

NS 53

Socialist

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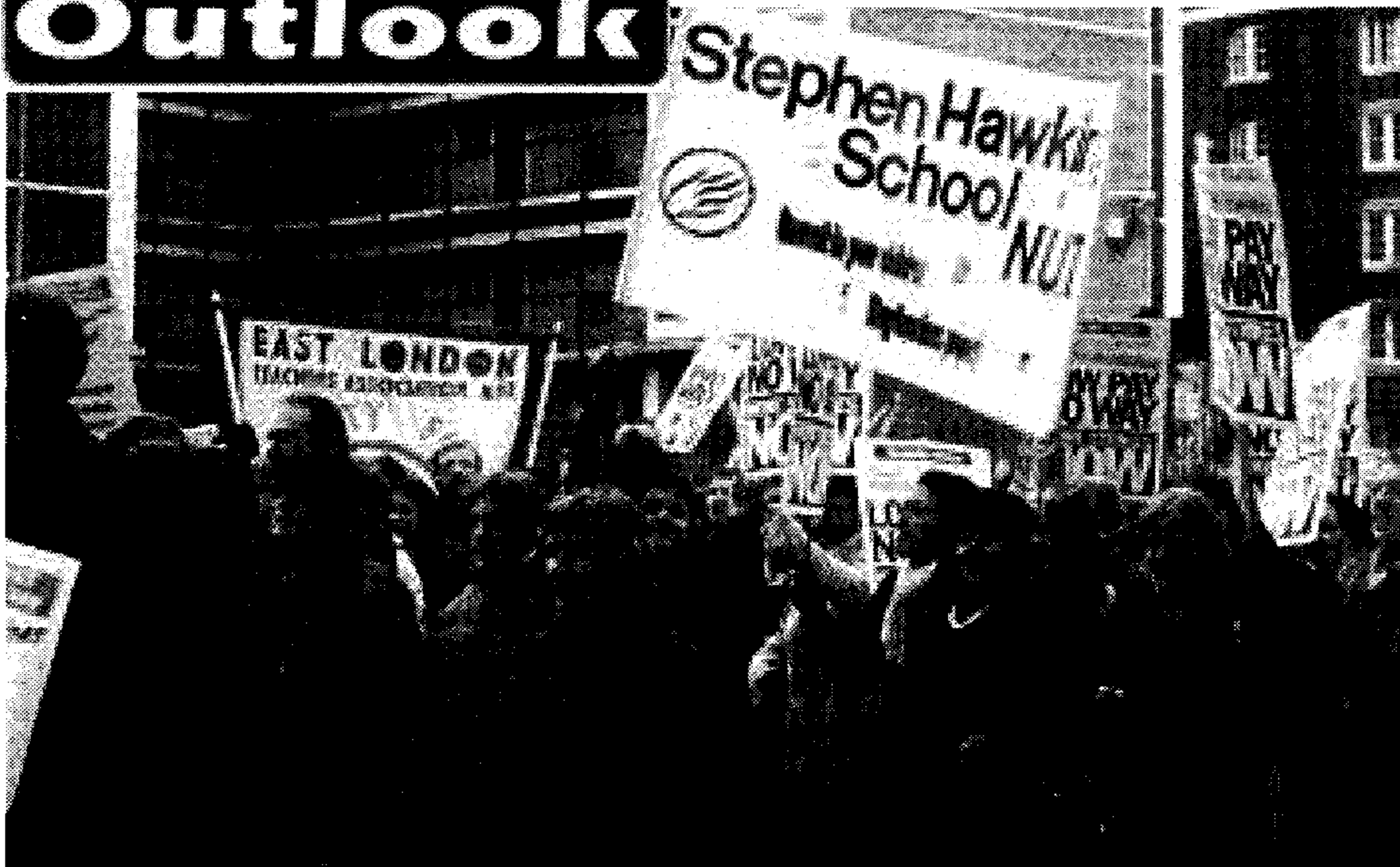
Stop arms sales to Israel!



Indict war criminal Sharon – see p10



Almost hourly, the TV, radio and newspapers are full of yet more massacres of Palestinians - and US Envoy General Zinni's visit to Israel is not likely to bring any more than a momentary pause in the slaughter. The Zionist state is using the full range of high-tech weaponry - including fighter bombers and helicopter gunships - to repress Palestinian youths armed with nothing more than stones, and lightly-armed Palestinian fighters demanding democratic rights in their occupied homeland. War criminal Sharon is revelling in the fact that he is still backed to the hilt by his cronies Blair and Bush. One way of stepping up our solidarity with the Palestinian people is to fight for the end of British arms sales to Israel. It is British tanks that are ploughing down children in the West Bank and Gaza - let's step up the campaign to stop it now!



London teachers strike

Gill Lee

Strike action by thousands of London teachers on March 14 could herald a renewed wave of struggle in schools throughout the country.

The initial low turnout in the ballot – 86% voting yes, but only a 30% turnout – was completely surpassed by the numbers taking part in action. Thousands of schools were closed and over half a million pupils affected as teachers struck and mobilised. Over 8,000 NUT members, out of a London membership of 40,000, took to the streets of the capital in a march organised by the NUT left, through the London associations.

Pickets were mounted at many schools to publicise the strike and there was mass leafleting of train and tube

stations to put the teachers' case to parents. The strike action received overwhelming support from parents who understood the lie behind Estelle Morris's concern about children missing one 'precious' day of education.

As Doug McAvoy, NUT General Secretary, told the packed rally following the march: "The pupils of teachers here today will have teachers back in their classroom tomorrow. For thousands of other pupils there is no teacher to come back."

Teacher shortage is particularly acute in London because of high house prices. Bernard Regan, Inner London Executive member, told the rally that one Westminster teacher in four left their jobs last year. 20% of newly qualified teachers

leave teaching within the first year.

While the crisis is worst in London, poor pay and worse conditions mean that the problem of teacher shortages is also a national one. Regan called for the March 14 action to be the start of a campaign for a national pay programme of action and for teachers to link up with other public sector workers who have pay claims in.

Greetings were also given to the rally from the London regions of the FBU, UNISON, RMT and CWU. As Jeremy Corbyn told the meeting: "If we want decent public services we need to give public service workers decent pay." The NUT now seems part of a growing wave of public service strikers demanding just that.

1500 march to defend postal service

Pete Cooper

Fifteen hundred postal workers marched against the threat of competition to the Post Office on March 16. The regulator, Postcomm, wants unlimited competition well ahead of the time-scale required by the European Directive and has the support of new Labour in pushing for this.

The result will be fierce "cream-skimming" competition in the profitable urban and business sectors of the market, and a deterioration of the postal service in rural areas.

The postal leadership has little stomach for a fight over this. This is despite the fact this will allow companies such as Hays, Deutsche Post and TNT to take massive market shares and make enormous profits in the City.

The plan also aims to intimidate the union into accepting privatisation without a fight by using the "discipline of the market" Consignia management has already announced cuts of 30,000 jobs.

John Keggie, Deputy General Secretary, promised the rally following the march further demonstrations, "not of 5,000 but of 45,000", while General Secretary Billy Hayes called on the government to sack the regulator.

However the action he called for was not up to the task. He pushed the union's "Rein in the Postcomm Monster" postcard campaign to the Prime Minister

and called for every level of government to pass resolutions against deregulation, from parish council upwards. The union has already collected 161 signatures for an Early Day Motion, and the Welsh Assembly has passed a similar motion.

He called for CWU members to talk to their customers (!) and was ambiguous on the question of the political fund.

Despite Hayes being elected with the support of the left, he has failed to overrule Keggie, his defeated Blairite challenger, who wants to persuade his new Labour friends of the invisibility of postal liberalisation and privatisation.

Hayes has come under increasing pressure from frustrated branch activists who can see what is in store and who want to fight. A massive industrial and political campaign against postal liberalisation and privatisation needs to be built.

Such a campaign must include at its heart both a political and industrial strategy which is incorporates strike action against these deadly threats to both service users and postal workers alike. The campaign must also make alliances in action with other European postal and telecommunication unions against the European directive.

To build popular support, the union needs to advance an alternative vision of a communications service that will meet

the needs of the working class and oppressed. This should include the provision of free post, telephone and internet services for the old, unemployed and young, drawn up with union, community and pensioner activists. Such a campaign would inevitably come into conflict with the anti-union laws that the CWU leadership is desperate to avoid.

But the Hayes leadership does not want to confront Labour on liberalisation. Even though Postcomm's plans have been public for months, the demonstration was called with barely two weeks notice. This was despite the pleas of the union's London Regional Committee for a delay of two weeks to enable a larger demonstration to be built.

Most branches only received leaflets days before. It was called on a Saturday morning, when most postal workers are at work. No strike action was called. This is no way to build a campaign to defend a public postal service.

The choice of date for the demonstration, which coincided with the Socialist Alliance trade union conference, may or may not have been accidental. It was certainly used by the Socialist Party to try to undermine the trade union conference, not only amongst CWU members, but more broadly amongst trade unionists.

In this they signally failed.

Postal pay fight: Keggie threatens strike action

We reported in the last issue of SO that postal workers had voted by a margin of 2-1 on a 65% turnout to take strike action over their pay claim from last October.

Following the vote, the unions claim of 5% and Consignia's pathetic offer of 2% with strings went back and forward to direct negotiations and references to ACAS.

In the first week of March, Deputy GS Postal John Keggie thought he had a deal that was due to be put to the Postal Executive on March 12.

What had apparently been agreed was for 2.2% increase from October 2001, a further 2.3% from November 2002 with the next pay review date scheduled for October 2003.

It also included the consolidation of £10 per week bonus payments by April 2003. Over

and above the basic increase there was to be a further increase of 0.6% in basic pay linked to the introduction of "new ways of working".

The basic increases were understood to take the guaranteed pensionable income to 267.86 by April 2003 and with the consolidation of bonuses this would mean most postal workers would be on £300 – the unions target income in this time frame.

In addition, Keggie understood Consignia to have said that where there was a shortfall for those workers not achieving bonuses, they would make this up, though this was never put in writing.

While Keggie might have thought this was a good offer, it was clear from the response of reps from offices all over the country that many postal

workers did not.

But before it could be formally put to the Executive, and then to a ballot of the membership, Consignia weighed in to say they had never agreed to make up the wages of workers in offices not getting bonuses.

This scuppered any possibility of a deal and left Keggie spitting blood and threatening strike action. It was never clear whether this action was to be in support of the original claim or the supposed deal. In any event the dispute has yet again been referred back to ACAS.

There was clearly strong support for action around the original claim. Activists want to see that as the basis for both negotiations, an end to officials playing around with 2 year deals and productivity strings – and action if that's what is needed to achieve it.

Anger as breakup hits BT workers

Pete Cooper

377 BT staff employed on desktop computer duties (DNDS) have been transferred to Computacenter, a non-union computer systems company. When the sale was announced in January, the CWU Telcoms Executive announced its intention to fight the sell-off and the terms being offered for the transfer.

While TUPE would apply, no-one was under any illusion about Computacenter's intentions to worsen pay and conditions. Staff are paid £14k for jobs which attract £25k at BT.

Existing employees are all on individualised contracts and subject to performance related pay while the CWU has so far successfully resisted the introduction of PRP within BT amongst engineering grades.

Computacenter does not recognise unions for its own employees. Furthermore it proposed to replace immediately BT's final salary index linked pension scheme with the much less favourable money purchase scheme. Pensions are not subject to TUPE. Staff were denied any right to opt to remain within BT as an alternative to transfer, or to take voluntary redundancy.

Meetings were organised across the country and promises were made to ballot the membership in the whole Business Information Systems (BIS) division of which DNDS is part. As part of the expanding internet protocol business DNDS was seen as a growth area into which staff working on

the declining voice products could be transferred over time. The selloff would severely curtail the potential to maintain employment levels within the division.

However, allegedly because of the poor state of branch membership records and the lack of time to update them before the date of transfer, only the DNDS members directly concerned were eventually balloted. They voted by 4-1 to take strike action against the sell-off.

Further negotiations produced an agreement which included a six year right of return to BT for staff made redundant by the new employer; contracts only to be varied with the consent of the individual, or of the union; an improved money purchase pension scheme and union recognition for ex-BT staff.

Right of return

There is no right of return to BT in the event of an ex-BT employee's deterioration of terms and conditions. Any changes in contract terms are in law subject to the agreement or implied agreement of individuals anyway. But this doesn't take into account the pressures to which individual employees are subjected when "asked" to change such terms.

These "improved" terms will be worthless without union organisation across the whole of this anti-union employer.

Branch officers were denied access to the agreement. In the national ballot the agreement was accepted by 3-1 by the members on the recommendation of the

executive, but with only 40% voting compared with the 80% who voted for action weeks earlier.

It is clear that despite union policy, the head office negotiating team were resigned to the transfer from the start, arguing that the union cannot control the workings of capital, and that their job was to negotiate the best terms and conditions for the members concerned in difficult circumstances.

It is also apparent that there was a lack of will to mobilise the members directly and indirectly affected. A strike should have been called, in accordance with union policy, to oppose the transfer of the work to Computacenter, to demand the right to stay within BT, and to defend the final salary pension scheme.

Even if the chances of winning were slim, at the very least the members involved would have gone to work for their new employer in combative mood, and better able to defend themselves, perhaps with a mission to organise their new colleagues.

But to do so would have run the risk of confronting the anti-union laws, and more generally to disturb the union's cosy partnership relationship with the employer and the government.

Instead the ballot result indicates demoralisation. BT has now been given the green light by the union to proceed undisturbed with its programme of disposal of the "non-core" elements of the business and its workforce.

Stand up to stop war drive!

If it had been suggested before September 11th it would have been regarded as bizarre. The US is not only preparing to launch all-out war against Iraq, without anything that can be claimed as new justification from the Iraqi side, but has decided to use nuclear weapons in that war if necessary – as revealed in the recent Strafor report on US global strategy.

It now emerges, in a leaked classified Pentagon report called the Nuclear Posture Review, that Bush has a list of countries against which the US is prepared to launch a nuclear first strike. The list includes not only Iraq but North Korea, Iran, Libya, China – and even Russia, despite President Putin's repositioning towards NATO. The report also includes the use of nuclear weapons in the event of an Arab-Israeli conflict.

The report was signed by Donald Rumsfeld as recently as January of this year, and was leaked to the *LA Times*. Included in the circumstances under which nuclear weapons could be used against the countries concerned are the possibility of "targets able to withstand a non-nuclear strike", and "surprising military developments". Alongside this the report revealed that the US is developing a new generation of so-called battlefield nuclear devices designed for particular situations.

Before September 11th these chilling revelations might have been dismissed as the ravings of a right-wing lunatic fringe: but unfortunately they represent

another major development in world politics.

Nuclear weapons, sold for the last 50 years as a supposed deterrent, are being rehabilitated as a legitimate means of warfare, even against states which do not have such weapons. The lunatic fringe of the Republican right is now calling the shots for the world's only superpower, and it is clear that they are prepared to contemplate the use of nuclear weapons – at least against Iraq.

At the same time political preparation for an attack on Iraq is going ahead apace. The Strafor report makes it clear that there is nothing Iraq can do which would divert the Bush administration from attacking it.

If Iraq agrees in principle to let so-called weapons inspectors in the US will demand a regime so stringent – access to anything and everything at a moment's notice – that it will be impossible for the Iraqis to accept.

Rumsfeld has said "we do not intend to take yes for an answer".

The coalition pieced together for the assault on Afghanistan will of course shatter once a war against Iraq is launched: but this is already factored in by Bush. Dick Cheney's current shuttle diplomacy is not designed to hold the coalition together – that is not achievable. It is designed to neutralise or contain the hostile reaction.

For Bush only one thing really matters, that he has the support of

Tony Blair, along with British troops and strategic British bases – and this is already in the bag. Blair is totally committed.

He is banging the war drums as much as Bush and is clearly prepared to commit large numbers of British troops in a new Gulf war, and is not particularly concerned about opposition on Labour's back benches. His warmongering is being egged on even further by the far-right leadership of the official Tory opposition.

Bush calls the preparation for war against Iraq 'stage two' of his "war against terrorism". But stage one is still expanding rapidly, and the world is changing by the day.

Military action continues in Afghanistan in the guise of so-called "mopping up" operations.

But the Palestinians also face all out war from Israel, with the direct support and protection of the USA. This has escalated consistently since September 11th and continues to do so.

In the USA Bush has increased defence spending by 14%, or \$48 billion dollars. There has been a militarisation of society. Thousands of immigrants have been rounded up and imprisoned.

US troops are already intervening in the Philippines and Colombia and well as Somalia and the Yemen, and civil rights are under attack across the world.

In Britain the Crime and Security Act has introduced internment without trial in contravention to the European convention on human rights. A number of people, all of Arab origin, have been



Anti-war protest in London, March 2

detained without trial or any apparent evidence of wrong-doing under this draconian legislation, and kept under top security conditions.

India, too, has responded, using its own "Terrorist" problem in Kashmir as the pretext for an internal crackdown with new draconian anti-terrorist laws.

As a result of all this US imperialism is stronger than ever before in military and political terms, having gained a new hegemony in central Asia and greater influence over Russia and China. There has been a fundamental strategic shift in Russian foreign policy towards the USA, with far reaching implications for the West – even though Russia is on the hit list for nuclear strikes.

The danger of an open-ended war, in which the most barbaric weapons of mass destruction are used by the world's dominant imperialist nation in pursuit of a fraudulent war against "terrorism" has never been greater.

Labour back-benchers remain muted in their opposition, possibly still incredulous that their party and its leader could be so totally craven in support of a vicious war for global domination by the USA – or possibly still hedging their bets, hoping that they can avoid a confrontation with the Millbank machine, and keep open their

hopes of a ministerial appointment.

But anyone concerned about the future of the planet should react with anger and horror at the US plans to bombard defenceless, dependent nations with nuclear radiation. Anyone committed to defending the rights of the oppressed should be joining the protests at the brutality of the Israeli forces, wielding the full force of a terrorist state to crush any aspiration of the Palestinians for the liberation of their occupied homeland.

A new US war on Iraq aimed at ousting Saddam Hussein and replacing his dictatorship with a dictatorial regime more amenable to Washington will escalate the slaughter of innocents that has followed September 11.

Already far more Afghan civilians have died in US bombings than the death toll in the Twin Towers and Washington on that day. But a war against Iraq brings the certainty of a far larger death toll, even without the threat of a US nuclear strike.

The Bush-Blair war drive has to be opposed by anyone committed to notions of democracy or to the working class.

Those who fail to stand up and fight it before the onslaught begins are likely to be discredited and unable to resist the war fever once the bombs and missiles start landing on innocent civilians.

More break ranks to denounce rudderless New Labour

MO MOWLAM, former darling of New Labour, has become the latest and most prominent figure to break ranks and criticise Tony Blair's increasingly discredited government.

Writing in the *Sunday Mirror*, Mowlam argues that New Labour is now widely seen as sleazier than the Tories, while Blair seems to regard himself as a president, with little time for domestic problems.

Her anger, like that of many Labour activists, has been brought to a head by the threat that Blair will drag Britain into a war with Iraq at the behest of George Bush, with little or no debate in parliament or government.

And she quotes a nameless minister warning that "People think we are a load of shysters."

Mowlam's criticisms follow strong words from other former ministers including Glenda Jackson and Frank Dobson, and growing evidence of unease among Labour's backbenchers at the way Blair's reactionary politics are alienating the party's traditional supporters.

The recent alliance between Blair and Italy's hard-line, right wing premier Berlusconi on deregulation and privatisation within the EU, produced an angry outburst even from the normally docile TUC leader John Monks,

who branded it "bloody stupid".

But the first few months of 2002 have seen a succession of events and policy decisions which confirm that New Labour, lacking any principles or policies of its own, is increasingly following the lead of big business.

At the beginning of March Blair chose to appear alongside a privatised rail company boss to launch a 30-page glossy pamphlet entitled "Reforming our Public Services", which served mainly to demand even more "flexibility" from public sector workers, and insist that public services should be subject to more competition and invasion from private sector providers.

Even while union leaders denounced this new declaration of war on public service workers, Blair got up to make a speech supposedly to settle growing doubts of Labour activists: instead he presented a vacuous series of waffling assertions that effectively reaffirmed New Labour's total lack of guiding principles.

"There is a clear road map to our destination but sometimes it can seem as if it were a mere technocratic exercise, well or less well managed, but with no overriding purpose to it," he burred.

Indeed frustration is often as much over Labour's complete inability to

manage or deliver on promised policies as it is about its increasingly reactionary political programme.

The complete dog's breakfast that has been made over reform of the House of Lords, the failure to deliver significant investment in public transport, Stephen Byers' legendary inability to run even his own office, Estelle Morris's ability to antagonise not only teachers but even head teachers in her pig-headed refusal to face facts on teacher shortages, the growing cash squeeze on local councils, the fiasco of Labour's efforts to force in elected mayors ... the catalogue of incompetence grows alongside the government's blinkered commitment to PPP on the tube, PFI in education and schools, and competition in the post office.

Add to this Blair's uncompromisingly reactionary foreign

policy, and his party's willingness to take cash and provide favours to a long line of unsavoury business figures, its control freakery and its arrogant disregard for the views of its members and supporters, and you have a recipe for an increasingly dysfunctional government.

The coming local elections will offer socialists in many areas another



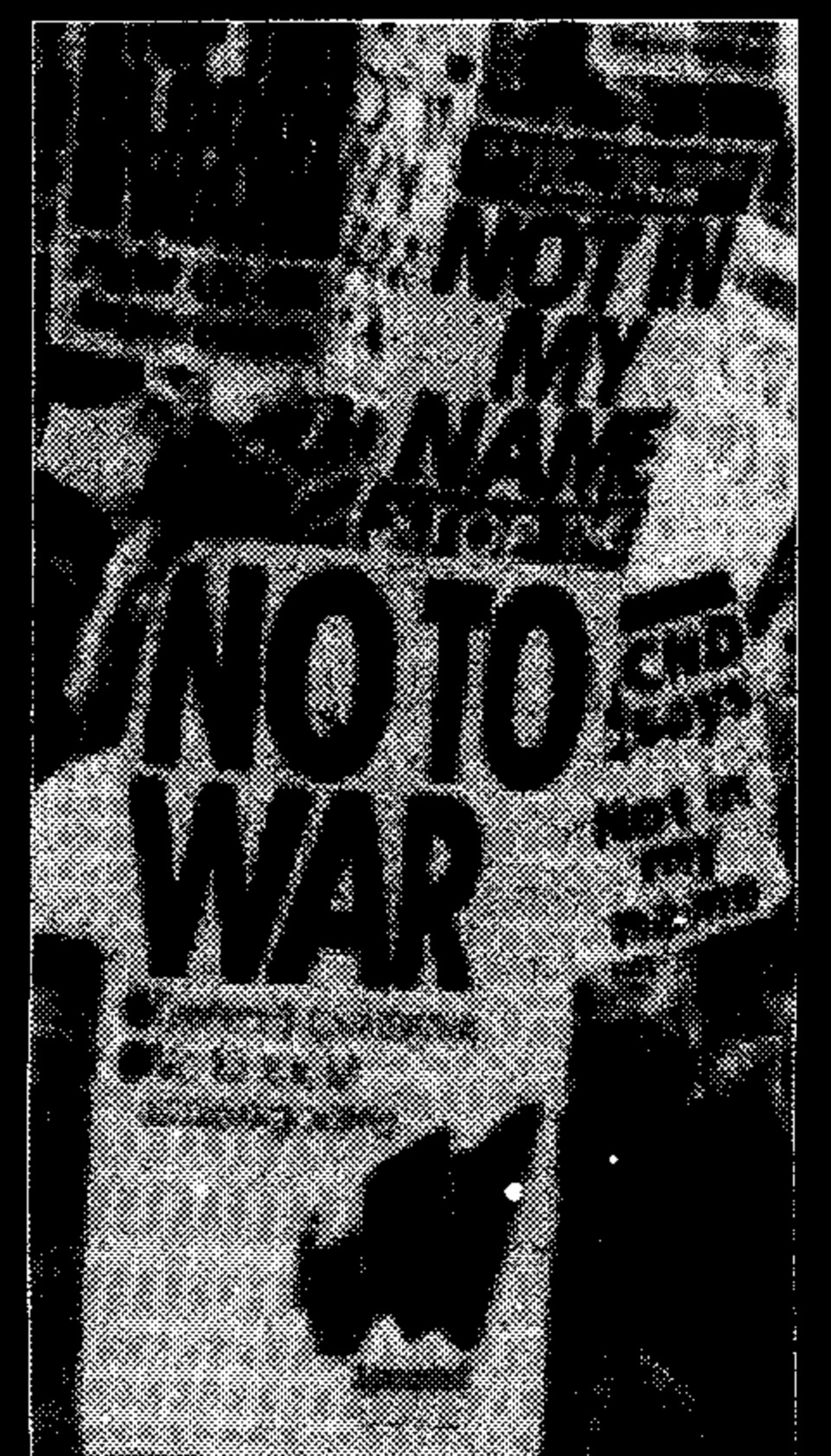
Blairusconi? Judge Tony by his friends

opportunity to test out the extent to which Labour's base support is not just alienated but actively looking for alternatives. The chances for Socialist Alliance candidates improve with each day of government failure.

CND March and Rally - London
Don't Start Wars!
MARCH 30

- No to attacks on Iraq -
- No to George W Bush's war drive -
- No to US "Star Wars"
- No to US bases in Britain -
- No to Britain's Trident nuclear weapons.

Supported by Stop the War Coalition.
Assemble 12 noon, Hyde Park.
March to rally in Trafalgar Square.



Scottish Socialists prepare for 2003

Gordon Morgan

The 4th Annual Conference of the Scottish Socialist Party at the beginning of March was completely unlike previous conferences of the SSP. It was the first delegate conference, all previous conferences having been all-member affairs.

As anticipated, this actually increased the attendance, from around 200 last year to 400 this year. The operation of a pooled fare for the first time ensured delegates attended from a wide geographical area.

This was also the first conference since the SWP joined the SSP. The structure and time-tabling was clearly a surprise to many of them. Issues such as the war, which many of them expected to be key debates at conference proved non-controversial and resolutions were passed without dissent in minimal time.

This was not a rally style conference, rather a decision making conference.

