

# Socialist Outlook

A monthly marxist review \* New series No. 22 \* February 1999 \* 50p

Labour tightens  
Tory racist laws

Throw  
out  
Straw's  
Asylum  
Bill!



Victims of racist laws: a Birmingham protest at deportation of Shirin and Farida Beigum

Less than three years ago the Tories introduced the racist Asylum and Immigration Act, which aimed at curbing the numbers of people entering Britain to flee persecution and repression.

Labour now intends to build upon the Tories' shameful record, by introducing legislation that will mean:

- Asylum seekers being sent to live wherever the immigration authorities choose,
- no asylum seekers will be entitled to benefits,
- strict limits on the right to appeal against decisions
- giving police and immigration authorities numerous new powers of arrest and surveillance
- those who are thrown

into destitution will be forced to live on food vouchers.

The newly formed Coalition for Asylum and Immigration Rights (CAIR) have called a national demonstration to defend asylum and immigration rights and oppose this Bill.

The demonstration in London on 27 February must be used to start to build an ongoing campaign to get rid of all racist legislation.

Anti-racists must oppose this Bill and demand that Labour repeals the previous racist legislation, and guarantees equal rights for all, rather than creating a category of second or third class citizens who can be locked up indefinitely without committing any crime.



# Motor industry bosses on war path

## A Rover worker

THE BEGINNING of February sees the start of lay-offs at Rover's Cowley plant in Oxford. The two day week is part of the "banking hours" agreement that was voted through at the end of last year.

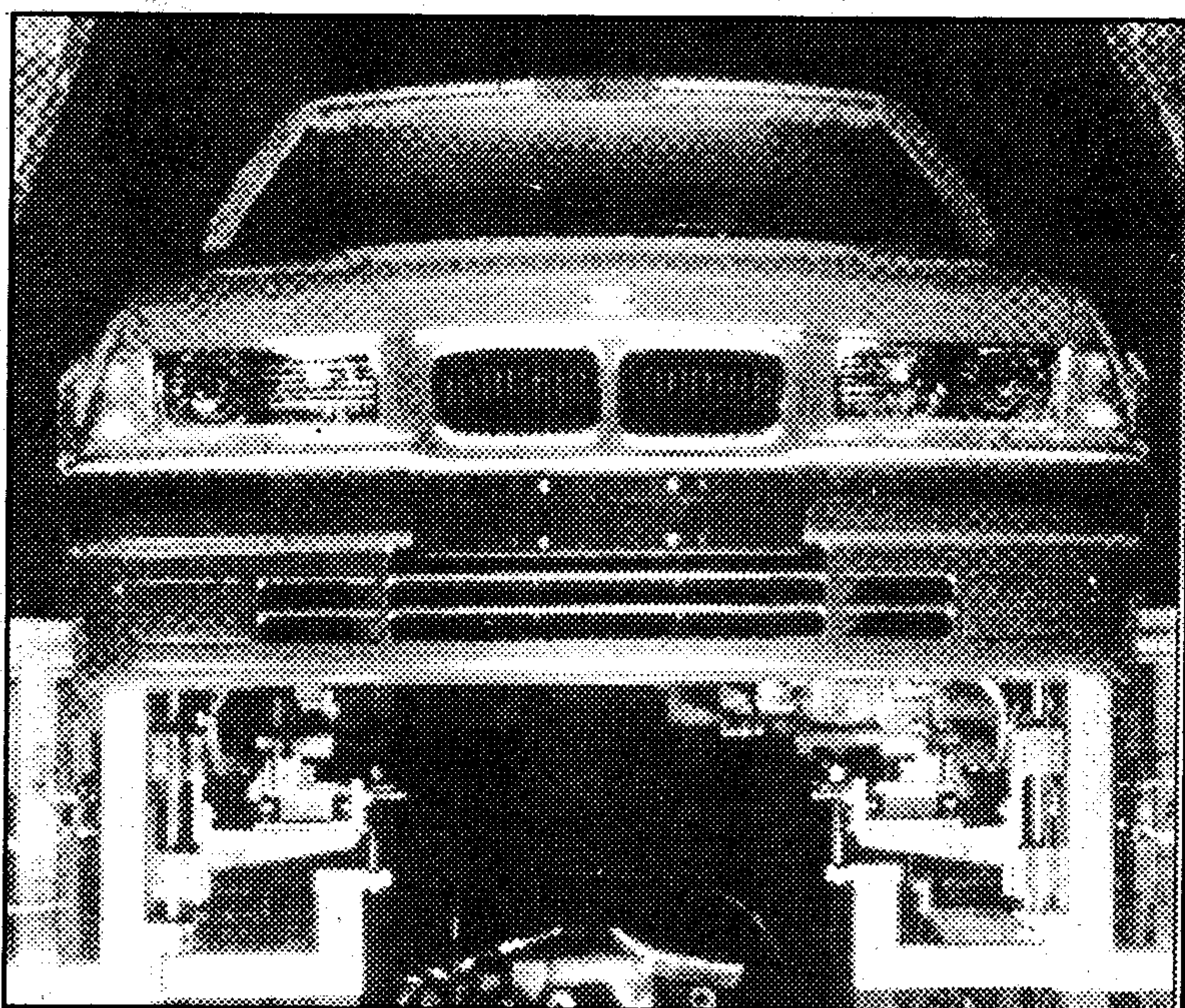
Already its bitter fruits are evident. Longbridge was laid off at Christmas and Land Rover at Solihull has just announced that the same fate awaits its workers.

The aim of the company is to engineer a situation where every worker owes 200 hours, so that when they require it they can use that amount of overtime - unpaid of course.

In this way the company is already making big gains from this agreement. The previous agreement, superceded by the latest deal, would have meant the workers had to be paid lay-off without having to pay the hours back.

Meanwhile workers at Ford Dagenham are facing a three week shut down at Easter on top of the present four day week. Under their present agreement, they are paid. But the company has already indicated that they want a Rover-type agreement. Stewards are clear that they will oppose any attempt to introduce "banking hours".

The biggest danger is from the national officials of the unions. These include Tony Woodley of TGWU who pushed through the



Now Ford and other bosses want to copy the BMW deal

Rover agreement, arguing that it was necessary in order to "save Longbridge".

In reality the future of the site is still in question, despite the agreement, as BMW has threatened to build the 200/400 replacement in Germany unless they get £300 million in government grants. Indeed there is much speculation about the whole future of Rover.

Both of the national union officials covering Ford are saying that it is necessary to do something to "safeguard the long term future of Ford in Britain". This is

the same language that was used both in Vauxhalls and then Rover just before "banking hours" agreements were brought in.

The only way to save the long term future of the motor industry is by uniting workers to fight the employers' offensive.

By offering concessions, we lower standards, setting worker against worker.

The accuracy of this view has once again been underlined by the fact that it is the employers who have grown in confidence since the banking hours deal at Rover, not the workers.

# Sky Chef workers fight unfair sackings

## Susan Moore

The 300 workers sacked by airline catering company LSG Lufthansa Sky Chefs are continuing their battle after being dismissed for taking unofficial industrial action. This is the real face of supposed Fairness at work we are offered by the Labour government.

A mass meeting on January 7 resolved to step up the fight for support from the

broader labour movement as well as pursuing a case for unfair dismissal.

Strikers are pleased that Bill Morris has regularly visited them on the picket line, but frustrated that all donations to the strike are going into the T&GWU's coffers, while the strikers survive on a measly £50 strike pay. This is obviously insufficient to live on - especially where more

than one person may be dependent on it - and also leaves the strikers no resources for publicity and campaigning.

Texas-based Sky Chefs is one of the world's biggest airline catering companies, supplying food to Air France, American Airlines, Cathay Pacific, Olympic Airlines and Iberia.

It is positive that a mass picket has been called for February 1 but the pressure needs to be stepped up to demand that T&GWU workers, whose organisation remains strong at Heathrow refuse to handle food produced by scabs. Whether the Sky Chefs support group, also to be launched on February 1 seemingly under the close eye of regional union officials will help in this direction remains to be seen.

■ Donations and messages of support to: Skychefs dispute, TGWU, Transport house, Uxbridge Rd, Hillingdon, Middlesex UB10 0LY

Visit the 24 hour picket: three quarters of a mile down Faggs Lane, off A30 (nr Hatton Cross underground) Woods, snacks and hot drinks appreciated.

# Attacks on UNISON democracy continue

## Fred Leplat

UNISON branches have now received a circular from the General Secretary about the 1999 conference.

This regrets the relatively small number of branches submitting resolutions, and urges branches to submit some for this year in line with the union's "priorities" - implying that these are determined by someone other than the union's sovereign body. The circular goes on to suggest that Conference should be a "showcase"!

This circular is opening in a roundabout way a debate on the role of the Conference. Some NEC members and senior officials have complained about the expense of Conference and the allegedly limited accountability of delegates.

Some are raising again the view that UNISON should be member "centred" (and officer-led) rather than "member-led".

Even though last year's UNISON conference clearly voted to maintain the right of branches to cam-

paign inside the union to change policy, this is already under attack

Branches are now being advised that if they want to organise a meeting at which other branches are invited, they must now seek the agreement of the regions concerned.

Branches and stewards committees who sponsored the call from the University College London Hospital branch to lobby the Labour Party conference for the Minimum Wage have been requested to submit details as to which body took the decision and of the money spent.

Branches were instructed not to attend a conference on Private Finance Initiative organised by the UCLH branch.

Five motions regarding UCLH submitted for the next London Regional Council have been ruled out of order because of UNISON's High Court appeal and internal disciplinary investigation, even though one did not refer to either the appeal or the investigation.

# WHAT'S ON

## February

### Friday 5

MASS LOBBY of the Department of Transport, the regions and the Environment, Bressenden Place Victoria from 12.30p.m.

### Saturday 6

NATIONAL Civil Rights March "Build an Independent Civil Rights Movement". Called by Duwayne Brooks, Abdul Omby, the Winston Silcott Campaign and many others. Assemble opposite Lambeth Town Hall, Brixton 12 noon for march to Downing Street.

DEMONSTRATION against cuts in Oxfordshire, called by Oxfordshire Stop the Cuts Campaign, Oxford and District Trades Council and branches of UNISON. Assemble 12 noon, Keble Rd and march to rally in the city centre.

NETWORK of Socialist Campaign Groups Steering committee.

DEMONSTRATION against Cuts in Brent. Assemble 12 noon Trafalgar Square for march to Downing Street. Called by Brent Trades Council, Brent Community Law Centre and local unions.

ANTI-RACIST Education Conference organised by Goldsmiths College and Lewisham NUT. 9.30a.m. - 5p.m., Goldsmiths' College, New Cross, London.

### Tuesday 9

OXFORD Socialist Outlook public meeting. John Lister, London Health Emergency on "The Fight for Health and Welfare Services". 7.30 Oxford Town Hall.

### Saturday 13

CAMPAIGNS 99 National Conference, Time for United Action. Hosted by Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance. 10a.m. - 4p.m., Mechanics Institute, Princess St., Manchester.

### Monday 15

LAMBETH Campaign Against Tube Privatisation public meeting "Stop Tube Privatisation". 7.30p.m. Bread & Roses Pub, Clapham Manor Street, near Clapham Common tube.

RALLY in support of Ken Livingstone's right to be selected as Labour's candidate for Mayor of London. 7.30p.m., Central Hall Westminster.

RALLY to launch London campaign for European Elections called by United Socialists Friends meeting House. Speakers from participating organisations and struggles and from French LCR/LO slate.

### Wednesday 17

LOBBY in support of Hillingdon workers. Lobby Granada HQ, 12-2pm, 13 Cleveland Row off St James Street.

### Thursday 18

LONDON Socialist Outlook public meeting. Geoff Ryan on "The Crisis in Kosovo". 7.30p.m. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1.

### Tuesday 23

LAUNCH of new book on Palestinian prisoners Samar Alami and Jawad Botmeh. 6p.m. House of Commons.

### Saturday 27

NATIONAL Demonstration to defend asylum and immigration rights. Assemble 12 noon, Embankment, London SW1.

### Sunday 28

MEMORIAL Concert for Blair Peach. Hackney Empire, London. Acts include Jeremy Hardy.

## March

### Sunday 21

TRESPASS Walk organised by the Sussex Network of The Land is Ours to bolster support for the 2nd reading of Gordon Prentice's Right to Roam Bill on March 26. Meet Brighton station 10.00a.m. Wrap up warm and wear good boots. Bring packed lunch sorry no dogs. Walk up to 6 miles. Contact 01273 620 815.

### Sunday March 28

CIVIL RIGHTS Conference Camden Town Hall

## April

### Saturday 10

MARCH for a living wage. Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Supported by UNISON and 8 other national unions.

### Saturday 17

MARCH AND RALLY for Peace and Justice. "Libya 1986 - Iraq 1999... No more bombings! Lift the sanctions!" Provisionally 1.00p.m. assemble Hyde Park. March to Trafalgar Square for rally at 3p.m. Called by the April 14-15 Commemoration Committee and the campaign Against Sanctions and War on Iraq. For more details 0171 436 4636.

### Saturday 24

NATIONAL demonstration against racism, organised by the Blair Peach 20th Anniversary Committee. Assemble 1p.m., Southall Park, Southall.

## May

### Saturday 1

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

### SATURDAY 29

COLOGNE demonstration of European summit.

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Alan Thornett's first-hand account of trade union struggles in the car industry from the 1970s, with serious lessons for trade union activists today.

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# A formula for even more unfairness

## EDITORIAL

**E**ver since the Labour government was elected, the refrain of the trade union leaders has been the same. When workers

have complained about the bosses' offensive; about low pay, long hours, new management techniques or job losses, the trade union hierarchy has responded, "never mind, our turn will come, we will get fairness at work soon".

When people have been fed up to the back teeth with a health service that is falling apart, with decaying schools, with privatisation as far as the eye can see, the answer is the same. The Labour government will do something for us soon - they will give us trade union rights.

Of course TUC leader John Monks and his cronies pretended to negotiate on behalf of union members. At every step of the way, when the government announced another of its likely proposals they said, no, this is not good enough, our members deserve more.

Expert bargainers that they are, they said, we want more - and by the way, if you make it worse we really will have to do something.

Now with the publication of the ludicrously-titled "Fairness at Work" Bill, the union bosses' bluff has been called.

After trade union rights were effectively destroyed by the Tories, what is now on offer is a cold, tasteless mess of pottage.

But do we hear the top table at Congress House calling for action? Not a bit of it! Rather we are told by TGWU leader Bill

beginning not the end" - despite the fact that Tony Blair has made it clear that there will be no further legislation on this subject within this parliament.

Of course the trade union leaders are helped in their cover up by the employers. The CBI are apparently complaining - so the Bill must be a good thing, mustn't it? Such a knee jerk reaction tells us more about how much the employers have come to expect from New Labour than about the substance of the proposals.

The proposals for "family friendly" policies may be in line with the European Convention on human rights, as Stephen Byers tells us, but they will be of no use to low and even middle income households, because the extra leave entitlements are unpaid.

There is a whole raft of data to demonstrate that existing provision is not used because people can't afford it. Christine Gowridge, director of the

Maternity Alliance, which is leading the parental leave campaign has said that most new mothers already opt to return to work rather than exercise their existing right to take more time off without pay.

On trade union rights as such, the Bill's provisions are toothless.

Morris, for example, that this is "the

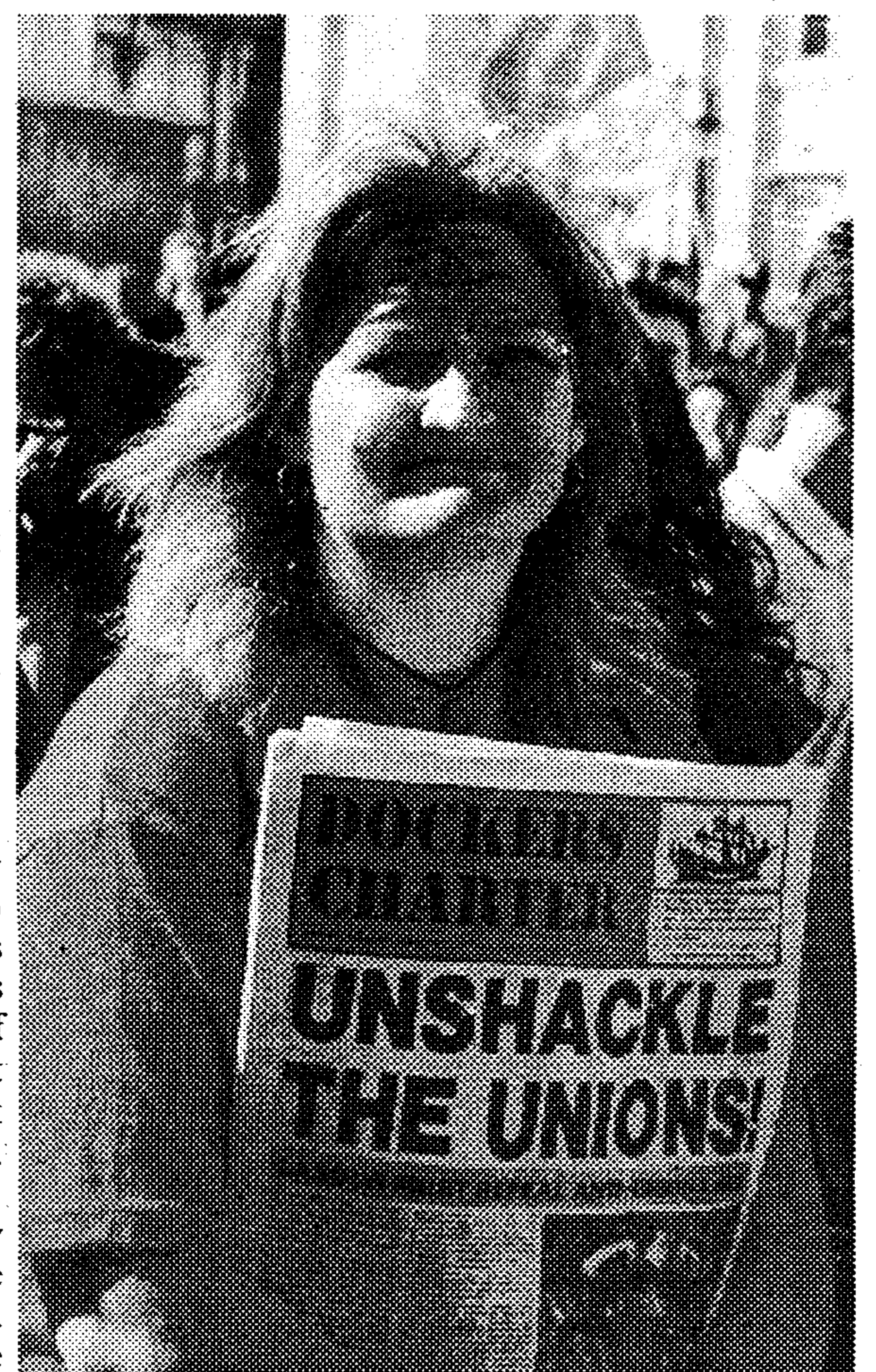
The clause which has had most exposure is the so-called "automatic" recognition of trade unions if more than half the workers in a bargaining unit are union members.

