100 Socialist Alliance candidates in biggest left challenge for decades

United in fighting Labour's Tory policies

For campaign coverage, meet more candidates, and a reply to Guardian's Polly Toynbee
SEE INSIDE, pages 6-7
**Private claws sink deeper into NHS**

**John Lister**

Any lingering doubts that a large chunk of the new money lavishly injected into the National Health Service in Gordon Brown’s last budget will be funnelled directly into the pockets of the big hospitals will have been dispelled by the latest government announcements.

With a failure of publicity, Health Secretary Alan Milburn unveiled plans for another 29 hospital developments when he announced there were two snags:

- **Moss**, if not all of the new hospitals will be funded and run by the private sector, and leased to the NHS for a 50-year contract under the controversial Private Finance Initiative (PFI) dreamt up by the Tories.
- And – basically of the complexity and bureaucracy of exciting PFI schemes – none of them will be up and running by 2006 at the earliest; that’s only not after the coming election, but probably after the next election as well!

The second snag, a package of hospital schemes carry a headline cost of £3.1 billion – including four (St Helen’s, North Staffordshire, Leicestershire and Birmingham) in excess of £200m.

The new University Hospital Birmingham, at a costing £291m, will be by far the most expensive hospital ever built in the NHS, but in each case the actual cost will be far higher.

The Trust involved will be required to fork out monthly lease payments over the next 30 years which guarantee the profits of the bank, building firm and second-tier profit-taking consortium.

Some of the PFI projects, following on the 38 already approved with the Department of Health, will bring the total of privately-funded schemes under £7 billion, all of this coming in at a time of inroads into NHS annual budgets.

New Labour boasts that it is the biggest ever hospital building scheme in the NHS: but when the Tory government in the early 1980s embarked on its Hospital Plan for England and Wales, all of the investment was carried by the Exchequer and the completed buildings belonged to the NHS. Indeed many of these assets are now being dumped to help pay for the massive cost of PFI projects.

**Concessions**

Milburn has been obliged to make a number of concessions in his efforts to win public acceptance of PFI hospitals.

- Unlike the first wave of schemes which involved massive reductions in numbers of available hospital beds, making PFI a by-word for service restraints, the new plans now claims the latest batch of new hospitals will expand bed numbers by a total of 3,000 – although no firm details exist to confirm this will be the case.

PFI schemes tend to inflate in cost and reduce in bed numbers as the process of negotiation winds down towards a final contract.

- Milburn has also broken from previous policy, under which the NHS has become a permanent provider in or rented private hospitals.

He says now that in the 29 new schemes included, the NHS will become a permanent provider in or rented private hospitals.

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- And after stubborn resistance by UNISON support staff at University College Hospital, London (UCLH), who fought plans to hand them over to private contractors as part of the PFI, plans for a new hospital, Milburn announced last year that future PFI schemes could separate the privatisation of hospital services from the private ownership of the building.

But as the Dudley Hospital strikers have found, this still appears to exist on paper, and is not binding on those who – as in the Dudley Group of Hospitals – may just dig in and insist on retention of the profession.

So keen is New Labour in the private provision of NHS care that the capital legislation which was forced through Parliament in advance of the next election proposes a further massive extension of PFI into the area of primary care through the provision of GP surgeries and health centres.

The Health and Social Care Bill includes a plan to “unlock £1 billion of new which provides services free of charge over a 4-year period,” through the extension of “NHS Local Finance Trust” (NIFT). This is a crock of unadulterated ‘local’ government.

But of this £1 billion, less than £77m, or some 0.7 per cent, will be contributed by the Treasury: the remainder will be raised from private sources.

NHS LEIT will be set up as a ‘limited company’, and those investing can obviously expect a generous and guaranteed dividend.

So while an ever-increasing proportion of health care will be delivered in privately-owned, profit-seeking NHS hospitals, or even by private medical companies and private hospitals through the “Concordat” between the Health Department and Milburn, there is also a growing role for the private sector in the provision of so-called “intermediate” (“nursing” or “acute”) beds.

And the hard line which has distinguished the NHS – that all health services are free at point of use – from local government social services – which have been subject to means-tested charges – is about to be blurred by another part of the Health and Social Care Bill.

This little-discussed legislatively related part of the Bill, trusts, combining health and social services in each area. Not only do Care Services Trusts raise huge issues for the future of public control in the affected services, but they also mean that the first time NHS bodies will be levying charges from patients for care they receive.

Any doubts that this will be the case should have been dispelled by the refusal of Milburn and the Blair government to implement the proposals from the Royal College of Nursing and long-term care of the elderly.

**Charges**

It called for charges for such care to be scrapped, and both “nursing” and “social” care to be funded from taxation, at a cost of about £3 billion a year.

New Labour in England is changing these policies, future charging and privatisation into areas of the NHS even after it had entered to treat.

The Health and Social Care Bill now has completed its passage through the Commons and is being granted rapidly through the House of Lords to reach the statute books before the election.

It is a far better that some of the Blairite MPs who nodded through with barely a thought could tell us what is in the Bill, other than the controversial plan to scrap the patients’ statutory watchdog bodies, the local Community Health Councils.

What is clear is that New Labour has used its massive majority and its mandate to roll back 25 years of Tory cuts in the NHS to force through the biggest extension of privatisation in our most public sector public service.

If nothing is ‘done to change these policies, future generations will still be lumbered with the bills, long after Milburn has retired.

**Campaign for Palestinian Rights**

**STOP ISRAEL’S WAR CRIMES**

**END THE OCCUPATION**

Saturday 17th March

Assembly 11am Hyde Park (nearest tube Marble Arch)

Rally at Trafalgar Square

Speakers

Tony Benn MP, George Galloway MP, Michelle Thomson MP, Ewan MacAskill, Ken Cameron (former BFI Gen Sec.)

**Blair's plan: a 2-tier school system**

**TONY BLAIR’s plans for education are again to be a cornerstone of his strategy for winning General Election. They have delighted the right wing of the party, who hailed Labour’s Green Paper as the "death of the comprehensive".

Labour’s press supremo Alastair Campbell summed up the government’s contempt for public standards: "We think the country is ready for a new 2-tier system.

Under her new Labour – and Education Secretary Rosemary Shephard – "real nursery education will be back in nursery schools and primary pupils will no longer have to sit primary school tests in settings that are clearly intended to measure secondary schools, which will have powers to select up to 30% of their pupils. By 2006, almost half of all secondary schools will be "specialist" schools, and receive extra funding to become a new 2-tier system.

The government wishes to spend up to £50,000 on to pay for specialist status. But a large part of the extra funding will go to the most hard-pressed schools, especially those in more deprived areas, will remain firmly at the bottom of the league tables.

This is a further lock in the race to the bottom. More staff at comprehensive schools - running morale at a time when the most deprived parts of the country are facing cuts to their budgets or being forced to recruit and retain sufficient staff.

To make matters worse, Blair also wants to bring more religious-based and "voluntary organisations" to take over failing schools.

All these have led education authorities to conspire to bring in a horrible law to pay for the average increase in teacher’s pay demand, under a mountain of assessments, paperwork and a chain of league tables and performance indicators and, worried that we have no one to blame but ourselves, to cast around for a growing list of subjects, Labour has now given the green light to what its second form would be even worse for students.

People voted Labour in 1997 to bring an end to the中小学, health education and other public services. Now if it turns a Labour vote in may into a policy more extreme on education, the service will be correspondingly worse.

However strong votes for general education in teaching unions in various parts of the country are, they indicate that the level of resistance to Labour’s policies is constantly rising. But if it wants to see a real upsurge, the National Union of Blunket and co. have come to expect.**
Farm crisis as Labour backs globalisation

The countryside is under siege, and thousands of animals are being slaughtered and burned, as the foot and mouth outbreak spreads inexorably further across Britain.

The restrictions on movement of people and animals—now extended to Wales by Tony Blair—to scrap the option of a snap election in April, and to help underlined the desired "footsoldier" factor. The crisis was not created by a relatively generous budget as part of Labour's pre-election preparation.

This latest blow to the dwindling number of British farmers and rural communities comes after confirmation that sales prices and stocks collapse in the market price of pigs, sheep and cattle.

This had brought a crisis even before the first outbreak of foot and mouth was confirmed.

Figures for foot and mouth in Wales have fallen to just over £4,000, and in Scotland the total is £25,000.

This will deeply undermine the distinct rich picking of EU subsidies are just a fond memory for many small and medium-sized farms.

Exodus

This dire financial situation, with farm prices hammering away at the living standards and choking power of a handful of profiteering super-market chains, is likely to lead to an exodus from farming and a frightening rate of suicide among farmers.

Against this background the hollow claim of the so-called Countryside Alliance to represent the needs and demands of the rural population has been starkly exposed.

The protest march they had threatened to mobilise on London later this month—and which had been condemned because of the foot and mouth epidemic—was nothing to do with television, but money, the loss of the workforce, the closure of village shops and post offices, or the absence of public transport or other key services in rural areas.

It was purely and simply against the abolition of fox-hunting, a pursuit cherished by the rural rich.

The countryside has become a reservoir of low pay, underemployment and deprivation for working families. This is the poker mining and many other traditional industries have also left large pockets of working class communities in "urban" areas, facing long journeys if they are to travel to rural areas.

But for the wealthy, with their large houses, holiday homes, leisure pursuits and 4-wheel drives, the countryside remains a playground.

Polarisation

The polarisation between rural rich and rural poor has widened with the privatisation of bus services and the collapse of much of the rural economy.

And as the squeeze tightens on agriculture it is only the bigger farmers who are able to survive and the margins to ride out the rough times and wait for a future return to profitability.

Yet domination of agriculture by these big farms, linked in the development of agribusiness at national and international level, has been a factor in the eruption and spread of foot and mouth disease.

Foot and mouth, a disease of feeding and food production involves the routine transport of countless thousands of live animals from one end of Britain to the other. Many are now taken huge distances for slaughter in the reduced national and international market, following the closure of much of the network of smaller, more local abattoirs in order to cut costs.

Not only are there issues here of animal welfare, but there are huge financial and social issues of how the disease is spread. The whole problem of how the disease is spread needs to be maximised and there is a health problem in one area can rapidly spread to other areas throughout the country—especially if it is a disease as infectious as foot and mouth.

Bourgeois page? Socialist should not be indifferent to plight of rural population.

There is no sense of the rural poor and the small farmers facing ruin in the current crisis.

Along with the Socialist Alliance, we call for policies that address the underlying cause of the countryside, which in most cases flow from the operation of New Labour's new-found business friends—the banks, agribusiness, and the supermarkets.

