

Thinking of organising a conference?

What with this conference and the one that some LRA members organised last year on Alternative Economic Control, we're getting quite good at this sort of thing. If you want, email us and we'll send you a copy of our distilled wisdom on the subject. Alternatively, if you are a well-disposed organisation in the East Midlands area and you want to pay some people a few hundred quid to organise your national/regional conference, talk to us and we can probably reach some sort of arrangement. We'll also do bits and pieces - like writing a report and putting it on a website - as well as organising whole conferences.

Want to know more?

This conference was a genuine attempt to create an open and pluralistic movement of activists. The Socialist Alliance has a role to play in that movement but it is not for everyone. However if you would like to know more or even join the Socialist Alliance fill in the form below and send it to Pete McLaren, 32, The Green, Long Lawford, CV23 9BL.

Please send me more information about the Socialist Alliance.

Name:.....

Address:.....

.....

Phone:.....

Email:.....

Hosted by the Leicester Radical Alliance
Dept Z, Little Thorn Books
Humberstone Gate, Leicester
(0116) 2440956

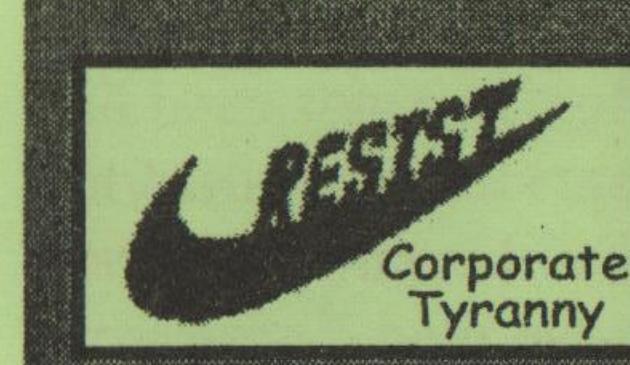
<http://www.plebs.com/leicester-radical>
Leicesterradical@hotmail.com

All Red and Green

Activism beyond the battle for Seattle



"they are calling for an end to sweat shops, child labour, the erosion of environmental laws and the third world debt. These people are well informed, well organised and determined."



All Red and Green Conference Report

The All Red and Green conference took place on 25th March 2000. It was convened by the Socialist Alliance and hosted by the Leicester Radical Alliance and aimed to unite activists fighting to make people matter more than profits.

let our resistance be as global as capital

"What was remarkable about Seattle and other recent radical events was the unity and pluralism that we saw amongst the protesters that were mobilised. No one is pretending that activists don't have differences, but increasingly it feels like we can overcome those differences and move forward. This conference was part of the process of building trust and respect between different radical traditions.

25th March saw activists from across the country converge on Leicester to discuss strategy in the wake of the "battle for Seattle". Activists from the Socialist Alliance, who convened the conference, were joined by people from the Green Party, Labour Party and the direct action movement as well as anarchists and single-issue campaigners. The day was far from perfect, there is still a long way to go before we are in a position to change the world. But, "reds", "greens" and people who don't fit into either tradition are starting to come together in a more constructive way than ever before.

Let's hope that this conference will mark the beginning of a new and radical century. We still have a world to change."

Tristram Hooley
Leicester Radical Alliance
(Hosts of the conference)

