Railtrack: how many more have to die?

The Potters' Bar derailment has added its seven dead and list of casualties to the toll of death and misery on Britain's chaotic, privatised railways.

Debate still rages on how the vital nuts were removed from the points which had allegedly been "inspected" the day before they triggered the 100-mph tragedy. But almost all impartial analysts and experts agree that the privatisation of the rail network has made it almost impossible to restore safety standards that were swept aside in the pursuit of profit.

Amid the shock and anger, only Labour ministers seem determined to leave Railtrack mired in the private sector, gambling with people's lives. New Labour - the friend of big business - has set its face against the 79% of people who still call for renationalisation of the rail industry. How many more need to die before they change their minds?
Local government staff in London have been key to fighting cuts in service and PF in schools: this time they are fighting for their own pay

UNISON set for battle over London weighting

Delegates at UNISON’s Health Group conference in Brighton delivered a sharp rebuff to their national leaders when they heavily voted down a compromise deal which would have kept most, but not all, non-clinical support staff in NHS employment, but handed others over to private operators.

The deal had been offered more or less as an ultimatum to non-clinical staff members, by which union negotiators, by the employers, to retire the mixed reaction of further education lecturers to the latest insulating offer from the Association of Colleges.

With teachers, nurses and many other public sector workers notching up rises in excess of 3%, the principals have offered only 2.5% to those who are already well below school teaching pay scales. With starting salaries as low as £10,000, and average salaries of just under £23,000 compared with over £25,000 for classroom teachers, it is becoming increasingly difficult for RE college lecturers and teaching staff.

To make matters worse, a growing cash squeeze is forcing a wave of cuts in curriculum and redundant in a number of colleges, which could mean an 8% cut in funding per student available to sixth form colleges.

But with hard-fisted managers who are determined to balance the books regardless of the cost to staff and students, the lecturers’ union NATFHE must fight hard for a better deal to prevent it from occurring.

In England, CFE bosses facing a £1bn deficit have computer staffs – but plan to appoint an extra three vice principals in a management restructure.

Pay deal welcomed

UNISON members working in non-Pay Review Body (PRB) grade public service jobs have overwhelmingly accepted a pay deal which gives increases as high as 6% for the lowest-paid ancillary staff.

The basic offer was 3.6%, the same basic increase as nurses and professionals have already received, but the larger percentage rise came from the guarantee of a £400 minimum increase.

Although the deal represents something of a breakthrough for the lowest-paid, it leaves tens of thousands of NHS staff well below £5 per hour.
Blunkett learns lessons of France from Le Pen!

n Sunday April 21 France – and the whole of Europe – was traumatised by Jean-Marie Le Pen beat Lionel Jospin, to go through to the second round of the French Presidential elections. The response of Jospin's fellow Social Democrat in France, Britain and every other country to be blame everyone but themselves for creating both the conditions that allow the far-right to flourish and the pernicious ideology which scapegoats asylum seekers and racial minorities.

On Wednesday 24 April, before the French results had even come in, Home Secretary David Blunkett pitched in to this debate. He argued on Radio 4's "Today" programme that "restoring confidence in the asylum system would be a step towards social cohesion and seeing off the far right in Britain."
The interview took place on the same day as the second reading of the asylum, immigration and nationality bill was to happen in the Commons.

The provisions of the bill include the imposition of English lessons, and an oath of allegiance to the crown, on those immigrants who wish to apply for British citizenship, as well as more detention centres for asylum seekers.

The Bill will also further tighten border controls. The decision to introduce variable fines of up to £4,000 on airlines and ferry companies which bung up proper documents comes after the high court ruled flat-rate £2,000 fines illegal because they failed to take account of individual circumstances.

Blunkett is also proposing that new asylum seekers should only receive education and health care in asylum centres while they are going through the appeals system. Detention centres have already segregated asylum seekers from the rest of society to a huge extent – these proposals take that apartheid even further.

The bill proposes that the children of 3,000 new asylum seekers attend special schools at four new pilot "accommodation centres". A further 15 sites are being looked at, nearly all of which are former Ministry of Defence bases and are in rural areas.

The Home Office says the new accommodation centres, which will not be locked, will provide full healthcare and legal and education facilities, including interpreters. But some MPs are sceptical that they will be able to deliver a broad enough range of services.

"While they're going through the process, the children will be educated on the site, which will be open, people will be able to come and go, but importantly not swamping the local area."

Tashid Pahsa, of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, was also critical: "The use of the word 'swamping' actually demonstrates the true intention of government - to keep them out of sight and out of mind, to remove them away from mainstream communities."

"People in this country are not against people coming in but they want to see a system that is fair," said the prime minister's spokesman.

New Labour even insists that, far from pandering to the right, Blunkett is addressing a leftwing agenda, designed to raise standards for families seeking asylum and provide a faster process for assessing their claims.

This is the same nonsense they have been parroting since they were elected in 1997.

In those years the conditions under which asylum seekers are forced to live has become worse, while the administrative system for process claims has become more complex.

Blunkett returned to the airwaves the following day to defend his use of the term "swamped", calling it a "ridiculous". This response is not to see how those resources could be found to enable adequate health and education be delivered to all – and thus really underneath the divide and rule policies of the BNP, but to pand for them.

Asked whether he wanted to see more or fewer foreigners come into Britain in 10 years time, Mr Blunkett said: "I'd like to see dramatically fewer people coming under the asylum regulations and then failing, because 80% of them fail, and I'd like many more people to feel free to come and work here, to holiday here, to feel welcome here."

Mr Blunkett returned to the airwaves the following day to defend his use of the term "swamped", calling it a "ridiculous". "This response is not to see how those resources could be found to enable adequate health and education be delivered to all – and thus really underneath the divide and rule policies of the BNP, but to pand for them."

The LOCAL elections on May 2 saw an alarming display of support for the nation's new far-right British National Party – though well short of the scale of success many had been hoping for.

The vile and xenophobic rhetoric of the BNP has been very effective in getting its message across.

The fact that it has been successful is a matter of deep concern to the social democrats, who see it as a threat to the values of democracy, freedom, equality and social justice.

The BNP's 33% share of the vote on May 2 is only slightly above their result in the 2004 general election, when they won 200,000 votes.

Labour's worst ever result in recent years, when they won 200,000 votes, and 7% lower than the 2004 result, when they won 200,000 votes.

The Manchester Evening News has reported that BNP leader Nick Griffin has said that the party's success is "a milestone in the fight against the multicultural nightmare of the 1990s".

The party's rise in popularity is due to a combination of factors, including the perceived failure of the government to deal with immigration, the rise of far-right groups in Europe and the perceived decline in standards of living.

Blunkett has said that the party's success is "a milestone in the fight against the multicultural nightmare of the 1990s".

"I think it's a real cause for concern," he said. "We need to be very careful about what we say and how we respond to these kinds of issues."
Busy timetable agreed as Alliance records progress

Alan Thornett and Terry Conway
A well-attended and up-beat Socialist Alliance National Council meeting on 11 in London took a discussion on the local election results with reports from alliances across the country. The balance of power was the best set of results that the SA had had.

The SA after a year and a half of becoming a national organisation was making an important step forward. There was a new enthusiasm and a new mood of optimism that can take the Alliance forward to a new stage.

This was followed by a debate on Palestine, or more precisely the attitude the SA should take to the struggle of the Palestinian people. There were different strategies and a discussion of four and three resolutions before the meeting.

Swindon Socialist Alliance presented a resolution that focused directly on immediate solidarity tasks. In moving it, Martin Sacks, the Swindon delegate argued that it was wrong for the Alliance to take a generic or 11 position on what should or could be the final solution in the Middle East - while also making it clear in his resolution that he vigorously opposed a two-state solution.

Martin Thomas from the AWL proposed a two-state position in a brief resolution, while the SWP's John Rees moved the resolution which was agreed in the end. Rees opposed a amendment from Margaret Manning for a "democratic secular state" and one from Workers' Power's Mark McIlwain, for a "socialist, secular Palestine" arguing that the meeting should not adopt a strategic line but should continue to support the Palestinian resistance.

The Alliance will organise a conference on international issues aimed at young people.

"Victory to the Intifada". Another amendment from Oxford SA proposed replacing these with "Solidarity with the Palestinians" and "Israel out of the Occupied Territories" was defeated as was the attempt to argue that we should have three slogans: "Solidarity with the Palestinians", "Israel out of the Occupied Territories" and "Victory to the Intifada".

Whilst the main resolution would have been strengthened by adding the demand for a democratic secular state the outcome was a good basis for the SA to give solidarity to the Palestinian people in the current conflict.

There is no doubt that the fundamental strategic issues will be debated again at both local and national level. The other main item dealt with was proposals for conferences and events for the rest of this year, which was a complicated discussion giving the difficulty of fitting everything in.

The outcome was an agreement for a number of important initiatives, even if the time and structure of several of them was controversial.

The following was agreed:

A trade union activists meeting, soon after the TUC. This would be a working meeting designed to organise and co-ordinate the trade union work of the SA and take forward the decisions of the conference in March.

A conference on new imperialism, new internationalism aimed at young people, to be held between September and the end of the year.

A policy making conference, open to all members, on the Euro to the held before the end of the year, in order to adopt policy in advance of a referendum on the issue.

An AGM to be held in January.

This busy time-table together with the real enthusiasm generated by the election results looks set to make sure that the Socialist Alliance regains the political force over the next months across the streets, in the workplaces and in the colleges, not just at the ballot box.

Socialist Alliance polls well in local elections

Alan Thornett

The Socialist Alliance stood 209 candidates on May 2, by far the largest number on the left. The best results it has achieved in a long time are not much better than in last year's general election even when the turnout was taken into account.

Within this there was a wide variation of results. Some were clearly break-throughs others were modest scores, putting down markers for future contests and getting the name of the Alliance more widely known.

In London the Socialist Alliance scored an average of 7.5% across the 88 seats it contested, a result which places its score in the London Assembly election. The strongest showing was in Hackney with an average score of 9.4% across the 13 seats contested.

The SA beat the Tories in 10 of the 12 seats. This reflected both the crisis which has existed in Hackney council and a strong campaign by the local Alliance.

Campaigning journalist Paul Foot had the best results in Islington ward with a score of 20.8%. He was followed by Polly Moutcham (Hackney Down) with 17.2% and Richard Peacock (Lambeth) with 16.2% both of whom had been particularly active in dis-bility campaigns.

There were strong results in other parts of London as well. In Camden Alan Walters scored 16.2% and in Hammersmith Simon Hester polled 10.6%.

In Lambeth (Brixton Hill) Julia Hall polled 12.8. In Newham Paul Phillips (Forest Gate North) polled 12.7% and Mervyn Hy (Forest Gate South) polled 12.5.

In Tower Hamlets Mark Weins polled 17.4% and in Waltham Forest Lee Rock (William Morris) polled 9.2%.

Outside London the best scores were in Wrexham where Barry Conway polled 21.4 and Judith Forre (Whitley) scored 8.3%. In Middlesbrough Michael Doberty scored 12.7% and Jacqui Penton 9.9%.

In Swindon Tony Newton scored 10.9.

These results were won by candidates who stood on a socialist platform which did not just include opposition to cuts and privatisation, important as that is, but opposition the war, solidarity with the Palestinians, and in defence of asylum seekers to this country.

These results are an important step forward for the Alliance. We now have an opportunity to build and revive the Alliance.

The SA did not go confidently into these local elections, there had been a few poor by-election results and many SA members were uncertain as to our electoral prospects at the present time.

This election has changed all that. It will increase our confidence in electoral work and invigorate future interventions.

The SA is in a very good shape, in the course of a few months it has held a trade union conference of over 1,000 activists, and have done well in these elections.