Alternative platform of policies includes:

1. Big grants for small farmers to switch to organic production, where margins are higher and food is healthier.

2. Incentives for small farmers to form more cooperatives (as some are already doing) to share and rebalance their costs and negotiate collectively with retailers and food process companies.

3. Incentives to reduce the transport and import of food that can be grown locally, thus reducing traffic pollution, and threatened animal welfare.

4. Workers—state and national—of the feed manufacturers whose use of animal protein triggered the BSE crisis, but who have never paid even a pence in compensation for the dead stock.

5. A steeply progressive turnover tax on multinational agribusinesses and supermarkets.

6. Stop the regulation and inspection of health and safety procedures at all levels of agricultural production and processing.

7. A big increase in the minimum wage.

8. An increase in local tax, but impose a windfall tax on the oil companies which have been creating billions from rampant crude oil prices.

9. Investments in a local and widespread public transport services using buses.

10. Investment in active and diverse rural communities— including community facilities, youth clubs, schools, and environmental projects.

Their Budget—and Ours

GORDON BROWN's Budget is to be unveiled the day after this issue of Socialist Outlook goes to press. We are not privy to the details of Brown's policies and economics, nor the nitty-gritty of economic calculations, but the pressures on the Iron Chancellor as he tots up the figures have been increasingly obvious.

There are four key factors that will be weighing especially heavily on his mind:

1. Brown has been so tight with public spending that the Exchequer is running an unsustain surplus various estimates set at £13 billion to as high as £40 billion. It seems this second figure also includes the proceeds of Brown's "windfall" auction of mobile phone franchises—money, which to the intense annoyance of public sector workers and pensioners, he has already insisted will not be spent but used to reduce the national debt.

2. But the same fanatical prudence with public spending, which left Labour clinging tenuously to Tony cash limits for health, education and other public services for its first three years in office, has left a long-term impact. Brown's belated conversion last summer to the frugality of record increases in health spending may well have come too late to revive the flagging NHS.

The authoritative Public Finance magazine has echoed the views expressed in the recent letter from teaching hospital finance chiefs to NHS chief exec, Sir Nigel Crisp—leaked to Channel 4 News—warning that they still do not have access to the money to meet government targets. Other hospitals and health authorities share the same view.

Education, too, is under the cost, and the shortage of skilled nursing and other professional staff in the NHS is mirrored by the growing shortages of school teachers. The potential for further education and training, and the deficiencies of government policy—upgrading expansion and squeezing resources—take their toll.

And local authorities up and down the country are once again looking for cuts and savings to balance the books, as New Labour's spending limits make it almost two decades of uninterrupted cuts in jobs and services.

3. While Brown would normally be happy to tighten public sector work in a deepening economic crisis, Labour's core support—fear of the looming election.

Expectations have been raised that he would pull out at least a few goodies from the famous red briefcase to placate hard-suffering workers. The advance announcement of an increase in the basic national minimum wage from a pathetic £3.75 to a footie £4.10 is scarcely going to set the inner cities alight with celebration.

But Brown also faces an unusual problem for a Labour Chancellor at this stage in the pecking order. He knows that baring a cosmic catastrophe Labour will be in office after the coming election, and that he will again have to manage the affairs of British capitalism to the satisfaction not only of British employers but also of global capital.

Only a week ago, the International Monetary Fund, an institution that pressed-ganged Harold Wilson's government into public ownership in its public services in 1976, published a highly critical report charging even the limited increases in public spending Brown announced last year.

We can only guess how far each of these factors will influence the eventual shape of the budget: but for socialists it is clear that very different a disaster would apply.

The Socialist Alliance has published an alternative budget for working people, which calls on Brown to spend the full £12 billion surplus on boosting public services.

The Alliance calls for a complete shake-up of the taxation system— including a 15% levy on all company revenues—so that direct taxes on businesses and the rich become the predominating source of revenue, while repressive taxes on ordinary working class families are scrapped altogether.

"It calls for the end to the "race" on National Insurance contributions, which would raise an extra £5 billion a year, and for employers to pay...."
Tube privatisation

Strikes show light at end of the tunnel!

Greg Tucker

Prime Minister Tony Blair's action taken by RMT and Aslef tube workers was magnified when RMT members defied court ruling that had decided their strike was unlawful. As a result, Aslef picket lines bringing London Underground to a halt.

Whilst the strikes were substantially suspended this is not the end, merely a breathing space. RMT members are being re-balloted to try to "legitimise" their dispute with the government. Backtracking on their deal with Kiley and Livingstone all the issues remain unresolved.

The tube workers' day of action was significant in a number of ways. Firstly it underlined the importance of unity between the rail unions.

Under Mick Rix, Aslef has changed direction. Previous General Secretary Len B梗on used to "play the market" to benefit directors at the expense of other workers. Now Aslef is opposing Prescom's Private Public Partnership (PPP) action as being possible. Without either RMT or Aslef this dispute would have faltered. With unity on the picket lines the need for a single industrial union is given concrete expression.

Secondly it showed that the law could be defied successfully. The 2,000 RMT members who struck did so in the face of considerable pressure from management.

I n addition to the obli- nation "repudiation" letter from Jimmy Mitchell's UNISON, other union leaders were threatened with all sorts of disciplinary action up to the sack and all time!

In the end, whilst the union was fixed by the courts the threats against individual workers had to be lifted.

Again unity was the key. LUL senior managers had been drawn up a list of a dozen RMT activities they wanted to send to prison for contempt of the injunction — they were forced to back down because Aslef refused to talk separately from the RMT until they did so.

It is important to understand the legal basis for blocking the RMT dispute. It was not Thatcher's anti-union laws but a 1999 Employment Relations Act that was used to rule it unlawful — on the grounds that the RMT had not identified how many of its members were being called out to strike, by grade at every individual workplace.

This is another intolerable loophole that is the right to strike that threatens all workers — Labour's anti-union laws.

Thirdly despite their subsequent backtracking, courtesy of the Treasury we are told, the fact that the government appeared to do a deal with Kiley and Livingstone was a real victory for the strike.

Whatever our misgivings over such a deal, Livingstone, shows it is possible to defeat this government.

Solid strike action can win. This message needs to be pressed home in the RMT tube-re-ballot and in the other national dispute over rail safety being waged.

On the picket lines we showed solidarity from the Socialist Alliance was greeted warmly. The unfortunates divisions of the Greater London Authority election campaign are no longer an obstacle.

Solidarity with further tube strikes will clearly be a key part of Socialist Alliance work in London in the run up to the general election.

The Socialist Alliance work around the re-nationalisation of the railways is already bearing fruit. At a recent meeting of RMT train crew representatives none of the one hundred and twenty or so activists present was prepared to stand up to defend the ballot.

In contrast a number of the delegations had been out working with the Socialist Alliance. As a direct result the rail unionists have launched their own mass picketing campaign to "take back the track."

The train crew meeting was called to discuss progress in the national dispute over the safety role of guard and drivers.

Railtrack and the operating companies have been trying to sidetrack the dispute into "working party" discussions. RMT Assistant General Secretary Vernon Hince, has been going along with this, no doubt as his contribution to the Labour election campaign. But rank and file opposition has blocked this approach.

A strike ballot should be called in the immediate future — only some preparatory work has been completed to overcome the new legal hurdles.

The aim remains to try to link in with the tube dispute - at the latest, strike action could be required by any May 3rd election date.

It is clear that action needs to be urgently called. In the run up to the general election the government is vulnerable and the operating companies have been seriously weakened by the continuing crashes as the railways lurch from crisis to crisis.

In the first years of privatisa- tion millions were windfall profits. The managers who bought the trains and tracks companies saw a profit of £17 million within months of "investing" about £100,000 each. Railtrack was making over £1 million a day in profit - profits increased because they effectively stopped doing any real track renewal for two years.

But now the doctored come home to roost. As passengers have been frightened off by the sheer chaos of failing services the companies have been squeezed.

Among others, Virgin and Stagecoach report massive losses. Railtrack appears to be technically insolvent. A national dispute now would hit the companies whilst they are exposed.

You would have hoped that such a situation would have been seized upon by the Labour government to implement its promises to return the railways to public ownership and control.

With a bankrupt Railtrack, and operating companies making losses at the end of their franchise period - all the problems of the "costing too much to re-nationalise" could now be dealt with.

And it would be popular - the public clearly wants the railways taken away from people who have shown they are unfit to be trusted.

But far from it! Instead Labour is giving up even longer franchises to the operating companies, and is propelling up Railtrack, looking sympathetic at their request for a £2 billion bail-out.

Four years ago that sort of money was deemed too expensive to use on re-nationalisation - it had to be targeted on schools and hospitals were we were told.

Today the government can contemplate giving this money over with not one share coming back into public hands.

A strategy for securing the future of public rail transport must now be developed, to include:

- A political campaign for hands off the tube and the immediate rail re-nationalisation (under workers and users control);
- Breaking with a Labour Party unwilling to take even basic measures to defend the rail industry;
- And support for those parties (such as the Socialist Alliance) who are prepared to make the case for a publicly owned, properly funded, integrated public transport system.

Vauxhall: it's all gone quiet

Vauxhall workers fighting to save jobs from the axe have now staged a successful series of strikes - but the action so far has been restricted to short stoppages. There has been no attempt by the Luton stewards to act on their radical policy statement, which declared that "This is our plant. General Motors of Europe have given us the right to call it theirs.

There is a real danger that with a number of new jobs on offer at a neighbouring plant, and in the absence of a fighting lead and occupation of the Luton plant, the early militancy of the Vauxhall struggle could be dissipated, and the remaining jobs could be lost without further resistance.
New “Barbed Wire Britain” network to stop immigration detention

Bill MacKeith
A UK Anti Detention Network was set up in January to try to halt the massive increase in immigration detention in Britain. It is made up of local campaigns in the neighbourhood of places of detention, such as prisons and detention centres, and national bodies such as the Coalition of Anti deportation Campaigns, the Movement for the Welfare of immigrants and the Campaign to Defend Asylum Seekers.

The Network will have its second meeting on 10th March to discuss the demonstration in Cambridge on the anniversary of the opening of the 400-placeOakington "reception centre" outside the city. A proposal to adopt the name (and web-site address) "Barbed Wire Britain" will be taken.

Why another network?

In the run-up to the general election the government seems determined to prove that it is tougher on asylum seekers than any other party ever had been. It is said explicitly that so many people should be locked up, without charge or conviction, but without escape, that any line of argument is given, without the say so of a court of law, and without any time limit whatsoever.

In these respects all detainees — including those in free-assocation regime of detention centres — are treated worse than people convicted of a crime.

The vast majority of immigration detainees are people who are seeking political asylum in this country and a large proportion of them have escaped traumatic situations only to be met with abuse, not a safe haven, once arrived in this country.