The key note of conference



(Above) Catriona Grant, SSP co-chair, who moved the women's network motion. (Right) Tommy Sheridan

was preparing for the 2003 elections to the Scottish Parliament. Whilst our poll standing ensures that the SSP will retain an MSP in Tommy Sheridan, the possibility is open for us to take 4 seats and, with an opinion shift, up to 8 seats.

On a proportional voting system the SSP would gain 8 seats out of 129 on its current poll ratings: however, even to gain 2 under the actual voting system will be an

achievement.

By far and away the most heated debate at conference related to the mechanism for choosing candidates for the most winnable seats in the election.

At the 1999 election, no one expected to win any seat other than Glasgow, and even there it was only won by 1,000 votes. As I recall there was no vote or amendment to the slates for candidates, indeed several people were press-ganged into appearing on the lists.

In 2003 there is the likelihood of further successes, and a furious debate arose over how we ensure 50% of those elected are women. When actual names are suggested, there seems little dissent as to which women should head lists and there may have been less controversy had a slate emerged as in 1999.

A democratic mechanism had been proposed by the SSP women's network and backed by the Executive.

Objections had arisen – supposedly over the method

suggested, though it seemed from some contributions that the disagreements were more fundamental. No one argued explicitly that they were opposed to 50-50 but some speakers both at conference and in local branches were extremely disparaging of the idea that there should be any form of positive action to ensure this actually happened.

Unfortunately of the four hours devoted to the topic, one hour related to wrangles about the voting procedure. In our view the wrong mechanism was agreed. The current standing orders need to be improved to ensure that such problems don't take

time away from political exchanges.

In the end the original women's network motion, improved by amendments, was narrowly passed on a card vote.

Although this was the right outcome, many delegates were seriously unhappy about the way the debate was conducted and indeed the time it took.

Many delegates with long experience in the women's movement abstained.

It also became clear that large parts of the SSP had heard little of the debate before arriving at conference. This highlights a weakness in the internal discussions within the SSP and in the roles of its regional organisers, that should be addressed at a special conference to be held in June.

A further procedural debate took place over whether we should decide our line on the Euro at this conference or at the June conference. Although the majority of conference seems likely to back a Vote No position, conference time-tabling meant that if the Euro was discussed Palestine could not be. Conference narrowly voted to postpone a decision to June.

On Palestine, last year's decision to back a 2 state solution was reversed, and the SSP now supports a unified secular Palestine. It is clear that on this issue the SWP presence made a difference to the outcome. A motion to drop the party's description of Cuba as socialist was lost.

This year was the first attempt at running the con-

ference with the help of a conference arrangements committee. This was a mixed blessing.

Before the conference motions had been composed, and all delegates received a booklet setting out all motions and amendments. The organisation of speakers and debates went smoothly, and most of the time delegates were clear what was happening.

However, the standing orders adopted for conference didn't allow for effective challenge to procedural rulings, which caused bad feelings on more than one occasion during the

weekend.

The overall style of conference was not unlike a trade union conference, which may have been off-putting for some less experienced members.

It is clear that an improved set of standing orders are required for next time.

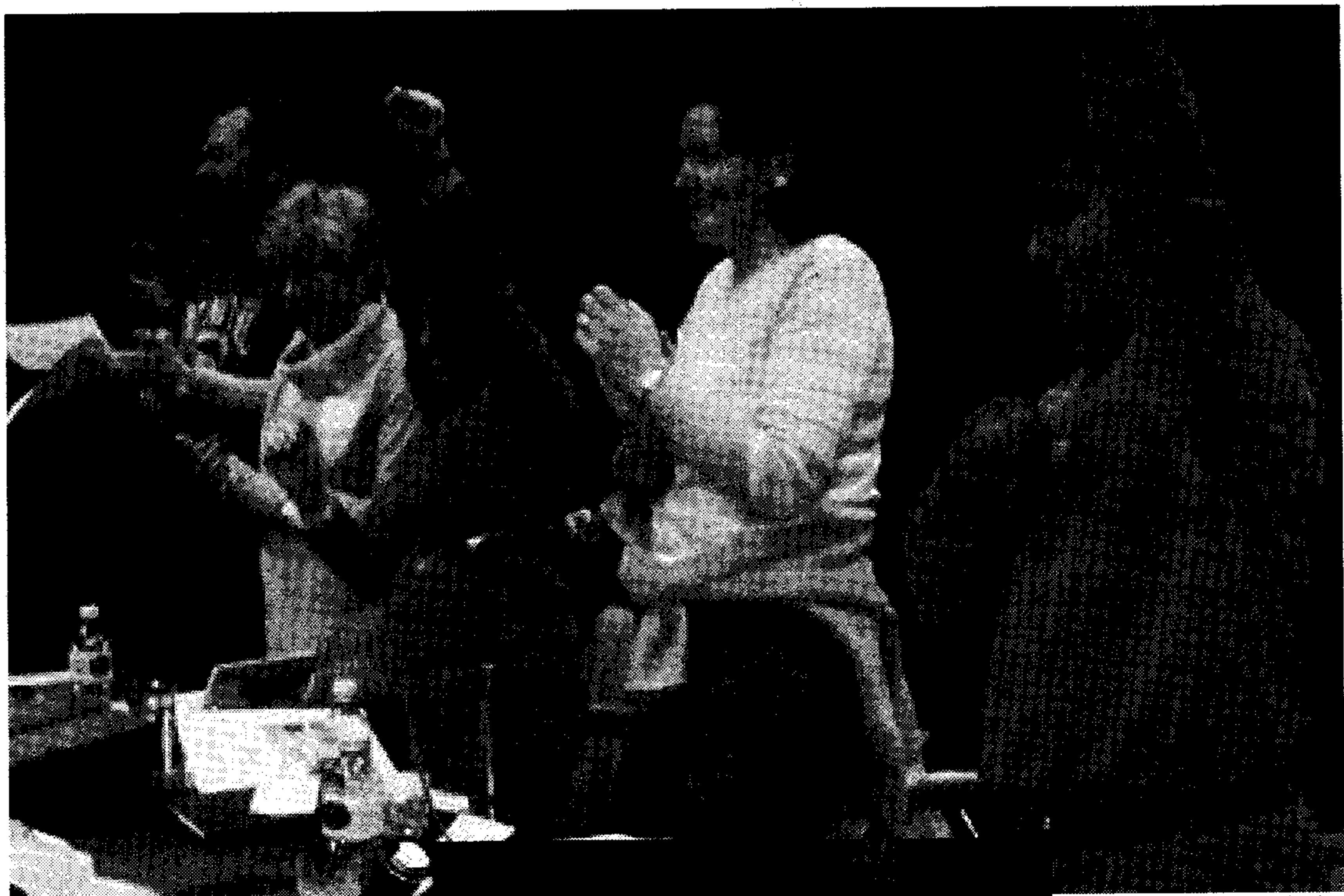
The pre-planning did, however, allow the conference to complete its business on time. Full debate took place on the issues being considered and overall the prioritisation of the agenda reflected the wishes of delegates.

The party had been considering other internal changes that were agreed by conference, although they had provoked dissent when first suggested. Amongst these was the decision to centralise membership administration and finances, taking on more full time staff including part-time National Secretary and treasurer and launching an appeal for increases in dues.

Overall the conference showed that the SSP is capable of holding well-structured debates on issues of deep controversy and reaching democratic decisions that enable it to go forward more or less united.

The party has grown by 50% over the last year and it is clear that the informal approach to internal discussion is inadequate.

A working group is looking at mechanisms of improving party democracy. The June conference should put these changes into effect and allow the SSP to present itself as an even more democratic socialist party in 2003.



Palestine policy – a surprise for the SSP

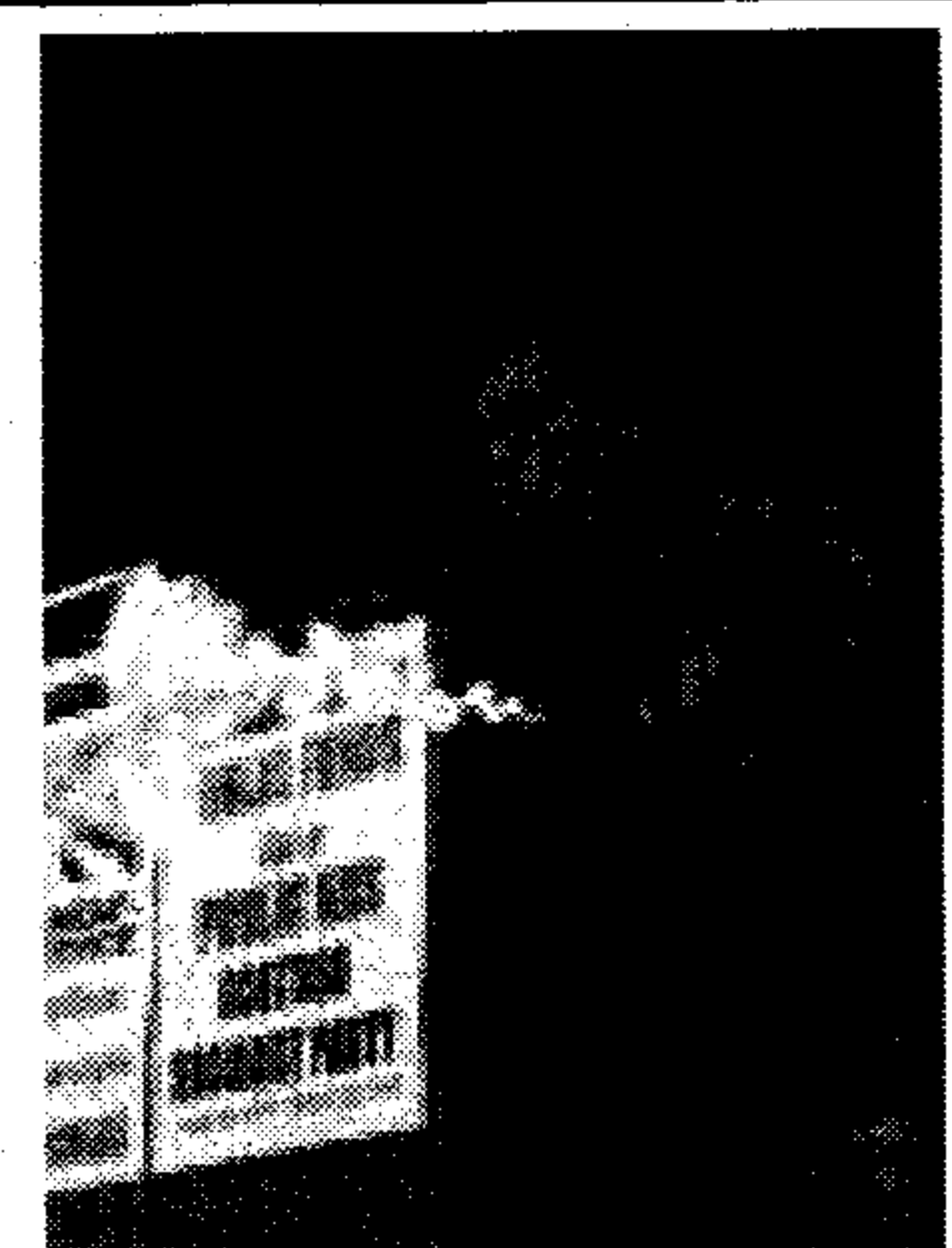
Campbell McGregor

Arguably the most surprising development at the recent SSP conference was the decision on Palestine. At last year's SSP conference, there was a serious debate on Palestine. I moved a motion which was agreed but in heavily amended form.

Many activists in the SSP have the political background of Militant, which traditionally had very bad positions on Palestine; effectively neutral in the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians.

Oddly, despite the fact that the ex-Militant forces in Scotland had recently split between the ISM and CWI loyalists, on this issue the two ex-Militant groups had basically the same position. They had both shifted to some extent, in that they now supported the struggle of the Palestinians taking place in the West Bank and Gaza, and opposed the Oslo Agreement.

However, they had not thought through their theoretic-



SWP's Alex Callinicos

cal positions. They were still calling for a 2-state solution, "a socialist Palestine alongside a socialist Israel", and opposed describing Israel as a "settler state".

They seemed to think the problems with Israel and Zionism only started with the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the Six Day War in 1967.

This year's conference debated a motion from the North-East Fife branch (with some amendments accepted)

which took an unambiguously pro-Palestinian and anti-Zionist position, calling for "a secular Palestinian state in which all peoples regardless of religion have equal rights".

It condemned "the violence inflicted by the terrorist state of Israel on the Palestinians", called for an end to the Israeli law of return and for the right to return of Palestinian refugees, funding of places for Palestinian students at Scottish universities by the Scottish Parliament, condemned Zionism as a racist ideology while also condemning anti-Semitism, and supported the Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

Although it was pointed out by the chair and some speakers against the motion that this would overturn the policy adopted last year, conference passed the motion, not overwhelmingly, but clearly enough without a count.

I spoke in favour, arguing that to accept the legitimacy of Zionism was to accept the legitimacy of ethnic cleansing as a solution to ethnic and national conflicts, which was

the thin end of a very thick wedge in relation to conflicts in a number of parts of the world.

Some speakers against the motion had pointed out that there was an Israeli working class, I said that here in Scotland we had taken up the Chhokar case even though this might offend sections of the white working class; we should not condone recent suicide bombings, but we should not equate the violence of the oppressed with the violence of the oppressor.

One speaker from a Jewish background pointed to the injustice where he would be able to move to Israel, but Palestinian refugees who came from the place would not.

This policy shift was clearly due to some extent to an influx of new members in the Socialist Worker Platform. I am not sure if they were originally behind the motion, but a number spoke for it.

Activists in the SSP and Palestine Solidarity Campaign should ensure that this victory is properly built on over the coming year.

Conference boosts debate over union political funds

Alan Thornett

Over 1,000 trade unionists attended the Socialist Alliance trade union conference on Saturday March 16, making it the most significant meeting of trade union activists for many years.

The conference came at exactly the right time to be able to address the linked issues of the fight to democratise the trade union political fund and the struggle against the privatisation agenda of Blair's second term. The conference was also able to link up with current strikes and disputes over pay and other questions.

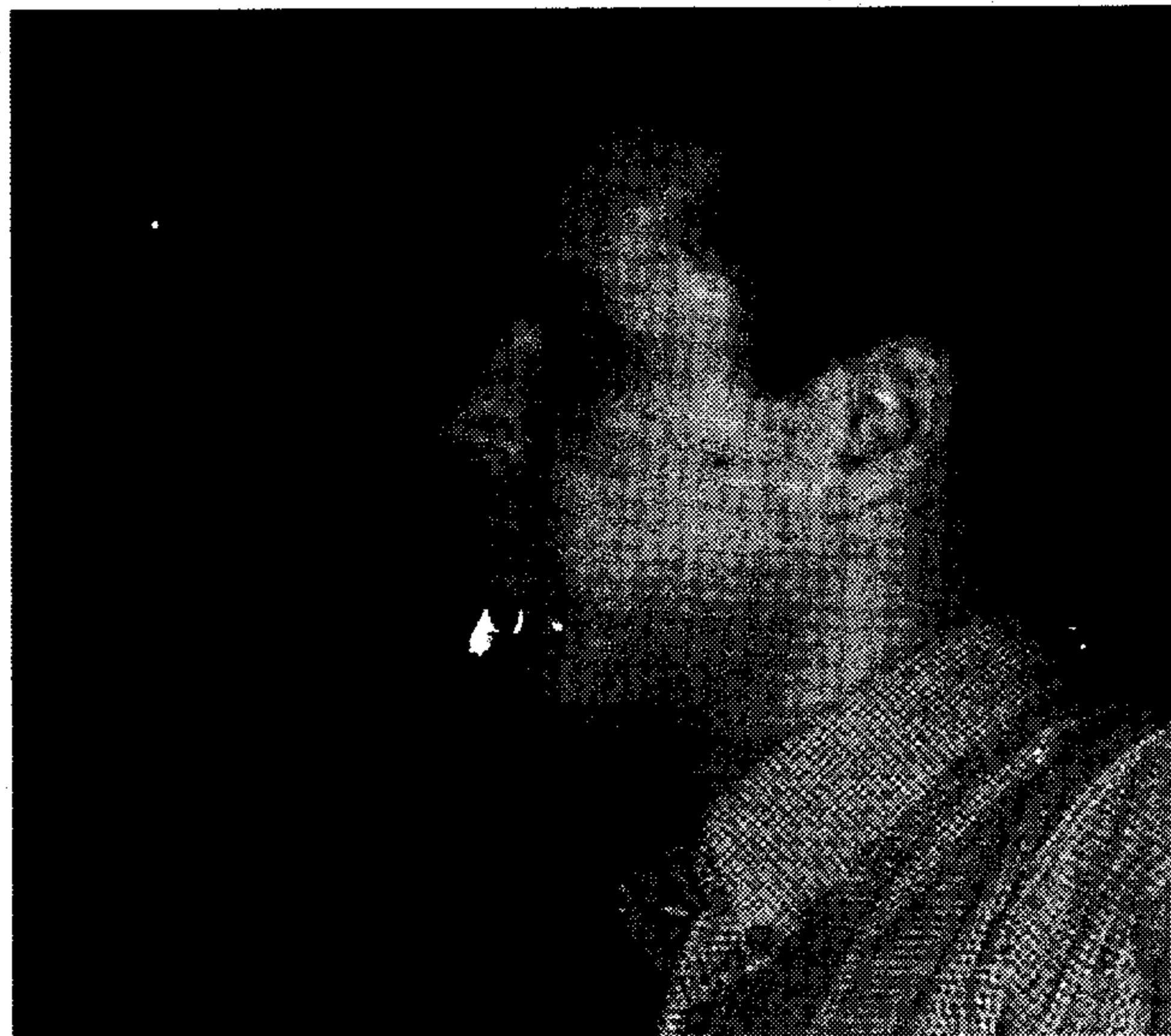
The first session was chaired by Christine Blower – ex-president of the NUT – who pointed to the one day strike and huge demonstration of London teachers which had taken place two days earlier on March 14 as an important part of the back-drop to the conference. The debate on the political fund was opened by Matt Wrack, FBU member and author of the Socialist Alliance pamphlet on the political fund (see below).

He argued that the time had come to end the situation where the unions were paying large sums of money to the Labour Party which in government was pursuing a privatisation agenda against the very unions donating the money. He was not calling for disaffiliation but for the democratisation of the political funds with trade union members having the right to decide how their own money was spent. This theme was emphasised by the slogan behind the platform which asked: "Whose money is it anyway?"

Greg Tucker spoke on the disputes on rail and refuted the idea that Railtrack was the subject of any kind of renationalisation, since the profits were simply being passed on to the operating companies. On the political fund, he stressed that the democratisation and diversification of the fund did not mean that we are in favour of giving money to the Tories or the Lib Dems, as was being reported in some quarters.

The Tories had called for strikes to be banned on rail and the Lib Dems had called for the ending of all immunities and a return to the conditions before the 1906 Taff Vale judgement.

Yunus Bakhsh, from the UNISON executive pointed to the alliance taking place at



Mark Serwotka

the European summit in Barcelona (as the conference was in session) between Blair, Berlusconi, and the Spanish right-wing Prime Minister Anzar to attack workers rights across Europe.

How, he asked, can we give money to the Labour Party when Blair is now the leader of the European right against the trade unions and in alliance with people with fascists in their government?

After discussion from the floor the conference broke up into 10 sector/union workshops: Rail, Education, Media, FBU, GMB, PCS, T&G, UNISON, banking and AMICUS. There was no CWU workshop, despite a high number of registrations, since CWU members had gone onto the demonstration called against the deregulation of the post office at short notice and at the same time as the conference.

Discussions in the workshops centred on how to pursue the conference's themes in the individual unions (and at their own conferences) and, in some cases, how to maintain co-ordination between SA members within the union.

At the start of the second session on privatisation a large delegation of postal workers arrived from the demonstration. They were given a huge welcome as they entered the hall.

The second session was opened by guest speaker Luciano Muhlbauer from Rifondazione Comunista. Luciano is also a member of the independent union S. in COBAS and of Bandiera Rossa, the Italian section of the Fourth International.

He talked about opposition in Italy to both neo-liberal

globalisation and the war. These two strands had merged into a powerful movement since Genoa and the bombing of Afghanistan.

He urged the conference to ensure that their would be a big participation from Britain in the European Social Forum which will be held in Italy in the autumn.

He was followed by a representative of the Dudley Hospital strikers who argued that whilst the strike had not in the end been successful it had been a beacon of struggle against privatisation and had therefore played an

Whose money is it, anyway?

This pamphlet, written by Matt Wrack for the Socialist Alliance is a vital tool for all trade unionists as the debate on the political fund opens up in the unions.

As CWU General Secretary addresses the Green Party Conference, and GMB's John Edmonds says he will give money to the Tories or the Lib Dems if they back the union's policies, both the SA trade union conference and this pamphlet could not have been more timely.

Wrack charts the miserable record of new Labour, elected to government by thousands of trade unionists desperate for change after the long night of Tory rule, highlighting Byers' recent description of public sector workers defending jobs and services as "wreckers".

As he argues "over the past decade, the Labour Party has

important role.

Richie Venton, a guest speaker from the Scottish Socialist Party, reported on the campaign against privatisation in Scotland. On the political fund, he said that whilst he agreed that in England and Wales it was right to call for the democratisation of the fund, in Scotland the SSP was in a position to present itself as an alternative to new Labour and therefore to call for the break to be made.

Mark Serwotka, the new general secretary of the PCS, made an outstanding speech to the conference. He reminded people that Blair and new Labour had taken privatisation into areas where the Tories had feared to tread.

He again pointed to the alliance between Blair and Berlusconi and went on to note that this had even prompted John Monks to call Blair "bloody stupid".

Several postal workers spoke in the debate stressing the strength of feeling amongst the membership of the union and the need to turn that strength of feeling into action against the deregulation agenda.

In similar vein, Gill Lee from Lewisham NUT spoke of the speed with which the

London teachers action had gathered strength once the decision for strike action had been taken.

At her school it had been difficult to get NUT members to vote in the ballot, but when the call came there were 24 teachers on the picket line out of 80 and solid action. The mail delivery van turned away at the request of the pickets.

Priyantha Wickramasinghe, leader of the electricity workers union in Sri Lanka currently visiting Europe added to the international dimension by giving a graphic description a strike of 14,000 electricity workers which he had led against the privatisation of electricity which had totally shut Sri Lanka down for four days.

Wickramasinghe, a member of the NSSP, Sri Lankan section of the Fourth International, said "There was a total blackout. Nothing functioned, transport, water, toilets, computers, nothing. The strike was ended by the use of the military and the arrest of the strike leaders".

A weakness of the conference was the lack of women speakers on the platform. This had always been a problem, but the problem was compounded by two adver-

tised women speakers being unable to attend at the last minute.

