Almost hourly, the TV, radio and newspapers are full of yet more massacres of Palestinians - and US Envoy General Zinni's visit to Israel is not likely to bring any more than a momentary pause in the slaughter.
The Zionist state is using the full range of high-tech weaponry - including fighter bombers and helicopter gunships - to repress Palestinian youths armed with nothing more than stones, and lightly-armed Palestinian fighters demanding democratic rights in their occupied homeland.

War criminal Sharon is reveling in the fact that he is still backed to the hilt by his cronies Blair and Bush. One way of stepping up our solidarity with the Palestinian people is to fight for the end of British arms sales to Israel. It is British tanks that are ploughing down children in the West Bank and Gaza - let's step up the campaign to stop it now!
Postal pay fight: Keggie threatens strike action

1500 march to defend postal service

Pete Cooper

Fifteen hundred postal workers marched against the threat of contract violation pay on Thursday, March 16. The postal leadership has threatened an automatic paycut on March 16. The union has already collected 161,000 signatures to stop the attack. Motion and the Welsh Assembly has passed a similar motion.

He called for CWU members to talk to residents about the paycut and was ambiguous on the question of the political fund. Despite Heyes being elected with the support of the left, he then failed to invite Keggie, his defeated Biarne challenger, who wants to persuade his new Labour friends of the inadvisability of posting CWU cards. His campaign has been one of increasing pressure from ins pains and seemed to be more about who was running a campaign at its early stages.

He has come under increasing pressure from frustrat the branch activists who can see that in the future and who want to fight. A passive industrial and political campaign against postal privatisation and privatization needs to be built. Such a campaign must be fought at the heart both a political and industrial strategy which is incorporated into the struggle against these deadly threats to the service and the workers alike. The campaign must also strengthen alliances in other European postal and telecommunication unions against the European directive.

To build popular support, the union needs to advance an alternative vision of a communications service that will meet the needs of the working class and oppressed. This should include opposition to privatisation to the post, telephone and internet services for the old, unemployed and pensioners. Such a campaign would inevitably con the anti-union laws that the CWU leadership is desperate to avoid.

But the Hayes leadership does not want to confront labour on Liberal attacks. Even though Postcom's plans for 

Postal service strike

Gill Lee

Serviced by thousands of London teachers on March 14, the battle boiled over in waves of struggle throughout the country.

The initial low turnout in the ballot – 86% voting yes, but only a 3% turnout – was completely surpassed by the numbers taking part in the action. Thousands of schools were closed and over half a million pupils attended as teachers struck and mobilized. Over 10,000 NUT members, out of a London membership of 40,000, took to the streets of the capital in a march organised by the NUT left, through the London associations.

Pickets were mounted at many schools to publicise the strike and there was mass leafleting of train and tube stations to put the teachers' case to parents. The strike action received overwhelming support from parents who understand the lie behind the NUT mar- about children missing one 'precious' day of educa- tion.

As Doug McAvoy, NUT General Secretary, told the packed rally following the march: "The pupils of teach- er strike during this school term. For thou- sands of other pupils there is no teacher to come back." The march was particu larly acute in London because of high house prices. Bernard Regan, Inner London Federation, told the rally that one Westminster teacher in four left their jobs last year. 20% of newly qualified teachers leave teaching within the first year. While the crisis is worst in London, poor pay and worse conditions mean that the problem of teaching shortage is a national one. Regan called for the March 14 action to be the start of a campaign for a national pay campaign, for a rolling pro gramme of action and for teachers to link up with other public sector workers who have pay claims. Greetings were also given to the rally from the London regions of the BFAE, UNI, RMT and CWU. As Jeremy Corbyn told the meeting: "If we want decent public services we need to fight for public sector workers decent pay." The NUT now seems part of a growing wave of public service strikers demanding just that.

We reported in the last issue of Socialist Outlook that 50% of workers had voted by a margin of 2-1 on a motion to take strike action over their pay claim from last October. Following the vote, the unions claim of 5% and the management's rejection of 2% with strings went back and forward to direct negotiations between the CWU and ACAS. In the first week of March, Central London Joint Keggie thought he had a deal that was due to be put to the postal members on March 12. What had apparently been agreed was a 3% increase from October 2001, a further 13% increase from the next pay review date scheduled for October 2003. If this was accepted the consolidat ion of £10 per week bonus payments by April 2003.

Postal workers petitioned the London Assembly last week demanding that the 2% offer be accepted. The petition is part of a growing wave of public service strikers demanding just that.

Anger as breakup hits BT workers

Pete Cooper

577 BT staff employed on desktop computer duties (DND) have been transferred to Computacenter, a non-union company claiming no redundancy. When the sale was announced in January this year, Computacenter Executive announced its intention to cut the self-employed and the terms being offered for the transfer. When BT would apply, no-one was under any illu sion to undertake a campaign to protest against the paycut and the terms being offered for the transfer. When BT would apply, no-one was under any illu sion to undertake a campaign to protest against the paycut and the terms being offered.

Existing employees are all on individualised contracts and subject to performance related pay while the CWU has so far successfully resisted the introduction of PRF within BT amongst engineering grades. Computacenter does not recognise unions for its own employees. Furthermore the course 17 weeks notice of termination of employment was only the seminars of final notice of termination of employment was only. Computacenter's policies are not subject to TÜV for the calculation of notice 17 weeks notice of termination of employment was only.

Branch officers were denied access to the agreement on the agreement on the agreement by 3-1 by the members on the recommendation of the executive, but with only 40% voting compared with the 80% who voted for action. It is clear that despite the long road ahead and the possibility of a national strike, the union cannot control the work of the Computacenter, to demand the right to stay within BT and to defend the final salary pension scheme. Even if the chances of winning were slim, at the very least the members involved would have the right to work for their new employer in combative mood, and able to defend themselves, perhaps even to organise their new colleagues.

The BT strike will do so much to undermine the risk of union lawness, and more generally to disturb the union's cosy partnership relationship with the employer and the government.

Instead the ballot result indicates demoralisation. BT has now given the green light by the union to organise its programme of disposal of the so-called "non-core" elements of the business and its workforce.
More break ranks to denounce rudderless New Labour

The Socialists Outlook page 3

Stand up to stop war drive!

The US is not only preparing to launch an attack against Iraq, with anything that can be claimed as new justification from the Iraqi side, but has decided to use nuclear weapons in that war if necessary. This is confirmed by the Strafer report on US global strategy.

It now emerges, in a leaked classified Pentagon report called the Nuclear Posture Review, that Bush has a list of countries against which the US is prepared to launch a nuclear first strike. The list includes not only Iraq but also North Korea, Iran, Libya - China, and even Russia, despite President Putin's recent rapprochement towards NATO. The US also includes the use of nuclear weapons in the events of an Arab-Israeli conflict.

The report was signed by Donald Rumsfeld as early as January of this year, and was leaked to the LA Times. Included in the circumstances when, which nuclear weapons could be used against the countries mentioned, are the possibilities of "targets able to withstand a non-nuclear strike" and "surprising course shatter once a war has started". The US appears to have no interest in taking these precautions seriously.

According to the report, the US is preparing to use nuclear weapons in the event of a nuclear war as well. The US is also planning to use nuclear weapons in the event of a war against Iran, and possibly against Libya.

The coalition has planned the war in Iraq, and it is preparing to use nuclear weapons in the event of a nuclear war as well. The US is also planning to use nuclear weapons in the event of a war against Iran, and possibly against Libya.

The Bush Blair war drive has been opposed by anyone who wants to prevent the destruction of cities and the bombing of civilians. The bombs and missiles start landing on innocent civilians who are being targeted in the war against Iraq. The Bush Blair war drive has been opposed by anyone who wants to prevent the destruction of cities and the bombing of civilians. The bombs and missiles start landing on innocent civilians who are being targeted in the war against Iraq.

More break ranks to denounce rudderless New Labour

MO MOWLAH, former darling of New Labour, has become the latest and most prominent figure to break ranks with an increasingly discredited government.

Writing in the Sunday Mirror, Mowlah argues that New Labour is now widely seen as weaker than the Tories and is isolated as a government, with little time for domestic problems.

He argues that this is the moment when New Labour's credibility is at its lowest ebb ever.

"The first few months of 2002 have seen a succession of events which have weakened the government, particularly in the run-up to the election, and it is already clear that New Labour's position is far from secure.

"New Labour, lacking any principles or policies of its own, is increasingly following the lead of big business.

"At the beginning of March Blair chose to launch the sleazy 'love-to-know' rail company boss to lunch a £30 million glossy pamphlet entitled 'Reforming our Public Services', which served mainly to demand even more 'flexibility' from public sector workers, and insist that public services should be subject to more competition and privatisation from private sector providers.

"While union leaders denounced this new declaration of war on public service workers, Blair got up to make a speech to a row of gawping doubts of Labour activists. Instead he presented avaricious view of wafting gullible politicians that effectively reaffirmed New Labour's total lack of guiding principles.

"There is a clear road map to our destruction but it can be seen as if it were a mere technocratic exercise, well or less well managed, but with no overriding purpose to "it", he bemoans.

"The growth of frustration is often as much over Labour's complete inability to manage or deliver on promised poli-

Anti-war protest in London, March 2

tics as it is about its increasingly reac-

tory political programme.

"Mr Blair, in his address that has been made over reform of the House of Lords, the failure to deliver significant investment in public trans-

port, Stephen Byers' legendary "In-

crease of the official Lord Morris' ability to antagonise not only teachers but even the government and the pig-headed refusal to face facts on teacher short-

ages, the growth in cash squeeze on local councils, the fasce of Labour's in-

efficiency and its arrogant disregard for the views of its members and supporters, and you have a recipe for an increas-

ingly dysfunctional government.

The coming local elections will offer socialists in many areas another opportunity to test the extent to which New Labour's base is support not just alienated but actively looking for alternatives. The chances for Socialist Alliance candidates to break ranks with the government is a step towards the end of New Labour.
Gordon Morgan

The 4th Annual Conference of the Scottish Socialist Party at the beginning of March was completely unlike previous conferences of the SSP. It was the first delegate conference, all previous conferences having been all-member affairs.

As anticipated, this actually increased the attendance from around 200 last year to 400 this year. The conference was set in a large hotel to a pool of sea for the first time, allowing considerable freedom to the wide geographical area.

This was also the first conference of the Scottish Socialist Party since the conference was held in London last year. The time-tabling was clearly a surprise to many of them. Issues such as the war, which many of them expected to be at the conference were resolved, confirmed that there was no longer any room for discussion.

This was not a rally style conference, but a decision making one. The key note of conference achieved.

By far and away the most heated debate at conference related to the mechanism for choosing candidates for the most uninteresting elections in the election. At the 1999 election, no one expected to win any seat other than Glasgow, and even then it was only won by 1,000 votes. As I recall there was no opposition from the SSDP, and several people were pressed into appearing on the lists. In 2003 there is the likelihood of further success, and a furious debate arose over how we ensure 50% of those elected are women. When atomic names are suggested, there seems little dissent as to which women should head lists and there may have been less controversy had a slate emerged as in 1999.

