

# Socialist OUTLOOK

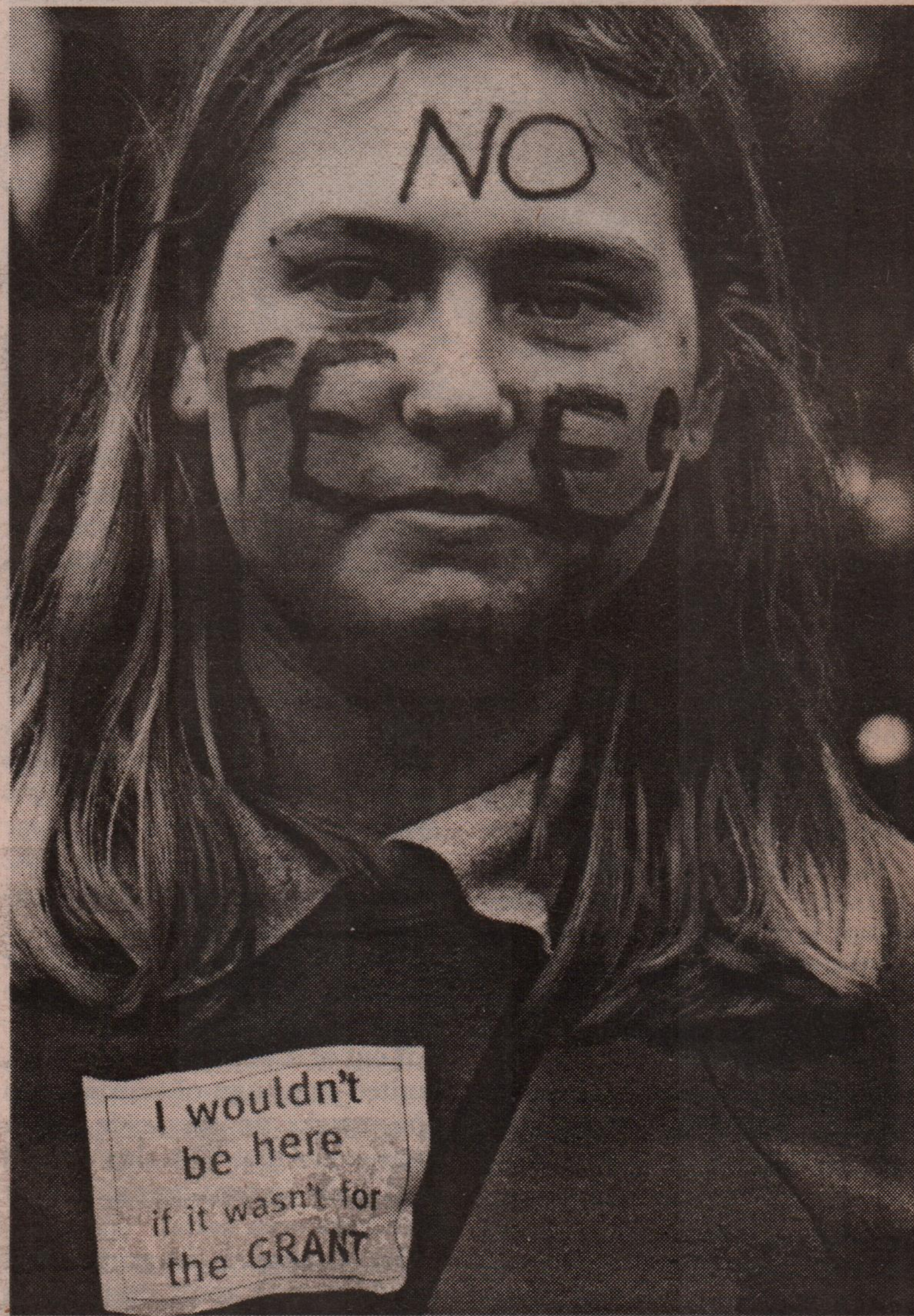
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6,500 health workers and campaigners marched through Canterbury against hospital closures

**Students, pensioners,  
health campaigners,  
postal workers...**

# Fighting back!



NEW LABOUR may be trying to continue where the Tories left off, but they are not carrying all before them.

The last few weeks have seen an upsurge in grass roots resistance to Labour's plans, giving a small taste of the type of fight that could be organised if the trade union leaders were not hand in glove with Tony Blair.

\* TWO MILLION students across the country are estimated to have joined the recent Day of Action against the imposition of tuition fees, despite the low-key campaign on the issue by a Blairite-led NUS.

\* THOUSANDS of pensioners showed what they thought of Gordon Brown's pitiful budget when they turned out for the national day of action on March 26.

\* POSTAL workers across the

country have been staging – and winning – strikes in defence of their jobs and working conditions.

\* CAMPAIGNS to block a new round of hospital closures across the country have been gathering strength, with big meetings and demonstrations in county areas including Kent, Hertfordshire, Essex, Oxfordshire and Worcestershire.

\* DISABILITY campaigns, battling against Labour threats to benefits, appear to have forestalled the expected drastic proposals in Frank Field's Green Paper.

There is more to be done: even the victories won so far have been partial and temporary. But it is clear that workers and campaigners are willing to fight – and in need of leadership.

**No to a bosses' Europe! Demonstrate in Cardiff June 13**

# Reclaim Our union Rights

Greg Tucker

WHAT MIGHT have been a great conference in the end was a passably good one.

As Arthur Scargill said in summary, "If this conference is nothing but good speeches then nothing will be realised. What is required is a massive campaign." Whether or not such a campaign will emerge is still too early to say.

Around 500 delegates did hear a series of good speeches. Early on Shirley Winter from Magnet earned a standing ovation. But this was then followed by a lack lustre Jimmy Nolan more interested in praising the SLP than drawing any lessons from the Liverpool Dockers dispute.

This set the pattern. Whilst there were speeches from the floor, delegates could be forgiven for believing that the whole thing had been carved up in advance.

Whilst the organisers tried to resist the pressure to turn the day into an SLP recruitment exercise, the threat that this was all there was lingered at the back of one's mind.

Having painted themselves into a corner by committing themselves to a massively long list of platform speakers it is perhaps excusable that no firm practical discussion or decisions were taken.

Instead the conference agreed to a basic statement, after little debate, and then accepted that decisions on all major questions, plans of action, election of officers and a steering committee will take place at future meetings to be held on April 18.

A recall conference is to be called before July 1. Only at those

meetings will the real direction of the campaign be confirmed. The maximum effort need to be made to mobilise for April 18 to ensure the healthy development of the campaign.

Reclaim Our Rights has to take up three strands:

- Becoming a movement of support for all those in struggle, giving workers the confidence to fight

As one speaker from the CWU put it, "Fear of the law is as dangerous as the law itself, as well as fighting to change the law we have to be prepared to break it."

- Building a grass roots campaign out on the streets.

The plans for regional conferences and for a march against the anti-union laws in a years time must focus on this aim.

- Fighting in every union to call our so called leaders to account, placing demands on the TUC, and

the Labour Party, to force them to act in our class' interests.

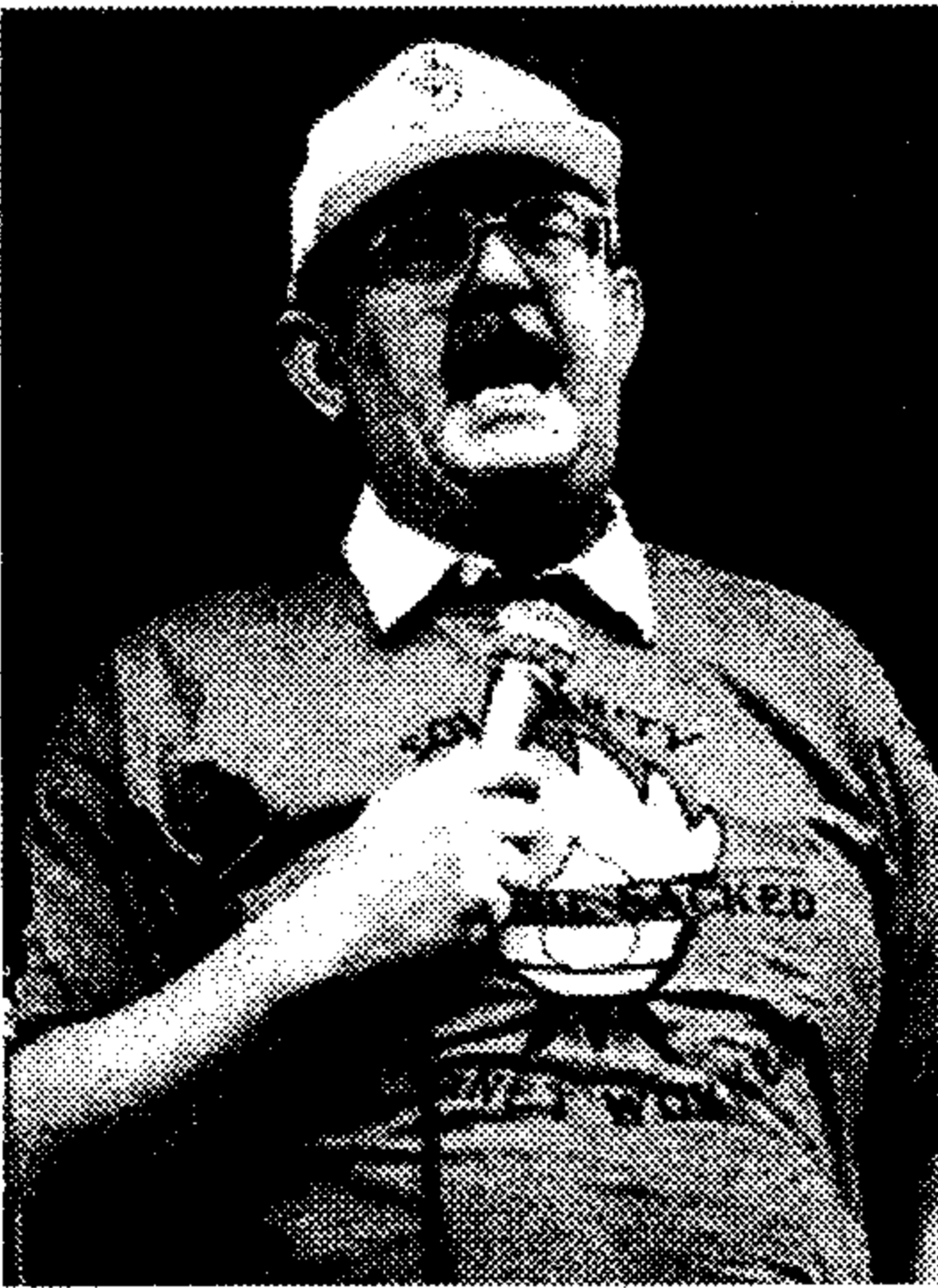
As Geoff Martin from UNISON put it, "When John Edmonds said get out on the streets I was pleased. The question, John, is when are you going to do it? Our pressure has to trigger the TUC into calling a national demonstration."

Despite many problems, the Reclaim Our Rights conference must be marked a success.

If out of it we can build a broad, united campaign of resistance to the attacks on the trade union movement that Thatcher started and Blair is continuing, then it will have been useful.

But to confirm its potential it needs to sink roots deep inside the trade union movement.

We must set ourselves that task.



Threatening marches: Edmonds

# New Deal means Hard Labour

by a North East London PCSU rep

LIKE THE unemployed, Jobcentre workers will see little of the £3.5 billion spent on New Deal. The State will waste most of it on subsidising miserly bosses to take on cheap conscripted youth. Instead of increasing the appalling wages and job security for Employment Service (ES) staff, New Deal is having the opposite effect.

The government has allowed the private sector to run New Deal in eight ES districts and ES workers are being offered a derisory 2% wage 'rise' in April.

Simultaneously ES management have launched another major attack on workers terms and conditions by attempting to selectively open Jobcentres on Saturdays.

Even in areas where the ES is 'leading' New Deal, so called 'partners' in the private sector are poaching ES work. Yet the threat is more apparent in private-led districts.

In Hackney and City, Reed Personnel Services were granted favour to deliver the whole of New Deal after their Chairman donated £100,000 to the Labour Party.

Although they declined to take on all the work and left some scraps to the ES, this partial

privatisation has already cost dozens of civil servants jobs. Reed has replaced ES workers with their own New Deal advisers offering them £2000 a year less than ES equivalent grades and longer hours.

Reed will make a vast profit



New Deal picks up where Tory JSA left off

from receiving payments for supplying youth to jobs through a network built up by ES. In Hackney, Reed have even taken over a Jobcentre. Every effort is being made by ES management to support such private sector initiatives. These developments are the tip of an iceberg.

In Hackney, the PCSU, the new Civil Servants Union have generated a good publicity campaign against creeping privatisation and linked up with a growing network of unemployed activists in the area. Yet industrial action may be the only way to stop Reed et al.

Such action would be fought by the right wing national leadership of the PCSU, as they are tied to the coattails of New Labour. For years they have been telling civil servants privatisations would be reversed by a friendly Labour government, but it is clear Blair has no intention of keeping any such promises. There is little vocal opposition to New Deal amongst Labour

MPs - they seem to have been conned into believing it will create jobs.

Civil Servants will have to fight battles on pay and privatisation without national leadership support. The Trade Union Left Alliance has an important role in trying to link up battles across public sector unions on these issues.

Yet trades unionists should not necessarily trust Broad Left leaderships either. The Socialist Party dominated Section Executive in the ES

last year sold a miserable pay offer to members. Recently they have been reluctant to totally oppose New Deal. The PCSU Broad Left must galvanise its support amongst ES workers to fight on such issues and reject leaders who see it purely as their electoral machine.

In London the Socialist Caucus run PCSU Regional Executive has started a lively campaign picketing Jobcentres opening on Saturday. The threat

posed of a six day week is real. A leaked memo from the Regional Director of ES to District Managers stated

"I have been very pleased to see DM's have begun to experiment with extended opening hours over and above the 36 hour minimum. I think this is an important development and just the sort of thing we should be doing to improve customer service and PERFORMANCE... I would want you to continue with extended hours".

The public have so far given a thumbs down to this development - not a single person showed up when Poplar Jobcentre opened on Saturday February 28.

Nevertheless New Labour and ES Management will persist in their efforts to increase labour flexibility. Civil Servants and the unemployed must unite in their efforts to fight for permanent, well paid jobs for all. We have a common interest in fighting for a socialist alternative.

# Star Wars - strikers stick out demanding The Return of the Editor

Neil Murray

MORNING STAR journalists have now been on strike for several weeks against the sacking of editor John Haylett.

The dispute started when Haylett was suspended for alleged misuse of a scanner at work. It then transpired that the chair of the management committee, Alan Rosser, had been keeping a file on Haylett for some years to use at an appropriate opportunity.

All of the 'charges' against Haylett are spurious, several coming down to the fact that he carried out his remit as editor, or

refer to things which were known common practice in the Morning Star office.

The action against Haylett was precipitated by an internal faction fight within the Communist Party of Britain. Following their conference last year Rosser's partner Mike Hicks was replaced as General Secretary. Rosser then appears to have acted to suspend Haylett in order to bring in the new General Secretary.

On a programmatic level there appears to be little to choose between the two sides of this dispute, although it seems that the new leadership are more willing to

work democratically with others on the Left.

However, it is important to support the journalists' strike without having to have a view on the internal fights in the CPB (or even caring over much about them) or the value of the Morning Star to the labour movement.

In the process of first suspending and then sacking Haylett, management has acted like any capitalist employer only scooping short of using the anti-union laws and then ever threatened to do that at one stage!). Members of the management committee have been coming out with Thatcher-like

statements about 'management's right to manage.'

All the agreed disciplinary procedures negotiated with the National Union of Journalists chapel have been ignored, and two of the three people on the original disciplinary panel were responsible for suspending Haylett in the first place. The third walked out in protest at the procedures being adopted.

The NUJ officially backed the Morning Star chapel from the start but management refused to meet the NUJ for some time.

Two meetings of the management committee have since taken

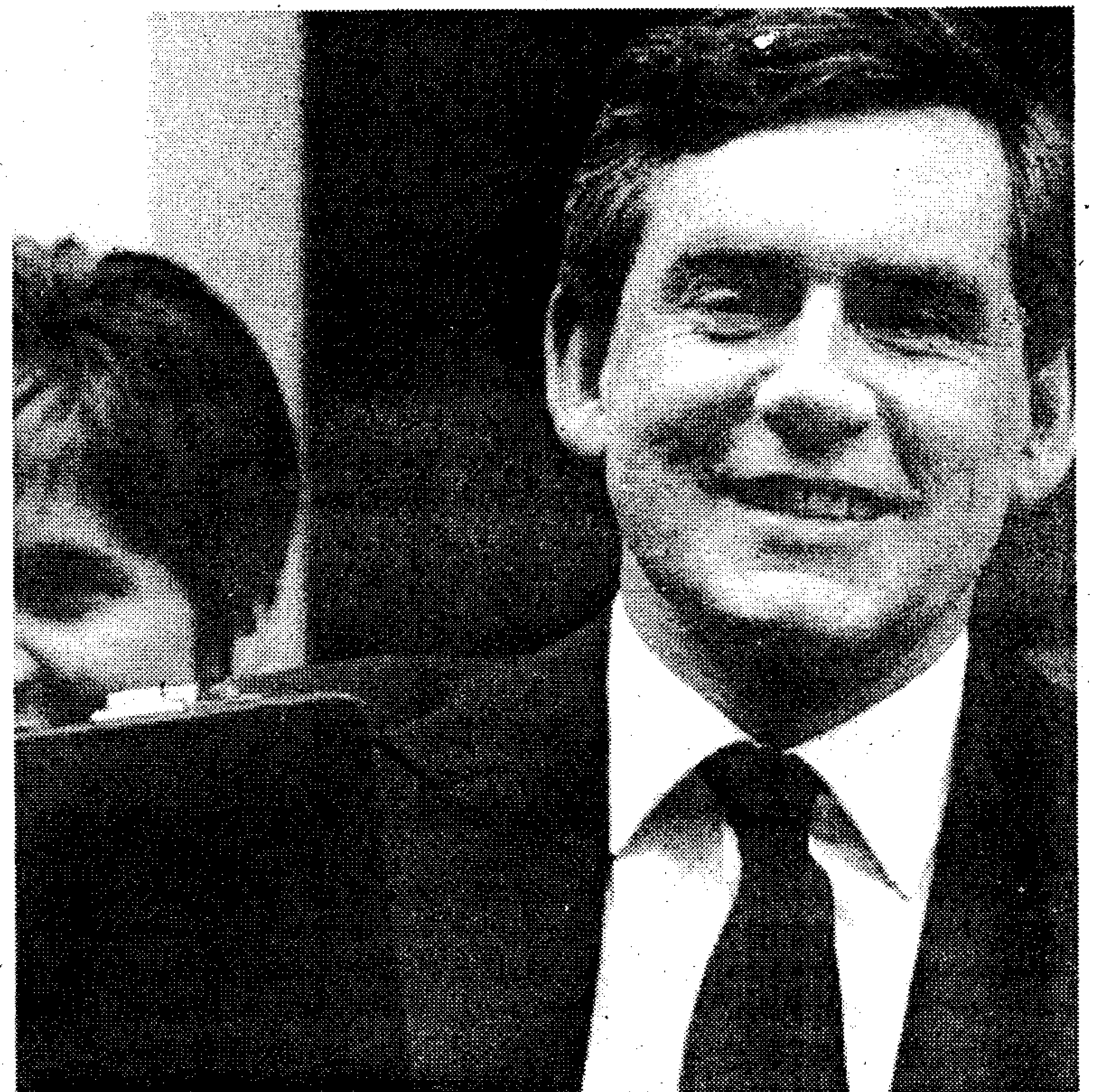
place to reinstate Haylett, but after some hesitation by management an independent three-person tribunal has now been established to look at the issues. The strikers

worry now is that management may refuse to abide by the findings of this tribunal.

The strikers have been producing strike bulletins, and latterly the weekly Workers' Morning Star. They have been getting wide support from the trade union movement, including the Reclaim our Rights conference on March 28, and from Communist Party and Morning Star readers' groups. The majority of the management committee seem to represent a small coterie around Rosser and Hicks.

● Contact the Morning Star NUJ Chapel at 422 Kingsland Road, London E8 4AA.

# Brown delights Euro bosses



*Laughing all the way to the bankers ... Brown*

**N**ew Labour is in a quandary. Certainly the powers that be wanted Frank Field to 'think the unthinkable' in his Green Paper on Welfare Reform published on March 26.

And there can be no doubt that the 'unthinkable' in this regard meant the scrapping of universal benefits. And yet, despite all the pre-publication hype, Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and attendance allowance have so far escaped the means-testing guillotine.

Second pensions have not been made compulsory - though the white paper makes clear that the government is 'seriously' considering the many submissions it has received to do so.

Gordon Brown would dearly have liked to tread the same path in his Budget that Field eschewed

## EDITORIAL

- but maternity and child benefits have not been taxed this time round.

For the time being at least it seems as if the protests of people with disabilities, lone parents, pensioners and other claimants have managed to ward off the evil day a little longer. Blair surely knows that hundreds of thousands of those who voted for him last May Day did so to protect the welfare state and the principle of universality.

But if campaigners can take some pause for breath that neither the budget nor the White Paper introduced some of the most feared attacks, there is certainly no room for complacency.

The budget itself (as we explain in more detail on page 8) was full

of hand-outs to business. Britain may not be going into the monetary union at the beginning, but New Labour is determined to keep to Tory spending limits in line with the Maastricht convergence criteria.

Pensioners continue to see their real incomes fall, and their needs were ignored by Brown. Last year's cut in lone parent benefits has by no means been reversed - just masked by subsequent changes.

While moderate disability groups such as SCOPE and RNIB may be relieved by the fact that DLA and Attendance Allowance have survived, new claimants for Incapacity Benefit will face more stringent testing than the current hated 'All Work Test', which has been the subject of many recent press scandals.

In a recent report, the Joseph Rowntree Trust expressed con-

cern that unless benefits are raised by more than the rate of price inflation, the poor will go on getting poorer. So much for fighting social exclusion.

At the same time as all this, Blair is trumpeting his message of labour flexibility to the rest of Europe.

We can't think of a series of bet-

ter reasons for marking the end of his Presidency of the European Union in Cardiff in June with a massive demonstration of protest.

The Cardiff demonstration needs to be built up and down these islands, both as a massive show of rejection of the single currency and of Blair's record in government.

# Labour bureaucracy provokes revolt over Welsh Assembly

**Darren Williams (Wales Labour Party Executive member - personal capacity)**

**T**he Wales Labour Party, and the whole Welsh political establishment, is preparing for the first elections to the National Assembly for Wales, due to take place in May 1999. The establishment of limited self-government for Wales has already proven a fertile source of controversy - over everything from the pay of the Assembly's members, to the location of its building.

