

News

For the millions, not the millionaires!

Newsletter of Oxford SOCIALIST ALLIANCE
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Socialist Alliance

Ripping us off – from cradle to grave!

Baby bond con

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

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

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

But child poverty flows from the low pay, unemployment and inadequate benefits of their parents: tucking £300 in a bank account for use by the child 18 years later will do nothing to address these problems. An increase in the minimum wage to the EU "decency threshold" of £7.40 would do far more to tackle child poverty than Labour's feeble bribe.

But behind the "Baby Bond" is a much more sinister shift of government policy. At the

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

Blair said: "We want to encourage adults to save for themselves to help ride out difficult times: losing a job or becoming ill, for example." David Blunkett argued for a system of "self-help", and suggested a return to the old mutual systems which were the only support for workers before the welfare state was introduced.

The Socialist Alliance opposes any further erosion or privatisation of the welfare state.



Thatcherite line – Blair

Green light for firms to plunder pension funds

THE ROBERT Maxwell scandal still haunts the pensions industry as the official report into the fraud showed that almost every top city firm watched and did nothing as he plundered £450 million from pension funds.

The report says that investment bankers Goldman Sachs, which helped manipulate Maxwell company share prices, bear "substantial responsibility" for letting him get away with stealing pensions contributions from



One supporter of Council policy was a Mr G. Reaper

Stop council attack on elderly homes

OXFORDSHIRE County Council has stuck up two fingers to local protestors, and decided to hand over its 19 residential homes for the elderly to a 'non-profit' trust – which notched up a £2m surplus in 1997.

The "Orders of St John Trust" was set up in 1992 and has since taken over elderly care in Lincolnshire and Wiltshire. In each case the Trust took the first opportunity to issue immediate redundancy notices for all staff, followed by savage cuts in pay and conditions. There are fears that exactly the same could now happen to Oxfordshire's 780 care staff.

The Trust is also expected to close and sell off seven of the council's 19 residential homes, all on valuable sites – forcibly removing their elderly residents.

The Council claims they are "only following orders" from the government. The Socialist Alliance opposes this privatisation as a vicious attack on public services. We demand the lifting of the cap on council spending, and investment in social services to ensure local, high quality care.

thousands of workers, many of them in Oxford.

Goldman Sachs made £23 million profit from its Maxwell dealings. It was fined just £160,000, while other banks, accountants and other leading firms were found guilty of "misleading" information on shares, failing "to report abuses" and breaching pension fund rules.

The scandal led to a change in the law, supposedly to ensure pensioners' contributions would be protected in the future.

Well, surprise, surprise, the High Court has just ruled against an electricity worker's attempt, backed by his union, to stop the privatised power companies from using pension fund surpluses as they wish.

No, the money was the company's, to use as they wished, ruled the learned judge. Firms have now been given the green light to use such surpluses to pay, for example, redundancy money, so that, in effect, workers

would be paying themselves off with their own cash!

The message is clear: workers cannot look to the courts or legislation to protect their company pensions – they can be plundered at will while the measly basic pension withers



on the vine.

But another pension scandal could be round the corner – and this time the instigator is not some big business fraudster but New Labour. From April, they launched their "stakeholder pensions", to induce the lower paid to bol-

ster their provision in old age.

This new scheme is part of New Labour's intention to carry on where Thatcher left off – to reverse the balance between state and private sector pensions from its present 60:40, to 40 percent of pensions from the state and 60 percent from private schemes.

Yet independent advisers believe the way in which the stakeholder plans are to be sold could lead to workers being badly advised. Indeed, the Government's own advisers also say there will not be enough money in the kitty to fund it.

A recent Post Office survey found that two-thirds of people say the Government should provide an adequate state pension and not the present mix of basic pension, income support and the new stakeholder pension.

The Socialist Alliance believes we are more in tune with the majority of people than New Labour when we demand a substantial increase in the basic state pension to £150 for a single person and £200 for a couple, to rise each year in line with average pay.