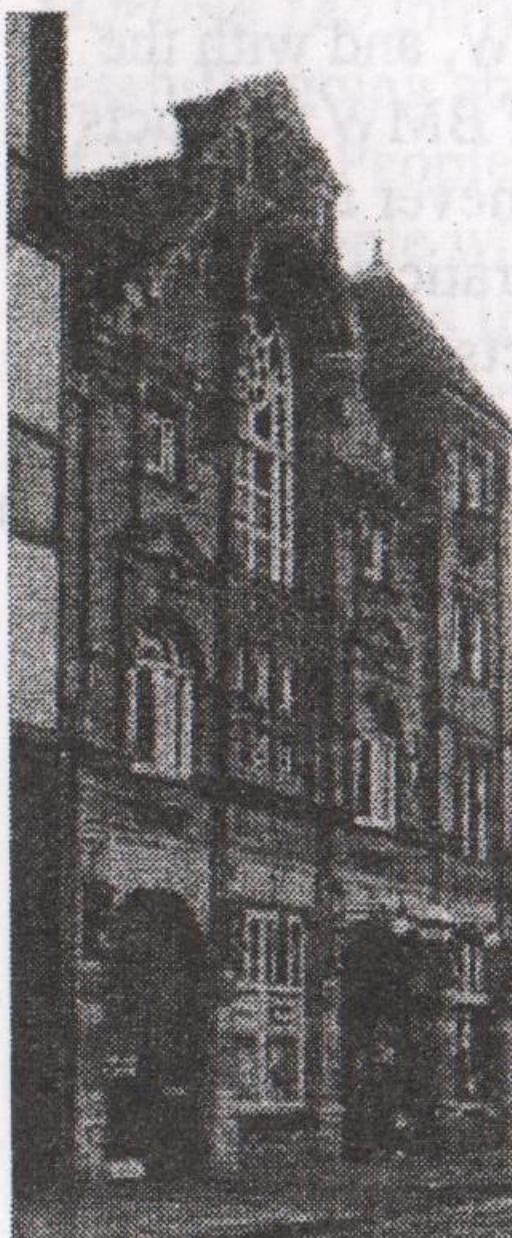
You can also read the conference report on the website of the Leicester Radical Alliance, hosts of the conference, at <http://www.plebs.com/leicester-radical>

Leicester Radical Alliance
Dept Z
Little Thorn Books
73 Humberstone Gate
Leicester, LE1 1WB
leicesterradical@hotmail.com
<http://www.plebs.com/leicester-radical>
(0116) 2440956

Socialist Alliance:

a network for socialists, environmentalists and direct actionists
Pete McLaren 32, The Green, Long Lawford, CV 23 9BL (01788) 569766
John Nicholson 58, Langdale Rd, Manchester M14 5PN (0161) 224 4197
Dave Church 36, Sneyd Hall Rd, Bloxwich, WS3 2NJ (01922) 479 214
Dave Nellist 33, Coundon Rd, Coventry, CV1 4AR (01203) 552 059
Declan O'Neill 9 Parkfield Rd, Grassecroft, Oldham, OL4 4JG

Attendance



The Leicester Secular Hall

Well over a hundred people registered for the All Red and Green conference. Thankfully not quite everyone made it on the day as the Leicester Secular Hall was full to bursting during the plenary sessions. Encouragingly, there were more women and young people than at previous Socialist Alliance events—perhaps we won't be a movement of sad old men for ever.

Opening Plenary: United We Stand

The Conference was opened by the chair of the first session, *Mandy Taverner* of Leicester Radical Alliance. She welcomed everyone to Leicester, outlined the day's programme and introduced the main speakers.

John Morrissey, editor of 'The Way Ahead' and Green Party activist, began by reminding everyone that we had agreed last March that we were an Alliance with principles which were red and green and broad. The elected Officers should be applauded for promoting this since. Red and

green unity was vital as we build something new: the link between the two was never more obvious than during the events around Seattle, where we won a partial victory. We need to be pro-active and not just oppositional. He concluded by referring to the importance of Longbridge as a local example of the failings of international capitalism. We need to develop an alternative to the traditional responses: socialists traditionally would see public ownership of the car industry as the sole solution, greens would see the factory's closure as a victory against the car economy. We should be looking to protect both jobs and the environment by calling for alternative production of socially useful goods.

