Major unions link up to challenge Labour's plans for privatisation

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INSIDE:
Special 4-page Briefing on PFI and PPP, pages 9-12

LOBBY Labour Party Conference BRIGHTON Sunday Sept 30
Defend Greg Tucker and Mick Skiggs
South West Trains with hunt RM activists

RMT activist and Socialist Alliance general election candidate Greg Tucker has been arrested at work on South West Trains, in a clear attempt to silence their opposition to 일이이다. The dispute, described as "the biggest narcotics dispute" by the media, concerned a "range of unfair application of sickness absence policies" to a refusal of the company to meet with RMT representatives.

After three days of successful strikes, the company backed down and agreed to meet with the union's demands. It was a clear victory for the RMT. However, now that SWT management saw their climb down as only a way of buying time to breathing space. They immediately put into place new measures to target key RMT activists.

This has now borne fruit with disciplinary action taken against Waterloo Branch General Secretary Gary McLean. As a result he has been downgraded from driver to revenue inspector assistant to a ticket collector in plain language. Aside from a personal
cut in wages, the clear issue here is to threaten other rail workers and undermine the RMT.

At the same time as disciplining Greg Tucker, SWT have decided to suspend two based RMT Guards' activists Mick Skiggs on similar grounds.

For Greg the charge was "sabotaging", for Mick using a mobile phone "at an inappropriate moment". In both cases SWT and B�� have broken their promise to pay him back without any sense of consultation.

The previous discipline was taken into account despite the fact that on both occasions the charges had been withdrawn.

During the general election campaign, according to which was subjected to a sustained attack by the Eavey Standard which highlighted his election activity in joining lecturers' and postal workers' picket lines, denounced him for his membership of the International Socialist Group and attacked his role in the RMT.

The Eavey Standard decided that Greg was too high profile an employee, and had to be dealt with.

The task now is for the RMT to wage a campaign to defend Greg and Mick not just because an injury to one is an injury to all, but because SWT want to use these attacks to clear out any opposition to their drive to increase profitability. All that was won in the dispute in May will be under threat.

The RMT leadership has already agreed to start the process of tailoring mem-

bers for industrial action. What is needed is a major defence to convince the membership of the need to fight back.

Campbell MacGregor
North Glasgow UNISON Branch Campbell MacGregor said:
"We need solidarity! Until conviction of this dispute, there will be also be a strict work to rule. This will involve:
- Adhering to contracted hours (no overtime, paid or unpaid) and ensuring all breaks are properly taken.
- No covering for established post that have been vacant for more than 3 months.
- Boycotting of all work associated specifically with current "Waiting List Initiatives."

As we go to press, a second batch of strike action from 8 August-September has started. On September 1, the strikers held a march through Glasgow. Through the rallies was addressed by speakers including MSP's Tommy Sheridan (Scottish Socialist Party) and Dorothy Grace Elder (Scottish National Party) and a member of the UNISON national executive.

On 14th day of occupation, early on the morning of August 7 the sheriff's officers moved in, accompanied by large numbers of police, to evict the occupation.

The clashes which took place were not quite Genoa, but the residents were all serious clashes between police and protesters which I have ever seen in Britain.

When I got up one morning I read the story on teletext that the authorities had moved in. I quickly finished my coffee and headed straight down to the pool.

When I got there around 100 people were inside the building, a few hundred protesters were occupying Calton Street outside the pool, and some were also blocking nearby Victoria Rd. It was a main road through Glasgow, forcing police to drive through.

A few minutes from the north of Ireland, I noticed dustbin lids in the road, which had presumably been used to warn of the approach of the sheriff's officers. The officers were inside the building, searching for 10 protesters who they thought were hiding inside. One protester had made it onto the roof.

The crowd was multi-cultural and contained several children. Most of them were local people. They were clearly in a militant mood and showed a defi-

nace of police authority that I have not often seen. Sometimes people linked arms and at other times they sat on the road to prevent the police clearing the street.

At one point a police car was surrounded by the crowd, to stop it moving. As scoffers took place various times the mood grew more heated and the police were often pelted with eggs.

I would have assumed that in the city of Glasgow the police might have difficulty dealing with a protest like this initially, but they had the ability to bring in large numbers of reinforcements within a relatively short time. This did not happen. Eventually 4 police horses appeared, 3 were used to charge the crowd. Although the police did gradually gain control of the street they seemed very reluctant to arrest people perhaps because they did not have the forces to do so. It took several hours before the police gained control of the situation.

A number of SSP activists turned up at various times during the day as did SSP MSP Dorothy Grace Elder but unfortunately there was no organised attempt by the SSP to mobilise. SSP members did go back to my flat for a time and try to alert SSP members myself by email but the mess-

sage was only delivered a week later (this was probably just a technical hitch, but you sometimes wonder). The SSP has supported the occupation throughout but it does not currently have the organisational ability to mobilise large numbers of people in a short time (I wish it did). At the same time the authorities are blaming the SSP for the occupation as an excuse for ignoring the militancy of many people in Gallowhill.

2 SSP MSPs and the SSP are calling for an enquiry into police brutality and allegations of racist abuse by protesters by the police. The struggle by Southside Against Closure is continuing, see http://crowd2.org/saveworpool
GMB's anti-PFI campaign raises the heat on Blair

In the wake of Finsal Yildiz's murder in
Gloucester last month (see p5), the govern-
ment announced a series of measures to re-
view its policy of dispersal of asylum seekers.

The Home Office has set a target to reduce
the number of forced removals of failed asy-

No report has emerged from that review
which was concluded last November.

A pilot scheme which has been underway
since December, which involves the restruc-
turing of asylum seekers in the
Newham, Hackney and

The National Coalition of Anti-
Deportation Campaigns at its Annual General Meeting in July agreed a resolution which pointed out that the
so-called National Asylum Support
Service is consistently failing in its duty to provide for the welfare of refugees.

The resolution points out that "we have
been forced to be grossly inefficient in
terms of the allocation of accommodation, with
average delays of three months before
appropriately allocated housing is provided,
and delays of between four to six weeks for
the issue of vouchers.

"Children have been prevented from enter-
ing schools because of these delays, and the
poor administration of dispersal proce-
dures has, in many cases, led to applica-
tions being rejected as 'irregular'." It goes on to argue that refugee organisations
should cease co-operation with NASS.

The call to end co-operation has also been
support by the Committee to Defend
Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

All socialists need to step up their cam-
paigning over these issues and ensure that
this time our voices cannot be ignored.
Racist ‘One Nation’ vision reinforces “fortress Australia”

Susan Moore

The court fight of the 438 Afghan refugees stranded on a freighter in appalling conditions while the Australian government refused to allow them to even land on its soil might gain a good deal of media attention.

The ignominy of Australian Prime Minister John Howard, who had been roundly condemned, as the refugees now face many thousands of miles of a journey to travel to New Zealand and to the remote Pacific island of Nauru.

On Sunday August 26, a boatload of refugees who had broken down in international waters. A Norwegian freighter received the distress calls and picked up the refugees. The freighter, however, decided to take the refugees to Christmas Island, which was the nearest port, as required by International Maritime Law.

Howard called an emergency press conference, banned the freighter from entering Australian waters, thereby stranding the refugees landing on the Australian territory of Christmas Island, in opposition to the views of those on the island.

Councillor Gordon Thompson, who is one of the secretary of the island’s workers union, said residents are ashamed of the military action taken to prevent the arrival of asylum seekers.

He says community leaders have never used or been unanimously behind welcoming ethnic groups as the community leaders have never used or been unanimously behind welcoming ethnic groups.

There has been strong opposition to the plan of the Australian government from a number of groups.

The Marhaba Union deplores what is essentially a military invasion of a friendly ship in peaceful international waters. Paddy Crumlin described the actions of the Howard government as an “inappropriate, inhumane and deserving of international condemnation.”

“People smuggling must be combated,” he said. “But the perpetrators are the ones who need to be targeted, not the innocent victims, the mañana and the crew of the boat, who are carrying a distress call from a sinking ship.

“Furthermore the Federal Government has demonstrated breathtaking hypocrisy on the issue,” said Mr Crumlin. “Here we have a government that actively solicits foreign shipping and third world labour to carry Australian cargo between Australian ports in our domestic transport chain, now saying that to protect our national security we must prevent the port the refugees from the Tampu, that this is another Australian authorities ordered us on the captain to change course and rescue the refugees on a sinking ship, only days earlier.”

The NSW Labor government, said Paddy Crumlin, “People are being migrated by the police of heaven, no one seems to give a toos who these people go, as long as they don’t come here.”

Roberts says it is up to the union movement to stand up for both the refugees and the Norwegian crew of the Tampu, even if this was not a popular position. Meanwhile, the Labor Council has also joined those condemning the government’s decision.

Robertson said the plight of six-year-old Shayan Bedwani - who faces deportation with his family - highlights the inhumanity of the current situation.

“It is clear that the processes have fallen down,” Robertson says.

“We need an effective system that deals with issues quickly and transparently, not the system that currently exists which more resembles a mass murder prison.”

In the meantime, the Australian Confederation of Trade Unions made a statement that it would respect the Tampu’s right to leave the country.

The Tampu are part of a process in which they have adopted more and more of the “One Nation” rhetoric by Pauline Hanson in an attempt to maintain his electoral base.

Hanson came to prominence in 1996 when she was elected to the Federal Parliament.

In the early years of the Howard government, the party promised on One Nation to do the racist scapegoating for refugees.

The emergence of One Nation within the Liberal Party provided a perfect vehicle for the dissemination and propagation of right-wing ideologies.

By blaming the current economic misery on isolated sections of the population – both on indigenous migrants and indigenous Australians – an anti-racist campaign has been launched with apatepization from the gains from the growing up between the wealthy and the poor.

However, the One Nation was not just a flash in the pan as it did not prove a moveable platform capable of challenging its power. It is now realized in support of right-wing and multiculturalism.

The Coalition, the Labor Party and the Liberal Party have formed to dominate and destroy One Nation – without challenging the strategies represented.

The Coalition are equally committed to the promotion of one nation’s policies and racist rhetoric and continued the promotion of migrants and indigenous Australians as a development the country is not geared to.

The Howard administration are up against the Labor opposition, which is mostly up against the Labor opposition, while the Howard opposition is in the center of the process of capitalist globalization.

The landing of a mass of right-wing and racist asylum seekers on the island, as the official statement of the government, has provoked a massive reaction.

The land of opportunity has become fortress Australia. Such a drastic shift has only been possible without the ideological shift that the Liberals have been搓着自己的大拇指向来到澳洲国面事的.

In exercise to this response, there have been increasingly desperate protests in the country. Right-wing and racist asylum seekers have began to straddle their black mass from within, with Ruddock or decided to take their cause to nearby towns.

The asylum seekers and socialists across the world have rightly taken to the streets to focus on solidarity and opposition to the policies of the Australian government.

At the same time as pursuing this course, we also need to step up both the battle against the current through by our own governments and strengthen our international program to develop a clearer picture of the need to defend the human rights of asylum seekers in the centre of the process of capitalist globalization.

Australian unions join protests

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Refugee murder unites Sighthill

Gordon Morgan

The murder of Kurdish refugee Feryal Dog in Sighthill has brought the debate about asylum seekers onto the streets of Glasgow. On August 23 a march of over 500 people from Sighthill took place under the slogan: "Sighthill united, against poverty, against racism. Asylum seekers welcome!"

Amongst the demands is the call that money Glasgow Council received from the Government for receiving asylum seekers should be spent in regenerating Sighthill.

Feryal’s murder was one incident in a steadily rising stream of attacks on refugees throughout the city, especially in Sighthill. Such has been the fear amongst refugees that many have demanded to be relocated in London to escape the racist insults and attacks. In the aftermath of the murder, the Council have temporarily sus-

pended locating refugees in Sighthill.

In the most appalling reaction to the murder, the Daily Record editorialised that the Turkish Embassy propaganda claiming that Feryal was a bogus asylum seeker.

Their article seemed designed to stir popular opinion and polarise the feeling amongst the non-residents of Sighthill that refugees were the trouble-makers.

