

NS 54

Socialist

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OUTLOOK

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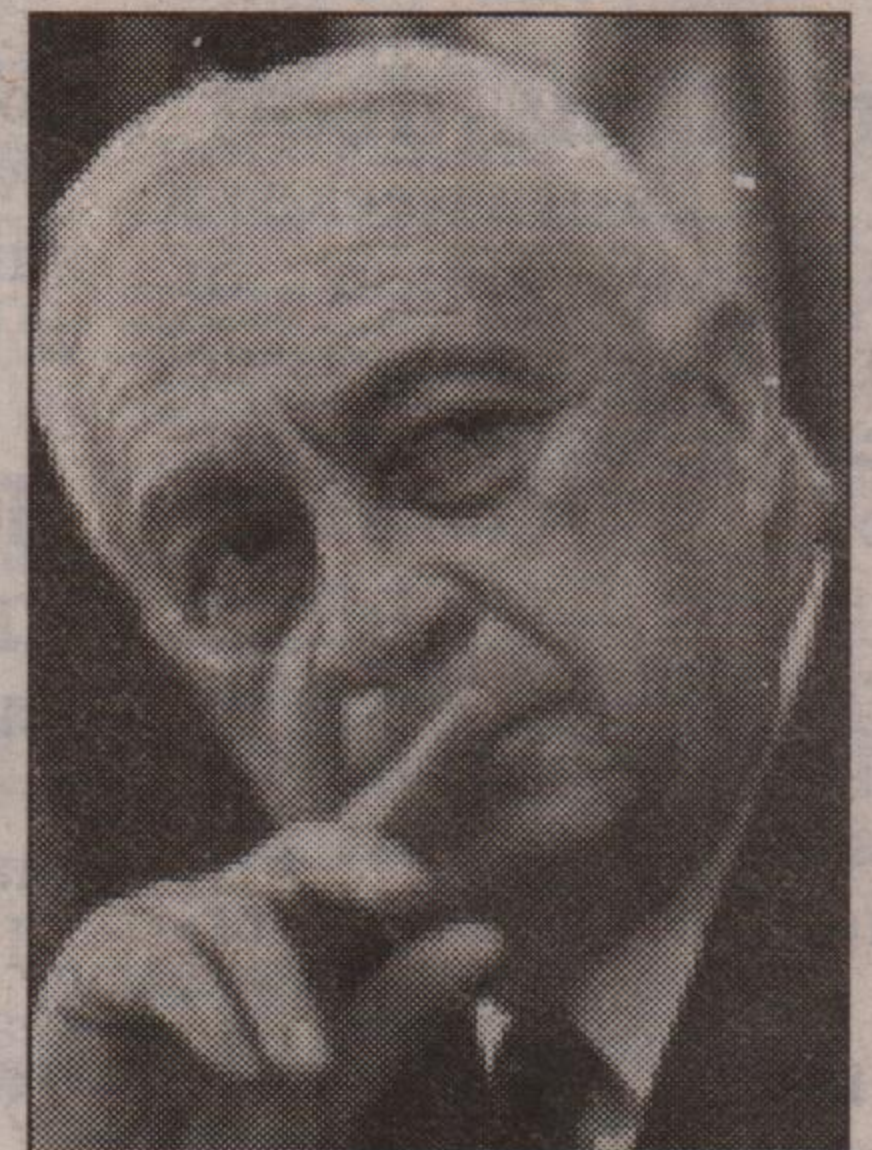
Stop Sharon war crimes – p3, p13



PLUS Zimbabwe, Kenya, Italy

As Sharon's terror squads butcher hundreds in Jenin

BOYCOTT



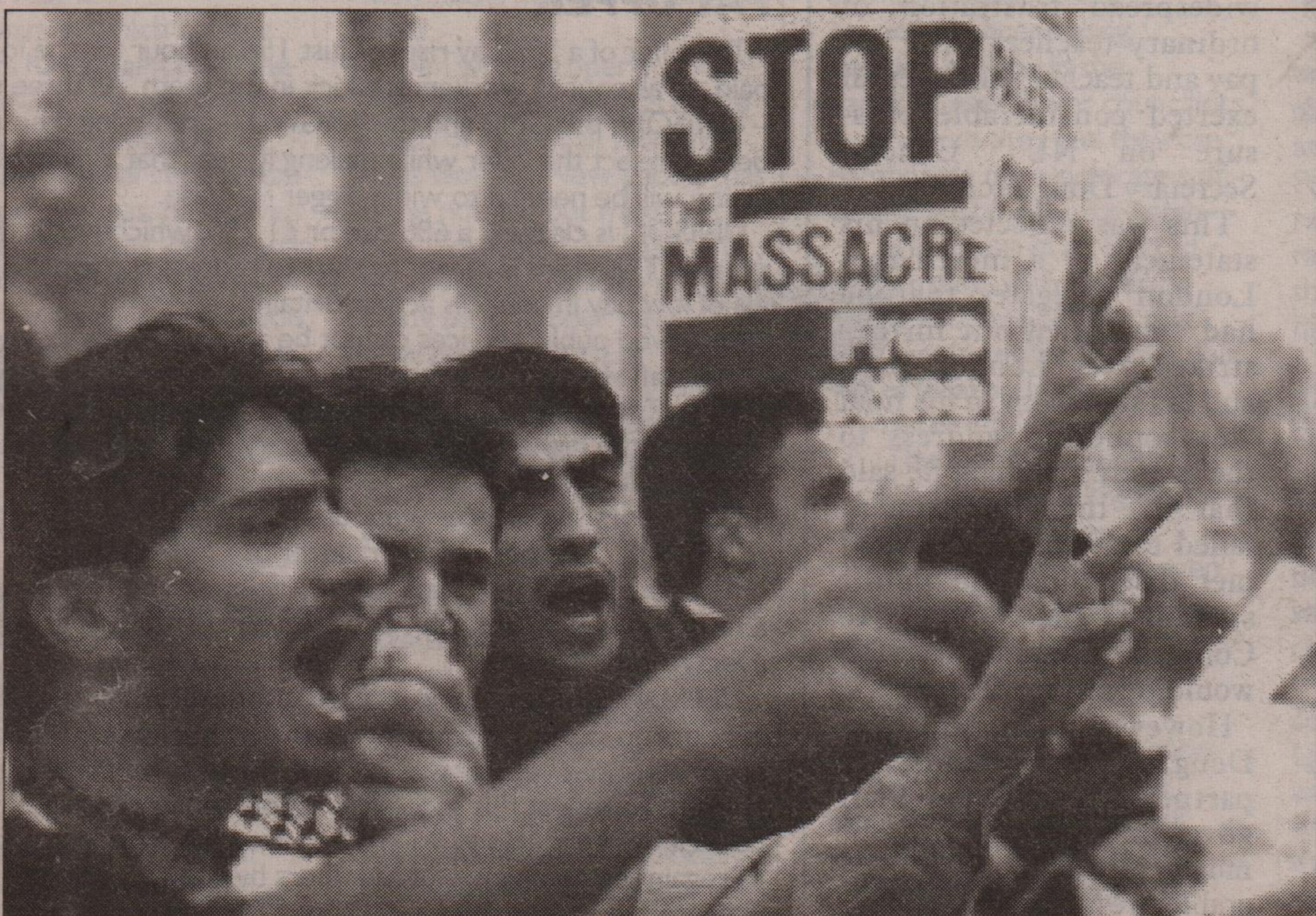
War criminal – Sharon

ISRAELI

GOODS!



Israeli troops: licensed to shoot, beat, harass and humiliate Palestinians under the banner of fighting "terrorism"



Molly Cooper

AS JOURNALISTS and aid workers finally gain limited access to the rubble of the Jenin camp, the full horror of a major Israeli massacre is being revealed.

The quality press are unusually agreed in their verdict: not only has the brutality of the Israeli troops against Palestinian civilians reached a new peak, but the offensive against Jenin was authorised by Zionist chief Sharon with the active connivance of Israel's paymasters in Washington, whose lavish aid props up the vicious, racist settler state. And behind Bush, at every step, is Tony Blair.

But the resistance is also growing. Demonstrations in solidarity with the Palestinians are growing all over Britain. 25,000 marched in London on April 13, and 300 in Cardiff. 500 people joined a "die-in" in Manchester, 1800 have marched in Edinburgh, and 1000 in Glasgow in recent weeks and there have been regular pickets in Oxford as well as in London.

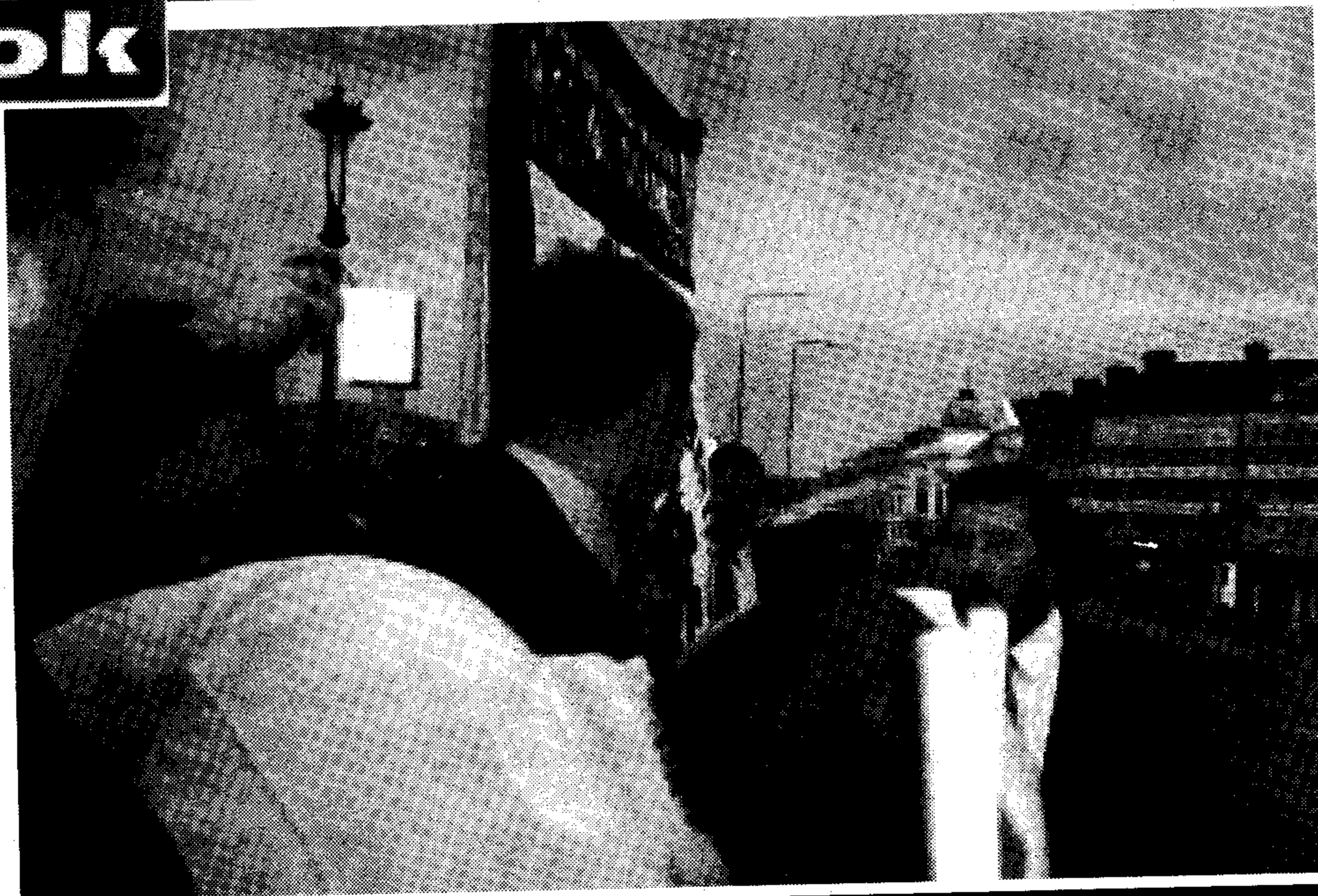
Activists need to make sure the May 18 demonstration called by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and supported by many other organisations is the largest and most vibrant showing yet of opposition to Sharon's war crimes – and Blair's complicity with them.

But there is something else we can all do ourselves. When people at work, college or school express their revulsion at the massacre going on in Palestine, tell them about the Boycott Israeli good campaign, launched by the PSC and supported by other solidarity organisations and prominent individuals.

● To order leaflets, stickers and other campaign material email: big@palestinecampaign.org Send donations for the BIG Campaign to: BIG Campaign Box BM PSA London WC1N 3XX, cheques payable to the BIG Campaign

Socialist Outlook

Solidarity? What's that? asks Home Secretary David Blunkett going in to Labour's Welsh Conference in Cardiff, past protesting workers from the Friction Dynamex dispute. The TGWU members were sacked last summer after taking strike action over conditions in the North Wales plant.
www.frictiondynamex.co.uk



NUT calls for national demo against privatisation

Stuart Richardson

During the Easter weekend the National Union of Teachers Conference passed an amended motion which included "Conference instructs the Executive to work with other TUC affiliates to organise a national demonstration against privatisation of public services".

The motion was passed with the support of the NUT National Executive. This would be a key step forward in the fight against the Blair government's privatisation programme and was prominently called for by civil service union leader Mark Serwotka at the recent Socialist Alliance trade union conference.

Although less publicised than other private inroads into public services, the private sector is increasing its role in state education.

The motion noted "the 'outsourcing' of LEA services to schools and private contractors", "the use of PFI/PPP to fund and implement school capital programmes..." and even "the handing over of schools to the private sector".

The near unanimous support for action on privatisation reflected a shift by the trade union bureaucracy and even the representative of the TUC General Council Brendan Barbar, normally extremely compliant towards the Blair government, was sharply critical of the government's privatisa-

tion policy.

Whether the NUT leadership will ever carry out this conference decision is open to considerable doubt.

Teacher shortage

The other key debate was on teacher shortages, which are becoming chronic in many parts of the country.

In Westminster and Surrey, teacher turnover has reached 25% i.e. one in four teachers leave every year and some schools in Westminster more than 50% of the staff are supply teachers.

The shortage has placed an intolerable burden on many permanently employed staff and severely affected many students' educational progress.

The motion from Croydon NUT called for a minimum of 20% non contact time for all teachers and an end to cover for absent colleagues beyond the first day of an unforeseen absence.

This position was sharply opposed by the National Executive since it exposes their dramatic retreat last year on this key issue for teachers. Action on one day cover would also dramatically expose teacher shortages, since students will be sent home.

Palestine

The most impassioned debate at the conference was on Palestine with a motion supporting "the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Israeli troops from all the territories occupied in

1967" and "the right of return for the Palestinian people".

An amendment to the Executive which essentially took a neutral position on the conflict was powerfully opposed by Bernard Regan, executive member for Inner London, who stated that the issue was about an occupier and an occupied people.

Courageously, Bernard said although he did not support or condone suicide bombing one had to understand this was an act of despair of people suffering horrendous oppression.

It was clearly a major victory to commit a union with 220,000 members to a position of solidarity with the Palestinian people. However as the Socialist Outlook conference bulletin said the motion had a number of weaknesses. It noted

"Based on United Nations resolutions, rather than a political and historical analysis of the conflict, it cannot fully satisfy the just demands of the Palestinian people. It was, after all, the UN which, without taking into account Palestinian opposition resolved in 1947 to partition Palestine.

Nor does the motion address the Zionist nature of the state of Israel, which is at the heart of the dispossession and oppression of the Palestinian people."

An amusing sideline was the confusion of the Workers' Liberty supporters who were apparently sup-

porting the motion despite their organisation's opposition to the Palestinians' right to return since it would threaten the "Jewish" nature of the Israeli state!!

Salaries

Another important victory for the left was the salary debate. The Executive position of support for the "chartered teacher scale based on continuing professional development" which is basically an endorsement for the Scottish McCrone deal.

This deal despite a modest pay increase, increases the working time and commitments of teachers.

The left motion was agreed by sizeable card vote victory of nearly 30,000. It called for a 10% or £2,000 (whichever is the greater) for all teachers and a £6,000 Inner London Allowance.

Other motions were also agreed by sizeable card votes against Executive opposition. The one on Foundation Stage supported the abolition of Key Stage 1 SATs (compulsory tests for 7 year olds).

Another motion on League Tables and SATs "instructs the Executive to canvass and act upon member's opinions on reinstating the boycott of SATs."

Doug McAvoy

The votes for action during the conference and the widespread frustration of ordinary teachers with low pay and teacher shortages all exerted considerable pressure on NUT General Secretary Doug McAvoy.

This was reflected in his statement at a meeting of London delegates that he had "not ruled out further strikes over London pay" and his statement in his final "left-sounding" address to the conference when he said that if the Government failed to deliver in the summer discussions on public spending the "Cover to Contract" industrial action would be re-introduced.

However it is clear that Doug, so long committed to partnership with the Blair government, will only be moved into action by considerable pressure from below.

UNISON sick of waiting for London weighting

Fred Leplat (London Regional Committee in a personal capacity)

For the last three decades, rises in the cost of living allowance for council workers in London have been pegged to national have been pegged to the national pay awards. 28 years ago, Council workers in Nalgo (now part of Unison) took strike action and won a substantial rise in the London Weighting.

The London Weighting is now totally inadequate for council workers, generally low paid, living in London, which is now the most expensive city in the world.

Not only do council workers suffer from the high cost of living, but the delivery of public services also suffer as employers are unable to recruit.

Unison has submitted to the London employers a claim for a flat rate £4000 backdated to April 2001.

The employers have responded by stating that this claim was unacceptable as they could not afford it. They also stated that a flat rate was no longer appropriate and that "recruitment and retention" packages for certain groups of staff may be more appropriate.

Unison has just concluded a "consultative" ballot of its members which resulted in a 6 to 1 majority in favour of going forward to strike action.

This overwhelming result shows the level of dissatisfaction amongst Council workers over pay. Not one branch in London returned a 'no' vote.

The turnout in the ballot was on average 30%, although it was up to 60% in some branches. However the margin between 'yes' and 'no' was universally massive.

The one-day strike by teachers for their London Weighting, also £4000, gave confidence to members to vote for strike action as a necessary way forward to win our claim.

Delegates from Unison branches at the London Local Government Committee decided unanimously to push for a quick ballot which would have allowed the first one-day strike to take place on May 1.

The symbolism of Mayday, the international workers day and this year also the day before the council elections, would have ensured a massive and enthusiastic strike.

However, regional and national full-time officials urged caution against taking this swift action by claiming that membership lists were deficient and open to legal challenge.

The real reason for putting off the strike beyond Mayday was the desire of some within the union to protect New Labour from political embarrassment. Even so, it was a close run thing as the Industrial Action Committee, which authorises the ballot and the action, voted by only one vote to delay the ballot timetable.

The ballot is due to start on April 19th, the result announced after May 3rd and the first strike to be called on May 14th.

Activists should now put all their efforts into winning the official ballot and turning the mood into real action. Meetings, both big and small, need organising to reinforce the message to members to vote 'YES'. New recruits can be signed up.

The stronger the campaign at work, the bigger the 'yes' vote will be. The result will undoubtedly be a "yes" vote, but a massive turnout is needed to ensure that effective strike action is taken to win. The strike on May 14th will be a start, but the employers need to know Unison members are ready and able to escalate if they don't pay up.

COUNCIL WORKERS REJECT NATIONAL PAY OFFER

The offer of a 3% pay rise, or just 15p an hour for the lowest paid, to all council workers is a kick in the teeth. All three unions - UNISON, the GMB and the T&GWU - are urging their members to reject this offer while making it clear that industrial action will be needed to win a bigger increase.

UNISON is claiming a 6% rise or £1,750, whichever is the greater. This claim is meant to start to redress the appalling levels of low pay in councils across Britain.

Improved public services cannot be achieved without investing in the staff who provide them. Yet council services are plagued with staff shortages, high turnover, and low pay. Local government has the highest level of temporary workers in the economy, about 10%.

Councillors' allowances went up by 60% last year, taking them to £12,500. Yet more than a quarter of a million council employees are still paid less than £5 an hour, and two thirds earn a basic rate worth less than £13,000, compared with a national average of £19,500.

UNISON is now running a consultative ballot, which will result in rejection in the miserly offer from the employers. The last national strike over pay was in 1988, under a Tory government. In order to repeat this successful action, the leadership of the council workers unions will have to launch a national campaign to regain the confidence of members by showing that they are prepared to break with New Labour if that is necessary to defend the members' interests.



New Labour's Newham council derecognises UNISON!

UNISON members in Newham have voted to commence a series of one-day strikes following the New Labour-council's decision to "derecognise" the branch.

As the Branch officers have put it "Tony Blair's favourite local authority is set to be rocked by industrial action"

Since the end of January, Newham council has banned all consultation and negotiations with UNISON, the largest union in Newham. This followed the Branch's criticism of an £11,000 pay rise given to a manager in the Chief executive dept, while refusing to regrade low-paid staff. The council is demanding UNISON withdraw its criticism.

An agreement reached, in a meeting in February with the employers and the national union officials to the settle the argument was

vetoed by the Chief Executive, Dave Burbage and backed by Council Leader Robin Wales.

It is no coincidence that this came at the same time UNISON had announced the consultative ballot of London members over our £4,000 London weighting claim.

Robin Wales, chair of the ALG- the body that refused to give the London cost of living allowance - is the same person authorising this attack.

The UNISON branch in Newham has recently had some successes for its members in the housing repairs call centre and for social workers.

The derecognition of the union is an attempt to strike a blow against the union as it is scoring victories against New Labour's agenda of privatising services and introducing flexible working.

Stop Sharon's war crimes



Molly Cooper

Victory to the Intifada

possibility for these people to move out of the camps in which they have lived for the last 50 years. No wonder Jenin camp and the other camps across the territories have been the site of some of the fiercest resistance to the latest murderous onslaught by the Israeli state – and the strongest support for the Intifada.

And now hundreds of homes have been bulldozed, many with people still inside them. Not content with slaughtering hundreds – men, women and children – the Israeli army has blocked ambulances removing the bodies. Corpses have either been left to rot – or have themselves been bulldozed into mass graves.

Many people whose injuries from Israeli ammunition were not in themselves life-threatening have bled to death because medical teams have been barred from access to the camp.

Jenin is a particularly vile example of what the Israeli

war machine has done – and the one in which so far the greatest number of Palestinians have been slaughtered. It is also tragically typical of what has been meted out to the Palestinian people by their Zionist occupiers in town after town, camp after camp across the West Bank.

The 1200 people that packed into a London rally to hear the report back from Ramallah by Sussex University students and entertainer Jeremy Hardy got a glimpse both of the horror of what the Palestinian people face day after day – and of their courage in the face of this indescribable nightmare.

This Intifada has a huge echo across the world – and those who are going to the Occupied Territories to act as human shields are playing a vital role as part of building solidarity with the struggle. Yet again Tony Blair has

demonstrated with brutal clarity where he stands in all of this. At huge public expense, he recalled Parliament – to conduct an utterly pointless debate on the death of a 101-year-old racist, snob and scrounger. Of course even Blair's enormous power could not prevent the death of Mrs Windsor – though he sought to exploit it.

But there has been no such measure to discuss the avoidable slaughter of hundreds of Palestinians by an army supplied with British arms, bankrolled by the USA, and given a bank cheque for slaughter by Blair's good friend George W. Bush.

The British government does have the power to stop selling arms to Israel, and to stop giving political support to the war criminal Sharon.

But these questions, along with the continuing war in Afghanistan and the threats to Iraq were not even up for debate at the "mother of Parliaments", despite calls from the back benches.

Outrage at Blair's criminal

stance, together with opposition to the Zionist war machine have brought increasing numbers of people out onto the streets across Britain in these last weeks.

This political radicalisation has been strongest, not surprisingly in the Arab and Muslim communities, many of whom have seen more accurate pictures of the reality of the Zionist massacres through Al-Jazeera than on British TV.

But other activists from the anti-war and anti-globalisation movement, from colleges and schools have increasingly participated alongside them. Significantly, sections of the Jewish community have also marched to show their disgust with what Sharon is doing in their name.

The Palestinian people will not, cannot give up their fight for freedom. It is the duty of every socialist to build the broadest possible solidarity with their struggle

Nearly two weeks after the invasion started on April 3, the media finally managed to break through the Israeli cordon surrounding Jenin refugee camp. But it is almost impossible for even the best journalists or the most talented photographers to convey the real horror of what has happened inside what *The Times* describes as the "camp of the dead" and *The Independent* calls "a human tomb", with

"grisly evidence of a war crime".

