TB: scourge of the poor!

The outbreak of tuberculosis (TB) among school children in Leicester has delivered a stark reminder that some of the dreaded killer diseases that used to haunt this country until the 1950s are still a menace in many parts of the world. The conditions for the disease are actually worsened by our own "TB" - Tony Blair and his New Labour government, which has become one of the most hardline advocates of "neo-liberal" policies at home and abroad.

Blair recently added his support to a government policy document which upheld the "right" of pharmaceutical companies to earn billions in profits from the sale of patented drugs for fighting diseases like TB and AIDS at inflated prices to debt-ridden Third World countries.

And Labour government policies are encouraging the process of globalisation which is rapidly creating new pools of poverty and ill health. TB is above all a disease of the poor. It flourishes in overcrowded, damp, and deplorable housing stock; and among malnourished men, women and children without access to basic medical services.

A public health official was quick to point out in Leicester, TB can be treated swiftly and effectively with modern antibiotics, but without treatment it can again emerge as a leading cause of incapacity and early death.

The Leicester outbreak is large enough and rare enough in Britain to attract news headlines, though the disease has been making an unwelcome comeback in many deprived inner city areas, notably parts of London and Glasgow.

But this proliferation in Britain is small beer compared with the rampant growth of TB and other avoidable disease on a world scale, as the increasingly globalised economy serves to widen the gap between an ever wealthier minority, and a much larger layer that is sinking ever deeper into the most grinding poverty.

Billions of people eke out an existence on $2 or less per day. Not only do their living conditions leave them vulnerable to TB, malaria and other devastating diseases, but they lack the means to buy health care and the drugs they need when they fall ill.

The cost of any form of treatment has been systematically increased by the austerity programmes of the World Bank and IMF, which have tried to limit any health provision in Third World countries to a minimal primary care service, often linked to full recovery of costs through the imposition of charges for drugs and medical care.
RMT opens witch-hunt

The RMT national executive has launched a major attack on the democracy of the union. It is attempting to have one leader, activist, Pat Skinksi, banned from holding any office for five years and also to discipline two others who are not even members of the executive.

They are doing this to Patrick whilst, as Secretary of the London Underground Regional Council, he is leading the industrial dispute on the tube, which taps out the criminal nature of these actions.

The union, after a biased vote, a right wing meeting of what used to be the elected executive decided to ignore the national executive.

At a subsequent special general meeting delegates were naturally furious at this decision. The Standing Orders Committee of which Patrick was a member, went to the party of the executive and decided to ignore this national executive.

Condemned

Three quarters of the conference delegates then stayed behind to agree a statement condemning the President and AGS for their actions. As Standing Orders Committee Secretary, Patrick was asked to circulate the text of the Branches.

For this crime, deemed to be “circulating unoffical circles”, Patrick is to be barred from holding office. Appeals from Branches for another special general meeting to be convened have been ignored, a flagrant breach of union rules.

The President paid the price of his actions by being defeated in an election at the end of the year. His replacement, Phil Boston, supports the members' rights to a democratic union.

He has defended Patrick and is challenging this year's AGM (annual conference) which it decided that the election should be held.

The national executive contemptuously decided to ignore this decision of the governing body of the union.

In the face of this, the two executive decisions were ignored at the conference.

Train crew dispute

One year ago the RMT Train Crew Conference demanded that a campaign to defend the safety of train crew be relaunched after the RMT national executive had “sacri
ced” the dispute with Railtrack.

The RMT AGM subsequently endorsed this demand for industrial action to defend rail safety.

It would have been hoped that by the time of this year's Conference the issue would have come to a head. Activists have argued that the main demand should have been to call a ballot for industrial action to place maximum pressure on the rail companies.

But further talks with Railtrack, Safety and the Association of Train Operating Companies the RMT national executive has yet to call a ballot for action.

Nothing has been done to resolve the basic issues – ATOC and Railtrack remain committed to undermining the safety role of train crew. The time for a long-term battle.

Delegates to the Train Crew Conference are now faced with the excuses: - we want to have the ballot under way. People are more to be seen than to be heard.

Teachers must step up class struggle

Gill Lee, ex-President

Lewisham NUT,

personally

PRIVATEATION, teacher shortages and the progressive undermining of comprehensive education form the background for this year's National Union of Teachers Conference.

Members of the union have shown where there is any call to action, they are ready to respond. Any honeymoon for private companies is over.

But the Broad Left (right wing) leadership of the union have no answers to the crisis facing education.

They refused the mandate of last year's conference to call a ballot to strike against performance related pay.

They have done nothing to prevent the increased privatization of education through PFI's and the handing of local education authorities over to profit

making companies such as road builders WSB Atkins.

In response to the crisis over teacher shortage, the leadership announced we cover action which has been very hard to carry out, and which in any case, was only meant that teachers should not work outside the conditions of their contracts.

Nevertheless, this action has led to the well-publicised sending of home of pupils from some schools, generally with support from parents, and had led to increased demands for strike action for better pay.

The leadership are trying to plan a rapid sell-out of this very limited no-cover action, simply waiting until conference is over before they can reach a stitch up with the employers.

The NUT-LWT, with a partnership more compliant membership, has already ended its action proposing to settle for a deal which would undermine everything they want to do at school, and make it cheaper for employers to get away with over-worked classroom teachers to do overtime, rather than employ supply teachers.

No answer

This is no solution for the thousands of pupils who spend increasing amounts of their time drawing at the back of another class's room in prim
aries. In secondaries they are taught by teachers who are not subject specialists, or who are exhausted trying to cope with the demands of their own teaching, or by a succession of supply teachers.

Teacher shortage has brought increased confidence to teachers. This has been shown by the huge London rally around an opposition motion, and the support, without a campaign, for the 'cover for contract' action.

But the looming recession could easily alter the conditions for struggle. Already the effects of performance related pay are working their way into schools, with teachers increasingly haggling individually or on a school by school basis for more pay. This is a cultural shift in teaching, where experience and responsibilities were seen as the only legitimate criteria in determining pay.

The leadership of the Broad Left should be counterposed to the role of the left in the union, and the Socialist Teachers' Alliance, which is seeking to gain the year to continue the campaign against performance related pay. Let us use this year to force the NUT leadership to call the necessary pay rally. This should be shown at King's College London by the union should act when confronted by the victimisation of its members.

Conference: The 3TA has also taken forward the arguments in defence of comprehensive education and against privatization through a number of initiatives and conferences involving broader forces.

The battle between the Broad Left leadership and the real left of the union will be crucial to win back this Easter which will be even more important for the future. Your guest speakers have been invited, including the Tory MP, the Labour MP, and three Executive priority motions have been tabled.

This will leave very little time for a conference that involves the discussion that really needs to be had: how to defend comprehensive education and conditions against a neo-liberal onslaught, by building up the collective strength of the union, on privatization and increased selection and division in education.
Alliance gains strength and confidence

THE SOCIALIST Alliance has continued to make remarkable strides forward over recent weeks. No wonder the BBC has decided that we are the forefront of the minor parties. While the Alliance was ready for an election on May 3, the postponement until June 7 will undoubtedly allow these processes to continue. Liz Davies' letter makes clear. This increasing strength can be measured at a number of levels:

- New Socialist Alliances are being formed in places were we didn't previously exist.
- Candidates are being selected in areas where activities were not confident that we had the capacity to stand. 88 are in place as we go to press, and the list is still growing.
- Liz Davies' decision to leave the Open University, and to support the Alliance is causing many others to think about joining her.
- All alliances are working better, pulling new activists in.

A national level, things have been extremely constructive and practical with an amazing degree of unity. As a result of all this we have seen that Bush would not be the same as the cold war. The degree of media coverage both nationally and locally, which itself reinforces the popular support.

The Birmingham conference at which the manifesto was adopted was a watershed. Sharp political debate took place over a wide range of policy areas, but in the end there was one question at the heart of matters: When it was needed to be settled was what kind of organisation are we trying to build.

Delyn Linda speaks at Harrow rally

Some comrades, particularly members of Workers' Power, the CPGB and RIG, argued that the Socialist Alliance should adopt a full revolutionary programme. The majority, including the International Socialist Group, SWP and AWS, argued that to take this road at this time would cut us off from our potential supporters.

It was a difficult issue to grapple with, given the fact that undoubtedly the majority of those present at Birmingham - indeed probably the majority of those currently active in the Alliance at any level - are revolutionary socialists.

The point is not at all that we want to hold our policies, but that the exciting potential of the project lies in our ability to win those breaking from new Labour to become involved in building a socialist alternative. Many of these people still have reformist ideas, while many others have not had the opportunity to discuss how the society they want to see can best be achieved.

This is the crucial audience that the Alliance has to reach out to and recruit to work on the basis of campaigning work as well as electoral profile.

Maturity

GIVEN that the stakes were so high, and the long history of sectarianism on the British left, the degree of maturity and calmness with which the Birmingham conference managed to address these questions was remarkable.

The commitment of those who had argued for a different approach to the Socialist Alliance itself was also shown by the fact that when the full manifesto was put to the vote at the end of the day only one comrade voted against.

The only negative factor within all these processes is the increasing absence of the Socialist Party, which had less than 20 comrades at the Birmingham conference.

While Socialist Party member and national chair of the Alliance Dave Nellist has played a full and positive role, at the last two national meetings he has been the only member of his organisation present. This pattern is replicated in most local areas, where Socialist Party branches effectively boycott Alliance activities and meetings.

We have argued many times in these pages that it will be the Socialist Party itself that will pay the price for their sectarianism. As the Socialist Alliance grows stronger, this will be even more the case than previously.

Meanwhile the Socialist Alliance is making plans to ensure that the next 100 years of the Debaker hospital workers

Campaigning against New Labour's outrageous support for so-called "intellectual property rights" of the drug companies.

- Mobilising for the UNISON low pay demonstration in Manchester on April 28.

The election broadcast that Ken Loach is putting together will bring to people's living rooms a picture of the breadth of experience, talent and ideas represented by our candidates up and down the country.

In addition we will be preparing to launch our own manifesto as a pamphlet which can be sold by activists on the doorsteps, in bars and workplaces and from stalls.

This will give us the opportunity to get in made up over the issues on which we have something to say and present a vision of a society which is fundamentally different from the profit hungry, poverty ridden one in which New Labour presides over.

Bush blots the landscape

George W Bush may only have been in office for five months, but he has already left an indelible mark on the landscape, both in the US and on a global scale.

As an oil man born and bred, it was always on the cards that Bush would instinctively side with big business and the corporate policies. And as a hard-line advocate of the "sun of star wars" National Missile Defence system, as well as new spending on long-range bombers and "smart" weapons, his commitment to further building into a new escalations of the arms race was predictable.

But Bush also attracted large-scale sponsorship from energy companies, and this, together with the influence of his Vice President Dick Cheney - another oil man - has also shaped his choice of personnel for the new Republican administration.

Interior Secretary Gale Norton, notorious as a keen defender of the oil polluting corporations, has no time in opening up formerly protected wildlife reserves in Alaska for oil exploration. And George Dubya himself has given a clear indication of his concern for the environment by abandoning any attempt to ratify the limited provisions of the 1997 Kyoto protocol limiting the output of "greenhouse" gases.

But by Bush has famously questioned the science behind Kyoto and complained at the extra costs it would impose on the US, his defenders point out with some justification that this is not so much a change of policy as a recognition of political reality in the USA. Indeed the Kyoto proposal for a minimal 5% reduction from 1992 pollution levels by 2012 would not have passed through Congress under Clinton, and would never get through the current Congress erected last year.

But the obvious change of direction on the environment is the administration's revision of Clinton's belated attempt last year to restrict levels of arsenic in drinking water from a hefty 50 parts per billion to the European and WHO standard of 10.

The direction of the Bush administration is consistent, rapid and direct: it is moving swiftly towards new, massive deregulation of big business, an enormous $1.6 trillion tax cut - worth an average $55,000 a year for the wealthiest one percent, and just a few hundred dollars for most working people - and a new escalation of military spending.

Threat

Bush's attempts to justify the NMD programme and a new arms race needed more of a credible "threat" than the hubbub and humiliation of Russian Federation, the old remote enemy of Iraq, and the marginal "rogue" state of North Korea, with whom the US has now ended peace talks.

That's why the administration has been keen to crank up the tension with the Chinese government over the spy plane which collided with a Chinese fighter. The probability of such a crash had been increased by the intensified US military surveillance of China from space, by air, by sea, and even using spy bases in Mongolia, after Bush's team decided to classify China as a "competitor" rather than a "partner".

The refusal of the Chinese to bend the knee to the world's only superpower has helped Bush and his defence and state department team to build up a stronger "imaginary threat" as justification for their own aggressive policies.

The protests against the new missiles are gathering pace, not least in Britain, where NMD is mounting a major demonstration on the Easter weekend.

But those who argue that Bush's hawkish and brutal neo-liberal policies justify a line of supporting the Democrats as a "lesser evil" have short memories and rather blinkered vision.

Onslaught

The NMD programme began under Clinton, while eight years of Democrat administration also served to push through neo-liberal policies, creating a massive onslaught on social security. Although Clinton's administration paid lip-service to Kyoto and environmental issues, the administration delivered little if anything in practical policy terms.

Widespread disillusion in the Democrats among ordinary working people who had naively expected better was a major factor in the close-run, highly dubious election in November which eventually enabled Bush to take office on a small minority of the popular vote.

But Bush is on the way to becoming the fondest for a return of the Democrats - who have largely disappeared as a coherent political opposition and are barely even noticed by US workers and socialists. But the globalised urge to campaign against building camps of resistance and a genuine political alternative to the twin parties of capital, which have been allowed to share power (and cynically reward their sponsors) for
Doubts linger over world economy

Andy Kilminster.