At the same time, the paper also gave cause close to branding all residents of Sighthill racist.

Sighthill had a large number of vacat-

ons, both in local and national media.

The Daily Record had a large number of vacan-

cies, both in local and national media.

They had to identify the areas of the city in which the refugees would be housed.

Observers commented not only on the lack of facilities but also the aftermath of the rioting. The parts of the City which were chosen included Pollokshaws and Pollokshields where refugees have been rea-

sonably well integrated.

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Cowdroy made Prague seem like a picnic

**Socialist Outlook**

**After Genoa**

Campbell McGregor travelled to Genoa as part of a Globalise Resistance contingent from Scotland. Below he shares some of his impressions of the time he spent there.

I arrived in Italy through Milan. Malpensa airport, successfully trying to look like an ordinary tourist. I later heard that a number of Scottish people who had been involved in protests at Faslane nuclear submarine base were turned back, so my concerns had obviously been justified.

When I got to Genoa I visited the WWF site on that day that it was open to the general public. The level of security had to be seen to be believed.

The whole boundary of the zone was a ring of steel, with a reinforced fence several feet tall. The only place I have seen anything like this was at checkpoints along the Israelioccupied West Bank.

During the three days before the G8 summit started I attended a number of meetings organised by the Genoa Social Forum, discussing the struggle against globalisation, poverty, and world debt.

On Thursday July 19 the first demonstration in the programme took place, in support of asylum seekers. Even then it was evident that a huge mobilisation was building. I heard that the official police estimate was 30,000, twice what the organisers had expected, so we can only guess what the actual figure was.

Later that day Rifondazione Communista held a rally with speakers from several leftist parties in Europe.

Friday was the direct action day, with various different protests across the city. I was with a contingent including people from Globalise Resistance in Glasgow who made it to the Piazza Dante at the edge of the Red Zone.

Many protesters simply banged plastic bottles against the fence and let off smoke bombs as the police decided to turn water cannon on the protesters, but the fence was largely lost by firing through the fence.

Then some protesters did bring down a piece of fence (not the main fence protecting the Red Zone, but an outer fence protecting a gate). After this an organiser announced that it had been a good protest and we should all go to Piazza Kennedy, one of the bases of the Social Forum.

After most protesters had already left the Piazza Dantia they threw a few tear gas canisters at those still leaving, which was pretty vindictive, there were shouts of “no panic!” at other protesters, and “Bastardi!” at the police.

On Saturday the march took place. The streets near the start of the route in Piazza Sordella became packed, filled with a sea of red flags, any hope of a coherent start point or time became lost in the sheer numbers, which have been estimated at 300,000.

We marched along the seafront, with police helicopters overhead and police and naval vessels patrolling off the coast.

I could see that there was trouble taking place ahead, with clouds of tear gas and smoke at the point where the march was supposed to turn away from the seafront up the Corso Ferrari. The organisers were diverting the march away from this up the street before the VCO Casarise, but the police charged forward up 2 streets and threw a large number of tear gas canisters at people who were marching past peacefully.

The street seemed to fill with tear gas in a short space of time and some people were quite badly gassed. It was quite nerve wracking because it was crowded and it could have been many if any panic had developed, but it didn’t.

The march was broken up into small groups, some never got any further, but others struggled towards the end point in Piazza Galileo Ferrari by various routes. Eventually we rejoined the official route on the Corso Sardenga. At the end point the organisers had called off their plans for a rally and were advising people to leave, as the situation had become too dangerous with the police attacking from several directions.

On Sunday I went to a press conference called by the G8F, around 1000 people turned up through word of mouth, their interpreters volunteered to carry on working unpaid. On the Saturday, I had heard rumours that somebody had been killed, but I now got the story of how Carlo Giuliani had been shot by a carabineri.

I spoke to a woman I knew from Dundee who had been tear gassed when she was shot, she had seen his body on the ground and still seemed shocked. The press conference began with a minute’s silence for Carlo. People were also appalled to hear about the attack on the Social Forum press office, located in a school for the deaf, which had taken place the late on the Saturday night.

The police had arrived on foot at its doors, there had been screams and cries from people in the school, most people were taken away on stretchers, and other hospitised. People arriving at the school in the afternoon of the attack had seen blood on the floor. The computers were totally destroyed and documents disappeared.

There was evidence that there were some police agents among the protesters. One placards, a woman who took part in the raid on the school was wearing a “No G8” t-shirt. A video was shown, in which “protesters” were up to police lines and had a friendly chat with them.

The police claimed that some incriminating objects were found in the school, such as pensknives, but these objects could have been found on any building site, and anyway the school was occupied. The Social Forum could not examine all the people staying there.

On Tuesday I took part in a protest with several thousand people in the Piazza de Ferrari in the centre of the Red Zone, very near the Ducal Palace where the G8 summit took place, against Carlo’s killing and police violence more generally.

Similar protests took place at the same time across Italy, including 100 000 in Milan. Late on the night Carlo was killed, it had been turned into a shrine with flowers and memorabilia.

I thought the protests in Prague against the IMF/World Bank conference were dramatic, but Genoa made Prague look like a picnic. Although Prague was a serious mobilisation, there was an element of “revolutions too soon” about it.

Genoa on the other hand was a serious test of strength between the Italian labour movement, with support from the anti-globalisation movement internationally, and the Berlusconi government. Both knew what the stakes were.

There were large contingents from the Confederalta Italiana - Communista and some Italian trade unions.

It was also a serious international mobilisation (although this may have been overshadowed by the sheer size of the Italian mobilisation) there were sizeable contingents from Britain, Greece, Australia, I met a Dane and a Swiss, and even spotted a placard from the Philippines.

Contrary to what some British people assume, clashes on this scale are not normal in Italy, the last time anyone was killed was on a demonstration in Italy was 1977.

One Italian said to me that the tear gas attack on Saturday was the worst he had ever known.

The international labour movement must continue to mobilise against such internationals. It is only when we meet, and should also give solidarity to the Italian labour movement in its struggle against the repression of the Berlusconi government.

Left takes the fight for justice to Rome

**Adam Hartman**

AS PART of a loud and vigorous delegation of fifty or so militants from the Fourth International Youth Camp in Central Italy I joined the over 300 000 demonstrators in Rome on July 24 against the police violence in Genoa and in solidarity with the Genoa Social Forum (G8F).

We held a minute’s silence in honour of Carlo Giuliani, just for the resignation of Interior Minister Claudio Scajola, and demanded the release of the scores of protesters still being held in police cells.

Spectacular street scenes were taking place virtually everywhere in towns and cities throughout Italy. In total 150 000 people took to the streets in a spontaneous outburst of protest against the killing of Carlo Giuliani and the beating, arrest and torture of dozens of people during and after the night raid on the Bovizzi Daz school and the G8F headquarters.

The protests put huge pressure on the government to explain how the police brutality and violation of basic legal protections and rights could not have been allowed to occur in a supposedly democratic country.

There is widespread fear that the repression in Genoa signals a return to the “strategy of tension” last used by the state in the 1970s to criminalise and destabilise the mass left-wing workers, student and women’s movement of the time.

At first the government tried to face down demands for Scapola’s resignation and for a parliamentary inquiry, with Berlusconi trying to distance himself and his ministers from the actions of the police.

But this position was impossible to sustain as evidence emerged of the role of “post-fascist” Deputy PM Franco Cossiga in Insti, the mass security plans for Genoa and his presence in the police “war room” along with four Alleanza Nazionale MPs on the Saturday of the protests.

Clearly the government was involved in the repression at the highest level.

Berlusconi conceded the demand for a parliamentary inquiry and the opposition, including the previously outspoken Left Democrats, conve niently dropped when he was shot, she had seen his body on the ground and still seemed shocked. The press conference began with a minute’s silence for Carlo. People were also appalled to hear about the attack on the Social Forum press office, located in a school for the deaf, which had taken place the late on the Saturday night.

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**Comprising against protesters: Berlusconi (right) with his “post-fascist deputy Fini**
Terry Conway

I travelled to Genoa for the demonstration on July 21 on a bus from Belgium, rather than on the Globalise Resistance since train, because I was then going on to the Fourth International summer camp near Rome with other comrades. This meant that it was unfortunately only possible for us to get to Genoa for the main demonstration on the Saturday.

Before I left Britain I saw the reports of the huge demonstration in support of asylum seekers, for open borders on July 19. This demonstration, which was completely peaceful, was much larger than the organisers predicted. It made me want to get to Genoa even more.

On Friday morning I travelled to Brussels and then left the city around 1pm. Shortly after we left, reports began to come through that two demonstrators were dead — through the information we could get at this time was very patchy. Radio reception was poor, and we were managing to get through to comrades already in Genoa to get the latest updates.

People were obviously very concerned and we began to discuss how we would organise ourselves on the demonstration and how we should proceed. We gathered into groups of 5 who would then work collectively to operate when we were in the city.

This was very useful as a huge demonstration is virtually impossible to stay together in a large group, but it is also vital when the police are being extremely aggressive that people don’t get left behind.

We also exchanged tips on what to do if you are sprayed with tear gas — and subsequently managed to get some of the lessons that would have been taught from the next service station — though I doubt the cashiers knew what we wanted them.

We drove through the night, managing to get a little sleep despite the fact the seats were entirely uncomfortable, and we were anxious about what would await us in Genoa.

Around 6am we drew near to the Swiss/Italian border. Well I say near, at this point we were probably 50km away, but already in a traffic jam caused by the police checks at the border. It took over an hour to actually get to the frontier.

Eventually we crawled to the check point itself. The bus was stopped and conspicuously armed police boarded. Each bag in the body of the bus was searched on our way to Genoa, the first hurdle passed.

We were stopped again as we entered the city itself, some hours later. This time things were a little quicker — only the body of the coach was searched and we were not body searched.

When we arrived, just before 2pm when the international contingent and march together with other comrades from across Europe.

The biggest contingent was from the LCR in France but there was also a significant turn out from the Portuguese PSR as well as comrades from Luxemburg, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Sweden, Spain and Greece.

Unfortunately the police had prevented us linking up with the Italian comrades who were elsewhere as part of the Solidarazione contingent.

The sense of strength which came from many people must have been at its greatest height when around 4.30 the street went through the crowd.

The summit had ended. Huge cheers echoed across the streets and there was a palpable sense that we were winning this battle against neo-liberal globalisation.

The positive atmosphere was also enhanced by the enormous support the march clearly had from the people of Genoa. It was a baking hot day — and virtually every shop and cafe in the city was closed as it had been for days previously.

Many people came out on to their balconies as the crowds went past, waving and shouting at the protesters. A significant number hung banners from their homes. I think there was one person I saw who was the white afternoon who was not supporting the protest.

Eventually we were all able to scheduled time for the demonstration to start, things were already in full swing.

Given the events of the day before, and the murder of Carlo Giuliani by the police, even more protesters had arrived in the city the had been anticipated. Organisers had hoped for 15000 but almost twice that many turned up.

The massive contingents of Italian metalworkers, fresh from the strike action they had been involved in over the previous weeks, were very noticeable.

We could taste the tear gas in the air and see that the police were blocking a number of street sides, breaking up the march and causing chaos. Despite that, the atmosphere was extremely festive — it was clear that police violence had not succeeded in intimidating people into going home.

Despite the chaos we managed to find the Fourth streets below in whatever containers they could lay their hands on. Hose pipes were probably the most popular and the march became even more chaotic as people tried to ensure they walked under the stream to cool down a little as well as get a mouthful of liquid. Some were lucky enough to even have bottles of mineral water rained on them.

Genoa was another milestone in the development of the anti-globalisation movement, particularly in terms of the weight of the mobilisation and the determination of the movement to protest against the inequalities of global capitalism.

Before Genoa, the world’s US had already cancelled the Barcelona summit. This decided that the WTO summit would take place in Qatar to deter us. But the response has been for the ITUC to call a day of trade union action on November 9 to co-incide with Qatar.

In the US the AFL-CIO have called a Global Justice week of action from September 26 to October 1, which will take action in defence of immigrants.

Global health fraud

ONE OF THE issues which Tony Blair claimed justified the attack for the Genoa summit was the need for progress on the long promised Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM).

