New Labour failures feed right wing revival

WHILE TONY Blair's right wing cabinet colleagues continue to "think the unthinkable" and implement a programme of unpopular right wing policies, they could yet unleash a monster. Several opinion polls now agree that the Tory Party's electoral fortunes, which hit rock bottom in the 1997 General Election and have "flatlined" under William Hague, are showing signs of revival. Hague's vicious band has not hesitated to exploit any opening offered to them by a New Labour team that has learned nothing from the failures of past Labour governments.

Blair's "partnership" with big business has come at the expense of alienating Labour's core support, and a widening gulf between rich and poor which feeds resentment. While failing to tackle the root cause of poverty, unemployment, poor housing, educational failure or NHS waiting lists, Blair's team has served to bolster racism and pandered to bigotry.

Jack Straw's reactionary attempts to make the last Tory Home Secretary Michael Howard look like a liberal have included a return to the discredited Tory notion of the "short sharp shock" for young offenders and a barrage of new, brutal attacks on asylum seekers.

The evidence so far is that these tactics are leading to a collapse of Labour's core vote, which in some areas could be enough to let the Tories in.

Our answer has always been that the key is in mobilising the working class to defend its own interests, in resistance to the onslaught on jobs, conditions and the welfare state - precisely the politics put forward by the London Socialist Alliance in the recent elections.

As the calendar counts down to the next general election, the need for a broad based challenge in the unions and across the labour movement to the passive politics of New Labour becomes ever more urgent.

Election analysis - pp 4-5
Set back for new trade union at MSF conference

Terry Conway

MSF Conference. Like everything else that has happened over recent months was dominated by the question of the proposed merger with the AEEU. Glossy propaganda had been spewed out almost daily to convince union members to support this merger - on terms that were far from any debate or say democracy. As AEEU Deputy Secretary Roger Lyons and his supporters know quite well the real reason they are so desperate to get their merger through. They talk about the AEEU’s ‘Sir Ken Jackson, have a dual and professional, functional vision - to create a new union on the right - an organisation dedicated to partnership with the employers. Despite the fact that the very road has led to the disasters at Rover and Ford, Lyons was able to portray the new MSF as a cover from the exposure he might otherwise have faced. It is in pursuit of this goal that MSF was so prepared to overlook a vicious witch hunt against its most vociferous opponents in the leadership of the London Region of the union - disbar- ing six former officers from holding any office in the union. While a small victory was won to allow these activists to attend conference as visitors, it was not possible to get the more substantive matters resolved both for technical reasons and because of the need to concentrate the ener-gy of the left on the merger debate itself. Despite all the resources they have poured into the campaign, and their attempts to silence dissent, the leader- ship did not get things all their own way. Conference adopted a series of policy resolutions against the wishes of the top table - including one hostile to partnership. While a majority of confer- ence delegates supported a motion by Peter Greenshields for a call for the MSF, they then rejected the precise agreement struck up between the two leaderships. As a result the MSF, particularly in manufacturing, see such a

Back to the drawing board? MSF chief Roger Lyons emerges as having an illegal strategy but refuse to accept plans that would undermine the sovereignty of union confer- ences and hand too much power to the national leader- ship.

This threw the National Executive Committee and fol- lowing a hastily convened meeting they tried to submit an emergency rule to challenge the conference which would allow them to get a majority ballot on the terms previously agreed with some small nodes in the direction of conference wishes. Rumours were flying round that a failure to agree this pro- posal could result in a financial crisis and significant staffing cuts. Despite the atmosphere of panic, conference stood firm and correctly refused to debate the motion on the grounds that it was not an emergency. With based

Glenn Voors Secretary of St Helen’s Union (personal capacity)

The year’s Trades Council conferences in May saw a deluge of motions from asy- lums of privateers to privatization. This conference was more open than that of previous years, although some delegations were disappointed but not sur- prised when the TUC ruled that two of the motions sub- mitted were unacceptable, because they were not on TUC business.

The campaign to Defend Public Services and Needy (DSN) and support, and many delegations were interested in suggestions that future conferences should combine educational work- shops with debates. The debates on anti-racism and asylum seekers were excellent. Tony Robinson from Oxford AEEU described the strength of opposition of New Labour and the Tories towards asylum seekers locked up in camps. In moving the resolution on Home Secretary’s attitude about building on the experi- ence of the successful camp- aign in St Helen’s Against the transfer and arguing for joint unemploye- ment campaigns. The debate about privatiza-

David Williams

The conference of Britain’s main civil service union, has committed the leadership to opposition to New Labour government’s pro- gramme. The annual delegate confer- ence of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), meeting in Blackpool, passed a number of strongly- worded motions opposing New Labour’s continuation of Tory policies on privatization, performance-related pay and delegated negotia- tion. The union also raised issues of concern like the scapegoating of asylum-seekers. The National Executive Committee (NEC) has been instructed actively to pursue the return of pay arrange- ments covering the whole civil service on a basis of a long-overdue national cam- paign against privatization; and to oppose the govern- ment’s attempts to drive down standards of sickness absence. Motions on these and many other issues were passed by an overwhelming majority, with only token opposition from right-wingers on the conference floor. This will have caused further embar- rassment for the NEC, con- nected as it is by two right-wing factions, Membership First and the National Moderate Group. National elections, con- cluded just before confer- ence opened, left the right-wing in control, which means con- stant pressure from activists will be required to prevent conference decisions being ignored.

Gains

The main opposition, Left Unity, made modest but sig- nificant gains, however - winning one of the four vice- presidentships and four more seats on the committee. In contrast, the first PCS NEC elections in 1998, Left Unity failed to win a single seat. On that occasion it stood a joint slate with the National Union of Public Employees (PUK) and an insti- tution-backed faction. This time, the Left Unity candidates in the four-member body, they may have some room for manoeuvre, thanks to the worsening of relations between the two right-wing factions, which of holds nineteen seats.

Personal rivalries have aggravated the smaller polit- ical differences and Membership First narrowly secured NEC support for a conference motion aimed at contesting the Moderate Joint General Secretary, Barry Reesman.

Former CPSA boss Reesman is known to have had a backbencher's seat on the central executive committee. He is trying to move the MSF to a more left-wing stance. He also has a reputation for being difficult to work with. His re-election is seen as a victory for the left.

However, the victory for Reesman is not seen as a major setback for the center-left bloc, which is still powerful in the union. The central executive committee is expected to continue to be dominated by the center-left, but the left has gained some representation and is likely to be more vocal in its opposition to the center-left's policies.

The election results are a reflection of the broader political landscape in the union, with the center-left holding sway but the left gaining some ground. The center-left's dominance is expected to continue, but the left is likely to be more active in its opposition going forward.
Labour left divided on lessons of May elections

Alan Thornett

The Socialist Campaign Group/New Labour Project has published a report looking at the Labour party's performance in the May elections.

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Renewing the left: the prospects after the London elections

Alan Thornett

The election of Ken Livingstone as mayor of London is a huge Labour Party victory. Blair has lost control of his capital and a potentially powerful alternative power base has been established but there are few signs that Livingstone intends to exploit the situation.

One can be clear that he would win the election with or without the Labour nomination. Livingstone had a unique opportunity to build a viable, effective Blairism. Tens of thousands would have followed him if he had taken that path.

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Local elections – a positive start

Greg Tucker – LSA Secretary & list candidate

46,670 people voted for the London Socialist Alliance in the elections to the constituency section of the Greater London Assembly – we averaged 4.4% across the constituencies.

Although not as strong for the LSA and other socialist candidates in the London wide top up list – 5.1% of the vote. Everywhere in London the LSA was able to engage working people in a real debate about a socialist alternative. But because the socialist vote was divided we did not succeed in having anyone elected.

LSA members are extremely heartened that, in the space of three months, we have built an organisation which delivered three million leaflets, held over two hundred public meetings and was the only organisation which tried to engage in a debate with working people in the election.

The media spent the whole election campaign focused on the Mayoral race. But as all the candidates, Livingstone included, ran apolitical “personality” campaigns, at times with more focus on the aspect of a beauty contest.

Fortunately it is argued that you cannot read much into Livingstone’s conducting a successful campaign election as he took votes from all quarters, including the Tories.

Certainly his campaign “Ken(London)” steerred clear of most political issues.

Nevertheless, the election of Livingstone as Mayor must be seen as a blow to Tony Blair’s project. Londoners have already rejected New Labour’s plans to privatise the underground. Their vote represents a desire to see an end to New Labour’s fey policies.

The Greens did particularly well in the elections, picking up three seats on the top-up list. Their vote was boosted by a positive endorsement from Livingstone. Unfortunately for the LSA, this helped make a vote for the Greens appear more productive. First time out, the LSA was unable to break through that confidence barrier.

We also lost votes on the top-up list to other socialists – Peter Tatchell, Scargill’s SLP the Campaign Against Tube Privatisation and the CPB (Morning Star). Despite approaches from the LSA they had gone their own way, the split vote costing the left a seat in the Assembly.

More annoying was the high level of min-voting with 16 percent spoils papers. The government had done absolutely nothing to explain the voting system. With the Mayoral vote you had a first and second preference vote. So many voters thought that the two votes for the Assembly were on the same basis. So instead of voting for the LSA for parity with constituency and top-up list voters LSA constituency number one and then what they thought was their second preference on the list.

The size of the Nazi vote was a worrying factor. The BNP was able to save its deposit with 47,000 votes. They had been able to capitalise on William Hague’s offensive witchhunt against asylum seekers, itself given credence by New Labour’s own policies.

The LSA’s future activity must now be to join with other antiracists to stop the Nazis, by mobilising directly against them and by supporting campaigns defending the rights of asylum seekers.

The LSA is keen to discuss in the next few weeks and the composition of the next Assembly.

As well as continuing work around our election platform, such as making Livingstone fight the government over the future of the tube and taking up the issues of asylum seekers we need to be part of the fight to defend jobs such as at Dagenham.

Almost certainly we will want to look at standing in any parliamentary or local council by-elections and to prepare for the next General Election.

At the same time we will discuss the best structure that can draw in those who became involved during the campaign and want to play a continuing role.

London wide co-ordination will remain necessary but so will organising in the localities.

With local elections elsewhere in England good results for the left another Socialist Alliance councillor in Coventry for instance, this is not just an issue for London but must be part of a British wide debate.

