

Socialist

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OUTLOOK

Blunkett's pay deal leaves teachers understaffed, under-paid and under pressure ...

Education, Education, Desperation!

IN THE run-up to the 1997 election, it was pressure on education cuts that helped polarise opposition to John Major's Tory government.

But almost four years later, school teachers in England are fuming at ever-increasing paperwork, assessment and demands upon them, and bitter that yet again the basic pay increase is well short of the 12% the unions had called for to attract the extra staff that are needed.

With some schools already on a 4-day week for lack of teachers, and an estimated 20,000 unfilled posts, the mix of mounting admin work, unlimited hours, inadequate support and unsympathetic management is driving away

experienced teachers and scaring off potential recruits.

The government's attempts to fob off many teachers with discretionary handouts of 'performance related' pay have not fooled most classroom teachers. They want extra cash for all teachers, as part of the basic salary, not an "extra" that can be here today - and taken away by the headteacher tomorrow.

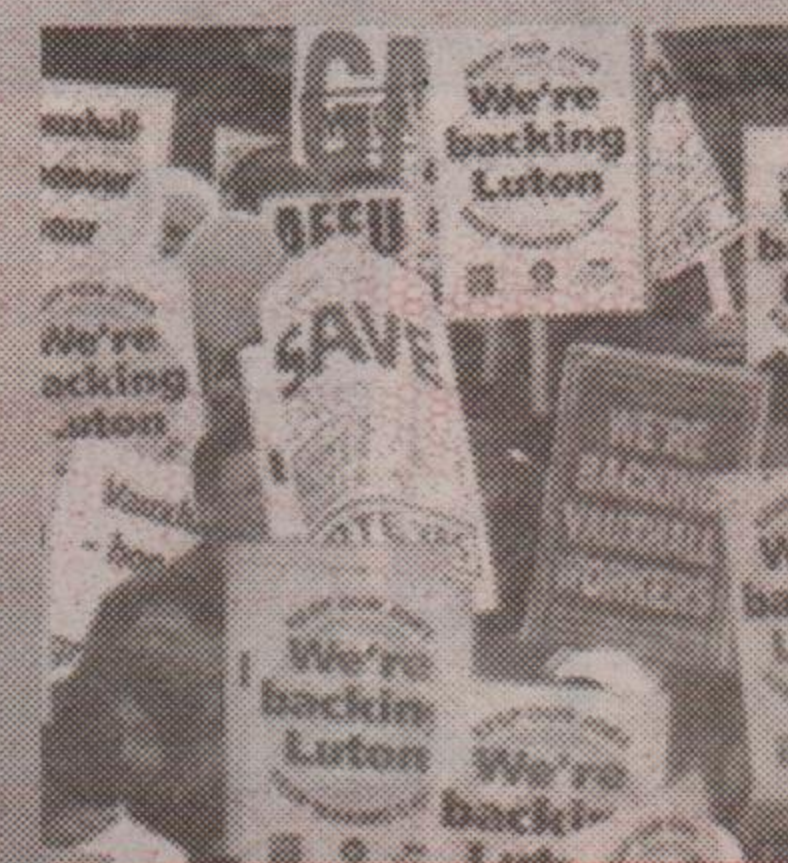
Teachers in England are even more angry to discover that their colleagues in Scotland have been given not only a hefty 10% increase this year, but a deal limiting their working week to 35 hours, along with extra teachers and more support staff.

That's why 1,300 angry teachers packed a London rally last week, baying for action by the NUT. The union leaders have promised a ballot on refusing to cover for vacant posts.

Labour romped to office pledging that its priorities would be "education, education, education". Little did anyone think that as the next election approached so little would have changed for the better.

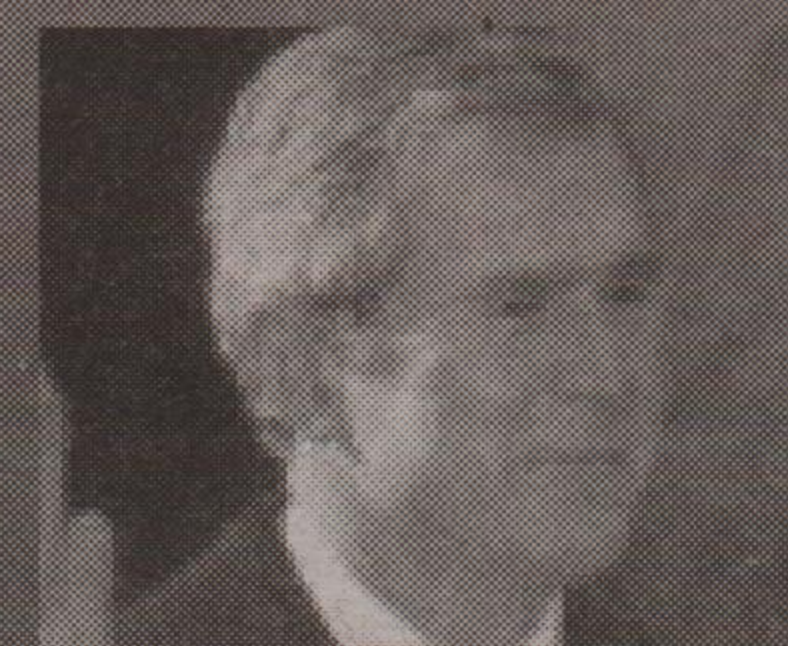
A strong vote for action now could yet force concessions from the government, if it is to avoid another embarrassing set of headlines as it launches its campaign for the next general election. Teachers must press for a swift ballot and a YES vote for action.

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Industry in crisis:

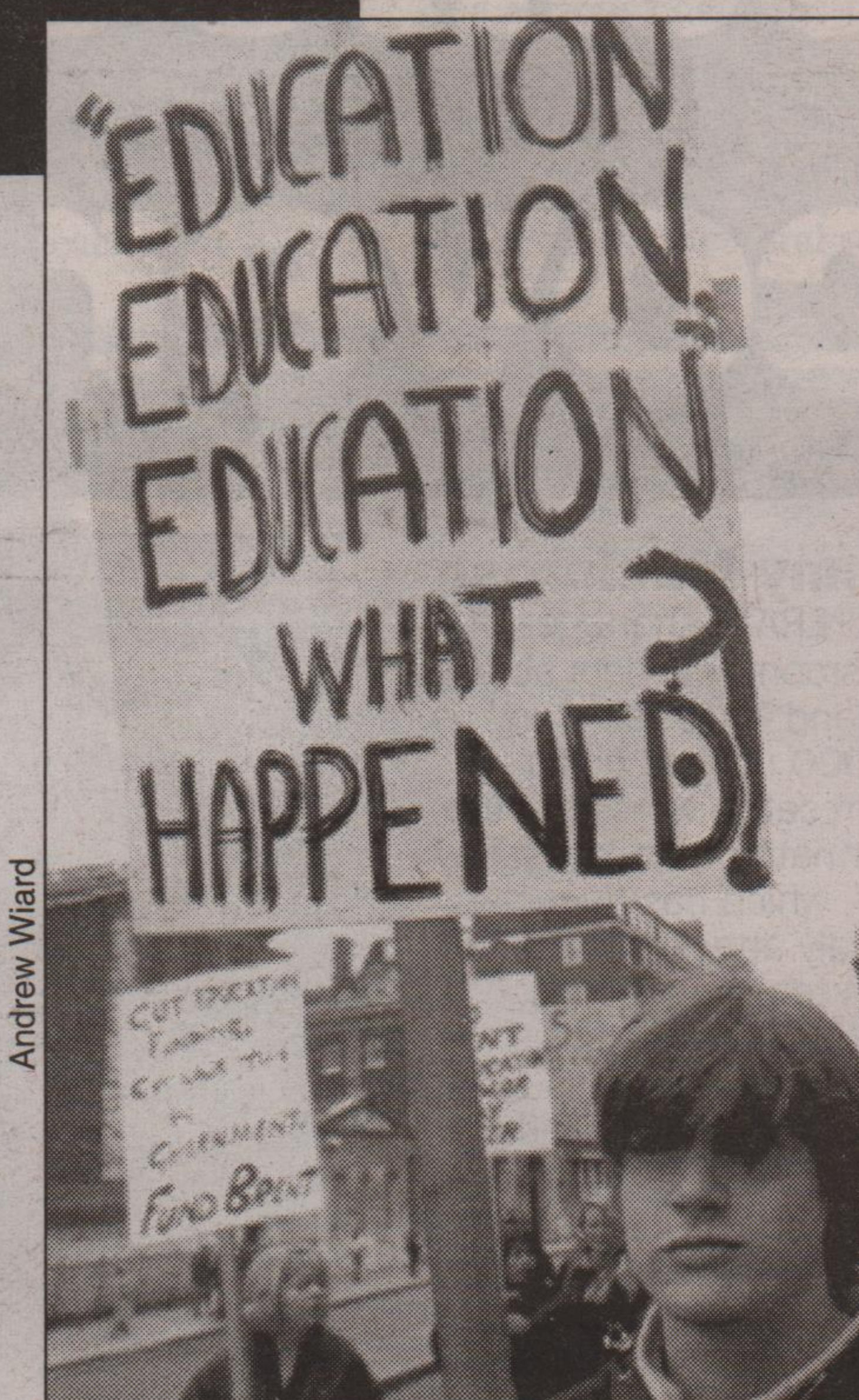
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Andrew Wliard



Andrew Ward

Teachers fighting Performance Related Pay branded it "Victorian", and took their protest to Parliament

Sniping from the Left

By Charlie van Gelderen



So this is democracy?

Israel has the support of the United States and most of the Western states, because it is, purportedly, the only democracy in the Middle East. We have just had an example of how this democracy works.

When a Jewish settler, living illegally in Gaza was shot, all the resources of the Israeli armed forces set out to avenge his death. Heavy artillery, tanks, and helicopters were used in a demonstration of strength.

By contrast a Jewish settler convicted of bludgeoning a Palestinian boy to death was let off with an £11,600 fine and community service.

This is clearly a signal to the thousands of illegal settlers in Palestinian territory that they can carry on their aggression against Palestinians with impunity.

What about the workers?

So Tony Blair has at last come to the conclusion that he may lose the hard core working class support in the next election. He must do something to appease them.

This will not, however, take the form of class action against politics. No question of carrying out the openly voiced demand for the renationalisation of the railways and other public utilities; no question of introducing workers' control into industry. Good lord no!

This might upset some of the rich people who produce fat cheques for New Labour's funds.

So, like the Edwardian ladies of the manor, who went out on Sundays to do good to the deserving poor, the Prime Minister is calling on his big business pals to be nice to the workers. He wants to introduce ethics into business practices.

Will this experiment will be more successful than the government's ethical foreign policy? Don't hold your breath waiting!

From MacDonald to Mandelson

When Ramsay MacDonald betrayed the Labour Party and headed a Tory dominated 'National' government in 1929, he boasted the 'now every Duchess will want to kiss me.'

With Peter Mandelson it's millionaires!

There is an old Dutch say-

ing which, translating, reads: Mix with the swill and the pigs will eat you!

Grateful

Why can't Mandelson and Vaz be as helpful to asylum seekers from India and elsewhere?

Who knows? They might even donate some of their weekly vouchers to New Labour's fighting fund!

Ill-advised

Before the New Labour Government came into office in 1997, there were only 38 special advisers at an annual cost to the Exchequer of £1.8 million. In 2000, the number had increased to 79, and the cost to £4 million.

Mo Mowlam, Cabinet Office Secretary, has revealed that the number of special advisers has dropped down to 78 - but the cost has increased to £4.4m.

No doubt, the departing adviser received a golden handshake, is now enjoying a profitable career in business.

But *WHO ARE* these special advisers, and what kind of advice do they give? One thing we can be sure: judging by the government's legislation, there aren't any socialists among them.

Green Michael

Michael Meacher is proving himself the perfect custodian of the environment and, especially, the British countryside and suburbia.

He once wrote: "Housing is not, or should not be a status symbol, an object of conspicuous consumption, or a source of market power and wealth. It is a place where individuals and families should be able to live and inter-relate in mutual happiness..." (*Socialism with a Human Face*, 1982)

As Mark Thomas has revealed on Channel 4, Meacher and his wife now own between nine and 11 residential properties, including the luxury Cascades Court in Wimbledon with flats whose present market value is £300,000 each and let at £700 a week.

Yes, this is the same Michael Meacher who told a fringe meeting at the 1999 Labour Party conference that "People like me who are privileged, should not be in a position to rob other people of a home which is their basic right."

Clearly as a minister in Tony Blair's government, Meacher has preferred to join the robbers!

Teachers to ballot for no-cover action

Danny Macintosh

DESPERATE shortages of classroom teachers across England - with as many as 20,000 unfilled posts - seem set to worsen in the aftermath of the latest pay deal, which has been roundly attacked by all the main teaching unions.

So bad has the crisis become that a mass rally of 1,300 teachers called by the London associations of the National Union of Teachers gave a standing ovation to calls for industrial action, and pressurised General Secretary Doug McAvoy to agree to a ballot on no cover for vacant posts.

This is a remarkable turn-about by a union leadership which just eight months ago brushed aside calls for action to resist the imposition of performance related pay.

The pay deal is complex and hedged about by government spin and double-speak, but teachers were immediately clear that the extra money on the table falls far short of the amount needed to tackle long-standing problems.

The new rates involve a basic rate increase of around 3.9%, with a 6% rise for newly-qualified teachers. But government figures for the new salary scale were distorted by including the controversial new "threshold" payments of £2,000 a year.

These payments only apply



Even NUT boss "Dynamic" Doug McAvoy has been stung into calling a ballot, after knifing last year's fight against PRP

to teachers at the top of the pay spine who apply for them, and are prepared to commit themselves to the government's latest pet projects. They are at the discretion of head teachers. Nor are the threshold payments secure: they can be withdrawn, and the government has only pledged to fund these extra payments for three years, leaving the long term future in doubt.

The administration of these payments is just another in a seemingly endless line of administrative and bureaucratic tasks now being dumped on teachers and head teachers by ministers.

Indeed the limited extra cash above inflation will not be enough to compensate for other aspects of the job including worsening conditions, rising workload, ever-

more administration and assessment, and an ever more restrictive curriculum, which are driving potential and actual teachers away from the profession in droves.

"You can tell it's bad when you see that English has now become yet another shortage subject: there never used to be any problem recruiting English teachers," says one NUT activist.

The apparently generous increases in London weighting also need to be taken with a pinch of salt. Many more experienced teachers will have the bulk to the extra £700 a year inner London allowance clawed back for three years as part of new system.

As if to add insult to injury, many teachers have been looking enviously at the

much larger increases and the improved working conditions negotiated by Scottish teachers with the Parliament north of the border.

Although they start from a lower salary, Scottish teachers will get a flat rate 10% rise this year, and an extra 21.5% over three years, along with a maximum 35-hour week and a "phasing in" of a maximum 25 hours "contact time" teaching in the classroom. An extra 4,000 teachers are promised, along with extra support staff.

The Scottish deal is costed at £816m over the three years for 50,000 teachers, compared with the £564m this year in England.

Education Secretary Blunkett has claimed that any equivalent of the Scottish deal would be "difficult and cumbersome to administer" in England.

The mood at the London teachers' rally suggests that he has badly miscalculated the mood of classroom teachers: with an election looming, now is the best time for teachers to take action and step up pressure on the government to tackle the root problems behind staff shortages.

Meanwhile NATFHE, the union representing 65,000 FE college lecturers, is angrily pointing out that salary scales for lecturers are now around 10% lower than those for school teachers, with the gap widening every year.

You tell them by their friends

SO it's true: after less than four years in office, more voters regard New Labour as sleazy than the Tories. And the spectacle of senior Labour figures denouncing each other and fighting like rats in a sack will reinforce the cynicism and apathy of growing sections of Labour's core vote, convincing them that the Party has completely lost sight of their interests.

Of course Tony Blair's supple-spined team of ministers are not the first Labour politicians to be caught in dubious company or to seek out the support of wealthy individuals. Who can forget the presence at Labour conferences of the notorious Robert Maxwell, or Harold Wilson's promotion of the Gannex raincoat?

But the sheer scale of New Labour's dependence upon big business sponsorship and immersion in the shady netherworld of millionaires, billionaires and unsavoury business types is unprecedented.

We simply need to ask the question: what could a leading member of a party committed to the interests of working people have in common with a billionaire business person? We can under-

stand William Hague and his team happily following decades of tradition in courting the super-rich, but wasn't Labour supposed to be different?

Why would Tony Blair and senior Labour ministers, including the already wealthy Lord Sainsbury, all want to join Tory MPs in signing a presentation painting to celebrate the 20th anniversary of a £1.7 billion company owned by an Iraqi-born tycoon?

Has this eagerness to please the ultra-wealthy anything to do with Gordon Brown's refusal to tax the rich, and his preference for holding down pensions, imposing tuition fees on students and holding down public sector pay?

Trying to minimise the scale of this moral and political collapse in the Labour Party, one of the Sunday papers ran a page arguing that the level of corruption in British politics



It's the politics that make most people wonder about New Labour

is not as great as in a whole number of other – mainly third world – countries.

Pardon us if we're not impressed.

It's not just the sickening hypocrisy of a government flexing every muscle to exclude asylum seekers and deport desperate "illegal immigrants" finding ways to open doors for wealthy people that sickens us.

It's the fact that New Labour is more politically influenced by – and keen to keep the company of – a small handful of mega-rich individuals than the large majority of ordinary working class people whose efforts and votes got them elected.

While the trade unions and campaigners on refugee and asylum rights are kept on the outside looking in at a gov-

ernment ignoring their problems and demands, they see a privileged élite able to summon ministers to grotesque social gatherings with a mere snap of their fingers.

While asylum seekers face starvation amid the wreckage of New Labour's brutal voucher scheme, billionaires can get top Labour bigwigs to exert influence to speed up their passport applications.

We don't really care what Mandelson said on the phone to another Blairite minister, or who leaked what information to whom. The curtain has been lifted high enough on the shenanigans to see that none of New Labour's priorities are those of the people who voted for them against the Tories in 1997.

David Blunkett may bleat that this type of revelation, fuelled by seemingly endless in-fighting by ministers who hate each other far more than they hate the power and arrogance of the rich, will increase cynicism and apathy. But *whose fault is it?*

If Blunkett spent even a few moments a day remembering where he came from as an FE teacher, or contemplating the grim reality of a day as a school teacher in Blair's

Britain, perhaps he could realise why the government is so far removed from the concerns of working people.

His gruesome colleagues – Milburn, Straw, Darling and Prescott – are all as bad: on almost every front the New Labour government has delighted its former adversaries and antagonised its supporters since 1997.

Popular pledges have been ditched, Tory policies embraced, and reactionary bandwagons set rolling, generally at the expense of people too isolated to defend themselves. Pensioners and students have been fleeced, unions short-changed, and asylum seekers victimised, while millionaires and shareholders laugh all the way to the bank.

After almost four years of this, Labour's comparatively high poll rating relies far more on the unelectability of Hague's far-right – and still sleazy – Tories and the irrelevance of the Lib Dems than it does on genuine popular support.

As the election countdown continues, the development of a serious challenge from a united left, under the Socialist Alliance banner, can start to test out the possibilities of focusing popular anger on the electoral stage.

Underground dispute enters a new phase

Greg Tucker

In the face of the threat of united strike action by ASLEF and RMT members on the Underground the Labour government has resorted to a series of threats and manoeuvres.

In a clear sign that they are rattled, they have both wheeled out a compliant judge to use the threat of sequestration to shut up the RMT, whilst offering a deal to Ken Livingstone to take the heat out of the issue of tube safety.

Despite an injunction on their union, RMT members have joined ASLEF on the picket lines ensuring that the first day of strike action has been successful. Neither union has been prepared to accept the deal offered to Ken Livingstone's transport supremo Bob Kiley by John Prescott.

After a 9 to 1 vote by RMT members and over 3 to 1 in favour from ASLEF, it would seem that the views of tube workers were clear. But rather than discuss the issues seriously LUL man-

agement, with the nod from the government, took the RMT to court.

LUL argued that in line with anti-union laws as put forward by the Labour government, the RMT was obliged to provide details of the numbers of members proposing to go on strike, not just across the whole of LUL, but workplace by workplace and grade by grade. The judge was happy to issue an injunction on this basis.

RMT members have likened the judgement to the Taff Vale case one hundred years ago. However hard it tries, the RMT will find it virtually impossible to keep track of the precise details of what station and what grade its members are at any time – particularly as the employer refuses to give any clues.

This will have serious implications for other RMT disputes – such as the national train crew safety dispute, which is nearing the stage of balloting for action – and indeed for any industrial

action by workers strangled by these anti-union laws.

Whilst the RMT Executive agreed to accept the injunction and to appeal the judgement (with two members being prepared to vote to keep up the strike) RMT members on the ground have acted to defend their "right to strike". ASLEF picket lines have been respected.

Tube workers have recognised that the move by Prescott to "compromise" with Bob Kiley is a sign of weakness. The government is trying to clear the decks of all sensitive matters before Blair calls the general election.

Rather than accept the "offer", the unions have redoubled their efforts.

The government has proposed to allow Kiley to maintain a unified management structure – thus attempting to answer his attacks on safety management. But the quid pro quo remains that extensive areas of work are contracted out.

The PPP bidding compa-

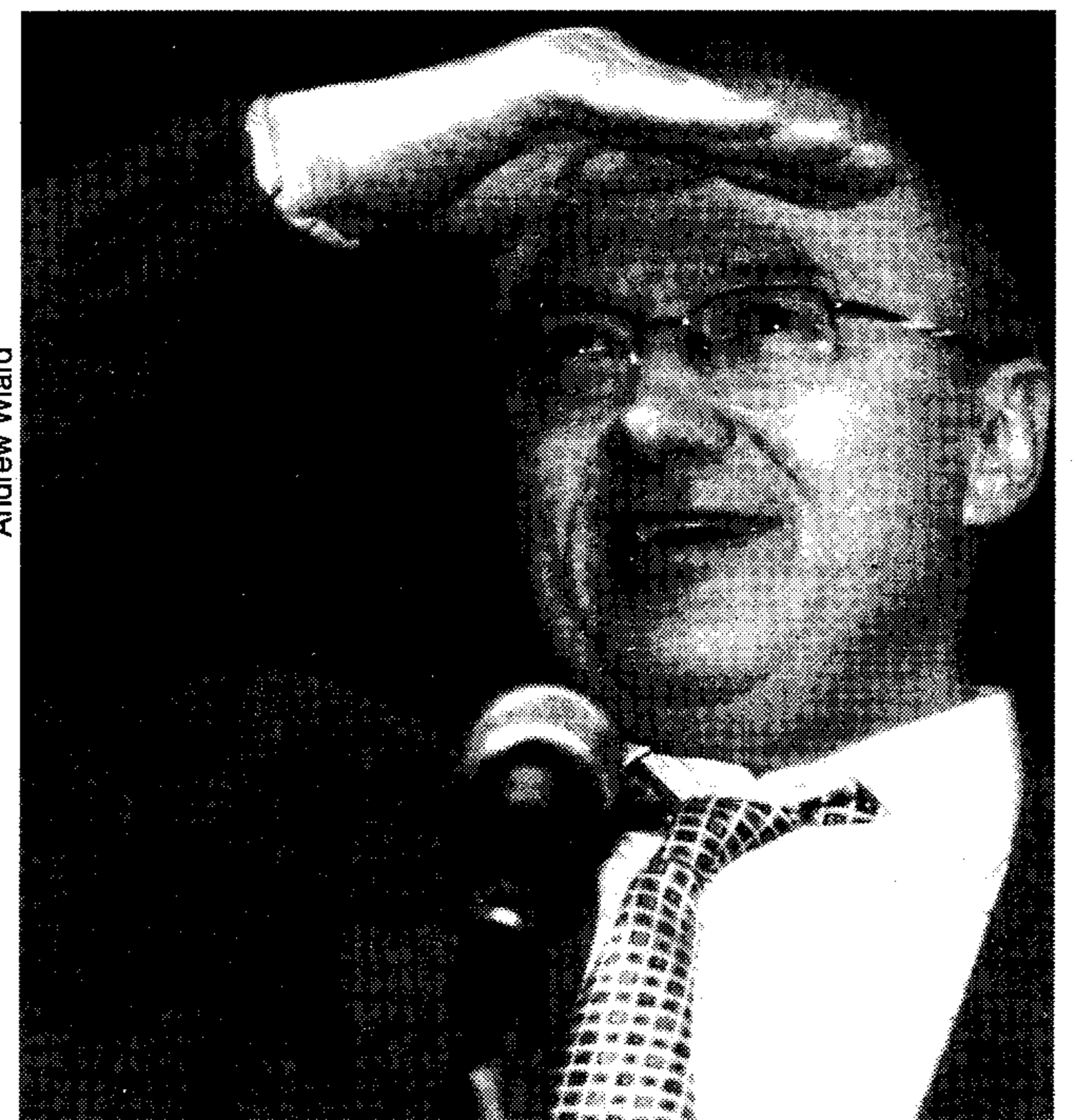
nies will be kept sweet, whilst tube workers remain under threat. To make matters worse Prescott wants to spend some months discussing the fine detail with Kiley. In other words the whole issue is to be moth-balled until after the general election.

