Not content with one Railtrack, Blair flogs off the tube and targets the postal service, health, education...

Why feed the hand that bites you?
Blair’s contempt for safety of benefit staff

By an Employment Service striker

Public sector workers are increasingly the victims of assault at work. Last year over 2,000 incidents were reported nationally in Benefits Agency offices and 1,100 in Jobcentres in the South East alone. Home Secretary John Iddesleigh in the Benefits Agency (BA) and Employment Service (ES) have nofaith in Tony Blair to improve our safety at work, despite his so-called toleration stance. Blair is forcing BA and ES workers to work in dangerous new Jobcentre Plus (JP) offices. On 28 and 29 January thousands of PCS (Civil Service Union) members participated in national strike action over Jobcentre Plus.

This action was part of a series of strikes that started when managers imposed new screens in pilot JP offices and ignored the health and safety concerns of their union. Eventually all BA and ES JPs have been shut and the 19 new JP offices with the merger of the two agencies. JP s to Blair’s plans to reform/merger the benefits system and privatise staff and clients on sickness benefits will be opened. No new unscreened JP offices for work-focused interviews under threat of the unions benefits being removed.

Civil servants are expected to put pressure on these claimants to go out to work. The PCS opposes compulsion and recognises its members are being exposed to an increased risk of assault working under such conditions. Claimant groups are supportive of the PCSU in the JP dispute as they see the civil service staff should not be blamed for Government policy and accept strikes are essential at pre-strike when dealing with clients in some circumstances.

Civil servants have no love for the current benefits system or screens. However screens can only be safely removed when the benefits system is reformed by increasing benefit levels and removing the biases of the all-work test and sanction for JSA claimants. So far the government and management seen removed by the Jobcentre Plus strike action and have offered an option to move to the Union to meet them at ACAS. They hope the dispute will fizzle out and a defeat will be inflicted on the Union that is financially bleeding its members.

They are being aided by union ‘moderates’ who are trying to call off the dispute and undermine the action of members on the Union’s National Executive that include Mark Serwotka, the socialist General Secretary.

Left Unity (LU), the main left grouping in the PCSU has little support on the Union National Executive but does dominate the ES and BA Section Executives and has been able to influence the strike at a local level. Unfortunately it was slow to call a national strike over JP and has left rank and file members in the dark over the progress of negotiations. The dispute has also highlighted organisational weaknesses of the union in the ES, a result of years of neglect by a DCU dominated Section Executive. The ES Section Executive has also failed to impress on their BA colleagues the need to produce campaigning literature specifically for ES members.

Despite these problems, more members have come out for national strike action than actually voted for it in the first place. The union is battling to escalate the dispute thorough voting on a work to rule/over time basis. There is growing discontent amongst JP pilot office workers where members have previously gone in and join the dispute. To cause greater disruption, there is need now for a programme of rolling regular action to be adopted.

The PCSU must mobilise its members in other departments to support the dispute. It must coordinate action with other striking public sector workers and claimants facing Blair’s assault. If the dispute is won it would transform the PCSU and inspire civil servants to mobilise against massive cuts, pay and pensions, and pressure on left unity candidates in the General Election to address the hawkeye: point of the civil service left which had lost a full battle to prevent merger being carried out on the terms of the right wing. The constitution entrenched bureaucratic control and the national lead by the London Left unites with the separation of ‘social control’ and the national lead by the central office.

Since then, however, the situation has changed due to two factors. First, there has been an upsurge in the public who have been demonised by the 1970s and 1980s, and perhaps hoped for better from New Labour. The party is labelled with the campaign against the, more outrageous, attacks on their jobs, pay and pension rights. Second, the sections groups who have long controlled the union and its predecessors have been de- radicised. This has enabled Left Unity to move out as an attempt to recapture the power on the NEC to make concessions that have promoted members’ interests.

One practical effect of all this has been that the union has been willing to vote for strike action and the national disputes committee has been willing to allow this to go ahead.

In addition, members elected climate Left Unity candidates, Mark Serwotka as general secretary in December 2005

An extended handover process for Serwotka will now lead to the union’s full membership and the hawkeye, hard left, preceded by Barry Nicholson, steps down in the summer following the results of the 40,000 members who voted for an upturn in the union’s campaign in the reorganisation of national pay bargaining, but he has often been at odds with the NEC.

The PCSU has the capacity to fight in the NEC, to ensure that he has the backing of the NEC to proceed with fighting leadership.

Fiction Frictions workers appeal for solidarity

The workers from Fiction Frictions, Gwernant, North Wales have been on strike/lockout since last June. On Sunday 3rd of February they demonstrated in Cardiff, in a March that ended at the Labour Party Conference. This was the only national protest organised in their support, by the TGWU and PCSU. At least 500 people attended the pre-march rally, which was addressed by John Smith, Barry Morris, and the strikers’ representatives.

The strike itself is of great importance, mainly because of the group involved – ‘professionals’.

But it also displays the emasculation of the Labour government’s limited improvements to the situation for workers.

Employers are not allowed to sack workers unless they have been out for 8 weeks. So this employer, Craig Smith, locked them out when they went on strike, and after 8 weeks sacked them. In the meantime he employed scab to do their jobs.

We were told at the time of the SkyChef dispute that if the legislation didn’t happen then those workers would not have been sacked. In reality the legislation makes no difference to the determined employer. As speaker after speaker at the rally said, “What changes after 7 weeks and 6 days if it wasn’t wrong soon because, it it’s not wrong, why is it right any other?”

This was the major demand of the strike, and the end of the week ruled John Monks Newman on this, and targeting the people who were doing the cut-backs and privatisation. None of the management, including the general secretary, would meet.

Morris support

Bill Morris repeated this, saying that the General Executive had supported from day one, and would continue to support “until you march back in.”

The strike was on for 42 weeks, if it takes 42 years we will be there with them.”

He wound up his speech with his usual “you ain’t no threat, we ain’t goin’ away” – last heard shortly before the union persuaded the SkyChef workers to accept a pay-off, and before that, in a speech made to the Liverpool dockers before withdrawing support from them.

The most moving speech was by strike leader Gerald Parry, who had worked for the firm for 37 years. He said there had been a continuous series of attacks on conditions in the factory, the dispute was over by 15/6 wage cut. But the defence to strike had come because they had seen has been a process of union members being got rid of, and replaced with non-union people. In reality the strike was to defend the existence of the union.

He father had told him, on the day he first went to work, to join the union, and then he would never be alone. Now by the amount of support he was getting, in Caernarfon, and outside, he could see what he meant.

The strike needs support, both financial, and in their suppliers and customers.

We need to find out who uses their products, and go to the union involved.

For details go to www.fiction-

Frictions.org.uk

Fred Leplat (United Left National Treasurer)

Last November saw the launch of a new “breadth left” in UNISON, the United Left, at a conference of 120 activists in Manchester.

The United left was born through the coming together of the former broad left in UNISON, the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic UNISON, members of the SWP in UNISON and independent left wing members who had stayed out of the old United Left.

This new United Left is a broad, open front, forward in the broad sense, for combating the over-reach of the unity. It has already seen successes with an increased number of socialist elected onto NEC of the union, and larger meetings of left activists in the union’s regions that want to thrust out a fighting strategy against privatisation or better pay.

There are new opportunities for the United Left to provide an alternative leadership and strategy for the union. But in order to do so, the force within it must be able to work together, and be able to make alliances with others on the left who have a ‘base’ outside of the United Left.

The Greater London Region is the most left region in the union, and has the most left wing General Secretary, Geoff Martin. Geoff has vigorously opposed the witch-hunt against left activists, consistently supported and fought to make the region a more campaigning body of the union. Although he is still outside of the United Left, he is certainly someone we must work with, to turn the region into a campaigning region.

It is therefore extremely unfortunate that Glenn Kelly, national chair of the United Left and Socialist Party members, voted against the nomination of his branch to stand against Geoff for the post of regional convenor.

Socialist Party members know that Geoff was now working as an organizer for the Battersea & Wandsworth Trades Council and did not belong to a branch which gave him a ‘base’ from which he must be accountable.

This narrow view does not take into account the fact that Geoff has been respected and respected by most union activists across the region. Further, he is more accountable through his election as a lay representative, Goddess, Geoff Martin.

Glenn Kelly’s challenge to Geoff Martin is not understood in the continuing desire of the Socialist Party to establish a left wing profile on every issue, even when it is more minimal or non-existent.

The sectarian approach, that is, that the rest of the movement before the needs of the Socialist movement, must be rejected.

The London United Left has called upon Glenn Kelly to withdraw his nomination and is backing Geoff Martin for regional convenor.
Enron and the politics of New Labour


B il MacKeith (Close Campfield Campaign)  

Home Secretary David Blunkett must publish a White Paper “Secure Borders, Safe Communities” in modern Britain” on February 25, the National Coalition of Anti-Deportations campaigns said. 

The coalition believes that a comprehensive set of measures can be drawn up to make sure Britain remains a secure and welcoming country. 

One of Blunkett’s announcements in the New Labour Government’s first year of office was that large numbers of asylum seekers would be able to apply for a work permit to enter the UK and work for three years before seeking asylum. 

However, “visitors” are not currently available for this purpose. More and more refugees are being detained as the government opens more detention centres. 

In 1997, the last year for which figures are available, the government detained 30,000 people, up from 24,000 in 1996. 

The government has announced plans to expand its network of detention centres, including one in Ormskirk, Lancashire. 

The closure decision may be made within days of the asylum seeker’s arrival, and there can be no doubt that the vigorous campaign of protest by the last eight and a half years of outside and outside the country has been the major factor.

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Milburn’s “mission unthinkable”

John Lister

The first “falling” NHS hospitals are to be taken off external management as we go to press, with the lingering fear that privates firms might be brought in to take charge, as was the case at one of the earlier trusts.

Health Secretary Alan Milburn continues his mission to seek and destroy any last vestiges of morals amongst NHS staff.