Already there are by-elections still to go in Tower Hamlets and in Lewisham. There are now some very good results to be built upon.

The Socialist Party stood in 30 seats in the local elections, standing under the Socialist Alternative banner. They retained two of their existing councillors and lost two.

Dave Nellist returned his seat in Coventry with a respectable 52.8% winning by a margin of over 300 votes. This was clear testimony to the respect Nellist has built up though the many years he has been active in the city.

Ian Pegg retained his seat in Lewisham with 1063 votes, again reflecting the long-term work he has done.

Elsewhere Socialist Alternative candidates had some good scores as well, reflecting the fact that the Socialist Party has been intervening in elections for a long time.

Bill Hope in Newport Baylake polled 20%, Paul Malliband in Eldwick (who lost his seat) polled 19.85, and Pete Glover in Bootle polled 12%.

The rest were in the same bracket as the Socialist Alliance results, which was particularly noteworthy.

The Socialist Party shows its disappointment

given that the SP seats were more carefully targeted. The SP itself, however, had clearly been expecting far better results, and made their disappointment clear. In their assessment published with the results Hannah Sell finds a novel way of counting the results:

"Nonetheless, our votes did not reflect the enthusiastic support we received from thousands of people on the doorstep. A far better expression of our support is reflected by the increased numbers of papers sold during the election."
Will the private sector pocket Brown’s extra billions?

Many health workers and health campaigners will have heaved a sigh of relief at the outcome of Gordon Brown’s Budget: but they would be well advised to study the small print before revelling in the streets, warns HARRY SLOAN.

The factor which nobody, however, medical, can question is that Brown has triggered the biggest and most rapid ever increase in spending on the NHS.

Spending next year will rise by a hefty £6.6 billion – a cash increase of over 10 per cent, 1.5 times the amount held in reserve in previous years.

This will be followed by successive rises of 10 per cent each year to 2007 – equivalent to 4% if allowance is made for the general rate of inflation, reaching an allocation of almost £10.6 billion in 2004-5 – equivalent to double the level Labour inherited in 1997.

By any standards these are large sums of money, and indeed Gordon Brown’s plans would meet Tony Blair’s promise to lift British health spending up to and above average levels for other EU countries – from the present level of 7.7% (including a private sector spending) to 9.4% in 2008.

This is a bigger increase than most commentators had even asked for.

Health Secretary Alan Milburn unveiled plans to invest some of this additional cash by recruiting an extra 80,000 professional staff, 15,000 consultants and GPs, 35,000 nurses and 50,000 therapists and scientists.

It all sounds good so far: so where’s the catch?

The big problem is that none of the extra cash kicks in until the budget for the financial year (2003/4): this leaves many GP practices and Primary Care Trusts staring down the barrel of deficits carried over from last year, and facing renewed demands to balance their books by next April.

For many trusts this already means painful and demoralising cuts and economies are only now even as the government promises “jam tomorrow.”

This links to a second major snag with Labour’s handling of the NHS: this year’s budget and all new money will be strictly tied to a series of stringent conditions for which many health authorities are already warn-

Don’t worry: there’ll be more money for services – next year!

ing there is barely enough money to go round. In South East London, for example, where the new Strategic Health Authority faces pressure to achieve 4.2% nationally defined targets, it has declared that there will be no resources available to meet any additional local priorities.

So if your name is not on the list, there will be no extra cash at all: and among the key services significantly affected are the mental health and in particular the treatment of acute mental illness.

There is no relief in sight for city centres mental health wards struggling tocope and contain potential violence and mayhem with beds 100% or more occupied. And none of the long-awaited investment in 24-hour crisis teams and community-based services to replace long-stay housing for people with long-term mental illness seems likely to materialise.

A third, related problem is that the lion’s share of the new money being pumped into health care is being allocated directly to the NHS, but relatively small amounts to social services, many of which are also facing deficits and cuts.

Yet without a major expansion of social service provision, government targets for the more efficient discharge of older patients from front-line hospital beds will be dead in the water: social services need extra cash to finance the expansion of home help and other support for frail older people living alone, and to purchase additional nursing home places – where these are available.

Indeed the problems of finding sufficient nursing home capacity are likely to worsen in the next period.

Given before Brown’s budget announcements, nursing home owners, almost all of them operating for profit but confronted with rigid ceilings on the amounts local authorities will pay for each place, have been pulling out of the market, and converting many of their properties into more lucrative luxury flats.

It seems certain that the new injection of cash into the health care system will be seen by these profit-hungry proprietors as a green light to rack up their charges, especially now Alan Milburn has decided to impose fines on local authorities which fail to deliver sufficient facilities for patients discharged from local hospital beds.

However Milburn has handed over only a pintance in extra cash to the councils, leaving them caught between a rock and a hard place.

Local crises can be expected.

The fourth general problem is the extent to which the new, expanded NHS budget will be siphoned off into the pockets of the private sector. There has been no major increase in the allocation of NHS capital, which is needed to replace the costly option of financing new hospitals and facilities through the Private Finance Initiative.

This means that by 2007 as much as £4.5 billion a year will flow straight out of local NHS revenue budgets to pay for the lease of PFI hospitals and fees for support services from private operators.

But Milburn has also restored his view that short-term shortages of beds and capacity in inner London must be tackled by buying in more operations from the private sector through the so-called “Com带动e”

After the Budget, Milburn declared that the number of NHS patients receiving private operations will double again this year to over 150,000.

Yet NHS hospital Trusts in London, where this is a major problem, warn that this will cost an average 4% extra for each patient treated privately – slicing even more vital cash, and poaching scarce nursing and medical staff from hospital in a desperate struggle to cope with demand.

This brings us to the fifth problem – one that cannot be evaded much longer: the availability of staff.

The plans to recruit thousands of additional nursing and professional staff each year underline the importance of retaining staff already trained and in post.

Yet the evidence is that all over the country nursing staff are being lured out of the NHS, either to other jobs, or drawn to the higher rates of pay, flexible hours and reduced level of responsibility offered by nursing agencies.

Theatre staff earning £22,500 in the NHS can find themselves working next to agency staff doing the same job for £35,000 plus travel expenses: agency nursing staff can earn rates of up to £30 an hour, even for work over weekends or bank holidays.

The fact that NHS managers are having to pay these rates to agency staff reflects the dire shortages of qualified staff within the NHS itself. The only way to prevent this hemorrhaging of skills (and cash) to the private sector, the NHS itself must increase pay, and improve conditions.

Top NHS managers know they are the first in line for demand or government tar-

The NHS must maintain backed out of the complex “Agenda for Change” negoti-

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Campaign for free school meals

The Scottish Socialist Party Bill to provide a "free and nutritious meal to all school pupils" is receiving widespread public support across Scotland.

In recent weeks the STUC voted unanimously at its conference to back the Bill. Other supporters include the Committee of Scottish Church's, UNISON and the Sunday Herald.

The Bill would allow local authorities to provide a free nutritious meal and a drink to all pupils. It cuts across the rapidly-growing burger culture in many Scottish schools where meal provision has been privatized, water costs more than a fizzy drink and obesity levels are mainly faced with fried and sugars with few health options.

Most poverty and health professionals have identified this as the single action which would have the biggest impact on children's and later adults' health. Although some pupils are eligible for free meals, there is still a stigma attached to this and take up of the provision is very low.

The SSP has been holding meetings across Scotland promoting the Bill. These have been well attended and there is real support for the measure from teachers, parents and pupils in schools across Scotland. At my local school we had queues waiting to sign the whole time we were there.

Although some of Scotland supports the Bill in Parliament there is opposition to the costs. It is estimated for every meal it will cost £1.74 million. The only parties committed to its support are the SSP and the Greens although some SNP members back their party's policy.

Despite this pressure is being brought to bear. The SSP have already had to scrap plans for the Bill but are still in a position to possibly push the bill and eventually support it. An alliance like this which successfully achieved the abolition of warrant sales is building up.

The parliamentary votes are expected in June, however, it is conceivable that procedural manouvres could delay its presentation.

While the SSP has had a distinct impact on a cause – free school meals – where the status quo is important but this is poor, costs the tax payer money through ill health and where our politicians are backed by huge sections of society.

If Labour or the SNP defeat the Bill this will be a major plank of the platform on which the SSP stand at the next election.

This also is an issue for socialists throughout the UK should take up through the Socialist Alliance.

Warrant Sales – the living dead

In a last plebiscate act, just as the bill to abolish Warrant Sales was about to pass into law, Labour passed an amendment delaying the implementation for 2 years to allow “alternatives” to warrantees and podnings to be set up. Over 18 months passed, and a report was tabled at the end of April 2002, setting out the Executive’s proposals. Surmise, surprise. Warrantes and Podnings are back – in a new guise.

The proposal is a debt referral scheme whereby most debts rather than going straight to a sheriff are referred to debt management services. This is the latest in a series of more warrant sales.

Unfortunately, the scheme does not make referral compulsory on the creditor. An obligate creditor could refuse and go straight to court where the sheriff could well impose compulsory surery of goods. Provided there is a sheriff in the area – podnings by another name. The scheme would also allow voluntary debt management agencies into legal agents, and this is an issue this sector.

Clearly the Scottish Executive, having opposed the SSP bill down to the wire, attempted to sabotage its implementation, now it seems their express wish of the parliament could be ignored.

The SSP Bill is a clear example of podnings from the proposals and will be seeking the support of all those who voted for the bill to that end.

Since the Act was introduced, the number of podnings has reduced almost to zero as councils found ‘alternative’ measures and found the bad publicity of being seen again was bad. These regulations were introduced in the 19th century.

Workers hit back at Blunkett’s “swamping” slur

Veronica Fagan

The outrage at David Blunkett’s outburst of bitter and abusive speech has spurred many teachers and health workers to action, to prove how isolated he is in his views and to leech the poison that his words can encourage.

Teachers and health workers in the East End Borough of Tower Hamlets also put together a petition, as have teachers in Brent.

The majority of those involved are people who work with large numbers of asylum seekers, who have heard first hand the situations from which children are coming. In the countries of birth and are furious at this attack on them.

They are also sore that far from being a way to undercut support for the far-right; whether in the shape of Nick Griffin or Le Pen, policies like those in these areas provide a mass support.

The Tower Hamlets petition reads:

"We, the protest at David Blunkett’s recent statement that asylum seekers are "swamping" schools and health services and that "legitimate concerns over asylum seekers are boosting the vote for nazi organisations."

"We, the health service and school system are indeed over burdened — by 25 years of under funding. However, far from seeking solutions we are constantly told that the reason why there are not enough teachers, nurses and doctors.

"Not are they to blame for crumbling school buildings and the long hospital waiting lists. Indeed refugees make a positive contribution to mainstream services, including working in schools, colleges and universities and the NHS."

We are appelid that the blame for the failures of dispersal policy is laid on frightened children and sick asylum seekers.

"We demand that the human right to live within society — not separated and segregated— be applied to all children. It is not possible to provide rounded education for children in segregated centres. We note the concerns of the cross party MSPs who recently visited Dungavel centre and reported that children there were left isolated and are being damaged by the conditions in which they are held.

"We demand that the policy of detention is no longer continuing and that it is immediately dropped."

Newham NUT have circulated the following official petition.

We, the undersigned, are school children, students, teachers and parents.

We condemn the comments made by David Blunkett, the Home Secretary, that educating refugee children in local schools would lead to them being “swamped”.

We oppose the Government’s plans that asylum — seeking children should receive separate education in accommodation and detention centres.

We are school children for ALL children and ALL refugee children are welcome!"
United for May Day

Paul Wilcox

In a letter to the May 1 saw 16,000 take to the streets. For the first time, trade unions and anti-capitalists joined together to demonstrate on May Day. This was the first time that a May Day march went to Trafalgar Square while Parliament was sitting.