Within the Labour Party, opposition to the principle of devolution seemed to have been largely silenced by the successful outcome of the referendum campaign in September. Fresh divisions have now been created, however, over the method by which the party will select its candidates.

As with the European and unitary authority elections, Labour is moving away from direct selection by constituency parties, towards a more tightly controlled system. Would-be candidates have to apply directly to the Wales Labour Party, to be considered for inclusion in a centrally compiled list. This of course

allows the party bureaucracy to filter out anyone considered politically undesirable.

Furthermore, the removal of any requirement for nomination by ward parties or union affiliates, means that the lack of a real support base need not hinder ambitious opportunists hoping for a seat. Their path has been further smoothed by the unpopular decision that candidates need only have been party members for one year.

All of this has fostered dissent among party activists concerned about the continual attrition of democracy. The greatest anger has, however, been focused on the party's proposal for achieving a gender balance in the Welsh Assembly.

The objective of equal representation for women and men - for the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the London authority - was agreed by Labour's Brighton Conference. The need for a clear action to bring this about in the case of Wales is unquestionable.

Women are grossly underrepresented in Welsh politics. Only seven women MPs have ever been elected here, and three of these first entered Parliament at the last general election.

Women also account for only 19 per cent of councillors in Wales,

and the country's politics is gripped by a macho, sexist culture, not least within the labour movement.

The system proposed by Labour's NEC to address this problem is more questionable, however. Parliamentary constituencies would be twinned, with the whole party membership across any pair of seats voting on a shortlist of four women and four men. The highest-polling man and woman would each then take up the party's candidacy in one of the two seats.

A far better system would be for each constituency to have two members, one male and one female, and this alternative would no doubt have won greater support in the Welsh party - if it had been allowed to have any say. 'Twinning' was adopted, however, by Labour's Welsh Executive Committee in January, without any prior discussion of the issues having taken place within the party's official structures in

Wales.

As with the decision to incorporate an element of proportional representation in the Assembly's voting system, a broadly progressive measure has been introduced in a top-down, undemocratic manner

The announcement of the move created an immediate backlash with around twenty constituency parties declaring their opposition to the proposals, and many of them helping to establish a pressure group, 'Constituencies Against Twinning'. This body represents an uneasy alliance of three different tendencies;

- die-hard opponents of devolution, who will take any opportunity to obstruct the Assembly proposals

- out-and-out reactionaries, hostile to any form of positive



is a troubling aspect of the situation that many left-wingers have been pushed into a coalition with some of their natural enemies.

While the belated assertion of constituencies' rights to autonomy is to be welcomed, Labour's bureaucratic bungling has given some of the most reactionary elements in the party the opportunity to obstruct the pursuit of a positive objective.

The whole saga has also shown the Welsh Executive to be a completely ineffectual body, incapable of exercising any real independence from the NEC in London.

When it was allowed to discuss gender balance - for the first time - on 19 January, the Welsh Executive was told that it must make an immediate decision to accept or reject the NEC's twinning proposals in their entirety, because of the lack of time available.

A majority therefore agreed to do this, despite strong misgivings. By the time the Executive next met, on 16 March, the revolt in the constituencies had made the need for a rapid change of plan apparent even to the NEC. The Welsh Executive again obeyed instructions from London, this time reversing its earlier decision and putting twinning on hold, to allow a period of consultation to take place.

Constituency parties, branches and affiliates now have until 23 April to discuss the issue properly, after which a final decision will be made by a special meeting of the Welsh Executive.

Socialists will have to support whichever system emerges from the consultation process with the best prospects of ensuring gender balance - while keeping up their criticism of the party's increasing centralisation of decision-making and attacks on democracy.

discrimination, who would like to see the party renounce even its aspirations to achieve gender balance

- those who oppose only the mechanism of twinning, as another constraint on the independence of CLP's to make their own decisions.

The distinction between these three tendencies is of course blurred in individual cases, and it

# Socialist Alliances move forward

**Chris Jones**

A STEP forward for left co-operation was marked by the meeting of English Socialist Alliances in Coventry on March 21.

60 people representing 30 national and local organisations discussed the current political situation and proposals for creating a united left.

Several organisations were represented for the first time. This included the Socialist Perspectives group, who have recently left the SLP, and the Green Party. Will Reece, secretary of the Trades Union Left Alliance (TULA), gave an opening address which high-

lighted the difficulties and benefits of drawing diverse groups together. TULA's experience offers a successful model from which the Alliances have much to learn.

Spencer Fitzgibbon of the Green Party argued that the Green Party was essentially left wing, that its starting point was social justice plus ecological sustainability, but some of its members hadn't realised this yet. He has fought hard to draw the Green Party towards the Alliances with some success.

From the point of view of those within the Alliances most interested in (in some cases obsessed

with) standing in elections he provided the biggest upset of the meeting. He announced that the Green Party would be standing in all seats in the Euro elections in 1999 and asked that the Alliances confined themselves to pushing Green candidates to have clearly socialist platforms.

While the electoralist wing of the Alliances remain strong there was a stronger mood at this meeting to make campaigning activity the key to the Alliances future. Work over the Summer on Trades union rights was agreed to, preferably in conjunction with the Reclaim our Rights initiative. The meeting also

unanimously endorsed demonstration in Cardiff at the time of the next Euro summit.

The mad decision of some comrades involved in London Alliances to try to stand a hundred candidates in local elections this May will hopefully lead to a more sensible appreciation of the role of electoral campaigns in the future.

This stance does highlight the Alliances' failure to come to grips with the fact that thousands of socialists and trades union militants with whom we wish to work do not see electoral campaigns 'against Labour' as the right thing to be doing at this time.

The meeting resolved to move towards being an organisation with a structure based on our common political aims (while encouraging debate on areas of disagreement). A further meeting in September will discuss how this should be done.

The meeting was a step forward for the cause of left unity. Comrades are behaving in a non sectarian manner and looking for opportunities for co-operation. At some stage, however, the thorny questions of working with activists in the wider Labour and Trades Union movement will have to be addressed.



Would political funds be better spent campaigning rather than backing Labour?

## Does Labour deserve us?

**Terry Conway**

50 PEOPLE packed into a House of Commons Committee room on March 26 at a meeting organised by London Region MSF to discuss how trade unions should relate to Blair's New Labour Party. Jeremy Corbyn MP and Hugh McGrillen, Regional Secretary addressed the meeting.

Individual trade unionists have been part of many discussions whether the left should stay and fight in the Labour Party or whether we should begin to prepare for a new party. However this is the first such meeting I heard of actually organised by a union.

Yet the fight within individual unions is time and again hampered by the "new realism" of its leaders - the very ideology of partnership with the bosses than Blair himself has made an art form. If there is to be the creation of a democratic re-alignment to the left of Blair then this must involve significant forces from the unions.

Blair is destroying the collective voice of the unions through the 'modernisation' of the Labour Party. All trade union activists whether or not they are individual members of the Labour Party must be concerned about how to develop a collective political expression for their demands and campaigns.

As expected a range of different views were expressed - although no one had a good word to say for Mr Blair. Corbyn was warmly received when he pointed out that Frank Field's cry of 'responsibility' rather misses the mark,

since it is socialists who believe in collective provision precisely because they are responsible for all in society.

There was also consensus that the left needed to step up the fight inside the unions. Other issues were more contentious.

There was a discussion about the extent to which New Labour is the product of deeper changes, of the process of globalisation, and the fact that social democracy has no more crumbs to throw to the working class whether it wants to our not.

The discussion as to whether people should remain individual members of the Labour Party was somewhat separate from this, and obviously people will make their own choices on this question.

For some at least it seemed that the major barrier to leaving the party they had spent their active lives building was as much emotional as anything. For others the lack of an obvious alternative meant that they were holding on to their party cards but with little conviction there was much point.

The final area of debate was the extent to which the union's political fund should continue to be given exclusively to the Labour Party. Many felt that in the present situation at least a portion of those resources could be better spent on direct campaigning by the union.

All in all, this was a positive exchange and one that not only needs to be further explored by London MSF but deserves emulation by other trade union bodies.

## The Socialist Labour Party: a lost opportunity

Supporters of the Marxist Bulletin participated in the Socialist Labour Party for two years. They have recently resigned and are establishing a group outside the SLP. Here they draw a balance sheet of the SLP, which we publish despite our disagreements with it as a contribution to the debate on recomposition.

The Socialist Labour Party was contradictory from the beginning. A wide spectrum of the left, seeking an alternative to the ever rightward moving Labour Party, responded to Arthur Scargill's call for a working class party that would really answer the needs of the class.

The initial pronouncements of the leadership were far from perfect, staying firmly within the bounds of old Labour left social-democracy, with a touch of the old CP's *British Road to Socialism*. But Scargill also talked of the need for 'revolutionary' policies, of destroying capitalism and creating socialism.

It was a historic opportunity, containing the potential for a real break from the Labourism that has long handicapped the British workers' movement. The necessity for socialism, and for a party committed to it, had been asserted. But a fundamental question was posed: How do we get there?

The revolutionary Trotskyists who publish the Marxist Bulletin joined the SLP at its foundation,



Set up a maze of obstacles - Scargill

committed to discussing this within the party. The job of Marxists is not to try to salvage reformism, as so many of the British 'far left' are doing. The task in this period is to seek to split working people away from reformism, and to build an alternative to it.

In the General Election, we argued against a 'tactical' vote to Labour in seats without an SLP candidate, pointing out that this would negate standing against Labour in the first place.

Our position of 'No Vote to Labour', led to substantial discussion, although never a firm position from the leadership.

Within the formal programme of the SLP lay the seeds, but only the seeds, of a transitional programme which could lead the working class to power. The leadership failed to make the link.

However, in discussions on a whole range of subjects, we were able to argue for a bridge from the immediate demands of today to the goal of a society run by the working class.

We knew the SLP might be shipwrecked by the incapacity and unwillingness of its founders to lead a real break from the Labourite betrayal. Now, two years later, that has indeed hap-

pened.

In our resignation letter of 4 March 1998 to Arthur Scargill we said:

"... you and other members of the SLP leadership have systematically set out to destroy the potential which the ... SLP represented. You have imposed your own programme on the party. You have set up a maze of petty, contradictory and impractical organisational obstacles to a dynamic internal life ....

"At the party congress last December this process came to a head. The congress ... was overwhelmed by an .. undemocratic bloc vote which rendered the ... views of every constituency activist in the party virtually meaningless. We were expected to endorse the constitution and the leadership's arbitrary rulings without discussion. It was a tragic moment for the working class when the majority of delegates .... did exactly that. ...

Many past and present members of the SLP will play an important part in the future of the British workers' movement. But the SLP is no longer the arena in which they can do so. ... Those committed to a socialist future must look elsewhere ...

"The need for a working-class alternative to Blair's Labour Party is stronger than ever. The need for a party with a Marxist programme that can lead the working class to victory is an absolute necessity. The Socialist Labour Party is neither.

The SLP has been shipwrecked by the incapacity of its founders to lead a real break from Labour

"Despite its faults, the SLP has shown ... that advanced sections of the working class are ready and willing to break from Labour and Labourism. Under the Blair government these numbers can only increase.

"The failure of the SLP is a setback, but a temporary one.

"A serious layer of activists have learnt from this experience, and seek to build a new, genuine party of the working class in Britain. This can only be achieved through honest debate on the programme necessary for victory, and through testing in action the various programmes on offer from different elements of the workers' movement.

"We are committed to that process."

■ Marxist Bulletin is available from: BCM Box 4771, London WC1N 3XX £3 for 4 issues.

# Islington Anti-deportation campaigns

# Here to Stay, Here to Fight!

**Sheila Malone**

A recent report by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees has named Britain as having "the worst record on asylum seekers in Europe". Fewer and fewer refugees are gaining asylum here, while others are locked in detention camps on arrival - sometimes for as long as twenty months.

People who have settled here for many years are suddenly being arrested and deported.

From 1991 to 1996 an average of 5,575 people per year were deported from the UK under Immigration Act powers - around 107 people every week. 590 were deported in September 1997 alone. This included Albert Tong, who had lived here for 21 years.

Up to 900 asylum seekers are presently detained in camps throughout Britain, under a system described by the Chief Inspector of Prisons himself as "a complete and utter shambles." Detainees are kept here for longer periods and with less legal sureties than anywhere else in Europe.

There are people who have fled persecution and torture in their own countries and do not understand why they are now being treated here like criminals. In desperation some have gone on hunger strike to draw attention to their plight.

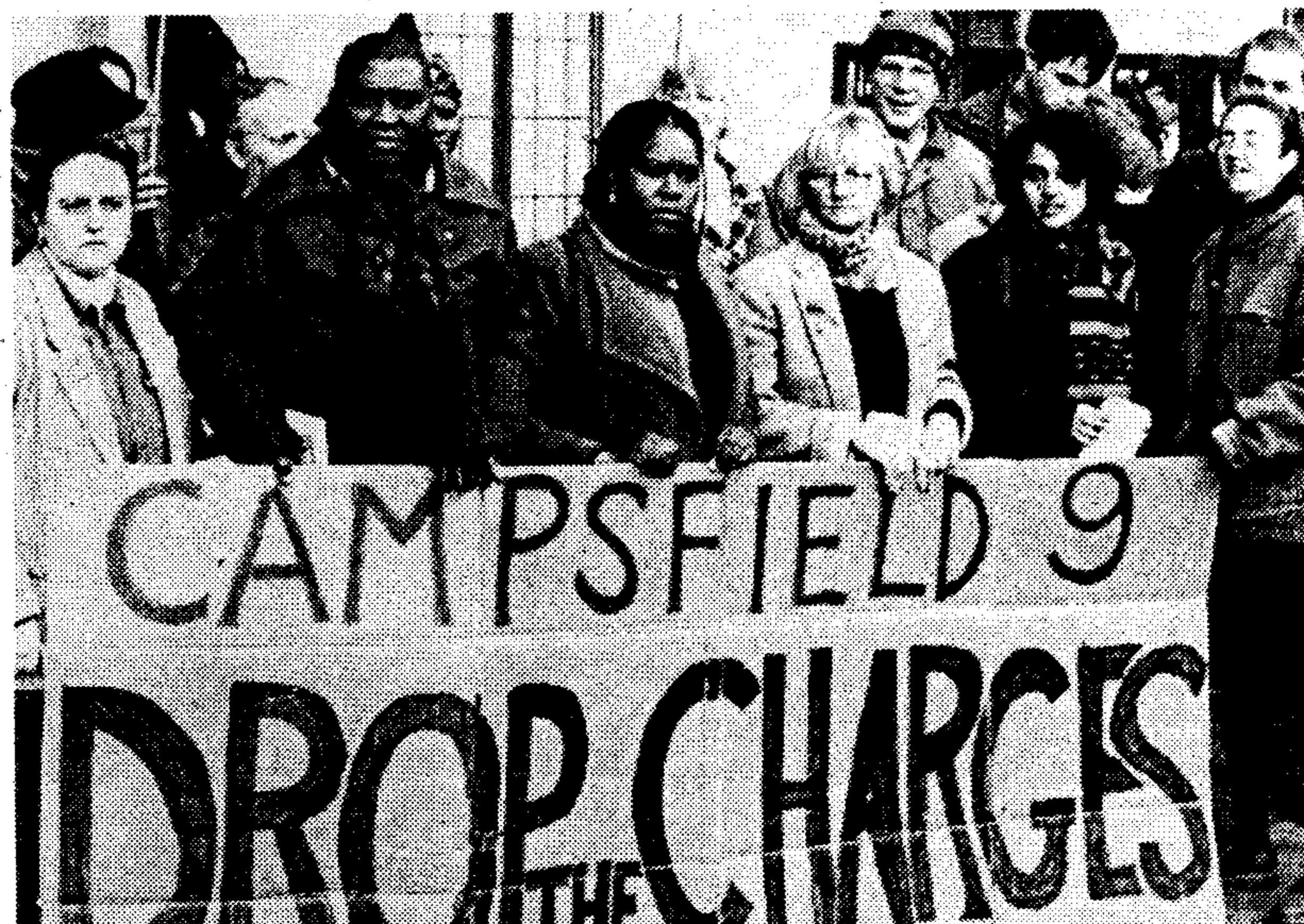
After Labour's election victory last May, Immigration Minister Mike O'Brien announced a "fairer, firmer and faster" system of dealing with refugees, and promised to treat individual cases in a "compassionate and sensible

way". In fact all we have seen is increased fear and insecurity amongst many communities as well as the spectacle of fascists marching against 'unwanted immigrants' in Dover.

### Mushrooming

We have also seen the mushrooming of campaigns in defence of asylum seekers, for their release from detention and their right to stay. In my own area of Islington, when a meeting was organised last year in defence of one family, others under threat turned up with their supporters and a local anti-deportation campaign was born.

We are fighting to stop the deportations of a mother and her four children back to Nigeria and of two Kurdish families back to Northern Cyprus.



At Campsfield, near Oxford, jailed asylum seekers face frame-up "riot" charges

All of them have lived here for a number of years and are part of their local communities. The children go to school or college here and are being supported in their fight to stay by pupils and teachers. Local Kurdish groups and churches have also helped as has North Islington Labour MP, Jeremy Corbyn.

We have held large and successful demonstrations outside the Home Office, handing in petitions signed by thousands of supporters as well as many public, workplace, schools, college and local community meetings.

Always the campaigns bring to light not only the distressing circumstances of their particular cases but the fact that they are only the tip of the iceberg of many, many more that need to be taken up. They also usually reveal the often shamefully mercenary and political motives behind the government's behaviour.

The oil interests of multinationals have usually influenced Britain's attitude to Nigeria. At one time this brutal regime was going to be put on the 'white list' of countries considered safe for deportation. Only public outrage at the execution in 1995 of nine minority rights activists, including the writer Ken Saro-Wiwa caused the government to change its outlook.

Yet deportations and the threat of deportations continue. Gillian Achu fled Nigeria eight years ago following her refusal of a forced marriage. She and her children have since led a settled and secure life here and would suffer great disruption, distress and probable reprisals should the family be sent back.

Jeremy Corbyn MP has stated "In view of Gillian and her children's very human needs, the government must view her situation with compassion. I await the response of Mr O'Brien to my

recent request that she should remain here."

### Puppet state

Northern Cyprus, from which the two Kurdish families have fled, actually is on the UK's white list. Strange, since this little puppet state of Turkey is not even recognised by Britain or by most of the rest of the world. Set up after Turkey invaded Cyprus in 1974, it remains occupied by 35,000 Turkish troops.

Turkey itself is not on the 'white list', because of its appalling record of human rights abuses, especially against Kurds.

Yet when its forces of occupation persecute and harass in Northern Cyprus this is conveniently ignored by Britain.

### Cooked

In fact 'ethical' Foreign Secretary Robin Cook is presently involved in negotiating a deal to admit Northern Cyprus to the European Union, despite an Amnesty International inquiry into "disappearances, missing persons, and deliberate and arbitrary killings".

Both the Ozbay and Sengul families have suffered arrests, beatings and constant harassment because of their Kurdish origins. In spite of this the government is proposing to send them back to face further persecution.

Setting up an anti-deportation group has strengthened the support and morale of the refugee families in Islington. The National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns has been supporting campaigns throughout Britain since 1995, and already 38 of these have been successful.

A lobby of Parliament has been organised by the NCADC to call for the ending of all deportations and detentions and for the right to stay.

Be there if you can.

## Stephen Lawrence Campaign: British 'justice' exposed

**Simon Deville**

THE RACISM of the British state has come under increasing scrutiny throughout the public inquiry into Stephen Lawrence's murder. The remit of the inquiry is becoming focused on whether the police investigation was hampered by police racism or absolute incompetence.

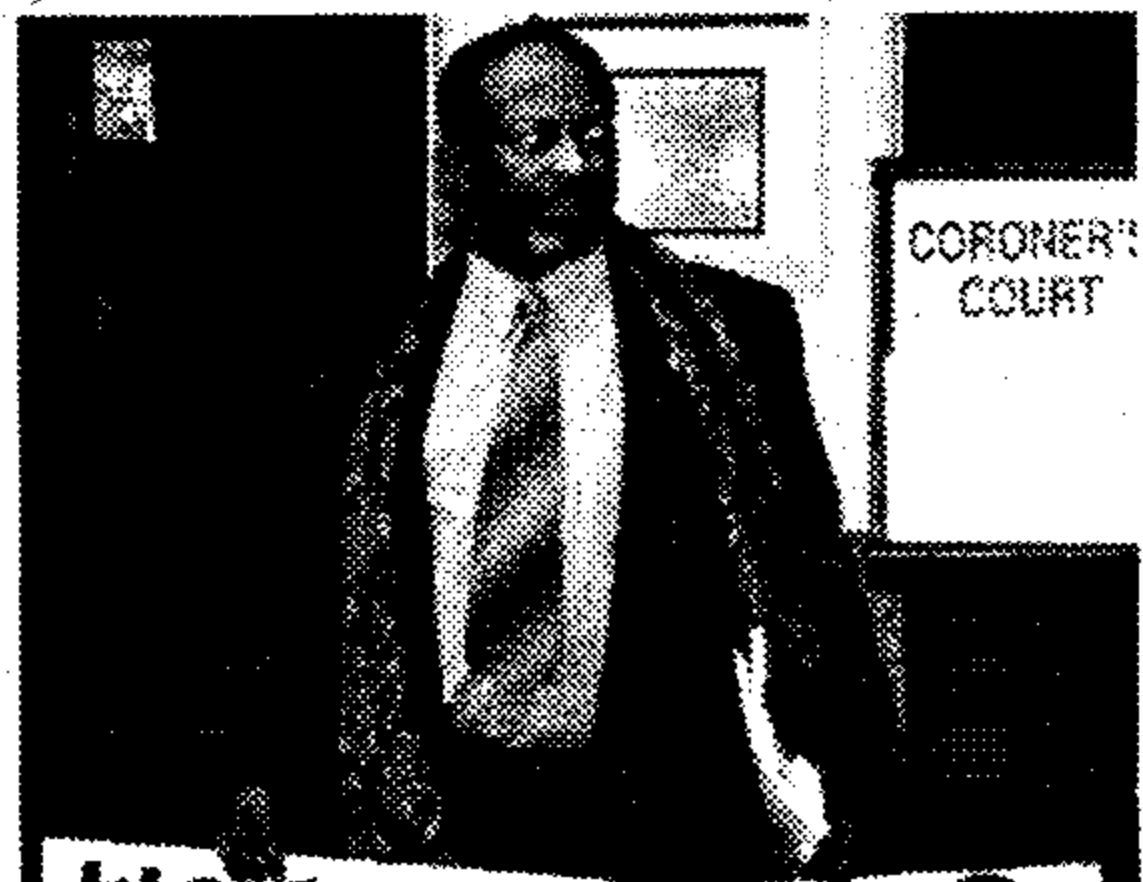
In the same week that the BBC's Rough Justice reported on the fitting up of the M25 three for murder, and the inquest into Alton Manning produced a verdict that he was unlawfully killed in prison, the excuses put forward by state officials are looking pretty shabby.