The advantages of timing, currently acting in the workers' favour, would be lost.

As our last edition pointed out Bob Kiley "is no friend of tube workers. His interests lie elsewhere." We warned, "Kiley's proposals include potentially handing over more than just the right to bid for new build contracts. Existing maintenance work will be threatened."

So whilst we believed that working closely with Livingstone was important, it was vital that tube workers took their own independent actions in defence of underground safety, jobs and conditions.

It hasn't taken long to be proved right. At the joint union rally called to build support for the ASLEF/RMT



Was that a principle over there? Not-So-Red Ken caves in to Johnny two Jags, leaving the tube unions to fight for safety.

strike ballot, Livingstone denied all rumours that he was preparing to do a deal with Prescott. He pledged that he would support any strike: he would join his local picket line.

But as the date for the first strike approached Livingstone suddenly found it expedient to withdraw his pledge. With negotiations with John Prescott at a sensitive point, being seen on a picket line just wouldn't be right!

Livingstone seems more concerned to improve his chances of re-admittance to the Labour Party than to stand with tube workers defending tube safety.

The issues are now clear. The tube's future remains under threat – from Prescott, and potentially from Kiley. But if the unions

keep their nerve, the government position is weak.

The RMT should widen its base of action by immediately balloting its mainline train crew on the parallel dispute over rail safety.

Solidarity for the strikes must be strengthened. The work already being done to build the picket lines and raise support for the strikers needs to be built upon.

The Socialist Alliance has played an important role in this and we need to ensure that local solidarity groups are established with broad labour movement support.

In particular it is necessary to focus not just on the issue of privatisation but also on Labour's anti-union laws which threaten every dispute, on the tube, on rail and in every industry.

“Labour’s manifesto will include major pledges which every socialist is duty bound to campaign against”

MIKE MARQUESE explains his view of why there is no room left for socialists to fight in Tony Blair’s Labour Party

When I recently left the Labour Party, after twenty years of active membership, I was surprised at how few people asked me to explain myself. For comrades outside the party, it seemed a step that needed no explanation, and was indeed long overdue.

For comrades remaining in the party, it seemed a step beyond explanation, and hopelessly “premature”.

To put it in a nutshell, I had come to two interdependent conclusions.

■ First, the cumulative impact of the changes imposed on the Labour party from the top down – in policy, ideology, structure, funding – has been to transform it into something like the Democratic party in the USA.

Labour is now a highly effective servant of big business; it relies on working class votes, but provides no representation to that class.

Crucially, there are no means available to reverse the damage.

■ Second, the political and social context demands an electoral challenge to the New Labour-Tory consensus. The price of electoral abstention was becoming too high.

In the run-up to the 1997 general election, I was one of those who believed that, in government, Blair would encounter stiff resistance from party members and trades unions, and that under these circumstances the Labour left would revive.

With the coming together of the Centre-Left Grassroots Alliance and the victory of four of the GRA candidates in the 1998 NEC ballot, it seemed our predictions were being born out.

But now, after nearly four years of Labour government, and with another general election looming, New Labour is more firmly entrenched than ever, and a reassessment is required.

Since 1998, the Grassroots Alliance vote has fallen back; in 2000, even Mark Seddon, who topped the poll in 1998, was unable to get elected – in a ballot conducted at the height of the discontent over the London mayoral stitch-up. Even taking into account the Millbank shenanigans, and the rather muted campaign run by the GRA itself,



It's not only socialists who are taking a stand: Kidderminster Hospital campaigners will fight their local seat against sitting Labour MP David Lock, who gave his support to the closure of their local A&E and in-patient services to fund a PFI hospital in Worcester.

this was a disappointing result.

In the past, the internal politics of the Labour party reliably reflected changes in the political temperature within the working class.

At the least, discontent with the Labour leadership, usually when it failed to deliver in government, was mirrored in increased support for left candidates in NEC elections and the like. In the year 2000, however, despite the palpable anger at the Labour leadership felt in working class communities, the left's vote receded substantially.

Only 25% of party members bothered to take part in the NEC vote – the party's only remaining meaningful national-level democratic exercise.

Of those who did take part, more than 45% voted for the Blairite celebrity Tony Robinson, presumably on the grounds that he had once done a funny turn in Blackadder.

In the highly-publicised vote on pensions at last year's party conference – a rare setback for the leadership – a substantial majority of the CLPs voted with the government.

Likewise, Geoff Martin's campaign for London Labour party chair was scuppered not just by the Millbank arm-twisting, but by a shortfall in support within the constituencies.

These developments defy all the left's predictions, and confirm impressionistic evidence of the changing social composition of the party's membership, and, along with it, the social content of Labour party activism.

To put it succinctly, there is no longer any meaningful sense in which this Labour party, as a living social formation, can be described as “the mass party of the working class”, or even a “bourgeois workers party”.

Many comrades point to Labour's remaining links to the trade unions and argue that this is the decisive test. Yes, trade unions remain, formally, constituent parts of the Labour Party – a contrast with labour unions in the USA.

But unions no longer have a vote in the selection of parliamentary candidates and play little role in CLPs; annual conference and the NEC, where the unions once deployed their political muscle, have been stripped of authority.

In practise, the current degree of union participation and influence in the Labour

never been merely a formal or constitutional one. It was a matter of lived history and a living presence, however contradictory, in working class communities.

Today, as an organic phenomenon, the link barely survives.

To the extent that political activity takes place at the base of the movement, in workplaces, union branches, trades councils, it does so in opposition to the Labour government and Labour councils.

In the foreseeable future, any re-awakening of working class political consciousness is more likely to take the form of disaffiliation from Labour and support for left alternatives than a concerted effort to flex what's left of trade union muscle through the structures of the Labour party.

As a result of a multitude of developments, political, social, cultural, the disconnection between the Labour

to affect the overall trend of development.

As a result the Labour left finds itself chasing an ever-receding horizon: the ground on which it is fighting (on policy, on party democracy) is being dragged ever further to the right.

Too many on the Labour left see Blairism as merely a conspiracy within the Labour Party. “New Labour” (or however it may choose to rebrand itself in the future) is the British facet of a global politics – and the political facet of a public culture promoted by global capitalism.

The transformation of the Labour party cannot be separated from other, intimately related, social phenomena: the symbiosis between the professional political caste and the media, the elevation of the managerial prerogative above all other considerations, the spread of popular cynicism, the general degradation of

democratic discourse, and driving them all, global capital's quest to tame modern democratic societies.

A challenge to New Labour also requires a challenge to these trends – a challenge that is stifled by continued party membership.

The Labour left also ought to take stock of its own performance over the years. The Grassroots Alliance has failed to become anything other than a place to negotiate slates for the NEC, NPE, etc. After the bright hopes of 1998, its non-performance will only have hastened the exit of yet more activists from the party.

Socialist Alliance

party differs little from the situation in the Democratic party in the USA – where unions send delegates to conventions, union leaders sit on policy bodies, union money funds election campaigns and union members, by and large, vote Democrat.

Overall, the unions are now merely one among a number of organised interest groups lobbying the Labour government – principally from outside the party structures.

Of course, the significance of the party-union link has

party and the working class is now profound and systemic.

Is there any means by which the connection can be reformed? If not, what prospects for the Labour left?

Yes, the valiant efforts of Labour left activists to use the existing system, to push motions through the policy forums, etc. do occasionally yield positive results. But these results are too meagre

Like other initiatives on the left, it has been hampered by sectarianism, but that isn't a satisfactory explanation for so many years of retreat. As someone who set great store by the Socialist Campaign Group, and encouraged others to do the same, I should come clean and confess my abject disappointment, not in the left MPs as individuals, but in the SCG as a collective force, an alternative leadership of the movement.

At a time when the huge vacuum on the left of British politics has been acknowledged even by academics and media pundits, the Labour left is unable to project a message outside an ever decreasing circle.

Ah, but there is Ken Livingstone waiting in the wings. It's disheartening to watch comrades pin such hopes on the campaign to readmit Ken to the Party. It's a just and reasonable demand, but what does it really amount to?

Since his election as mayor, Livingstone has gone to great lengths to reposition himself on two critical policy areas – economic globalisation and ‘law and order’. The one-time champion of the national manufacturing sector has reinvented himself yet again as a booster for global finance capital and a friend of the City.

He has toured New York with Mayor Giuliani, backed comprehensive DNA testing, more cops on the beat, and a tougher line with “anarchists”. He has also refused to lift a finger for the besieged people of Hackney, where a Labour-Tory coalition is wreaking havoc on public services.

As Livingstone himself has made clear, he has no intention of “leading” the Labour left anywhere.

I've been astonished to hear Labour party comrades declaring in recent months that “(bourgeois) elections aren't that important” – an ultra-left posture profoundly at variance with the Labour left's own traditions.

Universal suffrage is not the be-all and end-all of our democratic vision, but it represents a high-water mark in the struggle for human emancipation, and the major political conquest of the working class.

Significantly, for the managers of global capital, taming the franchise, gutting it of meaning and effect, remains an inescapable priority – hence their interest in New Labour.

At the coming general election, Labour will seek a second term on the basis of jam tomorrow for public services (peppered by privatisation) and strychnine today for

civil liberties and asylum seekers. Its manifesto will include major pledges which every socialist is duty bound to campaign against.

The vast majority of its candidates will be individuals who will obstruct, rather than facilitate, working class representation. The election material will echo Jack Straw's attempt to outflank Ann Widdecombe to the right.

Any kind of complicity with such reactionary and dangerous nonsense ought to be unacceptable to socialists, and nobody should need reminding that silence is a form of complicity.

In private, many Labour Party leftists will vote for the Socialist Alliances or whatever other alternatives to New Labour are available. It seems a rather "do as I say, not as I do" approach to working class communities. Popular cynicism about the efficacy of any kind of democratic or collective action is one of the biggest obstacles socialists face.

The evasive formulae being mouthed at the moment on the Labour left can only reinforce that cynicism, not challenge it.

If socialists forego an intervention in the coming general election, they will only strengthen all those forces, inside and outside the Labour party, for whom it is vital that the entirety of British politics be construed as a choice between Blair and Hague, Straw and Widdecombe.

By standing candidates in selected seats, the Socialist Alliances and other forces will at least be able to alert large numbers of people to the existence of alternatives to the prevailing consensus.

Without that minimum activity, not only the ideas of socialism, but the immediate concerns of the poorest and most excluded will continue to be air-brushed out of public discourse.

After the election, the Labour left will wring its hands about low voter turn-outs, but by its own ambivalence and inaction it will bear some responsibility for them. Against that disturbing and imminent eventuality, we are offered the highly speculative claim, unsupported by evidence, that the Labour Party can be "reclaimed" - at some unspecified time in the future, according to some unspecified political scenario.

It's a sign of the changing times that these days the most intransigent proponents of abstention from electoral activity are to be found on the Labour left. I've also noted the recent emergence on the Labour left of the "lesser evil" argument in defence of a Labour vote in the general election.

Yes, Labour probably still is the lesser evil, but if all that remains of the argument for the Labour party is lesser-evilism, then it really has become the British counterpart of the American Democrats, and the case for socialist participation in the party has been lost.

More than 1,000 tenants and trade unionists joined the Defend Council Housing lobby of Parliament and rally on January 24. Campaigners are determined not to be taken in by the government's new proposals for "arm's length" housing companies. We've got them on the run over stock transfers ... let's keep up the pressure!



Stalingrad O'Neill

Scottish Conference is crucial for left unity

Gordon Morgan

The Scottish Socialist Party Conference on February 10-11 takes place in the context of a number of key political developments.

Firstly it takes place in the context that the Scottish Parliament has yet again shown itself more radical than Westminster - this time over care for the elderly.

In terms of the forces involved in the SSP itself, the conference will happen shortly after the biggest political force within it, the ISM has split with the international formation of which it was historically part, the CWI. (see p 19).

In addition, after months of discussion, it seems almost certain that the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) will join the SSP shortly after the conference.

Positive

After their positive experience in the Alliances in England and Wales, the SWP recognised that they would pay a heavy price if they continued to remain outside the SSP.

The February conference will address two main issues - our programme for the General Election, and constitutional changes relating to party democracy and the rights of tendencies and factions.

Annual conference is the supreme decision making body of the party and at present all members are entitled to attend and vote. Last year's conference was the first to deal in detail with SSP policy.

Too many issues were discussed, which led to debate being curtailed. Nevertheless, on most topics the resolutions were non contro-

versial and were accepted. Others were amended, referred back or competing positions were debated.

The conference showed the SSP took decisions in an open democratic manner.

The proposed constitutional changes have been a source of some acrimony. A platform has been formed to "Defend Democracy in the SSP".

Delegates

Two main changes are proposed. The first would change the annual conference from one at which all members can vote to a delegate conference.

This is put forward partly on grounds of size of conference and also to reflect the fact that only small numbers of members are likely to be able to travel the long distances involved.

There are no principled objections to this, the issue is one of timing. Despite misgivings, I intended to vote for a similar change last year, however, the poor wording of the change and the low attendance at the conference led me and a majority of those present to vote down this move.

This year's improved wording means that in practice all who wish to attend are likely to do so until the party is at least double its present size. Some amendments allow for additional safeguards and should be supported.

However, I believe the controversy over this constitutional change has now been somewhat defused.

The second constitutional change will lay down rules for tendencies which on some interpretations prevent them selling their own newspapers or caucusing before

meetings.

The leadership proposing these changes state that this is just formalising norms which have been in place since the SSP formed. In practice the changes are being proposed to deal with the probability that the SWP will join the SSP.

The SSP was formed at the conclusion, of a bitter faction fight within the then Militant which saw the Scottish members separate from Taaffe's grouping to form the ISM whilst remaining members of the CWI. *Scottish Socialist Voice* transformed itself into the paper of the SSP.

Although the Socialist Party paper, *The Socialist*, was available at party meetings, the ISM does not have a public paper. While other members and platforms sell papers at meetings - *Socialist Outlook*, *Weekly Worker* etc, the largest tendency within the SSP does

not.

The discussions with the SWP have focused on whether they will sell the *Scottish Socialist Voice* as their main paper. *Socialist Worker* could be sold in meetings not in public.

The fear is that the SWP would operate from the start as a public faction of the SSP, and not help build it. The proposed changes set out the rules the SWP would be expected to follow.

Damage

Alongside possibly justified fears of the SWP, whose change of line to co-operate with the left is still fairly recent and possibly reversible, lies an experience of the damage done by sectarianism.

The ISM comrades have bitter experience of Taaffe and the CWI putting the interests of their group before the interests of the Labour movement and Left

as a whole.

The ISM's resignation from the CWI just before the SSP conference reinforces their position that these proposed changes are designed to defend democracy within the SSP. Viewed in abstract against a history of bureaucratic control in Stalinist parties, this proposed change is worrying.

But viewed against a struggle against sectarianism and attempts to build a united left and given the lack of any disciplinary actions within the SSP - the proposed changes can be justified.

What is necessary is to strengthen the avenues for discussion and debate within the SSP. There are no rules preventing this, but few organised mechanisms for it to occur. If the SWP does join, I anticipate and will welcome an explosion of discussion and educational initiatives as well as a weekly public paper.

Scottish Parliament overrules Executive

YET AGAIN the Scottish Parliament has defeated its own Executive. The first time was over Tommy Sheridan's Act to abolish warrant sales, this time it was over free care for the elderly.

The dynamics of this were revealing. The Labour majority within the Executive were determined to deny Scottish elderly people free personal care in order to maintain the line put out by Brown and Blair.

First Minister Henry McLeish effectively went over the heads of his own Executive and appealed to the Parliament, who were overwhelmingly in favour of the proposal. The Executive was outflanked and had to concede.

Henry has shown populist strengths and taken revenge on Westminster attacks on his compe-

tence and intelligence.

There remains the question of how to pay for the parliaments commitments. Money is being thrown at problems - teachers' pay, tuition fees, free care. As the Parliament has a fixed budget it must be paid for, although most of the costs come after the next 2 years, when there will be a new Scottish Election.

Already raising taxes has been raised by Liberals, SSP, even Scottish Conservatives. The SNP are likely to support this as well. Suddenly Scottish Labour looks the only party supporting low taxes and lower public services.

Will the Scottish Income Tax be raised or even the SSP's Scottish Service Tax introduced, which allows the higher rate of income tax to go up?

We will have to wait and see.

A rotten but necessary compromise

Terry Conway

The Liaison Committee of the Socialist Alliance - the main body with authority to organise the election campaign took place on January 13 in London.

This meeting was a big step forward for the Alliance and its General Election campaign. It took a number of crucial organisational decisions which put us on the road for an impressive showing.

The Alliance will have in the region of 50 candidates in England, running serious local campaigns within an overall national framework.

Combined with the SSP and the Welsh Socialist Alliance, this will be the most serious challenge from forces to the left of Labour since the war.

There was however a highly contentious matter to be dealt with - a joint statement from the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Socialist Party (SP) on the allocation of candidates in a number of contested seats for the General Election.

Over-riding

The statement overrode the democracy of the local alliances in the areas it covered, and imposed candidates by national decision - in contradiction to the "Coventry protocol" agreed by the Alliances national conference last autumn.

Ironically the SP had presented themselves as the champions of local democracy and autonomy and opposed important decisions being taken nationally. They



Dave Nellist

did not want strong, authoritative national structures. They argued that the protocol agreed at Coventry was far too centralised, while saying they would abide by it.

But this new agreement actually gives the Alliance centrally much more power than envisaged through the Coventry protocol!

The clear responsibility for this state of affairs lay with the Socialist Party. They define a number of areas of the country as their "patch" - essentially on the basis that they have previously stood candidates in their own name (or, more accurately, as 'Socialist Alternative' - as they are not allowed by the state to stand as the Socialist Party).

They also refused to agree that selection meetings take place in these areas where a candidate could be democratically decided on by all Alliance supporters. In some places they announced their candidature to the local press without any consultation with other forces in the local

Alliance.

What became increasingly clear is that, despite having been involved in the National Network of Socialist Alliances since the beginning, today the Socialist Party is not at all enthusiastic about building local Alliances.

In several areas where they are the strongest force and have some record of standing candidates, no local alliance exists, and they have no plans to set one up.

As a result of these problems destructive guerrilla warfare was taking place on the ground - which threatened the potential success of the Alliance, and possibly even its survival.

That is why the Liaison Executive in December asked the SP and the SWP (who the SP clearly see as its main competitor) to meet together and see if they could trash out a joint agreement.

The statement was a result of these discussions. In fact what it represented was an ultimatum from the Socialist Party.

Subsequently the Socialist Party have attempted to convince the rest of us that the statement represented equal compromise on both sides.

This just does not hold water. All they conceded was their right to control a couple of seats. What the rest of us gave up were issues of principle.

The Liaison Committee was faced with the same problem that presumably the SWP had encountered in their own discussions with the Socialist Party. Either accept their demands or face



The successful campaign last year by the London Socialist Alliance: Socialist Party has not learned the lessons.

the possibility that they would split the Alliances.

Problem

It would clearly have been a major problem for the Alliance if the SP were to walk out - as has looked possible at various points, including at the December meeting.

Everyone recognises that the potential success of the Alliance depends on our being able to begin to combat the deep sectarianism on the British left. The divisions on the left have alienated many working class people who agree with socialist ideas but do not see the point of getting involved when the left spend as much time fighting amongst themselves as working towards defeating the class enemy.

Therefore effectively the Socialist Party had got the Alliance over a barrel - either we had to give them what they wanted or face the very real threat that they would walk out, leaving the Alliance immeasurably weaker.

Consequently the overwhelming majority of the Liaison Committee voted for the statement while making clear our hostility to being put in such a position - and determination that nothing like this would happen again.

In agreeing that the SP takes the candidate and control of the campaign in 12 seats the Liaison Committee went over the heads of local

alliances. This is why I initially moved an amendment that nomination papers should only be issued either where the local alliance agreed or where none exists.

Unity

In the end I withdrew it because it was clear from the debate that while many others agreed with the sentiment, the overwhelming majority believed it was necessary to pass the motion unamended for the sake of unity.

While the principle at stake here is unacceptable, in practice it may not cause that many difficulties on the ground. SP candidates have already been selected in the two Coventry seats and in Deptford. In Leicester the Alliance is in agreement with the proposal. In Hull and North Tyneside and probably Wakefield, the SP nominee is genuinely the most appropriate person. (Though the SP candidate has subsequently withdrawn in North Tyneside - see page 5)

Birmingham Northfield is not a target seat for the local Alliance and in Bristol the seat might well not have been contested by the local alliance otherwise. In Stevenage there is as far as I know no Alliance. What the reaction on the ground in Bootle and Southampton will be, I can't tell.

Clause 3 alludes to the fact that the SP can - and in practice more or less definitely will - stand in their own name in Hayes and Walthamstow. The reason they will not get the support of the Alliance is that the respective Labour MPs there are John McDonnell and Neil Gerrard, both strong members of the Campaign Group.

The majority of those in the Alliance, including ISG members, would strongly oppose such a challenge, and made this clear. This part of the statement - which is simply a statement of fact - should not have been voted on. However in the climate that existed, it was impossible to raise this.

Clauses 4 and 5 make clear that the SP will control the campaign where they have the candidate. They make a small concession that at least £500 of their allowance can be used for propaganda that other forces want.

However what the existence of these points make clear is that on the key debate about how to build the alliances, the Socialist

Party retain their sectarian position.

This clause, as far as I understand it was the basis on which Workers Power voted against the resolution. They were right to think this was a major problem - although no more a matter of principle than the issues contained elsewhere in the statement.

It was also a problem that one of their comrades, together with a number of others, had indicated that they wished to move amendments but were not called to speak. While Dave Nellist of the Socialist Party, in the chair, rightly stressed the need to get to other urgent items on the agenda, this is no reason to trample on democracy.

