

Socialist

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OUTLOOK

No to Tory policies!

Millions of people voted Labour at the last General election in 1997, enthusiastic at the prospect of getting rid of the hated Tories.

But instead of listening to the aspirations of the majority of those voters, new Labour has continued with Tory policies and driven them through in areas that even their predecessors did not dare to venture.

- Blair's policies have seen a widening gap between rich and poor

- New Labour has carried through and planned privatisation in new areas – from housing to air traffic control

- Tuition fees have been imposed on students, and grants abolished

- Jack Straw has attacked asylum seekers and is threatening to tear up the 1951 Geneva Convention

- Despite refusing to make a clear statement, Blair backs Bush's "son of Star Wars" project, which threatens to trigger a new arms race

Blair's New Labour government will be comfortably returned on June 7 – winning votes from traditional Tory voters, whose own party is in deep crisis.

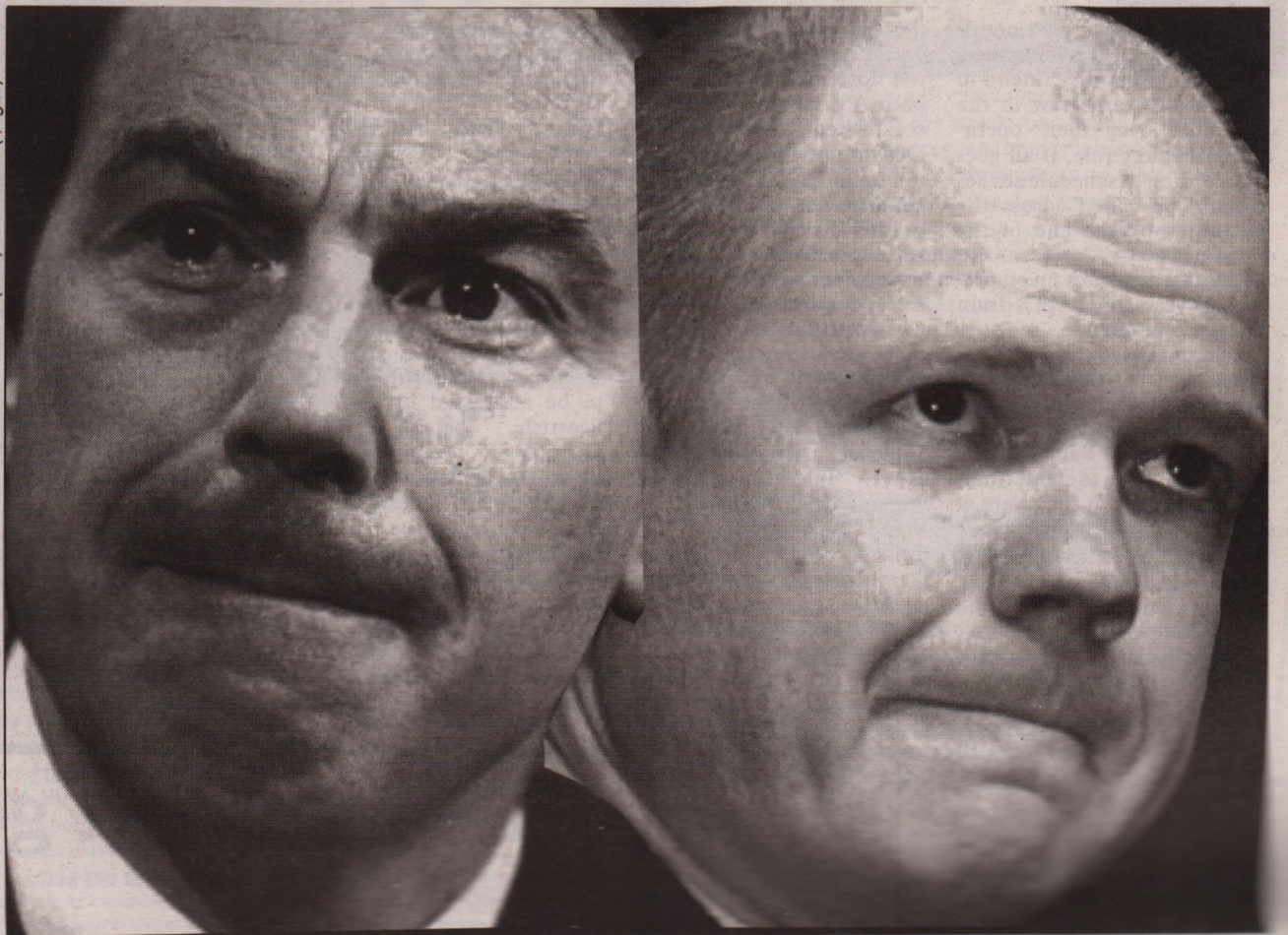
Many working class people on the other hand will vote for new Labour with a heavy heart. Keeping the Tories out rightly remains a central preoccupation – even though they are not a short term threat.

But building an effective opposition to Tory policies – whether they are put forward by Hague or Blair – must be the priority for socialists.

That opposition now has a focus at the ballot box as well as on the streets and in the workplaces.

The Scottish Socialist Party and the Socialist Alliance, together mounting the biggest left wing challenge to Labour in living memory, offer a voice to the voiceless at this election.

That is a huge step forward.



Andrew Widad (Blair) John Harris (Hague)

Vote Socialist!

Crow's surrender angers hi-jacked tube workers

Greg Tucker

Tony Blair wants to clear the decks before the general election is called. The controversy over London Underground is an issue he wants out of the way.

London Labour MPs are increasingly worried that PPP is a millstone round their necks. So whilst Blair was busy doing deals with Kiley and Livingstone, John Monks was pressed into service to try to convince the RMT to drop their opposition to tube privatisation.

Rather than take the opportunity to push through tube workers demands, Bob Crow has given in. Offered a deal which purports to give tube workers a guaranteed "job for life" Crow forced through the RMT executive the postponement of the strike called for May 3. A consultation

meeting with RMT reps on May 8 will be asked to settle the dispute on this basis.

Tube workers are angry that their dispute has been hijacked, particularly when it emerged that Crow had been in secret talks with Monks with even the RMT full time organiser for LUL kept in the dark.

They are furious that on the executive he was forced to use the EC rep for Scotland to move the resolution to suspend the action, against the wishes of the LUL rep.

Crow must realise that the "jobs for life" offer is useless. It answers none of the safety issues on which members were successfully balloted. Indeed up until last week Crow had argued against the likes of the *Evening Standard* that this dispute was not about "jobs for life".

Even on its own terms the offer does not stand up. Even if the necessary formulas were placed in the new PPP contracts they would be difficult to enforce.

In any case, the experience of the other engineering contracts run on the mainline railway, by the same contractors, shows the problem. With a turn over of staff, within a short period those formally protected start to lose out to new staff on worse conditions. It becomes progressively easier for management to run roughshod over their formal rights.

The Kiley deal gives no protection either. Whilst details are still sketchy at the time of writing, it seems that all the caution we have expressed in previous issues has been justified.

Kiley says he will continue with the judicial review of



Feeling lucky? Travel by tube is set to become even more risky as Prescott forces on with privatisation

Prescott's PPP plans, but he will also be sitting down with the government's preferred bidders. He might be satisfied with a form of unified management which still leaves RMT members transferred into the clutches of this collection of rogues.

This will still mean safety is compromised and tube workers jobs and conditions put at risk.

RMT members are mobilising for their "consultation" meeting. They would do well to give Bob Crow and the RMT executive a simple message.

Don't make things easy for Blair and Prescott - the only way to win is to keep up the pressure with further strike action now - for a total withdrawal of the PPP plans, and for direct government investment in the future of the Underground.

Some of us prefer safety!

Susan Moore

THE GOVERNMENT has announced its preferred bidders to run the London Underground.

Whoever had been chosen, we would have all been losers as they set performance targets for the 'Infracos' at 5 per cent below the existing inadequate standards.

However the specific records of the winners are worth noting. For the Jubilee, Northern and Piccadilly lines, TubeLines, a consortium has been chosen which includes Amey, the company responsible for the siting of signal SN109 at Paddington.

A subsidiary of one of the other companies, Bechtel, was the firm to which the public water system in Cochabamba in Bolivia was sold, resulting in massive price hikes within weeks and massive protests. A leader of the fightback, Oscar Olivera said "The blood spilled in Cochabamba carries the fingerprints of Bechtel".

Hyder was formed in 1996 from Welsh Water and SWALEC and has carried through major redundancies. It was fined £50,000 in 1999 after one of its electricians lost both arms following a 33,000 volt shock at one of its sub stations in Swansea

The final company is Jarvis, responsible for 60% of track renewals on the main line - what a recommendation! Last August it was fined £500,000 for breaches of health and safety regulations following two freight train derailments in 1999.

For the Bakerloo, Central and Victoria lines, Metronet, the chosen consortium includes: Balfour Beatty - the company responsible for maintaining the track in the Hatfield area prior to the crash; and WS Atkins, which advised Thames Trains not to fit Automatic Train Protection, the system that would have prevented the Paddington disaster.

Also involved are Adtranz who according to research published by Mayor Livingstone are involved in supplying the nuclear industry as well as illegal truck and arms deals to Iraq.

Finally there is Thames Water, who has been fined £250,000 for polluting the Thames. The OFWAT report on their performance in 1998-99 makes worrying reading.

So the companies responsible for deaths and disasters on the mainline railway are now to take over the Tube. The companies that make up these consortia have appalling records of endangering the health and safety of both workers and the general public.

RMT threatens new strikes to defend safety

The RMT has served notice on every train operating company that they intend to ballot all train crew in the dispute over their operational safety role. If all goes according to schedule strikes could be called across the country by the end of the month.

With attendance up on previous years, the RMT's Train Crew conference, recently held in Glasgow, gave a clear message that this action has to be given a firm priority. Members were fed up with having had to wait too long for action to defend their conditions, and the safety of the public, undermined since the privatisation of the rail network.

The mood amongst train crew has hardened since Hatfield. Delegates are keen to press for the scrapping of Driver Only Operation and

the reintroduction of Guards on all trains. This principle was lost in 1985, but with both ASLEF and the RMT committed to an end to DOO and with public opinion on our side the time has come to act. The fact that neither British Rail or the train operating companies have ever evaluated the safety implications of doing away with Guards in the first place gives a further urgency to this issue.

The conference also expressed a view on the internal crisis inside the RMT. In giving RMT President, Phil Boston, a standing ovation for his fight to defend union democracy against the attacks launched by Knapp and the right wing majority of the national executive.

The conference unanimously agreed resolutions of

no confidence in the executive and Senior Assistant General Secretary, Vernon Hince, and in defence of Pat Sikorski and the others being witch-hunted.

Rail workers are increasingly angry at the way they have been deserted by Labour. So the conference was pleased to be addressed by Scottish Socialist Party MSP, Tommy Sheridan. They were horrified to hear that, days before its closure was announced, Motorola workers had been lectured by RMT sponsored Labour MP Tam Dalyell to moderate their demands to keep their bosses sweet.

An SSP fringe meeting



Headed for another stoppage?

attracted a third of delegates who heard details of the SSP general election campaign. A number of delegates signed up for the SSP or pledged support for the Socialist Alliance campaign south of the border.

South West Trains halted by strike

As a precursor to the national train crew dispute, guards on South West Trains successfully staged the first of a rolling programme of strike days of action in defence of their agreed working conditions on May 3.

Picket lines outside depots across South West London, Surrey, Hampshire and Dorset ensured that SWT was unable to run a service. Out of 1,700 daily services under fifty trains actually ran.

Headlined as a dispute over red waistcoats, the guards are actually fighting against draconian sickness procedures, discriminatory promotion procedures and a refusal by management to seriously negotiate with the RMT on a number of other issues.

If SWT thought that this dispute would go away they have been proved wrong. RMT members have shown that, if given a lead, rail workers are prepared to stand up and fight to defend their working conditions.

MSF left must gear up for merger

Activists in MSF will not be able to rest after the General Election is over.

The union's conference starts on June 8. General Secretary Roger Lyons will undoubtedly use the opportunity to crow about both the supposed achievements of new Labour in government and his own success in winning the ballot for merger with the AEEU.

This issue, along with the fight against the continuing witch-hunt against left activists in London region has tended to dominate the

concerns of the left in the union.

It was always obvious that we would lose the merger ballot, given the highly undemocratic way it was organised. Huge amounts of the union's scarce resources were pumped into ensuring that a new and stronger right wing union was created, while opponents of the project were denied any opportunity to put their views across to the membership.

It was necessary to fight on this issue, as well as to

defend those facing trumped up charges on political grounds, but for the left to make real progress we need to move beyond this over-internalisation.

It is very welcome that moves are being made in advance of conference to try to create a new left, involving activists from the AEEU as well as MSF and focusing on political issues such as opposition to social partnership. It is on this big questions facing trade unionists that we can begin to go forward.



Lyons: won vote to hand over MSF to right wing AEEU

The coming General Election is very different from the 1997 election.

Then the main preoccupation was to defeat the Tories after so many years of destruction of working class organisations. This time there will be the biggest left challenge for decades.

In 1997 many people had aspirations that Labour would improve things significantly. Others had fewer expectations, but some faith that 'things could only get better'.

The disappointment that has followed has brought to the lowest-ever turn outs at local government and European elections. Millions of workers have stayed at home in solid Labour constituencies, while others have cast protest votes for green or nationalist candidates.

Where socialists and campaigners were able to put forward an alternative electoral platform, most notably in the first-ever elections for the Scottish Parliament and for the Greater London Assembly, they performed remarkably well.

Building on these successes both the Scottish Socialist Party and the Socialist Alliance have gone from strength to strength.

In this General Election every voter in Scotland will have the opportunity to vote for a party that puts the interests of working people first. It is a huge step forward that the Scottish Socialist Party are standing in every seat and building a fightback against new Labour's Tory policies.

And in more than 90 seats in England, the Socialist Alliance will be on the ballot paper. This is a magnificent achievement for an organisation that has not previously stood in a General Election.

The Alliance is already reaching out to many people who had been Labour Party members for years and have become deeply disillusioned with the record of this Labour government.

In Newark in Nottinghamshire, for example, a core section of the Labour Party, including the former council leadership, has joined the Alliance. They will be standing a candidate at the election.

During the election campaign proper, the SSP and SA will be able to reach out to more disenchanted Labour voters than those we have so far linked up with.

At this stage of its development, the Alliance has rightly decided not to stand in the small number of constituencies where real left-wing Labour candidates are standing. It would be sectarian to do so when the Alliance is not in a position to stand in all seats.

In places like Islington North, Hayes and Harlington, Meriden and Hackney North supporters of Socialist Outlook and many other conscious socialists will vote Labour with some conviction.

But even here, questions need to be asked. While a small number of MPs have consistently voted against the government on major issues such as asylum and lone parent benefits, they have failed to organise those who support them either inside or outside the party.

Voting against the government – which relatively few Labour MPs have done – or appearing on platforms of worthy campaigns is not sufficient. These MPs need to put themselves at the head of what resistance exists on the ground to the ravages that government policies are causing – whether on the question of privatisation, racism or international issues.

In other constituencies where there is neither a Socialist Alliance nor other credible



Dudley Hospital strikers. New Labour's rotten record on public services – with 3 years of Tory cash limits and even more privatisation, has helped alienate core voters

Vote Socialist where you can – and Labour where you must

left candidate we call on people to cast a highly critical vote for Labour.

We do so based on our analysis that while Blair intends to complete his transformation of the Labour Party, to make it into a straight capitalist party, he has not yet achieved this goal.

As well as supporting Socialist Alliance and SSP candidates, we think that people should vote for Arthur Scargill in Hartlepool and for other SLP or campaigning candidates where they are not standing against the Labour left and can mount a credible campaign.

We do not however call for blanket support for the SLP. The Socialist Alliance has made repeated requests for discussions with the SLP to try to reach some agreement around the election. These have been ignored.

The SLP have declared their intention to stand in a number of constituencies where they have virtually no members, and in some cases against either the Labour left or Alliance candidates. That is not the way to build a fighting opposition.

We do not call for a vote for Green candidates, while recognising that many will vote for them to show their opposition to new Labour's socialist policies. But while there are committed socialists within the Green Party, the Party itself has no solutions outside the framework of capitalism.

The undemocratic first past the post system in place for Westminster elections means it is unlikely that either the Scottish Socialist Party or the Socialist Alliance will see anyone elected on June 8. Tommy Sheridan, the SSP's MP in the Scottish Parliament, won his seat on the basis of a form of proportional representation. In other European countries where the new left has had successes at the ballot box, proportional representation has been an aid to their victories.

We also know that the majority of Labour voters, however frustrated they are with Blair's record, won't yet have confidence that we can build a viable alternative.

We judge our success on the basis of the fact that a minority will be inspired by our existence. We are positive about the fact that in area after area we have been able to reach out to people that had become apathetic, to breathe new life into campaigns that had faltered, and see new ones come into existence.

We are committed to building a fighting opposition: and we are in this for the long term. We won't go away after the election.

Blair will carry through his pledge to deepen the attacks on our living standards, our services, our civil liberties. In that context some of those who now dismiss our challenge will be won to our ideas.

The only way to turn the tide is to build a genuine opposition. The Scottish Socialist Party and the Socialist Alliance represent an idea whose time has come.

Our policies to fight back

This ISG pamphlet is a contribution to the debate within the Socialist Alliance on the policies needed to challenge New Labour and unite a broad movement of the left.

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INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST GROUP

Building the alternative to Blair

£2 Policies for change John Lister

Blair plans second term rip-off – from the cradle to the grave!



John Lister

Labour's plans for a "Baby Bond" are a bitter insult to the millions of students who are struggling to pay tuition fees and facing debts of more than £15,000 as a result of New Labour's policies.

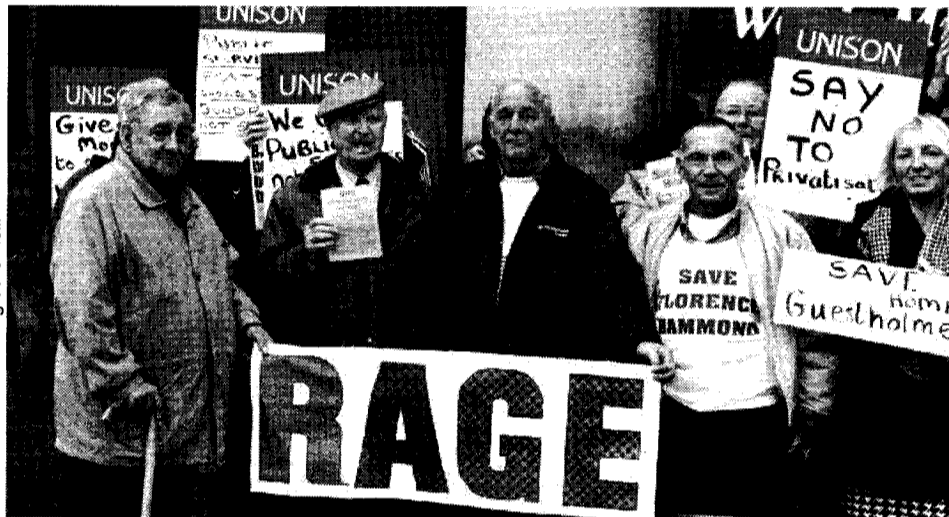
They will also be seen as a sick joke by school students struggling in under-funded classrooms without cash for books or equipment.

Tony Blair unveiled plans to give a cash handout to new born babies, and occasional extra payments that might add up to £3,000 by the age of 18, claiming that it would help tackle child poverty.

But child poverty flows from the low pay, unemployment and inadequate benefits of their parents: tucking £300 in a bank account for use by the child 18 years later will do nothing to address these problems.

An increase in the minimum wage to the EU "decency threshold" of £7.40 would do far more to tackle child poverty than New Labour's feeble bribe.

But behind the "Baby Bond" is a much more sinister shift of government policy. At the same press conference, Blair and fellow



While babies are promised a cash handout in 18 years time, pensioners are being ripped off now: and care of the elderly is being further privatised with the hand-over of council residential homes despite vigorous protests in Birmingham (above) and Oxfordshire (top).

ministers reverted to the language of Thatcherism, arguing that a second term Labour government would require people to "stand on their own two feet", and end the traditional support from the welfare state.

Blair said "We want to encourage adults to save for themselves to help ride out difficult times: losing a job or becoming ill, for example."

David Blunkett went further and argued for a system of "self-help". He suggested

a return to the old mutual systems, which were the only support for workers before the welfare state was introduced.

These warnings of New Labour's future right wing policy ambitions came in the run-up to Tony Blair's widely-expected announcement of an election on June 7 (though this is still awaited as we go to press!)

But they reinforced other significant hints that the privatisation and business-friendly policies that have so

antagonised many of Labour's core voters will be eclipsed by the onslaught as soon as Blair has won his second term.

Gordon Brown has said openly to TUC chief John Monks that the only sections of the public sector that would not be subject to privatisation would be the NHS and the police.

Of course the NHS is far from untouched by privatisation. Current plans would lead to a massive £7 billion worth of new privately

financed hospitals by 2007, resulting in annual rental payments of £2.1 billion to consortia of banks and developers.

There is also a huge increase in use of private beds by NHS Trusts, and the increasing reliance on private nursing homes to fill gaps in NHS care of the elderly. Indeed there is not that much left of the NHS which the private sector would want to take over.

So if that is one area Brown wanted to leave alone, workers in education, the civil service and other remaining areas of the public sector had better get ready for tough times to come.

Blair himself has spelled out an exceedingly right-wing agenda for New Labour's second term in a recent interview with a US business journal.

Speaking to *Forbes* magazine early in March, he made it clear that New Labour sees itself quite openly as the party of big business. Those hefty donations from millionaires and the continued close collaboration with Rupert Murdoch and the right wing press really have shaped Labour's policies.

Blair told *Forbes*: "Over the coming few years, corporation tax revenues as a percentage of national income will fall..."

"Our priorities for the next term are to carry on stimulating enterprise, through reforms in the taxation system, amongst others in relation to capital gains tax and corporation tax."

Business chiefs in the US were promised there would be no let-up in the anti-union laws Labour inherited from Thatcher:

"I have made it quite clear that we will retain a flexible labour market here..."

Life may still be hard for trade unionists and workers struggling to survive on a pitiful minimum wage, but Blair's priorities are clear:

"My ambition is for Britain to be the best place for business in the world and in Europe in particular."

But Blair also sees his key role as a driving force for globalisation and the neo-liberal agenda of deregulation and privatisation, headed up by the IMF, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation:

"I think for Europe and for Britain it is important we use this time to push forward measures of liberalisation within Europe, and we have played a part of reorienting the whole of the economic agenda around economic reform in Europe. ... At an international level we push ahead on the WTO..."

For teachers, Blair had a pre-election warning:

"I want to see far more emphasis on entrepreneurship in schools, far closer links between universities and business. I want to see us develop a far greater entrepreneurial culture. We have only just gone beneath the surface of this so far."

There will be no respite for beleaguered public sector workers, with Blair still delighted at the extent of privatisation driven through by the Tories, and which New Labour has extended:

"There are many steps of liberalisation going on at the moment. If I go to my constituency now, our country is more liberal in this way – my electricity and my water are both owned by French companies..."

The onslaught on the unemployed with the "workfare" system ushered in by Labour's "New Deal" will also continue, with people being forced into low-paid jobs for fear of losing benefit:

"When I came to office one in five non-pensioner households had no one working in them, right? We've reduced enormously the number of benefit claimants. We've introduced tough measures on welfare reform."

"You know, you lose your benefit if you're not taking the training and job opportunities. So there is a whole series of measures we're putting through, and it's vital we'll carry that on."

"There's performance-related pay for teachers. There's the whole reorganisation of our health system going on, there is a big agenda there for a second term."

Why Greens are not always good for you

John Lister

WITH New Labour having travelled so far and so fast to the right, and the Liberal Democrats lacking any real conviction in their efforts to appear as a left bourgeois alternative, many young and older voters have considered backing the Green Party, seeing it as a radical alternative.

The Greens have cashed in on mounting concern for the environment, worries over the food we eat and the impact of agribusiness, and on the growing anti-capitalist current – within which a substantial layer have drawn few substantive political conclusions.

But on none of these areas which might be seen as the strengths of the Green Party does it have a serious analysis or a viable policy other than seeking election as effectively another reformist party committed to working within the system.

In office – as we have seen on Oxford City Council, where Green councillors share control with the Lib Dems – this

approach leads to policies very similar to those of the Labour Party, seeking first and foremost to balance the books of the council, and little connection with the interests of working people whose jobs and conditions are at stake.

While some within the Green Party define themselves as socialists, and embrace at least elements of an understanding of capitalism – as a system of class rule and exploitation of the majority by the wealth-owning majority – this elementary starting point is strikingly absent from the Green Party's own Manifesto for a Sustainable Society.

