Union leaders and charities condemn Jack Straw’s attacks on asylum seekers

GET TOUGH ON LABOUR’S RACIST LAWS!

At long last the government’s appalling treatment of asylum seekers is beginning to provoke serious criticisms. The voucher system demands that asylum seekers live on an income one third less than other claimants. Yet it is pretty well impossible to survive even on the ‘full’ amount in new Labour’s Britain.

Then there is the further iniquity that shops operating the voucher system don’t give change – a system with which Oxfam have rightly refused to co-operate. It is excellent that other charities are increasingly backing them.

The decision of Bill Morris, General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers’ Union, to speak out against the racist implications of ministerial policies and pronouncements comes not a moment too soon. Other trade unions, trade unionists, MPs and campaigners should add their weight to his calls.

In particular support should be forthcoming for the demand of the London Socialist Alliance that the TUC call a national demonstration to stop the scapegoating of asylum seekers.

Labour movement fought 2001 racist laws: it’s time to march again
Defend Sarah Friday stop bully-boy management!

Conway

The campaign against the summary dismissal of Health and Safety Representative Sarah Friday by her employer South West Trains (SWT) is about to move on to a new stage. Sarah was sacked on February 15 on trumped up charges – but remains being an effective trade unionist. 

As Waterloo RMT Branch Secretary Greg Tucker said: “There is an issue about a train being delayed. This is rubbish. They are picking on one individual because she is an effective Health and Safety representative.

“This dispute is about defending every member from management intimidation and harassment.

The management of South West Trains have attempted to muddy the water. Managing Director Graham Escolme in his letter with the Evening Standard on March 27 claimed he had no evidence that Sarah was sacked because she was sacked because she was doing her job.”

Defend expelled UNISON activists!

The growing climate of witch-hunt in the so-called "non-union" public sector union UNISON has reached a new peak with the blacklisting of two of its high-profile activists in London. 

Candy Udwin, branch secretary of UCU branch covering five central London hospitals, and Dave Connolly, branch chair of UNISON London Region is a London region UNISON branch chair, are both SWP members.

They have been expelled by a UNISON kangaroo court after at the end of last January, 15 UNISON officers during the fight against a Private Finance Initiative scheme.

While many on the left may criticise UNISON's practices, those of its activists employed in that struggle, the overriding factor for UNISON is that the employers for the right to take strike action, the UCLH branch won what is accepted as the best deal for staff so far.

The determination of UNISON's London region to blacken the reputation of anti-union witch-hunting and victimise unions and UNISON activists is a case study of corporate responsibility. The case of two London UNISON activists, both SWP members, who have been expelled by their union.

And that is the dilemma faced by the Labour Party. There is a conflict between its desire to win elections and the need to ensure that the union's elected representatives act in the interests of all the members of the union.

Another worrying factor is the lack of respect for the democratic process on the part of some members of the union. There have been cases where members have taken decisions without consulting the majority.

Oxford Socialist Alliance launched

Andy Kilminster

Collaboration between socialists in Oxford could be the first step towards a more united socialist movement. The Oxford Socialist Alliance was launched at a meeting on March 28. 

Many members were from the Socialist Workers Party, Independent Socialist Group and a number of independent activists including two former student papers. 

One of the speakers, Jim Vivian, said: "It's important to have this kind of collaboration. If we are to stand a chance of winning against the right, we must work together." 

Candy Udwin on the LSA campaign but after a prolonged court battle with the employers for the right to take strike action, the UCLH branch won what is accepted as the best deal for staff so far. The employers have been blacklisted by the union, but the activists have been allowed to stand as representatives in the next election.
London elections May 4

Keep up the pressure on Chameleon Ken

Despite the fact that recent opinion polls show a drop in Ken Livingstone's lead, there seems little doubt that he will be elected as Mayor of London on May 4. While some caution should be worked for and welcomed by all within the movement, the many valid criticisms that can justly be made of Livingstone's leadership would be well placed to work with whoever is elected, there can be no doubt that a Livingstone victory will be a key defeat for Blairism - the greatest New Labour has so far suffered.

If this is combined with a serious vote for the London Socialist Alliance, whose campaign has been a breath of fresh air in these elections, so much the better.

Despite Livingstone's suggestions that supporters should back either the new Labour candidates or the Greens for the Assembly, the LSA offers the only consistent challenge to new Labour's reactionary policies.

The preferred outcome would be of course be for the LSA to get at least one supporter elected to the Greater London Assembly - not an impossible target given the electoral system. But LSA supporters should be pleased to-long as it establishes itself as the clear fifth force in this election.

At the same time as organising to support Livingstone - a difficult task given his failure to give a lead, or even produce basic campaign material beyond the glossy posters - the left needs to begin to think beyond the election itself.

While we have consistently argued that this is only one of many issues on which New Labour is implementing rotten policies, we do not at all downplay the significance of tube privatisation itself.

Certainly we also recognise that this is a key basis for Livingstone's massive support amongst voters.

That is why we are particularly concerned that Livingstone has made noises that suggest he may not mount a full frontal challenge to the government on this matter if they do not back down quietly following his election. Such a strategy would result in Blair snatching victory from the jaws of defeat.

On the contrary, the only way the New Labour government is to establish control of the tube in public hands is to build a huge mass movement to defend it in its entirety against Livingstone's election. He should launch a mass demonstration in the autumn - which is now likely to be when the key decisions around tendering are actually made.

However while a demonstration called by Livingstone himself would be guaranteed mass support, the best way of making this happen is to begin to organise new trade unions for such a demonstration to be called. Such a campaign should be supported by all those who oppose tube privatisation - wherever position they are taking in the London Elections.

The “other” local elections

May 4 is not just decision day in London: a round of local elections will take place across the country, and all of the preliminary soundings suggest that Blair and New Labour are likely to suffer more setbacks.

The last time these council seats were contested was in 1996, as John Major’s unpopularly mounted, and record gains were notched up by the Labour Party. While Blair and co were quick to grab the credit, it was obvious even then that there was a large element of anti-Tory voting in the results, leaving the party controlling only a handful of councils at any level in England.

To maintain this high level of support was always going to be a tall order; but party campaigns in some areas have been waging that the situation could be drastically serious as core voters register high levels of demoralisation, and numbers of party activists have nosedived.

The Welsh Assembly elections gave a graphic account of how this could cost Labour control under conditions where voters see a credible alternative to vote for to express their opposition to Miliband's hand-picked stooges. “Best value schemes”. Throughout many parts of the country the air is resounded with the thuds of Miliband's inspired leopards being dumped in the bin as ever more activists vote with their feet and go to all out the election campaign.

Many councilors are finding that the price of acting as Blair's bag carriers is that they have to carry round their own posters and do their own canvassing as Party supporters fall away. But being cheered off with Tony does not necessarily lead to an electoral bonanza for the left: a sufficiently broad and credible platform needs to be constructed before this can develop.

In Scotland the left has been able to launch a successful alternative in the SSP. In Wales, chastened Labour votes have swung behind the left nationalist politics of Plaid Cymru. Now in London we have a first test of the potential for the London Socialist Alliance. But in much of England such developments are yet to get under way. A few areas will see protest candidates opposing cuts in hospitals or other public services, and these may well prove an attractive alternative as happened last year in Kidderminster, where over a dozen campaigners against hospital closure were elected to Wyre Forest Council.

Socialists should organise these campaigns, and determine whether they stand on a progressive platform in seeking to win over Labour voters. The decision on whether to support such candidates is a tactical question in each given set of circumstances. But where no acceptable left or campaigning alternative has been constructed, the fight must continue within the Labour movement. Socialist Outlook calls - as we have consistently done in previous elections — for a critical vote for Labour candidates in these areas, despite the inadequacies of their programme, and for a fight through the trade unions and the Labour Party for alternative policies around which a genuine challenge can be mounted to the politics of Blairism.
Time for teachers to stand and fight!

Gill Lee

New Labour's rallying call of education to the community must be a dam down teachers' anger rather than risk mobilising the Labour faithful in large numbers.

This strategy will lead to further worsening of the conditions and pay packets and increased polarisation between and within schools. It will also be the death of the survival of the union itself.

An alternative leadership needs to be found in the NUT. A leadership which will mobilise the membership in a fight against Performance Related Pay, selection, league tables and testing; and for a true community interest system of state education which can deliver an education service accountable to local communities and based on the individual's right to choose their working class.

A year ago members of the so-called "Broad Left" majority leadership were told NUT Conference they would fight performance related pay (PRP) "on the barricades if necessary.

Conference was unanimous in opposing PRP and delegate after delegate denounced any wage policy which would destroy the teamwork which schools rely upon.

They explained that PRP would strengthen the hands of management, who could use it to reward those whose faces fitted best and penalise regime of league tables of teachers and schools related to national testing by rewarding teachers who most concentrated on getting kids through narrow SAT.

PRP also threatens the very existence of the union through the introduction of individual pay.

The dangers posed by PRP remain today - but the Broad Left leadership is the union is refusing to act. A year after Conference voted to fight PRP, union members are still waiting for the strike action that will defeat PRP.

No doubt this year's conference will be told that the will doesn't exist among members for a fight to get the hands of those who demand action are "out of touch" with the majority of the membership.

But in fact the leadership have consistently presented a muddled and confused message to member.

For example, the so-called week of action was merely noted to NUT "in the broadest terms" and the unions responsible for demobilising any action were "not those of Blair.

Failure reluctantly to oppose PRP rests on the Broad Left's ambiguous position. Many of the Executive's motionalists to Conference criticise aspects of Labour policy, the Executive is more afraid of the membership than it is of the government on Labour rhetoric may be strong, but prospects for action are weak or non-existent.

Perhaps the Broad Left leadership feel that demobilisation is good for the Broad Left, (i.e. right wing), of the union - as shown by the recent National Executive Election results, in which the balance of candidates shifted from 23-19 for the right, to 26-16.

In London, where there has been activity, for example around the STOPP Campaign against PRP, candidates from the left wing opposition, the Socialist Party, have gained more than third of the votes cast.