Dave Nellist, Chair of the Socialist Alliance and Socialist Party Councillor in Coventry, agreed that united we must stand. He described how we had moved on from just one local Alliance in 1992 to become a national network with many local Alliances and larger national meetings. There had been some electoral success as we took our alternative outwards, and the emergence of left challenges to New Labour from others like Dennis Canavan and now Ken Livingstone would help our cause. Growing numbers of oppressed groups including workers, pensioners, the unemployed and students were looking for a radical progressive alternative. He also concluded by talking about Longbridge, stressing the importance of the demonstration being organised in Birmingham next Saturday (April 1st). We should make clear socialist and envi-



*Dave Nellist
Chair of the
Socialist Alliance*

ronmental demands : it was no good calling for another capitalist firm to simply take over as they would be just as likely to behave like BMW, and with the same results. We should also avoid any call for a boycott of BMW products as this would simply hit other workers - and most of us could never afford one anyway! We must argue for public ownership under democratic workers control with production changed to more socially useful products than cars.

During a lively discussion which followed, there were calls for us to organise a Conference around the issue of alternative production.

Pete McLaren

Workshops

Activist Workshop (a) : Local magazines



Participants in the local magazines listen intently as Warren outlines the history of SchNEWS

Tristram Hooley of the Leicester Radical Alliance opened the workshop with a brief explanation of the history of *GrassRoots* (www.plebs.com/leicester-radical) which he edited. He explained they were attempting to be both politically informative and educational, and that one aim was to publicise the activities of all progressive groups in the area.

Warren from *SchNEWS* (<http://www.schnews.org.uk/>) described in detail how the weekly news sheet had de-

veloped in its 5 year existence. They were proud to shock, and were prepared to promote any radical/anti-establishment views and actions. Humour was considered vital. The paper was produced by a co-operative of 20 activists, none of whom were paid, and was sent out or handed out free of charge. They made much use of the internet, as did many fellow direct actionists. 3,000 copies of *SchNEWS* were produced every week, double during festivals like Glastonbury. He accepted the font was small and the news sheet was crowded, but this was inevitable given the amount of news they had to turn down. He felt it crucial to keep news as local as possible.

There was then much general discussion about local magazines and how they tended to differ according to their intended audience. It was suggested that such newsheets could be either fairly heavy politically like most local Alliance publications were at present, or more shocking and anarchistic like *SchNEWS*, but not both - but not everyone agreed with this.

Pete McLaren

Activist Workshop (b) Campaigning and direct action

Marlene Yeo introduced the work of Trident Ploughshares 2000. TP 2000 is successfully going about its task because it has a clear and achievable aim - get rid of Trident. People who engage in publicity are just as much part of the movement as people who cut the wire. Fighting the cases at all levels and refusing to pay fines means that every court appearance - like Marlene's recent one in Newbury for 'damaging' the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston is a chance to gain more publicity and to erode the legitimacy that the state enjoys. This even applies to its own supporters in the criminal justice system.

Kala Subbuswamy spoke in general terms about DA. It is empowering, unlike much political action which is based on meetings. Being arrested is intimidating, but it leaves you less scared about what it might be like in the future. Good actions are multi-functional and thus even if they do not close something down, they have raised the awareness of spectators and the consciousness of participants.

Nick Jukes told us about the success of an action in London in November 1999. This involved co-ordination between Nigerian exile leaders and UK-based campaigners for solidarity with Nigeria, and received international press coverage.

Floor: Although the floor discussion was not as long as it ought to have been, everyone got a chance to speak. A number of people wished to stress that direct action was not a recent invention, and some of them had personal experience of it going back over 40 years: the most notable success has been the campaign against the Poll Tax. Some lessons that people offered were:

- it was important to take people with us, not to go off on our own;
- the political party or movement can have a key role in providing support and a context for all this to happen in;
- the failure of direct action tactics in the past was not necessarily because anything was wrong with them, but that the state proved stronger than us;
- most people do not have a vision of a transformed society and education is needed to provide that shift in consciousness. Currently education teaches people to distrust themselves;
- one good tactic used successfully by animal rights activists against farms for experimental animals is to target the workers at their homes. [several people expressed disagreement with this intervention];
- People need to express their emotions - conventional politics does not realise that people are emotional;
- the aim is to move from small groups to a mass movement [Chair's dissenting voice: if I'm doing something with 20 mates, and this inspired 1000 people to do something, I'd far rather that they went off in groups of 20 and tackled other issues on the same basis, than they all turned up at my action. This is far harder for the state to combat, as the morning of J18]

- demonstrated.];
- How could direct action save Longbridge? Nick responded that we could use it to restructure the economy on a basis of de-industrialisation, LETS schemes and allotments.

