As Palestine revolts against slaughter and repression, Barak warns of more...

Stop the Israeli war machine!

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Alan Thornett - at the TUC conference

TUC calls for action - against picketing!

WHEN the TUC Congress opened in Glasgow on November 11, little notice was taken of the fuel blockades which had been gathering over the weekend.

The conference was going through its routine business, a bit like watching paint dry. Some useful things did happen at the secret conference, which endorsed the restoration of the link of wages with profits, and supported the resolution from the TGWU for stronger tender voucher scheme for asylum seekers.

This can be used by those mobilising against the voucher scheme to step up their vital campaign especially in new unions.

But these were social issues, not requiring the union leaders to think in any strategically or confront any employers. They do not have any relationship with the bosses, it was social partnership all the way down the line. This was entrenched in this reactionary framework.

When it came to the formal session on social partnership, on wage restraint, on the plodding for the platitude, no to say. In fact it almost looked like a rerun of the mover. The mover said how important it was to continue and build on this social partnership decisions of previous conferences.

There was no discussion from the floor, and the conference passed to the next business.

The only thing which broke the tedium that day was the debate over Britain's dollar currency. That got them going.

John Edmonds, from the GMB, moving a General Council resolution, led the pack demanding the earliest possible entry. He accepted that immediate entry was not on, given the high value of the pound, but called for the value of sterling to be brought down as quickly as possible to facilitate early entry.

Multinationals

He was backed to the hilt by the AREU's Sir Ken Jackson. Tony Duffinns from GPMU followed him by arguing that the alternative to the Euro was multi-national capital - a strange argument given the enthusiasm of European multinational capital for the Euro.

Three unions spoke against the resolution, very strongly. UNISON opposed the resolution by expressing strong support for the European Union and social model.

NAPTE comprehensively opposed the Euro and the whole EU project, as did the Community Youth Workers Union, who argued that the EU project would lead to a European super state.

Replying to the debate Jackson said "if it had not been for EU legislation, in the last year, we would have made no gains at all for our members". Well well. I wonder why?

By the following day the only thing that had run out of petrol, and the TUC high command had begun to catch on that something was happening. Picket lines were about to bring the country to a halt. This had to be stopped at all costs, it could catch on. Not only that there was a threat to the new Labour.

There was enough thought that there might be some legitimate demands involved, even though it was not an action by workers; no matter that there was mass support for the action in the working class due to the piecemeal level of tax on fuel. It had to be opposed.

John Johns addressed the conference, in a letter, to propose a General Council statement and to "offer the full support of Britain's trade union movement for the Government's efforts to ensure the immediate and full resumption of oil deliveries".

Bullying

He went on: "What we have seen this week in this county has gone well beyond democratic protest... This is no legitimate protest against an employer. It is an attack on a democratic government - a clear and crude attempt to bully the government into a change of course."

"Across the country today these protests are threatening vital public services... And what about the factories that are laying off thousands, public transport grinding to a halt, the life of the nation is being strangled?... We call on Britain's trade unionists to work normally and take part in this part in this bosses' blockade... let me tell you one thing today. You will not, and should not, shift this government... any government will bully-blockades and civil disruption..."

"Make your case peacefully by all means. This is the great strength of any democratic society. But these blockades are not blockades on fuel. They are blockades on our politics are no different from those who are now in power..."

Monsk was backed to the hilt by TGWU chairman Tom Morris, whose union represented the majority of directly employed tanker drivers at the refineries - many of them long time employees of the oil companies.

He told the conference: "This campaign has crossed the line from democracy into anarchy and breaking the law, the protesters should be arrested."

New laws

No wonder Blair was seen talking about new laws to ensure the transfer of fuel as an essential service. Monks and Morris had left the door wide open.

In the end it was just new laws which came out of the joint talks between the oil companies, the government and the unions (although new laws are still not ruled out).

But there was an agreement that fuel workers would be an essential service: a policy to ensure that the tanker drivers take action to defend their wages and conditions.

Yet again Congress indicated the left in the unions of building fighting opposition to the permanent discipline of social partnership.
Blair's team dig in under fire at Brighton

Not listening, hearing, or caring!

Brighton this year is Labour's first full crisis conference since Tony Blair's overwhelming victory in the General Election. This time conference took place in the context of a sharply fall in new Labour's popularity polls, with the Tories edging into the lead. But conference ended to the sounds of a poll revival - deep sadness at being defeated for the first time in 16 years since Blair was leader, on the question of pensions, rail safety and policing.

How was this turn around achieved?

Blair's speech attempted to parry the criticism that he was "not listening", which had become so damaging during the winter, although it had been made over the Dome and over the 75p rise for pensioners.

However, he certainly did not concede anything of substance - particularly on the issue of reducing the link between the state pensions and the earnings of the workforce. He merely confirmed that the link had been broken under Thatcher and is now the key demand of the pensioners movement.

But he countered the anger over the loss of the link and over the need for more investment in education, the NHS and in transport.

The theme of his message was that the job of government was to choose between competing goods and services. "It's not an arrogant government that chooses priorities. It's an irresponsible government that fails to choose".

Blair's attack on the Tories is not just at the question of conflicting interest group disagreements - but rather the fact that Hague and his team are portrayed as insular and obstructive.

Of course that attack is accurate - both in terms of the weaknesses of the Conservatives today, but also because the policy and political system is increasingly difficult to see any difference between the two parties. But that is not how the rhetoric reads.

For many people, as workers and as users, a key issue on which there is anger and fear in common with new Labour's policies is on the question of privatization - whether hidden under the label of FFS, PPP or some other acronym. But this is not defended anywhere in Blair's speech, because this is not a policy area he is prepared to present when poll ratings are so vulnerable.

We are told instead "The NHS was the greatest achievement of post-war Labour government. It was based on a single clear and enduring value: that health care should be based on need, not ability to pay for a service". "The Labour Party will not abandon what was one of the greatest civilising acts of emancipation this country has ever known."

What about prescription charges? The NHS plus optical and dental?

What about the increasing number of Labour voters who are told they have the choice of waiting for intractable lengths of time for pain relief operations - or paying to have them instantly?

We are told "If people want to pay for a nuclear submarine, they can. If people want to pay to go to Disneyland, they can."

Tell that to the refugees who are being turned away from Oakington detention centre, opened by this government.

Tell that to the thousands struggling to survive on unemployment benefit, and the asylum seekers, to those forcibly dispersed away from places of work and support and community support for people fleeing persecution at home.

So what we have in the end is an admission that mistakes have been made - but a ruthless determination to carry on in the same direction.

And the opinion polls demonstrate that this strategy is having some success. Of course part of that is because the Tories are such an unattractive option.

At the conference itself, the key debate was on the issue of pensions. The pensioners movement has managed to rally broad support for its platform. The demand to restore the link with earnings is a demand for a decent standard of living for this section of the working class.

But what came increasingly into focus was the means by which this standard of living should be achieved. The binary opposition of the link is in practice a campaign for universality, against means-testing and against regressive taxation.

Focusing on this opposition the leadership and their lack-
Hutton review slates PPP ... but only tube workers can stop privatisation

Greg Tucker

The Hutton review of London Underground funding has now reported. Set up by Ken Livingstone in a deal with Labour GLA members, the Review slams the government’s Public Private Partnership (PPP) privatisation plans.

But in accepting that some form of contracting out is inevitable it offers little comfort to tube workers.

With the government prepared to face out any legal challenge from Livingstone, only action by tube workers can stop LUL privatisation. And with time running out it is vital that the Labour movement across London now shows its support to give tube workers the confidence to fight back.

The tube is falling apart – every passenger can testify the seemingly unthinkable route of taxing the rich. Hutton effectively rules out this option from the start. Instead he focuses on comparing PPP with LUL bonds. The government argues that PPP is better because business knowledge how will lead to improved efficiency, at a cheaper cost. This is shown to be utterly unfounded.

There is no evidence that the private sector can manage any better that LUL. Indeed it is clear that the main, if not only, road to improved “efficiency” is the erosion of workers’ terms and conditions.

The only other improvement comes with the long term stability given by a thirty-year contract. There is no reason why LUL, if given the same stability, could not be even more efficient in the public sector, without having to attack jobs and conditions.

The government counters this by saying that under PPP the contractors carry the risk if something goes wrong. As the report says, “...this is a serious misunderstanding of risk allocation. No sensible private company will accept a risk without receiving full private sector debacle of the Channel Tunnel. But even putting the Channel Tunnel aside, let’s not forget that the problem with the JLE was that LUL failed to control its contractors – the very ones who are building for the PPP. Once a fairer set of assumptions about how the bond costs come out significantly cheaper than the PPP – even with the extra risk. How LUL would have to pay more to avoid the Treasury’s government investment would be even cheaper.

T

Even if Livingstone is serious about using his powers to make the contractors’ lives as intolerable as possible, it is questionable about how much he would be able to do. Despite using his threats to push up their charges, it is apparent that the potential PPP contractors are not unduly worried by this system.

Having demolished the financial arguments Hutton turns to the small matter of safety. As he comments: “the letter from the Inspector of Railways that was leaked during our review raises serious doubts about how it will operate. And, as the Review makes clear, the possibility will also exist for the contractors to hold LUL up to ransom. The slightest evidence of such a contract will be enough to put LUL on the spot.”

But the current Treasury-led system is unable to guarantee the long-term funding necessary to plan a proper investment programme.

New Labour’s PPP solves this problem by giving the tube infrastructure over into private hands for thirty years.

Alternatively Livingstone proposes to raise capital through an LUL bond issue. Both proposals dodge the option supported by the majority of Londoners, that the government directly fund the tube – the cheapest option by far, especially if instead of Treasury bonds the money was found through countercycle secure government funding. The Review ends with two unappealing options. That the government allows the GLA and Mayor to introduce bonds, on the understanding that such an option should include private sector management being contracted in at a much higher level than under traditional forms of contracting, what it calls a “win-win solution”. Or that the PPP should go ahead – but only if it meets much more rigorous safety and value for money criteria. Prescott and co. have hinted on this to claim endorsement for their general strategy, with only the details to quibble over. Of course, from Hutton’s perspective he has done everything to stiffen what Livingstone wanted – showing the PPP is unworkable and offering bonds as a viable alternative.

But don’t hold your breath if you are a tube worker. However bad PPP has been shown to be, the government can still defend any legal challenge, and the bond issue will still be a potential threat to jobs and conditions.

A

If this is made worse because the PPP is already beginning to affect tube workers lives. LUL has been carved up into smaller sub companies under “shadow running”.

The effective transfer of staff from the protection of the JLE to what will be the privatised contract companies has thus already taken place.

But rail privatisation this transfer does not appear to make much difference at this stage, with LUL central still in control (though the Railway Inspector’s report on safety shows that he certainly is concerned). But when it came time to hand over to the private sector rail franchises rail workers found that a number of their legal options to challenge their privatisation had already disappeared.

At the time we were sold this pop as a way for Knapp and co. to dodge the call for industrial action. Whilst this may not be quite the case here it does mean that the campaign to halt the PPP needs to hot up rapidly.

It is clear that any industrial action by tube workers can halt the PPP but it is important that the workforce is not divided.

The infrastructure workers, being threatened with the private sector, need to fight for themselves, face an uphill struggle. But all tube workers will be affected by the PPP – whilst many workers will remain in the public hall LUL, if nothing else every worker’s safety will be jeopardised.

However organised, all workers need to fight united – the RMT needs to be making clear at the earliest opportunity how essential unity will be campaigned for. The Hutton Review provides some useful ammunition in the campaign against tube privatisation, but the key is now the actions of the London Labour movement.

The LUL RMT have called for support for a demonstration on 21 October (11am Euston) and a lobby of the GLA on 24 October (6pm Marshall Street).

Both demonstrations need to be supported. Undergraduate workers have got to be convinced that when the time comes any action they take will be supported.
Fighting scandal of council house sales

Terry Conway

IN THREE YEARS since the election of this New Labour government more council houses have been privatised than underneath the tones. Now the government is planning the transfer of more than 200,000 a year — meaning that, if it is successful, within a decade there will be no housing left. This is a massive attack on the welfare state. We must see us return to the days of Rachman.

One of the biggest lies in this whole scandal is that these plans are being carried through for financial reasons. But the government are bribing councils by promising to write off up to £12 billion in debts if they transfer stock to the private sector. Another myth is that we shouldn’t oppose these transfers because Housing Associations are not really the private sector — they are non-profit organisations.

But Insdide Housing points out that 56% of all Housing Associations made profits of over 10% in the period 1995-1999 and gave average annual pay to their Chief Executives of £87,000.

Fortunately an increasing number of local campaigns are being set up to fight back against these plans — and some have won significant victories. Recent ballots where council plans have been defeated include Westminster, where there was a 62% no vote, in South Bedfordshire, where 72% said no and on the Etherden Estate, in Barnet, where the vote against privatisation was 60%.

Defend Council Housing National Conference

Saturday October 21, 11 am
Manchester - Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount St.

Lib-Lab coalition: a backwards step for Welsh Labour

Darren Williams

THE POLITICS of the National Assembly for Wales took a sharp twist on Thursday, October 5, with the announcement that the ruling Labour group is to enter a coalition with the Liberal Democrats.

Labour has governed as a minority since the first Welsh general election in May 1999, with twenty-eight of the Assembly’s sixty seats.

This meant that Labour had to make ad hoc agreements with at least one of the other parties — usually Plaid Cymru — if it was to ensure that it could win votes on controversial issues, and avoid a humiliating defeat like the no confidence motion that forced the resignation of Blairite First Secretary, Alan Michael, earlier this year.

Now, Michael’s successor, Rhodri Morgan, has drawn up a “Partnership Agreement” that seeks no formal stability by giving the Liberal Democrats twenty-two of the sixty seats, with Liberal leader Mike German becoming his deputy.

The Assembly is set to run until the next election in 2003, was agreed by an Assembly Executive meeting of the Welsh Labour and Liberal Democrat Executive Committee on Thursday night, and has to be ratified by a Liberal Democrat conference on October 14 if it is to go ahead.

The Partnership Agreement has been welcomed by Assembly Members, who see it as a necessary step to ensure that the Assembly can deliver policies that they say will benefit the people of Wales and enhance the body’s own standing in the process.

The Agreement contains one hundred and twenty policy commitments, including the provision of substantial sums of money for health and education, to our hospital waiting lists and school class sizes.

While the Liberal Democrats are claiming credit for these pledges, almost all of them are in keeping with the aspirations of mainstream Labour opinion.

