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For a revolutionary workers' party

Organise to fight privatisation in 2001

By Bob Archer

CAPITALISTS enter 2001AD in some confusion.

The apparent engine of prosperity in the US and western Europe over the last 20 years has been the general (if often interrupted) rise in stock and share values.

For most of the early 1990's, capitalists looked to emerging markets in the Far East, South America and (since the collapse of the Soviet bloc) eastern Europe and the USSR to keep the returns on investment rolling in. No praise was too lavish for Asian values and the dynamism of the Pacific Tigers.

The Far East collapse of 1997 put paid to that virtually overnight. As stock and currency values plummeted, every financial expert in the world started mouthing that the 'Tigers' were fundamentally flawed by protectionism and cronyism, not to mention downright corruption.

The consequent turbulence affected far-off Brazil, where it also appeared that there was insufficient discipline and transparency in the booming banking sector.

It also ripped the lid off the process of capitalist restoration in the ex-USSR. Instead of financing a restructuring of the Russian economy, western credits were being re-cycled through government-linked mafiosi straight into Swiss banks.

The results struck at the heart of US imperialism. Finance operators like George Soros took a big hit which briefly shook his confidence in capitalism, while some important hedge funds would have gone bankrupt without a concerted effort by all the US banks to save them.

Imperialist economy was able to survive because the working class internationally is split up and disorganised, lacking a political leadership and party which expresses its historical interests (and consequently those of all the oppressed and exploited masses in the world).

Next in line, the virtues of the New Economy were extolled. The Internet was to usher in a new kind of economy where value is based on control of 'information' and 'knowledge' rather than on the socially-necessary labour time required to make the goods and services people require to live.

A year ago any company with 'dot.com' in its name could find stock-exchange backers to buy its shares. Paper millionaires sprang up like mushrooms in dung.

Since last spring, there has been a steady stream of bankruptcies in this field and a downward drift of Internet stock values.

Investors started looking anxiously for new places to put their money. Were there signs of recovery in the Far East? Could they cajole the Japanese into opening up to foreign investment? But Japan's rulers are not keen on change, and the problems of the Nasdaq have spilled over to the Far East.

When the mighty Microsoft sneezed and joined the ranks of software companies who have posted a profits warning, share values in the Far East caught a cold. When the Bank of England warned that British Banks were over-exposed to Internet stocks, HSBC banking shares fell on the Hong Kong stock exchange.

Where are the capitalists to turn? They will be forced to continue and intensify their rapacious attack on the public services upon which millions of people rely for the basics of life all over the world.

Unable to feed capital's insatiable thirst for expansion from the development of the productive forces, capital turns with redoubled force to parasitise the very well-springs of life.

Health services, education, the care of the young and the aged, postal and telecomm services, the provision of water and the removal of waste, all must be taxed so that the banks can live.

Pro-capitalist governments (i.e. all present governments) have no alternative policy. This is why 'socialists' like Blair in the UK and Schroeder in Germany push forward open or concealed privatisation schemes at all costs.

Recently there have been signs that this policy, too, is starting to come up against growing opposition.

Independent candidates have stood in South Africa against the Thatcherite ANC.

Ken Livingstone was elected Mayor of London to oppose privatisation of the Underground railway system.

A series of horrendous accidents on the UK's privatised mainline railways has brought about something like a nervous collapse of the whole system, raising seriously the question of re-nationalisation.

Now even the staid UK Audit Office has questioned the break-up of London Underground into separate privately-owned companies. In simple terms, it is inefficient and highly unsafe for the passengers. Blair may not be able to privatise this public service in quite the way he wanted.

The task for 2001 is to develop the promising beginnings of opposition towards the founding of a revolutionary party of the working class, more and more international in character.

On pages six and seven



MEMBERS of Workers' International (left) opposed the NATO bombing of Serbia while still defending the rights of the Albanian Kosovar people. See pages 6 and 7 inside for an exchange of letters between Bob Myers of Workers' Aid to Kosova and Workers' International to Rebuild the Fourth International.

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Fred Green

IT is with great regret that we announce the death of Fred Green on 25 November 2000. Fred was and remained a Trotskyist for 40 years.

In 1999 he survived surgery and the treatment of cancer with great fortitude and optimism. This year he took early retirement and looked forward to having time to concentrate on political work and to see more of his family.

At several meetings of the Workers International executive committee and at our third congress, he joined in dis-

cussions on future work, including the production of a series of pamphlets. He enthusiastically agreed to carry out research and translations as well as editorial work and to learn page make-up.

But this was not to be. He became ill again early in October when cancer re-occurred—this time with no possibility of treatment. The next issue of Workers' International Press will carry an obituary of Fred.

We send our sympathy to his family.

WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE!

Panthers still caged in Angola

by Mumia Abu-Jamal

If ever there was any question of the slave parentage of the American prison system, one glance at a massive penitentiary known as Angola in steamy Louisiana removes all doubt.

Once a group of slave plantations, it earned its name from the south-western African kingdom which was later colonised by the Portuguese in the 1600s. It was from this region of Africa that a majority of black slaves were taken in chains to people Louisiana's rice plantations, and it is here, Angola, where the state concentrated its penitentiary, and its attempt to stifle righteous black resistance to racist repression.

It is here that a young prison guard joined the mound of dead bodies manufactured in Angola, and several young black men, members

of the state's Black Panther Party, were unjustly targeted, tried and two convicted in his killing.

The year was 1972, several months after then U.S. President Nixon's visit to China. It was the year the late Alabama Gov. George C. Wallace was shot and paralysed while campaigning for the US Presidency.

One year later, Watergate exploded across the nation, and four imprisoned members of the Black Panther Party were formally tried for killing the prison guard. One, Gilbert Montegut, was acquitted, two, Albert Woodfox and Herman "Hooks" Wallace were convicted, and another Chester Jackson, turned state's witness, and snitched.

Both Woodfox and Wallace have served a quarter of a century in continuous solitary confinement, locked down 23 hours a day.

There is every indication today that both men were

framed for the killing. Indeed, after Montegut's acquittal, even Angola's then warden, C. Murray Henderson, later admitted that Montegut was framed because of his "militancy". (*Disbarred*, Spring 1999, p. 14). Ironically, ex-warden Henderson, convicted of shooting his wife five times, is doing a 50 year sentence for attempted murder.

The crime's only "witness", (now dead) was a notorious prison snitch named Hezekiah Brown, known as "soft cop".

What wasn't known at the time of the trial was that Brown was, at and after the time of the stabbing, not only a paid snitch, who received one carton of cigarettes per week (letter from Angola warden F. C. Blackburn to C. P. Phelps, Secretary of Corrections, 7 April 1978).

The letter refers to "the original agreement with Brown" made by ex-warden

Henderson years before, in "partial fulfilment" of their agreement "with respect to his testimony in the state's behalf".

Several years ago, Woodfox submitted to a polygraph examination, and his denials of involvement in the stabbing were found to be "truthful".

Like Montegut, Woodfox and "Hooks" Wallace were tried because they were "militant" members of the Black Panther Party who organised the deeply oppressed brothers of Angola to rebel against the repression. They were so skilful that (before the killing) they organised a prison chapter of the Black Panther Party, an astonishing feat given the site.

Faced with life without parole in solitary, it is past time for people to organise for their life in freedom. They are political prisoners of the highest calibre who deserve your support.

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Mumia Abu-Jamal: his struggle against police frame-up and his articles from prison are an inspiration to new generations of young fighters

Appeal for the independent socialist candidate in Durban

Members of Workers International in Durban, South Africa, alongside many others, stood independent candidates in last year's municipal elections in opposition to the African National Congress government. We will report on the outcome of the elections in future issues of Workers International Press

Dear friends and comrades,

The Rt. Rev. Tshaka Jubele Zulu is a former industrial worker, with a minimum standard of education, because of the legacy of apartheid regimes, which prevented the black population of South Africa, which was of African origin, from gaining access to the formal and revolutionary education system, but only enabled them into an inferior status of being servants of the states and bosses.

Hailing from the poor rural homeland of the Transkei, he came to settle in Durban in search of formal employment, serving in the Natal canefields as a migrant worker. Having been able to qualify for a Durban Native Status, he got employment from a number of local companies until he lastly settled in a paper and pulp industry factory, where he played an active role in the introduction and formation of the industrial unions during the industrial revolutions in the mid 1970s. He was eventually elected a union shop steward and continued to occupy senior positions, viz —

Senior Shop Steward (Chairman) both at local and national levels until he was seconded to a very senior position of membership to a board of trustees at company level, when the pension fund scheme was repealed for a provident fund scheme, the first of its kind in the history of South Africa.

