The government and the TUC who have lectured us incessantly about the value of “partnership” with big business now have egg on their faces. BMW, which last summer was set to screw over £1.2bn from the government as a bribe to keep production at Rover’s Longbridge plant have decided to tear up all the agreements they have signed with ministers and with unions and to pull out – axing tens of thousands of jobs. Their decision makes perfect sense from the point of view of the free market economy which Tony Blair and co love so much. But the job losses – and similar cuts threatened by Ford mean devastation for the lives of workers. Pleading will not change their minds: only action by trade unions – firm action, designed to prevent them carrying through their asset-stripping operation – can prevent these cuts. That’s why we say Longbridge and other threatened plants must be occupied – with the demand that they be nationalised, without compensation.

Feature: centre pages
The privatisation of a city

Leeds for sale!

Bob Wood

Over the last few weeks, Private Finance Initiative (PFI) schemes worth more than £200 million have been announced in just one city - Leeds.

As Leeds is in a similar position to many other areas of the country, the lessons of developments here are important for us all. Bob Wood looks at the details and the mounting local campaign against the proposals.

The new cancer centre, private capital in education, health and housing is expanding at a surprisingly fast rate.

As far as education is concerned, Leeds City Council has announced that a new school is to be built under PFI in the south of the city in Morley, and two high schools are to be either rebuilt or completely refurbished. An additional four primary schools will be replaced under the scheme.

Each construction firm will benefit from this £35 million programme, which will be valid throughout the whole of the summer, but it will be either Louis Berger and John Mowlem or London firm Laing Hyder.

An earlier scheme involving a new building for Cardinal Heenan High School, costs at £12 m, is due for completion by September. In this case the company benefiting from the development is Jarvis.

The hospital sector, which is the council's largest budget item, is of critical concern in the proposed development.

In the housing sector, the council is planning a £40-45 m PFI scheme involving the repair and improvement of the Swarcliffe estate in east Leeds.

These council-based schemes are overshadowed by proposals, unveiled in late March by Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust for the city's health services, amounting to a staggering £160 million.

Almost £100 million of this will be private finance. A loan of £13 m to St James' Hospital (£58 million), and a new children’s hospital at Leeds General Infirmary (£19 million) are the biggest.

Other aspects of the scheme include the revamp of two wards at St James', and the updating of two hospitals in outlying areas as “locality hospitals.”

Bed losses

Although new facilities would be welcome in the city this should not be at the cost of the inevitable impact that PFI entails.

In the past few years we have seen the emergence of recent Oxford reports on Leeds Education Authority which has produced the biggest outcry. Following Oxford's highly critical, almost certainly politically motivated report, an unusual alliance of councillors, Labour Party activists and trade unions have been opposing the private hiving off of all or part of the LEA to the private sector.

The awful example of legislation, from this April education support services will be supplied by a postcode-based private company for the next seven years, is apparent in most people’s minds.

The campaign against privatisation in Leeds really got under way in early February at a well-attended public meeting called by an alliance of public sector trade unions, mainly UNISON local government and health branches.

Labour MP for Leeds North-West, Harold Bess, spoke about his experiences as an apprentice electrician working for a private firm ripping off a public sector contract, and made clear his complete opposition to the government’s privatisation agenda.

He was joined on the platform by Bob Crowe of the RMT and Candy Udwin of UNISON. This successful meeting laid the groundwork for a strong campaign in the city.

The possibility of gaining significant support from local Labour Parties is real. At the March meeting of the normally supine Leeds District Labour Party, where any motions critical of new Labour have monotonously ruled out of order, opposition to privatisation was strongly argued.

Resistance

One motion called for the city council to resist the privatisation of education services by all means possible while another opposed any reduction in bed numbers as a result of PFI in the health sector.

These and other anti-privatisation motions were passed without dissent after a debate which made the link between the threat to the LEA and the incursion of private finance into schools, hospitals and even Air Traffic Control. The deep unpopulariy of the government’s drive to privatisation is evident from every opinion poll on the subject.

No respite

And yet the momentum is moving without respite. Why are Blair and his team so determined to open up public services, especially health and education, to the private sector?

To those who like to divide the world up into tidy compartments - local, national and international, the answer must come as a bit of a surprise. For strangely enough, the beginnings of the answer can be found in Seattle.

The US agenda for the World Trade Organisation - and the United States is as usual backed to the hilt by its British law - is to open up across the world investment opportunities in services for American capital.

Potential markets in health and education are in the forefront of this drive to open up markets for profit across the globe.

The real aim is to reduce our schools and hospitals to no more than local branches of Education UK plc or Health Inc, with head offices in New York or Chicago.

In Leeds the next step in the campaign against this international project will be the annual May Day rally and march through the city centre on Saturday 26th April.

This year the Trades Council is organising the rally, together with the Leeds Campaign Against Privatisation, with the slogans - Free Education, Free Health and Free Welfare - No to Privatisation!

Perhaps it will be the beginning of a successful campaign to defend the welfare state.

Vote for new leadership in civil service

PCS national elections: vote Left Unity!

Darren Williams

The deadline for the election of the National Executive Committee of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) is just a week away. PCS’ 258,000 members work mainly in the civil service, and have faced massive attacks on jobs, pay and conditions, under New Labour’s rule.

The forthcoming elections, and the confidence that will follow it, are May, are the only second chance to hold their leadership to account since the union was re-organised in March 1998, with a constitution that stripped away many of the democratic rights that members enjoyed over civil service pensioners, CPSA and PTC.

Members elect a National Executive Committee consisting of a president, four vice-presidents and 40 national council members. The last elections, two years ago, delivered a majority for a coalition of two right-wing groups, the (ex-CPSA) More Secure and (ex-PTC) Membership First. These groups had presided over a long series of defeats for civil servants under the Tories, with 250,000 jobs lost through cuts, privatisation or privatisation. The introduction of performance-related pay and new management techniques and the break-up of national collective bargaining on pay and conditions.

New Labour has stuck rigidly to the Tories’ agenda – privatising thousands of jobs in areas like the Post Office and the Department of National Savings, and refusing to abandon performance pay or to restore civil service-wide pay and conditions.

The only difference is that its policies have been given a sugar-coated ideological justification, in the form of the supposed ‘partnership’ between the Government and departments on one side and staff and their unions on the other.

The PCS leadership has enthusiastically endorsed this approach, whereas before 1997 its predecessors attacked Tory policies but did so quietly. Now it barely makes even muted criticisms of what are essentially the same policies.

It is currently celebrating the apparent legitimation of this approach by members, who have recently voted to renew a national Partnership Agreement between the Government and unions.

Behind the warm words of this declaration is a union commitment not to challenge Government policy – whatever its impact on members.

The 20% turnout in this ballot suggests a lack of understanding of the NEC’s approach, but a cynical abstentionism prompted by the increasing divergence between members’ own experiences and the pronouncements of their leaders. It is essential to break through members’ disaffection with the union’s democratic processes, but this can only be done if the left demonstrates convincingly the link between a change of political leadership and the reversal of past defeats in the workplace.

The main opposition to the incumbent leadership is the Left Unity group, which brings together almost all socialist currents in the union.

It contains many fine activists who have fought determined campaigns within their own departments, but it has not yet succeeded in reaching beyond its strongholds to provide a clear project capable of winning all those workers opposite the right wing.

Two specific problems it faces are the refusal of the centre-left Unity group to agree a joint stand, and its own expulsion of activists in the Employers’ Service who stood their own candidates in departmental elections, in opposition to Left Unity’s accommodation to government policies.

But for all its weaknesses, Left Unity is the only real alternative to the right-wing at national level: all activists who want to see the buck of PCS’ current leaders should work hard, over the next month, for a Left Unity victory.
NEW LABOUR continues to reel over Ken Livingstone and John Smith, and the support he is receiving. Ken still has a lead of 45% even after the initial wave of support after he announced his candidacy had subsided. This is a widespread backlash against the rightward march of Blairism and Milliband manipulation. A Livingstone victory, which seems unstoppable, will be seen as a major blow against the control freak tendency in Milliband and Blair's right-wing project.

But it is more than that. This candidacy has the potential to change the landscape of British politics and is welcomed by all those who have been fragmented and disappointed by Labour's time in office. It is a situation with huge potential for the left.

New Labour's criticisms stretch far beyond London. They have abandoned their traditional supporters in favour of middle England and big business. The effects of this were clear in the recent local election results of the past year where the Labour vote collapsed dramatically.

This, along with the Livingstone challenge, has created a new political situation which poses the possibility of a broad-based alternative to the left of Labour for the first time in the post-war period.

In this Ken Livingstone carries with him the aspirations of a very large number of people who are looking for change and an alternative. This is true whether he recognises it or not. Unfortunately he seems not to recognise this and is content to do so.

It was clear that Ken had turned his back on these supporters when he called on them to stay inside the Labour Party, an appeal which is in the direct interests of Milliband. He has the view that he will get the party himself at some point in the future. This seems fanciful, but again it helps to hold the line for the Blairites.

He also made it clear, as he declared his candidacy, that he will not form a new party. While launching a new party immediately would not have been the right thing to do, he is not organising his base of support at all. This wastes the enormous potential of his move as well as depriving those who want to work for him of a forum for political debate.

Instead Livingstone's response to the mass support he has received has been ever more populism. He presents himself as "the best man for the job" rather than a political alternative to new Labour.

But for socialists, Ken Livingstone as mayor is not an end in itself. What is needed is not Ken Livingstone standing as an independent on a populist platform, but him standing on a socialist platform. He should have organised a socialist slate for the Assembly to support his campaign for Mayor.

