

Break Labour bipartisanship



Major greets the troops

Thomas Williams

WHEN FUNDAMENTAL issues of state are at stake, Labour abandons all pretence to democracy and anti-imperialism and becomes Defender of the Realm. Such is the case with Ireland.

From the outset of the cease-fire the Blair team has collapsed into abject bipartisan unity with the Tories on all aspects of the process—from decommissioning to internal elections as a precursor to talks.

Blair's "me too-ism" in response to whatever Mayhew and Major propose shows that the fundamentals of Labour's strategy are the same as the Tories.

They will keep pressure on Nationalists for an acceptance of solutions that will not alter the existing constitutional arrangements unless the Unionists agree—the 'consent' factor; and to gently persuade the Unionists that their political future is safe within the union but that they need to make a few concessions to assuage Nationalist fears of a return to the bad old days of Stor-

mont.

The supposedly "pro-nationalist" Kevin McNamara was replaced by Mo Mowlam as Labour's spokesperson. She reassured Orangemen that Labour has their best interests at heart. Labour will pander to reaction rather than risk any fracture of the British state.

McNamara has now denounced Blair's bipartisanship as contributing to the collapse of the cease-fire. McNamara calls for London and Dublin to adopt the Mitchell principles so as to allow the restoration of the cease-fire.

Implicit is the suggestion that the Labour Party should be less willing to accommodate to Unionism.

But while McNamara's break with Blair is welcome, his criticism does not deal with the key issues. He accepts that Republican commitment to the Mitchell principles—which effectively demands advance commitments by the IRA to disband and for Sinn Fein to accept whatever comes out of all-party talks—is necessary before any other political moves can be made.

Nor does he question the Framework Document on which talks would be based. This enshrines the Unionist veto. Thus his attack on Blair is over tactics rather than fundamentals.

Current Tory proposals are for discussions, leading to Six County elections, combined with simultaneous "referendums for peace" in the North and South, leading to all-party talks—all premised on a permanent cease-fire.

None of this breaks from the framework of partition. It is designed to maintain momentum for a Partitionist solution that incorporates Republicanism.

This is the underlying strategy behind the Framework Document and its predecessors—the Downing Street Declaration and the Anglo-Irish agreement—that critics of Labour's bipartisan policy must challenge.

The British labour movement must address the undemocratic character of Unionism and its veto.

The supremacist ideology of Loyalism gives prior right to the Unionist minority to decide on the political structures that should exist in Ireland,



Mo Mowlam, Labour's spokesperson, colludes in preservation of reactionary partition

thus denying the right of the majority to make such decisions. This is backed by the military force of the British state.

Any future settlement based on the Unionist veto will be inherently undemocratic and will contain the seeds of conflict since the existence of the sectarian "Orange State" will remain unchallenged.

A return to a full military campaign by the IRA could lead to catastrophe.

Whereas the cease-fire was beginning to make the mass of the Irish people realise that the real enemies of peace and democracy are the British and the Unionists, the resumption of militarist action can only lead to the further isolation of Sinn Fein.

How the cease-fire can be re-instituted should not be the concern of the British labour movement. Nor should

we support the imposition of conditions upon Sinn Fein before they can take part in talks.

Our concern should focus on the fact that a Blair government would not do anything fundamentally different from what the Tories are up to.

The task of the workers' movement in Britain is not to collude in the preservation of the reactionary partition, but to fight for the withdrawal of the British state from Ireland.

This means demanding Labour's rejection of the Unionist veto - including opposition to the Framework Document and its false notions of "consent"; and opposition to mechanisms like simultaneous referendums and internal elections - that will contribute to the emergence of a re-vamped Six County settlement.

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One-day Greek docks strike in solidarity with Liverpool

Liverpool dockers still standing firm

Michael Eve

MERSEYSIDE dockworkers have now been locked out for over five months in their struggle against casualisation.

In contrast to the official leadership of the labour movement they have shown that we can resist the bosses attacks.

The dispute has been in defiance of the Tories anti-union laws, the only way they could have fought. They have brought out the whole of the docks in support.

They have held out against the at-

tempts of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company (MDHC) to break the strike by bringing in scabs to work those ships still using the port, and all attempts by the MDHC and TGWU leadership to buy them off.

They have built international solidarity, with action in support in ten countries, including a one day strike by Greek dockers in their support.

The recent international solidarity conference was attended by 60 dockworkers from 17 countries. It discussed further support for the Liverpool workers and how to build links between dockworkers who are facing the same

problems of privatisation and casualisation around the world.

Public criticism by the Chamber of Commerce and the Port Users' Association shows how they see such international solidarity as a threat.

Despite the refusal of the TGWU to give them official support for fear of being prosecuted under the anti-union laws, the dockworkers and the "Women of the Waterfront" support group have toured the labour movement winning solidarity that puts the official movement to shame.

Such has been the confidence from these efforts that the vote to reject the



Pete Skinley of the FBU addresses dockers' rally in Liverpool, January 1996.

bosses' pay-off (backed by TGWU officialdom) was rejected overwhelmingly—the dockworkers are adamant they want all jobs back, not some sop.

The weakness so far has been the lack of supportive action from other British ports, despite the efforts of support groups in many areas.

Work at many British ports has already been casualised, with others seeing it coming. To spread the fightback

from Merseyside to other ports will require a willingness from the TGWU leadership to fight for it.

The dockworkers have now called a national support conference. It is important that labour movement bodies around the country send delegates to the conference to not only show solidarity, but more importantly to discuss how to build on the magnificent actions of the dockers to ensure they win.

Celebrate International Women's Day - and fight for its real tradition

ON MARCH 8 1908 women garment workers marched through New York City's Lower East Side protesting against sweatshop conditions and demanding the right to vote.

Two years later Copenhagen hosted a Congress of Socialist Women. A delegation of women socialists from the US inspired by the battles attended. It was agreed that March 8 should become international women's day.

Clara Zetkin, the militant socialist leader from Germany, moved the proposal.

Two of the most significant March 8 celebrations occurred in the next few years.

In 1914 Clara Zetkin organised thousands of women in Germany to protest against Rosa Luxemburg's arrest and convictions for speeches opposing the coming imperialist war.

In March 8 1917, striking women textile workers from the Vyborg district in Petrograd held an International Women's day demonstration which sparked the Russian Revolution.

That revolution brought enormous

EDITORIAL

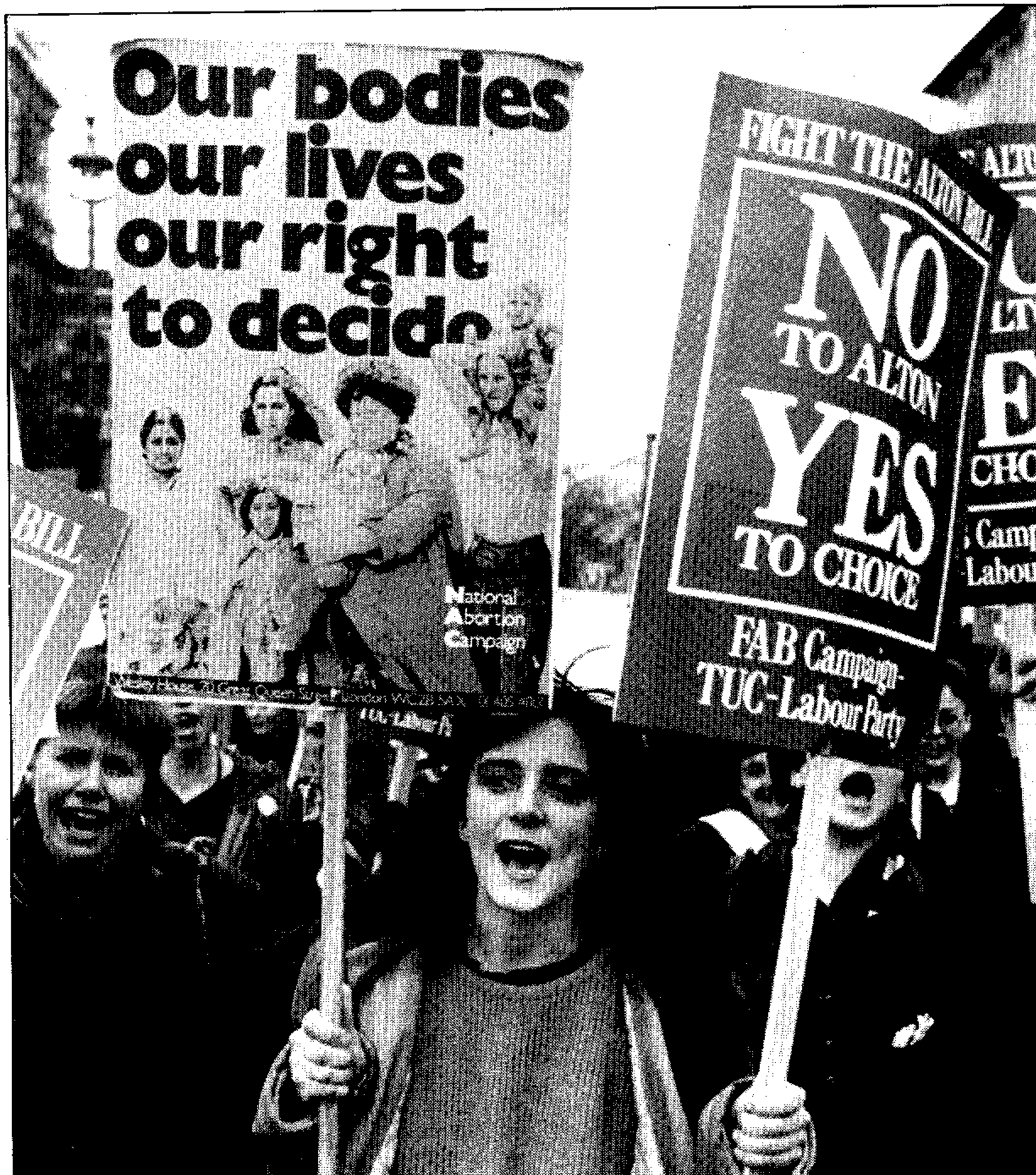
gains to working women, including the opening of child care facilities and the introduction of civil marriage.

