

NS 52

Socialist

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The left and the Euro pp6-8



Molly Cooper

Not content with one Railtrack, Blair flogs off the tube and targets the postal service, health, education ...

Why feed the hand that bites you?

Join the debate

THE POLITICAL FUND: where should it go?

- Stopping Privatisation,
 - Fighting job cuts.
- A conference for all trade unionists**

called by the Socialist Alliance

Saturday March 16

11am-4pm

The Camden Centre, Bidborough St, WC1



Blair's contempt for safety of benefit staff

By an Employment Service striker

Public sector workers are increasingly the victims of assault at work. Last year over 5000 'incidents' were reported nationally in Benefits Agency offices and 1000 in Jobcentres in the South East alone.

However Civil Servants in the Benefits Agency (BA) and Employment Service (ES) have no faith in Tony Blair to improve our safety at work, despite his zero tolerance statement. Blair is forcing BA and ES workers to work in dangerous new Jobcentre Plus (JP) offices.

On 28 and 29 January thousands of PCSU (Civil Service Union) members participated in national strike action over Jobcentre Plus.

This action has been part of a long running dispute that started when management removed protective screens in pilot JP offices and ignored the health and safety concerns of the union. Eventually all BA and ES sites are set to become JP offices with the merger of the two agencies.

JP is central to Blair's plans to reform/wreck the benefits system. Lone parents and clients on sickness benefits will be forced into new unscreened JP offices for work-focussed interviews under threat of their benefits being removed.

Civil servants are expected to put pressure on these claimants to go out to work. The PCSU opposes compulsion and recognises its

members are being exposed to an increased risk of assault working under such conditions.

Claimant groups are supportive of the PCSU in the JP dispute as they recognise civil servants should not be blamed for Government policy and accept screens are essential at present when dealing with clients in some circumstances.

Civil servants have no love for the current benefits system or screens. However screens can only safely be removed when the benefits system is reformed by increasing benefit levels and removing the likes of the all-work test and sanctions regime for JSA clients.

So far the government and management seem unmoved by the Jobcentre Plus strike action and have rejected an offer by the Union to meet them at ACAS. They hope the dispute will fizzle out and a defeat will be inflicted on a Union that is increasingly flexing its muscles.

They are being aided by union "moderates" who are trying to call off the dispute and undermine their opponents on the union's National Executive that include Mark Serwotka, the socialist General Secretary elect.

Left Unity (LU), the main left grouping in the PCSU



Striking out against Jobcentre Plus: PCS pickets in Streatham

has little support on the Union National Executive but dominates the ES and BA Section Executives and has been able to influence the direction of the dispute.

Unfortunately it was slow to call a national strike over JP and has left rank and file members in the dark over the progress of negotiations.

The dispute has also highlighted organisational weaknesses of the union in the ES, a result of years of ineptitude by a LU dominated Section Executive.

The ES Section Executive has also failed to impress on their BA colleagues the need to produce campaigning literature specifically for ES members.

Despite these problems, more members have come out for national strike action than actually voted for it in

PCS: vote Left Unity!

Darren Williams

Campaigning is now underway in the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS), as the mainly civil service membership looks to elect its national

executive committee (NEC). These will be the first such elections for two years, and only the third since the union's creation through the merger of CPSA and PTC in 1998.

control and the national leadership was determined to make the civil service safe for Tony Blair's vision of 'social partnership'.

Since then, however, the situation has changed due to two factors. First, there has been an upsurge in militancy, as members who had been demoralised by defeats in the 1980s and 1990s, and perhaps hoped for better from New Labour, have begun to rebel against the more outrageous attacks on their jobs, pay and conditions by management, backed by the Government.

Second, the two right-wing groups who have long controlled the union and its predecessors, have spectacularly fallen out. This has enabled Left Unity to hold the balance of power on the NEC and to win concessions that have promoted members' interests.

One practical effect of all this has been that members have been willing to vote for strike action and the national disputes committee has been willing to allow this to go ahead.

In addition, members elected rank-and-file socialist candidate, Mark Serwotka as general secretary in December 2000.

An extended handover period means that only now will Serwotka assume the full duties of his post, as his hard right predecessor, Barry Reamsbottom, steps down.

Serwotka has already justified the confidence of the 40,000 members who voted for him, by taking an uncompromising stance in opposition to privatisation and in defence of the restoration of national pay bargaining, but he has often been at odds with the NEC.

It is therefore vital that the Left does well in these elections, to ensure that he has the support he needs to provide fighting leadership.

The presidency, four vice-presidencies and forty-one other seats on the committee are being contested by two right-wing factions, the Moderates and Membership First, and by a single socialist slate presented by the Left Unity group.

With the campaign taking place against the backdrop of the first major strike in the civil service for six years – in the Department of Work and Pensions – and with a left-wing General Secretary about to take office, there are grounds for optimism about the performance of the Left Unity candidates.

PCS' creation marked a historic low-point for the civil service left, which had lost a long battle to prevent merger being carried out on the terms of the right-wing. The constitution entrenched bureaucratic

the first place. The union is balloting to escalate the action through voting on a work to rule/overtime ban.

There is growing discontent inside JP pilot offices where members who have previously gone in are joining the dispute. To cause greater disruption, there is a need now for a programme of rolling regional action to be adopted.

The PCSU must mobilise its members in other departments to support the dispute. It must coordinate action with other striking public sector workers and claimants facing Blair's assault.

If the dispute is won it would transform the PCSU and inspire civil servants to mobilise around their many pent up grievances such as national pay.

Friction Dynamics workers appeal for solidarity

The workers from Friction Dynamics, in Caernarfon, North Wales have been on strike/lockout since last June. On Sunday 3rd of February they demonstrated in Cardiff, in a March that ended at the Labour Party Conference.

This was a national march organised in their support, by their union the T&GWU. About 500 people attended the pre-march rally, which was addressed by John Monks, Bill Morris, and the strikers' representatives.

The strike itself is of great importance, mainly because of this group is showing that workers will defend their conditions, in a determined manner.

But it also displays the emptiness of the Labour government's limited improvements to workers' rights.

Employers are not allowed to sack workers on strike ... unless they have been out for 8 weeks. So this employer, Craig Smith, locked them out when they went on strike, and after 8 weeks sacked them. In the meantime he employed scabs to do their jobs.

We were told at the time of

the SkyChefs dispute that if the legislation had been in place then those workers could not have been sacked. In reality the legislation makes no difference to the determined employer.

As speaker after speaker at the rally said; "What changes after 7 weeks and 6 days? If it was wrong to sack before that, then why is it right after?"

This was the major demand of the rally, end the 8 week rule. John Monks concentrated on this, and targeting the people who are the customers of the scab-produced goods – which includes the government, and in particular the MOD.

Morris support

Bill Morris repeated this, saying that the General Executive had supported from day one, and would continue to support "until you march back triumphant": "the strike has been on for 42 weeks, if it takes 42 years we will be there with them."

He wound up his speech with his usual "you are not alone, we ain't going away" – last heard shortly before the union persuaded the SkyChef work-

ers to accept a payoff, and before that, in a speech he made to the Liverpool dockers before withdrawing support from them.

The most moving speech was by strike leader Gerald Parry, who had worked for the firm for 37 years. He said there had been a continuous series of attacks on conditions in the factory, the dispute itself was over a 15% wage cut.

But the decision to strike had come because they had seen a process of union members being got rid of, and replaced with non-union people. In reality the strike was to defend the existence of the union.

His father had told him, on the day he first went to work, to join the union, and then he would never be alone. Now by the amount of support he was getting, in Caernarfon, and outside, he could see what he meant.

The strike needs support, both financial, and in their suppliers and customers.

We need to find out who uses their products, and go to the union involved.

For details go to www/frictiondynamics.co.uk

SP candidate splits London UNISON left

Fred Leplat (United Left National Treasurer)

Last November saw the launch of a new "broad left" in UNISON, the United Left, at a conference of 150 activists in Manchester.

The United left was born through the coming together of the former broad left in UNISON, the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic UNISON, members of the SWP in UNISON and independent left wingers who had stayed out of the CFDU.

This new United Left is a tremendous step forward in overcoming the dispersion of the left. It has already seen successes with an increased number of socialist elected onto national bodies of the union, and larger meetings of left activists in the union's regions who want to trash out a fighting strategy against privatisation or better pay.

There are now opportunities for the United Left to provide an alternative leadership and strategy for the union. But in order to do so, the forces within it must be able to work

together, and be able to make alliances with others on the left who are still outside of the United Left.

The Greater London Region is the most left region in the union, and has the most left wing convenor, Geoff Martin.

Geoff has vigorously opposed the witch-hunt against left activists, consistently spoken out against privatisation, and attempted to make the region a more campaigning body of the union. Although he is still outside of the United left, he is certainly someone we must work alongside to turn the union into a campaigning organisation.

It is therefore extremely unfortunate that Glenn Kelly, national chair of the United Left and Socialist Party member, obtained the nomination of his branch to stand against Geoff for the election to the post of regional convenor.

Socialist Party members argued that Geoff was now working as an organiser for the Battersea & Wandsworth Trades Council and did not belong to a branch which gave him a "base" from which to be accountable.

This narrow view does not take into account the fact that Geoff is widely known and respected by most union activists across the Region. Furthermore, he is accountable through his election as a lay official at the Regional Council by delegates from all branches in the Region.

Only the right wing and the bureaucracy in the union would be pleased to see two left wingers stand against each other, and union activists will not understand the motivations that lay behind Glenn Kelly's candidacy.

Glenn Kelly's challenge to Geoff Martin can only be understood in the continuing desire of the Socialist Party to establish its own independent profile on every issue, even when differences are minimal or non-existent.

The sectarian approach, that is putting the interests of their own organisation before the needs of the broader movement, must be rejected.

The London United Left has called upon Glenn Kelly to withdraw his nomination and is backing Geoff Martin for regional convenor.

President George Bush may point the finger at Iran, Iraq and North Korea when he makes his war-mongering claims of an "axis of evil": but the axis that has done most damage to most working people in America is that which links Bush and the US political establishment with big corporations.

The collapse of Enron, previously listed as the seventh biggest company in the USA, with a stock market valuation of \$80 billion, has robbed tens of thousands of Enron staff and many more investors of their savings and pension rights, while top Enron bosses cynically sold off their vast shareholding to pocket millions and safeguard their own position in advance of the firm's collapse.

But it has also revealed just how widely and deeply the tentacles of big business have reached into Bush's innermost circle of ministers and advisers, and just how flimsy is the protection for the working class in a fully-fledged free market capitalism.

That a company so large could collapse leaving so little in the way of hard assets tells a good part of the story: accountants and investigators are having first of all to find out just what exactly Enron actually did.

Even if there are some tangible assets left in the name of this "energy trading firm" other than a few office blocks and shredding machines, it is clear that any productive work carried out within the Enron corporation was dwarfed in significance by the vast proliferation of speculative deals and financial jiggery pokery, running up liabilities totalling as much as \$60 billion, and which are now under criminal and congressional investigation.

But the huge sums of money sloshing about, and the link to big oil gave Enron a huge and disproportionate political influence in the US, and made it an attractive customer for auditors Arthur Andersen, who picked up \$52m for "auditing" (and then shredding) the company's accounts and for consultancy work.

Although Enron gave money to both main parties in the US, its main link was to Bush's Republican Party, including direct sponsorship of Bush's own campaigns.

As the investigations grow in scope, so the network of Enron-linked figures in key positions in the US administration – several of them former Enron employees, others recipients of Enron funds, some seeking Enron's views on policy issues – is becoming clearer.

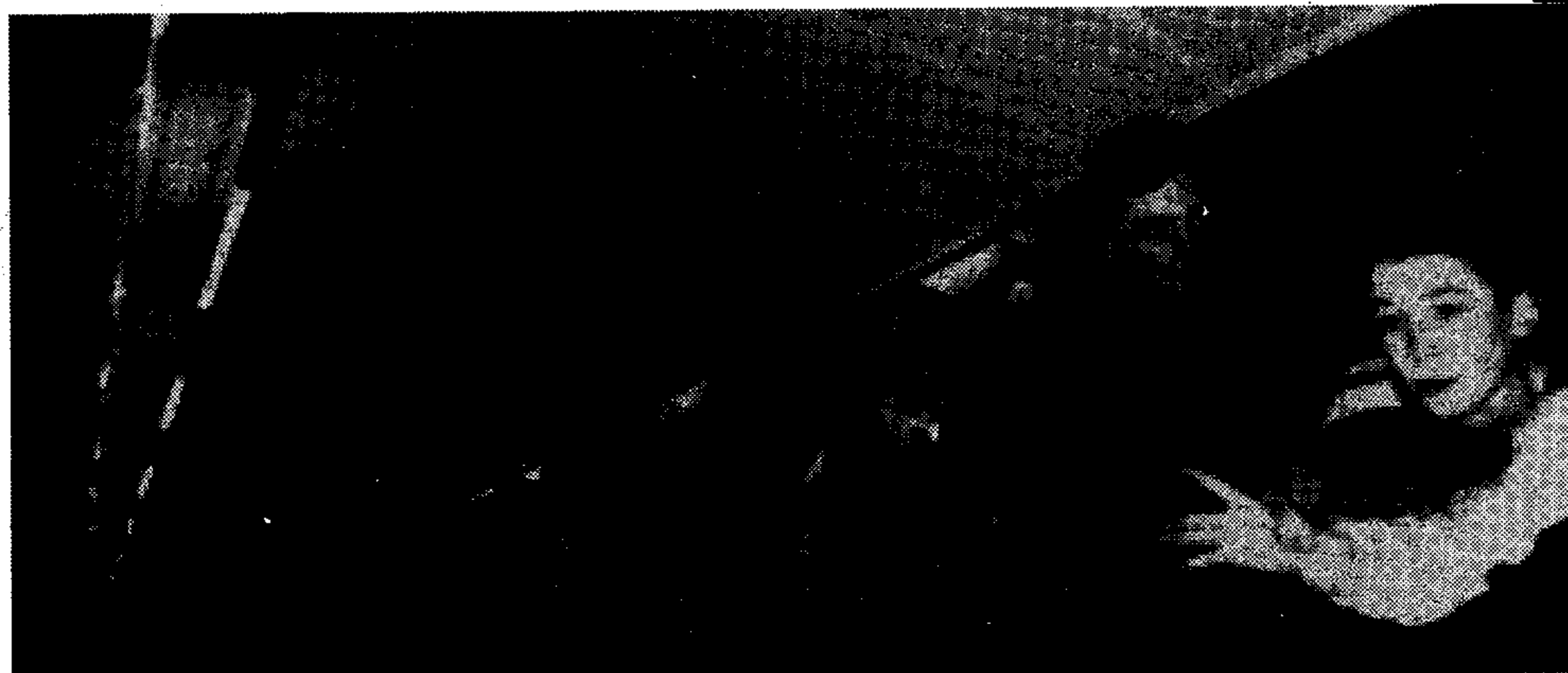
They include vice President Dick Cheney, Attorney General John Ashcroft, chief political advisor Karl Rove, Energy secretary Spencer Abraham, Army secretary Thomas White (who as a former Enron vice president had shares in the firm worth \$50-\$100 million), top economic advisor Lawrence Lindsey, and US trade representative Robert Zoellick.

Through these and other links Enron can be seen as helping to shape a whole raft of

Enron and the politics of New Labour



When the nodding has to stop: Wakeham must face the music



Down the tube? Enron's assets disappeared: now their auditors are promoting PPP and PFI

Bush's pro-business policies, including the energy policy widely regarded as a "polluters' charter".

And while the links to Enron and to the oil industry have been widely touted, this is only one sector of the business world which has successfully pressed Bush, the President they have bought and paid for, to implement policies in their interests.

As this scandal grows in the US, there are at least signs that it may at last revive some political debate and begin to dent the ludicrous 80% plus approval ratings that Bush, this war-mongering stooge for big oil and big business, has held since September 11.

But while at least some sections of the American public and political establishment appear to have learned some lessons from the Enron collapse and other corporate scandals, in Britain, it seems that nothing is capable of forcing any retreat or rethink on Tony Blair's government.

New Labour remains totally and inflexibly wedded to its dream of a "partnership" with free market capitalism, and to the policies of deregulation and privatisation for which

Enron paid good money in the USA.

Revelations that Enron gave small amounts of money both to the Tories and to the Labour Party serve mainly to underline that Blair's party already has policies so far to the right that no more extravagant bid for influence was required.

New Labour is already prostrate before big business, boasting about the extent of its anti-union laws, offering tax-breaks. It is already committed to handing over large chunks of our public services and their assets to the private sector, and surrounded by a coterie of business "advisors".

It already looks uncritically to firms like Andersen, KPMG, Ernst and Young and PricewaterhouseCoopers – all of them locked in to lucrative consultancy and accountancy contracts with the private sector – as sources of "independent" advice on so-called Public Private Partnerships and the Private Finance Initiative.

Ministers dismiss any criticism of reports from these firms as flowing from "vested interests", apparently oblivious to the vested interests the firms themselves represent.

As ministers set out to antagonise Labour's traditional trade union supporters – branding as "wreckers" those who question the value of privatisation and campaign to defend public services – their only political friends are the international business community that brought us the Enron scandal, the Marconi collapse, the Barings bank fiasco, the Railtrack rip-off, and a host of dodgy deals and carve-ups around the world.

Those "modernisers" hoping to see New Labour complete the transition from the party of the unions to the party of big business should maybe look more closely at the plight of Lord Wakeham, the most conspicuous British casualty of the Enron collapse.

As a former Tory energy secretary, Wakeham really was a member of the Party of business, and saw no reason not to cash in on what may have seemed like a lucrative sinecure with a thriving US company.

Now after apparently nodding through too many iffy balance sheets he faces legal action from US trade unions and aggrieved shareholders. The unions argue that he was "at best incompetent" in his role as an auditor at Enron.

Public sector unions and campaigners could make exactly the same point about Byers, Milburn, Morris and others who by signing up to PFI deals are buying a pig in a poke, and mortgaging the future of public services to grasping private corporations.

That's why the fight to democratise the control of the trade unions' political funds, and break the stranglehold of Millbank over union policy is more important now than ever. The forthcoming conference *The Political Fund: where should it go?*, called by the Socialist Alliance on March 16, offers an opportunity to draw some practical conclusions.

End Immigration detention

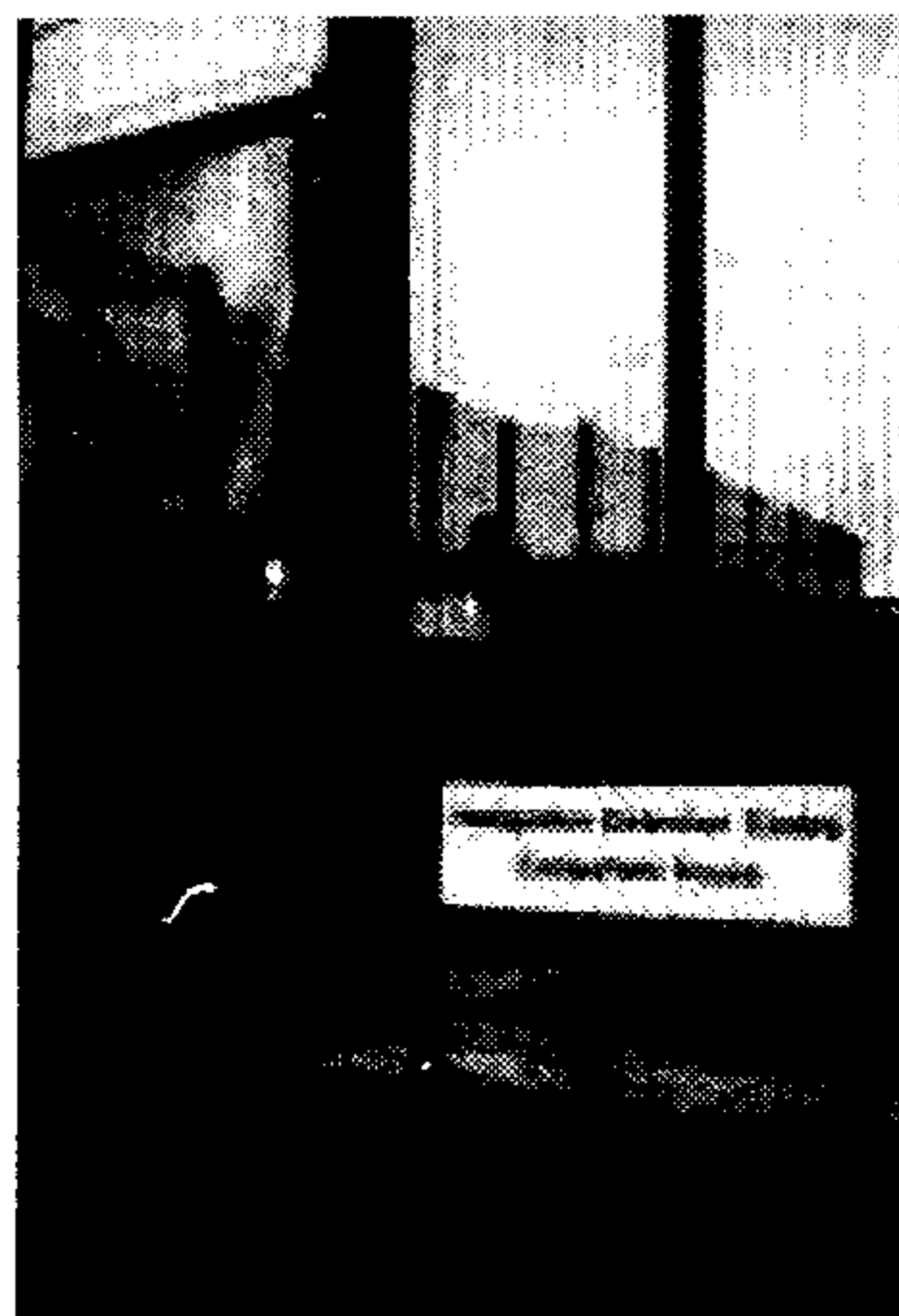
Bill MacKeith (Close Campsfield Campaign)

Home Secretary David Blunkett published his White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with diversity in modern Britain" on February 7.

As the National Coalition of Anti-Deportations campaigns put it: "The document sets out a comprehensive set of measures to deliver a improperly managed, racist and intimidating system of immigration, nationality and asylum for Britain in the 21st Century.

"The measures will enable the UK to mismanage migration, shut its borders, and build distrust and incredibility in the system amongst the wider community."

One of Blunkett's announcements was that Campsfield "House" Immigration



Detention Centre near Oxford is to close in about a year. The closure decision may be down in part to size, location, or age, but there can be no doubt that the vigorous campaign of protest over the last eight and a half years from inside and outside the centre has been the major factor.

However, "victory" is not sweet. More and more refugees are being detained as the government opens more detention centres. Next after Yarl's Wood [900 places] and Harmondsworth [550 places] last year will be Dover [400 places] being converted from a youth offenders institution this spring.

Since May 1997 New Labour has increased the number of dedicated immigration detention beds from 700 to 2,800, and has stated 4,000 is its aim. What this represents in terms of the suffering of individuals, including clinical depression, actual and attempted suicides, is uncountable.

If Campsfield is "outdated" as Blunkett says, then the detention prisons and centres at Haslar, Rochester, Linholm, Holme "House", Dungavel, Tinsley and Oakington should also be closed. They are of the

same age or much older with some dating back to the 19th century!

The new generation of two mega detention centres at Yarl's Wood (Europe's biggest) and Harmondsworth (550) may have bigger gyms but they are still prisons. As one detainee said "If you surround the Hilton with a fence, it is a prison."

Detention is an abuse of the basic right to freedom unless you are awaiting trial or have been convicted of a criminal offence. This is an absolute right, but to be denied it is worse when, like most immigration detainees, you are claiming political asylum – your right under international convention.

Demonstrations will continue at Campsfield on the last Saturday of the month until the centre is actually closed. The theme for February's protest

(February 23, at 12 noon) is: 'No One Is Illegal'.

The need for local activity may well continue: there is at least a 50% chance that one of the four 750-place "accommodation centres" will be at Arncliffe near Bicester, 12 miles from Oxford.

Action is also taking place elsewhere. On February 2 a campaign was set up to oppose the new Dover "Removal" Centre while the Yarl's Wood campaign set up last year is vigorous, systematic and inventive.

Over Christmas activists took part in an unprecedented – in the UK – number of "airport actions" against deportations: passengers and crew being leafleted near the check-in desks.

Despite Blunkett's sweet talk (an end to "shameful" detention in prisons!) and rechristenings ("removal" centres), the

majority of those detained are still detained on arrival. They are awaiting a first decision on their asylum application, not awaiting "removal" at the end of the process as the Home Office says.

As the *Oxford Mail* said under the heading "Curtains for Campsfield",

"For as long as any similar establishment remains open, we as a nation cannot stand in judgement on countries whose regimes we condemn as oppressive. Let us hope that Campsfield House is the beginning of the end."