The GFATM is a joint international effort to fight disease and poverty in the world’s poorest countries. The fund is supposed to be a global solution to the AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria crisis.

Aid agencies warn that deaths from malaria could be cut by as much as 97% by the correct intervention. The cost of such measures would be up to $10-$20 billion a year, but few of these countries have the funds to pay for them and many can’t even afford drugs to fight the disease.

The plan was always for much of the money to be used to buy drugs and vaccines — most of them from suppliers in the "developed" countries.

But the global bodies over- see by governments, NGOs and the private sector are unrepresentative, disorganised and unaccountable to those they are supposed to be serving in.

In some cases they resist that services are re-shaped to leave more room for private suppliers.

The focus on developing services based on high value drugs — not just in the treatment of HIV/AIDS victims — is diverting from the need for much cheaper preventative measures, which can cut off the spread of the disease in poor countries.
Marx’s warnings confirmed

British economy falters as world growth slows

The global economic picture is one of slowing growth, with the threat of recession looming large.

The developed world is suffering from high inflation and rising interest rates, making borrowing expensive and leading to a slowdown in economic activity. The United States, Britain, and Europe have all been affected, with the US economy experiencing a mild recession.

Inflation has been particularly acute in the UK, where the Bank of England has raised interest rates multiple times in an effort to curb the rising cost of living. This has led to a sharp decline in consumer spending and a slowdown in economic growth.

The European Union is also feeling the pinch, with many countries struggling to control inflationary pressures. The European Central Bank has raised interest rates to combat inflation, but this has led to a reduction in economic activity.

Emerging markets have also been impacted, with many countries experiencing a slowdown in growth and a decline in foreign investment. This has led to a decrease in economic activity and a rise in unemployment.

The situation is likely to get worse in the months to come, with the possibility of a global recession increasing. This would have serious implications for the world economy, with a potential decrease in trade and investment, falling stock prices, and a rise in unemployment.

Governments and central banks are taking steps to mitigate the effects of the slowdown, including interest rate cuts and fiscal stimulus measures. However, these actions may not be enough to prevent a recession.

The world is facing a difficult period, and the challenges will require a coordinated global response to ensure economic stability and growth.

For more information, please visit the Economic Outlook page.
Bankers’ licence to rip off NHS

John Lister

Debate over private sector involvement in the financing and delivery of health services has steadily increased over the last few years. Last autumn Health Secretary Alan came in the controversial “concor-
dee” with private medical providers, under which the NHS will pay for the treatment of wait-
ing list patients in “spare” beds in private hospitals.

In February, Milburn unveiled the latest list of major hospital schemes which he has given the go-ahead to proceed using private funding, as part of the government’s declared goal of establishing £7 billion-worth of hospitals funded through the “Private Finance Initiative” by 2010, as set out in last year’s NHS Plan.

During the election campaign, and in Labour’s election manifesto, there was an emphasis on increased “partnership” with the private sec-
tor in the provision and operation of hospital services, including the establishment of new stand-alone “health factories” to deliver elective (waiting list) treatment.

During the summer came the shock announcement that the NHS had bought up a loss-making 95-bed hospital, the Good Hope in heart surgery: it had been running with only 50% of its beds occupied. Managers of the UCLH Trust that will take it over admitted that over a third of the patients were new to this NHS hospital, but will continue to be private patients.

This increased involvement with, dependency upon and indebtedness of the NHS to the private sector has been strongly opposed by all of the organisations representing health workers. Among the most vocal of critics has been the British Medical Association, which has consistently rejected the core assumptions of the Private Finance Initiative.

What is PFI?

The initials stand for Private Finance Initiative: PFI is a Tory policy, first devised in 1992, which was strongly denounced by Labour’s shadow ministers until a few months before the 1997 election.

According to Tory Chancellor Kenneth Clarke, who in 1999 intro-
duced the policy, initially for NHS projects costing £5m or more, PFI means:

- “privatising the process of capital investment in health by public ser-
services, from design to construction to operation.”
- “Despite its popularity with ministers, and especially with the Treasury, PFI has incurred the increasingly vociferous opposition of the BMA, the Royal College of Nursing, almost all trade unions, local campaigned in affected towns and cities, and a growing body of academics.”

What does the policy involve?

Large-scale building pro-
jects, which would previously have been pub-
lcly funded by the Treasury, were to be put out to tender, involving consortia of private banks, building firms, developers and service providers to put up the investment, build the new hospital or facility, and lease the finished building back to the NHS — generally with additional non-clinical support services (maintenance, catering, cleaning, laundry, etc.).

Lease agreements for PFI hospi-
tals are long-term and binding commitments, normally at least 25 years. The NHS Trust involved, instead of paying capital charges to the Department of Health on its NHS assets, pays a “unitary charge” to the PFI consortium, which would cover construction costs, rent, service support, and the risks transferred to the private sector.

The big difference from capital charges is that not only are the PFI projects long-term but PFI “unitary payments” don’t circulate back within the NHS. Instead they flow into the coffers of the private compa-
nies, from where they are issued as dividends to shareholders.

The appeal of PFI both to the Tories and to the Labour govern-
ment is that it enables new hospitals and facilities to be built with-
out the investment appearing as a lump sum addition to the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement.

The government can appear to be funding the “biggest ever pro-
grame of hospital building in the NHS”, while in practice injecting less public capital than ever. Only six major NHS-funded schemes, totalling less than £300m, have been given the go-ahead since 1997.

By contrast, the Labour govern-
ment has so far given the go-ahead to 38 PFI-funded NHS schemes totalling almost £4 billion, and aims to increase this to £7 billion by 2010. 85% of all new capital investment in the NHS is now coming from the private sector.

In part this is because PFI consort-
iums have been keen to make each scheme as big as possible, and also because private firms prefer to buy and then build on greenfield sites and lease buildings back to the NHS rather than existing NHS hospi-
tals.

Among the more dramatic increases in prices from original plan to PFI deal are:

- Greenwich: up from £35m in 1995 to £93m in 1997
- UCLH, London: up from £113m to £404m
- Leicester: up from £150m in 1999 to £286m in 2001
- South Tees: up from £65m to £122m
- Swindon: a £45m refurbish-
ment of Princess Margaret Hospital in Swindon turned into a £125m new hospital on a greenfield site out by 2004.

The first 14 PFI deals escalated in cost by an average of 72 percent, from a total of £1.31bn to £2.2bn, on average in the time they were approved.

This inflation obviously had an impact on the final bill to be paid. The new Dartford Hospital was originally projected to be “at worst cost neutral”, but it soon emerged that purchasers were going to have to foot the bill for an extra £40m a year if the Trust were to be enabled to pay the PFI costs.

How PFI costs more

Increased “headline” costs of schemes

PFI hospital projects have become notorious for the massive level of increase in costs from the point at which they are first pro-
sed to the eventual deal being signed.

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Rate of return for private investors

PFI consortia don’t build hospitals for the sake of their health. They want profit for their investment.

A BMJ article in 1999 pointed out that shareholders in PFI schemes “can expect real returns of 15-25 percent a year”, and went on to explain how little financial risk is involved for the companies in PFI consortia.

In Burnet, the second phase of the new general hospital, originally tendered at £25m, went ahead at a cost of £54m, with capital borrowed at 13% over 25 years. In Dartford the rate was 11%, and the £17m annual payment represents a mas-
ive 35% of the Dartford & Burnet Trust’s revenue.

The new Worcester Royal Infirmary, a project which was origi-
nally expected to cost at £245m when it was first advertised for PFI tenders in 1995, was eventually given the go-ahead at a total cost of £265m, 10% over the annual charge of £7m is more than a quarter of the Trust’s projected income. Of this, £2.2m is the “availability charge”, or lease payment on the building, giving a total cost of £216m to rent the hos-

While most NHS Trusts spend around 8% of their income on capi-
tal, those with PFI schemes are spending between 16% and 2%. In part this is because the private sec-
tor has to pay more to borrow money than does the government — the result is that the taxpayer picks up an inflated bill, while the banks coin in an extra margin.

Margins for PFI consortium partners

The profits flow to the private sec-
tor at every level in PFI. Building firms, banks, business consultants and other PFI hangers-on are eagerly anticipating a generous flow of profits as the first hospital schemes take shape.

An investigation in the Health Service Journal showed building contractors “expecting returns of up to 20 percent a year on the equity stakes they hold in the pro-
ject companies” as soon as the building is complete and Trusts start paying up for the use of the new buildings. Consultancy firms, too – architects, engineers and sur-
evors – are pocketing above aver-
age fees for work on PFI schemes. As the HSJ article pointed out: “there is little chance of the construction industry losing interest in PFI hospitals.”

And once the building is finished, maintaining and providing services in the buildings will deliver com-
fortable, guaranteed profits of up to 7 percent for firms holding service contracts. The first two waves of PFI hospital schemes all involved the privatisation of any non-clini-
Framed beds

The first wave of PFIs hospitals being sold for a small fortune because the beds in the cut-in numbers they represented, with reductions in front-line costs amounting to 40%. PFIs planners wanted to axe almost 40% of beds in Hereford (from 414 to 250) and North Devon (from 244 to 138), a result the newly-opened New Dudley General was expected to bring into an immediate beds crisis. Two other PFI hospitals embodying large-scale bed reductions have so far opened, in Dartford and in Carlisle, and both have been met with some ungluing to cope with pressures on the decreased numbers of beds remaining.

These bed numbers were based not on the actual experience of front-line Trusts dealing with current levels of caseload, or on any actual examples of hospital practice in this country, but on the widely observed but fallacious practice of sector management consultancy working on PFIs as a proxy.

The verdict is still awaited on one of the key assumptions behind bed cuts based on this type of approach, in Worcestershire, where the Health Authority had agreed to a £26.5m PFI-funded Worcester Royal hospital which would cut 260 acute beds – over 200 of them in Kidderminster – as well as beds in Redditch – a countywide cut of 33%.

In Edinburgh the new Royal Infirmary will involve a loss of 500 of the existing 1,300 beds, and a halving of the 4,000-strong workforce.

But the shape of PFI schemes – or at least the way they are presented – has changed. The findings of the NHS Beds Inquiry, commissioned by the Labour government to report on the adequacy of bed numbers, Alan Milburn has become more sensitive to the charge that PFI is further reducing front-line capacity.

And it is partly (again in the aftermath of a strike) to force the UK government to invest in the Central Line to be expanded to include additional beds (at dramatically increased cost) that his Health Department has insisted that new PFI schemes must demonstrate the saving of existing numbers of acute beds.

One beneficiary of this decision could be the population of West Kent, which has been facing a cut of almost 400 beds in a massively funded PFI rationalisation scheme that was to save local A&Us, and reduce acute services from four hospitals to one.

Where are the promised extra beds?

Mr Milburn has gone further and increased the pressure on the health service to find the extra 3,000,000 extra beds on the number currently provided. Indeed, in every recent hospital debate one of the arguments against new beds and new hospitals is that the extra 3,000,000 extra beds on the number currently provided. Indeed, in every recent hospital debate one of the arguments against new beds and new hospitals is that the numbers of acute beds was right, but that there are too many of the "wrong type of patients" in them, who ought to be transferred to "intermediate" beds elsewhere.

And a new Birmingham University report on the market response to the major bed cuts proposed as part of the Herefordshire PFI scheme has concluded that the Trust will only be able to meet government funding list targets if more beds than planned are kept open. The consequence of a national "battled" wards, which were due to close in 2004, has led to the opening of a new hospital, which would have to stay open indefinitely.

However the figures are massaged, the pressures of rising demand for emergency treatments and for waiting list care will expose any weaknesses in the new system put in place and the requirements of PFI and the private businesses involved.

Consultancy fees/negotiation costs

The huge sums spent on negotiating new contracts for new hospitals spent a combined total of £45 million on advisors, with costs varying between 2.8% and 8.7% of the capital cost of the project. These costs are broadly inflated by the need to strike legally-binding deals with private sector firms in what are often very complex contracts. This pattern has continued, and according to health minister John Denham the first 18 PFI schemes involved £33m in consultancy fees – with £24m pocketed by lawyers, 1m (6.6m) to accountants, and £12m spent on "other" advice. Bromley Hospitals Trust alone had spent £6m on negotiations by 1999.

