

# **Socialist Outlook**

A monthly marxist review \* New series No. 20\* December 1998 \* 50p

# **CAPITALISM SCREWS YOU UP!**

**INSIDE** this bumper 24-page issue:

● Capitalism in crisis: 3 pages of analysis and comment

● 60 years on: the Fourth International then and now

... and much more!

# **Stop the jobs massacre!**



# London's Mayor - Party choice or Tony Crony?

**Pete Firmin**

HAVING IMPOSED a directly elected mayor on Londoners and the London Labour Party, Blair is now intent on ensuring that the most popular candidate, Ken Livingstone, does not get a chance to stand for the post.

He is even rumoured to prefer a 'non-politician' like Robert Ayling of British Airways, a staunch New Labour supporter and basher of unions.

Every opinion poll taken shows that Livingstone is the only Labour candidate who could stand a chance of beating the likes of Jeffrey Archer.

This doesn't seem to worry Blair. As far as he and his coterie are concerned they will not allow Livingstone to stand under any circumstances. He is too 'off-message', with a murky left past.

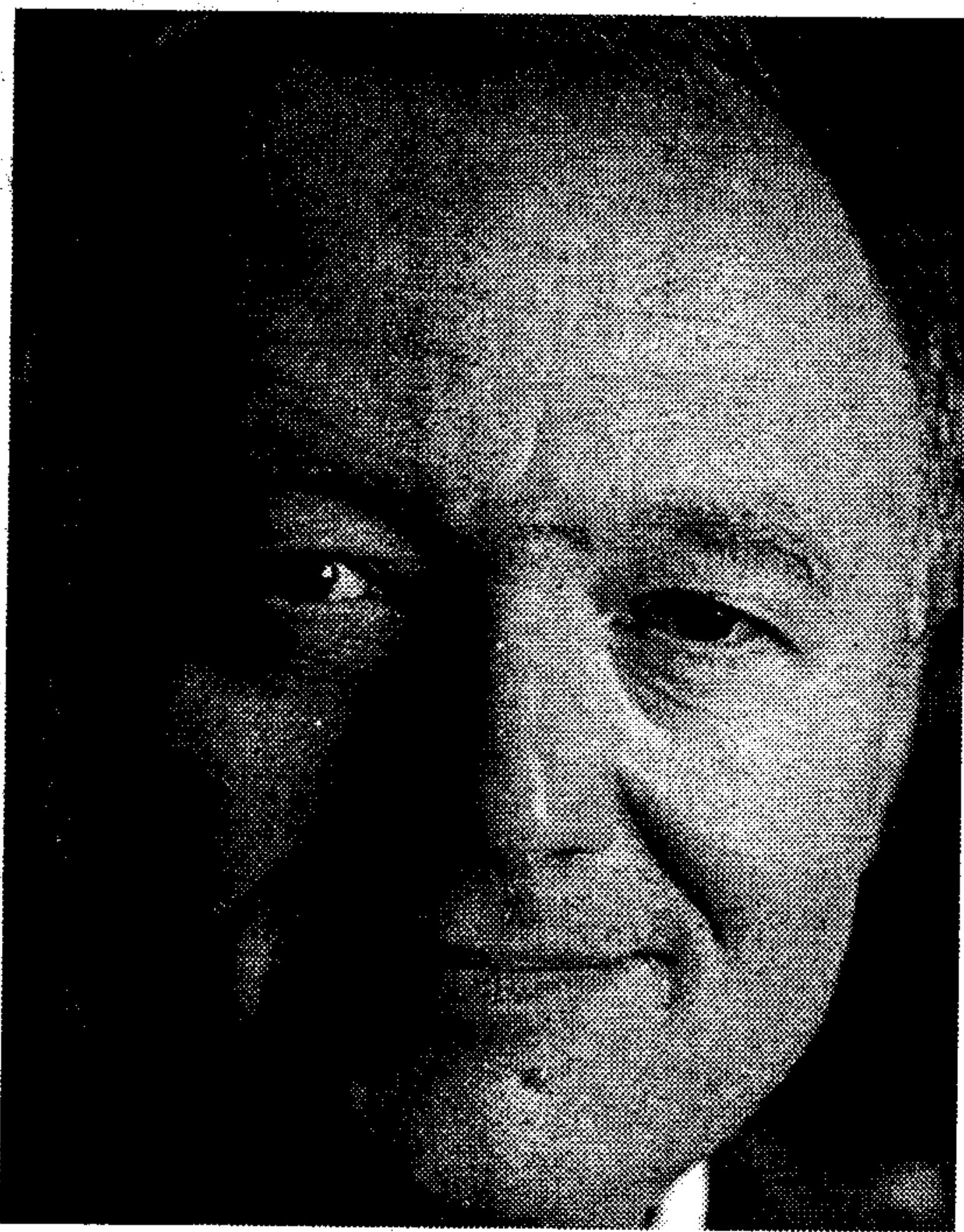
Even if Livingstone were to come out as a loyal Blairite for the next 12 months, this would not make him acceptable to them. While Livingstone has many faults (a lack of consistency being one) he is clearly on the left and no other left winger has a chance of winning the Labour candidacy or the election.

Other potential Labour candidates include Glenda Jackson, Tony Banks and Pauline Green MEP. Banks may even claim to be the left candidate if Livingstone is included. Blair knows that none of these is likely to beat Livingstone in a membership ballot, otherwise his solution would be simple - hold an election, Livingstone loses, end of story.

Greater London Labour Party conference in June voted overwhelmingly (400-2) that Labour's selection should be made by a one member one vote ballot, and that any candidate nominated by a minimum of 10 CLPs should be automatically shortlisted.

When the regional executive (now renamed as the regional Board) met to consider the procedure they even had to be reminded of this decision.

The regional board has now forwarded new proposals to Labour's NEC which include allowing individuals to put themselves forward, and a selection board, with representatives from



Wanted man? Ken's face just doesn't fit!

the region and NEC to consider candidates.

This mechanism would be similar to the one used to sift out unwanted candidates as was done - with explosive consequences - for the Scottish Parliament and European elections. This would allow the NEC to claim that the board rejected Livingstone as 'unsuitable'.

The regional board did also, however, agree to 're-forward' the regional conference resolution to the NEC. This means the regional board fudged the issue, leaving the decision about procedure entirely up to the NEC.

The NEC will consider this issue at its meeting on January 26. The intervening period should be used to put as much pressure as possible on NEC members to back the original decision of London Labour conference.

Union representatives, for instance, should be called upon to support this policy, pointing out that a system of nominations is the only one which allows any input from the unions through GC delegates, and which would filter out any business-style union-bashing candidate.

A lobby of the NEC will probably be called for January 26, and this should be supported by as many union and Labour Party

bodies as possible to show the strength of feeling on this issue. It is not impossible to inflict a defeat on Blair on this.

The following model resolution should be taken up by as many Labour Party and affiliated union bodies as possible and forwarded to the NEC, regional board and regional and national union bodies.

*"This ..... notes the meeting of the Greater London Labour Party regional board on November 10 which agreed "a system of self-nomination by potential candidates for inclusion on a panel of candidates for mayor and assembly"*

*and that "a selection board is established to consider candidates". We further note that this decision has been passed as a recommendation to the National Executive Committee.*

*"This ..... notes that the system recommended by the board removes any right of Constituency Labour Parties to nominate their candidate of choice, and contradicts the decision of the Greater London Labour Party regional conference on June 13 which agreed without opposition that 'all candidates who are nominated by a minimum of 12.5% of London CLPs (that is 10 CLPs) will automatically be shortlisted so that their names will appear on the ballot papers to select Labour's candidate.'*

*"This .... resolves therefore to write to the NEC calling on them to support and implement decisions of the Greater London Labour Party conference on the method of selecting Labour's can-*

*didate for London mayor.*

■ (Union bodies should add a call on their own NEC to back this and demand that union representatives on Labour's NEC support it).

■ The control-freak tendency took another step into the unions last month, as UNISON's London Regional convenor Geoff Martin was threatened with disciplinary action for speaking out in defence of UNISON policy.

Regional full-time official Chris Robbins, clearly acting at the behest of Millbank, has lodged a formal complaint that Martin, an elected lay officer, had "brought the union into disrepute" by suggesting that UNISON would not support the campaign of any anti-union candidate for Mayor endorsed by the selection panel.

It remains to be seen if UNISON General Secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe will face similar complaints after he correctly lent his voice to warnings by union leaders that Labour cannot count on union funds to run the Euro-elections and campaigns for the Welsh and Scottish parliaments if Blair's gang continue to ride roughshod over the demands of union members.

## Campaign Group Network conference December 5 Build the Labour Left!

**Pete Firmin (officer, Network of Socialist Campaign Groups, in personal capacity)**

THE NETWORK of Socialist Campaign Groups has its AGM on Saturday 5 December to discuss key issues and campaigning work for the year ahead. This conference comes at a time when dissatisfaction is growing in the Party, with government policies, but particularly with Blair's determination to centrally control anything and everything.

Blair (poor dear) was so hurt by press allegations of 'control freakery' that he went out of his way to deny them at the NEC meeting on 17 November, claiming that the decisions are made by the membership, not him (!).

This is of course rubbish, and two hours of that NEC meeting were taken up with the attempt to gag the 4 members elected on the Grassroots Alliance slate through the proposed 'Code of Conduct'. Some NEC members even argued there should be 'cabinet responsibility' on the NEC. Clearly, even if downgraded to 'guidelines', this may be used in an attempt to discipline the NEC members at some time in the future. The new drive to replace General Committees by policy forums, heralded in the press two days later, wasn't even mentioned at the NEC.

On top of the attacks on democracy, we have the continued attacks by the government on those it was elected to support, whether the new Asylum Bill, the squeeze on public sector pay, the privatisation of everything possible or the rumoured watering down of the already awful 'Fairness At Work' proposals. The government has also made its first use of the Tory anti-union laws, preventing the Prison Officers' Association from protesting over staffing.

However, dissent is beginning to find a voice, with the formation of

a Welsh campaign for Labour Party Democracy and the NEC election results as well as protests over the procedure for selecting Labour's candidate for London Mayor.

While the Labour Left is currently very weak, it could capitalise on this situation if it is willing to campaign vigorously. The growing levels of discontent mean that members are willing to listen to alternatives.

One of the major debates at the Network AGM will be around the future of the Grassroots Alliance. While the NEC members should be given all the support possible they are isolated on the NEC and marginalised

when it comes to policy. If the support shown in the elections is to be built on, supporters have to be drawn into discussion of the key issues in the party and active campaigning both around democracy and government policy.

While local Campaign Groups should take the lead in this, a major advance would be made if the Grassroots Alliance called national or regional meetings for its supporters.

Unfortunately, the majority of organisations making up the alliance do not see the need to move beyond standing candidates in internal elections and providing (important) reports from the NEC members.

The AGM will have the chance to express its view.

**December 5: Network of Socialist Campaign Groups AGM, Speakers include Ken Livingstone, Tony Benn, Jeremy Corbyn, Liz Davies and Christine Shawcroft. 11a.m.-5p.m.**

## Don't let our trains go down the tubes!

**Veronica Fagan**

THE FIGHT against the privatisation of London Underground continues apace.

On Tuesday 17 November over 100 reps met to discuss the next stage of the campaign. Industrial action around the New Year is under serious consideration.

Meanwhile RMT activists have been leafleting many tube stations at peak times, explaining what the effects of the government's proposals will be on service users. They point out that privatisation on British Rail has been a disaster - something that no commuter to London needs persuading of.

Privatisation of the tube will

cost £1 billion more than if the service remained in public hands. That is the breathtaking fact about which the labour government is keeping very quiet. And these extra costs will inevitably be borne by both workers and users. Safety standards will fall further, fares will rocket and services will be cut.

It is vital that activists across London should contact campaign. Invite speakers to any meetings you are involved in and find imaginative ways to defend your service.

Contact: Campaign against tube privatisation, Flat 2, 235 Queens Lane, London N10 Tel: 0181 883 7074 Fax: 0181 442 0276

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Alan Thornett's first-hand account of trade union struggles in the car industry from the 1970s, with serious lessons for trade union activists today.

448 pages, illustrated. £11.95 plus £2 post and packing. from Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU.



# No to war in Middle East!

AS WE GO TO PRESS (November 23) it seems that the immediate threat of major air strikes against the Iraqi people from US imperialism and its European allies, most notably our own Tony Blair are on the back burner.

However the situation could hot up again at any moment and the Americans have asserted that they need no further mandate for action which could murder many thousands of people.

Of course whether they actually do act, without the backing of the Security Council, will depend in the end not on formalisms but on whether they feel the balance of forces is sufficiently in their favour to permit this.

What may have as much long term significance as the threat of further bombings is the fact that the removal of Saddam Hussein is now an explicit part of US policy. Clinton has now signed the Iraq Liberation Act 1998, under pressure from the Republicans in Congress.

## Military aid

This allows the administration to release \$97 million (£64 million) in military aid to the Iraqi opposition, as well as allowing them to train and equip an opposition army which would invade the country with the aim of overthrowing Saddam.

In a statement on November 14 Clinton stated that the US intended to "intensify" support for the "forces of change" in Iraq. Blair has echoed support for this position in Parliament and discussions are underway with Iraqi groups based in London.

During the Gulf War there was much

more ambivalence on the question of unseating Saddam – because imperialism was not sure it could find a replacement that was any more reliable. After all, Saddam was initially *their* creature, and considered an ally until after the end of the Iran-Iraq war. Now it seems that there is optimism that a better replacement might emerge.

The basis of this change of heart lies not in changes in the Iraqi opposition but in larger geo-political issues in the region.

## EDITORIAL

The signing of the Oslo accords was a crucial factor.

The mobilisations of Palestinians and others across the Arab world were important in putting imperialism under pressure during the Gulf War. Today Arafat is policing the Palestinians more effectively than the Israelis were able to.

Nor has the settlement only had an effect within the bantustans supposedly controlled by the Palestinian authority but more generally throughout the Arab world – an effect of demobilisation and demoralisation after the promise of the Intifada.

In retrospect, while it was always clear that Britain's interest in ending the Rushdie affair was not based on a new-found (and short lived) belief in freedom of speech, the larger picture comes even more clearly into focus.

Settling this long-running dispute with

Iran was not only useful for imperialism in order to try to bolster the modernisers against the fundamentalists in Tehran, but to hopefully establish stronger alliances in any future conflict with Iraq.

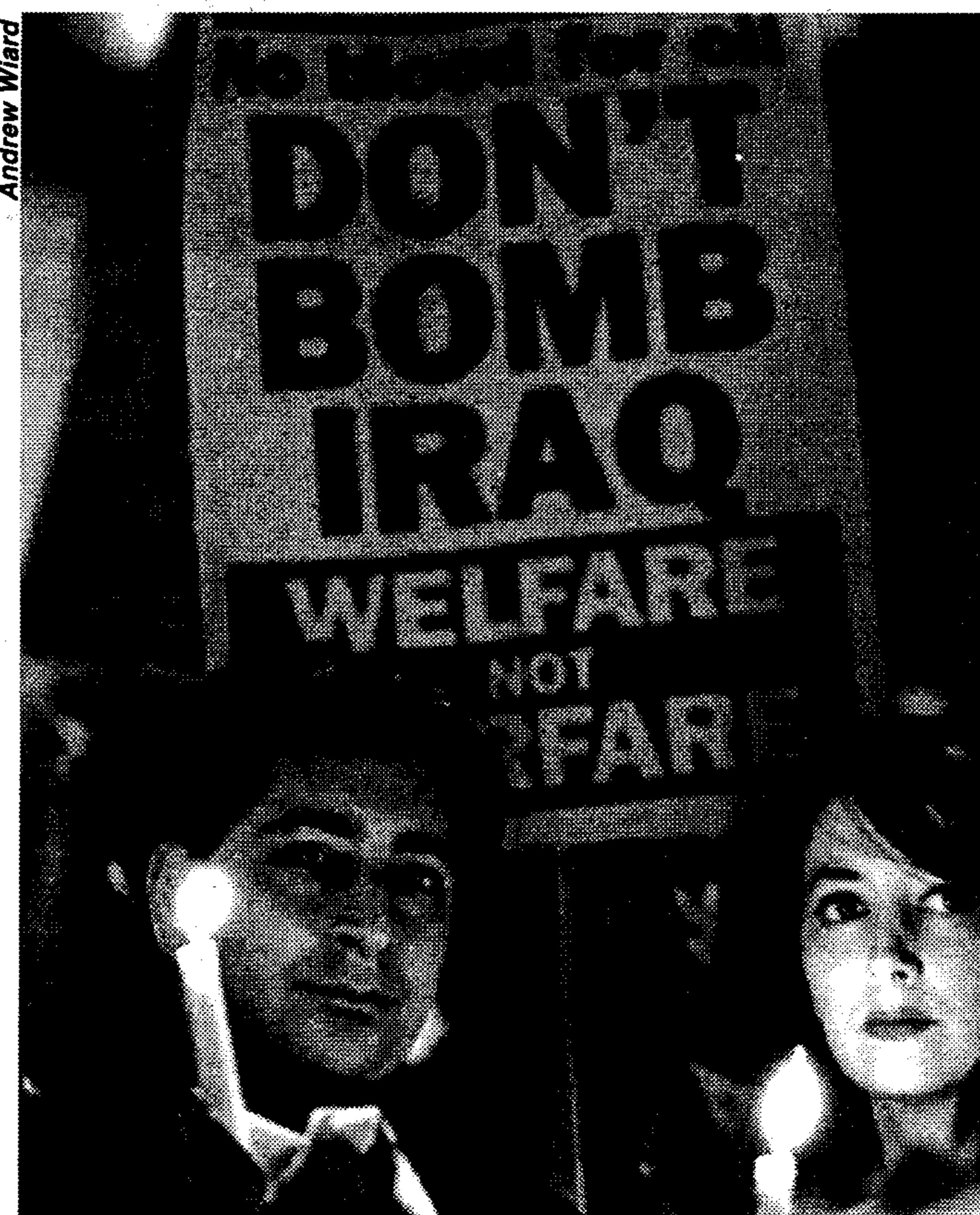
At the same time, Turkey, another key player in the region, has interests at stake.

It would dearly love to see the coming together of Kurdish groups from Iraqi and Iranian Kurdistan – between whom there has been little love lost – to isolate the PKK based in Turkish Kurdistan.

Turkey's determination to step up the offensive against a people whose existence it does not officially recognise has been illustrated by its attacks first on Syria and now on Italy over the whereabouts of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan.

*Socialist Outlook* is opposed to any imperialist offensive against Iraq, and continues to support demands for the lifting of sanctions which have led to death and disease being rife throughout that country.

We also warn that the 'Pax Americana'



Will Clinton find another pretext to use force against Saddam?

under discussion today would have repercussions way beyond the borders of Iraq.

The attempt to redraw the map of the Middle East which is now being considered in the White House and in Downing Street is an attack on Palestinians, Kurds and all the oppressed and exploited peoples of the Middle east. It must be opposed.

## Not so much a straw in the wind as more wind from Jack Straw ...

# It's "Back to Basics" II!

NO MATTER how much Jack Straw may protest, those who are effectively deemed "non-people" by the governments green paper on family policy are clear that they are being labelled second best.

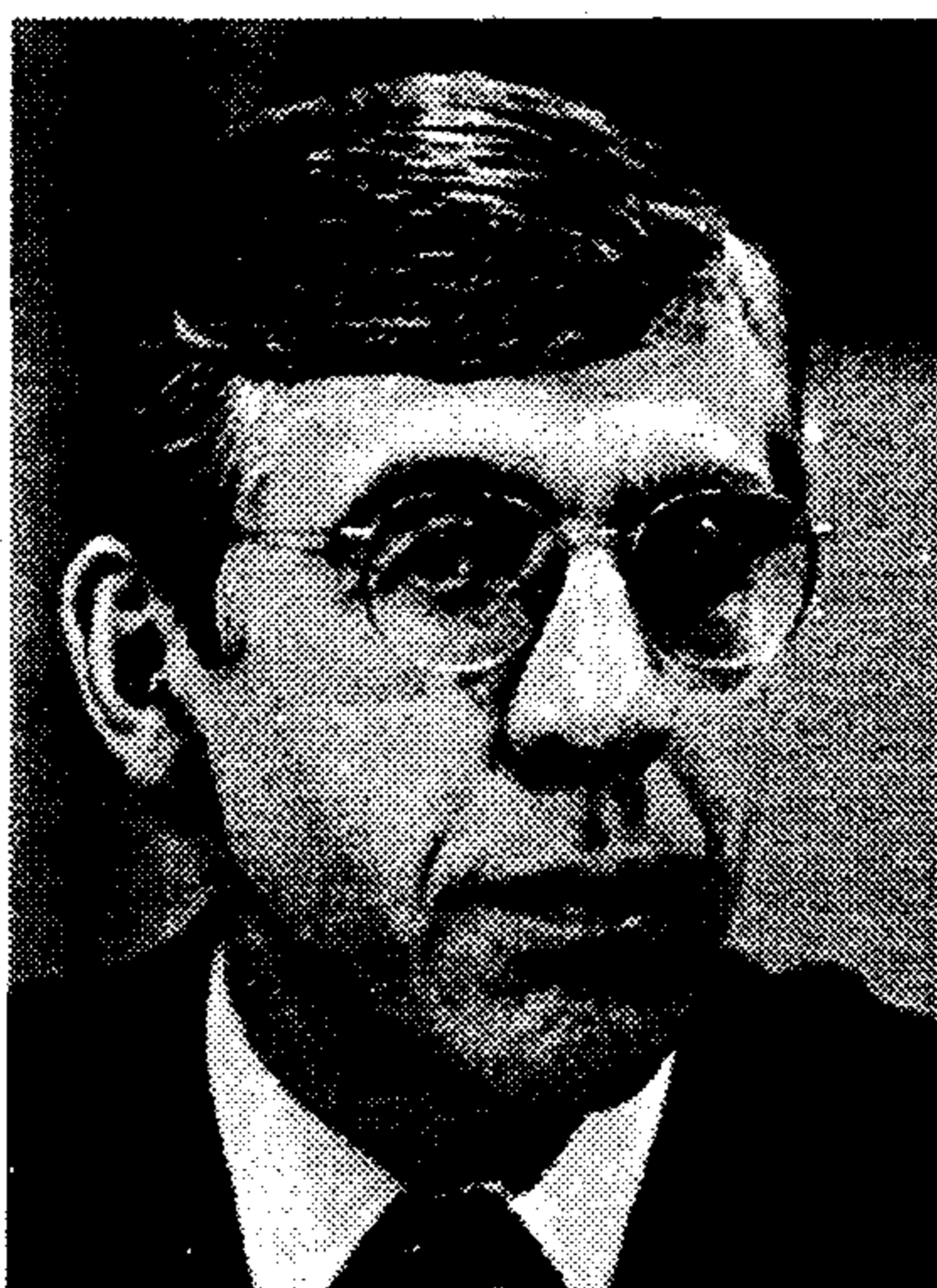
Lone parents, lesbians and gay men – and anyone who isn't married, whether through choice or circumstance, fall foul of New Labour's latest proclamation that "marriage is best".

The core of the document is as firmly based on Back to Basics ideology as anything put forward by Blair's hypocritical, moralising predecessors in the Tory Party. The strongest support for the document so far seems to have come from the Archbishop of Canterbury – hardly an indication of progressive nature.

This overall trajectory was further underlined by the Home Secretary using the launch of the document to make clear his own opposition to the rights of lesbians and gay men to adopt or the right of lesbians to have access to IVF treatment.

His "argument" for this was that "he didn't want to see children being treated as trophies". How dare he suggest that the motives of lesbians and gay men for wanting children are any different from anyone else's.

His views gave the Liberal Democrats the perfect opportunity to point out that these proposals could easily discriminate against children not from "government approved relationship" – somewhat ironic really, given the



Straw: tried real life – didn't like it

package is justified in the first place as being driven by the interests of children.

While some of the detailed proposals are inoffensive individually, these are the ones that are unnecessary. Giving a legal form to baby-naming ceremonies in a non-religious context? What on earth for?

Will grandparents play a bigger role because Tony and Jack say they should? The changes in family structure that may have affected their involvement are more likely to be driven by hard factors such as geography and economics than government ideology.

But of course ideology does play a material role. In a month where the press reported that a young gay man killed himself because of homophobia and isolation, the government's pronouncements

will lead to further misery.

Reputable surveys have shown that marriage may be beneficial to men – from the point of view of health, happiness and income – but not to women.

The idea of the supremacy of marriage plays a part, along with material circumstances, in trapping many women in oppressive or even violent relationships, which are destructive not only for them but for any children involved.

Those that have argued that New Labour is a modern party on social questions have been confounded by how little progressive movement is contained in the green paper. This is a million miles away from the debates in the French parliament over civil unions which would register lesbian and gay relationships for example.

Yet unfortunately some in the lesbian and gay movement, some who call themselves feminists have given at least some credence to the government's direction.

We are in favour of people having the right to have whatever sexual and social relationships they choose, and to register that – if they choose.

We think that the decision on whether people should adopt or receive IVF should be on their individual wishes and capacities to parent, not on some bigoted view of whether their sexuality and family circumstances comply with New Labour's moral precepts.

And we think that this govern-

ment could do far more to help the children who are supposed to be the main focus of this green paper if they took immediate action to lift millions of households out of poverty. They could do this with a decent minimum wage, increased benefits, and a programme of useful public works to create new jobs and plug gaps in our public services – not least the scandalous neglect of our children's services and chil-

dren's homes.

It is no accident that the green paper – like John Major's ill-fated efforts at "Back to Basics" was published in the midst of yet another alleged ministerial sex scandal. In real life ministers and MPs do not and will not, live the constrained, narrow lives required by the moral precepts their arrogant, priggish, moralising colleagues try to lay down. So why should they expect us to?

## PUT US ON YOUR XMAS GIFT LIST!

YES, IT'S THAT time of year again, when every relative and every good cause seems to be laying claim on your generosity. So we decided *Socialist Outlook* should not be left out – and here is our heart-rending Xmas Appeal for Socialists in Need.

Our picture editor has advised against any traumatic shots of our lean, hollow-eyed and hungry editorial team – let alone our production editor, who has to go for painful surgery soon (no violins, please!). But you wouldn't want the socialist cause to be starved of resources over Christmas, now would you? And if you saw us in a pub, and it was your round, you'd probably buy us a drink. We'd do the same for you, too, if we were a little better off.

So please put us on your Christmas List, send a present to help us develop and expand the paper in 1999. We'll do the rest, working over the holiday to prepare our next issue, for publication in the first week of January. Then, while you watch all those old Xmas movies, you can sit back and enjoy that warm glow of having contributed to a worthy cause!

Send donations to us at PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU.



# New Labour = Neo-Liberals

## Haringey's schools for sale?

**Doug Thorpe**

**EARLIER** this year Haringey Council in North London decided to investigate whether it could use funds from a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) to buy and refurbish buildings to create a new school.

They were soon told by their consultants that no company would be interested in a PFI for one school - they would have to turn over the management and servicing of all nine of the Borough's secondary schools for 30 years in order to get private business to finance the new school.

Without batting an eyelid or consulting any parents or teachers the Council decided to do just that - sell off all Haringey's schools.

The implications are a loss of community use and control of school buildings and worse conditions and pay for school workers. Teachers are not part of the immediate sell-off but a bid is being prepared for an Education Action Zone next year.

A group of Haringey socialists, trade union and community activists (including *Socialist Outlook* supporters) who had met to discuss solidarity with RMT members fighting privatisation on London Underground immediately understood the significance of the PFI and launched a community campaign "Haringey against Privatisation" to fight the deal.

The campaign has grown and, in early November, it called a public meeting together with the local UNISON branch. The platform of the meeting was impressive ranging from Keith Sonnet, UNISON's National Head of Local Government and Tony Brockman National Vice-President of the NUT, to local school governors, parents' representatives and Paul

**Foot.**

Over a hundred local people attended the meeting, and not one showed any support for the PFI. Such was the concern of the national trade union officials to be seen to be supporting the fight against PFI that when Tony Brockman at first refused to speak on the same platform as Paul Foot, (who he dubbed a "fascist"), he was told to appear by NUT General Secretary Doug McEvoy!

