debated at this year's Wales Labour Party Conference, to be held at the end of March. At least four constituency parties have submitted contemporary resolutions on the subject: Caernarfon, Blaenau Gwent, the Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff West. The text of the Cardiff West resolution reads:

"This conference congratulates the Labour Government on achieving Objective 1 status for West Wales and the valleys. This makes available £1.2 billion of funding over the next six years. Conference calls on the Government to guarantee that the required public funding will be made available for all Objective 1 projects approved by the European Commission. This money must be over and above that already assured under the Barnett Formula. Failure to provide full matched funding will mean that Objective 1 money will not come to Wales, or that money will have to be taken from the Welsh Assembly's existing budget. This will lead to cuts in other publicly funded services, with detrimental effects on the peoples of the people on the people and the image of our new Assembly. We call on Tony Blair and the Cabinet to 'listen to Wales' and provide the required additional funds."

Michael is out and Morgan is in!

After weeks of uncertainty and back-room dealings Alan Michael was forced to resign as First Secretary of the Welsh Assembly by a vote of no confidence supported by the three opposition parties, Rhodri Morgan was selected as Labour's alternative nominee for the post and subsequently appointed by the Assembly. CERI EVANS reports on the background to these events, the shady double-dealing which came to nothing and the implications for Labour in Wales.

Coming just a week before the debate on his future, the Ceredigion by-election result was a bitter blow to Alan Michael. All his efforts to bolster his administration and revitalise the Welsh Assembly's Assembly and Euro elections results were reduced to nothing, as Labour slipped from a humiliating fourth place.

Calling the election at this time was a political masterstroke by Plaid Cymru's Cyma Gwynn who knew the result turned out to be the final nail in Alan Michael's political coffin.

Even the most thick-skinned and slow-witted of Labour's Assembly Members (AMs) could not fail to understand the implications of the result. According to Carole McKeown, the Secretary of Ceredigion CLR "The message from Ceredigion voters is loud and clear. We, like the rest of Wales, want more socialist policies, with health, education and welfare at the top of the agenda."

Objective 1

As was reported in the last issue of Socialist Outlook, the initiative which finally led to Alan Michael's downfall was that of matched funding for Objective 1 projects in Wales. The opposition parties gave February 8 as a deadline for Alan Michael to deliver the goods.

On the day, Michael tried to prevent a vote of no confidence being tabled by tendering his resignation in the Assembly chamber, only to find that his closest allies in the Labour Party were aware of his cunning plan.

One of the consequences of the more far-sighted AMs that the vote of no confidence was eventually tabled and passed. It is now officially in the books, thus Alan Michael with no option but to resign.

It has now emerged that Michael hoped to prevent the vote being taken by offering his resignation, and then to win reinstatement as Labour's candidate under the Ceredigion by-election formula. Unbeknownst to him, there was by then a clear majority of Labour Assembly Members in favour of his removal. Out of a group of twenty-eight, Michael was left with five hard-core supporters, with a further eight AMs wavering between supporting him or Rhodri Morgan.

Michael's plan quickly unravelling as it became clear that he would not have the support of the Labour group. His forced resignation then became permanent as the Assembly's motion of censure brought about his dis-"
1,000 rally round London's left slate

Veronica Fagan

A THOUSAND people packed into the Camden Centre on February 22 for a rally organised by the London Socialist Alliance (LSA). It was a first round of meetings in constituencies across the city in a run up to a by-election for the Greater London Assembly.

Around 2,000 people have attended these events in the different boroughs where the LSA will be standing local candidates, as well as contesting the central positions for the Assembly.

Candidates have been selected in many areas and are out and about getting themselves known.

The Alliance has begun to put itself on the map with weekly stalls in many parts of London, and campaigning activities which has a wide range of issues. So far it has been relatively easy to get media exposure – the LSA has had more column inches than any other Assembly candidates.

It is no surprise that the LSA should be prominent in the defence of Camden Unwin and fellow campaigner Dave Carr, who are under attack both from UCH management and from their own union, UNISON.

Candy is the LSA candidate in Camden and Barnet, and she is standing against her own organised manager at UCH – who is the new Labour nominee.

The LSA has also been out building the rally at Waterloo on February 28 in support of RMT member Sarah Friday who has been sacked by South West Trains for fighting against the unsafe conditions her members work in.

The Branch Secretary of RMT at Waterloo, Greg Tucker, also an LSA candidate said “Our branch was pleased to sponsor the RMT.”

It is about time we had an organisation that stood up for the concerns of working people not just asking us to come out every few years to further some politicians careers, but helping us campaign here and now. …”

LSA supporters participated in the STOPP demonstration and will be marching on March 4 to demand that “Munia must live!”

We are clear that while we want votes in this election, what is even more important is to be involved in what resistance is actually taking place on the ground.

The rally itself had a very positive feel with a large crowd of the usually scattered sectarianism that the British far left is so doggedly opposed to.

Pat Stack, in the chair, opened the meeting by explaining the groups that had come together to form the Alliance, while also stressing that the involvement of non-affiliated individuals was key.

Speakers from both the platform and the floor the identified themselves mainly as LSA supporters with the need to identify their particular organisation when there was not a lot of time left.

The way that sectarianism has been such a problem in the movement was explicitly addressed in the contribution from film-maker Ken Loach and his challenge to a positive response from Paul Foot, who made the final speech.

Foot, making his first public appearance since his recent illness, was warmly received when he acknowledged to those being made to the movement to get outside his own tradition.

Up-beat

All the speeches were very up-beat and the meeting was clearly united around calling on both the LSA and the LSA as an independent – or rather as a socialist, as one speaker put it.

No one wants him to do what the rumour-mills have been suggesting – to put forward a slate with ex-Liberals, very well connected business people. His supporters are in the labour movement, and that is where he should be looking for candidates and allies.

I certainly came away from the meeting energised to do more to make sure the LSA gets on the map to say. There will be weekly stalls in most parts of London from now on as we are being laid for a round of pre-election meetings at the end of March.

For further information about both you can get involved contact 0207 928 4213 or main.office@london.socialistalliance.org.uk

rail militant victimised

Now who's taking the piss?

SARAH FRIDAY has worked at Waterloo for 12 years, 10 of them as a train driver. She is an RMT, IWGB and Safety Representative for drivers and Conductor Union RMT.

Following a disciplinary hearing on February 13, she was summarily dismissed by South West Trains. The charges against her were that she delayed a train, failed to notify a Supervisor that she required to use the toilet, and failed to surrender her safety card. She was trying to do a good job – under attack from management.

The RMT Executive has agreed to ballot all Traincrew members on South West Trains for strike action. They are demanding a resolution to the 10% pay cut, the dropping of all disciplinary and strike action, the sacking of all workers, sacked for co-operation earlier.

Now Prescott has done a complete backtrack on his promises that were made after Ladbroke Grove about safety responsibilities.

When Prescott was going round Ladbroke Grove, he promised that there would be protection for whistle-blowers. But I’ve been sacked, not for the ridiculous charges on my charge sheet, but because I’ve raised a lot of concerns about health and safety issues, particularly about the working patterns for drivers and some of the problems that causes.

TC: Management say in relation to the guards’ ballot that they are the ones who are protecting safety, because it’s much safer to give drivers responsibility for safety than it is guards. As a driver, what’s your response to that?

SF: Well, it’s an absolutely ridiculous statement. As a driver, I support the guards in their action, and we were actually balloted as well as drivers. You know, I can support the guards out of principle anyway.

But as a driver, I don’t want any more work dumped on me. The job is really gruelling but I do want to keep the safety things.

One of the main problems is that we could work seven hours without a break.

We do a lot of high intensive, suburban work, and to try and concentrate for that period of time on the signals is hard. There are some fairly busy sections of track. We’re often following each behind another train, so you’re getting from one yellow signal to another, so you’re not always sure what’s the case, so you know, you’ve

there's a breakdown at the depot. They put a new manager in last spring – he’s a part-timer, an almost casual manager. He was as bad as being well organised, unionised, and he brought in quite a lot of what’s there for. There was an unofficial overtime ban last year, but in the end they tried to hear local agreements regarding overtime. None of them are under any illusions about what he’s there for.

And there are just one or several key individuals who people realise are getting under their skin – from this man. They see my case as an attack on their rights at the depot, and I organised industrially within the union.

SF: Yes, I’ve made my priority to get round to other depots in the South West Trains area. I’ve been looking at Waterloo for industrial action, obviously we’re looking at negotiations at co-operation during the strike from other depots.

I’m also speaking at various different RMT branch meetings of the RMT and trying to get out to meetings of other union members generally. It was very good that at the beginning of the Socialist Alliance my case was advertised there, and there was a large turn-out. That happened when I asked people to come to the rally.

Send letters of support (marked on back S. Friday Reinstate Operator Fund) payable to Waterloo RMT c/o. Building SE1 5TW. To contact Sarah to speak at any meetings phone 0171 582 2955 or e-mail gstucker@zoo.co.uk
Italian lesson as teachers fight PRP

Performance related pay (PRP) for teachers is causing problems in the Labour Party's overall plan for education. Labour want to open education up to the interests of business and to reshape schools as enterprises which produce the kind of workers global capital needs in the Twenty First Century.

Teachers have fought successive attempts to fit the curriculum more closely to the needs of capital for example through the boycott of the SATs. They are now fighting on an issue which is not simply about the defence of wages and conditions, but also about the kind of nature of education. GILL LEVEE looks at the issues involved.

The introduction of performance related pay has substantially weakened trade unions, which it has been introduced. In the Civil Service, a major teacher's strike has left them demoralized and demoralized. At the 100-strong demonstration and rally organized by STOPP (School Teachers Opposed to Performance Related Pay) on February 12, Michael Rossen, poet and educator, point out the reasons for this: "It unites teachers against the pay. It provides a permanent sense of injustice, whinging and arguing among teachers. Now Labour knows this. So why are they introducing it? For one reason - to smash the union."

To carry out their plans to restructure education in the interests of big business, New Labour needs to weaken the teachers' unions.

Performance Related Pay is a very effective tool in doing so, since it reduces the role of the unions in determining the pay of their members (already essentially weakened through the imposition of pay settlements through the school teachers' pay review body). It also strengthens management. Not only will teachers' pay be influenced by how well the school is doing, but teachers will be made to feel they are doing their job, but, through being tied up with the pupils, the pupils' parents is a major threat. It forces the importance of results - however narrowly defined by the government. This may mean teachers focusing on particular groups of pupils whose improvements are key to the school, rather than catering for the differing educational needs of all their pupils.

It means an increased emphasis on those educational goals which are measurable and quantifiable, rather than those which are not (such as ability to work with others, ability to question, and think critically). It ties teachers more closely to New Labour's educational policies and reduces their willingness to meddle in these interests of their pupils.

PRP is also about blaming teachers for the failures of the educational system. As Nick Davies well-researched articles in The Guardian proved, the main cause of failure in education is poverty, and the main cause of failing schools is an increasingly broken down system in which there are few true educational levels left.

Schools are increasingly divided into 'good' schools and those which have a high proportion of their pupils from relatively privileged backgrounds. PRP will reinforce this divide with teachers increasingly choosing to teach where targets are easiest to meet, and 'sick' schools increasingly employing temporary agency staff. None of this is to the advantage of working class children, or teachers.

The teaching unions have yet to be pushed into decisive action on PRP (the NUT has agreed a boycott of appraisal meetings) and to the performance management part of the PRP process. The 1999 Conference of the National Association of Teachers Unions unanimously passed a motion calling for a campaign of action against PRP with a one-day strike. The majority "broad left" faction of the NUT Executive of the Union has however consistently blocked calls to deliver a ballot on strike action.

STOPP heavily influenced by the Socialist Teachers' Alliance, has begun a series of demonstrations, pickets and lobbying aimed at putting pressure on the government and the teaching unions. In Italy, threats of strike action by teachers marked the government retreat on PRP. The fight will be re-ignited at NUT conference in Easter to make sure that a similar course is followed here.

Faslane 'flyback'

Campbell McCracken

The movement against nuclear weapons has been undergoing a revival in Scotland. Britain's strategic nuclear deterrent is based on missiles launched by Trident submarines, which are based at Faslane on the Firth of Clyde. There has been a continuous peace camp outside this base since the early 1980s, with sporadic protests over the years.

The area was under the control of Dumbarton District Council, which was sympathetic to the protesters, but the Tory government transferred it to Argyll and Bute Council, who have tried to get the peace camp evicted.

The anti-missiles movement in Scotland was greatly encouraged last year, when a group of women who had damaged some barges in Loch Goil used in the testing submarines were acquitted at Greenock Sheriff's Court, after they argued that nuclear weapons were illegal.

On February 14-15, a group of 200 protesters at Faslane took part in the 34th annual anti-Trident demonstration. The nuclear submarine was in the waters of Faslane, but the activists were determined to keep the peace camp. The day ended with a police action against the protesters.