PFIs have left Trusts on shell organisations, which can negotiate with the private sector for the provision of services at a cost of around £24 million: but the project has been lagged since 1998. In June the local health authority was told that: "The Regional Office has said that the Trust must establish whether there is private sector interest in funding and managing the proposed new facility. What seems clear is that the development at Woodfield Road could be more attractive to the market because this is a new development. Schemes that involve refurbishing facilities are less attractive. However the scheme is a small one in cost terms and may be below the level at which most companies would be interested."

If the Trust has to advertise the scheme for PFI bidders, the HA is warned that: "Clearly this could add several months to the timetable. If any part of the scheme is that funded by the government this estimates this will add a delay of another 12 months."

And with the current fee costs so high, and property prices still rock-cringing up high in London, even £1m extra is likely to cost much more money, too.

Staffing levels reduced

The Cumberland Infirmary scheme involved a cut in clinical staff of 2.6%, and in North Durham the financial balance of the plan involved staff cuts to save £3m.

In Bromley, the Full Business Case projects savings in staff costs of £2.9m a year, which arise, among other things, from the reduction in the number of beds and theatre. 130 jobs are expected to be axed, including 34 nurses and 8.3 doctors, while the reduction in qualified nursing is to be compensated by a higher ratio of health care assistants.

Privatisation of support services and staff

In the first few PFIs hospitals staff work in non-clinical support services have been roundly "sold out" to private contractors providing "facilities management" for the PFI consortia. Their pay and conditions were safeguarded only by the fragile TUF (Transfer of Undertakings).

Squeeze on clinical staff

The complex syndromes of all clinical support services in rigid, legally-binding "unitary payments" effecting
tively top-sliced from Trust budgets under PFI creates a new pressure on health service delivery.

Clinical services become the only area of Trust spending where Trust managers can cut back on the "good improvements" and "efficiency savings" while still holding back revenue for each year to make each year by government and by NHS purchasing bodies. As the Wellesley House was told in the negotiations over the new Babylon Health Centre, where even medical records have been incorporated into a PFI contract in a new privatised system.

"Part of the price ... has been to agree to an indefinite regime which has no in-built cost improvement and is linked to the published RPI index". This will therefore be in a position to impose Cost Improvement Programme targets on the Trusts remaining under the management of the Trust."

Squeeze on community and other services

If the £150m be spent in paying inflated costs of building new hospitals through PFI, less cash is left for maintaining and improving other aspects of health care in each area. As the London Borough of Hackney, one of the first wave of PFI hospitals has had to be partly subsidised by local health authorities in order to make their massive costs affordable. The Wrexham Maelor NHS Trust, which has an extra £7 million is being allocated to keep the service alive. Trust pay for the new WRU: this has to be found by squeezing cash allocations to other NHS community services and primary care.

Poor quality buildings

Much of the argument in favour of allowing the private sector to own and manage new hospitals, and for the long terms of lease under the "sovereign" PFI has been that the result will be a higher-quality building. Unveiling the first of the PFI schemes receiving the rubber stamp, Alan Millar, NHS minister, said: "For too long in investment in NHS infrastructure has been a low priority. The PFI will change that, and make it a priority. Capital investment in the NHS has now been increased by 15% to the same level as the last Parliament than it was at the beginning.

"The consequences are plain for all to see. Buildings that are shoddy, equipment that is unreliable, hospitals that are out of date. In too many places the environment that staff and patients receive care is simply unacceptable."

But the experience has been new PFI buildings which are shoddy and new equipment that is unreliable at a higher price than before. After just a few months of the first PFI hospital in Cwmbran, patients complained.

In Carlisle, a cluster of disasters and problems, the most notable has been the impractical design — with a huge glass roof, but no air conditioning — and contamination with the smell of cheap sub-standard plastic joinery for wards and medical buildings. Patient family equipment and fittings have brought a succession of problems, while staff have complained they have been driven to the continent to buy medical equipment. In Wrexham, the contract is so thin for staff to be able to put up with problems.

In Dartford, too, plumbing was a central issue in the new hospital. Plans were delayed in operating theatres for a fortnight after the hospital opened, and it was not until the end of the year that some patients were able to go home, bringing elective surgery to a halt. Consultants complained that the passporting contract did not cover wheelchair patients back to wards.

In North Durham the saga continues, with generator failures plaguing operating theatres, ITU and casualty into darkness, overheating, poor planning, and plumbing faults which include sewage flooding through ceiling areas and cold taps that give out hot water.

Trust managers in response to the specially observe detailing the problems in Carlisle hit back arguing that the standard of the PFI build-

Looming threats

Pressure to include other services

The government's elec

Land assets stripped: NHS as tenant

Many PFI deals are part-funded by handing over to the consortium "spare" land and building assets released as part of the new scheme. Although this does some of the initial costs — and therefore reduces the monthly "rental charge" which must pay, the Trust then becomes a tenant, renting its key acute facilities from the private sector.

This has two important consequences for the future:

• Once the NHS assets — paid for over the generations by the tax payers — have been passed over in this way, the Trust no longer has any scope to use them in future service developments. The initial cost of any future schemes will inevitably be higher — and the probability of having to seek additional financial investments from the private sector is increased. And at the end of the contract, the NHS Trust is likely to be in a weak position to negotiate over a further extension of the lease agreement.

• The PFI deal effectively locks the Trust into a long-term commitment to maintain services around the new hospital or diverted facilities — no matter what changes may take place in local health services. New medical technology and population over the next 25-60 years. The flexibility of owning assets and buildings and being able to take decisions over how they should be used is seriously reduced.

Six times the capital value of £425m.

The annual fees on the next 14 schemes in the queue for which details are available add up to £250 million a year, giving a total cost of £7.9 billion — over FITIMUS the capital value of £1,307 million. If these deals are replicated in subsequent PFI schemes, the NHS could wind up paying between £32 billion and £38 billion in real terms (index linked payments) to private consortia over the next 25-30 years.

The argument that support services are included in this overall cost falls flat when we contrast this cost of financing a project through PFI, in which every £1m of capital eventually costs £5-6 million, with a standard 6% mortgage.

Every £1m could be financed this way over 25 years for just £I. 94 million, less than double the amount borrowed, and with no obligation to buy any other services, and free-hold tenure of the assets at the end of the deal.

The NHS is only part of the total PFI borrowing. At Sunday Times correspondent David Smith pointed out recently, on the Treasury's budget report, with deals worth £14 billion already generating revenue.

"Even if no new PFI deals were signed, the government would pay nearly £4 billion, or 25 years over, in fees and charges to PFI contractors over the next 25 years.

Of course the private sector is keen to ensure that even more deals are signed, despite the risk of being crank up revenues from the state for the whole gamut of PFI deals towards the £30 billion a year mark.

But how does all this represent value for the public sector? While the headline and actual costs of the large schemes are big enough to cause long-term dislocation to the finances of the NHS, the cumulative costs of financing some of the smaller schemes (less than £20m) through PFI can be ludicrously large.

Some small scale deals which ought to be affordable from one-off capital funds are to be paid off over 25 or 30 years, with a resultant cost as high as 24 times the value of the scheme. (Figures below are taken from Department of Health data, PFI schemes by Region: "total cost" is obtained by multiplying the index-linked — unitary payment by the number of years in the contract.)

• Queens Medical Centre catering: value £1m, total cost £23.8m.

• North Birmingham Mental Health: value £12.4m, total cost £183.3m.

• Royal Wolverhampton Radiology: value £10.9m, total cost £70m.

• Rothem Ropetet Elderly MHS value £2.1m, total cost £16.9m.

• North Bristol Brain Rehab unit: value £4.9m, total cost £42m.

In some cases, management will argue that even these small-scale PFI deals represent much more than a costly hire-purchase scheme, and that significant services are included as part of the unitary payment.

The combined deal is only available with this fixed, real terms cost, and the value for money must be judged on the final cost compared with the initial investment.

The figures suggest that financing piecemeal schemes in this way, with all of the on-costs of bureaucracy and delays, cannot be a sensible use of NHS funds.

The more money that is squeezed out of the NHS in PFI payments to bankers and private providers, the less that remains to treat patients, pay clinical staff and develop modern, appropriate services.

This article is adapted from the PFI dossier researched by John Liston for the GMB, the full text of which can be found on the GMB web site: www.gmb.org.uk
Deloitte and Touche report on Tube: PPP rigged - official!

Greg Tucker

THE PUBLICATION OF the report commissioned from accountants Deloitte and Touche on the privatisation of London Underground should be the last nail in the coffin of Public Private Partnership, as described by Will Hutton in The Observer as "the most devastating proposal of PPP..." "exposing a mendacious gerrymander that sets out unfairly to rig the rules", the report actually sets out little to prove this. The intervention had already been claimed by the RMT, Hutton himself in his own report and London Transport Commissioner Bob Kiley in his.

But what the government could previously denounce as ill-informed speculation is now the official stamp of accountants able to examine the books for real. Confirming these previous reports, it is obvious why the government and LUL went to such great lengths to try to keep its findings secret.

First they tried to buy Kiley off over the election period, then they sacked him after the election was over, then they used the courts to try to protect "commercial confidentiality".

The only commercial secrets being protected were just what a good deal the private contractors were being offered. Blair, Brown, and co. have argued that the Underground PPP will only go forward if it is shown to bring value for money. The Deloitte and Touche report shows how at every stage it has been necessary to assume the worst possible public sector performance and compare it with the best possible of the private sector to even get close to meeting this requirement.

Indeed, it is clear that far from being merely biased the assumptions made were highly unlikely to happen and private success. Because, up until now, LUL funding has always been on a short-term basis, set from Budget to Budget by the Treasury, investment has been piecemeal and inefficient. It is clear that given stable long-term commitments a more efficient regime would exist. This is the prospect facing the privatisers - but not LUL it seems - who are assumed to be £700 million less efficient.

Reality on its head

This turns reality on its head. Given a long-term commitment LUL could raise money cheaper than the private sector through European and Kiley’s bond issue proposals. It would be even more cost effective if the government were prepared to raise the funds itself through direct taxation.

Add to this another key assumption that LUL performance will disrupt services - the government decided to build in a £1.2 billion “performance adjustment” and then because it is well known that LUL cannot manage its investment and is bound to have major cost overruns another £1.6 billion is assumed as the extra cost that LUL would bear. No mind given by LUL in the past the actual offenders were the very contractors being asked to come and run the privatised LUL.

For it is assumed that the private sector will run to perfect efficiency, delivering everything they promise on time and to budget. And of course if things do go wrong they will bear the burden and not the public. Or so they claim.

But again here the report accuses the government of a sleight of hand. Whilst the PPP will last 30 years the private sector figures only build up, for the first seven and a half years. After that, with all the cards in their hands, the privatisers feel they will be free to renegotiate for better deals.

The sum total then is that the comparison of private to public costs starts from a false basis, with the full cost of the private sector bids not accounted for, and then assumes £3.5 billion extra costs for the public sector.

Despite this the private sector bids are still not competitive. And the government still claims that value for money is their sole criterion.

Of course, all this is simply based on a financial model under current economic and political frameworks. It says nothing of the other social costs - the jobs still to be created, the conditions, the effect on public safety and the environment. We have seen what that has meant on the mainline railways.

Kiley and Livingstone now have the option to use this report to launch a new legal challenge - a judicial review of the government’s decision.

But rather than relying on the courts the work we need is Livingstone to mobilise the mass of Londoners who voted for him precisely to express their concern at Tube privatisation.

In the run up to the TUC and Labour Party conferences trade union leaders have been trying to find forms of words to defuse the anger their members feel at the prospect of the broadening scope of the privatisation process.

What is happening to LUL should be a warning. There is no level playing field, no honest brokering. The government is acting out of deliberate ideological motives - to reward its supporters in big business - and will do whatever it takes to make sure that happens - value for money has never been its concern.