Care charges scandal

40,000 elderly people a year have been having to sell their homes, and many more raid their life savings to pay for means-tested care in private nursing homes since the Tory "community care" reforms in 1993.

Labour in opposition promised a Royal Commission to sort out this problem – but then in government refused to implement its proposal that all nursing and 'social' care should be funded from taxation.

Only in Scotland has Labour promised to implement the Royal Commission proposals, while older people in England will be saddled with bills for help with such things as bathing, combing their hair or using the toilet.

Vote Socialist Alliance to defend welfare state!

Who's the most racist?

As ministers milk electoral capital from the Tory Party's disarray over racism, New Labour is itself playing the 'race card', by claiming to be deporting even more asylum seekers than the Tories.

The government is now planning to charter jets to deport thousands more asylum seekers, and to take steps to prevent British judges taking an "over-liberal" approach to deciding who is a 'legitimate' refugee.

New Labour removed 8,900 asylum seekers from the country last year, 3,000 fewer than its target of 12,000: but it has now more than doubled the target for removals to 24,000 plus 6,000 dependents by March 2002. 500 extra case workers have been employed to speed up the process of exclusions.

The Socialist Alliance is completely opposed to this hostile and reactionary attitude to refugees and to those seeking to live and work in Britain. The present laws simply stir up nationalism and race hatred, and allow criminal gangs to exploit the desperation of vulnerable people.

We call for the abolition of immigration restrictions, the scrapping of New Labour's vicious voucher scheme and new measures that would allow refugees to work.

No platform for fascists!

It's not a union - it's a club with a £130 annual fee - and it doesn't allow in most people from Oxford: but the "Oxford Union" has again demonstrated its exclusivity and lack of any democratic accountability.

It has invited "historian" David Irving, who denies the genocide of the Jews in the Holocaust, and frequently speaks at neo-fascist gatherings, to speak.

The visit has been greeted with delight by the neo-Nazi terrorist group Combat 18, but denounced by Oxford University Students Union, the *Oxford Mail*, and by more and more progressive organisations in the city.

Not only could Irving's appearance, (supposedly to defend the principle of "free speech"), act as a magnet for thugs from violent far-right groups, but giving him a platform in such a high-profile forum helps legitimise his pro-Nazi views.

With the current racist hysteria over asylum seekers again being stirred up by Tory politicians at national and local level, and incidents of racist violence on the increase across the country, the arrival of such an inflammatory figure will not be welcome in our City.

The Socialist Alliance is strongly opposed to giving any platform for fascists, and we will be joining those picketing the Oxford Union on May 10 if - in the teeth of local popular opposition - the visit goes ahead.

People before profit

In 1997, millions of people voted Labour in hopes of a real change. They believed that "things could only get better". But four years of Tony Blair's government have seen New Labour drawing ever further away from the needs and concerns of its working class supporters.

Blair's team has rushed headlong into the arms of big business, and there has been a seamless continuity in the Thatcherite policies of privatisation, deregulation and squeezing public services - the very policies voters thought they were bringing to an end in 1997.

New Labour's move to the right has created a vacuum on the left of British politics. There is now a dangerous consensus among the major parties around the "neo-liberal" policies of privatisation and deregulation. This consensus excludes millions of people - and a wide range of vital ideas.

We believe democracy has to be about more than the choice between Tony Blair and William Hague.

By standing candidates in 100 constituencies in England and Wales, and in partnership with the Scottish Socialist Party, which is standing in all 72 seats in Scotland, we are mounting the biggest left-wing electoral challenge to Labour in modern times.

During the campaign, we will speak out for the people who are voiceless and disenfranchised. We will offer new hope to all those who have been let down, ignored and attacked by New Labour. Instead of voting yet again for a "lesser evil", working people will be able to vote for a party that represents and fights for their interests.

The larger the vote for the Socialist Alliance, the greater the pressure on the next government to listen to working people.

Our policies and our campaign will highlight the need for a new type of government, one that acts in the interests of workers, not the bosses. We need a government that builds a partnership with labour, not capital. We need a government committed to genuine democracy, not rule by a self-serving elite. We need a government that puts people before profit.