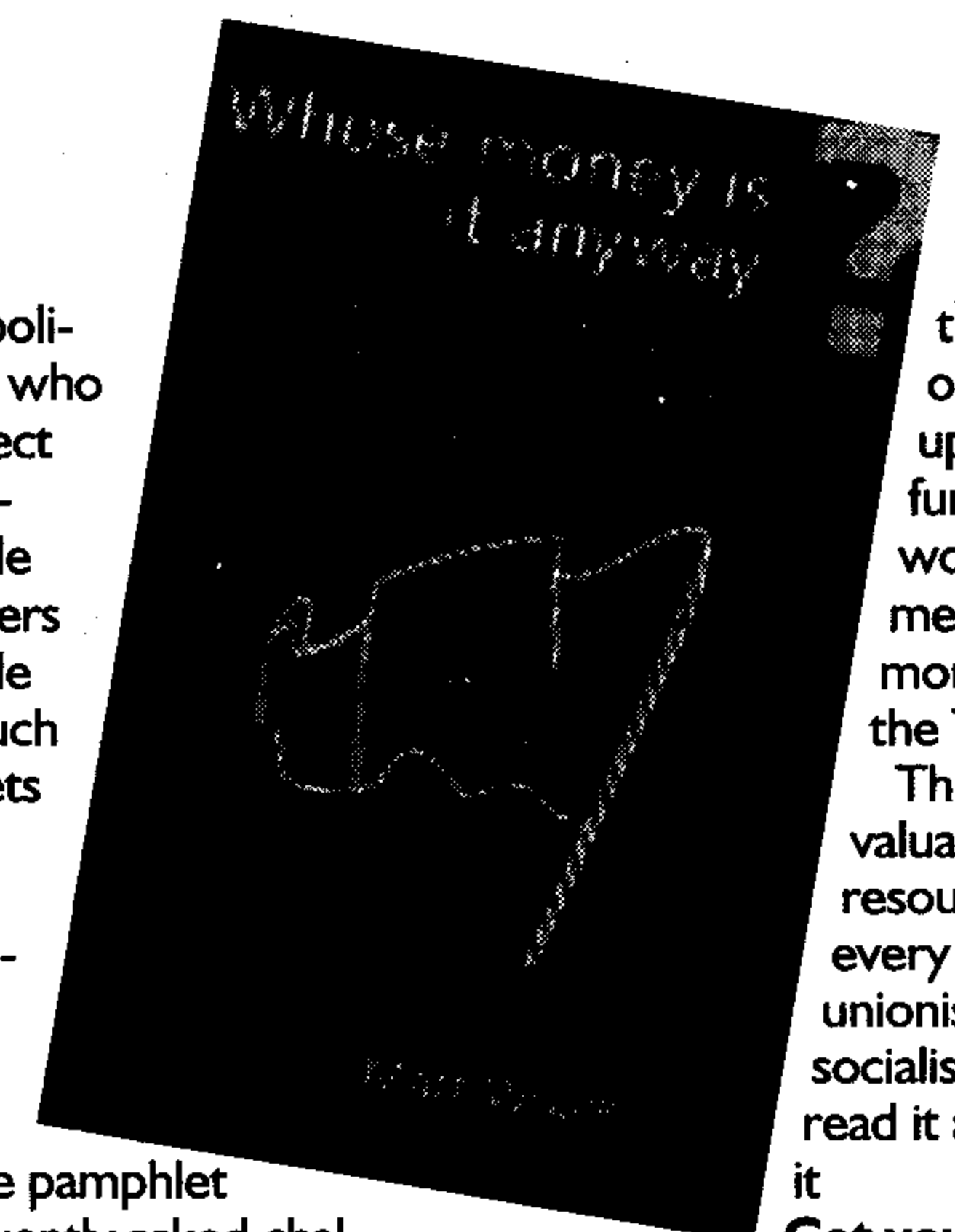
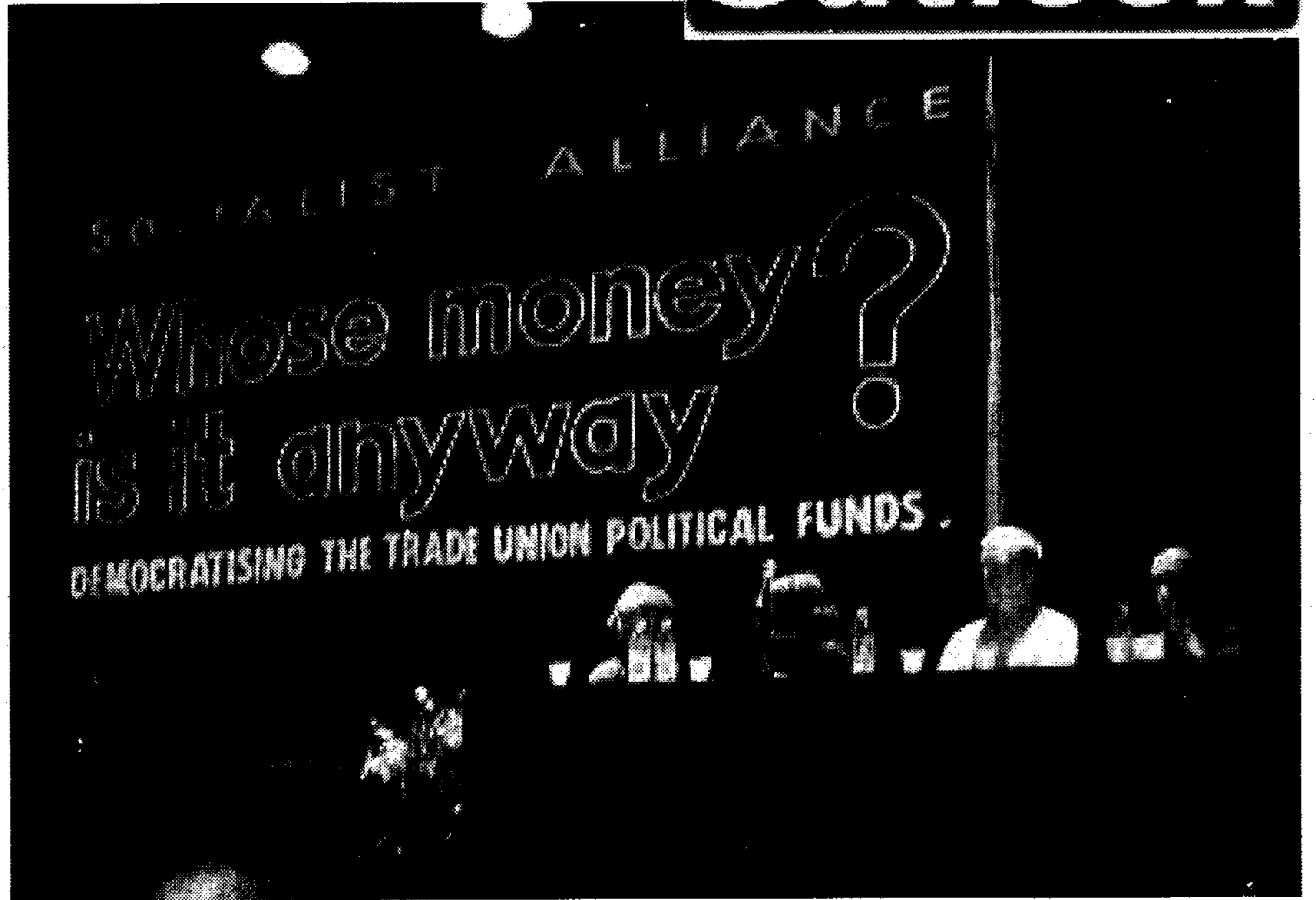
However it was a highly successful conference, reflecting the current situation in the unions, and making a real contributions to the debates both on the political fund and the struggle against privatisation.

As the final speaker from the floor Nick Wrack, from the Socialist Alliance Executive, spoke about the need to use the pamphlet, of which 10,000 copies were available at the conference, to continue the debate at every level in the unions.

In a powerful summing-up speech Mark Serwotka said that the excellent discussions at the conference now had to be turned into action – and that meant in particular ensuring that they are reflected in this years trade union conferences.

He also said that the unions had to mobilise on the streets against privatisation. He needed 100,000 people of the streets against privatisation he said.

He had written to the General Secretaries of every union facing privatisation to form an alliance and support such a demonstration – he was still waiting for their replies.



increasingly stolen the initiative from the Tories in courting and granting privilege to big business".

He takes us back to the creation of the Labour Party by the unions at the beginning of the last century, and the history of the political funds themselves – covering aspects of this evolution that are not necessarily familiar to those facing the new debates in today's conditions.

His conclusion, with which we completely agree, is that we need to fight today to democratise these funds, to break Labour's monopoly.

Organisations like the SSP and the Socialist Alliance "should have the right to argue their case in front of union members. Similarly Labour should also have the right to argue for support for their can-

didates and policies. Anyone who has any respect for the intelligence of trade union members should be able to support such a process. Lets have the debate and allow democracy to work".

The final section of the pamphlet is some frequently asked challenging questions about the political fund, with suggested answers. These are extremely useful because they pose challenges from a variety of different political positions – from those who don't think political funds should exist at all, to those who

think that opening up the funds would mean giving money to the Tories. This is a valuable resource – every trade unionist, every socialist should read it and use it

Get your bulk copies now from Socialist Alliance, Wickham House, 10 Cleveland Way, London E1 4TR by sending a cheque made payable to Socialist Alliance for £6 for 10 copies – or you can pay by credit card by ringing 020 7791 3138

ISG agrees on policies for new world situation

The International Socialist Group held its national conference on March 9-10. The key change coming out of the conference was the decision that the ISG should step up its involvement in the anti-capitalist movement and in Globalise Resistance and devote more resources to building itself amongst young people.

This was a successful and upbeat event. Comrades drew on their experiences in the Socialist Alliance, the Scottish Socialist Party and the anti-war movement to draw conclusions about the way forward both for the left as a whole and for the ISG.

The conference united around a single position on British politics and the main document was agreed without dissent. There were some substantive amendments put forward which were supported by a small number of delegates.

The conference also took debates on Ireland and on Palestine, on which we will report in more detail in the next issue. Here we reproduce the main line report to the conference, presented by Alan Thornett

The world has changed since September 11th: the world's only super-power is in the hands of the Republican right and is on the rampage – facilitated by the Twin Towers attack. The result is an extremely dangerous world.

Phase One of the so-called “war against terrorism” is still going on, with not only the continuing war in Afghanistan, but also the daily massacre of the Palestinians by Sharon, with Bush backing him to the hilt.

Across the world, those regimes that have supported the Bush/Blair war drive have been given licence to clamp down militarily on their own opponents – Putin for example has been given a free hand in Chechnya.

The US has spread its own



Shoulder to shoulder in the fight against global capitalism: Fourth International contingent on the march in Barcelona

military involvement, sending troops to the Philippines, Yemen, Colombia, and Somalia.

All this is accompanied by a massive expansion of the US military budget by \$48 billion and a situation where Star wars is getting closer

We have seen a massive attack on civil rights world wide with the suspension of the Geneva Convention and the inhuman conditions in Camp-X-ray. September 11 has brought in its wake new attacks on asylum seekers and increased racism, particularly directed against people presumed to be Arabs.

Across the EU there has been a tightening up of internal controls combined with a huge escalation of security services: CIA, FBI, MI6 and in Britain the introduction of imprisonment without trial in Britain.

In the wake of all that came Bush's axis of evil speech directed at: Iran, North Korea and Iraq. What has become absolutely clear since that speech is that the US government is preparing for an all-out invasion of Iraq.

Such an invasion represents a qualitative escalation of the imperialist war drive – this is far more than just the next step of Phase One.

This time there is no pretence: just unfinished business and US strategic interests in the region.

The Stratfor think tank claims that a decision has already been made to use nuclear weapons in Iraq if necessary. It claims that whatever concessions are offered by Iraq will be rejected.

When the invasion of Iraq takes place, the coalition that came together over the war in Afghanistan will shatter – but Bush doesn't seem to be worried about this. He has his lieutenant Blair – and that alliance will be the basis for this new war.

Fortunately there is another side to the picture – the fight back.

We have seen the rise of an important anti-war movement in Britain and other countries. Even today, when the continuing war in Afghanistan gets little coverage, this movement is still mobilised as witnessed by the demonstration on March 30?

Nor has the anti-globalisation movement been demobilised – one of Bush and Blair's prime objectives in the aftermath of September 11.

Anti-globalisation protestors have been central to the anti-war mobilisations. The demonstrations in Brussels at the EU summit last December were big and Porto Alegre Mark 2 was double the size of last years event.

Of course the situation has been more difficult in the US, but even the New York demonstration at the time of Porto Alegre showed that the movement remains unbowed.

In addition of course, there is a revolutionary situation in Argentina

These developments will shape politics over the next year or so. There is already a radicalisation taking place around world politics, once Iraq is invaded this will escalate rapidly – particularly amongst young people. This is why it is so important that we have a youth initiative out of this conference – this could hardly be more important.

In Britain the political situation remains dominated by the new Labour project – which continues unabated. The relationship of new Labour to big business deepens all the time. Blair remains at the forefront of the neo-liberal agenda.

The situation inside the LP has deteriorated further. Though the support for the early day motion opposing action against Iraq is welcome, particularly in comparison to the size of the revolt over Afghanistan, given the enormity of what is at stake, it remains extremely

weak. Blair has felt able to support Bush without looking over his shoulder very much.

It is not just that the Labour left has been weakened – the Labour Party is losing its traditional base as we have seen at election after election. There has been a huge drop in LP membership.

The LP is not yet a straight capitalist party, but it is a long way down that road

This means that a space is opening to the left of Labour – which must be filled by the left. This is an historic opportunity that must not be missed. The development of the left in the next period depends on it. The strategic task is the building of an alternative to Blairism

This means a broad formation to the left of Labour – comprising those breaking from the LP, those newly radicalising along with the far-left organisations. The Socialist Alliance in England and the Scottish Socialist Party are the organisations today best placed to fill that space.

It is remarkable what has been achieved already by the Socialist Alliance. We can see the role it is playing in the unions – in the debate over political fund and the response to the SA TU conference. Our position is not to for disaffiliation but for democratisation.

Our objective is for the Socialist Alliance to become a new party of the left. For us, this is the crucial discussion inside the SA. The Alliance cannot continue in its current form indefinitely – it should become a party like the SSP or the Left Block in Portugal.

Those models are approximate – because the political and organisational situation is different in each country – but they remain useful analogies.

Some question whether

this building of broad parties is in the Trotskyist tradition. Yes it is.

Trotsky was flexible on organisational form; the bottom line was the building of a revolutionary party in the most effective way. He was in favour of a Labour Party in the US, of revolutionaries working in the ILP, or being inside in social democratic parties if that was the best way to win forces to revolutionary ideas. He was in favour of setting out to win forces breaking from Social Democracy.

Today we need a broad party to fill the space to the left of Labour. Central to this is the evolution of the far-left itself – and particularly, given its size, the SWP.

The SWP decided to build the Socialist Alliance two years ago in the run up to of the Greater London Assembly elections. This turn was based on their analysis of the political situation, the opportunities that there were for the left in that situation.

Today they oppose the idea that the Socialist Alliance should become a new party of the left. We don't know whether they will change their mind on this. We have discussed it with them, and we will continue to do so.

We will continue to put forward proposals like that of the trade union conference, which as well as advancing the struggle can objectively take the Alliance in this direction.

But we think that what is most likely to convince them the Alliance should become a party is a change in the political situation, which makes the necessity of and opportunity for such a development much clearer.

The current industrial situation does not represent a return to the levels of militancy of the 1970s, but it does represent something important given the years of

battering the unions have been through. There is a new radicalism based on wages and the fight against privatisation and victimisations.

Union members are voting for leaders who are not tied in the old way to new Labour, not tied to social partnership in the same way.

Given this analysis of the political situation both internationally and in Britain, what are the tasks of the ISG over the next period?

These will obviously be determined by political developments – particularly the invasion of Iraq. This will lead to a growth of the anti-war movement that will dwarf what we have seen so far. Building this movement will be central for us, and we will see a further massive radicalisation amongst young people.

We want to step up our work in solidarity with the Palestinians – desperately needed in the current situation. The development of anti-war movement means that larger numbers of people are becoming aware of the issues in their struggle.

Our overarching project remains the Socialist Alliance. We support the idea that the Alliance should organise an event around world politics in the autumn – an event that we build heavily amongst young people.

We also want to step up our involvement in the anti-capitalist

movement, and within that in Globalise Resistance. We want to mobilise for the demonstrations taking place during the current Spanish Presidency of the European Union, and to build for the European Social Forum to be held in Italy in the autumn.

The fall out from September 11 has resulted in increased attacks on asylum seekers. We welcome the calling of the conference in Manchester in March 23 by a number of anti-racist and pro-asylum seeker groups and will work to ensure that it is a success and that stronger co-ordination of initiatives results from it.

All these developments underline the importance of our determination to build amongst youth. The conditions to do so are better than they have been for a long time.

This is because of the deepening radicalisation of young people. But it is also because of the subjective determination of our organisation to take our political ideas into these movements, to learn from them and to recruit from them.

Step up the fight for asylum rights

The Conference to Defend Asylum seekers in Manchester on March 23 presents a welcome opportunity for different organisations who have been campaigning on this issue to get together and co-ordinate and strengthen their activity.

Organised by Barbed Wire Britain, Campaign to Defend Asylum Seekers (CDAS), the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC) and the National Civil Rights Movement with the backing of the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups, the day looks set to bring together activists from all over the country who have been working in a variety of different local campaigns.

It is particularly positive that the speakers at the conference include a large number of asylum seekers. The fight against the deportation of individuals, the fight to close particular (and all) immigration detention centres, and the more general fight against all immigration laws are strengthened enormously when they are led by asylum seekers and refugees themselves.

The developments at Yarl's Wood on February 14 which yet again saw immigration prisoners rise up against the intolerable treatment they receive from both the state and Group 4, reminds us that this resilience is something the movement as a whole cannot stress too much.

The protests at Yarl's Wood and the massive fire that followed were sparked by

attempts by security staff to remove a elderly sick detainee in handcuffs to hospital. The detainee had been ill for three days and other detainees felt she should have been moved to hospital immediately.

As George Binette, secretary of CDAS said "There was a tragic inevitability to the fire, but above all the Yarl's Wood events spell out how fundamentally wrong the whole policy of arbitrary detention has been." This massive blaze comes at a time when the Home Secretary is seeking to push through Parliament a major extension of the detention regime. This will more than double the number of asylum applicants held in facilities like Yarl's Wood to some 4,000.

Emma Ginn of the Campaign Against Arbitrary Detention at Yarl's Wood said, "The aftermath of last night's fire has really brought home the contempt with which these people [the detainees] have been treated. The authorities have been far more concerned with how many asylum seekers might have 'escaped', rather than with the possibility of fatalities or serious injuries among the detainees. There was no helpline set up for the families and friends of detainees. Partially clothed women and children, including a two month old baby, were left to stand outside in sub zero temperatures. We already knew that some of these detainees were in need of medical treatment."

Home Office officials deliberately ignored advice from

Bedfordshire Fire Service that sprinklers should be fitted at Yarl's Wood Detention Centre. Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service Acting Deputy Chief Fire Officer Clive Walsh said the Yarl's Wood centre had no sprinklers. "We were asked for our opinion at the end of 2000, early 2001, and it was our advice to have sprinklers in a building of this type. Damage so far has been estimated at £35 million."

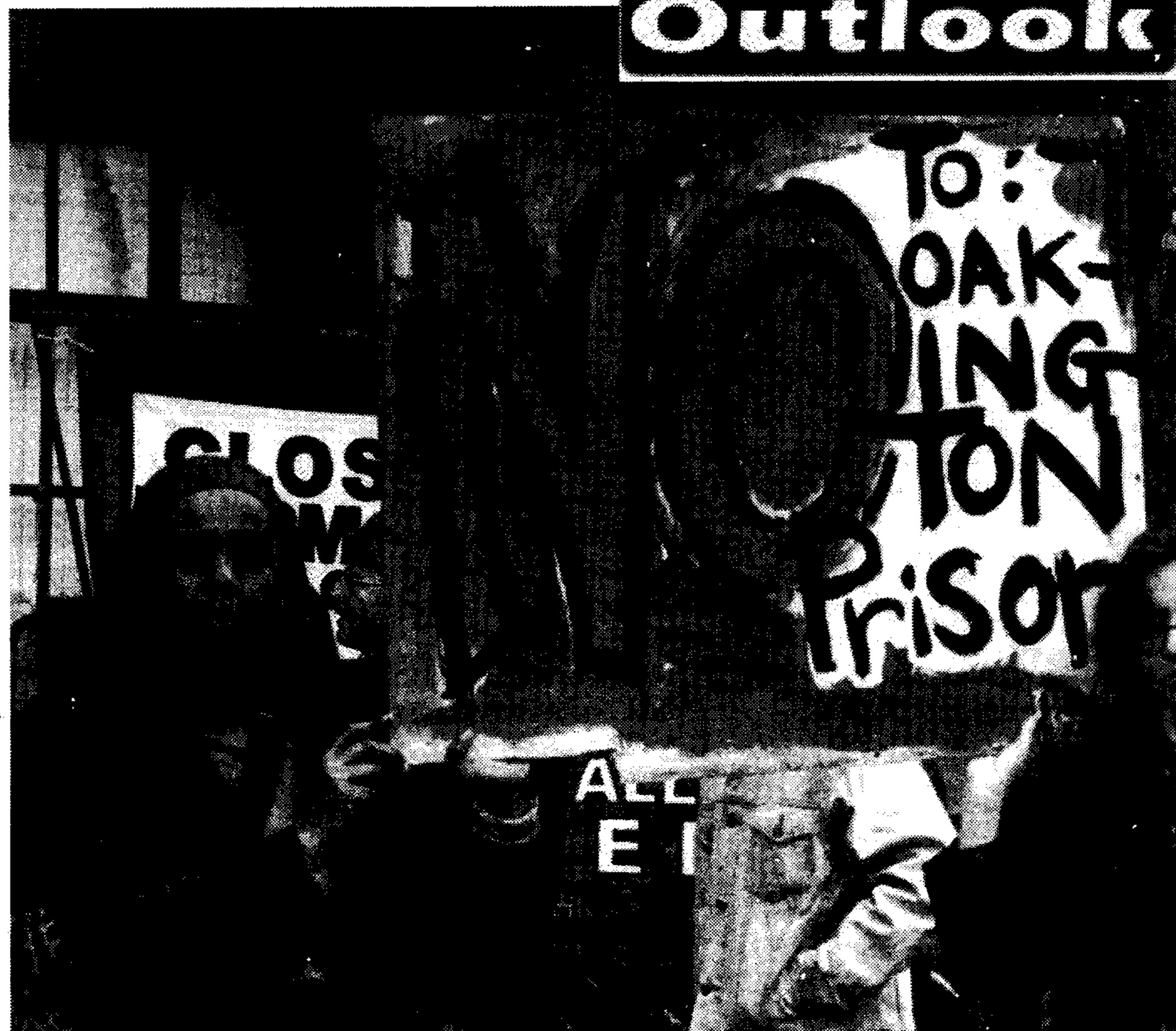
The NCADC said "The blame for what happened at Yarl's Wood lies squarely with the Government. Their latest Draconian proposals for asylum seekers, unveiled in "Secure Borders, Safe Haven", will lead to more incidents like these.

NCADC demands the immediate closure of all detention centres, a end to dispersal, scrapping the vouchers today, (not next autumn). To be blunt only the complete repeal of all the UK's racist Immigration laws, will prevent a repeat of the events at Yarl's Wood."

The Campaign Against Arbitrary Detention at Yarl's Wood and CDAS are calling for a full public enquiry into the events at Yarl's Wood.

This was just the latest of a series of continuing protests at Yarl's Wood Detention Centre since it opened on 19 November. Detainees at Europe's largest detention centre - have been suffering punitive conditions since the camp opened.

On December 10, just 3 weeks after the centre opened, five Roma began refusing to



Stalingrad O'Neill

eat. The hunger strike soon broadened into a opposition to detention itself. Since then there have always been people on hunger strike. One detainee from Eastern Europe went with out food for 34 days.

On January 18 nearly all the detainees went on hunger strike for 24 hours. One of the main complaints was the handcuffing of detainees being transported to hospital.

Nor have protests by immigration detainees been confined to Yarl's Wood. Everywhere that refugees have been locked up and criminalised, they have tried to organise and fightback - from Campsfield Detention Centre near Oxford to Rochester prison in Kent.

We may not have seen a "sans papiers" movement in Britain like that in France, but that certainly does not mean that asylum seekers here and not developing their own methods of struggle.

What it does mean is that others involved in the movement to defend asylum seekers do have the responsibility to try to allow the space for more

developed forms of self-organisation to be created.

Hopefully the Manchester conference will be a step on this road.

Demonstrate at Yarl's Wood

Saturday March 30 12-1.30pm. Protest in Bedford town centre 2.00-4.00pm Transport may be available from Bedford to the camp: contact Emma Ginn, 07786 517379.

Glasgow stock transfer: reject government lies!

Gordon Morgan

The ballot on transferring Glasgow's housing stock from the Council to a Housing Association in hock to major banks is underway and voting closes in early April.

At the beginning of March a tenant survey from the No campaign and an independent survey both concluded tenants would overwhelmingly (80%) vote No against the transfer if the same resources were made available to each option.

It was clear that most tenants were confused and undecided how to vote. Even those who had decided to vote for the transfer largely accepted that it was privatisation and in a majority of cases, felt coerced by the council and the government.

Since the beginning of March there has been a blizzard of pro-transfer material issued to tenants. A video has been sent to each house extolling its virtues, hundreds of billboards have been used to promote the yes vote, special supplements to free and paid press have been produced. The cost must run to millions.

The underlying object of this propaganda is to say to voters "do what we say and vote yes or else you will not get your houses improved." Because of the appalling condition of their houses many may succumb to this pressure, however, they will not like doing so.

A week after the ballot started, it is unclear which way the vote will go. The level of subsidy being promised - around £2,000 million - is astronomical. The Vote no campaign's main contention is that it would cost at least of £500 million LESS if the council retained the stock.

To the argument that the money is not there we pose the following scenario. Next

June, at the council and Scottish Parliament elections. Labour has said it has the money to do up your houses. The money is still there despite your No Vote. Labour is now saying they won't give it to you, because you didn't do what they said. Labour is asking you to vote for them. Get real - the money will be made available whatever the vote.

Early indications are that votes cast are equal for and against. A large percentage of those who have not yet voted say they will vote No, however, many feel it is a foregone conclusion.

However I personally feel the vote can still be won by the No camp.

Even if the ballot is won for them, it is clear that Labour will not repeat this exercise. Edinburgh has decided against removing council tenure. The cost of this ideology is now been made clear to the Labour establishment. Those voting Yes under coercion may vote against Labour next year. Bankers, the real winners, do not vote.

The SNP has also come under pressure. The Glasgow Association of the SNP and 3 Glasgow MSPs support the No vote. The SNP Housing Spokesperson and vice spokesperson have publicly broken from policy and face motions seeking their removal.

The only party consistently opposing the transfer has been the SSP. If the vote is No this will send shivers through Labour, and the SSP will campaign for funds to be delivered to the Council as if the vote had been Yes - housing must be improved.

If the vote is Yes, many people who felt pressured to vote that way will react in next year's elections by voting SSP.

Selective "faith" schools undermine comprehensive education

Duncan Cryer

Recent media coverage of the "creationist" City Technology college in Gateshead has opened up a more general debate on "faith" schools and their impact on racial and social segregation within the state school system.

Some parents - and ministers including Tony Blair - believe that religious schools produce better results.

The selective nature of many religious schools appeals to some opponents of comprehensive education as a way of "maintaining standards". Some non-Christian (e.g Muslim) parents demand non-Christian "faith" schools to balance the high number of Christian run schools.

If it is true that religious schools produce better results, then this is mainly

due to the fact that they are often able to select more affluent pupils. It is well known that poverty is a key obstacle to educational success.

There are approximately 26,000 state schools in England, of which the Church of England runs roughly 4,700. The Roman Catholic Church runs about 2,100.

Minority faiths run hardly any schools in comparison. An increase in religious schools may mean an even greater polarisation in these figures and consequently an increase in the control of the Church of England over education, rather than counteracting the inequalities in the education system.

Religious segregation in education fosters hostility and intolerance instead of



Estelle Morris

promoting mutual understanding and so increases divisions in society.

In Scotland and Northern Ireland, the Protestant/Catholic schooling divide has contributed to recent conflicts such as at Holy Cross primary school, Belfast.

Many parents and educationalists want ethnically mixed schools, are against religious schools and are supporters of true comprehensive education. As

Socialists, we should stand with these people and against the assaults on comprehensive schools by successive governments.

The increase of market forces in education (via league tables, increased selection, performance related pay based on exam results etc) has resulted in schools being negatively labelled by crude examination results.

Coupled with open enrolment, this has been a disaster for many so-called "failing" schools. Sink schools have been created by government initiative.

Religious schools are not the answer; they merely encourage conflict between different groups and lead to the increased deprivation of working class pupils of all groups.

April 24: picket war criminal Kissinger!

Henry Kissinger was US President Richard Nixon's Secretary of State, his second in command.

He was a driving force behind the US war on Vietnam which killed 1 million Vietnamese people.

Kissinger was directly responsible for ordering the carpet bombing of Cambodia in 1969.

He gave full backing and military assistance to the Pinochet coup in Chile, later sanctioning the murder of Orlando Letelier in Washington in 1976.

Kissinger backed the Pakistani government in opposing Bangladeshi independence. Once again he supplied arms and intelligence.

He gave the go ahead for the Indonesian invasion of East Timor in 1975. Over 200,000 people were killed as a result.

He was also responsible for souring relations between Turkey, Greece and Cyprus – a division which still produces murder and maiming.