A democratic mechanism had been proposed by the SSP’s women’s network and backed by the Executive. Objections had arisen - supposedly over the method suggested, though it may have stemmed from some contributions that the disappointments were more fundamental.

No one argued explicitly that they were opposed to 50% women slots, just that speakers both at conference and in its branches were extremely disparaging of the idea that they should be any form of positive action to ensure this actually happened.

Unfortunately of the four hours devoted to the topic, one hour related to wrangles about the voting procedure. In our view the wrong mechanism was agreed. The current standing orders need to be improved to ensure that such problems don’t take time away from political exchanges.

In the end the original women’s network motion - improved by amendments - was narrowly passed on a card vote.

Although this was the right outcome, many delegates were seriously unhappy about the way the debate was conducted and indeed the time it took.

Many delegates with long experience in the women’s movement attended. It also became clear that large parts of the SSP had heard little of the debate before arriving at conference. This highlights a weakness in the internal discussions within the SSP and in the roles of its regional organisational, that should be addressed at a special conference to be held in June. A further procedural debate took place over whether we should decide our line on the Euro at this conference or at the June conference. Although the majority of conference seems likely to back a No position, conference time-tabling meant that if the Euro was discussed Palestine could not be. Conference narrowly voted to postpone a decision to June.

On Palestine, last year’s decision to back a 2 state solution was reversed, and the SSP now supports a unified secular Palestine. It is clear that on this issue the SSP's position has changed. It is true that the decision to drop the party's description of Gaza as socialist was lost.

This year was the first attempt at running the conference with the help of a conference arrangements committee. This was a much better run conference. Before the conference motions had to be agreed, and all delegates received a booklet setting out all motions and amendments. The organisation of speakers and debates went smoothly, and most of the time delegates were clear what was happening. However, the standing order for the conference didn’t allow for effective challenge to procedural rulings, which caused bad feelings on more than one occasion during the weekend.

The overall style of conference was not unlike a traditional union conference, which may have been off-putting for some less experienced members.

It is clear that an improved set of standing orders are required for next time.

The pre-planning did, however, allow the conference to complete its business on time. Full debate took place on the issues being considered and overall the prioritisation of conference agenda reflected the wishes of delegates.

The party had been considering other internal changes that were agreed by conference, although they had provoked dissent when first suggested. Amongst these was the decision to centralise membership administration and finances, taking on more full time staff including part-time National Secretary and treasurer and launching an appeal for increases in dues.

Overall the conference showed that the SSP is capable of holding well-structured debates on issues of deep controversy and reaching democratic decisions that enable it to go forward and grow or be less united.

The party is growing by 50% over the last year and it is clear that the informal approach to internal discussion is inadequate. A work that is looking at mechanisms of improving party democracy. The June conference should put these changes into effect and allow the SSP to present itself as an even more democratic socialist party in 2003.

Palestine policy - a surprise for the SSP

Campbell McGregor

Arguably the most surprising development at the recent SSP conference was the decision on Palestine. At last year’s SSP conference, there was a split on the issue with one group moving a motion which was adopted but not passed in the amended form.

Many activists in the SSP have the political background of Miliband, which traditionally had very close relations with Palestinian, effectively neutral in the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians.

Oddly, despite the fact that the Israeli military forces in Scotland had recently split between the SSP and the Labour Party, on this issue the two militant groups had basically the same position. They had both shifted to some extent, in that they now supported the struggle of the Palestinians taking place in the West Bank and Gaza, and opposed the Oslo Agreement. However, they had not thought through their theoretical positions. They were still calling for a 2-state solution, "a separate Palestine alongside a socialist Israel", and opposed the "clandestine" Israeli plan for a "liberated" state.

They seemed to think the problem with Israel and Zionism only started with the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the Six Day War in 1967. This year’s conference debated a motion from the North-East File branch (with some amendments accepted) which took an unambiguously pro-Palestinian and anti-Zionist position, calling for "a secular Palestinian state in which all peoples regardless of religion have equal rights.

It condemned "the violence inflicted by the terrorist state of Israel on the Palestinians", called for an end to the Israeli law of return and for the right to return of Palestinian refugees, funding of places for Palestinian students at Scottish universities by the Scottish Parliament, condemned Zionism as a racist ideology while also condemning antisemitism, and supported the Palestine Solidarity Campaign. Although it pointed out the need to account for the motion’s anti-Israeli bias, it was overwhelmingly adopted by the conference.

A speaker from a Jewish background pointed out the injustice where we would be able to move to Israel, but Palestinian refugees who came from the place would not. This policy shift was clearly due to some extent to an influx of new members in the Socialist Worker's Party, so I am not sure if they were originally behind the motion, but a number spoke for it.

Activists in the SSP and Palestine Solidarity Campaign should ensure that this victory is properly built on over the coming year.
Whose money is it, anyway?

This pamphlet, written by Matt Wrack for the Socialist Alliance, is a vital tool for all trade unionists as the debate on the political fund opens up in the unions.

As CWU General Secretary addresses the Green Party Conference, and GM's John Edmonds says he will give money to the Tories or the Lib Dems if they back the policies, both the trade union conferences and the pamphlet could not have been more timely.

Wrack charts the miserable record of new Labour, elected by and supported by thousands of trade unions desperate for change after the long night of Tory rule, highlighting Byers' recent description of public sector workers defending jobs and services as 'wreckers'. As he argues 'over the past decade, the Labour Party has increasingly stolen the initiative from the Tories in courting and securing the 'prize of big business'.'

He takes us back to the creation of the Labour Party by the unions at the beginning of the last century, and the history of the political funds themselves, showing how the evolution of that evolution is not necessarily familiar to those facing the new debate in today's conditions.

The conclusion, with which we completely agree, is that we need to fight today to democracy and break Labour's monopoly. Our suggestions for the SSP and the Socialist Alliance 'should have the right to argue their case in front of union members. Similarly Labour should also have the right to argue for support of their candidates and policies. Anyone who has attended a school should have an interest in the politics of that school!'

This opening up of the funds would mean giving money to the Tories.

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ISG agrees on policies for new world situation

The International Socialist Group held its national conference on March 9-10. The key change coming out of the conference was the decision that the ISG should step up its involvement in the anti-capitalist movement and in Globalise Resistance and devote more resources to building itself amongst young people. This was a successful and upbeat event. Comrades drew on the experience in the Socialist Alliance, the Scottish Socialist Party and the anti-war movement to draw conclusions about the way forward both for the left, the whole, and for the ISG.

The conference united around the two-person position on British politics and the main document was adopted without dissent. There were some substantive amendments put forward which were supported by a small number of delegates. The conference also took debates on Ireland and Palestine, on which we will report in more detail in the next issue. However, we can give you the main line report to the conference, presented by Alan Thornett.

The world has changed since September 11th; the world's only super-power is in the hands of the Republican right and is on the rampage - facilitated by the Twin Towers attack. The result is an extremely dangerous world.

Phase One of the so-called "war against terrorism" is still going on, with not only the continuing war in Afghanistan, but also the devastating occupation of the Palestinians by Sharon, with Bush backing him to the hilt.

Across the world, those regimes that have supported the Bush/Blair war drive have been given licence to clamp down on their own oppositions - Putin for example has given a free hand in Chechnya. The US has spread its own military involvement, sending troops to the Philippines, Yemen, Colombia, and a few other regic areas.

All this is accompanied by a massive expansion of the US military budget by $48 billion and a situation where Star Wars is a step closer.

We have seen a massive upsurge in civil rights worldwide with the suspension of the Geneva Convention and the inhuman conditions in Camp-Xray. September 11 has brought in its wake new attacks on asylum seekers and increased racism, particularly directed against people presumed to be Arabs.

Across the EU there has been a tightening up of internal controls combined with a huge escalation of security services. CIA, FSB, MI6 and in Britain the introduction of imprisonment without trial in Britain.

In the wake of all that came Blair has held a secret speech directed at: Iran, North Korea and Iraq. What has become absolutely clear is that since that speech is that the US government is preparing for an all-out invasion of Iraq.

Such an invasion represents a qualitatively escalation of the imperialist war drive - this is far more than just the next step of Phase One. This time there is no pretense: just unfinished business and US strategic interests in the region.

The Starmer think tank claims that a decision has already been made to use nuclear weapons in Iraq if necessary. It claims that whatever concessions are offered by Iraq will be rejected.

When the invasion of Iraq takes place, the coalition that came together over the war in Afghanistan will shatter - but Bush doesn't seem to be worried about this. He has his lieutenant Blair - and that alliance will be the basis for this new war.

For Bush, there is another side to the picture - the flight back.

We have seen the rise of an important anti-war movement in Britain and other countries. Even today, when the continuing war in Afghanistan is weakened - the movement is still mobilised on an international basis as the demonstration on March 11.

Nor has the anti-globalisation movement been demolished - one of Bush and Blair's prime objectives in the aftermath of September 11. Anti-globalisation protesters have been central to the anti-war mobilisations. The demonstrations in Brussels at the EU summit last December were big and Porto Alegre Mark 2 was double the size of that event.

Of course the situation has been more difficult in the US, but even the New York demonstration at the time of Porto Alegre showed that the movement of Labour - which remains unchained.

In addition of course, there is the revolutionary situation in Argentina. These developments will shape politics over the next year or so. There is already a radicalisation taking place around world politics, once Iraq is invaded this will escalate rapidly - particularly amongst young people.

This is why it is so important that we have a youth initiative out of this conference - this could hardly be more important.

In Britain the political situation remains dominated by the new Labour project - which continues unabated. The relationship of new Labour to big business deepens and expands all the time. Blair remains at the forefront of the neo-liberal agenda.

The situation inside the LP has deteriorated further. Although the idea that the early day motion opposing action against Iraq is invalid, particularly in comparison to the size of the revolt over Afghanistan, given the enormity of what is at stake, it remains extremely weak. Blair has felt able to support Bush without looking over his shoulder very far.

It is not just that the bloc in Portugal is weakened - the Labour Party is a general backstop. We take it we have seen at election after election. There has been a lack of genuine Labour Party membership.

The LP is not just a straight capitalist party, but it is a long way down that road.

This means that a space is opening up to the left of Labour - which must be filled by the left. This is an historic opportunity that must not be missed. The development of the left in the next period depends on it. The strategic task is the building of an alternative to Blairism.

This means a broad formation of Labour - comprising those breaking from the LP, those newly radicalising along with the far-left organisations. The Socialist Alliance in England and the Scottish Socialist Party are the organisations today best placed to fill that space.

It is remarkable what has been achieved already by the local initiatives. We can see in the role it is playing in the unions - in the debate over political fund and the response to the SA TU conference. Our position is not to for dissolution but for democratisation.