So LSA supporters are keen to discuss with fellow socialists in England and Wales and with the SSP prospects for united campaigning.

Certainly we are sure that the positive experience in Scotland and our first positive steps in London indicate that thousands of people across Britain can be won over to a socialist alternative.

The positive lessons gained by the comradely collaboration of the different socialist organisations and individuals working together in the

Step up fight against UNISON witch hunt!

UNISON activists have been purged by the corrupting witch hunt against the left inside the union.

In last year the leadership, led by the vile Roddy Branch from Glasgow, shrewdly used David Cameron’s leadership at the time to take out a left from within the union, just before a leadership election was due to take place against eight Labour-backed candidates.

The Socialist http://www.soc.org.uk/health workers Kuma Bahl and Karen Rasmussen were accused of intimidation and bullying after allegedly calling an NEC member a "witch-hunter".

They have been told they cannot attend any event where the NEC member is likely to be present. This means they are barred from attending the most Conference despite being elected delegates, and that "whistleblowers" cannot take up the NEC position.

There is of course a considerable threat – all those who have been disciplined are under constant threat of revenge and of course, member's rights for the exercising political opinions.

The whole witch hunt is designed to shut up whistleblower activists who are demanding that the union can't conduct political expulsions and must take place where the NEC member is present.

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Behind the massacre of manufacturing jobs

European business mounts new offensive

More and more of those were hostile takeovers; the €400 billion worth of such deals since January 1999 is more than four times the combined total for 1996-98. Key sectors include: telecommunications, with the massive takeover of Mannesmann from Germany by Vodafone Air Touch, the largest hostile takeover ever, and the takeover of Telecom Italia by Mannesmann's former partner Olivetti; the restructuring of European capital, rather than exchange rates, is the central issue for workers... More than 1,000 factories in the UK and France have been closed or mothballed since 1990, and many more are under threat. The problem is not just in Europe. Just as in the USA in the 1980s, merger activity has gone together with splitting up companies and unemploying workers and firing financial controls on the remaining parts of the business, backed up by the threat of closure. An early example of this was Daimler-Benz, which shed a number of divisions after 1995 to concentrate on vehicles, trains and aeroplanes. Currently, all divisions are required to make a profit of 12 percent on capital or face closure.

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Norway: the workers teach the establishment a lesson

Anders Eklund

May 1, 82,000 workers in Norway's private sector went on strike for improved wages and conditions in the biggest action since 1921 which also ended in a defeat for the employers. Now negotiations in the public sector have broken down, and there could be major strike action there too.

It is not a rich country but especially small to its oil. But the Norwegian capitalists have used the defensive position of the working class in Europe to attack the established rights of the workers, and they have not been hampered by a national consensus on low wage growth, or more precisely – a wage growth that "is in line with our main trading partners" as the official mantra goes.

After a good agreement from the workers point of view in 1998, the state set up a wage commission to look at wage policy. The result was - not surprisingly - that the union leadership accepted a very low ceiling for wage growth. They claimed that part of the wage increase had to be considered as an "up-front" part of the 2000 agreement.

Government - parochial - big profits

Historically the wage rate is based on average between average industrial wages and the wages of senior executives in Norway but has been lower compared to the US and continental Europe. In the nineties, the bourgeoisie has tried to change that, giving themselves a higher profit rate, increases, bonuses, and stock options of all kinds.

Recently there has been a state of "golden parachute" scandals. The head of the state oil company had to abandon his plan to get the "golden parachute" to calm public opinion. This was also a very special case of the historically high wage of the Norwegian Trade Union Confederation (LO). But the government has been on the board and voted in favour of this golden parachute deal.

Other similar deals have been made, in the last few years, the most outrageous being that the Chief Executive of Kværner of 16 million Euro. Kværner tried to correct this saying that it was only 8 million Euro – as if that made a huge political difference.

This new culture of greed has been on the agenda of the top union bureaucrats. The latest being the agreement on a wage increase of over 13,000 Euro! The trade union negotiating delegation on average earned twice as much as the workers they represented!

Profits have also shown a huge increase since the early nineties with dividends almost tripling. In addition the tax system was changed in 1992, taxing capital gains less than before.

A resounding "no" vote

Against this background it was no surprise that the overwhelmingly majority of union members in the private sector voted no to the very measly deal that was negotiated in the beginning of April.

Normally wage negotiations happen several months after the deal was proposed to three years! There was increased flexibility. The hourly wage rate was increased by a tiny amount - about 0.1 Euro, or 20 Pfenning, 1/2 French Franc! Holidays would remain the same this year, one day would be added in 2001 and three more days in 2003.

That sounds OK unless you understand that the strike for a fifth week's holiday started 14 years ago, when the first day was run. So people were not impressed by the speed of introducing the fifth week especially as in Denmark they were going for the sixth week 10 years ago.

The union bureaucrats tried to sell this deal to the rank and file but with no success. There was over 60% participation in the ballot with impressive 64% against the deal. This was the largest ever no-vote on a national level since WWII. Sixteen of seventeen individual unions taking part had a no-majority.

The no-vote was a political victory for the trade union left, of all of them belonging to the two parties to the left of the Labour party, the Socialist Left Party (its left-wing) and the Red Electoral Alliance.

Having recommended acceptance, the trade union leaders make any concrete demands when the deal was voted down, but just said that the employers had to come up with a new offer. This passivity made it impossible for the trade union left to formulate a set of demands and organise a strike the leadership did not want. It was very much the left that ran the strike - there was quite a consolidated cadre of left trade unionists to the forefront.

There was also important European support especially from transport unions across Scandinavia to IG Metall in Germany who boycotted the companies were there was action.

The union leadership and the employers organisation did not want a drawn out strike in which they might lose more, so the strike was ended in 8 days, with most of the left's demands won.

The period before the next negotiations was to be two years as usual (not three). The wage increase was nearly four times higher than previously offered, it was raised from 0.75 kroner to 2.50, the left had demanded 3 kroner. This wage increase was somewhat above the ceiling fixed by the state commission - an important political break-through. There were also additional increases for those below the average wage. The fifth holiday week will be introduced one year earlier by getting two more holidays in 2001 and another two in 2002.

On the question of flexibility there was no change, so here the employers won. But it is a general formulization; the concrete implementation is a question of local negotiations, so how this turns out depends on a large degree to the strength of the local unions.

A warning to the Norwegian establishment

The fact that the trade union leadership in 1988 got a chain of events with the rank and file because very clear. They did not make such an effort to organize the membership that the negoti- ated result should be accepted but took for granted that they would. They had only contempt for the "Vot No" campaign of the trade union left.

On the other hand, perhaps they were pressured by the "New Labour" government to accept in negotiations are-sults that they themselves did not believe would be acceptable. When the no-vote happened, they explained it as a reaction to the golden parachutes and the "good culture".

But their moral indignation was taken not so seriously as the press showed that union representatives on the boards almost without exception had kept silent when the golden parachutes were handed out.

When the trade union membership voted against the deal, the immediate reaction of the employers organisation was to argue that even to have a ballot on such an issue after negotiations was "old-fashioned". They pointed out that in several other European countries, e.g. Sweden, this does not happen any more. But this just made people more angry and convinced them even more that the bosses really needed a teaching a lesson.

What happened was a chain of positive events with important lessons for the future:

- The political/trade union left had substantial support for its ideas and demands - and could achieve more if it was better organised
- There are strong egalitarian sentiments among trade unionists,
Union tactics help bosses carve up Rover

A Rover worker

A 152-page capitalist media present a picture of how the long struggle over closures has been "saved" on May 6, the day that John Towers announced that he had bought the plant from BMW for £70m. Workers demonstrated outside the plant, drinking champagne, and the ex-polician, who didn't work in the plant, but were a John Bull outfit, and a union jack, was again prominent in all the news coverage.

John Hennings, the Liberal councillor, who wants to be mayor of Birmingham, and a founder of Phoenix was continuously interviewed. This is a plant with a militant history. How did we reach a point where we are in numbers (though not the whole workforce) given a boss arriving at the largest car factory in the country?

According to Towers, he had a feasibility study into the possible survival of the plant, and showed it to Trade Secretary Stephen Byers, a personal friend, on the weekend BMW announced the sale of Rover (March 26). Then, according to Hennings, the Phoenix group first met on March 28 - four days before the huge demonstration Birmingham and the plant's moment.

When you now look back at the speeches made on that day you can see why for instance that Tony Woodley, national officer of the TGWU, stressed that whatever happened thousands of jobs would be lost. Woodley knew this because he was in with Phoenix from the beginning: in fact he claims it was him that phoned Towers and persuaded him to front up Phoenix.

There is hot competition among those claiming to have started it all rolling. Stephen Byers has also claimed that he got Towers involved: but no doubt when things turn sour these same people will start to take their distance and issue disclaimers. The rumour went around, amongst other things, that Woodley, who at the original Gaydon conference of all Rover workers on March 21 had called for nationalisation of Rover, had been ordered by TGWU leader Bill Morris to drop this demand. But the reality is he was already in with a capitalist 'saving' the company.

So that magnificent demonstration was really about putting pressure on BMW to accept a rival capitalist bid.

When the Phoenix bid became public knowledge, after the Birmingham demonstration, all union efforts were directed towards backing it, and asking BMW to reject the Alchemy bid. On April 18 all stewards were brought back to a recall meeting of the Gaydon conference.

At this Woodley outlined what he said were the differences between the Alchemy and the Phoenix bids. He said these were the only choices: BMW had offered Rover to large car producers, but all had said they weren't interested. As far as nationalisation was concerned, ministers had said they would not consider it.

Woodley argued that Alchemy did not have the dealers on board, and therefore would not be able to sell many cars. It had also declared it would not try to stay in mass car production. Phoenix on the other band was led by "a car man", and planned to continue volume production.

This was a distortion: Alchemy had said that they would continue to produce the cars as long as they could sell them, and that they would produce the Rover 75 under licence in Cowley, assess its sales and then if they were good, move it to Longbridge.

In both plans, all cars were to be produced at Longbridge. The main real difference was that in moving the 75 to Longbridge straight away they would cut down the numbers of immediate redundancies. (Probably thereby saving pay-offs, as for the first year the redundancy money is relatively high.)