But when Stalin came to power these gains were rolled back. Instead a cult of motherhood was developed. Women were imprisoned in low paid jobs.

With the growth of the women's liberation movement from the late 1960s, International Women's Day was again widely celebrated. Women began to re-examine our history including the struggles of working women internationally.

But the legacy of stalinism and the failure of many sections of the non-stalinist left to support the demands of the women's liberation movement weakened the influence of revolutionary socialist feminists.

The autonomous women's move-



Lack of strong pressure from a separately organised movement meant that the bureaucracy were often able to gain the upper hand

ment began to fragment and dissipate in the late 1970s in Britain and many feminists increasingly centred their activity in the trade unions and Labour Party.

While it was of course essential to fight for the labour movement to support feminism, the lack of strong pressure from a separately organised movement meant that the bureaucracy were often able to gain the upper hand.

It is tragic that today International Women's Day is not marked by militant street demonstrations but only by civic functions organised by local councils and the occasional social.

Today women are again bearing the brunt of the economic crisis, whether it is in the Free Trade Zones in Asia or South America or as workers in or users of the NHS and education service in Britain.

Throughout the world women's rights to control our fertility are under attack. We are the central target for the new religious right.

Not only feminists, but the whole of the left must repopularise the old slogan which has never been more apt - No Women's Liberation without Socialism - No Socialism without Women's Liberation.

Women strike hammer-blow

EARLY ON January 29 three women disarmed one of the 24 Hawk jets destined for Indonesia, delaying its departure by at least a month and causing an estimated £1 million damage.

Amazingly the women spent over two hours in the hangar before being arrested. They have been charged with criminal damage and illegal entry (burglary) and are currently on remand at Risley awaiting a third court appearance in Lytham on 7 March.

A fourth woman was arrested and charged with conspiring to commit criminal damage after publicly declaring her intention to continue the work of disarmament.

Following their action the Hawks into Doves campaign has been launched to continue non-violent direct action at British Aerospace's 32 military sites, including fence-cutting, blockades and office occupations.

The next action will be at BAe Brough, Humberside, on February 29. A bid has been made to get a summons for the arrest of Ian Lang, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, for

conspiring to aid and abet acts of genocide in his capacity as Head of the Licensing Authority which licensed the export of the 24 Hawks.

Ten MPs signed a declaration calling on Parliament to immediately debate cancelling the delivery of Hawks to Indonesia, approach the Attorney General to institute proceedings against the Department of Trade and Industry and British Aerospace for conspiring with Indonesia to commit genocide, and investigate arms sales to Indonesia.

Now two Early Day Motions (413 and 436) have been proposed by Ken Livingstone and Alan Simpson condemning the government's support for the general actions of the Suharto regime, and calling for the immediate cancellation of Hawk deliveries and for the Scott Inquiry Team to investigate the government's breach of national and international guidelines in licensing the Hawk deal.

For further information as to how to get involved phone Will on 0171 281 0297.

Adam Hartman

How to build anti-racist movement

THE CAMPAIGN against the Immigration and Asylum Bill has brought together a number of different organisations.

We need to continue to support every action in opposition to the Bill—including the demonstration called by the Anti-Racist Alliance on March 23.

Government inspired racism must be fought by a unified national movement. Past attempts to establish such a movement have ended up as sectarian fronts for far left groups or bureaucratic talking shops. The majority of black activists and anti-racists have voted with their feet and concentrated on local organisation.

Of the existing anti-racist groups the National Assembly Against Racism has by far the greatest number of affiliation from anti-racist groups and the Labour movement and has been fully involved in CAIAB. Whilst the ARA demonstration also has an impressive list of sponsors, the labour movement leadership have done little to mobilise their member-

ship or provide any kind of lead around either initiative.

CAIAB represents a great deal more in the sense that there are far more local branches of the campaign or anti-racist groups affiliated to the campaign that are organising public meetings, leafleting etc and mobilising on a grass roots level. It is a disgrace that there are essentially two national campaigns competing with each other in opposing the bill. A unified campaign could be mobilising tens of thousands more than existing demonstrations, and could place real pressure on the Labour Movement leadership to mobilise their memberships — as well as fighting for non-compliance with the bill and the benefit cuts.

Now we need a programme of action to build a movement that can respond to the needs of all those threatened with racism—people facing deportation, those attacked by racists on the streets and in their homes, and those facing criminalisation and beatings from the police.

The National Assembly Against Racism made a bold step in launching its anti-racist charter last year.

As it currently stands it will not be the best unifier of the movement, although it could be a useful way of generating discussion. A Charter which emphasises reliance on the state to fight racism when that same state is the source of much of the racism black people face when the same state is the source of much of the racism black people face is highly controversial.

The only way fighting unity can be achieved is through the widest possible discussion and the maximum democracy. The National Assembly holds its second national meeting on March 9. This could prove an important step towards building on the energy of the CAIAB campaign and uniting the movement.

It should open up such a debate and establish real decision making structures. We cannot waste any more opportunities.

Simon Deville

The Fire This Time

GLENN VORIS interviews NEIL THOMPSON, Chair of Merseyside Fire Brigades Union on the background to the long-running strike action by Merseyside firefighters

GV: What's the dispute about?

NT: It started over a £702,000 shortfall in the Merseyside Fire Authority's budget for this year. They decided that the only way to make savings was to cut 20 jobs and take away three days annual leave from every worker.

FBU members refused to accept this vicious attack. A ballot took place and 81 per cent voted for a series of nine-hour strikes. These were in August of last year. After a further ballot 90 per cent were in favour of 24-hour strikes.

Despite £2 million of reserves the MFA have constantly argued that there is no money. Liverpool City Council offered the MFA a loan to settle the dispute but they refused it.

We've had several discussions with the MFA but the options they keep coming back with all involve job losses.

Last year the FBU argued that the authority wouldn't be able to fulfil their statutory duties without applying to the government for further funds. If they had done this the government would have been compelled by law to make up the shortfall and we wouldn't be in the situation we're in now.

After the strike action began the MFA hired twenty-four Green God-

dess fire engines and brought in the army to use them. Specialist equipment owned by the authority such as that for tackling chemical fires is not being used. The MFA are putting the public at risk and are breaking the law.

The so-called socialist leader of the MFA, Peter Dowd, makes comments like, "we may even make a profit out of the dispute". The authority has so far spent £1.5 million on trying to break it - twice as much as the shortfall in the budget. This is the economics of the madhouse.

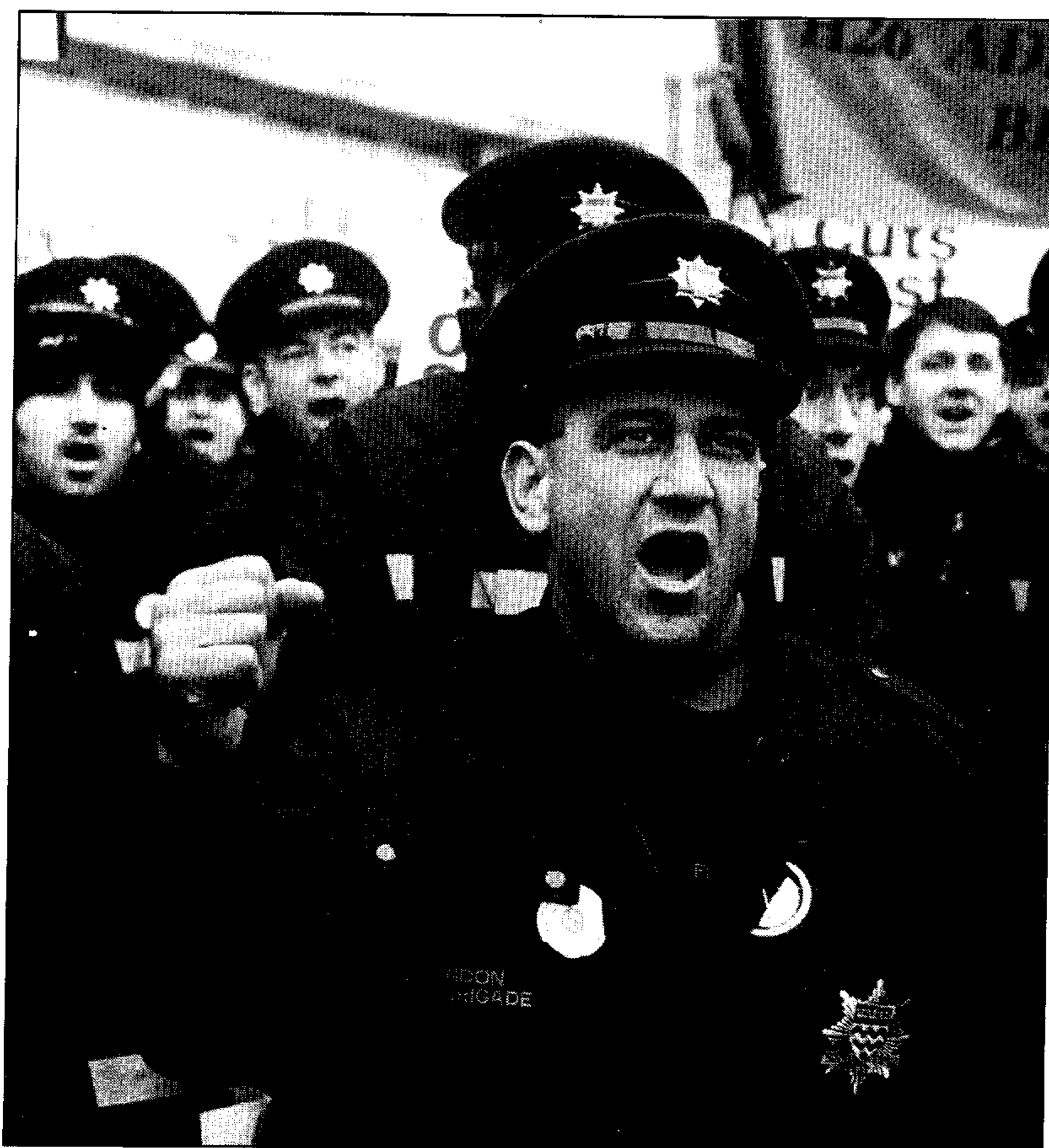
GV: Are there any moves within the union to escalate the strike action?