However what has received much less publicity is that the Central Arbitration Committee (CAC) may decide, at its sole discretion, to force a ballot anyway if it decides that such would be "in the interests of good industrial relations", or if they have evidence that significant numbers of union members do not wish the union to represent them for collective bargaining purposes.

The CAC will be appointed by the Secretary of State, and while the legislation sets out that it, and each of its panels, must include representatives both of employers' and employees' interests, experience of such bi-partite bodies like Employment Tribunals does not give much confidence.

Recognition will not be enforced, much less serious negotiations. But even if it were, it is not in these types of provisions alone that serious trade union rights rest.

As Greg Tucker, candidate for RMT General Secretary said: "When it comes down to it, what is offered in this legislation is pretty meaningless. All labour movement history demonstrates that it is only through strong



The early hopes of pro-union reforms have been dashed

collective action that trade unions can win victories against employers, who are driven by the relentless search for profit."

"That is why it is critical to use the space opened up by the debate around this

Bill to push forward with organising for full trade union rights - and demanding the repeal of all anti-trade union laws not touched by this Bill."

That is why Socialist Outlook strongly supports the Reclaim our Rights campaign and the call to make May Day 1999 a real workers' day by building a mass demonstration to demand our rights.

**On trade union rights as such, the Bill's provisions are toothless. Recognition will not be enforced**

**We must fight on, demanding the repeal of all anti-trade union laws not touched by this Bill**

# After Mandelson, Ashdown goes: clear out all the coalitionists!

TONY BLAIR seems to have been one of the first to know Paddy

Ashdown's retirement plans - before the rest of the Liberal

Democrats. This is a good indication Ashdown's priorities.

There has been much press speculation about who will succeed him. Blair is even said to have stated his preference, learning nothing from his failed attempt to influence last year's Labour NEC elections. In a Liberal Democrat Party not entirely convinced of Ashdown's policy of co-operation, any intervention by Blair is bound to produce a backlash.

The debate about contenders for the succession has not surprisingly focused on their attitude to 'the project'. It seems that even the most hostile, like Simon Hughes, have tempered this.

Maybe the opportunity of a seat at the cabinet table has changed some minds.

The Blair-Ashdown co-operation did not go down too well with either parliamentary party. Ashdown had a hard time winning over his party over their joint statement at the end of last year, and Blair recently had to give an undertaking to the Parliamentary Labour Party that there would be no extension of co-operation without consultation with senior backbenchers. Beyond parliament the hostility is greater.

With Mandelson temporarily out of the picture (although no doubt advising behind the scenes), Blair has lost his most vociferous advocate not just of greater co-operation, but of eventual merger with the Liberal Democrats.

Ashdown was apparently lined up for a Cabinet place before the General election. This only became unnecessary (and indefensible to the Labour Party) in the light of the scale of Labour's victory. Instead he was given a seat

on a Cabinet committee on electoral reform, since extended to cover defence and other matters.

Blair has obviously been hoping to gradually draw the Liberal Democrats so far into government that they would barely be a parliamentary opposition, be part of a formal coalition after the next election and eventually be subsumed into 'New Labour' (or whatever else it would be called) to keep it (and Blair) in power for many years to come.

Whether that strategy unravels with the departure of Mandelson and Ashdown (and the hostility of much of the Labour Party to the Jenkins proposals on voting reform, essential to keeping the Liberal Democrats sweet) remains to be seen.

There is another strand to Blair's love affair with the Liberal Democrats. As the exposure of Derek Draper and the power of the lobbyists last year showed, and Paul Foot has continued to expose in Private Eye, Liberal Democrats and ex-SDPers have immense say

in government.

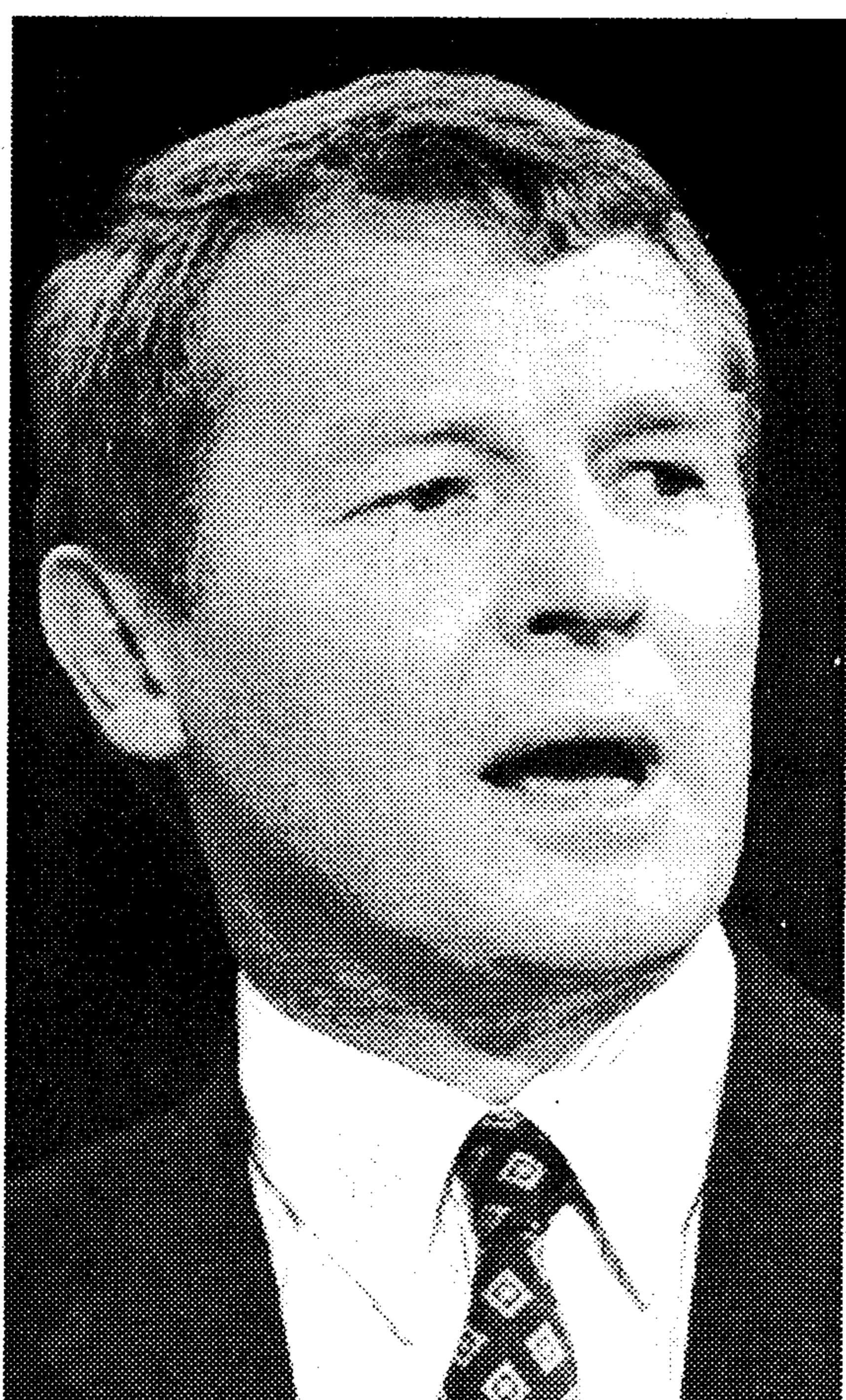
This goes well beyond the large number of them working for Westminster lobby firms who have the ear of government to those working in government policy units.

Former SDP and Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidates advise Blair on economics, Europe, defence and education. This is of course in addition to the Liberal Democrats, SDPers, businessmen and now wet Tories who have been appointed to countless posts by Blair.

While Blair has been working to draw the Liberal Democrats overtly into government, the policy advisers have been working with Blair to ensure the government follows the neo-liberal path, whatever the muted objections of the likes of Prescott.

Socialists should use the demise of Mandelson and the pending departure of Ashdown not only to campaign for the end of the informal coalition at leadership and Cabinet level, but also for the ejection of those still working to keep alive the SDP project of turning the Labour Party into an out-and-out capitalist party.

**Former SDP and Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidates advise Blair on economics, Europe, defence and education**





## Tube workers vote to resume action

Neil Murray

RMT members on London Underground have voted by over 5 to 1 for further strike action over the effects of privatisation.

The ballot result, announced on Friday 29 January showed 2,489 for strike action, 436 against and 3 spoilt papers.

John Leach, RMT executive member for London Underground, told Socialist Outlook "this is a better result than previously, and although it was a relatively low turnout of 49%, this was because the ballot had been held over a short period of 3 weeks in order to have the option of taking action in advance of the first handover of tube workers to a private company on February 14.

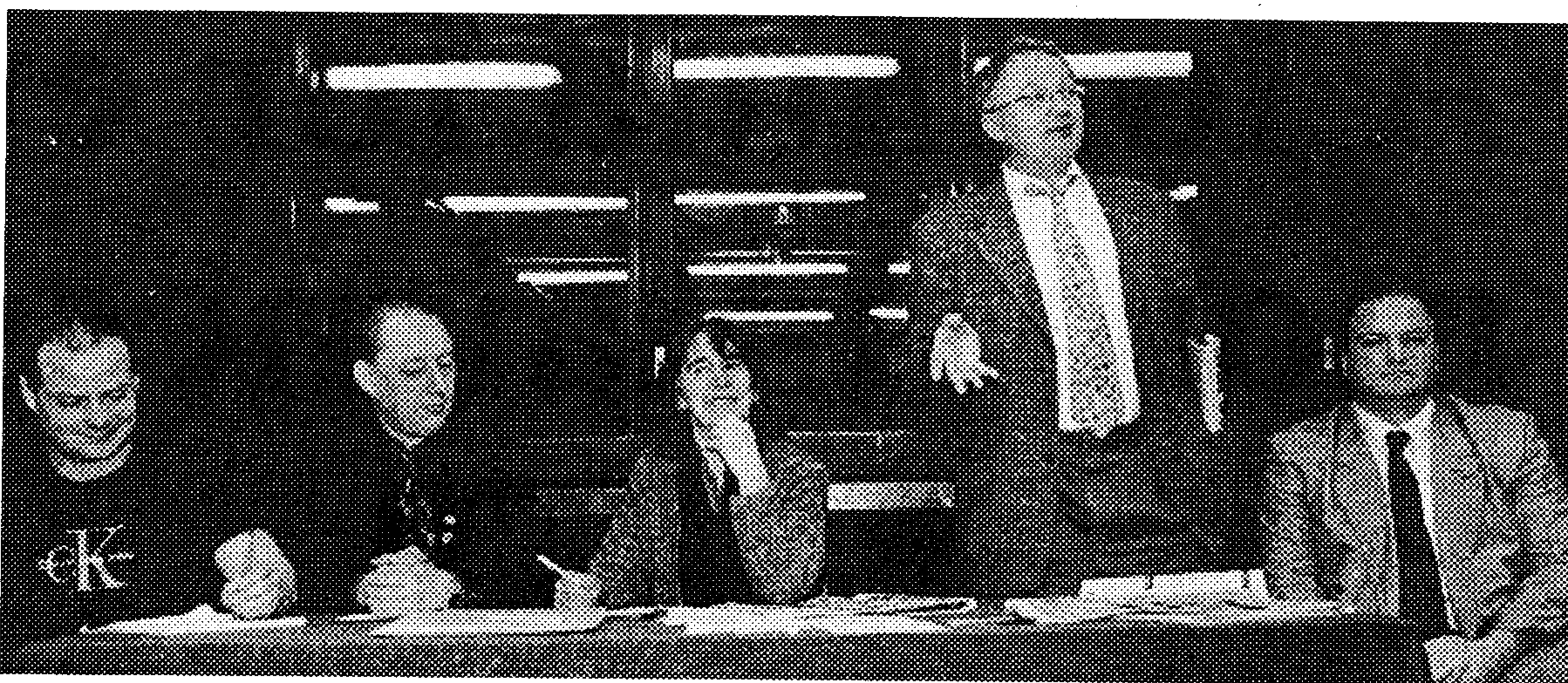
"Although no date is yet set for action, there is a mass consulta-

tion meeting set for Wednesday 3 February, and the Executive will be taking a decision on the afternoon of Thursday 4. We have also informed LUL management that we are available for talks."

The need for the re-ballot came about because the courts declared action planned for early in the New Year illegal. Despite opposition from the left, the RMT executive caved in and called the action off.

It is possible that management will attempt to get an injunction against further action on the grounds that the strike action would be being against a future employer not LUL.

If this happens the Executive and membership will be faced with the choice of giving up the fight or going ahead with illegal action. Greg Tucker, left candidate for General Secretary, points



Bob Crow (right) Steve Hedley (left) and Greg Tucker next to him listen to Ken Livingstone at the Brent meeting

out "If the courts declare this ballot illegal, there will be no basis for re-balloting and we will have to take illegal action."

Under Prescott's "Public Private Partnership" scheme those who maintain the automatic ticket gates will be handed over to Westinghouse on February 14, to be followed later by most non train crew staff. Although the deals are not finalised, different companies will have responsibility for different sections of the Underground, a re-run of the farcical privatisation of the railways. In theory it will all be handed back to LUL after 30 years and massive investment by the private companies, but no-one is holding their breath.

Rather late in the day public campaigning around the issue has taken off, in an attempt to link

other trades unionists and users with RMT members. A central Campaign Against Tube Privatisation meets regularly, and leafletting of tube stations has met a good response.

Brent Trades Council, together with local RMT branches and Brent East Labour Party held a public meeting against the privatisation on 14 January which about 100 people attended, including many RMT members.

Bob Crow, Assistant General Secretary of the RMT spelt out what the privatisation will mean for both users and workers. Greg Tucker pointed out the parallels with the disaster of rail privatisation and the need for railworkers to draw lessons from their failure to prevent it.

Ken Livingstone put the whole issue in a political context. Steve

Hedley, RMT member victimised during the rail infrastructure strike, also drew out the need for fighting trade unionism.

From that meeting a Brent Campaign against Tube Privatisation has been set up. The campaign will be leafletting several local tube stations just before the first handover and on any day of strike action.

It is also organising a lobby of the surgery of local MP Paul Boateng, a member of the government, on February 20 and a street stall on Saturday 13. It will also be supporting the mass lobby of Prescott's office on Friday 5 February and turning out on local pickets at Queens Park and Neasden Depots.

A similar campaign has also been set up in Lambeth, which is holding a public meeting on Monday 15 February with Bob Crow, Greg Tucker and John McDonnell MP.

## Fight council house privatisation!

Glen Vorris, Secretary Merseyside TUC, (in a personal capacity)

SOCIALIST Outlook supporters have taken the lead in resisting privatisation of council houses across the North West. This is after organising a successful ballot against transfers on the Wargrave estate in St Helens last October - the first and only victory in the region so far.

St Helens Council is going ahead with the privatisation despite the 61% vote rejecting the sale of 800 houses. There are plans to carve up the estate in a totally underhand fashion which gets round the ballot results. The ballot prevents the council from forcing tenants to

transfer for at least three years.

This new plan involves: asking tenants to transfer voluntarily to a housing association

Allowing people to stay with the council if they wish, but suggesting there will be no repairs for at least six years

Selling off around 150-200 houses to private companies who will bulldoze them and build private homes

A successful meeting of 50 tenants was held on the estate on January 26 to discuss the council's plans. After a lively discussion tenants these proposals

were unanimously rejected.

Advice is being sought about their legality and ways investigated of taking the council to court for not carrying out repairs. Tenants

agreed to try and unite with council workers to lobby the council in the near future.

Council plans go much further than the Wargrave estate - they have similar plans for all council estates. The need to

unite council tenants and the unions is very pressing. This has been made difficult by the Communist Party leadership of the

The successful ballot result in St Helens has sparked a real mood of militancy across the region

## Socialist Outlook in cyberspace

SOCIALIST Outlook is more than just a newspaper. It also has a growing presence on the World Wide Web. The newspaper itself has a developing site, and now supporters in West Yorkshire have launched their own local site.

West Yorkshire's site provides an introduction to the programme and coverage of 'Socialist Outlook'. It includes links to make it easy for readers to go to the national site and to those of the Fourth International.

It also promotes policies, events and activities "of local activists and campaigners with whom we sympathise or agree". So far this coverage includes material about the Leeds Independent Labour Network and an 'unauthorised noticeboard' for the UNISON branch at Leeds Metropolitan University, fighting the censorship of their noticeboards at work.

Socialist Outlook's main site includes an archive of the newspaper, details of events, and other documents. For example, it carries information about trade union struggles and links to the web sites of these and other campaigning groups. It gives access to an

archive of articles from the paper. Items from the most recent issue go up soon after publication.

These developments give an opportunity to promote our ideas to people who might not come into contact with supporters in trade union meetings or at other local events.

The sites are also a resource for supporters and sympathisers to promote our activities and support our efforts to argue for socialist ideas.

Web sites and e-mails will not replace all the ways we fought for revolutionary socialism in the past.

However as young people come to take these means of communication for granted, and more and more workers have access to the web through work, their unions, in libraries or at home, they are likely to become ever more important.

The Socialist Outlook web site can be found at:

<http://www.labournet.org.uk/so/>

The West Yorkshire supporters site is at:

<http://www.outlook.legend.org.uk/>

West Yorkshire's site provides an introduction to the programme of 'Socialist Outlook'

# 300 Club



## EVERYONE CAN BE A WINNER!

- The SOCIALIST OUTLOOK 300 Club offers readers and supporters the chance to win a £50 cash prize or alternatives each month - for just a £5 donation.
- We get the cash we need to run campaigns and improve the paper - and you get an excellent chance of a bumper pay-out, or the satisfaction of knowing your donation was well spent!
- To join the 300 Club, send us a Standing Order for £5 per month, or drop us a line at PO Box 1109, London N4 2JU, and we will send you a form.
- This month's lucky winners are (3rd prize) Fred Leplat (2nd) Ted Heslin, and the top prize goes to Davy Jones.