As far as the longer term is concerned the crucial fact is that the Gaydon conference's view that Rover has no replacement for the Rover 25 or 45. BMW had offered to sell the 3150, which they had planned for Longbridge, for £800 million, but Towers said he could not afford it.

As the details of the Towers plan have emerged more clearly, his future plans seem to be exactly the same as Alchemy, i.e. producing more sporty MG derivative cars, all of which sell in small numbers.

At the second Gaydon conference, when Woodley was asked by stewards from Longbridge if he had any fallback plans if the Phoenix bid failed he said that he did not believe in failure. In his view the Longbridge workers were totally reliant on Phoenix.

At the first Gaydon conference Woodley had accepted that all of Rover was united. He insisted that the plans "could not survive separately". At that meeting he himself had said that if BMW did not change their minds, or another major car company take over, then nationalisation was the answer.

He had also said that the next demonstration, after Birmingham, would be in London to fight for this. But by the second steward's conference he was happily agreeing to divide up the Rover workforce.

Woodley's new line was that BMW needed to sell Solihull, and the 4+4 to Ford in order to give money to whoever took over Longbridge, and therefore Solihull stewards should go away and negotiate their conditions with Ford, and BMW.

And since BMW would not sell Cowley and the mini to Towers, the Cowley stewards, too, should go and negotiate their conditions with BMW.

As far as Swindon and Powertrain were concerned, they would stay off with BMW, but he hoped would wind up eventually with Towers.

All calls for a demonstration in London were dropped. The call for the occupation of Longbridge was ignored, as it had been at the original Gaydon conference, and there was no call for any action by the workforce.

This meant that any meaningful pressure for nationalisation was gone, at a time when the situation at Fords was erupting.

Woodley's explanation for this succession of retreats and concessions was that he had to be "realistic". With the union back-peddling so hard it is no wonder that the Longbridge stewards, and their local radio mouthpiece, Karl Chin, concentrated on lobbying for Phoenix to win.

The workforce at Longbridge was itself totally unmotivated. No mass meetings were called throughout the whole closure process. So all the workers could see was the entire local media, the council and their own union and shop stewards, supporting Towers, with only the left saying that they should occupy. This was an inevitable result.

The Longbridge stewards, and union activists, organised small Key to Phoenix plan: saving Labour's electoral bacon

- Have YOU read it yet?

ALAN THORNETT's gripping account of the fight for jobs and conditions in the Cowley car plant, from the mid-1970s to the 1990s.

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The Longbridge stewards, and union activists, organised small Key to Phoenix plan: saving Labour's electoral bacon

As time goes on, it becomes clear that the recovery of the Towers plan is the Labour Party's real concern. Commentators consider that the company will at least survive until after the next general election.

If the Alchemy plan had been instituted then most of the giant would have been immediate and therefore could have had a big effect on Labour election chances.

The key issue of the working class in Britain is developments in manufacturing, car parks, components, steel, textiles and shipbuilding.

Biar obviously had a choice. The Daily Telegraph mentions former minister Geoffery Robinson had become involved. Biers says he got involved from the beginning and he did not take his role when the Alchemy bid failed.

So did the government get a pound of flesh from BMW? These are hard-headed business people. They knew that BMW had planned a new model for Longbridge, having worked out that this would be the viable life span of the Rover 25 and 45.

Sowerby has his doubts about the replacement model but at this point he keeps the place open beyond the next general election: thus we can expect more major cut-backs to take place.
Rover crisis

Tower: already known how to play union leaders like a violin

events against Alchemy - and for Towers. Only one danger was handled by the Works committee, at Crofton Park opposite the plant, on April 25. The Conyenor claimed, on May Day, that this was a mass meeting.

This demonstration was successful. Apart from the convenor and his deputy well under the 2,000 to three people there, the only speaker was Karl Chinn, who spent the whole time getting people to chant "Alchemy out! Towers in!"
The specially prepared platform was designed to give Towers time to prepare his bid. They then marched down to the gate, chanting "Towers in!"

On May Day, the works committee then flew to Munich asking for BMW to loan money to Towers. At national level several meetings of the national negotiating committee, led by Woodley, with BMW called for them to accept the Towers bid. Only the involvement of the German unions, apart from their representation on the management board, was decisive for losing the sell-off, took place. The workers did not feel sure of the outcome. Towers had just been persuaded to pressurise for the Towers bid.

So the Alchemy bid failed on April 27, it was not surprising that workers demonstrated their joy, and when the Towers bid succeeded they also celebrated. This was the only choice that Woodley and the stewards had given them: they were chucking at straws.

Now their problems start. Up to now everything has been obscured from them. This confusion has been added to by the fact that Rover has moved to the top of the sales league in Britain. Prices slashed

The heavily discounted prices that Rover has brought to the sales. So much in order to get every penny out of the deal, cut prices drastically, selling at a loss because any money raised was a bonus, and would simply reduce the stocks they were giving away. With sales figures time when prices go back up, and when the firm drops out of the money league?

The reality is that in order to continue to sell cheaply Towers will have to cut costs. This is where it is so dangerous for the unions to jump headlong into bed with the bosses.

How can the union that has led the workers to cheer for the new boss then resist him when he betray's working conditions? Remember conditions at the major plants usually lead the way for what happens in other workplaces, so that the workers could lose out of this.

Geoffrey Robinson, who was involved in the longest time of the talks, said he would expect the workers to take "a corresponding public contribution" to "bear up the rule book".

But what about those workers who are already affected by the present level of the price cuts? Which company will supply Rover?

Will Rover dealers stay loyal if other companies offer them franchises, and if Rover starts to deal with manufacturers with no new models in an increasingly competitive market?

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As the other plants similar problems will occur. Solihull will be on its own against Ford. Rover have shown at Dagenham how ruthless they can be. Cowley will only have one model, the new mini, and will be on its own with negotiating with BMW.

Immediate moves need to be made to form links between workers nationally and internationally to break the fragmentation created by the union leaderships. The lessons should be taken by the Ford workers straight away. You need to occupy immediately don't let union officials or the government decide on the situation in its time. Call for union demonstration in London demanding nationalisation.

United we can fight back divided we win up pleading for a benevolent capitalism to bail us out.

The workers at Longbridge have no vote on the deal that could affect their future, but at least they could try to influence events through their stewards.

But what about the component suppliers, whose jobs are also at stake? Ford have announced that they are going to buy more components for the Land Rover plant at Solihull from Europe, and some models will now have to share the same components as their Maverick and Explorer models.

Ford, too, have said they will switch to component suppliers in Europe. Many workers in the component industry have already been made redundant. Already there have been 600 job losses at Fort Dunlop in Birmingham, but more jobs can be expected to go, among steel producers and in the many smaller companies that supply Rover.

They are usually in the same unions as the Rover and Ford workers, and they are scattered all over the UK. But even though they are part of the same organisation, they do not feel there is a common interest. They have not had any say whatever, they are hidden workers.

The main unions should call an emergency conference of all car and component workers to discuss this crisis. They should be the forerunner of such a conference on a European scale. The centre-piece of such a conference should be an end to concessions bargaining, that is putting more and more out of work. Available work should be shared across the plants.

If such conferences were held, then car workers could put themselves at the forefront of developing a nationalised public transport system.
Scottish Socialist Party

The rise of a new socialist party

On 6 May 1999 Tommy Sheridan, head of the Scottish Socialist Party list in Glasgow, was elected as a member of the first Scottish Parliament for three centuries. This electoral breakthrough put the SSP, created only a few months earlier, at the forefront of the political scene. But the roots of the new party are much deeper.

Francis Curran and Murray Smillie

International co-ordinators of the SSP, explored what happened in an article for Imprecor, French language magazine of the Fourth International. Below we print an edited version.

By introducing the poll tax in 1989, Margaret Thatcher made a double error. Until then she had attacked the workers’ movement secure by sector, choosing their terrain, beating, one after another, steel workers, print workers, left wing councils and, as her pièce de résistance, the miners.

But then she tried to impose a new local tax which hit everybody and made the most impoverished pay the same as the rich. This provoked a mass movement which smashed the poll tax and contributed powerfully to her downfall.

Her second error was to first introduce this tax in Scotland, a part of Britain where her government had never commanded a majority and where the workers’ movement had strong traditions of struggle.

This is not the place to repeat the history of the mass mobilisations which defeated the poll tax, the sole victory of the British workers’ movement in a period of heavy defeats. But this is crucial in the genesis of the SSP.

In Scotland the anti-poll tax movement rapidly achieved great breadth. The Scottish section of Militant, which later became the main component of the SSP, played the leading role, defending the strategy of refusing to pay the poll tax combined with mass mobilisations and direct action.

A wide network of local committees developed, federated at a national level, with Militant’s Tommy Sheridan as the main spokesperson.

But, while Militant played a dominant role, this struggle also saw real unity, bringing together for left militants, Tsokhlyat and libertarian, alongside Labour party members, trade unionists, Communist party members, Nationalists and many coming into political activity for the first time.

It forged cooperation between forces from diverse backgrounds and began to change ways of behaving and thinking.

Scottish Militant Labour leaves the Labour Party

Following this campaign and the normalisation of the Labour Party under the iron hand of Neil Kinnock, Scottish Militant left the Labour Party in 1992 (a year before comrades in England) to create an independent organisation: Scottish Militant Labour.

The Scottish Labour Party, from the authority gained in the campaign against the Poll Tax, especially in working class areas of Glasgow, SML scored the first electoral success of the far left in Scotland, securing the election of several municipal and regional councillors in Glasgow.

The most spectacular success was Tommy Sheridan’s election to Glasgow city council when serving a six month jail sentence for trying to stop a warrant sale of a poll tax non-payer’s medieval treasure of furniture of so-called debtors.

In 1993 Thatchers’ successor John Major had won the General Election. In Scotland his victory created double disappointment.

We were condemned to five more years of Tory by the Tories and Labour’s defeat, set back the perspective of establishing an autonomous Scottish Parliament. This strengthened nationalist consciousness linked to social demands.

The lunch to the right of the LP began under Kinnock, continued under the brief reign of John Smith, who died in 1994, and was extended under Tony Blair.

The Scottish National Party, a bourgeois national party with a petit-bourgeois leadership and a popular base, was trying with some success, to develop a left force to attract the votes of disappointed Labour voters.