PS - I saw the Spring 2000 version of the Solidarity Federation's magazine *Direct Action* two days after the meeting. This issue is on direct action, and is spot on. Had I known about it a week earlier I'd have reproduced large chunks of it for the workshop. It's excellent. www.directa.force9.co.uk/

Chair, Chris Williams

Activist Workshop (c) Fighting Elections

The workshop was well attended, with about 50 people in the room. This necessarily limited contributions to a small proportion, causing some frustration. Nevertheless, responses were mostly constructive: the platform speakers were well received. Some tension within the London Socialist Alliance (<http://www.londonocialistalliance.org.uk/>) who were well represented at workshop surfaced, apparently with a fairly constructive sequel later.

The workshop showed overwhelming support for electoral activity as a valid strategy for radicals, with not one hand raised against it. It heard reports of radical left activity going on all around England. The moral seems to be that persistence counts: one activist group had spent 27 years converting a Tory ward in rural Somerset to solid socialist majorities!

Woody Wood

Lunch

During lunch conference participants had the opportunity to attend a couple of fringe meetings, sit and think, chat, browse in Little Thorn Books, pop to the pub or skulk around outside the hall remembering the happy days when you used to be allowed to smoke inside conferences.



Members of Leicester Radical Alliance
frantically prepare food before
the start of the conference

Little Thorn (0116 251 2002) is Leices-
ter's radical bookshop, and it needs
more support. They can order any
“mainstream” book in print, as well as
specialist “left” stuff.

Fringe Meetings

Anti-Fascist Action

Despite the fact that the people from West Midlands AFA didn't turn up this proved to be quite a useful fringe meeting for people from Leicester. Leicester has recently seen a slight rise in fascist activity and this has culminated in the cancellation of the Gay Mardi Gras being blamed on threats emanating from the NF. The meeting discussed the reasons for this growth in fascist activity with many feeling that the media was to blame for whipping up hate campaigns around asylum seekers and Clause 28. However the revelation that around £75,000 had recently been left to Leicester National Front went some way to explaining the recent improvement in the quality of NF output. Everyone at the fringe meeting agreed that there was a need to reform a Leicester based anti-fascist campaign and to begin to nail the lies of the far right.

Tristram Hooley

Green Left: No More Monologues

John Morrissey's summary of the Green Left Fringe meeting:

Much of the time it seems the left is just talking to itself, and not even doing that very successfully. We appear unable to enter into dialogue even with other organisations on the left, let alone with the public we seek to convince.

We need to reflect that simply taking up the correct positions on the issues is insufficient. The manner in which we conduct our politics is equally important. We will not succeed if we conduct ourselves in a fashion which is dogmatic, self-righteous and confrontational.

Two tasks face the left. The first is to adapt our politics to face the new challenges of economic globalisation, ecological crisis and declining class allegiance. The second is to develop a way of doing politics more appropriate to a more sceptical, less deferential age. Otherwise we risk being bored to extinction by the sound of our own voices.

John Morrissey

Onward and upward!

The afternoon session was chaired by Socialist Alliance Treasurer *Declan O'Neill*. He introduced *Kathryn Busby* from Liberty to open the discussion on the Anti 'Terrorism' Bill, pointing out how its predecessor, the PTA, had been used in an attempt to frighten Irish people away from politics: very few of those detained under the PTA were ever charged.