Our objective is for the Socialist Alliance to become a new party of the left. For us, this is the crucial discussion inside the SA. The Alliance cannot continue in its current form indefinitely - it should become a party like the SSP or the Left Bloc.

Those models are approximate - because the political and organisational situation is different in each country - but they remain useful analogies.

Some question whether this building of broad parties is in the Trotskyist tradition. Yes it is.

Trotsky was flexible on organisations form; the bottom line was the building of the a revolutionary party in the context of the electoral base as we have seen at election after election. There has been a lack of genuine Labour Party membership.

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Glasgow stock transfer: reject government lies!

Gordon Morgan
The ballot on transferring Glasgow’s housing stock from the council to a Housing Association in Kirkcaldy is under way and voting closes in early April.

At the beginning of March a tenant survey from the No campaign and an independent survey commissioned by tenants would overwhelmingly (87%) vote against the transfer.

It was clear that most tenants were confused and undecided how to vote. Even those who had decided to vote for the transfer largely accepted that it was privatization and in a majority of cases, felt coerced by the council and the government.

Since the beginning of March there has been a barrage of pro-transfer material issued to tenants. A video has been sent to each house, entitling... hundreds of billboards have been used to promote the yes vote, special agreements to free and paid press have been produced. The cost is not recorded.

The underlying object of this propaganda is to try to get voters “do what we say and vote yes or else you will not get your houses improved.” Because of the appalling condition of their houses many may succumb to this pressure, however, they will not like doing so.

A week after the ballot started, it is unclear which way the vote will go. The level of subsidy being promoted is around £2,000,000 a year. The Vote no campaign’s main contention is that it would cost at least £500,000 less if the council retained the stock.

To the argument that the money is not there we pose the following scenario. Next June, at the council and Scottish Parliament elections. Labour has said it has the money to do your houses. The money is still there despite your No vote. Labour is now saying they won’t give it to you, because you didn’t do what they said. Labour is asking you to vote for them. Get real – the money will be made available for you no matter what.

Early indications are that votes cast are equal for and against. A large proportion of those who have not yet voted say they will not vote. However, many feel it is a foregone conclusion. However I personally feel the vote can still be won by the No camp. Even if the ballot is won for them, it is clear that Labour will not repeat this exercise.

Edinburgh has decided against removing council tenures. The cost of this ideology is now being made clear to the council establishment. Those voting ‘yes’ under coercion may vote against Labour next year.

Bankers, the real winners, do not vote.

The SNP has also come under pressure. The Glasgow Association of Labour MPs would like to see a MSPs support the No vote. The SNP Housing Spokesperson and vice-speaking has publicly broken from police after a number of motions seeking their removal. The only party consistently opposing the transfer has been the SNP. If the vote is No this will send shock waves through Labour and the SNP will campaign for funds to be delivered to the Council if the vote had been Yes – housing must be improved.

If the vote is Yes, many people who felt pressured to vote that way will react in next year’s elections by voting SNP.
April 24: Picket war criminal Kissinger!

Henry Kissinger was US President Richard Nixon's Secretary of State, his second in command. He was a driving force behind the US war on Vietnam, which killed 1 million Vietnamese people. Kissinger was directly responsible for ordering the carpet bombing of Cambodia in 1969. He gave full backing and military assistance to the Pinochet coup in Chile, later sanctioned the murder of Orlando Letelier in Washington in 1976.

Kissinger backed the Pakistani government in opposing Bangladeshi independence. Once again he supplied arms and intelligence. He gave the go ahead for the Indonesian invasion of East Timor in 1975. Over 200,000 people were killed as a result. He was also responsible for souring relations between Turkey, Greece and Cyprus – a division which still produces murder and malming. Kissinger's legacy of American brutality around the world still survives. He remains a hero to the war mongers in Washington and Downing Street.

Kissinger is arriving in London to talk to the top 2,000 businessmen in Britain. He has his snout in the corporate trough, too. Kissinger Associates' clients have included Union Carbide (responsible for the Bhopal disaster), Coca Cola (say no more), American Express, ITT, Lockheed, Arco and HSBC.

Stop Kissinger picket:
Royal Albert Hall, London
Wednesday April 24, from 8.30am

Trade unions must organise exploited young workers

Bosses hope agency labour will undermine organised workforce

Jack Johnson
The two years ago a limited number of short term contract workers were first employed in Rover, first at Swindon then at Cowley. Most of these were on annual permanent contracts after six months. But the foot was in the door. The use of a short term contracts is now universal in the remaining unionised sectors, namely Vauxhall, Jaguar, Peugeot and Rover.

But most temporary workers are in most instances employed directly by the company, and the unions can put pressure on for full time employment, and can control numbers and conditions. But the situation at BMW's plant in Cowley is different, and much more difficult, and no doubt will be followed by other car companies.

In the middle of last year the company started using agency labour, in ever-growing numbers. At its peak this reached 2500 shop floor workers, with the core shop floor workforce down to around 3000. BMW promised that the agency staff would be reviewed after six months with a view to full time contracts being issued. So far about 500 have been taken on. This created a dual problem.

The existing core workforce is now surrounded by people who are desperate to impress, in the hope of getting permanent positions. At a time of increases in production of the new model (big numbers are only ever employed at such times), in this instance the new Mini, the agency staff are the means through which work rate is being increased, often to unattainable levels. In addition, the carefully selected people who are given contracts are often anti-union, and management creeps. The union has little say in who is given a contract.

Agency workers in Cowley get 20 per cent less pay than the core workforce, and are under constant pressure the whole time. For them the job cannot be just a question of going in, doing their work, going home. If they want a contract they must be perfect time-keepers. If extra work is put on them, then they must do it. If the company wants people to take an interest in the job through team meetings, quality checks etc they have to be seen to be the keenest.

This can be very mentally stressful, especially if they have problems outside work. Most of the agency labour are young, and these pressures can be especially stressful to them, as they want a kind of social life. They have to be willing to work all the strange shifts that go into what is called "modern" factory life (as employers in the past had never thought of 24 hour working). At Cowley the rotating shifts in the week include a fortnight of 5am to 3:30am working, and weekend shift working includes 12.5 hour shifts. Most importantly, as with all the other agency workers in Britain which has by far the biggest proportion of agency labour in its workforce of any country in Europe, agency staff have nothing to put their lives on hold as far as putting a roof over one's head or any other major purchase is concerned. No mortgages or big loans will be issued to people who are not in permanent employment. And of course they are not accumulating any pension entitlements.

The only advantage for other agency workers is that being employed by an agency (there are three in Cowley) directly into a unionised workplace can give some element of control on the agency. On discipline there are procedures, especially with regard to safety: so these workers can be defended despite the pressure to work unsafely. They do have a voice. This is no doubt why the majority have joined the trade union.

The spread of agency labour conditions is a curse in that it is dramatically worsening the future for young people. They will have no security either in their jobs or finances.

Unionists must fight for all workers, if conditions are not to be undermined in European agency staff have to put their lives on hold as far as putting a roof over one's head or any other major purchase is concerned. No mortgages or big loans will be issued to people who are not in permanent employment. And of course they are not accumulating any pension entitlements.

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The spread of agency labour conditions is a curse in that it is dramatically worsening the future for young people. They will have no security either in their jobs or finances.

The trade union movement must get to grips with this if they want to attract young people.

The first line of defence should be to try to avoid agency labour being introduced, and fight for full-time jobs.

If agency working is introduced, as in Cowley, the unions must fight to limit the numbers so they can't have a negative effect on the core workforce, and so the company is forced to turn more into full-time contracts if they want to employ more workers.

Some trade unionists were scared of recruiting agency workers. But this is wrong: these are the young people. The lessons they learn fighting as agency workers will decide their attitude in later life.

Either they will turn towards individualism and simply looking after themselves, or, if the union offers a proper lead, they can begin to see themselves as part of the organised working class - and thus help neutralise this major weapon in the employers' offensive.
Anti-capitalism

Thousands march on Barcelona EU summit

Veronica Fagan reports on the week-long protests in Barcelona

A new wave of anti-capitalist protest has swept the city, the repercussions of which are evident through the week's events. The mobilisation was led by the ETUC, which has called for the European government to undertake a full employment policy, demanding that unemployment be tackled at the root of the crisis. The movement has been bolstered by the support of Podemos, the party which has emerged from the protests of 2011.

Police were on high alert for the first two days of the protests, with large numbers of officers deployed to keep the peace. But the mood of the protesters was one of determination, with thousands taking to the streets each day to demand change. The demonstrations have been met with a mix of success and failure, with the government refusing to meet the demands of the protesters.

The highlight of the week was the general strike on Saturday, which saw a huge turnout of workers and students. The strike was called in response to the government's plans to cut public sector wages and increase taxes on the wealthy.

The protests have been accompanied by a wave of violence, with police using batons and tear gas to disperse the crowds. Several arrests have been made, and there have been reports of injuries among both protesters and police. The government has defended its actions, saying that the protests were a threat to public order.

The anti-capitalist movement has been supported by a range of international groups, including the World Trade Union Confederation and the European Trade Union Confederation. These groups have called for solidarity with the protesters, and for the European government to take strong action to combat the crisis.

Socialist Outlook

Police presence was minimal – just a few police cars were in side streets – and they seemed anxious to anger the huge crowd. There were no arrests.

Trade unionists on the march

The leaders of the ETUC have demanded that the European government make a full employment policy to tackle the continent's growing unemployment problem. They have called for a European union of workers and farmers, and a united front against the forces of the right.

Despite the government's resistance, the trade unionists have vowed to continue their protests until their demands are met. The movement has gained momentum, with new rallies being called every week.

The focal point of the protest was the call for full employment. The leaders of the ETUC have pointed out that the economic crisis is not due to a lack of workers, but to a lack of jobs for those who are ready, willing, and able to work.

The government has responded by saying that it is committed to creating jobs, but that it cannot do so without urgent action from the international community. They have called for a global economic plan to address the crisis.

Police violence and repression

Even before the summit itself started, Amnesty International called on the Spanish authorities to ensure that the demonstrations respected the right to peaceful protest.

"People must be allowed to express their opinions, no matter what those opinions are, The authorities have a responsibility to ensure the safety and security of participants in the Summit. However, it is the duty of the authorities to prevent the use of force by those who would peacefully exercise the rights of freedom of expression and assembly," Amnesty said.

Amnesty had previously expressed concern about the behaviour of the authorities, and had called on them to respect the rights of peaceful protesters.

The Catalan police were determined to follow the model of Berlusconi and their Italian counterparts in Genoa, rather than the lower key approach of the Belgian police during the Brussels summit in December, where at least during the main actions the authorities kept their distance.
Prevent another massacre: Indict Sharon for war crimes!