Blunkett's new proposals make the conference to defend asylum seekers in Manchester on March 23 organised by a number of anti-racist organisations even more important than before.

For further details contact: defend-asylum.org or phone 07905 566 183

Milburn's "mission unthinkable"

John Lister

The first "failing" NHS hospitals are likely to be handed over to external management as we go to press, with the lingering fear that private firms might be brought in to take charge, as New Labour's offensive gathers pace.

Health Secretary Alan Milburn continues his mission to seek and destroy any last vestiges of morale amongst NHS staff.

The latest phase of Milburn's relentless campaign for "modernisation", which has involved a non-stop round of bafflingly complex and apparently pointless organisational reforms on the one hand, coupled with setting ever-more rigorous performance targets on the other, includes the reintroduction of two of the most hated elements of the Tory internal market system, which Labour claimed to have scrapped in 1997.

The top-performing hospital Trusts are to be given new powers to run as "foundation hospitals", facing a bare minimum of intervention or control from the Department of Health, given extra cash, and with freedom to set up companies, and to set their own pay and conditions for managers

and staff.

This effectively revives and amplifies the original promises of "self-governing status" made by Thatcher's government when it first set up the internal market twelve years ago, and pressed hospitals to "opt out" of health authority control.

Of course the right for Trusts to vary local pay and conditions proved – as trade unions and campaigners had warned – to be little more than a license for Trust bosses to award themselves huge increases in their own pay, and squeeze down the terms and conditions of the majority of their staff.

New Labour, under pressure from health unions, restored national pay agreements – though many Trusts have yet to iron out all of the anomalies and injustices that arose from local pay bargaining. But now an ambitious attempt to revamp and simplify NHS pay scales has run into the ground for lack of cash, Milburn has effectively reversed the process towards a rational system ... and headed towards an even more chaotic and arbitrary arrangement.

But Thatcher's chief reason for imposing the costly market-style reforms on the NHS was to introduce competition for

"market share" between Trusts, whose income would depend on how many contracts it could secure from health authorities and GP fund-holders.

Now Milburn is bringing back precisely this element of competition which New Labour proudly claimed in 1997 to have replaced by a new notion of "partnership". This time the competition between Trusts is dressed up as offering patients a "choice" of which hospital to use, though in many areas there is only one NHS hospital to choose from.

Gulf

But while the "freedoms" to act more like a private business are being doled out to the top-flight hospitals, there is a widening gulf between them and those deemed to be "failing". The dozen hospitals branded as "no-star" Trusts six months ago have been under the cosh, with a threat that if they fail to raise standards their management will be replaced – by "successful" Trust bosses.

Several of the no-star Trusts have struggled, and now four – Barnet and Chase Farm (where the Chief Executive has just resigned after a stash of 2,700 unfulfilled requests for ultra-



Sending in new managers to shout at demoralised staff is unlikely to solve problems

sound scans were discovered by inspectors), Ashford & St Peters in Middlesex, Portsmouth and the new Darenth Valley Hospital in Dartford – have been sacrificed on Milburn's altar of modernisation.

But while high-flying NHS managers may be seen as playing a useful role in reviving flagging NHS Trusts, it does not seem at all likely that private sector managers could make much impact on failing systems of care in Trusts that cannot cope.

As Milburn's former boss Frank Dobson has pointed out, private hospitals in this country are extremely small compared with NHS Trusts, and very narrow in the range of elective services they offer.

Writing in the Independent, and arguing against any further

private sector involvement, Dobbo points out that the Leeds Teaching Hospitals Trust, for example, has as many Intensive Care Unit beds as the total number beds in most private hospitals: and that its large and complex combination of medical, nursing and support staff cannot be simply ordered into performing better.

Private hospitals

Milburn's insistence on the use of private hospital beds – whether in Britain or France – to treat NHS patients has also come under growing scrutiny. Given the tiny size of the private sector compared with the NHS (70,000 NHS operations in private hospitals last year, compared with over 6 million NHS operations), such deals are unlikely to be much more than a last resort of health

chiefs seeking to meet waiting list targets.

But even these small numbers of operations are very expensive. This seems to be why health chiefs steadfastly refuse to say how much many of the schemes are costing. Even if the potential knock-on effects of an expanding private sector on NHS staffing problems could be ignored, there is no evidence that such deals represent value for money.

This is unlikely to deter Mr Milburn, who is also having to fend off a growing body of evidence that his favoured way of funding new hospitals through the Private Finance Initiative represents rotten value for money.

Ministers challenged to show that PFI did in fact represent good value had until January relied upon an "independent" report drawn up for the Treasury by Enron's accountants (and one of the firms of City consultants most involved in PFI contracts) Arthur Andersen – the findings of which have always been contested by unions, academics and campaigners.

When an MP pointed out to Tony Blair that the Andersen report was now "holed below the water line," a desperate Blair could only refer to an even more flawed and partial report by ... PricewaterhouseCoopers, who are involved even more deeply with PFI projects than Andersens (now accenture).

Embarrassment

With ministers lacking even a thread of impartial evidence to hide their embarrassment over the cost of PFI, another of its failings has surfaced with the row over the brand new £67m PFI hospital due to open in Bishop Auckland.

There are now doubts over whether the new hospital is big enough or in the right place for the services that will be needed, while the £97m PFI-financed Dryburn Hospital in nearby North Durham is already too small and failing to meet waiting list targets.

Any proposals to reshape local services are stymied by the fact that far from being an asset, the new hospital is a major liability: the watertight PFI deal to lease the Bishop Auckland Hospital has another 27 years to run!

While he may well cheese off and drive away even more nurses, professionals and support staff, Milburn's campaign is having one unintended beneficial result: it has helped boost recruitment to the public sector unions, and force them into ever more open opposition to New Labour and its privatisation agenda.

As the new Education Bill goes through Parliament

Divide it up, contract it out... Labour dismantles comprehensive education

By the end of Labour's present term of office every parent will face in effect a new eleven-plus – will their child go to what has been called a 'bog-standard' secondary school, or get a place at one of the new Specialist Schools, better funded, more popular, and with the first pick of teachers in shortage subjects? RICHARD HATCHER reports.



Forcing through more faith schools and selection – Estelle Morris

THIS NEW two-tier system will divide every town, every neighbourhood. Cross-cutting that will be more divisions. Faith schools will expand. The emergence of Muslim denominational schools will be dwarfed by the Church of England's intention to create 100 more secondary schools.

At age 14 more segregation will take place. Some students will take the 'academic' route. Others will follow vocational courses based

successful' ...and the rest.

The top stream of schools will be granted what the government likes to call 'earned autonomy', which means they can be trusted with more freedom from government regulation – provided of course they don't use it to challenge government policy.

The rest of the schools will be subject to even more prescription, notably in the teaching of English through the Literacy Strategy at Key Stage 3 (the first three years of secondary).

Two tier staff

The teaching force, too, will be two-tier. The White Paper 'Schools Achieving Success' speaks of fewer teachers, not more, with classes being taken by classroom assistants.

More accurately, they will no longer be classroom assistants, they will be a new category of teachers, lower paid, less well qualified, in a two-tier profession.

We will be witnessing the death of the comprehensive school by a thousand forms

of selection. Meanwhile, private companies will be circling, seeking the opportunities to make the profits which the White Paper promises and the Education Bill legislates for.

These policies repay close examination. They are a case study in how to create a market out of a public service, treading carefully step by step, opening a door here, a door there, to the private sector while trying to minimise any political backlash.

Local Education Authorities continue to be targets. LEAs which are deemed to be failing must contract out their advisory services.

When an LEA wants a new school, or when a school labelled as 'failing' needs to be turned round, it must invite proposals from the private sector, and the Secretary of State can force the LEA to accept them.

A more radical step is the new legislation for schools. Private companies will be able to propose to set up an Academy – an independent specialist school, funded by

not just in schools but in FE colleges and workplaces, another two-tier system leading to two-tier futures.

And a further division among schools (and therefore among pupils and teachers) will be created between the "top" 25% of schools which the government regards as especially 'suc-

Glasgow steams ahead with housing sell-off

After further promises of funds from the Government and Scottish Executive, Glasgow Council has agreed to proceed to ballot on the transfer of its entire housing stock to Glasgow Housing Association. This transfer proposal is motivated by the simple dogma: Council Bad, Private good.

There were originally claims that there were Government rules relating to PSBR preventing council borrowing which were exposed as false by English authorities being given the right to set up arm's length housing companies.

The latest proposals are that the Scottish Executive will give an interest free loan of £300 million to the GHA.

The plan is to subsidise the transfer by £2,000m, including a £900m write-off of the debt and various grants of £800m, plus an interest free loan of £300m.

Whilst we called for investment in social rented housing and demanded the debt be written off, this is a huge waste of resources to the benefit of banks and financial institutions. There are huge costs involved in the proposal through higher interest rates, VAT, transfer costs, insurance, establishing a new organisation which would have been avoided had the government allowed debt cancellation for the council.

Over £500m of needless expenditure will result if the tenants vote yes. This money could significantly improve the social infrastructure of citizens of Glasgow through improved public transport, care for elderly, community programmes and so on.

If tenants vote against the government we cannot allow housing to remain as it is. Tenants are being blackmailed. We call for a No Vote and for houses to be improved with the same finances through the democratically elected council.



On Friday February 8, following a meeting of RMT representatives and branch officers on South West Trains with members of the union's National Executive Committee, strike action planned for the following week was suspended. GREG TUCKER reports on the issues behind that decision, and the tasks ahead for activists in getting strike action restarted.

THE GOVERNMENT and the press have used every opportunity to label me and other trade union militants as fundamentalists, as wreckers. This hasn't cut too much ice with most members. At one level this dispute is nothing to do with me, but about the conditions of large numbers of low paid members. The role of any activist is to help their views to be expressed. It's not me that made them angry – it's the company.

While the high profile I have received has been used against me in some quarters, the overall impression I have talking to people is that they are very positive that they have someone who is talking their language and representing their views. I'm very heartened by the level of personal support I have had.

The image of the RMT that most people have is of a union where the members are middle aged men and that's still true of most of the people who hold positions even at branch level. In terms of the workforce we have a large number of black workers and women workers, and at Waterloo some of the best new activists are from these groups.

Low paid workers have taken six days strike action already and as well as losing significant amounts of money through this: many have lost even greater amounts through the overtime ban the company has imposed to break the dispute.

There is so much intimidation, both at a collective level through the overtime ban, the withdrawal of the right to book leave as well as harassment targeted at individuals who have been on the picket line, for example. There have been two new suspensions of people involved in the dispute.

Sacrifice service

On Friday the company announced that it was re-organising the rosters, so that people would have had to take 4 days strike action next week rather than 2. Yet again the company demonstrated that it was prepared to sacrifice the level of service to the public in order to face down the union.

In that of course they have had support from the government and its instruments. We have seen the Health and Safety Executive declare that there is no problem with managers taking on duties normally carried out by guards and station staff – despite having

SW Trains dispute

"There is no doubt we will be fighting to restart the action"



Molly Cooper

reported to them incidents involving trains being waved away with open doors or when signals are at red.

The Strategic Rail Authority has waived the fines against the company for poor performance both on strike days and non-strike days.

Last week the company said they were prepared to discuss not the current pay claim, but the claim that would be due in October 2002. Union officials went off to meet them for talks about talks.

Having seen the letter from the company, I argued that there was no basis for calling off next week's action. Of course there was pressure. But it's like running a marathon – you come up against a pain barrier and you just have to run on through it.

In any campaign of industrial action you have to constantly fight to keep people out. We would probably have lost some people next week, but we could have fronted it out.

People have said before that there would be a drift back, but the strike has remained remarkably solid.

There is a huge degree of loyalty. What is needed is leadership: arguing with people, reminding them about the issues we are fighting over. It's a continual process and I think we could have held the line.

Members solid

RMT members in my branch are still very solid – they didn't want the action suspended. There are a lot of people who are very upset that the dispute has been undermined in this way, but we will be fighting all the way to regain the momentum.

We have built up some links with other workers in struggle. People know about the strikes on Arriva and the overtime ban in Scotland – and the activists know the people involved because we are quite a small union.

We have had PCS members on our picket line and when we organised a march on Monday 28 January quite a lot of PCS strikers came along to the rally afterwards. There were two speakers on the platform from their dispute.

And the connections work at other levels too – people have

partners and friends who are teachers or health service workers and see that many different groups of workers are facing similar problems.

It's also been clear at many of the meetings I have spoken at that our dispute has given confidence to other people. People have said, for example, at NUT meetings I have addressed that it made it easier to argue in their workplaces that people should take action being able to point to others who were doing it.

Despite the attempts to find members of the travelling public who will condemn the action, a remarkable number of people are supportive. People blame the Tories, management and the government for the situation on the railways before they blame the RMT.

There has been a small amount of abuse when we have been on the picket line, but both there and at work on non-strike days the majority have wished us well. Despite the fact that the company is continuing to put leaflets out to the public, saying that I am personally responsible for the whole rail crisis, when I get recognised at work on the barrier – as I often do – people are supportive and friendly.

This is both because they recognise that the real crisis is caused every day by privatisation, and on the other hand are making a basic expression of solidarity with workers in struggle.

The support we have had from the Socialist Alliance during the dispute has been very positive. Local Socialist Alliance groups have organised lots of meetings at which strikers have spoken and organised collections both there and on the streets.

Other Socialist Alliance members have taken up the dispute directly through their unions.

The fact that we have a political organisation that supports our campaign when New Labour is clearly on the side of the company is very useful. It has certainly had an effect on RMT activists – people have joined the Socialist Alliance – and others have said they want to go to the Socialist Alliance Trade Union conference.

International

We also have built up some international links – we have had contacts with rail workers and socialists in Italy, Germany for example.

The Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, French section of the Fourth International organised a meeting in Paris a few weeks ago. They showed Ken Loach's film *The Navigators*, and I spoke about the dispute to more than 100 railworkers from across France.

The threat of privatisation, and the dire consequences it has had in Britain, is something most activists in the industry recognise, whichever country they are in.

The union will meet the company to demand it lifts the ban on overtime and sick pay and stops the new round of victimisations prior to any discussion of the pay claim. Souter and his cronies won't budge.

The Executive and reps will have to decide where to go next. There is no doubt we will be fighting to get the action restarted. The prospect of action from the pay ballots on LUL, DLR and Silverlink will hopefully give us a boost in doing that.

This all means that it is vital that solidarity work continues. We still need money. We still want to come and speak at meetings.

For further information about the work of the strike support group contact Gill at gill_lee@talk21.com

What other RMT members say

A Revenue Protection Inspector, Clapham Junction:

"We have a fair dispute for fair pay and fair conditions which is the right of every person in the country. I voted for the Labour Party, not New Labour."

A Revenue Protection Assistant, Clapham Junction:

"I haven't heard anyone at Clapham say they want to go back. The mood is very solid. The TUC should come out and support us and reaffirm its past commitments to re-nationalising the railways."

Commercial Guard, Waterloo:

"We're hurting SWT financially and we must not be afraid of the heavy tactics Souter's using of threatening dismissal. We've lost the battle but the war is not over."

"The other strikes will boost the morale of the members. We are getting support from other unions and we are not alone."

"The victimisation of the union is still going on. We've got scabbing guards who've been listening in the mess room and watching who has been picketing. People have been refused leave, including hospital leave for essential treatment."

"I've worked as a guard with Greg Tucker, and I have complete confidence in him as a driver. He's being attacked because he speaks for the low paid and for ethnic minorities. He has dedicated his working life to railway workers."

"The mood at Waterloo is very solid. The pay deal and discipline are the issues. ASLEF members have given a lot of sympathy to us. Good luck to them, they got a good result. But the way we've been treated - it could be them next."

January 1 2002 saw mass publicity for the official launch of the latest stage in European capitalism's most central current project, the single currency. Yet just one month afterwards, the euro is facing its most difficult problems since its initial introduction in 1999.

Ironically, these problems centre on the largest European economy, Germany, and have called into question precisely the rules that the Bundesbank and the German government laid down in the Maastricht and Amsterdam treaties to govern the process of monetary union.

What does the economic crisis in Germany mean for the struggle for an alternative vision of Europe to that of the bosses? And how serious are the current upheavals for capital in Europe? **ANDY KILMISTER** offers some answers.

To answer these questions we need to look more closely at how Europe's economic difficulties relate both to the current downturn in the world economy and to the specific form that capitalist crisis has taken in Europe.

The immediate problem facing the European Commission arises from the so-called 'stability and growth pact', which states that any government in the euro-zone which runs a government budget deficit of more than 3 percent of its GDP can be fined up to 0.5 percent of GDP. This pact is really a continuation of the 'convergence criteria' set down in the Maastricht Treaty, which imposed a similar 3 percent ceiling on the deficits of those countries wishing to join the euro.

January 30 saw the first formal warning from the Commission to a member country that it was in danger of crossing this threshold. The warning was issued to Germany, which has a forecast deficit of 2.7 percent of GDP for this year. But this forecast is actually based on projected growth of 0.75 percent for the German economy in 2002. Currently output is rising at an annual rate of just 0.3 percent, and over the last three months it actually fell by 0.6 percent.

Meanwhile, unemployment has shot up by over 300,000 in the last month to 4.3 million, in what looks likely to be a closely fought election year.

It seems increasingly possible that Germany will break the 3 percent barrier and face the Commission with a politically explosive dilemma: either a country with significant economic difficulties will be faced with massive fines from the EU unless it cuts spending and plunges deeper into recession, or the 'stability pact' will break down at its first test.

This has prompted a wide-ranging debate among different sections of European capital about the stability pact and its usefulness, a debate which raises crucial questions about the project of monetary union itself.

There are three main constituencies of support for the pact. Firstly, there is the Bundesbank, and sections of German capital which were reluctant to give up the mark for the euro. In many ways monetary union means a lessening of German financial power over other European countries. In each two-way relationship between the mark and other currencies in Europe previously the mark was the stronger element, with the result that all other EU countries ended up adjusting their economic policies to those which the Bundesbank dictated for Germany.

While Germany is the single largest member of the euro-zone, it does not have the same dominance in a situation of pooled monetary sovereignty as it had before. The stability pact, which institutionalises the policies previously followed by the Bundesbank as rules for all participating in monetary union, is in many ways the price exerted by the bank and its co-thinkers for agreeing to the single currency project.

The second area of support for the stability pact is European financial capital in general, which is concerned about promoting the euro as an international reserve currency to rival the dollar and the yen. In order to do this the currency has to gain 'credibility' in global

Can the euro revitalise European capitalism?

Europe's instability pact



Germany's Chancellor Schröder - discovered the hard way that the Stability Pact is no laughing matter

financial markets, and the pact is seen as crucial for achieving this.

Restricting budget deficits is supposed to remove the possibility that such deficits will be financed by printing money, a policy which would potentially raise inflation and lower the purchasing power of the euro.

attempt to gain the status of a reserve currency is especially important because of the issue of 'seignorage'. This refers to the benefits that can be obtained in trade by those responsible for issuing a reserve currency, because they can pay for imports with that currency without having to earn foreign exchange to finance their purchases.

Sections of European capital have looked enviously at the ability of the USA to do this over the last two decades as a result of the status of the dollar. In particular, they would like to establish the euro as the international currency for the emerging capitalist economies of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, and so allow the EU to exploit this status to draw in commodities from this region without having to transfer value in return.

The third grouping which backs the stability pact is that part of European capital which wants to enforce restraints on government expenditure, both in order to ensure lower corporate taxation and to encourage privatisation programmes which will open up new, potentially profitable areas of economic activity to the private sector. Examples include telecommunications, energy, aerospace and transport industries.

In addition to these economic interests, there has been political backing for the pact from those supporters of European integra-

tion who are happy to see an essentially unstable structure being set up since they believe that this will provide the basis for the next 'push' towards unity.

Specifically, the gamble is that if the Maastricht process runs into serious difficulties because one or more countries face recession as a result of the common interest rates across the euro-zone, then massive pressure will build up for some kind of transfer of resources across the EU to such countries, rather than see the process break down.

This will then, it is thought, create the conditions for a common European fiscal policy and taxation system to match the common monetary policy. It is largely on the basis of such thinking that supporters of closer integrations such as Jacques Delors agreed to the stability framework in the first place.

These various groups have created a powerful informal bloc in support of the stability pact and the continuation of the Maastricht limits on government spending. But they now face increasingly strong arguments claiming that the pact is becoming a danger to capitalist strategies within Europe.

Firstly, the support of the Bundesbank and its German allies for the pact is being undermined by the fact that Germany looks likely to be the pact's first victim. The German finance minister Theo Waigel has raised questions about whether the pact should continue.

Secondly, the pact has been notably unsuccessful in maintaining the value of the euro against the dollar. Over the three years since the initial launch of the euro it has lost 15-20 percent of its value against the dollar and even during 2001 it slightly fell, despite the sharp slowdown in the US economy and the



French health workers have been staging strikes and demonstrations demanding extra cash and staff to compensate for the impact of the introduction of the 35 hour week

impact of the September 11 attacks.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that the project of establishing the euro as a rival international currency to the dollar is much more difficult than was previously thought to be the case, and is likely to involve a much more dramatic onslaught on working-class gains in Europe than even the pact embodies.

Related to this is a third point: that the pact itself says nothing about lowering taxes. It is always open to European governments to reduce deficits by maintaining, or even raising, taxation. Those sections of European business which want to see dramatic declines in taxation, linked to an attack on the welfare state and a movement towards an Anglo-American style deregulation of social provision, are coming to see the pact as too weak an instrument to achieve their objectives.

This links to a fourth argument, put forward by free-market observers such as 'The Economist', which is that the pact is a diversion from the real issues facing European capitalism in its attempt to enforce a neo-liberal strategy. Such analysts argue that the real issues are not macroeconomic figures for government borrowing, but microeconomic questions such as deregulation of the labour market, integration of financial markets, privatisation of pensions with the aim of boosting an 'equity culture' and the like.

If these things are achieved, it is claimed, pressures for bringing down government spending will follow naturally, as they have in Britain and the USA. If they are not, then neo-liberalism will be blocked in Europe regardless of the stability pact, and the pact just becomes an irrelevance.

At a political level the risks involved in using the pact to provoke a crisis which will further future integration are also increasingly worrying, particularly since the character of such integration remains uncertain.

It can by no means be guaranteed that a common fiscal policy across the EU will follow neo-liberal, free market dictates, and strategists among European capital remain conscious of the projects put forward just a few years ago by Oskar Lafontaine, for the use of such policies to combat just such ideas. They remain mistrustful of the Jospin government in France, and in some cases, such as the circles around Berlusconi in Italy, have become sceptical of the whole project of monetary union.

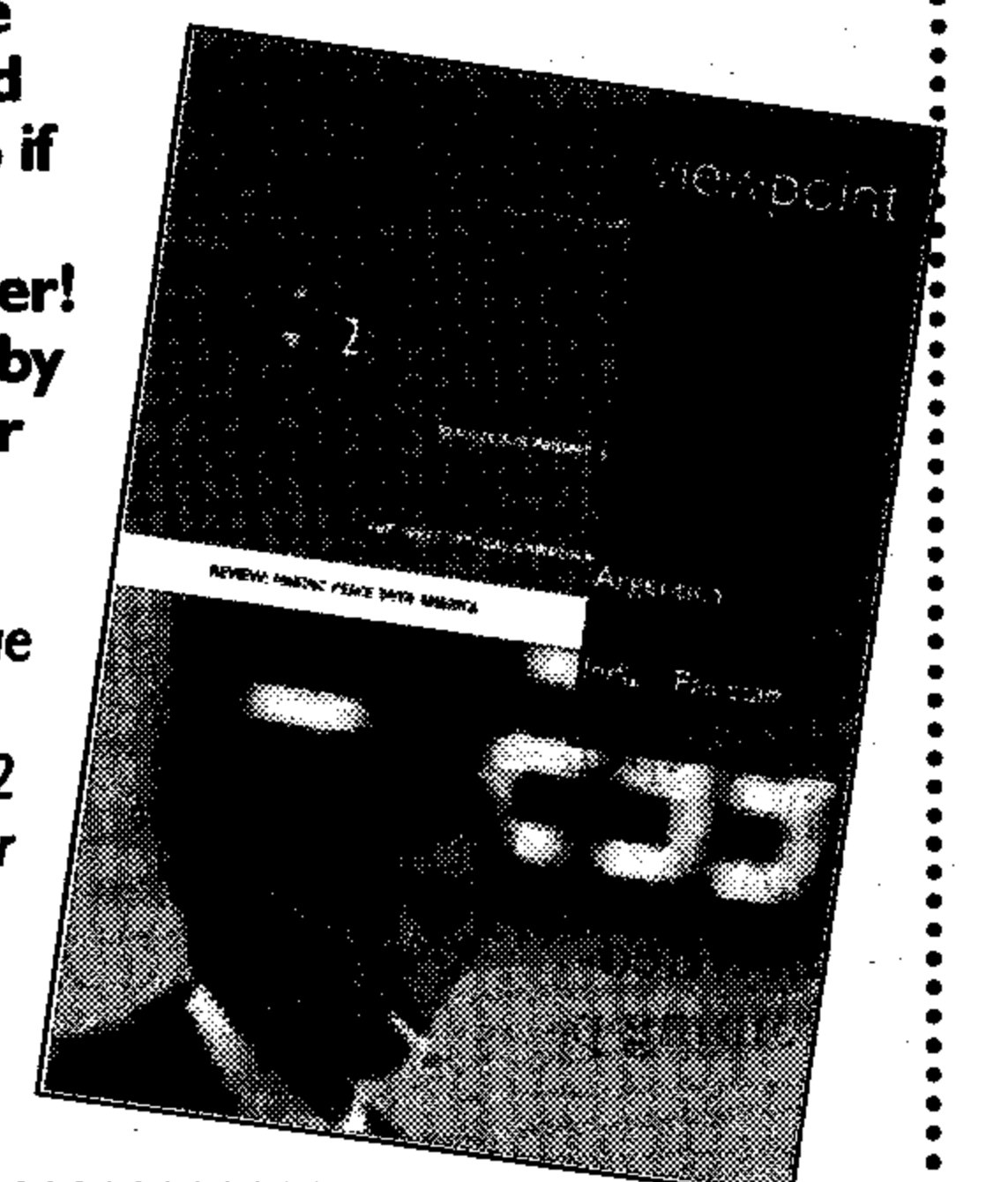
It is against this context that the current difficulties of the German economy raise such deep potential problems for European capital as a whole. The controversy over

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whether the German deficit should be allowed to rise is only the most direct manifestation of a much deeper divide about how the neo-liberal programme can be furthered within Europe and about whether the structures set up at Maastricht and Amsterdam are adequate for doing this.

