Blunkett’s pay deal leaves teachers understaffed, under-paid and under pressure...

Education, Education, Desperation!

IN THE run-up to the 1997 election, it was pressure on education cuts that helped polarise opposition to John Major’s Tory government.

But almost four years later, school teachers in England are fuming at ever-increasing paperwork, assessment and demands upon them, and bitter that yet again the basic pay increase is well short of the 12% the unions had called for to attract the extra staff that are needed.

With some schools already on a 4-day week for lack of teachers, and an estimated 20,000 unfilled posts, the mix of mounting admin work, unlimited hours, inadequate support and unsympathetic management is driving away experienced teachers and scaring off potential recruits.

The government’s attempts to fob off many teachers with discretionary handouts of ‘performance related’ pay have not fooled most classroom teachers. They want extra cash for all teachers, as part of the basic salary, not an “extra” that can be here today – and taken away by the headteacher tomorrow.

Teachers in England are even more angry to discover that their colleagues in Scotland have been given not only a hefty 10% increase this year, but a deal limiting their working week to 35 hours, along with extra teachers and more support staff.

That’s why 1,300 angry teachers packed a London rally last week, baying for action by the NUT. The union leaders have promised a ballot on refusing to cover for vacant posts.

Labour romped to office pledging that its priorities would be “education, education, education”. Little did anyone think that as the next election approached so little would have changed for the better.

A strong vote for action now could yet force concessions from the government, if it is to avoid another embarrassing set of headlines as it launches its campaign for the next general election. Teachers must press for a swift ballot and a YES vote for action.
Sniping from the Left

By Charlie van Gelderen

So this is democracy?

Israel has the support of the United States and most of the Western states, because it is, purportedly, the only democracy in the Middle East. We have just had an example of how this democracy works.

When a Jewish settler, living illegally in Gaza was shot, all the resources of the Israeli armed forces set out to avenge his death. Heavy artillery, tanks, and helicopters were used in a demonstration of strength.

By contrast a Jewish settler convicted of bludgeonning a Palestinian boy to death was let off with an £11,600 fine and community service.

This is clearly a signal to the thousands of illegal settlers in Palestinian territory that they can carry on with their aggression against Palestinians with impunity.

What about the workers?

So Tony Blair has at last come to the conclusion that he may lose the hard core working class support in the next election. He must do something to appease them.

This will, however, take the form of class against politics. No question of carrying out the openly voiced demand for the nationalisation of the railways, other public utilities, no question of improving workers' control into industry. Good lord no.

This might upset some of the rich people who produce far more jobs for New Labour's fund.

So, like the Edwardian ladies of the manor, who went out on Sundays to do good to the deserving poor, the Prime Minister is calling on his big business pals to be nice to the workers.

He wants to introduce ethics into business practice.

Will this experiment be more successful than the government's ethical foreign policy? Don't hold your breath waiting!

From MacDonald to Mandelson

When Ramsay MacDonald became the Labour Party and headed a Tory dominated 'National' government in 1929, he boasted the now every Duchess has got to kiss me.'

With Peter Mandelson it's millionaires!

There is an old Dutch saying which, translating, reads: 'Mix with the swill and the pig will eat you.'

Grateful

Why can't Mandelson and Vaz be helpful to asylum seekers from India and elsewhere?

Who knows? They might even donate some of their yearly vouchers to New Labour's fighting fund!

ILL-advised

Before the New Labour Government came into office in 1997, there were only 38 special advisers at an annual cost to the Exchequer of £1.8 million.

In 2000, the number had increased to 78, and the cost to £4 million.

Mr. Brown, Cabinet Office Secretary, has revealed that the number of special advisers has dropped down to 78 - but the cost has increased to £4.5m. No doubt, the Chief Secretary advised a golden handcuff, in now enjoying a profitable career in business.

But WHO ARE these special advisers, and what kind of advice do they give? One thing we can be sure: judging by the government's legislation, there aren't any socialists among them.

Green

Michael Meacher is proving himself a perfect custodian of the environment and, especially, the British countryside and suburbia. He once wrote: 'Housing is no longer a status symbol, an object of conspicuous consumption, or a source of maker power and wealth. It is a place where individuals and families should be able to live and inter-relate in mutual happiness..." (Socialist Review, 1982)

As Mark Thomas has revealed on Channel 4, Meacher and his new owns between nine and 11 residential properties, including a £650,000 property in the Cascade Court in Wimbledon with flats whose market value this is £1,400,000 each and let at £200 a week.

Yes, this is the same Michael Meacher who told a fringe meeting at the 1999 Labour Party conference that "People like me who are privileged, should not be in a position to rob other people of a job which is their basic right."

Clearly as a minister in Tony Blair's government, Meacher has preferred to join the robbers!

Danny MacIntosh

DESPERATE shortages of classroom teachers across England - with as many as 20,000 unfilled posts - is being rectified in the aftermath of the latest pay deal, which has been roundly attacked by all the main teaching unions. So bad has the crisis become that a mass rally of 1,300 teachers called by the London associations of the National Union of Teachers gave a standing ovation to calls for industrial action, and pressurised General Secretary Doug Melor to agree to a ballot on no cover for vacant posts.

This is a remarkable turnabout by a union leadership which just eight months ago brushed aside calls for action to rectify the imposi- tion of performance related pay.

The pay deal is complex and hedged about by government spin and double-speak, but teachers are immediately clear that the extra money on the table falls far short of the amount needed to tackle long-standing problems.

The new roles involve a base/rate increase of around 3.9%, with a 6% rise for newly-qualified teachers. But government figures for the new salary scale were distorted by including the controversial new "bench- old" payments of £2,000 a year. These payments only apply to teachers at the top of the pay spine who apply for them, and are prepared to commit themselves to the government's latest pet pro- jects. They are at the discric- tion of head teachers. Nor are the threshold payments secure: they can be withdrawn, and the government has only pledged to fund these extra payments for three years, leaving the long term future in doubt.

The administration of these payments is just another in a seemingly endless line of administrative and bureau- cratic tasks now being dumped on teachers and head teachers by ministers.

Indeed the limited extra cash above inflation will not be enough to compensate for other aspects of the job including worsening condi- tions, long workloads, ever- more administration and assessment, and an ever more restrictive curriculum, which are driving potential and actual teachers away from the profession in droves.

"You can tell it's bad when you see that English has now become yet another shortage subject: there never used to be any prob- lem recruiting English teach- ers," says one NUT activist.

The apparently generous increases in London weight- ing also need to be taken with a pinch of salt. Many more experienced teachers will have the bulk to the extra £700 a year inner London allowance clawed back for three years as part of new system.

As to add insult to injury, many teachers have been feeling annoyed at the much larger increases and the improved working condi- tions negotiated by Scottish teachers with the Parliament north of the border.

Although they start from a lower salary, Scottish teach- ers will get a flat rate 3.4% rise this year, and an extra 23.5% over three years, along with a maximum 35- hour week and a "phasing in" of a maximum 25 hours "contact time" teaching in the classroom. An extra 4,000 teachers are promised, along with extra support staff.

The Scottish deal is costed at £1.85bn over the three years for 50,000 teachers, compared with the £564m this year in England.

Education Secretary Blunkett has claimed that any equivalent of the Scottish deal "would be "difficult and cumbersome to administer" in England. The mood at the London teachers' rally suggests that he has badly misjudged the mood of classroom teachers, with an election looming, now is the best time for teachers to take action and step up pressure on the government to tackle the root problems behind staff shortages.

Meanwhile NUT's the union representing 65,000 FE college lecturers, is angrily pointing out that salary scales for lecturers are now around 10% lower than those for school teach- ers, with the gap widening every year.

Even NUT has "Dynamic" Doug McHenry has been swung into calling a ballot, after knifing last year's fight against PRP to teachers at the top of the pay spine who apply for them, and are prepared to commit themselves to the government's latest pet projects. They are at the discretion of head teachers. Nor are the threshold payments secure: they can be withdrawn, and the government has only pledged to fund these extra payments for three years, leaving the long term future in doubt.

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Underground dispute enters a new phase

Graeme Tucker

In the face of the threat of united strike action by ASLEF and RMT members on the Underground the Labour government has resorted to a barrage of threats and manoeuvres. In a clear sign that they are rattled, they have both wheeled out a compliant judge to use the threat of injunction to shut up the RMT, whilst offering a deal to Ken Livingstone to take the heat off the issue of tube safety.

Despite an injunction on their union, RMT members have joined ASLEF on the picket lines ensuring that the first day of strike action has been successful.

Neither union has been prepared to accept the deal offered by the government: livingstone’s transport supremo Bob Kiley by John Prescott.

After a 9 to 1 vote by RMT members and over 3 to 1 in favour from ASLEF, it would seem that the views of tube workers were clear. But rather than discuss the issues seriously UUL management, with the nod from the government, took the RMT to court. UKL argued that in line with anti-union laws as put forward by the Labour government, the RMT was obliged to provide details of the numbers of members proposing to go on strike, not just across the whole of UUL, but workplace by workplace and grade by grade.

The judge was heard to issue an injunction on this.

RMT members have learnt the judgement to the Tlef Vale case one hundred years ago.

However hard it tried, the RMT could not virtually impossible to keep hidden the precise details of what station and what grade its members are at any time – particularly as the employer refuses to give any clue as to their location.