Laurie King-Irani
March 12, 2012

Imagine that it is September 2010. The Israeli Apartheid Week in the Trade Centre in lower Manhattan has just come and gone. The drums are now silent. The drums are now silent. Teenagers meet to play pick-up games of soccer or baseball in this space filled with the ashes of thousands of black photos of the innocent who perished unjustly in the shootings. The ashes of lives that have ended, of dreams that have ended, of love that has ended.

Worse still, too, no one has been accused of these heinous crimes. Not one person has ever been tried for the murder of thousands of innocent office workers and airline passengers that took place on September 11 nearly a decade ago. The whole event has, in fact, been pushed off the public stage and relegated to the private memories of the bereaved.

They have gradually come to realize that their grief must remain unspoken. No one responds when they raise questions of justice, accountability, or the sacred duty to honour the dead. People get angry and leave whenever they hear about the unpunished events of September 11, 2001, so they have learned, after nine years of silence and suffering in silence and being told that it was no big deal, after all.

Such a scenario is not only impossible to imagine, but also offensive as well. Six months have passed since 11,"000 planes full of terrified civilians plummeted into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and a field in western Pennsylvania.

The US has launched a "global war on terror" with no end in sight. Countries and services have been held, various monuments to the dead have been raised, and the lives mercilessly and unjustly extinguished last September 11. The official story has been reiterated in songs by Neil Young, in speeches by leaders, and as well in the pages of the New York Times.

No American would stand for the heartless, unjust, and inhumane scenario depicted above. Nor should they—or anyone.

That scenario, however absurd and obscene, is not a hypothetical one, but an actuality. It is the reality for survivors of one of the most shocking war crimes committed during the last half of the 20th century: the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacres in Lebanon.

Over 1000 unarmed individuals—a 50-50 combination of women, children, and the aged — were brutally tortured, raped, gassed, and slaughtered in September 1982 by Lebanese militiamen allied with and supplied by the Israeli Defense Forces. At the time of the massacre the IDF were in complete control of Beirut, and under the command of Defence Minister Ariel Sharon.

As Israel’s top general at the time of the massacres, Sharon had command responsibility. Indeed, a 1983 Israeli commission of inquiry (which was not legally binding and lacked judicial force) found that Sharon bore “personal responsibility” for the deaths of hundreds of innocent civilians.

The survivors of Sabra and Shatila watched in mute horror, horror that was translated into the delirious dreams of the wounded and the mortally wounded. The lucky ones know where their loved ones are; hundreds won’t know. Many, many more, however, still have no clue as to the final resting place of their loved ones.

And in the hours and days after the massacres, many Palestinian men and boys were rounded up and tracked away, never to be seen again, most notably from a sports stadium near the refugee camps where Israeli military and intelligence officers were present. A mass grave of the refugee camp now does double duty as a garbage dump and an occasional soccer field.

Nearly 20 years after the massacre, not a single permanent memorial has been erected to commemorate those who died. The government of Israel has not admitted to the massacres that took place in the camps of Sabra and Shatila in September 1982.

Such impunity is not only morally reprehensible and politically unacceptable, but also politically dangerous because of the precedent it sets and the hearts and minds it poisons.

For those who covered the Sabra and Shatila massacre as journalists, no less than for those who served as medical workers in the camps in September 1982, the naked televised images remain with them all that they have left.

The pictures of Israeli tanks summarily rounding up refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza, the photographs of young men lined up, blindfolded and separated from their families, and the execution fantasies of Israeli soldiers point guns at them, they are chillingly familiar.

Those who have witnessed massacres fear another may unfold at any minute. Those who survived the massacres are incredulous that it could happen again, but this time with the entire world witnessing the killings on live television.

Those who have followed Ariel Sharon’s biographer closely warn that Sharon must be stopped before mass destruction and mass murder happen again, but this time with the entire world witnessing the killings on live television.

The disturbing events of the last week in the West Bank and Gaza Strip underline the pressing need to dismantle the settlements, end the occupation, and most importantly, to consolidate the rule of law by ensuring international oversight of the occupied territories.

What the alarming increase in killing and the disturbing trends in IDF strategy also indicate is an urgent need to end Ariel Sharon’s impunity for war crimes once and for all.

And if the recent legal efforts of 23 survivors of the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacre bear fruit, that may happen sooner than many once imagine.

A judicial forum for raising these issues and attaining justice did not exist in September 1982. It does now.

On May 15, 2002 arguments will continue before a Belgian court concerning a complaint lodged by massacre survivors accusing Sharon and other Israelis and Lebanese with war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions and international law.

In the 1990s, Belgium incorporated its criminal law system and the principle of Universal Jurisdiction for war crimes, which is embodied in the Geneva Conventions and international customary law.

This has enabled the government of Belgium to prosecute parents, sisters, brothers, and widows of those killed in September 1982 to seek justice, not revenge; to aim for closure, not retaliation; and to honour their loved ones through the course of their case before a court of law.

They are affirming an international order based on universal principles of justice, not a world blinded by the ancient and fruitless principle of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."

Bringing Ariel Sharon and others to trial for the heinous crimes committed in Sabra and Shatila twenty Septembers ago is just and proper compensation for the victims, and a long overdue remedy for the survivors.

They have inhabited a limbo of grief, fear, and bitterness for two decades, suffering not only the horrifying deaths of their loved ones, but the denial of any psychological, moral, or legal closure.

But bringing Sharon to trial is equally imperative for those now living under the threat of new massacres in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as the IDF, again under Sharon’s command, displays utter disregard for international law.

The innocents who perished in the camps of Sabra and Shatila in September 1982 are no less human, no less worthy than the innocents incarcerated in New York City, Washington, DC, and Pennsylvania in September 2001. After 20 years of waiting, it is time to lay the dead of Sabra and Shatila to rest, it is time to honour the murdering by holding the murderers accountable.

Please support the global campaign against impunity for war crimes. Join with all those throughout the world who are demanding that the trial in Belgium go forward until justice is done. Ariel Sharon and others must be held accountable for the grave crimes against humanity committed in Sabra and Shatila.

* Laurie King-Irani is the North American co-ordinator of the International Campaign for Justice for the Victims of Sabra and Shatila for more information visit: www.indictsharon.net
Stop the war drive

Declaration of Fourth International

Against the deployment of US troops in the Philippines

2) Clearly, another goal of the US forces in Mindanao is to combat the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), which is alleged to be part of the international Al-Qaeda terrorist network. It was only the US that linked ASG to Al-Qaeda, with no hard evidence. But the ASG today is not much more than a group of local bandits in the kidnap-for-ransom business, which uses terrorist methods to assist in that project (though it began life as an Islamic revivalist group).

3) The US has sent not only US troops but also powerful armaments to Mindanao. Even more sophisticated armaments are promised, part of an overall plan to install a US military command post in Basilan. Thus, the presence of the US troops in Mindanao will not be temporary. It will be ongoing (though without the presence of permanent bases in the Philippine archipelago) even if this openly violates the Philippine constitution. The goal is both control over the Southeast Asian region, and to strategically advance US policies regarding China.

4) The US-led anti-terrorism campaign in Mindanao constitutes a counter-insurgency war that will surely involve and harm the civilian population in the province of Basilan and elsewhere. US forces and the Armed Forces of the Philippines will conduct joint military operations against so-called terrorist groups, and this will not be limited to Basilan. It will cover all the islands of Mindanao. Also, the US-backed military operation is being conducted not only against Abu Sayyaf, but also against other revolutionary armed groups in Mindanao, this also worsens the existing political and social crisis there.

5) Mindanao plays a vital role in the neoliberal policies of the government—which complements 100 percent with terms imposed by the Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines East Asian Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA). The US-backed military offensive in Mindanao targets not only the ASG. It is also designed to crush all the revolutionary groups and terrorism militants involved in the struggle against neoliberal globalization. The US troop deployment in Mindanao is, in this way, part of the global capitalist scheme to fully consolidate the BIMP-EAGA as one of the regional free trade agreements in Asia.

The FI therefore thoroughly condemns the deployment of US troops in the Philippines. The irresponsible actions of the present Philippine government put the national interests of the country at risk. In particular, the US intervention threatens the lives and well-being of the civilian population in Mindanao (the tri-people: Moros, Christians, and Indigenous peoples).

We must build a worldwide solidarity campaign in order to uphold the basic right of the broad masses of people in the Philippines to be free from such threats. We call on social movements, revolutionary groups and human rights organizations everywhere to express their opposition to the new US presence in the Philippines, and to the US-led global war that has now expanded in the Southeast Asian region.

We condemn the terrorist activities of the ASG and other fundamentalist and rightist groups. Even more, we condemn the direct intervention of US forces in the Philippines.

28th February

Declaration of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International

Stop the bombing in Caguan!

No to Plan Colombia!

1) FINALLY and just as the United States had been demanding, the reactionary and neo-liberal government of Andres Pastrana has opted for all-out war. Beginning at dawn on Friday, 21 February, it began to attack the demilitarized zone which had been under the control of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC-EP). As a result, it has put a stop to any kind of peace process.

2) This bellicose offensive, entitled Operation Tornados, includes the use of OV-10 aircraft, DC-34 stealth planes, Kelt, and Black Hawk helicopter gunships. More than 13,000 soldiers are on the move on the ground, including the infantry battalion from Granada (in Meta Department) and troops from the Ninth, Twelfth and Thirteenth Brigades. All these forces of the Colombian Army and Air Force are "advised" by North American military personnel, as part of the Plan Colombia counter-insurgency strategy.

3) This new phase of the war aims to destroy not only the FARC-EP but the whole of Colombia’s insurgent and popular movement. The bombing in Caguan is accompanied by an intensification of the dirty war against social activists and militants, and by a campaign of intimidation against the civilian population. This war against the Colombian people is carried out by the army, the paramilitaries, the US Drug Enforcement Agency and high-ranking US officers.

4) Armed and financed by Washington, this offensive is part of wider strategy in Latin America. It’s a strategy that includes speeding up the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) as a project for domination, direct intervention to destabilize the “radical triangle” (Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela), and the use of a ferocious counter-insurgency campaign against the struggles of the popular movement and the left.

It is also part of the deepening process of economic re-colonization, via payments on the foreign debt and the IMF and World Bank adjustment programmes imposed. This imperialist offensive is intended to provide “armour-plating” against the crisis of political leadership within the local ruling elites. At the same time it is capital’s brutal attempt at “dis-sussion”, faced with the growth of social resistance and revolutionary struggles which, like that in Argentina, have both exploded the myth of neoliberal invulnerability, and opened the way to a process of radical and democratic self-organisation by the working and popular classes.

5) The Fourth International condemns the bombing in Caguan, repeats its opposition to US imperialism’s Plan Colombia, and expresses its solidarity with the struggles of Colombia’s armed insurrectionists, students and slum-dwellers.

We join in the international campaign of democratic, progressive, anti-imperialist and revolutionary forces which demand a halt to the war and full respect for human, social and political rights.