The section on the Economy, for example, talks in New Labour style the "equitable distribution of wealth", but does not address the issue of the ownership of the means of production. Under the heading "companies, ownership and the stakeholder principle" it points out that:

"The unaccountable exercise of economic power by large corporations has done much to destroy the environment

and convivial social structures. Green policies will establish greater community and environmental accountability."

Indeed the Green analysis of the capitalist system falls at the first hurdle, with its insistence that the *land*, rather than the labour of working people, is "the primary source of all real wealth".

Without an understanding of the class structure of capitalist society, and the relentless drive for profit which has propelled the banks and multinational corporations into their reckless plundering and destruction of much of our natural environment, it is hard to see the root cause that must be tackled if an ecologically sustainable economy is to be established.

Without recognising the profits that are being stacked up in the world's wealthiest capitals it is impossible to tackle the poverty that is being generated by the same system – for the billions who live in the world's poorest countries.

Of course the system not only

enriches the wealthy few, but also exploits and enslaves the vast majority of the world's population: this gives millions of working people a material interest in organising to fight back for their own rights and for a world fit to live in.

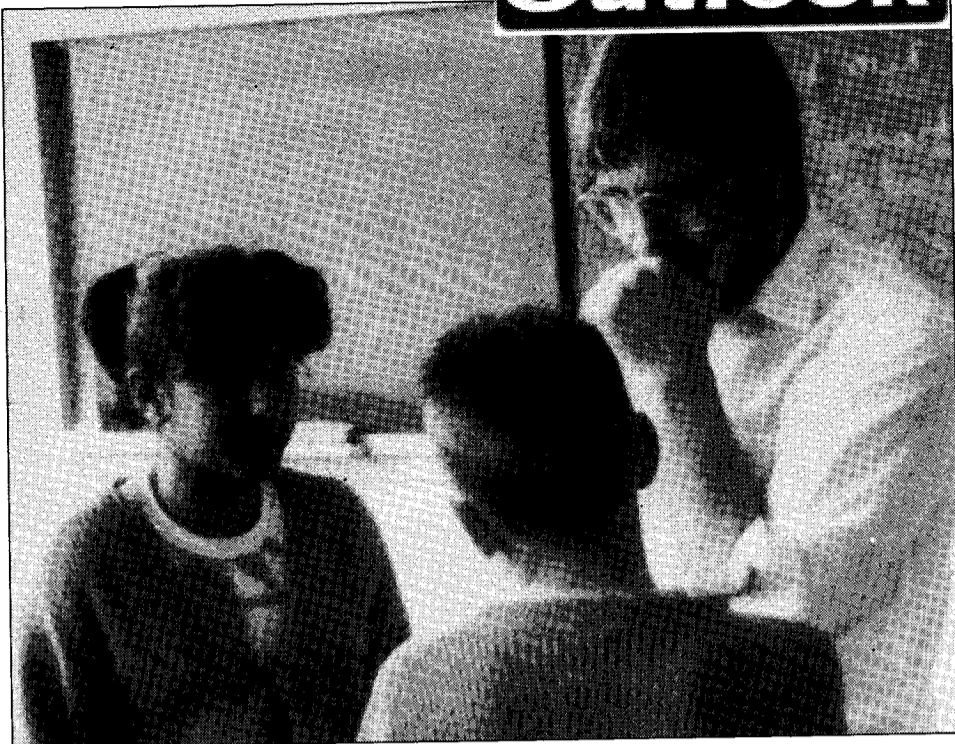
Socialists draw from this the need to build and work consistently in the organisations of the working class, which must play the leading role in the overturn of capitalist control.

Cut off from this analysis, the Greens have little perspective to offer but the quest for piecemeal reforms coupled with moral exhortations to individuals to live better lives.

The Socialist Alliance has made a point of incorporating the fight on environmental questions into its manifesto, and seeking to win the best anti-capitalist fighters to a consistent socialist policy.

The Greens, by contrast, wind up in alliances with other bourgeois reformist parties which share their reluctance to confront and challenge the power of capitalism – locally, nationally or globally.

NUT Conference setback for teachers



Having sufficient staff is a vital factor in quality education

Gill Lee, officer Lewisham NUT, personal capacity

THE NUT's Broad Left (right-wing) leadership once again proved at annual conference in Cardiff that it is incapable of defending teachers and education against attack.

Privatisation, teacher shortages, and the progressive undermining of comprehensive education formed the background to this year's Conference, as did the sell-out over performance related pay (PRP). The Executive had ignored the instruction of last year's Conference and refused to ballot for strike action.

The tasks of the Left were clear: to map out a strategy

of campaigns and action which could

- defend comprehensive education;

- increase salaries and so help overcome teacher shortage;

- hold the line on opposition to National Curriculum testing and league tables; and begin to rebuild opposition to performance management and PRP.

On most of these issue the left was defeated. Teachers, pupils and all those with an interest in the working class receiving a broad, balanced and critical education are the losers.

The only exception was on the issue of performance management, where Conference agreed to call for a boycott.

In his closing speech to Conference General Secretary Doug McAvoy summed up his view of the way forward for the union. He emphasised the need for "professional unity" with other teacher unions and stressed that unity could only be achieved through compromise.

He talked about the union reshaping itself as a deliverer of high quality professional development for teachers.

He stressed that teachers had nothing to fear from good performance management and that "We are not free agents and must not claim to be so".

In other words, the union must subordinate itself to what government decides ...

and McAvoy will not carry out Conference's decision to ballot for a boycott of performance management.

"Professional unity" had been the mantra for all those were opposed to a perspective of struggle.

The commitment of the leaderships of the NASUWT and ATL to a joint proposal to the government about talks on excessive workload and pay was continually used to stop debate on strike action for higher salaries and to defeat resolutions calling for action on workload.

The left were unsuccessful in arguing that action was the best motivator of unity and that tying ourselves to the coat-tails of the ATL meant no action at all.

The Broad Left had carried out a bold move in calling off the very limited 'cover to contract' action before Conference even began, and successfully defeated attempts to restart the action.

This opens up the danger that the unions will now be seen to be legitimating management's demands that teachers work beyond contract to cover up for teacher shortages.

In arguing that such a massive crisis in education can be resolved by an 'Inquiry' into workload and pay, the Broad Left pointed to the victories won in Scotland.

Those in the Scottish teachers' union, the EIS, who opposed the McCrone

deal pointed out at an NUT fringe meeting that it involved a 20% increase in workload in exchange for the increase in pay. This would intensify teacher shortage, not solve it.

The defeats at this year's Conference only emphasise the need for unity of the left, currently divided between the Socialist Teachers Alliance, the Campaign for a Democratic and Fighting Union, and the SWP which left the STA some years ago. (see page 8)

Some initial steps were taken at Conference and these need to be built on in order that the Left can better defend itself, teachers and comprehensive education against the attacks to come.

Blair's return could bring back two-tier education

Rick Hatcher

The *Daily Mail* headline called it the "Death of the Comprehensive School". That was how it summed up the proposal in the government's Green Paper on education to turn nearly half of all secondary schools into "specialist schools".

This move will create a two-tier school system in three ways.

- First, these schools will get extra money - £100,000 plus £123 per pupil per year.

- Secondly, they will be seen as 'better' by many parents, and this becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

- Thirdly, they will be able to select up to 10% of their intake.

However, 10% is not enough to really change the character of a school. How long will it be before some specialist schools demand that the ceiling is raised to allow selection of at least one whole class each year?

Specialist schools are not the only equality issue in the Green Paper. There is a real contradiction at its heart.

On the one hand it contains much more explicit

commitments to reducing inequalities than previous New Labour education policy documents.

On the other hand, the measures it proposes to tackle inequality are far too weak, and in any case many of the Green Paper's other proposals will tend to reinforce, not reduce inequality.

On gender issues the Green Paper has almost nothing to say. Current debates on masculinity go unmentioned. On racial equality at primary level the Green Paper says little.

At secondary level the solution is said to lie in a combination of monitoring, targets, the literacy strategy, and the 'EMAG' policy for teaching pupils whose first language is not English, with vague remarks about working more closely with Black parents and communities.

Social class inequality, in contrast, attracts a battery of measures. In the early years, the expansion of nursery and extended day provision is welcome, but far too limited.

At secondary level, there are three elements in Labour's approach to social disadvantage.

- First, the emphasis on diversity of schools.

- Secondly, the continuing application of Labour's established agenda for school improvement through leadership, monitoring, targets and inspections.

- Thirdly, a whole set of initiatives aimed at providing additional targeted support, including zonal programmes (Education Action Zones, Excellence in Cities, Excellence Clusters); extra funding for 500 low attaining secondary schools (£32 million, which is approximately £64,000 per school); 'partnership' between grammar schools and neighbouring comprehensive schools; City Academies; and Fresh Start or closure.

Inequalities might lessen under Labour - indeed, after 18 years of right-wing Tory governments it would be surprising if they didn't.

The question is, are they likely to diminish sufficiently to make even the limited notion of equality of opportunity a reality? In other words, to qualitatively alter the life-experiences and life-chances of those whose interests are served least by the school system?

What is entirely absent from the Green Paper is any notion that Labour's key policies might tend to work against even this limited equality agenda.

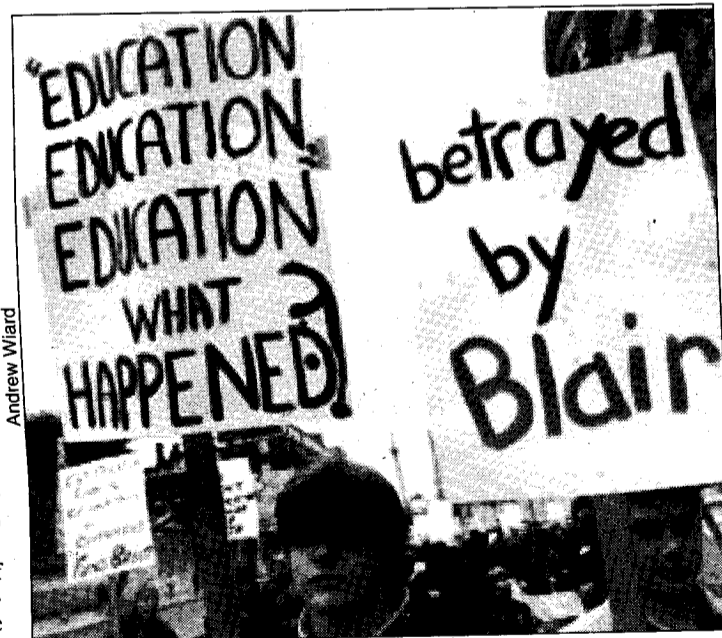
- **The structure of the school system:** The quasi-market (tests, league tables, parental preference, school selection, per capita funding etc) reinforces inequality.

- **Diversity of schools:** This reinforces inequality. The specialist schools proposal will create a two-tier system.

- **Differentiation within schools:** Ability grouping reinforces inequality, as will more academic-vocational segregation at 14.

- **The curriculum:** Is itself a powerful mechanism of social differentiation, but regarded as neutral by Labour. Nor is there any notion of tackling race, gender and class in the curriculum in an emancipatory perspective.

- **The management of education:** Authoritarian managerialism and increased workload prevents the cre-



activity and innovation by teachers which is vital to tackle inequality.

- **Home and school:** Could the reliance on the 'parent as co-educator' actually reinforce patterns of privilege?

- **Increasing role of the private sector:** What are the implications for equality?

- **Education Action Zones:** Effectiveness is doubtful

- **Excellence in Cities:** 'Gifted and talented' reinforces inequality.

There is a contradiction at the heart of the Green Paper between its concern for

social inclusion and (an albeit limited notion of) equality of opportunity and the three dominant imperatives of Labour education policy.

It is concern for the production of human capital for a hierarchical labour market; the refusal to challenge middle class privilege in education for electoral reasons; and the desire not to spend too much money that determines the government's agenda.

All these three targets are incompatible with a genuine egalitarian agenda.

Will Blackburn leave Straw in the wind?

Adam Britner

April 24 saw the largest gathering to date under the banner of the Lancashire Socialist Alliance, to launch the election campaign of candidate Jim Nichol.

Contesting the Blackburn seat against Home Secretary, Jack Straw, Jim puts us in an ideal position with his record as a civil rights lawyer, representing those marginalised by our society.

The main focus of the campaign will obviously be the treatment of asylum seekers as well as the sell off of Blackburn's council services, both of which have been raised through a town centre public stall and leafleting.

Mr Nichol said: "As a lawyer for 17 years I have been involved in cases involving people who have been wrongly convicted, such as the Carl Bridgewater case, the M50 case, and the M25 case. Every day I represent people with no money and no power.

"All this has made me especially indignant about top people who blame the less fortunate for what's wrong in our society. Every time Straw and his ministers follow the Tory line on immigrants and asylum seekers, every time they build a prison for children or pass a law to make criminals out of people who support dissidents abroad, I am incensed."

Nichol received local and national media attention last month for his most recent case, when he succeeded in having the murder conviction of Accrington-born Peter Fell quashed in the appeal court.

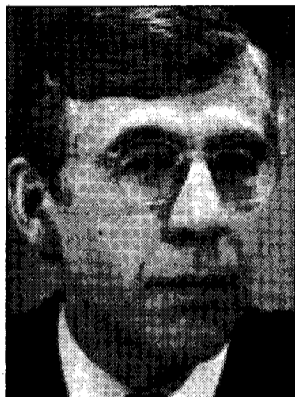
The meeting managed to raise over £1000 towards much needed funds. A generous donation for the £500 deposit came from John Nicholson from the compensation he received for being manhandled in a Manchester protest against the Terrorism Bill on April 1 last year. It's nice to see the Home Secretary paying the deposit of his opponent in this way.

Jim Nichol said of the donation: "I spend most of my working time fighting against injustice in the judicial system. In many ways therefore it is fitting that money from this source should be used to help mount my challenge to Jack Straw and his government's record on civil liberties."

In Blackburn the LSA has done the job of setting itself has a clear alternative to the reactionary Jack Straw.

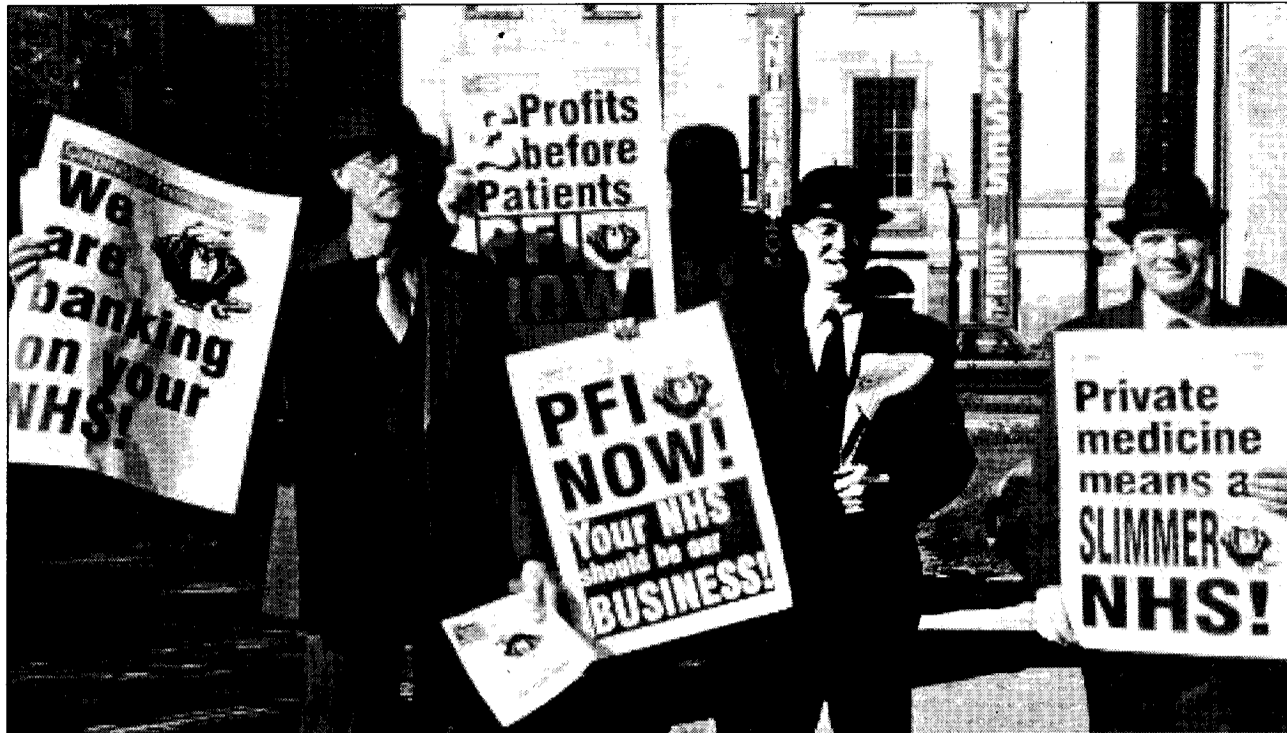
Nichol explained further his reasons for standing:

"As a lawyer I oppose Straw for his attacks on civil liberties. As a socialist brought up in a mining family in the North East, I oppose the government for their Tory policies, especially their obsession with privatisation.



Target: Jack Straw

"Look at the mess on the railways. Why doesn't Labour take them back into public ownership? I'm standing to give everyone who feels the same indignation a chance to vote for something they believe in."



A PICKET of Oxford's Radcliffe Infirmary by a highly suspicious group of "impatient businessmen" proved a highly effective focus for Oxford Socialist Alliance in challenging the government's Private Finance Initiative (PFI). The PFI scheme to relocate the Radcliffe's services to a new centre close to other Oxford hospitals in Headington – originally costed at £71m – has been log-jammed in secret negotiations since before the last election, raising doubts over how much it will eventually cost. John Lister, Alliance candidate for Oxford East, was able to get coverage on two local radio stations and in the *Oxford Mail* for his argument that PFI, which turns in returns of 12-17% on the private investment of bankers and developers represents "rotten value for patients". Alliance leaflets setting out the case against PFI were distributed to amused hospital staff and patients.

The Oxford campaign has also included a successful public meeting addressed by former Labour NEC member Liz Davies, along with anti-immigration laws author Teresa Hayter, Sylvia Barker from the campaign against privatisation of Oxfordshire's residential homes, and newly-elected National Union of Students executive member Helen Salmon. Among the new supporters attracted to the meeting was a woman with 60 years Labour Party membership who has just resigned in frustration at the politics of New Labour. An enjoyable fund-raising Curry Night also attracted strong support from most of the key union and campaign activists in the city.

Battle stations in Bradford

Paul Hubert

Local political developments have kept the Bradford Socialist Alliance busy over the last month. The Tory/Liberal Democrat council majority has continued to move forward on its privatisation plans and the riot in the Lidget Green area highlighted continuing issues of race and racism.

Unions representing thousands of council staff have failed to agree with the management over new terms and conditions. Following the breakdown of negotiations, a ballot for industrial action is now threatened.

A consultation exercise is supposed to be underway over the intended privatisation, or "transfer", of Bradford's council houses. However the sincerity of this

consultation was questioned when Councillor Kris Hopkins, executive member for health and housing, said of opponents of the privatisation "They want to get into the real world."

The council is also poised to choose between EduAction – a newly formed company of Nord Anglia and Amey – and Serco/QAA to run its education service. One company has no experience of running council education services, while the other has been strongly criticised in the only council where it has.

These policies are being carried forward by the majority vote of the Tories and Liberal Democrats. However Labour, having started the process with proposals for privatisation of the education service just before the

last election, offer only toothless opposition.

Events in Lidget Green on Easter Sunday highlighted the fear and resentment of the Asian Muslims in inner-city areas of Bradford. Racial provocation from a mainly white group led local youth to fear their area was under organised attack.

Their feelings were exacerbated by the delay of the police in arriving. When the police did arrive on the scene in numbers, they apparently encouraged the instigators to leave the area before turning their forces on local residents.

Bradford South MP Gerry Sutcliffe responded by calling for people to be brought to justice quickly, and then wrote to residents calling the events "unnecessary and provocative".

The Socialist Alliance issued a leaflet pointing out that this really means a dragnet through the Asian community. It also fails to address the issues of poverty and privatisation in Bradford, or the right of communities to defend themselves against attack by racists.

The Alliance called for a campaign for services and facilities in all areas, including defending and improving council housing, and fighting rising poverty and inequality.

Redundancies have been announced at Pace in Saltaire. The Bradford company, which manufactures items like satellite receivers and TV set-top boxes, has decided to close down its production in Bradford and set up with cheaper labour in Eastern Europe. 400

workers face the dole.

After the destruction of the textile industry on which modern Bradford was built, the likes of Pace were held out as offering the opportunity to replace old industries with sunrise once. Pace's announcement is an illustration that, while calling for loyalty from workers, capitalists have no loyalty towards them.

Bradford Socialist Alliance has campaigned steadily, finding new purpose from these events. It has offered an alternative view to the consensus of the main parties, and has supported local campaigners when they have not.

Alliance candidate for Bradford South, Ateeq Siddique, has also intervened into the national debate to offer a socialist perspective on events in Lidget Green.

Alliance supporters from around West Yorkshire supported protests outside the Bradford courts as a white man who had stabbed an Asian trader with a knife was acquitted of murder.

The court accepted a claim that he acted in the belief he was defending himself, in marked contrast to the treatment of many black people who have defended themselves when clearly they were under attack.

We have also shown that we can Party. A social featuring Hypersonic (former members of Fun-da-mental) and a young local band was well-attended – and made money!

The next test for this young grouping (I mean the Alliance) will be to step up several gears to meet the challenge of a general election campaign.

It is clear from the sympathy and interest we have received that much can be achieved.

Tyne for a change!

Tyneside Socialist Alliance has had plenty to keep it busy. Not only are there two candidates to support: Terry Sanderson in Tyne Bridge and Pete Burnett in Tyneside North, but there are a host of local issues to campaign around in addition to the national platform of the Alliance.

Easter weekend, for example, saw campaigners in the City centre petitioning not only over the threatened closure of the local fire station, an issue the Alliance has been working around for some time, but around the threatened closure of Cammell Lairds shipyard at Hebburn.

Cammells, which employs 750 men at Hebburn, had been taken into receivership the previous week. On May 13, the *Evening Chronicle* broke the exclusive story that the owner of the neighbouring Swan

Hunter yard, Jaap Kroese wanted to buy the Hebburn Yard. The story, published on Good Friday was headlined "Saviour"!

Kroese, who has since put together a consortium which involves the GMB said "We are really interested in the Hebburn yard for production and offshore work but not really repair work and would need a partner if we were going to take over Teeside and Merseyside as well." Alchemy, the asset-strippers whose bid for the Rover group brought them to prominence last year, and a number of other companies have also expressed interest.

The attitude of both the government and trade unions, led by GMB regional secretary Kevin Curran, has been atrocious.

Swan Hunter's plans would



see the closure of the yards at Birkenhead and Teeside, with the loss of hundreds of jobs. Tyneside Socialist Alliance believes that all the jobs should be saved. We don't want to see workers in one part of the country played off against those in another.

This was the basis of the

activity over Easter weekend and subsequently, and it was pleasantly surprising that so many people were ready to listen to the arguments despite the weight of press, politicians and trade union leaders pushing the message of compromise.

Extra mural support for Erdington fight

John Harding

STEVE GODWARD, the Erdington Socialist Alliance candidate, launched his campaign by unveiling a giant mural on the side of a friend's house. The mural shows fireman Steve Godward hosing away Tony Blair and William Hague!

Erdington is a working class area in north Birmingham represented at present by Robin Corbett. Almost at the last possible minute Corbett announced he was not standing again, allowing Milbank almost total control of the selection process.

The 300 local members of the Labour Party were blatantly canvassed during the selection process in defiance of the rules. Even though several local councillors and prominent members put themselves forward, not a single local member made it onto the short list of four – the 142 local party members who attended the selection meeting were appalled.

Ultra-loyal Labour Party right wingers stormed their disapproval for about 20 minutes and it looked likely the meeting would be closed and a candidate imposed. Eventually Sian Simon, clearly a head office stooge, was selected.

Mr Simon promoted himself by saying he wrote regularly for the *Sunday Telegraph* and *The News of the World*, two more reactionary newspapers it would be hard to imagine. Even a local Labour Party which has loyally supported every twist and turn of Blairite policy could not be trusted to select this person as the "right" candidate!

Meanwhile Socialist Alliance candidate Goodward has emphasised his opposition to privatisa-



tion, in particular the PFI scheme at the Dudley Group of hospitals and in Birmingham at Selly Oak and QE hospitals.

He said the Socialist Alliance would stop privatisation, bring the railways back into public ownership, repeal the anti-union laws and massively increase funding for health and education.