Kathryn Busby and Margaret Manning address the conference

Kathryn began by pointing out that all activists were under threat as the new definition of terrorism included any action, or threat of action, which was considered a threat to others or property. This could include strikes by health service workers, attacking crops, or protesting in a tree/tunnel. The accused would be labelled a terrorist. The Bill increased police powers - suspects could be under arrest for up to 7 days before being charged, and there would be wider discretion for stop and search. Groups could be proscribed, and then anyone deemed to be supporting such a proscribed group would face up to 10 years in prison - even if they were discussing the proscribed groups activities in order to oppose them! The new Law could

be used to prevent actions like J18 by arresting the leaders beforehand. She concluded by informing the Conference that the Bill had already had its third reading and was likely to become Law as early as May, with very little public knowledge or opposition.

The second speaker for this session, Stefan Chowelka from the Campaign Against PFI, had to send apologies at the last minute. *Margaret Manning* of GMSA kindly stepped in at very short notice. She gave first hand accounts of the devastating effects the introduction of private finance had on previously public funded services, both for service users and providers. She outlined the use of private finance in health and housing, and reminded Conference it was now being used in education as well.

The final speaker was *Andrew Lyden* from the West Midlands New Economics Group, which he explained as a relatively new red green pressure group based in Birmingham. He stressed the importance of responding to globalisation and the demise of the nation state. It was vital that we fully understand the changing nature of capitalism.

There were a number of contributions from the floor taking up the points made by all three speakers.

Pete McLaren

Socialist Alliance AGM

After the end of the All Red and Green conference members of the Socialist Alliance settled down to hold their AGM in record time.

Dave Nellist (Chair, Coventry and Warwickshire Socialist Alliance, Socialist Party) opened the AGM, with 50 members present. Apologies : Martin Wicks (Socialist Perspectives), Dave Griffiths (CAWSA), John Clegg (Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance)

1. The Minutes of the previous Annual Conference on 27/3/99 and the Structure agreed at that Conference were received. These were agreed with deletion of the reference to the ISL opposition to the resolution mentioned in point 2.

2. Matters Arising : it was noted that the Officers had carried out the re-registration of the Socialist Alliance details for electoral purposes and had registered the London Socialist Alliance logo as one of the three permitted logos.

3. Officers Report : a written report was presented. Margaret Manning (GMSA) raised the importance of holding three meetings and three events each year, included at the end of the Report. Nick Long (L&GSA) appreciated the membership organisation and co-ordination and regretted the delay in implementation of a national membership. Pete McLaren (CAWSA) explained the introduction of the membership from 1st January 2000 (due to previous subscriptions not expiring until then) and agreed with Nick's point of encouraging national membership. Greg Tucker (LSA) affirmed the London Socialist Alliance affiliation and in reply Dave Nellist (Chair) raised the question of affiliation of regional level organisations at the same time as local Alliances. Dave Church (Walsall DLP) suggested that we should encourage affiliation at both levels, and John Nicholson (GMSA) referred to the Founding Aims agreed at the previous Conference in support of this. It was therefore agreed that the London Socialist Alliance affiliation should be affirmed, in order to ensure a positive message to members of the LSA, in view of the encouraging developments reported to have taken place in London; and at the same time the question of duplication/omission in regional/local Alliances should be referred to the Officers and Liaison Meeting for further consideration.

4. The Finance Report was present by Declan O'Neill (Treasurer, GMSA), who urged that a more sound financial structure would be needed to ensure a secure national organisation. Subscriptions, which included receipt of bulletin, remain too low for this. Tristram Hooley (LRA) suggested that there could be some surplus from the Conference which could (at least partially) assist the Socialist Alliance account. Leicester comrades were thanked by all present for their work in organising and carrying out the Conference and AGM.