On the Left the idea was growing that it was necessary to try to create a socialist alternative to Blair’s New Labour. The potential was demonstrated anew by the success of Tommy Sheridan in the European elections in 1994, where he scored 7.5 per cent in the whole of Scotland.

It would have been very easy for SML, rooted in self-proclaimed triumphalism. But the organisation understood that it couldn’t form an alternative by itself; it was necessary to work to try to create a united, pluralist anti-capitalist force.

Struggles and debates on the Left

In the early 1990s Socialist Forums began as annual meetings organised jointly by the Socialist Movement (SSM, left Labour), the Scottish left Communist Party, left Labour Party of Scotland (one of the fragments born out of the explosion of the CPGB).

In 1994 for the first time representatives of SML participated. Subsequently they accepted an offer to jointly organise the 1995 forum.

Alan McCombes, in the name of SML, publicly launched the idea of an electoral bloc, a Socialist Alliance, to contest the first elections for the Scottish Parliament, a perspective which received some credit when the Labour Party in the next legislation elections.

The following year were marked by new struggles: the strike at Times in Dundee, the campaign against water privatisation. In 1994-95 the campaign against the Criminal Justice Act was characterised by mass, illegal demonstrations.

Although the law was adopted it has never been used against militant ecologist activists of direct action, as was expected.

In a campaign against the building of a motorway to south Glasgow, militias of traditional left encountered radical ecologist militias, some of whom subsequently became part of the Socialist Alliance and then the SSP.

A lost opportunity

The idea of a Socialist Alliance was making some headway, though with reservations in the SSM where a section of its supporters remained in the Labour Party and even more so in the Liberal Movement, which was entirely integrated into the SNP.

Things accelerated, however, thanks to the intervention of Arthur Scargill who left the LP and in November 1995 announced his intention to launch a new party.

This interested a number of political forces in Scotland, as it did in England, and could have been a real opportunity to create a new, pluralist, socialist society, in a country like Scotland’s Scargill’s ultra-centralist, authoritarian, even Stalinist, Seccesionists wasted this potential, with the result that the new Scottish Labour Party, is today reduced to a shadow of itself.

It is only today, five years later, that one can begin to see in London the outline of a new English radical left.

In Scotland discussions between Scargill and the organisations from the Forum founded on two points. He rejected pluralism, the entry into the new party of organised political currents feared either then or later by the Militant and SWP.

And Scargill refused to contemplate an autonomous section of the party in Scotland.

In addition, many conclude Scargill made, unthinkingly, the same mistake of his father when he launched the Scottish Socialist Alliance in February 1996.

The Scottish Socialist Alliance

What did this new SSA represent at the moment of its birth? SML joined, as an organised current. The Socialist Movement also decided to remain within the LP.

The SSM joined as a current though many left wing militants from the SNP and SML in the CMS, with groups such as Roseanne Kane, the leading figure in the radical ecologist movement.

Making the link between ecology and the anti-capitalist struggle, one of the slo
SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

May 2000: Engineering workers occupy the Kimber Energy engineering plant in Clydesbank, supported by campaigns outside.

Defeat of the Tories but also because devolution would lead to the creation of an autonomous Parliament in Scotland.

Political life in Scotland was more national, distinct from that in England. A referendum in September 1997 broadly approved the autonomy project proposed by Blair, opening the way to the creation of a Scottish Parliament.

The SSA had taken an action which positioned itself well in this new political framework: in favour of an independent existence for the country. It became its identity card and later that of the SSP.

Socialism is only marginally characterized by crude anti-enlightening sentiment. It is rather more the expression of the profoundly democratic aspiration of the Scottish people to determine their own destiny.

Critically this aspiration has always been championed by the workers and the workers' movement rather than by the rich, and today the support for the movement is stronger among the working class and the unemployed than ever before.

It is, therefore, natural to fuse this democratic aspiration with the struggle for social transformation. In this foundation is found the key project for emancipation in Scotland.

A new party

The SSP was launched in September 1999. SML transferred its apparatus and offices to the new party. Its journal Scottish Socialist Voice became that of the SSP.

The creation of the party built on the experience of the SSA but was also a break - it was a qualitative step. The SML had learned much more fundamental lessons from the experience of the SSA, and the party automatically became a new party.

In the discussions before the launch of the SSP the question had been posed: who will carry the banner of the SSA? You already know the answer.

The party was a success. Immediately it had a qualitatively different impact than the Alliance, at a mass level the SSP was understood as a political project.

Those who look to us, demand, and demand forcefully, that the SSP must also be a party like the others.

The SSP draws a line between ourselves and the Labour Party and the SNP.

The candidates stand as workers' representatives who will work for workers' wages and jobs. Tommy Sheridan only works half his salary, giving the rest to the party and other organizations.

Our profile is important: we proclaim our socialism and put forward proposals which meet the needs of the majority in the here and now. We are crucial to everyone involved in struggles, small and large, and not simply disappear when things go well.

We reject leftist platitudes that 'elections aren't our terrain, our terrain is struggles'.

On a historical scale it is true that important questions will not be decided by mass election actions. But election campaigns are an excellent way of carrying out political activity, making our ideas known on a mass scale.

There is no contradiction between election campaigns and struggles complement each other.

Electoral breakthrough

The new party began to attract an influx of new supporters and to create new branches beyond the geographical base of the SSA. The first electoral test was in a European by-election in north-east Scotland.

In unfavourable territory, covering the cities of Dundee and Aberdeen but also some of the richest agricultural areas in Europe, the SSP obtained a vote of 2,500, or 2 percent, which was a result but sufficiently revolutionary to establish credibility.

After the first SSP by-election in February 1999, energies were focused on the preparation of the first Scottish election campaign. Its successes convinced local elections. The electoral campaign emerged with the work of building the SSP. The party increased from 600-800 members to 1,000-1,100.

We present lists in every part of the eight regions of the UK, including in those parts where the party didn't exist. That allowed the running of a national election campaign and gave every elector in Scotland the chance to vote SSP.

This was the first election to introduce proportionality, real representation, even proportionally 56 members of the new Scottish Parliament were elected under proportional representation at a regional level and 73 in first past the post constituencies.

The SSP stood in 18 constituencies, making an agreement with the SWP who stood in 4.

At a national level the SSP won 2 percent of the vote (46,000) and its score of 7.5 percent in Glasgow allowed the election of Tommy Sheridan.

But the celebrations in Glasgow were tempered by bad news. Scargill's party gained 15,000 votes, beating the SSP in every region apart from Glasgow and the West. SSP members were incredible.

The SSL was very weak in Scotland and had been quasi-invisible for the long time. Confusion of names, the fame of Scargill and Haig...

We also addressed ourselves to those who still vote, reluctantly, for the LP those who work and who support the SSL. The later is ahead of Labour in the polls in Scotland and its political program is, for instance, to legalize cannabis and decriminalization of other drugs. Our policy was to present a book by our spokesperson on this issue to the Party and the SSL on the whole... We have put forward a proposal for a Scottish Service Tax - a system of local services, based on a system of progressive measures which would lead to a significant redistribution from rich to poor.

We aim to organize an unification of SSP and SSL efforts to get rid of the current situation, which is far from satisfactory.

Tommy Sheridan's Bill's on 'abortion' and 'same-sex' were carried at its first by a major and decisive vote of 79 to 15 with 30 abstentions. This was despite desperate opposition from the Labour-Lib-Dem-Presidencial executive, which had not been left in tatters after the parliamentary and judicial rebellion - a massive victory for the SSP which would have two stages to go through.

The SSP is engaged in a long-term fight within the left and smears, slander and slanders about the SSP, against handout for the bosses, against flexibility and for public services and the rights and dignity of workers. But every serious political force must present itself through a political party.

We work to deconstruct these anti-socialist campaigns. We are in a political situation where an electoral process is being formed, especially in Europe.

In that spirit that we participated at the conference of the SSP, we present our preparations to carry forward this type of collaboration.
Sierra Leone: tragic victim of globalisation

Bob Wood

GLOBALISATION is fraying at the edges. For evidence, look no further than Africa. Look at the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, look at the Congo, look at Angola or the Sudan. Or look at the untold story of Sierra Leone...

British forces prop up government troops and vicious pro-government militia, armed with Foreign Office help.

The country is rich in mineral resources, particularly diamonds, now said to be funded by the rebel, and also iron ore, aluminium and timber, the latter obtained through shallow mining of laterite, leaving vast areas in the south of the country environmentally sterile and useless for farming.

The profits from mining have also been channeled into the pockets of middlemen, company share-holders, merchants or local forces that rule the state.

Corruption

The extent of this corruption can perhaps best be judged from the activities of Janvier Mamou, a millionaire in the Afro-Lebanese community of the late President, Siaka Stevens. Although he was not an elected politician, in addition to his diamond and fishing industries, Mohamed and Amoud cabinet meetings and influenced political appointments.

At the same time, the President's secretary was busy selling civil service appointments, for example, an aspirating director officer might have to pay several thousand pounds on initial appointment, and then regular monthly fees for the privilege of retaining the job. Little imagination is required to understand the ultimately paid cost of these bribes.

Since independence in 1961, the politics of Sierra Leone has been influenced by conflict for spots between the three main groups - the Mende in the south, the Temne in the north, and the Kroo, descendents of freed slaves, in the Freetown peninsula. These ethnic conflicts have been subdued, but of course never entirely over-ridden class conflict.

After independence, the country was ruled successively by the MEND brothers from the Mende south, leaders of the SLPP (Sierra Leone People's Party), with the APC (All People's Congress) in opposition. Siaka Stevens, the leader of the APC took office in 1968, following disputed elections and a short-lived military intervention.

Stevens had been a trade union leader on the railways, and although he came from the north was not a Temne but from the smaller Limba tribe. Ruling first as Prime Minister, then as President of a one-party state, Stevens turned the moderate corruption of the MEND period into a known kleptocracy.

Successor

He was followed in 1985 by his chosen successor, Joseph Momoh, leader of the armed forces. Momoh was in anything even more corrupt than Stevens, and was eventually overthrown in 1992 by a group of junior officers under Valentine Strasser. These officers were concerned about the conduct of the war against the rebels which had by then begun.