Only by doing this and organising his support around a political alternative to new Labour can the full potential of the current situation be realised. And there is no doubt that if he did so, even now, the response would be huge. Not only would current Labour Party members join him, but so would others who have left in disgust at Blair's trajectory. Thousands who have voted Labour in the past would become involved.

To turn his back on such a potential is a stab in the back to all those who oppose new Labour. It deplores the workers' and social movements' response to the real potential of the situation. It is a major climb-down for someone who has presented himself as a leader of the left in various incarnations for over 20 years.

On April 20 the London Socialist Alliance (LSA) has responded very positively to the real dynamics underway. The LSA gives full support to Ken Livingstone for Mayor and is standing its own slate for the Assembly.

This takes the anti-Blairite dynamic of the Livingstone campaign and fuses it with the socialist perspective of the LSA. On the ground, support for the LSA is broader than anyone initially expected.

The LSA has rightly continued to demand that Ken Livingstone changes his mind. He should stand on a socialist platform, with a slate based on some form of democratic selection within the left and the wider labour and trade union movement.

The LSA would give way, at any stage, to such a slate. But it seems likely now that not only will Livingstone not stand such a slate but will in fact go it alone.

But it is not just Ken Livingstone who has failed to rise to the challenge of building a socialist alternative out of this situation. The Labour left, and in particular the MPs, have been in the best position to influence him in the right direction. But they dramatically failed to do so.

They seem to have lost the plot at the point where the battle broke. Some left MPs have gone further and are actively campaigning for Dobson.

All this is creating great opportunities for the LSA, and it is responding accordingly. All those involved have a responsibility to develop its potential to the full and to ensure that the LSA continues after May 4.

But we have to be clear: positive as the LSA campaign is, it is not the preferred option for developing a fight against Blairism. It is sad that the person who was in the best position to develop this dynamic - which is in itself far bigger than him - has turned his back on its potential.

Who's cheering Brown?

GORDON BROWN's Budget on March 21 was a disaster. It had to be. If it had been a success, it would have been a disaster for the economy. The Chancellor is the only one who can make Brown's budget work.

On the one hand, he was determined to keep New Labour's big business "partners" happy by handing out even more tax cuts in business taxes and avoiding any increased taxes on top salaries. On the other, he has come under pressure to fund some of his growing war chest of unspent tax surpluses into welfare spending, to placate growing dissatisfaction and demands of New Labour's supporters and core vote.

On the first objective he broadly succeeded, with its tax cuts in capital gains tax, cuts in road tax on lorries, and by maintaining and even astounding low levels of employee National Insurance contributions. Nor did he anticipate the fat cat tax by lifting the reactionary "cap" on National Insurance, which means that those earning £100,000 a year pay no more in NI than those on £22,000.

But many employers had desperately hoped for measures that would bring down the value of the pound and hit the decimation of manufacturing industry. Brown, like the ill-fated Norman Lamont, clearly believes that in his quest to squeeze out inflation and a growth in unemploy to his "price paying policy". But as a giveaway Budget it flopped for lack of sufficient goodies being given away. Children living in the most dire levels of poverty in this country are getting £4 weekly benefit, but pensioners owing on an existence on the miserable state pension have to be content with a meagre 7p increase, with a free TV license when they get to 75 years old. There have been great fanfares over Brown's announce ment of an extra £2 billion for the public sector - but to get this 10,000 extra nurses to be recruited. But in closer examination only £600m of this new money has so far been passed on to health Trusts, with the remainder tied up to be released only to subject to rigorous scrutiny. The 10,000 "extra" nurses turn out to be the same "extra" nurses as from last year.

On education, too, the extra £1 billion promised is to be used to ram through Labour's unpopular reforms, with the first £300m allocated directly to schools in a delib erate snub to elected local education authorities.

For those on benefits, for the long queues waiting for affordable housing, for students and staff in higher education, and for the elderly, people dependent on dwindling social services - now facing another round of cuts and increased charges - there was barely even a mention.

Few workers will feel inclined to celebrate the slab in the pound tax cut handled to them by a tight-fisted Chancellor - who is doing his bit to make Britain a meaner, harsher place for the working class. As a bit to win back Labour's core vote it was a half-hearted effort, and the coming elections in May are likely to register a vigorous thumbs down from the electorate, for whom only the ludicrous, reactionary iniquity of the Tory opposition now acts as much of an incentive to back New Labour.
Labour left Briefing ducks the challenge

Veronica Fagan

In days when it is hard to find a single Labour Party member, never mind a voter, who will even out their cross on a bit of paper for Frank Dobson, it seems at first sight strange that Labour Left Briefing should fail to call for a vote for Livingstone.

The current issue of the magazine contains an editorial which ducks this key issue. While it implies strong support for Livingstone it does not argue that readers should campaign or even vote for him. Inside there are pages that rightly condemn the Milliban fix but fail to draw political conclusions for the future.

Then there are a series of articles that attack Frank Dobson's stand against New Labour. There is a very positive article from Mike Mansfield arguing for support for the London Socialist Alliance, which we reprint on p of this paper. But Mansfield is clearly isolated in Briefing.

Chaos in action at a time when new Labour is trying to make the biggest recovery in its history. The roots of this lie in a series of factors.

Some seriously underestimated the particular nature of Blairism, seeing new Labour's betrayals as no different from that of other right-wing Labour governments.

For others it is impossible to conceive of any political alternative to the Labour Party. Still others feel that Blair has transformed the party and won't be stopped but have been thrown into confusion by Livingstone's appeal that they stay in new Labour and keep their heads down.

Whether Labour Left Briefing will survive remains to be seen.

Trade unions backing the London Socialist Alliance

- Tower Hamlets Health Care UNISON
- East Finchley ASLEF
- Hackney Joint Branch Services Committee (TGWU, GMB, UCATT, UNISON)
- Islington NUT
- Hackney NUT
- Waterloos RMT
- Willesden RMT
- London Fire & Civil Defence Authority UNISON
- Hammersmith Metropolitan Line RMT
- Hackney & Tower Hamlets Benefits Agency PCS
- Holborn GMB
- North & North West London CWU
- Lewisham NUT

The following unions have passed resolutions supporting Livingstone:

- CWU West End amalgamated branch
- CWU West London branch
- CWU North/ North West London branch
- CWU South East London Postal
- CWU London Postal Services Committee
- CWU UNISON branch
- RMT London District Council
- RMT Hammersmith & City Line branch
- ASLEF East Finchley branch
- MSF Wembley-Hendon 640 branch
- GMB Holborn branch.

For those who are interested, the full text of the manifesto has been uploaded here: [link to UNISON website].

For the forthcoming mayoral elections in London, UNISON has taken up its own version of the old John F Kennedy quote: "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."

Instead of debating which candidate they should endorse, the union's London Affiliated Political Fund has voted with no opposition to demand of candidates where they stand on UNISON's policies.

In place of the usual rubber stamping of whatever candidate the Labour Party sees fit to impose, which has led to the union donating £500 to an anti-unions NHS Trust boss running on Labour's slate for the Greater London Council. UNISON has drawn up a manifesto for public services, and is inviting candidates to declare their support for it.

This will obviously be extremely difficult for Frank Dobson, since it contains specific opposition to the Private Finance Initiative, which he implemented while Health Secretary, and the privatisation of the London Tube.

But it should be no problem for Ken Livingstone, who is already on record supporting many of the key demands. Other unions have also shown interest in the UNISON proposals which offer a stark alternative to the policies of New Labour in government.

Publication of the full text has been delayed - apparently by interference from the FBU - so we carry the full details here.

Another strike day has been set and the RMT is now to ballot all train crew working for SWT. If SWT refuse to restate their support for the RMT members at Waterlooland, many voters will be hit by the strike.

RMT train crew based at Waterlooland on Thursday 23rd March in defence of Sarah Friday, sacked by South West Trains, on trumped-up charges, for campaigning over rail safety. Only a handful of claims were worked out of the one hundred and eighty workers called out. Over twenty members joined all day picket lines outside the station. Workers into Waterlooland ran with guards and drivers from other depots. SWT was forced to cancel a significant number of services.

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RMT members at Waterlooland are very angry at Sarah's sacking. They understand it is an attack on all their conditions. And, despite being forced to work on the strike day, train crew at other depots did what they could to support us. Many refused to work their rest days rather than cover Waterlooland. A number of RMT branches have asked to be bailed over their own grievances and we are confident that we can successfully extend the Deputy Management Plan which have been attacked by the level of support - a fee to one vote for strike action. The local manager is showing the way. On the eve of the first strike he came into the guards room to ask to see us. We are now seeing the same at the other depots only to have to turn half an hour later to sheepishly apologise.

Support is pouring in. As well as sizeable donations to our strike fund from RMT Branches we have also received significant support from other union branches. MSF London Region, teachers from Ealing and various trades councils are among the thirty or so organisations who have responded in the last two weeks. The regional committee of the CGT from northern France has sent a message of support and faxed a letter of protest to SWT. (French rail workers operate trains into Waterlooland from Lille).

Further messages of support and donations are welcomed - to Sarah Friday Renunciation Campaign Care, St James House, Dalmarnock, Edinburgh.

UNISON policy stand will make it hard for Dobbo

Victim of police racism: UNISON member Roger Sylvester died in north London.

Campaiging for a living wage of £5.00 per hour

London is one of the world's most expensive cities to live in. And workers' salaries need to reflect this. To put an end to in-work poverty, UNISON is campaigning locally and nationally for a minimum wage of £5.00 per hour and a significant increase in London Weighting.

