

# Socialist DOWNLOOK

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After April 10 show of strength, unions must  
mount fight against low pay

# GET TOUGH

# with

March for a Living Wage

**APRIL 10, 1999**

Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Supported by TUC, UNISON, BIFU, FBU,  
GPMU, NATFHE, NUJ, NUS, UCATT and others

# SKINFLINT

# BOSSSES!



Andrew Ward

APRIL 1 is the first day of Labour's new minimum wage, of £3.60 an hour.

But as employers groan about paying even this pitiful rate to adult employees (and just £3 for young workers), ministers are already giving them a nod and a wink that firms which break the new law may get away with it.

Stephen Byers, Peter Mandelson's successor as Trade and Industry secretary, has promised that the legislation will be enforced with a "light touch".

What does this mean?

The clear implication is that instead of using the weight of the state machine to ensure that tight-fisted employers pay up, more subtle methods may be used to cajole

them and persuade them – or nothing at all may be done unless the workers involved are brave enough and sufficiently organised to take the case to court.

It's no coincidence that the same Stephen Byers also argues that creating wealth (for the employers) is more important than distributing it (to the workers and those who need state benefits).

With ministers like this in charge, it is clear that even the legislation of a minimum wage will not be enough. Unions will have to organise low-paid workers and fight for their rights.

But £3.60 is not a living wage. Three years ago the trade unions were demanding £4.26 as a bottom-line figure, and even

then it was clear that it is not enough to guarantee a decent standard of living at the turn of a new century.

Far from settling for the £3.60 figure, low-paid workers need to organise, campaign and fight for more. The trade unions who have given support to the April 10 demonstration for a living wage – but done little or nothing on the ground to build big delegations to march – must be called to order. Other unions have shown even less commitment.

Just as the minimum wage is a scaled-down version of what the unions demanded, so the Fairness at Work legislation, diluted though it is, will give trade unions increased scope to organise and

negotiate for improved pay and conditions. These opportunities, after 15 years of defeats and retreats by the trade unions, must be grabbed with both hands.

Here is a real chance to step up the fight for a living wage, relying on the anger and strength in the workplace, not on Blair, Byers and other feeble advocates of "partnership" with low-paying bosses.

There is no doubt that April 10 will be a major show of strength by UNISON and by the forces on the left committed to fight low pay. It will be in the weeks and months after this set-piece of rhetoric that we will be able to judge how serious the union leaders really are about pressing home the fight for a decent living wage for all.



# Skychefs strikers fight on for justice

**Adam Hartman**

Over 1,000 people marched through Southall in West London on February 20 in a resounding show of labour movement and community support for the 300 LSG Lufthansa Skychefs workers sacked on November 20 for taking part in a one-day official strike.

The march was joined by workers campaigning for union recognition at Rosti plastics factory in Wembley.

The march was addressed by TUC leader John Monks, TGWU chief Bill Morris and high-ranking officials in the regional labour movement, promising their full backing for the strikers in what they see as a landmark battle for human rights at work.

Under the proposals outlined in the government's Fairness at Work bill, which promise protection

from dismissal in the first eight weeks of official strike action, the sackings would have been illegal.

Whilst their high-profile support for the strike is very welcome, Monks and Morris are pursuing a flawed strategy which is leading the strike towards defeat.

They are insisting on compliance with the anti-union laws which curb picketing and outlaw solidarity action. The laws impose a deadly straightjacket on the union in the dispute because they forbid it using its trump card - the power of mass solidarity action by TGWU members at Heathrow Airport.

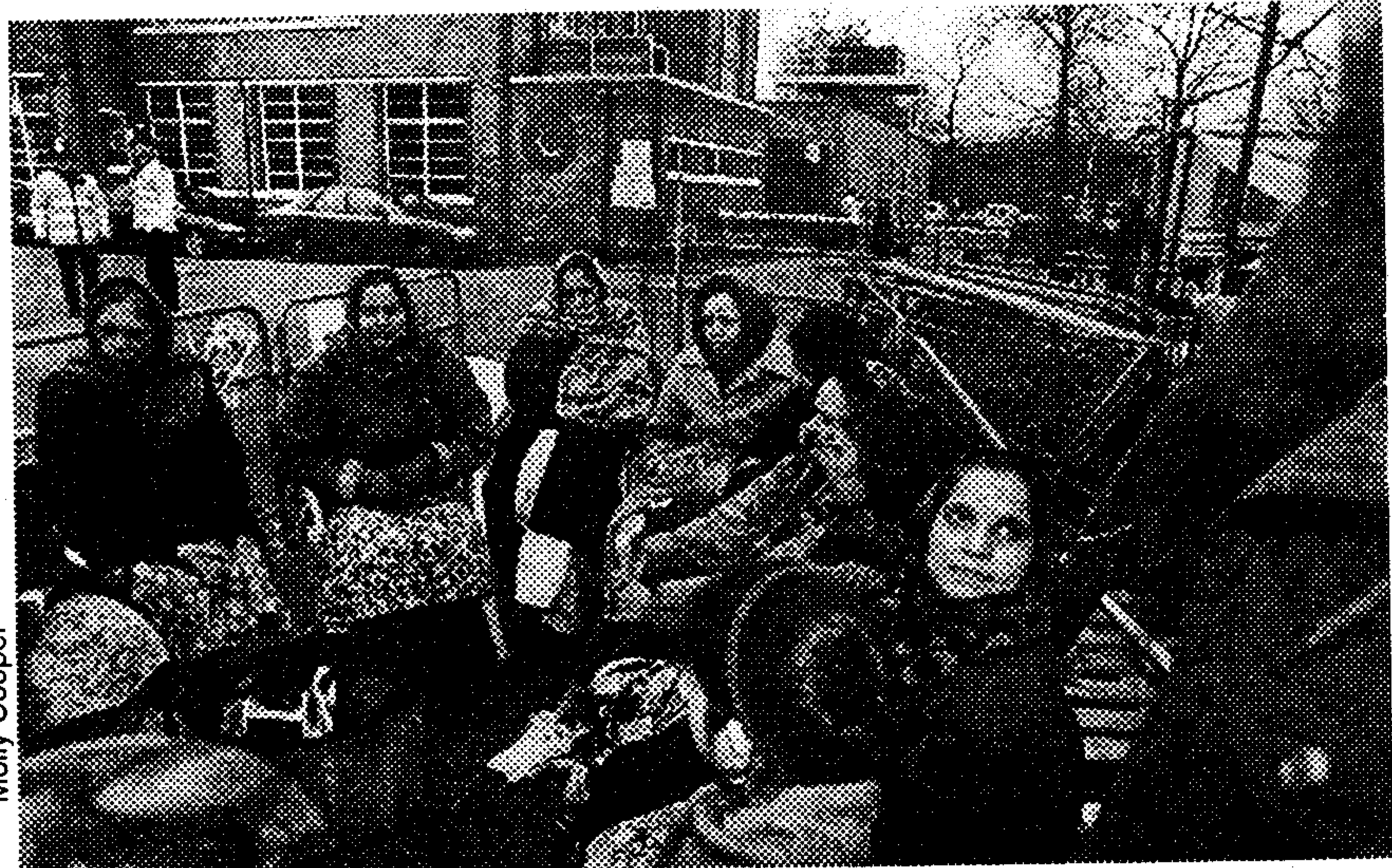
Of course there is no guarantee that the strikers would win if they defy the law. Nor is victory ruled out if they comply with the law. It is mass support - whether legal or otherwise - which is the key to victory.

But there is no doubt that the law gives the employers the upper hand. As long as they can keep production going, they have the resources to sit out lengthy disputes whilst strikers are increasingly hard-pressed. We should not hold ourselves in thrall to unjust laws which are clearly designed to empower the bosses and shackle the unions.

Monks and Morris believe that LSG Lufthansa Skychefs is a "bad employer" that can be made to mend its ways through pressure and appeals to "enlightened self-interest".

Their strategy is to mobilise public and union pressure, particularly at an international level, on its parent company Lufthansa and its customers amongst the big airlines (including Quantas, Iberia, Air France and American Airlines) to in turn put pressure on it to reinstate the strikers or face losing their custom. This is fine as part of a wider strategy including solidarity action, but is inadequate on its own.

This strategy is underpinned by



Women strikers from Skychef on the picket line

the ideology of partnership, both with the employers and the Labour government.

But LSG Lufthansa Skychefs is not a "bad" employer. It is simply doing what is necessary to stay ahead in the highly-competitive airline catering industry and retain its value to Lufthansa as a profitable subsidiary.

This means adopting new work practices to cut costs, and removing union members if they stand in the way. The airlines themselves benefit from competition between their catering suppliers to cut jobs, attack conditions of employment, and weaken the unions.

The outcome of the dispute is of strategic importance to the TGWU. Heathrow Airport is a bastion of TGWU strength. A failure of the TGWU to defend its

members at Skychefs will send a signal to employers at the airport that the union is weak, and that they can step up attacks on their workers.

Conversely a victory will increase the confidence of workers at the airport and be a massive incentive for non-members, especially young people, to join.

■ A support group has been set up: ring 0181-558 6612 for information on forthcoming activities.

■ Visiting the 24 hour picket line, and send donations payable to "TGWU" and marked "Sky Chef" on the back to: Regional Secretary, TGWU, 218 Green Lanes, London N4 2HB.

■ Ring the TGWU Heathrow Office on 0181-573 9494 for standing order mandates and dispute leaflets.

## Left gains new strength in RMT

**Susan Moore**

AS VOTING in the elections in the RMT for both General Secretary and one of the Assistant General Secretary positions continues, it is clear that incumbent General Secretary Jimmy Knapp has been more than a little shaken by the strength of the campaign in support of left candidates Pat Sikorski (for AGS) and Greg Tucker (for GS).

Knapp's own incompetence has been highlighted by serious errors in the AGS ballot. Though the election is run on a Single Transferable Vote, the ballot paper implies that people only have one vote.

Calls have been made for the election to be re-run and this is the most likely outcome. This embarrassment comes hot on the heels of a similar disaster - last December an election for an executive member had to be re-run after one candidate's election statement was "lost".

Over the last weeks there has been a flurry of coverage of the elections in the national media, aimed at red baiting the two challengers. In general this is likely to act in favour of the left; a vote for them can't be wasted if they are worrying their oppo-

nents so much.

When the *Evening Standard* implies that the bosses of privatised rail companies are very worried that Tucker could be elected, this is likely to motivate members to go out and vote for him.

Even if they didn't say it, LUL would be less than enthusiastic about a Pat Sikorski victory, given the sterling role he is playing in the fight against privatisation. As we go to press, it is expected that two more days of strike action will be called for March 17-18.

One story that does need replying to is the allegation, made in the *Sunday Times* on February 28th and repeated elsewhere that behind the candidatures is a plot to make Arthur Scargill head of the RMT.

Crazy you say? But the story refers not only to minutes of an RMT executive meeting, but also a comment from Downing Street (so it must be true, mustn't it...).

What the press don't tell you is that the proposal that they have dressed up in this way; that is a proposal for merger talks between the RMT, UCATT and NUM had no real resonance among RMT activists when it was made in 1996, and has been dead in the water ever since. So much for objective journalism.

The confidence of the left has been strengthened by this campaign as the candidates have spoken at meetings across the country, as they have received support from branches and individuals they might not have been counting on.

This unity and enthusiasm will need to be built on if RMT members are to resist the constant attacks from their employers.

## Student militancy on the rise?

**Mark Jansen**

OVER THE PAST two decades the National Union of Students have overseen a massive attack on the living conditions of students in Higher Education with the introduction of student grants combined with the erosion and eventual abolition of student grants.

At the same time there has been an enormous increase in the student population that has been nowhere near matched by resources available to universities.

Now even the NUS has recognised that students under Tony Blair's penny-pinching regime are worse off than they were five years ago under the Tories.

In 1994, David Blunkett in opposition derided the levels of student poverty as a "badge of shame" for the Tories.

He is now wearing the same badge, leaving many students to wonder which party really won a landslide victory in 1997.

Throughout this period Labour Students have maintained a tight control on the leadership of NUS, as they have steered it on a course of passivity and acceptance. Outrageously, they even proposed the introduction of fees, long before it was even Labour policy.

This has forced up the level of debt for undergraduates - and the latest leaked figures show that it is also deterring more students from applying for university places.

Applications for places in September 1999 - the first year without any form of grant - are almost 4 percent down on the same time last year.

Figures from the UCAS clearing



1991: the warnings have been vindicated as fewer apply

house also confirm that students from the more deprived social backgrounds are now even less likely to apply for a place, leaving Universities as the preserve of children of the well-to-do.

Up until now NUS leaders have managed to get away with this, many of them being later rewarded for their services by becoming MPs. But are Labour Students now beginning to lose their grip?

### Disaffiliate

Recently the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST) decided to disaffiliate from NUS, taking the view that their affiliation fees were wasted on a union that refuses to fight for the interest of students.

Whilst the strategy of disaffiliation may not be the best way forward, it represents a much wider disaffection with the NUS leadership felt throughout the country.

Over the last month students at the University of East London and Goldsmiths College have rejected NUS strategy, adopting a much

more militant stance, and have won at least partial victories.

Students at the University of East London occupied the main administration building at the Barking site for over two weeks last May, opposing massive cuts being proposed.

In the middle of last month around 100 students went into occupation again at their smaller Greengate site in Plaistow, to oppose cuts and demand better equipment, and permanent contracts for staff, whose contracts had not been renewed. Within a few days the university had granted

most of the students demands.

At Goldsmiths college 8 students were expelled for refusing to pay their fees, as part of a non-payment campaign.

Around 300 students went into occupation to demand that the letters of termination be withdrawn, that no students be excluded due to their inability to pay, and that the Student Union be informed of any demands for fee payment sent out by the university. As we go to press the occupation has ended in what appears to be a complete victory.

These occupations have shown that, even as an isolated universities, militant action can win students' demands.

To win much broader goals students need such militant action coordinated across the country.

This means challenging the do-nothing policies of the NUS leadership and ultimately replacing Labour Students with a leadership that is prepared to organise such a fight.



Prescott's plans to privatise the Tube have helped win support for the left



# Labour's racist hypocrisy

**L**abour and Tory MP's were falling over themselves to declare their anti-racist credentials on the publication of the report from the Stephen Lawrence inquiry.

According to William Hague, the Conservatives have now become 'uncompromising in our desire to see racism rooted out in society' whilst Jack Straw has apparently been convinced about 'what it is like to be black or Asian in Britain'.

It's an outrage then, that none of this prevented either party from supporting the racist Asylum and Immigration Bill during its second reading.

At least under the Tory government there would be a handful of left MPs who consistently opposed any new racist legislation the government introduced.

Not one Labour MP voted against the Bill as it passed through the commons at the end of last month: in fact Jeremy Corbyn and Tony Benn were the only two Labour MPs even prepared to abstain.

The Asylum and Immigration Bill is a vicious attack on one of the most vulnerable groups in society.

Those fleeing repression and persecution will find themselves even more isolated than ever, sent to all parts of the country regardless of what support structures may exist, forced to live a humiliating existence on meagre food vouchers, which is expected to be the equivalent of around £30 per week.

Britain's racist institutions will be further buttressed with immigration officers being given police powers of search, entry into property and arrest.

There are a higher proportion of mem-

## EDITORIAL

bers of the NF and the BNP in the immigration service than in any other profession, and they are not even placed under the limited constraints that exist through the Police Complaints Authority.

Even marriage registrars will be given powers to question whether they consider a marriage to be "genuine" or not.

**W**ary that 'bogus refugees' may try to slip through the net to live a life of luxury on their £30 food vouchers, the government is proposing the establishment of a surveillance network that will link the computer systems of the Immigration Service, Registrars, the Benefits Agency and the Police.

Labour's proposal to deal with the growing number of asylum seekers—locked up in prison for no crime other than to have sought refuge in racist Britain—is to build more prisons. They will also restrict the right of asylum seekers to appeal against Home Office decisions.

Just to make sure that this attractive prospect doesn't leave Britain swamped with economic migrants, New Labour are also making a number of proposals to stop asylum seekers getting here in the first place.

These include new and increased penalties for those who transport people to Britain without documentation, increasing the number of airline liaison officers both here and abroad, and demanding cash down payments in return for visas.



The existence of Campfield and other detention centres for refugees shows that it's not just the police (or the Tories) who are institutionally racist. Now Labour plans more racist laws.

Contrary to the claims of both Labour and the Tories, tough immigration controls are not part of a strategy to fighting racism in Britain, but a central feature of Britain's institutional racism. Attacking the most vulnerable section of society will simply increase racism overall.

**T**he last few weeks have shown a number of things about the struggle against racism. When the Tories introduced the Immigration and Asylum Bill two years ago, virtually every major trade union at least gave its paper support in opposing the bill.

Now, with a Labour government proposing legislation that is even worse, much of that support has dwindled away. The

labour movement leadership as a whole is far less prepared to challenge Labour unless it feels under pressure from its rank and file to do something.

Secondly, whilst there is apparently a high tide of anti-racist consciousness, this has as yet been limited only to some aspects of racist Britain.

The anti racist movement must take the demands of refugees and asylum seekers as central demands of the movement as a whole.

The Bill is not likely to become law until next October. The only thing that may make Labour backtrack is if a mass movement demands that Labour drops this racist Bill, as well as campaigning for an end to all immigration controls.

**Not one Labour MP voted against the Asylum and Immigration Bill as it passed through the commons at the end of last month**

# Let's really tax the rich!

**T**HIS ISSUE of Socialist Outlook goes to press on the eve of Gordon Brown's third Budget speech, amid a welter of speculation over its content.

One area of policy on which he has made no secret of his ambition is child benefit, where he and top civil servants have been seeking a formula through which it could be taxed for those on top incomes. This might raise up to £450 million a year which could then be directed to more worthwhile causes. How could socialists object?

The first objection is that this issue is a gigantic smokescreen, designed to create the illusion of Brown as some kind of redistributive Chancellor, taking from the rich and giving to the poor. Nothing could be further from the case: his pledge not to increase from the low levels of taxation inherited from the Tories has already treated a further bonanza for those on top salaries, while squeezing the cash available for health, education, pensions, social security and council services.

Brown's approach is no different from that of Trade & Industry Secretary Stephen Byers, who claims that the main issue is no



longer to distribute wealth, but simply to create it—in the form of profitable capitalism.

The second point is that if Brown really did want to tax the rich, he should tax all of the rich, and not just well-paid people with children. The richest 50 people in Britain have combined wealth and income of £34 billion—far more than the total wealth of the poorest 5.5 million.

**B**eside this grotesque inequality the prospect of slapping a tax on a possible £14.40 per child per week for a handful of top earners is pitifully small beer.

The third point is that by seeking to tax child benefit for the

rich, Brown is undermining the concept of a universal benefit, and one of the principles underpinning the welfare state.

**A** benefit which is exclusively targeted at the lower income and less-influential families becomes ever more vulnerable to future erosion and attack.

We have seen this time and again over the years, not least with the cynical run-down in the value of the basic state pension, the miserable level and increasingly vicious strings attached to benefits for the unemployed, and the way in which local government social services have been subject to years of sustained cash pressure.

The recent Royal Commission on Long Term Care should remind us of the Tory success in shunting off long-term care of the elderly from the NHS (where it was free at point of use, funded from taxation) and social security (where all individuals were entitled to income support) to local government—where it has been subjected to means-tested charges.

The argument against scrapping these charges, like the argument for taxing child benefit for top earners, is that a handful of



wealthy families would potentially benefit, while the poorest pensioners would not automatically gain any extra help.

But the fact is that the separation of the wealthy from the poorest through means-testing serves to marginalise and impoverish the state provision, which has increasingly become a service only for those with no savings or income.

As long as the system continues to depend on means-testing the houses and savings of pensioners, attention is diverted from the need to raise more in general taxation to pump in enough resources to raise the standards of care for all elderly people.

The present government is so

reluctant to tax the rich that it seems unlikely to implement even the partial reform called for by the Royal Commission—and scrap the charges for "personal" care in long-stay nursing and residential homes.

**R**ather than tinkering about with a tax on a handful of rich parents, Brown could do much more by scrapping the ludicrous and reactionary ceiling on National Insurance contributions, which gives the top-paid a free ride at the expense of the poorest. This one step could raise an extra £3 billion a year—enough to scrap the current charges for continuing care of the elderly and halt the current round of cuts in social services.