# Campaign For A Living Wage Demonstrate in Newcastle on 10 April

**Fred Leplat London Regional Committee, UNISON (personal capacity)**

Not since the fight against council rate-capping in the late 80s, has there been a national demonstration called by major national unions on a central issue facing all of their members.

The demonstration for a Living Wage called by UNISON in Newcastle on Saturday 10 April offers a welcome return to high profile campaigning with serious official union support.

Socialists in the unions and community organisations must start building now as widely as possible for this demonstration. We must use the fact that national unions have been forced to give official backing to make this the biggest protest yet against the failure of the New Labour government to meet the needs of working people who voted for them so overwhelmingly.

UNISON's Campaign for a Decent Living Wage is to protest at the government's miserly offer of £3.60 an hour, and £3 if you are under 21, as the Minimum Wage from 1st April.

The call for the demonstration is simple: "March for a Living Wage. The Minimum Wage at £3.60 an hour isn't enough". UNISON's own policy is for £4.61 an hour, two thirds of male median earnings, without exemptions. Even that would mean only a £184 for a 40 hour week.

A particularly objectionable aspect of the government's minimum wage is the exemption for those under 21. It is a ridiculous idea that someone under 21 is less productive than a 30-year old - or

needs less to live on. A decent Minimum Wage can easily be afforded in a rich country like Britain where there is still money for nuclear weapons and where the top rate of income tax is the lowest in Europe.

Twenty national unions and the British Youth Council are now backing this demonstration. It will be the first open break by the unions with the Labour government.

UNISON is beginning seriously to mobilise for the event which is two months away and has already produced leaflets and posters. Activists on the ground must use this opportunity to create the broadest possible discussion in their workplaces.

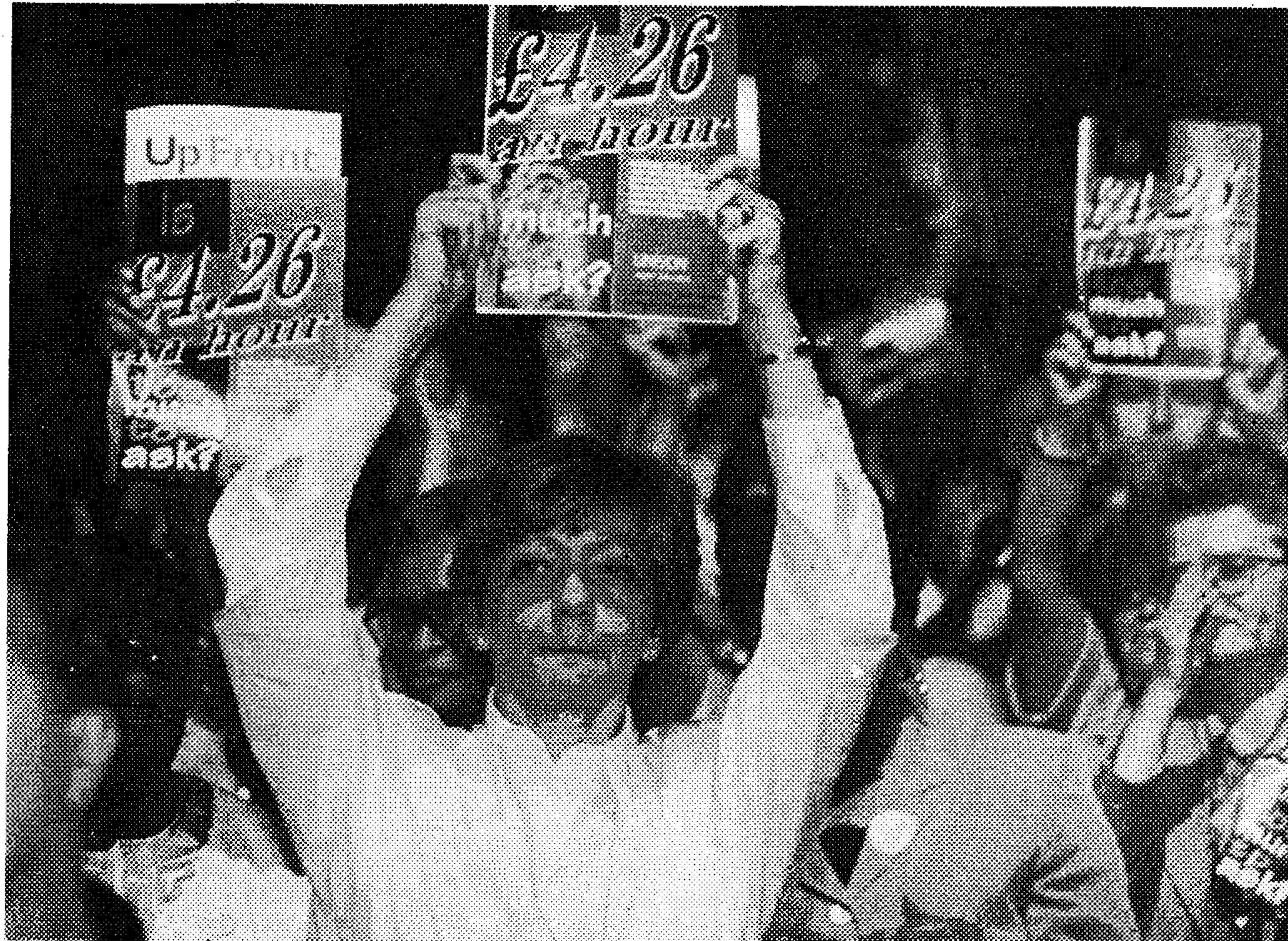
Leaders from unions like UNISON, the GMB and even the CWU, but noticeably not the TGWU, are indicating through this campaign that they want something something more from Blair in order to head off possible rank and file anger against New Labour's Tory policies. The demonstration has been called in Newcastle to cause less embarrassment than it would if it was held in London.

The demand for this demonstration was won by Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic UNISON supporters at last year's annual conference.

Prior to the opening of conference, the Deputy General Secretary made it clear that the NEC did not want any National Demonstration.

The call for the demo was contained in an amendment to the NEC's own motion, but the leadership were so determined to stop this move that they organised to lose the vote on their own resolution!

Eventually, after some fast foot-



Andrew Wigard

work by the left, another motion was prioritised which again called for the demonstration in an amendment. This was overwhelmingly supported by conference.

If militants are successful in responding to this call, a sizeable demonstration will be evidence that there is widespread opposition to New Labour's free market economic liberalism.

No one voted Labour for the continuation of privatisations, cuts in public services, redundancies and low pay.

A massive demonstration could give confidence to union activists and socialists to fight other attacks from the Labour government.

Tenants are fighting the privatisation of homes; London tube workers are preparing for action against the selling of the underground; Students are angry at tuition fees and the abolition of the grant; and pensioners are still waiting for change under Labour.

All these sections of the community should also be on the demonstration to make it clear that alongside trade-unionists, we all want a stop to Tory policies.

## Organise now for the Newcastle demo!

● Make sure 10 April is on the agenda of your next meeting. Book your transport now with other local unions, and pensioners, tenants or community groups.

● Leaflets and posters are now available. UNISON branches and stewards should rush their order to UNISON Communications on phone 0181-854 2244 or fax 0181-316 7770.

● Call the UNISON freephone 0800 096 96 00 for information about the day.

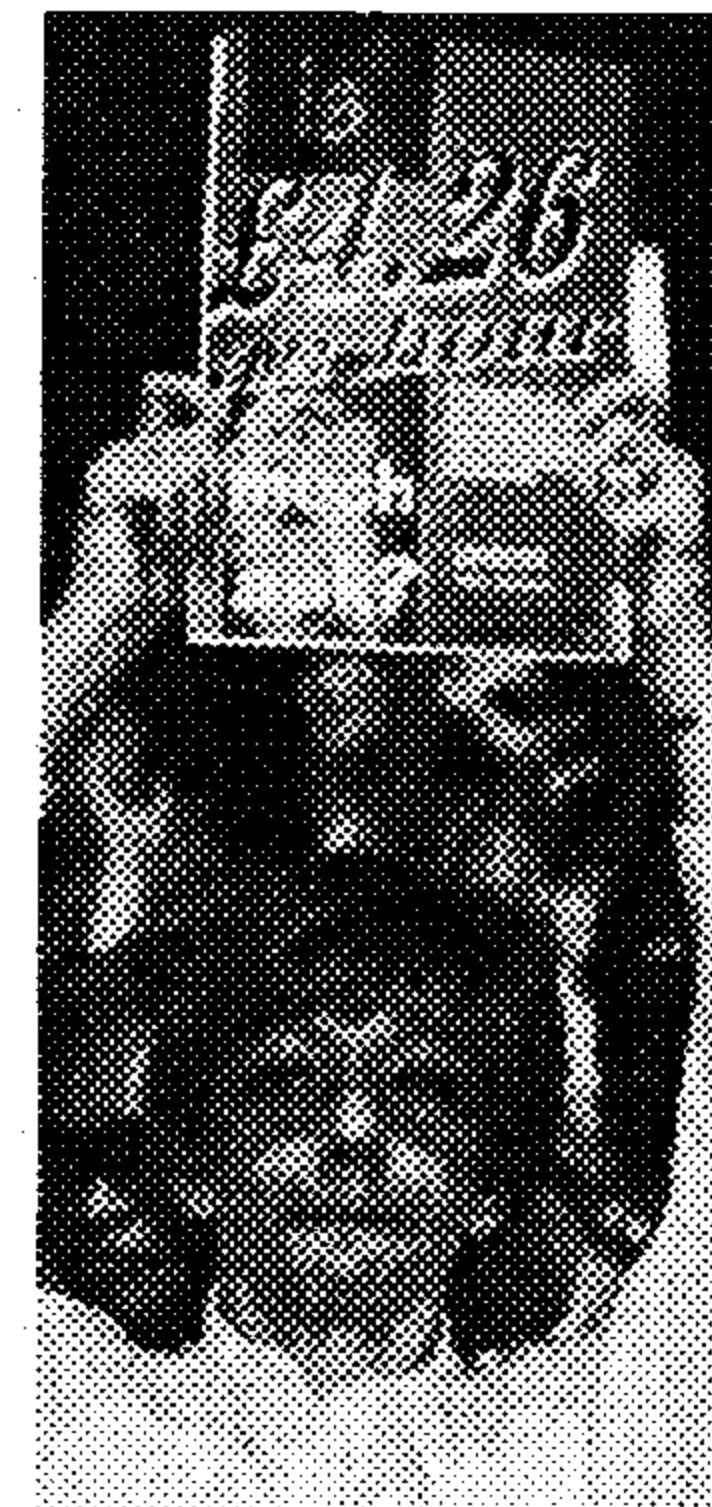
● London UNISON has booked a train which leaves King's Cross at 7am on 10 April and returns at 11pm. Tickets are available to branches for £10 each.

● Organise local demonstrations before 10 April against low paying health or local government employers. For example Redbridge (Labour-led) council is paying some of its manual workers £3.20

● Demonstrate outside local private low paying bosses such as supermarkets or pizza restaurants, and check out the rates for jobs in the local dole office.

● Join the London UNISON events: a demonstration outside the Low Pay Commission (ironically located inside the Dept of Trade and Industry) and a rally with UNISON-sponsored MPs.

● Backing this demonstration: UNISON, ASLEF, AUT, AMO, BFAWU, BECTU, BIFU, CWU, Equity, GMB, GPMU, NAPO, MSF, NATFHE, NUJ, PCS, TSSA, UCATT, NUS, Society of Radiographers, Chartered Society of Physiotherapists.



## Thumbs down to Labour's latest public sector pay foul-up

IT IS TYPICAL of the current government, which has deliberately set out to cock a snook at traditional labour movement values, that even when claiming to remedy long-standing problems they do so by increasing inequality and cultivating elitism.

Last year came the daft, divisive notion of the "super-nurse" and

the "super teacher" as a means of giving extra pay to a tiny handful from each profession, leaving their hard-working colleagues aggrieved and alienated.

Now, with the unveiling of the Pay Review Body recommendations, ministers are floating another package of policies that will leave the majority of teachers and nursing staff fuming.

The decision to award head teachers more than double the feeble increase allotted to classroom teachers will exacerbate the problems of recruiting new entrants to the profession, worsening the current 15,000 shortfall.

The plan to offer an increase of more than 11% to newly-qualified nurses will benefit just one in twenty of the nursing workforce. The remaining 95% of qualified nurses, who are already slogging their guts out for pitiful pay, are promised only a 4.5% pay

increase.

The half-baked plan to entice young entrants to the profession runs alongside the much-vaunted £5m advertising campaign which seeks to persuade trained nurses to return to the NHS and help fill the estimated 13,000 vacancies - but few if any of these will benefit from the 11% boost in pay.

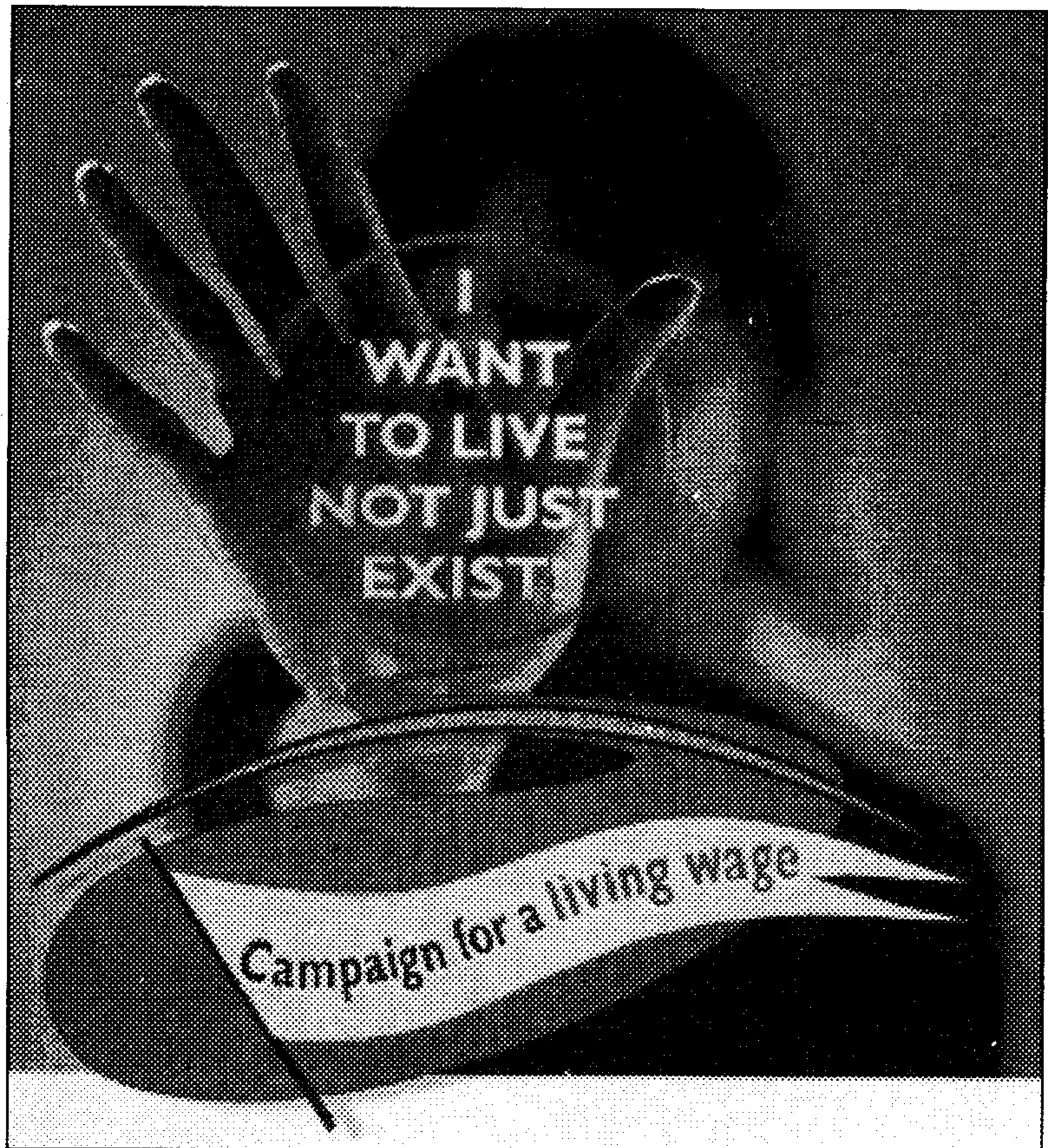
The biggest losers are the nursing staff on the lowest grades - nursing assistants and health care assistants, many of whom earn less than £5 an hour, and for whom a 4.5% increase will barely buy a bag of peanuts.

Half a million other health workers are also likely to face a pitiful increase in response to their claim for 10% or £1,000.

To compound the misery it appears the under-funding of the pay awards will leave Trusts and education chiefs imposing cuts to balance the books.



Wrong again - Dobson





# Dobbo offers a limp response to Viagra rationing challenge

John Lister

**W**HEN Frank Dobson was a hard-hitting opposition spokesman during the 1980s, before New Labour had been invented, he was the leading MP in an active campaign against private medicine under the excellent title "NHS Unlimited".

Since then it has been downhill all the way. Now, a decade later, it has fallen to Frank Dobson as Health Secretary to take new steps to limit the scope of the health service.

In mid January he finally responded to the development of the anti-impotence drug Viagra by spelling out the first formal proposals for rationing and restricting its availability to a small percentage of those who need it.

To make matters even worse, Dobbo, the former scourge of the Tory "two-tier" system, now suggests that GPs could use make use of Tory legislation from 1992 to write private prescriptions for the drug for impotence sufferers who do not qualify for NHS prescriptions but are wealthy enough to fork out £6 per tablet.

Angry GPs point out that as few as 15% of impotent men would meet Dobson's strict five-point criteria and qualify for Viagra on the NHS. And they complain that it is arbitrary and irrational – and even unethical – to treat the same health problem differently according to the factors that caused it, effectively creating a "two tier" system of impotence



sufferers, and distinguishing between "good" and "bad" reasons for erectile dysfunction.

### Depression

Estimates vary on how many men suffer from impotence – a problem which has been understandably under-reported, but which can lead to severe mental distress, clinical depression and even suicide, and which can imperil relationships. Only a minority are expected to come forward and seek the drug.

Many sufferers are elderly, but only the wealthiest pensioners will be able to afford private prescriptions of a drug which could significantly improve their quality of life.

The New Frank Dobson was scathing in his attempts to downplay the misery of impotence and justify his tight-fisted attempts to ration NHS spending: "Impotence is in itself neither life-threatening nor does it cause physical pain," he said.