Most are uncontroversial, if positive, but a few are designed to distinguish the Assembly’s programme from that of the Westminster Government:

 sede, for example, an independent review of all council funding whose proposals could see Wales, like Scotland, offering a element of financial support for students that is unavailable in England.

Other policies that Labour would not have promised include reviews of the powers of the Assembly, and of the electoral system for local government.

The fact that these initiatives are welcome in themselves does not at all justify the coalition that has put them on the agenda. The bitter irony, that it has taken the Liberal Democrats to initiate a process that could at last distinguish the Assembly’s politics from those of Westminster, is merely a reflection of the political reality of the Labour group.

In fact, Labour could have presented proposals like these itself and demanded support from both the Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru, with no strings attached, which would have been forthcoming in most cases if the parties had wanted to retain their progressive credentials.

The defeat inflicted on Labour in the past — most spectacularly the removal of Alan Michael - have been a response to the administration of Blair, who effectively imposed Michael against the wishes of Labour Party members and a minority of the Welsh people.

Plaid is to the left of Labour on a whole series of issues, and it is unfortunately significant that this deal has been struck not with them but with the Liberals.

For, however progressive the Partnership Agreement, a Lib-Lab coalition will ultimately pull Labour to the right.

The process by which the deal has been agreed also suggests a worrying move away from the genuine democracy that Rhodri Morgan supposedly embodies, in contrast to his predecessor. Labour AMs, outside the cabinet, were not even told about the deal until the day that it was publicly announced — by which time a detailed pact had been drawn up with the Liberal Democrats.

They therefore felt bounced into agreeing the deal, and while four AMs reportedly opposed the proposal as such, intense pressure is far more widespread.

The Welsh Executive was treated with even more contempt, being asked to endorse the proposals after they had been publicly announced, and therefore given the choice of falling into line or publicly humiliating their own leadership.

Labour’s minority position is a consequence of the unhappiness of large sections of the Welsh electorate about the politics of New Labour.

Rhodri Morgan’s administration should be seeking to demonstrate that it is in touch with grassroots Labour supporters, and by extension with the majority of the people of Wales.

Instead, it has signalled a move towards the politics of backroom manoeuvring, out of sight of the people.

Left Labour activists should work for the dissolution of this partnership and for Welsh Labour to demonstrate the genuine political independence that is necessary for the Assembly to become the tribunal of the people of Wales.

Nice target next for campaigners

Pete Cooper

Following the successful mobilisation against the IMF and World Bank in Prague in September, the next target of anti-capitalist campaigners needs to be the European summit in Nice in December.

Both the ATTAC network and the Etzioni network in France will be making Nice a priority.

Both these forces were key in the impressive turn out of nearly 100,000 demonstrators protesting against globalization in the small French town of Milau earlier in July.

Given that, and the strength of the left in the French labour movement, together with official Trade Union backing for the mobilisation, there is a real potential for December 6 to be another major step forward in building a genuine European response to neo-liberalism.

Let us make sure that we build a serious turn out from Britain.

This appeal is currently being circulated and deserves the widest possible support from individuals and labour movement bodies.

Appeal

WE THE UNDERSIGNED call for the biggest possible mobilisation for the demonstration called by the European Confederation of Trade Unions (ETUC) and supported by the TUC in Nice, France December 6 2000.

The Prague anti-capitalist demonstrations effectively exposed the role of the IMF and World Bank in bringing misery to tens of millions of people across the globe, through their austerity and structural adjustment plans.

But behind the WTO/IMF/World Bank stand the US and governments of the European Union. The EU is being used as one of the main instruments of the neo-liberal offensive against public services and living standards in Europe.

The Inter Governmental Conference will be deciding on a Charter of Basic Rights. This Charter, which is designed to form the basis of an EU Constitution, guarantees the freedom to conduct a business, but gives no guarantee of the right to collective bargaining and trade union action, including strike, at European level, in the words of ETUC General Secretary Emilio Gallego.

Nor are there any guarantees of the right to employment and housing, which are written into the constitutions of many EU countries.

The ETUC expects at least 100,000 demonstrators to converge from all over Europe. We call on all labour movement bodies, NGOs, and anti-capitalists to show their opposition to the direction of EU policies by mobilising with our European brothers and sisters, and calling for a fundamental change of course by European governments.

Meeting to build for Nice

Monday October 30, 7.30 Dinanora Centre, Orielton St London NW1 (or Great Portland St tube), includes report back from planning meeting in Paris on Oct 21.
Fuel protests: how should the left respond?

Labour reaps the whirlwind from its refusal to tax the rich

Alan Davies

 Socialist Outlook

Some sections of the left, and much of the left in the Labour Party and the trade unions, see the movement that erupted as simply one of small employers, to which the labour movement should offer no support at all.

There are some who say the more these people are supported, the more they will demand. Others, parts of the far left, have seen the protests as a new emergence of working-class struggle, which has to be recognised and built on.

In our view both of these positions are profoundly wrong.

First of all we have to be clear: the blockades were not protests by the working class.

The protesters were crisis-ridden sections of the small business people, sections of the petty bourgeoisie, who have turned against new Labour as higher fuel prices have been added to the unrelenting pressures of the market which they face every day.

Many of these people became self-employed as the result of Thatcherite deregulation and outsourcing in the 1980s, and now work endless hours in deregulated markets and are struggling for the survival against small profit margins.

To put it bluntly, we cannot give them any kind of support.

We should regard the protesters as a new movement of the petty bourgeoisie in defence of their interests against big business.

There were of course a range of dubious backers and manipulators behind the protest. These included the oil companies and the Road Haulage Association as well as the Countryside Alliance and the Tory Party.

We do not support these groups, but we do support the stated aims of the protest both in terms of a reduction in the tax on fuel, and in the presentation of the crisis facing small farmers, small hauliers, and owner drivers, which are at the core of the action.

The blockades centred on the emotive issue of petrol prices. British prices are the highest in Europe, due to both the level of tax, and are now punished against big sections of poorer people who run their cars.

The protest therefore earned mass support among the working class, and linked in to a range of other protests against new Labour. The result was an explosion of anger and resentment.

People who live in the countryside, and small business people, feel victimised by fuel prices. Small farmers, hauliers and owner drivers are being squeezed out by big business, neo-liberal deregulation (unregulated market forces), and - in the case of the small farmers - the supermarkets, food and market producers who profit from buying their produce at knock-down prices.

We should stand with them and call for the protection of small businesses threatened by their principal enemy - big capital and multinational companies. We reject any notion that this is not the business of the left or of the labour movement.

Tory tax

It is argued that high fuel costs are not simply to protect the environment. This was never the case.

The fuel price escalator was introduced by Tory Chancellor Norman Lamont virtually tax-free... The Tories made North Sea Oil a massive profit stream for the oil bosses - and they want to keep it in that way!

Garbing the use of cars can be achieved only through combining strong disincentives to car use with the provision of alternative forms of sustainable transport.

Policies in towns should include a major investment in public transport alongside more pedestrianisation, parking restrictions, park and ride, alternative energy sources for the car etc. and tackling of all the abscamming car culture which currently exists in this society.

But without visible alternatives that enable people to travel, increases in fuel prices are inscrutable and have little effect on consumption. A differential tax on engine size would be a much more useful way of reducing carbon dioxide emissions.

The protests have probably set back Labour's limited attempts to limit greenhouse gas emissions.

But the popular anger flows from successive governments, including new Labour, hypocritically claiming to use fuel taxation as a means of achieving a reduction in emissions, while in fact relying on this as a major source of revenue for the Treasury.

The shift towards indirect taxation, which began under the Tories and has continued under Blair, has been widely recognised as unfair and dissi place.

People can see that a tax which raises more money for the government the more petrol is sold is flawed as a means of reducing the consumption of fossil fuels.

They know that the extra money raised for the government is not being spent on the environment, it is being used elsewhere.

This is one reason why the call by the Green Party to maintain and increase the tax will go nowhere.

Direct taxation

We call for a turn back towards direct taxation. The increases in indirect taxation carried out by successive governments in this country have resulted in a reduction of wealth from the poor to the rich.

We say reverse this situation. Reduce indirect taxation. Tax the rich and impose massive direct taxation on the oil companies for an environmentally sustainable transport system: the current one on the North Sea is the lowest we have seen.

This should be a first step towards nationalising the oil companies, which are a green agenda can be pursued.

Only by taking on the power and wealth of capital can a green agenda be pursued.

The Green Party's lack of any analysis has left it with a blind spot on indirect taxation on oil.

We link our call for a reduction in oil to a call for a sustainable energy policy and an integrated transport policy for both passenger and freight.

This must include not only road haulage services for passenger travel but a complete reorganisation of the road system to switch large quantities of freight and road haulage back onto rail.

The current levels of transport (and the consumption of people) are a product of "just in time" and the culture of globalisation, as Andy Kilminster's article explains. "We need the Detox Dispatch" to be challenged.

Now Labour, of course rejects all calls to tax the rich and the big corporations. It is as true in Britain as it is in the US, noting the anarchy of the roads into the country and the major obstacle to any planned transport system of the environment to redevelop the environment.

Business friends

The government's continuing support of the fuel protest - frequently denounced as "a challenge to law and order" - is not simply a pragmatic alliance which now exists between new Labour and sections of big business. In fact all of the business interests courted by Blair's team and new Labour's relationship to the business sector has been the closest.

As Private Eye points out, New and British business has supplied more expertise of the Blair government than to the oil industry. The role of Lord Simon, former BP chairman, who was Minister for Europe has been well documented. The Blair government's enthusiasm for his plan for World Trade Industry Secretary actually brought together a number of oil executives "to tackle the problem of taxation with the public pronouncements of new Labour ministers, notably the call to end the tax on the oil companies - sometimes on the basis of "instituting" or "violence on the picket line" as the reason for the tankers not going out from refineries.

But the protest was a new phenomenon in many ways.

Mixed signals from hauliers

Small haulage companies and owner drivers face a European-wide crisis in their industry. This is not uncommon in that the industry was deregulated, beginning in the 1980s.

Even though regulations that still exist are filled by most of the industry, particularly owner drivers, in the struggle to survive. This deregulation has led to the cut-throat competition which now weakens the haulage industry as part of the globalised economy.

But the demands that they have raised are far from clear.

The tax take from heavy lorries may be substantial, but it is less than the environmental damage they cause, and fuel costs for hauliers are high, there are no limits on British motorways, and taxation on lorries and on business are much lower in Britain than elsewhere in Europe.

Some hauliers have argued that their particular protest is not the overall price of diesel (on which they can already claim back up to 80% of tax) but that they are suffering compared with the position in France and other European countries. They claim this allows haulage vehicles to cross the channel and compete with them with cheaper diesel in their tanks.

They call for a level playing field - even if that means making a general-leveling up in prices across Europe rather than a swelling down.
Collusion

The pickets were effective not only because they physically stopped anything, but primarily because of collusion between the steel companies, the hauliers, the owners and drivers of the police. The police companies not the protesters were the force that made the action so effective.

Local barons are making a fortune out of the processing and distribution of oil products -- but feared that with world oil price rising Gordon Brown might seek to increase the pitifully low rate of taxation they pay on TGWU members.

They argue that their take at the pump is low but fail to point out that this is because they have already extracted super profits earlier in the chain.

A number of these companies are keen to see the government take the blame for high fuel prices and thus retain their own rip-off profits stance.

That is why they supported the dispute in the events, forming a bizarre alliance with the hauliers to cut off deliveries of fuel and diesel. In some cases tanker drivers instructed to drive out -- even though the road outside was still open -- to avoid the option to go out or go home on the fuel price.

These are employers who normally make breaking picket lines and instructors a principle, and who would automatically incite drivers to drive through -- and sack if they refused. Anyone who did not see an employer try picketing an oil refinery for any other reason - and see the employer charged.

There were no threats to the pickets from the oil com-
panies, there were no injunc-
tions, they did not even ask the pickets to leave. Some of them allowed the pickets to use their loos without notice.

Derecognised

Any oil companies derecognised for the union -- a factor which seemed to have no effect on TGWU officials who met workers in these companies to tell them to work normally.

In most cases the oil companies no longer belong to the oil companies. They have been contracted out and are operated by haulage contractors.

The biggest fleet of tankers, it turns out, is owned and operated by the notorious strike breaker Lord Stirling, the PKO chairman who broke the seafarers' strike by delivering mass scabbing through the picket lines.

He was an adviser to the Tory Party and has had a close relationship with the oil executives at the meetings of the Blaze. The idea that he would not send his tankers though completely ineffective picket lines unless he was backing the action beggars belief.

Large numbers of tanker drivers are also contracted to work for the oil companies. This reflects the huge change in the haulage industry since the mass strikes of employed drivers in the late 1970s.

By the time of the 1984 miners' strike, the industry had changed and long hours were used to keep the power stations going. Then they were willing to drive not down an open road past a few protesters behind police lines, but through pickets of thousands of battling miners.

The TGWU still organises some people who are directly employed by the oil companies, although how many is not clear.

But the TGWU was one of the unions that have now signed up to the new "protocol" between the government, the oil companies and the unions, designed to keep oil supplies moving in the event of a repeat of the block-
ades at the end of the 60s dr-
ame.

Not only is this wrong: it is tantamount to a no-strike agreement for the industry. Does the TGWU really accept that tanker drivers should no longer ever be allowed to take action to protect their own jobs, wages and working conditions?

Precedent

The protocol is also a dangerous precedent for other sectors of the workforce in what could be described as "essential services". If it is wrong for picket lines to disrupt oil supplies, what about public transport on road or rail? What about food products to the supermarkets? What about ambulance crews, hospital workers or fire fighters?

This new, covert attack on trade union rights is a dangerous development, which should be opposed in the unions.

Reluctant to tax big business, and increasingly reliant on the tax revenue from fuel duties, Labour dug in against the protesters while not acting to support the TGWU with the oil companies. They are prepared to see sections of the petty bourgeoisie squeezed out of existence by precisely these big businesses and multi-national interests.

In this new Labour the full backing of the TGWU, which intervened strongly on behalf of the government. John Monks compared the protests with the fiery owners' action which helped bring Pinochet to power in Chile.

Backlash

But the Chilean example is a real threat to us here: it showed the ability of the right-wing to mobilise a backlash from small business after they had been alienated by the policies of Allende's social democratic government, which ignored their needs.

The shopping class are already defending themselves against the banks and finance capital, if we are to win then the working class must defend themselves against the banks and finance capital and the petty bourgeoisie, warning that they will move further to the right if they do not move towards the working class.

Tax the rich

We say tax the rich, not the small business. We say abolish VAT, cancel the debts of small businesses and provide them with cheap credit as an alternative to being bled by the banks.