Unhappy

However while Workers Power, like the rest of us, had every reason to be hostile to the developments taking place, they were in the end wrong to vote against the resolution. It is also regrettable that the CPGB, whose comrades voted for the statement, have since argued in their paper that it should not have been agreed.

The Alliance is well on the way to becoming the most significant development on the British left for many decades. But it is too fragile, too untested as yet to withstand a walk out of one of its major components. For that reason, it was necessary to vote through the statement despite its major problems.

The statement voted through by the Liaison Committee is a rotten compromise - but a necessary one in the circumstances. Given that, ISG delegates took the view that it was necessary to vote for it while making the political points that the Liaison Committee were being put in this position by the SP problems.

They have put what they perceive as their own narrow party interests before the need to build a broad Alliance against Blairism - and trampled over the most elementary democracy in the process.

Our hope is that it will be possible through the election campaign itself and other work in building the Alliance to convince the SP to change their attitude.

Split

Subsequent to the Liaison Committee the majority of Scottish supporters of the international organisation to which the Socialist Party belongs, the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) have left that organisation. (see p 19).

It is already clear in some parts of England that members of the Socialist Party have more sympathy for their erstwhile comrades in Scotland than with Taffite loyalists who put their own sectarian interests above those of the class struggle.

From this point of view, as well as the fact that the Alliance will be a more tested instrument after the general election, that will be the right time to stand up to any further bullying. For now the main priority must be to build the best campaign for the General Election the majority of us have seen in our lifetime.

Statement to Socialist Alliance Liaison Committee, January 13, 2001, from SP and SWP

1. We understand that no two political organisations represent the SA, but in the interests of the united general election campaign we have tried to come to an agreement, which we hope others in the SA will agree overcomes some immediately difficulties in the run up to the general election.

2. In the following seats, about 20 percent of the total number of seats likely to be contested by the Socialist Alliance, Socialist Party candidates are currently the most credible. These are Bootle, North Tyneside, Stevenage, Leicester West, Deptford, Southampton Itchen, Bristol East, Coventry North East, Coventry South, Birmingham Northfield, Hull North, and Wakefield. Therefore, we support the SP receiving papers for these seats at today's Liaison Committee.

3 In addition we acknowledge that the SP retains the right to stand under their own electoral name in Walthamstow and Hayes.

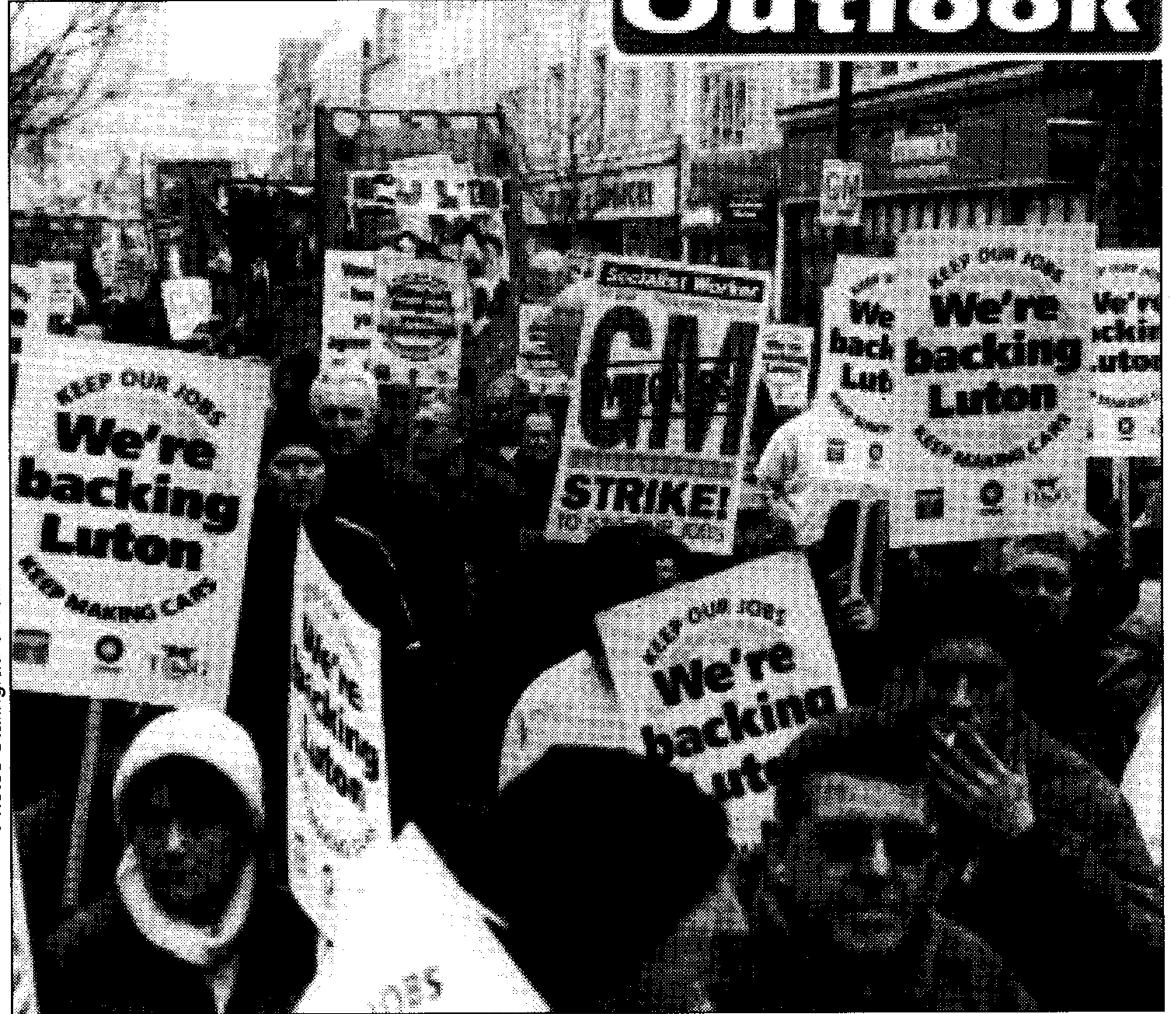
4. It is clear that where the Socialist Alliance candidate is a member of the Socialist Party the Socialist Party will want to produce their own propaganda in support of the candidate.

5. We realise that the SP has a different position within the Socialist Alliance on the best way to run the General Election campaign, which we would like to accommodate in the name of a unified campaign.

In the above constituencies where the SP have an existing record of contesting elections the campaign material will reflect that fact.

We accept that in the seats where the SP has the candidate the SP will have political and organisational control over the campaign; on the condition that they agree to prominently publicise the Socialist Alliance on all their election material.

In addition, in order to ensure that in these areas enough general Socialist Alliance material is produced to allow others in the Socialist Alliance to participate in the campaign without being made to feel that they are simply building the Socialist Party rather than the Socialist Alliance, the SP agent will authorise material to be produced up to a minimum allowance of £500, from the election expenses spending limits in each seat.



Photos Stalingrad O'Neill

Dudley Hospital strikers (left) – who have just decided to stage another 3-week stoppage in their fight against the effects of PFI – have also voted to stand joint branch secretary Angela Thompson as a Socialist Alliance candidate against local Labour MP Ian Pearson. Car workers fighting for their jobs in Luton will be able to vote for fire fighter Joe Hearne, who is also on the Alliance ticket.

More Alliance candidates adopted in election countdown

Oxford socialists gunning for Smith

TREASURY Secretary Andrew Smith, the key man driving forward the Private Finance Initiative, is the main target of the Oxford Socialist Alliance campaign in the Oxford East constituency.

There is no shortage of issues for a united socialist campaign to home in on as they prepare a concerted effort to win support in the General Election.

Beyond his eager support for the controversial plan to use PFI to finance a new hospital in Headington, Smith has also strongly supported moves by Oxfordshire County Council to privatise its homes for the elderly, arguing to angry lobbyists that it "might have been better for council finances if they had been privatised years ago".

Spending limits on the County and Oxford City councils – and the continuing series of cuts and privatisation flowing from them – are also part of Smith's remit as the man controlling government spending.

And Smith must also share responsibility for the scandalous detention of asylum seekers at the notorious Campfield detention centre near Oxford, which has been the focus of local and national protests.

The future of the much-reduced Cowley car plant, now preparing to produce the BMW mini, is also a key issue in the constituency: Smith's role as a cabinet minister in a government committed to "flexibility" of labour will not endear him to car workers facing a prolonged period of working Saturdays without pay to refund their "banked" hours during the long lay-off while the tracks have been rebuilt for the new model.

Small wonder then that the



John Lister

proposal to run a candidate against Smith in Oxford East has won early support from key activists in the public sector unions, car workers, and campaigners.

After a prolonged process, the selected candidate will be International Socialist group member John Lister, a regular contributor to Socialist Outlook. He is chair of Oxford NUJ branch, and perhaps best known for his job as information director of the long-running NHS pressure group London Health Emergency.

Explaining his decision to accept the nomination, John said:

"The political and moral collapse of this New Labour government has come as a sickening blow to many who campaigned for so long to kick out the Tories, expecting that Labour would end Thatcherite policies and rebuild the public services.

"In less than four wretched years Blair's government has convinced people it is even more sleazy than the Tories it

replaced. It boasts that most of Thatcher's anti-union laws are still in place.

"It's sometimes hard to remember that this government came to office with a majority of 180. It could have done whatever it wanted. This is what it wanted to do.

"Andrew Smith epitomises the wretched politics of New Labour. Even while they work hand in glove with the bosses, they are busily short changing the pensioners, ripping off students, victimising asylum seekers, under-paying nurses, teachers and other public sector workers, privatising new services, and shovelling even more handouts into the wallets of privatised firms like Railtrack, as well as bankrolling PFI consortia and private hospitals.

"This wasn't what people voted for in 1997. To vote again for Smith is to vote for another five years of the same.

"But if people want to vote against more privatisation, cuts and closures, against exploitation, racist policies, bigotry and corruption, and for a socialist alternative, trade union rights, democracy and public services, we will give them the chance in Oxford East.

"I am honoured to be the first candidate backed by a newly-united left in Oxford.

"The establishment of the campaign is a huge step forward. We are committed to reaching out to build the widest possible alliance of forces who want a progressive alternative to New Labour. However many votes we win, the aim of the Socialist Alliance is to strengthen the left in the town, give a voice to vital issues, and build a base for future campaigns and battles. That's why I'm standing."

Bristol campaign homes in on education, privatisation, racism ... and Primarolo

Socialist Outlook supporter and Labour Party member, Brian Drummond has been selected as the Socialist Alliance candidate to fight Bristol South against Treasury Minister Dawn Primarolo.

Brian is a longstanding NUT activist and member of the Socialist Teachers Alliance. He was secretary of the local FACE campaign which helped to prevent the closure of 10 local schools.

He has been centrally involved in Bristol Socialist Alliance since its inception four months ago. Brian has been excited by the potential of this new development which has more than 100 paid up members in the city and is able to act more effectively than the different left organisations could by organising separately.

One of the more innovative initiatives of the Alliance in Bristol has been the way they have intervened into the local referendum being carried out by the local Labour group as a cover for cuts.

The Alliance has put forward a fifth proposal of "No rise in Council Tax, no school closures, tax the rich at a high rate and for central funding of education". This has received wide support.

Brian explained to Socialist Outlook why he had taken the decision to stand.

"Like many other Labour voters I have been bitterly disappointed by this government which as a Chair of a Ward Party in the City I helped elect. As a teacher and parent, education is a particularly important issue to me.

Today the threat of privatisation is greater than it was under the Tories. The introduction of Education Action Zones has allowed private companies into our schools nationally.

The curriculum has been developed in line with the Thatcherite plans of the nineties. Many children are subject to an arid skills and academic based curriculum which in no way addresses their needs.

Teachers are still teaching large classes and subject to the immense pressure of Ofsted, performance management and poor wages.

Here in Bristol the Labour controlled council has managed to remove two secondary schools from the community of Knowle. They are proposing to close two primary schools in the Hartcliffe and Withywood areas of the city. The Bristol Socialist Alliance has been heavily involved in fighting

"The racist treatment of asylum seekers through the introduction of vouchers and the dispersal system has been impossible to stomach."

these alongside local parents.

Since it was elected in 1997, the Labour government has continued to attack sections of the community including single mothers and the disabled. In particular it has developed a policy of criminalisation of youth with policies such as the imposition of curfew.

The racist treatment of asylum seekers through the introduction of vouchers and the dispersal system has been impossible to stomach.

Local MPs, with the sole exception of Roger Berry, have been abject supporters of the worst of these policies.

In terms of the economy the government has pursued neo-liberal policies. The massacre of jobs in the car industry, the collapse of the privatised steel industry and the continued and relentless loss of jobs across the whole of manufacturing is the result.

The disasters we have seen on the Rail network cry out for renationalisation. That is why we were happy in Bristol to be part of the Socialist Alliance campaign against rail privatisation, mounting a picket of Temple Meades station. The response of the government to the experience on the railways – to privatise air traffic control and the London Underground – beggars belief.

New Labour plans to take Britain into the Euro as soon as it feels confident of winning a referendum. This would result in acceleration of manufacturing job loss, further privatisations and regulations which strengthen the hand of the international cartels.

As Treasury Minister, Dawn Primarolo must take responsibility for the failure to renationalise the rail and the unpopular and highly inadequate local bus service.

Treasury policies have led to the attacks on manufacturing – on our car and steel industries.

On the international stage, Blair has shown his support for George Bush's "son of star wars" project, which may rely on the use of Fylingdales and Menwith Hill.

And British troops will be used as a police force for NATO in an increasing number of wars across the globe.

I have consistently opposed the use of British troops in foreign wars – most recently in the Gulf and the Balkans – and so these are also issues I will seek to highlight through standing in this election."

Terry Conway

Tony Blair's hypocrisy has no bounds. The catalogue of death in recent times speaks for itself, he says, speaking of the growing trade in human trafficking.

Writing in the *Observer* on February 4, together with Italian PM Giuliano Amato, Blair announced a joint initiative between the two countries to stem the flow of so-called illegal immigrants from the former Yugoslavia.

The region is the starting point of one of the main transit routes for illegal immigration to Western Europe and gangs operating along it are believed responsible for smuggling up to 50,000 people a year.

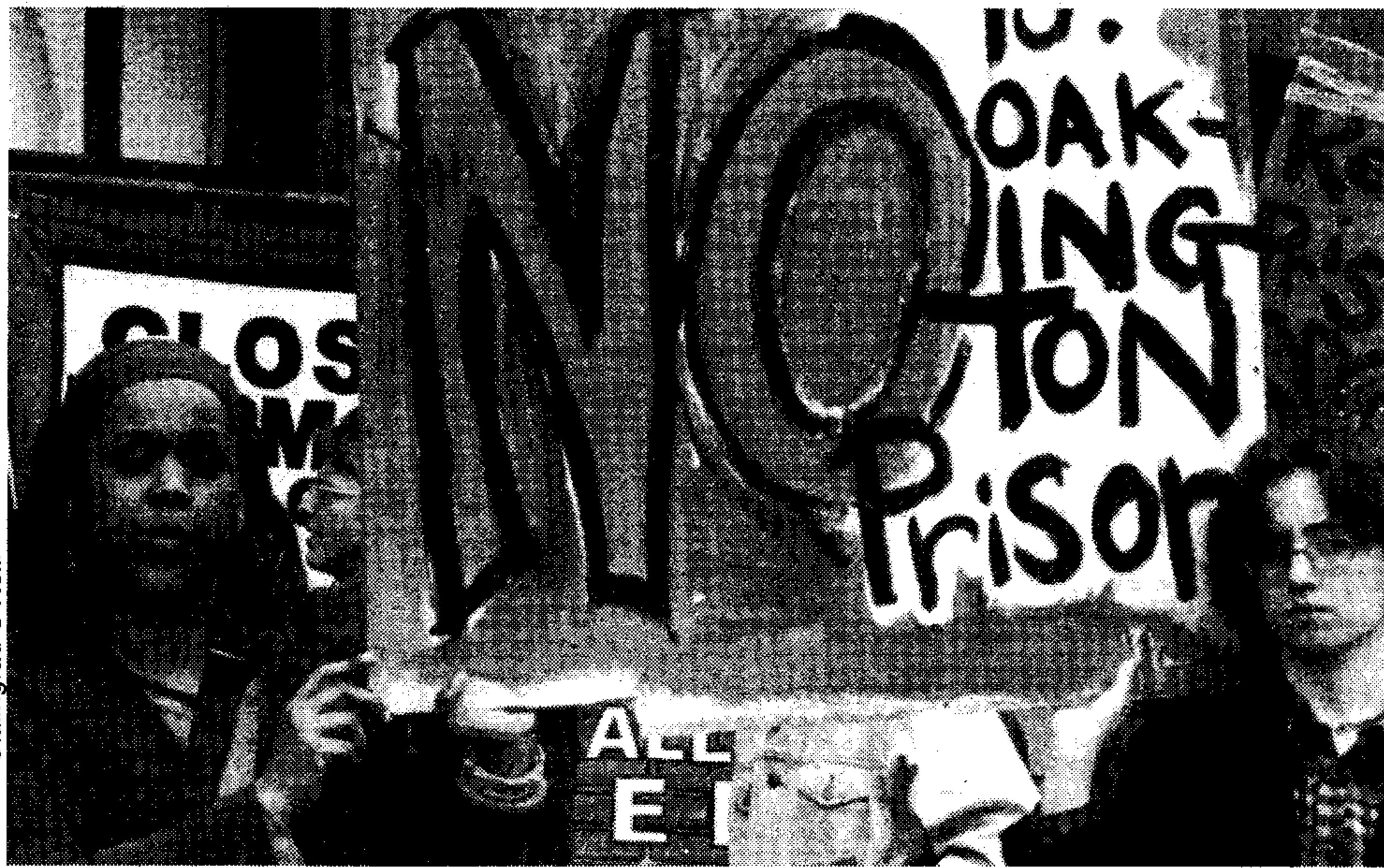
The UN says the route could be responsible for 10% of Europe's illegal immigrants, some paying up to £2,700 to make the trip.

But what is their solution to this tragedy which has seen many die by drowning or suffocation as they desperately flee to supposed safety?

At least 173 people drowned last year in the Adriatic attempting to cross from Albania to Italy. Two years ago, 90 Romanian illegal immigrants were rescued from a locked lorry in Italy suffering from asphyxiation. Just before that, in an incident similar to the one at Dover, in which 58 Chinese refugees suffocated, dozens of Sri Lankans died after a driver left them locked in a container lorry at the Austro-Hungarian border.

Do they have proposals which would bring an end to military conflict and political persecution across the

No borders! – fight for the free movement of people



Stalingrad O'Neill

Home Office ministers boast that they deported 8,000 "illegal" immigrants last year, while thousands more have been imprisoned in detention centres like Oakington and Campsfield

globe?

Do they suggest ways to lessen the environmental devastation and increasing "natural" disasters which result in so many people leaving their homes and communities behind?

Do they take up the fact that trade in human beings is the grotesque result of their economic and social prac-

tices in which everything becomes a commodity? If the human genome, rare plants, water and air are all for sale in this brave new world of the 21st Century then what's so different about trafficking people?

It seems obvious that the only way to end this barbarity is to end all immigration controls – to allow people to

move at will. Such a move would end this scandal at one fell swoop – the criminal mafia would no longer be able to exploit people desperate to escape.

But no. None of these logical and progressive policies appeal to New Labour. Instead these great statesmen have pledged to deploy more police and immigration offi-

cers in Bosnia to step up border checks.

Blair has also offered extra funds for a "voluntary repatriation" scheme encouraging people who had made the journey "just to seek a better life" to return home.

Sentences of up to 14 years for criminals profiting from the world's fastest growing illegal trade could be introduced as part of the crackdown. In Britain they currently face a 10-year sentence – less in many other EU countries.

Officials are reported to favour a Europe-wide sentence for traffickers. If other countries support the proposals, the new measures could be in place across Europe within six months.

This article appeared just the day after a debate on Radio 4's Today programme which showed that asylum seekers in the UK are going hungry because of lengthy delays in issuing vouchers.

Nick Hardwick of the Refugee Council believes there is a "crisis" in the system which is affecting families across the UK.

He told the programme: "All over the country there

are groups of asylum seekers who are going days or weeks without food because the vouchers administration has broken down."

He said one impoverished mother in Liverpool had been forced to make nappies for her baby out of newspaper. "People are scrounging food for small children because the vouchers aren't arriving."

It is impossible for asylum seekers to make ends meet even when the vouchers arrive – given that they represent only 80 per cent of miserly social security levels and can only be exchanged in generally more expensive shops.

When even the vouchers don't arrive, the level of deprivation is just unspeakable.

These revelations follow on the heels of a report from homeless charity Shelter on January 31 which showed that many asylum seekers were living in completely sub-standard accommodation.

The organisation inspected 154 properties used by asylum seekers and found that one-in-five were unfit for human habitation.

Many were infested with cockroaches, fleas or bed-bugs, and four out of five of the shared houses had major fire risks.

Shelter says the system is allowing hundreds of landlords to cash in on some of the poorest and most vulnerable people.

Far from the myths peddled by the tabloids, and fanned by government policies, asylum seekers are not living in luxury at all.

This cycle of exploitation

Deadly pay-off for Milburn's cynical organ recital

John Lister

FOR A DAY or so the scandal over the Alder Hey hospital stockpile of improperly acquired organs seemed like a dream come true for Health Secretary Alan Milburn.

The hefty report, pointing the finger at an evil – and conveniently also foreign! – doctor as the main culprit, and feeding a media frenzy of hysterical headlines, gave Milburn a double opportunity.

Not only could he pump out a story to knock the seemingly endless Mandelson/Vaz sleaze stories off the front pages, but at the same time he could pursue the government's agenda of debunking the medical establishment, and thus strengthening the hand of managers within the NHS.

Milburn seized the opportunity with both hands, shamelessly winding up the confused emotions of bereaved parents who had been lied to and deceived by unscrupulous or insensitive

doctors at Alder Hey, and prompting countless other relatives around the country to embark on a crazed hunt for the pickled organs of people long ago dead and buried.

The tabloids, also clearly getting bored with the Mandelson saga, happily joined in, locating people who were distressed at the idea that they had only buried "part" of a deceased loved-one, and who appeared now to want to reassemble the removed parts as if this will bring any consolation for their loss or hope for the future.

But the mawkish, semi-religious frenzy, together with the macabre details about heads kept in jars, and rooms filled with preserved embryos, organs, and body parts served another purpose, which neither the tabloids nor Milburn intended.