The inconvenient fact facing the council is that they have to persuade the governors of each school to vote for the PFI for it to happen.

To date they have not taken a single vote, but have still spent £250,000 on consultants. Most governors are against the scheme, but there is no room for complacency.

As more money is spent, the Council will become more desperate to force the project through. Enormous pressure will be put on governors, particularly Labour Party appointees.

To counter this, as well as addressing governors directly, the campaign must build up a counter pressure from parents, teachers and other workers. Only in this way will governors have the confidence to vote the proposals down.

The next step is a programme of public leafleting outside schools to build a demonstration and a lobby of the Council. There will also be stalls outside Wood Green Library every Saturday morning. We will not go away - our schools are not for sale!

■ *Haringey Against Privatisation* can be contacted at PO Box 8446 London N17 6NZ

**Demonstration Saturday 5th December 1 pm Ducketts Common (Turpik Lane Tube) Lobby Haringey Council Monday 14th December 6pm Civic Centre Wood Green London N22.**



Stairgrad O'Neill

Tempers run high as Birmingham City council discusses handing over hundreds of houses to a new Estates Renewal Challenge Fund, which will mean higher rents.

## Housing battles hot up

**Elkie Dee**

**BEHIND** Tony Blair's pronouncement that sink estates should simply be demolished are plans to encourage the privatisation of Council housing all over the country.

Tenants are offered incentives to vote for privatisation of their homes by promises of repairs and investment, so long as they agree that housing associations will take over the management of their estates. The housing associations "buy" the housing with huge loans from banks, to be paid for by rent increases set above the rate of inflation.

Campaigns are springing up all over the country against this underhand privatisation, developing links between tenants and affected workers.

On the Lee Bank Estate in Birmingham, tenants and Unison members talked about how to campaign for estate renovation funds to be given without the strings of privatisation. The meeting was organised by the Birmingham Community Conference.

In Camden, tenants have demonstrated outside Council meetings against the threat to bulldoze two run down blocks in Kentish Town. Before the last local government elections, privatisation proposals were withdrawn in the face of opposition against the borough. A housing strategy document published in August indicates that the

St Helens Council had spent over £750,000 on glossy brochures and advisors and still suffered a humiliating defeat. At the last meeting of the Housing and Environmental Services Committee, Labour Councillors commented that it was a "disastrous and embarrassing defeat". The meeting also agreed to suspend any future privatisation of housing for the next 3 years. The Direct Works Shop Stewards Committee and hundreds of Wargrave tenants were over the moon.

The campaign has only just begun. The next step is to force the Council to carry out its legal obligations to repair all the houses on the estate. A meeting on November 18, attended by 45 tenants unanimously decided to take legal action under the Housing Act via a Solicitor to order the Council to get repairs carried out. They also agreed to campaign to get central heating and fencing for all 800 properties.

The North West TUC Region Council unanimously agreed to fight council house privatisation across the region. A conference will be held in January with delegates from affected trade unions and tenants groups. Liverpool Unison City Branch has begun to mobilise together with the Merseyside Association Of TUCs to resist the draconian Liberal Democrat Council policy to offload all 44,000 council houses within the next 5 years. Unison has advertised in the Liverpool Echo and leafleted two areas picked for transfers in Speke/Garston (4,110 houses) and Pinehurst (750 houses). Three public meetings attracted around 500 tenants.

This protest includes legal attempts to stop the ballot taking place because of the lack of media impartiality over the transfers. This included a local radio presenter calling for a yes vote for transfer, in addition to Liverpool Council spending around £5 million on advertising. A joint union/tenant campaign is now developing across Merseyside, and is attracting much media attention.

## St Helens Victory against Council House sales

**Glenn Voris, Secretary of Merseyside TUC (in a personal capacity)**

THE CAMPAIGN against the transfer of 800 council houses on the Wargrave Estate in St Helens gained an important victory on October 26 when tenants rejected plans to privatise their estate by a margin of 61 percent to 39.

This result is the only victory so far in the North West against any proposed transfer and has started a determined campaign across the region to fight off privatisation. Glen Voris reports:

## Fury as Straw strips school assets

**A. Teacher**

**PRIVATISATION** of education came a step closer with a press conference on November 12 at Westminster City Hall.

In his last act before retiring as Chair of Governors of Pimlico School, Jack Straw teamed up with the Tory Council and the property developers to announce that demolition of the school will go ahead, and that in order to make re-building the school attractive to the developers, 23 per cent of the prime SW1 site is to be handed over to them.

The profits from the proposed luxury apartments alone could be bigger than the cost of rebuilding the school, and the developers will still be paid, on top of that,

an annual fee for providing the new school building.

The government will be locked into a 35 year commitment to pay the developers to provide the school building. But OFSTED inspectors, so popular with New Labour, have pronounced that the existing space was "barely adequate" and is in fact below DFE guidelines.

The press conference was originally planned for the school and was only moved to City Hall at the last minute - a wise decision since hundreds of students refused to return to lessons after morning break in protest against PFI.

Governors were not informed of the press conference, and several parent governors who turned up at City Hall were excluded.

The narrow majority of governors in favour of PFI has now changed, after one of Straw's allies resigned and took his child out of the school following no confidence votes by teachers and parents.

It is plain that Council's promises not to go against the wishes of Governors or Straw's own pledge, when standing for election as a parent Governor, to respect the wishes of parents, are - like other New Labour promises - used to get elected and then thrown away. Opponents of PFI make three main points.

● Firstly, the school building is sound, though years of neglect by Westminster Council (the Tories flagship) has meant there is a backlog of repairs. But repairs

wouldn't interest the developers who require big sweeteners.

● The cost to the public of using PFI to re-build the school will be bigger than if the State itself borrowed the capital. The only way the capital cost can be kept down is to give public assets - in this case nearly a quarter of the school site, to the developers.

● Finally, this would be a big step towards the privatisation of education because once you accept "market logic" in providing school buildings (and services like schoolkeepers, security and cleaning) then it's a very short step to handing the hiring of teachers over to them as well.

Of course Blair's New Labour is based on an old idea - that the market (by which he means capi-

talism) will provide better services at a lower cost than the State.

This is not true of course, but opponents of PFI at Pimlico recognise that even if we could show PFI was more expensive, New Labour would still go ahead with it, because politically they're on the side of capital.

Knowing that, and what it means for working class pupils, is what fuels the anger of so many parents and staff at Pimlico.

If "market forces" are allowed free reign in education, the small minority (like Blair himself) able to afford a good education might get it. The majority will have to try their luck in the reserve army of labour. And that's not very new either.



# “John Prescott, an RMT member, is dishing out worse conditions than those imposed by the Tories”

Over the next four months the Rail & Maritime, Transport workers Union (RMT) will be holding elections for its General Secretary, amid growing problems for the union and its members. *Socialist Outlook* interviewed RMT National Executive member GREG TUCKER about the issues at stake.

**SO: What do you think is the key challenge facing the union over the next year?**

GT: The core of our members' work on what was British Rail. They are now divided up into over one hundred privatised companies.

The key to our future is developing an industrial strategy that reunites rail workers and rebuilds our organisation in the face of this attack

We have attempted to do this over the last few months in one sector with a series of linked infrastructure company disputes. Rather than wait for the inevitable attacks on our members' jobs and conditions we have put forward our own demands and mobilised our members around them.

Whilst we have been successful in some companies our fight has shown just how poorly organised we are in others. It is clear that, with a firm display of leadership, our members are prepared to stand up and fight. But as a Union we have failed to deliver to our full potential.

Far too often our representatives have been cautious and bowed to management pressure. Members have realised this and reacted accordingly. Without confidence in their leaders they have lacked the will to risk a battle.

Elsewhere, on the buses, among lorry drivers and our catering members we face a range of threats, from de-recognition of the Union, personal contracts and the introduction of self-employment.

Some areas have been seriously neglected. Red Star members, for instance, have had a wage freeze for some years and pay cut this year. Their jobs have been franchised off into a myriad of small independent units. A strike this week has led to management threats to sack every union member taking action.

**SO: What changes do you think need to make in the way the union functions to take forward these battles?**

GT: Defending our members requires a root and branch reor-



Time and again RMT members have shown they are willing to fight management, if given a clear and firm lead from the union.

ganisation of the Union.

We need a national leadership prepared to throw its weight behind members' aspirations. Far too often national officials are content merely to contain the members' wishes. They want an easy life, safe to enjoy the privileges they obtain from members' subs.

This is partly to be addressed by putting all officials' positions up for election every five years. But it also needs a fundamental change in the political climate inside the Union.

In each company we need to ensure that our members have the representatives they deserve. Not ones that just kow-tow to management, but reps prepared to organise resistance.

This means instituting a more thorough democratic process to ensure the members can choose who they want to represent them – and a rigorous education process so their reps have the necessary tools to do the job they are entrusted to do.

In the face of new privatised companies trying to undermine our organisation it means finding resources to ensure we recruit and organise an absolute

majority of transport workers. This is not about gimmicks such as trade union credit cards – but a serious approach to convince every worker that being a trade union member is in their direct interests; that our collective strength can deliver real victories.

**SO: So what stance do you think the RMT should take towards the government?**

GT: However well we organise the shop floor, a range of problems can only be resolved with government intervention.

For instance, our shipping members are fighting to protect

themselves from attacks from ruthless employers such as P&O. A political solution to the problems of the maritime industry is necessary. But the government is busy cosying up to the same employers, offering them subsidies, grants etc. even while they make our members redundant.

Our industrial strategy has to be linked to a broader political strategy for dealing with the transport industry. RMT members had great hopes for the new Labour government. Whilst they had few illusions that our problems would be solved overnight they expected to see progress on bringing the rail industry back into public hands, that a prioritised integrated transport policy would deal with the effects of bus de-regulation.

Instead, they have seen Tony Blair fawning over Richard Branson and other private companies bosses and now planning to privatise London Underground as well. To their horror LUL members are discovering that John Prescott, an RMT member, is dishing out worse conditions than those imposed by the Tories on British Rail workers.

Whilst Prescott likes to talk about introducing a new tougher regulatory regime for the rail industry it is clear that the government will be content to allow the operating franchises to be renewed. Progress on a dramatically watered down transport White Paper is threatened in case it upsets New Labour's Tory constituency.

RMT members rightly feel let down by the Labour government – but we have no excuse when we place no pressure on the government to act any differently.

Despite clear Union policy on these matters, very little has been done nationally to press our demands.

It has been left to the local LUL leadership to develop any strategy opposing privatisation. Knapp has refused to do anything that might upset his rela-

tionship with John Prescott and the RMT's sponsored MPs. Our Annual General Meeting in June demanded that our MPs support Union policy. We are still waiting for anything to be done to implement this.

Some members think we should just walk away from Labour. Rather, we need to be mobilising our members to make the government clearly aware of the price they will pay in ignoring our wishes.

**SO: What are the key issues the TUC should be fighting around? What role do you think the RMT should play in assisting this?**

GT: In as much as the Left in the Union has been able to develop Union policy, we have been one of the few Unions presenting any sort of fight.

But we cannot continue to fight alone. It is important, as a Union that we work to force the whole of the movement to stand up and fight. The TUC must be pushed to oppose all anti-union laws, not just to accept what crumbs Peter Mandelson is prepared to offer as part of "Fairness At Work".

The Liverpool Dockers and others over the last years and the Jubilee Line electricians today have shown that it is possible to fight, irrespective of the legal restraints.

Instead of repudiations and sell-outs we need a movement prepared to fight to defend all its members from attack, whether their disputes are "legal" or not.

Instead of trying to "negotiate" some improvements to government policies on such items as a minimum wage and continued privatisation we need a TUC prepared to mobilise the strength of our movement in favour of the interests of working people.

**SO: What do you think will happen if there are no changes in the direction of**

the union?

GT: At the moment, it often appears that rather than represent the wishes of Union members our leadership is more concerned about how things will look to their friends in the leadership of the TUC and Labour Party. That cannot be allowed to continue.

Years of decline under the Tories have taken their toll. The RMT is far weaker than it was, with only a third of the members it had in the 1970's. This is not only because of drastic changes in the transport industry; we no longer can rely on a closed shop delivering 100% membership for us.

In some areas we are now a minority union. We have been forced to slim down our apparatus, so delivering a poorer service to members.

The very survival of the Union is still threatened by financial problems. Despite interminable discussions about internal restructuring nothing seems to get done to actually solve this crisis. The Union appears incapable of making the necessary changes to ensure its survival.

Things must change. Forget the gimmicks of the TUC's Recruitment Academy, the Union needs to go out and organise in every workplace, showing through its actions that it is worth joining. We have to change the way we operate so that our members have a direct stake in our future. Not as some remote body but as something they feel part of.

That means

- increasing investment in educating our activists and developing the practical services we deliver

- putting resources into dealing with the everyday issues our members confront and cutting away at the bureaucratic apparatus

- dealing with our financial crisis by targeting our resources where they are really effective.

The RMT is proud of its heritage as the "industrial" union for transport workers. We have always rejected any craft mentality.

Despite all our difficulties with the other rail unions the clear need for unity has never been more obvious. We need to continue to wage a fight for the unity of all rail workers in one union and for all transport workers to organise together.

The RMT faces major challenges. Now more than ever it needs a determined leadership prepared to develop a fighting strategy, industrially and politically.

**We must ensure we recruit and organise an absolute majority of transport workers**

**We need to continue to wage a fight for the unity of all rail workers in one union**



# Public risk and private reward: Leeds leads the way

Even the best political programme is of little value unless it is connected to grassroots activity. BOB WOOD reports on a campaign in South Leeds over a proposed major redevelopment at the Leeds United ground at Elland Road. Some hard lessons are being learnt about New Labour.

THE TRADITIONAL working class game of football is currently changing rapidly. The abolition of terraces and new all-seater stadiums are coupled with increased ticket price well beyond the reach of many fans.

At the same time, many club owners are diversifying their activities - Chelsea now has a hotel and a restaurant adjacent to the ground. Shops for the sale of replica strips at absurd prices are now standard.

Leeds United, in conjunction with the City Council, is not about to be left behind. It proposes to increase seating at Elland Road by 5,000 to 45,000 and build an arena next to the ground with a capacity of 16,000, as well as a hotel and other leisure facilities.

The idea for an arena came originally from Leeds City Council. As an aspiring European city, Leeds desperately needed a concert arena. In order to compete successfully for inward invest-

ment, Leeds wants facilities comparable with other cities. Sheffield and Birmingham have arenas, and so does Manchester, Leeds' rival across the Pennines. The City Council owned the stadium and the land round about - all it needed was a developer.

Media group Caspian bought the club two or three years ago, probably because of the investment opportunity they saw waiting. In competition with other development companies, Caspian (now in their new guise as Leeds Sporting plc) was awarded the contract to build the arena by the City Council.

In a complicated deal, Leeds Sporting acquired the site from the Council for just over £11m, although it was independently valued at around £27m. The council agreed to payment in stages, partly in cash and partly in shares.

## Free tickets

Ownership of the arena site remains with the council until completion of the development. As well as an Executive Box, the council will also continue to get free tickets.

Early this year Leeds Sporting unveiled their planning application. As a land owner and a major shareholder in the developer, it seemed that granting the planning permission would be a formality for Leeds City Council, acting as the planning authority.

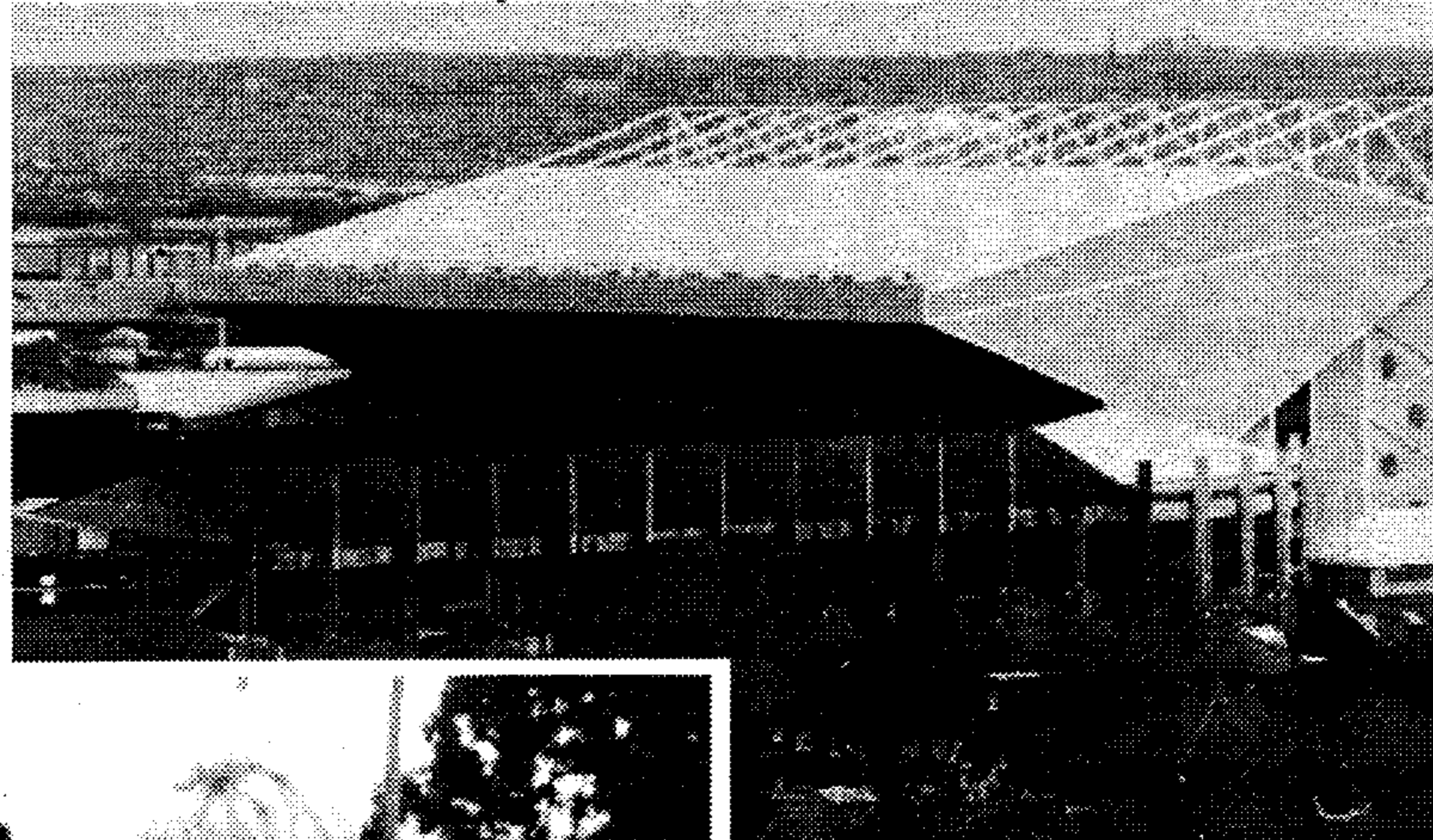
Consultation was kept to a minimum. Most local residents only found out about the proposals

from notices on lamp posts. Given the failure of the council to explain what was proposed, the local Labour Party branch decided to hold a consultation meeting for local people.

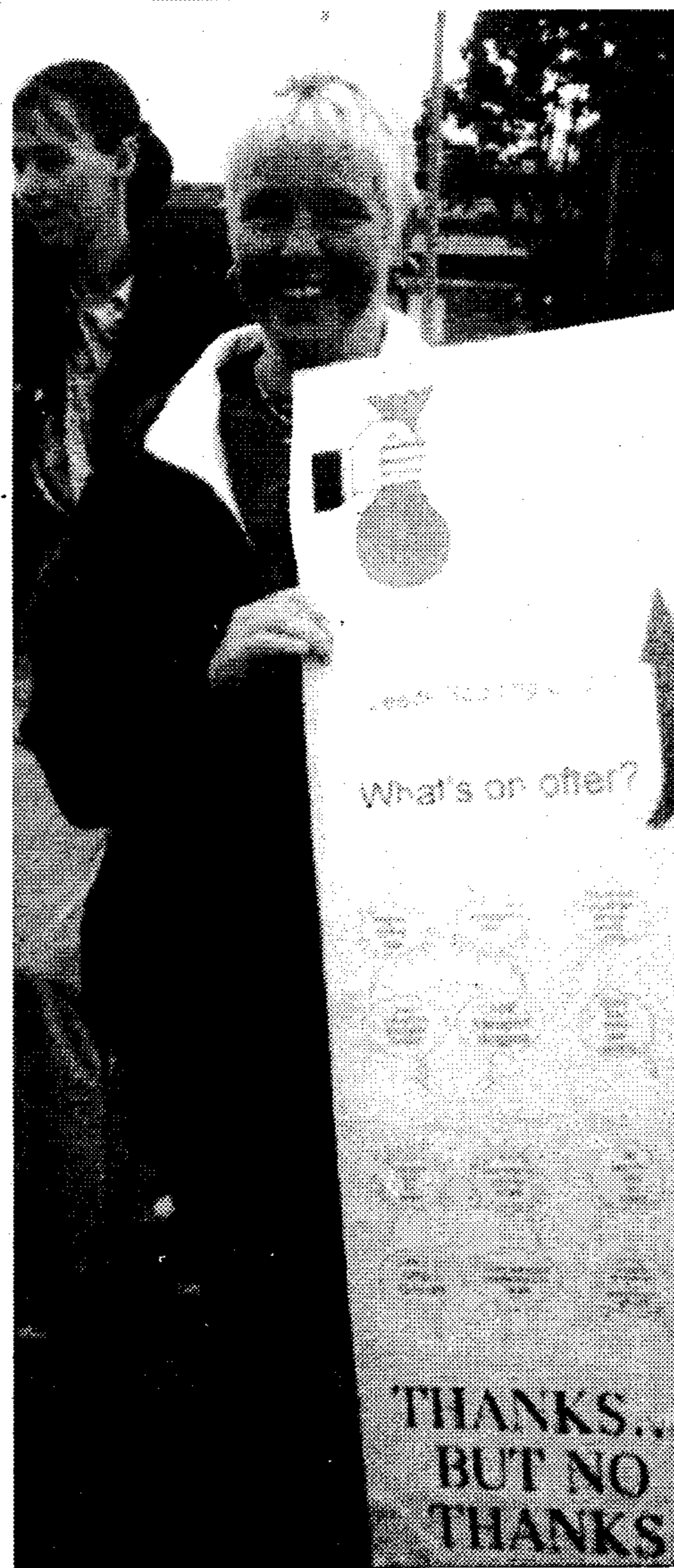
They were amazed when more than 300 turned out on a Saturday afternoon. However, only one of the six invited Labour councillors bothered to turn up. The meeting voted unanimously to oppose the application and also set up the South Leeds Action Group. This has continued since to meet weekly and campaign vigorously against the development.

If it goes ahead, extra traffic, pollution, noise and disturbance will make living in this inner city area even worse than it already is. The area is surrounded by motorways, and unemployment, poverty and ill-health are rife. Asthma, respiratory and heart ailments, and cancer are all well above average.

One of the selling points of the scheme has been its job-creating potential. Yet these jobs would be available to local people even if the arena were to be built on an alternative city centre site. If built there the impact on resi-



The present stadium



that permission will be granted. As one councillor commented in a local church magazine, it is difficult for 'ordinary members of the public' to believe that the Council can judge the planning application impartially when it owns shares in the developer.

## Suspicion

Even the Nolan Committee on standards in public life recognised the problem. It reported last year that: "Public suspicion is created by the power of local authorities to grant themselves planning permission for their own land and developments."

The two inner city wards affected by the development at Elland Road are among the safest Labour seats in the city. And yet local Labour councillors have treated their voters with contempt. Protesters have been told that they are simply 'an unrepresentative, vocal minority', and asked at councillors' surgeries: 'Who sent you?'

The development has not yet been stopped, but the South Leeds Action Group can claim a limited victory already, for construction was due to start in the summer of 1998 but work has already delayed by nearly a year.

Residents in these areas are expected to vote Labour loyally at elections, and to be grateful for Regeneration funds. But they have been denied control over decisions that affect their lives. The Labour Council in Leeds, as elsewhere, basking in a huge majority, would rather talk to big business than its natural supporters.

When applications of this kind are submitted, and local residents object, councillors and MPs are normally quick to lend their support. A proposal for a major leisure development on the Leeds ring road, including a cinema, a casino and a bowling alley attracted opposition from councillors from all three main parties, and both local MPs. The contrast with the situation over the much larger development at Elland Road is stark.

In spite of widely publicised opposition by local people, only one local councillor had the courage to oppose the application. He has now been deselected, and there are strong rumours that his opposition played a part in this.

## Prescott

The Planning Committee has now said that it is 'minded' to approve the application, although the final decision rests with John Prescott, the minister responsible. Most local residents think

## Millbank

As a spokesperson for the South Leeds Action Group said in an interview with Radio Leeds, "Whatever happened to democracy?"

As a spokesperson for the South Leeds Action Group said in an interview with Radio Leeds, "Whatever happened to democracy?"

The Leeds experience is likely to be repeated elsewhere. In mid-November, the Paymaster-General, Geoffrey Robinson, said: "We have made great strides with the Private Finance Initiative in the past year. But we must continue to identify and develop partnerships and opportunities with the public and private sectors."

"We need to exploit all commercial potential in public sector assets through a sensible balance of risk and reward."

No doubt he means public risk and private reward!

# Labour's U-turn triggers Birmingham road rage

## Marian Brain

THE LABOUR Government has shown its real colours where the environment is concerned. Its decision to change its policy on the Birmingham North Relief Road not only represents a U-turn from its policy in opposition, but is a complete capitulation to big business interests.

The government's decision to make this the first major toll road in Britain is not going to improve the quality of life or the environment in the Midlands. We have to step up the campaigning to get the government stop this road from being built.

The decision is bad on two levels. If more roads are to be built, they should be built out of taxation. The road system should be free at the point of use, like other public services and public infrastructure. We cannot allow a situation where it is only businesses that can afford to use roads.

But of even more importance is the impact that the building of the road will have on the environment. The stakes are high - 27 miles of Green Belt will be



BNRR is motivated by profit, which cuts across the interests of the environment and those of workers. Some consultants are furious at this, and want BNRR to re-think their plans due to the damage they are doing.

On October 5, the Alliance against the Birmingham

destroyed, and two nationally important sites of special scientific interests (SSSIs) will be damaged.

What measures can be taken that reduce congestion on the roads that do not damage the environment? Is it possible for cars to be shared? Can goods and services be produced on the local level?

We know that if the road is built we would soon see an increase in car traffic and not a reduction. More and more of the green belt would be ruined, and more jobs and housing could leave the inner cities, and be relocated in this area.

Northern Relief Road went to the high court to challenge John Prescott's decision to go ahead with the motorway. The campaign representing the residents argued that the Secretary of State acted illegally in approving the UK's first toll road. They were rejected: what a surprise!

But the battle to stop this road will continue at many levels and needs to be supported by all Socialist Outlook readers.

For further information contact: Birmingham Community Conference c/o 723 Pershore Rd, Birmingham B29 7NY.



**As BMW milk "crisis" to dictate changes to hard-won agreements ...**

# No concessions on Rover jobs or wages!

**by a car worker**

OVER THE PAST 4 weeks there has been a crescendo of leaks to the press suggesting that the Rover car plant at Longbridge, Birmingham will close, with the loss of thousands of jobs, unless the trade unions agree to vicious new attacks on working practices.

BMW, the owners of Rover, have declared that because of the strength of the pound there has been a fall in sales. They claim Rover is losing vast sums of money, mentioning amounts between £300 and £600 million. They say that they are not willing to accept this.

Management argue that because productivity is greater in Germany, Rover workers here will have to accept "banking" of hours - a system where you work extra when the company wants you, and are laid off when they don't - in order to save overtime payments. The company say publicly that they want many other savings.

Rover management have been carrying out discussions with a six-person sub-committee of the Rover Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC). These discussions have been reported to the JNC itself, but the content has been kept secret from the membership.