The origins of the rebel organisation, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), can be traced back to the '60s, its early and sixty sev, enets, a period of world-wide radicalisation. It came from the coalesence of several different radical and marginalised, discontented ex-students and ex-soldiers...

Bob Wood

What of the future? The UN and now British forces, has been no more helpful in solving the crisis in this poverty-stricken and war-torn country than the previous campaigns by Nigerian-led West African forces. Whatever the origins of the civil war, it is clear that since 1997, its shape has changed.

The alliance formed then between parts of the Sierra Leone Army and the RUF has consolidated the hold of the rebels over the northern part of the country. The map showing the areas held by the rebels is almost entirely the same as the area which the Temnes live.

Pipedream

By the same token, the areas controlled by the gov- ernment are the Mende areas. Any prospect of completely defeating the rebels is a pipedream, although as long as the government can hold Freetown, with interna- tional military assistance, the rebels can be contained.

New political structures must be found - possibly some form of federal government, with powers devolved to the regions. The Kabbah government was elected using a closed list system, similar to the European elections in this country, leaving the political elites in the party systems to pick their representatives.

And one of the reasons why this recent peace agree- ment broke down may well have been the failure to implement one of its clauses - the holding of local elec- tions.

What remains certain is that none of the imperialist countries concerned has done for the current state of Sierra Leone to be trusted to find an ethical solution.
Dave Bangs

The rapid racism of the British press response to land reform, especially in Zimbabwe, has all but obscured the appalling injustice of white dominance over the land there. Out of the 1.5 million white Zimbabweans, only 4% are farmers who were the main enemy. For those black nationalist guerrillas crossing back over the border, struggling through the bush, it was the white farmers who they confronted up to — with their Special Forces, razor wire, dogs and guns.

For ex-SADF soldiers, the population of the ZANU attacks on the opposition MDC, here in the colonial country, we should not forget the symbolised need for the use of war veterans to lead the land occupations. The volk face of the whites is untenable. The war veterans will lead the land occupations.

In a political game replete with symbolism, it is not by chance that the ZANU veteran gang should have attacked farmers like Martin Oldacre, a member of the white supremacist counter-insurgency Grey Scouts, who even called for the death of Kenneth Kaunda (can you get it?)

Violence

For us socialists, the clamour over the land occupations raises many basic issues. The Land is Ours, the statement denouncing white domination but arguing the need to uproot this violent seizures in today’s climate.”

But what is today’s climate? The reality of class rule fundamentally different today than it was when Irish workers burned our British absentee landlords 80 years ago? Where are the land occupations in Zimbabwe? Are they facing up to white farmers or the mandarins of Mugabe’s IMF backed regime, they will find that the reality of ruling class violence everywhere confront them.

When the anarchists workers of the Donnybrook district forced their pro-fascist landlords in 1936, or when the French serfs of the medieval Jacobites painted the night sky red with the flames of burning homes, was that not in the face of an after endless years of cruel repression?

The horror of the British media at the violence of the land occupations is primarily a horror of the class violence of the dispossession. We can argue that this violence was needlessly cruel, that it often affected other poor black people, or that it served the purposes of the corrupt ruling party. But it is in its character as a class struggle that its brutality and international investment that has played a role.

The British connection

Many of the big media sharehold- ers and establishment figures who have a personal connection for their horror of the killing of white farmers.

Members of the House of Lords, members of the House of Commons, big British landholdings also own huge estates in Zimbabwe. In Brighton, the Eiseng deug has given free publicity to the notorious and frightening landlord and convicted arsonist Nicholas Hoogstraten, who has a million acres holding in Zimbabwe that he funds with ZANU in the war of liberation.

The role of the state

Time and again the mass media have contrasted the ‘lawlessness’ of the armed land occupation with the urgent need to return to the rule of law. The independence of the Zimbabwean judiciary has been praised. The need for due legal process in the takeover of land, the consent of the seller and proper compensation have been stressed.

Yet what has this judicial independ- ence served? Any radical land reform at the time of independence was scuppered by the pro-imperial- istic terms of the Lancaster House settlement, which guaranteed that no expropriation of the land should take place until at least 1996.

Of course, Mugabe should have challenged the terms of this settle- ment, which institutionalised a continuing political role for the white settlers and business owners and the continuance of their prop- erty rights. But to do so would have brought him squarely into con- frontation with imperialism, and that he was not prepared to do.

All the main judgements of the Zimbabwean judiciary in the post-Lancaster House period have sup- ported the property rights of the whites.

The process of extracting land from them for poor rural blacks has been confined to quasi-commercial sales, mostly of national land, which has then tended to fall into the hands of Mugabe’s cronies.

The rule of law and the indepen- dence of the judiciary have been a major block on social progress in Zimbabwe, because it means the rule of bourgeois law and the inde- pendence of the bourgeois state. Law is not neutral.

It serves the dominant class. It is Mugabe’s implied threat to the independence of the bourgeois state that frightens European commenta- tors most, not the prospect of legal, gradualist land reform — or even squatter violence.

As The Economist (22 April) said, “Deplorable as it is, the violence is not, in itself, the main cause for concern. Not even ZANU is at reform… The sinister feature, rather, is the president’s role in the current campaign… The president says, ‘This is not a problem that can be corrected by the courts.’ He thereby lends his support to mob rule.

If the wider needs of the class rule dictate, then the bourgeois state can take very radical action.

In the crisis of the Second World War, the British state took over vast tracts of private land for war pro- duction, war facilities and for mili- tary training.

State-owned farms were temporarily (and sometimes permanently) expropriated and private ornament- al parks uncannily ploughed. Farmers who did not comply with local state directions were expelled from their homes.

What capitalist investment must have, however, is stability. And even a whiff of the self-activity and rebellion of the poor will send such investors off and away.

The Mugabe regime and the MDC

Driven by the pressure of imperi- alism, the Mugabe regime is desper- ate. All the vicious cut-backs of the IMF-borne Economic Structural Adjustment Programme, with its end to food subsidies, abolition of the minimum wage and massive rises in the prices of basic goods have not recreated the high growth rates of the first years of indepen- dence. MDC has used the confrontation with the MDC to its advantage.

huge strike movements of state and industrial workers, uprisings in the townships, demonstrations and mass protests have had an effect which is poor.

Yet the growth of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) has taken the course to offer itself a new opposition movement in the years since the fall of the guerrilla war. Most of them have de- scribed their version of socialism.

Although born out of the Congress of Trade Unions and mobilising large sections of the working class, it was soon captured by business interests. Democratic in form, the MDC is neo-liberal in its pro- gramme, calling for all state-owned companies to be privatised in two years, for central bank autonomy, and a 100-Day IMF-style stabilisation.

No wonder it has been joined by the ranks of white farmers.

A landless land reform

The British government has linked the process of land reform to the recognition of the new law and an end to the compulsory purchase of white-owned land. There is concurrence with the Mugabe regime that the reform should proceed to around 1500 of the 4500 white-owned farms, and to the return of the state farms which are voluntarily offered for sale.

Yet despite the heavy ZANU orchestration, it is difficult to con- vince that the process of land occupa- tion does not already involve the spontaneous activity of many poor and landless farmers who merely wish to take advantage of these new opportunities.

That is how it should be. Genuine land reform does not require the consent of the landlord or their compensation. It is merely a return of land that has previously been stolen to its rightful owners.

It proceeds in response to local needs and results from the self- activity of the landless themselves.

It would be criminal to spend a penny on compensating the expropri- ated, and to harm farmers in any way where the average income has dropped to £279 per year.

Of course, the continuing pres- ence of the white ex-farm owners in the country is not helpful to black farmers (if they have such skills) would be undoubtedly useful to the farm sec- tor, it would be a useful way to see how many stayed, in such circum- stances.

And of course, the Mugabe regime should not benefit themselves from the process of redistribution.

The Land Is Ours calls for an invention to be ventilated in need fully representative of the landless people to oversee the process of reform.

It calls for British financial aid for land redistribution to be consistent with the aims of local democratic accountability and to take into account the need of indigenous, tribal and nomadic peoples, and for it to be ensured that the best agricultural land is given to the landless and properly man- aged sustainably, taking into account environmental considera- tions.

Britain’s promise of a mere addi- tion to its annual aid to Zimbabwe is a paltry sum. The British government has refused to fund this process is paltry. As George Monbiot says in the Guardian: “We are committed to the government of Zimbabwe runs into billions”.

The problem of land reform is not simply the problem of land corruption and neglect but the fact that the state is more than a cen- tury of imperialism.

The conflict and the Revolutionary Front has become the super-exploitation of Zimbabwe and other neo-colonial states.

Our first duty is to repay our debt for the suffering of the black popu- lation.

The land is theirs!
Russian challenge to Chechnya's slaughter

Sheila Malone

Recent issues of Socialist Outlook have taken a detailed look at Russia and its war in Chechnya. The horrific social situation, increasing political and economic disintegration, and the shifting war effort among the Chechen, Russian, and foreign forces needs to be understood in the context of the political struggle for power in Russia, building solidarity. This was why the publication of this statement and appeal in the latest issue of Socialist Outlook (Humanity), a small, left, anti-fascist paper published in Moscow which supports the war against Chechnya. In Moscow, Vladimir Krotkov, was able to share his experiences and ideas with members of British anti-war and labour movement activists on a visit to the capital. In May there was much common ground in discussions of the war against the USA and its allies in Iraq.

There was also interest in the broader, albeit small, anti-war movement in Russia such as the left, anti-fascist human rights organisations like Memorial and the Soldiers' Mothers' Comm-itees, and in the small demonstrations which have taken place in Moscow.

The May Day demonstrations and celebrations with trade unionists here (London Region UNISON has passed a resolution opposing the war) led to discussions about trade unions in Russia and the difficulties in combating the influence of the workers' leaders who have chauvinistically backed the war.

In this they offer no alternative to right wing and pro-fascist ideologies and forces, but give them credibility.

On Russia's future under Putin, Vladimir had to say at a meeting in Camden, central London: Putin is a protegé of Yeltsin. We all know monopolistic oligarchy capitalism has its servants, including the big bosses. He (Putin) is just a representative of these financial oligarchs, he must be put there by them and they pull the strings. They give the orders, they pay the money, and they have the mass media to keep people believing in and wanting what they want them to believe.