Extend the Welfare State to end poverty

Under New Labour, British pensioners remain among the poorest in Europe. Gordon Brown's 75p increase - in a time of economic growth and fiscal surpluses - was a fresh insult added to long-standing injury.

Blair claims that we 'cannot afford' to restore the link between pensions and

Extracts from the Socialist Alliance election manifesto

earnings but at the same time boasts that the UK is the fourth richest economy in the world.

The real reason for short-changing pensioners - and for under-funding social security, health, education, and social services - is that British employers and the rich pay lower taxes and National Insurance than in other European Union countries. The Socialist Alliance says that a strong and fair welfare state must be founded on progressive tax system, raising direct taxes on income from those best able to pay.

That's why we say that there must be an increase in the taxes paid by big business and the rich, and why we demand that the ceiling on national insurance contributions for high earners should be scrapped - a measure that would on its own yield up to £5 billion a year - so that they pay a fair share of society's costs.

Behind New Labour's rhetoric about "getting Britain back to work" lies a relentless attack on every aspect of the welfare and benefit system. In their second term, Blair and Brown plan to increase "workfare" measures, along with the intimidation and harassment of claimants. The Socialist Alliance rejects this approach. We say the welfare system needs to be rebuilt:

- The Socialist Alliance demands that the state pension be set at a level of £150 a week for a single person and £200 for a married couple for the year 2001/2002. These pension rates should then be increased in line with wages or prices, which ever is higher. The minimum income guarantee should be converted into non-means tested universal benefit, paid from direct taxation, without loss of entitlement.

- As a minimum, the Socialist Alliance will set about raising the income of every child and adult above the poverty line as an immediate priority. The poverty line will be redefined to ensure it reflects the income needed to afford a decent standard of living. Benefits will then rise, as a minimum, in line with wages or prices, which ever is higher.

- No means testing of benefits or pensions - universal benefits that end up in the pockets of the rich will be reclaimed through progressive taxation.

- Free residential and nursing care



PFI will drain cash from front-line NHS hospital and community services

companies such as BUPA. The Socialist Alliance has policies for a first-rate health service free to all:

- Stop and reverse the £7 billion worth of hospital schemes in the NHS to be funded through the Private Finance Initiative, which will leave the public sector in hock to banks, developers and contractors for the next 30 years. Full Treasury funding for the NHS to take over the schemes under way, and for a massive programme of building new, publicly-owned hospitals, community hospitals, NHS-run nursing homes and health centres.

- Abolish low pay and long hours in the NHS to recruit and retain medical, professional and support staff at all levels.

- New investment to help abolish waiting lists as an immediate priority, and to rebuild a NHS as a publicly-owned service, run on its founding principle: free services for all at the point of use, funded from taxation.

- A major investment programme in mental health services to provide high quality, 24-hour community-based services, backed up by hospital places for those in most serious and urgent need.

- Abolish means-tested charges for all long-term nursing and "social" care of the elderly. Currently, 40,000 people a year are forced to sell their houses to pay for care. We call for an injection of funds into NHS and local social services, coupled with new powers to allow them to build and run residential and nursing home accommodation. The large nursing home chains should be brought into public ownership.

- Scrap competitive tendering in our hospitals, which has destroyed standards of hygiene and patient care. Bring all NHS support services back in-house, with staff on NHS terms and conditions.

- Bring back free prescriptions, eye tests and dental treatment.

- Scrap the "post-code rationing" policies that are imposed by some health authorities on more expensive drugs and treatment. All patients should have equal access to the best available treatments.

- Expand abortion facilities; end the "post-code lottery" on access to abortion; abortion to be available on request from the NHS up to 26 weeks of pregnancy

- Bring the NHS under democratic control. Scrap the mushrooming network of NHS quangos, and the costly and bureaucratic "purchaser-provider split" left over from the Tory market reforms; abolish the unaccountable trusts. Establish a new system of elected health authorities with powers to plan,

for the elderly and the disabled; end the scandal of the private care industries.