But the Broad Left genuinely believe that Labour is so strong that only a policy of making concessions to Blair can be effective. So, the NUT leadership needs to learn the lessons that Blair's candidate, Bill Morris has launched a scathing attack on Labour's racist asylum policies. Labour is increasingly seen to have abandoned its traditional voters who are staying away from the polling booths in droves. The NUT should stand and fight, not hide and squirm.

Sniping from the Left

By Charlie van Gelderen

BRITAIN, according to the Tories and the gerry gang, has been reduced to a "bogus" refugees.

They are right about Britain but wrong about the benefits bestowed on them; successively governments, not least by the present Blair administration.

After Gordon Brown's recent budget, capital gains tax was slashed. In 1979 it stood at 45%, now it has been reduced to 30 per cent. Gordon Brown boasted that this is now "the lowest rate in the history of British corporate tax", the lowest of any major country in Europe, and the lowest rate of any major industrialised country anywhere, including Japan and the United States.

It is globalisation, of course, which is the impostor behind this. If the capitalists don't find the financial climate here congenial, they just pack up and take their capital elsewhere.

Black and white issue

We SHOULD NOT be shedding crocodile tears about what is happening in Zimbabwe. Of course the white farmers should not be internationally attacked, though one can hardly blame the attackers. They have waited long enough.

Land reform in Zimbabwe, with the support of the United States, has been on-going for three years. It is not a simple matter of compensation being paid to the white farmers. The government has received offers of compensation, but all have been rejected.

Mugabe's demand is that if compensation is to be paid to the white farmers this should come from Britain, is not that outrageous. How did the white farmers get into the hands of the whites in the first place?

How much were the original inhabitants of what is now Zimbabwe paid by the first white settlers? If any payment for land was made it was not to those that lived there, but to Cecil Rhodes and his lackeys. The Rhodesian African Company, established by charter from the British government and over the signature of Her Most Britanic Majesty, Queen Victoria, whose forces conquered the land with machetes, guns and cannon. And who broke the land and tilled the soil, who planted and tended the rich tobacco plantations? Certainly not the wealthy white farmers!

Like capitalists everywhere, the white farmers have accumulated wealth by exploiting their workers. White-owned estates are the biggest employers in Zimbabwe. They also pay the lowest wages. Mazvis learn more than the farm labourers whose toll pro- duces Zimbabwe's wealth. They are already feeling the full impact of the international sanctions.

As one of the workers said in an interview: "These white farmers only want to deal with blacks as workers ... if there were any trouble with the war veterans (on the farm where he was working) I don't think any of us would help him (the white farmer)."
Stem the tide
of anti-refugee
hysteria

Veronica Fagan

It is extremely positive that a head of
steam is building up against the
racist treatment of asylum seekers,
as Jack Straw continues to vie with
Ann Widdecombe as to who can be
most hostile to asylum seekers.
Bill Morris' decision to speak out in
condemnation of government policies
has laid the basis for a much broader
campaign than currently exists, espe-
cially amongst trade unions.
Barnes Jay's suggestion that Morris
had only spoken out under pressure
from TGWU union members who feared being
fined when asylum seekers were found
in their lobbies is completely
scurrilous.
The reality is that Morris has begun
to understand what anti Asylum
Bill campaigners have long pointed out -
there is a link between racism against
asylum seekers and racism against all
black people in Britain whatever their
immigration status.
Morris's statement follows a success-
ful packet of the Evening Standard
and Daily Mirror - two of the papers in
the forefront of the worst coverage in recent
weeks and months by anti racist
activists on April 13. But despite these
important steps for-
ward there is great deal more to be
done.
It is clear that both Labour and
the Tories are presenting an
anti-asylum face in the for-
buildings in the hope of
increasing their votes. In the
meantime these policies and atti-
dutes can only strengthen the far
right and increase the likelihood of
racist attacks.
The London Socialist Alliance
are right to demand that the TUC call
a demonstration against the bi-
partisan policy of racist scapegoating
and their

SEND YOUR PROTEST TO: Evening Standard
4Th New Bridge St
London E2
London E2
Visit http://morris100.org.uk for more
information.

Susan Moore

Ricky Reel, like Stephen
Lawrence, died following a
racist attack. As in the
Lawrence case, the attitude
of the police has com-
pounded the grief of Ricky's
family many times.
When Ricky, a young
Asian man, failed to return
home from a night out with
friends in late 1997, the
police were sure that the
missing was wrong - despite the
fact that the group had been
chased and taunted by
racists before Ricky became
separated from the others.
The family was used to organise searches
while the police ignored their
pleas for assistance.
When Ricky's body was eventually found in
the Thames, the police actually informed Ricky's
young sis-
ter of this fact before her
parents had returned to the
house - provoking her to
have a serious asthma
attack. Does the insensitive-
ness of these people know no
bounds?
The Met decided that he
must have fallen in the river
while unattended. They clung
on to a useless piece of sup-
poused evidence - ignoring the
fact that when a body has been in the water for
days, fastenings do come undone.
But they were above all
determined not to accept that Ricky was the victim of a rac-

The police complaints
report should be published
as a matter of urgency. A public inquiry into this
case should be

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Day of Action for Ricky Reel

Justice For Ricky Reel
Day Of Action
Saturday 13 May 2000, 12-3pm
Piccadilly Circus, London W1

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Text continues...
Belfast shipyard closure threat

During the past few months the mood of the workforce has turned from optimism to pessimism. For a while there persisted a belief that the company would somehow manage to tide through the looming order book crisis.

The yard has faced crises in the past, and always survived through each crisis with a reduced workforce. It has been rescued more than once by injections of government subsidy and orders. After losing out on the Cassard liner contract and the French company it was believed that a Ministry of Defence order would naturally follow.

However even though the government is due to put up several orders for navy vessels, these seem more likely to go to BAe in Glasgow. There is little sign so far that Blair’s government is preparing a comprehensive rescue package for Harland’s and a cloud of doom now hangs over the yard.

The workers at the shipyard seem unsure as to what action to take to save their jobs. Reports in the financial press talk of Harland’s being forced to win new orders from customers in the United States. Rumours of possible orders have led union officials to play down any talk of mass resistance to closure.

Instead union leaders have drawn up a strikelexible working-time package in the hope that this might assist the company management in winning new orders. Some workers still believe that management is artificially playing up the prospect of a closure merely to get away with implementing a cost-cutting plan for capitalisation of the workforce.

At a public meeting organised by the SWP in Belfast about 40 workers turned out to discuss what to do, but unfortunately only one official from Harland’s turned up and he was torn between taking up the streets and supporting the company’s efforts to win new orders at the cost of reduced conditions for the workforce.

One interesting fact to emerge from the meeting was that the docks area would be worth tens of millions of pounds sold to private developers.

Clyde struggle

The SWP called for the workers to follow the example set by Clydesiders of 1971 who organised a ‘work in’ to prevent the closing of the UCS workforce from 8,500 to 2,500. Others argued that at the time of the UCS work-in the Clydeside yard had 14 ships yet to be completed and that Harland’s is in a much more precarious position having no more ships to build: militancy might actually hasten the closure.

For the moment lobbying parliament and government seems to be the favoured plan of the union leadership though this could change the closer the closure date gets.

One disappointing feature of the industry so far has been the level of dishonesty in the public debate.

On the one hand some working class nationalists seem positively delighted with the prospect of closure, emphasising nothing else but the yard’s infamous sectarian past of Catholic exclusion. The West Belfast nationalist newspaper the Andersonstown News expressed a strong Thatcherite view that the yard should close. On the other hand we have the unions and the left currents acting as if the yard was now a happy workers’ island of cross community harmony, overlooking its residual sectarian roots as a bastion of working class loyalty.

The threatened closure of the yard has certainly not united the working class of Belfast in a mass campaign. Any future campaign to save the yard from closure will certainly not mechanically overcome the deeply entrenched sectarian divisions that exist over political questions.

However a concerted period of workers’ struggle could be a basis on which to build, combined with an honest discussion and appraisal of the sectarian roots of labour could at least as a much needed spur to the formation of a new consciousness of class solidarity.

Socialist Democracy supports the call for the saving of the yard. We demand an opening of the financial books of Harland’s, all relevant information to the economic status of the company must be made available to the work-force.

We are demanding a workers’ buy-out of the company financed by the state, with the future of the yard to be decided by an elected management.

We also insist on an equal right to work without prejudice for both Catholic and Protestant alike.

What is happening at Rover?

Before the initial reaction to the announcement it was to be sold off, there were two positive steps, external to Longbridge.

The first was a meeting of all Rover stewards at Gipsy, on March 21, which decided on a campaign to keep the group together, and at which national officer of the TGWU, Tony Woodley, spoke several times, calling for nationalisation.

The second was the magnificent 50,000 strong demonstration in Birmingham on April 13, which particularly showed local support.

But since then there has been no sign of the planned follow-up meeting in London, and all talk of nationalisation has been dropped by union leadership speakers.

Instead, having got nowhere with trying to persuade a global car producer to take over Longbridge, Tony Woodley has concentrated on backing a bid led by ex-Rover manager John Towers. It is even reported in some of the papers that the unions are part of the bid.

All Woodley’s efforts, and those of the Joint Negotiating Committee, have now gone in this direction. At the first full meeting of the European Works Council of BMW, on April 13, he called not for action to make BMW backtrack on the sale, or try and get RMT to reverse their position of support for the company, but to ask for more time for the Rover workers to develop.

It is reported that Woodley also met the company on his own to support the bid.

The proposal for workers to stand outside BMW dealers and persuade people to put off their purchases, was also seen as a mean to give the workers more time.

The problem is that none of the stewards knows what the bid is, and no do the workforce. Woodley has become a one-man-band promoting the Towers consortium. Why is this the bid to secure? Does it involve the closure of Cowley, for example? Is it right that a union official who does not even work for the firm is able to do this in secret? Are the workforce just f偶der to pay subs, with no voice in such an issue?

Most importantly, Longbridge there is total confusion. No action whatever has taken place. There have only been two shop stewards’ meetings, and no mass meetings.

All the initiatives are in the hands of the company. Every part of the workforce is laid off for three weeks. The real question is whether they will all return to work?

The first step was to divide the Rover workforce. That’s one reason why Solluhall was sold to Ford, while Cowley workers were told they were “safe” with the transfer of the mini from Longbridge. This left Swindon facing an underdetermined future under BMW, engineering staff also allotted all over the place, and Longbridge told to Alchemy.