And while he's at it, Brown could consider raising the ridiculously low level of employers' contribution to national insurance towards the levels paid by employers in other EU countries. This would raise billions more.

Unfortunately the one thing we can be sure about, as New Labour digs in and the demoralised Tory opposition further disintegrates, is that the last thing this government wishes to do is to tax the rich—and that means that the rest of us have to pay more, for less.



## Candidates chosen to fight elections

# May 6 day of reckoning for Scottish Socialists

May 6 will be a historic day for Scotland with the first ever elections for a Scottish Parliament and even the press South of the border have been paying some attention to Blair's concerns that he may not get everything his own way once the results are in.

Certainly socialists should be paying attention as political developments in Scotland are often more advanced than in the rest of this island. The fight against the poll tax, for example, introduced a year early in Scotland, was more militant than in England and Wales.

The debates in the lead up to the Referendum for the Scottish Parliament saw unprecedented co-operation between the left. This laid the basis for the formation of the Scottish Socialist Alliance and then the Scottish Socialist Party.

The outrageous decision to ban the name of the later, along with the Scottish Green Party, (see below) in forthcoming elections was taken by the new Registrar of Political Parties, who takes advice from a parliamentary committee dominated by New Labour MPs, apparently including Gwyneth Dunwoody and Gerald Kaufman.

With Labour under real pressure from the SNP, this is a blatant political decision aimed at damaging any challenge to the left. **CAMPBELL MCGREGOR** of Glasgow Kelvin Scottish Socialist Party branch reports:

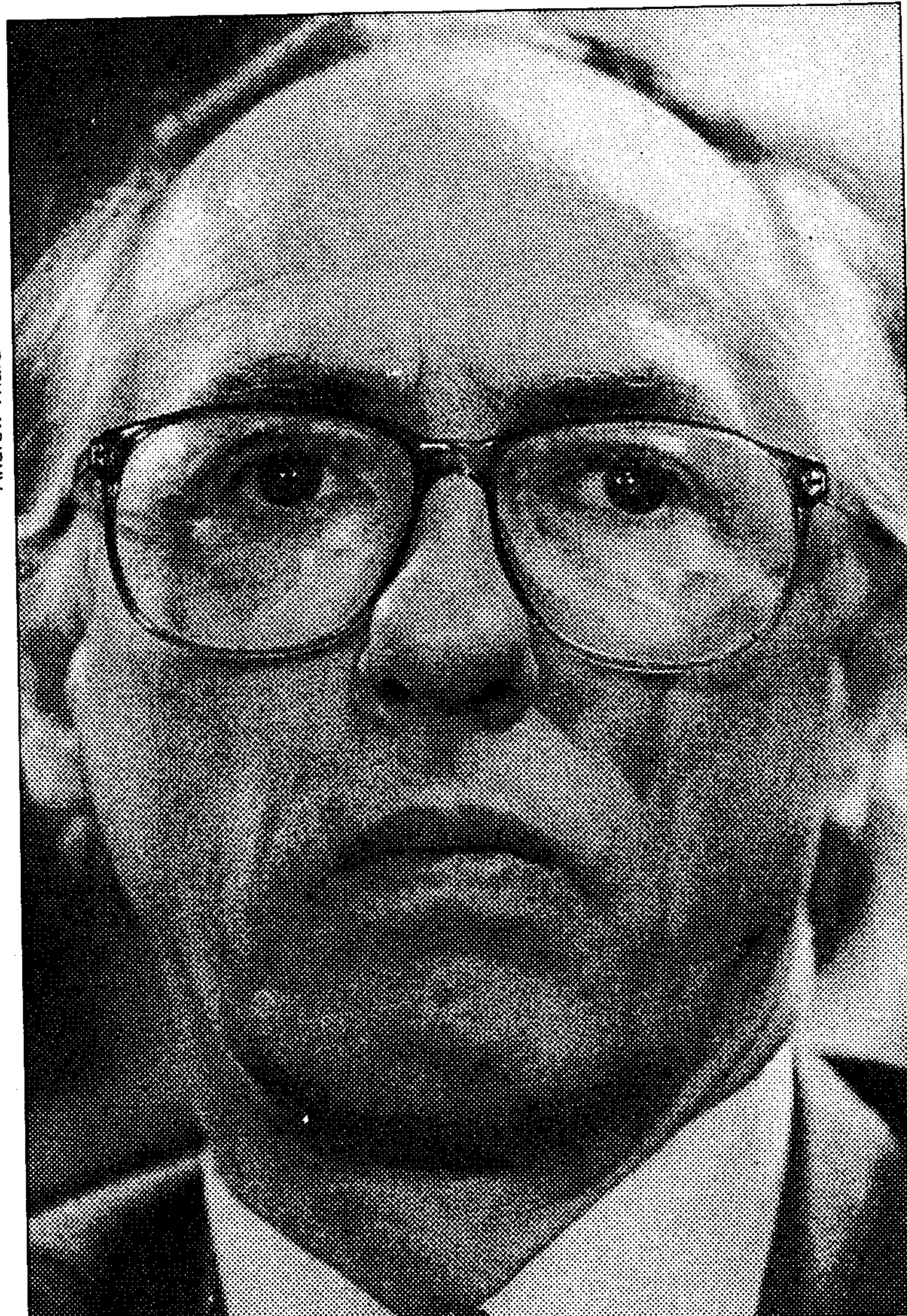
**O**ver 100 members attended the first conference of the Scottish Socialist Party on February 21 in Glasgow. The debate was lively but amicable. Conference adopted a 16 point political programme, based on support for an independent socialist Scotland.

In the forthcoming elections for the Scottish parliament, there is to be a two-tier system. One set of MPs will be elected under the old-fashioned first past the post system in constituencies with the old Westminster boundaries.

The other tier of seats is to be elected using the list form of proportional representation (PR) in eight seats, based on previous Euro-constituencies.

Conference decided to contest seats in these elections, taking place on May 6. The SSP's best chance of winning will be in Glasgow, where Tommy Sheridan will be the number one candidate, and where it needs to increase its vote by 75 per cent from the general election to win a seat.

Andrew Wigard



Labour's prospective Scottish Prime Minister Donald Dewar faces a stiff fight against the SNP to secure the largest number of Scottish MPs. Labour's cause has not been helped by blatant "control freakery", which has not succeeded in blocking the selection of a number of candidates viewed by Millbank as "off-message".

An electoral pact has been made with the SWP over the first-past-the-post constituency seats, and the SWP has decided not to contest the regional seats. Scargill's SLP seem determined to do their own thing, and agreement has not been reached here.

The SSP also decided to stand in the European elections on June 10, with Hugh Kerr, an MEP who has defected from the Labour Party, as number one candidate.

The SSP was formed out of the Scottish Socialist Alliance (SSA). All forces who were involved in the SSA have joined the SSP, and it has picked up a few defectors from the Labour Party (including two Glasgow city councillors) and the SNP. The Scottish Republican Socialist Party has also joined.

The SSP's largest component, the former Scottish Militant Labour, have survived recent difficulties better than their comrades in England.

They are, though, semi-detached from the rest of their international tendency, the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI). They have handed over much of their apparatus to the SSP (including the paper *Scottish Socialist Voice*), but have retained a Scottish organisation and identity of their own (including a journal in the name of the CWI).

Although it is understandable that much of the SSP's time has been taken up with prepar-

ing for elections, the SSP also needs to develop its intervention into the broader class struggle.

This has already included support for some industrial disputes involving Glasgow city council workers, and Kurdish solidarity work.

They also need to relate to developments in the Labour Party. Labour MP Dennis Canavan is intending to contest the Scottish elections as an independent.

The selection of Labour candidates for the Scottish elections has not gone well for the Blairites, with several victories for the ex-LCC "soft left".

The SSP remains rather diverse. For example, a recent day school on drugs revealed support for decriminalisation, but there were a few dissenters.

There are important differences on Europe. Although there is general agreement on opposing the Maastricht convergence criteria in their present form, a minority supports the single European currency and further European convergence, but on better terms.

The majority remains hostile to convergence. The SSP needs to make its mind up on this issue before the expected referendum on a single European currency.

### Model letter

## Allow the Scottish Socialist party and the Scottish Green party to register to contest elections!

We are dismayed by your decision to refuse registration to the above parties. We strongly urge you to reconsider your decision and allow both these parties to register.

One does not have to politically support the Scottish Socialist Party or the Scottish Green Party to recognise their democratic right to stand in elections for the following reasons:

1. Both parties believe in Scottish independence. Without having to support this position, it is politically legitimate for these parties to be organised as the "Scottish" Socialist Party and the "Scottish" Green Party.
2. Both parties intend to stand in every regional seat in Scotland in the Scottish Parliamentary and European elections. The Socialist Party of Great Britain (SPGB) and the Green Party (England & Wales) have been registered yet will either be mounting a very small or non-existent electoral challenge in Scotland. It is, therefore, unreasonable to refuse registration to the Scottish Socialist Party and the Scottish Green Party.
3. The Scottish Socialist Party and the Scottish Green Party are the largest "small" parties in Scotland outside the 4 main parties. Of the small parties, they also have the highest profile. It is therefore unreasonable to presume that other "socialist" and "green" parties would be disadvantaged by the registration of the Scottish Socialist Party or the Scottish Green Party.
4. The Scottish Socialist Party has qualified for a TV & Radio election broadcast for the Scottish Parliamentary and European Elections (and it is possible the Scottish Green Party will also qualify). The distinct political identity of the Scottish Socialist Party will, therefore, be even clearer to voters in Scotland.

In the interests of democracy, we ask you to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Scottish Socialist Party and the Scottish Green Party are registered without any further delay.

Yours faithfully

Send copies to:

- Donald Dewar, Scottish Office, New St Andrew's House, Edinburgh, EH1 3TF (Fax 0131 244 2756)
- Jack Straw, Home Secretary, House of Commons, London, SW1
- Scottish Socialist Party, 73 Robertson St, Glasgow G2 (Fax 0141 221 7715 Tel 0141 221 7714)





# Stand up for Ken - defend your rights!

## Terry Conway

THE LABOUR leadership may be wondering whether they made the right choice in postponing their decision on how to select Labour's candidate for London mayor.

The January NEC was due to discuss setting up a vetting panel as recommended by the London Regional Board. This recommendation was in defiance of the overwhelming decision of June's London Labour Party Conference that any candidate who received 10 CLP nominations should automatically be shortlisted. But in the end the discussion was put back to the next meeting on March 23.

It may be that the reason for this lies in Millbank's failure to come up with a credible alternative. Various names have been floated; Frank Dobson, Glenda Jackson, Tony Banks, Trevor Philips, Pauline Green. But none evokes confidence that they could beat Ken either amongst party members or Londoners as a whole.

Any sliver of doubt that the manoeuvres are aiming at exclud-

ing Ken should be banished by the failure of London's Board even to forward to the NEC one of the recommendations of its own working party.

Millbank had claimed that one of the main problems with the Conference decision was that it acted against equal opportunities; self nomination and then the vetting panel would lead to better gender and racial balance.

### Two-tier system

TGWU's Barry Camfield successfully proposed a two tier system to the working party. Either you could be nominated by CLP's and affiliates or nominate yourself. This is as it happens in line with new procedures for Westminster selection, so it is difficult for the leadership to claim they oppose it in principle. However the Board managed to 'lose' the recommendation, and all attempts to have it reinstated failed.

In the meantime the Stand Up for Ken campaign is well on the road. A packed meeting of 1500 on February 15 - in the middle of

a tube strike - filled Westminster Central Hall to demand the right of democratic selection.

The audience contained sizeable delegations from striking tube and UCLH hospital workers and fire fighters organising to defend jobs and services. The turn out far exceeded Ken's own expectations; he had booked a room that held 500, and the meeting was moved less than an hour before its advertised starting time when it became clear that the response was so large.

Excitement in the hall was highest in response to calls for Ken's right to stand, and support for workers in struggle was also warmly received. Livingstone got a standing ovation before he spoke. His proposals for London, for example to return conductors to London buses were popular, but clearly secondary to the key issue of defence of democracy.

In making this distinction the massive audience showed more maturity than that demonstrated by some parts of the left. The



Alliance for Workers Liberty, for example, has stepped up its attacks on Ken's policies and record in recent months.

Socialist Outlook would not stand on the political platform that Ken is putting forward, but we not only support his right to stand but his candidature. We recognise that the success of this campaign would be a real blow to Blair and his reactionary policies for the Labour Party and for the country.

The February meeting would have been the ideal place for further calls for action - those attending were eager to know what the next steps in the campaign should be. A lobby of the NEC on March 23 would have gained wide support for example. Unfortunately

that opportunity was lost, and it is to be hoped that further progress can be made in discussing similar proposals at the series of meetings soon to be organised in different parts of London.

In the meantime activists should step up the campaign for resolutions in support of democratic selection in Labour Parties and unions and where possible go beyond this and nominate Ken anyway.

Labour movement bodies should ask for the campaign to take affiliations and call protests outside London Board and NEC meetings where the issue is being discussed. Blair will only back down if we can show it would be more dangerous for him not to do so.

## New Labour attack on party democracy

### Jim Dye, President, Liverpool TUC

IN MAY 1998 the Liberal Democrats gained their only metropolitan council - in Liverpool. The Labour Party suf-

fered a crushing defeat at the polls.

This defeat was caused by a number of interconnected factors. The right wing Labour Group had imposed years of cuts and redundancies com-

bined with poor council services and the highest Council Tax in the country.

The scale of the defeat prompted the Labour Party NEC to set up a 'Liverpool Taskforce'. It comprises three unelected members (including Richard Arthur, leader of Camden Council) sent to mount a witch hunt against the Liverpool Labour Party in an attempt to find out what had gone so wrong, given that cuts and redundancies are the main policies of Blairite councils across the country.

The Taskforce could not blame the left for the defeat, as most left activists had been expelled at the time of Lesley Mahmood's Walton bye-election campaign of 1991. In the recent elections left candidates from the SLP and the Socialist Party (including Mahmood) got derisory votes that did not split the Labour vote at all.

What the Taskforce did focus on, however, was an attack on the 'Old Labour' right wing Labour Group.

Their report makes clear that despite the already decimated membership levels, there will be no more local Party democracy for the Liverpool Labour Party. In future all candidates for local elections will be vetted by an NEC-appointed Regional Director, with no rights at all for local wards or CLPs to choose their representatives.

All potential candidates must also swear a loyalty pledge to Blairite New Labour policies, while existing councillors will be vetted before they are allowed to be re-elected. In other words all

local accountability will be ended permanently.

The report also makes clear that local trade union branches will play no role whatsoever in the local Party, and that the District Labour Party (suspended for a decade since the witch hunt against the left) will not be allowed to be reformed. Indeed, activists from both wards and trade union branches will have absolutely no role in this new organisation.

This authoritarian attack on Old Labour within the Liverpool Party sets a dangerous precedent and should be vig-



Right wing helped pillar Hatton - now they face chop

orously opposed by all socialists.

We should not hesitate to block with these right wingers against the New Labour purge, but we need to keep our separate identity as socialists intact.

Above all, we must attempt to rebuild a socialist opposition within the Party that can link with union and community struggles outside it.

## WHAT'S ON

### March

#### Saturday 13

MARCH to support Istanbul's Saturday Mothers, assemble 1 pm, Turnpike Lane tube, march to Wood Green common to rally with Jeremy Corbyn MP and relatives of the disappeared

#### Monday 15

KURDISTAN Solidarity Committee Trade Union group meeting 6-8pm at KIC, 10 Glasshouse Yard, Barbican, London EC1

#### Sunday 21

TRESPASS WALK organised by the Sussex Network of The Land is Ours to bolster support for the 2nd reading of Gordon Prentice's Right to Roam Bill on March 26.

Meet Brighton station 10 am.

Wrap up warm and wear good boots. Bring packed lunch, sorry no dogs. Walk up to 6 miles. Contact 01273 620 815

PUBLIC MEETING organised by Justice for Roger Sylvester campaign at West Indian Cultural Centre, Clarendon Road, London N8 5-7pm, speakers include Roger's mother, father and brother

#### Sunday 28

MEETING to build a National Civil Rights movement, 12-5.30pm, Camden Centre, Judd Street, Kings Cross, London WC1. Provisional speakers include Neville Lawrence, Mike Mansfield, an American Civil Rights leader,

### April

#### Saturday 10

MARCH FOR A LIVING WAGE. Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Supported by UNISON, 8 other national unions and the TUC. Transport from all major towns.

#### Saturday 17

MARCH AND RALLY for Peace and Justice. "Libya 1986 ... Iraq 1999 ... No more bombings! Lift the sanctions!" Provisionally 1 pm assemble Hyde Park. March to Trafalgar Square for rally at 3pm. Called by the April

14-15 Commemoration Committee and the campaign Against Sanctions and War on Iraq. For more details 0171 436 4636.

#### Saturday 24

NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION against racism, organised by the Blair Peach 20th Anniversary Committee. Assemble 1 pm, Southall Park, Southall.

### May

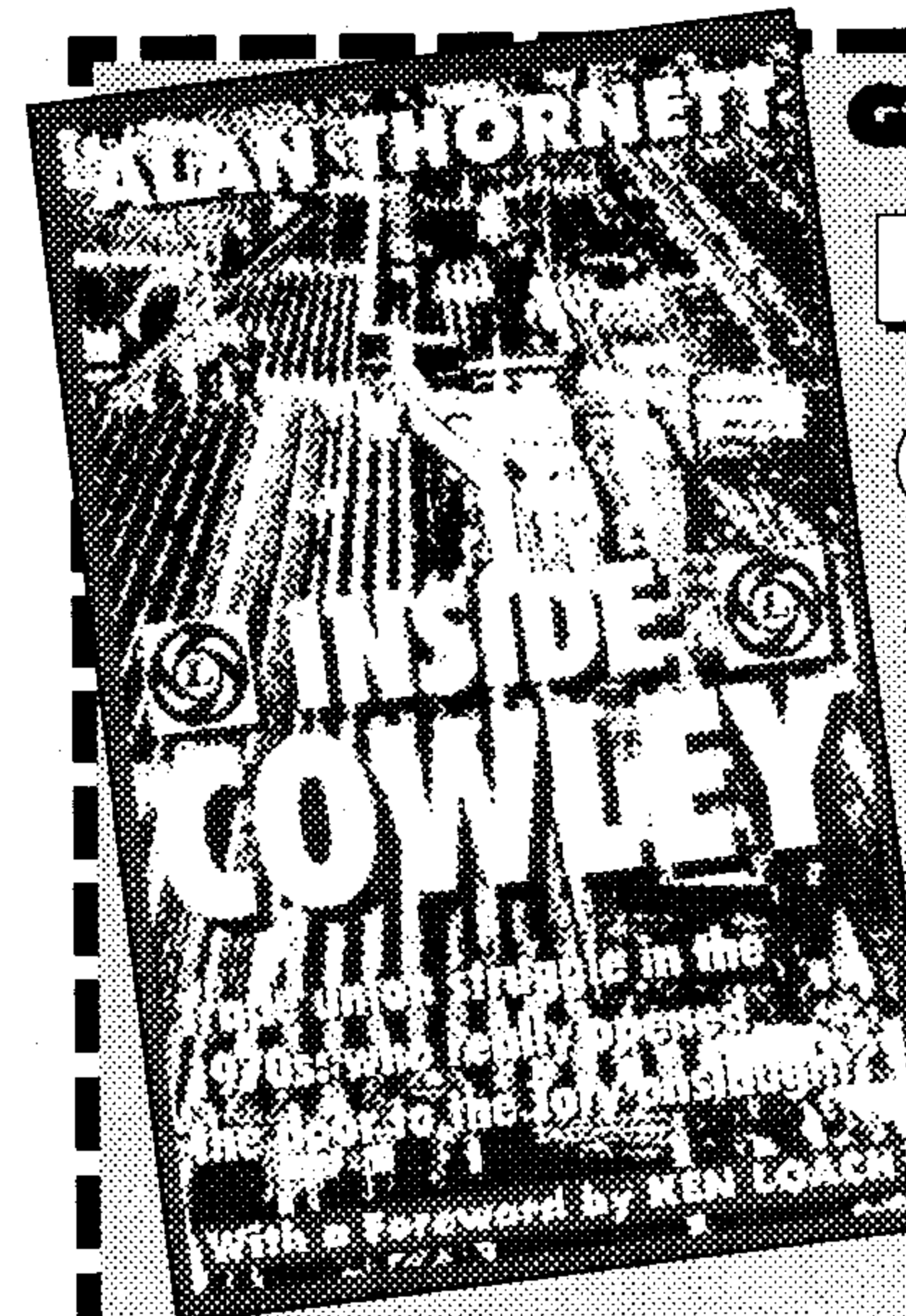
#### Saturday 1

UNION RIGHTS DAY march, assemble 12 noon, Clerkenwell Green, London.