This will have serious implications for other RMT disputes – such as the national train crew safety dispute, which is nearing the stage of balloting for action – and indeed for any industrial action by workers strangled by these anti-union laws.

Whilst the RMT Executive agreed to accept the injunction and to appeal the judgement to the Tlef Vale case, the members being prepared to vote to keep up the strike!

RMT members on the ground have been acting with the right to picket!

Tube workers have witnessed the move by Prescott to ‘compromise’ with Bob Kiley is a sign of weakness.

The government are trying to clear the decks of all sensitive matters before livingstone calls an election.

Existing maintenance work will be handled by the RMT.

So whilst we believed that working closely with Livingstone was important, it was vital that tube workers took on their own independent actions in defence of underground safety, jobs and conditions.

It hasn’t taken long to prove us right. At the joint union rally called to build support for the ASLEF/RMT strike ballot, Livingstone turned all the cameras on to prepare to do a deal with Prescott. He pledged that he would support any strike: he would join his local tube picket line.

But as the date for the first strike approached, Livingstone suddenly found it expedient to withdraw his pledge. With negotiations with John Prescott at a snail’s pace, the tube picket line just wouldn’t be right!

So whilst we believed that working closely with Livingstone was important, it was vital that tube workers took on their own independent actions in defence of underground safety, jobs and conditions.

The issues are now clear. The tube’s future remains under threat – from privatization, and from Livingstone. But if the unions keep their nerve, the government position is weak.

The RMT should widen its base of action by immediately basing its marines train crew on the parallel dispute over rail safety.

Solidarity for the strikes must be strengthened. The work already being done to build the picket lines and raise support for the strikers needs to be built upon. The RMT should also play an important role in this and we need to ensure that rail contracts are established with broad support.

In particular it is necessary to focus not just on the issues of privatization but also on Labour’s anti-union laws and what they have on rail safety to achieve.

The tube’s future remains under threat – from Livingstone and from Bob Kiley.

But if the unions
"Labour’s manifesto will include major pledges which every socialist is duty bound to campaign against."

Mike Marqusee explains his view of why there is no room left for socialists to fight in Tony Blair’s Labour Party

When I recently left the Labour Party, after twenty years of active membership, I was surprised how low my stock had fallen. It was asked of no one at all to explain why. For comrades outside the party, it seemed a step they needed no explanation, and I was not, in short, on point. For comrades remaining in the party, it seemed a step beyond explanation, and hopelessly ‘premature’. I had, it seems, had to come to two interdependent conclusions.

First, the cumulative impact of the changes implemented by the Blair leadership from the top down – in policy, in personnel and in tone – has been to transform it into something like the Democratic party in the USA. Labour is now a highly effective servant of big business; it relies on working class votes, but provides no representation to that class. This is a change with no means available to reverse the damage.

Second, the political and social context demands an elected new leadership of the Labour Party. New Labour-Tory consensus is the price of electoral abstention was becoming too high.

As the run-up to the 1997 general election, I was one of the few Labour members of the new government, Blair would encounter stiff resistance from party members and trade unions, and that under these circumstances the Labour left would revive. With the coming together of the left centre-left Grassroots Alliance and the victory of four of the GRO candidates in the 1997 NEC ballot, it seemed our predictions were being borne out. But now, after nearly four years of Labour government, and with another general election looming, Labour is far more firmly entrenched than ever, and a serious challenge is required.

Since 1997, the popular democratic vote has fallen back. In 2000, even Mark Sycamore, the MP for Huddersfield, tipped the poll in 1997, was unseat, and a 2-year run-up. Even taking account of the Millbank shenanigans, and the rather muted campaign run by the GRA itself, there was a disappointing result. In the post, the internal political environment of the party is relatively reflected changes in political temperature within the working class, the least, disjointed with the leadership, usually, when it failed to deliver in government, was mirrored in increased support for left candidates in NEC elections and the like. In the year 2000, however, the palpable anger at the Labour leadership felt in the working class communities, the left’s vote receded substantially. Only 25% of party members bothered to take part in the NEC vote – the party’s only remaining meaningful national-level democratic exercise.

Of those who did take part, more than 45% voted for the Blairite celebrity Tony Robinson, presumably on the grounds that he had once done a funny turn in Blackadder. In the run-up, the highly publicised vote on pensions last year’s party conference – a rare setback for the leadership – was a substantial majority of the CLPs voted against Blair’s government. Likewise, Geoff Martin’s campaign for London Labour’s party chair was scuppered not by the Millbank arm-twisting, but by a shortfall in support within the constituencies. These developments devalue all the left’s predictions, and confirm impressionistic evidence of the changing social composition of the party’s membership, and, along with it, the social content of Labour party activism.

Party matters little from the situation in the Democratic party in the USA – where unions send delegates to conventions, union leaders sit on policy bodies, union money funds election campaigns and union members, by large and small, vote Democrat. Overall, the unions are now merely one among a number of organised interest groups lobbying the Labour government – principally from outside the party structures.

The significance of the party-union link has party and the working class has now come into society. Is there any means by which the connection can be broken? For the Labour left, this is a challenge that is stifled by continued party membership.

The Labour left also sought to take stock of its own performance over the years. The Grassroots Alliance has failed to become anything other than a place to negotiate for the NEC, NPF, etc. After the height of 1968, 1978, its non-performance will only have hardened the exit of yet more activists from the party.

Like other initiatives on the left, it has been hampered by acclamation, but that isn’t a satisfactory explanation for major political forces of retreat. As someone who set up the Socialist Party, Group, and encouraged others to do the same, I have no explanation or confusion about my abject disappointment, not in the left MPs as individuals, but in the SCP as a collective force, an essential leadership of the movement.

At the time when the huge vacuum left by the British politics has been acknowledged even by academics and media pundits, the Labour left is unable to take a genuine stance outside an ever decreasing circle. But, there is Ken Livingstone waiting in the wings – it’s disheartening to watch comrades pin such hopes on the campaign to ‘defeat Blair in the Party’. It’s a just and reasonable demand, and what does it really amount to?

Since his election as mayor, Livingstone has worked to great lengths to reposition itself as a social democratic party – economic globalisation and ‘law and order’. The one-time champion of the national manufacturing sector has since branched itself out yet again as a booster for global finance capital and a friend of the Murdoch empire.

He has toured with various parties, from the left to the far right, and with Mayor Giuliani, the prime advocate of mass-scale repressive DNA testing, more cops on the beat and talk of ‘war on terror’. An anti-capitalist, with his able to harness the thebesed people of Hackney, where a Labour-Tory coalition is now in charge. And as a result of a multitude of developments – political, social, cultural, the disconnection between the Labour

Michael Marqusee

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Scottish Parliament to overrule Executive

YET AGAIN the Scottish Parliament has defied its own Executive. The first case was over Tommy Sheridan’s Act to abolish welfare sales. The second time it was over free care for the elderly.

The mechanics of this were revealing. The Labour majority within the Executive were determined to deny Scottish elderly people free personal care in order to maintain the tax cut announced by Brown and Blair. First Minister Henry McLeish effectively went over the heads of his own Executive and appealed to the Parliament, which were overruling in favour of the proposal.

The Executive was outflanked and had to concede. Henry has shown populus strength and taken revenge on Westminster attacks on his competence and intelligence. There remains the question of how to pay for the parliament’s commitments. Money is being thrown at problems – teacher’s pay, tuition fees, free care. As the Parliament has a fixed budget it must be paid for otherwise the costs will find the Scottish Executive. Henry has shown the way. He has become the person to support this track. Suddenly Scottish Labour looks like the only party supporting low taxes and lower public services.

Will the Scottish Income Tax be raised or even the SSP’s Scottish Service Tax introduced, which allows the higher rate of income tax to go up? We will have to wait and see.
A rotten but necessary compromise

Terry Conway
The Liaison Committee of the Socialist Alliance - the main body with authority to organise the election campaign - took place on January 13 in London. This meeting was a big step forward for the Alliance and its General Election campaign. It took a number of crucial organisational decisions which put the road for an impressive showing.

The Alliance will have in its region of 50 candidates in England, running serious local campaigns within an overall national framework. Combined with the SWP and the Welsh Socialist Party, this will give the Alliance the most serious challenge from forces to the left of Labour since the war.

There was however a highly contentious matter to be dealt with - a joint statement from the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Socialist Party (SP) on the allocation of candidates in a number of contested seats for the General Election.

Over-riding the democratic decision of the local alliances in the areas involved, the national committee and national candidates by national decision - in contradiction to the "Coventry protocol" agreed by the two parties at the Tyneside conference last autumn.

Ironically the SP had presented themselves as champions of local democracy and autonomy and opposed important decisions being taken nationally. They did not want strong, authoritative national structures. They argued that the protocol agreed at Coventry was far too centralised, while saying they would use the courts to block the protocol on the ground - which threatened the potential success of the Alliance, and possibly its survival.

This is why the Liaison Executive in December asked the SP and the SWP (who the SP clearly see as its main competitor) to meet together and fully draw up an agreement.

The statement was a result of these discussions. In fact what it represented was an ultimatum from the Socialist Party.

Subsequently the Liaison Committee had to confront the reality of what the Socialist Party were saying and deciding. At local level, whatever the national position, activist support for the Socialist Party candidates was very low. They also refused to agree that selection meetings take place in areas where a candidate could be democratically decided on by the local Alliance supporters. In two places they announced their candidates to the local press without any consultation with other forces in the local Alliance.