Now the company is driving Longbridge. With Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) legislation, they are saying that about 300 workers on the mini will have the

Strange bedfellows delay action

Derek Robinson, a Communist Party member, was the convenor of Longbridge until 1977 when he was sacked for putting his name to a complaint against the company. He then joined the Communist Party of Great Britain (advanced), and has fought several elections on the platform of a children’s playgroup. He is now secretary of the Revolutionary Socialists.

After this we might have expected Robinson to feel vindicated by subsequent events, and to restate now his commitment to occupation in defence of the plant. Instead Robinson has added his voice to those calling for action to be obeyed, and reassuring Rover workers that the union bureaucrats will defend them:

“The union, with which I have had constant contact, has dealt with the situation as best they could. If there are any problems, then the union has done everything it can.”

“Strikes and sit-ins are not the issue right now, but such action is on the agenda and is a probability in the future.”
right to go with their jobs to Cowley and they have issued them with letters saying they are under BMW. But they have issued others with letters saying they come under Alchemy, and a further group letters saying that they are multi-branded. These latter must now argue over who is to be their employer. All of this means that they have varying chances of jobs, and varying amounts of redundancy money. This is classic divide and rule tactics, against which the unions have offered no alternative. The workers still don't know whether they are in a fight or not. Woodley has already asked BMW about redundancy terms. The company knows that this will weaken the possibility of getting a fight off the ground. If the workers don't move to occupy soon, it will be too late, the workforce will be too divided and the moment will have been lost. There should be an immediate mass meeting, and the choice of occupation put to the workforce. If action is taken, it would be a real alternative to the present pathetic begging by union leaders for scraps off the capitalist table. An occupied Longbridge could be the focus of resistance for the 100,000 workers in the Midlands and Essex who would be affected by the closure of Longbridge and the threatened closure of Ford's Dagenham plant.

Others could be asked to support them, and the mood for rationalisation put forward. This could also give hope to the shipyard workers and others facing massive potential job losses. If action is taken, these divisions will be sharpened and workers will be fighting each other.

In Cowley, where the shop floor is on a four week layoff, the workers have the impression that Woodley is worried about keeping the mini in Longbridge, and that the closure of Cowley would not worry him. In Solihull, workers have been lulled into a false sense of security by the continuing production, and even the continued employment of some workers.

The major lesson of Rover is that going to the employer cap in hand, as Woodley did in 1998, gives all kinds of shift and productivity concessions does not save jobs, and in fact only worsens conditions for the working class. Now we are going back to the same position, the spilling down of conditions. For the representing salvation for jobs and conditions, John Towers was the only person through the Rover Tomorrow document in 1993 – the first major systemic attack on conditions, in which he argued that we had to follow Japan to survive.

It was this document that contained the 'jobs for life' clause, also endorsed by BMW. Clearly, this clause has been a threat in exchange for conditions maintained.

Towers will doubtless be looking to gain further concessions, seeing how desperate Woodley is. The workers at Cowley will be asked to make sacrifices to get the mini. Meanwhile Ford will use the opportunity to move models between plants to make deals at the expense of Solihull workers.

This vision can only be prevented by a shaped and co-ordinated by Longbridge taking action.

This must be around the call for the nationalisation of Rover and Ford's mini to compete in mass car production, in which new working conditions are forced down, but to line up with a rationalised railway industry, in the development of a properly planned public transport system, that should be run by the workers themselves.

All negotiations and deals must be in the open. Unions must represent members, not join employers as part of this deal.

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Unions must represent members, not join employers as part of this deal.
Labour's weedy countryside
Bill panders to landowners.

Dave Bangs

T
he government's new National Parks, Access and Wildlife Bill takes a few percentage points off the ecological face it will introduce a limited right to roam and improve measures to protect the interests of "Special Scientific Interests" - some of our top wet sites covering about 6% of Britain. What fails is to address any of the key issues: the conservation of biodiversity and cultural landscapes. The government says, "It is not a matter of conservation and development, but ofdegrowth in the face of globalisation". It is not true that all the environmental benefits of developing our countryside can be provided by a small number of large-scale projects. This bill is a cynical attempt to reduce the rights of the public to enjoy and use our countryside. It is a clear example of how the government is trying to appease powerful landowners and farmers at the expense of the public interest.

If the appalling Terrorism Bill goes through, protesters who threaten to destroy, or in any way impede, GM crops, will be faced with long prison sentences

most importantly, the Bill excludes woodland, wetlands and areas of accessible land. Yet ovast areas of midland and eastern England woodland are the only remaining countryside forever surviving productive farming. Further, under the definition of the most popular landscape types. In West Sussex this means that increases in public access on the western Sussex Downs will be minimal. Similarly, access to common land and lakesides has been blocked by the massive lobbying of course and game fishing interests.

The gorgeous chalk rivers of Hampshire and Wiltshire and the Cherwell of Cheshire will remain barred to us. In South Downs more than 50% of the River Rother (of national landscape importance) and 20 km of the River Arun between Billingshurst and Shorwell (much designated as SSSI) remains inalienable to the public. Yet the Rother Rother is almost all within the area of the future South Downs National Park. In Wales the Ffleddau BNCC for Wales has come out against future increases in access. The approach they are taking is to map existing access areas under the Bill.

An increase in compulsory purchase powers for SSIS's subject to damage is long overdue, as are powers for English Nature to prevent birds, such as sparrowhawks, lapwings, skylarks, continue their crashing decline, which signals far greater threats to biodiversity. The EU Birds and Habitats Directives both require conservation measures for species and habitats in the wider countryside, and other countries such as the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, require the drawing up of "Action Plans" to save endangered species. No such measures are proposed in the present Bill.

W
hilst we repeatedly hear the painful stories of farmers going out of business, we are not told the stories of farm workers made redundant. Yet the decline of farm workers' jobs is even steeper than that of farm businesses. In East Sussex, the number of farm workers is now less than that of farmers themselves. And whilst repeated glossy magazine articles tell us of the plucky fight of farmers' wives to take on farm jobs created by sacked farm staff, we do not hear of the plight of farm workers' families forced into hardship by redundancy.

Ironically, though it is true that large numbers of farmers are going out of business - ceasing to trade - it is not true that large numbers of farm workers are becoming bankrupt. This is because most of the former are selling on large assets in land, whose value remains relatively buoyant.
London joins the European fightback

A few extracts from the platform speeches at the LSA's 1,200-strong April 13 rally.

Dave Nellist
"The decision by Ken Livingstone is an important turning point in British politics. It will have the effect of breaking the grip of all manner of working class people on the Labour Party.

"'Ken's likely victory on 4 May will destroy the Labour Party."

Jean Kus
"The Irish have been voting in a way that contradicts the will of the majority of the Irish people."

Alain Krivine
"We are confronted with a new xenophobic offensive.

Veronica Fagan
"The London Socialist Alliance is surpassing even the most optimistic predictions of its potential as it gears up for the final push in the run up to election day.

Conference on April 9, where speaker after speaker stressed the need to step up efforts to get our political ideas across.

Paul Foot
"Conference on April 9, where speaker after speaker stressed the need to step up efforts to get our political ideas across.

The LSAs local candidates Cecilia Proper and Womyn Bennet on the campaign trail.

London Socialist Alliance steps up campaign.
in the fight to change the system

TOmmy Sheridan, the first Scottish Socialist Party MSP has lent his support to the campaign for the London Socialist Alliance in the forthcoming elections. In this speech to a rally of LSA supporters in central London on April 13 he drew out the thinking that led from an alliance of left forces to a party linking a wide range of political views in a common struggle.

It gives me great pleasure to offer the fullest solidarity of the Scottish Socialist Party to the London Socialist Alliance in the forthcoming elections. We hope this will begin to set a trend that will bring the left and the working class together united around clear objectives. We support demands and a socialist programme that bring back on to the political agenda the need for the redistribution of the massive wealth and resources that exist in this country. We have a problem in relation to socialism in that perhaps we have a great number of socialist parties but not enough socialists. What we have to do try to do is find a way to maximise unity by coming together to work together, building up trust and mutual respect of each and everyone's backgrounds and trends, everyone's talents and energy and what they have to offer in terms of a new socialist movement.

In Scotland at the end of 1995 we came to the conclusion that if we didn't offer an electoral alternative to the Labour Party then we would lose a generation of young people who were in particular but also of other workers to nationalism - to the Scottish National Party. The SNP isn't a right wing force it's actually left of centre - it's actually much more radical than the Labour Party although that wouldn't be hard days three. I think if Bengt Khan were still alive he would be more left wing than Blair. We had situations developing where the SNP were picking up support from left leaning workers, from young people looking for an alternative to the old Tories, and the new Tories in the shape of Labour, and therefore we decided to try to bring groups together.

We came from groups like the Scottish Militant Communist Party of Scotland, radical trade unionists, trade unionists, people who were involved in their daily struggle against the social and economic system that was doing all this separately. What we tried to do was to tie all of those various ropes together and see if we could have a bigger and a stronger rope.

We tried to do this at the end of 95-96 through forming the Scottish Socialist Alliance, and we stuck it together until the early part of 98. We had our full ears - we came from different backgrounds - some of us were Trotskyists, some of us were Marxist others were Stalinists, others had a reformist Labour party background, others a green background: but at the end of the day we managed to find that there was more to that united than divided.

We found that if our energy was collectively organised we could be much more powerful together than in their separate component parts. So we built on that and stood in 1998 and in 1999 to offer an alternative to new Labour's Tory policies in 22 of the 72 seats in Scotland. We were relatively successful and picked up 4.5% in some seats and in Glasgow we got 11 per cent. So it went alright, but when we managed to achieve in 1999 of that campaign was a belief that we could organise together, that we could stay together.

Then of course after the election of Blair there was a huge disappointment, huge disillusionment from workers. Maybe they had been suspicious but hoped that the Labour Party was going to be different. Unfortunately that is what it appeared on the surface - that once they got into power they would drop all the right wing rhetoric and they would actually be different. Of course many of us already knew the free market road that they had embarked all ready knew that they would let down workers and workers would embrace the Tory agenda 100%.