#### Saturday 29

COLOGNE DEMONSTRATION at European summit. (See details, page 13)

March 28: meeting to build a National Civil Rights movement



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## Social services under the cosh

THE IMPACT of what one MP has described as "year 21 of Tory cuts" is making itself felt on social service departments across the country.

In Oxfordshire, where the social service budget is enduring its fifth successive year of cuts, the County Council has agreed a package of £10.3m cuts reaching over the next three years – and point out that even after this, the county will still in theory be spending more than the government "norm".

Over 300 social workers, health workers, service users and campaigners joined an angry march through Oxford on February 6 to protest at the cuts.

These include closure of an old people's home, axing three of the county's four resource centres providing respite care for severely disabled children, cutting the number of child protection orders by 20%, slashing grants to voluntary organisations dealing with drug and alcohol problems, and closing a hostel and day services for people with learning difficulties. 180 jobs are at risk.

But Oxfordshire is not alone in proposing such cutbacks. Birmingham Council is contemplating the closure of up to half its homes for the elderly.

Leicestershire is to slash social service spending by £3m, including £750,000 from its community care budget.

Surrey County Council is tightening up its imposition of charges as one of the mans to tackle a £5m shortfall. Buckinghamshire and Warwickshire, too are looking to raise cash from charges for home care to the elderly: Warwickshire wants to raise more than a quarter of its £8.5m home care budget from charges.

Somerset is cutting back on placements of elderly clients in residential and nursing homes, raising charges and axing jobs.

Portsmouth council is trying to force down the pay and conditions of its home care staff to mean the cheapskate terms on offer from private contractors.

But as the carnage grows, two factors emerge as a major scandal:

- most of the cuts are being obediently nodded through by Labour councillors with no attempt to defend services

- and there is no coordinated campaign collecting information on these cuts or fighting back in defence of social services the way that campaigns have defended the NHS.

With hundreds of jobs, and now pay and conditions increasingly at risk, UNISON and other public sector unions must be forced to organise a fightback.

# Scrap all charges for care of elderly!

John Lister

ALTHOUGH it set the cat among the pigeons by calling for an extra £1 billion to be spent in providing free nursing care for elderly people, the Royal Commission on Long Term Care has produced an essentially conservative report.

We should of course be grateful that it is an independent report, which has clearly escaped the tentacles of the Millbank control freaks, and one which argues a line that is well "off message" to the Blairites.

But while campaigners and charities representing older people have broadly welcomed its key recommendation to scrap the bulk of the existing means-tested charges, and the commission's insistence that the extra cash required should come from general taxation, the report leaves many important questions unasked and unanswered.

Indeed, after 14 months of deliberations, the commission has largely accepted the framework set up under the Thatcher government, in which continuing care of the frail elderly is largely privatised, provided by profit-seeking nursing and residential homes.

There is no hint to be found in the report that any alternative system might provide better quality care for clients or conditions for staff.

The commission clearly did not even discuss the levels of profit extracted from this highly exploitative sector, or the changing patterns of ownership, in which large, corporations are increasingly carving up the market. Instead the commission's proposals have been eagerly embraced by the Independent Healthcare Association, which represents many private care homes.

No section of the report discusses the glaring inequalities in local provision of nursing and residential home places, which have left most London boroughs and many other city areas finding it almost impossible to secure local places.

The commission also managed to avoid any discussion of the huge variations in local "eligibility criteria" drawn up in 1995 by health authorities to limit the entitlement of frail elderly patients to NHS treatment, making the access to NHS care a lottery based on your post code.

Many of these are draconian, excluding all but the most extremely incapacitated, and



Council cuts in social services like these in Birmingham help make a mockery of the so-called "seamless service"

reducing NHS continuing care provision to little more than palliative care.

Nor did the commission question the increasingly restrictive "eligibility criteria" that are being imposed by local authorities, as they grapple with a two-way pressure on social service budgets (cash limits on the one hand, increasing local demand for care

on the other) by attempting to restrict the numbers of elderly clients entitled to any form of support.

The financial realities of the regime ushered in by the 1988 Griffiths Report, and then passed through the Commons by the Thatcher government – with eager all-party support – and implemented from 1993, are also consistently ignored in the chunky commission report.

Sir Roy Griffiths, then managing director of Sainsbury's, explicitly referred to making use of the savings and assets of pensioners as a means of paying for their long-term care through means-tested charges.

The Tory proposals never made any secret of their ambition to complete the privatisation of care of the elderly. But the Royal Commission stops well short of saying so, allowing the dimwits who write the leader column from the *Guardian* (which backed the Griffiths proposals all the way) to complain now that "No one announced this major policy

switch." (March 2)

Nor does the commission address the increasingly severe impact since 1993 of the "capping" of council tax and social service budgets, which has run alongside tightening NHS cash limits.

This dual pressure on resources has made a mockery of the rhetoric of "seamless care" which was revived at the time of the community care reforms: instead we have seen cash-strapped health and social services each seeking to pass risks and costs to the other.

The commission says that 38% of NHS long-stay beds for the elderly have closed since 1983. This seems to be yet another example of the report consistently using out of date statistics (most are from 1995).

In fact the current Department of Health figures show

that the NHS had closed almost 26,000 "geriatric" beds by April 1998 – 46% of the 1983 total. More significantly, health chiefs have closed almost 20% of long-stay beds since 1993, during the implementation of the community care reforms.

Despite the commission's reluctance to say so, there is no doubt that this relentless cutback represents an overall decision for the NHS to pull out of continuing care – and foist the responsibility and the bill onto local government.

Astonishingly, the pressing issue of so-called "bed-blocking", in which elderly patients are forced to remain inappropriately in acute hospital beds for lack of places or funds to finance their discharge to a nursing home, is only discussed in the most off-hand and passing fashion by the commission.

### Winter pressures

Yet the problem is one of increasing importance, as the government's allocation of "winter pressures" money to help partially relieve it, has shown.

With all of these factors left out of the equation, it is perhaps no surprise that the commission has also ignored the impending halt to the "Special Transitional Grants", which have been paid since the 1993 reforms to local authorities to compensate for their growing financial responsi-



bility for frail elderly patients (who would previously have received care free of charge in NHS continuing care beds).

These STG payments end in April of this year, leaving council chiefs across the country stuck with an additional bill, while their budgets are cut or constrained, and while the local NHS pockets the difference.

The commission's recommendation that "personal care" should, like other types of health care, be provided free at point of use and funded from taxation is of course a major step forward.

But it would still leave those pensioners with assets above the means-test limit to pay £120 a week for living and housing costs.

Many would still be required, as over 40,000 year are now obliged, to sell their houses or liquidate their savings to pay these charges.

But since many older people are in care homes not by choice but as a result of decisions taken by health and social services, this charge, too, would often be unfair, and should be scrapped.

Continuing care for the frail elderly should, like other parts of the NHS, be provided free of charge as a seamless service, and funded from general taxation.

It is a nonsense to argue, as some do, that to drop the means-tested charges and provide nursing home care free of charge would amount to a subsidy to the rich.

Under any likely system, those with substantial wealth make sure they keep well away from the cheapskate nursing homes and residential care on offer through social services – and opt to pay well above the local authority "benchmark" rate for luxury in their twilight years.

Health Secretary Frank Dobson is already hedging his bets on whether any of the commission's proposals will be put into practice. He knows that to suggest any new extension of the welfare state to Blair or Brown, especially one funded from progressive taxation, is like selling atheism in the Vatican.

The government should be urged to act promptly and implement the limited recommendations for free nursing care: but a further, more thoroughgoing inquiry is now needed to fill in some of the gaps left by the Royal Commission.

Among the issues to be addressed:

- the cost and quality of care in nursing homes,
- the training of nursing staff in the skills of continuing care
- the possibility of establishing NHS nursing homes, especially in areas where private sector provision is not available.

The commission has accepted the framework in which continuing care of the frail elderly is largely privatised, provided by profit-seeking nursing homes.

Frank Dobson knows that to suggest any new extension of the welfare state to Blair or Brown is like promoting atheism in the Vatican.





## Agencies move in on low-paid NHS nurses

FIGURES recently obtained by London Health Emergency have exposed the fact that nurses can immediately add at least 50% to their wages by opting to work for an agency rather than directly for the NHS.

A schedule of rates circulated to staff by an agency called Staffing Enterprise show that an E grade nurse working in intensive care can get a basic rate of £13.30 an hour compared to the NHS rate of £8.70.

With full enhancements some specialist nurses can expect to earn as much as £35 an hour through the agency – twice as much as their NHS colleagues.

Some agencies have even begun to offer nurses some of the "fringe" benefits which previously kept staff in the NHS, including paid sick leave and holiday entitlements. Many staff have already opted to vote with their feet, and have gone over to the agencies

blasting a hole in establishment staffing levels, and driving costs through the roof.

A recent report to the Royal London Hospitals Trust underlines the impact that the drift of staff towards the agencies is having on the NHS:

"A key issue in relation to the Trust's activity performance was the shortage of trained nursing staff and the additional costs of having to employ agency staff. In some specialties nursing staff were leaving the Trust's employ to sign on as agency nurses, as they could earn substantially more than the Trust paid."

The fear is that many more staff, angry at this year's 4.7% pay award, will join the stampede over to the agencies. LHE has heard of some key units where the entire team of nurses are considering going over to the agency wholesale, with devastating consequences for NHS budgets.

## Private health care - still a threat to NHS

By Bob Whale

SEVERAL BIG corporations have just signed up their workforce to BUPA health schemes, including the BBC, Natwest and HSBC.

The private health business is growing, in spite of the gathering recession, and BUPA's reported losses on its health insurance department, leaving it reliant on its hospitals to generate a profit.

The effect of increased private cover is in theory to remove whole sectors of the workforce from the need to use the NHS except for emergency and GP care.

In practice, of course, people of working age very seldom need to make use of medical insurance cover – which is why the private insurers are so keen to take them on.

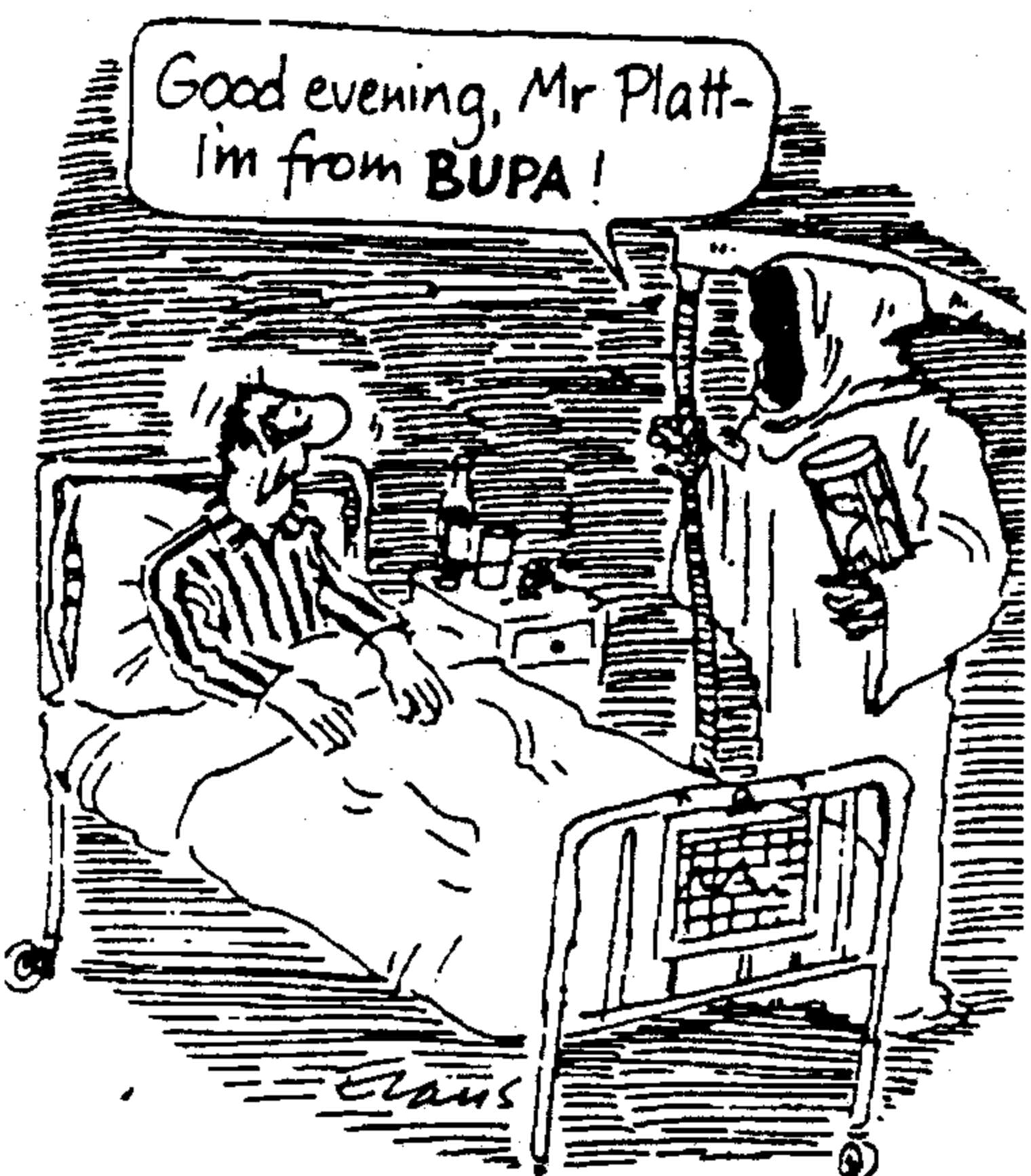
For most working age adults, the NHS, as the sole provider of emergency services, remains more important, no matter what their illusions to the contrary.

For many years, BUPA provided health care to the upper classes who could afford to pay to jump the queue and get superior accommodation.

However, in the 1980s, the market grew rapidly as waiting lists for NHS operations increased, and the scandalous state of hospitals came to light.

Several new competitors joined the scene, PPP (Private Patients' Plan) being the best known. An increasing number of corporations began to sign up their employees en masse, joining the number of companies that offer private cover at a discount.

But twenty years of Tory cash limits on the NHS and propaganda for private care have still left less than one in ten of the population with private health cover.



## Teachers in the firing line

# Meet the challenge: fight the Green Paper

By a delegate to NUT conference

THE VAST majority of teachers are hostile to the proposals contained in the government's Green Paper "Teachers: Meeting the Challenge of Change" which advocates radical changes to the pay and conditions of teachers in England and Wales. The real question is not whether the Green Paper should be opposed, but how can it be defeated.

If implemented, the proposals in the Green Paper will alter the pay and conditions of teachers in a fundamental way. The government has tried to link the worsened conditions to improvements in pay.

### Systematic attack

However the reality is that this year's pay award shows that the Blair government has no intention of rewarding teachers for the difficult job that they do: rather the insulting pay award and the Green Paper are both part of a systematic attack on teachers and their unions.

Education Minister, David Blunkett has already let it be known that he would relish a fight with the main teachers' union, the National Union of Teachers (NUT). The NUT conference over Easter week-end will allow him to attack teachers in the media whilst, no doubt, trying to project a different image to the teachers assembled in Brighton.

The Green Paper proposes the introduction of Performance Related Pay for teachers. Teachers would be subject to appraisal arrangements which would determine whether or not they were granted an annual pay award.

The National Union of Teachers was formed to fight payment by results last century. The arguments that were valid then are equally true to-day. Teaching is a collective activity.

Who can really determine the impact of an individual teacher on the progress of a child? A secondary teacher builds on the work of primary teachers who, in turn, build on the work of those employed in nurseries. A Geography teacher's results will partly depend on progress made in English, Maths and Science.

The Green Paper also proposes important structural changes to the teaching force. Teachers will be 'invited' to apply to 'cross the threshold' to achieve a pay rise. Crossing the threshold will mean accepting the right of management to impose extra hours and responsibilities.

The Green Paper argues that most teachers will eventually cross the threshold, however the reality is that the funding available is totally inadequate to deliver the required resources.

The proposals would also divide up teachers in a range of different categories: new teachers, pre and post threshold and those in the Leadership Group.

In addition to the impact on teachers, the proposals will have a serious and detrimental effect on education. Teachers in schools in better-off areas and working class schools with strong leaderships will be more likely to get pay awards than those in struggling working class schools in the inner-cities. The result will be a further shift of resources away from those areas who need it the most.

There will be a major debate on the Green Paper at NUT conference. What is required is a total rejection of the proposals and a serious fight to back up that rejection.

Currently, the NUT leadership is proposing a lobby of Parliament and an indicative ballot on boycotting appraisal. Both these proposals deserve support, but they are nowhere near enough. There is danger of some on the left not understanding that all official union initiatives need to be supported. Although the lobby does provide a national focus and is really a way of getting publicity, it does give the left an opportunity to build up confidence amongst broader layers in the union.

Appraisal should be boycotted, but the chances are that the new appraisal arrangements will be introduced in a manner that avoids an immediate confrontation. In well-organised schools appraisal schemes have not operated for years.

The proposal for national strike action is the key demand. It is the

only demand that begins to meet the seriousness of the situation. What the union leadership is currently offering is totally inadequate. However, NUT chief Doug McAvoy probably judges it might be enough to allow him to appear radical

in the run-up to the General Secretary's election, where he faces a strong challenge from left-winger Christine Blower.

Over the next period the left needs to build the existing union initiatives whilst pointing out their inadequacy. At the same time, we need to continually bring the left together, including serious united left support for Christine Blower's challenge to McAvoy.

**The National Union of Teachers was formed in the last century - to fight payment by results**







By Dafydd Rhys

**Stooge union bureaucrats deliver vital votes**

**Blairites complete stitch-up in Wales**

**T**he recent battle for the Labour leadership in the Welsh Assembly has highlighted the lengths to which Tony Blair will go to retain control over the Welsh Labour Party.

Not only did New Labour have to rely on very 'Old Labour' to deliver the victory of Alun Michael, it was also ready to sacrifice electoral advantage in the event that Blair's candidate did win.

The recent contest arose after a "moment of madness" committed on Clapham Common by Ron Davies, the previous Secretary of State for Wales and prospective Assembly leader. Ron secured the almost unanimous support of both the trade union and the local government bureaucracy in the previous contest.

However, the method of his election caused some consternation amongst rank-and-file Labour Party members, a consternation which was further exacerbated by the blatant political vetting of prospective Assembly candidates and the imposition of an English MEP above sitting Welsh MEPs on the party's Euro list.

Thus, when the new leadership contest was unexpectedly required, the wounds of recent events were still fresh. Anger was further heightened by the decision to reopen the nominations procedure for Assembly candidates, simply to allow Alun Michael to stand.

It was therefore much more difficult for the Welsh Executive of the Labour Party to stitch up the result in the same way as previously. Voting by OMOV was introduced in the Labour Party members' section of the electoral college and a number of unions declared their intention to consult their members before casting their vote.

Previous to his appointment as Welsh Secretary, Alun Michael, the MP for Cardiff South and Penarth, had shown no interest in the Welsh Assembly. He played no part whatsoever in the campaign to secure the 'yes' vote in September 1997.

He was selected simply because he would unquestioningly carry out the bidding of Tony Blair.

Peter Hain, currently a Welsh Office Minister, immediately threw his support behind Alun Michael and became his campaign manager. What little shreds of 'left' credibility that Hain had retained before this episode have now been swept away by his conduct in this campaign.

Ron Davies was also quick to offer his support to Alun Michael, still mindful of a possible future role in the Welsh Assembly. It is difficult to square this action with the image that many people in Wales have of Ron Davies - that of an outspoken and committed advocate of Welsh autonomy and 'inclusive' politics.

While Alun Michael's campaign was stuffed with ministers and Labour bigwigs, Rhodri Morgan attracted genuine popular support, particularly on the basis of his consistent work in exposing the corruptions of the quango state in Wales under the Conservatives.