21 February
N.I. Policing Board rejects Ombudsman’s Report

On Thursday 7th February the Northern Ireland Policing Board met to determine its response to the Ombudsman’s report on the Omagh bomb investigation. Given the highly critical nature of the report and the furious unionist and police reaction to it, the meeting was being billed as a make or break moment for the Policing Board, with important implications for the peace process as a whole. As it turned out there was actually a large degree of agreement between unionists and nationalists on how they should deal with the report. After meeting both the Chief Constable Ronnie Flanagan, and the Police Ombudsman Nuala O’Loan, the board members unanimously agreed on four measures to be taken against the police. One was to “clarify” the police’s role in the Omagh bombing. The full report can be read below.

The front page of the unionist-aligned News Letter declared “Policing Board deals O’Loan a double blow”, while the nationalist Irish News carried the headline “Policing board to raise confidence” – over a story which claimed that the measures recommended represented a move “closer towards implementing the recommendations of the police ombudsman”. There were also varying interpretations from the different members of the Policing Board. John Taylor of the Ulster Unionist Party claimed that the Board had delivered a “major blow” against the Ombudsman, while Ian Paisley Jr of the DUP declared that it had given a “vote of confidence in the police involved in Omagh”. In contrast, Joe Byrne of the SDLP claimed that the Policing Board had produced a “breakthrough”, and that “five-and-half of Nuala O’Loan’s six recommendations” had been implemented.

Obviously both unionists and nationalists were trying to play to their respective constituencies. However, when the recommendations of the Policing Board are examined, the findings of the Ombudsman’s report have been rejected. The only finding they accepted, and which was one of the major limitations of the report, was that the Omagh bomb could not have been prevented. This is despite the fact that the Ombudsman’s report identified two prior warnings of an attack on Omagh. There has also been a further media report of a third warning of an attack from an MI5 agent.

On the basis of the information that is currently in the public domain, it cannot be concluded that the Omagh bomb attack could not have been prevented. With further revelations over warnings likely to emerge, this conclusion will become even more untenable.

While the Ombudsman’s report called for the investigation to be taken over by an outside officer, the Policing Board merely appointed an “overseer” to “quality assure” the investigation. This officer will not direct the investigation; his status will be the same as that of the outside officer appointed by the chief constable to act in an “advisory role”.

One of the most telling recommendations of the Policing Board was a review of the work of the Ombudsman’s Office. This clearly raises a question mark over the role of the Ombudsman. The underlying assumption of such a review is that it is the Ombudsman’s critical report that is the source of the problem, and not the police investigation.

The positive reaction of the police to the Policing Board recommendations also indicates that the Ombudsman’s report has been rejected. The Chief Constable was able to claim that the RUC/PSNI remained “extremely in charge”, and that he had “no difficulty whatsoever” with the appointment of another officer from outside.

He also welcomed the review of the Ombudsman’s office as a way of ensuring that “the problems which have arisen in this instance should be avoided in the future.” As the problem for the police was that they had come under a degree of scrutiny, this-power to the limited powers of the Ombudsman’s office being further constricted.

Boosted by the Policing Board meeting the police launched a further attack on the Police Ombudsman when the Police Association, backed by Chief Constable, announced a legal challenge to his report.

Despite the rejection of her report Nuala O’Loan gave the recommendations of the Policing Board a “broad welcome”. Caught in the logic of defunding and seeking to improve the existing police force she has capitulated under political pressure and has backed off from the limited criticism of the police investigation.

That the police and unionists aren’t even prepared to accept this degree of scrutiny shows how little has changed in policing. Any notion that the Ombudsman can now play the role of a watchdog over the police is now patently ridiculous.

Nationalist descriptions of the Policing Board’s decision to reject the Ombudsman’s report and a vote of confidence in the police arrangements shows the degree to which rhetoric and reality have diverged. To give the impression that real reform is underway, it becomes impossible for nationalists to press issues which demonstrate that it is not.

Before going into the Policing Board meeting SDLP representatives said they would be calling for the Omagh investigation to be taken over by an outside officer, but they have not accepted the Ombudsman’s recommendation,

Faced with a choice they opted to back the unionist rejection of the Ombudsman rather than pursue something that would denaturalise a key structure of the peace process.

The underlying assumption of this is that the stability of the peace process must take precedence over pursuit of the facts even when it concerns the Omagh bombing and its investigation.

This is reflected in the growing frustration of the Omagh relatives. Despite all the spin, it is now generally understood that the Policing Board decision represented another barrier in their search for the truth.

This was expressed most forcefully by Kevin Blyth, who asked: “You sometimes feel like throwing up your hands and saying, ‘forget about it’... What has happened is an exercise to save the face of the Policing Board. All we were interested in were answers to Nuala O’Loan’s report. As far as we concerned that has not been answered – it has more or less been rubbished.”

He was backed up by Michael Gallagher, who asked the obvious question – “What is the point of having an independent ombudsman if you accept he has failed?”

For the supporters of the peace process the answers to these simple questions are unbearable: they must therefore continue to go unanswered.

For supporters of the peace process, it is uncomformable but any notion that the Ombudsman can now play the role of a watchdog over the police is now patently ridiculous.
Ireland votes against tightening anti-abortion laws

Narrow referendum
defeat for anti-woman constitution amendment

Joe Craig

The twenty-fifth amendment to the Irish State's constitution was defeated by 50.4% - 49.58% (618,485) on a turnout of 42.8%. The difference was only 10,556 votes which appeared to be a matter of one or even split in the population.

The essential question of the referendum, to permit abortion on grounds of mental illness, has now been rejected twice, the last time in the 1992 referendum.

The choice presented on both occasions was widely understood to be a criminalisation or decriminalisation, or to allow medical practitioners to carry out terminations in Ireland where the life of the mother was under threat, including that of suicide.

The consequences of the defeat and the fact that the most extreme wing of the Catholic right also opposed the referendum (on the grounds that it did not explicitly define the commencement of life from conception as opposed to implantation) has been seized upon by some to rule out any further legislation.

"The no vote was made of people with totally different views," was how Bertie Ahern, Taoiseach (Prime Minister) for the government described the vote. "There is no mandate emerging from this legislation in the particular direction."

"There is no simple answer, people will have to look at it again," said Ahern.

The real meaning and significance of the vote cannot therefore be understood without looking more closely at the result. When we do see that the population is divided in particular ways and the claims of Fianna Fail leaders are spurious.

The Vote

First the turnout. This was higher than the recent Nice referendum when only 34.7%, votes were cast, and when the 1992 turnout (68.16%) - which, however, was voted in with a general election - and the 1983 amendment (53.8%) - which first enshrined an anti-abortion clause in the constitution - were higher.

This was important in a number of ways, particularly in terms of the amendment, for example in Dun Laoghaire the no vote was 2 to 1 against a 53% turnout while in Donegal the no vote was 70.39% of Yes on a 33.5% turnou. In general the constituencies with the highest turnout also had the highest No vote, in Dublin the average turnout was 47%. Yes campaigns claimed that rain in the west of Ireland reduced the turnout in Yes constituencies, but it was more likely the low turnout reflected confusion and demoralisation in the prochoice camp and a waning of opposition.

Many people who had opposed abortion in the past, or possibly felt that it was an issue that should not be dealt with in this way. The pattern of voting indicated a heavier Yes vote during the day but a strong No vote in the evening work. The Fine Gael leader Michael Noonan was correct when he said "If poll boozers yesterday the young and particularly young women, and young men, came out to no vote." The five highest No votes were in Dublin (if we include Dun Laoghaire) while the highest Yes vote were in Donegal, Longford- Roscommon and Tipperary North. Even Bertie Ahern's own constituency the No vote was 58.96%.

The patterns of voting in Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford voted No, as did the commuter counties of Dublin and Meath, while the rural counties voted Yes. Many commentators remarked on a sharp urban/rural divide, though this must not be overstated as even in many rural areas over 60% voted No while in Dublin the Yes vote averaged over the high 30s.

Political significance

This pattern clearly demonstrates that the No vote was a progressive vote and attempts to claim it by the reactionary No campaign are fraudulent.

Dana, spokesperson for the most plausible of this movement, claimed her campaign won the vote, ignoring the fact that from the start she said she was not going to campaign - and did not do so. The reality is that a more reactionary waved amendment, as proposed by the extreme "pro-life" campaign would have been defeated more heavily.

An opinion poll in the Irish Times before the referendum recorded that 80 percent of those saying they would vote No were in favour of abortion in Ireland in certain (65%) or all (13%) circumstances. Does this mean that without the reactionary No vote the amendment would have passed? The answer is probably no.

Even the Irish Times opinion poll might lead one to such a conclusion was based on a lower percentage voting in Dublin than in rural areas, when in the real vote the reverse occurred, and underestimated the No vote in Dublin, estimating it at 41% instead of the actual 47%.

The Mother and Child committees which represent the newest voice of Catholic reaction and which formed prominently in the reaction No campaign would have done more to convince and put off potential progressive No voters than any additions to the No vote their support contributed.

There is no doubt that for the Catholic bishops, as well as for the Taoiseach, this result is something of a shock in the face," so spoke the religious affairs correspondent of the Irish Times while its regular columnist Finian O'Toole put it like this: "For the first time on a moral issue, the combined forces of Fianna Fail and the Catholic Church have been beaten."

Unfortunately almost all commentators are united in the judgement that Fianna Fail will not suffer from the defeat in the approaching general election. What we are talking about therefore, in terms of progressive developments after the vote, is a potential rather than inevitable.

What Now?

Ironically the immediate practical impact of the vote is zero. Terminations will not be carried out in the state and thousands of women will continue to take the plane and boat in Europe.

Politically the right has been stunned and plans to go after the morning after pill now look decidedly unlikely. It is to be hoped that the conclusiveness of the vote will be a sign of the long and Laurie time division.

However it is not the movement that is the real problem.

The whole remains Fianna Fail and the church and they will unlikely to try to force the issue again in the short term. Rather the No vote provides an opportunity for a progressive move on the question of the immediate call has been to introduce legislation in line with the Supreme Court judgement on the X case. The main forces in the No vote, Fine Gael and the Labour Party, have made promises on these issues at last.

as but as we suspected in our previous article before the vote was taken, it would be extremely hastily to rely on these forces.

If both party leaders have said that "widespread consultation" must take place before legislation can be introduced - which is code for the same delay that occurred after the 1992 referendum and which allowed the right to once again seize the initiative and eventually force another referendum.

Ruairi Quinn refused to rule out such legislation being a prerequisite for the Labour Party entering a coalition government with Fianna Fail. In any case any legislation emanating from these sources will offer rights on the one hand and a host of restrictions negating those rights on the other.

The spokesperson for the Doctors for Choice group advocated proper relationship and sexual education, free contraception, non-directive counselling and provision of abortion services in the country.

The problem however is not so much the demands raised, although the left-backed campaign had demands indistinguishable from those of the Labour Party (no consciousness raising there), as the complete lack of an on-going women's movement to raise the question of a woman's right to choose and continue to force a more progressive agenda.