We had built up a momentum, so that at the end of 98 we decided that there was actually enough trust, enough respect that we could turn that Alliance into a political party.

We formed the SSP in September 1998 - we brought together a number of those various strands and said: let's not have a political party that dictates that there is one way on the high way, let's have a political party that allows the organisation of trends of opinion. Let's allow platforms to organise, where people feel free to dissent, but let's make sure that we have a united programme that we can all get behind when it come to elections or supporting workers' struggles.

We were formed in September 98 and we were registered with the Electoral Commission in May 99. Like yourselves we were ignored - we were the fringe - we had no chance. Unfortunately for the SSP to the alliances, and some deperimentisation, but they remained the main force involved.

The most important alliance was the Scottish Socialist Alliance (SSA). This had developed a real strength and with the SSP in its core, SML never developed the same. The introduction of devolution and the parliamentary platform of the SNP certainly weakened us since it would transform our activists into SNP supporters. Most of the leaders of the SSA had stood in elections for decades but now - as a result of the SNP - there had become a serious split and small parties. Most of the leaders of the SSA were not satisfied with devolution - the line began to fracture in favour of electoral interventions. This itself has had an impact on the way the SSA campaigned.

When the London Socialist Alliance was launched for the European elections last year, the SSP became involved, but only a small part, the SSP couldn't adapt to the significant development. The London alliance started to switch away from the SSP and towards the left wing organisation.

The SSP and the SML stand at a real stake for the whole of the alliance remained unrelated, the Scottish Socialist Alliance was launched in the runup to the elections for the new London assembly.
those faint hearts in the media who managed to break a few hearts as far as new Labour was concerned. Across the whole of Scotland this new party managed to take 2% of the total Scottish vote. Some of you may say 2% is not very much and you would be right. But then the SNP was formed in 1936 and between 1936 and 1964 it never recorded more than 3% of the total Scottish vote.

It took it 30 years until 1966 where it actually got 2% of the vote when it had the breakthrough in the Hamilton South by-election - and to go on from there to where it is today, in May, with 10 and sometimes 30% of the vote.

Here was a political party that wasn't a year old, and it managed to secure 2% of the vote. We stood in first past the post seats as well - in my own seat of Glasgow Pollok we managed not to take 2% - we took 22% - we nearly won that seat. In Glasgow we won 8% of the vote - we won the sixth Glasgow list seat to get the first socialist elected to the Scottish Parliament.

We managed to show that such a political party with honesty and integrity, linked to a radical social programmatic for which it was bold enough to argue, could actually win.

A month later in June we had the European elections - many of you will by now know what happened - but the SSP went from 2% to 4% across Scotland.

Last year we had the Hamilton South by-election where we Rob Wightman was elected to the Scottish Parliament. It has grown rapidly to a membership of 3,500 in 53 branches throughout Scotland - a significant advance in power, from which it does not stem.

The SSP polled 10. We are told there is a four party system in Scotland at the moment. The SSP is in the fringes - but we came third in that seat, beat the Tories and Liberals.

Last month in Ayr - which has 100 years tradition of returning Tories apart from the exception of 1997 - it's one of those rare seats in Scotland - we stood and took 4.5% and beat the Liberals - we got twice their vote.

Tonight in Hamilton there's a council by-election, where I'm convinced predicting we'll be third or second and in two weeks time there's another in Edinburgh, where I hope we'll do again again well.

A new political force is being born, on the basis of Allianc, and now of an organised political party. Brothers and sisters, I want you to come from Scotland to offer prescriptions or tablets of wise advice to London or anywhere else, but I certainly hope that the road that we have travelled in a road that you should also travel.

Through working together, through building up mutual trust and respect, hopefully a new political party will be formed on the basis of that activity. One thing I am absolutely certain of is that we need an alternative for ordinary men and women to the right wing shenanigans of new Labour, of Blair and everything they represent.

In the little time I have it's difficult to give you a flavour of the political activity in Scotland. The SSP has not just been built through standing in elections - but on the basis of assisting workers in disputes, visits to factories, enlisting of council workers in the social work department in the action of post office workers or the private sector who have occupied factories. We have Stopped against the construction of new roads through communities, again against house sales.

In other words it's a party that has been constructed not just in elections - but in action as well. I would hope the Alliance in London builds up that party because the elections are not in any way a substitute for the class struggle, but a complement to the class struggle.

We have a political party in Scotland made up of people who are Marxists like ourselves but also people from different political backgrounds: but the common philosophy that runs through that party is the need to change the system, to tackle the terrible and obscene inequality of wealth and power that exists in our country. Brothers and sisters, I hope that each and every one of you will get involved in this campaign, involved in the construction, not just in London but everywhere in England and Wales, of a viable and credible alternative to new Labour - that has got to be the target.

The Office of National Statistics has just announced what we know anyway. The rich are officially getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. After three years of new Labour we now have the top 20% with a larger share and the bottom 20% with a smaller share of wealth. Brothers and sisters it's not about time for change? I would argue with every single one of you: for the sake of our pensioners, for the sake of our children, for the sake of our low paid workers, we need a socialist alternative that argues for decent wages, for a shorter working week, for increased public and social control of our industries.

The speech of Rory Branner says it very well - it should be compulsory viewing - he's the best politician on the TV. Two of his mates are in the pub and one says "My car got stolen the other night." "Oh, that's terrible." "It's even worse than that - the guy that stole it knocked the door last night and he offered to sell it back to me." "But that's theft" he says. "No, that's privatisation!"

Brothers and sisters it is not time that we took back what is rightfully ours - our telephones and our transport and our utilities? Then, when we get the moment we can carry on to take over the banks and insurance companies and the rest of industry - because we can run them a darned sight better than the spivs in the city.
A debate has been developing within the LSA, and beyond, as to how it should develop after the elections on May 6th. Workers Power, one of the components of the LSA, has published a contribution on this question in its paper which suggests that the LSA should be transformed into a revolutionary party in the short term. Anything else, it implies, would be a defeat.

This is an important debate, to which ALAN THORNETT replies.

Workers Power says it "will argue for the new party to be revolutionary – in programme and in practice; not a return to old Labour, a soulless talking shop, or a bunch of revolutionaries hiding behind a reformist facade."

They also claim that Socialist Outlook "just want an open-ended alliance of reformists, revolutionaries and grunts."

Nothing could be further from the truth, of course. We very much want a new mass revolutionary party to replace the LSA which is being resurrected from the dead.

But to want something is not enough to create it. And to pretend that a revolutionary party can spring fully formed from the LSA as the next stage of development (with or without some discussion) is left primitivism.

Such a development would need a much more radicalised political situation, and far higher levels of class struggle than we have at the present time – as well as a further development among the forces of the political left.

It is widely accepted within the LSA that, as new Labour alienates its traditional supporters, and moves ever further to the right, the construction of a political alternative to new Labour will become increasingly possible.

This view has been strengthened by the remarkable success that the LSA has achieved so far, the degree of unity already forged, and the positive experience of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP).

It is already clear that – provided the LSA does not receive a derisory vote in the elections (which seems unlikely, but the election is in unknown quantity) – there is a growing commitment to maintain the LSA after May 6.

The constituent organisations increasingly agree it should continue both as campaign- ing alliance and also to undertake future electoral interventions, either in by-elections like Tottonham or in next year’s general election.

One of the issues under debate is whether the ultimate objective should be a new party of the working class to the left of Labour. The Socialist Party as well Workers Power and the LSA have such a perspective.

The SWP, however, has traditionally presented itself as the more or less fully formed alternative, and this is an ingrained obstruction they will have to overcome – although they do show increasing commitment to maintaining the LSA after May.

Of course the prospects of a new party would be far more advanced if Livingston had been prepared to launch it. The support he enjoys is potentially a major opportunity to rebuild the left, and put a big responsibility on him given that the opportunity is in his hands.

If he were to organise his support on the left, he would get a huge response, whatever form it took – an alliance, a party, or whatever. Tens of thousands would immediately join.

Such a party would have to be democratic, have a federal structure and be pluralistic. In other words it must be inclusive of those sections of the left who want to be a part of it – with the full right of dissent, of internal debate, and of publication.

Unfortunately Livingston ruled this out from the moment he announced his decision to stand. He pledged that he would not form a new party as a first principle.

Although his own membership of the LSP was immediately suspended he called on his supporters to stay in the LSP, saying that he would fight to get back into it in the future. This decision represents a massive missed opportunity to reshape British politics.

Given Livingston’s position, what should be possible after the May elections will be to consolidate the LSA and formalise some of its structures; but it will remain an alliance – based on important elements of an action programme.

Cerainly the objective political conditions do exist for a new party of the working class – for the first time since the war in fact: but that does not resolve the problem of how or when it can be created or exactly what it could be.

The diversity of the left forces which have come around the LSA, and the legacy of years of often bitter sectarian rivalry, dictate that a protracted period of political development, preparation and confidence building is necessary before such a party can be formed on a stable basis.

The negative experience of Arthur Scargill’s premature, bureaucratic and sectarian Socialist Labour Party must never be forgotten.

Furthermore, any serious new party of the left will have to be much more than just a reorganisation of the existing far left. It has to involve substantial splits from the LSP and the reflection of this in the trade unions.

Such a split is in fact posed by Ken Livingstone’s candidacy, despite his own position.

However the conditions may mean that any split may now well take the form of an attrition of members rather than a dramatic rupture. The problem of what comes next is posed just the same.

It is going to require a longer period of discussion, joint experience and confidence-building before a significant new party could be launched to reach out to these forces, since there is clearly not yet agreement on what the political character of such a party is likely to be – and this is a crucial factor.

To demand – as do Workers Power – that a new party be something which it cannot be in the current conditions is to risk aborting a process which could lead to further positive development in the future.

And it is to take a sectarian attitude to those forces who are breaking from new Labour at the present time.

We are talking of a relatively small but significant new development (perhaps a few tens of thousands). This is still not a mass party, but more like the SSP. Nevertheless an organisation on this scale could begin to reorganise the left and lay the basis (hopefully) bigger developments at a later stage.