Opposing the Private Finance Initiative (PFI)

As a means of funding healthcare and local government services, the PFI is proving to be a costly, profit driven and unpopular quick fix solution, damaging job security and public services in the process. No wonder UNISON and many other organisations want the TUC to get rid of the private sector and are united in campaigning for public funds to be used for public services.

Ending crisis management and under-funding in local government

20 years of under-funding in local government have created excessive demands on the workforce, while too many were working under pressure and without proper funded services. London UNISON campaign alongside many of our branches against the continued privatisa-

tion and under-funding of local authority services.

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tion and under-funding of local authority services.
A real choice for Londoners

After twenty years active membership of the Labour Party - including a stint as editor of Labour Left Linking (LLB) - Mike Mansfield has left the Party to campaign for the London Socialist Alliance.

For many years, LLB editors have repeatedly noted that the changes imposed on the Labour Party were creating a "crisis of representation" in British politics. The reality of that crisis is now plain for all to see, not only in the London elections, but in the record of the New Labour government.

In recent weeks this government has launched reactionary attacks on beggars in the streets, people on benefits and asylum seekers. It is actively undermining basic democratic rights (including trial by jury), and is seeking to enrich itself at the expense of the poor, extending privatisation into transport and education, and presiding over an unprecedented collapse in the NHS. Labour governments have done many appalling things in the past, but in its scale and nature, the current regime's systematic opposition to the interests and electoral supporters of the Labour Party is something different, and demands a different response from socialists.

Over the last decade, while the country's political institutions, including the Labour Party, have been migrating decisively toward the right, a substantial swathe of public opinion has been travelling in the opposite direction. Up till now, the lack of current opinion has lacked an effective means of expression at the ballot box. Hence, the popular support for Ken Livingstone, who (whether he likes it or not) represents to millions of people the possibility of a political alternative to the left of New Labour. Of course, there is another side to the Ken groundswell: the post-ideological anti-politics of individual celebrity. Blair and his friends always saw elected big-city mayors as a means of denigrating the electorate, and though events in London have not gone according to plan, the long-term danger remains.

In this context, the left needs to undertake two tasks simultaneously. First, it should campaign for Livingstone in order to maximise the public expression of discontent with benefit Labour (something that will strengthen the left both inside and outside the party). Second, it should also inject a left political agenda into that campaign and the London elections as a whole. The most effective way to do this is to take part in the campaign organised by the London Socialist Alliance, which is building support for Ken and for a left slate of trades unionists, community activists, and journalists for the Greater London Assembly. The London elections are a huge democratic exercise, in some respects unprecedented in British history. To offer no credible alternative to the Labour-Tory consensus, to fail to send out an irresistible message to the London electorate, would be a major failure of opposition on the left of socialists, and would re-enforce the crisis of representation.

Wherever electoral choice is narrowed down, as it is in London at the moment, the rich benefit and the poor suffer. Wherever the exercise of power becomes hollow and ineffectual (as it would be in London if the likes of Ken and the Labour Party were absent from the ballot), apathy and cynicism flourish.

Livingstone and the New Labour Party have spent long years doubtfully describing themselves as "pro-police, pro-business" choice. They are mounting a poisonous "tough on crime, touch on Ken" scare campaign, scapegoating the poor, demonising Londoners and playing on fear and prejudice. The Labour Party is working to oppose and expose this campaign.

With the greatest respect for those comrades who believe, for perfectly honourable reasons, that it is important to preserve their party membership, I would suggest that an abstention from this particular public contest is simply too high a price to pay.

The LSA has put together a strong and dynamic candidate, Paul Foot, Mark Steel, Greg Dyke, Christine Blower, Jim Stanley, Ian Page, Ken Loach, Jeremy Hardy and Ricky Tomlinson.

Through the media and at scores of local meetings and street stalls, it is making an impact on public perceptions of the coming elections. It is also beginning to attract trade union support, including CWU, FBU and UNISON branches.

It will be easy for comrades to catalogue the weaknesses (some real, some imagined) of the LSA, reminding us that the principal, but by no means the only, forces backing it are the organised left groups.

But coming from LLB readers, that would be a self-fulfilling prophecy. The doors to participation in the LSA are wide open, and the "socialists' list has not been finalised.

The greater the number of Labour left-wingers who join the LSA campaign, the more likely it is to prove effective, electoral victory for the LSA, and help us all begin to realise the crisis of representation.

(First published in Labour Left Briefing)
Racist press gang are at it again

The last few weeks have seen the media effort to foment racist sentiments against asylum seekers, particularly Roma – reach unprecedented depths.

While some of the broadsheets have begun to pull back at little pressure from the semi-official criticism from their readership, they too are not far behind fully in the initial phase.

Independent socialist Ghanasah and Chinese, so furious about these developments that he sent us the following article.

THE BRITISH press is at it again – attempting to whip up a crede, racist backlash with the latest in a series of desperate ravings about asylum seekers.

For example, on March 13, the Birmingham Evening Mail followed up its double page spread on “aggressive beggars” in the West Midlands with the headline: “Fury At Asylum Handouts”.

On the same day the Daily Mail, equally reliable for reactionary wranglings, weighed in with: “£32,000 A Year For Asylum Seekers!” whilst The Sun insisted that: “Britain Has Had Enough!” as an editorial. These headlines alone were valued at £32,000 Per Year.

These headlines were all concerned with an Algerian man and his large family (eighteen), all of whom fled their country of origin fifteen months ago to escape civil war-type situations. The family now has two young boys born in inner Birmingham.

Anyway £32,000 split eight ways (£1,775 per person per year) is hardly “luxury” – any more than are mobile phones and satellite television – another ludicrous claim by the press.

Further the situation of the man in question, Mohammed Kine, is a clear exception to the situation facing most asylum seekers who, in Britain, normally face virtual imprisonment in concentration camp-style centres in Middlesex or Oxfordshire. Others await drawn-out hearings, frequently surviving on little more than the value of food tokens.

DIVERSION

It is always an easy option to deflect attention away from social issues such as homelessness and the fact that nearly three quarters of a million homes currently stand empty and neglected in Britain.

Instead of focusing on this, or unemployment, or poverty. The media is saturated with fanciful claims that “Roma are living in luxury and milking us dry.”

So seize on this example, as the racist tabloid press has done, and try to make it out as the norm, as it is distasteful and it is despicable. It is also important to point out that, all too often, the hypocritical British capitalist- national and its political rulers in the shape of Labour Party governments, are covertly (and sometimes not so covertly) supporting regimes that cause people to flee for their lives in the first place.

The same publications which now berate one Algerian family fleeing a life-threatening situation were comparatively restrained when Margaret Thatcher and other monsters were recently “taking billionaire’s sea” with Pinochet (a man who headed a vicious South American military dictatorship which violently overthrew a democratically elected, leftist government in 1973 and is known to have slaughtered tens of thousands of its political opponents with the direct connivance of the “democratic” USA and its shadowy CIA.

Now Labour Home Secretary Jack (“I hate aggressive beggars”) Straw has decided that the offending Pinochet is “too sick” to face extradition or a proper trial!

We should not take lectures from a press which tells us what its wealthy owners want us to hear and read, not least when The Sun and company also rant on about “Gypsy Spoons” and “Romany Squatters” and building mansions on our doorsteps.

The Labour press is not informed or objective journalism but a carefully contrived, dis- torted and deeply xenophobic trash, as is the hysteria surrounding the supposedly serious problem of “aggressive begging”.

BEGGARS

It is cynically designed to home in on some of people’s deepest fears when they see Roma on the streets.

Among those enlisted to help whip up openly racist sentiments among ordinary working people and is the bosses’ favourite trade unionist – Kenneth Jackson (I refuse to call him Sir Ken) general secretary of the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union (The Sun, March 14).

This man is currently retaliating the “riled old chauvinist-foreigner, semi-racist rubbish so beloved of the Labour Party’s right-hand cousins, bureaucrats, especially when claiming to speak for the ‘common man’.

Jackson does not object to media’s racist scandal: that family is free to roam the globe at will in the search for higher profits while similar freedom of movement is denied to labour – especially when the worker has a black skin.

This is the reason for the distortion of migration and controls: and these, like the capitalist system which breeds them, must be fought!

Snipping from the Left

By Charlie van Gelderen

From Keir Hard to Tony Blair

When the Labour Party fought its first general election in its history, its programme was entitled “A Vote for the Labour Party is a Vote for the Hope of the Worker.”

SOCIALISM – A system of government that will make poverty impossible.

Now, 100 years after that historic meeting in Farringdon, what have we got? Not socialism but capitalism, apparently triumphant. What do you do when a government has been in government 15 times – a govern- ment, but not in power.

Despite decisive majorities in 1945 – and equally decisive in 1997, it is only tinkered with the capitalist system.

To Labour’s leadership, from Ramsay MacDonald in the 1930s to John Major, Callaghan and Blair, what matters was the trappings of ministerial office.

MacDonald openly betrayed by not only entering but leading a so-called “national govern- ment”, which was actually a Tory government.

MacDonald held the office of Prime Minister, but it was the Tories’ iron master.

Stanley Baldwin, who pulled the strings.

George V approved of MacDonald – and he enjoyed racy joke sessions with right- wing union leader Jimmy Thomas. Elizabeth II apparently gets along very well with Tony Blair.

Tony Blair has gone one better than MacDonald, transforming the Labour Party into a more efficient Conservative Party.

Someone in Milbank must have slopped up. The centenary issue of the New Labour magazine quotes Robert Brown’s poem “The Lost Leader” (written against Alfred Lord Tennyson when he became Poet Laureate).

New Labour, new Labour, same old racist history.