This was a colourful and diverse march with a strong presence of youth, peace activists, Palestinians, Socialists, Anarchists and anti-capitalists.

The march went to Trafalgar Square and then on to other parts of London, including the Home Office and the Department of Trade and Industry.

The march was peaceful and orderly, and there were no incidents.

The march was a huge success and it proved that unity is possible.

Paul Wilcox

200 on March in Tyne & Wear

Paul Wilcox

Over 200 people marched on the Tyne and Wear in the annual May Day parade. The demonstration was larger than any previous one in recent years, with a high percentage of youth on the streets.

With pensioner activists, Trade Unions, Greens and the revolutionary left, the event brought together a broad spectrum of activists.

Paul Wilcox has always been a leader of the Left in the North East.

May Day around the world... May Day around the world...

Susan Moore

Any story of May Day protests in 2002 would rightly focus on the extraordinary demonstrations across France in protest against the war on Iraq. But we also need to remember the protests in other parts of the world.

In SYDNEY, thousands of activists focused on two questions - opposition to the obscene treatment of asylum seekers by the Australian government and solidarity with the Palestinians.

The Palestinian resistance and the decades-long conflict have been a constant theme in May Day protests around the world.

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Solidarity with Indonesian workers!

Veronica Fagan

Indonesian trade unionist Dita Sari recently refused to take a "human rights award" of $50,000 from the sports Wear transnational, Reebok. Reebok gives this award, annually, to a number of activists, because it is cheaper than paying the Third World workers who slave in its sweatshop factories a living wage. It makes them look good.

Dita explains that she turned the award down - despite the fact that her organisation could put the money to good use, because, "it would have been hypocritical to accept the money."

"In 1995, I was arrested and tortured by the police, after leading a strike of 5,000 workers of Indoshoes Istri Industry. The workers were demanding a wage increase (they were paid only 70 cents for an eight-hour day). They demanded maternity leave. This company operated in West Java, and produced shoes for Reebok and Adidas. I have seen for myself how the company treats the workers, and used the police to repress the strikers."

"Globalisation is producing neither universal welfare nor global peace. On the contrary, globalisation has divided the world into two antagonistic parts. There are wealthy creditors and bankrupt debtors. There are super-rich countries, and underdeveloped countries, super-wealthy speculators, and impoverished malnourished children. Globalisation intensifies the growing gap between the rich and the poor."

"The low pay and exploitation of the Reebok workers of Indonesia, Mexico and Vietnam are the main reasons why we will not accept this award."

"In Indonesia, there are five Reebok companies. 80% of the workers are women. Since the workers can only get around $1.50 a day, they then have to live in slum areas, in unhealthy conditions. This is particularly bad for the working-class children. At the same time, Reebok collects millions of dollars in profits, every year, directly contributed by these workers."

"We believe that accepting the award is not a proper thing to do. This is part of the consequences of our work to help workers improve their lives. We cannot tolerate the way multinational companies treat the workers of the Third World countries. And we surely hope that our stand can make a contribution to help changing the labour conditions in Reebok-producing companies.

Dita Sari is 29 and began her political activism ten years ago. The Indonesian labour movement faced constant repression under the Sukarno dictatorship. Dita participated in setting up free trade unions, in leading illegal strikes and rallies to try to improve workers' conditions and agitating for open democracy in Indonesia. Dita Sari was frequently arrested, and she was tortured and imprisoned. In 1996 she was jailed after leading a demonstration of 20,000 workers.

At her trial in 1997 Dita Sari handed flowers to the judge, prosecutor and hundreds of supporters packed into the public gallery. She then began reading a statement, and as she read people sang the popular song of struggle, "Hymn of Blood."

While Dita was in prison she was elected chairperson of the trade union, the National Front for Indonesian Workers Struggle (FNPNP), on whose behalf she turned down the Reebok award. She was released from prison in 1999 after the collapse of President Suharto, and after an international labour movement campaign, and publicity from Amnesty International.

In 2000 the FNPNP was recognised by the Indonesian government. Since her release she has continued to organise and agitate for improved conditions for workers in Indonesia: "We cannot tolerate the way multinational companies treat the workers of Third World countries."

These are just some of the reasons why the British campaign No Sweat has pledged to raise money for the FNPNP. Indonesian trade unionists don't want the blood money of the multinationals - but they do want money sent in solidarity by other trade unionists around the world.

- Send donations to "Indonesian Workers Solidarity" c/o No Sweat, PO Box 36707, London SW9 8YA
- Phone for more details, speakers etc. 07904 431 959. Affiliations to No Sweat are £50, individuals, £1. Send cheques to the PO Box, above, payable to "No Sweat."

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 all over the world?
- Would you appreciate the space to talk about how we can work together for a different, a fairer, more sustainable, demilitarised world?
- Do you want the opportunity to meet with hundreds of other young people for a week of political discussion and debate, and have fun as well?
- If so, you should come 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 Brioude, France from Saturday 27th July to Friday 2nd August inclusive. The theme will be "This globalisation is not ours, let's build another world!" Speakers will include Gilbert Achcar, Daniel Bensaid, Olivier Besancenot, Penelope Duggan, Michel Husson, Braulio Muro, Catherine Samary, and François Vergamme.

Don't yet know much how it will cost for travel and food - it's likely to be between £150-£200 from London, and we should have firmer costs soon. If you want to find out more, get in touch:
- RING us on 020 8800 7460,
- email outlook@an.org or
- write to Youth Camp c/o Po Box 1109, London N4 2UU

GERMAN metal workers, from the giant IG Metall union have put up two fingers to globalisation and the employers' pay strike that has now reached Berlin and the big car manufacturers. The employers have argued that they 'cannot afford' to pay the strikers' demands - but the strike is a challenge to all those multinational employers who aim to "compete" in the global marketplace at workers' expense by driving lowest pay and conditions to match or go below the lowest common denominator.
Le Pen reaches second round: left vote reaches 3 million

Double shock from French elections

L e Pen was allowed into the second round by the collapse of support for the government left of the Socialist Party and the Communist Party (PCF). And the reasons for this are clear enough. They were a part of a government which fully adopted the neo-liberal agenda and attacked the working class.

The destruction of the Socialist Party in this is a direct product of the evolution of Social Democracy across Europe. By the mid-1990s Social Democratic parties were in power in 13 of the European Union’s 15 states. Without exception they adopted the neo-liberal agenda, often in order to meet the Maastricht criteria and are now reaping the whirlwind of their attacks on the working class.

France, of course, was not about to go fascist, as the second round results show. But the rise of the Front National is a very dangerous development, and also reflects a European trend in the emergence and strengthening of far right parties.

What the Front National may not be a classical fascist party, Le Pen is certainly a neo-fascist, with a background of violence and with plenty of thugs around him. He was a torturer in Algeria. His core supporters go back to Petain. The level of sheer fear that the prospect of a possible Le Pen victory generated amongst the ethnic minorities in France was understandable.

If the collapse of the government left vote to below that of Le Pen was the first big shock of the first round then the rise in the far left vote was the second. This was absolutely astounding and a major step forward for the left in France.

In 1995 Laurent Outviere (LO) got 5.3%, which was remarkable enough. Now the far left have doubled that, with a score of 10.4% - or three million votes. What we saw in the first round was a collapse of the centre and a polarisation of the vote.

What was even more astounding was the vote of the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire (LCR), French section of the Fourth International, given that it fielded a candidate who was standing for the first time. The LCR won 4.2% of the vote, or 1.2 million votes. The idea that the LCR could pull more than the French Communist Party would have seemed unbelievable before this election. This achievement was based on having an excellent young candidate who handled the media well, and made a serious appeal to young people radicalising against global capital. The LCR scored 13.9% amongst the 18-24 year olds.

We have to stress that the far left were absolutely right to stand in this election and reject those such as new Labour (and others) who try to hold them responsible for Le Pen’s breakthrough.

The collapse of the PCF vote to 3.7% is another historic development in this election. From the PCF’s point of view the collapse of its support because it was part of the Government is bad enough - but to be outvoted three to one by the Trotskists could well be terminal.

Once Le Pen went through to the second round, the key issue was mass mobilisation on the streets. The LCR was the first to call for such mobilisations, immediately after the result was known.

Hundreds of thousands demonstrated over the next few days and then May Day saw two million on the streets - the biggest demonstrations since May-June 1968.

The LCR call, rightly, was to fight Le Pen in the streets and in the ballot box. In other words vote against Le Pen in the second round. This was opposed by LO in France and much of the far left in Britain, who called for abstention or for a blank vote.

Ultimately the issue here was whether you were prepared to see Le Pen elected, since if you call for abstention and enough people heed your call, this would be the result.

This is not resolved by piously arguing, as some did, that Le Pen wouldn’t win anyway so it was safe to call for an abstention. If you call for an abstention you have to be prepared to people for you to carry out your call, not assume they will ignore it.

In the course of this debate there is a tendency to minimise what the result of a Le Pen presidency would mean. It would have involved a huge attack on the organisations of the working class and on minorities, immigrants and asylum seekers.

Calling for a vote against Le Pen was not a call for a popular front, or an alliance with a section of the ruling class. It was a response to a dangerous situation created by a quirk in the French electoral system, which had handed Le Pen the possibility of a major political advance in France and beyond.

The second round was in effect a plebiscite against Le Pen. In fact the LCR called an anti-Chirac demonstration immediately after the declaration of the results of the second round.

It was crucially important that Le Pen got the worst possible result in the second round. The problem with abstention or blank voting was that it increases the Le Pen vote as a percentage of the Chirac vote - and that is the only result which has a mass impact. The snorals will look at the abstentions and blank votes, but they will have no political impact.

18-82 was the popular result of the voting. If big abstentions had reduced this to 30-70 Le Pen would have claimed a huge victory and the far right across Europe would have been strengthened. Not to understand this is to misunderstand the dynamic being generated on the streets.

The idea, as some argued, that voting for Chirac (or against Le Pen) sowed illusions in Chirac does not make sense either.

The slogan was “better a crook than a fascist” - it could hardly be clearer. People were having themselves disinfected after coming out of the voting booths. Chirac would have to be made to think that the 82% who voted for him support him.

In fact a big vote for Chirac weakens him rather than strengthens him, because weakening the far right weakens the whole of the right. The confirmation of this was the jubilation at the 18-82 result, particularly amongst the ethnic minorities.

The political situation has radicalised in France since the first round vote. The potential for the far-left to grow is therefore increased - and is probably greater than any time since 1968.

Whether this will reflect directly in the Parliamentary elections, however, is a more complicated question, since there will be a big pressure on people not to vote for what they believe, but what they should.

All this raises the future of the far left in France, and places a big responsibility particularly on the LCR and LO. What is posed, particularly if the PCF begins to break up, is a new party of the left on the lines of Rilondazioni Communists in Italy. And the LCR and LO are by far the best placed to initiate such a development.

LO unfortunately has rejected every appeal for unity from the LCR since the European elections, when they jointly won four seats in the European Parliament.

When this issue was raised in a debate on the French election results recently organised by the CGPBO, the LO speaker said that if any one thought that this would lead to unity between the LCR and LO they are “living in an enchanted forest.”

The unity of the European elections, he stressed, had only been so because there had been a 5% threshold to overcome, and because there was a united slate. That situation does not exist in any other elections.

If this presidential election the LCR proposed a joint slate behind Arlette (LO’s candidate) - and LO turned it down. And they have refused even a non-aggression pact for the forthcoming assembly elections. If they continue in this way LO may have to face being side-lined by events.