Workers Power for example denounce the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) for not being a revolutionary party at the point it was formed. They say it is "the wrong question, because the wrong answers can lead – as they have done in Scotland – to the creation of a smaller left-reformist party (the SSP) instead of a revolutionary one."

But the SSP is not left social democratic. It is a small mass-centre party, with a sizeable revolutionary wing and through Militant Labour at its core. And the idea that it could be a revolutionary party at this stage is to misunderstand both what is possible and the dynamics of its development.

Of course the SSP is involved in a left social democratic direction. The nature of a centrist is that it could go either way. But this is a highly significant conclusion to reach, since the signs are very much to the contrary. Everything depends on its evolution in the next period.

In our view the SSP even within its existing terms and limitations is a major gain for the working class. Whether it becomes a revolutionary party at some time in the future will depend both on the political situation in Scotland and the way that revolutionaries within it organise and conduct their struggle.

It is the same with the LSA. What is most likely to emerge after a period of preparation is not a new revolutionary party, but a new centrist party.

Such a party would nevertheless represent an important gain for the working class in this period. It would not be what we would advocate or prefer, but we would welcome it and seek to be a part of it. The issue would be how the far left organisations would relate to it and build it – and how they should work in order to win it to a revolutionary perspective a at a later date.

This is not a new debate with Workers Power, of course. They argued that even the LSA is it exists today should be a revolutionary organisation with a revolutionary programme.

They complain that: "The LSA rejected a revolutionary programme in favour of its current manifesto. This, again, is classic left reformism."

We say that it was correct that the LSA did not adopt a revolutionary programme. Had it done so it would not be the success it is today. It adopted the key elements of an action programme and it can develop through the experience of implementing this in practice.
Progress on Tobin tax

Pete Cooper

AROUND the world and in Britain the international campaign for the "Tobin tax" on foreign currency transactions continues to make rapid progress.

Because of the massive volume of foreign currency trading, which currently runs at $1 trillion a day, Tobin could raise an estimated $150bn revenue, depending on the rate at which it was levied. This could be used to make massive aid to the poor countries of the south.

Its supporters also see it as reducing the volume of currency speculation, and its damaging effects on vulnerable third world economies by making much of it unprofitable.

A world parliamentary appeal was launched at the April Web summit to mark the first presentation of a pro-Tobin tax resolution by US Congress member Peter DeFazio. The press conference was also attended by Labour MEP Glyn Ford.

The campaign is supported by the Canadian and Finnish Parliaments. 100 Brazilian MPs have recently voiced support.

In Britain the Commons motion from Harry Barnes MP has now been signed by nearly 100 MPs. The Liberal Democrats are set to adopt Tobin as official policy.

The growing global support in support for Tobin amongst liberal and left legislators is the outcome of a number of different factors – such as increasing awareness of cases of currency speculation against third world debt and third world poverty, and concern over the increased instability of two liberal capitalism illustrated by the current world stock market crash.

The objective of the campaign is to gain 1,000 signatures of MPs from 5 continents and to get the agenda of the next major parliaments, of the International Monetary Fund, and the G7 group of the world's richest countries.

In Belgium, the trade union federation, the 27-28 June in Brussels of members of national parliaments.

A successful world campaign will give the lie to those who argue that Tobin would be impossible to implement because currency transactions would be moved offshore. Labour MEPs have recently helped to have a downscaling calling for an end to tax havens such as Jersey and the Isle of Man.

In the US, the War on Want has been running a very successful campaign for Tobin, gaining the support of the AFT, the American Federation of UNISON. Tobin tax supporters in Britain are planning a major conference in the autumn to plan a campaign.

Only a mass campaign which gains the active support of all wings of civil society, NGOs, and campaigning anti-globalisation organisations can break the real pressure on Brown and Blair and force them to break with their slavish support for the City's right to retain its huge speculative profits.

Chris Jones

The fact that protesters in Washington caused some disruption of the International Monetary Fund/World Bank meeting on April 16 shows that the Seattle experience can be repeated. While the meeting itself went ahead, some of the Ministries, including France's, Fabius, were unable to reach the blockade.

The mass arrest of 600 people on the eve of the meetings, and the mass mobilisations of state forces, shows that the US regime is very wary of the developing situation.

The fact that major events for US imperialism, on its own territory, have faced disruption by the home population forecasts the regime in a way not seen since the anti-Vietnam war movement. The struggle of the Vietnamese and that movement's success affected US policy for decades, a similar impact this time round could be more significant.

The consciousness of structural adjustments and other IMF/World Bank policies have regularly been protested against and resisted by movements of workers and peasants throughout the world. These have never received the resounding active support of mass movements in the imperialist states.

Partially this situation has changed because of the impact within the US of some of imperialism's policies but it has also changed because of a change of political consciousness by the active movement.

The mobilisation in Washington marks the conclusion of a movement in the US at a higher political level. Since the anti-Vietnam war movement US 'civil society' has campaigned on a wide range of single issues, Nicaragua, Hispanic immigration, environment, Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) and third world debt are among the issues that have featured.

In Seattle, and now Washington, a coalition of over 50 organisations and networks has found a unifying target, and have shown they can fight for it.

The target is the main arm of imperialist economic policy – the IMF/World Bank/WTO. The single issues are now clearly seen as interlinked and requiring global resolution.

The movement in the US is divided on important questions such as whether these institutions should be reformed or abolished in order to create an economically fairer world. But is united in opposing the US government which does exist and sees itself as a direct and democratic result of US government policy.

The fact that official, if inac-
tive, support can be won from the IMF/World Bank union centre is a sign that serious links into the organised working class can be made – and another worrying development for the government.

The divisions that exist between the imperialist states; and the divisions between imperialism and the bulk of the third world on the future plan of the WTO created the room for success at Seattle.

The successful resistance to the Multilateral Agreement on Investment three years ago helped to build the confidence of the opposition movement.

The mobilisations in Washington show imperialism that Seattle was not just a flash in the pan. How the 'democracies' respond will depend on the tempo of protest continuing around all their meetings and manoeuvres.

Bangkok Appeal to the people of the world

Last December's events in Seattle have changed the balance of forces between the social movements opposed to globalisation and the G7 leading industrial powers and institutions, including the IMF, World Bank and WTO, that drive the globalisation project.

Seattle gave expression to the growing dissatisfaction and rejection of this new form of exploitation that violates on a massive scale people's human rights including, social, cultural, environmental, political and democratic rights.

Seattle showed that we are able to unite against this globalisation, and deepen the debate amongst ourselves in order to articulate and promote common alternatives. In that regard, we need to improve our capacity for mobilisation at a national and international level, and strengthen international co-operation.

We therefore appeal to all social movement, north and south, to the governments of all debt of developing countries in the total control of civil society is illegitimate, immoral or unpalatable; to end the IMF's structural adjustment policies in indebted nations; to call for a moratorium on any new negotiations that would increase the power and scope of the WTO, to exclude from the jurisdiction of the WTO such issues as peasant agriculture, social services, and intangible property claims; and to impose controls and taxes on capital.

We call on social movements to mobilise in large numbers and unite against globalisation wherever world leaders gather and meet. In particular we call on movements to focus on two main forthcoming events.

First, on the UN General Assembly Social Summit Review in Geneva on 22-25 June, 1999. On this occasion, we will assemble to organise the debate, discussion and articulation of our alternatives; and also to prepare for a mass mobilisation in New York in September 5-6, 2000. This will be the Summit of World Leaders in New York, on the occasion of the UN's Millennium General Assembly on 6-9 September.

We also call for support for mobilisation at the following events:

Meeting of the Asian Development Bank in Bangkok, 6-7th May.

The meeting of APEC 6-8th May

The Beijing +5 Review in New York, 5-9 June

The Africa EU Summit in Cairo on 27th June.

Demonstrations in the run up to the G7 Global Summit, where there will be an international Jubilee 2000 conference and actions for debt cancellation; in particular demonstrations outside Japanese embassies over this period, as Japan is the chair of the G7 this year.

Demonstrations in support of the anti-US bases campaign in Okinawa.

In the week of the G7 Summit, 21-23 July, 2000.

Demonstrations at the World Bank/IMF events in Prague 26-27th, September.


ASEM People's Forum in Seoul, 17-19 October

The Dakar anti-debt African meeting, from 11th to 17th December, 2000.

Signatories include the following International Networks and Organisations:

Agency Latino Americanas de Informacion (ALAI)

Committee for the Cancellation of the Third World Debt (CADTM)

Focus on the Global South International

South Group Network (SGSN)

Kairos Europa

Operation Speziale de Promotion du Monde du Handicape (O.S.P.M.H)

Servicio Paz y Justicia en America Latina

Via Campesina and from Brazil, Jubilee 2000 Coalition, UK.
Greek elections

PASOK wins again as left is split

Tassos Anastasidis

For years of austerity does not seem to have been too effective.

Greek workers to get rid of the bourgeois government (PASOK) in the country's recent elections.
PASOK - which has been in power for more than a decade - saw its vote (increase from 41.5% at the General and European and 33% in last year's Presidential elections) last year fall to 34% per cent this time round.

This was because for many people the key issue was to prevent the return of the right.

But it was only just sufficient for that.

For the first time, New Democracy, the major Greek capitalist party, used the same tactics (undercover and populist) with the exception of two small right-wing groups that only scrambled up a few thousand votes.

New Democracy tried to capitalise on the social discontent that has been growing against more state policies - PASOK. They got just one point less than PASOK (34% compared to PASOK's 38% for four years ago and 36% last year).

The left continues to attract the majority of the electorate body (55%).

The world is on trial as the Greek ballot box (PASOK, the main party, as part of the left because of its relationship with the Bolsheviks, and the right-wing political division right-left which is the expression of class divisions) constantly polarises to the left.

But it is almost exclusively PASOK's monopoly that is being polarised from this socialistisation process.

The Socialist Party's political program of the PASOK had which had reached nearly 96% last year in the European elections saw its percentage reduced to 5.5%, even less than it was four years ago.

Coalition

Synaspismos (a coalition of socialist and communist forces) also fared badly. It lost 6.5% of its votes (3.2%, while it had 5.1% four years ago) and last minute coalition government.

It only achieved this because of a coalition with the PASOK and an ebbery party.

