FIGHT FOR VAUXHALL JOBS!

OCCUPY LUTON!

International Day of Action January 25
March through Luton Jan 20

The stewards at Luton said in their statement to the work force: "This is our plant. General Motors of Europe have given up their right to call it theirs."

This is a vital fight in defence of jobs not only at this one plant, but throughout GM and its suppliers.

A successful stand here will also help workers in other industries fighting cuts and closures.

That's why it's vital that the Luton demonstration and the European day of action get the fullest support, to get the fight off to a flying start.
Defeat Tube privatisation—and any further contracting out of LUL work

Kiley criticisms of PPP must be handled with care!

Greg Turner

A

socialist

Outlook

We go to press
as

RMT

and

ASLEF

have

organised

a

joint

London Mayor Ken

Livingstone to further the

fight against privatisation of

London Underground and to

lay the groundwork for

a

successful ballot for

industrial

action.

The

Executive

Committees of

the RMT and ASLEF,

the two largest

unions

in

London Underground, have

agreed to ballot their

members

over safety concerns. A

joint letter sent by both

unions to their tube

members

states:

“We believe that the

London Underground

management decision to

proposed

Private-Public Partnership

seriously threatens the health

and safety of our members

and is detrimental to

passengers.

After the tragedies at

Southall, Parsons Green

and Holfield on the mainline

railway we are

concerned that the same

structure will be replicated

on London Underground.

The intensive service

levels

and narrow corridors

mean a breakdown in

safety on the tube will have

consequences beyond

for our members and the

public.

Safety is not negotiable

and if our demands are not

met then both ASLEF and

the RMT will be in dispute

with the Greater London

Authority.

Unity between ASLEF and

RMT is a big step forward.

It is important that this

is worked at at all levels,

not just between Mick Rix

and Bob Crow, but that

this is followed through in
every
department in the

company and available to

all out there working.

Unity is the one thing the

government

cannot take away.

Robert Kiley, the

new Commissioner of

Transport for London, brought in by

Ken Livingstone has

declared a campaign to

get London Underground

back under public

control.

Robert Kiley

The situation on the mainline railway also

continues to deteriorate. The RMT is in

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When America sneezes, Blair's spin doctors are no use at all

OME of Tony Blair's top spin doctors have made a tidy sum in a day. Gore's failure to win the US elections and concluded that it does not automatically question a walk-over Labour win at the next elections.

One of Gore's cardinal errors, according to these masters of entraill, was that his eagerness to distance himself from Clinton and his hidden presidency meant that he was not able to cash in on the image of a president and on the economic growth that came with it. New Labour's commitment to keep the state. shooting up as rapidly as possible.

But even as these sage words were being written by high priests of the dark arts, the very economic assumptions on which they were based were being undermined—both in the USA, and in a certain extent, in Britain, too. Even before the projected sagas of the Florida recounts had been con- cluded, with a panel of five reactionary judges solemnly installing the man with fewest votes as the next President, sharp-eyed observers had predicted that the US economic miracle was coming apart at the seams.

Economic output in the final quarter of 2000 was only half that of the previous quarter.

The much-vaunted Nasdaq stock exchange bubble was in steep decline, losing 29% of its value over the withering year, dragging much of Wall Street with it. Consumer confidence was plunging, after years in which consumer spending has been rising faster than personal income. Savings as a percent of income had effectively collapsed, declining from almost 5% in 1998 to zero at the end of 2000.

Retail sales were falling back, car production and house construction falling, and "dot.com" companies dying or teetering on the edge of collapse. Corporate profits were flat, and the number of companies defaulting on bonds was almost four times the 1996 level.

"I hadn't really suited anyone to point this out until after the election was over. Gore and the Democrats wanted to get the "feared" factor swing voters towards them, while Bush would have been eagerly pro- moting his call for cuts in the tax cuts whatever the state of the economy."

Since the new year began, we have seen the first signs of a open acknowledgement of these problems. The Nasdaq continued down- wards, to reach half its value in March 2000.

As discussion developed on the danger of a new recession, a highly publicised half percent cut in the Federal Reserve interest rate triggered at least a momentary euphoria among both stock and bond holders around the world. President-elect George "Dubya" Bush has been quick to wheel out his all-purpose call for tax cuts as a means to save the economic ship. Gore kept his distance from Clinton — and lost out

whatever the economic illusory, his answer is another dose of free market capitalism, deregulation, privatisation and a reduc- tion in welfare spending.

As we have seen before, this type of treatment can eventually prove to at least the semblance of a recovery — but only at the expense of the jobs and living standards of working people. Labour's first years in office, like the Clinton administration in the USA, have seen the gap between rich and poor actually widen during "good times". The US crisis should remind us that the system itself is anarchic and unstable. It can only maintain profits through the exploitation of the world's working class, kept in check by the threat of a mountain of debt. But manufacturing industry is also in another sharp decline here, with a pattern not dissimilar to the USA: cars and steel are shedding jobs, along with another old-fashioned industry, textiles, A standstill in the British econo- my would throw a spanner in the works of Gordon Brown's carefully stage-managed pre-election spending spree on health, education, and other voter-friendly measures. Unfortunately there is another common factor on each side of the Atlantic: both the British New Labour government and the new US president and his right wing team are wedded to the neo-liberal agenda.

Hackney staff fight Christmas stuffing

FIVE DAYS before Christmas might not be the time any of us would choose to go on strike, but the workers in the London Borough of Hackney were not choosing the massive package of cuts and privatisation their employers have imposed on them.

The council is in debt to the tune of £76 million, pays £81 million a year in interest payments to its banks and is in debt to (1) and is now making every worker and resident pay for the mess of the council's own making.

Hackney went ahead with the privatisation of its refuse service with the loss of 250 jobs — and unfortunately, these workers were then excluded from strike action on December 20 by regional officials.

While earlier occupatoins of two nurseries saved them from closure, the council has subsequently announced another is to close — even though it has more than 1000 children on its waiting list. Homecare staff stand to receive a pay cut of up to £50 per week while gardeners could lose as much as £500.

No wonder the strike on December 20 was absolutely solid in both manual and white collar sections. Many areas had 100% support and even some senior managers (PMT) were out on strike.

The local Hackney Gazette wrote its coverage the day before the strike (due to tight deadlines) and was forced to re-write the story the following week in the light of the outstanding support received by the strike call.

Pickets were out from early in the morning and by 9 am the town hall was more or less surrounded. There was a march at lunch time which ended near the City and a picket of the Town Hall in pouring rain in the evening (it always seems to rain in Hackney!). Both events were well attended and we received major press cover- age.

Unfortunately it seems that management are now deter- mined to raise the stakes. The package agreed on December 20, moniker called a "recovery package" will mean cuts of £4 million before April and £25 million in the following financial year. A further £26 million is scheduled to go in the follow- ing 2 years.

The Labour/Tory leadership is considering serving 90 day notices on all staff terminating our contracts and offering re-engagement on lower terms and condi- tions.

The council is also threat- ening to discontinue the Unison Branch Secretary, John Page for challenging institutionalised racism (apparently because of his support for the "three papers in the council's internal procedures").

Further action is planned by the unions and as the details of different cuts become clear over the weeks ahead there may be further action from the community, where support also remains strong.

To send messages of support or get up to date information about develop- ments in Hackney contact hackney@unisonfree.net or phone 0208 356 4130
Learn lessons of Dagenham
Act now to save Vauxhall jobs!

Jack Johnson

General Motors announced its intention to axe 4,000 jobs across Vauxhall. If they close its Vauxhall car assembly plant in Luton with the loss of 3,200 jobs, on Tuesday December 12th. (The corporation's climate-friendly wish is also slashing 15,000 jobs in its U.S. plants.)

The following day Vauxhall workers launched a militant and spontaneous occupation at Vauxhall's headquarters, Griffin House in Luton. The occupation forced Vauxhall Chairman, Nick Reilly, to come out and try to explain management's decision to close the plant. He got nowhere, and retreated under police protection.

There was neither brief nor angry occupation the following day. Such actions could hardly have shown more clearly the strong feelings of the work force.

On December 13th workers at General Motors' (GM) Ellesmere Park plant in Luton walked out in protest of the closure of the Luton assembly plant, as did many workers at the Ellesmere Park warehouse. They also made the announcement walk out at the huge GM Opel plant at Bochum in Germany.

GM were playing a tactical game in Luton – a new one, but an effective one. They made their announcement clear of the closure of the plant on December 12 knowing that the plant was about to be closed down for a month – from the 15th of December until the 15th of January. Management hoped that feelings would evaporate during that period of time. Their announcement posed workers with the choice to make an immediate decision on the plant in advance of the shutdown, which would have been the most effective action – giving the work force confidence that a fight was going to take place and they would not have to look for individual solutions.

In the event there was not even a mass meeting before the shutdown began. During the shutdown they shut down and strike – by passing jobs on to the other factories in the group. GM management hopes that this will further divide the plant, with some of the work force choosing to stay in these stressed factories.

Despite the lack of action before the shutdown, it is clear that the work force has not been dealt with any greater strength, and have immediate, clear, and bigger attitude, that than taken at either Rover or Vauxhall.

One important strength is in seeing the need for a concrete and organized action. In Dagenham the vote for action was lost not only by the long delay, and the effects of time, but the fact that the vote was confined to Dagenham rather than seen as a crisis of Ford UK – which was the reality.

There was little prospect that the closure could have been opposed in Dagenham alone.

In Vauxhall, at least for now, it is a very different situation. The European Works Council has called a one-day strike of GM plants throughout Europe, on the 25th of January.

In a letter to the membership of GMB in Vauxhall, the Ford and General Motors UK have called for a day of action, while saying: "We are appealing to all General Motors staff to join with the European GM plants in the UK, meeting on January 25th, and have called for a one-day strike in Vauxhall on January 25th. This is an important decision, and a big step forward in the Ford situation, where we have seen the success of the GM announcement of the Dagenham closure and the workers finally voting, there was only one public action – the one-day strike.

There needs to be a massive mobilisation for the January 20 demonstration from all over the country. We need to make sure that the movement of the Luton plant reopens, with a mass meeting to plan the mobilisation.

This is a fight for the whole working class. If this plant goes, it will component firms and even more jobs. One defeat leads to another.

It is a coincidence that one week after the vote at Dagenham to accept the closure of the plant, GM announced the closure of the plant in Luton.

It is not just that it is easier under British legislation to close British plants: it’s because close British leaders in this country have sabotaged any fight back at all.

This must be stopped. Other employers like Nissan/Renault, Corus Steel and Peugeot are waiting in the wings, looking to use more jobs, not to mention the companies and many component firms.

In motors companies against component firms in the UK, and super plants, so that if one model doesn’t sell they can concentrate the work on other models, so that the model gives them this flexibility.

This is why Toyota has bucked the trend and stuck to its production in the UK, although with very small increase in the work force (17% increase in the UK production. It is an attempt to show that the workforce gains flexibility and give them the flexibility they need.

The stewards at Luton said in their statement to the stewards: ‘The GM workers in our plant. General Motors of Europe have given up their right to call them.’

This is a profound statement, and in contradiction to the local Luton Labour MP, who never took the right to take such decisions – but that they should keep the work force informed.

This is in contradiction to Stephen Byers, who knew about the closure in advance and withheld it from the unions, and then said only that he would try to help the workers get other jobs.

If GM cannot guarantee workers then the small should be nationalised – as Should Ford’s and Rover. If there is our the requirement for cars, then the plants should be re-used for useful alternative production, such as armaments, public transport.