Janine di Giovanni comments in *The Times*: "Rarely, in more than a decade of war reporting from Bosnia, Chechnya, Sierra Leone, Kosovo, have I seen such deliberate destruction, such disrespect for human life".

Jenin camp was home to 15,000 refugees, driven off their land by the Zionists in 1948. The much-feted Oslo accord and the establishment of the Bantustan Palestinian authority did not create the

MARCH for Palestine

Saturday

MAY 18

Assemble 12 noon

**Central London
Rally Trafalgar Square**

Called by Palestine Solidarity Campaign

May 2: another chance to vote socialist

AFTER last year's record low turn-out of voters helped Blair secure another landslide victory in the general election, New Labour faces an even tougher fight to enthrone the electorate in the run-up to council elections on May 2.

Five years in which Labour ministers have maintained the Tory vice-like grip on council finances, driving forward repeated waves of cuts, privatisation and closures, have given working class areas little reason to turn out and vote Labour.

And the party's local election campaign, like a right wing parody of the infamous "loony left" diversions of Labour councils dodging hard issues 20 years ago, focuses primarily on demonising unruly youth, with plans to crack down on street disorder, youth crime, graffiti and abandoned cars.

Such desperate efforts to make populist capital out of the continuing polarisation and social decay of towns and cities, despite Blair's occasional crocodile tears over "social exclusion", is a feeble smoke-

screen to divert from the mounting shortage of affordable housing – and the knock-on impact on staffing levels in key public services, especially in London and the South East – and the problems of desperately under-funded social services.

Even while property prices have spiralled upwards out of reach of almost all working class families, New Labour has done nothing but make the problem worse. With little or no affordable housing now being built, Labour have a now taken over from the Tories as the most avid sellers and privatisers of council housing – though such plans can go seriously awry, as the recent bloody nose suffered by New Labour's efforts to hive off council estates in Birmingham has shown.

The steady privatisation of elderly care is just part of a constant drive by New Labour councils to undermine many of the remaining areas of locally-controlled public services.

As a result councils have been rendering themselves increasingly irrelevant as a factor in their local areas – and New Labour has also drawn the conclusion from that, seeking to restructure councils, concentrating decision-making in the hands of ever-fewer councillors – or, where they feel they can bamboozle the electorate sufficiently, pushing for the establishment of an elected mayor with sweeping executive powers that would render the election of local councillors even more redundant.

The model for such mayors would not be the impotent and hog-tied Ken Livingstone, who cannot even organise a firework party for Londoners, but US-style mayors with genuine executive powers.

Small wonder that the sponsors of the drive for more elected mayors include not only Blair – a Prime Minister notorious for spending less



time in the Commons than almost any of his predecessors, and his acolytes, who also see Parliament and council democracy are seen as a tedious charade, impeding their deals with the private sector – but also big business interests.

Big business has not the slightest interest in democracy for working people, but sees the establishment of a mayoral system as their best hope of pressing home even more privatisation of the remaining council services.

The "P" word is indeed a common strand linking New Labour's policies at national and local level. This is why – while still formally affiliated to the Labour Party – the GMB union, as part of its continuing

campaign against New Labour's drive to privatisation, has taken the novel step of writing to all 8,000 Labour council candidates demanding that they sign a 6-point programme opposing any further privatisation as a condition of GMB support.

Other public sector unions could usefully follow this lead and pile on the pressure against Blairite candidates in every area.

New Labour's track record suggests that few Party candidates will be able to pass the GMB test. But that raises the question of which party working class voters should support.

Once again the Lib Dems are presenting an apparently progressive and comparatively "left" face at national level, while their councillors in practice work – whether in their own right, or with Labour, or (as in Oxford) with the Greens – to put forward their own variety of cuts, closures and privatisation.

However there will be a developing challenge this year from the left, with the Socialist Alliance standing over 200 candidates in selected wards in a number of towns and cities across England, taking up local issues, but also putting forward a common 7-point programme and a platform of consistent

support for the needs of the working class.

In many areas the Alliance will be the only party committed to oppose privatisation, fighting for an expansion of council housing, and challenging central government refusal to give councils the cash they need to sustain vital services. The Alliance also brings in a nationwide policy of fighting racism, supporting asylum seekers, and opposing the Blair-Bush war drive.

Given the relatively low turnout in council elections, there are hopes that local campaigning by the Alliance can secure a respectable share of the vote, and force a genuine debate on the key issues.

Other socialist and working class candidates will also be running, such as veteran anti-cuts campaigner June Hautot, who has won the backing of the Battersea and Wandsworth Trades Council in her challenge to one of the last remaining flagship Tory councils.

Once more working people in many areas now have a real chance to vote socialist and take a stand in defence of public services. Every blow struck against the Blairites, every success and every inch of progress notched up by the left will help strengthen the fight for a genuine political alternative for the labour movement as a whole.

Heated debate on Palestine as Alliance agrees next steps

Terry Conway

The Socialist Alliance Executive met on April 13, under pressure of time to finish in time to allow comrades to get to the demonstration in support of the Palestinian struggle taking place later that afternoon. The brisk and business-like meeting was inevitably going to be unable to complete its fourteen item agenda.

Two discussions dominated the time there was. First a report back from the trade union conference and the subsequent meeting of the trade union committee by Mark Hoskisson and a debate around his proposals together with a resolution on the same issues from Martin Thomas.

There was unanimous agreement that the conference had been a huge success for the alliance, and a vote of thanks for those who had worked so hard to make it possible.

The meeting was also pleased to hear reports of the successful fringe meetings that had taken place subsequently at NUT and RMT Train Crew conferences, and that similar meetings were planned for all the major



Molly Cooper

TU conferences to come.

Proposals to convene trade union "fractions" were amended to talk about networks as comrades were very keen to make clear that the Socialist Alliance had no intention to set up rival organisations to existing left caucuses within the unions.

A proposal from Martin Thomas to organise around referendums in favour of public services was left on the table after it failed to reach overwhelming support

in the meeting.

Another proposal from Thomas was also not voted on - to encourage local socialist alliances to produce regular workplace bulletins. What was agreed was to produce a national 1-sided leaflet which could be used as a resource either by comrades working around different trade union conferences or at local level.

Lack of time prevented me asking why the original motion suggested that work-

place activists should not be the recipients of the general material produced by Socialist Alliances locally.

There was great enthusiasm for the fact that the GMB has decided to put six questions to all candidates in the forthcoming council elections around their support for public services - something that we support and which will definitely be to our advantage.

It was agreed that the question of pamphlet sales now needed a new push. The money taken at the conference itself for the pamphlet covered printing costs and already gave a profit of over £100.

Now we need to write to union branches in those unions where the debate is most developed, and those who sent delegates to the conference, encouraging them to make bulk orders.

Probably the most important proposal to come from Hoskisson's report - the idea of organising a follow up trade union conference on privatisation in November was not voted on. The Executive sensibly recognised that there are a number of proposals about conferences the Alliance should be organising in the months ahead. The deferral came in the context that everyone was committed to ensuring we had another public focus to ensure that we build on the success of the existing conference.

As well as the trade union conference, there is also a proposal to organise a major conference on anti-globalisation and the new internationalism, in order to develop a greater audience for the Alliance amongst young people.

The first trade union conference seriously developed our trade union work. Now a similar initiative is needed to bring into the Alliance those thousands of young people radicalising on questions from Palestine to third world debt who currently don't see

the Alliance as being an organisation that has anything to offer them.

Clearly this issue can't be addressed solely by organising the conference - we have to win our spurs on the streets as parties like Rifondazione in Italy have done - but it could be one important focus.

At the same time, the Alliance has to hold an AGM in December or around that time, and there has also been a suggestion that we need a policy conference with a major session on what position we should take in the forthcoming referendum on the Euro. This is obviously a crucial discussion and one on which there are major differences amongst Alliance supporters.

Given that the referendum will be an important turning point in British politics, the Socialist Alliance needs to take a clear position - in the view of ISG members a clear position to campaign for a No vote on the basis of internationalism.

It is possible (just) to hold all these events, particularly if the AGM is combined (probably in a 2-day event) with the debate on the Euro. But it will only be possible if there is careful planning to make sure that the events are organised in the sequence that maximises their effectiveness - and far enough apart that they can all be seriously built.

Discussion

It was in any event agreed that there should be e-mail discussion between Executive members over the next week to come up with a proposal on all this to go to the National Council on May 11. The second major discussion was on Palestine, which took place not only in the context of the actual situation in the Middle East itself, but of the burgeoning movement here in Britain.

Certainly it was a debate that needed more than the 30 minutes we gave it (although out of a 2 hour meeting that was by far the longest item) - and this was recognised by the meeting in agreeing there should be further debate at the National Council in May.

However what was also clear to everyone was that it was necessary to take positions on what slogans we should use in the meantime.

The debate was structured around two positions. Secretary Rob Hoveman of the SWP argued that the two main slogans we should use should be "Freedom for Palestine" and "Victory to the Intifada".

Martin Thomas of the AWL on the other hand argued that there should be 3 slogans: Israel withdraw from the Occupied Territories, Solidarity with the Palestinians and Two Peoples, Two States.

The preoccupation of the overwhelming majority of those present was to make sure the Socialist Alliance was seen to be and was prominent in the radicalisation which is currently taking place in revulsion against the genocidal actions of the Israeli state against the Palestinian people.

While Martin Thomas opened his remarks with a condemnation of Israeli actions, this position was objectively undercut by his

two next points.

He argued that the behaviour of the Israeli government towards the Palestinians has been outrageous for years. While this is true, it is also the case that the level of barbarity being exercised today was last seen in the massacres at Shabra and Shatilla - also at the hands of war criminal Ariel Sharon.

But what really infuriated me and many others was that he equated the oppression of the Palestinians with the oppression of the Israeli Jews. There was of course not time to debate this properly, or the two state solution which is its logical conclusion.

I appealed that the two state slogan not be voted on - it seemed to me wrong to conflate the question of immediate slogans which we needed to sort out with our more developed programmatic position on the issue - which should be properly discussed on May 11.

However while Martin had been prepared to let other resolutions on the trade union issues lie on the table, he insisted that this was voted on. The meeting supported all the other slogans apart from that one and agreed that Freedom for Palestine and Victory to the Intifada should be the main slogans on our placards.

Apart from those two major discussions the meeting obviously took a report on the local elections and decided that serious action should be taken to ensure that the policy document is finalised and available within the next few days.

Serious press work is planned, though it was recognised that organising a press conference as such was not a good use of resources.

Unfortunately time was also lost discussing a somewhat strange resolution from Marcus Strom of the CPGB. The resolution noted that some local Socialist Alliances had decided that comrades standing as candidates in the local elections could not include their membership of one of the supporting organisations in their personal statements.

It argued that the Executive should uphold the constitution - thus suggesting, though not actually saying so, that these Alliances were breaching the same.

The resolution as it stood was not something that anyone could logically vote against - and those comrades who suggested that it implied that people should be forced to declare their affiliations just hadn't read it properly. But the problem, as I argued, was how it would be used.

Fortunately Marcus accepted at least some of the arguments and agreed that the resolution not be voted on, but this had consumed rather a lot of precious time by this point.

The result of this combined with the necessity of getting to the demonstration was that a whole lot of items - most notably the report back from the Rifondazione conference were not reached.

All in all this was a positive meeting, demonstrating the political maturity of the Executive Committee that was elected from the December conference.

UNISON grudgingly consults on political fund

Fred Leplat

UNISON has started a historic review of its political funds, that could result in a new relationship with the Labour Party and the New Labour government.

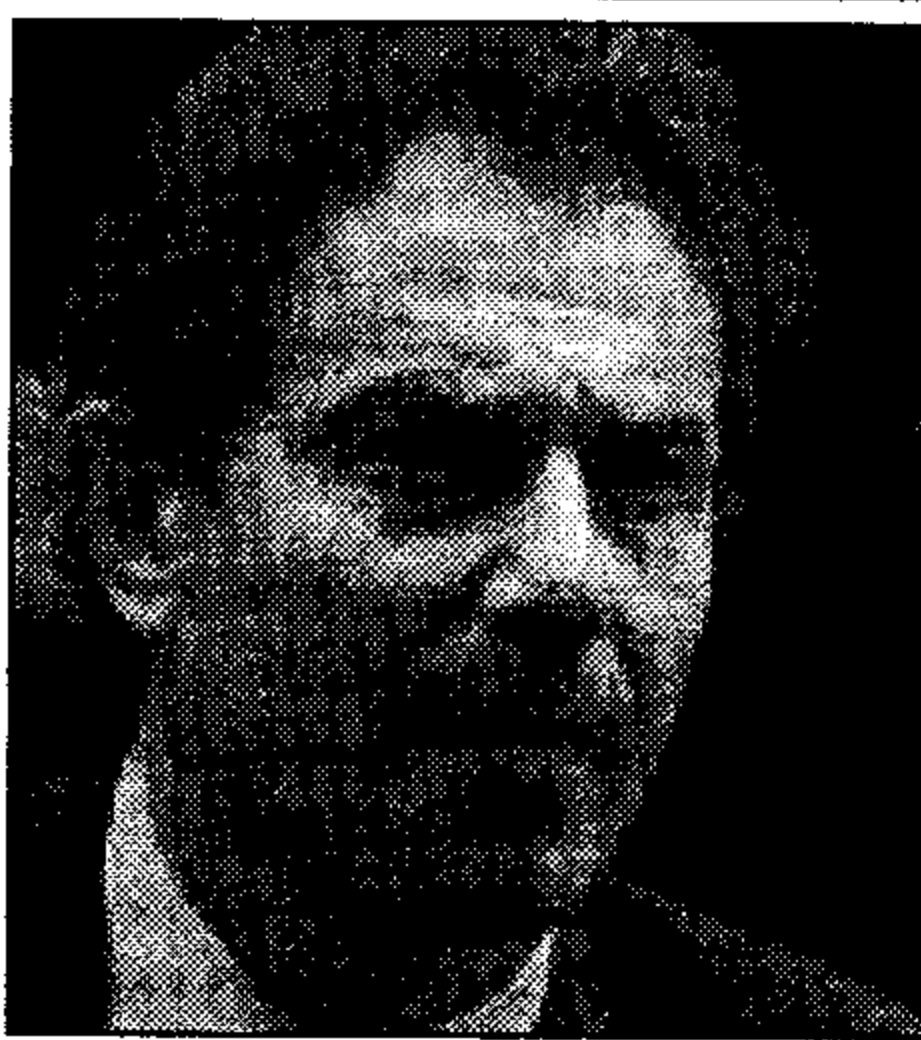
Against opposition from UNISON's leadership, delegates at last year's union conference voted to review the Affiliated Political Fund (APF) and the General Political Fund (GPF).

It has taken nine months for the leadership to start the consultation process. During this time, UNISON members have seen an unprecedented exercise to promote the APF by claiming that the union has obtained concessions from Labour.

Any significant concessions, such as on the minimum wage, have been obtained by campaigning, as when UNISON organised in 1998 a 15,000 strong demonstration in Newcastle.

Despite the "special relationship" through the APF, New Labour has continued with its agenda of privatisation, deregulation and a flexible workforce.

Representatives of UNISON through the APF on Labour's NEC have in the past voted against resolutions which were identical to the union's policies.



Let the bosses fund him?

The latest such example was at Labour's NEC of the 26th March when UNISON representatives voted against a motion opposing further privatisations which was submitted Tribune editor Mark Seddon and Mary Turner of the GMB.

Unfortunately delegates at UNISON's national conference will not be able to challenge the actions of its representatives on Labour's NEC due to the union's rules.

UNISON's "special relationship" means that only union members who are also members of the Labour Party can have a say on how the APF is run, yet the union encourages all of its members to pay into the APF. Local UNISON branches are also affiliated against their wishes to local Labour constituencies.

It is now clearly time to review the functioning of the political funds, as they are both undemocratic and in the case of the APF, there has been hardly any return on the "investment".

UNISON members are appalled at the pro-big business stance of New Labour. The CBI has more influence than the unions - although it is not affiliated.

UNISON's leadership is trying to keep the lid on a boiling kettle, but will get burnt in its attempt.

Only three resolutions on the union's political funds have been allowed on to the agenda for this year's conference - and twelve ruled out of order!

The consultation on the future of the Funds has proposed only three outcomes: disaffiliation from the Labour Party, a minor improvement on the functioning of the funds, or support for other parties and candidates.

In framing the options in such a manner, the leadership is deliberately excluding a necessary fourth option that would be maintaining affiliation, democratising the funds and supporting only those candidates, from the Labour Party and other parties and campaigns that support union policy.

Seven reasons to vote Socialist Alliance

- Tax the rich to fund public services
- Stop privatisation and renationalise the rail industry
- Decent pensions – restore the link to wages
- Defend council housing and comprehensive education
- Stop attacks on asylum seekers and fight racism
- Stop Bush and Blair's war drive
- Put people before profit!



Rough ride for Labour's heavyweights in Oxford

It was supposed to be the dazzling launch of new Labour's local election campaign in Oxford on April 11, but instead Labour's 'big hitter' cabinet ministers (John Prescott and Treasury Secretary Andrew Smith) were greeted by a demented PFI privatisation fat cat – and a small crowd of irate socialists. While local hospitals and staff are being sold as part of PFI deals, as Oxford's postal workers

face huge job losses and as the County Council makes yet another £9 million cuts in Social Services, things were bound to be tough for New Labour. They are increasingly being caught in the political crossfire from their 'friends' in the unions and the new force on the left – the Socialist Alliance. The Alliance is standing six candidates in selected wards across the City (Blackbird Leys, Churchill,

Headington, Quarry and Risinghurst, Rose Hill and Iffley, and St Mary's), following on the vigorous campaign challenging Andrew Smith in Oxford East in last year's general election. **Discomfort** The discomfort of the dwindling band of Labour faithful who turned out to hear Smith and Prescott at Rose Hill First School was plain to see, as protesters handed out

leaflets publicising the arrival of their own 'big hitter', Rodney Bickerstaffe, the pensioners leader and ex-General Secretary of the country's biggest union, UNISON. Bickerstaffe, with high powered team of medical professionals and union leaders, is expected to deliver a stinging rebuke of Labour's privatisation policy at a public meeting called on April 24 at 7.30pm at the Town Hall in Oxford.

Tucker for Lambeth!

Greg Tucker was a Labour councillor in Lambeth from 1986-1994. He was expelled from the Labour Party in 1993. Now he is standing in Tulse Hill ward for the Socialist Alliance. This is his personal manifesto:

"As a local trade unionist I have fought for years to defend my fellow rail workers. For eight years on Lambeth council I stood up for local people. I am proud of my record of opposition to cuts and privatisation of local services.

"As a councillor I campaigned against war in Iraq. The same issues face us today.

"With thousands of kids without school places, why were Labour and the Lib

Dems selling off our schools? "Instead of turning Dick Sheppard school into luxury flats, we need to invest in comprehensive education.

"Why did Labour and the Lib Dems allow Capita to wreck the lives of thousands of Lambeth residents with their mismanagement of housing benefit? Instead we need to bring all council services back under local democratic management.

"Labour in government is wasting millions of pounds on unnecessary wars abroad. Instead I want real investment in local services here at home, to give dignity in retirement to our elderly and to invest in a future for our young people.

"Being a councillor should be about more than deciding which private contractor gets to make profits at our expense.

"The Socialist Alliance is proud of working with the tenants movement, the pensioners' movement and other local campaigns fighting for a fairer society.

"As a local councillor my promise is not that I decide what is best for you, but that I will work with you, fighting for the interests of our community."

Huddersfield socialists stand against racism and privatisation

John Kipling

The Socialist Alliance is standing five candidates in the local elections in 2002. Our campaign is concentrating on anti-privatisation and anti-racism.

All the political parties on Kirklees council, including the Greens, have voted unanimously to close old people's homes, sell a local housing estate to a private developer, and set up an arms-length company to run the rest of council housing in Kirklees.

Kirklees was a flagship New Labour council at the forefront of "modernisation" in local government, until the elections in May 2000 when the liberals became the largest party.

Not surprisingly the remaining Labour councillors, despite the odd concern being raised occasionally,

have all ~~tood~~ the Blairite line and have refused to mount any fight against central government under funding and the privatisation agenda.

This will be the third time the Socialist Alliance has stood locally. Prior to the general election in 2001, where we stood a candidate in the Huddersfield Constituency, we had stood in a local by-election.

Our experience so far is that despite working hard on the streets leafletting and canvassing, and getting a good response from people on the doorstep, this has not translated into a respectable vote.

Unfortunately Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party deliberately stood against us last year, and split an already small socialist vote of about 500 down the middle.

This year the SLP are not standing, and we have made a pact with the

Socialist Party not to stand against each other.

The Socialist Party are standing in one ward. Their withdrawal from the Socialist Alliance will make very little practical difference, as they never devoted serious resources to it anyway, preferring to build only their own profile.

The BNP have often stood candidates in North Kirklees and this year they are contesting four seats in the Dewsbury and Batley area. They are trying to tap into the "race riots" which affected Bradford last year.

Luckily the fascists have not managed to operate in the Huddersfield area since the late 1970s when the labour movement stopped the NF setting up their national headquarters here.

However there are some areas of Dewsbury that are not well integrated racially, and the fascists have a

history of greater influence there.

Unfortunately we have not yet been able to establish a Social Alliance branch in Dewsbury, and all we have been able to do is distribute anti fascist leaflets there, but this did get a good response.

A number of our candidates in Huddersfield have been actively involved in the local refugee support group, and asylum rights is another of our points in the election campaign.

Of the candidates, one is Asian but unfortunately all are male. After the election the Alliance will have to make a systematic effort to recruit more members, particularly women, youth and blacks.

We will also have to make sure we continue to campaign seriously and try to gain respect from working class people who feel disillusioned with electoralism.

North East: Socialist Mayoral alternatives

Louise van der Hoeven

There are two mayoral elections in the North East in May the Socialist Alliance is fielding candidates in both Middlesbrough - Jeff Fowler and Mike Elliott in North Tyneside.

In North Tyneside the election is not coming at a good time for the ruling New Labour Party. The incompetent New Labour Council has run up debts of over £45 million which only came to light late last year. As part of their 'cost cutting' exercise the council is laying off 170 council workers with the threat of redundancy hanging over many more.

It will come as no surprise to Socialist Outlook readers that New Labour has gone cold on the idea of elected mayors and regional government. The Labour leadership in North Tyneside opposed the idea of an elected mayor. When the issue was put to a referendum the option for a presidential style mayor nar-



rowly won. In the metropolitan borough of North Tyneside, which covers the constituencies of Stephen Byers, Alan Campbell and Nick Brown, the turnout for the referendum was higher than in the general election. After the referendum, a split ensued in the local New Labour leadership. This was not a political split on left/right lines, but a clash of two bureaucrats chasing the top

job and a salary of over £80,000.

At the Socialist Alliance selection meeting, Alan Pond from the Campaign for an Independent Mayor gave an open invite to their selection meeting the following week in Whitley Bay. A small delegation of Socialist Alliance members attended this meeting of around 30 - mainly disillusioned Tories and Liberals with a few ex Labour Party supporters.

Kevin Flynn, Chair of the Tyneside Socialist Alliance explained what we stand for and invited those present to join our campaign. At the conclusion of the meeting Alan Pond (former Liberal & Green Party member) was elected by those present as the candidate of the Campaign for an Independent Mayor.

The consensus of the meeting was that they wanted a manager not a politician. Our candidate Mike Elliott stood up and spoke against the need for an elected manager,

arguing that people in North Tyneside do not need 'good management' but a mayor that will work and fight alongside them.

Mike is a well-known local comedian and former local radio DJ. He is also a part time teacher and actor with Live Theatre and has appeared on TV in shows such as Spender, Crocodile Shoes and in the film Billy Elliott. Mike, who left the Labour Party in 1992, was a prominent part of the local fight against pit closures in the 1980s. In the 1990's he was active in the campaign to keep the Swan Hunter Shipyards in Wallsend open.

In an interview with the Newcastle Evening Chronicle Mike said 'I am a committed Socialist and proud of it, this is a serious desire for change not some publicity stunt. I was approached by the Socialist Alliance and asked if I would be interested, so I decided to give it a go. It's about giving people more options and choice....

"Nationally there is a back lash against New Labour. When their spin goes against them they look for someone else to blame. A lot of decisions seem to have been made behind closed doors at the council. We are seeing now that means no one can be blamed when it goes wrong. I want more openness in local government."