It is estimated that on arrival an asylum seeker stands a 1 in 8 chance of being sent straight to detention. There is no national network dedicated to opposing immigration detention, a government policy which is arguably a cornerstone of immigration control and denial of the human right to asylum, and a case of institutional racism if ever there was one.

The Network’s programme includes

A series of demonstrations-locally organized but with outside support at all major places of detention (basically, those listed elsewhere in this report) — including construction of big names.

Local public meetings to publicise the issue.

A national media launch in mid March

A website to be set up in March

Publication of a map of places of detention in the UK.

Building on the local campaigns for a national profile which may include events in London, open letters, a mega concert with big names.

Going to see detainees and offering support through the local group of the Association of Visitors to Immigration Detainees (AVID).

Please forward any further suggestions to the contact’s list below.

The government’s building programme

Detention centres being built include Yarl’s Wood (or Yarlwood) (900 places) near the villages of Thurlmere and Clapham north-east of Bedford, and a new centre at Harmondsworth by Heathrow airport (550 places).

Like all detention centres, Yarl’s Wood will be a profit-making enterprise; it will be run by Group 4, which along with the US company Wackenhut runs the UK’s detention centres.

In addition the government has recently doubled the number of immigration detainees in ordinary prisons.

A wing at each in Bully Hill (near Oxford) and Liverpool, 50 in Holme House (Stockton-on-Tees), and 27 at Gateside.

Apart from Rochester, Haslar and Lindholme, these prisons have only recently been “designated” by the Home Office and are expected to take the bulk of the recent increase in numbers detained.

Of the total detained, 71 were in one and two in some 40 other prisons around the country.

Two prisons that do not feature in the figures above-Cardiff and Elmsley in Kent—are nevertheless included in the Home Office’s list of its current “detention estate”, of which the total capacity is 1,462 beds.

Detainees share cells with convicted prisoners

The Home Office says most immigration detainees in prisons are held in separate wings.

But in Winchester, Elmsley and in most places where numbers designated as small, immigration detainees are held in the same wings as prisoners on remand and awaiting sentence.

An asylum seeker recently released from HM Prison Belmarsh in south-east London reports that, contrary to what the Home Office says, asylum seekers are held on the same wing as convicted criminals, with whom they have to share cells.

They are locked in when convicted criminals are let out to have exercise or watch TV, sometimes for 24 hours a day.

They are limited to one 30-minute session a day, cannot receive faxes or phone calls from their solicitor, and can make only one 5-minute phone call a day.

When released they are not issued with keys to their cell, are dealt with as prison authorities might state that only remand or convicted prisoners are entitled.

Why “Barbed Wire Britain”?

The Network is named after a series of European conferences publicly discussing the spread of immigration detention across Europe.

The first major conference was held in Oxford last September (see Socialist Outlook No. 38).

Now the 94-page conference report “Barbed Wire Europe Conference Against Detention”“ is available through the Network — see contacts at end of story.

It gives a country-by-country rundown on the current situation and struggles to end detention.

Help

If you are near one of these places of detention and would like to join the campaign of opposition (or if you know someone else who would) please phone the Network on 01865 558145, or e-mail bmk@iol.com.

Copies of the “Barbed Wire Europe” report mentioned above are available for £5 (post included) from 40 Richmond Terrace, Oxford OX1 2JL.

March 10
March Against Racism and Police Brutality
Assembly 12 noon, Tavistock police station, North London

March 15
PUBLIC MEETING
Stand up to Barbara Hecht
Speakers: Louise Christian (TA Councillor, Harrow) Roy Mowery (Greenpeace, London), Refugee & Human Rights organisations,
Sos, Furniture Hall Community Centre, Moodley Road, Crouch End N8

March 16
OXFORD Socialist Alliance Film show: Ken Loach will speak about his recent release ‘My Name Is Joe’
Followed by a showing of the film, Ultimate Picture Palace, Jonson St 7.00pm (join us)

March 17
DEMONSTRATION for Pakistanis Rights
Assembly Tien Hyde Park
Tony Benn MP; George Galloway MP; AVSC, Pakistanis-delegates to Britain; Bruce Kent, Ken Cameron (former BNP Gen Sec)

March 19
Committee of Oxford Asians seekers Public meeting
7.30pm, Cowley toll, Red Lion Square, WCO

Tony Benn MP; Save Hoylake; Louise Christian, Andy Gidtsh, general secretary PNG, Paul Hobson, Roma Europe

March 27
Liverpool Socialist Alliance Rally
Friends Meeting House, Euston Road with Louise Christian, Bengt others

March 31
MANCHESTER DEMONSTRATION
Heads Off Asylum Seekers! Keep Razum out of the General Election!
Saturday 31 March
Assembly 12.00 noon (leaving 12.30pm proceed), All Saints, Oxford Road, Manchester
Get involved in the planning of this demonstration. Phone: 0161 248 1377 (Tony Openhour) or 0161 883 7552 (Mark Kremet) or Email: moruk@frelondon.org.uk, or moruk.openhour@pop3.jagmail.org.uk
Daring to dream that things could be better

John Lister
UNITING sections of the left in what will be the last challenge to Labour for over half a century was a crucial decision for many members and critics. There was a widespread sense that the national press launch of the Socialist Alliance campaign was eagerly awaited, and that Labour activists would have to respond to it.

This sense of urgency is quite understandable. The Socialist Alliance is a genuine force in British politics, and it is clear that the Labour Party cannot afford to ignore this new political movement.

However, there are some important differences between the Socialist Alliance and the traditional Labour Party. One of the key differences is that the Socialist Alliance is a genuine political force, while the Labour Party is an established political party.

It is important for Labour activists to understand these differences, and to work to ensure that the Socialist Alliance is not simply a sideshow, but a genuine political force that can be taken seriously.

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Socialists looking to down Hill

Leading RMT rail union activist and ISG member, Greg Tucker, will be standing as the Socialist Alliance candidate in Streatham against transport minister Keith Hill.

“Our campaign is about articulating the anger of local people and helping to organise the defence of our communities from the worst of Labour’s policies.

“As well as raising the vision of an alternative society free from the iron rule of profit, I believe we can make a real difference to peoples lives today.

“I still remember how angry I was sitting in the eleven plus at how our class was being artificially divided into success and failure – whole futures seemingly decided there and then.

“Speaking with a group of angry parents last week, for all their anger and frustration, no more selection? the situation has actually got worse.

“One after another they explained how they could not afford local secondary schools prepared to take their children.

“Theirs sons and daughters had had to sit entrance exams each school they applied for – up to six times in some cases. No wonder their kids felt alienated – branded as failures again and again.

“The parents’ demands were clear: to oppose, that the Labour council build comprehensive schools to replace the ones they have recently closed and sold off

Conducting a fight: Greg Tucker for conversion into yuppy flats, and an end to selection and the domination of religious schools across the borough.

”Unlike Tony and his cronies they cannot pick and choose which better funded school to send their kids to, miles away from home.

“We will be championing their demands, promoting their campaign for better than bog-standard provision for all.

“Talking to local tenants, the sell-off of council housing remains a threat despite the Labour council’s plans. In contrast we will be arguing the case for new council house building and a massive improvement strategy.

”After all council rents nationally subsidise the government to the tune of £1 billion – let’s use that money in the interests of tenants and the homeless.

“At the same time thousands locally face being made homeless because of the contracting out of the housing benefit service. Despite losing over 50,000 letters of inquiry and complaints, and threatening to send out renewal forms when individual grants were expired the private con- factors, Cofton, have been given an extra £4 million by Labour – to keep them in business.

“The Socialist Alliance has been campaigning for Capital to be thrown out. It is only one further example of how privatisation is turning peoples lives.

“But, for me, and the reason I’m standing against Keith Hill, there is no better example of this than on the rail and tube. Hill used to work for the NUR, transport union of the RMT, and the constituency Labour party remains supported by RMT.

“But despite his historic links Hill has done nothing whatsoever to defend rail workers. Neither has he been at the forefront of the government’s campaign to sell off the underground.

“Without the RMT Hill would not be an MP and I aim to remind him of this fact every day of the campaign.

“It is clear that Londoners remain overwhelmingly against any idea of privatising the tube.

“The case for renationalisation of the railways is reinforced every day by the utter chaos caused by Railtrack and the train operating companies.

“In contrast to Hill, we will be pressing firmly for the action taken by tube and rail workers in defence of safety.

NEW!

This ISG pamphlet is a contribution to the debate within the Socialist Alliance on the policies needed to challenge New Labour and unite a broad movement of the left.

Now available for just £2.00 including post & packaging from ISG, c/o PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU.

Building the alternative to Blair.

Policies for change
John Lister

Socialist Alliance

Alliance Tyneside challenge

Byers beware!

Socialists in the North East are challenging Tony Blair’s lieutenant Stephen Byers in the coming General Election

The Tyneside Socialist Alliance have selected PETER BURNETT, secretary of Newcastle Trades Council, and International Socialist Group member to fight for the Industry Supporter’s Tyneside seat.

Peter is also a well known anti-racist campaigner who recently organised a march of several hundred through the streets of Newcastle for asylum rights. Elected to Socialist Outlook why he was so keen to stand against Byers, Peter pointed out that many Labour voters in the North East were bitterly disillusioned by the performance of the Blair government.

"Instead of tackling the urgent problems in the region, new Labour has pursued the same system of policies that impoverished the region in the past. By selecting me, the Socialist Alliance has given the opportunity to fight against Byers, who has been absolutely key in promoting these capitalist strategies."

In North Tyneside the key issues will be jobs, quality of life and the environment. All have worsened in 4 years of a Labour government. Income per head in the North East is 23% below the national average, with results that can be seen in the wasteland of housing estates, boarded up property and broken pavements in derelict shopping centres.

The Socialist Alliance will focus on the disasters of ‘Byers’ regional policy’, which involves scandalously handing out thousands of millions of pounds to big companies while keeping wages low, work flexible and the anti-union laws in place to encourage inward investment.

"Grants of more than £20 million were given to Siemens, roads were laid, and a new Metro stantion built to encourage the German giant to stay" says Peter.

"But 12 months after the Queen had opened their North Tyneside works Siemens had mothballed the site, with a loss of thousands of jobs across the region."

The Nissan scandal reveals the other side of the same coin.

"Byers gave the ailing Japanese multinational £40 million in a rescue package designed to keep the firm in the area. The price however was a new work regime with productivity increases of 50%. The result – exhausted and stressed out workers and the break-up of families."

Moreover the arrogant decision of Nissan to pay its suppliers in devalued Euro has forced contractors across the region to shed workers to compete with European firms.

In the same week that the press were praising the rescue over 100 jobs were lost on trading estates.