In its issue of March 24 the Economist talked openly in the leading article of the possibility of “the new world recession — the first recession?” Over the last few months the fall in stock markets has spread from the US to Europe and elsewhere that from the high-tech sector to the rest of the world economy.

Many US companies are slashing employment and close to 200,000 manufacturing jobs are expected to go in Britain this year. How serious are these problems for global capitalism? Is the world on the edge of recession or not?

The problems that the world economy now faces result directly from the experience of the last decade and the strategies followed by capital during this period. In 1980 West Germany noted for some time that the global economic turbulence of the late 1990s needed to be seen as the product of a new kind of segmentation, but interlinked, developments. Three in particular were especially important:

■ the long-term stagnation of the Japanese economy;
■ the speculative bubble in the USA;
■ and the turmoil in international financial markets leading to continuing currency crises in developing economies.

The nightmare for the capitalist class is that these three developments might prove to be mutually reinforcing. This would make international capital even less stable, which would destabilize the rest of the world, in particular the fragile periphery.

Such a development seemed possible in 1997 and 1998, even if the US policy of a strong dollar allowed for some economic recovery in Europe as the euro fell in value and for an export boom in Asia which gradually pulled much of the region away from recession.

The financial markets regained some confidence, on the expectation that US government and companies had weathered any global meltdown. As a result the currency crises in Russia in 1998 and Brazil in 1999 each had only localized impacts, although regionally their effects were severe.

What is different now? Most obviously, the USA is no longer in a position to play the role it did in 1998. For the US to continue to take in the amount of imports from the rest of the world that it has done over the last few years requires the continuation of the American consumer boom. This appears less and less likely as US citizens’ wealth falls with the decline in the stock market and the rise in unemployment there.

Also, the US no longer appears to have the capacity for investment funds as in previous years. The result is a panic in the financial sector. Investors in regions like South Asia are faced both by a decline in exports from the area as the US economy slows, and by a shortage of other places to take their money to.

In such circumstances each capitalist will try to act as quickly as possible to safeguard their funds, but all this will be in vain as this way can easily trigger a general recession.

The first country among the so-called emerging market economies to suffer from this mood has been Turkey. Here a process of financial liberalization similar to that undergone by East and South East Asia in the 1990s has had the same effect of encouraging speculative investment. At the same time the underlying profit rate has not justified the speculations.

The realisation of this by the markets sparked a collapse of the currency in Turkey and for international capital are centred more in the Asian region than in Latin America than in Turkey.

This concerns of countries like Argentina, the Economist over the last two years has been that the Asian economies had not restructured themselves in a free-market direction as much as had been hoped in 1997.

However, this depends on the willingness of capitalists and workers in such countries to endure unlimited periods of recession in order to defend the value of the currency. If the value of the Argentine currency does plummet, then the credibility of currency boards will be shaken severely. This could cause another round of panic on the international financial markets.

Argentina works more than impressed with globalisation

Argentina works more than impressed with globalisation

Most importantly, it is not clear how successful the strategy of the US federal reserve in trying to boost the American economy through interest rate cuts will be.

Either it is clear whether international financial markets will react in the same way as they did in 1997. Much also depends on whether EU countries or Japan are able to take up some of the slack left by US developments through an increase in their rates of growth.

What we can say, however, is that the strategies adopted by capital to try avoid economic crisis now are not the ways to top further problems for the future. The US is encouraging further borrowing through interest rate cuts at a time when debt is already at record levels.

The Japanese government budget deficit is moving towards a level which will be unsustainable in the long run. And with previous “suc- cess stories” like Argentina facing problems in maintaining currency values, the range of options open to developing nations is narrowing drastically.

We must argue that the direct effect of such developments on Britain will be limited. It has been pointed out that Germany exports more proportionately to the USA than the UK does. But this ignores two factors.

Firstly, the effects of the increased international competition mean that indirect effects of global unrest are as significant as direct effects. If the Asian economies run into difficulties, for example, as a result of a US slowdown, then this will rebound on Britain.

Secondly, the linkages between Britain and the USA is much more through foreign investment than through trade. A decline in the value of British investments abroad, coupled with financial instability in London, will cause serious problems for British capital.

It is impossible to predict how serious these difficulties face by global capitalism will be. But whatever the outcome of the current recession, these developments offer a wealth of opportunities for socialists to argue their case.

It will be much more difficult for the next few years to argue that the market can solve the problems facing humanity than it has been recently. And in those circumstances it becomes both more possible and more important to argue the contrary; that central to the problems facing the world today is the role of the market and its destructive effects.
Darren Williams

There are always times for socialists in the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) to rally and campaign for their aims. The year 2000, which has seen a general election and the end of the Cold War, among its membership, ended spectacularly with the election of the socialist candidate, Mark Serwotka, as general secretary.

There now exists the best opportunity in more than a decade to ensure that civil servants have a union that is run democratically and is willing to fight to defend their interests. One way to achieve this will be to attend a special conference called, as Left Unity demands, by Left Unity to discuss how to build the left and organise effective campaigns on pay, privatisation and all the other issues that make up PCS's membership.

The conference will have to address the experience of defeat during the 1990s and 1990s, during which the left was increasingly excluded from power while the rights-wing leadership allowed Tory governments to 'refurbish' the civil service, while taking away the rights of their members.

The creation of PCS in 1998 with a rulebook that institutionalised bureaucratic power, seemed to guarantee the indefinite continuation of control from the top down by the likes of general secretary, Barry Rasmussen, and his National Moderate Group. An enthusiastic advocate of co-op along the lines of the National Postal Mutual, Rasmussen refused to lead campaigns against the Tory privatisation policies that have continued seamlessly under New Labour.

Unwilling to campaign for a return to civil service-side pay deals based on cost of living increases, Rasmussen even vetoed strike action in those departments where members felt strong enough to take on their own management.

Splits in the ruling rights-wing coalition led to the general secretary election being brought forward to a candidate for lack of support and in exchange for being allowed to continue in office until May 2002 and to remain an official until he retires at age 65.

In the ensuing election, rank-and-file left-winger, Mark Serwotka, was the surprise winner over Blairite favourite, Hugh Timms, thanks to Left Unity's decision to support Serwotka. Although the right's-wing-Rasmussen was surprised to learn that his dominance had been challenged, he could not take the decision in his stride.

At one extreme in this debate are the Socialist Fury and their fellow-travellers, as well as the remnants of the Jobs and Pay Broad Left coalition. These have a record of prioritising elections over campaigning, and putting their positions in the bureaucracy from which they can exert subtle influence.

They point to the presence on the National Executive Committee (NEC) of Left Unity members, suggesting that these members can exert power between the two fraternal rights-wing-extension of their arguments. They claim that their contacts within the bureaucracy can do what they can do better.

On the other side, the Socialists claim to have won with a platform of telling the truth and nothing but the truth, and of giving workers a real voice.

New Labour's achievements

As the general election approaches, all eyes will soon be enticed by posters, all over the country, boasting of the government's successes. Here are a few examples:

Britain lags far behind the rest of Europe in applying the Equal Pay Act, which requires women to be paid the same rates for the same job as men.

Women working full-time earn 30% less per cent of men's full-time hourly earnings.

Women working part-time get less than two-thirds of male full-time hourly wages.

The Equal Opportunities Commission in its recently issued report, Just PAY, concludes that the long-term consequences of the pay gap are poverty, social exclusion, inadequate pensions.

Britain has the highest prison population in Europe, a telling commentary on the causes of crime policy. Labour has been the crime capital of Europe. But Stalin decreed the imprison of 12-year-olds.

When Tony Blair removed Clause 4 from Labour's programme, he recognised the only effective weapon for reducing crime.

Building on the success of the privatised railways - the highest-accident rate in Europe - New Labour will proceed with the privatisation of Airports control and the London Underground. Anything the Tories can do we can do better.

Education, Education, Education. Hasn't been so successful with Chris Woodhead, New Labour will now be looking for another Conservative as head of Education watchdog, Ofsted.

Woodhead's policies, supported by Blair and Blackburn, have contributed to today's situation, which has made it difficult to recruit sufficient teachers.

To make up for this, the government has used teachers from overseas, depriving less developed countries of sorely needed resources. This is, probably, to many of the debt redemption programmes.

The South African Development Community (SADC) is subject to a number of external debt burden of over $70 million. In sub-Saharan Africa, nearly 50 per cent of the people subsist on less than a dollar a day, in the face of the unprecedented growth of global debt.

It is from some of these countries, such as Zambia, that teachers are being recruited.

And not only teachers - nurses and midwives, for example, are being recruited to deal with the plague of TB.

"The crisis in Britain and other rich countries is depriving less developed countries of sorely needed resources. This is, probably, to many of the debt redemption programmes."

Perhaps this is all part of New Labour's ethical foreign policy.

Don't forget! It is New Labour which gave Old Age Pensioners that meagre 75p a week increase last year. Vote New Labour and all our hard work will be given up to you for another four glorious years.

Even fatter cats with new Labour

In order to preserve the government's budget-friendly image, the government will do nothing to stop the scandal of squads room pay, which has repeatedly risen by more than the increases they handed out to their staffs.

Incomes Data Services found that chief executives of the top 100 public companies received a 10% increase in basic pay last year - that is before bonuses and share packages are added. After all, if these incomes are curbed, where will the £5000 cheques into New Labour's coffers come from?

Silent guns

Not all Israelis share Barak and Sharon's enthusiasm for killing Palestinians. The Israeli army has been hit by an unprecedented wave of dishonourable discharges. Some soldiers have refused to serve in areas which have seen the worst violence during the intifada.

Hundreds of serving soldiers have requested transfers from the West Bank and the Gaza strip or have refused reserve duty. Thousands have opted out of the compulsory military service.

Regal generosity

In a fable of publicity, His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales announced that he was donating £500,000 to help the rural communities hard hit by the foot and mouth epidemic. It's a mystery caused by the outbreak of the disease in the Twmpa area, near the area is connected. But the royal munificence has not yet ended. His estate agents are sending out leaflets, with a donation of £50,000 for each house, and holding a lottery and many of them stricken with the epidemic, to the tune of £2.3 million.
How Labour flogget off Leeds education

Leeds Local Education Authority no longer exists. The education service in the city is run by Education Leeds, an unelected and only partially accountable "arms-length" company. BOB WOODS explains how this came about.

In its drive to develop a free market in education, the new Labour government has selected Leeds, the second largest authority in the country, as a flagship for its policy. The intention is to end the direct provision of education by local authority or local government, and to develop both a national market in education and a thriving education industry that can compete in world markets. The state will buy the education it requires on the market.

The Blair government has never explained or acknowledged its sudden conversion to privatization since it took office. The emphasis is on the private sector, and the contribution that it can supposedly make in the public domain is starkly at odds with what Labour said in opposition to Thatcher and Major.

But this conversion is not irrational. Behind it lies the policies of the World Trade Organisation, and the 1994 General Agreement on Trade in Services. Under this agreement, countries are committed to the progressive liberalization of trade in services. Services on the agenda for trade negotiations include education, health and transport. The logic of this is that, since these services do not define services, the possibilities are endless.

Britain is already one of the largest exporters of education in the world, and British business stands to benefit enormously as the education market is gradually opened up to competition.

First of all, though, a private British education industry must be built up which can take advantage of a new international market. And this is the purpose of the public-private initiatives that the government is promoting. What is happening now in Leeds is the model for the future of education, and other services as well.

In early February 2000, Ofsted published a highly critical and damaging report on the Local Education Authority of Leeds City Council.

Although the report acknowledges that the proportion of successful primary schools than the national average, and that progress was being made under a new Director of Education, it concludes that "the inspection has little confidence in the LEA's capacity to respond fully to the government's agenda within an acceptable timescale."

The report also complained of a history of "political interference" in the functioning of the LEA.

In fact, the performance of the LEA in Leeds has been better than many other authorities in several respects, as the report itself acknowledges. The score for A-Level results is above the national average and "has been rising for the past six years". Test results at the ages of seven and fourteen are above average.

More is spent on education in total than central government requires; The City Council's expenditure on education has been consistently above its £583.2 million of the Local Schools Budget was delegated in 1999/2000, compared with the government target of 80% by 2000/2001, and "central administration costs are £44 per pupil, well within the Secretary of State's target of £60."

The report also notes that: "The LEA has been successful in recent years in reducing the rate of permanent exclusion and in 1998 it was broadly in line with the national target. There has been a further significant reduction in permanent exclusions since then."

Moreover, Leeds is in the forefront when it comes to both early years provision and the integration of children with special needs into schools. On the provision for special education, the report recognized the LEA's "good intentions in recent years" and that as a result "fewer pupils attend special schools as a proportion of its school population than nationally."

The report also refers to strengths in IT, behaviour and numeracy.

Probably the most remarkable aspect of the report is the extent to which it acknowledges the recent improvements in the LEA, or rather its success in responding to the criteria laid down by central government.

As the report says: "The LEA has now had a new permanent Director for one year" who has "laid out a clear vision for the future and has encouraged a fresh approach" and has "reorganised the Education Department along very sensible lines."

The Director has also "set out his priorities for the education service clearly and has won widespread support from schools for his new strategic approach."

The report even states that: "Many of the weaknesses noted in this report have already been recognised by elected Members, senior and middle managers and developments are taking place. Given the report's own evidence, it is difficult to see how the inspection team reached its conclusion that the LEA's 'weakness of provision extends almost consistently across all of its core responsibilities'."

Comparison with other local authorities is also revealing. In 1999, Leeds outperformed both the DLA and the LEA, head teachers were actually paying a salary to itself as the one-sided nature of the report.