As for Putin's practical activities, we know about his pursuit of the war. Then it is to bring in and install the 
Petersburg clan and his KGB people in the Kremlin. Why? Because in our country capitalism is directly connected with the criminal - these are class fighting amongst themselves, financial and industrial groups and also geographical groups, eg, the Leningrad clan of Putin, the Leningrad clan of Putin, Chubais etc.

And there is also the increasing role of the army, police and special forces under Putin.

A memorial plaque to Andreiop, a former KBG leader and ruler of the Soviet Union, has just been placed on the walls of the Lubyanka. (secret police headquarters). He was perhaps the best known persecutor of human rights organisations.

As for the economic side of Putinism, just before the recent presidential elections, he brought in some economic measures which were very popular, e.g., pensions up from $20 to $24 per month, a 10 per cent wage increase for teachers as well as popular tax break, but then destroying the oligarchy. But this was all hot air; they are still there - Borisovski, Businski etc.

In fact, Putin has in general turned from economic and social policy and into repressive and xenophobic policies. The media just carries on propagating the "blacks" (Caucasians).

There are perhaps more parallels between Russia and Britain than we might have thought.

Moscow March 2000

From the editorial board of the Russian anti-war newspaper Chechenskoye Vtoroe (Humanity)

The bloody war against the Chechen workers - who never violent approached or accepted participation in the Tsarist or Stalinist empires, or the Tbilisi "self-determination" - has already been going on for six months. Ten's of thousands have been killed or injured as civilians have been driven into exile and towns and villages reduced to rubble. This is the price being paid for the political and economic ambitions of the Russian ruling class bent on reinforcing and redoubling its position.

Despite the official propaganda, this war has nothing to do with fighting terrorism or "rooting out fundamentalism". On the contrary, the federal armed forces, burning and burning everything in their way, push Chechnya down the path of armed revenge - and, by forcing it economically and socially back to the Middle Ages, create the very conditions for reactionary radical-Islamic political forces to gain influence.

The military action, which is no more nor less than genocide against the people of Chechnya, is accompanied by a growth of authoritarianism in Russia itself.

Russia will only be freed from such a situation, the inflation of hysterical glory-power campaigns, by the growing political awareness of the military police apparatus - all this is a real threat to the civil society taking shape in Russia. It is vital that all of us work together to promote the development of a movement of people which is the basis of society. The ruling circles which today sanction mass murder of civilians, torture and beatings in concentration camps and the "disappear-
ice" of people the regime disapproves of could perhaps understand the same methods against movements of social protest.

All the political groupings of the Russian ruling class - from those who dream of returning to the days of Stalin's empire, to the liberals, whose demagoguery about human rights amounts to empty rhetoric - have united in support of the colo-
rial adventure in Chechnya.

Only a small number of left-wing and human rights groups, who demand the withdrawal of the occupation from Chechnya and the right for its people to decide their own future, have been consistent in their opposi-
tion to the barbaric military onslaught.

In February 2000, a left group of workers, the Praxis centre and the editors of the anti-fas-
sicist Chechenskoye Vtoroe (Humanity), set up an action group in Moscow for a "cultural and peaceful" campaign in support of the victims of the Chechen war.

This group has already begun the collection of material for a book which will be sold for refugees from Chechnya who have lost their homes, their property and their basic human rights. We at all our organisations of working-class people, left political organisations, all those who have an internationalist and humanitarian outlook are in close touch with the Russian anti-war movement.

They must know that they are not alone, that the international workers' movement is staying true to the traditions of international solidarity and that the oppression of the oppressed is on its side!

The Praksis centre

Geoff Ryan
SERBIA: boss Skobodan Milosevic's murder in Novi Sad of Boris Perovic, head of the Voivodina provincial govern-
ment, to launch a massive crackdown on war crimes. Claims by the regime that the man arrested for the murder was linked to the opposition Otpor (Resistance) group movement have been strengthened. There is much suspicion that the murder was, in fact, engineered by the ruling Socialist Party itself.

Atrocities on the opposition have not been restricted to arrest of supporters. The sole opposition TV Station, Studio 8, was shut down after being reoccupied by Milosevic supporters. Radio B2-92, Radio Pancika and the student radio index have also been closed down, as has Blic, the newspa-
paper with the highest circulation in Yugoslavia.

Milosevic now has effective control of the media in the lead up to local and federal elec-
tions at the end of the year. Protests against the closures

Milosevic cracks down, as Bosnian cities vote to boot out nationalists

Young and old alike: these Serb protesters have Milosevic broken up by not police. Nevertheless, the various opposition parties are still calling for daily demonstrations in all the major cities. It is too early to say how successful they will be. Unfortunately past experience shows the political and economic forces behind all the opposition parties, as well as personal vanities of some of the leading figures, make Milosevic survival a distinct possibility. Elsewhere in former Yugoslavia there has been a limited move away from nationalism - most notably among the Muslim population of Bosnia- Herzegovina.

As the Muslims were the chief victims of wars of aggression by both Serbia and Croatia this is a welcome develop-
ment. It confirms our analysis during elections in Bosnia that defence of a united, independent Bosnia-Herzegovina was essential. Following the develop-
ment of an alternative to the nationalist movement.

In local elections on April 8, the main Muslim party, Alija Izetbegovic's Party of Democratic Action (SDA), was utterly routed in larger towns by the Social Democratic Party, the successor to the former Communist Party.

Sarajevo, Zenica and Tuzla in "federalised" areas won by the SDF SDP leader Zeljko Lugasdija pledged that refugees of all ethnic groups would be welcome to return to their homes in cities run by the Social Democratic Party. The pro-capitalist, pro-western policies of the SDF are clearly not ones we would suppor-
t. Nevertheless, as with the earlier victory of the former Communist Party in Croatia, the SDF victory in Bosnia is an important step in breaking the hold of nationalist politics over large sections of the popula-
tion.

Moreover, the fact that the SDF vote was strongest in the main towns and countryside shows that the working class will lead opposition to nationalist oppressors.

However, the break from purely nationalist politics is not less developed in Croatia and Serbia in the Serb-led regions of the country. The Serb Democratic Party (SDS) won 52 out of 62 municipalities in west Serbia and the Serb-controlled half of Bosnia. The SDS which was "ethnically cleansed of croats and Muslims."

The SDS vote was swollen by the exclusion from the election of the extreme-right wing nationalist Serb Radical Party.

The elections were generally a disaster for the three parties running the ruling coalition - SDG, SNS and SDS. Former Bosnian Serb president Fikret Abdić's Serb People's Alliance (SNS) saw its support halved, while the SDS which had also fared poorly, notably in Banja Luka. However, Milorad Dodik's party of Independent Social Democrats (SNS) had a good election with 10 seats.

Dodik's tiny party began as a movement against the SDS, but was in fact far better than either of the other two parties. In Croatia those areas the HDZ improved on its 1997 parliamentary elections in all the municipalities where it was not faced with an ODS-PDS alliance. In Uzice previously held by the New Democratic Initiative.

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Norway: the workers teach the establishment a lesson

Anders Eklund

On May 3, 82,000 workers in Norway's private sector went on strike for higher pay and conditions. The biggest single protest in the country since 1936 was called in a dispute between the employers' and the union's wage policy. The result was not surprisingly - the union had accepted a wage offer of 2.5%.

The result was announced last week by the Norwegian Labour Federation (LFT), which represents 1.2 million workers. The union won a majority of 92% in the vote, with only 8% voting against the proposal.

Major points of the agreement:
- A 2.5% wage increase
- A one-month extension of the agreement
- A commitment to negotiate further wage increases in the future

The result is seen as a victory for the union and a defeat for the employers, who had been seeking a wage increase of only 1%.

Golden parachutes - big profits

Historically, the relationship between average wages and the wages of senior executives in Norway has been relatively low compared to the US and other advanced economies. But in recent years, the executive pay packets have increased significantly as companies have seen themselves generate huge revenues, bonuses, and stock options.

Recently, there has been a spate of "golden parachute" scandals. The head of the state oil company had to step down last year after it was revealed that he had received a parachute of over 1 billion kroner. Furthermore, the country's top executives have seen their pay packages increase by 50% in the past two years.

A resounding "no" vote

Against this background, it was not surprising that the overwhelmingly majority of union members in the private sector voted against the measure that was negotiated in the beginning of April. Normally wage negotiations happen every second year - but this was to be prolonged to three years. There was increased flexibility. The hourly wage rate was increased by a tiny amount - about 0.1 Euro, or 20 Den. This is very little in comparison to the amount of overtime the workers are asked to work.

Wages in a nutshell

With the new wage agreement, the average hourly wage in Norway is now 29.5 kroner. This is an increase of 2% compared to last year. The new agreement also includes a provision for a one-off payment of 100 kroner for all workers.

On the other hand, perhaps they were pressured by the "New Labour" government to accept in negotiations a result that they themselves did not believe would be acceptable. When the no-vote was announced, they explained it as a reaction to the golden parachutes and the "poor culture".

Their moral indignation was taken not seriously as the press showed that union representatives on the boards almost without exception had kept silent when the golden parachutes were handed out.

The result was that, for the first time since 1980, the union won in a wage negotiation. The union was able to negotiate a wage increase of 2.5% and maintain its workforce.

Protests and strikes were avoided, and the union was able to negotiate a better deal for its members. This is a significant victory for the union and a defeat for the employers, who had been seeking a wage increase of only 1%.

A warning to the Norwegian establishment

The fact that the trade union leadership was not out of touch with the rank and file became very clear. They did not do much to convince the members that the negotiated result should be accepted but took for granted that they would. The had only contempt for the "Vote No" campaign of the trade union left.

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"Bottom line? There is no bottom line!"

John North
"Bottom line? There is no bottom line!" are the words of an unhappily republican dissident after witnessing the tragic event of the republican leadership to conciliate the British and unionists with what amounted to final surrender and the subsequent response of their opponents.

The latest twist in the tale of the Good Friday Agreement came on May 8 with a statement from the British and Irish governments. This promised to restate the elements of the Good Friday agreement, restore the Stormont executive, implement the Patten report, cut off policy dumps and reduce the military occupation of areas like South Armagh as long as the IRA was perceived not to offer any threat.