This could, with a centralised railway system, and bus system, create a proper public transport system. Support the Luton workers.

All out on January 25th, and 25th.

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Unions must end concession bargaining

One thing that the decision of General Motors to close its Luton plant has made clear, yet again, is that concession bargaining (making concessions on working conditions in exchange for so-called guarantees) on jobs is a big mistake, reports JACK JOHNSON.

In Swindon, BMW, threaten with the plant, and promised unions to accept a 36 hour week but is selling the plant anyway.

In Cowley the union leadership has repeatedly recommended a deal that is the worst of both worlds. The return to the 37 hour week, the continuation of bank holidays, but no reduction in working time or the paid for holidays on Saturday. Also conceded are the use of agency workers, at agency rates, new hours on 20% less pay, and monthly pay.

There are also other elements in relation to grading, and, particularly dangerous, an element of performance related pay which will divide workers.

Another money-saving element is a reduction in shift over the new plant. The actual increase in a year deal is just 7%, with lower union rates.

Considering the new Mini is aimed at go to production in Cowley, to make concessions, this big, now is dissolved. Nor will it guarantee the future. At best means are designed to increase production, but no more competent working of the plant. The Cowley deal for example incorporation the ‘Peugeot’ style Friday, Saturday, and Sunday shift.

This increases the capacity of the plants – but one person’s job loss.

More than two is a united fight back, and a strategy
Political organisations define themselves and are defined by their programmes. The only difference with the alliance is that because it is a new and developing organisation, definition and precise character are not yet fully established. Nor do all those involved yet have clear ideas of how they would like to be seen in the future. Whether or not the Socialist Alliance will develop into a new party in the future and the speed it could do this remains controversial. It is dependent as much on circumstances beyond our control, as on our own efforts. Some see the Socialist Alliance simply as an electoral front unit, and therefore, as being, more or less temporary, and probably a front unit for the purpose of building a new party in the future. The Socialist Alliance as a framework for building a new party to the left of Labour, is clearly possible. An alternative perspective is a response to Blair's take-over of the Labour Party. The "Third Way" is not just another name for Blairism, but for the very existence of the labour bureaucracy. There is, in fact, a new pheno-menon, which explains the failure of the Labour Party to bring about a change. Accidents have happened before and some of them already happened. Each of these perspectives leads to different ideas about what we do now and what kind of mani- festo we need to put forward. The process of agreeing a platform for the General Election could involve all these big questions.

In the view of the International Socialist, the Socialist Alliance today is a united front-type formation, a political alliance of socialist organisations and individuals with the common goal of becoming a future recomposition of the workers' movement and the organised. This will hopefully result in a new workers' party. While we would fight for such a party to become a revolutionary party, we cannot pre-empt people forces for that to happen does not exist today. However we want to ensure that the steps we now take to build the Alliance do not prejudice such a development in the future. In this context the type of manifesto we aim to develop has been called an 'Action Programme' - neither a revolutionary programme nor a mass programme. The Manifesto must include a small number of advanced but popularly formulated demands that, if taken up by the mass movement, would challenge the basis of capitalism and the state (spoilt by less advanced legislation), and see Trotsky called 'transitional demands'. The other demands in the platform would be of a minimum type. Such an anti-capitalist programme would correspond to the type of alliance that exists today and also take into account the existing levels of class-consciousness.

If we do not adopt this approach there is a number of dangers. If the alliance projects itself merely as a collection of campaigns and issues, with a corresponding list of partial or minimum demands, then it will not be seen to offer answers to the big questions confronting society. These are precisely the issues that many people are more likely to think about at a General Election than at most other times.

One central area we must discuss thoroughly is our governmental approach. We want to challenge the big money interests and make inroads into free market capitalism, raising slogans such as "People's profit and the free market!". Our alternative should be summed up through a governmental slogan such as "For a government based on the workers and oppressed". For us this is the sort of way we would want to express the traditional trotskyist demand for a workers' government.

Eating in with the question of cuts we could raise the slogan "For a government which will tax the rich and nationalise the banks" (to pay for hospitals, schools, housing and an integrated transport system which will soak up unemployment). We need to work out a central governmental slogan which will be conjuncturally appropriate and which can define us in the election.

We can advocate other demands which we believe can guide effective working-class politics, from "open the books" and "work-sharing with no loss of pay" to "workers' control" through to the expropriation of the giant financial institutions and big capitalist companies.

Such an approach eschews a narrow, reformist, parliamentary perspective, while avoiding the trap of ultra-left propaganda. It also promotes the fundamental idea of working-class political representation, which the Blair government has trampled on.

The consequences of this are clear: the need for new political representation, for a new mass workers' party.

There are other considerations in drawing up a manifesto. Many comrades in the Alliance, including ourselves, believe that is still necessary to maintain a united front orientation not only to movements outside the Labour Party but directly in relation to the Labour Party itself, in practice its left-wing.

Others fail to see the importance of this or reject it, wishing to work only in the unions and social movements. It is true that the left in the Labour Party has been defeated, but the majority of the working class, including its active vanguard, will still vote Labour in the spring. Their ideas and perspectives are important and they still remain illusions in Labour because of their basis.

We think in this conjuncture that it is important to try and link up with left reformist and class struggle forces that exist and will emerge in the future within what is still a unitary Labour movement. A united front method which we try to link up with local councillors, trade unions and parties, even a few MPs, to fight for example against the sell-off of council housing, has implications for our manifesto and how it is presented. Without such an orientation the Socialist Alliance will never become a centre of reorganisation of the movement.

One view represented by comrades of Workers Liberty argues that: "We raise the issue of union disaffection with the Milbank machine forming its own Labour Representation Committee, which might take shape initially as a ginger group in Labour (or on its fringes, like the new US Labour Party with the Democratic Party) and later become part of a new mass workers' party." The ISG is in favour of a fighting unity and building common struggles with militants in the Party and unions.

However, the idea of a new Labour Representation Committee is appropriate only if big ruptures from within the Labour Party and between the Party and the unions are imminent. This seems to us unlikely at present, or in the forseeable future.

What we can expect is a slow haemorrhaging of members from the LP and the strengthening of the left caucuses in the unions. It is true that our big business funders, of Blair's Labour, have not only strengthened the ties between the Labour Party and the organised working class, but there is no sign that they are about to stop promoting from the top the union bureaucracy breaking from Blair or the Labour Party. This is an issue of concern to a small section of the political vanguard, not a central political issue facing the class in the General Election.

What we see is a growing class consciousness against the Blair government, but as yet little confidence to challenge it or the employers. But these are not the only considerations. There is the question of what social forces we wish to address.

Some may want to concentrate on a purely working class/Labour movement campaign, while others also want to attempt to address the anti-capitalist youth radicalising on issues such as globalisation and the ecological crisis.

Some will be more sensitive to defending the gains of the movement since 1968, for example on issues such as women's and black liberation.

Some within the SA have 'economics first' (orienting to daily trade union struggles) which leads them to underestimate the important new political issues and movements unless they are to be found in the unions. Example of issues which don't fit this 'economics first' model include the youth radicalisation over the ecological crisis of our planet, pollution and global warming.

This diverse movement involves and influences young working class people, but it is not based on the organised workers' movement. If the Alliance avoids organising and putting forward demands around these issues it would be a big mistake. The Socialist Alliance would seem old fashioned, unable to reach out to young people.

We need a programme to counter the greenhouse effect, which means that it is necessary to transcend the fossil fuel economy. George Monbiot has put forward a campaign on the use of fossil fuels in five years time! More practically, the SA manifesto should state this to be our objective without giving a time scale.

This means a move away from the car economy. There are economies which will reach 500 million cars in the world, and with present trends this will reach 1 billion in twenty years.

The amount of human labour per mile is now decreasing, and the number of accidents and fatalities increasing. This means a move away from the car economy.
Welsh coalition sparks rank-and-file backlash

The 'Partnership Agreement', which put two Liberal Democrats in Rhodri Morgan's cabinet in an attempt to secure stability for the devolved administration, has been battered by the anger of Labour activists who feel betrayed by both the deal and the method of its execution.

Rhodri's cabinet was sprung on Labour Assembly Members (AMs) only hours before it was announced to the press, and was effectively a fait accompli before it could be ratified by the Welsh Executive Committee – theoretically the party's governing body.

Rhodri Morgan justified the deal as a necessary expedient to maintain stability for the coalition that had eluded the Assembly during eighteen months of minority government, following Labour's disastrous showing in the May 1999 Welsh general election.

Three short seats of an otherwise impressive Liberal Democrat member body, Labour had continually needed to win the support of at least one other party (usually Plaid Cymru) on an ad hoc basis in order to carry out its programme.

While Rhodri has subsequently painted this as an insoluble problem, Labour activists expect their government to make the situation work, rather than seek a way out at the expense of tying themselves to a permanent arrangement with another party.

A motion from Islwyn CLP at the 2000 Welsh party conference sought explicitly to prohibit a coalition with the Liberal Democrats. While this reflected the unease of the membership, it was rejected by the conference as the behest of the leadership. Moreover, a resolution subsequently passed by the Welsh Executive Committee specifically left open the possibility for a deal with the Liberals, while excluding any such arrangement with either Plaid Cymru or the Tories. Nevertheless, the deal came as a shock.

There was particular unhappiness about the award of the single most important portfolio – Economic Development – and the title of Deputy First Minister to Liberal leader Mike German. As soon as the coalition was announced, German was hit by allegations of financial impropriety connected with his previous job at the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC).

While these charges seem to have been stoked up by long-term Labour opponents in local government, they have not been definitively dismissed, and could yet force his resignation and jeopardise the whole administration.

The first opportunity for backbench unhappiness to find expression was the election of a new Deputy Presiding Officer (DPO) – i.e. the speaker – following the elevation of Jane Davidson to the cabinet as Education Minister.

Having sacked Rosemary Butler, it made sense for Davidson, Rhodri had promised, to make the DPO's job, with the cabinet as a consolation prize. When this became clear, AMs – including Labour backbenchers – were disgusted that First Minister Rhodri was seeking to dish out an independent, non-party political post not in his gift.

John Marek, the maverick Labour AM and MP for Wrexham, stood in opposition, to the delight of the cabinet and loyalist AMs, but with the support of Plaid, the Tories and a couple of Labour colleagues, including Ron Davies.

In the end, he won by 28 votes to 27, thereby showing Rhodri that he could not guarantee to get things his own way.

The willingness of backbenchers to stand up to the administration on more substantive issues has been limited, however.

While several of them defend the whip on a Treaty amendment in favour of PFI (abstaining, instead of voting in favour as they had been instructed) they all fell into line to support a government statement in support of PFI a week later.

Rhodri's coalition: the tugging angle for Labour's core supporters

W hen four AMs reportedly voted against the deal at the Labour group meeting, unease about it was a lot wider.

Low turn-out

This follows the recent by-elections in Glasgow Anniesland and Falkirk West, which were marked both by a very low turn-out and the continuing poor of the SSP (7.1% and 5.1% of the vote respectively).

In both elections the Labour Party tried to ducker a serious confrontation, refusing to take part in public debates; in Falkirk they even took the absurd decision to hold the by-election 4 days before Christmas, on the shortest day of the year.

The working class in Scotland is still mainly supporting the Labour Party, but without enthusiasm. This is a sign of the weaknesses of the opposition parties.

Though the SSP is now generally accepted to be Scotland's 5th party, it has been by far the most consistent left-wing party in Scotland over the past year, and all but one of the Westminster and Scottish by-elections.