PFI/PPP Briefing

Socialist Outlook

Milburn’s muddle

IT SEEMS that white-kid Health Secretary Alan Milburn just can’t find a way to get good news out of the NHS, despite Gordon Brown’s beloved injection of extra cash since last year.

The normal winter media fare of headlines on hospital problems, bed shortages, and unfilled nursing posts, now involves the water supply round. But it has been supplemented by reports of filthy hospitals, and more recently the first full-scale condemnation of a Trust management regime by the General Medical Council for Health improvement.

The GMC report panned the Epsom and St Helier Trust in SW London as the worst in the country, pointing to health death rates for emergency surgery, dirty wards and urine-soaked carpet, and staff not only demonised but intimidated by blundering Trust bosses. But it has only enamelled a few Trusts: there could be even worse to come.

Epsom/St Helier ‘Trust chief executive Nigel Sewell opted for the easy option of early retirement, pocketing a golden handshakle and a hefty pension, just before the report was published, leaving others to pick up the pieces. A frustrated Department of Health refused to get involved, leaving the Trust to be run ineptly by a hostile media as they tried to cover up the scale of the scandal.

But this crisis was immediately turned into headlines on the death of an elderly patient on a trolley waiting for treatment at Whipsnade Hospital, and year-round crisis conditions in emergency units in Lewisham and across the country. But Milburn’s latest answer to the problem - buying more operations from the private sector and exporting patients to hospitals in Germany and elsewhere, (which have spare capacity because their health services are more money), Britain in front line care - simply rubs in the point that New Labour has failed to grasp the scale of the problem.

In any case the intervention actually compounds the problem by spinning off much of the NHS, leaving the most hard-pressed Trusts without the resources they need to cope with local need.

Signs of a new round of NHS campaigning

Harry Sloan

It seems that raising the tempo of activity against the Private Finance Initiative in the Treasury should fund the programme of new hospital build-

In Oxford, stung by comments from local PFP and Treasury Secretary Andrew Smith that he had seen no sign of union anger at PFI schemes in the NHS, a short-notice meeting held in mid August attracted over 30 activists from public sector and other unions to re-launch the Oxfordshire Campaign Against Privatisation, with its aim target being the local scheme to switch hospital services from the old Radcliffe Infirmary to a new centre in Headington.

This had been costing at £7m; but has now been put out to tender costing at £91m. OACF intends to mount a series of high profile meetings and public meetings, including lobbies of Andrew Smith’s local council in the days.

The new round of the UNSIGN campaign for the Constituency Labour Party.

UNISON in areas facing such campaigns will have to consider the sorry fate of David Locke, The Labour MP in Wyre Forest, who was expelled by his constituent Health Authority against local campaigns defending Koothan - and paid the price with an embar-

Campaigning can make a difference: and with the new agreement between the public sector unions nationally, more local campaigns are likely to make their mark, leaving ministers and their stooges isolated in defence of PFI.
An orgy of murder, kidnap, theft, and hostage-taking, in state terror campaign... liedict	

Boycott Israel, the Apartheid state!

Roland Rance

With the murder of popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) leader Abu Ali Mustafa, and the creeping reoccupation of parts of the West Bank and Gaza, Israel has intensified its onslaught against the Palestinian people to a state of near-open warfare.

In other acts of aggression over the past week, Israel has attempted to murder the leader of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), threatened to shoot a bishop and a key UN official, and held civilians hostage as human shields when it occupied family homes and an orphanage. These incidents were part of the massive increase in Israeli troop movements during its invasion of Beirut, leading to Bethlehem.

Israel's latest escalation has caused Western governments and private industry to pile in support. Foreign secretary Jack Straw has said that the actions are "extremely distressing, disproportionate and threaten to set the region on fire".

But this has not stopped Israeli's ongoing confiscation of Palestinian land, destruction of homes and olive groves, expansion of illegal Israeli settlements, and siege of the Palestinian communities, which continue in full force.

At the same time, Israel, with the unwavering support of the US, is disrupting the UN conference, part of an attempt to isolate it in Durban, in order to prevent delegates criticizing Israeli policies and practices.

Abu Ali Mustafa was elected head of the PFLP last year, following the resignation of its ailing leader, Dr. George Habash. Together with Habash, he had established the PFLP after the 1967 war, when Israel seized those parts of Palestine it had not occupied in 1948.

For the next twenty years, the PFLP was second in importance among Palestinian organizations only to Yasser Arafat's Fatah. It was known for its militancy, its hijackings, and its rejection of any compromise over the Palestinian right of return or the establishment of a unitary, secular and democratic Palestine.

It played a significant role during the earlier Intifada, when it was centrally involved in establishing and leading the United National Leadership which directed the struggle - in effect, a service-type body, similar to those set up during many revolutionary struggles.

The PFLP declined in significance with the growth of Hamas and other Islamist organizations, when Arafat turned to open dialog and compromise.

According to recent polls, it commands the support of about 8% of the Palestinian population, though this support is believed to be growing.

The assassination of Abu Ali Mustafa marks the first time in this Intifada that Israel has targeted a clearly political, rather than allegedly military, leader.

Since his election, Abu Ali had reinvigorated the PFLP and was regarded as second in importance only to Arafat within the PLO leadership. Despite the restrictions on movement in the occupied territories, some 50,000 supporters are reported to have attended his funeral.

Over the summer, Israel has also continued its policy of reoccupation of areas from which it had earlier withdrawn as part of the Oslo agreement.

Under this relentless attack, increasing numbers of Palestinians are calling for an international peacekeeping force to replace the Israeli presence in the occupied territories.

While this call is understandable, it is not one that we can support. Indeed, we would warn that, while such a presence might provide a short-term easing of the situation, in the long term it would prove disastrous to the struggle for Palestinian liberation.

Troops from third countries would clearly not have the emotional commitment to the biblical borders of Israel and to the settlements, and might initially be more even-handed than Israeli forces.

But calling on imperialism to provide a military solution to a situation which it has created, and to bring to an end an occupation which it has always supported, is a dangerous illusion.

The powers which imposed "order" in Iraq and Serbia can be no allies of people fighting for their freedom.

While we oppose such a call, it is significant that many Israeli activists have endorsed it. This reflects a deep and growing alienation from the national consensus. However, this call is still a retreat from the unequivocal call for a complete, unconditional and unconditional Israeli withdrawal from all the territories occupied in 1967 - the only interim demand which we can support.

Opposition to this call, however, does not mean opposition to any demand for international action. In particular, we support the call for a boycott of Israeli goods and tourism to Israel.

Activists across the world are increasingly coming to recognize the similarities between Zionist Israel and apartheid South Africa.

To mark the UN anti-racism conference in Durban, the South African Palestine Solidarity Committee recently issued a statement which noted:

"We, South Africans who have lived through apartheid cannot be silent as another entire people are treated as non-human beings; people without rights or human dignity and facing daily humiliation.

"We cannot permit a ruthless state to use military jets, helicopters, gas chambers and tanks on civilians. We cannot accept state assassinations of activists, the torture of political prisoners, the murder of children and collective punishment..."...

"We pledge ourselves to be part of a new International Anti-Apartheid movement against Israel..."
How long can NATO hold on to fragile Balkan “peace”?

Geoff Ryan

The peace deal that is supposed to give greater rights to the minority Albanian population in Macedonia is hanging by a thread. At the time of writing the Macedonian Parliament has refused to open discussions on the Framework Agreement. The debate was suspended on August 31 but was delayed after several hundred American Free Trade supporters paraded around the parliament building and burned MPs away.

Other events over the last week suggest even if the deal is approved by Parliament the chances of the current ceasefire holding are very slim. Some have begun collecting weapons from Albanian guerrillas and formed the Liberation Army. However there is a reactive discrepancy between the three thousand or so weapons NATO are proposing to collect and the eighty thousand weapons in Macedonian government claims are held by the NLA.

While the Macedonian government does not doubt exaggerating the NLA’s arms, the reality is that many weapons will remain in NLA hands. The only question is whether those arms will remain in Macedonia or, as appears to be happening, be moved temporarily over the border into Kosovo.

Although the NLA claims it is willing to cooperate with NATO, and has enormous illusions that NATO will offer them protection, tensions have already developed.

On August 29 NLA guerrillas engaged in a fire-fight with US troops deployed on the Kosovo-Macedonia border. The previous day US soldiers had arrested 32 guerrillas as they tried to enter Kosova from Macedonia. Since June over 600 Albanians have been detained under the90-day mandate of the Macedonian government. The US president’s adviser on Kosovo, Mr. Slobodan Milosevic, is still refusing to cooperate with the “peace


Bio-pricy in Chaspa

Veronica Fagan

In March 2001, the Zapata National Liberation Army (EZLN) made its way into Mexico City at the beginning of a six-month journey from the southern state of Chiapas.

This action was the latest in the long campaign of the Zapata’s for autonomy for the indigenous people of the region and it is likely that the government might at this point make some concessions. Within six weeks however, the San Andre agreement has been gutted by the politicians and the EZLN broke off dialogue with them.

This contest has been taking place since the Zapata’s launched their first offensive on January 1, 1994, as the North American Free Trade Agreement came into force. The disaster was no accident – the struggle has always been one which contests both the actions of the Mexican government but also the right of the multinational to plunder the natural resources of Chiapas.

Threatened

The UN-recognized Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve in Chiapas holds the last, threatened heart of virgin forest in the Lacandon jungle, which has essentially been under Zapata’s control since 1994.

Despite President Vicente Fox’s pledge to reduce the number of troops from Zapata territory the peace has not been maintained. Several camps have been shut, they have been just moved and a number of new military checkpoints installed. There were several attacks on the authorities in Chiapas between May and

Zapata warriors: but capitalists carry out daylight robbery

July in 6 cities in the area. A low intensity war is clearly being carried out.

Based on the ceasefire from attacking the Zapatista, the troops in the virgin forest area are supposedly operating against drug traffickers and from deforestation. But the area’s Maya inhabitants are clear that Montes Azules is not being “protected” in their interests but for transnational corporate biologists and foresters who hope to profit from the region’s genetic wealth.

In 1998 the California firm Diversa signed a three-year “bio-prospecting” deal with the Mexican government. Diversa, which has a similar deal with the US government for Yellowstone National Park, is granted access to this area on June 24, when it exchanges for $5,000 to train the biologists from the National Autonomous University of Mexico.

These people will collect the samples and receive $50 for each sample and their royalties of between 0.3 and 0.5 percent net sales.

But they are getting 95% of the proceeds on “bio-creative profits”.

The University of Georgia, the British-based company Mankind Nature Ltd, and El Colegio de la Frontera Sur have launched a similar deal with the Zapata in 1997. This one, titled Drug, Discovery and Biodiversity Among the Miskitos in Mexico, specifically targets Chisapas.

Teaching the vast reservoir of local knowledge about the rare plants found in this area and their potential uses, the programme will receive $2.5 million from the International Co-operative Biodiversity Groups (ICBG), a consortium of US government agencies.

The US government had negotiated a related agreement with local Indian communities, including the Timucu, who were living on the land. The project has received consent of nearly fifty communities and forged profit-sharing deals with them. The terms are kept hidden, but what is going on is clearly not about raising the living standards of impoverished people, but of making bigger and bigger profits for the big corporations.

But in a situation where large companies own the land and control the company that is co-operation can be bought.

Grants

Since 1993 the ICBG has awarded eighteen bio-prospecting grants totaling $18.5 million worldwide. The project has 20 partners, including GlaxoSmithKline, Dow AgroSciences, American Cyanamid (recently acquired by BASF) and, until recently, Monsanto. Seperately, a glycerin-dwelling microbe collected from the hot springs in 1986 was used as the source for enzymes widely used in DNA testing and to Hoffman-La Roche for $300,000.

So while bringing wealth to impoverished villages, new patents are much more likely to impose economic burdens by requiring farmers to pay royalties to foreign corporations to grow their own indigenous maize. Even the Mexican government has expressed concern over DuPont’s recent patenting of certain Aztec herbal medicines, including many indigenous maize varieties.

Impoverished mayors, villagers, small farmers, and others have been paid to protect their genetic resources, to support their communities’ livelihoods, and to improve their lives.