Labour's election fixers stack odds for grammar schools

Blunkett's obstacle course for comprehensive campaigners

Richard Hatcher, Birmingham CASE

In Birmingham the government is pushing grammar schools into a comprehensive future. This sounds like a news story from the 1960s. But for those in the country where the 164 remaining grammar schools exist, it is still as relevant as it was 30 years ago.

For example, in Birmingham we have 8 grammar schools which grossly distort the pattern of education at the expense of working class children. 38% of pupils in Birmingham secondary schools are entitled to free school meals. In the grammar schools the figure is less than 5%. Children from some minority ethnic backgrounds in African, Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi are under-represented.

The existence of the grammar schools depends on the exaggerated importance of comprehensive schools of a significant number of the most academically able children. Recent research conducted by less able children was to go to grammar school. Research has shown that grammar school children are better prepared for university than their comprehensive school counterparts.

In Birmingham, the most able pupils do just as well in comprehensive as in grammar schools. Performance in the grammar schools has actually been reduced over the past few years.

The 1996 local elections show the enthusiasm of the grammar schools community to maintain the grammar school system. The grammar school parents have the power to maintain grammar schools.

In Birmingham the grammar school system is supported by a massive majority and that is why the government is determined to force through the comprehensive reform. If Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s could get rid of most of the grammar schools, so can Tony Blair.

The national umbrella organization is CASE, the Campaign for State Education, 158 Durham Road, London SW20 0DG. Website: http://www.mandolin.demon.co.uk/case.html

The task is huge, but there are vigorous local campaigns in a number of areas, Rikon, Birmingham and Kent among them. They need help.

If the government persist in forcing comprehensive education on Birmingham, what will the students do? They will resist. They have the power of numbers.
Hiving off jobless

UNION activists in North West England are building a programme of activity to fight privatisation.

They are calling attention to the continuing push to hive off segments of the public sector encouraged by the Government.

Threats include the transfer of council services, the search for a vehicle to get rid of more council houses, schemes like the Private Finance Initiative to build new hospitals, Education Authority cutbacks and Zone threats to replace 'failing' Education Authority services with contractors.

The Blairists are also struggling to dispose of air traffic control.

One of the most sinister developments is the privatisation of unemployed people through Employment Zones. The services to drive them into work will be run by private companies paid by results. Jobless workers will be bullied for profit and the attainment of targets under the contract.

Speaking at a meeting in Liverpool to launch a campaign against the zone, one union rep from PCS pointed out that the contracts would have an incentive to work with unemployed people who would most easily find jobs, not those who have the greatest difficulty.

An ongoing campaign against the zones was agreed at the meeting, among local trade unions and Liverpool Trades Council. The trades council is also acting as an organising focus for broader anti-privatisation action. To pool knowledge and information a one day North West conference has been called. This will be held at the Friends Meeting House in Manchester on June 3.

For more details contact Jim Dye (Liverpool TUC) or Duncan Macleod (Unison, 4th Floor, Produce Exchange, 8 Victoria Street, Liverpool L1 1JH). (Tel 0151 236 1944).

John Lister
Q: WHEN IS an inquiry not an inquiry?
A: When it's a New Labour Inquiry!

That is the simple lesson from the NHS beds inquiry, but ultimately pointing the way into the availability of hospital beds in England, commissioned 18 months ago when Frank Dobson was just an intellectual Health Secretary, and published in the midst of an entirely predictable winter crisis for the NHS.

Dobson asked for the report to be prepared not by any independent or open-minded researcher but by Clive Smeed. No, it seems he is not Cap's Hock's bosun from Peter Pan, but the Department of Health's chief economist, and by implication a man who has been closely involved with the dis- astrous cuts in hospital beds implemented by successive Labour governments over the last 20 years.

At first sight it might have seemed a strange appointment, but it was finally, grudgingly published by ministers, offered sweeping and bold conclusions. It declared that the 1994 NHS will need another 4,000 beds in the next three years and now it is with the mounting pressure from emergency admissions and from frail older patients for whom most of the appropriate NHS beds have now closed down.

But on closer examination the findings are rather less radical. Seven beds are not what they appear. 2,000 of them are supposed to be "intermediate" beds: these are not hospital beds at all, but nursing homes, and almost all of which are privately run by profit-seeking firms. Expanding this sector is a further privatisation of what was part of the NHS.

Indeed Alan Milburn has only recently rubber-stamped the closure of NHS community hospital beds in Oxfordshire, making it clear that this is not the "intermediate" beds Mr Smeed is referring to.

This leaves a call for another 2,000 front-line NHS "general and acute" beds over 3 years: surely this is at last recognising the chronic problem of an NHS system which cannot cope with any surge in emergency demand? Of course, more beds are needed while calling for more beds on the one hand, Mr Smeed seems oblivious to the loss of a similar number of beds which were not gathering dust.

The problem is that - whether by design or neglect - it appears that Mr Smeed was not asked to include any examination of the likely impact on hospitals of the Private Finance Initiative, the Tory scheme to get new hospitals funded by private industry and let to "share" back to the NHS. And he did not think to include this in his report.

PFI has become a by-word for bed losses: even those arguing in favour of the costly plan admit that in many cases 25-35% of acute beds will be axed. The dozen or so PFI schemes already under way could easily wipe out the 2,000 "extra" beds called for by the inquiry.

But neither the phrase nor the initials PFI can be found in the 130-page of Mr Smeed's analysis, which appears to have been concocted in near-paralysed secrecy, with no attempt to seek the views of health unions or user groups.

The other vital missing link in the report is any discussion of how much its proposed cuts would cost, or where the money should come from.

While many of the 25,000 acute beds which have closed since 1982 have been lost as a result of increases in day surgery and shorter lengths of stay in hospital, the closures have been increased by cash pressures on health authorities and Trusts, many of which are again staring down the barrel of deficits this year.

Without extra cash allocations, no extra beds will open; instead more will close in the battle to balance the books.

But the cash battle also hangs over the so-called "intermediate" beds in nursing homes. First Dobson, now Alan Milburn, have maintained a constipated year-long silence over the findings of the Royal Commission on continuing care of the elderly, which recommended that nursing homes should be covered by the NHS - instead of the present paperwork means-tested charges administered through social services.

Until this question is answered, the so-called "consulation" on the possible shape of the future NHS in 20 years time is a wasted effort.

Smeed puts forward three possible - but contradictive - vari- ants: "Maintaining current direction", which would require an additional 8,000 acute beds, 7,000 nursing home beds and 15,000 places in residential homes. This option would also need an extra 6,000 GPs, a possible doubling of home help services and a 20 percent increase in district nursing.

"Acute bed focused care", which Mr Smeed suggests would need a 45% increase in acute hospital beds along with 7,000 nursing home places and 15,000 residential home places.

The report does not explain why this variant would need so many additional places overall: it would require a 5% increase in home help services, little change in district nursing, and 4,000 extra GPs.

Alternatively, the scheme most likely to tickle the fancy of Alan Milburn is the so-called "closer to home option", more accurately the "back bedroom DIY option" which would cash acute beds by almost ten percent, almost double the number of district nurse contacts, and require an extra 10,000 GPs. This, like the other two options would also require 7,000 extra intermediate beds and 15,000 residential beds.

But because they are run by the private sector for profit, it is impossible to ensure that these additional beds expand in number, or that they are provided where they are most needed.

While areas of the country, including most of London, have well below the national average provision of nursing home places. The result is - as a separate report by the National Audit Office has pointed out - that large numbers of frail elderly patients remain stuck in inappropriate acute hospital wards for lack of suitable alternative beds and care.

The report estimates that up to 6,000 patients could be transferred in a single band time, while hospitals struggle and social service budgets are stretched to breaking point.

This means more cash for reverse, more NHS bed, and an immediate campaign to recruit and train the additional 10,000 health professionals that the NHS will require whatever system is adopted.

"Moderniser" Milburn has helped waste 18 weeks while things have got worse, and we are now in the second half of this Labour government.

If he doesn't get the injection of resources we need, he could be taking the blame in 12 months for another electorally damaging NHS winter crisis.
Section 28: charter for bigots and bullies

Francis Clarke

Anyone viewing the recent repeat of the Channel 4 documentary 'Queers' will have seen the homophobic bullying of the character Nathan. He is a 15 year old school student who was targeted by both teachers and his classmates because of his sexuality, and suffers homophobic bullying as a result.

In fact his experience probably understates the weight of the problem. Systems of bullying and 'pecking orders' exist amongst school students, mirroring what happens in society at large. It operates at all levels from local bullying to out and out violence. This is one of the important routes by which homophobia is reproduced in society.

The government recognises the problem of bullying within the educational system and is in the process of adopting a range of strategies to eliminate this problem. However, it is a particularly important issue for the future of the gay community.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science has made it clear that she believes homophobia is a form of bullying and that it should not be tolerated.

The Secretary of State also underlined her commitment to ensuring that all pupils are treated fairly and equitably. She said: "Homophobia is a form of bullying and it is unacceptable. It is important that schools work together to ensure that all pupils are treated fairly and equitably, regardless of their sexual orientation."

The Department for Education and Science has published guidance for schools on how to tackle homophobia and bullying. This guidance includes advice on how to create a safe and inclusive learning environment for all pupils, regardless of their sexual orientation.

The government has also introduced changes to the Education Act 1999 to make it a criminal offence to discriminate on the grounds of sexual orientation.

After yet another ballot stitch-up ...

Civil service union bosses sign away members' rights

Darren Williams, PCS Group Asst.
Secretary, Office of National Statistics (personal capacity)

MEMBERS of the 250,000-strong Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) have just voted overwhelmingly to back the union's exclusive right to negotiate with the government. The union is currently represented by 3,500 civil servants.

It aims "to promote a positive and inclusive environment for everyone in the union, and to ensure that employees are treated fairly and with dignity and respect in the workplace.

The union has a long history of representing civil servants, and has been involved in negotiating collective agreements, including on pay, conditions of service, and equality.

The union's right to negotiate is a key condition for civil servants to work in a positive and inclusive environment.

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Close Rochester – close all detention centres

Paul Johnstone

Rochester prison has been the subject of many protests since it was declared a Detention prison in 1995. On average there are 150 immigration detainees at Rochester. Now the way they are treated by the Prison Service has been condemned by the official inspectors of Prisons. The report followed an unannounced inspection last year.

Sir David Ramsbotham said Rochester was found in a worse state than it was last inspected. He questioned the legality of treatment applied to these unconvicted prisoners.

Drug tests

For example they have been subject to mandatory drug testing and punish- ment through prison disciplinary procedures if they fail to co-operate. No legal justification for this could be shown.

This lack of concern for due process extends to the very fundamentals of the detention of these people – they were not provided with any written explanation as to why they were detained.

Ramsbotham’s report makes clear that this was a wider concern on his part, which had also arisen from inspections of other establishments such as Campfield in Oxfordshire. Despite his urging, no coherent set of guidelines, regulations or statutory rules have been formulated for all detainees.

When subjected to prison procedures adjudication documents used were only in English, which many of the detainees do not understand.

Induction procedures and documentation were available only in English, although detainees who did not understand them were still required to sign them as if they did.

In general, although many of the detainees speak little or no English, they were unable to communicate with them in other languages where they were not employed: “remarkably there had been no instances in which the Language Line had been used at Rochester during the past year.”

Ramsbotham also criti- cised the Prison Service for treating detainees as if they were unconvicted prisoners when their needs were markedly different. There was little activity of any kind and little work, although they needed money to have access to various facilities.

Hostile

Some staff were clearly hostile, and resented the presence of detainees, who were others wished to be able to provide a better regime. Criticism was made of the general regime.

Overall Rochester Prison was dirty. This particularly extended to the toilets used by detainees, and he remarked two cells had been left bloodstained for weeks after incidents in which a detainee cut him.

These criticisms are official, but the detainees in Rochester have themselves repeatedly protested the conditions. Numerous suicide attempts, hunger strikes and official complaints have gone unheard. The response of the prison authorities and immigration is forceful removal of the individual to the segregation unit, restrictions under prison regulations without hearing or trial pending removal to another prison.

In some extreme cases individuals have been removed to hospital without their consent so as to shift the prison’s responsibility for action and medicalise the problem.

However the campaign outside must continue. The answer is not mild reform and better management of this cruel and degrading treatment but ending it.

As a first step the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns is calling for the closure of Rochester, but all of these conditions go... and the sooner the better.

Stop hounding asylum seekers

No more deaths in detention!

Stella Pearson

On January 24, Robastas Grabyk, a 40 year old Lithuanian asylum seeker, was found hanged at Harmondsworth Detention Centre.

Campaigners against Britain’s racist asylum and immigration laws believe it is no coincidence that the Home Office had attempted to deport him two years before.

His death was only publi- cised by a press release from the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns.

Their Home Office boasted that it was the first death in a detention centre in 10 years, neglecting to mention the deaths and suicide attempts of asylum seekers that have taken place in prisons and homes in that time.

Just days before Robastas died, three detained Roma asylum seekers attempted suicide together by drinking poison.

In January 1999, Dorcas Wasnya arrived in the UK, applied for asylum on land- ing and was put in detention. After 9 months, she drank a bottle of bleach and was imprisoned in Holloway – she has since been deported.