TGWU General Secretary Bill Morris, who is supposedly nothing to do with the negotiations, has stated in an interview with *The Sun* on November 20:

"We cannot afford not to reach an agreement. The consequences of not reaching an agreement would be too catastrophic to contemplate. Both sides recognise the importance of an agreement to protect jobs and to safeguard the interests of the motor industry. It will certainly create some new principles and establish new parameters working in Rover and the motor manufacturing industry."

He went on to admit that he would be prepared to see such agreements spread to other industries, openly identifying himself and the union with the cause of the company, saying "This will be seen as a no winners deal, except for the industry, it will maintain our [sic!] place as a motor manufacturer."

Only last year management pushed through the first 3 year deal in Rover, arguing that they needed this for "stability"; they had to plan their costs, they said. They avoided negotiating the "banking" of hours then, though the May 1997 edition of their magazine (*Torque*) said issues being discussed with the trade unions included "flexible working time".

The 1997 review was supposed to settle all wages and conditions issues for 2 years. It is a signed agreement, as is the "Rover Tomorrow" agreement that is supposed to guarantee 'jobs for life'.

BMW are trying to use the pre-

sent crisis in the motor industry to force through things it always wanted, plus more besides. The comparison with German workers is quite sickening.

BMW workers are paid twice as much, are on a 35 hour week, have 6 weeks holiday (compared to 5 here), have 16 additional bank holidays, and many other benefits. Yet the whole of the British media presents the picture in almost daily articles that whatever the company says has to be accepted in order for the firm to be competitive.

By contrast, BMW's chief spokesperson in Munich has stated: "It is almost a relief to employ people in countries like the UK where you are actually allowed to sack people."

"The social costs of employing people in Germany are awful. You have no freedom to decide what you do with the workforce."

What is clear from this statement is that the BMW are also using this situation to prepare attacks on their German workforce, by threatening to move production to "cheaper" plants in Britain if Bill Morris and co manage to force through further wage cuts.

When a delegate conference was held of stewards from the whole of Rover on November 21 the details of the negotiations weren't revealed, but it was said that the company was "looking at everything", including the sick pay scheme - and virtually every other benefit that it has taken the trade unions decades to achieve.

Management need the agreement of the trade union leadership, because the only other way

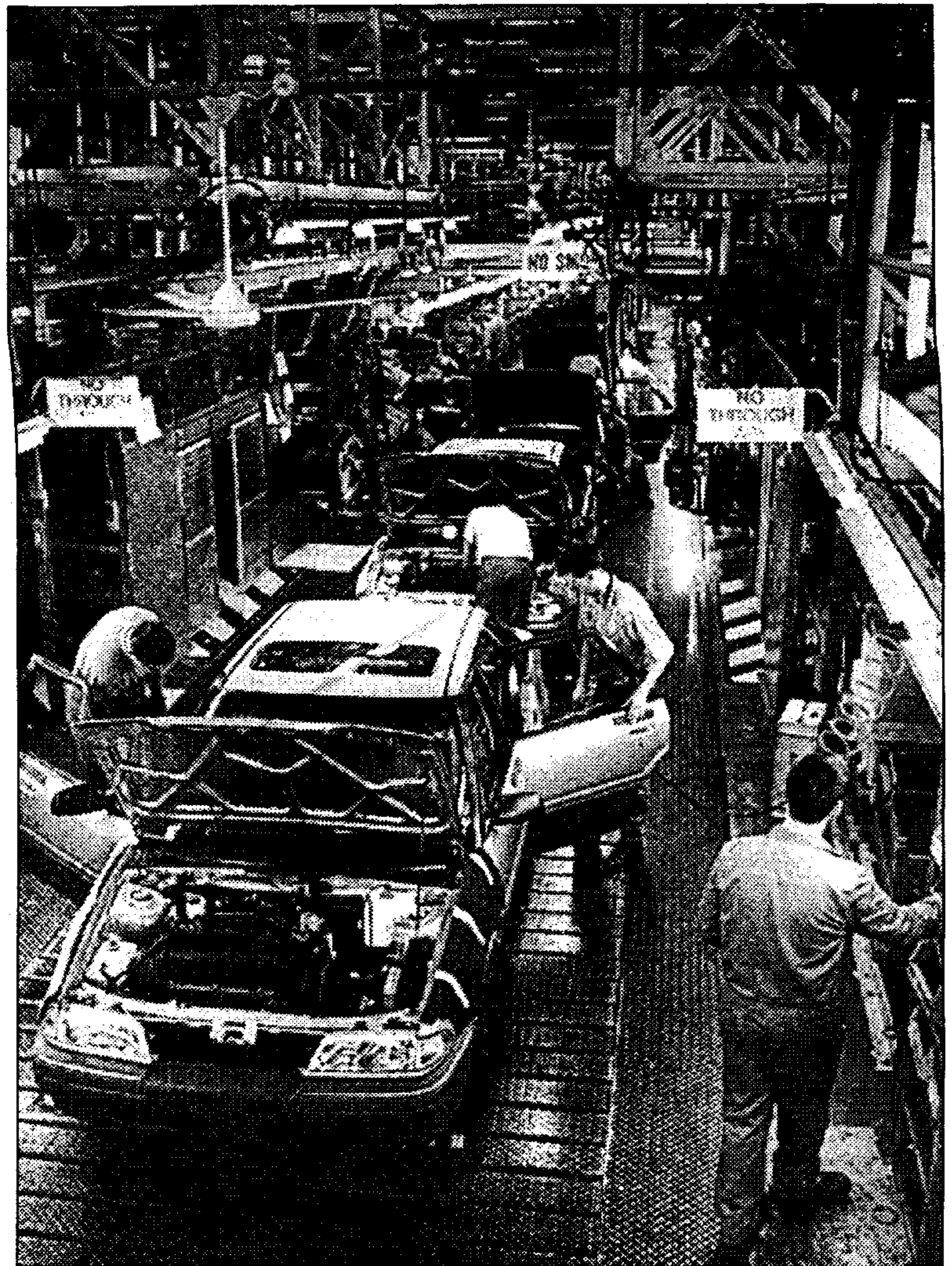
to break signed agreements is to give 3 months notice of a change of contract, and on the day that it expires if the workers come to work then they have won. But there is a strong chance that they won't, and there will be a confrontation.

The response of the union leadership has been consistently to play into the company's hands. In the September issue of the *TGWU Record*, national official Tony Woodley argues that productivity increases have been so great in all car firms that they should all be on a 35 hour week, and get wage increases above inflation, and he urges us to "look at the fat cats". But he is now sat with the fat cats, discussing which of his members' rights can be given away. The term "negotiations" is used, but only one side is giving.

At the same conference at which Woodley was speaking, Peter Unterweger of the International Metalworkers Federation (of which BMW workers are members), said we were seeing "a race to the bottom" that we needed "international solidarity". Not even a word of this has been offered.

The TGWU has participated in talks throughout the UK motor industry, in which "banking" hours have been conceded, almost always with the use of threats. This includes Vauxhall, Jaguar and Peugeot: now Ford management, too, is saying that none of their UK plants are safe - the sort of statement that is always followed by an offensive. Car workers in the same union,

**BMW are also using this situation to prepare attacks on their German workforce**



Longbridge: lower pay, longer hours, less holidays than BMW's German plants

and often the same company, should not be "competitive" with each other, unless it is in order to improve conditions towards the best.

We must meet across company and country, and demand that our unions work together against the employers. The defence of Longbridge should be the clarion call. Defend jobs for life, but not by productivity concessions that end up losing more jobs.

If there is not enough work, then there should be work sharing, with no loss of pay. This is vital, because it appears that Woodley is talking about giving up part of the next two wage increases in exchange for a 35 hour week.

Concessions such as this will never be regained. It will be a permanent loss of earnings, as would banking hours in terms of overtime pay.

To the employers cry of poverty - BMW just made a huge profit - we say "open the books" to an

elected committee of workers and sympathetic experts. Even *The Express* has been able to show how BMW turned last year's Rover £128 million operating profit into a loss. If the company still feel that they cannot operate, then it is clear that they and the component industry should be nationalised, or in the case of Rover re-nationalised.

The agreement in Rover is for all Rover workers - the company is trying to use the situation at Longbridge to attack all of its employees. If they did close Longbridge then it would affect all the others, because they could not sustain a dealer network to market the remaining models.

The Longbridge fight is everybody's, but these workers must realise that to give in now will lead to other attacks, and eventually to the destruction of their trade union. The only way is to say no - and appeal for solidarity from workers in the rest of Rover and BMW.

## Fight now to defend civil service jobs!

RIGHT WING "moderates" within the Civil Service union, PCS are wrong. New Labour is intent on smashing up the Civil Service rather than saving it.

A government bent on privatising the Tube and Royal Mail will certainly sacrifice civil servants to the speculators. The government's refusal to reduce the hundreds of pay bargaining units we face, and the pay strategies it has designed for civil service managers, demonstrate that it seeks to further divide and rule PCS members.

In the merged union covering all civil service sections, it should be easier to co-ordinate pay campaigns and struggles against privatisation, but the moderate National Executive will not support such activity.

Left Unity, which controls many Section Executives, promises to provide such a lead, but it has failed to deliver on this commitment.

Left Unity's weakness stems

from its inability to organise cross section initiatives, partly because some of its leading lights are purely concerned with their own electoral fortunes. These "leaders" have become as moderate in their own Sections as the moderates are on the National Executive.

Common action is also prevented by Left Unity Section Executives adopting different approaches to crucial questions.

### Rotten deal

The Employment Service Executive's recommendation of a rotten pay deal and approval of youth slave labour under the National Traineeship scheme embarrassed and undermined the work of the Benefits Agency Executive, which rejected a similar dismal pay offer and opposed outright the introduction of National Trainees into its section.

In the Employment Service, a reaction to the sell-outs of the majority of the Left Unity Execu-

tive which included their support for the New Deal was the decision of Socialist Caucus to electorally challenge them. This split in Left Unity in the Employment Service dominated proceedings at the recent Left Unity National Conference.

The conference revealed the depth of crisis inside Left Unity, which is partly a reflection of the crisis inside the Socialist Party, the main force behind it.

The attendance was pitiful, and hardly any supporters of Broad Left 84, one of the three main components forming Left Unity, turned up. The Socialist Party and its allies did not, as expected, attempt to exclude Socialist Caucus, probably realising it would spell the death of Left Unity.

No major campaigns were launched by the Conference, and without them, it will be difficult to heal divisions.

The PCS Conference offers the opportunity for a greater number

of Left Unity supporters to discuss together the way forward in the union. An honest approach is needed to difficulties. At least that was the spirit of the debate on the ES Section at the LU Conference.

Whilst being critical of the Employment Service Executive, the Left Unity Benefits Agency Executive deserves some credit in the past year for their rejection of the pay level offered to their members.

The loss of the pay vote was mainly due to the interference of the moderate National Executive, preventing them getting their message over.

This example shows that Left Unity can work at Section level, and the necessity for it to work at a national level.

Even if the left cannot unite in one organisation in the PCS, it must begin to unite around a series of campaigns and struggles to stop Blair savaging the Civil Service.



# Why left must say no to Jenkins' feeble PR fudge!

Neil Murray

**M**ATTERS are moving apace around issues of voting systems, and Labour/Liberal Democrat alliances.

There is considerable confusion on the left about voting systems. For some the starting point is not the voting system as such, but who they want to see win.

So for many in the Labour Party, First Past The Post has to be defended because anything else allows the Liberal Democrats to determine the outcome. Some on the Labour Left state explicitly that they are opposed to any system which might prevent Labour governing alone – an argument for ballot rigging if ever there was one.

Socialists, (i.e. those who want to see capitalism replaced by socialism), are not advocates of parliamentary democracy.

Parliamentary democracy is a facade which masks the fact that the people making the real decisions over our lives are not parliamentarians, but the owners and controllers of big companies.

We want to see it replaced by a system of workers' councils, or soviets, running society.

Any government in capitalist society acts primarily as facilitator and arbitrator of the interests of capitalism. However the greater democracy there is, the greater the space is for the working class to organise.

This is why until we are able to replace bourgeois democracy by a superior, socialist, system, we fight for the maximum freedom and democracy under capitalism. This means the right to organise, to strike, and to demonstrate; but it also means that as long as par-

liament exists we are in favour of elections to it being as fair as possible.

Socialists use parliamentary elections and, if elected, parliament itself, as a platform to argue the need for the destruction of capitalism and to support and encourage the struggles of the working class.

A voting system which allows socialists some chance of getting elected also means they will get more of a hearing in the election campaign and beyond.

Any system which can deprive a party winning 25 per cent of the popular vote of any seats in parliament – as First Past The Post (FPTP) can – is undemocratic. The make up of parliament should reflect as directly as possible the way the electorate votes.

FPTP means that a small proportion of the electorate in marginal seats determine the outcome of the election.

Governments get a large majority of seats in the Commons on a minority vote, and many people feel disenfranchised.

The arguments of the defenders of First Past The Post in the labour movement vary, but are usually a combination of the following:

- that PR inevitably produces coalition government and gives disproportionate power to small parties;
- this in turn mitigates against 'stable government';
- we would not have had Labour governments under PR;
- PR allows the far right representation which they would not get otherwise;

**Socialists, are not advocates of parliamentary democracy.**



Control freak running rampant: Blair

● PR removes the link between the MP and a geographical constituency.

Some on the Labour left are prone to announcing that PR is a 'class issue', and that anyone supporting PR is taking sides against the working class, conveniently forgetting that the Tories are the most ardent defenders of First Past The Post. Supporters of PR have always included the likes of Ken Livingstone and Arthur Scargill.

Among the strongest opponents of PR in the Labour Party are not only Dennis Skinner on the left, but also Jack Straw and Stuart Bell, stalwarts of the right.

The recent glossy pamphlet from the First Past The Post campaign is sponsored by the AEEU, recently renowned for its heavy funding of the Blairite slate for the NEC elections.

It contains supportive quotes from several Tory MPs, including John Major and the Party chair!

Why socialists should favour stable government is a mystery. We have just had 18 years of stable Conservative rule, and a lot of good it did us. Stable government under capitalism surely means an unchallenged ability to carry out a programme in the interests of capitalism.

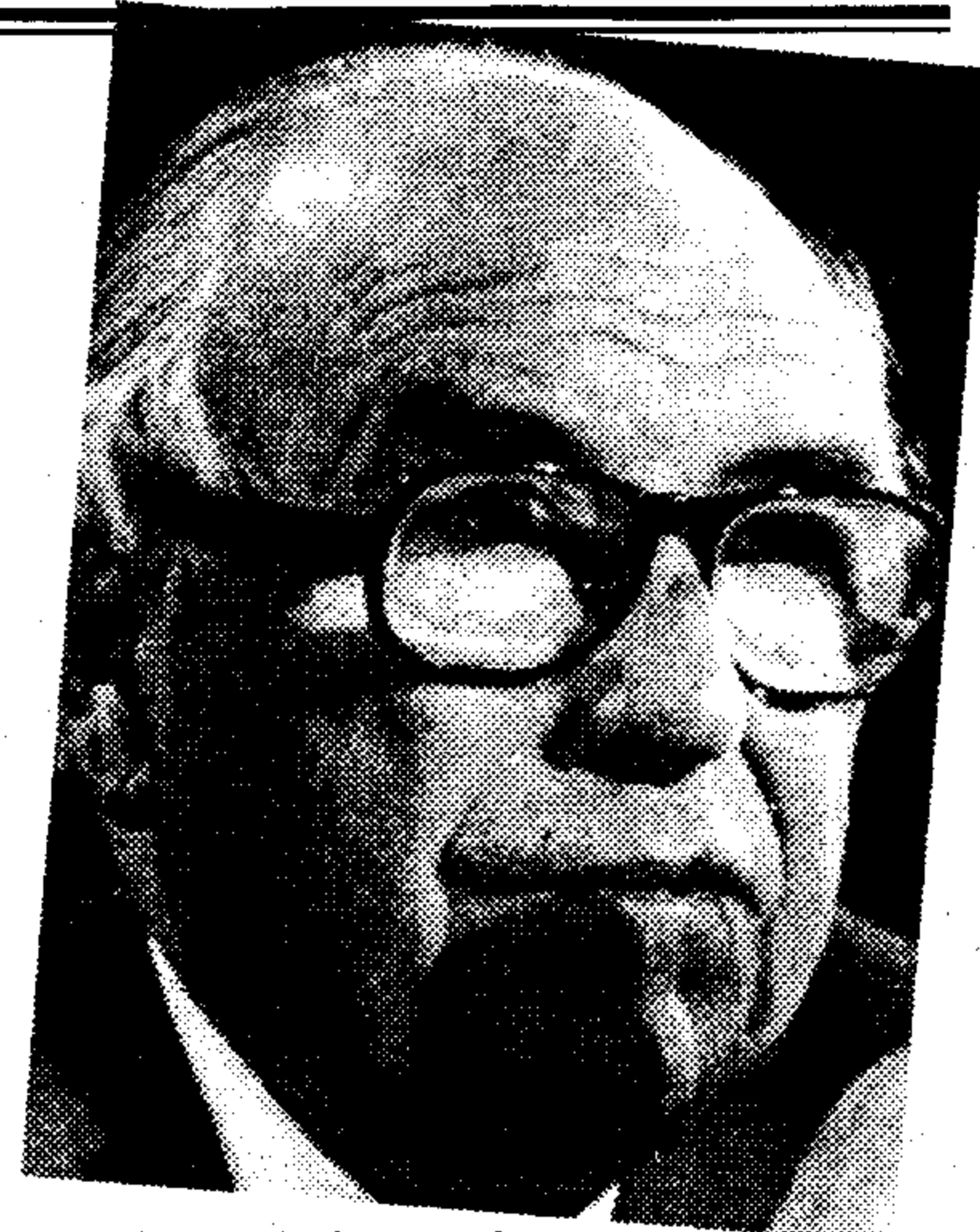
Shouldn't socialists therefore favour *unstable* government? Of course, we prefer governments being destabilised by working class action, but if the electoral system helps, who are we to complain?

As for coalitions and the election of fascists, these are political questions which cannot be wished away by rigging the electoral system to make them less likely. The growth of fascism has to be prevented by posing a socialist alternative and by mass mobilisations. Fascists have anyway been elected under FPTP.

FPTP did not prevent the Lib-Lab pact of the 1970s, and it is not stopping Blair and Ashdown's

current rapprochement, despite Labour's overwhelming majority in parliament. Such coalitions have to be fought *politically*, regardless of the voting system. The argument has to be raised for the political independence of the workers' movement from bourgeois parties.

The opposition to PR reveals a vision of politics which is purely parliamentary among sections of the Labour Left. The struggle for socialism gets subsumed in a desire to see Labour elected at all costs.



Jenkins: fudge-maker

The trajectory of the current government

reveals the bankruptcy of such a view. It is an echo of the view put forward by the right during the Tory government, that all we could do was wait for a Labour government, to avoid leading any kind of fight against their policies in the immediate term.

Support for PR does not by any means imply support for the proposals of the Jenkins commission. The system it has put forward – 'AV plus' – is the least proportional of any system devised.

Even the strongest advocates of PR have difficulty in arguing the merits of this system over FPTP. Its small 'top up' quota would mean that a third largish party would get nearer to its proportional number of seats in parliament, but small parties which got around 10% of the votes would not.

It creates two different categories of MPs, those directly

elected and those from the top up list.

Of all the voting systems on offer, only one, Single Transferable Vote really offers anything approaching true proportionality for all parties which get above a basic quota of votes. Because this involves multi-member constituencies there is not the same identification of an MP with a (relatively) small geographical area as for FPTP, but this is a small price to pay for a fairer system.

The fudge which Jenkins has come up with seems based on the calculation that it is the least the Liberal Democrats would accept (given they have long campaigned for STV) and the most the die-hards in the Labour leadership would accept. As with any such fudge, it has in fact satisfied nobody but those in the middle.

The timetable for discussion of the Jenkins' proposal is drawn-out, probably in the hope of wearing down the opposition.

Labour Party conference won't take a position until October 2000, with a referendum some time after that. It is unlikely a new system will come in before the next general election.

Activists should argue in the meantime that Jenkins is unacceptable, and that STV should be adopted instead.

## Blair hooks up with Paddy's wagon

**BOTH Jenkins and Blair are well known for arguing that the split between Labour and the Liberals at the turn of the century was a mistake which they want to rectify.**

Jenkins, having failed to break the Labour Party as a class party through forming the SDP, has to seek other means. Moving towards a system which might mean Lib-Lab coalitions on a permanent basis and ultimately merger is one way of doing so. But there is more than one way to skin a cat.

Paddy Ashdown has been sitting on a Cabinet committee for the last 18 months and the recent statement from him and Blair shows a deepening of this collaboration. While the content of the statement was fairly hollow, its message was clear – closer co-operation and two fingers to those members of each party who value their

independence.

Those who might have objected, like Deputy Prime Minister Prescott, were not even told in advance. The direction is clear: the two parties will stand against each other in elections 'where appropriate'.

Riding on the back of the defeats inflicted on the labour movement by Thatcher, Blair continues to erode labour movement democracy while building on Tory policies.

Assisted in this by the willingness of all the major union leaders to absorb everything he throws at them, Blair hopes to see an organisational realignment to set the seal on his political realignment of British politics.

The fight for class independence goes on whether or not Jenkins' plan or any other form of PR is adopted.



Feet under the table?

## Is this the end of the peers show?

**THE ONLY successful resistance to Blair's centralisation at the moment is coming from the arch reactionary hereditary peers in the House of Lords. At the time of writing they have blocked his European Parliament elections bill for the fifth time. This means it will need to be re-introduced into the Queen's speech on November 24.**

Blair's "closed list" system brought widespread dissent (but little opposition) in the Labour Party, where the ranking of candidates was according to a Blairite scale of loyalty.

Voters would not have the right to vote for candidates of their choice, only for a Party list. Even Jenkins proposes an open list as part of his fudged formula.

The hypocrisy of the Liberal Democrats is shown by the fact that their peers are loyally voting for Blair's proposal, despite it being against all they have argued for.

Socialist Outlook does not defend the House of Lords, least of all the hereditary peers. We are in favour not only of abolishing the friends of Charles I and all royalty since, but the whole second chamber. We do not favour their replacement with friends of Tony Blair.

But in a stand off between the reactionary Lords and the centralisers of the Labour leadership over an undemocratic voting system, we cannot resist taking pleasure at Blair's discomfort.



# There can be life after Blair!

**Celia Foote explains how and why the Leeds Independent Left Network was set up**

IN THE run-up to the General Election of May 1997, it became apparent to a number of Labour Party members that all was not as it should be in the Party.

In the main these were members on the receiving end of the internal oppression exercised by Party officials and a select coterie of 'insider' members.

In Leeds North-East Constituency Labour Party this took the form of paid Party officials fiddling the postal vote in favour of the Blairite candidate in the Parliamentary Selection procedure, and attempting to hi-jack the following Annual General Meeting. When this failed they suspended the Constituency and six leading members of the CLP.

Following a hearing at which all the allegations against the activists were demonstrated to be untrue, national officials put together an entirely new 'case' of false allegations.

Hearings were held in secret, at which all six were found guilty, four were expelled, one suspended, and one given the task of healing the rift in the Constituency.

Political activists fuelled by a sense of outrageous injustice, and a fair degree of bloody-mindedness, never die, they reform. In the European Parliament, two MEPs had refused to sign up to New Labour's 'loyalty oath'. Ken Coates and Hugh Kerr were given the treatment by the Millbank Propaganda Unit until one wondered how such manoeuvring men had ever been tolerated by what passes for civilised society.

Keen to continue promoting their socialist politics in Britain, the two MEPs established the Independent Labour Network. At its inception they were at pains to express their regret at being unable to work within the Labour Party, and to make it clear that the Network was not a Party, but rather a forum where members of several political parties or none could discuss and promote socialist policies, politics and politicians.

Activists in Leeds North-East saw the similarities in the experiences of the two MEPs and themselves, and were interested in discovering whether other links might exist.

One year on from the General Election our concerns were more than confirmed and indeed exceeded. The Blair Government has been proved to be the true heir of Thatcherism.

It would be easy to dismiss this view as the resentful whinging of 'losers' and 'trotskyite enemies', but one need only exam-

ine the balance sheet of one year of the New Labour government to find the evidence for this position.

Not mentioned in any manifesto, but carried out with astonishing speed nonetheless, was Gordon Brown's gift of monetary control to the unelected financiers of the Bank of England.

The surprises continued with the removal of single-parent benefit, abolition of the right to free higher education, refusal to increase pensions in line with earnings, and extending the privatisation of public services, be it under the guise of 'best value', the Private Finance Initiative, or Education Action Zones.

Prisons are privatised, Legal Aid effectively abolished, and local authorities still starved of funds. 'Ethical' government has seen the continuing sale of armaments and 'crowd control' equipment to repressive regimes.

This is in sharp contrast to New Labour's behaviour towards Big Business. Corporation Tax has twice been cut and the bright young things who helped get the Leader and his ministers where they wanted to be have acquired lucrative, influential jobs. Conversely, there is the minimum wage for the starving cats, and the trade unions are marginalised.

The 1998 Party Conference saw New Labour in all its glory with Party members being used as human advertising hoardings for supermarkets, and ministers and MPs encouraged to sell their bodies to wealthy winners and diners.

A significant number of Labour Party members believe that Blair is doing to the country what he has done to the Party. Essentially this is to destroy all democratic structures in the organisation and replace them with centrally controlled, unaccountable methods.

And in whose interest does this take place? As the list above demonstrates, very few of the people who rely on benefits will find their lot

improved. Neither will the ever-expanding band of low-paid and part-time workers. Neither will those who work in the public sector be included in Mr Blair's Brave 'New Labour' World - and definitely not trade union members.

In the realisation that the Labour Party no longer holds out any hope to the unemployed, the low paid, and believers in accountable and democratic government, socialists in Leeds North-East contacted Ken Coates and Hugh Kerr. In June 1998, over fifty people attended the inaugural meeting of Leeds

Independent Labour Network. Ken Coates spoke of his belief in a just and equitable society based on socialist principles.

The Labour Party, much as at any time in its history, was threatened by the forces of the right-wing, in the interests of the rich and powerful. It was resolved to establish a Leeds group of the ILN. It will hold regular campaign and planning meetings, public meetings and social events, produce a newsletter, set up a website, and begin a supporters drive.

Other groups have been set up in Hull and Doncaster and in other parts of the country. It is intended to establish a regional network and planning is underway for a national meeting of local representatives.

Many members of the Labour



Stalingrad O'Neill

Tameside care workers, locked in a battle with a privatised employer, are among those whose demands now run counter to the whole logic of New Labour at local and national level.

Party identify with socialist aims. As the leaders of New Labour continue to remould the Party to serve capitalist interests, there is inevitably going to be more internal conflict.

The Party machinery has been developed to prevent socialists from influencing anything important. Some will leave, others may well be removed, but this will not prevent those who believe in socialism from being politically active.

The aims of the ILN are to battle on all fronts in the cause of establishing a just and fair soci-

ety based on the principles of socialism. There is a lively debate as to whether the Labour Party can ever be reclaimed, or are the structural changes irreversible?

What is needed at this time is a 'politics of inclusiveness' to enable all socialists inside and outside the Party to make a difference. Leeds ILN is committed to helping bring this about.  Celia Foote was expelled from the Labour Party earlier this year. She is a former chair of Leeds North-East CLP, and now chairs Leeds ILN.

## Progress on joint Left platform

**SOCIALISTS in London have been meeting over the last few months to discuss the possibility of putting together a common platform and list for the European Elections.**

These moves, if successful, could represent unparalleled co-operation between left currents and groups. Supporters of the Independent Labour Network, the Socialist Party, the Socialist Workers Party, the Alliance for Worker's Liberty, Socialist Democracy and Socialist Outlook have participated in these discussions.

It is not yet clear whether agreement will be reached on a common platform or whether all of the groups involved will support such a list. The impact of a possible return to First Past the Post if that is the outcome of the row with the Lords is a further complication.

Similar discussions seem to be developing in other parts of Britain. Below we print the platform currently under discussion in London:

"WE ARE STANDING in these elections to represent the demands and interests of working and jobless people.

"We believe that by its support for the priorities of profit, official Labour has deprived its supporters of political representation.

We support the struggles of the working class and all the oppressed in defence of their interests.