The SSP campaigned around the present state of transport in both by-elections. Falkirk has many commuters, as it is mid-way on the main Glasgow-Edinburgh rail line with what used to be fast trains to both cities, but these are now running more slowly than the steam trains used to.

Nationalise

In the SSP’s refurbished Hub high station several times calling for the re-nationalisation of the railways.

Anniesland lies under the flight path for Glasgow Airport, a succession of low-flying aircraft is an everyday sight, but the SSP campaign against the privatisation of air traffic control, and the possibility of another Heathrow in the skies is not taken seriously.

It also campaigned in Falkirk against the astronomical closure, and in Anniesland against the sell-off of Glasgow's council housing stock to a housing association.

SSP members took part in the SSP's election campaign in both by-elections, for seeking an easy way out of Labour's minority status, of a restructured party’s political independence, for failing to consult the membership about the deal, and for including the Partnership Agreement a commitment to review elections systems for the government.

This last concern, reflecting the determination of Labour councillors to defend their bailiwicks against the threat of PR, is the most pressing.

Justified hostility to Lib-Lab coalitionism has been given a more conservative twist by the likes of Llew Smith MP, who is 'left' on social and economic issues, but utterly reactionary on democracy and on the Welsh national question.

The news of the coalition brought Llew, like a vulture scavenging fresh carrion, to the scene of the crime, ready to blame the betrayal on the original sins of devolution and PR.

T hese, like Llew, who blame Labour's minority status on PR, and see the coalition as an inevitable consequence, are at best misguided and at worst distingueous. Labour lost 'safe' seats like Islwyn and the Rhondda to Plaid Cymru on the eve of the post-serenity polls.

Such results undoubtedly reflected hostility both to Blair's control-freakery – including Simon Hughes – on the Welsh party – and more importantly, the general political backlash to the rule under Blair.

Plaid's successful appeal to the Welsh electorate on the basis of the old SNP argument that there has always been a potential majority in the Assembly if only Labour would want it – for progress in the interests of the majority in Wales.

Instead, Plaid's increasing challenge to its hegemony has led Welsh Labour into a tribal party mood, and left the Nats. The most reactionary aspect of the coalition is that it reinforces these tendencies, embracing the Liberals as 'partners' while freezing out Plaid as the official opposition.

To his shame, Rhodri recommended the coalition to his party with the assurance that it would expose the 'conser- vative tendency' represented by the SSP and the Tories – an outrageous statement, considering that Plaid are clearly to the left of Labour on probably every issue.

Socialists have nothing to gain from the Partnership Agreement. The TUC's passive, non-redactional engagement between left and centre in Labour and Plaid Cymru is an essential step towards developing a stronger, coherent socialist agenda for Wales.

The Greens need to begin to make this a reality, at the same time as stepping up support for the Lab project.

The credibility of the Assembly as a progressive advance, and the legacy of the Welsh Labour movement, are at stake.
Beginning of the end for ‘social partnership’ in PCS?

Left victory in main civil service union

Darren Williams

rank and file document 

Socialist Outlook

The way it was. PCS must rebuild confidence of members to fight government attacks

After 1988, however, all the unions were run by right-wing ‘new realist’ leaders who argued that it was necessary to accept the government's agenda for industrial relations. The Thatcher-led union defeated the PCS national executive for industrial relations imposed by Thatcher’s anti-industrial relations, and continued to lobby politicians to moderate the worst excesses of government policy.

While a series of mergers meant that, by 1998, the union – PCS – represented the majority of civil servants, there was no attempt to translate this unity into industrial struggle. The bureaucrats wrote the benefits so as to make themselves as unacceptable to members as possible.

Any hope that the PCS could become stronger under New Labour was swiftly dispelled by the Performance Related Pay (PRP) and the delegation of pay and conditions to departments and agencies.

The only difference was that the PCS’s role now was to manipulate the government into passing the legislation that the PCS’s line unalterably.

Where they greeted the Thatcher measures such as PFI by warning branches of the dangers and instructing them to organise to campaign against (albeit with no support from the centre), they now become threatens public service unions.

Brandes expected to co-operate enthusiastically with employers in introducing changes in the workplace, as these are now seen in the context of a new regime of ‘social partnership’.

Once the Moderates get over their sublation at Lanning’s defeat, however, there is a danger that the two factions will bury their differences, recognising that they have a common interest in holding back Serwoda and working against a resurgence of the left.

It is therefore vital that the left demonstrates the single-mindedness necessary to win a majority in the 2002 NEC elections. The campaign must begin now.

There are two main lessons that we can learn from Serwoda’s victory.

Firstly, many activists - most notably in the Socialist Party (SP) – have cause for embarrassment over their refusal to support Serwoda’s socialist candidate against the right wing from the outset. Given the SP’s enthusiasm for standing candidates in state elections (which we believe is ironic, to say the least. It is almost certain that this reflects a belief in corporatist unionisation into bureaucracy and the civil service machine.

For the sake of a handful of their members at HQ and full-time officials is likely to have strengthened the SP’s inclination to work for the victory of the exceptionally reasonable and inclusive Left Unite over the vindictive Left Unite and the vindictive Right

E ven then there had been no chance of a left victory in the election, it would still have been worthwhile running, to use the election as an opportunity to address many issues. “Now is the time to rally to the Left Unite in PCS. I stood in this election for a few reasons, because I thought that Left Unite decided not to run a candidate.

“Left Unite is an important grouping in our Unite, it should be the natural home for all socialists, and activists who do not support the whole range on all those who supported me in this campaign to join Left Unite, particularly the new generation of activists in PCS.

“By making itself more open and accessible to a new generation of activists, and to those who have previously refused to join, Left Unite can become an organising centre to ensure that the policies I fought for in this election can be delivered. It can be ensured that the Left will fight for policies that are a reflection of a more militant mood within the working class generally and that we can also go on and win the NEC elections.

“In order that the Left can urgently begin to discuss these issues I call on Left Unite to arrange a special NEC meeting to discuss how we can ensure the maximum the new opportunities opened up by my victory.”

The attempt to impose its income policy on the PCS in 1998 marked a nationwide strike in 1979. Over the next 18 years, the government pursued an offensive that left this picture transformed beyond recognition.

Each department was broken up into a number of autonomous agencies, run according to business criteria, with managers given ever-greater power, and charged with making efficiencies by any means necessary.

By 1996, departments and agencies were given responsibility to set their own conditions of service and make their own pay arrangements – provided that these were based on performance-related pay (PRP).

A few agencies, including large chunks of the Ministry of Defence, were sold off to the private sector, on whose terms they cut in their entirety, but almost all understood the ‘outsourcing’ of specific functions to private contractors, whether by market testing, PFI or some other arrangement. 250,000 jobs were cut.

This whole process served a dual purpose: firstly, the dismantling of the state, making government services pay for themselves as far as possible; and secondly, breaking a united workforce into smaller and smaller sections with increasingly differentiated pay and conditions, so that the capacity of workers to resist change was overthrown.

The response of the unions to this offensive was to engage in a new initiative, but to do so without any tooth in practice. During the 1980s, the largest union, CTSA, was run internationally by the Militant-led Broad Left and there was a loss of national pay strikes.
New NHS cash sucked into private pockets

Harry Sloan

A for three years of brutal Tory cash cuts, the NHS has been brought to the brink of collapse. As a share of Britain's GDP is set to rise by almost 2 percent by 2020, the government's six-week plan to close 246 hospitals and nearly 1,000 GP practices is a farce.

Many health authorities are already looking at ways to reduce their budgets, even those with more than enough money to pay their staff. This is a clear sign that the government is not ready to invest in the NHS.

Thefts of hospital equipment and the diversion of funds to private companies are on the rise. Last year, the NHS lost £2.5 billion in this way.

McPlan exposes Millburn's muddle

Health service chiefs and Labour ministers in Scotland have insisted for some time that their policies are not affecting the NHS. However, Millburn Trust is suffering from a lack of funding.

The Scottish government has scrapped NHS Trusts and taking bold steps to establish a new NHS system. But the proposed reforms are not enough. The NHS must be properly funded to deliver the services that people need.

Dudley strikers battle on

Danny Macintosh

The country has voted to protect the NHS, and now the time has come to support the striking NHS workers. The government's cuts to the NHS budget are unacceptable and should be reversed.

Dudley strikers are on strike against the government's plans to close hospitals and cut services. The strikers are demanding better pay and conditions, and an end to the cuts.

The service is struggling to provide the care that patients need. The government's cuts have resulted in a crisis, and the strikers are standing up for their rights.

The world is watching as the Dudley strikers continue their strike. Their efforts are an inspiration to all those who care about the NHS.
Most of the British media hailed the EU’s Intergovernmental Conference (IGC), held in Nice from December 9-3, as a failure. The spin had it that Blair had held the line in maintaining Britain’s veto on domestic tax and social security. The summit had been a shambles, failing on its key objectives. This was an effective spin, but it was an illusion, reports ALAN THORNETT.

The success of Nice for big capital cannot be measured against its failure to bring tax and social security under Qualified Majority Voting (QMV), which builds on Maastricht and Amsterdam, and marks another major step towards a European super-state – the central objective of the European ruling class since the Single European Act of the mid-1980s.

The aim is a single economic and political entity under which European capital can more effectively exploit the working class and compete more strongly with Japan and the Pacific rim and the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA), dominated by the USA. The stakes, therefore, are high.

The anti-EU Daily Telegraph (December 11) assessed Nice this way: “Make no mistake, Nice is another federal treaty. Listing to the BBC, you might have got the impression that, apart from some woe-kerdy about voting weights, the summit has really turned on Tony Blair’s historic defence of our veto over taxation and social security. But, even before the publication of the final text, we know that the summit has seen giant strides towards closer integration in four areas: the establishment of a European military force, the adoption of a European constitution, the up as a “Charter of Fundamental Rights”; the extension of EU competence in several home affairs matters; and the general removal of the national veto.”

The pro-EU Economist (December 16) assessed it this way: “Poor past the verbal sleight and fudge, blood and bruised ego, and you can now see that – thanks to four rounds amongst the EU’s 15 leaders – an imposing new shape rising on the global stage. This is surely a cause for celebration. Who, aside from those with their imperfections the Nice summit was a success.”

Certainly Nice was the most fraught EU summit yet, with bouts of bare knuckle-fighting amongst the delegations – all but two of which represented social democratic governments. They were split into two camps, the big countries and the small countries. But this conflict simply reflected the enormity of the task involved: to prepare the EU for enlargement – a major new stage in the development of the EU – and at the same time continue the process of integration, centralising the EU’s decision-making processes, and consolidating its institutions.

At stake in Nice was who will be the real decision makers in the EU under enlargement, the first round of which is due in four years time. There was bound to be feathers flying over that.

If EU structures were not reformed, enlargement would shift the balance of power towards the smaller countries by diluting the influence of the few most politically powerful countries. This was unacceptable to the big countries, who have long wanted a more direct EU dimension. And that is exactly what they used Nice, and the preparation to Nice, for.

Enlargement to the east, unavoidably posed with the Warsaw Pact. The Czeckoslovakia, at least, will be an EU. from 15 to 27 member states. Of the 12 applicant members accepted for membership (some in 1997 and others in 1999) 10 are from eastern Europe and the Balkans; plus Malta and Cyprus.

Turkey has been knocking at the door and has been granted applicant status, but it has not been accepted for negotiations. Enlargement on this scale will create an EU stretching from Ireland in the west to Bulgaria in the east, and from Sweden in the north to Malta in the south.