Next, a young Anthony Ola from Nigeria was arrested on a criminal charge and sent to Brockham. At the time he was completely exonerated, but was kept in Brockham awaiting deportation, where he tried to hang himself. He too has now been deported.

Kimua Nsirito from Zaire committed suicide in Harmondsworth Detention Centre in June 1990. James Segaya was hanged in Birmcnth in August 1992, where officials refused to believe he was hung.

Turun Pelak committed suicide by immigration Guest House Immigration Centre, Croydon, in March 1993.

Joy Gardner died as a result of asphyxiation by the Extraction Unit of the Metropolitan Police, at home in Harrow, West London, in front of her son, Kavemele Sibola, Nsirito and Nooyanah Begum all died by falling from their balconies facing immigration officers.

Herbert Gbattah died in the custody of the Walsall Police while they were trying to deport him back to Jamaica. Lin Yan-Guang, a Chinese asylum seeker, committed suicide in December 1998.

All these people were remembered at a vigil outside the Home Office, organised by the Coalition for the Protection of Asylum and Immigration Rights (CAPAR), a joint venture by the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC) and the National Assembly Against Racism (NAAR).

People from all around the world, faced with deportation, made their voices heard.

For more information, email care@ncadc.demon.co.uk

Protosters outside the Austrian embassy in London on February 19 in solidarity with the mass demonstration in Vienna (see p 16-17). In Britain state racism is a greater danger today than the far right – but watch out. It was Austrian-Social Democracy’s support for the EU’s Schengen treaty and other racist measures which laid the basis for Haider’s ascendency.

Straw’s laws criminalise people

Elkie Doe

THE EFFECT of immigration laws is to criminalise people, simply for being immigrants, migrants, refugees or asylum seekers. It does not matter if they have committed any criminal offence or not. The Immigration Act autho- rises detention and imprison- ment where there has been no offence, no charges no prosecution and no court trial.

Reinforcing the image of immigrants as criminals is done in a number of ways:

Language

Under immigration law, immigrants, migrants and refugees are defined as being in the UK “illegal” or “unlawfully.” So they are defined as non-persons and outside of the law. Immigration Officers regularly define Third World people as “Illegal” – with no identity other than being devoid of status in the UK. Those who lose their claim for asylum become “Bogus”. All these definitions are used to criminalise people.

The Media

On February 26 2000 “The Times” ran a story under the headline “Refugees flock to Germany and Britain,” written by Stewart Tindell, Crime Correspondent. The story, about Home Office figures released the day before, was that Britain attracts more asylum seekers than any other country in Europe bar Germany.

The cost to the British tax- payer was also illustrated – Kent County Council reported that dealing with child asylum seekers will cost households an extra £3 next year on council tax. It was suggested that many other councils will follow suit unless the government pledges more money.

The NCADC is calling on people to protest at the presentation of this story in the Times by writing to Peter Scott, editor of The Times, fax no 0171-782-5046. The Times has labelled 71,166 asylum applicants as criminals by giving the story to their crime reporter.

Please e-mail copies of any- thing sent to ncadc@ncadc.demon.co.uk.

Contact the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC) for more information by phone: 0121-554 6947, fax: 0870-055 4570, Web site:
which way will the swp jump?

The London Socialist Alliance (LSA) is potentially the most interesting development on the left in Britain since the formation of the Scottish Socialist Party. ALAN THORNETT looks at the issues involved and the role of the Socialist Workers Party.

In the past many socialists have gone off long term involvement in organised politics by the divisive sectarianism of the British left - something for which all far left currents bear a degree of responsibility. That is why the remarkable unity which has developed in the LSA is so encouraging: a breath of fresh air. Suddenly, instead of stressing what divides us, the organisations involved - the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), the Socialist Party (SP), the Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL), Workers Power, the Independent Labour Network (ILN), the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and the International Socialist Group (ISG) - are seeing consensus grow about the best way to get things done. This most surprising and important component of class, its size and history, is the SWP. This organisation has clearly made a sharp turn outwards, and seems to be involved in an ongoing discussion about how to move.

Previously the SWP's hallmark was its sectoral politics, its activist campaigns either excluded these inorganised sections or through organisations which it controlled. Now the SWP seems to operate through open union fronts and to be itself more open and collaborative with the rest of the left.

This important shift in attitude is reflected not just in the SWP's involvement in the LSA but around other campaigns such as that against WFTO and in opposition to Russia's war in Chechnya - although it is a more partial way. This change may have potential consequences for the future shape and strength of the left in Britain.

This change directly reflects the current political situation in Britain. Blair's right-wing avalanche means that socialists are learning the Labour Party in increasing numbers. But the traditional heartland voters are no longer turning out, and many of those who do seem to be looking for an alternative. In this context the introduction of Proportional Representation in a number of elections gives a greater chance for candidates to the left of Labour to actually be elected.

All this has opened up space to the left of Labour. The left cannot afford to miss this opportunity, particularly given its decline over the past 10 years, a decline which has been uneven but dramatic in absolute terms. Unfortunately the left has, up to now, been outflanked. Outside of Scotland, this new space has been filled by the Greens and the national - who have positioned themselves to the left of Labour for that very purpose. Yet most of those dissatisfied with Labour are now looking for a natural affinity to an alternative socialist project.

There is more than one reason for this failure of course, including the lack of a track record by the left in the electoral field. But the principal answer must be the chronic divisions within the left and its inability to put forward an attractive socialist alternative.

People are looking for answers and what they see is splits and divisions. Unity, therefore, is key, since the sum of a united left is much greater than the sum of the constituent parts.

This opening up of space to the left of Labour - which reflects a developing crisis of Labour representation - has been developing since the election of Blair as leader of the LP and the defeat of Clause 4.

This was what brought Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party into existence, albeit at a premature stage. Later it led the Militant to change its name to the Socialist Party - with the aim of developing a broader organisation after they were scandalously denied membership of the SLP by Scargill.

Both of these initiatives foreshadowed the SLP's strategic decision to stand as a victim of the politics of Scargill and those who aided and abetted him (and who should, have known better). The SP failed to build a broader organisation and eventually turned back to building itself into a smaller, less radical, group.

But the SP did continue with the mainstream relationship with the rest of the left. It continued to lead Socialist Alliances in various parts of England, Scotland and Wales. Most of these were embryonic bodies but represented the green shoots of socialist recomposition in this new situation.

In Scotland the situation was qualitatively different, particularly given the role in an anti-poll tax movement of Scottish Militant Labour's (SML) leading activists, and led to the foundation of the SLP the following year with the former SML as the core of it.

Several Alliances stood in the European elections, but in London such an initiative was torpedoed by the decision of the SLP to stand a slate with Scargill. This split the unity of the left and led the SLP (rightly or wrongly) to disband.

But now we are at a new stage. The Blair project, and the way the election of Labour candidates for Mayor exacerbated the process.

When the London Socialist Alliance was reformed last year, with the object of standing a slate for the London Assembly it was a qualitatively different body from its predecessor - although it contained most of the old personnel.

This new strength was also due to the attitude of the SWP, which had stayed counter-positively outside of the Socialist Alliance and the SLP - and still does.

Perhaps it has learnt the lessons of Scotland in its new role in London - certainly it has made a new level of commitment to this time round. This has resulted in the rapid development of the campaign with close day-to-day collaboration between the organisations and individuals involved - with the 1,000 strong meeting on February 22 the high point so far.

There, responding to Ken Livingstone's challenge about how good it was to be on the same platform as an "old state capitalist like Paul Foot", Foot responded by saying that it was about time we got rid of the divisions and sectarian ghosts of the past.

The other very positive feature of the meeting was the way the campaigning was strongly projected. The Alliance is not mainly about getting votes, but about putting an active alternative to new Labour - and again the SWP were important in this.

Most of the organisations involved have been on a learning curve as far as how to work in a campaign like the LSA is concerned. And some of the new non-sectionalist ways of working are only being partly achieved.

The SP in particular has got itself into a swirl over the Campaign Against Taxation (CATP) (see p23).

The SP has remained a part of the LSA, and have a candidate, but will only support the LSA candidates at constituency level not on the all-London top-up list.

But it is not just that. It seems likely they would have pulled back anyway, even if the CATP issue has not come up.

They have found it difficult to find a way of building their own organisation in the same way as building Socialist Alliances as well.

But their shift is a problem for everyone. The SP are the second biggest of the far-left organisations, and their full involvement is very important to the LSA.

Most of the organisations involved accept that there are new ways of working if the LSA is to be successful. And a lot has been achieved.

On LSA stalls most of the literature is in the name of the Alliance, at LSA meetings of people identifying themselves as Alliance supporters rather than from the component groups.

The SWP has been part of this shift, although perhaps not all their members have caught on yet. They have a particular responsibility not to dominate things or impose their culture as the largest current involved.

And the changes need to go further. The LSA needs to let its hair down a bit. It needs to be open and realistic and seen to be so. We need to open the way to create a democratic forum for discussion, whilst having an open door to new people and new ideas and even new formations.

The big unanswered question is where is all of this leading. What, for example, will happen to the London Socialist Alliance after the elections?

It is clear that some of the smaller organisations see this as the start of a longer term process, but the SWP has not yet made up its mind.

We hope they will come down in favour of continuing to work with the rest of the left in this new way - and there are positive signs. Certainly the SP have decided that they want a continued relationship with LSA supporters after May.

But if all those who disband after the London Assembly elections it would be a great pity, since the crisis of Labour representation won't go away.

The possibility of a new party to the left of Labour, whilst not possible at the present time, could be posed at any time. If not then if there were significant developments in the LP in the form of either electoral or defections.

The practical political preparation for such a new party has to take place in advance, given the position of the important role the far left could play in this.

The crucial factor about such a party would be its broad character - a federation in which the existing far-left groups could participate with their own politics.

It could not be just a coalition of the far-left: it would have to have its own serious commitment or there it would be nothing. And such a party would have its own structures, with a guru handing out the message will have to be found.

None of this diminishes the fight for the far-left: those parties would have to play in such a party. And even that the anti-Stalinists on the mainstream of the far-left would have to find the preparation for such a party is an important political task.

If this implies that the very broad definition of the left is not to be allowed to lose ground place around the LSA and other campaigns must be made to give the left new breathing space from disbanding the LSA in the hope of something better, and further and make it the basis of further initiatives. After the election the LSA can be seen as the end of one battle for the development of a real alternative to new Labour is in the name of the Alliance, at LSA meetings most are identifying themselves as Alliance supporters rather than from the component groups.

The SWP has been part of this shift, although perhaps not all their members have caught on yet. They have a
Is there a ‘New’ Economy or just the same old system dressed

Andy Kilmister

Ever since the beginning of the 1990s, the ruling class has dreamt of abolishing boom and slumps in the economy. Indeed, the 1990s economy was excessively debated whether the business cycle was obso-

leste. The last two months of this year have seen a massive media hype around the concept of the ‘New Economy’.

The Financial Times recently ran a five part series of articles on this theme, at the same time as The Economist ran a part series on the central feature on ‘e-Commerce’. Meanwhile, practice in the City has been packed with features on the influential internet million-

aires. European stock markets are now following US examples, with a main

trend of the last two years and broadening up the hype of information technology

in this. It is just a passing frenzy.

of it signifies anything important about the change taking place in global capital-

ism? The most detailed examination of this kind of question is in the Marxist tradition in the theory of long waves, developed by Ernst Mandel in his basic Capitalism and Unemployment. No attempt to analyse the situation is one of the key factors of capitalist development. Mardel had been little written about Marx, but he went Marxian per-

sonal analysis of the new economy, it has been

ever so important to get the same old system dressed in the new language of the technological age.

A net gain for capitalism?

While this was widely seen as a tribute to the power of the new economy, The Economist correctly read our time that part of the new economy by simply an alternative distributor

like Lycos.com can bring profits. But while this will encourage certain industries it is unlikely to remain limited in extent. Book sellers were the first to go for on line retailing, and it seemed a natural product - easy to ship, and with great advantages resulting from being able to list a wide range of products on your own site. But companies like Amazon.com have still made no profits.

The cost of delivering, and the services needed to encourage buyers to wait for delivery have wiped out the effect of growing market share and other products are much less well suited to this approach. A share index of the biggest online retailers in the USA calculated by the magazine

U.S.A. Today fell 31 per cent between November and the beginning of February. Other online retailers have done worse. Shares in E.Los fell 45 percent in a month, Value America is sinking half its workforce and Beyond.com is laying off 20 per cent of staff and leaving the consumer market, with shares down 80 per cent. The basis of the large num-

ber of consumer-based internet companies which do not change is even shakier. Guardian profiles of their founders are always notice-

able on one basic point - how they will make any money. In fact, in nearly every case it is through sell-

ing advertising space. The idea is that if enough people are seen to be visiting the site, advertisers will be keen to pay for a space on the site. Yet recent reports are decisively bad about the

The most important is that the new long wave is the start of a new upswing of a long wave. This would bring an end to the downturns in the world's economies. Won't the new expansion be caracterised by slow growth, peri-

odic, deep recessions and weak credit-based booms, which has lasted since 1973. A new ‘long boom’, which could be compared with that from 1948 to 1973, would satisfy the stock market fever and substantially increase profits.