From Blair and Ramsey MacDonald: both fond of “partnership” with employers.

Tony Blair and Ramsey MacDonald: both used to attack MacDonald.

"Just for a handful of silver, he left us.
Just for a rind to stick in his coat.
Does it remind you of someone – perhaps a little more contemporary?"

Banking mad

For the greater part of the century, one of the major planks in Labour’s platform was the nationalisation of the financial institutions, especially the Bank of England.

Labour’s current Chancellor of the Exchequer (what a grand name for a Finance Minister) has handed over control of the nation’s finances to the Governors of the Bank of England – not a worker amongst them.

The working class, in whose interest the Labour Party was founded, has very little reason to celebrate its 100th birthday.

It now has to start all over again to build a party – a real socialist party – the only hope for the workers.

In black and white

In the days, no the years, when the people of South Africa were fighting against apartheid, some of us tried to explain that apartheid and capitalism were intertwined, that you could not get rid of one without the other.

Now derided, not least by the Stalinists of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and even some who owed allegiance to the Fourth International.

When President de Klerk proclaimed the end of apartheid and the release of Nelson Mandela, when the ANC-led coalition was swept into power with a huge majority, they jeered – we told you so! We were right! Addressing a meeting of the in Queenstown, the SAPC regional chairperson, John Robb, called for parity pay for all races in South Africa, saying that blacks continued to receive poorer wages than other race groups.

“We live in a very rich and happy land,” he said, “but we know that it is a land of suffering and starvation. The racist (sic) government and its friends are afraid to talk about the wave of prosperity in South Africa – prosperity for whom?”

He failed to remind his audi- ence that his party, the SACP was an integral part of the government which serves owners, farmers, and foreign investors.

When workers had also benefited from the boom and had been given a monopoly of skilled jobs – the masses of non-whites, especially Africans, have not benefited at all from this so-called prosperity. The pay gap between black and white miners were also widening – annual African inflows were up to 15 times less than annual white income. More profit was being squeezed out of cheap black labour.

“The only solution was equality in pay – levels – from management to workers.”

Sounds almost like socialism!

Tee bloody hee, David


When pre-1997 election Labour leaders promised a “change of heart” to replace the House of Lords, with Tony Blair promised one-person-one vote for the election of a candi- date for London’s Mayor. They were only joking.

What are they doing now?
Immigration detention: a growing injustice

Bill MacKeith, The Observer (1993), Harmondsworth detention centre (near Heathrow airport) and Harlaxton prison (near Grantham) in 1996. Oskingston "reception centres" near Cambridge, 1996. The recent increase in the number of refugees in Oxford has led to speculation that the abandoned US Air Force base at Upper Heyford in north Oxfordshire will be next on the government's list. Around 10,000 people are detained under the 1971 Immigration Act each year in the UK, and 700-1,000 are imprisoned at any one time in detention centres and in breach of UN guidelines). To imprison someone is to confine them. They must have done something wrong if they are locked up. It is unjust. In other words, they must be criminals. A reasonable assumption in normal life. The treatment of a refugee arriving at Heathrow or Dover is anything but "normal".

On the way to so-called immigration officers, around 15% of people claiming asylum on arrival are arbitrarily selected to be locked up in a detention centre or prison for an unlimited period (usually months, sometimes over 2 years). This is without being charged or convicted of any crime, without written reasons being given, and without proper legal and medical support.

This is much worse than the treatment meted out to a convicted criminal. Detention is one of the injustices meted out to refugees and asylum seekers. It goes with the (relatively new) system of vouchers - not cash benefits - for asylum seekers, vouchers that total 70% of official poverty level income; with the constant stress of racist "scandal" stories about the murder of "Britishness in the soft touch" - both all too often promoted by the government itself.

This is the politics of deliberate social exclusion. It is the politics of mass asylum-seekers, who are black and colonialist asylum. And it comes from a government whose ministers explicitly state that it seeks an end to both social exclusion and institution- alised racism.

In the last few years, Britain and Germany have led the way in immigration detention in Europe, not only imprisoning more refugees and migrants at home, but upping, even paying for, the construction of prisons/camps in Poland, Romania and other states to the east, and in Italy to the south. There have been many protests by detainees in the prisons/camps: verbal protest, hunger strikes, destruction of centres. Last year migrant support groups set up solidarity camps on the Germany's eastern border.

Popular revulsion at the escalation in detention policies has been greatest in Italy. Two years ago protesters forced the closure of a newly opened detention centre at Trieste. Last month there were nationwide demonstrations following the burning to death of four refugees in a refugee prison in Sicily; later the closure of the new detention centre in Milan was announced (a "better" one will replace it). There is a great deal of resistance - most of it unreported - inside the detention centres and by supporters outside.

In Britain there is a big need for more local campaigns to close Harmanworth House (Gaswork airport),chester prison's detention wings", and the new centres at Aldington and Linchom, alongside the campaigns to close Campfield, Harmondsworth and Oskingston.

In Parliament MPs still demand support the unap- portable: barely a hundred of Labour MPs voted against last year's appalling Immigration and Asylum Bill.

The chairman of the House of Commons Committee on Refugees said at a meeting in Oxford that his committee had never even discussed the question of immigration detention. But given that the develop- ments are Europe-wide - driven by European Union member-states' immigration officials, and ministers convening at secret meetings - resistance needs to be more co-ordinated on a European scale also.

The demand of the confer- ence on immigration deten- tion held in Ferney Voltaire, France in 1998, that there should be a debate on deten- tion in the European Parliament, has never been heeded. And the MEPs should not let the interior ministers get away with their secrecy.

An international confer- ence on immigration detention is currently being planned by the Campaign to Close Campfield. It is to be held in Oxford in September.

Useful contacts:
Campaign to Close Campfield 01865 551845/557282/726804
Cambridge Against Refugee Detention 01223 462717/07957 558612
Close Harmondsworth Campaign 0181 571 5019

Labour sets capitalist spongers onto refugees

Charlie van Gelderen
The New Labour government is planning to send 400 asylum- seekers to the former army barracks at Oxford, north of Cambridge.

Cambridge Against Refugee Detention (CARD) is running a vigorous campaign, which has attracted good support in the local area, as well as linking up with similar campaigns elsewhere. Nearly 600 marched in support of the Oxford campaign, through the crowded streets of Cambridge city centre, on Saturday, May 23.

The centre will imprison children, who have been forced behind fences and under guard. It will be run for profit by the notorious Group 4. Blair's government is again

Howard's grim legacy lingers on under Jack Straw
(John Stranks) to show that they can have more than one racist immigration policy of the government.

Once upon a time, in fact, not so very long ago, Jack Straw, when in opposition, reminded the then Home Secretary, Michael Howard, that they were both descendants of refugees. This government also includes Peter Hain, once a refugee from the apartheid regime in South Africa.

Not satisfied with looking up people who have committed no crime, the government is giving the screw another turn. From April, asylum seekers will not be entitled to benefits in cash. A voucher scheme is being introduced, which will of course be managed by private enterprise, the French company Sodexo Pass, which runs a similar scheme in Germany.

Every adult asylum seeker will be entitled to vouchers worth £36.54 a week, plus a special voucher for £10 for a week that can be exchanged for cash.

"Several major multiple groups have already signed up as Sodexo Pass Trading Partners - don't miss this revenue making opportunity" say promotional brochures circulated by the company. "Sainsbury's and Asda are amongst the chains who have already got involved. Spell out participat- ing firms can raise extra benefit, Sodexo informs them that "Vouchers cannot be exchanged for cash. Change should not be given. If goods are purchased to the value of £4.50 with a £5.00 voucher, the 50p change should not be handed back, but you, as a Trading Partner, will receive the full value for that £5 voucher."

NICE WORK IF YOU CAN GET IT

The gutter press has now turned the spotlight on the "opportunity of women at market, to control the free market, to control the free market, to control the free market,..." in the London Underground. That daughter of human rights, Ann Widdecombe, has recently quipped, "I would hate to think what I might commit, if any offence.

Even our Government's Minister of Home Affairs, Kenneth Clarke, has been known to adopt the racist language of Thatcher and Enoch Powell's and talk of this country being "swamped by millions of immigrants. Since the 1950s, we have not had the courage to stand up for our culture here."

Are these people leaving? Presumably they are "economic refugees", seeking improvement in their own standard of living. Unlike the majority of those who have come to live in Britain, they have not come to die at the hands of the suicide bombers of the IRA. They are not dangerous, and they are not taking jobs from other British people.

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Act now to challenge BMW asset-strippers

How concessions cost more car jobs

BMW also achieved what was effectively a 2-year wage freeze, and the same deal also included the introduction of more extensive shift working, which meant the machinery in all the plants would be used to a greater degree.

Since then, BMW has also introduced large scale use of Agency workers, avoiding adding new staff to the company’s pay rolls.

Though 1992 deal had been carried by a wafer-thin 51% majority of the workforce, the 3:1 majority for the 1998 coal was due to workers at Longbridge being persuaded to vote overwhelmingly in favour under the threat of closure.

In each instance the union leadership, notably Tony Woodley of the TGWU, argued that the deal on the table was the only way to save the company.

The present governments, too, has played its part in the BMW-Rover fusio, seeking to promote the New Labour notion of a "partnership" between workers and capital.

Last summer, still under the same threat from BMW that they would pull out of Longbridge, Trade Secretary Stephen Byers came up with a massive £125 million aid package to bail out the firm.

There was continuous concession bargaining. The "Rover Tomorrow" deal, in 1992 was a document full of commitments to "flexibility", which would supposen to be given in exchange for a commitment from the company of "jobs for life".