- Scrap the Job Seekers Allowance and Welfare to Work and restore unemployment benefit.

- Restore benefit rights and housing benefits to 16 and 17 year-olds and students.

- Restore incapacity benefit.

- The scandal of the cash-limited Tory "Social Fund", which refused loans to over 360,000 poor families last year, must be ended. Scrap the scheme, and restore special needs grants.

- Bring all privatised benefits agencies back into public ownership.

- Full benefits for all prevented from working by childcare, disability or injury.

- Provide free, high-quality childcare and state nurseries with flexible opening hours to suit working parents.

- Increase child and maternity benefits, guarantee adequate paid maternity and paternity leave and restore full benefits to single parents.

- Since the Tories destroyed the school meals service, a million children living in poverty do not have access to a free school meal - for many the main meal of the day. We say all children should have a free, nutritional breakfast and lunch at school.

- Ensure full employment by establishing a maximum 35-hour week with no loss of pay.

- A minimum wage equivalent to the European Decency Threshold (currently £7 an hour).

- Scrap New Labour's vicious voucher system for refugees and asylum seekers, which forces them to eke out an existence on just 70% of official benefit levels.

NHS: health for patients, not profit

The NHS is not safe in either Tory or Labour hands. Both have opened it up to the private sector. Both have run down patient services and staffing levels. Both have under-funded it.

Both are happy to see precious resources gobbled up by the profit-hungry multi-national drugs and health supply companies, as well as private health

"Labour is now proud to be the party of big business. Thank goodness there is now an alternative - the Socialist Alliance."
Ken Loach, film director



"It's time to teach Blair a lesson. Support the Socialist Alliance."
Paul Foot, Journalist



Other sections of the manifesto include set out our policies on ● Privatisation ● Unions and rights at work ● Homes for all ● Transport ● Rural Britain ● Fighting all forms of discrimination ● Democratic rights ● Culture, sport & the arts ● International issues ● Our socialist vision

"Britain is a country of huge wealth – wealth that remains largely in the hands of a tiny elite. The Socialist Alliance stands for a transformation of society that will enable this wealth to be used for the benefit of the great majority."

commission and provide local services, accountable to the communities they serve, and including health workers' representatives.

- Bring the multi-national drugs and health supply companies, as well as private health companies such as BUPA, into public ownership.

Education is a right

Blair and Blunkett have continued the Tory attack on comprehensive education and the scapegoating of teachers. They make derogatory remarks about "bog-standard" comprehensives and promise that in a second term they would introduce a system of selection that poses a major threat to the future of working-class children.

This would create a two-tier education structure that benefits the well-off but leaves countless others as fodder for Britain's low wage economy. Blair's plan would mean more influence by "entrepreneurs" and businesses, more privatisation and more pressure on teachers.

The Socialist Alliance opposes this backward lurch in education.

We believe that public education is not just "vocational"; it should enable children to become rounded human beings and active citizens with critical minds. When the Socialist Alliance says 'education, education, education', we mean it!

- Increased and sustained investment in comprehensive state education; no selection.

- Improve pay and conditions for teachers and other education workers.

- Stop and reverse Private Finance

"The Socialist Alliance are brilliant. They got me a British passport, and it only cost me a million quid."

Linda Smith, comedian



is getting them on the cheap.

- People of all ages should be entitled to free education and training facilities.

- For the return to local democratic control of education at all levels, to include representatives of education workers, students and the wider community.

Urgent action is required if we are to save our planet from environmental degradation. Prescott and Blair fiddle while our globe gets hotter, our water supply becomes more polluted, and our health is endangered by multiplying threats – not least from BSE and, potentially, Genetically Modified crops.

New Labour's "green" policies have been mainly cosmetic. They have levied massive taxes on petrol and on car owners, but, like the Tories who introduced these taxes, they have not invested the money raised in public transport, so the disincentive to private car use is ineffective.

Huge subsidies to rail operators have been pocketed by shareholders, while the system teeters on the edge of disaster. New Labour's embrace of agribusiness, the big corporations and economic globalisation have contributed to the pollution of land and waterways and exacerbated the post-BSE crisis and the foot and mouth outbreak in the countryside.