*Morgan won the members and the young: Michael had the Millbank machine and the old-style union bosses*

Most of the left-leaning Welsh MPs supported his campaign, as did many left-wing Assembly candidates. A number of prominent academics and dissident members of the Welsh Executive also supported him.

Rhodri's main campaign slogan was "an Assembly for the people, and not the crachach" - crachach being a colloquial and derogatory Welsh word for the upper class.

While Rhodri stood for the greater autonomy of the Welsh Assembly, the weaknesses of his campaign were very apparent. He placed great stress on the fact that there were no major policy differences between himself and Alun Michael. This position was criticised by many within the Rhodri camp.

Despite his failure to stand on a left platform, it was very clearly the case that Rhodri Morgan should have been supported against the candidate imposed by Tony Blair. After an extended period of campaigning, necessary to provide some kind of profile for Alun Michael in Wales, the result was announced on 20 February.

The overall result gave Alun Michael 53 per cent of the vote against Rhodri Morgan's 47 per cent.

The breakdown of the votes for each section of the electoral college were: 64 per cent versus 36 per cent for Alun Michael in the trade unions; 58 per cent versus 42 per cent for Alun Michael among the MPs, MEPs and Assembly candidates; and 65 per cent to 35 per cent for Rhodri Morgan among party members.

The scale of Alun Michael's victory in the trade union section was ensured by three of the four largest unions in Wales: the TGWU, AEEU and GMB, which together accounted for 17.5 per cent of the overall vote.

None of these unions carried out a comprehensive consultation with their members. The AEEU and GMB carried out partial consultations, conducted in such a way as to ensure that the required result was achieved.

When George Wright, leader of the TGWU in Wales, was questioned as to why his union was backing Alun Michael, he replied: "because he's Secretary of State for Wales". Whoever Tony Blair had selected for the post, he clearly implied, the TGWU would meekly have given their support.

The only major union to conduct an OMOV ballot was UNI-

SON, and the result showed an overwhelming majority in favour of Rhodri Morgan. This pattern was repeated in all the smaller unions which conducted OMOV ballots.

**T**here is now a danger that the backlash against union involvement might be used, quite cynically, by the Blairites to weaken union links after their objective has been achieved. This must be vigorously resisted, though measures to give union members greater control over how their votes are cast in the Labour Party should be supported.

Tony Blair and his supporters in Wales went to enormous lengths to ensure the victory of Alun Michael in this contest. It revealed once again the brutality of Blairism in dealing with any opposition within the party, however timid.

Blair had to rely on those bastions of 'Old Labour', the very union bureaucrats he had attacked so vigorously in the past, in order to deliver the result.

Opinion polls conducted before the result was announced showed that the Labour Party would lose 10 per cent of its support if Alun Michael was elected rather than Rhodri Morgan.

Thus, Blairism, which was founded on the basis of making

every concession to the right necessary to ensure electability, became turned on its head. This loss of electoral support is particularly significant in the case of the Welsh Assembly, since it will be elected with an element of proportionality.

One thing is very clear: the furore caused by this campaign is only a foretaste of far greater struggles within the Welsh Labour Party once the Assembly is established.

It also shows how the relationship between the Labour Party and the trade unions is not simply a one-way street: events in the Labour Party can have the effect of revitalising and politicising the trade unions.

Following the result, Alun Michael made very clear in which direction he planned to lead the Assembly. He claimed that Labour's Assembly

manifesto, a vacuous document full of empty phrases, was a solid basis on which to run Wales.

He also attacked what he called the "black, negative side of the Welsh character", and said that Labour in Wales should be positive and "look to the future".

It is clear that the role of the Assembly for Blair and his supporters is one of a buffer between the Welsh people and Parliament and a propaganda instrument for the Labour Government. What little powers have been relinquished to the Assembly will be controlled by means of greater centralism within the Labour Party.

The blatant rigging of the election has left many party members in Wales feeling both distrust and anger towards the Labour leadership. This provides the left with a far greater scope for activity than in very many years.

The two main tasks in the coming months will be to try and channel this discontent into an effective campaign to extend democracy within the Welsh Labour Party, and also to encourage a wide-ranging debate on policies for the Welsh assembly.

Such policies must stand in stark contrast to Labour's existing Assembly manifesto, if they are to serve the vast majority of the people of Wales.

**The TGWU, AEEU and GMB, together accounted for 17.5 per cent of the overall vote. None of them carried out a comprehensive consultation with their members**



## Sheila Malone

IN FEBRUARY much attention focused on Turkey over the hunting down and arrest of Kurdistan Workers Party leader Abdullah Ocalan, which sparked off massive protests world-wide.

Now, the spotlight has turned on the proposed Ilisu dam project in the south east of the country, which would flood over 50 Kurdish towns and villages, leaving 15,000 people homeless and causing widespread environmental damage.

In the first case, the hounding and kidnapping of Ocalan through the combined efforts of Turkish security forces MIT, Mossad and the CIA resulted in him being delivered up bound, blindfolded and humiliated, to his probable state executioners.

No less shameful than this pursuit was the supine collusion and compliance of most of the rest of the world's leaders, none of whom were prepared to offer the liberation struggle leader a refuge. Whatever happened to the right to political asylum? And why was Britain's "ethical" foreign secretary, declared defender of human rights, so silent on this matter?

The same lack of criticism has surrounded the dam building in the south-east. In fact, the Ilisu project is yet another of the past and present schemes whereby Turkey is seizing control of the scarce water resources of the Middle East and securing its own electricity supplies at other countries' expense.

### Euphrates

Key to this are the mighty Euphrates and Tigris rivers, which start in north Kurdistan (south east Turkey) and flow through Syria and Iraq. Already in the past, the completed dams (there will be 15 dams and 18 hydro-electric power stations when all the projects are finished) have been used by Turkey to cut off water supplies in both these neighbouring countries.

Undoubtedly, such power was also used to blackmail Syria into expelling Ocalan from his place of exile there last autumn - an expulsion which led to his flight around the world and final capture. Indeed, one journalist had recently summed up Turkish policy towards Syria as "Send us the PKK in the form of Abdullah Ocalan, and we will give you water".

In its aspirations to control the vital water supplies of the region, both for its own sake and for the levers it provides in terms of the geo-politics of the region, Turkey is following closely in the footsteps of its close ally Israel. The

## Why Cook shouldn't give a dam...

# Bankers rush to aid Turkish oppressors

two countries have had common interests for some time and in recent months their military alliance has deepened.

Since Robin Cook has recently turned green, adding environmental friendliness to foreign policy goals, one might have expected a word of condemnation of Turkey's behaviour. Instead, we learn that Britain's Department of Trade and Industry is set to actually back the Ilisu project if it goes ahead by underwriting it to the tune of £200 million! So much for both the human, land and environmental rights of the Kurds!

There are over 30 million Kurds, the majority living in Turkey (around 14 million), the rest mainly in Iraq, Iran and Syria, as well as 1½ million dispersed throughout Europe. Despite having their own history, culture and language, Turkey has never recognised their separate identity, officially calling them "mountain Turks", and their language a deformed Turkish/ Persian dialect.

Besides being denied expression through their own language and organisations (Kurdish publications, associations and political parties are continually closed down and banned), the Kurdish areas of the South Coast have always been starved of government funding - only 10 per cent of the development budget goes to them, although the Kurds constitute over 20 per cent of the population.

As a result, the majority live in poverty in the often barren and mountainous regions of the south east, and elsewhere, are subject to harsh discrimination and racism, often through the violence of the fascist Grey Wolves, especially prevalent within the police and the military.

Kurdish resistance to this forced assimilation and underdevelopment was always met with brutal suppression by the state. In 1984, this escalated into a full-scale war, with the newly-formed



Routine barbarism from Turkish troops hit young and old alike.



PKK prepared to take up arms in self-defence.

Since then, 30,000 people have been killed, 3,000 villages destroyed and 3½ million made homeless. Such is the state terror, genocide and ethnic cleansing of a government about to conduct a show trial which will end by calling for the death penalty for someone who has opposed and organised resistance against it.

Nor is this military offensive confined to the areas of Kurdistan which is within the Turkish state but is an offensive against Kurds in northern Iraq - the very people in whose name the undeclared imperialist war against Iraq is being fought. Turkey has

sent 40,000 troops into southern Kurdistan (northern Iraq) in recent weeks.

While this apparently to pursue PKK supporters, the effect is undoubtedly to strengthen their control in the region.

This is not only a war which affects the Kurdish areas.

In the manner of all dirty wars, its chickens have come home to roost within and throughout Turkish society as a whole.

The war divides people. While some Turks are infected with the anti-Kurdish chauvinism which government policies create and sanction, others are being persecuted for their support and solidarity with the Kurds.

The 1998 Turkish Human Rights Association report on human rights violations in Istanbul records a shocking 23,312 detentions, 560 of which resulted in formal arrests, 21 people disappeared, 79 killed by unknown perpetrators, 310 publications confiscated, the premises of 100 political parties, associations and cultural centres raided by police, and 29 journalists and writers formally arrested.

Many of these, both Kurds and Turks, are members and supporters of the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HADEP) which the government is presently seeking to ban - as was the fate of its forerunners.

Since Ocalan's arrest the crack down on dissent has deepened further; there have been many thousands of people arrested in the provinces where Kurds live and in the Kurdish areas of the cities. More than twenty leaders of the KESK teachers' union

have been arrested, and there is grave concern for their safety.

In addition to these human costs, everyone in Turkey pays financially for the war, on which millions of dollars are squandered annually. With inflation exceeding 100 per cent last year, foreign debt at around \$75 billion and government borrowing soaring, there is plenty to criticise in terms of current erosion of living standards.

Last November, a privatisation corruption scandal brought down the ruling Turkish coalition government of Mesut Yilmaz, and early elections are expected this April. Ocalan's capture and trial will certainly be used during this period to try to weaken, discredit and split opposition.

This could, of course, backfire, and instead reveal more starkly the plight of the Kurds and thus the legitimacy of their struggle. Further more Turkey's failure to deal with this issue except through repression will surely be questioned, since this has long contributed to crisis within the society as a whole.

### Favourable treatment

Western support is, as we see, very easy to come by for Turkey. Its strategic position between East and West has always afforded it favourable treatment within big power politics.

Brought into NATO and bolstered by massive arms supplies from the West, Britain especially, Turkey has long acted as the main ally of the US and Israel in domination and control of the Middle East, whether this be through access to oil supplies and water resources, or in subduing states such as Iran and Iraq.

Many of the daily air strikes in the US's present undeclared war on Iraq (over 100 strikes since December) fly from the Incirlik base in Turkey. An additional prize being fought over at present is the opening up of the Caspian basin oil and gas reserves, which promise enormously rich pickings for multinationals.

The Ocalan and Ilisu dam affairs, the widespread human rights abuses, the role of the military and the running sore of the Kurdish war all show Turkish society today to be a parody of a democracy where neither fair trials nor free elections are possible. In their uncritical backing and collusion, Western governments are condoning savage injustices and allowing Turkey to get away literally with mass murder.

For further information about the arrests of trade unionists and others contact Kurdish Solidarity Trade Union Committee, 42 Southall Court, Lady Margaret Rd, Southall, UB1 2RQ, Tel: 0171 250 1315, Fax 0171 250 1317

Send protests to: Emergency Regional Governor tel 0412 228 6301/224 3572, Diyarbakir governor: tel 0412 222 2288 fax 0412 228 4872.

The 1998 Turkish Human Rights Association report records 23,312 detentions, 560 of which resulted in formal arrests, 21 people disappeared, and 79 killed

## Solidarity with the Kurdish people

"WE STRONGLY condemn the European governments who together with the American and Israeli leaders are responsible for kidnapping and sending back of the PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan to Turkey - a country that criminalises the political struggle, practices torture and maintains a legal death penalty.

The European Union has hypocritically closed its eyes to the situation of the Kurdish people while at the same time the "international community" pretends to protect the Kosovar people in the name of liberty and democratic rights.

The cohesion of NATO and the defence of the powerful American interests in the region have prevailed over human rights

and the Convention on Refugees.

This cynical policy has provoked violent confrontations, including in the major cities in Europe.

It has helped the Turkish regime - which has over the years repressed thousands of Turkish citizens; human rights activists, trade union and political militants, members of parliaments, journalists and artists - to worsen the oppression of the Kurds.

We struggle in favour of:

- Respect for human rights, including the abolition of the death penalty and the suppression of all anti-democratic laws which prevent freedom of opinion and organisation, and amongst them

the so-called "anti-terrorist" laws.

- Amnesty for all political prisoners, Turks and Kurdish

- The dissolution of all the "special" war units and the so-called "village militias" in the Kurdish region;

- The suppression of the "emergency law"; and the possibility for all those who have been chased from their villages to return, with financial compensation for the material damages they have suffered.

- The recognition of the right to self-determination for the Kurdish people." (adopted by the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International, 25 Feb. 1999)



# Shed no tears for Hussein

*Picking up where Hussein left off: it's up to Arafat to continue to contain the strength and anger of the Palestinians*



THE FUNERAL of King Hussein, the west's favourite Arab ruler, was attended by a rogues' gallery of his admirers and allies mourning the man referred to by some Israelis as "our king".

**In the acres of newsprint dedicated to Hussein in the British press, there was scarcely a negative comment. And in the Jordanian press, too, he was praised and sanctified.**

**Yet Hussein was a man who, for nearly half a century, was the autocratic ruler of one of the world's poorest countries; a military dictator from a minority tribe in a state, the majority of whose population were refugees, ethnically cleansed from their homes and land by a regime with which Hussein collaborated for decades, and with which he hastened to sign a treaty at the earliest possible moment. ROLAND RANCE reports.**

The press played on the story of the young Hussein ascending to the throne shortly after the murder of his grandfather on the steps of Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque, and turning to the British army for protection against his enemies.

Invariably described as "brave" and "plucky", he was portrayed as a rare example of civilisation in a brutal region. The obituaries were even full of reports of his "kindness" to Jordan's political prisoners! The truth is that Hussein - like his dynasty and his state - was created by the British to serve imperialist interests in the Middle East.

Following the First World War - in which Britain had recruited Arab tribal leaders to fight against Turkey with the promise of establishing an Arab kingdom over the whole Middle East - the victorious powers proceeded to carve up and parcel out the territory like a piece of real estate.

Kuwait was created as a British colony in order to deny Iraq access to the sea; Lebanon was established as a French colony, reducing Syria's coastline and denying it the area's major ports, and Palestine was designated a "national home for the Jewish people".

British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour, author of the famous declaration, was candid in his cynicism: "in Palestine we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country".

Hussein's great-grandfather, the Sharif Hussein, proclaimed himself king of Hejaz (the area around Mecca and Medina), but lack of popular support enabled Ibn-Saud to overthrow and expel him. As compensation, Britain imposed Hussein's son Faisal (already thrown out of Syria) as King of Iraq.

In 1922, Palestine was partitioned for the first time, and Faisal's brother Abdullah was made Emir of Transjordan. (This partition has never been accepted by the founders of Israel's ruling Likud. Its central component, the Herut Party, still maintains that "The River Jordan has two banks. One of them is ours. The other one is ours too")

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (the only state other than Saudi Arabia to be named after its ruling family) was thus established by outsiders, serving a distant imperial master.

The regime has always been sustained by a British-trained and equipped army; Hussein himself was a pupil at Harrow and Sandhurst. Its economy is based on foreign grants and loans; until the late 1980s, these brought in up to 70% of the national budget. Unemployment is over 25%, and a quarter of families live in absolute poverty.

The whole history of Jordan has been bound up with that of Palestine. Effectively a British colony for thirty years from the end of World War One, it did not attain even nominal independence until the end of World War Two.

In the period leading up to the further partition of Palestine and the establishment of the state of Israel, King Abdullah, while publicly proclaiming his support for the Palestinian people, was secretly meeting Israeli emissary Golda Meir to discuss the division of spoils.

With the eventual ceasefire, Abdullah annexed those parts of western Palestine not occupied by Israel, and renamed his state Jordan. Revealingly, this annexation was never accepted internationally; only Britain and Pakistan recognised its legitimacy.

As well as acquiring territory, including the religious and tourist centres of Jerusalem and Bethlehem, Jordan gained a new population. The 400,000 inhabitants of Transjordan were joined by some 800,000 Palestinians from the West Bank of the Jordan, and several hundred thousand refugees expelled from their homes in the Israeli state.

But, in the absence of any democratic system, power remained in the hands of the tribal leaders of Transjordan, who formed the basis of Abdullah's regime.

In 1951, Abdullah was assassinated by a Palestinian incensed at his collaboration with the Zionists. His son, Talal, briefly succeeded him, but was soon deposed and declared insane after he attempted to detach Jordan from its British alliance and to work more closely with Egypt and Syria.

Talal's son Hussein, still a minor, took over in 1953. For the next 46 years, he ruled with an iron fist, only occasionally hidden in a velvet glove.

From the start, he continued the policy of collaboration with Israel, assisting them in preventing Palestinian refugees from cross-

ing the border to return to their fields and homes. Despite this assistance, in 1953 Israel reacted with fury when infiltrators killed three Israelis.

A huge Israeli force crossed into Jordan, and in the village of Qibya dynamited dozens of houses where people were sleeping, killing 66 men, women and children. The commander of this force was the same Ariel Sharon who oversaw the slaughter in the Beirut refugee camps in 1982, and who in 1999 attended Hussein's funeral as an honoured statesman and guest.

This set the pattern for Israeli-Jordanian relations. The resulting popular discontent in Jordan, among Palestinians and Jordanians alike, led to increased repression. Even the populist step of dismissing the British commander of the Jordanian army did not help Hussein; with the overthrow of the Iraqi monarchy in 1958 he was forced to call in British troops to maintain his regime against massive unrest. The US propped him up with loans of \$50 million a year.

Israel's continuing raids, and its threats against Egypt, led to the 1967 war. In the first hours, Israel demolished the Egyptian and Syrian airforces, and made deep advances into Egypt. Hussein originally attempted to keep his army out of the war.

He was eventually persuaded that exaggerated Egyptian and Syrian claims of victories were true (possibly as a result of Israeli manipulation of radio signals), and attacked across the border. This led to a lightning Israeli attack, which succeeded in bringing the whole of Palestine under Israeli control.

Hussein lost the only economically productive part of his kingdom, which was forced to absorb many hundreds of thousands of refugees, expelled at gunpoint by Israel's chief of staff, Yitzhak Rabin - who Hussein later lauded as a "man of peace" after his assassination in 1995.

Palestinian armed resistance to Israel, which had started on a small scale in the mid-1960s, developed rapidly after 1967. In line with its usual practice, Israel responded massively and disproportionately, killing hundreds of Jordanians and Palestinians in cross border raids, and repeatedly destroying the main irrigation channel.

Hussein took the hint, and in the notorious "Black September" of 1970 he launched his own brutal attack against the PLO and other Palestinian groups. So vicious was the Jordanian offensive that

many guerrillas forded the Jordan to surrender to the Israelis rather than fall into the hands of Hussein's security forces. The PLO's front line against Israel was destroyed, and Hussein had again shown where his true interest lay.

As the PLO turned from military to diplomatic tactics, it gained increasing Arab and international support. At the Rabat summit of 1974, Arab leaders recognised the PLO as the "sole legitimate representative" of the Palestinian people, effectively reaffirming their long-standing refusal to accept the Jordanian annexation of the West Bank.

This, and its subsequent endorsement by the UN, led to Hussein officially renouncing his claim to the West Bank, and his recognition of the PLO.

The Palestinian Intifada posed a challenge to Jordan. Jordanian citizens, as well as Palestinians (now 60% of Jordan's population), rioted and demanded economic as well as political reforms. True to form, Hussein repressed the riots and then made limited reforms.

But his image as a benign ruler is misleading. A 1998 report by Amnesty International notes that "several detainees have died in jail over last two years following beating by different security services".

Shortly before his death, Hussein replaced his brother with his son as designated heir. Jordan has neither free elections, nor a recognised line of royal succession. With a twenty year military career, including leading the Jordanian special forces, the new King Abdullah II is well placed to continue Hussein's repressive apparatus. There is unlikely to be any change of policy towards Israel, nor any political opening in Jordan.

Jordan is an artificial and unviable state, the plaything of more powerful neighbours. It owes its creation to the needs of British imperial policy, and its continued existence to its willingness to act as a client of other states.