But Mandel's central point about the new economy is that they cannot depend on one factor to go right, as Marx wrote in the ‘Grundrisse’, the ‘the concrete is concrete because it is the concrete combination of many determina-

tions’. Any attempt to ground a new long wave on technological developments alone is doomed to fail. Developing different social

sented by localisation, the decentralisation of large sectors of the economy, particularly finance, and the attack on the welfare state. There seem to be three main areas where the internet is playing a role. First, there is the use of IT internally within companies as a way of restructuring. This can involve production itself, but also as in the case of Unilever's office in purchasing, marketing and after-sales services. The result of this case is projected to be job losses of 10 per cent and factory closures of over 50 per cent, quarter-wide. Second, there is the use of the internet as a way of distributing products and services to consumers. Here it is where the effects of restructuring are important, for those things which can be distributed over the net, notably music through the MP3 software, and business services. Tickets for cultural events are also a natural area for the occasional bright idea behind Lycos.com can bring profits.

The current hype which is currently influential is based on the idea that such develop-

ments will lead to a new upswing of a long wave. This would bring an end to the downturns in the world's economies. Won't the new expansion be caracterised by slow growth, peri-

odic, deep recessions and weak credit-based booms, which has lasted since 1973. A new ‘long boom’, which could be compared with that from 1948 to 1973, would satisfy the stock market fever and substantially increase profitability. But Mandel's central point about the new economy is that they cannot depend on one factor to go right, as Marx wrote in the ‘Grundrisse’, the ‘the concrete is concrete because it is the concrete combination of many determina-

tions’. Any attempt to ground a new long wave on technological developments alone is doomed to fail. Developing different social
As Russia's leaders falter, fumble, and fail ... The crisis behind war in Chechnya

After the capture of Grozny, Russia's brutal war against the Chechen people continues in the southern mountains in even more difficult terrain against a guerrilla army of national liberation. While the siege of Grozny was approaching its successful conclusion, President Boris Yeltsin, after nearly ten years in power, suddenly stepped down in favour of his protégé. It is appropriate at this juncture that socialists re-assess what is going on in the ex-Soviet Union, and ask: What kind of society is being created by the "free market" and "Shock Therapy"?

Here DAVE PACKER discusses some of the issues.

The Dauphin takes power

No sooner had Boris Yeltsin resigned as President of the Russian Federation – on the last day of the millennium – than the Russian Dauphin, Vladimir Putin, moved quickly into the breach to secure his inheritance. Clearly an element in Yeltsin's decision to step aside was the extraordinary good showing in December's Duma (parliamentary) elections by Unity, the so-called 'Bloc' coalition, which was endorsed by the popular Putin, gaining 33.62% of the vote (64 seats).

The success of Unity, and Putin's spectacular rise in popularity, which still stands at 75%, can be put down entirely to the stage-managed and politically convenient war in Chechnya – he is seen as a strong and able leader of the war effort. It can also be put down to the fact that in the run up to voting, Russian TV and media mounted an extended campaign in favour of Unity.

Unity had been brutally thrown together only a few months before the elections in a desperate attempt to defend Yeltsin's 'family' interests, by cynically benefiting from the kudos derived from the bloody Chechen war. Another right wing bloc, the neo-liberal Union of Right Forces, led by former prime minister Sergei Kiriyenko, and including Anatoly Chubais and Yegor Gaidar, achieved only 8.2% (24 seats) despite their claim that they, along with the Unity gang and the IMF, are the main architects of "economic genocide".

The vanguard of Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), the largest party in the Duma, managed to hold up, raising its share by two percent to 24.29% (67 seats), although its other allied partners, the Agrarian Party and Popular Rule, failed to break the 5% threshold to win any seats.

Significantly, an alliance between Unity and the Union of Right Forces, together with defectors from Fatherland/All Russia to Unity, will mean that the CPRF will no longer be able to dictate in the Duma.

A 13.53% vote (37 seats), was also disappointing for Fatherland/All Russia, a so-called 'centre-left' bloc, headed by Moscow's mayor Yuri Luzhkov and former prime minister Yevgeniy Primakov. They seem to have lost millions of voters to Unity.

The ultra nationalist Zhirinovsky Bloc received only 5.98% (17 seats); and the Liberal T'yakovski also received 5.98% (16 seats). Many other coalitions did not reach the 5% to gain any seats.

Half of the lower house of the Duma, consists on the party list system and half on the basis of individual mandate constituencies. When the figures are combined with the so-called independent candidates standing in the 225 seat single constituency section, the final composition of the Duma, after wheeling and dealing will be different.

The distribution of seats will look something like the following: The CPRF will get 150-160 seats; Unity: 120-130; Fatherland/All Russia: 65-70; Union of Right Forces: 30; T'yakovski: 25; Zhirinovsky Bloc: 18; Vladimir Putin, a poker faced ex-KGB operative, should have a smile on his face. With Grozny now in Russian hands and his defence minister Igor Sergeyev claiming the war is nearly over, the linked successes on the military and political fronts make him the most likely winner in the March Presidential elections. There is no challenger in sight.

Putin had been plucked from relative obscurity by his patron to be groomed as Prime Minister and subsequently heir apparent. He is a man in a hurry, with policies geared to electioneering for the Presidency. It therefore came as no surprise when, after hardly warming his new seat in the Kremlin, he rushed off to the front line to Gudermes near Grozny to give out ornamental hunting knives to Russian officers in the new year awards.

The trip was a calculated gesture to further build the kudos and to ensure the confidence of the military – the power of last resort in Russia.

Putin vowed to the TV cameras that he would "crush the terrorists" and halt "the break-up of the Russian Federation."

According to The Observer (2/1/2000), at about the same time as Putin was in Gudermes giving out the awards, his other big backer and a third element in his rise to power, the media mogul and Kremlin crony, Boris Beresovsky, was unearthing in the new millennium with a ball at the Bolshoi costing $5,500 per head! His TV station was one of those on the air showing Putin live giving out the new year awards.

Shortly after his visit to Chechnya Putin was obliged to make one of the pay-offs. He signed a new presidential decree guaranteeing Yeltsin and his family immunity from prosecution for corruption (and probably from official investiga-

impressions). Meanwhile, Kremlin officials were searching for a new country dacha for Yeltsin just outside Moscow. This was part of the deal, as was a large pension, official car, bodyguards and attendance by top medi-

cial experts.

The Yeltsin camp tried to present Putin as their protector – and they have plenty to fear. The failing ex-President and his cronies have their hands so deeply in the till that it could be said that Yeltsin and Putin stand at the head of a near-gangster state with minimal mafia like its most dreaded export.

It has been estimated (Fitch IBCA) that between 1993 and 1998 an enormous $130 billion has flowed out of Russia legally and illegally. A single mafia/businessman, Sergei Mickhaliev, stands accused of laundering $10bn of IMF money through the bank of New York – which alone is equivalent to a staggering 40% of Russian government spending.

Most of the IMF's $25 billion sent to Russia since 1992 has been laundered back into western banks.

International investigators in Moscow, Geneva, London and New York, who were soon on the trail of the IMF's World Bank's lost billions kept coming across the names of Yeltsin's political cronies and his family.

Hence the necessity to ensure the succession and his immunity.

December,1999 Socialist (Guilfo) Everybody knows that organised crime is linked to the state bureaucracy. In his New Year Address to the nation Putin stated, probably tongue in cheek, that, "it will be some time before we can appreciate how much this man [Yeltsin] did for Russia."

However, Putin is not just a puppet. He has a programme which promises to make Russia powerful again – a country that "the people and the army can be proud." He lays emphasis on a powerful centralised state, on patriotism and on "courage.

He told the assembled military at the new year awards in Gudermes that the war, "is not just about restoring the honour and dignity to the country. No, this is about more serious things. This is
about how to bring the end of the break-up of Russia. This concern is known as the ‘Russian crisis’ goal.’

President Putin has been reported as saying that, ‘To the Russian a strong state is not an abstract idea which guarantees resistance and guarantor of order, the initial conditions of unity behind all changes.’

The Yeltsin regime had already effectively ended the ‘partnership for peace’ and begun to build relations with China and other major third world countries while increasing its confrontation stance towards the West. In mid-January, a 24-hour presidential decree of 24th

effect a shift in Russia’s defence doctrine by placing the military in a nuclear-framed state of combat readiness and new, more stringent, ground rules for the use of nuclear weapons and promising a 60% increase in the defence budget.

It is not surprising therefore that Western commentators are a bit concerned about President Putin. He is, after all, a pragmatist, pro-West, probably the best Russian president since Yeltsin, i.e., a pro-capitalist neo-liberal! Or is he, as the group of Western analysts suggest, a strongman who will destroy any vestiges of national interests ruthlessly – albeit in a capitalist framework.

In any event, the goal of Western policymakers has always been to move in the latter direction. However, this is not a realisable goal with a national capitalism which can sustain such a strategy, let alone sustain GDP, and will rely heavily on the state apparatus and on resources taxes from the oil industry to support its ‘socialised’ collective sector.

Some of this damage created by Yeltsin’s IMF “Shock Therapy”, which failed to create a viable free market but left a weakened and riddled economic system, will have to be reversed. But a turn towards the state capitalism based primarily on natural resources, like the state-owned Bratsk hydroelectric power, and a brutal business requiring a strong centralised state backed by a reliable army and a cohesive nationalist, even xenophobic, back to the collapse of Stalinism and the collapse of Stalinist system and a system of socialist command economy.

Such a course will of necessity be a harsh capitalist bonapartist state which is able to smash working class resistance, both passive and active, in order to finally carry through the bourgeois counter-revolution. If such a regime became stabilised, it could in the future be a further example of a fascistic state capitalism in Eurasia, with imperialist aim to dominate the East European region of war, for example, in the case of the Caspian Sea basin.

The road to capitalist restoration

The roots of the Russian economy are usually traced to the post-Stalinist failed attempt, through his policies of glasnost and perestroika, to reform the decreed bureaucratic system of the stagnant command economy that had created.

In fact the counterrevolution we witness today is merely the latest in a series of contrary acts, which has been played out since the fall of Stalin himself and his consolidation of bureaucratic rule in the 1920s.

Gorbachev’s reforms opened the borders of dis- content and undermined the principle of command on which the bureaucratic command economy was based. The Stalinist system soon began to unravel.

As Trotsky decades before predicted would happen, the dominant sections of the bureaucracy who had always looked after their own material interests first, opted for private property and capital- ist restoration.

However, there was no democratic mechanism for deciding how this should be done (or whether it should be done), or who would most benefit from it (it was the layers of the bureaucracy).

In 1990 Yeltsin the radical reformer was elected speaker in parliament, while Gorbachev began to falter and equivocate about the actuality of his many words of action he had adopted. On 20 August 1991, sections of the so-called old guard – those bureaucrats and generals who had adopted a different process of restoration, one more tune with national interests (i.e., their interests) rather than foreign interests behind them, had attempted a coup.

led by the Ukraine, they succeeded one by one. This partial and qualified victory of the masses in struggles for national liberation and for nationalisation was undoubtedly a step forward for democratic rights, but was not without its contradictions. Independence movements achieved under right wing nationalist leaderships, not socialist one.

Gorbachev was finished too. He was released after the coup, but was then humiliated in the parliament by Yeltsin, who ousted him. The man of the hour was unambiguously in favour of the restoration of capitalism and adopted the neo-liberal IMF plan of radical marketisation plus lucrative aid. The policy soon became known as “shock therapy.”

State planning mechanisms were dismantled, all foreign exchanges set up and privatisations embarked upon. Partial privatisa- tions, fake pur- chases, the distribution of wealth and other schemes were – launched in order to kick- start the capitalist market economy. All were to fail. They producing only a relatively small capitalist sector of ‘sherry picked’ industries, which ran parallel to the disintegrating socialist command economy.

Things went from bad to worse for the Russian economy and for the rest of the world’s media and denounced Yeltsin for not declaring himself the government. Because they had not gathered enough support of popular support, the coup-makers immediately gave in.

After the failure of the coup, the USSR has been proclaimed. Trotsky had rightly called the Union Soviet Socialist Republics a ‘Kronstadt of nations’, and this analysis was confirmed by the untold number of powerful nationalist movements in diverse Republics.

Rejection then boldly drove themselves to the centre of the city and stood on the roof of a building in front of the government building. They declared themselves the government. They government that they had not gathered enough support of popular support, the coup-makers immediately gave in.

The crash made it clear to the whole world that the Russian economy in Russia had not only stalled again, but had never seriously off the ground.

(TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT MONTH)
Russia's current war in Chechnya is a leftover from the old Soviet Union, which became a "prison" for Chechnya under the new Russian leadership in 1991. Although the rights of the Union Republics were a sick joke in 1991, once the USSR broke up, things changed dramatically. A massive vote for independence in the Ukraine (and a crisis over the seizure of the USSR's Baltic fleet) resulted in thirteen Union Republics gaining their independence. The result was the formation of the Russian Federation inside a newly created CIS—a loose and unstable formation dominated (to the extent it could be dominated) by Russia.