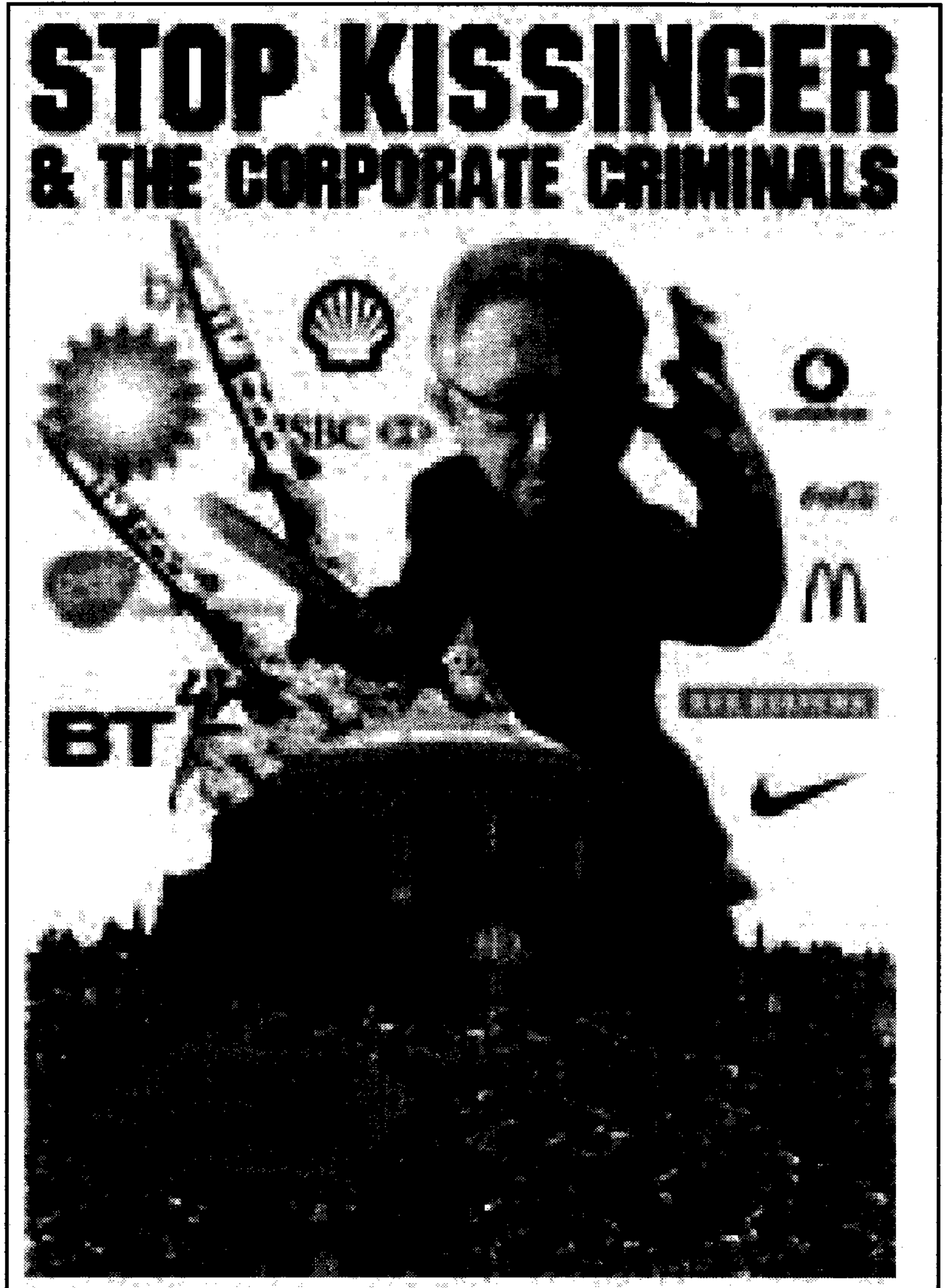
Kissinger's legacy of

American brutality around the world still survives. He remains a hero to the warmongers in Washington and Downing Street.

Kissinger is arriving in London to talk to the top 2,000 businessmen in Britain. He has his snout in the corporate trough, too.

Kissinger Associates' clients have included Union Carbide (responsible for the Bhopal disaster), Coca Cola (say no more), American Express, ITT, Lockheed, Arco and HSBC.

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



Trade unions must organise exploited young workers

Bosses hope agency labour will undermine organised workforce

Jack Johnson

TEN years ago a limited number of short term contract workers were first employed in Rover, first at Swindon then at Cowley. Most of these were given permanent contracts after six months.

But the foot was in the door. The use of a short term contracts is now universal in the remaining unionised motor industry, such as Vauxhall, Jaguar, Peugeot and Rover.

But at least temporary workers are in most instances employed directly by the company, and the unions can put pressure on for full time employment, and can control numbers

and conditions.

But the situation at BMW's plant in Cowley is different, and much more difficult, and no doubt will be followed by other car companies.

In the middle of last year the company started using agency labour, in ever-growing numbers. At its peak this reached 2500 shop floor workers, with the core shop floor workforce down to around 1000.

BMW promised that the agency staff would be reviewed after six months with a view to full time contracts being issued. So far about 500 have been taken on.

This created a dual problem.

The existing core workforce is now surrounded by people who are desperate to impress, in the hope of getting permanent positions. At a time of increases in production of the new model (big numbers are only ever employed at such times), in this instance the new Mini, the agency staff are the means through which work rate is being increased, often to unbearable levels.

In addition, the carefully selected people who are given contracts are often anti-union, and management creeps. The union has little say in who is given a contract.

Agency workers in Cowley get 20 per cent less pay

than the core workforce, and are under constant pressure the whole time. For them the job cannot be just a question of going in, doing their work, then going home.

If they want a contract they must be perfect timekeepers. If extra work is put on them, then they must do it. If the company wants people to take an interest in the job through team meetings, quality checks etc they have to be seen to be the keenest.

This can be very mentally stressful, especially if they have problems outside work. Most of the agency labour are young, and these pressures can be especially stressful to them, as they want some kind of social life.

They have to be willing to work all the strange shifts that go into what is called "modern" factory life (as if employers in the past had never thought of 24 hour working). At Cowley the rotating shifts in the week include a fortnight of 5:00pm to 3:30am working, and weekend shift working includes 12.5 hour shifts.

Most importantly, as with all the other agency workers in Britain (which has by far the biggest proportion of



Unions must fight for all workers, if conditions are not to be undercut

agency labour in its workforce of any country in Europe) agency staff have to put their lives on hold as far as putting a roof over one's head or any other major purchase is concerned. No mortgages or big loans will be issued to people who are not in permanent employment. And of course they are not accumulating any pension entitlements.

The only advantage over other agency workers is that being employed by an agency (there are three in Cowley) directly into a unionised workplace can give some element of control on the agency.

On discipline there are procedures, especially with regard to safety: so these workers can be defended despite the pressure to work unsafely. They do have a voice.

This is no doubt why the majority have joined the trade union.

The spread of agency labour conditions is a curse in that it is dramatically worsening the future for young people. They will have no security either in their jobs or finances.

The trade union movement must get to grips with this if they want to attract young people.

The first line of defence should be to try to avoid agency labour being introduced, and fight for full-time jobs.

If agency working is introduced, as in Cowley, the unions must fight to limit the numbers so they can't have a negative effect on the core workforce, and so the company is forced to turn more into full-time contracts if they want to employ more workers.

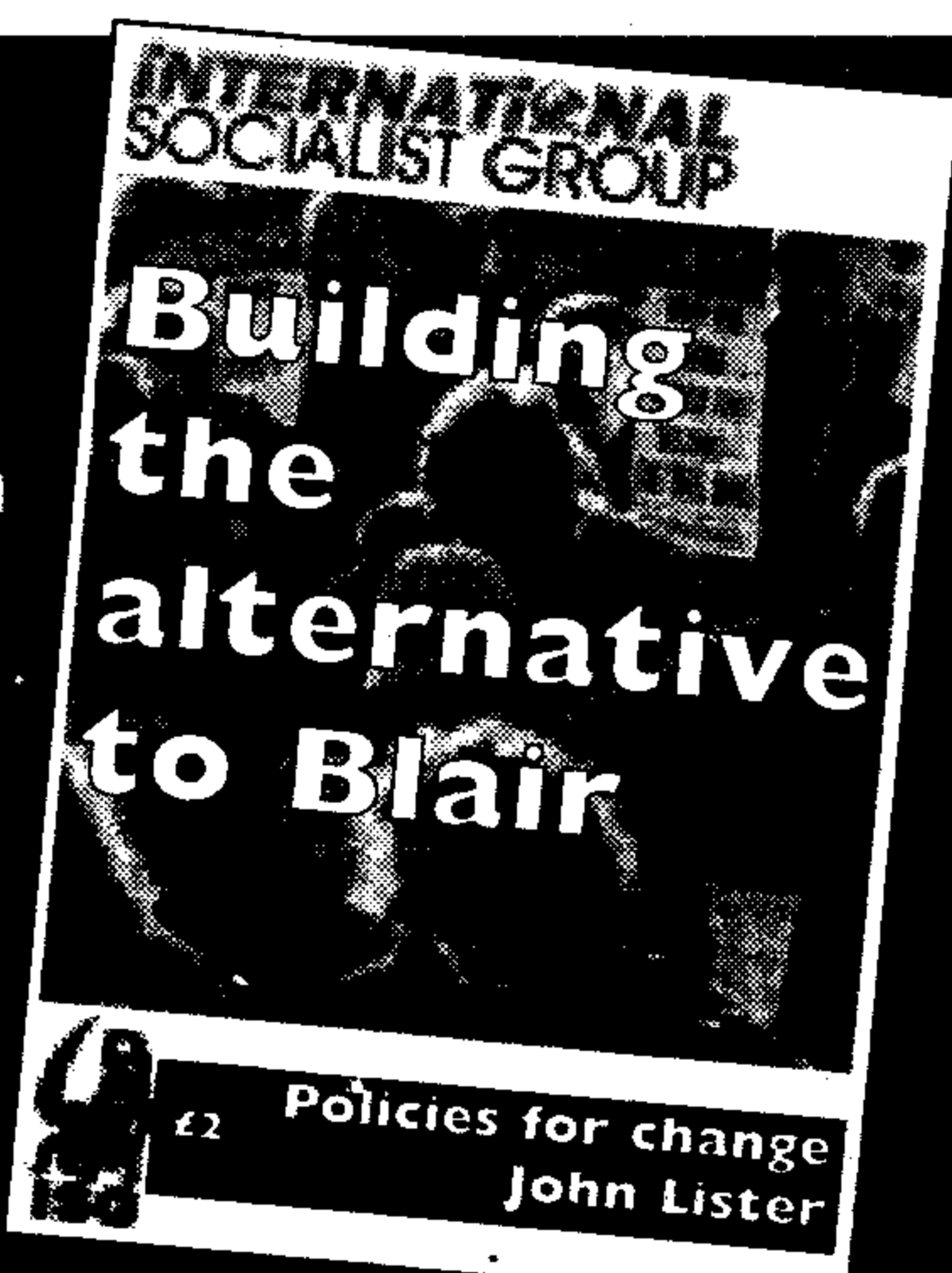
Some trade unionists were scared of recruiting agency workers. But this is wrong: these are the young people. The lessons they learn fighting as agency workers will decide their attitude in later life.

Either they will turn towards individualism and simply looking after themselves, or, if the union offers a proper lead, they can begin to see themselves as part of the organised working class – and thus help neutralise this major weapon in the employers' offensive.

Building the alternative to Blair

This ISG pamphlet is a contribution to the debate within the Socialist Alliance on the policies needed to challenge New Labour and unite a broad movement of the left.

Only £2.00 including post & packaging from ISG, c/o PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU.



Thousands march on Barcelona EU summit

Veronica Fagan reports on the week-long protests in Barcelona

Anyone who had any doubts about the health of the anti-globalisation movement should be well and truly convinced by the week of mobilisations in Barcelona that the movement is alive and kicking.

While it is impossible to be precise about the numbers on such huge protests as this, even the British media are saying that there were 25,000 people on the streets on Saturday for the main anti-globalisation march.

This means that this protest, despite the attempts of Bush and Blair to silence the movement in the aftermath of September 11, was of the same order as the magnificent turn out for Genoa last summer.

The highlights of the week were many:

■ Sunday 10 March 400,000 people demonstrated against the National Hydrological Plan

■ Thursday 14 March 100,000 trade unionists answered the call of the European TUC, demonstrating for "More Europe with full employment"

■ Saturday 16 March 300,000 people marched under the banners of the Campaign against Capital and War.

Police violence, which had started on the Friday when protestors in the Gracia area of the city had been attacked, continued on Saturday. Even this didn't dent the resolve of the marchers - or the enjoyment of a huge open-air concert with Manu Chao and other bands to round off the events.

The various protests took place in the context of a summit in which the European heads of state were determined to push forward with the logic of capitalist globalisation. The official EU web site listed the priorities for this meeting as follows:

- interconnection and opening-up of the trans-European transport networks;
- liberalisation and interconnection of the electricity and gas markets;
- integrating the financial markets, to make Europe a real financial power;
- developing a more flexible labour market capable of creating more jobs, and
- improving the education and training of Europe's students and workers and increasing their scope for mobility.

Despite the fact that all the European governments agree wholeheartedly with these objectives, there are tensions between them.

This is both because of their own individual national interests and because some of them feel more constrained about the pace at which they can impose change because of relatively strong trade unions or social movements opposing their neo-liberal policies.

This is the context in which we have seen Tony Blair gain a new best friend - a European counterpart to his alliance with George W - in Italy's Prime Minister Berlusconi. For Blair it is irrelevant that Berlusconi's coalition government includes the MSI, the direct descendants in the Italian political family of Mussolini's fascist Brownshirts.

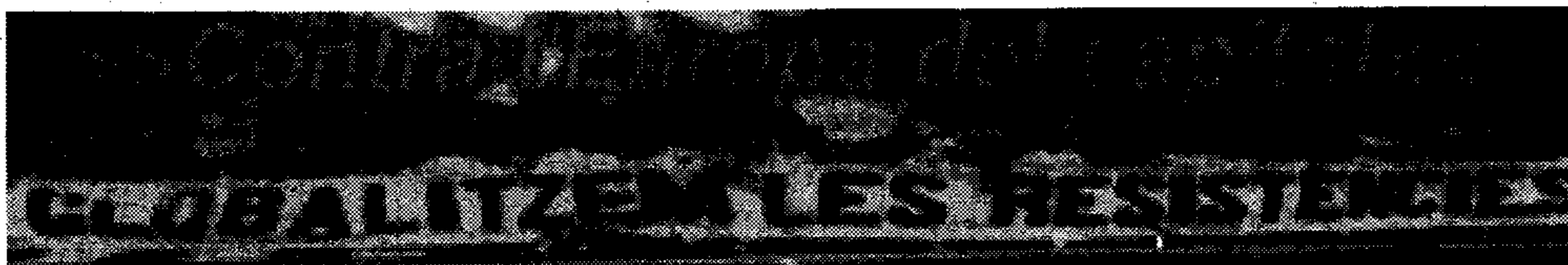
The basis of this new relationship, which has infuriated both our own John Monks and Italy's centre left parties, is particularly based around opposition to the idea that any rights should be given to Europe's increasing army of temporary workers.

The most contentious debate at the summit itself was around the question of opening up the energy market. France opposed immediate liberalisation.

Both Jospin and Chirac talked tough with the impending French Presidential election clearly in mind. Finally a compromise was agreed, with Germany also backing France. This will open up non-domestic energy, 60% of the market, from 2004.

This was particularly galling for the other leaders given that Electricité de France has aggressively expanded into other European markets that have already liberalised supply. The company already owns London Electricity, the supply business of SWEB and the country's biggest regional electricity distribution board.

The summit also agreed to boost spending on Research and Development to 3% of GNP by 2010, to raise the average retirement age from 58 to 65 and to provide day care for 90% of working mothers. Agreement was reached on moving towards a single market in financial services.



The right to water

The massive demonstration on March 10, when even the police estimate was 150,000 was called in opposition to the Plan Hidrológico Nacional (National Hydrological Plan) adopted by the Spanish government in June 2001.

The plan calls for the building of 120 new dams and would also redirect the flow of the Ebro River. These projects would lead to the destruction of many designated conservation areas, including the Ebro Delta.

Although the plan was apparently developed to address water shortages in parts of Spain, opponents argue that the plan encourages wasteful use of water, and is not a sustainable solution. They call for a decrease in water usage, especially by industry and public services which waste large amounts of water by failing to clean and reuse waste water.

The cost of all Plan Hidrológico Nacional (PHN) projects will total more than 23 billion Euro, which will be passed on to those who purchase the water, both industry/commercial users and household consumers.

A international movement is growing to encourage more respect for water as a precious, scarce resource. The privatisation of water places control of this important resource in the hands of large corporations, which care little about whether the public has access to safe drinkable water.

Water privatisation is a major problem in many parts of the world. In Durban, South Africa, water privatisation led to more than 200 deaths from cholera and typhoid after water service was stopped to poor neighbourhoods.

In 1999, Bolivia privatised its water resources following a mandate by the World Bank - but was forced to back down after enormous protests.

Most of those marching came from Catalonia or Aragon. The crowd was filled with red and yellow Catalonia flags. Unions and other organisations came in large groups, bringing banners and costumes - one group called "somos las aguas", (we are the waters) representing the "River of Life," walked through the crowd wearing nothing but blue body paint.

The Catalan police seemed determined to follow the model of Berlusconi and their Italian counterparts in Genoa

Police presence was minimal - just a few police cars were in side streets - and they seemed anxious not to anger the huge crowd. There were no arrests.

Trade unionists on the march

The leaders of the ETUC have made demonstrating at European summits a regular activity over the last few years since Luxembourg - though few British trade unionists would know, given the failure of the British TUC to mobilise more than a handful of people for any of these events.

The focus of this protest was the call for full employment without the abandonment of the social model supposedly approved at the Lisbon summit and against the liberalisation of the energy and transport. During the demonstration, Jose Maria Fidalgo, the secretary-general of Workers' Commissions [CCOO], insisted on the need to reach a Europe with full but not deregulated employment in 2010. He argued: "They have the moral obligation to build a Europe on the European social model. That is - as was said in the Lisbon strategy - to reach, in the year 2010, a Europe of full employment with rights, and not a deregulated Europe without any rights. If they take the latter path, the EU will lack any legitimacy. They must therefore take decisions tomorrow in relation to full employment, to the social Europe"... Yet again, therefore the leaders of the European unions demonstrated their continuing refusal to see that this European Union is a Europe of Capital, of deregulation, of unemployment, and of war. The whole point about the Lisbon summit in the summer of 2000 was that it promised to create 20 million jobs - by carrying through greater liberalisation. Full employment and job security can never be delivered by this Europe.

At the same time, workers across Europe demonstrated their real anger at the iniquities of the same system - an anger to which the anti-capitalist movement is increasingly trying to relate since the inspirational sight of the metal workers banners on the streets of Genoa last summer.

Police violence and repression

Even before the summit itself started, Amnesty International called on the Spanish authorities to ensure that policing of demonstrations respects the right to peaceful protest.

"People must be allowed to express their opinions, no matter what those opinions are. The authorities have the responsibility to ensure the safety and security of participants in the Summit. However, it is the duty of the authorities to ensure the rights of protestors to peacefully exercise the rights of freedom of expression and assembly."

Amnesty had previously expressed concern about the behaviour of the Catalan police on a number of other occasions including during a protest by immigrants in Almeria in January 2002 and during an anti-globalisation demonstration against the policies of the World Bank in Barcelona in June 2001.

The organisation is additionally concerned that the Spanish authorities have decided to suspend Article 2 of the Schengen Convention between 9-17 March. On 12 December 2001 the European Parliament specifically recommended that member states "avoid blocking borders or denying individuals or groups of people who seek to participate peacefully in legitimate demonstrations the right to cross borders".

Despite this, dozens of buses were prevented from crossing the French border into Spain with no reasons given to those trying to reach Barcelona.

In Barcelona itself the violence from the police started on Friday afternoon when the police started charging groups of protestors in the Gracia area, some of whom were apparently throwing stones.

Friday was a day of decentralised activity throughout the city, in which over 20,000 people took part. Police violence continued on the Saturday with systematic baton charging and the firing of rubber bullets.

The Catalan police seemed determined to follow the model of Berlusconi and their Italian counterparts in Genoa, rather than the lower key approach of the Belgian police during the Brussels summit in December, where at least during the main actions the authorities kept their distance.

Who's next in US bomb-sights?

EVERY DAY now brings fresh evidence that George W Bush and his cabal of far-right Republicans who control the US policy machine are now intent upon a war against Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.

Despite the growing alarm among the USA's traditional allies, not least among the reactionary Arab regimes which

facilitated the last Gulf War and have connived at the bombing of Afghanistan, the Washington hawks have convinced themselves that by ruthless use of massive air power and bombardment they could if necessary "go it alone" and invade Iraq, oust Saddam, and install a new regime more suited to their political tastes.

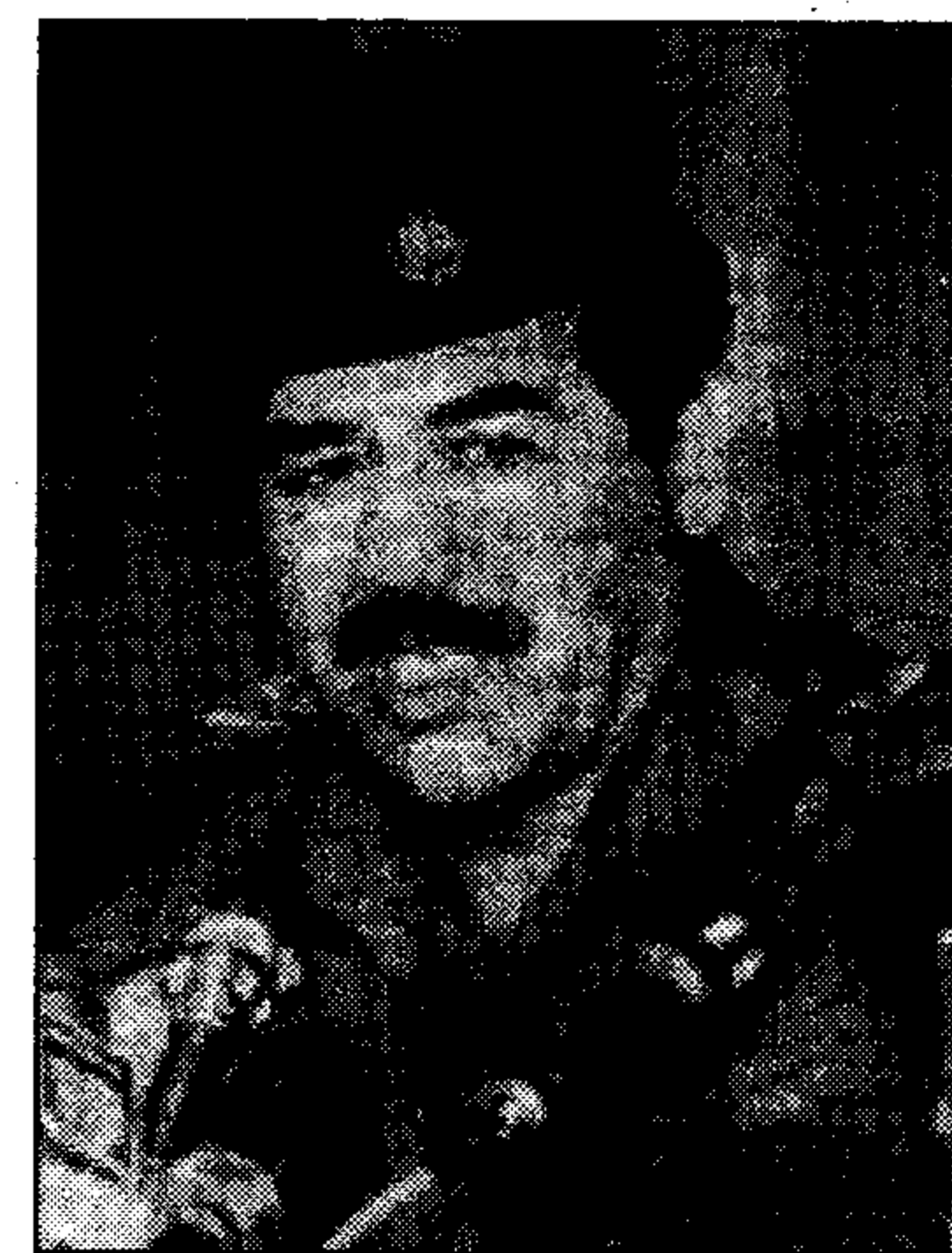
However it has also become

clear that the US war-drive will not end even with Iraq. Bush, tacitly backed at every stage by a servile Tony Blair, has argued that the problem of "terrorism" involves a protracted war against an "axis of evil" which also includes Iraq's long-standing enemy Iran, the bankrupt and isolated North Korean regime, and others.

The US "war on terror" has

also included support for out-right terror regimes, notably Israel's brutal Zionist regime, and of course an escalation of US military intervention in the Pacific (Philippines) and in Latin America (Colombia).

The fight to stop the war drive must challenge these and other attacks, designed to bolster the global power of the US and its crony states.



Saddam: first target?

Prevent another massacre: Indict Sharon for war crimes!

Laurie King-Irani
March 12, 2002

Imagine that it is September 2010. The site of the World Trade Centre in lower Manhattan is just a garbage dump now. Weather permitting, teenagers meet to play pick-up games of soccer or baseball in this space filled with the ashes of thousands. The photos of the innocents who perished unjustly in the shocking attacks nine years earlier have faded into oblivion. All of the makeshift altars and memorials to the dead are long gone, and no one remembers their names. Not a single monument to their senseless erasure from the world of the living has ever been erected.

Worse still, no one has been punished for these heinous crimes. Not one person has ever stood trial for the murders of thousands of innocent office workers and airplane passengers that bright September day nearly a decade ago. The whole event has, in fact, been pushed off the public stage and relegated to the private memories of the bereaved.

They have gradually come to realise that their grief must remain unspoken. No one responds when they raise questions of justice, accountability, or the sacred duty to honour the dead. People get annoyed whenever they bring up the troubling events of September 11, 2001, so they have learned, after nine years, to suffer in silence and pretend that it was no big deal, after all.