Richard Tilt, head of the prison service claimed that there are proportionally far more black deaths in custody because black people are genetically prone to die of positional asphyxia.

There must also be a gene that makes black people act in a way that makes police more likely to stop them and to prosecute them, that makes courts more likely to find them guilty and to give them custodial sentences.

Tilt attempted to justify his claims by stating that research has shown that more blacks than whites are killed in custody in other countries, not just within Britain. Many of us had naively assumed that this was simply because racism was an integral part of the capitalist system, rather than a specifically British invention!

Whilst all this has focused atten-



**We want Justice C.P.S. We want it now. We want it not I want when? Justice**

*Demanding justice: campaigners outside Kidderminster inquest into death of Alton Manning*

tion on how black people are dealt with by the state, the Stephen Lawrence inquiry has focused on how state institutions fail to defend those facing racist violence. Stephen Lawrence was killed by racist thugs five years ago.

The police issued statements at the time that their investigations had been met with a 'wall of silence', despite 26 witnesses giving the police the names of the alleged killers. The Lawrence family where forced to take up a private prosecution after the Crown Prosecution Service dropped the charges, claiming there lack of evidence.

It has become absolutely clear that the police did next to nothing to find any evidence.

As we go to press the inquiry has been adjourned. The Lawrence campaign understandably find it hard to believe the claims of one officer that he attended the scene but did not see the pool of blood around Stephen Lawrence, despite it being directly beneath a street lamp.

In fact so much crucial evidence was missed that it is impossible to ascribe this to mere incompetence. A detailed statement was given to the police about the gang of youths accused of his murder, but the police waited a further two weeks before arresting anybody.

The case of Stephen Lawrence is just the tip of the iceberg. Countless victims of racist attacks have contacted the police to be told that they are not facing racism. In other cases the police have arrested the victims and let the perpetrators of racist violence go free.

Racist murders may be relatively rare, but they will continue so long as racism as a whole is not dealt with head on. The Lawrence family have shown enormous courage and determination in the pursuit of justice for Stephen.

What has become abundantly clear throughout their struggle is that the courts, the police and the state will not and cannot deliver such justice. Anti-racists need to build a mass movement independent of the state to challenge the scandal of racist Britain.

**Join the lobby**

**April 29**

**Houses of Parliament**

**Lobby 1.30-3.30pm**

**Public Meeting 3.30-5.30pm**

**Organised by National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns**

# A Trojan horse for business in schools

**Richard Hatcher**

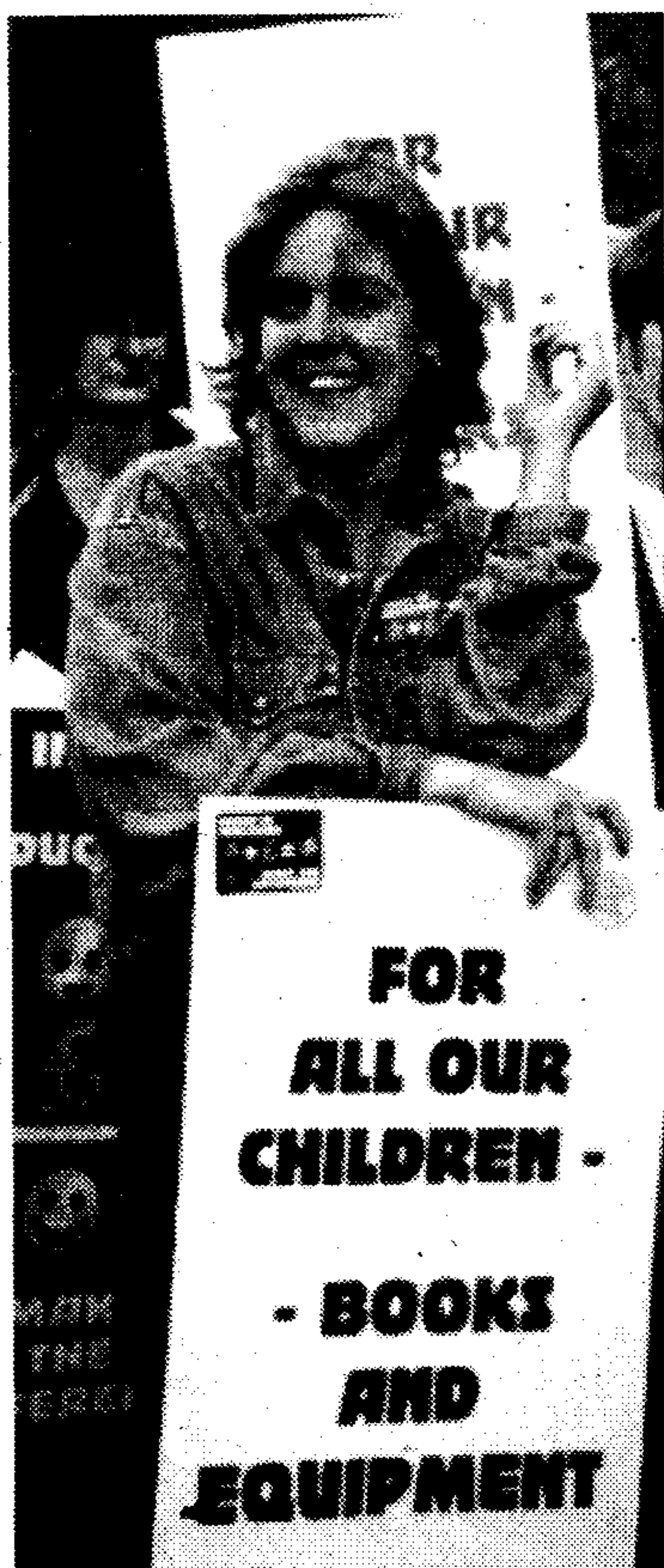
**T**he effects of Education Action Zones are not just a problem for 25 areas of the country. They are intended to be test-beds for future Labour policy for the whole education system - or to be more exact, they are a model for the future school system in working class areas.

The decision to hand over schools to be run by private companies marks a historic break in Labourist education policy. It is a step that even Thatcher felt unable to take. Education Action Zones would become Education Profit Zones. But to make a profit, companies will want to take the opportunity offered by Labour to remove the obstacle of teachers' national pay and conditions.

We already know how this will work. Labour has taken the idea from the United States, where state schools are already franchised out to private companies, including management companies, Procter and Gamble the detergent manufacturers, and Disney.

One of these companies, Edison, which runs 25 state schools in the US, is planning to bid for a Zone in Tameside, near Manchester, and has also made approaches to schools and LEAs in Surrey, Nottingham and Hackney. In the US, Edison schools have longer days and teachers are contracted out of union pay rates. Another American company, the Toledo Private Industry Consortium, is involved in a bid in Bradford.

But there are plenty of home-grown British companies already making a profit out of the schools, and now anxious to take full control of some. Labour has set up a new scheme, the Public Private Partnership Programme, to encourage them. For example, the Centre for British Teachers, based in Reading, carries out school inspections, teacher training, consultancy, and supply teaching. Says its chief executive,



'The market is opening up. In principle there is no reason why private companies shouldn't run whole schools'. No doubt they see their partnership with Lambeth LEA in its EAZ bid as a first step.

Of course contracting out the schools to the private sector is just the logical extension of what Labour, following on the Tories before them, has done in other areas of the public sector.

They claim it is different from Tory privatisation because the schools will still be publicly owned and regulated. New Labour's 'Third Way' says 'the job of government is to steer, not row'. The problem is that the steering ends up being driven by the overriding logic of profit, as we can see elsewhere in the neo-liberal public sector.

But contracting out the schools is a risky political step for Labour, and so is locally dismantling teachers' pay and condi-

tions. Both of these proposals have already aroused vigorous opposition, and many schools and local authorities have refused to consider EAZs on that basis. Any proposed Zone tempted to try it should know that it will be met by a huge campaign of opposition including strike action by teachers.

A total of around 50 bids have been submitted. The vast majority are led by LEAs, though often with private sector involvement. In some cases these are education businesses, in others they are companies like Lloyds and the TSB (Croydon) or the Optimum Health Trust (Southwark). None of them are so far known to be planning to break teachers' national agreements (though they would keep quiet about that at this stage anyway).

What is emerging is a range of models of EAZs. None of them represent a fully-fledged example of Labour's preferred model, and to that extent it is a political setback for the government. But most of them contain other dangers.

### Private funding

Zones will only receive £250,000 a year from government, which isn't enough, shared among 20 schools, to bribe them into compliance in the way that the Tories did with opting-out. Zones are expected to find matched funding from the private sector. It is by no means certain that the private sector will want to subsidise the schools (after all, the Tories' City Technology Colleges failed to attract much private funding), unless of course they are confident it is a profitable investment.

### EAZ quangos

The Zones represent a further dangerous erosion of the principle of schools being part of the system of local elected government. All EAZs will be run by an 'Action Forum'. The form this takes is flexible, but the model Labour clearly prefers is one in which the schools hand over their governing body powers to a small, unrepresentative and

## What are Education Action Zones?

- Education Action Zones (EAZs) are intended to raise standards in 'socially disadvantaged' areas, mainly those with what are regarded as underperforming schools.
- Each of them will comprise two or three secondary schools and their associated primary schools (up to a maximum of twenty schools).
- Five Zones will start in September 1998, and another 20 in January 1999.
- Private companies will take the lead in running some EAZs, including one out of the first five
- EAZs will be able to scrap existing national pay and conditions arrangements for teachers
- Each Zone will receive £250,000 a year from government for three years in the first instance
- Zones will be expected to find a matching sum from private business
- EAZs will be run by Action Forums comprising unspecified representation from the schools, parents, business and the LEA, together with one or two persons appointed by the Secretary of State.
- At least one of the secondary schools in each EAZ should become a 'specialist' school, selecting 10 per cent of its students on the basis of 'aptitude'.
- Schools in EAZs can opt out of the national curriculum.
- Bidding finished on March 20, and the successful bids will be announced in June.

years ago, of which one critic wrote that too many urban education reformers have been guilty of 'producing naive school-centred solutions with no sense of the structural, the political and the historical as constraints'.

Certainly, if they undermine pay and conditions or the principle of a publicly-run school system. But what of those models which avoid these, omit 'specialist schools', are LEA-led though with business as well as community involvement, like the two Birmingham proposals? Even if we wanted to boycott them - and in my view we shouldn't - they will go ahead anyway.

Our attitude should be to oppose the negative parts, support the positive, and push for more radical policies. The fact is that in many areas local working class communities will see benefits in EAZs, because they are desperate for anything that will provide a better education for their children.

EAZs provide an exceptional opportunity for the left to take part in that debate, bringing together teachers, parents, school students and communities in local struggles for an education that meets their needs - a debate that goes beyond funding and class size to the heart of the character of schooling. To abstain would be to play into the hands of New Labour.

### Democratic alternatives

There are good things we can take from schools in the US as well as bad. In their book *Democratic Schools*, published in 1985 and soon to be published in this country, Michael Apple and James Beane, two socialist educationalists, provide case studies of four such schools which show the way forward.

'Taken together, the stories told in this book say something quite important about the realities of democratic school reform. In each case, success required the building of coalitions within the school and constituencies outside it. In none of the cases was the impetus generated from the "top".'

Instead, bottom-up movements - groups of teachers, the community, social activists, and so on - provided the driving force for change. Finally, none of the reforms was driven by a technical, achievement-at-all-costs vision.

Instead, each was linked to a broadly defined set of values that was put into practice: enhancing participation at the grass roots and in the school, empowering individuals and groups who had heretofore been largely silenced, creating new ways of linking the real world and real social problems with the school so that the school is integrally connected to the experiences of people in their daily lives.'

unelected quango, run by a high-paid executive, and on which LEAs would only have minority representation.

### Selection

At least one secondary school of the two or three in each EAZ is to become a 'specialist' school, selecting 10 per cent of its intake by 'aptitude'. This extends the principle of selection within the comprehensive system. (My prediction is that 'specialist' schools would not be content for long with selecting only 10 per cent). Again, this idea is borrowed from the US, where 'magnet schools' can be successful, but at the expense of neighbouring schools.

### A formula for failure

On the curriculum the aim of the EAZs is to raise school achievement in socially deprived areas. The Tories' National Curriculum is experienced as boring and irrelevant by many young people in schools, and has contributed to a widening of inequality. The EAZ permits schools to opt out of the National Curriculum, but the alternative being offered is a mixture of 'basic skills' and narrow vocational education feeding into low-level courses in FE. This reproduces inequality by locking students, mainly from working class backgrounds, into lower-paid low-skill jobs and excluding them from the entry qualifications for higher education.

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### Boycott?

EAZs are not part of a radical programme to tackle the roots of educational disadvantage in poverty. Without that they seem likely to repeat the failure of the Education Priority Areas of 30

**The EAZ permits schools to opt out of the National Curriculum, but the alternative is 'basic skills'**

### Conference

## Education Action Zones

Speakers include **DEXTER WHITFIELD** (author of *The Welfare State*) **ROGER SEIFERT** (Centre for Industrial Relations, Keele Univ.) **Socialist Teachers Alliance**, plus speakers from EAZ areas

**Saturday 9 MAY, 11am-4.30pm**

Argyle school, Tonbridge St, London

(behind Camden Town Hall, near Kings X and Euston)

Conference fee £10

Conference organised by the 'Labour, Education and Social Jus-

# As New Labour flunks the test Teachers must prepare to fight

**Roy Leach (NUT Executive, personal capacity)**

THIS YEAR'S NUT conference will act as the first barometer of the extent to which disillusionment with the Labour Government has established itself, not just amongst teachers but organised labour in general.

Delays in publishing the 'Fairness at work' White Paper and strong hints that Blair is leaning towards the CBI view of what a 'majority in the workplace' actually means, have set the alarm bells ringing amongst even the previously staunch loyalists Edmonds and Morris.

For NUT General Secretary Doug McAvoy and the 'Broad Left' majority on the Union's executive, worries about the direction New Labour has taken have grown almost since the moment they took office.

Blunkett's decision to 'name & shame' the so-called worst 20 'failing schools' was firmly in the mould of his Tory predecessors whilst the 'Standards & Framework' education bill does little to undo the damage of 18 years of Tory education reforms and, in some respects, extends them into territory they appeared to balk at entering.

## Crumbs

There have been some crumbs from the table which McAvoy has eagerly seized: additional capital has been allocated to do away once and for all with outside school toilets; nursery vouchers have been scrapped - but they haven't been replaced with quality nursery places for 4 year olds, and in many areas provision for 3 year olds has all but disappeared as LEAs pack 4 year olds into classrooms to improve their under-5s funding (as part of the SSA mechanism). The phased abolition of the Assisted Places Scheme has allowed for the reallocation of the savings to reduce class sizes for 5,6 & 7 year olds but despite this about 20 per cent of Chief Education Officers responding to a FACE questionnaire still believe that the proportion of pupils in classes of over thirty will increase.

However, on other substantial issues there have been few if any concessions.

Blunkett has backtracked on his "read my lips - no more selection"



NUT members fought cuts under the Tories (above) - and must stand their ground now, ready to fight alongside parents to defend education (left)

has studiously sought to avoid in preference to a 'constructive dialogue'.

The single biggest challenge to the Union (and indeed all the unions organising in the schools education sector) is the creation of Education Action Zones (see facing page).

Initially promoted as "imaginative" and "forward thinking" ways of addressing the needs of pupils in disadvantaged areas, their character can now be seen as something very different.

With so-much talk of increasing the working day and year for teachers, EAZs will be the test beds - if extra work can be screwed out of teachers in these areas, then the scene will be set for a more generalised offensive.

## Assurances

Despite assurances from Blunkett in a letter to McAvoy that EAZs do not mark the first step towards privatising education, it is patently obvious that this is what they are.

To date the Union's strategy has been to encourage LEAs to put in 'friendly' bids to establish EAZs, in preference to more predatory businesses, and to secure guarantees that teachers' pay & conditions will not be worsened.

for September 1999 and LEAs which have not put in bids have received hand written notes asking to explain why they haven't. The writing is on the wall for LEAs as democratically accountable providers of state education.

McAvoy himself recognised this when he confessed to the Union's executive that LEAs will only be needed where schools are in difficulties and "the Government's agenda is to increase the number of EAZs [where schools are in difficulties]".

When the Tories introduced opting out the NUT maintained a principled opposition to this, fighting every opt-out ballot whilst ensuring representation for members in GM schools.

At the conference the left will have to ensure that this policy is adopted in relation to EAZs - it won't be possible to stop the creation of the first ones but, as with opting out, the process can be brought to a standstill before education is delivered through profit making EAZs.

## Set piece

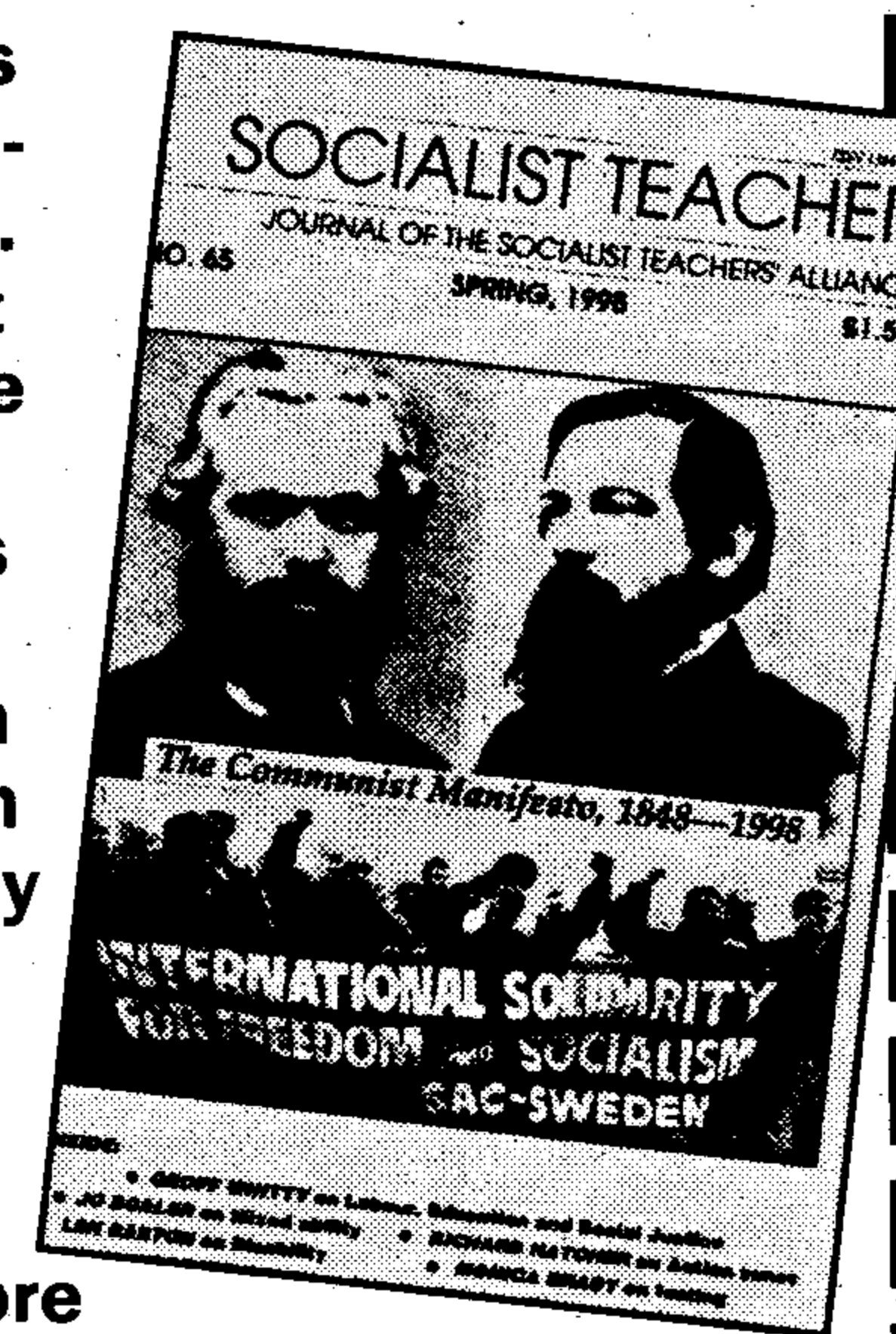
Other 'set piece' battles at the conference will be around the issue of 'capability procedures'. Here, an ambiguous wording agreed by a full-timer at a series of ACAS meetings with the employers (subsequently rubber stamped by the executive) has opened up the route to the introduction of 'fast track' dismissal where from raising a concern about performance to dismissal may take only 4 weeks.

NUT branches which have sought to hold out for less draconian procedures have been undermined by full-timers, whilst sympathetic LEAs have been warned by Schools Minister Stephen Byers that they may be 'named and shamed' and have even worse schemes imposed.

The anti-union laws will also split the conference down the middle as the right-wing 'Broad Left' seek to head off a call for Leab to repeal the Tory laws.

## Socialist Teacher

"There are some things which you know instinctively are utter rubbish. The recent government and media panic on the so called under achievement of boys is one such event. Those statistics together with the shocking revelation that there are not many male primary school teachers is all it takes to put two and two together and come up the conclusion that more men will make all the difference."



SO STARTS Carole Regan's article in the latest edition of *Socialist Teacher*, which goes on to explain that girls doing better in examinations than boys is nothing new - and most pertinently to ask why Labour is doing nothing to tackle the much more severe problem of the class gap.

Get your copy of *Socialist Teacher* now from John Yandell, 96 Carysfort Rd, London N16 9AD  
tel 0171 690 4308 fax 0171 690 4611 e-mail john@isocreas.demon.co.uk

**Nursery vouchers have been scrapped - but they haven't been replaced with quality nursery places for 4 year olds**

promise by nailing New Labour's colours to the mast of 'specialist schools' which receive additional funding and can select part of their intake on the basis of aptitude (i.e. ability). Grammar schools are to continue and the current minority of opted out Grant Maintained schools - many of which operate covert (and not so covert) selection will be given a privileged status of 'Foundation' schools to distinguish them from LEA 'Community' schools.

The issues at NUT conference which are likely to produce the sharpest debates are those with the potential to align the Union in clear opposition to the Government, something which McAvoy

**T**here have been two main pieces of economic news in Britain in the last fortnight; the budget and the rising value of the pound. Commentators have tended to treat these separately, but in reality they are closely linked and both arise from the particular position of British capitalism at present.

Marxism can help to explain this linkage and point to likely future developments for the UK economy.

There are two central economic problems for the British employers. Firstly, there is the problem of extracting profits through the process of production, both by keeping wages as low as possible and by increasing the intensity of work. Secondly, there is the problem of realising those profits by selling goods and services in the market. This requires a stable economic environment and is thrown into danger by booms, slumps and crises.