Peter also pointed out that in a new White paper on Regional Regeneration, Byers offers more of the same:

"Free market, social partnership and hot air. Tax free zones are promised and an increase in the budget of the development agency which will fund various clusters of firms which unite bosses trade union bureaucrats and Labour councils in endless talk of a ‘sunless revolution’ and a new cultural renaissance’.

Tyneside Socialist Alliance is internationalists, Peter argues. ‘We will expose the fraud of ‘ethical foreign policy’, in which Byers is deeply implicated. He is currently considering whether to provide £200 million in support for Balfour Beatty, the firm responsible for the Hatfield Rail crash, to build the Ilisu dam in Turkish Kurdistan’.

The dam breaks all the guidelines of the World Commission on Dams. It will affect 78,000 people, displace the oldest and ruin archaeological heritage sites. It threatens Turkey’s relations with countries downstream such as Syria, increasing the possibility of water wars and the certainty of thousands more refugees.

All these issues raise a fundamental question which needs to be discussed by socialists in the North East.

"How is it that such right wing politicians as Blair and Byers come to dominate the politics of a region so overwhelmingly working class, with a history of poverty and unemployment, in which the bankruptcy of capitalism is so obvious revealed?"

"The answer which unites today’s socialists with those of the past lies in the strength of the trade union bureaucracy, especially the GMB.

Union leaders are the king-makers in North East politics, subordinating the greatest strength of the working class to the rotten politics of right wing Labour.

The Socialist Alliance will be a voice for democracy in the Labour movement – a democratic alternative to secret deals between government multi-national union bosses.

Peter Burnett

P.S. On a personal note, I am no stranger to Byers’ regional government, as I was on the technical committee for the A1 road and was sent a formal letter threatening to charges were not made. That is the question which needs to be asked of Byers’ regional government now they are threatening to charge the people of Northumberland.
Scottish socialists gear up to contest every seat

Terry Conway and Gordon Morgan

The second conference of the Scottish Socialist Party took place in Glasgow on Saturday, February 16-17. It was attended by around 200 people, with the main focus being to discuss the party's forthcoming General Election plans.

Yet again the conference demonstrated that the SSP is a serious force in Scottish Parliament, with the 27% score in the Irvine by-election ringing in participants' ears.

As the Executive motion pointed out, the average score for the SSP since the Scottish Parliament elections is just under 7%, they have beaten the Liberal Democrats every time, and can now realistically claim to be the fourth political party in Scotland.

The Party's National Council decided that a public meeting had agreed that the target should be to stand in each of Scotland's 72 seats – as has been stated many times since to give every Scottish voter the opportunity to vote socialist.

The only constraint on such a project, they said, should be if it seemed that the required finances could not be raised.

The SSP has 16 candidates standing in the forthcoming general election. The party's Thought Platform is based on the principles of the SSP and the Scottish Socialist Party, and it wants to see a socialist state in Scotland.

Committee for Workers International (CWI) has been an important supporter of the SSP. They have given financial support and have provided a platform for the party's candidates to speak at events.

The conference heard that there were major problems facing the SSP in the run-up to the election, including a shortage of funds and the need for more resources.

However, the SSP is determined to continue its fight for a socialist society, and the conference gave its support to the party's candidates in the general election.

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Time to stop the roller-coaster of globalization!

Veronica Fagan
April 30, 1994

In these post-Seattle days it is no longer possible for the governments of the world and their friends in the business community and the IMF to discuss how to tip us off more effectively without their plans being challenged. People all over the world, whether or not they will make it to the protests in Quebec, want to see what these agreements are about and whether they will change our lives as workers more than they change our lives as workers more than they do as consumers. People are threatened and dangerous than before.

Con us buying even more of our scarce public services?

In the years before the Quebec summit was an important step on the road to implement the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA)—an expansion of the North American Free Trade Agreement implemented on January 1, 1994 to cover the whole of the western hemisphere.

The Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) would intensify NAFTA’s “race to the bottom.”

Exploited workers in Mexico should be fought off with even greater determination in Haiti, Guatemala or Brazil, by companies seeking access back into NAFTA markets. Over a million U.S. jobs have been lost since NAFTA as companies relocated to Mexico to take advantage of the lower wages and weaker laws regulating basic health and safety practices.

The American workers who lose their jobs this way then end up finding new jobs, but with less security than they had before—and wages that are about half of what they were at the time.

The U.S. trade surplus with Mexico has become a $18.6 billion deficit.

NAFTA was sold to the American public on the basis that it would lead to economic prosperity. In fact, it is only in the bordol of Chesapeake, Maryland that diversified industrial activity has taken place—in the region's maquiladoras.

And of course this has only been partly true for the workers. It has meant increased exploitation.

Today more than one million more Mexicans work for far less than the minimum wage of $3.40 per day than before NAFTA. As the last seven years eight million Mexicans have fallen into the middle class. It is our job to demand that the removal of standards or laws signed to protect public health and safety, which may cost the corpora-

A sell is threatened and dangerous than before.

tradesmen to make steps to deepen the threat in the environment.

In addition, the growth of the maquiladoras has led to illegal economic practices and to the use of children and other workers.

This is why activists have been效果ing for the removal of NAFTA’s restrictions on the freedom of trade.

In addition, the local councils of Sainte-Foy and Quebec City have passed by-law prohibiting the wearing of scarves to cover a part or a whole of the face. These by-laws will take effect in 1994 and will be enforced in towns, cities and even in the streets leading up to the main gates.

The problem is to:

Make April 2 Scarf Wearing Day

Quebec City, along with other cities in the region, will also be participating in a campaign to restrict the wearing of scarves to cover a part or a whole of the face. These by-laws will take effect in 1994 and will be enforced in towns, cities and even in the streets leading up to the main gates.

The problem is to:

FTAA: a bosses’ ‘Bill of Rights’

Susan Moore

The negative effects of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), implemented in 1994, are starkly apparent to working people in Canada, Mexico and the U.S.

It was no accident that the Zapatistas chose January 1, 1994 as the day to start their rebellion in the Lacandon jungle—they were not only fighting for the rights of the indigenous people of Chiapas but protest-

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Mexican women fight global exploitation

It was only when a group from a Catholic lay organisation arrived, involving a priest and a young politician and offering Church support to the workers that the trouble began to back off.

When the police arrived, calling out the name of the non-Hispanic Americans, and forcing the thugs to withdraw. The Mexican government provided the crucial police protection not to its own citizens but to avoid an international incident.

If the Duro workers succeed in getting an election, and if the election is democratic enough for them to win, then a real union, committed to negotiating improvements in wages and working conditions in the maquiladoras will have been born.

A breach of a tremendous breakthrough. That's why COPARMEX, Duro and political pressure from Fox to Governor Yarrington of the State of Tampasumas, to the local Labor Board are all working hard to make sure this doesn't happen.

The authorities blame everything on outside agitators - Americans who come to take their jobs back and on Mexicans intent on economic destabilisation.

The more the company and government fire, threaten and harass the Duro workers, however, the more determined they seem to be.

So far they have weathered nine months of hunger and repression, and they see their movement growing both inside the plant and among an increasing number of allies in Mexico, the U.S. and Canada.

When they began their struggle, none of the largely young and female workers thought about the possibility of making real progress against a global economy which offers them only deadly working conditions, starvation wages and daily assaults on their dignity.

But this struggle could win real gains. The forces are arrayed on both sides, and the Duro workers' determination and support in across the continent offer a real opportunity for a big step forward.

Contact CJM at clm@clm.org or fax 210-732-3212.

Make a financial contribution: cheques or "Emergency Support Fund to The Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras," 539 Bandera Road, San Antonio, TX 78228.

Volkswagen sacked 344,000 workers because they rejected a contract negotiated by the courts. In 1967, the company threatened its workers, sacked 12,000 and imposed a wage cut of 45% on the rest.

And again in Mexico, in collaboration with big business, the workers who reject the right to form independent unions face well below in productive changes in place in the context that many American firms are in.

In the areas where they can pay workers. A bank loan, to the U.S. workers receive - even though it: a...
Zapatistas challenge rape of the rainforest

Susan Moore

As the Zapatista march marks its way from the Lacandon rainforest in Chiapas to Mexico City, Yalambo Roosevelt, President of the World Economic Forum addressed big business and the World Economic Forum meeting at the tourist resort of Cancun on the Yucatan peninsula. Speaking at the end of a two-day meeting organized by the World Economic Forum to discuss the financial and political future of his country, Roosevelt stated: "We do globalisation as an opportunity, but we've got to get globalisation with human and environmental quality." Proto-marked this gathering of the Forum in the same way as they did its recent gathering in Davos, the militarized zones which were attacked by riot police. The World Economic Forum is a key symbol of unfeathered markets and borderless trade which leaves much of the world's population mired in poverty. Today ninety per cent of Mexican Indians have no sewerage, sixty per cent of running water. The Mexican establishment is the key issue at stake at the Forum was a new neoliberal offensive in the shape of the infamous Plan Puebla – Panama. This project aims to kill two birds with one stone: promoting eco-momic globalisation and undermining the Zapatista struggle for autonomy. Plan Puebla – Panama aims to turn the area between Puebla (just south of Mexico City) and Panama into a "development corridor" in order to integrate these regions into the global economy, and has a budget of US$9 billion. It is the economic side of a counter-insurgency plan whose military face is the low intensity war against the Zapatistas. The central idea of the programme, according to its supporters, is to create the economic conditions for the inhabitants of this region – primarily subsistence farmers – to work in the oil, tourism, and maquiladora (export-assembly) industries. The Plan was originally devised by a member of the previous PRI government and is now being supervised by multi-millionaire Alfonso Romo, president of the agro-technology transnational Grupo Pulsar. Referring to the Chiapas part of this project, Romo has stated that it is "the one I like best out of all my business enterprises" (see www.ciesp.org/analysis/pulsar for more information on Pulsar). Romo has a joint project in association with Conservation International (of which he is a board member) in the Lacandon rainforest, allegedly for "environmental purposes." 

According to Miguel Pickard, from the Centre for Economic Research and Community Action Policies (CIEPAC), it is likely that behind these so-called environmentally-friendly projects lurk "biopiracy" activities – the robbery of medicinal plants and knowledge of patents by transnational corporations. The Lacandon rainforest hosts key resources in terms of water, oil and biodiversity. According to the World Bank, Chiapas is an "inter-linking experimental field in biotechnology and biodiversity for business investors." The rainforest covers 1.9 million hectares and 25 per cent of the countries surface water which generates 45 per cent of its hydropolict power is found there. More than half of the species of Mexican tropical trees, 3,000 plant species, 114 of mammals, and 345 of birds have their home in this area. Since 1997 the forest has been partly under Zapatista control. Clearly both the previous PRI government and Fox's administration are extremely unhappy that the EZLN's presence prevents them from pillaging this natural wealth in the way they would like. There are also plans for further hydroelectric dams and the privatisation of water supplies which would be very difficult to carry through with the present relationship of forces in Chiapas.