NT: We're thinking about changing tack and having a series of two-hour strikes instead of 24-hour strikes. It costs the authority a lot of money to just cover for 2 hours and it causes far more disruption. It also means our members don't lose as much money.

In London and Essex, because of budget cuts there, FBU members are demanding ballots for strike action. The London Fire Authority want to make 700 redundancies and shut six fire stations. If both regions take action it will obviously help us in Merseyside. In Essex members are already taking action by only answering 999 calls.

To highlight government underfunding of the service, we're campaigning for a national 24-hour strike of all firefighters when budgets are set in April.

GV: Have you received support from outside of the un-



"The London Fire Authority want to make 700 redundancies and shut six fire stations". Fire-fighter protest at FBU London HQ.

ion?

NT: The general public on Merseyside have been very supportive. The Liverpool Daily Post conducted a telephone poll showing that 93% supported our action to protect the

service.

So far our members have received hardship payments from the union but we could do with donations from the movement in order to sustain them.

GV: Will the dispute be won?

NT: Members have been incensed by the intransigence of the MFA. They are determined to win however long it takes. I believe we'll continue our struggle until we achieve a victory.

FACE conference looks to the front

Roy Leach

"IT IS VERY easy for FACE to be non-party political" said Sue Lister in her opening speech to the conference "no political party has offered us anything".

150 delegates from around the country identified local elections in May as a major focus of campaigning.

"FACE pledges" are already being drawn up, calling upon candidates to publicly commit themselves to support governors setting needs related budgets or, where they have the power to do so, actually spending more on education.

This was debated in depth, debunking the myth that it is illegal for Governors to refuse to implement cuts—councils' re-

sponse has been varied. In Sheffield governors who held out were given extra money while in Warwickshire governors have had their financial powers withdrawn.

Budgets

This requires the council to directly manage school budgets—an expensive and time consuming task which they will find increasingly difficult.

If a sufficiently large number of governing bodies set these budgets, there is a very real possibility that councils will not be able to cope and will be unable to implement cuts at school level.

This could, in turn, put pressure on councils to set their own needs budget.

On April 20 there will be a major demonstration in Ken-

neth Clarke's constituency, Nottingham. It is vital that FACE groups and teacher unions start building for this now.

Although principally about education funding, other anti-cuts campaigns should use it as an opportunity to argue their case for more cash from central government.

The Tories have shown themselves vulnerable over education underfunding. It would be an even more dangerous terrain for them if Labour were prepared to make firm spending commitments.

Success or failure in our battle will ultimately be determined by how effective FACE and other anti-cuts campaigns are at mobilising and focusing the anger and frustration felt by parents, governors, students and other service users.

Camden workers get the gift of the sack

Brian Gardner

A COUNCIL'S threat to sack at least 4,000 workers has provoked angry reaction in Camden, north London.

A February meeting attended by a thousand UNISON members called unanimously for strike action unless the authority withdraws the dismissal notices.

The Council's leader, Richard Arthur, says that its action is "not about sacking staff".

A UNISON spokesperson said that the thousands of staff who had received brown envelopes "may beg to differ with this ludicrous assertion".

Before his recent departure, the chief executive, Jeremy Smith, described all terms and conditions as "gifts" to the staff which were "generous to the point of illegality".

Camden UNISON says that residents and workers in the borough know all about gifts.

Last year all Camden's top managers received hefty pay rises. The chief ex-

ecutive himself received 19 per cent. Branch Secretary, David Eggmore, said, "The Council should keep its own house in order, rather than attacking staff with an inferior package of terms and conditions, which by its own admission serves no financial purpose whatsoever".

Terms

The Council intends to re-employ most of the workforce but only on an inferior contract which first saw the light of day in January 1995, year.

Although several other union branches in Camden have accepted the terms of this, UNISON negotiators have been holding out for improvements but the council has now removed its previous offer from the table.

Eggmore said that the council had nothing but contempt for its workforce.

Following the call for action, a ballot is now taking place and if successful, a one-day strike in April will be followed by a rolling programme of action.

Linking union left together

ON FEBRUARY 17 for the first time in over a decade, representatives of 13 union broad left organisations met in the same room to talk about working together.

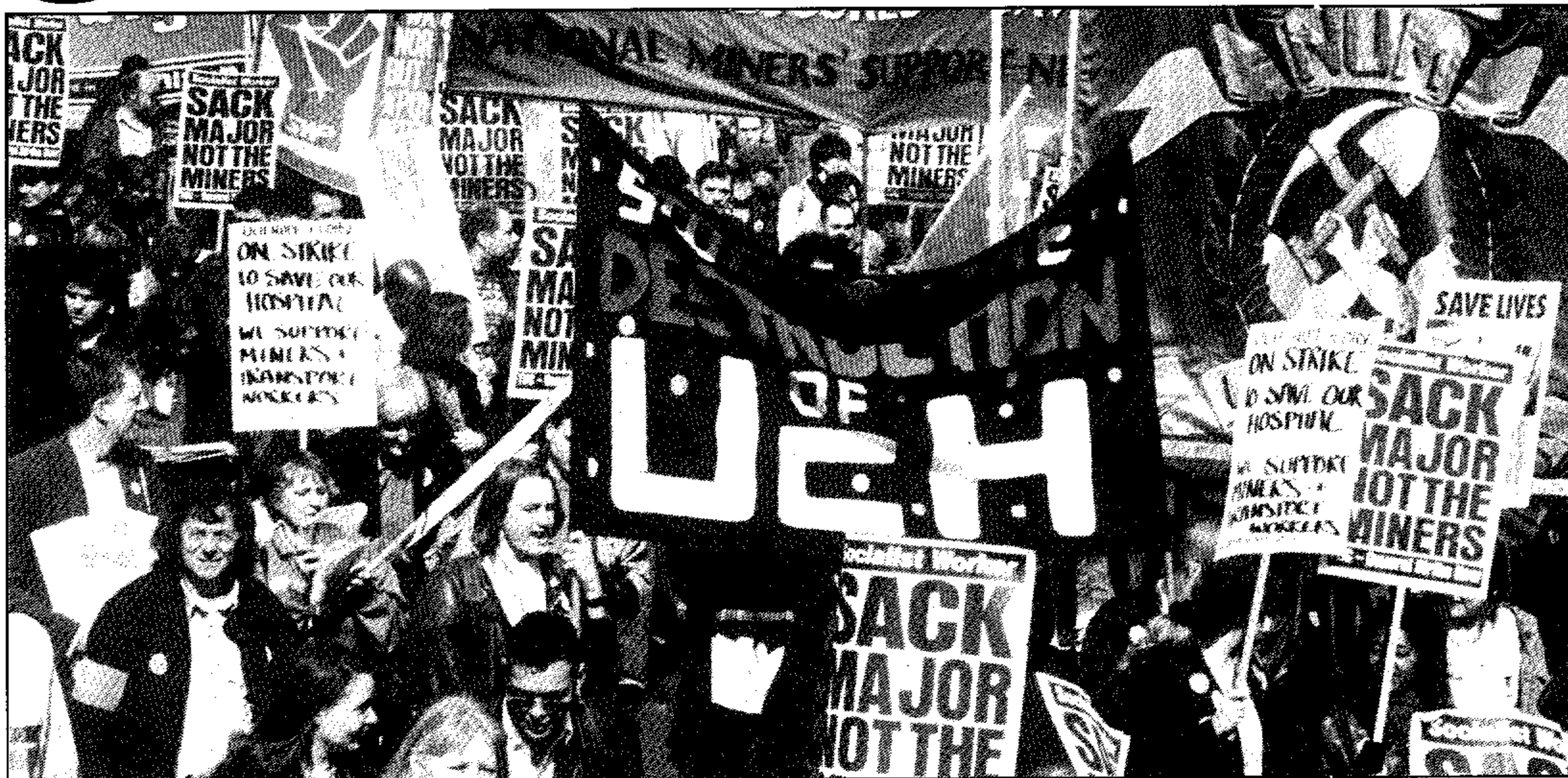
The meeting was organised by the Socialist Teachers Alliance. Other left groups at the meeting included those from UNISON, MSF, the NUJ, the CPSA, the CWU, NATFHE and Equity. Individuals from the GPMU, the TGWU and the RMT were also present.

Many delegates pointed out that despite the leaderships' collapse into Blairism their unions had good policies on a range of issues.

These included support for a minimum wage, re-nationalisation of the utilities and defence of equal opportunities.

However policies tend to stay paper. The paid union bureaucrats were not willing to lead a fight against the employers' offensives.

In many cases union leaders were attacking internal democracy. STA members said that NUT General Secretary, Doug



A united left across the whole of the trade union movement could generate an alternative pole of resistance.

McEvoy, had completely undermined a vote by conference representatives to hold a ballot on strike action, saying it was first necessary to consult members on the issues.

McEvoy's ballot papers were nevertheless accompanied by publicity stating that action would not work and that the conference had been hijacked by left wing militants.