Maybe. But this is not a formula for health but a recipe for a

long and miserable life. Since medical science has produced a new, safe and effective cure for a debilitating condition, and can now improve the lives of large numbers of mainly older men – and their partners – the question has to be why this particular drug has been singled out as the first to be explicitly and deliberately rationed.

It appears that Dobson – who remains (to his credit) one of the few public atheists in a prudish and Bible-bashing Blair cabinet – has been swayed by the "moral" outrage of the right wing press hinting that NHS prescribing of Viagra would unleash orgies of randy pensioners and its widespread use as a recreational drug at the taxpayers' expense.

If Viagra was a wonder drug to tackle "mainstream" medical problems such as heart disease or diabetes, this type of debate would never have occurred.

This is also why Dobson, and Blair himself, who swiftly endorsed the rationing plan, have chosen wildly to exaggerate the likely numbers who would seek Viagra, and its potential cost to the NHS. Blair claimed that "To spend *hundreds of millions of pounds* on prescribing Viagra on the NHS would not be a sensible use of resources."

But Pfizer, which manufactures the drug, has already seen demand elsewhere peak and

decline, and projects that no more than 50,000 men would seek prescriptions in Britain in the first year, with steady growth to around 200,000 over five years.

### No extra

The initial cost of £12m a year would, on these estimates, be little more than current NHS spending on less effective treatment for impotence.

The danger is that after exploiting the phony "moral" confusion around Viagra to push through the principle of rationing certain types of care, and cynically playing off one type of medical problem against others –

like cancer and heart disease – New Dobbo and his co-thinkers will now spread the net to restrict the availability of other comparatively expensive drugs and forms of treatment, treating minority medical problems (such as Beta Interferon for multiple sclerosis or cochlear implants for the deaf), which in some cases have the potential to destabilise the budgets of under-funded health services.

Of course there are other ways of tackling the costs of innovative medical treatment. Dobson could have used the monopoly purchasing power of the NHS and mounted a concerted effort to force Pfizer to drop the price per tablet of Viagra.

New Labour could implement the long-standing call by social-

ists for the nationalisation of the drug companies or even – in the case of multi-nationals – look towards a substantial turnover tax on their operations in this country.

In a more radical move, Gordon Brown could simply scrap the ludicrous top limit on National Insurance contributions, which benefits only those at the top of the salary scale, and gain an extra £3.5 billion to pump in to health and other public services, eliminating the problem at a stroke.

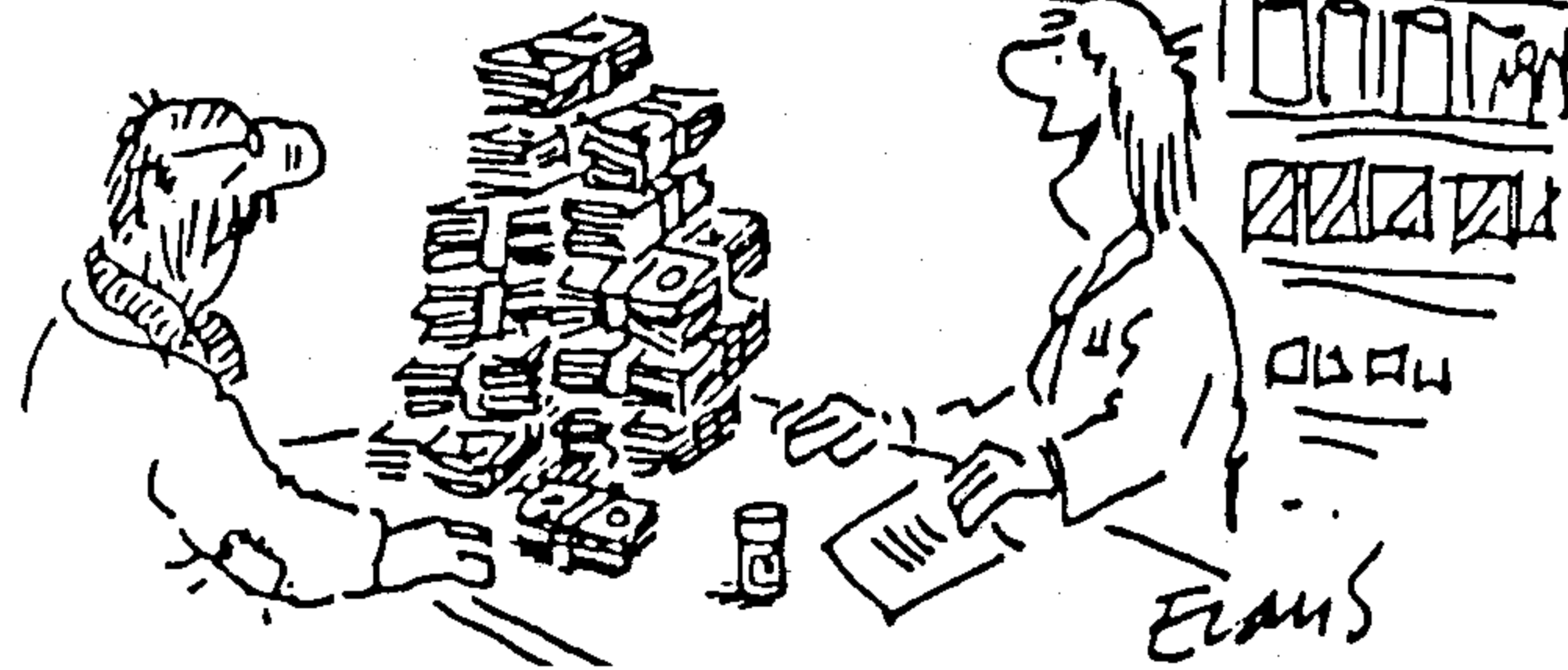
Exploiting the problems of an NHS which lacks the funds, staff or front-line beds needed to deal with peaks of demand for emergency and elective treatment, the vultures of the far right are again circling as they did in the Thatcher years, advocating their well-worn line of private medical insurance and more charging for NHS treatment.

The *Sunday Times* recently editorialised on the headline-grabbing flu crisis by advocating hefty charges to visit a GP, and arguing that New Labour should herd more people down the road to join the minority (one in eight) who are covered by private health plans.

This is similar to the line being peddled by Ann Widdecombe, one of the few recognisable Tory shadow ministers.

With today's spineless and silent trade union leadership, a barely detectable left in the Labour Party, and New Dobbo advocating private prescriptions, we must wonder who will have the nerve to hold the line for a properly state-funded, compre-

~~FREE PUBLIC HEALTH~~



**Frank Dobson used to support the "NHS Unlimited" campaign against private medicine: now he is the man limiting access to new treatment**

## New Health Bill will marginalise hospital workforce

Harry Sloan

**NO LABOUR** MPs have had any prior opportunity to discuss the implications of the government's sweeping reforms in the NHS, which are already being implemented, and will lift off from April 1, even before Parliament's endorsement of the new Health Bill.

The new scheme will place GPs – the least accountable of any group of health professionals – in the driving seat of policy-making, with a token involvement of nurses working in primary and community services.

But despite the fact that hospital staff at all levels are to be systematically excluded from any voice or involvement in the planning of services, while having to suffer cuts

and changes imposed by the PCGs, the plan has been "welcomed" by public sector union UNISON – most of whose NHS members will be stuck on the outside, looking in.

The positive side is that under the new system, GP Fundholding and many of the trappings of the old Tory "internal market" system will be scrapped.

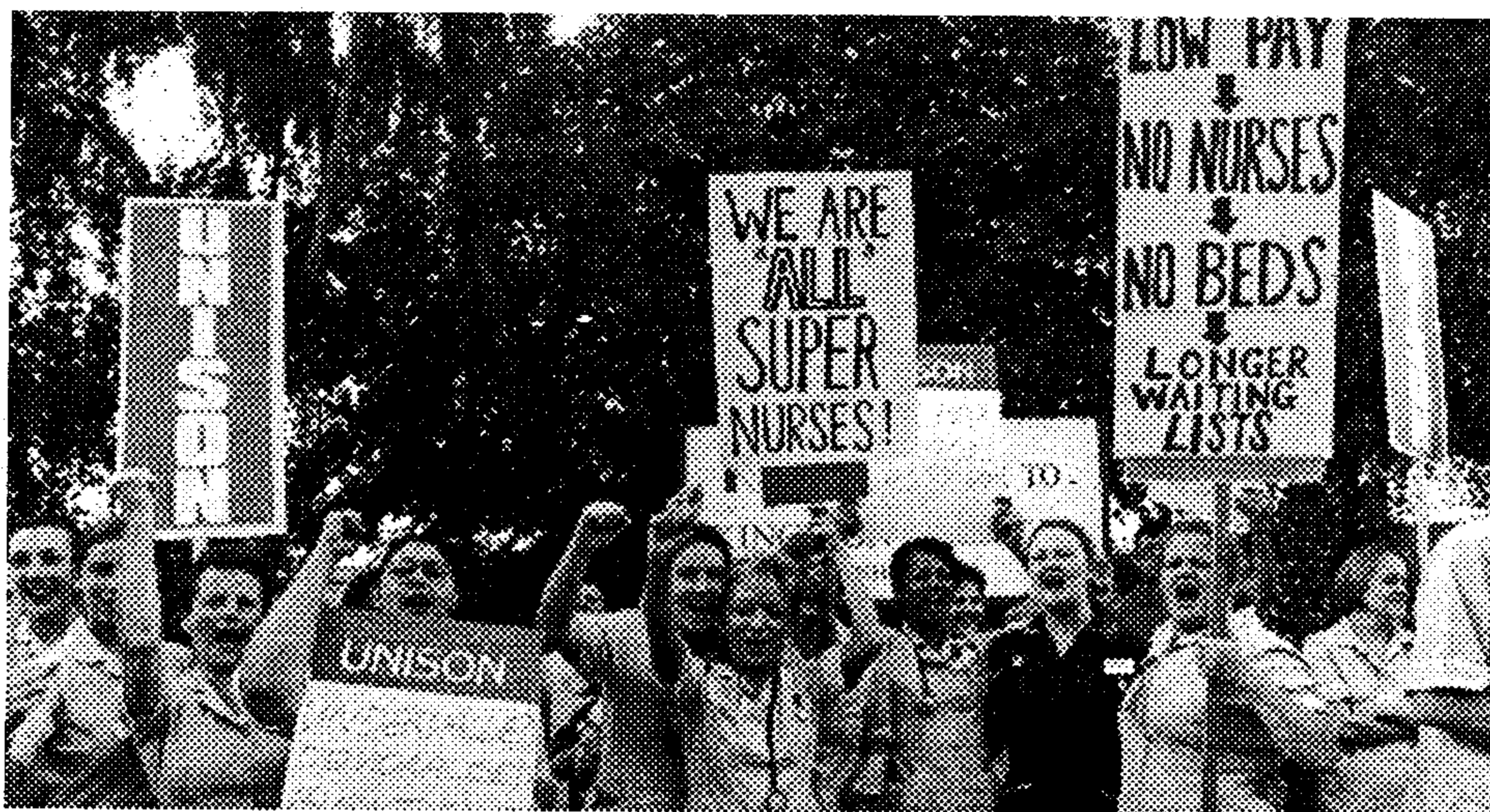
The negative side is that it will be replaced by a system of 481 "Primary Care Groups" (PCGs), which will cover all of the GPs in their locality of around 100,000 population, and increasingly take over the task of planning and commissioning the full range of health services.

GPs have been guaranteed that they can take a majority of the seats on the board of each PCG, as well as the chair, if they choose.

Also on the board will be two token "nurse" representatives, a social work manager, a health authority member, and an "independent lay member" as well as a chief executive on upwards of £40,000 a year. PCGs will have budgets as high as £60-£70 million a year.

Excluded from the new system are any elected representatives of the local community, any of the clerical and support staff who keep GP practices going, and other non-nursing professionals working in GP ("primary care") services.

It is the consolidation of power in the hands of GPs – who have since 1948 steadfastly refused to be employed by the NHS and remain



PCGs open up yet another 2-tier system, with primary care nurses in, but hospital nurses left out

"independent contractors" – which poses the greatest threat to hospital services.

Early reactions by the BMA to the new system focused on efforts to ensure that funding for GP services would be "ring-fenced", and that PCGs would not begin life in April with any cash deficits.

This means that each and every deficit and cutback will inevitably fall on the hospital sector, which Labour expects also to deliver a massive 3 percent per year "efficiency savings".

After months of delays it now

seems that the Millbank machine is set to force this legislation through Parliament with no serious political discussion, counting on ignorant MPs obediently trooping through the lobby.

What a contrast with the storm of debate, protests and meetings which surrounded the Tory health reforms of 1989-90 which first split up the NHS into Trusts.

There will be plenty of time for UNISON leaders – and anyone else who thinks this half-baked plan should be welcomed – to count the cost of their mistakes.



**By Mark Findlay and Pete Firmin**

The government has rightly been under pressure to increase the grant to communities where coalfields have closed resulting in increased poverty. However, they have done so at the expense of some of the poorest boroughs in London.

One of the biggest problems is that 80% of local authority income is from central government grants (the rest being mainly Council Tax). The government has said it has no intention of reintroducing local business rates which might begin to shift this.

Instead it is sticking by the Tory system of crude Standard Spending Assessments (SSAs), while making it clear that it does not trust local authorities with decision-making, and is taking as much as possible away from them.

Brent Council in North West London is faced with cuts of £17.4 million in its 1999-2000 budget if the final grant allocation from central government, to be announced on February 4, is the same as the provisional figure.

This despite the fact that as well as a Labour government, Brent has a Labour Council, 3 Labour MPs, and the MEP for the area is also Labour.

**Grants scrapped**

There are several causes of this crisis. In its wisdom, the government has decided that while the proportion of ethnic minority children under a council will continue to warrant extra grants for education, they have cut it completely for children's personal social services. This is despite all the evidence that language, health and other factors contribute to increased spending.

This cut particularly hits some London boroughs (and areas like Leicester), with Brent, Hackney, Lambeth, Haringey and Newham accounting for £30million of the £40 million cut from London grants for this reason. Brent alone is losing £8.3million, a 30% drop.

Other problems stem from the fact that when the Tories controlled Brent council (until a Labour-Lib Dem coalition took over in 1996) their prime concern was to keep down spending, sell off council assets and keep the Council Tax as low as possible. Apart from appalling services, one result of this is that Brent has spends well below the government's Standard Spending Assessment, supposedly what the government considers it necessary for a council to spend to provide services.

However, the government is proposing a new scheme whereby Council Tax Benefit subsidy is clawed back from authorities which increase their Council Tax by 4.5% or more than their cash increase in Standard Spending Assessment, whichever is higher.

**Penalised**

This penalises any low-spending council which attempts to bring its spending up closer to the SSA, but not high-spending councils which don't increase their Council Tax by much. In addition, the level of clawback grows with the proportion of people on Council Tax benefit, which penalises councils like Brent with high levels of poverty.

Meanwhile, Prescott, the minis-

*While Prescott (below) tries to laugh off the problems his cuts have caused, the Brent cutbacks have united the local population, including these young people who joined the lobby of councillors at the Town Hall on January 29.*



Molly Cooper

**Outrage not enough to beat Brent Cuts!**



ter in overall charge of this shambles, has said that he is abolishing the "universal and crude" capping of Council's spending used by the Tories. This is to be replaced by a totally arbitrary decision to be taken after a budget has been set, with no guidelines.

Despite being the 20th most deprived local authority in England and 13th in London on the government's own figures, Brent's SSA for this year increases by just 1.35%, as against 4.4% for London as a whole, 4.84% for England and 8.5% for an affluent borough like Bromley in south London.

Unlike some other authorities, Brent cannot cushion the cuts by using up its reserves. A major result of the Tories years is that Brent only has about £3 million in reserves, unlike neighbouring Westminster which has £55million.

On January 21 a large and angry meeting was held to protest against the proposed £17 million cut in Brent's government grant.

Over 200 people crammed into Willesden Library to hear repre-

sentatives from the Brent Law Centre and council leader Paul Daisley.

Jamie Ritchie from Brent Community Law Centre gave a graphic account of how the new cuts will come on top of years of low spending from the Tories, resulting in already appalling services.

A desperate housing shortage results from council home sales and the reduction in housing on estates like Chalk Hill and Stonebridge. Ritchie said we should call the cut in children's personal social services grant what it is, a racist cut.

Paul Daisley, leader of Brent council, spoke next and naturally defended the Labour council's record (to howls of rage from the audience!). He described how the Tory council ran the reserves run down, charged high rents and sold some £95m worth of assets. Their general expenditure was below even the mean spending limits set by Tory governments. However he did outline the devastating effect that the further cuts would bring.

He also stated that the main gainers were, incredibly, the wealthy Tory strongholds of Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea, and Wandsworth, although there has been a general shift of expenditure to the North and Scotland.

To roars of disapproval, he (and his deputy) stated their absolute intention to set a legal budget.

Speakers from the floor raised the possible cuts to come - hitting the library service, youth service, mental health and more.

Pete Firmin from Socialist Outlook called for a march to Whitehall, and unity with the other affected boroughs.

There was a large and militant pensioners contingent at the meeting, as well as numerous trade unionists and users' groups.

The meeting overwhelmingly agreed a motion put by the Law Centre condemning the government's cut and calling for a rethink and agreed there should be a demonstration to Whitehall.

Brent's Labour councillors have made it clear they cannot defend what "their" government is doing to them.

**"Fall-back"**

They have been protesting and lobbying ministers, putting forward a 'fall back position' which would mean that the money is cut in stages rather than all at once. They have even called on all three MPs not to support the grant settlement if it comes to a vote in parliament, which has caused a stir because one, Paul Boateng is a minister.

However they are beginning to put cuts through committees in preparation for the budget-setting meeting. Plans include closing libraries, cutting home helps, making 300-500 staff redundancies, and making substantial reductions in grants to the voluntary sector.

There have already been sizeable lobbies of committees discussing cuts, and the Trades Council and Law Centre have called a lobby of parliament on Monday 1 February and a demonstration has been called for Saturday 6 February. An anti-cuts committee is being set up to co-ordinate the activities.

Between now and 8 March when the council sets its budget for the year the demand has to be for the councillors to refuse to pass on the government's cuts - and if the council officers or a commissioner step in to do so, then the councillors should lead the fight against the cuts.

Maximum support has to be built for the workers and users of the services to prevent any cuts going through, including strike action by council workers and occupation by users of facilities being closed.