Impact study

Both Burrows of the Earthrise Institute and local Mexican environmental groups have conducted a court-ordered impact study on the bio-prospecting program.

Says Burrows: “To privatize living organisms, whether it is Mexican maize or ‘yellowstone’ microbes, may serve corporate interests, but it does not serve our social contract or our duties to steward the land and support farmers.”

Farmers all over the world save seeds and trade them with neighbors, but Monsanto has taken farmers to court for violating their property rights. Farmers have been threatened by the corporations like masters on the manor.”

This is what lies ahead and is backed up by the “trade-related intellectual property rights” provisions of TRIPS — of NAFTA and the World Trade Organization’s recognition to that point. In contrast, the United States still resists ratifying the Convention on Biological Diversity, unveiled at the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit, which would recognize the peoples’ intellectual property rights.

However there is resistance in Chiapas as well.

Burrows and other opposition figures from more than 100 Chiapas organizations of “mother earth” are calling for a new law to protect the land.

Accords breached

This is clearly part of the political conflict which led to Vincente Fox following in the footsteps of his predecessors in breaching the San Andrés accords.

The real autonomy for the people’s of Chiapa’s would be to the rights of transnational corporations to plunder their resources. But Fox was elected on the People’s of Chiapas, with the support of the PRI, precisely on the promise of speeding up Mexico’s integration into the market.

That is why many meaningful peace accords can be only by a real defeat for the forces of neoliberalism.

Such an outcome would open the way to a much-needed social and political movement against government support for the international fight against capitalist globalization. It would be a victory of solidarity with the people of Mexico and Chiapas should be an important issue for all socialists.

Further information:
http://www.chiapaslink.ukat.eway.net
RUC key to sectarian state

The key to understanding the violent conflict around the RUC is to look back to the events of Ardoyne earlier this summer, where Catholic primary school children were threatened by orange mobs and prevented from entering school (a threat that was never really realised as such). The RUC actions in Ardoyne, followed up by a full scale attack on nationalist residents, is simply part of a long tradition where the state forces support orange intimidation and attacks anyone who objects.

To round out the picture we simply have to add the latest wave of bombings and ethnic cleansing carried out by Loyalist paramilitary groups, which have taunted Shankill Road 'C company', a creation of British intelligence.

Despite the murder of two young men, one a Catholic and the other a Protestant, the RUC and the British state confine themselves to a review of the UDA ceasefire and find themselves unable to decide if it is holding or not.

There's a word for this sort of inaction. It's called a 'national crisis'. It's the collapse of sectarian terror. The 'socialists' UVP attempted to seize on this with a car bomb in Ballyciste and hold a demonstration celebrating sectarian peace. But the British state and the British exhibit a similar blind-sided inaction.

The refusal of the Good Friday agreement and for its expression around policing - the Patton report - was to deflate the sectarian state and the RUC. However any serious analysis of Patton indicates that it cannot directly address the issues of sectarianism and state failure.

Instead it defined the problem as a cultural one. It was not the sectarian equilibrium the force with even more lethal plastic bullets.

In fact this absolute control has been a feature of the agreement for some time, enshrined in two Police Bills that define its role.

The latest lobbying by the nationalists and Sinn Fein have only been about implementation - generally they have been looking for promises from Sin Fein that they will behave well in setting up new structures.

One should be surprised that under these circumstances the Dublin government, the Catholic Church and the SPLP have declined to sign the new RUC. The briefest of glances at Irish history would indicate that these groups always acted to defend imperialism and to win stability for big business.

I n a speech in New York last year Bernadette McAleer convinced the republican support for the Good Friday agreement to a funnel. Once you accept the logic of the only place to go was down and down to where the principle of the republicanism is. This is the situation that Sinn Fein finds themselves in now. There's a claim that they will build a campaign to bring back the Patton report and that there is still time to negotiate reform, despite the British and their erstwhile friends telling them that the time for talk is over. A glance at one of the 20 points Sinn Fein said they will react is to say all:

"The oversight commission was tasked by the government to oversee the operation of the Police Act, rather than the implementation of the Patton report as was suggested. His position has been undermined by the act. In addition the oversight commission has no power of direction. He should be given the statutory powers and the role envisaged by the assessment report and in being as in alliance with the government in fighting the legalisation of apartheid."

Some of the union statement touches on this, and in general the unions are reluctant to point out the fact that the agenda being followed by Mbeki has a great deal in common with the neo-liberal agenda elsewhere in the world.

Despite these limitations, other aspects of the criteria are disappointing. It is perhaps not surprising in a situation where over 10,000 jobs have been lost as a result of privatisation. Public sector job losses have contributed to soaring unemployment, which rose from 13% to 25% between 1995 and 1998. These job losses have been accompanied by attacks on wages and conditions in the public sector.

The effects of some privatisation have already been completely or partially gone through, the government is now privatising in schools in 1994. Now, the rich pay high fees and get great schools in the suburbs. Meanwhile, working people's schools in the townships and rural areas don't have electricity or proper classrooms, ending in high failure rates.

Privatisation of health services started under the apartheid regime, mostly through devolvement. Today 16% have private health insurance at a cost of $36 billion. This is more than the R22 billion spent on public health.

Spending on public health care has fallen by 15% in real terms since 1996 - resulting in a real deterioration of service. There has also been a shift of key health professionals from the public to the private sector.

Some companies have privatised water management, leading to rising prices and a worse service. Dublin's water is set to go up by 28%. Making people pay more, yet their tap has led to cut-offs and even exacerbated the spread of cholera.

Privatisation of the telephone system means even though Telkom is rolling out new phones, basic rental and local call costs up - and phones get lost for poor people. The cost of local calls has risen by 35 percent,

**Through Irish Eyes**

RUC's main target is still Catholics, terror which was the problem, it claimed but rather Catholic perception of the RUC.

What it claimed therefore was needed was to change the symbols and thereby encourage Catholic recruitment and give well-off Catholics some influence at local level.

But even in its own context this seems likely to fail. When applications were invited in the "new" RUC, it was predicted that 50% of these would be Catholic. But despite the fact that the British were able to write the definition of 'Catholic' so that it included people with no links to any republican or nationalist opinion, they still only managed to claim one third of the applications.

But even this level of success cannot be a step too far.

Sinn Fein claim that the British wish well us and that 'securocrats' were sabotaging the agreement. But it is the British that have consistently ensured their absolute control of the force, to preserve its overall sectarian character, to retain repressive laws and to repress the growing numbers who want to be treated as citizens.

As the fight against privatisation continues in here in Britain, trade unions will be pleased to hear about the successful two-day General strike in South Africa.

On August 29 and 30, particularly in the large enterprises thousands of workers demanded that the government reverse in attacks on services. Huge demonstrations were held in many parts of the country, including 150,000 workers in Johannesburg, 300,000 in Durban and 300,000 in Pretoria.

COSATU stated that around 60% of those who were not in overtime services and therefore exempted from the action by the unions - came out on strike. There was a clear difference in response in different parts of the country.

In South Africa, the unions have had to confront the government propaganda that they are putting forward is not privatized, and that they are acting in the interests of every worker by providing "consumers choice".

And of course the South African trade unions in the main see themselves as in alliance with the government in fighting the legalisation of apartheid.

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The Socialist Alliance had a highly successful campaign in the General Election, and greatly strengthened itself in the process. It is organizing a conference on December 1 to adopt a new constitution which can facilitate its further development and consolidation.

The present constitution of the Alliance developed out of the organisational process which grew and changed, and is no longer adequate to today's challenges. There are a variety of different positions on how things should develop, but most seek in various ways to consolidate the SA and its structures.

This means reorganising and strengthening the structures of the SA at both national and local level. It means a unified membership-based organisation rather than the two-tier system which exists at the present time.

The main debate is likely to be with the Socialist Party (SP) which is opposed to constituting the SA, and to any real drive for decentralisation. The SP has submitted both a proposed constitution and a political motivation for it.

This submission calls for the SA to be a loose association of political organisations (though some aspects would in our view be overcome in a later stage of development).

For the ESG the new constitution must be based on democratic principles, which for us is the basis for the support in the general election campaign. There is an understanding between the SP and the ESG that Almonia was threatened with autonomy in which they determined all political decisions, including who the candidates would be. They demanded this repeatedly, with the implied threat that they might split if they didn't get their own way.

Nominally the SP was part of the Alliance, but used the SA to promote its own narrow advantage. It contributed almost nothing so the campaign at national level, largely drafting its members into those constituencies where it had the candidate, even from other constituencies where there was an Alliance candidate.

These issues came up at a head in the January meeting of the Liaison Committee of the SA, which was only held together by the acceptance of a statement, prepared in advance between the SP and the ESG. This allowed the SP to determine the candidate and have political control in a list of pre-selected constituencies.

This statement overrode the democracy of the local alliance by imposing control on them. This was directly contrary to the 'Constitutional Council' which had been agreed by the earlier national conference of the SA, and which put candidate selection in the hands of the local branch.

The SWP agreed to this in order to maintain the unity of the Alliance. The ESG, along with most of the other left organisations, voted for it for the same reason. But everyone was clear that this was a mistake and a necessity to get the Alliance through its first General Election campaign.

Whatever else happens at the December conference, this grossly undemocratic imposition of candidates must not be repeated. As a first principle, the selection of candidates must be made by properly constituted meetings of local SAs on the basis of a majority vote of those present.

Local SAs might want to make other decisions by consensus, with majority decisions only being taken when this proved impossible, but a formal vote is necessary for candidate selection.

It is important that the SA remains united, and that the SP remains within it: but this cannot be at the expense of basic principles. It is impossible to build an alternative to Blairism without the most rigorous democracy, accepted and carried out by all participants in the SA. The SA cannot be built on the basis of undemocratic decisions bullied through under threat.

The constitution put forward by the SP is not only undemocratic but also contradictory. Whilst its general framework is to decentralise the SA at national level, it becomes ultra-centralised by proposing a detailed constitutional structure for local SAs.

There is of course a perverse logic behind the SP proposals. They want to weaken the national structures in order to give themselves maximum room for manoeuvre, whilst finding a way of getting their own candidates in at least local level in their priority constituencies. They want to perpetrate the logic of the liaison committee's statement into the new constitution.

Of course the SP cannot with any credibility propose openly that they be given political control of certain constituencies as a constitutional right. They have, therefore, looked for mechanisms which will give them more or less in practice.

Their answer is to introduce 'members platform' into the Alliance - with a local right of veto.

The constituent would oblige local SAs to have in their local constituencies the right of any (minimum of six members to establish a 'members platform' on request.

Once any platforms are established any decisions (including the adoption of candidates) could, at local (not national) level, only be taken unanimously. In other words each member's platform would, at local level, have a veto over any decision. In practice any six people could paralyse the decision making process of a local alliance.

The SP member's platform would frustrate the will of the majority in a local SA to adopt a candidate of its choice. This would also apply pressure for the adoption of a candidate put forward by the vetting platform. If that does not work it is a step from there to putting forward another candidate under another name.

At national level platforms would not have the right of veto other than on changes to the constitution - presumably to protect this initial stitch up from future challenge.

This outrageous procedure of local vetoes is partly justified, in the SP's political motivation, by counterposing it to the concept of one-person-one-vote brought in by Neil Kinnock. But the analogy with Labour whip-busters does not make sense.

OMW was invited in the LP in order to use a large passive membership against a smaller active membership, and used postal ballots for that end. It does not mean every one in the room voting - as the SP implies. It means all those NOT in the room also being entitled to vote. The most democratic procedure is all present voting, providing the meeting has been properly constituted.

The SP attempt to justify their proposals by saying that they want a SA which is federal rather than centralised. But of course it depends what is meant by federalism. The Socialist Party use the historical example of the LP between 1900-1918 and quote Keir Hardie at the LP founding conference, expounding the right of affiliated organisations to use their own candidates.

But is not true that the early LP had no control over candidates: those selected still needed to be endorsed by the Party. True, a few defined this rule, but that was the requirement.

And the same form of federalism that organisation was shaped by the context. The LP was formed under conditions of a slow break from Liberalism.