Such a scenario is not only impossible to imagine, but offensive as well. Six months have passed since planes full of terrified civilians ploughed into the twin towers, the Pentagon, and a field in western Pennsylvania.

The US has launched a "global war on terror" with no end in sight. Countless memorial services have been held, various monuments to the dead are on the drawing table, and the lives mercilessly and unjustly extinguished last September are being commemorated in songs by Neil Young, in special television features, as well as in the pages of the New York Times.

No American would stand for the heartless, unjust, and inhumane scenario depicted above. Nor should they - or anyone.

That scenario, however absurd and obscene, is not a hypothetical one, but rather, the daily reality for survivors of one of the most shocking war crimes committed during the last half of the 20th century: the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacres in Beirut.

Over 1000 unarmed individuals - women, men, children, and the aged - were brutally tortured, raped and slaughtered in September 1982 by Lebanese militiamen allied with and supplied by the Israeli Defence Forces. At the time of the massacre the IDF were in complete control of Beirut, and under the command of Defence Minister Ariel Sharon.

As Israel's top general at the time of the massacres, Sharon had command responsibility, according to the Geneva Conventions and international law, for anything that happened in Beirut. Israeli units controlled access to and from the camps while the massacre unfolded.

The IDF allowed the Lebanese militia to enter the camps and then launched flares into the night skies to assist the killers in their gruesome tasks.

The burden of the massacres rests ultimately on Sharon's shoulders, and indeed, a 1983 Israeli commission of inquiry (which was not legally binding and lacked judicial force) found that Sharon bore "personal responsibility" for the deaths of hundreds of innocent civilians.

The survivors of Sabra and Shatila watched in mute horror, powerless to stop marauding militiamen from exterminating, mutilating, and raping their children, parents, husbands, wives, and friends. The lucky ones know where their loved ones' bodies are buried; many more, however, still have no clue about the final resting place of their dead.

And in the hours and days after the massacres, many Palestinian men and boys were rounded up and trucked away, never to be seen again, most notably from a sports stadium near the refugee camps

where Israeli military and intelligence officers were present.

A mass grave site at the edge of the refugee camp now does double duty as a garbage dump and an occasional soccer field.

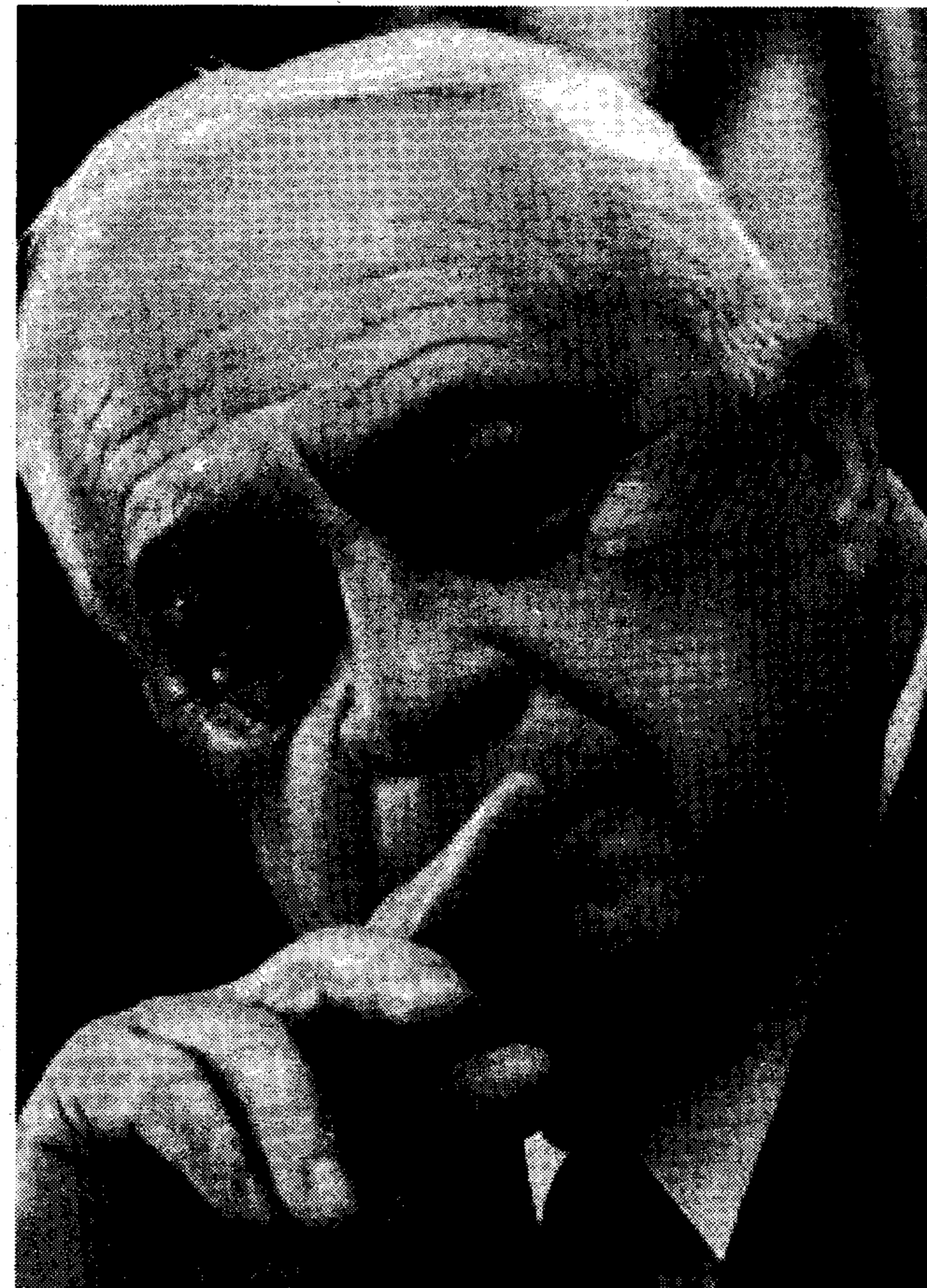
Nearly 20 years after the massacre, not a single permanent memorial has been erected to commemorate the dead, not a single person - Israeli or Lebanese - has stood trial for the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the camps of Sabra and Shatila in September 1982.

Such impunity is not only morally reprehensible and psychologically unbearable, but also politically dangerous because of the precedent it sets and the hearts and minds it poisons.

For those who covered the Sabra and Shatila massacre as journalists, no less than for those who served as medical workers in the camps' hospitals that scorching September twenty years ago, this week's televised images brought all that back. The pictures of Israeli tanks surrounding refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza and the photographs of young men lined up, blindfolded and separated from their families as Israeli soldiers point guns at them, are chillingly familiar.

Those who have witnessed massacres fear another may unfold at any minute. Those who survived the massacres are incredulous that it might happen again, but this time with the entire world witnessing the killings on prime time television.

Those who have followed Ariel Sharon's biography closely urgently warn that Sharon must be stopped before mass graves are dug again in other refugee camps. This is the man who orchestrated the cold-blooded attack on the village of Qibya in 1953 as leader of the notorious Unit 101, resulting in the deaths of nearly 70 innocent civilians. Now he threatens to wreak large scale destruction and collective punishment on Palestinians who have been trapped in their towns and villages under a long siege



Sharon: time to end his impunity for past crimes

The disturbing events of the last week in the West Bank and Gaza Strip underline the pressing need to dismantle the settlements, end the occupation, and most importantly, to consolidate the rule of law by ensuring international oversight of the occupied territories.

What the alarming increase in killings and the disturbing trends in IDF strategy also indicate is an urgent need to end Ariel Sharon's impunity for war crimes once and for all.

And if the recent legal efforts of 23 survivors of the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacre bear fruit, that may happen sooner than many imagine.

A judicial forum for raising these issues and attaining justice did not exist in September 1982. It does now.

On May 15, 2002 arguments will continue before a Belgian court concerning a complaint lodged by massacre survivors accusing Sharon and other Israelis and Lebanese with war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions and international law.

In the 1990s, Belgium incorporated into its criminal law system the principle of Universal Jurisdiction for war crimes, which is embodied in the Geneva Conventions and international customary law. This has enabled the bereaved sons, daughters, parents, sisters, brothers, and widows of those killed in September 1982 to seek justice, not revenge; to aim for closure, not retaliation; and to honour their dead by taking their case before a court of law. Thereby they are affirming an international order based on universal principles of justice, not a world blinded by the ancient and fruitless principle of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for

a tooth." Bringing Ariel Sharon and others to trial for the heinous crimes committed in Sabra and Shatila twenty Septembers ago is just and proper compensation for the victims, and a long overdue remedy for the survivors.

They have inhabited a limbo of grief, fear, and bitterness for two decades, suffering not only the horrifying deaths of their loved ones, but the denial of any psychological, moral, or legal closure.

But bringing Sharon to trial is equally imperative for those now living under the threat of new massacres in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as the IDF, again under Sharon's command, displays utter disregard for international law.

The innocents who perished in the camps of Sabra and Shatila in September 1982 are no less human, no less worthy, than the innocents incinerated in New York City, Washington, DC, and Pennsylvania in September 2001. After 20 years of waiting, it is time to lay the dead of Sabra and Shatila to rest, it is time to honour the murdered by holding the murderers accountable.

Please support the global campaign against impunity for war crimes. Join with all those throughout the world who are demanding that the trial in Belgium go forward until justice is done. Ariel Sharon and others must be held accountable for the grave crimes against humanity committed in Sabra and Shatila in 1982.

* Laurie King-Irani is the North American co-ordinator of the International Campaign for Justice for the Victims of Sabra and Shatila for more information visit: www.indictsharon.net

Declaration of Fourth International

Against the deployment of
US troops in the Philippines

1) The "all-out-peace" declaration of Philippine President Arroyo, aimed at resolving the conflict in Mindanao, has now turned into an all-out US-backed military campaign. The Arroyo administration approved the deployment of 660 US military personnel to the province of Basilan, Mindanao, last January – the biggest deployment of US troops as part of the global "war against ter-

ror" outside Afghanistan.

Arroyo said that this was only for a joint military exercise called 'Balikatan Exercise 2002', designed to upgrade the counter-terrorism skills and capabilities of Filipino soldiers. However, these military exercises will last for six months, violating the US-Philippines Visiting Forces Agreement and Mutual Defence Treaty.

2) Clearly, another goal of the US forces in Mindanao is to combat the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), which is alleged to be part of the international Al-Qaida terrorist network. It was only the US that linked ASG to Al-Qaida, with no hard evidence.

But the ASG today is not much more than a group of local bandits engaged in the kidnap-for-ransom business, which uses terrorist methods to assist in that project (though it began life as an Islamic revivalist group).

3) The US has sent not only troops but also powerful armaments to Mindanao. Even more sophisticated armaments are promised, part of an overall plan to install a US military command post in Basilan. Thus, the presence of the US troops in Mindanao will not be temporary. It will be ongoing (though without the expense of permanent bases in the Philippine archipelago) even if this grossly violates the Philippines constitution. The goal is both control over the Southeast Asian region, and to strategically advance US policies regarding China.

4) The US-led anti-terrorism campaign in Mindanao constitutes a counter-insurgency war that will surely involve and harm the civilian population in the province of Basilan and elsewhere. US forces and the Armed Forces of the Philippines will conduct joint military operations against so-called terrorist groups, and this will not be limited to Basilan. It will cover all the islands of Mindanao. Already the US-backed military operation is being conducted not only against Abu Sayyaf, but

also against other revolutionary armed groups in Mindanao. This can only worsen the existing political and social crisis there.

5) Mindanao plays a vital role in the neoliberal policies of the government – which complies 100 percent with terms imposed by the Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines East Asian Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA).

The US-backed military offensive in Mindanao targets not only the ASG. It is also designed to crush all the revolutionary groups and terrorize militants involved in the struggle against neoliberal globalisation. The US troop deployment in Mindanao is, in this way, part of the global capitalist scheme to fully consolidate the BIMP-EAGA as one of the regional free trade agreements in Asia.

The FI therefore thoroughly condemns the deployment of US troops in the Philippines. The irresponsible actions of the present Philippine government put the national interests of the country at risk.

In particular, the US intervention threatens the lives and well-being of the civilian population of Mindanao (the tri-people: Moro, Christians, and Indigenous peoples).

We must build a worldwide solidarity campaign in order to uphold the basic right of the broad masses of people in the Philippines to be free from such threats. We call on social movements, revolutionary groups and human rights organizations everywhere to express their opposition to the new US presence in the Philippines, and to the US-led global war that has now expanded in the Southeast Asian region.

We condemn the terrorist activities of the ASG and other fundamentalist and rightist groups. Even more, however, must we condemn the direct intervention of US forces in the Philippines.

28th February

Declaration of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International

Stop the bombing
in Cagayan!
No to Plan Colombia!

1) FINALLY, and just as the United States had been demanding, the reactionary and neo-liberal government of Andres Pastrana has opted for all-out war. Beginning at dawn on Friday 21 February, it began to attack the demilitarised zone which had been under the control of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army (FARC-EP). As a result, it has put a stop to any kind of peace process.

2) This bellicose offensive, entitled Operation Tanatos, includes the use of OV-10 aircraft, DC-34 stealth planes, Kafir, and Black Hawk helicopter gunships. More than 13,000 soldiers are on the move on the

ground, including the infantry battalion from Granada (in Meta Department) and troops from the Ninth, Twelfth and Thirteenth Brigades.

All these forces of the Colombian Army and Air Force are "advised" by North American military personnel, as part of the Plan Colombia counter-insurgency strategy.

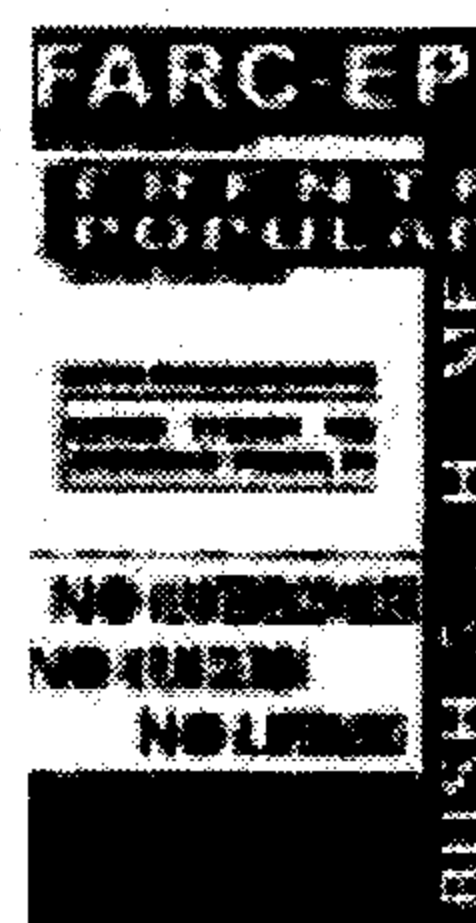
3) This new phase of the war aims to destroy not only the FARC-EP but the whole of Colombia's insurgent and popular movement. The bombing in Cagayan is accompanied by an intensification of the dirty war against social activists and militants, and by a campaign of intimidation against the

civilian population. This war against the Colombian people is carried out by the army, the paramilitaries, the US Drug Enforcement Agency and high-ranking US officers.

4) Armed and financed by Washington, this offensive is part of wider strategy in Latin America. It's a strategy that includes speeding up the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) as a project for domination, direct intervention to destabilise the "radical triangle" (Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela), and the use of a ferocious counter-insurgency campaign against the struggles of the popular movement and the left.

It is also part of the deepening process of economic recolonisation, via payments on the foreign debt and the IMF and World Bank adjustment programmes imposed. This imperialist offensive is intended to provide "armour-plating" against the crisis of political leadership within the local ruling elites.

At the same time it is capital's brutal attempt at "dissuasion", faced with the growth of social resistance and revolutionary struggles which, like that in Argentina, have both exploded the myth of neoliberal invulnerability, and opened the way to a process of radical and democratic self-organisation by the working and popular classes.

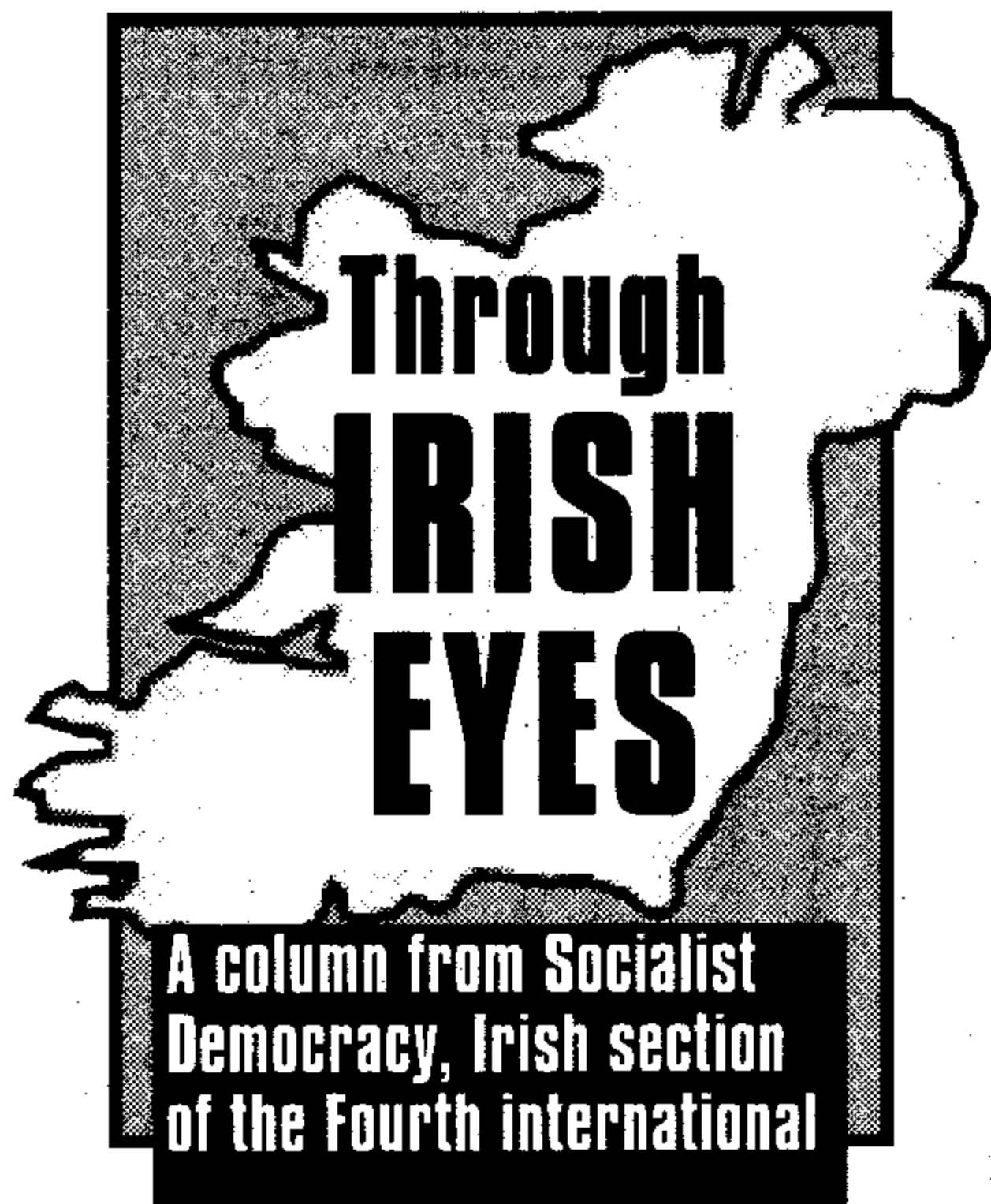


Banner of Colombian campaign against privatisation, on display at this year's Scottish Socialist Party conference

5) The Fourth International condemns the bombing in Cagayan, repeats its opposition to US imperialism's Plan Colombia, and expresses its solidarity with the struggle of Colombia's armed insurgents, its workers, peasants, students and slum-dwellers.

We join in the international campaign of democratic, progressive, anti-imperialist and revolutionary forces which demand a halt to the war and full respect for human, social and political rights.

21 February



N.I. Policing Board rejects Ombudsman's Report

JM Thorn

On Thursday 7th February the Northern Ireland Policing Board met to determine its response to the Ombudsman's report on the Omagh bomb investigation.

Given the highly critical nature of the report and the furious unionist and police reaction to it, the meeting was being billed as a make or break moment for the Policing Board, with important implications for the peace process as a whole.

As it turned out there was actually a large degree of agreement between unionists and nationalists on how they should deal with the report.

After meeting both the Chief Constable Ronnie Flanagan, and the Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan, the board members unanimously agreed a package of measures to deal with the Omagh bomb investigation.

However, if there was unanimous agreement on what the measures should be, there was widely varying interpretations of what those measures signified. This was reflected in the different headlines in the two main Belfast newspapers the following day.

The front page of the unionist aligned News Letter declared "Policing Board deals O'Loan a double blow", while the nationalist Irish News carried the headline "Policing board to raise confidence" - over a story which claimed that the measures recommended represented a move "closer towards implementing the recommendations of the police ombudsman".

There were also varying interpretations from the different members of the Policing Board. John Taylor of the Ulster Unionist Party claimed that the Board had delivered a "major blow" against the Ombudsman, while Ian Paisley Jr. of the DUP declared that it had given a "vote of confidence in the police investigation into Omagh".

In contrast, Joe Byrne of the SDLP, claimed that the Policing Board had produced a "breakthrough", and that "five-and-half of Nuala O'Loan's six recommendations" had been implemented.



Andrew Ward

RUC: tooled up to repress nationalists: so why did they make such a horlicks of investigating the Omagh bombing?

Obviously both unionists and nationalists were trying to play to their respective constituencies. However, when the recommendations of the Policing Board are examined, the claims of the SDLP and Irish News

are just not credible. Despite the nationalist spin, it is clear that the findings of the Ombudsman's report have been rejected.

The only finding they accepted, and which was one of the major limitations of the report, was that the Omagh bomb could not have been prevented. This is despite the

fact that the Ombudsman's report identified two prior warnings of an attack on Omagh. There has also been a further media report of a third warning of an attack from an MI5 agent.

On the basis of the information that is currently in the public domain, it cannot be concluded that the Omagh bomb attack could not have been prevented. With further revelations over warnings likely to emerge, this conclusion will become even more untenable.

While the Ombudsman's report called for the investigation to be taken over by an outside officer, the Policing Board merely appointed an "overseer" to "quality assure" the investigation. This officer will not direct the investigation; his status will be the same as that of the outside officer appointed by the chief constable to act in an "advisory role".

One of the most telling recommendations of the Policing Board was a review of the work of the Ombudsman's Office. This clearly raises a question mark over the role of the Ombudsman. The underlying assumption of such a review is that it is the Ombudsman's critical report that is the source of the problem, and not the police investigation.

The positive reaction of the police to the Policing Board recommendations also indicates that the Ombudsman's report has been rejected. The Chief Constable was able to claim that the RUC/PSNI remained "unequivocally in charge," and that he had "no difficulty whatsoever" with the appointment of another officer from outside.

He also welcomed the review of the Ombudsman's office as a way of ensuring that "the problems which have arisen in this instance should be avoided in the future." As the problem for the police was that they had come under a degree of scrutiny, this points to the limited powers of the Ombudsman's office being further constrained.

Boosted by the Policing Board

meeting the police launched a further attack on the Police Ombudsman when the Police Association, backed by Chief Constable, announced a legal challenge to her report.

Despite the rejection of her report Nuala O'Loan gave the recommendations of the Policing Board a "broad welcome". Caught in the logic of defending and seeking to improve the existing police force she has capitulated under political pressure and has backed away from the limited criticism of the police investigation.

That the police and unionists aren't even prepared to accept this degree of scrutiny shows how little has changed in policing. Any notion that the Ombudsman can now play the role of a watchdog over the police is now patently ridiculous.

Nationalist descriptions of the Policing Board's decision as a triumph and a vote of confidence in the new policing arrangements shows the degree to which rhetoric and reality have diverged. To give the impression that real reform is underway, it becomes impossible for nationalists to press issues which demonstrate that it is not.

Before going into the Policing Board meeting SDLP representatives said they would be calling for the Omagh investigation to be taken over by an outside officer, but they retreated even on this demand.

Faced with a choice they opted to back the unionist rejection of the Ombudsman rather than pursue something that would destabilise a key structure of the peace process. The underlying assumption of this is that the stability of the peace process must take precedence over pursuit of the facts even when it concerns the Omagh bombing and its investigation.

This is reflected in the growing frustration of the Omagh relatives. Despite all the rhetoric they clearly understood that the Policing Board decision represented another barrier in their search for the truth.

This was expressed most forcefully by Kevin Skelton - "You sometimes feel like throwing up your hands and saying, 'forget about it.' ... What has happened is an exercise to save the face of the Policing Board. All we were interested in were answers to Nuala O'Loan's report. As far as we concerned that has not been answered - it has more or less been rubbished."

He was backed up by Michael Gallagher, who asked the obvious question - "What is the point of having an independent ombudsman if you don't accept her findings?"

For the supporters of the peace process the answers to these simple questions are unpalatable: they must therefore continue to go unanswered.



Staligrad O'Neil



Ireland votes against tightening anti-abortion laws

Narrow referendum defeat for anti-woman constitution amendment



Joe Craig

The twenty-fifth amendment to the Irish State's constitution was defeated by 50.42% (629,041 votes) to 49.58% (618,485) on a turnout of 42.89%. The difference was only 0.846% or 10,556 votes which appeared to demonstrate a more or less even split in the population.

The essential purpose of the referendum, to criminalise abortion on grounds of threatened suicide, has now been rejected twice, the last time in the 1992 referendum.

The choice presented on both occasions was widely understood to be criminalisation under the constitution, or legislation to allow medical practitioners to carry out terminations in Ireland where the life of the mother was under threat, including that of suicide.

The closeness of the result and the fact that the most extreme wing of the Catholic right also opposed the referendum (on the grounds that it did not explicitly define the commencement of life from conception as opposed to implantation in the womb) has been seized upon by many to rule out such legislation.

"The no vote was made up of people with totally different views," was how Bertie Ahern, the Taoiseach, put it. The Minister for Health declared that "I don't think there is any mandate emerging from this decision to legislate in any particular direction."