Delegates agreed that it was high time to start fighting back against the employers' offensive and the collusion of the bureaucracy. A united left across the whole of the trade union move-

ment could generate an alternative pole of resistance. Common themes could be explored and mass campaigns in defence of working class interests could be built.

After a further meeting in April a joint statement will be issued. It is also planned to hold a fringe meeting at the TUC and an open conference in the autumn.

Michael Eve

The other side of Scott: Labour and arms

Adam Hartman

WHILE THE Tories squirm at Scott's revelations of double-dealing, incompetence of lies Labour postures as beyond reproach.

But the outrage from Labour's front bench over the Scott Report sits uncomfortably with the fact that it was a Labour government which first licensed the export in 1978 of Hawks to Indonesia when the genocidal campaign of the Indonesian armed forces in East Timor was at its height.

Support for East Timor from many party activists and some MPs, contrasts with a leadership which continues to be

compromised by strategic, commercial and diplomatic considerations.

While expressing concern at human rights abuses by the Indonesian regime, they use the official secrecy cloaking arms contracts to argue that they lack sufficient information.

Indonesian atrocities are well-documented by Amnesty International. What more do they need to know? Do they intend to honour secret arms deals signed by the Tories?

They say that only once in office will they make decisions on individual countries within the framework of general arms trade policy, taking human rights and UN resolutions into account. But this did not stop Robin Cook call-

ing for an arms embargo against Nigeria.

The refusal to make a commitment leaves a Labour government with a get-out clause when big business and the mandarins in the Foreign Office and MOD turn on the heat.

The arms trade is central to the effort of Britain's ruling class to project its influence across the world, both because it finances military development, enabling Britain to match or surpass its imperialist rivals and maintain its supremacy over the "Third World", and because British arms are used by client regimes in pursuit of British strategic objectives.

This is true in Turkey, where British

arms are used against the Kurds to keep the resource-rich region "safe" for British investors, and likewise in Indonesian-occupied East Timor and West Papua.

Blair's craven support for the arms trade should be no surprise. Every Labour government has supported Britain's position as a world power.

However, the Scott Report gives internationalists a chance to exploit the contradiction between rhetoric and reality and tear the party away from its equivocation on arms to Indonesia. Now is the time for a political hammer blow for East Timor in the Labour Party.

200 attend SLP launch in Wales

Dafydd Evans

OVER 200 people attended the Cardiff launch of the Socialist Labour Party.

Speakers included John Willock, a community councillor from Llanelli, Lynn Cromie of NUCAPS, Bob Crowe of the RMT and Arthur Scargill himself. Each speaker repeated the same false arguments. Ditching Clause Four means Labour is no longer socialist. In truth Labour has never been socialist. Second, that the only way to fight Blair is to leave Labour. The delight many Blairites showed at Scargill's departure is evidence that this is untrue.

Scargill never issued a clear call to organise while he was a Labour mem-

ber. Had he done so, a broad, united, left might have emerged.

Scargill's most significant statement of the evening was that policy on Wales and Scotland would be decided by the respective committees of the SLP. It is clear that the SLP in Wales will contain widely diverging views on many aspects of Welsh politics, such as the Welsh Assembly.

The party will establish some presence in Wales. The Labour left must respond by promoting key political issues such as the Assembly, the minimum wage and opposition to anti-trade union laws. We must set the political agenda in Wales and win back left activists who turned to the SLP and Plaid Cymru.

Labour left network gets organised

Pete Firmin, Officer, Socialist Campaign Group [supporters' network]

On Saturday February 17 about 120 Socialist Campaign Group supporters from the North of England and Southern Scotland met for a conference in Carlisle.

It brought together trade union positions in the area as well as councillors, MEPs and PPCs and rank and file members. General discussions on the problems facing socialists in the Labour Party and prospects under a Blair government were supplemented by more detailed workshops on work-

ing in the unions, campaigning and socialist economics.

Comrades from Barrow reported on a witch-hunt against four councillors and a branch for opposing cuts by the Labour Council.

Inevitably, the Socialist Labour Party came up in discussion, though the option of joining it was rejected as ducking out of the coming fights. Overall, those who attended felt it was a very worthwhile day and are looking to build on the links that have been made.

• A Southampton Socialist Campaign Group meeting of over 150 heard Tony Benn speak on 'Principles or Power'. Over £100 was raised for the Liverpool dockers. Benn then spoke at a meeting of 100 at Eastleigh.

Crunch on the post

RECENT disputes within the postal service have centred around two inter-related issues, delivery standards and the employee agenda. The crunch point is arriving fast.

Union negotiators have broken off discussions on delivery standards and are about to recommend industrial action. The issues are protection of full-time jobs within delivery, and maintenance of the second post.

Management seeks to concentrate mail in the first delivery to cut down on second deliveries and duties, effectively reducing jobs.

The "employee agenda" involves a major internal restructuring of pay and working conditions by the Royal Mail.

Royal Mail hopes to buy off union opposition to teamworking by offering a reduction in the week by 90 minutes and guarantees on jobs.

Another concern is the introduction of personal development profiles. These could be used as a future basis for internal job selection, weeding out so-called trouble makers.

All these measures would attack and undermine the union's strength. There is a London meeting on March 2 to discuss them, despite the opposition of Alan Johnson, CWU general secretary.

The CWU looks destined for a national dispute that would be a successful challenge to management's anti-union offensive.

Ann Gowan

Women's world-wide fight

Women are at the sharp end of moves the world over to restructure the world of work—whether it be through the introduction of the market into Britain's Na-

tional Health Service or in the free trade zones of the countries of the South.

The gains of limited control of our fertility won through bitter struggle are under attack from church and state alike.

But the traditions that led to International Women's Day at the turn of the century are not dead. Women are fighting back both in our own name and as part of broader movements for workers rights.

French women build mass action

Penny Duggan

On November 25 1995, the day after the start of the general strike in transport, over 40,000 people marched through Paris in defence of women's rights. In several other cities, those unable to get to Paris because of the strike organised impromptu demonstrations. While the "old feminists of the 1970s" were clearly at the demo, all the media noted the mixed nature of the demonstration, in both gender and generational terms.

The demonstration was called in defence of the right to abortion and contraception, for women's right to work, for real equality between men and women and against the new moral order.

It was supported by a broad range of social and political organisations—from women active against violence against women, young women's groups and organisations of immigrant women to trade unions and all political organisations from the Socialist Party leftwards.



Over 40,000 people marched through Paris in defence of women's rights

This broad support and the unexpectedly large turn-out also reflected the new spirit that developed in the strike movement of last November and December.

It is not yet possible to meas-

ure the long term effects of that movement. Certainly the demonstrations called as a follow-up by the FSU (national teachers' federation) on February 11 were far from reaching the size of those of December. The

other unions (particularly the CGT) did very little to mobilise for them.

However, as the effects of Juppé's measures begin to bite, activists who considered the December strike movement to

have only been 'suspended' may well return to the streets.

But the success of the November 25 demonstration cannot be understood just in the context of the overall political ferment.

It was also the fruit of the work of the Coordination of Associations for the Right to Abortion and Contraception (CADAC) which was behind the original call.

CADAC was formed in 1991, following the first "commando attacks" by anti-abortionists on abortion clinics in France.

These attacks, organised by a series of Catholic fundamentalist groups whose links with the French far right are also well-known, usually take the form of occupation of clinics with the commandos chaining themselves to the beds and praying.

Hospital managers were often reluctant to press charges and on the rare occasions these attacks did come to court, sentences were very light (suspended sentences and fines at most).

CADAC was formed by the small feminist organisations still active along with the Family Planning Movement, which in France has both an institutional

Zones made for super-exploitation of women

Jodley Green

BRITAIN'S politicians on both sides of the house look for inspiration to the economic miracle of South-East Asia. US businessmen hope that Mexico's free-trade zones opened up by North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) will bring salvation in the midst of economic crisis.

Alongside efforts to forge protectionist trade alliances that can weather the intensity of international competition, the slogan of the rich and powerful is free-trade and more free trade.

Export Processing Zones (EPZs) across South-East Asia offer foreign investors the opportunity to super-exploit an almost exclusively female workforce. Investors don't have to pay tax in the EPZs, nor do they worry about red-tape or human rights legislation.

Women's labour comes cheap, with the added advantage that women possess "natural subservience" and "a high tolerance for boredom" according to Philippines Department of Trade advertising.

Preferring to employ single, childless women, factory owners in the Phil-

ippines EPZs make potential recruits have a virginity test.

Those factories that employ married women insist that they take contraceptives and take part in "population education".

Women who work in the maquiladora plants in Mexico's free-trade zones tell similar stories. "Most plants require a woman to present a doctor's certificate testifying that she is not pregnant.

A good number of maquiladoras offer the women, or even demand that they use, oral contraceptives or contraceptives by injection.

Yellow unions sign agreements about working conditions behind the workers' backs, establishing clauses like the worker's obligation to inform the company of her pregnancy".

Chu Yue, a Taiwanese worker in the Kaohsiung EPZ has been sewing labels into garments at a rate of 300 per day for the last seven years.

She explains "It gets really frantic when a large order comes in. Supervisors walk around the machines, quickening their pace when they want us to work faster. Others set the pace by clapping their hands".

Mandatory overtime is a fact of life, as are penalties for failing to meet quo-



Demonstrators led by Bolivian Workers Refederation (COB)

tas.

The safety of the workers is the lowest priority for free-traders world-wide. In the Mexican maquila industry women handle chemicals and solvents without safety equipment.

They are subjected to high noise and heat levels, fast production lines and toxic waste from the plants being dumped in the shanty towns where they

live.

Nine hundred women in a Sri Lankan EPZ were recently poisoned by leaking chemicals. The Japanese-Sri Lankan company claimed that the poisoning was caused by 'collective sabotage' refused to pay hospital bills and sacked half of the affected women. Blair's comment that Japanese investors are not worried about the social

chapter because "They already treat their workers decently" is despicable.