Enlargement will create by far the biggest single trading block in the world, with a population of nearly 500 million – twice the size of the USA. But it’s a difficult process, and success is not guaranteed – even given the massive political will behind it.

Nice opened up a critical four year period for the EU – from now until the summer of 2004 – when the first round of applicants – Estonia, Poland, Slovenia, and Hungary and Malta – are due to join. A “Super Summit” will then be held (under the Dutch presidency) to promote a “deeper and wider” discussion on the future of the EU – to map out the next stage of integration.

EU enlargement plan puts power in the hands of the big countries

The role of the EU in the global economy

Nice has further strengthened the fundamental character of the EU as a zone of European capital based on a neo-liberal, privatised, deregulated model, designed to increase the profitability of the employers, increase the power of multi-national capital, maximise flexibility in the work-place, and run down the welfare state.

It is a Europe controlled by selected bankers and the so-called stability pact, designed to keep government borrowing per cent of GDP below the 3% ceiling set by the Maastricht convergence criteria.

It is a reactionary, anti-working class project, which becomes more reactionary as it moves towards its goal of a federal super state – something it needs if it is going to challenge its main rivals in today’s globalised economy.

The US and Japanese ruling classes have advantages which the existing EU, as a glorified trading block with multiple decision making centres, cannot match. Tokyo and Washington dominate and politically lend their power blocks in a way that even a unified Germany cannot do within the EU. They have a single leadership, totally dominant currencies, lower social spending, and multi-nationals even more powerful than those in Europe.

So we need to resolve these problems which lies behind the drive for a European super-state.

The successful introduction of the Euro – at the moment uniquely a currency without a state – is a prerequisite to that. But public opinion remains deeply divided on it in most countries of the EU, as can be seen by the recent referendum in Denmark.

But the Euro is not as weak as often argued – at least its weakness is notchiefly reflected in its current weakness against the pound. That has been created by the strength of the dollar, and is likely to change substantially as the US economy moves towards recession.

The Euro, in any case, cannot be allowed to fail if the possibility of transcending the established nation states and creating a truly European ruling class with its own institutional framework or state is to be a reality.

And it has massive backing behind it. The driving force behind the EU, as well as its neoliberal policies, is the European Round Table of Industrialists. This consists of 47 European based multi-nationals, which include Nestle, Unilever, GKN, Brab, Amoco, Renault, Marenco, IC, Olivetti, BT, Pilkington and Fiat. They have long shaped the development of the EU behind the scenes.

The EU today is an integral part of an increasingly globalised world economy, which has given a renewed impetus to the formation of large, competing trading blocks and intensified global competition between ever larger multinational companies.

Globalisation is an integral part of a world increasingly dominated by international capital institutions such as the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the World Bank. These institutions are the driving force of the world-wide neo-liberal offensive against the working class, promoting economic and financial deregulation, privatisation and labour flexibility.

The key decisions at Nice

The Nice summit agreed to extend Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) in the Council of Ministers – the law-making making body of the EU – into 29 new areas. Currently about two-thirds of the Council’s decisions are subject to QMV. Fortunately attempts to make trade, educa-
The protests have followed the process of EU integration around the cities of Europe: above French protesters on the streets of Cologne

This page is not fully legible due to the quality of the image. However, it appears to discuss the challenges faced by the European Union (EU) and its member states, particularly with the integration and expansion of the EU. It mentions the Nice Summit and the Nice Treaty, which expanded the EU's political and economic powers.

The text also touches on the political landscape of the EU, with references to German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and the French Labour Force. It mentions the political antics of the EU and its member states, including the challenges faced by the German police force in dealing with the protests.

Overall, the page seems to be discussing the complex and multifaceted nature of the EU, its integration process, and the challenges it faces in maintaining its unity and effectiveness.

The text also discusses the role of the EU in managing financial crises and the need for cohesion and solidarity among its members. It mentions the financial and economic challenges faced by the EU, including the need for structural reforms and the role of the European Central Bank.

The page ends with a quote from the late Austrian Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who said that the EU is divided and needs to reform itself to remain relevant and effective. The quote emphasizes the need for the EU to address its internal issues and demonstrate its commitment to the values of unity and solidarity.

In summary, this page provides a comprehensive overview of the EU's political and economic landscape, its challenges, and the need for reform to ensure its continued effectiveness and relevance.
cans. The idea that Poland, with a huge agricultural population, could be brought into the CAP without a major restructuring of EU finances to finance the money is absurd. Detailed criteria have been laid down for the enlargement before any negotiations can begin. They must have a strong market economy and viable institutions that guarantee democracy, the rule of law and human rights. That rules a good chunk of the existing members out, including France! Also, they must have adapted their laws to comply with 35,000 pages of EU legislation (known as acquis) and have the ability to implement such legislation.

If this is serious, it is not credible – unless enlargement is put into a completely different trajectory – that the one-on-one negotiations of the Schengen agreement, will be wide open.

The countries of the EU are unlikely to agree to open their borders to the poor people of the east. Some are already talking about a "closed" enlargement. Right-wing populists and neo-fascists from Haider in Austria to the Vlaams Blok in Belgium and the Northern League in Italy are whipping up racism around the issue, talking of "invasions" of impoverished people streaming in from the east and taking all the jobs.

In practice the external boundaries of Fortress Europe are likely to remain where they are – between the poor countries of the east and the rich countries of the west. This is not easy but may be justified by some kind of 'bilateral' arrangement with new conditions written into the treaty which triggers the process of enlargement.

The EU has been developing into a two-tier Europe: those inside the Euro-zone and those outside. This has formalised at Nice, with the decision that any eight countries (minimum) can go ahead as an "inner core". But enlargement creates another tier; it is the point of the whole debate.

However the final proposals shape up in 2004, one thing is clear enough: the new applicants are going to be offered a very real deal indeed. And the assumption seems to be that most of the new applicants will accept a raw deal.

This may not be so. It will be true of the government in the poorest countries. It is true that at the present time that a lot of people in the post-socialist states are trying to get into the richer west. But these countries have to have a referendum before they make such a decision. Some of them in some countries is not so certain.

I n the Czech Republic, for example, support for EU membership has dropped from three quarters to just over a half. It may be that people will now want to hold out for a better deal, or that they may have seen more of the realities of the EU so its neo-liberal policies go deeper.

None of the existing members of the EU are likely to hold a referendum on Nice or on enlargement – although some will be under pressure to do so. But Nice has to be ratified by the European Parliament and there will be opposition around that.

The EU and integrationists have little popular support in many of the states, apart from the poorest ones which receive cohesion funds. Danish referendums was a shot across the bows for those who are marching down the road towards a federal super-state. Perhaps particularly since it introduced the single currency in the teeth of opposition from many of the new applicants and the mainstream media. Nor was the vote based on British Tory-type nationalism, but on the basis of a lack of a indigenous democratic control.

It is led to build an opposition to the EU and the Euro which rejects completely the neo-liberal project.

We need a position which recognises that to oppose the EU and the single currency is also to defend a working-class against the ravages of the neo-liberal offensive and the global economy as it is reflected through the institutions of the EU, which are designed to increase the rate of exploitation and destroy welfare and social provision.

### Steps to unite Europe’s anti-capitalist left

#### Greg Tucker

**At the beginning of December, preparing for the Nice counter-summit the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR, French section of the Fourth International) acted as host to the second European conference of the anti-capitalist left.**

Around forty representatives of left parties and united left formations from eight countries attended the Paris meetings. Groups from three other states sent apologies.

Building on relationships built at its first meeting in London, the conference represents a further step forward in bringing together democratic, non-parliamentary groups in Europe who see the need for a united opposition to capital’s plan for Europe and want to struggle for another Europe – the conference statement put it, "social, democratic, peaceful and based on workers’ solidarity – a democratic socialist society".

The conference delegations essentially brought together the experiences of the left unity in Europe – broad united left fraternities such as the Red Green Alliance from Denmark, the Left Bloc from Portugal, the Red Electoral Alliance from Norway, and the Socialist Alliance from England, with broad left party groups such as the Scottish Socialist Party and Solidarity from Switzerland and far left groups involved in united projects, notably the French LCR and the British SWP.

The London meeting had essentially been a “getting to know you” gathering. Paris has moved things forward with a useful discussion on the nature of the European Union – from broad principles to the specifics being discussed in Nice. This led to a joint statement being issued.

We have learned that across the continent of Europe there is a range of positions taken by the left on how you respond to the existence of the EU.

Representatives from some organisations (particularly Britain and northern states) explained that they were part of a "wider" movement in their own countries and that for them the break up of the EU was an option to fight for.

Others argued that for them the EU was an established reality, you had to fight for its radical transformation rather than its reform but its replacement by a truly democratic European entity.

Others, from states currently outside the EU, argued that it would be tactically to their advantage to be included in the EU. They took the view that, in or out, they were affected by EU policies and the overall effects of globalisation and that it would be easier to fight these forces from within.

These broad tactical differences did not get in the way of moving forward on what EU unite the meeting – an understanding that fighting the policies of European capital needs a united Europe-wide response from the left – to struggle against the actual policies and institutions of the EU.

Concretely, the conference attacked the new stage in the history of the EU open in Nice. It pledged itself to oppose the rise of the EU’s military power, represented by the creation of a European armed forces.

It opposed the formation of an expansive from the East, calling instead for a voluntary unity of the whole continent through working class solidarity in particular this means fighting for the free movement of people, open immigration into the EU and… the right to full citizenship.

The meeting noted that EU policy is pushing forward the objectives of the WTO and pledged to oppose the institutional changes that would enhance this process, as part of a rising struggle against the impact of globalisation.

And it asked for the introduction of the "EU Charter of Fundamental Rights", pointing out that, far from being a progressive statement, this charter is a radical setback, a step backwards from most national and international legislation which will be used to hold back advances in some states and roll back existing rights in others.

The conference could have discussed much more. How practically can we actually work together to achieve our objectives? Are the ways we can learn from and build on cooperation which developed between the British SWP and the French LCR in Nice? Is there room for joint electoral work at the level of the European Parliament?

What can we do to build active solidarity between workers in struggle?

What are our policies towards existing European-wide institutions of the workers’ movement, ETUC etc.?

But as French LCR MEP Alain Krivine pointed out at the press conference that closed the meeting, “we are still at the beginning of a process.”

What was agreed was that the campaign must continue. It is planned to reconvene in six months in the run up to the Gothenburg summit and in Brussels again six months later. It is hoped this will take the process still further forward, looking at these practical issues.

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**Forward to Genoa!**

The main target for the anti-capitalist movement after Nice will be the G8 summit in Genoa. Certainly that will be the target of the next round of the "Drop the Debt" campaign – one of the main objectives of the "Out of Jubilee 2000"

But Genoa will be far from the only focus of protest over the months to come.

The World Trade Organisation, International Monetary Fund, and European Union representatives will meet in Genoa in March to thrash out the next stage of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Services, or Gats.

Already the forces of opposition, unions and environmentalists - are mobilising, which is hardly surprising because what lies at stake under Gats is the prospect of health and education provision throughout the EU being sold out to US and British companies.

Geneva will concentrate on the World Health Assembly meeting on which service sector Gats will be offered for "internationalisation" in the so-called "bottom up approach". It is also mobilising seriously for every International Monetary Fund day of action, and March is not very far off now.