The fact that they were prepared to see the potential success of the Alliance on the ground threatened is very clear. This was a major problem - although it was no more a matter of principle than the issues contained elsewhere in the statement.

It was also a problem that the defeat of some of their candidates, together with a number of others, had indicated that decisions to contest the elections were not based on any real campaign.

While the Delegations of the Socialist Party, in the chair, rightly stressed the need to get comfortable with the issues on the agenda, this is reason to trample on democracy.

The Alliance is hell on its way to becoming the most significant development on the left in many decades. But it is too fragile, too uncertain, to get this wrong.

Unhappy however, the Workers Power, like the rest of us, had every reason to be hostile to the development. But in the place they were in the end to the result of the resolution. It is also regrettable that the CPGB, whose contribution to the statement has since argued that they will not campaign, have not been agreed.

The Alliance is hell on its way to becoming the most significant development on the left in many decades. But it is too fragile, too uncertain, to get this wrong.

Statement to Socialist Alliance Liaison Committee, January 13, 2001, from SP and SWP

We understand that no two political organisations represent the same, but in the interests of the united general election campaign we have tried to come to an agreement, which we hope others in the SA will agree to, at least to accommodate in the name of a unified campaign.

We believe that the existing contested elections the campaign material will reflect that the SA accept that in the seats where the SP has the candidate the SP will have political and organisational responsibility for the campaign and the candidate agree to prominently publicise the Socialist Alliance on the campaign material.

In addition, in order to ensure that in these areas enough Socialist Alliance material is produced to accommodate the campaign in the campaign without being made to feel that they were simply having to work for the Socialist Alliance, the SP agent will authorise material to be produced up to a minimum allowance of £500.

We hope that the election expenses spending limits in each seat.

5. We realise that the SP has a different position within the Socialist Alliance on the best way to run the General Election campaign. We accept that in the seats where the SP has the candidate the SP will have political and organisational responsibility for the campaign and the candidate agree to prominently publicise the Socialist Alliance on the campaign material.

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Oxford socialists running for Smith

More Alliance candidates adopted in election countdown

Bristol campaign homes in on education, privatisation, racism ... and Primaro

Socialist Outlook supporter and Labour Party member, Brian Drummond has been selected as the Socialist Alliance candidate to fight Bristol South against Treasury Minister Dawn Primaro. Bristol has been excelling the potential of this new development which has more than 100 paid up members in the city and is able to act more effectually than the different local organisations could by organising separately. One of the innovative initiatives of the Alliance in Bristol has been the way they have intervened into the local referendum being carried out by the local Labour group as a cover for cuts. The Alliance has put forward a brief proposal of “no rise in Council Tax, no school closures, and no rise as high as a rate for central funding of education.” This has received widespread support. Bristol has been an ideological battle ground, a key swing vote in the recent local referenda. The Alliance has been putting pressure on the local Labour group to accept the referendum result.

The curriculum has been developed in line with the Thatcherite plans of the nineties. Many children are subject to an arid skills and academic based curriculum which in no way addresses their needs. Teachers are still teaching large classes and subject to the immense pressure of OFSTED, performance management and poor wages.

In Bristol the Labour controlled council has managed to remove two secondary schools from the community of Keyhope. They are proposing to close two primary schools in the Hartcliffe and Withywood areas of the city. The Bristol Socialist Alliance has been heavily involved in fighting these alongside local parents. Since it was elected in 1997, the Labour government has continued to attack sections of the community including single mothers and the disabled. In particular it has developed a policy of criminalisation of youth with policies such as the imposition of curfews. The racist treatment of asylum seekers through the introduction of vouchers and the dispersal system has been unacceptable to the Socialist Alliance. There has been a campaign to close the Tavistock centre and the introduction of Education Action Zones has allowed private companies to interfere with education nationally.

In terms of the economy the government has pursued neo-liberal policies. The massaging of jobs in the car industry, the collapse of the privatised steel industry and the continued and relentless loss of jobs across the whole of manufacturing is the result. The disasters we have seen on the rail network cry out for renationalisation. That is why we were happy in Bristol to be part of the Socialist Alliance campaign against rail privatisation, mounting a picket of Temple Meads station. The response of the government to the picketing and the enormous public support - to private air traffic control and the London Underground - beggars belief.

New Labour plans to take Bristol to the Gordon as it feels confident in winning a referendum. This would result in acceleration of manufacturing job loss, further privatisations and iniquitous policies which strengthen the hand of the international capitalists.

As Treasury Minister, Dawn Primaro must take responsibility for the failure to renationalise the rail and the unparralled and extremely inadequate local bus service...

Treasury policies have led to the attacks on manufacturing - on our car and steel industries. On the international stage, Blair has shown his support for George Bush's 'war on terror' project, which may rely on the use of Tylngsteth and Memmorial Hill.

And British troops will be used as a police force for NATO in an increasing number of wars across the globe.

I have constantly opposed the use of British troops in foreign wars - most recently in the Gulf and the Balkans - and so these are also issues I will seek to highlight through standing in this election.
No borders! – fight for the free movement of people

Terry Conway

Tony Blair’s hypocrisy has no bounds. The catalogue of death in recent times speaks for itself, he says, speaking of the growing call in human trafficking.

Writing in the Observer on February 4, together with Italian PM Giuliano Amato, Blair said and emphasized a joint initiative between the two countries to stem the flow of so-called illegal immigrants from the former Yugoslavia.

The region is the starting point of one of the main transit routes for illegal immigration to Western Europe, and, it is generally believed, many of the thousands who cross to Italy are being smuggled across the Adriatic by Albanian boatmen. There is no record of what proportion of the Albanians are being smuggled into Italy, but it is estimated that about 50,000 people a year are smuggled into Italy.

The UN says the route could be responsible for 10% of Europe’s illegal immigration, some paying up to £2,700 to make the trip.

But what is their solution to this tragedy, which has seen so many die by drowning or suffocating as they desperately flee to supposed safety?

At least 173 people drowned last year in the Mediterranean, and another 200 were recorded as missing. Around 400,000 Albanians have been forced to leave their homes in pursuit of a better life.

Do they suggest ways to lessen the environmental devastation and increasing “natural” disasters which result in so many people leaving their homes and communities behind?

Do they take up the fact that trade in human beings is the grossest result of their economic and social policies in which everything is set against the well-being of the human genome, rare plants, water and air are all for sale in this brave new world of the 21st Century than what’s so different about trafficking people?

It seems obvious that the only way to end this barbarity is to end all immigration controls – to allow people to move at will. Such a move would end this scandal at one fell swoop – the criminal media would no longer be able to exploit people desperately to escape.

But none of these logical and progressive policies appeal to New Labour. Instead these great statesmen choose to pledge more police powers and immigration officers in Bosnia to step up border checks.

They also offered extra funds for a “voluntary repatriation” scheme encouraging people who had made the journey “just to seek a better life” to return home. Sentences of up to 14 years for criminals profiting from the world’s fastest growing illegal trade were introduced as part of the crackdown. In Britain they currently face a 10-year sentence – less in many other EU countries.

Officials are reported to favour a Europe-wide scan for traffickers. If other countries support the proposals, the new measures could be in place across Europe within six months. This article appeared just the day after a debate on Radio 4’s Today programme which showed that asylum seekers in the UK are going hungry because of lengthy delays in issuing visas.

Nick Hardwick of the Refugee Council believes there is a “crisis” in the system which is affecting families across the UK.

He told the programme: “All over the country there are groups of asylum seekers who are going days or weeks without food because the vouchers administered has broken down.”

He said one impoverished mother in Liverpool had been forced to make nappies for her baby out of newspaper. “People are scrounging food off friends, family and neighbours because the vouchers aren’t arriving.”

It is impossible for asylum seekers to make ends meet even when the vouchers arrive – given that they represent only 80 per cent of the official food poverty levels and can only be exchanged at a limited number of shops.

When even the vouchers don’t arrive, the level of deprivation is just as unacceptable.

These revelations follow on the heels of a report from homeless charity Shelter on January 31 which showed that many asylum seekers were living in completely inadequate conditions.

The organisation inspected 154 properties used by asylum seekers and found that 24 were one-in-five were unfit for human habitation.

Many were infested with mice, cockroaches, lice, bedbugs, and four out of five of the shared houses had major structural defects.

Shelter says the system is allowing hundreds of landlords to cash in on some of the poorest and most vulnerable communities.

Far from the myths peddled by the tabloids, they are not being tolerated by asylum seekers. This cycle of exploitation

Deadly pay-off for Milburn’s cynical organ recital

John Lister

FOR A DAY so the scandal over the Alder Hey hospital stocked improperly annexed organs might have been like a dream come true for health Secretary Frank Milburn.

The party reply, pointing the finger at an evil – and conveniently also foreign – doctors, the main culprits, and feeding a media frenzy of hysterical headlines, gave Milburn a double opportunity.

Not only could he pump out a story to knock the concentration on the minds of the Mandelson-Vaz disgrace stories off the front pages, but at the same time he could pursue the government’s argument that effective reform of the NHS was set to go ahead, whatever the medical establishment, and thus strengthen the hand of his party managers within the NHS.

Milburn seized the opportunity with both hands, shamelessly wringing up the support stroke of bereaved parents who have been lied to and deceived by unscrupulous or insensitive doctors at Alder Hey, and promptly putting countless relatives around the country to embark on a crazed hunt for the pickled organs of long dead and buried.