The Mexican side of the project has four stages. The first is would involve the "modernisation" of the transport infrastructure (trains, roads, airports) in order to facilitate the extraction of goods and resources and their removal from the area. In fact road building programmes have already started in Chiapas for this purpose – as well as to make containment of the EZLN easier for the government and right wing paramilitaries.

The second stage is a concerted drive towards agricultural exports (which includes biotechnology). The third is support for small and medium sized businesses, and attracting companies to the region, including maquiladoras. The last is to exploit the potential of the region as a tourist attraction principally through more road construction... It is clear that this "modernisation" of Chiapas can only take place if many of the indigenous communities of the area are driven out in construction with the spirit of the San Andres Accords which the Fox government claims to genuinely wish to implement.

The Zapatistas on the other hand defend the communal ways of the communities of the forest which are so counterpointed to the relentless search for individual profit regardless of cost which are integral to the plan.

Ironically of course such initiatives as the Plan Puebla – Panama may actually serve to increase support for the Zapatistas as it is so evident that the only ones who will benefit from such schemes are multinational-corporations and their friends in government.

International solidarity with the march of the EZLN

Resolution of the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International

1. Today, neo-liberal globalisation faces ever broader, more sustained and radical social resistance. The idea that "another world is possible" was asserted strongly at the recent World Social Forum in Porto Alegre. This was not only an expression of resistance, protest and revolt against the tyranny of the market but also a multiverse view of the plural and massive experiences of struggle and, above all, the desire to construct a popular and democratic, anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist alternative.

2. The Zapatista movement has been a key factor in this change of climate. From its initial uprising in January 1994 and then through campaigns like Interzone, the encounter for humanity and the fight for autonomy, the EZLN has become an unavoidable political and reference point. All those who, on the basis of their own struggles, oppose the contemporary world order, the caricature of modermisation that is carved out in the name of "modernisation" are part of the same process.

Without doubt, the EZLN has been a fundamental protagonist in this movement for "another world is possible." This movement became visible at Seattle but had in truth been gestating for some years previously, with struggles that reject concessions like those of the Zapatistas and the expression of struggles of the indigenous, peasant, trade-union movement, the movements of the unemployed, of women, for human rights and many other popular sectors. They see the fulfillment of the San Andres Accords as necessary for a political exit from this. Along with the release of Zapatista prisoners and the withdrawal of the federal army from their communities.

4. Struggles against capitalism's "neo-liberal globalization" such as the struggle of the Zapatistas, but also experiences like the Participatory Budget in Porto Alegre, Brazil, the recent victory of the popular and indigenous movement in Ecuador, or the campaigns against Plan Colombia and the imperialist project of AFTA, show that there is a growing movement of resistance to the powers-that-be which can actually win some victories and struggle for "a world where all worlds can fit!".

5. The Fourth International reaffirms its solidarity with the struggle of the EZLN, its March and its demands, and also salutes the Indigenous National Congress which is currently meeting. This militant position will be expressed both through the work of our comrades in Mexico and also in the field of internationalist solidarity.


International solidarity with the march of the EZLN
Another world is possible!

ERIC TOUSSAINT, President of the Belgian Committee for the Cancellation of the Third World Debt (CDTM) reports from the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil

It was an audacious gambit: bringing together hundreds of representatives of movements opposed to neo-liberal globalization from all over the planet in a big city in southern Brazil. The aim was to map out alternative paths and agree which international mobilizations would be a priority over the months ahead - exactly the same time as those who aim to push the world still further towards commodification and the domination of capital were meeting in Davos.

We were counterposing to the World Economic Forum (WEF) at Davos a World Social Forum (WSF) - affirming that another world is possible.

Theable poffed from all points of view. There was a high participation of representatives from a very wide number of movements opposed to neo-liberal globalisation.

There was significant convergence: people who had come with their own demands and a high quality of debate. Three complementary declarations from social movements, parliamentary representatives and local government representatives were adopted.

And we got widespread media coverage. The WEF at Davos and the WSF at Porto Alegre were respectively presented as symbolising two basic choices facing humanity.

The World Social Forum is the culmination of more than a year’s careful preparation by a Brazilian organisational committee composed of social movements (including the MST, the movement of the landless, and trade union federation CUT) and non-governmental organisations.

This committee worked in liaison with movements from other continents like ATTAC, Focus on global South, the CDTM, Jubilee South, as well as the French journal Le Monde Diplomatique.

The initiative was supported by the state government of Rio Grande do Sul (10 million inhabitants) and the city council of its capital, Porto Alegre (1.3 million inhabitants), both of them led by the Workers’ Party (PT).

On January 25, 2001, the Forum opened with nearly 4,000 participants. Radical speeches (like that of the governor, former trade union leader Oliu Dzura) and high-quality cultural production - presenting the indigenous and African roots of today’s struggles in terms of the struggle of Black slaves for emancipation - set the tone for a 5-day race against time.

For the opening, the participants of the FSM met in the city centre for a big demonstration of around 10,000 people on the theme “March for life, another world is possible” which ended with an open air concert.

From January 26-29, each morning was taken up by four major debates which took place simultaneously with an attendance of between 400 and 900 people according to the debate.

In total, 16 debates devoted to the big social themes and oriented towards mapping out of alternatives. Each afternoon there were workshops - nearly 360 of them in four days, organised by the movements themselves.

Following this, there were “conference-testimonies” involving personalities like Lula (leader of the PT), Caesareo Cardenas (leader of the Mexican PRD) or Jose Bové (French Peasants Confederation).

In addition, there was a world parliamentary forum (in which 350 elected representatives participated) and a world municipal forum led by the new mayor of Porto Alegre, Faro Gero.

There was also an international youth camp with more than 1,000 participants as well as a camp of indigenous peoples and many activities involving the Movement of the Landless.

The WSF ended on January 30 with the decision to meet again in Port Alegre on the same date as the WEF in Davos in 2002.

After the defeat of the MAI (Multilateral Accord on Investment) in October 1998, the defeat of the WTO in Seattle and the fluo for the World Bank and the IMF in Prague, the WSF in Porto Alegre constituted another step forward for the movement of resistance.

This meeting was preceded by a dozen very significant initiatives of mobilisation in the year 2000 in the course of which these movements have systematically acted together.

At Bangkok in February 2000 (the 10th UN Conference on Trade and Development), Washington in April 2000 (Spring meeting of the IMF and World Bank’s Geneva in June 2000 (Evaluation of the UN Summit on Social development) we organised common actions.

At Okinawa in July 2000 (G7); Prague in September 2000; Brussels, New York and Washington in October 2000 (World Women’s March); Seoul the same month (3rd Asia-Europe Conference); Nice in December 2000 (EU summit); Dakar in December 2000 (“From resistances to alternatives”) we made our voices heard.

The points of agreement between these movements include:

- The necessity of a democratic and internationalist alternative to neo-liberal capitalism globalisation;
- The need to achieve equality between women and men;
- To deepen the crisis of legitimacy of international institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO, the Davos Forum, the G7 and the big multinationalities;
- Cancellation of the Third World Debt and the abandonment of structural adjustment policies;
- Rejection for an end to the deregulation of trade;
- Opposition to certain uses of genetically modified organisms;
- Rejection of the current definition of intellectual property rights in relation to trade;
- Opposition to militarist policies (for example, Plan Colombia);
- Rights for indigenous peoples;
- Peasant reform;
- A generalised reduction of working hours;
- The promotion of democratic experiences like the participatory budget practised in Porto Alegre.

A common North/South and East/West struggle.

These main elements are all, or almost all, to be found in the declaration that the social movements adopted at the Porto Alegre Forum (see the website www.forumso-sociaux.org).

They were also part of the Bangkok appeal (February 2000) and the declaration of Geneva (June 2000). Such a level of agreement is a very encouraging sign given our different geographic origins, political traditions and experiences of struggle.

Some big issues remain the subject of debate. Is it necessary to “abolish” the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO or can they be reformed?

Should we fight in the countries of the periphery for the suspension of the payment of the debt or rely on negotiations without recourse to this measure? These debates will continue but we can still organise together.

Davos, surrounded by barbed wire and protected by hundreds of police and soldiers, Porto Alegre open to all who put humanity before profit. In Davos, luxury; in Porto Alegre, dignity. In Davos the crisis of legitimacy, in Porto Alegre, the alternatives.
After Gujarat earthquake: the political economy of rehabilitation. A statement from the ICS

"Nothing left between earth and sky"

The all-India Conference of the Inquilab Communist Sangathan, Indian section of the Fourth International, meeting at Vadodara February 10-12, expressed grief and solidarity with the victims of the terrible earthquake, which struck the people of Bhuj, Amreli, Aravabad, and many other parts of Gujarat.

The work of the Conference was cut short because comrades were busy with relief work. The conference issued this statement.

The ordinary people of Gujarat and the rest of the country have spontaneously rallied round the affected people in their hour of agony. From the moment people heard that the masses had donated money, goods, and organized relief.

They had no faith in the government, which sat on the news for several hours, in order to allow the Republic Day parade to pass "undisturbed".

This same approach has since marked the functioning of both state and central governments.

Because the government did not co-ordinate relief properly, many of these spontaneous initiatives have been extremely chaotic. After a few days after the disaster, the chaos continued, for the government has still to organise and coordinate.

From the beginning, the government of Gujarat has tried to minimize the scale of the disaster and reduce the actual number of the dead.

While people on their own initiative have been organizing rescue, government ministers and VIPs have been wasting time and money organizing costly trips to enhance their image while doing nothing concrete.

De facto the governments have abdicated their responsibility in a number of ways. They have appealed to companies to adopt villages. They have made a similar appeal to Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

If firms and NGOs are to adopt villages and rehabilitate the villagers, what is the role of the Gujarat government supposed to be? Perhaps the time has come for it to take voluntary redundancy, to be downgraded, for truly this is an organisation which is doing nothing, and whose disappearance would be financially good for the country.

But the government is trying to project an image of itself, by talking about the need to form disaster management committees etc. They can do so only by hoping that the public memory is short.

Similar promises were made at the time of previous earthquakes - including one a few short months ago - but nothing happened.

It is evident that the government is inefficient. This has been made amply clear by the mass media.

The government's response to its own inability to cope is to try to privatize the work of relief and rehabilitation. We oppose the proposal to hand over rehabilitation to industry and NGOs. They are donors, and they are not accountable to anyone.

Many of the companies are interested in such relief work because they want to create an image which they can subsequently utilise when issues like industrial pollution, anti-worker activities, or other economic charges are brought against them.