Meanwhile the left needs to get to grips with the political issues raised by the fuel blockades and begin to address the problems of the petty bourgeoisie in order to deal with this kind of move-
ment. The politics of the protesters - and their demands - are confused and contradictory, and they offer no easy way in for the left, as some found to their cost when they tried to join the fuel protesters' picket lines.

But the left must help to clarify the real battle lines, and press for the wider labour movement to respond.

We can start with the following list of demands:

- Protect the environment
- Tax rich business and the rich to fund a massive programme of sustainable transport
- Free or tolko passenger pricing
- Defend jobs and wages
- No no-strike agreements with the unions
- Nationalise the oil companies

Derecognised the transport sector and build sustainable transport systems
- Socialise banking, property companies and large landowners
- Demand TUC support for this programme.

Pumping up the oil firms' profits

This crisis is not caused solely by taxation. The oil companies have massively increased their average gross profits; the top five companies are on target to rake in over £30 billion this year, by exploiting both consumers and the oil market.

Their role needs to be highlighted by the left. We should demand the right of gainful workers to strike and buy the oil companies out on the basis of their capital value.

The role price was part of a general fall in world commod-
ity prices driven by globalisation. The left has few arguments to offer--we should not exclude oil from this view.

Not surprisingly with the privatisation of OPEC by the government. The world's major oil producer is the US, which is not part of OPEC.
After toppling Milosevic... Serbian workers must break from nationalism

Geoff Ryan

There can be no doubt that what happened in Belgrade on 4 October was a revolution. Slobodan Milosevic was overthrown by a mass uprising of the Serbian people. His downfall is to be welcomed by all socialists.

The revolution in Belgrade demonstrated the validity of the socialist argument that when the working class is united and prepared to take decisive action it can achieve anything.

In the face of determined action, the repression was almost melted into thin air.

Nevertheless, while we can undoubtedly rejoice at Milosevic’s demise, we also have to soberly assess the meaning of what it means. Certainly it opens up new possibilities, but there are also many new dangers.

Milosevic lost the presidential election despite massive fraud. He then attempted to manipulate the election nullified and rerun at a time of his own choosing. His fraud was exposed and large numbers of former Milosevic supporters began to withdraw support. In particular Serbia’s miners revolt and occupied the mines. The official trade union movement gave its support to strike action.

This entry onto the scene by the organised working class was decisive. It encouraged the leaders of the opposition to believe they could win and, more importantly, undermined the willingness of Milosevic’s security forces to ‘intervene’. Support for Milosevic evaporated within a few hours. Hence the revolution was virtually bloodless.

Milosevic’s fall was because the disparate forces of the opposition managed to maintain unity. In fact they attracted further support.

Vojislav Kosnica, who had stood his own candidate against Milosevic, quickly gave his backing to the coalition backing Vojislav Kosnica, admitting his error in refusing to support Kosnica’s candidacy.

Draskovic’s candidate had

Suddenly, he was on his own! received a derisory vote. Vojislav Seselj, leader of the far-right Radical Party, whose Presidential candidate also did extremely badly, announced he was considering breaking from his coalition with Milosevic.

Kosnica is now President of Serbia, though for how long he will continue to have much influence is open to question. In fact one of the reasons the opposition coalition won the elections was precisely because Kosnica was a relative nonentity.

Unlike most of the opposition leaders, he had never been a Milosevic supporter and he also had no record of corruption. His modest living standards and his lack of past involvement in the internecine squabbles of Milosevic’s opponents is what made him so attractive to large numbers of Serbs. That is both his strength and his weakness.

The coalition was held together only by hostility to Milosevic. But now that Milosevic has been overthrown all the differences will start to re-emerge.

The political differences are enormous and likely to exacerbate by personal hostilities and ambitions.

We should be under no illusions about the nature of the majority of the opposition parties. The vast majority of these organisations were not opposed to Milosevic because he had waged wars of aggression against the peoples of former Yugoslavia. They opposed Milosevic not for starting wars, but for losing them.

Kosnica was the last straw. Not only did Milosevic lose the war in Kosovo but, for the first time since the break-up of Yugoslavia the people of Serbia had to face war. In the short term, the massive destruction of Serbia by NATO rivalled Serbs around the regime. Nevertheless, the economic hardships resulting from this destruction led to rapid disillusionment.

By focusing solely on the responsibility of Milosevic for Serbia’s plight, the opposition leaders have ignored their own complicity in the crimes committed in the name of Serbian nationalism. No doubt they hope that by getting all the blame on Milosevic the west will ignore their responsibility. In that they will almost certainly be right.

The west has shown that it will back even the most virulent anti-Milosevic nationalists, such as Biljana Plavsic in Bosnia.

Kosnica’s support for the war in Kosovo, and Zoran Djindjic’s backing of Radovan Karadzic against Milosevic in Bosnia will probably be quietly forgotten in western capitals.

The inability of the Serbian opposition to grasp the fundamentally reactionary and destructive nature of Serbian nationalism is a massive weakness. It infects virtually every sector of the organised opposition.

This is not, of course, a product of the Serb psyche. It is a reflection of the failure of the Stalinist leaders of the League of Communists of Serbia to dominate Serbian nationalism during the 1980s: a collapse that brought Milosevic to power.

The rise of Serbian nationalism certainly pushed the Stalinist leaders of the other republics of the former Yugoslavia in nationalist directions, but they never capitulated completely to nationalism.

This is not clear if we contrast Croatia and Serbia. The leaders of the League of Communists of Croatia certainly supported Croatian independence, largely in response to the Greater Serbian nationalism that was dominating the party in Serbia.

Nevertheless, they also maintained criticisms of the Croatian chauvinism of Tudjman. Moreover, in particular they opposed Tudjman’s invasion against Bosnia, a stance supported by Croatia’s independent trade union movement.

Opposition to Tudjman also came from within his own party, the HDZ. The current President of Croatia, Stipe Mesic, was one of the founders of the HDZ, but he broke completely from Tudjman over the war in Bosnia.

Criticism of Tudjman’s nationalism from the former Communist leaders – now transformed into social democrats – and sections of the HDZ was on a generally principled basis of opposition to Tudjman’s chauvinism.

It found strong echoes amongst large numbers of Croats. That is why Iva Racan, leading member of the League of Communists of Croatia, now Prime Minister and Mesic could also be President.

Whether or not Kosnica will find a way to handle over Milosevic to the Hague war crimes tribunal is also not yet clear. At present Kosnica says he has no intention of doing so, though a combination of carrots and
H

However, Milos-

ovic should cer-

tainly go on the

list of Serb

crimes. The Ser-

bian people must

seek justice. They

are entitled to

name. That was

consistent with

the reactionary

nature of Serb

nationalism. It

meant that the

majority of Serbs

now wish to domi-

nate the Milosevic

regime.

A real settling of

accounts would

demonstrate the

commitment of the

new leadership and, espe-

cially of the Orthodox church, to the

crimes committed by the

Serbian people.

The new rulers are hardly

likely to carry out such a

important task, so it

would reveal their own

criminal responsibility.

The real settling of

accounts to

take place the Serb

working

class will be
decisive.

The Serbian working
class has shown it is capable of act-

ing without the

strike throughout

Serbia over the

overthrow of

Milosevic would have

been much more difficult, if not

impossible.

But the Serb working

class has now begun to develop a

programme to defend its

own interests. That can only be

done by recognising that

the interests of Serb workers are

the same as those of other

workers throughout the

Balkans, irrespective of their

nationality.

That will mean them

coming into conflict with the

new leaders of Serbia.

This will be most

impressive in potential conflicts that

lie ahead over the status of

Kosovo and Montenegro, as

well as relations with Bosnia.

For many of the Serbs of

Bosnia, hostility to Montenegrin and Kosovo

independence will be almost

a point of principle.

Although it is possible

that the change in regime in

Bosnig will weaken sup-

port for independence in

Montenegro – though that is

by no means certain – it is

unlikely that the Albanian

majority of Kosovo will give up

their aspirations for their

own state.

It is equally unlikely that whatever
government Kunstmann forms will

accept the break-up of

the Yugoslav state – not

least because Western govern-

ments are also hostile to

Montenegro and Kosovo

independence.

We can expect to see

massive pressure on the

Montenegrin and Kosovo

governments to

remain within Yugoslavia.

Nor is it likely that

Kostunica's government will

abandon support for Bosnian

Serb Republic and argue for

its integration into a unified

Bosnian state. Much of the

opposition was united in

hostility to Milosevic, and the

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The interests of Serb

workers, however, demand

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dence if the Kosovars and Montenegrin choose that

road. They demand aban-

donment of the reactionary

Serb entity in Bosnia and its

reintegration in a

unitary, multi-ethnic

Bosnia.

Failure to distance them-

selves from Serbian national-

ism will seriously weaken the
tremendous potential the

Serb workers have already shown to
dramatically transform

the political situation throughout

the Balkans.

Socialists should certainly

distance themselves from

Milosevic. But we also have to

open up a dialogue with

Kostunica.

International Workers

Aid are already taking

steps in the past, in much

more difficult conditions.

Now that opportunities for

more fruitful discussions are

opening, they have to seize

them rapidly.

Students blacked main roads in solidarity with striking miners as the old regime lost its grip

Kostunica's government will abandon support for Bosnian Serb Republic and argue for its integration into a unified Bosnian state. Much of the opposition was united in hostility to Milosevic, and the Kostunica government would be no different.

The interests of Serb workers, however, demand support for the right of Kosovo and Montenegro to independence if the Kosovars and Montenegrin choose that road. They demand abandonment of the reactionary Serb entity in Bosnia and its reintegration in a unitary, multi-ethnic Bosnia.

Failure to distance themselves from Serbian nationalism will seriously weaken the tremendous potential the Serb workers have already shown to dramatically transform the political situation throughout the Balkans.

Socialists should certainly distance themselves from Milosevic. But we also have to open up a dialogue with Kostunica. International Workers Aid are already taking steps in the past, in much more difficult conditions.

Now that opportunities for more fruitful discussions are opening, they have to seize them rapidly.

Sniping from the Left

By Charlie van Gelderen

Banking on poverty

In what it describes as "the most
detected study ever" of world poverty, the World Bank claims that the poor have benefited from the

If it isn't so tragic, this

statement would be almost

hilarious.

Its own World Development

Report, released on September

13, says 2.8 billion people—

almost half the world's popula-

tion—live on less than $1 a day.

A further fifth had to do with

less than $2 a day! Learned critics of Karl Marx, while

acknowledging the abysmal

state of capitalism, are always

aver that he was wrong about

the inevitability of govern-

ment of the masses.

But according to this report,

the poor in these very rich

countries has doubled over

the past decade, with the average

income in the 20 richest coun-

dies now 37 times the average

in the poorest.

This does not only apply

abroad. A report published by the

Joseph Rowntree Foundation claims that two

million children in Britain lack at

least two basic necessities. Social scientists from four uni-

versities found that 1.45 million people were too poor to afford

Margaret Thatcher, when she

was Prime Minister, always
drew on some of the

wealth accumulated at the top of

the economic pyramid to
"tickle down", and everyone would

gain.

Not so, according to this sur-

vey. It estimates that the pro-

portion of households living in

poverty grew from 14% in 1983 to

24% in 1999.

New Labour has done little
to correct this situation.

Another popular criticism of

Marx is his anticipation of

power passing from the

bourgeoisie to the proletariat —

the working class.

"The working class?" asks

the academic critic. "What work-

ing class? Here's what they

almost completely disappeared, their

place taken by modern tech-
nique which makes the work-

ers redundant?"

Indeed! Where do the

clothes these anarcho-selling

are? Or the food they

eat?

Who moves down the trees

in the banana forests from

which the paper on which they write

their learned theses are ma-

ufactured?

It is true that in the economi-
cally advanced countries mil-

lion of workers are not work-

ing any more. They have joined

the vast army of the unem-

ployed: but even here it is still

workers who sell their labour

to power the building, manufact-

ure the cars and pro-

vide the multitude of services on

which the rich depend for their

super-high standard of liv-

ing.

Of course to most of the con-

sumers of expensive clothes

and exotic food, the people

who make this possible are

invisible. They work in sweat

shops in the so-called develop-

ing world, often small children

working long hours for a mere

pittance.

An Indonesian worker who

came to Seattle last year
to take part in the anti-
capitalist demonstration

learned that the training which she

made for a 2 day were

being sold in San Francisco for

£120 a pair.

Marx's proletariat are still

there – hundreds of millions of

them, and, as Marx predicted,

they are being joined by sec-

tions from other classes in the

battle to put an end to this
destructive system.

No room for principles

Michael Young, who helped
to draft the manifesto on

which Labour won its elec-

toral victory in 1945, pin-points the

conference battle with the

Labour and the new variety in an

article in The Guardian.

The Abdes government

was not revolutionary socialist; far

from it, it was a reformist gov-

ernment. Its manifesto was

based on two basic principles. The

first was public service, in

local government and in essen-

tial industries such as water,

electricity, fuel and railways; the

second equity in the distri-

bution of income.

New Labour has thrown both

these principles overboard. As

Michael Young puts it, "teach-

ers have become the butt of

criticism; social workers have

hardly done better; and even

nurses and doctors have not

escaped: obliquely altogether. As for equity in income, a

recent Guardian survey shows

that pay of Britain's top busi-

nessmen went up by

40% in 1999, four times the

average wage increase.

The increase was from an

already elevated base. More

than 110 senior executives

received more than £1 million

a year in basic income, not
counting share options with

their tax advantages.

The Blair government

has "done nothing" says Tony Blair

claimed with much heart-beat-

ing at the year's Brighton

Labour fund raising dinners as well as donating £10,000 to Frank Doolan's

treed attempt to come London

Labour.

After moving to London

in 1982, he became involved with

Hans Pharmaceuticals, Harris

became Norton Heath Care, with whom he is in

line with company philosophy.

No ethics, please, we're New Labour.

So the New Labour govern-

ment have not got anything

to itself to the pursuit of an ethical

foreign policy at the next elec-

tion and then to change?

There will be no reason to
deny that the British firm

GKN is selling armoured cars to

Indonesia.

Several Labour MPs enjoyed

the hospitality of this firm

Roger Casale (Wimbledon)

the freebie trips to Italy over

the last two years. Roger

George (Walsh South) and

Rachel Squire (Darlington)

were also treated to trips
to Italy by the friendly GKN.

On July 17, 17 kids could

be shot dead and five injured in

Colombia. Troops opened

fire on the children who

were looking for a picnic spot, with

out provocation.

Last year British sent compo-
nents for heavy machine guns to

Colombia's military.