Socialist Outlook not only supported the right of all the republics to secede but backed their decision to do so since this was what was democratically decided. We felt that in the concrete conditions there was no other option to exercise real self-determination—despite our criticisms of many of the leaderships involved.

The only Autonomous Republic which refused to be incorporated into the Russian Federation at that time was Chechnya. In the autumn of 1991, a few months after the August failed coup and the effective collapse of the USSR and at the time the Union Republics, led by the Ukraine, were demanding independence, the Grozny Supreme Soviet was stormed and Dudayev took power. In Georgia, where the independence of the Autonomous Republic of Chechnya was not involved. It broke away from Chechnya and voted to remain a part of the Russian Federation.

Dudayev himself was a rather brash former Soviet air force general who commanded a wing of Soviet nuclear bombers in Estonia. It was a mark of the weakness of the Chechen national movement that Dudayev, who was a product of the Soviet system and decorated for outstanding service in Afghanistan, so rapidly became the leader of this movement.

In the event, Moscow did not at this point oppose the Chechen revolution. In fact, Dudayev phoned Khasbulatov, who was a Chechen and Speaker of the Russian Parliament (the first Chechen to hold such a position) to ask him if the tanks would be sent in from the Federal barracks. He was told no. However, Khasbulatov quickly became an opponent of the Dudayev regime, and moved a resolution in the Russian Parliament declaring it invalid. After that Chechnya was regarded by Russia as an unacceptable rogue state, and Dudayev was to be removed as soon as possible by the Russian military.

Why Chechnya was so different from other Chechen Autonomous Republics is a complex question, but there are some obvious factors. The Chechens were brutally oppressed by the Stalinist USSR—as they had been under the Tsarist Empire. The national oppression of the Chechens under Stalin was extreme. Then, during the Second World War, many Chechens died in the late 1930s and in 1944 the entire Chechen nation was exiled. But, along with the Ingushetians, transported at a few hours notice by Stalin lorries and cattle trucks to Kazakhstan, there they stayed in segregated conditions until they were reburied by KGB. Almost all of them died in the process.

But the Chechnians were not alone in suffering this fate. Many of the populations of the republics of the north Caucasus were transported in the same way: the Karachais, the Karabikhs, the Balkars, the Meskhetians. All were accused by Stalin of being pro-Fascists. But the deportation of the Chechens was the most brutal treatment of an entire nation carried out in that region at that time. After the deportations, Chechnya ceased to exist and its territory was divided up between other republics.

In addition, discrimination against the Chechens continued throughout the post-war Soviet period. This was particularly extreme in employment and higher education. Most of the skilled and professional jobs on Grozny, and most of the best housing as well as the party apparatus, was occupied by Russians, who were about a third of the population.

The early moves by Russia to end the Chechen rebellion failed, mainly because they were ham-fisted and understimulated the scale of the tank. Consequently Russia did not launch a full invasion until the end of 1994. Yeltsin had other preoccupations before then. Chechnya under Dudayev from 1991 to 1994 was as unstable and mafia-ridden as Russia itself, possibly more. Presidential elections were held in October 1992 and Dudayev won 85% of the vote. Independence from Moscow was declared a month later.

Politically Chechnya was an independent state; it had made a clear declaration of independence. But in practical terms it was a strange set-up; there were no border controls, no Chechen passports, and no real state apparatus. Dudayev himself travelled abroad on a Russian passport.

Moscow imposed a trade embargo, but continued to purchase oil from Chechnya—much of it siphoned by Chechens out of Russia's own pipeline! And the Grozny football team played in the Russian league.

If the post-Soviet governments in the former Autonomous Republics were comprised of former Soviet bureaucrats transformed into nationalist and Islamist regimes of various sorts. Chechnya was no different: the leaders began to grow beards and present themselves as Islamic.

There are various views as to why Chechnya was not supported by the other Autonomous Republics, particularly those in the north Caucasus: Daghestan, Kabardin-Balkar and North Ossetia. Certainly these had much more pro-Moscow regimes from the outset, but there also seems to be a demographic element as well, in that Chechnya is the only one with a national minority.

Eventually Russia invaded Chechnya at the end of 1994. By this time the Dudayev regime had degenerated, its popularity was at an all time low, and Chechnya was falling apart. Yeltsin was certainly getting impatient: it was still existing and Khasbulatov was no longer in the Kremlin.

Russian presidential elections were approaching and Yeltsin's popularity was at 10% and Russian nationalism dominated. Zhirinovsky was making an impression down his lines. The person who could solve the Chechnya "problem" could be a strong contender to lead Russia.

There were also geopolitical problems. Although the Grozny oil field was running out and its refineries antiquated, the pipe line from which ran to the Caspian Sea to Novorossyisk on the Black Sea through Grozny remains intact. So new oil fields being opened in the Caspian would give it added importance since the existing pipeline through Grozny would be the cheapest est way to get the oil through.

In February 1996 Khasbulatov returned to Chechnya, an event which led to proposals for negotiations between Dudayev and Yeltsin. This was forestalled by an invasion attempt against Dudayev.

The first Russian attack on Grozny during the summer failed as did a coup against Dudayev. But hard liners were taking over in the Kremlin around Yeltsin and all-out war eventually came in November.

In the end, the Russian army was disastrously defeated, after Grozny had fallen to them only to be retaken by the Chechens. An ad hoc army from a country with a population of less than a million defeated the army of the Russian Federation with a population of 150 million. This compounded the fragile political situation in Russia and added to the existing demonization of the Russian army.

A large part of the Russian victory over Russia, however, Chechnya continued as before—although it was even more fragmented than previously. It was still a type of free trade zone through which all kinds of trade, most of it illegal, could find its way into the Russian Federation.

Dudayev himself was assassinated soon after the end of the war by an air to ground missile which hit his car, presumably a Russian aircraft at high altitude.

The invasion of Chechnya, as we know, came in 1999. It took place in the wake of the NATO war in the Balkans and under different conditions than in 1994. Some of the reasons for the new war were the same as in 1994, and some were different.

The main factors were:

I This was partly anti-NATO war. It was a response to NATO's war in the Balkans and the humiliation which Moscow felt during and after the operation by NATO's eastward expansion which had been angering the Russian regime for several years, but had now come to fruition and had been a factor of the Balkans conflict.

II There was also a wish to face the moral and offensive capability of the Russian armed forces. The General has been exposed to the invasion of Chechnya in 1994 but in 1999 they were fully behind it.

III Yeltsin wanted to be held up as great Russian chauvinism, which had weakened during the collapse of the USSR. The 1994 defeat by the Chechens had been a particular blow—honour needed to be restored.

IV He wanted Chechnya is also aimed at the other Autonomous Republics. Although at the moment there do not seem to be any moves to independence elsewhere, it is always useful to send a warning shot across the bows before breaking the ice.

V In the case of Chechnya it was motivated partly for internal political reasons. So far at least it has been useful for distracting attention from the the economic situation in Russia itself.

Yeltsin wanted to ensure the victory of his nominee Putin in the forthcoming Presidential elections. It is not yet clear that the elections—which have already been brought forward to March—will take place in an atmosphere of peace. Certainly there has been increases reporting inside Russia of an upsurge of attacks at the front and the Mother's movement has been growing in strength.

The fall of Grozny took longer than Moscow hoped, and even now the fighting is not over.

This war may drag on for some time, and its repercussions inside and outside Russia are not yet determined.
The situation in the Middle East is more critical than for many years. Negotiations between Israel and Syria over the Golan Heights have stalled, Israel has launched another vicious attack on Lebanon, and the final stage of the Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights is discussed, setting to lead to a sell-out which will be rejected by the majority of Palestinians.

Roland Rance

The increasingly close cooperation between US and Israeli policies, including an agreement to share water diverted from Syria and Iraq, will initiate the desiccation of the Lisan Dam, threaten further bitter resource conflicts and wars.

The Golan Heights, occupied by Israel in the course of the 1967 war, are small in area, are economically insignificant, and have symbolic importance for both Israel and the Arab countries.

It would be impossible for any Syrian regime to concede or agree to any agreement which left Israel in occupation of the Golan, and this is probably why it reacted with such intensity to the US overtures to Damascus.

For visiting President Hafez al-Assad, keen to secure a smooth transfer of power to his son, the return of the Golan is an urgent issue, and he has seemed willing to compromise on other issues. For instance, he has expressed a willingness to discuss the future of the north west bank of the Sea of Galilee, East Jerusalem and the Palestinian territories currently occupied by Israel, all of which were seized by Israel in 1967.

Israel, on the other hand, has rejected a full withdrawal from Golan, offering at best “partial” redeployment of troops.

Despite constant Israeli provocation, Hizbullah has largely refrained from firing across the border at civilians in Israel’s northern towns and villages. For example, on 16 December, Israel shelled a Syrian school during a break, injuring dozens of children. Under US pressure, Syria instructed Hizbullah not to respond by shelling Israel.

However, Israel’s casualties in Lebanon (although insignificant compared to the suffering of the Lebanese and Palestinians) are becoming domestically insupportable, and a move to withdraw from Lebanon is growing in Israel.

Prime Minister Ehud Barak was elected last year after pledging to bring the troops home.

In order to do this, he needs to establish that he can control the area without a destructive presence. With the growing disparity of Israel’s allies in the so-called South Lebanon Army, and the death in an ambush late last year of their deputy com- mander, Israel will be forced to rely on continuing Syrian restraints.

But without movement in the stalled negotiations, and an Israeli commitment to return the Golan Heights, Assad has no reason to give Israel any undertakings to control Hizbullah.

In this situation, Israel faces two options: negotiate with Syria and return the Golan to war with Syria and demand its compliance with Israel’s retention of the Golan, and its control over Hizbullah in Lebanon. According to some activists in Israel, all the signs are that Barak is tending towards the latter option.

During January, it was announced that sources of new homes were being built for settlers in the Golan, that several new water wells will be drilled (diverting groundwater from Syria to Israel), and that a temporary bridge will be replaced by a permanent one — hardly the behaviour of an occupier planning to leave.

Professor Tanya Reinhardt of Tel-Aviv University claims that Assad has indeed been threatened with what she terms “a Kosovo style war... Israel will withdraw temporarily from Lebanon, and demand, in the first incident or missile (that could easily be provoked), the Western world, led by the US, will stand behind the peace-seeking Israel, when it attacks Syria, and will lend its air-force umbrella to this new mission of peace” (Yediot Aharonot, 16 December 1999).

Israel, meanwhile, is seeking to augment its fleet of US-built Apache helicopters, used almost daily in its attacks in Lebanon.

According to the New York Times, US Air Force officers say their bombing raids against Hizbullah guerrilla targets would be more effective and pose less risk to crews if they could use the new Longbow Apaches (3 February 2000).

Although Barak cultivates an image as a peace-maker, his own history belies this. Like his mentor, former PM Yitzhak Rabin, he is close to Likud leader Ariel Sharon, Finance Minister during the 1982 invasion of Lebanon. Following the Kahan report into the massacres at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, Sharon was forced to resign.

The inquiry found that he had systematically lied and misled the cabinet as to his war aims and the situation in Lebanon (though it did not ask whether the cabinet had deliberately allowed him to be misled, in order to disclaim some responsibility).

But Sharon was not alone in his duplicity. One of his aides was Barak, then a Colonel, who not only shared the same aims but wanted to go further and to attack Damascus.

In a memo in March 1982, he proposed that the US support “a two-pronged military exercise, whose real goal should be concealed from both the government and the army high command. (This memo was published in Hadashot on 8 January 1999, and “denied” by Barak)."

Barak’s 1982 proposal was not pursued at the time because the expected Israeli losses would have been heavy. But now, following the failures of the Gulf and Kosovo wars, it appears more feasible. In this light, it is ominous that the Cabinet has authorised PM Barak to order military operations personally, without consultation.

Barak has now declared an “Emergency Situation” in northern Israel, allowing him to suspend civil rights and order residents to remain in their shelters. The alliance between Israel and the USA continues to be the dominant feature on Syria, which still has an outstanding border dispute with Turkey.

An attack on the Antioch area, carved out of Syria when it achieved independence in 1922.

Joint military manoeuvres have demonstrated that any part of Syria (and Iraq) is within range of the combined military forces of Israel and Turkey.

Turkey, the controversial neighbour, shall like Hamas, which shall control the territory of the Turkish military bases, bring them to bear on those areas.

The Middle East situation must be continued.

Activists in Israel are beginning to mobilise against the possible war with Syria.

They support them, and demand:

- Immediate, complete and unconditional Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon;
- Long-term Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights to Syria and dismantlement of all Israeli settlements now occupying them;
- An end to military sup- port to Iran and Turkey;
- No British government money for the Israeli occupation.