If these companies misuse the villages or the territories in the name of rehabilitation, then too they cannot be brought under control, since rehabilitation is not their duty, but a voluntary act.

We do not consider NGOs in the same way as we look at business, but we oppose the move to hand over villages to NGOs too.

This would absolve the government of all responsibility. All the work of relief and rehabilitation should be carried out by joint committees consisting of government representatives, elected representatives of people directly affected by the earthquake from all classes and communities, and representatives of people involved in relief work.

We demand that action be taken against those promoters who had built houses illegally, or had violated the building rules, which contributed greatly to the scale of the tragedy.

We oppose the Central Government's plan to raise a huge sum of money through a surcharge on the income tax.

We do this for three reasons. First, such a move is regressive. It puts the burden of funding the rehabilitation on working class people.

This is happening when there are large sums of money owed by big business in unpaid taxes. The government should declare that industries who have not paid their taxes should be either pay up immediately or have their properties taken over in this hour of disaster in the interests of the people.

Secondly, we oppose the proposal to mobilize funds through income tax because there is no transparency in how the government utilizes this money.

Finally, we could easily be diverted to the nuclear programme or to other unpopular and anti-people aims of the government.

We oppose the call for income tax surcharge because as of now, the government is not even sure of the extent of the disaster. So the figures it is mentioning are sheer guesswork.

The government is concerned about how much money industry is losing, or how much the Western Railways will lose, but it has no figures for how much working people will lose since they have been rendered effectively jobless.

Nor has the government any clear plan to pay such people at their usual rate of earning till economic and social life is restored to normalcy.

Conflict, communal conflict, and anti-Dalit feelings have not died with the death of Bhal. While any torn clothing and any kind of food will do for the working people, for the Dalits, upper middle class people with cars are getting priority for relief.

Especially sinister is the role of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS): a communal organisation linked to the extreme right wing party, in relief work.

To common people, who see RSS activists bringing out dead bodies while many others refuse to do so, this may appear a harsh accusation.

Yet we make this statement with full understanding. The RSS wants to show how committed to "serving the people" it is.

But such disciplined cadres who will do what their leaders say. So they bring out the dead. Are they truly humanitarian?

No, this is an image building exercise. The RSS cadres have never expressed regret for those who died as a result of the mass riots during Advani's Ratha Yatra, or after the destruction of the Babri Masjid.

The RSS have never expressed regret for anything but joy at pogroms of Muslims, Christians. Today, also, their image building exercise seems to conceal a grim reality.

Whenver they have dominated, and with the rise of support and patronage they have all the advantages, they have discriminated between Hindus and non-Hindus, between caste Hindus and Dalits.

This condems the mixing up of government machinery with the RSS machinery. If the RSS wants to carry out a communalist and casteist relief policy, it should do so as a voluntary organisation, without government support.

It was a great surprise, that all so-called experts absolutely ignored the human factors in this tragedy. It may be true that earthquakes can not be predicted.

But the social consequences of such disasters are in our hands.

The lack of a proper housing policy, of a proper long-term rehabilitation policy, or of a proper industries policy can all be felt. We demand a serious, scientific and transparent reassessment of earthquake zones all over the country.

Appeal

Please send donations to the Gujarat victims affected by the Gujarat earthquake to:
Emami model Memorial Fund, Co PO Box 1109
London NW 240.

Money will be paid in rupees to the Samarthan Trust.
As we celebrate International Women’s Day on March 8, SUSAN CALDWELL, a socialist feminist activist from Quebec, now working as co-director of the International Institute for Research and Education in Amsterdam, looks at the gains of last year’s World March of Women Against Poverty and Violence.

While unfortunately little happened here in Britain in response to the March, in many other parts of the world it has led to bridges being built between existing feminist activities and younger women mobilising in opposition to capitalist globalisation.

**Campaigning and cheering, tens, hundreds and thousands of women demonstrated in 359 countries throughout the second and third weeks of October last year. The World March of Women Against Poverty and Violence was a huge success — although ignored by the media of almost all countries. On October 15 last year, 20,000 people marched in Washington, including some 2000 women and men from countries other than the United States. In New York, about 10,000 women and men from many nations rallied at the United Nations and then marched to Union Square. They joined the March and represented women from all over the planet taking part in the World March of Women. Close to 100 countries were represented.

Notable among the delegations were the large European contingent, energised by the success of the March of European Workers held earlier in Brussels on October 14 which brought together almost 35,000 women. There were also 250 women from Mexico, who arrived in a motorcade that set out from Chiapas. Some 50 Japanese women also showed up as well as a significant number of Native women and vibrant groups of women from Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

These women represent both a continuation of the wave of women’s liberation movements from the 1970s and new generations of young women fighting against the poverty and violence created by the neo-liberal globalisation. They are part of the mobilisations against neo-liberal globalisation in Seattle, Washington, Melbourne and Prague — and now focused on the specific impact on women.

There are two major new features of both this Women’s March 2000 and the World March of Women Against Poverty and Violence: those joining aspire to a radically anti-colonial globalisation and anti-patriarchal platform, and, almost all were part of a forum organised process that generated the simultaneous actions in each country as well as the march in New York.

Focusing on the ‘female face of power’ in the wake of the Women’s March 2000 calls for the shedding of the image of women as a group as well as rejection of the IMF and World Bank’s structural adjustment programmes. While noting the link between poverty and violence against women, the platform also notes that many rich countries maintain patriarchal laws and policies that treat women as ‘less than human’ and thus perpetuate and reinforce the violence that women suffer.

The World March of Women demanded from the UN and its member States concrete measures to put an end to poverty and the different forms of violence against women. It demanded genuine respect for the rights of all women regardless of their origin, their sexual orientation or their social or cultural affiliation.

And this raises a weakness of the Women’s March 2000. While the platform is quite radical, the strategy is one of lobbying governments and the various institutions of national and international government. This flows from the origin of the call for a World March of Women by the Fédération des Femmes du Québec (FFQ) after the UN Beijing Conference on Women in 1995.

Like other NGOs (non-governmental organisations), the FFQ had taken part in the parallel conference of NGOs same time, but on the outskirts of Beijing.

As a result of the surprise success and impact of the FFQ and organisations and that of the FFQ and organisations in Quebec, they had concluded that governments paid more attention to public actions than just private lobbying. This was the context in which the FFQ launched the appeal for a World March of Women in 2000. With the original contacts being those women-based NGOs that had been at Beijing, the lobbying strategy was maintained.

Thus the Women’s March calls upon the very institutions — the IMF, World Bank, and national governments that are the source of the problem — to reform themselves and in adopting the human rights legislation to protect women from violence and to ensure with action against poverty and its effects on women and children.

Respecting national differences and respecting someone to operate in a democratic way, the FFQ was able to get the funding for a conference in Montréal, Canada, in 1998 to develop and adopt the platform.

The focus was on developing national unity structures for the March in each country and encouraging the development of national demands and actions as well as international ones.

**While the conference was exciting, conflict arose over the style of decision making (this versus vote-taking) and the inclusion of lesbian and transsexual organisations.

The involvement of many women’s organisations from non-American or non-European areas of the world. This concern with the non-representative and the sometimes bureaucratic functioning continued throughout the preparations for the World March.

But the very impact of ongoing neo-liberal globalisation lead to a broad response:

- Women from the ‘first world’ who had seen their gains of the 1970s and 1980s eroded as well as the cuts in social services causing both job loss and increased work load;
- Women in the ‘third world’ who saw the devastation of the AIDs and the globalisation of land and agricultural adjustment on educational and social issues leading to a widespread hostility to public health care services with a consequent increase in maternal and infant mortality and a return of previously controlled illnesses such as TB and cholera;
- Women in war-torn areas who were both victims of violence by soldiers and war crimes and often victimised as refugees in camps in nearby areas.

As the Women’s March in New York, six women from countries in conflict — Afghanistan, Colombia, Colombia, Palestine, and Federal Republic of Yugoslavia — talked with emotion and conviction of the effects of these conflicts, particularly on the lives of women and children. They denounced the industry of death that travels from country to country in the form of arms and other kinds of trafficking. In all women from 159 different countries organised and acted within the framework of the World March of Women 2000 Against Poverty and Violence. Roughly five million signatures were collected from all over the globe in support of its two demands — to eliminate poverty and violence against women — and were presented to the UN.

The actions in each country sought specific changes — whether to the minimum wage laws or to increased funding for women’s centres or for education for girls, etc. Few, if any, concrete changes can be seen as a result of these actions. But women have organised the ability to collectively organise and the strength of this collective solidarity.

The decision has already been made to continue the organisational network set up for the Women’s March and to begin discussing both a balance sheet and the prospects for future actions.

Socialist feminist organisations, including sections of the Fourth International, need to be part of these discussions and organisations.

We need to push the platform to develop a more explicitly anti-capitalist platform and to move beyond the congenital displaced faith in the national and international institutions to other implement current human rights legislation or to reform themselves into progressive structures.

Organising needs to expand to include more grass-roots women’s organisations in all countries which will raise again the question of the need for truly representative decision making structures.

But with the recommitment of feminism from the 1970s and 1980s and the involvement of young women of the ‘Seattle generation’ now taking place, there are grounds for hope.

The younger generation of women are often spontaneously anti-capitalist and anti-opposition to neo-liberal globalisation, and have not had an opportunity to throw off the shackles of the period after the gains by the first generation of women, are organically anti-patriarchal.

Consequently, the resurgence of a women’s liberation movement is back on the agenda. Our slogan is very clear: “No socialist revolution without women’s liberation — and no women’s liberation without social revolution!”
Global day of action against drug company power

Terry Conway

The grass roots campaign fighting HIV/AIDS in South Africa, the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) has called on activists across the world to mobilise locally and globally against the profiteering of the pharmaceutical industry.

Campaigners across the world, including in Brazil, Chile, India, the United States and Britain will be protesting in solidarity with TAC on the opening day of the legal action brought by 42 major companies against the South African government to prevent it importing cheap drugs and making them available to people with AIDS.

For health campaigners, trade unions and socialists the grotesque levels of profits of these vast multinational corporations have long been a source of anger and frustration. But this rage has increased many times over in regard to their response to the spread of HIV/AIDS, and we should not be surprised for there is a connection here.

At the same time, with the rise of mass protests against globalization, the drug industry is one of the most graphic symbols of what is wrong with the neoliberal world we live in.

Below we print the letter which will be appearing in papers across the world which demonstrates the absurd drug companies are putting their greed for profit before the right of thousands of people in the Third World to stay alive.

In Britain action will be focussed through groups against GlaxoSmithKline, the world's largest drug corporation which leads the fight to enforce patents and price-fixing for anti-HIV drugs.