The LCR are determined that they will not be in that position. Hundreds of people have been rushing to join the organisation.

The Ligue has been at the forefront of the mobilisations against Le Pen, and is preparing to step up the fight against Chirac.

It has launched a call for a new political force in France, based on the anti-capitalist movement and the working class.

It will continue to put forward these ideas on the streets and at the ballot box in the forthcoming elections in June.
French youth take to the streets

The elections in France may have seen the rise of the far right vote — but we have also seen the biggest mobilisation in France since 1968 and again the youth are central to this.

And just as in 1968, when the youth of France inspired the young comrades in Britain, today they also inspire us. While the revolutionary left in Britain may not be as big as we would like, we have come a long way from the sectarianism of the past, and a new Left unity has been built.

Over the last ten years the Fourth International has been working to build the social movement around the globe from the World Social Forums in Brazil, with our comrades in the Brazilian Workers Party (PT) and ATTAC, with our comrades in Europe central to this movement.

In places like France, Spain, Italy, Brazil we are fighting back. The young comrades in the Fourth International are fighting the far right — but most of all we will fight against the capitalist system which breeds the Le Pen of this world.

All together against Chirac and the bosses

Statement of the LCR 6 May 2022

The road has been blocked to Le Pen, 82% for Chirac, 18% for the leader of the Front National, constitutes a massive rejection of the far right. This result is also a result of the translation of an uprising of the youth, the secondary schools and the universities but also of the inner cities. But it is also the translation of the resistance of the workers and more broadly of society against the rise of the Front National. From the 6 May to 8 May, demonstrations are the most important since the winter of 1969 and more precisely since May 1968.

Chirac is preparing to strike

Even though it has been possible to use the vote for Chirac as a means to block Le Pen’s path, the president of the Gaultier RPR Party and the whole of the right cannot constitutionally agree with the Front National. Sunday evening onwards, the Gaultier language of Chirac has been preparing people for policies which will attempt to win back the left’s voters, by allying with ultra-right-wingisers such as Milton, De Villiers and company. Statements by Juppé and others also clearly reveal their intentions: more privatisations, deregulation, attacks on youth and schools.

So we should not imagine that the 80% vote for Chirac will modify his neo-liberal, anti-worker, anti-youth, and anti-immigrant policies.

Starting again with a Jaspein Government.

For 100% left policies.

All the causes of Le Pen’s rise are still there: over the past twenty years, successive governments have increased inequality, made social misery grow. Fundamentally you cannot fight the extreme right without fighting the roots of the economic, social and political crises.

You have to fight against the neo-liberal projects of the right and of the bosses, but also those of a ‘united left’ which does not learn anything from the policies pursued by the Labour and Socialist left governments.

In continuation with Olivier Besancenot’s previous campaign, we propose an ecological and democratic emergency plan, which breaks with that of the government left, policies for a fighting anti-capitalist left, a left which gives new hope to thousands of youth and workers.

This is also what the 100% left Parliamentary deputies will support.

A law prohibiting sackings

A law defending public services and halting all privatisations

A 230 euro increase in levels of wages, for social pensioners

Preserving pensions and rejection of pension funds

The provision of grants for youth in education

Ensuring equality at work between men and women and an end to part-time working borne by women.

Left wingers held their votes to vote Chirac:

Daring to have policies of equality of rights, legal status for undocumented immigrants, without concessions to Le Pen’s regime.

Supporting ecological policies where our lives are prioritised over profits.

Facing up to the challenge to the absolute power of the bosses over the economy and the privileged minority.

On the basis of these proposals and of these principles, we are submitting an anti-capitalist perspective for discussion by all those who identified with Olivier Besancenot’s campaign, in order to present the largest possible number of “100% left” candidates.
Parliamentary elections 2002

At the time of the first round of the Presidential elections the left united with the Front to win 54% of the vote. Despite the Le Pen effect and the 20% score of the far right, this unprecedented result was positive in the current relationship of forces as in the struggles to come. It confirms the rise of a radical vote which pursues the government with its legislative left. It shows the readiness of a significant part of the youth, young workers, and young people to punish the different components of the Jospin government from the left, while rejecting the right and the far right.

It bestows major responsibilities on the LCR and LO. In spite of the LCRR declaration that it was for the unity of the left, our opinion has not changed after the first round. Nationally, only the LCR and the LO have the capacity to present a clear alternative in the political landscape. A multiplication of candidates and competitive situations is necessary for everyone.

Therefore last week we proposed to Lutte Ouvrière last week that we discuss an agreement to divide up constituencies. This approach was confirmed by our central committee.

Such a sharing out of constituencies seems to be the most effective way, in view of the very short time left before the 2nd round. We would support an agreement, in our opinion, provided that it was a question of a common declaration dealing with the main issues in the election. The LO has been involved for some years in some departments in local agreements like "Lutte Ensemble a Gauche" (All together on the left) in Finistère (Brittany) or A Gauche Autrement (An Alternative on the Left) in the Rhone. These groupings should be included in this national approach and be written into the agreement. In its own constituencies, the LO will pursue its policy of openness towards those who identified with Olivier Besançon's campaign. (Translated from Rouge)

"No agreement" - LO

A letter from Lutte Ouvrière on the Parliamentary elections.

Following the LCR’s proposal for an agreement, to divide up seats in the forthcoming elections, we reprint from Rouge Lutte Ouvrière’s response, our subsequent reply to the LCR.

Dear comrades, China’s triumphal plateau complements the policies of the government in the plural left in the worst possible terms. While the results of the first round of the Presidential elections showed clearly that Le Pen would be very decisively beaten solely by the votes of the right, the whole of the left went to work picking up the shredding. Le Pen and in the name of a fight against a claimed fascist threat, prostituted itself for free to Chirac.

We believe that a deliberate choice on the part of the left could avoid any discussion of the causes of the loss of 2,488,554 votes for Jouvin and 1,672,458 votes for vaccines. The votes for Hue, i.e. a total loss of 4,160,914 votes. By diminishing the threat of Le Pen’s election to the Presidency of the Republic, which it knew perfectly well could not happen in today’s context, in evoking a non-existent fascist danger, the left has again sought on the one hand, to conceal the reduction in their vote among the popular classes, and on the other have transformed this failure into an advance for Le Pen. But their pressure was not enough. We are not the only ones, although you succeeded in not saying China’s name! You used up a resolution which took two or three rounds in order to satisfy each of your tendencies. Through opportunism by adapting to the milieu which surrounds you, you join me in alliance around Chirac. Your hypothetical call for a demonstration in the evening of the 5th May in order to wash your hands of your vote during the day doesn’t change anything.

Your contribution to Chirac’s election was derisory. Independently of your appeal, a large part of the far left electorate would have understood how difficult it is to give the pressure to vote for Chirac. But the fact is that in a situation which required telling the truth to the popular electorate, we are not listened to or not, you chose to lie to them, at the behoof of the Socialist, Communist, and Green Party leaders Hollande, Hue, and Masson.

You brought your minuscule support for a Chirac vote by presenting it, despite your denial, as a roadblock to Le Pen.

You will understand that in these conditions we will not respond to your proposals which would imply at least a certain political agreement. And we do not wish to endorse an attitude as opportunistic as yours.

As for your allies, for the agreement is supposed to extend to others than yourselves, we’re not even sure about them. You are not even sure of being able to convince them to participate in an agreement between the LCR and LO.

There is therefore no question of making out that our respective politics are neighbours while they are opposed.

While posing as activists for far left unity, against that which you call Lutte Ouvrière’s "sectarianism" — one word which you yourself used repetitively during the campaign which in the context created by the calisthenics against us which form a particular chord — your proposal was in some way hypocritical.

In numerous places, indeed, representatives including central representatives of your organization have already designated the LCR candidates in the legislative elections. In some cases candidates have been announced in every constituency in a department, while you were talking to us about dividing up departments between us. What credibility can you give a proposal for dividing up departments when all the evidence shows that you have begun to choose?

Therefore each of us must defend their own politics and then the morning of the votes will be clear!

With our revolutionary greetings,

Georges Kally and
François Druberg.

Our responsibilities

The response of the LCR to LO

Dear comrades,

Again you respond to a proposal from the LCR for unity by refusing to entertain it. However, we are in a situation which should make us perceive the necessity for far left unity.

Our two candidates Arlette Laguiller and Olivier Besançon gathered around 10% of the vote. That gives us a major responsibility in order to respond to the hope created.

We would have been able to consolidate and confirm the April 21 vote by putting forward a single candidate in each constituency who supports the main points of a programme which breaks with past politics, in front of the youth and the wage-earner.

The right will present united states of candidates, the government left too. With your refusal only the far left will be standing in competition with each other.

The main point you give is our position on the May 5 vote. You reproach us for having participated in a "republican front" while calling for a Chirac, but the reality is different.

We called for a fight against the far right is struggle, as well as at the ballot box. We called for an orderly vote against.

We were present on all the demonstrations.

Is it like this so for

Arlette Laguiller

taken for idiots; two million demonstra-
tors on May 1 were not fighting against a "phantom of the operaists", as you wrote in Lutte Ouvrière, but against an ideology which is spread in between neighbour-
hoods and workplaces and which repels them, more and more as you do. In the street the republican from Nice inhibited their con-
sciences.

We asked you a question about the Parliamentary elec-
tions which you have not answered: are you prepared to call for a vote, not for the right, but for a Communes, Socialist, or Green Party can-
didate against a fascist?

You also raised again the question of our "partners", i.e. those who find themselves within the framework of the "100% left" unity against the right and the policies of the left in government.

It is the very idea that others, who are not members of our organizations, but close to us, should wish to participate in this union so insuffi-
cient? With the support of 10% of the electorate, should LO and the LCR only discuss about themselves?

Than one must perhaps find the more boring explanation of your rejection in Lutte Ouvrière of 26th April, where G. Kally writes that: "In all the elections where there are no other stakes — as there could be for example in certain situations of electing Parliamentary rep-
resentatives — the presence of several far left candidates... is not a disadvantage but a bless-
ing."

Behind this lies a very specific conception of unity: you only conceive of it when it useful to gain electoral positions. In no other case do you understand the necessity.

For our part we think that the political situation is so spec-
ic and so grave that the unity of the left of the left is urgent. We will pursue this policy at the time of the Parliamentary elections and afterwards, despite your current refusal. We have never proposed to you a single party. We actively have different. We do not have "opposed orientations" as you write (why not a "class break" between us while you are at it).

Our two organizations have fought the politics of the plural left. We have proposed to you to take steps towards, in order to give back hope to millions of your people and wage-earners who look to us. You have shown less than an opportu-
nist. Like your sectarian-
ism, we will not abandon our desire for unity.

Framenoy

The secretary of the LCR

Political Bureau
A new political force in France

Olivier Besancenot

The presidential election in 2012 was a better taste in our mouths, with Le Pen at 20% and "super-lair" at 80%. Le Pen was not even re-elected to less than five million votes. Now, Chirac is going to rub our noses in the dirt, by emphasizing law and order and economic ultra-liberalism. Against the far-right and the "neoliberal" lobby, a rapacious governmental left will not measure up. The "unelected left" will fool no one. It will only represent the policies of the plural left and of the European Union, to the detriment of the political earthquake which the country has experienced.

A new political force is needed today, a party which breaks radically with all the policies pursued for too long by the authorities.

The LCR addresses the millions of electors, socialist activists, ecologists, and communists who wish to draw the balance sheet of the policies pursued by the left in government. We address everyone active in the trade unions and campaign organisations in order to discuss the programme and the concrete proposals.

Right now we call on everyone who wants to commit themselves to defending a real left in service of the majority of electors to take part in the "100% on the left" with the LCR and its partners. We deeply regret that LO has refused to join us in a common approach in the coming parliamentary elections.