They scared and confused thousands of people into believing that any removal of body parts could only be for

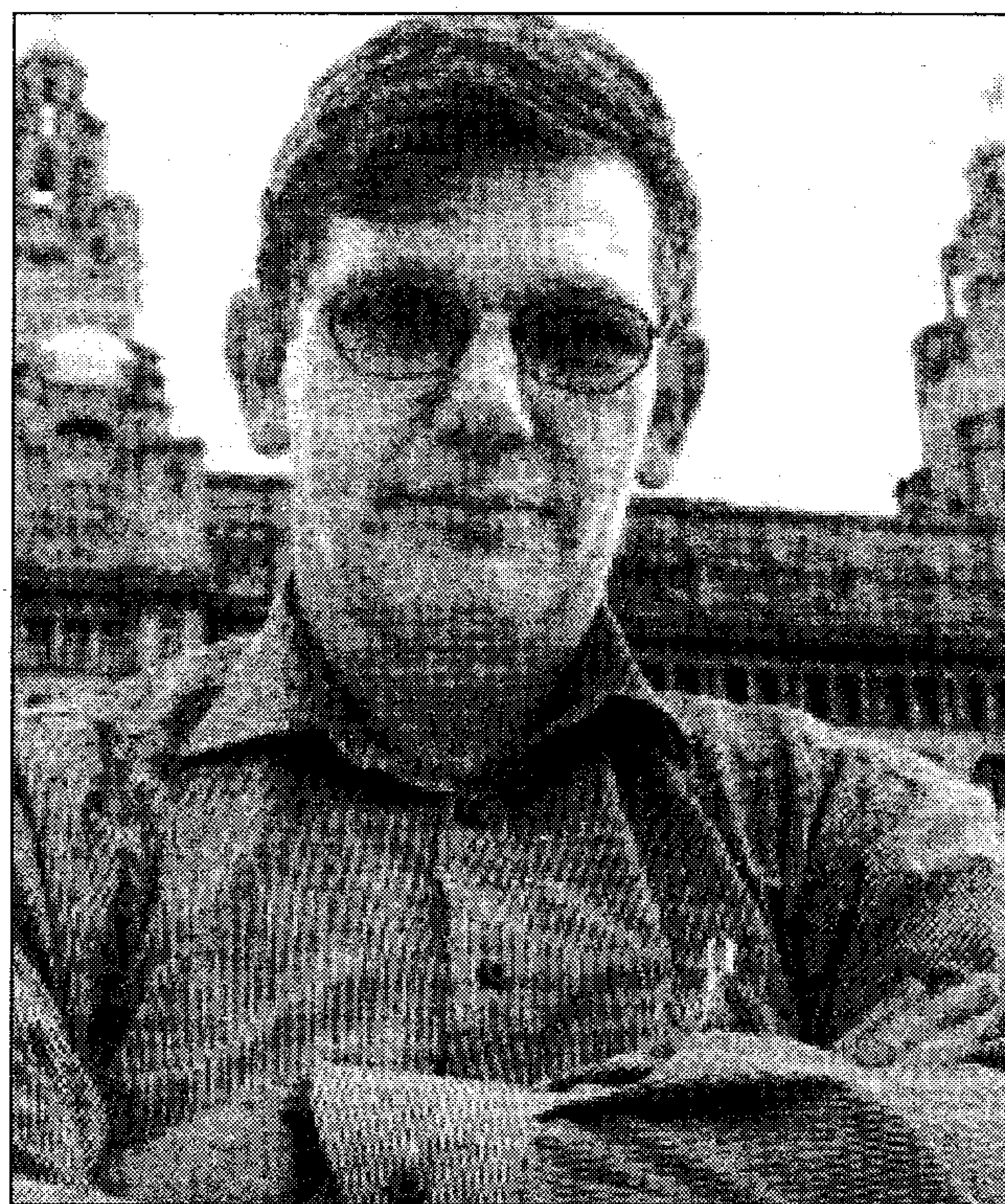
some grotesque self-satisfaction of the pathologist – forgetting the genuine need to conduct research on the reasons for death, and the anatomy of disease, if help is to be available to the living.

The press hysteria also undermined and intimidated doctors, who are required to ask relatives for permission to take organs from dead people for research and medical training, and for transplant surgery.

The combined effect is that a growing number of desperately ill children are already in danger of dying as the supply of donated organs for transplant dries up.

Now in a panic move to redress some of the damage he has done, Milburn has ordered a top-level "summit" of medical experts to stop the rot, stem the numbers tearing up donor cards, and press the case for more people to join the register of organ donors.

But there is another, more political, issue which



Milburn's easy target: Prof van Veltzen

Milburn's exaggerated response to the Alder Hey situation has helped to cover up: the question of accountability in the NHS.

The indefensible antics of Professor Dick van Veltzen and other pathologists who have developed a practice of taking organs without consultation or consent are a product not only of the hierarchical power of doctors, but of a health service run by quangos, which allows little public scrutiny.

But Milburn's new Health and Social Care Bill going through Parliament proposes

to reinforce the secrecy surrounding clinical services with a draconian Clause 59, which would impose tight controls over any information on the treatment of any individual patient – and, therefore, of any deceased patient. Unauthorised use of such information would become an offence, punishable by a £5,000 fine.

This type of gagging order would make it even harder for external investigations to discover, expose or question what happens to patients at any stage of their treatment. Worse, this new restriction

is coupled with Milburn's plan to scrap the existing statutory bodies that are supposed to speak up on behalf of patients and their interests – Community Health Councils.

The new Bill would sweep away the existing network of CHCs, and replace them with a confused and completely unrepresentative array of local quangos, none of which would have the level of local support, organisational and operational independence that the best CHCs currently enjoy.

Campaigners have often pointed to weaknesses in local CHCs which fall under the thumb of local health authority or Trust bosses: but this is exactly the type of stooge organisations that Milburn seems determined to create, while dispersing the existing levels of expertise and social commitment among the best campaigning CHCs.

The organs scandal was an ideal moment to promote a new era of openness and accountability in the NHS: but Milburn has cynically used it as a fig leaf to divert from his attempts to slam the lid on future scrutiny and protest.

The abolition of CHCs has already been challenged by Labour backbenchers, and by an increasingly vocal campaign by CHCs themselves, while those in support of Milburn more likely to mirror the views of Professor van Veltzen than Dr Finlay.

Cowley leaders won't take "no" for an answer!

BMW workers at Cowley voted, by 769 votes to 726, to reject the new 'Mini' package on pay and conditions, even though their union negotiators had pushed for it strongly at meetings of the membership.

In this they joined a growing group of carworkers voting down productivity packages. Recent votes at Land Rover and Peugeot in Coventry show that workers are fed up with losing their personal lives to 'banking hours' 'week-end shifts' and other so-called flexibility.

It also shows that if the unions organised opposition to these deals, which all mean job losses in the end, then not only would they get solid backing from their members, but there would be the basis of unity in the motor, and component, industries.

Instead the union officials are determined to fight for the deals and force them through. Minor changes were made at Peugeot, and at Land Rover the contentious 'banking hours' system is to be reviewed.

At Cowley union officials, and senior stewards did not even get any changes in the deal. Instead they exploited the fact that with the 'Mini' still being prepared very little work was taking place. So they went to a mass meeting and proposed a strike!

This of course was heavily defeated. But since when has the only choice been an all-out strike or nothing? The answer is only when the proposal comes from a union official, and when no production is taking place.

T&GWU official Ivor Braggins stood out against opposition to the closure of the Cowley Assembly Plant when he was senior steward there, 10 years ago. Now he is back as the official for the plant, and continuing in the same vein.

With strike action rejected, the next proposal was to have a re-ballot on the deal. This was of course heavily carried.

With this sort of leadership it was no surprise that the new vote was 1299 to 288 to accept the deal.

Senior steward Bernard Moss called it a "minor blip".

The result of this second vote was announced on the January 25, and before the end of the month the company was using its new right to call workers in on banking hours with just 2 days notice, and saving themselves huge amounts of overtime pay.

Luton: it's OUR plant!

Veronica Fagan

15,000 car workers and their supporters marched through Luton on one of the coldest days of the year in protest at General Motors proposal to shut the town's Vauxhall factory laying off the 2,000 workers, currently employed.

Several thousand more in the components supply industry would probably face the sack as well.

More or less the whole Luton workforce was joined by a strong delegation from their sister plant in Ellesmere Port. Car Workers from Longbridge and several other British factories were there as were delegations from car plants in Germany,

Spain and Belgium

Other groups of workers represented included the Dudley Hospital strikers and stalwarts from the miners' strike.

The demonstration had a different feel from last year's massive protest over the Longbridge closure. Of course the Birmingham demonstration was much larger – and felt extremely powerful.

Many were also vocally supporting calls for occupation at the final rally. However at the end of the day no action happened – whereas this time at least the European Day of Action and the ballot remained to look forward to.

At Rover as well union

GM action a big step forward for European solidarity

40,000 European car workers staged protests against plans by General Motors to slash jobs across the region as part of a European Day of Action on January 25.

This huge show of strength and solidarity with workers in Luton facing the closure of their plant represents over a third of GM's European workforce. The walkout took a 12 per cent bite out of GM's daily European vehicle output, with only 7,450 of the usual 8,500 autos rolling off assembly lines.

This is one of the first pieces of pan-European industrial action, which gives it a political significance which outstrips the loss in production, caused mainly by hour-long walk outs in plants across the continent.

The European Metalworkers' Federation (EMF) statement, issued on the day of action reported that 16,000 workers in Germany, 7,000 in Belgium, 11,000 in the UK (Luton and Ellesmere Port), 1,000 in Portugal and 5,000 in Spain all took part.

In Britain Luton shut down for the day, while at Ellesmere Port the workers struck for half a day. At the Merseyside plant it is clear that the majority see the proposed closure at Luton as making their own situation extremely vulnerable.

"Any plant in Europe could itself be the next one affected," said spokesman Guenter Lorenz for the German engineering union IG Metall, calling for workers across the continent to down tools in solidarity.

"This striking example of European solidarity cannot fail to impress GM manage-

ment," declared the EMF's General Secretary, Reinhard Kuhlmann, addressing the 7,000 workers assembled at the Opel AG plant in Rüsselsheim, Germany.

What remains a concern despite these protests is that many see their goal primarily as giving added weight to the European Works Council negotiating team in its talks with GM management in Zurich.

While pressure on management is not a bad idea in itself, the illusion that a corporation like GM would back down because industrial action has cost them 1,050 cars is far from the truth.

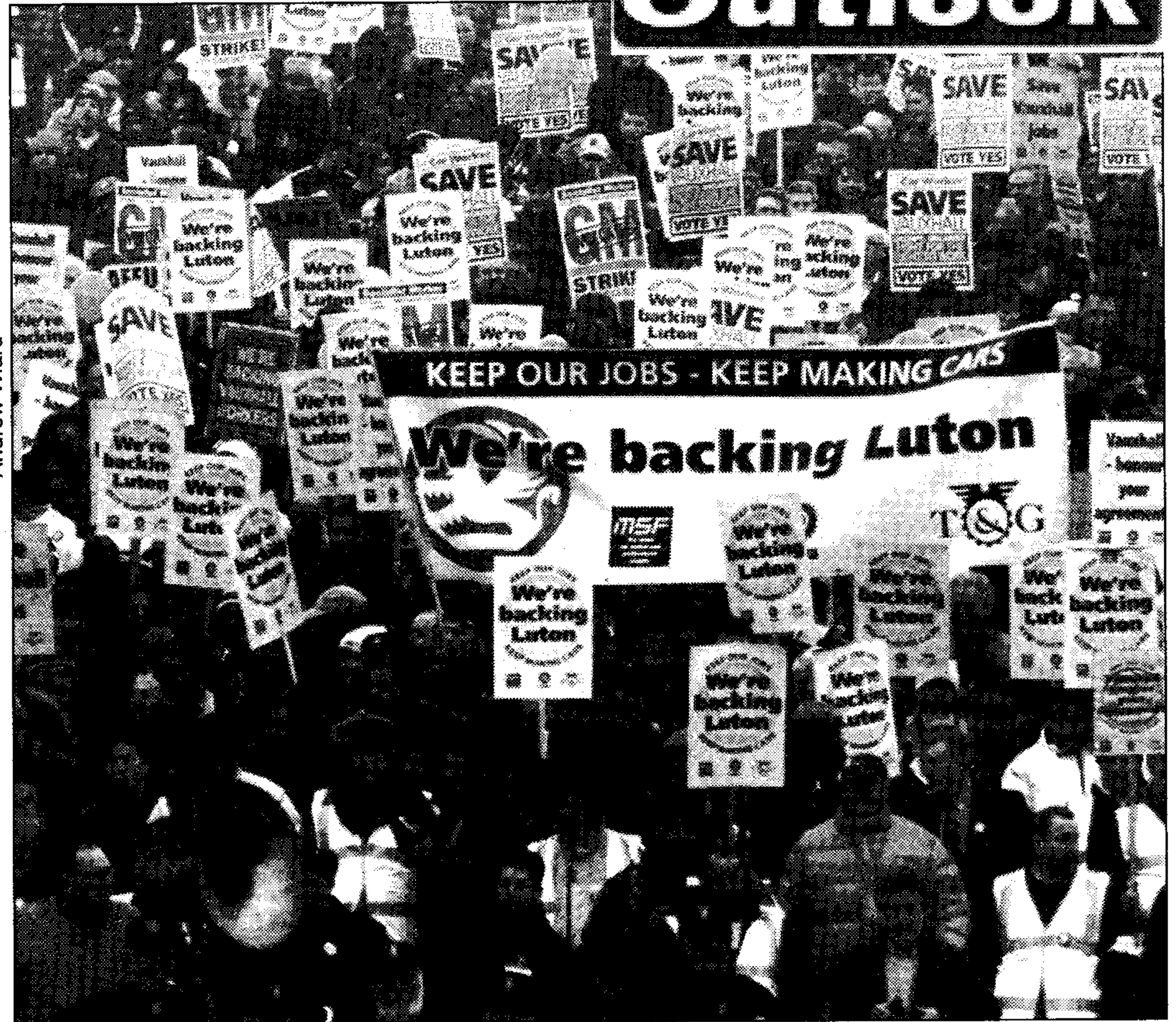
An occupation at Luton as soon as the closure was announced would have been the strongest response the workforce could have made.

Taking over the plant when the workforce returned after the Christmas shutdown would have acted as a clear focus for other action. Even now, occupation remains the strongest tactic in the workers' armoury.

As the ballot starts here in Britain, a huge campaign needs to be mounted by militants for the biggest possible "yes" vote.

Without industrial action of either occupation or strike at Luton, the solidarity campaign that made such a promising start on January 25 will dissipate. With a lead from Luton, workers across Europe have shown they are ready to follow the lead.

With thanks for information to: www.savevauxhalljobs.org.uk website which carries many other details about the fight to save jobs in Luton.



Andrew Ward

jacks and nationalist rhetoric was strong, whereas this time workers from GM plants across Europe received the greatest applause from the crowd, both on the demonstration itself and when they spoke at the final rally.

The fighting tone of their speeches, and frequent references to their determination to build the forthcoming European day of action was in sharp contrast to the tepid talk from the assorted union chiefs who also addressed the crowd.

John Monks, general secretary of the TUC was heavy on rhetoric about the power of 'faceless directors' but of course refrained from making any suggestion as to how this power could be challenged.

Tony Woodley, the TGWU's chief officer for the car industry, clearly under pressure from both the anger of the workforce and the demonstration itself, reluc-

tantly used the phrase 'industrial action, if necessary'.

You would not have known from listening to him that a ballot for action was already planned.

The union bureaucrats were joined by a whole plethora of local worthies including local new Labour MP, Margaret Moran.

Challenge

She faces a general election challenge from Joe Hearne, a local fire-fighter, who is the Bedfordshire Socialist Alliance's prospective candidate in Luton South.

Even the local Tory MP, Sir David Madel addressed the rally, though happily many workers from the plant booed his speech.

It was clear however that Tony Woodley's previous plea for unity was geared to keeping people like Madel on board. The "unity" he and the rest of the union bureaucracy want is unity to

prevent militant action from the workforce – whereas the unity we need is unity to achieve and spread support for such action.

The danger now as balloting begins is that the anger that sparked a swift occupation of management offices in December in response to the closure announcement in mid-December may have already begun to dissipate.

Offers of jobs elsewhere or redundancy packages which can seem generous if the alternative might be the dole queue have their effect, especially when the leadership have dragged the start of the ballot out for all these weeks.

While the signs are better than they were at Longbridge or Dagenham, given the successful European day of action, occupation remains the best way to undermine the power of the bosses.

Vote yes in the ballot – occupy Vauxhall now!

Hidden cost of "saving" Nissan jobs

Alan Thornett

After a £40m sweetener from the government Nissan has confounded speculation and decided to build the new Micra in its Sunderland plant.

On the face of it this deal protects several thousand jobs which were on the line if the Micra had gone to France, and it gives the plant a better chance of survival in the medium term.

Certainly if the Micra had gone elsewhere it could well have been the beginning of the end for the plant.

But a closer look at the deal shows that jobs are under threat just the same. Firstly, management have made it clear that the allocation of the Micra to the plant involves a commitment to further productivity increases in a plant where the pace of work is already high.

The workforce will go onto 7 day working on a 24 hour shift pattern. This will be combined with the introduction of a working time system in which overtime will be replaced with a banking of hours system.

Nissan has been one of the few plants where this system was not already in existence, and it will mean a huge pay cut for the workforce as a high proportion of what they previously took home was made up of overtime payments.

There is also the question of how Nissan intend to deal with the strength of the pound, when they are manufacturing cars inside the EU but outside of the Euro zone – the principal reason for considering moving production to France.

Nissan UK will only pay for components (which is by far the biggest part of the labour value which goes into a car) in euros. This gives them the best possible situation: they will have the benefit both of cheap and flexible employment conditions in Britain, and the current low value of the euro.

There are far reaching implications for the component industry, however. Either component manufacturers located in the UK can cut costs to the extent that they can accept payment in euros (which would mean very substantial

cuts): or orders will be switched to manufacturers inside the Euro zone – which would involve large jobs losses in UK component plants.

This would probably lead to further closures as the shrinking industry loses the economies of scale. But of course these would not have the same high political profile for New Labour as the closure of Nissan itself – and therefore they are happy to see these workers' jobs sacrificed.

Contrary to the sickening platitudes that AEEU leader Sir Ken Jackson has trotted out – that the Sunderland plant was "saved" because the workforce had embraced new management techniques, the reality is that these measures represent yet another attack on conditions in the plant as well as a major loss of jobs in the component sector.

The greed for profit is endless, and the sooner workers in the car industry and elsewhere recognise that the only way to protect jobs and conditions in through struggle not partnership, the better for us all.

George W. takes over: so it's (big) business as usual

Jeff Mackler

The Gore/Bush election dispute's sound and fury rapidly gave way to everyday bipartisanship as the "president-elect," George W. Bush, made the photo-op rounds to assure his rivals and supporters alike that not much would change with the new regime in power.

At Gore's concession speech, calling for an end to "partisan rancor", largely calmed ruffled feathers, and ended the escalated rhetoric of the previous month.

In the interim, on Dec. 15, Congress approved a \$450 billion appropriations bill by a 292-60 margin, affirmed by a voice vote of the Senate a few days later.

This Clinton-praised legislation included \$1 billion for another 50,000 police; an additional 500 agents for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms; and 600 new "gun prosecutors." Clinton also promised to help local communities put 100,000 new cops on the street.

Like the Clinton administration, Bush's ruling-class team includes cabinet appointments of representatives of the corporate elite - from Alcoa Corporation Board Chair Paul O'Neill as Secretary of the Treasury, to oil executive Donald Evans as Secretary of Commerce - and a host of former corporate bosses from previous Republican administrations.

The right-wing anti-abortionist Senator John Ashcroft, a Republican from Missouri, is slotted for Attorney General. His Democratic predecessors heading the Justice Department, minus the conservative rhetoric, have largely eliminated affirmative action and access to abortion. Under Clinton 87 percent of all U.S. counties have no abortion facilities.

George Bush, more public about the matter, opened his presidency with a decree



Promising to carry on in the interests of capital: George W

banning federal funds for U.S. personnel working overseas on projects which provide abortion.

The Secretary of State post went to former Pentagon Joint Chief of Staff General Colin Powell, the Republican who led the 1990 genocidal war against Iraq.

Some 250,000 virtually defenseless Iraqis were slaughtered in a matter of weeks under Powell's military reign. The Clinton administration in turn murdered an additional million Iraqis through bombing and its criminal sanctions that continue to this day.

Powell lost no time in proclaiming at a Texas press conference that the Bush team would press forward with its campaign pledges to construct a so-called

"Missile Defence System", in reality a multi-billion-dollar boondoggle designed to give the United States a first-strike nuclear capacity.

Clinton's military experts had already begun work, including some dramatic publicised failures, on a lesser version of the project, designed to both prime, Keynesian style, the falling U.S. corporate profit rates and to match the massive arms expenditures of imperialist competitors in Europe and Japan.

Most serious scientists believe that no real "defense" system can be constructed against a multiple nuclear warhead attack. But as in decades past, today's military experts calculate "nuclear victory" not in terms of zero losses to the United States.

The insane logic of nuclear war is instead based on "acceptable losses," a term that includes the incineration of tens of millions of Americans, provided the "enemy" is totally devastated while the U.S. retains the capacity to rise from the ashes and continue!

The coming working-class mobilisations in Russia and Eastern Europe are similarly not without concern in regard to the use of the barbaric U.S. nuclear arsenal.

Election fraud ignored

Former Vice President Gore disappointed his liberal supporters by refusing to challenge the numerous instances of electoral fraud engineered by the Bush campaign to win the presidency.

Bush's Florida state campaign chair, Katherine Harris, for example, also Florida Secretary of State, sent a list of 700,000 supposed felons to all 67 counties.

She ordered that these individuals be dropped from voter registration roles. Florida still enforces an 1868 law banning felons from voting - legislation originally implemented to deny former slaves the franchise.

It now appears that Harris's list was obtained from a Texas-based private outfit associated with George W. Bush. It has been found to



It's back to the future with George W's team including Jim Baker (front) Defence Secretary Rumsfeld (back right) and Dick Cheney

include thousands of people convicted of misdemeanours, not felons. These were also purged from the voter roles.

In this manner, Florida bans 31 percent of all Black males from voting. The racist law applies even if the former felons have served their time and "paid their debt to society."

Florida is one of a growing number of states that ban felons from voting. Some 4.2 million citizens are thus denied the franchise nation wide.

Numerous instances of racist voting practices have been well-documented by the NAACP, [National Association for the Advancement of Coloured people, the most prominent U.S. civil rights organisation] whose citations include the use of Florida state police who barred Blacks from voting, the refusal of voting officials to assist first-time Haitian voters, the illegal early closing of voting sites in counties with large Black communities, and many more.

In some locations, Republican officials allowed supporters to fill out incomplete absentee voter forms, garnering additional thousands of Republican votes. The unsupervised Republicans didn't bother to complete the forms submitted by the registered Democrats, and the Democrats were not informed of the existence of such incomplete forms.

The Clinton Justice Department took no action on any complaints. The provisions of the 1964 Voter Rights Act, largely instituted under pressure of a growing civil rights movement, have been ignored.

Gore's electoral challenge was limited to his demand for a recount in four counties where Democrats largely predominated. He declined to file for a state-wide recount. Gore's position centred on the use in these four counties of antiquated punch card voting machines, which routinely fail to register upwards of three percent of all votes cast. By contrast, the failure rate of the more modern optical scanners is less than one percent.

Gore was attacked for his "selectivity" in choosing just a few predominantly Democratic Party counties for a recount. And his supporters neglected to mention that the antiquated machines were placed there by Democratic Party officials, who routinely provide the minimum of public services to the communities of oppressed nationalities.

Nevertheless, an unofficial post-election recount conducted by the Miami Herald indicated that in at least the

contested counties Gore did pick up enough votes to have won the state-and thus the presidency. But no information has come forward of a recount in the other 63 counties, including those in which Bush might have picked up votes.

In truth, voter fraud, racist or otherwise, is the norm in capitalist America, regularly practised by both parties when it suits their needs. In the current situation the Democratic Party representatives of the ruling rich made it clear that they had no intention of making racial discrimination an issue in regard to the outcome of a presidential election.