The moment of Milburn’s relentless campaign for “moderation", which has involved a non-stop round of complex and apparently pointless organisational reforms on the one hand, coupled with setting ever more rigorous performance targets on the other, includes the reintroduction of a number of the most hated elements of the Tony internal market system, which Labour claim to have scrapped in 1997.

The top-performing hospitals Trusts are to be given new powers to run as “foundation hospitals”, facing a bare minimum of intervention or control from Whitehall. Hospitals, given extra cash, and with greater freedom to dictate what they spend it on, and to see their own pay and conditions for managers and staff.

This effectively reverses and amends most of the provisions of “self-governing status” made by the previous government, when it first set up the internal market twelve years ago, and experts warn it adds up to the destruction of health authority control.

Milburn has warned trusts to vary local pay and conditions “as trade union and employers had warned – to be little more than a license for Trust bosses to afford them themselves huge increases in their own pay, and squeeze down the terms and conditions of the majority of their staff.

New Labour, under pressure from health unions, restored national pay agreements – though many Trusts have yet to iron out all of the anomalies and injunctions that arose from local pay bargaining. But now an ambitious attempt to reverse and simplify NHS pay scales has run into the ground with lack of cash, which has effectively reversed the process towards a rational system.

But Thatcher’s chief reason for imposing the country-style reforms on the NHS was to introduce competition for each

“market share” between Trusts, whose income would depend on how many contracts it could secure from Health authorities and GP fundholders.

Now Milburn is bringing back precisely the same form of competition which New Labour Of course allowed. You have replaced by a new notion of “partnership”. This time the competition between Trusts is dressed up as offering patients a “choice” of who to go to and to use, though in many areas there is only one NHS hospital to choose from.

But while the “freedoms” to act more like a private business are being dished out to the top-flight hospitals it is widening gulfs between them and the rest. The dozen hospitals branded as “star” Trusts six months ago have been under the cash, with a threat that if they fail to raise standards their management will be replaced by “successful” Trust bosses.

Several of the so-called ‘new city’ hospitals have struggled, and now four are in financial black and the Chief Executive has just reigned after a stash of 2,700 unutilised requests for ultra-sensitive scans were discovered by Birmingham and Dudley.

Private hospitals

Milburn’s insistence on the use of private hospital beds – whether in Britain or France – to treat NHS patients has also come under growing scrutiny.

Gulf between the private sector compared with the NHS (70,000 NHS operations in private hospitals last year, compared with over 1 million NHS operations), such deals are unlikely to be much more than a last-resort of health

As the new Education Bill goes through Parliament

Divide it up, contract it out... Labour dismantles comprehensive education

By the end of Labour’s press conference, every parent will face in effect a new eleven-year-plus – where they go to what has been called a ‘bog-standard’ secondary school, or get a place at one of the new Specialist Schools, better funded, more popular, and with the first pick of teachers in shortage subjects, according to HATCHER’s reports.

THIS NEW two-tier system will divide every town, every neighbourhood. Cross-cutting that will be more division, externalised, and will expand. The emergence of Muslim denominational schools will be described by the Church of England’s internal market as being as inevitable.

As age 14 more segregation will take place. Some states will take the ‘academic’ route. Others will follow vocational courses based

Forcing through more faith schools and selection - Estelle Morris

not just in schools but in FE colleges and workplaces, another two signs are leading to two-tier futures.

A further division among schools (and therefore among pupils and teachers) will be created by the top 25% of schools which the government Trusts regard as especially “successful”... and the rest.

The top 30 Trusts will be granted what the government likes to call ‘earned autonomy’, which means they can be trusted with more freedom: “participation regulation" - provided of course they don’t use it to challenge government policies.

The rest of the schools will be subject to even more prescription, and in the teaching of English through the Literacy Strategy at Key Stage 3 (the first three years of secondary education).

Two tier stuff

The teaching force, too, will be two-tier. The white Paper ‘Schools: Success and Success’ spoke of fewer teachers, but not with schools labelled as ‘failing’ needs to be moved around, it must include proposals from the private sector, and the Secretary of State can force the LAs to accept them.

A more radical step is the new legislation for schools. Private companies will be able to propose to set up an Academy - an independent private school, funded by the government.

Approval can be granted by the Secretary of State - regardless of the local LEA - and she can compel the LEA to transfer its land to the Academy.

Furthermore, school governing bodies will be able to form companies, invest in companies or become members of companies. Add to this the plan to allow federations of schools and close the LEA, and the biggest changes are well under way.

Local Education Authorities continue to be target. LEAs which are deemed to be failing must contract out their advisory services.

When an LEA wants a new contract, it must not be misunderstood, with schools labelled as ‘failing’ needs to be moved around, it must include proposals from the private sector, and the Secretary of State can force the LAs to accept them.

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Glasgow steams ahead with housing sell-off

After further promises of funds from the Government and Scottish Executive, Glasgow Council has agreed to proceed to ballot on the transfer of its entire housing stock to Glasgow Housing Association. This transfer proposal is motivated by the simple dogma: Council Bod, Privatise good.

There were originally claims that there were Government rules relating to PSRB preventing council borrowing which were exposed as false by English authorities being given the right to set up arm's length housing companies.

The latest proposals are that the Scottish Executive will give an interest free loan of £300 million to the GHA.

The plan is to subsidise the transfer by £120m, including a £90m write-off of the debt and various grants of £80m, plus an interest free loan of £300m.

Whilst we called for investment in social rented housing and demanded the debt be written off, this is a huge waste of resources to the tune of banks and financial institutions. There are huge costs involved in the proposal through higher interest rates, VAT, transfer costs, insurance, establishing a new organisation which would have been avoided if the government allowed debt cancellation for the councils.

Over £500m of needless expenditure will result is the tenants vote yes. This money could significantly improve the social infrastructure of citizens of Glasgow through improved public transport, care for elderly, and youth programmes and so on.

If tenants vote against the government we cannot allow housing to remain as it is. Tenants are being blackmailled. We call for a No Vote and for houses to be improved with the same finances through the democratically elected council.

What RMT members say

A Reverend Protection Inspector, Clapham junction: "I've got a lot of respect for the RMT, which is the right of every person in the country. I voted No today."

A Reverend Protection Assistant, Clapham junction: "I haven't heard anyone at Clapham say they want to go. If they are in love with the job, they will come back. The TUC is trying to convince us and we've got the vote." The other staff don't want to go.

We are getting support from everywhere."

On Friday February 8, following a meeting of RMT representatives and branch officers on South West Trains with members of the union's National Executive Committee, strike action was planned for the following week was suspended. GREG TUCKER reports on the issues behind that decision, and the talks ahead for activists in getting strike action restarted.

The Government and the press have used every opportunity to label me and other trade union militants as fanatics, as villains. This is just too much ice with most members. At one point the discussion was nothing to do with me, but about the conditions of large numbers of low paid members. The role of any activist is to help their views to be expressed. It’s not me that made them angry - it’s the company.

While his profile I have received has been used against me in some quarters, the overall impression is that I’m not taking to people is that they are very positive that they have someone who is taking their language and representing their views. I’m very heartened by the level of general support I have had.

The role of the RMT that most people have is of union where the members are middle aged men and that’s still true of most of the people who hold positions even at branch level. In terms of the workforce we have a large number of black workers and women workers, and at Waterloo some of the new activists are from these groups.

Low paid workers have taken six days strike action already and as well as being significant amounts of money through this: many have lost even minor amounts through the overtime ban the company has imposed to break the dispute. There is so much militancy, both at a collective level through the strike, the withdrawal of the right to book leave as well as harassment targeted at individuals who have been on the picket line, for example. There have been two new issues of people involved in the dispute.

Sacrifice service

On Friday the company announced that it was re-organising the rosters, so that people would have had to take 4 days strike action over a week rather than 2. Yet again the company demonstrated that they can sacrifice the level of service to the public in order to face down the union.

In that of course they have had support from the government and its institutions. We have seen the Health and Safety Executive declare that there is no problem with managers taking on duties normally carried out by guards and station staff - despite having reported to them incidents involving people being taken away with open doors or when signals are red. The Strategic Rail Authority has walled the fines against the company, poor performance with both on strike days and non-strike days.

Last week the company said they were prepared to discuss not the current pay claim, but the claim that would be due in October 2002. Union officials went off to meet them for talks about talks. Having seen the letter from the company, I argued that there was no basis for calling off next week’s action. Of course there was pressure, but its like running a race – you come against a pain barrier and you just have to run on through it.

In any campaign of industrial action you have to be flexible right to keep people out. We would probably have lost some people next week, but we could have frontal it out.

People thought that there would be a drip back but the platforms has remained remarkably solid.

There is a huge degree of loyalty. What is needed is leadership, arguing with people, reminding them about the issues we are fighting over. It’s a continual process and I think we could have held the line.

Members solid

RMT members in my branch are still very solid – they didn’t want the action suspended. There are a lot of people who are very upset that the dispute has been undermined in this way, but we will be fighting all the way to regain the momentum.

We have built up some links with other workers in struggle. People know about the strike on Amtrak and the overtime ban in Scotland - and the activists know the people involved because we are quite a small union.

We have had PCS members on the picket line when we organised a march on Monday 28 January quite a lot of PCS strikers came along to the rally afterwards. There were two speakers on the platform from their dispute. And the connections work at other levels too – people have partners and friends who are teachers or health service workers and see that many different groups of workers are facing similar problems.

It’s also been clear at many of the meetings I have spoken at that our dispute has given confidence to other people. People have said, for example at NUJ meetings I have addressed that it made it easier to argue in their workplaces that people should take action and point to others who were doing it.

Despite the attempts to find members of the tribunal for a civic who will condemn the action, a remarkable number of members are supportive. People blame the bosses, management and the government for the situation on the railways before they blame the RMT.

There has been a small amount of abuse when we have been on the picket line, but both here and at work on non-strike days the majority have wished us well.

Despite the fact that the company is coming over to be listened to by the public, saying that I am personally responsible for the whole rail chaos, while they are at work on the barrier – as it often do - people are supportive and friendly.