Godward was until recently a member of the Labour Party, and other local members and ex-members have become involved in his campaign, including ex-ward chair Clive Kesterton.

Steve said "We can make a difference. People don't have

to vote Labour, and they don't have to vote Tory. There's a new political party in the area that puts people before profit and people before greed."

Steve's campaign has been the most dynamic and well supported in Birmingham with two successful public meetings so far in Erdington and on the Castle Vale estate and a very successful weekly stall.

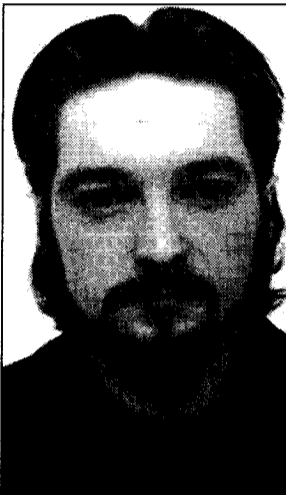
On May 5 a comrade with a Tony Blair mask harangued the crowded shopping area in Erdington High St saying he was going to privatise more public services!! Local people were queuing up to pay 10 pence to throw wet sponges.

Six of the best from the ISG

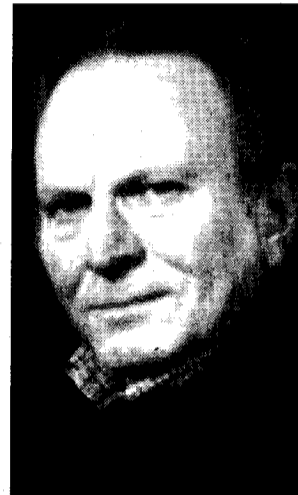
The International Socialist Group has 6 candidates standing for the Socialist Alliance at the General election.

They are: PETER BURNETT in Tyneside North, BRIAN DRUMMOND in Bristol East, JOHN LISTER in Oxford East, ANDY RICHARDS in Hove, GREG TUCKER in Streatham and PAUL WILCOX in Carlisle.

Putting forward these members as candidates across the country is one of the ways we hope to play a role in building the Socialist Alliance as an effective opposition to Blair's Tory policies.



GREG TUCKER is a train driver and RMT activist, standing against Keith Hill, Minister for Transport who is also a member of the RMT. Greg was a Labour councillor from the mid 1980s until 1993 when he was expelled from the Labour Party for his record of defending local services and fighting the poll tax. As well as fighting for renationalisation of our railways and against tube privatisation, Greg's campaign has highlighted the creeping selection taking place in Lambeth's schools.



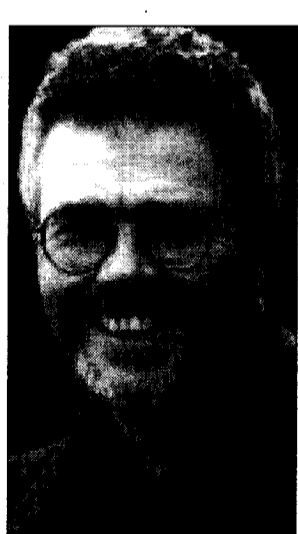
PETER BURNETT, standing against Trade and Industry secretary Stephen Byers, is currently a call centre worker and member of MSF. He has a long-standing record fighting unemployment and social exclusion – key issues in the North East where income per head is 23% below the national average. As a committed anti-racist campaigner, Peter recently organised a march of several hundreds through the streets of Newcastle in defence of asylum rights.



PAUL WILCOX is a shop worker and member of USDAW. Carlisle Socialist Alliance has been fighting for renationalisation of the railways and Paul has been campaigning against the imposition of tuition fees on students.

Paul says: "We don't just say vote for us and we will fight for you, we say vote for us but also join the Socialist Alliance and fight with us. The only people that can change the conditions of the working class are the working class themselves."

ANDY RICHARDS is an activist in UNISON, currently chair of the Brighton and Hove branch. He is also Treasurer of the local Trades Council. He was a member of the Labour Party from until February of this year, a Labour Councillor from 1995-97 and also held the positions of Chair and Secretary of the local constituency. Andy says: "What is striking is the marvellous spirit of unity in the Socialist Alliance. There seems to be a real commitment to make it successful as a socialist alternative to new Labour."



JOHN LISTER is standing in Oxford East against Chief Secretary to the Treasury Andrew Smith. John, a journalist who sits on the NUJ's Standing Orders Committee, is best-known as a campaigner against hospital closures, cuts, privatisation and PFI in the NHS in his job as Information Director for London Health Emergency. John also lectures in journalism at the local FE college and has also played an active role in campaigns against education cuts and in defence of social services in Oxfordshire.



BRIAN DRUMMOND, who is standing against Treasury Minister Dawn Primorola, is a teacher and NUT activist. He has been particularly active in the fight to defend education in the city after the council used a local referendum to try to implement massive cuts in the cities schools. Bristol Socialist Alliance, together with other local anti racists have been out demonstrating outside the local Tesco's demanding an end to the demeaning voucher system for asylum seekers.

Socialists must listen to win Labour supporters

Terry Conway

Islington Socialist Alliance has had plenty to keep us busy in recent weeks. We have been out campaigning against the closure of the local sorting office, against Arsenal's plans to site a new waste dump in a residential area in order to facilitate their new big business stadium, and in solidarity with tube workers.

One of our focuses was to build a public meeting which was addressed by our candidate Janine Booth and also the candidate for Hornsey and Wood Green, Louise Christian and Liz Davies. We felt that people in Islington would be particularly interested in hearing why Liz Davies, an Islington councillor and respected local activist for many years, had made her decision to leave New Labour and support the Socialist Alliance. We were proved right by the turn out of over 70 people, many of whom we didn't know before

including 8 local Labour Party members.

It was the debate with these Labour Party members which not surprisingly was the most important aspect of the meeting. Many of the activists were from Islington North and not surprisingly supportive of local Campaign Group MP Jeremy Corbyn.

Socialist Alliance supporters were able to point out that we had made a conscious decision not to oppose Corbyn, and that we would be calling for people to vote for him, as well as suggest that people from the north of the borough could come and assist with Janine's campaign in the South.

There was however a weakness in the response from many of the Alliance speakers, particularly from the SWP. Speakers who were still Labour Party members clearly showed that they were torn between their anger with government policies and their loy-

alty to a party that many of them had been involved in for all their adult life.

But some speakers ignored their questions, simply making general statements about the numbers of people breaking from new Labour.

May's *Socialist Review* carries quotes from long standing Labour Party members who have eventually come down on the side of the Alliance, indicating that the SWP leadership recognises that this is the vital group of people that the Socialist Alliance needs to orientate towards.

To do so successfully, we need to encourage people to get involved in the Alliance before finally making a decision to leave new Labour.

We need to recognise that we will build a stronger movement if we are able to listen to and address people's personal concerns as well as their political aspirations.

Why I left the Labour Party

**Andy Richards
Socialist Alliance
PPC Hove**

My decision to leave the Labour Party was finally made in February, although I had been thinking about it seriously for six months or more.

I started to wonder what I was actually going to do come the general election. Was I going to campaign for my local MP, a loyal Blairite who has colluded in every attack made by New Labour on the poor, on public services, on non-selective education, on asylum seekers? Or was I just going to sit the whole thing out?

When the Socialist Alliance started to come together locally and nationally, it

became clear to me that really only was one choice.

It is vitally important that the left makes an intervention in this election – otherwise the credibility of the political forces which would have everyone believe that the only choice on offer is between Blair and Hague, two sides of the same capitalist coin, will be immeasurably strengthened.

The great question which has preoccupied the Labour left has always been 'what is the alternative?'

It is clear that the Socialist Alliance does represent that alternative and I hope that those leftwingers still hanging on in the Labour Party will do all that they can to make it a success.



Why I joined International Socialist Group

Paul Wilcox

I LEFT the Socialist Party with much sadness, but I could not stay in a party which had a perspective which was so different to mine.

The first thing that worried me was the leadership of the Socialist Party's position in the debate with their Scottish comrades and their hostility to the setting up of the Scottish Socialist Party.

I thought that the creation of the SSP was a very positive development, though I did have concerns about whether the Scottish comrades would remain properly organised.

Then there was the attitude of the Socialist Party leadership over the Fuel Crisis, where they made no criticisms of the reactionary leadership of the protests.

But the most important issue for me was the fact that the Socialist Party began to pull back from the Socialist Alliance. I was fully com-

mitted to the development of the Alliances and hope that from this it will be possible to build a new party of the working class.

So why did I choose to join the ISG? Well I liked what they had to say about the Fuel Crisis and about Mark Serwotka election campaign when he stood for the General Secretary of the PCS.

Most importantly, I agree with the Fourth International's position of building organisations like the Socialist Alliance in other countries and developing co-ordination between them.

I strongly support the ISG's perspective on building a new party of the working class - based on the SSP model.

And after the ISG intervention at the policy conference of the Socialist Alliance in Birmingham I was convinced that I had made the right choice.

Merger of Scottish socialists

Gordon Morgan

IN A HISTORIC move, the Socialist Workers Party in Scotland joined the Scottish Socialist Party on May 1.

This event concluded a relatively brief period of discussions between the two parties and creates a much strengthened united organisation.

A total of 272 SWP members are expected to join the SSP, which at a stroke increases its membership by over 10 per cent and its experienced activists by around 30 per cent.

As Tommy Sheridan stated "For the first time in 70 years, around 90-95 per cent of the active socialists in Scotland will be in one party, selling the one paper, and promoting an independent socialist Scotland. We are stronger together."

At its February conference the SSP had voted to accept the SWP provided certain conditions were met. The SWP accepted these and negotiations continued on measures to integrate the SWP into the SSP.

Three SWP members will join the full time staff and help produce *Scottish Socialist Voice* among other duties. The SWP will constitute itself as a platform within the SSP, organised by a full time convenor in the same way as the ISM platform. The SWP has agreed to raise pledges of £15,000 towards the election fund.

The discussions did not attempt to reconcile policy differences. The SWP will be free to argue for its programme within the SSP, for example on the national



question.

Meanwhile it will carry out the SSP's conference line. Keir McKechnie for SWP said: "There has been some discussion on how you marry the national question with the fact that we are principled internationalists, but we have always said we would never shed a tear if the British state broke up."

Following the agreements made centrally, the proposals were put to regional aggregates of both the SWP and SSP. Attendance at the SSP aggregate was low, (around 150) as most members believed the terms had been agreed by conference. But discussion was lively and 30 members, including most CWI supporters voted against.

At the SWP aggregate of 117 members only 1 voted against joining. In an interesting late move the SWP changed its mind on which of its members will become SSP full timers.

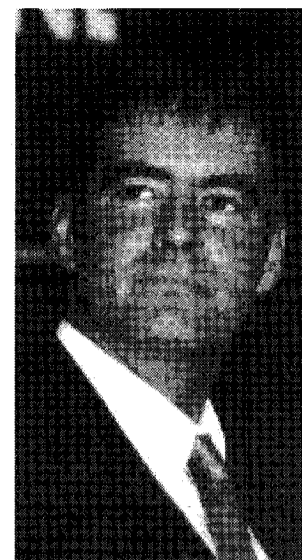
Although the vast majority of SSP members welcome this move, given the extent of former rivalry between the parties and differences in their methods of organising

and campaigning, it is inevitable that suspicions remain and that some conflicts may arise within the SSP.

These issues were referred to in a detailed memorandum and statements issued to the press which received wide coverage.

The memorandum noted that "From May 1, former SWP members will sell the *Scottish Socialist Voice*. Public sales of *Socialist Worker* will cease in Scotland".

"All SSP and SWP members have a serious responsibility to behave in a tolerant



Tommy Sheridan

and respectful manner and we would appeal to members of both parties to act in a cooperative and comradely fashion towards one another."

Many within Labour and the SNP will be looking for signs of conflict or lack of discipline within the SSP to attack us and undermine the respect accorded the SSP and Tommy in particular for our achievements to date. The continuing *Daily Record* smear campaign gives a hint of what may be to come.

Initial indications are that the fusion will work. My branch will increase from 40 to 55 members. SWP members sell *SSV* at work and on the street where previously they sold *SW*.

This is a new experience welcomed by both former rival parties which will strengthen the effectiveness of socialists in Scotland. As Tommy put it "this is the unifying of the left compared to the previous divisions on the left."

Scottish Socialist Voice goes weekly

An immediate consequence of the fusion is to increase the viability of the SSP producing and sustaining a weekly paper.

Due to the postponement of the election and the financial risks, the launch of a weekly has been postponed to May 15. However, the last two issues of the *SSV* have been laid out in its new format and the cover price increased to £1.

A distribution deal has been set up which will allow the *SSV* to reach most newsagents in Scotland.

A print run of 25,000 has been set for the first 2 issues which will come out during the election campaign. Hopefully support and members will follow.

Socialist Alliance makes its mark at NUT conference

Gill Lee

The Socialist Alliance held an impressive fringe meeting at NUT conference. Called for the Monday lunchtime when meetings are generally fairly small, it was attended by over 120 people who heard a series of uplifting speeches, mainly from Alliance candidates who are themselves teachers.

The optimistic mood of the meeting was in contrast to that of many other conference fringe meetings where delegates were confronting the rather bleak picture of struggle within the NUT (see report on page...).

It represented the feeling among supporters of the Socialist Alliance and reflected

in the speeches from both platform and audience that there is a growing opposition to the neo-liberal policies being pursued by New Labour and that the Alliances can begin to express this politically.

The meeting was chaired by Christine Blower, ex-president of the Union and a leading member of the Campaign for a Democratic Union. Other platform speakers included members of the Socialist Teachers Alliance and of the Socialist Workers' Party who currently operate outside these two main left union groupings.

The question of unity of the left within the union was thus posed in the choice of speakers. The solution however is

not as suggested by one platform speaker; that we set up a Socialist Alliance within the NUT. This would cut us off from many within the union who have an excellent record of class struggle militancy but have yet to be won to the perspective of opposition to Labour at the electoral level.

The Socialist Alliances also had a speaker at a meeting called by the Socialist Teachers Alliance on the opening night of Conference. Brian Drummond, the Alliance candidate for Bristol East, and a teacher himself, spoke about the work of the Socialist Alliances in the general election campaign and their involvement in local struggles around

education.

He stressed that Socialist Alliances are not just about elections but about campaigning.

There was a lively, at times heated, discussion from the floor. This centred around the orientation of the Alliances to those still in the Labour Party, whether sufficient support could be won away from Labour to make the Alliances a serious political alternative; and whether a new party could or should be formed in a situation of downturn.

In his reply Brian pointed to the involvement in the Alliance of ex-Labour Party members such as Liz Davies and invited STA members to get involved in the Election campaign.

Daniel Morrissey

In Wales, the voting pattern in the British general election seems certain to reflect – but not to answer – the desperate need for a new, Welsh national agenda in social, political and economic policy.

Two years ago, the Welsh people elected their first National Assembly. The low turnout at that election suggested widespread disillusionment about the political process and a lack of conviction that devolution would provide any answers to Wales' problems.

Among the more politically engaged, there was a massive loss of support by Labour within the party's core working-class constituency. Hundreds of thousands of supposedly reliable voters failed to support 'their' party at the ballot-box, and tens of thousands switched to Plaid Cymru, which presented a more traditional social-democratic platform, in contrast to the neo-liberal policies of New Labour.

Two years of a devolved administration that has failed to exercise any real autonomy from Westminster is unlikely to have won back the deserters. Many disaffected working class voters will still be prepared to vote Labour, in a British general election, in order to keep out the Tories, but nevertheless 1999's two trends of increasing abstention and a swing from Labour to Plaid are likely to be repeated.

While Assembly Members (AMs) won't themselves be held to account until 2003, their failure to develop a new politics in Wales, that might inject some real content into the shell of self-government, has heaped further discredit on all political parties, at all levels of government.

The crisis in the steel industry has underlined the Assembly's ineffectiveness. From the earliest suggestions that the days of steel-production in Wales might be numbered, Welsh politicians were reduced to pleading with Corus to put the interests of its employees and their communities before those of its shareholders.

There followed a desperate scramble for any financial inducements that might be permissible within the tight constraints of European competition legislation, and which could therefore be offered to the Anglo-Dutch multinational.

As it became increasingly clear that nothing available was sufficiently attractive to keep Corus here, AMs lined up to condemn Corus boss, Brian Moffat, for his lack of social conscience – demonstrating an almost childlike naivete about the motivation of capitalist enterprises.

Radical solutions to prevent the destruction of the Welsh steel industry were conspicuous by their absence. To some extent this is due to the Assembly's limited powers: there is genuinely very little that it could legally have done. But it is worrying that hardly anyone in the Assembly even suggested any radical action, by any layer of Government.

Only the former Plaid leader, Dafydd Wigley, called in the chamber for nationalisation (although this call was taken up by Ron Davies in a TV interview shortly afterwards, as well as by numerous other prominent Plaid politicians).

In their timidity, AMs were, of course, no more remiss than the Westminster government, whose powers are far greater. Politicians at London and Cardiff alike adhere to the neo-liberal consensus that national governments are power-



New Labour and union leaders agreed that there was nothing to be done to save steelworkers' jobs threatened by Corus

Election: Why it's different for Wales

less in the face of multinational corporations.

But in Wales, this timidity also reflects an unwillingness to push at the boundaries of the devolution settlement – a lack of any determination to do a more serious job, requiring greater powers, and thereby demonstrating the need for those powers.

As with steel, so with a series of other damaging developments in the economy. Wales' political 'leaders' present themselves almost as passive observers. In late February, when more than 5000 job losses had already been announced since the beginning of the year, First Minister Rhodri Morgan suggested that he was powerless to protect employment in Wales: "We do not control macro-economic policy. That is left to the Treasury."

When asked how Labour plans to regenerate the Welsh economy, Rhodri and his ministers typically offer little more than vague generalities: "developing the export potential of Welsh companies ... establishing an innovation and entrepreneurship culture ... promoting our natural strengths", etc, etc.

With such a lack of vision, it is unsurprising that most people in Wales are hard-pressed to name a single achievement for which the Assembly can claim credit.

Rather, reflecting the meagre vision of the Liberals in particular, they are offered as 'one-off' giveaways.

Rather than call for greater powers to allow it to pursue a bolder strategy, Welsh Labour pins its hopes on early entry into the European single currency. The occasional hint in this respect (never strong enough to suggest impatience with Gordon Brown's caution) is the only suggestion that anything about the status quo might be less than perfect.

For the first eighteen months of devolution, Labour blamed its lack of discernible progress on the trials of minority government. The coalition with the Liberal Democrats, agreed in October, was supposed to have removed this obstacle, however.

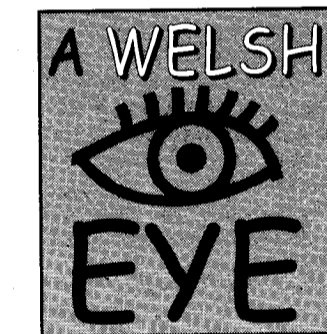
In fact, it has pushed the administration to implement a series of worthy, but small-scale reforms: free school milk for children under seven; free prescriptions for the under-25s; free bus travel for pensioners and the disabled; free entry to all museums and art galleries.

Potentially, such measures could help to rehabilitate the idea of a public service, freed from the intervention of the market, but it is telling that there is no such attempt to present these developments as part of an overall strategy of decommodification.

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The Welsh Labour administra-



tion, invariably react with phoney anger whenever Plaid Cymru makes any statements about the devolution settlement not being final. Indeed, Plaid's pronouncements on the national question provide Welsh Labour with the only stick with which it feels it can beat the official opposition.

This usefully distracts attention away from the fact that Plaid's policies are generally far more in tune with the views of Labour supporters than Labour's own. (For example: on privatisation, Plaid is critical of PFI and supports the renationalisation of the railways.)

So, Labour was quick to pounce when Seimon Glyn, a Gwynedd Plaid councillor, called for the 'monitoring' of immigration by affluent, and arrogantly anti-Welsh, English settlers into economically depressed Welsh-speaking communities.

Rhondda Plaid councillor, Mike Brittain, badgered by a BBC interviewer for a controversial quote,

said: "the English, every country they've been in, to me, they have raped, they have taken the wellbeing out of the country."

Labour politicians immediately lined up to demand the head of this "racist" on a plate, despite the fact that he'd clearly meant the British Empire, not the English people. Tragically, the emphatically non-racist Brittain narrowly escaped suspension by his own party, and even then had to consent to be "re-educated", so rattled was the Plaid leadership.

The incident demonstrates Labour's insistence that it can determine the limits of the Welsh national project.

And this at a time when national self-consciousness is flowering in Wales – particularly among young people – even if few see the Assembly as the embodiment of their aspirations on the political plane. The British state may increasingly be exposed as an outdated encumbrance, but it still finds loyal support from the unionists of the official labour movement.

Plaid's policies do not, however, offer a real alternative to Labour's.

Its leadership is less infatuated by the market and the private sector, and it proposes a more interventionist approach to the Welsh economy, targeting state assistance where it is most needed. But it is even more inclined than Welsh Labour to see the European Union and specifically the single currency – with all the constraints on public spending that this involves – as a panacea.

Neo-liberalism at the European level is seen as the only alternative to neo-liberalism at the British level.

Nevertheless, socialists should welcome a big vote for Plaid, and an increase in its parliamentary representation, on 7 June. Without making any concessions to its right-social democratic leadership, we should be able to recognise that people in Wales – especially working class people – will vote Plaid essentially for two reasons.

Firstly, a vote for Plaid is seen as a means to defend the welfare state, and public services generally, from the ravages of neo-liberalism. Secondly, Plaid represents a greater self-confidence on the part of the Welsh people, an impatience with the conservatism of the Labour Party and a determination to develop solutions to national problems at a national level.

With the Welsh Socialist Alliance a weak and feeble creature, and the Greens having found little resonance in Wales, an increase in support for Plaid will be the only clear manifestation of the demand for a more progressive agenda.

At the very least, it will put pressure on Labour from the left and help to shift the centre of gravity of Welsh politics away from Westminster and neo-liberalism.

Moreover, several of the Plaid candidates in winnable seats – notably Adam Price (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) and Leanne Wood (Rhondda) represent a resurgent left-wing in the party: youthful, working-class and often with a trade union background. The strengthening of this new left against the more conservative forces in Plaid would be a positive development in itself.

This election seems very likely to deliver another big shock to New Labour in Wales. It is to be hoped that this will also open up the possibility of greater engagement and discussion between the Labour and Plaid lefts and other socialist and campaigning groups.

Wales' political 'leaders' present themselves almost as passive observers. In late February, First Minister Rhodri Morgan suggested that he was powerless to protect employment in Wales: "We do not control macro-economic policy. That is left to the Treasury."

ISG response to Lindsey German's "Third Way"

**Why not make it
a real party?**

Terry Conway and Alan Thornett

It is positive that *Socialist Worker* has set out its views on the future of the Socialist Alliance, in an article by Lindsey German in its May 5 edition

German's article marks the long road that the SWP have travelled since committing itself to the Alliance eighteen months ago. The article proposes that the Alliance be restructured after the General Election more on the lines of a party – a proposal with which we would broadly agree. But it then rejects the idea that this should be a stage towards the Alliance becoming a political party as such.

A year ago the London Socialist Alliance stood in the elections for the Greater London Assembly. Livingstone's decision to stand for Mayor as an independent after he was robbed of the Labour nomination, convinced the SWP that a new space was opening up to the left of Labour.

But at this point they had only committed themselves to serious involvement in London. It was only after the positive results in London that the SWP moved towards making a national commitment to the Alliance and in so doing began to reshape its structures and contribute to its dynamism.

By the autumn the question of a general election challenge was an issue of debate within the Alliance, with the SWP arguing for this and helping to make its implementation a reality.