But trade unions should attempt to organise some major events in this country to make clear our opposition to this neo-liberal agenda.
Wednesday 6 December:

GOT UP before 5am to drive to Luton airport for 6am. It was obvious at check in that this was no standard flight to Nice - four women in front of me who didn't know definitely needed like demonstrators. By the time we boarded the plane it was clear that around two thirds of us were going to the match. Someone brought maps of Nice and the programme for the next few days round the plane - it was certainly the first time I'd seen a plane leaflet.

Amused by Nice and its rain... it was warmer when we left London. We got a couple of calls to the hotel. Friendly and sympathetic taxi driver tells us that the town is empty - people have been told to get out of the city before we arrive. The streets are deserted - it's a strange feeling.

Arrive at the hotel and book in. Go and get coffee and applause and then off to the ATTAC phone call where a group of people are going to Francoise. People dive into the sea without looking, then they're still swimming, but it's warmed up, and there seems to be a lot of people gathering, including some of us.

Wander through the old town, which is picturesque and quiet. Get some lunch, buy an umbrella and head for the demonstration. We think it starts at 2 but meet the head of the march about 3 kilometres from the Assembly point - obviously it started at 1pm.

Walk back to the Assembly point by the side of the demonstration, stopping to draw breath and take photos every so often. It's an extraordinary sight.

Continental demonstration are so different from those here: virtually everyone carries an individual flag as well as the head banners for each contingent and then some contingents also have hats or blazers in their union colours as well.

Then there are flares and firecrackers and vans with loud hailer.

There are no police marshall us, we just pass the conference centre there are police on every street corner. Only one or two may be visible, but I'm sure there are far more hidden round the corner in case of any trouble. Every European country you can think of is represented. Huge contingents from Italy - I reckon more than 10,000 - and from Spain and Portugal, around 6,000 each. A number of Eastern European countries - Poland, Slovenia, Hungary - have contingents that are at least 500 strong. And then there are the French - probably about half of this mammoth demonstration.

By now we have reached the assembly point. The CGT contingent takes more than one and a half hours to pass us, then smaller but still sizeable contingents from the CGT and FG.

Brits

Oh, did I forget to say anything about the Brits? Well I did find the TUC contingent - which must have had all of 50 people in it - though there were probably around 500 of us altogether, in different parts of this huge march.

We finally leave the assembly point just after 5pm - more than 4 hours after the march set out - and there are still people behind us. We join the ATTAC contingent, which is several thousand strong, noisy and jubilant. By the time we have been marching for less than 20 minutes the pavements are filling up with demonstrators returning to coaches and trains.

At one point it is announced that 130,000 people have joined the march. This may be over optimistic - these estimates usually are - but it is the biggest demonstration I have seen for decades.

And this is a genuinely continent-wide mobilisation. I wish we could import some of that militancy to Britain as we chant "Our world is not for sale!"

Return to the hotel exhausted and full asparagus in my room makes it in the shower. Out for dinner and then off to a rally at the Convergence Centre. Several thousand people packed into this room. Sadly Jose Bove, star of the Milan demonstration in the summer didn't make it. Hear that a train with 800 Italians has been delayed at the border and not allowed through.

Listen to Christophe Aguton from ATTAC, Susan George and various others. Great speeches. Most people I know - from Britain, but also from France, Holland, Italy and Belgium. Christophe Jourden is here and we are told that the care-taker has agreed people can sleep here.

We booked into a hotel because it was not clear up until now that there would be anywhere for people to sleep. The right wing mayor was extremely uncompromising - wouldn't even allow the marches to put up a marquee.

Walk back to the hotel and collapse - it's been a long day and there is another one ahead.

Thursday 7 December

Up at 6.30, Supposed to be at the railway station at 7.30 to march to the conference centre. Of course it takes longer than that to get organised.

Leave at 7.30, past rows of people who are massing by now. Buses have already been diverted, so we have to walk some way to the nearest bus stop. But we have performed a social service - buses are free in Nice today as the municipality is trying to persuade people not to use their cars because of us.

The demonstration has already left. About 8.30 catch up with the first contingent near the conference centre.

The idea was to surround the centre - to make our opposition to what is going on clear. This is why we are taking different side roads.

But the police have closed off such a big area that we don't seem to have the plan is to go right towards, though the old city and approach the conference centre from the other side. Many police come out of their balconies or open the windows as we do so - and the majority are supportive. The weather, probably in her 70s was waving and crying and we used to chart "No Passers!"

Soon we are joined by a third contingent, mainly comprised of Basques, and together we march, singing and cheering towards the rear of the conference centre - where we are met by yet more police and yet more tear gas.

At this point various people got their heads together, and it was announced that we would have a couple of quick speeches and then disperse. Actually we marched back to the Conference Centre.

This section of the march had a different feel to it than the rest. We were walking away from counter-protest, so it seemed. My thoughts (apart from wanting a cup of tea) were that we had made a good show.

Local agent

People from France should have stayed over. It is frustrating that some of those who mobilised for Prague don't understand that EU's local agent of the IMF and the World Bank, but in the end it would have been extremely difficult because the police needed to stop the demonstration - the relationship of forces just isn't there. To have actually stopped the conference we would probably have needed hundreds more people.

I heard a sound behind me, turned and saw that someone had just thrown a brick through a plate glass window. I understood this was an agent provocateur - it seemed such a foolish thing to do.

The police don't appear and we certainly didn't use the Convergence Centre for more speeches. Unfortunately there is no translation at this point, so I don't know what we are supposed to do. People are starting to leave to return to their coaches and go home.

Then some of the anarchists grab the mike to say someone has been arrested and we should back this up at the police station. But there are dwindling numbers and it seems like the anarchists are bloody for a flight - so we end it.

So most of us decide not to go. A few hundred people set off, I later hear that I was right - this degenerated into lengthy battles with the police.

It seems that some of the police were involved in what get media coverage overshadowing the sustained demonstration which has been going on.

There are now so few people left that we abandon the meeting and go off in search of somewhere to use the toilet. We make a quick visit to the old market and then, when we arrive at the airport and home, I'm exhausted but it has been a very good day!

Forward to Genoa

Terry Conway
The silence of the US

John North

Analysis of developments in Ireland is difficult, but the role of the US in Ireland depends as much on observing what is not said as on observing what is said.

Right now the dog that is not barking is the unionist dog. The reason is quite simple: despite great inventiveness in describing them, there are no unionist victors; the unionists are finding great difficulty in finding anything to complain about.

The Good Friday agreement itself represented a massive victory—Republican defeat, recognition of the nationalist state in the north, the return of the regional Stasi that should have been the insertion of an undemocratic unionist veto at the heart of political life in both parts of Ireland.

The gains since then have been immense. It has been established that the agreement itself is subordinate to overcoming nationalism, not subject to suspension at the behest of the British Secretary of State. Within this nationalism is dominant. Noble is able to bain Sinn Fein members from cross-border meetings and effectively put parts of the agreement into cold storage. The Patten commission proposals for a wide-ranging, if largely cosmetic, reform of the RUC have in essence been reduced to a proposal to change the name, with the hint of background influence for nationalist politicians in the police boards.

The Irish and Unionists are united with the support of the nationalists in insisting that the physical surrender of the working-class community in the future is a central component of the agreement. It is in this context that the IRA new year statement "that the RUC arms must be seized" was made. The statement in reality indicates a policy of going ahead with the destruction of the IRA arms but also looking for further concessions to justify the humiliation to their supporters.

In a familiar pattern the Irish government calls for progress on policing, ignoring the fact that that issue has been resolved in the sense that the original Patten deal no longer even exists. They have in fact rowed behind the 'nationalist family of the SDLP and Dublin government in attempts to win a battle from which the British are in the implementation of the new arrangements. It is in this context that the unimplemented British promise to end the mass occupation of South Armagh. The IRA call on Blair to take direct responsibility for "demilitarisation". This is a just a variation of a familiar cry about "squatters". This means that we have to consider a small group of civil servants and intelligence operatives acting against the interests of the British state and that they are able to block these interests. What is involved in the theory is simply the collapse of republicanism into bourgeois nationalism.

The republicans could of course reject the whole deal, but how often have their supporters waited for that? The continued harassment of political opponents in the republican writers group is an indication of where the movement is going.

The new Northern Ireland will soon be in view. There will be pockets of patrimonial for the catholic bourgeoisie, but overall it will look strikingly like the old British colony.

Questions will remain. Will the unions tolerate a tame Sinn Fein in government? What will happen when the nationalist workers find they are not included in the bonus now won? These are questions for a new resistance—not for the old.

No national question in South of Ireland?

Left stumbles in search of unity

Joe Craig

A meeting of nearly 100 people was held at the Institute for Public Policy Research in London on 25 November to discuss the possibility of a socialist unity in Ireland. Called by an ad hoc group of independent socialists its clear purpose was to emulate the progress made in Britain, particularly by the London Socialist Alliance (LSA).

The meeting started with reports from Greg Tucker of the LSA, Francois Vercammen of the Fourth International, and John Joe of the Irish Socialist Party, all relating the experiences of their unity initiatives.

The real debate was left for the second session, which closed with a question in Ireland. Mick O'Reilly of the ATGWU emphasised the problem of social partnership between the unions, bourgeois government and concentrated his attention in the political sphere on the union/organisation relationship to the Irish Labour Party. However, it was the question of unity on the far left that dominated the discussion. The speaker from the Irish SWP, Richard Boyd Barrett, called for the creation of an electoral alliance of left parties which could be created in Britain. This was rejected by the floor as a political conditions had changed. The difference of 1968 in 1997 has given way to a new radicalisation, occurring across Europe from the French public sector strikes in 1995 and now evidenced through the anti-capitalist protest in Seattle and Prague etc.

This was reflected in Ireland through the weakening of two key pillars of conservatism: Fianna Fail and the Catholic Church, both of which are dominated by the UK Establishment.

The booming economy had witnessed a renewed level of strike activity, which reflected deepening class division and created potential for the left. A rather bare electoral platform was mentioned but it was later stated that this was open for debate. The Socialist Party speaker, Stephen Boyd, also dealt with the rising level of workers action and what he called the final betrayal of social democracy which no longer be regarded as working class party.

The revolutionary left was disoriented; much of it having abandoned the prospect of building a revolutionary party. What was required was "a new mass working class party". He argued that the success of the Socialists (the Socialist Alliance was exaggerated. The LSA and SSP were not the start of building mass working class party. The SSP was reformist and did not represent anything in the Irish context. There was "no real" party in Ireland which has a real capacity to win the Irish seat in European (!) meant that the same development had not taken place as had in Scotland.

Boyd rejected an electoral alliance because unity with the SSP would have an impact on the working class and there were not more candidates. The SSP had no base and his advice to the rest of the left was that he follow the SSP example and build one.

While agreeing to a non-aggression pact and not ruling out an alliance in the future he rejected one now. The Irish working class would either by-pass such an alliance and build its own mass party or the SP would become that party. In the next election, expected next year, the task for the working class was election of a second TD, a PUP in the North.

The meeting had clearly been based on the unity of the SSP and SP and many of the independents involved could not accept the arguments of the SSP in recent months.

One of the organisers rated the two organisations pretty even in terms of influence, while others noted the united activity that sometimes took place in other ways. A united left would self-evidently be stronger than a divided one. It was argued that the SP had never taken the sectarian approach previously adopted by the SSP.

Despite lip service to the idea that electoralism was to be avoided, there was little discussion of programmes and a clear note of impatience that steps towards unity had to be made in order to address an upcoming general election.