In Mexico there is growing discontent, spurring organisation of maquila workers, community members in the polluted shanty-towns around the plants and, since the adoption of NAFTA, joint resistance by US and Mexican trades unionists.

Despite no union, no strikes policies operating in most EPZs, the Manila-based Women Workers' Movement is finding that "Increasing numbers of women are joining the labour movement to fight for a better deal".

The risks are high. Marsinah, the organiser of a strike at an Indonesian-Swiss watch factory was found murdered on the day after the strike. Western investors claim that local factory conditions are a local matter, while raking in the profits.

Nike Inc paid Michael Jackson \$20 million for his endorsement of the brand, about the same as the company paid Indonesian labour to make 19 million pairs of shoes.

The free trade agenda attacks the conditions of women across the world, and especially in the so-called Third World. Against the brutalities of the international capitalists we need international solidarity.

Socialist Outlook 98 • March 2, 1996.

and an activist role.

Unfortunately, the Family Planning Movement recently withdrew from CADAC, although it supported the November 25 demonstration.

CADAC has also won support and continuing participation from a number of unions (particularly outside the main union confederations) and political organisations.

After organising a national conference on abortion and contraception in 1992 which attracted 1,000 participants, it co-organised a European conference in 1994 with the European Network for Women's Right to Abortion and Contraception.

One major victory of CADAC was to force the last Socialist Party government to introduce a specific law in 1993 making such attacks crimes. It had mobilised around the country, each time there was a commando attack, to attract media attention to the trials and support those who did press charges, as it continues to do.

After the presidential elections in 1995, an amnesty for a number of minor offences was proposed, as is French tradition. CADAC opposed any attempt to include the anti-abortion commandos in this amnesty and called a picket of parliament at 24 hours notice, which was supported by all the unions. This was successful.

The situation in France shows how fragile women's rights to control their fertility are even where gains have been won. Contraception was legalised in France in the early 1970s, and thus made "reimbursable" under the social security system, which requires you to pay for your medical treatment and then be paid back according to a fixed rate.

But many of the latest most expensive pills are not reim-



The situation in France shows how fragile are women's rights to control their fertility

bursed.

Abortion clinics do not exist in every hospital, because the so-called "conscience clause" applies in French abortion law. They suffer from lack of resources and staff are often on temporary contracts.

The November 25 demonstration was launched partly to insist on French women's, and men's, determination to defend the abortion law, introduced in 1975, against any attempts to restrict it.

Problems for women in France are wider than questions of abortion and contraception. As elsewhere, women's unemployment, the gap between

women's and men's wages and sex segregation of jobs are still present and showing no sign of diminishing.

Yet France was the country which insisted on the inclusion of equal pay for equal work in the Treaty of Rome in 1957, which founded the European Community. Mainly because equal pay was already in French legislation and they wanted no unfair competition.

France has the second lowest number of women in its national parliament of EU countries. One women's group, the Women's Alliance, including a number of well-known women from the SP, proposes the intro-

duction of a legal requirement for parity in parliament. While this is not supported by most feminists, it has provoked a much needed debate on women's absence from this arena.

Following the success of the November 25 demonstration, CADAC and other organisations plan a national conference on women's rights around International Women's Day 1997.

Women in France are not ready to accept limiting their rights and have shown that even in these "post-feminist" days it is still possible to mobilise. A lesson to be learnt.

Fighting for abortion rights

Jodley Green

ACROSS THE world women are denied the right to control their fertility. They risk their lives, their health and their freedom to have illegal abortions.

Reasons for wanting an abortion vary, but they are all equally determined not to have a child against their will.

Twenty-one year old Suntali Rai spent two years imprisoned in Nepal for having an illegal abortion after being raped. "I was three months pregnant and went to the *sudeni* (midwife), who gave me some herbs and told me to put a sharpened stick in my vagina. I bled and bled... I thought I would die".

Her story is common in Nepal, where women who have had abortions can be charged with murder and sentenced to life imprisonment.

In the fifties Mexico was the destination of many US women—most famously Marilyn Monroe—seeking illegal abortions.

Mexican abortion laws vary from state to state, with women usually having to prove that they have been raped or that the pregnancy is a risk to life. Abortions done for other reasons incur risk of arrest and harassment by the police.

One woman explains, "I became pregnant despite using a contraceptive device. I have two sons and could not afford to feed another child... We were taken by bus to where 'the deed' would be done... On our way home, a blue car without number plates suddenly stopped our vehicle and armed police boarded the bus.

"The journey continued, during which the insults and hitting started. 'Murderers', 'bitches', 'whores', 'sluts', they yelled, accompanying their words with blows."

Many women in Europe, from countries such as Poland, Spain and Ireland (both North and South) travel in order to obtain an abortion.

But when they return they can still be prosecuted. This Spanish woman, who had her abortion in Portugal, said after being sentenced by a Spanish court to six months in prison "I never expected that the judge would give me such a severe sentence.

"We're in 1996, not the 1950s; this Europe, not the Third World; and we're a democratic country, no longer under General Franco's dictatorship. Children should be born from love, not error, and the last word should always be with the woman".

In more than 69 per cent of countries abortion is either entirely illegal or only available in very exceptional circumstances.

Illegal or unsafe abortions account for about 70,000 deaths annually, according to World Health Organisation estimates. Unsurprisingly, most of these deaths occur in the countries with the repressive anti-abortion laws.

The argument for the right to legal, safe abortion could not be clearer. It is a necessity for improving the welfare and freedom of women.

Women in the firing line

With 800,000 women working full or part time, Britain's National Health Service is the biggest employer of women in Europe. But the new market system created by Thatcher's reforms is threatening jobs, pay and conditions, as NHS Trust bosses explore new ways to hold down costs. HARRY SLOAN reports.

WAGE CUTS of £25 to £35 per week were the spark that led to the long-running struggle of 56 NHS support staff, most of them Asian women, at Hillingdon Hospital.

The women were by private contractors Pall Mall, who won the contract for catering, cleaning, portering and sterile supplies services at the large West London hospital.

Although the company was legally obliged to take on the existing staff—some of whom had worked there for almost 30 years—it waited only the statutory minimum of six months before announcing a 'rationalisation' of services involving wholesale cuts in the pay and conditions of its 200-strong

workforce.

Initially 34 women were sacked for refusing to accept the changes: later another 22 were also sacked for rejecting a brutal cut in their already low pay.

With official support from UNISON, the women have been bravely fighting back, and have picketed the Hospital throughout the bitter winter months.

Hillingdon Hospital bosses have cynically turned a blind eye to these scandalous practices by their contractors, and ignored the slump in standards of hygiene as Pall Mall has bused in scab labour from Belmarsh.

Workers have faced the process of 'skill mix review', in which managers analyse just how few qualified staff they feel they could get away with in each department, and seek to make up the numbers with lower-paid, unqualified Health Care Assistants. Numbers of qualified nurses are now declining in the NHS for the first time ever.

Some of the most highly trained (and highly paid) health care professionals, health visitors, face a drastic reduction in numbers as cost-cutting

Trusts and GPs seek to replace them with less qualified—and cheaper—"D" grade nurses.

And if skilled staff are not to be employed, today's lean, mean NHS won't train them either: by 1998 the number of health visitor students will be just 362—less than half the 1991 figure. Nurse training, too is being decimated, with drastic consequences for the women denied vital skills and for the long term future of the NHS.

Nothing matters to today's NHS bosses except the balance sheet

Those staff who have qualified face a new problem: the lack of permanent, full-time jobs. Hospital Trusts, increasingly run like supermarkets, are seeking to use staff on an increasingly casualised, part-time basis making it easier for management to shed workers 'flexibly' without paying redundancy. For the women concerned it means a continual lack of job security, threatens their entitlement to the NHS pension scheme, and makes it hard to maintain any continuity or quality of care.

20 per cent of advertised health visitor posts are now offering only short-term contracts, often as short as 12 months or less. Over 40 per cent of

advertised posts are now part-time.

But for hard-pressed NHS staff, there could be worse to come, in the wake of last year's pay sell-out, which surrendered the principle of national pay negotiations.

One of the selling points of Trust status for many hard-line NHS chiefs was that it offered the opportunity to impose 'local' pay and conditions.

Once Trust managers had indulged in a bonanza of big salary increases for themselves, some began to weigh up the balance of forces between themselves and the health unions in each hospital, and debate whether to make an offer, with or without strings.

Last year's fudged formula guarantees health workers only an average of the local deals negotiated with Trusts across the country: if the management gang up, get tough and call the bluff of the unions, the average increase could be next to nothing.

The lesson for health workers from the Hillingdon dispute is that nothing matters to today's NHS bosses except the balance sheet: unless the unions get organised and confront them, Trust chiefs across the country will fancy their chances of slashing a bit more from the pay and conditions of their staff.

ANC-led government maintains white minority privileges

White whingers call the tune

Charlie Van Gelderen

IT IS NOW nearly two years since the African National Congress won an overwhelming 58 per cent of the polls in South Africa's first "democratic" elections. How has it performed?

From the beginning Nelson Mandela made reconciliation with the former dominant white minority his prime concern.

Recently Jon Quelane the editorial director of Penta publications expressed his misgivings in an assertive article. Reconciliation, he writes, is getting bogged down in sham and appeasement—"appeasement leads to capitulation".

The whites are behaving as if they had won the election "they carry on as if they are still in power, calling all the shots and riding roughshod over the rest with their arrogance and ridiculous pontifications...the ANC's almost obsequious devotion to their every whinge gives the impression that white people are the greatest thing that ever happened to this country".

What happened at a state school in Potgietersrust is an example of this process.

A group of white racists blockaded the school to prevent the entry of black pupils. They were not racists, they claimed, they just wanted to preserve educational standards. This was in direct defiance of the constitution.