The Socialist Alliance is determined to stop the ongoing destruction of the environment. We call for firm and urgent action:

- Emergency action to reduce fossil fuel use and slow down global warming; for massive investment in the development of sustainable alternative energy sources – including solar, wind and wave power.

- Invest now to build a cheap and integrated public transport system, to lessen reliance on private cars.

- Renationalise the entire rail network and place it under the control of those who work on and use it.

- Bring the entire bus network into public ownership, under democratic control.

- Tough action on corporate polluters – fines and awards for damage must be substantial enough to act as a real deterrent; whistle-blowers must be protected.

- Bring the oil companies into public ownership.

- The planned closure of nuclear energy plants, with workers involved transferred to jobs at equivalent rates of pay.

- The planned closure of open-cast coal pits, with workers involved transferred to jobs at equivalent rates of pay.

- Introduction of clean-burn technologies in coal-fired power stations

- Public investment to make all homes energy efficient.

- Food and other agricultural prod-



Lecturers from Oxford College of Further Education staged a one-day strike on April 3 in protest at the College's refusal to offer a pay increase last year. The Socialist Alliance argues that FE Colleges, which were hived off by the Tories must be brought back under democratic control, and given the resources to recruit and retain staff.

ucts should be locally grown as much as possible; we must replace intensive capitalist exploitation of land and animals with sustainable farming.

- Renationalise the water industry, scrap water charges and finance a clean-up operation of rivers, lakes and the sea.

- Provide every household with quality doorstep recycling facilities so that at least half our waste is recycled by 2010 and no new incinerators are built.

- Stop the commercial use of GM foods; a moratorium on crop trials pending further scientific research.

- For the workers' movement to launch an independent enquiry into the BSE scandal and for full compensation to those harmed or killed by it so far.

- Promote the Right to Roam – equal access to the countryside.

Where will the money come from?

Gordon Brown preaches prudence and "living within our means", yet Britain is a country of huge wealth – wealth that remains largely in the hands of a tiny elite.

The Socialist Alliance stands for a transformation of society that will enable this wealth to be used for the benefit of the great majority.

Labour ministers talk at length about tough measures to fight alleged "fraud" by social security claimants, but turn a blind eye to the tax evasion and fraud by the real scroungers – big business and the super-rich.

The difference between New Labour and Tory spending plans currently amounts to about 1% of Gross Domestic Product.

In a society where the richest 20% take home more than 45% of all post-tax income, where corporations pay the lowest tax rates in Europe, and where some 5 million people (9% of the population) live in absolute poverty, and millions more struggle to make ends meet, that is simply not good enough.

The Socialist Alliance says there is an alternative:

- Abolish VAT and replace it with a tax on the rich – for a steeply progressive income tax and a big increase in corporate taxes, towards the higher average levels elsewhere in the EU.

- Increase the income tax thresholds to ensure that all those with an income of £13,000 or less pay no income tax.

- For a swingeing tax on the profits of the oil companies like BP.

- A turnover tax on all multinationals doing business (and making profits!) in Britain.

- Increase tax on capital gains.

- Raise the top-rate of inheritance tax, impose higher duties on other transfers of wealth and financial transactions, tax dividend income at higher rates

- Increase stamp duty on stocks and shares.

- Crack down on tax evasion by large companies.

- Abolish the ceiling on National Insurance contributions

- Raid the offshore tax havens.

- Slash current spending on arms, nuclear weapons and defence, to release money to rebuild the NHS and other public services.

- Bring all the utilities privatised since 1980 back into public ownership, to be run by workers and consumers – paying no compensation to the fat cats who have pocketed huge profits since privatisation.

- Centralise all pension funds into one national fund run under the supervision of the workers who have paid into these funds.

The measures above would enable us to make major strides in eliminating poverty, providing the public services we need and advancing towards a just society. Most of them could be implemented tomorrow.

But if we are to maintain these improvements, we will need to go further.