The Mayoral Election will be contested on a entirely postal ballot. There are over 140 thousand voters registered, and each household will receive the election address's of all the candidates.

The Socialist Alliance campaign has attracted a good deal of interest from the press - but our focus is to put the passion back into Socialism.

We are campaigning on the ground to raise the profile of the Socialist Alliance and give the people of North Tyneside a real alternative to the faceless bureaucrats.

Birmingham tenants give two fingers to New Labour privateers

by Geoff Smith
(Birmingham
Defend Council
Housing, personal
capacity)

Council tenants in Birmingham have recently thrown out plans drawn up by the city's ruling New Labour group to "transfer" nearly 88,000 municipally owned flats and houses over to a group of eleven supposedly 'not-for-profit' Registered Social Landlords.

Such a move – which would have effectively meant privatisation by another name – was not simply defeated in the required tenants' ballot, it was positively routed by a majority of more than two to one (66.8% against the transfer with only 33.2% in favour).

This is a welcome hammering for New Labour's pro-privatisation agenda, not least as it came in one of the largest authorities in the country. rid with all eyes on Birmingham following the disappointing vote for transfer by understandably desperate tenants in Glasgow, this result must stand out as a beacon to all who want to oppose New Labour's

bankruptcy.

The struggle to oppose stock transfer in Birmingham was led by Defend Council Housing (DCH), a body with a national profile and a fair amount of Socialist Workers' Party influence.

With the support and involvement of individual tenants, tenants' groups and the trade union movement (especially UNISON and UCATT), DCH campaigned tirelessly for a vote against transfer and also for government investment into the much-needed renovation and extension of social housing.

Greasing the palms

No expense was spared as far as the New Labour council was concerned and, had a "yes" vote gone through, at least £36 million of housing rent money would have been spent greasing the palms of various greedy money merchants seeking to "advise" the housing department on how best to push the transfer.

Even with a "no" vote, at least £13 million of tenants' rent money has been squandered on an attempt at a slick pro-transfer campaign.

Indeed, according to Dennis Minnis, who, for the moment at least, performs the somewhat pretentious function of "Cabinet Member for Housing", the Royal Bank of Scotland "...was queuing up to lend Birmingham City Council money".

Such a dubious boast certainly lets the cat out of the bag regarding privatisation and goes hand-in-hand with the payment of over £17 per hour to misguided housing staff to go out and conduct a scabby, pro-transfer campaign (where, to their credit, most UNISON members refused to collaborate).

This is where half-baked propaganda was pushed claiming a future paradise for tenants provided they voted "yes". UNISON activists in the housing department will no doubt remember the £17 figure next time pay rises are to be fought for!

Legitimate grievances

Many Birmingham tenants have legitimate grievances regarding years of under-investment and housing mismanagement (by Tory and Labour run councils) and a lack of repairs to their

homes.

However, despite being bombarded by a small forest's worth of glossy pro-transfer literature where economy with the whole truth was the order of the day, tenants showed the New Labour privatisation mob the proverbial two fingers!

The campaign to secure public investment into the much-needed modernisation and extension of social housing must be stepped up both locally and nationally. Writing off social housing debts with no strings should also be fought for.

With the possibility of even this New Labour government pushing through a bill to make central funds available for the regeneration of council housing by the year 2004, the pressure needs to be kept up.

Brazen opportunism

The Birmingham experience showed clearly that brazen opportunism is alive and well, when it is remembered that Liberal Democrats and Tories claimed to be opponents of stock transfer. However, bourgeois forces cannot be



trusted and when Lib Dems in the city claimed to oppose transfer, they were never prepared to answer "awkward" questions concerning how the same party nationally has been promoting transfer in Sheffield, Stratford upon Avon, Liverpool, Walsall and parts of London.

Similarly, the Tories in Birmingham only "opposed" stock transfer because, true to form for the senior capitalist party in Britain, "the figures in the business plan did not add up"!

In such circumstances, it is surely vital for socialists and all class fighters to point out that cross-class alliances tie the working-class to the various representatives of capital and class independence is a must.

Unfortunately, the majority of those involved in Birmingham DCH saw nothing wrong in providing the leader of the Liberal Democrats with a platform at several public meetings organised by anti-transfer campaigners.

The SWP were up to their

necks in this dangerous business, habitually referring to the Lib Dems as "our united front partners" and sundry nonsense. It does not require a genius to work out how our class enemies will repay us after being allowed to use our platforms in order to pretend to oppose housing transfer in front of concerned tenants faced with an utterly bankrupt Labour Party and with local elections looming!

Good hiding

The lessons are clear. Birmingham tenants have given New Labour's housing sell-off plans a good hiding. However, any one of the mainstream parties could take charge of the city with Labour being so discredited, and alternative plans for housing privatisation could result.

Despite an admirable commitment by genuine DCH activists, weaknesses in the campaign could have posed problems had much of the city council's propaganda not been so hilariously contradictory.

The best way to prepare for the future is to pursue decent class politics which seal off the rotten opportunists of the Liberal Democrats and Tories. If DCH continues to function locally in the future a radical transformation of its activities will be needed.

Proper debate must be permitted inside any ongoing campaign and not frowned upon as was the case in the run-up to the ballot. Similarly, minutes of each meeting must be properly kept and adhered to. More tenants and active trade unionists need to be involved in ensuring everything is done to secure a massive injection of public money for social housing investment.

And the Socialist Party must abandon the petty sectarianism it displayed in effectively boycotting the campaign in the ten months which preceded the ballot.

Similarly, the SWP must be challenged to break from its quite scandalous cosy up to the Lib Dems and groups such as Socialist Outlook and Workers' Power need to recognise that they were both seriously mistaken in limiting their involvement in the campaign thus far to some relatively belated estate leafleting.

NHS: Tories set course for 1947

John Lister

THE SHOCK-HORROR revelation by the *Mirror* (April 11) that the Tory leadership has developed a master-plan to scrap the NHS as a tax-funded service would

be more sensational and surprising if it had not been preceded by months of right wing journalists arguing precisely the same thing.

The *Observer's* Anthony Browne, for one, has been conducting a prolonged crusade arguing that the NHS is a hopeless basket-case: the *Sun*, the *Sunday Times*, *Daily Mail* and other right wing rags have also regularly added their two-pennyworth of bile and prejudice arguing for more charges, more private sector involvement, and more private insurance as the only way to inject more resources into health care.

However the cynical scheme hatched apparently behind closed doors by Ian Dunkin-

Doughnut's sidekick Dr "Death" does seem to represent a concerted move by the Tories back to the reactionary ground last occupied by the Tories early in 1948, when Winston Churchill, in disgruntled opposition and in alliance with the most grasping elements of the BMA mounted a last-gasp effort to prevent the launch of Nye Bevan's new, nationalised NHS.

Churchill marched his minority of Tory backwoodsmen through the Commons lobbies for a final, futile time to vote against the principle of the NHS: a few weeks later a delighted electorate was signing up by the million for a health service free at point of use, funded from taxation.

Since then successive Tory and Labour governments – even including Margaret Thatcher – have felt obliged to defer to the principle of a tax-funded service, which the Wanless Report commissioned by Gordon Brown has again confirmed is the most cost-effective way to share risk and finance an equitable health care system.

According to the *Mirror's* edited highlights of Dr Fox's secret speech to Tory doctors in Harrogate, his plan involves convincing the public that the NHS is not working properly – a project made easier by Labour having stuck foolishly to Tory cash limits for its first three years in office.

The next step is to persuade them that it cannot be repaired. Then comes a process of floating ideas for insurance-based schemes, centred on branding the NHS as a "monopoly" against which the Tories will pit the notion of the "individual" and the "consumer". The good doctor is convinced that there is a popular market out there of people wishing to opt out of the NHS and pay for health care and treatment "from their own savings".

Finally the Tories would move in for the kill with a suitably phrased manifesto commitment to finish off the NHS – and hope to persuade people to vote for it.

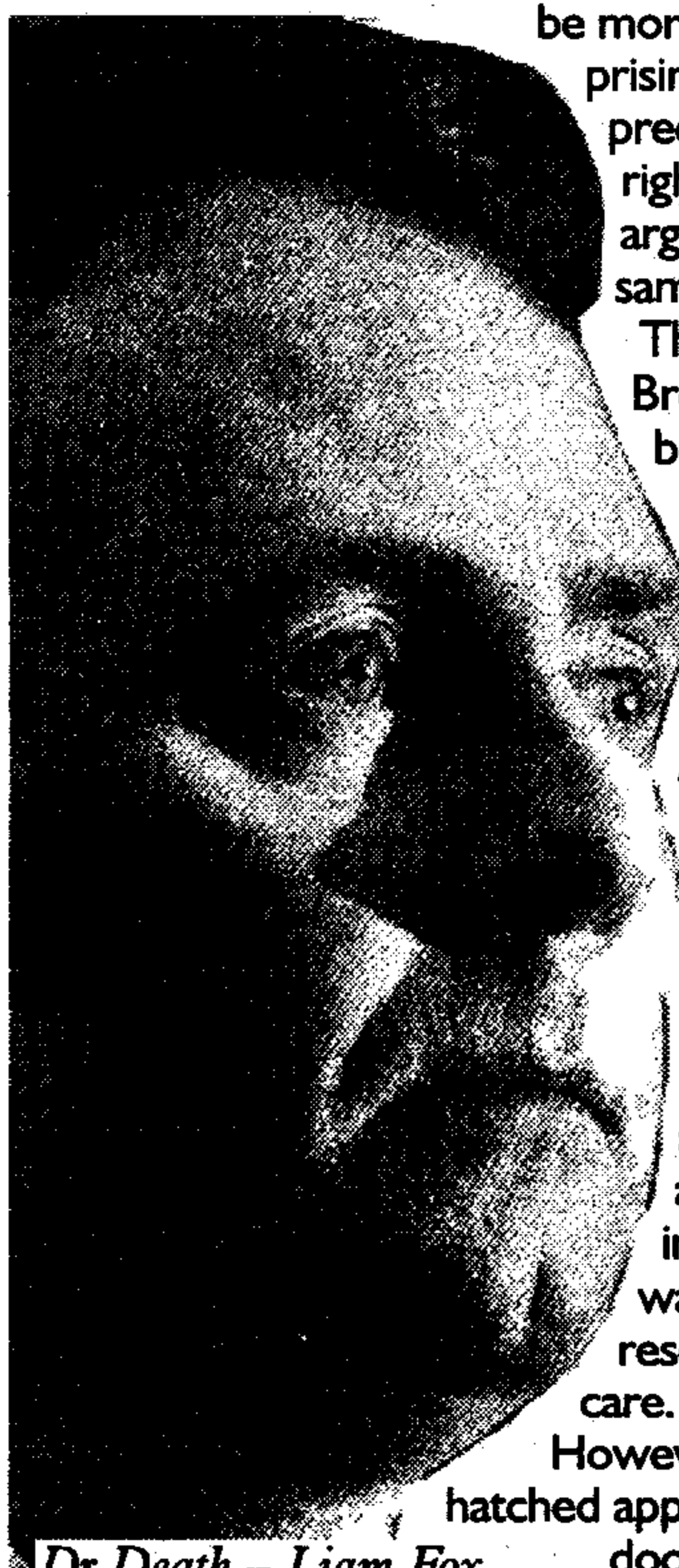
The plan at least has the merit of being relatively honest, and will begin in earnest this month with the publication of a Tory study of 20 countries around the world which finance their health care services in other ways.

But they have a huge problem of credibility to get over. For even as IDS wades into the attack on Gordon Brown's Budget by demanding increases beyond Labour's planned increases in health spending, it is obvious that any insurance-based scheme is going to require most, if not all, people to pay more for health care out of their own pockets.

The tax-funded option is the most cost-effective and the best way of sharing risk: any other scheme is likely to wind up with a succession of costly market failures like those in the USA, where insurers increasingly "cherry pick" the lowest risk patients, and where 40 million poor people lack any health insurance.

The privatised US system hoovers up a massive 14% of the country's GDP, compared with around 7% in Britain. The bureaucracy involved in administering insurance-based schemes in the USA and Europe dwarfs the admin costs of the NHS, even after Thatcher's crazy, costly, market-based "reforms".

But as the Tories set course for the electoral wilderness, the question is whether Gordon Brown's budget will seek progressive or regressive ways of raising the additional cash that ministers now admit must be funnelled in to enable the NHS to meet demand – and whether New Labour has left it too late to rescue morale after two decades of demoralisation.



Dr Death - Liam Fox

We enjoyed every minute of it!

Terry Conway

Such a description can't accurately be made of many political conferences or meetings, but Civil Rights lawyer Louise Christian spoke for all the participants in the conference to Defend Asylum Seekers held in Manchester on March 23.

Around 350 people

crammed into the conference, which was jointly organised by Barbed Wire Britain, the National Civil Rights Movement, the National Coalition of anti-deportation campaigns and the Campaign to Defend Asylum Seekers. It gave a platform to a number of asylum seekers who explained

in graphic and moving detail the reality of life in Britain's detention prison, and to many other campaigning against this government's racist and draconian policies.

The conference started with a plenary session which set the scene and then broke into 5 different workshops. After lunch the same workshops ran again and the day concluded with a round up plenary in which there was the opportunity not only to report back from workshops but to discuss and agree future action.

The tone was set by Suresh Grover of the NCRM. In his opening remarks, he pointed out that this was a unique event, not because there had not been many previous conferences on asylum, but because so many of the key organisations involved had come together to organise the day.

He hoped that it would be possible to cement closer working relationships in the future. Grover also argued "This government has seen the most racist legislation and practice yet when it comes to asylum seekers. These attacks are something we didn't witness even under the Tories."

Campsfield campaigner and author, Theresa Hayter forcefully put the case against all immigration controls saying "A more just world would be one in which no one is forced to migrate, but everyone is free to do so if they want".

Emma Ginn from the Yarl's Wood campaign, told the story of the fight against the flagship Category B prison near Bedford. In particular, by reading from letters sent to her by those moved from Yarl's Wood since the fire, she demonstrated both the courage and resourcefulness of immigration prisoners and what a great deal it means to have to have activists on the outside fighting for their freedom.

Cameroonian Gabriel Nkwel closed the session.



(Top) Audience listens intently, Aamer Anwar (bottom)

Gabriel fled Cameroon after exposing electoral fraud there – and has been in detention most of the time since he arrived in Britain. He is a remarkable fighter – and a remarkable person – who has not only battled to win freedom for himself but for other immigration prisoners. He was nearly deported last Christmas, but fortunately this was stopped at the last minute.

Gabriel's speech recounted the agony of all this and many more experiences. Gabriel is unique – but his story has many parallels with thousands of other immigration detainees. If anyone needs convincing that asylum seekers have resources and skills, energy and commitment to offer this society – then read Gabriel's story. (www.freegabriel.org.uk)

Other things that about the day were also special – the fact that asylum seekers and refugees were given space to recount their own experiences and the high proportion of black people in attendance being two of the most obvious.

There were frustrations – mainly as a result of the fact that the turn out almost doubled the organisers' expectations and the capacity of the venue's main hall. But they were definitely secondary to the level of energy and enthusiasm generated by sharing so many lessons of campaigning together and planning for the future. Workshops on 7 topics provided the opportunity to discuss: Working in trade unions, Working with asylum seekers, detention, Fortress Europe, Challenging the media, Asylum: election timebomb.

The final session had an ambitious programme. There were workshop report backs, contributions from guest speakers and a discussion about how to take the work of the day forward.

Apart from summing up the atmosphere of the day, Louise Christian also set out

had met in advance to propose an agreed statement to the conference, which would have been available to all participants when they registered.

There had been prior discussion about a week of action – but some people had no knowledge of this until the final session itself. This inevitably meant that there was some argument, including between leading members of the sponsoring organisations, about precisely what the priorities should be.

In the end however, agreement was reached to organise a week of action from June 15-22, which coincides with Refugee week.

On June 15 there will be a day of action against Detention, with protests outside Dungavel in Scotland and Harmondsworth in London. (Actually the conference agreed the focus would be Yarl's Wood – but seeing as the insurers have now shut it for us, that would currently seem a little pointless... See box for more).

During the week, it is hoped that there will be local activities and then on June 22 there will be a march through central London.

Since the conference itself, there has been a further planning meeting involving all the sponsoring organisations to take this work forward.

This agreed the model resolution below, which should be taken through trade unions, Labour Parties, anti-war group etc to build the broadest possible support for the week of action.

Planning meetings for the week of action are fortnightly from April 22, 6.30pm, Camden Town Hall, Judd St, WCI.

Stop attacks on asylum seekers

Model motion

This branch notes:

1) The devastating fire at the privately-run Yarl's Wood detention centre in February, and the subsequent refusal of the Home Office to grant a full, independent public inquiry.

2) The Home Secretary's 2001 White Paper, Secure Borders, Safe Haven, which paves the way for:

a) A doubling in the number of asylum seekers, including infants and children, to be detained to 4,000;

b) a quadrupling in the number to be deported to more than 30,000 a year, disregarding the validity of their asylum claims;

c) accommodation centres housing hundreds in isolated rural areas, segregated from mainstream society and a potential target for racist attacks;

d) continuation of forced dispersal;

e) and the scrapping of the humiliating voucher scheme, but benefits still limited to 70% of basic Income Support.

3) The annual refugee week, from 15-22 June, offers an opportunity to show solidarity with refugees and to protest against draconian government policy.

4) The call from the 23 March conference in Manchester for a national demonstration on 22 June in central London and protests outside detention centres on 15 June.

This branch believes:

1) Government policy on and media scapegoating of asylum seekers are fuelling an atmosphere where racist violence is increasing along with support for fascist parties such as the BNP.

2) The Home Secretary's proposals amount to the biggest attack on civil liberties since the Second World War.

3) Refugees and immigrants have, for generations, made a positive contribution to UK society both economically and culturally.

This branch resolves:

To back the national demonstration on 22 June and protests outside detention centres on 15 June by:

a) circulating stewards with leaflets publicising the protests

b) encouraging members to attend;

c) sending the branch banner;

d) donating £... toward the cost of the demonstration and transport;

e) and sending this motion to the appropriate regional and national bodies of the union [as well as Trades Councils, Constituency Labour Parties and other relevant organisations].

Donations to Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers, BCM Box 4289, London WC1X 3XX

Yarl's Wood scandal: demand public inquiry!

Veronica Fagan

Yarl's Wood detention centre, with the capacity to hold over 900 immigration detainees in "luxury" prison conditions has been closed following the refusal of insurers D J Pye to continue to provide cover for the detention centre following the fire there in February (see SO 53).

Yarl's Wood had originally been built at a cost of nearly £100 million (but with no sprinkler system) and was operated by Group 4 who also run Campsfield and Oakington Detention Centres.

D J Pye are now suing the Bedfordshire police under the Rix Damages Act 1985 for

nearly £97 million – or some 250 per cent more than the damage estimate. Pye, as Group 4's insurers, have also suggested that they are looking again at the insurance cover they provide at the other two centres.

They claim that some of the detainees had a history of setting fires! but also make the more telling point that people who are facing deportation may well feel they have nothing to lose...

If they carry through their threat to withdraw cover this could either lead to a situation where the centres in Oxfordshire and Cambridgeshire also close – or rather more likely where

the government has to pick up the tab.

In the meantime, more than 70 Yarl's Wood detainees who were in the facility on the night of the fire have been transferred to actual prisons since then. At least one and possibly two Yarl's Wood inmates have since been deported. The obvious question that arises: did these men and women see too much?

The government refuses so much as a public inquiry, and the smell of a cover-up is rife.

■ Demand a public inquiry

■ Free all immigration detainees

■ Close all immigration detention centres

■ No compensation for

Video treat

Barbed Wire Beat
Edited by Richard Herring, Directed by Anne-Marie Sweeney (running time 14 minutes)

£5 to individuals and immigration rights campaigns and £15 to organisations, available from Close Campsfield Campaign, c/o 111 Magdalen Road, Oxford (01865 558145 /557282 /378734).

All proceeds to Close Campsfield Campaign and Barbed Wire Britain

One particular highlight of the Manchester conference was the opportunity

to watch this vibrant video in the lunch break.

Set to the music from Banner Theatre's "Fortress Europe" CD, it shows the history of the fight to close Campsfield – both the actions of the detainees in roof top protests and hunger strikes and the actions of their supporters outside in solidarity.

This is a useful tool to start a discussion on the reality of immigration detention in your trade union, school, Socialist Alliance, Labour party or anywhere else you are active. Use it to build the week of action – and enjoy!

Train crew are still on the offensive

Greg Tucker - RMT train crew national secretary (personal capacity)

Despite the undermining of the South West Trains dispute, rail-workers across the country continue to engage in strikes over pay and conditions. The prospect remains that the current disputes will broaden into nation-wide action over the summer.

For the media the SWT dispute was all about jockeying for advantage in the RMT General Secretary elections. This was an insult to the SWT workers who struck for six days. Their dispute was in response to real grievances shared by rail-workers around the country.

That is why action is still taking place with Arriva North guards in the north-east, with First North Western drivers in the north-west and with others elsewhere in the country. SWT workers were let down because the RMT leadership was not prepared to confront the political issues involved in the dispute.

The RMT was faced with a company that was prepared to use scab managers to run services on strike days and to disrupt its own services on non-strike days to starve out the workforce. At the same time the government intervened directly on the side of management through the Railway Inspectorate and the

Strategic Rail Authority.

The only way to deal with these attacks was to broaden the dispute. The RMT leadership balked at any such action. Even what little it did agree to do it failed to implement.

Having set up a national dispute fund, for instance, letters written to ask for donations from other organisations were never put in the post. Instead, behind the scenes, company level reps were encouraged to mobilise the weakest elements amongst the workforce to call for the dispute to be ended.

Despite the fact that the workforce was still solid on strike days the dispute was first suspended, and after the resultant further demoralisation finally closed down, having failed to make any serious progress on the RMT's demands. The majority of SWT members have been left angry with the RMT for failing to progress the dispute with the necessary vigour.

However, with the Arriva North pay dispute still going strong, and with FNW drivers taking action to halt draconian treatment of staff matters are far from over.

The RMT train crew conference held this weekend in Portsmouth is a good indication of the current mood. Delegates debated the role of the government in undermining the SWT dispute agreeing to campaign for a

truly independent railway health and safety body.

Giving practical support to the existing disputes, they called on the rail unions to progress the demand for national collective bargaining as a priority.

At the same time the prospect of a national train crew strike this summer over rail safety was put on the agenda. After a year of discussion with the RMT, Railway Safety, the Railtrack subsidiary responsible for the Railway Rule Book has rejected an independent risk assessment that supported RMT Rule change proposals that protected the safety functions of train Guards.

It is clear they have done so in collusion with the train operators to keep down staffing costs at the expense of passenger safety. The conference called on the union to progress the issue to a ballot for strike action of train crew in every company if the matter is not resolved by the end of May.

The conference was further heartened by a report from new General Secretary, Bob Crow. He has taken immediate action to reorganise the union's head office to give more support to the membership.

Outlining these changes, aimed in his words to 'help develop a fighting union', he also described changes in the union's political stance that were warmly welcomed by delegates.

On Bob Crow's initiative the RMT Executive has agreed to support a new group of fourteen MPs who have indicated they agree with a four plank programme of RMT policies, on renationalisation of the railways, defence of the tube from privatisation, defence of merchant shipping and repeal of the anti-union laws.

But even these changes were not enough for the conference. Delegates unanimously supported a resolution calling for the immediate ending of payments from the political fund to the Labour party nationally, calling instead for payments to be made to parties that support RMT members when in dispute.