When Estelle Morris, the Schools Minister, spoke to primary school leaders in Leeds Civic Hall shortly after the report had been published, the chair of the Secondary Heads Association said: "It was clear that the majority of heads were in support of the local authority. There were criticisms in the report. But where there is praise it is faint and where there is criticism it is harsh to the degree that it gives an extreme view."

The decline in the number of LEA teachers has accelerated rapidly. When Leeds were applying for Education Service Delivery status in 1998, David Blunkett said that Leeds were "a very welcome bidder indeed", and he praised the "excellent work" done by the LEA in education and social services.

Following the Ofsted report, the DfEE and the Council, acting together, appointed the consultants PricewaterhouseCoopers to consider what should be done next.

Their work is said to have cost Leeds in excess of £200,000. When the report appeared after a consultation period of four months, the conclusions reached by the consultants were little different from the original Ofsted assessment.

Our review confirmed Ofsted's criticism that fundamental weaknesses in the strategic management of the LEA exist as the report said. It continued: 'Collectively the agenda for change is a formidable one, which we believe requires a whole service response that will only be efficient, effective and of high quality if it is based on a clear plan and dynamic leadership. We conclude that the scale and scope of the agenda for change is such that we do not believe the current LEA infrastructure as it operates now has the capacity to bring about the fundamental and rapid change required in a time-frame which is achievable."

Like Ofsted, PricewaterhouseCoopers had chosen to ignore the evidence about the overall performance of Leeds in comparison with other LEAs, and the strides that had been made since the appointment of a new Director. With this mindset, it is difficult to see how any new company could have come through unscathed.

The report ranked various options in a highly subjective procedure. Total outsourcing of the services was given the highest merit by public-private partnership (a joint venture company) scored almost as highly. The option was on this occasion at least considered as an option, but appeared well down the list.

PricewaterhouseCoopers recommended the setting up of a Joint Venture Company (JVC), jointly conceived in a 50-50 company by Leeds City Council and a private sector partner. Unsurprisingly Estelle Morris endorsed this choice in June. The chair of the new company was to be a 'neutral' man named Peter Ridgeway, until then known only as the chairman of Leeds Sportscross, the owners of Leeds United.

Fittingly, Estelle Morris met the chair of the LEA school's conference centre at the Leeds United ground at Elland Road, and announced her decision, repeating the now familiar mantra of no change, no change, no change.

The response was less than enthusiastic. The chair of Leeds Primary Heads Association said: "This isn't what the primary heads asked for. We were after continuity and structure. At the end of the day we are part of an experiment."

The news of the PHA was even more outspoken: "Similar examples have not gone well and we have already received bad coverage. We are very concerned that we are going to happen to the Tinari."

There could be a lack of direction, going on, going on, going on. He added: 'Councillors are accountable to the public. It is the Joint Venture Company needs to be just as accountable.'

A shortlist of potential prime candidates or partners was announced last November: Capita (who have been far from successful in running housing benefit in Lambeth), and OCS (who have faced many complaints to the ombudsman in a single year), W S Atkins (best known at present as consultancy), and Serco (who include in their diverse interests holding the contract for Doncaster Prison).

The choice of Drummond was人选 the next leader of the Council and all the LEA MPs (all Labour) were said to be discreetly lobbying the DfEE for a more acceptable candidate with another Leeds MP, Morris, perhaps Brighton or Lancashire.

A year later, and on the very accurate of the inaugural Ofsted report, the government finally announced that Leeds Joint Venture Company in favour of an 'arms-length' company to be known as Education Leeds.

The new company is fully owned
by the City Council, but still with Peter Riddell of Leeds United in charge, and still employing Caist as consultants. The change altered the form but not the substance of the arrangement.

Caist were the successful bidders and they have already had extensive interest in schools computer information management systems. Caist appointed two members to the board of Education Leeds, both until now senior members of Newham Council in London, the Director and Deputy Director respectively.

S

Successful bid was led by Bedfordshire Council's Director of Education. It is clear that the private sector remains an educational option largely by poaching from the public sector.

In early March, the Chief Executive of Education Leeds was named as Chief Executive of Newham Council, London, and Deputy Director of Education in York. The new team was to start work in April this year, when staff formerly employed by the LEA were transferred.

The campaign to prevent any loss of demand or accessability has been led through-out by the Leeds Campaign for the Advancement of Private Sector Education (CASE). The Yorkshire Evening Post also provided very strong support for the case, with extensive coverage to the issues and arguments over the private sector.

The Labour Party in the city holds more than three-quarters of the seats on the City Council and has generally been hostile to the removal of the education service from direct control of the council. But the government has often been tempered to an extent by feelings of loyalty to Westminster. Clear division have emerged between the Party at large in the city and the Labour Group on the Council. Leeds CASE was launched in June 2000 and public sector trade unionists and others have also played a role. The campaign has been determined to maintain control of the education service over a period of many public meetings, lunches, demonstrations, street stalls, leafleting and many other activities.

The central case argued was that education should continue to be controlled, but imperfectly, by the people of Leeds through the mechanisms of the ballot box. Any attempt to reduce the accountability of elected representatives for the education service should be resisted. Any suggestion that the private sector is somehow by definition more efficient has been relatively easy to refute, given the state of the railways.

CASE has also questioned the cost of the exercise. In addition to the costs involved in setting up the new arrangement, the council will have to maintain a parallel structure to monitor the performance of the new company. Fees or profits earned by the private sector partner may not be available to be spent on education. The likely costs are put at a region of £750,000. In addition, given the inevitable loss of control of the trade unions, CASE has also been concerned with the impact on the pay and conditions of a group of workers.

Understandably perhaps, the campaign has been less successful in setting what is happening in Leeds in the wider context of a potential global market in education, and the government's well-hidden determination to ensure that UK education is strongly placed to benefit from this market. It could also be argued that CASE would have benefited from linking up to a greater extent with the opposition inside the Labour Party.

If July, shortly after Estelle Morris had noted for a Joint Venture Company, the Leeds District Labour Party, after a heated debate, resolved to call for the retention of the management of education by the City Council, support for the CASE campaign and a city-wide referendum on the issue. It also called for the Labour Group in the council to publicly oppose the government's proposals. Although this had little apparent effect, it did indicate the strength of opinion within the party.

When an adjournment debate on the issue took place in the House of Commons in July 2000, all the MPs expressed doubts about the way in which the DfES was doing seven sets of LEA, albeit with varying degrees of fervour. Leading off the debate, George Mudie (Leeds East) asked rhetorically why Osborne and the DfES had singled out Leeds.

"It is one of the biggest Labour authorities, and there is a feeling that everyone would take notice if Leeds were made an example of. It is a type of syndrome. If the Minister reads the press, she will discover that the mood in Leeds has become worse as the saga has developed. The authority may not be perfect, but the grotesque pictures painted by Osborne does not serve anyone, unless the political agenda is to destroy Labour education authorities!"

He asked the Minister whether she thought that 'Leeds children were experimenting by handing over their education to the private sector'?

Another local MP took up the issue of democracy. Harold Benn MP said that the "people of Leeds want their children's education back in the control of their elected representatives."

The suggestion that it would take the required management skills to be instated, and therefore before the return of control and management of the educational system to the city's elected representatives was not acceptable.

Estelle Morris' rather unhelpful and unilluminating reply was worthy of George W Bush. She referred to George Mudie's contribution and said that he had 'talked about Leeds ... in an interesting way, and he meant some praise by saying that its schools were average. That is not good enough for Leeds. It is capable of better than average.'

The head of Education Leeds is not about the public versus the private sector, but about forging a new relationship between the best of Leeds LEA with something new that it currently lacks.

Following the marginal concessions that the JVC would be replaced by an arm's length company, George Mudie, who is a former leader of the council, complained that a council which had seen Margaret Thatcher should have no difficulty with Estelle Morris.

The Council's preference for a partnership with another local authority was roundly ignored, but the opposition within the party have never been translated into votes in the council chamber.

In a last ditch attempt to head off the arm's-length company and retain education services in-house, the Lord Mayor, Bernard Atta, offered to lead a delegation to Blankenett if the people of Leeds want me to. A barrage of letters in the local evening press urged him to do so, and so did the District Labour Party.

The board of Education Leeds met for the first time at the beginning of April behind closed doors. Afterwards, with unintentional irony, chairman of the board Peter Riddikle promised a new culture of openness and transparency.

In its report in February 2000, Ofsted wrote of the government's agenda and the need for the LEA to respond to it. Unfortunately, the government's agenda appears to have more to do with the needs of British business rather than public education and the defence of the comprehensive ideal.

As Minister for Trade and Industry in 1998, Peter Mandelson issued a consultation paper to industry, whose purpose was to encourage businesses on the important negotiations on international trade in services ... Within the European Community we will be drawing up request lists country-by-country and sector-by-sector. These negoti- ating priorities must reflect UK business priorities. Why has Leeds been chosen for this experiment? Part of the answer may be that it is the second largest LEA. Secondly, although its performance is better than Sheffield or Hull, it does not have a cabinet minister to inhabit.

The last word should perhaps go to an editorial in the Yorkshire Evening Post: "Thank snobs to Leeds is nothing less than an outrageous affront to democracy which divorces us all from the right to take a part in our children's education. And if this untested experiment fails they will be the ones to pay the price."

The above is an amended and updated version of an article due to appear in the journal Education and Social Justice. An annual subscription for personal subscribers costs £25, and can be obtained from Barbara Wiggins, Thorpeham Books Ltd, Westminster House, 734 London Rd, Oakhill, coke-on-Trent, ST4 SNP

Walk-out over college pay freeze

Lecturers at Oxford College of Further Education staged a one-day protest strike on April 3 after the College's Board refused to offer the nationally agreed pay rise for the last financial year.

A massive majority of the NATFHE members among the lecturer staff voted for the action, which forced the cancellation of all lessons for the day, and many joined a cheerful and confident picket line.

The hard line from Oxford College management - one of only a handful of Colleges not to honour the dispute - flows from the reforms pushed through by the Tories, which made each FE College responsible for balancing its own budget each year.

Among those on the picket line was the Socialist Alliance candidate for Oxford East, John Lissis, who teaches journalism part-time at the College.
Campaigning in Cumbria

Paul Wilcox

The Socialist Alliance in Carlisle, which involves 60 local residents who would be affected by the closure.

Janine Booth, the Socialist Alliance candidate for Carlisle South addressed the meeting as did Jeremy Corbyn, Labour MP for Carlisle North who has been working with Janine to oppose the Post Office's proposals.

Minister Chris Smith was apparently otherwise engaged and the meeting clearly agreed with Janine who wondered what other engagement could be more important than fighting to keep 1300 local jobs in your own constituency.

Smith apparently agreed with his Cabinet colleagues, who claim that what the Post Office (perhaps I should call them by their new title, Consignia) does is not the government's business.

The meeting was also pleased to hear Executive member Dave Wall state that the union would support strike action if management refused to back down and make the investment needed to build a new office in the North as socialist at last.

The next stage of the campaign will be a local demonstration in late April. The Socialist Alliance intends to make sure we remain at the heart of this vital campaign to defend jobs and services.

Before basic human needs. Not a week goes by when our food is unsafe to eat or our National Health Service is so underfunded that waiting lists are getting longer not shorter as we were promised by Tony Blair.

Education is not just a basic human need it is a necessity. But New Labour has taken away the student grant and charged us for our education. It's easy enough for Tony Blair to call our schools "Bog Standard" - but when the cabinet ministers went to public schools.

Last year in the Local Elections (Carlisle City Council, B彻cherby Ward) I was the Socialist Alternative candidate (Socialist Party). We were helped in the campaign by the SWP Carlisle branch and by individual trade unionists.

I had worked closely with the SWP in the Coalition against the tax in the Balkans, which was begun in 1999 by the CNR, Socialist Party, SWP and Carlisle & District Trades Council. This co-operation with other left activists helped build our election campaign a year later.

The seat was won in one of Cumbria's largest constituencies, which in 1999 had been won by the Tories (all three seats). In fact many people told us that they voted for the Labour Party (out the Liberal Democrats did not stand in 1999).

Anger had crept up in 1998 when the Labour-led council tried to put up the pensioners' bus pass. This was opposed by trade unionists, youth and pensioner activists. Labour lost control in 1999 after 20 years of domination.

We go into the forthcoming general election with no illusions about winning. Our task is to put socialist ideas back on the agenda.

Pumping out the message in Pompey

Roger Welch

PORTSMOUTH Socialist Alliance was set up in January this year by the local Socialist Party and a number of independent socialists including myself.

In February, John Molyneux, a leading SWP member and very well known activist and speaker in the city, was elected as our parliamentary candidate and I was elected as his election agent.

Since that time we have moved to holding weekly open meetings and leaflet
ting and petitioning in the main shopping centres on Saturdays.

There are several positive parallels between Portsmout SA and other campaigns such as

People and Planet and the local campaign in defence of asylum seekers. The SA is also supporting the number of Iraqi Kurdish comrades who regularly participate in our meetings and activities. The main focus of our activities has become the demand for the re-nationalisation of the railway system.

Station protest

This has mainly centred on use of the railway union's petition but this was followed up yesterday evening (Monday April 20) with a protest at the local railway station.

We 'occupied' the station for a good half an hour with placards and slogans demanding renationalisation and, unsurprisingly, were well received by the majority of passengers coming off trains.

However there were fewer of these than anticipated, as if to prove our point of view was improvement the all the trains from this station were subject to signi
cific delays.

And it was this day that was brought to the attention of the private promoters who own South West Trains has been given to the contract to run our trains for a year or two.