After losing his job at the factory, he made a significant contribution to the formation of the Folweni Civic Association in the early 1990s, after which he served on the ward development committee at the time of the birth of the new system of local government, immediately after the first South African democratic elections. He also played a proactive role in the welfare networking which involved the church, peace and community structures during the height of the general civic crisis, particularly the flood disasters which gripped our country and when political tensions ran high with violence setting much of the country ablaze.

He never stopped there, but proceeded to initiate a well co-ordinated multi-sectional economic development forum through which he applied for financial funding for financial and material support from foreign donor agencies which organised skills training workshops for the participants.

Owing to the failure of the new dispensation to deliver the goods there has been

widespread dissatisfaction and resentment and loss of confidence in the present system, particularly the present party-politics which bear no regard for their rejective and general membership. This prompted our communities into deciding for alternative avenues in local governance, which saw the widespread rise to the new trend towards the nomination of independent candidates like Rt Rev. Tshaka Jubele Zulu, who was pressurised by his fellow residents to stand on their behalf as a rightful choice to represent the people's aspirations across the spectrum and defend their legitimate rights irrespective of their party allegiances, as they are now sick and tired of being forcefully subjected to party-political ideologies even when it is not necessary — like on development matters.

Rev. Zulu is not a source of delivery himself, but is a people's loyal representative in the council chambers to truthfully articulate the people's rights, without necessarily adhering to the commands of the parties in government.

He will base his ability to be the true representative of the people on the strength and active participation of the people themselves as against the usual rhetoric of his campaign opponents to: deliver the goods, solve their problems and to have all the answers to their questions.

He will act on the instructions and within the mandate

of the people at all times and shall be accountable to them and exercise his powers with all due transparency.

His vision

The ultimate objective of all this is the development of the people's cadreship to lead the revolutionary struggle of the oppressed within the system for a total emancipation of the working class around the globe.

This will only be reached after the workers of the world have united against the common enemy — the universal imperialists — to form their workers' independent party for a socialist society.

Therefore, without the meaningful support of the international working class this vision cannot be realised. That's why we are appealing for this kind support from our comrades.

It is indeed both a difficult and mammoth task to successfully field an independent candidate in South Africa, due to a lot of financial red tape, imposed by the ruling government and party political dirty games played by the big parties in cahoots with the capitalists.

Our informed estimation shows that our goal can only be achieved if we can secure an additional financial support of more than R15,000 after having been able to meet primary expenses.

Comradely yours,
Prince Cele,
Tshaka Jubele
Bongani Mkhungo

No charges in Sylvester death

The Crown Prosecution Service in the UK has decided that no police officer involved in the death of Roger Sylvester is to face criminal charges.

Roger, a young black Londoner, died while being restrained by police. The campaigning group INQUEST and the Roger Sylvester Justice Campaign are calling for an independent judicial inquiry into his death.

Support for such an inquiry has already been received from The Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, the new Tottenham (north London) Member of Parliament, David Lammy, and 38 other Members of Parliament who signed a Parliamentary Early Day Motion. The National Association for the Care and Rehabilitation of Offenders, the public service union UNISON, The Runnymede Trust, the Churches Commission For Racial Justice, The Monitoring Group, National Assembly Against Racism, Liberty, Newham Monitoring Project, Campaign Against Racism and

Fascism, the Institute for Race Relations, the 1990 Trust and Diverse Minds also support the call.

Sheila Sylvester, mother of Roger, said: "This shocking decision by the CPS comes as no surprise to my family. We have continually voiced our dissatisfaction with the investigation process, which we believe, was based on selective information."

"It is nearly two years since my beloved son met his death while being restrained by police officers and I am no closer to finding out the truth about how he died."

"There is something shameful about a system where when people die in custody their custodians never give a proper account of what they did and the system is not geared towards making anyone properly accountable."

A full background briefing on the case is available from INQUEST and further information on the case on websites <http://www.inquest.org.uk> and <http://www.rsjc.org.uk>.

Send your letters and articles to:

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The Irish worker by John Steel

Demand a community-based inquiry into Joseph O'Connor's murder! Defend Anthony McIntyre and Tommy Gorman!

After investigating the murder of Real IRA member, Joseph O'Connor and issuing a statement (see this page) which says 'it is our unshakeable belief that the Provisional IRA carried out this assassination', members of the Irish Republican Writers' Group (IRWG) in west Belfast have been subjected to threats and intimidation.

Former long-term IRA prisoners, Tommy Gorman and Anthony McIntyre, have had their homes picketed by crowds of up to 50 people, including many Sinn Fein members.

McIntyre, along with his wife and children, was forced out of his home for a while. Joseph O'Connor's family also claim that they have been facing "massive harassment and intimidation". They say that members of the Provisional IRA had rung the family and taunted them about the murder. His widow said that she had received hate mail and malicious telephone calls and pleaded to be "left in peace".

The O'Connor family have picketed Sinn Fein's headquarters on the Falls Road in Belfast demanding to know the truth about the murder and his mother recently picketed a Sinn Fein fund-raising dinner in New York which Gerry Adams attended.

It is the duty of socialists and working-class activists everywhere to unequivocally condemn the killing of Joseph O'Connor and the intimidation of his family as well as the intimidation of Tommy Gorman and Anthony McIntyre.

The Workers International is resolutely opposed to the methods of the Real IRA but it is a matter of absolute principle that everyone who fights against British rule in Ireland has to be defended against the forces of the state and those who act on its behalf.

While making it clear that it profoundly disagrees with the Real IRA and "that organisation's pursuit of an armed campaign" the IRWG is correct in asserting that the truth about O'Connor's murder must be confronted. Gorman and McIntyre have not named any individuals in connection with the killing and their call for an open inquiry should be fought for in the local community and in the international workers' movement.

The statement by Gorman and McIntyre does more than accuse the Provisional IRA of being responsible for O'Connor's killing. It points to the reasons for it and correctly says that "The real purpose of the killing was not merely to kill any member of the Real IRA but also to kill off any semblance of alternative republicanism, even that which is exclusively peaceful in its opposition to the Stormont regime".

It continues, "this murder is a state killing, perpetrated by a movement that is deeply entrenched in the apparatus of government at Stormont".

With this analysis the IRWG takes the discussion — which it and other groups and individuals have been engaged in since the capitulation of the Sinn Fein leadership — a step further and poses many questions which the IRWG must begin to address if it is not to remain as a debating circle, tolerated by the state and admired by the liberal media and academics as "left critics" of Sinn Fein.

Why did the Adams leadership sell out the struggle? What connection is there between Sinn Fein's swift

"entrenchment in the apparatus of government at Stormont" and the pro-capitalist nature of their programme? If the new six-county administration will not tolerate opposition from those pursuing a united Ireland—and will

attempt to physically remove them — how do we organise against it? Is it sufficient to have discussion and debate separate from involvement in the many issues confronting the working class?

And, crucially, while the six-county state remains as the main barrier to a united Irish working class will the British capitalist state and its armed forces allow it to be peacefully removed? This last question is sharply raised by the IRWG's comment that, "Republicans should never again use guns in pursuit of its ideals".

If this means only that the IRWG renounces the militarism and the isolated guerrilla tactics of previous IRA campaigns then there is no argument, but if it expresses a belief that there can be a peaceful road to a united Ireland then it flies in the face of its own analysis. The new Stormont is not merely a replica of the administration that was brought down in 1972.

The long period of war has strengthened most of the ways in which the British state maintains control, particularly its army and counter-insurgency methods. These have developed to the point where Britain no longer relies to any extent on the local police force.

At the outbreak of the current phase it relied almost exclusively on the RUC, particularly its Special Branch and B Special Reserves. But the new wave of struggle revealed that these hitherto indispensable arms of the Stormont government were inadequate to the needs of imperialism.

Both the scale of the revolt and the growing sophistication of the republican movement's methods dictated that British army intelligence moved quickly to take away from the RUC the lead role in security. This has now been

accomplished to the point where the British state is happy to reform the police service, removing the RUC's name and opening it up to a degree of accountability. It hesitates in implementing all the Patten proposals only because it must attempt to shore up the David Trimble wing of unionism as the Stormont administration threatens, once again, to crumble.