This is both because they recognise that the RMT people are being blackmailed every day by privatisation, and on the other hand they are making a basic expression of solidarity with workers in struggle.

The support we have had from the Socialist Alliance during the dispute has been massive, and Local Socialist Alliance groups have organised and written that which strikers have spoken and organised collections both there and in the streets.

Other Socialist Alliance members have taken up the dispute directly through their unions.

The fact that we have a political organisation that supports our campaign when New Labour is clearly on the side of the company is very useful. It has certainly had an effect and activists of workers have joined the Socialist Alliance – and others have said they want to go to the Socialist Alliance Trade Union conference.

International

We also have built up some international contacts with rail workers and socialists in Italy, Germany for example. They have a lively Communist/Révolutiennre, French section of the Fourth International organised a meeting in Paris a few weeks ago. They showed Ken Loach’s film The Navigation, and I spoke about the dispute to more than 100 railworkers from across France.

The threat of privatisation, and the dire consequences it has had in Britain, is something most activists in the industrial movement, whichever country they are in. This will really make the company think about the company demand it lifts the ban on overtime and sick pay and stops the new round of victimisations prior to any discussion of the pay claim. Smout, Stone and their cronies won't be able to get away with it.

The Executive and reps will have to demonstrate where to go. There is no doubt we will be fighting to get some action restored. There is a prospect of action from the pay battle, which if all the reps and delegates will hopefully give a boost in doing that.

This means that it is vital that solidarity work continues. We still need money. We still want to come and speak at meetings. For further information about the work of the strike support group contact Gill at gill_lee@talk21.com.

"There is no doubt we will be fighting to restart the action."
Can the euro revitalise European capitalism?

Europe’s instability pact

French health workers have been staging strikes and demonstrations demanding extra cash and staff to compensate for the impact of the introduction of the 35-hour week. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the project of establishing the euro as a rival international currency to the dollar is a much more difficult task than was previously thought to be the case, and is likely to involve a much more dramatic onslaught on working-class gains in Europe than even the Europhiles expected. Elated to this is a third point: that the pact itself says nothing about lowering taxes. It is always open to European governments to reduce deficits by maintaining, or even raising, taxation. Those sections of European business which want to see dramatic declines in taxation, linked to an attack on the welfare state and a movement towards an Anglo-American style deregulation of social provision, are coming to see the pact as too weak an instrument to achieve their objectives.

This links to a fourth argument, put forward by free-market observers such as ‘The Economist’, which is that the pact is a diversion from the real issues facing European capitalism in its attempt to entice a neo-liberal strategy. Such analysis argues that the real issues are not macroeconomic figures for government borrowing, but microeconomic questions such as deregulation of the labour market, integration of financial markets, privatisation of pensions with the aim of boosting an ‘equity culture’ which is really a sham.

If these things are achieved, it is claimed, pressures for bringing down government spending will follow naturally, as they have in Britain and the USA. If they are not, then neo-liberalism will be blocked in Europe regardless of the stability pact, and the pact just becomes an irrelevance.

At a political level the risks involved in using the pact to provoke a crisis which will further fuel the traditional and increasingly worrying, particularly since the character of such integration remains uncertain.

It can by no means be guaranteed that a common fiscal policy across the EU will follow neo-liberal, free market dictates and strategies among European capital remain-conscious of the project put forward just a few years ago by Oskar Lafontaine, the state of such policies to combat just such ideas. They remain mistrustful of the project government in France, and in some cases, such as the circles around Berlusconi in Italy, have become sceptical of the whole project of monetary union.

It is against this context that the current difficulties of the German economy raise such deep potential problems for European capital as a whole. The controversy over

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whether the German deficit should be allowed to rise is only the most direct manifestation of a much deeper divide about how the economic union can be furthered within Europe and about the political structures set up at Maastricht and Amsterdam are adequate for doing this. Yet this divide in itself reflects more fundamental issues about the constraints facing European capitalism.

At a political level, large segments of European social democracy continue to see the euro as a means of protecting the European social model rather than of surrendering the full force of global competition. This may be an illusion, yet it is a powerful perception that has become a negative anti-liberal strategy. Social democracy has undergone neither the frenzied speculativere boom of the USA in recent years, nor the long-drawn-out stagnation of Japan, the euro has not provided a magic key to sustained capitalist accumulation.

Unemployment remains high across most of the continent. Even in Spain, the fastest growing large euro economy over the last year, growth of almost 3 percent barely brought the unemployment rate down at all. Working-class resistance to neo-liberalism has maintained strong in many of the euro-zone countries, following the upturn in struggle instigated by the French strikes of 1995 and the fall of the first Berlusconi government next year.

In particular, on the crucial issues of pension reform and the welfare state, neo-liberal forces have yet to score a decisive victory. Financial markets remain wary of the fiscal weakness of the weaker countries, particularly in the area of state markets, where London and Frankfurt continue to compete to become the euro's prime speculative competition with one another.

The Economist of December 1 2001 reported that in 2000 only a quarter of European public spending on public services was spent on the under-25s, compared with 40 percent in the USA. They compared this with the USA where more than 60 percent is spent across state borders and only 17 percent within an individual state.

Most significantly of all, the growth that has taken institutions out of the zone over the last three years has depended to a large degree on the weakness of the euro against other currencies, notably the dollar, rather than on the success of the euro project.

Prepare now for a referendum?

Alan Thornett

The introduction of the single currency within the 15 countries of the EU has been completed. The overwhelming and almost total success of the single currency has underlined the original neoliberals' view of a direct power and economic and political level it 2008 of the Marshall Plan, in the immediate post-war period. This large force of European Economic Community in 1957.

Rhetoric in the British media about the burden of the euro against the pound has been exaggerated, which has been based on current economic conditions should not obscure the relatively small size of what the introduction of the euro represents.

The sheer size of the zone the Euro now covers — Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Ireland, Greece, Portugal, and Luxembourg — already makes it the largest single currency area in the world, a market larger than the global player in world markets.

Politically it represents the unity of nations that has been established. A look toward a European Union, which has been at the forefront of what the MS Townsend lobbied for the introduction of the Euro.

This is a major development in the economic integration of the European Union and it is a problem for all sectors of society. The establishment of the eurozone has been characterized by the social and political trajectory of the European Union, which is facing a new era of integration. The new currency will be a key step toward a genuine European Union.

The demise of the Exchange Rate Mechanism in 1992 demonstrated just how difficult it is to maintain the stability of a single currency that straddles a multiplicity of diverse economic systems.

The Treaty of Maastricht and the Single European Act 1986, between its member states and the needs of the Eurozone. The single European Act was designed precisely to challenge the Eurozone's role in the single European Act.

The single European Act was designed precisely to challenge the Eurozone's role in the single European Act. The single European Act is the key to the success of the single European Act.

It is likely to intensify both strategic debates on the role of the EU and of the eurozone, and the attacks on the working-class which accompanied such debates. The spread of such attacks depends not just on the future of the stability pact but also on the prospect for laying the basis for future struggles against neo-liberalism in Europe over the coming period.
What is Socialist Party line on a new workers’ party?

Letter from John Malcolm

In Socialist Outlook 55 the following statement appears in Alan Thornett’s article on the Socialist Party:

"The word 'masc' is crucial. Whilst the SP calls for a new mass party, it is in fact calling for the formation of a new party of the left which is not, at this stage, a mass party; for example the Scottish Socialist Party or a party on same lines as the SSP; even though it originally welcomed the formation of the Socialist Labour Party by Arthur Scargill in the mid 1990s.

This is completely false. We do not oppose a new party of the left even if it fails far short of the term mass party. Neither do we oppose the SSP in fact our section is a crucial part of this party.

John Malcolm argues that I was wrong to suggest that while the Socialist Party is in favour of a new mass workers party at some future date, it is opposed, in the meantime, to the formation of a new party of the left which is not at this stage a mass party.

My article in S0 51 was a response to the statement issued by the Socialist Party following that organisations’ call for a referendum on the Socialist Alliance.

I argued that it would be a disaster if the SSP were to replicate the mistakes of the Scottish Socialist Party. I have taken their advice – and found that not only does the SSP not even heed the fact that the agenda on the single currency remains in the hands of the Tory right – something which has already been worsened by the confusion on the British left.

John Malcolm argues that I was wrong to suggest that while the Socialist Party is in favour of a new mass workers party at some future date, it is opposed, in the meantime, to the formation of a new party of the left which is not at this stage a mass party.

I am sure that this statement was not made to undermine the project of a new Labour party. What I would say is that the SSP must be aware of the fact that the basic problem of how to relate to powers that are not of one’s choosing cannot be wished away.

The key point is that the SSP has not only joined the ranks of those who oppose the single currency but is also offering support for the single currency.

The SSP is commitment to the single currency is not something that can be wished away. It is a commitment that is not only shared by the SSP but also by the Labour Party and the SNP.

The SSP must be aware of the fact that the project of a new Labour party is not something that can be wished away. It is a project that must be carried out with determination and with a clear understanding of the implications of the single currency.

The SSP must be aware of the fact that the project of a new Labour party is not something that can be wished away. It is a project that must be carried out with determination and with a clear understanding of the implications of the single currency.
Scottish Socialists set their sights on new targets

Gordon Morgan

The Scottish Socialist Party will hold its 5th Annual Conference in Dundee on March. The will be the first conference held since the SWP joined, its first delegate conference and the main preparation for the 2003 Scottish Parliament elections. Over 500 delegates are expected to attend.

Following criticism last year that conference papers were not dealt with in advance, there has been ample preparation this time.

Reports were submitted early December, becoming before Christmas. The programme by early January and completing a month before conference, reports presented by all National officials. Electoral reform ensures that all branches have had the opportunity to debate content issues.

The reports point to the significant increase the SSP made in the last year. We stood in all 72 seats at the General Election and achieved a national profile with 3.3% of the vote.