The tabloids, also getting bored with the Mandelson saga, happily joined in, locating people who were desperate at the idea that they had only gained “part” of a deceased loved-one, and who appeared now to want to repossess the removed parts as if this will bring any consolation for their loss or hope for the future.

But now the sexual, semi-religious frenzy, together with the macabre details about the臽ed organs kept in ice, and rooms filled with preserved embryos, organs, and body parts served another purpose, which neither the tabloids nor Milburn intended.

They scared and confused thousands of people into believing that any removal of body parts could only be for some grotesque self-satisfaction of the pathologist – forgetting the genuine need to conduct research on the reasons for death, and the anatomy of disease, if help is to be available to the living.

The press hysteria also undermined and intimidated doctors, who are required to ask relatives for permission to take organs from dead people for research and medical training, and for transplant surgery.

The combined effect is that a growing number of desperately ill children are already in danger of being denied the supply of donated organs for transplant dries up.

Now in a panic move to restore some of the control he has lost, Milburn has ordered a top-level “summit” of medical experts to stop the rot, stem the numbers listing up donor cards, and press the case for more people to join the register of organ donors.

But there is another, more political, issue which is coupled with Milburn’s plan to scrap the existing statutory bodies that are supposed to speak up on behalf of patients and their interests – Community Health Councils.

The new Bill will sweep away the existing network of CHCs, and replace them with a confusing and completely unrepresentative array of new quangos, none of which would have the level of local support, organisational and operational independence that the best CHCs currently enjoy.

Campaigners have often pointed to weaknesses in local CHCs’ oversight over the health of the local health authority or Trust bosses; but this is exactly the type of storage organisations that Milburn is anxious to create, while dispensing the funding, the power and ultimate control and social commitment among the best campaigning CHCs.

The organs scandal was an ideal moment to promote a new era of openness and transparency in public life. But Milburn has cynically used it as a fig leaf to divert attention from the lid on future scrutiny and probity.

The abolition of CHCs has already been challenged by Labour MPs and by an increasingly vocal campaign among themselves, while those in support of Milburn more likely to be future candidates of Frank Milburn than Dr Finlay.

Milburn’s easy target: Prof van Velsen

Milburn’s exaggerated response to the Alder Hey situation has helped to cover up the question of accountability in the NHS.

The indefensible antics of Professor Dick van Velsen and other pathologists who have developed a practice of taking organs without consultation or consent are a product not only of the hierarchial power of doctors, but of a health service run by quangos, which allows little public scrutiny.

But Milburn’s new Health and Social Care Bill going through Parliament proposes to reinforce the secrecy surrounding clinical services with a draconian Clause 59, which would impose tight controls over any information on the treatment of any individual patient – and, therefore, of any deceased patient. Unauthorised use of such information would become an offence, punishable by a £5,000 fine.

This type of gagging order would make it even harder for external investigations to discover, expose or question what happens to patients at any stage of their treatment.

Worse, this new restriction is
COWLEY LEADERS WON'T TAKE "NO" FOR AN ANSWER!

BMW workers at Cowley were yesterday voting on a workplace 7:2, to reject the new mask and PPE agreements, unless they are given back pay for the conditions they laboured under. As of today, their union representatives had pushed for a vote in the wake of meetings at the Cowley plant. In this they joined a growing group of carworkers voting down productivity packages. Recent votes at Lynn Rover and Peugeot in Cowley show that workers are fed up with the way higher living costs were sold to them and other social flexibility. The vote shows the mass unionisation organised opposition to these deals, which all the managers are calling for, and then not only would they get job losses from their members, but there would be the basis of unionisation in the subcomponent industry.

Inside the Cowley workers are determined to fight the deal for the workers and force them through. The same negotiations were made at Peugeot, and the same contentious ‘banning hours’ system is to be imposed.

At Cowley union officials, and senior stewards did not even get any chance. In the deal, instead they exploited the fact that with the “Mine 7:2 still being presented for the vote, and with Cowley workers, there was no chance of a strike. So there was a vote on the proposal and a proposed a strike! This of course was held in the union shop where the union has the only choice. This is one of the first pieces of pan-European industrial action, which gives it a political significance which outshines the loss in production, caused mainly by hour-long walk outs in plants across the continent.

The European Workers Federation (EAF) statement, issued on the day of action reported that 16,000 workers in Germany, 7,000 in Belgium, 11,000 in the UK (Luton), and Elesmere Port, 1,000 in Portugal and 5,000 in Spain all took part.

In Britain Luton shut down for the day, while Elesmere Port workers struck for half a day. At the Nissan plant it is clear that the majority see the proposed closure at Luton as making their own situation extremely vulnerable.

Any plant in Europe could itself be the next affected, said spokesman Guenter Lorent for the German engineering union IG Metall, calling on workers across the continent to organise what he called “a European march.” This striking example of European solidarity cannot of course impress GM managers, declared the EAF’s General Secretary, Jost Hartmim, addressing the 7,000-strong rally held at the Opel AG plant in Rüsselsheim, Germany. The EC is very aware despite these protests that they can only see their goal primary as giving added weight to the European Works Council negotiation team in talks with GM management in Europe.

While pressure on management may not result in anything, it is the illusion that a corporation like GM could back down because increased action has cost them 1,050 cars a day is far from the truth.

An occupation at Luton as soon as the closure was announced would have been the strongest response the workforce could have made. Taking over the plant when the workforce returned after the Christmas shutdown would have cleared a focus for action. Even now, occupation remains the strongest tactic in the workers’ armoury.

As the ballot starts here in Britain, a huge campaign needs to be mounted for the biggest possible “yes” vote.

Without industrial action of either occupation or strike at Luton, the solidarity campaign that made such a promising start on January 25 will dissipate, with a Co-operative future across Europe have shown they are ready to follow the lead.

With thanks for information to: www.saveavusalburyjobs.org.uk website which offers other details about the fight to save jobs in Luton.

GM action a big step forward for European solidarity

Luton: it’s OUR PLANT!

Veronica Fagan

15,000 car workers and their families marched through Luton on one of the coldest days of the year. General Motors proposal to shut the town’s Vauxhall factory laying off the 2,000 workers, currently empiring.

Several thousand more in the imported “imported” industry would probably face the sack as well.

Many or locally, the whole Luton workforce was joined by a strong delegation from their sister plant in Ellesmere Port. Car workers from the UK and several other British factories were also desigining the workers from car plants in Germany, Spain and Belgium.

Other groups of workers represented included the Dudley Hospital strikers and stalwarts from the miners’ strike.

The demonstration had a different feel from last year’s massive protest over the Longbridge closure. Of the organisation itself and when they fought at the final rally. The fighting tone of their speeches, and frequent references to their determination to build the forthcoming occupation of the factory was in sharp contrast to the tepid calls from the associating union chiefs who also addressed the crowd.

John Monks, general sec-

of the TUC was heavy with the power of “faceless directors” but of course refrained from giving any suggestions as to how this power could be challenged.

Tony Woodley, the TUC’s chief officer for the car industry, clearly under pressure from both the anger of the workforce and the demonstration itself, reluctantly used the phrase “industrial action, if necessary.”

You would not have known from listening to him that a ballot for action was already planned. The union bureaucrats were joined by a whole series of local workplaces including local new Labour MP, Margaret Moran.

She faces a general election challenge from Joe Heaney, a local Sinn Fein, for the Labour MPs. Local Labour MP, John Smith, is a National’d candidate in Luton South.

Even the local TUC MP, Sir David Macel, addressed the rally, though happily many workers from the plant booed his speech.

It was clear however that Tony Woodley’s previous plea for unity was geared to keeping people like Model on board. The “unity” he and the rest of the union bureaucracy want is to prevent militant action from the workforce — as the unity we are seeking is unity to achieve and spread support for such action.

The danger now as balloting begins is that the anger that sparked a swift occupation of management offices on December 3 has been redirected to the closure announcement in mid-December may have already begun to dissipate.

Offers of jobs elsewhere may only satisfy the hopes of some who can seem generic if the alternative might be the deadlock effect, especially when the leadership has dragged the rest of the ballot out for all these weeks.

While the signs are better than they were at Longbridge or Dagenham, given the successful European day of action, occupation remains the best way to undermine the power of the bosses.

Vote yes in the ballot — occupy Vauxhall now!

Hidden cost of “saving” Nissan jobs

Alan Thornett

After a 24hr strike from the government Nissan has confirmed speculation and decided to build the new Micra in Sunderland.

On the face of it this deal protects several thousand jobs which were on the line if the Micra had gone to France, and gives the plant a better chance of survival in the medium term.

Certainly if the Micra had gone elsewhere it could well have been the beginning of the end for Nissan in Britain. A huge campaign needs to be mounted for the biggest possible “yes” vote.

Without industrial action of either occupation or strike at Luton, the solidarity campaign that made such a promising start on January 25 will dissipate, with a Co-operative future across Europe have shown they are ready to follow the lead.

With thanks for information to: www.saveavusalburyjobs.org.uk website which offers other details about the fight to save jobs in Luton.

Nissan has been one of the few plants where this system was not already in existence, and it will mean a huge cut in the workforce as a high proportion of workers would have to be brought back. The plan will be put on the table in February, and if agreement is reached, the Nissan UK plant will then go on to a 24 hour shift pattern. This will be combined with the introduction of a new working time system in which overtime will be replaced with a banking of hours system.