Even before Gore's campaign team had time to contemplate the importance of the Supreme Court decision that sealed the Vice President's fate, Ed Rendell, National Chair of the Democratic Party, joined with other top Democrats to call on Gore to end the matter and concede.

This Pandora's Box of overt racism was too hot to handle. Both parties, of course, will continue their racist practices, but in more subtle ways, like the criminal "justice" system and so-called welfare reform.

Fraud of U.S. "democracy"

In the end, the Republican-dominated U.S. Supreme Court, in a decision that will be laughed at for decades, cited the Equal Protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution to admonish the Florida Supreme Court for supposedly allowing different standards for counting votes with disputed chads.

Widely divergent standards have been and remain the rule throughout Florida and likely in every other state. Were the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling to be applied nationally, the country's electoral system would be reduced to a bad joke.

But when the chips were down, the historic "states' rights" Republicans in the nation's top court used federal intervention against the state of Florida when it suited their partisan needs.

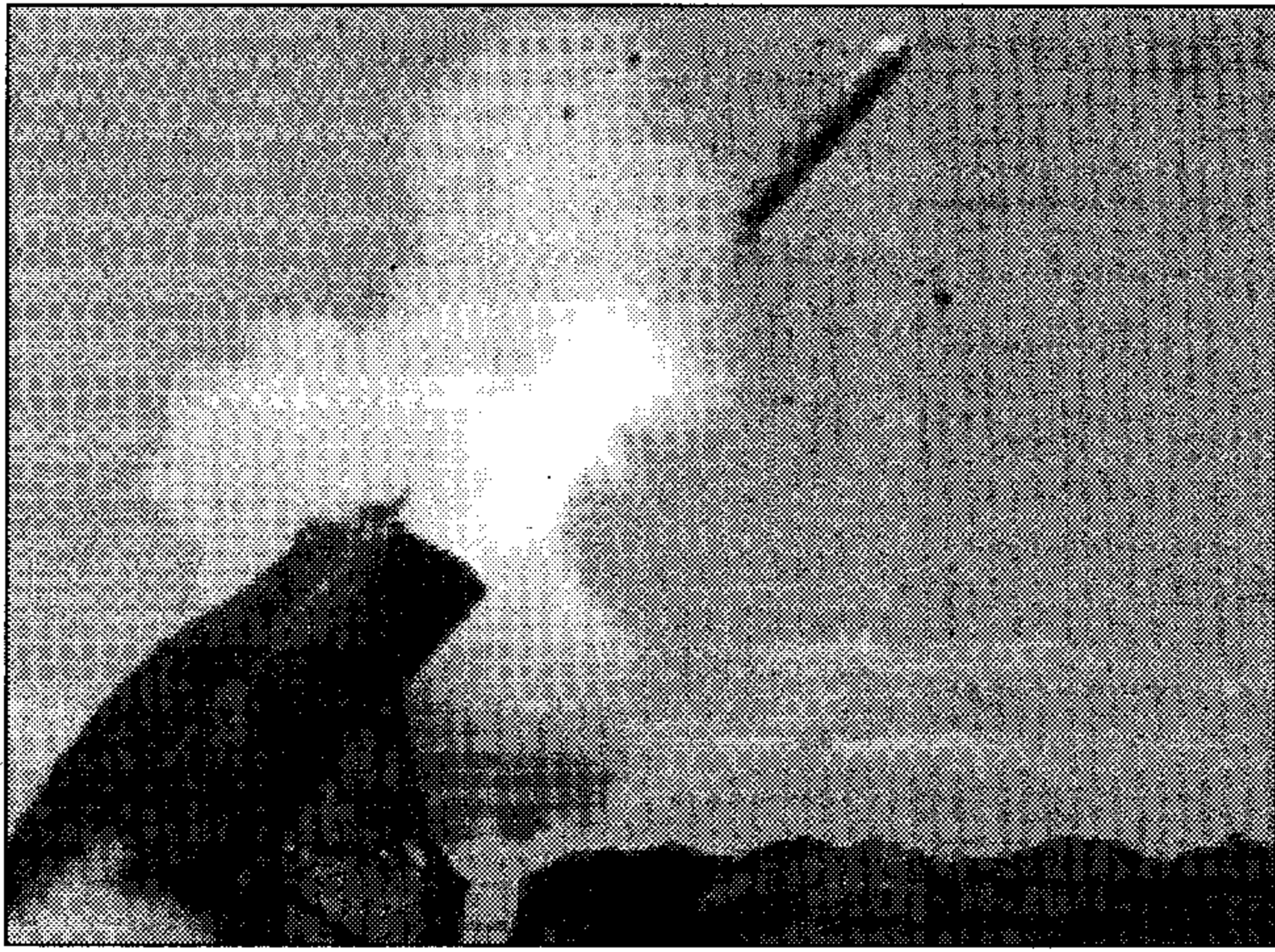
Fraud is also the rule with the Electoral College system, originally implemented to allot a disproportionate vote to the Southern slave states where Blacks were denied the franchise but were nevertheless partially counted in terms of Electoral College vote determinations.

While Gore won the final popular vote by a margin of over a half million, he lost the decisive vote in the Electoral College. An exam-



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Bush fires first shots in a new global arms race



Missile Defence: a multi-billion-dollar boondoggle

ple of how this system can work is helpful. In 12 small states where Bush won, he received a total of 73 electoral votes. In the single state of California, where Gore received more popular votes than the combined total of Bush in these 12 states, Gore received an Electoral College vote of 54.

But it is not just the undemocratic Electoral College, or even racist and corrupt voting practices that marks U.S. "democracy" as a fraud. Elections in the United States are the property of the ruling rich, whose representatives own and control literally every key institution of the capitalist state.

From the expenditure of billions of corporate dollars to promote their candidates, to the direct ownership of the vast proportion of the media, to reactionary laws that ban working-class opposition parties from the ballot, U.S. elections are a charade played out among the élites who vie among one another for power to better promote their corporate interests at the expense of the vast majority.

In truth, working people have no say within the electoral system in regard to the critical decisions that affect our lives. The great mass of voters are relegated to a choice between their oppressors and exploiters.

Any and all significant social and political change has always been a product of mass social movements rooted in the daily struggles of working people who challenge the status quo.

From the winning of the franchise by the general population (it was originally restricted to white, male property owners), to the right of unions to organise and bargain collectively, to the gains of the mass civil rights movement including the ending of legal segregation, to the stopping of the murderous Vietnam War, working people broke with the policies of the ruling-class parties and took to the streets to win in practice what the law and the ruling-

class parties denied.

George Bush's first days in the White House have gone beyond the usual "honeymoon" period accorded all new presidents. He has courted leading Democrats, who in return have signed up to his early proposals, including a further gutting of funds to public education.

Federal Reserve Chair Alan Greenspan, the guru of the staggered U.S. economy, gave Bush the go-ahead for a massive tax cut for the rich. Greenspan, in his nationally televised speech last week, broke new ground in advocating the very policies that Bush's Republicans are planning.

Some 90 percent of the so-called tax cut planned is earmarked for the ruling rich, while working people will receive little or nothing.

Citing the state of California's just revealed energy crisis, Bush announced plans to "end America's dependency on foreign oil" by introducing legislation to begin oil exploration in the now protected Arctic National Wildlife Refuge: Bush's new environmental chief won her spurs as a lobbyist for the lead industry!

Thus the Bush team plans to do in public view what the Clinton team did without the hoopla and fanfare.

Clinton cut more social services and engineered more corporate welfare than the combined presidencies of Nixon, Reagan and George Bush Senior.

The new president, like Clinton before him, is far from a rogue individual with a conservative agenda. He is the U.S. ruling class answer to increasing capitalist competition and declining U.S. corporate rates.

The transparency of Bush's agenda and the expected support of his Democratic Party "critics" may well result in a renewed fight-back by today's workers and allies in U.S. society.

The mass national protests on January 20, Bush's inauguration day, brought tens of thousands into the streets. The battle has begun.

Veronica Fagan

You wouldn't expect the *Yorkshire Evening Post* to be overly concerned with the outcome of the US Presidential Election.

However the most significant international message to come out of the new American administration since the election of George W Bush is that the National Missile Defence system – dubbed "son of Star Wars" after Reagan's failed 80's project – will go full steam ahead.

This is despite its estimated cost of \$60 billion. and the fact that two of the first three tests of the system failed.

This has huge implications for Yorkshire in particular, given the likelihood that US bases at Menwith Hill near Harrogate and Fylingdales on the North Yorkshire moors will be an integral part of the system.

That is why the paper ran a major article by Helen Hutchinson on February 2 headlined "Son of Star Wars puts Yorkshire in the front line" which focuses on the likely role of Menwith.

Hutchinson points out that the base, which hides some of the most powerful spying devices on the planet, capable of listening in on millions of conversations by phone, fax or e-mail worldwide, would be a prime target in a new nuclear arms race.

No weapons are stored at Menwith, but it is linked to a new a new generation of satellites in deep space through receiving aerials known as radomes.

These satellites are powerful enough to detect the heat of a missile launched 25,000 miles away. through a mechanism known as a Space Based Infra-Red System (SBRIS). This is expected to come on line at Menwith by 2003, and would be a clear breach of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missiles Treaty (ABM) signed with the

Soviet Union.

Professor Paul Rogers of Bradford's Peace Studies Department commented: "As soon as the decision is given to go ahead with NMD then it becomes part of the process which breaks the treaty... One of the first targets to be hit will be Men-with Hill and Fylingdales."

Hutchinson also points out that Blair's New Labour government, who have made in clear that they will do everything to maintain Britain's "special relationship" with the USA, despite the defeat of their great buddy Bill Clinton, is refusing to discuss US plans in any detail.

More than 40 MPs have signed an early day motion opposing NMD, but there has been no Parliamentary debate. Blair says that until the Americans make a formal request to use bases in Britain there will be no comment.

So important is the National Missile Defence Project to the Bush team that the first international trip since inauguration was the visit of new Defence Secretary Rumsfeld to Munich on February 3 to a European Defence conference to meet with European and Russian politicians to attempt to get them on side. Peace campaigners made their opposition to the project strongly felt.

German Defence Minister Rudolf Scharping has indicated that he is opposed to any breach of the ABM – though Chancellor Schroder has been more circumspect. French President, Jacques Chirac, has been one of the most outspoken critics of the American plans, commenting at a Turin press conference on January 30 "In our opinion

NMD cannot fail to relaunch the arms race. The costs of this technology are colossal. It seems to us there is something contradictory between unrestrained increases in defence spending and the very excessive reduction on development aid throughout the world."

US Secretary of State Colin Powell made clear, in his first comprehensive TV interview on February 4, that if going ahead with the programme meant America leaving the ABM treaty, then this was a price they were definitely prepared to pay.

Both Vladimir Putin and Secretary of the Russian Security Council Segei Ivanov, have made it plain that they are extremely unhappy about this prospect. They argue that they would have no choice but to respond by beefing up their own armoury in response.

Putin, in a statement on January 27 commented that a National Missile Defence shield would do "irreparable damage to the architecture of international relations". Ivanov, speaking at the Munich conference, argued that "destruction of the ABM Treaty will... create prerequisites for a new arms race, including one in outer space".

Hostility to the US plans is also strong in China, while India has used the developments to carry out a test on January 17 of what it claims is an improved version of its Agni Two missile.

This is an intermediate ballistic missile capable of reaching all of Pakistan and much of China. Given the fact that Pakistan also has nuclear capability and carried out its own tests in retaliation to the pre-

vious Indian salvo, the situation in the sub-continent also looks precarious.

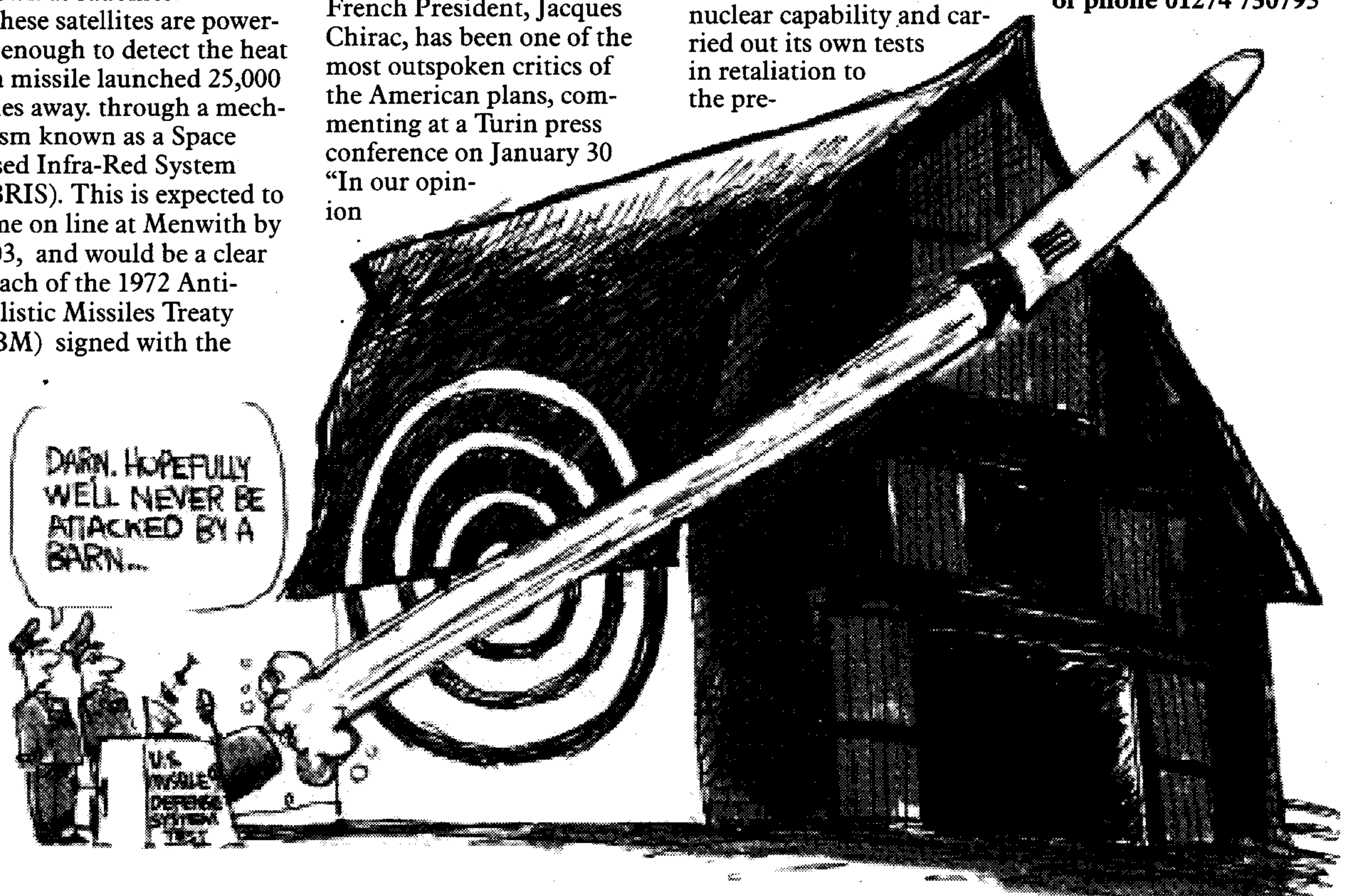
Of course this programme was initiated under Clinton. His supporters on both sides of the Atlantic are now trying to claim that he was a reluctant convert, but the reality is that this is one more area where bi-partisanship in US politics is clear. The differences are around tactics and tempo, not the enormous waste of human life and resources that this project represents.

The political justification used by both the former President and his successor is the supposed "threat" from so-called rogue states such as North Korea, Libya and Iraq and Iran.

But as commentators have pointed out, relations with North Korea, for example have improved over the last year. More importantly the whole notion of "rogue" states is itself a construction of US imperialism to justify whatever mechanisms they see as in their interests – either at an economic or political level (of course combining the two is even more preferable.)

Campaigners for nuclear disarmament across the globe are clear that opposition to NMD is their first priority. That is why an international conference, hosted by Yorkshire CND, is being held in Leeds on May 4-6 to focus on this real threat to all our security posed by the warmongering of American imperialism.

■ For further details contact cndyorks@gn.apc.org or phone 01274 730795



Financial analysts like to say that there are four words which strike terror into the heart of observers of asset markets when they hear them uttered by investors: "it's different this time".

Over the last few years this has been said more and more about the US economy. American capitalism has been engulfed by a wave of speculative hype based on either the growth of information technology, 'globalisation', changes in the labour market or the magical powers of US Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan, depending on the particular pundit speaking.

Now, however, things look very different. The last four months have seen US profits fall dramatically in many sectors, growth slow, and what looks like a cut in interest rates fuelled by panic. Is the US economy really heading for a crisis – and what does this mean for the stability of global capitalism? ANDY KILMISTER reports.

In order to answer these questions we need to look more closely both at the nature of the US economy in the last decade and at Marxist accounts of economic crises.

The nine year expansion in the USA since 1991 has really been made up of two separate processes. There was a modest upturn between 1991 and 1996 which actually produced slower growth than that of the 1970s and the 1980s. But from 1996 onwards the growth rate accelerated and became inextricably linked with a dramatic stock market bubble and a consumption boom.

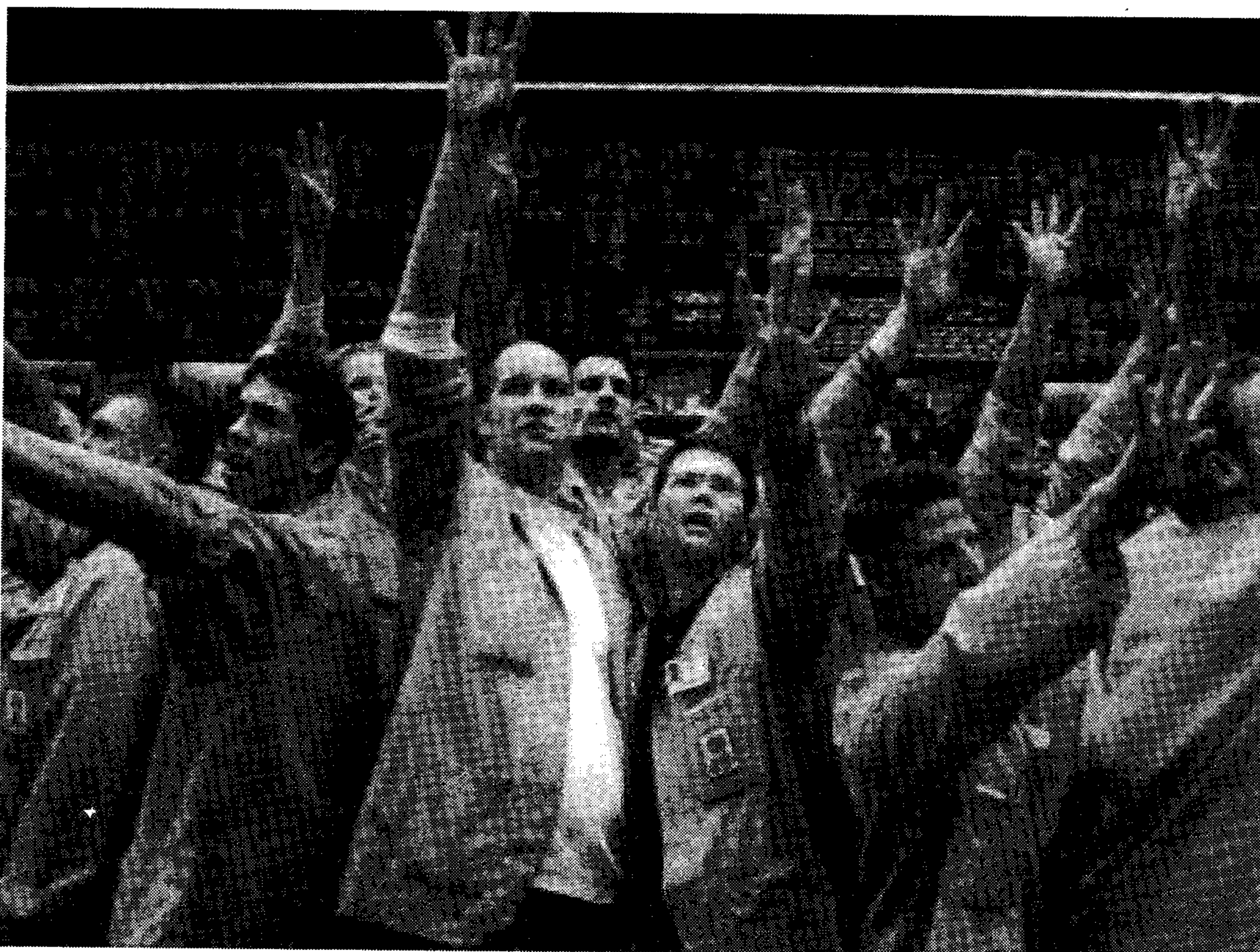
The size of this boom cannot be underestimated. Between World War 2 and 1996 there was just one year in which the private sector (firms and households taken together) had a negative net savings rate in the USA. This was 1955. Since 1996 this rate has been continually negative, and borrowing has been increasing all the time.

By the beginning of 2000 private sector net borrowing had reached about 7 percent of US GDP, with the stock of debt at a record level of 165 percent of private disposable income. Corporate debt was at a record level of 74 percent of corporate GDP.

The basis of this massive increase in borrowing was twofold. Firstly, there was a wave of optimism about the future profitability of the American economy, sending share prices soaring and encouraging households and firms to spend on the basis of future incomes.

Secondly, this borrowing was funded by an inflow of funds from abroad, which financed a record US trade deficit. This money came from Japan and Europe and, after 1997, from elsewhere in Asia as investors withdrew from South East Asia, Russia and Latin America in the wake of currency and stock market

US economy: the bubble has burst



crises.

Marx's ideas about capitalist crisis can help us see both why the slow growth of the first half of the decade in the USA developed into the bubble economy of the second half, and whether this is sustainable.

For Marx, capitalism is an inherently unstable system, in which crises are not just interruptions to growth but play an important function in temporarily resolving economic difficulties and laying the basis for the next period of expansion. However, given this instability, such resolutions can only be temporary and themselves lay the basis for future crises.

The root of such crises lies in the constant tendency of capitalism to undercut the basis on which profits are made, the exploitation of living labour, by replacing such labour with machinery and capital.

Such investment raises the productivity of individual workers and thus is rational from the point of view of each capitalist in isolation. But looked at from the perspective of capitalism as a whole it lowers the rate of profit and lays the foundation for crises.

This process however is a long-run trend and is constantly modified by a number of more concrete developments. The tendency

of profit rates to fall can be offset for a while by increased exploitation of those workers that remain, by falls in the price of capital goods and raw materials or by the opening up of new markets.

Yet these factors themselves create tensions in the system which give rise to a constant movement between booms and slumps. Such a movement reasserts itself even in those economies which have appeared to overcome the business cycle, like Japan in the 1980s or the USA in the 1990s.

The basis for the upturn in the US economy in the 1990s and the initial growth was the dramatic restructuring of American capitalism in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and to a lesser extent in the early 1990s. A wave of closures and 'downsizing', followed by a takeover boom in the second half of the 1980s destroyed large amounts of unprofitable capital and presented the opportunity for a rise in the profit rate.

The financial crisis of the late 1980s triggered a restructuring of the banking system, allowing it to mobilise the funds to finance future investment.