What did the government do? Nothing.

Hundreds of thousands of whites, having seen no difference made to their material privileges by the abolition of apartheid are pressing for more and more. And they are getting it.



The deal is done — Mandela wins the elections, the whites run the country

"Preaching reconciliation while millions go begging for food is simply not good enough" says Quayage.

Millions of blacks are still living in the primitive shacks they occupied under apartheid. They are still waiting for the houses and the fuel and clean water promised in the —now forgotten— Freedom Charter.

Shacks are still being bulldozed just as they were in the good old days, leaving thousands of families homeless.

Unemployment is endemic.

Why has the ANC been unable to deliver?

First of all, because it is hamstrung by the power sharing deal which pre-

ceded the elections and the veto which allows a third of the parliament to block any piece of legislation.

This deal was, of course, monitored by South African and international capital.

And there's the rub.

The people have the vote but finance capital still dominates the economy.

Imperialism still holds the country in thrall.

The evils inherited from apartheid will not be finally overcome until the people of South Africa, under the leadership of the working class overthrows capitalism and take the road toward socialism.

Kabul resists Taliban seige

K. Govindan

KABUL RESIDENTS have taken to the streets in recent weeks demanding a halt to the

air and artillery attacks on the Afghan capital by the anti-government Taliban forces.

These self-proclaimed theological scholars are the most recent players

to enter an arena already overcrowded with militia based on ethnic and denominational loyalties.

But they came with bursts of gunfire rather than incantations from the *Quran*—significant considering their avowed mission to disarm other groups and end the civil war.

The latest round of fighting arises from Taliban frustration at the slow pace of transferring power from the Rabbani-Masood government to an all-party transitional administration.

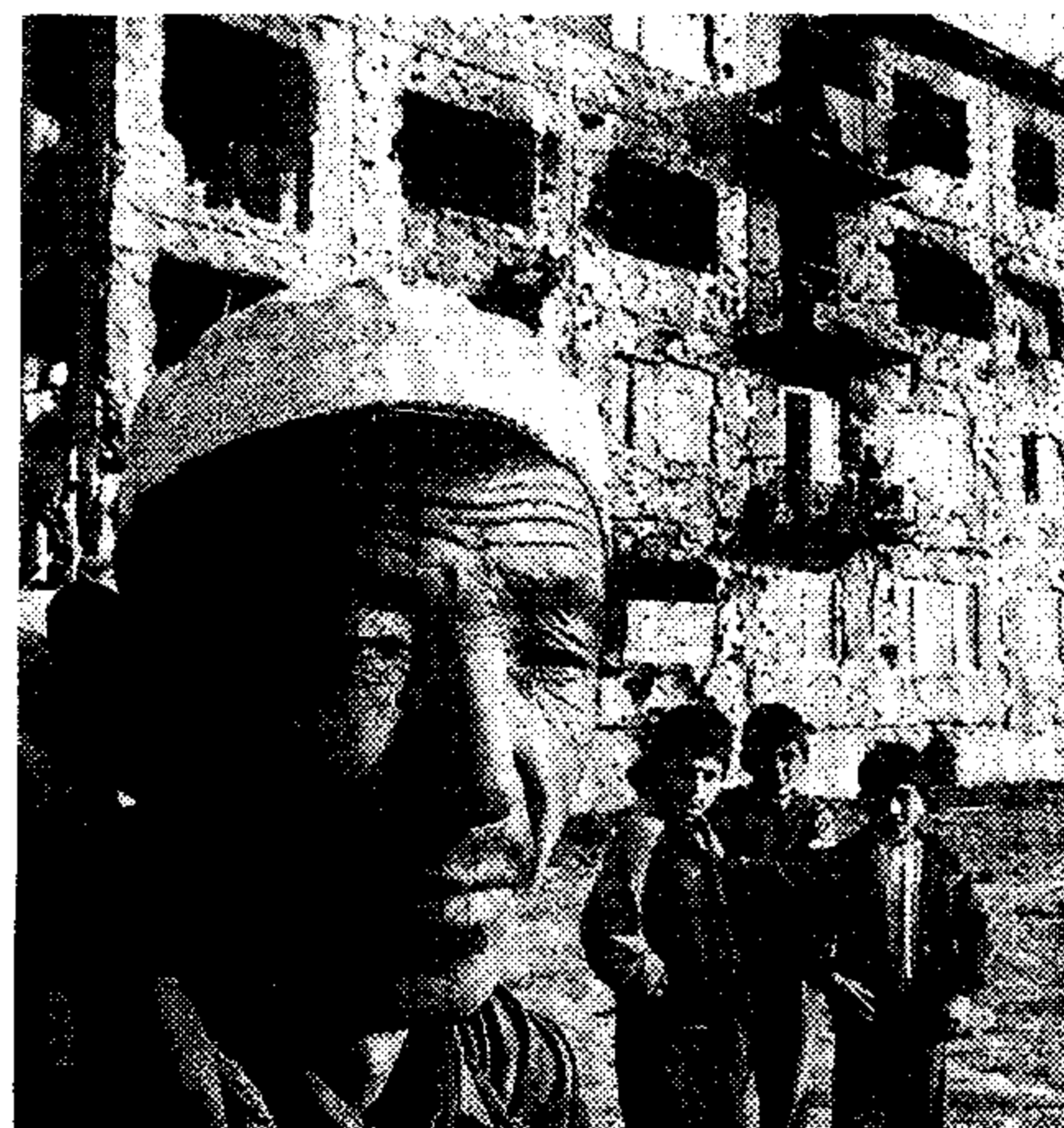
War-weary Afghans had hoped the Soviet Union's withdrawal in 1989 would end the conflict. But it dragged on.

So far it has claimed up to one million lives, maimed hundreds of thousands, and driven more to seek refuge in Pakistan and Iran.

This is no longer a *jihad* waged under the banner of Islam and nationalism. It is a fight for political dominance between competing ethnic militias for the spoils of power.

The Taliban consists of Pashtuns from the south of the country whose kin-folk are the Pashtuns in Pakistan's north-west frontier province.

They are the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, resentful of Tajiks such as Burhanuddin Rabbani and his strong-man Ahmad Shah Masood in the Kabul administration.



Onlooker surveys Kabul devastation

When they gain control of an area they impose harsh restrictions on women that include compulsory wearing of the head-dress, removal of girls from schools and forbidding waged-work for women.

In the north, Uzbek leader and ex-communist Rashid Dostam can count on his allies in Uzbekistan for arms and money. The Uzbek government fears the spread of Islamic fundamentalism.

In the ever shifting sands of Afghan politics Dostam has now made

peace with the Taliban in order to dislodge the current government.

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and some Gulf states are financing the Taliban while the Kabul regime receives aid and military hardware from India, Russia and Tajikistan.

The US wishes to contain the growing influence of Iran in central Asia. As the Iranians back Kabul, the US weighs in behind its enemies.

Imperialism has never minded using Islamic groups when it needs to, despite the hysteria about Islam.

International Viewpoint

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International
VIEWPOINT



Bosnia's Pax Americana

Tahiti:
Paradise and the bomb

France:

Back to 1968?

Confronting the new colonialism

THE G7 GROUP of imperialist leaders will meet in Lyon, France, this June. A counter summit outside of around 20,000 people will discuss alternatives to the global austerity policies of the G7. The Brussels-based Campaign for the Cancellation of the Third World Debt (COCAD) is co-ordinating a World Appeal — "World Bank, IMF WTO: Enough!" — in the months before the Lyon event. To find out more DUNCAN CHAPPLE interviewed ERIC TOUSSAINT, a COCAD staff member and a leader of the Fourth International.

"COCAD STARTED after a public concert and demonstration in Paris of more than 200,000 people in 1989. François Mitterand invited the other six leaders of the G7 to meet during the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution. The counter-mobilisation was a mixture of singers, artists and intellectuals, and social and political movements.

We followed it with an appeal for the immediate and unconditional cancellation of the Third World debt. It succeeded in gaining various supporters at the level of massive organisations, above all in the NGO sector. We have met a very big echo amongst young people. Now we are regularly invited to secondary schools and some colleges.

We make a direct link between the austerity here against public services and the public debt of the state, and again we gained very big support. Behind the public debt crisis in the countries of the North, you'll see the same chronology as for the South. It begins at the end of the 1970s, increases in the



July 1990 London demonstration for repeal of the Third World debt was joined by French socialists

1980s. Debt service payments have been very high since ten years ago.

These debt service payments have many consequences which are similar in the North and the South: privatisations; public sector cuts; sackings in the public sector; the reform, or ending, of the welfare state.

From beginning with the Third World debt, COCAD has made a World Appeal against neo-liberal policies and their consequences in the East, South and North. It took five months to write that little Appeal, because it comes from many people. I finished writing it in Chiapas, discussing it with the Zapatistas.

From the South, COCAD now receives many letters every day: from Zimbabwe, from the Philippines, from India, from Sierra Leone, from South

Africa: really impressive! So from Zimbabwe now we have 20 addresses. We've sent to the people in Zimbabwe the addresses of the others and now they are in contact. We now have been invited to Senegal and we will make a common meeting with Samir Amin, of the Third World Forum.

World-wide, we're in a situation of imperialist and capitalist offensives. Various sectors which are resisting are trying to have some convergence. That something more or less marginal, but significant. Yesterday COCAD staff were in Paris at a meeting of the organisations which are preparing for the G7

summit in June. Fifty-two organisations support the mobilization and that's what I want to show: — there's AC! [the national anti-unemployment campaign]; the anti-racist movements: Fasti, MRAP, SOS Racisme; the NGOs; trades unions like the CGT, SUD, FSU and at the political level the Communist Party, LCR and the Greens and some anarchists.