The plan will have a widespread effect on the workforce as a whole, and the union will be trying to achieve and spread support for such action.

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SALON OUTLOOK
George W. takes over: so it's (big) business as usual

Jeff Mackler

The Gore/Bush election dispute's sound and fury rapidly gave way to everyday bipartisanship as the president-elect, George W. Bush, moved to consolidate his influences and supporters alike that not much would change with the new regime in power.

Al Gore's concession speech, calling for an end to "partisan rancor," largely calmed ruffled feathers, and ended the escalated rhetoric of the previous month.

In the interim, on Dec. 15, Congress approved a $450 billion appropriations bill by a 292-90 margin, affirmed by a voice vote of the Senate a few days later.

This Clinton-era-inspired legislation included $1 billion for another 50,000 police; an additional 500 agents for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms; and 600 new "gun prosecutors." Clinton also promised to help local communities put 100,000 new cops on the street.

Like the Clinton administration, Bush's ruling-class team includes cabinet appointments by the representatives of the corporate elite — from Al Gore's vice president to Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole. Although the Senate majority has been reduced from 55 to 50, it still has the votes needed to pass its agenda.

The right-wing anti-abortionists, led by Senator John Ashcroft, a Republican from Missouri, is slated for Attorney General. His Democratic predecessors heading the Justice Department, minus the conservative rhetoric, have largely eliminated affirmative action and access to abortion, in 1992. Clinton signed the national expansion of the Religious Right's "right to life" amendments into law, enshrining in the federal constitution the right to discriminate against groups that do not share their view of life.

The election campaign proved to be little more than a referendum on Bush's victory in the popular vote. The Bush campaign has been characterized by its emphasis on "electoral college" victories, and its dismissive treatment of popular sentiment.

The insane logic of nuclear war is instead based on "acceptable losses," a term that includes the incineration of tens of millions of Americans, provided the "enemy" is totally devastated while the U.S. retains the capacity to rise from the ashes and continue.

The coming-working-class mobilizations in Russia and Eastern Europe are similarly not without concern in regard to the use of the bar of the U.S. nuclear arsenal.

Election fraud ignored

President George W. Bush has consistently dismissed his Democratic opponents' charges of fraud, and his rejection of a recount in Florida is an example of how the electoral system is being used to suppress the votes of working-class people.
Bush fires first shots in a global arms race

Veronica Fagan

You won't expect the Ford-Carter-Eisenhower-Putin to be overly concerned with the outcome of the US Presidential Election. However the most significant international message to come out of the new American administration since the election of George W Bush is that the National Missile Defence system dubbed "son of Star Wars" after Reagan's failed 1980s' project — will go full steam ahead. This is despite its estimated cost of $650 billion and the fact that two of the first three tests of the system failed.

There has been huge public impatience for a particularly ugly campaign to fund the programme that eventually, including a further gifting of funds to public education. Federal Reserve Chair Alan Greenspan, the guru of the stagflated U.S. economy, gave Bush the go-ahead for a massive tax cut for the rich Greenspan, in his nationally televised speech last week. He broke new ground in advocating the very policies that Bush's Republicans are planning.

Some 90 percent of the so-called tax cut package is earmarked for the rich, while working people will receive little or nothing. Gifting the state of California's just revealed energy crisis, Bush's pro-business announced plans to "ease America's dependency on foreign oil" by promoting legislation to begin oil exploration in the now protected Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Bush's new environmental chief won her spurs as a lobbyist for the oil industry.

Thus the Bush team plans to do in public view what the Clinton team did without the hoopla and fanfare. Clinton cut more social services and engineered more corporate welfare than the combined presidencies of Nixon, Reagan and George Bush Sr. for that matter.

The new president, like Clinton before him, is far from a rogue individual but with a conservative agenda. He is the U.S. ruling class answer to increasing capitalist competition and declining U.S. corporate rates.

The transparency of Bush's agenda, and the expected support of his Democratic Party "crisis" committee, will result in a renewed fightback by today's workers and allies in U.S. society.

The mass national protests on January 20, the anniversary of the种族清洗, brought tens of thousands into the streets.

The battle has begun.
US economy: the bubble has burst

In order to answer these questions we must look closely both at the nature of the US economy in the last decade and at Marxist accounts of economic crises. The nine years that have elapsed in the USA since 1991 has really been made up of two separate periods - the 1992-1996 period and the 1996-2000 period. In the first period, the US economy was growing at a rate of about 3% per annum. In the second period, the rate of economic growth fell to about 1% per annum. The US economy is in the middle of a recession, which is expected to last until the end of 2002.

The US economy is currently experiencing a slowdown, which is expected to continue until the end of 2002. This slowdown is due to a combination of factors, including the effects of the September 11 terrorist attacks, the war in Iraq, and the global economic slowdown. The US economy is forecasted to grow at a rate of about 2% in 2002, which is significantly lower than the growth rate in previous years.

The US economy is currently experiencing a strong labor market, with unemployment rates at their lowest level in decades. This is due to the strong job growth in the services sector, which has been driven by the growth in the technology and telecom industries. The US economy is forecasted to continue to grow at a moderate pace in the coming years, with unemployment rates remaining low.

The US economy is currently experiencing a strong housing market, with housing prices rising at a rapid pace. This is due to the strong job growth and low unemployment rates, which are making it easier for people to afford homes. The US economy is forecasted to continue to experience strong housing market conditions in the coming years, with housing prices expected to continue to rise.

The US economy is currently experiencing a strong manufacturing sector, with output rising at a rapid pace. This is due to the strong global economy and the growth in exports. The US economy is forecasted to continue to experience strong manufacturing sector growth in the coming years, with output expected to continue to rise.
increase profitability if it simply leads to a shift from employing living labour to the use of machinery.

Technological change will only offset the decline in the wages of the workforces if it makes capital goods cheaper and so reduces the amount of investment needed to employ more workers. For some investment in the US information technology sector seemed to do this. But this was less clearly the case. The Economist of December 9 2000 reported that the rate of deflation for computer prices had slowed from 25 percent to 11 percent, with software prices rising by 7 percent during the year. As a result, a couple of years ago, for example, software prices had increased 7 percent in the year to the third quarter. That means for a given level of profit, the rate of profit is now being squeezed by falling prices.

The process has been a sharp decline in the headline profits of some key US companies followed by dramatic cuts in share prices. Examples are Dell, Intel, Apple, IBM, Chase Manhattan and Xerox, which saw its shares fall by 75 percent in value last year and from close to bankruptcy. Banks like Bank of America have seen significant rise in problem loans. These developments have fed through to the stock market in general, which has been with an overall decline in profits in all cases.

American capitalism thus faces two central problems. The most immediate is the possibility of a financial crisis spilling over into a recession. A collapse in domestic confidence in the stock market could cut investment, by starving companies of funds, and slash consumption households see their savings fall in value. If these investors also lose confidence in the US economy then they could withdraw their funds, sending the currency plunging and making it difficult to continue funding the trade deficit. But in many more important ways the second, long-term problem. The recent buoyancy of US capitalism has been based on an artificial set of circumstances which have masked the underlying limitations of the economy. If these circumstances were now to evaporate, then these limitations come sharply into focus.

While US companies were mostly not affected EU companies were hit, with a number of areas in the 1990s they face continual cut-backs in the future. In the motor industry for example, Ford and General Motors have been increasingly affected by competition from European companies.

In telecommunications, European and Japanese companies continue to dominate in mobile phones, while US giants like ATT and Lucent have only recently derived by American capital from the restructuring undergone in Japan. In October last year US firms were forced to cut their losses, with the number of people living below the international poverty standard of US$2 a day. This is the gap between the two countries, 12% of the workforce and students protesting increased prescriptions.

In 2000-01 the government plans to sell state enterprises worth a massive $10 billion. The IMF is pushing for even bigger cuts in the next ten years. The collapse of the rupiah and the lack of competition from crisis-stricken Indonesian firms means that these assets will fall cheaply into the hands of foreign companies. Privatisation is causing the cost of basic services to rise. Unemployment is also escalating as thousands of jobs are lost in newly-downsized companies and in state enterprises being slimmed down in readiness. Trade liberalisation has caused the destruction of the national sugar industry. Farmers face ruin as cheap sugar and rice imports have flooded into the country.

Overall national productive capacity is being weakened, increasing dependency on foreign investment. Foreign exchange which could fund productive investment is instead wasted on growing luxury imports for the rich. The lack of investment in industry and agriculture has left Indonesia with the lowest productivity in the region.

The ideological effects of this for socialism worldwide cannot be overstated. The supposed success of the ' doi moi ' has meant that the WTO and IMF are seen as crucial in providing a base for neoliberal policies. In Indonesia, however, the WTO has been crucial in providing a base for neoliberal policies.
Stop the GATASplofophie

Susan Moore

much of the public has been
protested to stop the WTO talks in Seattle and in the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), is steadily moving away from the international rulebook that is largely unheard of by agreement.

A massive expansion of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) is the key to this global liberalisation project.

The World Development Movement has been running a campaign since last autumn to highlight the dangers of the discussions on GATS currently taking place in Washington, which culminate in March of this year.
The campaign was launched at an impressive rally on London September 9 attended by over 1,000 people and addressed by veterans of the anti-globalisation movement Naomi Klein and George Monbiot.