This was backed up by three further developments which helped to offset the long-term tendency for the profit rate to fall.

Firstly, US capital launched a massive assault on the working class, both lengthening hours of work (according to some estimates by as much as 160 hours a year – or an extra month, on average), and by increasing the intensity of labour, while keeping wages down through attacks on trade unions and a shift to temporary, part-time and insecure employment, under the banner of 'flexibility'.

Secondly, the fall in the dollar after 1985, especially against the yen, allowed for some extra strength in export markets, while the costs of increased import prices were again offloaded onto labour rather than capital.

Thirdly, capital goods, particularly in the area of information technology, fell drastically in price over the 1990s. In addition, the US state played an important role in subsidising US capital throughout the 1980s and 1990s, particularly through the defence-related sector.

However, such developments on their own did not allow for an upsurge in the American economy which could match the 'long boom' of the 1950s and 1960s.

There were three main reasons for this. First, the squeeze on wages limited the growth of consumption at home. This meant that growth became very dependent on a constantly rising rate of business investment.

But such investment was itself limited by available profits, and by raising the value of the capital stock put a downward pressure on the rate of profit.

Second, slow growth in Europe, Japan and elsewhere placed limits on the export potential of the US economy, especially as these markets were also being served by US firms located abroad.

Third, the high rate of investment did not appear to transfer into increased labour productivity, at least in the first half of the 1990s.

By the mid-1990s for these reasons the upturn in the US economy appeared to be running out of steam, as the effect of the rationalisation at the turn of the decade worked itself out.

It was at this point that the rise in the stock market and the growth in borrowing began to take effect. The underlying imbalances in the economy were temporarily hidden by developments in the financial markets. Limits on consumption growth were lessened by the rise in credit.

Export potential became less important if foreigners were prepared to fund a record trade deficit. And investment could continue to rise on the basis of stock market finance and the growth of corporate debt. The result was an increase in growth rates and the continuation of the upturn.

The Federal Reserve (US central bank) was unable to check the growth of speculation because of their own worries about the world economy in the wake of the Asian crisis and the near-bankruptcy of the Long-Term Capital Management hedge fund.

In such circumstances a lessening in confidence ('irrational exuberance' in Greenspan's words) in the American economy was the last thing needed. Instead, they reduced interest rates, talked up the economy and helped to prolong the speculation for a further two years.

However, the enthusiasm of the financial markets cannot hide the limitations of the mechanisms which have been used to maintain the rate of profit.

One important development has been a change in the labour market. Declines in unemployment finally appear to have had an effect on the ability of employers to attack labour.

The 'Financial Times' of September 4 2000 analysed a report by the US think tank the 'Economic Policy Institute'. The report concluded that 'the turnaround from widespread wage decline between 1979 and 1995 to widespread wage growth since is a significant new development for working Americans' and that 'the long-term rise in job instability and job insecurity which continued well into the current recovery, finally abated at the end of the last decade'.

A second key factor was the rise in the value of the dollar. After 25 years when the tendency was for the dollar to decline, especially against the yen, since 1996 the US government has tried to pursue a strong dollar policy.

Among the reasons for this has been fear of the effects of continued rises in yen values on the fragile Japanese economy. Letting the yen fall is the price paid for avoiding Japanese investors 'repatriating' their US assets in order to avoid financial collapse at home.

In addition, the high dollar has been important in keeping US inflation under control despite the speculative boom. But it has limited the ability of US companies to compete internationally and contributed to the record trade deficit.

Also central has been the issue of the so-called 'new economy'. Partly, this has been framed as a debate about whether information technology is really raising the productivity of labour. There appear to have been some increases since 1996, but it is very uncertain whether these are long-term or simply a result of the cyclical boom and whether they justify the massive investment required to achieve them.

But more fundamentally, investors have begun to question whether even if productivity does increase this will be translated into a rise in profitability.

For Marxists this should be no surprise, for the reasons set out above. A rise in labour productivity on its own does not necessarily



Indonesian workers bear the brunt of neo-liberal policies

increase profitability if it simply leads to a shift from employing living labour to the use of machinery.

Technological change will only offset the decline in the rate of profit if it also makes capital goods cheaper and so reduces the amount of investment needed to employ more workers.

For some time developments in the US information technology sector seemed to do this. But this is becoming less and less clearly the case; 'The Economist' of December 9 2000 reported that the rate of deflation for computer prices had slowed from 25 percent to 11 percent, with software prices rising by 7 percent during 2000: "after falling for a couple of decades, prices for IT equipment and software were flat in the year to the third quarter. That matters because IT investment has been spurred by falling prices".

The result of all this has been a sharp decline in the headline profits of some key US companies followed by dramatic falls in share prices. Examples are Dell, Intel, Apple, IBM, Chase Manhattan and Xerox, which saw its shares fall by 75 percent in value last October and came close to bankruptcy. Banks like Bank of America have seen significant rises in problem loans. These developments have fed through to the stock market in general, which has been wildly optimistic about future profits in any case.

American capitalism thus faces two central problems. The most immediate is the possibility of a financial crisis spilling over into a recession. A collapse in domestic confidence in the stock market could cut investment, by starving companies of funds, and slash consumption as households see their savings fall in value.

If foreign investors also lose confidence in the US economy then they could withdraw their funds, sending the currency plunging and making it difficult to continue funding the trade deficit.

But in many ways more important is the second, long-term problem. The recent buoyancy of US capitalism has been based on an artificial set of circumstances which have masked the underlying limitations of the economy. If those circumstances have now evaporated, then these limitations come sharply into focus.

While US companies were notably successful in a number of areas in the 1990s they face continuing challenges in the future. In the motor industry for example, Ford and General Motors have been increasingly threatened by competition from European companies.

In telecommunications, European and Japanese companies continue to dominate in mobile phones, while US giants like AT&T lurch from crisis to crisis. The strength derived by American capital from the restructuring undergone in the decade after 1979 cannot be expected to last forever.

The USA faces not just a recession but also deeper questions about the nature and limitations of growth over the last 20 years.

The implications of a US slump for capitalism elsewhere could also be dramatic. The USA has accounted, directly or indirectly, for about half the increase in world demand over the last few years. A collapse in the value of the dollar could easily choke off any recovery in Japan or Western Europe as the yen and euro rise in value.

Japanese and European companies which have invested in the US could also see their profits fall if there is an American recession. Stagnation in the US will have a much more direct effect on global capital than the slow growth in Japan over the last decade, given the relatively low level of exports to Japan and of foreign investment there before the slump.

It is not clear how sharp the downturn in the US economy will be, or to what extent the Federal Reserve can hold it off by reducing interest rates and trying to stimulate demand. But what is clear is that the bubble of the last five years has burst, and that from now on American capital will have to grapple with its real problems without the aid of the financial hysteria we have seen recently.

The ideological effects of this for socialists worldwide cannot be overstated. The supposed success of the 'new economy' based in the USA has been crucial in providing a basis for neo-liberal thought and for the strategies of the WTO and IMF.

The explosion of this myth will provide important opportunities for arguing against such ideas and for putting forward the view that the problems demonstrated in the USA cannot be solved by capitalism but require a renewed struggle for an alternative economic system.

Adam Hartman

More and more people in Indonesia are being plunged into poverty as a result of the Wahid and Megawati government's subjugation to the dictates of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

This is the conclusion of a report published at the end of last year by the left-wing People's Democratic Party which played a key role in the popular mobilisations which brought down the Suharto regime.

The combined impact of subsidy cuts, privatisation, trade liberalisation and foreign debt has pushed up to over 136.8 million the number of people living below the international poverty standard of US\$2 per day. But workers, small farmers and the urban poor are not taking this lying down. Over the past six months here has been an upsurge in social resistance.

On October 1 the government cut fuel subsidies, having been forced to back down over this in April. It had previously cut electricity subsidies.

The resulting 12% fuel price rise fed through into all sectors of the economy, particularly public transport. Tens of thousands of workers and students protested in response.

In 2000-01 the government plans to sell state enterprises worth a massive 6.5 trillion rupiah. The IMF is targeting over 60 state enterprises for privatisation in the next ten years.

The collapse of the rupiah and the lack of competition from crisis-ridden Indonesian firms means that these assets will fall cheaply into the hands of foreign companies.

Privatisation is causing the cost of basic services to rise. Unemployment is also escalating as thousands of jobs are shed both in newly-privatised companies and in state enterprises being slimmed down in readiness.

Trade liberalisation has caused the destruction of the national sugar industry. Farmers face ruin as cheap sugar and rice imports have flooded in to the country.

Overall national productive capacity is being weakened, increasing dependency on foreign capital. Foreign exchange which could fund productive investment is instead wasted on growing luxury imports for the well-off.

Public foreign debt now stands at US\$80 billion, soaking up 37% of government spending in debt service in 2000. With the government funding a

bloated and vicious military and bailing out corporations which are themselves hit by debt only crumbs are left for public services. Education spending for example has fallen to 1% of GNP, 30% less than the previous year.

But the IMF shock "therapy" has not solved the economic crisis which engulfed Indonesia when international financial speculators pulled out of Thailand and Malaysia in 1997 leading to a collapse of currency, stock and property values in the region. Instead the IMF policies have brought the economy to

in Parliament until 2009.

Their role is now written into the Constitution as the organ solely responsible for "defending, protecting and safeguarding state integrity and sovereignty". This means the generals can declare a state of emergency if they see fit.

The TNI may be given impunity for all past human rights violations under the "non-retroactivity" principle, although it is unclear whether a new human rights law passed in November will override this.

Wahid and the military have clashed in their approach to the national liberation struggles

and armed police used the utmost brutality to stop people getting there, including firing on convoys and torching or confiscating vehicles.

Up to 178 people were killed in the days before the rally. This repression failed to stop the rally going ahead and issuing calls for a general strike. At the same time a shadow ballot of the entire adult population (2.75 million) showed 92% in favour of independence.

In West Papua a more relaxed approach under Wahid's influence to the independence movement has given way to a clamp-down supported by his Vice President Megawati Sukarnoputri.

Since August the Indonesian military and security presence has doubled and in a chilling echo of East Timor the army has begun forming militias amongst the settlers and stirring up conflict between settlers and the indigenous community.

The state has cracked down on the popular practice of flying the Papuan Morning Star flag. In recent months police have shot dead five and wounded 23 flag-raisers. One incident led to revenge attacks against settlers who were sheltering police, leaving nearly 30 dead. The state responded by detaining and torturing dozens of Papuans.

British Hawks

In late September Hawk jets sold to Indonesia by British Aerospace were flown low over towns in West Papua in order to terrorise the population. In January 2000 Britain voted to lift the EU arms embargo on Indonesia imposed during the militia violence in East Timor.

The British government hypocritically claims credit for not licensing exports of new heavy equipment but it is licensing the supply of spare parts for Hawks and armoured vehicles. For the New Labour government business as usual is more important than human rights.

The sale of state assets means rich pickings for British companies. British and other multinationals continue to profit from the plunder of natural resources in Aceh, West Papua and Indonesia. A strong well-armed state which clamps down on popular resistance helps to keep the profits rolling in.

While New Labour sacrifices its "ethical foreign policy" on the altar of profit, the priority for socialists could not be more different.

We demand and aim to build full solidarity with all those fighting for national liberation and against the neo-liberal policies forced by the governments of the rich countries on the poor throughout the world through the IMF and other instruments of imperialist domination.



brink of collapse.

Foreign and domestic investment has dried up. Capital is flowing out of the country. The rupiah fell 40% between September and November last year. And although the annual growth rate was 4% this was almost entirely driven by consumption as poor people sold their assets to meet basic needs.

An untamed military

For months the government has faced pressure on all sides and is now in crisis with President Abdurrahman Wahid impeached on corruption charges.

His personal authority has steadily diminished and he has completely failed to bring the military (TNI) under the control of society, the most crucial reform demanded by the mass movement which toppled Suharto.

Several things highlight the government's weakness in its dealings with the TNI. Changes to the Constitution have bolstered it. The TNI and police will retain their unelected seats

being fought in

Aceh and West Papua. This again underlines

Wahid's weakness. While both refuse to contemplate independence for either territory Wahid has preferred to negotiate and is prepared to concede greater autonomy.

The TNI has tried to undermine negotiations by stepping up repression - favouring a military solution to these conflicts. "Dark forces" within it are also believed to have stoked the religious conflict in Maluku.

The aim is to restore the TNI's legitimacy in the eyes of the public by making it seem essential for restoring order and holding the country together.

Aceh and West Papua

In Aceh (the northern part of Sumatra adjacent to Malaysia) there are mass mobilisations calling for a referendum on independence.

Hundreds of thousands attempted to gather in the provincial capital Banda Aceh in November for a Mass Rally for Peace called by the advocates of a referendum. The TNI

Stop the GATSastrophe!

Globalise the resistance: forward to Genoa!

Susan Moore

Much of the agenda protestors so vigorously opposed at the WTO talks in Seattle, and in the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), is steadily making its way onto the international rulebook through a largely unheard of agreement.

A massive expansion of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) is the next phase in the global liberalisation project.

The World Development Movement has been running a campaign since last autumn to highlight the dangers of the discussions on GATS currently taking place in Geneva which will culminate in March of this year.

The campaign was launched at an impressive rally in London November 9 attended by over 1000 people and addressed by veterans of the anti-globalisation movement Naomi Klein and George Monbiot.

Klein argued that "Public services are the public tangible manifestation and expression of our shared values as citizens. How we choose to heal our sick, teach our kids, protect our water, connect to one another through transport and communication are expressions of our collective vision for society.

"This idea is an extremely threatening one to the free market, which is what the attempts to extend the World Trade Organisation's reach into services is really all about. In market terms services are not an expression of our will as citizens, but opportunities for foreign investment - untapped resources"

Monbiot, who has written about GATS in the press, pointed out that:

"Big business wants a single, harmonised global market in which it can trade under precisely the same conditions everywhere, with as few barriers to its operations - in the form of regulation, public ownership or organised labour - as possible. And this is precisely what it has been getting.

"Big business has to get bigger because the market it has engineered is growing to embrace the whole world. As harmonisation means that only the very biggest companies will win, each one is trying to get bigger than any other."

GATS was originally agreed at the World Trade Organisation discussion in 1994. The aim of this agreement is to remove any restrictions and internal government regulations in the area of service delivery that are considered to be 'barriers to trade'.



Capitalism? snow way! Protestors defy the weather and the forces of globalisation in Davos

As the WDM briefing in whose service makes clear:

"Those intent on pursuing liberalisation, frustrated by the demise of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment in 1998, and collapse of trade talks in Seattle in 1999, now see GATS as their golden opportunity. As a result, all kinds of agendas are being pursued in the continuing negotiations around this agreement, which now extends beyond any reasonable definition of either trade or services"

The service industry is big business, covering about two-thirds of economic activity in industrialised countries. The powerful companies want to operate freely within the service sector, but much of it is owned and regulated by governments.

Freeing up the trade in services will benefit business and the GATS is designed to do this. Unsurprisingly, corporations have been the driving force behind the agreement.

The negotiations taking place in Geneva aim to extend the 1994 agreement. Governments are under pressure to drastically reorganise the ownership and delivery of services within their countries, and subject them to even tighter 'free trade' rules.

At the same time, negotiators from the world's richest countries are pushing for this liberalisation process to be speeded up.

The GATS liberalisation agenda threatens basic service delivery. If multinational-

als are seeking to make a profit out of water, health and education, those without purchasing power are likely to lose out.

Recent water privatisation in Puerto Rico has meant that poor communities have gone without water while US military bases and tourist resorts enjoy an unlimited supply. A system governed by people's ability to pay will not bring desperately needed services to the world's poorest people.

Moreover, the irreversibility of GATS will ensure that once governments have opened up particular service sectors to WTO rules, there is no going back. The decision of how to organise service delivery is effectively being removed from the political arena. In future, citizens will no longer have the democratic right to decide whether or not services should be regulated.

One of the strengths of the WDM is that unlike campaigns such as Jubilee 2000 it has consistently pointed out that trade and debt can't be dealt with separately. This is a mistake that campaigners in advanced capitalist countries often make.

If industrialised countries had not stacked the terms of trade so heavily in their own favour, Southern countries would not have fallen so deeply into debt. As Charles Abugre of Third World Network argues:

"Debt and trade are inextricably linked. Unfair trade rules left Africa in debt and debt has allowed creditors to impose further unfair trade rules on Africa."

Instead of rectifying this

imbalance to allow countries to pay off their debts, Northern governments insisted debtor nations integrate even further into the unequal global market, leaving them even deeper in debt.

For Southern activists, the 'free market' simply transfers resources from the South to the North, whether it's through debt or through trade, through the International Monetary Fund or the World Trade Organisation.

The WDM have highlighted the fact that resistance to globalisation in the south gets very little coverage in the media here. While Seattle, Prague and Nice were inspiring on our TV screens, it would also give a fuller picture of the scope of the fightback that exists if we saw the protests that have taken place across Latin America, Africa and Asia to policies that squeeze people even harder there.

Many of Bolivia's poorest families received water bills totalling a third of their income when the government sold the public water system with International Water (of London) taking a major share. The charges that the company imposed were so crippling that they sparked mass protest. For many low-income families water cost more than food. Even collecting rainwater in rooftop tanks became illegal without a permit.

Hundreds of thousands took to the streets of Cochabamba city in April

2000. Soldiers sent in to quell the protests killed six and injured hundreds of others. The governor of the state resigned saying he did not want to be responsible for the 'bloodbath' that would follow the Bolivian government's refusal to reverse the privatisation.

In the end, the protestors won - International Water was kicked out of Bolivia and the government accepted the protestors' demands to put control of water in local hands.

If current negotiations at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) continue, it would be difficult, if not impossible for the Bolivian government to go back on its privatisation decision.

Despite these important strengths, the WDM campaign has one crucial weakness - one it shares with many other similar organisations. Its focus is on research, education and the lobbying of politicians.

But the lessons of the struggles it talks about, whether in the south or the north, are that only mass action will defeat the neo-liberal steamroller.

Socialists and trade unionists must find ways to act on these issues urgently before global capital takes away more of our services, livelihoods and lives.

■ For further information on GATS contact WDM
25 Beehive Place
London SW9 7QR
0207 737 6215
www.wdm.org.uk

The following statement has been signed by Tony Benn, George Monbiot, former political prisoner in Burma Rachael Godwin, Chris Harman, editor of *Socialist Worker* and Greg Tucker, secretary of the LSA and member of the International Socialist Group.

A planning meeting has been called in London on Tuesday February 20 at Conway Hall at 7pm to begin to organise for Genoa. Similar meetings will be taking place in your area. For further information contact: globaliseresistance@hotmail.com or www.gn.apc.org/gloabliseresistance

"Across the world, a thousand and one new forces are emerging" This was the word from the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre Brazil where 10,000 activists gathered last week to discuss the fight against the corporate globalisers. The main slogan was simple: "another world is possible".

Last week in Davos Switzerland thousands gathered to demonstrate against the world's bosses at the World Economic Forum, and then to discuss and organise opposition at a huge counter summit.

In Britain tube workers are striking against privatisation. Health workers in Dudley have just voted for another 3-week strike against the Private Finance Initiative in their hospital. Car workers are balloting for action against closures. Across the country tenants are fighting and winning against private landlords trying to get their hands on our homes.

Attempts have been made by politicians, the police and college authorities to stop the Globalise Resistance tour. The authorities in Switzerland turned Davos into an armed camp. Police in Brazil arrested and attempted to deport Jose Bove a leading speaker at the Porto Alegre forum. But this attempted clampdown only shows the authorities are worried by a movement that is rising across the world. Our response must be to make the movement grow everywhere.

The next planned European mobilisation against corporate power is the protest at the G8 summit in Genoa Italy on July 22. Tens of thousands travelled to Prague last September and Nice in December. Genoa is set to be the biggest protest yet.

"We need less realism, then we might be more realistic about the potential of the movement to insist that a truly different and better world is possible".

Chechnya's long battle for freedom

On February 23 1944 the NKVD, Stalin's secret police began an operation to deport the Chechen and Ingush people en masse from their homelands in the North Caucasus.

By March 1, almost half a million had been loaded into cattle trucks and sent to Central Asia for "resettlement". The Soviet Republic of Chechen/Ingush was abolished and erased from all maps, and the Chechen and Ingush nations officially ceased to exist. Tens of thousands of other peoples of the region suffered the same fate, including the Karachai, Balkars, Kalmyks, Tatars and Meskhetians.

This brutal and tragic episode in the history of the North Caucasus is commemorated this month. (See below for details of London meeting).

Despite little coverage in the western media, Putin's present Chechen war has escalated and has now reached a barbarous impasse. Every week up to fifty Russian soldiers, many of them young and unwilling conscripts are being slaughtered and others maimed and

wounded. Chechen casualties are less, since their tactics involve surprise ambushes against the often inexperienced, ill-equipped and demoralised Federal forces.

Russian bombardment has reduced the capital Grozny and other towns and villages to rubble. As our report from a French aid convoy illustrates, the plight of the 250,000 refugees, both inside Chechnya and on the borders is dire.

Chauvinism

In last year's presidential elections, Putin rode to power on a wave of government-led chauvinism and hysteria - portraying all Chechens as murderous bandits intent on destroying the Russian Federation.

Worried that the military has apparently bungled the war and that the media has not been completely gagged, Putin has now put his old ex-KGB mates in charge.

They may not do any better for him, given the determined resistance of the guerrillas. But we can expect increased activity of some sort, perhaps a spring offen-

sive when the snow melts.

Today's war reflects a long history of conflict between Tsarist, then Soviet and post-Soviet Russia and the North Caucasus. The region provided a natural mountainous border and a source of raw materials, including oil. Historically, Russia contained the region through its 'sword and samovar' tactics of conquer, divide and rule.

For a brief period after the 1917 Russian revolution the Socialist Confederation of Caucasian and Russian people brought unity through common development.

But this was destroyed by Stalin's forced collectivisation and terror of the 1930s, culminating in the 1944 deportations, which were justified by false allegations of collaboration with the Nazis.

After their eventual rehabilitation in the Khrushchov era, Chechens and most others were allowed to return and rebuild their homelands. In Chechen towns, especially Grozny, oil revenues brought some prosperity, but rural areas remained poor.

However, by the 1980s the Soviet Union was experienc-



Grozny reduced to rubble by the latest in a long line of Russian atrocities against the Chechen people

ing economic and political crisis, which affected both the Union Republics and the Autonomous Republics of the Russian Federation.

In 1991, as the Soviet Union broke up, the Union Republics opted for independence.

However, the Autonomous Republics, economically tied and dependent on central government for subsidies opted to stay in the Federation, though with greater autonomy.

This was the first option of Chechen leaders such as the two future presidents Dudayev and Maskhadov. However, Dudayev's uncertainty over Russia's intentions and his own developing belief that Chechnya could survive as a separate state pushed him to seize power in 1991 and declare indepen-

dence. At the same time Chechnya separated from Ingushetia, which stayed within the Federation.

Russia first reacted by sending in troops, but later struck a deal, which however left the status of Chechnya unresolved.

This has had two tragic outcomes. Firstly it meant Chechnya has not been able to build itself as a viable, independent state. Since it was not formally recognised as separate by Russia, no one else in the world would recognise it either.

Tied

So it could not get outside trade and investment or even aid, and remained tied in many ways to the Federation. The most damaging result is that the economy have been plundered by the new gangster capitalists of restorationist Russia, in collaboration with equally corrupt Chechen elites.