■ For massive public expenditure to defend jobs and services

**To ensure jobs for all**

■ For a 35 hour week without loss of pay

■ For a minimum wage of £6 an hour

■ Full trade union rights for all

■ Fight all closures and redundancies

**To save our services**

■ Tax the rich and slash the arms budget to provide proper health care, housing, education, child-care, public transport and other public services.

■ Restore and increase benefits and pensions to guarantee a decent standard of living for all.

■ Free access to high-quality education and training for all.

■ Publicly-owned, integrated, well-funded, cheap public transport in London.

■ For a Europe that puts people before profit

■ For the public ownership and democratic control of industry and finance.

■ For the immediate return to public ownership of privatised utilities.

**We are opposed to all privatisation - private profiteers should not control public services.**

■ Companies threatening closure should be taken into public ownership.

■ Profiteers should not be allowed to cut jobs.

■ Social control of industry and agriculture to stop the destruction of our planet.

**A democratic Europe to end discrimination**

■ For an end to discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, nationality, religion, age, disability or sexuality.

■ End the racism and corruption of the Metropolitan Police.

■ For the right to asylum. Scrap all racist immigration controls.

**For the unity of workers and jobless for a socialist Europe**

■ We are for a democratic and accountable people's Europe, based on socialist, environmental and inclusive policies, against the Europe of the multinationals and the bankers.

■ We reject the destructive monetarist criteria for European Monetary Union, and oppose the undemocratic European Bank.

**For a nuclear-free and peaceful Europe**

■ We are for a nuclear-free and peaceful Europe. NATO divides Europe and threatens our security.

■ Cancel Third World debt.

**Blair is doing to the country what he has done to the Party: destroying all democratic structures**

**We support the struggles of the working class**



## DEBATE:

# What really IS new about New Labour

**MARTIN WICKS, convenor of Socialist Perspectives, replies to NEIL MURRAY'S article in September's Socialist Outlook ("Not so New Labour senses its weakness").**

COMRADE Murray seriously underestimates the changes which Blair has made in the Labour Party.

Neil says you can only describe Blair as a Tory or a Liberal if you believe that there was "a 'golden age' of socialism in the Labour Party". This is false.

You do not have to believe the LP was socialist – it has never been such – to comprehend that Blair is a neo-Liberal. He really does believe in a rapprochement between social democracy and Liberalism. That was the significance of his comment last year about the 'tragedy' of the split in the ranks of 'progressives' at the turn of the century (i.e. the political break from the Liberals and the setting up of the Labour Party).

Blair's politics are firmly rooted in the legacy of Thatcherism. His policies are not just 'more right wing' as comrade Murray implies. We are talking about a government which is carrying out a policy of privatisation, whether outright, or through PFI or PPP. They are systematically dismantling all the post war reforms that social democracy introduced.

To assert, therefore, that "there are limited differences between Blair and his predecessors as Labour leader" is a touch extraordinary! This underestimation of the change is also reflected by his identification of 'social partnership' with class collaboration which has always dominated the Party.

'Social Partnership' is not just a modern form of class collaboration. It is an outlook which completely subordinates the unions to the interests of capital. It is rooted in an acceptance of the 'global market' as a positive development, and one which demands of workers that they unite with their employers in striving for success in global competition.

Class collaboration, in its many variants, was based on the idea of compromise between Capital and Labour, though this did not exclude a conflict of interests. But 'social partnership' accepts the ongoing productivity drive to make companies competitive.<sup>(1)</sup>

Indeed, the White Paper, "Fairness at Work" threatens to inscribe the 'duty' of employees to enter into a 'partnership' with their employers!

Murray says that "the most significant factor determining the right wing character of government policies is the low level of class struggle, meaning that there is very little pressure to do differently."

He concludes: "Who is to say Blair's (or Brown's) policies would not be different if the level of class struggle were not higher. It is possible that Blair could pull back under the pressure of the class struggle, or that members of the leadership could force them out."

In my view this is false. New Labour reflects the political evolution of social democracy produced by the end of post war economic growth and the changes known as 'globalisation'.



Tube workers have no doubts about the politics of New Labour as privatisation looms

It was only the fact that the Labour Party was out of power for so long which slowed its evolution in the same direction as the European and Australasian varieties, which in the 1980s introduced a series of counter-reforms and privatisations.

Blair and his coterie have accepted the ideology of 'globalisation' which they view (ironically, given the current global crisis) as a progressive force. They have abandoned traditional social democratic views on progressive taxation, on redistribution etc.

It likewise seems false to imply that there would be any significant change in their policy. While it is possible for any politician to tack course under pressure, even the Iron Lady did this, it is illusory to imagine that this government would change course significantly.

Murray says that "the Labour Party's nature has not yet changed". However, you have to examine that 'nature' as a living thing rather than a wooden category: 'bourgeois workers party'. New Labour is moving in the direction of being transformed into 'a bourgeois party sweet and simple'. The affiliation of the unions is an obstacle to this. However, we should avoid formalism.

The schema of a wholesale split of the unions from the Party, or vice versa, after which we can safely place the label 'bourgeois party' on it, is not necessarily the way events will develop. Life is always more complicated than theory.

The unions have accepted much of Blair's neo-liberal agenda. Most of them have swallowed 'social partnership' whole.

More and more Labour Councils are attacking trades unions and carrying out privatisations, including Council Housing, which you might say is the very essence of social democracy and what was known as 'municipal socialism'. Can anyone show me a Labour Council challenging the government in any way? I see no evidence.

These are not just 'more right wing policies'. They represent a fundamental political shift by social democracy: beginning the process of overturning the post war reforms they introduced, and which constituted the material basis for the mass

support they had.

The current situation, says Murray, "demands that socialists are present (in the LP) raising their criticisms and alternatives to the government's programme." The left should take heart from the fact that Blair saw the Grassroots Alliance as a threat and "step up the political and organisational assault".

This view will no doubt be bolstered by the success in the NEC elections. But, of course, there is no assault. We are in a defensive position in which the trades union leaders are striving to prevent a serious struggle against the government's programme.

Does he mean that all socialists should be in the LP? This seems a justification for continuation of the concentration of forces in the Labour Party.

I can understand people working in a constituency where there is an organised left resisting the direction of the government and their local government clones.

However, there are few such local Parties left. The shift to the right is reflected in the fact that our old right wing opponents of the 1980s are on the left of New Labour!

Of course, there is no reason why socialists inside and outside the Labour Party should not work together in building resistance to Blair. However, the issue of a new party of the working class is not today an abstract theoretical issue: a possibility at some unspecified date far in the future.

We are seeing the beginning of the break-up of social democracy. It is necessary to concentrate on assembling the forces for a new party rooted in building the broadest possible alliance of those resisting the government's actions.

How far we are down this road is a question of dispute. But one thing is certain. There will not be an influx of radicalised workers or youth into the party which is attacking public sector workers, New Labour the party of privatisation, the 'party of business'.

Of course, the new party we need cannot be brought about simply by the actions of a few people, especially when defeats have continued since the General Election. However, it is necessary to popularise the

idea and to draw together all those who want to build such a party.

The battle in relation to the Labour Party is not yet over within the affiliated unions. However, even there it requires the struggle for a complete break with social partnership. The tensions between the unions and the government are all well and good, but the very same union leaders who are whining about the minimum wage level refuse to break from the government and mobilise their members.

What is required is a political break from this neo-liberal programme. That is what we have to fight for in the unions, against the resistance of the union leaders. It would be wrong to take the view, from a formal definition of the nature of the Labour Party, that socialists should simply reaffirm affiliation on the basis of continuing the fight 'within the Labour Party'.

Let's look at the way the issue is posed in the RMT. The debate at its AGM this year was instructive. The resolution which spoke of ending political and financial support for the party if it did not change direction was lost by 28 to 21.

Those who had voted for a resolution which demanded that sponsored MPs sign a statement condemning the privatisation of the London Underground, or their sponsorship be withdrawn, changed sides and voted against the resolution which placed a question mark over the future of affiliation.

However, not a single delegate defended the MPs, and the attitude of Labour Party members present was probably summed up by one delegate who said he was not handing over his party card to "the Blairites who have hijacked the party". They would have to take it off him.

Of course, there is no alternative party for the unions to affiliate to at present. But there is no blueprint to determine when you call for a break of the unions from the Labour Party. What is clear to RMT members is that New Labour will not re-nationalise the railways.

Prescott's threat that train operating companies will be given back to BR if they do not produce the goods is just hot air. When London & Continental Railways failed, the European Passenger Service (which runs EuroStar) could have been taken back – it was in the contract – but Prescott did not do that, even though it would have cost him nothing!

What credence has the demand that the government re-nationalise the railways when it is carrying out privatisation of the London Underground infrastructure?

Members of the union which was instrumental in founding the Labour Party will have to build a new party to assist in taking the privatised railways out of the hands of the profiteers.

Perhaps as a transitional step socialists in the RMT should propose that the union sponsor socialist candidates who are opposed to privatisation.

Socialists have to popularise the idea of a new socialist party, a new party of the working class and oppressed, seeking to draw together all forces opposed to the government's policy and actions.

This does not preclude some people working in the Labour Party where there is some purpose in a particular locality or a union. The political reality of the programme and actions of the government must be explained clearly.

The real significance of the evolution of the Labour Party is papered over by Murray's analysis.

(1) Issue 11 of *Socialist Perspectives* reports on a Training course for union reps involving the AEEU, MSF and TGWU, as well as the Engineering Employers Federation, which aims at reps "constantly re-assessing and re-evaluating your role to ensure you are in line with business development"! (Copies available for 76p from 333 Welcombe Avenue, Park North, Swindon SN3 2PF.)

**Perhaps socialists in the RMT should propose that the union sponsor socialist candidates who are opposed to privatisation**

**'Social Partnership' is an outlook which completely subordinates the unions to the interests of capital.**



# Fight now to stop Labour's anti-refugee Bill!

**Mark Jansen**

WHEN the Tory government introduced its Asylum and Immigration Bill, there were mobilisations across the country. Even the Labour front bench voiced their opposition to the draconian measures it included.

Unfortunately, rather than scrapping the previous legislation, Labour is planning to build upon it and worsen the situation for asylum seekers.

The Tories withdrew benefit entitlements from those who did not claim asylum on entry into Britain. This was partially overturned when the courts ruled that local authorities had a duty to provide basic necessities such as clothing food and housing to destitute people, under the National Assistance Act and the Children's Act.

But this shifted the financial burden onto cash-starved local authorities and away from central government.

The chaos left from this has meant that most local authorities pay food vouchers rather than cash, allowing asylum seekers only the most meagre existence, the worst housing and totally dependent on such pitiful 'hand-outs'.

As well as creating a desperate situation for those fleeing persecution this has also led to the whipping up of racism in the



*Racist laws into the millennium?*

press because asylum seekers have suddenly become more visible. No one would think that the number of asylum seekers has fallen in the last few years, but this in fact the case.

The new Labour government has been under pressure from local authorities to return responsibility for asylum seekers to central government. They do propose to do this in the White Paper but in a way that goes further even than the Tories dared. They propose to withdraw benefits from all asylum seekers whether they apply straight away or not.

They further aim to have a central register that will instruct asylum seekers where they must live. For many who flee persecution, one of the few comforts is to have

some contact with people and organisations that have an understanding of their situation. Labours plan will end this by dispersing refugees throughout the country where they will be far more isolated.

The white paper increases immigration officers powers of search, arrest and entry into property, and lays the basis for a computer 'spy network'. It strengthens the Carriers Liability Act, which makes airlines liable for anyone travelling without correct documentation. By using airline staff as an additional arm of the immigration service, the government can cut down on asylum applications, since most people fleeing from repression are unable to get the documentation they need.

As a means of cutting down on applications this is probably quite effective. How this fits in with labour's supposed ethical foreign policy isn't quite clear.

The white paper proposes streamlining asylum applications so that the whole process of application and appeal will last no longer than six months. It is unlikely that the government could deal with the applications within this time limit, but the 'streamlining' that has been proposed is to streamline the rights of appeal.

From the initial application asy-



lum seekers will be given just five days to prepare all documentation (currently they are allowed a month). If an application is turned down there will be just one appeal, after which they can then be detained and deported. Such streamlining will only prevent asylum seekers presenting their cases adequately.

These proposals are both firmer and faster than current legislation. They can only be said to be fairer in the sense that all asylum seekers will be discriminated against equally.

Despite the fact these proposals have been in the public domain for some months there is as yet no

campaign to oppose them. This shows how much more difficult it is to mobilise under a Labour government. Many people have illusions that the labour leadership is somehow working for a fairer society - despite the evidence to the contrary shown by this Bill and many other measures.

The National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns and the National Assembly Against Racism are organising a public meeting to launch a campaign. This must be widely supported throughout the labour movement.

## Zoora Shah: Life in jail ...for lying!

**Susan Moore**

On 30th April 1998, Zoora Shah lost her appeal to overturn her conviction for the murder and attempted murder of Mohammed Azam on the grounds of diminished responsibility.

Zoora's testimony - given for the first time - was dismissed as being 'not capable of belief', mainly because she had originally lied to the police. In effect, she is now serving a life sentence for lying rather than for culpability for murder.

The Court denied Zoora the right to put forward her defence - a defence not available to her at trial because she feared for the future well-being of her daughters, and because she did not understand the nature of her own depression.

The judgement suggests that if you do not put forward one of the defences to murder at trial, you can never raise such a defence again unless there are exceptional circumstances. There is no indication as to what constitutes 'exceptional circumstances', but it seems to restrict the term to the narrow condition of severe mental illness.

The Court denied Zoora the right to any trial, let alone a fair trial, and usurped the function of the jury, since no jury has been allowed to hear the evidence first presented at her appeal; her own testimony and contemporaneous medical records.

The Court suggested that Zoora

had 'no honour left to salvage' because she had been involved in sexual relationships, ignoring the fact that it was her status as a divorced, isolated and poverty stricken Asian woman which made her vulnerable to sexual and financial exploitation by a series of predatory men.

The Court has discriminated against Zoora because she does not fit the category of the 'fragrant housewife' and is therefore deemed to be undeserving of justice.

The Courts have been rather more willing to accept cultural and religious factors used by Asian men to excuse the killings of wives and daughters, on the basis that 'their' wives' or daughters' behaviour transgresses cultural norms, even when such men hold the balance of power in the family and community.

Zoora, and women like her, should not be punished twice - first by their oppressors and then by the law. Zoora Shah urgently needs your help to end the injustice she has faced at the hands of her family, the community and now the law.

For further details contact Free Zoora Shah Campaign, c/o Southall Black Sisters, 52 Norwood Road, Southall; Middx UB2 4DW Tel: 0181 571 9595

Full background to the case can be found at <http://www.ncadc.demon.co.uk/news9hts/zoora.html>

## No more racist murders!

**Simon Deville**

IF ANYONE believes that the police incompetence and racism revealed by the Stephen Lawrence inquiry was an isolated incident, they need only to look at the way the police have investigated any number of racist killings.

Recently two separate killings, that of Lakhvinder (Ricky) Reel and of Michael Menson, have shown police refusal to admit that any crime had even been committed.

Whilst the police have been forced to backtrack in both cases to a degree, the evidence would suggest that the metropolitan police have learned nothing from Stephen Lawrence's death.

**Justice for Ricky**

On October 14 1997, 20 year old Ricky Reel and his three friends were attacked and racially abused.

They fled, and Ricky was not seen again. When Ricky's mother went to report the incident to the police, they dismissed her claims and said that he'd probably just run away, and that since he was over 18 they couldn't do anything about it.

Realising that she could not get any response from the police, Ricky's mother went to see The

Monitoring Group in Southall, who started to organise search parties to look for Ricky. It was only after this, on October 21, that the police set up a serious incidents room to look into Ricky's disappearance.

Eventually the police found Ricky's body in the Thames. Even after this, the police still refuse to

admit that any crime has been committed claiming instead that he must have gone to relieve himself and fallen in the river.

An independent pathologists report suggested that Ricky had fallen in the river backwards and that the police version of events just didn't add up.

Even if the police were not convinced about Ricky being murdered, the fact that he and his friends were attacked previously should have meant that they at least investigated the possibility. Instead they waited a week before doing anything, and then just dismissed any suggestion that there was a crime involved. It is extremely unlikely that the police would have had such an attitude if Ricky was white.

The Monitoring Group have set up the Justice for Ricky Reel Cam-

paign, to demand that the authorities carry out a thorough investigation into his death, and into the police failures. For further information contact Suresh Grover on 0181 843 2333 or write to Justice for Ricky Reel, c/o SMG Unity, PO Box 304, Southall, Middlesex, UB2 5YR

**Michael Menson inquest**

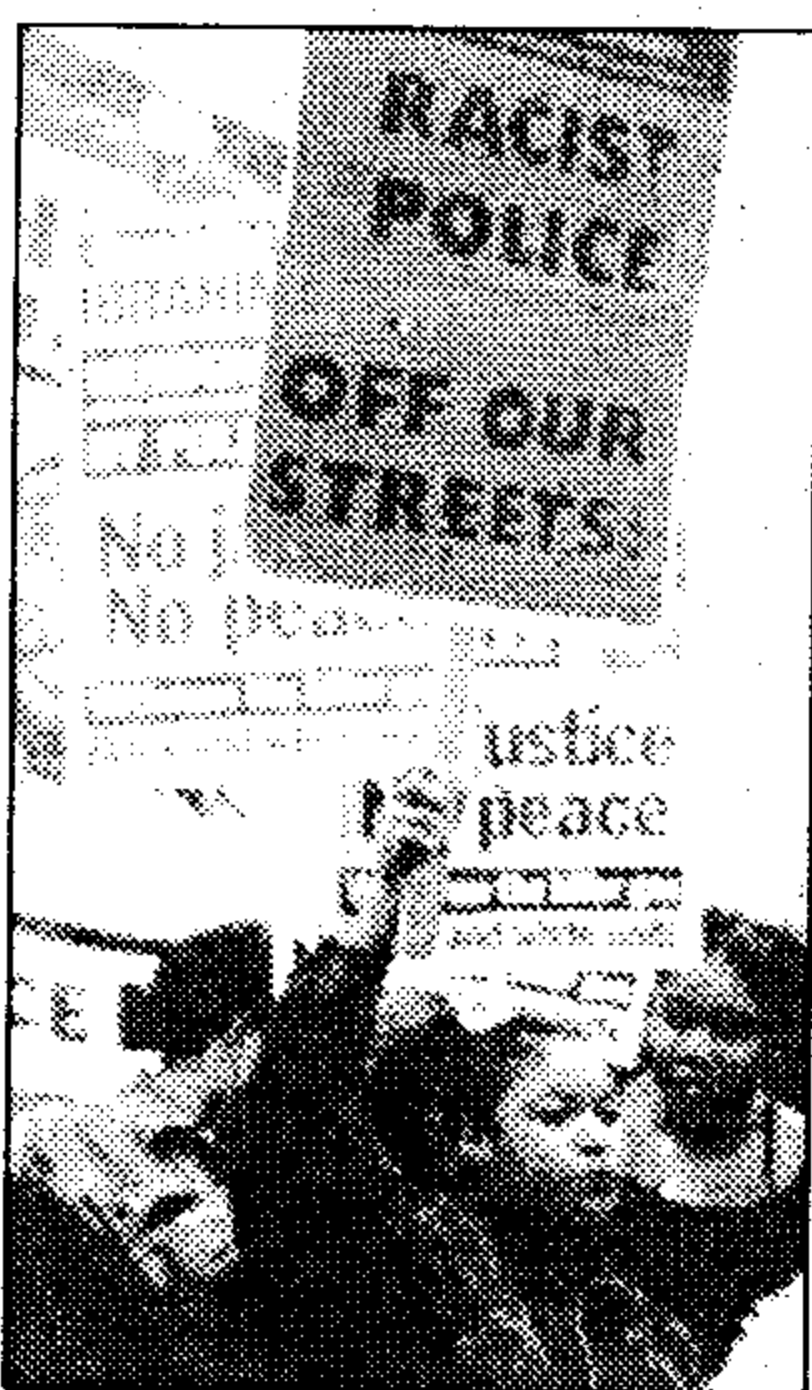
In January 1997 Michael Menson was attacked by a gang of racists in Edmonton, North London and set on fire.

He received massive burns and died in hospital two weeks later. Michael gave some details of the attack to his brother, who reported this to the police. The police refused to act on this, so losing any evidence that there might have been at the scene of the attack. They also failed to take a statement from Michael.

They assumed Michael, who had a history of mental illness, had set fire to himself.

After more than a year and a half campaigning, an inquest into his death reached a verdict of unlawful killing.

Campaigns like that into justice for Michael and his family have been given a real boost by the campaigning and determination of the Lawrence family and their supporters. Socialists need to ensure their voices are heard.





# Why we were right to launch the Fourth International



On November 14, CHARLIE VAN GELDEREN was among the panel of veteran Trotskyists who spoke at the London rally organised by Socialist Outlook to celebrate 60 years of the Fourth International. Charlie is the last living participant from the FI's founding conference in Paris in 1938. Here we reproduce his speech to this year's FI Youth Camp in Denmark. Future issues of Socialist Outlook will reproduce some of the platform contributions from the London Rally.



"Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past."

(Karl Marx: *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*)

In September 1938, I was privileged to attend the Founding Conference of the Fourth International as an observer from the Fourth International Organisation of South Africa.

It was not accidental that the conference took place at that historical moment. The beginning of the second world war was a year ahead, but its threat was looming over Europe.

The international labour movement was in total disarray, its Stalinist and social democratic leaderships unable and unwilling to organise working class resistance to the coming catastrophe. Far from resisting the war, they were, in fact, vigorously at work mobilising the masses for enthusiastic support of the war.

It was against this background that the thirty delegates met in Paris in September. It is often stated that the founding conference took place in Switzerland.

This was for security reasons.)

We had very real reasons to fear the activities of both the police of the bourgeois states and the secret agents of the Stalinist regime, the GPU. Rudolf Klement, the secretary of the organising committee was, in fact, abducted and assassinated on the eve of the conference.

The conference itself was penetrated by a GPU agent, known to us as Etienne, who attended as the Russian delegate. His real name was Mark Zborowski, and he had wormed his way into the confidences of Trotsky's son, Sedov.

When I look back, I am appalled at the almost complete lack of security. Paris seemed to be swarming with members of the youth organisation of the American section. They were all aware that the conference was taking place, and were frequenting cafes with delegates.

It was in this atmosphere that the man who was to drive an ice pick into the brain of Leon Trotsky years later, known to us then as Jacson, a Belgian sports journalist, was able to enter into a relationship with Sylvia Ageloff, one of the young American comrades who were in Paris simply to have a good time.

He was, of course, a GPU agent, a Spaniard, Ramon Mercader. I saw a great deal of him and he was, apparently, not at all interested in politics. He seemed to have plenty of money, which he spent freely.

The conduct of the leaderships of the Second and Third (Communist) Internationals in those fateful months leading up to World War II, was even more craven than that of the Second International in 1914.

All the important parties of the Second International – the German, the French and the British Labour Party formed a 'civil peace' with their respective capitalist class, once war actually broke out.

But, before hostilities began in August 1914, they at least made noises, deceiving the masses that

they were trying to stop the threatening catastrophe. They met in Brussels, to discuss what could be done to mobilise the workers, half-heartedly, it is true, and completely without conviction.

The Noskes and Eberts were waiting breathlessly to join their compatriots in singing 'Deutschland, Deutschland Uber Alles'. In Britain Henderson was waiting to join the War Cabinet.

But even these hypocritical gestures were missing in September 1938. There was no meeting of the Bureau of the Socialist International to discuss possible action. When British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, departed for his meeting with Hitler, Mussolini and Daladier to sign the Munich Agreement, the Labour leader, Major Clement Atlee, wished him 'God speed'.

The leadership of the Third International differed from that of the Second only in their more rabid patriotic zeal.

They called for an immediate holy war of the Democracies against the Dictatorships.

In Britain, the Communist Party organised demonstrations condemning Chamberlain for not immediately declaring war against Hitler. Even in Ireland, the so-called Communists were calling on all good Irishmen to rally in defence of British democracy.

It is in these circumstances, with the complete absence of revolutionary internationalist leadership from the two existing Internationals – leaderships which had become, in fact, counter-revolutionary that the Trotskyists called for a new International, the Fourth International.

Trotsky had already condemned the Comintern as dead in 1933

when the German Communist Party, the strongest section of the Third International, which had won 6 million votes in the last general elections, failed to organise any working class resistance to Hitler's seizure of power.

The Social Democrats, with the support of more than 12 million votes, like the CP, surrendered without firing a shot. Together, in a United Front, they could have stopped Hitler. There would have been no war, no concentration camps, no holocaust.

The historic conditions of the day were crying out for a new international, a new revolutionary general command for the workers and the oppressed people of the world. It was in these conditions that, urged on by Trotsky, we launched the Fourth International.

Now, sixty years later, we can look back and ask ourselves, were we right? Or were people like Isaac Deutscher right, who thought it was premature and that there were still possibilities to work inside the Comintern? These questions have returned to us throughout our history, and I will return to them later.

The main task of the Founding Conference was to adopt the programme 'The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International', perhaps better known as the Transitional Programme.

Trotsky, exiled in Mexico, was unable to attend the Founding Conference, but in the Spring of 1938, he prepared the draft of the Transitional Programme, which was discussed in all sections of the International Communist League, the precursor of the FI.

**We had very real reasons to fear the activities of the police and the secret agents of the Stalinist regime, the GPU.**

He considered its adoption the "most capital conquest" of the revolutionary movement since Lenin's time, perhaps a rather exaggerated claim, but its importance must not be underestimated.

The significance of the Transitional Programme must not be judged by a pedantic study of its texts. Many of its demands are no longer relevant but this is also true, of course, of the last section of the Communist Manifesto. It in no way diminishes its historic importance. Those who come fresh to the document will probably be surprised how fresh and modern much of it still is.

The Programme made a thorough and rounded analysis of the period in which it was launched.

It presented to the international working class, to the peasants, the poor and oppressed in the colonial countries and to the revolutionary core of Bolsheviks fighting the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union, a programme for immediate action on all the pressing problem of life and struggle which confronted them.

It differed from previous programmes because of its transitional approach. The programme of the Second International was divided into two parts, independent of each other.

The minimum programme 'limited itself to reforms within bourgeois society' and the maximum programme promised 'socialism in the indefinite future'. There was no bridge between the minimum and the maximum programmes, socialism was mentioned only in passing at May Day rallies.

The same approach lay behind the Stalinist revisionist theory of a 'two-stage revolution': first the struggle for democracy then – but when? – on to socialism. The latest example of this is South Africa.

The Transitional Programme takes the struggle from where it is, from the concrete consciousness of the working class today to the conquest of power and socialism. It lived up to the prescription laid down by Rosa Luxemburg:

"Our whole programme would be a miserable scrap of paper if it were not capable of serving us for all eventualities and in every moment of the struggle, and to serve us by virtue of it being practised and not by its being shelved.

"If our programme is the historical formulation of the historical development of society from capitalism to socialism, then obviously it must formulate also the transitional phases of this development.

"It must contain them in their fundamental features and therefore also be able to indicate to the proletariat the corresponding attitude in the sense of approaching closer to socialism in every given moment.

"From this it follows that for the proletariat there cannot be, in general, a single moment when it would be compelled to leave its programme in the lurch, or in which it could be left in the lurch by its programme."

Rosa Luxemburg would have approved of Trotsky's Transitional Programme.

In Britain we now have the Labour Party in power with the biggest majority a government party has ever enjoyed. In France we have a so-called Socialist government but, far from advancing toward socialism, they are busy dismantling even the nation-



alised enterprises still extant and embracing the 'free market' with even greater enthusiasm than their right-wing predecessors in office. They have even left large chunks of their own reformist programmes in the lurch.

The Stalinised Communist Parties of China and Vietnam are travelling at breakneck speed in the same direction. The Stalinist distortion of the workers' state has been overcome by its own contradictions and the utopian illusion of the "socialism in one country".

The main point of the Transitional Programme is that the economic prerequisites for a socialist revolution have already in general been achieved.