Activities are taking place in London, Birmingham and Manchester and will involve actions from Globalisation Resistance, Action for South Africa and various HIV/AIDS groups.

"The outcome of this court case will affect 52 million HIV sufferers in poorer countries, who cannot afford these exorbitantly priced drugs.

"The sector's profits exaggerate the problem and make it seem unstoppable.

"We believe that this lawsuit is a legal and morally reprehensible and that the companies involved should drop the case and make the drugs available free.

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Palestinians fear Ariel attack

Sharon: the real face of Israeli culture

Roland Rance

The election of Ariel Sharon as Israel’s prime minister has been seen by many as a turning point in the history of Israel, and as the definitive end of the “peace process.”

Sharon, after all, is revisited in the Arab world as the “Butcher of Beirut,” and in many quarters of the world as a figure of international concern.

The fallacy of such a simplistic view, however, is that it is based on a simplistic view of the man and his policies.

As foreign minister, Peres who until just before that election was being touted by many as the “left’s” candidate, has been a vocal critic of Sharon’s policies internationally.

Another Labour minister, former defence minister Yitzhak Rabin, who was assassinated in November 1995, has been outspoken about his views on the situation.

The fact is that Sharon has been a consistent supporter of the Palestinian people, and has worked hard to bring about peace and stability in the region.

One military man with a brutal past succeeds another Prime Minister as nation’s tire of mavericks

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One military man with a brutal past succeeds another Prime Minister as nation’s tire of mavericks

Sharon’s appointment as defence minister has sparked a huge controversy, in the course of which he has come under attack from both the political establishment, and from the general public.

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Mumia’s case at critical stage

Steve Bloom

On October 15, 1999, attorneys for the wrongly convicted U.S. political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal filed legal papers in Federal District Court asking that he be given a new trial. The next legal step - which could happen any time now - will take place when Federal District Court Judge William Yohn sets a date for an initial hearing in the case.

At the hearing he will listen to oral arguments from lawyers on both sides to support or rebut briefs which have already been filed. Mumia will be present in the court and plans are underway to mobilize large numbers of his supporters to be inside and outside the courtroom.

Mumia Abu-Jamal was originally convicted in 1982 of killing a police officer, Daniel Faulkner, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Since his conviction, in a trial marked by blatant police, judicial, and prosecutorial misconduct, he has spent the last 18 years on Pennsylvania's death row, under the most brutal and dehumanizing conditions.

Meanwhile a world-wide campaign of protest has developed, as evidence mounts that Mumia was the victim of a police and government frame-up: executions were as much more and more people find out about it.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation had been spying on Mumia since he was 14 years old and a member of the Black Panther Party.

Before his arrest he was the president of Philadelphia's Association of Black Journalists. Mumia is widely known and earned a considerable reputation as an frequent spokesperson for Philadelphia's Black community and for other poor and oppressed peoples. Also, to teachers in the sumity of the Philadelphia establishment.

He has continued his journalistic work while in prison, achieving same worldwide as the "voice of the voiceless.'

Many of the facts which have convinced people across the globe that Mumia's trial and conviction were a miscarriage of justice in the years after it took place. Witnesses have come forward to say that they testified falsely, or refused to testify at all, because they had been coerced by the police.

Ballistics

Ballistics experts (not paid by the defense during the original trial but paid for by the money) have stated that the scientific evidence excludes any possible role of Mumia in the shooting took place as the prosecution claimed.

But none of this new evidence is part of the official record at the present time, and therefore cannot be used.

Mumia's attorneys attempted to introduce it during hearings that took place in 1995 - but the same judge, Albert Sabo, who presided at the original trial. Sabo ruled that none of this testimony was credible, and to excluded it from the 1995 transcripts.

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court, the last state court to rule in the case, upheld Sabo's findings. But the Pennsylvania Supreme Court has been elected body, and the majority of its justices ran campaigns with support from the from the Philadelphia Police - the main group which has been crusading for Mumia's conviction.

Any vote in favour of Mumia's appeal, then, by any of the court's eight justices, would have constituted a guarantee that they would lose their next bids for re-election.

So one of the key issues which Judge Yohn must decide is whether he will allow new evidence to be introduced as the record part of the Federal appeals process. He is not legally required to do so, but the higher levels of federal courts: the Federal Court of Appeals and the U.S. Supreme Court.

Transcript

The justices of those courts will rule strictly on the written transcript that is placed before them, which is why Yohn's decision on this issue is so crucial.

It is no exaggeration, then, to say that the fate of Mumia Abu-Jamal may well depend on the public outcry that is raised in the time before Yohn makes this determination.

He is reminded of how many people around the world are watching to see the way the federal courts handle Mumia's case it can be a substantial factor in influencing his ruling.

One development in the case revolves around the so-called "Currie incident." Sabo filed with Yohn during the year 2000. The groups which requested Yohn to consider additional legal arguments, based on a substantial material interest to what decision is made on Mumia's request for a new trial, were the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the American Civil Liberties Union, 22 members of the British Parliament, and the Chicano/Chicana Studies Foundation.

However, Yohn decided that he would not read or consider these additional briefs, asserting that they did not contribute anything new of substance, and that to take time up with them would merely delay the appeals process.

The British MPs and the Chicano/Chicana Studies Foundation, however, refused to take "no" for an answer, and appealed Yohn's decision to the Federal Court of Appeals, asking the judge Yohn to direct them to take their briefs into account.

Delay

The Court of Appeals upheld Yohn's decision, but the process of appeal has been further delayed proceedings in Yohn's court.

More significantly, the entire process has begun to focus attention on the information contained in these two briefs, which cover some previously unpublished aspects of the original trial.

Through reissuing the transcripts and looking into other legal material they document additional evidence of a conscious frame-up against Mumia.

For example, statements by Mumia's (now disbarred) attorney indicate he attempted to collaborate with the judge and prior to make sure any conviction would not be overturned on appeal.

Judge Sabo claimed in court to have checked with a higher court on the propriety of a decision denying Mumia the right to have a non-profit organization around Mumia's case, and Sabo was one of the prominent black protesters who lined the route of Mumia's inaugral parade in Washington D.C. on January 20.

Conference

In addition, a major national activists' conference is projected, also in Washington D.C. (20-31), to discuss the next steps in Mumia's defense.

In one of the developments in the case, one of the leaders of the national campaign, Karl G. Kinsinger from the organisation Free Mumia, was sentenced to 90 days in jail by a Federal Judge in Pennsylvania - for the "crime" of speaking in public.

The jail terms stem from a probations revocation brought down to Kinsinger as a result of the six-in for Mumia, which he led a visit to Mumia in Philadelphia on July 3, 1998.

Most of the activists arrested that day were charged with resisting charges and paid a fine. Kinsinger and a host of others pleaded not-guilty and demanded a trial.

As a result, after they were found guilty, they were given extremely punitive conditions of probation, which include being bar from leaving their home (New York in Kinsinger's case) without prior permission, and being required to hand over information about their persons.

Speech

Kinsinger defended these provisions as a speech giving a speech demonstrating at the British Parliament's Jan.

At a hearing on December 6, Federal Judge Arnold C. Rappoport ordered him to the time in which the organization of his original probation will be reconfirmed on his conviction last August.

But a Sexual Orientation of the U.S. Socialist organisation Solidarity and on the steering committee of the "Coalition against Homophobia at Mumia's case.

Step up the efforts to save Mumia

Declaration by the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International on the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal

The case of Mumia Abu-Jamal is well known around the globe as one of the worst examples of racist and class injustice in the United States, a nation which is among the world's richest and most powerful. From the European Parliament to Amnesty International, to former president Nelson Mandela of South Africa, to popular politicians everywhere, world public opinion has loudly proclaimed his judgment that Mumia's original trial was a travesty, and raised the call that he be set free.

The year 2001 is likely to prove decisive for Mumia's legal appeal, when it will turn determine whether this global demand for justice is granted or denied.

Federal District Court Judge William furnished with crucial ruling, including whether all the evidence of police and prosecutorial misconduct, witnesses who have recanted or changed their testimony, and others including scientific experts who were never heard by the jury (the limits of facts which have not been communicated internationally public opinion) will be considered by the federal courts as part of Mumia's appeal process. It is therefore crucial for every one concerned with basic human rights and legal due process around the world to renew and reeducate our efforts on behalf of Mumia Abu-Jamal at this time.

A victory for justice in this case is not only a victory for Mumia. It will also be a victory for the thousands of others across the U.S. who were convicted or sentenced to death in trials that came to no closer to international legal standards than Mumia's, but who have simply received less publicity, as well as much less support from their families and other political prisoners everywhere.

February 21, 2001
A phoney
Loyalist
cessation

"The Nazis were convinced that with our time has a morbid force of action!"

Franz Borkenau

LAST MONTH the self-styled Inner Council of the Ulster Defence Association claimed that the organisation was not involved in orchestrating the sus- tained pipe bomb and grenade attack on Catholics' rights - across the north of Ireland. In the previous month alone there had been at least fifty such attacks with the small towns of Larne, Coleraine and Antrim being badly hit.

A typical attack occurred in North Belfast last weekend when a pipe bomb was tossed into the living room home of an ordinary working-class family causing an extensive fire. The young children lived to tell the tale, but the man in the house was killed. The woman and her daughter died because of the prompt action of their father and some local youth.

Evidence

There is abundant evidence to prove that the Loyalist organisations are in fact more or less involved in a comprehensive campaign of sectarian and gangster terror directed against the nationalist population.

The idea that only militarists are responsible for the general situation is not new, but it is the sort of nonsense that only the latest generation of disaffected youth will be willing to play along with in the long run. As the period of the organisation's existence continues to march towards its final resolution the issue will become clearer.

The UDA has just met with the decommissioning body. The government line was restated by a senior police officer at the New IRA meeting: "There is no evidence to say that the UFF is involved in an organisation, but there may be individuals who are taking action as individuals.

Acceptance

There is nothing new about this ruling party of the Loyalists being accepting Loyalist crimes. For over thirty years there has been a pervasive government and unionist tolerance of Loyalist violence.

It is now generally accepted that undercover British military police (the Force Research Unit) that took their chain of command from the Joint Security Committee were actually heavily involved in directing Loyalist violence.

A recent Irish Human Rights Watch report indicted PRU agents in the direct killing of at least 14 people between 1966 and 1990 using Loyalist gunmen as the instrument of death.

Speak out against intimidation

Socialist Democracy condemns absolutely and unreservedly all physical attacks and death threats against Anthony McKenna, a Sinn Fein supporter who was involved in ear-lier protest action against the writer.

Journalism is the strongest weapon when we learn of Sinn Fein statements following the attack which effectively justify the assault.

The Irish Republican Writers Group, by a Sinn Fein supporter who had been involved in ear-lier protest action against the writer.