The Socialist Alliance believes that there is a fundamental contradiction between the needs of capital in an exploitative, profit-driven system and the needs of the large majority of human beings in this country and throughout the world.

What is required is a thoroughgoing restructuring of the economy and society as a whole. We are convinced that more and more people will come to recognise the need for a new system of production and distribution to meet genuine social need without the waste and exploitation inherent in the current system.

That's why we call for policies to:

- Take the major corporations, banks, insurance companies, pension funds and other giants of the financial sector that dominate the economy into public ownership, along with the major transport, construction and manufacturing industries.

All of these should be run under democratic working class control and management, so that their assets can serve public need, not private greed.

"There has got to be positive resistance to 'big business' government – and the Socialist Alliance is it."

Harold Pinter, playwright



Emergency action to reduce fossil fuel use and slow down global warming; for massive investment in the development of sustainable alternative energy sources – including solar, wind and wave power.

- Invest now to build a cheap and integrated public transport system, to lessen reliance on private cars.

- Renationalise the entire rail network and place it under the control of those who work on and use it.

- Bring the entire bus network into public ownership, under democratic control.

- Tough action on corporate polluters – fines and awards for damage must be substantial enough to act as a real deterrent; whistle-blowers must be protected.

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- Public investment to make all homes energy efficient.

- Food and other agricultural prod-

"The Socialist Alliance can be proud of the fact that it has got people to unite who haven't traditionally worked together."

Mark Thomas, comedian and investigator



Air Traffic Control is just one of New Labour's targets for privatisation

Initiative and Public Private Partnership schemes in education.

- Abolish Education Action Zones.

- There should be a comprehensive review of the national curriculum, to involve (among others) teaching unions and experts chosen by them.

- Abolish league tables and the current testing system.

- End charitable status and tax privileges for Eton, Harrow and other private schools. Abolish private education.

- For free after school clubs and play centres for all who need them.

- Ensure provision of a full range of arts, sports and sex education in all schools.

Of course education is not just about children. Young people and adults at colleges and universities – and the staff who work in them – have also suffered a succession both the Tories and Labour, who imposed tuition fees and ended free higher education.

We say:

- Abolish tuition fees and student loans! We call for free education and a living grant to all further and higher education students, funded from taxation on the high-paid and on big business – which wants skilled workers, but

Oxford's NHS: condition critical

The state of Oxford's health services have been in the headlines recently, with the crisis in the 999 ambulance service, and record numbers of waiting list operations being cancelled at the last minute at the Radcliffe Hospitals Trust.

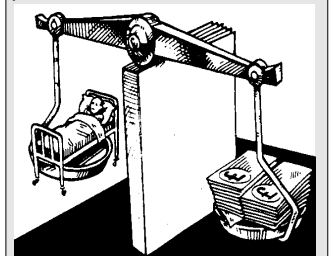
At the root of all these problems is the lack of sufficient beds to enable the John Radcliffe and Churchill Hospitals to maintain a full emergency and "elective" service.

But the government has also been running into problems with its latest round of reforms: plans to scrap the patients' watchdog bodies, Community Health Councils, have been defeated in the House of Lords.

Oxfordshire CHC was central to the campaign to stop the closure of community hospital beds in the county and has been a constant pressure on local NHS chiefs. It is to gag CHCs like this that New Labour wants to sweep them away and set up a new, tame, toothless breed of 'watchdog'.

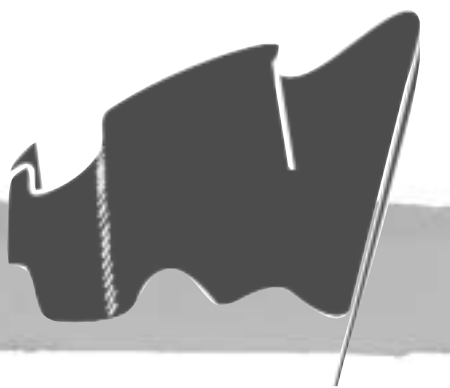
The latest planned NHS reforms will go even further, and merge health authorities into even bigger, less recognisable and accountable bodies.