Without such a movement, the possibility always remains that the right will regroup and come back the offensive again, however unlikely that appears at present.

In this situation the responsibility for the larger forces on the left is greater: but a new agreement on the same position could be visible.

While in the last few days of the campaign the Socialists Workers Party put up many posters in Dublin as a woman's right to choose, they failed against this demand being part of the Socialist Alliance programme during that organisation's short existence. This is where knowledge that a referendum was in the offing.

The abortion referendum thus will call the same questions posed by the threat of a lack of leadership of the women's movement and that weakens both their resistance to attacks on their living standards and democratic rights.

It is not clear that the good result in the referendum has done much to address this central problem.

International Viewpoint

English language
magazine of the Fourth International

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Argentine workers find new ways to organise — and a new level of struggle

Vladimir Marconil from the Argentinean MST spoke at the International Socialist Movement fringe meeting at SSP conference last month. This is part of what she said:

IN THESE LAST few months the masses in Argentina have overturned three civilian governments, for the first time in the country’s history.

The Argentinean working class and the people have been overthrowing military dictatorships for the first time in Argentinean history against a “democratic” government. This is creating a tremendous change in the consciousness of the workers.

This does not mean to say, as some people say, that we are in a period comparable to February 1917 in Russia. What we say is that for the first time in the masses are beginning to organise themselves at this level.

There is a very interesting discussion going on in Argentina at the moment as to whether it is the working class that is moving forward or whether it is the middle class — the unforeseen thing that has no Marxist definition or characterisation.

The thing that is at last the 20 years the working class all over the world has been charged. The MST thinks that what we are seeing in Argentina is the struggle of the working class by different means.

The unemployment and the fact that workers cannot start strikes in their workplaces without being sacked — because of the level of repression — has led them to take part in the popular assemblies.

The 3 governments that fell in Argentina because people went out into the streets banging pots and pans (in what we call cacareo) and creating a situation where they could not stay. That does not mean that they felt peacefully.

Die Rua was the first president who was overthrown on December 20. His Minister of Defence and the current Chief of Police of Buenos Aires are currently under investigation by a judge on the charge of assassination because 32 people were killed in those days. So people paid a price for overthrowing the president.

In spite of the repression people kept going onto the streets. There was a civilian government in place in front of the Supreme Court of Government almost every week, and also almost every week in front of the Supreme Court, People want the Supreme Court to reign, because they know they are absolutely corrupt.

Because of this, now Congress is starting a political trial against the Supreme Court and all the members of the military dictatorship who thought that their crimes would not be punished. They are being summoned to the capital and the popular assemblies fed them with money and marched them to the House of Government.

What emerged from this was the slogan “Viguetoseros and cacareadores have only one struggle and also ‘They all have to leave’ — that is all the people in the misery, all the politicians, all the capitalists have to go.”

On February 16 there was the first national meeting of the piqueteros and cacareadores in the city of Buenos Aires around March 15. So these organisations are developing and coming together.

The programme that they carry if they sign up for the union. Freedom for everyone who has been imprisoned accepting these demonstrations in those organisations.

Non-payment of the foreign debt

Nationalisation of the banks and the main enterprises.

Pensions to become state pensions again.

The three states are unemploy- ed don’t have to pay taxes on VAT. VAT have been frozen in the banks and get them back at least 13% cut in state salaries and state pensions be restored.

This last demand is very important. The money was taken in order to pay the foreign debt. Now the government says not only will they not reveal the names of these paper, they might not be able to state salaries at all.

The government is now well led to strike by public sector workers. The teachers have already said that they will not begin classes at the end of the summer holidays unless they are paid.

The movement is very heterogeneous because it really does not agree they don’t want political solutions.

If the left wants to talk to the workers there is an enormous opportunity to develop the socialist programme. This programme is that the movement is no socialist but it can be the way to it. People understand this they can understand that they will not be able to talk to it to a political system.

But where the left turns to talk to them, to accompany them in this there is no possibility that the left will benefit.

Banana workers fight “race to the bottom”

The crisis in the banana industry, caused by a number of factors including overproduction, has resulted in mass layoffs as production concentrates on low-wage, non-union, Ecuador at the expense of countries where workers are unionised, with higher wages and benefits.

Ecuador’s Role in the Crisis:

The crisis in the banana industry is characterised by the “race to the bottom”, with Ecuador leading the way as the largest banana exporter in the world. Noboa, the largest banana exporter in Ecuador is the fourth largest banana company in the world, following the three U.S. giants, Del Monte, Dole, and Chiquita, and Dole.

While Ecuador may have an advantage in banana production in terms of numbers, the working conditions, wages, benefits and freedoms for the people employed on Ecuadorian banana plantations are some of the worst in the world.

Noboa is estimated to be the largest employer of indigenous peoples in Ecuador, although the company did not respond to requests for comment.

The company’s banana plantations are located on lands traditionally occupied by indigenous peoples in areas that are home to a diverse range of cultures and biodiversity. However, many indigenous communities have been displaced, their lands have been seized, and their rights have been violated.

The government of Ecuador has not effectively protected the rights of indigenous peoples. The government has failed to respect and enforce their rights to self-determination, land rights, and to a healthy environment.

In 2000, a United Nations report found that indigenous peoples in Ecuador were faced with extreme poverty and food insecurity due to landlessness, lack of access to credit, and inadequate educational opportunities. The report recommended that the government provide financial and technical support to indigenous peoples to help them develop sustainable livelihoods and protect their cultural heritage.

Banana trade: the background

The crisis in the banana industry, caused by a number of factors including overproduction, has resulted in mass layoffs as production concentrates on low-wage, non-union, workers. Ecuador has the largest banana worker base in the world and exports bananas to the US, UK, Spain, France, Italy, and other countries.

Ecuadorian banana workers face long working hours, low wages, and poor working conditions. The company widespread use of pesticides and herbicides, which can be harmful to health and the environment.

The company also maintains a large police force to prevent workers from organizing and demanding better working conditions.

The workers in the banana plantations organise collectively, with the support of the Workers’ Center of the Confederation of Agricultural Workers of Ecuador (Conaie), which is a federation of around 200 unions representing workers in the banana industry.

In 2016, the Conaie organised a series of strikes and protests by banana workers in different parts of the country, demanding better wages, working conditions, and the right to organize.

The workers’ struggle against the company continues, with regular protests and strikes demanding better working conditions and the right to organize.

The company has responded with harsh repression, with the police and security forces using violence and intimidation to prevent workers from exercising their rights.

The workers’ struggle has attracted international support, with trade unions and human rights groups from around the world expressing solidarity with the workers and calling for an end to the repression and for the workers’ rights to be respected.

Despite the challenges, the workers’ movement has grown stronger, with more workers joining the unions and organizing collective bargaining agreements.

In 2017, the Conaie won a significant victory in the banana plantations, with the approval of a new collective bargaining agreement that includes improved wages, working conditions, and the right to organize.

The company has responded by refusing to recognize the new agreement, leading to ongoing disputes and protests.

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The seeds-of-popular-power-begin-to-emerge

Ernesto Herrera Bustamante
January 2002

SOME IMAGES recall the Paris Commune of 1871. Not because of the number of courtesans, of course but because they bring to mind Marx’s phrase, "the subjection of man to man has at last discovered." 1

In a crisis, dual power, revolutionary days, insurrectionary situation, Crisis of bourgeois hegemony and complete loss of the legitimacy of its state members of dominion. Categories abound, multiply and dance.

But it is difficult to contextualize them in a landscape where death is breeding. Today, would say, the ‘civil society’, the ‘nation’, the ‘people’, are in a state of insubordination, and self-medication, among forms of direct participative democracy, in a process of self-constitutional institutionalization.

Nobody sleeps anymore, the nation, even the smallest of the Par- liamentary Assemblies – however they are described – is a state of perpetual night and have become gener- alized.

Thousands of people commun- icate, listen, deliberate and propose, in hundreds in hun- dreds of meetings. They orga- nize as in the past demonstrations of the week. Every Sunday, in the Centennial Park of the Federal Capital, the coordination of the Assemblies of Buenos Aires takes place. Here the young, the unemployed, the working, the retired, the mass of workers, women, children come together. As well as the multitude of the left organizations that must hang up their party flags and handle their questions wisely. Although the political weight of its presence does not go unnoticed, in particular the diverse Trotskyist currents (PO, PST, MAS, PTS), the Communist Party of Argentina (PCP), the Carrera Clasica Comandante in which the Movement of the PCP predominates.

The assemblies are built in opposition to the ‘nuclear-sectional’ dialogue proposed by the government and the Catholic Church, with the support of the upper bureaucracy of the NGOs.

Manoeuvre

What is at stake, however, is not only the rejection of this manoeuvre from above for ‘dis- solving the problems of the country.’ It is true that there is an instructive feeling for positivism ‘politics’ (mainly against the digressed corruption of polit- ics), but the deputy Luis Zanon (Primero Libertad) can take part in meet- ings, marches and barricades, without ever being insulted or regarded with distrust. Moreover, this sense of community below is developing a con- scientiousness for ‘itself’ and a movement of solidarity, and the liberal and anti-capitalist demands are advanced. What begins as a movement of indignation at the ‘financial corromption’ and the dis- mess of the infamous Supreme Court of Justice, advances in the direction of a true national programme, including: Non-payment of the foreign debt; breaking with the IMF; Nationalization of the Free Trade Area of the Americas; against militarization and for a South American currency; nationalization of the banks; nationalization of privatized public compa- nies; taxes on speculators; financial capital; suspension of all diaspora; immediate food and medical assistance to the unemployed; creation of a mil- lion jobs; unemployment bene- fit of 380 dollars a month; reduction of all, public labour flexibility; elimination of the tax of 13% on wages and pensions; suspension of this in the case of workers of small charges; one to one weighting of all debts and credits; immediate return of the money of the small savers; distribution of the indebted companies to the people; increased budgets in education and health; free and public education at all levels; cuts in military and police expenditure; judgment and punishment of those responsible for repression; reduction of the pay and privileges of politi- cians.

Constituent Assembly

To the general demand ‘that they should all go, that not a single one is left’ (referring to the political leaders and gov- erning Peronists, radicals and Frepasa), is now added the de- sign of a ‘Free and Sovereign Constituent Assembly’ and above all representatives of the Popular Assemblies in the Congress (not the discussion of the national budget); Cuba and Plan Colombia are not absent from the Assemblies: the demand to end the imperialist blockade is expressed and soli- darity demonstrations are held. Obviously, there is a link that connects the struggle of the masses in Argentina with the results of Seattle and Genoa. The movement against capital globalisation and the World Social Forum, the insurrections in Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia and the formidable rad- icalization of ever wider layers of youth.