With the use of highly-developed technology Britain has built up an unprecedented amount of information about the population of the six counties. In his book, *The Irish War*, (recently published in paperback) the journalist, Tony Geraghty, notes that Britain used "eavesdropping and other surveillance gear from cameras the size of a pinhead to satellites" to "provide total cover of a largely innocent population".

Geraghty gives details of the Vengeful computer which tracks vehicles in the north of Ireland and the Glutton TV camera system, which "scans and automatically reads number plates of vehicles at locations as far apart as Derry, Dover and Gretna Green". He quotes figures given to him by army and civilian intelligence officers. From a population of 1.5 million people "at least one million names are now on some security agent's computer".

This aspect of the British state will not go away, no matter what compromises Sinn Fein and the IRA make on the decommissioning of weapons. The Belfast Agreement makes it clear that the British army will remain and the O'Connor assassination shows that as well as the loyalist killer gangs there are other forces willing to be used in state killings. It is wishful thinking to believe that this state apparatus can be peacefully removed.

This is a shortened version of a statement (17 October) from Anthony and Tommy Gorman, former long-term IRA prisoners who set up the Irish Republican Writers' Group.

Thirteen years ago this week, Francisco Notarantonia was murdered on the orders of the British state. Last Friday his grandson was murdered in the same street. Joseph O'Connor (26), father-of-three, was a republican. Our stringent opposition to the Real IRA, of which he was a volunteer, in no way minimises our abhorrence towards his political assassination.

He was part of a wider republican spectrum which exists in opposition to the Stormont regime. It was primarily his disagreement with the regime that cost him his life. It is not our purpose to sensationalise the circumstances surrounding this political assassination. We are aware of the knock-on effects of spurious allegations and alarmism.

But we shall not be intimidated, bribed or blackmailed by the imperatives of the peace process whereby we would emulate many in the media and politics who endlessly speculate about who might be responsible but ultimately avoid saying anything that 'might not help the peace process'.

In the wake of the attack the Irish Republican Writers Group was asked to begin the unenviable task of interviewing people who, in one form or another, had knowledge of the event. Also interviewed were relatives of Joseph O'Connor. Despite the sensitivity, the writers' group felt compelled to probe, press and challenge, declining to accept anything that was speculative. As a result there is no room for doubt.

We state publicly that it is our unshakeable belief that the Provisional IRA carried

out this assassination. BBC Panorama's exploration of the Omagh bombing issue helped create a climate of moral anathema which was taken advantage of by those who killed Joseph O'Connor. It was subsequently made easier for them to assassinate a member of the Real IRA rather than other republicans opposed to the Stormont regime. Whatever reasons given by the IRA leadership to its volunteers who were involved in the operation, this murder is a state killing, perpetrated by a movement that is deeply entrenched in the apparatus of government at Stormont.

When a branch of the executive has at its disposal a private militia capable of and willing to politically assassinate republicans in nationalist communities we are left with Brown-shirtism. We are forced to ask what has really changed? Is the protection of a republican's life from state murder a mere privilege determined by their attitude to the state?

We repudiate this political assassination, and we repudiate the motivations behind it. ... We reject totally any call for revenge and state unambiguously that there are no circumstances in which Real IRA activity against republicans or others could be justified. We call for an open inquiry monitored by international observers. Friday's murder has fuelled our increasing doubts as to whether our part in this war has been worth it. What did we fight to achieve? The state murder of republicans in order to secure political cleansing and impose conformity is not what our war was waged for.

Support for Russian actions

AT the beginning of December Russian workers showed growing organised opposition to the proposed new Labour Code, in response to a call for action from the Zashchita and SOTSPROF union federations.

On 1 December 1000 workers demonstrated outside the St. Petersburg regional assembly, blocking the main road for several hours. Workers in Nizhni-Novgorod factories staged meetings and marches and were featured prominently on Moscow television, as were protestors in Tambov, where 100 workers blocked the street and forced their local Duma deputy to conduct a question and answer

session on the new code on television.

Russian dockers staged a five-minute warning strike at all ports at 10 am Moscow time. The fact that railway workers on the Moscow-St. Petersburg line, who belong to a rival union, also participated in the action showed that support for the call is widening.

About a hundred workers at the ZIL car factory in Moscow staged a protest at lunchtime at the humpbacked bridge, a famous local landmark. Traffic was blocked for an hour.

The most impressive actions were in Astrakhan, led by Duma Deputy (and Zashchita leader) Oleg Shein.

The following accounts is based on eyewitness reports from Graham 'C' Campbell and other bulletins from International Solidarity with Workers of Russia

SOTSPROF organised rallies in factories in Tyumen region and there was an all-out strike of education workers, pre-school and primary-school and correctional school teachers in the region.

Workers at Anzhero-Sudzhensk in the Kuzbass coalfield in Siberia once again blocked the Trans-Siberian railway.

Rallies and stoppages were organised at two factories and a school in Kirov. Zashchita union, local student unions,

the local congress of women and left-wing groups were involved in organising the action.

Demonstrators in Samara symbolically burned a copy of the draft labour code.

There were similar actions in Primorye Territory and Vladivostok in the far east of Russia.

The SOTSPROF regional committee in Irkutsk also organised action on the day, supported by workers at a sewing-machine factory and

the state university scientific library. Workers at the Federal Nuclear Centre at Arzamas-16 organised meetings against the new code. There were also actions by workers in Penza, Sergiev Posad, Orenburg, Ufa, Voronezh, Bashkortostan and Kazan.

As a result of solidarity work by the International Solidarity with Workers of Russia, support for the strike came from distant Mexico.

Also on 1 December, between 20 and 30 thousand protesters demonstrated at the inauguration of newly-elected President Fox. The new president is expected to start a programme of sweeping privatisations. Battles erupted with

thousands of police and soldiers as the demonstrators tried to break through to the Zocalo, and some demonstrators were injured.

A delegation of 40 from all the organisations involved in the demonstration handed a letter in at the Russian Embassy expressing solidarity with the Russian workers.

Oleg Babich, interregional co-ordinator of Zashchita, reported that a meeting of workers at GPZ-1 factory in Moscow had received and discussed a letter of support received from the Mexican Electrical Workers' Union SME and will be sending a letter of thanks back.

Oppose imperialism's plan Down with "PI

One of FRED GREEN'S last jobs for Workers International before his untimely death was to translate into English the statement printed here which was issued by the International Workers' League, Fourth International (LIT-CI), which is a member organisation of the Koorkom. The Koorkom, which exists to fight for a Workers International Party, arose from the Liaison Committee established on the 21 Points of agreement between the Workers' International and LIT-CI.

On the 30th August US president Bill Clinton visited Colombia to give an official send-off to the so-called 'Plan Colombia'. The symbolism of the place chosen could not have been more eloquent. (Colombian president) Pastrana received King Clinton in Cartagena de Indias, the former seat of the Spanish colonial power.

Two days later in Brazil the presidents of Latin America were solemnly met together to give their approval to the 'Plan', thereby legitimising Yankee military intervention on the Latin American subcontinent. Although they had refused to send troops themselves, as requested by Secretary of State M. Albright (for fear of spreading the conflict to their own countries), their endorsement of the so-called 'Plan de Colombia' clearly shows the compliant and submissive character of their governments.

The decision of the Latin American governments to distance themselves from the military part of the Plan Colombia is merely a division of labour with the imperialist master. An example of this can be seen at present. Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the president of Brazil, showed himself very 'concerned' with the US military operation, by sending thousands of soldiers and police to the frontier with Colombia to prevent conflict in that country from crossing over to Brazil. So thousands of peasants trying to escape the criminal actions of the paramilitaries and the US-led Colombian Army will meet up with the barrier of the Brazilian military, who will send them back to where they came from.

The Plan Colombia, which has the approval and financial backing of the UN, envisages the immediate release of 1.3 billion US dollars (in addition to the 350 million dollars already sent), of which 935 millions is earmarked for the military and police. The remainder is for 'social investment'. These amounts are just for the initial phase of the Plan, which foresees a total investment of 7.5 billion US dollars from neighbouring countries and, in particular, from the European Union.

The Plan involves the despatch of 80 attack helicopters, the training of special forces, the use of chemical weapons for the 'biological war', heavy armaments, etc.