Now that the election has been postponed our main task is to ensure we do not lose momentum by using the extra time to spread our campaign and demands into the wider community and build the vote for the Socialist Alliance on June 7.
Reds rock Boateng in Harlesden

Adam Hartman SOCIA 'LALLY, North West London are mounting a challenge to Waltham Forest MP Paul Boateng. Mick McDonnell, a campaigner for tenant rights on the Snowshill estate in Harlesden, is standing as the Socialist Alliance candidate. His candidacy will give a voice to the thousands of working class people who feel abandoned by New Labour, and who face mounting uncertainty in many areas of their lives, jobs, education and health. Snowshill has been sacked and redeveloped in a huge redevelopment and "community" plan. The area has been "run down" by a Housing Action Trust. "This area will sell out and manage the new properties. Residents' livelihoods and less secure tenancies. There will not be enough new homes for the current residents. We are campaigning to defend council housing, freeze rents, uphold tenants' rights and to make the necessary resources to upgrade the housing stock and provide decent facilities for residents. The threatened closure of Waltham High School and its reopening as a City Academy specialising in sport, with the aid of a £2 million "donation" by sports marketing tycoon Frank Lilley, will spark a voice to uncertainty for parents in south Waltham Forest. School will be free to select 10% of its pupils and attack teachers pensions.

What about the local kids who won't continue education? 10%? What about those who would rather specialise in music or art? What about the other schools which will lose out under this two-tier system? The government is funding a fund-upgrading dinner organised by Oxford East Labour Party. The local chief executives were invited to meet the new minister, Andrew Smith - at $65 per head. A rival Curry Night for trade unionists and socialist organised by the Alliance on April 6 attracted over 50 key union and campaign activists and raised over £100 for the campaign.

"Cash for canapes?" Oxford Socialist Alliance hit local press and radio headlines with the launch of a fund-raising dinner organised by Oxford East Labour Party. The local chief executives were invited to meet the new minister, Andrew Smith - at $65 per head. A rival Curry Night for trade unionists and socialist organised by the Alliance on April 6 attracted over 50 key union and campaign activists and raised over £100 for the campaign.

Southwark goes for the double

Jane Kelly SOUTHWARK Socialist Alliance, which has nearly 100 paid up members, has two candidates standing in the general election. In Camberwell and Peckham, Harriet Harman's seat, John Mulrenan, long term UNISON activist (and once Harriet Harman's agent) is standing, while in Dulwich and West Norwood, Brian Kelly is standing against New Labour minister, Tessa Jowell.

Brian Kelly has a long trade union and Labour Party record, having been a member of the POEU then its successor the CFU. He was also chair of Dulwich Labour Party and a Labour councillor.

The Southwark Alliance is now divided into two weekly meetings, one for each constituency, but with officers and members co-operating to keep an overview of the campaign.

The whole the Camberwell and Peckham constituency has been leafleted, and we are starting to get positive comments from this with people writing and phoning in, wanting to join and help with the campaign. Fundraising is also going well, with £1200 profit made on a hugely successful social last week. Collaboration between the component parts of the Alliance is working well. A joint Southwark Trades Council and ANL sponsored march took place on April 7 against the NF supporter in Romford. Southwark Trades Council also called a meeting on privatisation, sponsored by the Alliance, where Simon Hughes, Liberal Democrat MP for Bermondsey and Southwark, Kingsley Abraham, prospective Labour Parliamentary candidate for the same constituency and John Mulrenan all spoke about the effects of privatisation on services in the area.

The debate was undoubtedly won by John, who raised the level of politics in the meeting by a combined analysis of the project of the WTO and globalisation and a clear knowledge of its effects in Southwark. We are now looking forward to being on these success stories.

Campaigning - Bristol fashion

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 NW4 2UU.

NEW! 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 NW4 2UU.

Left branches out in Waltham Forest

Roland Rance After a slow start, the SA campaign in Lenton and West Bridgford is picking up support, particularly from voters ferocious at the local council's education policies. SA candidate Sally Linley, an activist in the local parents' groups, will be standing against Labour MP Harry Cole. Biography: who used to be an MP from the Green Party, has moved steadily closer to New Labour. The main local issue is the scandal over the proposed privatisation of education services. Already controversial, this made national headlines when it was revealed that one of the two preferred bidders, the Tribal group, had bought the company currently running Waltham Forest's education services and advising the council on the matter. They had offered large cash bonuses to the teachers if their bid was accepted. Although the one remaining candidate, Nork Anglicas, had been 'found guilty of racism in his management of education services in neighbouring Hackney, Waltham Forest Council refused to cancel the bidding process. The anger of parents, teachers and other education workers has led to mounting support for the challenge to New Labour. The campaign is also strengthening the local Socialist Alliance, which is developing close links with local unions and the Trades Council. Activists hope that this will lead to a strong challenge to New Labour in Waltham Forest in next year's local elections. One complication, however, is the fact that the Socialist Party is running a local UNIONIST activist, Simon Donovan, against Nigel Gerrard, the left Labour MP for Walthamstow. While many Labour Party members in Lenton and West Bridgford are expected to vote for the SA candidate, many SA members will vote Labour rather than for the Socialist Party.
“There is no hope of changing the Party back to the values that most Labour Party members believe in”

Veronica Fagan from Socialist Outlook talked to LIZ DAVIES about her run (reviewed opposite), and the political choices that had emerged for her during and since its writing.

SO: One of the things that struck me reading the book, is that because it is written, in a certain sense as a chronology, it’s difficult to distinguish between the slow drip of the realisation you came to the conclusion you joined the party for and branched off.
LD: I suppose it was that it was more of a slow drip than one break-point. When we were elected to the NEC in 1998, I had very low expectations. I knew we were a party with a great deal of capable dirty tricks, and I also knew that the Grassroots Alliance – holding four seats out of the 53 – were never going to win any votes against the leadership.

So I could say that Millbank’s behaviour exceeded even my low expectations. The first meeting was spending discussing Millbank’s “code of conduct” – the code for drinking and speaking to the press – dubbed by the media a “pissing clause”. At the second meeting, they moved next business to prevent us even discussing our motion condemning the bombing of Iraq.

Then at the National Policy Forum in July 1999 the Grassroots Alliance was hoping that we could ally with some of the trade unions in order to achieve a few amendments on minority positions – such as stopping the link between pensions and earnings, lifting the cap on national insurance contributions, defending housing benefit, opposition to PFI. Our committee wanted everyone to withdraw amendments so that they would not even be voted on by the National Policy Forum, let alone Conference. The trade unions went along with Millbank’s manoeuvres, withdrawing all their motions in favour of a mean.

It also became clear to me that the decision-making structures in the Party – which had been created in order to restrict democracy in the first place – were hopelessly manipulated by Millbank and there was no possibility of any dissenting voices being heard through those structures.

As far as government policies were concerned, like many on the left Labour, I did not have high expectations of the New Labour government in May 1997. But I did expect an assault on lone parents, the scapegoating of asylum seekers, the attempts to restrict trial by jury – some of which were in the Blairsetro.

SO: You talk about Christmas 99 being a key time, but you don’t say very much about the dilemmas you were grappling with?
LD: I was trying to decide whether to stand for the NEC for a third term. We were in the middle of the Livingston saga. The Asylum Bill had been passed by Parliament six months earlier with only seven Labour MPs voting against. I was beginning to feel that I could not necessarily support New Labour at the ballot box. I was very clear that Livingston ran as an independent, I wanted to support him.

It seemed wrong to put myself forward for Party members to stand for the leadership body of the Party when I did not feel committed to the Party any longer.

And the reason why I did not feel committed was because this was a Party now dominated by New Labour – it was not the Labour Party that I had originally joined.

SO: You mention that you did not vote for Dobson in the London Mayoral election and that your partner put a Socialist Outlook poster in the window at this time, but you do not say very much about the Socialist Alliance.

Yet you were one of those leaving the Labour Party was combined with a declaration of support for the Socialist Alliance. What I don’t get from the history is how much your decision to support the Alliance is a negative against New Labour, and how much it is a positive choice.

LD: I took three separate decisions at probably three separate times. I wanted to come off the NEC – I had a mandate to stay on the NEC for a term of who I ended in October 2000, but I wanted then to come off, to take a breath and make some political decisions.

Having come off the NEC, I had some time to think and what became clear to me was that, for reasons that I explained in the book, the Labour Party had qualitatively changed as a result of New Labour and was no longer the Party I had joined.

My experience on the NEC had led me to conclude that there was no hope of changing the Party back to the values that most Labour Party members believe in – the decision-making structures were entirely manipulated by Millbank to prevent that. As a result, I felt that I could not support New Labour at the ballot box and that seemed fairly conclusively to mean that I should not continue as a member of the Party.

The third decision was to support the Socialist Alliance and it’s been the inimicality of the general election that has crystallised that question for me.

I am happy, because I live in Hackney North, I will be voting for Diane Abbott, one of the few remaining left Labour MPs and someone for whom I have a good deal of respect.

But in the neighbouring constituency of Hornsey and Wood Green the choice between Socialist Alliance candidate Louise Christian and Barbara Roche is one of the most straightforward in British political history. There is no doubt in my mind I would vote for Louise Christian.

SO: But what do you think are the major factors in the decline of the Labour Left?
LD: the Labour left started to be beaten back under Kinnock, but there’s no doubt that New Labour has made it impossible for the Labour left to function. When they barred me from standing for Parliament, that sent a message to the Labour left not even to try to put candidates forward.

The left used to play an important role in the decision-making structures of the Party – so New Labour closed them down. The only opportunity for Labour left voices to be heard are the annual NEC elections. Even those elections are large symbolic, since they cannot affect the balance of power on the NEC, but Millbank resents them so much that they are now proposing to reduce the frequency of NEC elections.

The Labour left has declined in influence, also in numbers. Lots of good socialists have left the Labour Party in recent years. In the last few months, I’ve been struck by how low the expectations of the Labour left have become.

It seems to have lost its ability to be shocked by the wickedness of New Labour, because it spends so much time watching New Labour up close – and I think that’s another reason for its decline.

SO: Towards the end of the book you talk about the lack of energy in the Labour Left, but you don’t say very much about how you think that has come about.
LD: The book is intended as an exposure of New Labour, not a study of the Labour Left. But obviously I’ve been part of the Labour Left for years and there can be no disguising that the Labour left has declined.

I contrast my experience in Alexandria – when I was involved in the campaign to save two nurseries from closure, with the recent crisis in Hackney.

The point about the nursery occupation is that the campaign, working both inside and outside the Labour Party, managed, like and persuaded the Labour councilors to overturn their original decision to close the nurseries.

It took a strategy of public campaigning – the occupation, leaflets, petitions on the streets etc, along with the Party’s democratic structures to put pressure on the councilors.

One shouldn’t be too nostalgic – there were plenty of campaigns at that time using those methods that didn’t succeed, but that one did and as a result one nursery was re-opened.

In Hackney in 2000 – 2001, the Council (run by a Labour Party coalition) is privatising its services, attacking the terms and conditions of the workforce, closing nurseries and old people’s centres – and there’s a serious trade union and community campaign opposing these measures.

But the campaign isn’t heard within Hackney Labour Party.

The people involved certainly was not an attempt by the Hackney left, including myself, to raise the issue at Hackney North Labour Party General Committee meeting – but a motion that was written to appeal to the broadest possible support. In general terms, the people involved already have the a Havillars.

That taught me that the struggle of which I have always worked – public campaigning and raising the issue of the Party at the same time – no longer exists and that the very acts of struggle are to be defeated, that will only happen through the public campaign. It won’t happen inside the Labour Party.

SO: Earlier, you referred to your involvement as a party as a party and as a campaigner and as a person. For you, what is the Alliance about? Whether the long term project is...
An Alliance programme to reach layers of workers - or to isolate the left?

Dave Packer
According to Peter Manson in Weekly Worker (March 15th) this was the role of the Alliance in leading the "revolutionary bloc," at the Socialist Alliance conference in Birmingham. In a classic sectarian fashion, their global attempt to fast-track to the Conference their version of the "revolutionary programme" and tried to fast-track the SA, towards becoming a revolutionary party. This of course would have and cut off the Alliance, not only from the mass of the working class but the broad workers' vanguard. It was premature to try to impose such a programme. It reveals an urgent understanding of what the Socialist Alliance is today and of the method of the united front that is involved here.

At Socialist Alliance brings together diverse left wing currents and individuals united in struggle against the capitalist offensive and the Balfour govern. The SA is a united front of a special type, which bears within it the dynamic potentiality to become a new workers party.

A new emergent party must by definition be based on the class struggle and - if it is to provide a socialist answer - must at some point call for a revolutionary platform.

It is understandable what is needed at any point to understand a process, which is a part of the dynamics of the class struggle.

Absurd
We should attempt to force the whole of our vision of the truth, down the throats of the workers even if they move into action - this can not be done.

It's fairly simple for Weekly Worker. Its strategy is to elimin. the only programme to challenge capitalism is a revolution.

The whole premise of the left is that it cannot move into struggle against capitalism, since, times their limited size, without being revolutionary. So build unity in action on a whole range of anti-capitalist demands around the Socialist Alliance programme. This programme represents a frontal challenge to capitalism in today's conditions. It challenges the capitalist system's rule, its rights, ownership, control and management of the free market with planning and control.

It proposes to tax and expropriate the rich and big business. It challenges the capital. logic of globalisation and the decision making, and vigorously promotes the independent class struggle of the working class.

The road reached new depths in reporting that called the 1997 election. In fact I repeated one of the slogans we used in poisoning the minds of the murder of Damilola Taylor - "more resources for the community."

Anyone who knows me or the SA should have understood the point I was making here.