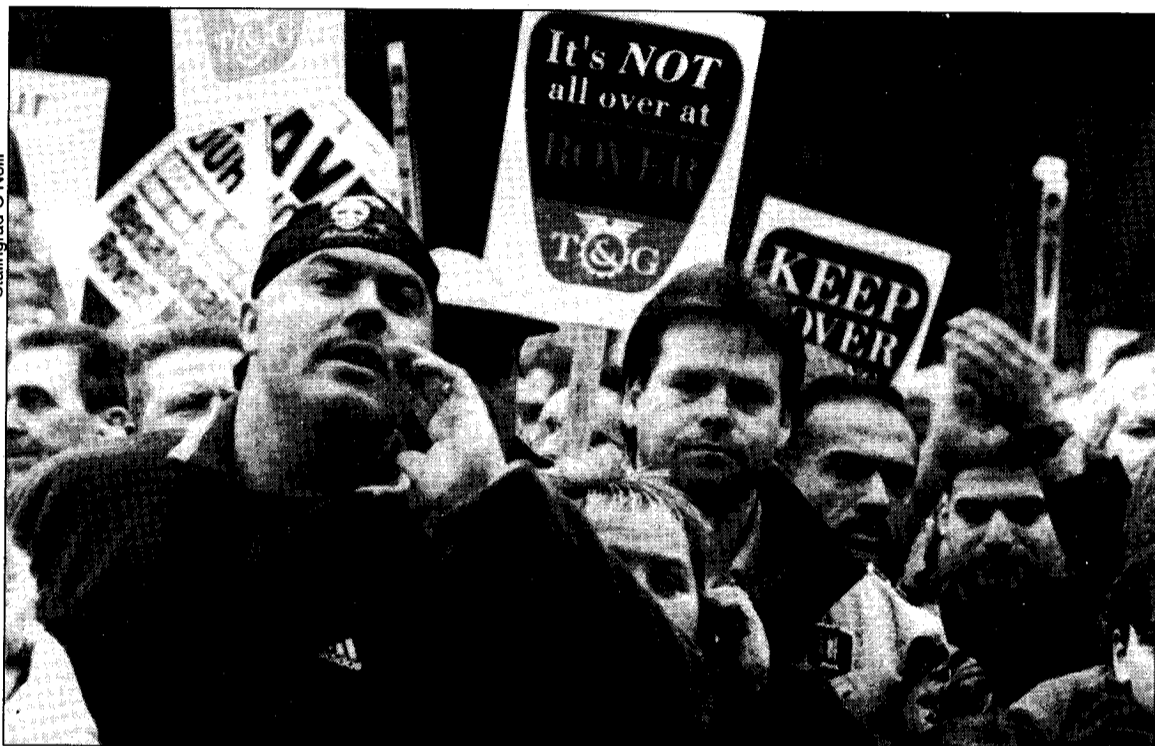
Throughout this process the Alliance itself was beginning to develop an identity, a personality.

In town after town Alliance supporters were meeting on a regular basis, campaigning on the streets and debating through ideas and strategies.

Particularly in the wake of Liz Davies' decision to join the Alliance, a whole host of Labour Party members, many with decades of membership, have become involved. And as several interviews in the May edition of the SWP's *Socialist Review* make clear, what most of these people wanted from the Socialist Alliance was a political home.

The Alliance is an almost unique phenomenon in British politics. (almost because of course there are parallels as well as differences with the evolution of the Scottish Socialist Party). For the majority of those involved – and certainly for those who are not aligned to any of the left groups involved, this is an ongoing project.

This reality has been increasingly recognised by the SWP. The major article by John Rees in the current issue of the SWP's theoretical journal *International Socialism*, in setting out the political parameters within which the Alliance has developed, strongly indicates that



Stalingrad O'Neill

the SWP is involved in the Alliance for the long term. But he doesn't state it explicitly in the way German does.

There has clearly been debate within the organisation on these issues. As Greg Tucker argues in SO 44, Rees analyses the shift in the objective situation which, in the opinion of the SWP leadership, has necessitated a break with past practice.

But German's article goes further. It explicitly rejects the idea that after the General Election the organisation should return to its old ways of organising and treat the Alliance as just another arena in which to sell papers or make a few recruits.

She mentions the elections that will need to be fought over the next two years and argues that the Alliance needs to prepare now for those campaigns. She asserts that the Alliance needs to campaign publicly on the key issues on which its pledges have been agreed and build a leadership and infrastructure that will enable it to do so.

All this is excellent – a step forward both for the SWP and for the Alliance.

But unlike many other individuals and groups in the Alliance, the SWP still draws the line at calling for the Alliance to become a party as the next stage beyond this.

Unfortunately German distorts the argument by polemicising against what she calls a "new mass working class party". This is an idea which the Socialist Party calls for at this stage, but which others, including ourselves certainly do not support.

She argues (rightly) that today the bulk of the organised working class

have not broken with Labourism and that the movement behind the Alliance is relatively small. She indicates that this cannot change by more effort of will – it will be objective conditions that determine our ability to make this transformation into a new mass party.

All these things are true. A new mass party is not on the cards without higher levels of class struggle and bigger ruptures in the existing labour movement.

But they miss the point. The choice is not between a new mass party and an Alliance.

The question we will face in the medium term is whether to maintain the Alliance or move towards a small but significant new left party along the lines of the SSP. This could start the development towards a future new mass party when political conditions make that possible.

Current developments on the left do make an SSP-type party feasible. The political conditions do exist if the left can respond.

Lindsey German partly recognises this in arguing for what she calls a "third way" – the restructuring of the Alliance along the lines of a party without calling it one. This would create something she correctly says would be "short of a full party".

The danger in calling it a party, German says, is that it could degenerate into factional arguments and may founder on new political developments over which there may be sharp differences.

But this is a potential problem within the Alliance anyway – either as it is currently structured or under her third way proposals. Either the left can find a way of

containing such differences or it can't. If it can't the project will be in danger whatever the structure.

In fact this very point is a compelling argument to moving towards a party structure in the future. A party can have a more politically structured way to deal both with sharp discussion and the democratic resolution of disagreements.

Independent socialists within the alliance, in particular, will at a certain point want it to move towards a party in order that they can participate in a fully structured way, have their say and have their democratic rights guaranteed.

We welcome Lindsey German's concern about the dangers of forming a party in which the SWP dominates. But we think those dangers will need to be addressed in the Alliance itself, whether or not in becomes a party.

The *Socialist Worker* article states that the SWP will continue to put forward and support proposals within the Alliance which ensure political pluralism. This is also welcome. What is less clear, either from the article or from practice on the ground is to what extent it has a formed attitude on the question of political debate.

German is worried that in present political conditions discussion could easily be dominated by the existing far left groups. The solution to this problem – which is a real one – is not to stifle debate – which has sometimes been the reaction of comrades on the ground.

The more the Alliance succeeds in winning non-aligned activists, the greater the thirst for discussion will become. After all, those of us in revolutionary organisations already

have a forum for discussion within our own groups and publications. If the Alliance is to be the political home that disillusioned Labour party members want, it must be a place for debate.

Of course we all have to learn new ways of having such exchanges. We have to differentiate between discussion where it is important to come to decisions – on issues where we need to act together as an Alliance in public, and those where we can exchange ideas but agree to disagree.

We have to resolve this as part of building the Alliance we need, whatever name we give it.

The final hurdle which German erects is perhaps the most controversial. While she can conceive of a situation where it would be right to build "a party that encompassed people holding quite different views", she again asserts that this would "most likely come out of a mass movement of struggle involving much bigger forces than ourselves, including large groups of workers who had only partially broken with Labourism and reformism."

Leave aside the fact that some of the small groups of workers we are already winning are certainly not conscious revolutionaries, the spectre which she raises is that uniting a new party on minimal demands would lead to either splits or fudges in times of crisis.

But the Alliance today is not, and should not be constructed on a minimum programme. In some senses the key pledges that we have adopted could be seen in this way – but even then the idea that there would be disagreements of a principled nature on how to react to "a controversial strike or a real racist backlash" seems pretty far fetched. Sure there might well be different views about the best tactics to adopt in such a situation – but that is a different question.

But it is not just the pledges that the Alliance has agreed. It has adopted an extensive manifesto agreed at the Birmingham conference in March. What is contained in that document goes far beyond any minimum programme, while at the same time it rightly is not a blueprint for a revolutionary transformation of society.

The Manifesto at least partially adopts a transitional approach and can act as a bridge between the current consciousness of workers breaking from the policies and approach of new Labour. And while adherence to every dot and comma of the document is not a condition of membership of the Alliance, there was a great deal of consensus behind its adoption – including amongst those not from a revolutionary tradition.

The SWP have moved in an positive direction over the last year. Lindsey German's article commits her organisation to continue on that road, and this augurs well for building a fighting opposition to Blair's Tory policies.

The ISG hopes that with further debate and dialogue, through the structures of the Alliance, in the pages of the left press and elsewhere, it will eventually be possible to win a convinced majority for taking another step down that road – through the creation of a new left party in England on the lines of the SSP in Scotland.

That way we can reorganise the left on a new basis and build a lasting alternative to the betrayals of Blairism.

Current developments on the left do make an SSP-type party feasible. The political conditions do exist if the left can respond.

No to racism – defend Geneva Convention!

Veronica Fagan

The last few weeks have seen the greatest racist backlash since Enoch Powell's "river of blood" speech. But Nick Griffin of the BNP is only partly right when he says that William Hague is his best recruitment sergeant.

The leadership of both main political parties have been vying with each other to play the race card.

Of course all anti-racists deplore William Hague's failure to deal with the deeply offensive statements of John Townend and his supporters in a more decisive way. But the comments that Townend made reflect a widely held opinion in his party – that black people are not welcome in Britain.

This episode demonstrated yet again the deep crisis of the Tory Party and the threat that Hague's leadership will be under after the election.

But few people expected anything different from the Tories.

It is Tony Blair, as Prime Minister and leader of the Labour Party who must bear the greatest responsibility for much more widespread upsurge of racism, through:

- The witch hunt against asylum seekers
- The increase in racist attacks
- The backlash against the Stephen Lawrence Enquiry

The fact that this is a deliberate strategy on the part of new Labour is graphically demonstrated by Tony Blair's recent articles in *The Times*. In the few days before calling the General Election, the Prime Minister made sure that racist passions were further inflamed by writing an article calling for the scrapping of the 1951 Geneva Convention.

Blair protests that race and asylum are two separate issues, and castigates the Tories' flabbiness over Townend for making a "sen-

sible" debate over asylum difficult. This separation does not hold water.

It is black people, along with those from Eastern Europe, who pay the price for the tougher asylum regulations that are part and parcel of Fortress Europe.

It is black communities who are attacked by the police, while their legitimate right to self defence is challenged.

And the Chinese community has been subject to racist scapegoating for their alleged role in the outbreak of foot and mouth disease, rather than pointing the finger where it belongs – at the neo-liberal deregulation of agriculture and food production.

Blair's attack on the Geneva Convention focused on the supposed increase in "economic migration".

He treats the idea of people fleeing wars and persecution as a minor issue, one with capitalism can deal easily. Likewise he ignores the mil-

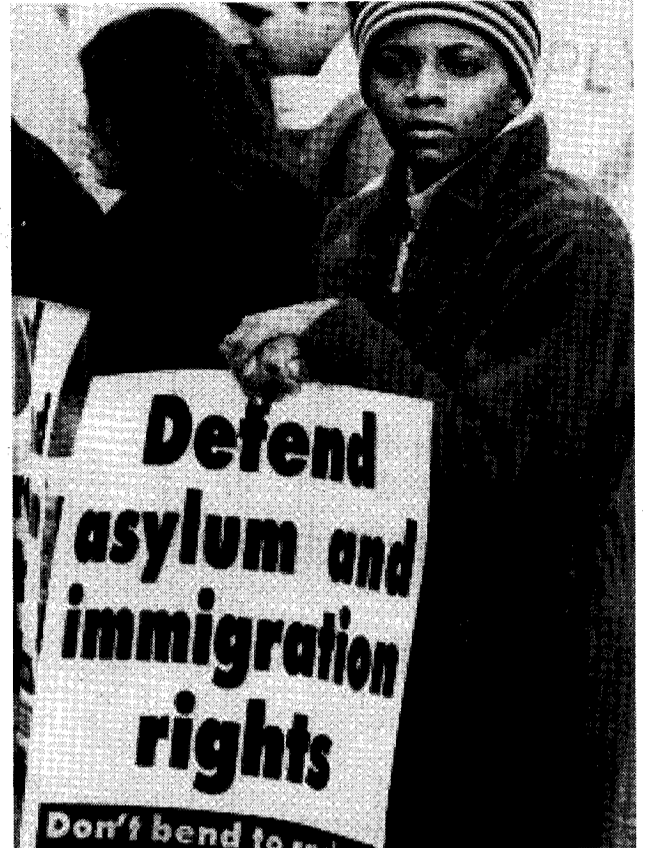
lions made homeless by environmental degradation, despite the fact that the system he and his cronies preside over is responsible for these massive involuntary population movements.

And when he deals with economic migration, he implies, just as much as the most brazen of the tabloids, that what we are talking about is greedy scoundgers looking for a flasher car or some other status symbol.

The stark reality is that neo-liberal capitalism is starving to death many children, women and men across the world not because there is not enough food to eat but because that food is produced for profit not greed.

Socialist Outlook stands for the abolition of all immigration controls. We have argued time and again in these pages that a world which values profit before people is one that fuels racism.

In this issue, we are pleased to print letters from Gabriel Nkwelle which are a power-



ful indictment of immigration detention.

In previous issues, we have told stories of the horrific realities from which other asylum seekers have fled in their own countries. We have tried to give a voice to black people fighting back against racism in the so-called criminal justice system in this country.

This is why we welcome the initiative from the Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers to launch a petition against racism in this election and carry the text on this page.

We hope all our readers will not only sign it themselves but become actively involved in the campaign around it.

Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers

Sign the petition against racism by politicians!

- We the undersigned are appalled that politicians are encouraging racism and vicious racist attacks.
- Scotland Yard noted a 300 percent increase in racist attacks following William Hague's notorious Britain as a "foreign land" speech.
- The leaders of the far right British National Party has announced his intention to stand in Oldham, with the aim of increasing racial tension. He says that scapegoating legitimises the idea "that we cannot afford to have asylum seekers here in the first place".
- Britain is a vibrant multi-racial country, which has benefited greatly from immigrants' contribution.
- Meanwhile, the right to work has been denied to refugees under New Labour. Some 1,500 asylum seekers are detained in prisons and holding centres. The home secretary boasts of his intention to deport 30,000 asylum applicants this year.
- The voucher scheme has stigmatised those fleeing persecution and oppression, while the dispersal programme has created isolation and alienation for asylum seekers.
- We object to New Labour's draconian racist policies on asylum seekers and believe that Jack Straw's policies are directly fuelling racism.
- Instead of scrapping the voucher scheme, the dispersal programme and detention centres, Jack Straw wants to abolish the 1951 Geneva Convention. He claims it is outdated, at a time when the United Nations estimates that 37 million people are presently refugees across the world, only 0.5 percent of them in Britain.
- We demand:
 - Abolition of the voucher scheme
 - An end to dispersal and detention
 - The retention of the 1951 Geneva Convention
 - Full economic and social rights for asylum seekers
 - An end to inflammatory speeches by both Tory and New Labour politicians
- Copies of the petition and further information from CDAS, BCM Box 4289 London WC1X 3XX or email info@defend-asylum.org

Alliance leads charge against racism

The Socialist Alliance held a press conference on racism on May 2 to make clear its determination to make anti-racist politics a key aspect of its profile in the forthcoming General Election.

Four of the Alliance's black candidates – Cecelia Prosper from Hackney North, Theresa Bennett from Vauxhall, Berylene Hamilton from Dagenham and Ateeq Siddique from Bradford South were joined by Louise Christian from Hornsey and Wood Green and Jabez Lam from the Chinese Community Centre.

As the press briefing explained "The Socialist Alliance believes it is not enough to sign up for the CRE pledge and not enough merely to denounce the more extreme forms of racism preached by the BNP or John Townend.

"We need a practical commitment to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with all the victims of racism. We need discussion of the policies – on immigration, policing, racist violence, criminal justice, public services – that can really take us forward in what must be an unremitting effort to eradicate racism from all our institutions

"We see our general election campaign as part of a broad-based and continuing

struggle against racism. While New Labour and the Tories compete over who can be seen to be "toughest" on asylum seekers, we argue for a crackdown on racism in the police, prisons and other government agencies.

"While New Labour and the Tories compete about how many people they can lock up in prison, we argue for an enhancement and extension of all our democratic rights.

"While the media, along with elements in the judiciary and police, foment a backlash against the Macpherson inquiry, we argue for a co-ordinated strategy to stamp our racist violence."

The briefing went on to set out the many manifesto pledges that are particularly relevant to taking this fight forward and to quote a number of statements made by local alliance candidates.

Ateeq Siddique said "I'm not surprised that the BNP has gained the confidence to run in Oldham, considering the climate of racism that has been created by politicians and

media alike. "This is a direct result of Straw and Roche competing with Hague and Widdecombe in blowing up the asylum seekers issue.

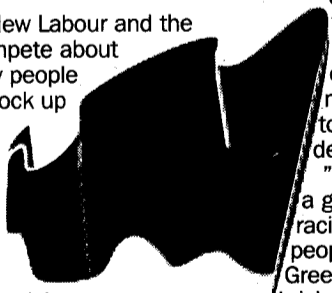
"The BNP is a worm that crawls out whenever there's enough filth to feed it. It will take more than chicken tikka masala platitudes to starve it to death.

"On Easter Sunday a group of 40 white racists attacked Asian people in Lidget Green, Bradford, with bricks and milk bottles.

"A key element has been missing in the media discussion of the background. For years New Labour and the Tories have been competing to be the toughest on 'bogus' asylum seekers. This has encouraged racists to organise.

"We'll be opposing the fascists in Oldham and anywhere else they creep out of the woodwork. But we'll be doing more than that. We'll be challenging the racist policies that give the fascists room to breathe.

"We've seen that New Labour has pandered to racism just like the other parties. Now there is an



"It is time for asylum seekers and humanity as a whole to fight back"

Gabriel's LETTERS

GABRIEL NKWELLE was imprisoned for eleven months in various detention centres and prisons in the UK. He has tirelessly campaigned against detention and the conditions faced by himself and his fellow detainees and his letters, sent while in detention, are an inspiration. He has given us permission to reproduce his letters, which are a heavy indictment of the system of immigrant detention. They continue on page 14.

**HMP Rochester
09-10-00**

Dear Sir/Madam,
Appeal For Urgent Intervention

Fellow human beings, fellow mankind, it is with great sincerity that I make this desperate appeal for your timely intervention in the horrifying and pathetic plight of asylum seekers in UK detained at HMP Rochester, Kent under Immigration Act 1971.

A subjected people have by right under universal standards and human principles the obligation to seek redress by any means internationally acceptable.

I hold the view that all men were created equal and by virtue of their existence are vested with certain inalienable rights to be the sole masters of their destiny.

This has not been the case with asylum seekers in UK detained at HMP Rochester who from the beginning, because of their accommodating attitudes, have been slowly stripped of their human rights. With the oppressors mechanism of 02/10100, now working full time to completely dehumanise and emasculate our people no matter what means including genocide. It is therefore time for asylum seekers in Rochester, Kent, and humanity as a whole to fight back.

Many people may not readily understand or agree with the rea-



sons why asylum seekers should be clamouring to restore their rights equally as any other human being.

Asylum seekers detained at the notorious HMP Rochester, are treated worse than convicted criminals detained at the same HMP. Asylum seekers are held indefinitely without trial or initial decision on a claim made. This decision is taken by the immigration Service which does not explain the decision in detail to the persons concerned.

Asylum seekers held at HMP Rochester, Kent, have fewer rights than suspected criminals and often do not understand why they are being held indefinitely.

Not surprisingly, this causes mental anguish among detainees, many of whom may have already survived horrendous ordeals in their own countries. The whole process of asylum seeking and being detained for a lengthy period of time in UK, is extremely humiliating and distressing.

The way to refugee status, is a long way to go. At HMP Rochester, Kent, the Echo and Delta wings where asylum seekers are being detained for this lengthy period, has rectangular dimensions of sixty

by fourteen metres.

Cells are four by four metres, toilet included, two inmates per cell. The sixty by six metres at the middle of the two buildings is for games. Inmates are not allowed to move beyond the sixty by six metres area. Echo wing houses one hundred and fifteen whilst Delta about sixty five inmates. Out of twenty four hours a day, you are allowed six hours only at the sixty by six metres area, whilst for eigh-

"Not only are detainees held in prisons, but they get far worse treatment in here than convicted criminals found guilty by the law courts."

teen hours you are locked up in your cell.

Being locked up, makes you appreciate your freedom. Out of everything in life, losing your freedom is the hardest situation to deal with. No one listens in our society any more. If you put a foot wrong, you are never forgiven; "you are not allowed to forget". We should learn to forgive and forget for we can always reshape the future, but

"If a detainee voices his displeasure at all, the prison staff are quick to remind him to "piss off back to your own country". ... I strongly believe some of the prison staff are staunch members of BNP."

we can't reshape the past.

After months/years of incarceration the following are mentally deranged. Shi (Chinese), Saglam (Turk), Nwange (Kenyan), Fal (Gambian), Shayanghi (Iraqi), Hammidou Deraji (Algerian), etc.

Inmates had attempted serious self-harm and nobody cares. Medication is a forgotten issue, if you happen to be sick, the grave should be your next home. Both medical and wing staff abuse asylum seekers racially, call them Kunta Kinte and used words like you all will be deported poor people, to the black coloured monkeys".

It's awful. I can't tell how awful I feel. The secret self ever more secret, unhappy misled; "unless you know where you are, you don't know who you are."

In a recent survey of 02/10/00, a Rumanian (Kvec) was seriously brutalised by five Echo wing members of staff (Archibald RCO5G, Brads RC062, S O Gamble RCO20, Henderson RC096 and Mather RCO112) in my presence and others inmates for doing absolutely nothing.

A Kenyan that has been detained for fifteen months by Immigration Service without trial, roasted himself in his cell on the night of October 5th. None of the inmates knows his whereabouts as from that night to date. Life without freedom is a high price to pay.

Asylum seekers are kept in prison without charge, the sound of doors slamming and the ever constant keys echoing around the wing, become our early morning wake up. If we are on remand, when are we going to be sentenced? It's a question without an answer.

Expired food stuffs are always given to asylum seekers at HMP Rochester. When questioned, you are threatened to be taken to the segregation unit. On September 25th a verbal system was implemented by the governor, whereby asylum seekers detained at HMP Rochester must work seven hours in a workshop job for 0.25 pence per hour. He who refuses, is locked up till those in the workshop are back in the wing.

Today October 10th inmates are served with the workshop compulsory memo. I enclose a copy. For God's sake, where on earth is an adult human being forced to do a job not of his/her choice and to be paid 0.25 pence/hour? Is it modern slavery? Where are we? Third world or first world? Some inmates have been trying to draw the attention of media, but once you are noticed, you are transferred to the

"Not only are detainees held in prisons, but they get far worse treatment in here than convicted criminals found guilty by the law courts."

segregation unit.

On the day I was to publish my appeal for urgent intervention, a member of education department whose name was not made known to me, betrayed me to the governor. At about 13.10 hours, five members of staff (Whooten, Grimes, Henderson RC 096, Breds RC 062 and Virdler RC 158) rushed into my cell, moved out my inmate Ndoma TD 0534 to the TV

room and seized all the appeal papers printed ready to be dispatched. That governor Lewis ordered the seizure.

As a detainee have I not got the right to express my view to the media?

We leave at tiptoe stance never knowing what to expect next as thousands of asylum seekers live in internal exile being continuously hunted for out right elimination like dogs. To us as people, there can be neither peace nor progress where unrestrained repression, assimilation, exploitation and human inequality reign supreme.

To you comrades, also battling your own personal hell; I wish you courage and with God's blessings a happy ending to all your woes. It will also help all of us disadvantaged people, to get together and aid each other in any way possible.

To all of you, whom God has blessed with justice, humanity's most cherished gift, human dignity and freedom, help us, the not so fortunate so we can have a semblance of it someday.

The situation now brewing here at HMP Rochester, has the potential of making the asylum seekers the flash point of a dangerous regional conflict. I call on you people to render any help you can to asylum seekers held at HMP Rochester.

The gratitude of asylum seekers will know no bounds. God crown our efforts with success and may he bless us all.

If you have any queries concerning the contents of this appeal, please do not hesitate to contact the writer,

Yours sincerely,
(signed)

Nkwelle Gabriel A(Human Rights Activist (HRDG) no. 11344 Cameroon)

22/1/ 2001

**Haslar
ASYLUM SEEKERS FACING
LIFE IN PRISONS (BEHIND
BARS)**

Kindly permit me to bring to your notice the appalling treatment that Immigration detainees are being subjected to in prisons following the Home Office announcement of June 1994 to keep Immigration Act detainees in five prisons.

The UK state of affairs is so dehumanising it contradicts the Human Rights of all concerned. Immigration detainees comprise mainly asylum seekers and others who, for one reason or the other, are being held for an unnecessarily lengthy period by the Immigration Authorities.

The treatment meted out to detainees held in prisons makes me wonder if we are actually detainees or prisoners on death row. Why are detainees held in prisons? This is the first bit of the whole story which I cannot comprehend.

Not only are detainees held in prisons, but they get far worse treatment in here than convicted criminals found guilty by the law courts.

The detention of people who have already suffered so greatly is, from any moral standpoint, inadmissible. Detention of torture survivors causes serious mental and emotional effects. It compounds

the effects of previous detentions. Further detention puts torture victims in circumstances of relative isolation, often exacerbated by the barrier of lack of language, thereby increasing the likelihood of their re-living and fixating upon past horrors, of increased anxiety and distress, of the possibility of self-harm and suicide.