The British far-left and the French elections

John Bulatit

I have been on many demonstrations, but never on anything like the 1 May in Paris. It was an exhilarating, exhausting and inspiring experience. The March was called to start from the Republique and try and get to the Place de la Bastille. People were packed together like sardines. And once started, one million people spread out over the entire octopus winding through every available street to reach the Nation. Looking at this great ocean of humanity, we noticed two things. Everyone seemed to be turning around, stretching on tiptoes, trying to gauge just how huge the crowd was. And as the numbers grew and grew, so did the confidence and the joy.

The second thing was the hats made of cardboard and banners. People had made them on their home computers, on the backs of newspapers, or just screwed slogans on paper with felt-tips. And the slogans more than anything else crystallized the mood in relation to the situation on the streets. All were variations on the theme that Chirac and Le Pen are not the fascist. Perhaps the best, hung out great to cheers on the Rennes 11th arrondissement sheet from one of the apartments along the route (Chirac - A Jasper et al Usage (Chirac a pun on Durers) (Jasper a pun of Jasper)

After these momentous events, I checked the websites of the British far left to see what they had to say about them. The sterility and sectarianism was quite staggering.

For example, the Socialist (1 May) argued: "Gaulois Revolutionnaire (the CFTC faction) is mobilising around the slogan "neither the fascist nor the crook". We shouldn't underestimate what Chirac would do if he won with 70% or more of the vote and we have to prepare now for the struggles to come." The only conclusion anyone can draw from this astonishing statement is that it would be best for Chirac to get less than 70% of the vote, which of course means that Le Pen would receive more than 30%. It is a quite incredible position to argue that it does not take much thought to see that such a result would have made the balance of forces more difficult in the 'struggles to come'.

The Socialist, like others, justified its abstention position on the basis that the legitimisation of Le Pen and the far right would be a win for the opposition to the capitalist policies which both advocate (26 April).

Of course, Chirac and Le Pen both represent capitalist policies. But if the content had been between Jospin and Le Pen, so would you say.

The Socialist and Le Pen both represent capitalist policies. But if the content had been between Jospin and Le Pen, so would you say.

One, I am willing to wager that they would have not.

The point is that for the millions who mobilised in France, Le Pen represented much else besides. Think what images his call for "transit camps" to store immigrants in before they are deported conjures up in a country that saw "transit camps" set up by the Nazis for the Jews and resistance fighters, before they were deported to the other form of camp - the death camps.

The FN may not be a classical fascist party. But it fought the elections on a classically fascist programme - openly threatening the democratic rights of the workers' movement, the left, the minorities, women and youth in France. As for Socio-Culturel Worker (4 May), the paper's line is ambiguous to say the least. But the interview with their French sister organisation strongly implies that an abstention is the best approach and, it should be remembered that the SWP's French group supported Lutte Ouvriere in the first round of the elections, against the less sectarian LCR campaign which raised centrally the anti-globalisation struggle.

And then there is the CGBP. According to Weekly Worker (2 May), the slogan "Vote escro, pas facho (vote for a crook, not a fascist)... plays into the hands of the ruling class because "a victorious victory for Chirac" would be claimed as "a vote of confidence in the current order." (Again, presumably, the CGBP thinks it would have been better for the gap between Chirac and Le Pen to have been narrower.)

But it is self-evident that the slogan, which was raised spontaneously by the youth, implies no illusions, or support for Chirac.

The very fact that hundreds of thousands took to the streets shows that they understood instinctively that the fascists would be defeated by the mass movement, and not simply at the ballot box. Otherwise, why take to the streets?

By arguing for a boycott of, whatever form, the British far left, like the Lutte Ouvriere in France, were in practice suggesting that the result of the second round did not matter.

But it is only necessary to pose the question as to why this mass movement has developed in the first place? The spark was the electoral success of Le Pen in the elections' first round - in other words, the threat of Le Pen winning the second round and becoming President of France.

That is why for those who mobilised the result of the second round was of critical importance. For the youth, who have grown in confidence as the demonstrations developed, who triggered the biggest demonstrations since the Liberation, the result was absolutely vital.

And their instinct was correct. If the FN had received 25%, 50% or 35%, then inevitably the dynamic behind the party would have been strengthened. In confidence there would have been a defeat. And the youth in France understand that - even if the Socialist, Weekly Worker and company do not.

The outlook on the demo in Paris and across France was that we are going to vote, not for Chirac, but AGAINST LE PEN. In that sense, the LCR's position in the French election crisis in Whisky Worker is not ambiguous but understood perfectly by all participating in the mass movement.

The idea that Chirac and his reactionary politics would be strengthened by a crushing defeat for Le Pen is an argument that at best completely misunderstands the situation in France, and at worst reveals a laughable contempt for the youth and others who have taken to the streets.

The right, of course, have been temperamentally strengthened in France, but not because of the vote against Le Pen but as a result of the experience of the Gauche Plurielle government's neo-liberal agenda and Jospin's humiliating defeat in the election's first round.

However, if a campaign along the lines suggested by British far-left and Lutte Ouvriere in France, had had some success, then leading to a higher percentage for the NF, that would have strengthened the right even further.

Chirac would have had even more freedom to carry out his right-wing agenda. He would have oriented even further towards the right to appease NF voters. And the pressure would be on the social movement to hold in check, because the argument would be that if you don't, there is the NF waiting in the wings.

Paradoxically, Chirac, although re-elected with 82% of the vote, is a weak-ened president. He received a historically low vote for a sitting president in the first round, and won his massive majority with the votes of the left in the second round. Perhaps the politics of abstention make some individuals feel that they have done their revolutionary duty by not voting for a bourgeois candidate. Although since when have Marxists been opposed on principle to voting for a bourgeois candidate when tactically it can advance the movement?

But the British far-left is once again demonstrating a sterile dogmatism, rather than looking to engage with a mass movement.
What’s so radical about Sinn Fein?

Joe Craig

I

n late March, Sinn Fein launched its campaign for the local elections with a rally in Dublin's Gresham hotel, at the same time as the Irish Labour Party was holding its conference. Both conferences focused on the issues immediately facing southern voters. What is the republic of Ireland doing to integrate the north of the southern state? Hardly different to becoming the poorest - greater assistance and funding for women in business.

Sinn Fein criticises the EU, but in almost every action it takes the attempt to strengthen the nation states comprising it. But the centralisation of the EU is taken as place in that there is no future for the indigenous national capitals in Europe without unity in competition with the USA and Japan. The Nice Treaty is only criticised for its impact on the 'politics of southern neutrality' not for its neo-liberal agenda.

Indeed the past Adams has financial and social costs for the rich, while Sinn Fein promises only a 'fair funding system', to be completed and implemented in the lifetime of the next government.

Since they also promise that 'inclusion' by those who should receive the same aid as foreign countries is also promised, it implied that corporation taxes are not to be increased.

In the past Adams has boasted of a fair distribution of corporate taxes in the south that should be introduced in the north. How exactly a new health service is to be created without cuts in funding for the rich is explained. At least the Labour Party is being clear about the problem and proposes a once-off 'creative accounting' style solution that was used in the last budget to postpone public expenditure cuts until after the election.

What both parties make clear, by omission rather by open declaration, is their attachment to a policy which sees multinational investment as the economic priority. Sinn Fein just makes more noise about helping indigenous capital, but since there are more and more, and more authoritative and dependent on the multinationals the effect could not help but be the same.

No mention is made by Sinn Fein of promoting the trade unions to break from the disastrous social partnership deals that have hobbled women's organisations for the best part of fifteen years.

Indeed their promise, like the Labour Party, to focus public spending on health, education and infrastructure development, with a new tax to finance it, would mean that it would be cut, would take place in a new 'partnership' with the trade unions and 'other representatives of the wider society'.

Their vision of equality is a utopian one of maximum local self-sufficiency, so that if Aid is to commit to a sustainable practice of local quality produce for local markets, and of 'equality' defined by each of the oppressed being given the opportunity to be the agent of the profession - greater assistance and funding for women in business.

Sinn Fein criticises the EU, but in action it demonstrates the 'common market' with the attempt to strengthen the nation states comprising it. But the centralisation of the EU is taken as place in that there is no future for the indigenous national capitals in Europe without unity in competition with the USA and Japan. The Nice Treaty is only criticised for its impact on the 'politics of southern neutrality' not for its neo-liberal agenda.

On 21 March Martin McGuinness announced spending of £10m on new school buildings, £3m through Public Private Partnerships (PPP), later PPP schemes will make serious inroads into school revenue budgets, making it even harder to tackle teacher shortages and over-sized classes.

"Education is a hugely labour-intensive service ... The only way these new buildings can be paid for, without significantly rating public spending, is by taking funding away from existing services and distorting local school budget priorities. This means lower not higher standards." (Public Finance Feb 6-8 2002)

These schemes aim to reduce government borrowing that might arise from the state building the new schools themselves. But the state has to pay back the costs of the new building to the private sector as if it had taken out a loan, except that the cost will be greater to allow the public companies to make a profit.

This is an attempt at what accountants call 'off-balance sheet' accounting: if the school is not financed by a loan the future cost does not appear in the government's books.

It was precisely such 'off-balance sheet' accounting that was involved in the Eason scandal when America's seventh largest company collapsed. On the day of the announcement of the school-building programme the Irish News reported that the Department of Education had spent £750,000 on consultancy costs for these PPP deals over the previous year.

The other major initiative of the Sinn Fein minister of education is the Burns report on the 11-pl plus, the means of selecting young children for either grammar school or secondary education.

The effect of this initiative so far has been to present a choice between the existing inconsistencies and a new system, and one that also fails to guarantee equality.

No wonder right wing politicians in the south, not to mention the British, have no reason to complain about Sinn Fein's performance in government. Government that said that they needed to be 'house trained'.

With all this in mind it is simply laughable to hear Gerry Adams say that "the real question is not, and never has been whether they (Fianna Fail etc) will go into government with us. The real question is whether we would go into government with them." Having gone into coalition government with Ian Paisley's DUP how could anyone believe that there would be the slightest problem supporting a Fianna Fail government in the south? Only the most blind of Sinn Fein members could possibly be deceived.

Sinn Fein does not represent any sort of alternative to working people in the south. They represent a dead end for anyone looking for a radical alternative to the corrupt politics of the southern establishment.

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Belfast Socialist Forum – a new socialist discussion group

A non-sectarian socialist discussion group has been set up in Belfast. Initiated by Socialist Democracy and supported by independent left activists and by a new organisation, the International Socialists, it is open to all socialists interested in debate and education in socialist ideas.

The depressing reality on the Irish left is of split organisations, endless pampering of mindless activists, dogmatic statements of ill-digested political positions and a light-headed dismissal of serious politics, that leads to constant swings of policy that can lead to organisations taking contradictory positions from one week to the next. This distrusts not only them, but also the standing of socialism in the working class. In its short life the group has discussed:

- The US ‘War on terror’
- The ‘anti-capitalist’ and ‘anti-globalisation’ movements
- The Communist Manifesto, and
- Theory and spontaneity in revolutionary politics.

The May debate is on the outcome of the abortion referendum. Decisions on discussions, activities and speakers are taken by open meetings of the forum, which is open to all socialist activists. Further details from the Socialist Democracy contact addresses.