Labour's decision to ditch any

poverty action agenda shows

the all-to-clear to British firm

Balfour Beatty. The firm is in

participation in building the

futuro dam in Turkey, which

would destroy the homes of up

to 35,000 Kurds and potentially

stop the flow of the Tigris river

into Syria and Iraq.
Left Links up for Major Campaign at Next Election

ALAN THOMAS ElTTS the International Socialist Group's Assessment of a Landmark Conference.

The conference of Socialist Alliance held in Coventry on September 30 was a historic event on the British left. Over 400 hundred activists embracing the bulk of far-left organisations in Britain (outside of the Stalinist tradition) came together, along with independent activists and local campaigning groups, to hammer out a framework for a united intervention into next year's general election.

This remarkable gathering included a large number of members from the two largest far-left organisations in Britain, the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party. As Dave Nellist, who chaired the conference, said in closing it: "not only were we in the same room at the start of the conference, we were also in the same room at the end of it.

The conference itself - which was four or five times as big as any previous such gathering called by the Socialist Alliance nationally - reflected a wide realisation that without a Socialist Alliance campaign there will be no serious socialist voice in the general election, given the current weakness of the left in the Labour Party. The resulting successful outcome of the conference has set the scene for the biggest electoral intervention by the left in Britain since the war.

This is a unity which springs from the harsh realities of the current political situation in Britain: the rightward march of Blairism on the one hand, and the dis-illusion of the working class with the political landscape.

There is no reason for politicians to be left out of the running for the general election. There is a demand for a socialist alternative to the current political scene.

The conference was not before time, however. Since the success of the London Socialist Alliance, the expansion of Alliance in towns and cities across England has far outstripped the development of the structures needed to consolidate them and maximise their potential in the election.

The practical upshot of the conference was the adoption of an agreed protocol which can provide both an organisational structure for the election campaign and an approach designed to bring as many left candidates as possible under the banner of the Socialist Alliance.

1. The Socialist Alliance will stand candidates in the next General Election to give people a chance to vote for a socialist alternative to New Labour and the Tories.

2. For this to be a credible alternative for people, we have to have mass participation. To mount the most effective opposition to New Labour, the Socialist Alliance believe that local Socialist Alliances should seek to build the broadest, most inclusive and unified organisation possible.

Local Socialist Alliances, together with the national network, should begin raising money and winning working class support in the unions, the local communities and from all progressive campaigns now with the aim of recruiting wider forces to the alliances in preparation for the election campaign.

This means building Socialist Alliance locally as active, campaigning organisations oriented to the struggles of the working class.

We must not limit the alliances to being electoral vehicles to be used only at election time for the benefit of the Trotskyist organisations who make up the national network.

3. The Socialist Alliance will work to organise the widest possible number of socialist and other anti-cuts candidates to fight the Westminster General Election in seats in England. We will do so in liaison with the Scottish Socialist Party, which will fight seats in Scotland, and with the Welsh Socialist Alliance, which will fight seats in Wales.

4. A further conference will be held (possibly in February, certainly before the election) to finalise a national election manifesto; the national committee should invite drafts to be put forward now and should vote on a substantive draft to be put to such a conference for discussion and amendment. A short series of demands (our key pledges, so to speak) should be agreed by the manifesto conference as the demands carried on all leaflets as a summary of what we are fighting for.

5. All affiliated organisations within the alliance are free to publicise their own programmes in their own name.

6. Local Socialist Alliances/groups should seek to build the broadest, most inclusive and united organisation possible. Whilst affiliated political organisations clearly have the right to produce their own political material, the establishment of broad, inclusive and united organisations will mean affiliated political organisations having to exercise self-discipline in promoting their distinctive political positions and identities within the Socialist Alliance.

Only by putting what unites us in the Socialist Alliance first will we attract the candidates and active supporters beyond the existing organisations affiliated to the Socialist Alliance who will be vital to our success.

7. All local Socialist Alliances/groups and political organisations which accept the minimum programme which are members and which want to fight this election are invited to contribute to fighting together under the electoral registration name of the Socialist Alliance - with the freedom to describe their own backgrounds and their own party/organisation affiliations (a protocol to be developed by the Election Committee).

8. All local Socialist Alliances/groups and political organisations which accept the minimum programme are invited to stand under the electoral registration name of the Socialist Alliance - with the freedom to describe their own backgrounds and their own party/organisation affiliations (a protocol to be developed by the Election Committee).

9. The Election Committee of the Socialist Alliance will have responsibility for co-ordinating the work of the Socialist Alliance during the election, including the election campaign, other campaigning work, our national media profile and national fund-raising initiatives.

10. The Election Committee will act as a clearing house, in order to make possible any difficulties locally and to enable agreement to be reached on seats. It will be for local candidates to be contested, as to be able to endorse SA candidates formally.

The Election Committee will be made up of the local candidates, agents and treasurers.

11. The National Agent will provide co-ordinating support for all local socialist alliances/groups and others who agree with the minimum programme in order for them to be able to use the name 'Socialist Alliance' on the ballot paper.

In return, all such local socialist alliances/groups and others will agree to supply the officers of the Socialist Alliance with whatever financial and other information is necessary to comply with the new election legislation.

12. The Election Committee will consist of the Election Meeting, which is the elected officers, national agent and one delegate for every affiliated organisation and local Alliance.

13. This protocol is for the purpose of fighting the Westminster General Election only. We commit ourselves to building on this unity in our future work.
Human Trafficking - Human Misery!

Blame it on Europe’s governments!

In July this year the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) published a report smugling of refugees: the end game in European asylum policy. The report is an in-depth analysis of human trafficking and smuggling and concludes that existing policies are part of the problem not the solution. Refugees are now forced to use illegal means if they want to access Europe at all. The direction of current policy risks not only starving the problem of trafficking but rather ending the right of asylum in Europe, one of the most fundamental and all human rights...

Any comprehensive approach that tackles trafficking and smuggling successfully requires legal and safe migration opportunities for all refugees, as well as necessary enforcement measures...

As international policy currently stands, if an illegal migrant is ever successful in stopping or deporting the smuggling operation, all the reform efforts would have ended European asylum policy as we know it...

The final effect of criminalisation of the NGOs and the later claim asylum is public, as well as official, perception that their claims must be handled otherwise they would not receive their right of asylum. In the UK, labelled as ‘bogus’, there is already no way for asylum seekers to communicate themselves...

The ICHR report makes a number of useful proposals: it is misleading in the extreme to continue reporting the outcome in terms which are likely to be refugees, ‘illegal’ or ‘illegals’...

United for Intercultural Action has documented more than 200 deaths as a result of Fortress Europe and the ongoing challenge policies is increasing...

As far as European policymakers are concerned it simply one wants to be considered a ‘genuine’, asylum seeker they will have to perishate themselves into Europe, because no...
Breaking through Europe’s barbed wire

Terry Conway

The Barbed Wire Europe conference was held at Ruskin College, Oxford on September 15-17. It was a unique event for the British anti-racism movement, as it convened the European Conference held in Britain.

A fascinating array of discussion and debate was packed into two days, with activities ranging from the analysis of the political strategies of immigration detention plays in the strategy of the European ruling class and in the determination to strengthencontinental wide opposition to these plans.

The conference included representatives from refugee organisations, campaigns for an end to detention and from Europe, Latin America, Asia and most European countries.

Speakers explained the intensification of both crackdowns on asylum seekers and other European Union nationals who pretend to be asylum seekers. They also discussed the use of techniques to combat the policies that result in camps being set up at the border and the spread of detention centres throughout Europe.

Over 200 people from the VOICE, the German asylum seekers organisation, explained that in Germany there are more and more asylum seekers who are isolated from other asylum seekers, and that the German government only grants asylum to 5% of applicants. Last year it deported approximately 1,600 asylum seekers.

The conference was also attended by representatives from the Czech Republic, as an aspiring EU member, to discuss their own situation. The Czech authorities have been denying asylum to asylum seekers and closing the borders to the east.

The conference was also attended by representatives from the Czech Republic, as an aspiring EU member, to discuss their own situation. The Czech authorities have been denying asylum to asylum seekers and closing the borders to the east.

As well as highlighting issues of racism faced by refugees and asylum seekers in Britain, the conference was also open to all those interested in the work of the conference.

In particular, the speaker from Cuba talked about the current situation in Cuba, which has been increasingly threatened with American diplomatic isolation.

On Sunday afternoon over 100 of the delegates held a rally outside the Immigration Detention Centre near Oxford. Group 4 guards clashed with the police, who tried to stop them from getting to the detention centre.

As the conference adjourned, the delegates were encouraged to continue the work of the conference through the formation of new organisations and the establishment of new networks.

The conference was a significant step forward in the struggle against racism and discrimination in Europe.
"There is no place more institutionally racist than an immigration detention centre!"

Bill MacKeith

The opening speech at the Barbed Wire Europe conference in Oxford was given by Bill MacKeith, a key organiser of the Close Campfield campaign, and President of Oxford Trades Council.

We are here to build the movement against immigration detention. It will be part of the movement for all sorts of justice – for freedom of movement, the right to work and to full benefits for refugees and other migrants – equal treatment with all residents.

It will be linked to the fight for a world free from the activities of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, big companies and governments that support them that subordinate people to the needs of private profits, a world free of the debt burden, from deserts sustained and often put in power by the force of arms sold by the rich countries.

And we should note that last year the UK sold more arms abroad than any other country except the USA.

Brutal (often futile) attempts to control the movement of people are a world-wide problem. In the last 2-3 months thousands of immigration detainees have been locked in a centre in the wilds of western Australia, thousands of south Chinese have been deported from Canada. A great wall, armed police and vigilantes divide the USA from the rest of the Americas to the south, and inside the USA two million people – disproportionately black people – are in prisons built and run for private profit – a system that is being exported into Europe.

Europe is a world super-power in the process of construction at the expense of people's rights inside it and without. The walls around the Spanish enclaves Ceuta in North Africa, the fences around the Spanish officers, embassies, consulates and visa systems are to erect a fortress Europe.

This conference is dedicated to opposing detention because the practice of arbitrary detention of refugees and other migrants not only is part of the European fortress but also is a key mechanism of the divide and rule home policy of governments inside the European Union.

And we being unjust, painful, boring, traumatic, depressing and very bad for your health (particularly your mental health), arbitrary detention of migrants is a gross incitement to racism in thought and deed.

"If they are locked up, they must have done something wrong," is a common reaction.

We are very angry that the British government talks about opposing institutional racism, while, we believe, there is no place more institutionally racist than an immigration detention centre.

The government attitude reminds me of another piece of breath-taking hypocrisy: the Anti-Racism Declaration which is on display – to visitors, not detainees – as they first enter Campfield.

In the past 2-3 years, there has been a very rapid extension of immigration detention in Europe. This morning's speakers will relate the key developments in eastern Europe – a buffer zone to check immigration from the east – and in Italy – what the German and British governments in particular regard as the soft and vulnerable underbelly of Europe.

The past 2-3 years has seen the development of new forms of resistance to detention and other forms of racism – major protests by detainees, border camps, signs of internationalising of resistance – this conference being an example, the further development of independent migrant organisations, such as the VOICE movement in Germany following the so-called racist papers in France, the stopping by passengers, pilots and others of air flights with deportees on board.

An important boost to European-wide work to end detention were the two conferences organised by the French organisation FASST, at Lille in 1997 and Ferney-Voltaire in 1998. They were under the title "Europe Barbed Wire".

The Campaign to Close Campfield took part in these and – in the absence of any other offers to do the job – has organised this "Barbed Wire Europe" conference in the same spirit. The aim is to take stock of the considerably altered situation described above, to inform ourselves, make new friendships and build new networks and agree a realistic programme for future collective action – a few points that we can actually carry out will be more productive than a massive shopping list.

The Campaign to Close Campfield seeks to work closely with the detainees and with ex-detainees and migrant organisations. The organisation of migrants themselves will be crucial in changing the situation in the UK.

That is why this conference is organised to encourage refugees and other migrants to participate.

I think that last night's session on conditions in countries of origin was very useful in this respect. I am sure that participants in this hall will be among those who will build the same papers movement in the UK and Ireland (and decide what it will be called). I am sure this will happen now that the voucher scheme and forced dispersal has led to organised protests by refugees in Hull and in the West Midlands, from which a group of protesters set out recently on a protest march to London.

The UK Caravan for Civil Rights will be part of this UK migrants mass movement; it is very good for this conference and I thank the Caravan for that it is coming here on Sunday to lunch, speak and join the demonstration at Campfield tomorrow. These demonstrations are not big media events, but they have the detainees find them very supportive. So if you can come it will be worth it.

Campfield was opened in November 1993. It holds nearly 200 detainees for an average 5 months. Both detainees and their supporters in the campaign have staged many protest actions – some spectacular, and done much campaigning. Both detainees and the campaign have a remarkable history.

In the UK, before the current expansion of detention, over 10,000 immigrants a year, most of them seeking political asylum, were detained under the 1971 Immigration Act on a decision made by an individual immigration officer at the lowest level.

At this moment over 1,000 are detained a detention centres near Oxford (Campfield), at Harmondsworth near Heathrow, at Tinsley near Garwick, and Oakington near Cambridge (this one opened this year and is called a "reception centre" where asylum applications can supposedly be turned round in a week or ten days), at Lintholm in Yorkshire, and at prisons in Rochester, Kent, and Haslar, Portsmouth.

A 700-bed detention centre is being planned at Thorliegh near Peterborough. Total current detention capacity is 1,327, but in addition many people are held for short periods at ports and in police stations.

Following a vicious and organised campaign against migrants, particularly the asylum seeker in detention. A key reason that detention centres are so important is that they make it easier to deport people. Labour has carried out its election policy – to deport more people that the Tories. In the first 7 months of 2000 there was a 29% increase in the number of deportations and removals over the same months in 1999, and the number was 26,915.

Finally, we should like to see two kinds of initiative coming out of this conference:

A group of participants agreeing to form a basis of a group that will facilitate – by email as well as more traditional means – coordinated actions across Europe at detention centres, at courts of government and in the cities.

Some steps focusing on the interests of the European state, the European Union, that is, the Parliament and the Commission, not to mention the secret meetings of interior ministry officials who shape immigration law along with crime and drugs in the same meeting. The Parliament has never discussed detention. It is time that it did.

The decisions of the conference were:

1. To maximise Europe-wide participation in co-ordinated actions against detention at places of detention, in town centres and outside key periodic institutions.