How should the ‘social com- petition of the Assembly be defined?’ In a provisional fash- ion: it is not ‘working class’ but an amorphous partner- ship of the middle class. The Assembly is ‘polyvalent’ it expresses the deep mutations of the social framework and the escalating effects of an imposed neoliberal model. But, first of all, the Assembly is ‘popular’ somewhere the façade of the safe, the housewife, the worker or the unemployed are no longer humiliated and find a common identity.

On Monday, January 28, this common ‘popular identity’ was already able to express itself on a broader scale: a march of 20 thousand people started from the locality of La Matanza (Province of Buenos Aires) and ended in the Historic Plaza de Mayo.

This immense column of the working class met with the enthusiastic support of the vaccine alliance, facili- tating the insurgent union between piqueteros and caceroleros.

The stores did not lower their prices, fear of being looted, but offered coffee and refreshments to the demonstra- tors. In any case, as the self-organization movement is con- structed and the social laboratory de-velops new experiences, the scenario becomes more urgent: how to translate this democratic, polit- ical radicalism into a real social- ist alternative of power.


Next issue: A special Socialist Outlook feature examining the 1877 Paris Commune and its lessons for today.

The Paris Commune lives – in Argentina!

Olivier Besançonet and François Ollivier report from Buenos Aires for Rouge, the weekly newspaper of the Communist Révolutionnaire, French section of the Fourth International, early February.

EVERY DAY Argentina slides further into crisis. Industrial production fell by 20% in December. Tens of thou- sands of people are falling into poverty and civil society believe that more than their livelihoods are now being classified as poor, the million of them in extreme poverty. Last week also marked a further drive by the industrial sector, Economic paralysis is worsening, little by little across a country that seems to be disintegrating. On 14th February 4-5, the banks were closed – the bank closure was the direct consequence of a new phase of the movement of popular assemblies in the country; on Friday 1st, the Supreme Court of Justice had declared the 'comarita' plan¹ unconstitutional.

The court is made up of corrupt judges and politi- cians linked to the ultra neoliberal faction of Carlos Menem; where the Treasurer dissolved by the govern- ment is the only judge who revives the political crises. These divisions at the highest level of the state summit are one of the manifesta- tions of the acute crisis of Argentina is experiencing.

The institutions have not collapsed, the state is still there and if the army cannot intervene at this stage it remains intact, however, the dominant classes are wor- ried. The garment and crime crisis is such that after the fall of two governments and prior to a probable dissolu- tion of the Supreme Court of Justice, the whole edifice seems rotten through and through.

Their worries are reinforced by the combined crisis of the big two traditional parties (the Peronist Justicialist party and the Radical) and by the emergence of a vast movement of mass self- organization throughout society against capitalists, gov- ernment and state. The emergence of popular assemblies in the capital, Buenos Aires, and across the entire country is the major phenomenon of recent weeks. This process is only at its beginning, but since the insurrectional days of December 19-20, the social mobilization has broadened immensely. The mobilization is on the move, all social and political forces have become the questions of everyday life. At the end of the setting up of popular assemblies in the neighborhoods spreads and concentrates in the streets across more than a hundred across the country.

What is at stake is opposition: the government and the ranks of the trade union bureaucracy with another legitimacy: a democratic legiti- macy through which the citizen recover their rights and their votes that have been confiscated by the cor- rupt politicians and trades unionists. In these assemblies people refer to themselves as vecio, 'neighborhood'. Some sociologists and observers point out the similarities with the experience of the Paris Commune of 1871.

Very quickly, urgent ques- tions are posed: how to help the hardest hit, the children, the unemployed the poor, how to settle the emer- gency food problems? How to oblige the pharmaceutical giants to provide medicines to hospitals?

One of the smallnesses of this movement resides in the fact that it is not yet present in the workplaces: the Argentine working class – one of the most power- ful in Latin America – has crumbled under the blows of neoliberalism (more than 30% unemployment).

Still, a number of workers (employed or not) participate in the assemblies as workers besides middle class sec- tors. Already contacts are being built with the unions in the front line against layoffs (notably in the rail sector), and with the piqueteros. The coordination of these structures of self-organization will be decisive. The movement is spreading already to the most popular neighborhoods of greater Buenos Aires and to the provinces.

The assemblies consist of about 100-200 people per neighborhood: in the best- mobilized areas, they break up into smaller groups when they reach several hundreds. Beyond the vital questions, they structure themselves in policies or commissions (organization, relations with the media, apparatus of the next caceroles) . . . an Assembly of assemblies coordinates the assemblies of Buenos Aires every Sunday at the Central park: nearly 10,000 people attended the coordination assembly last week.

February 3, a veritable social vanguard of several tens of thousands of people is coming into being, involving new generations but also the re mobilization of thousands of revolutionary militants or ex-militants.

This socio-political vangu- ard is also beginning more generalized discussions on emergency measures to meet the crisis: nationalization of banks, reinte- gration of the privatized enter- prises in the public sector, cancellation of the debt, payment of wages and pen- sions and so on. Finally, these assemblies have often demonstrated their support for the World Social Forum at Porto Alegre.

1. This plan imposes a limit on bank withdrawals. 2. Former Argentine president (Peronist).
Stop the riots in Gujarat

Resist the fascist VHP!

Statement of the ICS, Indian section of the Fourth International

On February 27, 2002, several compartments of a train were set on fire near Godhra in Gujarat. The train was carrying many "kar sevaks" or cadres of the VHP (Hindu Front) of India. The Inquilab Communist Sangathan unreservedly denounces the torching of the train compartments leading to the large number of deaths. While warning the people of minority communities that this community cannot passively respond and condemn the action, we also need to situate it in the proper context.

For several months, the VHP has been creating an communal tension and targeting Muslims with its renewed campaign under the banner of ‘kar seva’. One of the leaders of this campaign, Lalpara Anbali, a thousand strong crowd surrounded a small, beggar-like, old man and burnt 67 of them alive.

In every case, where the Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, has even bothered to comment, he has claimed that the sequence of events proves that the blame cannot fall on the VHP. Modi passed the police on the back, and claimed that Jaffery was responsible for his own death, because he had opened fire. The VHP has been met with warnings to Muslims not to lose their cool while the VHP has been given still more elbowroom.

When the Central Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes was to pass through sensitive areas of Baroda, women from minority community in several areas were desperate for three days. They did not have milk vegetables or any necessities to feed their children in their homes. Children were crying without food. At night they could not sleep because of threats at mobs moving around freely in the area.

In desperation women from one area decided to stop Mr. Fernandes and ask him to listen to them. They came out of their homes as his cavalcade with several cars and police vehicles came past. They tried to wave their hands and make gestures to stop him - but the big shot did not stop.

Immediately after his car went by, the police attacked these women, beating them with batons and using vulgar sexual abuse for trying to "satisfy" their image in the eyes of Fernandes. This led to fear among women and their families. If this can happen when Mr. Fernandes was just a few metres away, what will happen to them at night?

And this is not an isolated incident - in several places women have suffered abuse and violence in the hands of police.

We demand immediate action against whoever is responsible for this incident and we demand safety for those women and their families.

It is women and children who suffer most when there are shortages so we also demand that the necessary action is taken to ensure the supply of milk, vegetables and other necessities reaches all the affected by the curfew without discrimination on the basis of caste and community.

On March 3, local TV cable operators in Gujarat were instructed to block Star News Channel as they were showing the reality of the government's utter failure to prevent communal violence. On the same day, Union Home Minister, R.P. Laxmi finally found time to visit Gujarat. He started off by assuring, without a shred of proof, that the Godhra incident was pre-planned. He also asserted that police in Gujarat were perfectly fine, and rejected all criticisms of them.

Even as the violence continues, there is a ray of hope from initiatives in some places where peace committees are being set up, involving people from both communities. These are having daily meetings so that they can also coexist and create any tension in the area. There are instances of majority community people saving their neighbours who practice minority religions.

As a matter of principle, we believe that the state should not be given the right to curtail anyone's civil liberties, because this is a weapon that the state is likely to use against the oppressed.

We also believe that communalism, a product of reactionary capitalism utilising often pre-capitalist ideologies, cannot be ejected by the bourgeois state. Only a revolutionary working class, exercising its hegemony over the other oppressed, can successfully achieve that goal.

However, this is different from the question of tackling communal riots. A communal riot of the scale unleashed by the VHP currently cannot be tackled directly by the working class at its present stage of disunity and weakness. In order to defend human lives and conditions of existence, the governments, both at the state and the centre, must be compelled to take a firm stand.

We demand:

- Immediate and effective application of the army to stop all riots.
- The sacking of Gujarat Home Minister and Chief Minister for their failure to apply the law and to stop riots, indeed, for their complicity in the riots.
- The arrest of all VHP leaders under the ordinary criminal laws.
- The scrapping of the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance.
- The weeding out of all communists from the police.
- We call on working class and democratic/human rights movements active in India and abroad to publicly criticise these actions, and to mobilise against the fascists.
- We urge that messages of condemnation, and demands for action, be sent to the National Human Rights Commission at the address given below.

- The National Human Rights Commission, Post Box 18, 110098 India
- Tel: 111340016

The former Congress M.P. Ehsan Jaffery has been burnt to death in Ahmedabad. Prof. Bhandarkarwalla's house was burnt down in Valsad.

The fact of historic: Hindus fundamentalists on the rampage
Nearly 100 people participated in a protest outside the Indian High Commission in London on 11 March, demanding "Stop the Killings", "Denies the Gujarat Government" and "VHP Out of Ayodhya".

The picket was organised by South Asia Solidarity Group and Asian Women Unite!, an umbrella group of Asian women organisations in Britain, and attended by members and supporters of BASG, Newham Asian Women’s Project, Southall Black Sisters, Newham Monitoring Project, the Asia Project, National Civil Rights Movement, and women and teachers from SCAS, LSE and University College London.

The organisers stated: "We have called this protest to express our grief and anger at the terrible events in Gujarat during the last week. We add our voices to the demands of progressive and anti-communal people across India for those responsible for the killings, including those in government - to be brought to justice. We are also committed to oppose and resist the growing influence of communal forces, in particular the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) who are using these events to polarise relations between South Asian communities in Britain.

Despite police attempts to keep us penned in and away from the High Commission, we moved up to the main entrance of India House and remained there for about an hour. The mood was very angry and demonstrators shouted slogans and held placards including: "Narendra Modi must go", "BJP - VHP - Balraj Dal - RSS - Murderers", "Murderers off the Streets, Fascists out of Government!". The picket continued for more than 2 hours despite pouring rain.

For several months, the VHP has been whipping up communal tension and targeting Muslims in India. In particular, it continues to focus on building a Hindu temple at the site where the historic Babri Masjid (mosque) was demolished on 6 December 1992, leading to riots in which more than 3,000 people died.

Far from trying to prevent this, the Central Government led by the BJP, which also controls the state government of Gujarat and up until elections last week, U.P., has provided popular support to the BJP. Soon after November 11, the government introduced a draconian anti-terror law. This has been used to persecute Muslim youth in a large scale, while the terror outflanks of the Hindu right remain free to do their thing.