That's something more or less new. Ten years ago we had big anti-nuclear demonstrations in Britain or Belgium. We've had some demonstrations since then against racism and on other single issues. Now we have some general trend which attempts to derive some general conclusions against neo-liberalism.

We want the cancellation of the Third World debt and combine it with the demand to expropriate what the Southern bourgeoisie, allied to imperialism, owns in the North. We want complete expropriation of what they own here — in the banks, businesses, property and so on — and to give it back to the people.

We must support the struggles of these peoples in their struggle against the bourgeoisie. We explain to the people here that we don't have to expropriate these things in order to repay the Third World debt, but to give it back to the peoples of the South because they need it to apply other types of policies. And we favour the expropriation of the allies of imperialism inside their own countries as the Sandinistas did with the Samoza sector."

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World Appeal against the policies of the Bretton Woods institutions

World Bank, IMF, WTO: Enough!

THERE IS little to rejoice as the international community commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of the Bretton Woods agreement which led to the founding of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the GATT.

The Structural Agreement Programmes imposed by the Bretton Woods institutions to obtain the reimbursement of the debt have led to famine and the brutal impoverishment of the developing world while contributing to the 'third worldization' of the countries in the former Eastern bloc.

While the World Bank's mandate consists, amongst others, in "combating poverty" and protecting the environment its actions have contributed to the dismantling of health and education programmes. Its

support of large scale hydro-electric and agro-industrial projects has speeded up the process of deforestation and destruction of the natural environment, leading to the forced displacement of several million people. In the South and the East hundreds of millions of undernourished children are denied the fundamental right of primary education.

In several regions of the world the brutal compression of social expenditure, combined with the collapse of purchasing power, has led to resurgence of infectious diseases including tuberculosis, malaria and cholera.

The GATT agreement further violates fundamental people's rights, particularly in the areas of foreign investment, biodiversity and intellectual property rights. Several clauses

of the Structural Adjustment Programmes are now permanently entrenched in the articles of the World Trade Organisation. The WTO's mandate consists in regulating world trade to the benefit of the international banks and transnational corporations as well as 'supervising' (in close collaboration with the IMF and World Bank) the enforcement of national trade policies.

In the developed countries of the North, similar socially oppressive economic policies are now being applied. The consequences are unemployment, low wages, the marginalisation of large sectors of the population, and racism.

Social expenditures are curtailed and many of the achievements of the Welfare State repealed. State policies have also encouraged the destruc-

tion of small and medium-sized enterprises.

In the South, the East and the North a privileged social minority has accumulated vast amounts of wealth at the expense of the large majority of the population. This new international financial order feeds on human poverty, the destruction of the natural environment, generates social apartheid, encourages racism and ethnic strife, undermines the rights of women and often precipitates in countries destructive confrontations between nationalities.

The time has come for humanity to forcefully respond and establish a agenda for social change. We the undersigned — citizens, workers, teachers, writers, artists, civil servants, trades unionists, members of Non-Government-

Organisations throughout the world — reassert the fundamental right of people to national economic sovereignty, democratic development and social justice.

We denounce this destruc-

tive "economic model" while reasserting our firm opposition to the interference of the Bretton Woods institutions and the new World Trade Organisation in the internal affairs of sovereign states.

I/We endorse the International Appeal:
'World Bank, IMF, WTO: Enough!'

Name _____

Address _____

Post Code _____ Tel _____

Fax _____ Email _____

Occupation _____

Organisation (optional) _____

Signature _____

Send signatures to 'World Bank, IMF, WTO: Enough!', COCAD, 29 rue Plantin, Brussels, Belgium. Tel 0032 2 5234023. Fax 0032 2 5226127.

Obituary

Ellis Hillman

ELLIS HILLMAN, who has recently died, was both a serious political activist and a unashamed eccentric.

A committed Trotskyist Ellis was a supporter of the Fourth International and a sympathiser of Socialist Outlook.

He was a regular visitor to our offices, making suggestions and comments or criticisms, or to request information. He was particularly interested in the work of Trotskyist groups in other parts of the world.

As Mayor of Barnet, Ellis was proud to be known as London's only Trotskyist mayor.

An expert on Lewis Carroll, he persuaded the borough to mount a major exhibition on Carroll's work, with the indisputable argument that, as far as he knew, Carroll had never had any connection with Hendon!

Ellis was also an expert on subterranean archaeology (an interest that could partly have explained his membership of the Flat Earth Society). His book *London Under London* is the best history of London's underground rivers, sewers, tunnels and services.

Ellis Hillman was due to speak at Socialist Outlook's Ernest Mandel Memorial Rally last October, but had to cancel after suffering the first of the heart attacks that eventually claimed his life. With his death, we have lost one of the most colourful and original talents of the Trotskyist movement.

Charlie van Gelderen adds a few personal memories

I FIRST met Ellis Hillman in the 1950s, when he came to discuss with me about joining the RCP.

He had been, for a time, a student at a Yeshiva, an orthodox Jewish seminary, specialising in the study of the *Talmud*. He did not find the transition from the sometimes vehement theological discussion to the Marxist dialectic very difficult.

He remained a member of the RCP till it was absorbed by Healy's group inside the Labour Party. Healy recog-



nised his talents and he was soon a member of the Central Committee. At that time, the group aimed at capturing positions in the Labour Party. With the group's encouragement, Ellis was elected to the Greater London Council, while I and a few others became local councillors.

When Healy decided to come out of the Labour Party and launch the Socialist Labour League (later WRP) as an independent organisation, this move was vigorously opposed by Ellis and myself. We were of the opinion that there was still work to be done in the Labour Party and that it was both politically and strategically wrong to abandon the positions we had established, especially the control of the Young Socialists.

Ellis was always a bit of a maverick. For the last few years, he belonged to none of the overtly left grouplets, yet he appeared to be everywhere. I remember him trying to act as honest broker when Ernest Mandel came over to try and avert a split between the Militant group and The Week.

He was also something of an eccentric, a founder and lifelong Chairperson of the Flat Earth Society. He was also, for a time, a collector of goldwogs from jam-jars.

When he became Mayor of Barnet, in Thatcher's former constituency, he removed all photos and relics of her and replaced it with a bust of Lenin.

He once took me to his room at the town hall to show me his book shelf. It was filled with official tomes of one sort or another. When swung around on its hinges it revolved to reveal another side entirely made up of his Marxist book collection.

This was typical of Ellis.

Labour's greens face Blairism

Paul Walker

"THE GREENS will become a permanent part of British politics" said Ken Livingstone when the Green Party won 15 per cent of the vote in the 1989 European elections.

"What that means for the left is clear. The Red-Green alliance is no longer simply a matter for West Germany or other European countries. It applies to Britain too."

Livingstone had got it right on the importance of the politics of environmentalism and sustainable economics but got the political form wrong.

This was reflected on February 17 when over 500 people turned up at Westminster Central Hall to the Socialist Environment and Resources Association conference: 'Working for a Green Future - sustainability, full employment and the quality of life.'

The hall was full of labour movement activists, a smattering of Green Party members and significant numbers of youth. Activists from Reclaim the Streets were also there.

The significance of the event was underlined by the political battle between the Blair wing of the labour movement and the old fashioned social democrats who have, it seems, at last started to get to grips with the issue that Livingstone first pointed to while in charge of the GLC.

Joan Ruddock and Chris Smith were on the platform for the front bench of the Labour Party.

What was unnerving about their contributions was that they both made almost the same speech—to the embarrassment of everybody watching. Even down to the same opening line which was to quote Margaret Thatcher who had said during the Malvinas crisis "isn't it nice to have a real crisis when you have to deal with such humdrum matters like the environment".

Throughout Chris and Joan spoke with one voice—that of Tony Blair.

Both speeches were a mixture of Tory bashing and Euro-enthusiasm. Most of it was, of course, intellectually vapid but—if you are desperate enough—believable.

It was left to John Edmonds, wearing his Full Employment Forum hat, to pose a socialist environmental politics as opposed to the liberalism served up by the Blairites.

Edmonds argued that high unemployment had led to a social break down and that this could only be corrected by "a large public sector and a well developed system of public services".

For this "you need planning and regulation" and money spent on health, education and sustaining a quality of



Edmonds: which hat is he wearing?

life for the older generation.

Full employment, he argued, would come from three sectors of the economy, communications, health and education.

At this point Edmonds was well in his stride announcing that Britain needed "a massive infrastructure investment" including water systems and house building (or an improvement in the built environment, as environmentalists would say).

It was left to John Edmonds, wearing his Full Employment Forum hat, to pose a socialist environmental politics

Also needed was a shift from private to public transport. Edmonds went on to explain how the GLCs fares-fair policy had got him out of his car and on to the bus and what a good idea that this had been. He also put a figure on it - £8 billion worth of investment.

At the end of his speech Joan Ruddock was staring at a fixed point in the distance as the conference clapped its

head off to a most unexpected tub thumping speech.

In response to a question from the floor about the transfer of skilled workers from he military to environmental sectors Edmonds completely blew the gaff by saying that 'It will not happen if market forces are allowed to do it for us. This is an area where socialist planning has to take place.' Socialist planning! Ruddock gulped down another glass of water. Conference was left

wondering how market forces were going to create the 'large public sector' that Edmonds had called for.

Edmonds' speech was only outflanked by

that of Jonathon Porritt who, as the last speaker, argued that full employment could only be reached by a cut in the working week, a ban on overtime, a radical redistribution of wealth and a shift of taxation from labour use to resource use. The audience lapped it up.

Is SERA the plaything of Blair and co? Perhaps not. Only its reaction to a Blair government will make it clear.

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"We should give critical support to the CPRF to engage in the struggle of the masses"

Critical Support for CPRF?

NICK DAVIES in the previous edition of *Socialist Outlook* resurrects Tony Cliff's theory of State Capitalism. He treats the stalinist bureaucracy which rules the CIS as a bourgeoisie.