It can only continue to exist as a military dictatorship, answerable to the demands of its masters and not those of its people.

For the people of Jordan, possibly even more clearly than for others in the area, the only way forward is through the struggle for a socialist federation of the Middle East.

Jordan's economy is based on foreign grants and loans; until the late 1980s, these brought in up to 70% of the national budget.

Amnesty International noted in 1998 that "several detainees have died in jail over last two years following beating by security services".



# UN pulls out to let Angola fight resume

The United Nations peacekeeping force withdrew from Angola on March 3, apparently at the insistence of the Angolan Government. The United Nations is only inclined to leave countries if their policies have been defeated or successful.

So what is the story in Angola? PETER STEVENS investigates.

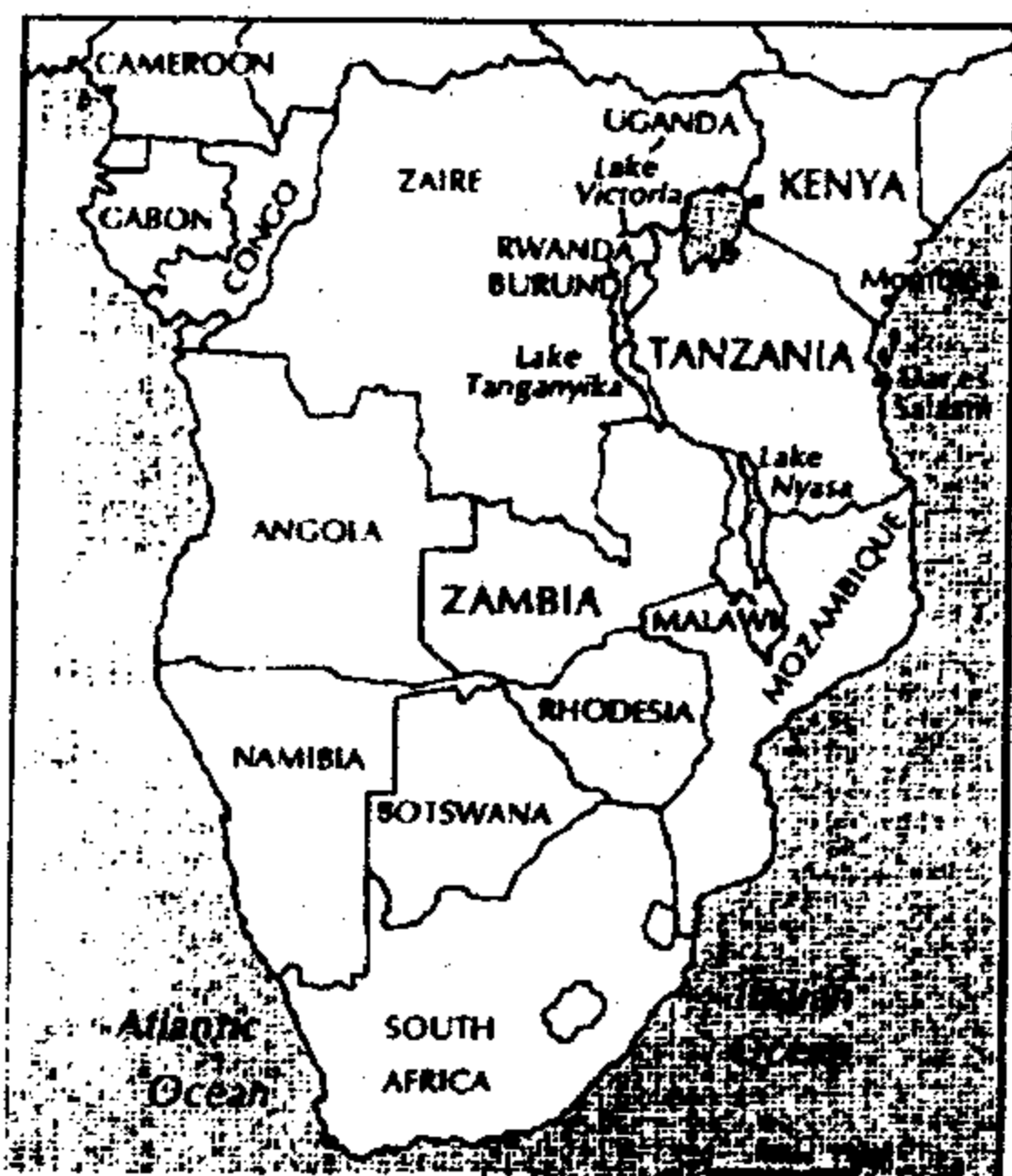
Socialist Outlook has always campaigned against UN interventions. We do not believe their presence will benefit the workers and peasants of affected countries. Their involvement is only to buttress imperialism's interests.

So what was the imperial interest which took these troops to Angola and why are they acquiescing in their departure?

A brief history is necessary.

Angola achieved independence from Portugal in 1975. This independence was achieved primarily because of the collapse of the Salazar dictatorship in Portugal in 1974, under pressure of wars of independence in all its colonies. At this point the liberation struggle in Angola was at a stalemate.

The Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) had been forced to fight not only the Portuguese but also the rival



The African map in 1976

National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA).

The latter had increasingly come under the influence of apartheid-ruled South Africa, keen to protect itself against black liberation struggles. The announcement of the Portuguese withdrawal produced a race for the capital city (Luanda) between these two movements.

The MPLA won due, amongst other things, to the support of Cuba which airlifted thousands of troops into Angola with the help of the USSR.

This great success, and the move of Angola into the 'Socialist' camp was too much for South Africa and US imperialism. UNITA became an important part of the efforts of these powers to destabilise Angola.

These efforts became more desperate as the struggle against apartheid intensified in South Africa and Namibia, and Zimbabwe achieved independence in 1980.

By the mid 1980s the South African Defence Force (sic)

(SADF) was directly involved in Angola. This led to a decisive but unexpected outcome - SADF was defeated by the Cuban army.

This defeat, particularly when combined with the collapse of the USSR and the ongoing struggle further south, caused imperialism to enforce a new political order on its allies in the region.

Namibian independence, majority rule in South Africa, cease-fire in Mozambique (where the South African backed Renamo has been terrorising and destabilising), and lastly, peace accords in Angola.

It was the need to stabilise this new political order that led to UN troops being sent to Angola to police these accords.

This has been no easy process. There were two peace accords, in 1991 and 1994, and many outbreaks of fighting.

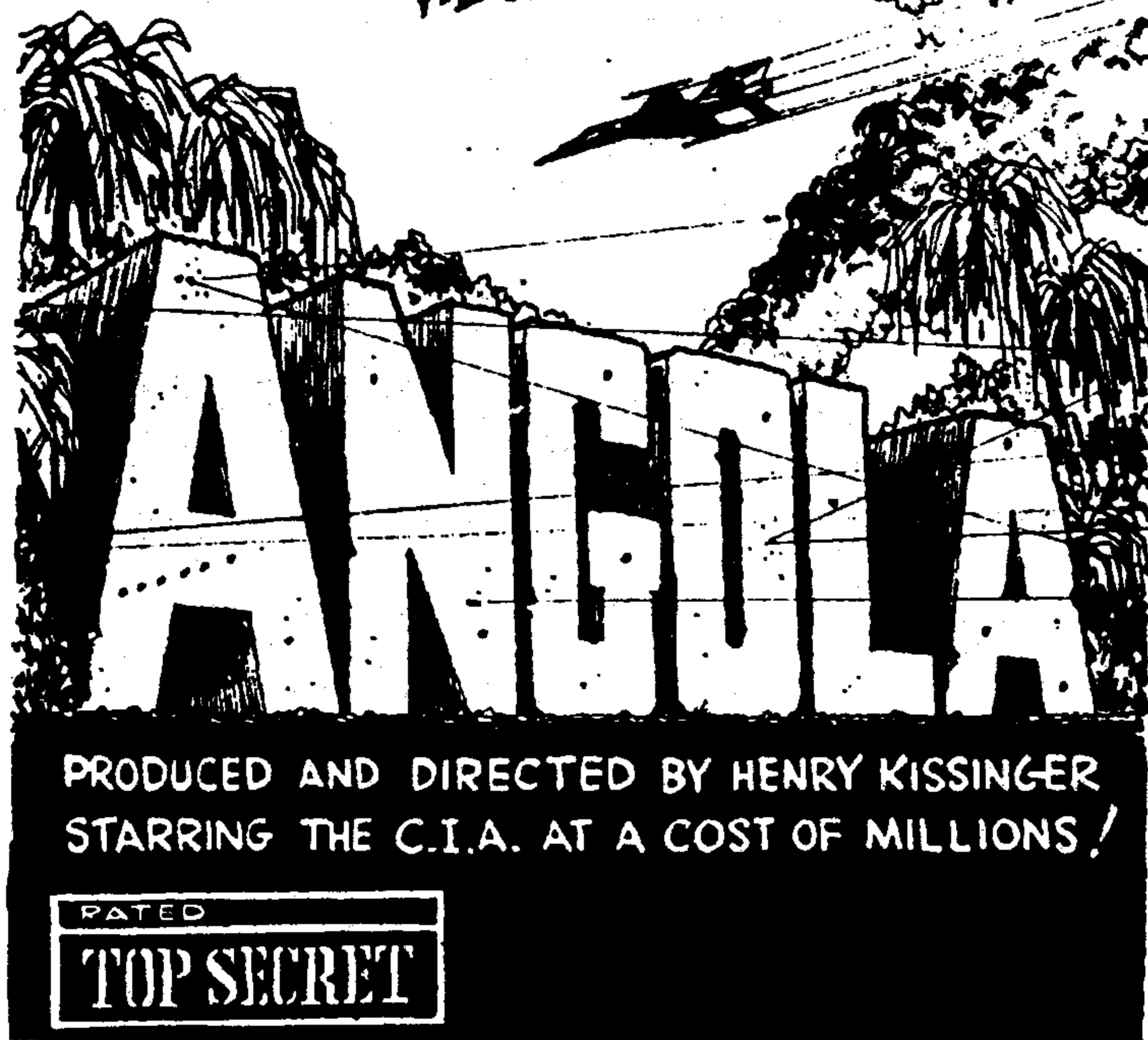
The Lusaka protocol in 1994 involved new cease-fires and elections (UNITA won a third of the seats in the new assembly and several government ministries) and the arrival of UN peace keepers.

Imperialism was interested in the exploitation of the rich diamond and oil wealth of Angola. Undermining popular revolutions was no longer top of the agenda (the MPLA had declared itself no longer Marxist in 1990). Stability was a necessity.

Today the situation has shifted; not in terms of imperialism's goals, but the means by which it thinks they can best be achieved. A new 'new order' is emerging in southern Africa resulting from the genocide in Rwanda and the over-

The MPLA won due, amongst other things, to the support of Cuba which airlifted thousands of troops into Angola with the help of the USSR.

IF YOU LIKED VIETNAM, YOU'LL LOVE THIS ONE!



The Angolan struggle became a new flashpoint of the Cold War

throw of Mobutu in Zaire.

The Congo is a vast disjointed country. If it collapses into chaos this will be a major threat to stability across Southern Africa. Mobutu was the US's principal ally in the region after apartheid South Africa: to lose him was of great significance. The US wishes to see a new government safely controlling the country. The only one on offer at the moment is that of new President Kabila.

The Angolan government is willing militarily to prop up Kabila. This is specifically to prevent UNITA, and a group fighting for independence for the oil rich Angolan region of Cabinda, from using the Congo as a base.

This gives the Angolan government a usefulness to US interests. Firstly as an ally of Kabila, and secondly as the defender of the US oil companies with interests in the Cabinda region.

The UN is willing to withdraw its forces because it wants to redraw the line in Angola. Nobody thinks that the Angolan government will be able to destroy UNITA. But they do believe that the oil wealth of the government is far greater than the diamond wealth of UNITA.

This should result in UNITA's

areas of control being reduced. The removal of the peace keepers enables this fighting to take place.

At the same time the UN is maintaining its "humanitarian" operation (good PR), tightening sanctions against UNITA's arms supplies and diamond smuggling and declaring its willingness to facilitate new negotiations.

This is not some tidy conspiracy run neatly by a suit at the CIA. It's a blood and horror story of the conscription of men and boys, criss-cross alliances between southern African states (Uganda against Kabila, Zimbabwe for him), the slaughter of tourists, Zambian supply roots for UNITA, the De Beers diamond corporation's involvement with UNITA; an endless list. Tragically there is a distinct lack of good guys.

But to go back to the beginning - why have the UN agreed to go? - because it suits imperialism at this moment in time.

Exploring the concrete issues behind the actions of the UN here and elsewhere can lead to better understanding of the much misunderstood role of the United Nations in the world today.

# Protests call for cancellation of apartheid debt

Charlie van Gelderen

PRE-ELECTION budgets always try to please every one. South African Finance Minister Trevor Manuel's last budget before this year's general election is no exception.

It has met with the approval of the Chamber of Mines and the South African Chamber of Business who welcome especially the cutting of corporation tax from 35% to 30%.

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) gave

more muted approval. The inclusion of the three top COSATU officials in the ANC's election list, with the probability of ministerial posts in Mbeki's first government may have made some contribution to this favourable judgement.

COSATU expressed concern with the reiteration in the budget of the need for public service cuts and the decrease in company taxation, the cost of which could be transferred to the poor in future.

It also opposed the continued emphasis on exchange control liberalisation. This, of course, is a

requirement of the World Bank and the IMF for their support of South Africa's economy.

Outside the gates of parliament on Budget day there were other voices. A protest organised by Jubilee 2000 called on the government not to repay debts incurred by its apartheid predecessor.

Jubilee 2000 is part of an international campaign aimed at scrapping the debts of developing countries. National Organiser Brian Ashleigh said South Africa's debt stood at R45 billion Rand (R9.63 = £1):

"A significant proportion of this



Eye to eye: Mandela with chosen successor Mbeki, saddled with apartheid debt

money is paid to organisations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, while people living in rural areas are robbed of sustainable development.

"The government was paying debts which should have been settled by the previous government. It is unable to create jobs as such a huge amount of money is used to

repay the debt. Swiss and German banks, who had benefited under the previous government, should consider paying reparation to the victims of apartheid."

As the Finance Minister began his speech in the National Assembly, the protesters outside chanted "Down with apartheid debt, down".



# All buses stop in Sweden!

Peter Lindgren  
In Sweden, 16,000 bus drivers all over the country have been on strike since February 25. This national dispute is rooted in privatisation and neoliberal policy. Although Kommunal, the union of public employees, demands a payrise of three per cent instead of the one per cent offered by the employers, working hours are more important.

"There are two main problems" explains Anders Wettemark, a bus driver and member of the Socialist Party (Swedish section of the Fourth international), and member of the union's national negotiating committee.

"Firstly, the working hours can mean that you start at 6 in the morning, have one or two breaks during the day and leave work at 10 pm. Here our union demands shifts of less than twelve hours, a very reasonable demand.

Secondly, the time between breaks can be up to five hours. That's why so many drivers says the strike is about the right to go to the toilet!"

Privatisation of the publicly owned local bus services in Swedish cities started in 1989. The company who offered to run the buses most cheaply won the franchise. Competition was very tough, and bidders for the contracts used long working hours to cut costs.

"Yes, we have certainly paid for this EU-instigated system", says

Anders Wettemark, "but this is also the reason why the drivers are so solid behind the strike".

Swebus is the largest company with 30 percent of the national market. Swebus was privatised in the mid-nineties and sold to the infamous multinational Stagecoach. Stagecoach, formed in Perth, Scotland in 1980, is clearly an union-busting company. As late as December 1998 Stagecoach faced a four week strike in New Zealand due to its union-busting.

On the highly organised Swedish labour market, strike breaking is not allowed during legal strikes. No-one, not even conservatives, promotes strike breaking here. And Swebus' new owners have never tried any union busting towards their employees.

But the strikers still face problems. Around ten percent of the workforce are not in the union and thus they receive nothing from strike funds. So Swebus pays every non-member who reports for work each day their full salary, although they do not have to work. As the strikers only get 80 per cent of their wages, non-union members are better off, and Wettemark finds this "irritating".

Swedish legislation still reflects the power of the Swedish workers movement. Union membership is the highest in the world, 84 per cent of the total workforce. Since state appointed mediators have no right to force any of the parties in a conflict to sign an agreement,

the strike might be a long one. Both sides have funds for a long fight. The employers' costs will be covered by the national employers' association SAF.

"I think the decisive factor will be the reaction of the general public", says Anders Wettemark. "That's why it is so important for us to launch a campaign aimed at the public, explaining our motives. I am promoting a campaign to collect signatures amongst the public, demanding that the employers sign an agreement acceptable to the union."

A poll on the first day of the strike showed that 85 per cent of the public support the strike. Wettemark explains "Many, many are experiencing the same problems as us in their jobs, it's not just public sector workers who have suffered during these last neoliberal years. But our strike causes obvious problems for the public. We have to take that seriously".

This strike is the most important one this decade in Sweden. Perhaps the union leaders were not too happy about launching a national strike, but it is not easy to simply a strike with such a high level of support by signing a lousy agreement. The strike was joined by a further 3,000 drivers on March 6.

Clearly, the outcome of this strike is important not just for the bus drivers (and their passengers). It will set a precedent for future workers' struggles in Sweden.



Blairite policies have all gone horribly wrong for German Chancellor Schröder, who has seen unemployment rocket by 250,000 in a month, pay strikes and the start of a recession just as the Euro takes off.

## Blair heads to Euroland

**Alan Thornett**

TONY BLAIR has at last abandoned his famed 'wait and see' stance over the Euro.

He has begun the government campaign to win the vote in a referendum which is likely to be held soon after the next election - assuming Labour win it, which looks like the only outcome at the present time.

Preparations for Britain's entry into Euroland are now going full steam ahead, with the aim

not only of ensuring that Britain can qualify economically and will be technically prepared, but also to present a virtual fait accompli to voters by the time of the referendum.

This preparation involves full compliance with the terms of the job-cutting stability pact, which both regulates the Euro zone and controls further entry into it.

Blair is also aware that the political mood has been swinging in his direction, not least in the leadership of the trade unions, where the TUC has consolidated its position of full support for the Euro and the stability pact.

There is an urgent need to step up the campaign in the unions and the Labour Party against the Euro and its social consequences. This must be done on a working class agenda and on an internationalist basis - totally separated from the Tory right and the little Englander nationalists who want to "save the

pound".

This is important, not least because of the mass street protests reportedly being planned by the Tory right for next year in the run-up to a referendum.

That a principled internationalist campaign can be built has been shown by the Euromarch campaigns around the EU summits in Amsterdam, Luxemburg, and Cardiff, and now the campaign for Cologne.

Meanwhile we are told that the launch of the Euro has been "highly successful". Some would say "so was the Titanic" - the problem was that it hit as whacking great iceberg not long afterwards.

Already city forecasters predict that the Euro, dragged down above all by the growing economic problems in Germany, may fall below the US dollar in value by the end of the year - an event which would have huge political consequences, not least for Blair's referendum.

It is already clear from the first two months (in which it has lost over 6 percent of its starting value) that, the fiscal straight-jacket the Euro imposes on the economies of the Euro zone will tend to pull the single currency project apart.

All this makes the mass protests to be held in Cologne at the end of May and the beginning of June even more important.

We are told that the launch of the Euro has been "highly successful". Some would say "so was the Titanic"

## Cologne 99

International demonstration, May 29

The European Marches (organiser of the mass demonstration in Amsterdam in 97) is calling another major protest (50,000 or more) in Cologne in June to coincide with the Heads of Government Summit of the EU under the German presidency.

Marchers will set out from every region of Germany and from other European cities including Prague, Luxembourg, and Paris, to converge on Cologne for the demo. There will be a (1,000 strong) march from Brussels to Cologne. Across Europe unemployment, job insecurity, social exclusion and

poverty are growing. The demands will be:

\* A guaranteed job for all, and a decent standard of living.

\* For an immediate massive reduction of working hours, coordinated on a European level, without loss of wages or purchasing power.

\* Opposition to compulsory part-time work, child labour, and social dumping.

\* Opposition to the enrichment of the minority and the impoverishment of the majority.

\* Yes to the redistribution of wealth.

\* Opposition to all forms of exclusion and discrimination, including those based on gender or race. Yes to the full right of asylum for the persecuted.