True, capitalism is still turning out new inventions and higher levels of technology. It has spread its tentacles into every corner of the globe, as Marx and Engels predicted in the Communist Manifesto, 150 years ago. But this has not filled the bellies of the starving masses in the so-called developing world (formerly Third World).

**F**inancial crisis is still an unavoidable feature of capitalism. There really is no way out for the capitalist class.

This was true in 1938, when the Fourth International was founded, as it is today. The historical conditions for socialism have not only ripened but, in the words of the Transitional Programme, they 'have begun to get somewhat rotten.'

As I said earlier, people who come fresh to the Transitional Programme will find that many of its prescriptions for the ills which afflict society are still valid. What the Programme describes as the two basic economic afflictions which summarise the increasing absurdity of the capitalist system; unemployment and high prices, are still very much with us.

As then, so today, we demand the right to work and decent living conditions for every one, not only in the industrialised countries but also in the deprived underdeveloped lands.

We want to see an end to the pictures of children starving in famine conditions while in Europe and America the cold storage units are overfilled with carcasses of meat and farmers are encouraged not to produce with heavy subsidies.

To combat the ever rising prices, the 1938 programme raised the slogan of a sliding scale of wages. This means that collective agreements should assure an automatic rise in wages, in relation to the increase in consumer goods. This is a slogan which we could well use today and to which we would add that state pensions also should be pegged to the rising cost of living.

Today we have millions of working class families where no one has been in a job for years. The working class cannot permit an increase of chronically unemployed paupers. In Europe we have over 20 million unemployed and the weekly hours for those still at work is rising.

In the United States, where in

1950 corporation executives were 30 to 40 times higher paid than the average of their employees, by 1990 this had increased to 100 times higher.

In the so-called developed countries, the workless total uncountable millions, forcing the youth into prostitution and making families dependent on child labour. These basic facts make some of the demands of the Transitional Programme very relevant.

As in 1938, the demand for a programme of public works and a sliding scale of working hours should be in the programme of demands of every trade union. The bosses vote themselves fat cat salary increases and bonus shares.

In Britain, the directors of the privatised Yorkshire Water, despite the droughts of the last years and record complaints from the consumers, have voted themselves pay increases of 40 per cent. The workers who make the flow of water possible, are limited to pay increases of 5 per cent.

The merchant bankers, Goldman Sachs have voted to sell off the company. Each of the 190 full partners will make at least £50 million from the deal - without putting in any extra hours of work.

Yet they insist that giving in to the demands of the workers for a bigger share of the wealth which they produce with their labour would not be possible; that it would lead to increased unemployment and bankruptcies. To this the workers must raise again the demand put forward in the Transitional Programme: Let us have a look at the books!

Of course, the Transitional Programme, valid in 1938, must be brought up-to-date, to meet the conditions of today and related to the current consciousness of the workers and the oppressed. But its methodology is as relevant as ever.

I refer you again to the quotation from Marx with which I began.

While we make our own history we can only do so 'under circumstances directly encountered...'

In 1938, the most immediate dangers facing the world were imperialism, fascism and war.

While these will remain dangers as long as capitalism lasts, a revised Transitional Programme would embrace the issues of women and gay rights and the environment.

We must demand the abolition of the international debts of the impoverished countries of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America.

Capital, in its mad rush for profit is fast destroying the earth's resources, regardless of the cost in human life which this entails.

**W**hy, if the programme adopted at the Founding Conference was so correct why did the Fourth International not develop into a powerful organisation? Why did it not succeed in planting itself deep into the working class movement? What has been its role and its influence in the 60 years since it was



Trotsky in Mexico: his draft of the Transitional Programme was a key strength of the new International

founded?

Of course, we do not claim infallibility, we were certainly not always right. We have to admit that in the sixty years since it was founded, the Fourth International has not succeeded in implanting itself deeply in the mass movement. It is impossible, in the space available, to go into all the reasons for this and others will find different explanations.

We knew war was coming but it came less than a year later - before we could make any real impact. The working class had experienced a series of defeats - Germany, Spain, Austria. In the Soviet Union, what remained of the Bolshevik cadres who made



the October revolution had been physically annihilated.

Thanks to the revisionist Marxism of the Stalinists and the social-patriotic doctrines of the reformists, the struggle against fascism was transformed into support for war against Germany. For the Stalinist parties, of course, this changed after the signing of the Stalin-Hitler pact.

We were rowing against the stream. Our tiny forces could not effectively counter the mass produced propaganda of the Stalinist and social democratic bureaucracies.

And, of course, in a period when the working class was in retreat, there were many in our ranks and on the periphery of our movement, who could not stand up to this; who identified the years of reaction as the conclusive defeat of the revolution.

(We see the same symptoms today, with the apparent triumph of the so-called free market, which has even been described as 'the end of history').

The assassination of Trotsky was also a powerful blow. His leadership at that time was crucial and irreplaceable.

We expected, with Trotsky, that however it started, the Soviet Union would inevitably be involved in the war and that, whatever the outcome, the Stalinist bureaucracy would collapse. In the event, the military victory of the Red Army strengthened Stalin's grip and gave him renewed prestige.

This led to increased despondency in our ranks and to people seeking alternative programmes, even to desertions to Stalinism and to bourgeois democracy.

I again return to the question: Were we right to launch the Fourth International when we did and what has it accomplished?

Let us look at the nature of the historic period in which we took the decision. What were our targets?

The objective conditions were revolutionary, but the working class, the proletariat who was to be the instrument of the revolution, was ideologically backward and tethered to Stalinism and reformism.

Our programme, the Transitional Programme, laid down a line of action which would free the working class from these chains and lead them into battle with slogans and demands that corresponded to the objective reality.

Above all it aimed to restore the class independence of the working class, to tear them away from the ideology which tied them to the bourgeoisie.

**F**or reasons which I have already mentioned - the swift approach of the war, which transformed the anti-fascism of the workers in the bourgeois democratic countries into a patriotic war against Germany (a line vigorously endorsed by the Stalinist parties until the signing of the Hitler-Stalin pact and to which they returned with renewed enthusiasm after the invasion of the Soviet Union) we were unable to make any real impact.

But we cannot take refuge in blaming the objective conditions. While our activities are circumscribed by the circumstances in which we find ourselves, human beings do make their own history.

We believed, with Trotsky, that the collapse of the bureaucratic Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union would place the Fourth International in a favourable place to give the proletariat renewed revolutionary Marxist leadership.

Perhaps, and I emphasise perhaps, if we had a strong leadership and a united international we could have made a dent on the reformist party cadres in the regimes of the period since then.

Many of the writings of Trotsky became available, and Trotsky's works, the Fourth International had to be re-established.

But the world with the internationalist perspective, all claiming to be the authentic voice of Trotskyism.

Sectional splits have been a chronic ailment in our movement. Minorities, instead of remaining inside the international and fighting for their positions, split off on the slightest pretext, believing themselves to be more Trotskyist than Trotsky, to form tiny sects, impotent and without any future.

How different to Trotsky, who persisted in his adherence to the Third International till 1933 and the utter defeat of the German working class.

Our International is not dead or dying. In these dark days of defeat and betrayal we have kept aloft the banner of revolutionary Marxism.

The working class, the oppressed peoples of the world will not for ever bear the crushing burdens of unemployment, poverty and repression which is their lot under capitalism. For capitalism there is no way out.

Even as I write, the signs of a new economic decline are evident. The liberal economists talk of 'down-sizing', 'reorganising production' and 'layoffs'. These are euphemisms for the sack.

There is an ever-decreasing expenditure, in real terms, on the social and health services. The homeless are still living in the streets. The only expenditure which has increased is in preparation for the next war.

Only the workers of the world and their allies in the underdeveloped countries can put an end to this madness.

For that they need international leadership and a program which will give a revolutionary impulse to the struggle. I believe the Transitional Programme of the FI, brought up to date, can give that leadership.



# Counting the cost of Arafat's surrender

**TIKVA HONIG-PARNASS, from the Alternative Information Centre in Jerusalem and editor of *News from Within* explains why the Oslo accords are in the interest of Israeli big business, American imperialism and the IMF and World Bank. In the light of the recent signing of the Wye accord, such detailed analyses could not be more timely. (This article is based on the presentation given at the *Socialist Outlook* event, *Fighting Neo-Liberalism worldwide*, held in London on November 15.)**



PLO, but as an organisation which did not represent the entire Palestinian people. Therefore, the Oslo agreements easily avoided recognising the right of return of the 1948 refugees.

Moreover, the PLO has renounced the national struggle by accepting its definition of the national struggle as purely 'terroristic', and has promised to forsake it.

The PLO in fact gave legitimacy to an additional partition of historic Palestine by agreeing to Israel's pretension to ownership rights on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which have now become "disputed territories." The Israeli withdrawal from these territories has become a matter of give and take in the future final settlement negotiations — which of course will be determined by Israel and the US alone.

However, the territories which are due to be included in the Palestinian self-rule areas will only have limited sovereignty. Symbols of statehood may indeed be granted to them. However control of borders, foreign relations, security, and natural resources will all remain under Israeli control.

What is perhaps more important is that the territories under Palestinian self-rule are not at all contiguous. Instead, they consist of scores of tiny, isolated, enclaves, disconnected by the Israeli settlements and military checkpoints.

The bigger enclaves, which include Gaza, the northern West Bank, the southern West Bank, and Greater Jerusalem are also completely separated from each other. These fragmented pieces which will finally be granted statehood, are presently being turned into a caricature of the South African Bantustans.

The Palestinian Authority's collaborative self-rule, whose backbone is the repressive and corrupt bourgeois machinery of the Diaspora, are already replacing some of the tasks of the Israeli army in keeping "internal order." In cooperation with the Israeli security forces and the American CIA, any struggle against Oslo and the Israeli occupation will be repressed.

The political and military framework which was delineated by the Oslo agreement in 1993 determined economic agreements, sponsored and controlled by the IMF and the World Bank. These agreements aimed to create a unified and "open" economic system in the Middle East which would strengthen the international machinery of economic exploitation in the region.

The political agreements aim at 'normalisation' and the lifting of the boycott on Israeli goods. This

is a necessary condition for opening the Middle East markets and serves as the "bridge" for the economic penetration of the Arab hinterland for Israel.

In the division of labour designed for the "new Middle East", Israel was to be a regional economic power, concentrating on high-tech industry and technically advanced knowledge. The comprador and Palestinian-Jordanian bourgeoisie were designed to become active agents for this penetration, and to collaborate in the exploitation of cheap labour resources, without the security risks inherent in importing Arab labour to the Israeli territories proper.

Indeed it was Israeli big business which in fact led the "peace" process towards the Oslo agreements, as a necessary step towards privatisation and integration into the globalisation system.

American economist Lester Thurow charted the division of labour designed for the Middle East by the IMF and the economic path Israel ought to take:

"Those not producing oil in the region should be making goods and services for those who sell oil. Israel should bring technology, middle-waged industries and organisation abilities to the table. But none of that can happen unless and until the political and military disputes between Israel and the Arab World are settled." (*Head-to-Head*, Warner Books, pages 216-7)

**Heading the PLO, which led the national movement, enabled Arafat to commit himself to the humiliating surrender conditions of Oslo**

The PLO leadership which signed the agreement is simply the emanation of the corrupted bourgeois of the bureaucratic apparatus of the PLO in exile, and of Palestinian capitalism in the territories, which had no special interests in a national market.

The Oslo agreement, which denies any real sovereignty for the Palestinians, has instead designed the framework for the Paris economic agreement to confer the status of defender of the 1967 occupied territories on the Israeli economy.

The Palestinians will be denied control of their own borders and of their national currency, including the authority to impose their own custom duties, along with severe limitations on their independent economic foreign relations. Also, the agreement makes possible the continuity of Israeli theft of the natural resources — mainly land and water.

The principle of free movement of goods and individuals, which is supposed to be the foundation of neo-liberalism, and which of course was adopted in the Paris economic agreement, is to be unilaterally implemented for the benefit of Israel alone. The newly-developed industrial parks

uprising by their exploited people.

The local bourgeoisie in the Arab States is a heterogeneous class which combines pre-capitalist elements with local foreign capital. This feudo-bourgeois class is not capable of existing outside the imperialist framework, and is consequently not capable of implementing the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution

Historically, the Palestinian question has been a source of instability in the Middle East. The continued Palestinian dispossession by Zionism, coupled with their struggle for national rights has maintained a situation with a high potential for turning the Arab masses against imperialism and their exploitative regimes, and thereby raising Arab nationalism.

Hence imperialism's support of the Zionist colonialist movement's aspirations to establish an exclusive Jewish state in Palestine. This goal was achieved during the 1948 Partition War, in which the majority of the Palestinians were expelled from the area designed for the Israeli state, and those who remained were dispossessed economically and politically, rendering them second rate citizens in the Zionist-Jewish state.

In the 1967 War, which was aimed at destroying the Egyptian President Nasser's nationalist

project, Israel completed what it had not been able to achieve in 1948, by conquering all of historic Palestine. Israel thus won the status of "strategic asset" for American imperialism.

The US accepted the Israeli Labour Party's 'Alon Plan', which has been directly translated into the Oslo agreements. This plan, which is a version of an apartheid solution, was rejected and contrary to international consensus and UN agreements prior to the Gulf War.

The Intifada, the Palestinian popular uprising which began in 1987, was directed against both the policy of surrender of the PLO leadership (which despite its official declarations, in fact, accepted the US-Israeli plan) and of course the Israeli occupation.

The Intifada demonstrated the permanent threat to the stability of the region, and furthermore confirmed to the imperial powers the need to implement the Alon Plan.

The Gulf War of 1991 consolidated US hegemony in the Middle East and made possible the enforcement of its plan. The aim of this new agreement was to put an end to the national aspirations of the Palestinian people, and to ensure the continuity of Israeli rule in the 1967 occupied territories, with the collaboration of Arafat's PLO leadership.

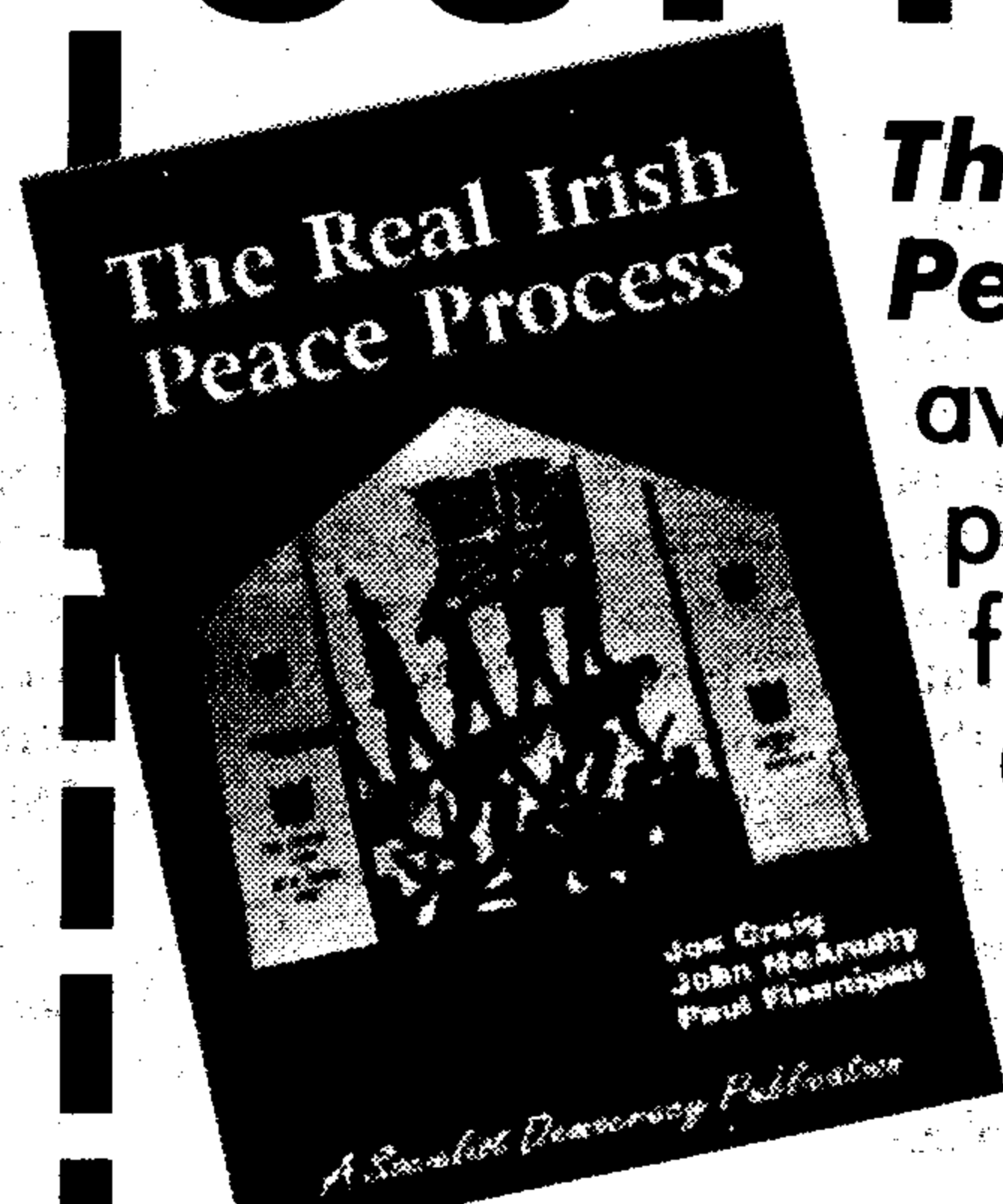
Arafat, who succeeded in sabotaging the Intifada, was the only potential partner who was willing to integrate into the regional 'Pax Americana' and to accept the Oslo agreement and its apartheid solution.

Heading the PLO, which led the national movement, enabled Arafat to commit himself to the humiliating surrender conditions of Oslo, with the temporary support and trust of the Palestinian masses. However, a large portion of the leadership in the PLO as well as its institutions opposed Oslo from the beginning.

The PLO has officially recognised the Zionist racist state, founded on the dispossession and expulsion of the Palestinian people — and has thus practically accepted the 1948 Partition and even Zionism.

Israel, in turn, recognised the

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which will be opened to Israeli labour-intensive industries and to Israeli, European, and US investments, will have no connection to the domestic Palestinian economy, nor its development.

Having total control over the Palestinian economy, Israel is able to reward its own self-policing partners by granting the Palestinian Authority the monopolies which manage the basic sectors of goods bought from Israeli companies.

Thus we are witness to the growth of a corrupted layer whose interest is to preserve the repressive and exploitative situation. This layer is there to satisfy the main concern of the IMF and US imperialism; namely stability. However it is ironic that the Oslo surrender agreement and the repressive role of Arafat eliminates any prospects of the very stability which is Oslo's rationale.

The two main dominating parties in Israel, Labour and Likud, do not differ in their positive position toward neo-liberalism (as well as towards Oslo) Beginning in the late 1980s, the Labour party started privatising the huge public sector by distributing public property to multi-national corporations and wealthy businessmen.

During the past two decades, many of the assets of the Histadrut (the only trade union in Israel) were privatised as well. This was part of a policy aimed at destroying the only (if even it is corrupt) organised power representing the Jewish working class, reducing wages and making cuts in social welfare.

Thus when Netanyahu from the Likud came to power in 1996 he in fact inherited from the Labour government an economy which replaced collective bargaining with "personal contracts", without unified trade unions, and social services which had been destroyed. More than 15% of labour power is foreign workers brought in by the State to replace the Palestinians from the 1967 occupied territories.

Nonetheless, there remains a rather strong support among both Labour and Likud to continue with certain facets of the welfare state economy. This is a natural desire in a settler society such as Israel in which there is a permanent tension between the Zionist, colonialist ideology and policy on the one hand, and economic liberalism on the other hand.

The consensus around the Zionist ideology as well as the national and religious element of Jewish identity of the state and its citizens is almost total. This creates a strong bias towards social defence. Thus the new aspirations to liberalise the economy are compromised by traditional Zionist beliefs which by definition require the state to play a substantial role in managing the economy.

It is therefore impossible that the liberalisation of the Political/economic basis of Israel can be completed within the Jewish sector to the same brutal and unhuman extent which we witness in other places. On the other hand, this full mobilisation and commitment to Zionist ideology, which incorporates certain social defence mechanisms, is one of the central factors which has traditionally blocked the radicalisation of the Jewish working class.

One of the necessary conditions in the pre-state period for the suc-

cessful establishment of the Zionist-colonialist project was its capability to prove that it could be an effective servant of imperialism in the Middle East (first with the British and later with the Americans). In turn, the Zionist project was therefore dependent upon the success of harnessing the Jewish proletariat in Palestine to support the aims of Zionism and imperialism in the region.

The Histadrut, and the Zionist "socialist" labour movement which headed it, was the main vehicle used to mobilise the workers to the tasks of colonisation as well as to pacify their exploitation by emerging capitalism.

The Histadrut and the labour movement did not come to Palestine to build a new "socialist" society. They did not for example attack the concept of private property. But they did adopt a discourse of socialism (using their local version of "national socialism") for it served as an effective myth in mobilising the workers behind Zionism.

However, it was the Stalinist Palestinian Communist Party which gave legitimacy to the combination of colonialist politics and socialist language which characterises the Israeli left.

The Communist Party accepted the imperialist partition of Palestine, and has presented the 1948 War as a national liberation and anti-imperialist war. The positions of the Communist Party have made it difficult to separate the youth and the proletarian vanguard from Zionism and made it easier to divide the working class according to nationality.

The Arab-Palestinians who remained in their homeland after 1948 (when approximately 800,000 of them were expelled) became "Israeli". They were dispossessed of their lands and were transformed into labourers, for whom the village served as only a place to sleep.

But the policies of all Israeli governments have prevented the Palestinians from working in major industries, such as energy and arms, due to "security reasons." They have been completely marginalised into the lowest paid jobs with the weakest defence of the Histadrut.

The division of the working class in Israel, according to nationality, is supplemented by an important division between the Jewish wage-labourers. This division runs along the major ethnic cleavages which divides the Israeli Jewish society, namely between the Mizrahim (immigrants from Arab countries and their Israeli-born descendants) and Europeans, the Ashkenazim.

The bulk of the Jewish working class, especially in non-managerial positions, whether skilled or not, consists of Jewish Mizrahim.

Their exploitation and discrimination in the economic sphere was accompanied by racist and systematic cultural oppression by the Ashkenazi-European settler elite. Thus, the overlapping of race and class among the Jewish working class has reduced the development of a strong class consciousness, mainly through the prevailing discourse which



Arafat: his policing of Palestinian struggle is key to imperialist strategy for the entire region

expresses the Mizrahim oppression in the terms and politics of cultural-identity.

In Israel, the executive business class are mostly Ashkenazi Jews. Those who lose the most, in declining order, are the Palestinian labourers from the 1967 occupied territories, the Palestinian minority from inside

Israel, and the Mizrahi Jews who have remained since their arrival, trapped in the geographic and economic periphery.

Israeli society is characterised by a high consensus around Zionism. "Left Zionism" was born distorted within the colonialist

framework. Nationalists and racists saw themselves as revolutionaries and humanists, settled on the stolen lands of Palestinians, and sang the *Internationale*.

The Zionist left, still continues to view Zionism as a national liberation movement and totally rejects its colonialist nature. Both Left and Right agree in principle on all of the fundamental issues of Zionism: Jewish immigration, "security" and the building of an exclusive Jewish state, as well as the Oslo agreements as the just solution to the conflict. This is a "Left" which sees the American imperialists as democratic, human, and just allies!

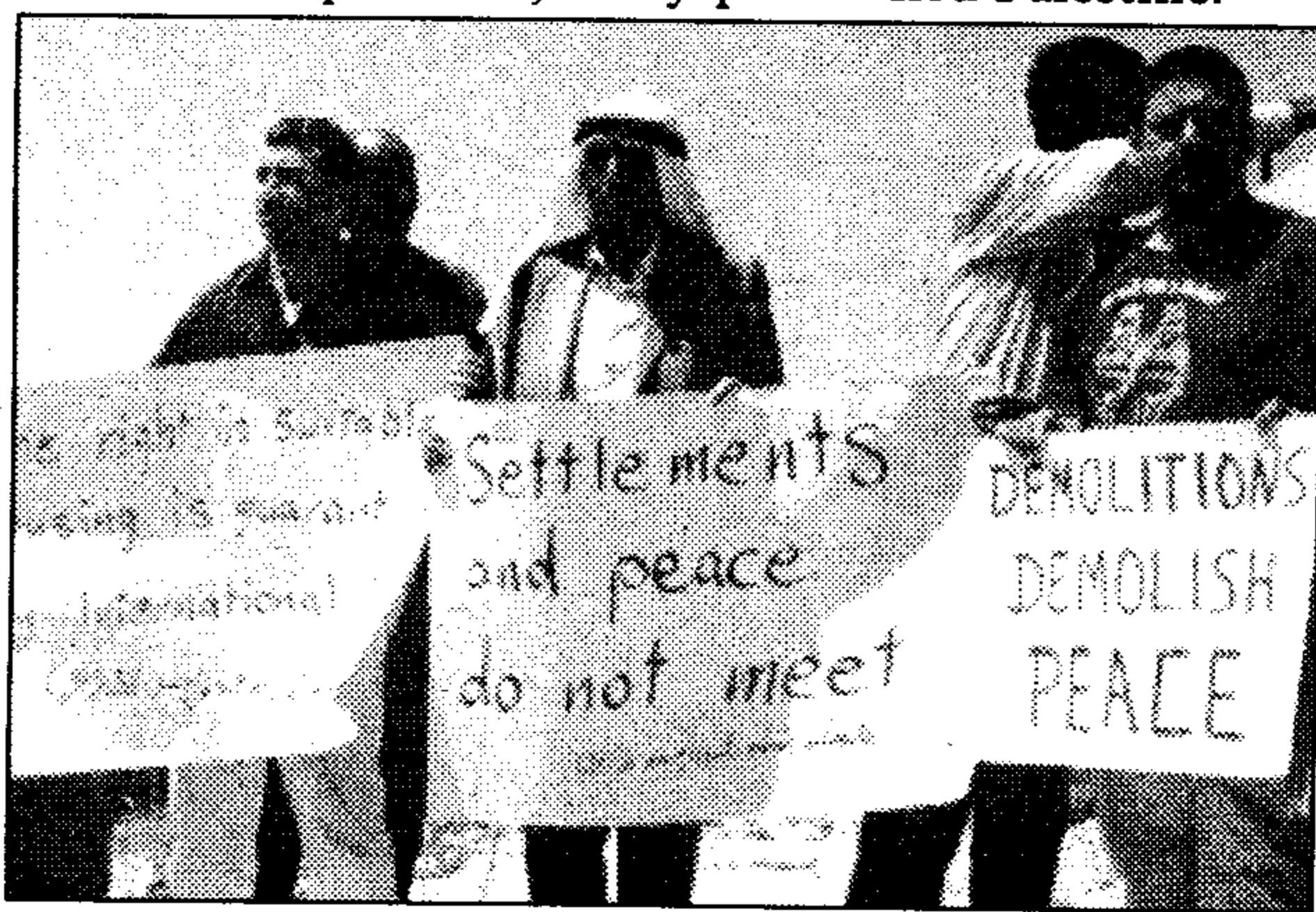
The Palestinian Left is now paying for its terrible mistakes. Arafat sabotaged the Palestinian Intifada, and took all measures necessary to re-establish his hegemony over the national movement in Palestine, which had liberated itself from him during the first months of the popular

uprising.

The struggle, in all of its various forms, had the potential to prevent the Oslo agreements. Instead these deals culminated in the defeat of the national struggle against the occupation and the legitimisation of the Zionist colonialist state

From this point on, every pur-

tinian Marxist left (the Popular Front and the Democratic Front) have led to the disintegration which now exists. They failed ever to differentiate their politics from that of the PLO leadership ... that is, to carry on a struggle for a democratic program which centres around a secular and unified Palestine.



Stitched up: Palestinians are seen as obstacle to "stability"

suit of the national struggle will be confronted with the corruption of the Palestinian Authority and its police, which, under the guidance of the American CIA and Israeli "security" forces, is becoming a brutal oppressor, not less than the Israeli army it has replaced.