PASOK a party which was formed from the left wing of the PASOK, was in the case of the necessary 3% for representation in parliament.

The Socialists for one organisation of the left wing which was represented in the Synaspismos (two out of a total of 30,000). The programs of PASOK and ND overlap on many issues.

Both support the integration of Greece in the European economic and monetary union and the authority policies that flow from the Stability Pact.

A modern fraction of the bourgeoisie wants the opportunity to penetrate the Balkans and Turkish business-wise, which presupposes the use of the Greek state machine for economic and ideological support and not as a political or war machine.

The division of strategy in the Greek bourgeoisie (nationalists versus moderants) is a constant in recent Greek politics and is reflected within both the main parties. Social-democratic Prime Minister Samaras has been rather effective in managing the Freedom and Democracy (ND) may be more risky, as it could be more sensitive to pressures from the far right.

One of the central themes of ND's campaign was against the influx of immigrants, especially Albanians, who are considered as a necessary workforce by a great number of employers in the cities and the countryside.

The new PASOK government will find it difficult to carry through its austerity policies - which is one of the reasons for the premiership of the elections. It needs to carry through the privatisation and dismantling of the public pensions system and the rethinking of the last civil educational reform.

Workers will resist in a context in which even their vote will be transformed to its opposite! The necessity to continue the struggle, cultivated also by ND, is the primary problem that the workers have to face.

The elections did not change the order.

Greece, the section 46th Internationale applauded for votes for any of the left parties (except for PASOK), to show that the self-confidence of the workers movement. Unfortunately this did not happen.

Alternative

The main difficulty is that no credible alternative actually exists. It is true that the KKE has a serious organisational capability and opposes the government with constancy of the Euro. But it does so from a nationalist standpoint and is not in line with reactionary forces. For this reason an old union leader of KKE refused publicly to participate in the election campaign of this party.

Synaspismos is too compliant on European policy and a fraction of its members have been basically to merge with their great social-democratic (and on the same time) friend, PASOK.

They have turned from the far left, the women's movements and the traditional parties, and they cannot but oppose yet another communist alternative.

Without a doubt this is one of the lessons to be learnt from these elections. Has the left the ability to learn?

John McKinlay

THE SECOND anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement in Ireland brings with it the realisation that, in the words of one supporter, "it has all the aerodynamics of a flying brick".

The suspension of most of the structures of the agreement after only a few weeks is not longer looks like a temporary glitch. It is becoming clearer as time goes on that neither London nor Dublin have any clear plan of action in place.

By the best that can be expected from their point of view or would be a cobbled together agreement that would prove highly unstable or, more likely, that the fractured agreement will stall through its second anniversary and through the May 22 deadline for arms surrender by the republicans.

The collapse has been presented as a failure by republicans to hand over arms. It is true that many people, including some republicans, believed that the Sinn Fein leadership had agreed to such a handover, but to focus on this is to ignore the role of the unionists.

The reality is that the agreement fell to the right. As first Minister Trimble recently announced, decommisioning of arms as an element of the good Friday agreement was a political impossibility. The decommisioning demand became a rallying cry for the unionist right, a way in which they could express their opposition to any diminution of their sectarian privilege.

The persistent growth of reaction has led to the British partially collapsing the institutions set up by the process.

The unionist response has been to look for further concessions, especially the retention of that same RUC (Royal Ulster Constabulary) for the local sectarian police force.

So what now? We are entering a new period where the majority of the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement are not operating, but the agreement remains overwhelmingly dominant politically.

What we have now is a bare bones Good Friday agreement. What remains is British rule, sectarianism and repression.

Through Irish Eyes

Two years after Good Friday deal

Republicans rue slim pickings from a bare bones agreement

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They then attempt to appease by offering everything else to the right.

The RUC are awarded the George Cross, and their sectarian history is endorsed by the British Prime Minister and the Queen.

Prime Minister Blair hints that police reductions will be reversed if there is a security threat. All this feeds further reaction, with Trimble surviving a leadership vote by the skin of his teeth and an agreement candidate selected as the unionist candidate in a Westminster by-election.

Any deal done now must concede to loyalist reaction, and this will make it almost impossible for the Sinn Fein leadership to endorse it. Meanwhile Sinn Fein continues to proclaim victory. They do this in the same way that sportsmen do, by constantly redefining their goals. Success is now defined as Sinn Fein becoming a large reformist nationalist party in government in both parts of Ireland.

To this end their recent Ard Fheis had the hilarious sight of a debate about coalition with capitalist parties in the South. As a party whose main demand is coalition with the unionist party in colonial administration in the North would balk at a coalition with the main capitalist party that it has been in bed with throughout the evolution of the peace process.

The process here is a familiar one. The handpicked delegates have long passed the point where they could offer any serious opposition to the leadership. They still feel sentiment for the good old days and need to be talked around. The decision to hold a delegate conference is in practice acceptance of coalition.

The problem here for the Sinn Fein leadership is that bare bone process which excludes them from government in the North makes their claims of victory implausible and leaves them open to the criticism of former leading activists like Brendan Hughes - that they have abandoned the programme of republicans and gone into alliance with local gombeen capitalists who exploit republican prisoners.

The long sleep of the peace process is over, but there is a long road yet to travel.
Interview with Brendan Hughes

“A few republicans have slotted themselves into comfortable positions and left the rest of us behind”

And there I was decades later digging holes for the same peanuts.

Q: But there are many who feel it was worth it.

A: True. But amongst some of my friends who have big houses and guaranteed incomes. Of course it is worth it for them. I recall going to the Falls Road with the IRA to get a statement and asking that it highlight the exploitation of workers. We were squeezing the republican pocket. The movement censored me and refused to allow me to speak. Once they published a piece that I wrote – or should I say did not write, as the thing was so heavily censored as to be totally unrecognisable from the article I actually wrote.

Some of the cowboy builders have influence with movements and members. Whether true or not, there were many whippers doing the rounds that these members were taking back-handers and so on. In any event this led to a vicious circle in which money created power, which in turn created corruption and then greed for more money. Dreams of ex-prisoners are exploited by these firms. They run the black economy of West Belfast simply to make profit and not out of a sense of helping others.

Q: Is the future bleak?

A: People are demoralised and disillusioned. Many are tired but it would still be possible to pull enough together to first number what has happened and then to try to change things.

Q: But has Sinn Fein not been stuck so far into the system that any salvaging of the republican project must now look a very mocking task?

A: While I am not pushing for any military response, our past has shown that all is not well. In 1972 we had to break the truce in order to avoid being sucked in. In 1975 the British came at us again. And from prison through the internment articles written by Gerry Adams we warned the IRA that it was being sucked in. We broke the British on that but it took hard work. And now they are at it again. And it will be even harder this time.

Think of all the lives that could have been saved had we accepted the 1975 truce. That also would have justified acceptance. We fought on and for what? – what we rejected in 1975.

Q: What do you feel when you read that Michael Oatley (former of MI5) expresses support for the Sinn Fein leadership, and that David Goodall, who helped negotiate the Anglo Irish Agreement in 1985 recently said that it is all going almost exactly according to plan?

A: These are the comments of men supremely confident that they have it all sewn up. What we hammered into each other time after time in jail was that a central part of British counter-insurgency strategy was to mould leaderships whom they could deal with.

So I get so demoralised when I read about this. I look at South Africa and I look at here and I see that the only change has been in appearance. No real change has occurred. A few republicans have slotted themselves into comfortable positions and left the rest of us behind.

Q: Has the nationalist middle class been the real beneficiary of the armed struggle?

A: Well, it has not been republicans - apart from those republicans eager to join that class.

Q: It seems that the social dimension is your real concern regarding republican direction?

A: No. There is much more than that. It has been the falsity of all the talks. From a nationalist perspective alone what we have now could have had at any time in the last twenty-five years. And even nationalist demands don’t seem to matter any more. And in the process we have lost much of our honesty, sincerity and comradeship.

Q: But could it not be argued that this development is because people are too weary? A: In 1969 we had a naive enthusiasm about what we wanted. Now in 1999 we have no enthusiasm. And it is not because people are weary – they are politics weary. The same old lies regurgitated week in week out. We’re in the same political sausage machine. And if the political process has created a class of professional liars and untruthfulness it contains many republicans. But I still think that potential exists to bring about something different. And I speak not just as a member of our community but about the loyalist community also. These prisoners from both and not the politicians can effect some radical change.

Q: Do you sense any radical potential amongst loyalist ex-prisoners?

A: Yes. Very much so. Not only are they much better than the old regime, they have experienced through their own struggle the brutality, hypocrisy and corruption of the regime against which republicans fought for so long.

Q: What are your views on the Good Friday Agreement?

A: What is it? Have we agreed to the British to stay in the six counties? If we listen to Francis Molloy that is what republicans have agreed to. The only advantage is that unionism has changed. The landed classes have been smashed but only because of the way of life. Not the Good Friday Agreement. Overall, the facade has been cleaned up but the basic structure remains the same. The state we set out to smash still exist. Look at the RUC for example.

Q: What do you think of Sinn Fein being in parliament now?

A: I don’t really surprise you.

Q: Do you see that the republican leadership has become a corrupt democratic leadership?

A: The response to democratic republicanism has been a total uselessness to stay within the army line. Even doing this interview with you generates a reluctance within me. The republican leadership has always exploited our loyalty.

Q: What do you say to those people who are unhappy but are pulled along the other way by feelings of loyalty?

A: Examine their consciences. Take a good look. See what is going on. If they agree – OK. If not, then speak out.
Does President Putin represent the last act of the Stalinist counterrevolution?

In Part I of this article (issue 33) DAVE PACKER discussed the seamless transfer of power from President Yeltsin to his chosen protege Vladimir Putin, the new prime minister and President of the Russian Federation.

Yeltsin established his political rule on the basis of relative ease, but this was not the same as restoring capitalism, which proved far more difficult.

The IMF-endorsed “shock therapy” which Yeltsin tried to implement inevitably led to social and economic chaos and a catastrophic collapse in industrial output – the biggest economic collapse in peacetime – while mafia-like crime grew rampant and the state became increasingly dislocated.

As Tony Blair and other western leaders cynically observed, “their man” President Putin, the Russian crisis deepens and the final act of the Stalinist era is being enacted, whether or not the West approaches its climax.