\* Defend the welfare state. Yes to social rights in all areas (housing, education, health etc.) with



the necessary funding.

The European Marches are appealing to the peoples of Europe, to associations, trade unions and social forces, to make May 29 1999 a massive day of mobilisation.

The current plan is to have a British delegation on one (or more) of the marches in Europe and organise coaches for May 29.

Organisations and individuals wishing to be a part of such a mobilisation, under the name of Cologne 99, should fill in and post the form below.

I/we wish to be a part of the mobilisation for the marches and demonstration in Cologne on May 29.

Please send me/us all information about the campaign as it develops, along with information as to how I/we can be involved. I/we enclose a donation to help start the campaign.

Name .....  
Organisation .....  
Phone .....  
Address .....

Donation £.....

(Cheques: Cologne 99)  
Send to: Cologne 99, c/o Leeds TUC Centre, 88 North St, LEEDS LS2 7PN



## Left unity in French elections

# LO and LCR link up to form "100% left" slate

Across Europe today in every country except Ireland and Greece, Social Democratic governments are in power. While this achievement for social democracy is a result of the crisis and defeats of the right wing parties, these governments continue to apply austerity policies, albeit in new clothes. This situation opens up more space for left recomposition to the left of these traditional working class parties. France's largest far-left groups have united for the European elections in June. Opinion polls show 5-8% support for the list led by Alain Krivine (LCR) and Arlette Laguiller (LO). 3000 people packed into the launch meeting for the campaign on February 5 at the Mutualité in Paris. Laure Favieres spoke to Alain Krivine about the project

**LF:** What are the main challenges for this common list?

**AK:** To make visible, electorally, a current of opinion which is already present in the social sphere: the current of French opinion which is against the right-wing parties, against the far-right, and also against the policies of the current, "plural left" government.

This current has been present in social struggles since 1995. But on the political front, it has remained marginal - apart from the respectable vote which Arlette Laguiller won in the last presidential elections, and a good score for our two organisations in the regional elections in early 1998.

**LF:** The opinion polls give you

eight per cent support

**AK:** Let's be prudent about these opinion polls. The only important question is whether we pass the 5 per cent barrier, the minimum to take any seats in the European parliament.

That would be the first time that a vote for the far left would seem useful and credible, rather than a protest vote.

Make no mistake, if we get more than 5 per cent, it will be a real event, both in France and at the European level. To the left of the institutional parties there will at last be a credible force which rejects all the capitalist and neoliberal policies being applied across Europe, by governments of left and right.

A good score will also be a warning to the employers, and to the "plural left" government. Their obedience to the laws of the market will cost them something!

**LF:** Communist Party leader Robert Hue says the LO-LCR list seeks to weaken his Party.

**AK:** Our campaign isn't aimed against the Communist Party as such. But it is certainly aimed against that party's current leadership.

The fundamental goal of our list is to organise a front of all those who are ready to resist the right and the far right - these are our major enemies.

We are obliged to oppose the policies of the "plural left" government, in which the Communist Party participates. Their government refuses to respond to the attacks from employers. On the contrary, it goes along with them.

The top of the Communist Party participates in government, but the base of the party is often present alongside us in social mobilisations against those policies. That party's balancing act cannot last for long. That's why the CP is in crisis.

Many voters, or former voters for the Communist Party feel more attracted to the LO-LCR policies than to those of Robert Hue. Good!

**LF:** LO and LCR are not new parties. Why is this list suddenly possible?

**AK:** Everyone on the left knows about the differences between our two parties, particularly concerning the type of organisation we want to build, and the way our militants should implement "the line" on a day to day basis.

This isn't some politicians' agreement which covers up those differences. But there are clearly enough common points for us to collaborate in these elections.

We urgently need an alternative to Maastricht Europe, with its 20 million unemployed and 60 million poor, the expansion of part time and unstable contracts, its anti-ecological and anti-democratic policies. Instead of a monetary union, on financial criteria, we want a social Europe, based on social criteria.

LO and LCR faced an exceptional situation. We needed to act, and act together, to show that there is an alternative to the "plural left" government, and that left politicians can and should implement audacious measures to reduce unemployment, marginalisation and job insecurity.

**LF:** What are the main elements of your campaign?

**AK:** Employment is the central focus, much of the rest follows from this. The rise in urban violence and support for the far right is, fundamentally, linked to persistent mass unemployment and the lack of a future for so many people. Thirty years ago, there were 200,000 unemployed people in France, and the fascists scored 1% in elections. Today there are three million unemployed, and the fascists score 15%.

We say that cuts in the working week, without flexibilisation, annualisation or salary cuts, can create one million new jobs in France.

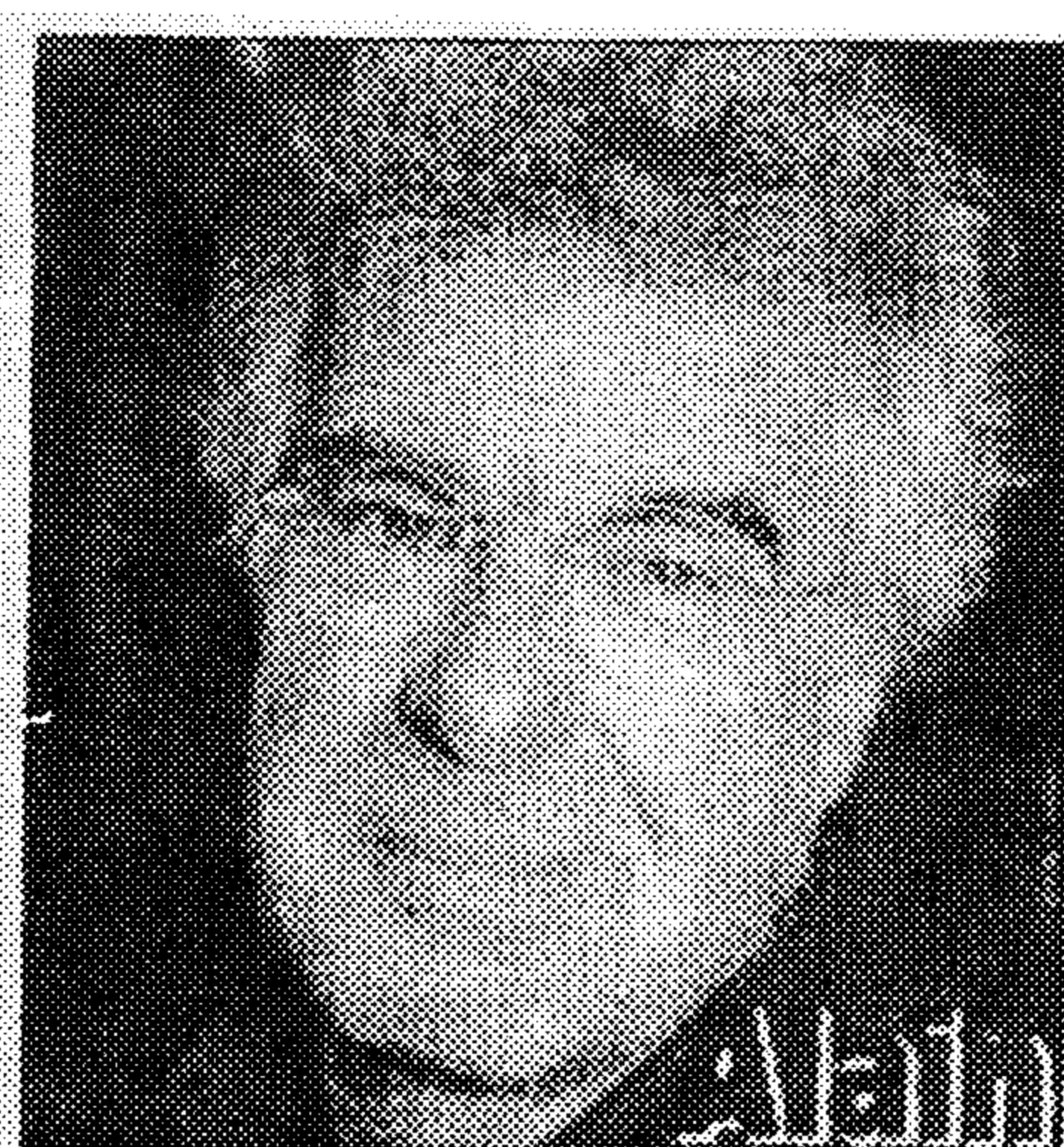
The amount of overtime registered in 1998 is equivalent to 600,000 full time jobs! The bosses want to use compulsory overtime to avoid the introduction of a 35 hour week. We should make that impossible. A left government could make overtime work so expensive for



Arlette

**LAGUILLER**

Lutte ouvrière



Alain

**KRIVINE**

Ligue communiste révolutionnaire

the employers that they would stop using it.

It all depends, of course, whether you want to stay within the framework of capitalist logic, or confront the bosses. We want to see new taxes on financial transactions and on capital.

Let's reform the tax system, end the tax cuts for employers, and increase their share of the tax burden! Drain the wealth of the rich, and redistribute it through a job-creation programme! That will require popular mobilisation and confrontations with the employers. But it can be done.

We will also put forward the demands of the sans-papiers (undocumented immigrants), of women, the unemployed and the homeless. We know, too, that our society's social deficit is also an ecological deficit. Who suffers most from the noise pollution of modern cities: the rich in the suburbs or those in the inner cities?

**LF:** How is the campaign progressing?

**AK:** It is too early to tell for sure, but there are countless positive echoes and signs - from those around us, and from our own supporters. People don't perceive this as a "Trotskyist unity list," but as the only non-governmental, anti-capitalist left option. "100% left", some call it.

People who would not have voted LO or LCR in the past now see this list as a useful tool. Some are already helping us with posters, meetings, leaflets.

**LF:** Who are the candidates?

**AK:** Our list of candidates reflects our various struggles. Most of our candidates are women, including 8 of the first 10 positions.

Our candidates come from all walks of life, including immigrants, and two candidates active in other countries of the European Union.

**LF:** Why should anyone vote for the LO-LCR list?

**AK:** To show that the balance of forces is changing, that there is a radical, anti-capitalist wing of the movement which has no confidence in the "plural left" government.

To demand a job, a roof, health, education. To reject nationalism and the Europe which is being built above us. The more votes we get, the less people will be discouraged about defending themselves.

These elections are a step towards the construction of a new anti-capitalist force which will not be confined to the far left, but will attract anti-capitalist militants currently working in the Communist and Socialist parties or the Greens, as well as the much larger group of people who are sceptical about all the parties, and concentrate their energies on the trade union movement, single issue campaigns and voluntary sector activities.

A good vote will enable us to send deputies to the European Parliament. It is an institution without any power, but we can use the credibility of parliamentary status to gain information, and get media coverage when we denounce the secret structures of the Europe which is being planned for us.

We will use our positions as a tribune for the social movements, and use the resources at our disposal to build those movements.

*In voting for us, people are voting for themselves!*

(from Rouge, 4 February 1999)

"Most of our candidates are women, including 8 of the first 10 positions"

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## Solid support for campaign in the LCR

The LCR spent several months debating the joint list with LO, culminating in a national conference on January 16.

The common list was approved by 79 per cent, and the motion on how the campaign would be organised was approved by 76 per cent. Motions rejecting the common list received 14-19 per cent of the vote. Four percent of delegates supported a third option, which would have concentrated more on the LCR's own European project.

Participation in the preparatory meetings for this congress was high by LCR standards, with 13% more comrades than participated in the last regular congress.

This reflects a significant growth in the membership of the organisation over the last 12 months.

In a separate congress the same weekend, LO supporters also approved the common list. Their vote was virtually unanimous.

(from Rouge, 4 February 1999)



# Lift the sanctions! Stop the silent war against Iraq!

While there has been no declaration of war against Iraq since the bombings earlier in the year – cynically timed to delay Clinton's impeachment hearings, there is no doubt that the Iraqi people are being subjected to a prolonged military offensive.

The Kirkuk pipeline, recently bombed by US, is the prize of south Kurdistan for imperialism. Currently under Iraqi state ownership, the Pentagon is dangling a deal in front of the apparently good Kurds of Iraq (in contrast with the supposed bad Kurds of the PKK), Barzani (KDP) and Talabani (PUK).

The trade off they suggest is that the oil will be privatised in exchange for some supposed measure of independence.

In practice this will be little different from the current supposed safe havens - which have only proved safe for imperialist interests not the people who live there.

While it is unclear whether these Kurdish leaders will accept the deal, it certainly seems that imperialism is prepared to consider redrawing the map of the Middle East yet again.

Unfortunately protests against this barbaric offensive



have been extremely muted - as if bombs without a declaration kill less people than if they have been announced.

Serious effort needs to be put in to ensure the maximum possible turnout for the demonstration against sanc-

tions on April 19 - the only national focus for opposition to imperialism's crimes against the Iraqi people.

# New beginnings for the Portuguese Left

Many socialists in Britain have eagerly been watching the progress of the French left as the slate put forward for the European Elections by the Ligue Communiste Revolutionaire (LCR) and Lutte Ouvriere (LO) is getting an impressive showing in the opinion polls (see facing page). Rather less is known about developments in other European countries. Terry Conway from Socialist Outlook talked to João-Carlos Louçã of the PSR, Portuguese Section of the Fourth International.

**SO: Tell us about your plans for making an impact in the forthcoming European elections.**

J-C: We have formed a new block, Bloco de Esquerda (Left Bloc), together with two other groups, to stand candidates not only in the European elections in June but in the Parliamentary elections that will take place in October.

The forces involved in this project are ourselves (the PSR) the UDP, an organisation of Maoist origin and Política XXI, a group of ex-CP intellectuals.

The organisations involved have a real weight in society. For example PSR leader Manuel Graça is General Secretary of the Shoemakers' Trade Union, and the PSR and UDP are active across the leather-working and shoemaking unions. The PSR is also involved in the national leadership of the teachers' union, the biggest union in Portu-

gal.

The UDP has had a Member of Parliament previously. Up till 1983 they had a member elected in their own name, and between 1983-1985 they had a member elected on the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) list.

Under the slogan "Beginning Again" the Bloco proclaims that it is time "to remake the left, and begin again. To combat the negative effects of globalisation, with its trail of misery and injustice. To struggle for a Europe able to build a future based on the best elements of its history. A Europe which values all its identities, be they national, class, immigrant or pluri-cultural."

The initiative has already attracted considerable interest.

Among the "independents" who have signed up are the historian Fernando Rosas, composer Jose Mario Branco, and the writer and active feminist Melice Ribeiro Santos.

Despite the encouraging number of individual members, militants of the three founding groups are still the base of the Left Bloc. This exciting move was approved by the congresses of the three organisations in January.

**SO: Has this development happened suddenly, or is it something you have been discussing for a long time?**

J-C: All the forces involved have worked together politically on a number of key campaigns; for example in the referendum opposing Maastricht and the referendum in support of women's abortion rights.

The PSR has also stood on common election platforms with Política XXI in municipal elections in Lisbon and Opporto which won three per cent of votes and elected a councillor.

The three organisations are convinced that we must bring into politics all those who are excluded or marginalised.

It is high time for all those who identify with the essence of what we are saying to come together in a new project which will be capable of carrying forward strong and credible proposals for democracy and socialism. For the PSR "Such a project is a long-standing idea. Many independent militants have long been convinced of the need for an electorally viable alternative.

"People have wanted the intervention of organised militants to be directed towards concretising a political and cultural force representative of an alternative current in the Portuguese left. But what is new is the decision to assume the responsibility and the risk of doing so. It is time now to do it."

**SO: What do you see as the main purpose of the Block? What impact do you expect to have?**

J-C: We are not standing just in order to get elected. We also see the formation as a way of intervening into the internal debate going on inside the PCP.

This debate is between a tendency tending to social-democratisation, defending an "alternative of power" that wants to negotiate a governmental programme and

places in that government with the socialists, and another tendency - more to the left - that still wants to build a social and political alternative.

We regret that the PCP is still unable to understand the complexity of Portuguese society today. This prevents the Party from presenting itself as a party which wants to break with the current society.

We have said that we want to bring together all those who want to build an alternative to Social Democracy, and that the PCP is central to this. But their reaction to the Block has been hysterical - they still think that they are the alternative alone. This is despite their recent setbacks. They won only 11 per cent of the vote in the local elections and only 9 deputies in the last General Election.

## Impact on CP

We have already had an impact on them, even before the campaign has started properly. The PCP has been organising a series of meetings across the country on various topics, including on the future of the left.

They organised a meeting in Coimbra on this theme last May and invited Fernando Rosas, the block's main spokesperson, as well as others who support us. They did not invite a single representative of the Socialist Party.

While these meetings had in principle been agreed to by the whole PCP, subsequent developments underlined what we already thought about the tensions in that organisation.

A further meeting on the same lines, with the same platform had been planned for Lisbon. But following the Coimbra meeting the CP leadership manoeuvred time and again, postponing the meeting

several times and then eventually organising it at short notice to try to minimise its impact.

Finally, the debate took place at the beginning of February, with the PCP's leadership having to justify taking its distance from the project of the Left Block and its support for "institutional work" at the level of European institutions.

**SO: What are the next key steps in the campaign?**

J-C: There is much to be done. We have already agreed who will lead the lists; Miguel Portas of Política XXI for the European elections and a candidate chosen by the PSR for the elections in October. But other candidates still have to be chosen.

The next step is registering the Left Bloc as a legal political party. That means collecting five thousand signatures, each of which has to be accompanied by a lot of supporting paper work. This is a time-consuming and expensive challenge but it will be good practice for the European elections in June, and parliamentary elections in October.

The local meetings to present the Left Bloc have had, so far, a very big impact. They have attracted many people including a significant number of left militants - even from the PCP - that haven't been organised for many years.

The intention of the Block is to bring together many more people than the forces of the 3 organisations that started it. This is working - so far - because we are having success in getting together different generations of social activists.

For these people and for the left in general, the Left Block represents not only a new hope, but also something completely new in terms of the left recomposition.

Among the "independents" who have signed up are the historian Fernando Rosas, composer Jose Mario Branco, and the writer and active feminist Melice Ribeiro Santos.



# Free Mumia Abu-Jamal!

Mumia Abu-Jamal is the first class struggle prisoner to face execution in the United States of America since the Rosenbergs, more than 45 years ago. His conviction in the 1981 slaying of a Philadelphia, Pennsylvania police officer was the result of a frame-up in which the police, prosecutors, and the judge at his trial all played a role.

As an award-winning Black journalist, Mumia had gained the enmity of Philadelphia's ruling circles for his exposure of their racism, and for his consistent support to the struggles of the poor, the oppressed, and the dispossessed. This is work he has pursued even while on Pennsylvania's death row for the last 17 years. It has earned Mumia the title, "Voice of the Voiceless."

Mumia's case focuses a clear spotlight on a number of troubling issues regarding the criminal justice system in the U.S.A. It is one of the few countries in the world which continues the barbaric tradition of the death penalty.

Both the death penalty and the criminal justice system more broadly reflect the deep racism which permeates every aspect of life in that country.

Four of every ten people on death row in the U.S. are Black, while they constitute only eleven percent of the general population. In the last 30 years the prison population of the United States has expanded six-fold, and it is still rising.

The US now has a greater percentage of its population behind bars than South Africa did at the height of apartheid. And that prison population consists disproportionately of Blacks and other people of colour.

In addition to Mumia there are scores of political prisoners in U.S. jails - people who have been imprisoned not primarily for any real or imagined criminal acts, but because they are committed to

fighting for an end to oppression in the USA, and against that country's role in the oppression of other peoples throughout the world.

Last October, ignoring overwhelming evidence of misconduct at his original trial and a large body of evidence which has since emerged to cast an even greater doubt about the legitimacy of its verdict, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court turned down Mumia's appeal for a new trial.

This creates an emergency situation in his case. Without a favourable intervention by the federal courts (something which is far from certain) Mumia could be executed within a year. In truth, as

Mumia, his legal team, and his supporters all state, his fate rests with our collective capacity to make the price of his political murder too high for the ruling powers to pay. What happens to Mumia Abu-Jamal will have global repercussions. Already his case has generated substantial protests in the US and around the world.

Major mobilisations are scheduled to take place on April 24 in Philadelphia and San Francisco, as well as internationally. We call on all members and supporters of the Fourth International, all supporters of liberation throughout the world, and all those who simply believe in elementary justice and human rights, to do everything possible to participate in and support these and all other protests demanding:

■ Stop the Execution of Mumia Abu-Jamal!