At present the Palestinian people lack any organisation or party which is capable of engaging in a systematic struggle against the imperialistic settlement. The Palestinian defeat, the depth of popular de-mobilisation, and the disarray of the left forces that would have been needed to create the progressive dynamic for this step, are enormous problems.

And of course the unfavourable relation of forces which brought the surrender of Oslo has only grown worse as a result of it.

The past politics of the Pales-

Nor in the past did these parties condemn the PLO leadership, which has forsaken this task and accepted the Palestine partition and the idea of a Palestinian state alongside Israel.

The Palestinian Left

never adopted a policy of class independence, and could not adopt a class programme which connected the social, democratic and national demands. In short they acted within the narrow confines of petit-bourgeois nationalism: they were certainly radically anti-Zionism and anti-imperialist, but never anti-capitalist.

Thus, in the post-Oslo era, we are witness to the completion of the imperialist partition policy: Palestinian and Israeli working classes whose leaderships are captive under their own national bourgeois ideologies and policies.

This is an achievement much more significant for the multinational corporations, the IMF, and the World Bank, since it is a necessary condition for the stability of their direct profits throughout the entire Middle East.



# Fighting neo-Liberalism in Ontario

**Julia Barnett**

THE NEO-Liberal/Neo-Conservative agenda did not emerge overnight during the 1980s in the Canadian state. It began to take shape in the 1970s under the federal government of the Liberal Party. It was manifested in moves to control the public sector and slash the social welfare state in the form Canada had possessed since the period after World War Two.

In the 1980s Brian Mulroney's Tory federal government came to power and marked a major shift in the strategy of Canadian business, which demanded a comprehensive attack on social welfare. The Tories' main accomplishment was the severe cutting of the federal transfer payments to the social programmes of the provinces.

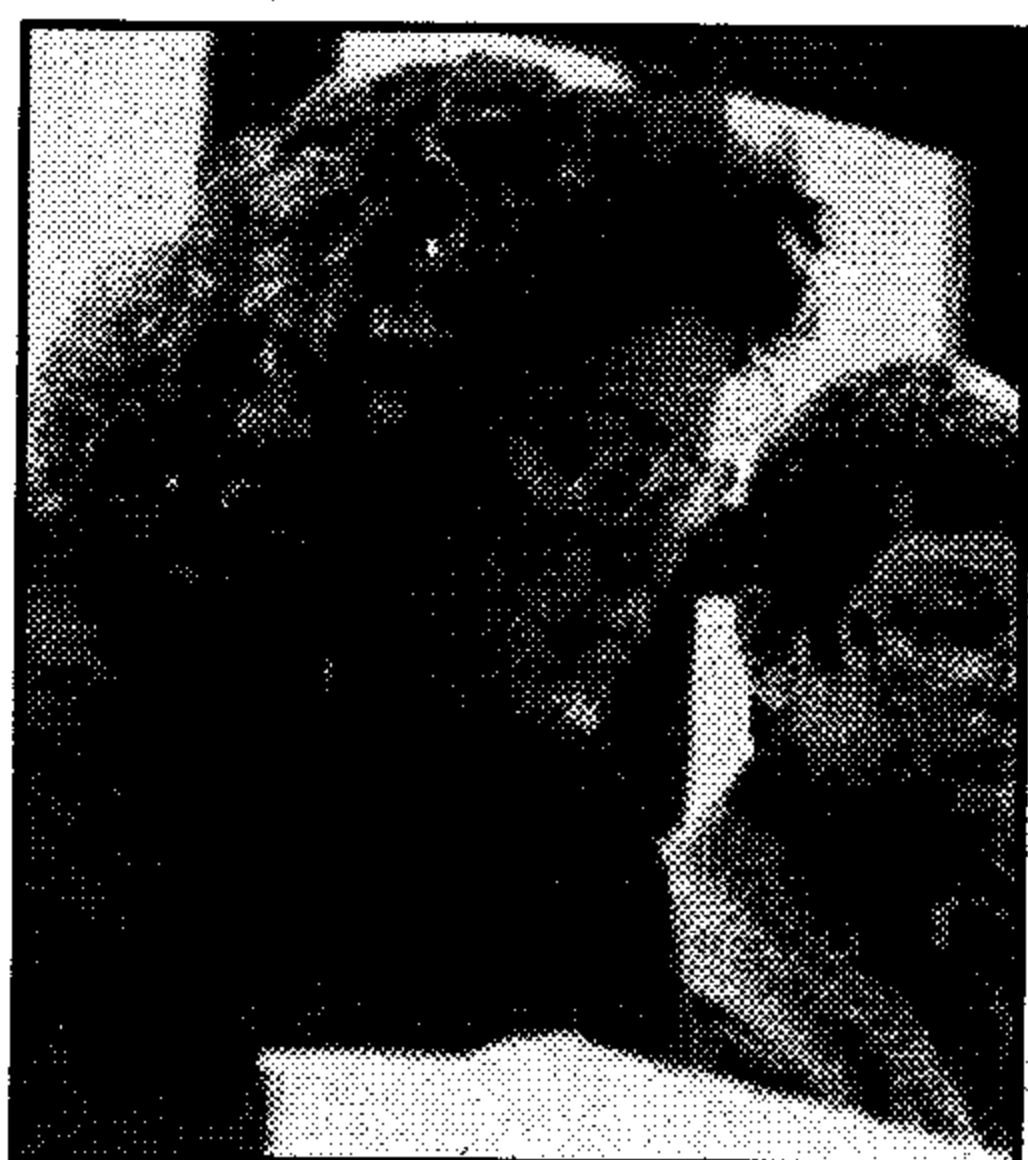
The provinces, like local government in Britain, are very dependent on payments from the centre to provide the services that they are responsible for. The Tories also paved the way for cuts to unemployment insurance eligibility and benefit levels, lower taxes, low interest loans and handouts to private corporations.

As a result of the international neo-liberal offensive, major changes are being made in the highly decentralised Canadian state which comprises ten provinces (of which one, Quebec, is a nation) and two territories. Provinces are directly responsible for health care, education, social welfare and labour relations. Mobilisations tend to take place on the provincial rather than than the federal level.

In the 1980s the federal government took the lead in the neo-liberal offensive but did not have control over all the provinces. The New Democrats (NDP), which is supported by most of the unions, had control in the two most industrialised provinces with the biggest populations and resources; British Columbia and Ontario.

The NDP held office in Ontario from 1990 to 1995. Their election in 1990 was a great surprise to everyone. The union leaderships in the province were completely uncritical and encouraged no analysis or debate about how to relate to the NDP in power. The same held true for most of the social movements, with the exception of the pro-choice movement, which still demanded greater access to abortion facilities for poor women.

In order to understand the context in which we have been organising it is necessary to note that we have had the greatest number of demonstrations and mobilisations in Ontario in the last two years than probably North America has seen in



Julia Barnett is a member of the Fourth International caucus in the New Socialist Group in the Canadian State. She has active in mobilising against the Harris government in Ontario before spending a year living in England. She recently returned to Canada. This article is based on a speech she gave to the Socialist Outlook event on November 15.

decades.

Two years into its term, the Ontario NDP imposed public sector rollbacks that even the federal Tories wouldn't have attempted.

They implemented a 'Social Contract' including wage freezes and mandatory unpaid leaves of absence. They prepared the elimination of thousands of public sector jobs. This is now being carried through by a Conservative government in Ontario.

While the NDP was introducing some of the worst austerity measures for years in the province, the Liberals came back to office



at the federal level. Jean Chretien's government came to power with the pretence of making the federal deficit the number one issue.

During this time the North American Free Trade Agreement was passed, and at the time there were major mobilisations against it. These have died away with the exception of solidarity actions with workers in the maquiladores in Mexico and the US.

On the federal level the Liberals have succeeded in imposing the most draconian cutbacks in social spending in the postwar era. Responsibility is being passed to the provinces through multi-billion dollar cuts in transfer payments.

These affect health, post-secondary education and welfare. Despite the liberals promise of job creation, unemployment is still officially 10%, and over 20% in some Eastern provinces where



the main industry is fishing.

Eligibility for unemployment benefits and welfare has been cut drastically, worsening the increasingly desperate conditions of the poor. One example is that recently the City of Toronto, the largest and most industrial city in the whole Canadian state recently declared homelessness a national disaster.

The reason for this is that because of these cuts there is no money to build new housing. The federal Liberals recently closed 12 hospitals in Toronto - and now the City has opened up one of these as a homeless shelter!

On a federal level, none of these drastic cuts has led to mass radicalisation or a political shift to the left. The liberals won on the platform of cutting the deficit, while the Conservatives and the right-wing populist Reform Party fought amongst themselves over tax cuts for the rich and law-and-order rhetoric. The NDP talked about job creation, but its vote only rose from 7% to 11%.

After the defeat of the NDP in Ontario's last election, Conservative premier Mike Harris declared the goal of a zero deficit, 30% reduction in taxes pro-workfare and cuts in all social spending. The same programme had been declared in Alberta.

In the name of the 'Common Sense Revolution', Ontario has its



own Newt Gingrichification. In 3 years, Harris has been able to make cuts matching anything Thatcher and Reagan did in their whole period in power. The cuts were sharp, swift and brutal.

However there has been more opposition to this government than ever before. Mass mobilisations have taken place including students, welfare recipients, trades unionists and teachers. Protests and demonstrations followed Harris wherever he went in his first

ter. They were not strongly supported by the majority of the union leadership. There was no real strategy to mobilise a united fightback. The leaders would rather wait 4 years to re-elect the NDP.

Elections will be taking place later this month in Quebec and Ontario. I strongly believe that those that have been mobilising against the neo-liberal offensive whether at the rank and file union level or through social movements will reap benefits here.

In Quebec the nationalist Parti Quebecois (PQ) have also implemented austerity measures in power. The main electoral opposition is the Liberals - they are arguing for a 30% reduction in the provincial deficit.

In Ontario the Days of Action have been called off. The electoral strategy offered by the union leaders is to vote Liberal or NDP to get Harris out.

The teachers went on a 3-week illegal strike, with 98% support across the province. However they were sold out by their leaders and face 230 school closures, with 30 in Toronto. Many are disillusioned both with the union movement and their ability to beat the Tories out of office which failed to establish the basis for a long term strategy to mobilise against neo-liberalism.

At the same time our organisation, the New Socialist Group, has been able to build a new branch in Regina, Saskatchewan, of all places - this is predominantly made up of people under 25. Indeed 85 per cent of our membership is under 25, coming out of mobilisations against the Harris government.

Many have been active on campuses, in anti-racist campaigns fighting the government on questions of immigrants and refugees. This is symptomatic of significant numbers of people who are not disillusioned but rather have turned to organise beyond the limits of the old official organisations.

Revolutionary socialists and activists have the opportunity to continue to build struggles in united fronts.

We can look for ways to bring a range of forces together to make an impact both within the union movement and the various social movements - beyond the upcoming elections.

year in office.

This has occurred with a divided union leadership, a fragmented and small organised left and, for the most part, single issue social movements. The Ontario Federation of Labour put out a call to protest the new labour laws calling for 'Days of Action'. Large numbers were involved, climaxing in 200,000 on one occasion in Toronto. In London, Ontario, 24,000 congregated in sub-zero temperatures.

These days of action were inspirational to many sectors and movements. For the first time in decades, labour and community-based organisations worked side-by-side. However the union leaderships failed to take advantage and call a province-wide general strike.

This stemmed from their political failure to mobilise against the architects of NAFTA or neo-liberalism, or to examine the real divisions between organised labour and the bosses. This failure was due in part to the 1980s model of business unionism they followed and partly to their view that a NDP government was the pinnacle of their ambitions.

The Days of Action were always limited and defensive in charac-





# 5 years of International Workers' Aid to Bosnia A balance sheet of solidarity

**Mick Woods**

WHEN I HEARD the first Workers Aid for Kosova convoy reached the town of Mitrovica in Kosova earlier this autumn I got a tremendous buzz.

There is now a campaign running internationally, very well supported in Tuzla by the unions and the municipality, to run further convoys to the workers and refugees in Mitrovica. If anything demonstrates the achievements of IWA and the other groups involved running aid to the workers of Tuzla it is that the workers of Tuzla are now taking the initiative to help their colleagues in Kosova.

In celebrating the 5th birthday of International Workers' Aid (IWA), I want to attempt to draw a short balance sheet of the campaign. It is crucial to ask why our efforts in supporting the multi-ethnic forces in Bosnia attracted as little support as it did, and why the groups which did support this political line were so apathetic, ineffective and unable to collaborate on a day to day basis.

This balance sheet is critical if we are to learn anything from this campaign and deepen our understanding of internationalism.

If the war in Bosnia was a test for the left, most of it failed. Some assumed that they were duty-bound to take the opposite side to the Yanks, and therefore ended up as apologists for the ultranationalists Milosevic and Karadzic. Others had a sort of mirror image analysis where they felt obliged to concoct American imperialist plots to support Serb



nationalism, when at the same time the Yanks were dropping (OK a very limited number of) bombs on the Bosnian Serb Army.

Reality in the Bosnian War was not volunteering to be easily shoehorned into any simple imperialist v anti-imperialist or fascist v anti-fascist scenario.

Much of the left did basically agree with the analysis and efforts of IWA, but basically sat on their hands and did little beyond make occasional literary interventions. It actually demanded a high level of co-operation, flexibility, trust and discipline to make IWA work.

The nature of our activities meant that there was a lot of resources – and comrades' lives at stake – not just squabbling over what goes in the next leaflet or what slogan we have on the banner.

For many of the left, I believe,

there was simply a fear of working with a popular cause in a principled way and having to take real responsibility for things. It's a damned site easier to play with slogans such as 'arm the Bosnian resistance' than to ensure the 'rolling-convoy' had spare parts and diesel to drive flour up to Tuzla every ten days.

The failure of the British left to work together in one campaign led to two, almost identical, campaigns, both driving essentially the same goods to the same bloody city...

I mean OK there were political

differences, a few shibboleths and different conceptions of democracy and how to organise: but if we can't overcome these and behave sensibly well, as Dr Martin Luther King succinctly put it, 'If we can't hang together as brothers, we will surely hang separately as fools.'

A little anecdote might help to illustrate the problem. - I was in Swansea doing an IWA tour in February 1994 just before I left these lovely isles for ever.

I drove with Brendan Young up the valley to Tower colliery to a lodge meeting. First we visited the lodge treasurer and showed him the video, then



we went to the lodge meeting, where we were very well received and a large donation was agreed. Unfortunately it got sent to Workers Aid for Bosnia by mistake! If Branch secretary Tyrone O'Sullivan could get confused, what about the average worker?

When the first IWA convoy got to Tuzla on November 7 1993 we brought about 18 tonnes of aid.



This was a drop in the ocean for a town of 140,000 inhabitants plus 70,000 refugees.

But we did bring a lot of encouragement and hope though, and hopefully helped the multi-ethnic, non-nationalist forces who still run Tuzla and seem to be getting stronger in both parts of Bosnia.

It was significant that the small Bosnian delegation at the Fourth International Youth Summer Camp in Denmark this year came from Banja Luka as well as Tuzla. This and the involvement of Tuzla unions in the convoys to Kosova are maybe little legacies of the work of IWA and others in the region.

Eastern Europe is for sure more full of dangers than opportunities for the left: but we must continue to support and develop a dialogue with socialist and democratic forces in the region.

It'll maybe be a generation before socialism comes back on the agenda in the old Eastern European states: but we have to show there is an alternative to neo-liberalism and nationalist demagoguery.

# Hands off Abdullah Ocalan!

**Sheila Malone**

KURDISH activists across Europe are stepping up their campaign for political status for PKK (Kurdish Workers Party) leader, detained after arriving in Italy on November 12.

Turkey reacted to the detention by demanding Ocalan's extradition for his long time part in the Kurdish liberation struggle, and threatened an economic boycott if Italy does not comply. If sent back Ocalan faces the death penalty.

Protests erupted around the world in support of the Kurdish leader. Up to 40,000 Kurdish, Turkish and Italian trade unionists, workers, students and refugees have demonstrated daily in Rome. In Kurdistan and Turkey thousands defied brutal repression by the police and military, as well as fascist thugs, and took to the streets.

According to independent Kurdish TV, 2,000 people have been arrested, many of them beaten up and one at least has been killed.

Others have protested by setting fire to themselves, 3



*Cook: passive over Pinochet, will he back genocidal Turkish government?*

of them dying in Rome and Moscow. In Britain up to 300 people are on hunger strike at Kurdish and Turkish community centres in London and 4,000 demonstrated outside the U.S. embassy against America's support for Turkey.

The Turkish state's genocidal war against its own Kurdish population is one of the most well documented by human rights and other organisations. It has resulted in over 30,000 people losing their lives, over 3,000 villages

destroyed and 4 million internally displaced refugees. The PKK has been a focus for resistance, at the same time calling for political dialogue and declaring 3 unilateral cease-fires (the last one being on 1st September this year).

Turkey's response has been to continue the war with renewed savagery, and to threaten countries which host Ocalan, whilst branding the Kurdish leader as an international terrorist. Predictably the US has echoed this view with the State Department calling for Ocalan to be extradited and "brought to justice".

Ocalan's arrival in Italy was a result of his expulsion from Syria, who also have conflicts with Turkey over water from the mighty Euphrates, and the refusal of Russia, Cyprus or Greece to allow him to stay.

Our own British "ethical" Foreign Secretary has made no comment on Ocalan's asylum rights or consequences of extradition, possibly because any criticism of Turkey might upset the lucrative arms trade between the two countries. Indeed Britain's position of

support for Turkey is the most unequivocal in Europe.

It seems increasingly likely that Ocalan will be allowed to stay and pursue his claim in Italy. A week after his arrival, a court of appeal ruled against extradition and he is now being kept in Rome pending a decision on his status there.

Ocalan's supporters have hailed this as a step forward and are calling for his total release and for him to be

given political status as "the legitimate leader of the Kurdish freedom struggle". This they hope will lead towards a just and lasting settlement of the war.

Messages of solidarity with the hunger strikers can be faxed to 0171 690 4003 or they can be visited at the Halkevi centre, Stoke Newington High Street, London N16.

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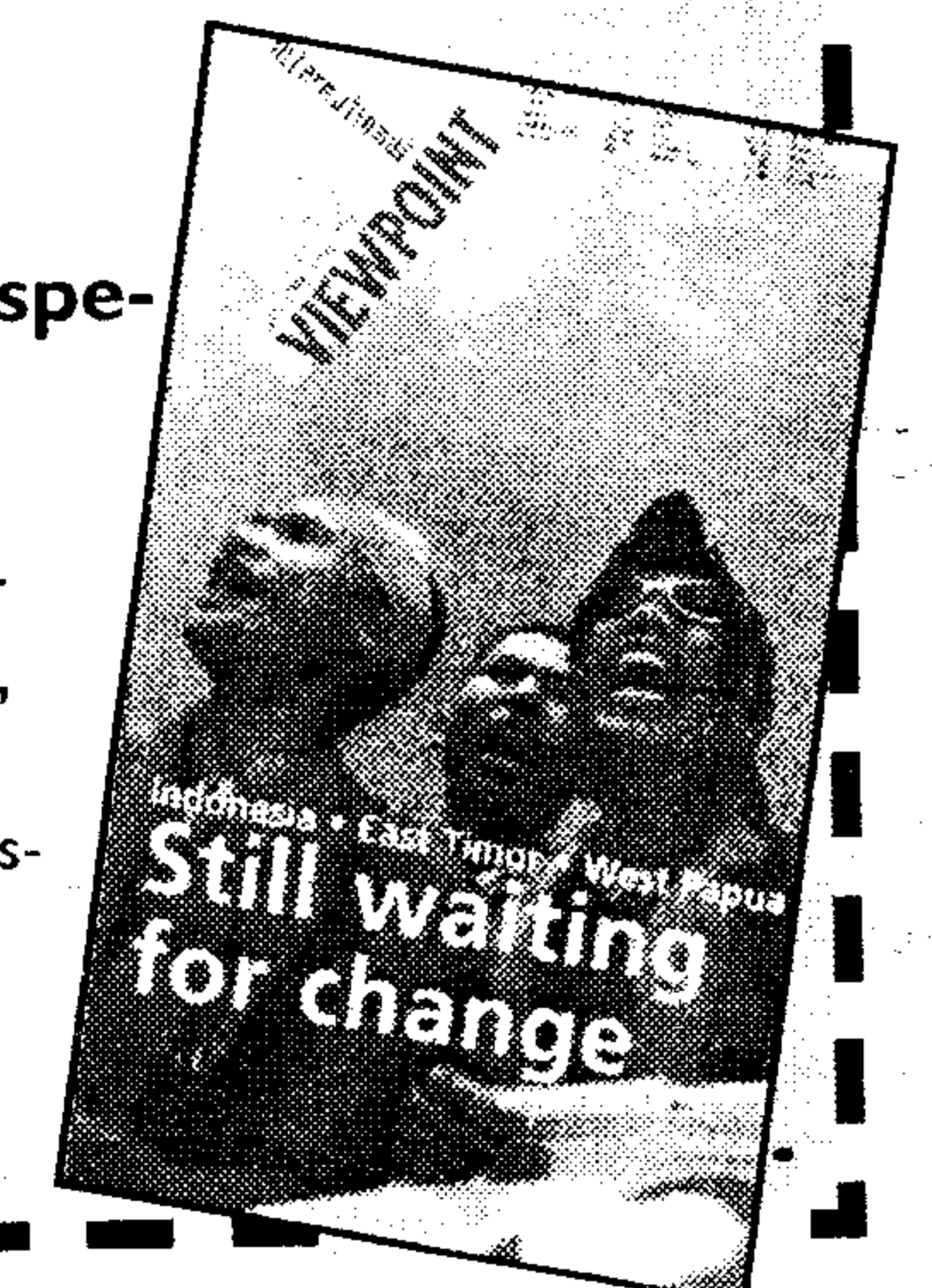
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## How Brenner's stripped-down view of crisis leads to reformism or reaction

# Simply wrong!

**R**OBERT Brenner is one of the most widely respected Marxist historians currently writing. He is also a long-term activist on the US left.

The special issue of *New Left Review* published this summer, in which he attempts to provide an interpretation of the course of the capitalist world economy from 1950 to the present, has already sparked wide debate among socialists.

It arrived at an appropriate time, being published at a time of exceptional economic instability, in the very week that the Russian currency and stock market collapsed. Any debate on the current world crisis needs to consider Brenner's work.

Brenner wants to explain two developments in particular. Firstly, the "long boom" in the major capitalist countries between 1950 and 1973, and secondly the equally long downturn from 1973 to the present. His explanation of these phenomena is basically very simple, though he links it to a large amount of historical detail (much of which is very interesting).

He sees the turn from boom to downturn as being fundamentally caused by competition between different nationally-based capitalisms. In particular he argues that it was the rise of Japan and Germany as competitors to the USA which first fuelled the boom, which was largely based on growth in those countries, and then led to a world wide crisis of over-production and over-capacity.

Competition from Japan and Germany has meant that US and other manufacturers have faced a crisis of profitability since 1965 or so, which has become acute since 1973 and has persisted almost to the present day.

This has fed through into lower investment and so into lower productivity. Lower productivity has meant that capitalists have been desperate to keep wages down, and have correspondingly led a massive assault on working class organisation, especially in the USA.

This assault has been partially successful in the US, according to Brenner. Wage growth has been held down so much that profitability has recovered in the last few years, allowing for a weak and sporadic boom.

But this boom is at the expense of capitalists elsewhere, especially those in Japan, Germany and East Asia who have been squeezed out of export markets by US competition and are now in deep crisis.

Brenner presents his account of the boom and downturn as being fundamentally different from the Marxist analyses previously offered.

*The Economics of Global Turbulence*, by Robert Brenner (Special issue of 'New Left Review' No. 229 May/June 1998). 264 pages, £8.

Reviewed by Andy Kilmister

There are three main variants of these. First, there are a variety of accounts which are based on Marx's theory of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. For Marx profits only arise through the exploitation of living labour in the productive process.

Use of plant and machinery can not on its own create profit, it only allows for the employment of workers who do create profit

Brenner dismisses the theory of the falling rate of profit quite quickly.

He then treats the other two approaches as being essentially similar, in that both are based on seeing the crisis as being rooted in working class resistance to capital - either over wages or over productivity. In contrast, he argues, it is *competition between capitalists* that is key to the downturn, and relations between capital and labour follow from the way this competition has developed.

If Brenner had managed to develop a distinctive and convincing Marxist account of the boom and downturn which was superior to the available alternatives, then that would have been a major development. Unfortunately, his analysis is a failure.

It is not as different from existing views as he maintains, and in many

ways it is actually weaker. To see this we need to look at three things; Brenner's method, his theory of economic crisis and his account of the post-war economy.

**B**renner does not really use Marx's concepts at all. Most of his work is simply an analysis of the influence of three factors on the rate of profit - namely the distribution of income, productivity and the ability of capitalists to raise prices. There is nothing in this analysis which would be strange to mainstream economists.

That does not of course mean it is necessarily wrong. But it does raise questions about the view of New Left Review that Brenner's work provides the basis for a renewal of Marxism.

More seriously Brenner presents a view of crisis as being determined essentially by just one factor - inter capitalist competition. It is worth comparing his account with that of Ernest Mandel in his book *Late Capitalism*, the most detailed account of the post-war boom to have emerged from the Fourth International.

Mandel argues that the rate of profit is determined by (is a 'seis-



and value. Technological change, by increasing the volume of such plant and machinery used by each individual worker, tends to drive the overall profit rate down, because capitalists have to lay out more capital for each worker they are employing.

This mechanism is seen to be at the root of the collapse of profitability at the onset of the downturn in the early 1970s.

The second major account of the transition from boom to downturn is the 'profit squeeze' approach. This sees the crisis as being caused by worker militancy which raised wages and led to profits being cut back.

The third approach is the 'regulation' approach, originating in France. This view sees the crisis as being caused by the exhaustion of the 'Fordist' approach to economic regulation, based on high productivity due to assembly line production coupled with high levels of demand stemming from wage growth and from welfare state expenditure.

The crisis of Fordism, it is argued, is rooted in a decline in the growth of productivity, which threatens the balance between production and consumption.

**There is nothing in Brenner's analysis which would be strange to mainstream economists.**



Striking US carworkers: fighting the employers, not workers in other countries

mograph of the history of') no fewer than six fundamental variables. "Any single-factor assumption is clearly opposed to the notion of the capitalist mode of production as a dynamic totality in which the interplay of all the basic laws of development is necessary in order to produce any particular outcome," he states.

He traces the effects of these variables through a number of concrete developments, such as the evolution of arms production, technical change, and the transformation of raw materials production. Compared to the richness of this account, Brenner's analysis appears rather simplistic.

**M**andel often runs into quite severe difficulties as a result of the complexity of his model. But these difficulties arise from the complexity of capitalism itself and cannot be evaded by arguing that capitalist development is reducible to the effect of just one variable.

Brenner's analysis of the tendency of the profit rate to fall clearly shows the weakness of his approach. His attack sees Marx's theory as arguing that profits will always and inevitably fall under capitalism. Marx's position is rather that there is a *tendency* for them to fall. The actual course of the profit rate depends on the interaction of this tendency with other factors such as those considered by Mandel.

Brenner analyses Marx as if he were writing mainstream economics with various factors acting simultaneously to produce an equilibrium rate of profit. But this was not Marx's approach. For him capitalist production was fundamentally marked by the way it takes place in time, and so new developments constantly disrupt any equilibrium. The tendency for profits to fall arises from just such an approach, and cannot be understood in a static framework.

Criticism of Brenner's method is not enough to show his theory is wrong. However, there are real problems with the theory itself.

Most importantly, any theory of crisis based on capitalist competition comes up against the problem that such competition is essentially redistributive. It can explain why one firm or country enters difficulties when it is out-competed. But it cannot show why the capitalist world as a whole should enter a downturn.

Brenner's answer to this is that established companies do not respond to new competition by leaving the market. Because they

have invested large amounts in the past in fixed capital (such as buildings, plant and machinery) they are prepared to stay in business and compete against newcomers by lowering prices.