This was at the height of the "Japanisation" period, a period of new management styles which were supposed to be the salvation of Rover as a car manufacturer.

When BMW took over, they agreed to continue with the "jobs for life", but demanded more concessions to maintain it.

Rover shipped a series of concessions from individual plants - and then in October 1998 BMW threw down a fresh ultimatum.

They threatened to close Longbridge unless workers agreed to a new "Working Time Account".

Under this scheme workers would not be paid if they were laid off - as they had been previously - but in future they would have to "pay back" the time when it suited the company to boost production.
His view was echoed by fellow Blairite Roger Lyons of the white collar union MSF, who declared that they were particularly pleased about the new job security that this agreement will bring for all our members."

MSF, June 1999.

This type of controversy has taken place in a Dutch auction of jobs and conditions in plants all over Europe, leading to increased productivity and a massive expansion of anti-social policies. Each plant has been able to produce much more - and one consequence of this is the growth of co-operatives that are able to compete in the car industry on a global scale. Now the chickens are coming home to roost.

The Rover-BMW fxo is also a case of a fundamental crisis facing British-based manufacturing industry. The biggest of the bond against the Euro - it's the German surrender in Gordon Brown's economic policy - means that British plants are in a growing drive towards the rationalisation of production across Europe, driven on by the logic of the EU single market.

Manufacturing industry within Britain sees no future remaining outside the Euro zone, and has been operating under the assumption that New Labour were keen to get into the Euro as politically possible. The big firm will be this; this would be seen as the demand for the referendum.

The anti-Europe xenophobia which is around British beef and the government, with the full support and involvement of the government itself, has increased reactionary opposition to the Euro - to a point where no one now knows if Britain is likely to join the Euro zone even or whether there is to be a referendum.

Manufacturing companies, particularly in cars and car components, are not prepared to wait any longer. They either want to accelerate their exportation of Europe altogether - taking advantage of the high-est levels of productivity available outside the Euro zone - or they want to be inside the Euro zone.

Over is just the beginning of a series of shocks to come. This is Dagenham, which has been run down to a single assembly line and is no longer viable under the conditions of today's car manufacture.

Urgent talks are going on between the components industry and the government to try to avert closure and the loss of thousands of jobs. But last month Ford and Rover announced a sweeping review of the European car manufacturing operations, aimed at cutting overall capacity.

The review will not be finalised until mid-April, but Ford management has said that it will rule nothing out. The precarious situation of Dagenham is obvious. If Dagenham closes, the next Fiesta will be made in Cologne.

The rot does not stop there. the plight of BMW now leaves the future of Rolls-Royce Motor Cars in the balance, and the Goodyear tyre making plant in Wolverhampton is also at risk with 2,500 jobs at stake. The plant went on strike last time last week and management refused to give the unions any assurances for its future. This follows cutbacks and redundancies at other tyre making plants in the Midlands.

And finally there is the question in all this as to what is a multinational corporation and what is a private enterprise. The answer is that the latter are already full circle.

So what are the government doing in all this? New Labour is going all the way with today's global market. "There's nothing we can do," they say. "We have no option, only the government: these are the global forces we're dealing with."

They have to be confronted with the reality of this globalisation - which is allowable by EU rules.

What is not allowable under EU rules is for the government to break into these companies the multinational corporation that has dominated them after the ravages of their private sector.

Far from saving jobs, years of concession before the unions has helped to pave the way for more plant closures.

The only answer for Rover and Ford workers faced with an increasingly aggressive employer is to fight to oppose the plans for rationalisation.

The demand must be that just as the workers have been obliged to stick to the concessions negotiated on their behalf by the unions, BMW must stick by the deal they signed in return for saving 'the life'.

This means that BMW must build a replacement for the Iconic MG Rover, and a new car at Cowley, similarly Fords should fulfil its agreement to build the new Fiesta at Dagenham.

If they do not do this, then they will be rationalised, alongside the components industry, with no compensation.

A Rover worker 50,000 jobs are at risk in the West Midlands motor industry, more with at stake in Swindon and Cowley. 50,000 more could face the axe in East London.

This is the greatest blow to workers in Britain since the 1992 pit closures. The huge job losses are also a massive blow to union organisation. They will have to decide whether or not to make that stand, to fight to keep the production of Ford and BMW to protect these workers' jobs.

The problem is that although there appears to be a 6 week leeway before the changes are made, this has proven to be the case. Workers are already being laid off, and plans are being worked up to implement the job losses.

The unions have correctly called a national demonstration in Birmingham. But, apart from this and desperate appeals to BMW, and other employers, they have made no calls for action.

The TGWU chief negotiator Tony Woodley from the platform at Gaydon echoed the views of most shop floor speakers, calling for Rover to be rationalised - but even this demand is not being pushed with any form of activity.

Longbridge should have been the immediate focus of action. Occupation of that plant would not only stop BMW's plan being implemented, but it would also encourage component workers whose jobs are at risk to take similar action, and give other threatened workers a focus for supporting action. It would also point the way forward for Dagenham work.

Of course it is difficult for Tony Woodley to argue that this is the case. Has he consistently stood shine the apple from any fight with BMW? At every moment of crisis, he has argued for workers to make more concessions.

This is also one of the reasons why respect is not high for him on the shop floor. But if he and other union officers don't act soon, then the car industry will go the way of the coal mines.

The first step must be action by the workers; and then, on the basis of this fightback there should be an appeal to the BMW unions.

Some questions certainly need to be asked about the way the links with BMW has worked. The Rover workers come under the same European Works Council - what has happened to this?

Why weren't Rover workers told what was happening by the IG Metall representatives who sit on the BMW board? Obviously Rover workers can't expect much support from these union bureaucrats, but what about in the BMW plants themselves? After all if BMW can do this to Longbridge why not Munich?

At the time of the takeover, BMW said that they needed Rover for the scale of production to ensure the country could survive. Now Rover is being closed down, where do they go next? Who is inuned to take them over? If BMW cannot be forced to put a new model into Cowley, then the campaign for nationalisation must come to the forefront. The position of Byers & Blair has been laughable. They have become the puppet of big business and apologists for the free market system and global capitalist system.

Even as their deal with BMW has disintegrated all they have done is criticise the company for the way it carried out its decision. Now they are best of friends again.

The next demonstration should be outside Downing Street demanding the company is nationalised. The TUC, too, has done little other than talk about changing the law so that workers cannot be sacked so quickly. No major company is going to fear this type of response. Only if the unions fight back - hard - will the employers be forced to think twice.

Both the government and the TUC have been peddling the need for greater flexibility, and concession bargaining. This devolution is the result.

Greater productivity, and antisocial hours mean greater use of machinery - and speed up factory closures.

We cannot wait. Inactivity only allows the media to talk workers in to believing they have no choice.

End Concession bargaining! Fight to defend jobs! Occupying Longbridge now! Nationalise Rover and Ford

One in six jobs in the UK are at risk - nationalise BMW.
Power of a service like Thatcher couldn't kill

WHILE spenders on the left are right to be suspicious, there is no doubt that an extra £2 billion in the coming financial year is a major change of policy for this government — and as such a victory for campaigned and public anger.

Indeed after years in which sloppy rhetoric from ill-informed leftists has increasingly discredited the NHS as having already been "privatised" or already "col- lapse", Gordon Brown's announcement is a testimony to its resilience — and the political strength of a tax-funded service, free at point of use.

The service which survived even Margaret Thatcher's near-victorious claim in 1988 at her peak of power, but decided against any substantial privatization, and failed to generate sufficient support for pri- vate medical insurance — now appears to have resuscitated the most recent of New Labour's "modernisers".

Mr and Mrs Brown have felt forced to endorse the decidedly "old Labour" model of the NHS.

Blair's responses to William Hague inter- estingly dropped his usual polite use of the term "NHS" and instead referred to NHS and NHS care, thereby recognising that, yes, the health service needs more money, it needs to be reformed and change. We, the party that cre- ated the NHS, have now learned that we need to work with people in the health service like we used to.

By finding the extra cash to pump into its revival, Gordon Brown has also released those on the right who claimed it could only be funded through massive increases in income tax.

Ministers were clearly becoming increas- ingly isolated in their rhetoric demanding that the NHS had been given sufficient resources and so was "fuller and longer". The Frost programme in January Blair himself was the first to go "off message". In 1997 the Government effectively under-funded and declared a commitment of £2 billion a year spending towards the European average.

**£2 billion extra for NHS**

**Just what the doctors ordered?**

AFTER two years of frustration among health workers and continued cost cutting in vain for the "extra" £2 billion promised in 1998 by Gordon Brown, this time the new money is real. But there are questions over how it will be used and many questions still to be answered on how it will be spent, report JOHN LISTER.

Mr Brown has ripped up his dis- credited and complacent comprehensive spending review, with its plans to squeeze NHS spending for another year, and brought in a series of above-inflation increases in spending that will clearly raise the share of national wealth allocated to health care to almost 6.6% now to 7.0% in 2003/4.

New Labour's credibility among front-line NHS staff had plummeted as it became clear that the "£3.5 billion" increase — as coming as it did after two years of Tory cash limits upheld by Brown — was a deliberately mis- leading statistical concoction. They knew it bore no relation to the actual provision of cash resources for health care.

Over the five year period, spending was set to replicate the levels of increase achieved under the Tories.

Health workers have also had to endure a winter crisis in which neither the relatively mild weather nor the largely routine level of flu and viruses were suf- ficient to explain away the dire shortage of beds to treat emer- gency medical admissions.

The right wing press had a field day. The Daily Mail, the Times and Telegraph predictably used the opportunity to press their case for increased reliance of pri- vate medical insurance — a call taken up by the hapless William Hague even as his party's health spokesman admitted what poor value private cover represents.