John McGuffin

Death of an anarchist

The members of Socialist Democracy would like to note, with sadness, the death of John McGuffin. A founder member of the Peoples Democracy, fore-runner of Socialist Democracy, John was the spokesperson for anarchism in the NIO. He was also part of the early Loyalist Defence Committees. However we remained connected through John’s unwavering reportage of the hypocrisy and oppression involved in the continuation of the Northern state. He wrote prolifically. Two of his books, The Guinea Pigs, detailing British torture of interned and Internment, detailing the history of its own internment classics (at the time John had been the only Protestant interned). A man with a wicked sense of humour and a love of practical jokes, John was full of kindness. I remember especially a period in the 1970s when I was jailed under a system of Internment by remand and John went to great trouble to get me reading material. Much more recently I posted my first article on the internet. The first response, after a 20 year gap, was from John McGuffin, with words of congratulation and praise. Perhaps the greatest sign of John’s life was in its beginnings. A schoolmate of John’s, now Lord Kinnock, he had the opportunity to become a part of the unionist establishment. He rejected that and turned instead to the purity and honesty of revolution. John’s death reminds us that the beginnings of the troubles in the North of Ireland lay not in Catholic revolt, but in a youth revolt that crossed sectarian boundaries.

For the unionists biggest and their British masters the first priority was not to smash Catholic dissent but to break the young, Protestants who had emulated the flag of revolution. They never succeeded in breaking John.

John McAnulty

Palestinians fight on for right to return

Palestinians in the 1967 occupied Palestinian territories, over 50 percent of whom are refugees, are preparing to commemorate 45 years of displacement and dispossession - al-Nakba. At the same time they are beginning to assess the massive physical damage and destruction (estimated at over US $300 million) left in the hands of Israel’s most recent military campaign to crush indigenous resistance to the ongoing illegal military occupation and the denial of the right to self-determination.

Israel continues to deny Palestinian refugees, including internally displaced Palestinians, the right to return to their places of origin and recover their property inside Israel. A total of three-quarters of the indigenous Palestinian population are displaced either outside or inside their homeland.

All Israeli governments have denied displaced Palestinians the right to return, real property restitution and compensation in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (11 December 1948) and numerous recommendations by UN human rights bodies.

Since 1948 Israel has expelled more than 17 million dunams (17,000 sq. km.) of land owned by Palestinian refugees and nearly 1 million dunums owned by Palestinians inside Israel, including internally displaced Palestinians.

Moreover, Israel has further expropriated and/or controls some 4.7 million dunums in the 1967 occupied West Bank, eastern Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. In 1948 Palestinians owned more than 90 percent of the land in historic Mandatory Palestine.

Today, the indigenous Palestinian Arab population owns and controls just over 10 percent of the land within the borders of their historic homeland (i.e., inside Israel and the 1967 occupied territories).

At the same time, Israel has either expatriated or destroyed over 150,000 homes belonging to refugees displaced/expelled in 1948.

The primary reason why Israel refuses to allow the refugees to come home is that they are not Jewish.

For Israel’s political and military establishment, the death of hundreds of Israelis and more than a thousand Palestinians since September 2000 - and perhaps thousands more, as well as the mass destruction of Palestinian property is a price that it is willing to exact in order to impose a solution on the Palestinian people that preserves both, the post-1967 colonisation program in the occupied territories and the Jewish character of the Israeli state (i.e. a Jewish demographic majority and Jewish control of refugee lands).

At the time of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations at Camp David (July 2000) and Taba (January 2001) numerous Israeli politicians and analysts commented that violent confrontation, including war, was preferable to accepting the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their places of origin inside Israel.

In March 2002 Israel’s Prime Minister Sharon stated, “It won’t be possible to reach an agreement with the Palestinians before the Palestinians are hit hard. Now they have to be hit. If they aren’t badly beaten, there won’t be any negotiations. Only after they are beaten will they be able to conduct talks.” (Ha’aretz, 5 March 2002).

Israel has also argued, however, that because refugee homes have been destroyed or expropriated to house Jewish Israelis (referred to as ‘secondary occupation’) return is not possible.

In the early 1950s, for example, Israeli officials informed the UN Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP), mandated to facilitate a durable solution for the refugees based on General Assembly Resolution 194 (i.e., voluntary return, restitution, compensation), that “the individual return of Arab refugees to their former places of residence is an impossible thing. Their houses have gone, their jobs have gone.”

This argument has since become something of a mantra repeated not only by Israeli officials but also by international diplomats, analysts and academics. Writing in the May issue of Foreign Affairs (“The Last Negotiation: How to End the Middle East Peace Process”), for example, Hussein Agha, a Senior Associate Member of St. Anthony’s College, Oxford University, and...
Illegal occupation is upheld through brutal daily repression of Palestinians

Robert Malley, Director of the Middle East Program at the Hoover Institution, said, "Many of the refugees presumably want to go back to their original homes. But these homes, and indeed, in many cases, the entire villages where they were located, either no longer exist or are now inhabited by Jews."

The conclusion drawn is that while limited numbers of refugees may be able to return, "consistent with the exercise of Israel's sovereign powers over entry and resettlement locations," financial and other incentives will be needed to "persuade" the majority of the refugees (i.e., impose arbitrary restrictions on their basic human right to return) to "choose" some form of resettlement, rather than remain in a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip or in a third country.

Land transfers by the refugees has remained largely vacant; Jewish settlement construction has increased year on year, with numbers of urban centres, which include some Israeli Jews living on more than 36,000 km² of refugee land.

In light of this fact, the argument that the destruction (or even secondary occupation) of a Palestinian refugee camp outside of a Palestinian village, permanently negates the right to return and its right to exist is at best misinformed, if not delusional. No one has raised the argument, for example, that Israel's destruction of hundreds of Palestinian villages in the 1967 occupied Palestinian territories since the beginning of the al-Aqsa intifada negates the right of the home owner to continue living in his/her city, town or refugee camp.

Nor have such arguments garnered serious consideration in other refugee crises. In Kosovo 50 percent of the housing stock was destroyed, 65 percent in Bosnia and 80 percent in East Timor. In each of these cases the international community supported the right of refugees and displaced persons to return to their places of origin.

The legal solution to the problem of damaged or destroyed housing is rehabilitation and reconstruction.

For additional information contact: Association for the Defense of the Rights of Internally Displaced in Israel: solomon.tahhan@gmail.com


Israel: above the law for 54 years?

Veronica Fagan
"One and Jinn - What Kind of Deal Did Bush Strike?" was an editorial published in the US press (Minneapolis Star Tribune, 20 Apr 2002).

The same question is asked in the Jenin refugee camp and by all those in Palestine and elsewhere who know that justice and respect for human rights and international law are the key to the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict between Israel and the Palestinian people.

The Israeli government eventually surrendered to this demand by US President Bush and relinquished its request for the extradition of the six prisoners allegedly involved in the killing of Israeli Minister of Tourism Rehavam Zeevi and in arms smuggling for the Palestinian Authority.

The six were transferred from Palestinian Authority's Ramallah compound to a Palestinian prison in Jericho, where they were held by US and British troops dispatched for that purpose.

Thus, Palestinian President Arafat had finally succeeded in leaving the Ramallah compound where he had been held since March 29th by the Israeli army.

Subsequent to six weeks of siege of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem was ended, but on the basis that 13 Palestinians had been killed (excluded from the by the Arab-Israeli funeral, the fifth hours, the Ramallah, Al-Aqsa - church compound, the death of 29 by the Israeli army.

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Reaction of the Dutch Socialist Workers Party (SAP) to the death of Piem Fortuny

We condemn the murder of Piem Fortuny. An act of this kind can never be a contribution to achieving the society of solidarity and freedom that we are fighting for.

Piem Fortuny's idea was far removed from our ideas. Fortuny tried to mobilise people, not only on the basis of their 'alienation', discontent with the political situation, but also on the basis of irrational prejudices, such as: the Netherlands is full and has no room left for immigrants and people on disability benefits are doing too well, and women should go back to the kitchen. We have been working in recent months against Fortuny's ideas in words, in writing and on the streets. We strongly condemn any implication that Fortuny's left-wing opponents have contributed to creating an atmosphere that led to the murder.

Fortuny's programme and public statements made, and many others, argued and determined to continue fighting for solidarity and against racism.

Fortuny had made a mistake to take advantage of the death, just as that occurred after the September 11 attacks. We will continue to speak out.

The conservative daily De Telegraaf is trying to criminalise the left. They are using the murder of young Moroccans to react to Fortuny's death for the sole purpose of expressing at the fact that they are not upset enough.

Now more than ever in the coming days and months, we must fight in large numbers and with renewed energy for a social, multicultural Netherlands - before, during and after the elections. Fortuny's 'typical' polemics could well lead to an even greater lurch to the right.

We call on all the more urgently on everyone to vote for one of the left-wing parties: the Socialist Party or the Green Left.

Since the municipal elections in March we have been active in mobilising and organising for the demonstration on May 11 in Rotterdam under the slogan 'Not One Vote for Racism'.

We support the decision of the organisation committee. Nederlands Bevrijdingskruis, to cancel this demonstration, because holding the demonstration before the elections would be counterproductive and would not help build a broad movement against racism.

The decision not to hold the demonstration does not mean that we are sitting out the far right, which had already announced a counter-protest.

The SAP is non-violent. Not does it mean that we think action for a multicultural society is not needed, but the contrary.

Now more than ever in the coming weeks and months we must continue fighting in large numbers and with renewed energy for a social, multicultural Netherlands.

Socialist Workers Party (SAP)
email: redaction@grazhekbo.org
website: http://www.grazhekbo.org

SO: How would you characterise Fortuny?
PD: It's not so easy to characterise him politically because he was very contradictory.

The most right-wing policies he put forward were undoubtedly to the right of a section of the Dutch trade unions: he was for the abolition of the Geneve Convention so that not one single more refugee would get into Holland for an example.

But then just before he died he called for an amnesty for "illegal" immigrants already in the country.

He said that health and education were in a dreadful state - which they are - and then said that his solution was not to spend a single euro more but to sack the whole load of managers.

He was in favour of the abolition of the monarchy - but then used events like the recent Royal Wedding. He called for the army and the air force to be abolished because he said that the strength of the Netherlands was a naval power - but then he said that he would vote to buy the latest super fighter planes.

As a person he was also contradictory. He started out being quite left wing and ended up on the right.

It was ambitious - he also came over as being rather lonely.

There is also clear is that while he had these ambivalences, this was not true of others at the top of his party - who would still be left behind.

If they form a coalition as they have done in Rotterdam with the Christian Democrats and the VVD (right wing secular party) following the recent municipal elections, we will end up with the most right-wing government we have had for more than 30 years.

50: Fortuny was openly gay. How did this play?
PD: I suppose it was a new trivialising factor. People said, well he can't be that bad if he's gay... He also used his homosexuality in a cynical way - saying he couldn't be racist because he liked Morroccan men!

SO: Immediately after Fortuny's death, there was a discussion about whether the election should be postponed. Was the decision to go ahead controversial?
PD: Yes it certainly was - particularly with the current head of the Socialist Party (!). But once Fortuny's party said they wanted to go ahead the government felt it had no alternative - they feared that there would be riots otherwise.

Despite the contradictions of both Fortuny and those that have mourned his death, there can be no doubt that his murder has already resulted in a shift to the right.

A far right party has been outflurering in Rotterdam calling for a ban on the far left. People, especially in the predominantly working class, but also in the anti-racist movement and on the left have had death threats.

50: There has been quite a lot of coverage in the media of the demonstrations in the wake of his death. What has it been like living through this?
PD: I think it will take weeks, even months to fully untangle the different strands of all the following.

One of the specifically Dutch phenomenon - these gatherings have been in the tradition of "masses against senseless violence".

A number of times in recent years people, not famous people or politicians, just ordinary people, have been killed - usually on the streets late at night, sometimes after arguments.

Then there have been silent marches to protest - to protest against the kind of thing happening in our country. And some of this has carried through into the Fortuny situation.