Weekly Worker have made a long and difficult attempt to break out of their Stalinist past, and have in many respects succeeded. It's welcome, but the old baggage still weighs heavy. It often leads them to falsely opponents' positions - which can only be a slide back to those sectarian methods of the past.

Crystallised Reflections

Through the Looking Glass
by Liz Davies
(Verso 2001, £15)
Reviewed by TERRY CONWAY

Through the Looking Glass has achieved more exposure than might warrant, after publishing for years, not least because the Guardian and major extracts of the book two days running.

The reason that paper was prepared to cover the book, as well as the story of author Liz Davies' resignation from the Labour Party and support for the Socialist Alliance, was that the book positively nothing to do with support for the principal politi- cally anything to do with this work.

In fact the Guardian has often gone out of its way to rub Liz Davies' politics but at the same time they know that their readers have fol- lowed her story more closely than the law of the market should occasion- ally stand the left in good stead but this time it did - even though the first day's extracts were incredibly badly edited.

Hopefully the taste given to Guardian readers from these brief snippets will convince many to go out and buy the whole thing. The full menu is definitely to be recommended. As Liz Davies says in their interview with her. Through the Looking Glass lets us to expose the machinations of new Labour. It certainly suc- ceeds in that goal and does so in an accessible, vivid style - building up the picture through a series of incisive commentaries, which impacted on this reader despite the fact that there was little in the book that I wasn't already familiar with.

Liz manages to make all the characters real, whether they are friend, foe or somewhere in between.

This is most memorable when she breaks with revealed wisdom. Her analysis of John Prescott for example gently undermines the popular myth that the man is a bum- balling fool and an unwiling pri- oner of his leader.

Instead Liz shows that often it was Prescott who was choos- en to argue the Blairite line inside the party precisely because he was not seen as an outsider in the way that Blair's creatures is.

Having assumed the role, he carried it out through the use of coherent arguments.

Conversely she shows Blair, portrayed in the media in the image he has created for himself as Mr Cool, being riled on more than one occasion.

What is less clear to those readers who haven't encoun- tered Liz herself except through these pages, it is tor- rent of the author.

Few people in my experience use the same style when they are speaking as they are writing, Liz Davies does - and its a style with a good deal to commend it.

Not only do the people come to life, but the political implica- tions of the actions depicted are drawn out in a gloriously understated style. From the dedication to Tony Benn: "For speaking truth to power" through the concluding pages which illustrate the paucity of today's Labour Left by con- trasting it with the vigour of the anti-globalisation move- ment, we are in no doubt of the viewpoint of this chroni- cler.

What emerges from these pages is a clear demonstration not only of the lengths the party machine goes to stifle even the mildest dissent, but their craven dedication to fur- ther the interests of big busi- ness and the rich, regardless of the cost to their own support- ers.

Of course this is a story familiar to most readers of this paper - but hearing it again in clear ringing tones can cer- tainly reinforce my anger and strengthened my determina- tion to fight it yet more vigor- ously.

It is true that some of the heart-rending moments that led Liz to finally decide to resign from the party that she had worked for and in all her adult life didn't appear to the full extent they could.

I suspect the reasons for this are two-fold.

Firstly both Liz herself and the book are enormously gen- erous to those she has worked with but disagreed with.

The second, as Liz states in the interview, is that the pur- pose of the book is to chroni- cle the rise of New Labour, not to talk about the strengths and weaknesses of the opposition to it.

This book is a valuable asset to anyone who wants to understand the rise of Blairism in order to fight it more effec- tively, Liz Davies has done a great service in writing it.

More than that, by continuing to commit herself to struggling for socialism, she is continuing to lead her readers and passion and develop in exciting new directions.
Learning lessons from Socialist Alliance

The SWP awakes

Greg Tucker

"The Socialist Workers Party is experiencing a massive break from the experiences which have shaped our understanding of the last two decades," writes Chris Bambridge in the latest issue of Socialist Alternatives. He argues that a new radicalisation means that it is necessary for the SWP to break with its relatively isolated branch and paper sale method and turn outward to build the Socialist Alliance, backing back to the IS/SWP experience of the 1950s.

Certainly it has been obvious to the workers of the left over the recent past the SWP has been undergoing major changes, most graphically illustrated by its new open relationship with other left groups and individuals within the Socialist Alliance, but with other manifestations as well. Over the last two years, a slow change has been taking place at the top of the SWP, first tentatively with the campaign against the war in the Balkans, picking up confidence with the turn to the London Socialist Alliance last year, and now finding full expression with the Socialist Alliance general election campaign. A thorough-going attempt to change the practice of the organisation as a whole is now underway.

The political basis of this development has been the way in which Socialist Alliance expression in two recent keynote articles, by John Rees in International Socialism and an essay in a piece on the SWP website from Andrew Wightman, has been taken to heart by the SWP's sister organisation in the United States, the ISO.

Turning point

For both Callinicos and Rees, the achievement of international organisation in Seattle is the key, a turning point in the class struggle, legitimising direct action and providing a new language - anti-capitalism.

While the Fourth International would highlight some of the perils to Seattle, and the role that revolutionaries had in starting the process - with the Euro-marches in Amsterdam and Cologne, and the growth of campaigns for the Tobin Tax such as ATTAC - for all of them, it is clear that we agree that a new cycle of protest has clearly broken out.

In turn a new anti-capitalist mood is developing. John Rees correctly points out that what is now about the current wave of demonstrations and campaigns is that they identify the capitalist system as the enemy. Rather than fighting in isolation against specific issues, there are now whole areas that have become starting points from which to rapidly move on to identifying the real sources of the problem.

Alex Callinicos identifies two further developments - the growth of new political militance such as the ATTAC movement, and the development of new critiques of capitalism from such as Naomi Klein, Susan George and Wladem Bello.

Win to socialism

That they have recognised these developments is to be welcomed. What is even more important is that - along with the Fourth International amongst the revolutionary left - they want to fight to win this broad contradictory current to develop a more coherent socialist consciousness.

At the same time Rees understands that, as social democratic leaderships adopt the neo-liberal economic orthodoxy, the space for traditional reformist consciousness narrows - and an increasing minority of left reformists are forced to draw more left wing conclusions - and turn to the anti-capitalist movement.

Thus the anti-capitalist movement takes on an importance far greater than its current size would suggest - "as a house where those bourgeoisie that Labour is to the left and revolutionaries can co-operate".

Both Rees and Callinicos promote this argument subtly. For them it is the movement's potential and symbolic role that is important. But it is apparent that others in the SWP have inflated the real numbers that have been involved - "bending the stick" - to create an imaginary movement that is not actually there.

In the late '70s the "downward" theory was used to explain away the SWP's inability to politically overcome the hold of left reformism Stalinism inside the trade union movement. For some it is clear that the "upward" theory is now to be used to reckon with the SWP without critically examining the errors of analysis of their past.

Within the Socialist Alliance, and more generally on the left, there is a sharp debate on the nature of Realism. If New Labour is now neo-liberal, has the Labour Party fundamentally changed its nature? John Rees has a more sophisticated analysis compared for example to those in the Socialist Party who argue that New Labour is just ideologically bourgeois.

Labour in government has pushed forward an agenda that has left many working people worse off than they were under the Tories. Its programme has included elements, like the privatisation of nationalised industries, that Margaret Thatcher basked at.

In this context the gut reaction - and at many levels a healthy one - is to argue that this party is now one totally alien to our class. Rees argues that, however right wing Blair is, he is no worse than his political ancestors.

However noted New Labour is in its espousal of capitalist policies, in practice it is no different to any previous Labour government in practice. Despite all the business donations now flowing into Labour's coffers, Blair remains reliant on its financial links with the trade unions.

While perhaps we would go further in believing that Blair intends ultimately to break with Labour's working class base, we would agree with Rees' conclusion that New Labour is still as Lenin described it "a capitalist workers party" and that therefore our electoral slogan must be "Vote socialist where you can, vote Labour where you must.

Reformism in crisis

With a worsening economic situation developing, the crisis in reformism will deepen. How should revolutionaries react? John Rees points out that there are no quick fixes. It will take a long time to reverse the influence of reformism - but the possibilities are stronger than for a long time.

In the trade unions the issue of independence of action is vital. The union bureaucracies have so far been able to turn back what developing mood exists, clamping ranks behind "their" government. But there is a growing politicised left in the trade unions. Rees correctly identifies the need to build a new rank and file movement independent of ties to the Labour. But whilst he is right to stress that socialists, revolutionary or not, must be at the core of this movement he fails to spell out what forms of organisation are necessary. In the past the SWP's view of rank and file organisation has led to building "party"-controlled currents in opposition to genuine broad left movements.

Suspicion

They were right to attack the rotten electoral blocs run by the Socialists and others: but independent activists were rightly suspicious of movements that appeared to be subordinate to the whims of specific parties.

Part of the recent development of the SWP has been for their trade union militants to become involved with other broad left currents. Whilst this has varied from union to union there are positive signs of a new approach.

We need to build truly inclusive organisations that are not in the control of one or another faction, where all experiences are respected. The collaboration in the Socialist Alliance has shown such inclusivity is possible.

Secondly, Rees calls for joint work with the new activists moving into political activity in order to rebuild the left. Employing the notion of the united front is essential for this, we are told. The united front is not some manoeuvre to expose the vacillation of reformism. It is not through differentiation inside the united front that revolutionaries will win recruits.

Rees calls on revolutionaries to "show in practice that their methods of struggle are superior". But that said, the frame of reference is still unclear. Callinicos in his articles talk of the "systematic use of the united front approach" having been "vastly improved... more or less empirically" by the SWP during the Balkan War campaign that has been developed in the London Socialist Alliance GLA election campaign.

But whilst that the building of initiatives such as Globalise Resistance have depended crucially on the diverse range of political viewpoints represented both in building for them and in the actual conferences themselves.

It is true that the SWP has changed dramatically in its relations to the rest of the left. But this has been partial and contradictory. Some campaigns have remained as SWP-led affairs where other organised currents are only barely tolerated.

That is no longer the norm is to be welcomed. However fact that the initial shift took place empirically means that its theoretical implications have not been fully worked through by the organisation as a whole - nor its practical consequences taken to their consistent conclusion.

Open debate

Of course, the SWP - and indeed other revolutionaries - are entitled to feel that their strategy and tactics are the best line of march in any particular arena. But there needs to be an open debate to decide the line of march, fully involving all those committed to that campaign.

Only through open democratic structures and full collaboration can lessons actually be learnt and these new forces won over. Of course, this leaves campaigns open to factional intervention by others. And it is clear that in the past the SWP has not been alone in wanting to close off "their" campaigns for fear of disruptive intervention from the basic flaws problems have to be fought politically rather than through bureaucratic manoeuvre.

The SWP also have to recognise that in so far as their "turn" remains incomplete, some others on the left will hark back to the bad old days when they insulated themselves from other campaigns and organisations. While such backward looking thinking is not the most constructive approach today, the basis for it is completely understandable.

In the end, the SWP itself has the..."Talking to ordinary SWP members, it is clear that the organisation is serious about making a change. But at the same time, for many, this is entering uncharted waters."
Scottish Socialists step up electoral challenge

Gordon Morgan

The Scottish Socialist Party Conference in February elected a new leadership team for the Scottish left.

In the recent General Election, the SSP has been represented by 72 seats in Scotland, with 10,000 members across the country.

The SSP has a strong record of representing workers' interests and fighting for justice.

The SSP is committed to building a socialist Scotland and working towards a more equal and fair society.

SSP conference: Tommy Sheridan and Alan Green

Tommy Sheridan's election and his stance on certain issues have sparked controversy within the SSP.

Sheridan's pro-cannabis stance has been a point of contention within the party.

The SSP has a strong record of fighting for workers' rights and promoting social justice.

The SSP believes in the need for a radical change in Scottish politics.

The SSP's socialist politics are rooted in the struggles of the working class and the need for a more equitable society.
S African union slams “water imperialism”

Charlie van Gelderen

The South African Municipal Workers Union (Sewa) has condemned the privatisation of water supplies in Johannesburg by one of the world’s worst multinational companies, the French-owned Suez-Lyonnaise.

This privatisation took place when the residents of the Johannesburg township, Alexandra, were being forcibly removed from their homes, adjoining the Jekkel river, to areas where there are no services. This is not what they voted for when they voted in the recent local elections when they were promised clean water.

The company’s only response to the threats of cholera in Alexandra, was to check up on the few chemically treated toilets in the area. They showed no evidence that they would install even basic taps even though when they win the contract they promised to “improve services rendered” to customers.

The track record of Suez-Lyonnaise is abominable. They have drastically increased water charges in every city where they operate.

In Paris, water is privatised in a “partnership” between the city and the company. Auditors have been brought in to investigate excessive prices. In a preliminary report, they have come to the conclusion that the administrative, legal and financial arrangements are “characterised by an absence of financial transparency.”

The report estimates that the company’s true profit margin is two-and-a-half times the official reported figure.

In Santiago, Chile, water supply was taken over by Suez-Lyonnaise in 1999. They appointed 4 out of 7 directors to the board, giving them a guaranteed management control, despite holding only 42% of the shares.

The water guarantees them a profit margin of 33%.

In Grenoble, France, a former mayor and a senior executive (now Suez-Lyonnaise), have both been jailed for receiving favours from the company to extend the water contract.

Rostock, in Germany, contrated out its water and sewage system to Europwasser (now Suez-Lyonnaise) for 25 years. Two years after the contract was signed, the water charges were increased by 7% and sewage levels by 6%.

In South Africa itself there are other examples of water privatisation.

The experience in Fort Beaufort, in the former Cape, with Suez-Lyonnaise’s South African subsidiary, Wassa, was that a secrecy clause has been built into the contract, preventing any member of the public getting a sight of it in the explicit approval of the company. The document contained herein has been developed exclusively by the operator (WSSA) and shall not be disclosed to third parties without the written approval of the operator.