The Plan establishes the presence of 500 US military 'advisors', which number can be exceeded in the case of 'signs of aggression'.

Since Yankee military intervention started a year ago, the spectre of Vietnam has been present. Just like 40 years ago the US establishes itself in the role of 'saviour'. Just like then, military intervention is preceded by a mission of advisors, back then called

'search and destroy'. Biological experimentation delivered a sinister defoliant known as 'agent orange', which led to a large number of deaths and deformities among the Vietnamese population and all this is brought to mind in the current talk about fungus 'fusarium oxysporum', a powerful herbicide derived from the coca plant, whose dissemination among the plantations is part of the military operation, despite the fact that many organisations, including scientific ones, have warned of the environmental disaster which could arise from a fungus whose effects on both the environment and on humans have hardly been tested.

Of course we cannot ignore the fact that during his short visit Clinton

banks that convert the dirty money into capital and thereby complete the transaction? The US does not attack the drug traffickers or the drug traffic, but only those traffickers they are unable to control.

It is said that intervention is indispensable because guerrillas such as FARC are financed by drug trade. According to the Colombian authorities this allows FARC an income of 500 million US dollars annually. If this were the case then FARC would be making precisely one per cent of the 50 billion dollars generated annually according to the same sources. What about the other 99 per cent? On 4 July the main Colombian paramilitary group was in possession of more than 1,485 kilos of pure cocaine, with

is that the operation is concentrated in the guerrilla-occupied zones. This is why in July the AUC gave its public backing to the Plan Colombia, as was reported in the Spanish newspaper 'El Mundo'. 'The Colombian paramilitaries back anti-drug Plan. The AUC approves the new measures against drug trafficking, even though they control the world's largest coca production zone.'

The argument put forward to justify this aggression is a sick joke. In the USA marijuana is one of the principal products of agriculture, providing the American financial system with more than 150 billions of dollars every year. In the last 10 years 35 US banks have been accused of money laundering and Miami is one of the



was forced to comment 'this is not Vietnam, and this is not Yankee imperialism'.

The fight against drug trafficking: the cynical pretext for intervention.

Once again Yankee military intervention is based on the ground of 'humanitarianism', or in this case a cause as laudable as the fight against drug trafficking. However the argument is as cynical as it is superficial. Hypocrisy has no limits: the US is the greatest consumer in the world of cocaine and has the largest number of drug traffickers in the world. So why don't they take on the traffickers in their own country? If the main reason is the struggle against drug trafficking, why doesn't the operation concentrate on the essential point of the drug traffic 'industry', namely the

a value of 53 million US dollars. It is no secret that the so-called AUC (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia = Self-defence units of Colombia), the paramilitary group which has the most solid links to the Colombian Army, are the main beneficiaries of the drug trade (they recently stated that 70 per cent of their income comes from the traffickers). The sinister members of the AUC, with hundreds of civilian deaths to their account, have their headquarters in the south of Putumayo department in the Colombian Amazon region and they control cities like Puerto Asís—the main trading city in coca, La Hormiga in the centre of the Gamuez valley—the major zone of production of coca in the world, and El Placer—the main centre for the purchase of coca.

If Plan Colombia were really about putting an end to drug trafficking, then the intervention would be against all and sundry, but the reality

Imposing 'order' by force of arms or a negotiated settlement: — Colombian government negotiators in dialogue with guerrilla leaders last autumn

most notorious centres of the money-laundering trade. The reason for the intervention in drug trafficking is to regulate a business whose principal beneficiaries are the US banks and finance houses. Not in order to put an end to the traffic, but to remove it from the 'cowboys' and put it completely in the hands of capital.

An intervention set to colonise Colombia and Latin America

The reason for US intervention has to be found primarily in the complete bankruptcy of the Colombian state on the political, economic and military levels. Neither the 130,000 members of the Colombian Army nor its blood-stained paramilitaries have been able to stop the 'subversion' of the FARC and the ELN, who control a large part of the national territory.

The Colombian state has more

than 35,000 assassinations to its name over the last 10 years, 2.2 million refugees and the destruction of large areas of forest with great attendant ecological damage, all in order 'to combat insurgency'. These are some of the achievements of the Colombian state.

Due to the extreme economic crisis, last year the government was forced to reduce military expenditure by 25 per cent. Neither the 180 million US dollars received in 1998, nor the 250 millions received in 1999 have been sufficient for the Colombian government. The neo-liberal solution which Pastrana tried to impose on the Colombian workers and peasants, fully in line with the IMF at whatever the cost, has only led to bankruptcy, the worst economic crisis in 70 years, the destruction of a large part of the productive apparatus, the failure of public sector hospitals, the closing of the Agricultural Fund, and has turned Colombia into a country where 77 per cent of the population live in poverty.

What the US really fears is that the Colombian masses, pressed by the economic crisis, will respond in an active way to the imperialist plunder and that what today is a struggle of the army against strong guerrilla organisations will turn into a civil war which will put imperial rule into question not only in Colombia but throughout the subcontinent. The bankruptcy of the Colombian state and the threat of an extension of this process to Latin America, are the real grounds for this intervention. The 'masters of the world' want to restore order in what they regard as their estate. And this is a foretaste of what they intend throughout Latin America in those places where their interests are 'out of control'.

Imposing order by force of arms or by a negotiated 'solution' — like in Central America

'The assistance of the United States will force the guerrillas to sit down and negotiate'. This is how it was explained by the Colombian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Guillermo Fernández Soto, at a meeting in July in Madrid called by the 'Board of Donors', set up to define the amount of support to be given by the various countries of the European Union to Plan Colombia. The Minister added: 'we hope and expect to achieve a permanent cease-fire by the end of the year'. Colombian Conservative MP, Roberto Camacho, added: 'If peace moves forward, we can diminish the military component of Plan Colombia.'

These statements, directed at the guerrilla leadership, presuppose that Plan Colombia has a social dimension, as expressed in the aid to 'social development' which the Board of Donors agreed. The Colombian delegates thereby gave expression to the imperialist policy of the carrot and the stick. The 'military component' could be 'diminished' in exchange for steps towards a 'peace agreement'.

Imperialism is conscious of the social and political cost that can arise from a military intervention which in turn could unleash a dynamic chain

for re-colonisation

an Colombia”

of unrest with fatal consequences throughout Latin America and even in the United States itself, as happened in Vietnam. This experience has led to a policy of avoiding the commitment of American troops as far as possible in more recent interventions (such as Yugoslavia). Thus the so-called Drugs Czar, US General Barry MacCaffrey said to Colombian General Mario Montoya: ‘You supply the men, we’ll supply the means’. So at the same time as they step up their military intervention, they press the guerrilla leaders to ‘negotiate’, to get them to the negotiating table and accept the world order and the ‘Pax Americana’.

For imperialism as a whole the ‘peace accords’ mean the same as they did in Central America, in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala. In the words of James Patras: Finally with the so-called ‘peace accords’ the devastated countries are transformed into a paradise for speculators, the poor peasants are left without land, those who trampled on human rights remain in power and the oligarchs return from Miami to reclaim their property. The same strategy that was carried out in Central America of destructive war, guerrilla organisations and peace accords which protect the neo-liberal status quo is the strategic objective of Washington behind the peace accord for Colombia.

Halt the offensive to recolonise! Unite Latin America for social and national liberation!

Contrary to the declarations of the leaders of FARC and the ELN, there is no answer to be found by appealing to European governments, nor to ‘democratic’ governments in Latin America who like to call themselves ‘arbiters of peace’, nor in making compromises with Latin American governments by ‘not carrying out military operations in other countries’, as guerrilla representatives have stated: only by organising a rejection of the proposed intervention from Colombia and calling for the greatest possible Latin American unity and the support of the international workers, peasants and democratic movement, is it possible to respond to this offensive of colonialisation and submission.

Despite tactical differences, essentially US imperialism and the ‘democratic’ European Union have the same policy. So that there can be no doubt about this on 8th July the Spanish press eloquently reported the conclusions of the Madrid meeting: ‘As Solana said two weeks ago in Bogotá and repeated yesterday in Madrid at the forum of countries supporting the Colombian peace process: the EU

completely supports Plan Colombia’.