A third of delegates, including Bob Crow, had earlier attended a Socialist Alliance fringe meeting debate on the future of our links with Labour. It is clear that the debate at the union's AGM in June will be highly significant. A series of resolutions on the AGM agenda outline a number of options ranging from support for the

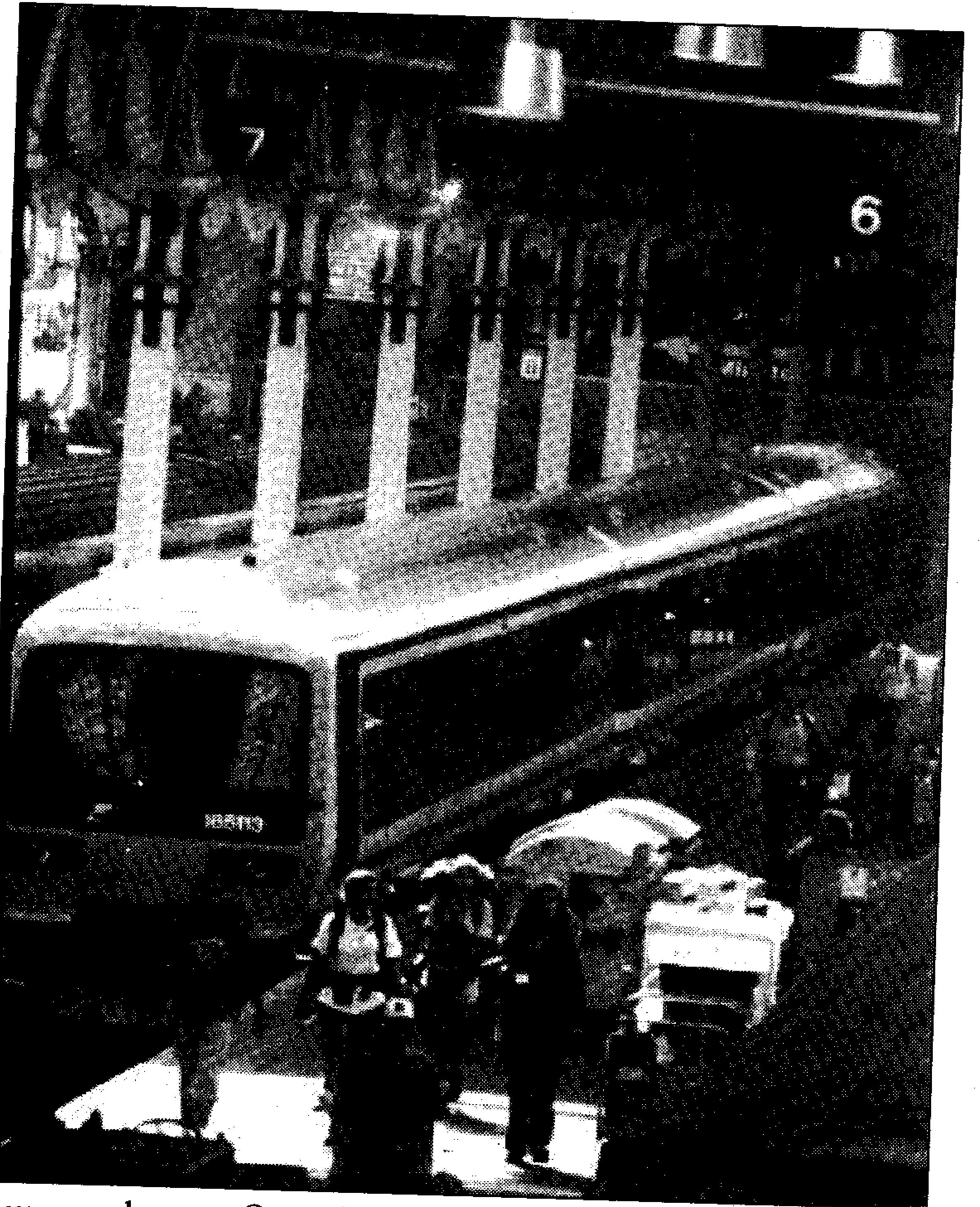
changes Crow has implemented, to total disaffiliation from Labour. It is almost impossible to find any RMT activist prepared to defend Labour's policies on the railway. But that said the right in the union is not going to go quietly. In the election to fill the Assistant General Secretary position caused by the retirement of Vernon Hince, the right's candidate, Mick Cash, has been successful.

Alongside the defeat of the left in the annual election of the union's President, this is a serious blow. The right wing clearly aim to hem in

Bob Crow, and wait to counter attack at a later date.

It is vital that in the current election for Assistant General Secretary to fill Bob Crow's old post the left unites to ensure we can get elected someone who can give Bob Crow the strategic support he needs from the left.

Pat Sikorski, London Underground rep on the national executive is already picking up significant supporting nominations from branches around the country and RMT activists should be looking to build his campaign.



Just issued - a new book on the Irish trade unions

TORRENTS of ink have been used to describe and analyse the 'Celtic tiger' - boosted by the bosses as an economic miracle totally transforming the Irish economy and Irish society.

The vast majority of these studies have been unanimous in seeing a series of partnership agreements between government, unions and the employers as key foundation elements in building the 'tiger' economy. The story stops there. There is no detailed history or analysis of the agreements themselves.

Now this gap has been filled by Socialist Democracy activist Joe Craig, who has produced the first history of this key feature of modern Irish society, interpreting it through a case study of two key strikes - the strike by Ryanair baggage handlers for union recognition and the nurses' strike against the constraints of the national agreements.

Joe Craig's analysis focuses around a number of penetrating questions:

- To what extent was transnational investment to linked to the partnership deals?
- Were the claimed benefits for workers delivered?
- Did the union movement itself, as opposed to a narrow layer of the top of the union bureaucracy, improve its negotiating position and industrial rights?

The answers to these ques-

tions will surprise even hardened activists used to the history of betrayal by the Trade Union bureaucracy.

The main outcome of the Ryanair dispute, for example, was to establish that one of the major trade unions supporting the agreement did not have the right to union recognition under it. If the employer objected the Government felt that it could do nothing and the union leadership were willing to give way.

The nurse's strike was an even more graphic example of the workings of partnership. Their union had not signed up to the agreement and they were under the illusion that they were free to negotiate their own agreement.

This idea was quickly dispelled when bosses, government and the ICTU leadership all combined to isolate the struggles and defeat the nurses.

The years of what was essentially a pay freeze were justified by the union leadership on the grounds that the payoff would be a slashing of tax rates. (In the South of Ireland almost 100% of tax revenue comes directly from the working class, who pay 50% of their wages.)

Local capitalists and multinationals avoid tax. Some of the multinationals pay a negative tax - collecting from the tax agency rather than paying in.)

In fact the agreements were marked by a whole series of tax amnesties that eventually persuaded Irish capital that it could repatriate its profits without risk of any sizable tax bill. The result was a boom in house prices that left those on the average industrial wage without any affordable housing.

As *Prisoners of Social Partnership* is issued the Nurses have yet again taken industrial action.

There are persistent stories of unions breaking away from the national partnership agreements. All the signs are of a bumpy road for industrial relations in Ireland in the future.

Prisoners of Social Partnership will prove an invaluable primer for trade unionists, political activists and academics in understanding these coming industrial battles in Ireland and the industrial underpinning of 'New Labour' in Britain.

'Prisoners of Social Partnership', by Joe Craig
Published by Socialist Democracy
Publications, PO Box 40, Belfast Further details: 028 90601555



United for Mayday
12 noon, Wednesday 1 May
Clerkenwell Green (Farringdon tube)
March to rally at Trafalgar Square, 3pm

For the first time, trade unionists and anti capitalists will march together on Mayday from Clerkenwell to Trafalgar Sq. This is also the first time a march will go to Trafalgar Square while Parliament is sitting. May Day is building up to be another incredible event.

The Stop the War Coalition has adopted 1 May as the next anti war mobilisation. In the South East, CWU, UNISON and PCS regions are actively backing May Day and urging their members to attend. Palestinian groups are organising a big contingent.

A group of 25 anti capitalist artists has come together to decorate Trafalgar Square on the day.

A Palestinian theatre group are staging scenes from a play called Islamophobia at Clerkenwell Green before the march starts. Coaches are coming so far from Bristol, Brighton, Northampton, Manchester & Medway. Be there!

Justice for Brazil's landless

Richard Hering

On Wednesday 17th April a march of members of the Brazilian Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST) will arrive in Belém, capital of the northern state of Pará.

On the way they will be joined by the Homeless Workers' Movement and the Small Farmers' Movement, coming together to celebrate the first International Day of the Fight for Land (OR International Rural Workers' Day). The date has been chosen to mark the sixth anniversary of the Eldorado massacre.

The MST is campaigning for justice for the massacre by military police of 19 members of the movement in Eldorado dos Carajás in the state of Pará.

Six years on, after a series of judicial delays, the case of

the 150 police officers has still not come to trial. Meanwhile, chances of conviction have been greatly improved by evidence from the only videotape of the massacre, which demolishes the police case that they were acting in self-defence.

It clearly shows that the police shot dead Amâncio dos Santos Silva, a deaf and dumb man who was unarmed. When the landless ran forward to try to rescue him, the police fired into the crowd.

Many of the 19 killed were shot point-blank or murdered with their own machetes in extra-judicial executions.

"We remember it like it was yesterday", said Maria Luis da Silva, whose husband was one of the 19 killed. Her case shows how

the abuse of basic human rights for workers in struggle does not end when the bullets stop.

Maria only by chance managed to discover that her husband's body was in the local hospital, and when she went there the police repeatedly barred her entry.

"I only got to see him four days after. His body was already rotting. You had to put a handkerchief over your face. I almost didn't recognise him. The trial? It's really important that it happens. Six years on, and they haven't done anything."

The latest delay to the Eldorado trial came when the local judge refused to accept the video as evidence. The MST is now demanding her replacement, and for the trial to be relocated to a federal court, in Brazilia,



The Brazil Solidarity Group demand justice for the landless outside the Brazilian Embassy in London on the day the trial was due to start.

increasing the chances of a fair trial, free from powerful pressures from local landowners, state politicians and the police, themselves, whose colleagues are on trial.

There are 5 million landless families in Brazil, while 1% of the population owns nearly half of the land, much of it held idle for speculation. The MST's direct action occupations of this idle land have made the movement the most successful of its kind in the world.

The Brazilian constitution says that land should be redistributed if it does not fulfil its social function, but this rarely happens without the landless first occupying the land themselves.

MST settlements are cooperatively run, and are frequently more productive

than neighbouring farms. The MST sets up schools and health clinics in the new communities, and their children are often better educated than other poor Brazilians. These successes make landless activists the targets of death threats and assassinations by local landowners.

On 9th July last year José Pinheiro Lima ("Dedé"), a leader of the Rural Workers' Union, his wife Cleonice, and 15-year-old son Samuel, were murdered in their own home by hired gunmen.

Dedé was leading an occupation of land near where the Eldorado massacre took place. His son Edinaldo, leafing through the pile of documents he prepared to pursue the case against his family's killers, said:

"This is what's left of my family - a pile of paper. Here are the faces of the murderers, but they're linked to the police, and they've never been arrested."

After the family's murder, the rural workers Dedé was organising won the land they were occupying.

"I'm proud to say I'm the son of a trade unionist who fought for a piece of land. I'm happy because he didn't sell out to that farmer. He paid with his life."

Rural trade unionists and landless activists are put on a death list by local landowners. Because of his quest for justice, Edinaldo is himself now on that list. The continuing impunity for the Eldorado killers makes his murder more likely.

Bringing Porto Alegre to Europe

Terry Conway

The first meeting to plan for a mobilisation from England to the European Social Forum in Italy this autumn saw around 70 people cram into a room not big enough for them.

Those in attendance included large numbers of supporters of Globalise Resistance, a serious delegation from the Green Party and representatives from the Socialist Alliance, the SWP, the International Socialist Group, Red Pepper and a number of trade union militants and independents.

The meeting heard report backs from Porto Alegre from Hilary Wainwright of Red Pepper, the Parliamentary Forum from Caroline Lucas of the Green Party and from the first European planning meeting in Brussels on March 8-9 given by Chris Nineham of Globalise Resistance.

A report was also given from the massive demonstration that took place in Rome on March 23 - which certainly confirmed that Italy is once again at the forefront of mobilising against neo-liberal globalisation and war - and is therefore an excellent place to hold the ESF.

The meeting agreed that the political basis of the ESF should be support for the appeal of Porto Alegre - a declaration which is clearly against war as well as globalisation as such.

This should be the way of ensuring that the soft left were not able to take over and reappropriate this space - rather than the idea which was raised by some in Brussels than the way to exclude those who only

want to tinker with the worst elements of today's system rather than create a real alternative was to ban political parties.

As well as discussing these reports, the meeting addressed the question posed by the Green Party as to whether we should launch a British/English Social Forum at this stage. After debate it was agreed that this wasn't the right time to do so - first we needed to build much wider support than was currently represented in that room (however crowded) for the Italian meeting - and then on the basis of that work, launch something permanent here. Johnathan Neale, who was heavily involved in the Genoa Social Forum, pointed out that the Italian Social Forum was only established after the Genoa demonstrations themselves.

There seemed to be some concern from the Green Party that by not creating a Forum as such as this stage people were somehow arguing that the fight against neo-liberalism on the ground could be somehow delayed, was not urgent.

But that was not what people were saying at all - rather the question was proving that this new instrument could be useful to people on the ground - and therefore building something that would in the long term be broader than what could just be declared at this point.

The meeting then broke into various sub-groups to discuss the political basis of the group, publicity, and practically getting people to Italy and came back

together again to report on what had been done.

The aspiration is to try to take twice as many people to Italy in the autumn as went to Genoa in Italy

The first focus of public activity to build for this will be on the forthcoming May Day marches up and down the country where leaflets and stickers will be distributed

We are campaigning to get as many organisations as possible to sign the appeal of Porto Alegre

Raphaella one of the co-ordinators of the European Social Forum will be speaking at the Globalise Resistance AGM on May 18. She will be approached to see if it is possible for her to come for longer and therefore speak at meetings in other parts of the country

There was some disagreement about precisely what the name of the coalition should be - Mobilising Committee for the European Social Forum, Mobilisation for the ESF, Mobilising for the ESF. This will be finally resolved at the next meeting.

Leaflets, stickers and a letter to organisations are currently being produced and will be available very soon from ESF c/o PO Box 29689, London E8 2XR. E mail: mobilisationesf@yahoo.co.uk.

Web site: <http://uk.geocities.com/mobilisationesf/>

Next meeting :6.30pm, Monday 22 April, University of London Union, Malet St WC1 (Euston, Euston Square, Goudge St tubes)

International Summer Camp

Calling all young activists ...



- Are you involved in the anti-globalisation movement, the anti-war movement or other struggles against the rotten capitalist system we live under?
- Would you appreciate the space to talk about how we can work together for a different, a fairer, more sustainable, demilitarised world?
- Do you want the opportunity to meet with hundreds of other young people for a week of political discussion and debate, and have fun as well?

If so, you should come to the Fourth International's Youth Summer Camp - where revolutionary socialists from across Europe get together to do just that.

The camp will take place in Brioude, France from Saturday 27th July to Friday 2nd August inclusive. The theme will be

"This globalisation is not ours, let's build another world!"

Speakers will include Gilbert Achcar, Daniel Bensaïd, Olivier Besancenot, Penelope Duggan, Michel Husson, Braulio Moro, Catherine Samary, and François Vercaemmen.

We don't yet know how much it will cost for travel and food - it's likely to be between £150-£200 from London, and we should have firmer costs soon. If you want to find out more, get in touch.

■ RING us on 020 8800 7460, ■ email outlook@gn.apc.org or ■ write to Youth Camp c/o Po Box 1109, London N4 2UU

**Stop Kissinger picket:
Royal Albert Hall, London
Wednesday April 24, from 8.30am**

Refounding Rifondazione

The Fifth Congress of the Italian Partito della Rifondazione Comunista (PRC) took place in Rimini from 4 - 7 April 2002. Soraya Lawrence and Nick Wrack report:

The PRC's red flags with the party emblem welcomed delegates. Throughout the proceedings huge screens surrounding the massive conference hall displayed images of oppression and resistance past and present from the civil rights and anti-Vietnam protests of the 60s to the anti-globalisation demos in Genoa. Scenes of police and state brutality contrasted with strikes and the Intifada.

It was a tremendously inspirational event. The impact of the upheavals in Italian politics at present, with the Italian working class preparing for a clash with the Berlusconi government, was reflected in all aspects of the congress.

The debate was carried out in terms of revolution, with references to Marx, Engels, Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky. The PRC leader, Fausto Bertinotti opened the Congress explaining, "There is a new opportunity for the transformation of society. We have to build an alternative movement against war and against neo-liberalism. The idea of revolution is necessary."

The Congress took place against the background of a prolonged



Genoa: Rifondazione has drawn inspiration from anti-globalisation movement

period of growing social and political unrest, beginning with the low point of Berlusconi's election in May 2001 that was almost immediately followed by the mass protests in Genoa in June. The state murder of young Carlo Giuliani provoked a massive wave of protest. There have been huge demonstrations against the war in Afghanistan. In January 200,000 marched in Rome against racist immigration legislation.

Protests against the government's attacks on workers' rights culminated in the demonstration of 3 million in Rome on 23 March 2002, the biggest demonstration in Western Europe for half a century.

All eyes are now on the general strike that has been called by the three main trade union confederations for 16 April.

A number of themes dominated the Congress deliberations both in the formal debates and the discussion outside. The "movement of movements" as the Italian comrades call the coalition of forces involved in the anti-capitalist protests, especially the demonstrations in Genoa last June, has affected all aspects of political life in Italy.

The attitude of the PRC has been to turn dramatically and decisively to this movement with the result

that the PRC has managed to overcome some of the hostility towards "parties" and appears to be an accepted part of the movement. "Another world is possible" was a constant refrain throughout the congress.

The second major theme was the party's anti-war stance. Some of the biggest demonstrations against the war in Afghanistan have taken place in Italy with the active participation of the PRC. A central part of this theme at the Congress was its absolute condemnation of the state terror being carried out against the Palestinian masses and support for their struggle.

Perhaps the most immediate and pressing subject for debate was the response of the working class to the attack by the Berlusconi government on workers' rights. Berlusconi is intent on abolishing Article 18 of the Italian labour statutes, which protects workers from arbitrary sackings. As seen by the demonstration on 23 March the reaction has been overwhelming.

Art 18 only applies to workers in workplaces with 15 or more workers. However, the clear call from the party leadership and the ranks is to involve every worker, student, unemployed person and pensioner in the general strike with the aim of closing down Italy for the day. More than this, the party calls for the protection of Art 18 to be extended to every worker, regardless of the size of their workplace, whether they are casual or permanent.

Participation in the Social Forums and the other anti-capital-

ist activities has not only invigorated sections of the party, with the Young Communists claiming to have grown, but has also provoked a major discussion about how the party should relate to the 'movement of movements'.

The party leadership around Fausto Bertinotti has turned the PRC towards the social movements and argues that this global anti-capitalism is central to the work of the party, including its work in defence of the working class and labour rights. In this the leadership are fundamentally correct. By turning to the social movements, the anti-war protests and now, despite coming under tremendous hostile criticism in the press, in support of the Palestinian struggle, the majority has ensured that the PRC has placed itself centrally within the growing protest movements, rather than simply issuing 'guidance' from the sidelines.

The majority orientation was challenged fundamentally by the minority opposition led by Marco Ferrando and Franco Grisolia. This opposition was itself not entirely homogeneous, being comprised of some Trotskyist groups as well as some adherents of Stalinist currents. Its main objection seemed to be that the PRC was dissolving itself in the social movements. In this they showed a remarkable lack of understanding about the impact that the 'movement of movements' has had on events in Italy over the last nine months.

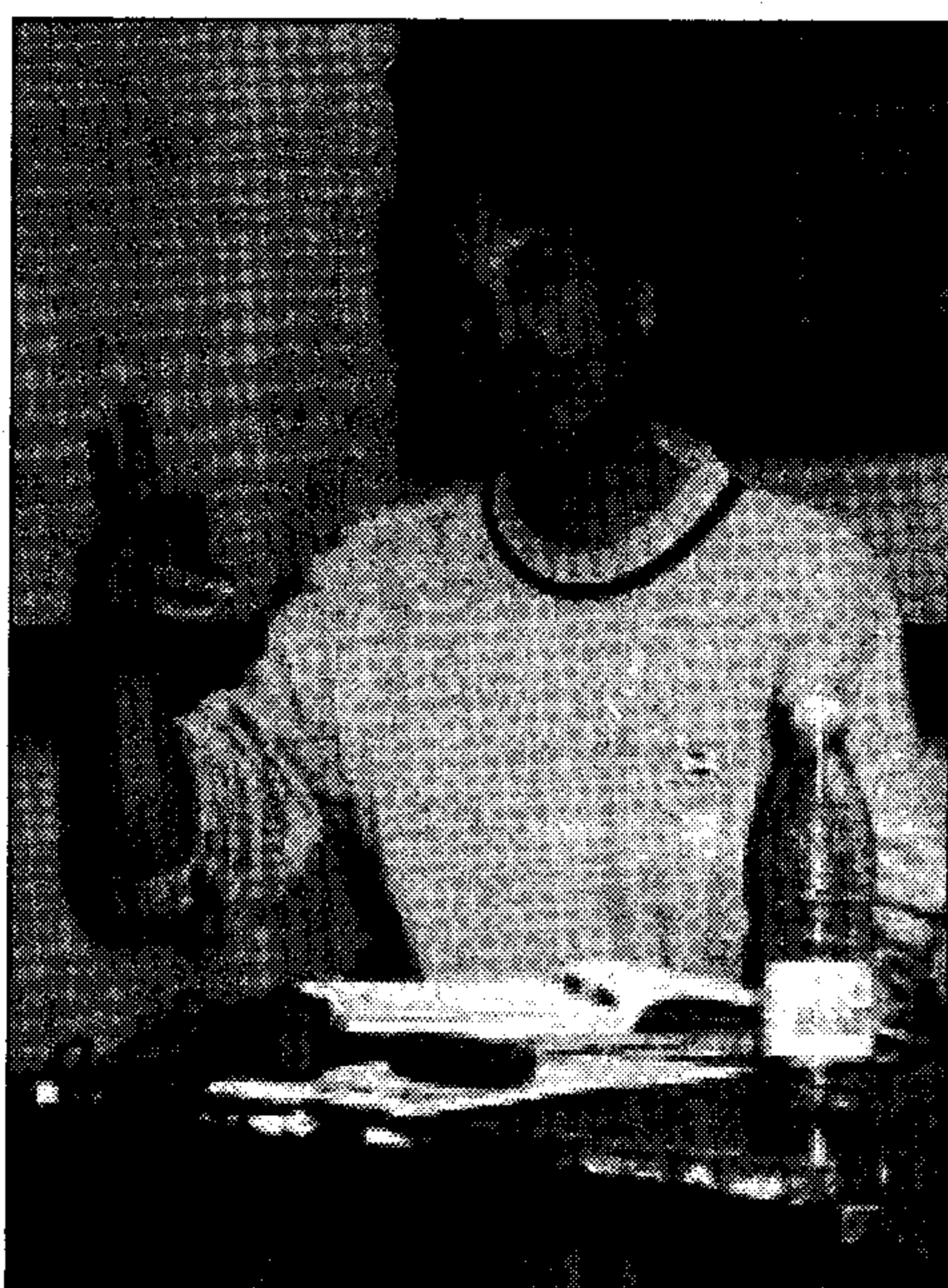
While making formally correct criticisms, their position appeared mainly to be one of counterpoising propagandist programmatic demands while criticising the involvement of the PRC in the social movements. This set them apart from the new arenas of struggle that have developed in every area of Italy and the orientation that the PRC has adopted. So, their criticisms appeared abstract and could be dismissed by the majority speakers, especially Bertinotti, as being removed from the concrete struggles taking place. The labour movement, the anti-war movement and the protests in support of Palestinian rights have all been strengthened by the social movements.

The birth of Italy's independent unions

Italian trade unionists Luciano Muhlbauer spoke at the Socialist Alliance trade union conference last month, both in the plenary session on fighting privatisation and in a longer workshop session after the conference proper.

In the latter he explained in some detail the political and industrial situation that would lead to the extraordinary day when 3 million people marched on the streets of Rome on March 23, as well as talking about the debates in Rifondazione in the run up to their congress which are dealt with in the report from the Congress by Soraya Lawrence and Nick Wrack (above).

Luciano is a member of the national leadership of the Sindacato Intercategoriale dei Comitati di Base, S.in.Cobas. S.in.Cobas is an anticapitalist Trade Union which was born in the 1980s from the new movements which led social fights in the factories, in transport, in the schools and in the public sector in general, that gave



birth to self-managed committees named COBAS.

This new Trade Union organisation was alternative to the traditional Trade Unions (Cgil, Cisl and Uil), all of which practise social partnership.

COBAS took inspiration from the experience of factory councils and considers itself engaged in the process of building new democratic trade unions, based

on the working class and mass organisations.

S.in.Cobas is a component member of Attac, of the network of European Marches against unemployment, social insecurity and exclusion, and have supported the various international mobilisations at the EU summits. They are also engaged in the promoting the international co-ordination of activists, starting from multinational companies (Fiat-G.M. in Italy and Germany, Alcatel in Italy and France).

S.in.Cobas believes that the movement of workers must give birth to new tools on the international level, in order to develop co-ordination of concrete initiatives. They want to promote debate and dialogue between all those resisting capitalist globalisation; thinking it is

necessary to give birth to new internationalism in the working class.