It was an unstable mixture of idealists, socialists, disaffected Liberals, and trade union leaders. Many of the later straddled both the Labour and Liberal Parties, and would have preferred to have remained Liberals if they could have only got candidates from organised labour selected.

Trade unions got involved because they felt the need for labour representation, without regard for this stage to particular politics. The socialist Alliance did not have anything approximating to a socialist (or even social democratic) construction or political creed until reorganisation and consolidation out of wartime conditions in 1918.

Moreover MPs were not paid by Parliament, so when trade unions paid them a wage, naturally they wanted the seats. At the same time the local organisations of the Labour Party were weak and non-existent. 100 years later the idea that the first 18 years of the LP would be our model shows the weakness of our socialist Party.

If we want to look at lessons from the early history of the Alliance - which the model of the ILP would be a better example.

The ILP was a conscious break with Liberalism and was socialist from its inception in the early 1890s.

It did, however, consider itself federalist, despite having a centralised decision making process (the supremacy of conference) and central control over the adoption of candidates.

The term 'federal' is in any case a much abused concept. The ISG wants a 'federalism' in which there is an open and pluralist organisation containing not only individuals but organisations coming from different traditions.

These organisations have their own structures and procedures but work closely together in a unified organisation - the Socialist Alliance - which needs its own policy-making process and an elected, authoritative leadership to carry this out. Such a structure could not reasonably be called over centralised.

The SP falsely implies that it is intrinsic to the idea of the Alliance that the Alliance should be only a collection of groups mainly doing their own thing but coming together for elections under loose arrangement. This does not hold water.

Unfortunately it is hard not to read into the SP proposals an irrational hostility to the Alliance even in its case. The SP is not interested in serving for the national constituency, where they propose themselves as a set of 'municipal' councillors (effectively councillors) - which only the SP has - and for trade union NEC members or national representatives.

It would be good to have such people on the EL, it is hard to see how this one factor qualifies them. In any case why national officers and NEC members in the unions rather than other office holders or rank and file activists? Some of these are the most undemocratic out of such positions by the right wing.

The SP also argues that the SA should support groups of workers who run the GP in elections themselves, as a protest against new Labour. This is clearly the case of some candidates.

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In the run up to the December conference which will decide the future structure of the Alliance, there is a new and growing area of political debate which has not been sufficiently explored is that of a new and growing positive action. The Alliance needs to decide what - if any - measures we need to take in the full involvement and representation of the different oppressed peoples, particularly, such as women or black people, within our own structures.

Behind the question of adopting different administrative measures however, lies a broader and more fundamental debate about our vision for a different type of society and the type of government that goes with it. Having a political exchange about these questions is of value in itself, irrespective of organisational decisions we take at the conference. Mary Conway offers her views for debate.

The Socialist Alliance has developed and evolved in a political period where the ideological credibility of those who argued for old style socialism and that the capitalist society in which we lived was meeting everyone's needs is being rejected by more and more people. The rise of the anti-globalisation movement is an exceedingly positive development in a situation where the world and country is in a far greater state of confusion than ever before.

However, it is not the case that we have now entered a new period of social democracy. The development of anti-globalisation movements which historically argued that the capitalist society was equivalent to socialism - Social Democratic Parties and even Christian Democrats - are deeply implicated in what has been discarded.

The view of socialism that we put forward through the Alliance is obviously one that differentiates itself both in theory and practice both from the legacy of Stalinism as a political force and from any project has anything to do with market justice, never mind socialism.

We have tried to take on board in the Alliance the need to act on negotiations towards the concerns of those coming into activity today - for example by putting the Alliance on the political agenda at the centre of our concerns.

We see the evolution of the Alliance through this intention in practice is another question, but we have at least moved beyond the situation of aspiration.

Our political questions however we have been less developed. It is the need for thinking creatively, that we ought to have made a break with the old type of organisation in which we were a part.

But we have to look honestly at ourselves and discuss how we can address them.

From this point of view, we should look critically at which social forces we have so far been attracted to our banner.

If we put to one side for a moment those who a members of revolutionary organisations, what is most noticeable about those who have become involved in that are not people who are new to politics, however many had been inactive or only partially active for a period.

Of course it's excellent to see people that have had experience and talent coming back into activity. But it doesn't answer the question of the side of the organisation - how we win the new generations to support our ideas - how we can evolve a politics for the 21st century. That is why the Alliance needs to give our generation, thought over the next period how we win young people to the organisation.

The involvement of women in the Alliance is more complex. It's not possible to give statistics at this stage because there is no unified membership system, but my guess would be that in terms of membership in the Alliance, local level, women and men are fairly equally involved.

However, when it comes to the participation of women in the leadership structures - the officer's group and the Executive Committee - the figures are different.

In our view this is a situation that needs to change. Despite the gains of the women's liberation movement, without conscious measures, there is always a tendency for organisations to replicate the sexual division of labour in our society - a division of labour which disadvantages women and undervalues the contribution we can and do make.

This problem is one which faces organisations of the left as well as other types of organisations in capitalist society, because we are conditioned and shaped by the sexual division of labour that permits that society.

The best way is addressing such inequalities will vary from situation to situation - for example, the first hurdle that needs to be overcome is winning acceptance that some such measures will be necessary.

We need to look at the question of the structure of women's representation in the Alliance. The Socialist Alliance proudly put the question of opposition to racism and defence of asylum seekers at the centre of the General Election campaign.

It was often the most difficult issue to argue with people who otherwise supported our ideas - for example among the callers who rang the national office after the election broadcast, a significant number focused on this issue.

Since the election campaign, if anything the issues have moved even more towards the centre - we have seen increased racist attacks and provocations from the BNP in particular and rebellions in response from significant layers of black youth. In the last weeks we have seen the Tory leadership campaign be replaced by questions over BNP involvement.

It's true that in this latter period part of the difficulty for us nationally has been having the political resources to respond to these questions.

If Alliance members have been involved, they are more likely to have used other umbrella's such as the Anti-Nazi League or other anti-racist organisations rather than act in our own name. And it's fair to say that such difficulties have occurred across the political spectrum, and not just on questions of racism.

But at the same time, while we were able to put forward a significant number of strong black candidates at the General Election (as well as in the London Assembly elections before that) there can be no doubt that we remain an organisation where the proportion of black people remains shamefully low.

The ISG has believes that in order to create the sort of organisation we need to meet the challenges facing us, the December conference should support a number of measures to help address these in an similar question.

We should: Support the rights of women, black and minority ethnic people, lesbians, gay men and bisexual and people with disabilities to caus within the Alliance. Such causes should then put forward proposals to the Alliance as a whole which can both make the organisation more effective and more active in fighting oppression.

Adopt measures that will ensure that leadership structures have at least a minimum number of women involved. At this stage we would suggest a rather modest figure of 25% - but this figure should not be one we are happy with in the long-term.

Elect both a youth officer and a black officer, with the remit of working with the leadership team to involve more black people and more youth in the Alliance.

One of the effects of the 1980s we have been living through (really since the Munich massacre) is that there has been a break in political culture and legacy.

Many of those who are involved in the Alliance today have grown up and been politicised active through a time when for example the women's liberation movement was much more dynamic and visible than it is today.

One of the natural questions that party members and supporters are currently facing is whether the situation of women and men today are certainly not going to get any easier through - for example - the books available, the libraries whether at college or where they live.

Today what tends to mean that the news and the access to the media successes - particularly in exams at schools. While the fact that most of these very same women will end up learning less than their male counterparts is not something currently being challenged.

But when such a discourse has become so dominant, we should certainly work to expose the reality that the struggles for equal pay or abortion rights, not the legacy of Women Against Pit Closures but the question of female chief Executives there are.

The anti-racist debates which took place - between groups of women who had a different idea of what society they wanted - on the way forward for the women's movement should be of interest to the whole left.

The distortions in the presentation of the fight for women's liberation impact today on the way that particularly young women are likely to approach the question.

And the role of New Labour is not insignificant at this level.

The Observer - "If Clare Short or Mo Mowlam is a feminist, then I am not." This is not just in common with working class men that those women who cut child benefits or condemn women and their families in the third world to sell their bodies through poverty and disease."

The response of socialist feminists has to be clear. Whatever label she uses, a woman with power is a power to attack other women, and to reduce their standards of living to a less than a woman or a man who does the same. We need to be very careful to use the label "socialist".

A central part of our whole reason for existence as the Alliance is to be as loud and as possible that Tony Blair's policies have nothing to do with socialism.

It is not so different to argue at the same time that the new privilege for a small minority of women has nothing to do with any real vision of women's liberation.

The other movements against women, such as the lesbian and gay movement, the black movement and everyone with disabilities all have things to teach us about space and challenges to pose to us.

The histories of each of these movements are important as a common and also their own particular dynamics - the space or time to explore here.

And of course the way that support comes from the left - the first time today will raise questions. The situations today, will be different from those that animated people to develop their revolutionary politics and be affected by both the gains and the losses of women's movements.

"We need to find ways to discuss these lessons and to work together with these movements in the battles that they are taking on.
What's so great about genius?

Martin Smith: John Coltrane: jazz, racism and resistance.
Mike Gonzalez: Diego Rivera: Mexican artist who painted walls.
John Molyneux: Rembrandt and revolution.
Paul McGarr: Mozart: outwitting the naysayers.

Reviewed by Andrew Kennedy

W hat attitude should Marxists take to the work of "great" artists, with their attendant cults of genius? Is the idea of a body of artistic work that "stands the test of time" and is "historical"? Such questions are raised both explicitly and implicitly by the first volume of the series "Revolutionary Portraits", newly published by Sedgwick, an imprint of the Socialist Workers Press.

These CD-sized booklets are each devoted to a major artist, namely Rembrandt, John Coltrane, Diego Rivera and Mozart.

One obvious justification for the series overall is that the creativity of each artist is related to their class position and relations with revolution, rebellion or resistance; another, that the artist concerned introduces a new or "revolutionary" kind of representation.

The underlying thesis here seems to be that the most inspiring and innovative works of art are related in some way to historical progress and that this connection is achieved through the creative activity of heroic individual figures.

All the texts are opposed, however, to the grand idea that art and in particular individual creativity is a straightforward reflection of politics or economics. They equally content the notion that artistic geniuses arise as if by magic, independently of historical circumstances.

All four works are based at least notionally upon a dialectical materialist model of (to quote the series blurb) "the relationship between individual and large historical forces", in which "each influences and shapes the other".

Yet there are interesting differences of emphasis among the texts. In the Rembrandt and Coltrane volumes, the individual artist seems to be accorded more auton-

omous and the tone is more celebratory. The authors appear to be fans and to want to enhance our appreciation of the works concerned.

On the other hand, the Mozart and Rivera studies, which were originally published as theoretical articles in International Socialism, take a more dispassionate approach, in which there is greater emphasis upon the sharing of power of "the larger historical forces".

In its historical context, the account of Rembrandt's prints and paintings now are not simply present-day "constructs" created with hindsight, but are related to the real, material gains for humanity brought about by the Dutch revolution and war of independence against Spain (1568-1648).

Interestingly, he argues that the Dutch capitalist revolution brought a gregarious sense of human individuality, reflected in Rembrandt's self-portraits, for instance, and a greater acceptance of diversities, which would presumably "do not exist" if it were not for the context within which Rembrandt could create his sympathetic images of Jews and black people.

Here, as elsewhere in Rembrandt's work, Molyneux argues, the bourgeois celebration of the individual, pushed to extremes, takes on an anti-bourgeois logic: for example, Rembrandt's "positive" depictions of black people would sit ill with contemporary anti-exotic and anti-black ideology which legitimised the republic's policy of colonial slavery.

More problematically, Molyneux asserts that Rembrandt's images of the women with whom he had relationships are extraneous to sexual, because they were painted out of love, and not out of a desire to objectify. How does he know?

Furthermore, Molyneux does not examine the precise forms that patriarchal power took in the bourgeois republic, nor whether these forms allowed a space for the expression of fulfilling heterosexual love, at least. Without such a historical foundation, his argument here tends not to advance beyond the level of humanists, empathetic insight.