Call for solidarity with Mexican students

Paul Johnstone

Students from Mexico’s largest university UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico) have been conducting a militant defence of free higher education since April 1999. They now face a paramilitary attack.

In early February their occupation of the UNAM was aided by a hybrid force of soldiers and police which made almost 100 arrests in clearing the campus. The campaign began with an IMF- sponsored attack on public education by President Ernesto Zedillo. He proposed to introduce fees for higher education. An earlier report had stated the right of all graduates from secondary education to progress to university.

The strike committee also demanded a democratic internal regime in the University and an end to relaxions against UNAM students, teachers and workers who were participating in the strike. They demanded breaking of the link between UNAM and CENEAU (a private body) which sets the entry and evaluation tests.

The first round of the repression came as activists from the struggle connected their cause with other issues. In December, more than 600 activists from the Consejo General de Huella (a student united front) rallied in front of the American embassy in Mexico city.

The speakers demanded the release of Mario Abi- nel, and expressed their solidarity with workers, students and ecological demonstrators protesting against the meeting of the World Trade Organisation in Seattle.

A contingent of armed granaderos (Mexico city para- troopers) guarding the embassy charged the crowd.

had been a completely peaceful rally. The crowd was met by firing, with some reporters in attendance, and one or two Mexican students were taken to hospital.

The major parties fighting the forthcoming presidential election are trying to exploit the protest and ‘reform’ higher education. The latest assault was intended to destroy the legitimate protest movement. Meanwhile many of the student activists remain in jail or have been subjected to repeated interrogation.

The Mexican Workers Revolutionary Party (PRT) says: "Appealing for help. ‘This is not a family, not a poor, Indian or com- munist party, it is against the state’.

The PRT and other left organisations are calling for solidarity support. They are to hold demonstrations today."
Who let in Jorg Haider?

The recent inclusion of Jorg Haider's Freedom Party in Austria's coalition government has been met by mass protests on the streets of Vienna and other Austrian cities.

As protests continue around the world at this increased influence of the far right, WALTER SCHULITZ from Die Linke, Austrian paper supporting their International, reports from Vienna.

Platform for a World against Racism

We do not feel obliged to claim Austria's "innocence". There would be government down right denial of the support of the majority of Austria's population.

We do not feel obliged to claim Austria is "just another" population. He is not. He is a populist that is unashamedly, racism and the denial of the Holocaust.

The major threat is not the increase of direct violence against minorities. The major threat is the signal that right agitation and action is not only OK but earns you a place in government. As opportunism is one of the most prominent features of the "Austrian mentality", this is a severe political danger.

We have reason to be afraid of:

- the final end of refugee or integration policies
- increasing xenophobia, racism and anti-Semitism, because Austria has never faced its past and now people have government legitimization for such attitudes
- law and order policies instead of cooperative strategies to deal with crime and conflict
- abolition of progressive women's policies (e.g. the post of the minister for women's affairs will be cancelled and replaced by an extended family ministry)
- severe restrictions to freedom of art, especially where it puts a finger on the state of the Austrian society (already, in Carnitia, artists are faced with political limitations to their work)
- restrictions to the freedom of press, because subsidies for critical media products will most certainly be cut down.

We don't know yet what to do about it, we need both your solidarity and your ongoing criticism. don't stop looking at our country. Vienna, February 2000

Socialist Outlook

Austria

L

ast October there were parliamentary elections in Austria. For the first time in the last 30 years it wasn't clear that Social Democracy would have the majority of the government or that the Chancellor would be a Social Democrat. The Social Democrats got 33% and the Freedom Party of Jorg Haider got 27%. The Austrians People's Party, the party of Wolfgang Schuessel who is now Chancellor, also got 27% with only one more vote than the Freedom Party. The Greens got around 9%.

In this situation nobody believed that the Freedom Party would end up in government. Everybody in Austria thought that there would be lengthy negotiations between the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats but that in the end they would form a coalition.

In November there was a big demonstration in Vienna of 70,000 people, particularly young people, something that is unusual in Austrian politics, but there were also many trade unionists with one single demand: "No Co-operation with Nazis!" This was posed above all to the Social Democrats not to negotiate with Haider's party.

There were secret negotiations between the Austrian People's Party and the Freedom Party because Chancellor Schuessel said that it was not possible to agree a common platform with the Social Democrats so instead he would to negotiate with the Freedom Party. From this point of view what has happened is the responsibility of Schuessel's Peoples Party.

From this moment on there were spontaneous demonstrations throughout Austria and mostly of young people and students who came out into the streets to protest.

The first manifestation on the day the government was formed was also very spontaneous. The organisations of the far left were not the leaders of this movement.

On Saturday February 12 there were 30,000 in Vienna and several thousands in other Austrian cities. Then there was the massive demonstration in Vienna on February 19 with 300,000 people which was preceded by actions by students. The mass demonstration was organised by committees of the far left and also committees of artists and other democratic personalities. But the Social Democratic Party and the trade unions also called on their members to protest.

At the same time there were actions of solidarity in many other European cities. Now the week of protests will be weekly protests every Thursday night.

In order to understand what has happened you need to know something about the specificities of Austrian history.

Anti-Semitism

Firstly Anti-Semitism is an element of Austrian politics that persist until the 11th Century. The Catholic church had strong anti-Semitic elements and the Christian Social Party at the beginning 20th century also had an anti-Semitic ideology.

In November 1938 when the Nazis carried out the pogroms called Kristallnacht the Viennese participated enthusiastically and in fact the Nazi leaders had put an end to the riots to stop the whole city being burnt down.

During the Second Republic between 1945 and 1955 Austria was once more independent but never no war. There was no de-Nazification in Austria - there were no educational measures against Nazism.

There were thousands and thousands of Nazis - not the leaders but people who participated in this movement and who were worried about it.

Austria was occupied by the Soviets and in only a few weeks the liberation from Nazism changed into occupation. Each social group had its own reasons and had their specific characteristics.

In the French zone for example there were French officers who failed to act against anti-Semitism. The紅 ribbon of Tyrol and Vorarlberg in the West prevented Jewish survivors returning home and there were also problems in this by these officials.

In the British zone in the south, partisans, mainly members of the Austrian CP who were Slovenes came into conflict with the British officials. Of course this was the time the cold war was beginning. So in both the French and British zones it was not at all the ex-Nazis that were feared but the enemies of the occupying armies but the displaced.

Before 1938 there was a Jewish population of 70,000 in Vienna and at the end of the war there were only 6500. They formed a political threat - many of them were from a bourgeois background and were not liberal and tolerant.

Almost all the Communist Party activists from the pre-war period had been killed, they had been in the concentration camps. Many left-wing social democrats had also died in the camps. So a whole political current was missing - there was no left wing or liberal current that was interested in talking about Nazism or Anti-Semitism.

After 1945 the Christian Socialists created a new party - the Austrian People's Party. In this period the CP was getting 15% of the vote - but all the Austrian parties agreed on a consensus which said that Austria was the first victim of Hitler and of Nazism.

On the basis of this thing it was not necessary to talk about what had happened to the victims of the Austrian Nazism.

The period after 45 was one in which people tried to rebuild capitalism. All the parties, including the Communists tried to win former Nazi's vote for them and ignored the question of de-Nazification.

The Freedom Party played a particular role in this process which will I return to later. During the 1950s and 1960s anti-Semitism was less visible - but it still existed "under the skin". It could be found in the bars and cafes in anti-Semitic jokes and this was not just perpetuated by the right but also Social Democrats that had a certain electorate and activists who were anti-Semitic.

In 1946 there was Kurt Waldheim's election campaign, and this was the first time that there was public discussion of the past relationship with Nazi Germany.

During the campaign young socialists and intellectuals discovered that he had played a role in an army unit in Teslenakia in Greece where Jews were deported - even if it was not clear whether his role had been very active.

And Waldheim's response to this - again an Austrian specificity - was to say, "I only did my duty". That's very Austrian because the people in power say what should be done and Austrians do it. It is a view is common to all parties including Social Democracy. Therefore the period 1945-1970 in Austria was no longer the same as before. You had young intellectuals and historians who began to investigate the Nazi crimes and the role of Austrian Nazis.

For the first time there was an open discussion which was covered in the media and this influenced many people particularly young people. It also meant that there was more of an international spotlight on Austria than previously.

Before the First World War, Austria was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire under the Habsburgs monarchy. This territory was bigger than today's Austria and those who spoke German were only a small minority.

There are historians and economists who say that this monarchy functioned a bit like the system of centre and periphery of colonial empire. There were immense tensions between the different ethnic and national groups and this was one of the reasons why this state did not survive.

Amongst the German speaking population of the Empire there was a good deal of prejudice against the others - against
The international community

Declaration of the Austrian antifascist movement

IN THIS MOMENT of Austrian history we are deeply concerned with the political developments in our country. For more than 10 years, many NGOs, initiatives and smaller groups have been working to keep the Austrian anti-fascist struggle alive.

In the new millennium, Austria still is not a democracy but a national democratic state. More than 10% of our population is systemically oppressed and is prevented from participating in elections. In many cases, they are not even members of the political parties that are supposed to represent their interests.

We are deeply concerned with the fact that the Austrian government is not doing enough to ensure equal rights and opportunities for all citizens. The right to vote, for example, is not granted to all citizens, regardless of their social or economic status.

We, therefore, call on the international community to support the efforts of the Austrian antifascist movement and to hold the Austrian government accountable for its failure to protect the rights of all citizens.

Signed,
The International Committee of Austrian Anti-Fascists

platform for a world without racism Vienna, 1.2.2000
More than 60 women, including 49 delegates from all over the globe, met in Montreal, Canada, from November 3-7 last year to put the finishing touches to plans for the World March of Women in the Year 2000, around 17 demands.

Their aims of the work session were to put together plans for mobilisations and actions under way around the international campaign leading up to the March; decide the nature and details of international actions; report on progress in the campaign for the 17 international demands; and finally to increase women’s sense of involvement in the project and encourage everyone to carry on.

At this successful meeting, women from five continents were able to weave together bonds of solidarity to strengthen them in their common struggle against poverty and violence against women.

Since the beginning, the values (or principles) underlying the project have been clear:• leadership in the hands of women, especially grass-roots women
• recognition of the diversity of the women’s movement
• agreement to the goals and action plan of the World March
• autonomy of participating groups and countries in terms of their own March organization
• non-violence
• above all, that the march belongs to women in every region of the world; at this meeting, the last principle became a concrete reality.

In Montreal, New York, Geneva and other major cities, March 8 2000 is the official launch date of the World March and the start of a global signature campaign in support of our 17 world demands. Between March 8, October 17, 2000, millions of women and men in every region of the world – at this meeting, the last principle became a concrete reality.

In Montreal, New York, Geneva and other major cities, March 8 2000 is the official launch date of the World March and the start of a global signature campaign in support of our 17 world demands. Between March 8,

The Real Irish Peace Process available (£6 plus 70p p&p) from Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU

The statement below was passed by the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International at its February 2000 meeting and was also supported by many of the constituent organisations of the FI.

The need to maintain control in the Puerto Rican island of Vieques has become even more important for US imperialism since its handing back of the Panama Canal not only in terms of its influence in the Caribbean itself but also as launching pad to quell any "trouble" in Latin America. As we go to press activity in the protest camps is hotting up – send messages of support to herzog@caribe.net>

The countdown begins!

International Monetary Fund and the World Bank: International representatives hope to meet the presidents of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, to present them with the demands of women from all over the world.

On October 17 2000, a demo is planned through the streets of New York to the world headquarters of the United Nations. International representatives hope to meet with the Secretary-General. The campaign has already sent a letter requesting this. They have also asked for time on the agenda of the UN General Assembly that same day.

There are now over 3000 groups from 143 countries participating in the World March.

In addition, there are 65 national coordinating bodies currently planning March activities. Some world regions are also developing plans at a regional level. The huge diversity of women’s movements and groups is readily apparent, as is the variety of struggles against the universal problems of poverty and violence against women.

A petition in support of the demands of the march has been set up, with a goal of 10 million signatures.

A few of the most important of these are as follows:

1. The closed-door strategy of the United States and its allies in the UN has led to the subversion of women’s rights.

2. The United Nations has been a place where women’s rights have been ignored.

3. The lack of support for women in the United Nations has led to the subversion of women’s rights.

4. The United Nations has been a place where women’s rights have been ignored.

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16. The United Nations has been a place where women’s rights have been ignored.

17. The lack of support for women in the United Nations has led to the subversion of women’s rights.

Many groups participating in the World March have received an invitation to take part in a global women’s strike on March 8 2000. In the invitation, it is stated that the activities of the "Women of the World" are being combined with the international strike. This information is inaccurate.

The World March organisation received a letter from groups organising the strike and replied that since the two projects (World March and global strike) are proposing actions on March 8, 2000, the organisations should keep in touch with one another.

The global strike is not one of the planned actions of the World March. Naturally, this does not exclude groups participating in the March from associating themselves with the strike action, if they so desire.