**Oxford protest at social service cuts**

A SIXTH successive year of cuts imposed by Oxfordshire County Council has served to reinvigorate the local anti-cuts campaign (OSTCC). A demonstration has been called to march through Oxford on February 6.

The lion's share of this year's cuts, arising from Labour's decision to give Oxfordshire the lowest grant settlement in England, will fall on social services, which are already struggling to complete the £5m cuts imposed during the current financial year.

A vocal group of social workers have been attending OSTCC meetings, and spelled out their concerns in a statement to the press:

"The proposed Social Services cuts in Oxfordshire will cause severe suffering to very disabled children and to frail elderly people, and make life impossible for their families.

"The suffering will come from the closure of day centres for the most disabled children and from reductions in help to dress, bathe and feed elderly disabled people living at home.

"The closure of old peoples' homes will also cause considerable distress. The removal of social workers supporting families and caring for children will also be very damaging.

"We frontline social workers hope that the people of Oxfordshire, having learned the effect of these cruel cuts, will agree they simply cannot be made."

Three UNISON branches - Oxfordshire Health, County and Oxford City - have joined forces to back the February 6 demonstration (details p2), which is also supported by the Trades Council, and by City council leader John Tanner, who will chair the concluding rally in the Town Hall.

■ In HAMMERSMITH, UNISON members staged a one-day strike on January 18 to save 100 jobs in the housing benefit office.

■ SHEFFIELD council, stung by campaigners, has banned union meetings on council premises.



**AWL's blatant hi-jack of broad campaign network**

# This is no way to build left unity!

**Jim Beagle**

**L**ONG before the Lewinsky scandal hit the headlines, Bill Clinton was neatly described as someone who would "smile in your face while he pisses down your leg".

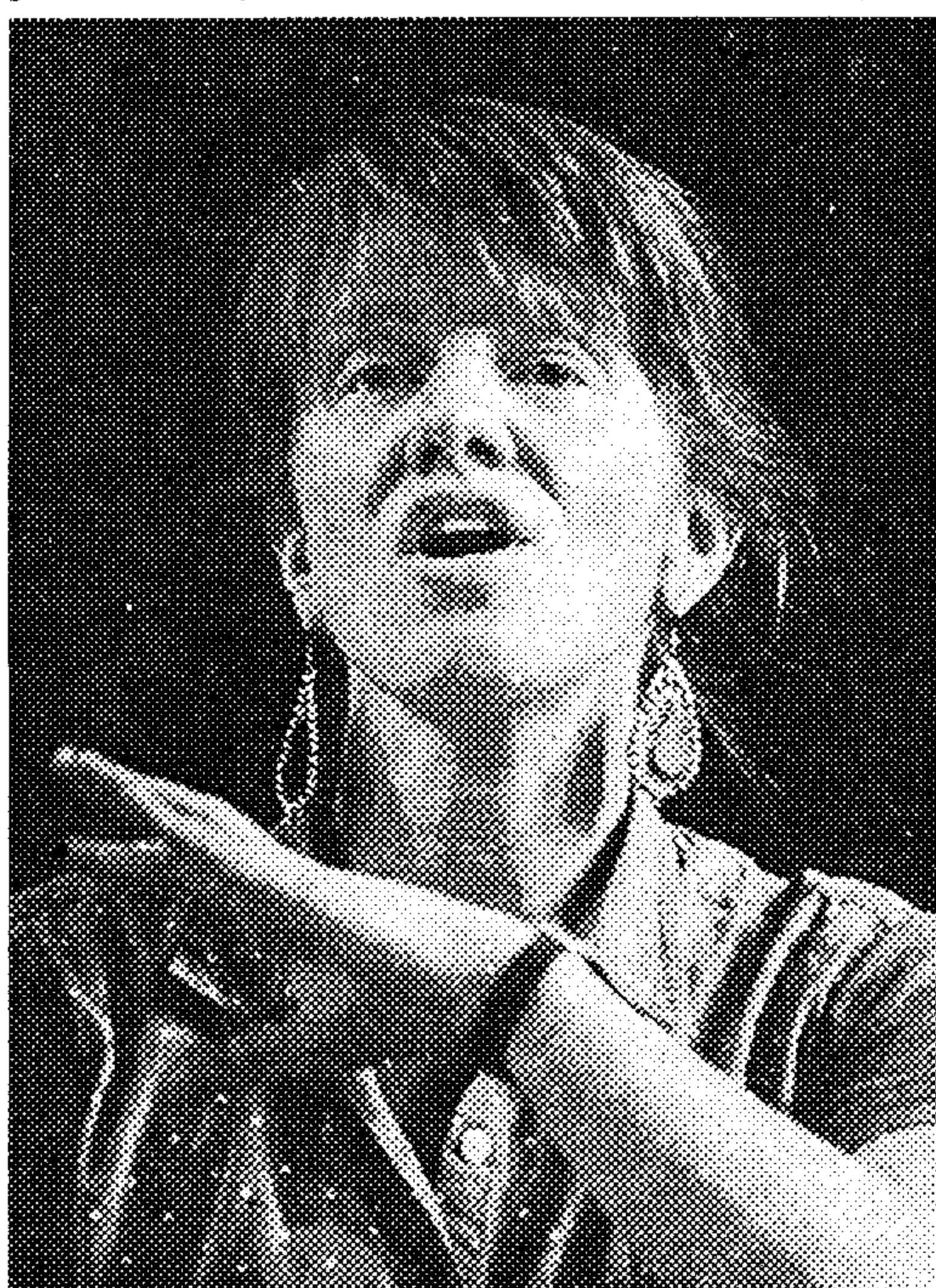
In the small world of British left politics, the equivalent is the Alliance for Workers Liberty, whose long and grisly track record of failure to work for any length of time and with any consistency with other currents is matched only by its succession of proposals for "unity" and for new "broad" organisations.

The one organisation which appeared to represent an exception to the rule of AWL sectarianism was the Welfare State Network. For over four years the WSN managed to operate as an organisation linking activists and campaigns from a wide range of political organisations and backgrounds - including the AWL, Socialist Outlook, Socialist Labour Party, Labour Party, and others who simply wanted to fight back in defence of health and welfare services and benefits.

Although there were a number of political - and even some more major programmatic - differences between the various component currents of the WSN, we found in practice that these could easily be contained within a common organisation which remained focused on the unifying issue of welfare state campaign work.

**I**ndeed it was not differences over political line, but the collapse of trust and the eradication of internal democracy within the Network which eventually brought its demise as a broad campaign.

The WSN itself staged successful lobbies, marches, meetings and protests as well as conferences, and it launched a newspaper *Action for Health & Welfare*,



Jill Mountford: her letter seeks "continued support" for the brand new AWL-run newspaper



1995: The Welfare State Network drew a sizeable audience and a broad platform to its April conference in London

produced with substantial resources from the AWL, but with a degree of "power sharing", with John Lister from Socialist Outlook elected as joint editor, and initially open access to a wide range of contributors.

The newspaper won a considerable degree of respect in the wider labour movement, and helped the WSN develop a base of affiliations in the trade unions.

**H**owever this open regime suffered a setback last year, with the decision to move from monthly to fortnightly publication - one forced through the WSN Steering Committee on the insistence of the AWL.

Although the newspaper still professed the same objectives, the frequency of publication was clearly intended to meet the needs of the AWL rather than match the pace of any objective events or the rhythms of labour movement activity.

Fortnightly publication made *Action* even more reliant on financial, organisational and political input from the AWL, narrowed the range of contributors, and led to the paper being increasingly filled not with the specific campaign-orientated material which had been its early strength, but with general "lefty" political articles on topics unrelated to the Welfare State, largely written by AWLers.

Many of these extraneous articles were in themselves politically contentious, and divisive because they dealt with issues on which there was no basic unifying agreement.

The WSN Steering Committee, too, dwindled both in size and in regularity of meetings, with ever fewer non-AWL delegates attending. By November, the Steering Committee in Liverpool was attended



by just seven people - five AWL, plus the Chair, Alec McFadden (SLP) and John Lister from Socialist Outlook.

That meeting heard Cathy Nugent, the AWL joint editor of *Action for Health & Welfare*, outline a series of proposals to change the paper, including a return to a monthly publication which would focus more closely on welfare state campaigning issues.

She appealed for greater practical involvement in editorial and production work and financial input from the other currents. AWL comrades also stated their wish to launch a new, broad newspaper of the left. It was agreed that after the various participating organisations had been able to discuss these proposals, a meeting of the four WSN officers would be convened in Birmingham in early January to decide any changes.

The January meeting was cancelled at the last moment by the AWL, with no attempt to fix a new date, and has never taken place. This meant that the decision taken in December by Socialist Outlook to respond positively to the proposed changes, and to inject additional funds and human and political resources to the WSN and *Action for Health & Welfare*, could not be reported to the WSN.

**We found in practice that differences could easily be contained within a common organisation focused on the unifying issue of welfare state campaigns**

**Left unity has to start with honesty, transparency, democracy and integrity**

However the AWL was clearly working to a very different agenda. Even while they were cancelling the WSN officers meeting, their comrades were preparing an operation to hi-jack the WSN and its newspaper, to transform it into their so-called "broad" newspaper.

They were ringing round seeking sponsors for the new paper - but consciously not asking the WSN's other officers and Steering Committee.

**I**n mid-January, a new publication, "*Action for Solidarity*", plopped through mailboxes of WSN affiliates and subscribers, accompanied by a letter from WSN National Organiser Jill Mountford - on WSN headed notepaper, carrying also the name of Alec McFadden, who knew nothing of the letter or the new paper - asking people to "reaffiliate to the campaign and subscribe to *Action*".

The letter went on to stress the alleged continuity between *Action for Health & Welfare* and the new (and unilaterally-launched) AWL newspaper:

"We hope that you *continue to support our campaign and Action*. We have over the years developed a broad layer of contributors and readers ... You will see that the first issue of 1999 is redesigned, there will be a number of new columns, 4 extra pages and the paper is now called *Action for Solidarity*. We believe that this best sums up the most fundamental principle of working class organisation ..."

As Tonto says in the joke as he and the Lone Ranger are attacked by marauding Indians "What do you mean "we", paleface?"

The newspaper and the letter are a transparent political fraud. The renaming and redesign of the paper are unilateral decisions *not* of the Welfare State Network, but of the AWL and its political leadership.

As John Lister, announcing his immediate resignation from the WSN - having been ousted as joint editor by the AWL coup - commented:

"Jill Mountford's letter was a sectarian master-stroke. It simultaneously seeks to annex the resources of the WSN for the latest AWL publication, while making it impossible to relaunch *Action for Health & Welfare* as an independent publication."

At no point has the AWL attempted to secure agreement to these changes with the elected leadership of the WSN. Nor have they made any honest approach to other left wing organisations to invite their involvement.

The new paper is not a broad publication, nor any serious effort at left unity or "solidarity", but a cynical hi-jack carried out by an organisation which specialises in such manoeuvres.

As John Lister comments "This latest, absurd, manoeuvre may in the short term secure a few misguided affiliations from union branches or individuals who fondly cherish the illusion that *Action for Solidarity* is still the paper of the WSN.

"But it will NOT build a broad alliance, and it has effectively sealed the fate of the WSN, which can no longer operate in the absence of any basis of trust."

**B**y destroying over four years' collective work in building a serious attempt at a broad campaign, the AWL has now - as many sceptics predicted from the start - reverted to type, contenting itself once more with a tame, sterile, sectarian front organisation pliable to the whims of AWL guru Sean Matgamna, rather than continuing any attempt to link up with wider forces in the real world to influence the class struggle.

It is a special irony, therefore, that this blatant and destructive move should coincide with the

AWL's publication of a special issue of their magazine *Workers Liberty*, with a screaming cover headline "UNITY! How do we get left unity?" Here's a hint, comrades. Start with honesty, transparency, democracy and integrity. If any one of these qualities had informed your organisation's recent antics, we could still have a functioning broad campaign in defence of the welfare state.

John Lister's verdict sums up the demise of what could have been a promising initiative:

"It didn't have to be like this. This is a pointless and a-political-manoeuvre.

"Unfortunately it shows that the AWL comrades still prefer to strut around as phony advocates of "solidarity" and "unity" - and spend their time denouncing or belittling their rivals on the left - than to work constructively or consistently for principled left unity."



# Campaigns 99 - a welcome opportunity

## CAMPAIGNS 99 CONFERENCE

Hosted by Greater Manchester Socialist Alliance

Saturday 13th February, 10am- 4pm  
Mechanics Institute, Princess Street, Manchester

A conference open to campaigners across all issues - workplace, immigration, deportations, low pay, PFI - as well as socialist, green and trades union organisations.

CAMPAIGNS 99 Conference is a contribution to the growing opposition to free market ideology and to the demands placed on people by global capitalism.

Workshops have been arranged under the broad headings: Workplace, Welfare State, Environment, Transport, Refugees, Anti-deportations, Civil Liberties and International.

Opening Speaker: **Dave Nellist, Socialist Councillor in Coventry.**

Registration: **£5 organisations £1 unfunded campaigns**

Sponsors: Kent, Coventry and Liverpool Socialist Alliances, Scottish Socialist Party, Socialist Outlook, Leeds Independent Labour Network, Merseyside Port shop stewards committee, TGWU 6/399 branch, Workers Aid for Bosnia.

### Terry Conway

THE DEVELOPMENT of Socialist Alliances is something that Socialist Outlook supporters have welcomed - as our participation has demonstrated.

Within the Alliances we along with many others have argued that it is important that these Alliances, together with other comparable bodies like the ILN need to promoting active campaigning and organising solidarity with struggles.

We do not underestimate the difficulty of doing this - particularly in a period like the current one where activity, particularly that with a national resonance has been patchy to say the least.

There is no dispute at present which carries the authority and weight of the miners or the dockers strikes, around which people are coming together spontaneously up and down the country.

Struggles are going on of course. At an industrial level there are bitter - and often long standing disputes - at Tameside, Critchley, Hillingdon and Sky Chefs. There are local fights in defence of the welfare state - over health and education, particularly - and



Hillingdon strike: over jobs and NHS against privatisation.

Local battles against deportations and immigration detentions continue, and the Lawrence inquiry and the surrounding publicity has given a new spur to those organising for justice in the wake of racist murders - whether caused by the police and compounded by their indifference.

Lesbian and gay activists cele-

brate what looks like being set to be a final victory over the age of consent and continue to organise against Section 28 and for rights at work.

Ecological campaigners continue to protest at the destruction of the environment through the relentless search for profit.

But most of these, and many other campaigning targets to numerous to mention remain isolated from each other. This has its own dynamic just because lack of information prevents more people getting involved - though that is a real drawback.

More importantly our isolation makes us less confident of the possibility of success - and that is the biggest barrier to much greater numbers becoming active.

There is no doubt that many many of those who voted Labour at the last General Election did so hoping that a new government would lead to a let up in the relentless attacks they had endured under the long years of Tory rule.

Unfortunately on many questions New Labour has continued and even deepened Tory policy which has served to further disheartened many whose organisations had been battered by Thatcher.

Campaigns 99 cannot on its own solve this problem, but it can begin to turn the tide.

That is why it is vital that it is attended by as many activists as possible - but also why it is even more important that all of us make sure we bring with us those involved in the struggles which are going on.

# "We'll fight every inch of the road!"

For nine months protestors have been organising to stop Britain's first toll road, the Birmingham Northern Relief Road, which is unlikely to bring relief to anyone other than the companies who will cream off a substantial profit from its users.

Terry Conway interviews Bobby Macintosh, road protestor

**SO: Why did you get involved in this protest**

BM: I have always been interested in environmental issues and my involvement in this protest developed from that. I decided to move onto site after meeting other protestors, and seeing that they had a point to prove and were proving it constructively.

**SO: Why do you think this road is being built?**

BM: As Britain's first toll motorway, someone somewhere is going to be making big money here, mainly Kvaerner and Autostrada, the two private companies that will be building and running this road. Even though this is a private road, much of the cost (£750 million) will be funded by taxpayers.

**SO: What will be destroyed by building the road?**

BM: This road is to be 27 miles long, much of it countryside, some of it green belt (you know, the thing that holds up John Prescott's trousers).

Two sites of special scientific interest will be extensively damaged and affected. The impact on wildlife through loss of habitat will be enormous and irreparable. 41 homes are going to be demolished - people are being forced to leave them for the benefit of a private company.

**SO: what have you learnt since you have been involved with the protest?**

BM: Through being on site, I have learned a lot about self-suffi-

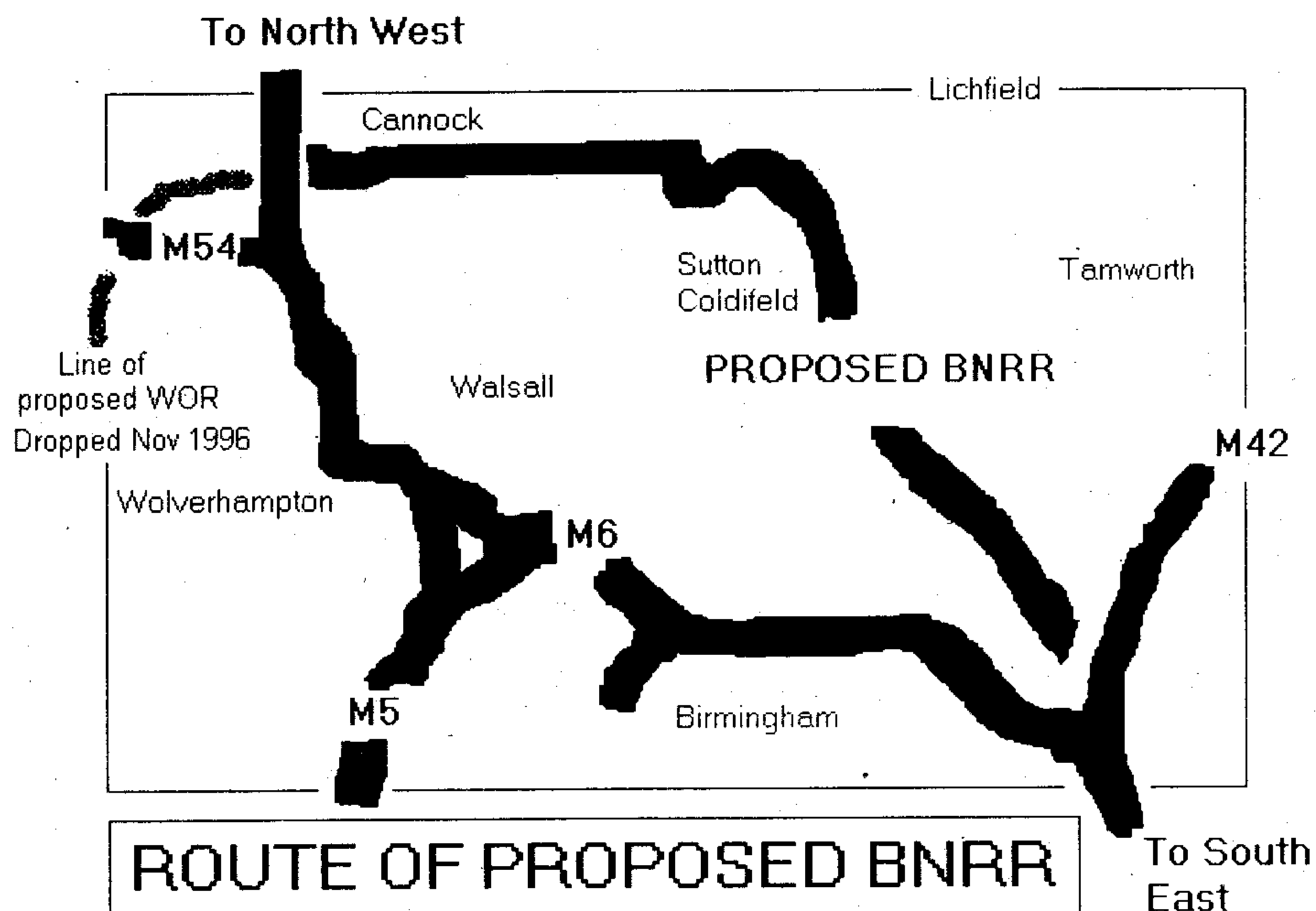
ciency and survival. At first, I was hopeless. I couldn't even light a fire.