Former Russian President Romanov has been whipped up by Putin and the pro-capitalist elite as a political weapon to restore a viable and stable Chechen war. However, this weapon may change against the Chechen people fighting for self-determination, but is also a danger pointed at the heart of the Western European class.

Nationalism in Russia today is a powerful ideological force in the hands of the pro-capitalist political elite which can cross the underly-
ing class polarisation which is tak-
ing a different, but also popular, form.

Unfortunately, many of those who claim to speak for the working class, such as the leadership of the so-called Communist Party, have also played the nationalist card and supported the slaughter in Chechnya.

The restoration of capitalism under Yeltsin was an impasse. By August 1998 the social, economic and political crisis reached cata-
drophic proportions with a collapse of the rouble and a default on Russia’s debt-repayment to the IMF. This in turn contributed to the growing world financial crisis at that time.

Yeltsin’s failures over ten years to fully restore a viable and stable capitalist system had profound socio-
political reasons and were not due to Yeltsin’s drunken clowning or the unachieved “Russian soul”, as is sometimes suggested by the Western media. Nor is it all down to a misapplication of free market policies pursued by the IMF, as bil-
onial speculator George Soros claims.

Rather, as Marx explained, it is not possible to lay hold of the exist-
ing state apparatus, and fundamen-
tally change the social system and mode of produc-
tion.

Recovery or counterrevolution is required, which means the destruction of the old state apparatus – which in Russia today has nearly been achieved – and the creation of a new state power. The disintegra-
tion and dissolution of the Russian state is not the same as its total destruction.

Petr Aven, President of Alfa, Russia’s biggest and most success-
ful private bank, esteemed economist and a former Russian trade minister, understands this crucial issue. He supported Putin in the presidential elections and publicly argues that the new President must end the chaos by using totalitarian methods.

First, Putin must assemble a reli-
able military force out of the ruins of the old state apparatus. He sug-
gestes that this regime should be modelled on that of Augusto Pinochet.

In a recent interview he said: “Pinochet tried to enforce obedi-
ence to the state. Sometimes you need to use force. The only role of the state is to use force when needed.”

And again: “The only way ahead is for fast liberal reforms (more "shock ther-
apy" – DP), building public sup-
port for that path but also using totalitarian force to achieve that. Russia has no other choice.” (The Guardian, 31.3.00)

Putin’s chief economic adviser German Gref also insists that they will make the transition to a nor-
mal market system, “in the shortest possible time.” Putin, Gref and even understand that this requires the closure of thousands of enter-
prises and the sacking of millions of workers – this would make the Great Depression look small beer.

This was why Yeltsin pulled back from the brink and looked foolish and compromised. The bureau-
ocracy knows that the working class would be kicked into violent resis-
tance if such a brutal, counterrevolu-
tionary policy was adopted.

But can the former Red Army be relied upon to impose the will of the emergent, and still narrowly based, capitalist class? Putin will first have to construct a reliable military force which is entirely loyal to the President. This is the symbolic meaning of his New Year’s Day visit to the army in Chechnya the day after Yeltsin’s resignation.

However, Putin will have noted the important increase in votes for the Communist Party, his main opponent in the March Presidential elections. Despite a last-minute camp-
paign they reached 30%, making the CP the far by largest party.

Despite its mainly working class vote, the Communist Party remains a Stalinist party, purporting a national-
ist and pro-capitalist policy. However it is not a pro IMF/neo-
liberal party as it has campaigned against the corrupt theft of national assets.

This is why important sections of the working class support it. Nonetheless, it is not a party of political revolution and socialism which is the only fundamental choice which would meet the needs of the working class.

The first part of this article (issue 33) maintained that the economy we saw in Yeltsin’s Russia had many of the surface appearances and paraphernalia of capitalism, but was mostly without the sub-
stance. More than any other event, the 1998 crash made this clear. The renunciation of capitalism in Russia had not only failed, but had hardly got off the ground.

"Economic genocide" and the failure of the IMF policy.

Today, IMF “shock therapy” is seen by ordinary Russians as little more than “economic genocide.” Overall, the shock tactics have led to a massive decline in GDP, stagnation and partial functional collapse of whole industries, indebtedness, collapse of welfare, etc.

While this has made the few in the political elite enormously rich, the international bourgeoisie has increasingly received the Russian “transition” as a bottomless pit, and the economy a “basket case.”

Western bankers lost $20 billion in the 1998 debt default alone. The crash caused imports of consumer goods, mainly for the bureaucrats and capitalists, to fall drastically (50% of all consumer goods were imported before August, 1998). Boris Kagalinsky writes: The policies of the IMF were based on the assumption that a stronger currency automatically leads to a stronger economy. The currency should be strengthened at whatever price, including the decline of production, the impover-
ishment of the population and even the disappearance of most basic services in the spheres of health care, education and social security.”

Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, No. 61, 1998)

Although it is claimed that 50% of GDP is now privatised, the form of this is often little more than “a juridical formalism”, a distortion of vouchers which excluded out-
siders, making the workers and managers the direct or collective owners.

This did not lead to restructuring of the pre-capitalist petite-bourgeoisie, just mass under-
employment rather than mass unemployment. The law of value still does not generally operate in the Russian economy, where labor is the order of the day.

However, after the 1998 crash, increasing numbers of unpaid workers were forced to sell their enterprise vouchers, mainly to the management, and between August 1998 and April 1999 real unemploy-
ment rose by 30%, while wages con-
inued to fall approximately 40%, despite a small economic recession.

Nonetheless, there is a widespread survival of companies and indus-
tries (in thousands of factories) which would not survive in a gen-
sine capitalist market operating according to the laws of value. The cap-
itist terms they are bankrupt. Nor do they pretend to include all the big industrial sectors, parts of which remain profitable.

Eventually, if the working class can’t assert their control and manage-
ment, the law of value will assert itself: but in the meantime, the Russian working sector is crucial for subsidising the much smaller capitalist sector with cheap raw materials, farm products, engi-
neering, metal work, and so on.

Moreover, the rapid growth of exported commodities is in effect due to subsidies from the state, though in large part in kind, state benefits such as low cost housing, education and health care, etc, which are hidden costs of production and repres-
ent an added profit to the prices of goods sold on the world market. It has contributed to the rise and the devaluation of the rouble which in 1998 fell by an estimated $30 billion “trade surplus” (The Economist, Feb 19-25, 2000).

Nor do the figures include the huge black market or the widespread barter/personal subsis-
tence production of food. It is esti-
mated that a staggering 50% of all internal trade is now barter. The result is that large parts of these ‘non-commodity’ sector are in small scale and by-pass taxation.

There is no problem for the neo-liberals is low investment and a slow rate of capital accumulation. Investment in Russia is chronically low even compared with East Europe.

Prior to 1998 there was a snow-
calling in the number of banks to more than 500, however, most were involved in speculation rather than investment and many went bust when the rouble collapsed and Russia defaulted, in August, 1998.

In Russia investment in industry stands at about $50 per head of pop-
ulation compared to $2,750 per head in Hungary.

A rapid restoration of capitalism in Russia requires a massive injec-
tion of capital, as occurred in East Germany, and is only on an impossibly larger scale.

Loans from Western banks and the World bank/IMF are crucial but not enough.

Instead many of these loans have been directed not towards invest-
ment in infrastructure or industry.
but mostly embezzled and laundered back into Western bank accounts belonging to the mafia barons. The system has become a new outflow of capital. Much of the profit from speculation has ended up in tax haven

ities, which are still functioning, also ends up in foreign bank accounts.

Foreign buy-outs have not been without their difficulties either. An example is the large Vybpor Bank and Cellulose Mill bought out by a British company in St Petersburg in 1997.

The plant’s 2,100 workers, fearing massive layoffs and saying they were owed more than $8 million in backpay, took to the streets to keep out the new owners. They ran the plant under workers’ management and used the profits to feed their families.

The workers gained wide and active support from the local and regional working class organisations, and even managed to block the closure of the factory by the court from Helsinki to St Petersburg to attract attention to their cause.

In the autumn of 1999, when the strike committee was planning to block the plant once again, a number of organisa

ties acted by organising a dawn raid by a special force, which resulted in a shoot-out. This time the state won, and occupied the factory and forced the workers to leave.

This struggle not only illustrates a high level of solidarity and combative spirit among workers and a wide range of democratic workers’ control and management, but the use of special armed forces is a strong lesson that the state will need to carry forward the counterrevolutionary drive.

Last but not least, the agricultural sector continues to operate essentially on a landlordism and collective farm basis, despite the official privatisation drive. Agriculture has been hit hard by the generalised privatisation drive which has only privatised those that are not important, while leaving those with the highest incomes untouched.

The result is a fall in employment and of the food industries in general, with a consequent fall in the population. However, when the machinery wears out, if it can be replaced, there will be a rentier trend into smaller peasant holdings.

The human cost of

the nature of the Russian Federation today

The conclusion of the analysis is that the Russian Federation contains a peculiar combination of property ownership, social property, and private property, including corporate accumulations.

Despite the growth of private enterprise and the market system, neither the bulk of production and distribution nor labour is dominated by the law of the market or the law of value. Also, debts, wages and taxes are regularly not paid, and there is a process of de-monetisation and a widespread and assumed nature of barter.

A majority of workers in industries such as extraction, transport, manufacturing, even many service industries such as health, still have offensive and the IMF’s project.

Paradoxically, the difficulties in restoring capitalism are due to the social strength and the traditional fear of the working class by the bureaucracy, while at the same time the reason restoration has made such advances is due to the polarisation and ideological weakness of the working class.

The state’s inability to pay wages or benefits on a regular basis has been a major cause of poverty. In 1992 alone, in the first year of “shock therapy”, real wages fell, due mainly to wage cuts and inflation, by over one third and average personal consumption had fallen by over 40%.

This situation got much worse with inflation at the end of the 1990s reaching about 2,500%. In 1998 wage arrears in Ukraine and Azerbaijan reached more than 4 percent of GDP. This is the good news — in Kazakhstan they are estimated to amount to some 80 percent of GDP.