New Labour is clearly committed to the control of health services by ever more obscure and remote quangos, while a large and growing share of NHS budgets are siphoned into private sector providers.



The full Socialist Alliance manifesto, with many more sections than we have room for here, will be published as soon as the election date is announced. Copies will be available, price £1. To order your copy, send a cheque for £1.30 to PO Box 315 Oxford OX2 9LQ. To join the Socialist Alliance, ring 07929 618579.

Socialist Alliance



Alliance campaign gathers strength

IN RESPONSE to Andrew Smith's "cash for canapés" scandal (exposed in our last issue), the Socialist Alliance laid on a very successful fund-raising dinner of its own – a special curry night for 50 trade unionists and their families.

Not for us the £65-a-plate dinner at the plush Four Pillars Hotel in Sandford organised by Oxford East Labour Party for Oxfordshire chief executives.

No, instead we stood by our slogan "For the millions, not the millionaires" by holding a more modest £10 a head evening at the Asian Cultural Centre in East Oxford, with a selection of folk and blues music by Mavis Bayton to add to the occasion.

Trade unionists from a cross section of the local economy – from the car industry to the post office, from the health service to local councils, from the media to education – were there to show their support for a real socialist alternative to the new party of big business.

There were no ministers with the latest New Labour gimmicks to woo big business, but a chance for workers to chat to our prospective candidate for Oxford East, John Lister, about the problems caused by those very same chief executives.

John Lister said: "We were delighted that the Curry

The Socialist Alliance candidate for Oxford East will be **JOHN LISTER**, 51, a journalist who lives on Greater Leys.

John has worked 17 years as the press officer and researcher for London Health Emergency – a campaign which works with health unions and local campaigners to defend the NHS.

Though working in London, John has lived all his adult life in Oxford. He is chair of the National Union of Journalists branch, and has been active in many local campaigns against cuts in health, education and social services.



Night brought us such wide support from Oxford's key trade unionists and campaigners.

"In spite of the new Employment Relations Act, New Labour ministers boast that this country still has the most draconian anti-union laws in western Europe.

"Our boast is that only the Socialist Alliance calls for the scrapping of all anti-trade union laws to enable workers to organise freely and show solidarity with other trade unionists in struggle."

Public meeting

A LIVELY Town Hall public meeting of the Socialist Alliance heard former Labour Party National Executive member Liz Davies catalogue

some of New Labour's unsavoury links with big business – and declare her enthusiastic support for the Socialist Alliance and prospective candidate John Lister.

Liz's book *Through the Looking Glass*, describing her experiences as part of a minority of left wingers on Labour's NEC, is now available in local bookshops.

Other platform speakers at the April 24 meeting included Teresa Hayter, author of *Open Borders*, who argued a powerful case against immigration controls and urged support for the continuing campaign to close Campsfield Detention Centre and other immigration prisons.

Sylvia Barker, whose moth-

er is a resident in the threatened Iffley House residential home, challenged the impending privatisation of homes for the elderly in Oxfordshire; and newly elected National Union of Students executive member Helen Salmon spoke of the scandal of a Labour government privatising services and imposing student fees. "Nobody could have joined the Labour Party to do that!" she insisted.

The audience included a number of disillusioned Labour Party members and recent ex-members, including one woman who had been a party member for sixty years before leaving in disgust at Blair's "New Labour".

John Lister underlined the contrast between a Labour government hell-bent on privatisation, and opinion polls showing 76% want the railways renationalised.

"It doesn't have to be like this," he said, setting out a number of alternative policies on health and public services. "And if you want to see some different policies, you will have a choice at this election. Vote for what you believe, vote Socialist Alliance."

News distribution

20,000 copies of the first issue of our first newsletter have been distributed throughout Oxford East, with many new activists helping by covering their own local area.

We are always looking for more people to help, so if you have any time to spare between now and the Election, please give us a call on 07929 618579.