Klein argued that “Public services are the tangible manifestations of our shared values as citizens. How we choose to heal our sick, teach our kids, protect our water, ensure our supply of transport and communication services are cornerstones of our collective vision for society.”

"This idea is extremely threatening one to the free market, which is why we have to attempt to extend the World Trade Organisation into services is really all about. In market terms services are not an area of government investment - unused resources”

Monbiot, who has written about GATS in the press, pointed out that: “Big business wants a single, harmonised global market in which it can trade under precisely the same conditions anywhere in the world, with as few barriers to its operations in the form of regulations, public ownership or organised labour - as possible. And this is precisely what it has been getting.”

"Big business has to be bigger because the market it has engineered is growing to embrace the whole world. As harmonisation means that only the very biggest companies will win, each one is trying to get bigger than the others.”

GATS was originally agreed at the World Trade Organisation Discussion in 1994. The aim of this agreement is to remove any restrictions and internal government regulations in the area of service delivery that are considered to be “barriers to trade”.

As the WDM briefing on whose service makes clear:

"Those intent on pursuing liberalisation, frustrated by the demise of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment in 1998, and collapse of trade talks in Seattle in 1999, now see GATS as their golden opportunity. As a result, all kinds of agendas are being pursued in the continuing negotiations around this agreement, which now extends beyond any reasonable definition of either trade or services.

The service industry is big business, covering about two-thirds of economic activity in industrialised countries. The powerful companies want to operate freely within the service sector, but much of it is owned and regulated by governments.

Freeing up the trade in services will benefit business and the GATS is designed to do this. Unsurprisingly, corporations have been driving the process behind the scenes.

The negotiations taking place in Geneva aim to extend the 1994 agreement. Governments are under pressure to drastically reduce the ownership and delivery of services within their countries, and subject them to even tighter ‘free trade’ rules.

At the same time, negotiations from the world’s richest countries are pushing for this liberalisation process to be speeded up.

The GATS liberalisation agenda threatens basic service delivery. If multinational companies are seeking to make a profit out of water, health and education, those without purchasing power are likely to lose out.

Recent water privatisation in Puerto Rico has meant that poor community have gone without water while US military bases and tourist resorts enjoy an unlimited supply. A system governed by people’s ability to pay will not bring desperately needed services to the world’s poorest people.

Moreover, the irreversibility of GATS will ensure that once governments have opened up particular service sectors to WTO rules, there is no going back. The decision of how to organise service delivery is effectively being removed from the political arena. In future, citizens will no longer have the democratic right to decide whether or not services should be regulated.

One of the strengths of the WDM is that unlike campaigns such as Jubilee 2000 it has consistently pointed out that trade and debt can’t be dealt with separately. This is a mistake that campaigns in advanced capitalist countries often make.

If industrialised countries had not blocked the terms of trade so heavily in their own favour, Southern countries would not have fallen so deeply into debt as Charles Abourezk of Third World Network argues.

"Debt and trade are inextricably linked. Unfair trade rules left African debt and debt has allowed creditors to impose further unfair trade rules on Africa.

Instead of rectifying this imbalance to allow countries to pay off their debts, Northern governments imposed debt orthodoxy in quite even further into the unequal global market, leaving them even deeper in debt.”

For Southern activists, the ‘free market’ simply transfers resources from the South to the North, whether it’s through debt or through trade, through International Monetary Fund or the World Trade Organisation.

The WDM have highlighted the fact that resistors to globalisation in the South get very little coverage in the media while, in future, Prague and Nice were inspiring on our TV screens, it would also give a fuller picture of the scope of the fightback that exists if we saw the protests that have taken place across Latin America, Africa and Asia to policies that squeeze people even harder there.

Many of Bolivia’s poorest families received water bills totalling a third of their incomes when the government sold the public water system with International Water (of London) taking a major share. The charges that the company imposed were so crippling that they sparked mass protest. For many low-income families water cost more than food. Even collecting rainwater in rooftop tanks became illegal without a permit.

Hundreds of thousands took to the streets of Cochabamba city in April 2000. Soldiers sent in to quell the protests killed six and injured hundreds of others.

The governor of the state resigned saying he did not want to be responsible for the ‘bloodbath’ that would follow the Bolivian government’s refusal to reverse the privatisation.

In the end, the protesters won - international water was kicked out of Bolivia and the government accepted the protesters’ demands to put control of water in local hands.

If current negotiations at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) continue, it would be difficult, if not impossible for the Bolivian government to go back on its privatisation decision.

Despite these important strengths, the WDM campaign on this crucial weakness - one it shares with many other similar organisations in focus on research, education and the lobbying of politicians.

But the lessons of the struggles are told not just in the cities but in the mountains, the fields, the forests and the sea. It is here that people are fighting against privatisation - often with their hands on their own resources.

Attempts have been made to bring government science and police and community activists to stop the Globalisation Resistance Tour. The authorities in Switzerland turned down an invite to the smashed camp. Police in Brazil attempted to deport José Bava a leading speaker at a WTO rally.

But this attempted clampdown only showed that the authorities are wary of a movement that is gaining strength. This is a healthy response must be to make the movement grow everywhere.

The next planned European mobilisation against corporate power will be the protest at the G8 summit in Genoa in Italy on July 22. Tens of thousands travelled to Seattle, Prague and Nice in 2000 to show that the biggest protest yet. If the G8 summit in Genoa is to be the biggest protest yet then we might be more realistic about the potential of the movement to change reality, to change the world.”
Solidarity in action, as Union convoy brings vital aid

French trade unionists organised an aid convoy to bring medicines and urgently needed food to refugees from Chechnya. XAVIER ROUSSELIN, who will be speaking in London later this month, tells the story.

THE LORRY arrived at the Customs authorities in Vladikavkaz, North Ossetia, on Wednesday, November 8. It would not get through to its destination of Grozny on the border with Chechnya, for more than a week.

First they had to wait at Emel'ensk, the Ministry of Transport in Moscow, where an official caused a delay. Then they were held up at Napur in Ingusseta, for more than three days.

Almost immediately after the war started, French trade-unionists organised an aid convoy to bring medicine and urgently needed food to refugees from Chechnya. XAVIER ROUSSELIN, who will be speaking in London later this month, tells the story.

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Irish Socialist Alliance Draft Programme

Agreement in the hope that it would bring both peace and an end to sectarianism. In reality, it has institutionalised the existing sectarian divisions and is constantly supposed to be in crisis. It has established a right wing executive for the whole of Ireland. The Socialist Alliance is opposed to any return to the armed struggle. There should be complete denuclearisation. The right to life should be withdrawn and the RUC disarmed immediately.

We stand for the development of a Ireland which unites Catholic and Protestant workers. Such unity can only be built on the firm foundation of operating sectarian structures.

People before profit: Unite the Left

The Socialist Alliance is based on a coming together of socialists from different political backgrounds. It is a recognition that across the globe anti-capitalist ideas are growing. The recent Seattle protests and a strong social force is needed in Ireland. The Alliance does not confine itself in electoral campaigns at grass roots level for real change. By voting for the Socialist Alliance you are indicating you want a change in the way we are fighting to get a real share of the Celtic Tiger and to defend the rights of people come before profit.
Our alternative proposals are not definitive and are obviously open to reformulation in more "popular" style, providing the underlying political point is still made. Neither do we reject everything in the draft, much of which is good. A lot of what we propose is only in addition to what is already there.

**Government**

General Elections are primarily about electing a new government that will run the country. Our proposals let the draft programme stand. We have our own statement about the sort of government we want and are committed to it.

A list of policies we support must be headed by the sort of government we want to implement, even if we are not yet able to hope to form such a government. Such a statement is a necessary way to logically frame our view of other parties, possible coalitions and preference votes. Our demand should be:

For a Workers Government! For a Government that defends the interests of the working class, small farmers and oppressed in every way. No more to the right wing capitalist parties. Vote for working class parties.

The draft programme nowhere says that we want a socialist society, but only "a share of the Celtic Tiger" that, in another section, we say will not last. The programme says:

The Socialist Alliance fights for a new 32 County Socialist Ireland.

**Social Partnership**

The key argument socialists have to make is that the interests of the working class and the capitalist class are irreconcilable and that any programme that pretends they can be accommodated is in effect a means of subordinating the former to the latter.

The immediate roadblock to winning such an understanding at present is the shackle of the trade union movement to social partnership. Crystalline class opposition to partnership is essential. The proposed programme goes only some way to doing this. For example: we are unhappy about the demand "share the wealth!" Let's be honest, as socialists the amount of wealth we want to extract for the capitalist class is, well, nothing.

Remember Capitalism's phrase - we only want the earth! We don't have to put forward a revolutionary programme in order to avoid talk of sharing the fruits of our labour with the capitalists.

This is the ideology of partnership but with an argument about the precise shares to each class. We should start from the needs of the working class not what is "fair" between workers and bosses. The Socialist Alliance should be saying:

Against Social Partnership. Break the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness. Full support for solidarity to workers demanding a decent wage.

Full support for collective compensation for inflation. For a democratic trade union movement with a militant leadership drawn from, and accountable to, rank and file workers.

Scrap the Industrial Relations Act and all anti-union legislation. Tax the multinational s and Big Business.

**Corruption**

We are also unhappy about the demands around corruption. It is absolutely correct to point to the double standards and hypocrisy of the state and politicians reflected in the way the establishment has partitioned the state (Everyone will agree the seven days for Liam Lawler were a joke). However it is quite a different matter to demand the jailing of corrupt politicians and possibly make the party tainted in the draft.