Rembrandt's "genius" is not a product of the tensions in society, rather, his art is a product of the tensions in society, rather, his art is a product of the tensions in society, rather, his art is a product of the tensions in society. He does on to state: "At a certain point in history Coltrane was able to express his musical ideas with greater clarity and force than those around him".

This begs the question of why it was Coltrane rather than another jazz musician, who was able to express these ideas, which means that we are still left with the notion of exceptional individual.

attributes. In other words, we have a modified and not very satisfactory version of the bourgeois genius thesis, which might be expressed as: "such-and-such an artist is great, but their greatness has a material explanation, sort of."

One volume breaks the mold, however. Mike Gonzalez argues that Diego Rivera depicts peasants and workers as passive inhabitants of a timeless, mythic Mexican nation, rather than as agents of change, impervious to social contradiction and in fact actually "the most revolutionary" of the Mexican mural painters.

The incidental effect of his account is to show how completely inappropriate the representation of the individual artist as "great" can be. Such a cautionary note is welcome: the desire to portray an artist both as revolutionary and as creative genius, the notion that great art and political action can originate from the same figure — all this creates a huge pressure to mythologise and heroise.

I doubt Redwords will cover some female cultural practitioners such as — the German socialist artist Kathe Kollwitz occurs to me as a prime candidate. But it is a question of whether an artist's or a people's culture will be represented. Her unselfing images were produced for herself or for her friends: they were not intended to be part of the public domain; their relation to the conditions of production are not straightforward; they don't wear the epistemological trappings of the self-consciously "revolutionary"

Might this lead some Marxists to re-evaluate Coltrane once again to the limits of capitalism?

It was Trotsky — himself often portrayed as a genius — who predicted that under communism, "the average human type will rise to the heights of an Aristotelian, a Goethe, a Marx. And above this there will be nothing.

This promises a future levelling-up of human capacities only to re-assert us with the notion of genius arising who will reach an even higher level. Even in an apocalyptic context of technological and human beings will never possess absolutely, total talent and expertise. Is Trotsky right about this, and if so, is it a problem?

We are still in the early stages of developing a dialectical materialist model of the creative human subject and its relationship to social structures and processes. It is worth remembering, however, that these volumes have been produced primarily not as interventions into theoretical debates, but as accessible and enjoyable Marxist introductions to their respective subjects. From that point of view, they work very well.

Andrew Kennedy lectures in art history for various institutions.

1. Molyneux, pp 14-16
2. See Molyneux, pp 14-16
3. See also Molyneux, pp 31-34 and Berger's "Ways of Seeing."
4. Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte
5. See also Molyneux, pp 34-35 and McGarr, pp 6-7.
6. See also Molyneux, pp 34-35 and McGarr, pp 6-7.
7. Gonzales, p 62
8. See also Molyneux, pp 34-35 and McGarr, pp 6-7.
Building a mass party is the Socialist Alliance missing its opportunity?

Building a mass revolution might be a task that has faced the extreme left since the collapse of the Russian Revolution in 1917. The history of the movement—the secretaries of the early communist movement followed by its degeneration due to Stalinism, accompanied by the betrayal of socialists, and the growth of fascism have been discussed by others, particularly by Trotsky and his followers.

The question I am posing (and it is a question not an answer) is this: Is the current situation in Britain, how should Marxists expedite the break of Labour Party members and sympathisers from that Party, overcome the cynicism of Labour MPs who don't vote—particularly the youth—and win back a section of the working class that has been middle class attracted to the fascist parties?

The "entry tactic" will never solve the problem of the mass movement or revolution, nor will it lead to the conclusion that there has been a failure for nearly 70 years! I well remember the election of Gen. Healy and John Lawlor entering the Labour Party in 1948. As a member I know the experience was useful, indeed enlightening. Yes, we made some recruits. Ted Kain was one. We participate and helped in the growth of the British communist party in 1952, 1953 and 1954 (an important left centrist movement). Nevertheless, despite this favourable development most of us got done by the right wing Executive Party. Bill and Ray Hunter in Islington North (now Labour MP Tom Mercer and myself in Norwood L.P.) in 1954. There is no remembrance of left centrist current in the L.P. now, and far less chance for a mass break from that Party.

So the unions the key for opening up the construction of a powerful alternative party, despite their leader- ships and bureaucrats? I think they are.

A number of unions e.g. the TGWU, FBU, RMT, UNISON and GMB have threatened or decided to cut back on funds to the Labour Party. They have voted for alternative policies: renationalisation of the railways; opposition to privatisation; opposition to the government's cuts in local government spending; laws (especially vouchers and lotteries) and laws that assist at the growing divergence between rich and poor and the growing unease for directors and executives, the attack on comprehensive education and the encourage- ment of Big Business to run schools; the refusal to restore the link on pensions.

The right wing policies of New Labour have resulted in a shift in the mood within the Labour Party and in the mood of those normally voting Labour. The vote for Livingstone, the primary dissent over the Chairs of Select Committees, the abstention of millions of voters, the increasing opposition (mainly of youth) to global capitalism, the fight to restore the link on pensions, together with the growth of fascism and a serious increase in racist attacks in areas of unemployment and deprivation—this all show the shift in mood.

So far the movement in the unions has been, as far as I know, to a loss of funds to New Labour and the threat to back candidates in elections who will campaign for union policies. I believe for it the majority groups (be they the groups associated with or in the Socialist Alliance or those on the left critical of the Socialist Alliance) to campaign, in and out of the unions, for the unions to adopt an alternative policy based on the unions but with a more radical policy than that founded just over 100 years ago.

In campaigning for such a party I would suggest at this stage there should be a minimum policy such as: the renationalisation of the railways; opposition to privatisation of any public services; increased funding to hospitals, transport (such as the Tube), schools etc. by taxing the rich; the restoration of the pensions link; an end to the minimum wage and no differentiation for age; opposition to participation in America's "war wars" and support for the anti-globalisation campaign and the Kyoto agreement.

Once such a break was achieved, candidates would fight on the programme in local, national and European elections. If the left can force the formation of a new party based on the unions, as the Labour Party was just over 100 years ago, but in this quite new situation, the opportunities for building a mass Marxist party would be qualitatively different.

I believe such a party would have an enormous attraction to disaffected Labour party members, but more importantly, to many workers, youth and pension- ers, the unemployed and middle class.

With the threat of recession and the world economy the political and social situation will change drastically. A search for an alternative path will be facing many.

Lessons from Wales and Scotland

I was interested to read Alan Thorntree's assessment of the June gen- eral election results (New Labour a government with no mandate, SC 46). I now have a question of some of his judgements.

In the first place, while I agree that it is indeed bizarre that Labour's landslide was founded on only around a quarter of the electorate, I think it is difficult to go on to argue that anything is wrong with the figures that vindicate the decision to not the Socialist Alliance campaign.

Outside three constituencies in which special factors came into play, the over- all average percentage poll of under two per cent (in an election in which the turnout was staggeringly low anyway) hardly indicates the emergence of any- thing like a significant layer within the workers' movement breaking from Labourism to the extent that they are prepared to vote against it.

These kinds of numbers are what one comrade memorably called a 'BT vote' i.e. 'family and friends' (of the candi- date). So while the degree of co-operation among the groups of the far left may be growing, the actual content of the joint work seems far less so.

But this is in England. In Scotland, on the Labour front, the level of the vote won by the SNP does seem to have passed some sort of threshold. Here there is a different process underway—reflected this time round by the vote to the left of Labour, but building on pat- terns already evident in the way in which the SNP and SWP in Scotland have evolved.

Politics in Scotland seems to be moving in a different rhythm than in England, a significant fact that socialists in Britain have to be able to understand and work with.

And what of Wales? Here the situation appears different again. Comrade Thorntree can only note the poor perform- ance of the Alliance, and the fact that Plaid Cymru 'did a bit worse than expected' One is now asked to accept expected by whom? By some within Plaid I expect, but when did a small party do as well as it expected?

The very same point could be made about the Alliance. In fact, by any stan- dards, Plaid did in fact remarkably well indeed. If a comparison is made with the last Welsh state general elections in 1997.

Looking at the total votes cast for the main parties in both elections, we see that not only was Plaid the only party to increase its vote in Wales, but it is by a whopping twenty-one per cent.

Why was this so? Who were these new Plaid voters? Looking at the figures, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that they are former Labour voters fed up with the current Labour government, especially when it is borne in mind that the biggest swings from Labour to Plaid (again calculated using actual numbers of votes cast) tend to be clustered in the traditional Labour bastions of the south Wales coalfield.

That this is so can be largely explained by the fact that Plaid's policies are in general not only to other Welsh voters, but also appear to be more in line with the aspirations of the latter's own tradi- tional supporters. With regard to pri- vatisation, for example, Plaid is both critical of the Private Finance Initiative and in favour of renationalisation of the railways.

For many Labour voters, it seems, a vote for Plaid is seen as a vote in defence of the welfare state and public services. Plaid's appeal to Labour voters would seem to lie in the popular per- ception that Plaid are better defenders of traditional 'labourist' interests—'Labourists'—than New Labour itself. This is of course exactly the same pat- tern of voting that we saw in the Welsh Assembly elections in 1999, save the fact that this time round it has been on a much smaller scale.

The reasons for this are obvious; the Welsh working class is not stupid, and for the time being it is going to take the question of Westminster government seriously. But the pattern that we saw in 1999 is exactly the same, only this time with smaller numbers. There is a real process here, different to that in both England and Scotland.

And this is the real point I want to make about the role of the Welsh, the other economic and political system in the British state has been breaking down, and the fruits of this process are what we can discern in the June results.

The consequence today is that in England, especially in metropolitan England, there is no significant radicalisa- tion occurring outside of the organisa- tional or political confines of Labourism. In Scotland, following on from the poll tax movement and the impact of the national question, there is a genuine large-scale radical current that is begin- ning the break from the dominant cur- rent of British working class politics.

In Wales, a different process is taking place, with a small but significant shift in political allegiance from Labour to Plaid. Aside from the electoral consequences or otherwise of the performance of the Socialist Alliance, therefore, the main real point is that a British political outlook which does not recognise that England is not Scotland and Wales is not England is not going to be able to address the real political developments taking place within the British working class move- ment.

Ed George, Spain

Socialism on the internet

Under these circumstances socialist ideas will take on added force as will the need to fight increasing unemployment, cutbacks and wage slashing. The Labour leadership has no answers to these problems except to advise workers to pull in their belts a little tighter and wait for the good times to return.

It is now that the left should be putting the maximum pressure on the union leadership to consider an open break with Labour and the formation of anew party based on the unions.

If such a party was formed, with the right of any group agreement joining this new party to affiliate to that party to affiliate to the charter, the chances of an independent left party to be built would be present. I have oversimplified the problem? Maybe I have.

But at least the left wing groups should discuss these ideas—or is the prevalence of socialism in all the different tendencies too powerful?

Dave Finch
South London
Stem the tide of racism!

NEW LABOUR is swimming in a tide of increasingly racist and reactionary policies. Foreign Secretary Jack Straw calls us "sympathisers" with Australian Prime Minister John Howard's plight in trying to keep out the Afghani asylum seekers on the Tampa — at a time when Howard's actions have met with widespread condemnation across the globe.

David Blunkett promises to send in snatch squads to remove people whose applications for asylum have failed. Immigration officers will be armed with new powers to search premises and make arrests. Blunkett has argued that these measures are necessary to restore "faith in the asylum system".

Now the Government have given catering company Sudeko an opt-out from the minimum wage legislation so that they can pay asylum seekers less than one tenth of the paltry minimum wage — a miserable 34p an hour — for cleaning and cooking! The timing of this is somewhat ironic, coinciding as it does with the UN conference on racism, at which the British government is leading the former slave-trading nations in resisting any apology for their past crimes against humanity, any recognition of the legacy of slavery — and any payment of reparations to the African countries affected.

Every cruel racist comment in the tabloids is met by yet more concessions and right-wing policies from politicians. These people must be held to account and their reactionary ideas consigned to the dustbin of history. We say: Stop up the fight against racism, throw out the system of forced dispersal, and scrap immigration controls.

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