In Parliament the SSP followed Labour around the abortion of Warrion Sales by presenting bills - which have been rejected - to replace Council and Water Tax with income based taxes, to call for Trident to be scrapped to restructure free school meals. The Party has been in the front campaigns for drug liberalisation, Trident, anti nuclear, anti racism and pro refugees, against privatisation and Stock Transfer and of course against the War.

Our members have been active in several successful industrial disputes including line painting and social and in medical secretaries' dispute.

Our paper, Scottish Socialist Voice moved in May from a fortnightly 12 page paper to a weekly 16 page paper at most newstands. Membership has doubled since the SWP joining. The Party now has between 2,000 and 3,000 members of whom 1/3 are women and has 66 branches, the full list is in the movement to send delegations to all the major European demonstrations in Genoa, Brussels etc. We supported the European Anti-Capitalist Left conference in Brussels and held a first public forum in Edinburgh.

The most contentious issue in the lead up to 2003 has proved to be the method for selecting candidates for the forthcoming Scottish Assembly elections. The Scottish Parliament and the focus of public and media attention in Scotland and thus the elections in 2003 are extremely important. If the SSP can win more than one seat, as most polls say is likely, then the possibility exists to qualitatively strengthen our influence beyond its current base of support. The choice of eligible candidates is therefore crucial - it is vital to ensure at least some women are in those positions.

At this stage the SSP cannot win by first past the post. Any successful candidate would be elected from the top of the list of additional members. The SSP already has a policy of 50:50 in terms of gender, so it is essential that 4 men and 4 women are selected to top the list.

The women's network proposed a way of achieving this - to have elections for a male and female list in each region against the National to decide in advance which regions would be topped by men and which by women.

The oppositionists who claim to support our campaign to stop the controversy, however, small group believe the SSP should abstain in the referendum.

I believe the vast majority support the Vote No position, however, it would have a broader public leading to a public conference rather than delay the decision.

Last year's conference set up a working party to look at making the SSP's structures more democratic. Following the SWP joining work began on this, however, and War activity has delayed the group reaching conclusions.

A special conference may be held to consider these.

There are however, a number of organisation changes proposed for this conference which should improve the efficiency of the party apparatus and the accessibility of information to members.

At present the SSP has no National Membership system or bank account. Each region has traditionally maintained its own membership list and finances. In the rapid expansion the membership system effectively broke down. It is now proposed to formalise national accounting and membership procedures and improve feedback to regions and branches. This should end the tragic situation where new contacts wishing to join get their application letters lost or not followed up.

The party is also proposing to expand its apparatus to allow the National Secretary to become party full time and expand the number of regional organisations.

The proposed changes are ambitious and require additional resources; however, they are vital if we are to increase our profile and support in the lead up to the Scottish elections.

Weekly Worker echoes SWP management lies

Alan Thornett

The Weekly Worker (No. 417) carries a nasty front page political attack on Greg Tucker, in its article dealing with the South West Trades strike. It also has some bizarre views about the strike itself.

It argues that SWT are being successful in their attempt to avoid any disruption on the picket line. Tucker is all about raising the profile of some RMT members, and that the union should have balloted its members on the action and that the strike was imposed by management.

All three views are, of course, those of management. It would have been useful if the paper had spent some time talking to the strikers and not just getting its line from the conglomerate group.

Scab managers are under-mining the union but not all at the level that SWT claim. As reported in the Weekly Worker, millions every strike day. Rather than dwell on management "success" it would be useful to look at what can be done to make the strike more effective.

The accusation that this is a dispute manufactured for political ends is precisely the way that SWT bosses Sosster and the bourgeois media have tried to undermine the action.

It is not true. From start to finish this is a dispute about low pay and the lack of recognition of trade union members. It is a disgusting way to portray the majority of trade union members who voted for the strike because they can be manipulated in this way.

And WW's call to ballot the members of the strike into management make an offer well short of the demand to be a textbook way of how not to run a strike.

The CPGB view that this would have resulted in the acceptance by the members (and therefore have brought end to the action) is manifestly nonsense at that time. In fact the situation situation is not to the resolve of the strikers.

The CPGB is entitled to advocate drastic tactics for the strike (if they must) or to misunderstand the dynamics of it.

But to attack Greg Tucker (and strangely also Bob Crow) for failing to give the Socialist Alliance a profile in the strike by helping his associates with it, for "being a trade unionist first and a politician second" and for failing to give political leadership in the strike is either to completely misunderstand the links between the trade union and trade union work, or a willful distortion.

How can a high profile trade unionist who stands as a Socialist Alliance election candidate be accused of putting trade unionism first and politics second? It stands reality on its head.

In fact Greg Tucker better represents the link between politics and trade union struggle than almost anyone on the left at the present time.

Greg stood as a candidate for the Alliance last year and in that week a strike to do it, was constantly attacked in the media (mostly the Evening Standard) as a result - and then victimised for it on his first day back to work. To argue that such a candidate is putting trade unionism before politics is crazy.

In fact it is to Greg's credit that after being constantly attacked in the media for his political involvement with the Alliance, he was still - after months of delay - able to get the support of his members to fight his victimisation.

This shows that he has been able successfully to combine public political activity for the SA and maintain a solid base amongst his members.

Nor does it help the CPGB's case to accuse Bob Crow of not giving the SA a high enough profile. Bob Crow is not a member of the SA. We hope he will join, but at the moment he has only given limited support for the Alliance. It is clear that he is not going to promote it at every opportunity.

Of course Greg argues the strikers' case at every opportunity - that is his job as a socialist as well as a trade unionist. Clearly, though, in speaking as a representative of the strikers he cannot confuse that with promoting the Socialist Alliance.

Greg has been correct in carefully distinguishing between those points where he acts as a representative of RMT members, and those points where he speaks for himself as a Socialist Alliance activist.

In attacking him over this the CPGB show that they don't understand the relationship between politics and industrial struggle.

In fact Greg has given the Alliance and its members of very important publicity and profile which we need to build on, particularly for the March 16 trade union conference called by the Alliance.

Apart from Greg's tireless round of Socialist Alliance public meetings across the country, the political work he has done has been shown in a practical sense by the fact that a number of the strikers have joined the SA and are coming to the SA TU conference.

Members and supporters of the Alliance will not doubt be surprised to find that the CPGB, which is also supposed to support the Alliance, feels able to offer so little in the way of solidarity to one of the SA's most high profile activists.
**Why feed the hand that bites you?**

Fred Leplat

At last year's UNISON conference, a resolution was clearly adopted on a card vote committing the NEC to consult the UNISON members on the future of political funds and to report on proposals at the 2002 Conference.

The NEC pulled all the stops to denigrate the resolution. "The Labour government - what do we get for our money?" However, delegates realised that it was time to "stop feeding the hand that bites us".

The political funds have been controversial since UNISON's formation seven years ago. The union has two funds: The General Political Fund (GPF) and the Affiliated Political Fund (APF). APF's origins are the constitutive unions, but they are both controversial as neither fund is accountable to UNISON members.

The GPF is used for general campaigning, while it is through the APF that the union maintains its links with the Labour Party. Labour Party relations with, and representatives to the members of the APF Committee. All members may pay into the APF, only Labour Party members may participate in the APF structure.

There has been a while dissatisfaction about the lack of democracy of both funds, particularly with the APF. However, matters came to a head last year after the NEC's re-election to government.

After 9 years of continuous privatisation and lack of investment in public services, UNISON members are fed up. They jeered Stephen Byers when he addressed conference, and went on to vote for a review of the union's political funds.

However, despite this decision, there has to be no confidence about the future of the funds. Instead, there has been a sustained exercise to promote the APF. Literature is now being sent regularly to members about the work of the APF and its successes in influencing the Labour government!

A consultation document and a statement about the APF has been sent out to all branches, but union officials admit that it is unrelated with the general consultation that the NEC has been instructed to carry out.

In January, UNISON's NEC presented the commencement of the consultation for the current year, which will be carried out in two stages. The dragging out of the consultation exercise is clearly designed to allow the APF to propagate itself in order to avoid any changes to its functioning.

However, as the government is continuing with its privatisation programme through hospital and housing FPI schemes, stock transfers of estates, attacks on working conditions and poor pay rises, UNISON members are increasingly on the defensive and action by the union's leadership in defense of public services and jobs. They also do not understand why we should finance MPs and a party that is attacking us.

While advertisements in the newspapers and the cinema are not necessarily wrong, we are not substitutes for a national campaign including industrial action against privatisation - or at the very least a demonstration on a Saturday in London. Such a demonstration had been agreed at last year's conference, but has been dropped.

UNISON's political funds clearly need to be changed. The United Left, a campaign of left activists in UNISON, has decided that the political funds should be placed under the democratic control of the whole membership, and that they should be opened up to allow the financing of candidates from outside the NEC or the UNISON Labour Party, provided that they support UNISON policy.

The small but significant success of the Socialist Alliance, Scottish Socialist Party, and the Socialist Work Councils, such as the anti-FPI candidates in local elections and the sit-in in Kidderminster, now put this matter on the agenda.

This initial position of the United Left needs to be developed. UNISON should have one political fund, used for general campaigning, the affiliation to the Labour Party or other parties, and the sponsoring of election candidates.

For the time being, we should reject any moves to disaffiliate from the Labour Party, as in the absence of a sufficiently credible alternative on the left, it could be seen as shift to the right.

A debate has occurred in the NEC on the question of the possibility of a "third political fund". This position is promoted by the Socialist Party, who argue that this is the only rule change that could be allowed onto the agenda of conference.

However, such a fund would easily be dismissed as "troty fund", and even if successful would only attract a handful of subscribers from union members, and would thus be doomed to being an irrelevant diversion.

The United Left clearly rejected this position, but it is feared that Socialist Party members will continue campaigning for this position in the union.

The debate on the future of the political funds is the opening of a debate if the future of the political representation of union members. With all the reforms in the Labour Party closed down and a government that is a bunch of "privatisation fundamentalists", the debate on the need for a new workers party is opening up.
Facing 30,000 job losses and private sector onslaught ...