The majority of detainees must have gone through horrendous ordeals in their own countries and being banged up in prison on arrival in UK is just away over the top.

The way I view it, the whole system has been designed to strip immigration detainees of humanity, to cause maximum frustration and to degrade detainees. The underlying issue regarding asylum seeking is being liable to persecution in a particular country. Why then does a detainee have to face this anguish in UK having escaped to this country to seek asylum.

Lengthy detention is another cause of concern. Some detainees are held at the so-called detention centres (prisons) for months/years with little or nothing being effected on their case. Amongst the five prisons holding immigration detainees, HMCI Prison Haslar, (to which the Home Secretary announced a change of name to HOHC in January 1993; a change existing only in White Papers) houses 160 detainees in dormitories A to H. A Dormitory houses 19, B 22, D 37, E 36, G 36 and H 10 detainees.

At HOHC (Prison) Haslar at the time of writing, some detainees have undergone this horrendous ordeal for from one month to twenty one months and above, with medical reports which should permit their release.

But the immigration Authorities do not appear minded to release them, eg David Smith, Ragavan Ramswami, Abdul Cader, Patrick Madila, Kumbu Kamalandua, Krishna Kumar and many others. These detainees have spent what is tantamount to a three year prison sentence! For what? Mainly for being immigration detainees.

Why should prison rules apply to detainees when they are not on remand or convicted? Why, as detainees, do we have to spend more time on "bang up"? It gets worse on Wednesdays with staff training, a process whereby occupants of dormitories are locked up all morning or all afternoon and evening.

The psychological torture, the "bang ups" and the harrowing experience of being detained for lengthy periods takes such a heavy toll on some detainees that they end up in hospitals or mental institutions!

During the month of May/June 2000, an Egyptian detained at HOHC Prison Haslar spontaneously signed to go back to Egypt. As a result of getting no reply from the Immigration Service, and of having no knowledge of what was going to happen the next day, he became so frustrated and distressed that he wounded himself badly. He ended up being admitted to a medical institution from Haslar prison.

Furthermore, the heavy handedness of prison staff must be addressed. A misunderstanding on 13.12.00 will highlight this. Detainee Doven Tohlor a Jamaican was told by a member of staff (HR040) on 12.12.00 in D Dormitory to take his feet off a chair, which he did. The next day about 10 of us were sitting with our feet on other chairs when the same officer came in.



He fetched another officer, went direct to Doven and told him to take his feet off the chair, which he did without protest. The only protest was from me. I said that it was unfair to pick on Doven. On 14.12.00, an officer came and told Doven he was going to hospital. By the time we came back from education, Doven had left, not for hospital, but for H.M. Prison, Rochester.

On 27.12.00 and 07.01.01 respectively, despite the fact that racial or insulting language is unacceptable under prison rules, detainee Nkwelle was insulted by officer (HR020) on the first occasion and by officer (HR015) on the second.

On both occasions the officers asked about keys and both officers called the detainee "a stupid...." Witnesses to the drama are Oguniyi, Augustine, Yu, Suh, Kiam, Henry Smith and David

Smith. These matters were reported to the Governor, Mr Riach, on 8 January 2001.

Unfortunately, action has not been taken. If a detainee voices his displeasure at all, the prison staff are quick to remind him to "piss off back to your own country".

The language barrier means that these officers get away with so much insulting language that detainees do not understand and which I do not care to go into. If you are bold enough to point out the wrongs they do, they will tell you where to jump and remind you that you won't be getting even with them by the time you get to HM. Prison, Rochester. I strongly believe some of the prison staff are staunch members of BNP.

The food is not good either. It is as if the expired foodstuffs from the supermarket are earmarked for detainees' consumption at HOHC Prison Haslar. Expired foodstuffs best before October 13th 2000 were cooked and served to detainees

during the months of November and December, and up to 7th January 2001.

Likewise expired bread best before 23rd December 2000 was served up to January 7th 2001 on the instruction of power hungry kitchen staff Mr Monks.

A detainee, Nkwelle, employed to work in the kitchen was bold enough to question the staff in charge of the kitchen, Mr Monks, why expired food has to be cooked and served to detainees. The prison staff responded "Do you know how much money the government spends on detainees? Why shouldn't they consume expired food?"

Because of Nkwelle's boldness in questioning Mr Monks, his contract to work in the kitchen got terminated on 06.01.01 by Deputy Governor, Mr R. Crew, without any enquiries being made of Nkwelle. Governor R. Crew's

are heated only by a pipe running along the wall. The standard issue of clothing is not enough to keep detainees warm during the day and two thin blankets are not enough at night.

In most of the dormitories, the cubicles in which detainees sleep have no door, no curtains on the window and the partitions do not go up to the ceiling. Detainees have no privacy and no respite from the noise of TV and of other detainees. This contributes much to their depression.

It is not an effective use of detention space to detain people for lengthy periods before a decision is taken on their claim. It is abundantly clear that in the actions of the Immigration Service, there is little or no consistency or logic in the current arrangements for using prisons for detention, nor in the way that prisons used for detention

Kiam, Mathieu etc can testify.

I have already been victimised by HMP Rochester and HOHC Prison Haslar prison staff, likewise immigration authorities, for daring to speak out on the poor treatment meted out to immigration detainees held in prison.

If, as a result, I am murdered like General Beausoleil in Togo, Dr Hanson in an accident in Tanzania etc, or like other asylum seekers abroad, it would still be worth it because killing the messenger does not kill the message.

This letter therefore could be regarded as the first course in a restaurant, meant to whet the appetite for the main dish that could follow one day. If you, however, find it too salty then I alone am the bad cook.

Yours sincerely,

Gabriel A. Nkwelle
Human Rights Activist (HRDG)
Cameroon with reg. no.11344

"The food is not good either. It is as if the expired foodstuffs from the supermarket are earmarked for detainees' consumption at HOHC Prison Haslar."

reaction without inquiry shows he is associated with Mr Monks' poor misconduct in cooking expired food for detainees' consumption.

On 08.01.01 this matter was reported to Governor, Mr Riach, who made an urgent inquiry. From his inquiries, he found the allegation positive. He then ordered kitchen staff Mr Monks, to throw away all expired food stock at the main store and kitchen store.

This confirmation took place at the prison office at about 14.20 hours before me and other prison staff. This incident implies that consumption of expired food by immigration detainees held in prisons is a daily routine because the same incident occurred at HMP Rochester as I reported in my Appeal for Urgent Intervention letter of October 2000.

The heating system in the dormitories in HOHC Prison, Haslar, is very old and appears overdue for major maintenance. It is not adequate to heat the dormitories in the cold winter weather. The cubicles

are managed, if there is a cordial relation between detainees and prison staff.

I strongly believe that the use of prisons to detain immigration detainees is a corrupting experience, particularly in the case of asylum seekers.

I implore you people to, please, look into these atrocities and demand from the Immigration Authorities reasons why immigration detainees are held in prisons when there are proper detention centres. Why are immigration detainees treated differently? At the end of the day, immigration detainees are not different from any other human being. They are not criminals and refuse to be treated as such, or even worse than criminals.

As regards the expired food allegations, it is not that other detainees are not aware. They are, but they are scared to speak out. Kitchen workers such as James Alao, Patrick Madila, Kuznbu,

10 February 2001 Belmarsh

at HMP Belmarsh
Asylum Seekers
(Immigration

Detainees) are mixed up on Spur or Wing and in Cells with Remand and Convicted Prisoners

I cannot believe that anyone could imagine that detaining Asylum Seekers, or any other human being, in prison is the right thing to do.

The plan to increase the number in detention in the U.K. is absolutely ridiculous. The U.K. detains asylum seekers in prison for longer periods, with less judicial review, than any comparable country in Europe.

Despite worldwide criticism, politicians are using the asylum issue to gain an election advantage and are now suggesting that the policy of detention will not only be maintained in future, but will be expanded to include all asylum seekers. The Conservative Party

Continued
overleaf ...

Gabriel's LETTERS (continued from centre pages)

announced recently that their policy of detaining asylum seekers in prison "will have a significant deterrent effect on those travelling to U.K. to seek asylum".

I do not agree that it is the answer to solving concerns about immigration. People who are fleeing are desperate. They will take any risk to get here and detention won't stop that.

In the history of the western world, Australia has been the only western country that detains asylum seekers in prison and it has repeatedly faced criticism from the U.N. bodies. Today this policy has been enacted in the U.K. and U.K. is leading this race.

I have heard and read many dramatic stories of how foreign nationals can be maltreated if he or she opposes or exposes the British government or Prison Administration. I am a victim of such circumstances. The question I would like to pose is: Is this country practising democracy or dictatorship?

My appeal for Urgent Intervention letter of October 9th 2000 against HMP Rochester administration and the Immigration authorities resulted in a removal from HMP Rochester on November 23rd 2000 to HOHC (Prison) Haslar.

HOHC (Prison) Haslar, being controlled by prison staff, is no different in its regime against asylum seekers held there. Today I have again exposed HOHC (Prison) Haslar administration and the Immigration authorities' ill treatment of asylum seekers held in there in my letter of 22/01/01 "Asylum Seekers Facing Life in Prisons (Behind Bars)".

I have been moved unexpectedly from HOHC (Prison) Haslar to HMP Belmarsh on February 2nd 2001 as a punishment for my letter.

Such a bitter experience also happened to a Nigerian asylum seeker ENIOLA ADEWALE who was moved from Glasgow YMCA to Leicester on 11.08.2000 for speaking the truth. Ref NCADC Newsletter issue 21 Jan/Feb/March 2001. I consider this a crime against humanity.

Reaching HMP Belmarsh, that became one of the prisons holding asylum seekers in October/November 2000, what I witness in the treatment meted out to immigration detainees held here is unbelievable, unacceptable to today's society and unwelcoming. It is against human nature.

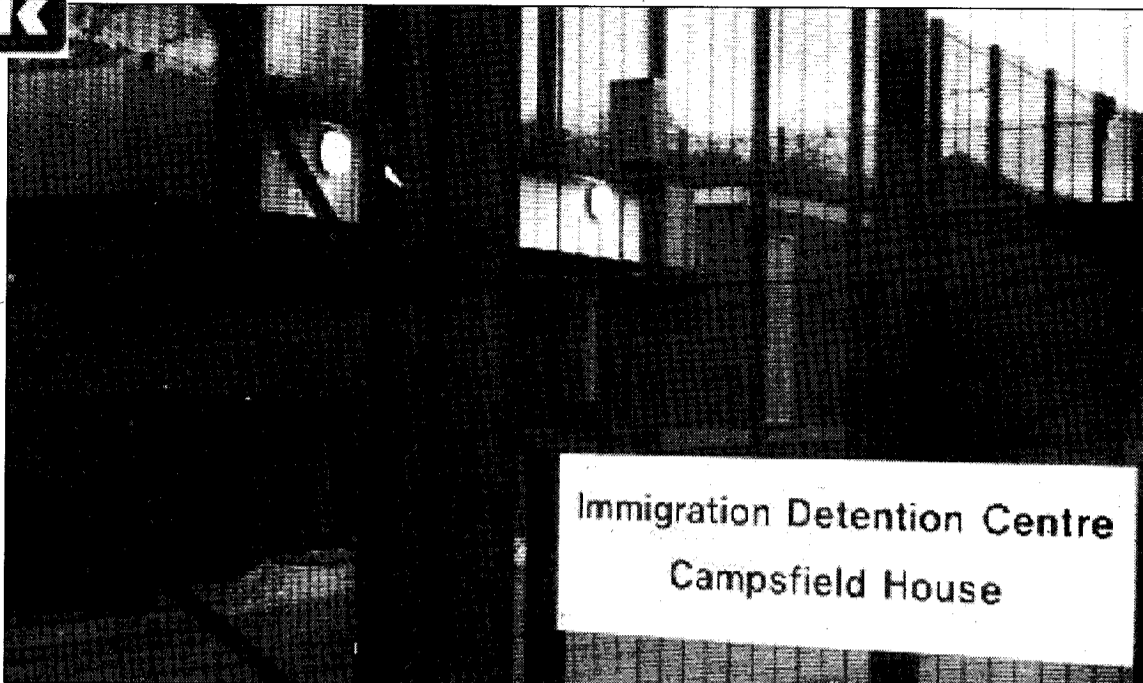
a) Asylum seekers are mixed up on spur or wing and in cells with convicted criminals and remand prisoners.

b) Asylum seekers are "Banged up" twenty three hours out of twenty four hours a day and some days they are "Banged up" twenty four hours.

c) No access to incoming calls or FAX to/from solicitors in case of emergency or urgent letter/message.

d) Asylum seekers are allowed to go to the canteen once a week and for one hour, 30 minutes or two hours only. If you happen to be late, no canteen for you that week.

e) No respect for asylum seekers. Words like "the government is spending more on asylum seekers" and bullying by prison staff become first and second nature to



asylum seekers at Belmarsh. Despite the fact that bullying or racial language is unacceptable under prison rules.

f) Bibs must be worn by asylum seekers while in the social visits hall.

g) The food standard is another issue to be addressed. Poor cooking; rice is served to detainees often without sauce; quantity and quality of food served is unbearable. If you ask for more food, despite the poor quality, which only a few detainees like me are bold enough to ask, the reply you get from prison staff is "if you are not happy with the food, you find your way back to your country".

On February 6th 2001, I put in an application to see the number one Governor, which I have already discussed with a member of staff, Mr Wilson.

He gave me the go ahead. Unfortunately this application was turned down by a female member of staff; Bond (BA 144), who said that I am not allowed to see the governor as a detainee. I consider her words abuse of Article 10 and 14 of the Human Rights Act.

Ali Walled, a Somali asylum seeker detained at Belmarsh house block 3, was physically assaulted by a member of staff, Mr Mackenzie, on February 12th 2001 at about

- Article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "No one shall be subject to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile."

Despite political assurances that such a policy is intended for the benefit of "genuine" asylum seekers, the reality is that detention is a simplistic and ill-conceived method of deterring future arrivals of asylum seekers in the UK.

A suitable welcome for asylum seekers would be one that validates their freedom, rather than placing them behind bars again. I hold the view that every asylum seeker who is detained in prison for long is in some way damaged by the experience.

What incenses me is that the UK government have learnt absolutely nothing from comparable dispersal programmes on other continents where dispersal programmes are imploding. In stead of copying from other continents where asylum seekers are being treated as any other human being, the UK government is repeating the same mistakes.

If the dispersal of asylum seekers had been voluntary, it would have been one thing, and would proceed with the positive endorsement by government ministers on the

popular opposition to asylum seekers to date have come from the Conservative Party which has led to vociferous campaigns in UK politics. The tabloids have been blatantly relentless in their vilification of refugees. People whose prejudices have been formed by the media are not only attacking asylum seekers. They are also attacking people of so-called visible ethnic minorities.

I have made very few dents in the armour of an increasingly aggressive asylum regime by the UK Government. I understand and it is quite staggeringly clear that the UNHCR has been urging the UK Government to abandon the practice of arbitrary detention for the simple reason that it is inhumane and a violation of basic human rights.

Imagine, at any point, as a British human being, you go to bed or wake up, there are other human beings being locked up in prisons when the only crime committed is seeking asylum in Britain.

It is a depressing thought, most especially when you think what many have gone through before getting here. This will have after effects on the young generation for we can forgive and forget, but history will never forgive or forget. Nobody considers a place where

"A suitable welcome for asylum seekers would be one that validates their freedom, rather than placing them behind bars again. I hold the view that every asylum seeker who is detained in prison for long is in some way damaged by the experience."

11.50 am. Ali Walled had toothache. He drew the attention of a member of staff. Mr Mackenzie came. Instead of taking Ali to health care, he moved out Ali's cell mate and butted Ali, beat his back on the wall, saying "you bloody fucking African. If you are sick go back to Africa".

Mr Mackenzie was accompanied by two other members of staff - Marshall and a Chinese officer (BA168). I refer Mr Mackenzie's act to Schedule I, Article 3 of the Human Rights Act, as explained by para 3.24 of the Home Office Study Guide. Inmates opposite, Abdullah Wallid and Bendif Karnal witnessed this.

There have been threats of mass suicide from asylum seekers detained in HMP Belmarsh as well as many attempted escapes. These are the reactions of desperate human beings who, having fled persecution in their own countries, suffer further hardship under Britain's much criticised mandatory detention regime.

Despite the fact that freedom from arbitrary deprivation of liberty is a Fundamental human right

enrichment asylum seekers bring to today's society. Take the example from Germany and other European countries where asylum seekers are allowed to work and generate income to the country and feel as free as any other human being.

What I have experienced in the UK Government is that, for the first time in Europe, it is disappointing to recognise institutionalised racism - which is a complete complacency over the corrosive effect that xenophobic language and stereotyping has on public debate. I do not doubt that putting asylum seekers in prison is a means that UK politicians are using to gain public support during the forthcoming general election.

Stigmatisation by Government Ministers, political parties (Conservative) and media alike of asylum seekers as bogus; the constant Dutch auction between political parties (eg Conservatives) over asylum numbers has had a corrosive effect on political and popular culture and has helped shape hostile reactions locally to asylum seekers.

Some of the worst examples of

your parents are not citizens to be his/her home. Home is Montego Bay.

To be at home you need to feel at home and be at ease at all times with your surroundings.

That could never be completely possible in a society where the majority of the citizens, at any point of time, could come up to you and ask you "what are you doing here in UK?" and tell you to "go back home you asylum seeker."

I always have the sound of harsh screams in my heart where my soul is shattered, shaking and deeply crying, but without tears coming out. Although I am miles away from my homeland, I can still live and breathe the sorrow and darkness of my people's panting in Africa.

It is a tragedy of a great continent, such as Africa, where you can find all resources, for her people to be classified today by the Western world as third class people, where prison is the only suitable place to keep those claiming asylum in UK. This is the same continent from which some of the western world is still breathing from.

Why and for whose interest is the UK Government keeping people from this great continent in prison for seeking asylum? I am addressing this question to the civilised world, to the Government who share a major part in such inhuman, degrading and frustrating treatment of other human beings.

I don't hate British, French, Germans, Netherlands, Americans or other citizens whose states are destroying our countries in Africa on a daily basis. I only hate injustice and the removal of the right to a good standard of life for any person. I raise my hand to object against these wrong UK policies on asylum seekers. That is my main concern.

The UK is not the only country with high asylum applications. Statistics show other European countries with high asylum applications, e.g. Germany, Switzerland, France, Netherlands and Belgium as well.

Can any parent in the entire world today imagine his/her baby or child without healthy milk? Why is the UK Government continuously keeping asylum seekers in prison without proper feeding or regime? Could you bear, as an individual or family, this ill treatment of mankind by the British Government?

Why are asylum seekers paying this price? Why? What are the benefits of this poor treatment? Why add hatred among the young generation? Are we calling for a third world war? I write this awaiting the reaction of HMP Belmarsh administration, either transfer again, dead or alive, only God knows.

Despite the humanitarian disaster which camps on me like the black shadow of a tent, I can still touch the rainbow of hopes and wishes inside asylum seekers' souls and hearts, just like the group of candles they used to light in the flow of the Tigris river.

Although I and other asylum seekers face wax of sadness and sorrow, I will never ever surrender. I derive sustenance from the fact that God gave me the courage to do what I had to do for the freedom of asylum seekers in UK.

Regardless of whether I shall survive my detention in UK or not, I assure you, The Prison and Immigration Authorities, that my letters are irrevocable and irreversible. I therefore urge the UK Government to grant asylum seekers full freedom of this esteemed country.

I am still languishing in detention. When I am finally released I shall provide a detailed account of my own personal experience as an asylum seeker prisoner in the torture chambers of the UK Government.

I do appreciate the efforts of those who have been encouraging and been so sympathetic to the appalling treatment meted out to me by the UK Prisons Authorities and the Immigration Service, whose names cannot be mentioned for security reasons.

If any other asylum seeker or organisation can liaise about this ill treatment meted out to immigration detainees, please do, for the sake of the world tomorrow.

Finally "TOUGH TIMES NEVER LAST BUT TOUGH PEOPLE DO"! I quote Robert Schuller.

Yours sincerely,
Gabriel A. Nkwelle
Human Rights Activist (HRDG)
Cameroon with reg. no. 1134

New Labour invents violent conspiracy while anti-capitalists are

Reinventing May Day

Greg Tucker

An orchestrated campaign of deliberate violence by thousands of masked rent-a-mob thugs. That is the only way you can describe the police actions in detaining the anti-capitalist demonstrations in London on May Day.

But despite the hysteria before and after May Day, despite the demoralisation of many on the day, cold tired and hungry after being penned in Oxford Circus for seven hours, despite Tony Blair denouncing our "spurious cause", the anti-capitalist message was put firmly on the agenda.

For once the media was forced to debate our views of how capitalism is strangling the lives of everyone on our planet.

It is ironic that some of the best bourgeois press reporting of the London May Day events could be found in the London *Evening Standard*. Safely sandwiched between the usual eulogies to "our magnificent bobbies" they have published articles from journalists who were actually present inside the police cordons at Oxford Circus.

So a debate of sorts has been forced into the open – was it actually right and proper for the state to imprison without charge, for several hours, in atrocious conditions, thousands of peaceful demonstrators on the off chance that one or two of them might be considering doing something somewhat unlawful?

Months ago plans were put into place by the police and politicians to whip up a hysterical campaign to try to prevent any serious protest. Two messages were sent out: that our cause was "spurious" and that our activity would be crushed by massive police intimidation.

While, of course, we should not be surprised that the police tried to suppress the right to freedom of expression, the forces lined up against the demonstrators were quite breathtaking.

Aligned with the *Daily Mail* and every other national daily, Tony Blair condemned those who did not understand "the right way to protest".

Presumably one has to ask his permission first.

Lord Harris, New Labour Chair of the London police authority called for the use of rubber bullets. And Ken Livingstone weighed in too,

with the demand that the police "vigorously enforce the law".

Lee Jasper, Livingstone's adviser on policing, praising the Met's "professionalism", and called on the police to summarily arrest protesters.

Bizarrely commenting on how the anti-apartheid movement proved how society could be changed by means other than violence, Jasper put forward Livingstone's message: do not attend this demonstration.

The fact is that none of this worked. What was significant on the day was that, despite this offensive, and the deliberate disorganisation of the May Day Monopoly collective, many thousands of new, young activists were prepared to come out onto the streets to express their views.

Whilst the official trade union May Day demonstration wended its way through other parts of London, once again a respectable size only because of the large presence of Kurdish and Turkish activists, in London's West End a new May Day was being born.

In line with other actions around the world, May Day is being rediscovered, not as a sad Stalinist reflection on past glories, Red Square march pasts and so on, but as part of over a century of struggle and international solidarity.

The May Day Monopoly collective's plans, by their very nature, made it hard to give any focus to the day, nevertheless the better-organised parts of the day were effective.

In particular the Globalise Resistance picket of the World Bank offices became a real focus. It was these demonstrators who were to form the core of those trapped by the police at Oxford Circus.

Despite being held in the cold and rain for seven hours they remained lively and good-humoured. With only one or two examples of frustration, there could be no justification for the police actions in keeping everyone "detained to prevent a breach of the peace".

How can we build on the successes we achieved? May Day was a success in showing that the anti-capitalist movement exists in Britain as firmly as it does elsewhere in the world.

Socialists must put real resources into developing this movement. The Globalise Resistance conference later this month is a

vital starting point in this process.

The state suppression of the right to demonstrate needs to be taken up. Liberty and others are talking of launching legal challenges to the role of the police on May Day. These should be supported and other direct campaigning activity to defend the right to protest encouraged.

And the whole way in which the May Day actions were disorganised needs to be critically assessed. The police were able to trap thousands of demonstrators because no demonstration leadership had been built.

The key socialist groups involved on the day cannot allow themselves to be manoeuvred into this position again by anarchist forces who, when the chips were down, were not interested in what happened to the people they had encouraged to attend.



May Day, London: cops in cahoots with media, Mayor and ministers in defence of capitalism

May Day crack down in Pakistan

**Farooq Tariq,
General secretary
Labour Party
Pakistan**

NEVER BEFORE in the history of Pakistan has any government, civil or military, banned the traditional workers on the eve of May Day. But this year the military regime formally warned the workers to refrain from taking to the streets.

If workers wanted to remember the martyrs of 1886 uprising of Chicago, they should hold the meetings indoors, Retired General Moeen Haider, federal interior minister told reporters on April 28.

The main aim of this, and other similar messages issued in different parts of Pakistan was to stop the rally planned by the Alliance For Restoration Of Democracy (ARD) in Karachi on May Day.

The rally was planned to protest against the policies of the present military regime, which is restructuring, downsizing and carrying through privatisation to meet the conditions imposed by the IMF and World Bank.