■ Mumia must receive a new trial now!

In the US contact: International Concerned Family and Friends to Free Mumia Abu Jamal 215 476 8812 or The Mobilization to Free Mumia Abu Jamal 415 821 0459 or Fax 415 821 0166.

(Resolution adopted by International Executive Committee of the Fourth International, February 1999)



# Endgame for Irish pacification process

John North

**T**HE FEBRUARY vote at the Stormont assembly to endorse new structures of partition for the island mark the beginning of the endgame for imperialism's current plans on imposing stability and smothering the Irish question for now.

It is becoming harder and harder to hide the true nature of the settlement.

A familiar cycle, acted out at each stage of the pacification process, was repeated again. The republicans clung desperately to last month's bottom line. Their allies in the nationalist family joined with the British and Unionists in moving the line even further to the right.

A new status quo emerged, even more reactionary than before. What causes a special shudder in Republican ranks was that the issue was absolutely fundamental for the movement - the surrender of weapons.

The focus was a "mistake" by Bertie Aherne, Irish premier and titular leader of the "Irish family" invented by Sinn Fein. In an interview with the British *Sunday Times* he made it clear that he expected the republicans to begin handing in weapons as a precondition to taking their place in a Stormont executive.

At the time of the Good Friday settlement the Republican leadership had had to agree to the renewal of partition, the return of a Stormont regime and an end to the formal statements of a right to unity in the Irish constitution.

In return their nationalist mentors stood by them in asserting their right to a place in the executive and the movement of the arms issue sideways.

The unionists have demanded decommissioning to humiliate the republicans, in the expectation that they would be unable to deliver and could be forced out of the executive.

The Good Friday agreement did not require decommissioning before the formation of a government, but that was then and this is now. The task for the imperialists and their capitalist allies is to prevent the "Faulknerisation" of Trimble. (William Faulkner was the last unionist to agree to the co-option of the catholic middle class in support of reaction, but when he lost the support of the majority of unionists in a tide of reaction the British stood back and abandoned the Sunningdale agreement.)

Ahern's demand for weapons was later supported by the SDLP and Bill Clinton called for support for the "spirit" of the agreement. This shows the position of Irish capital and US imperialism.

Trimble was publicly assured that if necessary Sinn Fein would be dumped, and was able to hold 50% of the unionist vote in the Stormont ballot on the new structures.

This would be significant but not fatal if what we were observing was the dying of an old regime and Sinn Fein's analysis of sweeping reform were correct.

A moment's thought shows this cannot be the case. Protecting Trimble means placating the unionist right, and that means no significant democratisation nor desecularisation - impossible anyway given the sectarianism built into the new structures.

All the evidence points that way. The great transitional structures that would lead to a united Ireland have been replaced by Micky Mouse committees like inland waterways and food safety. The sectarian bear pit of Stormont looms larger than ever but all the structures that were supposed to transform it are fading away.

**I**ssues of equality will be the special concern of the proposed PM - David Trimble! A super-quango, the Civic forum, will be set up. Nominations to the forum would come from business, voluntary and community, trade union, church, arts and sports groups, as well as victims' organisations.

The British will control not only the Stormont regime but a thoroughly artificial and dependent civic society. The whole caboodle will cost £36 million at the expense of services like Health and Education.

The reformist illusion is summed up by the laughable expectation that Chris Patton, Tory Grandee, will propose any fundamental reform of the RUC. Hardly a day goes by without new allegations against the force - allegations that won't be answered.

We will receive no explanation as to why RUC members stood by while as Portadown man Robert Hamill was beaten to death by a loyalist mob.

There will be no answer to their involvement in the murder of lawyer Pat Finucane - the local legal structures refuse, despite overwhelming evidence, to support calls for an enquiry.

Even statements by prominent loyalist paramilitaries that they were flooded out with documents from state forces identifying targets are simply brushed aside despite overwhelming evidence.

In Britain evidence of police racialism in the investigation of Stephen Lawrence's death has



caused outrage. In Ireland evidence of the routine involvement of the RUC in sectarian killing produces only indifference. Nothing could make the reality of the pacification process clearer.

What is unveiled is always negative. The RUC are to continue the use of plastic bullets. Plans to cut down the number of arms in civilian (ie Unionist) hands are to be shelved.

British army demilitarisation has gone into reverse as they step up activity in border areas. The British continue to duck their obligation to protect nationalist civilians in the Gervaghy Road. Sectarian intimidation is presented as cultural difference and residents are under constant pressure to bow to the orange bigots and allow the British off the hook.

Sinn Fein feel they are protected by the formal wording of the agreement and by the secret assurances they have received. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The February vote at Stormont moved the process into the endgame. Its final operation depends only on secretary of state Mowlam and on British interests.

Britain wants Sinn Fein in to help bolster a really quite fragile process, but on Britain's terms. Sinn Fein must bend the knee. The only issue is the amount of leeway they have in timing and formulation.

The choices are presented quite starkly. They can wear suits in the new Stormont or they can be the victims of the sort of witchhunt being aimed at republican dissidents - political opponents of the agreement are quite clearly being targeted under the catch-all of the Omagh bombing. Some have been abducted and threatened by the IRA itself.

In the North of Ireland there is growing uncertainty. Limited accommodation to Loyalism does not produce conciliation. The Loyalists move even more sharply to the right and demand further concessions.

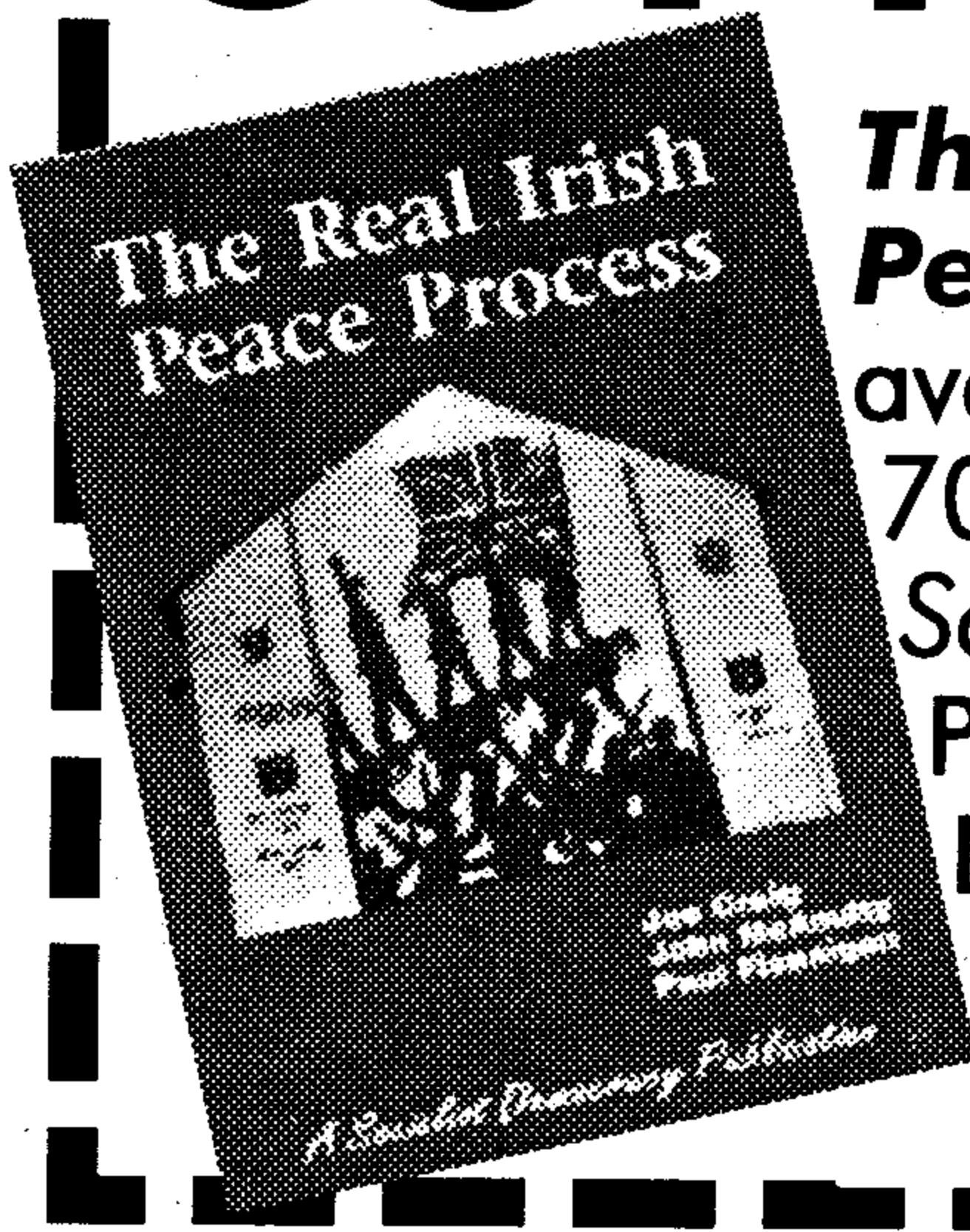
The British are determined to keep their Loyalist base but find they have less and less to offer nationalist workers, who gain nothing from the process and face new structures of repression.

As growing disillusion comes to fruition we must ensure that it is not tagged on to the interests of a corrupt capitalism based around the nationalist family nor sent up the dead end of saving the "peace" process.

Socialists must provide a class alternative that can fight both local capitalism and the forces of imperialism.

**In Ireland evidence of the routine involvement of the RUC in sectarian killing produces only indifference.**

## OUT NOW!



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Paul Flannigan.

These days the Irish political scene is spiced with rumour and scandal. The infamous lifestyles of Dublin's criminal fraternity have been replaced on the front pages by the even more infamous lifestyles of 'the politicians'.

Almost everyone is now ready to believe that most politicians are up to their armpits in bribery and corruption, taking kickbacks from businessmen for services rendered.

A drip-drip flow of news emanating from two public tribunals confirms many of the prejudices working class people harbour about 'their' politicians. The proceedings bring into the open the tip of Irish capitalism's unseemly underworld.

The Moriarty Tribunal was set up in September 1997 primarily to look into the shady financial affairs of Charles Haughey, leader of Fianna Fail between 1979 and 1992 and twice Taoiseach, and to detail any payments made directly to him during any period in office.

Haughey has taken over the title previously held by Martin Cahill as the country's most illustrious crook. Though many legal restrictions hamper the tribunal enough information has emerged to expose and taint much of what passes for normal political practice in the land of saints and scholars.

The current leadership of Fianna Fail is increasingly worried about what sludge might eventually spill out from the sewers they have made for themselves.

For years there was speculation about how Charlie Haughey lived a lifestyle more fitted to a Saudi prince than a mere politician. Some imagined he had made it big in business investment before he became Fianna Fail leader. This turns out to be untrue.

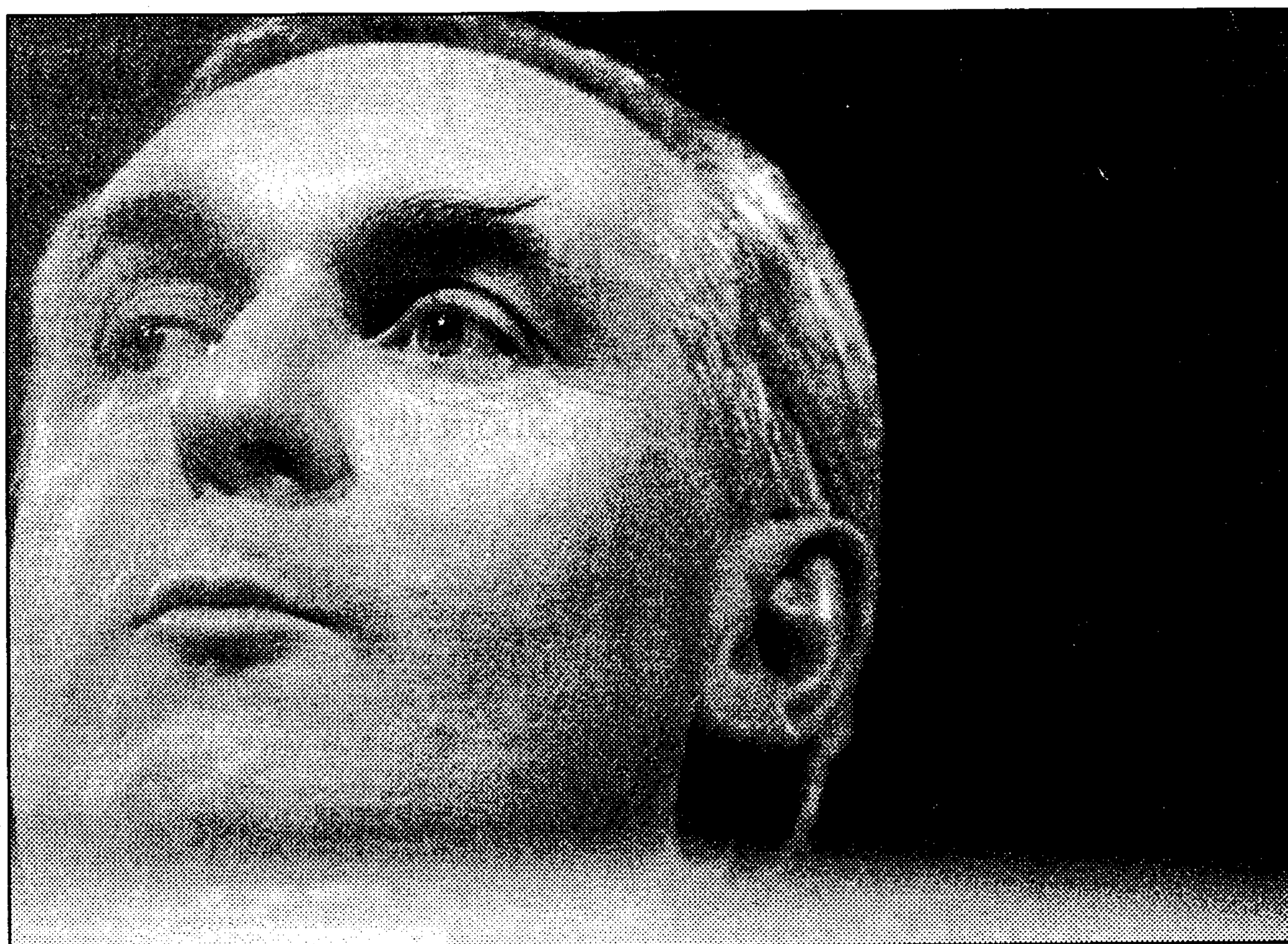
The simple truth is that for decades Charlie's luxurious lifestyle was paid for by an assortment of wealthy sponsors. More directly than most political leaders Haughey's morals were the creation of big business.

The revelation that Haughey was a kept man came about after a family row in the Dunne family in 1994 as to who should control the family's silver. The family own Ireland's premier retail chain, and are notorious for treating their workers like dirt.

In the course of fighting an action by other family members to have him ousted from the 'Dunnes Trust', Ben Dunne instructed his solicitor to reveal that his client had gifted Haughey a sack full of money (£1.1 million.) The payments were made secretly via a slush fund in an account in the Cayman Islands under the name of Ansbacher.

Gifts to friends are not illegal, but when they are made from secret bank accounts, are of such huge amounts and made to prime ministers by parvenu characters like Dunne, then suspicions are aroused. Even worse for Haughey such gifts are liable for tax inspection and should have been declared to the Inland Revenue.

A little at a time, pieces from Haughey's financial past are being unearthed. Ireland's dominant politician over the past two decades was receiving large dona-



Keeping his head above the slurry? Bertie Ahern may yet have some explaining to do

# Fianna Fail's 'Goodfellas'

tions from several business sources.

He had a bagman called Des Traynor, chair of a private bank in Dublin which controlled flows of money in and out of the Ansbacher account. It was suggested during the tribunal that the account contained upwards of £45 million. Lucky for Haughey and the rest of his 'firm,' Traynor is now dead, and the Ansbacher account has so far resisted proper legal inspection.

Last week representatives of Ireland's biggest bank AIB came before the tribunal and shed some light on their relationship with Haughey. Back in 1979, they explained, the bank agreed to write off a Haughey debt of £400,000. The bankers stated that Haughey had in fact owed the bank £1.4m.

When Charlie refused to give up his cheque books he warned the bank that he could become 'a troublesome adversary'. What raised eyebrows most was that Haughey had been allowed to build up this debt without offering any collateral.

He had been borrowing about £12,000 a week for years to finance his champagne lifestyle. Traynor had partly alleviated Haughey's debt by repaying the bank a £750,000 lump sum proffered by some mysterious donor. It seems that there is even more material yet to be uncovered.

Another inquiry, the Flood tribunal, is pulling other leading Fianna Failers into the slurry and even threatens the present Fianna Fail led coalition government headed by Haughey's most favoured son Bertie Ahern.

Set up in late 1997, it is examining allegations of payments to politicians pertaining to Dublin planning decisions after Fianna

Fail big boss Ray Burke was forced to resign his post as Foreign Minister.

Burke allegedly received £60,000 from James Gogarty in June 1987 acting on behalf of two building developers JMSE and Fitsuilton plc.

When he was a leading city councillor and its chairman in 1985, Burke pushed through controversial rezoning schemes favourable to certain developers. Rumours are rife that Burke is seeking immunity in return for talking freely about corruption in high places. For a long time Burke was a central fund-raiser for Fianna Fail.

The story emerged after the 81 year old Gogarty went to the press because he was refused a satisfactory pension from his employer JMSE. Gogarty also alleges that a former senior Dublin Corporation official and Fianna Fail supporter George Redmond received thousands in kickbacks from developers.

Redmond denied this, but in a dramatic twist last week was arrested by police at Dublin airport as he arrived back from the Isle of Man carrying more than £300,000. It is believed that Redmond was desperately attempting to deposit some of his ill gotten gains in a bank on the island.

In yet another twist, developer Tom Gilmartin now says he will give evidence that he paid Fianna Fail EU commissioner Pdraig Flynn £50,000 in 1988 to smooth the way for a development around Bachelors Walk on the north side of the Liffey.

The immediate question is whether the present Fianna Fail led government can survive. So far the coalition partners are staying on board hoping that Ahern himself is clean.

The opposition parties also have

reason to fear a spring cleaning of the political system. The most righteous of Haughey opponents, Fine Gael's G. Fitzgerald also had large personal debts written off by the AIB under the chairmanship of Peter Sutherland, a close political friend and associate.

Ahern may not manage to keep himself out of the slurry. His closest political friend and confidante is building developer Joe Burke, whose name keeps cropping up.

Burke's name surfaced again recently when Tom Gilmartin spoke of meetings with Ahern in the late 1980's and claimed that he had spoken to him about making a £50,000 donation to Fianna Fail and to Flynn. Gilmartin claims that Ahern had advised him to speak to his constituency manager Burke about it.

Ahern was apparently advising him to meet with his fixer to find out what favours he might expect for a party donation. Who knows, Bertie may yet take a dive!

Despite everything, most media criticism of the politicians is weak and misdirected. It is directed solely at them, accusing them of lacking personal integrity. There is little or no criticism of the capitalists who offer bribes and little investigation into what they gain from handing unmarked brown envelopes to politicians.

All the newspaper editorials expressed their contempt for Haughey, a man who had the audacity to leach off businessmen and bankers for so long. But did the capitalists not get anything in

return?

Implicit in some of the letters presented to the Moriarty tribunal is the suggestion that they were not just the innocent victims of Haughey's threats. Haughey was permitted to run up a mountain of bad debt because he 'might be a man of influence in the future'. The bankers had an abbreviation for people like Haughey, they called them KBI's or key business influencers.

What kind of things did the politicians do for the banks? In a testament to the Moriarty tribunal, Gerard Scanlan, former chairman of AIB, indicated that Haughey and Fitzgerald were men that any bank manager would be delighted to assist.

Certainly politicians of various stripes have helped the AIB become Ireland's most profitable company. They pushed through its takeover of smaller banks, and supported the bankers during the national banks strike. They rescued the AIB from near collapse in 1985 handing over £350 million of tax payers money.

In 1991, the revenue commissioners discovered that the bank was operating 87,660 non-resident illegal accounts containing a billion punts in undeclared income. This was hushed up until a recent leak to Magill magazine.