POSTAL WORKERS have voted by 65% turnout to take strike action, after being one of the largest votes for action by a major group of workers in recent years, and is a measure of the anger felt by many over recent developments at Consignia.

The claim is the modest 5% as the first step towards a £300 a week basic wage in 2000, for this low paid group of workers. Consignia’s offer is a first step to nowhere. It has offered 2% with strings that include a 1.7% increase for over 50s, and removal of driving allowances. The low offer, or vote, can only be seen as a step towards the removal of pension payments altogether.

Although the gap between the offer and the claim is only 3%, the membership is prepared to fight. The CWU made it clear in its publicity that those opposed to strike action should vote no, implying that the union intended to call such action in pursuit of the claim.

But there is also a feeling amongst both activists and the membership that the pay claim is not the main issue confronting the union.

Liberalisation

The real issue is the moves by the New Labour administration to speed up the rapid liberalisation of the industry, (far faster than the CWU’s plan) and the 30,000 jobs which Consignia has announced are to go.

Business (junk) mail (30% of the total) is to be opened up to competition, and the membership is prepared to fight. The CWU made it clear in its publicity that those opposed to strike action should vote no, implying that the union intended to call such action in pursuit of the claim.

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The liberalisation of the industry is a threat to the jobs of postal workers, and the CWU has announced that it will fight to protect those jobs. However, the CWU is also aware that it cannot fight the government alone, and will be working with other trade unions to defend postal workers' rights.

In addition, the CWU is calling for a national protest to be held on 22 February, to demonstrate the strength of the trade union movement and to demand action to protect postal workers' jobs.

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A tale of two Labour Parties

Farooq Tariq, General Secretary of the Labour Party Pakistan addressed a packed meeting of over 70 people on a wet Friday night in London on January 25. Below we print his speech:

I would like to thank the International Socialiste Group for organizing this meeting and to thank you all of you who have come in large numbers to hear the point of view of the Labour Party Pakistan and the role we have played in the peace movement in Pakistan.

The Labour Party Pakistan has nothing to do with the Labour Party in Britain. The Labour Party in Britain is on the side of the dictators, on the side of the fundamentalists, on the side of the bombasts. The Labour Party Pakistan is on the opposite side - on the side of the socialists, the Marxists, the side of those who want to promote peace and human rights with the active participation of the working class.

We have been part of the anti-war movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran. We have been part of the resistance against the Shah. The Tudeh Party had played an important part in the mass movement that brought the Shah overthrown, and Khomeni came to power. But the way he did was to hang the General Secretary of the Tudeh Party, 200 trade-union activists were hanged. And we saw a total collapse of those left forces who thought they could make a temporary alliance with those fundamentalists to fight against the imperialist, who make a lot of noise against imperialism.

We had had a similar experience in Afghanistan. In 1977, when there was the mass opposition to Bhutto, sections of the Socialists aligned with Jamat-al-Islami to launch a movement against him. The Socialists argued that Bhutto was a fascist and that we should join the mass opposition to Bhutto to liberalize Pakistan and to get rid of the fundamentalists. The Labour Party in Pakistan fully supported the Labour Party in Britain.

Another example comes from Afghanistan. During the Niujibullah period, the Afghan Socialists were split into two parts. Some were within the party collaborated with the regime, some thought that the military should take over and Zia put itself into power.

The Trotskyist movement in Afghanistan was totally finished and now you don't hear any more about this party. Afghanistan Motherland Party of Socialism.

After September 11, we condemned the terrorist action and also we condemned the American neo-cons. The headline in our weekly paper, Worker's Struggle, said "No Terrorism against Terrorism". Our paper played an important role at that time. We anticipated that there would be an immediate attack on Afghanistan.

We also said there should be no support for fundamentalists. This was nothing new for us. Since the LPP was in formed in 1997 we have always said we should have any alliance with the fundamentalists or any section of the religious parties.

There have been many offers to us, in the trade union field, in the political field where they have said we should support the fundamentalists, we say, we are against privatization, let's get joined now and fight against the privatization of the railways.

But we reply, what is your philosophy, you are in favour of private property, you are in favour of...
The left and Islamic fundamentalism

Terry Conway

The article is the transcript of an editorial broadcast on Radio Free Europe (RFE) and London-based Radio Liberty (RL) to Pakistani audiences in the city of Lahore on a date not disclosed. The meeting was organized by the Islamic Solidarity Association, which had been formed in 1974.

As the left and Islamic fundamentalism struggle for power in Pakistan, the question of how to reconcile the two sets of ideas continues to be a matter of debate. While some argue that the two movements are fundamentally incompatible, others believe that there is potential for cooperation and mutual understanding.

The left and Islamic fundamentalism movement may be relatively weak, their populist nature comes to the fore. Revolutionary movements could therefore be expected to gain momentum in Pakistan, where the growth of fundamentalism is seen as a threat to the stability of the state.

Saying this, however, does not mean that the questions of how we should respond at a tactical level—particularly in a situation like that in Pakistan—should be left to be answered by others. We need to find our own answers, and that is the job of the intelligentsia, the intelligentsia being those who can think critically and independently.

The left and Islamic fundamentalism movement's political strategy is unclear, which is why it is so important to understand the different perspectives and to engage in a dialogue that will help us to find common ground.

Fundamentalis has hijacked Kashmir struggle

The left and Islamic fundamentalism movement in Pakistan is facing a crisis of identity and direction. The left and Islamic fundamentalism movement's political strategy is unclear, which is why it is so important to understand the different perspectives and to engage in a dialogue that will help us to find common ground.

The left and Islamic fundamentalism movement's political strategy is unclear, which is why it is so important to understand the different perspectives and to engage in a dialogue that will help us to find common ground.
Thousands converge on Porto Alegre

**By our correspondent**

It is very hard to describe succinctly the experience of the World Social Forum. With thousands of delegates, a similar number at the youth event and possibly another 30,000 participating as observers and on demonstration, it is the largest gathering in the world of people who agree on the need for a different world.

The participation was so broad for two reasons. One is the scale of popular mobilisation in Brazil — over half a million went from Curitiba and Brasilia and were probably a higher proportion of the other categories.

The other is the prestige arising from the success of the first conference as a world forum of discussion and demonstration of alternative visions in the world.

It was consciously a place of political diversity, where different visions were emphasised and decisions were restricted to supporting equally broad mobilisations. Whether any people were actually inspired by debates I don’t know, but many certainly learned a lot in the 800 or so workshops. The coming together of people in these numbers also gave a great boost to morale which I’m sure went well beyond those present.

There really is an emerging world-wide opposition to the global bad guys for activism to look towards. The Forum’s slogan ‘Another world is possible’ could be seen as weak by many, but it is quite apt as a starting point when Bush is trying to convince the world that it has no choice.

This was the area where the real gaps were in the participation. With large Argentine, French and Italian contingents showing the success of local movements in those countries, they highlighted the impact of militarist, states.

European, Asian and former eastern block participation in particular was very weak and must be a question for the organisers of next year’s event (which will be in Porto Alegre). There is a movement developing to hold the 2004 conference in India, but also plans for regional events in different parts of the world.

The political diversity represented at the conference was also great. Well known academics such as Chomsky and Bensaid, NGO leaders and activists such as Borel and Susan George rubbed shoulders with leading liberation theologians such as frei Betto, various Nobel Peace laureates and the complete spread of radical Brazilian workers’ and peasant organisations.

Kofi Anan sent a senior official and Mary Robinson, UN Human Rights Commision, was main speaker at a seminar.

Specifically Brazilian events had 20,000 in the Forum. The very public support of a São Paulo trade union Federation’s offices in Sao Paulo on the Sunday, and the other was an armed attack on the Brazilian government’s premises resulting in the death of one robber. The tragic irony of the latter event was lost on nobody.

The Fourth International’s involvement in the event was impressive. This reflected both the strength of the comrades in Sao Grandiole do Sul (Porto Alegre is the state capital) and a wider recognition of the event’s importance. The 150,000 and 400,000 of the 2,000 were the first drawing a large attendance from the PT left.

The emergence of what is, effectively, an annual parliament in opposition to neoliberalism and barbarism must be a great step forward. Maybe next year larger UK contingents can be organised.

See declaration (opposite)

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China joins WTO: a balance sheet

A recent issue of the Observer Business news headlined on the threat to many as many as 40 million jobs in China arising was from its entry to the World Trade Organisation this year. ZHANG KAI from the October Group of saw an attempt to read the fourth International, wrote this analysis of the situation in December.

After 15 years of negotiation, and making sacrifices to concessions to WTO members, China eventually gained access to the WTO. The mass media in China was filled with euphoria. However, let us take a close look at the facts revealed by the press in order to come to some assessment of the pros and cons of China’s accession.

The initial direct beneficiaries of the Hong Kong, Wen Hui Bao, on the day of the accession, wrote that this implies China will enjoy multi-lateral, steady and unconditioned ‘most favoured nation’ treatment within China’s state interests, and prompt China’s accelerated economic systemic reform and restructuring. This will also imply China’s marketisation and internationalisation. The international ended with the phrase ‘the formation of China’s socialist market economy will greatly impede obstacles’. The sector that may benefit most from the accession is textiles. The USA, EU, Turkey and others will normally cancel all quota restrictions on China’s textile exports by 2005. Next to that is the electronics sector. The World Bank gave an optimistic estimate of China’s annual economic growth to be 2%.

Wang Rong, Chief Scientist of the Sustained Development Strategy Division of the China Academy of Sciences, estimated that in the next five to ten years, about 30 to 40 million jobs will be created.

However, there are worries about possible severe consequences for state enterprises and current production quality. With China drastically reducing tariffs on imports, foreign industrial and agricultural goods may be dumped into China, creating serious difficulties for Chinese products to compete.

It is estimated that in the four years starting from the beginning of 2002, the overall level of tariffs on industrial goods will drop from 15.3% to 12%. The decrease will affect only 5% of tariffs, and low tariff items (lower than 10%) will increase to about half of all items.