News in BRIEF

Keeping it private

WHILE public sector services and staff that fail are "named and shamed" with league tables by New Labour and face threats of privatisation, private sector failures are given a pat on the head ... and more cash!

Despite a recent opinion poll showing that 76 per cent of the public want the railways renationalised, Railtrack, the chaotic privatised firm that brought us the Hatfield rail crash, followed by months of delays and disaster, is to be given a massive £2 billion of government subsidies to fund its renewals and maintenance programme and to help reduce costs of carrying freight.

And when Oxford's John Radcliffe Hospital was singled out as one of the dirtiest in the country, the management response was not to sack the privatised firm that had failed to maintain basic hygiene standards and bring services back "in-house", but to hand them more money to clean up the hospital ... effectively rewarding failure.

Waiting for weighting

The soaring cost of housing in Oxfordshire is a key factor in the chronic shortage of nursing staff in Oxford's hospitals – where over 300 posts (15 per cent) are unfilled.

But it is also hitting other public services in the City, and the public sector union UNISON has decided to do something about it.

A 200-strong meeting from the various UNISON branches in Oxford has agreed a campaign for an additional "weighting" allowance to be added to pay packets – as already happens for public sector staff in London, and has now been agreed for the Thames Valley Police, who will receive an extra £2,000 a year.

A minority of nurses and midwives have been given a smaller cost of living supplement of between £400-£600 per year, but the demand is for a higher payment to cover all staff work-

ing in Oxfordshire.

A demonstration has been called as we go to press. The Socialist Alliance urges full government funding for cost of living allowances, coupled with urgent action by Oxford City Council to build new council houses and expand the availability of affordable housing to ensure key services can recruit and retain the staff they need.

Rubbish policies



The Green Party likes to present itself as the custodian of our local environment, but since it took over control of Oxford City Council with the Liberal Democrats it seems to have lost the plot.

The latest wacky wheeze to come from these "radicals" is the imposition of hefty charges for the removal of "bulky household waste". To have three items removed will no longer be free, but now costs £18.80 – equivalent to five hours' work at the new minimum wage, and a major chunk out of an old-age pension.

Not only does this discriminate against the poor, it is more or less an encouragement for people to dump their rubbish on roadsides and river banks, and for wholesale "fly tipping" which can so damage the local environment.

Let's hope nobody tries dumping any large household items like fridges or sofas near the houses of Green or Lib Dem councillors – or on the steps of the Town Hall!

£4.5bn millstone for NHS

New research into New Labour's plans to build hospitals valued at £7 billion with cash from big business through the Private Finance Initiative warns that by 2007 the NHS will be forking out over £2.1 billion a year in lease payments to profit-making consortia, plus another £2.4m in capital charges.

The Socialist Alliance has demanded that PFI be scrapped. We want new NHS hospitals publicly funded, with Treasury investment from Gordon Brown's vast surplus.



If it's any consolation, he died laughing

Can you help us in the campaign for a Socialist alternative?

The Socialist Alliance is a new organisation, uniting the left, and standing **100** candidates across England and Wales in the next Election. Oxford Socialist Alliance welcomes support from anyone wanting to challenge the Tory politics of New Labour.

We already have backing from many union and community activists and campaigners. We are keen to meet and speak to local union branches, tenants groups and campaign meetings. Help us make a difference!

Membership is just £2, but we obviously need donations towards our campaign and helping hands on the ground to give out leaflets and canvass the constituency.

Just send in this form, or ring us on **07929 618579**, or you can email us at: **feedback@oxfordsocialists.org.uk**. Web site: **www.oxfordsocialists.org.uk**

I CAN HELP! (Tick as many as apply)

I ENCLOSE

- £2 to join the Socialist Alliance
- £..... donation towards the campaign.

I AM WILLING TO:

- Display a poster in my window
- Give out leaflets
- Canvass
- Come to campaign meetings
- Help raise funds
- Publicly endorse the campaign

Name

Address

..... Post code

Phone (day) (home)

e-mail

Position held (if any)

**Send to Oxford Socialist Alliance
c/o PO Box 315 Oxford OX2 9LQ**