They aim just to make a profit on their circulating capital (wages and raw materials payments). But by doing this they lower the overall rate of profit for all concerned, both themselves and the new entrants. This is the response that Brenner sees US companies making to Japanese and German competition in the 1970s and 1980s.

There are two questions about this. When the new entrants realise that the existing companies will be prepared to lower prices rather than give up the market to them, why don't they stop entering the market? There is a long-standing tradition in orthodox economics which sees exactly this mechanism as being a way of stopping new companies entering markets.

What motivates new entrants to come into the market even when they know it will lower profits?

Secondly, once fixed capital has worn out, why don't the existing firms leave the market and restructure their activities by moving to areas where profits are higher and there is less competition?

Brenner does not really answer either of these questions. He analyses the first by saying that

the entering firm may simply miscalculate or may have a strategic reason for accepting a lower rate of profit (page 27).

But such strategic reasons are surely based on expecting higher profits in the future.

Without these occurring Brenner seems to be saying that the crisis resulted simply from capitalist irrationality.

Brenner's answer to the second question rests on his account of post-war economic history. Here, however, he gradually moves away from the theoretical framework he has earlier outlined and introduces a number of new factors. The central one of these is the role of exchange rates.

**I**n his narrative account Brenner sees the movement of exchange rates as the main way in which US capital has competed with Japanese and German capital.

As Japan and Germany moved into the US market and out-competed US companies in the late 1960s, the US responded (for almost two decades) with a sustained devaluation of the dollar, raising their competitors' costs and lowering their profits. In this way US firms were able to remain in the market at the cost of lower

**Brenner's account is not as different from the "profit squeeze" and "regulation" approaches as he hopes.**



profitability worldwide.

The difficulty of this account is that, again, exchange rate changes are redistributive. They can explain the transfer of wealth between different national capitalisms but not a generalised crisis across the capitalist world.

For example, the fall of the dollar opened up two possibilities. First by raising incomes in countries like Japan and Germany it could have opened up new markets for US goods. Secondly, by lowering the cost of raw materials (oil for example is priced in dollars) it could have boosted profitability in those countries and helped them compete in the US and other markets.

It could also, of course, have lowered costs for the increasing number of US multinationals producing abroad. It is not clear why such exchange rate changes should have led to generalised crisis.

Actually, Brenner's analysis of the link between exchange rate changes and crisis is spelt out by implication on pages 28 and 29 of his book.

**T**he basic argument is that some of the gains of higher exchange rates in Japan and Germany went, not to capitalists, but to workers. Wages did not fall in those countries to reflect the extra purchasing power of the mark and the yen – and as a result German and Japanese companies became uncompetitive.

But this means that Brenner's account is not as different from the "profit squeeze" and "regulation" approaches as he hopes. They emphasise workers' militancy and see restraints on capitalists in raising prices as a secondary factor. Brenner sees these restraints as central and workers militancy as a secondary factor. But both work in the same framework.

Even if we accept that capitalist competition may have sparked off the downturn, it is still hard to explain why it has persisted for 25 years.



The fight against Renault plant closures has spanned Europe

Brenner has two further arguments here. First, he argues that the explosion of debt in the capitalist world has hindered the restructuring of capital. But he fails to put forward any detailed analysis of why this should be the case and why financial capitalists should have failed to enforce restructuring.

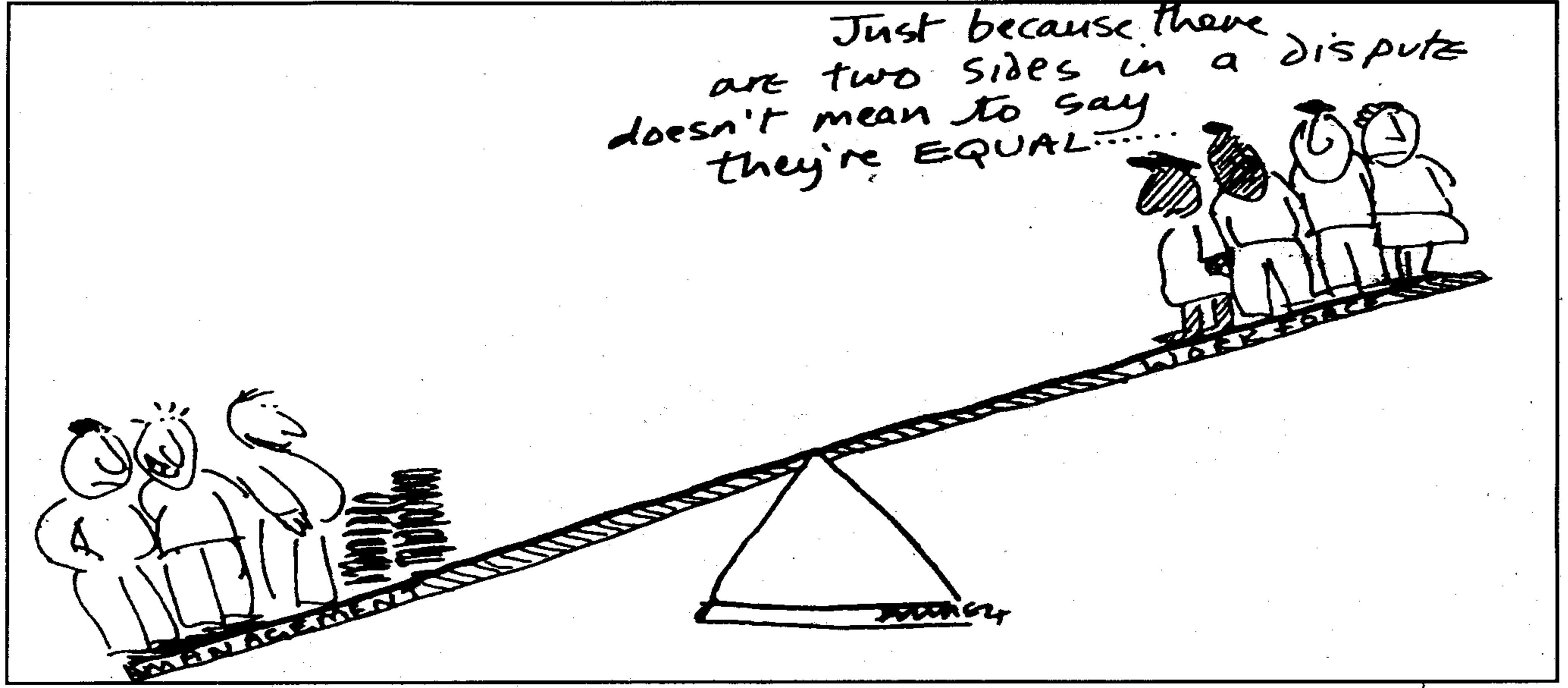
Secondly, he argues that monetarism, by creating such an acute crisis in the early 1980s, made restructuring difficult by closing down opportunities for profitable production in new areas. But this ignores the way in which crises have always been seen in the Marxist tradition as providing the basis for restructuring and change.

**A**nalytically, despite individual insights, Brenner fails to help us understand the long boom and the following downturn, and by extension the current economic crisis. He is certainly right to argue that inter-capitalist competition must be a part of any explanation of booms and crises. But this is hardly a new insight, and the links Brenner proposes between such competition and other key areas, for example class struggle and technological change, are simplistic and misleading.

Politically, however, the book is even more problematic. The best political conclusion that can be drawn from Brenner's work is a reformist one – that the USA, EU and Japan should jointly agree to co-ordinate their production and share out markets more equitably.

The worst though is a reactionary one – that the problems in each individual economy spring not from the nature of capitalism itself but from the producers living and working in other countries.

Sadly, Brenner's account may well turn out to be an obstruction to the forging of the international working class solidarity, which is the only solution to the current economic turmoil.



# Friendly advice to worried capitalists

Marxism Today, the long-defunct magazine that once did so much to reinforce the right-wing policies of "new realism" amongst trade union and Labour leaders, paving the way for the rise of Tony Blair, has clambered temporarily out of the grave to stage a bizarre posthumous protest. ALAN THORNETT takes a look at the special one-off issue, and wonders whether its publishers should be prosecuted under the Trades Descriptions Act.

THE CRISIS in the world economy, the turmoil in the stock exchanges and money markets, and the nightward march of the Blair government has rattled the cage of the long defunct *Marxism Today* magazine. A one off November/December edition has been published under the editorship of Martin Jacques.

The magazine provides a useful intervention into current debates around British and international politics and the neoliberal offensive, even for those like myself who reject most of its conclusions.

Its contributors include Eric Hobsbawm, Stuart Hall and Will Hutton and David Held. Although they have their different angles on the issues there is clearly a common thesis.

They present a useful demolition of Blair's claimed "third way", pointing out that what Blair actually represents is continuity with Thatcherite and Reaganite policies.

He is carrying forward US/IMF/World Bank style neoliberal policies at every level, from his acceptance of Tory spending limits to his drive for a "flexible" labour market. "WRONG" they say in large letters on the front cover across a photo of Blair himself. They rightly point out that recent events pose a big question mark over the perceived wisdom since the fall of the wall – that the free market works.

Blair, they say, is not only wrong for throwing himself behind the neoliberal agenda, but he has missed the boat.

He has backed neoliberalism – the deregulation of capital and the drive for super profits – when it is not only out of fashion, but is in profound crisis and is coming to an end.

They argue that neoliberalism is directly responsible for the international financial crisis. International capital they say will be (and already is) forced to recognise this and respond accordingly. If you are in a hole, stop digging! This is an interesting but controversial view, which is repeated in the latest edition of *New Left Review*, in an article by Robert Wade.

It is true that the victory of the US model of raw unregulated capitalism over the Japanese more regulated model and its release on the world is at the core of the current world economic crisis, including the 'Asian' crisis and the Russian crisis. This is what makes the current crisis something new and not an old style cyclical crisis (although there are cyclical crises within it at the national level).

Whether they are able to stop digging, however, is another matter altogether.

Certainly the bourgeoisie is split on what to do world-wide. Japan, already in deep recession, is advocating both Keynesian solutions (the government is currently giving away free shopping vouchers and urging people to spend them!) and re-regulation of the currency markets.

Maharathir in Malaysia has reintroduced controls – against IMF advice. There are calls for an Asian Monetary Fund (AMF) as an alternative to the IMF and based more on the Japanese model.

Some of the so-called "thinking capitalists" like George Soros have called for some re-regulation since, he says, unregulated capitalism will tear the world apart. In Europe, new German Chancellor Schroeder and French Prime Minister Jospin are trying to loosen the Stability Criteria to give them more room for Keynesian manoeuvre within the Maastricht Treaty.

This is a major debate: but is it likely that the neoliberal offensive will be brought to an end by a return to regulation and/or Keynesian pump-priming? I don't think so.

International capital does not sit down and work out its problems in that way. Each section of capital (and individual capitalist) acts in their own interest – not in the best interests of capital as a

whole – even if re-regulation and a return to Keynesianism was capable of solving the problem.

Clinton made clear during his recent visit to Japan that in the USA's view the answer to Japanese recession is not watering down the neoliberal agenda but stepping it up.

The current crisis has its roots in the failure of Keynesianism and de-regulation going right back to the ending of the Bretton Woods settlement and the free floating of currencies in the early 1970s. It is unlikely that all this will be thrown overboard now, even given the scale of the problem.

The most likely answer from the USA, the IMF and the World Bank will be more neoliberal policies, not less – despite the political consequences in countries like Malaysia, Indonesia and South Korea. There will be no AMF, and moves to reintroduce controls will be opposed.

*Marxism Today* not only advocates a regulated, Keynesian solution, but has plenty of suggestions as to exactly what these measures should be: they include stake holding, maintaining welfare, the strengthening of international agencies and their "regulatory" role, tightening banking regulations, putting controls on capital and regulating the markets.

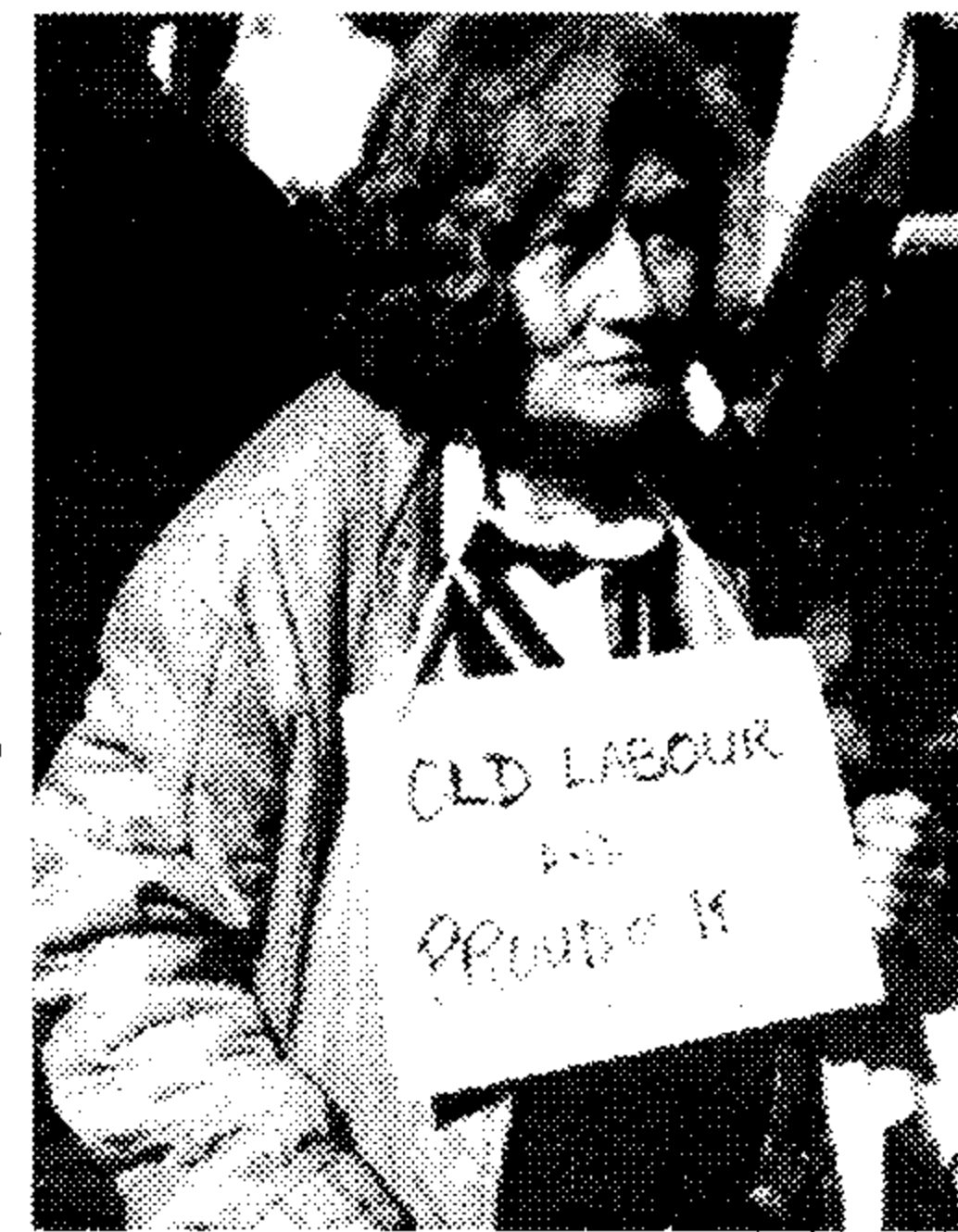
It is hard to see, however, what scope there is for such solutions given the decline in profits and over production which exists in the world economy.

The Japanese government has been unable to make any headway despite huge cash injections into the economy. As far as regulation is concerned, the IMF and the World Bank are unlikely to be impressed.

*Marxism Today's* one-off edition has made a contribution to an important debate but their central thesis is flawed. Capitalism is not a rational system that can simply plan its way out of a crisis. The neoliberal offensive is likely to be deepened rather than reversed.

As far as Tony Blair is concerned, despite divisions amongst the bourgeoisie world-wide, he stands unflinching with neoliberal agenda, and sees his task as ensuring that its writ runs through the European Union.

We are not told what *Marxism Today* proposes to do about that: it is a problem for us, the living Marxists, not those whose journal is long dead.



No, not the *Marxism Today* line!



# A look into the eye of the tiger

**BEHIND** the recent confidence-boosting headlines about a recovery in share prices in New York and London, (due, we are told, to Dr Greenspan's "miracle" cure of lowering US interest rates, the serious financial press live in fear. They fear the growing financial bubble, a world excess in productive capacity – and the continued failure of Japan to stimulate its economy and home market. **DAVE PACKER** looks at the Japanese economy, and asks why this key player in the unfolding world economic crisis has a trade surplus up 45 per cent and a government which is giving money away.

THE SERIOUS financial press in Britain is not fooled by the temporary recovery of share prices to their August levels and fresh talk about overcoming the crisis.

The *Economist* has been warning for months that much of the agony of Asia will move in due course to the rest of the world economy. However, it does not blame the problem on overproduction or excess capacity or supply, which it considers "mainly bunk". As a champion of free market capitalism it riles against the idea "that capitalism has somehow fixed things so that the world's capacity to produce has overtaken its willingness to consume." (Nov. 15th 1997)

As a neo-liberal, money supply, magazine, its editorials consider that the Japanese crisis is mainly due to; "bank lending that is incompetent, reckless or downright corrupt." It writes about a "mountain of bad debt. It is already an ugly sight, and there is worse to come." (Ibid)

The Japanese banks are certainly mired in a crisis of bad, unrecoverable loans, with increasing numbers of its borrowers defaulting. The government stated this much when it refused to reveal the result of a government audit into the state of its biggest banks.

These banks are sitting on suspect loans of between Y87 and Y140 trillion (\$600 to \$1000 billion). The bulk of the collateral is land, and as land prices are still spiralling downward, the amount the banks can reasonably hope to recover is following likewise.

The National Tax Administra-



Japan has exported part of its crisis to Korea: could Korean struggles spread to Japan

tion Agency revealed that land prices in Japan have fallen for the sixth year in a row.

Already many of the country's nineteen largest banks are probably insolvent. Controversial rescue packages for the Long Term Credit Bank of Japan, and other big banks, pumping in huge amounts of new capital, are seen as ways to stave off wider economic collapse.

This has frightening social and political implications for the Japanese bourgeoisie! The social contract involving 'Jobs for life' in Japan still has a powerful ideological and material attraction; the class struggle might be unleashed if unemployment was allowed to reach its 'natural' level.

In August the *Economist* reckoned that at least 15 of the 119 construction firms listed on the first section of the Tokyo Stock Exchange are bankrupt in all but name, because the value of their land holdings, bought at the height of the bubble, had plummeted and loans guaranteed to subsidiaries and property developers have turned sour.

Big general contractors and huge employers, such as Fujita, Kumagai Gumi, Tokyu, Aoki, all have suspect liabilities, and things have got worse. Costly rescue packages, which eat into reserves and push up government borrowing are seen as the only way to hold the line.

However, Japan's disastrous problems are not just due to an explosion of a debt, rather, this is a symptom. The underlying crisis is to be found in the so-called real economy, in a crisis of over-accumulation.

Gretchen Morganson of the *New York Times* reported as early as June, 1998, wrote that inventories in Japanese warehouses had risen to double the amount piled up in the recession of 1991-2, a recession from which Japan never really recovered. (Quoted by *Socialist Action USA*)

By August, Japan's Economic Planning Agency reported that seven of the country's ten regions were officially in a slump, and

two others were stagnant. The agency also found in a survey of 4,500 big Japanese companies that they plan to cut foreign direct investment by 57% this year to Y1.2 trillion (\$8.3 billion). At its peak, in 1990, investment reached Y4.2 trillion. (*Economist* August 22.) All these figure are being continually revised downwards.

The end of the Japanese miracle can be dated as far back as 1985 when the USA responded to its disastrous trade deficit with Japan, by imposing the Plaza Accord. This forced the Japanese government to raise the value of the Yen against the dollar. By 1990, this had led to a 40% reflation of the Yen against the dollar.

Although this failed to solve the American trade deficit, it did precipitate a rush of capital out of Japan into the South East Asian dollar zone, to the tune of \$15 billion by 1990. This stimulated a flood of new speculative investment into the region, resulting in overaccumulation and a financial bubble, which eventually broke in the summer of 1997.

Stock markets collapsed, and there was a huge round of major currency devaluations, as the speculative capital outflowed. This had the effect of pushing the Japanese economy deeper into recession and stagnation. Its economy staggered along with an average growth rate of only 1% p.a. from 1992 to 1997, when Asia crashed.

Since 1993, in response to this developing crisis and in opposition to current neo-liberal thinking, Japanese governments have embarked on the biggest neo-Keynesian reflationary, pump-priming programme in the history of capitalism: seven huge government spending packages, with the latest package announced this month of \$112 billion, bringing the total cost to an estimated \$760 billion!

Large amounts of cash have gone to construction companies to re-equip the country's infrastructure (described as 'roads to

nowhere'). However, the government undermined some of the earlier packages by attempting to claw back part of the huge cost by raising taxes to reduce its budget deficit. Although these massive stimuli have kept employment levels up and avoided a full scale slump for the time being, they have not succeeded in jump-starting the economy, even when combined with near zero interest rates. The latest figures show a fall in production of 3%, with unemployment rising.

In an increasingly globalised economy the effects of the Japanese crisis, the second largest economy in the world, is far-reaching, with repercussions on the rest of the world. Its impact on Russia and Brazil has been widely discussed, but the crisis is also impacting in Europe and America too.

As Japan retrenches, its huge foreign investments are halted or withdrawn, resulting in factory closures around the world. Worse is to come. Even more serious, as Japanese inventories increase, so prices fall and inter-imperialist competition intensifies.

Although trade in the South East Asian markets is down by nearly a third, Japan's trade surplus with the rest of the world jumped in September by 45.6%! Japanese exports to the USA have continued to rise, up 3.9% year on year while overall US imports to Japan fell 9.3%.

In 1996 Japan took 44% of all US exports, which has today been significantly reduced because of the shrinking Japanese home market - a market where they now hope to stimulate spending by giving money away! The trade surplus will have serious knock-on effects in the USA and Europe and could lead to calls for protectionism.

The *Financial Times* (Nov 8 1998) reported the threats made by William Daley, US commerce secretary, who told a meeting of US and European business leaders that Japan's growing trade surplus with non-Asian economies was a major source of instability which could create political unrest by causing workers to fear for their jobs.

US imports of hot-rolled steel from Japan had increased more than five times this year. But Daley's warning was directed against the European Union, which he said had to open its markets and take a greater share of Japanese imports - or it would run the risk of a protectionist backlash in the USA.

"We will not be the dumping ground for troubled economies... Unless Europe does more, there could be a huge public outcry that is loud enough to rekindle the fires of protectionism," he said.

Both Daley and Sir Leon Brittan warned that they would rigorously implement anti-dumping policies against unfair trading practices from other countries. In the name of the free market, the *Economist*, more rigorous in its neo-liberal ideals, does not approve of such anti-dumping policies, or expensive rescue packages.

The *Economist* is right when it says the bubble will burst and

that neo-Keynesian pump-priming will fail to stop the inevitable, as the Japanese experiment is showing us. But the idea of a free-market, de-regulated, crisis-free capitalism, properly managed through controlling the money supply, is also a dream.

The world has been travelling down this road for nearly 20 years and the proof of the pudding in the eating.

Contrary to the neo-liberal dogma peddled by the *Economist*, a crisis of overproduction and falling prices is maturing. In Asia there has been a serious overcapacity of probably more than 30%, especially in computers, electrical consumer goods and motor vehicles, but not just in these worst hit sectors.

World capitalism is actually producing far more goods than can be absorbed by consumers with money to buy them. Only a massive destruction of productive capacity and even higher levels of mass unemployment over the next decade will create the basis for a new recovery - that is if the working class and its allies don't deal with this rotten system once and for all.

But now we should fight for a united front with the neo-Keynesians for a massive programme of state expenditure on public works to defend jobs and services.

We should demand that Brown breaks with Tory neo-liberalism and takes his lead from the spending proposals made by German finance minister Oskar LaFontaine. But for us this can only be a first step.

**300 Club**



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The **SOCIALIST OUTLOOK** 300 Club offers readers and supporters the chance to win a £50 cash prize or alternatives each month - for just a £5 donation. We get the cash we need to run campaigns and improve the paper - and you get an excellent chance of a bumper pay-out, or the satisfaction of knowing your donation was well spent! To join the 300 Club, send us a Standing Order for £5 per month, or drop us a line at PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU, and we will send you a form. This month's lucky winners are (3rd prize) John Lister (shurely shum mishtake?) (Ed) (2nd) John Finnegan, and the top prize goes to Vince Gillespie.

Japan has begun the biggest ever reflationary programme, costed at \$760bn

At least 15 of the top 119 construction firms are bankrupt in all but name



# “The most expelled man in Australian politics”

*Red Hot. The Life and Times of Nick Origlass*, by Hall Greenland

Reviewed by Alan Thornett

HALL GREENLAND'S excellent biography of Nick Origlass is a useful edition to the early history of the Trotskyist movement.

Nick Origlass was a central leader of the Australian section of the Fourth international for 30 years – from the mid 1930s until the mid 1960s – when he was expelled as part of a minority opposing the reunification which formed the United Secretariat.

After that he remained an active and campaigning socialist, mostly in local government, until his death in May 1996 at the age of 88. He was politically active for a total of 60 years.

Hall Greenland presents him as “the most expelled man in Australian political history”. He explains that he was: “ousted from the Communist Party in 1931, from the State Council of the Unemployed in 1939, from his union in 1946 and 1955 (the first time by the Communists and the second time by the anti-Communists), from the Labour

Party in 1955 and 1968, from the FI in 1965, and even from the Leichard Council in 1969. And this isn't counting the times the bosses tried to sack him.

It's an interesting point, but his various expulsions were in fact quite diverse events – although some of them, at least, did reflect his prickly and uncompromising character. Origlass, however, was first and foremost a fighter for the rights of the working class: that is what shaped his life, and that is what comes through in the book most clearly.

His first battle was a beer boycott, in 1929 in Mount Isa, a mining town in the hot and thirsty Australian interior, which began in October 1929 and ended 10 months later in August 1930. Town mass meetings demanded, and eventually got, a reduction the price of beer from two shillings to one shilling and threepence a pint.

He left Mt. Isa in 1933 to work in Brisbane and Sidney where he came into contact with Trotskyists, and eventually joined the Workers Party of Australia – the Australian section of the Left Opposition.

In 1937 he moved to Balmain, the industrial district of Sidney, and two years later started work as a blacksmith in Mort's ship yards – where he was to play a major role as a key rank-and-file

organiser for the next 10 years.

This is the most fascinating part of the book. For me it was déjà vue with a vengeance, since the battles he was involved in at the shipyards in Sidney during the 1940s are a remarkable parallel with the battles myself and others fought in the Cowley car plants 30 years later. In Balmain they faced not only management and right-wing union leaders acting together, but the industrial role of the Communist Party.

Many of the measures taken against them then would be painfully familiar to Cowley car workers in the 1970s: ballot rigging by the right-wing, de-recognition of elected left-wing union reps, the expulsion of left-wingers from the union, the disbanding of militant branches of the union, and key union positions held by renegade Trotskyists who had moved to the right.

I was de-recognised by Cowley management in 1974 and defended in a month long strike. 30 years earlier in February 1945 Nick Origlass was also was de-recognised, in his case by the Stalinist leadership of the union – the Federated Iron Workers Association – for failing to get workers back to work as ordered under war-time regulations.

He was defended for 6 weeks by nearly 3,000 Balmain shipyard workers. It was one of the

most remarkable strikes in Australian trade union history: such strikes over the recognition of individual militants are in any case rare. And the strike was aimed directly at the Stalinists themselves – a strike led by Trotskyists who they had marginalised and vilified. When 600 strikers turned up at the union branch meeting to call for the ban on Origlass to be lifted, the Stalinists refused to take a vote.

The end of the strike was as remarkable as its beginning. The strikers turned up at a union meeting and claimed the right under an overlooked rule to re-elect the leadership. They voted out the existing leadership, and voted in a new one – with Nick Origlass elected not just as the delegate for Mort's shipyard but as the full-time official of the union!