The continuing weakness of British capitalism has been its inability to solve both these problems simultaneously. The strategies adopted to try and raise the level of exploitation in production, particularly wage cuts, have not allowed for stable economic growth. When growth has occurred it has been through inflationary booms which have threatened to undercut the conditions for profitability in production.

### High profits

The last six years have, however, seen the British economy temporarily appearing to provide high profits and continuing growth. This has been based on the weakness of the labour movement both in struggles over wages and new management techniques, the devaluation in 1992, and relatively fast growth internationally outside Europe.

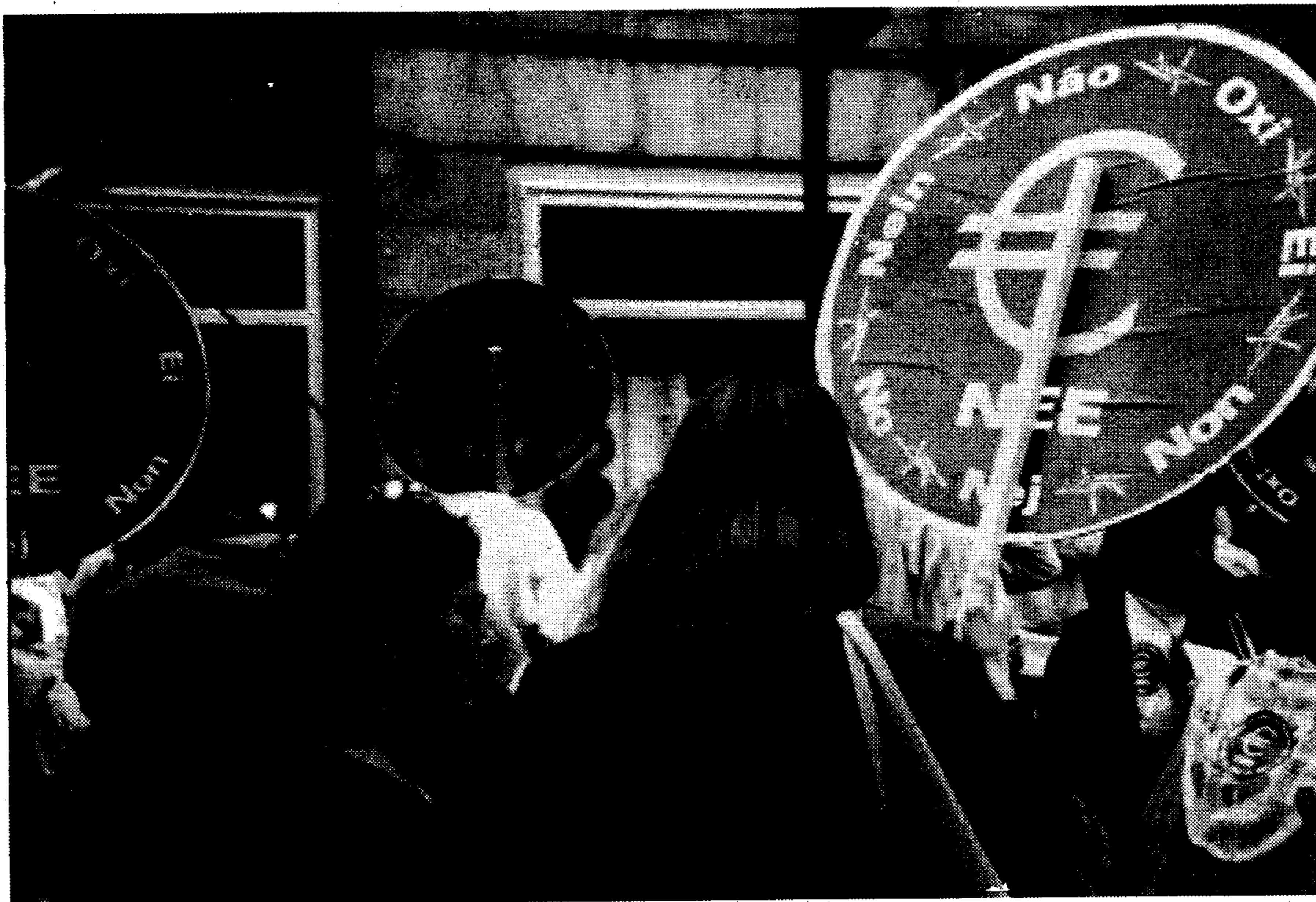
This has led some orthodox economists to predict that the days of booms and slumps, in both the UK and USA, are over and that capitalism can now look forward indefinitely to steady expansion.

Blair and Brown know that is not the case. The conditions which have underpinned growth in recent years are changing rapidly. With spare productive capacity now largely used up and unemployment somewhat lower further growth may well lead to inflation.

At the same time the Asian crisis is likely to reduce world economic activity, and British firms are among the more vulnerable here as big investors in the region. The government's strategy is centred around trying to prolong the upswing and avoid a crash, while limiting inflation.

Brown's budget is important to this process. The key element of the budget, the Working Families Tax Credit, is a highly reactionary instrument, which is effectively a massive subsidy to low paying employers.

It extends and reinforces the principle of "Family Credit" — that bosses need not pay decent wages because the state will foot the bill. In this way the hope is that the size of the potential



*Anti-Euro protest. Brown boasted that the British economy now meets the Maastricht criteria: but the advent of the single European currency is already pushing up the value of the pound and undermining his balancing act.*

## Andy Kilmister looks at Gordon Brown's Budget for business Caught in the contradictions of capitalism

labour force will expand reducing wage pressure, and that unemployment will continue to fall even though investment is low and most jobs being created are low skilled and low paid.

Not content with simply accepting that British employers pay low wages, Brown is also actively encouraging them to do so by removing the employers' contribution to National Insurance for the low paid.

This is financed by increased contributions for those paying higher wages, which they will surely attempt to pass on to workers.

### Low-paid jobs

These measures are not simply accidental. They are based on a strategy which sees continuing growth as dependent on creating large numbers of poorly paid jobs, and forcing the unemployed into them. This provides profits in production, while the state subsidy creates enough demand for these profits to be realised.

This is not an original strategy, it is the basis for much of the growth over the last decade in the USA. American unemployment is relatively low but real wages have fallen and inequality is at record levels.

Just as in the United States a low minimum wage is an essen-

tial part of this approach. Big capitalists balk at seeing unlimited state acceptance of very low wages which are predominantly in smaller companies. The minimum wage provides a 'ceiling' to the amount of tax credits which the state pays out.

But the strategy is based on the minimum wage being low, as in the USA, and we can expect to see this as a major area of conflict over the next year.

Brown's generosity to business does not stop with the labour market. Corporation tax, already the lowest in Western Europe, is to be cut even further.

Modest rises in spending on areas like health and child benefit are only a fraction of the amount the government is paying back in record debt repayments and appears to be saving for future tax cuts.

How successful is this strategy likely to be? It is here that Marxist theories of crisis can help in understanding the constraints facing the British economy. Two competing explanations of crises in the Marxist tradition are "underconsumptionism" and the "profit-squeeze" approach. Both of these have elements which can be applied to Britain today.

Underconsumptionism sees the root of crises as being in a lack of demand caused by the con-

stant pressure to keep wages low under capitalism. The profit-squeeze approach, on the other hand, sees crises as resulting from higher wages and input prices which eat into profits when the economy booms and the level of class struggle rises.

In reality neither of these approaches captures all aspects of capitalist crises. Rather they are each appropriate to different phases of the business cycle. The underconsumptionist approach relates to the difficulties capitalism faces in restarting growth after a slump, while the profit-squeeze approach deals with the difficulties which occur at the break-up of a boom.

### Headed for crisis

Brown's strategy can be seen as an attempt to avoid both of these potential causes of crisis; to provide demand while keeping costs low and profits high. But in doing so he appears to be leading the British economy towards a third kind of variant of crisis from the Marxist tradition.

"Disproportionality" theories see the roots of crises as lying in an imbalance between the production of consumption and investment goods (in Marx's terminology Department 1 and Department 2 of production).

Continued stable growth depends, as Marx shows in vol-

ume 2 of *Capital*, in keeping these two sectors in harmony, so that enough investment goods are produced to make the consumer goods which are in demand and enough consumer goods are produced to feed, clothe and provide for the workers in both sectors.

What is happening in Britain today is a growing imbalance between these sectors, such that some orthodox commentators have begun to speak of a 'dual economy'. Consumer expenditure is growing fast, but Brown's low wage economy provides no stimulus to investment.

Even if labour costs are held down, the shortage of productive capacity is likely to feed through into higher inflation before too long.

### Interest rates

The government's response to this has been to rely on higher interest rates and the Bank of England to keep prices under control. But by raising interest rates investment is cut back even more, worsening the disproportion.

Higher interest rates are also relatively ineffective in limiting consumer demand, since there are a large number of consumers who are savers rather than borrowers, especially elderly people. Their incomes rise if interest rates go up.

Not only do interest rates lower investment, they also push up the value of the pound. This again worsens the disproportion as manufacturing industry is hit, while services, which are still traded less across borders, continue to grow.

This effect is especially serious because there are strong pressures apart from interest rates which are pushing the pound up at present.

Chief among these is European Monetary Union. The pound has become a favoured currency for international speculators who do not yet trust the Euro and prefer to hold their money in a currency which doesn't plan to join the single currency in the first wave.

Over the last five years the experience of the Swiss economy has made it clear what effect this can have, as currency traders have pushed the franc high and the country into long-term recession.

### Fundamentals

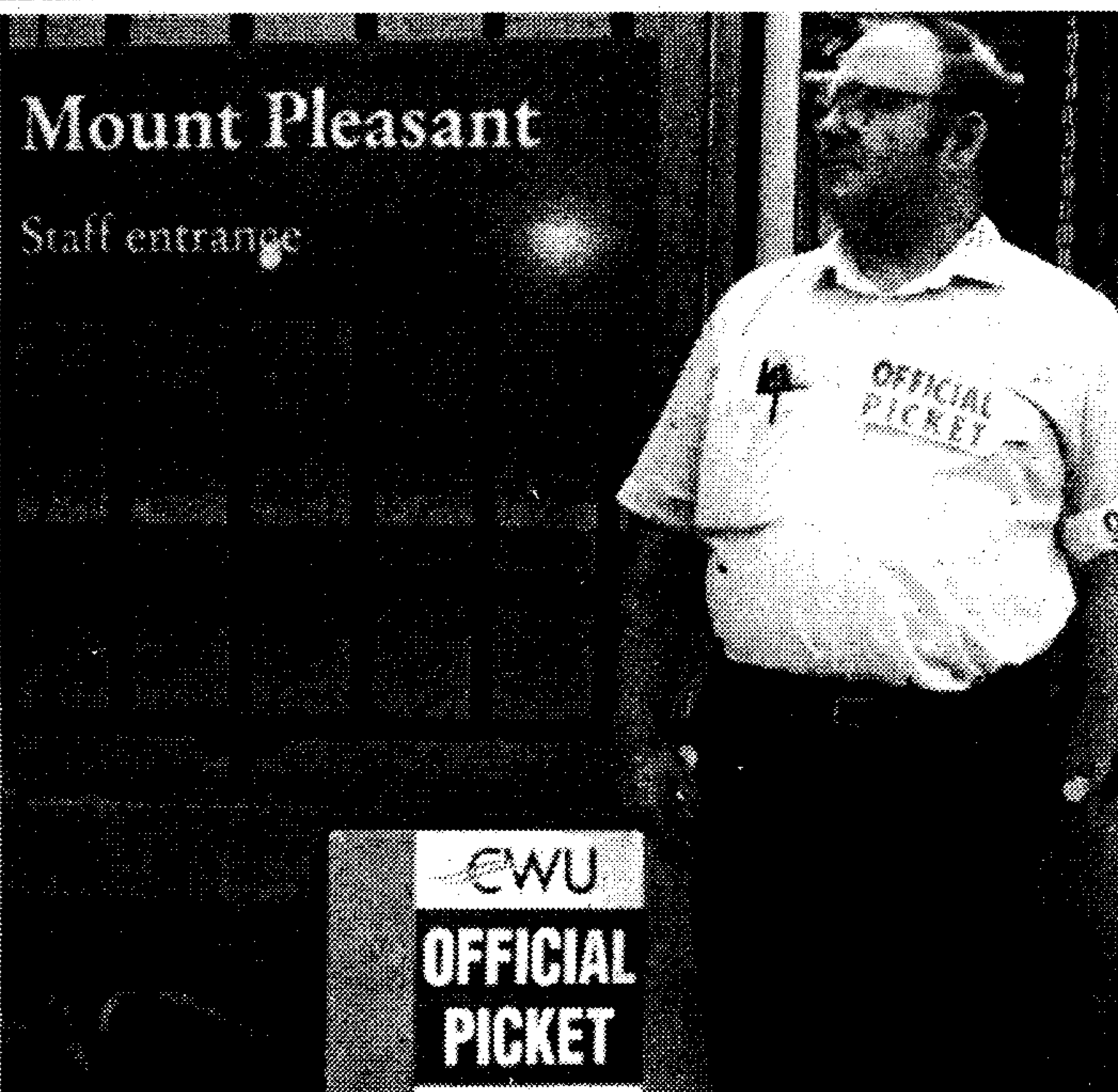
Capitalism remains a crisis-ridden system, and British capitalism has not solved its fundamental problems. The growth of the last six years has lasted longer than most expected.

But it will not last forever and may now be beginning to reach its limits. Brown and Blair are hoping that by reshaping the labour market they can push those limits further and further into the future.

But the measures they are taking to do this are creating imbalances and pressures which are likely to make any crisis that does occur even more damaging. When this does happen, the ideas of Marx will be invaluable in helping us to understand the conflicts facing British capitalism.



# WIN BACK OUR UNION RIGHTS!



**ANOTHER trade union conference season, one year in to a Labour government, opens with little sign of progress on trade union rights. Here JOHN McILROY explores the issues at stake and argues for a concerted campaign.**



British trade unions are at a historic turning point. Nobody should underestimate the dangers, or the opportunities the present situation holds. The chips are down, what happens next could determine our future for decades to come.

Are we going to seize the time, exploit the new mood the change of government has engendered and use the power we still possess to reverse 20 years of sustained decline?

Or are we going to follow the present route of retreat and end up with fewer members than we had at the start of the twentieth century?

A new report from the International Labour Organisation should strengthen the optimism of those willing to look beyond this small island. It argues that across the world: "There is every sign that a whole new social movement is developing. Both in word and in deed, trade unions are looking more and more like genuine social movements with a clear vision of how to defend and promote the interests of their members."

Membership grew in the decade to 1995 in countries as diverse as South Korea by 61 per cent, Chile 90 per cent, Spain 92 per cent and South Africa, where membership increased by 127 per cent.

Even in some West European countries, the major site of retreat, decline in countries such as Italy has been marginal at around 7 per cent, whilst in Sweden membership grew by 10 per cent, to embrace 91 per cent of workers.

There is encouragement here, for we are internationalists, citizens of the world. But we fight in Britain, and we

*We can fight again: but with present leaders? And present policies?*

have had a beating in Britain — although our comrades in Australia, New Zealand, the USA and France have had it worse and, particularly in France, have shown there is always room for resurgence.

Nevertheless the fabric and confidence of British labour has been severely dented. The membership of TUC unions declined every year since 1980, plummeting from 12.2 million members to 6.7 million to-day.

This is unparalleled. It means less than a third of workers are trade unionists, less than half are covered by collective agreements and today there are shop stewards in fewer than 40 per cent of workplaces. In 1989 1 in 7 union members were under 25. By 1996 it was 1 in 14.

We have experienced historic defeats in the 1984-85 miners strike, at Wapping, in the hot summer of 1989. We have seen the successful imposition of a battery of anti-union laws, the dwindling of strikes to the lowest numbers since statistics began, and the qualitative erosion of our role in the Labour Party.

This has laid the basis for a significant increase right across industry of employer hostility to trade unionism. Derecognition spread from publishing and printing to the docks, the oil

industry and the privatised utilities. Its incidence has trebled in the 1990s.

ACAS reports demonstrate the decreasing success of recognition

drives even where ballots record high levels of support and in an increase in victimisation.

In the private sector less than 20 per cent of the workers in enter-

prises opened over the last decade are members. The current dispute at Critchley Labels evokes the period we are living through. BT sells off the business to a thrusting, profit hungry, anti-union employer. A weakened, insecure workforce accept a freeze on wages, the sacking of half the membership, the removal of an established bonus scheme, a reduction in holiday entitlement. The bosses want more.

They increasingly ignore stewards, and when members are successfully balloted over strike action they derecognise the union and sack 300 of the strikers, replacing them with agency labour on lower wages.

The very resilience of trade unionists like the Critchley workers demonstrates that the game is not up. We can still come again. But with present policies? With current leaders?

As new challenges and possibilities presented themselves, as we entered a new period in the run-up to the general election with the installation of Blair as Labour leader and the relaunch of the TUC in 1994, we have witnessed crucial failures of policy and leadership.

At the centre of this has been renewed emphasis on partnership

(Continued over, pages 10-11)

## EWU FIGHTING FOR JOBS ON MERSEYSIDE

### We need a new charter for union rights!

WE NEED to go beyond the piecemeal approach of Blair and the TUC. We need to dismantle the Tory terror, not trim a tentacle or two.

We need not an isolated change here and there but a new, integrated, code of workers' rights, a blueprint for strong trade unionism that we can campaign for.

Starting with organising and recognition. But going beyond it.

We need a new charter for union rights hinging on:

- \* The right to organise
- \* The right to recognition
- \* The right to strike
- \* The right to picket
- \* The right to take solidarity action
- \* The right to make our own union rules
- \* The right to a minimum wage
- \* The right to take political action.

**DON'T ATTEND UNION MEETINGS!**



# 10 SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

## Why are new laws important?

### Remember recent and current disputes Magnet Darlington:

Workers vote to go on strike in a ballot which meets all the requirements of the Tory legislation. They are immediately sacked.

Though their strike is lawful they have no legal remedy, no rights to compensation or reinstatement against their boss.

**SOLUTION:** A new legal right to reinstatement if sacked for taking industrial action.

### Quadrant Catering:

Members of the Communication Workers Union vote to overwhelmingly to take industrial action to stop Blair selling off 49 per cent of Quadrant, the Post Office caterers, to private industry.

Union officers are advised industrial action is unlawful as it is 'political' and falls outside the definition of a 'trade dispute'.

**SOLUTION:** An amended definition of a trade dispute to reverse the Tory changes in their 1982 Act and protect trade unionists when they strike against privatisation.

### Critchley Labels:

Members of the CWU are sacked after their union is derecognised and they go on strike. Critchley's main customer is BT.

The CWU leadership supports the strikers but refuses to organise a boycott of Critchley's products as the Tory laws prohibit secondary action.

**SOLUTION:** New rights to recognition and protection for trade unionists and union funds when taking solidarity action.

### Noon's Products:

Gulam Noon refuses to recognise the GMB at his Southall factory even though a majority of workers have joined the union and elected shop stewards.

The workers are not on strike. But they are suffering harassment.

**SOLUTION:** New rights to recognition, a duty on the employer to bargain, protection for union members and facilities for shop stewards.

### Liverpool dockers:

Sacked Torside workers picket out Mersey Docks and Harbour employees. All are sacked. They have no legal remedy.

Bill Morris claims solidarity action cannot be fought for or the unions will be sequestered.

**SOLUTION:** New rights to reinstatement to take solidarity action and for trade unionists to make their own balloting rules.

Solutions ... but only partial solutions. Countries like the USA have had rights to recognition since the 1930s, yet union density at 12 per cent is less than half that in Britain.

Whatever the law, it is unlikely "Bank of England" Bill would have fought for solidarity action in support of the dockers. Legislation can be a useful weapon. But only if supported by determined and aggressive rank and file action.

with employers, embrace of Human Resource Management (HRM) and new production techniques - at the very time employers' rejection of any role for unions was in the ascendant.

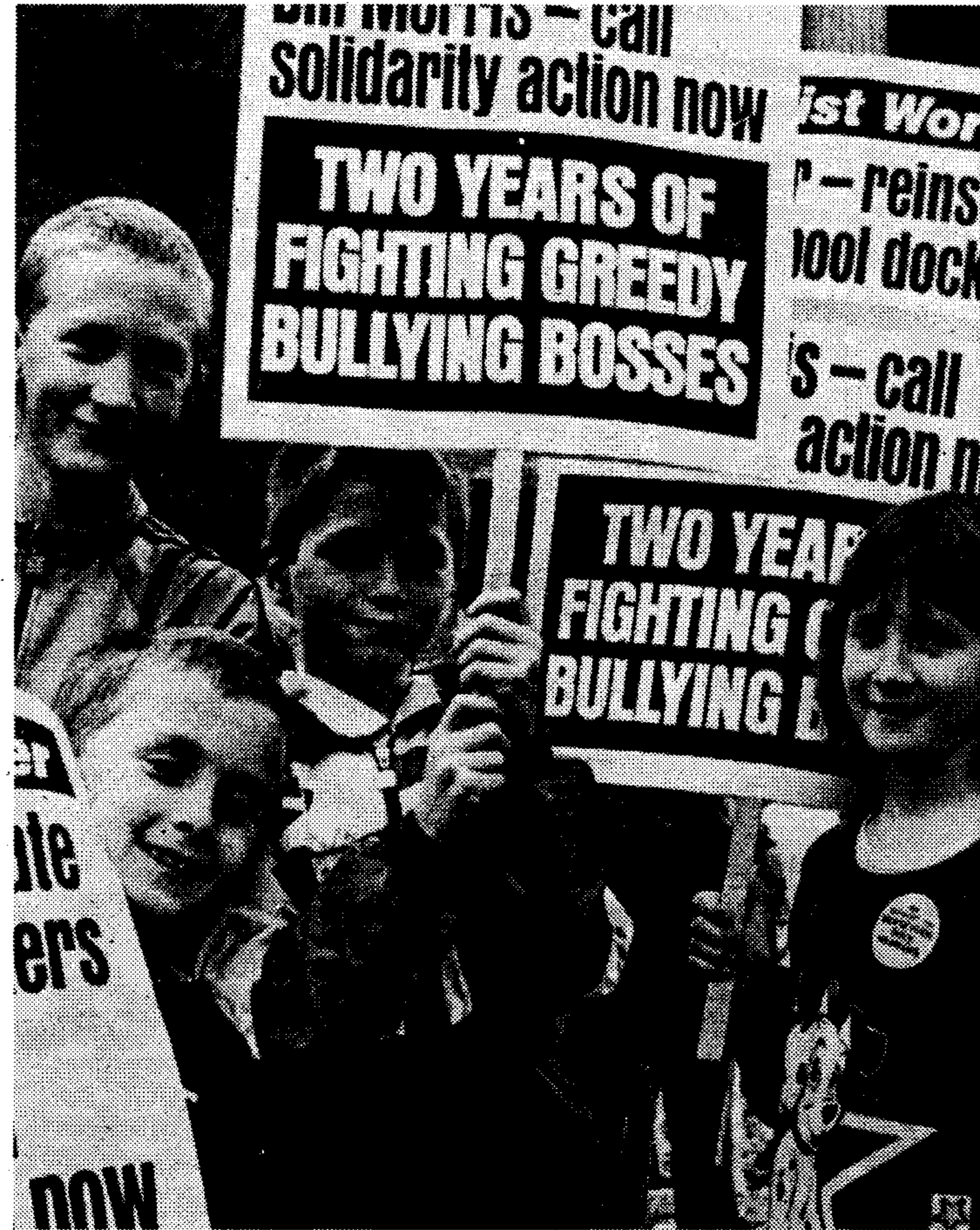
The TUC put the case against the new techniques incisively: "In the experience of many trade unionists, HRM is about nothing more than implementing redundancies, casualisation the workforce, reducing wages and reasserting management's right to manage. It is often associated with intensification of work and a deliberate strategy to derecognise or limit the influence of trade unions." They then advised trade unionists to accept HRM, even to urge its introduction!