Contact:
World March of Women, Fédération des femmes du Québec, 110 rue St-Thomas, 2007 Montréal, Québec, CANADA H2Y 1E6. Telephone: (1) 514-395-1196, Fax: (1) 514-395-1224, email: machev2000@fqq.org.ca

We are counting on the presence of thousands, hopefully millions, of women in the streets in the year 2000!

Statement of Solidarity

We ARE profoundly troubled by the situation imposed on the people of the Puerto Rican island of Vieques due to the presence of the U.S. Navy and its activities there.

For the last fifty years, the U.S. Navy has occupied more than three quarters of the territory of Vieques. This they have done, not only without consulting the people of Vieques, but in fact, against the will of the people of both Vieques and the rest of Puerto Rico.

Since then, the U.S. Navy and its allies in NATO have used Vieques as a stage for military manoeuvres. For more than five decades the U.S. Navy has bombarded the waters and land of Vieques and has installed a huge stump on its territory.

This has led to the terrible effects on the ecology, the health, the economic and cultural development of the archipelago which the people of Vieques and the U.S. Navy have peace and the survival of its people in danger.

However, Vieques has not resigned itself to its own disappearance. For decades, sectors of Puerto Rican society have resisted the presence of the Navy and its activities.

In April 1999, a Navy plane dropped two bombs which missed their target and caused the death of David Sane, a resident of Vieques. His death has provoked an explosion of indignation among the Puerto Rican people.

Since that moment, the movement against the U.S. Navy presence has grown to include all the political, social, religious sectors, as well as the labor movement. Hundreds of demonstrators have set up camps in the areas controlled by the Navy. Their presence has made it impossible for the Navy to renew its bombing exercises.

The demonstrations have taken on such a magnitude that the President of the U.S., William J. Clinton, has been forced to name a special commission to study the situation. The Navy persists in its intention to continue occupying Vieques.

Faced with this, the example of colonial imposition, militarism, misuse of resources, and disdain for human rights, we express our full solidarity with the struggle of the people of Vieques for demilitarisation, the return of the land to the people, the clean-up of its environment, development and peace.

The struggle for Vieques is our struggle because this struggle is not just about Vieques. This is a struggle for the dignity of our peoples, for the self-determination of Caribbean nations, for the protection of the environment, for demilitarisation and to ensure that the material wealth generated by the people is used to benefit the people.

We demand that the government of the USA and its military allies respect the will of the people of Vieques and Puerto Rico and turn over the lands in Vieques that were
WO can seriously damage your health!

John Lister

For the headline-grabbing clashes at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) summit last November, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has become a byword for the expanded power of grasping multinational economic interests. But few realise the extent to which the WTO is also seeking to intervene to shape policies of member governments on health care and education. The WTO's objective is to sweep away any restriction on the brute forces of the free market - reinforcing the dependence and subordination of the developing "doughnut" economies, and opening up the world as a free-fire zone for the market.

At Seattle, this strategy ran into sustained opposition from some Third World governments as well as campaigns representing the poor, unemployed and environment lobby.

But behind the scenes, debates on the extent to which the global market in health and social services could be opened up have been running for over a year, and continue in the corridors of the WTO.

A Background Note from the WTO secretariat set out some of the key issues in September 1998. For the headlong rush of global Thatcherism there are two distinct pieces of evidence about health care spending which concern them:

- In developed economies, with the exception of the US, health care spending is largely government spending, or financed through compulsory insurance schemes. For non-liberal countries, health care spending represents an unwelcome increase in taxation or overall costs, restricting competitiveness.

- The attempt to restrict or reduce this "burden": the WTO also wants to open up potential new markets - and promote the role of the private sector. This means examining the extent to which the dominant role of government spending serves to subsidise public sector hospitals and services, making it more difficult for international capital to compete and build up its stake in what is a massive world-wide health care market.

Health care is certainly a massive global industry, but it also one of the most starkly unequal in the mid-1990s: the top 29 countries, grouped in the OECD, spent a total of $1.5 trillion ($2,000 billion) a year on health. This was 90% of total world health expenditures, leaving the majority of the world's population (among them many of the inhabitants of Latin America, Africa, the Indian sub-continent and much of the rest of Asia) to share the remaining 10%.

In these countries there is little short or medium term prospect of substantial gains in the fight against the epidemic of pharmaceutical monopolies. These firms will want to reinforce the rip-off price and prevent any of the Third World countries producing medicines more cheaply.

However the WTO does have power to change a number of countries - including Chile, Brazil, Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland - which are "decentralising and/or commercialising the health sector in a bid to contain cost pressures". The WTO is set to impose new restrictions and regulations to stop the private sector from getting a foothold in the future of the public sector.

The WTO document urges member governments to ensure that their basic health care services are not threatened by the move to privatize.

Many WTO members are now also shifting away from a wholesale switch of government resources from hospitals to primary health care, which accounts for little of the World Bank and World Health Organisation's (WHO) cost-efficiency and low-cost treatment programmes. There has been a clear difference of opinion between the World Bank and the WHO over the importance of health care charges or "user fees" in providing the poorest countries. While the WHO recognises charges as an obstacle to access to services for the poorest and most vulnerable, and is openly sceptical about the value of market-style reforms, the Bank is a gunboat advocate of both.

Back in 1987 the Bank included "user fees" as part of its recovery as part of its agenda for health care reform in the developing countries. Its apologists now argue aggressively in favour of charges - as an "equilibrating" measure. They claim that so-called "cost-sharing" or "co-payment" systems are more equitable because they "charge those [the well-to-do] who make most use of services ... channelising subsidies to those least able to bear the cost."

A key factor has to be the tightening of the financial regime in hospitals. Banks that nobody gets away without paying a patient's account should be opened immediately on admission. This means that nobody is able to collect a cash deposit early in the patient stay and to sell commercialised bills before patients leave the premises.

Perhaps more adventurously from the Bank's standpoint is the fact that imposing user fees for government funded services "fosters greater competition and efficiency between public and private providers" and lays the basis for the imposition of health insurance schemes which could further cut government spending.

One World Bank pamphlet explains that: "Countries cannot jump into self-financing health insurance schemes without first passing the full cost of imposing user fees in government facilities, especially hospitals. The reason is simple - that when people have the option of using commercial health services at zero or low cost they are unlikely to have much incentive to pay insurance premiums to cover their future needs. Indeed if some services are available free of charge "How can the private sector expand and compete under such circumstances?"

The ideal combination for achieving the market-based strategic model is a combination of high fees for hospital and other treatment - to scare people into an "affordable" insurance scheme.

If for those most determined to defend their health systems, even the lack of money is not enough to block the WTO and the WHO over the imposition of charges for health care or user fees, especially in the poorest countries. While the WHO recognises charges as an obstacle to access to services for the poorest and most vulnerable, and is openly sceptical about the value of market-style reforms, the Bank is a gunboat advocate of both.

In place of raising the money needed for health services through taxation, the Indian government has sought to World Bank and other international loans and the imposition of user charges. Meanwhile the private sector can get government help to set up clinics, laboratories and diagnostic services, and 70% of newly-qualified doctors trained in public service proceed to work in the booming private sector: many of these then leave the country to practise abroad.

The targeting of the largely unregulated private sector brings with it many of the distortions and problems encountered in the privatised US health system. Private hospitals carry out unnecessary operations, redound tests, overcharge and over-prescribe. They also carry out far more cosmetic, six times the average in government hospitals.

Private hospitals try to keep their beds full - but also refuse to admit patients who cannot pay a cash deposit beforehand. The prevalence of private charges predetermines the greatest burden on the poorest households. With the lower middle classes spend around 4.5% of their income on health care, the lower middle classes can spend 8.10%, while surveys have shown some on the lowest income spending 14% on health.

The market system isn't working for them: nor is it delivering affordable accessible health care for the poor and oppressed elsewhere in Asia, in Africa or in Latin America.

But there are no grounds for complacency anywhere. The WTO debates and the OECD and other initiatives should remind us that market-style methods, including "Build Operate Transfer" (now known as the Private Finance Initiative) are already alive and kicking in our NHS and in most advanced countries.

And the debate over user fees, far from being resolved, keeps coming back with each increase in pressure on under-funded health services. Health workers and those who value comprehensiveness of health care services need to fight back against the WTO and its initiatives.
A bad agreement won't bring good government!

Statement from supporters of the Fourth International in Barcelona.

The agreement reached by the leaders of the PSOE (Spanish Socialist Party) and IU (United Left) has rocked the pre-election scene in the Spanish State. The process of negotiation made headlines in the press. The United Left had found its place ‘under the sun’ after a period of some hesitancy following on from the EU elections.

The spokespeople for the right-wing Partido Popular dashed off slogans from earlier times in order to forestall the constitutency of the PSOE’s electorate. They claimed that this was a ‘socialist communist agreement’.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

The eventual agreement proved of the defeat of the Socialist Party, if it ran on its own ticket. This was in the context of prolonged social demobilisation and because their programme was not capable of animating and mobilising the working class. Indeed, with this prospect, the Socialist Party leadership went into negotiation with IU.

Apart from their less than harmonious leadership, the PSOE also signalled a change in the traditional sectarian attitude of the PSOE towards the United Left.

The willingness of the IU leadership to negotiate has also meant the suppression of their old sectarian attitudes. In the first phase of the process there was little to object to.

There was a tug of war between the Socialist Party proposal that the United Left withdraw its lists from those constituencies where they could not win to concentrate the vote and the counter-proposal from IU to organise electoral coalitions in these areas. This diverted public attention from an essential part of the negotiations: the programme, its nature and content.

The eleven point agreement, under the headings of employment, economic policy, autonomous region policy, foreign policy, terrorism, and credibility, signifies a break with the programme passed by the IU’s national conference and with the public given until now.

The other points such as education, pensions, health and social welfare, monetary policy are clearly insufficient.

We deal in a more detailed manner with the most controversial points.

A) Employment:

This section of the text is headed ‘Commitment to our international undertakings in the areas of defence and security’.

This says it all.

The undertakings referred to are those of the Spanish State which we have seen in recent years such as the logistical support given to the bombardment of Iraq and the bombing of Kosovo and Serbia (Who is next?).

This is yet another break by the United Left with their programme of a ‘traitorous one’.

B) Economic Policy:

There are a number of progressive sounding general statements, but the agreement is based upon the compliance with budgetary agreements made in the framework of Monetary and Economic Programmes.

This adds up to an acceptance of the austerity and anti-social policies of stabilisation pact which arise from the economic policies imposed by the EU.

C) Autonomous Regions Policy:

There is no mechanism which allows citizens of the different nationalities to decide on the changes to the state, whether these would be in a federalist direction or other equally legitimate one such as confederalism or independence. In a nutshell, the right to self-determination is denied.

Instead the agreement continues to stick to the model of authoritarian leadership to resolve the contradictions in the Basque Country.

This makes a lasting democratic agreement with the various national conflicts more difficult, particularly in the Basque Country. This is another abandonment of the United Left.

D) Foreign Policy:

This section of the text is headed ‘Commitment to our international undertakings in the areas of defence and security’.

This says it all.

The undertakings referred to are those of the Spanish State which we have seen in recent years such as the logistical support given to the bombardment of Iraq and the bombing of Kosovo and Serbia (Who is next?).

This is yet another break by the United Left with their programme of a ‘traitorous one’.

E) Terrorism:

On this question the United Left has lined up behind the reannexation and centralist position of the PSOE.

They have not at all the credibility gained at the time of the Lizarra Accords [N.B. the accords were the framework in which all the political parties in the Basque country came together to agree a negotiated settlement] as a political democratic force committed to a peaceful and just solution to the national question.

In other terms, this is a programme in which women are hardly mentioned, and where environmental measures are extremely limited – it is not even timetabled for the closure of all the nuclear power stations.

There is little which is in contradiction with the program being crushed by external debt.

In general, the social commitments are insufficient – and will not be carried out in any case, due to the economic and financial policies which will be applied.

In other words this is a programme which is insufficiently feminist, green, or socially in solidarity with those in struggle. This programme is not a bilateral – it is anything but radical and autonomous.

The agreement is a government accord for the PSOE and IU if they gain a parliamentary majority. The justification and explanations which surround the agreement rises to a minimum demands, that ‘each side can defend its right to complement ‘their respective programmes’. These demands provide a framework for the programme for government.

Experience shows that the internal functioning of government will not provide the mechanisms of solidarity and discipline, interests which develop, that weigh down and anchor seas and hills.

All of this takes place in an unfavourable climate which is unlikely to change in the short term – there are social mobilisations and the Socialist Party will gain far more seats than last year.

This is an agreement reached at the top, the participation and involvement of the affiliates of both organizations and ignoring the social needs of the majority in the Spanish State.

The agreement will be use in the face of a political crisis, it will not motivate and mobilise women, men and youth in a sustained manner.

It will not even be easy to generate the desired electoral support behind this agreement. The idea of the ‘useful vote’ and the inevitable abstention amongst the left will be negative for IU.

The agreement destroys the United Left’s credibility as an independent political force critical of the capitalist system. If this agreement manages to bring IU into government it will become a prisoner and will reinforce the process of management of the old policies of the existing system.