"There is no simple answer, people will have to look at it again," said Ahern.

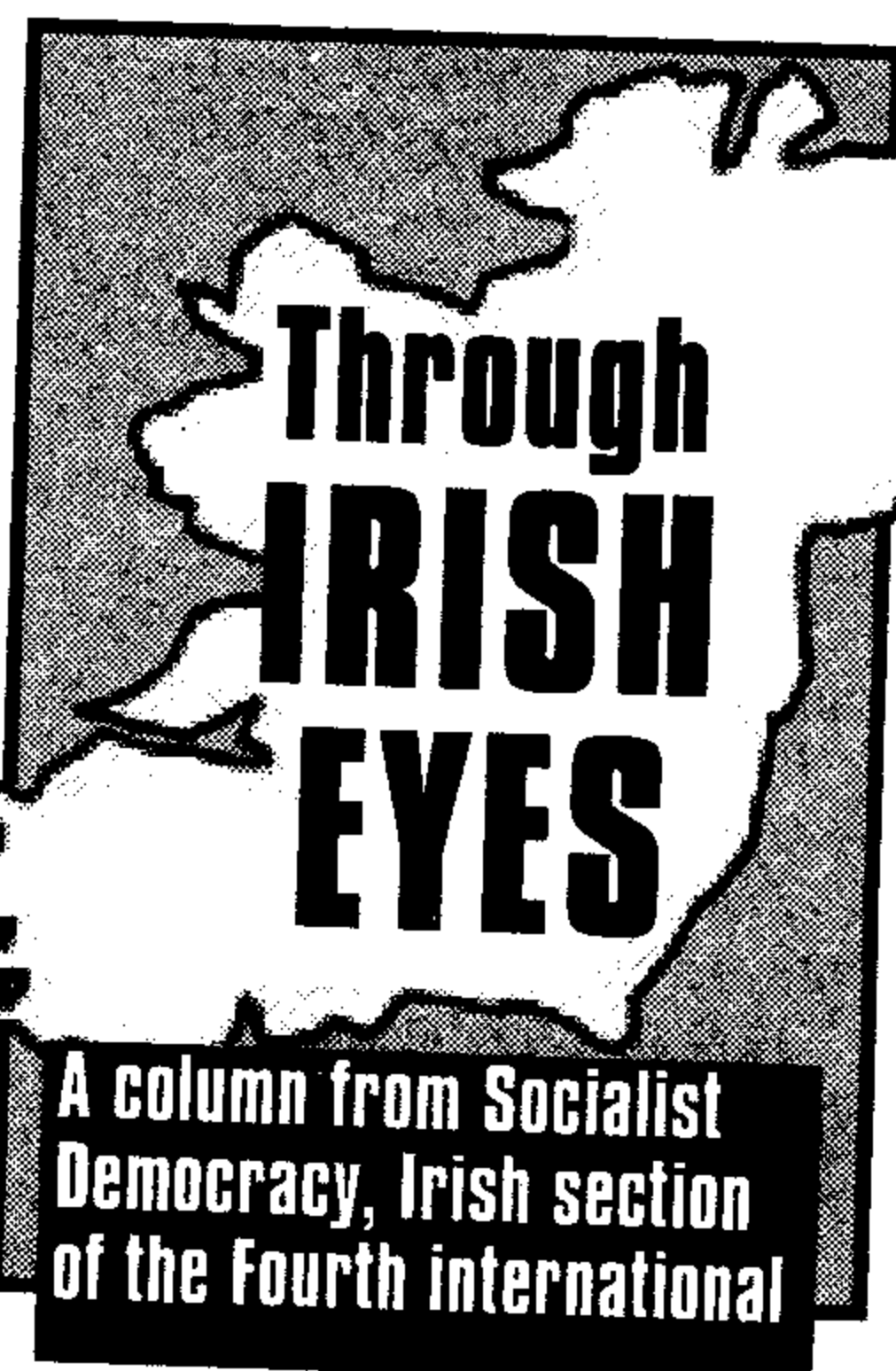
The real meaning and significance of the vote cannot therefore be understood without looking more closely at the result. When we do so we see that the population is divided in particular ways and the claims of Fianna Fail leaders are spurious.

The Vote

First the turnout. This was higher than the recent Nice referendum when only 34.79% voted but lower than the 1992 turnout (68.16%) - which, however, coincided with a general election - and lower than the 1983 amendment (53.67%) which first enshrined an anti-abortion clause in the constitution.

This was important in a number of ways.

The highest turnouts were in those constituencies that voted heavily against the amendment, for example in Dun Laoghaire the vote was 2 to 1 against on a 53 percent turnout while in Donegal



North-East it was 70.59 percent Yes on a 33.5 percent turnout.

In general the constituencies with the highest turnout also had the highest No vote, in Dublin the average turnout was 47 percent. Yes campaigners claimed heavy rain in the west of Ireland reduced the turnout in Yes constituencies, but it was more likely the low turnout reflected confusion and demoralisation in the pro-life camp and a waning of opposition.

Many, who would have opposed abortion in the past, possibly felt that it was an issue that should no longer be dealt with in this way.

The pattern of voting indicated a heavier Yes vote during the day but a strong No vote in the evening after work. The Fine Gael leader Michael Noonan was correct when he said "At polling booths yesterday the young and particularly young women, and young men, came out to vote no."

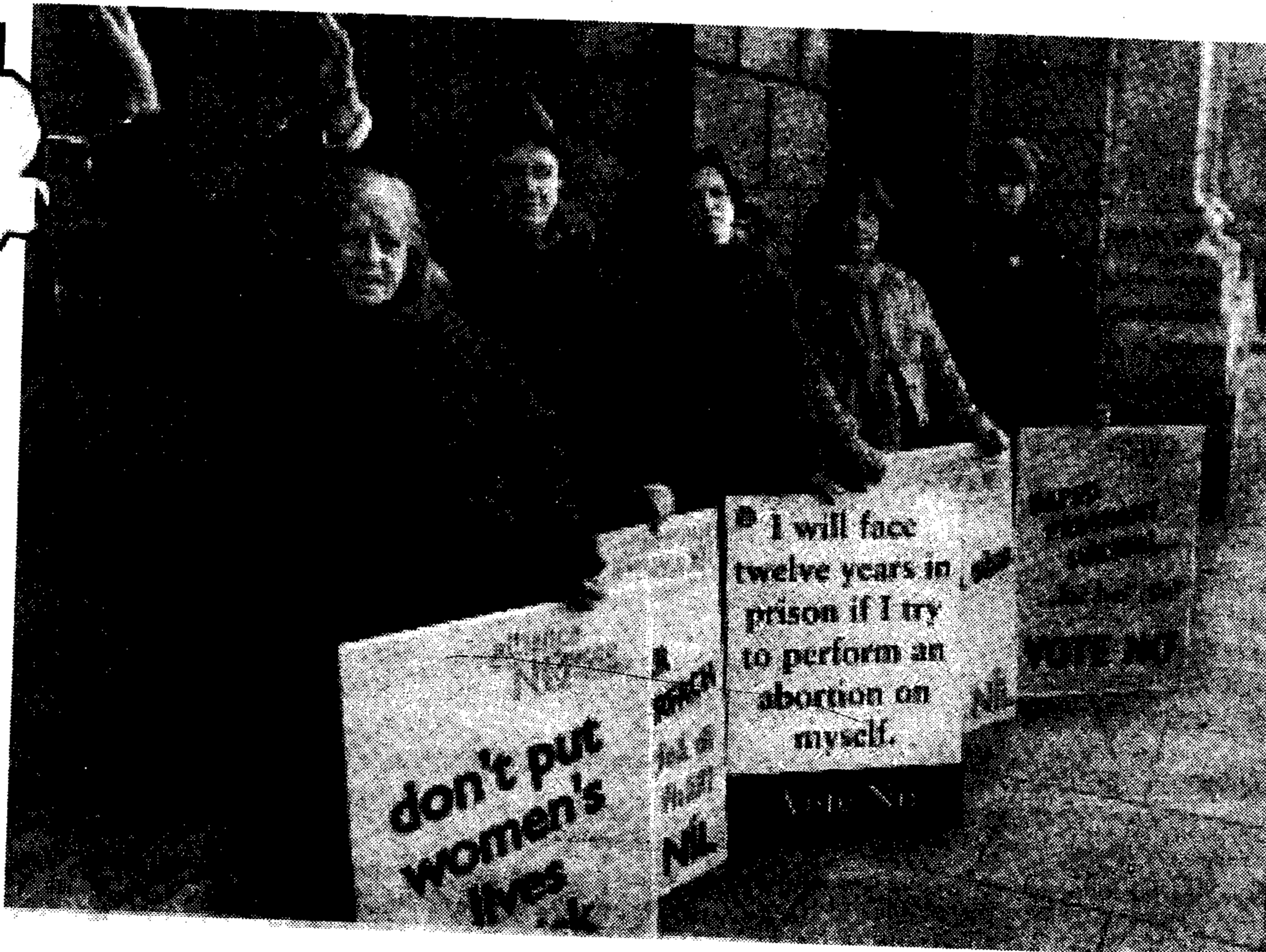
The five highest No votes were all in Dublin (if we include Dun Laoghaire) while the highest Yes votes were in Donegal, Longford-Roscommon and Tipperary North. Even in Bertie Ahern's own constituency the No vote was 58.98%.

The biggest cities, Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford voted No, as did the commuter counties round Dublin, while all the rural constituencies voted Yes.

Many commentators remarked on a sharp urban/rural divide, though this must not be overstated, as even in many rural areas over 40 percent voted No, while in Dublin the Yes vote averaged in the high 30s.

Political significance

This pattern clearly demonstrates that the No vote was a progressive one



and attempts to claim it by the reactionary No camp are fraudulent.

Dana, spokesperson for the most plausible of this movement, claimed her campaign 'won the vote', ignoring the fact that from the start she said she was not going to campaign - and did not do so.

The reality is that a more reactionary worded amendment, as proposed by the extreme "pro-life" campaign would have been defeated more heavily.

An opinion poll in the *Irish Times* before the vote recorded that 80 percent of those saying they would vote no were in favour of abortion in Ireland in certain (65%) or all (15%) circumstances.

Does this mean that without the reactionary No vote the amendment would have passed? The answer is probably no.

Even the *Irish Times* opinion poll that might lead one to such a conclusion was based on a lower percentage voting in Dublin than in rural areas, when in the real vote the reverse occurred, and underestimated the No vote in Dublin, estimating it at 41% instead of the actual 47%.

The Mother and Child campaign which represents the rawest voice of Catholic reaction and which featured prominently in the reactionary No campaign would have done more to confuse and put off potential progressive No voters than any addition to the No vote their supporters contributed.

"There is no doubt that for the Catholic bishops, as well as for the Taoiseach, this result is something of another slap in the face." So spoke the religious affairs

correspondent of the *Irish Times* while its regular columnist Fintan O'Toole put it like this: "For the first time on a moral issue, the combined forces of Fianna Fail and the Catholic Church have been beaten."

Unfortunately almost all commentators are united on the judgement that Fianna Fail will not suffer from the defeat in the approaching general election. What we are talking about therefore, in terms of progressive developments after the vote, is potential rather than inevitable.

What Now?

Ironically the immediate practical impact of the vote is zero. Terminations will not be carried out in the state and thousands of women will continue to take the plane and boat to England.

Politically the right has been stymied and plans to go after the morning after pill now look decidedly unlikely. It is to be hoped that the reactionaries' split on the vote will lead to long and rancorous division.

However it is not this movement that is the real problem.

This remains Fianna Fail and the church and they will be unlikely to try to force the issue again in the short term.

Rather the No vote provides an opportunity for a progressive move on the issue and the immediate call has been to introduce legislation in lines with the Supreme Court judgement on the X case.

The main forces in the No vote, Fine Gael and the Labour Party, have made promises on just these lines,

but as we argued in our previous article before the vote was taken, it would be extremely foolhardy to rely on these forces.

Both party leaders have said that "widespread consultation" must take place before legislation can be introduced - which is code for the same delay that occurred after the 1992 referendum and which allowed the right to once again seize the initiative and eventually force another referendum.

Ruairi Quinn refused to rule out such legislation being a prerequisite for the Labour Party entering a coalition government with Fianna Fail. In any case any legislation emanating from these sources will offer rights on the one hand and a host of

restrictions negating those rights on the other.

The spokesperson for the Doctors for Choice group advocated proper relationship and sexual education, free contraception, non-directive counselling and provision of abortion services in the country.

The problem however is not so much the demands raised, although the left-backed campaign had demands indistinguishable from those of the Labour Party (no consciousness raising there), as the complete lack of an on-going women's movement to raise the question of a woman's right to choose and continue to force a more progressive agenda.

Without such a movement, the possibility always remains that the right will regroup and come back on the offensive again, however unlikely it appears at present.

In this situation the responsibility on the larger forces on the left is greater: but once again the same opportunistic approach is visible.

While in the last few days of the campaign the Socialist Workers Party put up many posters in Dublin advocating a woman's right to choose, they voted against this demand being part of the Socialist Alliance programme during that organisation's short existence. This despite the knowledge that a referendum was in the offing.

The abortion referendum thus raises all the same questions posed by the present lack of leadership of the working class and oppressed that weakens both in their resistance to attacks on their living standards and democratic rights.

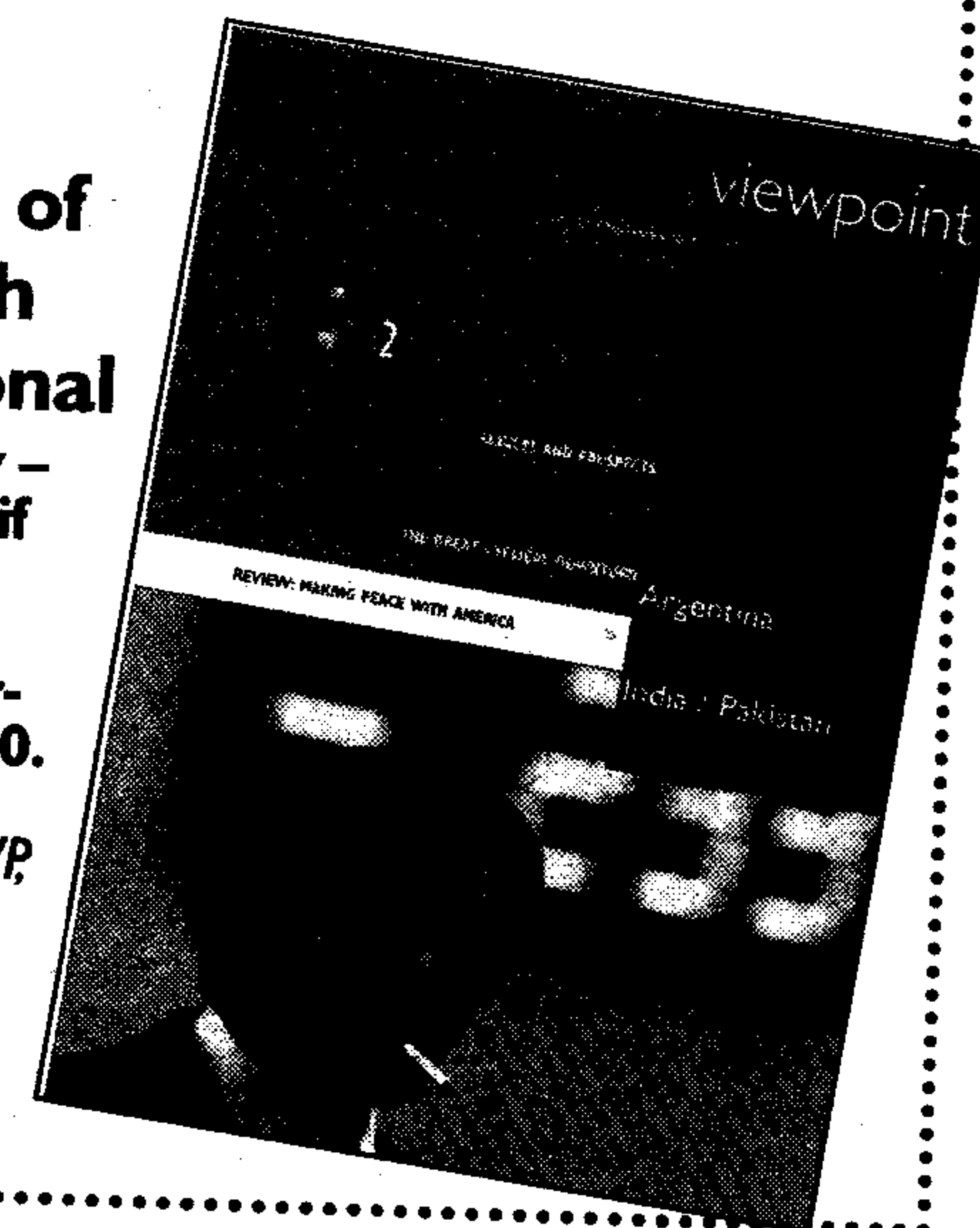
It is not clear that the good result in the referendum has done much to address this central problem.

International Viewpoint

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Argentine workers find new ways to organise – and a new level of struggle

Virginia Marconi from the Argentinian MST spoke at the International Socialist Movement fringe meeting at SSP conference last month. This is part of what she said:

IN THESE LAST few months the masses in Argentina have overthrown three civilian governments, for the first time in the country's history.

The Argentinian working class and the people have before overthrown military dictatorships but this is the first time that the masses moved against a "democratic" government. This is creating a tremendous change in the consciousness of the people.

This does not mean to say, as some people say, that we are in a period that is similar to February 1917 in Russia. What we can say is that for the first time the masses are beginning to organise themselves at this level.

There is a very interesting

discussion going on in Argentina at the moment as to whether it is the working class that is moving forward or whether it is the middle class – this undefined thing that has no Marxist definition or characterisation.

The thing is that in the last 20 years the working class all over the world has changed. The MST thinks that what we are seeing in Argentina is the struggle of the working class by different means.

It is unemployment and the fact that workers cannot start strikes in their workplaces without being sacked – because of the level of repression – that has made them take part in the popular assemblies.

The 3 governments that fell did so because people went out into the streets banging pots and pans (in what we call caceroleos) and creating a situation where they could not stay. That does not mean that they left peacefully.

De la Rúa was the first president who was overthrown on December 20. His Minister of

Defence and the Chief of Police of Buenos Aires are currently under investigation by a judge on the charge of assassination because 32 people were killed in those days. So people paid a price for overthrowing the president.

In spite of the repression people kept going onto the streets. There was a caceroleo taking place in front of the House of Government almost every week, and also almost every week one in front of the Supreme Court. People want the Supreme Court to resign, because they know they are absolutely corrupt.

Because of this, now Congress is starting a political trial against the Supreme Court and all the members of the military dictatorship who thought that their crimes would not be punished are now being submitted to caceroleos every week. They cannot go into the streets without people going after them and chasing them.

Every week in every neighbourhood in the capital there is a popular assembly where the

neighbours get together to discuss what activities they are going to do in the next week, who they are going to target with the caceroleos.

Then there is the movement of the unemployed workers, the piqueteros, who became organised over the last year. Mostly these are workers who have had trade union experience but who lost their jobs. They have been blocking the roads into the capital to get unemployment benefit or jobs. These people have their own assemblies and they have their own programme.

One month ago they marched to the capital and were received by the popular assemblies. Buenos Aires is more or less the size of London, so just imagine somebody coming from say Reading (I don't know Scotland so well) and walking say 20 hours. They started walking from different neighbourhoods to the capital and the popular assemblies fed them and marched with them into the main square, to the House of Government.

What emerged from this was the slogan "Piqueteros and caceroleos have only one struggle" and also "They all have to leave" – that is all the people in the government, all the politicians have to go.

On February 16 there was the first national meeting of the piqueteros and caceroleos and there will probably be a 2nd around March 15. So these organisations are developing and coming together.

The programme that they raise calls for

Freedom for everyone who has been imprisoned for participating in these demonstrations

Non-payment of the foreign debt

Nationalisation of the banks and the main enterprises

Pensions to become state pensions again

That those who are unemployed don't have to pay taxes

That those whose savings have been frozen in the banks get them back

That the 13% cut in state salaries and state pensions be restored

This last demand is very important. The money was taken in order to pay the foreign debt. Now the government says not only won't they reverse this cut but that they might not be able to pay state salaries at all.

This might well lead to strikes by public sector workers. The teachers have already said that they will not begin classes at the end of the summer holidays unless they are paid.

The movement is very heterogeneous but everyone agrees they don't want political parties.

If the left wants to talk to the workers there is an enormous opportunity to develop the socialist programme. This programme that is the programme of the movement is not socialist but it on the way to it. If people understand this they can understand that they will not be able to achieve this under the capitalist system.

But unless the left learns to talk to them, to accompany them in this there is no possibility that the left will benefit.



Ecuador banana workers fight "race to the bottom"

Banana workers in the world's top exporting country went on strike at the beginning of March in the first major union drive in Ecuador in 20 years.

The struggle is being watched carefully by banana unions throughout Latin America, whose wages and benefits are threatened by the dominance of non-union, low-wage Ecuadorian banana exports.

On 25 February, more than 1,400 workers at seven plantations producing for the Noboa Corporation in Ecuador went on strike to call for their basic labour rights. These rights are established under Ecuadorian law and include overtime pay,

health care benefits and health centres, and a decent salary.

The workers are also demanding the recognition of a new union they have formed, called the General Union of Plantation Workers of Haciendas Yanayacu 1 & 2, Rey Rancho 1 & 2, La Nueva, Zapotal, & La Teresa.

Management responded to the strike action by firing eight union leaders. On advice of counsel, workers went back to work, since their wildcat strike was technically illegal. Union supporters subsequently began signing up hundreds of members and filed an application for legal registration of the union.

In the first week, 500 workers signed up for the union.

The company is now under an injunction that would make any further firings illegal and make any new strike legal.

The union has prepared a list of demands for negotiations with management, with meetings scheduled this week. According to the union, the fincas are divided into seven separate businesses that rotate workers from one to another in order to avoid legal obligations and benefits enjoyed by permanent workers.

The union believes that the plantations are secretly owned by Noboa, and are requesting

that the company and government divulge the true ownership of the plantations.

Regardless of who actually owns the plantations, they produce bananas for Noboa. The owner of the Noboa Corporation is Alvaro Noboa Ponton, candidate for the Presidency of Ecuador. Noboa is the fourth biggest banana company in the world (after Chiquita, Dole and Del Monte) and owns the Bonita brand.

The union has also submitted to the Labour Minister an application for legal registration of the union. Assuming the Minister approves the registration of the new union, this will be the first independent banana workers' union since the 1970s.

SUPPORT BANANA WORKERS

1) Contact Noboa. Write the owner of the Noboa Corporation, Alvaro Noboa Ponton. Urge the Noboa company to ensure that these plantations, whether they are directly owned by Noboa or not,

(a) comply with Ecuadorian law concerning worker rights, (b) recognize the union, and (c) negotiate the union's demands in good faith.

Fax a letter to Noboa in Ecuador at 011-593-42-444-093.

2) Contact the Ecuadorian government.

Contact Ab. Martin Insua Chag, Minister of Labour & Human Resources in Ecuador. Fax: 011-593-2-256-3469 or 011-593-2-250-3122; E-mail to <mintrab@accessinter.net>.

Banana trade: the background

The crisis in the banana industry, caused by a number of factors including overproduction, has resulted in mass layoffs as production concentrates on low-wage, non-union Ecuador at the expense of countries where workers are unionised, with higher wages and benefits.

Ecuador's Role in the Crisis:

The crisis in the banana industry is characterised by the "race to the bottom", with Ecuador leading the way as the largest banana exporter in the world. Noboa, the largest banana exporter in Ecuador, is the fourth largest banana company in the world, following the three U.S. giants, Dole, Chiquita, and Del Monte.

While Ecuador may have an advantage in banana production in terms of numbers, the working conditions, wages, benefits, and freedoms for the right to organise on Ecuadorian banana plantations are some of the worst in the region.

Not surprisingly, unlike most of its competitors in the region, Ecuador's banana industry is almost completely un-unionised.

In a study commissioned by US/LEAP in 2000, Ecuadorian workers reported earning an average of US\$56 per month. This compares to an average monthly wage of over \$500 in Panama, \$200 to \$300 in Colombia, \$200 in Costa Rica, \$150 to \$200 in

Honduras, and \$120 to \$150 on Guatemala's Atlantic Coast. Subsequent minimum wage increases in Ecuador have only partially narrowed the gap.

Ecuadorian banana workers also have few if any benefits usually provided on most plantations in the region including housing, drinkable water supply, education for children, and health benefits. Because banana plantations are often not near any cities or towns, these benefits are essential to a decent life for banana workers.

Over the last few years, the low standards in Ecuador have enticed multinational corporations to move production from countries with higher labour costs and respect for worker rights, a trend that only furthers the depression of worker rights standards in the region.

For example, Dole announced in November 1999 that it would layoff 9,000 workers and suspend its operations in Nicaragua (where it had been the exclusive buyer from independent producers) and Venezuela.

Dole now gets about 30% of its bananas from Ecuador. Del Monte fired virtually its entire workforce in Costa Rica in mid-1999 and then rehired most of the workers, but with substantial pay cuts and loss of benefits. Chiquita began planting the less-labour intensive African Palm on some of its Honduran plantations and then in June 2000 announced it would not rehabilitate

other plantations destroyed by Hurricane Mitch, resulting in job loss.

Fighting the race to the bottom: Bananas and Beyond:

A defeat of banana unions would have an adverse effect on the labour movement in Central America. The hard won and long-standing unions in the banana industry are the backbone of the labour movement in many of the countries in Central America.

The banana industry is one of the most highly unionised industries in the private sector. The deterioration of that backbone is a threat to working and living standards throughout the region.

The best way to protect the standards of union plantations in Central America and Colombia is to raise the standards of all the plantations in the region, especially in Ecuador.

The struggle to form a union on eight of the Noboa plantations is the beginning of the fight to do just that. Support worker rights and a decent life for all in Central America, Ecuador, and Colombia; support the General Union of Plantation Workers of Haciendas Yanayacu 1 & 2, Rey Rancho 1 & 2, La Nueva, Zapotal, & La Teresa!

(Information provided by US/LEAP)

The Paris Commune lives – in Argentina!