This new collaboration was accompanied by moves on the part of key leaders with some left reputation to follow the TUC in accommodating emerging Blairism as New Labour repositioned itself as the open party of global capitalism. From 1994, the UNISON leadership sought to remove power from the branches and lay activists and increasingly blocked action likely to embarrass Blair. In the TGWU, Bill Morris was converted to social partnership, HRM and hostility to strikes.

In 1994 both Bickerstaffe and Morris - albeit with limited conviction - voted against the removal of Clause Four. In 1997, like the turkeys voting for Christmas they had earlier used to ridicule the idea they would support their own eviction from the Labour Party, both voted for the 'Party Into Power' proposals.

By the election they were firmly if critically in the Blair camp. In the Hillingdon Hospital dispute, the UNISON leaders went beyond compliance with the anti-union legislation, suppressing discussion of the dispute, terminating support without a ballot, refusing to allow the strikers full membership rights. Morris's behaviour over the dockers needs little extra elaboration.

A small number of small unions, the RMT, FBU, NUM



remained isolated on the left. Despite positive initiatives, such as the Trade Union Left Alliance, the serious left remained weak, divided, unable to influence the rightward trajectory of union leaders. In some quarters illusions in Bickerstaffe and Morris were painfully slow to dissolve.

Today, with only minor contradictions, the TGWU Broad Left is the General Secretary's organising arm in the union. Its supporters on Labour's NEC have accepted every single Blairite innovation. The existence of three competing lefts in UNISON and the confident initiatives of the leadership to suppress opposition affirm our current weaknesses.

What remains encouraging is the increase in the strike figures in 1996-97 and the underlying

power and vitality demonstrated by the strikes in the Royal Mail and the long running disputes among groups of low paid workers outside the sectors of traditional militancy. Here we have the makings of a fightback.

As these disputes demonstrate (see Box) the issue of the anti-union legislation is absolutely central to any reversal of the retreat. Yet here again there has been timidity at the top, intended to obfuscate dispassionate consideration of the vast complex of Tory legislation, the problems it offers the day-to-day practice of trade unionism, the necessities for its repeal and the possibilities for confronting it in practice.

The TUC has sought to seal off the questions of repeal and defiance. At the 1996 pre-election congress, Morris, acting as

**Morris, a future governor of the Bank of England says: "Laws are like morality"**

the General Council's frontman, called successfully for rejection of motions from the Communication Workers, NUM and RMT for repeal of the legislation and its replacement with a new framework of rights.

In language impregnated with Blairism, he pronounced these motions as dangerously seeking "to put unions above the law. Our call, as it is now and always has been, is for fair laws, not for special treatment." With little regard for history Bill maintained: "This Congress has long supported the principle of ballots ... it secures the moral high ground".

Condemning the NUM's call for defiance, the future governor of the Bank of England preached, "laws are like morality: you cannot pick and choose which one you support or which you obey."

Congress firmly turned its face against a new framework of union laws, in favour of a moderate shopping list of demands to be introduced in Labour's first year of office."

Affirmed at the 1997 TUC, this list covered

- \* A National Minimum Wage
  - \* Adhesion to the Social Chapter
  - \* Restoration of rights to trade unionists at GCHQ and to Prison officers
  - \* Union recognition
  - \* Secondary and solidarity action
  - \* Rights to legal protection from day one of employment
  - \* Reinstatement of those sacked in lawful disputes
  - \* Removal of restrictions on deduction of union dues from pay packets
- Most of these demands figured, albeit vaguely and inconsistently, in New Labour policy documents - with the vital exception of solidarity action. And always with the vital qualification: restrictions on strikes and picketing and requirements for ballots would continue.
- However as the election loomed Blair back-pedalled furiously. New Labour's manifesto distanced the Party from the

## The argument over recognition rights

### The TUC argues

A UNION should be recognised for collective bargaining by an employer when a simple majority of those voting in a ballot vote 'yes'

Disagreements about 'the bargaining unit' who should be included in the group of workers to be balloted should be resolved by a new Independent Representation Agency.

Recognition should be widely defined. It should cover the right to bargain over pay, hours, conditions of employment, training, holiday entitlements and other issues.

All employers should be covered. Small companies are often amongst the worst employers. There should be no exemptions.

Industrial action to secure recognition should be protected by law after a ballot. Those dismissed should be eligible for reinstatement

### The CBI argues:

THE EMPLOYER should decide which workers are to be balloted. There should be support from at least 30 per cent of workers in the proposed bargaining unit before a recognition ballot is held.

Companies with fewer than 50 workers should be excluded from the legislation

Unions should be recognised only if more than 50 per cent of workers eligible to vote, vote for recognition in the ballot

Recognition should only cover bargaining over wages and hours - not issues like training

Strikes over recognition should be barred once a statutory procedure is in place

Employers should still have the right to negotiate with individual workers and secure a derecognition ballot if 30 per cent of the relevant workers favour this

### We say:

The debate over recognition legislation has obscured many important details. For example, if recognition legislation is to have any impact unions need

\* Clear cut rights of access to non-union workplaces, facilities to discuss with prospective members and protection against victimisation.

\* Strong powers of enforcement so that if employers refuse to abide by the law and bargain in good faith action is speedy and punitive and includes sequestration of assets.

The last time we had recognition rights in Britain - between 1975 and 1980 - they achieved very little. The powers of ACAS the body charged with supervising the recognition process were successfully undermined by the courts.

We need a law on recognition. We need to pay attention to its detail. But we need to remember that legal rights to recognition are a means of building independent workers' power in the enterprise. They are no substitute for it.

**Legal rights to recognition are a means of building independent workers' power in the enterprise. They are no substitute for it**

TUC with commitments restricted to the minimum wage recognition and the Social Chapter.

The commitment to recognition was vaguely worded. The *Financial Times* pointed out on April 7 1997 what the slow thinking Monks and Morris only realised months later: it was unclear whether recognition would depend upon support from a majority of workers to be represented by a union, or alternatively only by a majority of those voting.

No figure was set for the minimum wage. And Blair personally assured employers he would renege on earlier promises to introduce a Bill in his first year of office and legislate for employment protection rights from day one!

In the *Sun* he fulminated: "We will not be held to ransom by the unions. We will stand up to strikes. We will not cave into unrealistic pay demands." This was followed by his now infamous assurance that Britain would continue to have the worst labour laws in the western world.

Once in Downing Street Blair's back-peddalling continued. There has been a dripfeed of small changes mixed with promises. The introduction of a Bill in New Labour's first Parliament was replaced by the promise of a White Paper 'in early 1998' and then 'in the first half 1998'.

Blair's strategy of rigorously limiting the scope of the debate about change and cutting down the area of what union leaders conceive as politically possible has been dramatically successful. After 12 months of New Labour we have seen adhesion to the Social Chapter - but the Prime Minister encouraging the CBI to refuse to support EU directives on workers' consultation. There has been restoration of limited rights for GCHQ workers but refusal to lift the ban on union membership for union officers.

A minimum wage bill has been introduced but the government instructing the Low Pay Commission to consider exemption of young people and supporting a figure under £4 (see Box) Then there is the 'promise' of a White Paper on recognition and employment protection rights due anytime now.

In recent months the government's approach has ensured that attention has focused almost completely on recognition - a key, but minimal demand. John Smith's famous promise of an extended programme of employment rights from 'day one' has fallen by the wayside.

Leaks suggest that all the White Paper will propose is cutting the qualification period for rights such as unfair dismissal from two years to twelve months. Workers will be worse off in 1999 than they were in 1979 when the qualification was only 6 months.

The handling of recognition affirms New Labour's organic support for global capital, whatever was agreed between Blair

and Rupert Murdoch, and the hardening of capital against state regulation, however limited.

Whilst the *Financial Times* calls for the CBI to calm down - there are recognition laws in numerous havens of neo-liberalism such as the USA - the CBI includes on its committee reviewing the issue anti-union warriors such as News International, Associated British Ports, BT and the Midland Bank.

In the face of employer intransigence, the CBI's formal position remains one of opposition to any legislation on recognition - Blair at the 1997 TUC urged union leaders to negotiate a framework for legislation with the CBI. This has now failed (see Box) and the final decision on the form the legislation takes lies with Blair.

Amongst all the fury over recognition the massive edifice of anti-union legislation, unremarked by the TUC, continues to impede union resurgence.

We still have the restrictions on political action and unofficial strikes; and we still have the bans on solidarity strikes. The 1997 Congress passed a resolution calling for a campaign to remove the law on solidarity action. Not a peep out of Monksy about this.

Bill Morris has devoted his time to telling us how the current laws on strikes impede his freedom of action. Not a word about getting rid of them. The misnamed Tory Commission for the Right of Trade Union Members continues to disfigure the industrial landscape



Union rights are needed as a starting point in the fight against low pay and exploitation

undisturbed by the union leaders.

A strong law on recognition is important. If the CBI persuade Blair to support their position it will be a blow for trade unionists. But the fact remains inescapable: a myopic focus on recognition leaves discussion of the rest of the Tory laws and their repeal and replacement in limbo. It reinforces the position of Blair: they are sacred and untouchable.

The TUC's convening of a special conference of union executives on May 6 to discuss the White Paper is welcome. So too is GMB leader Edmonds' call for demonstration if Blair does not come through. And Morris's call for a special TUC. The TUC's lobbying has been useful in ensuring the issue of recognition

is taken up in the ranks of New Labour.

But, as with Edmonds trailing in the wake of the Countryside demonstration and Morris's assertion that if there is not a strong law on recognition stewards will call strikes (and Bill will support them?) - there is a lot of rhetoric.

Fundamentally, we have to separate ourselves from the content of the union leaders when they say "we want recognition to improve competitiveness and profitability".

We have to take up and argue the issue of recognition as a means of *disrupting* not extending partnership with the bosses. We have to support and extend the TUC campaign and build a lobby of the May 6 conference on this

clear basis.

We want a good law, a strong law, pro-union law. Statutory trade union rights are fundamental human rights.

But they are the beginning not the end of it. We must use the legislation on recognition and the minimum wage to launch a crusade to build union membership and combat low pay and insecurity.

Recognition and the minimum wage are fundamental rights recognised across the world. We need a right to organise.

But we need the right to strike and take solidarity action every bit as much. We need a new charter of workers' rights to replace the Tory laws and create a new vibrant democratic unionism for the 21st century.

Amongst all the fury over recognition the massive edifice of anti-union legislation remains

## Fight for a decent minimum wage

THE BILL introduced into Parliament late last year provides the framework for the National Minimum Wage.

Key issues such as the level at which it will be set and which workers it will cover, will only be settled after the Low Pay Commission reports in May.

A lot will depend on what the Commission's report has to say. It will provide an important platform for mobilisation by the left to ensure that the final legislation is as favourable as possible. The Commission consists of three bosses, three academics, Bill Callaghan of the TUC, Rita Donaghy of UNISON and Paul Gates of KFAT, the footwear and clothing union.

Final decisions on the legislation will be taken by the government i.e. by Tony Blair. And on the 'slow track' principle adopted by New Labour, the minimum wage will not become operative until 1999.

### Key issues are

#### Level:

TUC policy requires that the wage should be set at half male median earnings - around £4.60 an hour. This would cover some 4.5 million workers.

But unless it was accompanied by changes in tax and welfare it would have only a marginal impact on poverty. In practice TUC staff continue to refer to 'a figure around £4 an hour', having fought strenuously at recent Congresses to avoid any figure at all.

The CBI are offering a magnanimous £3.20 an hour. And Blair on his munificent salary favours a handsome £3.50 an hour. Three favours are certain.

Firstly, if the figure is set at under £4 it will be a waste of time: the low paid would have to work more than 70 hours a week to be free of dependence on benefits.

Secondly, the betting must be on a figure of less than £4.

And thirdly, union leaders on £70,000 a year will urge patience if it is! After all it's a start, it's the principle that's important, I've got to get back to the Bank of England.

#### Coverage:

The Bill states that the government will not have powers to vary the rate by region, employment sector, occupation or the size of the enterprise.

But the armed forces will not be covered. And employers are frantically lobbying for workers under 26 years of age or under 21 years of age to be exempted on the lines suggested by Peter Mandelson.

This possibility is left open by the Bill. If workers under 26 were excluded then this would hit around 2 million young people in hotels and catering, retail, clothing, manufacturing and cleaning where they make up the

majority of the workforce.

#### Enforcement:

Bosses will have to keep records and provide workers with statements of their entitlements under the legislation.

Workers will be able to sue bosses who break the law in industrial tribunals and the county courts and be protected against harassment and dismissal if they do so.

Failure to pay minimum rates will also be a breach of the Criminal Law, Department of Trade and Industry inspectors will be able to take companies to court. But the maximum fine for each offence will be a miserly £5,000.

#### Workers Action:

We should curb our instincts towards abstract militancy and join with quite moderate people willing to fight for £4.60 an hour as a start.

This would give limited help to around 6 million workers around two-thirds of them women.

We should hammer home the fact that those who earn low wages work long irregular, inconvenient hours in appalling conditions in insecure jobs. And emphasise that the national minimum wage and its enforcement mechanisms will always be inadequate to a real break from poverty.

There is a need to use the legislation on the minimum wage together with that on recognition as a springboard for organising drives to unionise Britain's sweated trades.

If the figure is set at under £4 the low paid would have to work more than 70 hours a week to be free of dependence on benefits.

## Camden library staff break silence

**Elkie Dee**

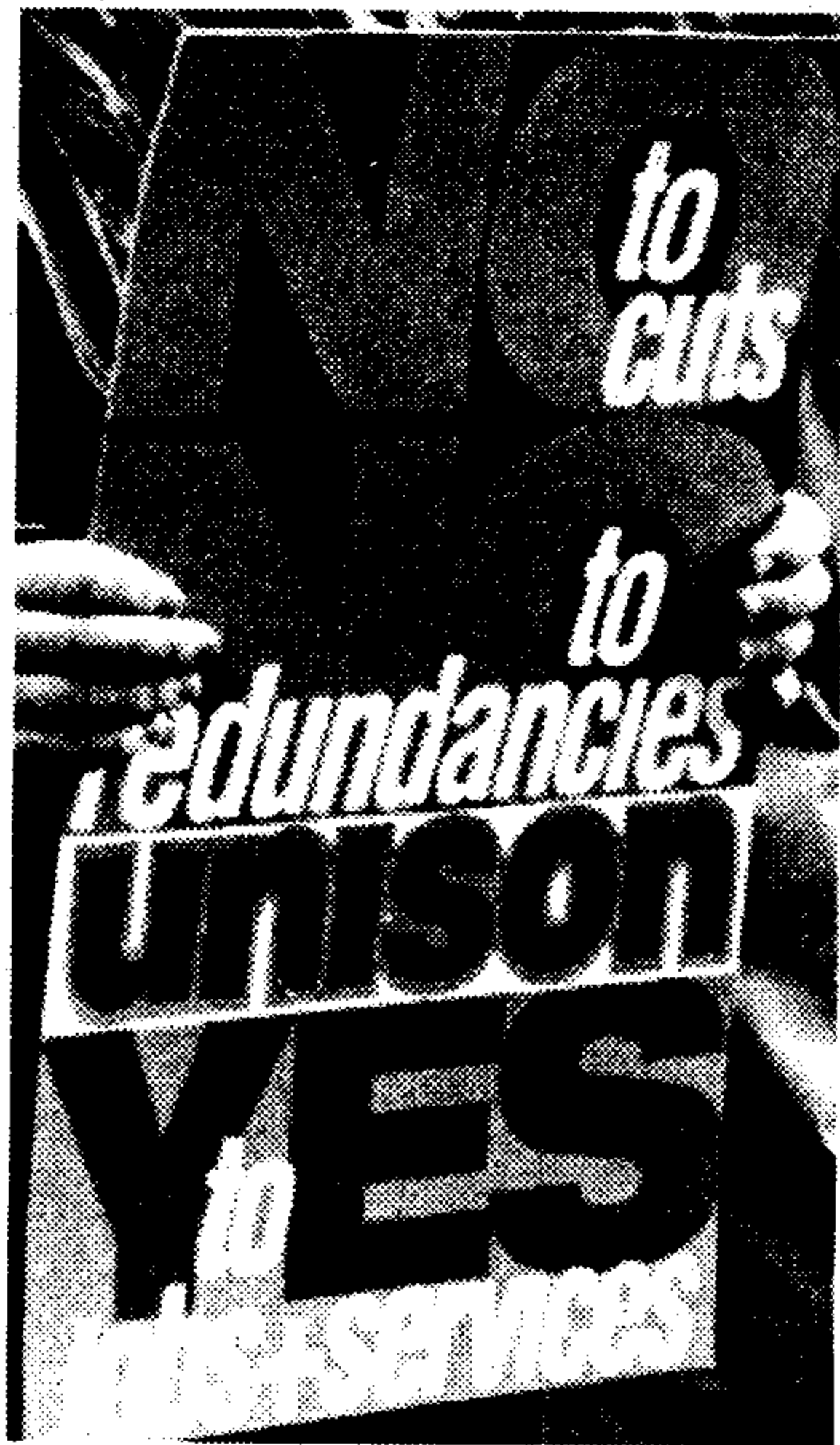
INDEFINITE strike action has closed most of Camden's libraries for over a month. On March 20, a meeting of 105 strikers voted unanimously to continue until a satisfactory settlement is reached. They marched to their UNISON branch AGM chanting "No more shushing, no more quiet, these librarians want to riot".

Camden Council in north London plans to impose a new management structure in its libraries. This involves an increase in management posts of 30 per cent, a decrease in frontline posts (library assistants who work at the counters and do a lot of the backroom admin work) of 26 per cent. It will mean redundancies and downgrading, forced changes in part-timers' hours which may mean loss of pay and other conditions.

The strike has been solid, with management only being able to open 2 out of 13 libraries. A threatening letter from management has only made the strikers more determined.

The driver of the bus being used to smuggle scabs into St Pancras Library near King's Cross station refused to drive the others up to West Hampstead after he was told who he was driving. They had to go by taxi. Strikers commented "Can't they go by train like the rest of us?"

The staffing structure proposals for Camden libraries are not just an attack on jobs and conditions for workers there, though. They are clearly part of a planned attack on Camden's library service, as the Council plans to implement the recommendations of management consultants KMPG made in a recent review.



KMPG's view is that Camden has too many libraries. They suggest closing most of them down and selling off the buildings and land, and running the service through a few big libraries with other access points situated in supermarket kiosks etc. If such ideas are implemented in Camden, other boroughs are likely to follow.

Of course, this would mean job losses and downgradings - why pay decent wages just to stamp a few books?

This misses the point of what library services are about, and the jobs their workforces do.

Public libraries started in the 19th century and developed in this one as a means of making books and education available to working class people. Previously, libraries were the preserve of elites - those in universities and those who could afford to subscribe to services to borrow the latest books.

Some cheaper services existed - but these would have been in rooms at the back of shops and their stock would have been limited to popular fiction. A twopenny lending library in a kiosk down at Sainsburys? No thanks - it's hardly the same.

Libraries are places where people go to borrow and read a wide range of books, newspapers and magazines which they could not get elsewhere. They also go there for social reasons, to get out of the house, or off the streets, to somewhere warm and dry. Students use libraries to study and many people use the computer facilities. All this needs people to help find books and use equipment, do backroom admin work for reservations etc.

Many of the additional services are provided for a fee, but until now, the principle of free book lending has remained. We should defend this principle, and seek to extend it to other services such as access to information technology, rapidly becoming a new class dividing line in this society.

The Tories wanted to introduce fees, and KMPG's proposals would pave the way for charges, always a temptation when councils are constantly told they have to cut costs and generate income.

This struggle from Camden Unison members to defend their jobs and local services needs solidarity and support.

**Send messages to the strikers and donations to the strike fund, invite speakers to meetings, and in London, join the picket lines. Contact: Camden Unison, 59 Phoenix Court, Brill Place, London NW1, tel: 0171-911 1633 for details.**

## Partial victory for victimised UNISON rep

**Susan Moore**

VICTIMISED British Gas activist Bernie Hynes won a partial victory at his Industrial Tribunal hearing on March 23. An order was made that he be reinstated as a Health and Safety Representative at British Gas's Leicester office.

This is not surprising as the law states that only trade unions have the right to nominate or withdraw health and safety nominees - though the legal team for the employer did not seem aware of this fact!

The law on union recognition is however rather different as it is perfectly legal to derecognise a union or its representatives and many employers have done so. Bernie made a further claim to the tribunal against his derecognition as a steward. He lost this claim as the tri-

bunal ruled that action short of dismissal of a lay union officer did not count under a protection which applies to individual union members.

While they agreed that Bernie had been derecognised because of his union activity, they then applied the test of 'reasonableness' to the employer's action. They agreed with British Gas that their action was 'reasonable', as it was claimed that Bernie's criticism of managers had 'escalated' to what they viewed as an unreasonable extent.

While the implications of these judgements require studying they underline the fact that there is no legal protection for trade union activists. A campaign for positive rights is urgently needed.

At the same time it is necessary to fight trade union

leaders who are more interested in fighting the left in the union than the employers. UNISON's leadership are prepared to spend vast sums of members' money on barristers to attack the CFDU, but resisted obtaining one in Bernie's case against British Gas.

It seems that Dave Johnson the Deputy Head of Energy had been involved in discussions with the employer leading to the derecognition. At the same time he is leading Gas members up the garden path on other issues such as a pay freeze and performance related pay.

As well as fighting to maintain branch autonomy and for trade union rights, the left in UNISON needs to campaign for full time officers to be subject to the democratic control of the membership.

## UNISON branches organise to defend union democracy

### 300 attend Newcastle conference

**Fred LePlat**

THE PUBLICATION of the preliminary agenda for UNISON's national conference in June gives a clear indication of what most concerns branches: defence of public services and the welfare state against attacks from the New Labour government, and defence of union democracy against the attacks from the bureaucracy.