From this point of view S.in Cobas participated in the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre and in centrally involved in the planning of the European Social Forum to be held in Italy in the autumn.

Below we print part of Luciano's speech:

"It's a bit complicated to explain about the unions because you don't have the same tradition of independent unions in Britain - they only exist in Italy, in France and a little bit in Spain.

They developed in the 1980's and at the beginning of the 90s. First were the teachers and then the rail-workers then some public sector workers and then in the 90's in some factories as well - starting from Alfa Romeo in Milan.

There were splits to the left from the CGIL and also from the Christian Democratic unions in the north of the country - because this region was to the left of the national federation.

The splits developed in a dynamic against social partnership - but also on the question

of democratising the unions to put decision-making in the hands of the rank and file.

There was a strong dynamic of this development up to the early 90's - but today it doesn't exist any more.

The independent unions exist, they have their space, but there are not any new splits from the traditional unions since then. There is also a problem between the different independent unions because each of them comes from a different history: the history of Alfa Romeo and the history of the teachers are not the same. And the leaderships are different too - and so it's hard to bring them together.

On February 15 we did manage this. There was a strike called by all the independent unions and a march through Rome of about 100,000 people and it was politically very good. But at this moment there are differences within the independent unions with regard to the march that has been called for March 23 - where some people are supporting this and others are not.

The reason for this is because there is a fear that the demonstration will be used as an alter-

native to the call for a General Strike, which at this moment it's not sure will happen. But never the less these divisions amongst the independent unions are a real problem.

This is particularly the case because you also have a crisis in the traditional unions. For 10 or 15 years we have had the politics of social partnership - particularly since the Concordat which restricted wage rises in 1992.

But now the bosses and the government are breaking with social partnership to the right - they don't want it any more - they want even more concessions from the unions and the workers. So today we have strikes and we have very bitter clashes about basic rights.

Two weeks ago the GCIL decided to call a general strike on March 23 - but the other traditional unions said no - we want to talk to the government.

Then there were discussions between them and finally there will be a common demonstration on the 23 - but as for the strike we still don't know because everything is still very much in flux....."

On the other hand, there is no doubt that the position of the leadership around Fausto Bertinotti, while correctly taking the party into the movements and speaking in terms of revolution and the need to forge a new workers' movement, leaves open and ambiguous its position of quite fundamental issues such as its attitude towards agreement with the Centre-Left and as to what should happen after the General Strike. Unfortunately, the abstract way in which these points were taken up by the speakers for the minority made it easy for the majority to avoid having to give clear answers.

So, while correctly criticising its own previous involvement in supporting the last government of the Centre-Left Olive Tree coalition, which carried out attacks on the working class and neo-liberal policies, further deals with the Centre-Left were not ruled out, especially at local level. This was despite Bertinotti correctly explaining that it was the neo-liberal agenda of the Centre-Left that prepared the way for the return of Berlusconi.

Further, what happens after 16 April was left vague, concentrating on the preparation for a referendum to extend the protection of Art 18 to all workers. In this way it appeared that the emphasis was being placed on the parliamentary arena rather than on the extra-parliamentary. Of course, the two should be combined, but the latter is decisive.

Despite this, Bertinotti was correct in his criticism of the minority when he said that their approach would separate the party from the movement.

One of the most striking features of Bertinotti's two speeches to the Congress was the clear denunciation of Stalinism: "Stalinism is incompatible with Communism", he repeated. The PRC, he said, must do away with the history of oppression and Stalinism. It must reject any form of authoritarianism. He pointed out that it was not just that Stalinism was not democratic, but that it was not socialist. It had denied the emancipation of men and women which socialism would bring. He pointed out that under Stalin all the leaders of the October Revolution were killed.

This was a continuation of the theme of "refoundation" which has been ongoing since the party began in 1991 but was stated more starkly than at any previous Congress. It was clearly trying to deal with the party's Stalinist past of the old PCI and with that part of the PRC that still adheres to the worst part of its traditions.

In the final votes on the different positions put to Congress the majority won 87.5% of the vote with 12.5% for the minority. Within the majority there is an opposition centred around Claudio Grassi, representing the main right-wing Stalinist grouping which won 25% for its amendments to the majority theses.

The comrades in Bandiera Rossa, the Italian section of the FI, are a part of the majority, giving support to the orientation of the PRC towards the social movements. However, because they made no open criticism of the deficiencies in the majority approach, not even submitting amendments to the Majority theses, they appeared to have no independent impact at Congress. This is despite having a number of comrades in the party leadership as part of the majority. Whilst supporting the majority orientation towards the social movements a clear revolutionary programme linked to the struggles should be advanced. The seemingly uncritical support from Bandiera Rossa allows the majority to get away with its lack of clarity about what is to done.



Protesters young and old joined the massive 3 million-strong protest through the streets of Rome on March 23



One interesting feature of the Congress was an afternoon given over to invited representatives of other 'movements' or campaigns. These included trade

unionists, ATTAC Italy, a speaker for Palestine, a representative of the women's movement and Vittorio Agnoletto, the leader of the Social Forum in Italy who had just returned from Palestine where he had been denied entry.

There were 634 delegates representing 92,000 members. 71% of the delegates were male. There were 68 speakers in the debate out of 154 who wanted to contribute. Speakers in the debate were allowed ten minutes. The majority of speakers seemed to have been called because they represented the alternative positions that had been debated in the pre-Congress period. This meant that although themes could be developed in full fewer delegates could speak and the debate tended to lack spontaneity and failed to give an adequate flavour of what was happening on the ground.

The National Political Committee was reduced from 380 to 135. There can only be a maximum of 60% for either sex on the party's leading bodies.

Bertinotti expressed concern at the turnover in party membership. Membership stands at 94,000. It has stood at around this figure since the party was established in 1991. However, every year a third of the members leave and are replaced by new ones. Why was it that the party appeared so attractive from the outside, yet was not so welcoming or accommodating once inside, was the question that had to be answered the congress was told. Young people had to be attracted. That meant changing old ways. The young people were on the streets but they would not join the party. It was because we are old-fashioned, said Bertinotti. Notwithstanding this, the Young Communists have grown and established a good name within the 'movement of movements'.

A special meeting to discuss the European Social Forum was organised for the European delegates. The ESF is to meet in Florence in November or

December of 2002. It is proposed that this should also involve countries from the Mediterranean and the whole of Europe. Issues to be discussed will revolve around the slogans "Another Europe is possible" and "A Europe without war". The different delegations present discussed how they were preparing for this event. The Socialist Alliance needs to participate in this process.

There were 139 international delegates from over 90 separate organisations (parties and social movements) covering 53 countries. All were well looked after. There was simultaneous translation throughout the conference through headphones for all the international delegates.

It was extremely important that the SA attended the PRC conference. Not only are they at the forefront of huge class struggle protests they also have a European and global perspective of linking up with the left in other countries. This will have important and potentially profound implications for unifying the left in Europe on social, industrial and parliamentary campaigns.

To this end there has already been a series of meetings of the left parties in Europe and this will continue with a meeting in Madrid later this year. It is essential that the Socialist Alliance is involved in that meeting. There is also the collaboration at the European Parliamentary level through the GUE.

Both of these, in addition to the European Social Forums, give socialists across Europe the opportunity to work together practically on specific issues - as well as trying to work towards a common programme to confront the attacks facing the working class in all European countries.

Peace, international solidarity and the struggle against the neo-liberal agenda of global capitalism are the themes we can join the PRC in promoting. The conference was fascinating both because of the deep and long traditions of Italian communism and because the new movement in Italy, as part of the global trend, had obviously affected and helped invigorate the PRC.

Soraya Lawrence and Nick Wrack attended the PRC conference as part of a delegation from the Socialist Alliance that also included Liz Davies and John Rees. This article is based on the report they wrote for the Socialist Alliance Executive.

Extract from the majority resolution agreed by the congress:

With this conference our party completes a determined and innovative step forward in the process of refounding modern thought and communist action to meet the great challenge that faces us, with the deep transformations taking place in the capitalist system world-wide in the current phase of globalisation.

The whole of humanity finds itself at a crossroads between the return to barbarism and the construction of an alternative society, that we continue to call Socialist.

This development and innovation in analysis and political theory are only possible if at the same time we put into effect a serious, brave and also a harsh balance sheet of the history of the communist movement of the last century and the experiences of constructing socialist societies.

Those ideas, those conflicts, those struggles, those revolutions have indelibly marked the history of humanity, as for the first time the masses have been protagonists of their own destiny in this way.

But in this history, which we do not set aside or to fossilize, mistakes were made, and also horrors - those of the Stalinist age - were committed that we must look at in order to avoid them happening again, in the present or the future.

This is an indispensable and also a possible task today, because we are facing a world-wide movement against globalisation that is fighting for "Another world is possible", and that therefore raises questions about the nature and the characteristics of a new society - one without exploitation, alienation and wars.

This search, on the basis of a return to the basic elements and foundation of Marxist thought, must continue and be expanded and our conference is a definite contribution in this direction.

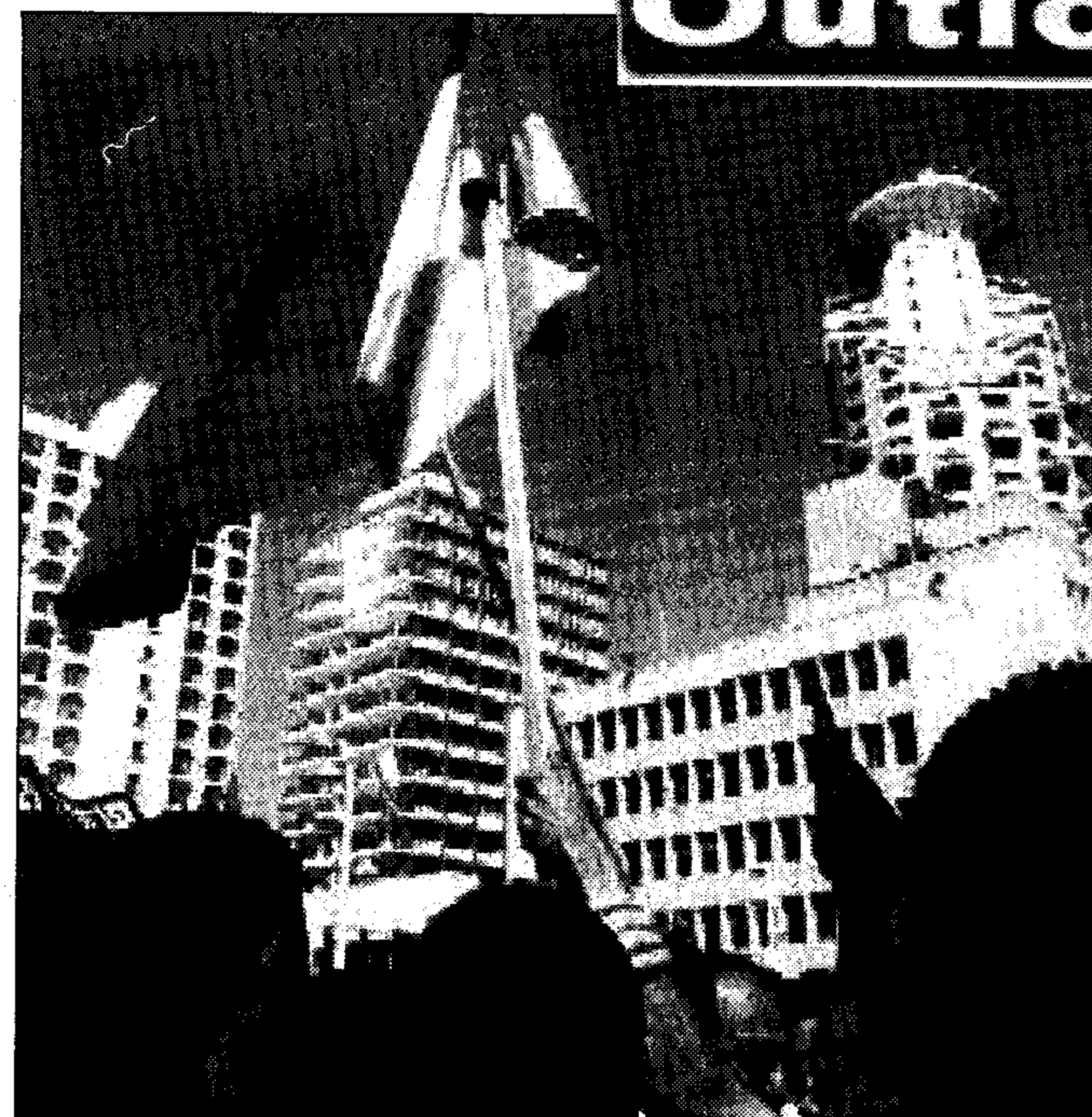
With this conference our party proposes and effects a turn to the left. This has been made necessary by the present crisis in the process of globalisation, that it is an economic, cultural and unresolved political crisis, to which the capitalist system answers with a permanent state of war.

It is necessary in order to be in tune with the growth of the movements, that in our country in particular, we see more and more a meshing together of the movement against globalisation, war and neo-liberalism and the extraordinary upturn in the combativity of the working class movement itself.

It is necessary because of the defeat of the political project of the Centre left and the so-called "third way" put forward by the moderate left, which not just in Italy but on a European level, demonstrates its total inability to face and defeat the right wing, neo-liberalist policies and wars.

We commit ourselves to these fundamental aims on all fronts, be it social, political, cultural or institutional, working inside the movements for their growth and participating politically at an international level.

Where is US imperialism going?



Red flag and Palestinian flag fly side by side as Israeli Jews and Arabs protest together outside US Embassy in Tel Aviv against Bush's support for Sharon.

As the Israeli military smashes through the West Bank, piling up the bodies and destroying the infrastructure needed to sustain life – water, electricity, medical facilities, civil administration – the one power with the means to stop it, the USA, refuses to do so. ALAN THORNETT looks at the direction of US policy.

Empty gestures are made, like the visit of Colin Powell, which are cynically designed to give the impression of concern, but which in reality allow Sharon a free hand to continue the slaughter.

The reasons for this are not difficult to see. For Bush, and for his lapdog Blair, the overarching issue is their so-called war against terrorism – which is in reality a war to increase the military, economic and geo-political, and ideological dominance of US imperialism still further.

Nothing could have illustrated this more clearly than the recent meeting of Bush and Blair at Bush's ranch in Texas. Designed to finalise the main lines of their battle plan for an invasion of Iraq, it took place as Palestine erupted into a bloodbath. This bloodbath was the direct result of US policy since September 11, which not only gave the green light to Sharon to step up the offensive against the Palestinians, but the political justification he needed as well.

If it was right for the US to use whatever military force was necessary against Bin Laden, they claimed, then it was right for Israel to use similar military force against the PLO and Arafat. Israeli spokespersons repeat this mantra everyday.

Far from being thrown off course by the staggering resistance of the Palestinians and the reaction of the Arab countries to Sharon's naked brutality, Bush and Blair proceeded to discuss and complete their battle plans as if all-out war in Palestine did not exist.

They emerged to announce that a "regime change" was necessary in Iraq, and made it clear how they would provoke the necessary war to effect it.

Saddam would be told that Iraq must implement all UN resolutions or face military action. This at the very moment when Sharon had rejected yet another UN resolution to withdraw from Palestinian territory.

Iraq would also be told that it must accept UN weapons inspectors "at any time in any place and by any one" – conditions chosen consciously because they would be unacceptable.

Why are Bush and Blair so keen to invade Iraq? The first reason is US strategic interests in the region



Hundreds dead and homes bulldozed: but Bush sees it all as part of the US drive to control the Middle East

in terms of oil reserves. These exist in Iraq in a way that they did not and do not exist in Afghanistan.

This is also the reason that the US bankrolls Israel, as guardian of those strategic interests. Israel is an utterly reliable regional imperialism for the US – unlike the Arab bourgeois regimes who would dearly love to play that role but – as the recent wave of huge demonstrations throughout the Arab world has shown – have to contend with populations with a very different outlook.

The second reason is the drive for even greater US global hegemony world-wide. Invading Iraq would allow the US to engineer a massive escalation of the war drive whilst simultaneously bolstering its regional interests.

There is of course a price to be paid. As invasion of Iraq would shatter the coalition which was got together (through various levels of persuasion) for the invasion of Afghanistan, and it would destabilise the region.

Bush is prepared for that, provided he has Tony Blair and new Labour shoulder to shoulder with him – both for political support and for Britain's strategic air force bases. Blair is prepared to face down opposition in the Parliamentary Labour Party in order to provide this.

For Bush the priority is to take advantage of the opportunities for US imperialism opened up by the collapse of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact in the early 1990s. Their collapse was a result of internal crises, with the West sitting

back as a spectator, but this left the USA as the sole world super-power.

It was not the only imperialist power, but was emerging as overwhelmingly the dominant one, shaking off the Vietnam syndrome which had prevented it from taking military action abroad for nearly 20 years. The military domination attained by the US today is greater than any imperialist power in history.

The 1990s were marked by the rise of US military power towards this pinnacle, building on Reagan's military build-up. More precisely, it saw the rise in Washington's ability to use its military power.

The most important landmarks in this were the Gulf war of 1992 (which never quite achieved a new world order) and then the bombardment of Serbia in 1997. They were carried out with the increasing use of air power and with a growing sophistication of the US military.

This is now further bolstered by a \$48 billion increase in military spending next year. At the same time Bush is setting out to make the use of nuclear weapons acceptable as a battlefield option. He has a contingency for using nuclear weapons in Iraq if they are needed. A new generation of weapons is being developed alongside the star wars project, which would allow the US to use them without the fear of retaliation.

The 1990s were also marked by the rise of US economic hegemony. This was the US's longest period of expansion, whilst its principal economic rival of the 1970s, Japan,

went into long term recession. At the same time it saw the success of its neo-liberal economic model which characterised a new rapid period of capitalist globalisation.

The fightback against this process of neo-liberal globalisation began in the mid 1990s. In Europe this took the form of mass strikes in France and other European countries against austerity packages designed to meet the criteria for the introduction of Maastricht and the single European currency.

But in South Korea, in India, in Mexico and in many other places radicalisation and mobilisation was taking place against the effects of globalisation itself. The growing instability of global capital was shown by the crisis in the South East Asian economies, which threatened the stability of the whole system.

Seattle triggered the anti-globalisation movement as we know it today, with mass demonstrations every time the international organisations of globalised capital meet to discuss their project. But it was always more than these demonstrations. It was, and remains, rooted in the escalating inequalities which flow directly out of neo-liberal globalisation – both between nation states and within nation states – and in the mass movements in the third world.

Bush's "war on terror" after September 11 was designed to reverse the growing anti-globalisation forces and send them into reverse. It was also designed to further change the balance of forces in the world further to the advantage

of the USA and to use the might of the US military to strengthen US geo-political interests and shore up the instability of its political system.

What emerged was a super-power on the rampage. An unchallengeable military machine in the control of Bush and the Republican right, and with political conditions in the USA which would allow them to use it on an unprecedented scale and in an unprecedented way.

The Vietnam syndrome – which inhibited the use of the military option – had been purged. The US military is now operating in 100 countries, and intends to operate in even more. There has been a huge expansion of special forces and secret services.

The result has been not only the slaughter of tens of thousands in Afghanistan and war against the Palestinians, but more repression in Chechnya and the introduction of the US military into a series of countries where it would not have been able to deploy before.

We have also seen a massive attack of civil and human rights in series of countries across the globe. In short the world has become a much more dangerous place since September 11 – particularly if you are a Muslim, or a minority, or part of a struggle for national or democratic rights.

So how has the balance of power changed in the world seven months after the attack on the twin towers?

That many more people are dying at the hands of the US military and those supported, promoted and encouraged by them is clear enough; and this is likely to continue and escalate – particularly once Iraq is invaded.

That the balance of power has changed to the advantage of US imperialism is also beyond dispute, but its stability is another matter entirely.

We have seen in Argentina that the mass movement has been able to bring down three governments. The unbelievable struggle of the Palestinians represents not just a defence of their national rights but a direct response to the war drive of Bush and Blair as it is carried through by Sharon.

The Palestinians are at this moment the front line fighters against this war. Their remarkable fightback shows that attacks will provoke fightbacks ... and fightbacks increase instability. A price will be paid at every stage by the war mongers.

Pictures of Israeli tanks smashing through Palestinian refugee camps brought masses on the streets, from Egypt to Indonesia.

Then there is the anti-war and anti-capitalist movement. The Brussels demonstrations in December were very big: 80,000 on the trade union demonstration and 30,000 the following day on the demonstration of the anti-capitalist left.

Porto Alegre was twice as big this

Sharon murders on – with Bush and Blair's support

“A war against Iraq will create a new and much bigger anti-war movement. There is a radicalisation in Europe which is expressed most importantly in the Italian working class and radical movements ...”

year as last, with 80,000 attending. The demonstration of 500,000 in Barcelona, far bigger than the organisers expected, was living proof that the movement is not only surviving but is taking new steps forward and is taking the struggle to a new level.

At the level of the trade union struggle, moves by Berlusconi to clamp down on the Italian trade union movement – in alliance with Blair who is advocating British-style labour relations throughout Europe – were confronted by a mobilisation of 3 million on the streets of Rome last month ... the biggest mobilisation of the Italian trade unions since the war.

This does not mean that the fightback at the present time cancels out the huge and barbaric offensive of US imperialism, or that it is about to be driven onto the defensive. But it does mean that the fightback is real, and that it is here to stay.

Nor does today's dominance of US imperialism mean that we are necessarily facing a resurgence of US power for an extended period. Not only is the economic basis of US power unstable, but the backlash against this power and its use is unpredictable and may become uncontrollable.

At the same time the world is changing. The US faces an economic challenge from European capitalism reorganised within the EU. The Japanese and Pacific rim economies may well rise as a new and more serious challenge, and China is a rapidly rising economic power with a huge population and potential resources.

At the moment the answer of the Bush administration is to use its military might to create the geo-political conditions to counter these challenges. The US war drive is indeed the military wing of the neo-liberal global offensive.

This is effective in the short and medium term but a long term solution to the problem of US capitalism is another matter.

All this means that there is now a great opportunity as well as a great responsibility placed on the left.

A war against Iraq will create a new and much bigger anti-war movement. There is a radicalisation in Europe which is expressed most importantly in the Italian working class and radical movements.

The European Social Forum in Naples in October can help to generalise these experiences.

In Britain there is a modest but important increase in trade union struggle alongside a strong anti-war and anti-globalisation movement. We have to ensure that this is linked into the movement at a European and international level.

The horrific events in the West Bank are causing revulsion around the world. But while the right wing media focus has been almost solely on the suicide bombings by desperate Palestinians, the sheer scale of the Israeli state terror is beginning to be revealed.

Details are emerging of the bloodbath which has taken place in the Jenin refugee camp, with hundreds killed and hundreds more wounded – many of them dying though the denial of medical treatment as Israeli troops fire on ambulances and drive away journalists and aid workers.

The Palestinians are being subjected to endless murder and humiliation inflicted by a state-of-the-art military juggernaut armed with F16s, Apache helicopter gun ships and up-to-date battle tanks.

Hundreds have been killed in the past few days as Ariel Sharon has launched all-out war on the Palestinian people, the Palestinian Authority, and Yasser Arafat.

Pictures of these events have prompted mass demonstration from Egypt to Indonesia. Over a million demonstrated in the Yemen, up to three million in Morocco, 100,000 in Tripoli, 50,000 in Egypt, 100,000 in Baghdad, 30,000 in Jordan. In towns and cities across Britain there has been pickets and protests and demonstration.

Even before the Jenin massacre, the Israeli military had killed over 500 Palestinians since the second Intifada began 18 months ago. And since September 11 the so-called ‘war on terrorism’ launched by Bush has given Sharon every excuse he needed to step up the offensive and to move to destroy the Palestinian Authority.

In the middle of this Bush, after prolonged vacillation, made his cynical call for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the West Bank, no doubt prompted by the need to placate the Arab bourgeoisies in the build-up to a US attack on Iraq.

At the same time any action to enforce Bush's call was firmly ruled out. Calls for sanctions by the EU were brushed aside.

Colin Powell, sent by Bush to enforce the call has travelled by the scenic route going first to Morocco, Egypt, and then Spain – making sure that Sharon and his generals had the opportunity to kill hundreds more Palestinians before he got there. No wonder Sharon took not a blind bit of notice.