Yet this divide in itself reflects more fundamental issues about the constraints facing European capitalism.

The launch of the euro, now with twelve member countries, does represent a significant success for the European capitalist class, at least in the short term. It has not proved possible for the working class to block or deflect the central project of European capital over the last decade, except in rather particular instances such as the result of the Danish referendum.

Yet at the same time, it is very unclear that this launch in itself can actually achieve the objectives which supporters of neo-liberalism have set for it.

At a political level, large segments of European social democracy continue to see the euro as a means of protecting the European 'social model', rather than of opening it out to the full force of global competition. This may be an illusion, yet it continues to represent a powerful counterweight to neo-liberal strategies.

At an economic level, while Europe has undergone neither the frenzied speculative boom of the USA in recent years, nor the long drawn-out stagnation of Japan, the euro has not provided a magic key to sustained capitalist accumulation.

Unemployment remains high across most of the continent. Even in Spain, the fastest growing large euro-zone country over the last year, growth of almost 3 percent hardly brought the unemployment rate down at all. Working-class resistance to neo-liberalism has remained strong in many of the euro-zone countries, following the upturn in struggle initiated by the French strikes of 1995 and the fall of the first Berlusconi government.

In particular, on the crucial issues of pension reform and the welfare state, neo-liberal forces have yet to score a decisive victory. Financial markets remain unintegrated in significant ways, particularly in the area of stock markets, where London and Frankfurt continue to construct rival blocs in fierce competition with one another.

'The Economist' of December 1 2001 reported that in 2000 only a quarter of European merger and takeover deals spanned European borders, and almost 35 percent were purely domestic (the rest involved non-European companies). They compared this with the USA where more than half of all deals are made across state borders and only 17 percent within an individual state.

Most significantly of all, the growth that has taken place in the euro-zone over the last three years has depended to a large degree on the weakness of the euro against other currencies, notably the dollar, rather than on the success of the euro project.

And now, even with a low value for the currency the euro-zone is running a deficit on the current account of the balance of payments, while output growth is a mere 1.4 percent per year and industrial production across the zone is falling sharply.

The launch of a common currency has not provided the basis for a durable upturn in the European economies. Rather, for the euro-zone as a whole, just as for Germany, a brief period of moderate growth fuelled by exports to the rest of the world which were encouraged by the speculative boom in the USA, is now coming to an end as the boom subsides.

This is likely to intensify both strategic debates on the way forward for European integration and the attacks on the working class which accompany such debates.

On the response of workers to such attacks depends not just the future of the stability pact but also the prospect for laying the basis for future struggles against neo-liberalism in Europe over the coming period.

Prepare now to fight referendum!

Alan Thornett

The introduction of the Euro in 11 of the 15 countries of the EU has been completed. No amount of jingoism from the British tabloids can hide the fact that from the point of view of European capitalism it has been a great success.

At the level of logistics, this was the biggest operation of its kind ever undertaken. On the political and economic level it was an event on the scale of the Marshall Plan, in the immediate post war period, or the original launch of the European Economic Community in 1957.

Rhetoric in the British media about the weakness of the Euro against the pound sterling - which have been based on current economic conditions - should not obscure the overall significance of what the introduction of the Euro represents.

The sheer size of the zone the Euro now covers - Germany, France, Italy, Austria, Belgium, Finland, Holland, Ireland, Greece Portugal and Luxembourg - already makes the it a super-currency second only to the dollar, and a major new player in world markets.

Politically it represents the biggest single step yet towards a European super-state - the project favoured by the most powerful sections of the European bourgeoisie.

This is a major development of the EU as an overtly anti-working class institution, aimed at increasing the rate of exploitation of the working class in its member states and destroying welfare provision won in the post-war period.

The ruling class in Britain has been deeply split on this project, particularly since the Single European Act of 1986, between its previous world role and alliance with the USA and the needs of European capital. The split remains in full force, but the dominant section of British capital - as now represented by New Labour - backs full membership of the EU.

The Single European Act was designed precisely to challenge what was then Japanese pre-eminence in the world economy.

It marked the transition from what had been until then a mainly economic common market or customs union (aimed largely

at avoiding further European wars) towards the highly political project of the European Union. Today its central aim is to challenge the dominance of US capital.

The single currency was the core provision contained in the Maastricht Treaty signed in 1992. Maastricht takes away the ability of individual nation states to fix interest rates, the most important fiscal lever available to them, and puts it in the hands of an un-elected European Central Bank.

restrictions on balance of trade deficits and inflation levels.

It imposed an economic framework that put the Europe of Maastricht firmly within the neo-liberal agenda of the USA, the IMF and the World Bank.

As Andy Kilmister's article points out, the operation of the convergence criteria, which have now become the stability pact, has just been demonstrated with the stark warnings by the European Central Bank to Germany.



EU leaders, laughing all the way to the European Central Bank - at workers' expense

The Treaty is a profoundly neo-liberal document, requiring the break-up of nationalised industries and widespread privatisation.

Maastricht also contained provisions for a common foreign and defence policy and elements of social policy under the Social Chapter. Other measures, such as a common immigration and asylum policy under the Schengen agreement, were developed soon after the introduction of Maastricht.

The demise of the Exchange Rate Mechanism in 1992 demonstrated just how difficult it would be to maintain the stability of a single currency that straddled a multiplicity of diverse economies across Europe.

And the Euro comes to Europe at a time when there are 20 million unemployed inside the EU and 50 million people living below the poverty line, much of this a direct result of job losses caused by preparation for the Euro.

The Maastricht treaty's answer to stability was the qualification clauses for membership of the single currency, the so-called 'convergence criteria'. This placed a strict limit on government borrowing of 3% of GDP, along with



Internationalist message: the anti Maastricht demo in Cardiff, organised by Euro march campaign

ship but none of the advantages and influence that comes with membership of the single currency.

New Labour's view is that now the Euro is on the streets, some of the xenophobic "keep the pound" opposition to the Euro will weaken as people use it when they travel to other EU countries and see the advantages at that level.

A referendum is therefore likely before the end of this parliament or early in the next.

Blair will get the full support of the TUC and most of the trade union leaders in fighting for a "yes" vote. The TUC has led the pack as enthusiastic supporters of the whole European project, hoping that a few crumbs from the European table will compensate for their total lack of fight against the government and employers in this country.

It is time now for the left to begin the preparation for a socialist, anti-nationalistic, campaign against the Euro - based on the defence of jobs, services and democracy.

Unfortunately the left has lost the initiative on this in recent times but it needs to regain it if there is to be an effective socialist voice in the campaign around a referendum.

Germany's only way of avoiding heavy penalties this will be to cut public spending.

At the same time the arrival of the Euro will accelerate the restructuring of the European economy, under way since the Maastricht Treaty, through mergers, takeovers, and strengthening the domination of the multinational corporations.

Whilst at the present time most individual countries in the EU have some involvement in the production of most goods and services across Europe, there is no reason why this should be the

case under a single currency.

Why should such things be duplicated when the degree of protection given by the existence of individual currencies is gone and the single market complete?

The strongest will survive, the weakest will go to the wall. Production and services will be even further rationalised and still more jobs will go.

In Britain Blair is determined to enter the single currency as soon as he can be sure of winning a referendum. British capitalism cannot accept a halfway house situation where they have EU member-

Clash of dates with LCDTU

A meeting between the representatives of the Socialist Alliance and Liaison Committee for the defence of Trade Unions (LCDTU) failed to resolve the problem that both organisations have called trade union conferences for the same day - March 16th.

The SA took a decision at the end of last year to hold a trade union conference on that day only to find in January that the LCDTU had a conference on the same date. The SA promptly approached the LCDTU and proposed a joint conference, even being prepared to adjust the format of the conference if that was necessary to make it possible.

A further meeting is to take place but a joint conference now looks extremely unlikely. The conference will be quite different in size and content, of course. The SA conference is expected to be between 700 and 1,000 people, whilst the LCDTU con-

ference is being held in a room with a seating capacity of 80 - although it will certainly have more general secretaries present.

The LCDTU is the trade union campaign of the CPB, and has been going for over 30 years. In the 1970s it played an ambiguous role as the unofficial movement with the biggest influence within the trade unions.

Its conferences were tightly controlled, generally to the exclusion of the Trotskyists. Although today it has suffered a big decline and represents only a fraction of the forces it represented in the 70s or even the 80s, a joint conference between it and the Socialist Alliance would represent a rather historic uniting of forces which could only be to the benefit of the left in the unions and the working class movement.

The Socialist Alliance should therefore continue to press for this up to and beyond March 16.

Socialist Alliance and the Euro

The introduction of the Euro on January 1 has given new urgency to new Labour's plans for a referendum on Britain's membership of the single currency.

Blair thinks that the introduction of the Euro on the streets will open up a window of opportunity in which a referendum can be won as people travel in the Euro-zone and see the benefit of a single currency at that level.

This poses a challenge to the left in general and to the Socialist Alliance in particular - which should have a perspective of putting itself at the centre of the campaign for a no vote.

There is a problem, however. Although the SA adopted a position on the single currency for its manifesto in last year's general election, this was a line that all the SA's component organisations could accept - rather than a line that would hold water in a referendum.

The manifesto said the following:

"For a democratic and federal Europe based on solidarity and co-operation. Against the Europe of the bosses, the unelected European Central Bank, and the creation of 'Fortress Europe' as a bastion of racism and exploitation. Against British nationalism and the raising of barriers between nations in Europe. No to the monetarist criteria for European Monetary Union - we neither advocate the Euro or defend the pound".

In fact the organisations involved in the SA are divided on how to vote in a referendum - and the SA as a whole has taken no position on this question.

Whilst the SWP has an analysis which would imply a vote no in an election (as do the Socialist Party, who have walked out of the SA) the CPGB, AWL and Workers Power already advocate an abstention.

Abstainers

Strongest of the abstainers (if that is not a contradiction in terms) is the AWL. They see the EU as a mixture of progressive features with others that are unacceptable. They are strongly opposed to any call for withdrawal, and call for reform.

They argue that it is up to the capitalists how they organise themselves and we should be neutral on the issue of the introduction of the Euro - simply fighting capitalism whatever form it takes. They counterpose the EU and the Euro to international workers solidarity and caricature those who oppose the euro as supporters of the pound.

This is a strange position to take. If the capitalist class change their form of rule (either on a national or international level) in a way which is detrimental to the working class (i.e. to one that is more effective in carrying through attacks on our rights) we should oppose it.

This does not mean we support the existing form of rule -

it means we are opposed to a worse form.

We take this attitude to different bourgeois governments: we don't just say that they are all capitalist. The idea that we could have been indifferent to the Thatcher governments of the 1980s or Berlusconi in Italy today turns political reality on its head.

When we say we are opposed to the single currency, this does not mean that we support the pound. It means that we are opposed to the alternative on offer at this time.

We oppose a reorganisation that is to the detriment of the working class. We have no interest in how many currencies the ruling class wants - only in how it will affect the class struggle. We oppose the single currency, not by supporting the pound but by defending the jobs and services and democracy that it puts

Europe. No concessions to a transitional approach there then!

They put it this way: "The workers of the EU must reject attempts to withdraw 'their' nation states from this entity, but rather combine our forces more urgently and militantly to overthrow the bureaucracies in each state and in Europe as a whole. We want to build a Socialist United States of Europe with real democratic rights for all and free from exploitation by the big corporations and militarism".

Don't we all? The CPGB argue that although the EU is indeed a reactionary institution, and that the Euro project is aimed directly at the European working class, they cannot call for a no vote because the campaign against it is reactionary as well.

Well, it depends which campaign the CPGB is talking about. If they are talking about the xenophobic campaign of the Tory right, they are correct.

If they are talking about an anti-nationalist working class campaign, organised by socialists, and based on the defence of jobs, services and democracy, they are

wrong.

In any case, it is a strange idea to suggest that those of us who don't give a damn for the pound, and oppose the Euro from an internationalist standpoint, should abstain from voting against an anti-working class project of this kind... simply because others will also vote against it from a completely different political standpoint.

The problem with these positions of the AWL, Workers Power, and the CPGB is that in the event of a referendum they help to ensure that the agenda on the single currency remains in the hands of the Tory right - something which has already been worsened by the confusion on the British left.

Sidelines

Their policies would leave the left wringing our hands on the sidelines, with nothing to say, whilst the Tories held forth. There would be no socialist strand to the debate.

This would be a disaster in a referendum. Precisely what is needed is a campaign against the Euro based on the interests of the working class, and with the Socialist Alliance at the centre of it.

This would be impossible on the basis of abstention. It makes no sense to working people for us to argue that the single currency is such a big threat to jobs and welfare that we are going to abstain!

The SA needs to open a discussion on these issues, to ensure that by the time decision making time comes any disagreements which remain are not the result of a lack of political dialogue.



under threat.

The AWL counterpose 'workers' unity' to the EU and the Euro. But workers' unity is a concrete issue. We always strive for it, but it takes place under given conditions. We are not in favour seeing the conditions of workers worsen in order to provoke an international response - not least because that is likely in practice to have the opposite effect.

Struggles

But there is another aspect to this. Although international solidarity is extremely important, the reality is that most struggles take place at the national level - even when the attack is international. This was the case even with the bulk of the strikes and demonstrations in different European countries against the introduction of the convergence criteria in the second half of the 1990s.

Therefore to weaken the struggle at the national level is to weaken it at the international level.

Workers Power rightly see the EU as a union of big business interests manipulated by organisations like the Round Table of European Business Leaders and the European Employers Association. They think it is a vehicle for neo-liberal economics aimed at the oppressed of the third world. They think it is racist towards immigrants and refugees.

Yet they call for an abstention rather than a 'no' vote because they want Britain to stay inside the EU in order to call for simultaneous social revolutions in each of the EU countries and then for the formation of a Socialist United States of

What is Socialist Party line on a new workers' party?

Letter from John Malcolm

In **Socialist Outlook 51** the following statement appears in Alan Thornett's article on the Socialist Party:

"The use of the word 'mass' is crucial. Whilst the SP calls for a new mass party, it is opposed to the formation of a new party of the left which is not, at this stage, a mass party; for example the Scottish Socialist Party or a party on same lines in England - even though it originally welcomed the formation of the Socialist Labour Party by Arthur Scargill in the mid 1990s".

This is completely false. We do not oppose a new party of the left even if it falls far short of the term mass party. Neither do we oppose the SSP: in fact our section is a crucial part of this party.

Alan Thornett replies

SP's pamphlet is just as bad as its statement!

John Malcolm argues that I was wrong to suggest that the statement showed that while the Socialist Party is in favour of a new mass workers party at some future date, it is opposed, in the meantime, to the formation of a new party of the left which is not at this stage a mass party.

My article in SO 51 was a response to the statement issued by the Socialist Party Executive following that organisation's walkout from the Socialist Alliance conference last December.

I argued that it was clear from that statement that the SP would logically be opposed, for example, to a new party in England on the lines of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) in Scotland.

John Malcolm advised me, for my enlightenment, to read the SP's pamphlet **The Case for a New Workers Party**. I have taken his advice - and found that not only does the pamphlet contain the same political line as the EC statement (although the EC statement is a cruder version) but that my criticisms of the EC statement apply with equal force to the pamphlet.

The pamphlet does indeed fail to call anywhere for a new party that is not at this stage a mass party, and remarkably it fails to say anything at all about the rise of the SSP.

In this 24page A4 pamphlet, entirely about a new party of the working class in Britain, the only mention of the SSP is in a half-sentence aside about a by-election result in Scotland!

If, as John Malcolm claims, the SP fully supports the existence of the SSP, this is a very strange way of showing it. The SSP is after all the most successful new broad party of the left launched anywhere in Britain for a long time. The

We do not see the Socialist Alliance as being a party of the left, although it could have and may still develop in this direction. The SLP at the time of its launch had far more potential than the existing forces in the SA, and could have developed into a party of the left.

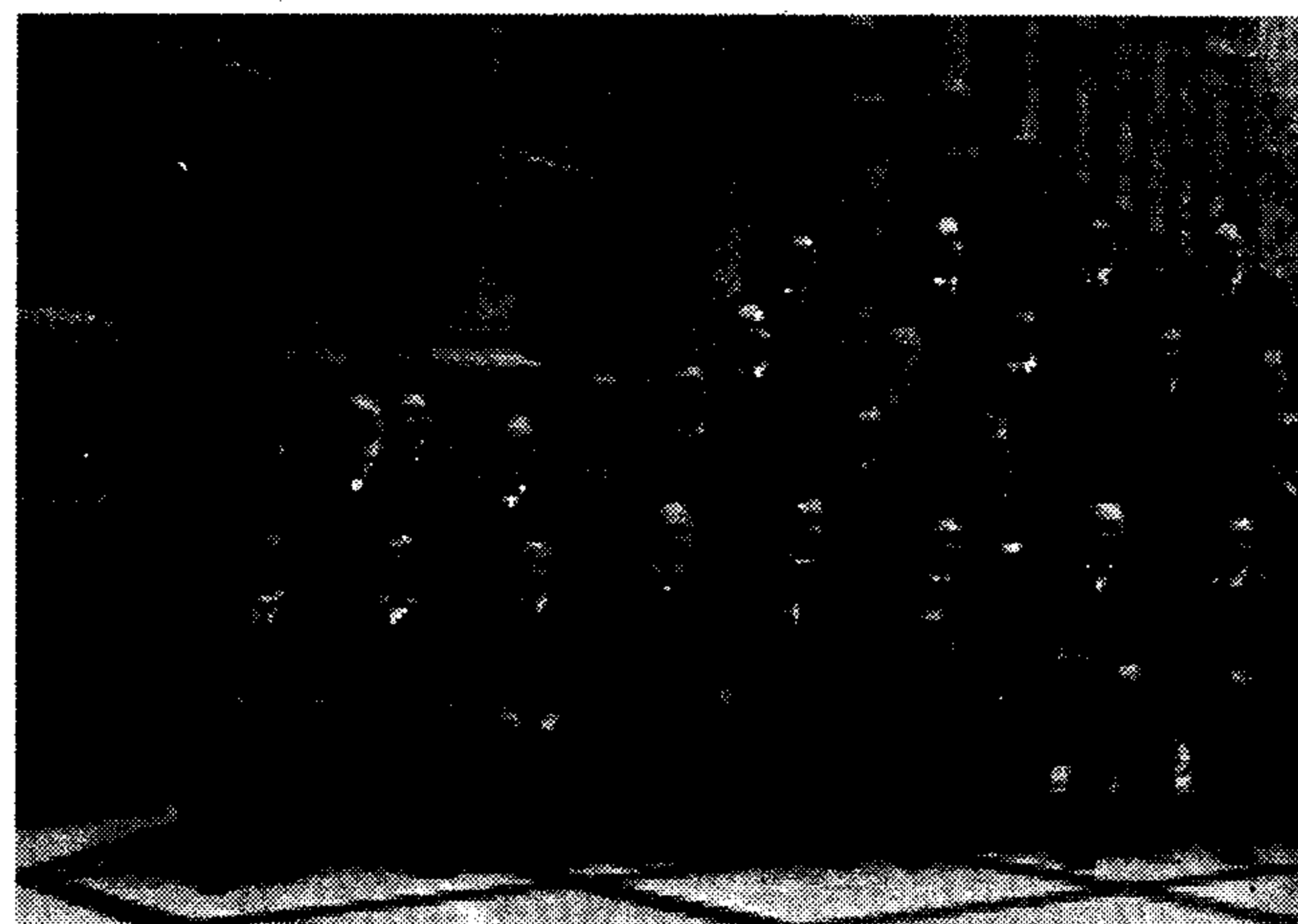
We need to make the distinction between what are the objective conditions and what is needed to advance the working class.

We do not see the development of a mass party as linear rather as a complex process with various forces and formations contributing to this development.

There can be no shortcuts however much will depend on exploiting the likely favourable objective conditions for socialist consciousness in the next period.

I would expect an accurate reflection of the SP position from a serious organisation.

I suggest you read or even review the latest pamphlet on the mass workers party.



Things have changed a little since these Liberal & Labour MPs arrived at Westminster in 1906: but SP don't seem to have noticed

idea that it does not warrant a mention (let alone a thorough analysis) in a pamphlet specifically on the formation of new left parties is bizarre.

The overall framework of the pamphlet, like the statement, is one of economic determinism. It argues that an inevitable economic crisis will trigger an inevitable explosion of working class struggle and a new mass party will emerge out of this.

The class content of this party is unknown, or at least unspecified. We can only assume that it would be old Labour recreated.

Meanwhile preparation for that eventuality should be limited to loose, federal Socialist Alliances, and various other forms of resistance, which crucially avoid moving towards party structures or becoming parties at this stage.

The model for the SP's new mass party - expounded at great length in the pamphlet - is, predictably, the formation of the Labour Party a hundred years ago!

True, this model (spun in the right way) can be twisted to suit the SP's current argument about federalism. But to entertain the idea - after 100 years of social democracy, the rise and fall of Stalinism, the emergence of radically dif-

ferent social conditions, and with a trade union movement that has been through a long period of decline - that the early formation of the LP provides the tactical model for the emergence of a new party today is to lose touch with reality.

The formation of the Labour Party was characterised by an extended, tortuous, and incomplete break from Liberalism. The task today is different. It is to reassemble and regenerate the socialist forces scattered by the march to the right of new Labour and the collapse of Stalinism.

It is to link these forces to those, particularly young people, who are radicalising against the new world order. In the unions it is to fight social partnership and redefine the link between the unions and new Labour.

The best way of advancing such a political fight today, and preparing for a new mass party of the future, is not the recreation of old Labour - even if that was possible.

It is the formation of new parties which like the SSP are not yet mass parties but establish the model of broad inclusive socialist parties which can be the basis of a mass development when it comes.

Scottish Socialists set their sights on new targets

Gordon Morgan

The Scottish Socialist Party will hold its 5th Annual Conference in Dundee on March. This will be the first conference held since the SWP joined, its first delegate conference and the main preparation for the 2003 Scottish Parliament Elections. Over 500 delegates are expected to attend.

Following criticisms last year that conference papers were not sent out in advance, there has been ample preparation this time.

Resolutions were submitted early December, compositing before Christmas, amendments by early January and compositing a month before conference, reports presented by all National officials. Electronic distribution ensures that all branches have had the opportunity to debate contentious issues.

The reports point to the significant advances the SSP has made in the last year. We stood in all 72 seats at the General Election and achieved a national profile with 3.3% of the vote.

In Parliament the SSP followed through the success around the abolition of Warrant Sales by presenting bills – which have been

rejected – to replace Council and Water Taxes with income based taxes, to call for Trident to be scrapped and to reintroduce free school meals.

The Party has been at the front in campaigns for drug liberalisation, anti Trident, anti globalisation, anti racism and pro refugees, against privatisation and Stock Transfer and of course against the War.

Our members have been active in several successful industrial disputes including playing leading roles in the medical secretaries' dispute.

Our paper, *Scottish Socialist Voice* moved in May from a fortnightly 12 page paper to a weekly 16 page obtainable in most newsagents. Membership increased significantly with the SWP joining. The Party now has between 2,000 and 3,000 members of whom 1/3 are women and has 66 branches.