More worryingly for Blair's team, the grimmest experience of a drabbing at the hands of the press has served to focus their attention on the dangers of allowing any major funding again next winter, in what they hope would be the run-up to the next general election of the nation.

Despite Blair's efforts to refo- cus attention onto other issues, at least "education, education, education", the NHS has remained voiceless and unimportant — even in the com- ing elections for London Mayor. Something had to be done.

Clearly £2 billion, on top of the increase already pencilled in for health services from April 1 to be followed by around £2 billion above inflation for another three years, is a very sub- stantial something. Few campaigner had asked for as much, and nobody — not even the IMA — had asked for more.

Indeed "Revised Plan" drawn up in 1998 by London Health Emergency called for NHS annual spending to rise by half of one percent of GDP — £4 billion — of which £2 billion was needed for the development of a new framework for local health care services. Gordon Brown seems set to exceed.

The key issue now is how the money is to be spent: the LHE Rescue Plan named key areas where investment should be tar- geted for maximum effect.

It urged the opening of an extra 5,000 beds across the coun- try in a sustained effort to treat additional patients and eliminate the waiting list over a 3-year period — at a cost of £500m a year.

It called for an extra £500m a year to be spent on mental health services, along with £500m in capital over 2-3 years to set up new units of 24-hour nursing accommodation for people with long-term severe mental illness.

It urged the NHS to resume regular training of junior doctors, in an effort to ensure that the current shortage of doctors is made up.

At the same time, it urged the government to guarantee funding of a 90% pay rise for nurses over the next three years.

The plan also recommended that the government should put GPs and primary care "in the driving seat" of the "new NHS".

Now, according to Blair's state- usual 'telling it like it is' Health Secretary Alan Milburn — the answer must answer "five challenges":

1. The "partnership challenge", requiring all parts of the health system— hospitals, primary care groups, social services and com- munity health services — to work together to provide the right level of care for the elderly.

2. The "partnership challenge", requiring all the information, incentives and inspection, all trusts and primary care groups come up to the stand- ard.

3. A "challenge for the professions" to strip out what Blair calls "unnecessary demarcations", and introduce "more flex- ible training and working practices".

4. The "patient care challenge" and primary care groups to ensure that no one has to stand in queues for an operation that they need.

5. A "challenge on preven- tion", to "persuade more people to play their part in achieving better health by adopting a better lifestyle".

They have delegated to one new quango already established, the Commission for Health Improvement, as "an Ombuds for the NHS".

They learned that Old-style "hit squads" will crack down on "failing hospitals". But as with schools, the varia- tions in performance between different areas still reflect varying catchments, social pressures and local conditions.

At national level, too, there will be a new group of task forces, to look at gaps in care, and particularly in rural areas. And Blair himself will take charge: a "new Cabinet commit- tee chaired by me will be estab- lished".

Still Blair's insistence of hocus-pocus of new money is worrying:

A key goal for the new funding is to make the NHS "work harder and more flexibly", bearing the brunt of every cash to be stinted on an inexhaustible and unimagined future.

They now have good reason to fear that even as new money is injected, they will once again be the fall guys for a government "modernisation" drive whose main objective seems to be to hang tough in the eyes of the public and the press.

The "partnership proposal" sig- nificantly leaves out the views and interests of health workers and health unions.

Nurses have worked for service users get a look in, as the growing army of quango-mongers at force to force- ish the NHS. It has been referred even more rapidly into reforms which are only vaguely understood, and which significantly tip the balance of power towards the least accountable of all NHS profes- sionals — GPs.

The socialists' answer to Labour's new line on the NHS should be a grounded welcome for the new funding — with the pressure to ensure that it is not cashed out from front line care and not transformed into yet another demoralising set of tar- get-setting and under-funded workforce.
Scottish Socialist Party Conference 2000
At last: a socialist answer to council tax!

Gordon Morgan

A small meeting room in the Scottish Parliament was packed with observers and reporters. The Scottish Socialist Party Conference was about to begin, and everyone was waiting with anticipation for the socialist answer to council tax.

The conference began with a keynote speech from the party leader, who outlined the party's policy on council tax. The SSP proposed to replace council tax with a graduated tax on incomes, with no payment on incomes below £10,000 and 12.5% on incomes over £50,000.

This would replace Council Tax and is essentially a graduated top up income tax, with no payment on incomes below £10,000 and 12.5% on incomes over £50,000. This has had significant coverage by the media and will be the subject of a Bill to be introduced by Tommy Sheridan in the Scottish Parliament.

Legal advice is that such a Bill will be deemed within the powers of the Parliament, which will surprise many in the SNP and Labour.

Most issues were agreed without dissent, but some controversial issues such as drugs and animal rights were discussed at length. On Europe, a holding position was adopted on our attitude to a single currency referendum, but the SSP is very likely to oppose it.

On Ireland there was some controversy, but the adopted position “For a Socialist Ireland” criticises the Good Friday Agreement and calls for the repeal of the PTA, release of all political prisoners, and immediate demilitarisation of the British army.

On international issues, a resolution to defend Cuba against US attacks, and opposition to the Iraq War, was adopted. The party’s love of Cuba was emphasised, and the SSP called for solidarity with the Cuban regime’s attitude to pay rights and free Trade Unions were made.

The SSP agreed to support international forums such as Sao Paulo and around the Zapatistas, to work internationally to oppose the WTO, to forge links with other organisations using the Internet, and to support and where practical participate in international initiatives against capitalist globalisation.

The conference was addressed by delegates from socialist organisations in Denmark, France, Ireland, Australia, and Portugal. Most controversy was at the end of the conference, with a move to a delegate-based conference. The executive sought to have 4000 members by next year and argued that democracy required a 1 in 5 delegate conference. As there were only 150 out of 2000 at this conference, their argument was weakened, and the opposition motion to continue with all member conferences was passed.

These debates showed that there is no controlling current within the SSP, as most platforms split on these issues.

Overall, the conference highlighted the strengths of the SSP: for over half the members this was their first conference, discussions were lively, and policies reflected a broader base.

There was great innovation, and a focus towards building the movement. The weaknesses of the apparatus were also reflected, hence initiatives to build branches and establish organisers and party spokespersons at local and national level.

In many ways the SSP is a party with too few chiefs.

Ayr sees Labour’s support collapse

Campbell Macgregor

Glasgow Kelvin
SSP

The first ever by-election for the new Scottish Parliament on March 16 saw Labour pushed into third place, as voters stayed at home in droves.

The episode is a reminder of the Blairite nightmare scenario in which a limp Tony opposition wins no extra votes, but eats into New Labour’s majority. In the core vote collapses, Ayr is a gentrified seaside town with many retired people, but some working class trades. The Tories held it for a century until Labour won it in 1997; and in 1999 Scottish election Labour only beat the Tories by 25 votes.

This time the Tories won the by-election, but there was hardly a famous victory: their vote was down on 1999 and even their share of the vote only increased by 1.3%.

Considering that they were always the favourites, they fought a rather low-key campaign, as if they knew themselves that they could not get out their traditional voters but their chances of winning depended on the what happened to the non-Tory vote, which was outside their control.

They won because the Labour vote collapsed. Some of it shifted to the SNP but most of it stayed at home.

Labour looked weak and demoralised, even making allowances for the fact that they were going to be a difficult seat to defend, and they seemed to have thrown in the towel a few weeks before the poll. The candidate was the council leader responsible for flogging the local pensioners’ centre to make way for a shopping mall, and exuding all the charisma of a dead fish.

The SSP had the most dynamic campaign of the major parties, but were lacking in serious political content; they vacillated on where they stood on Section 26, and for the last 2 weeks concentrated on portraying themselves as the party most likely to beat the Tories.

They came second, with 1,945 votes more than last time, but it is not clear that they are heading for a dramatic breakthrough.

The Scottish Socialist Party was not under any illusions that this was going to be an easy seat to fight, but it did already have a branch in Ayr which worked very hard, and dozens of activists descended on the town from Glasgow and further afield.

When I canvassed for the SSP in a better-off working class area I realised that the SNP was getting significant support, but I was surprised at the anti-partisanship to all parties from many people. I had never known this before.

The SSP candidate was James Stewart, a popular shop steward in the local bakery. It was the only party to hold any public meetings, campaigning around the closure of facilities for senior citizens by Labour-controlled South Ayrshire Council, the privatisation of air traffic control at Prestwick which is within the constituency, and support for a strike by drivers at the Ayr garage of Stagecoach.

It was a respectable 1,345 votes (4.2%) beating the Liberal Democrats for 4th place, and recruited over 40 new members in the constituency.

At the 1999 European election, Labour effectively de-selected Alex Smith, Euro-MP for Scotland South, by putting him bottom of its list of candidates. He had been the running for the Labour nomination at this by-election, but was excluded from the shortlist by Labour’s Scottish executive.

He went on to speak on SSP election platforms, as did Henry McCollin, former Labour Euro-MP for Scotland North-East who lives in Ayr.

For the past few months there has been a very nasty campaign in Scotland to retain Section 26, financed by Brian Souter, the millionaire owner of the Stagecoach bus company who has previously made huge donations to the SNP and backed by the normally Labour-supporting Daily Record (Scotland’s most popular tabloid).

However, most observers felt that this did not have a major impact on the by-election result: while there remains a strong streak of homophobia in Scottish society, most people are not swept away by this campaign of hysteria which obviously depends on one individual with a large bankroll.