Olivier Besancenot and François Ollivier reported from Buenos Aires for Rouge, the weekly newspaper of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, French section of the Fourth International, in early February.

EVERY DAY Argentina slides further into crisis. Industrial production fell by 20% in December. Tens of thousands of people are falling into poverty every day: official bodies believe that more than 15 million can now be classified as poor, five million of them in extreme poverty. Layoffs multiply across the industrial sector. Economic paralysis is spreading little by little across a country that seems to be disintegrating. On Monday and Tuesday February 4-5, the banks were closed again. The closure was the direct consequence of a new phase of the political crisis in the country: on Friday February 1, the Supreme Court of

Justice had declared the 'corralito' plan¹ unconstitutional.

The court is made up of corrupt judges and politicians linked to the ultra neoliberal faction of Carlos Menem². Threatened with dissolution by the government, it sought thus to revive the political crisis. These divisions at the highest level of the state summit are one of the manifestations of the acute crisis Argentina is experiencing.

The institutions have not collapsed, the state is still there and if the army cannot intervene at this stage it remains intact. However, the dominant classes are worried. The gangrene of corruption is such that after the fall of two governments and prior to a probable dissolution of the Supreme Court of Justice, the whole edifice seems rotten through and through.

Their worries are reinforced by the combined crisis of the two big traditional parties (the Peronist Justicialist party and the Radical Party) and by the emergence of a

vast movement of mass self-organization throughout society against politicians, government and state.

The emergence of popular assemblies in the capital, Buenos Aires, and now across the whole country is the major phenomenon of recent weeks. This process is only at its beginning, but since the insurrectional days of December 19-20, the social mobilization has broadened incessantly.

The entire society is on the move, all social and political questions have become questions of everyday life. The process of the setting up of popular assemblies in the neighborhoods spreads and generalises: today, there are more than a hundred across the country.

What is at stake is opposing the generalized corruption of the state institutions and the trade union bureaucracy with another legitimacy: a democratic legitimacy through which the citizens recover their rights and their votes that have been confiscated by the corrupt politicians and trades

unionists.

In these assemblies people refer to themselves as vecinos, 'neighbours'. Some sociologists and observers point out the similarities with the experience of the Paris Commune of 1871.

Very quickly, urgent questions are posed: how to help the hardest hit, the children, the unemployed the poorest? How to settle the emergency food problems? How to oblige the pharmaceutical firms to provide medicines to the hospitals?

One of the weaknesses of this movement resides in the fact that it is not yet present in the workplaces: the Argentine working class – once one of the most powerful in Latin America – has crumbled under the blows of neoliberalism (more than 30% unemployment).

Still, a number of workers (employed or not) participate in the assemblies as vecinos besides middle class sectors. Already contacts are being built with the trade unions in the front line against layoffs (notably in the rail sector), and with the



piqueteros..

The coordination of these structures of self-organization will be decisive. The movement is spreading already to the most popular neighborhoods of greater Buenos Aires and to the provinces.

The assemblies consist of about 100-200 people per neighborhood; in the best-mobilized areas, they break up into smaller groups when they reach several hundred. Beyond the vital questions, they structure themselves in groups or commissions (organization, relations with the media, preparation of the next caceroleos ..

An 'assembly of assemblies' coordinates the assemblies of Buenos Aires every Sunday at the Centenario park: nearly 4,000 people attended the coordination of Sunday

February 3. A veritable social vanguard of several tens of thousands of people is coming into being, involving new generations but also the remobilization of thousands of revolutionary militants or ex-militants.

This socio-political vanguard is also beginning more generalized discussions on emergency measures to meet the crisis: nationalization of the banks, reintegration of the privatized enterprises in the public sector, cancellation of the debt, payment of wages and pensions and so on. Finally, these assemblies have often demonstrated their support for the World Social Forum at Porto Alegre.

1. This plan imposes a limit on bank withdrawals. 2. Former Argentine president (Peronist).

The seeds of popular power begin to emerge

Ernesto Herrera Buenos Aires, January 2002

SOME IMAGES recall the Paris Commune of 1871. Not because they are comparable events, of course but because they bring to mind Marx's phrase, 'the political form at last discovered'.

Pre-revolutionary crisis, dual power, revolutionary days, insurrectionary situation. Crisis of bourgeois hegemony and complete loss of the legitimacy of its state mechanisms of domination. Categories abound, multiply and repeat.

But it is difficult to contextualize them in a landscape where daily life is broken (as Trotsky would say) and the 'civil society', the 'multitude', the 'nation', the 'people', are in a state of insubordination, and self-management, exerting forms of direct participative democracy (without any political-institutional mediation).

Nobody sleeps anymore, the neighborhood, village or popular Assemblies – however they are described – take place at night and have become generalised.

Thousands of people communicate, listen, deliberate and propose, in hundreds and hundreds of meetings. They organize the protests and demonstrations of the week

Every Sunday, in the Centennial Park of the Federal Capital, the coordination of the Assemblies of Buenos Aires takes place. Here the young,

the unemployed, the working, the swindled savers, pensioners, women, children come together... as well as the militants of the left organizations who must hang up their party flags and handle their questions wisely.

Although the political weight of its presence does not go unnoticed, in particular the diverse Trotskyist organizations (PO, MST, MAS, PTS), the Communist Party and the Corriente Clasista Combativa (in which the Maoists of the PCR predominate).

The assemblies are built in opposition to the 'multi-sectoral dialogue' proposed by the government and the Catholic Church, with the support of the trade union bureaucracies of the two CGTs.

Manoeuvre

What is at stake, however, is not only the rejection of this manoeuvre from above for 'discussing the problems of the country'.

It is true that there is an instinctive feeling of opposition to 'politics' (mainly against the disguised corruption of politics), but the deputy Luis Zamora (Autonomia y Libertad) can take part in meetings, marches and caceroleos, without being insulted or regarded with distrust.

Moreover, this power from below is developing a consciousness 'for itself' and a movement where anti-neoliberal and anti-capitalist demands are advanced. What began as a movement of indignation at the



'financial corralito' and the dismissal of the infamous Supreme Court of Justice, advances in the direction of a true transitional programme, including:

Non-payment of the foreign debt; breaking with the IMF; rejection of the Free Trade Area of the Americas; against dollarization and for a South American currency; nationalization of the banks; renationalization of privatized public companies; taxes on speculative financial capital; suspension of all dismissals; immediate food and medical assistance to the unemployed; creation of a million jobs; unemployment benefit of 380 dollars a month; derogation of the law of labour flexibility; elimination of the tax of 13% on wages and pensions; suspension of the cuts for non-payment of public service charges; one to one weighting of all debts and credits; immediate return of the money of the small savers; distribution of

the indebted companies to the people; increased budgets in education and health; free and public education at all levels; cuts in military and police expenditure; judgment and punishment of those responsible for repression; reduction of the pay and privileges of politicians.

Constituent Assembly

To the general demand "that they should all go, that not a single one is left" (referring to the political leaders and governing Peronists, radicals and Frepaso), is now added the slogan of a 'Free and Sovereign Constituent Assembly' and above all '5 representatives of the Popular Assemblies in the Congress' (for the discussion of the national budget). Cuba and Plan Colombia are not absent from the Assemblies: the demand to end the imperialist blockade is expressed and soli-

darity demonstrations are held.

Obviously, there is a link that connects the struggle of the masses in Argentina with the revolts of Seattle and Genoa, the movement against capitalist globalization and the World Social Forum, the insurgencies in Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia and the formidable radicalization of ever wider layers of youth

How should the 'social composition' of the Assembly be defined? In a provisional fashion: it is not 'working class', nor is it an amorphous partnership of the middle class. The Assembly is 'polyclass'. It expresses the deep mutations of the social framework and the devastating effects of an imposed neoliberal model.

But, first of all, the Assembly is 'popular': somewhere the small saver, the housewife, the worker or the unemployed are no longer humiliated and find a common identity.

On Monday, January 28, this common 'popular' identity was finally able to express itself on a broader scale: a march of 20 thousand piqueteros started from the locality of La Matanza (Province of Buenos Aires) and ended in the historic Plaza de Mayo.

This immense column of the working class met with the enthusiastic support of the vecinos and retailers, facilitating the insurgent union between piqueteros and cacerolas.

The stores did not lower their shutters for fear of being looted, but offered coffee and refreshments to the demonstrators. In any case, as the self-organization movement is constructed and the social laboratory develops new experiences, the dilemma becomes more urgent: how to translate this democratic political radicalism into a real socialist alternative of power.

1. Karl Marx, 'The Civil War in France', p.290 in Marx and Engels, Selected Works, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1977.

Next issue:

A special Socialist Outlook feature examining the 1871 Paris Commune and its lessons for today.

Stop the riots in Gujarat

Resist the fascist VHP!

**Statement of the ICS,
Indian section of the
Fourth International**

On February 27 2002, several compartments of a train were set on fire near Godhra in Gujarat. The train was carrying many "kar sevaks" or cadres of the Viswa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council).

The Inquilabi Communist Sangathan unreservedly deplores the torching of the train compartments leading to a large number of deaths. While warning the people of minority communities that this cannot be any legitimate response, and condemning the action, we also need to situate it in the proper context.

For several months, the VHP has been whipping up communal tension and targeting Muslims with its renewed focus on temple building at Ayodha. This is the site where the Babri Masjid stood until December 6 1992.

With a BJP dominated government at the centre, as well as a BJP government in Gujarat, the VHP had had ample support. Its forces had carried on extremely provocative activities without any hindrance.

Without in the least condoning the massacre, it must be set in the perspective of continuous

Hindutva provocations - provocations that had goaded some people of the minority communities evidently beyond endurance and had led to such a reprehensible act.

There has been continuous violence against Muslims in BJP ruled provinces (also elsewhere, but particularly in those states). In recent times, new anti-terrorist laws have been targeted against Muslims. Even when communalists have been challenged, only the Muslim communalists have been the target, while the Hindu communalists of the VHP and other groups have not had a single hair on their heads touched.

The immediate reaction of Hindu communalist and fascist forces has been to talk, as usual, of Hindu tolerance and its abuse by the perfidious Muslims. The truth is quite different.

Massive riots have been unleashed, with the epicentre at Gujarat and tremors being felt as far away as Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. The organised lumpen-gangs and storm troopers of the Hindutva brigade went on the rampage for two days. The promulgation of curfew did not halt them.

By the afternoon of March 1, even the government was formally admitting to 150 deaths, a figure that rose to over 300 by the end of the day.

The former Congress M.P. Ehsan Jaffrey has been burnt to death in Ahmedabad. Prof. Bandoowallah's house was burnt down in



The face of bigotry: Hindu fundamentalists on the rampage

Vadodara. In both cases, despite repeated urgings, the police played the role of silent spectators.

In Naroda, near Ahmedabad, a thousand strong crowd surrounded a slum, dragged out people, and burnt 67 of them alive.

In every case, where the Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, has even bothered to comment, he has claimed that the sequence of events proves that the blame cannot fall on the VHP.

Modi patted the police on the back, and claimed that Jaffrey was responsible for his own death, because he had opened fire. What is a man, facing a violent mob, and having found the police non-responsive to his plea for help, supposed to do?

Police Commissioner PC. Pande, in open justification for the communal role of the police, stated that the police "were not insulated from the general social milieu".

They allowed 36 hours to pass without any serious intervention (the same pattern as in 1992 after the Babri Masjid destruction) and now the army is being deployed.

By declaring a curfew, the government formally took the position that the situation was serious - but did nothing beyond that formality.

It is not only the state government, but also the Central Government that must be held responsible.

We opposed the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance.

But the government claimed this law was needed in the interests of India - and then hesitated to apply it to the VHP?

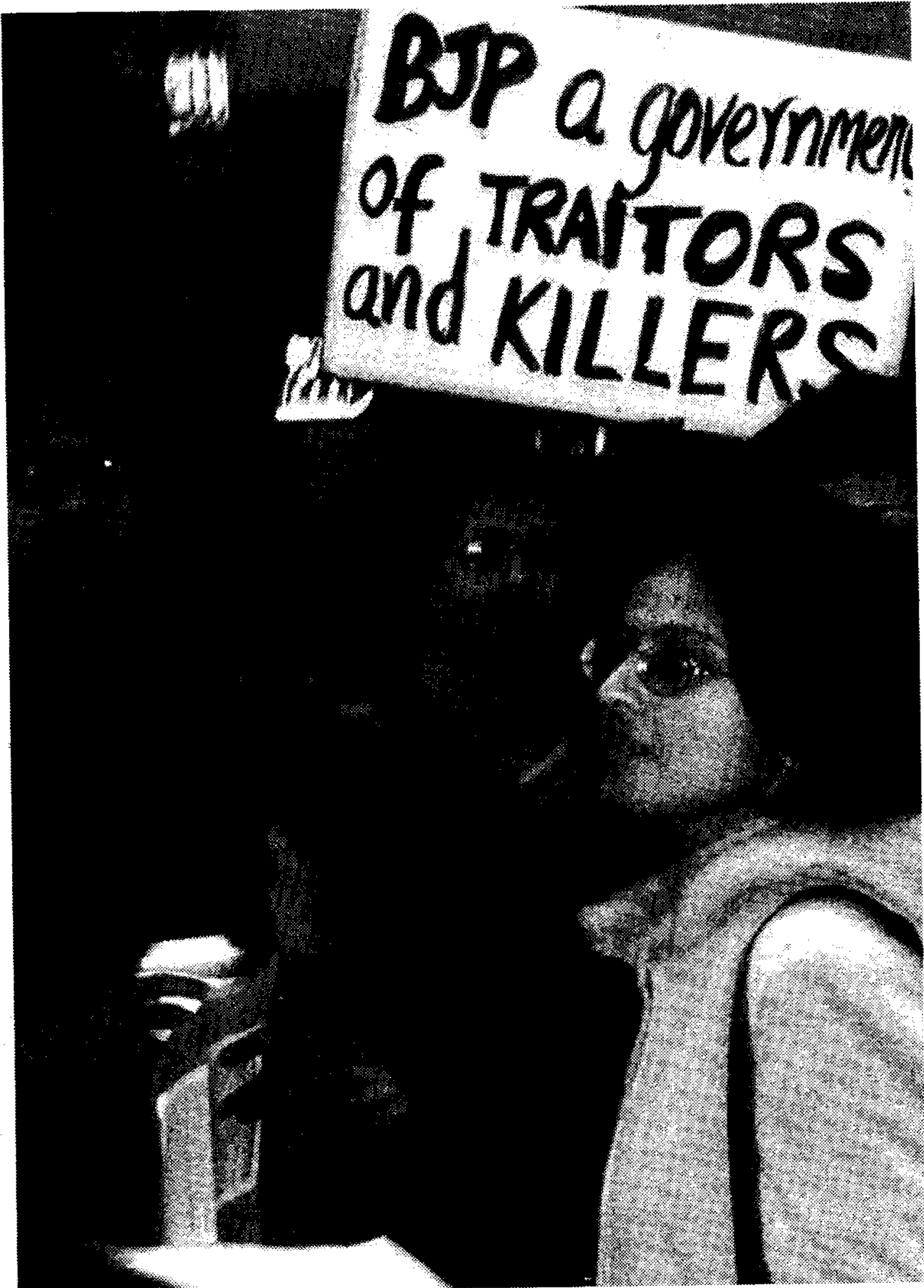
The government treats the kar sevaks and the VHP as a whole as though they are extremely reasonable forces. And this is no surprise, since the VHP is part of the Sangh Parivar, the same family

of organisations as the BJP itself.

So each case of intensification of communal provocation by the VHP has been met by warnings to Muslims not to lose their cool while the VHP has been given still more elbowroom.

When the Central Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes was to pass through sensitive areas of Baroda, women from minority community in several areas were desperate for three days. They did not have milk vegetables or any necessities to feed their children in their homes. Children were crying without food. At night they couldn't sleep because of threats and mobs moving around freely in the area.

In desperation women from one area decided to stop Mr. Fernandes and ask him to listen to them. They came out of their homes as his cav-



alcade with several cars and police vehicles came past. They tried to wave their hands and make gestures to stop him - but the big shot did not stop.

Immediately after his car went by, the local police attacked these women, beating them with batons and used vulgar sexual abuse for trying to "tarnish" their image in the eyes of Fernandes. This led to fear among women and their families. If this can happen when Mr. Fernandes was just a few metres away, what will happen to them at night!

And this is not an isolated incident - in several places women have suffered abuses and violence in the hands of police.

We demand immediate action against who-ever is responsible for this incident and we demand safety for those women and their families.

It is women and children suffer most when there are shortages so we also demand that the necessary action is taken to ensure the supply of milk, vegetables and other necessities reaches all the affected by the curfew without discrimination on the basis of caste and community.

On March 3, local TV cable operators in Gujarat were instructed to block Star News Channel as they were showing the reality of the government's utter failure

to prevent continuous violence. On the same day, Union Home Minister, BJP leader, and Gujarat MP, L. K. Advani finally found time to visit Gujarat. He started off by asserting, without a shred of proof, that the Godhra incident was pre-planned. He also asserted that police in Gujarat were perfectly fine, and rejected all criticisms of them.

Even as the violence continues, there is a ray of hope from initiatives in some places where peace committees are being set, involving people from both communities. These

are having daily meetings so that no outsider also comes and creates any tension in the area. There are instances of majority community people saving their neighbours who practice minority religions.

As a matter of principle, we believe that the state should not be given the right to curtail anyone's civil liberties, because this is a weapon that the state is likely to turn against the oppressed.

We also believe that communalism, a product of reactionary capitalism utilising often pre-capitalist ideologies, cannot be extirpated by the bourgeois state. Only a resurgent working class, exercising its hegemony over the other oppressed, can successfully achieve that goal.

However, this is different from the question of tackling communal riots. A communal riot of the scale unleashed by the VHP currently cannot be tackled directly by the working class at its present stage of disunity and weakness. In order to defend human lives and conditions of existence, the governments, both at the state and the centre, must be compelled to take a firm stand.

We demand:

■ Immediate and effective application of the army to stop all riots.

■ The sacking of Gujarat Home Minister and Chief Minister for their failure to apply the law of the land and to stop riots, indeed, for their complicity in the riots.

■ The arrest of all VHP leaders under the ordinary criminal laws.

■ The scrapping of the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance.

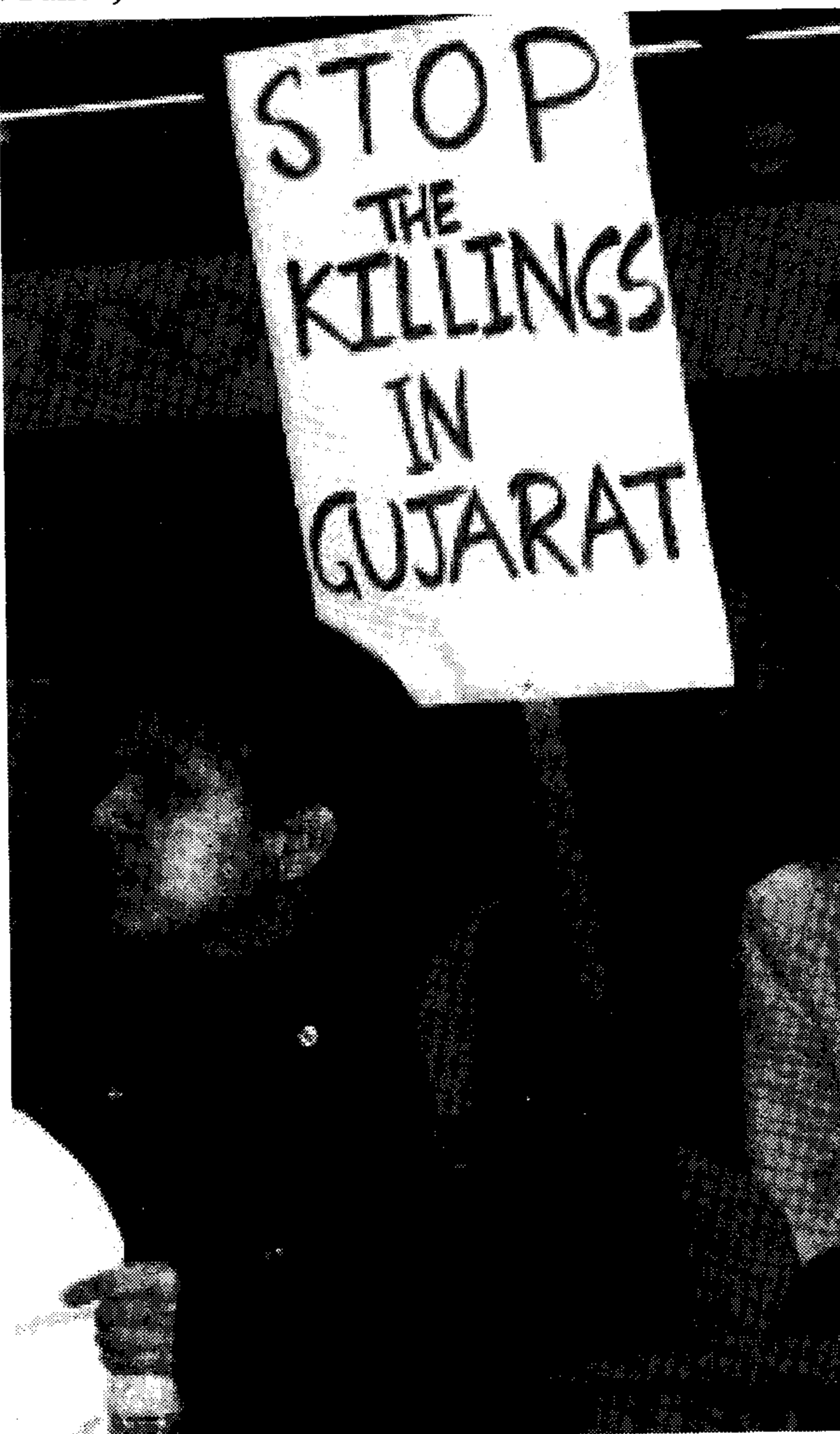
■ The weeding out of all communalist elements from the police.

■ We call on working class and democratic/human rights movements active in India and abroad to publicly voice their concerns, and to mobilise against the fascists. We urge that messages of condemnation, and demands for action, be sent to the National Human Rights Commission at the address given below.

■ The National Human Rights Commission, Sardar Patel Bhavan, Sansad Marg, New Delhi-110001.

tel (011) 311560; 3348478 fax (011)3340016

■ Fax no of Chief Minister of Guajrat 091-79-3222101/3222020





Stop killings in Gujarat!

Nearly 100 people participated in a protest outside the Indian High Commission in London on 11 March, demanding 'Stop the Killings', 'Dismiss the Gujarat Government' and 'VHP Out of Ayodhya'.

The picket was organised by South Asia Solidarity Group and Asian Women Unite!, an umbrella group of Asian women's organisations in Britain, and attended by members and supporters of SASG, Newham Asian Women's Project, Southall Black Sisters, Newham Monitoring Project, the Asha Project, National Civil Rights Movement, and students and teachers from SOAS, LSE and University College London.

The organisers stated: 'we have called this protest to express our grief and anger at the terrible events in Gujarat during the last week. We add our voices to the demands of progressive and anti-communal people across India for those responsible for the killings - including those in government - to be brought to justice. We are also coming together to oppose and resist the growing influence of communal organisations, in particular the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) who are using these events to poison relations between South Asian communities in Britain'.

Despite police attempts to keep us penned in well away from the High Commission, we moved up to the main entrance of India House and remained there for about an hour. The mood was angry and demonstrators shouted slogans and held placards including 'Narendra Modi must go!' 'BJP-VHP-Bairang Dal -RSS Murderers' 'Murderers off the Streets, Fascists out of Government'. The picket continued for more than 2 hours despite pouring rain. For several months, the VHP

has been whipping up communal tension and targeting Muslims in India. In particular, it has renewed its focus on building a Hindu temple at Ayodhya in UP at the same site where the destruction of the historic Babri Masjid (mosque) on 6 December 1992 led to riots in which more than 3,000 people died.

Far from trying to prevent this, the Central Government led by the BJP, which also controls the state government of Gujarat and up until elections last week, U.P., has provided ample support to the VHP. Soon after September 11, the government introduced a draconian new anti-terrorist law. This has been used to persecute Muslim youth on a large scale, while the terror outfits of the Hindu right remain free to do as they wish.

At the end of February, VHP activists travelling to Ayodhya for the temple building - were reported to be terrorising train passengers, tearing off burkhas of Muslim women and attacking those they suspected of being Muslims. On 27 February several compartments of a train carrying VHP activists to Ayodhya were attacked and set on fire at Godhra in Gujarat and 58 people were killed, including women and children and other passengers unconnected with the VHP.

No sooner had the news of Godhra spread than organised gangs of the Hindu communal organisations went on the rampage while the police stood and watched in silence, or in some cases actually took part in the killings.

From well-off residential areas in Ahmedabad city to smaller towns and surrounding villages, Muslim neighbourhoods were singled out and people burnt alive. The planned and cold-blooded nature of the killings was clear - in one case alleys adjoining Muslim homes were filled with water and electric cables submerged in them so that those who tried to escape the mas-

sacre would be electrocuted. Up to 1000 people have been killed.

Among those who have lost their lives is Mohamed Aswat Nallabhai from Batley who was on holiday and was travelling by minibus with three relatives when their vehicle was set alight. Two others who were with him are still missing.

Sponsors of carnage

The BJP government in Gujarat simply withdrew itself and watched as the killer squads went about their systematic slaughter of Muslims with absolute impunity. Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi has shown where he stands by justifying the killings as an "emotional reaction" to the Godhra incident, and congratulating the police for their "excellent work". The Home Minister in his government, Gordhan Zadharia, is himself a VHP leader. Dismissal of this communal government has to be the first step to restoring

trust in Gujarat.

Central Government Collusion The Central government is an alliance of parties led by the BJP - the party of Prime Minister Vajpayee. Gujarat has been seen as a laboratory for a "Hindu rashtra" or Hindu state. The government delayed sending in the Army by a full 36 hours and even then it was deployed so slowly and selectively that the killings continued to spread.

Only a week ago, the results of the Assembly elections in four states showed a massive rejection of the BJP by the Indian people from all communities. The BJP had fought the elections on a platform of appeals to anti-Muslim, anti-Pakistan sentiment and paranoia about national security and terrorist "threats".