The SSP has played a role in the international movement – sending delegations to all the main European demonstrations in Genoa, Brussels etc. We participated in the European Anti-Capitalist Left conference in Brussels and held a fact finding visit to socialists in Pakistan.

The most contentious issue in the lead up to conference has proved to be the method for

selecting candidates for the forthcoming Scottish parliamentary elections. The Scottish Parliament and MSPs are the focus of public and media attention in Scotland and thus the elections in 2003 are extremely important.

If the SSP can win more than one seat, as most polls say is likely, then the possibility exists to qualitatively strengthen our influence beyond its current base of support. The choice of electable candidates is therefore crucial – it is vital to ensure at least some women are in these positions.

At this stage the SSP cannot win by first past the post. Any successful candidate would be elected from the top of the list of additional members. The SSP already has a policy of 50/50 in terms of gender, so it is essential that 4 men and 4 women are selected to top the 8 regional lists.

The women's network proposed a way of achieving this: to have elections for a male and a female list in each region with the National Council deciding in advance which regions would be topped by men and which by women.

The oppositionists who claim to support 50/50 oppose this proposal on the grounds of giv-



ing excess control to the National Council.

Unfortunately their alternative proposal would not be likely to deliver 50/50. I strongly support the women's network proposal, and believe the top two additional regions where we are likely to have electoral success should have women topping the list. This is likely to be one of the most controversial debates at conference.

Another area of discussion will be around what our attitude should be in the referendum on the Euro. The Executive is proposing we have a special conference to discuss this. Many members including myself believe this conference should decide to support a Vote No position.

There is no one arguing for a Yes vote: however, a small group believe the SSP should

abstain in the referendum.

I believe the vast majority support the Vote No position, and that we should build a campaign leading to a public conference rather than delay the decision.

Last year's conference set up a working party to look at making the SSP's structures more democratic. Following the SWP joining work began on this, however, anti War activity has delayed the group reaching conclusions.

A special conference may be held to consider these.

There are however, a number of organisation changes proposed for this conference which should improve the efficiency of the party apparatus and the accessibility of information to members.

At present the SSP has no National Membership system or bank account. Each region

has traditionally maintained its own membership list and finances. With the rapid expansion of membership, these systems effectively broke down.

It is now proposed to formally establish national accounting and membership procedures and improve feedback to regions and branches. This should end the tragic situation where new contacts wishing to join get their applications lost or not followed up.

The party is also proposing to expand its apparatus to allow the National Secretary to become partly full time and expand the number of regional organisers.

These proposed changes are ambitious and require additional finances: however, they are vital if we are to increase our profile and support in the lead up to the Scottish elections.

Weekly Worker echoes SWT management lies

Alan Thornett

The *Weekly Worker* (No. 417) carries a nasty front page political attack on Greg Tucker, in its article dealing with the South West Trains strike. It also has some bizarre views about the strike itself.

It argues that SWT are being successful in their attempt to avoid any disruption on strike days, that the strike is all about raising the profile of some RMT members, and that the union should have balloted its members on the wage rise imposed by management.

All three views are, of course, those of management. It would have been useful if WW had spent more time talking to the strikers and not just getting its line from the bourgeois press.

Scab managers are undermining the dispute – but not at all to the level that SWT claim. SWT is losing many millions every strike day. Rather than dwell on management "success" it would be useful to look at what can be done to make the strike

more effective.

The accusation that this is a dispute manufactured for political ends is precisely the way that SWT boss Souter and the bourgeois media have tried to undermine the action.

It is not true. From start to finish this is a dispute about low pay and the effects of privatisation. It is a disgusting slur on the majority of RMT members who voted for the strike that they can be manipulated in this way.

And WW's call to ballot the members every time management make an offer well short of the demand seems to be a textbook way of how not to run a strike.

The CPGB view that this would have resulted in acceptance by the members (and therefore would have brought an end to the action) is contrary to all indications at that time. In fact the imposition stiffened the resolve of the strikers.

The CPGB is entitled to advocate disastrous tactics for the strike (if they must) or to misunderstand the

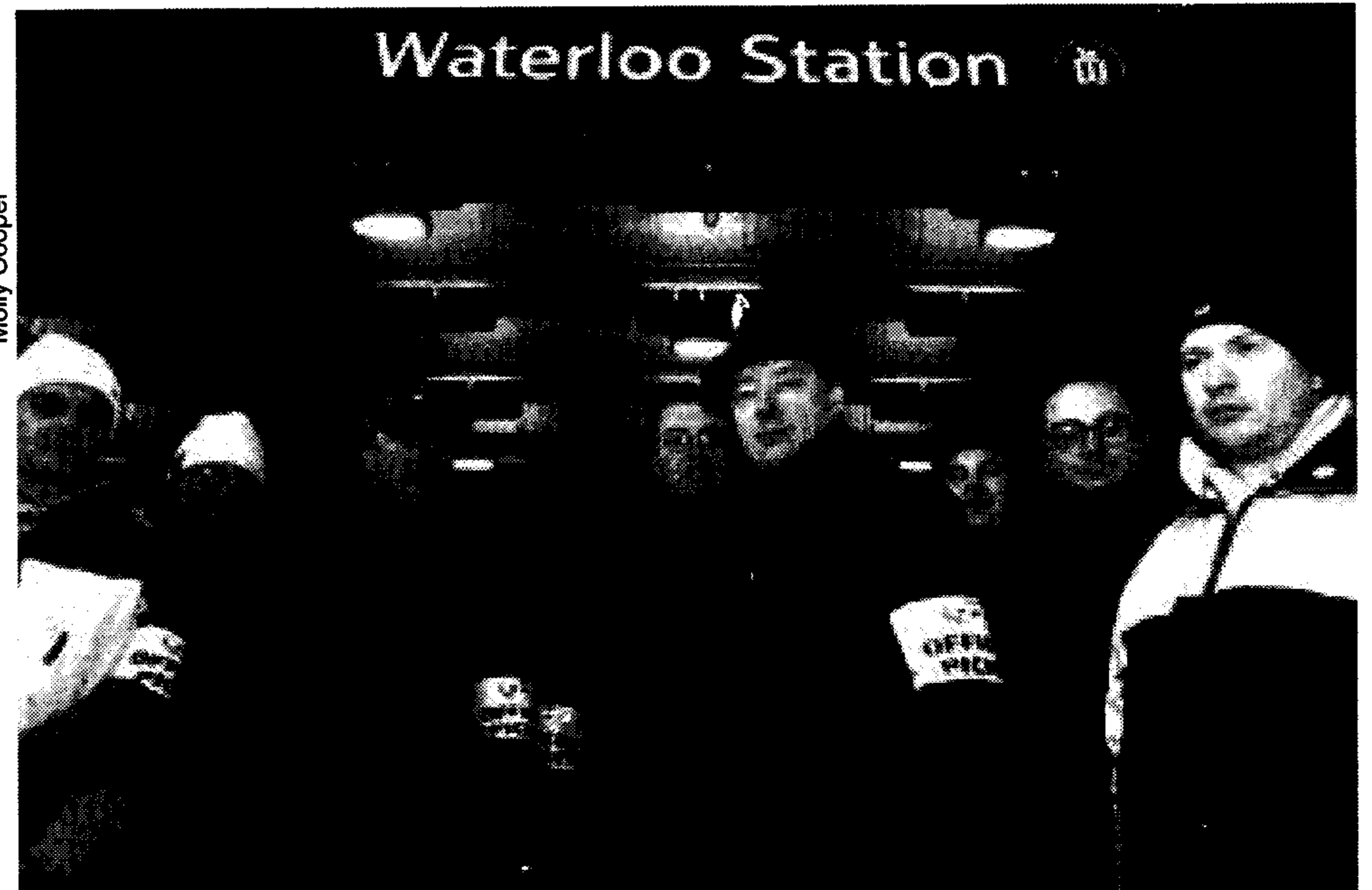
dynamics of it.

But to attack Greg Tucker (and strangely also Bob Crow) for failing to give the Socialist Alliance a profile in the strike by hiding his association with it, for "being a trade unionist first and a politician second" and for failing to give political leadership in the strike is either to completely misunderstand the links between politics and trade union work, or a wilful distortion.

How can a high profile trade unionist who stands as a Socialist Alliance election candidate be accused of putting trade unionism first and politics second? It stands reality on its head.

In fact Greg Tucker better represents the link between politics and trade union struggle than almost anyone on the left at the present time.

Greg stood as a candidate for the Alliance, took three weeks off to do it, was constantly attacked in the media (mostly the *Evening Standard*) as a result – and then victimised for it on his first



Molly Cooper

day back to work. To argue that such a comrade is putting trade unionism before politics is crazy.

In fact it is to Greg's credit that after being constantly attacked in the media for his political involvement with the Alliance, he was still – after months of delay – able to get the support of his members to fight his victimisation.

That shows that he has been able successfully to combine public political activity for the SA and maintain a solid base amongst his members.

Nor does it help the CPGB's case to accuse Bob Crow of not giving the SA a high enough profile. Bob Crow is not a member of the SA. We hope he will join, but at the moment he has only

given limited support for the Alliance. It is clear that he is not going to promote it at every opportunity.

Of course Greg argues the strikers' case at every opportunity – that is his job as a socialist as well as a trade unionist. Clearly, though, in speaking as a representative of the strikers he cannot conflate that with promoting the Socialist Alliance.

Greg has been correct in carefully distinguishing between those points where he acts as a representative of RMT members, and those points where he speaks for himself as a Socialist alliance activist.

In attacking him over this the CPGB show that they don't understand the relationship between politics and industrial struggle.

In fact Greg has given the Alliance a lot of very important publicity and profile which we need to build on, particularly for the March 16 trade union conference called by the Alliance.

Apart from Greg's tiring round of Socialist Alliance public meetings across the country, the political work he has done has been shown in a practical sense by the fact that a number of the strikers have joined the SA and others are coming to the SA TU conference.

Members and supporters of the Alliance will no doubt be surprised to find that the CPGB, which is also supposed to support the Alliance, feels able to offer so little in the way of solidarity to one of the SA's most high profile activists.

Signs of political life in the unions

SOMETHING is stirring! More and more groups of workers, especially in the public sector, are deciding to take action to defend and improve their conditions.

The excellent result of 65% of postal workers voting yes is the latest example of this. Hopefully postal workers will soon be joining workers in the rail industry and civil service in standing up for their rights.

As Pat Sikorski points out on page 11, UNISON health workers are also discussing action – while NUT General Secretary Doug McAvoy has agreed to ballot London teachers with a view to action before Easter.

We shouldn't get carried away. We are starting from very small beginnings.

The trade unions have been battered by many defeats over the last two of decades. Though there is a shift, the number of days lost through strike action still remains pitifully low. But we need to build on what is now developing.

In the second term of a Labour government, increasing numbers of workers are asking why they should feed the hand that bites them.

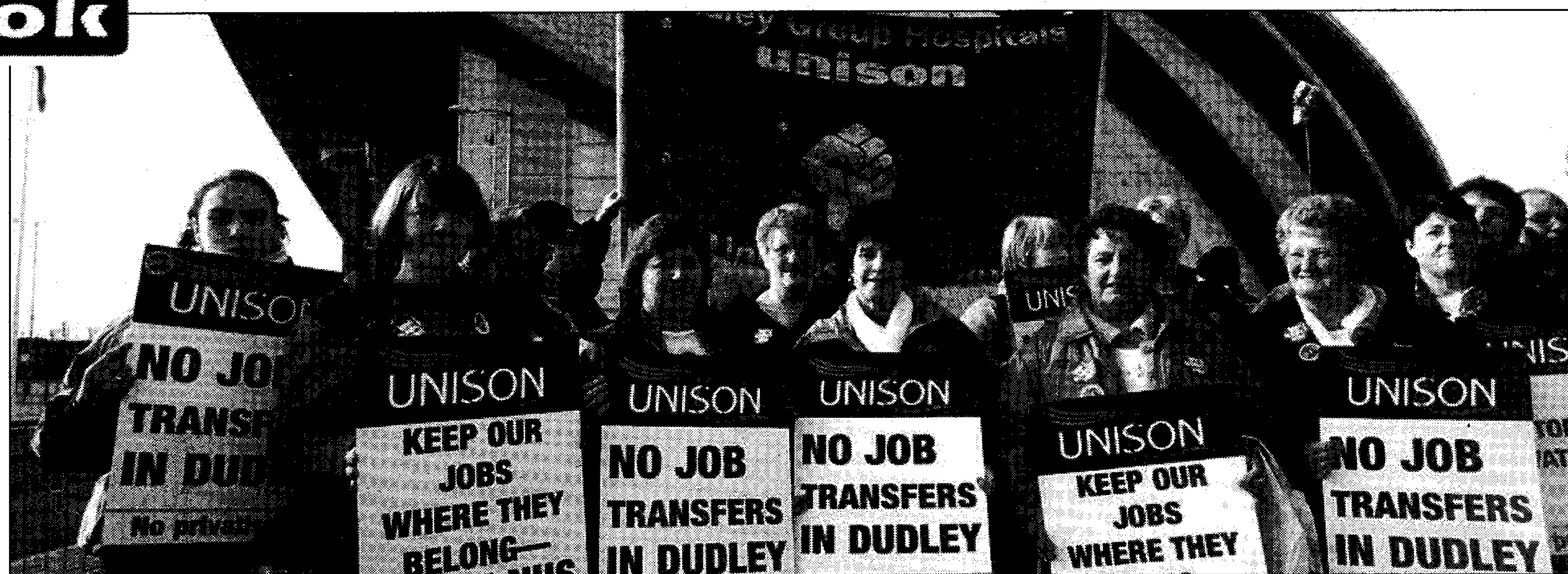
New Labour is storming ahead with privatisation – most recently in terms of London Underground. Blair and many of his front bench who are sponsored by a union are attacking workers in struggle as fundamentalists and wreckers.

This is why the Socialist Alliance Trade union conference on March 16 is the right initiative at the right time.

More than a month before the conference, over 400 activists have already signed up to debate the way forward on the political fund and the next steps in the fight against privatisation.

Join us.

Andrew Ward



Why feed the hand that bites you?

Fred Leplat

At last year's UNISON conference, a resolution was clearly adopted on a card vote committing the NEC to consult the union at levels on the future of political funds and to report on proposals at the 2002 Conference.

The NEC pulled all the stops to denigrate the resolution "The Labour government – What do we get for our money?" However delegates realised that it was time to "stop feeding the hand that bites us".

The political funds have been controversial since UNISON's formation seven years ago. The union has two funds: the General Political Fund (GPF) and the Affiliated Political Fund (APF) reflecting the origins of the constituent unions but they are both controversial as neither fund is accountable to UNISON conference.

The GPF is used for general campaigning, while it is through the APF that the union maintains its links with the Labour Party. Union relations with, and representatives to the Labour Party are determined by the APF Committee. While all members may pay into the APF, only Labour Party members may participate in the APF structure.

There has been for a while

dissatisfaction about the lack of democracy of both funds and in particular with the APF. However, matters came to a head last year after Labour's re-election to government.

After 5 years of continuing privatisation and lack of investment in public services, UNISON members are fed up. They jeered Stephen Byers when he addressed conference, and went on to vote for a review of the union's political funds.

However despite this decision there has so far been no consultation about the future of the funds. Instead there has been a sustained exercise to promote the APF. Literature is now being sent regularly to stewards about the work of the APF and its successes in influencing the

Labour government!

A consultation document and questionnaire about the APF has been sent out to all branches, but union officials claim that it is unrelated with the general consultation that the NEC has been instructed to carry out.

In January, UNISON's NEC at last announced the commencement of the consultation for this year, which will be carried out in two stages. The dragging out of the consultation exercise is clearly designed to allow the APF to promote itself in order to avoid any changes to its functioning.

However, as the government is continuing with its privatisation programme through hospital and housing PFI schemes, stock transfers of estates, attacks on working conditions and

poor pay rises, UNISON members are increasingly exasperated with the lack of action by the union's leadership in defense of public services and jobs. They also do not understand why we should finance MPs and a party that is attacking us.

While advertisements in the newspapers and the cinemas are welcome, they are no substitute for a national campaign including industrial action against privatisation – or at the very least a demonstration on a Saturday in London. Such a demonstration had been agreed at last year's conference, but has been dropped.

UNISON's political funds clearly need to be changed. The United Left, a campaign of left activists in UNISON, has decided that the political funds should be placed

under the democratic control of the whole membership, and that they should be opened up to allow the financing of candidates from other than just from the Labour Party, provided that they support UNISON policy.

The small but significant successes of the Socialist Alliance, Scottish Socialist Party and independents such as the anti-PFI candidates in local and parliamentary elections in Kidderminster, now put this matter on the agenda.

This initial position of the United Left needs to be developed. UNISON should have one political fund, used for general campaigning, the affiliation to the Labour Party or other parties, and the sponsoring of election candidates.

For the time being, we should reject any moves to disaffiliate from the Labour Party, as in the absence of a sufficiently credible national alternative on the left, it could be seen as shift to the right.

A debate has occurred in the United Left about the possibility of a "third political fund".

This position is promoted by the Socialist Party, who argue that this is the only rule change that could be allowed onto the agenda of conference.

However, such a fund would easily be dismissed as a "trot fund", and even if successful would only attract a handful of subscribers from union members, and would thus be doomed to being an irrelevant diversion.

The United Left clearly rejected this position, but it is feared that Socialist Party members will continue campaigning for this position in the union.

The debate on the future of the political funds is the opening of a debate if the future of the political representation of union members.

With all the democratic channels in the Labour Party closed down and a government that is a bunch of "privatisation fundamentalists", the debate on the need for a new workers party is opening up.

GMB pulls £2m from Labour

A very different approach to the Political Fund has been taken by the GMB trade union, which is increasingly positioning itself as a rival to UNISON in the recruitment of public sector workers.

The GMB voted early in 2001 to withhold £1million of its planned political fund contributions to the Labour Party over the next four years, and instead to spend this in campaigning against privatisation.

The result has been a succession of investigative reports, news stories and high-profile, hard-hitting adverts in the national

press, which have been so successful that each advert has recruited new members for the GMB.

Buoyed up by this success and angered by Labour's intensified rush towards further privatisation, the GMB's National Executive decided in January to double the deduction from Labour's funding to £2m over the four years to the next election.

They also voted to refuse GMB support to any Labour candidates in May's local elections who support Blair's privatisation policies.

Fire-fighters first on the scene

Socialist Outlook talked to Matt Wrack of the Fire Brigades Union

SO: The debate that has developed in many unions in the last few years over the political fund has been gathering more and more steam, as increasing numbers of trade unionists feel that the Labour government they are funding is stabbing them in the back.

But last year's FBU conference went further than any other union has so far done. What do you think were the factors that specifically affected FBU members that

led to that decision?

MW: Our debate goes back to at least 1996 when a motion was carried calling for a review of the uses of the political fund. It has been building ever since. I think there are three main reasons why last year's decision was carried.

Firstly, virtually all Fire Brigades are run by Labour controlled authorities and FBU members have been campaigning against these authorities for over a decade.

Secondly, there were four Socialist Alliance general election candidates who were FBU members. Obviously under the old policy we were unable even to discuss giving official

union support. Finally, we did not allow the leadership to turn the debate into one about disaffiliation. The resolution carried was about democratisation of the fund and involving the members in decision making. That is a very powerful argument.

SO: Were there any particular tactics the left adopted in putting forward the resolution to last year's conference that you think would be of use to activists in other unions?

MW: I think the fight has to be aimed at democratising the political fund and not seen as an attempt to simply "capture" some money for a particular

organisation. If we are seen to be genuinely supporting democratisation we can draw a much wider layer into the debate, including many Labour Party members.

SO: What has happened since conference and how is the left responding?

MW: Our Executive Council were instructed to bring any necessary rule changes to this year's conference. Instead, but not surprisingly, they have issued a policy statement that seeks to overturn last year's decision, by centralising power into the hands of the Executive. The left needs to ensure that a serious fight is waged to defend last year's decision and, most

importantly, to begin to implement it.

SO: What role do you think the SA trade union conference can play in taking forward the fight over the political fund, and also the fight over job losses and privatisation?

MW: Any opportunity for trade unionists to get together across the various unions is welcome. I see the conference as a forum for debate for trade unionists, rather than as a conference of Socialist Alliance trade unionists. Obviously to achieve anything the conference has to appeal to a wider layer than simply the Socialist Alliance.

Facing 30,000 job losses and private sector onslaught ...

Post workers vote to strike on pay

POSTAL WORKERS have voted by a margin of 2-1 on a 65% turnout to take strike action over pay. This is one of the largest votes for action by a major group of workers in recent years, and is a measure of the anger felt by many over recent developments at Consignia.

The claim is a modest 5% as the first step towards a £300 a week basic wage in 2003, for this low paid group of workers. Consignia's offer is a first step to nowhere. It has offered 2% with strings that include a 1.7% increase for overtime payments, and the removal of driving allowances. The lower offer for overtime can only be seen as a step towards the removal of premium payments altogether.

Although the gap between the offer and the claim is only 3%, the membership is prepared to fight. The CWU made it clear in its publicity that those opposed to strike action should vote no, implying that the union intended to call such action in pursuit of the claim.

But there is also a feeling amongst both activists and the membership that the pay claim is not the main issue confronting the union.

Liberalisation

The real issue is the moves by the New Labour-appointed regulator towards rapid liberalisation of the industry, (far faster than required by EU directives) ... and the 30,000 jobs which Consignia has announced are to go.

Business (junk) mail (50% of the total) is to be opened to competition, and the industry completely deregulated within less than three years.

Deregulation not only threatens massive job loss, and deterioration in pay and conditions at Consignia, but will also directly lead to a drastic reduction of levels of service delivery to rural postal services in particular. It will also probably lead directly to the end of uniform national postal prices, established in the mid 19th Century.

The left wing CWU leadership of Billy Hayes has conducted a not very energetic and so far disastrously unsuccessful lobbying campaign against liberalisation

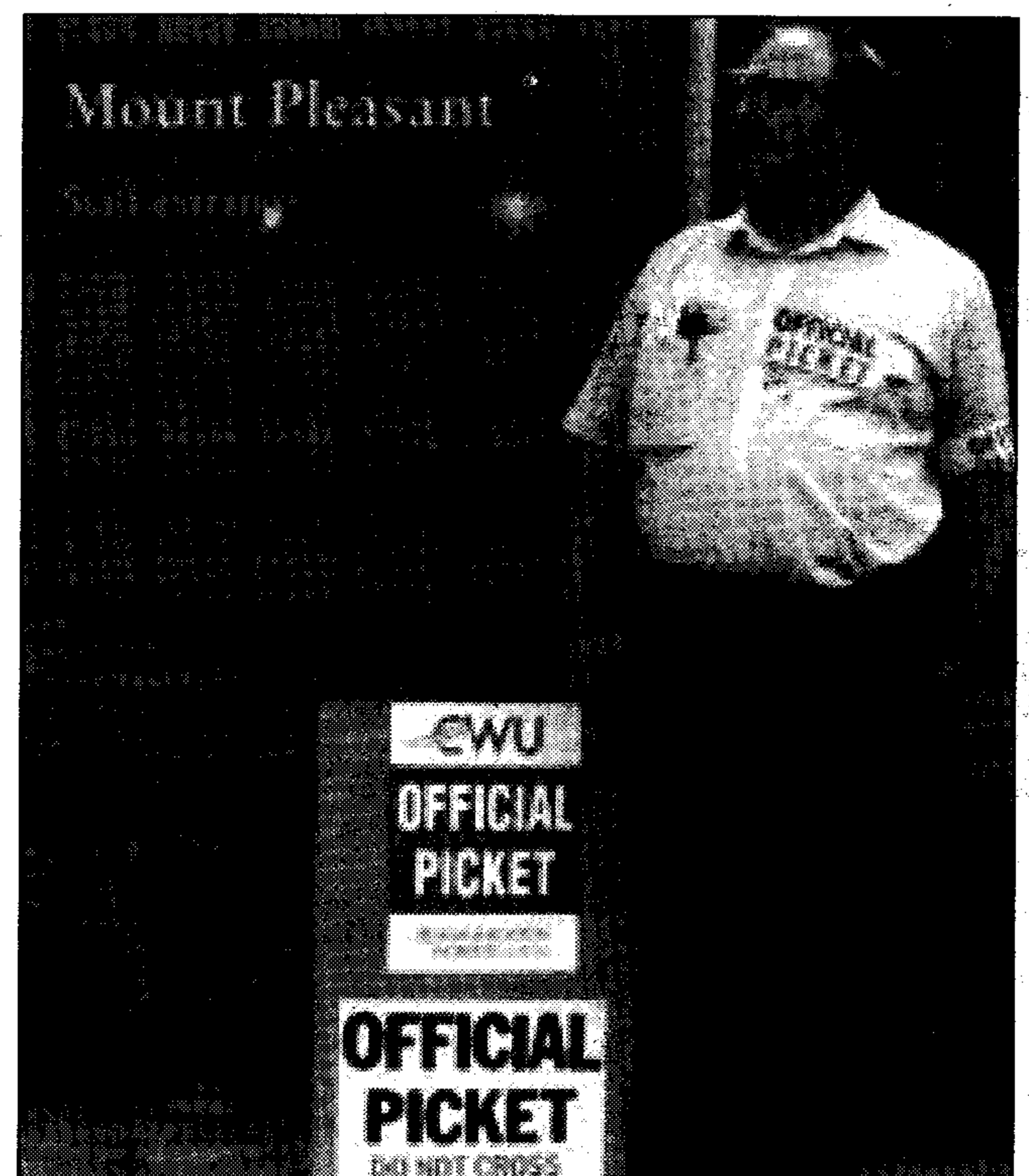
and its consequences, which it is now promising to step up.