The average tariff rate for over 300 information technology products will be reduced to about 5%, of which over 100 items will be tariff-free. By 2005, there will be further drastic changes, and items with tariff over 25% will be reduced by half from now, and constitute less than 5% of all items. The general VAT will go below the average level of developing countries (9-10%).

The tariff on automobiles will go down from the current 70-90% to a standard 25% by July 2006. This will create much pressure on the domestic car industry.

It is also estimated that with such concessions and with the economic restructuring by state enterprises, workers will be laid off. The impact on peasants will also be serious. Chinese imported soy beans, for example, is 13-20% lower than domestic products. The tariff rate is only 3%.

According to the trade agreement, China will reduce tariffs on agricultural products in stages, starting from January 2001. By 2004, the average tariff rate on imports will be reduced from the present 20-30% to 14.5-15%. By 2006, the quota on certain imported agricultural products such as soy oil and vegetable oil will be cancelled, and all tariffs will be uniformly reduced to 9%.

US farmers

The Minister of Agriculture of the USA commented that US farmers will immediately benefit from exporting agricultural goods to China, and it is estimated the annual increase will be US $2 billion. It is also believed that more peasants will be transferring to the urban or industrial sector. Telecommunications and insurance will be the two major sectors that will be open to foreign capital.

Regulations restricting their operation by foreign capital have been removed. That means China could be attracting more foreign capital and investments, providing the ground for activity by global capital.

Major state-owned enterprises will also be restructured and shares will be sold to foreign investors. Statistics show that by the end of 1999, 84% of state-owned enterprises had been corporatised.

On the other hand, the operating mechanisms of state-owned enterprises and small state-owned enterprises have been changed through shareholding systems, joint capital ventures, sale or bankruptcy. There are also moves towards privatisation of land ownership through the idea of “operating agriculture by science and education”. This could allow limited transfer of land use rights from individual peasants to corporations.

There have obviously been differences of views concerning China’s accession to the WTO, which is why the Premier Zhu Rongji, in a meeting on Dec 9, stressed that “all levels of leadership should correctly understand the significance of the accession to the WTO, and unify all opinions under the central leadership’s policy.” It is also expected that the masses of workers and peasants will resist the adverse impacts on their working and living conditions with China’s accession to the WTO and further concessions to the forces of global capitalism.

More resistance, protests and organisation will inevitably follow.
Declaration of Porto Alegre Against neoliberalism, war and militarism: for peace and social justice

1) In the face of continuing deterioration in the living conditions of people, we, social movements from all around the world, have come together between 22 and 25 November at the second World Social Forum in Porto Alegre. We are the voice of the subjected peoples to break our solidarity. We come together again to continue our struggles against neoliberalism and war, at the agreements of the last forum and to reaffirm that another world is possible.

2) We are diverse - women and men, adults and youth, indigenous peoples, rural and urban, workers and unemployed, homeless, the students, peasants, smallholders, peoples of every creed, colour and sexual orientation. The expression of this diversity is our strength and the basis of our unity. We are a global solidarity movement, united in our determination to fight against the concentration of wealth, the proliferation of poverty, violence, and the destruction of our earth. We are living and constructing alternative systems, and using creative ways to promote them. We are building a large alliance from our struggles and resistance against racism, sexism, homophobia, racism and violence, which privileges the interests of capital and patriarchy over the needs and aspirations of people.

3) This system produces a daily drama of women, children, and the elderly dying because of hunger, lack of health care and preventable diseases. Families are forced to leave their homes because of war, the impact of “big developments”, landlessness and environmental disasters, unemployment, attacks on public services and the destruction of social solidarity. Both in the South and in the North, vibrant struggles and resistance to uphold the dignity of life are flourishing.

4) September 11 marked a dramatic change in the form the attacks, which we absolutely condemn, as we condemn all other attacks on civilians in other parts of the world, the government of the United States and its allies have launched a massive military operation. In the name of the “war against terrorism”, civil and political rights are being attacked all over the world. The war against Afghanistan, in which terrorists methods are being used, is now being extended to other fronts. Thus there is the beginning of a permanent global war to ensure the domination of the US government and its allies. This war reveals another face of neoliberalism, a face which is brutal and unfeeling. Islam is being demonized, while racism and xenophobia are deliberately promoted. The mass media is actively taking part in this belligerent campaign which divides the world into “good” and “evil”. The opposition to the war is at the heart of our movement.

5) The situation of war has further destabilised the Middle East, providing a pretext for further repression of the Palestinian people. An urgent task of our movement is to mobilise solidarity for the Palestinian people and their struggle for self-determination as they fight for their existence in the Holy State. This is vital to collective security of all peoples in the region.

6) Further events also confirm the urgency of our struggles. The Argentine financial crisis caused by the failure of IMF structural adjustment and mounting debt precipitated a social and political crisis. This crisis generated spontaneous protests of the middle and working classes, repression which caused deaths, failure of governments, and new alliances between different social groups. With the force of “cacerolazos” and “piquetes”, popular mobilisations have demanded their rights, fair wages, jobs and housing. We reject the criminalisation of social movements in Argentina and the attacks against democratic rights and freedom. We also condemn the greed and arrogance of the multinational corporation supported by the governments of the rich countries.

7) The collapse of the multinational Enron exemplifies the bankruptcy of the casino economy and the corruption of businessmen and politicians, moving workers without jobs and pensions. In developing countries this multinational engaged in fraudulent activities and its projects pushed people off their land and led to sharp increases in the price of water and electricity.

8) The United States government, in its efforts to protect the interests of big corpora- tions, arrogantly walked away from negotia- tions on global warming, the antibalist gathers treaty, the Convention on Biodiversity, the UN conference on racism and intolerance, and the talks to reduce the supply of small arms, proving once again that US unilateralism undermines attempts to find multilateral solutions to global prob- lems.

9) In Genoa the G8 failed completely in its self-assumed task of global government. In the face of massive mobilisation and resis- tance, they responded with violence and repression, denouncing as criminals those who dared to protest. But they failed to intimidate our movement.

10) All this is happening in the context of a global recession. The neoliberal economic model is destroying the rights, living condi- tions and livelihoods of people. Using every means to protect their “share value”, multi- national companies lay off workers, slash wages and close factories, squeezing the last dollar from workers. Government has faced with this economic crisis by privatising, cutting social sector expenditures and permanently reducing workers' rights. This recession exposes the fact that the neoliberal promise of growth and prosperity is a lie.


Social movements energetically condemn violence and militarism as a means of con- flict-resolution; the promotion of low inten- sity conflicts and military operations in the Columbia Plan as part of the Andes regional initiative, the Puebla Panama plan, the arms trade and higher military budgets, economic blockades against people and nations espe- cially against Cuba and Iraq, and the growing repression against trade unions, social movements, and activists.

We support the trade unions and informal sector workers struggle as essential to main- tain working and living conditions, the gen- uine right to organise, to go on strike, to negotiate collective agreements, and to determine their struggle conditions between women and men. We reject slavery and the exploitation of children. We support workers struggles and the trade union fights against casualisation, subcon- tracting of labour and lay offs, and demand new international rights for the employees of the multinational companies and their affiliated, in particular the right to organise and space for collective bargaining. Equally we support the struggles of farmers and peoples organisations for their rights to a livelihood, and to land, forests and water.

12) Neoliberal policies create tremendous misery and insecurity. They have dramatically increased the feminisation of poverty, exploitation of women and children. Poverty and insecurity creates millions of migrants who are denied their dignity and human rights. We therefore demand the right of free movement, the right to own land and legal status of all migrants. We support the rights of indigenous peoples, and the implementation of ILO article 169 in national legal frameworks.

13) The external debt of the countries of the South has been repaid several times over. The illegitimate and unconstitutional functions as an instrument of domination, depriving people of their fundamental human rights, to reschedule the enormous international usury. We demand unconditional cancellation of all debts, in respect of the natural resources and the traditional knowledge of the South.

14) Water, land, food, forests, seeds, culture and people's identities are common assets of humanity for present and future genera- tions. The countries of the North have no right to claim them. People have the right to safe and permanent food free from genetically modified organ- isms. Food sovereignty at the local, national, regional level is a basic human right; in this regard, democratic land reform and peasants' access to land are fundamental requirements.

15) The meeting in Doha confirmed the ilegitimacy of the WTO. The adoption of the "development agenda" only defends corporate interests. In effect, the WTO is moving closer to its goal of con- verting everything into commoditity. For us, food, public services, agriculture, health and education are not for sale. Patenting must not be used to be a weapon against the poor countries and peoples. We reject the patent- ing and trading of life. If the WTO agenda is perpetuated at the continental level by regional free trade and investment agreements. Byorganisation such as the huge demonstrations and plebiscites against FTAA, people have rejected these agreements as representing a reconcentration and the destruction of fundamental social, economical, cultural and environmental rights and values.

16) We will strengthen our movement through common actions and mobilizations for social justice, for the respect of rights and liberties, for quality of life, equality, dignity and peace. We demand democracy; people have the right to know about and criticize the decisions of their own governments, especially with regard to dealings with international insti- tutions. Governments are ultimately account- able to their people. While we support the establishment of elective and participative democracy across the world, we emphasise the need for the democratisation of states and societies and the struggles against dic- tatorship.

■ the abolition of external debt and repara- tions.
■ against speculative activities: we demand the creation of an international fund to address the Tobin Tax, and the abolition of tax havens.
■ the right to information
■ women's rights, freedom from violence, poverty and exploitation.
■ against war and militarism, against for- eign military bases and interventions, and the systematic escalation of violence. We choose to protest against violen- ce and conflict resolution. We affirm the right for all the peoples for international auto- nomation, with the participation independent actors from the civil society.
■ against war and militarism, against for- eign military bases and interventions, and the systematic escalation of violence. We choose to protest against vi- olent conflict resolution. We affirm the right for all the peoples for international autono- mation, with the participation independent actors from the civil society.
■ the rights of youth, their access to free public education and social autonomy, and the abolition of compulsory military service.
■ the self determination of all peoples, especially the rights of indigenous peoples.
Postal workers go back to work, but threats remain

JM Thor
On January 16 postal workers in Belfast voted to go back to work after a three day stoppage called in reaction to the murder of young postman Daniel McColgan. A 20-year-old Catholic postman, was shot dead by loyalist gunmen in the early hours of January 11.