After the vote they marched through Balmain to the union office to install the new leadership – only to find that the existing officials had barricaded themselves in and were refusing



leave! They resolved the problem by setting up a new office, from which the union could function, under the leadership of Origlass and the militants. It was a total victory.

Mort's yard did not survive very long into the 1950s, but the contribution which Origlass and other early Trotskyists around the world made did survive – with all its problems – and the workers movement has been much stronger as a result.

The book is a short history of the Australian Trotskyism and essential reading for those interested in the history of the movement.

● Copies available £11.50 including P&P from W. Greenland, 11 Temple Fortune Lane, London NW11 7UB. Cheques to W. Greenland.

## Arguments for internationalism

*Fatherland or Mother Earth? Essays on the National Question* by Michael Löwy. (Pluto Press/IIRE, £9.99)

Reviewed by John Lister

“THE NATIONALITY of the worker is neither French, nor English, nor German, it is labour, free slavery (...). His government is neither French, nor English, nor German, it is capital. His native air is neither French, nor German, nor English, it is factory air. The land belonging to him is neither French, nor English, nor German, it lays a few feet beneath the ground.”

These brilliantly scathing words from a little-known letter by Karl Marx give a new and more vivid take on the familiar line from the *Communist Manifesto* that “the proletariat has no country”.

They are among the array of nuggets of new and unfamiliar material which help make this little pamphlet of essays on nationalism and internationalism a stimulating read.

Löwy's book begins with a focus on the internationalist kernel of the *Communist Manifesto*, and goes on to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the early Communist writings of both Marx and Engels.

He takes on the discussion about the “racism” of some comments by Marx and more especially Engels, putting the allegations in political context, and contrasting other passages in which both men demonstrate their support for colonial revolutions and a consistent internationalist stance.

But Löwy also carefully distinguishes between Marx and Engels, and joins the crit-

ics of Engels' theory of “non-historic nations” as “a foreign body in the theoretical system of Marxism”.

The essays then go on critically to examine the varying attitudes to the issue of national self-determination set out by a number of leading revolutionary figures, including Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky.

Luxemburg's refusal to support the call for Polish self-determination is explained in part as an ultra-left overreaction to the nationalistic line of the main Polish social democratic party.

Trotsky's initially contradictory position is also critically traced through its various stages, while Lenin's insistence upon the right of nations to self-determination is explained as flowing from his conception of the need for the Russian working class to lead an alliance of the oppressed (including the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie) if it were to take power.

In this sense, as Löwy points out, Lenin's understanding of the importance of the national struggle developed alongside his adoption of the strategy of permanent revolution after April 1917.

Lenin's aim was democracy and the internationalist unity of the proletariat, and Löwy praises his ability to make no concessions whatever to nationalism.

While many Marxists would claim to be familiar with Lenin's line on the national question, Löwy also attempts to rehabilitate the contribution of Austrian Marxist Otto Bauer, whose “classic” work was the subject of harsh side-swipes from Lenin.

Löwy is especially enthusiastic about Bauer's notion of “nations as processes”, which avoids attempting to impose rigid definitions, his hostility to nationalism, and his very modern-sounding conclusion from 1907:

“The International's duty can and must be, not to level national particularities, but to promote international unity in national diversity.”

By contrast, Löwy wages a fierce attack on Stalin's article *Marxism and the National Question*, which he describes as the very opposite – an “obnoxious attempt to impose rigid rules”. He points out a series of inconsistencies between Stalin's approach and that of Lenin, and queries Lenin's alleged support for it.

Throughout this survey, Löwy time and again comes back to the fundamental distinction which Marxists make between the nationalism of the oppressor and the nationalism of the oppressed – but does so without making political concessions to the politics of nationalism, which are correctly bracketed, with religion, under the heading of “irrational” responses.

However the later chapters are less satisfying. Löwy does not appear to have fully grasped the link between the growth of internationalism in the workers' movement and the rise of mass struggle – and the converse problem, which can open space for racism and reaction after the workers' movement suffers significant defeats.

The rise of the early Communist Interna-

tional took place precisely on such an upward tide of class struggles, as did the blooming of internationalism in the late 1960s.

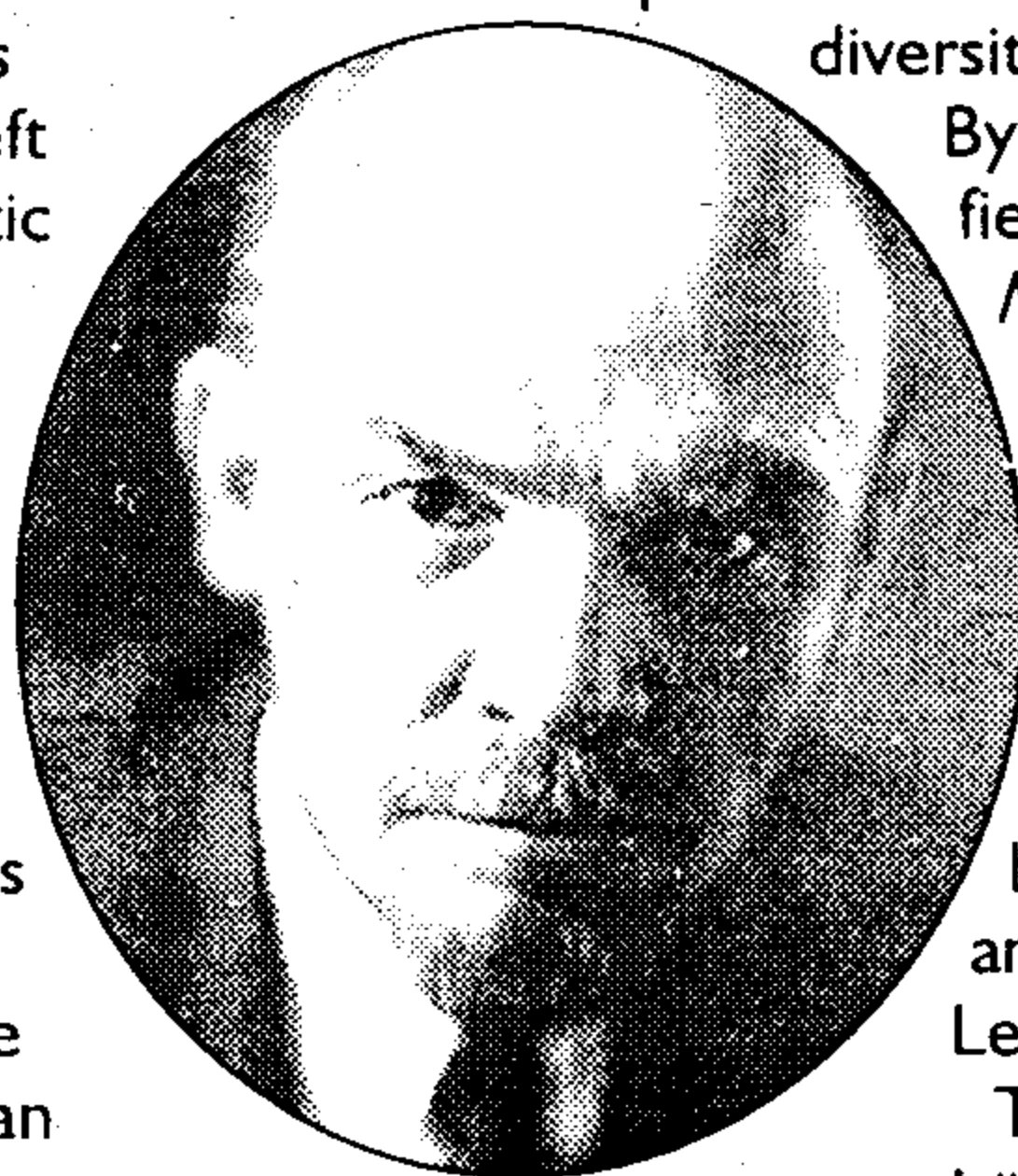
On the other side of the coin we see for example today's slide of sections of the Palestinian masses towards religious fundamentalism can be seen as a reaction to the vacuum of leadership opened up by the capitulation of Arafat and the PLO. The rise of the far right in parts of Europe can also be traced in part to the lack of combative working class leadership.

In my view some of the formulations in the final two chapters are open to doubt, not least Löwy's apparent support for the greater integration of the European Union “which renders many old nationalist quarrels increasingly obsolete and creates favourable conditions for common European social struggles” (p84).

This was written in 1993 and therefore pre-dates the subsequent debates over the impact of the Maastricht Treaty, but maybe it should have been amended or been subject to a footnote comment.

It follows on another unfortunate formulation taking a soft line towards “Christian socialist networks who have been establishing strong internationalist links”. Alas, the most influential “Christian socialist network” affecting us today is the one linking Tony Blair to many of his priggish, Bible-bashing cabinet colleagues.

These weaknesses however are not enough to detract from the value of a clearly-written and admirably succinct little book, which certainly stimulated me to think, and made me want to read more – although the price of £9.99 for just 85 pages of text is a little steep.



Lenin: hard on nationalism



VERY FEW people are ever likely to know the truth about why former Welsh Secretary Ron Davies was on Clapham Common one cold October evening.

Behind the press innuendo however lay the suggestion that the full story was too embarrassing to be made public. This was despite the fact that Davies is not accused of committing any crime – if anything he is a victim.

No one should be under pressure to resign from their job because they have had or have sought gay sex. While we did not support Ron Davies' candidacy for Welsh Secretary, this is irrelevant to our stance on this question. Below MARK FINDLAY looks at the politics of cruising :

### What is cruising?

EVEN TODAY probably the majority of gay men are unable to be open about their sexuality. They remain within the closet and resort to secret means to meet each other.

Cruising is one of the terms used to describe this activity when meetings happen in places such as parks. Other common meeting places include public toilets – this is known as "cottaging" (a public toilet is a "cottage"). Sometimes men meet and go elsewhere for sex; but frequently it happens there and then in the bushes.

"Cruising" and other attempts at anonymous sex used to be unknown amongst lesbians. This is hardly surprising given women's economic and social position in society, and the fact that women are conditioned to have a less active sexuality than men. It is interesting to note that in recent years the growth of a more developed lesbian commercial network has led to some changes at this level – although still mainly within the confines of known lesbian venues.

### Why do gay men cruise?

Well - in many parts of the country there is little else. "Legal" gay meeting places like pubs and clubs are concentrated in big cities and some seaside resorts. In countless small towns and the countryside there is nothing except roadside lay-bys (another common location for meetings to take place) and "cottages".

Gay pubs and clubs are also expensive – drink prices are higher than in most "straight" bars, closing them off to many on the dole or low paid jobs. Such venues are also closed to anyone "illegally" young – under 18. In any case, even today gay bars that do exist outside big cities are prone to being raided.

However, this doesn't explain the popularity of places like Hampstead Heath – and, let's face it, Clapham Common, even though London is full of legal gay venues. Part of the reason is the prevalence of homophobia and harassment that makes it difficult for people to be open about their sexuality – to "come out".

Many apparently "family" men are in fact gay or bisexual. They may resort to the anonymity of cruising to avoid exposure and the loss of family life and contact with their children that would result. Exposure may mean the sack and/or concentrated homophobia from work colleagues and erstwhile friends, particularly in small towns where "everyone knows everyone else".

But let's face it, many gay men do it pre-

# The politics of cruising



The fight by gay men against discrimination and legal harassment goes on

cisely for the immediacy, thrill and excitement of it. In one sense gay men are acting out stereotypes of male sexuality – in a situation of greater equality than is the case when heterosexual men act in a similar way in relation to women.

### What does the law say?

All forms of cruising are thoroughly illegal. Sex in public places is prosecuted as "Gross Indecency" under the Sexual Offences act of 1956, which was definitely not repealed by the 1967 Sexual Offences Act which is generally assumed to have decriminalised homosexuality. In fact the Act only made sex between men lawful in some very specific situations.

The 1956 act provides that it is unlawful "for a man persistently to solicit or importune another man in a public place for immoral purposes". In addition there are many more laws – and local bylaws – that make it illegal to cruise or cottage.

### "Acceptable" and "unacceptable" activity

What does this say about the attitudes of society to gay men?

We are "OK" if we have steady lovers – but a non-monogamous gay man is still regarded with suspicion. It is much easier to come out if one has a regular partner. This makes me an "acceptable", "good", "well behaved" gay man. Men not in this situation are regarded as "dangerous", or "predatory" if they go out and search for partners in public.

The difference in attitude to 'promiscuity' amongst gay and heterosexual men is very stark. For 'straight' men, whether or not they are already in a relationship, mul-

tipl sexual encounters are seen as a sign of manliness, as something to be proud of. For gay men the reverse is the case.

There are interesting parallels to the way women's behaviour is judged – they may well be regarded as "nymphomaniac" if they go out and seek male partners.

Gay men and lesbians are to be kept away from children. Even those in steady relationships are not thought suitable as adopters or foster parents – and even lesbians are likely to lose custody of their children if their sexuality is known. The old legend of homosexuality equalling pederasty dies hard, and the fact that most sexual abuse of children is committed by heterosexual men within the family is ignored.

### What is the response of the police?

Police raids on cruising areas are frequent. This may involve entrapment, where plain clothes "pretty" police pose as gay men waiting for sex (this is particularly the case around public toilets).

It may involve the use of police cars charging around trapping men in their headlights, use of dogs, etc.

Police policy has changed somewhat, however. A "gay police" society has been formed, there are "community liaison officers", there is increasing recognition of "queer bashing", and in a number of major cities gay groups have regular liaison meetings with the police.

Despite this, double standards continue. Arrests and harassment of men found in public areas continues, especially in smaller towns and cities. Queer-bashers who harass, maim and murder gay men in cruising areas are rarely prosecuted.

The attitude of the government towards gay sex "crimes" appears not to have changed either. In the recent "Bolton

Seven" case, which saw seven men arrested for consensual sex, the prosecutions were sanctioned by Jack Straw

### Why it shouldn't be illegal

We are against all discrimination against gay men. The hounding of gay men who meet each other in public is a gross breach of their human rights. We are opposed to the criminalisation of any consensual acts – of "crimes without victims".

A complete ending of any legal justification for harassment of gay men is required. We are in favour of active anti-discrimination legislation and equality of childcare rights for lesbians and gay men.

Even in countries where more legal progress has been made such as the Netherlands, lesbians and gay men do not have the same rights to recognition of relationships and child care.

The heterosexual family is still a cornerstone of capitalist society, especially in Britain, as Jack Straw's recent pronouncements bear witness.

The threat to this from lesbian and gay sexuality is real, as can be borne out by the hysterical reaction of the press. Gay and lesbian liberation therefore has a revolutionary content.

A socialist society would abolish all discriminatory laws and substitute social rules based upon consent. We are committed to fighting for a view of lesbian and gay sexuality as completely good and normal.

### The role of the Blair government

A good start was made, with promises to equalise the age of consent and abolish Section 28 in the manifesto. But we have now seen the following:

- Failure to face down the Lords over the age of consent (although there are promises of separate legislation soon)

- Legislation banning relationships between workers and young people in schools, social work etc considered together with debates on the age of consent. While we accept there is a real issue here, the linking of the two issues tends to strengthen the gay sex equals paedophilia argument of the reactionaries.

- Abolition of Section 28 put on the back burner,

- No mention of repealing the 1956 act or the "privacy" clauses of the 1967 Act

- Jack Straw's and Tony Blair's recent statements favouring marriage in bringing up children

These alone should point out that the Blair government is to say the least not as "friendly" as some in the gay community think.

### What we call for

We argue for:

- Equalisation of the age of consent as a step to moving to consent as the only criterion governing whether a sexual act is legal

- All discriminatory laws, and clauses in other laws to be repealed, notably the "Gross indecency", "importuning", "soliciting" provisions in the 1956 acts, and the "in private" provision of the 1967 act.

- Removing all by-laws that can or are used to control use of parks etc by gay men.

- Repeal of other legislation used to harass lesbians and gay men such as "breach of the peace" provisions

- Repeal of Section 28

- Repeal of all legislation that discriminates over childcare

- Full anti-discrimination provisions; constitutional rights.

- Full recognition of all relationships, with the right to register and de-register any relationship with no waiting periods etc.

- No specific favouring of "marriage" for inheritance and childcare purposes. The removal of the right of priests and other religious figures to register marriage.

- Specifically outlawing homophobic acts.



# SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

## Where we stand

IN THE NINETIES, millions of women and men have taken part in mobilisations against the evils of capitalism and the bureaucratic dictatorships. This reflects the fact that humanity face widening dangers. Ecological, military, social and economic devastation faces millions of people.

Many more people recognise the barbaric nature of capitalism. In a situation where the inability of the social democratic and communist parties to provide socialist solutions is becoming clearer, the task of creating new leaderships remains ahead.

**Socialist Outlook** is written and sold by socialists committed to this struggle. We are the British supporters of the world-wide marxist organisation, the Fourth International. We stand for the revolutionary transformation of society and a pluralist, socialist democracy world wide.

The overall goal which we pursue is the emancipation of all human beings from every form of exploitation, oppression, alienation and violence.

Socialism must be under the control of ordinary people, democratic, pluralist, multi-party, feminist, ecologist, anti-militarist and internationalist. It must abolish wage slavery and national oppression.

The working class is the backbone of unity among all the exploited and oppressed. The working class and its allies must uncompromisingly fight against capitalism and for a clear programme of action in order to gradually acquire the experience and consciousness needed to defeat capitalism at the decisive moment of crisis.

The movements of women, lesbians and gay men, and black people to fight their particular forms of oppression make an essential contribution to the struggle for a different society. They are organised around the principle "None so fit to break the chains as those who wear them".

The whole working class needs to fully commit itself to these struggles. Furthermore we fight for a strategic alliance between workers and these organisations - an alliance which respects their legitimate autonomy.

By building simultaneously revolutionary organisations in each country and a revolutionary International, we aim to guide and encompass the global interests of the workers and oppressed. By building a united struggle against exploitation and oppression we aim to ensure the survival of the human race.

If you think this is worth fighting for, and you like what you read in *Socialist Outlook*, why not join us? Drop a line to the address on this page, and we'll be in touch.

## Back to the future?

I APPLAUD those of you who showed courage and foresight in organising the 60 Years of the Fourth International event at the weekend.

Placing such a grouping of veterans of the revolutionary movement on the same platform to discuss their experiences of building the movement in the 1930s was bound to make sparks fly - although I think that had Ted Grant been in attendance, it would have stoked more flames still.

The presence of a latter day Lambertist, John Archer, and his entourage, a dissident Morenista, Bill Hunter, a veteran USec supporter, Charlie van Gelderen, and a veteran renegade "reluctant revolutionary", Harry Ratner, provided potential for bringing all the old arguments from the 1930s back to the surface. Had Ted Grant accepted his invite, the battles would have raged.

It seems that there is a new spirit of rapprochement in the air - to mix a metaphor or three - with all the veterans commemorating 60 years together.

What is needed now is some way of progressing as a single united revolutionary Trotskyist

group composed of Socialist Outlook, Workers Action, the two wings of Militant, the Lambertists, the Morenoists and the Bob Archer/Dot Gibson dissidents is unlikely to say the least.

I would like to suggest the following:

1) The speeches should be made available to the socialist movement in the form of a pamphlet as soon as possible, together with an impartial introduction.

2) Some type of Trotskyist Study Centre or Institute/archive where leftists could come and research the ancient texts etc should be set up. This would be non-profit making and open to all. Problems to be tackled include where to put it and how to finance it. Perhaps a cafe/library could be included. It would be non partisan and not linked to any group. If the PTS in Argentina and CERMTRI in France are viable, then we can do it too.

These are my suggestions for a first few steps forward, perhaps beginning with a meeting before Christmas convened by Alan Thorntt and those present on 14 November?

Yours for socialism,  
**Frank Wainwright, Clapham**

## Letters



We welcome readers' letters on any topic. Letters over 400 words may be cut for space reasons. Write to **Socialist Outlook**, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU. email: [outlook@gn.apc.org](mailto:outlook@gn.apc.org)

## Picket Harmondsworth Detention Centre

THE CLOSE Down Harmondsworth Campaign are organising a Christmas picket of the Detention Centre, on December 12.

As Labour prepares to tighten the asylum laws even further, they are preparing to lock up even more asylum seekers who have committed no offence other than that of fleeing repression.

The Campaign is appealing for donations of funds and phone cards, to assist detainees in keeping in contact with friends, relatives and solicitors.

Please bring them along to the picket or send cheques to 'Slough Trades Council', c/o SBS, 52 Norwood Road, Southall, Middlesex, UB2, indicating whether cheques are intended as an affiliation or a donation to the campaign.

**Oliver New, Southall**

## Close Campsfield!

THE GROTESQUELY misnamed 'Campsfield House' in Kidlington, just outside Oxford, is five years old this month. It is a purpose-built prison for asylum seekers, run by a private security firm, Group 4. It is as full now, under a Labour Government, as it was under the Tories who built it.

Some things, however, have changed. For most of its existence its most notable feature was that the asylum seekers detained in it were all black - reflecting the racist nature of the immigration controls of Britain and the EU. Now alongside the black faces

there are 40 white ones. It is not that Britain no longer discriminates in its immigration policy.

It does. But the 40 new faces are Kosovan, and the British government is not prepared to protect them against the repression ethnic cleansing to which they have been subjected.

After 5 years of consistent opposition to the Campsfield detention centre the Close Campsfield Campaign is calling a national demonstration on November 28 to mark its 5th anniversary. It should be given wide support.

**Jeff Bridges, Oxford**

## WHAT'S ON

### November

#### Thursday 26

**BIRMINGHAM** Socialist Outlook public forum, 'Too many cars? Too little profit? How to resist the world economic crisis'. Speaker, John Lister, joint editor Socialist Outlook. 7.30p.m., The Union Club, 723 Pershore Road, Selly Park.

#### Saturday 28

**CLOSE DOWN CAMPSFIELD!** 5 Years Too Long! Demonstration at Main gates, 12 noon, Langford Lane, Kidlington.

#### Saturday 28

**OPEN LONDON** meeting of the United Campaign to repeal the anti-union laws. Speakers include John McDonnell MP, Bob Crow and Shirley Winter. 2p.m., Conway Hall, Red Lion Square (Holborn tube).

### December

#### Tuesday 1

**LONDON** Labour Left 'Preparing for the Greater London Authority'. 7p.m., Committee room 5, House of Commons.

**OXFORD** Socialist Outlook public meeting 'Close Campsfield! Fight the new Immigration Bill'. Speakers Sheila Malone (Islington anti-deportation campaign), Bill MacKeith (Close Campsfield). 7.30pm Seminar room 4, Ruskin College, Walton St.

#### Saturday 5

**NETWORK** of Socialist Campaign Groups AGM. Speakers include Ken Livingstone, Tony Benn, Jeremy Corbyn, Liz Davies and Christine Shawcroft. 11a.m.-5p.m. (registration from 10a.m.), University

of North London, Spring House, 6-40 Holloway Road, London N7 (near Highbury & Islington tube).

**AGM** of the National Abortion Campaign, 1p.m., Print House, 18 Ashwin St., London E8.

**Campaign for a Fighting Democratic UNISON** Conference '98. 10a.m.-4p.m., South Camden Community School, Charington St., London NW1 (near Kings Cross and Euston).

**NORTHERN** Conference of the National Assembly Against Racism. Speakers include Lee Jasper and Kumar

Murshid. 10.30a.m.-5p.m., The Hudawi Centre, Great Northern St., Huddersfield

**Thursday 10**  
**LEEDS** Independent Labour Network public meeting, 'Reclaim the Welfare State', 7.30p.m., Leeds Civic Hall.

#### Saturday 12

**PICKET** Harmondsworth Detention Centre, 11.30a.m.-1p.m. Bus 81 from Hounslow West tube or Bus U3 from Heathrow Airport to detention centre on Colnbrook By-pass (A4).

### January

#### Saturday 30

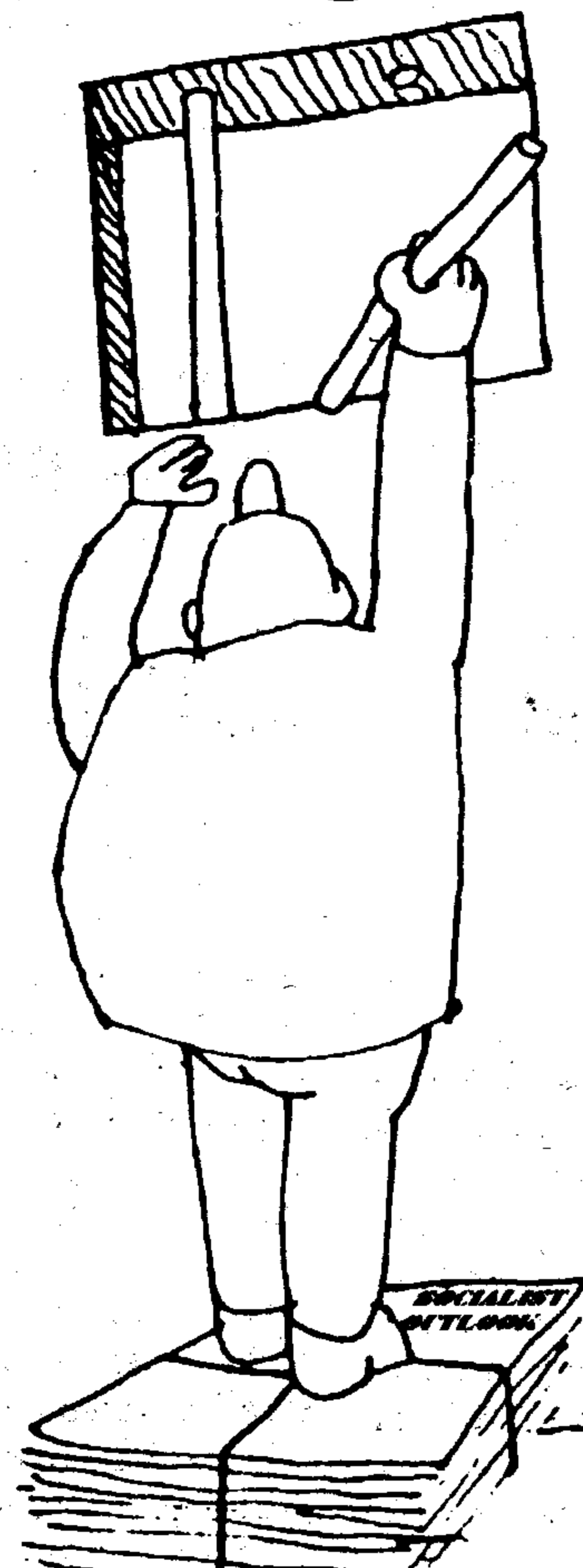
**BLOODY SUNDAY** March for Justice, Time for Truth. Assemble 12 noon Victoria Embankment (opposite Temple tube station), London.

### February

#### Saturday 13

**CAMPAIGNS 99** National Conference, Time for United Action. Hosted by Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance. 10a.m.-4p.m., Mechanics Institute, Princess St., Manchester.

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# Socialist Outlook



**No more  
private profits  
from public  
money!**

Anger is growing across the country as the New Labour government indulges in an orgy of privatisation at the expense of public services.

■ Hospital schemes to be funded under the Tory-inspired Private Finance Initiative will run up bills for 60 years into the next millennium, while slashing the numbers of beds available, often "centralising" services on remote greenfield sites, and stripping the NHS of some prime property assets.

■ Schools, too, face asset-

stripping and costly PFI schemes which hand control of new school buildings to private firms.

■ Housing estates are being handed over by Labour and other councils to private, profit-hungry firms, which threaten to jack up rents, evict hard-pressed tenants, and sack council workers.

■ Road schemes, too, are being turned into money-making ventures for city fat cats, whose profits are guaranteed. Privatised rail companies cream off billions in subsidies for the franchise holders, while working people face

rising costs of travel and dwindling public transport services.

However the fightback has been gathering pace as the numbers of schemes proliferate.

UNISON has consistently campaigned against PFI, and TUC policy, too, is now opposed to Labour's approach.

There are signs of growing resistance at local level (see p4). This is a fight we must win if growing amounts of public money are not to be funnelled directly into the pockets of Tony Blair's unsavoury business friends.