2. To identify and lobby MEPs to raise migrants' and asylum seekers' rights in the European Parliament.

3. To demonstrate solidarity with detainees across Europe and a determination to end immigration detention by recouping the conference's costs out of the UK's next contributions to the Detention Centre "House" Immigration Detention Centre, at Spen on 17th September 2000.

4. To encourage the dissemination of these ideas and actions, we urge all those who can to participate in a European-wide network of action and solidarity amongst detainees.

5. To support all existing networks which share our views on detention, and to aim for an international day of action against detention in a day to be decided in consultation with participants in the conference and other networks in Europe.

6. To develop new deterrence actions in conjunction with organisations actioning to mark Holocaust Day, with special reference to the situation of refugees in Europe.

7. To support the demonstration called by the UK, Irish rights network on 14 October in London.

8. To spread the issue of war and detention on line.
Caravan tours to promote civil rights

The Civil Rights Caravan is currently travelling throughout England in solidarity with asylum seekers, migrants and black victims of racist attacks and murders. The Caravan, a form of grass-roots resistance, is demanding:

- Full rights for asylum-seekers, undocumented workers, migrants and victims of racist attacks
- The right to asylum and an end to deportation, repression, vouchers and dispersals
- An end to racism and racism violence

The idea for the caravan comes from Germany, where it has been an important and successful tool developed against the anti-racist movement.

The Caravan brings together black families, asylum-seekers and those working to defend their rights.

In each place the Caravan visits there will be a variety of events, such as public meetings, anti-racist festivals, picnics and demonstrations.

The Caravan is visiting hostels and detention centres to expose the conditions under which asylum-seekers are forced to live and working in rural areas where black families are often isolated in their struggles against racism. Whenever we go, we will seek to provide practical support and help.

The original timetable for the Caravan was delayed because of the fuel crisis through a number of pro-planned events went ahead on a more ad-hoc basis.

Following a successful public meeting of over 200 people in Leicester to greet the Caravan, a new group was established to support asylum seekers and victims of racist attacks in the area.

They went to Oxford for the Barbwire Europe Conference and the subsequent demonstration at Campfield, at both of which the speakers were well received by activists present.

The links made between fighting immigration detention and other aspects of racism strengthened the debate already taking place during the conference. The caravan also participated in a successful workshop at the Brighton 926 conference and in the subsequent successful demonstration to Labour Party Conference.

The rest of the Calendar is:

- Market Square, 11:00-12:00pm, Leaflet and spoken word
- London, 14 October
  National demonstration against racism on the anniversary of the disappearance of Ricky Reel. Assembly 1pm, Embankment, London
- Margate, 20 October
  12:00pm, Caravan arrives in Margate. Walk from the seafront to Paul's Community Centre 1:00pm, Gathering at community centre 3:00pm, public meeting at community centre 7:00pm, party in Dover
- Dover, 22 October
  11:00am, Meet up at
  - London
  - Coventry, 27 October
    2:00pm, Demonstration with asylum seekers in local park
  - Birmingham, 28 October
    2:00-4:00pm, public rally in Victoria Square 4:00-7:00pm, Civil Rights Caravan convoy through inner city 7:00-9:00pm, reception

hosted by City Council 9:00am, benefit social, fund-raising event with live band and DJs

Manchester, 29 October
  Public meeting to be confirmed

Join the Civil Rights Caravan:
  Contact us via email: CaravansForCivilRights@ac.adem.co.uk
  Or phone: 020-7837 1540
  Or call: 0770 552 5899
  Or post: CARF Caravan, BM Box 8784, London WC1N 3X

Flying pickets can stop airline deportations!

One of the forms of direct action that was much discussed at the Barbwire Europe Conference in Oxford was the increasing number of actions being taken at airports to prevent deportations.

VERONICA PAGAN looks at the campaign to prevent the deportation of Amanu Gafor and the plans to widen these forms of action.

SADLY the battle to prevent the deportation of Amanu Gafor from Britain was not finally successful. On August 13 he was removed by British Airways after a four-and-a-half-year struggle, during which he had sought asylum in six EU countries.

Nevertheless many milestones were passed in this fight. During his seven-month campaign to stay in Britain, activists stopped two removal attempts by British Airways and one by Lufthansa.

A sea blockading was also planned but, in the end, Amanu made the decision to go: a decision that was reluctantly respected by his supporters. He had been ground down by his wholesale rejection in Fortress Europe.

He is now being held in a refugee camp in Germany, awaiting removal to Iraq/Kurdistan, from where he fled for his life in 1996. An opposition to Saddam’s regime, he had refused conscription into the army.

The day before his removal from the UK, Amanu said: “I will not beg those who do not want me anymore, the solicitors, the governments. I know it is not my wish, but now I want go back and fight.”

“I leave behind me a new found family in the UK - those who came to visit me in detention, the trade unionists that adopted me, the many supporters that I will never know, the protesters who faced police lines and the courts for myself and others.

“Now, I prefer to fight, and pay the price of death for my beliefs, in Iraq, and to stand proud in the face of tyranny, rather than beg for the human rights of someone whose life doesn’t offer any more.”

On the first attempt to remove him by plane, Amanu fought until the last moment, struggling physically against his captors who bound and handcuffed him on British Airways flight BA4732. Amanu’s struggle won the compassion of the pilot and flight crew, who refused to take off.

Passenger

On August 3 the government tried to remove Amanu secretly. He was booked as a passenger on a Lufthansa flight from Heathrow Airport, but was cancelled, and Amanu was re-booked on a BA flight from Gatwick, without any prior communication with his solicitor. Amanu resisted being put on the flight and was taken to Thames House Immigration Detention Centre.

British Airways, who were initially in charge of the deportation, were annoyed about the protest at their check-in desk; they are aware of the bad image they create with such activities.

With a total of millions from Labour’s immigration spending, the cheque started to bounce. Amanu, in the name of human rights, proved the fare doesn’t offer any more.

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When activists refused to leave the Lufthansa check-in point with slogans such as “Amanu must stay”, “Deportation is a crime”, “Unfasten your seat-belts”, “Stand up for human rights” and “Stop these cruel deportations”, they were asked to remove them immediately. When they started to leave, they were asked to stop. They did manage to leave the passengers informing them of the kind of action they were planning.

On the lefset passenger were asked to demand the pilot refuse to take off and thereby prevent the deportation. The pilot then asked the passengers to demand the pilot refuse to take off and thereby prevent the deportation.

An activist managed to get onto the plane, but didn’t act because – obviously – he couldn’t see Amanu among the passengers.

The plan was to stand up informing the passengers of what was going on until the pilot decided to take Amanu off the flight. This kind of action was initiated by the CAGE group, who managed to stop the deportation of the Zairean Salim Rambo.

Union

The intervention of the PCS (the union representing air traffic control workers) which circulated the campaign’s communiqué through its affiliates, was very positive. The reaction of the majority of passengers was very supportive. There will be more possibilities for this kind of action at future deportations.

Send letters or messages of support to Amanu in Germany please contact: AMANGHAFUR
(Ref No: 254306-418)

LRA

Australandehorde

Oberstdorf

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Germany

A national campaign against airlines who help the UK Government enforce their immigration rules by carrying deportees, is to be launched on October 14th 2000.

British Airways are the largest carriers of deportees and make millions out of this ‘legal trafficking’. BA are to be the first target.

If you want to be part of the action, contact National Coalition against Deportation Campaigns, 110 Ramseald Road, Handsworth, Birmingham B29 2QH
Phone: 0121-554-6947
Fax: 0870-055-4570
E-Mail: ncadc@ucd.adem.co.uk

ncaid@ucd.adem.co.uk
We, the members of non-governmental and community-based organisations from different parts of the world, gathered in Prague and signing this statement, note the unprecedented and dangerous suspension of the 2000 Annual General Meeting of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Game over was called for unscheduled sessions, including meetings with governmental organisations, that will evidently be cancelled, the claim that they have simply included their business rings hollow.

We believe that the reactivation of the final day of meetings reflects the institutions’ recognition of their own lack of credibility. Confronted with vigorous protests and actions by a refusal to accept the empty rhetoric of “poverty reduction” and “debt relief” offered in response to a series of demands for their responsibility for decades of economic malfeasance, they have, with widespread silence over more. Our challenge to the League of these institutions and those who control them to dictate economic policies worldwide through the leverage gained through the Bretton Woods institutions has gone unanswered. Our call for a wholly new global economic structure which mandates not a single model but a wide range of choices for many peoples of the world, is one that these institutions cannot ignore or even contest.

We gathered in Prague for an annual meeting called by international protest against the discriminatory way the IMF and the World Bank. We oppose the unjustified and discriminatory treatment of both institutions and the meetings they hold. Our numbers rank amongst the greatest young activists as well as people from the Americas, Africa, Asia, and European who have now shifted the agenda of economication against corporate globalisation in this region. We have gathered the most brilliant and most democratic opposers in over 30 other countries from throughout Afghanistan, Bangladesh, South Africa, Argentina, the United States, France, and India, who express solidarity actions this week.

We came to Prague to protest solidarity with the millions who cannot be in Prague: the workers, educators, farmers, workers, of Asia, the workers who have been laid off in the Caribbean; people denied work for their livelihoods, the women, women workers and Latin American sweatshops.

We have been in Prague not only to protest, but also discussing positive, people-centred alternatives to the debt crisis, structural adjustment and environmentally devastating infrastructure projects, and the economic policies that need development through eradication of the population and large majorities of the peoples in the South and in the East.

At the same time we demand the international terrorist and physical repression executed by the Czech police forces before and during the conference of the IMF and World Bank. Their actions, notwithstanding instances of provocative behaviour by a few protesters, have ruined dozens of innocent people and resulted in hundreds of unjustified arrests during the conference. Let the essentially peaceful demonstrations. We express our solidarity with the hundreds who remain imprisoned, and implored for their release from the police control and speedy release of all those detained.

We particularly express our grave concern over reports of police brutality in the Czech prisons. We note that the World Bank itself has acknowledged this month that its policies are failing. It World Development Report, made clear in the absence of a new “growth strategy” and a political philosophy that has long been the Bank’s standard answer to every question. And its report on the transition economies of the New Soviet Union and Eastern Europe has revealed a rapid increase in poverty. From 3% to 21%, a clear indication that the neo-liberal policies embodied by the IMF and World Bank has failed yet again the entire region of the globe.

Given the evidence supplied by the World Bank, we would thus suggest that the IMF and the World Bank, which continue to support them, consider that their calls for “more of the same” in health, education, and more of the same in medicine, more of the same in conditions, are inadequate. A revolution in economics is called for to reverse control of economies to the people who live in them. This is what we mean to put the economics of the people, rather than those who live on the service of economic models that have failed for over 20 years.

Our protests in Prague, following those in Paris, Yokohama, Geneva, Chengi, Shangai, Washington, Seattle, and countless other places, have again exposed to the world the contradictions of the policies of the IMF and World Bank.

Our protests also echo the struggles going on today in Bolivia, one of the many places where people from many sectors have risen up against the local manifestations of the globalised economy. So long as that model continues to be imposed by the rich and the powerful, most of the institutions such as ours shall continue to protest and do nothing to change the power in our power to expose the failures of the system.

Wherever those who have been taken upon themselves the duty to be effective for the global economy will gather, we will be there to witness, to expose, and to resist.

Welcome to the free market of neo-liberalism: Czech riot cops put on a display for the anti-capitalist protesters

Campbell McGregor, Glasgow Kelvin SSP
Friday 22 September
I got a cheap flight from Glasgow to Frankfurt and a night train to Prague, to take part in the protests against the IMF/World Bank conference.

Saturday 23
I took part in a legal labour march through Prague, with about 3000 people.

Sunday 24th
I attended a large discussion which was part of the counter-summit.

It was announced that a train from London protesters had stopped at the border, and that a protest at this would take place near the Sparta football ground.

There was an impromptu march to the city centre, police looked on but did not do anything. Later, I took part in a sit-down protest on Charles Bridge. There were cheers when it was announced that the train had been allowed through.

Monday 25
It was a quiet day so I visited Prague Castle. In the evening I attended a discussion meeting between various Trotskyist groups who had sold some material from the Irish group Socialist Democracy.

Tuesday 26
The first day of the IMF/World Bank conference. Around 10,000 protesters gathered in Peace Square to march on the conference. I told a journalist from Red Pepper "I was thinking of going to Prague for a week, this is much more fun". The plan to divide into 3 groups who would march on the conference 3 days. I was with the largest group, eventually we came to a narrow bridge blocked by riot police. They were standing behind a crowd control barrier, wearing gas masks, with batons drawn. They had an armoured car with a water cannon aimed at the protesters.

A message was broadcast in several languages: "Citizen! The police of the Czech Republic wishes to inform you that this gathering is illegal. We ask you to leave peacefully. If not then the forces of order will take whatever action is necessary." I went up to the line of riot police, and said to one: "Hello friend. (in Czech) I think it's a really new job you've got. You must be feeling really high in all that gear." Some of the protesters put on makeshift riot gear like gas masks.

We spent over 2 hours facing each other. This was a pretty hairy experience. I realised that there was the serious risk of getting hit by the water cannon, so I put my Czech phrase book (borrowed from Glasgow City Librarians) in a waterproof bag.

Towards the end I really thought that the protesters were going to make a serious attempt to force through the police line, and a few stone were thrown. Instead the apparatus organisers that we should all go to the Opera House, where an event involving the conference delegates was going to take place.

I felt that the protest could be dying down, so I decided to go to the railway station, 2 stops away under the ground, to deal with a query. At the first stop up the line everyone was told to leave the train, apparently the authorities were shutting down this latter event. I had difficulty finding the Opera House (the maps in the Time Out Guide to Prague are not very good). Then I noticed a corner of the Wenceslas Square that a McDonald's had a heavy police guard. Later I noticed that it had been burnt, presumably the police had been temporarily forestalled.

The riot police assembled further down Wenceslas Square, when they started moving up most protesters stomped very easily, but there did seem to be a few hardened street fighters looking for a serious fight. I saw the police fire tear gas, and a protester throw the canister back at them. Firecrackers went off, a few people were arrested. I got away as soon as I felt it was safe to move. I heard there were sporadic fights with the police during the evening. Later I saw a convoy of 14 police vehicles speed past.

Wednesday 27
I got the train back to Frankfurt. It was quite a few days! There has been some discussion about the Prague conference on the left press in Britain. There are valid questions to be asked about the organisation of the protest and problems of democratic accountability. I had doubts over whether the best route was chosen on the day. However given the forces involved, on the whole, the protesters did well to achieve as much as they did. They took over part of central Prague, the conference was seriously disrupted, the Czech authorities were forced to mount a military-style operation.