At the end of February, VHP activists travelling to Ayodhya for the temple building were reported to be burning train passengers, throwing rocks at Muslims and attacking those suspected of being Muslims. On 27 February, several compartments of a train carrying VHP activists to Ayodhya were attacked and set on fire at Godhra in Gujarat, where 58 people were killed, including women and children and other passengers unconnected with the VHP. No sooner had the reports of Godhra spread than organised gangs of the Hindu communal organisations went on the rampage while the police stood and watched in silence, or in some cases actually took part in the killings.

From well-off residential areas in Ahmedabad city to smaller towns and surrounding villages, Muslim neighbour-hoods were singled out and people burnt alive. The planned and cold-blooded nature of the killings was clear - in one case alloying Muslim homes were filled with water and electric cables submerged in them so that those who tried to escape the massacre would be electrocuted. Up to 1000 people have been killed.

Among those who have lost their lives is Mohan Anawat Nathar, from the village where the destruction of the historic Babri Masjid took place. Nathar was on holiday and was travelling by minibus with three relatives when their vehicle was set alight. Two others who were with him are still missing.

Sponsors of Carnage

The BJP government in Gujarat directly withdrew itself and watched as the VHP squads went about their systematic slaughter of Muslims, this absolutely impunity. Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi has shown where he stands by justifying the killings as an "emotional reaction" to the Godhra incident, congratulating the police for their "excellent work". The Home Minister in his government, Gordanzadagh, is himself a VHP leader. Denial of this communal government has to be the first step to restoring trust in Gujarat.

Central Government Colossal The Central government is an alliance of parties led by the BJP - the party of Prime Minister Vajpayee. Gujarat has been seen as a laboratory for a "Hindu nation" or Hindu state. The government deigned seeking help from the Army by a full 16 hours and even then it was slow and selectively that the killings continued to spread. Only a week ago, the results of the Assembly elections in four states showed a massive vote of confidence for the BJP by the Indian people from all communities. The BJP had fought the elections on a platform of anti-Muslim, anti-Pakistan sentiment and para-nuts about national security and terrorism "threats".

For further information contact: South Asia Solidarity Group, tel 020 7367 0193, email: southasia@hotmail.com or Asian Women Unite!, tel 020 7424 9535, email: londdec@hotmail.com

A petition from nine organisations working with Asian communities in Britain including Indians of all faiths has been sent to the President of India. The text is given below:

As organisations working with Asian communities in Britain, including Indians of all faiths, we welcome Wednesday’s verdict delivered by the Indian Supreme Court prohibiting any kind of religious ceremony on any land held by the Central government in Ayodhya. But we are deeply concerned that the BJP-led Central government does not appear to have the will to make sure that the verdict is implemented on the ground.

Meanwhile the tensions raged by the latest horrific events in Gujarat which have left up to 1,000 dead and tens of thousands homeless and dispossessed remain to be addressed. In the context of the violence the British government and the International community generally, was to express its outrage in the strongest possible terms our condemnation of these heinous communal killings, and of the abject failure of the Government of Gujarat and the police force in the State. While we universally condemn the killings of train passengers in Godhra, we feel that it is a completely unacceptable for Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi to attempt to justify the systematic massacre of Muslims that followed as a ‘reaction’ and we believe that it is only further to expose the communal character of his government.

In a petition submitted to the Indian President, we are demanding:

- the immediate resignation of the Gujarat government and of

- Union Home Minister L.K. Advani
- The National Investigation Agency (NIA) to investigate the plight of those who have been affected by the riots.
- As a result of this investigation, make sure that those who are guilty are brought to justice.
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Left gains after Sri Lanka's coalition ousted

Election results for the UNP, the opposition party, have been published.

The LTTE's main stakes are not only the Chandrika and Ranil Wickremasinghe government's reunification with the Tamil people. The LTTE's strategy is designed to keep the Tamil people in the political process and to ensure that the new government will implement the terms of the Ceasefire Agreement.

The LTTE's strength lies in its ability to mobilize the Tamil people and to create a sense of unity and purpose. The LTTE's political strategy is based on the belief that the Tamil people have the right to self-determination and that the only way to achieve this is through the establishment of a Tamil nation.

The LTTE's military strategy is designed to create a sense of fear and to prevent the government from taking any action against the Tamil people. The LTTE's military forces are highly trained and well-organized and are able to strike at will.

The LTTE's economic strategy is designed to create a sense of dependence on the LTTE and to prevent the government from taking any action against the Tamil people. The LTTE's economic forces are highly organized and are able to create a sense of fear and to prevent the government from taking any action against the Tamil people.

The LTTE's social strategy is designed to create a sense of identity and to prevent the government from taking any action against the Tamil people. The LTTE's social forces are highly organized and are able to create a sense of fear and to prevent the government from taking any action against the Tamil people.

The LTTE's overall strategy is designed to create a sense of fear and to prevent the government from taking any action against the Tamil people. The LTTE's military, economic, and social forces are highly organized and are able to create a sense of fear and to prevent the government from taking any action against the Tamil people.

The LTTE's long-term goal is the establishment of a Tamil nation. The LTTE's strategy is based on the belief that the Tamil people have the right to self-determination and that the only way to achieve this is through the establishment of a Tamil nation.

The LTTE's long-term goal is the establishment of a Tamil nation. The LTTE's strategy is based on the belief that the Tamil people have the right to self-determination and that the only way to achieve this is through the establishment of a Tamil nation.
Who wants ‘old Labour’ back?

Alan Thorner (SP’s pamphlet is just as bad as its content — SO 52) “assumes” that the Socialist Party’s idea of a new party is “old Labour”. I can only conclude that Alan had his own preconceptions of the SP’s position, and then set out to prove them. For he does not provide a single quote from this 24-page pamphlet (Revising Capitalism — The Case for a New Workers’ Party). He makes his own interpretations, which are not trustworthy.

“The model for the SP’s new mass party — expounded at great length in the pamphlet — is, predictably, the formation of the Labour Party, a hundred years ago” says Alan, and “The class content of this party is unknown to any unspecified class.” (There is a difference between “class content” and “characterisation.”). To be concrete, the old Labour Party was working class in content, but its leadership and policy was bourgeois in character. In fact the SP’s pamphlet is quite specific in opposition to such a party “Historically the Labour Party was a ‘capitalist workers’ party’. The leadership at the top reflected the outlook and interests of the capitalist class.” (p3 — with reference to the Appendix “How the Labour Party was formed.”)

And the SP draws the conclusion (p3) “Blair has succeeded in his aim of transforming New Labour into a capitalist party, although the process of consolidating it as such will continue”. The SP refers to the poll-tax struggles and the 18 million people who refused to pay, “defeating the tax and bringing down Thatcher in the process” (p15) and says “Further struggles in the workplaces, communities etc. will mobilise millions of working class people.”

At the end of the pamphlet (p18) the SP says, “asking workers to join their party”. “If we are to avoid the set-backs and missed opportunities … then an organised force has to be built which has a clear understanding of what needs to be done.”

For this, Alan accuses the SP of “economic determinism”. Amazing! Perhaps he wants to attack the view that the construction of a new party must be based on the movement of workers themselves? He says the SP “argues that an inevitable economic crisis will trigger an inevitable explosion of working class struggle and a new mass party will emerge out of this.”

This is not “economic determinism”, it is simply the old Marxist position that the working class is the force to carry out the socialist revolution.

It is Alan who does not say what he thinks the class basis of the new party should be, except that the “screamed” socialists must be linked to those who are “radicalising against the new world order … to establish the model of broad inclusive socialist parties which can be the basis of a mass development when it comes”.

The question must be asked: what is the difference between the “broad inclusive socialist party” that Alan sees and the “broad socialist church” of “old Labour”?

Dol Gibson
London SW8

Have bosses got it wrong on the Euro?

Alan Thorner (Prepares now to fight referendum — SO 53) is right to say that the left has lost the initiative on the Euro, but the reasons for this are not as clear-cut as he claims.

That the British ruling class is, on balance, in favour is neither here nor there as far as the rest of the population is concerned, because the working classes of the Euro countries also appear to have been, on balance, in favour.

And if the majority of the European working class has voted in favour, perhaps there is an argument we are missing.

One argument might be that a federated Europe with a single currency means a more unified working class, a working class harder to split, by their own ruling classes, along national lines.

The bosses think the Euro’s adoption strengthens their control. They might just find a Trojan horse in their midst.

René Gimpel, London

Social Forum launched: Europeans follow Brazilian lead

On of the decisions of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in January was that there should be regional social forums organised in different parts of the world. This will enable a greater level of participation of grass roots activists from outside Latin America than has been possible so far.

After some debate it was decided that the European Social Forum should be held in Italy in November. Italy is obviously an excellent choice given the strength of the anti-globalisation and anti-movements in that country.

The first planning meeting for the European Social Forum took place in Brussels on March 9 and got the organisation underway. There was a lively debate about whether political parties should be involved in the forum.

This debate actually conflated two things.

On the one hand, there is legitimate concern about the extent to which political parties who support the establishment want to co-opt the movement, to remove its potential to fight for real change and a different kind of society. When even the ring-wing Gaulists in France feel under enough pressure to turn up to Porto Alegre, this is a real discussion.

On the other hand, there are other political parties that see themselves as part of the movement itself. In Italy itself, Rifondazione Comunista was at the centre of the mobilisations in Genoa and in building one of the most powerful anti war movements in Europe. This question will be debated at the next planning meeting in Venice on May 15 & 16.

Watch this space for further developments.

Sign up now for the European Social Forum!

ATTAC France has set up a Europe-wide mailing list, fse-esf@ras.eu.org, for all groups that want to be involved in the European Social Forum, which is to take place in Italy in October or November 2002.

To join, please email Laurent Jesover (jesover@ras.eu.org), and indicate the name of your organisation.

International Summer Camp Calling all young activists …

- ARE YOU involved in the anti-globalisation movement, the anti-war movement or other struggles against the rotten capitalist system we live under?
- WOULD YOU appreciate the time to talk about how we can work together for a different, a fairer, more sustainable, less globalised world with other activists?
- DO YOU want the opportunity to meet with hundreds of other young people for a week of political discussion and debate, and have fun at the same time?

If so, you should seriously think about coming to the Fourth International’s Youth Summer Camp — where revolutionary socialists from across Europe get together to do just that.

The camp will take place in Brucade, France from Saturday 27th July to Friday 2nd August inclusive. This year’s theme will be “We reject military, profit-making globalisation, let’s build another world!”

We don’t yet know how much it will cost for travel and food — it’s likely to be between £150-£200 from London, and we should have firmer costs for our next issue.

We will also try to do some collective fundraising to make it easier to afford.

If you are interested in finding out more, get in touch now.

Rint us on 020 8800 7460, or email outlook@gn.apc.org