In step with the government announcement, and coming immediately afterwards, was an IRA statement indicating that as a confidence building measure the contents of a telephone tapped by the Government could be open to inspection. There really is no doubt that a terrorist will be the surrender of the IRA. No general consideration of an arms dump that had been inspected in this way would be so well understood and the inspection of the inspectors would be of utmost importance in order to clearly identify the position of all parties.

The complexity of the agreement is meant to satisfy a militant rank and roll with criteria to move towards the point that it is the politics of the surrender and humiliation of republicanism that is important and not what happens to a few weapons.

Even more significant were the concessions on which the republicans based their surrender. The idea that the Stormont executive represented any sort of stepping stone to a united Ireland is long gone. British democratic institutions are not a concession, they would automatically recognize two new appliances in the event of their victory. The Patten report is so far from reform that the republican leadership had never been able to secure it. It amounts to a plan of modernization, a promise to accommodate the demand of the Chinese and a change of name. This statement is also significant because it is clearly refusals of the protests of republicans following the conciliation of the British. The British remain in charge, the agreement is dependent on republican surrender and the unionist veto remains also.

The republicans, having said firmly once again that this was their bottom line, watched slacks-jawed as the unionists exercised their veto and the bottom line fell through the floor. As SDLP deputy premier Seamus Mallon bitterly commented, for two years the problem had been deconstruction but half an hour after it was solved two new problems arose.

These problems were unionist demands that the IRA retain its name and that the Union Jack remain as a badge of sectarian dominance. The British give way once, for the British Secretary of State decision on the RUC name and on the British flag.

Comfort letter
They also issued a "comfort letter" to unionist leader Trimble indicating that they would cancel the deal at any sign of resistance from republicans.

Behind the IRA statement is the fanciful belief that they're equal partners with British capitalism and that they are both in alliance with the British to bring unionism to heel.

This is a total misunderstanding of British strategy and of the interests of Irish capital. Any objective assessment would make clear that for the British stability in Ireland equals partition and continued sectarian privilege for unionism. Irish capital has very few demands beyond stability and in any case has no intention of coming into conflict with the British. Now the republican leadership has no choice. The agreement has to work, because it's only by claiming victory that the extent of their defeat can be disguised. Yet again they have united with nationalists, this time to rescue Trimble and the moderate unionists, with whom they say they can do business, from the far right. Yet again this bears no correspondence to reality. It was Trimble and the so-called moderates who have led all the assaults on the Good Friday agreement.

Another unspoken assumption of republican strategy is that this will all end if the executive is dissolved. Yet the events of the past weeks make it clear that the British will remain in charge. The main objective of British strategy will be to preserve their unionist base around Trimble. Trimble's main strategy will be to demonstrate that he can secure the lion's share of sectarian privilege and preserve partition indefensibly.

Just to underline reality the DUP, the supposed voice of "Protestant socialism" (in reality the voice of the UVF) was discovered to be listed as the owners of offices stocked with an arsenal of weapons. This did not rate as an issue because the British and their allies are not interested. After all, they armed the UVF in the first place.

Two RUC men were jailed for a sectarian beating that they tried to cover up by framing their victim. The police command body decided that no action would be taken against RUC members who threatened human rights lawyer Rosemary Reilly shortly before her murder.

They figure in the whole debate in the 25% of republican supporters who declared their opposition to the deal in an opinion poll. The report of the poll is to break those workers from Sinn Fein and win them to a socialist opposition.

Anger as majority vote for Harland deal

It looks as if the twin crises of Samson and Goliah will continue to stand over the Belfast skyline for a few more years. Management has announced that Harland and Wolff has won a conditional £400 million contract with a Norwegian company for four roll-on/roll-off ferries. However, the workforce is not exactly jumping for joy. Harland and Wolff believe they have been taken for a ride by the management and union officials.

At a fraught union meeting on May 9, only 35 votes separated the 'yes' from the 'no' vote relating to a 'final management offer' which involved a massive erosion of workers' terms and conditions. The offer was in fact an undignified act of intimidation of the workforce.

Closure threat
Workers were told they could accept the new terms and conditions or have a management-negotiated 'deal' to turn down the new offer of work and close down the yard. Union officials had to work extra hard to sell the deal to a hull of deeply alienated workers maintaining that the company would not sign a prospective E400 contract with a Norwegian customer without a yes vote to the restructuring plan.

In the end the vote came out as 424 in favour and 389 against.

Some 1,800 staff at the shipyard were living under a 90 day redundancy notice.

To save the company, the workforce has had to accept around 350 redundancies, a no-strike agreement, a pay freeze for three years with a basic wage of £330 per week and a short-term working week when ever the management believes it is necessary for survival.

George Mountch, an official with the GMB welcomed the yes vote on behalf of the union.

Sell out
However, dozens of workers stormed out of the meeting complaining of a "sell-out" and a 'hacked vote'.

Several workers interviewed after the vote said that they would now start looking for a new job rather than accept the latest terms and conditions.

The cold draft of alienation will continue to blow through the shipyard for a little while longer.

Harland in its heyday.
RUC disgraces itself again

Paul Flannigan

A concerted campaign is underway to deceive the British public as to the real nature of the RUC. It is being propped up by Downing street and being orchestrated primarily by the Tory press. The Blair government recently awarded the George Cross to the RUC, the highest and rarest mark of distinction for bravery the British State can endow. A foundation with financial backing to celebrate the courage of the RUC is also to be established. The Daily Telegraph has been vociferous in its opposition to the token proposals of reform outlined in the Patten report. It can hardly be surprising then that in the middle of their "Save the RUC Campaign," the Daily Telegraph would not be in a hurry to report some unsavoury RUC news from Belfast.

The Independent, the Daily Mail, Daily Express and The Times all joined with their friends in the Telegraph in "overlooking" last week's "sensational story" concerning the conviction of RUC officers for serious sectarian crimes.

Two RUC officers were handed jail terms by a crown court in Belfast on May 10 for beating up and attempting to frame a young Catholic man. Two other officers and a British soldier were given suspended sentences for conspiring in the act.

Lots of people have reminded 21 year old Bernard Gibbens how lucky he is to be free to walk the streets after his encounter with a typical RUC patrol. The sardonic joke in West Belfast says that he was "the one that got away".

It is best to let Bernard demonstrate, if all began in February 1998:

"I came out of the GAA club in Andoyne and went to buy a burger. An RUC officer came over to me and said we have been watching you this past hour throwing bottles at RUC patrols.

"There was nothing I could say to him, I mean I had just come out of the GAA club. He threw me into the back of the lorry. As soon as the doors were closed it started. An officer started hitting me saying "what is your name, you French bastard?"

"He hit me in the back of the head, and on the mouth. He punched me on the face and kept screaming at you "you French bastard".

"He said I was wearing a Catalan and that I was "he's fucking wearing a Catalan top". He ripped it off and hit me on my back.

"Then he pushed my baton up my backside and said "we'll get the LVF to shoot you."

"It was then that I thought I might not get out of this alive. When I was brought to Antrim Road police station I was relieved even though by that time I was covered in blood. I was then charged with disorderly behaviour and with assaulting a police officer."

Days later the charges against Bernard were suddenly dropped. It turned out that one officer out of the five present, Andrew Lea had an attack of conscience and reported to his superior that the charges against Bernard were entirely fabricated.

An internal RUC investigation was launched and Bernard's solicitor decided to pursue an assault charge.

Then one September morning a different set of RUC officers turned up looking for Bernard. "It was Sunday morning, I was sleeping. My brother woke me to say that the police were at the door looking for me. I came down and they told me they were going to search the house for explosives. They went up to the attic and came back with a coffee jar bomb."

Bernard and his brother were then charged with terrorist offences and then held in custody to await trial. After spending three months in custody yet again the charges against Bernard and his brother were mysteriously dropped.

Bernard's solicitor concluded that the explosive charges were simply a crude RUC attempt to get Bernard to drop his assault claim against them.

He pressed on successfully and won the claim in the Crown court last week. Given the clear evidence from constable Lea the judge said he had no alternative but to send two RUC officers to prison for assault and hand down two suspended sentences to two others for perverting the course of justice.

He summed up saying that "we could find a motive for the disgraceful police behaviour other than blind sectarian hatred. The jail sentences of the RUC officers are the first of its kind."

Bernard Gibbens publicly thanked officer Lea saying "if not for him it would have been me who ended up in jail."

However he was less forthcoming in his comments on the RUC as a whole, he declared that the best he could say about them was that "they are 75 per cent rotten and sectarian and 25 percent OK."

Bernard was lucky that one police officer refused to go along with the usual sectarian routine - countless others have not been so fortunate. Bernards story is just one more everyday reason why nothing other than the disbanding of the RUC will do. Bernard is set to leave northern Ireland soon, fearing another RUC frame-up: "I just want to get some of my life back."

"Saving our planet..." of the International Socialists' Group

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Man of straw
HAS Jack Straw fallen victim to his campaign to outdo the Tories racism? Is he really beginning to believe all the rubbish about black "bogus" refugees?
On May 9, he shared a platform in Church House in London, with the bogus social scientist Charles Murray, best known for his book The Bell Curve. This argues that black people are genetically more stupid than whites. The book is a best seller with white racists, delighted to have their prejudices "scientifically" verified.
Next he will probably search for some proof that Romanies also have genetic defects and that non-white Anglos-Saxons are inferior species, justifying plans to put them into concentration camps.

An ethnic Foreign Policy?
British troops went to Sierra Leone on "humanitarian grounds", see British and other EU citizens from that troubled country, Edward Flood was born in South Glamorgan in October 1977. He has a birth certifi cate to prove this.

When he went to the evacuation centre in Freetown, hoping to join the other evacuees, he was turned away. He had no passport. He was a child whose mother returned from Britain to Sierra Leone and was on her British passport. Since then he had no need for it.

At least he was not evicted.

Anyway, said the British official in charge of the evacuation, nothing doing. Not only did he have no passport, he was black.

Missing the point
The violence in the May Day anti-capitalist demonstration in London, may have shocked some people. But there is increasing violence that also stimulates latent anti-capitalist feelings. This has been stressed in the reports from the actions of BMW and Ford.

A letter in the Daily Express read: "I am baffled by the number of people who have taken to the hand of the May Day anti-capitalist protesters as mindless thugs, and on the other hand complained about the threatened closure at Rover and now the MOD decision to have boots made in Brazil.