A caller to a newspaper life-saving line was from the Red Hand Defenders (RHD). The caller said they were the authors of the killing and warned that postal workers must return to work. The threat was said to have been to the effects of the killing. The postal workers were also warned that they would face consequences if they continued to refuse to work.

A spokesman for the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) said that they were not involved in the killing and that they had acted in self-defense.

The UFF, which is a paramilitary group, have been active in recent weeks with a series of bombings and shootings.

Postal workers in Northern Ireland have been involved in a dispute over pay and conditions for several years.

East of the Isle of Man?

David Coen
The British response to the recent intervention in Egypt in 1956 was to retreat "east of Suez". Now, according to Sinn Fein and Labour Friends of Ireland, they intend to retreat east of the Irish Sea.

This acute insight into British Government thinking was made by Labour MP John Hume, in a recent Bloody Sunday Commemoration. While denying that he had any special access to Tony Blair, McDonnell was able to assure those present that Britain wanted to leave Ireland, indeed would already have done so, were it not for the Unionists.

The left should abandon its "old fashioned" Leninist notions about imperialism and help the British to leave. The best way of doing so was to implement the Stormont Agreement. Larry O'Toole, Sinn Fein leader on Derry City Council agreed. The "unionist kidnapped people in the leadership of Sinn Fein", with their razor sharp political antennae, had decided that the British wanted out, and so Irish unity was inevitable.

The audience were clearly bowled over by this, especially as it followed an earlier speech by Eamon McCann who pointed out that everyone knew what happened on Bloody Sunday: the questions to be answered were what ordered it and why. So the British ruling class, apparently reeling from the revelations of their foul deeds, and no longer having a "sufficient strategic or economic interests in Ireland" were just trying to make their excuses and leave.

There was no one there who asked why, when precisely the British had decided to go. On this point, neither of the new, modern "post-imperialists" could put even an approximate date on this decision or say what had led to it.

The date is important because it could give us a clue as to why they had decided it was time to act. McDonnell quoted former Tory NI Minister Peter Brooke's 1990 statement that "Britain had no selfish strategic or economic interest in Ireland".

For him it was simple. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Britain no longer has a major strategic interest and as for economics, the annual subsidy from the British state more than outweighed the return from British investments, therefore they are pulling out.

McDonnell here engages in the crude economics for which he demonizes antimonopolists from Lenin on. For Lenin, metropolitan capital, faced with falling rates of profit at home sought more profitable outlets elsewhere and this led to them to attempting to militarily and politically subjugate whole regions of the globe.

Imperialism's specific interests could vary with period and region: it was markets, raw materials or even the physical labour. It wasn't a simple calculation of the surplus or deficit for any particular period, still less a comparison of state spending in a particular region compared to the return on investment flowing to domestic capitalists. What mattered was the continuation of the right to investment.

Applying this to Ireland we see different phases of imperialism. The South of Ireland was independent 60 years after Marx's description of it as "only an agricultural district of England, marked off by a wide channel from the country to which it yields corn, wool, cattle, industrial and military resources" yet it was still supplying food (predominantly cattle) to Britain and was still a significant exporter for British goods. The North, occupied by the British army was still supplying ships and textiles.

What mattered to British capital was not the detail of the political arrangements but whether it could carry business as usual. While the changing relationship between the nation state and indigenous capital is more complex, British capital basically relied on the Irish state to sort out the arrangements. And these remained more or less unable until the end of the post-war boom, eventually being destroyed by the mass upsurges for Civil Rights in the late 1960's and the abolition of Stormont after Bloody Sunday in 1972.

Two things have happened since then. The Southern ruling class has steadily revised its opinion of the British. Like some nationalism in late 19th century Ireland, it now wants to be a junior partner with imperialism, having failed to become economically independent in the 60s between 1922.

The 90s boom, the so-called "Celtic Tiger", has both boosted their confidence and their faith in partnerships with imperialism. This is anyway the nature of the period: formerly radical and "anti-imperialist" bourgeoisie making their peace with their former colonial masters under US global hegemony. And imperialism will tolerate any number of political arrangements as long as trade (i.e. profits) flow freely.

Secondly, the Unionist ruling class in the north, being less economically important, is now politically less so as well. So the British seek to push them into a coalition with the petty bourgeois nationalist parties of Sinn Fein, supported by the Dublin ruling class.

This requires minor concessions such as renaming the RUC. Britain's (and Dublin's) hope is that by doing so, the Stormont Agreement will draw the sting out of militant Republicanism which was (and remains) a threat on the whole island.

Recognising that a military defeat of Republicanism was not possible, they aim for stabilisation in the hope that a better opportunity will arise in the future if it can be neutralised politically. The game plan is to "modernise" the imperial relationship, not to change it.

So Sinn Fein joins the coalition government of "a failed political entity" and possibly does the same in the South. Expect a growth in "cultural independence" - the revival of the Irish language and so on. (This also happened in the South in the 1930s and 1940s after the defeat of the radicals in the independence movement there).

Not so political and economic independence: those will be deferred or explained away in the interests of helping the British deal with the Unionists.

To get Britain out means helping them to stay. And that's why John Hume said it's not imperialism, it's the Unionists.

Isn't that what the British keep saying?
Vote No to stop anti-abortion fundamentalists!

Brendan Young, (Press Office, Alliance for a No Vote)

The outcome of the abortion referendum taking place in Ireland on March 6 will be of critical importance to Irish women, to working class women in particular and to Irish culture and society in general. If the proposals are passed, the abortion regime in Ireland will be akin to that of Afghanistan, Iraq or Iran - states that are much criticized for their anti-woman regimes.

As Prof. Tom Fahy says, if Irish women feel stigmatized by having abortions they will have good reason under the proposed law. It can only deepen what Niall Tóibín has described as 'the national neurosis' created by the denial of Irish women's right to the termination of pregnancy.

Under the referendum proposals, women who are suicidal as a result of a crisis pregnancy will not be allowed to have an abortion in Ireland.

The case of a 14-year-old who was pregnant after being raped was allowed an abortion because of the risk to her life from suicide, not because she was suicidal. Contrast the recent announcement by Health Minister Michéal Martin, Health Boards will be denied the power to take rape or other violence victims in their care for abortion if they are suicidal.

The only grounds for abortion are the risk of the loss of the woman's life from physical cause - neither rape, incest nor suicide are included. In the 'x' case of 1997, the Health Board was only able to talk the girl for an abortion because she was suicidal - risk to life from suicide having been established as grounds for abortion by the 'x' case.

We perform abortions on ourselves, for the first time this year women who help a woman get an abortion in Ireland, will face twelve years in prison. Under the proposed law there is a possibility of a trial that we saw recently in Portugal - with fewer avenues for a legal defence.

A woman with complications in pregnancy will only be allowed an abortion when there is a risk that she may die. The current proposals on where abortion is legal when there is a risk to a woman's life - will change because the new laws say there must be the risk of the loss of her life. In some states in the USA laws like this have meant that abortions are delayed until there is more than a 50% chance the woman will die.

A woman carrying a non-viable foetus, perhaps with severe abnormalities like anencephaly (where the foetus does not have a brain), will be compelled to go to full term or until her life is threatened - rather than have an early, safe termination.

Doctors will only be allowed to perform such abortions in a limited number of approved places - rumour is in - which could be many miles from a local hospital. Lives and health will be risked as women are ferried from place to place.

Current practice allows abortion in local hospitals under remote direction from specialists in teaching hospitals - a system the new law will end. Hospital consultants are now only waking up to this restriction and are taking legal advice.

There is a conscience clause which allows a doctor to refuse to perform an abortion. The Commonwealth Medical Association says that in such circumstances, there must be provision for emergencies. Alber's proposed abortion has no provision for emergencies.

Ahern and Hanley argue that this is the best they could do under the circumstances - and that it is a reasonable and compassionate solution to the lack of legislation. Their hope-for consensus however is nowhere to be seen. It is reduced to a section of Flanna Flann (22% of FF voters say they will vote no), the Progressive Democrats split - with Minister of State Liz O'Donnell now saying she is against the proposal having voted it through the Dáil, and the Catholic Church.

Against the referendum proposals are Fine Gael, the Labour Party, the Green Party TDs, Sinn Féin, the National Women's Council, the Irish Family Planning Association, many women's organisations, the pro-choice movement and the far left.

The Women's Health Council - a state funded body advising the government on women's health policy - has sharply criticised the proposals. So has the Adelaide Hospital Society - in terms similar to the ANV. And it has recently revealed that the psychiatric evidence submitted to the government is not the position of the Royal Society of Psychiatry of Britain and Ireland - who say it is a mis-representation of their views.

So the claims of William Binchy - leading spokespeople for the so-called Pro-Life Campaign - that the referendum proposals are "what the psychiatrists want" - are untrue. The unsavouring of the 'consensus' is such that Michéal Martin recently said to an ANV member - "I wish I had never heard of the abortion referendum".

To date the Alliance for a No Vote has led the active campaigning and has established a national profile as the leading pro-choice organisation opposing the government's plans. Our approach has been to work with all who oppose the referendum and who are not part of the anti-abortion movement.

Opinion poll evidence indicates approximately 35% for, 33% against, 20% undecided and the rest abstaining. There remains however, much confusion as to what a 'yes' or a 'no' vote means - including amongst supporters of the right to choose - some of whom think a 'yes' vote means more choice.

So we are working to win over a majority of the undecided by explaining the implications of the referendum, while making it clear that supporters of choice should vote 'no'. This is a delicate task, as there are many who would say they oppose abortion and do not support the right to choose, but would not want to see another 'x' case. And while some polls indicate significant support for increased abortion services in Ireland, this is no guarantee of a majority 'no' vote. There is no suicidal 14 year old being denied an abortion - as in 1992 - to humanise the choice for the voters.