Socialist Democracy argued that the starting point had to be the task facing the working class at the present time and that this clearly made a nonsense of the SP analysis that this reduced itself to a second SPD TDP.

These tasks clearly required explicit opposition to social partnership and the Good Friday Agreement. We supported creation of an alliance and recorded our previous active support in the election of the SPD TDP.

We argued however that the alliance had to be democratic, and that this would mean a clear break with existing practices on the left. One task immediately presented to the gathering was to oppose the attempted cen-
Dirty Deal in Pakistan: both will pay the price

Military let Nawaz off the hook

Faroq Tarig, General Secretary Labour Party Pakistan

In a dramatic political move, Ex Prime Minister, Mian Nawaz Sharif has been allowed to leave Pakistan by the military regime to proceed to Saudi Arabia with 19 family members. He had been sentenced to 21 years in prison on charges of hijacking a plane on October 12, 1999.

The deal between military and Nawaz Sharif and his successor from Pakistan raises many serious questions about the nature of the political system in Pakistan, the future of the Muslim League, and the effects on the Alliance for Restoration of Democracy (ARD) and on the future of the military regime.

Who will gain what out of this move?

Both the parties, it seemed had been working on this formula for sometime. Both must have drawn their own likely outcome. Both the military and Sharif would like to have a political or physical advantage to their own capitalist class point of view.

But what concerns us is what will happen to the people who have on the policies of the working class. Both the political conditions do we have to draw from the above dirty tactics on both sides?

There is nothing "humanitarian" in this episode, as has been claimed by General Rashid Qureshi, the chief spokesman of the military regime. The decision is nothing to do with the deteriorating "health of Nawaz Sharif" for which the military have shown no concern during the past year.

The decision is an outright political one – on a class basis. Both the parties have taken a safe road, external or internal, through this unprecedented outrageous deal.

The Nawaz camp has played dirty campaigns, first by joining the ARD last week and former ARD members, by the first meeting of ARD at their supporters house in Rawalpindi. By joining ARD alongside former PPP members Pervaiz Musharraf has been receiving requests and applications from Sharif family to go abroad for the sick Mr. Sharif.

The fundamental reason for the military regime to let Nawaz off the hook is not any request of any outside intervention for the state of the Saudis, Prince, as has been claimed by the military through Pervaiz Musharraf. The military has been able to get the state of the Saudis, Prince to lend support of the ARD for the military regime.

Primarily, the decision to let Nawaz off the hook is an act of an acute economic necessity. In fact it is this second decisive political economic step of the last few months.

In 1995, the military regime had to abandon its plan to build the controversial Kala Bagh Dam. The construction of the dam was opposed by the three nationalities in the area, Sindhi, Baluchi and Punthsano, on the ground that it will deprive them from its share of water from river Sind.

The military regime has earned tremendous hatred from the masses by bowing to the conditions imposed by the IMF and World Bank. That meant a large-scale retreatment of the massive tax increases.

The military has lost what it had gained in terms of "a state of religion" by the masses when it overthrew the unpopular authoritarian kingdom of Nawaz Sharif in October 1999. They have learned the hard way the realities of running a crisis ridden declining economy. The release of a quick installments of the IMF last week only allowed the regime to draw a quick breeze from which they based the formation of the new alliance.

The military had been building its case against Nawaz Sharif as a corrupt leader who had looted and plundered the wealth of the state in an unjustified manner. The so-called running success had produced thousands of pages proving the misadministration of Nawaz family. In one such case he was sentenced for not paying compensation.

The whole justification for the military takeover was that the ruling Muslim League had brought the country to near collapse economic conditions. Nawaz was "the criminal" among the whole class of "criminal politicians" according to the military propaganda. But a weakened military regime sought an internal reconciliation by getting rid of its main enemy by pardoning him and sending him abroad.

By this action, the whole programme of accountability has become a cruel joke. It was, and will continue to play a dirty tactic to prolong the military regime.

It was a bitter fact already asserted that "corrupt" leaders of the Muslims League never touched by the National Bureau of Accountability. But those who were in the Nawaz camp were arrested, and cases of corruption and malpractice were registered against them.

It turns out that Nawaz Sharif is no longer the political leader of the military regime. Until yesterday he had1 been protecting a life long fight for the restoration of democracy. His wife Kulsoom led a bitter struggle to kick out of the party those who had suggested a compromise with the military regime.

The main contradiction with their opponents in the Shehbaz clique was on the question of whether an alliance with PPP Kalsoom Nawaz boasted that an alliance with PPP would help to bring about the struggle for democracy closer. "This is to launch a mass movement against the regime," she said several times.

Nawaz Sharif was in jail for over a year. The military regime was becoming more unpopular day by day. The formation of ARD had raised the hopes of many as the only alternative to the military regime. A momentum was building up for a confrontation with the regime.

The sudden capitulation of Nawaz Sharif will give the military some more breathing space. But it is he and his son who will bear the burden of unpopularity more than anyone else. The Muslim League is a traditional conservative power base in Pakistan. It has a long history of compromises with every ruling class and military regime.

Right from the British imperialism to the present day military regime, the Muslim League has kept its uninterupted record of compromises and reconiliation instead of fighting back.

The capitulation of Nawaz Sharif has once again exposed the real nature of the capitalist politicians in the colonial countries.

They cannot put a real fight for people's rights. They cannot play any progressive role in achieving the goals of modernisation of the society.

They have not yet been able to find the way to achieve democratic rights, industrialisation and national unity in the real sense.

They are totally dependent on the mercy of imperialism and - in the case of Pakistan - on the army. Those who had hoped against hope that the capitalist class would sometime play a progressive role have been disappointed against again.

Leon Trotsky argued in his Theory of Permanent Revolution that the Russian capitalist class, because of its late entry onto the stage of history, was too weak economically and politically, too much tied to the old land relations and too subservient to its stronger international competitors to lead the revolutionary fusion in Russia.

This argument is a thousand times more correct in the case of Pakistan and other east colonial countries.

The examples of Bhutto, Benazir and now Nawaz Sharif underline this historic conclusion that the ruling class is able to solve any of the basic problems of the working class. Instead they pave the way for brutal military regimes to take over again.

"Do not trust the rich politician," will be the main lesson that the working class must learn once again through this whole drama.

The working class has to build a party of the workers by themselves. No one else can create and build a mass party that is capable of fighting the oncoming military regime.

In the days to come, the military will be in power that any politician who dare normally against the military will be subjected to such humiliation as Nawaz has undergone through this deal today.

"No one can challenge the supremacy of military" will be the main lesson that military will want us to learn. But dirty deals by rich, corrupt politicians cannot strengthen the military.

Objective conditions will determine their fate. Subjective factors cannot alter the path of history.

The weak economy, the on-going fear of military regime, the lack of proper planning to pick up, will make sure that, despite the belief of Nawaz Sharif, the military regime will not last long.

We cannot repeat the history of decades of military rulers, of General Ayub Khan in the Sixties or Zia ul Haq in the Eighties. The dirty deal has improved the life of Nawaz's family and the military regime, while the lives of millions who spend their days in utmost poverty remains unchanged. This fact will remain the crucial deciding factor when we have to discuss the future of the military regime.

The deal is a temporary fix for the recently formed ARD. But it will pick up some support if the PPP does not repeat history.

Benazir Bhutto's husband, Asif Zardari, has been in jail for four years. If the PPP make the same dirty deal for his release as was announced for Nawaz, it could lose another opportunity to gain political support of its lost support in the days to come.

The Labour Party Pakistan has opposed the military regime from day one. We will continue our campaign for the restoration of democracy linking it with the need to change the capitalist system with a genuine democratic socialism.

Visit our website: www.labourpakistan.org

21 Years of Workers Struggle

On January 4, the paper Mazdoor Jadidjut ("Workers Struggle") celebrated 21 years of publication.

"Workers Struggle" was first published from Düsseldorf in December 1962 as a monthly paper in Urdu and English, then going monthly during 1982.

During the military dictatorship of Zia ul Haq it became the largest opposition paper in exile. When martial law was lifted in 1990, the paper started its publication from Pakistan as a book series. In 1998, it became a monthly, and since 1998, it took the important step of becoming a weekly.

Today the paper is heard in only 6 countries.

You can subscribe for the 260 Rupees / annually in Pakistan, or abroad $50. Please send your cheque to "Workers Struggle" at the following address in Pakistan:

Weekly Mazdoor Jadidjut, Salti Manor, 7- Egerton Road Lahore Pakistan.

Left notches up election victories

LOCAL ELECTIONS were held in Pakistan on December 31 in the four of four provinces and one territory. The other three will take place over the next six months.

The elections were held in East Pakistan as to what date they should take those elections. Does standing conditions for elections are set by the military regime their own.

On the other hand, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) fielded 50 candidates in the two provinces. PPP and the Islamic Party, which is an electoral front that is always in a minority, fielded 92 candidates.

PPP was able to secure a small victory in the Sindh, a conservative province where it has already been a long time since the PPP won a single seat.

PPP was also able to win the vote in the other two areas where PPP and the Islamic Party were able to secure a small victory in the two provinces. PPP was also able to win the vote in the two other areas where it has already been a long time since the PPP won a single seat.

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West digs in behind Serb nationalists

Geoff Ryan

A

The election campaign was very low-key, and only 58 per cent of the 6.5 million electorate turned up at the polls. Moreover, despite the scale of their electoral defeat, Milosevic's Socialist Party remains the largest group in Parliament.

This will take on considerable significance when the 18-month peace coalition breaks up — and it is certainly a question of soon, if not the month, due to both unity only by hostility to Milosevic, falls apart.

Less than a week after its election victory, the government was faced by protests and demonstrations over its handling of the worst-ever Serb attack on a Black Sea town. Activists from the National Freedom Movement have left without electricity for 8 and 18 hours a day.

Recently resumed Russian gas supplies have been insufficient to keep the home front from crumbling. People protested by turning over rubbish bins and setting them on fire. On tram lines, traffic lights were out as well, due to the blackout.

The new government also faces major difficulties in its relations with the other component of Yugoslavia, Montenegro. In fact, the victory of DOS has hastened, rather than prevented, the final break-up of Yugoslavia.

The government of Montenegro demanded that the Yugoslav parliament receive the backing of the Montenegrin officials instead of the republic as well as the pro-Serbian JNA.

Freed from the threat of the Montenegrin government, president of Milo Djukanovic has called for fresh elections in the region.

At the end of December, his government endorsed a plan that would give greater autonomy from Serbia. The proposal envisages Yugoslavia as a loose union of Serbia and Montenegro, each with their own seat in the United Nations, with a common army, monetary and financial policies.

Four ministers from the People's Party walked out of the ruling coalition in Montenegro in opposition to the proposals, reflecting the deep division in the Montenegro over the issue of independence.

However, it is still likely that the plan will be endorsed by the Montenegro parliament.

Montenegro has agreed to pro- pose the deal to Serbian representatives by mid-January.

If the talks with Serbia fail, and this seems likely, as Serbian President Vojislav Kostunica and Prime Minister designate Zoran Djindjic began to talk with Montenegro independence, president Djukanovic will hold an independence referendum by mid-2001.

Serbian obstruction would almost certainly increase the pressure on Montenegro in favour of independence.

Serbian MPs have rejected the idea of Montenegrin independence and do not just reflect relations between the two republics. Zoran Djindjic certainly believes that Montenegro independence would almost certainly result in the loss of Serbia's claim to restore its sovereignty in Kosovo.

And Kosovo independence would increase demands by the majority Albanian population in the Pristina Valley area of southern Serbia for the region to be reunited with Kosovo.