The UN report shows that there is a widening inequality in wealth and incomes. This is exacerbated by hyper-inflation, with the richest being especially affected to the food prices. Average real wages in Russia in 1999, food prices in Armenia rose by 24,000%, average real incomes fell by only 7.800%. The weakest in soci

ty, pensioners, the disabled, single mothers and the young are most exposed to the most acute financial difficulties, by the nature of life in Russia.

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, there has been a decline in life expectancy across the whole region, with falls of at least four years in countries such as Russia. Average male life expectancy is now only 58! Several million people in Russia died between 1990 and 1999, who would have done if the life expectancy levels had been maintained.

Between 1991 and 1994 infant mortality increased by nearly 15% and things are much worse today. Accompanying these developments is a grim rise in suicide.

Tuberculosis and other diseases are being spread as big killers, especially in the Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Moldova. AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases are spreading rapidly.

Women have increasingly been pushed out of public life and out of the economic and political inequality between the sexes is also increasing. Violence against women also includes physical abuse from spouses becoming more common and more women are falling victim to crime.

Women desperate to find employment have found themselves forced into prostitution both within their region and by organised criminal networks in western Europe.

There is a dramatic deterioration of education and health care, with a fall in spending on schools and universities. Almost 10% of enrolment and attendance rates, especially at pre-primary schools, have fallen. In the former Soviet Union, there are now 30,000 pre-school facilities for 3-5 year old children (1995 vs. 1980).

Overcrowding, dilapidation, lack of decent places for children and a lack of health checks also have taken their toll.

Understanding this social deprivation is the economic and social deprivation, but also the social deprivation. Bankier Peter Aven advises Putin that even more cuts in welfare and social provision are necessary if capitalism is to be restored. The specter of transition in reverse can’t be stabilised for long, but it does reflect the failure so far of the neo-liberal

Russian soldiers survey Chechenya from the top of a tank

Sculan (shown here on right) Chechenya and US President Thamus at Yalta post-terror summit) and vicious police repression of Soviet working class as base to strike deals with imperialism.

jobs — of a kind, although unemployment is steadily rising. Most manufacturing enterprises are on part time and wages are in arrears, however, company shops, housing, even nurseries, often still exist.

To some extent this maintains the social weight of the working class in society. However, it also maintains the old corporate, paternalist structure which ties the workers to the management who run the enterprises, in so far as they function. The same managers often cream off some of the surplus for their own ends. Corruption is endemic.

Although more than 50% of enterprises are formally privatised, it is clear that non-capitalist social relations continue to predominate in a decayed form because capitalist social relations have not replaced them to become the dominant mode of production. Such a system of transition in reverse can’t be stabilised for long, but it does reflect the failure so far of the neo-liberal
Lessons from British Trotskyism in the 30s

In full flow, Trotsky is filmed speaking in Copenhagen in 1932.
Tony Cliff - a personal reminiscence

Charlie van Gelderen

I FIRST MET Tony Cliff shortly after his arrival in Palestine in September 1946. As Ya’gel Gluckstein, he was already well known for his contributions to over-estimating Masist analyses of the situation in what we in those days referred to as the Middle East, a geographical conception of that territory between the Western imperialists (I remember vividly the Netherlands) and their possessions in the Far East.

Not without some justification, Jack HasTon, then a leader of British Trotskyists, saw him as a representative of the Middle East.

At that time, I was living with my wife and daughter in a two-room flat in Labour Grove, London, sharing a kitchen and bathroom with two other families. Cliff and his South African born wife, Cynthia, decided to come and stay with us. When Tony saw the ‘opulence’ in which we were living, he exclaimed, ‘So much room for only four people. There must be at least two families living in such a space.’ Cliff would not be caught napping on Monday. That is just what they did.

He was living with me when he debated about the class nature of the Soviet Union opened in the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), the British section of the Fourth International.

The questions raised by Jack HasTon, since of the RCP, at the conference of the RCP in 1946. The International Secretary asked Cliff to take up the cudgels in defence of the traditional position of the International, that the Soviet Union was a workers’ state, albeit with bureaucratic deformations.

I still remember vividly Cliff saying ‘The Old Man [Trotsky] is not yet old in his grave and we already have to renege on his teachings.’

He took time off from active political work when he went to the Museum in London. ‘I will destroy them!’ he said to me before we started visiting the museum.

I think he spent about six weeks in two months in this intellectual retreat. During this time, his relationship with the RCP continued and we eventually came to the conclusion that not only was the USSR still a deformed workers’ state, but that this appellation also applied to those countries which came under Soviet domination and where the economy was restructured to assimilate to that of the Soviet Union.

When Tony left his self-imposed exile, one of his first meetings was with Ted Grant, ‘you are quite right, Ted, the Soviet Union cannot be defined as a workers’ state, it is state capitalism’. He then elaborated his conclusions in the biggest internal bulletin produced by the RCP, it was reported in a special edition of Workers International News and published as pamphlet as Russia - A Marxist Analysis. The State Capitalist Tendency was born.

Support

Cliff’s theories. In my view, the manner of the discussion with the RCP turnover is thrown away. But this is still open to argument.

I salute Tony Cliff for his tremendous contributions to Marxist theory and, despite accusations like the ‘African Wall’, his loyalty to the working class and his lifelong battle for international socialism.

Alan Thornett

Tony Cliff, who died on Sunday April 9 at the age of 82, was a major figure of the far-left in Britain and internationally. He built an organisation in Britain, which has existed since the 1990s, has been by far the biggest on the far-left.

Whilst I have a range of disagreements with his politics and the way in which the contributions he made to revolutionary politics in Britain was clearly substantial. His energy and integrity will be greatly missed and the workers’ movement will be the poorer without him.

I first met Tony Cliff nearly 40 years ago when I was a young shop steward in the car industry in Oxford and still a member of the Communist Party, even if a dissident one. There were two Trotskyist organisations in Oxford at the time the Socialist Labour League (SLL) and the International Socialists (IS).

The SLL was a growing organisation which had won the leadership of the Labour Party’s youth organisation the Young Socialists, and was recruiting young people in quite large numbers and had an impressive trade union intervention in some parts of industry. The IS was a much smaller organisation seeking to build itself a base in industry. The major problems with the SLL’s internal regime were not apparent to us at that time.

My interest in Trotskyism, along with other militancy from the car industry, was triggered by contact with a group of SLL students in the University.

In the same period we had a discussion with Tony Cliff as well. He came and addressed us from a group of the car plants. We were unimpressed by Cliff’s rank and file politics, and IS’s consequent reluctance to take positions in the trade unions and shop stewards movements.

So the issue of disagreement was on the theory of ‘state capitalism’. Tony Cliff had long rejected Trotsky’s analysis of the Soviet Union as a degenerate workers state, set out in Revolution Betrayed, in favour of the idea that it had been state capitalism with some points in the second half of the 1920s.

As a result, a debate between Cliff and Ted Grant on the subject of state capitalism raged. The SWP has taken from the working class by a counter-revolutionary bureaucracy on the basis of bureaucratic relations, but that the mode of production had changed back to a form of capitalist relations. The bureaucracy were now a new ruling class extracting surplus value and accumulating capital as capitalism does.

This led to the conclusion that there was nothing at all to defend in the USSR and that it was as much an imperialist power as the USA. The practical application of this theory was when he took a position of neutrality in the Korean war, but it was a position which was not carried through consistently.

The USSR was not neutral in the Vietnam war but correctly opposed US imperialism and capitalism and developed a more consistent anti-imperialist position whilst maintaining its ‘Neithet Washington or Moscow’ slogan.

Tony Cliff saw the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the USSR and the Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe as a massive vindication of the theory of state capitalism. This view was shared by the SWP. As a whole, and it gave them confidence at a time when the Communist Party went in free fall in many countries including Britain and sections of the far-left drew pessimistic conclusions out of these events.

The SWP was unencumbered by the events because it regarded those regimes as capitalist anyway. Nothing had changed, and this confidence gave SWP members an advantage.

But you did not have to be a state capitalist to be unencumbered by the fall of the wall. The problem was for those who had attributed something progressive to Stalinism.

Trotsky characterised Stalinism as a counter revolution force on a world scale. But he also argued that whilst control of societies by the working class had been destroyed, the mode of production had not been changed. He therefore called for a political revolution to overturn a parasitic bureaucracy, not social revolution to overturn a capitalist bourgeoisie.

Confirmation

In my view it is this analysis of Trotsky’s which is confirmed by the collapse of the USSR, not the theory of state capitalism.

This is shown in the immense problems encountered in re-capitalising the Russian economy. Even 10 years later the capitalist mode of production does not predominate in the former Soviet Union. Most of the population survives by various forms of barter and individual subsistence production: many still have no contact with the market at all. Of course Russia and the other ex-USSR countries have rabidly pro-capitalist governments. And they have an emerging comprador capitalist class. But whilst that represent the existence of a capitalist market in parts of the economy, non-capitalist social relations continue to predominate.

Collective property relations have been broken up and dislocated, but capitalist social relations have not been established to replace them. The key to the dominant mode of production is capital. These governments exist which defend capitalist social relations of production but lack the political or economic conditions to make them a reality. And the social layer in power remain a bureaucracy, even if their function in life is to become capitalists - many of them already have alibis of the gangster variety.

Wherever you stand on state capitalism the relevance of the debate is diminishing in today’s world. And the political situation Tony Cliff leaves behind is very different from the one which prevailed during much of his time building the IS and the SWP in Britain.

Political alternative

Whilst the defeats of the 1980s hang over the workers’ movement, and the level of strikes remains at an all time low, a real possibility of building a political alternative to Blairism and to reshape the left is beginning to present itself.

Stalinism has fragmented and its influence has declined: the far left has a greater weight within the left as a whole. It is to his great credit that Tony Cliff recognised these changes and emerging opportunities in the last months of his life, and fully backed the London Socialist Alliance. The organisation he built, regarded by many as insular for a long time, slowly opened itself up to a dialogue, joint work and with other sections of the far left. It would be a tribute to him for us to continue towards the construction of an effective alternative to the rightward march of British politics.
For socialism
Vote London Socialist Alliance for Greater London Assembly
For public services
Vote KEN LIVINGSTONE for London Mayor
Against privatisation