The Labour Party and the FFPA have recently launched mass 'no' campaigns, with poster campaigns and in some areas mass leafleting is while these campaigns have raised clear arguments against the proposal as such, they have not organised for greater availability of legal abortion in Ireland. Sinn Féin has formally stated its opposition, but as yet has done little campaigning. The FFPA has been a deafening silence from the trade union movement.

Despite changes in attitude towards sexuality and abortion amongst the population, the outcome of this referendum is not a foregone conclusion. Either result will have a profound impact on Irish society. Defeat for the government will mean that no further referendums will be possible and abortion will be legalised for certain circumstances - specifically on grounds of risk of suicide. The pro-choice movement would be hugely strengthened.

Victory for the government will set a subscript of enormous proportions for the struggle for reproductive rights in Ireland. The anti-abortionists have served notice that they will try to get the morning after pill and IUD outlawed. And notice to say the Irish women who go for abortions in Britain - and now in Canada for the cheaper - at a rate of 7 to 10,000 a year, will be further criminalized and stigmatized. And the ongoing litany of pub quizzes and other fundraising that women in working class communities organise to send poorer women with crisis pregnancies - often alone - to Britain for abortions.

International support is very important. It will help show the world the misogynist and reactionary intentions of the Irish government. It helps maintain pressure on the FFPA and the wobbly PDs. While we are conscious of defeating the government, we need the solidarity of our comrades, sister organisations worldwide. Letters to the Irish press, to embassies and consulates, and messages of support are vital.

Solidarity with Irish women

Picket the Irish Embassy
17 Grosvenor Place SW1
Monday March 4
4.30-6.30
Called by Irish Abortion Solidarity Group
Further information: ring Tenny on 07903 362175 or email outlook@gaiap.org
**Obituary**

**Leonora Lloyd**

“She grabbed life by the scruff of its neck”

Tessa van Gelderen acted as Mistress of Ceremonies, threading together the other contributions with powerful recollections of her own. The phrase that I use to title this article comes from one of those scenes.

Each speaker not only recalled Leonora’s political contribution and beliefs but reminded us of many of the other things that made her unique – her endless knitting, her ever present crossword puzzles, the deep joy that her two grandchildren Lucy and Theo gave her.

But for many of us, it is for her contribution to the struggle for women’s liberation that Leonora will be most remembered.

She was one of the founders of Socialist Woman, a magazine started by the National Marxist Group in 1969 as the voice for a network of Socialist Women’s groups. Socialist Woman provided the foundation of the Women’s Liberation Movement in Britain, launching its first conference at Ruskin in 1970.

Even before this, Leonora had been involved in 1968 in the setting up of NACWER, the Joint Action Campaign Committee for Women’s Equal Rights. NACWER was founded at a meeting of the House of Commons, organised by one of the officials involved in Leonora’s Ford machinists’ strike of 1968.

While the Ford strike was not formally about equal pay, it was certainly concerned with the principle of equal pay for work of equal value – the principle that would be enshrined in the 1970 Equal Pay Act introduced by Barbara Castle.

The Ford strike itself was a broader action and moved from equal pay to a more general set of demands that were won in Wick. The fact that Leonora’s life was one of a number of women who had won the seat, she would have been one of the very few MPs, along with Jeremy Corbyn, who would have stood to the barricades were she to have lived in her years after 1945.

Leonora’s younger sister, Terry Conway, described Leonora’s death on January 24 1998, as the saddest day of her young age of 83. She had deprived the Labour movement of a doughty fighter for socialists for workers rights for the environment and above all for a women’s right to self determination.

Sympathetic to many friends and comrades and to her family particularly her children Vanessa, Cassandra and Stephen and her sister Teresa.

Leonora died only 18 days after the celebration of her father Charlie van Gelderen’s life which took place in Church Street on October 24.

She was determined to speak there to celebrate his contribution to the movement, though she was obviously feeling the pain of her illness brought to her.

All her life she was a friend to many, a political household, with meetings and discussions taking place all around her.

She joined the Labour League for Democracy in 1954 at the age of 14 and the Socialist Labour League in the late 1950s. From those teenage years she was always involved in one – or often many things – including the Aldermaston marches and making the apartheid5 on the picket line at Hethers Green Cemetery in February I saw many tributes from friends, family and colleagues witnessing to the many facets of her contribution to the struggle for women’s liberation.

Former General Secretary of the Labour League for Democracy, Mortimer saluted the work she did as President of the London branch of the Women’s Liberal League. From the Socialist Congress, when Leonora Corby recalled her tireless lobbying of MPs to defend abortion rights, remembering how Labour MP Joan Richardson, when asked a question on abortion, refused to answer, would often say “I must ask Leonora”.

Dr. Wendy Savage from Doctors for Choice, and Michelle Carlyle who knew her from her involvement in the abortion struggle spoke of her strong character about her strong personality and irrepressible commitment.

The Lasky and Corby Family, Bash from the Labour Briefing Editorial Board also contributed to the picture. Leonora became involved in Briefing in the 1960s and those years was Co-Chair of its Editorial Board.

Former Labour Party NEC member Liz Dawie, now Chair of the NEC, Alliance, spoke of Leonora’s fight for justice for women and the seat of Hendon South for Labour in the 1992 General Election. When Leonora won the seat, she would have been one of the very few MPs, along with Jeremy Corbyn, who would have stood to the barricades were she to have lived in her years after 1945.

One of the factors that most contributed to her becoming a leader in the Labour movement was the Women’s Liberation Movement.

The Women’s movement was the first time women were able to raise their voices and fight for their rights. Leonora was a leader in the Labour movement and was a driving force behind the Women’s Liberation Movement.

The movement was a grassroots organisation that aimed to empower women and fight for their rights. Leonora was a key figure in this movement and played a pivotal role in its formation and growth.

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Experiences remembered with a smile

"His political life spanned almost the history of the Trotskyist movement."

Extracts from Alan Trotter’s speech

A couple of covenants before we start this afternoon. The first is that this is not a celebration; it is a commemoration. It is the celebration of the life of a fantastic comrade and his contribution to the movement. We have listened to the words of the speakers today and we want to try to stick to that agreement.

I have changed my mind several times in the past few days as to how to approach this presentation. Some comrades—in the particular—urged me to ensure that I covered as much as possible the whole of Charlie’s political life. "Make sure you say something about each of the decades", he said. I decided I could not approach it this way. I decided I could not do justice to Charlie and his comrades in this way. I have to do justice to Charlie and his comrades.

His political activity spanned virtually the entire history of the Trotskyist movement. To talk about his political life, therefore, is to talk about the entire history of the movement.

I am not going to do that. Not just because I am not an historian of the movement, or because there are comrades here better qualified than me to do that, but because I have been asked to limit my remarks to an hour or so. I want to stick to that agreement.

One of the first impressions of Charlie’s smile was a symbol of his infectious enthusiasm which is my most abiding memory of him. Another testament to how well he communicated his ideas and ideas that his two daughters also became revolutionary Marxist activists—despite the well-known propensity of Trotsky’s children to become Trotskyites.

"Charlie was the last representative of the comrades who made the important and difficult decisions to found the FI. Not since the First International had there been a situation to launch an International without a mass party behind it; and the FI had to battle as a minority against powerful and opposing forces until the 1st. Charlie knew that this created difficulties within the movement and always fought against sectarian splits which dogged the Trotskyist movement."

One of the occasions on which I heard Charlie speak was the annual camp of European youth organisations in solidarity with the Fourth International in 1998 where we invited him to speak to commemorate of the sixth anniversary of the founding of the Fourth International.

"Our movement has known many difficulties, but never been more than a minority, has not gained political power, and has known the inevitable splits and sectarianism which beset the formation of such a situation. As Charlie said, sectarian splits have been a chronic alament of our movement. Minorities (…) split off on the slightest pretext (…) to form tiny sects, impotent and without any power. How different to Trotsky, who persisted in his adherence to the Third International until 1939 and the utter defeat of a member of the German working class against peasants.

"I am so recalls Charlie’s participation in the small group of comrades who established the Fourth International in South Africa, and brought this group of comrades, Claude Gabriel, and others, to the point where we could call ourselves the Fourth International. He was one of the few Trotskyists of the old generation who understood how to do this and put his experience to the service of the new groups with which the Fourth International started to work from the 1980s."

"Charles would have understood that this movement is particularly important because it is giving birth to a new radicalisation amongst young people. He consistently emphasised the importance of young people, knowing how important it was that revolutionary organisations draw in the new generations coming into struggle."

"He was always delighted to come to our youth camps. He came to 50th and 60th anniversary and we looked forward to seeing him at 65th and 70th. But sadly that is not to be. In a letter to his brother Herman, who worried about how Charlie was going to keep a young audience of his ideas, Charlie said that he was the one that was learning and being inspired."

"He lived his socialism."

My father was a wonderful man. Not a perfect man, but always the first to acknowledge—except in fun. His sense of humour was one of his many saving graces. He was a realist in his concentration on the things that made him what he was. Above all he was a socialist in spirit and through.

Charlie believed firmly in the infinite possibilities of the combined human spirit to achieve what it wanted to, while aware that it could be for good or evil, depending on the circumstances.

Unlike those who are religious, the political vision that direct, personal, co-operative intervention is what makes the difference. Things could not be left to other people. If you had something to do, you had to do it. It was a way that pulled in others and ensured that you did it together. That was the philosophy he brought me up with.

"One thing that made him important and unique was the way he lived his socialism, while acknowledging the limits of living in a capitalist society."

I have known many people who call themselves socialists, and some of them have been quite successful and I have been impressed by their dedication to what they believed in. However, I have known very few people who have really, truly lived their socialism. I have been impressed by this, and the very few people who have been successful in this way.

Over and over again I have heard people say things which have made me think: “I wouldn’t want to do that. It’s too difficult.”

No body ever said that about Charlie. In fact many said exactly the opposite to me.

(From a letter to his brother Herman, who worried about)
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