The privatisation of water, like that of so many other services across the Third World, generally takes place under the dictat of the World Bank.

In more than 12 African countries, water privatisation has been among the conditions for getting loans from the bank. In Benin, Tanzania, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, and Rwanda water privatisation must be completed by the end of this year in order for governments to qualify for loans.

IMF programme

The irony is that this is taking place under the International Monetary Fund’s new programme — inappropriately named Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF).

More than 5 million people, most of them children die every year as a result of illnesses caused from drinking unclean water. In Ghana only 36% of the rural population have access to safe water and 11 per cent have adequate sanitation.

In poor areas of the country, Accra, families are paying almost half the daily wage for 10 buckets of water. In Angola, there is an agreement that water prices should rise regularly so that the company delivering water can make a “reasonable profit”.

In South Africa today, cholera infections are approaching 70,000. In the last month alone in both Cape Town and Johannesburg, thousands of people have been disconnected from water they could not afford to buy.

Even workers with secure full time jobs are being forced to choose between food, electricity and water.

This is why it is an outrage that on this year’s World Water Day, March 22, the United Nations chose the theme “Water and Health,” but failed to highlight any of these grim realities. This job was left to the activists.

In Auckland, New Zealand, protesters certainly took to the streets highlighting the hundreds of families that have been disconnected since water privatisation in that country.

SAMWU called for the day to be declared a day of mourning for the millions who are sick and dying as a result of water poverty and infected supply.

The weak show their strength

Brian Anglo

For nearly two months, over 260 Pakistsans, Bangladeshis, Indians and about 300 Moroccans, together with smaller numbers of West Africans and East Europeans, have made front page news in Spain. On January 20, an attempt to deport them before a draconian New Immigration Act which threatened them with immediate deportation was due to come into force, these so-called “illegal” immigrants occupied a church in the centre of Barcelona and straight away went on hunger strike, the movement soon spread to another nine churches in the city.

Having tried demonstrations, rallies and a host of other protest actions without much success from the authorities to their simple demand for “papers”, i.e. a permit giving them the chance to work in the country, they felt socially isolated but not wanting to let down the people who had invested their hopes and considerable amounts of money in the strike, they decided in desperation to resort to this more dramatic and dramatic form of struggle.

The impact was enormous. The blanket media coverage was forever sympathetic and attracted a huge amount of support and solidarity to those in the sixties. Public opinion was won over and the government, which had hitherto regarded them as “non-persons” and refused even to acknowledge their existence, was forced to sit down and negotiate with them. More than this, in direct defiance of the new Act, which forbids “undocumented” foreigners to take part in meetings, demonstrations or strikes this spirited group of migrant workers were overly breaking the law on all these counts with absolute impunity.

However there was no quick and easy victory to be had against this right-wing, authoritarian Spanish government with a comfortable parliament majority and just one year into its second term office. It tried every trick in the book to derail and divide the movement, but at every turn was met by the steadfast unity and strength of the protesters.

They were helped by a series of mass public demonstrations and rallies staged by a broad-based support movement. These demonstrations were highly successful, despite the obstructive and divisory tactics of the major trade unions and normally left-wing political parties who made their backing conditional on the immigrants giving an end to the hunger strike - the one weapon that had been left to them after they had been groomed and abandoned by these very organisations.

After a tense and grinding feint, the hunger strikers managed to wring an agreement out of the government. But as this was couched in rather general terms, they maintained the sit-in and the team of lawyers, under their instructions thrashed out the actual details with the government’s legal experts until the wording was to their satisfaction.

Eventually, after 47 days, when together with smaller actions in other parts of Spain, brought the plight of foreign workers to an incredible climax of the political scene, the hundreds of participants in the sit-in streamed out of the main church in a mood of euphoria - the long packed mass meeting...and marched straight to the central government offices in Barcelona to show that they were still as militant and united as ever. These extraordinary struggles have had the virtue of demonstrating very again that where there is a will to resist the dictates of unjust governments and an exploitative economic system, resistance is always possible, even by those in the apparently weakest positions and in the most difficult situations.

It is all the more remarkable for having taken place during a period when major political and social struggles have been virtually absent from Spain. Another related aspect of this fight, which captured the imagination of tens of thousands of Catalans and Spanish citizens, is the way it confirms that ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances are capable of the most extraordinary feats.

For among these heroic hunger strikers there were practically no political activists, no hardened trade unionists, no seasoned campaigners, no experienced organisers, 'merely' ordinary people prepared to stand up for their rights.

This struggle could never have achieved as much as it did without the unity of all those at its heart. And in this sense, one of the more notable features was the close co-operation and good relations among the Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani, who were not the slightest bit interested in whether or not their respective governments were on good terms, but only that they were determined to get along well with each other.

Although it has now shifted to a new phase, the struggle is by no means over. The main task in the immediate future is to maintain pressure on the government to ensure that it keeps to the agreement.

However, whatever the outcome, these valiant workers and their supporters have made a lasting impression on society at large and changed the way the immigration issue will be approached from now on.

Barcelona, 19 March 2001
The arrest of Simo-Sabotan Milošević comes at a time of growing tensions throughout former Yugoslavia. In the last week, 19 people were killed in armed clashes in Macedonia. The Dayton accords, which supposedly brought peace to the region, are beginning to look less secure as elections of the Serb community. Later this month elections in Montenegro will provide a test of whether or not to secede from what remains of Yugoslavia.

These issues are inextricably linked. They are a product of the wave of Serb nationalism unleashed by Milošević since the break-up of Yugoslavia. This is also the result of increasing intervention, intervention which has led to new crises arising. Geoff Ryan explains.

**The arrest of Milošević**

Socialist Outlook has consistently argued that the Greater Serbia policy pursued by Milošević is the major cause of the violence in the break-up of Yugoslavia. There is no doubt that Milošević began to be a threat to the region for the wars that have led to so much death and destruction. Consequently, he has always been in favour of the overthrow of Milošević, his arrest and then, in his absence, the overthrow last year, we now welcome his arrest and investigation pending trial.

Does that mean that the workers of Serbia. They are the people most fit to judge him.

The reuniting of unity between working people throughout the Balkans necessitates the Serbian working class coming to terms with Milošević’s crimes. That requires recognition that almost anything that Milošević has done was by no means the major victim. A real setting of accounts with Milošević means making him accountable to all other former Yugoslav countries and Kosovar.

Does that mean that Milošević should be handed over to the War Crimes Tribunal in the Hague? We certainly do not demand that. We demand that the workers of Western powers to build the Yugoslav government into a genuine socialist state.

In particular we condemn the cynical hypocrisy of the United States and Britain and the Democratic and Republican administrations have made absolutely clear that there is no chance an American soldier accident of war crimes would ever be handed over to the Hague.

However, if the Yugoslav government did freely decide to hand over Milošević I certainly would support the move. I have no sympathy for a new power in the region to oppose it. The present governments of Croatia, Slovenia, and Bosnia-Hercegovina are clearly no better than the former government of the Bosnian town of Prijedor.

**Divisions**

The arrest of Static sharply divided between Yugoslav President Karanica and Socialists in Serbia. The two sides are divided over the former opposing extradition and reaffirming that Milošević should be tried for war crimes. However, as a Serb human rights worker recently told the Guardian, none of the post-war governments in Serbia is likely to join the former government in the courtroom anywhere.

The imperialist powers and Yugoslav politicians want to put all the blame on Milošević. This allows them to cover up their own responsibilities in aiding and abetting his crimes against the people of former Yugoslavia. Milošević should certainly be in the dock – but large numbers of western and Yugoslav politicians will be standing alongside him.

**Macedonia**

The ‘Macedonian Question’ was a major issue for imperialism in the last nineteen and early twentieth centuries. It was also a central concern for NATO and western governments in the region. Between 1945 and 1989 it was also the subject of heated arguments between the ‘socialist’ governments of Bulgaria and Yugoslavia.

Today its continued existence is threatened, with recent armed clashes between the Macedonian army and the Albanian minority.

The current state called Macedonia was created as one of the Republics of Yugoslavia in 1945. In royal Yugoslavia it was part of Serbia, and is still regarded as ‘South Serbia’. In 1975 ‘Macedonia’ was added to the name of the republic.

However, the republic did not include the whole of the geographical area of Macedonia which was split between Vardar Macedonia (the former Yugoslav republic), Pirin Macedonia (with south-west Bulgaria) and Aegerian Macedonia (northern Greece) – as well as a small part in Albania.

**Challenged**

Bulgarian and Greek nationalists, including the Stalinist varieties, have always challenged the legitimacy of an independent Macedonian nation, insisting that Macedonians were ‘real’ Bulgarian or Greek. Hence the insistence by Greek governments on the absurd name of former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The disintegration of Yugoslavia also threatened the disintegration of Macedonia, with Bulgaria and Greece making territorial claims. Bulgarian and Greek offers of support to the government of Macedonia should not be allowed to obscure their own designs on the territory (or their own misrepresentations of national minorities).

The possibility of war between Greece and Turkey, both members of NATO, was a major cause of anxiety in western capitals in the early 1990s. It also inflamed current western hostility to the recent Albanian guerrilla struggle.

Albanians make up one third of the population of the Macedonian state. They have been discriminated against in terms of jobs, education, language and other basic democratic rights.

The situation of Albanians in Macedonia is by no means the same as in Kosovo under Milošević. An Albanian party participates in government while mother is in (legal) opposition. However, that does mean the Albanians (and, for that matter, other national minorities in Macedonia) are not subject to national oppression.

Socialist Outlook has always championed the right of peoples to self-determination. That includes the right to independence. We argue that borders are not sacrosanct and that, at a certain time, we insist on the need to guarantee full and equal rights to all national minorities.

In the real world, especially in such a multi-national region as the Balkans, there can be no ethnically homogenous states. Attempts to unite all Croats, Albanians, Hungarians, etc in a single state will almost certainly involve, at best, massive transfers of people. In reality it will mean war and ‘ethnic cleansing’.

It is also clear that any attempt to force one third of the population of a state to remain against their wishes can only be accomplished by large scale repression. If the majority of the Albanian population of Macedonia want to secede and unite with Kosovo we support their right to do so. This includes the right to unite the majority of the Albanian people in a single state. Macedonian socialists have a duty to insist on the right to self-determination, including independence, of the Albanian minority.

However, it is by no means clear that a majority of Albanians in Macedonia do, in fact, want to secede. Even the imperialist powers to build a huge campaign of democratic rights for the whole population.

Recent events in Macedonia are a split off from the war in Kosovo. The refusal of the imperialist powers to countenance independence for Kosovo has increased frustrations among Albanians throughout the region which are currently being fought out in Macedonia.

**Same initials**

In Albanian both the National Liberation Army and Kosovo Liberation Army are known by the same initials: UCK. This is no coincidence. Many of the fighters with the right of veto in the KLA and many, though by no means all, are Kosovars. Most probably the majority of fighters in a KLA which is not a creation of Albanian politicians. They have to be primarily designed to prevent the continued existence of another state.

We support the right of Croats in Bosnia to full and equal rights, including national minorities. Croatian socialists should not be frightened by the fact that the national minorities in Bosnia, should have considerable autonomy. However, we do not see their right to secede from Bosnia if the level of national oppression was such that there was absolutely nothing else to do.

That is clearly not the situation at present. Nor is it the situation of the Macedonian Albanians.

Macedonian government. They did not understand that imperialism intervened in Kosovo not because the list of Albanians but because Milošević was no longer the best guarantor of security in the region.

Hopefully the haste with which western governments have declared the ‘massacres’ to be a basis for Albanian secession in Macedonia will helpッシュ them of their illusions in imperialism.

**Bosnia**

From the beginning of the war in Bosnia Socialist Outlook supported Bosnian national independence. We do not take the view that all parties involved in the war were equally bad. We argued that the war was between Serbian and Croatian aggression.

Bosnia was a multi-national state and its government, (whatever our criticisms of it), continually defended its multi-national ruling coalition.

We therefore opposed the Dayton Accord Tudjman’s plans for the curbing up of Bosnia along ethnic lines. Far from reducing national conflicts, Dayton internationalized them.

In the Republika Srpska the hard-line nationalists of the Serbian Opposition Party (SDS) associated with Radovan Karadžić have received the backing of Yugoslav President Milošević. Milorad Dodik, who was simply removing Milošević was never going to be the right man for the right job.

This had an impact in the Muslim-Croat Federation where the Croats (led by Dragan Tudjman) is now attempting to resurrect Tudjman’s vision of a Muslim-Croat federation in the heart of Croatia.

Large numbers of Croats have responded to their call to leave posts in the army, police and government services. In the divided city of Mostar, clashes have broken out between HDZ supporters and Bosnian and UN police, backed by NATO troops. Another clash over taking over the Herzegovina Banka – widely believed to be controlled by the Croats – has prompted a new escalation campaign.

The HDZ consistently refused to end the division of Mostar and has maintained parallel institutions to those of the Bosniaks. Despite paying lip service to the Muslim-Croat Federation, it has continued to maintain a separationist campaign.

There has been a reversal in the relations between Croatia and the Bosnian Croats. Tudjman used his position in Croatia to absolutely no possible alternative. The Bosnian Croat leadership are now trying to influence events in Croatia. In February a 100,000 Liberation Army officer to be indicted for war crimes. Along with four others, he is charged with ordering and participating in the massacre of at least 24 Serbs in Kupres.