There are doubtless differences between the directly warlike policy of the US and the fears of Latin American governments, but while voicing concern at the consequences of intervention for their own countries, leading them to ‘only support the social aspects of Plan Colombia and the peace talks’, these governments are tied by their dependency and will not in fact dare to confront the plans of US imperialism. So while they refuse to send the troops requested by Madeleine Albright, they limit themselves to asking the Clinton government not to exaggerate the military force and remind them that they could have increased problems caused by guerrillas and drug traffickers escaping onto their own territory. We have to call on the people of the whole continent and the world to repudiate this re-colonising intervention disguised as an action against drug trafficking.

We have to oppose this re-colonising offensive with a unity of struggle throughout the subcontinent. The struggle of Bolivian, Argentinian, Peruvian, Brazilian workers is one and the same. The enemy which oppresses the Colombian workers and is intervening militarily, is the same enemy that oppresses economically and politically all the peoples of Latin America.

We must unite this campaign with

the defence of the Ecuadorean revolution against bringing in the US dollar and against corruption—Ecuador could be the next step in the imperialist military escalation.

We must expel imperialism from the region. Out with the USA! Out with the IMF from Latin America! Only the working class with its allies among the exploited, the peasants, the indigenous population, the students, can mark out a consistent anti-imperialist perspective. No confidence in the policy of negotiating through the medium of puppet and compliant leaders such as Fernando Henrique Cardoso of Brazil and De la Rúa of Argentina. Repudiate the governments who support Plan Colombia and the surrender of national sovereignty. No acceptance of imperialist military bases on Latin American territory, no direct command by Yankee generals over the armed forces of the region in the name of ‘fighting drug trafficking’!

It is clear that we cannot expect the Latin American bourgeoisie and its leaders to halt the re-colonialist offensive of imperialism.

The key to defeating this sinister Plan is unity around: the defence of workers’ rights, land to those who till it, democratic liberties. In this struggle the working class and its allies must confront, as they already have, not only imperialism but also its local agents: all the governments of Latin America.

In the past Latin America was able to liberate itself from its Spanish and Portuguese colonisers. Now it is a question of liberation from its new colonisers, American Imperialism and its ally European Imperialism. It is a fight for a Second Independence. But without a social revolution to expropriate imperialism and its native allies, this independence will not be achieved.

A continental struggle against Plan Colombia is needed to turn into the first stage of a continental movement for the second independence.

In this process of struggle our current will defend these points of view in the same way that other anti-imperialist currents will defend theirs. Doubtless there are many differences on the direction this movement must take, but these differences must not be made an obstacle to arriving as quickly as possible at the widest unity of action with trade union, political, guerrilla, indigenous, student and popular organisations so that together we can strike at imperialism and its local agents such as the Pastrana government. This is the great challenge of today.

- **Throw the Yankees out of Colombia and Latin America!**
- **For the broadest unity of workers, peasants, indigenous and popular action to confront the invaders!**

LIT-CL, São Paulo 10 Sept 2000.

Brazilian police murder leading trade unionist

Report by PSTU

On the morning of 6 October, civil police from the Federal District of Brasilia assassinated Gildo da Silva Rocha,

Press and Publicity Secretary of SINDSER (Union of Civil Servants and Public Employees—CUT affiliated) and a member of the PSTU (Partido Socialista dos Trabalhadores

Unificado—United Socialist Workers Party).

After a meeting of the union leadership Gildo and two other comrades left for Ceilândia to organise a picket at the regional offices of the

Urban Cleansing Service. When the comrades began to set up the picket, plainclothes police appeared, ordered them to the ground and began shooting. Two comrades, Geraldo Rufino and Edson Sampaio — who were detained — went down; one of them, Geraldo, was nearly shot in the foot, while Gildo ran towards the car and got inside. He was shot 17 times by the police, one of the bullets entered Gildo’s back and killed him.

Intending to cover up this vile murder, the police planted a weapon in the vehicle as well as stolen cheques and a joint of marijuana, later claiming that Gildo returned fire and was involved in drugs. The representative of the 15th governmental district of Ceilândia, João Emilio de Oliveira, stated that “the police did not know that the men were trade unionists and were setting up a picket”. Once again the universal police logic of “shoot first and ask questions later” was imposed.

The police strategem only

succeeded in deepening the anger as this type of snare is known to be typical and Gildo was a very well known comrade. As the CUT communiqué states, Gildo “was one of the most experienced trade unionists and in his picket organising vehicle he could never have held the materials alleged by the police.” “What happened with Gildo was an execution,” stated SINDSER president Francisco Alves.

Governor Joaquim Domingos Roriz (PMDB) is the same one who during an open strike by NOVACAP workers a year ago, ordered the Special Battalion of Military Police to intervene against demonstrators resulting in 28 workers being seriously injured and one, José Ferreira da Silva, killed.

Many trade union, political and social organisations have supported the demand for justice and punishment of those responsible, including an independent investigatory commission. The PSTU also demanded Joaquim Roriz be dismissed.

The funeral turned into a big event after which a demonstration went towards Gildo’s house. Actions and meetings carried on for some days, not only in the cleansing sector but with various other unions. The demand for justice and punishment for Gildo’s murder will be raised in the national day of action on 18 November.

Messages have poured in from all over the world. To all of you, our most sincere gratitude. Please keep sending messages repudiating the murder, demanding investigation and punishment, and supporting the united demand for an independent commission of enquiry.

Gildo leaves his partner and two sons, aged 1 and 3. To them, his family, his comrades in the CUT and PSTU we wish to offer our most sincere condolences and solidarity.

And to comrade Gildo, our farewell as to a fighter, a revolutionary, giving tribute to his memory, pledging to keep his struggle alive.

**Comrade Gildo:
Onwards to socialism!**

Auto workers win wage increase

BRAZIL is still suffering the effects of the government’s 1999 devaluation of its currency, the real. At the same time generally rising prices mean that wages are even further devalued.

In November tens of thousands of oil and auto workers led the fight against these attacks on living standards when they halted production lines in 24-hour strikes in support of their demands for increased wages.

Unions representing the 35,000 workers in the oil giant Petrobras insist that the gov-

ernment-run company should share a larger chunk of its profits with the workers. They demanded a 9 per cent pay rise.

The metalworkers’ union, representing workers at Ford, Volkswagen, Mercedes Benz, Toyota and Scania, as well as workers in several auto part factories, reported that 60,000 workers walked off their jobs in Sao Bernardo do Campo, an industrial suburb on the outskirts of Sao Paulo. They won a 10 per cent wage pay rise, were paid for the time lost on strike and guaranteed job security for 90 days.

Massive cuts in the workforce with the introduction of casualisation and productivity agreements has gone hand in hand with attempts to break union organisation.

Workers are concerned that Brazil’s trade union federation, the CUT, encourages co-operation with the companies and the government to bring in such agreements, not only increasing exploitation and unemployment but giving rise to increased attempts to destroy workers’ democratic structures.

Reply from Workers' International to Workers Aid

No support for imperialist NATO!

THE defence of the rights of an oppressed nationality—the Kosovar Albanians—raised essential points of principle. Bob Myers of Workers Aid was one of a group who unsuccessfully tried to wind up Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International. The correspondence reproduced here shows how quickly he moved to abandon more and more principles under the pretext of 'new ways of working together'.

To Workers Aid Members

Dear Comrades

We have received a letter dated 10th October signed by Bob Myers, which seems to be sent to us on behalf of Workers Aid, and the following reply was agreed at our recent meeting.

The letter refers to a "report of a meeting of [our] organisation". We believe that this means the Workers International Third Congress resolution on the former Yugoslavia, which was published in Workers International Press (issue no: 25—July/August 2000).

The letter states that "there were a number of criticisms of Workers Aid based on factual inaccuracies." It seems that objection is raised to that section of our resolution which says:

Workers Aid was hijacked by the members of the Movement for Socialism, and the result was seen during the Kosova conflict, when the MFS declared the defence of the Serbian working class against the NATO bombing to be of secondary importance to the assertion of the right to self-determination for the Kosovar Albanians. In their actual practice, which more accurately reflects their theoretical position, during this period, they engaged in no activity which upheld the defence of Serbian workers against imperialism.