I feel it was correct that the main group of protesters did not try to force their way through the police lines (although another group did get very near the conference) but this is a concrete assessment based on the balance of forces, not a matter of principle.

The sporadic fights later in the evening were not helpful, but we should understand the anger behind them.

The protesters seemed to be a diverse collection of leftists from across Europe, with a limited base in the labour movement in their own countries. I noticed a UNISON banner, and Rifundacion Communist from Italy was officially represented.

There was little sign of Czech involvement itself. Czech protesters I spoke to said that there had been a lot of anti-communist propaganda although curiously most of those arrested in the evening were Czechs.

To have achieved much more would really have needed a higher level of involvement by the labour movement, particularly the Czech labour movement.

The labour movement should support those who were arrested and protest spontaneously against their ill treatment.

Many of those in Prague hope to carry out similar protests world-wide next May Day. The labour movement in Britain should discuss how to respond.
Washington plans “fumigation” – and military bases in major new Latin American offensive

First Colombia - but where next?

When Bill Clinton visited Colombia on August 30, his primary purpose was to give his personal endorsement to Plan Colombia which he claims is anti-narcotics and pro-peace. SEARROD O. LOINGSIGH explains why he was lying on both counts.

Plan Colombia

US bases

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The US bases are apparently as part of an anti-narcotics strategy the US has persuaded the number of governments to allow it to set up what are called Forward Operating Locations (FOLs). These are essentially US bases in Latin America, even though the personnel are often local troops ostensibly under the command of US officers who have ultimate control.

The US have set up FOLs in Honduras, Ecuador, Colombia, Curacao, Peru and Brazil. Added to that the border countries with Colombia have agreed to militarily border their borders with Colombia.

The US thus finds itself in a position of being able to command considerable logistical military resources in various parts of Latin America even though the same governments have some what hesitated at taking the next logical step of forming a multilateral force of intervention made up of Latin American armies but responding to US orders.

Although Brazil, one of the major players in the area, has thrown its go at the ideal of such a force, it is not altogether a failure. Essentially the US has engaged in a kite-flying exercise. There is no need for such a force at the moment to intervene in the Colombian internal armed conflict but the idea has been floated in the Panama Canal along with the idea of such a force, it is not altogether a failure.

Especially, the US has engaged in a kite-flying exercise. There is no need for such a force at the moment to intervene in the Colombian internal armed conflict but the idea has been floated. It is not a new idea but the idea of such a force is not altogether a failure.

The US has engaged in a kite-flying exercise. There is no need for such a force at the moment to intervene in the Colombian internal armed conflict but the idea has been floated.

Counterproductive

The US government has spoken out against such a move in principle. It cannot be said that such a move would be counterproductive. In the 1970s the main threat to anti-imperialist interests died in the Southern Cone countries. This threat was neutralised through the imposition of military dictatorships.

These dictatorships gave way in the 1980s and 1990s to regimes that equally guaran
teed imperialist interests without the bad PR of disappearances and torture centres. These regimes have been in place in the Sandinista government in Nicaragua and the insurgencies of El Salvador (FMLN) and Guatemala (URNG).

These regimes represented a threat to imperialism in their example more than the economic loss they represented to imperialism. (Though it was the loss of some of these regimes that led to the fortunes of United Fruits that prompted the US coup in Guatemala in the 1950s.)

Colombia on the other hand is potentially the seventh richest nation on the planet. It is the largest coca producer in Latin America, a major producer of oil, gold, emeralds and coffee. It is a major player in the global drug markets.

With Plan Colombia imperialism not only guarantees the continued exploitation of Colombia and its wealth – it also gains through the FOL the opportunity to formalise its military influence by building logistical centres of operations under US command throughout Latin America.

Colombia is the plan for the re-hegemonisation of the Americas by the US with EU cooperation and the good will of the Latin American governments.

For further information on the US and Colombia contact the Latin American Solidarity Collective, PO Box 8466, London N17 6NZ Tel 07950 923 448 LatinAmericancollective@hotmail.com
Rebellion in Palestine
“WE ARE A PEOPLE”

Roland Rance

The latest Palestinian intifada is the most determined and fatalistic uprising in the history of the Palestine conflict. It has put a definitive end to the period of diplomatic negotiations which opened with the 1990 Gulf War and the 1991 Madrid conference. It also exposes the terminal bankruptcy of the Labour Zionist strategy, with the predictable establishment of a broad coalition government, and the likely creation of a new national party led by ex-generals Ehud Barak and Ariel Sharon.

This, then, is the context of this uprising. The massive involvement of Palestinian citizens of Israel. There have been previous mass-movements of Israeli forces of Palestinian citizens; notably Kufur Qassem in 1956, when 49 peasants were shot for ‘any reason’ at the Likelik, and another ‘incident’ at the Afrin Ghetto, and the clear declaration of a common purpose with Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and those in exile. All of these, along with the specific reasons for Palestinian protests in Israel (ongoing theft of land, systematic institutionalised discrimination, denial of resources), are clearly a rejection of the Occupation. The military and the political Middle East, and indeed Jerusalem, have been able to contain the protest by the two generals to upstage Netanyahu’s political comeback and put an end to the diplomatic process.

Barak’s willingness to provide Sharon with such a huge resource is three-fold. First, it is a move to contain the “peace process” with Syria and Lebanon, and to repossess the Palestinian cities, and the discussions between Barak and Sharon towards a national coalition government, and the government in general to the suggestion by some Israeli activists that the entire process was a delib- erate ploy by the two generals to upstage Netanyahu’s political comeback and put an end to the diplomatic process. But, however much Barak may threaten, it is doubtful whether it is within President Yasser Arafat’s power to strike back at this revolt.

In 1987, both Israel and the PLO professed to believe that the Intifada had started in response to an order issued by Arafat from Tunis. To most observers, it was obvious that the spontaneous uprising, despite initial support for the PLO, was in reality a threat to Arafat’s continued intellectual and political leadership.

This was the reason both Israel and the West failed to prepare a comprehensive policy to deal with the uprising, despite the government’s statement that the Intifada had started in response to a wave of renewed Arab terror. In fact, it left Egypt to respond, and it led to a wave of renewed Arabic and Israeli terrorism, and to a wave of renewed Arab terror.

The bourgeoise press is mistaken to argue that the uprising occurred at the behest of the Saudi monarchy, or that the Pulaski uprising is the result of a wave of renewed Arab terror. The PLO had started the wave of renewed Arab terror and Israeli terrorism, and to a wave of renewed Arab terror.

It is unlikely that these renewed energies will be satisfied with the Balfour-type solution which was the minimum outcome of the Camp David conference.

The intifada started with the provocative visit of Likud leader Ariel Sharon to Haram as-Sheriff, the compound in the Old City of Jerusalem containing the Al-Aqua and Dome of the Rock mosques, and allegedly the site of the biblical temple. But it would be wrong to ascribe all responsibility to Sharon, as some simple-minded supporters of the Israeli government are attempting.

Sharon, a famously secular Jew, was not involved in the prayer visit before the Jewish New Year. His visit, accompanied by an estimated 3000 troops, came one day after the decision of the Attorney General not to prosecute former Likud leader Binyamin Netanyahu for corruption.

Netanyahu’s promised return to politics threatens not only Sharon’s position as head of the Likud, but also Barak’s own position as prime minister. Opinion polls suggest that Netanyahu would defeat any rival for the position.

Israel has just two options: “to become a state without any Jewish characteristics, or to become a Palestinian state with full sovereignty and economic resources” would be viable. The increasing politicisation of Israel’s Mizrahi populations — Jews from Arab countries, who have suffered racism and economic exploitation in the Jewish state, and form the overwhelming majority of the Israeli working class — demonstrates the need and space for a class-based party which will take up the struggle against this apartheid, and for a common future for all of the people of Palestine, and those who have been expelled.

However, at present the prospect for such a party seems remote. The Palestinian left is divided, with PFLP leader George Habash quitting the organisation he led for over 30 years in despair.

The Israeli left is rudderless and demoralised, split between those who see Barak and the Labour Party as preferable to Sharon or Netanyahu and the Likud, and those who see no difference between them.

New forces are developing among both communities, around the right to return, and in opposition to apartheid. The task of the left now is to find a way to knit these two strands together, into a democratic movement for a democratic state in the whole of Palestine.

The alternative is now apparent to all, summed up in the horrific film of the murder of a terrified Palestinian child.

Free Mordechai Vanunu now! For a nuclear-free Middle East!

Mordechai Vanunu, the nuclear whistle-blower convicted by an Israeli court of “spying an enemy state in time of war” and sentenced to 18 years in prison, after being illegally kidnapped by Israeli agents in Rome in 1986, has been returned to solitary confinement. The murder of Yasser Arafat on 11th November in 2004 was a significant step towards destroying the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the 18-year-old man has been put on trial for the murder of Yasser Arafat.

Vanunu’s regular requests to be imprisoned with Palestinian political prisoners, rather than Jewish inmates, have all been rejected. He has no access to the outside world, for any purpose, and cannot expect to be released before 2004. A 12-hour vigil outside the Israeli embassy in London on 30 December, the 18th anniversary of Vanunu’s staining, was supported by Tony Benn, Jeremy Corbyn, Harold Pinter, Benjamin Zygier, Brian Eno and many other political and cultural figures.

The defence campaign continues to hold regular Pickets every Saturday.

Further information at http://www.vanunu.freezone.co.uk/
Why the planet cannot live with global capitalism

It is becoming more and more apparent that ecological struggles are central to creating socialism.

The protests against the IMF, World Bank and WTO at Seattle, Washington and Prague have shown how important environmental questions are in building a movement against globalization.

At the same time the rising price of oil, the impact of global warming, increases in atmospheric pollution and a host of other developments have placed ‘green’ issues at the centre of political debate.

But what do Marxists have to offer in this area? Does the rise of the ecological movement mean that Marxism has become less relevant - or does that movement need Marxist ideas to fulfill its radical potential?

ANDY KILMISTER reports.

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great deal of the thought of Marx and Engels was centered on issues that we would now recognize as ecological. Engels’ book The Condition of the Working Class in England, written as long ago as 1844, discusses not just the situation in workplaces and trade unions, but also the environment in which workers lived in Manchester.

He outlines the effect of industrialisation on the air they breathed and the water they drank and devotes many pages to the dramatic effect of industrialisation on the landscape of the North East.

In a similar way, Marx’s great work Capital looks at questions like food adulteration, and links this to the exploitation of wages of workers which force them to eat bread mixed with alum, dust and chalk, as well as to the industrialisation of the baking trade.

Ralph’s friend John Bellamy Foster’s Marx’s Ecology (Monthly Review Press) have shown how central ecological ideas have been to the Marxist tradition since its birth.

For Marx, capitalism has two central characteristics which make it incompatible with preserving the earth’s ecology. Firstly, capitalism has inherited the drive towards commodification. Throughout its history things previously held in common have been taken into private ownership in the pursuit of profit.

The first example of this, which provided the basis for the foundation of capitalism, was the enclosure of common land, from the sixteenth century onwards. But since then capitalism has depended on transforming freely held objects into private commodities.

Today, plant remedies used for generations in Latin America and South Asia are being patented by US and European multinational companies. Indian rice growers have seen the recipe for Basmati rice, which they have grown for centuries, appropriated by foreign companies.

Even the genetic structure of individuals who have undergone particular medical treatments is now being patented by pharmaceutical firms.

This means that the environment has increasingly become fragmented into private commodities. The complex links between different parts of this interrelated whole are ignored as commodity-owners concentrate on maximising the returns from their particular spoils.

What might, from their individual perspective as capitalists, appear rational to them, is disastrous for the world as a whole. The classic examples of this are world-wide phenomena like global warming and the destruction of the ozone layer where capitalist production actually threatens the survival of the planet.

The second characteristic of capitalism which is incompatible with environmental security is its drive towards expansionism.

Capitalism is unique among the various economic systems (‘modes of production’ in Marx’s terms) which have existed up until now, in the way it depends upon continuous expansion for its economic viability.

Profits for capitalists depend upon exploiting living labour in the process of production. As capitalism develops, such labour works with an ever-increasing amount of machinery and fixed capital – which does not generate new profits.

If production remained at the same level, this would tend to drive down the rate of profits, and threaten future production.

So, to maintain profits, productivity has to increase, generating more and more commodities. These commodities in turn have to be sold, realising the new profits, either by the creation of new geographical markets or by generating new “needs” for consumption, either capitalists or workers.

This movement towards expansion is a characteristic of capitalism (though it is a deeply unstable process characterised by alternating booms and slumps). But it is in constant conflict with the fragile linkages binding together the earth’s ecology.

Capitalism’s expansionary drive has shaped the environment for centuries, for example in its discovery and exploitation of new sources of energy. But it has done so in a deeply distorted way, governed not by any long-term plan of developing the world’s resources, but by the immediate pressure of the market.

These two characteristics of capitalism make it fundamentally opposed to ecological sustainability, as Marx and Engels recognised.

However, this opposition takes dramatically different forms in different historical periods. The ecological crises generated by capitalism are in many ways similar to ecological crises.

At each point capitalist production generates ecological contradictions which in turn threaten the stability of the system. Such crises are resolved, but in a way which in turn sets up future contradictions and tensions.

However, until such contradictions become apparent it can appear to capitalists that the market can generate the basis for preserving the environment – in the way that, for example in Eastern Europe today, capitalist firms like Asa Boveri are making environmental reclamation a central part of their foreign investment strategy.

Tracing the links between capitalism and environmental destruction cannot just be done by looking at the abstract nature of capitalism as a system, but requires concrete analysis of particular historical periods.

What then are the particular contradictions between the current phase of capitalist production, globalisation backed up by an international neo-liberal offensive, and ecological sustainability?

There are a whole range of examples which could be pointed to here. The following three seem particularly appropriate, given the direction of current political struggles.

The first example is that of the exploitation of primary commodities. The recent speculation on high fuel prices and the worry of capitalists about the price of oil only underline the extent to which growth in the imperialist countries over the last two decades has depended on low commodity prices.

Apart from oil, these remain at record low levels, and even oil is still only half its 1980 price in real terms. The ability of the US economy in particular to grow for the last nine years without inflation rising has depended crucially on these low prices.

How has this been achieved? In the long boom following World War 2 commoditiy prices were kept low by the systematic application of science to the production of synthetic substitutes.

But by the 1970s this potential was largely exhausted, leading to a dramatic rise in commodity prices and inflation.

This has been reversed since 1980 by a massive offensive in the developing world, promoting expansion of food and commodity production for export and largely reversing the development towards manufacturing of the previous decades.