Secondly, Russia was able to threaten the weak Republic with an economic blockade and withdrawal of Federal subsidies. In 1994 it used the pretext of the threatened integrity of the Federation to send in troops to bring Chechnya back under its control.

Despite de facto indepen-

dence and open and fair elections in 1997, giving Maskhadov the presidency, Russia has used this same issue of threatened integrity to justify the present war.

The war is being waged for numerous reasons - to gain Putin popularity, to assert Russia's right to control its own backyard, and with an eye on Chechnya's position in the present Caspian oil deals. (Although Chechnya's own wells are now almost exhausted, it is still important for its refineries and pipelines).

However, neither the majority of the Chechen people, nor the wretched Russian soldiers reluctantly fighting them, nor the thousands of cold, hungry and homeless refugees can gain anything from the continued carnage and destruction.

Both Federal troops and Special Forces (which are the ones responsible for the reported atrocities) must be withdrawn immediately, to allow a just settlement, giving Chechnya the right and the means to decide its own future.

At the same time regional borders must be open for refugees to escape the conflict and for aid to reach those in need.

Solidarity in action, as Union convoy brings in vital aid

French trade unionists organised an aid convoy to bring desperately needed food to refugees from Chechnya. XAVIER ROUSSELIN, who will be speaking in London later this month, tells the story ...

THE LORRY arrived at the Customs authorities in Vladicavcase, North Ossetia, on Wednesday, November 8. It would not get through to its destination, the refugee camp at Nazran in Ingushetia, for 9 more long days.

First they had to wait until Emercom, the Ministry of emergency services in Moscow, sent a document through. By Thursday it had still not arrived, so they decided to ask the North Ossetian authorities to intervene on our behalf with Customs.

Customs officers had taken a sample of flour to analyse its quality. The result was OK. But the Vladicavcase laboratory also had to make an analysis to determine the radio activity level of the flour and to quan-

tify its heavy metal content. This takes at least three days. So the lorry was obviously unable to move until after the weekend.

Why is it so difficult to enter Russia with flour?

Firstly, Russians don't like imported food products. Secondly, in Vladicavcase they are afraid of anything that could help the Chechen fighters.

Thirdly, and maybe most importantly at the present time, the Customs had rejected a train of 48 wagons, with 2,957 tons of US flour given by the World Food Program, the UN body in charge of food aid.

This flour had a high heavy metal content, and its quality was poor. At this time the WFP and the Russians were negotiating since the Russian authorities had categorically refused to accept this flour and the WFP wanted to send it to another country.

These delays were very tiresome but gave some of us the chance to visit near by refugee camps. The conditions are really bad.

Food distribution is totally inadequate. In Karabulak the kitchen is out of order. Refugees are obliged to cook in their tents. There is very little space around tents to cook outside.

The children cannot play football or any other kind of sport which requires space. Tents in this camp have heating, but winter is coming. The first snow fell on the Caucasus plains on November 9.

The sanitary situation is appalling. In Karabulak there are only 24 showers for 6,318 people and the women's toilets are closed. In another camp made up of carriages there are only 12 showers for 4,568 people. There are schools in these two camps, but only for children aged 7 to 12.

On Monday, the analysis of the flour was complete. The heavy metal content and the radio activity rate were below the Russian maximum levels. We were told the lorry would be allowed to leave on Tuesday.

At this point Eric and Vincent had a problem with their visas needing extensions. But the person in Nazran who is responsible for this could not do anything because she did not have the key of the cupboard where the stamps are kept!

By Thursday, the key had still not been found, so they decided to ask for a UN escort. They went to Vladicavcase with a UN representative and - miraculously - were allowed to leave. They

crossed the border at night. And then on Saturday morning they got their visa extension - a second miracle!

The distribution of the flour finally began on Sunday.

It took us 9 months to reach our target. We got a lorry loaded with 22 tons of flour through to the people who needed it.

And it is obvious that the problems we had getting there are nothing compared with the difficulties of Chechen refugees. Our long road is an illustration of the terrible isolation of the Chechen people.

And our job now is to publicise the facts. A small organisation like ours was able to send a lorry. Why then do the UN, the EU, our rich governments do nothing for these people?

Why are the Chechen refugees going to spend the freezing winter in tents? Why have the refugees received no food aid for three months? Why are the wealthy countries unable to give \$6.2 million to the world food program?

As trade unionists, we want to shout out to our governments, but we also want to do what our governments should be doing. Our lorry was in a camp, surrounded by refugees and we told them that as trade unionists we will not let them down.

Campaign to stop the war in Chechnya PUBLIC MEETING

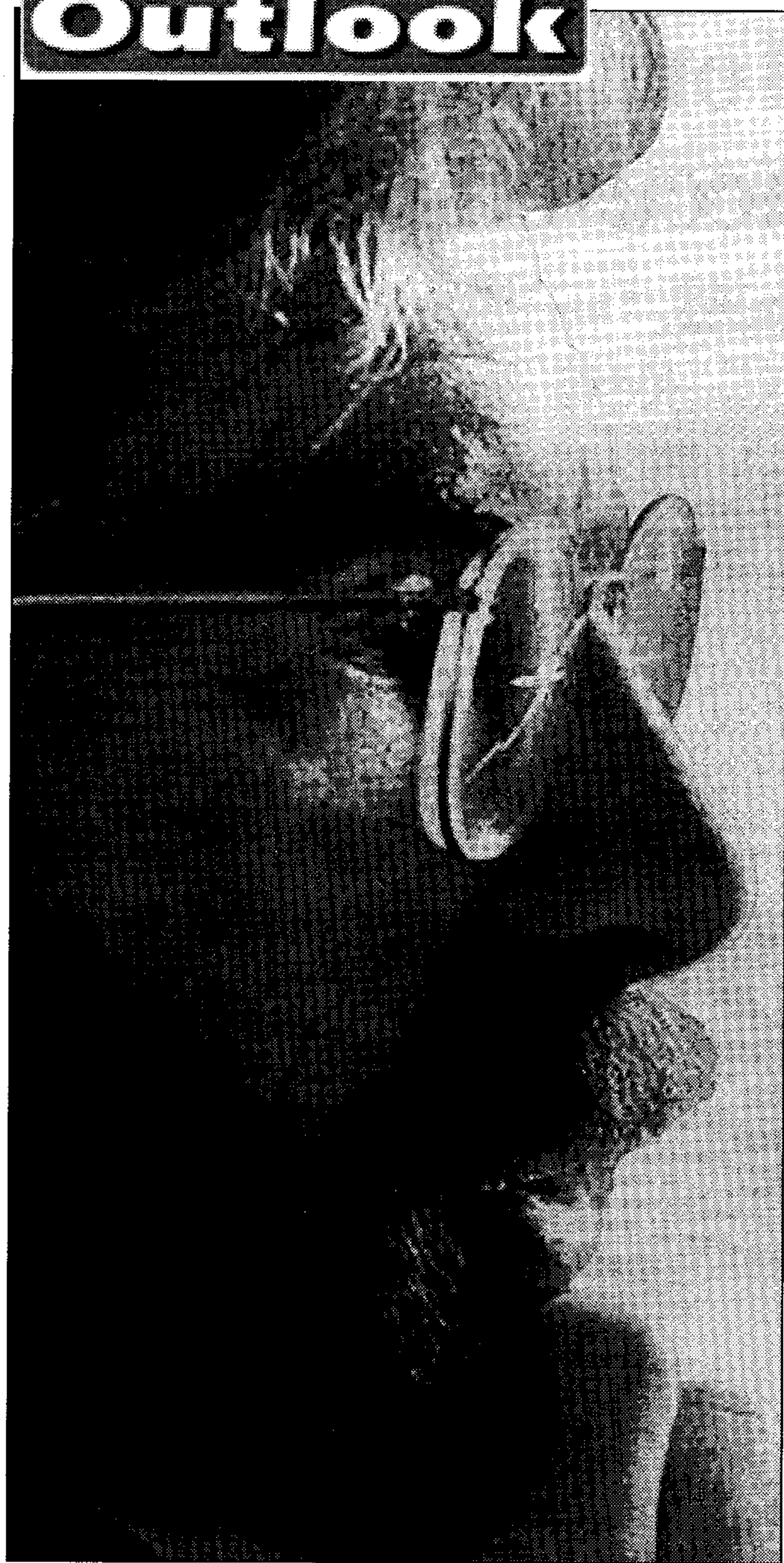
To commemorate the mass deportations of Chechen and Ingush people by Stalin in 1944.

Saturday February 24, 2-5 p.m.
University of London Union
Malet St, (nearest tube Goodge St)

Speakers

- XAVIER ROUSSELIN - French aid convoy to Chechnya.
- ROB FERGUSON - Campaign to Stop the War in Chechnya
- BOB MYERS - Workers Aid for Bosnia

- Stop Putin's war
- Withdraw Russian troops
- For a just peace and self determination for the peoples of Chechnya
- Open the borders for refugees and aid



It's hard for Gerry Adams to find a way out of the impasse

Republicans search for concessions

No rush to throw final dice in peace process

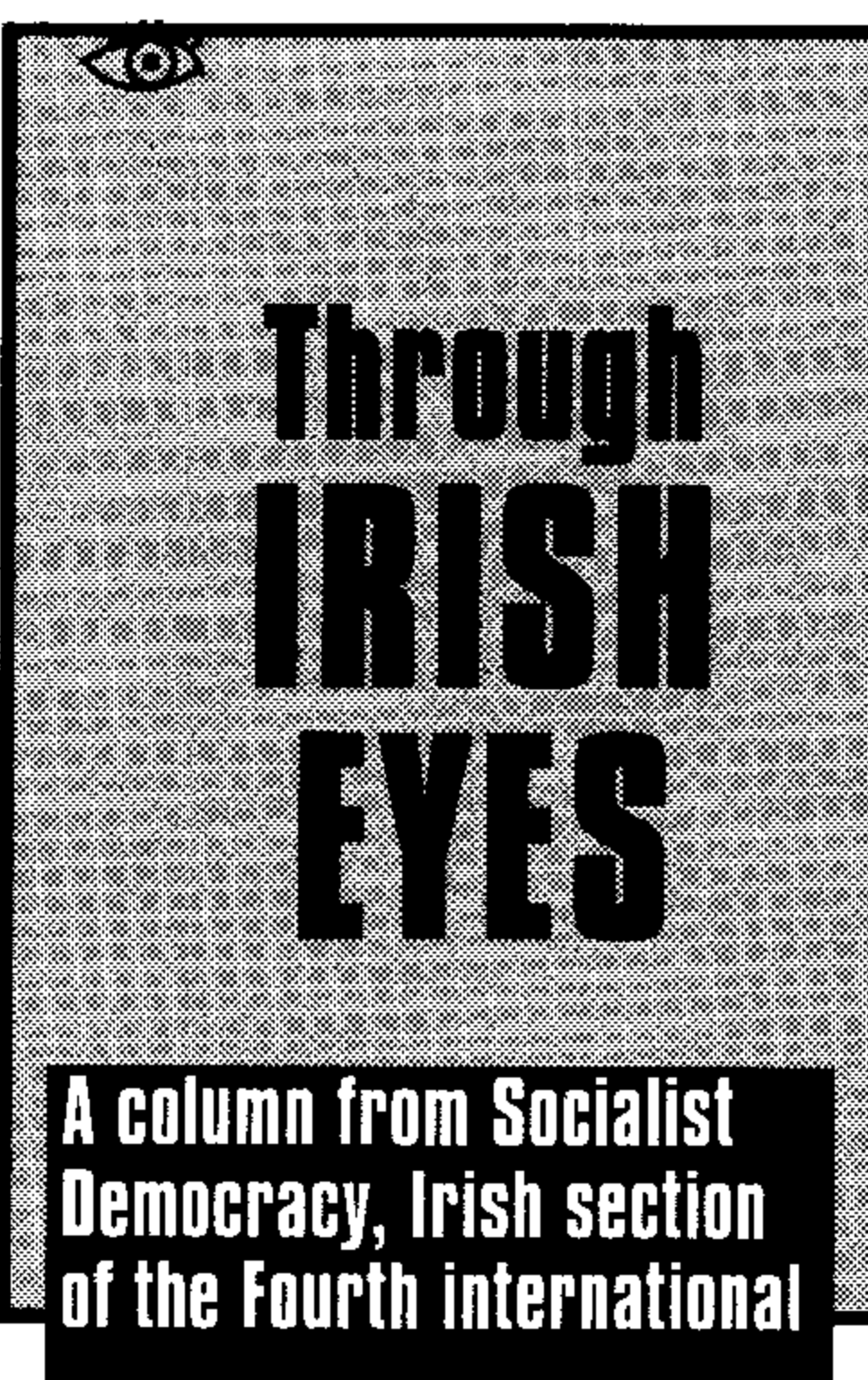
There's a fairly simple reason for the current protracted nature of the present crisis in the peace process. It really is the last throw of the dice.

If the negotiations come to a successful conclusion then the republican arms will be "put beyond use", and British arms will remain against a background of nightly sectarian assaults by loyalist death squads tied to the British. It will be pretty hard to disguise the reality of defeat.

That is the main element of the protracted negotiations. The republicans are making one final attempt to wring concessions that they can claim as victory.

This shouldn't lead to any real crisis. The republicans have already lost all the major battles and risk losing the approval of their capitalist partners in the nationalist family if they hold out too long. In any case they are scrabbling amongst the scraps of the agreement.

They are looking for concessions on policing when the British already have two police bills under their belt – both of



which ensure their absolute control of the force and ensure that the RUC will be able to torture and kill with impunity if it is required to do so.

The republicans are looking for the removal of some military posts in South Armagh at a time when it is clear that they British will maintain a massive military and intelligence presence there for the foreseeable future.

The utter silence of the unionist camp gives the game away. The internal unionist timetable should have led to a council meeting in January and the ousting of Trimble because of the concessions given to republicanism. That scenario is so laughable that even the Unionist right appear unable to proceed with a straight face.

Massive unionist discontent remains – simply because many bigots can't stomach any role for republicans and nationalists – even subordinate roles in a British victory. This is presently expressed through an undeclared sectarian war that sees nightly bomb attacks on Catholic workers.

The republican leaders privately dream of an entity that they always argued could never exist – a reformed northern statelet. Yet even before a final settlement is declared, events prove the unreality of the reformist illusion.

It's not unionist bigotry we should focus on, but British action. That action has made major shifts to the right in the structure of an agreement that

was already an undemocratic and sectarian settlement.

Actions of the ground today are even more ominous. Most sectarian attacks go unreported. The press report a split in the so-called Ulster Democratic Party when the reality is the vast majority of the paramilitary UDA is breaking from the agreement.

The "new" RUC invent a republican splinter group they claim is carrying out sectarian attacks, to cover up loyalist feuding at a time when the British claim that a peace deal has been brokered.

Beneath the smiling face of the Good Friday agreement the skull of the old sectarian state is showing through. The result is growing discontent within the republican base and a growing opposition.

Unfortunately the vast majority of the opposition is coming from republican militarists who have learnt nothing and understood nothing following the republican defeat. Political understanding, a political resistance, will be slower to arrive.

Irish Socialist Alliance Draft Programme

Last month's *Socialist Outlook* carried a report of a meeting in Dublin in November 2000 to discuss possible establishment of a Socialist Alliance in Ireland.

A follow-up meeting was held on February 3 to which decided in principle to stand candidates at the next General Election and formally set up the Workers and Socialist Alliance.

The organisers circulated the draft programme we print below apparently to stimulate discussion as to what programme such candidates should stand on. Opposite we carry the response to this draft by the comrades of Socialist Democracy. Decisions on programme will be taken at the next meeting.

The Celtic Tiger was built by the efforts of Irish workers but the rewards have gone to a tiny elite. The gap between the super-rich and the working population has never been greater. Under the guise of social partnership, wages have been held down while profits soar.

All the major parties urge people to accept this state of affairs. They warn that if we dare rock the boat and look for more, we will destroy the boom. But the Celtic Tiger will not last anyway. The growing signs of recession in the US will soon mean that the very bosses who claimed to be partners today will come after us for redundancies and sackings tomorrow.

The Socialist Alliance will break this cosy set up that has benefited the super-rich. We want to send TDs into the Dail who will expose the games of the corrupt establishment and give their full

support to workers who take them on. Its elected representatives will only take the average workers wages.

We oppose any coalition or informal deal with the crooked right wing parties of Fianna Fail and Fianna Gael.

We stand for the following policies

Share the wealth - end wage restraint

Profits, land prices, houses prices, rents have all mushroomed in the Celtic Tiger. But the only item that is controlled is wages. It is no wonder that this has produced huge inequality.

We support the right of every worker to submit claims for extra wages and not to be hemmed in by social partnership deals. Social partnership is a fraud that promotes the myth that workers and bosses have the same interests.

■ End low pay. For a guaranteed minimum wage of £200 a week after tax.

■ The right to join a union of your choice. Companies must be forced to recognise these unions.

End corruption - jail the corrupt politicians

Politicians who have taken million in bribes are walking about freely while people who have not paid a television licence have been jailed. It is time to end a system where there is one law for the rich and another for the poor.

■ Jail the corrupt politicians. Any politician found guilty of taking bribe should be immediately sent to jail.

■ Seize the assets of the big tax dodgers. The Criminal Assets Bureau has power to seize assets of criminals. So why should the banks be let off after they swindled millions in DIRT taxes?

■ Ban corporate funding of political parties. Big business never gives out money for without expecting something in return. They should not be let buy politicians so brazenly.

Housing

An emergency local authority house-building programme. Rent controls and tenant rights to prevent evictions. Take building land in cities into public ownership

Health

A two-tier health system has

grown up in the Celtic Tiger. Those with the most money get the best and fastest treatment while the poor languish on long waiting lists. The Socialist Alliance stands for:

■ A free National Health System, where the only criterion for treatment is need not money. A sharp increase in health spending to bring Ireland up to the level of the EU

Education

Our primary schools are among the worst funded in OECD countries. Working class children are severely under-represented in the colleges and there are not enough places for mature students. 100% state funding of the school system, under local democratic control.

■ Double the student grant – greater access to colleges

■ Pay the teachers – improve the quality of education.

The Environment

The quality of our environment is deteriorating. On a global level the Irish government has done little to challenge US government's sabotage of policies designed to control global warming. At home, it has pushed a policy of incineration rather than proper waste management based on re-cycling.

Ban GM Foods

Tackle the BSE Crisis - put the interests of consumers above the beef industry.

No to incinerators - publicly funded programme of

re-cycling. Increase public transport - cut the fares to encourage its use rather than private motoring.

End racism and discrimination

The Socialist alliance stands for an end to all forms of discrimination.

■ Sections of the political establishment are trying to stoke up racism to deflect attention from themselves. They must be stopped. We are for the right to asylum and believe that refugees should be made welcome and given the right to work

■ For full access to buildings, public transport for the disabled.

For equality for women

We are for real equality for women. All employers to give equal pay and equal opportunities for women. For free workplace and state run crèches. The Celtic Tiger has brought tens of thousands of women into the paid labour force - but it makes no provision for proper crèche facilities

For fully funded rape crisis centres and refuges for women and children who have been violently attacked or abused.

■ Irish women should not have to travel to Britain for abortions. Implement the Supreme Court Judgement on the X case now.

The north of Ireland

Many voted for the Belfast

Agreement in the hope that it would bring both peace and an end to sectarianism. In reality, it has institutionalised the existing sectarian divisions and is constantly supposed to be in crisis. It has established a right wing coalition government

The Socialist Alliance is opposed to any return to the armed struggle. There should be complete demilitarisation. The British army should be withdrawn and the RUC disarmed immediately.

We stand for the development of class politics in the North which unite Catholic and Protestant workers. Such unity needs to be built on the firm foundation of opposing sectarian structures

People before profit: Unite the Left

The Socialist Alliance is based on a coming together of socialists from different parties and none. It is a recognition that across the globe anti-capitalist ideas are growing since the great Seattle protests and that a strong socialist force is needed in Ireland.

The Alliance does not confine itself to elections but campaigns at grass roots level for real change.

By voting for the Socialist Alliance you are indicating your support for all those fighting to get a real share of the Celtic Tiger and to ensure that the needs of people come before profit.

The politics of Irish working class unity

Our alternative proposals are not definitive and are obviously open to reformulation in more 'popular' style, providing the underlying political point is still made. Neither do we reject everything in the draft, much of which is good. A lot of what we propose is only in addition to what is already there.

Government

General Elections are primarily about electing a new government that will run the country. Any socialist programme must have its own statement about the sort of government we want and are fighting for.

A list of policies we support must be headed by the sort of government we want to implement them, even if we are not yet able to hope to form such a government.

Such a statement is the only way to logically frame our view of other parties, possible coalitions and preference votes. Our demand should be:

For a Workers Government! For a Government that defends the interests of the working class, small farmers and oppressed in society. No coalition or support to the right wing capitalist parties. Vote for working class parties.

The draft programme nowhere says that we want a socialist society, but only 'a share of the Celtic Tiger' that, in another section, we say will not last. The programme should say:

The Socialist Alliance fights for a new 32 County Socialist Ireland.

Social Partnership

The key argument socialists have to make is that the interests of the working class and the capitalist class are irreconcilable and that any programme that pretends they can be accommodated is inevitably a means of subordinating the former to the latter.

The most immediate roadblock to winning such an understanding at present is the shackling of the trade union movement to social partnership. Crystal clear opposition to partnership is essential. The proposed programme goes only some way to doing this.

For example: we are unhappy about the demand - 'share the wealth'.

Let's be honest, as socialists the amount of wealth we want to share with the capitalist class is, well, nothing!

Remember Connolly's phrase - we only want the earth! We don't have to put forward a revolutionary programme in order to avoid talk of sharing the fruits of our labour with the capitalists.

This is the ideology of partnership but with an argument about the precise shares to each class. We should start from the needs of the working class not what is 'fair' between workers and bosses. The Socialist Alliance should be saying:

Against Social Partnership. Break the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness.

Full support and solidarity to workers demanding a decent wage.

For automatic increases to compensate for inflation. For a democratic trade union movement with a militant leadership drawn from, and accountable to, rank and file workers.

Scrap the Industrial Relations Act and all anti-union legislation. Tax the multinationals and Big business.

Corruption

We are also unhappy about the demands around corruption.

It is absolutely correct to point to the double standards and hypocrisy of the state and politicians reflected in the way the establishment has got away with corruption. (Everyone will agree the seven days for Liam Lawlor is pathetic)

However it is quite a different matter to demand the jailing of corrupt politicians and possibly make this the central demand of a campaign.

We point out the hypocrisy, and do not oppose jailing them. If asked we will say they should be put in jail - but this isn't the point. It is not the point of a programme.

As socialists our main focus should not be demanding the capitalist state solve corruption (because this is the point, not mere revenge). Our argument should be that *only the working class* can solve it.

The socialist programme is a call for the working class to take action, not the capitalist state. Where the latter makes reforms it is only because of pressure from working class action. This action must go from moral outrage to political attack.

The dangers of demanding strong state



Full support and solidarity to workers like the teachers, demanding a decent wage

action on 'law and order' can be seen in the demands of the draft programme.

What increased state powers are required to 'immediately' send corrupt politicians to jail?

The Criminal Assets Bureau should be scrapped. It is an attack on civil liberties that requires the accused to prove innocence rather than the state proving guilt. We should not be demanding that it use its powers more forcefully.

We should be warning the working class that draconian legislation will never be used impartially and will more often be used against it rather than the ruling elites.

The Alliance should demand: Nationalisation of the Banks under workers control.

Open the books of all companies and Agencies implicated in corruption.