For the Collectiva per una Esquerra Alternativa (I) this agreement was not the only possible outcome of the process. Another type of agreement was possible, taking into consideration the national and the circumstances.

That agreement should have been to get the right wing party out of government.

The PSOE and IU should have committed themselves to giving their vote to the best positioned left candidate, in this case the PSOE, in order to gain the Parliament.

It should also have included a serious and conclusory commitment after the elections to open a dialogue with the social and citizens movements to promote unity in action and mobilisation in favour of the most urgent social and political demands.

That agreement would have maintained the independence of the United Left from the actions of the government, exercising control from the Parliament and society at large, with its hands, heart and head completely free.

February 5, 2000
Collectiva per una Esquerra Alternativa (IV International)

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on request).
Mandelson spells it out: Irish "Peace" deal means British rule!

When negotiations were still ongoing the republicans focused their attention on the Irish unionist blackmail. With its breakdown, they have begun to speak more loudly of the overall British responsibility and to propose street protest. That political message was to be amplified by a new Catholic and socialist stew at last begin to emerge. If British strategy is not peace and withdrawal, then what is it? And how did the republican leadership get it so badly wrong? To break from their current strategy the republicans would have to break from their overall friends in the "nationalist family", who are now calling for their immediate surrender.

The majority of working people in Ireland will continue to support the peace process, given its endorsement by the Irish State, mass media and capital and the absence of any sizeable left opposition, particularly as the alternation of power by the republican minimalist opposition in recent elections is another violent campaign with no hope of victory.

The present instability and the present condition of the republican leadership does offer at least the prospect of a decline in the use of secret diplomacy, the reenactment of militant sceptical of the nationalist family and the rebirth of opposition based on a principled democratic political movement that states clearly that democracy in Ireland depends not on British good intentions but on British withdrawal.
New weighty analysis on Balkan history


Reviewed by GEOFF RYAN

MISHA Glenny's latest work is a wide-ranging historical analysis of all but two of the European states that make up the Balkans

In no sense of the term is it light reading. The hardback edition weighs nearly three pounds: reading in bed is not recommended! But as Kosovo once again returns to the headlines, as Kosovoors increasingly protest the parting of the ways of two centuries, Glenny's book offers important insights that were lacking in much of the anti-war movement.

It is well written, and in the west the peoples of the Balkans have indulged in vicious ethnic hatred for centuries. Glenny totally destroys that belief. He also shows that when ethnic hatreds were比起, the west was usually the result of imperialist intervention in the region. However, Glenny's analysis is a long way removed from the rather crude notions popular among much of the left. He attempts to show the complex of the relationship between imperialism and the Balkans.

For example, during the Tzarist period (mid-19th century) to the Ottoman empire it led to conflicts in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The nature of those conflicts was complex.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina many of the Muslim landlords opposed the opposition to the reformist Sultan in Istanbul, since their privileges were under threat. The Sultan was supported by both Muslim and Serb peasants. Serbia's efforts to unify among the different national and ethnic groups can be found throughout the Balkan history.

Glenny recognises that the people of the Balkans are not merely pawns of imperialism: they also have their own agendas and sometimes, under nationalist leaderships, this can lead to conflicts between them.

Having expelled Turkey from most of Europe, the victorious Balkan states immediately fought among themselves, with Greece and Serbia taking large chunks of Bulgarian territory.

In her book, despite its protestations of horror, has encouraged ethnic cleansing.

The most brutal example is the mass exchanges of population between Greece and Turkey in the early 1920s after attempts by Greece and Italy, backed by the major powers, to seize huge tracts of the Italian/Bulgarian state.

Culminated in military disaster. Perhaps the main strength of Glenny's book is his understanding of the conflict between rural and urban society. From being resolved by the various Stalinist regimes in the region after 1945, this problem was exacerbated by the heavy-handed manner in which the regimes attempted to subjugate the peasantry.

Ceausescu's Romania is the most brutal example but was by no means unique, even if the lack of western support for Ceausescu was totally unusual.

Certainly, Glenny's analysis is a model of the nature of the conflicts in former Yugoslavia as the revenge of the countryside on the city is the best I have ever read.

This was an absolutely crucial point.

Furthermore, the New Military Humbug: Lessons From Kosovo, Noam Chomsky, Pluto Press.

Reviewed by GEOFF RYAN

FOR MUCH of this book Chomsky attempts to refute the claims of NATO leaders to have been acting on humanitarian impulses in Kosovo. He does so by pointing, at least for the sake of the argument, the claims put forward by Clinton and Blair that the end of the Cold War and the East-West conflict now act solely on high moral principles. Hence Chomsky tries to expose the lies to the last ten years.

He does so by that far from having changed their policies during this period, the major military powers continue in the same old ways.

But he shows that the level of murder in Colombia in the year before the Viole's Balkan war was almost exactly the same as in Kosovo in the period.

The number of displaced persons was also similarly similar in both countries (2-300,000).

Chomsky also draws attention to the lack of western criticism of the Turkish military's role in the wars against the Kurds. He does not, however, see the very different attitudes of the west towards repression by the Colombian and Turkish military and its offensive against Serbia as examples of double standards. In fact, he argues they reflect a sense in the interests of (primarily) US imperialism.

It is not that western leaders are unaware of political repressions in both states. But rather there is no qualms about the practice of such regimes.

From this Chomsky's book is a book for all those who are interested in seeing the truth about the US role in international conflicts.

For those who are interested in seeing the truth about the US role in international conflicts, this book is a must-read.
Don’t let unity go down the tube!

Greg Tucker, 1SG member of the LSA steering committee

WORKERS International Press has been circulating widely an “open letter” to Socialist Outlook on the Greater London Assembly elections. They have argued that it is sectarian for socialists to unite in the London Socialist Alliance. Rather, they say, we should be behind the leadership of the Campaign Against Tube Privatization. In this they have, of late, been encouraged by the Socialist Party who, for their own internal reasons, have given a tactical boost to the CATP standing in the GLA list section, whilst themselves standing as part of the LSA in the constituency based section.

WP correctly point out that, one hundred years after the formation of the Labour Party, workers again need to address the burning need for a new party of the working class. For them, such a party cannot be based on an alliance of left groups. It may only come out of a mass movement encompassing broad expressions of discontent and action with the working class at its head. Concretely they argue, what better way to challenge every reactionary political party of the government – than to support the CATP?

The Socialist Party, we agree we need, will be built though a dialectical combination of political debate amongst the left and reaching out to link up with the mass movement. It will not be

There’s more in fightingclass than tube privatization

So it is agreed that it could not oppose the anti-union laws. However, it would be possible to take a position on racism – until black tube workers complained and it agreed to take up how racist affected tube workers across the board.

Secondly, it decided that its constituency would have to be drawn solely from the ranks of RMT tube workers. Rather than a selection campaign to reach out to broader political forces, the dynamic of their stance has been to cut themselves off more and more. Only the most die-hard tube groups are now to be allowed into the bunker.

All this has meant that the CATP has found itself turning its back on campaigning, falling back to capitalise on the real debate about tube funding whilst not able to build the electoral front it needs to go with the task of getting its message across to the five million London electorate.

Workers International Press put forward three arguments:

Firstly, that a socialist programme cannot be drawn up outside of socialist groups, only derivé and developed in the actual experience of the working class.

Secondly, that the possession of a socialist programme is no guarantee against sectarianism. For that you need to understand a groups relationship to the working class.

Thirdly, that a socialist programme worthy of the name would be competing with working-class socialist groups.

In practice the LSA programme, drawn up by comrades, is more developing. It is the CATP that has cut itself off from the actual experience of the working class. The LSA has been able to reach out to campaigners against police violence, against council house sell-offs, against hospital cuts and privatisation, against the effects of rail privatisation, drawn in independent activists and enriching our understanding.

The CATP has found itself tailor ing its own policies on tube privatisation, on funding by bonds for instance, in order to relate with the debate put forward by Ken Livingstone. And though the LSA, through its activity, is breaking down barriers, the CATP leads the way that is becoming more entrenched. After a first round of public meetings, which have attracted around two thousand people, and united street stalls across London which have signed up large numbers of volunteers, a real shared experience between left groups and independent socialist is making things possible which would have been impossible for any one group, even the largest.

Despite our differing theoretical starting points, we have been able to reach new collective understandings.

Pessimistic

The CATP leadership on the other hand seems to be profoundly pessimistic, even of the views of its own RMT base. There is a real sense in which the election work is a substitute for building an industrial campaign.

The CATP leaders know that industrial action will be necessary in the very near future – privatisation is to be halted, but worry morale will not too soon to sustain it. At the same time they believe their members will not be able to understand that what is happening is not just part of the same attack on hospital workers, school teachers and others.

Rather than wage a struggle to convince their membership of their historic role in action they have closed ranks. That they have been out manoeuvred is not only possible but inescapable if we were talking about a real, newly formed, worker’s leadership. We are not.

The core of the RMT leadership has many years of experience as part of the far-left. They are imposing non-unionism to be free from the restraints that come with working with other socialist organisations.

Some of you may be doing this honestly, from a syndicalist perspective of what is best for tube workers, from an idealist position of trying to build the best possible party. But we do not.

Cynical

It is hard to escape the suspicion that some are doing this from a cynical perspective of becoming part of an new, independent socialist bloc around Livingstone.

Possession of positions in a mass movement is no guarantee against sectarianism.

We want to fight the struggle by tube workers against privatisation. The CATP has made this impossible, without harming the LSA’s work with others in struggle.

We cannot accept that we cut ourselves off from these developments, however important the tube is. Neither can we accept the cynical position of the Socialist Party, who seem to have endorsed the CATP because they want to work with Livingstone.

The CATP should throw themselves fully into the LSA, where they have to compete with the SWP.

Above all, the socialists leading the CATP are not assisting RMT membership by their stance. This is still time for them to recognise that their election campaign, far from being an historic break from Labour, is helping no one, especially their own group.

A campaign no one notices and a banal vote will only sow even deeper demoralisation, throwing away the advantages they now have with opinion polls showing overwhelming support for the-Labour in public hands.

The socialists in the CATP should be more than just in the paces of working with the rest of the left, the whole of all if they decide to do so.

Socialist Outlook

Where we stand

AS A NEW CENTURY BEGINS, the battles of the last century remain to be won, millions of women and men are taking part in movements with theahir the evils of capitalist society and the bureaucratic dictatorship. This reflects the fact that humanity face withering social and economic relations, dictatorships. Ecological, military, social and economic degradation faces millions of people.

Many more people recognise the barbaric nature of capitalism. In a situation where the inability of the social democratic and communist parties to provide socialist solutions is becoming clearer, the task of creating new leadership remains ahead.

Socialist Outlook is written and sold by socialists committed to this struggle. We are the British supporters of the world-wide socialist and revolutionary organisations, the Fourth International.

We stand for the revolutionary transformation of society and a pluralist, democratic society, a society where we all rule.

The overall goal which we pursue is the total and uncompromising fight against capitalism and for a clear programme of action in order to achieve a socialist future. An internationalist world view is the hallmark of our organisation.

We are the supporters of women, lesbians and gay men, and black people to fight their particular forms of oppression and to organise around the principle “No one is fit to break the chains as those who wear them”. We are the supporters of women, lesbians and gay men, and black people to fight their particular forms of oppression and to organise around the principle “No one is fit to break the chains as those who wear them”.

The whole working class needs to fully commit itself to these struggles. Furthermore we fight for a strategic alliance between workers and these organisations which will unite us to go against this and any other form of oppression.

By building simultaneously revolutionary organisations in all the countries of the world, including the mass movement of the Working International, we aim to guide and encourage the international movements of the working class and oppressed.

By building a united struggle against exploitation and oppression we aim to ensure the survival of the human race. If you think this is worth fighting for, and you are willing to do what you need in Socialist Outlook, don’t resist us. Join us!”
Scandal as Labour "minded to" sign up for environmental disaster in Kurdistan

Lies, Dam Lies - and no statistics!

Water fuels war danger – inside p 15

PRESSURE is mounting on Trade Secretary Stephen Byers after he revealed that he is "minded" to grant £200m in export guarantees for the construction of the controversial Ilisu dam in Kurdistan.

As Roland Range reports (p15) this Turkish government project is a potential flashpoint for war in the Middle East - but is also an environmental and human disaster waiting to happen.

Friends of the Earth and other campaigners point out the despite New Labour's much vaunted "ethical" foreign policy, Byers has ignored detailed evidence of the destruction the dam would cause, and not even insisted that an environmental impact report be produced before making his decision.

For its part, the Turkish government, secure in its status as a NATO ally, has not bothered even to go through the motions of pretending that it will rehouse or in any way compensate the 20,000 Kurdish people whose homes and land would be flooded as a result of the scheme.

British firms and EU multinationals are of course among the would-be contractors for this vast and lucrative project, and their influence appears to count for more with Mr Byers than the needs and rights of the oppressed Kurdish people.

The final decision has yet to be taken, however, and the fight must be stepped up to avert yet another crime being committed by New Labour on the global stage.