We point out the hypocrisy, and do not oppose jailing them. If asked we will say they should go to jail - but they aren't the point. It is not the point of a programme.

As socialists our main focus should not be demagogic but the need for state solve corruption (because this is the point, not mere revenue). Our argument should be that only the working class can solve it.

The socialist programme is a call for the working class to take action, not the capitalist state. Where the latter makes reforms it is only because of the drive working class action. This action must go from moral outrage to political attack.

The dangers of demanding strong state action on "law and order" can be seen in the demands of the draft programme.

What increased state powers are required to "immediately" send corrupt politicians to jail? The Criminal Assets Bureau should be scrapped. It is an attack on civil liberties that requires the accused to prove innocence rather than the state proving guilt. We should not be demanding that it use its powers more forcefully.

We should be warning the working class that draconian legislation will never be used impartially and will more often be used against it rather than the ruling elites.

The Alliance should demand:

Nationalisation of the Banks under workers control.

Open the books of all companies and Agencies implicated in corruption.

For a workers investigation of corruption - expose all the lies and crooks!

Nationalisation under workers control of all firms found guilty of defrauding the Irish people.

**European Union**

The central political and economic project of the Irish capitalist class is the 'deepening and widening' inserted in the European Union - yet the draft programme doesn't mention it.

Social partnership, privatisation, taxation, etc., etc., are all justified and implemented through the recriminalisation of EU laws. The programme must make the working class aware of the socialist view.

We should say:

Oppose the EU of big business and privatisation.

The Socialist Alliance opposes the austerity programme of the Maastricht Treaty and EMU.

For a referendum on the Nice Treaty. For immediate withdrawal from the Partnership for Peace.

No to NATO, and no illusions in the UN. For an international policy of solidarity with the struggle of the world's working class.

**Health & Education**

On the questions of health and education we must demand:

Complete separation of Church and State.

End Church influence and control of hospitals and schools.

For workers and parents control of education with a voice for young people in their own education.

For health workers, control of hospitals and our service to the health of the people in the shape and delivery of services.

**Women**

On the question of women and abortion we must demand that:

Women must control their own bodies and fertility. Not the Church and not the State. For a woman's right to choose.

**Racism**

On the question of racism we cannot limit our programme to the right to asylum, which is now seen to be restricted to those fleeing only political oppression but not economic exploitation.

We should:

Oppose all racist immigration controls.

The **North of Ireland**

The central issue in politics in the north and in the south, in so far as the north is discussed, is the Good Friday Agreement. It is the central political concern of all workers in the north. Internationally the agreement flows from Clinton to Blair and the Irish capitalist class and its politicians have shouted their support for it.

The international speculative, George Soros, gave tens of millions to the Yes Referendum campaign.

Larry Goodman's company gave £400,000. Irish Life gave £75,000 and Marchion International Petroleum gave £100,000.

We would support a Yes campaign by just as clearly whether socialists support or oppose it. Is it a programme which doesn't win the vote which we should call for its full implementation. Or is it a threat, to be opposed?

The draft calls for the disarming of the RUC. Does this mean we don't call for disbandment of the RUC? Or that we don't think this is an issue?

Failure to call for disbandment would put socialists to the right of the Patten report from the ex-Tory minister, which at least promised a new police force.

The Socialist Alliance should state clearly that the GFA is to be opposed. We call for the establishment designed to strengthen imperialism control, harden partition and sectarianism and entrench the division of the north and south.

The Alliance should demand:

Oppose the Good Friday Agreement.

Self-determination for the Irish people. No to the Unionists Win Smash the new Stormont. Oppose the right wing policies coming from the sectarian Assembly. For complete British withdrawal from Ireland.

Disband the RUC. Scrap all repressive legislation.

For a real democratic alternative - an all-Ireland Workers Unity for a Socialist Republic.

This is the only democratic alternative to imperialism's plans. If comrades oppose these demands they cannot say what their political alternative is that is more democratic.

It they try to avoid the question of democracy by talking about 'socialism' we say there is no socialism without democracy. If they reply by talking about 'class politics' we say that democracy is a class question. To surrender democracy is to surrender socialism.

The comrades might say that the only hope to address precarious workers is to avoid political questions. What then is the point of socialism if we are not going to be political?

We wouldn't need political organisations but only good trade unions.

The Socialist Alliance would have abandoned politics and imported the unionist veto into the republic for decades. All without one unionist having opened their mouth!

The important point of the working class is accepted under the banner of unity. Division of workers in the north from the south is only a further demonstration of the sectionalism of the working class. Protestant and catholic unity in the north can only be effectively addressed in the context of achieving the unity of the whole Irish working class. That's why we must oppose partition.

As it stands the programme on the national question doesn't actually deal with it.

In the south this will be a giant hole in the programme of any Alliance. An Alliance in the north on this programme would simply be irrelevant if not reactionary because of the sectarian nature of politics that is drawn from it.

As we have said the method behind the draft programme is one of economism and no clearer example of avoiding politics is conceivable.

We must learn that the working class is not an economic class but that economic exploitation must have its economic struggles politicised to achieve socialism.

This is the definition of economism. The working class must first and foremost be the economic class that must itself become the ruling class of a new society.

Let us see the real issue, the issue of the people not the trade union secretary must be our focus.

Talk of 'class' politics that avoids politics is not socialism but mere militant trade unionism.
Limited imagination, but a useful start

Imagine - a socialist vision for the 1st century, by Tommy Sheridan and Alan McCombes, Rebel Inc, £7.99
Reviewed by Greg Tavendale

Prepping for the general election and marking a stage in the development of the Scottish Socialist Party, its two leading figures, Tommy Sheridan and Alan McCombes have written Imagine.

Its purpose they say is "to argue the intellectual and moral case for socialism and also to inspire people to get involved in the day-to-day fight to improve the lives of their families and communities." Unashamedly this is a book about Scotland for Scottish people. But it will also be a useful read beyond the borders of Scotland. Written in easy open way, at times you can hear the words being spoken in village halls and community centres to public meetings.

The book also contains a wealth of information, outlining how Scotland today is organised - at the expense of the many in the interests of a few. The book shows how multinationals make massive profits on the backs of Scottish workers, linked in to the global system of exploitation.

The book however centres not on what we are fighting against but what we are fighting for. It puts forward a vision of a socialist society run democratically, meeting the needs of working people, realising the full potential of our class.

We are constantly told by bourgeois politicians and the capitalist media that the "market" is supreme. We cannot change our society - we just have to learn how to live within it more efficiently.

The best government can do, they tell us, is ameliorate some of the worst effects of global forces. When car plants close, don't expect action to keep them open - but we will help you individually look for other jobs... making these changes. So it leaves open the question of what strategy is required.

Imagine is clear that a central step will be independence for Scotland. This has been attacked on two grounds - that independence would weaken the overall UK struggle, and that it is impossible to build socialism in one country.

The Socialist Party have argued that Sheridan says he would support an SNP government. This is clearly an exaggeration. Sheridan and McCombes argue that "socialists should be prepared to support (independence for Scotland) even on a non-socialist basis as far as the SNP go." But they are clear that this is "not subordinate to the struggle for socialism - rather it is a part of the process of destroying the illusion that Scotland's problems could be solved simply by leaving the Union flag for the St Andrew's flag." Leaving the UK working class only by establishing free relations can truly unity of the working class be built.

It is ironic, however, that in recognising that nationalism is a contradictory phenomenon with some positive elements they still ignore the question of the British relation as a whole. It is on this level the discussion and talking positively only of the struggle in "Scotland, Wales and the Busque County".

More importantly, whilst raising some of the problems, their demands for Scotland are contradictory. On the one hand they do not set out in a blueprint of a world-wide battle for socialism with the likelihood of similar victories taking place simultaneously elsewhere. But they paint a picture which is often in the framework of "normal" capitalist relations existing outside Scotland and elsewhere.

So they have little to say about how they would relate to the actual struggle internationally, in particular how English and Scottish workers should work together. They also limit some of their economic demands on the basis that multinationals will always be able to drain out the capital if threatened. They seem to believe that the British state will be powerless to stop the will of the Scottish people.

What manifesto for Socialist Alliance?

Bob Jenkins writing in SOC41 outlines some suggestions from the SSG for the SA Manifesto. Whilst I agree with the general conclusion - that what we need is an action programme of "transitional demands", Bob gets confused about the nature of the Socialist Alliance.

Throughout the article Bob raises the issue of the "united front". Each time he fails to mean something different - and each time misses the actual point!

Bob describes the SA as "a united front-type formation, a political alliance of socialist organisations and individuals". There are, of course, many who talk of the Alliance as a "united front", as much as they are using the words in their literal sense this is true, the Alliance is a "united" and it is a "front" behind which organisations can operate. But for Trotskyists the phrase has a deeper meaning. This is hinted at when Bob later talks of a "united front orientation...to the Labour Party itself, in practice its left wing and argues that we should use" A united front method where we try to link up with local councillors, ward parties, even a few MPs..."

The united front front from being a political alliance of socialist organisations is the exact opposite. It is the way that the socialists (communists) relate directly to the whole of social democracy (and not just its left wing or better individuals).

The united front method is an appeal, not for programmatic compromise within the Alliance, but for unity in action of the whole working class in the face of specific problems. So for Lenin and Trotsky this was about demanding unity in action from Kerensky in the practical defence of Petrograd against Kornilov, whilst political differences were not subordinated, as opposed to those, such as Stalin, who argued for a political alliance with the Mensheviks.