Both these imperialist institutions have hailed the present economic policies of the regime, which is resulting a

massive wave of price rises and unemployment. Explaining the present government priorities to a three day Pakistan Agri-Business Conference held on April 28, General Pervaiz Musharraf said that those not required will be relieved from their jobs.

He was referring to the 131,000 public employees who would lose their jobs if the present plans go ahead.

Arrests

Over 2000 political activists of ARD including LPP central chairman Shoaib Bhatti were arrested during the last week of April in a bid to foil the Karachi rally. The main leadership of the ARD were banned from entering Sind province by the regime. Those who were able to get to Karachi airport were sent back or arrested.

On April 29 Shoaib Bhatti was arrested in Karachi, shortly after arriving in the city by train. Over the following days more than 800 other ARD supporters were arrested in Karachi.

As we go to press they are still being held. Other arrests took place in Lahore despite the fact that public rallies were not planned there. Those arrested in Lahore, including myself were released relatively

quickly.

Rallies are planned in support of the detainees in both Karachi and Lahore.

Qazi Hussain Ahmed, chief of Jammāt-ı-Islami, the main religious fundamentalist party in Pakistan, while condemning the April arrests, said that they are part of the strategy of the military regime to make the ARD leadership popular once again. This is nonsense.

What has compelled the regime to make a U-turn from their initial liberal attitude towards the political parties and labour organisations is that its economic policies have made it highly unpopular.

During the last eighteen months the regime has tried to fulfil the demands of IMF and World Bank. By doing so, they had to face strikes by traders and anger from workers in both public and private sectors.

May Day would have focused this anger and so the rallies were banned.

On the railways trade unionists have faced massive repression because of their militancy. Over 100 activists were transferred to work in far off places as part of the victimisation by the regime.

Mutihida Rail Mazdoor Itihad (United Rail Workers Alliance) planned a May Day rally despite

the ban. The leaders of the recently formed Alliance were immediately transferred in the second week of April, after they addressed a press conference to expose the corruption of the Railway minister who is an ex military general.

Two of the main leaders of this Alliance Saifu Rehman and Gul Deraz have not been paid wages for the last 10 months despite a court order in their favour.

Labour Party Pakistan has condemned the bans imposed by the regime.

The present regime will not go very far on the road it has adopted. Many governments internationally, which have followed the anti worker policies of the international financial institutions have faced great anger from the masses and had to leave in disgrace.

The present regime may be able to please the IMF and World Bank but it has displeased the masses to a level not seen in the recent past.

■ Please send your protests to Chief Executive General Pervaiz Musharraf :ce@pak.gov.pk and send copies to outlook@gn.apc.org for forwarding to comrades in Pakistan.

Victory for people over profiteers

After the historic victory in South Africa, in which mass protest forced a major retreat by the world's leading pharmaceutical companies, DENISE MCDOWELL, Director, George House Trust and JOHN NICHOLSON, Chief Executive, UK Public Health Association look at the issues at stake in the campaign.

The victory in the South African court case was a victory for people with HIV. It was a victory for campaigning. This was despite all the best efforts of governments and multinationals and international lawyers. It was a victory for public health - although there is still a long way to go. It was a victory for developing countries.

South Africa stood up to the pharmaceutical companies and the USA and the free market as a whole. And they won.

As the High Commissioner for South Africa in London said when the case first started, by standing up to the drug giants, South Africa was doing something that the Clintons had never managed to.

And it was a victory for anti-capitalists. Everywhere. All in all, it was a "victory for common sense".

Indeed, it was a victory for just about everyone other than the greedy multi-national pharmaceutical companies, who used the World Trade Organisation and the courts to put profits before people.

All of which makes it so outrageous that our government was backing the wrong side.

Our government was prepared to see people die from HIV in order to protect the profits, the patents and worst of all the favourable regard of the multi-nationals.

"Labour means business" was the slogan adopted before the 1997 General Election. Exactly so. Our government took up their stance firmly in support of the rich drug

companies and against the poor and sick.

South Africa

In contrast, the public support for South Africa was because the issue was so clear. It was an issue of life and death.

The UK government report into pharmaceutical industry competitiveness rejected cheaper drugs for developing countries - stating categorically that "patents are the lifeblood" of the industry.

At exactly the same time the actions of non-governmental organisations throughout the world in support of individual people with HIV were combining to put the brakes on the unregulated drive for world domination.

In its appalling choice of words, our government offered no such concern for the "lifeblood" of

"patients", such as those living with HIV in the developing world.

Prime Minister Blair endorsed this personally: "the UK must offer a supportive business environment". How telling. No such supportive environment is offered people seeking refuge here.

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

According to the government, membership of the 12-person task force included Astra Zeneca, Glaxo Well-come, SmithKline Beecham, Novartis, MSD, and both the ABPI President and Director General.

Also on the force is Lord Sainsbury, whose position is Minister for Science and Innovation. Of course he was also previously Chair of J Sainsbury plc, one of the superstore chains referred to the Competition Commission for alleged anti-competitive practices - and the principal backer of the biotechnology company Diotech, as well as funder of the Sainsbury Laboratory at the John Innes Centre, genetic engineering centre in Norwich.

In acting thus, government abandons governing. It acts in the interest of the greed of the few rather than meeting the needs of the many.

South Africa has more people living with HIV than any other country, an estimated 4.7 million people. In 2000 2.4 million African people died from HIV-related causes. HIV deaths in South Africa are expected to rise from 120,000 last year to an annual 635,00 in 2010.

And South Africa is not the hardest hit. Life expectancy in Botswana has been cut to 44 years. The whole continent is devastated. 70% of adults with HIV world-wide and 80% of children live in Africa.

Our health cannot be left to private sector

Depopulation might suit the gold and diamond asset-strippers and conspiracy-theorists - but there is enough wealth on this planet to protect and support the population, of the whole world. It is just a case of putting the priorities in the right order, by redressing the stark

inequalities.

Ensuring we are - all - healthy is not amenable to the profit motive of the pharmaceutical companies who exist to make money for the few. Public health is not safe in private hands.

But the issue is much broader than the drugs alone. In this respect, Mbeki has always been right. For countries with widespread poverty, where access to food, water, shelter and basic amenities are totally lacking, the solution is bigger than discounts on drugs. Any realistic solution must be holistic. It must involve governments - all governments - taking action on a wide range of issues.

This includes tackling head-on the global anti-health forces, such as the multi-nationals who aspire to run the world and who are flooding developing countries with such products as arms and tobacco.

It includes all western governments now pressing the multi-nationals to drop all their legal actions, including Brazil, where the battleground has now shifted. It includes governments playing their own part in ensuring that health care is provided, publicly funded and accountable, for all the peoples of the world.

Where does a special "fund" fit in with this?

For some time now Gordon Brown, in his stated Budget commitments to tackling inequalities in the UK and world-wide, and Clare Short, in her pronouncements of "making globalisation work for the poor", have been promoting the initiation of a multi-government fund to assist developing countries obtaining vital medicines.

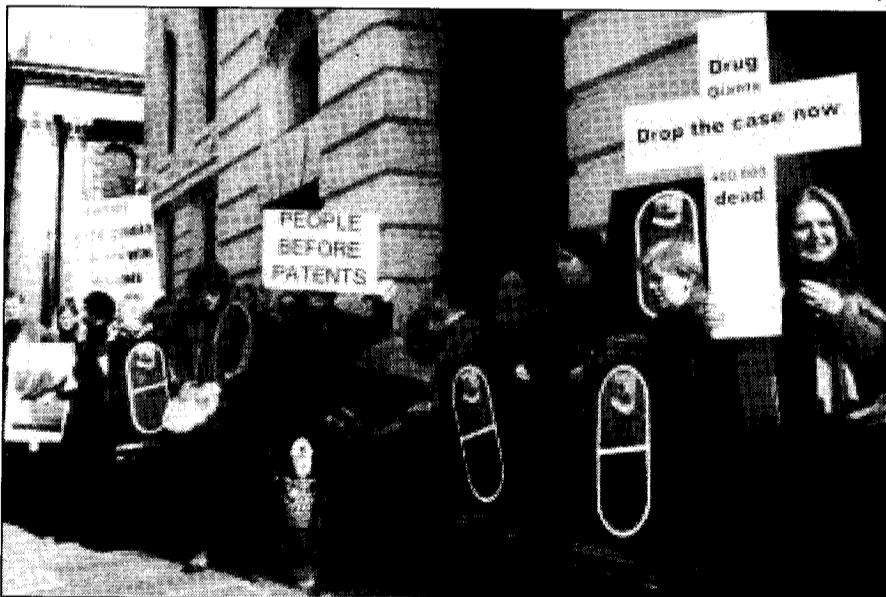
They have been wistfully sending out messages of encouragement of cheaper production, by multinational pharmaceutical companies.

But what we should be doing is "making the rich work for the globe". Just 10% of the multinational pharmaceutical companies' re-search money goes on illnesses affecting 90% of the world's population (on their own figures).

They still restrict development of cheaper medicines locally, through use of World Trade Organisation regulations. The giants devote their laboratory time and resources to illnesses affecting the rich world, in which there is a profit, because the people here can afford to pay.

And they do not devote the same energy to illnesses such as malaria and TB - and even on these they are still slapping patents on new remedies being developed for resistant strains.

A "special fund" is a step in a better direction. But it is not a solu-



London solidarity: protestors demonstrate against drug companies outside South Africa House

Solidarity key to drugs fight

Charlie van Gelderen

The organised labour movement in South Africa regards the law court victory over the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association as the beginning and not the end of the campaign. At its Central Executive Committee meeting on April 26, COSATU said that the war was not yet won.

A long battle still lay ahead before affordable medicines were available for people who need them. If the Medicines and Related Substances Amendment Act was not implemented immediately, the courtroom victory would prove a hollow one.

COSATU is demanding that employers, especially the big corporations, provide free treatment for those of their workers and their families who are living with HIV/AIDS. It is also demanding that insurance companies, banks and medical aid

schemes end all discrimination against people with HIV/AIDS.

Although COSATU is part of the tripartite alliance (ANC, CP, COSATU), which forms the government of South Africa, it is not promising the government an easy ride on this issue.

COSATU promises to be its firmest supporter if it does the right thing such as introducing the Medicines Act, but its firmest critic if it fails to meet its constitutional duties to protect life and dignity. The trade unions are particularly concerned at the continual delays in implementing country-wide treatment programme to prevent mother-to-child transmission.

COSATU is demanding a treatment plan by 16 June, which will outline how treatment will be made accessible to all South Africans with HIV/AIDS, opportunistic and sexually transmitted diseases, and which will commit the government to increased

health-care spending.

Linked to these measures, the government must urgently introduce a comprehensive social security system, to end the poverty and hunger which contributes to the spread of HIV/AIDS and makes treatment far more difficult.

An important lesson from the Pretoria court case has been that international solidarity was an immensely powerful factor in forcing the pharmaceutical giants to withdraw.

South Africa's organised workers will be solidly alongside their Brazilian comrades in Brazil's battle with the World Trade Organisation, and the US pharmaceutical companies who are trying to stop the Brazilian government doing the same as the South African government is trying to do.

This victory in South Africa is proof that global capitalism is not invincible.

tion. The public fund is still a subsidy to private multi-nationals, to carry out research and development work for poor consumers. (Can the "poor" be "consumers"?)

Like any aid, it is tied to those who have control of it. It can only be wishful thinking on the part of governments to hope that the multi-nationals will regulate themselves in the public health interest. Indeed, it is structurally unsound.

Private companies exist to make profits. It is their reason for existence to provide returns for their shareholders. Their philanthropic excursions are purely PR marketing.

The point is that it should not be their job to ensure public health more broadly. Because this is the job of governments. That is what governments are for.

Affordable Health for All

Governments must recognise that health is more than medication. For even more than promoting the elimination of disease, the rich world should ensure basic support is available for the poor.

All governments in the developed world must support the infrastructure which would enable children to grow up in an all-round healthy environment.

People with HIV need clean water, good food, adequate housing, employment opportunities, and an absence of war and starvation. People throughout the world need the cancellation of debt so that their countries can afford public services such as health and education.

Health is more than the absence of disease.

The victory of South African people with HIV in the court-room in Pretoria shows that world-wide people are willing to say, in many different ways, that people come before profit.

Need v. greed

The imagery and the victory were clear. It was and is life and death. It was and is need and greed.

For the pharmaceuticals to declare immediately afterwards that this was merely a continuation of their policy of working together with developing world governments – and for the media to swallow much of this so uncritically, with endless JP Garnier articles and commentaries in the *Guardian* for example – fools no-one (except, sadly, for our government!)

The message then from all the non-governmental organisations and all the individuals who campaigned for this result is that we want – and need – a fairer world.

One without inequalities. One without debt. One without the institutions of the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and World Trade Organisation.

One in which we, the people, force our elected governments to take back control of health, environment and economy in the interests of the people.

One in which we put people before profit.



Quebec stand-off as global bosses hide behind barricades

Susan Moore

QUEBEC CITY from April 20-22 was the site of the latest round of international mass protests, this time in opposition to the Summit of the Americas. For the governments of the Western hemisphere (excluding Cuba) and their friends in corporate boardroom, the idea was further talks towards creating a "free trade" area across the role region, in order that the process of neo-liberal globalisation could proceed more smoothly.

The protesters – upwards of 50,000 of them, of course had other ideas.

These mobilisations in Quebec, and echoing protests in other parts of the Americas, saw greater union participation than we have seen at any previous anti-capitalist demonstrations. This was despite the attempts by the union leaderships to keep a wall between their membership and the predominantly youthful protesters.

To some extent this reflects the strength and combativity of the trade union movement in the Canadian state were battles against privatisation in particular have been bitter and prolonged. But it also reflected the fact that increasing numbers of trade unionists world wide see the battles fought by the anti-capitalist movement as their own.

The attempts of the Canadian government to suppress the protest through a range of repressive measures also back-fired. Protesters dubbed the 4 metre high metal fence round the conference site the "Wall of Shame" and actions in the lead up to the summit highlighted the attack this represented on the democratic rights of all those who live in the area. The wall was breached in several places during the demonstrations.

Since January the Canadian police have been stopping people entering the country - searching cars and taking people off trains. At least 100 activists were prevented from entering including at least one person who could prove she was going to provide

medical assistance and had no criminal convictions.

The police violence on the demonstration itself was extreme. X rounds of tear gas were fired during the course of the weekend - fortunately a lot of the time the wind was blowing the gas away from the protestors and into the police lines. The hotels and the convention center were required to shut their windows and their air conditioning systems so that the tear gas does not enter the undemocratic hallways of corporate power.

Water cannon and rubber bullets were also used – one man was shot in the leg when dancing with a group of drummers about 15-20 metres away from the police lines. Another marcher, already on the ground, was attacked by a stun gun.

On one occasion on the Friday a group of protestors were chased by

the police into a block of flats which turned out to be a sheltered housing block. Some activists were giving a peace sign to the police, and others were explaining to them in both English and French that this was obviously where pensioners lived. Despite this, and the fact that some of the residents were visible volleys of tear gas were fired into the block.

At another point the police became frustrated that people near the fence were becoming immune to the gas, so they starting throwing canisters further back where people weren't prepared for it. Some of the canisters missed their mark and fell into the streets below.

Over 400 people were arrested and 120 hurt - of which 2 were police. This yet again proves that the real violence comes not from those opposing neo-liberalism but those in

the state protecting it... Amnesty International, after examining a report from its observer in Quebec City, made a statement expressing concern about:

■ the excessive use of tear gas on protesters not involved in violent behaviour or posing any threat to property or police, including the firing of tear gas canisters directly at individuals and directly into a private property for no apparent reason (the use of tear gas in enclosed spaces is extremely dangerous in certain circumstances);

■ the use of plastic bullets in situations where the safety of police officers and the integrity of the Summit were not threatened;

■ the use of an electro-shock device (taser gun) on a peaceful demonstrator who had refused police instructions to move. This amounts to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment;

■ the denial of prompt legal representation to those arrested and;

■ the overcrowding of cells containing those arrested, including the holding of up to five persons in cells designed for two"

It is clear from the events in Quebec, as well as the increased state violence against May Day marches across the globe, that our opponents in the boardrooms and governments are increasingly rattled by the strength and visibility of the anti-capitalist movement. The best way of replying to their repression is to ensure the biggest possible mobilisation for Genoa in July

If you haven't yet booked transport to Genoa contact globalise resistance on 0208 980 3005 or 7956 681328 or contact www.resist.org.uk.

All aboard for Genoa!

The next stop for the anti-globalisation movement after Quebec, will be the G8 summit in Genoa on July 21.

The protest outside the World Bank organised by Globalise Resistance on May Day showed that cancellation of the debt is a hugely popular issue amongst thousands of people furious about the way capitalism is destroying our lives across the globe.

Since May Day, and their subsequent appearance on Newsnight Globalise Resistance has been inundated with phone calls and enquiries.

Make sure you book your seat for Genoa today: contact globalise resistance on 0208 980 3005 or 7956 681328 or contact www.resist.org.uk



Russians fight for press freedom

Sheila Malone

WIDESPREAD protests erupted throughout Russia last month against the takeover of the country's most popular and respected independent TV station, NTV. A 20,000 strong demonstration filled Moscow's Pushkin Square, and meetings, pickets and petitioning took place in up to 50 other regions.

Protesters are opposing a boardroom coup in which the 38% state-owned monopoly Gazprom seized control and ousted the exiled owner Vladimir Gusinski and his supporters.

The sister paper *Sevodnya* and magazine *Itogi* were also forced to close. Media workers are refusing to work under the new management.

The issue is a complex one, involving press freedom, but also the 'wars of the oligarchs' in the new Russia and President Putin's role within them.

To be a media worker in present-day Russia can be difficult, insecure and dangerous. Reporters often work in conditions of instability,

unrest and war.

117 journalist have died over the last decade whilst carrying out their work. Outspoken reporters like Andrei Babitsky and Anna Politovskaya have been kidnapped by Russian Special Forces whilst in Chechnya and detained without knowledge of their whereabouts or safety.

The good reputation of NTV, *Sevodnya* and *Itogi* is largely due to staff being prepared to investigate and publicize controversial issues, such as the Chechen war. Reporting has concentrated on mounting Russian casualties (now up to 50 a week), increased human rights abuses and the plight of the 250,000 refugees

Casualties

The Chechen guerilla tactics of surprise ambush are leading to appalling casualties amongst the young, inexperienced and frightened conscripts. In retaliation the Russians, with the FSB Special Forces now in charge take barbaric punitive measures against the whole population.

Guerillas and civilians

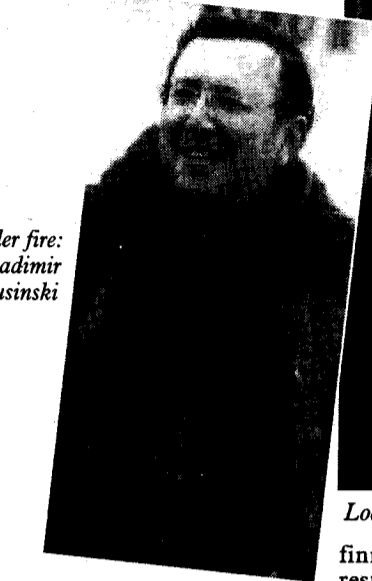
alike are being rounded up in "clean-ups", beaten, tortured, or thrown into now infamous mud pits. These are sodden or frozen, airless trenches, originally dug for rubbish, where prisoners are held indefinitely. Mass graves have also begun to be uncovered.

A Russian colonel is presently on trial for the murder of an 18yr old Chechen woman (the charge originally included rape, but this has since been inexplicably dropped).

Investigation of the new Russian-imposed regime in Chechnya has also not been favourable. Its proclaimed task of rebuilding the war-torn country has been a manifest failure, with many towns and villages still in ruins, and a lot of the money for reconstruction pocketed by corrupt officials.

Russians have also been shocked by the increase in racist attacks in their country since the beginning of the war, and directly attributable to government-led propaganda branding all Chechens as gangsters or terrorists.

In a particularly brutal



Under fire:
Vladimir
Gusinski



Locked out: Itogi journalists

attack last month, a Chechen was beaten to death by neo-nazis in the middle of Moscow.

NTV is the only large and independent TV net work in Russia able to give critical coverage and analysis of issues uncomfortable to the government. But this was not always so.

Speculation

Vladimir Gusinski is not a popular man amongst ordinary Russians. He is extremely rich, having made his money through property speculation during the notoriously corrupt 1990s. He then used it to set up a media empire whose blatant bias and rubbishing of opponents assured Yeltsin's election victory in 1996.

Yeltsin's heir was Vladimir Putin. His role (much approved by the West) is to

finish the job of capitalist restoration in Russia, but more efficiently and ruthlessly than his predecessor.

He has used his presidency so far to put in place the necessary structures and legislation to this end.

It has meant a clean up of some of the new gangster-capitalists (and this is one reason for his popularity), but also the building of a power base of his 'own' oligarchs. Gus-insky is not now among them.

Gusinski's media began to attract talented reporters, journalists and producers and to reach a wider audience than the state-owned and Kremlin-friendly media.

Whilst not digging too deep in fraught and muddy waters, investigations into the two areas of rival oligarchs and the Chechen war were bound to provoke Putin.

The basis of his popular support has been his proclaimed intention to deal with corrupt oligarchs and deal with the war in Chechnya. He has done neither.

He therefore cannot afford the kind of independent media criticism that has emerged in Russia today.

A government campaign to destroy Gusinski's media empire has been waged since last year when it's headquarters, Media Most was raided by masked, armed FSB.

The government is claiming that the takeover is simply about outstanding debts (which are real).

But most Russians see it as an obvious attempt to stifle criticism.

Media workers in Russia need our full support in defending the right to a free and independent TV and press.

Rebellion in Cincinnati

In the context of the backlash that black communities from Oldham to Bradford are facing in the wake of Tory policies on race and immigration from both Blair and Hague, we are pleased to publish this statement from the Black Radical Caucus in the USA.

Agreed on April 18, this statement from the National Coordinating Committee graphically catalogues the experience of black people at the hands of the racist police and the demands they are raising in fighting back.

The situation in Cincinnati almost reminds one of advertisements for the 1970s film "Jaws": just when you thought that it was safe to go back into the water... Just when many people thought that it could not get any worse, another blatant example of police abuse and murder.

After well-publicised police abuse and terror nationally, we have now witnessed the murder and burial of Timothy Thomas, yet another Black person executed by the police.

Were Cincinnati more of a major media market, we might have been better prepared for this new atrocity. Were Cincinnati more of a major media market, we may have better grasped the history of police abuse conducted in that city against the Black population.

It was not the murder of Timothy Thomas that surprised many, but the outrage and rebellion on the part of the city's Black population.

Clearly Black people in Cincinnati had had enough.

Their fury could no longer be contained and therefore exploded. Ours is not to address the dynamics of the rebellion but to affirm that the outrage was just and that only by calling attention to police rampages and lawlessness will we be able to bring it to a halt.

Some have said that the murders in Cincinnati should not have been a surprise because Cincinnati is Klan country, i.e., very conservative with a history of terror deployed against Black people, reminiscent of the Jim Crow South.

This may be true, but the growing attention to police terror in the USA more than anything else reaffirms Malcolm X's old adage: the "South" is everything south of the Canadian border. Thus, most recently the terror was in Cincinnati, but it has also happened in New York, Los Angeles. ...

The bottom line, whether in Cincinnati with Timothy Thomas, or New York with

Amadou Diallo, is control. It is not simply a matter of racial fear, or even racial profiling.

Those are all symptoms of a much deeper issue. It is about the control over the movements of the Black population, and thereby the complete frustration of democracy.

The continued reality of police terror facing people of color generally, and Black people in particular, remains a legacy from slavery and the absolute control which the overseers had over us.

Police terror ensures that we understand the limits placed on us and that we continue to lack any rights that the racist state is bound to respect.

If Cincinnati proves anything, it is that the struggle against police terror cannot and should not be handled exclusively on the local level.

After the funerals are over, and the tearful words have been uttered, the situation more often than not returns to the status quo.

Even after rebellions such as in Cincinnati, or in Los Angeles in 1992, the larger system generally finds a means to excuse away the police terror and to placate many of its most outspoken critics.

The Black Radical Congress suggests that Cincinnati must be a symbol of why we must fight the police state nationally and locally! We must demand, as we are advancing in our national petition campaign, a federal statute criminalising police terror.

The assumption of Black guilt is so pervasive in this system that allowing, by our silence or acquiescence, these executions to be treated as accidents turns unfortunate situations into absurdity.

This is a time for action. We must cry for Timothy Thomas. We must grieve with his family and friends. But more than anything else we must organise.

In Cincinnati, the call that we should support nationally has emerged from the

Black community: the removal of the City Manager, Police Commissioner and Public Safety Director. There must be accountability for this situation of racist lawlessness, particularly given the demonstrated history of atrocities.