For a workers investigation of corruption - expose all the liars and crooks!

Nationalisation under workers control of all firms found guilty of defrauding the Irish people.

European Union

The central political and economic project of the Irish capitalist class for decades has been insertion in the European Union - yet the draft programme doesn't mention it!

Social partnership, privatisation, taxation, etc., etc., are all justified and implemented through appeal to the requirements of EU laws. The programme must make the working class aware of the socialist view.

We should say: Oppose the Europe of big business and privatisation.

The Socialist Alliance opposes the austerity programme of the Maastricht Treaty and

EMU.

For a referendum on the Nice Treaty. For immediate withdrawal from the Partnership for Peace.

No to NATO, and no illusions in the UN. For an international policy of solidarity with the poor and oppressed around the world.

Health & Education

On the questions of Health and education we must demand:

Complete separation of Church and State. End Church influence and control of hospitals and schools.

For workers and parents control of education with a voice for young people in their own education.

For health workers, control of hospitals and care services with a voice for patients in the shape and delivery of services.

Women

On the question of women and abortion we must demand that:

Women must control their own bodies and fertility. Not the Church and not the State. For a woman's right to choose.

Racism

On the question of racism we cannot limit our programme to the right to asylum, which is seen to be restricted to those fleeing only political oppression but not economic exploitation.

We should: Oppose all racist immigration controls.

The North of Ireland

The central issue in politics in the north and in the south, in so far as the north is discussed, is the Good Friday Agreement. It is

the central political concern of all workers in the north. International capitalism from Clinton to Blair and the Irish capitalist class and its politicians have shouted their support for it.

The international speculator, George Soros, gave tens of thousands to the Yes Referendum campaign.

Larry Goodman's company gave £20,000, Irish Life gave £75,000 and Marathon International Petroleum gave £10,000.

Yet the draft programme doesn't say just as clearly whether socialists support or oppose it! Is it a promise unfulfilled? In which case we should call for its full implementation. Or is it a threat, to be opposed?

The draft calls for the disarming of the RUC. Does this mean we don't call for disbandment of the RUC? That we don't think this is an issue?

Failure to call for disbandment would put socialists to the right of the Patten report from the ex-Tory minister, which at least promised a new police force.

The Socialist Alliance should state clearly that the GFA is an imperialist settlement designed to strengthen imperialist control, harden partition and sectarianism and entrench the division of the working class.

The Alliance should demand:

Oppose the Good Friday Agreement. Self-determination for the Irish people. No to the Unionist Veto.

Smash the new Stormont. Oppose the right wing policies coming from the sectarian Assembly. For complete British withdrawal from Ireland.

Disband the RUC. Scrap all repressive legislation.

For a real democratic alternative - an all-Ireland Constituent Assembly.

Build Workers Unity for a Socialist Republic.

This is the only democratic alternative to imperialism's plans. If comrades oppose these demands they should say what the political alternative is that is more democratic.

It they try to avoid the question of democracy by talking about 'socialism' we say there is no socialism without democracy. If they reply by talking about 'class politics' we say that democracy is a class question. To surrender democracy is to surrender socialism.

The comrades might say that the only hope to address protestant workers is to avoid political questions. What then is the point of socialism if we are to avoid politics?

We wouldn't need political organisations but only good trade unions.

The Socialist Alliance would have abandoned politics and imported the unionist veto into its own programme. All without one unionist having opened their mouth!

The imperialist division of the working class is accepted under the banner of unity. Division of workers in the north from the south is unchallenged, while the unity of protestant and catholic is upheld.

We must understand that no particular division can be addressed unless we put forward the complete unity of the working class.

Protestant and catholic unity in the north can only be effectively addressed in the context of achieving the unity of the whole Irish working class. That's why we must oppose partition.

As it stands the current programme on the national question doesn't actually deal with it.

In the south this will be a giant hole in the programme of any Alliance. An Alliance in the north on this programme would simply be irrelevant if not reactionary because of the partitionist conclusions that could easily be drawn from it.

As we have said the method behind the draft programme is one of economism and no clearer example of avoiding politics is contained in the draft.

We must learn that the working class is not an economic class suffering exploitation that must have its economic struggles politicised to achieve socialism.

This is the very definition of economism. The working class must first and foremost be seen as a political class that must train itself to become the ruling class of a new society.

As Lenin said, every political issue facing every class must be addressed. The tribune of the people not the trade union secretary must be our model.

Talk of 'class' politics that avoids politics is not socialism but mere militant trade unionism.

Limited imagination, but a useful start

Imagine – a socialist vision for the 21st century, by Tommy Sheridan and Alan McCombes, Rebel Inc, £7.99

Reviewed by Greg Tucker

Preparing for the general election and marking a stage in the development of the Scottish Socialist Party, its two leading figures, Tommy Sheridan and Alan McCombes have written *Imagine*.

Its purpose they say is "to argue the intellectual and moral case for socialism and also to inspire people to get involved in the day-to-day fight to improve the lives of their families and communities."

Unashamedly this is a book about Scotland for Scottish people. But it will also be a useful read beyond the borders of Scotland. Written in easy open way, at times you can hear the words being spoken in village halls and community centres to public meetings.

The book also contains a wealth of information, outlining how Scotland today is organised – at the expense of the many in the interests of a few. The authors show how multinationals make massive profits on the backs of Scottish workers, linked in to the global system of exploitation.

The book however centres



Tommy Sheridan: a socialist vision for Scotland

not on what we are fighting against but what we are fighting for. It puts forward a vision of a socialist society run democratically, meeting the needs of working people, realising the full potential of our class.

We are constantly told by bourgeois politicians and the capitalist media that the "market" is supreme. We cannot change our society – we just have to learn how to live within it more effectively.

The best government can do, they tell us, is ameliorate some of the worst effects of global forces. When car plants close, don't expect action to keep them open – but we will help you individually look for other jobs...

as long as you are prepared to be retrained to work at McDonalds!

This book shows how things can be different. A different society is possible. If in its "utopian" vision it inspires working people to get involved in political activity it will have fulfilled a valuable function.

For Sheridan and McCombes "The key question is this: Which side are you on? ... Capitalism or socialism?" But they also recognise that their ideas will provoke a wide-ranging ideological debate.

The book does have one central weakness. Because it concentrates on its vision of a changed society it does not set out a blueprint for

making these changes. So it leaves open the question of what strategy is required.

Imagine is clear that a central step will be independence for Scotland. This has been attacked on two grounds – that independence would weaken the overall UK struggle, and that it is impossible to build socialism in one country.

The Socialist Party have argued that Sheridan says he would support an SNP government. This is clearly an exaggeration.

Sheridan and McCombes argue that "socialists should be prepared to support (independence for Scotland) even on a non-socialist basis as promoted by the SNP."

But they are clear that this is not subordinate to the struggle for socialism – rather it is a part of the process of destroying "the illusion that Scotland's problems could be solved simply by swapping the Union flag for the St Andrew's flag".

As to weakening the UK working class only by establishing free relations can true unity of the working class be built.

It is ironic, however, that in recognising that nationalism is a contradictory phenomena with some positive elements they still ignore the question of the British relation to Ireland talking positively only of the struggle in "Scotland, Wales and the Basque country".

More importantly, whilst radical, their demands for Scotland are contradictory. On the one hand they do situate them in the context

of a world-wide battle for socialism with the likelihood of similar victories taking place simultaneously elsewhere.

But they paint a picture which is often in the framework of "normal" capitalist relations existing outside their borders.

So they have little to say about how they would relate to the actual struggle internationally, in particular how English and Scottish workers should work together.

They also limit some of their economic demands on the basis that multinationals will simply withdraw their capital if threatened.

They seem to believe that the British state will be powerless to stop the will of the Scottish people. This leads to more fundamental problems with their approach.

They highlight the way that the capitalists will use every means to undermine the fight for social change and correctly recognise that "the battle to transform society will only be victorious with the active involvement of millions of ordinary people."

But arguing that "if we can't convince people to vote for change, neither will we be able to convince them to struggle for change" at times it does seem that voting, and getting SSP comrades elected, comes first and the struggle later.

Whilst the crudities of the old Militant staged process of change have been lost, the idea that a socialist government takes power with the role of the working class

only then to put into place the necessary popular democratic defence committees still permeates their thinking.

Time and again they refer to what their government would do as if they will be given a free hand – to change the nature of the police the army etc.

Change will not come about through voting in a socialist government. The SSP needs to develop a clear understanding of what needs to be done now in building working class struggle in a way that encourages working people to fight to take control of the whole of society.

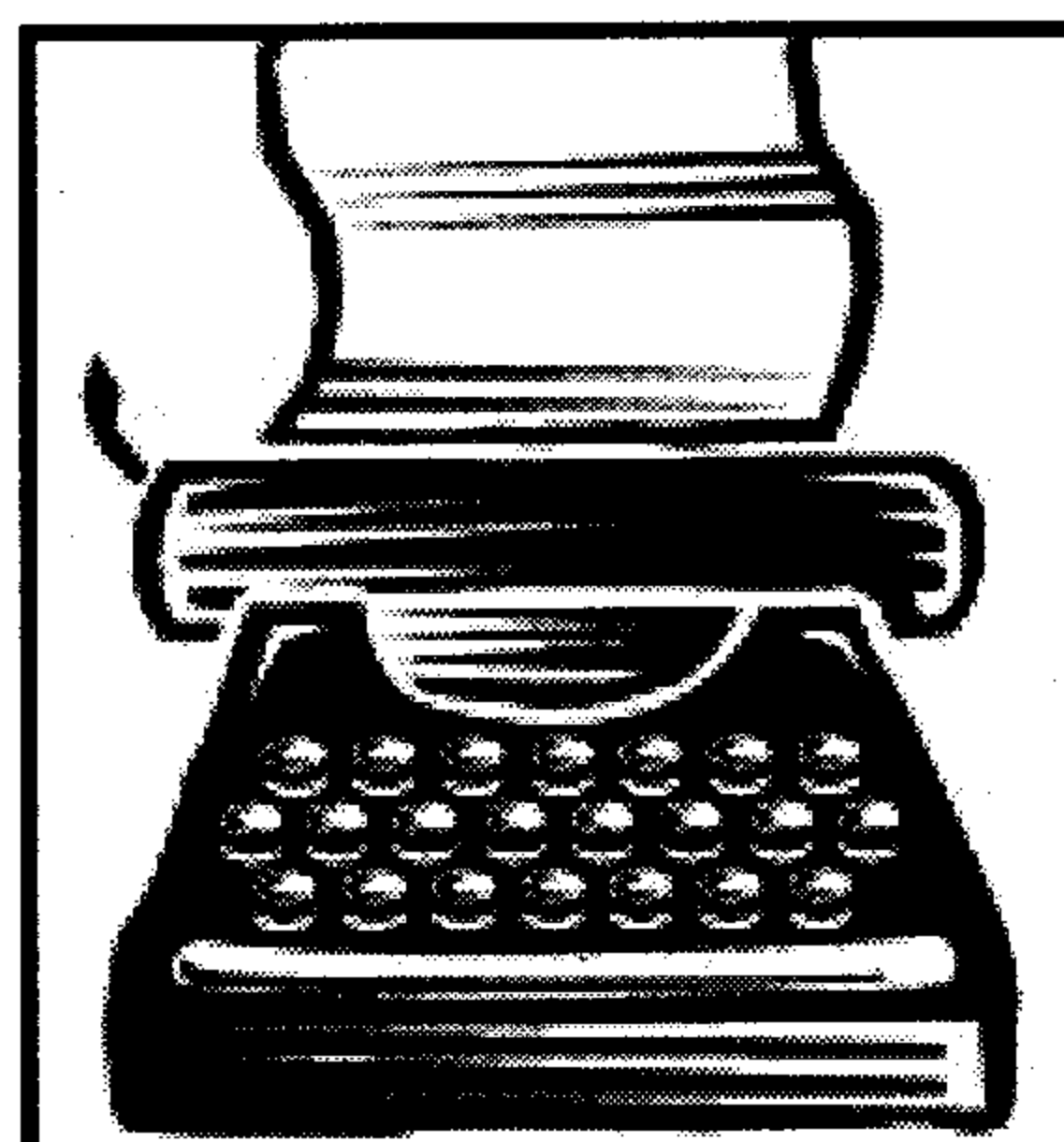
This will require the building in time of organs of popular power as well as a dedicated cadre of socialist activists.

It will mean confronting difficult questions about how to organise to deal with the repressive forces which will be used against us by the capitalists.

These questions are only partially dealt with in this book. For some this is indicative of the reformism" of the authors. The practice of the SSP has, however, not been that bleak. There is no indication that the SSP is limited to the "visionary" format of this book.

Despite its limitations *Imagine* is a useful starting point in opening up a debate. Our task is to ensure that the debate continues taking in the broader strategic questions necessary if the vision of *Imagine* is to be realised.

What manifesto for Socialist Alliance?



Writeback

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

Bob Jenkins writing in SO41 outlines some suggestions from the ISG for the SA Manifesto. Whilst I agree with the general conclusion – that what we need is an action programme of "transitional demands", Bob seems confused about the nature of the Socialist Alliance.

Throughout the article Bob raises the issue of the "united front". Each time it is used it means something different – and each time misses the actual point!

Bob describes the SA as "a united front-type formation, a political alliance of socialist organisations and individuals". There are, of course, many who talk of the Alliance as a "united front". In as much as they are using the words in their banal sense this is true, the Alliance is "united" and it is a "front" behind which organisations can operate.

But for Trotskyists the phrase has a deeper meaning. This is hinted at when Bob later talks of a "united front orientation ... to the Labour Party itself, in practice its left-wing" and argues that we should use "A united front method where we try to link up with local councillors, ward parties,

even a few MPs."

The united front far from being a political alliance of socialist organisations is the exact opposite. It is the way that the socialists (communists) relate directly to the whole of social democracy (and not just its left wing or better individuals).

The united front method is an appeal, not for programmatic compromise as with the Alliance, but for unity in action of the whole working class in the face of specific problems. S

o for Lenin and Trotsky this was about demanding unity in action from Kerensky in the practical defence of Petrograd against Kornilov, whilst political differences were maintained, as opposed to those, such as Stalin, who had argued for a political alliance with the Mensheviks.

To fight for a united front implies no compromise on the political differences we have with social democracy but it is about relating to social democracy as a whole. In today's climate with a very weak left it has been argued that this is impossible other than with social democracy's left wing.

This is again a misunderstanding. Yes, there are a few councillors and MPs

with whom we can work. But our work is not enhanced by accepting their limited overall framework but by uniting in appeals for practical activity around issues on which complete unity of the class is needed.

The Socialist Alliance is different. It is not a united front in this classical sense but a bloc between organisations and individuals where a level of political trust and compromise is both possible and necessary.

It is about accepting that weak as we are the different organisations involved necessarily have only partial understandings of the tasks ahead of us and that by collaborating we can strengthen our ability to develop a political response to the questions of the day.

For some it remains simply an electoral bloc. But in as much as it allows for a real sharing of experiences it has the potential to develop beyond that.

Bob is right to recognise that potential "of becoming the focus of a future recomposition of the workers' movement and the oppressed" – it is our duty to fight within the Alliance to realise this potential.

This means practically fighting for a

programme based on encouraging working people to struggle to satisfy their own needs. Not to present a list of abstract policies, minimum or maximum – but an action programme of anti-capitalist measures which, starting from existing levels of consciousness, can be taken up by the mass movement.

It is in this sense that we approach the general election – not as the be all and end all of our activity – but in as much as the election is seen as a point where politics can legitimately be discussed by the whole of society as a useful point in which to raise our programme and to strengthen our implantation to thereby further our continuing fight to realise our demands in practice.

Our target is not merely to get so many candidates elected, or such a percentage vote, but must be to ensure that on the day after the election we are qualitatively better placed to help organise the working class fight back.

George Charon, South London

Socialist Party splits with key Scottish supporters



ISM are falsely accused of abandoning the struggle for Trotskyism (and no, it's not THAT Militant!)

Alan Thornett

"ISM leaders desert the CWI" was the page 4 headline in the Socialist Party's paper *The Socialist* of January 19.

This was the Socialist Party's response to the decision of the International Socialist Movement (ISM) formerly Scottish Militant Labour, and the key component of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), to leave the Committee for a Workers International (CWI) the SP's international organisation.

The article, by Hannah Sell, argues that the split has taken place on the basis of "a number of fundamental differences". It followed a press release to the media on the same subject.

These two statements denounce the leaders of the ISM, Alan McCombes and Tommy Sheridan, for:

- Handing over the resources of the Scottish section (of the CWI) to the SSP.
- Failing to recognise that

the SSP is a left reformist party with a left reformist programme.

- Failing to remain organised as revolutionaries inside such a party.

- Abandoning the struggle for Marxism in its modern form, Trotskyism

- Rejecting the entire history of the of the ISM in the CWI

- Using methods (in the negotiations with the SWP to join the SSP) which "bear more resemblance to those used by the Labour party right wing against us in the past than to the methods of Marxism".

- Proposing the adoption of internal procedures within the SSP (internal referendums on constitutional issues) which are the methods of the right wing.

- Proposing a coalition with the SNP

- Calling Cuba socialist.

- Abandoning the struggle for internationalism

The leaders of the ISM have issued a detailed rebut-

tal of the charges made by the SP. These rejoinders demonstrate that the accusations against them are either completely baseless or at best a massive distortion of the real facts - which are well known to the Socialist Party leadership either directly or through their loyalists inside the SSP.

This split had been a long time coming. The deepening rift between Peter Taaffe's Socialist Party and its Scottish organisation goes back to the decision to form the SSP out of the Scottish Socialist Movement, and other groupings, in 1998.

Taaffe was hostile to the formation of the SSP, although the public position of the Socialist Party was to support it - it could not do otherwise.

He had briefly opened up the Militant to work with broader forces at the time of the formation of the SLP in 1995 - the change of name from Militant to the Socialist Party was a part of that.

But it was a short-lived shift, and he quickly retreated and took the Socialist Party back into its bunker.

The SP began calling for a new 'mass party' of the working class (which was not on the cards at the that time of course and is still not) in a propagandist way. At the same time they refused the kind of collaboration with other left forces which would be the only way to work towards such a party.

Line opposed

Those in Scottish Militant Labour never accepted the 'back to the bunker' line, and continued to work in and build the Scottish Socialist Alliance - whilst in England the SP allowed the alliances they had set up to wither and become semi-dormant.

The announcement of the creation of the Scottish Parliament after Labour came to office in 1997 with a form of proportional representation (as well as the political implications of new Labour) was the spur which brought the SSP into existence in September 1998.

Taaffe resented this development since it cut across

what he was seeking to do, which was to retrench and build the SP and the CWI.

He created a false debate, accusing the ISM of not being organised as a Marxist current inside the SSP when they clearly are.

Neither side in the debate seem very clear about the political character of the SSP or its programme at this stage of its development.

It was however clear enough that the formation of the SSP was a major advance for the left in Scotland, and was a model which could be followed in England and Wales.

Taaffe's dogmatic and sectarian retrenchment policy set the SP against this development and sent it into a crisis from which it shows no signs of recovery. In fact the split with the ISM is likely to deepen the crisis and possibly spin it out of control.

Alliances

This has been all too evident in the role of the SP in the Socialist Alliances - currently developing in an impressive way in England.

The SP's view (developed during its leftist lurch whilst breaking from entryism) that Labour is now a straightfor-

ward capitalist party, no different to the other capitalist parties, leads it into the sectarian stance of standing against left Labour candidates in the forthcoming election.

Fortunately the Alliances have been able to separate themselves from this.

Mass party

The Socialist Party have continued to call for a new mass party, whilst at the same time denouncing the Socialist Alliances (the best development yet towards a new party, although not a mass one) as being 'too centralised', and too much like a party!

They continue to be a disruptive force inside the Alliances, insisting on its own fiefdoms and spheres of influence, and the right to impose candidates in selected constituencies irrespective of the views of other activists involved.

In Taaffe's attacks on the comrades of the ISM he accuses them of using the methods of the right wing.

But he should take care in pursuing this line: it is his own methods in this developing situation that would bear closer re-examination.

Socialism on the web

Socialist Outlook web site: www.labournet.org.uk /so
International Socialist Group: www.3bh.org.uk /ISG

Where we stand

AS A NEW CENTURY BEGINS, the battles of the last century remain to be won. millions of women and men are taking 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.

Socialist Outlook

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 es-

sential 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 us at **PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU**, and we'll be in touch.

Socialist

A monthly marxist review. No 42. February 2001. 50p

OUTLOOK

STEEL, VAUXHALL: STOP THE ROT! FIGHT NOW FOR JOBS!



Andrew Wiaard

Union reps hear news of Corus job losses: but there is support for a fightback

AS CORUS, the Anglo-Dutch firm that took over the remnants of British Steel in a 1999 merger, unveiled plans to sack 6,000 British steelworkers, its share price shot up.

Nothing could more clearly demonstrate the ludicrous New Labour notion of a "partnership" between workers and the companies that employ them.

Corus bosses have never made any secret of the fact that they are not in the business of making steel, but making money – for their shareholders.

That's why they are determined not just to get rid of their plants at Llanwern and Ebbw Vale, but to ensure that nobody else takes them over to produce steel, which would then be in competition with Corus.

And it's why Corus bosses

celebrated the 1999 merger with a massive £800 million handout to shareholders, clearing out the company's reserves, only to follow up with a continuous series of redundancies and cutbacks as they attempt to maximise profits – at the expense of their employees.

The pattern has been exactly the same as we have seen in the car industry and elsewhere: management come to timid union officials demanding concessions and redundancies in exchange for a promise to safeguard a smaller number of jobs. The unions concede – and a few months later, the bosses come back for more.

That is how the British steel industry has dwindled from its previous 300,000 workforce 30 years ago to just 22,000 if the new wave of redundancies go through.

The impact on local areas around the steel plants will be brutal: whole communities will be devastated as well-paid, apparently stable jobs disappear.

More to come

Nor is there any chance that the latest round of redundancies is the last. Corus chief executive, accountant Brian Moffat, may be strutting around in a hard hat talking about drawing "a line in the sand", but steel unions have been told that Corus will invest no new money in its surviving British plants, making it likely that more closures will follow – especially if these sackings are not resisted.

Hypocritical Labour ministers bleat that they were not consulted in advance on the closure. But they know that they have already

rejected the only policy that could make a difference to the company's decision – to renationalise the British steel industry, without compensation to the shareholders who have already gobbled up billions in government handouts since the plans were flogged off by Margaret Thatcher.

Unions who have mounted no concerted opposition to steel bosses since the historic national pay strike in the first year of the Thatcher government have called no mass demonstration to challenge the redundancies, and avoided any call to occupy the affected plants. They have talked only vaguely about industrial action.

Instead they have apparently been discussing among themselves and with the gov-

ernment a new "package" of concessions that would cut Corus losses, and reduce the numbers of jobs lost – again at the expense of Corus workers!

Europe-wide

This would be a monumental error, especially at a time when the Vauxhall workers have shown the possibility of mobilising mass support and tapping in to solidarity in a Europe-wide fight for jobs (see page 8).

And with the prospect of an election looming, it is also the best time to pile pressure

on the government.

While British unions have dithered, and even scandalously called for some of the steel redundancies to be "shared" with other countries, the Dutch steel unions have offered a positive lead, pledging that they will not take work diverted from British plants.

A real fight could be launched, side by side with the Vauxhall workers. The possibility of building international solidarity depends upon a firm stand being taken here in defence of the threatened jobs.



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