But it is wary of mobilising the membership for action over the issue of liberalisation for fear of running foul of the anti-union laws which prohibit the use of industrial action for political ends.

Mobilising

Instead of counterposing action over the pay claim to action in defence of the postal service, as the union leadership appears to be doing in practice, action for the pay claim should be seen as a way of mobilising the membership which if successful could also be a first step to mobilisation over competition and jobs.

Consignia, mindful of its recent losses, and of the



impending threat of competition, is unlikely to go much above its current offer without actual industrial action. The membership has voted massively for a strike.

The union must reject any offer which falls short of the claim, and call strike action. An all out indefinite strike would be the most effective way of making the union's

case, and making its still considerable economic power felt.

It would both prepare postal workers for the battles to come – and be a shot in the arm for the rest of the trade union movement, for most of which this type of action has unfortunately become a distant memory.

Rail strife: the bitter fruits of privatisation

Terry Conway of Socialist Outlook talked on February 8 to Patrick Sikorski, the member of the RMT National Executive Council representing London Transport workers.



Pat Sikorski

SO: There is obviously a lot of action going on in the industry at the moment with disputes on Arriva and South West trains and the overtime ban on ScotRail. Why do you think it has all come together at this moment?

PS: Well it's privatisation that is behind it. With the fragmentation of the industry into so many different operating companies bargaining takes place on a company by company basis.

In some grades such as drivers, and some signal staff which are seen as essential to the operation of the service it has been possible to achieve high pay settlements across the industry.

Individual companies cannot get away with paying less than their rivals because otherwise they won't be able to find enough staff to do these key jobs.

But the RMT, unlike ASLEF, represents all grades in the industry. We want equality of treatment for all members in whatever grade. And we have not been able to achieve that through negotiation alone.

where do you see the dispute going then?

PS: Well we are certainly not going to wait for weeks to see if they offer anything concrete. And if we are still in dispute next week, which I think we will be, then we will be discussing further action.

SO: One of the features of this dispute has been the interference of the government on the side of the company, including through MPs like Keith Hill, who is sponsored by the RMT. What do you think should be done about this?

PS: We have very clear policy on this, agreed at our last AGM, that if Labour continued to act against our interests we would review continuing to give them money. In fact we have had policy in this direction for some time.

And now with the announcement that they are going ahead with the PPP on the tube we will definitely have to review what we are doing.

SO: Well that brings me nicely on to my next question which was about the response to the PPP. Livingstone said last night on Newsnight that the unions can stop the PPP. What do you think the situation is?

PS: Well of course there may be legal challenges. We are particularly concerned about the consultation on the health and safety side.

For example, with the last health and safety report, they

delivered five boxes of documents – hundreds of pages each – and we had only two weeks to respond. It was completely unsatisfactory.

We are also going to be looking at restarting industrial action. It won't be easy to take up where we left off last year, but we will have a serious attempt at it.

We will be discussing with our members on the maintenance side – the people who maintain the tracks, and who maintain the trains.

And things are changing. There is obviously a different mood in the public sector from what there was a year ago with the teachers' ballot on London weighting going ahead now, and some action being planned by UNISON health workers and of course the CWU national action.

The other thing that is different is that these disputes today are being organised from the bottom up, and that of necessity means more rank and file involvement.

Last time round on LUL the dispute was led from the top and based on an alliance with ASLEF that didn't have enough staying power to reverse government policy on PPP.

So this is also a positive change. Of course we will need to make sure there is support at the top, but the



Terry Conway

feeling at the base is more confident I think than a year ago.

SO: I agree with what you say about the importance of rank and file organisation, but at the same time there are crucial elections going on in the union at the minute. How do you think that the outcome of those will affect things?

PS: Bob Crow will almost certainly be declared the winner in the General Secretary Election on February 13. That will give new confidence to the membership – that they have put in place someone with a strong record of supporting their struggles.

Bob has a record of supporting the members in disputes, of fighting privatisation. He will fight for a return to national pay bargaining.

Then we also have the election currently in progress for one of the Assistant General Secretaries, to replace Vernon Hince who will retire in April. The left's candidate is John MacDonald.

If Bob Crow is elected, that will then create a vacancy for the second AGS post, and nominations for that position are likely to open very quickly.

So there is a lot going on at the level of elections.

A tale of two Labour Parties

Farooq Tariq, General Secretary of the Labour Party Pakistan addressed a packed meeting of over 70 people on a wet Friday night in London on January 25. Below we print his speech:

I would like to thank the International Socialist Group for organising this meeting and to thank you all of you that have come in large numbers to hear the point of view of the Labour Party Pakistan and the role we have played in the peace movement in Pakistan.

The Labour Party Pakistan has nothing to do with the Labour Party in Britain. The Labour Party in Britain is on the side of the dictators, on the side of the fundamentalists, on the side of the bombings. We are on the opposite side – on the side of the socialists, the Marxists, the side of those who want to promote peace and human rights with the active participation of the working class.

Comrades, twice in the last 10 days I have visited the border area between India and Pakistan, about 20km from Lahore where I live. We wanted to counter the endless government propaganda pushed by the media saying the peasants in the border area wanted to fight with India, that there is a feeling for war. This is total nonsense.

The LPP, with the help of some NGOs, organised a delegation including journalists – and not a single villager from 75 villages in the area said that they wanted war in Pakistan.

This is probably the first time that the overwhelming majority of Pakistanis are against war with India – very different to 1965 or in 1975 when there was war between us. Then there was a "Crush India" movement launched by fundamentalists but which whipped things up. Now there is a mass sentiment

for peace which is strengthened by the fact that people know what it means if war starts with India over Kashmir.

Today in Pakistan the dictator Musharaf is taking some measures against fundamentalists – the very same people that were promoted not only by sections of the Pakistan Intelligence Service, the ISI, but also by Bush and Blair.

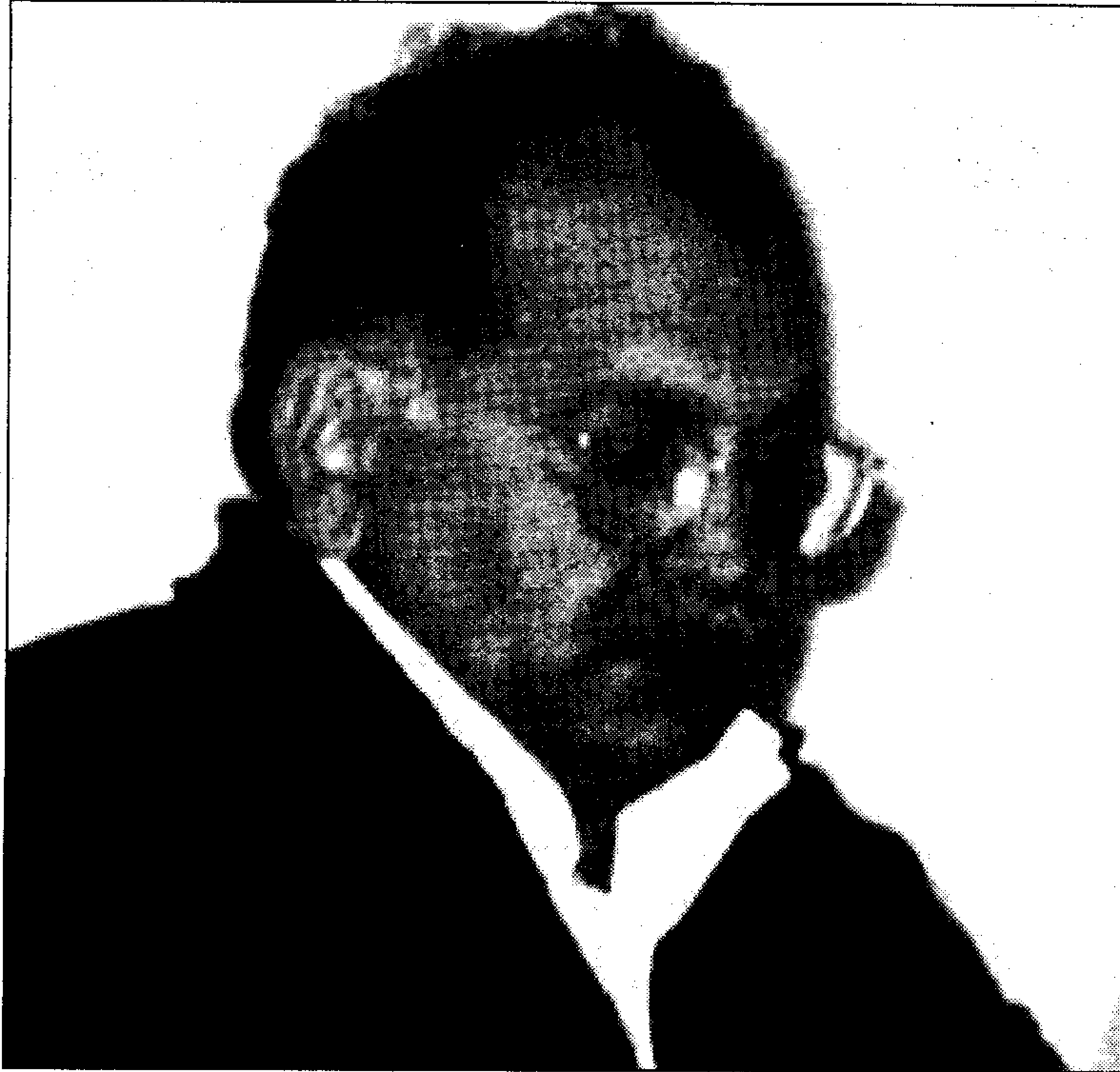
It was their neo-liberal policies that led to the poverty and wretched conditions that allow fundamentalism to develop a base in countries like Pakistan. The ISI wanted to create a war-like situation to justify the existence of a large army in Pakistan. There is an army of 1 million in Pakistan and more than that in India, which is taking up 46% of GNP spent on defence.

But when the fundamentalists get out of control, US imperialism wants people like Musharaf to crack down on them. So Musharaf dutifully announced a ban on some of the terrorist groups. He didn't take these steps because he is a liberal, or a peace loving person.

The measures are very superficial; they don't deal with the real problem. The only way to combat fundamentalism is to deal with its causes.

Musharaf has praised the role of the madrassas – 35,000 schools with over 1 million students who get religious education when the state system is almost non-existent. These schools promote mis-education and fundamentalism. We want to see these schools nationalised, we want to see a normal curriculum introduced into them. That is one of the ways that fundamentalism can really be undermined.

Musharaf also avoided sensitive issues like the blasphemy laws, under which death sentences are still handed out – including in cases where there has clearly been a frame up. There was a famous case three years ago where a Christian bishop, John Joseph, committed



Speaking in London: LPP leader Farooq Tariq

suicide to protest about a particular frame up. Despite this, the Lahore high court recently confirmed the death sentence in that case.

The Islamic Ideological Council, which is the main base for the promotion of fundamentalism in Pakistan, has not been touched. The system of Sharia law under which women are worth half of men remains in place. This means a woman can't give evidence on her own – there must be two women. If you murder a woman you are fined half what you would pay if it were a man.

Bush and Blair hail Musharaf for taking action against fundamentalists but laws like this still exist. These superficial actions have been taken to please the Americans – but also the Indians, in the hope that the tension that arose after the bombing of the Indian Parliament will go away.

This confirms that no section of the bourgeoisie has any progressive aspect. Pakistan had 10 years of civilian rule under Benazir Bhutto, and then Nawaz Sharif and now we have had nearly 2 years of military rule under Musharaf. These years confirm that the ruling class – in whatever form – can only play a reactionary, conservative role. The task of modernising our society lies on the shoulders of the working class.

The truth of the theory of permanent revolution has been vindicated time and time again by the total failure of the different sections of the ruling class to carry out any reforms in the interests of the workers. The Labour Party Pakistan believes that only when the working class takes power will any fundamental measures to modernise our society be carried through.

Since September 11 we have seen that when there is a dispute between states, the language of war predominates. After the attack on the Indian Parliament on December 13, the Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee, who leads a Hindu chauvinist party, took the same line as Bush. He sent an army that was more than half a million strong to the border and threatened to start a war.

Across the world, discussions are not about how to negotiate, but to

"The Labour Party in Britain is on the side of the dictators, on the side of the fundamentalists, on the side of the bombings. The Labour Party Pakistan are on the opposite side – on the side of the socialists, the Marxists, the side of those who want to promote peace and human rights with the active participation of the working class..."

sive, nothing anti-imperialist, in the strategy of fundamentalists against America.

We have seen in practice that fundamentalists are an extreme right wing, antidemocratic force who have nothing in common with progressive ideas.

Some left groups say that we should side with the fundamentalists because they are opposing American imperialism. But we in Pakistan have learned this lesson through hard realities.

We saw what happened in the Iranian revolution. Before Khomeini took over in 1979, the Tudeh Party, the Communist Party of Iran, made an alliance with Khomeini's fundamentalists against the Shah. The Tudeh Party had played an important part in the mass movement but when the Shah was overthrown, and Khomeini came to power the first thing he did was to hang the General Secretary of the Tudeh Party. Hundreds of activists were hanged. And we saw a total collapse of those left forces who thought that we should make a temporary alliance with those fundamentalists who seem to be anti-imperialist, who make a lot of noise against imperialism.

We also had a similar experience in Pakistan. In 1977, when there was mass opposition to Bhutto, sections of the Stalinists aligned with Jamat-Al-Islami to launch a movement against her. The Stalinists argued that Bhutto was a fascist and that we should join hands with fundamentalists to liberalise Pakistan and to get rid of him. But the result was that the military took over and Zia put these left forces into jail.

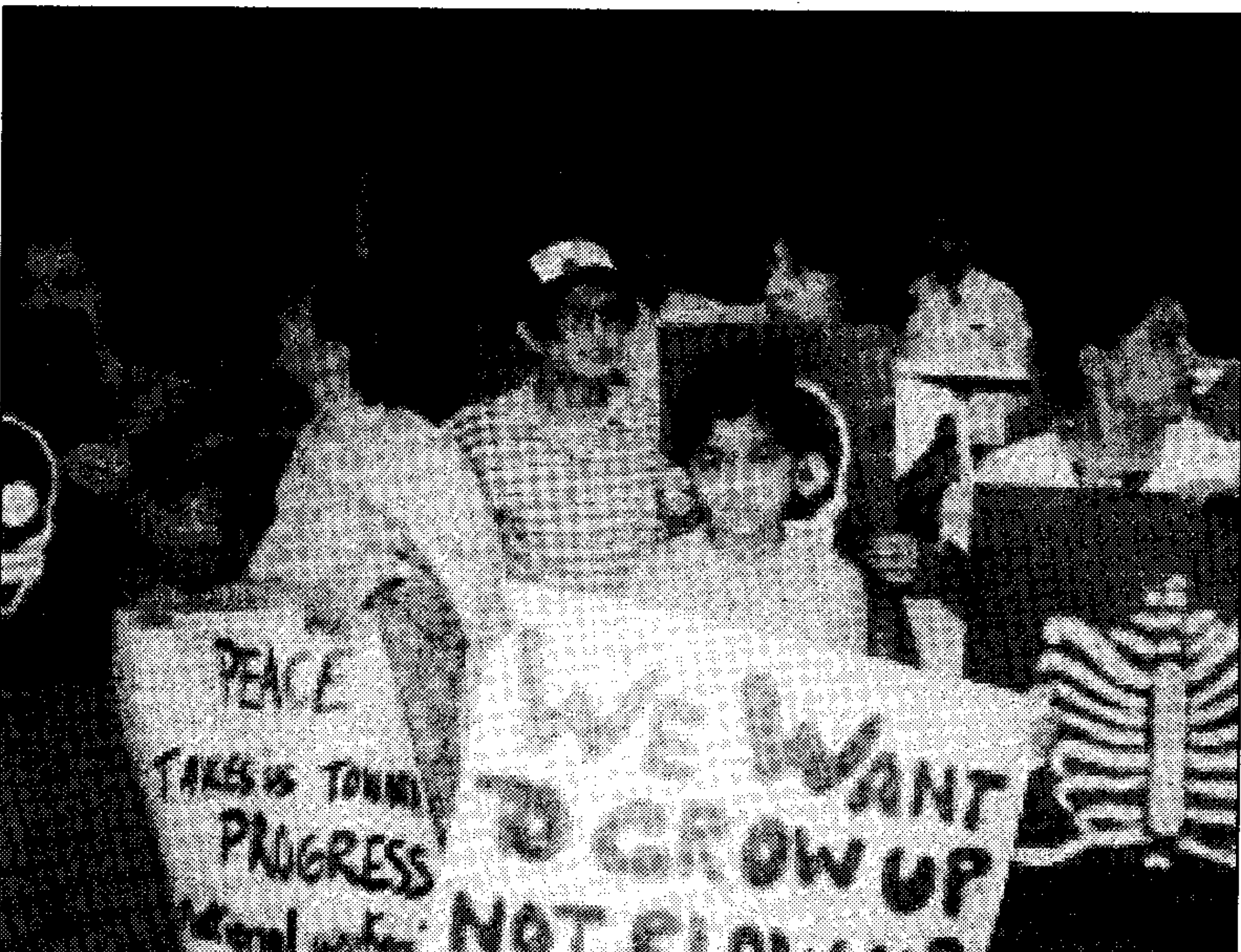
Another example comes from Afghanistan. During the Nijibullah period, most of his opponents within the party collaborated with the mujhadeen and thus gave ammunition to Nijibullah. They thought that first they could have an alliance with the fundamentalists to defeat Nijibullah and that afterwards they could deal with the mujhadeen – and do so easily. But in 1992 when the mujhadeen took over the Nijibullah party was totally finished and now you don't hear any more about this party, Afghanistan Motherland Party of Nijibullah.

After September 11, we condemned the terrorist action and also said war is no way to stop terrorism. The headline in our weekly paper, *Worker's Struggle*, said "No Terrorism against Terrorism". Our paper played an important role at this time and we anticipated that there would be an immediate attack on Afghanistan.

We also said there should be no alliance with fundamentalists. This was nothing new for us. Since the LPP was formed in 1997 we have always said we will never have any alliance with the fundamentalists or with any section of the religious parties.

There have been many offers to us, in the trade union field, in the political field where they have said let's have a joint campaign. Some fundamentalists said, we are against privatisation, let's get together and fight against the privatisation of the railways.

But we replied if we look at your philosophy, you are in favour of private property, you are in favour of



LPP-led anti-war protest

feudalism, in favour of capitalism – how can you fight privatisation? We won't go along with your demagoguery. We know you only say you are against privatisation under the pressure of the working class. You are taking this initiative to develop a social base in the working class in order to attack working class rights more effectively.

The Pakistani and Arab fundamentalists who went to Afghanistan to fight with the Taliban were massacred whereas the local, Pashtun Taliban left the jihad, melted into the background and just became Pashtun. Mullah Omar and Osama left the foreign fundamentalists to be massacred by the Northern Alliance and the American army. Most of the Taliban leadership were not killed, they made a compromise with Karzai – maybe with the approval of American imperialism – and they escaped to safety out of Kandahar. So Karzai will be able to use them in the future if there is a tension between Uzbeks and Hasarabs and Tajiks and so on.

When it came to saving their own necks they forgot about the jihad, about the slogans that "we will fight until death" – it was only to Kandahar that they fought! They ran away on motor bikes and all this – and this has left a very bad taste in Pakistan because the Pakistanis did not escape.

It seems that there is some feeling in the West that if Osama is alive, or Omar, they could regenerate. But I think that Osama as a leader of this section of the Taliban is finished. They are totally exposed. No fundamentalists in this area of the world will believe them again, will follow them. There will be new leaders with different forms of fundamentalism, but this current is finished.

I want to say a few words about the role of the LPP. The first demonstration we organised was before the attacks of American imperialism on Afghanistan, on September 27. The Women Workers Helpline took the initiative to launch the first peace demonstration, with more than 500 activists.

This is an organisation we have set up over the last year which is helping women to break into the trade unions, helping in the communities, which is fighting against domestic violence and against police brutality against women. The demonstration made the headlines across the country that women have come out for peace in Pakistan.

This brought an alternative view in the country because before that every day the fundamentalists were on the streets, with their slogans that Osama is the hero of the Muslim world. Generally these were not large marches, but there was a general feeling of support for what they were saying. This is hardly surprising given what American imperialism has done to Third World countries. That is why the majority of the Pakistani working class sympathised with the terrorist actions on September 11.

So this first action of ours on September 27 was very much a minority position. But then on October 15 in Lahore, over 1000 party activists rallied at the same time as the fundamentalists called a General strike.

The police pressured us to cancel our action but we said no, you're not telling the fundamentalists to cancel their action, why should we be the ones to back down? So over 1000 came, of which about 400 were women and we had a very militant demonstration against the war and against the fundamentalists.

We said that day that we totally oppose American imperialism but that we will not support Osama and Mullah Omar who have attacked women's rights. We exposed the hypocrisy of American imperialism and their newfound support for women's rights. As one of our women



LPP-led protest against privatisation

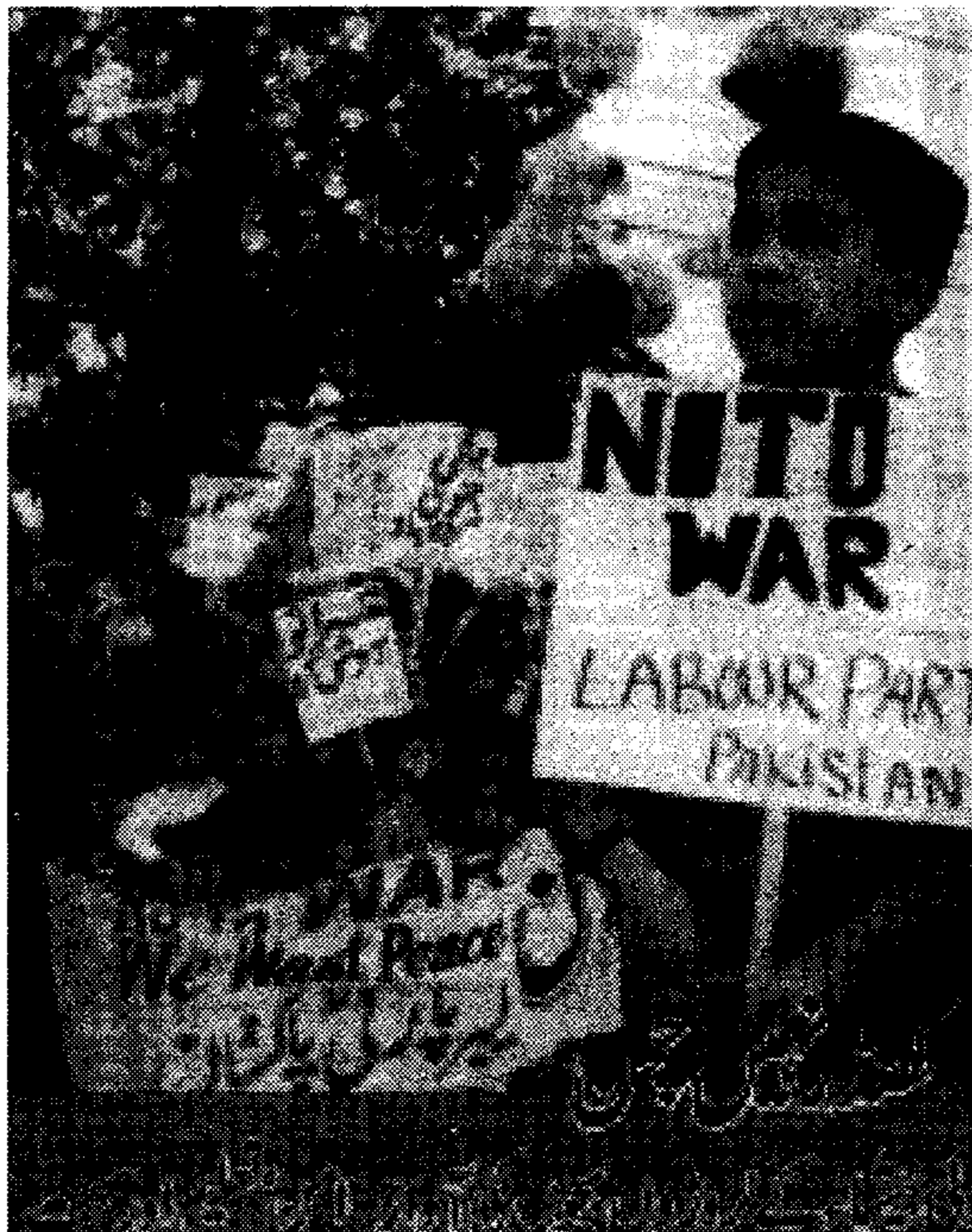
activists said that day: "They are killing women in Kabul, how can they defend the rights of women?"