"These are both excellent examples of global capitalism at work, the very thing which many of those present were protesting against."

Black and white issue
Honor or horror? The black peas- ants in Zimbabwe are occupying white-owned farms and demanding the land without compensation.

Surely this is against the "rule of law"? Ah, but there is an historic precedent. When Cecil Rhodes’ Pioneer Column took possession of what is today Bulawayo, they called it Occupation Day. And from there they went on to seize whole of Matebeleland and Mashonaland, called it Rhodesia, and then crossed the Zambezi to seize more territory, which they called Northern Rhodesia. There was no mention of compensation.

On his death bed Rhodes whispered "they can’t change the name of a country, can they?" Little did he know! As for those who are horri- fied by the vio- lence which accom- pans some of the occu- pation of white farms, they should study history a bit. They don’t have to delve too far into the past - only twenty years.

When the first elections took place after what was then Southern Rhodesia, in 1980 British-appointed pro-colonial, Lord Soames, who was supposed to be neutral, did all he could to prevent Mugabe’s Zanu-PF from taking power.

He turned a blind eye when gangs of black thugs, known as auxiliaries, who were loyal to the puppet black prime minister, Bishop Abel Muzorewa, subjected the Shona villages where the bulk of Mugabe’s sup- porters lived, to a reign of terror.

Mugabe’s motives may be opportunistic - a desperate attempt to stave off an impending electoral defeat. This does not do away with the just demand for a re-distribution of the land. As for compensation - most of the white farmers have done exceedingly well out of their occupation of these lands for nearly a century.

The re-distribution of land is an issue which affects the whole of post-colonial Africa. Already there have been repercussions in Kenya, where landless families invaded two-white-owned farms.

While most of the white farmers gave up their land voluntarily after independence in 1963, the few farms which are still white owned, are some of the biggest in the country and this remains a highly sensi-
tive issue.

Stephen Nightcho, who is leading the campaign for land redistribution, says: "... when they (the whites) took our land they gave us trouble and did not pay for it. Now we are saying it should be given back to the ancestral owners."

Polls apart
The most recent public opinion polls show a rapidly narrowing gap between Tories and Labour.

Perhaps there is a simple explanation. When the elec- torate see the New Labour government trying to outdo the Tories with racist immi- gration laws, crime and pun- ishment, invaliding pensioners with a degrading 5p a week rise, etc, they are probably thinking "If we are going to have Tory policies anyway, we may as well have a Tory government to administer it."

Perhaps even Tony Blair will eventually come to realise that making up to big business and ignoring traditional Labour support- ers does not a guarantee of the second term he so obviously craves.

Where we stand
As a new century begins, the battles of the last century remain to be won, millions of women and men are taking part in mobilisa- tions against the evils of capitalism and the bureaucratic institutions. This reflects the fact that humanity faces widening despair.

Ecological, military, social and economic dev- astation pose millions of people. Many more people recognise the barbaric nature of capitalism. In a situation where the inability of the social democratic and communist parties to provide socialist solutions is becoming clearer, the task of creating new leaderships remains ahead.

Socialist Outlook is written and sold to people committed to the struggle. We are the British supporters of the world- wide Marxist organisation, the Fourth International. We stand for the revolutionary transformation of society and a pluralist, democratic, democratic world wide.

The overall goal which we pursue is the emancipation of all human beings from every form of exploitation, oppression, war, discrimination, and violence. Socialism must be under the control of ordinary people, democratic, pluralist, multi-party, feminist, ecologist, anti-mili- tarist and internationalist. It must abolish wage slavery and national oppression.

The working class is the backbone of unity among all the exploited and oppressed. The working class and its allies must uncompromisingly fight against capita- lism and for a clear programme of action in order to gradually acquire the experi- ence and consciousness needed to defeat capitalism at the decisive moment of crisis.

The movements of women, lesbians and gay men, and black people to fight their particular forms of oppression make an essen- tial contribution to building a dif- ferent society. They are organised around the principle "None so fit to break the chains as those who wear them."

The whole working class needs to fully commit itself to these struggles.

Furthermore we fight for a strategic alliance between workers and these organisations an alliance which respects their legitimate autonomy.

By building simultaneously revolutionary organisations in each country, the Interna- tional, we aim to guide and encompass the global interests of the work- ers and oppressed.

By building a united struggle against exploitation and oppression we can ensure the survival of the human race.

If you think this is worth fighting for, and that you like what you read in Socialist Outlook, why not join us? Drop a line to us at PO Box 1199, London NW 2 2UN, and we’ll be in touch.
A Marxist view of world history

Reviewed by Geoff Ryan

Chis Harman’s book is of tremendous value to all socialists. In nearly 700 pages he gives a wide-ranging picture of the development of human societies from the earliest times up to the present day. Harman’s work is a thoroughly Marxist interpretation, basing itself on the methods of historical materialism in the Communist Manifesto, continuing the analysis of Marx and Engels for a further 150 years.

The front cover of Harman’s book reminded me of A.L. Morton’s A People’s History of England. Harman’s book is in the same vein but with the vulgar interpretations of Marxism and the crude economic determinism that sometimes emerge in this latter work.

He understands the importance of ideology and the battle for ideas. He devotes chapters to the rise of Christianity and of Islam, paying serious attention to ideological and theological disputes within these religions. He also recognises the importance of art and culture within human development: numismen, writers, painters and musicians make an appearance, as Chris tries to set their works within the context of the changing nature of the societies they inhabit.

A People’s History of the World is a serious piece of academic scholarship. Harman makes use of the best available historiography, even when written by non-Marxists. For example, the important contributions to our understanding of feudalism by Marc Bloch and Georges Duby have been admirably digested. Chris is clearly aware of the writings of Cyril Mango, a leading scholar of Byzantium, and of Fernand Braudel.

Numerous Biblical references show a serious attention to the pre-Christian religions of Christianity.

Avoiding Euro-centrism

The greatest strength of Harman’s work is that he avoids the Euro-centrism that has long gone ignored or forgotten in Marxist writings. His explanation of the causes of the Thirty Years War and its importance for European political development is possible the best I have ever read. Harman’s chapter on Jacobinism outside France is also outstanding, demonstrating how the ideals of the French Revolution could rapidly spread beyond the boundaries of France – indeed, even of Europe, as sections on Haiti and Latin America make clear.

He also very clearly that capitalism produced modern slavery and, associated with it, racism – rather than the other way around.

Because Harman’s work is of such vast scope he has clearly had to make hard choices about what to include and what to exclude. Everyone will no doubt have suggestions for topics that could have been included.

Inevitably there are also interpretations within the book with which I would disagree – though many may simply be the product of the necessary simplification Harman has had to make. Chris recognises, for example, the important contribution to the development of vernacular literature of Dante – but fails to point out that in order to justify his use of the vernacular Dante had to write his major work on the subject (De Vulgari Epicienatia) in Latin.

Chris also notes that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was initially a very small political entity. The Communist Party of China had only 700 members when Zhang Daliu was expelled. This was a decision that has escaped the notice of virtually everyone who has written about the Chinese Revolution.

The Communist Party of China are particularly obvious: the theory of State Capitalism to explain the rise of Stalinism, the analysis of the break-up of Yugoslavia as area areas where Socialist Work and Socialist Outlook have long standing differences. There is little point in rectifying them. I will confine criticisms to a few areas.

While Martin Luther King is given a mention, Malcolm X is completely absent. This does not fit with the astonishing omission, given that it is only a few years since the 2SPW was organising meetings about Malcolm in every place where they have members.

Harman’s analysis of the Second World War is marked inferior to that of Ernest Mandel. While Mandel understood that this conflict contained within it a whole series of different wars, some of which Marxists supported as progressive, others they opposed as imperialists. In fairness, however, Mandel developed his analysis in a whole book (The Meaning of the Second World War) whereas Chris has only a chapter in which to outline his views.

A Marxist view

As noted above Chris devotes a chapter to the rise of Christianity. Robin Blackburn, in a friendly essay, but International Socialism, has already suggested that Harman underestimates the importance of the rise of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman empire for its growth. I would add further.

Although Chris shows how, once established, the Christian hierarchy rapidly became an instrument of state power, he underestimates the level of intolerance in Christianity even before it became the official religion. Christianity never wanted tolerance, or a free society, within Roman society. It wanted the suppression of all non-Christian religions, since it saw itself as having a monopoly of truth. This extended beyond the theological field to control many areas of Roman life.

Vulnerable

They understood they were unable to defend themselves openly. For a time, even though they were much more powerful, they also realised that traditional political power could no longer be used, or the Christian Church, with its many branches world over, could no longer be used. They no longer had to be upheld: ‘civilised’ Europeans inflicted slaughter on another for four years, rather than on each other.

These criticisms are not meant in any negative sense. They are meant to update his work, he will incorporate them. In my view they would make what is already a very impressive book even better.
Sierra Leone: No British solution!

British military involvement in the former colony of Sierra Leone is gradually escalating, and with it the danger of a long-term British role in propping up the corrupt and unstable regime there.

Despite the initial denials and prevarications of ministers it is increasingly obvious that the paratroopers allegedly sent in to secure the rapid evacuation of British citizens are digging in for a much longer stay. Massive naval and air reinforcements have been dispatched, and British military advisors are now reportedly playing a key role in coordinating the war effort of the Kabbah regime against the RUF, part of which appears to have included the capture of rebel leader Foday Sankoh.

This military adventure does not even pretend to be conducted under the banner of the United Nations or any international authority: the UN forces in Sierra Leone (mainly from black African countries) have been left to their own devices while the British military pursues the government's undeterred political agenda.

Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon has now admitted that the government is contemplating a long-term plan to "stabilise" Sierra Leone, which would involve a continued supply of arms and military advisors. This amounts to a covert recolonisation of the country, and represents a potentially open-ended commitment to fight each and any challenger to the Sierra Leone government for the foreseeable future.

As our article (page 12) explains, a key component of the crisis that is wracking the country flows from its dependent status and the cynical meddling of British and other imperialist powers.

Far from offering a long-term solution, Britain is part of the problem. Labour ministers, who appear to have learned nothing and forgotten nothing from the reactionary foreign policy of previous Labour governments, could be on the slippery slope to another mini-Vietnam style debacle. They must be stopped.

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