A key element in allowing this has been the growth of international debt, forcing countries into expanding export revenues to pay off...
The ecological consequences of this dramatic shift to export-oriented agriculture and raw materials production are obvious. The destruction of the rainforests of Latin America and South East Asia to provide timber and clear land for crops is only the clearest example.

In retrospect, the most surprising thing about the recent rise in oil prices is that it has taken so long to arrive and that it is still so limited. This is a testimony to the integration of the rulers of the Middle East into an imperialist framework. However, the limited rise in the price of oil did partly stimulate the privately owned and controlled by the government of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, which is enough to scare significant protest from Western employers and policy makers. As this report shows, the rise in oil prices is not enough on its own to cause a recession. But if it reduces confidence in the increasingly shaky US stock market, then its impact would be dramatic. Given this, it is clear how deep a change would be required if global commodity use were to approach ecological sustainability.

The second example of the impact of globalization on the environment, also apparent in recent fuel crisis, is the rise of "just-in-time production" - originally in the car industry, but now across large parts of the economy in the USA, Europe and Japan. The more towards carrying low stocks necessitates regular delivery of goods to factories that have been passed on to societies as a whole (particularly the working class, who are least able to move to areas with low transport densities) and to future generations.

The third example of the impact of globalization on the environment comes through massive expansion of foreign investment over the last two decades. Not only has this increased the pace of the extraction of primary commodities described above, it has also led to the export of ecologically damaging production to countries where it has been thought that resistance will be less.

A famous example in the 1980s was the Bhopal disaster in India as a result of toxic leakages from a Union Carbide plant. To take just one case in recent years, it is worth looking at the country which is the single largest recipient of direct investment in the developing world. In 1997 Richard Smith published a detailed account of the impact of economic unf for drinking and their fish unfit to eat. Since the 1980s some 10 million hectares of farmland have been polluted by rural industrialisation, causing losses of crops and animals worth some $2.7 billion. During 1992 and 1993 more than 100,000 Chinese were poisoned by pesticides and fertilizers. More than 14,000 of them died. Polluted air and respiratory disease is now the leading cause of death in urban areas of China.

In China's ten biggest cities some 5,000 tons of plastic waste are produced every day. The government estimates that environmental losses total some $12 billion annually.

The import of cheap commodities, the rise of just-in-time production and the expansion of foreign investment are not marginal aspects of contemporary capitalism. They are central to the whole process of globalization and to the neo-liberal offensive. All ecological questions are central to them.

The strategies depend on the process of commodification outlined earlier, where the environment is taken into private ownership and the costs of ecological destruction are not borne by those who receive profits but are transferred to workers and to future generations. Some struggle against globalization has to make ecological considerations equally central to its theory and practice, and to build on the insights of Marx and Engels in a contemporary setting. We need to build a movement which makes the analysis of the impact of capital on the environment a crucial part of the struggle against the system.
Stage set for a new shift to the right

Joe Craig

T he victory in the recent Stirling by-election by the singing vice-chairman of Paisley’s Democratic Unionist Party against Unionist candidate David Burnside has plunged the sectarian process into yet another crisis.

There is hardly a safe Unionist seat left in Scotland for the prospect of a UK Government has taken on new dimensions in the Unionist Party. McCrea, the vice of loyalist support group Billy King’s ‘Rat’ Wright, was pitted against Burnside, also ‘opposed’ to the agreement and given the backing of British Airways. Trimble confirmed his own moderate credentials by nominating Gary McMichael, front man for the UDA, to the civic former president, and add-on to the Assembly for those unable to get on the gravy train directly.

The UDA is currently involved in a turf war with the UVF on the Shankill Road in a battle that combines drugs and politics. This kind of conflict has put terrorism into some working class Protestant communities but to far hasn’t stopped some on the left from supporting the UVF as the ‘moderate’ and ‘loyalist’ group. Apparently the Protestant working-class man so much to these people that vicious sectarianism dressed up in ‘sickles’ clothes is good enough for them.

Once again, the media is pushing the agenda that nationalist Ireland must save David Trimble and the Good Friday Agreement from the “no” men of unionism. The threat should be allowed in the place while for others any Catholic in government is unacceptable. Booting out the Provos would simply be the first step in weakening the SDLP with a view to their eventual expulsion as well.

T he problem for the Provos is that saving David Trimble in order to save the agreement they love hardly makes sense when Trimble leads the fight for demands that are outside the agreement. The “no” men aren’t actually against the agreement. They are for it, minus the Provos.

This explains their lack of street campaign against the agreement, their participation in the assembly and their committees since Sinn Fein and their taking of ministrial seats.

It also explains why there are those criticizing Paisley for conceding to the Provos as well. Yes, I know, it’s hard to believe but that’s why this sectarian line hole is kept.

As we go to press, the Unionist Party is preparing to oust Trimble by passing policies that the Unionist Party participation in the Government Executive to further resist on the Provos and decommissioning.

There is even speculation that Trimble will propose something like this himself. The differences between them are close.

Meanwhile the British are pressing the SDLP and Sinn Fein, partly through the Dublin government, to accept continuation of the RUC, without even a new lick of paint by way of a name and badge change. The IRA is being called on to make yet another attempt to getUnity back. That is, confidence they will soon surrender absolutely.

The SDLP hold the key process on the basis that they had already got the deal they had been seeking – a share of sectarian privilege. The Provos sold it on the basis that it was just the start. They were both right. The sectarian privileges will be shared but the unionists must not get the lions’ share because they are the majority. The agreement was just the start, the start of revolution following the complete collapse of the sectarian rule and its sectarian state.

Whether Trimble falls or not, whether the Executive or Assembly will be suspended or finished, whether the Good Friday agreement collapses or staggers on or are all important. The Unionists must not put enough on the line to allow the Provos to love them down the Stormont they love with the Provos they hate. It will get the line’s share. The sectarian state will still be.

There remains room for Trimble and the British to manoeuvre on concessions to bigotry and/or suspension of parts or all of the Agreement institutions. The pressure through Dublin can be maintained, if necessary, to keep the Republicans as a loyal opposition.

But what matters is that the dynamic behind the peace process will continue to depend on whether the unionist opposition will get their way through the system. The push towards the right might lead to continuing movement towards temporal or permanent collapse of the present framework towards a political of building a democratic and socialist opposition remains.

Lethal “partnership” deal kills off Irish rail strike

Paul Flannigan

A fter ten weeks on strike the 130 locomotive drivers of Irish Locomotive Drivers Association (ILDA) were forced to take strike action. The last action was called off in striking not just for themselves but to guarantee a safe rail service for everyone.

The longed Eireann management were jeopardising rail safety by the addition of eleven hour work rosters, the driving of heavy loads and by reducing training for new drivers. What started as an important but fairly unimportant dispute quickly turned into a national political issue.

The press quickly targeted ILDA General Secretary Brendan Ogles as public enemy number one. The Independent group of newspapers accused Ogles of causing everything from the closing down of enterprises to the rise in the costs of living causing the lives of cancer patients. Politicians from every political party raised up a howl of disapproval against one trade unionist. Some newspaper columnists called for the law to come down hard on the strikers.

Worse of all the ICTU and the union leaders of Ireland’s biggest union Service, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) and the National Rail and But Union (NBRU) joined in the trade. They issued a letter to their members instructing them to stop the picket line. Why was such a farrago of investigative directed at a small group of workers on strike?

The answer is that the formation of ILDA itself was seen as an affront to the spirit of the time which goes by the irascibly named ‘social partnership’. The ILDA was identified by the social partners as a union opposed to the proposed privatisation of the railways.

Even before the strike began, fears were expressed that ILDA was a militant union who would attack all social partners. Its militancy in organising secondary picketing during the strike merely confirmed this fear. Social partnership derives on deals being struck at the top table well out of reach of ordinary union members. Successful governments have sought more and more of a partnership with the union leaders which today crucially involves support for privatization.

The ILDA was formed out of a frustration and instinctive opposition to this. It grew out of a pressure group formed in 1994 by three train drivers who were members of SIPTU and opposed a private sector deal agreed between their union officials in SIPTU and NBRU and the employers. The drivers used to meet regularly in Dublin’s Ashling Hotel and finally registered as a union in July 1995. In establishing itself from the official union apparatus, ILDA was going against the program of union centralisation and privatization encouraged by the enactment of the 1995 Industrial Relations Act and the ideology of partnership and consensus.

In the last few years the state has dished out over two million pounds to facilitate union mergers and centralisation. With this help the number of unions has fallen from 150 to below 50.

So from the outset there was a pronounced hostility to ILDA. The ILDA people were portrayed as dangerous militants. It is hard enough to win a dispute even with the solidarity of other unions but when their leader are actively opposing you then you really have got big problems.

During the course of the strike the rail workers received magnificent support from ordinary workers who simply ignored the instruction to stop from the ‘social partners’. Trains continued to run. ILDA put pickets on bus garages, most workers refused to cross them.

Picketing

For the first time in years we saw the power of secondary picketing. Nobody can now claim that the rail workers lacked determination or that their tactics were not militant enough. However they were stiffened back to work. They were not on the end being fought by the political reality that is social partnership. There are plenty of workers who are angry, there are even enough potential militant leaders capable of fighting hard.

But what is lacking is a comprehensive political consciousness that appreciates the sociopolitical relationship between mechanisms and ideology of social partnership right across the system. Instead of the peer epidemic and spontaneous emotions of militancy we need a consciously organised fight against social partnership which is well prepared in advance. The workers need an organisational current of politically conscious workers armed with an action programme to fight against privatization – and the support for it from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU). In short Irish workers need to become overtly and progressively more political.

The ILDA was an industrial dispute that the capitalist bosses and their press recognised was a key political battle

Irish premier Bertie Ahern is an eager proponent of “partnership” because it was about forcing this split and not depending on the ILDA membership was slow to realise just how politically significant this was.

Small militant break can transform the situation, solving the solution to the problems facing Irish workers. But the way for the workers is that their industry is being readied for privatization under the worsening of their conditions.

The ILDA workers were in fact left stranded, unable to influence the crucial debate on privatization taking place in ICTU and NBRU. For the ILDA key workers need a solution based on stopping centralisation. This can only be brought about by means of a general political struggle against social partnership.
Popular NO vote defeats Denmark's euro elite

Finn Kellejær

Hundres of jubilant young left-wingers gathered in front of Christiansborg on the eve of 28 September to celebrate the no victory in the euro referendum. Meanwhile, behind the walls of Parliament, there were tears and bitter comments from the establishment politicians.

In spite of a massive scare campaign, a 51.1 per cent majority came out against Danish participation in the single currency — a verdict strengthened by a poll turn-out of 87.8 per cent.

The bulk of those who voted no were supporters of parties which supported joining the Euro. More than a quarter of the Liberal and Conservative voters said no.

In spite of a well-planned campaign from Social Democracy and the Danish trade union confederation, LO, 40 per cent of the social democrats took no. And even though the pro-euro wing of the left wing Socialist People's Party (SF) got lots of friendly media attention for their "New Europe" campaign (funded by the Confederation of European Trade Unions), 68 per cent of the SF electorate chose to say no.

With the state budget clearly divided on the euro question, there was certainly a massive no vote from what is often termed "Under-Denmark". The poorest, least educated urban areas showed a "no" majority of around 70 per cent, while well-off areas went to the "yes" side by as much as 70 per cent.

The sites where marginalisation and threatened by the "development" was very likely to have rejected the euro while many of the better-off workers have voted yes in their own interest.

In the final phase of the campaign, SF leader Holger K. Nielsen, became the main spokesman for the "no" side, engaging in an intense polemics with Prime Minister Nyrop Rasmussen on welfare questions.

Piia Kjærsgaard, leader of the far right, xenophbic Danish People's Party (DF), has been portrayed in some media as the "No" Queen. It is true that the right wing, not least DF, has been clearly strengthened since previous referendums. Social democracy did its very best to focus on the role of DF in order to deter progress for the "yes" side, engaging in a sort of no vote with nationalists.

The final poll results called for a "Danish vote" to protect "country and country", but stayed low key on anti-euro feeling that order not to stage unnecessary provocations.

Denmark's two main EU-critical cross-party movements, the People's Movement against the EU and the June Movement, including many left wing activists, favoured the broad alliance stopping short of Pia Kjærsgaard's party.

They entered into a "Euro No" campaign including, among others, the Thatcherian Conservative Youth. When it came to actual campaigning, though, the right wing seemed to have played a small role. Parallel to this individual campaigns were carried out by the Socialist People's Party (SF), the Red-Green Alliance (Enhedslisten) and other left wing parties as well as by minor currents inside Social Democracy and bourgeois parties.

Oftewill, the no campaigns proved less problematic than could have been feared. They were not as attacked by nationalistic and self-sufficiency, while such attitudes did make themselves felt among part of the electorate.

No campaign often put forward the situation of East Europeans who are having a hard time joining the EU because of the harsh EMU criteria. And, as pointed out by an Enhedslisten member: "The world is larger than the EU."

The impact of the EMU on the welfare system played a major part in campaigns ranging from the left wing to social democratic dissidents and even some bourgeois groupings.

Increasing tax competition combined with the Stability Pact rules against budget deficits constitute a threat to the funding of the welfare state, it was argued. In Denmark, 69 per cent of welfare payments are tax financed, a share far larger than in most euro countries.

Prime minister Poul Nyrop Rasmussen has been boasting about his role in placing "employment" high on the EU's agenda. He even put forward the Lisbon summit last March as proof that the social Europe is happening right now.

"Unbearable and obligation-free". That is how another prominent social democrat, Ivar Nørregaard, referred to the Lisbon employment goals. As a government minister, Nørregaard co-signed Denmark's joining the EC in 1973.

But he was deeply disappointed, when the Maastricht criteria were laid down without including one on maximum unemployment.

The problem with the euro is that price stability goal is given a far higher priority than the employment situation of the various countries, he said.

Ole Jensen, a representative of "Trade Unions against the Union", also warned against the Lisbon thesis, according to which millions of new jobs will be created in small and medium sized enterprises. Behind all the talk of "innovation", he puts his finger on well-known corporate-friendly prescriptions making up the concrete measures agreed in Lisbon:

"You have proposals to alleviate taxes on the lowest paid, so that, in return, their wages can be lowered. And once again, you have the demand for greater flexibility. This usually means lower wages, wider wage gaps, uncomfortable working hours and easier access to sacking workers."

The "yes" establishment had at its disposal far by far the most money, the government services, three quarters of the MPs, massive support from employers' as well as trade union federations, and all major newspapers except one tabloid.

However, the "yes" was weakened by a series of mistakes.