This brings us back to Milošević. The will have no doubt that he will, in a limited way, to recognise war crimes committed in the name of Croatian nationalism and to deal with the perpetrators. Unfortunately, he has failed to do so far of the Serbian authorities to recognise the responsibility of the Serb government for the brutal wars in ex-Yugoslavia.

Moreover, events in Bosnia show that if we support the war, we have to ensure that we do not support the perpetrators. We have to ensure that we do not support the perpetrators. We have to ensure that we do not support the perpetrators. We have to ensure that we do not support the perpetrators. We have to ensure that we do not support the perpetrators.
As many commentators have noted, one feature which distinguishes the current Palestinian uprising from earlier ones is the relative speed with which it has moved beyond passive demonstrations to a state of low-intensity warfare with the Israeli occupation. Most of these commentators, however, have failed – whether wilfully, or through lack of understanding – to account for this differing development. ROLAND RANCE reports.

T he first Intifada, started in 1987, and which was successfully brought to an end with the 1983 Oslo accords. It began in the Palestinian territories against the failure of the Arab states to act effectively to bring this to an end, reached boiling point. Thousands of Palestinian youth, many of whom had spent their entire lives under occupation, took to the streets in mass demonstrations. Very quickly, popular committees were established across the country, and the Unified National Leadership was established. The parties of the Palestinian left, particularly the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, played a crucial role in these developments.

Of particular importance was the experience gained from the prison struggle of the 1970s and 80s, where activists from different factions had learned to work together to forge concessions from the Israeli authorities. Graduates of the prison system – a majority of the young men in the occupied territories – had gone through a process of political education; many of them had learned Hebrew, studied Marxism, and organised successful struggles while in prison. They formed the backbone of the community and political organisations in the occupied territories, and ultimately of the Unified National Leadership of the Intifada.

The slogan of this Intifada was not, as earlier protests had chanted, “We support the PLO”, but “WE ARE the PLO”. This represented not only an increased willingness to defy the Israeli authorities, but a challenge to the PLO leadership in exile. A new leadership, with political experience and mass popular support, supported by the will of the people associated with the PLO in exile, was also a threat to the unpopular and reactionary regimes across the Arab world. A wave of popular revolts, from Jordan to Morocco, threatened the interests of imperialism’s client states, as well as those of both Israel and the PLO in exile.

With the return of the PLO to the Occupied Territories following the Oslo accords, a new element was introduced into this volatile situation. Over the years of exile, the PLO had developed a largely military structure and practice. Following the expulsion from Jordan in “Black September” of 1970, the PLO had in effect renounced the strategy of revolutionary struggle across the Arab world, for one of alliance with Arab regimes for a confrontation with Israel.

While Palestinians living directly under Israeli military occupation had focussed on the daily struggle against the brutalities and indignities of Israeli rule, leading to involvement in mass struggles, the PLO in exile developed increasingly into a proto-state, with responsibilities for thousands of refugees and a burgeoning security apparatus. When Arafat returned from exile, he brought with him many thousands of trained soldiers, organised into several rival military groups.

One of the few specific commitments in the Oslo accords was that the Palestine Authority would have a “strong police force”. This was in line with Rabin’s understanding that the PLO, operating, as he put it, “without the High Court and without civil rights groups”, would be able to police the Palestinian people on Israel’s behalf, than could be done through a continuation of the open military occupation.

Faithful to these expectations, Arafat has over the past seven years built a regime in the occupied territories characterized by corruption, arbitrariness, and contempt for civil rights. Socialist Outlook has frequently published articles about the harassment of trade unions, independent media and other democratic bodies, by the Arafati regime. Almost all of these groups were led by the cadre which developed during the first Intifada.

This repression was a necessary part – indeed, a precondition – of the ongoing negotiations between the PA and Israel. Israel was unwilling to make any substantive improvement to the miserable conditions of the Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. While continuing with its policy of illegal land expropriation and settlement, Israel constantly demanded that the PA contain dissent, suppress hostile media, and act ruthlessly against suspected Islamic or leftist activists. At the same time, the PA was unable to stand aside from the growing popular discontent caused by Israel’s ongoing military occupation. When, as in 1987, this discontent flared into open revolt, the PA was faced with a dilemma. To allow the development of a genuine revolutionary struggle, as in the first Intifada, would reveal its own total irrelevance.

It would be totally incapable of leading such a struggle, having little conception of mass struggle, and even less public credibility as a revolutionary leadership. But it would have been equally impossible to ignore the uprising, allow Israel to suppress it, and carry on negotiating as though nothing untoward were happening. Socialist Outlook has previously quoted journalist Amiria Hazz: “During the first few weeks of the present Intifada, veterans of the first Intifada and members of NGOs, who (and this is no coincidence) belong to the Palestinian left, said that this Intifada should be an unarmed popular struggle, as was the case with the first Intifada.

These individuals failed in this attempt ... Members of the Fatah movement – the backbone of a regime that, in the course of seven years, has been unable to improve the living standards of the residents of the PA, tried to restore its past legitimacy as a national liberation movement.

“However, they preferred to do so by focusing on the ‘militarisation’ of the Intifada - the opening up of safety valves and the use of firearms, which immediately erased the popular-civic character of this uprising” (Al-A'Azar December 2000).

Socialist Outlook recognises the right of the oppressed people to struggle in any way necessary against their oppressor.

We specifically recognise the right of the Palestinian people to take up arms and engage in armed struggle against the Israeli occupier. However, we do not necessarily believe that this is the correct response in any given situation.

In the present uprising in the occupied territories, the turn to a military struggle has had several unfortunate effects. It has falsified the mass of the Palestinian people, who cannot take an active part in such a struggle. It has substituted a military campaign for the movement for a mass popular struggle for independence, with the Israeli authorities.

And it has allowed Israel to claim that Arab society is incapable of violence (as former Israeli PM Netanyahu frequently does) and that it is only American critics “We live in a violent neighbourhood”.

Palestinians can never win their struggle by a military campaign. It is an illusion to think that they can achieve a negotiated settlement with the Israeli state, unless Israel is first disarmed. Further, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and other Palestinian groups have pointed out that a military campaign will not end occupation. Over recent weeks, there has been a desire to negotiate a settlement with Israel, but this is only possible with a full and unconditional withdrawal of Israeli forces. The price paid for this will be the creation of a new state in the occupied territories, and the destroyed body of the Palestinian people. This is the only way to achieve independence and create a just society.

The first signs of this have been seen in the mass marches in Ramallah and Bir Zeit in which Palestinians (assistant by Israeli activists) fighting in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine fired shots at the Israeli army to isolate Bir Zeit from the surrounding crowds.

Although no weapons were used, the attack was a major step by the Palestinian people in the struggle. Several articles in the Palestinian press have noted that the Intifada is a conscious and strategic rethink in taking place.

Such a development would open new opportunities for the Palestinian left, and for the cadres of the first Intifada, which have experience in conducting and leading such a struggle. The development of popular committees, the rebuilding of democratic leadership, and the strengthening of the mass of the Palestinian people under occupation in the struggle against Israeli military rule, pose a greater threat to Israel, and its corrupt ruling class, than the continuation of a lowkey Israeli political campaign.

Such a development could also pose new responsibilities for the solidarity movement in the west. We must develop links with these committees and expressions of Palestinian solidarity, giving concrete political and material support which will enable the Palestinian left to build a mass base for such a challenge to Israeli continued occupation.
Ten nationalisations in search of a profit

Genetic monopsonisation

What is genetic modification?

Genetic modification, GM, is the introduction of hereditary factors of living organisms in a technical, not a natural, way. Sometimes the hereditary factors of one organism are taken out, changed, and then put back again. What this technique makes it possible to transfer different animal and plant species. The plants and animals, which could not be combined in a natural way.

Why do companies want to genetically modify our food?

The food market is enormous and thereby well adapted to those seeking more and more profits. The fact that GM techniques are that modified grains, even certain genetic lines can be patented. The ability to patent gives the companies power and possibilities of profits, that conventional plant refinement and animal breeding cannot.

Which companies?

Monsanto (USA), Pioneer (USA), Novartis (Switzerland), Syngenta (Switzerland), Astra/Geneva (Sweden/Great Britain) as well as a number of chemical and seed companies.

In Sweden the LRF-owned Svalof/Webball is one such company. In the spring 1999 the German chemical giant Bayer became one influential partner in Svalof/Webball with 40 per cent of the shares. The LRF has applied for permission to cultivate GM-potato for industrial use.

The plants that have been modified are all crops that are foremost soya, corn, potato, sugar beet, rape, tobacco and

The old RUC makes a comeback

As with so much around the Good Friday Agreement, what is not included in the debate around the RUC is as significant as what is. What is excluded is the traditional demands of socialists and republicans, demands supported by the vast majority of Irish workers, demands that by themselves are far from revolutionary and simply add up to a demand for democracy. They are: Repudiate the sectarian RUC

Disband the sectarian RUC

End Diplomatic Courts

Remove representatives of the Catholic community

Overall Patton held out the promise of sharing out patronage and control. As with the Good Friday Agreement as a whole, the ignoble goal of a shared sectarian privilege in running the police proved an illusion — that would, after all, be no point in sectarian privilege if it were shared out evenly. After two police bills, the cold light of reality shows what looks suspiciously like the old RUC.

The British retain absolute control, unfeathered by the decorative committees they have set up. The state will retain the right to suppress investigations it doesn’t want. What is left is a new uniform, the expectation that nationalist politicians who climb on board will be able to fix speeding tickets and a promise that recruitment will be 50% Catholic.

If the RUC were to eventually become 50% Catholic it would be a different force, but to get to that promised land you are asked to support the actually existing farce. RUC is totally implausible to suggest that a savage bipedal force, able to resist reform, is the closest to the support to the RUC.

A sectarian state needs a sectarian police to serve it. That’s what the SDLP are push for. Together with their slogan “Reforming the community” that the SDLP will support the RUC. But the real progressives of the Young Irelanders and the closest to the support to the RUC.

What workers need to defend themselves is a policy of unremitting opposition to the recruiting ads are sectarian police force. Above all it is necessary to defend themselves against the forces supporting the Good Friday Agreement — those seeking ways to ameliorate sectarianism and imperialism rather than smash them.

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Foot and mouth: the debate rages

Dave Bangs

The council estate at Beveden, Brighton, has at its bottom of a steep-sided Downland valley, surrounded, on the slopes above, by the bare fields of Upper Beveden Farm. As some of the heaviest rains for a thousand years poured and poured last October, the autumn-ploughed, sodden valley sides shed their soil into the river, leaving footpaths and burying the ground floors of all homes below up to 4 feet deep in mud. 5 months later many of these homes are still empty. No financial liability hit the farmer.

No loss of tenancy.

This February, as the foot and mouth outbreak spread, Brighton Council's countryside Rangers, paid for by these same residents scarred around the valley countryside, posted notices banning them from further access across that farm. And being kind folk (and not wanting to risk 500 fines), they obey. For surely the farmer's business is at risk?

Such is the tremendous cultural weight that farmers and landowners still possess. They have their own government ministry. Their trade association - the National Farmers' Union - has the ear of the Prime Minister.

This weight has been used to push through a massive, militarized, campaign of livestock slaughter which has demurred some of our most hard-pressed farming districts of live stock lovingly built up over decades, and even centuries. Even rare breeds have not been spared.

For the NFU and MAFF merely assumed, as always, that this was their countryside, to do with as they pleased.

The Shire County Councils, the BSSP, the National Trust and the Wildlife Trusts - huge landowners themselves - are desperate not to offend the rural ruling class.

The Environment Agency, the statutory body, set up to protect the environment, has banned all countryside visits by its staff.

The government let a simple measure to ban the old rural ruling class cruelty of fox hunting fall in the House of Lords, but two lads caught with air rifles in a Wiltshire Country Park were fined £50 each for breaking the foot and mouth regulations.

The laid-off workers of Cambria and the besieged livestock owners, had to take the matter into their own hands and demonstrate to Blair and Nick Brown that they were not just bit-players in MAFF's cold-hearted power-play.

Foot and mouth is a disease which has disproportionately affected the weakest, the most hard pressed of Britain's farm businesses. It is the sheep and beef producing westerly uplands where farmers are often living on income support levels on marginal holdings entirely dependent on subsidies, that are most hit.

Yet whilst the output-related subsidy system pushes these farmers to damage moorland and mountain ecosystems by overgrazing, it still fails to provide them with a decent living. And now it imposes indiscriminate mass slaughter on their flocks and herds.

Foot and mouth is an economic disease. It is the one symptom of the economic and political disease which cause such grief. This is not BSE, cattle plague, or swine fever. This is an illness directly commensurate to its flu.

The animals suffer. They lose condition. They go off their food. Sometimes they fall ill and weak and die. But most recover. Animal marketing has only to be postponed for some weeks.

It is the archaic methods of dealing with the disease, not the disease itself which bring the horrors of mass slaughter, incineration and burial, rural siege and personal despair.

The cure is far worse. Many farming systems, from the Kenyan Masai to the Duke of Westminster's Cheshire estate, have shown that common sense disinfection and hygiene can cure this disease in a matter of weeks.

Mass herdsmen routinely infest their cattle to raise their immune levels. The Duke of Westminster (who was ex-emption from the mass slaughter policy in the 1923 outbreak) showed how selling stock which had suffered foot and mouth at the Royal Show the following year.

This outbreak is not a result of intensive systems. It is not, and has never been, an urban-rich agricultural which is suffering. But it is the growth of mass motorway live stock marketing, its enormous scale and the need of it, and it is the need of international export which has dictated the mass slaughter policy.

There is no proof that walkers have presently spread the disease. In terms of movement restrictions, it would be more rational to close the motoway system than the pedestrian right of way.

The major agricultural county of Cambridgeshire has resisted closing its footpath system, except where paths cross pasture boundaries.