In recent days the IRA has threatened to kill someone in response to an attack against a Catholic and a Protestant. The writer.

Passing through IRISH EYES

A column from Socialist Democracy, UK, of the fourth international.

Through IRISH EYES

Partnership deal helped violate Irish nurses during their last pay battle.

Joining forces to fight "partnership"

The task of ordinary workers is to reclaim their work from the rotten bureaucracy that presently malfunctions the movement. This was the framework when over 100 nurses met in Dublin to discuss setting up a rank and file campaign against social partnership.

In the Republic of Ireland the bureaucracy has presided over nearly fourteen years of social partnership deals. A neo-liberal agenda of deregulation, privatisation and wage restraint has been implemented through the right wing social and economic policies, now known as neo-liberalism.

This is usually sold as 'competitiveness'; in other words workers should not join in solidarity with workers elsewhere in Europe and beyond, but compete with them to see who can work hardest and for least reward.

The meeting showed that these lessons were at least up for discussion. Socialist Democracy member Kevin Keating pointed out that just because Gerry Twiste asked for 'more' didn't mean he wanted to overthrow the whole workplace system.

Other speakers mentioned the importance of unionisation but this view was not universally accepted.

A member of the SWP claimed that the demand for higher wages was key because it "went to the heart of the system." It was particularly disappointing that a Marxist should claim that the price of exploitation would actually challenge it, placing it in competition with more polite attacks that workers face. No doubt this debate will go on but the fact that it started is itself a step forward.

Some previous resolutions also showed some positive movement although their manner of introduction left much to be desired. Three pages of resolutions were distributed at lunchtime, leaving little time to read and absorb them while listening to speeches from the platform.

Only the last session was devoted to discussing the resolutions, which, as the primary outcome of the meeting, were the most important thing about the conference.

Better procedure must be adopted, especially where resolutions may be the cause of differences. In a campaign devoted to democracy we should all ensure we practice what we preach.

Fortunately the resolutions did not cause major division. In fact they reflected an advance on the political basis of previous campaigns dealing with the question of privatisation, anti-union laws and unspecified policies for "the transfer of wealth from the Golden circle to the workers who produce it."

Nevertheless there is room for elaboration and clarification.

Particular resolutions were passed on trade union recognition and recruitment, against benchmarking in the public sector, to support the anti-fatigue campaign on pay claims and a workers charter in the forthcoming referendum on the Nice Treaty.

The last resolution was included which pointed out that while the idea of a workers charter was a good one, the adoption of such a charter would not turn a reactionary treaty into a good one that could be supported.

A resolution on the minimum wage was also remitted when the conference could not agree at what level it should be set.

The aims of the conference are clearly very ambitious, with a resolution calling for the setting up of an office and a regular bulletin.

The overall role of the campaign has still to be clarified. It would be a mistake to see it as purely one of organising solidarity - which really should be, and at present could only be, carried out by the trade union movement itself.

The real value of a rank and file campaign at present is to bring the lessons of previous struggles against partnership to groups of workers who are engaging in new struggles.

The campaign elected a committee to oversee its organisation including union representatives from ACGWU and ASTI, independent campaigners such as Des Derwin and Eddie Conlon, and members of the SWP and Socialist Party. All in all, the conference was a positive start to the crucial task of winning workers to oppose partnership and fight for a genuine alternative.

It reflected the first moves towards the beginning of what is hoped to be the final campaign on the left. Hopefully the campaign will go on to demonstrate the benefits of such unity.
Letters

Socialist Outlook mistakenly suggests that the US economy's "bubble of the last five years has burst" (US Economy: the bubble burst, Feb 2001). However, by making a serious attempt to relate the movements in the US economy to the attempts by the ruling class to drive up the productivity of labour, Andy Kimmist's article represents a major advance on the approach of the SWP and SP who also foresee a recession in the US economy. As a metaphor for an economy, a bursting bubble is always an unwanted event. A bubble does not merely implode; it disappears. As a metaphor for the US economy, it is quite misleading. The US economy will almost certainly be larger in a year's time than it is now.

Most economists agree that the growing US economy will back up this year. In the first half the economy will not grow. In the second half, as in the year as a whole, the economy will grow. This is certain to be slower growth than the 1970s and 1960s, when there was a unique combination of European reconstruction, the rapid mobilisation of the old colonial markets and a global modernisation of industry.

On a global scale, however, the world economy in 2001 looks set to grow faster than the one percent to one and a half percent annual growth rate has normally seen. Only a few years ago, comrades in the SP, SWP and IS also foresaw a deep recession. They did not happen. The theory of the stock market and the currency instability for a crisis in the world economy from which there was only one way out: a world slump. This was not the approach of socialist change leading to increasing productivity. Increasing capitalist accumulation does tend to reduce the rate of profit gradually.

However, Marx also outlined a number of influences that can counter this law including increasing productivity, cheaper labour, cheaper constant capital, unemployment and foreign trade. Due to the past gains and the social weight of the working class and their allies, US imperialism has not been able to exhaust these options.

However, as Henri Wilno outlined in November's 'International Viewpoint', productivity has grown substantially in the US since 1965. Even in Europe, the rate of profit has risen to high levels since the mid-1980s.

Duncan Chapple
South London.

Socialism on the web
Socialist Outlook website: www.labournet.org.uk/socialist
International Socialist Group: www.3bh.org.uk/ISG

Socialists should intervene into the debates on the future of agriculture and the country.

Only a socialist programme can tackle the problems in agriculture and meet the goals of producing safe, cheap and nutritious food, and a decent living for small farmers and rural workers, protecting the environment and treating animals with compassion.

Adam Hartman

Where we stand

As a new century begins, the battles of the last century remain to be won. Millions of women and men are taking part in mobilisations against the evils of capitalism and the bureaucratic dictatorship. This reflects the fact that humanity faces widening dangers.

Ecological, military, social and economic devastation faces millions of people. More and more people recognise the barbaric nature of capitalism. In a situation where the possibility of the social democratic or communist parties to provide socialist solutions is becoming clearer, the task of creating new leaderships remains ahead.

Socialist Outlook is written and sold by socialists committed to this struggle. We are the British supporters of the worldwide Marxist organisation, the Fourth International. We stand for the revolutionary transformation of society and a pluralist, socialist democracy worldwide.

The overall goal which we pursue is the" construction of a world in which every human being is free from every form of exploitation, oppression, alienation and violence. The world must be under the control of ordinary people, democratic, pluralist, multi-party, feminist, ecologist, anti-militarist and internationalist. It must abolish wage slavery and national oppression.

The working class is the backbone of unity among all the exploited and oppressed. The working class and its allies must unreservedly fight against capitalism and for a clear programme of action in order to gradually acquire the experience and consciousness essential 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 "Nothing for the chains at those who wear them".

The whole working class needs to fully commit itself to these struggles. Furthermore we fight for a strategic alliance between workers and these organisations - an alliance which respects their legitimate autonomy. By building simultaneously revolutionary organisations in the United Kingdom and the Fourth 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 can 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?

Duncan Chapple
South London.

Foot and mouth madness

The government's response to the current outbreak of foot and mouth disease illustrates the barbaric nature of an economic system which treats animals as commodities and puts profit above all other considerations.

It also shows the repressive measures which the state will take to protect private property and business. Foot and mouth disease is rarely fatal to animals and poses little danger to humans. There is no justification for the mass slaughter of livestock from an animal welfare or human health aspect. Foot and mouth undermines both the productivity of livestock and the market for them: the destruction of all livestock is purely economic and tied up with private production under capitalism.

The same way to tackle foot and mouth is a vaccination programme. The point has not always been made to the public that the disease is not more expensive than slaughter.

The closure of public footpaths and pressure to stay out of the countryside is highly convenient to landowners' businesses to frustrate the right to roam legislation. And xenophobia is being whipped up to account for the source of the outbreak and deflect attention from the unhealthy conditions in Britain which animals are reared and slaughtered.

Junior Ibbotson
South London.

Crisis? What crisis?

Bubble unpoped; it's US business as usual

The multi-national pharmaceutical companies are trying to prevent developing countries such as South Africa, Brazil and India from producing their own, cheaper, anti-HIV drugs. Western governments seem reluctant to challenge this so as to expect higher ethical standards from drug companies, wishfully thinking that consideration for the well being of all human beings will temper their drive for profit. But why should it be so?

Whatever its motives, Smith & Nephew, for example, is correct to say that tackling HIV takes more than drugs, cheap or not. People with HIV need clean water, good housing, employment, freedom from war and whatever else it is that drugs are to work for them.

Ensuring we are all healthy is not amenable to the profit motive of the pharmaceutical companies who must make money for the few. The point is that public health should not be left in private hands. And, after four years of promising, it is time that our own government finally produced its HIV Strategy and made clear its own contribution to tackling HIV - here and worldwide - including calling for the companies to drop their lawsuits against developing countries such as South Africa.

John Nicholson
Manchester

Drug firms will always put profits first

If you would like to send a letter to Socialist Outlook, please use the form on page 20 of this issue of Socialist Outlook, or write to Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UH. email: outlook@gn.apc.org
Labour backs Turkish state terror

TONY BLAIR's government has just published the list of organisations proscribed under its new, draconian Terrorism Act.

Among the organisations which New Labour has declared it unlawful to support are the Tamil Tigers and the Kurdish Workers Party, the PKK.

In each case the "crime" of these organisations appears to be having taken up arms to resist brutal, racist oppression by the ruling regime - Sri Lanka in the case of the Tigers, and Turkey in the case of the PKK.

But Labour ministers have remained conspicuously silent on the human rights abuses and violent, terrorist action of these governments, and most recently the full-scale, bloody military attack on hunger-striking political prisoners by the Turkish government last December.

These attacks left 28 prisoners dead, and hundreds suffering burns, bullet wounds, the after-effects of tear-gas and smoke, and injuries inflicted during rape, torture and systematic beatings by troops and prison guards. In its efforts to excuse and challenge this state terror, the PKK has supported the Committee for Struggle Against Torture Through Isolation, which has been marching from Liverpool to London, meeting local trade unions and socialists, and showing a heart-rending video of the prison massacre.

It is bizarre and outrageous that the Terrorism Act now means it is the PKK that is regarded as outside the law while the Turkish government, as a cherished NATO ally, feels able to inflict the most barbaric treatment on the Kurdish people as a whole, and to slaughter those prisoners and activists who dare to resist.

The marchers are urging the British labour movement to take up their fight for justice, and declare its opposition to the Turkish massacre.

In doing so, trade unions and other organisations should also challenge the restrictions imposed by the Terrorism Act, which by gagging protesters can only strengthen the hand of those who use state violence to oppress them.

Details: www.noisolation.de

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