Labour’s attempts to blame this factor for their humiliating defeat are not only unnecessary but divorced from the hard lessons they have yet to learn about the demobilisation of their electoral base.
How far does the US control the world's economy?


The Global Gamble sets out that framework in its first half, and uses it to analyse the global strategy of the United States government under the Reagan, Bush and Clinton presidencies. The second half of the book repurposes a number of powerful ideas that reinforce and apply the approach developed earlier. The emphasis here is predominantly on Eastern Europe, although Peter Gowan is also a critic of the analysis provided for the Gulf War and of modern Iraq by Western liberals.

Gowan's account is wide-ranging and offers a great deal of empirical evidence. However, the core of his argument is quite simple and very powerful. It is that the transatlantic political and economic driving force behind a phenomenon termed 'globalisation' over the last twenty-five years has been a single-minded attempt by the United States to regain and extend its global hegemony.

This hegemony was dramatically threatened by the events leading up to the break-up of the Soviet Union and the breakdown of the 1944 Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates between 1971 and 1973.

Faced with challenges at this point from both the European Community, especially West Germany, and from Japan and later from South East Asia, the United States has reasserted itself by developing a distinctive international financial regime, termed by Gowan the 'Dollar-Wall Street-Washington System' (DWSR).

This book provides the basis for a reassessment of United States economic power, based crucially on understanding the opportunities provided by floating exchange rates to push down the value of the dollar and on opening up global financial markets in order to provide flows of money to finance the country's enormous government budget deficit and balance of payments deficit.

The most detailed description of this process deals with the sophisticated and aggressive international economic strategy developed by the Clinton administration, and in particular with the response of the United States to the Asian economic crisis of 1997, focusing on South Korea.

Gowan's work joins a number of recent accounts written from the left which have reasserted the importance of inter-state competition as fundamental to explaining contemporary globalization. Noteworthy here are Robert Brenner's analysis published in 1983 and 1989, and last year (Brenner 1998). This sees the long period of global economic stagnation as resulting primarily from such competition.

In this book, Paul Wade and Frank Veneroso have highlighted the role of what they refer to as 'the US Treasury IMF Complex' in exacerbating the economic crisis in Asia following a crisis.

His specific knowledge of Eastern Europe permits him to show in great detail how the general strategies and conflicts he identifies have played themselves out in a particular case. Last but not least, the book is written with real passion and this in turn makes it gripping for the reader.

There are however a number of crucial points relating to Gowan's argument which require further investigation. In particular, two closely linked questions appear especially important. They concern the degree of the control that the United States has been successful in establishing hegemony, the extent to which it has been doing so has been consciously planned and the relation of inter-state competition to conflicts, particular that between capital and state to look at these in turn.

A key to the question of analysing global inter-capitalist competition has been the extent to which the 'Dollar-Wall Street-Washington Regime' (DWSR) has actually succeeded in re-establishing US economic power. Gowan's introduction of the concept tends to stress the control over the world economy which the United States has achieved.

"Since the 1970s, the arrangements made in 1944 by the Bretton Woods administration have developed into a patterned international regime which has constantly reproduced itself, but had very far-reaching effects on transnational capital, political and social life and which has been distinctive for use by successive American administrations as an enormously powerful instrument of their economic and political strategy (p.5)."

Further, when discussing the deregulation of international financial markets in the 1970s, Gowan writes: "We shall below show how these processes actually worked to strengthen the political power and economic policy freedom of the US (p.33)."

Yet later in the analysis Gowan concludes that the continuing threats faced by the US derive from the temporary successes of the DWSR, especially the financial crisis in South Korea, as "the temporary financial crisis challenge posed by the development of the euro and the "new productive centre threat" posed by possible integration between the European Community and the USA (p.73-6)."

The book shows vividly how Japanese attempts to take the lead in dealing with the Thai economic crisis through an Asian Monetary Fund were held off by the USA and the European Union and details the aggressive attempts by the United States to use the crisis in South Korea to reverse the Korean economy.

But, as Gowan points out, these attempts were to a considerable degree unsuccessful. Paced with a dramatic fall in the value of the Indonesian rupiah and the threat of a default by Indonesia on its private sector debt, the US Treasury and the IMF were forced to agree to make substantial funds to South Korea without the domestic policy changes which they wanted: "The United States'cliff descent was, in fact, a stunning deluge" (p.113).

It is of course true, as Gowan says, that US companies have been able to buy up South Korean companies cheaply as a result of the crisis, but so have Japanese companies, thereby intensifying possible future rivalries between the two. The DWSR has also, according to Gowan, had detrimental effects on the domestic United States economy: "the DWSR had offered a way out from the prolonged recession, raising productivity levels and reorganising economic relations between savings and productive investment in the US economy" (p.138).

As a result "by 1996, the US economy was inflated by very large and socially all-pervasive asset price rises... the distortions: the stock exchange, despite the falls in 1998, remains the central inflated bubble" (p.119). This bubble is fuelled by an unprecedented expansion of personal and household debt, so that "the entire US economy is now locked into the bubble" (p.119).

It is clear then, that if the DWSR has worked to strengthen the US economy, it is a very particular kind of hegemony, which remains immensely valuable, at least in terms of its economic basis.

More fundamentally, it is not entirely clear just how the DWSR works to entrench this hegemony. The DWSR appears to have three main components, according to Gowan: floating exchange rates, an international role for the dollar and deregulated international financial markets. The second of these already existed under the preceding Bretton Woods system.

Gowan lays particular stress on "dollar seigniorage" (pp.23-5), the ability of the US to evade any constraint on the amount it can import, the result of the acceptability of the dollar as international currency. Yet this held equally for the Bretton Woods system, with the added problem for America's trading partners that, with fixed exchange rates, any attempt to exploit seigniorage to finance an import boom will either drive the value of the dollar down by increasing its supply, or will require a corresponding increase in foreign lending to the USA so that the newly created dollars. A constantly depreciating currency or a rising long-term interest rate, both surely express the US economic weakness rather than strength.

It is here that the other two elements of the DWSR come into play. While for Brenner it is the ability of the US to push down the value of the dollar, in order to compete with Germany and Japan, which is crucial for explaining the effect of floating exchange rates is increased competition.

It is this volatility which has led to the massive growth of the international financial markets and of Wall Street, particularly in the area of derivatives.

Coupled with internationals, and the growth of financialisation, such volatility has had considerable problem with financial crises across the globe which in turn have further entrenchment of US dominance as capital flows back to America.

"One of the paradoxes of the DWSR is that such financial crises in the US work to break the regime: they actually strengthen it. For example, when the Russian crisis, in the bubbles, funds tend to flee from private wealth-holders in the state concerned to Wall Street. They also entrench US political dominance by enhancing the role of the IMF in reshaping social relations in the countries concerned. This argument has considerable force. Yet exchange rate volatility has also brought considerable problems for the USA. The long-term downward trend in the dollar relative to the yen and the mark has, after all, reduced the wealth of the US people and weakened American economic rivals, though it has also made American exports more competitive.

The sharp rise in the dollar, however, in the early 1980's, based in part on high US interest rates, did, as Gowan points out, fundamentally increase the dependence of the Latin American economies on the US, as the US could demand some debt. However, it also had a dramatic effect on US domestic industrial competitiveness, leading to the opening up of a balance of payments deficit which persisted for this day.

There is some uncertainty in Gowan's account as to the extent to which these developments which he outlines have been driven by the USA. There is no doubt, as...
he shows very well, that the USA has developed, especially under Clinton, a very clear strategy based on economic competition against Japan, East and South East Asia.

However, he goes on to imply a much stronger case – that the USA consciously acted to provoke the Asian crisis of 1997, both by driving up the value of the dollar against the yen from 1995 onwards, and by structuring the Asian financial system as an instrument of economic statecraft against the East and SouthEast Asian economies. What is certain is that the dollar-yen exchange rate is in the policy goals of US Treasury and Federal Reserve. Summers [the US Secretary of the Treasury [now Treasury Secretary]] was deliberately organising a strong dollar against the yen and was fully committed to it (p.93).

Gowan argues that this could hardly have been because the US wanted to encourage Japanese exports, which is also a reason the yen has risen recently.

Consequently, "we are thus left with a dollar-yen exchange rate that is much US control as Gowan suggests.

Secondly, it is clear from Gowan's economy, clamping and the consequent risk of the repatriation of capital.

Furthermore, the impact of the high dollar was that it might have been the companies located at home in Asia, while Gowan himself points out the higher dollar exchange rate (p.115).

None of this means that it is impossible to say that the USA-developed strategy is the problem against the Asian economies. However, while Gowan does not claim that it is proven that such a strategy was followed, he clearly implies that it was, as yet, no conclusive evidence that the Clinton administration acted strategically. He goes on to point out, however, that the dollar price rise, pressure to dissociate themselves from the capital account, inflows of hot money and financial warfare by the US hedge funds to bring countries in East and South-East Asia to their knees.

This raises the third general question about Gowan's analysis, that of its relation to social conflicts other than international competition. This can be posed more specifically in terms of the links between Gowan's work and other Marxist analyses of international economic crisis.

One of the attractive features of Gowan's book is its very clear foundation given to his account by his deconstruction of orthodox accounts of financial markets and his demystification of his Marxist understanding of the role of finance within capitalism (chap. 7).

Yet there is a possible tension here in that, until the final sections of the first half of his book, which deals with alternatives, Gowan presents no explicit analysis of the productive sector to parallel his study of financial factors.

This has a number of consequences for the shape of his argument.

Firstly, there is a tendency to downplay the contradictions and problems in those economies subject to competitive pressure from the US, particularly the Asian economies, with the implication that problems that result from international factors rather than from internal contradictions.