It was wealthy and influential breeders who dictated the slaughter policy 130 years ago. And it is the need of the export trade which dictates its continuance today. Yet our export trade does not even reach the limits of the same meat products; total exports of lamb for example only equal 82% of its imports.

No serious scientific assessment of the loss of productivity caused by the disease has been done for 130 years. The appalling cure has come to be equated with the disease itself. It is a myth that the biological features of the disease have dictated its management. On the contrary, the avirulent orthodox of the NFU and MAFF that have brought about this catastrophe.

The sheer scale of the farming disaster has forced an increasingly stringent ruling class reassessment while social, economic & cultural role of agriculture.

The Independent, the Observer and the Guardian all carry heavy criticism not just of the slaughter policy, but of agriculture and MAFF, in general. Sometimes, sotto voce, the Telegraph joins in. Even some of the main-stream farming press (like the Farmers' Guardian) sympathetically trials critiques of dominant ideology within the farming business which cause such grief.

Yet much of the reassessment by people like Ainslie Wood is confused, insensitive and even vicious. It ranges from calls to stop comprehensively to change agriculture, to celebrating the loss of farm jobs, to calls for massive conversion to organic production and for industry "restructuring" - a euphemism for further business concentration, job losses and the destruction of small farms.

 Everywhere, on all sides, the issues of tenure, of ownership, are ignored. Farmers are treated as though their interests are always the same. No distinction is made between a sheep farmer on 100 acres of damp valley land in Wales, and a Jaguar-driving baron from Norfolk on his 1000 acres who runs this desert on a workforce that couldn't have run 200 acres 100 years ago.

We need a real debate on the future agriculture - not Blair's cosmetic gestures.

We need more people working the land, not less, both for the sake of people and of the landscape itself. The option of involvement in food production corresponds to a basic need for integration with natural processes in us all.

It is no surprise that as the option of paid work in farming has been destroyed garden ing and countryside activities have grown to such an extent. Whether they want or not don't want long hours of back-breaking work at poverty wages but they do want to work the land.

One of the worst features of capitalism, commented on by the earliest socialists, is the ruthless alienation from nature and natural processes which its concentrated destructive productive processes brought.

A socialist society without the option of land-based work is inconceivable.

The landscape desperately needs more labour. Our richest landscapes and ecosystems were created by human labour and management systems.

Now they have been replaced with giant mach-ines needing huge, uniform spaces to operate, whose fabrication contains the alienated labour of thousands of line of workers, technicians and drivers. Livestock farming and pastoral systems are essential even above the obvious reasons of meat, hide and wool production. Many cultural landscapes are the direct product of pastoral systems. Hedgegrowths, moors, downs, heaths and meadows are all the product of grazing systems. Without grazing many of our richest ecosystems would simply disappear.

The price of abandoning livestock farming will be the extinction not just of many species, but of whole communities of species. Alternative systems, such as organic farming, are no solution without dealing with the social relations of production. Converst to organic farming include huge landscape destructors, who have already ruthlessly destroyed their farm landscapes and wish to escape huge agrochemical bills.

Organic farming, with greater direct labour inputs, offers a way out. Farmers who make conventional agriculture seem generous. Organic agriculture is brimming with potential. It could deal with the ecologies of pollution, which brings new dangers to wildlife. Organic systems can be as land hungry as conventional systems.

Small scale farming is no solution. Conversion to organic farming by 'big and ambitious' farms are amongst the most backward of any sector, with deep isolation, pasting individual activities, poor living conditions, and poverty wages. Hereditary farming is no longer to be celebrated than hereditary monarchy or hereditary shelf stacking.

Farming should be subsidised only where it makes a social contribution. Low intensity agriculture is a necessary condition of environmental management, for instance, make vital landscape and wildlife contributions in addition to their productivity.

At present the richest 21% of farmers attract 80% of all subsidies. This leads to further environmental degradation and the consolidation of agribusiness.

The neo-liberal world trade system seizes both Third World peasant economies and the British countryside. The refusal to pay for the destruction of small farms, for the destruction of small farms, for the protection, for local markets must be the basis of sustainable food production.

The countryside belongs to everyone. Farmers contribute only 10% of overall control 80% of the area of Britain. Food production is very much a minority element in the structure of the countryside.

The crisis is here. Everyone's changes the nature of demand and the way that food is produced.

The NFU and MAFF have publicized their willingness to be part of a new food production process. Farm machinery workers, seed merchants, packers, processors, fertiliser manufacturers, growers, retailers, co-operative voices have to be part of the process though their work gives them no political base.

And access to nature must be at the centre of all dreams of socialist self fulfilling.
or to continue the slaughter?

Alan Thornett

I COULDN'T quite believe it when I saw George Monbiot's Guardian article (March 29th) entitled "Foot and mouth is a good thing." Monbiot argues that the disease should be allowed to become endemic in Britain, and that the real job of MAFF should be to ensure that this happens as soon as possible.

He quotes a Masai cattle herder in East Africa, where animal welfare understandably takes a different priority to that in rich countries, to argue that endemic FMD can be lived with.

Monbiot is against anything which might result in FMD's eradication. He says: "The vaccination programme is successful, then, as an urgent strategic priority, the government should relegate the country to the back of the queue. This is not difficult, since FMD is just one of the most contagious diseases known to science. His 'rationale' for this bizarre view is that it would encourage farmers to develop local markets for their produce since it would mean markets would support and not just be necessary. Most exports may well be unnecessary, especially in the short run, but the idea that the way to do it is to deliberately introduce a disease that costs farmers money is not a new or unproven theory. The animal welfare problems into the domestic meat supply is the fall of the wall.

Animal welfare

Monbiot accepts that his policy would have implications for animal welfare and that his policy may lead to a reduction in the number of animals and produce less milk. The answer he says would be to cut out the worst affected farmers and let the rest live with it.

But he ignores the suffering which would become routine and does not see how a cut of the worst affected could be carried out without reducing the worst numbers of wild-life (mostly various species of deer) which would eventually become infected once the disease was endemic.

It is an ill-informed argument which seeks to minimise the effects of the disease on the individual animal and minimises the general effects on animal welfare of endemic FMD - although of course it may be that as far as some on the left who bizzarishly argue that FMD is like a mild cold one is.

In fact the effects of FMD on different species are different. Cattle get the disease much more severely than pigs or sheep. A recent graphic description by a ministry vet of a cow's tongue coming away at the back of its mouth was justifying it was convincing. The lesions at the back of its tongue were so deep that the tongue was severed from the head.

Monbiot also seems to assume that humans cannot catch FMD, but this is not true. People can be infected through skin wounds or the oral mucous through handling diseased food, contact with the virus in a laboratory, or by drinking pasteurised infected milk - not by eating meat from infected animals.

The human infection is temporary and mild, but why is Monbiot so keen to minimise the problem of disease in food production?

Vaccination is the answer to FMD advocated by much of the left. There are two issues involved here: the use of vacci- nation to help to control an outbreak and the routine ongoing use of vaccination of all susceptible animals to prevent the disease (a huge $7bn in the case of Britain). In Holland vaccination is being used as a rapid reaction (fire-break) policy, the vaccinated animals are then killed as soon as possible.

The effectiveness of vaccination is controversial. There are 40 strains of the virus on top of the wild type O Asian strain involved in the present outbreak, and they mutate freely with new strains regularly emerging.

Not effective

- Vaccination is not 100 per cent effective even within the rich strain since some animals escape it.
- Therefore if an FMD outbreak occurs some animals will still get it and it will probably get into the wild, which cannot be vaccinated. Vaccination against FMD does not involve just one job, but has to be repeated every six months.

Potential human health problems linked to avian influenza.

FMD is endemic in many third world countries where neither slaughter nor vaccination are economically feasible since any method of prevention or eradication is hugely expensive. Most of the rich parts of the world - North America, Australia, New Zealand, the EU and Scandinavia - have kept it out by strict regulation of food and agriculture which have to be in place against a range of deadly diseases transmissible to humans.

When it has arisen it has eradicated by slaughter. This seems to be the most effective policy. The USA last had a case over 70 years ago in 1929. Canada had its last case in 1952. In Britain the last outbreak was in 1967.

No evidence

The case for the ongoing use of an unreliable vaccine over long periods of time is not strong. Vaccination was tried in some European countries where there it effectiveness cannot be evaluated since there is no evidence that the disease was imported during that time. As George Monbiot points out there is a commercial case against vaccination since it results in an export ban. But there is also a food safety element - the fact that consumers want as many diseases as possible to be kept out of the food they eat and many do not want to consume animals infected or vaccinated with FMD.

The issue therefore is to keep FMD out. And what makes Britain valuable today is the deregulation of both the farming and food production and importation. Britain is vulnerable to a range of diseases in farmed animals - particularly BSE, FMD and swine fever. It is also vulnerable to a wide range of diseases dangerous to humans.

The problem lies in the system of regulation of farming and the intensification of agriculture. The increasing com- mercialisation of animals, particularly sheep, means they are shunted around the country in vast numbers (1.3m a month) in a market which produces nothing except the profit for the dealers.

The closure of slaughter houses and, therefore longer travelling distances to slaughter, is an issue - although many of the small houses were closed because they were spreading BSE. Again the absence of strict regulation was the key issue.

Stress on animals increases their susceptibility to disease whatever from travel or intensive farming methods. The numbers of government veterinarians have been drastically reduced in recent years, along with all other government services, thus when something happens there is no one there to deal with it.

Despite the seriousness of this outbreak there has been a sense of proportion. The political inactivity of a general election has shaped perceptions of the outbreak from the start.

Sensationalist

Apart from the sensationalism of the British media, the Tories have played it up to the full.

They are facing defeat whether the election was May or June it was and there is one last chance to pull off a breakthrough.

Unfortunately for them it has not worked, and their unconvincing hype has actually increased Labour's lead.

Much of the media coverage has been grotesque; concentrating on moving images.

Language such as 'fearful pyres' and 'killing fields' gives the impression of a war zone making it look as if the farming industry is about to be wiped out - and compounds the problems of the tourist industry.

In fact it has taken six weeks for the number of animals slaughtered to contain FMD to some 50,000 normally slaughtered each week for food production.

The meaning of this outbreak is that it has caused great alarm of course are many of the small farmers who were facing a serious crisis before FMD came along.

It is not just the aftermath of the old but the high value of the pound, the globalisation of food production and the power of the supermarkets which are driving many of the industry or deeper into penury.

Large supermarkets must demand a reorganisation of farming on a completely new and sustainable basis. (See ISG 43)

The government want to protect the meat industry competitiveness of the meat industry, cheaper drugs for developing countries: stating categorically that "patents are the lifeline of the industry, Prime Minister Blair endorses this: "the UK must offer a supportive business environment."

How telling. No such supportive environment is offered people seeking refuge here. No such concern is offered for the "lifeline" of patients, such as those living with HIV in the developing world.

Even Oxfam, which has rightly campaigned against the voucher system and for affordable health drugs for all, is taken aback at this "government capitulation to big business." But this is what happens when a task force investigating the industry is stuffed full of the very multi-nationals whose activities need regulating.

Membership of the 12 person task force is listed by the government as including: Astra Zeneca, Glaxo Wellcome, SmithKline Beecham, Novartis, MSD, and ABPI President and Director General, also Lord Sainsbury, Minister for Science and Innovation. In doing so, Government abandons governing. It gives encouragement to the greed of the few rather than meeting the needs of the many. Publicised as not safe in private hands.

John Nicholson, Manchester

Outlook line is right on Good Friday deal

Socialist Outlook is to be congratulated on its genuine commitment to socialist internationalism, in particular the way that, unlike the vast majority of the British Marxist left, it takes up the question of Ireland. It alone stood rock solid in its support for the Irish freedom movement and opposition to the Good Friday agreement through those lean years. Owing years, I am especially pleased to see SO condone the recent violent intimidation orchestrated by Provisional Sinn Fein against republican opponents of the Good Friday agreement. I reckon that Socialist Democracy (Ireland) can genuinely claim the right to be the historical constituency of the working-class tradition established in Ireland by James Connolly, in those far off heady days of the early 20th century.

Steve Woodling, Newcastle upon Tyne
Dutch lorry driver Perry Wacker was sentenced to 14 years for his role in the deaths of 38 Chinese "illegal immigrants" who suffocated on the crossing from Zeeland to Dover last June.

Wacker and other gangsters who exploit the misery of poor and vulnerable people around the world deserve no sympathy, but neither does the system that allows them to make huge sums from the trade in human beings.

If it were not illegal for all but the smallest number of refugees and immigrants to come to Britain and other countries in "Fortress Europe", there would be no space for criminal gangs to charge desperate and impoverished people thousands of pounds for smuggling them in.

But of course it has suited New Labour – even more than other EU governments – to play up to backwardness and racism by maintaining and strengthening the racist laws against immigrants and asylum seekers. Ironically, the only reason Wacker's unfortunate passengers found any sympathy was by dying in tragic circumstances, had they been found alive they would have been deported without a thought.

Home Office minister Barbara Roche, Labour's answer to Ann Widdecombe, proudly boasts that the government deport more people than any previous government. The government that so eagerly promotes free movement of capital is soft on racism and soft on the causes of racism, using almost every excuse to whip up hostility to asylum seekers.

Ministers were even happy to let false rumours circulate blaming foot and mouth disease on illegal meat imports to Chinese restaurants.

Locking up Wacker won't prevent similar tragedies in the future; to do that we must campaign for open borders and the scrapping of all immigration restrictions.

"History has shown that immigrants bring ideas, vigour and ambition as well as their mere labour... As more countries are finding, migrants have a benign effect on rich economies."

The Economist, March 31