I've also learned a lot about squatters' rights, our main weapon being Section 6 of the Criminal Law Act 1977, which applies to dwellings. After 48 hours in occupation, we are in legal possession and have certain rights.

There are 27 miles of this proposed road, and we plan to fight every inch, our site motto being, "if it's got a floor, we'll tunnel under it". The local media described the eviction of the Moneymore squats in December as our "final fight" - far from it!

**SO: What do you say to people who argue they have to drive as there is no public transport and that they are fed up with sitting in traffic jams?**

BM: We do not have a problem with cars as such, only with the way that people use them. We can understand that there are problems with public transport being inadequate and overpriced, and with congestion on the existing roads, but building more roads



ROUTE OF PROPOSED BNRR

that will become giant car parks and cause pollution is no kind of a solution.

It's important to realise that we are not just tree-hugging hippies (honest!) but that ultimately it is the health of future generations that is at stake. Asthma is one obvious problem, along with cancers and other respiratory diseases and problems.

**SO: How much local support do you have and how is it expressed?**

BM: This particular protest has a lot of local support - I have yet to meet someone who is in favour of this road.

It is expressed mainly through donations of food and clothing, provision of safe bail addresses, and taking us home for a bath

occasionally.

**SO: What can people do to help who can't get to visit you?**

BM: People who cannot visit in person can show their support by raising awareness of the campaign - it's important that people know we are still there fighting.

A final decision on the road will be made at a High Court appeal hearing on 23 February. Although we are all hoping for a ruling against the road, we know that there is little if any chance. We are prepared for a long battle.

■ The site is at: The Spinney, Turf Pits Lane, Roughley, Nr Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands. Tel: 07970 301978 or 0831 190825.



# No Justice - No peace

**"Peace is not just the absence of conflict - without justice there can be no peace" - Martin Luther King**

The Lawrence inquiry has marked a turning point in British politics. It has reflected and enhanced a deepening self organisation of black people.

Certainly across London, the campaign of the Lawrence family, and other similar organisations fighting for justice in the face of racial attacks, have called meeting after meeting in packed rooms. People have turned up to demonstrate their determination to fight injustice who have had no previous involvement in organised politics.

The intervention of the black community organising to support the family has forced the police onto the defensive.

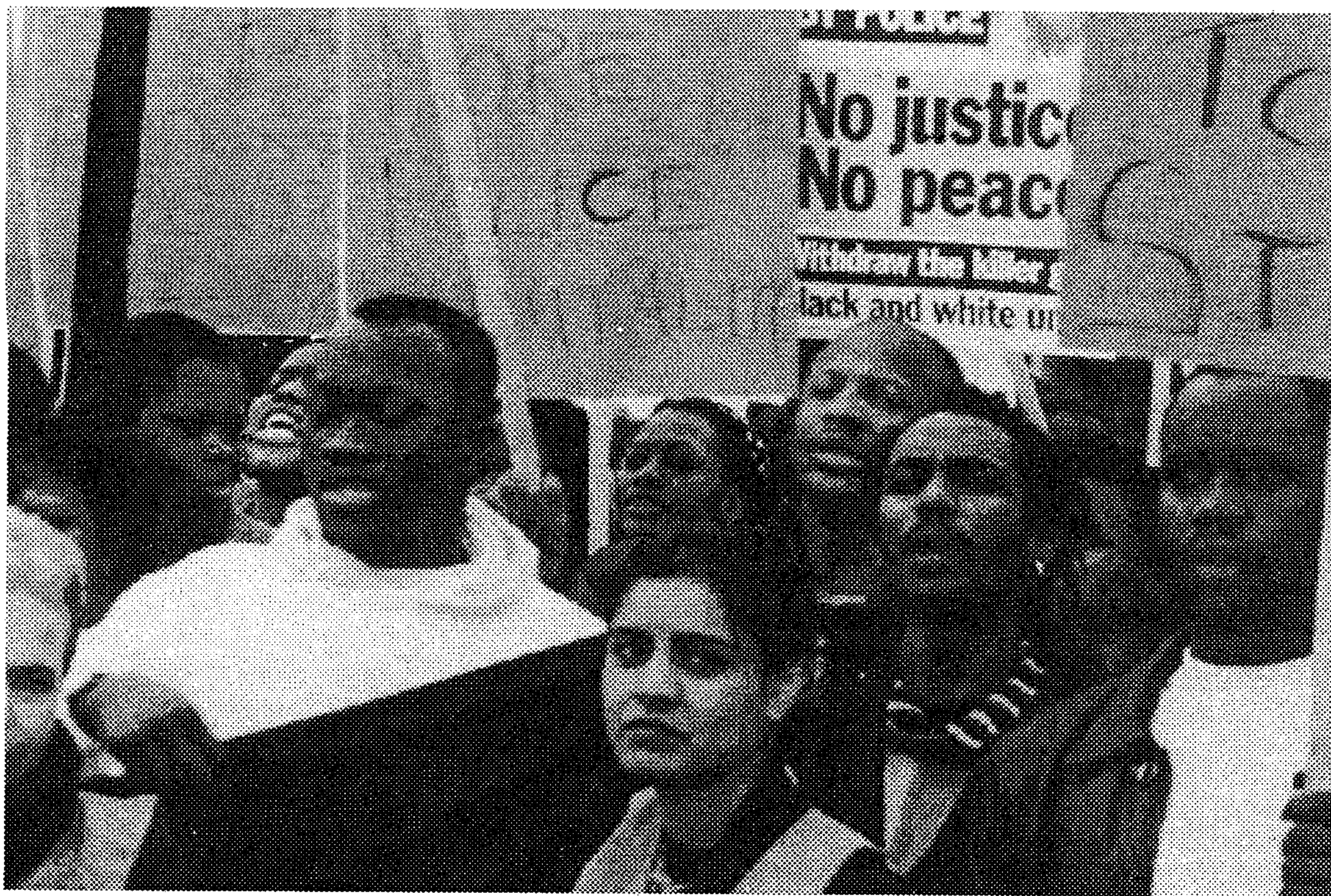
Of course some of the conse-

quences of this have been further racism - as in the demand from the Police Federation that Doreen Lawrence apologise for her remark that perhaps the police didn't give Stephen first aid because they did not want to dirty their hands with black blood.

It is unlikely that when Sir William Macpherson's report is published it will answer more than a tiny proportion of the legitimate demands of the movement.

But the pressure can and must be maintained. There is a real opportunity today to go forward, which has built not only from the family campaigns, but behind them from monitoring groups which have worked on issues of racial violence both from the police and others for long years. It is a moment that may not come again for many decades if we let it pass by.

Suresh Grover of the Monitoring Group, which has worked not only around the Lawrence Inquiry but around other racist



Protestors demand justice after the death of Ibrahima Sey

murders such as Michael Menson and Ricky Reel argues: "The inquiry has opened many people's eyes to the reality and extent of police racism."

"We now have to build on this awareness and develop a civil rights movement which will work together in a united and non-sectarian manner... We cannot expect the Lawrences to lead the movement for another five

years." The development of such a civil rights movement is not separate from the other main task of combating racism today - that of confronting the racist asylum legislation that this labour government is again in the process of strengthening.

Unfortunately some in the Afro-Caribbean community in particular have been slow to recognise

that such laws increase racism against all black people - even those whose families may have lived here for generations.

But a strong civil rights movement with a genuine base across the black community and support from white activists would be a much better forum to debate this issue and develop sustained action against all forms of racism than anything that exists today.

# The Colour of Justice

Susan Moore reviews Richard Norton-Taylor's play about the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry.

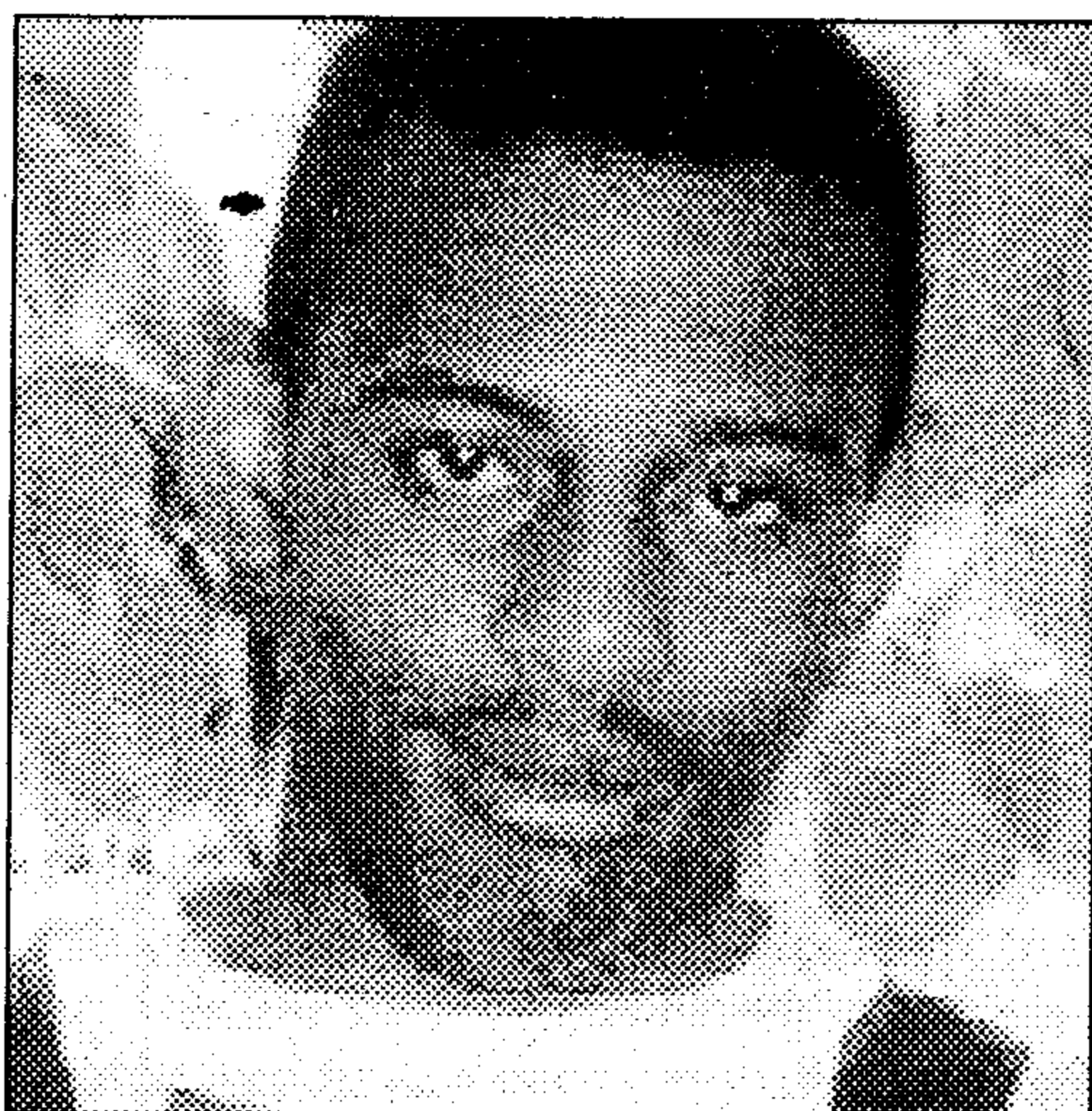
IT IS NOT often that even the most devoted political activists continue a formal political discussion until 11.30pm on a Friday night. It is even more unusual that such an event should take place at a theatre performance - even a theatre that has seen as many progressive events as the Tricycle in Brent, North West London.

After most performances of *The Colour of Justice*, there is a panel discussion in which the issues raised in the play are examined further. When I visited, this allowed the audience to discuss what they had seen unfolding on the stage, but also to exchange information about anti-racist campaigning.

When I arrived at the theatre I didn't quite know what to expect. I had followed the Lawrence enquiry quite closely and knew that the play was entirely based on the transcripts from the 69 days of public hearings. I did wonder if my attention would be held by a performance of more than 2 hours.

During the first ten minutes my doubts grew. The first few presentations seemed somewhat flat and slow, and I didn't hear anything I didn't know.

There were things I warmed to. Neville and Doreen Lawrence were the only characters on stage who didn't have easy access to the huge computers on which all the relevant documents were called up - they had to lean awkwardly to see what was being



Stephen Lawrence

considered. Jeremy Clyde, playing Michael Mansfield, has rather a different build to the lawyer, but when I shut my eyes I could believe it were him, so well has Clyde got off his intonation patterns.

Richard Norton-Taylor had set himself a more difficult task than when he wrote *Half the Picture*, an adaptation of the Scott arms-to-Iraq Inquiry.

While that inquiry certainly dealt with serious issues, their direct consequences were further away from much of his audience. It was possible to deal with many of the characters with somewhat of a lighter touch than in building up a picture of the events surrounding Stephen Lawrence's murder.

On the stage before me, police officer after police officer came forward to give evidence and the themes became sharper. When Norton-Taylor condensed the 11,000 pages of transcript into about 100, he explains that he "set out to include the most telling exchanges, many of which did not hit the headlines at the

time which reflect the interlocking threads which ran throughout the Inquiry - police incompetence, conscious or unconscious racism and stereotyping and the hint of corruption in the background."

Certainly as the evening wore on, I became convinced that he had succeeded brilliantly. It certainly seems impossible to believe that every crucial piece of paper that should have recorded police activity in the vital first

days after Stephen's murder vanished with no human agency.

I had known the facts from the press reports, but they had been strung out. Seeing them concentrated together increased their impact.

I remembered reading about Doreen Lawrence's anger when she gave Detective Chief Superintendent William Illsley, who supervised the murder investigation a piece of paper with the names of the suspects on it and saw him screw it up as if to throw it away.

But the dramatic reconstruction highlights the subtleties in a more powerful way than a newspaper report can.

We see the reason for Doreen's response; the essential contempt of this man for her search for justice. This is underlined by the way he treats the crucial evidence she gives him - denying its significance by folding it time and again into the smallest piece

of paper possible. To add insult to injury he then contradicts her evidence by his pedantic differentiation of 'folding' and 'crumpling'.

But for once we can see what is actually going on, and he is left standing there holding the crucial note in a way that completely validates Doreen's interpretation.

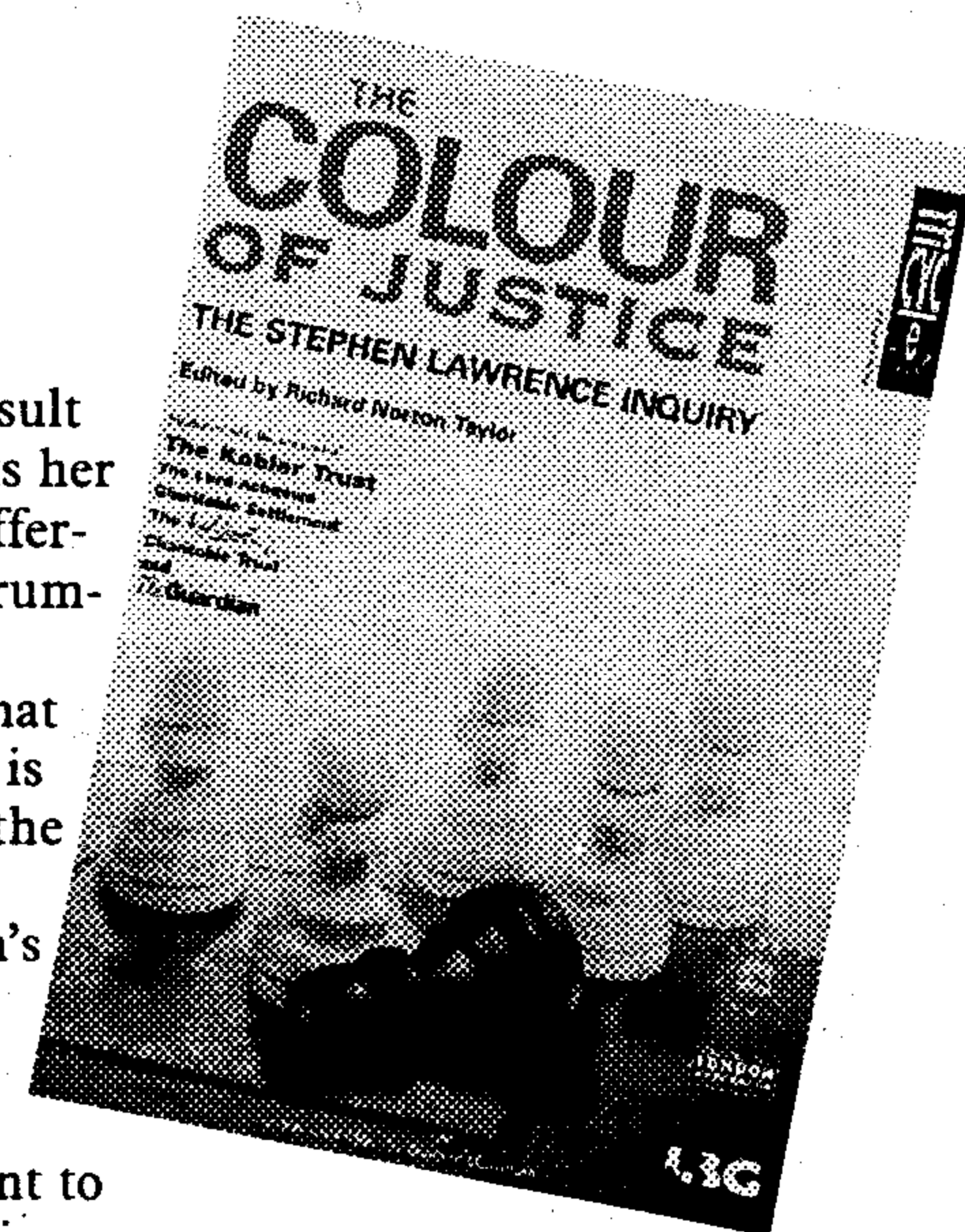
There were other things that I had not picked up on - or remembered. The extent to which the family were kept in the dark, the scale of the failure to collect evidence that could have nailed the suspects, and the complete defensiveness when police racism was raised were just a few of the issues that were explored in new ways.