Increased clashes between Albanian guerrillas and Serb police led Djindjic to visit the Kosovo border area with Yugoslavia's top general, Vojislav Kosikovac.

Part of Djindjic's strategy is to use the international support enjoyed by the new government to persuade NATO forces to crack down on Albanian militants.

Current evidence suggests that this has met with some success.

However, this a high risk strategy for both the Serbian government and western governments who, with the partial exception of the United States, remain justified in their opposition to Kosovo's independence.

There are limits on the extent to which NATO troops can intervene against Albanian guerrillas in the border region without encountering hostility in Kosovo itself.

As the current dynamic of most western governments is clearly to favor Serbia, this can be seen in the new agreement to push for the November elections in Bosnia by the head of the OSCE mission, Robert Barry.

In both the institutions of the Croats-Muslim Federations to have to reflect the multi-ethnic nature of Bosnia-Hercegovina, this does not apply in Republika Srpska.

For example, while the President and Vice-President of the Federation may not be of the same ethnic group, in RS no such requirement exists. Serbia can, and do, hold both posts.

The result of the changes was to convince many that the western governments would be willing to allow RS to secede from Bosnia and join Serbia. Not surprisingly, therefore, the elections in RS were won by the hard-line nationalists of the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) founded by Radovan Karadzic — a victory welcomed by Kostunica and Djindjic who see the SDS as their natural allies.

Equally surprisingly, in Croats areas, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) was able to use apparent western support for the secession of RS to push its own claims for secession and unity with Croatia.

Only in Muslim areas, and particularly urban areas, was there an increase in support for parties supporting a united, multi-ethnic Bosnia. This continues a trend we noted in previous Bosnian elections.

The continued dominance of nationalist parties in RS and among Bosnia's Croats is a direct result of western policies towards Bosnia since Dayton, which accept the de facto partition of B-H.

As western governments turn more and more towards Kostunica and Djindjic, any presence of supporting a multi-ethnic Bosnia is likely to disappear.

South African unions join battle against privatisation

Charlie van Gelderen

THERE HAS been little or no mention in the British media of the Global Privatisation Summit which started in Cape Town on 8 June. The summit was hosted by South Africa's Minister of Finance, Trevor Manuel and Minister of Local Government, Sydney Mufamadi.

According to were privatisation ministers from 14 countries, as well as international financiers such as the Bank of America, European Investment Bank and Commonwealth Bank of Australia.

These financial institutions have one thing in common — they will only loan money to local governments if they promise to privatise.

Also present was the Development Bank of Southern Africa which has refused to lend money to the South African Government to construct a new water system, to upgrade its water infrastructure, but then lent a British multinational firm £150 million to privatise it.

This summit has aroused the ire of the South African trade unions, especially the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) who has expressed its disgust that only international contractors when dealing with privatisation, such as Price Waterhouse Cooper, KPMG and Investec, have been invited to address the summit.

Milked

SAMWU points out that consultants have already milked South African municipalities of well over R1000 million in the last two years — money which was desperately needed to maintain services.

The union believes that the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), which was introduced in Britain by the Conservative government in the early 1990's and is now central to New Labour's public sector strategy, has no relevance, except in Africa and the developing world. "The PFI mechanism seriously undermines delivery of the basic services", said SAMWU's General Secretary, Roger Ronnie.

PFI in Britain has already been rejected by public sector unions and the TUC. Under PFI, private companies take over services for as long as 50 years, instead of the municipalities borrowing money to finance services, they are forced, under PFI to pay a hefty annual fee to the private company.

Under PFI, the future provision of public services is determined by what the private contractors wants, rather than what the public needs.

Thin lengthy contracts mean that councils, the elected representatives of the people, lose control. Control of any influence they have over service delivery. After elections, revenue councils can be replaced, but service delivery remains tied into a contract.

International experience shows that PFI projects profit from paying lower wages than can be paid in the long term, and by cutting back on health and safety standards.

There are many examples of PFI contracts failing to meet their obligations. Here in Britain there were huge delays in processing passports after Siemens failed to provide a functioning computer system, leading to huge queues — and more expensive passports.

Buy now, pay later

The cost of PFI arises from the "buy now pay later" financing of projects. The long term costs of PFI are much higher than the public financed projects because of the high setting up costs, high interest charges from the banks, high interests on the investment, high negotiations involving solicitors and consultants and, of, course, the profit margin which must be built into the cost of the service. PFI consortia demand an excessive rate of over 20% on their investment.

SAMWU and other South African trade unions are particularly incensed because ANC ministers are hosting this summit during elections and the elections in RS were won by the hard-line nationalists of the Serb Democratic Party (SDS) founded by Radovan Karadzic — a victory welcomed by Kostunica and Djindjic who see the SDS as their natural allies.

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As western governments turn more and more towards Kostunica and Djindjic, any presence of supporting a multi-ethnic Bosnia is likely to disappear.
Vicious crackdown on political prisoners

**Turkish regime shows its true colours**

During the week of December 19-26, 10,000 Turkish soldiers violently occupied 48 prisons to add two months of hunger strikes to the “death fasts” by hundreds of political prisoners.

Operation “Return to Life” and “Return to Life II” claimed the lives of 348 political prisoners and two soldiers dead. Eight prisoners reportedly “disappeared,” and another 426 were wounded. 1,005 prisoners have been transferred to F-type cells. VERONICA FAGAN reports.

The hunger strikers were protesting the government’s plan to transform large wards into US-style “F-type” cells holding one to three occupants. The armed operation supposedly aimed to “rescue” members of illegal, radical left organisations from “forced” starvation at the hands of these political prisoners. However, people on hunger strike has risen since the raids.

The government argues that their decision to replace the ward-based prisons with single cells is justified because of the need for the collective life of left wing political organisations in prison, which had supposedly become untenable.

F-type prisons, modeled after the US prison system, have little or no shared social space, and would break up the social networks that political prisoners in Turkey have traditionally relied upon to make prison life bearable.

Human rights groups, left-wing parties, the Turkish Medical Association (TTB), the Union of Turkish Bar (TTB) and the Association of Judges and Architects (TMMOB) have spoken strongly against the harsh design of F-type prisons.

A joint report of the TTB, TBB and TMMOB concluded that F-type prisons are geared to break prisoners psychologically through isolation.

Turkish prisons fail to meet international standards and do not implement extrajudicial punishment. Since 1980, political prisoners have regularly protested against poor conditions through numerous hunger strikes and death fasts.

Between 1980-95, 640 prisoners died from torture, armed operations, lack of medical care or death fasts. 27 prisoners have died from death fasts since 1980, 12 in 1996 alone.

The government has responded to their demands with armed opera-

**Ocalan’s decision, after his cap-

Ture but before his stage-managed trial, to order the organisation to withdraw its armed forces from Turkey borders and change its strategy to legal, political struggle has compounded this set back.

It is clear that the only reason Ocalan’s death sentence, currently under review at the European Court of Human Rights, has not been carried out is because of pressure from the EU.

But Turkey’s response to what seems a very moderate suggestion for the right to media in their own language for the Kurdish people, demonstrates clearly the depth of hostility of the state to even basic human rights for the Kurds.

The third condition for EU admission, the only one to have received media coverage in Britain, is the commencement of constructive negotiations with Greece and Cyprus over those countries’ long-standing disputes with Turkey.

The constitution of Turkey, adopted during the military junta of 1980, establishes the “supervisory” role of the military over the political system. One of the requirements of October 2000 was that this should go.

A further condition is native lan-

**Turkey to make even the small
democratic changes required to
gain entry into the customs union.**

Several other recent events point to hard-

line resistance to democratisation. In

November 2000, several thousand

people held illegal demonstrations to protest at socialist party killings of

two officers – and to demand that the government include officers

convinced of applying torture in the amnesty bill that came into effect this week, releasing

20,000 non-striking prisoners.

Businessmen called upon the military to intervene in Turkey’s “chaotic” economic crisis. Shortly thereafter, the government signed an additional agreement with the IMF, bringing all key econ-

omic policies in line with its neoliberal demands.

Turkish troops have once again crossed the Iraqi border to enter F-4490 forces that have been planning an unilateral ceasefire for over a year.

Operation Return to Life was not confined to the military. Hundreds of civilians demonstrating against the prison regime were arrested daily, and harassment of human rights organisations and legal aid groups.

Turkey has long regarded itself as part of the “Western world” – for example it has loudly denounced the Soviet occupation.

But while military rule formally ended in 1985, its political heritage has continued. The continuation of the military constitution is merely the most obvious sign of this.

The concrete demands for EU membership have sharpened the polarisation between these weak forces who want to move away from this legacy just far enough to reap the economic and political benefits they believe they will get from Turkish membership, and those who believe the tiny price this would cost is far too high.

Operation Return to Life once again demonstrated the strength of the latter.

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(Based on information from **MERIP Press Information Note 42, “Turkey’s Operation Return to Life,” by Murat Paker, December 29, 2000**)

For more information on F-type prisons, see the Human Rights Watch report on small isolation prisons in Turkey:

http://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/turkey

For background on human rights in Turkey, see the Human Rights Watch 2001 report:

http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/europe/turkey.html
Caught between Intifada and hard-line Israelis
No easy way out for Arafat

The Al-Aqsa Intifada has entered its fourth month, and the on-again, off-again US-sponsored peace talks show no sign of leading to an early resolution of the conflict, reports ROLAND RANZ.

Since the uprising in late September, over 330 Palestinians have been killed, and more than 100,000 injured. As a result of widespread destruction, this would be equivalent to over 650,000 deaths, and 200,000 injuries, over the same three-month period in Britain. Several hundred of the injured, who have been shot in the face, legs, or spine, have been blinded or are likely to remain permanently incapacitated, possibly paraplegic.

The human and economic cost is immense, particularly for the occupied society like Palestine.

Despite this appalling suffering, the vast majority of Palestinians want to end the uprising. Nor does it seem that they would support any deal made by Arafat which compromised on essential issues.

At the beginning of November, researchers at Birzeit University published a major opinion poll in the occupied territories. 75% of those polled supported the continuation of the Intifada, even though 30% expected it to continue for months, and a further 24% thought it would continue for years.

The popular pressure against a deal which does not include Israeli withdrawal from Jerusalem, the dismantlement of Israeli settlements, and the return of refugees, and it is likely that most of the sections of Arafat’s own Fatah would support this.

The issue of return is now seen to be the most contentious of those dividing Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Diplomats and academics

Israelis and Palestinians have produced several reports on how to deal with claims of sovereignty over parts of Jerusalem, the status of the Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, roadblocks and checkpoints, and the question of Palestinian border controls.

No form of words can bridge the gap between the near-universal demand for the right of some 6 million refugees to return to the homes from which they, or their parents and grandparents, were evicted in 1948, and the adamant Israeli refusal even to accept responsibility for their situation, let alone do anything about it.

In recent years, a new generation of Israeli historians has shown definitively the truth of the left analysis of the events of 1948. There was never a military victory, nor a diplomatic achievement in the new Jewish state.

Israel’s leaders did not accept the 1949 UN partition plan, but manoeuvred to undermine its implementation and the borders of the state. There was collusion between Israel and Jordan to carve up the West Bank and prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Israel deliberately, as a matter of policy, expelled 700,000 to 900,000 Pal estinians from their homes and across the borders.

Despite this, the Israeli government continues to place responsibility for the Palestinian refugee problem on the Arab states, and argues that to allow them to return would undermine Israel’s existence as a Jewish state.