Powell arrived in Israel only to be seen joking with Sharon, and claiming that he has an assurance that the Israeli army will complete their operations “as soon as



Molly Cooper

Less than warm welcome. Blair with Arafat in Downing Street: don't ask for sympathy as a refusal often offends ...

possible”. Presumably they always intended to complete them as soon as possible.

It is ridiculous to suggest that the Israeli government could resist the demands of the US government if Bush meant what he said. Israel is bank-rolled by the USA to the tune of billions of dollars a year, and is totally dependent on the USA. A serious demand by Bush behind the scenes, spelling out real consequences of Israeli defiance, would produce the results.

Instead the US has again shifted its fire towards the Palestinians, demanding Arafat make a humiliating condemnation of the suicide bombings before Powell would attempt to secure a meeting with him.

Now Powell is in Israel he has nothing to say about the Jenin massacre, and nothing to propose.

The flawed Oslo agreement and the so-called “peace process” is dead in the water: and the PLO is (rightly) no closer to accepting the Bantustan option offered at Camp David (repeatedly and cynically cited by the Israelis as an offer to give the West Bank and Gaza back).

In reality there was little if anything on offer: there was to be no independent Palestinian state, no withdrawal to the borders of 1967, no return of the Palestinian refugees, and no compromise over Jerusalem.

Now the objective effect of Powell's visit is to legitimise what Sharon is doing – since the US appears to have abandoned Bush's call on April 4 for an Israeli withdrawal.

Sharon is operating on the basis that the only solution is a military solution – i.e. kill a lot more Palestinians. The next steps in this hardly bear thinking about: it could even mean the ethnic cleansing of part of Israel itself of its Arab population as Israeli Arabs protest against the war.

There can be no way out of the situation in Palestine without addressing the real issues that have created the situation – the expulsion of the Palestinians and the partition of Palestine in 1948, the establishment of a state which gave privileges to Jewish people to the detriment of Palestinians, and the cynical role of British

and US imperialism in dividing the Middle East in their own interests.

Since Oslo, thousands more Palestinians have lost their homes and land, while the relentless, illegal expansion of the Zionist settlements has continued.

Bush and Blair, busily preparing to invade Iraq, demanding Saddam implement UN resolutions have consciously ignored Sharon's flagrant and long-standing defiance of repeated UN resolutions.

If the reaction of Bush to the events of September 11th has let loose the full force of Israeli brutality, it is the Palestinians (as George Monbiot rightly argues) who have emerged as the vanguard of the resistance to Bush's war drive – as well as in defence of their own national rights and liberties.

A small people with no army, navy or air force have mounted a remarkable resistance against overwhelming odds.

They are a part of a growing resistance world-wide to a superpower on the rampage and those who act in its shadow to consolidate their own regional domination or crush those fighting for their democratic rights.

They fight alongside those fighting for national self-determination in Chechnya against the

Russian army and those resisting military repression in Colombia, the Philippines, and elsewhere. They fight alongside those mobilised in the anti-war movement around the world and those resisting the onslaught of global capitalism. Anti-globalisation activists have been to Palestine to protest against the repression.

Socialists must support the struggle of the Palestinians for national liberation and justice – for the victory of the intifada and the rejection of Oslo and other dead-end solutions like the Saudi peace plan.

This means supporting those forces on the ground who are attempting to build a real alternative – the draft resisters, the civil rights groups in both communities, and others.

It means campaigning for a boycott of Israeli goods, for the end of arms supplies to Israel and for the indictment of Ariel Sharon as a war criminal.

- For a democratic secular Palestine, with full rights for all minorities

- For the mobilisation of the Arab masses in defence of the Palestinians

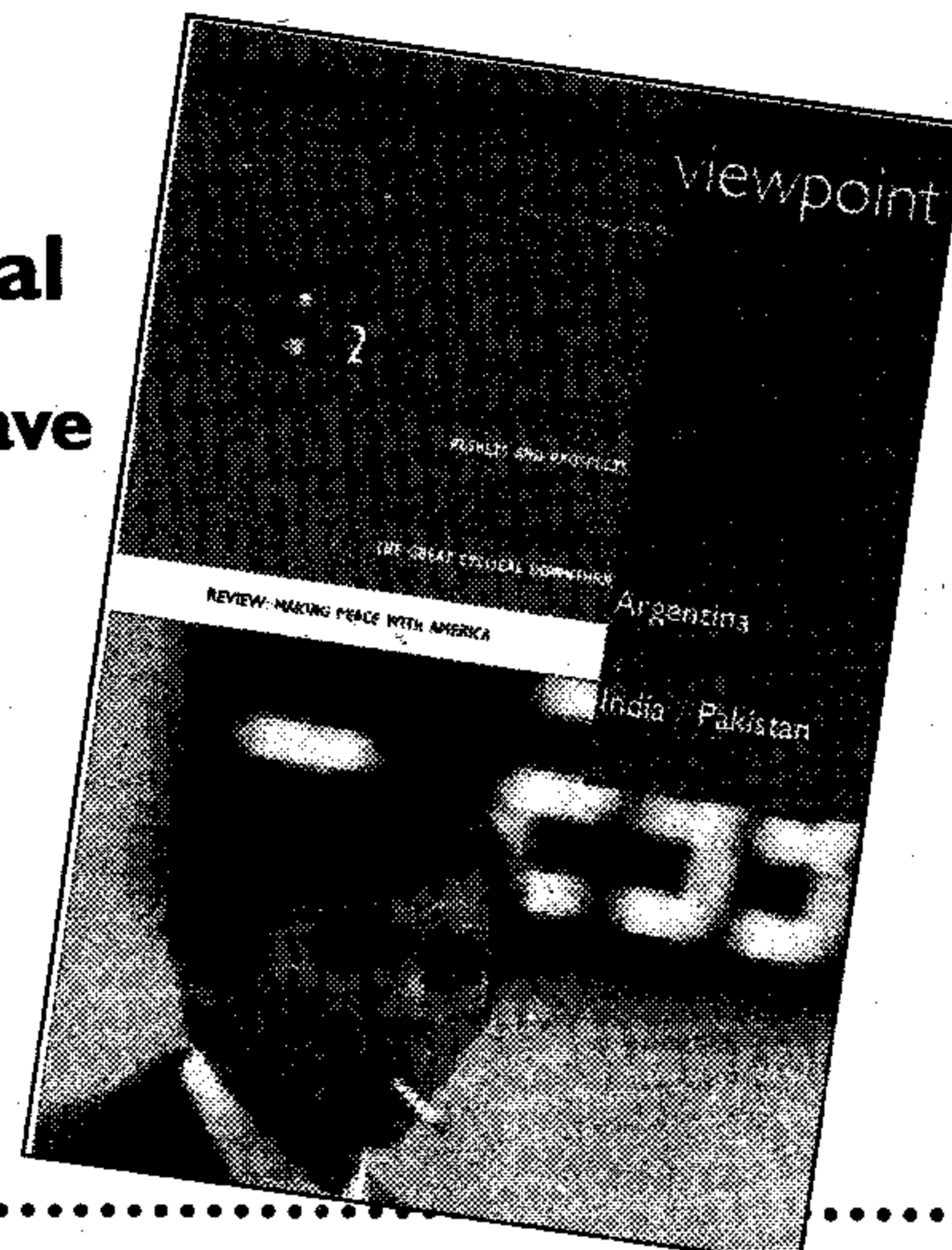
- Victory to the Intifada
- No return = no justice
- Dismantle the settlements
- End arms supplies to Israel
- Boycott Israeli goods

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The introduction of the Special Powers Act in 1922 provoked the following comment from the *Manchester Guardian*:

"Whilst envenomed politicians in the Ulster Parliament are voting themselves power to use torture and capital punishment against citizens whom they forbid to defend themselves ... some of their own partisans in Belfast carry wholesale murder to refinements of barbarity hardly surpassed in Armenia and Constantinople".

Recent anti-terrorist laws are the latest descendants of the SPA. They might provoke similar comments.

Oppressed communities are being targeted in an extension of powers by a state which, with its international allies, is perpetrating "refinements of barbarity" in Afghanistan, Palestine, and possibly Iraq. Piers Mostyn reports.

The SPA was introduced by the Unionists on the basis that it was only required for a matter of months or perhaps a year. It had to be renewed annually and this made it more palatable. But in 1933 it was made permanent.

In the 1960s a campaign for basic rights in the North of Ireland was met with programs against the nationalist community and a military suppression of the Civil Rights Movement. Under the SPA's powers, internment was introduced in 1971. The response was a mass rent and rate strike and the creation of IRA no-go areas.

These events finally exposed unionist rule. It was replaced by direct rule and the SPA was scrapped. But if the political structures were changed, the transition to new legislation was seamless.

The Emergency Provisions Act (EPA) and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) were no less sweeping in their scope - giving the police and the army "draconian" powers to stop, question, search, arrest and detain.

This period witnessed a catalogue of human rights abuses against the Irish nationalists. On Bloody Sunday 13 unarmed civilians were murdered by the British army. The Dublin government (no friend of Republicanism) took Britain to the European Court of Human Rights for the use of torture. And jury trial was abolished.

The EPA and PTA were defended by the Tories and Labour as draconian measures that, like the SPA, would require annual renewal and were necessary responses to a strictly short term emergency. Like the SPA, annual renewal went on for decades until the laws became permanent.

Terrorism was said to be such a threat to the fabric of society that the normal rules for protecting individuals against the abuse of state power had to be removed. The deep irony of abandoning "the rule of law" in the name of a defending "the rule of law" - was explained away on the basis that it would stop the violence and "normality" would soon be resumed.

Of course the opposite happened. The "troubles" raged on as their basic causes - the partition of

80 years on: the return of the Special Powers Act

New Labour's new war on civil liberties



Bloody Sunday: 13 unarmed civilians were murdered by the British army.

Ireland, the institutionalisation of unionist supremacy and the oppression of the nationalist community opposing this - were if anything entrenched.

The key effect of these laws was intimidatory: to marginalise, criminalise and silence targeted communities.

An infamous catch-all clause in the SPA revealed much of the true intention of the later legislation:

"If any person does any act of such a nature as to be calculated to be prejudicial to the preservation of the peace or maintenance of order in Northern Ireland and not specifically provided for in the regulations, he shall be deemed guilty of an offence against the regulations".

No wonder South African Justice Minister John Vorster when introducing a new Coercion Bill under apartheid in 1963 said he "would be willing to exchange all legislation of that sort for one clause of the Special Powers Act".

The real impact on individual alleged "terrorists" was virtually irrelevant to this process. On the August 9 1971, the first day of internment, raids began at 4.30am and by evening 342 had been rounded up. Only a handful of these could in any way be described as "terrorists".

But they did include the secretary of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, a Belfast City councillor, a blind man, and a 77 year old who had first been interned in 1929.

Over the next four years over 2,000 were interned (only 5% of whom were Loyalists - despite years of very serious Loyalist violence). A large number were beaten up and tortured.

In all, over 7,000 were detained under the PTA over the period up to the IRA cessation. But less than 5% were ever charged with a "terrorist" offence - some of these simply for wearing a badge or "withholding information". A far smaller proportion were ever convicted.

Hundreds (including present Sinn Fein MPs) were arbitrarily prevented from traveling from the North of Ireland to England. To be a UK citizen who had not been charged with any offence was no protection.

Every year for two decades some 50,000 Irish people were stopped, searched and questioned. They missed travel connections, were separated from loved ones and subject to traumatic harassment and humiliation.

All this was against a background of anti-Irish racism, the political witch-hunting of those who dared question this status quo and state-sponsored media censorship.

In the 1990s the Irish Republican Movement decided to abandon its military struggle. It welcomed the re-introduction of a parliament based on the partitioned North of Ireland. The "emergency" had ended. One might expect the draconian powers to go with it. Far from it.

The laws remained, and now we are seeing an even greater extension of oppressive state powers.

The Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act became law in December 2001. It was passed in great haste in response to the September 11 attacks.

It introduced a power of internment (detention without trial). This simply requires the Home Secretary to believe that a person is a risk to national security or has "links" with someone that it is suspected "may" be involved in non-domestic terrorism.

To get this through, the government had to derogate from the European Convention on Human Rights, on the basis that there is a "war or other public emergency threatening the life of the nation".

Other measures include:
 ■ Additional powers to expel refugees;
 ■ Police powers to obtain personal information on individuals from government departments;

■ Increased police powers to photograph, take fingerprints and "intimate samples";

■ Police power to use force to remove items or substances from the head (including headscarves) without any need for terrorism to be suspected;

■ A new offence of failing to provide information to the police that might prevent acts of terrorism anywhere in the world;

■ Provisions that could create, for the first time, a nationwide paramilitary police force.

This Act follows the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, which puts wide-ranging powers of surveillance and communications interception on a statutory footing.

And the Terrorism Act 2000 radically extended the existing definition of terrorism from "the use or threat of violence to achieve political ends".

It is now defined as the use - or threat - of "action" designed to influence the government, or to intimidate the public or a section of it for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause.

It must involve serious violence against a person, serious damage to property, endanger life, create a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or be designed seriously to interfere with or seriously disrupt an electronic system.

The "action" can be anywhere in the world. Guilt can simply be for inciting. This catch-all definition is eerily reminiscent of the infamous SPA clause.

It could be applied to union pickets, anti-globalisation protests, anti-GM crop protests, non-violent direct action by peace activists, solidarity with anti-imperialist struggles or any kind of mass action.

In addition the TA contained:
 ■ Police power to stop, detain and search without reasonable suspicion

■ A new offence of arranging a meeting to be addressed by a person belonging to a "terrorist" organisation, or sharing a platform with

such a person.

It took a decade of hard political work in difficult conditions (an ongoing IRA bombing campaign) for Irish, left and trade union activists to break the silence of the 1970s and start building opposition to the PTA.

In the teeth of opposition from the leaderships, a string of unions were won to a position of supporting the scrapping of the laws and defending the lengthening list of its victims (the Guilford 4, the Birmingham 6 etc).

By the 1990s opposition to the PTA was official Labour Party policy, and this was not even abandoned with the junking of Clause 4 and other progressive policies.

With the Republican military cessation followed by a Labour election victory, even cynics assumed that a new dawn of rights and liberties beckoned.

Instead Blair has maintained and extended these state powers with little opposition - despite the absence of the fig leaf of a "terrorist emergency" in this country.

It is vital that a campaign is built that understands the role these laws play and starts building opposition to them in the left, the unions and the communities most directly effected by them.

They are a legislative counterpart to the war drive since September 11, and a propaganda flagship of the new assault on the communities alleged to be harbouring "terrorists" and anybody seen to defend them.

Resisting the war must involve defending the communities under attack not just from racists but also the state.

In a whole series of countries a similar backlash has been unleashed. In the US over a thousand Arab Americans have been detained incommunicado without access to lawyers and without trial.

There has been the scandal of the treatment of the Guantanamo Bay prisoners who now face "trial" by secret military tribunals, presumably because there is no evidence against them that could possibly stand up to public scrutiny.

The EU has scrapped its extradition procedures, has clamped down on cross-border political protests and has made parallel moves to redefine terrorism in ways that are a threat to any international socialist movement.

Most serious of all, Blair and Bush's stance has given a green light for an Israeli onslaught against the Palestinians. These states can act with impunity so long as there is no great political price to pay.

For many years such laws succeeded in silencing the Irish community and intimidating Irish and socialist activists from speaking out, let alone organising against the iniquities of British policy in Ireland.

Although the TA and ATCSA has yet to have a significant impact it would be mistaken to allow complacency to lead to a similar history.

Opposition to the PTA and the miscarriages of justice in the 1980s was made possible by a vibrant left in the labour movement. This connected the abuse of British state power in Ireland with the experience of sections of the British working class under Thatcher - particularly the miners and the black community.

The current mobilisations against the war greatly exceed anything that was possible in Ireland.

This, and the emergence of a new left through the Socialist Alliance and the anti-globalisation struggle, suggest possibilities for taking up these issues with greater urgency on nationally and internationally.

Internationalists must learn from Zimbabwe elections

Brian Raftopoulos, Associate Professor, IDS, University of Zimbabwe. Chair, Crisis in Zimbabwe Committee.

After two weeks of mulling over the devastation of the fraudulent Presidential elections; millions of Zimbabweans are still in a state of shock and wondering what will happen next. Most citizens went to the polls, aware that the ruling party had stacked the deck, but hoping that their overwhelming turnout would negate any attempts to nullify their vote.

Thousands braved the administrative chaos, deliberate delays, long lines, ruling party harassment and violence, to assert the one individual action they thought they still had some control over. Many, usually non-political people, were arrested for daring to assert this right to vote, and had to ponder on how far this authoritarian state had taken control of their lives.

The lesson has had to be learnt, that politics is not "out there" for other people to engage in; that if people retreat into their personal and family lives, and ignore their loss of rights and liberties for long enough, then the realities of such repressive encroachments will fol-

low them into their particular retreats.

Robert Mugabe is fond of lecturing Zimbabweans about how the liberation struggle brought democratic politics to Zimbabweans. There is substantive truth to that statement, for the energies and possibilities, which were released by the anti-colonial struggle, and the promise of the independence years were immense.

No individual who suffered the oppression of settler colonial rule could not have felt the sense of being enabled by the new dispensation.

However, Zimbabweans, including the nationalists, learnt about democratic politics from other sources too, including the contradictory practices and promises of colonial rule itself.

In a more negative sense the nationalist legacy, in response to colonial violence, also brought with it experiences of political mobilisation which we need, as a nation, need to unlearn and move away from.

In particular, we need to continue our protests against the practices of forced party affiliation through violence, the demonisation of dissent as "unpatriotic", a selective use of the history of the liberation struggle to deny other voices the right to be heard, and narrow race-

based assertions of who has a legitimate right to be called 'national' undermined the civic and political rights of millions of Zimbabweans.

Mugabe's campaign of violence and election fraud, as well as the persistent message of recrimination and threat, produced an ominous sense of a ruling party capable of any action to retain power. Indeed we have seen the Zimbabwean state reconstructed and increasingly criminalized, in order to allow greater powers to military and militia elements. The election process itself has been so badly deformed, that only a return to constitutional reform can offer any hope of an overhaul.

The public broadcasting authority, the ZBC, is an obscenity and a daily insult to Zimbabwean taxpayers. One statistic will serve to illustrate this point: The Media Monitoring Project calculated that out of a total of 14 hours and 25 minutes that ZBC news bulletins devoted to the Presidential campaign, ZANU PF's candidate was granted a total of 13 hours and 34 minutes, or about 94% of the coverage.

The MDC candidate was 4% of the coverage, which was used to "attack, denigrate and discredit the MDC."

Any hope of a fruitful national discussion through

such a media organ was completely lost. That 1.2 million people still managed to vote for Morgan Tsvangirai, in the face of such abuse will be a lasting tribute to the critical abilities of the Zimbabwean public.

No less disturbing has been the supine and accommodating approach of other African leaders to Mugabe's project. For they have been unable to challenge the Zimbabwean leader's articulation of the African project, giving him ample room to define the struggle against colonial legacies in his own authoritarian terms.

President Mbeki, in particular, has been found wanting, as he has been left to chase Mugabe's tail, in an effort to remain in the SADC political terms of reference, and to avoid South African isolation from the region.

The result has been that Mugabe has effectively toppled South Africa from their assumption of regional leadership, thus seriously compromising the much-vaunted New Partnership for Africa's Development, (NEPAD).

There is little chance of civic groups, originally marginalized from the discussions around NEPAD, claiming any ownership of this project, when the continent's leaders show so little spine in the face of the delin-



Zimbabwean women queue for sugar as the economy hits the skids

quent politics of one of their elders. Solidarity without accountability is simply a return to the modalities of Cold War politics, leading to a constant stream of empty slogans and political structures locked in arthritic postures.

The western countries should find no solace in their condemnations of the ruling party in Zimbabwe. For there are dominant global economic and financial structures, presided over by the regimes of the West, which will make the emergence of a Robert Mugabe a persistent possibility.

We need better and more accountable structures of global economic governance, for even if a new government were to come to power in Zimbabwe tomorrow, a new round of fallacies about the neo-liberal economic

agenda, would not deliver Zimbabweans from their current problems.

Mugabe's message has found some resonance in Africa and the developing world, because some of his critique of globalisation is correct. It is also necessary to say that some of the statements that have emerged from the British government and the EU on Zimbabwe, lack the tone and understanding that are necessary for a more realistic engagement with former colonial countries.

Therefore as much as Zimbabweans and Africans more generally must take stock of the events of the past few years in Zimbabwe, Western nations must seriously re-examine the terms of their re-engagement with development issues on our continent.

Lop-sided "justice" of Milosevic trial

Geoff Ryan

The trial of Slobodan Milosevic at the Hague was restarted after a three week break, caused by Milosevic's illness. A few days later, in New York, the go-ahead was given to the setting up of a permanent war crimes tribunal after a further ten states ratified the Rome treaty, which establishes the International Criminal Court. The court will come into existence on 1 July.

The setting up of the court was greeted by a standing ovation in the crowded chamber. However, the United States' seat was empty. The US boycotted the ceremony, just as it has not attended meetings preparing for the court's operations since last year.

Former President Clinton signed the treaty during his administration, but the United States has refused to ratify it. Two weeks ago the Bush administration said it was considering 'unsigned' the treaty to stress that it won't be bound by its provisions. The US government wants to exempt U.S. soldiers and officials from the court, claiming that the US will be subjected to 'frivolous and politically motivated' prosecutions.

Although Tony Blair has enthusiastically welcomed the court, his differences with Bush are more apparent than real. Blair's support for the international court is simply a continuation of his paternalistic and fundamentally imperialist view of the world.

Blair sees the court essentially as punishing only those who British and American governments brand as war criminals. He, would, no doubt, denounce any attempts to indict British or US politicians or military personnel for war crimes, as 'frivolous and politically motivated'.

So, in Blair's eyes, it is perfectly acceptable to indict Milosevic but not to indict all those in suc-

cessive British and American governments who encouraged him in his brutal wars and, until Kosovo, continued to present him as the most important part of the solution to the break-up of former Yugoslavia.

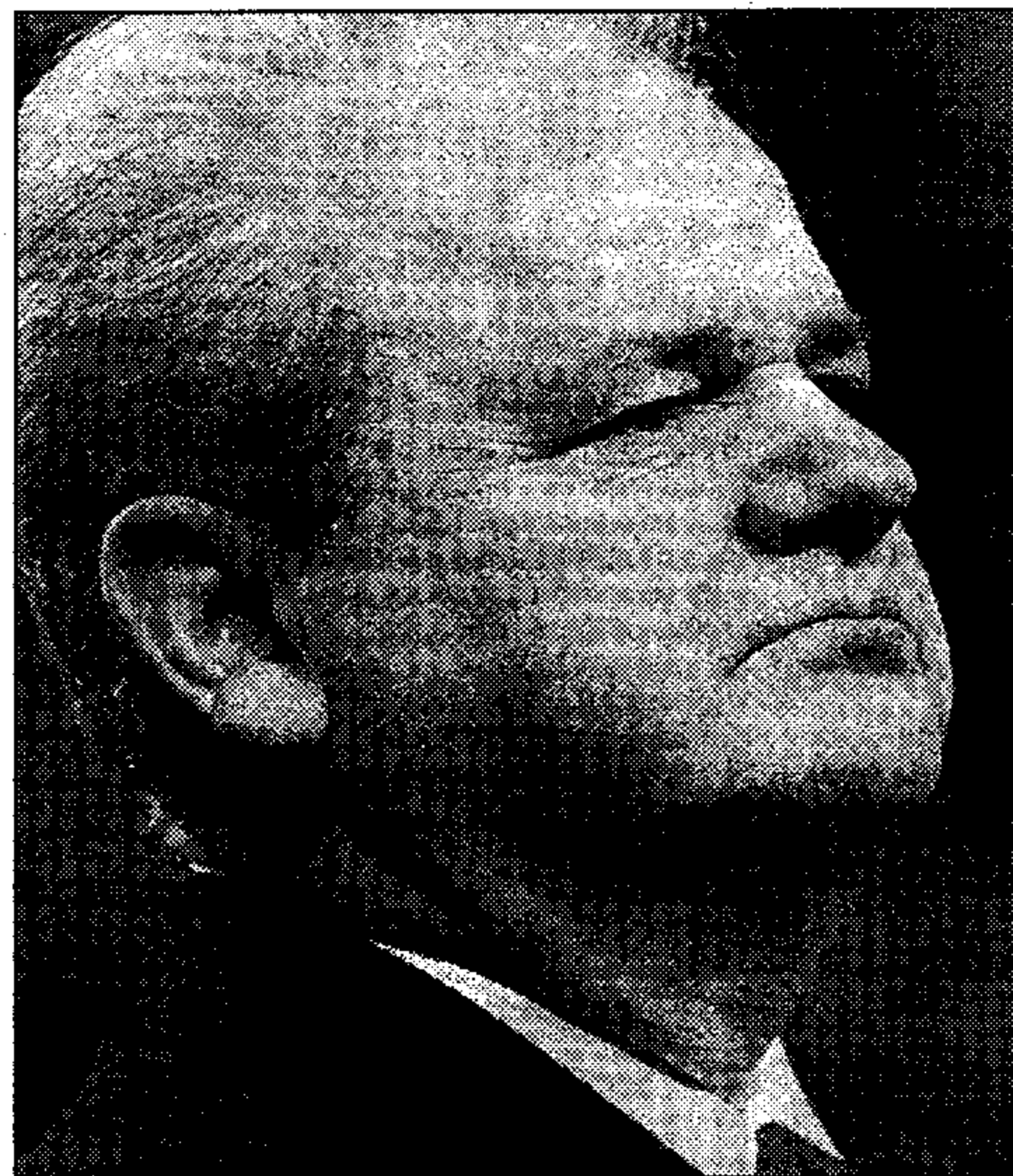
It is fine to indict Saddam Hussein (assuming Bush and Blair allow him to live) but not the CIA officers and US government officials who helped organise the coup which brought Saddam to power and who sustained him throughout his ten year war with Iran.