Then on November 6 over 8000 people demonstrated in Rawalpindi on our initiative and the majority of them were women. Some NGOs who were involved wanted to use the demonstration just against the fundamentalists and maybe in favour of the army. We had formed an alliance for justice and peace and some NGOs who were linked with the military regime said "OK we will take part in the demonstration, but on our terms".

But we made sure that the main slogan and the main tone of that demonstration was against imperialism, against the bombing and so on, but we also condemned fundamentalism on the same demonstration.

That demonstration really changed the mood in many organisations; it really gave courage to people to come out against both American imperialism and the fundamentalists.

Then on 10 December we had another demonstration in Lahore of 2000 and then on December 31 we had brought 2000 activists to the border with India and we had slogans on both sides of the border opposing war. This was the first time we had



managed to reach the border itself – the area is fenced off and we had to force our way through the barriers.

The Indian people on the other side were there to see the ceremony of flag changing but when they heard our slogans they responded in the same voice that they want peace and not war. And then the baton charges started and we were all hurt including the former Chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan who was one of the main leaders of this demonstration.

For you I'm sure it is normal to celebrate New Year. But the fundamentalists have made a big deal of preventing any celebrations. In Lahore in particular, they roam round the streets in gangs on New Year's night, trying to find out who

has drink. If there is a party going on, they will attack it and try to disperse people – and the police will just stand by and watch while they do this.

This year the LPP announced in the press that we will go onto the main road to celebrate New Year's night as a Peace Night. So 30 of us went there and we saw hundreds of police waiting for us and we were really afraid that we would be arrested. But actually when we got there they said, well at least someone has dared to come to this place to celebrate the New Year, and they wished us Happy New Year.

So this was a very good initiative by the Labour Party, and thousands of people waved to us. And it was maybe the first time in maybe 25 years that there was a little demonstration on the main street in Lahore to celebrate New Year's night openly and publicly.

It was very symbolic – symbolic that someone has dared fight against fundamentalism and it gained us big publicity in all the newspapers and so on.

The most important initiative we have taken recently, together with comrades in the Scottish Socialist Party is the Afghan Workers' Solidarity Campaign. So far we have produced three issues of a monthly paper in Pashtu, and sent a truckload of material worth half a million rupees from Lahore. Our solidarity is practical but also about ideological help.

Seven radical left groups from Afghanistan met in Peshawar last month and agreed to form a committee. They are mostly ex-Maoists. The main group is the ex-Maoist Afghan Revolutionary Labour Organisation. They are closer to our politics now and have withdrawn their initial support for Zahir Shah, the former king of Afghanistan.

The Afghan left groups are quite influential in the refugee camps in Pakistan. They have done heroic work. Many, many of their activists have been killed. One of their women comrades came to Lahore and spoke very bravely without purdah in a meeting we organised of 200 people, mainly men.

The Afghan Workers' Solidarity Campaign can create some sort of basis for a new left in Afghanistan. The old Stalinist groups have been defeated and disillusioned. The new groups have been making visits to Afghanistan for a long time, but they are still based in Pakistan.

There is a very big discussion among them about whether they should go back now the Northern Alliance is in power. The NA are fundamentalists as well, and the comrades don't want to voluntarily hand themselves over to another fundamentalist group.

The left and Islamic fundamentalism

Terry Conway

The adjacent article is the transcript of the speech Farooq Tariq, General Secretary of the Labour Party Pakistan (LPP) made to a London audience on January 25.

The meeting was organised by the International Socialist Group, after it became clear that an initial suggestion that the Socialist Alliance host the event was controversial.

The ISG had been approached by our sister organisation in France, who were bringing Farooq to Europe to speak at the launch of their presidential election campaign. We felt that given the controversy within the Socialist Alliance, the best basis for a successful event was to organise the meeting ourselves.

We were already in contact with the LPP, a serious Marxist organisation in Pakistan. Our positive opinion of the LPP was fully confirmed by Farooq's speech.

From the response on the night, that opinion was shared by the majority of those at the meeting including many who had disagreements with the LPP. Representatives of virtually every left group in Britain, and from a number of left groups from the sub-continent were present and contributed to the discussion.

Unfortunately Stuart King from Workers Power chose to denounce both speaker and audience in way that lowered the tone of the discussion and served only to show the British left in a poor light.

The decision of the ISG to host the meeting does not however mean that we agree with everything the LPP says. In particular, we do not agree with the press statement issued by the LPP in response to Musharraf's speech of January 14, which we had not seen at the time of the meeting.

We do not agree with calling for state bans on fundamentalists. Our opposition to this is not because we fail to recognise the serious danger that fundamentalism represents to the working class movement – we also oppose the left calling for state bans on fascist organisations or demonstrations.

This is because we think that such bans will be used also against the left. We think far right organisations can only be defeated by the independent mobilisation of trade unions, black communities etc.

However we also recognise that this position is not held by the whole of the left. The Anti-Nazi League and the main organisation involved in it, the Socialist Workers Party, have called for various mobilisations of the BNP and the NF to be banned by the state – most recently this summer.

The tone of Stuart's contribution at the meeting implied he considered the LPP an enemy and therefore would not work with them. But he works with the SWP in the Socialist Alliance, in the anti-war movement etc. So what is so differ-

ent about the LPP?

We also argue that Islamic fundamentalism cannot simply be equated with fascism. Indeed What Farooq himself said was slightly more precise, he said "these fundamentalists represent a new type of fascism".

It is certainly true that the fundamentalist movement shares many of the characteristics of fascism as outlined by Trotsky – its social base, the nature of its political ideology and its totalitarianism and fierce anti-communism

But there are differences. The economic programme of fundamentalism is actually more reactionary than fascism – fascism in power has actually led to a limited development of the productive forces, which could never be the case under an Islamic dictatorship which is more likely to lead to their regression or at best stagnation.

However, on the other hand in some situations the struggle of fundamentalists for power is mainly against big private capital, and where the workers'



Fundamentalists have hi-jacked Kashmiri struggle

movement may be relatively weak, their populist nature comes to the fore.

Revolutionaries could therefore be faced with situations where we would find ourselves on the same side of the barricades – something that would be unthinkable in terms of fascists.

Saying this, however does not by any means answer the questions of how we should respond at a tactical level – particularly in a situation like that in Pakistan where the growth of fundamentalism came as a result of the encouragement of a section of the Pakistani state, the Intelligence Service, which necessarily colours the response of the left.

In particular, there is a difference between finding yourself on the same side as fundamentalist organisations and consciously blocking with them, as Stuart advocates.

This is neither justifiably politically – nor advisable from the point of view of defending the class independence of the working class – and the physical survival of the left as the case of Iran and other examples quoted by Farooq so dramatically show.

Thousands converge on Porto Alegre

By our correspondent

It is very hard to describe something on the scale of the second World Social Forum. With 15,000 delegates, a similar number at the youth event and possibly another 30,000 participating as observers and on demonstrations, it was on the scale of a very successful demonstration that went on for six days.

The participation was so high for two reasons. One is the scale of popular mobilisation in Brasil – over half the delegates were Brazilian, and Brazilians were probably a higher percentage of the other categories.

The other is the prestige arising from the success of the first conference as a world focus of opposition to and discussion of imperialist globalisation.

It was consciously a place of political diversity, where debate and discussion are emphasised and decisions are restricted to supporting

equally broad mobilisations.

Whether any people changed their minds in debates I don't know, but many certainly learned a lot in the 800 or so workshops. The coming together of people in these numbers also gave a great boost to morale which I'm sure went well beyond those present.

There really is an emerging world-wide opposition to the global bad guys for activists to look towards. The Forum's slogan 'Another world is possible' could be seen as weak by many, but it is quite apt as a starting point when Bush is trying to convince the world that it has no choice.

There were however large gaps in the participation. With large Argentine, French and Italian contingents showing the success of the mobilisers in those countries, they highlighted the weakness from other countries.

African, Asian and former eastern block participation in particular was very weak

and must be a question for the organisers of next year's event (which will be in Porto Alegre). There is a movement developing to hold the 2004 conference in India, but also plans for regional events in different parts of the world.

The political diversity represented at the conference was also great. Well known academics such as Chomsky and Bensaid, NGO leaders and activists such as Bové and Susan George rubbed shoulders with leading liberation theologians such as Frei Betto, various Nobel Peace laureates and the complete spread of radical Brazilian workers' and peasant opinion.

Kofi Anan sent a senior official and Mary Robinson, UN Human Rights Commissioner, was main speaker at a seminar.

Specifically Brazilian events had some impact on the Forum. The very public split between the right wing Workers Party (PT) mayor of Porto Alegre and the



Trotskyist PT State Governor dominated the last day's headlines in Brasil.

The mayor launched his campaign to become governor with a scurrilous attack on Trots and Stalinists. Two other events during the Forum also highlighted the situation in Brasil.

One was the smashing up of the CUT trade union federation's offices in Sao Paulo on the Sunday, and the other

was an armed attack on the Forum's cash dispensers, resulting in the death of one robber. The tragic irony of the latter event was lost on nobody.

The Fourth International's involvement in the event was impressive.

This reflected both the strength of the comrades in Rio Grande do Sul (Porto Alegre is the state capital) and a wider recognition of

the event's importance. Rallies with 600 and 400 participants were organised, the first drawing a large attendance from the PT left.

The emergence of what is, effectively, an annual parliament in opposition to neo-liberalism and barbarism must be a great step forward. Maybe next year larger UK and Irish contingents can be organised.

● See declaration (opposite)

China joins WTO: a balance sheet

A recent issue of the Observer Business news headlined on the threat to as many as 40 million jobs in China arising from its entry to the World Trade Organisation this year. ZHANG KAI from the October Review group of supporters of the Fourth International, wrote this analysis of the situation in December.

After 15 years of negotiation, and making maximum concessions to WTO members, China eventually gained accession to the WTO.

The mass media in China was filled with euphoria. However, let us take a close look at some of the facts revealed by the press in order to come to some assessment of the pros and cons of China's accession.

The editorial of the Hong Kong Wen Hui Bao, on the day following China's accession, wrote that this implies China will enjoy multi-lateral, steady and unconditional 'most favoured nation' treatment, defend China's state interests, and prompt China's accelerated eco-

nomie systemic reform and restructuring.

This will also imply China's marketisation and internationalisation. The editorial ended with the phrase "the formation of China's socialist market economy will rise above all obstacles".

The sector that may benefit most from the accession is textiles. The USA, EU, Turkey and others will formally cancel all quota restrictions on China's textile exports by 2005. Next to that is the electronics industry. The World Bank gave an optimistic estimate of China's annual economic growth to be 2%.

Niu Wenyan, Chief Scientist of the Sustained Development Strategy Division of the China Academy of Sciences, estimated that in the next five to ten years, about 30 to 40 million jobs will be created.

Agriculture

However, there are worries about possible severe impacts on agriculture, state enterprises and current product quality. With China drastically reducing tariffs on imports, foreign industrial and agricultural goods may be dumped into China, creating serious difficulties for Chinese products to compete.

It is estimated that in the

four years starting from the beginning of 2002, the overall level of tariffs on industrial goods will drop from 15.3% to 12%. The decrease will affect over 70% of tariff items, and low tariff items (lower than 10%) will increase to about half of all items.

The average tariff rate for over 300 information technology products will be reduced to about 5%, of which over 100 items will be tariff-free.

By 2005, there will be further drastic changes, and items with tariff over 25% will be reduced by half from now, and constitute less than 5% of all items. The general tariff rate will go below the average level of developing countries (9-10%). The tariff on automobiles will go down from the current 70-90% to a standard 25% by July 2006. This will create much pressure on the domestic car industry.

It is also estimated that with such competition and with the economic restructuring, tens of millions of workers will be laid off. The impact on peasants will also be serious: the price of imported soya beans, for example, is 15-20% lower than domestic products. The tariff rate is only 3%.

According to the tariff agreement, China will reduce tariffs on agricultural prod-



ucts in stages, starting from January 2001. By 2004, the average tariff rate on imports will be reduced from the present 20-30% to 14.5-15%.

By 2006, the quota on certain imported agricultural products such as soya oil and vegetable oil will be cancelled, and all tariffs will be uniformly reduced to 9%.

US farmers

The Minister of Agriculture of the USA commented that US farmers will immediately benefit from exporting agricultural goods to China, and it is estimated the annual increase will be US \$2 billion. It is also believed that more peasants will be transferring to the urban or industrial sector.

Telecommunications and insurance will be the two major sectors that will be open to foreign capital.

Regulations restricting their operation by foreign capital have been removed. That means China could be attracting more foreign capital and investment, providing the ground for activity by global capitalism.

Major state-owned enterprises will also be restructured and shares will be sold to foreign investors. Statistics show that by the end of 1999, 81% of state-owned enterprises had been corporatised.

On the other hand, the operating mechanisms of two-thirds of small state-owned enterprises have been changed through shareholding systems, joint capital ventures, sale or bankruptcy.

There are also moves towards privatisation of land ownership through the idea of "operating agriculture by science and education". This

could allow limited transfer of land use rights from individual peasants to corporations.

There have obviously been differences of views concerning China's accession to the WTO, which is why the Premier Zhu Rongji, in a meeting on Dec 9, stressed that "all levels of leadership should correctly understand the significance of the accession to the WTO, and unify all opinions under the central leadership's policies."

It is also expected that the masses of workers and peasants will resist the adverse impacts on their working and living conditions with China's accession to the WTO and further concessions to the forces of global capitalism.

More resistance, protests and organisation will inevitably follow.

Declaration of Porto Alegre Against neoliberalism, war and militarism: for peace and social justice

1) In the face of continuing deterioration in the living conditions of people, we, social movements from all around the world, have come together in the tens of thousands at the second World Social Forum in Porto Alegre. We are here in spite of the attempts to break our solidarity. We come together again to continue our struggles against neoliberalism and war, to confirm the agreements of the last Forum and to reaffirm that another world is possible.

2) We are diverse - women and men, adults and youth, indigenous peoples, rural and urban, workers and unemployed, homeless, the elderly, students, migrants, professionals, peoples of every creed, colour and sexual orientation. The expression of this diversity is our strength and the basis of our unity. We are a global solidarity movement, united in our determination to fight against the concentration of wealth, the proliferation of poverty and inequalities, and the destruction of our earth. We are living and constructing alternative systems, and using creative ways to promote them. We are building a large alliance from our struggles and resistance against a system based on sexism, racism and violence, which privileges the interests of capital and patriarchy over the needs and aspirations of people.

3) This system produces a daily drama of women, children, and the elderly dying because of hunger, lack of health care and preventable diseases. Families are forced to leave their homes because of wars, the impact of "big development," landlessness and environmental disasters, unemployment, attacks on public services and the destruction of social solidarity. Both in the South and in the North, vibrant struggles and resistance to uphold the dignity of life are flourishing.

4) September 11 marked a dramatic change. After the terrorist attacks, which we absolutely condemn, as we condemn all other attacks on civilians in other parts of the world, the government of the United States and its allies have launched a massive military operation. In the name of the "war against terrorism," civil and political rights are being attacked all over the world. The war against Afghanistan, in which terrorists methods are being used, is now being extended to other fronts. Thus there is the beginning of a permanent global war to cement the domination of the US government and its allies. This war reveals another face of neoliberalism, a face which is brutal and unacceptable. Islam is being demonized, while racism and xenophobia are deliberately propagated. The mass media is actively taking part in this belligerent campaign which divides the world into "good" and "evil". The opposition to the war is at the heart of our movement.

5) The situation of war has further destabilised the Middle East, providing a pretext for further repression of the Palestinian people. An urgent task of our movement is to mobilise solidarity for the Palestinian people and their struggle for self-determination as they face brutal occupation by the Israeli state. This is vital to collective security of all peoples in the region.

6) Further events also confirm the urgency of our struggles. In Argentina the financial crisis caused by the failure of IMF structural adjustment and mounting debt precipitated a social and political crisis. This crisis generated spontaneous protests of the middle and working classes, repression which caused deaths, failure of governments, and new alliances between different social groups. With the force of "cacerolazos" and "piquetes," popular mobilisations have demanded their basic rights of food, jobs and housing. We reject the criminalisation of social movements in Argentina and the attacks against democratic rights and freedom. We also condemn the greed and and the blackmail of the multinational corporation supported by the governments of the rich countries.

7) The collapse of the multinational Enron exemplifies the bankruptcy of the casino economy and the corruption of businessmen and politicians, evicting workers without jobs and pensions. In developing countries this multinational engaged in fraudulent activities



and its projects pushed people off their land and led to sharp increases in the price of water and electricity.

8) The United States government, in its efforts to protect the interests of big corporations, arrogantly walked away from negotiations on global warming, the antiballistic missile treaty, the Convention on Biodiversity, the UN conference on racism and intolerance, and the talks to reduce the supply of small arms, proving once again that US unilateralism undermines attempts to find multilateral solutions to global problems.

9) In Genoa the G8 failed completely in its self-assumed task of global government. In the face of massive mobilisation and resistance, they responded with violence and repression, denouncing as criminals those who dared to protest. But they failed to intimidate our movement.

10) All this is happening in the context of a global recession. The neoliberal economic model is destroying the rights, living conditions and livelihoods of people. Using every means to protect their "share value," multinational companies lay off workers, slash wages and close factories, squeezing the last dollar from the workers. Governments faced with this economic crisis respond by privatising, cutting social sector expenditures and permanently reducing workers' rights. This recession exposes the fact that the neoliberal promise of growth and prosperity is a lie.

11) The global movement for social justice and solidarity faces enormous challenges: its fight for peace and collective security implies confronting poverty, discriminations, dominations and the creation of an alternative sustainable society.

Social movements energetically condemn violence and militarism as a means of conflict resolution; the promotion of low intensity conflicts and military operations in the Colombia Plan as part of the Andes regional initiative, the Puebla Panama plan, the arms trade and higher military budgets, economic blockades against people and nations especially against Cuba and Iraq, and the growing repression against trade unions, social movements, and activists.

We support the trade unions and informal sector worker struggles as essential to maintain working and living conditions, the genuine right to organise, to go on strike, to negotiate collective agreements, and to achieve equality in wages and working conditions between women and men. We reject slavery and the exploitation of children. We support workers struggles and the trade union fights against casualisation, subcontracting of labour and lay offs, and demand new international rights for the employees of the multinational companies and their affiliates, in particular the right to unionise and space for collective bargaining. Equally we support the struggles of farmers and peoples organisations for their rights to a livelihood, and to land, forests and water.

12) Neoliberal policies create tremendous

misery and insecurity. They have dramatically increased the trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and children. Poverty and insecurity creates millions of migrants who are denied their dignity, freedom, and rights. We therefore demand the right of free movement; the right to physical integrity and legal status of all migrants. We support the rights of indigenous peoples and the fulfillment of ILO article 169 in national legal frameworks.

13) The external debt of the countries of the South has been repaid several times over. Illegitimate, unjust and fraudulent, debt functions as an instrument of domination, depriving people of their fundamental human rights with the sole aim of increasing international usury. We demand unconditional cancellation of debt and the reparation of historical, social, and ecological debts. The countries demanding repayment of debt have engaged in exploitation of the natural resources and the traditional knowledge of the South.

14) Water, land, food, forests, seeds, culture and people's identities are common assets of humanity for present and future generations. It is essential to preserve biodiversity. People have the right to safe and permanent food free from genetically modified organisms. Food sovereignty at the local, national, regional level is a basic human right; in this regard, democratic land reforms and peasant's access to land are fundamental requirements.

15) The meeting in Doha confirmed the illegitimacy of the WTO. The adoption of the "development agenda" only defends corporate interests. By launching a new round, the WTO is moving closer to its goal of converting everything into a commodity. For us, food, public services, agriculture, health and education are not for sale. Patenting must not be used as a weapon against the poor countries and peoples. We reject the patenting and trading of life forms. The WTO agenda is perpetuated at the continental level by regional free trade and investment agreements. By organizing protests such as the huge demonstrations and plebiscites against FTA, people have rejected these agreements as representing a recolonisation and the destruction of fundamental social, economical, cultural and environmental rights and values.

16) We will strengthen our movement through common actions and mobilizations for social justice, for the respect of rights and liberties, for quality of life, equality, dignity and peace. We are fighting for:

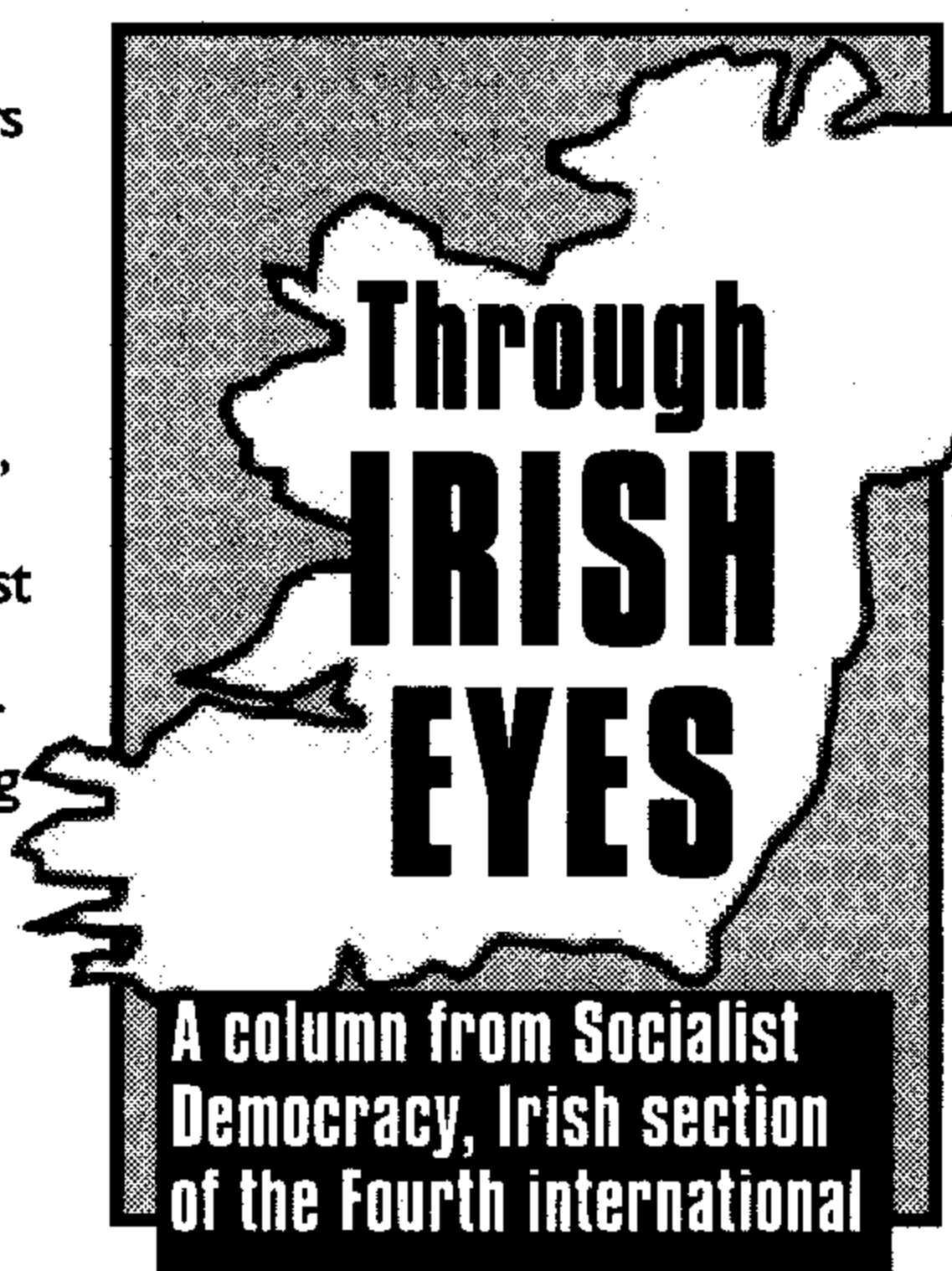
- democracy: people have the right to know about and criticize the decisions of their own governments, especially with respect to dealings with international institutions. Governments are ultimately accountable to their people. While we support the establishment of electoral and participative democracy across the world, we emphasise the need for the democratisation of states and societies and the struggles against dictatorship.
- the abolition of external debt and reparations.
- against speculative activities: we demand the creation of specific taxes such as the Tobin Tax, and the abolition of tax havens.
- the right to information
- women's rights, freedom from violence, poverty and exploitation.
- against war and militarism, against foreign military bases and interventions, and the systematic escalation of violence. We choose to privilege negotiation and non violent conflict resolution. We affirm the right for all the people to ask international mediation, with the participation independent actors from the civil society.
- the rights of youth, their access to free public education and social autonomy, and the abolition of compulsory military service.
- the self determination of all peoples, especially the rights of indigenous peoples.