This statement is **not** based on inaccuracies. As the letter says, there was a meeting at which Bob Myers warned the Kosovars that they should not place confidence in NATO. Member of the Workers International, Dot Gibson was present and she did express agreement with this. **However, the letter omits the most important development in the working-out of the decision of that meeting,**

It was agreed to hold a march and rally in London. Bob Myers contact-

ed Dot Gibson to assist in its organisation and they agreed that the form of wording on which the demonstration should be based was the right to self determination of the Kosovars. However it became clear that the Kosova Crisis Committee wanted the demonstration to call for NATO intervention against Serbia.

As socialists and internationalists Workers International could never agree to give any support or any credibility to imperialist NATO. We drafted an open letter to the Kosova Crisis Committee explaining this position. We considered that those Kosovars who placed confidence in NATO were making a mistake, but that this did not alter our total commitment to their struggle for self-determination.

This open letter (see attached) was sent to a number of organisations inviting them to join us in signing it. We got immediate support from the International Socialist League and the International Socialist Group. However, Workers Aid and the Movement for Socialism (MFS, of which Bob Myers is a leading member) did not respond.

We took copies of the letter and a banner to the demonstration. Under the heading of Workers International, our banner stated: **Milosevic and NATO Hands Off Kosova! — Arms for Albanian Kosovars — No to partition of Kosova! Build Workers Aid Convoys!** We found that the Kosova Crisis Committee had kept their people away. Only about 50 of them came (even though on every other occasion a few thousand Kosovars had taken part in demonstrations in London). The Kosova Crisis Committee stewards did not want our banner on the demonstration. They said it would upset the British government and the "international community".

Nevertheless the open letter led to



serious discussions with a number of the Kosovars. Representatives of the Crisis Committee said that in the existing desperate situation the KLA had no alternative but to call on NATO to intervene on their side. We were very aware of the enormous difficulties facing them without the existence of a socialist international. There were others though, who said that in their own internal discussions, they were already expressing doubts about putting any faith in NATO, and, like us, they pointed to the example of the occupation of a divided Bosnia. During these discussions members of MFS, including Bob Myers and others representing Workers Aid, kept their distance.

Although exchanges between Workers International members and the Crisis Committee stewards were determined and emphatic, both respected the other's firmly held views and we shook hands in appreciation of this. Finally the march moved off without us; we could not take part without our banner and we did not support the call for NATO to act. The MFS members, including Bob Myers, joined the march — **behind the Stars and Stripes and the Union Jack and banners calling for NATO/UN intervention.** We went to the rally at the end of the march where we heard Bob Myers make mention of the fact that the Kosovars should not have illusions in NATO!

Throughout the whole Kosova

It became clear that the Kosova Crisis Committee wanted the demonstration to call for NATO intervention



Workers International condemned the barbaric NATO bombing campaign against Serbia but wholeheartedly upheld the right of Albanian Kosovars to self-determination

self-determination for the Kosovars. We marched together as a bloc on all the anti-war demonstrations, handing out our independent leaflets; we fought for resolutions in trade union branches and other labour movement organisations and we held our own independent public meeting (which included speakers from Bosnia and Kosova who explained their hopes that NATO could and would solve the problems).

In the meantime articles written by Bob Myers, usually with a sentence expressing doubts about NATO, were published in various "left" papers. He also signed the Manchester "internationalist bloc" statement opposing NATO bombing. **However, when it came to practice, he kept his so-called principles "in his pocket"**. Neither he nor other MFS members joined or organised a single demonstration or meeting against the NATO bombing. On the first London anti-war demonstration, Workers Aid member and convoy driver Andy McFarlane brought the Workers Aid Banner, which members of Workers International carried whilst he and another comrade gave out Workers Aid leaflets. However, that was the last and only participation of Workers Aid. Its accepted representative Bob Myers discouraged members from taking part.

On the anti-war demonstrations, our bloc had to keep close together because we were attacked (on a couple of occasions there were attempts to physically attack us) by Serb fascists, but on each march our group was joined by various individuals who welcomed the possibility of opposing NATO bombing and at the same time opposing Milosevic and fighting for the principle of Kosova self-determination. One or two former members of the Communist Party, with whom we had worked in the Liverpool Dockers' Support Group, marched with us, saying that although their sympathies lay with Serbia against what they considered to be Kosovan anti-socialist nationalism, they defended our right to fight for our views.

On one occasion the Kosovars had gathered at Admiralty Arch, adjacent to Trafalgar Square, where the final rally was held. They shouted their support for NATO and hos-

conflict, from the Rambouillet Agreement to the NATO bombing there was a significant number of Kosovars who supported oppositionist, Adem Demaci. Bob Myers and the other members of the MFS failed to make a stand in practice to strengthen Demaci's more socialist internationalist position. **When it was crucially necessary to take an open and public stand against the UN and NATO to build and strengthen the minority within the KLA opposed to imperialism, Bob Myers and his supporters refused to fight the "enemy at home"**.

This was in complete opposition to the independent, socialist way in which Workers Aid for Bosnia had campaigned for and organised the first convoys to Bosnia in collaboration with the Bosnians in Britain and in Zagreb but at the same time in active opposition to those among them who called for NATO to carry out bombing raids.

Bob Myers and his supporters refused to fight the "enemy at home" in case it upset the Kosovars. In fact this was a great disservice to the Kosovars, who are now learning through bitter experience that the so-called "international community" has no intention of giving them any right to self-determination. The situation of virtual partition of their country with an army of occupation is a mighty obstacle to rebuilding solidarity links between Serbian and Albanian workers, and **that is exactly what NATO intended.**

When the NATO bombing started Workers International joined nine other socialist groups and a trade union branch in an "Anti-NATO war, Pro-Kosovar Rights" co-ordination within the anti-war movement, the basis of which was:

- **Stop the NATO bombing — NATO out of the Balkans;**
- **Stop the ethnic cleansing — for the right to independence for the Kosovars;**
- **Open the borders to the Kosova refugees.**

The MFS and its influential supporters in Workers Aid refused to join this bloc which stood out against Tony Benn, various Stalinists and the Socialist Workers Party who were all apologists for Milosevic and against

Letter from Bob Myers to Workers' International

'Criticisms of Workers Aid based on factual inaccuracies'

Dear Comrades,

A report of a meeting of your organisation has a section on the Balkans. There were a number of criticisms of Workers Aid based on factual inaccuracies.

You say that during the NATO bombing Workers Aid made the defence of the Serbian workers secondary to that of the Albanian Kosovars.

Workers Aid has always brought together a range of people with different views. From 1996 its activities in relation to Kosova were based on support for the Kosovars' struggle against ethnic oppression and ethnic cleansing inflicted by the Belgrade regime. Workers' Aid supported their right to self-determination. People who joined our activities had different views about whether that right could be achieved. But no decision was taken that the defence of the Albanians took precedence over defence of the Serbs. No such question was ever raised in that way in any meeting. For many of us it was clear that real self-determination, real popular control over their own societies for the Kosovars (or for the Bosnians) could only be achieved if new forms of co-operation between all people of the region could be developed. We also were highly critical of all the

people from the left who wanted to shout "down with imperialism" but developed a totally fraudulent image of "imperialism" completely ignoring Milosevic's role — the attack on the Yugoslav working class.

You say we abandoned any struggle to unite the Serbs and Albanians. Again people may have very different views about the basis for such a unity and the means by which it can be achieved but such a perspective was always central to our actions. Most of our delegations to Kosova in the 96-98 period were made possible by help from people in Serbia and we were always conscious of the need to find ways to develop that relationship. This was not easy. We organised a public meeting in London in 1999 with two active members of the journalist trade unions — one from Belgrade and one from Prishtina. Small stuff but it had a lasting impact. The Albanian journalist, speaking at the Edinburgh Festival a few weeks later said that with Serbs, like the one she had just met, she could and would cooperate. A short while after this we organised a tour of the UK for a representative of the Kosova miners and the Serbian journalist. Again this link has been maintained despite very big prob-

lems. I visited the Kosova miners in July this year and took with me proposals from the Serbian comrades for the miners' consideration. In my report of that visit I commented that despite great frustrations amongst the Albanians with NATO/UN control over their country they would continue to welcome their presence as long as there remained a threat from Belgrade. Therefore it was essential for Workers Aid to find ways to assist co-operation between the two communities in order to assist the Serbs to remove that threat.