Despite their differences over the setting up of the international court, both Bush and Blair believe that the government and military of the United States have the right to do whatever they like, whenever they like and wherever they like - without being held accountable.

Nauseating hypocrisy (and total capitulation to Washington's diktats) is, of course, Blair's stock in trade. So Robert Mugabe is denounced for a fraudulent election victory based on intimidation, violence and removal of voters from the electoral roll, while Blair has never once raised the intimidation, violence, removal of voters from the electoral role (as well as the discounting of 'hanging chads') used in Florida to ensure the election of George Bush to the Presidency.

Yet, if there were any justice in the world, the international criminal court would be immediately issuing arrest warrants for Henry Kissinger for war crimes in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Chile and East Timor. Or perhaps they could start with the mastermind of the United States' dirty wars in Central America, John Negroponte. He shouldn't even be too hard to find, since he is the current United States ambassador to the UN.

Ariel Sharon and Vladimir Putin would also be under indictment for their crimes in Lebanon,



He's on trial: but Henry Kissinger walks free

Palestine and Chechnya, as would all those responsible for the massacre of nearly one million Indonesians in the 1960s - including the staff of the US embassy who handed over lists of 'subversives' to the Indonesian military.

Unfortunately, the chances of the international criminal court indicting any of these butchers are zero. Bringing those responsible for the murders of millions of people in Asia and Latin America to justice would be viewed as 'frivolous and politically motivated'.

Socialist Outlook has consistently argued that Milosevic is guilty of war crimes. We have called for him to be put on trial to answer for those crimes. However, we have always argued that he should be judged by the people of former

Yugoslavia. Firstly, because they were Milosevic's victims; secondly, because this was the best way to break large numbers of people in Serbia from the hold of nationalism.

The trial in the Hague, however, is simply another example of the hypocrisy of British and US governments... and not only because they have made sure that NATO will not have to answer for the war crimes its forces committed in Serbia.

Indeed, it was only when it was clear that Milosevic could no longer guarantee stability, and unleashed the war in Kosovo, that western governments decided he was a war criminal.

If there had been no war in Kosovo then Milosevic would never have been charged with war crimes in Croatia or Bosnia. They would have been quietly swept under the carpet as western governments and corporations looked to do business with Milosevic.

There is another repugnant aspect to the trial of Milosevic. Considerable resources have been put into prosecuting him and the trial has received considerable publicity. Far less resources have gone into the other international war crime tribunal - Rwanda. Yet vastly greater numbers were killed in Rwanda than in former Yugoslavia.

The conclusion is inescapable: the killing of Europeans is considered a much greater crime than the killing of Africans. And that, too, is likely to be the attitude of the new international criminal court.

However, we can at least make clear our rejection of Bush and Blair's hypocrisy on 24 April when arch war criminal Kissinger visits London to give the Institute of Directors the benefit of his wisdom attained during his career as a mass murderer.

Kenya's pre-election tension

Unions call for end to IMF talks

Harry Sloan in Nairobi

TRADE UNION leaders in Kenya have called on their government to break off any further talks with the IMF and World Bank over the resumption of aid payments.

Their statement came at the start of a 2-day seminar on Structural Adjustment Programmes which began in Nairobi on April 9, attended by over 60 unions and representatives of the IMF, World Bank, Kenyan employers and the government.

Francis Atwoli, General Secretary of the Central Organisation of Trade Unions dismissed the talks - which have dragged on for over 10 years - as a waste of time, and a diversion from policies to raise additional resources within Kenya itself. "Our finance ministers have been to and from Washington and nothing has been forthcoming," he said.

Kenya has received just \$44m from a \$250m aid scheme which was agreed in 2000, but suspended soon afterwards after the Kenyan government failed to act as required by the IMF to rein in corruption. An IMF team was due to arrive in Kenya later in April to review progress, but Finance Minister Chris Obure was less than hopeful it would produce any swift result.

Other unions present at the seminar included the embattled Kenyan National Union of Teachers, which is threatening strike action from the end of April unless the government pays a substantial increase agreed in a 4-phase deal back in 1997.

Kenya's public sector workers have been feeling the brunt of government austerity measures as they grapple with a projected budget deficit this year. Nurses working in community and primary care services had also threatened strike action over pay and allowances, only to delay under pressure from government ministers pleading that the coffers are empty - and threatening to sack strikers. Rail workers recently marched on the *Nation* newspaper offices outside Nairobi, demanding payment of large sums in back wages.

Air traffic controllers who went further and staged strike actions and protests have faced mass sackings, arrests and police brutality - with retired staff brought back to scab on the dispute and keep services running.

The government has even managed to antagonise judges, running up pay arrears of £1.5m.

Underlying these tensions is the financial plight of a government which faces a £320m budget deficit, but is more than ever reluctant to increase taxes in what is a pre-election period.

President Moi, the country's second President since independence in 1963, is in the final year of his second term, and must make way for a new President by early in 2003. However last-minute talks about constitutional reforms and new drafts of anti-corruption legislation are now not enough to divert the anger of increasing sections of workers who are struggling to make ends meet.

Moi will hand over a country with foreign debts of \$6.2 billion and a rapidly growing but increasingly impoverished population. Latest government figures show 56% of Kenya's 30 million people living below the official poverty line of just \$1 (78 Kenyan shillings) a day - up from 52% in 2000.

Estimates of unemployment are as high as 70%. 80% of the labour force is employed in agriculture, many of them in small-scale subsistence plots: GNP per head averaged just \$330 per year in 1998, with a total GDP of just \$45.6 bil-



Favourite son? Uhuru Kenyatta keeping in with President Moi at the merger congress of New KANU

lion in 2000.

The small section of the labour force in formal employment produces a small tax base, and government revenues of just \$2.9 billion a year. A large chunk of this is allocated to a void entitled "the office of the President", while the infrastructure of the country - roads, railways, electric power, telecommunications, etc are in dire need of investment.

Health services and education are in general only available to those able to pay substantial charges, though the government has been praised by the World Bank for spending 40% of its revenue on education.

Supplies of clean running water are available only for a minority, while bottled water sells in supermarkets at a price higher than petrol. Sanitation is therefore also a problem, especially in the slums around Nairobi and other shanty towns, with newspapers discussing the problem of "flying toilets" - polythene bags filled with shit - thrown into the air by slum residents, to get rid of it - at someone else's expense.

Additional health hazards include infectious diseases, including a new rise in malaria, typhoid and polio, as well as HIV/AIDS. Immunisation campaigns depend upon aid programmes from external donors, who appear satisfied to have reached around 70% of the population, though this clearly leaves some of the most vulnerable 30% without even this basic level of protection.

The World Health Organisation has calculated that a basic provision of primary health care (GPs, nurses, immunisation and local clinics) can be sustained in devel-

oping countries for \$8 per person per year: that alone would be the equivalent of nearly 10% of Kenya's total tax revenue.

The interruption of the aid programme has run alongside a series of calamities including a prolonged drought in 2000, an epidemic spread of HIV/AIDS, and more recently a 30% reduction in foreign tourists visiting the country's national parks since the September 11 events. Kenya imports all its oil - and world prices are being forced up by the US war drive against Iraq.

The country desperately needs radical change, but faces a continuity of increasingly conservative rule by one of Africa's tamest "nationalist" parties.

Moi will step aside for a new president, but will retain a controlling position as chair of the ruling New KANU (Kenyan African National Union) party, which recently consolidated its electoral position by a merger with the one-time opposition National Development Party (NDP).

All of the leading contenders to take over Moi's Presidential duties are his political creatures, not least Uhuru Kenyatta, son of the iconic leader of the independence struggle, whom Moi has shrewdly promoted to one of four vice presidents of the new party, and appointed as minister for Local Government.

Not that there is any glimmer of radicalism left in a party that emerged from the victorious Mau Mau liberation struggle. KANU's uninterrupted control of the government over almost 40 years has created opportunities for many of its leading lights - including

Kenyatta - to build up lucrative business interests which consolidate them as the conservative political establishment within Kenya, and tie them in strongly with the interests of multinationals and big banks on a global level. 40 years of patronage and favours have also created a web of influence corruption and privilege which the ruling party is keen to retain, no matter what the cost may be in IMF loans or aid.

Even among the opposition parties there is little on offer to address the needs of the poorest and most desperate sections of the population.

Just as KANU has retained power through a deft process of welding together alliances guaranteeing support in the key tribal areas, the opposition has guaranteed failure by its fragmentation into a series of splinter groups reflecting different local and tribal interests, including no less than three parties sharing the title Forum for the Restoration of Democracy.

However the run-up to these elections may see something new, with the launch of a new National Alliance for Change, linking three opposition parties around a reformist programme promising a rather confusing combination of tax cuts and job creation, increased spending on schools and health care, cheaper electricity, a crack-down on corruption, and help for Kenya's struggling farmers.

The Alliance argues for measures to bring more workers into formal employment, thus increasing the tax base and creating scope for additional government spending.

According to Alliance leader Joe Donde their plans include the establishment of car-assembly and bicycle manufacture in Kenya to reduce the costs of imports.

Donde argues that by reducing costs of electricity, more Kenyans will be persuaded to use it, thus increasing revenues. Plans also include borrowing on the money markets to finance a new programme of low-cost housing.

Asked how the Alliance would relate to the Bretton Woods institutions (IMF and World Bank), Donde appeared even more radical:

"We will have to forget them for some time as I think they have no interest in the development of African countries. Even at the conference I attended in Cape Town, it became quite clear that countries which have embraced Bretton Woods, have had their economies collapse.

"Historically all the countries that refused to deal with Bretton Woods including China, have succeeded. Wherever you have seen these two institutions, they have increasingly served the interests of the capitalist West.

"If I were in charge of making decisions as to that, we would recognise their presence, but we would not deal with them that way. Let us manage our country first as we are capable of managing our finances and then think about them later."

This brave talk is reminiscent of the "leftism" of Lib Dem leaders in this country, safe in the knowledge that they will not be required to put their promises into action. The National Alliance itself has not yet even managed to agree a single candidate to challenge KANU, without which it cannot hope to make an impact.

But in the absence even of echoes of the aspirations for 'African Socialism' which used to be touted in the 1970s by Kenyan politicians such as Tom Mboya, Donde does appear to be the only political leader of any substantial opposition party prepared even to pretend to challenge the dominance of the global financial institutions.

However with nine months or more to go before the election, and the government increasingly alienating public sector and other workers, it is possible that the Alliance could strike a chord with a section of the electorate - who are being offered little more than a flying toilet, and the promise of more of the same, by the ruling party.

Crackdown on South African protest

100 members of the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee were arrested on April 6 for protesting outside the Mayor of Johannesburg's house. They were also shot at more than 8 times by the Mayor's bodyguard who was standing on the roof.

Among them was Trevor Ngwane, well known anti-globalisation activist and South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) organiser Rob Rees. They and 38 other protestors were jailed in the notorious Diepkloof Prison until April 16th. The comrades could not get bail on the weekend because the police failed to complete charging them all. The police made excuses like they didn't have enough stationery!

The court initially wanted to detain all 100 protestors and only later agreed to release about 60 pensioners and children. The children had been in jail for almost two days!

SAMWU is dismayed that the state is returning to apartheid practices of holding people in prison for little or no reason.

Part One of two articles by Matthew Jones

The last issue of *Socialist Outlook* compared the developments of mass struggle in Argentina with the Paris Commune of 1871. Indeed to this day the basic programme for the working class capture of state power put forward by revolutionaries is largely inspired by the experience of the Paris Commune.

It was the first time in history that the organised working class had seized state power in its own right and used it to establish what Marx and Engels later called the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

Over forty years on, the lessons of the Commune were the first considerations of Lenin and Trotsky when the Bolsheviks overthrew the Provisional Government in Russia in October 1917. If, as Lenin put it, the 1905 Russian revolution and the Moscow insurrection were the dress rehearsal for 1917, then the Paris Commune was the political inspiration for the whole act.

The France of 1848-1870 was ruled by Louis Bonaparte, self styled Emperor Napoleon III. The regime had stepped into the vacuum created when the bourgeoisie had proved itself incapable of maintaining its rule over the working class, but that class was not yet politically and organisationally mature enough to take power in its own right.

After putting down the heroic Paris workers' insurrection of June 1848 with great brutality, and whittling down to nothing the powers of the elected National Assembly, the Second Empire of Napoleon III was established in 1851.

The Second Empire was a regime of phenomenal corruption where bribery, embezzlement and speculation reigned supreme: however, rapid industrial development of the major towns, particularly Paris, did take place. Side by side with this expansion there was a growth in the size and influence of the working class.

But in size and influence the Second Empire was a mere parody of the First Empire of Napoleon Bonaparte. The French chauvinists and speculators around Louis wanted a war, to restore French domination of Europe, to enrich themselves by plunder, and to quell discontent at home caused by conditions of work and the ruinously high taxes imposed to maintain the immense bureaucracy of the state.

In particular they laid claim to the Western provinces of Germany which had been a part of the First Empire. After 1866, when the Prussians under Bismarck had defeated the Austrians, and established Prussian dominance over Germany, the cry became "on to Berlin" to crush the Prussians.

On July 15 1870 Napoleon III declared war on Prussia and marched to occupy the "left" bank of the Rhine.

The First International, the International Working Men's Association, founded by Marx and Engels, protested against the war. Both the French and the German sections held large meetings and issued proclamations. In Paris on July 12, the members of the International issued a manifesto against the war, part of which reads:

"Once more on the pretext of European equilibrium, of national honour, the peace of the world is menaced by political ambitions. French. German, Spanish workmen! Let our voices unite in one cry of reprobation against war! ... Brothers of Germany! Our division would only result in the complete triumph of despotism on both sides of the Rhine."

Numerous other manifestos were issued in towns across France. In Germany, meetings in Berlin and Brunswick came out against the war. At Chemnitz delegates representing 50,000 Saxon workers unanimously adopted a resolution, part of which reads:

"In the home of the German Democracy, and especially of the workmen forming the Democratic Socialist party, we declare the present war to be exclusively dynastic... We are happy to grasp the fraternal hand stretched out to us by the workmen of France..."

The war was a debacle for the French. They were defeated at Sedan on September 2 1870 after being driven back across their own border. Napoleon III and most of the French army were taken prisoner by the Prussians.

On September 4, the Paris workers rose and delivered the death blow to the shattered Second Empire. A republic was proclaimed. The Prussians occupied a third of France and



The Paris Commune 1871 When workers first took state power

encircled Paris; and a siege began.

Inside Paris a Government of National Defence took over. This was a bourgeois affair, composed of the Paris representatives of the old Legislative Assembly of the Empire. In reality this was a Government of National Defence against the working class, openly trying to betray Paris to the Prussians and break the power of the Paris working class by treachery, famine and broken heads.

The leaders of the working class, particularly Blanqui, whose followers, the Blanquists, had a majority among the workers of Paris, were in jail. Thus a government composed of some of the worst swindlers, thieves and speculators in Europe, headed by Thiers, a former Bonapartist Minister of Police (!), was able to usurp the power seized for them by the workers of Paris.

The most important result of the rising of September 4 was the arming of the Parisian working class. The National Guard, over 300,000 strong, was made up of everyone in the city who was able to carry arms, and it was overwhelmingly working class.

The Prussians laid siege to the city, causing widespread food shortages and famine. Bismarck demanded the handover of Alsace and Lorraine, plus the payment of the cost of the Prussian invasion force, and an indemnity of 5 million Francs as terms for an armistice.

The Central Committee of the German Socialist Democratic Workmen's party came out against these demands in a manifesto issued on September 5:

"We protest against the annexation of Alsace and Lorraine. And we are conscious of speaking in the name of the German working class. In the common interest of France and Germany, in the interest of Western civilisation against Eastern barbarism, the German workmen will not patiently tolerate the annexation of Alsace and Lorraine."

In addition, the manifesto called for the return of Louis Bonaparte to France for trial as a common felon and accused Bismarck of trying to get Bonaparte reinstated Emperor so that he could finish the job of ruining France.

Tensions between the bourgeois Government of National Defence and the working class National Guard were always apparent. On October 31, workers' battalions stormed the Town Hall and captured part of the Government. However, they were released and the Government allowed to go on as the only alternative to civil war in the besieged city.

On January 28 1871 the Government surrendered. Two conditions went with the surrender:

● Firstly the line regiments and the Mobile Guard were to surrender their arms and be taken prisoner. The city walls were stripped of their guns, and the forts surrounding the city occupied by the Prussians.

So great was the Prussian commanders' fear of the power of the organised Paris working class that the National Guard was allowed to keep its weapons including artillery and the conquering army occupied only a small part of the city, consisting mainly of public parks! Even this they left after a few days.

Despite entreaties from Thiers and the bourgeoisie, Bismarck was not going to put down the revolutionary Paris workers: the French bourgeoisie was going to have to do its own dirty work.

● Secondly a National Assembly was to be elected eight days (!) after the surrender, to decide on whether to sign the armistice or continue the war.

Even before the surrender Thiers and his bourgeois cohorts were out in the country campaigning with the only allies they could find, the Royalists, to return a reactionary majority in the National Assembly. Communications were in chaos, many areas only heard of the elections on the eve of voting, so it was not surprising that out of 750 Representatives, 450 were Royalists.

This Assembly, known as the "Rural" Assembly because of the number of backward landowners present, signed the armistice when it first met in Bordeaux on February 12 1871.

The bourgeoisie and its allies were facing economic ruin. To add to the cost of the French war effort and the vast parasitic bureaucracy of the state there was an army of half a million Prussians holding them by the throat demanding its costs plus the huge indemnity, with 5% interest on unpaid installments.

Thiers and Co. had one answer: the workers and peasants of France. As Marx put it:

"Thus the immense ruin of France spurred on these patriotic representatives of land and capital, under the very eyes and patronage of the invader, to graft upon the foreign war a civil war, a slaveholders' rebellion"

300,000 armed Paris proletarians stood in the way: war was inevitable.

The government started chipping away at Paris, appointing Royalist ambassadors, levying a 2 centime tax on publications; passing sentence of death on the workers' leaders

Blanqui and Flourens; the suppression of Republican journals, laws on overdue commercial bills and house rents which hit Paris hard; the transfer of the National Assembly to Versailles; and the renewal of the state of siege, lifted on September 4.

The National Assembly appointed three vicious reactionaries to command the three agencies of state force in Paris: Vinoy, a Bonapartist, to command the army; Valentin, another Bonapartist, to head the police gendarmes; and Aurelle de Paladines, a Jesuit general, to command the National Guard... They never took up the appointments.

Thiers started demanding that the National Guard hand over its artillery and mitrailleuses (an early French form of machine gun mounted on a light gun carriage) as property of the state. This was the grossest insult. The guns had been paid for by public subscription during the siege and manufactured in the city.

Many of them had been saved from the Prussians by the National Guard who rounded them up after the bourgeois capitulators had left them and secured them inside the city. Finally Vinoy with a group of sergeants-de-ville and some regular line regiments were sent to seize the guns on March 18.

After the surrender of France and the flight of the bourgeois Government of National Defence, the National Guard reorganised itself. Most of its units elected a supreme Central Committee to command the Guard.

When Vinoy made his attempt to remove the guns from one of the depots at Montmartre he was foiled by the women and children of the area, who called out the National Guard. His force was dispersed or taken prisoner, and in one instance the 81st line regiment, after repeatedly refusing to fire on an unarmed crowd, shot dead its own commanding officer, General Lecomte.

The Central Committee of the National Guard, representing 300,000 armed Parisians, took power in Paris on March 18 1871.

At the same time sympathetic rebellions took place in Marseilles and Lyons - but these were swiftly crushed. Paris, having endured five months of famine, stood alone against the armed might of Prussia.

Immediately the Central Committee were magnanimous to General Vinoy and his troops, who were allowed to leave the city ... and went to Versailles, where Thiers' Government of Rurals was assembled.

The Central Committee called elections to the Commune to be convened on March 26. The manifesto of the Central Committee, issued on March 18, stated:

"The proletarians of Paris, amidst the failures and treasons of the ruling classes, have understood that the hour has struck for them to save the situation by taking into their own hands the direction of public affairs... They have understood that it is their imperious duty and their absolute right to render themselves masters of their own destinies, by seizing upon the governmental power."

(Marx, *The Civil War in France*, p. 50.)

The reaction of the Paris bourgeoisie came four days later on March 22, when a demonstration of reactionaries armed with revolvers, daggers, sword canes and the like attempted to seize the headquarters of the National Guard in the Place Vendome.

They were dispersed by a single volley from the National Guard, dropping their weapons as they fled. But the Central Committee did not follow up their success and hunt down the offenders. Only two days later the same crowd were able to muster an armed demonstration which ended with a mass stampede to Versailles.

Again the Central Committee did not follow it up, this time committing a cardinal error. Versailles stood virtually undefended and within striking distance of the might of the Paris proletariat. Thiers could have been crushed easily, but the Central Committee did not want to continue the civil war. Tens of thousands of Parisians paid for this mistake with their lives.

The capitalists had no such scruples. Throughout the campaign any members of the National Guard who fell into their hands were killed, frequently after enduring brutal tortures at the hands of the enraged, vindictive bourgeoisie.

Even after these two demonstrations, the "Party of Order" was allowed to stand candidates in the elections for the Commune!

Continued next issue

(reprinted from *Socialist Viewpoint*, 1986)

Nu Metal? – It's only rock'n'roll, but I like it!

John Kipling

Even if you missed it on TV or the radio, just walking down the street you can hardly fail to notice that rock music is currently experiencing a renaissance. Hundreds of kids are sporting clothes bearing the emblems of bands such as Slipknot, Limp Bizkit, Linkin Park, Blink 182, Papa Roach or Sum 41, confirming that a new generation of youth are getting into nu metal. But what is nu metal?

The term is best used to describe a diverse range of rock bands that are generally characterised by high-energy music, featuring powerful, distorted electric guitars.

A number of different types of extreme rock have influenced this new wave and are benefiting from a new found popularity. Some hardcore purists criticise nu metal as a pop trend cashing in on manufactured angst that will disappear leaving the "true" bands to carry the torch as they always have.

Certainly bands from a number of different extreme rock genres have been plugging away for years, to a minority audience, and all these strands have influenced the new wave. But ALL forms of extreme rock are benefiting from the popularity of nu metal.

Despite the sniping of purist critics, the boundaries between genres are blurred as musicians influence one another and innovate. In nu metal you can hear the influences of death metal (e.g. the brutal Slipknot), rap metal (e.g. the punchy Limp Bizkit), "emo" punk (e.g. Sum 41), and ska punk (e.g. System of a Down).

Nu metal is also generating new interest in stoner rock (e.g. Queens of the Stone Age), grungy bands like Trail of the Dead, and creative punk influenced bands like The Strokes and The Hives.

Probably, the main innovation in nu metal is the importation of the power of extreme rock into a more classic rock form, with a strong injection of melody. Thus heavy bands like Incubus, Puddle of Mudd and The Lost Prophets push out a beautiful wall of sound.

So why the new popularity of this powerful rock? Of course the music industry engages in marketing, but a movement can't be created by this alone. There is a complex relationship between artists, the industry, critics, the media and the audience.