The tribunals are severely restricted as to what they can investigate. The all party parliamentary committee that instituted the Moriarty tribunal disgracefully restricted the investigation into the Ansbacher account to payments made directly to Haughey.

This was on grounds of protecting privacy, but there are many more secrets about that account that need to see the light of day. Irish capitalism is protected by walls of secrecy and confidentiality.

In April the outgoing chairman of the revenue commissioners disclosed to a closed session of the public accounts committee that the tax amnesty introduced by Fianna Fail and Labour in 1993 covered domestic accounts to the value of a billion punts.

He estimated that Irish institutions held assets worth £80 billion in off-shore tax saving accounts. Even this disclosure was subject to a parliamentary secrecy clause and had to be leaked to the press.

Some on the left like Socialist Worker have called for politicians to be sent to jail for taking bribes. This is inadequate. Workers

need to know just how much is being kept secret from them about the real wealth in the Irish economy.

The Transitional Programme drafted by Leon Trotsky in 1938 states that "the abolition of business secrets is the first step towards actual workers control over industry."

"Workers no less than capitalists have the right to know the secrets of the factory, of the trust, of whole branches of industry, of the national economy as a whole. First and foremost the banks, heavy industry and centralised transport should be placed under a magnifying glass."

The tribunals can only be the first step to this end.

**Workers need to know just how much is being kept secret from them about the real wealth in the Irish economy.**



# Kosova threatened on all sides

Geoff Ryan

**T**he failure of the Kosova Albanian delegation to sign an agreement at the Rambouillet 'peace' talks created consternation among western leaders. The US, in particular, has used the period leading up to new talks on March 15 to put massive pressure on the Kosova Liberation Army.

Former Republican Presidential candidate Bob Dole is currently meeting some of the Albanian delegation in Macedonia, after the Milosevic government refused him a visa for Kosova. Dole's trip has the full backing of President Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Dole will be accompanied by a senior State Department official, Jim O'Brien, and a general from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. O'Brien is taking with him a document ready for signing. This calls for a three-year interim period of autonomy for Kosova, now a province of Serbia, and for the withdrawal of Serbian forces and the demilitarisation of the rebel Kosova Liberation Army.

Dole will no doubt be making it plain that the west will refuse any support for Kosovar independence and that continued support for the limited autonomy granted at Rambouillet is dependent on the KLA leadership doing what it is told. The General will, no doubt, warn of serious consequences for the KLA if it does not toe the line.

Dole is largely pushing an open door as KLA leaders have indicated a willingness to accept

the terms of Rambouillet. However, most of its spokespeople are out of the country at the moment. Dole's visit is to ensure no backsliding when they have to sell the deal inside Kosova.

While Dole is in Macedonia, Madeleine Albright is proposing to break her far eastern trip to visit Nato headquarters. She will remind some of the less gung-ho European Nato leaders that they too are expected to do whatever they are told by the US. If the US decides to launch airstrikes against Serbia then the Europeans will have to follow suit. Europeans will be expected to provide the bulk of Nato troops in Kosova, as envisaged by the Rambouillet plan.

**T**he possibility of air strikes to force a few concessions will also be raised by US special envoy Richard Holbrooke, who plans to visit Milosevic in Belgrade in the near future - once the KLA has been bullied into accepting American demands.

While all this diplomatic activity is going on Milosevic has been stepping up military activity in Kosova. Serbian troops have recently shelled KLA positions in villages of the Mitrovica and Vushtrri area, while Serbian aircraft flew overhead. Hundreds of Albanians fled from villages along the Çiçavica massif in the municipality of Vushtrri while residents of a number of neighbourhoods in Mitrovica spent the night out, fearful of a Serbian attack on the town.

Fighting has also taken place in Gjakova, Klina and in the border



villages of Reka e Keqe region, along the Kosova-Albanian border. There have been heavy Serbian troop movements in many parts of Kosova.

Milosevic's military build up is not necessarily contrary to American plans for 'stability' in the Balkans under American leadership. In many ways it strengthens the diplomatic activity.

Dole is there to get the Albanians to drop their demand for independence and disarm. Without the KLA the Kosovars would be totally at Milosevic's mercy - hence the 'need' for Nato troops to 'protect' them. Although US politicians may deplore the current Serbian offensive it does, nevertheless, reinforce this point.

Holbrooke, meanwhile, will try to convince Milosevic that his best interests are served by allowing Nato troops to ensure Kosova remains part of Serbia. Albright will add the threat of military action to make Milosevic more pliable - but also to demonstrate what could happen to the KLA if it refuses to play the US game.

Western leaders may not like Milosevic very much but he still remains central to their plans for the region. Given that the most important Serbian opposition politicians are now in government alongside Milosevic supporters there is no credible alternative to him. Hence any set-

tlement for Kosova depends on restricting Milosevic's military capabilities but also demobilising any move towards Kosovar independence.

Milosevic of course has to oppose any deployment of Nato troops in Kosova. To fail to do so would be suicidal. Yet he may well find it useful to allow Nato troops in after some token resistance. Failure of Russia to come to his aid would provide him with the necessary excuse. Boris Yeltsin's threats of military action to oppose Nato troops in Kosova can hardly be taken seriously - even assuming Yeltsin was sober at the time.

**N**ato troops would also be welcomed by Macedonian President Kiro Gligorov. Since troops would have to enter Kosova via Macedonia Gligorov could hope to gain increased western support for his allowing Nato use of Macedonian territory.

Indeed Gligorov probably understands the real aim of deploying Nato troops better than most. He is totally opposed to Kosova independence because of his problems with Macedonia's own minority Albanian population. He knows that the main role of Nato troops will be to disarm all those who continue to struggle for independence. By denying

independence to Kosova, and showing they will use military force, Nato will also stop Albanian minorities in other states demanding independence for themselves.

**S**ections of the KLA leadership appear oblivious to the real aims of Nato. Splits have been developing. Adem Demaci, who spent 28 years in Yugoslav prisons for pro-Albanian activities, has recently resigned as political spokesperson for the KLA in protest against the willingness of sections of the leadership to abandon the demand for independence.

Western officials have publicly welcomed Demaci's resignation since they considered him a major obstacle to their attempts to oppose a solution on the Kosovars. Demaci had refused to take part in and recognise the outcome of the Rambouillet talks.

It remains to be seen whether Demaci and others opposed to any sell-out on independence will organise against the current civilian and military leadership. Certainly this is essential.

But any movement will also have to be prepared to oppose the machinations of the west and to understand that if Nato troops do enter Kosova their main target will be those forces still fighting for Kosovar independence.

## Genetically modified foods

# Are you swallowing the government's line?

Paul Rhadische

GENETICALLY-modified food products could have been on your table today. After the recent controversy about the issue you probably care more about this than before.

Two months ago Socialist Outlook wrote: "Despite all the reasons for not having been interested in food, there are powerful reasons to expect food issues to become more important."

Of course we could claim the credit, but perhaps this is a good moment to step back. There has been considerable heat about whether Dr Arpad Pusztai's potatoes were poisonous to his rats, and if so whether this has any relation to the food you may find yourself eating.

Most lay people can make little judgement about the science, especially when there is dispute even about what research has been conducted. What we can and do judge is that a system of 'regulation' of food production which can allow the feeding of rendered cattle to herbivorous cattle and the BSE crisis is untrustworthy.

Defenders of the process of assessing new products depict the whole process as rational and innocent. Derek Burke, chair of the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and

Processes from 1988 to 1997, wrote: "In the nine years I chaired the committee, no political or commercial pressures were put on me. Only once was I lobbied by a company, and the lobbying had no effect at all on the committee's decision."

Such figures complain that Pusztai's research has not been validated and that if there is any cause for concern they are the best people to judge it. Meanwhile the growing and selling of GM produce in Britain should continue.

In the words of James Watson, one of the discoverers of DNA: "You should only have a moratorium when there is a possibility of harm that you can quantify."

As with, say, exposure to nuclear radiation from leaks, the promise is that all is well, with the fallback that something can be done about it in the future if not.

University professors who belong to various quangos try to offer reassurance but fail to convince. Universities feel financially squeezed and, in disciplines in natural science especially, success is measured as much by the ability to raise research grants and strike up partnerships with commercial interests as any other criterion.

For individual scientists, there is also the

possibility that convenient and saleable research work will lead to a better paid job heading a better-funded research unit within or funded by major capitalist firms. Many of those who have been in the government's 'advisory committees' have already been down this path as they make the way to the top of their field.

Controversy has been raging in the press about experimental maize and potatoes in Britain. Meanwhile one of the British government's activities has been allying with the US government at talks in Colombia to water down proposed controls on the international trade in GM products, especially as it affects soya and maize.

The argument is all about 'free trade', but what this means principally is the opportunity for big firms like Monsanto to get their produce into all corners of the world market. Resistance in countries like India is based on the fear that if farmers can no longer collect seed from their own crops, but have to pay the supplier every year,

many will not survive. They will also have no security if new crops fail because of unexpected problems.

Any Labour MPs who can make it into the government have already proved their willingness to sell any principles they used

to have. Labour ministers speak of 'the public interest' and 'waiting for the results of research'. However as with the Tories, seats on the board wait for ministers and civil servants whose actions benefit the big monopolies.

Capitalist companies see big opportunities for monopoly profits in food. Together with their friends and dependants in government and the scientific establishment,

they want to control the debate on food, to keep it 'sensible'. Some of the fears expressed in the last few weeks are extreme, such as escaping genes giving rise to 'Triffid-like monster plants'.

However the issue of control of information and of the technology is central. Its emergence in the recent debate is invaluable, and we must build on that.

**The British government has been allying with the US government at talks in Colombia to water down proposed controls on the international trade in GM products**



## Education, education ... unemployment

AFTER 16 years of preparation for the world of work, now that I am 17 I have recently learned that my school taught me nothing of the real world. I feel let down by my teachers and the older generation.

Since my awakening after education from Margaret and Glenn from the St Helens

TUC centre of working class history (which is far more exciting than kings and Queens)

I am disgusted that I was not taught my own history. For example we are taught about castles and palaces as if they erected themselves and not of those who built them.

Also I was led to believe that if I worked hard in school this would help towards a well paid job. The reality soon set in when I tried to find these 'well paid jobs' that don't seem to exist in the job centres. All that is on offer are slave labour schemes such as New Deal which is a shit deal.

At the moment I am at college studying catering and hospitality. As it happens our college has a restaurant which is open to the public and guess what?

I and others on the course have to work in the evenings some nights up to 10.30pm. to wait on the public. We do not get paid for this because it is classed as "train-

ing'. Someone is making a profit out of us and I feel we should be paid for our labour.

I am pissed off with the way we "the youth" are being treated in today's society and I urge all youth to get organised. I am

**David Bishop**  
Volunteer at St Helens  
TUC centre

## Gays and the law

Tim Briggstone (SO 22) makes the correct point that my recent article on section 28 didn't comment on work going on outside London. He is right to alert us to the fact that there are other bodies out there like the George House Trust.

However, this organisation campaigns primarily around HIV issues. It does make the important link between HIV education, sex education in schools, and the climate of fear created by S28.

But this does not invalidate my comment that the major London based campaigns, push mainly for what the Labour Government is prepared to concede (the age of consent), but place everything else on the back burner.

In this and my previous article I argue that Socialists should push on other issues which affect lesbians and gay men. Section 28 of course, but also "Gross Indecency", and employment law.

A campaign for wholesale law reform is required, along the lines called for by LCLGR. You can get copies of information by post from LCLGR, PO Box 306, London N5. By joining, you get an excellent newsletter.

**Mark Lewin, London**

**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**

## Beyond "Goodies" and "Baddies"

I READ with interest Michael Calvert's letter in your February 1999 Socialist Outlook entitled "Time to Get Good Guys Together". This is what I think.

Though not agreeing that there is as much demoralisation and low activity as he thinks at present, I do agree that the time is ripe for initiatives to be taken over the reunification of the socialist movement locally and internationally on a genuinely working class progressive basis. The question remains, how?

Bro Calvert's example of the 1986 Symposium on Hungary 1956 was a very good one, I think. However, the whole thing should be broadened to embrace all currents of the Marxist and Socialist movement worldwide.

An open historical commission should be set up in order to work towards the definite target of producing a sourcebook which would be published in several languages (French, English, Spanish) in order to reach as broad a readership as possible among all the international working class movements.

We could call the book something like the "Proletarian's Historical Guide to Action". What do Socialist Outlook readers think?

After 1905, the Bolsheviks under Lenin produced similar symposiums and for a time, with help from worker-intellectuals like Maxim Gorky, once planned to produce a workers' encyclopaedia. Such volumes were actually produced by some British socialists, and also, I think, by militants of the CNT in Spain in the same period.

Work towards a handy one-volume guidebook on our movement's history, involving people from all strands of genuine socialist opinion - not only Trotskyite

## Letter



Marxists - can only be of help to all of us, especially working class militants.

I know that there are many even among the various "Stalinist" organisations who want to know more about how and why, for example, the USSR collapsed, or why Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh retained a high regard for the "Trotskyist" leader Ta Thu Tau all his life. What was the POUM in Spain? What was the significance of the original Socialist Labor Party in the USA and its British counterparts only this century? Who were Liu Piao and Ch'en Tu-Hsiu in China? Antonio Gramsci and Amadeo Bordiga in Italy? What was Allemanist socialism in 19th century France? What books did James Connolly write and where can you find them now? There are so many vital questions people need guidance on.

Invitations should be sent out for an open historical conference of socialists as soon as possible (to be held this year or, at latest, next year), with a view to setting up a general historical commission. We have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Why doesn't Socialist Outlook take a lead in these plans through its pages? Someone has to.

**Steve Metcalfe**

**President Lancaster TUC,  
Chair Lancaster 0844  
RMT**



## SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

### Where we stand

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

If you think this is worth fighting for, and you like what you read in *Socialist Outlook*, why not join us? Drop a line to us at PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU, and we'll be in touch.

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# Socialist Outlook

## Imperialism goes bananas

MARCH BEGAN with Tony Blair insisting that European unions and "socialist" parties should follow his lead and embrace the values of capitalism, in the same way as the Democrats in the USA, which he regarded as a beacon of economic achievement.

Within days this beacon of unregulated capitalist enterprise was firing the first shots in a trade war against the European Union, with the clear objective of further boosting the profits and monopoly market share of its banana exporters, at the expense of bankruptcy for banana producers in Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific (ACP).

It may seem like a storm in a custard bowl, but the "banana split" is a crucial test of strength between two of the world's three major imperialist trading blocs – a test in which the EU has already surrendered crucial legal ground.

The EU says Caribbean banana producers account for only 3% of world banana exports and represent only 7% of the EU market – their only outlet. The relatively small amounts of money involved however mean the difference between survival and collapse for the ACP exporters. Since many of these are former colonies of the leading EU nations, their potential collapse is an embarrassment – not least to Blair, whose government has voiced rare criticism of the US administration.

But US multinationals, notably Dole Food Company and Chiquita Brands International, which give money to both US political parties, and dominate the market in bananas from Latin America, want to wipe out even this small pocket of competition.

In launching this offensive and preparing a wide-ranging onslaught designed to force genetically-modified and hormonally-altered American foodstuffs onto the plates of sceptical Europeans, the US has been quick to make use of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the shadowy

group of Geneva-based civil servants who now lead the global fight for "free trade".

In February, the leader in genetically modified food crops, US giant Monsanto, arrogantly declared that it would take legal action to overturn any measures by the EU or European governments to limit the distribution of these foods. More test cases, involving US beef containing growth hormones (banned in Europe for ten years) and milk products are due to pit EU governments against the might of US imperialism later this year.

By signing up for the "liberalisation" of world trade, surrendering any right to take independent action, and establishing an new world arbiter in the form of the "independent" and completely unaccountable WTO, EU governments have left themselves without a legal leg to stand on in banning these US exports – even where public opinion is hostile and public health issues are concerned.

The WTO was due to pronounce on the long-running banana issue on April 12.

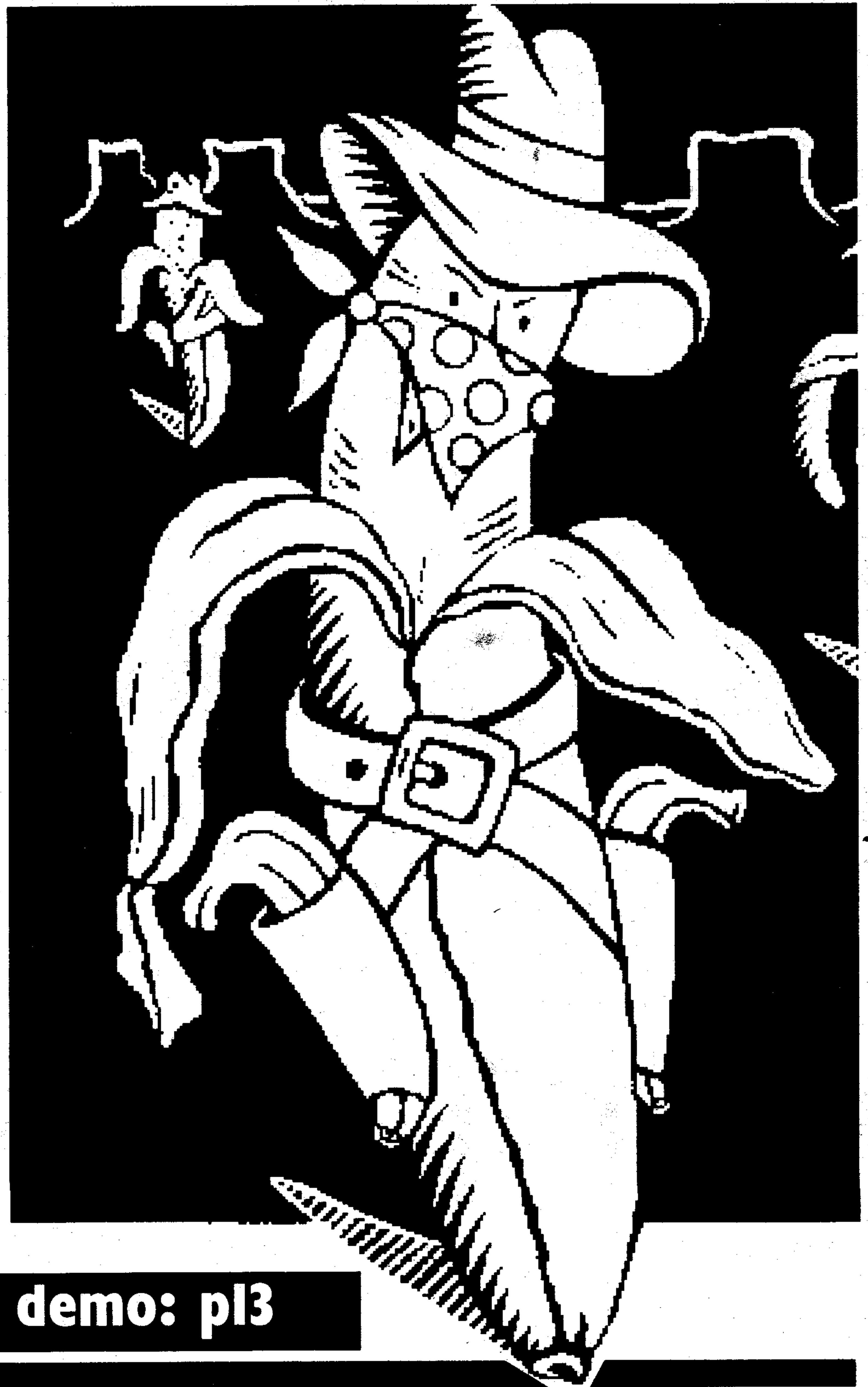
So certain is the US that the WTO will do its bidding, Washington has preempted the ruling and announced its own package of retaliatory sanctions against a random list of European exports to the US, which will face drastic increases in import tariffs.

Socialists will not back any of the governments involved, all of which have connived to subordinate the interests of working people to the profits of big business and exploit the commodity-exporting countries of the "third world".

The WTO, like the treaty which established it, was only ever a device to secure further monopoly control of world trade, and should be scrapped.

Trade unions and community campaigners must urgently discuss a policy to halt the production and distribution of potentially harmful foodstuffs churned out by multinational agribusiness.

**Socialists  
will not back  
any of the  
governments  
involved**



**GM food debate: p18. Cologne demo: p13**