The topic with the highest number of motions is the Welfare State review with 32 motions. Then comes union democracy with 18 motions, and close behind trade union rights, PFI and privatisation, the minimum wage and public services.

The concerns of branches are clear. Branch autonomy and the right to campaign inside the union to change policy must be defended if UNISON is to be able to fight for its members and for public services.

The democratic principles of UNISON have slowly been eroded through the power given to the bureaucracy by the anti-union laws. They have also been under assault from the leadership - including general secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe. This unsavoury crew have used barristers to produce a report on the Campaign for a Fighting & Democratic UNISON (a Broad Left in the union) and to press disciplinary charges against individual union activists in a number of branches, Liverpool and Leeds in particular.

The attack on individuals and the CFDU confirms that the bureaucracy have wholeheartedly taken up Blair's call at the TUC for the unions to "modernise their political structures as Labour has done". Getting rid of the left, if necessary by ditching union democracy, is now the priority for the general secretary and his 13 regional secretaries.

The December NEC adopted a

report which demonises the left by describing the CFDU as an organisation "external" to the union, as it seeks to interfere into the affairs of the union by attempting to get UNISON to adopt its policies and get its candidates elected! The CFDU is composed only of UNISON members and its activities are those of any union broad left.

The attack has caused such concern the London and Northern Regions called an unprecedented national conference in Newcastle on Saturday March 21.

The purpose of this meeting, attended by nearly 300 activists

from across the country, was to plan a common approach in defending branch autonomy and the right to campaign.

Most of those attending were supporters of CFDU, SWP or UNISON Labour Left with a few independent activists and five

NEC members.

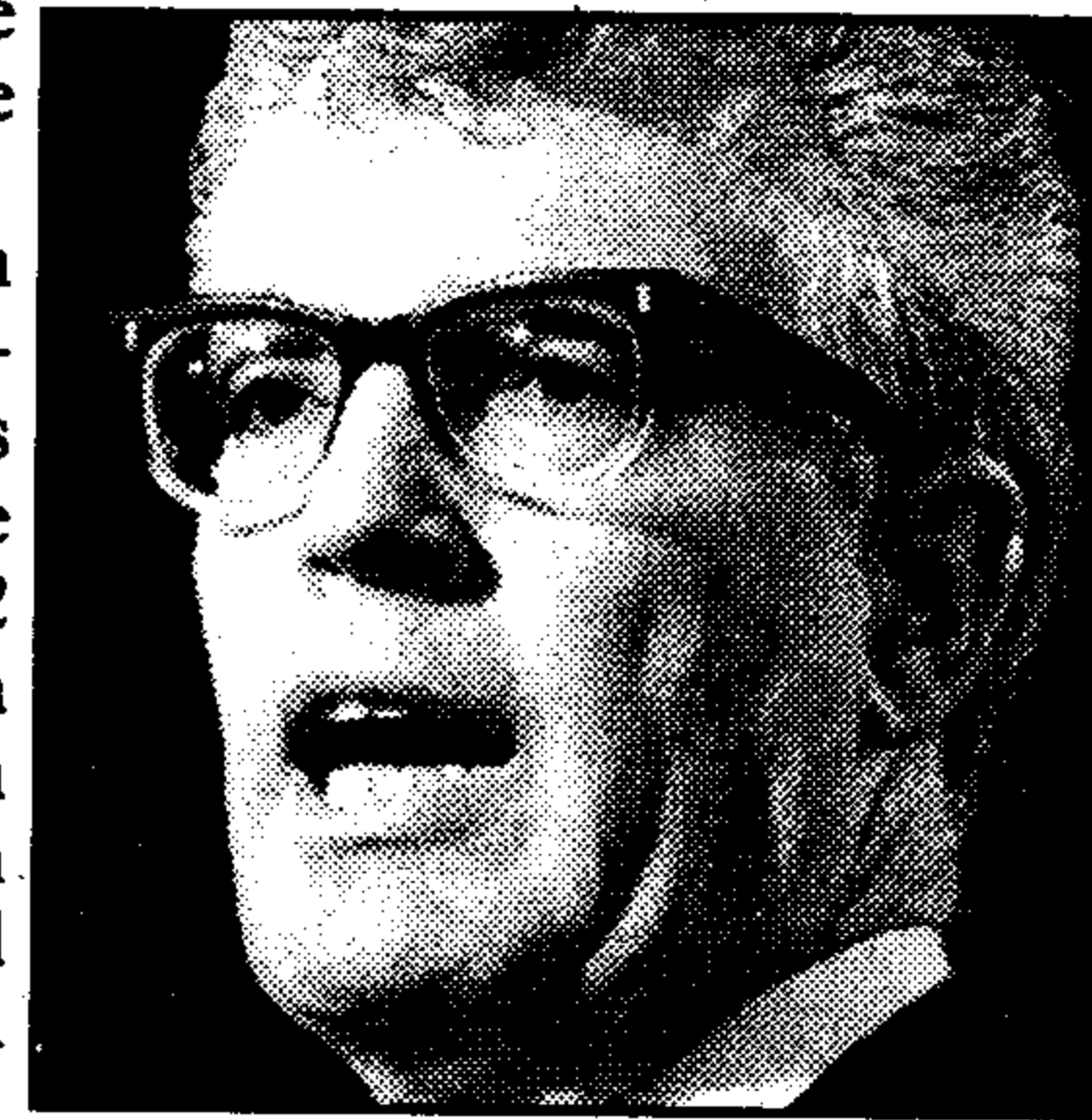
Despite tactical differences, there was a welcome degree of agreement, in particular on the need to unite behind a single composite motion at national conference.

This conference has clearly worried the national leadership, who by co-incidence produced its monthly newsletter for stewards that week, with a message claiming that the NEC and the General Secretary defend branch autonomy and the right to change union policy.

Regional secretaries were actively dissuading branches from attending the Newcastle conference, (which was not called by the CFDU, pointing out that it was unofficial and no union funds could be used to pay travel expenses.

As the Conference agenda demonstrates, branches understand that internal union democracy is vital in order to have an active membership which knows that the union is theirs.

This attack on democracy by barristers and unelected officials has to be defeated so that UNISON can organise on the other priorities; fighting in defence of the welfare state and public services, for trade union rights and for a decent minimum wage.



Attacking the left: Bickerstaffe

## Voters desert French mainstream parties

# Move to the left – or else!

The recent French elections have received a fair amount of coverage in the British press. However those reports have mainly focused on the impact of Le Pen's National Front and the crisis this is provoking for the traditional right. The problems faced by the current government, the rise in votes for the far left and the overall decline in the numbers voting have been largely ignored. Below we reprint an article by Christian Picquet from *Rouge*, paper of the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire (LCR), French Section of the Fourth International.

France's political elite is in crisis. Only 58 per cent of voters participated in regional elections in March. And only two thirds of those voting supported the parties of the current government (Socialist, Communist and Green) or the conservative opposition (UDF and RPR).

In other words, only one in three registered voters is somehow represented by the "mainstream" parties, including the Communists and the Greens.

Of course, there was enormous variety in the motivations of those who didn't vote, or who supported one of the minor parties. But there is clearly a suspicion, even an open defiance, of the political system.

Twenty years of crisis and unemployment have converged with popular frustration with the identical policies which left and right have applied in government.

At each election, the challenge is clearer: either the left responds to the urgent social situation, and gives the victims of neoliberalism new hope in politics, or there will be a further decline in civic participation, mixed with rejection of the existing political parties.

All to the benefit of the extreme right, of course.

### Little victories for the government

Taken together, the left and far-left parties scored 40.7 per cent, rather higher than in the 1992 regional elections. But the parties of the governing coalition (Socialist, Communist and Green) did worse than they expected (36.5 per cent). This shows not only people's critical atti-

tude towards the Jospin government, but also a growing distrust of the "Plural left" government, as a result of its refusal to listen to the demands of the unemployed movement, and its other unkept promises. Leonel Jospin's Communist and Green allies in government are starting to pay for their inconsistency.

In many areas, the increased vote for radical left candidates [to the left of the Communist Party] was the result of a significant decline in the Communist Party's stable electorate, which is increasingly disoriented by their leaders' manoeuvres.

On 17 March the Communist Party newspaper *L'Humanité*, commented that, "the far left clearly benefited from the protest votes of a section of the left, i.e. communist, electorate: people who feel that the Jospin government is not going fast enough and far enough in its reforms in favour of the most disadvantaged groups of the population."

In these elections, the Greens benefited from the collapse of ecological rivals and splinter groups. But, wherever they stood separately from the Socialist Party, some Green voters preferred to vote for their party's national ally.

How to be a Communist and govern?

During the last nine months of participation in government, Communist Party leaders have tried to force their members to accept privatisation, workfare schemes for young people, and another reactionary reform of immigration and citizenship legislation.

Each time, Party leader Robert Hué has invoked the party's importance, its responsibilities, and its mission as "a bridge between the social movements and the government."

In the past, elections were one of the key opportunities for Party leaders to reaffirm the party's communist identity. Except that, for the first time, the Communist Party presented joint lists with its partners in government. Many militants refused to accept this, particularly where the common candidate was a prominent member of the Socialist Party.

A majority of Communist Party members in Lille, and 40 per cent of Nord-Pas-de-Calais members voted against "their" candidates.

Not surprisingly, this also meant a lacklustre election campaign, with most of the work done by mid-level cadres rather than the rank-and-file.

Paradoxically, Robert Hué has emerged from these elections stronger than before, thanks to a ruthless selection of candidates. But he is under pressure from the

rank-and-file to make some verbal concessions towards the far left.

Not that this will worry Prime Minister Leonel Jospin, who is relying on the Communist Party to absorb any stray voices on the left.

### Growing tension on the right

The conservative RPR-UDF opposition will look back on these elections as the beginning of the end. In last year's parliamentary elections, they won 34.2 per cent of the vote. In these regional elections, they won only 28.1 per cent.

Key personalities like Edouard Balladur and Charles Pasqua did badly, and in many regions the right's only chance for government will be some kind of agreement with either the extreme right or the Socialist Party.

The far-right National Front is now as large as each of the two conservative parties, as well as being more ideologically coherent and well organised. Fascist leaders Jean-Marie Le Pen and his deputy Bruno Megret are gracefully imposing themselves.

The "classic" conservative parties must now either merge into a single liberal-conservative-republican party (which would mean sacrificing part of the leadership and the parliamentary superstructure), or negotiate some kind of re-composition of the right as a whole.

Many local conservative politicians resent their leaders' refusal to co-operate with the National Front. But, in any kind of re-composition across the "Republican line" which separates the "democratic" right parties from the fascists, Le Pen's party will be the dominant component.

The National Front maintained its share of the vote (15.3 per cent), the same score as during the 1997 parliamentary elections. In greater Paris and some other regions the fascist vote is stagnant, but in the industrially depressed north, east and south-east, the party reached new levels of voter support.

In the large south-eastern region of Provence-Alps-Cote d'Azur, the National Front won as many votes as the conservative parties combined. In Bouches-du-Rhone, Vaucluse and Var it did even better.

This is enabling the National Front to impose itself as arbiter in those 13 of the country's 21 mainland regions where the left coalition didn't win a relative majority of votes. Although the leadership of the RPR and UDF were determined to refuse co-operation with the National Front, even if this kept them out of power, the fascist strategy of offering alliances is progressively weakening the cohesion of the conservative parties. Any local split in the RPR-UDF would be a step forward for the National Front in its march to power.

to refuse co-operation with the National Front, even if this kept them out of power, the fascist strategy of offering alliances is progressively weakening the cohesion of the conservative parties. Any local split in the RPR-UDF would be a step forward for the National Front in its march to power.

The radical left

Radical and far-left candidates won almost one million votes (4.2 per cent), and imposed themselves as a new fundamental element on the political map. This is partly the result of the popular re-mobilisation which started in winter 1995, and partly a reflection of growing rejection of the right and of neo-liberal policies, whoever implements them.

This "social radicalism" has existed in France for some time. What is perhaps new is the reduced capacity of the Communist and Green parties to capture these votes, now that they are locked into the "pluralist parliamentary majority."

The Trotskyist group Lutte Ouvrière (Workers Struggle, LO), was the main benefactor of this political radicalisation, winning 4.8 per cent of the vote in those regions where the group presented candidates. This impressive score is partly the result of the group's tradition of electoral participation, and the considerable portion of its energies which it devotes to elections. Lutte Ouvrière also has, in Arlette Laguiller, a well-known and popular representative.

Unusually, this latest Lutte Ouvrière campaign was less crude in its characterisation of the Socialist and conservative parties as two sides of the same coin.

With 19 elected members of the new regional assemblies, LO has made significant step forward in electoral support. While their support is nation-wide, it is particularly strong in the declining industrial areas of northern France – clear proof that there is nothing automatic in the far-right's ability to win over working class voters in these areas.

To stabilise this vote, unique in Europe for a Trotskyist group, LO needs to build links with those militants who are leading social struggles at a local level. Can LO work in and with a milieu increasingly used to pluralist practice and unity? Or will its elected representatives see themselves only as public spokespeople for their own group?

### The LCR's new challenge

For the first time, the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire (Revolutionary Communist League, LCR) also benefited from the leftward shift of some sections of the electorate. The LCR vote included a significant number of former Communist Party sympathisers and voters, and, to a lesser extent, frustrated Socialist Party and Green voters, looking for a genuine left alternative.

Unlike Lutte Ouvrière, the LCR managed to build broader electoral coalitions in 12 regions. These lists received an average score of 2.7 per cent, a considerable improvement on the 1.26 per cent of votes in the 1997 parliamentary elections. And this average excludes the result in Nord region, where the LCR supported a Green list which won 8.76 per cent of the vote.

Despite this success, which included the election of two LCR members to the Breton regional assembly, the group has recognised a number of shortcomings in its campaign.

Unlike LO's stable voter base, the potential LCR electorate is clearly more tempted to cast a "useful" vote for a larger party. Another problem is the LCR's inconsistent participation in electoral politics, and the bewildering range of names under which LCR candidates present themselves: 19 in these latest elections.

Of course, this reflects the atomisation and division of the left forces and social movements in which the LCR is active and influential. And, despite the variations of name, the growing convergence of forces which, alongside the LCR, are striving for a change in left politics, is recognisable as a national force.

Years of LCR work in building and rebuilding authentic alternative politics are starting to bear their first real fruit. In any case, the growing menace on the right, and the advance of the radical and far left, send a clear message to the French government: move to the left, or else!

Source: *Rouge*, 19 March. Jean-Louis Michel, Arnaldo Castellanos and Georges Villetin also contributed material to this article.

Only one in three registered voters is somehow represented by the "mainstream" parties ... 20 years of unemployment have converged with popular frustration with the identical policies of left and right governments

# Relief for Roisin

CAMPAIGNERS had a good deal to celebrate early in March when Home Secretary Jack Straw finally decided that Roisin McAliskey should not be extradited to Germany.

Straw said the medical evidence meant extradition would be "unjust and oppressive". Roisin had been detained by British authorities for sixteen months with no clear evidence to link her to an IRA attack at the Osnabruck barracks in 1996.

Her mother, Bernadette McAliskey, prominent Republican and former MP for Mid Ulster, said from her home in Coalisland, Co Tyrone: "I'm relieved and delighted. We can now concentrate on getting her well again. Expectation of good news from the British government is never something I have lived with easily. And yet I have it and I appreciate it."

Solicitor Gareth Peirce said her client's weak mental state had been caused by her original arrest and questioning at Castlereagh in November 1996.

"She was in effect given the makings of a complete mental breakdown by reason of the interrogation process in Castlereagh. The doctors who have had her under their care, and the doctors for the home secretary, agree that whatever happened to her in Castlereagh it has caused this ongoing effect for this length of time. You have to ask what is going on there? What is being allowed to go on there?"

She said her client would now consider legal action against the RUC and the home office.

The Republic's Foreign Affairs Minister David Andrews also welcomed the British government's "enlightened decision".

Roisin was arrested, while pregnant, at her home in Tyrone. She was held in the notorious Castlereagh Interrogation centre for six days and vindictively questioned for twelve hours a day, one hour on and one hour off.

After being flown to London she was at one stage thrown into a filthy, faeces-smear cell in an all-male prison at Belmarsh. Only an

international outcry forced her transfer to Holloway - where she was strip-searched over a hundred times and told that she would be forced to give birth shackled to a prison guard. As a result of the extensive support her case received she was eventually 'allowed' to give birth in the secure ward at Maudsley psychiatric hospital.

The appalling conditions inflicted on Roisin had been condemned by human rights groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

The Home Office psychiatrist said her mental health had been seriously undermined by the trauma of her imprisonment at Holloway jail, and had continued to deteriorate while being held at the Maudsley. He is believed to have said she would be unable to face further interrogation on the allegations against her.

Sinn Fein's Mid-Ulster MP, Martin McGuinness wished Roisin a



Campaigning for Roisin: Bernadette McAliskey

speedy return to full health and praised her family, friends and solidarity groups world-wide who had campaigned on her behalf.

John Wadham, director of the civil rights group Liberty, welcomed the move. "It's a decision that should have been taken many months ago but it's still important that it's happened now."

Unionist politicians have not suprisingly responded differently. Ulster Unionist MP Ken Maginnis said he was outraged; "No-one will be surprised if she now makes a miraculous recovery," he added.

Home Office minister Mike O'Brien dismissed any suggestion that the move was a politically inspired, coming as it did on the

day Sinn Fein's suspension from multi-party talks ended.

"It would be wrong for political considerations to interfere with a decision to order an extradition or not," he said. Certainly there has been little indication that the British government is likely to bow to nationalist opinion in the peace talks or anywhere else - they are far too busy playing the orange card.

Roisin owes her freedom not to the generosity of the British government but to the thousands of supporters across the world who tirelessly worked to expose her arrest, imprisonment and torture for the scandal it was.

# Ryanair - the bitter fight for union rights

Paul Flannigan

There are growing indications that layers of Irish workers are beginning to break with the ethos of 'social partnership'. Social partnership is the latest version of the type of class collaboration preferred by the leadership of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions whereby they 'strive to move away from adversarial industrial relations in order to build a new system based on mutual respect and partnership'.

So far this month we have witnessed two different worker versus employers disputes spontaneously erupt into open class confrontation.

Building workers in Dublin have just won a significant victory over their employer Crampions. The company has been forced to reinstate all 16 sacked workers and agreed to eliminate the hated system of subcontracting (a practice which forces building workers to work as self employed thus eliminating things like holiday pay and pension rights and often pushing workers into a black economy).

The dispute began when workers at the Smurfit Business Park site in Clonskeagh asked to be employed directly by the company. They presented their P45s but were told by a company sub-boss to remain on the dole. They refused and were then sacked. The bricklayers then proceeded to mount a picket to demand the right to work directly, but Cramp-

tions responded by getting a High Court injunction against the workers.

In the recent past these high court injunctions have delivered a deadening blow to workers in dispute. The 1990 Industrial Relations Act, tacitly agreed to by the ICTU, outlawed all secondary picketing or solidarity action. However this time the building workers ignored the Court injunction and organised a hundred pickets around the site and at a number of other Crampions sites across Dublin. At a well attended public meeting a 'Building Workers against the Black Economy' group was set up to publicly expose the exploitative and often criminal ways of Dublin's building contractors; at least 40 workers have died as a result of accidents on building sites within the past three years. Crampions took fright and capitulated to the workers demands. The success is already having a positive knock-on effect across the building sector - another builder Rohcon has already been forced to submit to identical demands.

A more significant instance of workers breaking from the ethos of social partnership began with a dispute at Ryanair, one of the most trumpeted superstar companies of Irish capitalism. The acting boss of Ryanair, Michael O'Leary, is very much the golden boy of Irish business. The 37-year-old chief executive has just made it into the top twenty of Irish millionaires. He recently

pocketed some £17 million in share bonuses, holds a 14 per cent share in Ryanair valued at £122 million and enjoys an annual salary of £200,000.

The dispute started out over wages and conditions and was confined to 37 baggage handlers. But it quickly became one about union recognition, with the company refusing to allow SIPTU, Ireland's biggest Trade Union, the right to represent the baggage handlers at negotiations. Many of the more traditional Irish-owned companies are looking to imitate the large influx of newer, foreign-owned firms operating in Ireland, which refuse union recognition of any kind. The latest figures show that less than 30 per cent of the multinationals have any union representation.

After nine weeks of argument Ryanair attempted to finally kill-off the demand of the baggage handlers for union recognition by suddenly withdrawing the airport security passes of the workers. This amounted to an old fashioned capitalist lockout.

The action of Ryanair was supported by IBEC, the employers federation and the supposed social partners of Congress. The big surprise came when hundreds of other airport workers unconnected with the dispute walked out in solidarity with the locked out workers and closed down the entire airport.

The fire fighters walked out, as

caterers, cargo handlers, Team Air Lingus Workers. Taxi drivers and bus drivers refused to drive passengers through the picket lines. All this solidarity action was completely illegal but the employers could

do little to prevent it happening,

The workers' display of social solidarity shocked and dismayed the employers and the political and trade union establishment. The government quickly announced an inquiry to be conducted jointly by Dan Maculey, a former chairman of the employers federation, and well known Sinn Feiner Phil Flynn, an ex-union leader turned banker.

The day after the announcement of the inquiry O'Leary told the news media that there was no question of his company agreeing to any Union recognition even if the inquiry makes such a recommendation. On the other hand Des Geraghty the acting head of SIPTU promised to be 'flexible' about a possible solution.

What is emerging is that more and more workers are coming to the conclusion that the partnership 2000 deal negotiated on behalf of workers by the ICTU is delivering massive benefits to the employers but next to nothing to the majority of workers. The Irish capitalists have never had it so good, they constantly boast about the economic success story that is the Celtic Tiger.



The economy is booming but workers' wages are pegged to rises of just 2%

Just last week the *Sunday Tribune* celebrated the massive new wealth recently acquired by the Irish business class. The paper took satisfaction in declaring that the total declared wealth of Ireland's richest 100 people amounted to a staggering £8.5 billion; undeclared wealth is thought to be even bigger.

The average declared wealth of the 100 richest was thought to be around £85 million. It would take the average waged worker 6,535 years to accumulate such a figure.

The economy is booming but workers' wages are pegged to a social partnership deal which keeps pay rises to a mere two per cent per annum. Worst of all under the cover of social partnership the unions are being expelled from whole sectors of industry in Ireland.

The rot can only be stopped by following the example of the building workers who won by ignoring the ethos and apparatus of social partnership.

If Ryanair continues to resist the call for union recognition Dublin airport should be brought to a standstill by secondary action until they capitulate.

# Cook's tour ends in shambles

Roland Rance

**F**OREIGN Secretary Robin Cook misbehaved during his visit to the Middle East, and Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu sent him to bed without his supper. This, at least, was how the media presented the diplomatic row caused by Cook's visit to the proposed Israeli settlement in the Palestinian village of Jebel Abu Ghneim.

It is a measure of Israel's propaganda success that this village is now better known by the name of the as-yet-unbuilt Israeli settlement, Har Homa ('Mount Wall').