On top of this it's been a cross between the aftermath of September 11 the response to Princess Di's death. The mobilisations have been enormous, and very mixed politically and socially.

I have seen and read about many people who came out who said that they didn't support his ideas, that they wouldn't vote for his party, but that he didn't deserve to die.

But then there were people like the guy who said he had been going to vote for the Socialist Party, but now he was going to vote for Fortuny's party. So there is no doubt that the right hope to capitalise on his death at the polls.

50: The Socialist Party is a far left, ex-Moscow Party - currently in the government but will to the left of the Dutch Labour Party which is the largest party in the current Parliament.

1: The Socialist Party is a far left, ex-Moscow Party - currently
Revolutionary artist who sided with Trotsky

André Breton and the politics of Surrealism

When André Breton spoke to a packed meeting of students and intellectuals in Port-au-Prince in December 1945 on the philosophy of surrealism, he inadvertently sparked off an upsurge which led to the overthrow of the Haitian government a few days later. As Breton himself pointed out, the country in any case was ripe for revolt, with the bulk of the population living in grinding poverty under a repressive regime. But this incident undoubtedly reinforced his belief that raising thewatchword of liberty could constitute a revolutionary act.

Surrealist engagement with political struggle has a long history. The movement's emergence from the nihilism of Dada was marked by the dawn of a new political consciousness within its ranks. Faced with the attack on the Rif tribemen by the French government in 1925, Breton's circle published the first of many collective tracts denouncing "... we profoundly hope that revolutions, wars, colonial insurrections, will annihilate this Western civilisation." This statement was followed by a series of consistent and principled interventions on all the major political issues of the day throughout the twenties and thirties.

After the Second World War, which dispersed the movement and led to widespread re-groupings, the surrealists renewed their assault on Western imperialist pretensions. Breton signed the "Manifesto of the 121" against the French war in Algeria, and declared that "the cause of the Algerian people, which has contributed in decisive fashion to the overthrow of the colonial system, is the cause of all free men.

They continued to agitate against war, exploitation and clericalism.

Following Breton's death in 1966 the movement again fragmented, but remained influential in the areas of idee fixe. The Paris salons of May 1968 were "Long live the surrealist revolution" and "All power to the imagination".

 Surrealist groups, which had existed at one time or another in countries as diverse as Japan, Yugoslavia, Martinique and Czechoslovakia, began to spring up once again, and inevitably made new interventions around the struggles of the day. In recent times they have promoted against the attack on the rights of indigenous peoples, the war against Afghanistan, and the rise of facism in France.

But it is the surrealists' involvement with Trotsky which most sharply catches the imagination. The abrupt shift towards a revolutionary political stance in the twenties had its roots in Breton's reading of texts by Lenin and Trotsky, which convinced him of the heroic nature of the Bolshevik uprising and of the need for proletarian revolution.

There followed several years of stormy relations with the French Communist Party, whose reactions on art ideas and literature - not to mention their impassioned attacks on the surrealists' desire to maintain their own separate group - ensured that the marriage would not be a happy one. The adoption successively of the absurd doctrines of "proletarian literature" and "socialist realism" by the Stalinists widened the rift.

It was the Moscow show trials which prompted the surrealists to come out openly against Stalin, characterising the trials as "an abject police enterprise which for purposes that of the Reichstag fire", and their perpetrators as "the great regenerator and principal enemy of the proletarian revolution."

But Breton and his supporters were active in building support for Trotsky and the other victims of Stalin's purges. In Spain, where a number of surrealists went to fight for the republicans, their sympathies were with the POUM and the anarchists.

In 1938 Breton travelled to Mexico on the pretext of a French cultural mission to meet Trotsky. He was deeply moved by the heroic isolation of the great revolutionary: "I saw him as that man who placed his genius in the service of the greatest cause I know...I saw him at the side of Lenin and later, as the only one continuing to defend Lenin's ideas. I saw him standing alone among his fallen comrades...accused of the greatest crime possible for a revolutionary, threatened every hour of his life, delivered up to blind hatred..." and yet, what self-control, what certainty of having lived in perfect accord with his principles, what great courage!"

It was during this visit that Breton and Trotsky wrote the "Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art" which has since become the classic statement on the subject of art and class struggle.

The manifesto was designed both as a vigorous rejection of Stalinist attempts to impose military discipline in the cultural sphere, and as a rallying cry for writers and artists who supported the class struggle but were not prepared to accept Communist Party hegemony. The necessity of facilitating the development of an independent proletarian revolutionary art is made clear: "In the name of artistic creation, the imagination must escape from all constraint...To those who would urge us... to consent that art should submit to a discipline which we hold to be radically incompatible with its nature, we give a flat refusal, and we repeat our deliberate intention of standing by the formula complete freedom of art."

How different from the prescriptive formulations of the Communist Party's cultural bureaux, and from the assertion of the surrealist renegade Louis Aragon, recently converted to Stalinism, to eschew the avant-garde in favour of "writing the Stalinist truth"?

Publication of the Manifesto was followed by the setting up of an embryonic revolutionary artists' organisation, the F.I.A.R.I., which however failed to flourish in the worsening political climate of the late thirties. The outbreak of war put paid to the experiment.

The impact that the collaboration with Trotsky and the infusion of revolutionary socialist ideas had on Breton lasted for the rest of his life. He fought a principled, and at times bitter, struggle within his own circle against deflections to both right and left. Salvador Dalí, whom the surrealists nicknamed Avida Dollars ("greedy for cash"), is the best known of those who sold out to commercialism.

But in a sense the defections to Stalinism were far more damaging; Breton lost his closest allies, Aragon and the poet Paul Eluard, to the French CP. Even after the "occultation" of the surrealist movement in the post-war period, Breton's insistence on the link between surrealism and the fight for proletarian emancipation remained as strong as ever.

The potency of this link can be judged from the fact that even today, politics is written out of the accounts of surrealism which we find in the media, in the groves of academe (and perhaps above all) in the art world.

The recent exhibition of surrealist work, "Desire Unbound", at the Tate Modern in London paid Breton and his comrades a backhanded compliment when (as Andrew Kennedy pointed out in his recent review) it omitted any serious reference to the political surrealism from what was supposed to be a definitive account of the movement's opponent.

Even Breton's translator and biographer, Mark Polizzotti, who seems to have established a monopoly position for himself in the publication of Breton's work, manages to combine political illiteracy with a third-rate apology to his subject's revolutionary views.

If it is the relationship with Trotsky and the political engagement of the surrealists as a collective which is most immediately striking, there is another aspect to the relationship which is instructive - the implications it had for revolutionary politics which should not be overlooked.

If one looks for the driving force behind the surrealists' move to the left in the early thirties, it lies not only in their reading of Lenin and Trotsky, but also in the profoundly revolutionary atmosphere which was produced by the creative process itself.

And the heart of surrealism is the belief in the creative potential of every human being, and a conception of a post-revolutionary society in which the role of artists as specialists will wither away.

The surrealists saw themselves as technicians of the imagination, developing a series of techniques - some borrowed from other disciplines, some with an innovative - which would enable non-specialists to tap into this well against the imagination located in the unconscious mind.

They were the researchers of Sigmund Freud but rejected therapeutical applications in favour of the creative technique of a means of exploration. Their toolkit included experiments in automatic writing and drawing, the use of hypnosis and trance, collective writing and an arrangement of image collage, found images and objects.

They investigated objective chance, occultism, ecstasies, dreams, tribal art and contemporary non-objectionable - image collage, found images and objects.

They investigated objective chance, occultism, ecstasies, dreams, tribal art and contemporary non-objective art in which - to quote the words of their hero Isidore Ducasse: "poetry should be made by all."

Breton realised that this specifically surrealist revolution could never be accomplished within class society. Under capitalism, such techniques would be the preserve of a privileged few.

"Surrealist activity," he stated, "had to cease being content with itself; it had to reorient itself, not intellectually but socially, to change its basis, rather than to change its form." The surrealists had to reorient themselves in order to create the social conditions in which the imagination could regain its right to life.

The surrealists joined the revolution.

Jay Woolrich runs the surrealism website www.surrealism.co.uk and is a member of the Leicester Surrealist Group.

(1) Quoted in Helen Lewis, "Dada and Surrealism", Phoenix Publishers, 1988. Several of the quotes used here can also be found in Lewis's book.
(2) Originally published under the name "Theatre of Desire". The text has since been released (and acknowledged) as Trotsky was Breton's main inspiration.
(3) "The text can be found on the website at www.surrealism.co.uk in the Theory section."
Workers' power in Paris

The dictatorship of the proletariat

The Commune was elected on March 26, and the Central Committee regressed and handed over power to it two days later.

The politics of the members of the Commune were by and large of two camps, the Blanquist and the Proudhonist-Leninists. These were the Second of two articles by Matthew Jones

International Working Men's Association, the First International set up by Marx and Engels. The Blanquist, followers of Louis-Auguste Blanqui (1805-1881), believed that militarism would be freed from wage slavery not by means of an armed struggle, but through a conspiracy by a small minority of intellectuals. They lost sight of the need for a successful uprising and ignorance the working class and peasantry.

The Proudhonists were socialists of the small peasants and self-employed master-craftsmen. In keeping with this, they believed in a form of cooperation in which each worker would be his own means of production, his tools. They abhorred mass organisation of the working class against the employers, seeing it as unnatural other than in the "exceptional" case of large workplaces.

Even in Paris, a large center of both working and middle classes, large enterprises were becoming the rule rather than the exception. Circumstances, and the involvement of the mass of proletarian Parisians, forced the Commune to take steps to break them up.

The Commune was a majority Blanquist and most of its delegates working class.

Twenty-five working class delegates, including 12 members of the International were elected on March 26. Subsequent elections on April 16 brought in more socialist delegates including Marx's son-in-law Lorge. The members of the International were responsible for most of the economic measures of the Commune. The ministry of Trade and Labour was headed by a German revolutionary, Frankel, the Post Office and the Mint and distribution offices, (towards the end of the Commune) finance were all handled by the International.

In keeping with its role at the head of an entirely new form of state, the Commune was an entirely new type of body. All delegates were subject to recall by the constituents at any time.

Executive body

The Commune was no more Pauline than the executive body, its members had to carry out its own policies, breaking down an important barrier between people and state.

In addition, the Commune declared that all workers, artisans, administrators and teachers would be elected and subject to recall by their constituents.

As Marx put it: "Instead of deciding once in three or six years which member of the ruling class was to represent and express the people in parliament, universal suffrage was to serve the people constituted in Communes, as individual suffrage serves every other employer in the search for workers, foremen and accountants for his business." (Quoted in Lenin, State and Revolution).

And Lenin himself comments: "The Commune substitutes for the venal and rotten parliamentarism of bourgeois society institutions in which freedom of opinion and discussion does not degenerate into degradation, for the Parliamentarians themselves have to work, have to execute their own laws, have to serve themselves to see the results achieved in reality, and to account directly to their constituents." This workers' democracy, developed and tested through the experience of the Commune and the Russian Revolution, is a key element in every genuine revolutionary socialist programme.

The basis for the establishment of this new workers' state was the destruction of the old fundamentally capitalist one. The last act of the Central Committee of the National Guard was the abolition of the notorious Paris "Morality Police"; the first act of the Commune on March 30 was to abolish conscription and the standing army, plus the old state administerable.

The army was replaced by the National Guard in which all citizens capable of bearing arms were to be enrolled. The state as the repressive machine of the minority bourgeoisie was replaced by the armed people, i.e. the majority, armed to repel the counter-revolutionary minority.