This means he calls for a social revolution within the CIS, instead of the classical trotskyst position of calling for a political revolution to overthrow the bureaucracy.

If the CIS is capitalist how can

you explain why there is going to be a 20 per cent increase in investment on education; the miners are getting all their back pay owed to them over many months; that 4.5 billion roubles is being invested in the mining industry; and that the CIS along with China are reasserting themselves against imperialism?

If the CIS was capitalist all these gains of 1917 would already be destroyed with devastating consequences.

He writes off the battle unfolding in the workers' states as already over—he doesn't see why the majority of the working class voted for the CPRF.

It is because they realise that the battle within the bureauc-

racy over whether capitalism is restored determines dramatically what happens to their whole standard of living. They used them as vehicle to fight for their own interests.

Davies' real position would be abstentionist.

Instead we should give critical support to the CPRF to engage in the struggle of the masses against the restorationists and at the same time utilise the independent working class mobilisations to move it in the direction of political revolution.

The workers moved in a decisive way to defend their social gains which were based on the economic foundations of a planned economy.

This shows that the bureaucracy still remains a parasitic caste, which is a parasitic growth on that economy, which still rules politically over the working class.

The bureaucracy is not a new ruling class. Understanding this is key in forging a revolutionary leadership in the CIS which will lead the political revolution.

If Nick Davies argues that the stalinist bureaucracy is a new bourgeoisie how does his position differ with that of the SWP? He, like them, calls for social revolution instead of *Socialist Outlook's* position, which is political revolution.

Anthony Brain, Birmingham

No to illusions in Evita Peron!

I WAS SHOCKED to read 'Argentina's Evita' in the youth supplement to *Socialist Outlook* 97.

Evita Peron was not, as you suggested, a feminist and friend of working class self-liberation. Peronism was a system of fascist-like repression which, because of the weakness of the working class, could incorporate parts of the workers movement into the state.

Despite her early death Evita Peron's project did not differ from her consort, Juan Peron. I wonder if *Socialist Outlook* will carry an article explaining the Fourth International's opinion on Peronism?

Julian Menear, Haringay N4

What's Happening

February

Thursday 29 Socialist Outlook meeting on State racism, Adelphi pub, Leeds, 7.30

March

Tuesday 5 Brent Campaign Against the Asylum and Immigration Bill. 7.30, Trades and Labour Hall, 375 Willesden High Street.

Saturday 9 National Assembly Against Racism discussion on Asylum Bill. 10am-5pm, York Hall, Old Ford Road, London E2

Saturday 18 Socialists in or out of the Labour Party? Debate between Socialist Campaign Group, Militant and SLP, 7.30, Adelphi pub, Leeds.

Saturday 23 ARA demo, London. Assemble 12.30 Embankment.

Saturday 23 Welfare State Network confer-

ence. Mechanics Institute, Manchester.

Saturday 23 North West Peoples March against Job Seekers Allowance. Assemble 10.30 Cavendish Street, Manchester. Will march to WSN conference.

Monday 25 - Thursday 28, NUS Conference, Blackpool.

Saturday 30 Socialist Campaign Group Steering Committee meeting, Leeds. 1pm

April

Saturday 20 CAIAB demo. Assemble 11 am, Embankment, London

May

Friday 10 - Sunday 12 National Conference of Trades Councils, Kettering.

July

20-27 International Youth Camp, Portugal.

WHAT WE'RE FIGHTING FOR

UP AGAINST mass unemployment, rampant employers with savage anti-union laws, and a war on hard-won public services, the working class in Britain faces a real crisis – an avoidable crisis created by the historic failure of its official leadership.

Socialist Outlook exists to build a new type of working class leadership, based on class struggle and revolutionary socialism.

The capitalist class, driven by its own crisis, and politically united by its need to maximise profits at the expense of the workers, has had determined, vanguard leadership by a brutal Tory high command.

The Tory strategy has been to shackle the unions, and to fragment and weaken the resistance, allowing them to pick off isolated sections one at a time.

In response, most TUC and Labour leaders have embraced the defeatist politics of 'new realism', effectively total surrender, while ditching any pretence of being a socialist alternative. Every retreat encouraged the offensive against jobs, wages, conditions and union rights.

New realism is the latest form of reformism, seeking only improved conditions within capitalism.

We reject reformism, not because we are against reforms, but because we know that full employment, decent living standards, a clean environment, peace and democracy, can never be achieved under capitalism.

Nor, as we argued long before the collapse of Stalinism, could these demands ever be achieved under the bureaucratically deformed workers states and degenerated USSR, whose regimes survived only by repressing the working class.

We are a marxist current, based not on the brutish totalitarian parodies of state marxism, nor on the tame, toothless version of 'marxism' beloved by armchair academics, but the revolutionary tradition of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky.

Our socialist alternative is not based on parliamentary elections or illusions of peaceful legislative change.

We fight to mobilise and unleash the power of the working class to topple the corrupt and reactionary rule of capital and establish its own class rule.

We struggle against fragmentation by building solidarity, to unite the various struggles of workers, the unemployed, of women, of pensioners, of the black communities, of lesbians and gay men, of students, of youth – and of those fighting imperialism in Ireland and worldwide.

Socialist Outlook is above all an internationalist current, in solidarity with the Trotskyist Fourth International, which organises in over 40 countries.

Unlike some other groups on the British left, we do not believe a mass revolutionary party can be built simply by proclaiming ourselves to be one. This degenerates into sectarian posturing and abstention from struggles in the labour movement, playing into right wing hands.

Nor do we believe that the demands of women, black people, lesbians and gays or the national demands of people in Scotland, Ireland and Wales should be left to await revolution. The oppressed must organise themselves and fight now for their demands, which are a part of the struggle for socialism.

But propaganda alone, however good, will not bring socialism. The fight for policies which can mobilise and politically educate workers in struggle, must be taken into the unions, the Labour Party and every campaign and struggle in which workers and the oppressed fight for their rights.

To strengthen this fight we press for united front campaigns on key issues such as racism and fascism – in which various left currents can work together for common objectives while remaining free to debate differences.

If you agree with what you see in *Socialist Outlook*, and want to join with us in the struggle for socialism, readers' groups meet in cities across the country.

Contact us now, get organised, and get active!

Get organised! Contact us now!

- I want to know more about *Socialist Outlook*.
- I would like to sell *Socialist Outlook*.
- Please send me your introductory pamphlet:— 'Socialism After Stalinism'. I enclose a cheque for £1.00 payable to *Socialist Outlook*.
- Send me details of the *Socialist Outlook* Fourth International Supporters' Association.

Name

Address

Post Code

Tel

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

Socialist OUTLOOK

Socialist Campaign for Labour Victory

The next issue will be in a fortnight—March 14. We will then take three weeks to prepare number 100. It will be out on April 4.

THE TORY government's overthrow is the most immediate task of the British working class.

Labour is the only party capable of defeating the Tories. A Labour victory will boost the confidence and combativeness of the working class.

Those on the left who stand apart from or oppose the fight for Labour victory will be marginalised.

But it is not enough just to call for Labour victory or to put out official Labour Party material. The left needs to organise itself and establish its own profile as part of reaching out to all those in struggle.

The Campaign Group call for a Socialist Campaign for Labour Victory gives us this opportunity. It is a crucial political development. It will play a key role in the regeneration of the British left.

It needs to:—
IDENTIFY the key issues;
ORGANISE people inside and outside the Labour Party;
PRODUCE its own propaganda;

ORGANISE public meetings before during and after the general election;

GET labour movement endorsements and affiliations.

This campaign can strengthen and unify the left. We will need every ounce of that strength in the battles to come.

Socialists in the labour



The Labour Party left needs to organise itself and establish its own profile as part of reaching out to all those in struggle.

movement need to win all those who want to fight to the struggle for socialism.

We must wage that fight in the organisations of the class. Labour—despite Blair—remains a party based on the working class.

This said, Labour was never the party of socialism. Only the naïve believed that a Labour government could or would want to achieve socialism.

Anger, frustration and impatience have led some socialists to break with Labour. First Militant Labour and then Arthur Scargill has called for an electoral challenge to Labour.

But success in launching a new

left party would require a high level of confidence and activity in the working class.

Both are still at a historic low point. There will not be a sufficient revival this side of a general election.

A new party would have to break the self-destructive sectarianism of the British left. It would need an open democratic structure and a healthy respect for the various traditions of the left.

Only then would it be able to grow and develop as a healthy political organisation.

The Socialist Labour Party is dominated by a small,

non-democratic circle around Arthur Scargill.

They have imposed a constitution which excludes most of the SLP's natural supporters. This structure is one of the most authoritarian and centralist of any in the left's history.

Excluded from membership or any meaningful involvement in the SLP many of its would-be supporters have been forced to form other formations. The SLP leadership has succeeded in a space of months in demoralising and disorganising the small section of the left that has turned to them.

Scargill's attempt to launch an alternative party of labour is

tragically mis-timed. Its lack of democracy has meant that even those who wanted to build the party are unable to take up membership. This is no way to start a new political formation.

It is crucial that socialists take up the fight inside all the structures of the workers' movement. Despite the leadership's best efforts, it is still possible for the left to organise in the Party.

Reflection

And the trade union link means that any struggles that break out under a Blair led government will find some reflection inside the Party. This is one reason that after the election he will undoubtedly try to break the link.

It is inconceivable that the union leaderships will put up with this without a fight. At the moment the bureaucrats are keeping their heads down in the run up to the general election.

But they have not abandoned their own self-interest. Their position depends on having a special relationship with the Labour Party leadership.

Decisive battles in the labour movement are therefore still ahead and will develop apace after the general election.

The left must organise and position itself now. We must raise those issues which will be key areas of conflict during the next Labour government.

The Socialist Campaign Group's initiative will help this to happen.