Innovations may or may not be successful and are gambles for both artists and the industry. Some artists may willingly be manipulated and manufac-

tured. How much can an audience be told what to like by the media, or influenced by critics? Audiences are not homogeneous anyway.

The popularity of thrash metal and hardcore punk waned in the early nineties, perhaps because of the techno revolution which, along with hip hop, broke rock's monopoly on white youth as an expression of rebellion.

Dance and hip hop saw many innovations and are still hugely popular and influential, but they generally use sampling, sequencing and programming to produce the whole sound, and so don't have much room for instrumentalists, apart from vocalists.

Although death-metallers like Morbid Angel and stone-rockers like Kyuss outlived the decline of thrash, it wasn't until the advent of ska punk bands like Rancid and emo punks like NoFX in the mid-nineties that extreme rock started to rekindle interest, perhaps because of the melodic content and danceable rhythms of those genres. Green Day got into the charts.

In 1998 Black Sabbath reformed and Ozzy Osbourne started organising the "Ozzfest" rock festivals, bringing fans of extreme rock together and providing oppor-



Limp Bizkit – on the commercial end of the Nu Metal boom

tunities for heavy bands.

Sabbath are widely regarded as the inspiration for the whole metal scene. Although in the late 60's acts like Hendrix and Pink Floyd had experimented with the noise capabilities of electric guitars, Sabbath's whole sound was a powerful wall of noise channelled into heavy blues riffs.

Their reformation perhaps offered something for both the old rockers, who could remember the early 1970s, and new generations who saw the influence of these legends. The Ozzfests, at which Sabbath headlined, could have been the catalyst that facilitated the new popularity of heavy rock.

So what does nu metal represent? Most of the bands are American. Rock seems to have endured in the U.S. more than the U.K., perhaps because it offers a focus for youth rebelling against conservative, puritanical christian fundamentalism which is a major force in America.

Perhaps the power of American imperialism, its control of resources and media, has been enough to export nu metal and usurp the dominance

of the Beatlemania that seems to have characterised British guitar-based music in the 90's.

Youth rebellion in the form of rock is complex and not wholly progressive. The genre itself could be accused of being macho and clichéd. Although metal bands are predominantly male, this is true of most forms of rock, indeed most cultural phenomena of any kind, and this may be just be a reflection of sexism in society.

Nu metal certainly has its fair share of female fans and when the bands tackle the subject of 'love' they tend to sing about the complexity of relationships rather than treating women as sex objects. Perhaps nineties girl-power had some influence after all!

Rock is certainly not the most experimental genre, and eighties rock in particular was guilty of cheesiness. However there is a lot of room for creativity in nu metal, not least through the crossover between different genres, and the sheer energy of most of the bands leaves one in little doubt about their sincerity and conviction.

There are contradictions in the fact that loud and obnox-

ious music that may be originally intended to upset the mainstream is picked up and marketed by business in the capitalist music industry.

Overtly anti-capitalist artists could probably spread their message wider if they used the music business for promotion, but they may come under pressure to compromise their politics in the interests of popularity, or in the face of resistance from the music business.

Some bands however, have been able to remain overtly political and popular at the same time, for instance System of a Down who are critical of the American society and the W.T.O., and Brazilian band Sepultura who support the rights of indigenous Amazon tribes. How well their fans digest their message however is another matter.

Most bands are not overtly political, some could be accused of inanity and the complacency of American Imperialism (e.g. Fu Man Chu? - sorry, guys!) and others are nihilistic (Slipknot: people=shit).

Luckily, politics is not the only reason to like music! (Did anyone really enjoy Chumbawamba?). Music is not only an expression of identity but also entertainment, a release. The power and energy of nu metal may find resonance amongst angry or alienated youth in a way that pop idols cant.

The nu metal trend will no doubt decline and only a few bands will struggle on, as has happened so many times before.

What seems to be the case though is that rock music continues to endure, not least because guitars are accessible, versatile and fun to play and kids have a lot of energy.

Mosh it up while it lasts!

The Selfish Century?

The Century of the Self, Written and produced by Adam Curtis, BBC2 Sunday evenings 17 March – 7 April (four one-hour programmes)

Reviewed by Andrew Kennedy

THIS FASCINATING series, recently screened on BBC2 on Sunday nights, was unusual among present-day TV documentary output for its intelligence, ambition and scope.

Its subject was the development of the self in the advanced capitalist countries in the twentieth century. Its argument was that the selves we cherish as individual and unique have in effect been created by political and corporate power structures in order to ensure obedient citizens and dutiful consumers.

A central theme is the deep complexity of psychoanalysis, particularly Freudianism, in this project. The series thus seems to owe much to the ideas of the French thinker Michel Foucault.

The first programme shows how the ideas of Freud were used by US bosses and political leaders and (ironically, given that Freud was Jewish), by the Nazis. The conduit, or perhaps the sewer, between Freud and the American and German ruling classes, was the psychologist's opportunist nephew

Edward Bernays, who argued that people were fundamentally irrational and could be sold anything, whether products or political ideas, so long as what was being sold was associated with their deep unconscious desires.

Roosevelt's thirties New Dealism is presented as an attempt to present a positive alternative to all this: the suggestion is that Roosevelt wanted to resist the corporate agenda by appealing to people as rational citizens.

However, the programme fails to mention the bosses' fear in the twenties and thirties concerning the influence of socialists and communists in the American labour movement who campaigned for a different form of rational, collective identity, based upon class.

Episode two examines the reassertion of corporate power and techniques of psychological manipulation in the US after 1945, which created the conformist consumerism of the fifties.

During the sixties, however, as the third episode shows, businessmen and establishment politicians were faced with the problem of the new expressive self, promoted by dissident psychoanalysts such as Wilhelm Reich,(1) in which "self-actualisation" and resistance to conformity was commonly linked to a desire for wider social change. Cleverly, they worked out that

they could sell right-wing ideas and consumer products to the sixties generation by appealing to its desire for self-fulfilment, which tended to become the central focus (often to an absurd degree), after the defeat of New Left radicalism by US state repression.(2)

It is revealing how the new self-actualising psychology of the sixties and seventies seems to have had a largely progressive effect in one case - the spectacular break-up of a US Catholic nunnery, where the few nuns who remained had decided to become radical lesbians.

Cathartic

Yet it appears as quite reactionary in another example - the attempt to stage a cathartic encounter between blacks and whites in which the prejudices of each group would be admitted and people would relate "as individuals". This failed not least because the black people involved felt they needed their collective identity as blacks in order to resist racism.

Reagan's and Thatcher's election campaigns are cited as prime examples of the new consumerist politics of the eighties, appealing to individualism against "big government", while the last programme looks at how so-called left-of-centre politicians like Clinton and Blair who copied these techniques were bound to betray the hopes of

their supporters.

Instead of investing in state education, for example, Clinton played to the fears of parents by promising them "V-chips" in their televisions which would stop their children watching porn. Derek Draper, Peter Mandelson's former aide, contemptuously describes how New Labour politicians hung on the every word of free-associating focus groups: "A bunch of eight people drinking wine determined pretty much everything Labour did".

Perhaps rightly, the series concentrated mainly on the US, but it should have looked more deeply, for example, at ideological dynamics in Western Europe, where relatively strong political traditions even now exist which stress the possibility of collective identities based on class and which have often acted as counterweights both to consumerist forms of individualism and to right-wing and racist collective identities.

Also, the series tends to over-emphasise the role of individuals (which is interesting, given its critique of individualism). For example, Reich seems to be presented as the "cause" of the emergence of the new expressive self, without enough attention being paid to contradictions and cracks in the structure of the family and the wider bourgeois hegemony as key

factors.

Its approach can therefore be too pessimistic: it focuses too often simply on the power structure, a few strong individuals and the largely passive masses.

Revolutionary marxists would of course stress the masses' collective capacity for self-organisation and resistance and their ability at times to take the offensive.

Moreover, I think that the ability of the powerful to create new selves as though from scratch (again, shades of Foucault here) is very much exaggerated.

While marxists might have problems with the idea of a fixed, essential self, there are significant aspects of continuity in the self, especially those based on early experiences, which for good or ill become very deep-seated and can at times furnish the basis for strong personally-motivated resistance to the powers-that-be.

Nevertheless, this series stands head and shoulders above other recent "educational" programmes on TV in its sharp analysis of the attempts of our would-be masters to control us and in its construction of a convincing narrative which does not insult the viewer's intelligence (at a time when critical grand narratives are still unfashionable). I can only pray it gets repeated, and soon.

Tripping on ego

24 Hour Party People
(directed by Michael Winterbottom)

Reviewed by Adam Hartman

24 Hour Party People bills itself as a tribute to "Madchester" and its unique contribution to music and popular culture in Britain as seen through the eyes of its narrator and central character Tony Wilson (played by Steve Coogan).

Wilson was the moving spirit behind the Factory record label, which launched the pioneering new wave and indie bands Joy Division, New Order and the Happy Mondays, and the Hacienda club which was at the centre of the dance culture craze of the late eighties and early nineties.

An ambitious director could try to make an epic film chronicling Manchester, its people and music against a backdrop of industrial decline in late twentieth century Britain.

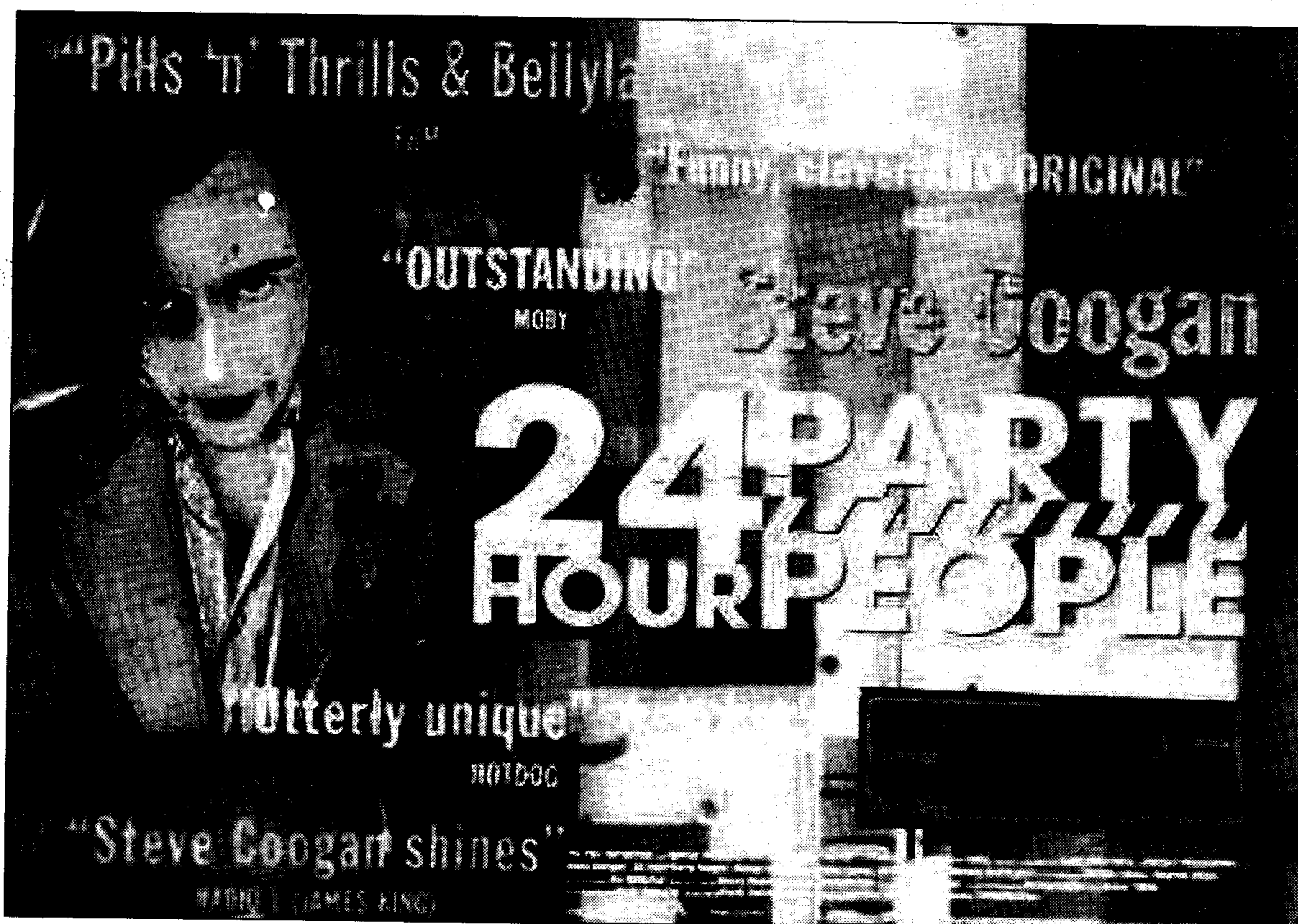
Thankfully Michael Winterbottom rejects epic in favour of a mock-epic which pokes fun at Tony Wilson's capacity to mythologise about himself and which casts him in the role of tragic anti-hero who rises and falls on the wheel of fortune and is brought down by the size of his ego.

This makes for an entertaining film. Coogan successfully portrays Wilson both as a pretentious "post-modernist" prat and as a visionary with the energy and determination to make his dream come true – at least for a time.

Although as narrator Wilson says that the film is not about himself but about Manchester and its music, in reality it is about him above all and the mark which he left on the city. In the final scene Wilson has a vision of himself – as God – which I suppose gives a whole new meaning to the expression "God made Manchester".

However the focus on Wilson means that so much which should have been there is barely glimpsed or left out altogether. We see plenty of Joy Division and the Happy Mondays representing new wave and indie but where are the Buzzcocks, Smiths, Stone Roses, James or the Fall? Weren't they part of the story?

And behind the story there is little context. Although Wilson remarks on the irony of naming his label Factory at a time when factories were closing down all over the city, the film makes no attempt to explore what lay behind punk or acid house or what those movements meant to the thousands of young working class people whose feelings and thoughts they expressed.



The chilling suicide of Ian Curtis (lead singer of Joy Division) is portrayed with sensitivity but we are not shown into his state of mind nor do we probe the darkness behind the band's music and lyrics.

The suggestion that the band was influenced by fascism (Joy Division was the name given to Jewish women used as prostitutes in the Nazi concentration camps) is dismissed by Wilson with a quip about post-modernism.

Similarly the dance floor scenes later on in the film do not do full justice to the acid house movement although they do convey something of its joyful spirit. The thousands of young people who came to the parties are there in the background but we do not hear their voices.

It was these young people who made rave culture happen and like punks before them they held up two fingers to the state and challenged the boundaries of what capitalism will accept.

They organised illegal raves in squatted fields and warehouses, taking over private property and bypassing the commercial club scene. The state reacted by breaking up raves and criminalising the movement through the Criminal Justice Act.

The film charts the demise of the Hacienda as drug gangs fought to control the supply of ecstasy and acid, leading to shootings outside and even inside the club.

Dealers also took control of the door policy and started to turn away

party goers who didn't "fit".

This completely contradicted the ideal at the heart of rave culture – the right of everybody to enjoy themselves and the desire to dissolve the boundaries which separate people in everyday life under capitalism.

Winterbottom doesn't ask these questions. But perhaps it isn't fair to criticise him for this. He simply presents the story and leaves it for viewers to ask their own questions. Where the film falls down is in its choice of narrator.

The story of Madchester could be told so much better by the people who made it their own. But don't let that put you off. Take this film if you want a good nostalgia trip spiked with some good laughs. And enjoy.

Exploring Ireland's legacy from colonialism

The Irish Counter-Revolution 1921-1936 by John M. Regan. Gill & Macmillan, Paperback 2001

Reviewed by David Coen

Fianna Fail in English means "soldiers of destiny". In the late 1950s economic crisis, with hundreds of thousands emigrating, they became known as the "Fine Failures". So serious was the crisis that some sections of the ruling class began openly to question whether the country was economically viable or whether it wouldn't have been better to remain part of Britain.

Caught between problems at home and US pressure for free trade from abroad, the Dublin ruling class abandoned its previous policy of protection of native industry and opened the economy to foreign capital. Economic nationalism was dead: in fact bourgeois economists and historians identify 1958 as the turning point in the development of the now sickly Celtic tiger.

Attracting foreign capital became the new policy and workers were taxed heavily in order to give incentives to transnationals to move in. The one time "frugality" of Fianna Fail gave way to a feeding frenzy of crony capitalism which a succession of tribunals have spent the last few years appearing to investigate.

John Regan's book suggests that the roots of the complete about turn in Fianna Fail in the late 1950s can be traced back to the 1921-23 Civil War. Regan is no Marxist (he's a liberal historian) and he works from the position that in every revolution a point is reached where:

"An attempt has to be made to turn aspirations into realities and in that process com-

promises have to be struck, dissenters abandoned, opponents suppressed".

But he can't avoid pointing out that the outcome of the civil war was not merely a consolidation of the revolution but a counter-revolution. The victorious pro-Treaty side represented the large farming and financial interests who relied on the link with Britain. The defeated republicans were the small farmers, small town bourgeoisie and sections of the working class who had done most of the fighting and were disappointed by the partitionist deal imposed by the British in 1921.

At best, the outcome of the 1919-1921 War of Independence was a stalemate – echoes of the most recent "peace agreement". Neither wing of the bourgeoisie in the South (both represented within Sinn Fein) was strong enough to impose its solution to the economic and political crisis of the new state.

The Treatyites had to get heavy weapons from the British to attack the Four Courts and the anti-Treaty forces were both reluctant and incapable of mobilising the mass of the people against Partition and neo-colonial status.

Not alone was the southern ruling class divided among itself, it was also divided from its natural allies, the Unionists in the Six Counties. The working class was similarly divided and politically weaker.

If there was the diversion away from class politics it was because the working class in both parts of Ireland allowed itself to be divided and dominated by the bourgeoisie through the carnival of orange and catholic reaction foretold by James Connolly.

The first post independence regime lasted from 1922 to 1932. Despite Regan's obvious

sympathy with some of its leaders, for example Kevin O'Higgins, he acknowledges (excuses?) the brutality of its suppression of its opponents in the Civil War.

Afterwards there was the free use of repressive legislation, a rigid economic policy following the line set in the British Treasury and a harsh Catholic social policy, which mirrored the Orange State in the Six Counties.

Having split over the Treaty, Sinn Fein split again in 1926 with the majority following de Valera into the Parliament they had thought illegitimate and which involved swearing an oath of allegiance to the British king.

Majority

In 1932 de Valera was able to form a government with the help of Labour and early the following year won an overall majority. Fianna Fail, which remained in power until 1973 with two brief interruptions, implemented the original Sinn Fein policy of protection until it ran into the US led demands for free trade in the late 1950s.

Regan devotes a section of the book to the reaction of the outgoing Cumann na nGaedheal party to Fianna Fail's election victory. Having failed with a vicious redbaiting campaign, there were rumours of an army mutiny. More seriously, in 1933 General Eoin O'Duffy, recently dismissed Chief of Police, took over as leader of the Army Comrades Association, an organisation comprising former Treatyite soldiers and better known as the "Blueshirts".

Modelled on Mussolini's Blackshirts with a fascist-type salute, it was committed to "opposing communism". For a while it threatened the Fianna Fail government but

faded within a couple of years and merged into Cumann na nGaedheal, not because of any anti-fascist sensibility on the part of the ruling class as a whole, but because the mass of the population wouldn't support an organisation which was clearly identified, in spite of its proclaimed aim of national unity, as pro-British.

It did however have its uses for the ruling class. Apart from threatening and intimidating the remnants of the Republican movement which had shifted to the left, it exerted pressure on de Valera to deal with the Republicans, which he duly did in the late 1930s by executing several.

De Valera's political base was narrow and once the hopes of economic development were set back by recession and war, he found he had to rely more on the traditional sectors of the ruling class. The 1938 Constitution, which recognises the "special position of the Catholic church", is essentially a sop to reaction.

De Valera's idyllic vision of a frugal, rural Ireland, its blinkered cultural outlook, its sectarian clericalism and its attempts to impose the Irish language by Government order can be understood as the outcome of the defeat of the radicals in the Civil War.

De Valera's government was probably saved by the outbreak of the Second World War, but once wartime measures were lifted, the economic (and the political) crisis emerged again.

The 1958 decision to abandon protection and to re-orient to foreign capital was not therefore the result of a sudden conversion to the benefits of "free trade" but the reassertion of the power of those sections of the Southern ruling class which had always favoured the link with Britain, the large farming and banking sectors.

For Fianna Fail to survive this required, as in the 1930s, the integration of the working class behind the new perspective on development, a variant of the "social partnership" which exists today.

Despite its limitations, this book is well worth reading for the insight it gives into the ways in which the legacy of colonialism continues to shape the politics of "independent" Ireland.

Socialist

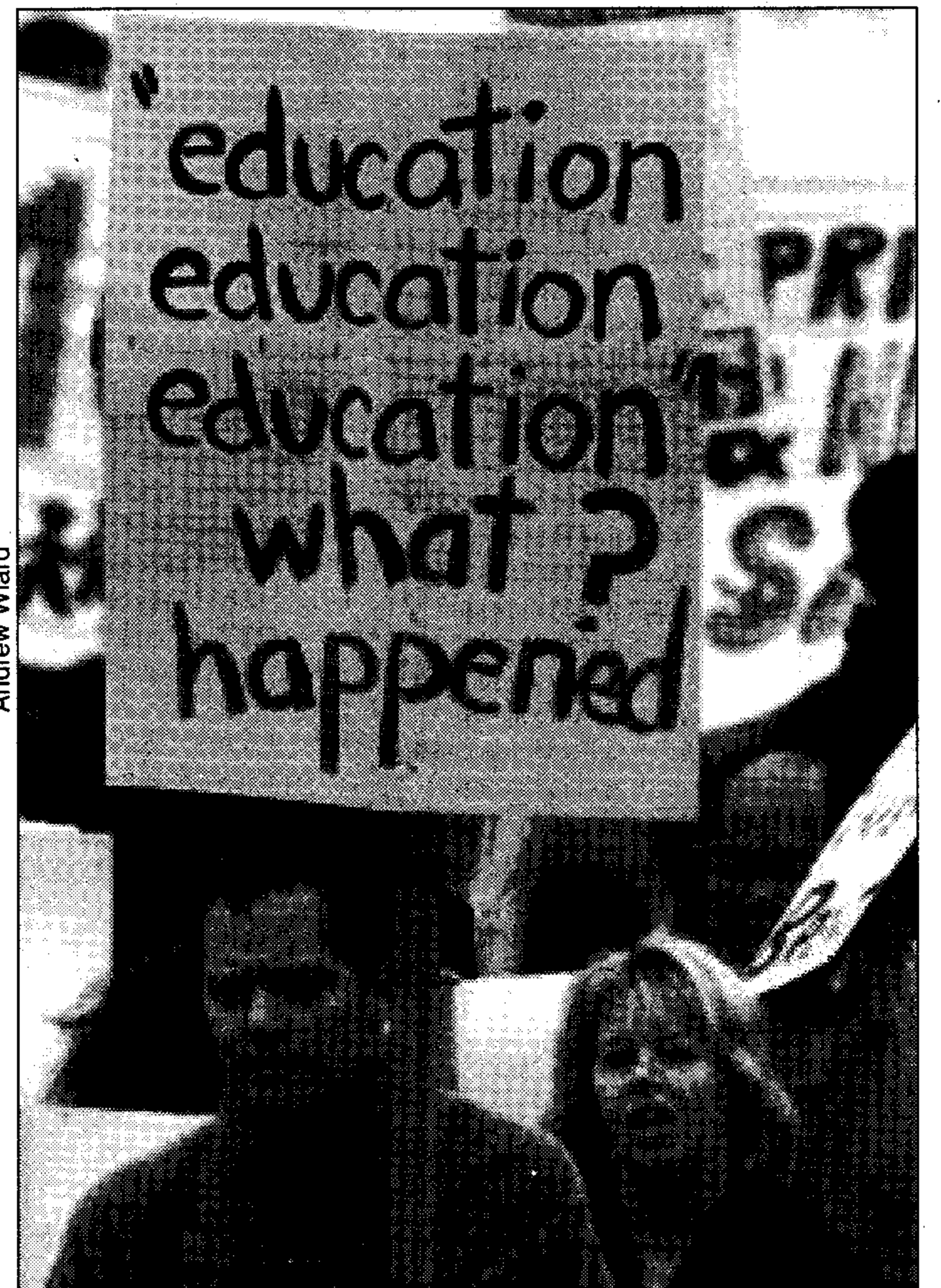
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