At the national level, in addition to support for Cincinnati's Black community, we must push the demand for criminalising police terror. This issue must be raised in every Black community newspaper, every pulpit, but also in city council meetings, on talk radio programs, and in the streets.

It is not enough for us to express support to those in Cincinnati carrying out a valiant fight against police terror.

The time to nationalise this issue and to sustain a national campaign has arrived. Enough is enough!

■ **Contact: National Co-Chair, Bill Fletcher Jr., bfletcher4@compuserve.com**

**Pete Cooper reviews
the new Ken Loach
film, Bread and Roses.**

The janitors strike back!

Ken Loach's latest film *Bread and Roses*, set in Los Angeles tells the story of Maya (Pilar Padilla), a young illegal Mexican immigrant who becomes drawn into the fight to organise her fellow janitors (cleaners) in LA's glass and marble downtown office blocks.

The story is based on the real life struggle of mainly Hispanic janitors over the last decade against the poverty level wages on which much of the "prosperity" of the last decade has been based.

In the opening scenes of the film we follow Maya in the hazardous journey across the Mexican-US border and soon learn that Maya is a resourceful fighter when she avoids rape at the hands of one her loathsome traffickers.

Her sister gets her a janitor's job, and she soon gets involved in the "Justice for Janitors" campaign organised by a young union organiser Sam (Adrien Brody).

Their initial encounter where she helps Sam avoids the Office security guards is sheer slapstick. We are shown the contempt with which the janitors, mainly women, are treated by the foreman, and the economic structure of their exploitation is explained. We follow their growing confidence and assertiveness, led by the lively Sam in standing up to the multinational bosses.

We are treated to many familiar Loach devices - the authentic documentary feel provided by hand-held camera techniques - the partially unscripted group discussions - the use of unknown and unprofessional actors.

This mostly works well, but sometimes the inexperienced actors including Padilla herself cannot carry the emotional and dramatic weight of the scenes.

The emotionally charged confrontation between Maya and her

sister elder sister Rosa (Elpidio Carillo) who reveals that she has had to work as a prostitute to finance the family is undoubtedly the most powerful in the film, but Padilla's contribution to it is weak.

The film gets better as it goes along, and initial fears that it is simply going to be a socialist feel-good film about the heroic struggle of the workers, without dramatic tension, are dispelled.

However there is little character development - and with the exception of Rosa, we are left with little illumination of individual motivations. Additionally references to traditions of Latin American collective struggle which form an important part of the social and political backdrop to the Hispanic-American struggle are not developed.

The sexual and racial politics of the film are interesting. Sam, a typical ex-student young union organiser currently employed by the US unions in their organising drives is a dynamic, resourceful and attractive character.

Maya is in the mould of Loach's recent female protagonists in *Land and Freedom* and *Carla's Song* - Hispanic, feisty, quick witted, young and beautiful who just happen to fall for white socialist English-speaking men!

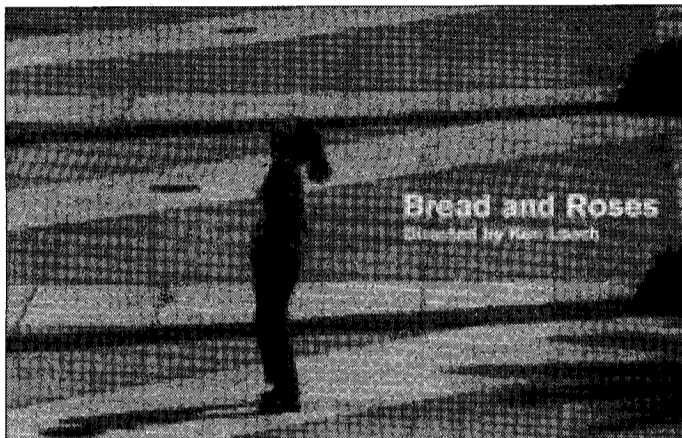
While she challenges Sam over an act of carelessness which leads to a sacking, and she takes the sexual initiative, there is no doubt as to

who is politically and organisationally in charge.

The radical politics of Loach's film was clearly too much for Philip French *The Observer's* normally perceptive film critic.

Leaving aside his ignorance of Loach's politics, suggesting that "he probably had a sneaking regard for Michael Foot"(!), French complains

"Not for the first time, however,



Loach treats all middle-class people with contempt and holds up to ridicule those he regards as class-traitors who serve the capitalist establishment - foremen, the police, bureaucrats.

"There are not many characters in his films like the kindly schoolmaster in *Kes* and the understanding parish priest in *Raining Stones*....

"He is also hostile to the older trade-union officials who disapprove of Sam's theatricality and provocations. Loach, one infers, would rather lose than compromise.

"Fabian tactics are anathema to



him and the small victories that stem from New Labour and the social ameliorisation that might have flowed from Gore defeating

Bush are to him not worth having."

It does not seem to occur to French that perhaps Loach's films are a rather more accurate portrayal of reality than his own class-bound prejudices.

Why should these people be portrayed in a sympathetic light when their collective (and usually

individual) behaviours cause suffering to millions of people on a daily basis?

As for his appeal to the virtues of the US Democrats (and New Labour) Mike Davis, writing in *Socialist Worker*, points out that "The median household income of 30 million US Latinos fell by nearly \$3,000 between 1989 and 1996-the biggest loss registered by any ethnic group since the Depression. And in Los Angeles, despite the now faltering "New Economy" boom, poverty levels in Latino neighborhoods were significantly higher in 1999 (22 percent) than in 1990 (15 percent)."

French's point about the virtues

of trade union officials and Fabianism shows that he has no understanding of the film's main point. Only struggle can be successful and the unspecified "small victories" of New Labour are almost entirely illusory.

One factor in Loach's choice of the LA location to make his film was undoubtedly the absence of struggles such as that of the janitors and any significant victories of any kind in Britain in recent years under New Labour.

While the backdrop of *Bread and Roses* is illegal immigration, its focus is on union organising.

For an examination of the inhuman and dehumanising consequences of immigration controls the moving and anger-inducing portrayal of British racist treatment of undocumented immigrants in Pawel Pawlikowski's *The Last Resort* is to be recommended, providing a stark contrast to the upbeat tone of *Bread and Roses*.

Bread and Roses is well worth seeing, but you might have difficulty in finding it. Channel 4 films have only made twenty copies for British distribution and have produced little publicity.

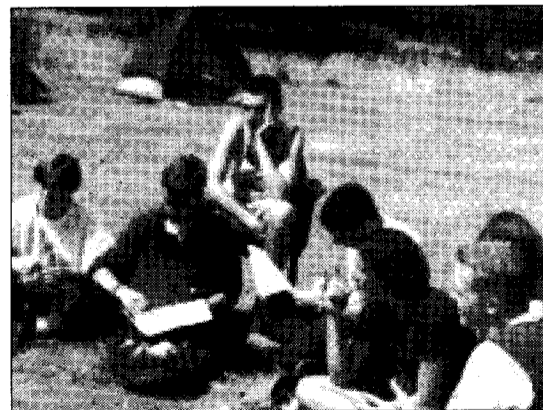
There is no chance of for example the mass distribution and acclaim which has accompanied the release of the film in France, where Loach has a mass audience and where the consequences of neo-liberalism are better understood and resisted.

INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST GROUP

Globalise the Struggle



Fourth International International Youth Summer Camp July 22-28 near Rome



For young people who are going to Genoa to protest against the G8 summit and also want the opportunity to find out about revolutionary ideas by meeting with young socialists across Europe, the Fourth International's Youth Summer Camp is the ideal place to be.

Hundreds of young people come together for a week of political discussion and debate, but there will also be plenty of time to chat informally and have a good time at the camp, near Rome.

The theme of this year's camp is "Against Capitalist globalisation, globalise our struggles". Forums and workshops on a whole range of related themes will give people the chance to discuss the new movement that has developed from Seattle onwards and what lessons and questions this poses for revolutionary socialists.

The cost of the camp will be around £250 which will cover transport to Genoa, transfer to the camp and food for the week. Come and join us!

I am interested in coming to the camp

Name _____

Address _____

E mail _____

Phone _____

Please send this form to PO Box 1109,
London N4 2UU or e mail the information to
outlook@gn.apc.org

Where unity really is divisive!

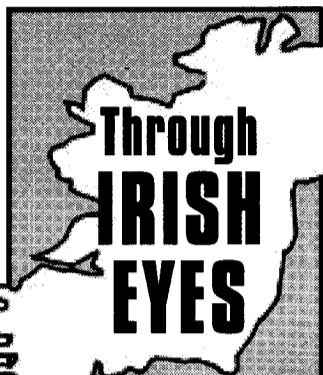
Joe Craig

An initial report by Socialist Democracy on discussions on the formation of a Socialist Alliance in Ireland was headed 'Where Unity is Divisive.' This was a quote from Mick O'Reilly of the ATGWU remarking on what was a common problem afflicting the Irish left. Little did he know how right he would be.

At a meeting on April 7 the fledgling Alliance took a giant step backwards. The SWP announced that as far as they were concerned the new Alliance was to be a partitioned one, with different structures north and south. Socialist unity was to be built on the division of the working class!

The meeting had been called to discuss the draft programme proposed by the organising committee elected at the last general meeting. Socialist Democracy had made clear our criticisms of the draft programme and had attempted to make changes to it at the committee meeting.

These were largely unsuccessful and we had hoped that a debate among a wider audience would clarify the issues and at least achieve a common understanding of



A column from Socialist Democracy, Irish section of the Fourth international

what the purpose of the programme was. Unfortunately only fifteen attended the meeting.

For most people present this was the main disappointment but it reflected weak attempts to build the meeting and the general downgrading of specifically political discussion.

Socialist Democracy pointed out that such a meeting did not have the moral legitimacy to decide on the programme and that a further meeting should be built.

Initially the SWP agreed, but as it became clear that they would gain a majority for any position they put this began to change. After some animated discussion it was

eventually agreed that the redrafted programme along with Socialist Democracy's 'minority' amendments would be circulated, having a discussion only status. (See amendments, facing page)

The discussion leading up to this decision and the announcement that we were operating in a partitioned alliance brought out the key issues that will determine the direction and success of the initiative.

Socialist Democracy introduced its thinking on the question of programme by stating that its content must be determined by the challenges and tasks facing workers, as understood by the socialist movement.

A similar formulation was repeated by Kieran Allen of the SWP but another SWP member stated that the programme should be determined by the need to unite the existing left organisations, a need that was demanded by a large number of workers.

It is not clear that the SWP understand that there is a difference - but a difference there certainly is.

Besides the obvious point that there are not large numbers of workers waiting for

socialist unity, the resulting programme has clearly been set to fit the Socialist Party which has rejected the alliance. So the programme of socialist unity is tailored to those that have rejected it!

The Socialist Party has rejected the unity of the whole Irish working class and has reduced their electoral programme to the barest reformist populism.

This fits with the approach of many in the alliance who look upon the programme as an obstacle to workers voting for the alliance and therefore the more it includes the worse it must get.

Instead of seeing Socialist Democracy's amendments as means of clarifying the tasks ahead and of raising demands that meet real needs, such as a woman's right to choose, these are labeled as part of a 'maximum' programme that we wish to impose.

Had we put forward the demands for armed workers' militia, workers' councils and an insurrectionary general strike this latter criticism might have had some merit.

Some independents were annoyed that the SWP had gone ahead and created local alliances without their involvement and clearly feared SWP domination. In



A serious programme has to deal with sectarian structures

fact the creation of local alliances by any component is to be welcomed. The problem lies in the basis for uniting the local initiatives that develop.

The organisational unity of the alliance now appears to be dependent on the SWP and the political platform is similarly subordinated.

The role of independents would now seem to be to provide the cover to allow the SWP to take initiatives they could not credibly carry out by themselves. It was therefore ironic that in the short discussion on the name of

the alliance someone suggested 'Not the SWP!'

The only positive decision taken was to launch a Socialist Alliance campaign against the Nice Treaty in the forthcoming referendum.

This will be an important test of the Alliance, showing whether it can bring in new forces and reinvigorate old ones and by so doing put the existing programme to the test.

It is instructive to remember that the initial programme criticised by ourselves had failed to mention the EU - never mind the Treaty.

A tale of two alliances: the story so far

John McAnulty

INSPIRED by the movements in Britain, independent leftists in Ireland have tried to build a comparable socialist unity in Ireland.

This was initially based on the idea that the SWP and SP would unite to create the new alliance. This perspective collapsed at the first meeting when the SP made a sectarian refusal to unite with others.

The process continued with attempts by smaller groups and independents to unite with the SWP.

Programmatically, the SWP proposed a populist electoralism that would adapt to the SP by, amongst other things, adopting a partitionist perspective.

This rightward drift was also reflected organisationally, with greater emphasis on local organisations rather than a broader electoral unity.

Now there has been a further shift to the right. The



Unity on trade union issues is not enough

SWP has set up local red-green alliances in Belfast and Derry. Socialist Democracy was not invited to the initial meetings, even though we had written to the SWP requesting a meeting.

The programme of the new alliance (as illustrated by the text on the right) has no connection even with the rather weak southern programme or even with any explicitly socialist demands

and is in practice by refusing to raise the issue, a capitulation to the new sectarian structures being set up following the Good Friday agreement.

The unity movement is not quite dead.

There is still a slightly greater willingness to discuss with each other on the left and the opportunity to test this in practical campaigns where we can unite in a principled way.

Moving rightward

Declaration of the new Socialist Environmental Alliance launched in Belfast and Derry by the SWP.

"THE Socialist Environmental Alliance is a new initiative in Belfast politics, which aims to challenge the pro-business line of the nationalist and unionist parties that dominate the City Council.

For too long, the interests of multinational companies have been put above the interests of Belfast workers and of the local environment.

We demand that the issues that affect the lives of the people of Belfast be put at the top of the agenda. Northern Ireland is currently seen as a soft touch for companies who don't want to pay their workers a decent wage.

One of our priorities will be to campaign on the ground for a living wage of £7.40 (the European decency threshold). There is a severe lack of affordable housing in Belfast.

We will demand that money be allocated to build decent public housing. We will also demand extra levels of funding for public transport, so that people can opt for a greener

way to travel.

At all times, we will be a voice for the rights and interests of all working people instead of the demands of big business.

- MORE MONEY FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORT
- FOR A CLEAN AND HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT.
- Also more recycling depots throughout the city
- PUBLIC SERVICES IN PUBLIC HANDS - AN END TO ALL PFI SCHEMES
- We will support and mobilise workers and the community against any new sell-offs of council jobs, water services, or the Housing Executive.
- We will also oppose all

"Our job as councillors will be to police the police"

schemes to hand over schools and hospitals to the public sector under PFI schemes.

□ OUR JOB AS COUNCILLORS WILL BE TO POLICE THE POLICE.

□ Defend the people against abuses by police forces, either state or 'community'. No to RUC bullying and belligerence. No to punishment beatings and paramilitary exclusions.

□ ACCOUNTABILITY AND

TRANSPARENCY IN THE ALLOCATION OF PLANNING PERMISSION

□ An end to the current system of vast over development of some residential areas.

□ INCREASE MONEY SPENT ON YOUTH FACILITIES AND SERVICES.

□ A massive expansion of facilities for young people and opposition to the threatened withdrawal of funding for current projects.

□ FOR A £7.40 A HOUR MINIMUM WAGE with no exclusion of young people.

□ FULL TRADE UNION RIGHTS to be a condition for welcoming new jobs.

□ FOR A NEW LOCAL ECONOMIC STRATEGY, geared to the needs of the mass of the people, not big business.

□ FOR GENUINE LOCAL DEMOCRACY.

□ Publish the minutes of all meetings involving elected representatives.

□ SAVE THE NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE. Cut waiting lists by increased spending on health, more doctors, nurses, midwives, speech therapists etc.

□ FREE AND EQUAL ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL. End student fees, restore grants. Abolish the 11 plus, end selection."

Socialist Democracy's proposed amendments to programme for unity

OUR PROGRAMME is not directed to reforming the state or putting forward what a socialist government might do for workers. It is aimed at empowering workers to take the action themselves that will achieve their demands.

It is with this in mind that we are putting forward the following amendments to the redrafted programme, which is an advance on the first draft circulated before our last meeting.

Social Partnership

On the section on Social Partnership we should be precise and make the following call:

"The Socialist Alliance calls on workers to reject the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness and all such Partnership deals."

Corruption

The demand for the state to jail corrupt politicians, which it will undoubtedly be argued requires increased state powers, is not in any sense an anti-capitalist demand but simply a demand for the state to clean up its act.

It in no way empowers workers or weakens capitalism. The demands of that Socialist Alliance should be:

"Open the books of all companies and Agencies implicated in corruption. For a workers' investigation of corruption - expose all the liars and crooks. For nationalisation under workers control of all bodies found to have defrauded the Irish people."

Privatisation

In the section under privatisation we should demand nationalisation under workers control, simple nationalisation is not socialist. Otherwise, as Connolly pointed out, the army, police and judges would be bastions of socialism.

The North

The section on the north still does not say whether we are for or against the Good Friday Agreement. Are we in opposition to it, or simply its left wing?

We still do not demand the disbanding of the RUC - which puts us to the right of the British and Irish states! It correctly calls for working class unity, but utterly fails to state the politics that will achieve this unity. The programme says we are opposed to sectarian structures but does not say what they are!

If the Socialist Alliance wants to represent a new beginning it must reject the left's history of betrayal on the national question. The Socialist Alliance should state as a minimum:

- Opposition to the sectarian Good Friday Agreement.
- Oppose the new Stormont.
- Disband the RUC.
- Self-determination for the Irish people.
- For an all-Ireland Constituent Assembly.

Overall Objective

The Socialist Alliance should state what its objective is, beyond that of a fairer share of the Celtic Tiger. It should state that: "The Socialist Alliance fights for a 32 county Socialist Ireland."

Build the Socialist Alliance - or hang on in Labour Party, waiting for something to happen?

Nearly 70 people attended a debate organised by Workers Action (Red Rose Islington April 22) to discuss "what role for the Socialist Alliance". ALAN THORNETT was there.

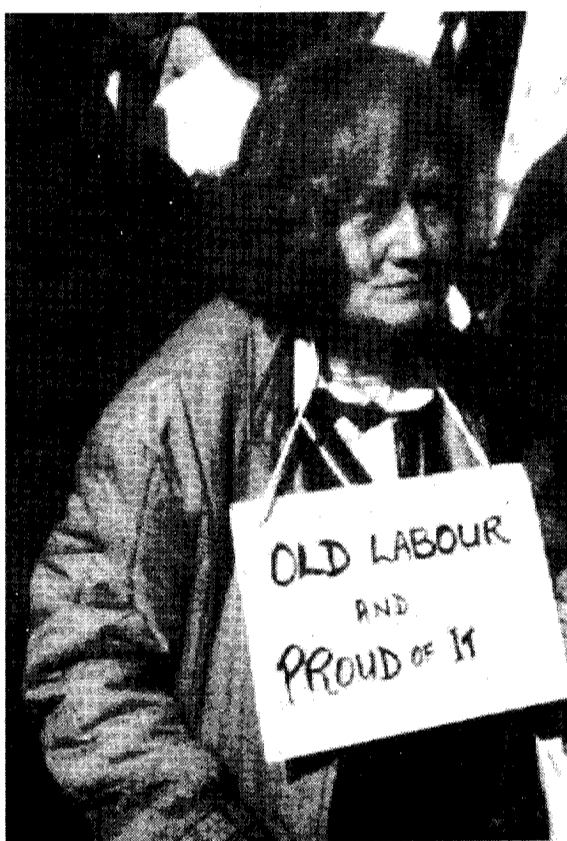
Despite the title, the debate was more about whether the Alliance has any useful role to play at all rather than the particular role it might play in building a fight back against Blairism.

The meeting was more or less evenly divided between advocates of the Alliance and those from fragments of the left which still insist that working inside the Labour Party remains the key tactic of the day. The average age of the (almost entirely male) meeting was also remarkably high.

There were four platform speakers; two against the Socialist Alliance - Pete Firmin from Workers Action and Bob Pit the editor of What Next, and two in favour - myself and Rosie Wood from the AWL.

Pete Firmin's was the opening speaker, offering not so much a rejection of the Alliance as a series of complaints about it. It had failed to do this, that, and the other that it should to have done. People in it, he said, did not speak with one voice, and there were competing ideas as to its next stage of development. But his contribution missed the main political issues.

He did strongly make one political point, however. That was that the politics of New Labour are little different from the politics of previous Labour governments in the 1960s and 1970s. This is a standard argument among those insisting that work in the LP has to remain the principal tactic. After all, if the LP has not changed, why



should tactics towards it change?

Firmin concluded by stressing that the task was still to defeat social democracy and Labourism, and therefore the most effective place to be was inside the Labour Party.

I spoke next making it clear that I was not there to condemn those who were continuing to mount resistance inside the Labour Party (quite the reverse), but I was there to argue that this could not possibly be the principal arena for mounting an effective opposition to Blairism.

Right now, and for the foreseeable future, that has to be predominantly outside of the LP. The idea that you have to be inside the LP to fight Blairism makes no sense: how and where you fight depends on prevailing conditions.

You can wage a battle against Blairism in the unions, and in the various campaigns, and by building a political alternative.

Blair has not just repositioned the Labour Party in British politics, and built a completely new relationship with the employers and the super-rich, he has carried through fundamental changes in the rules of the party which make all this extremely difficult to reverse.

It also severely restricts

the scope for the left to work usefully in the party or to influence its policies and decisions.

I argued that there are now two defining political issues which the left in Britain has to address - and will pay a heavy price if it fails to do so.

The first is the rise of the anti-globalisation movement - which is not a passing phase involving a few thousand demonstrators on the streets, but a new factor in world politics. It reflects a profound reaction by people all over the world against the effects of the neo-liberal offensive, particularly in the third world. It is attracting thousands of young people - and the left must be a part of it.

The second is the reshaping of the left in Britain, which is expressed in the emergence of the Socialist Alliance in England and the SSP in Scotland.

This reflects severe disenchantment in the Labour heartlands and amongst Labour voters and the fact that socialists are leaving the Labour Party in increasing numbers. The task of the Alliance and of the left is to offer such people an alternative.

Many will return to vote Labour in the general election, but a significant number will not - and they represent the most important

factor in a fight-back.

If the Alliance can organise them, it can reshape the left in England and move towards a new party on the lines of the SSP in Scotland. This is the right response to the rise of Blairism which is a new type of Labour leadership and a sharp break from traditional social democracy.

The strength of this approach is shown by the spectacular rise of the Alliance to a position where it has selected nearly 100 candidates, has had two major conferences, has adopted an extensive election manifesto, and has new people coming on board all the time.

Bob Pit's contribution was utterly negative and cynical towards this, and contemptuous of the far-left as well. He refused to see any useful form of life outside of "the labour movement". He said that instead of standing "no-hope candidates" in the election the most positive thing the Alliance could do would be to shut up shop and go away.

Rosie Woods responded to this by pointing out that those arguing for the importance of work in the Labour Party had nothing to say about what to do in it other than be in it. There was no strategic framework suggested for such an intervention.

She pointed out that if the Alliance did not exist, the left would have no profile in the election at all. The days when it was possible to have things like a Socialist Campaign for Labour Victory were over.

The only practical thing that Bob Pit proposed was to go to Meriden and campaign for Christine Shawcroft, as if that represented a perspective for the left in the election.

The only difference between my contribution and Rosie Woods seemed to be on the future of the Alliance. While I stressed the need for a new party of the left, she talked about the need to resolve the crisis of representation of the working class. This is an abstract truism - which still needs a practical solution in the form of a party.

The discussion from the floor was polarised a bit by the decision of the chair to

ask everyone to categorise their contributions as either "for" or "against" the Socialist Alliance - so that he could balance the discussion. In fact the range of views in the meeting was more complicated.

One issue quickly raised from the floor was how to vote in constituencies where there is no Alliance candidate. A number of speakers - Moshe Machover and Anne Grey in particular - argued for no vote for New Labour under any circumstances. Machover argued that Labour was now a straight bourgeois party and could not be supported.

Rosie Woods replied, rightly arguing that we should call for a vote for Labour where we have no candidate. Although it is the aim of the Blairites to turn the LP into a straight capitalist party, they were not there yet, and we should still vote Labour where there is not a socialist alternative.

The meeting demonstrated that Workers Action has hardened its position against the Alliance. But they are opposed to the Alliance standing against Labour in the election, rather than against it existing as a campaigning organisation. Bob Pit, on the other hand, insisted that the Alliance could play no useful role, even as a campaigning organisation.

Some Workers' Action speakers criticised the Alliance for being too harsh in its criticism of New Labour, arguing that living standards had actually improved since 1997, and this should be recognised.