Gowan makes the point valid that China, Vietnam, India and Taiwan were protected from the financial crisis which struck elsewhere in Asia through retaining a structure of capital controls. He also argues correctly that Anglo-American commentators and politicians in both the US and Japan have been complicit in undermining the country's sovereignty and its right to control its own resources and economic development.

Another attractive feature about Gowan's book is his willingness to suggest concrete policy measures to deal with the international instability which he diagnoses. His prescriptions (pages 131-4) revolve around two pivots – taming the power of financial markets and re-organising the relationship between states and regions, particularly Eastern and Western Europe. At this point Gowan rightly recognises the interdependence of financial and productive relations and that the financial sector will not be brought under control without a strategy for economic growth. This strategy, in his view, is to be centred on the provision of massive financial resources for Eastern European development, which will in turn allow for a virtuous cycle of growth in Western Europe.

This vision is compelling and inspiring. However, it does not analyse the extent to which economic stagnation in Western Europe is caused not simply by a lack of demand but by a determined strategy on the part of European capital to break the relative social and economic power of labour. I would argue that this gap in Gowan's account is close linked to his central stress on inter-state competition at the expense of other social conflicts.

For Gowan, attempts to break up the European social model result primarily from an American initiative, backed by Britain, to impose an Anglo-Saxon system of capitalism on the continent. The interests of European capitalists are recognised but used in this process.

Yet it seems to be argued that the line of causation runs the other way. It is the project of European capital to reverse the gains achieved by labour which has led both to slow growth and the ascendancy of finance rather than the power of finance imposing a social strategy on Europe.

References


The short edition is edited version of a review which was initially published in Labour Focus on Eastern Europe.
Pakistan military steps up repression

Terry Conway

General Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan has been panned in the Western media for his "military ruler" status. Despite missing the 1998 elections, his membership of the Eurozone.

From point of view of manufacturing employers, whilst Britain remains part of the EU, there is no future for manufacturing industry outside the Eurozone where they would be protected from foreign competition. This situation was once the EU.

The current strength of the Eurozone is an echo of the EU's past. And the trend is expected to continue, with the EU's major members applying to join (having got their bilateral house in order, after being initially refused for not meeting the criteria). Denmark, too, is moving towards a referendum on the EU.

British manufacturing industry expected that since the UK would be part of the Eurozone as soon as politically possible, they would go ahead with a referendum soon after the next election. It was just a case of when, not if.

The General Assembly of the United Nations Resolution on de-industrialisation of the Third World is a contribution to the destruction of the drive for high technology and further de- industrialisation.

The agreement, signed on the 20th of a weeklong meeting in the gas, electric- tricity and transport sectors across Europe. This was initiated by the EU and supported by the UK government.

The main problem for labour is the "liberalisation" of the Japanese, German and American market, which has led to increased reactionary opposition to the Eurozone. While the government fully supports this, it is now complete with labour whether it could win an early referendum to take Britain into the Eurozone.

Manufacturing companies, particularly cars and car component manufacturers, under further pressure from the strong pound, are not prepared to wait. They are retooling production inside the Eurozone.

The government therefore has to retain their strategic objectives - even if this was created by their own reactionary and business policies. However positively new Labour presents the outcome of the December election, they will need to do more if they are to win the referendum to enter the Eurozone.

The workers have consistently raised in Socialist Outlook and in the Eurozone March campaigns are being vindicated the danger of the anti-liberalisation campaign.

Tony Benn noted, although Simon and Paul’s jobs are not safe even with carrying out the actual bombings, the police have tậped the propaganda of the new and the working people of Europe.

Roland Rance

The campaign for the release of Samar and Jawad has gained a significant success with the decision to end the case for the release of S. Alim and Jawad Bousheh were jailed for two years five years ago for supposed involvement in the bombing of the Israeli embassy - a complete fabrication.

This welcome decision to reduce their status followed an appeal to the Prime Minister on February 17 of a petition signed by 47,000 people from Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon - the largest representation from overseas on any issue for Israel.

Later that day, a packed meeting at the House of Commons heard a moving tape from Jawad, describing his struggle even to gain access to the evidence against him,

Tony Benn noted, although Simon and Jawad are not safe even with carrying out the actual bombings, the police have tậped the propaganda of the new and the working people of Europe.

Meanwhile, Samar and Jawad remain in prison, with deportation orders hanging over them. Although they were granted the right to appeal last May, they are still waiting for the courts to set a date for the hearing.

The trial, former M15 agent David Shayler revealed that raids were executed before the 1994 bombings of the Israeli Embassy and Tourist Hotel.

This undermines the evidence of the head of the Anti-Terrorism Branch that the police were operating in "intelligence vacuum". Shayler later told Paul Foot that a senior M16 officer had written a memo arguing that Israel had itself bombed the Embassy, in order to put pressure on Britain to allow Israel more responsibility for security.

It was not revealed to the defence, nor to the judge, in the original trial. It had been kept in the courts to set a date for the hearing.

More information from Simon and Jawad’s case, as well as the harassment of British intelligence involvement in a plot to murder Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi.

The continued campaign continues both for disclosure of all evidence and for the creation of a Public Interest Immunity certificate, and for an independent investigation into David Shayler’s claims.

Samar and Jawad remain in prison, with deportation orders hanging over them. Although they were granted the right to appeal last May, they are still waiting for the courts to set a date for the hearing.

It is an outrage that the EC is not prepared to participate in the campaign for their release.

The Office of the PPL has also refused to respond to letters from the Labour Party members.

It is clear that solidarity is desperately needed. Send messages of protest.

- Chief Executive General Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan, c/o the Director General of the Pakistan Press.

- Federal Interior Minister Mr. Mian ud-Din Haider, Fax number 92 51 2022642

- Local Government of Punjab, Lt. Gen. (R) Muhammad Sattar, Fax number 92 42 9200077

- Please send a copy of your message to the Office of the PPL, Email: lips@ep.org.uk or To: PO Box 78, London NW4 2UW.
The Manics: the entrystas of pop music

"We just want to mix politics and sex and look brilliant outage." Clad in leopardskin, eyepatch, white dreads and women's trousers, in 1991 the Manics burst onto a bemused British music scene. They were a shock apart instantly. After all, this was the era of Baggy and the lachrymose sound of the Manchester scene. The difference wasn't just in the cheers but rather that since they arrived, the Manics acquired a slight badge in the tradition of punk heroes. The Clash, and spread trademark slogans of political rebellion, boredom, alienation and deadpan.

And the Manics were Welsh. Welsh in every way. Their words, their Welsh and 'cool' were often seen as mutually exclusive and the notion of a Welsh rock and roll band was regarded as laughable and bizarre. They were mocked and bellowed with slogans ridiculing them for being Welsh - headlines like 'Meet the staff Taffs', 'Meek Leek Mantleface'. The boys are back in town and it's 'Spiral Taal'. The NME even reported that a record shop in Edinburgh refused to stock their single because "they're crap, they're Welsh and they wear eyeliner."

Stitches

In the now infamous '4 Real' incident Richard sliced his arm with a razor blade in response to a journalist who questioned the band's integrity. The wound required seventeen stitches and Richard's lumenous expression as he holds his bleeding arm out for inspection has become an iconographic image of 20th century rock and roll. A recent NME poll placed it at no 1 of the 100 greatest events of rock. It was a turning point; however, that Richard Edwards, the leader and voice of the band, was suffering mental health problems - including depression, an eating disorder, bouts of binge drinking and further self-destructive acts.

During the making of their third album 'The Holy Bible', the band's manager died of cancer and the band experienced Richey's ongoing depression. For his first time he took complete control of the lyrics and artwork of a Manics album.

Aspall

The result has been described as one of the most despairing albums in rock music, dealing with issues such as the Holocaust, prostitution, and anomia. Despite the production of the album Richey was seen as Richey's ongoing depression. For his first time he took complete control of the lyrics and artwork of a Manics album.

Despair

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Abstentions grow as Spain lurches right

Jim Padmore

The Spanish General Election, in early March, resulted in the biggest electoral victory for the right since the death of Franco. Since 1996, Amas's Partido Popular (PP) party has sustained a majority government only with the support of the Catalan nationalist IU. Now, the PP has a large parliamentary majority (183 seats out of a total of 350), having increased their vote in all areas of Spain.

Key to this about-turn was that two months earlier a pact was signed between the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) and the United Left (IU), (see S0 32).

The idea of this was to form a government of the "plural left" as in France. The contents of this agreement have been widely condemned within the IU for, amongst other reasons, its commitment to the EU, to NATO, to the right to self determination and to its ability on the demand for the 35 hour week.

The IU leaders argued that the deal with PSOE was necessary for electoral reasons. Even from this point of view it has been a total failure. Its only result has been to alienate sectors of IU's base. In the 1996 elections the rate of abstention was 22.7%, this time it was 30.3% - an increase of almost three million people. In the Basque country, abstention increased from 29% four years ago to 36.8%. Therefore, the abstention rate was 45%. In addition there were a record number of split ballots, especially in the Basque country where more than 3% of those who voted spoil their papers. And it is clear that this increase in abstention is almost entirely amongst the people who, in 1996, voted for either PSOE or the IU. In 1996, the IU lost 240,000 to PSOE and it was more than twelve million, on March 22 they notched up only nine million.

Of those twelve million four years ago more than one in five (2.7%) abstained this time. It's clear that neither the leaders of the PSOE or the IU have offered their base any kind of solution to the problems we face. The results are there to be seen four years more of the PP in government.

There's no political space for two reformist parties in Spain. If the IU cannot show itself to be a political alternative to PSOE, its days are numbered.
London elections

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