Postal workers go back to work, but threats remain

JM Thorn

On January 16 postal workers in Belfast voted to return to work after a three day stoppage called in reaction to the murder of a colleague on January 12 Daniel McColgan, a 20 year-old Catholic postman, was shot dead by loyalist gunmen in the early hours of the morning as he arrived for work at the Rathcoole sorting office on the outskirts of North Belfast.

A caller to a newspaper claiming to be from the Red Hand Defenders (RHD) claimed the murder of the postal worker and issued a blanket threat to the staff of Catholic schools and Catholic postal workers. These workers were now being regarded as "legitimate targets" by loyalists.



Only hours later, the UFF in south east Antrim were privately insisting to journalists that it had carried out the killing.

In response postal workers

refused to deliver or collect mail until the threat was lifted. Protestant and Catholic workers were united against loyalist attacks.

The issues were very clear. A fellow worker had been murdered and Catholic workers were under threat from loyalists.

The action taken to meet this threat was also clear. There would be no mail until the threat was lifted. If there is an example of the trade union principle of "an injury to one being an injury to all" in action this was it.

However, solidarity was not the guiding principle behind the actions of the leaders of the CWU.

Although expressing sympathy with their members, the officials' primary concern along with Post Office management

was an end to the strike and a return to "normality".

The RUC/PSNI played a central role in enabling the CWU to press its members to return to work. This came in the form of a security briefing to union officials from the senior officer responsible for Belfast, Assistant Chief Constable Alan McQuillan.

He claimed that following an analysis of the series of statements from the Red Hand Defenders and the UFF, he had concluded that the threat against postal workers "did not come from those who murdered Mr McColgan".

He stated he was "90% sure" the initial coded call making the threat "was not a genuine call". In conclusion he stated that, as it was Northern Ireland, he could not "offer any guarantees" on security.

This followed a farcical series of events in which the UFF, who had claimed the murder, ordered the RHD, who the police now admit is a non-existent organisation, to disband because it was undermining Loyalism.

Dressed in a black uniform and wearing a mask, and flanked by men brandishing machine guns, a UFF spokesman read a statement which claimed that postal workers and teachers had "nothing to fear from the Ulster Freedom Fighters."

Then RHD released a statement announcing that it was disbanding in response to the call from the UFF.

It was on back of these statements and subsequent police assurances that the CWU recommended a return to work.

Such assurances are worth-

less, designed to sow confusion and to downplay the violence of loyalists. The RHD and the UFF are both cover names for the UDA, which is orchestrating the ongoing offensive against nationalists.

No wonder that many postal workers are disgusted by the ending of the strike and by the attitude of their union. This sense of betrayal was summed up by a West Belfast postman:

"The unions went in determined to get us back to work and that was their main priority. . . ."

"We are only going back to work under duress and we feel our union representatives have let us down." Postal workers went on strike to remove a threat, but now they are returning to work with that threat still looming over them.

East of the Isle of Man?

David Coen

THE BRITISH response to the debacle of intervention in Egypt in 1956 was to retreat "east of Suez". Now, according to Sinn Fein and Labour Friends of Ireland, they intend to retreat east of the Irish Sea.

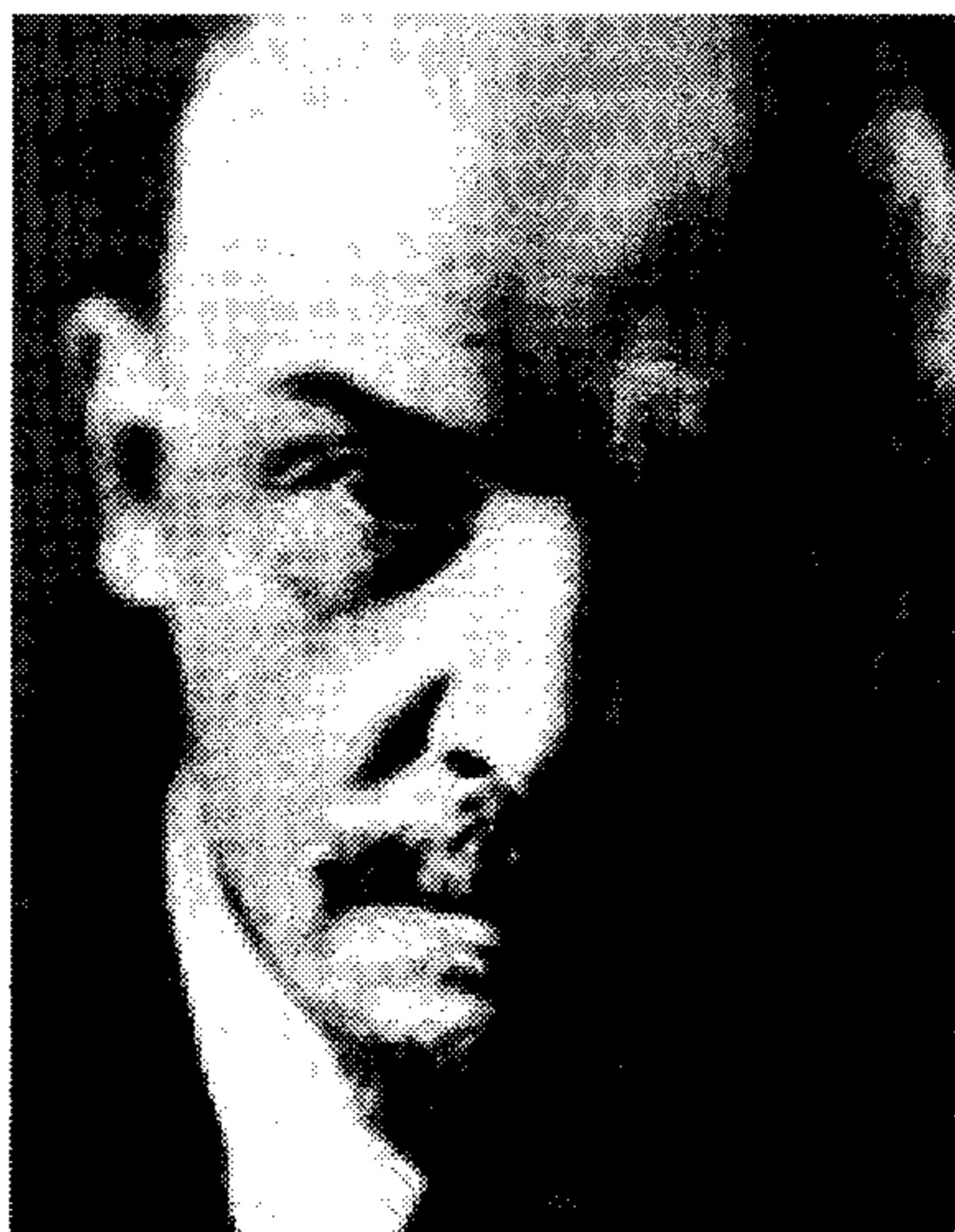
This acute insight into British Government thinking was made by Labour MP John McDonnell at the recent Bloody Sunday Commemoration. While denying that he had any special access to Tony Blair, McDonnell was able to assure those present that Britain wanted to leave Ireland, indeed would already have done so, were it not for the Unionists.

The left should abandon its "old fashioned, Leninist" notions about imperialism and help the British to leave. The best way of doing so was to implement the Stormont Agreement.

Gerry O'Hara, Sinn Fein leader on Derry City Council agreed. The "two or three hundred people in the leadership of Sinn Fein", with their razor sharp political antennae, had decided that the British wanted out, and so Irish unity was inevitable.

The audience were clearly bowled over by this, especially as it followed an excellent speech by Eamon McCann who pointed out that everyone knew what happened on Bloody Sunday: the questions to be answered were who ordered it and why. So the British ruling class, apparently reeling from the revelations of their foul deeds, and no longer having a "selfish strategic or economic interest in Ireland" were just trying to make their excuses and leave.

Of course there were a few who asked when precisely the British



Lenin: out of date?

had decided to go. On this point, neither of the new, modern "post imperialists" could put even an approximate date on this decision or say what had led to it.

The date is important because it could give us a clue as to why they had decided it was time to go. McDonnell quoted former Tory NI Minister Peter Brooke's 1990 statement "that Britain had no selfish strategic or economic interest in Ireland".

For him it was simple. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Britain no longer has a major strategic interest and as for economics, the annual subsidy from the British state more than outweighed the return from British investments, therefore they are pulling out.

McDonnell here engages in the crude economism for which he denounces anti-imperialists from Lenin on. For Lenin, metropolitan capital, faced with falling rates of profit at home sought more prof-

itable outlets elsewhere, and this led to them to attempting to militarily and politically subdue the rest of the globe.

Imperialism's specific interests could vary with period and region: it might be markets, raw materials or access to cheap labour. It wasn't simply a matter of a quick calculation of the surplus or deficit for any particular period, still less a comparison of state spending in a particular region compared to the return on investment flowing to domestic capitalists. What mattered was the continuance of the right to exploit.

Applying this to Ireland we see different phases of imperialism. The South of Ireland was independent 60 years after Marx's description of it as "only an agricultural district of England, marked off by a wide channel from the country to which it yields corn, wool, cattle, industrial and military recruits" yet it was still supplying food (predominantly cattle) to Britain and was still a significant customer for British goods. The North, occupied by the British, was still supplying ships and textiles.

What mattered to British capital was not the detail of the political arrangements but whether it could carry on business as usual. While the changing relationship between the nation state and indigenous capital is more complex, British capital basically relied on the British state to sort out the arrangements. And these remained more or less usable until the end of the post-war boom, eventually being destroyed by the mass upsurges for



Gerry Adams takes a break from Stormont to meet an anti-imperialist

Civil Rights in the late 1960's and the abolition of Stormont after Bloody Sunday in 1972.

Two things have happened since then. The Southern ruling class has steadily revised its opinion of the British. Like some nationalists in late 19th century Ireland, it now wants to be a junior partner with imperialism, having failed to become economically independent in the 60 years after 1922.

The 90s boom, the so-called "Celtic Tiger", has both boosted their confidence and their faith in partnerships with imperialism. This is anyway the nature of the period: formerly radical and "anti-imperialist" bourgeoisies making their peace with their former colonial masters under US global hegemony. And imperialism will tolerate any number of political arrangements as long as trade (i.e. profits) flow freely.

Secondly, the Unionist ruling class in the north, being less economically important, is now politically less so as well. So the British seek to push them into a coalition with the petit bourgeois nationalists of Sinn Fein, supported by the Dublin ruling class.

This requires minor concessions such as renaming the RUC.

Britain's (and Dublin's) hope is that this new coalition formed out of the Stormont Agreement will draw the sting out of militant Republicanism which was (and remains) a threat on the whole island.

Recognising that a military defeat of Republicanism was not possible, they aim for stabilisation in the hope that a better opportunity will arise in the future if it can be neutralised politically. The game plan is to "modernise" the imperial relationship, not to change it.

So Sinn Fein joins the coalition government of "a failed political entity" and possibly does the same in the South. Expect a growth in "cultural" independence - the revival of the Irish language and so on. (This also happened in the South in the 1930s and 1940s after the defeat of the radicals in the independence movement there)

Not so political and economic independence: those will be deferred or explained away in the interest of helping the British deal with the Unionists.

To get Britain out means helping them to stay. And that's why neither John McDonnell nor Gerry O'Hara will mention the politics of British occupation. It's not imperialism, it's the Unionists.

Isn't that what the British keep saying?

Vote No to stop anti-abortion fundamentalists!



**Brendan Young,
(Press Officer,
Alliance for a No
Vote)**

The outcome of abortion referendum taking place in Ireland on March 6 will be of critical importance to Irish women, to working class women in particular and to Irish culture and society in general.

If the proposals are passed, the abortion regime in Ireland will be akin to that of Afghanistan, Iraq or Iran – states that are much criticised for their anti-woman regimes.

As Prof. Tom Fahy says, if Irish women feel stigmatised by having abortions they will have good reason under the proposed law. It can only deepen what Niall Tobin has described as 'the national neurosis' created by the denial of Irish women's experience of abortion.

Under the referendum proposals, women who are suicidal as a result of a crisis pregnancy will not be allowed to have an abortion in Ireland. The 'x' case of 1992 - when a 14-year-old who was pregnant after being raped was allowed an abortion because of the risk to her life from suicide - will be overturned. Contrary to the recent assertions of Health Minister Micheál Martin, Health Boards will be denied the power to take rape or incest victims in their care for abortions overseas - even if they are suicidal.

The only grounds for abortion will be risk of the loss of the woman's life from physical causes - neither rape, incest nor suicide are included. In the 'c' case of 1997, the Health Board was only able to take the girl for an abortion because she was suicidal - risk to life from suicide having been established as grounds for abortion by the 'x' case.

Women who try to perform an abortion on themselves, or anyone who helps a woman to get an abortion in Ireland, will face twelve years in prison. Under the proposed law there is the possibility of a trial like that we saw recently in Portugal - with fewer avenues for a legal defence.

A woman with complications in pregnancy will only be allowed an abortion when there is a risk that she may die. Current practise - where abortion is legal when there is a risk to a woman's life - will change because the new law says there must be the risk of the loss of her life. In some states in the USA



laws like this have meant that abortions are delayed until there is more than a 50% chance the woman will die.

A woman carrying a non-viable foetus, perhaps with severe abnormalities like anencephaly (where the foetus does not have a brain), will be compelled to go to full term or wait until her life is threatened - rather than have an early, safe termination.

Doctors will only be allowed to perform such abortions in a limited number of "approved places" - rumours say 16 - which could be many miles from a local hospital. Lives and health will be risked as women are ferried from place to place.

Current practise allows abortion in local hospitals under remote direction from specialists in teaching hospitals - a system the new law will end. Hospital consultants are only now waking up to this restriction and are taking legal advice.

There is a conscience clause which allows a doctor to refuse to perform an abortion. The Commonwealth Medical Association says that in such circumstances, there must be provision for emergencies. Ahern's proposal has no provision for emergencies.

Ahern and Harney argue that this is the best they could do under the circumstances - and that it is a reasonable and compassionate solution to the lack of legislation. Their hoped-for consensus however, is nowhere to be seen. It is reduced to a section of Fianna Fáil (22% of FF voters say they will vote no), the Progressive



1992: pro-choice campaigners picketing Irish embassy in London during the 'x' case.

Democrats's (who are split - with Minister of State Liz O'Donnell now saying she is against the proposal having voted it through the Dáil), and the Catholic Church.

Against the referendum proposals are Fine Gael, the Labour Party, the Green Party TDs, Sinn Féin, the National Women's Council, the Irish Family Planning Association, many women's organisations, the pro-choice movement and the far left.

The Women's Health Council - a state appointed body advising the government on women's health policy - has sharply criticised the proposals. So has the Adelaide Hospital Society - in terms similar to the ANV. And it has recently been revealed that the psychiatric evidence submitted to the government is not the position of the Royal Society of Psychiatry of Britain and

Ireland - who say it is a misrepresentation of their views.

So the claims of William Binchy - leading spokesperson for the so-called Pro-Life Campaign - that the referendum proposals are "what the psychiatrists want" - are untrue. The unravelling of the 'consensus' is such that Micheál Martin recently said to an ANV member ... "I wish I had never heard of the abortion referendum".

To date the Alliance for a NO Vote has led the active campaigning and has established a national profile as the leading pro-choice organisation opposing the government's plans. Our approach has been to work with all who oppose the referendum and who are not part of the anti-abortion movement.

Opinion poll evidence indicates approximately 35% for, 33% against, 20% undecided and the rest abstaining.

There remains however, much confusion as to what a 'yes' or 'no' vote means - including amongst supporters of the right to choose - some of whom think a 'yes' vote means more choice.

So we are working to win over a majority of the undecided's by explaining the implications of the referendum, while making it clear that supporters of choice should vote 'no'. This is a delicate task, as there are many who would say they oppose abortion and do not support the right to choose, but would not want to see another 'x' case. And while some polls indicate significant support for increased abortion services in Ireland, this is no guarantee of a majority 'no' vote. There is no suicidal 14 year-old being denied an abortion - as in 1992 - to humanise the choice for the voters.

The Labour Party and the IFPA have recently launched mass 'no' campaigns, with poster campaigns and in some areas mass leafleting is planned. While these campaigns have raised clear arguments against the pro-

posals as such, they have not made arguments for greater availability of legal abortion in Ireland. Sinn Féin has formally stated its opposition, but as yet has done little campaigning. There has been a deafening silence from the trade union movement.

Despite changes in attitude towards sexuality and abortion amongst the population, the outcome of this referendum is not a foregone conclusion. Either result will have a profound impact on Irish society. Defeat for the government will mean that no further referendums will be possible and abortion will be legalised for certain circumstances - specifically on grounds of risk of suicide. The pro-choice movement would be hugely strengthened.

Victory for the government will be a setback of enormous proportions for the struggle for reproductive rights in Ireland. The anti-abortionists have served notice that they will try to get the morning after pill and IUD outlawed. And needless to say the Irish women who go for abortions in Britain - and now to Russia where it's cheaper - at a rate of 7 to 10,000 a year, will be further criminalized and stigmatised. And there will be the ongoing litany of pub quizzes and other fundraising that women in working class communities organise to send poorer women with crisis pregnancies - often alone - to Britain for abortions.

International support is very important. It will help show the world the misogynist and reactionary intentions of the Irish government. It helps maintain pressure on Fianna Fáil and the wobbly PDs. While we are confident of defeating the government, we need the solidarity of our comrades, sisters and brothers overseas. Letters to the Irish press, to embassies and consulates, and messages of support are vital.

Solidarity with Irish women

Picket the Irish Embassy
17 Grosvenor Place SW1

Monday March 4

4.30-6.30

Called by Irish Abortion Solidarity Group

Further information: ring Terry on 07903 162175 or email outlook@gn.apc.org

Terry Conway

Leonora Lloyd's death on January 23 2002 at the young age of 61 has deprived the labour movement of a doughty fighter for socialism, for workers rights, for the environment and above all for a woman's right to control her fertility. She is mourned by many friends and comrades and by her family particularly her children Vanessa and Stephen and her sister Tessa.

Leonora died only 18 days after the celebration of her father Charlie van Gelderen's life which took place on January 5 (see facing page), following his death in October last year.

She was determined to speak there to celebrate his contribution to the movement, though she was obviously fighting to overcome the pain her illness brought.

All her life she was a fighter. She grew up in a political household, with meetings and discussions taking place all around her. She joined the Labour League of Youth in 1954 at the age of 14 and the Socialist Labour League in the late 1950s. From those teenage years she was always involved in one - or often many things - including the Aldermarston marches and many anti apartheid rallies.

Her packed funeral at Hither Green Cemetery on February 1 saw many tributes from friends, family and colleagues giving witness to the many facets of her contribution to the struggle for a better world.

Former General Secretary of the Labour Party, Jim Mortimer saluted the work she did as President of the London Regional Council of MSF. From the Socialist Campaign Group, Jeremy Corbyn recalled her tireless lobbying of MPs to defend abortion rights, and remembered how Labour MP Jo Richardson, when asked a question on an aspect of women's rights to which she didn't immediately know the answer, would often say "I must ask Leonora".

Dr Wendy Savage from Doctors for Choice, and Michelle Carlyle who knew her from her involvement in the abortion struggle spoke with strong emotion about her strong personality and irreplaceable commitment.

Sue Lukes and Graham Bash from the Labour Briefing Editorial Board also contributed to the picture. Leonora became involved in *Briefing* in 1991 and for some years was Co-Chair of its Editorial Board.

Former Labour Party NEC member Ljz Davies, now Chair of the Socialist Alliance, spoke of Leonora's fight to win the safe Tory seat of Hendon South for Labour in the 1992 General Election. Liz argued that had Leonora won the seat, she would have been one of the very few MPs, along with Jeremy Corbyn, who would have stuck to her principles through thick and thin.

Leonora's younger sister,

Leonora Lloyd

"She grabbed life by the scruff of its neck"

Tessa van Gelderen acted as Mistress of Ceremonies, threading together the other contributions with powerful recollections of her own. The phrase that I use to title this article comes from one of those cameos.

Each speaker not only recalled Leonora's political contribution and beliefs but reminded us of many other things that made her unique - her endless knitting, her ever present crossword puzzles, the deep joy that her two grandchildren Lucy and Thea gave her.

But for many of us, it is for her contribution to the struggle for women's liberation that Leonora will be most remembered.

She was one of the founders of *Socialist Woman*, a magazine launched by the International Marxist Group in 1969 as the voice for a network of Socialist Women's groups. *Socialist Woman* predated the foundation of the Women's Liberation Movement in Britain, launched at a conference at Ruskin in 1970. Even before this, Leonora had been involved in 1968 in the setting up of NJACCWER, the Joint Action Campaign Committee for

NJACCWER launched a charter which took up issues beyond the Equal Pay question - also calling for equality of opportunity for women in employment, education and public life, promising to "keep on fighting until the women of this country have full rights in every sphere".

In practice however, through its 18 months of real activity it campaigned only for Equal Pay. The highlight of its existence was the Equal Pay demonstration on 18 May 1969, attended by 2000 women from all over Britain.

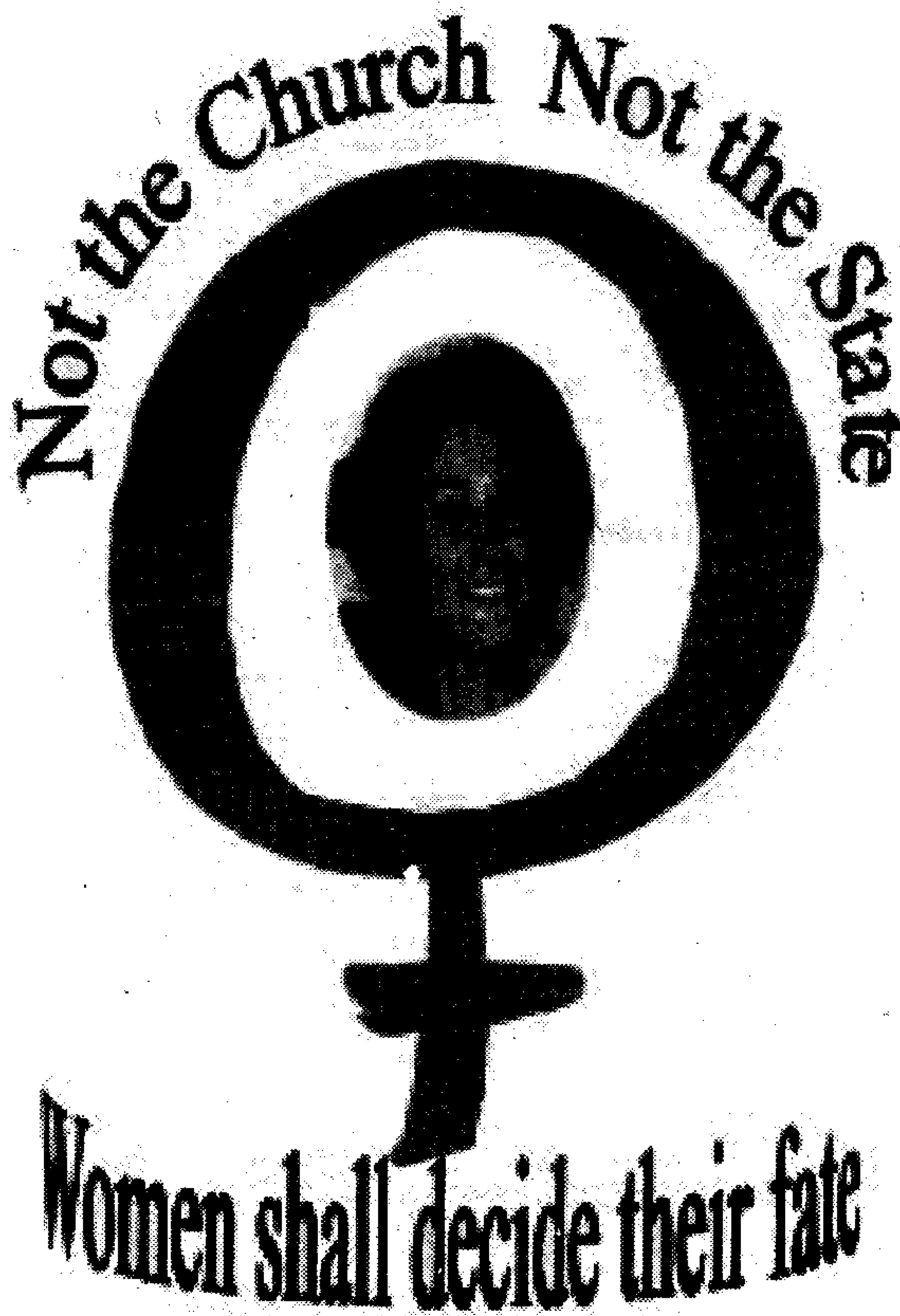
There can be no doubt that the work of NJACCWER was central to ensuring that the 1970 Act was introduced and passed. However, a militant campaign was also needed to ensure that the legislation was put into practice.