5. Election of National Officers : it was suggested that there could be two additional Vice Chairs elected, in view of some geographical and gender imbalance to the existing nominations, and it was proposed that nominations should be invited from all members before the end of May with an election at the next national meeting. An amendment to carry this election out at the AGM was defeated in favour of the above. It was additionally suggested that by next year there should be a move towards 50% women's representation within all of the Socialist Alliance structures, including the Officers. Following this, the following Officers were unanimously re-elected : Dave Nellist (Chair), John Nicholson (Correspondence), Dave Church (Membership), Pete McLaren (Bulletins) and Declan O'Neill (Treasurer).

6. Election of Election Agent: John Rothery (Walsall DLP) was unanimously elected. Cathy Wilson (Merseyside Socialists) questioned the procedure for election agents for the future. John Rothery replied that the situation for the current elections was fine but Dave Nellist added that this would need to be codified and changed for next year.

7. Resolution to clarify one aspect our structure was moved, as previously circulated, by CAWSA. An amendment was moved by GMSA, and with further amendment by the meeting, the issue was discussed in detail. There was general agreement for continuing work to ensure maximum electoral unity across the left, in the face of electoral registration processes which are restrictive, subject to sudden and unannounced changes and not necessarily in line with the Socialist Alliance's internal democracy or its desire to come to electoral arrangements on a one-off basis at certain times or in certain areas with other groups, parties, or organisations, as appropriate. Pat Stack (LSA, SWP) proposed that the original amendment (for a conference in the early autumn to work for maximum unity) should be changed to "at the earliest possible opportunity", to build on the activity currently taking place in London. After discussion, the resolution was carried without opposition, as follows:

"The Socialist Alliance is at this stage of its development more of a Network of left/green groups than a Party, and affiliation will be encouraged in line with the aims of the Socialist Alliance agreed at the 1999 Conference. The title 'Socialist Alliance' will remain our electoral name, to be used as such only where local/regional Alliances are affiliated nationally and, if necessary, approved for that purpose by the Officers/Liaison meeting. A special conference will be held at the earliest possible opportunity to work for maximum unity across all socialists in elections." In agreeing this, the meeting accepted that there should be discussions soon after May 4th to consolidate the work carried out in the current elections, especially in London.

8. Other Urgent Business : Dave Nellist from the Chair proposed two statements, emerging from discussions during the Conference held earlier in the day. These called for Government intervention in Rover and for Socialist Alli-

ance support for the demonstration in Birmingham on 1st April, and for maximum socialist, environmental, trade union unity in support of the London Socialist Alliance and Ken Livingstone election campaign for the Assembly and Mayor in London. After discussion on the need for a broad inclusive socialist alternative to take forward this challenge to Labour after May 4th, these statements were agreed unanimously.

9. Final announcements: there would be a Jim Allen memorial event, with Ken Loach, in Manchester on October 7th; and a request was made that all Socialist Alliance materials should be clear about accessibility of venues used and creche facilities available, and that this should be taken on as a responsibility by all comrades, not solely by those with disabilities themselves. The meeting endorsed this fully.

Dave Nellist closed the meeting and thanked all present for a comradely and participatory day and AGM. Dates of Liaison Committee and national members meetings to be notified as soon as possible.

John Nicholson

Social

After the conference quite a few people popped into the Ale Wagon for a few jars before taking the train home. The most sociable of socialists then returned to the Secular Hall for a few more drinks, a curry and a quiz. The quiz was won



"No after you comrade." A scrum quickly developed once the curry arrived!

by a team calling themselves the Young 'Uns who were made up principally of members of LEAF and the youth contingent of Leicester Socialist Party. However this victory was in my opinion only possible because the team consisting of myself and members of Walsall DLP had to dissolve itself after the curry so that the WDLPers could get back to the West Midlands at a reasonable hour.

The surprises of the night came when first Dave Nellist then Tim Lessells gave outstanding piano recitals! Dave's repertoire stretching from the Internationale to Stairway to Heaven. Many of us thought that the Socialist Party must include piano lessons as part of its summer schools, until Karl's turn at the piano showed that even the Socialist Party had its share of the tone deaf.

A good time was I think had by all.
Tristram Hooley