Israel has also succeeded in convincing most observers that Jebel Abu Ghneim is part of Jerusalem. In fact, it is less than a kilometre from the heart of Bethlehem, and until 1967 was part of the Bethlehem District. In 1967, Israel annexed occupied East Jerusalem and its surrounding areas.

Since 1967, Israel has expanded the area of East Jerusalem from 61/2 to over 70 square kilometres, annexing lands from many West Bank villages while excluding populated Palestinian areas. Almost all the land expropriated since 1967 was privately owned by Arabs. Some 38,500 housing units have been built on this land, all of them for the Jewish population.

Not one housing unit has been built for Palestinians. A ring of exclusively Jewish settlements

isolates Jerusalem, the main city of Palestine and capital of the state which the PLO hopes to establish, from the rest of the 1967-occupied territories. Since Jerusalem is also a major communications centre, this effectively cuts the West Bank in two, preventing access from Hebron and Bethlehem to Ramallah and Nablus.

Har Homa, with its planned homes for a further 50,000 Israeli Jews, will complete the last gap in this ring of Jewish settlements. The site itself is a largely unspoiled area, with several ancient Christian sites, including Byzantine monasteries.

Bethlehem is now virtually surrounded by Jewish-only settlements and by-pass roads; 61 per cent of all the land in the Bethlehem district - more than 350 square kilometres - has been confiscated or declared a closed military or conservation area.

Israel is now developing its own tourist complex, to be known as 'Bethlehem, Israel', based around the heavily fortified Rachel's Tomb shrine. The Christian sites in the town are losing visitors, a trend that is exacerbated by the high emigration rate of Palestinian Christians and the prolonged strict curfews on Bethlehem.

The final status of Jerusalem, one of the most emotive and intractable issues of the Palestine conflict, has been deferred to the



New settlements are a standing insult to dispossessed Palestinians

final stage of the so-called 'peace process'. The official rationale behind this is that the parties will make so much progress on other issues, that they will not let a possible deal flounder at the last hurdle. However, Israel's actions over recent years demonstrate clearly that it always intended this process to be a smokescreen behind which it continued with its dispossession of Palestine.

Following earlier disputes over the tunnel under part of the Old City of Jerusalem, and the proposed Jewish settlement on Ras al-Amud, on the Mount of Olives in the heart of East Jerusalem, there can no longer be any doubt that Israel's strategy is to create a Jewish majority not merely in the city of Jerusalem, but in the whole Greater Jerusalem area, which includes 20 per cent of the West Bank.

Israel is also expanding the settlement of Ma'ale Edumim, between Jerusalem and Jericho; it is planned that soon 30,000 people - all Jews - will live there, and the borders of Jerusalem will be extended a further 10 miles to the

east to include the settlement within the city. Many roads are planned to link these new suburban settlements; these, too, are built on expropriated Palestinian land.

This territorial expansion is linked to a drive to deprive Palestinians of their Jerusalem residency ID cards and thus force them to leave their homes and city. According to figures collated by the BADIL Alternative Centre in Bethlehem, during 1996-7, 1300 families, comprising some 4000 Palestinians, were thus deprived of their Jerusalem residency.

This represented an increase of 500 per cent over the average from 1968-95; an increase which cannot be accidental, but reflects a determined strategy of ethnic cleansing.

Palestinians will this month be marking the fiftieth anniversary of the notorious Deir Yassin massacre of 9-10 April 1948, when Zionist terrorists from parties led by ex-PMs Begin and Shamir murdered 250 Palestinian women and children in a previously

peaceful village on the outskirts of Jerusalem.

Though far from the only massacre of the 1948 war of conquest, nor even the bloodiest, Deir Yassin played a major part in the campaign to terrorise and demoralise Palestinians and drive them off their land. Deir Yassin is now the site of the main Jerusalem postal sorting office, a mental hospital, and light industry.

The Knesset (Israeli Parliament), the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the National Museum, and Independence Park are likewise all built on stolen Palestinian villages and fields, some of whose remains can still be seen.

For the past fifty years, Israel has carried out a process of ethnic cleansing; until 1967 only in the western part of Jerusalem, and since then in the entire metropolitan area.

Palestinian resistance is still relatively low-key, but there can be no doubt that Israel's arrogant intransigence will, sooner or later, ignite a new and powerful uprising.

For once, we can only welcome Robin Cook's 'ethical foreign policy', and his refusal to bow to Israeli demands that he condone their actions. It is also worth noting that Tony Blair, on his forthcoming visit to the Middle East, has promised to spend a night in Gaza as a sign of Britain's commitment to the establishment of a Palestinian state. But, welcome as these gestures are, they are merely a sub-text to the real struggle developing on the ground between the Palestinian people and the Israeli occupier.

# Free Mordechai Vanunu!

IN AN UNEXPECTED move, the Israeli government recently released nuclear prisoner of conscience Mordechai Vanunu from solitary confinement.

This is the first time since his kidnapping in 1986 that Vanunu has been allowed to mix with other people. The conditions under which he was held have been described by Amnesty International as "cruel and inhuman".

It is likely that fears for his mental stability prompted this relaxation; campaigners hope that it will be followed by Vanunu's release from gaol on licence later this year.

Mordechai Vanunu, a Morocco-born Israeli citizen, worked as a technician at Israel's Dimona nuclear weapons plant from 1977 to 1985, when he was dismissed for his political views. As a part-time student at Beersheba University, Vanunu joined Campus, a joint Jewish-Arab student political group, mixed socially with Palestinians, and was elected on the left slate to the student council.

His politics moved steadily to the left. He demonstrated for a Pal-

estinian state, in support of Israeli draft resisters, and for equality for Palestinian students. He recognised that Israel had been built on the systematic dispossession of the Palestinian Arabs, and called for negotiations with the PLO, full equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel, and the return of the Palestinian refugees.

Given his political activity, his dismissal from Dimona could not have been a great surprise. However, before he finally left, Vanunu managed to take a camera into the plant and snatch scores of photos of its operations.

He then left - with the film - for Australia, where he eventually made contact with the *Sunday Times* Insight team, who were working on an expose of Israel's nuclear bombs. Piecing together information from Vanunu (who, despite Israeli claims, received not a penny from the newspaper) and

from the photos, with other material, the *Sunday Times* published an article in October 1986, identifying Israel as the world's sixth largest nuclear power, with as many as 200 nuclear bombs.

Word of this scoop had meanwhile reached the *Sunday Mirror*, then owned by Robert Maxwell and a rival paper to the *Times*.

Maxwell and *Daily Mirror* foreign editor Nick Davies, were both working with Israel's foreign intelligence service, Mossad. They informed the Israelis of Vanunu's whereabouts, and published an Israeli-inspired article attempting to discredit him.

By the time the *Sunday Times* article appeared, Vanunu himself was back in Israel, having been lured from London to Rome by Mossad, who then drugged him and smuggled him onto a boat. Israel's Prime Minister who ordered this act of piracy, Shimon

Peres, had thirty years earlier, as director general of the Defence Ministry, been in charge of the development of Israel's nuclear weapons programme.

Vanunu was charged with treason and espionage, charges which can carry the death penalty. Particular anger was expressed at his conversion to Christianity; the state prosecutor described this as "betrayal of his family and his country". There was stringent censorship of the case and related issues.

After Vanunu managed to tell the story of his kidnapping by writing on his palm and holding it up to the window of the prison van, he was brought to court handcuffed, wearing boxing gloves and with a helmet over his head.

Vanunu's brother, Meir, was himself threatened with a criminal prosecution for discussing the trial with journalists. Some of the evi-

dence was kept secret from the defence, and the full judgement is still confidential.

Following his conviction, Vanunu was only allowed to meet his family, his lawyers and a priest. He was recently adopted by an American Christian pacifist couple, who are attempting to get him US citizenship and consular protection.

Their recent prison visit was cut short when he started to speak about his kidnapping. Thus the new relaxation is all the more unexpected.

Mordechai Vanunu has spent eleven-and-a-half years in solitary confinement. Although his transfer to regular prison conditions is welcome, we continue to call for his immediate release.

There should also be a full investigation into the Israeli intelligence networks in Britain and Europe, and their role in the illegal kidnapping.

**He recognised that Israel had been built on the systematic dispossession of the Palestinian Arabs**

**He was brought to court handcuffed, wearing boxing gloves and with a helmet over his head.**

# Kosova: the cauldron bubbles over

Geoff Ryan

**S**ocialist Outlook has argued several times in the past that a renewed explosion in Kosova was on the cards. Kosova was at the centre of the first struggles in post-Tito Yugoslavia when, in 1981, the Albanian majority took to the streets to demand that Kosova be granted the status of one of Yugoslavia's constituent republics. The street protests were met by fierce police and military repression.

The response in Serbia to demands for republican status was a key element in the break-up of Yugoslavia. The repression of dissidents was not simply a typical example of the way in which Stalinist governments suppress all opposition. It took on an altogether different, and more sinister, dimension.

In 1985 the Serbian Academy of Arts and Science published its infamous Memorandum which, for the first time since the formation of the second Yugoslavia in 1945, put forward an openly Serbian nationalist agenda.

The Albanian population of Kosova was presented as a threat to the Serb nation and Kosova became the centre of the most strident Serbian nationalists. At various times extreme right-wingers such as Seselj and Arkan have represented Serb constituencies in Kosova.

Slobodan Milosevic rose to power on this virulent anti-Albanian Serbian chauvinism expressed by the Academy. The main difference was that the Academy attempted to cover its views with some intellectual fig-



leaves: Milosevic expressed his hatred of Albanians in more crude language.

Kosova was central to the whole Milosevic project, which was to end the federal structure of Titoist Yugoslavia and replace it with a more centralised state - a state dominated by Serbia.

## Autonomous

Up until 1989 Kosova was an autonomous province, though nominally part of Serbia. In practice it enjoyed virtually all the rights of a Yugoslav republic other than the name. In 1989 all that changed.

Despite a lengthy struggle by Kosova's miners, who occupied their pits, the Kosova Assembly accepted incorporation of Kosova into Serbia and abolition of its autonomous status. Since the

Assembly was surrounded by Yugoslav Army tanks this was hardly a free vote.

Earlier in 1989 Milosevic staged a massive rally in Pristina, capital of Kosova, at which he declared 'No-one will ever again beat the Serbs'. Milosevic was surrounded by leading figures from the Serb Orthodox church and no-one at Pristina could be in any doubt that he was preparing to give full support to a Serbian nationalist project that would destroy the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Kosova was the first step to the wars in Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia.

Of course Kosova is a vital part

of Serbian nationalist mythology. The rally in Pristina was to mark the 600th anniversary of the defeat of the Serbian empire by the Ottoman empire at the Field of Blackbirds. While it is perhaps a strange sort of nationalism that glorifies military defeats (though some similarities can be found in other nationalisms, not least Irish) Kosova clearly has a significance for Serbs that cannot be simply wished away. Any solution in Kosova has to take that into account.

At the same time there is the problem of the division of the Albanian nation which has never been united in a single state. It remains divided between Albania, Macedonia, Greece and Kosova. In Macedonia there have been attacks on demonstrations opposing Serbian repression in Kosova while in Greece Albanians are being blamed for a rising crime rate.

Or, more accurately, recent Albanian immigrants are being blamed - so far the indigenous Albanian population has largely escaped these allegations, but it is surely only a matter of time.

## Dayton failure

The current upsurge of Albanian opposition to Serbian rule in Kosova is a product of the failings of the Dayton peace process that was supposed to end conflict in the former Yugoslavia. Dayton could only work if Milosevic was given a key role. To some extent he has fulfilled this by allowing Karadzic to be pushed out of office in the so-called Serb Republic in Bosnia.

He has also faced a challenge from the far-right in Serbia itself. Seselj was only prevented from becoming President of Serbia by dubious electoral practices.

To head off this threat Milosevic has been forced to patch up his differences with Seselj and bring him into the cabinet.

For the Albanian population of Kosova, Dayton appeared to give carte blanche to Milosevic.

Their previous tactic of refusing to recognise the existence of the Serbian government - by running their own schools, hospitals, wel-

fare organisations etc - had both failed to move Milosevic or win international support. Hence the emergence of the Kosova Liberation Army and the adoption of more militant tactics.

While western governments and, to a lesser extent, Russia have criticised the brutalities of the Serbian army and police in Kosova and denounced massacres of civilians they have no solution to offer. They may criticise Milosevic but they still need him to implement Dayton.

Moreover, by refusing to support the right of the Albanian majority to secede they accept, however unwillingly, that Kosova is a purely internal matter for the Serbian government. Allegations of hypocrisy by various Serbian officials against Britain for its claim that repression of Republicans in the North of Ireland is a 'purely internal matter' are not without foundation.

Clearly there is no easy solution in Kosova: for both Serbs and Albanians Kosova has such importance that neither view can be easily reconciled - any more than one can reconcile the views of Republicans and Unionists in Ireland. Ultimately, however glib it may sound, the only solution is Socialism, in which the national rights of all the different nationalities in the Balkans can be respected within a common framework.

## Take sides

Unfortunately such a solution does not appear to be on the immediate agenda. In Kosova therefore, just as in Ireland, socialists have to take sides.

We support the right of the Albanian majority to secede and form their own state or to become part of the existing Albanian state if they so wish - but we also defend the rights of all non-Albanian minorities in any state that emerged.

Of course secession or becoming part of Albania would not solve the problems of the working class in Kosova - or anywhere else in the Balkans (or the world) for that matter. Only socialist revolution can start to do that. But to refuse to support the right of the Albanian majority to secede in the name of some abstract concept of socialism or working class unity is criminal sectarianism.

To refuse to support the right of the Albanian majority to secede ... is criminal sectarianism

## News from the Fourth International

### Left coalition wins seats in Amsterdam elections

A coalition of Greens, the SAP (Dutch section of the Fourth International) and a number of independents have just won three seats (with 14,800 votes) in Amsterdam's municipal elections. One of those elected was a member of the SAP.

The coalition campaigned on a programme opposed to the big infrastructure projects in the city, against the privatisation of public transport, for a shorter working week without loss of pay and for an increase in the minimum wage.

The coalition consists of a broad range of activists from environmental campaigns, trade unionists involved in the recent dock strike, organisers of last year's European Counter-

Summit anti-racist and others.

Overall there are now 13 of the 45 seats to the left of the Social Democrats, and potentially a new alignment in the overall control.

### Danish Election results

On March 11 Danes re-elected the centre-left government of Social Democrats and Social Liberals, despite opinion polls and political commentators predicting a victory for the right and their policies of austerity and tax cuts. In the end the Government's vote actually increased slightly, with the traditional right wing parties losing 11 seats.

The government and the left opposition parties successfully confronted the right's auster-

ity and tax-cutting proposals by focusing on the defence of social rights, despite the outgoing Social Democratic government's record in removing taxes on capital and reducing unemployment benefit for youth.

The Red-Green Alliance was formed in 1994 by the SAP (Danish section of the Fourth International) and a number of other organisations. Their vote fell slightly, as many people voted for mainstream parties to oppose the right, though they have maintained much of their base of support.

The election campaign was a success for the Alliance, with more people active than ever before, including many young people. During the 2 1/2 week election campaign the Alliance signed up about 200 new members.

### Secret Service Infiltrates Danish Section

During the recent Danish elections a former intelligence agent admitted in a national television documentary that the intelligence services

had infiltrated the Socialist Workers Party (SAP) to monitor the activities of its militants.

Their activity included copying the 20,000 signatures the SAP collected in order to stand for elections and spying on trade unionists and activists in international solidarity campaigns.

They seemed particularly interested in the work of the SAP as part of the Fourth International.

SAP militants have pointed out that they always assumed the state was watching them. However as the revelations have caused widespread discussion on these issues, they have been able to use them to explain more about how the state works.

Since the documentary it has also been revealed that the intelligence service knew of a fascist plot to attack members of the International Socialists (sister organisation of the British SWP).

The intelligence service never informed the IS of the plot and two months later, the secretary of the IS was killed in a bomb attack which remains unsolved.

The SAP is demanding a public inquiry into the role of the intelligence service.





# Ontario's student occupations

**Elkie Dee**

A WAVE of student activism in Ontario, Canada, focused on tuition increases linked to cuts on campus. In January 1995 and February 1996, tens of thousands of students mobilised for shutdowns and marches. In 1996-97, smaller numbers at various campuses occupied key sites to protest against tuition fee rises and spending cuts.

At Guelph, students occupied the President's office, sat in at the University Centre, and shut down a Board of Governors meeting.

The university management responded by bringing charges against 37 individuals, in an outrageous attack on students' right to protest, intended to set a precedent in stifling campus dissent not seen in Ontario since the early 1970s.

*When Campus Resists: The Politics of Space, Power, and the Culture of Resistance in the Guelph Occupation* is a collection of documents and analyses of these struggles in Ontario, a "how-to" guide for those planning occupations, and a propaganda tool for the defence campaign for the Guelph students, raising money and awareness.

This book gives the real flavour of occupation, from great images of the University President yelling through his office door to reflections on stir-craziness. It claims "this move towards occupations, a political response to the perceived inef-

fectiveness of previous protests, thus marks an increase in the intensity of student resistance".

There is another reading of this. In 1997 the gap between the more militant student activists and many others on campus who hated tuition hikes and cuts was much wider than in January 1995 or February 1996.

The more isolated activists were actually more radical than before, while the rest did not feel it was possible to fight and win. The radicals had no confidence that it was possible to mobilise greater numbers of students.

Students at Windsor, Ontario, in 1996, invented chants and designed posters about issues ranging from future shitty employment in Macjobs to underfunding for fine arts. They thought about the world and their own activity in new ways.

Then, sadly, it ended. We need to figure out why these protests ended so suddenly with such a limited residue of radicalisation.

Students are pissed off by changes on campus. They know the job market upon graduation sucks. This can lead to radicalisation, or to narrow horizons and a competitive attitude, combined with acceptance that cuts, tuition hikes and the corporate agenda are inevitable.

The book suggests that the central dynamic in student

protest should be to expose and challenge the power relations in education. The goals are student power and education for freedom.

But power relations in education are not simply produced on campus. The capitalist education system's goal is training for relations in the workplace and society. Potential workers are conditioned to show up on time and accept authority. Women and men learn gender roles, while people from different ethnic backgrounds are assimilated or marginalised.

We are currently seeing a real shift in capitalist education priorities, to fit the neo-liberal corporate agenda. Employers believe that the schools, colleges, and universities are pumping out too many graduates with high expectations who don't take well to the low-wage, part-time, or temporary jobs that are out there for younger people.

Students know this. They are concerned about the relationship between university and the rest of their lives (jobs, debt, etc).

The student movement needs to transform this knowledge into an activist movement that builds solidarity with workers and others fighting the corporate agenda, a student-worker alliance.

Adapted from a book review in *New Socialist* magazine.

*When Campus Resists* is a "how-to" guide for those planning occupations

# The Butcher is coming

**Veronica Fagan**

HE'S BROKEN loads of UN resolutions. He has murdered hundreds of thousands of people. He has invaded neighbouring countries and is armed to the teeth.

He is General Suharto, the butcher of Jakarta, the dictator of Indonesia for the last 33 years.

So is the UK about to declare war on him? No - in fact, he's coming to Britain in April for the Asia European Summit Meeting (ASEM), which will focus on trade and investment.

It is doubtful if humanitarian matters will be on the agenda.

Suharto is responsible for:

- \* the deaths of up to a million members and sympathisers of the PKI (the Indonesian Communist Party) in a state-sponsored massacre, after he came to power through a military coup in 1965;
- \* the deaths of 200,000 East Timorese, a third of the population, after the Indonesian invasion of East Timor in 1975;
- \* 150,000 deaths in West Papua (New Guinea) following the Indonesian invasion in 1963;
- \* imprisoning thousands without trial for political and religious beliefs;
- \* logging and mining huge tracts of tropical rainforest
- \* lining his own and his relatives' pockets with the proceeds.

All is not rosy for him, though. Commentators describe the current Indonesian situation as "one of political, social and economic freefall".

The rupiah is less than a quarter of its value a year ago. Bankruptcy affects 90 per cent of



Indonesian companies, leaving tens of millions out of work. There is widespread unrest, with food riots in East Java and daily demonstrations in Jakarta.

What's the difference between Saddam Hussein and Suharto for Britain?

Simple - Indonesia is one of the main markets for British arms exports.

Although Suharto's future is uncertain, the Indonesian military, thoroughly armed and trained by the UK, will maintain real power in Indonesia, with a major say in who runs the country.

● Contact 0171-739 2301 for news of actions etc

**Saturday April 4**

**Demonstrate near the QEII Centre where ASEM is taking place - assemble at Jubilee Gardens**

**18-19 April in Oxford**

**Ploughshares are holding Hammers & Spanners event. Call 0161-226 2996 for details.**

# Putting the fun into canvassing

EACH YEAR hundreds of young militants from across Europe and beyond gather for the Fourth International Youth Summer Camp, this year's camp will be in Denmark.

The camp offers a unique opportunity to meet socialists from other countries to discuss the similarities and differences of our struggles, to better equip ourselves for future struggles and equally as important - to have fun.

The theme of this year's camp is 'reclaim freedom'. The theme runs through the camp on a number of levels, from the content of discussions, workshops and forums, through to the

very organisation of the camp itself.

We see lesbian and gay liberation, feminism and black liberation as central aspects of the struggle for socialism. We will integrate aspects of all of these into the whole of the week, organising discussions on how young militants are fighting oppression across the continent, and how we can work together.

The development of a capitalist EU threatens to drive back the struggle for liberation, with the destruction of welfare rights and a concerted offensive from the ruling class. We aim to develop our understanding of how to deal with the banks,

the multi-nationals and the various governments in the context of the increasing integration of capitalist Europe.

Overall we will discuss our perspectives for bringing about revolutionary change in society, how we can link up across national boundaries,

across different social movements, the trade unions and the labour movement and create a dynamic mass movement

that can create the kind of society we want.

Whilst we are all working hard to make this an interesting and useful political camp, we will also make sure there is plenty of time to enjoy the social and cultural aspects of the camp, with a socialist cabaret, exhibitions, numerous sporting activities and parties throughout the week.