It is still necessary to suppress the bourgeoisie and crush their resistance. This was particularly necessary for the Commune, and one of the reasons for its defeat was that it did not do this with sufficient determination. The organ of suppression, however, is here the majority of the population, and not a minority, as was always the case under slavery, serfdom and wage slavery. And since the majority of the people itself suppresses its oppressors, a "special force" for suppression is no longer necessary! In this sense, the state begins to wither away."

(Frankel, State and Revolution).

Lenin saw the Commune as a first step towards a classless Communist society in which no repressive state apparatus need exist.

Workers' wage

Two additional measures completed the new state. The first was the decision on April 1 that all state employees including the members of the Commune themselves should be paid at not less than 6,000 francs (i.e. working men's wages) thus preventing any form of careerism at the expense of the state.

The second was the abolition of all state payments for religious purposes on April 1 and on April 8 the removal of the church from the state, the dissolution of the police force from mysticism.

The Commune was able to manage with roughly a quarter of the number of functionaries employed by the old Second Empire, and moreover it paid them at most a salary barely amounting to one fifth of what Professor Huxley put forward as a minimum for a secretary to a metropolitan school board.

"The Commune made that catchword of bourgeois revolutions 'cheap government', a reality by destroying the two greatest sources of expenditure the standing army and state functionaries."

(Marx, The Civil War in France)

This had its effect. Shortly after the National Guard seized power in Paris there were risings in Marseilles, Lyons, Dijon and other places, attempting to set up Communes along the lines of Paris.

Federaion

The Paris Commune's own programme was for a national federation of urban and rural Communards along the same lines as in Paris with a Federal body made up of representatives from all the communes to be convened in Paris as the central authority.

The rising in the cities were suppressed, but the real fear of Thiers and his lackeys was that the programme of the Commune might reach the French peasant. The peasants had been ground down by taxation (it was they, the majority who paid for the excesses of the Second Empire) and in the weight of the state bureaucracy. The Commune promised the peasants freedom from the tax burden, from the petty state officials and gendarmes who under Communal rule would be elected by and responsible to the population, and from the superstitions of the priests in the - schools.

"The Rurals - this was in fact their chief apprehension - knew that three months' free communification of Communal Paris with the peasants, and the general rising of the peasants, and hastening trial by jury to try men according to police blockade around Paris, so as to stop the spread of the rinderpest."

(Marx, ibid., p.61).

Before going on to discuss the economic reforms of the Commune it is necessary to say a word about its financial policies. As being surrounded on its Eastern and Northern fronts by hostile German armies, the Commune called on a German socialist, Frankel, as Minister of Labour.

In addition, several Polish revolutions were incited by a fellow, who was a general, served in the Polish state, and in the Polish Senate all foreigners elected to the Commune were confirmed in office with the words "the flag of the Commune is the Flag of the World Republic" (quoting Lenin), a condonation and the task of the Democratic Dictators.

The Commune lifted the financial burden imposed by the big bourgeoisie and May 12 Second Empire on the working class and the petty bourgeoisie. It declared on March 30 that all persons renting dwellings from houses from October 1700 to April 1721 and all rents already made would be looked for as rent. At the same time it also defered the debts of the small shopkeepers and tradesmen and provided for the foreclosures on their mortgages. The sale of all articles pledged in the municipal loan office (the state pawnshop) was stopped.

For the workers, the Commune outlawed the fines imposed by employers to claw back part of the meagre wages they paid. Night work makers was abolished on April 20, and the employment offices, previously run by agents of the police, were handed over to the Mayoralty of the twenty arrondissements (districts) of Paris. April 30 saw the closure of the pawnshops as private exploitation of the right of the workers to their investments of Labour and to credit.

Workers control

A start was made on workers' control of industry. On March 16 the Commune ordered a list to be made out of all the factories by the employers - and called for the participation of trade unions and all employees and workers of all kinds to work out plans to run them.

The possession of the symbols of the previous power was started by the 157th Battalion of the National Guard, who dragged out the guillotine and publicly burnt it amid great rejoicing.

The great victory column on the Place Vendome, cut from guns captured by Napoleon was ordered to be demolished because it served as a symbol of chauvinism and an incitement to national hatred; this was decided by the Commune.

The Chapel of Atomeum built in the time of the execution of Louis XVI by the revolutionary Jacobins suffered the same fate. But in their place a monument to the soldiers of the Royalist and Republican armies were put up.

They remained standing outside the Bank of France, centrepiece of the old regime. But if they had seized it, they could have imposed their own central bank, offering cheap credit to workers and the petty bourgeoisie including the peasants. In the event, they bought the French bourgeoisie to promise to stop the Revolution and allow them the services of the Bank.

Militarily and politically the Commune lacked the resources of purpose to win an insurrection. After seizing power in Paris on
March 18 the leadership went on the offensive against the skirmishes of the Versailles Rurals instead of delivering the deathblow to the crippled bourgeoisie. Even if the problems posed for the “Party of Order” were massive. The municipal elections of April 27 in the 35,000 remaining French communes elected 700,000 councilors — of whom less than 8,000 were supporters of the assorted Royalties and even those few which made up the majority of the Versailles National Assembly. This deprived the “Rurals” of their last claim to represent France in crushing the Commune.

Bismarck

Bismarck chose his moment to intervene — signing a puppet treaty with the National Assembly in Frankfurt on May 10. The conditions included the release of the Prisoners of War held by the Prussians — for the specific purpose of the Paris workers. This was signed by the Assembly on May 18.

In just 10 days French troops gained entry to the city and eight days of slaughter began. Men, women and children fought on the barricades as the bourgeoisie army moved across the city, culminating in the last stand in the cemetery Pere la Chaise. The firing squads used mitraillasses to annihilate over 20,000 men, women and children of the Commune. Their monument is the “Wall of the Federals” (so called because one demand for a Federal Communist state) or “Wall of Communards” in the center where the last atrocities were carried out.

Some escaped. Fifteen thousand were deported to New Caledonia. Many made their way through the Prussian lines with assistance of the Prussian soldiers. Marx’s epitaph for the Commune was: "Working men’s Paris with its Commune, will be for ever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society. Its martyrs are enshrined in the great heart of the working class. Its exterminators’ history has already called to that eternal pillory from which all the prayers of their priests will not avail to redeem them." (Marx, The Civil War in France).

The Commune’s political tasks were largely democratic in nature, carrying out the tasks of the 1789 bourgeois revolution. It freed the system from the fetters of religion, the people from the fetters of usury and crippling taxation, and opened up democracy for the masses.

But its driving force was the working class allied to the petty bourgeoisie and extending the arm of international solidarity made up of the majority of the French population.

In this way it exemplified the fight for what Marx called International Proletarian Revolution, with the working class carrying forward the democratic revolution as a part of the fight for socialism.

The measures carried out by the Paris workers: regulation of employment; abolition of unsocial hours; the workers’ takeover of parts of manufacturing industry, were what Lenin called a minimum socialist programme.

Bolshevik revolution

The true heirs of the Paris Commune were the Bolsheviks of 1917. Lenin wrote The State and Revolution in August and September 1917 using the lessons of the Commune to urge opposition to the bourgeois Provisional Government, a minority of power in Russia, the smashing of the state machine, and carrying into its full flower the Commune’s embryo programme.

In 1919 Engels wrote an introduction to The Civil War in France to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Commune.

He used it to argue against the reformist attitudes then creeping into the Social Democratic (revolutionaries of the time still called themselves Social Democrats). His closing words were:

"Of late the Social-Democratic philosophy has once more been filled with wholesome terror at the words: Dictatorship of the Proletariat. "Well and good, gentlemen, do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.”

Eddie Coles (1937-1002)

Militant trade unionist and revolutionary socialist

Alan Thornett

Eddie Coles, who recently died at 100, was a highly respected figure very much outside his native Oxfordshire. But Eddie was a rare breed — a true trade unionist.

He lived in the Cotswold town of Shipston-on-Northam, 20 miles from Oxford, and had worked on the assembly line in the Cowley car factories continuously for 38 years until his retirement in 1988.

Eddie and I were the same age, and both started our working lives as farm labourers. I first got involved in trade union work in 1956, but Eddie must have been 10 years ahead of me. Eddie was a member of the National Union of Wokers, the Shop Stewards movement and I went into the army. After that we both started work in Cotswold towns, Shipston on Northam, summer of 1959. He started as a time worker on the Nuffield tractor and I worked on the assembly line of the Morris Oxford, which was just going into production at the time. I started as a forklift truck driver, then moved up to being a shop steward.

We both participated in the building of the trade union movement in the period during the mid-1960s and Eddie in the early 1970s. By that time the shop stewards movement in the plant had developed into a powerful force and controled many aspects of the functioning of the plant. It was forcing up wages and improving conditions year on year.

Eddie never held a position in the union above shop steward, but the role he played was more important than that of many who did hold promotion positions. The words "amazing hero" spring readily to mind. He, and others like him, were the shock of the communist movement in the plant. He was always there, always standing by his principles, and always ready to help and defend his fellow workers.

It was a militant period with strikes in the plant running because of a new worker’s contract called strike action — in one of the many negotiations with management. Eddie Coles’ shop steward would be one of the first to call him.

When the T&G officials led by Jones removed the left from the leadership of the plant in 1974 and replaced it with right-wingers, Eddie was amongst those who continued the struggle for a militant trade union. He was in the thick of the battles against the so-called "workers’ participation" plan introduced into British Leyland in the mid-1970s.

When four shop stewards in the North Works, etc., the militant part of the plant at that time, were famously victimised by management after Jack Jones called militant shop stewards "the enemy within", Eddie was amongst the group of North Works shop stewards who came to their defence in a bitter battle not only with management but with right-wing officials within the T&G.

When the left retook the T&G union shop stewardship soon afterwards in a spectacular victory against the right. Eddie was in the forefront of the campaign for the vote. When the wages struggle broke out in BL in the early 1980s Eddie’s was a part of the struggle to get the strike vote of the membership implemented by the full-time officials.

When I won my first book of the plant in the mid-1980s (after I had been victimised out of the plant in 1982) I met him to discuss several of the chapters and asked him how things were going.

He said that it was a constant battle, and at times he could hardly face another drive into the plant and another confrontation with management. But he always did it, he said, it was hardly ever lost a day. In the latter part of the 1980s and into the 1990s, with the right-wing back in control of the plant and attacking the left, Eddie never compromised his principles or cared in no-agenment as many others did.

The picture of him was always with a group of workers around him in the canteen at lunchtime discussing problems.

The legacy Eddie leaves behind is one of political trade unionism. He comes from a generation which produced a strong shop stewards and trade union movement. But Eddie was outstanding because he became political and worked from the basis of a socialist analysis of society. That is what allowed him to stick to his principles as others fell by the wayside.

There is now a generation of younger workers who have not had the experience of that militant period, and it is for those that the legacy of Eddie and his generation is so important.

Eddie’s political life was not just in the car factory. He was a member of the Labour Party and an active member of the Labour left, and a part of a militant tradition in the Chipping Norton area which goes back to Joseph Arch and the struggles of the Chipping Norton agricultural labourers. He remained a Marxist in the Labour Party (and chair of the Chipping Norton constituency) until quite recently, when he could not stand New Labour any longer.

He was also involved in local campaigning in Oxfordshire, whether it was defending asylum seekers, opposing privatisation, or defending hospitals against closure. Not long before his death he was in Oxford at a meeting of Labour Against the War. In all these Eddie was sorely missed.

He is survived by a son and a daughter and his wife Eve, who is still a member of the ILP and a formidable campaigner against the effects of the policies of new Labour especially in defence of social services and elderly care.
Boycott Israeli goods! No arms to Zionist regime!

March for Palestine: London, Saturday May 18
Assemble 12 noon Speakers Corner (Marble Arch tube). Rally in Trafalgar Square

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