Employers tried to reorganise to get round the limited terms of the act, so that there was no "like" work between women and men that could be compared.

Unfortunately NJACCWER failed to live up to this challenge, which is why subsequently the IMG,

together with others, was instrumental in pushing the Working Women's Charter campaign - which continued to organise around the same issues but also broadened out to take up questions such as abortion and contraception.

Looking back through the pages of *Socialist Woman* in preparing to write this obituary reminded me of what a vital role socialist women played in the creation of the broader women's movement in this country. It also underlined how quickly our ideas changed in a political period as rich as those years which followed in the wake of the massive upheavals of 1968.



Leonora's first contributions to *Socialist Woman* were mainly on the question of women's low and unequal pay, though she also wrote a number of reviews of books and films - such as the influential series of programmes on the history of the suffragettes, *Shoulder to Shoulder*.

Of course the particular role in which Leonora's contribution was most unique was in her enormous contribution to the creation and sustaining of the National Abortion Campaign, founded in 1975.

Limited abortion law reform had taken place in 1967, but was to suffer a series of sustained attacks through the mid-70s. A series of MPs, backed by the extremely well organised anti-abortion lobby funded and organised by the Catholic Church, launched assault after assault on the limited rights we had won through that legislation.

In between battling off James White, Bill Benyon, James Corrie and Victoria Gillick, pro-choice campaigners also attempted to fight against the restrictions of the 67 Act itself. While a huge step forward, the Act still leaves women dependent on the approval of two doctors to get an abortion and so exercise our right to control our bodies and therefore our lives.

We campaigned against the inequity that existed and still exists today in provision in different parts of the country because of the existence of a 'conscience' clause that meant that doctors could refuse to perform or consent to the performing of

abortions. We fought for the Labour Party to see abortion as a political issue rather than one on which individual MPs should be allowed to defy party policy by voting against women's rights.

In all of this and more Leonora was so often at the centre. She worked full time for NAC from 1983-93, but even when her paid employment was elsewhere, the fight for abortion rights was at the centre of her beliefs and her activity.

She spoke at countless meetings, in particular understanding the importance of winning support from the trade unions for a woman's right to choose - the Women's TUC, for example, passing a resolution in support of abortion and contraception on demand as far back as 1975.

The huge demonstrations that NAC organised in opposition to each successive attempt to restrict our rights would not have been possible without the huge support we generated amongst the ranks of trade union women.

For many women, this battle to defend and extend women's control over our fertility was the first contact with the ideas of the women's liberation movement. This fight also challenged the idea that the role of trade unions was only to take up issues of pay and conditions - rather than to fight on all the issues that affect working people - and working class women in particular.

At the same time as playing a high profile, leadership

role, no task was too small for Leonora. She went from public debates with anti-abortionists under the bright lights of the TV cameras, back to the chaotic NAC office in Wesley House to get out yet another mailing to supporters often late at night.

She was everywhere, inspiring others with her conviction that without control over our bodies, women would never have control over our lives.

One contribution that she was particularly proud of was the Schools Kit that she developed for NAC. It was vital to her that younger women should not suffer the return to the backstreets that women who had grown up before the 67 Act had lived through - at the cost of so many lives.

Leonora also understood that the battle for abortion rights was an international struggle. Back when NAC was launched in 1975, women in France active in MLAC (Mouvement pour la Liberté de l'avortement et de la contraception - Movement for free abortion and contraception) hosted the first international conference on abortion, contraception and sterilisation attended by women from across Europe, from the United States and from Latin America.

This took place at a time when the Supreme Court in Germany had just thrown out a more advanced abortion law than that in place at the time, and when abortion clinics in Italy were under attack from the right.

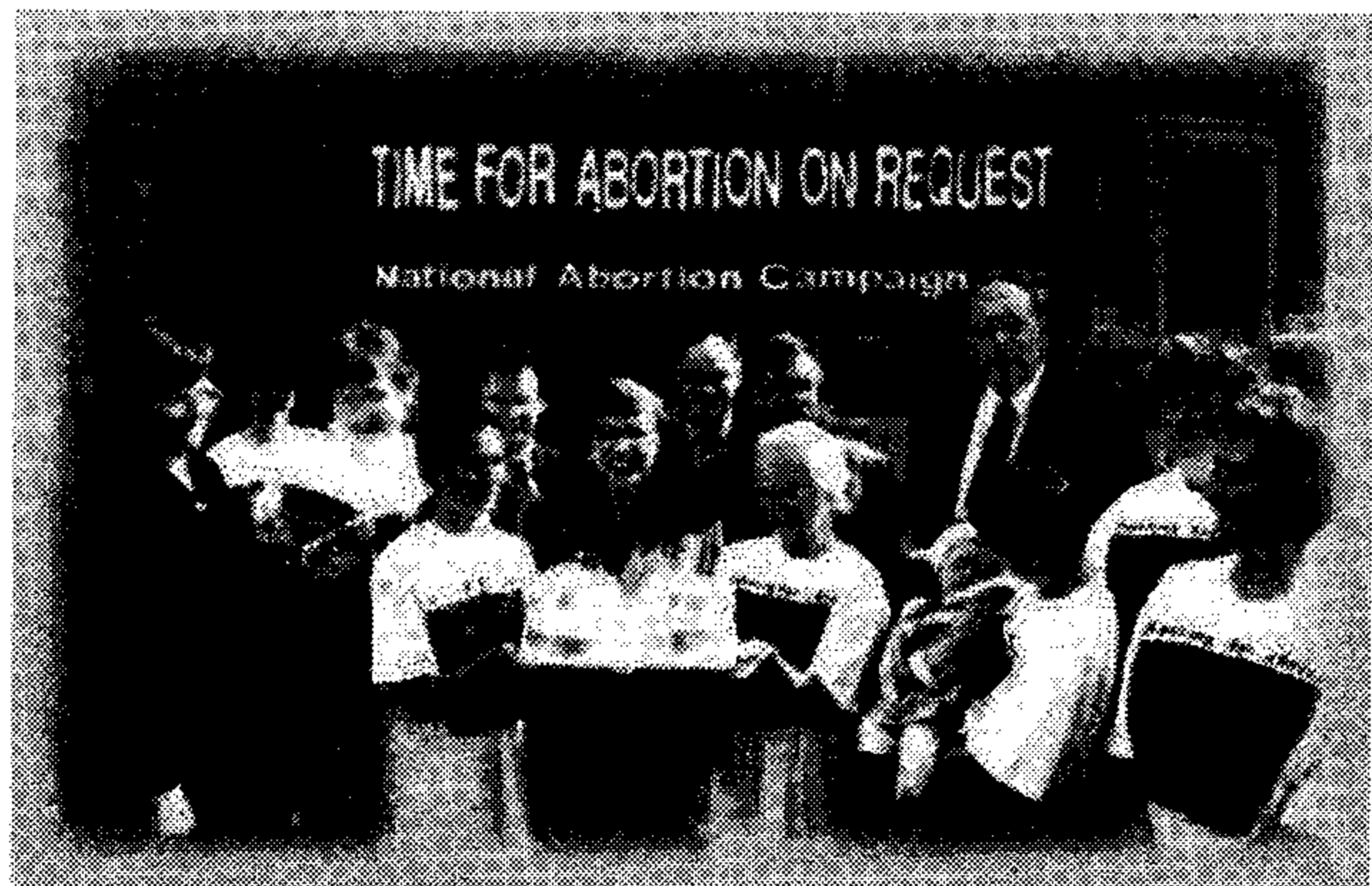
The conference led to greater co-ordination of battles across Europe in particular - with for example an international solidarity demonstration being organised in Italy in October 1975. In 1978, Leonora organised for NAC to host the second conference here in Britain in June of that year.

This internationalism was to continue to be an important thread of her political activity through the years ahead.

Many of the restrictions on women's rights that motivated Leonora to devote so much of her life to the fight for socialist feminist ideas in the 1970s have not been won today. On the day of her funeral, it was reported in the press that the anti-abortionists intend to launch an attack on the 'morning after pill', using medical advances that have lowered the age of "viability" of the foetus to restrict our rights still further.

As we report elsewhere, women's rights to control our fertility are under assault in Portugal and in Ireland, with the forthcoming referendum on March 6. One way we can pay tribute to Leonora is to step up our own commitment to those battles.

There will be a commemoration of Leonora's life later in the year.



Women's Equal Rights.

NJACCWER was founded from a meeting in the House of Commons, organised by one of the officials involved in the famous Ford's machinists' strike of 1968. While the Ford strike was not formally about equal pay, it was certainly concerned with the principle of equal pay for work of equal value - the principle that would be central to the 1970 Equal Pay Act introduced by Barbara Castle.

The Ford strike itself was part of a broader rank and file movement around equal pay, which also involved the setting up of an equal pay committee in Scotland for example.

Experiences remembered ... with a smile

On January 5 more than 150 people crowded into Conway Hall, to celebrate the life of Charlie van Gelderen, the last surviving participant in the founding conference of the Fourth International in 1938.

The event, organised by the International Socialist Group together with Charlie's family, was a combination of political rally and an informal opportunity for comrades and friends to share reminiscences.

The first contribution, from Alan Thornett on behalf of the ISG outlined the major political events of Charlie's life. Here we reproduce part of that speech, which went on to run through the main political experiences of Charlie's life from the early years in South Africa, his role in the Trotskyist movement in Britain both before and after the war and his contribution to fighting for revolutionary ideas in Italy as a member of the British army in the heady days just after the fall

of Mussolini.

Other speakers included Alison Drew, author of a major study of the South African left, Julian and Paul Harber whose parents Denzil and Mary were Charlie's comrades in the RCP, and Steve Potter, who talked eloquently about Charlie's role in Southern Africa work.

Pam Singer's poem on the experience of sharing a house with Charlie added more than a touch of humour as well as more poignancy to the proceedings. Comrades and friends who hadn't previously asked to speak spontaneously came forward to join in and build up an even fuller picture of this remarkable individual.

There were also many messages from individuals and organisations that were not able to be present. These included tributes from Harry Ratner and from Margaret Johns who had worked with Charlie in the 1930's, from Chris Khamis and from Anne Henderson who knew him more

recently and from comrades of the Fourth International in France, Italy, Germany, Portugal, the United States, Lebanon, Sri Lanka and of course South Africa. Most of the contributions not only dealt with Charlie's political work and beliefs but also to how much knowing Charlie had changed their lives.

The meeting concluded with Penny Duggan speaking on behalf of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International said:

"I'll always remember Charlie's smile which was a symbol of his infectious enthusiasm which is my most abiding memory of him. Another testament to how he well he communicated his ideas and ideals is that his two daughters also became revolutionary Marxist activists - despite the well-known propensity of young women to rebel against parents.

"Charlie was the last representative of the comrades who made the important and difficult decision to found the FI. Not since the First

International had there been a decision to launch an International without a mass party behind it; And the FI had to battle as a minority against powerful and opposing forces unlike the 1st.

"Charlie knew that this created difficulties within the movement and always fought against sectarian splits which dogged the Trotskyist movement.

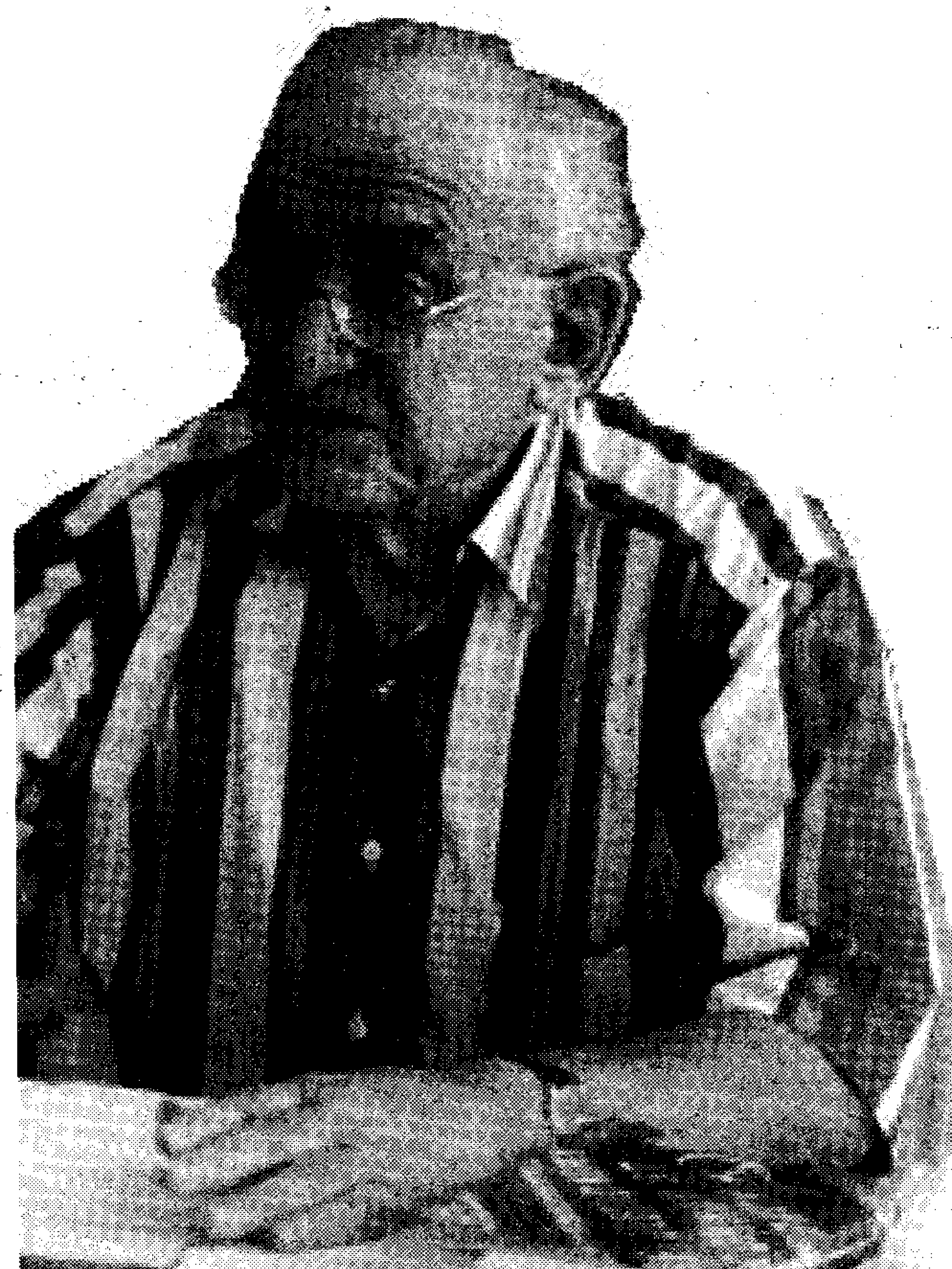
"One of the occasions on which I heard Charlie speak was the annual camp of European youth organisations in solidarity with the Fourth International in 1998 where we invited him to speak to commemorate of the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the Fourth International.

"Our movement has known many difficulties, has rarely been more than a very minority political current, and has known the inevitable splits and sectarianism that are the result of such a situation. As Charlie said 'Sectarian splits have been a chronic ailment of our movement. Minorities (...) split off on the slightest pretext (...) to form tiny sects, impotent and without any future. How different to Trotsky, who persisted in his adherence to the Third International until 1939 and the utter defeat of the German working class'."

Penny recalled Charlie's participation in the small group of comrades responsible the International's political work in southern Africa, and brought tribute from another one of those comrades, Claude Gabriel, who said that it was impossible to weigh the value of Charlie's contribution.

She underlined the fact that when the situation changed in the beginning of the 1980s. Charlie was able to reconsider the traditional positions of South African Trotskyism and turn his attention to the independent trade-union left and the new networks of revolutionary socialists.

"He was one of the few Trotskyists of the old generation who understood how to do this and put his experi-



ence at the service of the new groups with which the International started to work from the 1980s. She said:

"The recent strikes against privatisation in South Africa and militant trade union action elsewhere in the continent were examples he was holding up to others in the last years of his life.

"Today Charlie would have seized on the importance of new global justice anti-war movement knowing that the stakes for building the revolutionary movement are immense in a situation that is very unfavourable but there is a new possibility on the horizon.

"Charlie would have understood that this movement is particularly important because it is giving birth to a new radicalisation amongst young people. He consistently emphasised the importance of young people, knowing how important it was that revolutionary organisations draw in the new generations coming into struggle.

"He was always delighted to come to our youth camps. He came to 50th and 60th anniversaries and we looked forward to seeing him at 65th and 70th. But sadly that is not to be.

"In a letter to his brother Herman, who worried about

how Charlie was going to convince a young audience of his ideas. Charlie said that he was the one that was learning and being inspired.

"But although he said that they enthused him, it was also very clear that his contribution really gave his audience a sense of history and of continuity between the ideas that motivated them now and those that had motivated Charlie and his comrades at the birth of our movement.

"One testimony of that inspiration comes in the message to this meeting from Andrea Peniche who spoke with Charlie in the 1998 60th anniversary rally. Andrea says: 'Charlie had a dream and during his whole life he fought for his dream. And we are here to say that his dream is also our dream. We are here to say that we will continue the struggle he started.

The best tribute we can make to Charlie is to struggle for another world, a world without discrimination. A just world, a world of solidarity. A world of violet [for the struggle against women's oppression] and red [for the workers' struggle]. Thank you Charlie."

■ An appreciation of Charlie's life appeared in SO No. 50.

"His political life spanned almost the history of the Trotskyist movement"

Extracts from Alan Thornett's speech

A couple of caveats before we start this afternoon. This first is that this is not a commiseration it is a celebration.

It is the celebration of the life of a fantastic comrade and his contribution to the movement. When I have finished speaking therefore you don't need to be silent; you can clap your hands, scream appreciation, have a standing ovation or even a Mexican wave. It's a celebration. You can even do that for the other speakers as well.

The second is that for Charlie two score years and ten was not life expectancy it was political activity. He became a Trotskyist almost when Trotskyism began, and he was active until the latter part of last year and campaigned for the Socialist Alliance in Cambridge in the election.

His political activity spanned virtually the entire history of the Trotskyist movement. To talk about his political life, therefore, is to talk about the entire history of the movement.

I am not going to do that. Not just because I am not an historian of the move-

ment, or because there are comrades here better qualified than me to do that, but because I have been asked to limit my remarks to an hour and forty five minutes and I want to try to stick to that agreement!

I have changed my mind several times in the past few days as to how to approach this presentation. Some comrades - one in particular - urged me to ensure that I covered as



much as possible the whole of Charlie's political life. "Make sure you say something about each of the seven decades", he said.

I decided I just could not approach it this way. I decided that the contribution of the early pioneers of our movement was simply too great. They were the ones who in tiny numbers

faced the Stalinist juggernaut at the beginning of the 1930s.

They had seen the destruction of the Russian revolution and the Stalinisation of the Soviet party. They had seen the betrayal of the Chinese revolution. They had been driven out of the CPs or worse. This, as Trotsky said was the midnight of the century.

Soon those who had led the revolution would face show trials in Moscow. It was under these conditions, as someone said, they dared to begin.

They made themselves the living link between the revolutionary Marxism of the Russian revolution and future generations of revolutionary socialists. They are entitled to our gratitude for that and we should show it for Charlie today.

We could turn it round the other way. Imagine had they not dared to begin. Imagine a situation where the Stalinist nightmare had extinguished the flame of revolutionary Marxism in any living or organised form.

Can you imagine how much poorer we would be today? It is for these reasons that today we salute the early pioneers and

"He lived his socialism"

My father was a wonderful man. Not a perfect man, as he was always the first to acknowledge - except in fun. His sense of humour was one of his many saving graces.

I want to concentrate on the things that made him what he was. Above all he was a socialist through and through.

Charlie believed firmly in the infinite possibilities of the combined human spirit to accomplish everything it wanted to, while accepting that it could be for good or evil, depending on the circumstances.

Unlike those who are religious, the political activist believes that direct, personal, co-operative intervention is what makes the difference.

So things could not be left to other people. If you wanted something done, you not only had to do it yourself, you had to do it in a way that

pulled in others and ensured that you did it together. That was the philosophy he brought me up with.

The second thing that made him important and unique was that he lived his socialism, while acknowledging the limits of living in a capitalist, materialist society.

I have known many people who call themselves socialists, and no doubt they are.

Over and over again I have heard people say things which have made me think: "I wouldn't want to live in their version of a socialist society".

No body ever said that about Charlie. In fact many said exactly the opposite to me.

(Part of Leonora Lloyd's speech at Charlie's funeral.)

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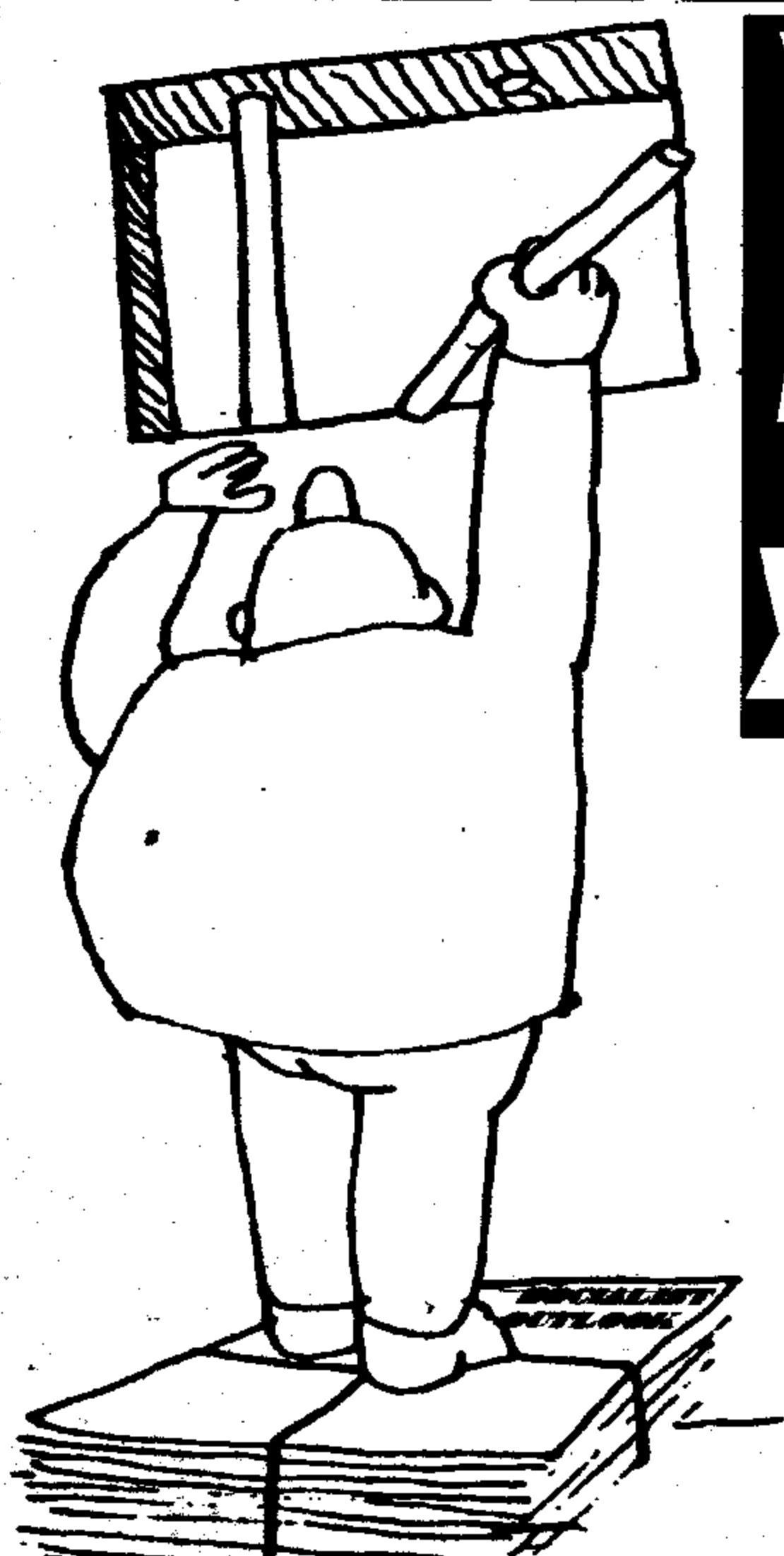
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