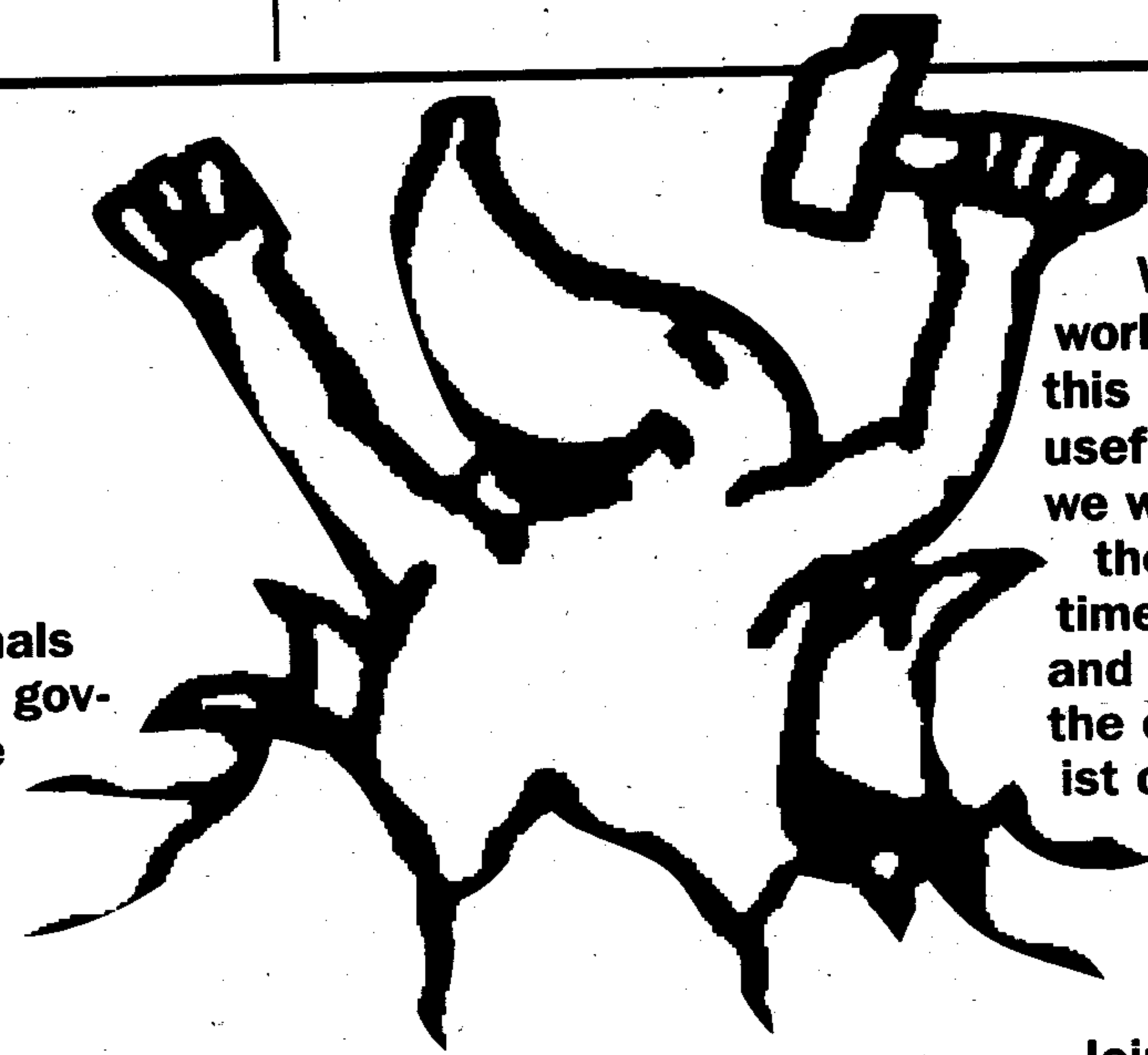
Join us in building the biggest delegation from Britain yet, and help us to create a socialist world, free from exploitation and oppression.

## Fourth International Youth Summer Camp Denmark, 25 - 31 July

IT WILL COST about £250 per person to get to the camp and to pay for registration and meals at the camp.

*Socialist Outlook* will be trying to raise money to help young people who want to go but can't afford it themselves. Contact us to get involved in fun fundraising with us. If you do want to come you should start saving now - send cheques made payable to 'Liberation' to the address below - it will make it much easier when it comes to July.

For more details contact **Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU**



## May Day greetings

SOCIALIST OUTLOOK sends the warmest May Day greetings and solidarity to the countless thousands of working people in struggle against exploitation and oppression in 1998.

The history of May Day as a landmark in the calendar of the working class movement is bound up with the campaign that grew in the final quarter of the last century for a restriction of working hours and a legal eight-hour day.

This led in the USA to the call by the trade unions for a strike on May 1 1886. The strong response to this – especially in Chicago – led to brutal repression, and a further demonstration in Haymarket Square, where a bomb was thrown, killing a policeman. Four union militants were subsequently hanged and others jailed, on frame-up charges.

In response, the newly formed Second International, in solidarity with the American unions, decided to designate May 1 1900 as an international workers' day, with simultaneous strikes and demonstrations "according to conditions prevailing in each country".

The tradition has been upheld by class fighters ever since, celebrating for at least one day a year continued support for values which Rosa Luxemburg summed up as "the 8-hour day, world peace and socialism."

In Britain, it is ironic that May Day 1997 ushered in a "Labour" government which has deliberately broken from these proud traditions. The fight for socialism continues



## Health campaigners raise the heat

**John Lister**

10,000 angry protestors took to the streets of the small Worcestershire town of Kidderminster on March 21 to oppose the threatened closure of their general hospital.

The turn-out was boosted by an energetic campaign headed by the local press, which had earlier attracted 66,000 signatures on a protest petition to Worcestershire Health Authority.

Just a few days earlier a massive turn-out of 1,300 opponents of the closure packed a Health Authority public meeting in Kidderminster.

Health Authority plans would close all but 30 of the local hospital's 300 beds, leaving what managers cynically describe as an "innovative ambulatory care centre" – in other words clinics dealing with only minor injuries and day surgery, with a handful of beds for frail elderly patients.

Those with more serious health problems would have to travel a minimum of 17 miles across poor roads to the nearest hospital.

With plans like this, and controversial schemes to "rationalise" services in Hertfordshire, Kent and Essex triggering massive opposition, the Labour government seems set on a collision course with defenders of the NHS.

Gordon Brown's feeble budget gesture, handing an "extra" £500m

to an NHS facing end of year debts in excess of £600m, falls far short of what is needed. Labour's first two years in office have so far yielded NHS cash increases below the average over 18 years of Tory rule.

With less cash, fewer beds, and fewer hospitals available, there is little scope for any magic solution to the crisis in the NHS created by Tory cuts – and worsened by Labour.

### Fighting health cuts – French style

**AN OUTBREAK of strikes and local protests is sweeping through hospital in France, as spending cuts, rationalisation and staff shortages lead to cuts in services.**

**There have been strikes affecting general and geriatric hospitals in Paris and in Clermont Ferrand, while hundreds of health workers have joined trade union-backed demonstrations against cuts in Thionville (Moselle) and Dinan.**

**In Moselle, thousands of voters took the opportunity to "write in" their support for local hospital services on their ballot papers in the local elections.**



## Eileen Gersh

**Eileen Gersh, a revolutionary and supporter of the Fourth International since it was founded in 1938, has died in London aged 85.**

Until recently an active supporter of *Socialist Outlook*, two years ago Eileen joined the small Workers International League. Despite this, she remained politically and personally close to our paper and supporters.

She remained alert and vigorous until December, when she was hospitalised after breaking her arm. Several complications, including a heart attack, meant that she never left the hospital.

Eileen's political life began as a student at Oxford University in the early 1930s, where she joined the Labour Club and read Marx. In an interview for *Socialist Outlook* in 1978, she recalled the arrival of a hunger march from Wales in 1934:

"We were drafted to help prepare meals for them, peel potatoes and things like that. We went out to meet the marchers and came in with them, shouting slogans. I was given a pail of water, a sponge and some rubbing alcohol to do their feet and treat their blisters!"

"I don't think they would have dreamt of asking men to peel potatoes – and they didn't ask any of us women to do the important organisational tasks. But women were quite prominent among the speakers we invited to the Labour Club: I remember listening to Dora Russell, Charlotte Haldane, Naomi Mitchison."

Eileen also took part in anti-fascist mobilisations, in Oxford and later in London, where she joined the Labour League of Youth (LLY). She met the early Trotskyists in London, Arthur Wimbush, Vic Carpenter and Reg Groves, and organised support for the Spanish Republicans in the Civil War.

In 1938, the year of the founding of the Fourth International, Eileen moved to the United States.

"We were not talking seriously about the Fourth International when I left Britain – everything seemed up in the air." But once in the United States, she went to see US Trotskyist leader James P Cannon.

"Cannon told me about the founding of the Socialist Workers' Party, coming out of the Socialist Party and about the founding of the Fourth International."

Eileen remained in the United States for forty-seven years, where she taught life sciences at university. But for a period during the war she more or less dropped out of political activity.

"I got married, had children and I did not go out of my way at this time to get involved politically. But then in the late forties I began to get involved in the anti-nuclear movement in Chicago which developed since the war."

"When my daughter was seventeen, she went to the University of Pennsylvania and met up with the Young Socialist Alliance [the youth organisation of the Socialist Workers Party]. She brought home *The Militant* for me to read. I recognised it, of course, and got in touch!"

### Vietnam

Eileen joined the SWP, working particularly with the Women's National Abortion Action Committee and the anti-Vietnam War movement.

But the SWP was in internal difficulties by this time. Along with many others, including most of the long standing cadres of the party, she was bureaucratically expelled in 1984.

"They instituted new practices for the SWP. They did everything they could to avoid debating with those who opposed them in the party, and then finally expelled us."

She fought unsuccessfully for

readmission, but following the death of her husband, she returned to England in 1985.

In England, too, supporters of the Fourth International were in turmoil at the time. Eileen worked with *Socialist Action* in London, but as a result of disputes with supporters of the American SWP, who were moving away from a revolutionary position, in 1988 she and many others left to join the other groups who had recently started to produce *Socialist Outlook*.

Eileen was an active member of the Labour Party in Hackney, and continued campaigning for abortion rights, international solidarity, and increasingly on environmental issues.

She became involved in local campaigns against the construction of further urban motorways, and used her scientific background to expose the health hazards – especially the rise in asthma – resulting from excessive road transport.

As a seller of *Socialist Outlook*, Eileen had few rivals. A small, frail looking woman, she would hold the paper proudly above her head, and patiently explain the arguments and positions in it.

She was always measured and mild in her tone, but there was nothing wishy-washy about her politics. However, she remained confident that reasoned argument would prevail over hostile denunciations.

*Socialist Outlook* supporters were saddened when she left the Fourth International to join the Workers International League. We remained in contact with her, hoping that the relatively minor disagreements between us could be resolved. On essential issues, we were at one.

Eileen Gersh was a committed revolutionary and a warm and generous friend. Her life and activism were an inspiration to many. We share the sorrow of Eileen's comrades in the WIL, as well as their pride in having known and worked with her.

## SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

### Where we stand

IN THE NINETIES, millions of women and men have taken part in mobilisations against the evils of capitalism and the bureaucratic dictatorships. This reflects the fact that humanity face widening dangers. Ecological, military, social and economic devastation faces millions of people.

Many more people recognise the barbaric nature of capitalism. In a situation where the inability of the social democratic and communist parties to provide socialist solutions is becoming clearer, the task of creating new leaderships remains ahead.

**Socialist Outlook** is written and sold by socialists committed to this struggle. We are the British supporters of the world-wide marxist organisation, the Fourth International. We stand for the revolutionary transformation of society and a pluralist, socialist democracy world wide.

The overall goal which we pursue is the emancipation of all human beings from every form of exploitation, oppression, alienation and violence.

Socialism must be under the control of ordinary people, democratic, pluralist, multi-party, feminist ecologist, anti-militarist and internationalist. It must abolish wage slavery and national oppression.

The working class is the backbone of unity among all the exploited and oppressed. The working class and its allies must uncompromisingly fight against capitalism and for a clear programme of action in order to gradually acquire the experience and consciousness needed to defeat capitalism at the decisive moment of crisis.

The movements of women, lesbians and gay men, and black people to fight their particular forms of oppression make an essential contribution to the struggle for a different society. They are organised around the principle "None so fit to break the chains as those who wear them".

The whole working class needs to fully commit itself to these struggles. Furthermore we fight for a strategic alliance between workers and these organisations - an alliance which respects their legitimate autonomy.

By simultaneously building revolutionary organisations in each country and a revolutionary international, we aim to guide and encompass the global interests of the workers and oppressed. By building a united struggle against exploitation and oppression we aim to ensure the survival of the human race.

If you think this is worth fighting for, and you like what you read in *Socialist Outlook*, why not join us? Drop a line to the address on this page, and we'll be in touch.

## Hard lessons still to be learnt

CHARLIE Van Gelderen says in his review of Bill Hunter's book *Lifelong Apprenticeship: The Life and Times of a Revolutionary*, "because of his long and active participation in the movement, this (book) is almost a short history of British Trotskyism, its triumphs and failures." (SO No 13). The review begins, but does not continue, in a promising way.

One of the points Van Gelderen ignores is the important question of the Fourth International and the Italian revolutionary situation at the end of the 2nd World War. There was a revolutionary upsurge in Italy; "The problems which Trotsky had been trying to answer were posed immediately before the leaders of the Fourth International". Hunter.

However, the points, which Goldman and Morrow (that Hunter quotes) raised about how the transitional programme was to be developed in relation to facing tasks of leadership in Italy were answered with generalisations.

Van Gelderen was in Italy during the war with the British army and worked with US comrades and others to help re-establish contacts with revolutionaries and to develop the Fourth International, so he must have some thoughts on this central question.

Van Gelderen agrees that 'British exceptionalism' is an important question for the Trotskyist movement in Britain, that is the refusal to carry through the International struggle of Trotsky above purely national considerations. However, his review gives a different meaning to that which Hunter was dis-

cussing.

Perhaps because of this Van Gelderen mis-informs the reader, "It is a pity that Bill did not perceive that this weakness in the Workers International League's (WIL) refusal to participate in the unification which preceded the Founding conference of the Fourth International in 1938."

Charlie ignores Chapter 5 of Hunter's book - called the "Formation of the WIL" yet this deals with this question and in fact takes up those who said that the WIL should not be called anti-internationalist.

Bill Hunter quotes from Rae Hunter's notes in the chapter: "The Fourth International conference condemned the split and the non-attendance of the WIL as "anti-internationalism". ... The split was not on political differences but on a subjective basis of personal attacks that had been made on Ralph Lee (which were unfounded)...."

"In fact, international relations and the first Congress of the Fourth International assumed less importance than the relations between the WIL and the leaders of the Revolutionary Socialist League. Therein lies the anti-internationalism of the split of 1938."

Because of space, I cannot give all the details but the chapter should be read - although it seems Van Gelderen did not do so. It appears the reviewer is trying to make Bill out as a follower of anti-internationalism because he does not write from Charlie's particular view of what internationalism means, he does so by ignoring large chunks of the book.

He says "Pabloism was not born with the *Rise and Decline of*



## Writeback

We welcome readers' letters on any topic. Letters over 400 words may be cut for space reasons.

Write to **Socialist Outlook**, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU.

email: [outlook@gn.apc.org](mailto:outlook@gn.apc.org)

*Stalinism*, which was written in 1953", implying that this is what Hunter says. Actually, Hunter says that Pablo and Mandel changed their position around 1948-50.

It is also interesting that he makes no comment on the observation in the book that Mandel boasted, at the time, of drafting the above named document. This information is all in the same chapter.

I do not agree with his assessment of Pablo and he ignores Mandel's close support for Pablo which is shown in the book. He just implies that Mandel carried the struggle forward for the Fourth International and therefore helps to prevent a critical re-examination of more than just Mandel.

The question to answer is why the reviewer does give such a one-sided interpretation of the book, and of history. This way of writing history and reviews is something Hunter shows he is strongly opposed to.

Martin Ralph

## WHAT'S ON

### April

#### SATURDAY 4

PICKET President Suharto. Protest against Indonesia's dictator on his visit to Britain. Assemble 11 a.m. Jubilee Gardens, London. Called by the Campaign Against the Arms Trade and others.

#### WEDNESDAY 8

SOLIDARITY with the Hillingdon Hospital strikers. Protest outside Granada (Pall Mall's new boss) 12 noon-2 p.m. Golden Lane, off Piccadilly, Central London.

#### SATURDAY 18/SUNDAY 19

EUROPEAN Marches Coordinating meeting, Brussels. Details from Andy: 01642 242 413.

#### SATURDAY 18

MANCHESTER Coalition Against War in the Gulf Conference against sanctions in Iraq. 1 p.m.-5 p.m. Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street (near Albert Square) Manchester. Sponsors include Greater Manchester FBV, City College of Manchester NUS and Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance.

Meeting to elect officers and a central campaign organising committee for the anti-trade union laws campaign. Open to delegates from trade union bodies which supported the Reclaim our Rights conference or the Free Trade Unions campaign. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.

#### WEDNESDAY 29

NATIONAL Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns lobby of Parliament 1.30 p.m. Public meeting 3.30 p.m.

#### THURSDAY 30

RAIL UNIONS rally and lobby of parliament against

privatisation of London Underground from 2 p.m., Central Hall Westminster

### May

#### FRIDAY 1

LONDON MAY DAY march. Assemble 12 noon Highbury Fields for march to Clerkenwell Green. Speakers include Rita Donaghy (President, UNISON), John Edmonds (General Secretary GMB), Jimmy Knapp (General Secretary RMT), a representative of the French CGT and from the Turkish and Kurdish communities.

#### SATURDAY 2

BIRMINGHAM May Day demonstration 'No to Benefit Cuts, Defend the Welfare State', Assemble 10.30 a.m. Chamberlain Square, rally 1 p.m. Trade Union club.

INTERNATIONAL Evening for May Day, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Music and dance from around the world.

#### WEDNESDAY 6

LOBBY of TUC Special Congress 9am onwards, Central Hall Westminster. Called by the Free Trade Unions Campaign.

#### SATURDAY 16

GREATER Manchester Socialist Alliance Annual General meeting.

#### SATURDAY 30

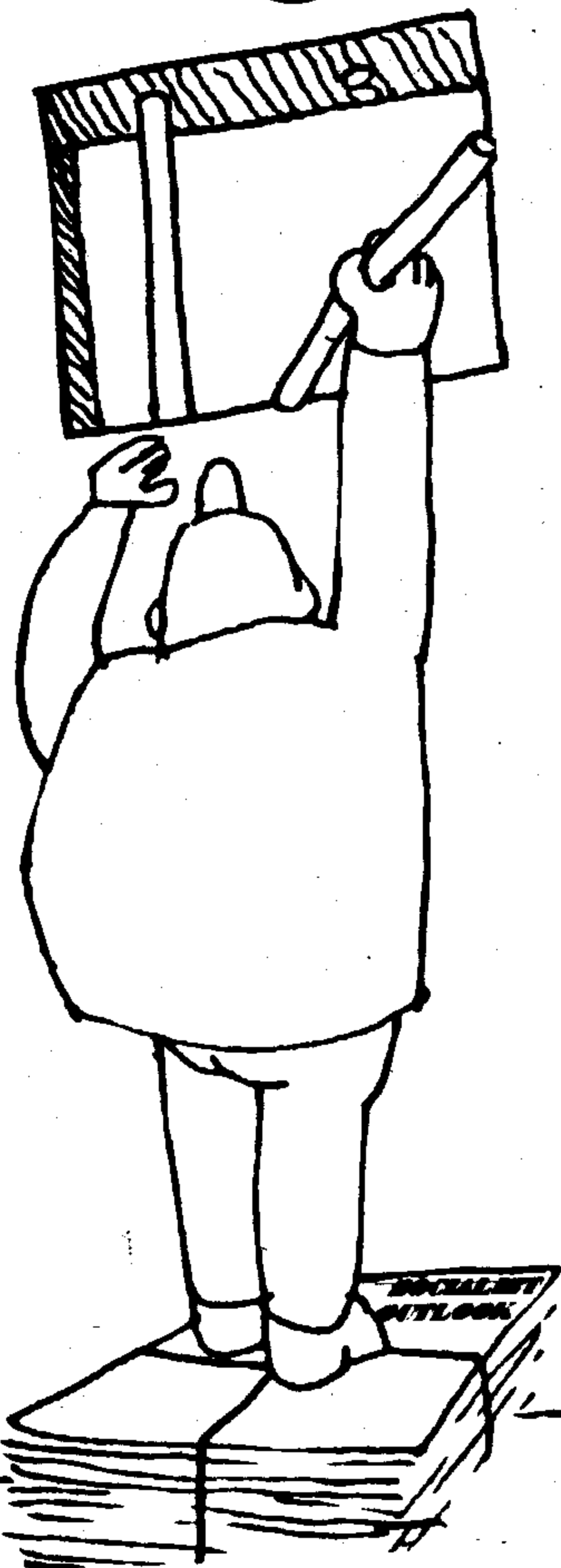
SOCIAL JUSTICE demonstration, London, supported by the Liverpool dockers.

### June

#### SATURDAY 13

INTERNATIONAL Demonstration at the Cardiff EU Summit. Assemble 1.30 p.m.

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# Socialist Outlook

## May 7 ballot test for Labour

NEXT MONTH's local government elections will be the first major test at the polls of Blair's New Labour Party since its triumphant victory just one year ago. It seems certain that they will not repeat the overwhelming successes of the General Election.

Local government elections are rarely kind to government's of course and the anti-Tory factor that was so important last year will not operate in the same way. But there are other factors too.

Millions voted for Blair in the belief that he would deliver them from the Tory nightmare but instead the same policies have been followed.

This has had its impact locally as well as nationally as local councils have continued to slash public spending, squeezed between lack of central government funding and their own unwillingness to mount a political fight. At the same time most have continued to levy high levels of council tax, rents and other charges.

Across England we are likely to see a rise in the Tory and Liberal Democrat vote, while in Scotland the SNP are likely to do much better than last year. With the Scottish Assembly achieved, voters north of the border are determined to make clear that they are not content.

In one area of England there is another crucial issue at stake on May 7. In London there will be a referendum on regional government - with a massive and poisonous sting in its tail.

The dismantling of the GLC was one of the most unpopular acts of

### London: why we say 'NO'

Thatcher for voters in the capital. But Blair is determined that there will be no restoration of democracy for Londoners.

Instead after a sham consultation period London's voters are presented with a take it or leave it package of a presidential type mayor and a weak assembly of 25 members with no real power.

All real decisions will be made by the mayor, the assembly will just rubber stamp them. Nor will there be any power to levy finance to deal with the desperate problems the city faces. This is no way to reverse the years of Tory decline.

Voices that have called for a different model of government have been ignored. The London Labour Party Special Conference on this issue was not even allowed to vote because it was clear that it would oppose the leadership's plans.

Labour's sick slogan for the referendum is "Let's get London moving", but their package will do nothing of the sort.



Labour councils, since before Labour was in government, have established a wretched record of attacking jobs and services - and could pay the price on May 7.

Given all this, *Socialist Outlook* adds its voice to those in the labour movement who are calling for a 'no' vote in the referendum.

A sizeable 'No' will be the best basis for the campaign that will need to be mounted after May 7 to achieve real democracy and effective control for the people of London.

It is also the best way to make it more difficult for Blair to carry through his other plans for local government reform, which include the introduction of powerful mayors into other major cities.

**Vote No in London on May 7 - and fight for real democracy.**