● For further information contact: South Asia Solidarity Group, tel 020 7267 0923; email southasia@hotmail.com or Asian Women Unite! Tel. 020 7424 9535, email london@hotmail.com

Lahore: women lead land protest

The celebrations for International Women's Day started early in Dharampura, Lahore. Women Workers Help Line, a working class organisation, staged a day-long women's Mela on 6th March in the Ahata Makhan Singh area of Dharampura.

Hundreds of women, men and children paid five and two rupees respectively to participate in this festival.

This was third year the event had been staged in this area. For the first two years the Labour Party Pakistan's Mustafabad unit had organised it, but this year, WWHL decided to take it on.

The festival was opened by the performance of local artists who sang songs and performed small sketches exposing the evils prevailing in the community. Romana Shabnum, a local resident and member of Lahore Aziz Bhatti Town council explained the ideas behind this event:

"March 8th is a day to remember in the historic struggle of women to demand rights for voting and associations. Here in Pakistan, we are in majority but we don't have rights that would bring working class women onto an equal level with men. This festival is our way of teaching the masses. We want to oppose domestic violence and raise the issue in lively manner."

Azra Shad, chair of WWHL, spoke of the struggle of peasant women for land ownership rights.

"They are doing wonders, and are fighting the police and military brutality with their sticks and dandaas. WWHL is shoulder to shoulder with peasant women to fight for their rights. Women from the cities must join

hand with peasant women and men to forge a real unity."

Rahila Zareen, joint secretary of Pakistan Federation of Trade Unions and a member of Labour Party Pakistan told the gathering:

"We must organise on our own. Only our independent associations and unions can guarantee the protection of the rights we have got so far, and help us to fight for more. The WWHL has become the most vocal and fighting voice of working class women."

Farooq Tariq, a local resident and general secretary LPP said

"Let us attack the primitive and reactionary traditions that are upheld by some working class families. Let's not beat women at any cost. Let us not threaten them to divorce, let's not insult them. They are equal partners of the family."

Many women and whole families work day and night to earn a little bit of money, he said. "Let's honour the revolutionary spirit of the women of this area and as a whole in Pakistan and internationally. Let's stop sending our children to work: send them to school instead. We do not want a working class who cannot read and write."

The local union organisers and councillors also spoke of their solidarity with the WWHL's fight for women rights. Several nationally known artists performed various songs, and local artists danced to popular tunes.

Children of the area had prepared special songs for the event exposing the conditions they are living in. They opposed drug addiction and child labour.

A petition from nine organisations working with Asian communities in Britain including Indians of all faiths has been sent to the President of India. The text is given below

As organisations working with Asian communities in Britain, including Indians of all faiths, we welcome Wednesday's verdict delivered by the Indian Supreme Court prohibiting any kind of religious ceremony on any land held by the Central government in Ayodhya. But we are deeply concerned that the BJP-led Central government does not appear to have the will to make sure that this verdict is not violated on the ground.

Meanwhile the issues raised by the recent horrific events in Gujarat which have left up to 1,000 dead and tens of thousands homeless and dispossessed remain to be addressed. In the context of the silence of the British government and the 'international community' generally, we wish to express in the strongest possible terms our condemnation of these orchestrated communal killings, and of the active collusion of the Government of Gujarat and the police in the State. While we unreservedly condemn the killings of train passengers in Godhra, we feel that it is completely unacceptable for Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi to attempt to justify the systematic massacres of Muslims that followed as a 'reaction' and we believe that this only further exposes the communal character of his government.

In a petition submitted to the Indian President, we are demanding:

- the immediate resignation of the Gujarat government and of

Union Home Minister L.K. Advani

- the dismissal of the police commissioners in the cities worst affected by violence

- immediate measures to prevent any further VHP activities in Ayodhya. Ayodhya remains the core issue behind all the violence that has gripped Gujarat and rocked the entire country. Instead of brokering any deal with the VHP, the government must ban it, arrest its leaders, and seize all the stones and other building materials that have been amassed in Ayodhya for the proposed construction.

- immediate assistance to all those affected by the riots. The state must immediately rush medical and food aid to those affected, make arrangements to shelter those displaced, and extend monetary assistance to rebuild the homes and businesses of those who have been affected by the riots.

The petition has been signed by: Prafula Vadgama, Asha Project, Simi Woodwal, Hounslow Asian Women's Refuge, Suresh Grover, National Civil Rights Movement, Anjum Mouj, Newham Asian Womens Project, Asad Rehman, Newham Monitoring Project, Mukhtar Rana, Peace and Human Rights Trust, Iqbal Singh, Punjab Human Rights Group, Internet Armit Wilson, South Asia Solidarity Group, Hanana Siddiqui, Southall Black Sisters

Priyantha
Wickramasinghe
(NSSP)

The present government of the United National Front (UNF) was elected in December 2002 on the basis of support from the national minority parties – the Tamil National Alliance, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (Hakim faction) (Hakim is the present leader of the Muslim Congress), Ceylon Workers Congress representing the plantation workers who are of Tamil/Indian origin and the break-away from the People's Alliance (PA).

At the core of the new government is the UNP, the party of the comprador bourgeoisie.

After seven years in office, the People's Alliance government under Chandrika was hated by the minority communities.

She was unpopular amongst Tamils because despite promising peace, she continued the war in the North East.

The military occupation of the Jaffna peninsula by the Colombo government made thousands of Tamil people homeless and increased the number of refugees both in Sri Lanka and in the Tamil diaspora of asylum seekers.

In this context it was not surprising that Chandrika's campaign to isolate the LTTE (Tamil Tigers) from the Tamil community was a total failure.

Towards the end of her seven year regime she also antagonised the Muslim community.

The main issue in the 2001 election was peace. Chandrika carried through her campaign by breeding and building on Sinhala chauvinism. Her severe defeat in the elections was also due to her failures on the economic front.

Since 1998, the capitalist class in Sri Lanka has been increasingly aware of the weakness of their two parties, the PA and the UNP and has therefore adopted a bi-partisan

Left gains after Sri Lanka's coalition ousted

approach to the problems already in 1998.

They really didn't have any original programme of their own, but wanted to be partners with the WTO, IMF and trans national corporations. Therefore they pushed for labour market flexibility, reduction of holidays, reforming the labour laws in their own interests.

The 'left' in the People's Alliance coalition, comprising the (one-time Trotskyist) LSSP and the Communist Party, failed miserably in the election, failing even to safeguard their left identity.

By contrast the NSSP and the New Left Front did not fail: they did very well in the rural areas – much better than the chauvinist elements.

In the urban areas we failed to maintain our earlier majorities, but now opportunities have opened up in a massive way for the left.

The NLF has already started its campaign to end the war, and against globalisation. It has practical experience of opposing globalisation through picketing, protest rallies and strikes. It has a history of opposition to globalisation since the 1980 General Strike in Sri Lanka.

As the UNP is the government of the employers, now they want to rush through this programme of liberalisation and deregulation. The trade union movement is waking up from its slumber due to these targeted attacks of liberalisation and labour law reforms.

However, the UNP government is able to disrupt any opposition because of their approach to peace and conciliation with the Tamil community.

On 22 February 2002 the President and the leader of the LTTE signed a memorandum of understanding for de-escalation of the war, and to usher in a long-term cease-fire. This is a preliminary stage to a negotiated political settlement. The chauvinist groups – particularly the JVP are of course still opposed to this.

The employers want a resolution of the war in the North East, but they want to declare war on the working class and to deregulate it into a state of casual contract labour.

Today the threat of globalisation is directed at the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB), the Railways and the state banks, and the government is greatly concerned about selling the shares of Sri Lanka Telecom. These are the areas in which the multinational companies can see a boom in their profits. The state is making every effort to privatise these areas by hook or by crook.

In 1986 the employees of the CEB threw the whole island into darkness by taking 4 days strike action against privatisation. The union leaders were threatened by the security forces who threatened to take their families including children into

custody and pointed guns at them.

It was the 'CEB – Protect You' organisation which gave leadership in this struggle and I was the Joint Secretary. The security forces surrounded the Party HQ to arrest me, but it was in vain.

At this time also the government had to postpone its decision to privatise the state bank as a result of a decision by 8000 bank union delegates for strike action to stop this.

The privatisation of the railways was also postponed because of continuing strike action, picketing and various other forms of militant action.

It is the working class which pays the cost of the floating exchange rate by which their living standards are affected.

The foreign investors heavily exploit the working class through these policies. For example the devalued rupee, which used to be worth \$2 is now only worth \$0.50.

Now once again the threat of privatisation of banks, railways and CEB is back on the agenda. As a result of this threat the 'CEB- Protect You' organisation has started its agitational campaign against these plans.

They do not see any other solution than a general strike. and the



Ousted: Chandrika (above) replaced by Ranil Wickramasinghe (below)



organisation is making every effort to go for this by discussing a plan for joint action with the bank and railway unions.

Such action would throw the whole country into chaos.

But the question is who is going to take the leadership, because such a struggle would result in a political battle with the traditional leadership of the unions who try to avoid their members taking militant action.

The JVP has a policy of opposing the privatisation of natural resources, but in practice they are engaged in a communal campaign.

NSSP members are tirelessly working to make this struggle a success. The NSSP leadership in the CEB and Railways that has come forward to lead this struggle together with the other unions.

Sri Lanka: the way forward after the cease-fire

Statement of the Nava Sama Samaja Party, Sri Lankan section of the Fourth International

THE SIGNING of the memorandum of understanding and the cease-fire between the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE (Tamil Tigers) at the end of February 2002, took place at a very specific conjunctural moment of the world political situation. At this time an alternative policy for a negotiated political settlement was permeating the thinking of the LTTE leadership.

The world powers have turned their attention from the traditional centres of protest and dissent to the hostilities of the emerging Muslim radicalism and other political rebel groups throughout the world. The US and its allies have not only been involved in civil, political and human rights violations, but they have also infiltrated other territories to subdue the sovereignty of poor nations.

Within recent history the US and its allies have violated the sovereignty of ex-Yugoslavia for the sake of defending the Kosovo-Albanian national community against the Serbian majority. They recently subdued the sovereign state of Afghanistan as retaliation for the September 11 attack on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon.

It is in this context that the previous PA government and its Foreign Minister Kadiragamar were successful in their campaign for the total proscription of the LTTE by the US and Britain. India, of course, has already proscribed the LTTE.

The LTTE's main stakes are not mainly with the Chandrika and Ranil Wickramasinghe governments but with the US and its allies and the international community. Its has influenced the world body politic due to the specific existence of the Tamil diaspora.

Therefore the proscription carried out internationally greatly affected the LTTE. Fortunately, its leadership took a timely decision on their position with regard to "separatism" and "terrorism", and making clear to world opinion their true nature as a liberation movement of the Tamil people.

These concepts were very clearly enunciated by the leader of the LTTE in his speech on the 26 September 2001.

Peace and self-rule

In this message, the LTTE made very clear what exactly they want. They expressed their wish to live in peace and harmony in their own lands in the North-East region and to establish self-rule without any encumbrances.

Within the context of a globalised market, the concepts of separatism, partition or the formation of a totally independent nation-state are losing ground and almost becoming outdated.

However, at the same time in the present globalisation, diversity and self-identity are of specific importance. Against the ideology of globalisation, the cultural diversity of the nations has to be safeguarded and protected.

The developing countries can only survive as independent nations if there is a possibility within a country or a province or a region, of economic development. We need investment for serious production and growth, for the ability to build an

industrial and agricultural base and the capacity to invest in health and education for the working people.

Only with such an economic base, could a nation build up its national image and make serious links with the market, within a country and across borders.

Therefore, it is not only civil wars that threaten the sovereignty of poor countries. The liberalisation policy of the World Bank, the IMF, and the WTO that seeks to open up developing countries, and plunder their natural resources, their economies, their financial and labour markets, also pose this threat.

Serious conclusions have to be drawn from the above two positions of the world political situation and the alternative policy for a political settlement adopted by the LTTE.

The heavy weight of the political influence of the Bush administration and its Western allies which have created the present scenario, have to be taken seriously.

That is the reason why in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), the third party facilitator, the Norwegian Government, eventually turned out to be an arbitrator who could take final decisions that affect both parties.

Connivance

This makes clear that major decisions will only be taken with the support or connivance of the US and the Western powers. That is why we have strong reservations on this matter.

But once the present MoU paves the way for the political dialogue, as both parties have willingly accepted the cease-fire agreement, very valuable preliminary requirements have been

established.

The creation of the Monitoring Mission and its terms of reference will pave the way for the demarcation of the lands in the North-East for the Tamil speaking people. The Tamil National Question is half solved if the Sri Lankan government agrees that the question of the lands is the core-problem of the present dispute.

A Sinhala army cannot look after the security of the Tamil people. The absorption of the paramilitary groups into the regular army outside the North-East cannot and should not create a precedent.

Independent forces

An independent Tamil regiment and a Police force should be allowed for the security of the Tamil people. Of course, this will be the crux of the problem, which will make clear whether both parties want a genuine resolution of the present conflict.

The aspirations of all the national communities could blossom only in an environment of a union of regions. Therefore a meaningful devolution of power has to be proposed instead of the existing sham. The economic, social, political and cultural rights of the Sinhala and the Muslim communities should be given prime importance in the North-East region.

Despite all these reservations, due to the heavy weight imposed on Southern Asia by the US-led allies, the radical left and the labour movement will stand by the cease-fire agreement, because the LTTE with all the risks involved, has come forward to defend the destiny of the Tamil people.

Who wants 'old Labour' back?

Alan Thornett ('SP's pamphlet is just as bad as its statement' - SO 52) "assumes" that the Socialist Party's idea of a new party is "old Labour".

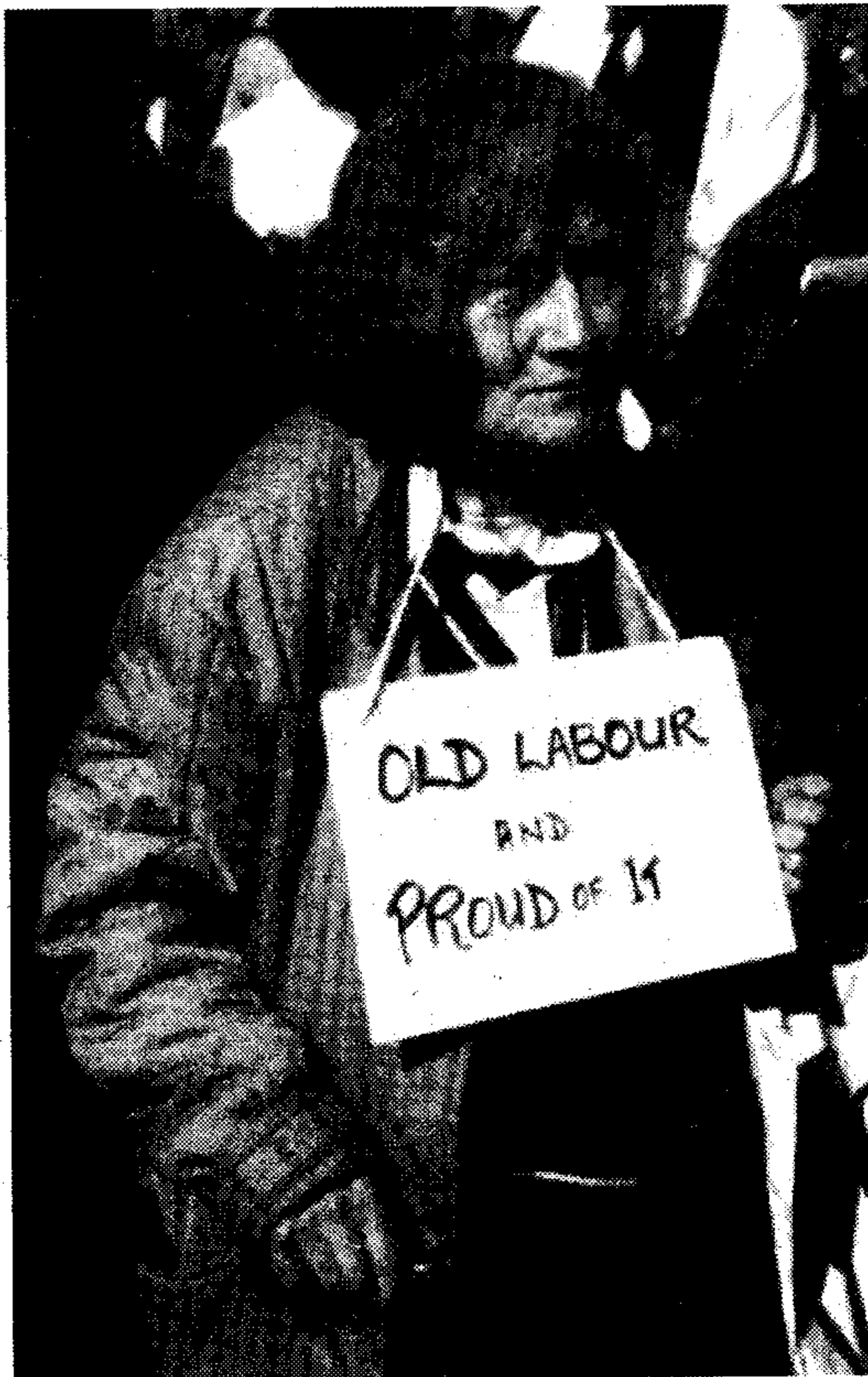
I can only conclude that Alan had his own preconceptions of the SP's position, and then set out to prove them. For he doesn't include a single quote from this 24-page pamphlet (Resisting Capitalism - The Case for a New Workers' Party).

He makes his own interpretations, which are not truthful.

"The model for the SP's new mass party - expounded at great length in the pamphlet - is, predictably, the formation of the Labour Party, a hundred years ago" says Alan, and "The class content of this party is unknown, or at least unspecified".

(There is a difference between "class content" and "characterisation". To be concrete: the old Labour Party was working class in content, but its leadership and policy was bourgeois in character.)

In fact the SP's pamphlet is quite specific in opposition to such a party: "Historically the Labour Party was a 'capitalist workers' party'. The leaders at the top reflected the outlook and interests of



the capitalist class." (p3 - with reference to the Appendix "How the

Labour Party was formed".)

And the SP draws the conclusion (p3): "...Blair has succeeded in his aim of transforming New Labour into a capitalist party, although the process of consolidating it as such will continue".

The SP refers to the poll-tax struggles and the 18 million people who refused to pay, "defeating the tax and bringing down Thatcher in the process" (p 15) and says "Future struggles in the workplaces, communities etc. will mobilise millions of working class people".

At the end of the pamphlet (p 18) the SP says, (asking workers to join their party): "If we are to avoid the set-backs and missed opportunities... then an organised force has to be built which has a clear understanding of what needs to be done".



Writeback

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

Write to Socialist Outlook, PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU.
email: outlook@gn.apc.org

For this, Alan accuses the SP of "economic determinism". Amazing! Perhaps he wants to attack the view that the construction of a new party must be based on the movement of workers themselves? He says the SP "argues that an inevitable economic crisis will trigger an inevitable explosion of working class struggle and a new mass party will emerge out of this".

This is not "economic determinism", it is simply the old Marxist position that the working class is the force to carry out the socialist revolution.

It is Alan who does not say what he thinks the class basis of the new party should be, except that the "scattered" socialists must be linked to those who are "radicalising against the new world order... to establish the model of broad inclusive socialist parties which can be the basis of a mass development when it comes".

The question must be asked: what is the difference between the "broad inclusive socialist party" that Alan wants, and the "broad socialist church" of "old Labour"?

Dot Gibson
London SWS

Have bosses got it wrong on the Euro?

Alan Thornett (Prepare now to fight referendum, SO 53) is right to say that the left has lost the initiative on the Euro, but the reasons for this are not as clear cut as he claims.

That the British ruling class is, on balance, in favour is neither here nor there as far as the rest of the population is concerned, because the working classes of the Euro countries also appear to have been, on balance, in favour.

And if the majority of the European working class has voted in favour, perhaps there is an argument we are missing.

One argument might be that a federated Europe with a single currency means a more unified working class, a working class harder to split, by their own ruling classes, along nationalist lines.

The bosses think the Euro's adoption strengthens their control, but they might just find a Trojan horse in their midst.

René Gimpel, London

Social Forum launched: Europeans follow Brazilian lead

On of the decisions of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in January was that there should be regional social forums organised in different parts of the world. This will enable a greater level of participation of grass roots activists from outside Latin America than has been possible so far.

After some debate, it was decided that the European Social Forum should be held in Italy in November. Italy is obviously an excellent choice given the strength of the anti-globalisation and anti-war movements in that country.

The first planning meeting for the European Social Forum took place in Brussels on March 9 and got the organisation underway. There was a lively debate about whether political parties should be involved in the forum.

This debate actually conflates two things.



On the one hand there is legitimate concern about the extent to which politicians who support the establishment want to co-opt the movement, to remove its potential to fight for real change and a different kind of society. When even the ring-wing Gaullists in France feel under enough pressure to turn up to Porto Alegre, this is a real discussion.

On the other hand, there

are other political parties that see themselves as part of the movement itself. In Italy itself, Rifondazione Comunista was at the centre of the mobilisations in Genoa and in building one of the most powerful anti-war movements in Europe.

This question will be decided at the next planning meeting in Vienna on May 11-12.

Watch this space for further developments.

International Summer Camp

Calling all young activists ...



● ARE YOU involved in the anti-globalisation movement, the anti-war movement or other struggles against the rotten capitalist system we live under?

● WOULD YOU appreciate the time to talk about how we can work together for a different, a fairer, more sustainable, less militarised world with other activists?

● DO YOU want the opportunity to meet with hundreds of other young people for a week of political discussion and debate, and have fun at the same time?

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

The camp will take place in Brioude, France from Saturday 27th July to Friday 2nd August inclusive. This year's theme will be "We reject military, profit-making globalisation, let's build another world".

We don't yet know how much it will cost for travel and food - it's likely to be between £150-£200 from London, and we should have firmer costs for our next issue.

We will also try to do some collective fundraising to make it easier to afford.

If you are interested in finding out more, get in touch now.

■ RING us on 020 8800 7460, or email outlook@gn.apc.org

Sign up now for the European Social Forum!

ATTAC France has set up a Europe-wide mailing list, fse-esf@ras.eu.org, for all groups that want to be involved in the European Social Forum, which is to take place in Italy in October or

November 2002.

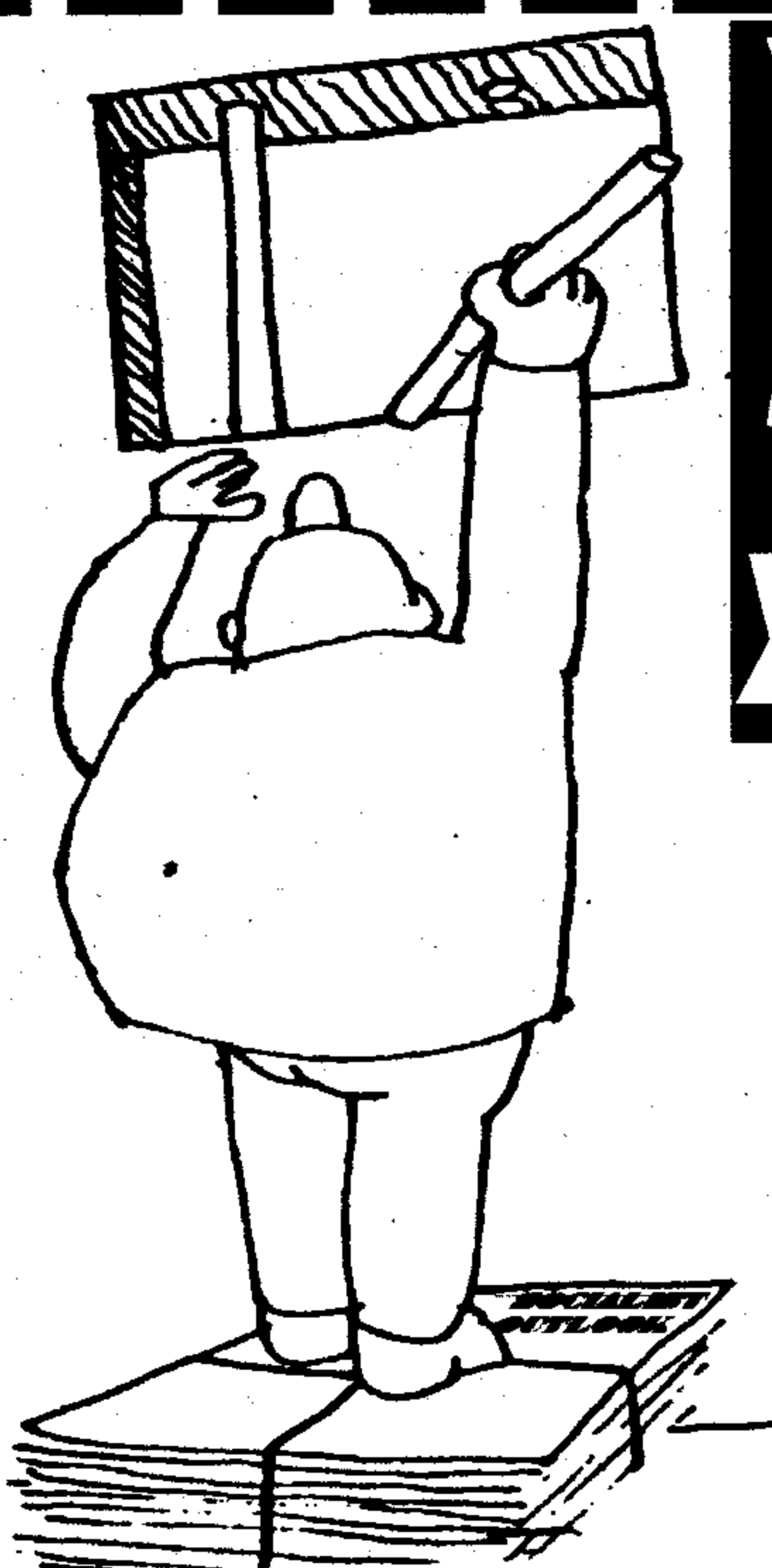
To join, please email Laurent Jesover (jesover@ras.eu.org), and indicate the name of your organisation.

Socialist

A monthly marxist review. No 53. March 2002. 50p

OUTLOOK

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