You say Workers Aid was hijacked by members of Movement for Socialism. As the situation in Kosova deteriorated more people, especially the Albanian community in London became involved in our work. We held a number of national meetings to plan the work. Members of your organisation never came to any of these meetings or contacted us to enquire whether any meetings were taking place. On the eve of the NATO bombings we held a public meeting in London at which a large number of Kosovars came. From the platform I said that NATO was opposed to Kosovar self-determination and that any action it might take was not in support of the Kosovars but to contain their struggle.

Dot Gibson, from your organisation, spoke and said she agreed with everything I said. Over the next two weeks I liaised with Dot to organise a demonstration in London. Together we agreed the slogans and publicity without any disagreements. In the next two months we held two national Workers Aid meetings. No-one came from the Workers International came to make any criticisms. The first we heard of disagreements came with news that Dot Gibson had organised a meeting in London to set up a new Workers Aid (this proposal came to nothing). So there was no "hijack" because while there were discussions and disagreements amongst Workers Aid activists was no proposals to change direction in any major sense. If Workers International supporters through Workers Aid was taking wrong directions why didn't they submit alternative proposals or ask for a meeting to discuss things?

Finally I see from your report that you are involved in organising a joint visit of Kosova miners and Serbian trade unionists we will of course be keen to help in this work.

Yours fraternally,
Bob Myers.
9th October 2000

tility to the anti-NATO marchers. We took our banner over to them, behind the police cordon, gave them our leaflets and discussed our position with a number of them. Bob Myers and his supporters were neither on the anti-NATO march, nor were they with the Kosovars. They just kept away!

The letter says: "For many of us it was clear that real self-determination, real popular control over their own societies for the Kosovars (or for the Bosnians) could only be achieved if new forms of co-operation between all people of the region could be developed." What is this "real self-determination"? What is this "real popular control"? What are these "new forms of co-operation"? Clearly any real self-determination can only be achieved within the fight for socialist internationalism and not under imperialist domination. Although this does not presuppose that all those fighting for self-determination must be socialists, it does mean that all socialists must openly fight against imperialism.

It was on this basis that Rade Pavlovic, the Serbian Trotskyist and member of the executive committee of the Workers International had proposed the workers' convoy to Bosnia, which led to the founding of Workers Aid. He had also campaigned against Milosevic and for Kosovan self-determination from the very outset of the violence against the Kosovars ten years earlier.

The letter also says: "We [Workers Aid?] also were highly critical of all the people from the left who wanted to shout 'down with imperialism' but developed a totally fraudulent image of 'imperialism' completely ignoring Milosevic's role — the attack on the Yugoslav working class. But, as we have shown, there was an alternative socialist bloc within the anti-war movement which did link Milosevic to imperialism. We did go out on the streets, we did campaign in the workplaces and we did openly fight against the enemy at home — the British state and the New Labour government.

We would remind all Workers Aid members that in the days of the first convoys to Tuzla and then on the two massive demonstrations in London when at least 8,000 men and boys were massacred at Srebrenica in July 1995, followed by the three-month 24-hour picket at Downing Street, the central question was always opposition to the imperialist powers. US and British imperialism for years had built Milosevic up as somebody "they could do business with", had placed an arms embargo on the Bosnians (just as they did on the Kosovars) and who finally imposed a "peace deal" by the division and occupation of Bosnia.

As for the Workers Aid meetings referred to in the letter: when Dot Gibson tried to move a resolution for action against NATO at a small meeting in London (around 15 people) Jill Oxley, supported by the other MFS members, said that a national Workers Aid meeting had already decided that no matter about "our" opposition to NATO, it was not necessary to advertise this. Thereupon the majority decided that the resolution should not be put.

At the following larger meeting (around 40 people) the MFS group turned up with a prepared resolution aimed at keeping out, of all future Workers Aid meetings, all those who insisted on acting on their opposition to NATO. However these MFS members did not take part in the discussion at which Workers International and International Socialist Group comrades called for support for a principled socialist opposition to NATO.

They even stayed silent when members of the Alliance for Workers Liberty shocked the whole meeting by specifically stating that they would not even oppose in words the NATO bombing let alone in practice! Then the MFS members, unsure whether they could win their resolution, kept it quiet. However, after that (as is shown in your letter) we were simply not notified of Workers Aid meetings.

It may be that not all Workers Aid members were aware of the above, but it is surprising that Bob Myers,

who purports to have written the letter on the members' behalf, says: *The first we heard of disagreements came with news that Dot Gibson had organised a meeting in London to set up a new Workers Aid (this proposal came to nothing)!* As we have shown, he knew of our differences months earlier when he and other professed "anti-NATO" MFS members marched behind the US and British flags and banners calling for NATO intervention.

The meeting referred to was an attempt to form a socialist internationalist Workers Aid tendency based on the founding principles of Workers Aid to rebuild independent workers internationalism against imperialism.

MFS members Liz Leicester and Anton Moctonian came along to that meeting. They told us that there were absolutely no differences between Workers Aid, the MFS and Workers International on opposition to NATO bombing. However the crucial difference between us was that they refused to stand up and fight in defence of this principled position.

We are quite prepared to discuss these matters with other Workers Aid members and supporters. In the meantime we note the interest expressed in the letter (and in subsequent telephone calls from Bob Myers) in any visit to Britain of Serbian and Kosovan trade unionists.

The new developments in Serbia have opened up new possibilities for contact and co-operation, which are currently being discussed by our executive committee, including Rade Pavlovic, and which will be fully covered in Workers International Press. We have seen the letter, also signed by Bob Myers, about the possible visit of a Serbian journalist to Britain, and we ask you to let us have details of the meetings organised for him so that we can assist in campaigning for them and also take part.

Yours fraternally,
Bob Archer
Secretary, Workers
International
26th October 2000

Open letter to the Kosova Crisis Committee and Albanian Kosovars

Dear friends,

We express our deep sympathy and entire solidarity at the plight of your families and friends affected by the escalation of the actions of Milosevic's terror troops to carry out ethnic cleansing for Greater Serbian nationalism. We respect and support your right to carry out your struggle in whatever way you think fit. We believe that you should be armed for self-defence, for a free Kosova and against partition.

Out of this respect for you and for the integrity of our own principles, we will not hide our opposition to imperialism — and at this moment this is opposition to NATO's war on Serbia. Our support for your self-determination and our opposition to NATO is not in contradiction.

For many years, we have upheld the principle of a united struggle of workers of all countries against their common enemy — capital, whose private property and profits NATO exists to defend, and we have always upheld the right of people to self-determination. For us to march today on any other basis would be a betrayal of this principle. We not only appeal for your understanding and respect, we also ask you to consider this independent stand for workers' unity as the way forward for all of us.

We know that the voice of Serbian opposition to Milosevic has been reduced to a small echo as the Serbian state takes punitive action against journalists, radio stations and trade unionists who have consistently fought for multi-ethnic communities against the "Greater Serbia" of Milosevic and his openly fascist supporters, Arkan and Seselj. Together, as socialists and internationalists, we must stretch out our hands in unity to strengthen the struggle of Albanian Kosovars and also those Serbian oppositionists who kept the banner of workers' internationalism flying throughout the war in Bosnia and in defence of Albanians in Kosova, and without whom there can be no victory over Milosevic.

We support the Workers Aid for Kosova convoy to open a humanitarian aid route into Kosova to those who are resisting ethnic cleansing. We support the International Workers Aid convoys to Kosovan exiles. We support all independent efforts to arm the Kosovan people and its army to defend themselves.

With comradely greetings,
**International Socialist Group
International Socialist
League
Workers International**

10 April 1999 March

Independent trade union in Serbia

Report on a visit to 'Nezavisnost'

This is an edited version translated from the Spanish report by Alfons Bech of Ayuda Obrera Balcanes of a visit to Belgrade and other cities in south-west Serbia from 7-14 November as guests of the engineering section of Nezavisnost, organised through their president, Milan Nikolic.

I visited five factories and took part in union meetings and other meetings of workers. Besides meeting engineering works and engineering trade unionists, I was also able to interview trade unionists in transport, the postal service, telecommunications and food processing. I also had an interview with the official engineering workers' union.

As soon as I landed, I went to the union's headquarters in Belgrade. I was met at the airport by the secretary of the engineering workers' section, Aleksandar Todic, an active and determined man of about 35 and the office-manager, Vesna. My first impression of the union headquarters was of a hive of activity. When the president of the engineering workers arrives, there is frenzied activity. The phones keep ringing, different meetings go on, union activists are coming and going. Workers also arrive for the first time to find out about the union and sign up. There are women, too, a little more shy and in groups.