And the contrast between the statements from Duwayne Brooks and the Lawrences and the police officers was an understated counterpoint that spoke volumes.

If the play had weaknesses they were in its silences. Duwayne Brooks doesn't get much focus. During the private prosecution he was 'looked after' by Officer XX, the man who was in cahoots with wanted drug dealer Clive Norris, father of one of the suspects. This obscene fact comes out in the play, but in second hand testimony so that some of its impact is lost.

While we see on stage many of the most prominent characters in the story there is one absence that makes a difference.

Not Sir Paul Condon, the other suspects (only Jamie Acourt



**Norton-Taylor has condensed the 11,000 pages of transcript into about 100**

appears on stage, though we hear the videoed words of brother Neil repeated by Mansfield). The absence is the Lawrence family campaign, the supporters who packed the public gallery day after day and made it more difficult for either MacPherson or the police to wriggle as much as they might have hoped.

It would have been dramatically difficult to incorporate us into the production - but audience participation is not completely foreign to the theatre even if it is usually confined to pantomime.

Evidently the ending of the play itself has already been changed in response to criticism from campaigners. You never know, maybe my suggestion will get taken on board in the weeks to come!

But whether they do or not - this is certainly a play that no reader should miss.

■ *The Colour of Justice* is transferring to The Theatre Royal, Stratford East, 15-27 February (Box office 0181 534 0310) and to the Victoria Palace Theatre from March 3 (Box office 0171 834 1317). It is also being made into a film by the BBC.



# Who killed Michael Menson?

**Terry Conway**

**T**wo years ago on January 28 1997 Michael Tachie Menson, a thirty year old black man, was brutally murdered by racists. He was set on fire by four white youths in Edmonton, north London.

Passers-by contacted the emergency services who took him to hospital. Michael suffered 30% third degree burns on his back. He remained conscious for almost one week – and then suffered a massive heart attack from which he never recovered. Michael died on February 13 1997.

On the night of the assault police were contacted immediately. But during the first week while Michael was still conscious in hospital, they failed, despite constant reminders from the family, to take a statement from him. It has taken sustained campaigning over these long months by his family and friends to force the police to begin to admit even some of the truth about the circumstances of his murder.

Only in recent weeks have the police acknowledged for the first time what supporters have argued from the beginning; that Michael's death was a racist murder.

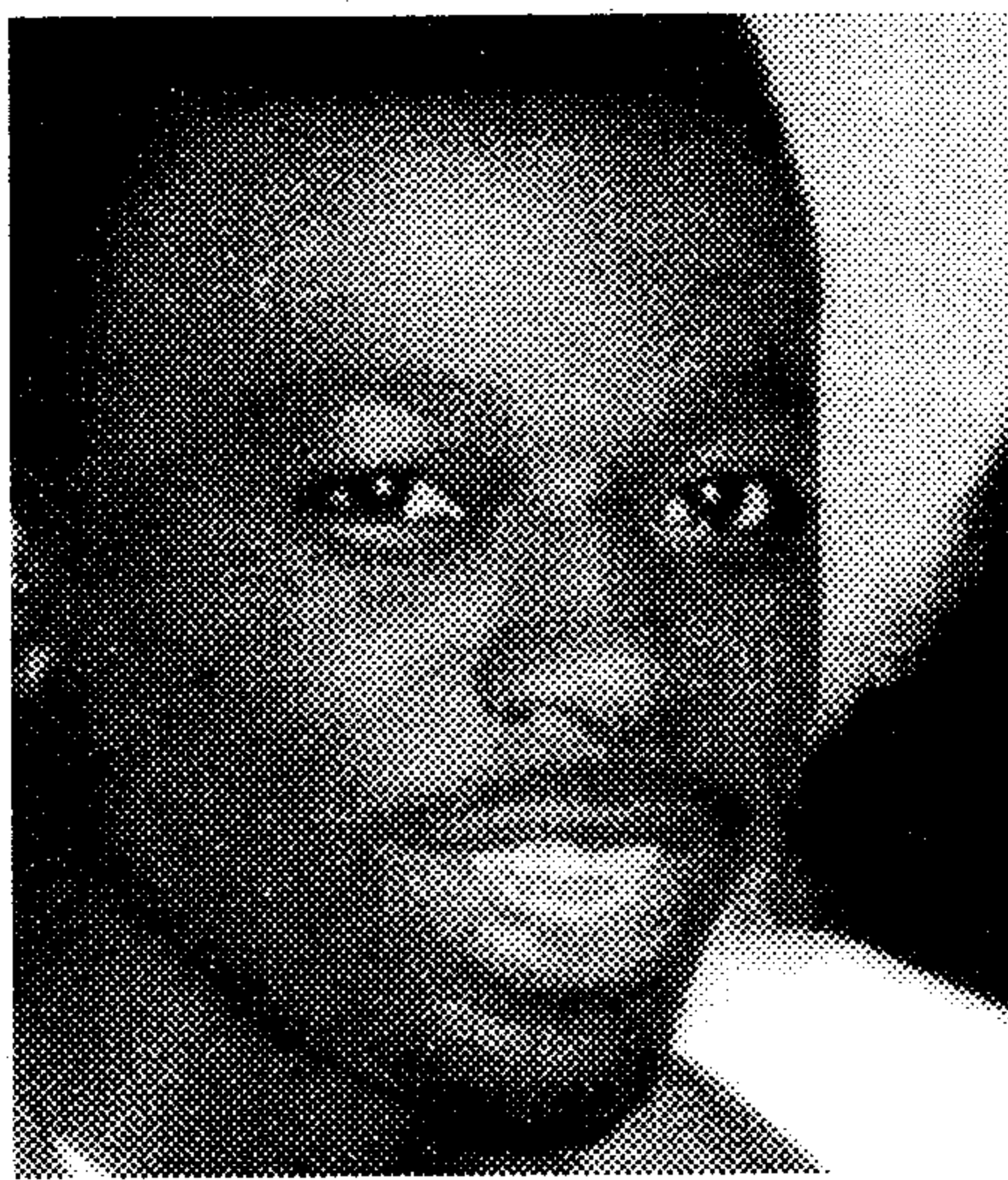
Instead, despite massive forensic evidence to the contrary, police at first argued that Michael set himself alight. This is despite the fact that four expert witnesses, including two fire experts and an eminent pathologist, have confirmed that in their view Michael was attacked.

As Mike's sister Essie explained the behaviour of the police added to the already intense grief of the family: "the hardest thing to bear was the overwhelming feeling that it didn't matter".

Deputy Assistant Commissioner Grieve, who heads the Racial and Violent Crimes Task force set up in the wake of the Lawrence Inquiry told *The Guardian*: "There is clearly a racial motivation. Three or four people were involved in the attack on Michael Menson. It is a 'boast' crime, and we know people have been talking about it. We know a number of witnesses have been trying to get in touch with us".

Police have also discovered in recent weeks that an accelerant was used to ensure that the burns to Mike were more damaging.

It has taken all this time for the police to own up to basic facts which were known in the days after the attack. Campaigners are well aware that Grieve's new unit is desperate to put the Lawrence inquiry behind them, and for that reason may now try to solve the Menson case. Only continued scrutiny will prevent further blunders which will deny yet



*Murder ignored: Michael Menson*

another family access to the truth.

The anniversary of Michael's death was marked by an impressive public meeting in Tottenham organised by the Menson family campaign, addressed by members of the family, Sukhdev Reel (mother of Ricky Reel), a representative from the Stephen Lawrence Campaign and Michael Mansfield QC.

The meeting listened attentively to contributions from Essie and Kwesi Menson, Michael's sister and brother who both gave those present a flavour of who Mike was and urged us fight for justice in his memory.

Kwesi explained that when Mike was in the hospital he asked his brother "Why have they done this to me?". While many of us have answers as to why racism is endemic in our society, they all seem inadequate when faced with its brutal and murderous consequences.

But as the point is not just to understand the world but to change it, a more meaningful answer can be given to Mike's question by organising to ensure that the litany of racist murders and police indifference cannot continue. As Essie Menson told us "Black people will not be victims and will not give up."

Scotland Yard has been forced to admit in a letter to the family solicitors, that senior officers made fundamental errors in their investigation. Not only did they assume when they first found Michael that he was suffering from mental illness and had set fire to himself, but that his injuries were not life threatening. They failed to seal off the scene of the incident, losing vital forensic evidence and witnesses, and then took a number of weeks to launch an 'investigation'.

Scotland Yard admits that formal disciplinary action should be taken against a number of police officers. But the Yard says it is powerless to do so, because most have, or are in the process, of "retiring". Yet again we see the

echoes of the Stephen Lawrence story – and so many other stories.

On Wednesday 16 September 1998, an inquest jury ruled that Michael was unlawfully killed. However, due to police inaction, the exact details of the assault will probably never be known.

The appalling nature of police investigation in the Menson case is now being compared to that of the Stephen Lawrence case. In order to find the truth about Michael's death, his family and friends and The Monitoring Group have set up The Michael Menson Family Campaign.

The Campaign wants Home Secretary Jack Straw to intervene in this case by installing a fresh team of police detectives to investigate Michael's murder. The campaign needs funds, including for payment of legal costs and publicity.

The campaign is looking for new activists, especially in these next few weeks. Volunteers who have been talking to people in the Silver Street area where Mike was killed have uncovered disturbing facts in just a few days work.

Suresh Grover of The Monitor-



*Tottenham: anger boils over death of Roger Sylvester (see below)*

ing Group told the public meeting that they had discovered four other racist murders in the area in recent years and a number of black families who were afraid to go out of their homes for fear of attack.

One of the lessons of the Lawrence campaign is that the search for witnesses is too impor-

tant to be left to the police.

For further information and to send donations contact: The Michael Menson Family Campaign, c/o SMG Unity, PO Box 304, Southall, Middlesex, UB2 5YR Telephone: 0181 843 2333, Fax: 0181 813 9734

**Police failed to seal off the scene of the incident, losing vital forensic evidence and witnesses, and then took weeks to launch an 'investigation'.**

## Roger Sylvester Mourn – and organise!

**Elkie Dee**  
The death of Roger Sylvester on January 19, eight days after being forcibly restrained by eight police officers in Tottenham, North London, has provoked great anger amongst the local black community.

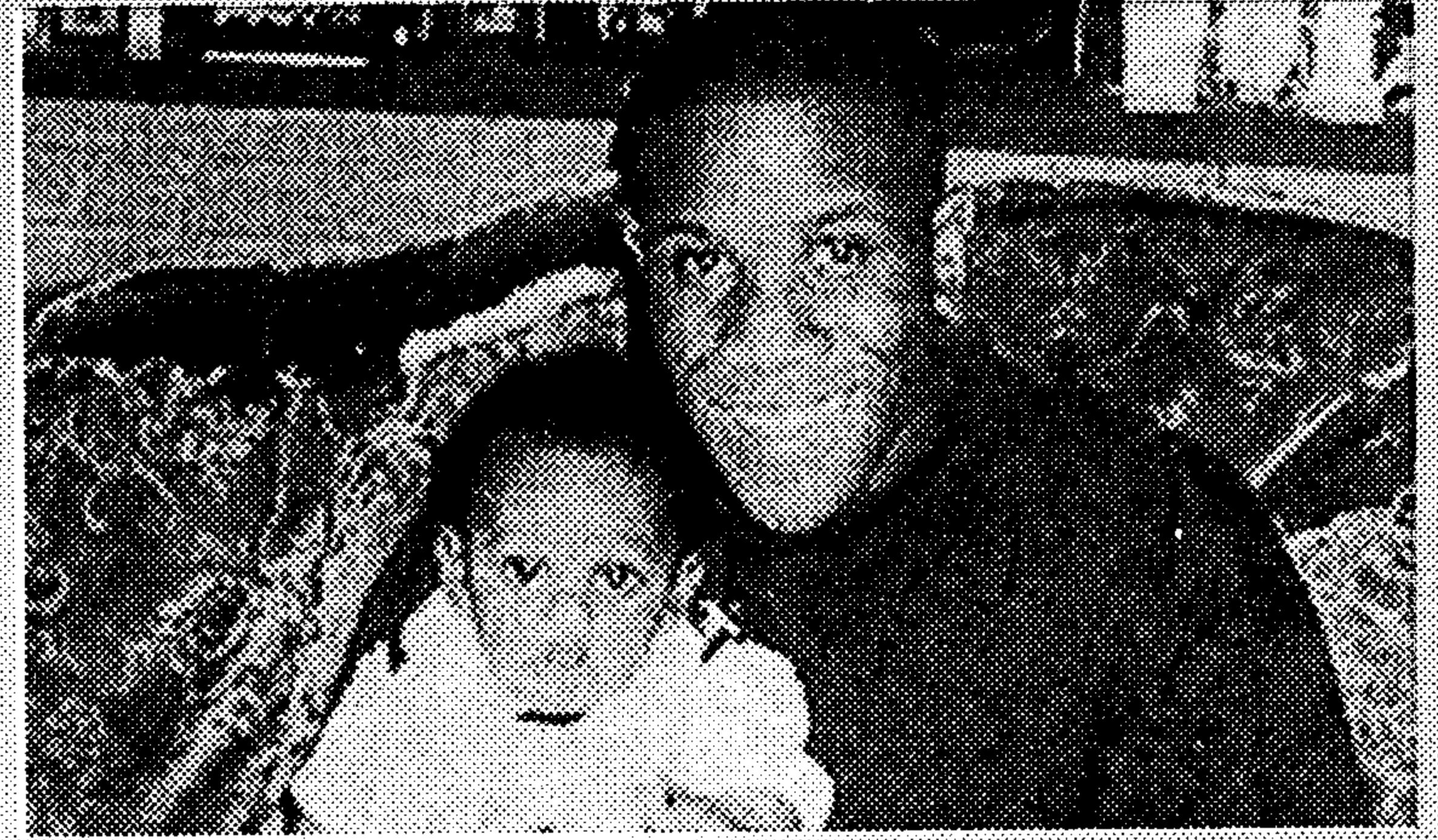
His family called a demonstration from their home in Summerhill Road to the police station on 24 January, intended to be a quiet candlelit vigil. However, the police turned up with 4 vans and a helicopter which drowned out the words of the family's pastor, making it clear how they viewed the event.

Nearly one thousand people came to pay their respects, including many local residents and workers from Islington Council, where Roger Sylvester was an administrative assistant in a day centre, and was a member of the UNISON branch.

Police were called to Roger Sylvester's home in Summerhill Road by a woman reporting a disturbed naked man outside in the street.

They decided they needed eight of them to overpower him, and took him to the local psychiatric hospital, St Ann's, sectioning him under the Mental Health Act.

The hospital was short-staffed and dealing with another crisis, and the police were left alone



*Roger Sylvester*

with Sylvester in the isolation room.

By the time the doctor was able to come, he needed to be transferred to intensive care at another hospital several miles away, where brain-stem tests showed him to be dead a week later. Since Sylvester's death, the police officers involved have been transferred to desk duties in another area.

The Lawrence inquiry has highlighted police racism and led to a renewed interest in other racist murders and deaths of black people in police custody.

Neville Lawrence attended the demonstration, and other families and campaigners have visited the family.

The Sylvester family attended the meeting called by the Michael Menson campaign to mark the second anniversary of Mike's death.

Even *The Times* has commented that "this is not the first time that a black person has died during an encounter with the local police".

Certainly this is something that increasing numbers of black people are all too well aware of - but out of these tragedies there is a real possibility that a significant fight back will begin to develop.

**His family called a demonstration: the police turned up a helicopter which drowned out the words of the pastor**



# International conference launches campaign for Cologne protest

**Alan Thornett**

OVER 500 activists from across the European Union attended the conference of the European marches held in Cologne on 23 and 24 January.

The conference - called to plan a series of marches, a mass demonstration and a counter-summit around the Heads of Government conference in Cologne this summer - was the biggest and most representative yet to date by Euromarch networks, and shows that interest in its campaigning continues to grow.

Whilst virtually every country of the EU was represented, nearly a half of the conference came from German organisations and the German Euromarch network, the biggest international delegations coming from France and Denmark.

The British Euromarch network had only three activists present, but were joined by delegations from Reclaim the Streets, the Campaign for Free Education and the Socialist Party, the latter being organised as part of a Committee for a Workers International (CWI) delegation.

The discussions at the conference revolved around four 'big ideas' and a series of workshops covering a range of related subjects. The four main themes were

- A mass international demonstration in Cologne on 29 May

(brought forward a week because of the change of dates of the official conference)

- Marches from various parts of Germany to Cologne

- An international march from Brussels to Cologne

- The occupation of trains to get to the Cologne demonstration

The aim is for the Cologne demonstration to be as big and of the same character as the 50,000 strong international demonstration in Amsterdam in June 1997 - this time in Germany the most important country in the EU.

The marches through Germany will start from Prague, Basal in Switzerland, Berlin and Hamburg. International delegations will be encouraged to join them where possible.

It is hoped to have between 1,000 and 1,500 people on the march from Brussels to Cologne setting off on Tuesday May 25. The Spanish Euromarches have already pledged to send 100 marchers on it.

The occupation and requisitioning of trains to get to Cologne is seen as a major feature of the campaign - on the lines of the trains that were successfully requisitioned by over 1,000 Italian

unemployed people to get to the Amsterdam demonstration.

It not only provides free transport to the demonstration but makes the point about the rights of free transport for unemployed people.

The stress on this aspect however, was controversial with many delegates (mostly) from Northern Europe, doubting that it could be done successfully.