Other speakers pointed out that this ignored the fact that the rich were getting richer and the poor poorer - which is the real and most damning legacy of new Labour. Richard Price (from WA) even criticised the Alliance for representing a rather old age-group - which seemed odd at a meeting which was on average 10 or 15 years older than the average Alliance meeting.

It was an interesting discussion. But all that was being offered as an alternative to building the Alliances was hang on in the LP ... and hope that something turns up.

Should Socialist Alliance fight for a revolutionary programme?

Jason Travis, Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance

Veronica Fagan addresses an important issue in her article 'Manifesto must aim for broad appeal' (Socialist Outlook, March 2001) and I would like to welcome the fact that *Socialist Outlook* has explicitly joined in on the debate about the future of the Socialist Alliance, whether it should be a party and, if so, when and what sort of programme we should have.

Fagan argues against those who 'confuse their own political ideas with what can be common ground in this alliance' - those who argue for a revolutionary programme - in favour of adopting reforms that can wider forces to the project of the Alliance.

This argument is significant: whatever our different conclusions we should keep up the debate and indeed take up such arguments with people we meet in struggle.

The two main questions then are whether we should argue post the election for the Alliance to become a party and whether revolutionaries inside the Alliance and any future party should argue for a revolutionary platform. In this article, I want to argue for both a party and a revolutionary platform.

There are three reasons I want to highlight for this:

- (i) there are good reasons for believing that a revolutionary programme argued for correctly (i.e. following Trotsky's transitional method) can win much wider forces much more effectively than a rehash of Old Labour reformism;
- (ii) reformist politics is a dead end and many workers and youth can see this already, even if only a tiny minority are self proclaimed revolutionaries;
- (iii) the crisis of politics is still a crisis of working class leadership - reformism will lead us to more defeats.

Iwant to make clear straight off, however, that adopting a transitional programme, does not mean adopting a full scale maximum revolutionary set of policies.

On the eve of a revolution, we will be able to pose very different politics. Now we need to go to significant sections of the class struggle and argue for the next step ahead, for the policies and tactics that will win in strikes, protests, mobilisations of youth, workers, asylum seekers etc.

We must not hide the fact that what we ultimately need is a revolution but neither should we isolate ourselves by slogans, posturing or language that isolates us from the struggles: that would be ultra-left - several steps beyond the struggles



Socialist Alliance gets rolling

of the class without any significant resonance or connection with them.

In summary, then I am putting forward the argument that we need to return to Trotskyist orthodoxy on this question, not in an unthinking manner but because an examination of its history will show that time and time again the workers' movement has faced such questions.

There is a genuine danger of revolutionaries being ultra-left and thereby cut off from the class: but the way to avoid that danger is to engage in the struggles of workers and youth and respond to the needs of those struggles.

A revolutionary party could help co-ordinate the struggles of the international working class by sharing and reflecting on experiences and learning the lessons both from history and present day struggles.

A greater danger facing the self defined revolutionary left at the moment is refusing to put forward transitional demands and the lessons of previous revolutionary struggles for fear of being seen as ultra-left.

There has been a lot of confusion over this issue with an attempt to portray those in favour of a revolutionary program as being indeed ultra-left.

Fagan writes in the previously mentioned *Socialist Outlook* article: 'We would not have won the breadth of support we are already getting on the basis of a revolutionary platform - the political base does not exist for this today. So it will be important not only... to vote against amendments from [some groups], but to try to convince those who put them forward why this is the wrong approach.'

I am currently not in another political organisation and I think it should be noted that not all 'independents' are necessarily supporting the apparently more moderate line. The major point of my argument is that many more 'independents' may be won to the Socialist

Alliance if we come out with better politics.

We need to connect with people in struggle, searching for answers and make programmatic demands that take that struggle on to the next step, through our political experience, of engaging in past struggles, and engaging with the history and political theory of the working class. That way we may avoid the terrible defeats of the past.

It is important that Socialist Alliance does not become a new version of an 'Old Labour' style left reformist party. Millions of people have dropped out of voting altogether and become utterly cynical about the ability of parliament to do anything significant.

What do we say to such people? Do we say, you're wrong to be so cynical arguing that parliament can actually do something? No, of course not.

The whole point about socialists calling for a vote is to test those illusions some people still have in parliament. Where people have abandoned such illusions we should not attempt to resow them.

In this election, we should say to such people we agree with you that parliament is an empty hollow sham. Vote Socialist Alliance as a protest against this sham and then (whether you vote or not) join us to help lead struggles to victory. If people are not ready to join then we would say work alongside us in a united front.

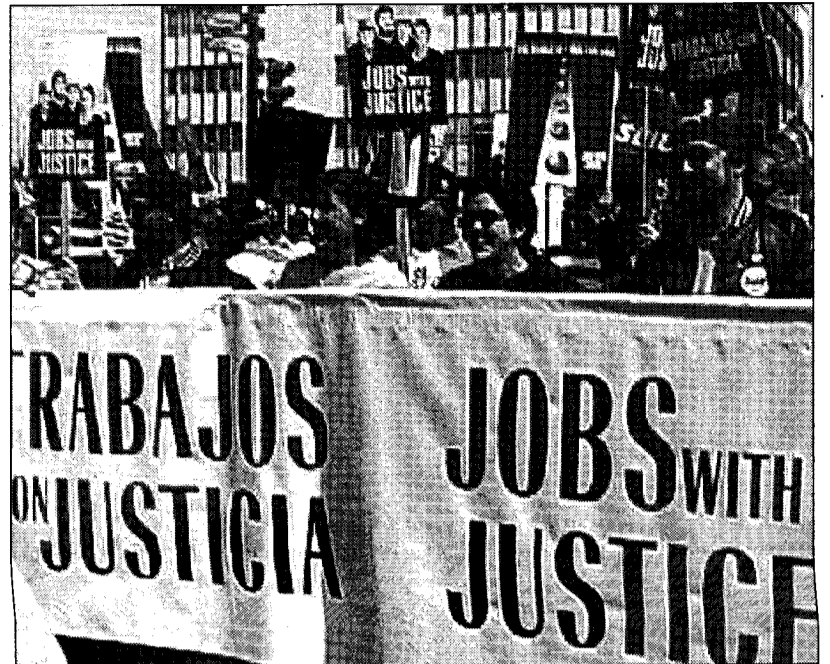
Others have abandoned socialist ideas of equality and real power for working class people as dreams - as Polly Toynbee says 'where will the money come from?' We, in the Socialist Alliance, of course answer, 'Tax the Rich!'

However, if this is the only argument how will we answer those who point to the past crises of left reformist governments?

At the best, there is a flight of capital so that reforms become increasingly difficult to finance and an economic crisis is provoked. At the worst, as in Allende's Chile or Sandanista Nicaragua the economic crisis is accompanied by imperialist sponsored civil disturbance and war.

In Chile workers were demanding arms to be able to defend the factories and the gains of the left reformist government but Allende, in the name of placating the bourgeoisie and not being too left, led them to catastrophic defeat.

In Nicaragua similarly the working class and peasantry needed arming, the bourgeois needed complete expropriation. Even Cuba here can be instructive because however deformed its workers' state (in my opinion right from the start) nevertheless workers and peasants were able to repel a US invasion and hold on to some of the



Thousands of youth have rallied to anti-capitalist mobilisations

limited gains.

Imagine how much more powerful a genuine healthy revolution would be that did not imprison or deport people for their political beliefs (as the Castro leadership did to Trotskyists).

It would have immediately linked with the struggle for black civil rights in the USA, for mass strikes against the Vietnam war, for a working class women's movement, for an end to youth oppression - all this and more could have and could still lead to a seismic shift to establishing global socialist revolution.

Another example would be Ecuador, where recently a rebellion led by indigenous peoples was on the verge of seizing state power. However, lack of leadership and experience led to a defeat: they did not call for the armed working class to join them and complete the process of revolution.

If none of this happened before then we should now be arguing to learn the lessons. However, socialists should point out that many of the lessons are already there for the taking in the study and application of Bolshevik history and principles.

How will the working class ever learn these lessons if self avowed revolutionaries and Trotskyists say now is not the time to talk about revolution? If we wait until the moment we can win then victory will be snatched from under us as arguments are not won over night or by words alone.

We must argue a consistent line throughout, and go through the experiences of victory and defeat along with our fellow workers in struggle. Socialists must from day one raise demands of democratic community defence, socialisation of the means of production under democratic workers' control, and international solidarity.

The argument presented by Veronica Fagan (and previously Alan Thornett) would be relevant if Workers Power, the CPGB and others were arguing for a maximum revolutionary programme immediately, along the lines of issuing leaflets 'Revolution Now! Prepare for power! Armed insurrection!'

Such a programme would jump several steps ahead of the working class and be rightly derided as absurd, adventurist and dangerous if anyone was silly enough to take it seriously. However, this is clearly not the case.

We should put forward transitional demands such as the disarming of the police, community defence patrols and a workers' government.]

This would connect with anti-capitalist youth and workers in

struggle such as the Dudley strikers.

If we do not win the Alliance to such a position we should stay in and continue to argue for similar policies and form a revolutionary tendency or faction to forward the campaign for a mass workers' party which we would attempt to win to a revolutionary programme.

We would show through practical solidarity that we would not walk away, that we would not be sectarian or ultra left. It is imperative that this comradesly debate continues and is explored in some depth and honesty.

At the moment, we are winning some new forces to the Alliance but nowhere near enough. Thousands of anti-capitalist youth remain immune to our arguments. Some may say that this is because they are anti-Left whether Labourist or Leninist and that anyway a few thousand youth is not enough.

However, unpublished research as well as everyday anecdotal evidence indicates that hundreds of thousands of young people can be won to radical politics and that (probably for the same reason) they have little interest in mainstream political debates, processes or activities such as voting.

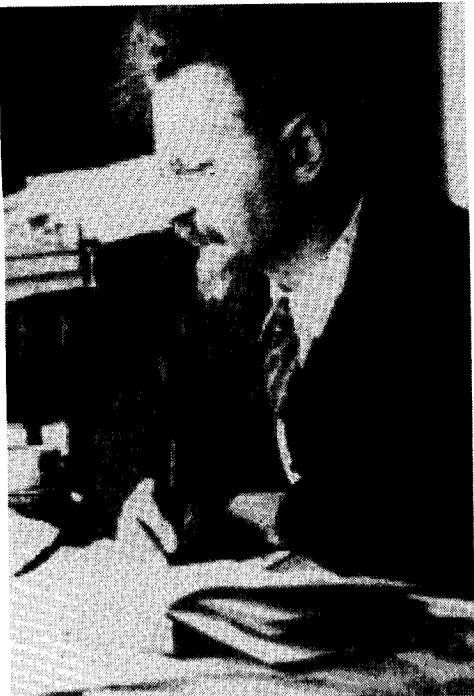
Talk to young people about GAP workers slaving for less than a dollar a day, or strikers being shot in Cambodia, or our ridiculous drug laws, or how 19,000 children die every day from easily preventable diseases whilst trillions of dollars are made on the stock markets.

Or talk to Asian youth in Oldham (where I teach), Bradford, or London, who are sick of racist abuse, colonial-style policing and poverty - and also sick of being dismissed as vigilantes or racists themselves while they are calling for the urgent need of community defence patrols.

The potential for anti-capitalist politics goes way beyond the 20,000 or so who can get to Prague. Look at the wave of mass strikes in Argentina, Brazil, South Africa. The rebellion is beginning. We must reach out.

The revolutionary method of the transitional programme still offers the world hope through resolving the crisis of working class leadership to overthrow the crisis ridden capitalism currently strangling the planet and murdering millions of humanity every year.

This debate should not only take place inside the Socialist Alliance but also more importantly must be extended to all those millions of workers and youth disillusioned with the betrayals of New Labour and across the globe to the millions fighting the increasingly rapacious but also increasingly vulnerable global capitalism.



Trotsky: stick to his method but not necessarily each and every demand of 1938 programme

Veronica Fagan replies

I welcome Jason Travis' contribution to the debate about the direction and shape the Socialist Alliance should take both now and in the future. And I agree with him these issues needs serious discussion.

The International Socialist Group has tried to stimulate and participate in such a debate through the pages of *Socialist Outlook* and through our involvement in the Alliance itself.

We agree with most of the main political points that Jason puts forward; that the Alliance should become a political party, and that it should do so using the method of the transitional programme.

Our disagreements however are important, and centre on concretising Trotsky's approach to create a living instrument that can take the working class forward in the concrete conditions we face today. We don't think that we – or anyone else – has fully worked through what this means and we welcome any opportunity to explore these issues.

Certainly it is true that the Socialist Alliance should move towards becoming a political party – we would argue on the same sort of lines as the Scottish Socialist Party. But the question of tempo will be important here.

Few people would have imagined just one year ago that the Alliance would develop anything like as rapidly as it has done. Even when we started discussing standing in the General Election back at the end of last year, people were talking about standing in around 50 constituencies. In the event we will stand in more than 90.

New Alliances are being set up almost every week. Particularly since Liz Davies' announcement that she would support the Alliance, people who have been Labour Party members all their lives, including many who have been councillors or held prominent positions in local parties, are joining. These people are coming into the Alliance focused on the general election itself rather than on what the future of the Alliance should be.

Even amongst the majority of people who have been involved for some time, the question of the future shape of the Alliance has not been the issue at the forefront of their minds – making the best possible showing at the election has rightly been predominant.

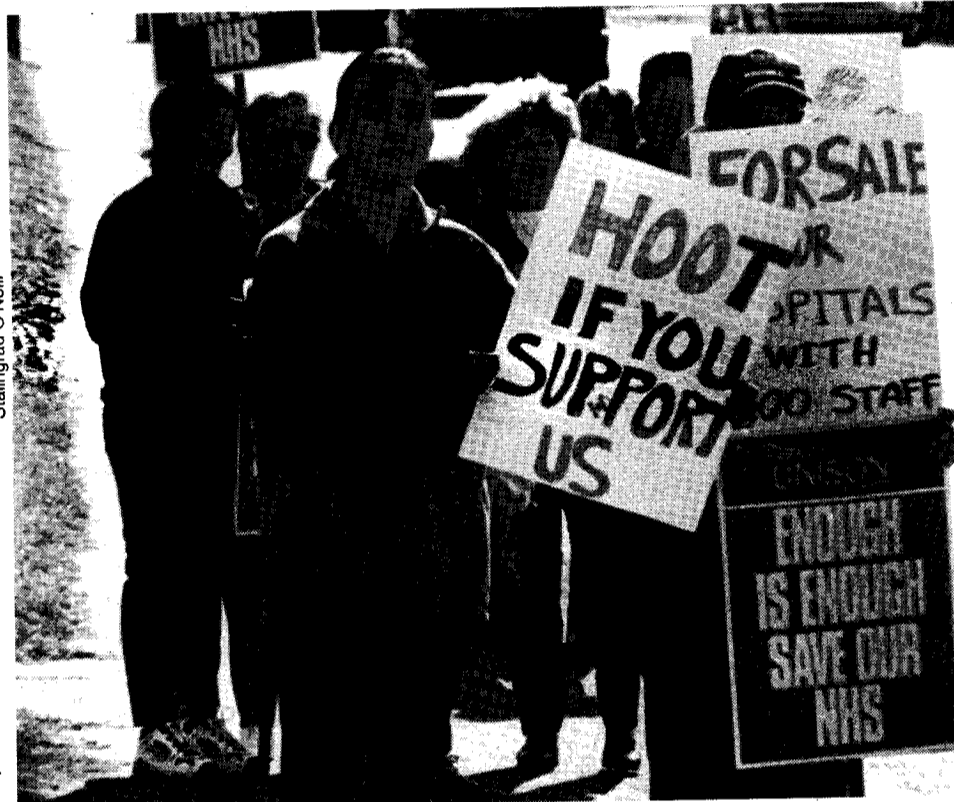
Conference

The conference of the Socialist Alliance in the autumn will discuss the question of the Alliance's structures. It seems to be common ground amongst most involved that we should move to an individual membership structure, where anyone who joins nationally automatically becomes a member locally and vice versa.

Ensuring that we have structures that reflect the political diversity of the Alliance should be possible without the current quota system because by then we will have worked together long enough to know what those strands are.

The Socialist Worker's Party have made clear in the current issue of *Socialist Worker* (May 5) that they favour strengthening the central structures of the Alliance – through steps such as taking on full time staff and maintaining an office, employing full timers and creating a system of affiliations. Elsewhere in this issue of *Socialist Outlook* (p10), Terry Conway and Alan Thornett respond to their position that there is not the basis to create a new party at this

Building a real 'bridge' to win the masses



Stalira O'Neill

stage.

The ISG agrees with Jason that the creation of a new party is a step that should be taken, we don't think it is yet clear when the most opportune moment would be for such a transformation. It is important that we go forward with as much consensus as possible amongst both current and potential supporters of the Alliance, both on the need for a party and what form and political content it should have.

No return to Old Labour

The second major point that Jason makes, where again there is agreement, is that we don't want to recreate Old Labour. This is an issue now in terms of what policies and ideas the Alliance puts forward, and would become an even more crucial debate if we move towards creating a new party.

The Labour Party since its inception has been a *bourgeois* workers' party – that is a party whose very existence came about to prevent working class people taking power for themselves, while claiming to speak for them.

But there is a complication here which Jason doesn't really address. We don't want to replicate what was reactionary about Old Labour – but at the same time we want to win to the Alliance those thousands of working class people who are angry with what Blair is doing, but not yet convinced of revolutionary ideas.

Jason refers to the transitional programme drawn up by Leon Trotsky in 1938, and says that this is the approach that the Alliance should adopt. We agree. That is the approach the ISG adopted in putting forward in its submission to the Socialist Alliance Conference (available on the website) and in assessing the material that went to the Alliance conference in Birmingham in March.

In quoting my article in SO 43, Jason says that I am in favour of "adopting reforms" in order to win broader forces to the Alliance. That is not my approach at all.

I don't think it is possible to point to anything in the Socialist Alliance manifesto that

could be seen to argue that working class people should have confidence in parliament or the institutions of the capitalist state. And that is the essence of reformism; not the fact that we argue for reforms such as a minimum wage of £7.40 an hour.

At the core of Trotsky's approach was the idea that revolutionaries had to build bridges between current levels of consciousness and the ideas necessary to defend or advance the interests of working class people.

This cannot mean in all circumstances just repeating the demands that Trotsky himself put forward in 1938, it must mean analysing the concrete situation we are in and putting forward the appropriate demands for that actual living situation.

To be more concrete, let's look at what was proposed on the manifesto that the ISG opposed. On the question of the police for example, Worker's Power in amendment 18 starts:

"The police cannot be reformed as an institution. The police force exist to defend the bosses system. That is why we support the disbanding of the police....."

Or the CPGB in Amendment 23 "The Socialist Alliance is against the standing army and for the armed people".

If this isn't a maximum programme, then I don't know what is. There is no way that this reflects the consciousness of the majority of people breaking from New Labour – the audience we want to win to revolutionary ideas through a transitional approach.

Self defence

Jason doesn't himself use this formula. Instead he talks about community self defence – and explicitly argues that this should be a demand that socialists "raise from day one".

But even community defence councils can-

not be seen as a transitional demand in today's political conditions. Most people, even politically conscious and organised people don't have a clue what we mean by them. So that's no bridge.

On the other hand, the slogan 'self-defence is no offence' – now part of the Socialist Alliance manifesto – is much more accessible. It has been the spontaneous slogan of many protests and demonstrations especially those led by black youth.

And it incorporates the same political idea – that is no confidence that the ruling class will police our communities with anything other than repression in mind, so we have to organise our class independently.

Jason says "Millions of people have dropped out of voting all together and become utterly cynical about the ability of parliament to do anything significant."

Certainly it is true that many of the people, particularly the young people, involved in the anti-globalisation movement have drawn some of these conclusions.

Ultra-left

One of the problems for us is that some of them have gone further, in an ultra-left direction and adopted anarchist ideas because of the failure of the revolutionary left to address their concerns.

It is certainly true that this layer of people is one with which the Alliance needs to engage, to learn from through our dialogue as well as to suggest ways of organising that can take forward the struggles they are involved in.

But you can't explain the increasing level of abstentions in elections solely – or even primarily – on the basis of the growth of this layer.

Most traditional Labour voters who have stayed at home, or cast a protest vote in recent elections, have done so because they are fed up with this new Labour government. They voted Plaid, or SNP or Green or even Socialist Alliance to protest against the widening gap between rich and poor and the fact that privatisation has been taken to lengths that even the Tories did not dare.

They have not however drawn the conclusion that what is needed to further the interests of the working class is the replacement of Parliament with genuine workers' democracy or the destruction of the existing state system.

Revolutionary socialists want and need to convince them – or at least significant numbers of them – that this is what is needed. We can do this to some extent by working with them in campaigns and through the trade unions, but we can also do this through political dialogue in the Socialist Alliance.

Level of debate

The level of political debate about these fundamental questions that affect all our lives today and for the future is not high in the British Labour movement. While the majority of people who are disillusioned with new Labour do not define themselves consciously as revolutionary socialists, few of them have hardened ideas from which they would argue against our type of politics.

We should point out that revolutionary ideas are really very commonsensical. After all we want a society that is organised in the interests and with the active participation of the majority – our opponents are the ones who want a world that puts profit before people.

But unless there is a huge rise in the class struggle that leads to a major shift in political consciousness, that if we succeed in creating a new party, conscious revolutionaries will be in a minority. That is the situation in which we will need a 'revolutionary platform', a banner within the broader party around which to organise to fight for our ideas.

The opportunities that are opened up by the Alliance project are enormously exciting – we have the potential to create a sustained challenge to the system that is destroying our lives and our planet.

At the same time the challenge we face to avoid the twin dangers of rightism and ultra-leftism makes the fullest possible debate about the steps we need to take to achieve our goals indispensable.

Socialism on the internet

Socialist Outlook web site: www.labournet.org.uk/so

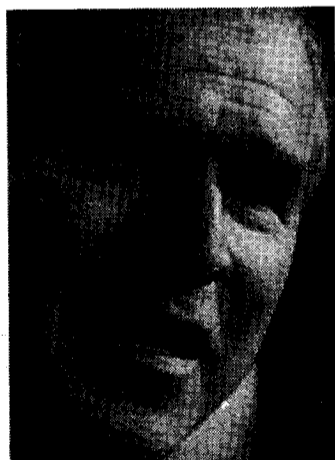
International Socialist Group: www.3bh.org.uk/ISG

Socialist

A monthly marxist review. No 45. May 2001. 50p

OUTLOOK

Socialists join fight to halt Star Wars madness



Bush: knows Blair will support his madcap missile scheme

George W Bush has made clear that he intends to go ahead with his 'Son of Star wars' project – and tear up the existing Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in the process.

Bush's determination to take this crazy path, which will in all likelihood provoke a new arms race, is fuelled by his close relationship with the oil and arms industries.

Tony Blair, while refusing to make any definite statement on the question, is clearly happy to

let his new friend in the White House use the US bases in Britain as part of this macabre operation.

Both internationally and here in Britain a new mass movement of opposition to this nuclear madness needs to be built, building on actions like the mass protest at Faslane earlier in the year.

As Frank Ormston, the Socialist Alliance candidate for the City of York has said "Together with others, the

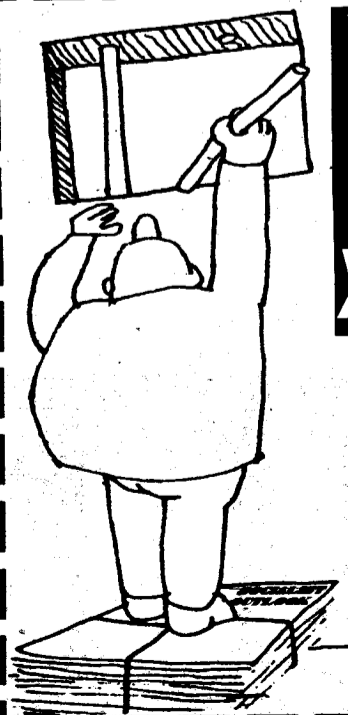
Socialist Alliance is committed to taking action to stop the USA using Menwith and Fylingdales in Yorkshire as outposts for its world-threatening NMD scheme.

"The casual attitude of both Bush and Blair to the violation of the Anti-Ballistic Missiles Treaty of 1972 is terrifying. Their aggressive stance will incite other countries to develop further their nuclear capabilities.

"Instead of the peace dividend

we were promised with the end of the Cold War, we now have a renewed and utterly pointless war-drive. Virtually alone in Europe, Tony Blair, Geoff Hoon, Robin Cook and their New Labour colleagues are giving Bush and the American right-wing crucial support and credibility.

"We say to Labour members: join our fight for nuclear disarmament, cuts in military spending, and a British foreign policy independent of US influence."



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