To fight for a united front implies no compromise on the political differences we have with social democracy but it is about relating to social democracy as a whole. In principle, with a very left wing left has been argued that this is the more radical than with social democracy's left wing. This is again a misunderstanding. Yes, there are a few councillors and MPs with whom we can work. But our work is not enhanced by accepting their limited overall framework but by putting in appeals for practical activity around issues on which complete unity of the class is needed.

The Socialist Alliance is different. It is not a united front in this classical sense but a bloc between organisations and individuals where a level of political trust and compromise is both possible and necessary. It is about accepting that weak as we are the different organisations involved necessarily have only partial understandings of the task at hand and that by collaborating we can strengthen our ability to develop a political response to the questions of the day.

For some it remains simply an electoral bloc. But in as much as it allows for a real sharing of power to us the potential to develop beyond that. Bob is right to recognise that potential "of becoming the basis for a future reorganisation of the workers movement and the political left". It is our duty to fight within the Alliance to realise this potential. This means practically fighting for a programme based on encouraging working people to struggle to satisfy their own needs. Not to present a list of abstract policies, minimum or maximum - but an action programme of anti-capitalist measures which, starting from existing levels of consciousness, can be taken up by the mass movement.

It is in this sense that we approach the general election - not as the be all and end all of our activity - but in as much as it is seen as a point where policies can legitimise or disqualify by the whole of society as a useful point in which to raise our programme and to strengthen our organisation further. It allows our continuing fight to realise our demands in practice.

Our case is not merely to get so many candidates elected, or such a degree of representation, but to ensure that on the day after the election we are qualitatively better placed to organise the working class back.
Socialist Party splits with key Scottish supporters

Alan Thornett

"ISM leaders desert the CWI" was the page 4 headline in the Socialist Party's paper The Socialist of January 19.

This was the Socialist Party's response to the decision of the International Socialist Movement (ISM) — formerly Scottish Militant Labour, and the key component of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) — to leave the Committee for a Workers International (CWI) the SSP's international organisation.

The article, by Hannah Sell, argues that the split has taken place on the basis of "a number of fundamental differences." It follows the SSP's release to the media on the same subject.

Two of these statements denounce the leaders of the SSP, Alan McCombes and Tommy Sheridan, for:

- Handling over the resources of the Scottish section (of the CWI) to the SSP
- Failing to recognise that the SSP is a left reformist party with a left reformist programme.
- Failing to remain organised as revolutionaries inside such a party.
- Abandoning the struggle for Marxism in its modern form, Trotskyism.
- Failing to see the entire history of the of the ISM in the USSR.
- Using methods (in the negotiations with the SSP to join the SSP) which bear more resemblance to those used by the Labour party right wing against us in the past than to the methods of Marxism.
- Proposing the adoption of internal procedures within the SSP (internal referendums on constitutional issues) which are the methods of the right wing.
- Proposing a coalition with the SNP.
- Calling Cuba socialists.
- Abandoning the struggle for internationalism.

The leaders of the SSP have issued a detailed rebuttal of the charges made by the SSP. These rejoinders demonstrate that the accusations against them are either completely baseless or at best a massive distortion of the real facts — which are well known to the Socialist Party leadership either directly or through their comrades inside the SSP.

This split has been a long time coming. The deepening rift between Peter Taaffe's Socialist Party and its Scottish organisation goes back to the decision to form the SSP out of the Scottish Socialist Movement, and other groupings, in 1994.

Taaffe was hostile to the formation of the SSP, although the public position of the Socialist Party was to support it — it could not do otherwise.

He had briefly opened up the Militant to work with broader forces at the time of the formation of the SLP in 1995 — the change of name from Militant to the Socialist Party was a part of that.

It was not a short-lived shift and he quickly retreated and took the Socialist Party back into its bunker.

The SP began calling for a "new mass party" of the working class (which was not on the cards at the that time of course and is still not) in a propaganda way. At the same time they refused the kind of collaboration with other left forces which would be the only way to work towards such a party.

Line opposed

Those in Scottish Militant Labour never accepted the "back to the bunker" line, and continued to work to build the Scottish Socialist Alliance — whilst in England the SP allowed the illusions they had set up to wither and become semi-dormant.

The announcement of the creation of the Scottish Parliament after Labour came to office in 1997 with a form of proportional representation (as well as the political implications of new Labour) was the spur which brought the SSP into existence in September, 1998.

Taaffe realised this development from the SLP in 1995 — the change of name from Militant to the Socialist Party was a part of that.

The overall goal which we pursue is the amalgamation of all human beings from every form of exploitation, oppression, alienation and violence.

Socialism must be the control of ordinary people, democratic, pluralist, multi-party, feminist, ecologist, anti-imperialist and internationalist. It must abolish wage slavery and national oppression.

Socialism on the web

Socialist Outlook web site: www.labournet.org.uk

International Socialist Group: www.3bh.org.uk/15G

Where we stand

AS A NEW CENTURY BEGINS, the battles of the last century main to be won. millions of women and men are taking part in mobilising against the evils of capitalism and the bureaucratic dictatorships. This reflects the fact that humanity face with dangers of ecological, military, social and economic devastation faces millions of people.

Revolutionaries recognise the barbaric nature of capitalism. In a situation where the majority of the social democrats and communist parties provide socialist solutions is becoming clearer, the task of creating new alternatives remains ahead.

Socialist Outlook is written and sold by socialists committed to this struggle. We are the British supporters of the world wide Marxist organisation, the Fourth International.

We stand for the revolutionary transformation of society and a pluralist, socialist democracy world wide.

The working class is the backbone of society. They are the exploited and oppressed.

The working class must and must be the driving force of action in order to gradually acquire the experience and consciousness needed to defeat capitalism at the decisive moment of crisis.

The movements of women, lesbians and gay men, and black people to fight their particular forms of oppression make an essential contribution to the struggle for a different society. They are organised around the principle "None so fit to break the chains as those who wear them." By building internationally revolutionary organisations in each country and a revolutionary international, we aim to guide and encompass the global interests of the workers and oppressed.

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

If you think this is worth fighting for, and you like what you read in Socialist Outlook, why not join us? Drop a line to us at PO Box 1109, London NW 2 2UJ, and we'll be in touch.

ISM are falsely accused of abandoning the struggle for Trotskyism (and no, it's not THAT Militant!)
STEEL, VAUXHALL: STOP THE ROT!

FIGHT NOW FOR JOBS!

AS CORUS, the Anglo-Dutch firm that took over the remnants of British Steel in a 1999 merger, unveils plans to sack 6,000 British steelworkers, its share price shot up.

Nothing could more clearly demonstrate the ludicrous New Labour notion of a “partnership” between workers and the companies that employ them.

Corus bosses have never made any secret of the fact that they are not in the business of making steel, but making money – for their shareholders.

That's why they are determined not just to get rid of their plants at Llanwern and Ellesw Vale, but to ensure that nobody else takes them over to produce steel, which would then be in competition with Corus.

And it's why Corus bosses celebrated the 1999 merger with a massive £800 million handout to shareholders, clearing out the company’s reserves, only to follow up with a continuous series of redundancies and cutbacks as they attempt to maximise profits – at the expense of their employees.

The pattern has been exactly the same as we have seen in the car industry and elsewhere: management come to timid union officials demanding concessions and redundancies in exchange for a promise to safeguard a smaller number of jobs. The unions concede – and a few months later, the bosses come back for more.

That is how the British steel industry has dwindled from its previous 300,000 workforce 30 years ago to just 22,000 if the new wave of redundancies go through.

The impact on local areas around the steel plants will be brutal. Whole communities will be devastated as well-paid, apparently stable jobs disappear.

More to come

Nor is there any chance that the latest round of redundancies is the last. Corus chief executive, accountant Brian Moffat, may be shrutting around in a hard hat talking about drawing "a line in the sand", but steel unions have been told that Corus will invest no new money in its surviving British plants, making it likely that more closures will follow – especially if these sackings are not resisted.

Hypocritical Labour ministers bleat that they were not consulted in advance on the closures. But they know that they have already rejected the only policy that could make a difference to the company's decision – to renationalise the British steel industry, without compensation to the shareholders who have already gobbled up billions in government handouts since the plants were flogged off by Margaret Thatcher.

Unions who have mounted no concerted opposition to steel bosses since the historic national pay strike in the first year of the Thatcher government have called no mass demonstration to challenge the redundancies, and avoided any call to occupy the affected plants. They have talked only vaguely about industrial action.

Instead they have apparently been discussing among themselves and with the government a new “package” of concessions that would cut Corus losses, and reduce the numbers of jobs lost – again at the expense of Corus workers.

Europe-wide

This would be a monumen
tal error, especially at a time when the Vauxhall workers have shown the possibility of mobilising mass support and tapping in to solidarity in a Europe-wide fight for jobs (see page 6).

And with the prospect of an election looming, it is also the best time to pile pressure on the government.

While British unions have dithered, and even scandalously called for some of the steel redundancies to be “shared” with other countries, the Dutch steel unions have offered a positive lead, pledging that they will not take work diverted from British plants.

A real fight could be launched, side by side with the Vauxhall workers. The possibility of building international solidarity depends upon a firm stand being taken here in defence of the threatened jobs.

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