Although on other issues Israel appears to have made concessions, closer inspection reveals that there is more spin than substance.

For instance, although Barak has repeatedly offered to return 95% of the occupied territories to the Palestinians, the real issue is, 95% of what?

Greater Jerusalem, which has already absorbed large parts of the West Bank, is not on offer. Land already acquired by Israel as much as one third of the West Bank is to be “leased” to Israel, and other areas will not be returned.

The Palestinian negotiators have not been allowed to see a map of Israel’s proposals, but face demands to agree them regardless.

The Palestinian struggle, meanwhile, is increasingly assuming the character of a low-intensity war, rather than a mass civil uprising.

Writing in the Israeli daily Ha’aretz, respected intellectual and respected journalist Amira Hass – the only occupied territories correspondent actually to live in the occupied territories – notes the ineffectiveness of the Palestinian Authority.

He points out: “During the first few weeks of the present Intifada, veterans of the first Intifada and members of NGOs, who (and this is no coincidence) belong to the Palestinian left, said that this Intifada should be an unarmed popular struggle, as it was the case with the first Intifada.

“These individuals failed in this attempt... Members of the PNA military... the backbone of a regime that, in the course of seven years, has been unable to improve the living standards of the residents of the PA – tried to restore its past legitimization and move.”

However, they preferred to do so by focusing on the ‘militarisation’ of the Intifada – the opening up of safety valves and the use of firearms, which immediately erased the popular-civic character of this uprising.”

This silence of the initiative contributed to the further weakening of the elements of Palestinian “civil society”, which over the past seven years have faced the combined onslaught of both the Israeli occupation and the corrupt PA regime.

Socialist Outlook has regularly noted the arrest and harassment by the PA of Palestinian activists, such as members of the teachers’ union and supporters of last year’s “democracy statement”.

This militarisation of the conflict is a further stage in the ongoing power struggle within Palestinian society, with both Hamas and Fatah militarising popular discontent in an attempt to succeed the ailing Arafat, but cautious about the potential revolutionary forces.

In Israel, meanwhile, Barak, in a desperate move, has resigned as Prime Minister and prompted a new election. In order to prevent a return of the former PM, Barak alleged that the event of PMs taking place before the dissolution of the Knesset, thus disbarred Netanyahu from standing.

The only other candidate will be Likud leader Ariel Sharon, revered by Palestinians and liberal Israelis alike as the man responsible for the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacre, and for many other acts of mass murder and anti-Arab brutality.

In the last election, over 90% of the Arab vote went to Barak; this far exceeded his margin of victory over Netanyahu. This time, however, it is unlikely that he will get more than a handful of Arab votes.

Although some Israeli liberals argue that Sharon would be even worse than Barak, many argue that his choice between two generals is no choice at all, and plan not to vote, or to spoil their ballot papers. Some activists have called for a write-in vote for Mordechai Vanunu, Israel’s nuclear prisoner of conscience.

Clinton is pushing for an agreement before he leaves office on January 20, while Barak hopes to achieve some sort of deal before the election on February 6. In this situation, and with rising opposition among the Palestinians to a sell-out, Arafat has little reason to make concessions.

But the failure to build a mass popular resistance, and the attack on Palestinian grassroots institutions, leaves the Palestinians with no real strategy to defeat the occupation.

The likely collapse of the “peace process”, and the election of Sharon, will represent a terminal blow for the strategy followed by the PLO, Israel and the US alike for the past ten years.

Although Hamas is gaining support, this does not seem to be reflected in Palestinian political attitudes.

The Birzeit poll found that 85% of those asked supported equality between women and men, and 87% favoured equality between Muslims and Christians.

The voices rejecting an imperialist settlement, and insisting on the need to struggle for a unitary, democratic and secular Palestine are again being heard.

Revolutionaries in the Middle East face the responsibility of offering a new leadership and strategy for the nascent mass struggle.

* The complete poll can be found at:

http://www.birzeit.edu/dps/urw/3/index.html

http://www.birzeit.edu/dps/urw2/index.html

ON THE TENTH anniversary of the Gulf War, the hope for the imperialists to ruin him was that Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein had commanded an invincible. Meanwhile top UN envoy has now added weight to the allegations that the systematic bombing of Iraq by British and US surdars has already killed well over 100 civilians, with many more injured. Labour ministers have stubbornly avoided attempting to justify this barbaric, illegal onslaught, which runs alongside continued economic sanctions.
Mapping the environmental crisis

Our Ecological Footprint - reducing human impact on the Earth, Mathis Wackernagel and William Rees (1996), New Society Publishers (British Columbia)

Reviewed by Paul Hubert

The concept of the ecological footprint explains the hidden impact of production and consumption on the world, by making us aware of what is necessary to supply all the raw materials used, for the activities that occur and to absorb the waste generated. While I was conscious that the period since Oslo had meant a deterioration in the conditions of the Palestinians in the Territories, the detail in which Said deals with this brings the reality home very starkly.

Also noteworthy is his insistence that the Palestinians must understand the effects of the Oslo Accords in terms of reality now and the need to differentiate between Zionism that has erased the Jews. Nor does he fail to set the trap, while criticising the cancellation of the UN’s call for understanding what its appeal can be particularly urgent in the context of the current situation. My favourite essay is probably the one where he set out to visit his son “On visiting Wadi”, in which similar patterns are recognisable through the internment experience and his makes lives on the page.

As Said, Jacob’s charts, in a review of two of Said’s previous books in International Viewpoint in March 1996, was the Washington Agreement, signed between Israel and the PLO in September 1995 which led to a sharp radiation in Said’s position. Before that time Said, was best known for his academic work as an author of books such as Culture and Imperialism. From 1977-91 he was a member of the Palestinian National Council, albeit a not unctuous one. He was only elected by the Council that he made public the basis of his disagreement. In Said’s first book after the 1992 agreement, Peace and Its Discontents: Gaza – Jericho 1993-1995 (Vintage, London 1995, 16.99), he explains that the agreement is a sell-out of Palestinian national interests.

Writing of Arafat’s “Vichy government” he argues “He has now established a formidable network of hangmen-on, secret service commission agents, spies and informants through which, his non-ideological and tribal organisation”... “his employers plus his subordinates give him an impres- sive network of about 350,000 dependents. If you add to the number of prospective killers, employment businessmen and unscrupulous specula- tors who must go through Arafat to get projects approved, his team almost doubles.”

This is accurate and vivid material, but its impact, that of companion descriptions in “The End of the Peace Process” are undercuts to some extent by the weak- ness of what follows. Said’s attempts to explain why the Fatah leadership and Arafat’s leadership was “endlessly problematic”... “he was always open and personal incorruptible” and that “his commitment to his people and cause had no limits. It certainly seems from the nature of what he has written subsequent to 1993 that part of Said’s failure to address the substantive errors of strategy stem from the fact that today he tends to be the problem as being down to the individual failings of Arafat and his cronies. In a number of places in “The End of the Peace. Process” Said touches on the failure of globalisation which has led to the multi- plification of speculations process over recent years: not just in the Middle East but also in Europe, in Central America and elsewhere. In the Introduction, for example, he says “one of the intended effects of Oslo was to set up within the administration of American-style globalisation, where the market is king, everything else irrelevant or marginal.”

But the prospect of this early introduction is not followed through elsewhere. The next time he deals with the global economy it is to focus on the extent to which the independent media has become more constrained - a true enough statement but not the central problem. Nor is the problem only analytical – Said is also short on solutions. In the conclusion of “Modesty, Inflation and Governance”, Said poses the problem as follows: “There is no other way of achieving the minimum goals of a decent live without also translating ourselves from a privatised to a modern condition in which for the first time our leaders are directly accountable to the people.”

Of course he is completely right that democratic accountability would be a major step forward for the Palestinian struggle. But why should their horizons be confined to that of mini- mum goals?

In “Reflections on the role of the Private Sector,” he points out that the Palestinian Authority – like other such bodies in the Third World – has decided that its allies are business- men and its enemies are nongovernmental organisations which, in the institutions that make possible a genuine civil society. It is in opposing this situation that efforts should be made, and not in unrestrained private invest- ment. “In other words the real requirements for development should not only be strategic but also an awakened social awareness and a serious interest in national civil institutions.”

Again Said, like many intellectuals who identify themselves with the anti-capitalist movement (who have what is different a trajectory from the activist wing of the same movement) seeks to imply that there was a golden age of democrati- cism in which the market was less tyrani- cal. He suggests it is the Palestinian people who should aspire to.

In the end however it is not Said’s striving for the possibility for the fact that he does not understand that the only way forward for the Palestinian people is the road of permanent revo- lution. It is rather the failures of the left in the region which mean that minds as sharply incisive as his are not more often won to per- spectives which seek to do more than just survive.
Obituary

John Archer

Critical support: John Archer (writing) and Bill Hunter share some of the recent Trotskyist celebration surrounding the Fourth International in London, 1999.

Why US left should have voted for Nader

In my view, many socialists in the USA were right to vote against Ralph Nader, the Green candidate, as president.

Of course we should build a mass workers’ party in the USA. However, a revolutionary electoral policy should be based on the level of the mass movement.

Here in Britain, we support replacing the Labour Party with a revolutionary party, but we are sometimes faced with fringe candidates standing on a formally revolutionary platform, but who in practice have not even united much of the far left.

We have rightly decided that these candidates are not relevant at the level of the mass movement, so we can safely ignore them and call for a Labour vote.

While I would very much have preferred it if there had been a serious socialist or labour candidate for US president, given that there was not, it was not unprincipled to vote for a radical petty bourgeois candidate like Nader.

Can you imagine Gore supporters bothering to condemn the SWP for splitting the anti-Bush vote? Nader was in a different ball game, scoring 10% of the vote in Alaska, and actually won in the town of Fairfield, Maine.

Campbell MacGregor

Glasgow

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As unions hold back on funding, millionaires step in to bail out Blair

THE LATEST revelations of a series of hefty £2m donations to the Labour Party are just another symptom of the way the Party has been hijacked by Tony Blair’s “modernisers” and is haplessly breaking free from its links with the unions and its working class base.

Of course Labour has often had its less savoury backers: who can forget the portly figure of Robert Maxwell, who would routinely double the collection at Labour conference and make other token gestures to keep his influence with Labour’s leaders? Geoffrey Robinson was by no means the first millionaire to sit as a Labour minister.

But Blair’s government has gone further than ever before in explicitly courting support from big business and the ultra-wealthy. And by no means all of their donations have been returned in the way that Bernie Ecclestone’s £1m had to be refunded in a storm of controversy.

This year’s Labour conference exhibition had more stalls from big firms than did the increasingly unloctable and europhobic Tories.

And the wealthy feel confident that Tony Blair will use their money to help people larger unions decided to hold back on payments towards Labour’s electoral war-chest, seeking some sign that Blair’s team was at least prepared to listen to some of their concerns.

Instead Labour has carried on regardless, forcing through more privatisation, PFI schemes, and holding down public sector pay. Isn’t it time Millbank-dominated unions like UNISON were forced to carry out a value for money audit on the effectiveness of handing over millions from low-paid members’ subs to back a government that has consistently kicked them in the teeth?

Blair’s answer to the unions is simply to raise taxes on top earners remain as low as under Thatcher; taxes on business have been held down, privatisation and speculation continue unfiltered, and Thatcher’s anti-union laws hold workers in check and keep profits rolling in.

Which raises the obvious question: just what has New Labour done to merit the millions it still receives from the unions?

Last autumn several of the

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