A few weeks before the referendum, the Prime Minister made a fool of himself by "guaranteeing" the future of the national pension scheme. This guarantee was considered unanswerably by three quarters of the public, especially since in 1996 the new general election, Nyrop Rasmussen "guaranteed" the early retirement pension, and six months later introduced an important element of private insurance, thus adapting to EU policies.

While the yes parties tried to keep the EU core countries' plans of increased EU powers from the public, the no side was able to quote leading EU politicians voicing demands for further harmonisation and an "economic government" still louder than the euro rate went down.

According to some analysts, the yes side could have gone on the offensive by arguing openly in favour of a closer political Union. However, most pro-euro politicians were painfully aware that this would have caused an overwhelming majority.

Opinion polls before and after the referendum show that, in general, the Duits are interested in and well-informed about European questions, but they tend to be sceptical towards the Union project because they fear that the EU is undermining democracy. One opinion poll shows that half of the voters made their choice on the basis of the general EU development.

That is why the yes side resorted to a scare campaign similar to the one used in the five previous EU referendums in Denmark.

Failure to join the euro, portrayed as the "crude market force", would mean the Danish crown would come under pressure, they claimed, causing interest rates to go up, which would cost 20,000 jobs and 20 billion crowns. Voting no would unleash a package of austerity measures.

The same message was conveyed by an alliance of bosses and trade union officials.

Full-page advertisements showed managers and shop stewards saying: "We, the people working in the enterprises, fear a no vote."

Nevertheless, the catastrophic scenarios failed to convince a majority and were discredited by the extremely moderate response by voters in the days following the vote.

The no victory was a heavy blow for Poul Nyrop Rasmussen and his Social Democratic -Social-Liberal government.

While promising a series of "people's hearings", the government is trying to prevent the EU critics from gaining any influence on the Danish EU policies.

The negotiations on a new treaty to be decided in Nice in December are central to the discussions about the consequences of the no vote.

The government claims that the Nice Treaty is something completely different, while the EU-critical movements demand that government put a brake on the Union train in Nice by blocking for further majority decisions, particularly on social questions.
The legacy of George Orwell

Daron Williams

In January of this year a small milestone passed somewhat unannounced amid the glut of milestone celebrations: the 50th anniversary of the death of George Orwell. He was 46 at the time.

Orwell’s literary career was relatively brief: his first book, Down and Out in Paris and London was published in 1933, and his last and most famous, Nineteen Eighty-Four, in June 1949, a few months before his death.

The work that he produced in this short period had enormous impact, however, and its influence has endured long after his death.

There are many different illustrations of this. In the last three years there have been film versions of his novels, Keep the Aspidistra Flying and Animal Farm (the second version). The latter and Nineteen Eighty-Four are among the top ten of ‘Britain’s favourite novels’ in a recent survey carried out by Waterstones. Orwell’s views are still widely cited by political commentators: for example, last year, the Guardian columnist, Francis Wheen, quoted at length from Orwell’s writings on fascism in order to justify his own support for the Nato bombing of Serbia. Even the TV programme Big Brother and Room 101, are based on trivialised versions of ideas from Nineteen Eighty-Four.

A contested legacy

Orwell’s two novels reflect the major preoccupation of his last years: the danger of totalitarianism, the features of which he saw as common to both Nazi Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union.

Nineteen Eighty-Four is a horrific premonition of Britain (renamed Airstrip One) in what was then the near future: under the military regime of the Party (English socialism), the Party has brutally suppressed all political pluralism, cultural diversity and even independent thought. The plot of Animal Farm closely follows the history of the Russian Revolution, and with the revolutionary overthrow by the animals of the tyrannical humans leading to the creation of an egalitarian society, which is sabotaged by the corruption of Big Brother, the Party.

For this reason, these works have been invoked, since their appearance at the outset of the Cold War, to justify the view that revolutions inevitably become corrupt and socialism means the demise of freedom. This was very far from Orwell’s intention, however. He remained a socialist to the end of his life, and argued, throughout the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War, that revolution was both desirable and an urgent necessity if fascism were to be defeated.

In his non-fiction books and in his prolific journalistic output, Orwell was a tireless critic of class society, social injustice and colonialism, and, in the recently discovered letters, he explained himself to be, in the words of the Opium Department of the Indian civil service. The young Blair attended a prep school near Eastbourne, and worked very hard to earn a scholarship to Eton. His subsequent academic career was unimpressive, however. After leaving Eton in 1921 he went not to Oxford or Cambridge, but to Burma, where he served as an officer in the Imperial Indian Police until his return to England in 1927. After serving for himself the reality of the occupation and exploitation of that country by a foreign power, he came to hate British imperialism.

This was undoubtedly a politically formative experience – turning his natural rebelliousness towards a specific target – but at this stage he did not develop a general critique of capitalist society. His decision to become a writer was motivated entirely by literary, not political, goals.

Even the poverty that he described, from first-hand experience, in Down and Out in Paris and London, was undergone voluntarily for the purposes of ‘social investigation’, and was the poverty of tramps and drudges, not of the working class itself.

It was not until 1936 that he became convinced of the necessity of socialism, explaining it ‘as the only hope for the future in a world beset by economic crises, Fascism, and the threat of another major war’ (Letters from Spain). His work was not intended to be read by the ordinary working people. The first literary expression of his socialism was The Road to Wigan Pier, which attacked capitalism by vividly describing the poverty of the Lancashire and Yorkshire mining communities, but also deplored the weakness of the socialists movement and the inept inability to win the support of ordinary working people.

The second half of The Road to Wigan Pier addresses the problem that, just as socialism is more urgently needed today than ever, so it is becoming less attractive to the intended beneficiaries. Orwell argues for the movement and its propaganda to be rooted in the hands of middle-class intellectuals, whose ‘crankish, repelled potential supporters’ and who were preoccupied with issues and incapable of relating to the concerns of working class people.

He argues that if socialism is to succeed, it must be rooted in the experiences of the people to whom it is aimed, based on the specific social circumstances of each country.

In England, this means, for instance, recognising the many gradations of what is ‘white’ and what is ‘black’ and which take on undue significance because of the effect of sordidness; and accepting that socialists must appeal not just to manual workers, but to all those in the intermediate social strata who do not consider themselves working class, but who nevertheless have an interest in the defeat of capitalism.

Their class prejudice will ultimately, he argues, only have a quality of ‘mounting obligations alongside the proletariat. The need for English socialism to reflect its social and cultural background is by far the most apparent in The Lion and the Unicorn: The Englishness of the English Genius, a pamphlet written in 1941, when the war was raging, and directed to the task of overthrowing the bourgeois and building a classless society.

Here Orwell argued that a national socialist revolution could not be achieved by attempting to transplant onto English society the experience and ideas of the revolution in Russia or any-
where else, without regard to local circumstances. Indeed, an English revolution would take up the best elements of the country's culture and traditions; the spirit of an unaccountable power, the belief in democracy and the play 'common decency' and also the patriotism that Orwell sees as progressive, not a conservative, force. "Since it is a deviation to something that is always changing and yet is felt to be basically the same."

These things would be given a new social context, initiating the country's plebeian traditions into a new political and economic regime. The development of nationalisation of the means of production, constraints on personal incomes and the establishment of educational system. Once he believed that the struggle against Hitler could be victorious only by turning it into a revolution. Although these events did not bear out the book's prognosis, there is much to be said in its central idea - that socialism must, in part, be a programmatic one, and not just a search for national culture, not an alien imposition. This argument needs to be re-examined, seeing how the left, despite the rather sentimental aspects of the book which Orwell presents it (not to mention various other problems, such as its neglect of the Scottish and Welsh national questions).

The critique of Stalinism
Among the many things The Road to Wigan Pier are the Stalinisms, whose Orwell sees as isolated from the world at large. At least because of their unrightful adulation. Stalinism was the form it took through his experiences in the Spanish Civil War, however, that he was most critical of. Homage to Catalonia - perhaps his most important book, in political terms - describes how he went to Spain with to help defend the democratic forces against the fascist cromis, only to discover that there was effectively a second war taking place as well. This, along with the Communist Party, the liberals and left-wing socialists on one side, the Stalinist anarchists, the nationalist-socialists and the POUM, which Orwell was fighting on the other. His first visit to Barcelona in December 1936 considered Orwell that a social revolution was taking place.

"Practically every building of any size had been seized by the workers and was draped with red flags or with the red and black flag of the Anarchists. Every shop and cafe had an inscription saying it had been collectivized; even the bootblack had been collectivized and was dressed in a red shirt and black jacket. Waiters and shopwalkers looked at you in the face and treated you as you did them.

There were no private motor cars, there was no street cleaning, and all the stairs and taxis and all other sorts of public transportation were painted red and black. For the Stalinists, however, the revolution was too much. The Popular Front with the liberal bourgeois, which they saw as essential, could not proceed. The non-socialist left saw the war and the revolution as inseparable. The Communist Party insisted that the revolution would have to wait until Franco was defeated. In the meantime, private property had to be protected, in order to reassure their liberal allies.

Orwell's second visit to Barcelona in May 1937 it was clear that bourgeois normality was being restored. The political tension erupted into street-fighting between the two forces on the side of the Republic, the POUM was suppressed and its members, along with many anarchists and other revolutionaries, were thrown into prison, tortured or murdered by the Stalinist-controlled police. Orwell himself narrowly escaped.

The experience convinced him that the official Communist movement was a counter-revolutionary force, which consistently subordinated the interests of the working class to the dictates of Soviet foreign policy, with all its alliances of convenience with bourgeois powers.

Homage to Catalonia was attacked by many on the left - far beyond the Communist Party itself - who romanticized the Soviet Union and the parties of the Comintern. To a lesser extent, this tendency persists among sections of the left even today. In exposing the machinations of the Stalinists in Spain, Orwell made one of his most important contributions demonstrating that the socialist project stands its best chance of success when it pursues its objectives with revolutionary determination, and that Stalinism, with all its bad faith and shabby compromises, is the very opposite of this.

Ken Loach's film Land and Freedom, gave a wider audience a flavour of the conflict between the pro-Soviet and the independent left in Spain. Such events help to understand the hatred of Stalinism that was such a prominent feature of Orwell's later writings. This did, however, sometimes lead him to reactionary positions - such as criticism support for the USA in the Cold War, and an almost McCarthy-esque readiness to excommunicate anyone whom he believed to be doing Stalin's work in Britain. This is no more acceptable for being understandable, but it does not detract from the fact that Orwell's critique of Stalinism, from 1936 onwards, came clearly from the left.

The defence of intellectual honesty and critical judgement
Orwell's experiences in Spain and their aftermath, sharpened his awareness that the distortions exerted by the Stalinists and their fellow-travellers represented something qualitatively different from the atavistic as it had always been associated with major political and military conflict. The development of totalitarian movements and regimes had been accelerated by the development of totalitarian habits of thought among the pro-Stalinist and pro-fascist intelligentsia.

It was no longer enough for such people simply to attack their political adversaries: they had to attribute motives and associations to their opponents that made their ideas and actions appear too disingenuous or corrupt to be worthy of consideration. Thus, the Stalinists they attributed the views of their opponents to the deliberately dis-ruptive activities of the "Trotskyist-fascist fifth column".

These lies were repeated unquestioningly by pro-Communist press and commentators around the world, often by people who had no personal knowledge of the conflict or its protagonists themselves.

In later years, Orwell regularly challenged those who were apologizing for Stalinist movements, both inside and outside Europe, and to the ritual denunciation of whichever enemy was their current target.

In a number of articles, and particularly his classic essay, Politics and the English Language, he described the way that intellectual adherents of a particular orthodoxy would use pretentious language, abstract terms or worn-out metaphors to conceal the fact that they were defending the indefensible.

"People are imprisoned for years without trial, or shot in the back of the neck or sent to die of scurvy in Arctic lumber camps: this is called 'executed by the Stalinists'" he wrote. Such phrasology is needed if one wants to name things without calling them by their proper names.

In opposition to this intellectual deceitfulness, Orwell vigorously insisted that political issues should be discussed in clear, concrete language - as he had always done himself.

And although the open, explicit masses of the working class: a mass movement reproducing a map of Lebanon as a map of London, with the revelation of Israeli involvement in withholding forensic and video evidence, and with the attempt by Israeli correspondents to interfere with the jury. None of this prevented the convictions and vociferous complaints.

Since the trial, it has been revealed (partly through David Shayler) that the prosecution withheld evidence from both the defence and the court. From operating, as they had claimed, in an intelligence vacuum, they were actually doing a piece of work that a foreign government was likely (up to a point) both Marx and Trotsky. His arguments for social- ism were often more emotional than scientific, but given his lack of a definite analytical method or interpretative skills to the events he lived through, his judgement and political integrity show a creditable consistency.

The books that I have mentio- ned, and the many shorter pieces found in The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters (4 vols) should be essential reading for all socialists today, likewise the classic biography of Orwell by Bernard Crick. We need to reclaim the revolu tionary and democratic ideas that ran through Orwell's work, if we are to maintain the link between the fight for socialism in the twenty-first century and the best traditions of the British left.

Free Samar and Jawad!
Roland Rance
A day has finally come for the appeals of Samar Alawi and Jawed Borkiewicz. Palestinian activists sentenced to twenty years in prison after their wrongful conviction in connection with the 1994 bombings of the Israeli Embassy and Zonar headquarters in London. The appeal, which starts on 24th October, will be their first chance to challenge the suppression of evidence which could have led to their acquittal.

Samar and Jawad were convicted of "conspiracy to cause explosions". A co-defendant (who neither of them knew) was accused of actually planting the bombs, and the prosecution accepted that Samar and Jawad had certainly not planted them.

The trial was riddled with inconsistencies, with the prosecution inflexibly producing a map of Lebanon as a map of London, with the revelation of Israeli involvement in withholding forensic and video evidence, and with the attempt by Israeli correspondents to interfere with the jury. None of this prevented the convictions and vociferous complaints.

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"Review" won't end scandal

Scrap Straw's vouchers!

When TGWU leader Bill Morris remitted the motion to scrap vouchers for asylum seekers at Labour Party Conference, it was apparently because the Front Bench promised a review of the system. No review is needed to show that people can not live on 70% of poverty level income support.

No review is needed to show that giving asylum seekers vouchers not cash is racist and demeaning.

No review is needed to prove racist attacks against asylum seekers are on the increase since vouchers and other reactionary measures like dispersal have been introduced by this new Labour government.

Increasing numbers of people have been won to support for the Campaign to Defend Asylum Seekers which is demanding that the voucher system be scrapped.

The only positive thing about the review is if it gives campaigners an opportunity to make our case even more loudly. Add your voice!