The first thing that occurs to me is that the union must have a mass of paid workers. The work that needs doing probably justifies it, but isn't it a bit expensive? While the offices are clean and well-organised, they are austere, and there is only one computer, but there seem to be so many people on the payroll. At the end of the day I asked how many people were employed and I got a shock. Only the office manager, Vesna, is actually paid. Aleksandar receives a subsidy of about 65 marks a month, because his wife works. Not even the president gets paid. He is helped out by his family. The rest are laid-off workers, union representatives with time off work to attend meetings, or people who have come to discuss their problems and join the union.

Nezavisnost was born as a union independent of the state and the parties of the state in 1991. It came into being after engineering workers tried to reform the existing unions and

to win a constitutionally recognised economic role. After three years of fruitless efforts they decided they should set themselves up as a union independent of the authorities. Paradoxically the rising tide of the labour movement between 1988 and 1991 was exploited by a little-known bureaucrat using first promises and then war. It was Slobodan Milosevic. He managed to turn himself into a god for the workers at that time. The engineering workers had good reason to see things differently, as did the television and radio journalists in Belgrade and elsewhere. One thousand two hundred journalists were sacked after the student mobilisations and opposition in 1991. It was then that the engineering worker Nikolic and television journalist Canak decided to set up the Nezavisnost union (the name means 'independence'). Today Canak is the president of the federation and Milan Nikolic the vice president, re-elected to those positions at the last Congress in 1999. The hardest time they had was during the wars, which they openly opposed. They have stories about very delicate situations, such as when they signed a joint statement with the Croatian unions in Zagreb defending the rights of the Croats to oppose Milosevic's attempted seizure of Krajina. On the way back to Serbia they had a really hard time. Or when they called for a boycott of the referendum on Kosova in the spring of 1998, which Milosevic wanted to use to justify the war of ethnic cleansing. Their slogan was, more or less, 'Serbia is a prison. We want rights and work for the workers, not a referendum on Kosova'. At the demonstration they organised, about three hundred protesters were surrounded by about 1000 policemen. 'Like being in prison', Aleksandar commented. Just before the events which caused the fall of Milosevic, Nezavisnost had 200,000 members.

Membership is voluntary, and workers have to make a deliberate effort to sign up, unlike the official unions, where membership is automatic as soon as you start working for a company. But Nezavisnost is now buoyed up by a huge growth in independent trade unionism. Hundreds of workers turn up at the union headquarters at the end of each day, but the leaders are also invited to go to the factories to explain what the union is about and answer questions. I attended one of these sessions and workers certainly put many questions. Officials of another unions tried to pour scorn on the new union but were finally silenced by their own workers and left. What normally happens after these chats is that the workers meet with the people who are promoting the union in the factory to join up individually and elect a committee. The Nezavisnost leaders think they have already doubled their numbers to about 400,000 and that rapid growth will continue for the next three to six months.

The leaders of the engineering workers (and also the food-processing and communications workers) I met struck me almost all as experienced people. Others are not, and its like jumping onto a moving bus. One factory worker, a turner, got threatening phone calls saying they had broken his car window. His family was upset. Suspicions pointed to a member of the official union. The engineering workers' president commented that this sort of thing often happens and comes as a surprise to members of the independent union. However, they are not intimidated, they organise a meeting, take the appropriate steps, and carry on. I went to this comrade's factory a couple of days later and nobody said anything about these incidents. I asked what the union's aims were now that Milosevic has fallen from power. They told me that Nezavisnost had stood shoulder to shoulder with other organisations to ensure full participation in the elections and help organise the parallel recount. They have joined in all the campaigns against Milosevic over the past few years, so their commitment to the change of regime is clear. On the other hand, many leaders of the democratic opposition did not do anything them-

selves because they were hiding behind Milosevic. 'Nezavisnost has been and will continue to be a union that is independent of the authorities'. They told me that the opposition has tried to turn it into 'their' union and they had refused. Then the opposition went to a smaller union lead by a certain Mr. Dragan Milanovich and reached an agreement with him. Now it seems Mr. Milanovic stood in the elections as a trade union and won a seat, so he is part of the new powers that be. Now this small union is signing agreements with the old official unions, particularly over appointing new factory managers.

Nezavisnost thinks this situation will call for stronger and more independent trade-unionism because workers should be organised to face the privatisation laws expected in the spring, so that they can control the process and make sure that workers end up as majority share-holders. They also need to make sure wages go up and help find solutions to increasing production, finding new markets and re-opening old ones.

The kind of trade unionism

Nezavisnost represents tries to combine what was good in the previous system, in which workers participated in running factories and companies, with the opening up of the European and world market. Once aspect of this participation is the right of mass meetings to change managers. The opposition issued a general call for a strike and the appointment of new managers on 5 October, hoping to set up so-called 'crisis committees'.

The argument was essentially political: since Milosevic had fallen, it was necessary to change all the managers who were tied to the previous governing parties (mainly the Socialist Party). Nezavisnost had a different position: they only supported those changes which really benefited the workers because the new managers were superior, better able to increase production, technically better qualified, etc. Furthermore, they said that political appointees tied to the DOS could be bad for production, and it was important to make sure that people did not get appointed to directorships which they could exploit when the privatisation law was passed.

In general the leaders of Nezavisnost are in favour of using every legal right they have, like the right to change managers. Should that happen, there should be a period during which production plans are displayed along with proposed changes in working conditions and wages so that workers can discuss them, vote on them and then submit them to the management of the company. 'It is a slow process', one factory leader said, 'but more orderly. The "crisis committees" on the other hand are illegal and it could be that workers went on strike only to end up with a worse manager than expected'.

Nezavisnost is already a big and significant union. It may have more active members than the official union. But it is painfully lacking in material resources. Milan Nikolic has agreed to draw up a formal request for what they need most. But he told me that immediately they need office space, they need to train their organisers, they need money to publish union journals and they need furniture. And I can add, from personal observation, they need computers and telephone lines.

An appeal for help

Dear colleagues and friends

As you know, recently we had visit involving three metalworkers unions from Spain and your Representative was colleague Alfons Bech.

We welcomed him and we tried to show him how we are living and what are our problems are within the context of all political and social problems in Serbia.

I think that colleague Alfons could see quite a different situation in our country and he will be able to explain it to you, although for a real impression he would have had to stay much longer.

Our situation is especially difficult because we do not have experience of trade unions because in our previous system (in the former Yugoslavia) we didn't have unions like normal unions with freedom and rights.

All rights for workers in our previous system were a matter for the Communist Party and the union only dealt with sport and recreation, holidays and things like that.

Although Milosevic has gone, the new authorities in Serbia try to continue Milosevic's way of work toward unions and because of that we still have the same

attitude toward those in power.

So today we are on the beginning of very serious business and responsibility for workers BUT without anything what we need for such work.

As Alfons saw we are in one office 4m by 4m with four other trade unions belonging to NEZAVISNOST, and we haven't the conditions for normal work. Very often we hold discussions with colleagues in the corridor because we haven't enough space.

Our five Unions, in that office, have only one Computer and one phone and I don't know whether you can imagine the conditions we are working under.

Milosevic's union has become the DOS union, and the new authorities don't want to talk with us about the buildings which that union use, although we have rights to part of them. We haven't the money to rent bigger offices because an office similar to the one we have would cost about 600-700 DM per month.

Our Unions has members all over Serbia and we cannot keep in contact because members of our executive committee have not got phones

at work and I hope that you will be able to imagine how we try to organise serious work under such conditions.

So far we got 8 mobile phone from colleagues abroad but we have 15 members of our presidium and we need another 7 mobile phones. In Serbia one single phone is about 200 DM. For each mobile phone we need about 30 DM a month, so we need about 450 DM a month just for running costs. I don't know how much one Computer is, but I think about 2-2.500 DM. Our shared Computer is very, very busy and very necessary for our work and you well know.

To keep our members informed, when we can, because of problems with money, we publish our Bulletin 'Metal PRESS' and it costs 450 DM a month for 500 copies.

For propaganda materials we have nothing and only sometimes we do something like that. Dear colleagues and friends if you can help us with anything we would be very thankful and we will never forget.

All the best to all of you.
Milan Nikolic,
President, Metalworkers Union of NEZAVISNOST.

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