Plans were also discussed for a 'Balkans' (paid for) train to start in Northern Greece to travel through Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, Austria and into Germany - although the logistical problems in doing this seem far from resolved.

There is also a strong 'global' dimension planned for the Cologne events. Hundreds of landless peasants are planning to come from Brazil although again there are logistical problems with this.

There will also be delegations from the South Korean trade unions (who have already built some links with the Euromarches) and the World-wide March of Women.

The final part of the conference was to agree a political appeal for the events. This included a series

of key demands which could form the basis for campaigning:

- A guaranteed and fair income
- A massive reduction in working hours without loss of income or increased flexibility
- Equality between men and women

- Equal (levelled up) social rights across Europe
- Equal rights for all irrespective of ethnic origins
- Opposition to the stability pact, which will create further impoverishment
- The defence of welfare provision
- A massive redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor

Overall the conference was a big success. It was cumbersome and sometimes chaotic but there is clearly a lot of enthusiasm for the campaign and certainly the conference was broad enough and representative enough to make the campaign a big success.

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In Britain the Euromarch Liaison Committee will be taking early steps to bring together all interested parties to discuss the campaign in this country.

**It is hoped to have between 1,000 and 1,500 people on the march from Brussels to Cologne**

## Youth fighting austerity mobilise for Cologne 99

**Veronica Fagan**

ONE of the most successful features of the recent European conference to build the May 28 demonstration in Cologne was the major participation of young people - this time much more significant than at previous events organised by the Euromarches.

Perhaps this is not surprising with increasing mobilisations of young people to defend education in places like France and Greece.

There was a particularly sizeable delegation from Denmark, but there were young participants from most EU countries including from the Campaign for Free Education here in Britain.

After a lively workshop, young people decided to support the general call for the demonstration but also to organise around their own specific demands. Below we print the statement they drew up.

"Young people are one of the social groups who suffer most from unemployment, flexibility and social exclusion. Today right across Europe, young people are systematically under attack in relation to their right to a decent job through short term contracts, part time work, undeclared work, unemployment, and so on.

This is why we fully accept the demands of the general platform calling for the demonstration in Cologne on May 29th: reduction of working time without reduction of

wages and without flexibility; massive creation of secure jobs, minimum income enabling everyone to a decent standard of living.

In addition as young people we put forward our own demands:

- The right to education and training for men and women without discrimination
- Against privatisation and the destruction of public education which has ignited student strikes all over Europe.
- For a real democratisation of public education that necessitates free access to education; a massive financial investment by the states to allow everyone access to free education; a greater participation of the students to the life of the schools and universities.
- Social right to autonomy of every man and woman without discrimination
- Right to decent housing
- Free access to culture
- Free access to public transport
- Free access to health care
- The right to choose freely his/ her sexuality and against discrimination on the ground of sexuality

On the basis of these demands, we appeal to all young people, all youth organisations, associations and students trade-unions to fight for a social Europe based on solidarity, anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-fascism, ecology, anti-militarism and therefore to mobilise for Cologne on May 29 1999."

On the basis of these demands, we appeal to all young people, all youth organisations, associations and students trade-unions to fight for a social Europe based on solidarity, anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-fascism, ecology, anti-militarism and therefore to mobilise for Cologne on May 29 1999."



# Cologne 99

International demonstration, May 29

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

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

- \* A guaranteed job for all, and a decent standard of living.
- \* For an immediate massive reduction of working hours, coordinated on a European level, without loss of wages or purchasing power.
- \* Opposition to compulsory part-time work, child labour, and social dumping.
- \* Opposition to the enrichment of the minority and the impoverishment of the majority.
- \* Yes to the redistribution of wealth.
- \* Opposition to all forms of exclusion and discrimination, including those based on gender or race. Yes to the full right of asylum for the persecuted.
- \* Defend the welfare state. Yes to social rights in all areas (housing, education, health etc.) with the necessary funding.



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

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

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

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

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

Name .....

Organisation .....

Phone .....

Address .....

..... Donation £.....

(Cheques: Cologne 99)

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



# Murderer Milosevic is still NATO's preferred partner

**Geoff Ryan**

THE MASSACRE of 45 Albanians in Recak by Serb security forces confirms there is only one way to bring the war in Kosova to an end: recognition of the right of the Albanian majority in Kosova to independence.

*Socialist Outlook* has, in the past, argued for a solution allowing Kosova to participate as an equal partner with Montenegro and Serbia. The unity of different nationalities within a freely agreed confederation would obviously help to rebuild unity amongst the South Slav peoples. There is, however, a world of difference between what would be theoretically better and what is currently possible.

After Recak it ought to be patently obvious that there is no possibility whatsoever of ending the conflict with Kosova remaining part of Yugoslavia.

**Destabilise**

Unfortunately this is the one solution none of the western powers is prepared to accept. Kosovan independence, it is claimed, will lead to further destabilisation, with Kosovars linking up with Albania and encouraging Albanian minorities in Macedonia, Montenegro and Greece to secede in order to join a Greater Albania.

Such a 'threat' to 'stability' is sometimes given a more sinister aspect - Albanians are all described as "Muslims" suggest-

ing that a Greater Albania would be a Muslim state. (In fact ten percent of Albanians are Roman Catholics, which is one of the reasons why the Mother Theresa foundation has been active in organising relief work in Kosova).

**After Recak it ought to be obvious that there is no chance of ending the conflict while Kosova remains part of Yugoslavia.**

All the NATO threats against Milosevic are aimed at maintaining the totally impossible solution of keeping Kosova as part of Yugoslavia. At the same time, despite the rhetoric, they are aimed at keeping Milosevic in power.

Milosevic is still the key to a 'solution' in western interests.

To avoid any misunderstanding we are, as socialists, totally opposed to NATO: it is a creation of the Cold War aimed at preserving capitalism. It is now looking to extend its role as a US-loyal world policeman.

We do not support any actions by this imperialist military machine. On principle we totally oppose air strikes on Serbia, despite our hatred of the Milosevic regime.

And what would be the effect of such actions?

Hundreds of Serb civilians would be killed - perhaps many more. Barring Milosevic accidentally being hit by a stray missile, he would remain in power after any air strikes. In fact his power would be greatly strengthened, as Serbs rally round his regime



*Kosovan refugees flee Serbian state terror*

against what they will rightly see as NATO aggression.

This process is already under way. Vuk Draskovic, the one time hope of the west, has recently become a Vice President of Yugoslavia. Both the 'liberal' Draskovic and the hard line nationalist Vojislav Seselj now sit side by side in government with Milosevic.

**Pressure**

Air strikes are designed to put pressure on Milosevic, not to remove him.

There are difficulties even in doing this. Milosevic can only go so far in reigning in the more nationalistic elements of his armed forces without leaving

himself open to attack from Seselj.

For that matter, Draskovic has in the past shown himself quite capable of trying to outflank Seselj as the champion of hard line Serb nationalism.

In any case it is absurd to believe that Milosevic personally controls every action by Serb security forces. Even if he were pressured into withdrawing further Serb forces from Kosova, the logic of the war there means it is likely further massacres of Albanian civilians remains will be carried out.

The KLA has taken advantage of the Holbrooke agreement to rebuild and reorganise its forces.

It is probably better armed than last year.

It has been able to move back into the rural areas it was forced to abandon when it found itself over stretched and incapable of resisting a massive Serb offensive.

**Naive**

It appears to have taken on board the lessons of that defeat - though it still retains a naive belief, despite all the evidence to the contrary, that NATO will intervene to support Kosovar independence.

- Support Kosova independence
- Arm the Kosovars
- No to Nato military intervention.

## Behind the war in Sierra Leone

In the wake of the arms to Sierra Leone affair, the ten year old civil war in that country has been getting considerably more coverage in the British media than hitherto. **BOB WOOD** looks at the underlying causes of the war.

IN EARLY January, the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF) occupied the centre of the capital Freetown and, we are told, terrorised the million or more inhabitants of the city.

If we are to believe the reports, then a desperate band of terrorists and drug-taking boy-soldiers somehow managed to over-run Freetown in defiance of a 15,000 strong Nigerian 'peace-keeping' force.

The truth may be somewhat different. Atrocities have undoubtedly been committed by both sides in the conflict, but a rebel force could not

possibly take a city the size of Freetown without some support from the civilian population.

The Nigerian army, together with much smaller contingents from other West African countries, are in Sierra Leone to offer support to the unstable government of President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah.

The rationale for Nigerian intervention is that the Kabbah government is the legitimate democratic ruler of the country, under threat from a combination of undisciplined rebels and dissident armed forces.

Nigeria, notwithstanding the irony of a military regime acting as the defender of democracy, currently seems to have the West African franchise to act as the representative of American imperialism in the region, as it recently did in Liberia.

The democratic credentials of Kabbah are in any case open to dispute. When the general election was held in 1996, the northern half of the country was in rebel hands, and out of a population of

about four million, only three-quarters of a million participated in the elections.

Like the vast majority of African states, the borders of Sierra Leone are a legacy from the imperialist past, uniting a number of disparate peoples, with different languages, within a common boundary.

Since independence in 1961, politics in the country have been dominated by tension between the Temne in the north (the area now in rebel hands) and the Mende in the south.

Freetown has traditionally been under the sway of the descendants of freed slaves, the Krio, although the population of the city has been radically altered by migration from countryside.

Coupled with the underlying ethnic tension, two other factors are responsible for the current instability and war. Firstly, Sierra Leone is rich in mineral resources - diamonds, bauxite (for aluminium), rutile

(for titanium) and iron ore, together with gold and platinum. Over the years since independence, these resources have been raped by foreign mining companies, devastating the countryside and bribing successive governments.

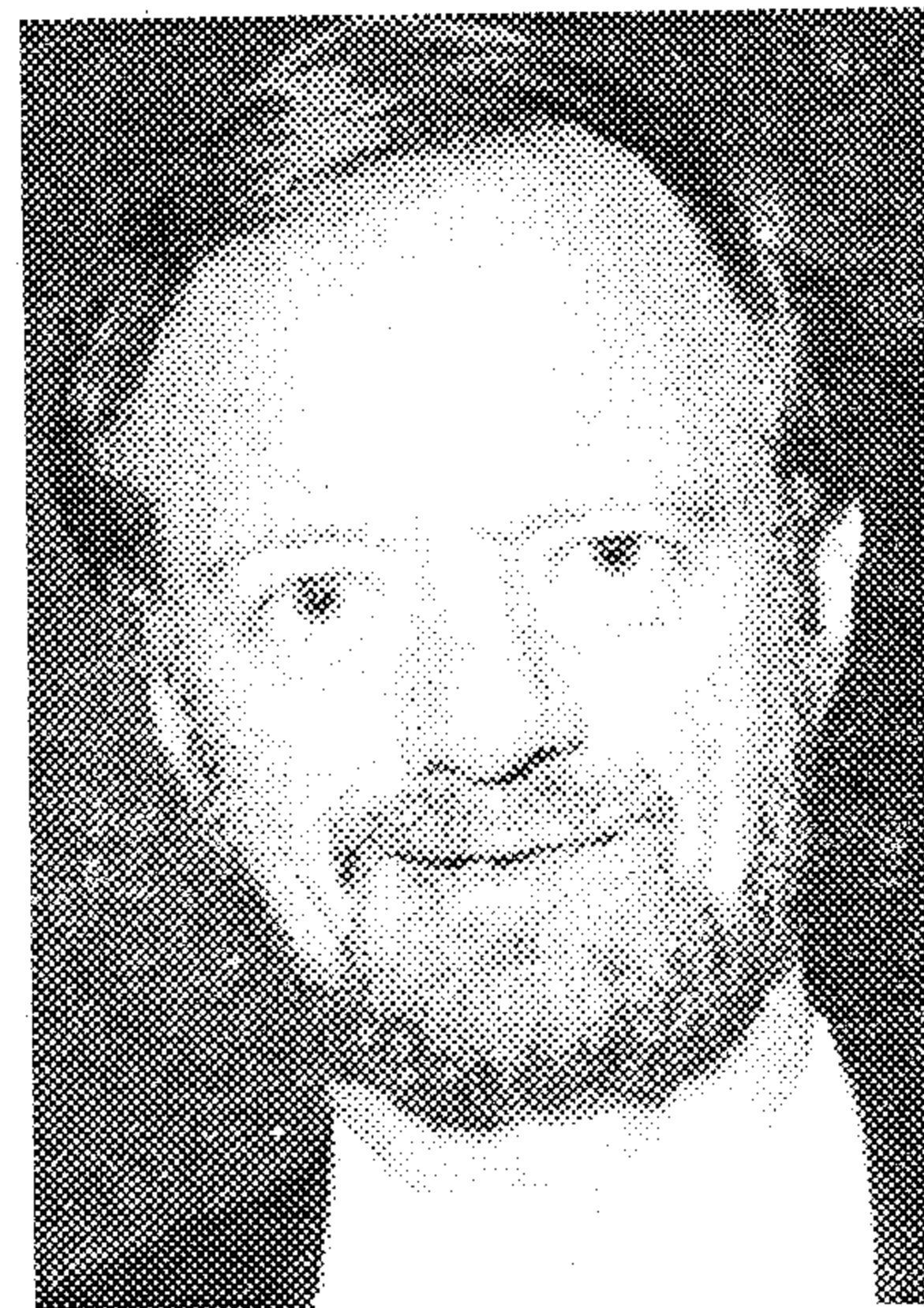
Nearly all the wealth created by the mining activities has been siphoned off overseas, or used to line the pockets of a few individuals in Freetown - none of it has reached the ordinary people. The trickle-down effect has been as notable for its absence as it was in Thatcher's Britain.

Secondly, the civil war in neighbouring Liberia (which ended only recently) undoubtedly helped to undermine peace in Sierra Leone, not least by making arms more readily available.

The Sierra Leone government has accused Liberia of aiding the rebels, an accusation strenuously denied by the Liberian government.

A group of Sierra Leonean

**Sierra Leone is rich in mineral resources including diamonds, bauxite, gold and platinum**



*One-sided approach: Britain's Foreign Secretary Cook*

exiles in the UK, the Alliance for Peace and Democracy in Sierra Leone, has called on Britain and America to end their one-sided approach to the conflict and for dialogue between the Kabbah government and the rebels.

Perhaps part of the settlement will need to be recognition of the right to self-determination of the various peoples in the country and a federal solution.



# Warning: privatisation approaching!

Compared to many other states southern Ireland has lagged behind in the greed inspired rush to sell off the public utilities on the cheap. The public sector accounts for one tenth of Ireland's GDP, of the 20 state owned utilities, to date just four have been pushed into the private sector, Irish Sugar, Irish Life, Irish Steel and B&I Ferries. However this is all about to change big-time.

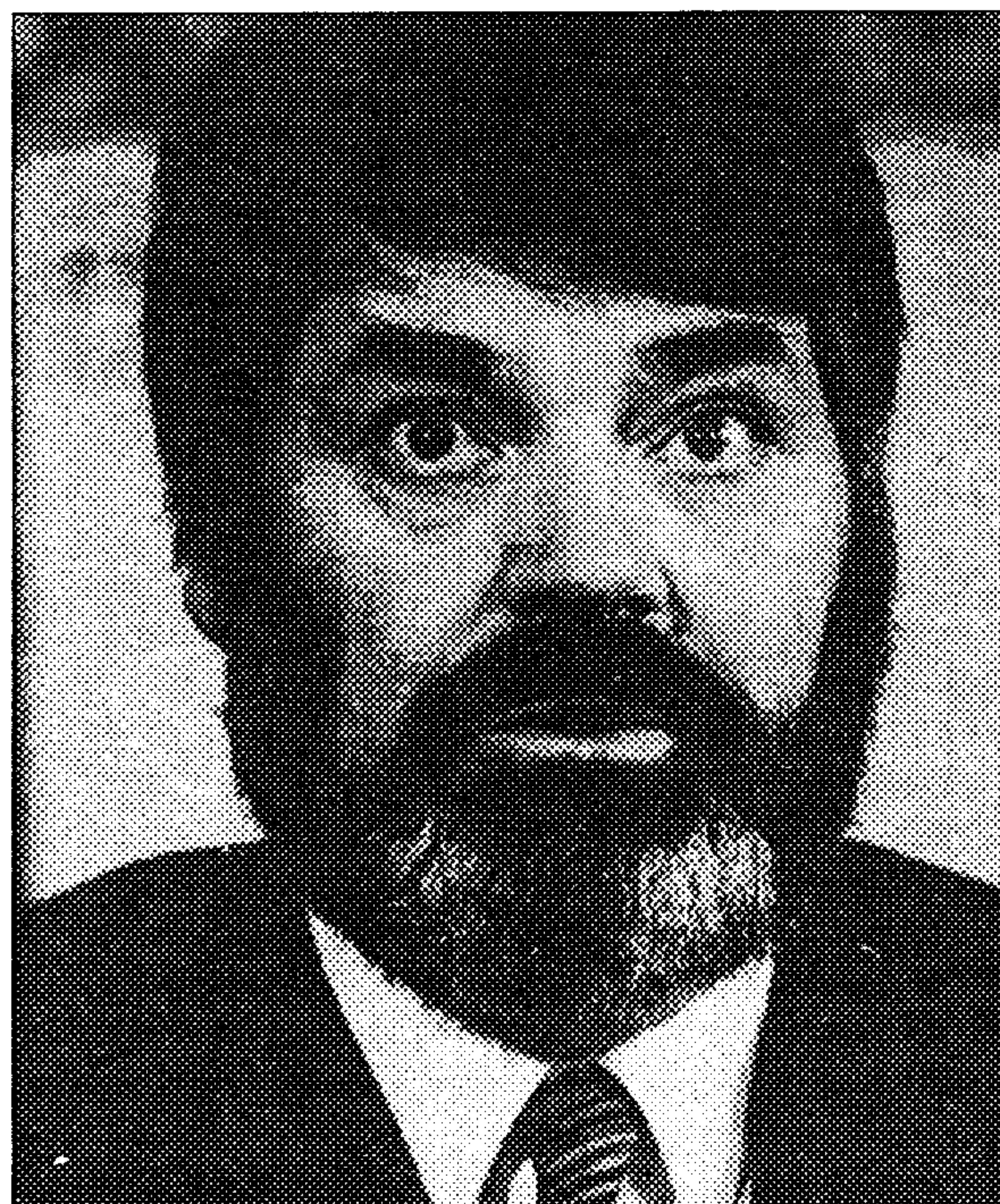
The Fianna Fail led government intends to sell off Telecom Eireann this summer and has also ordered the sale of Cable Link. A plan to merge Aer Lingus into one of the giant multi-national airlines is well under way, Aer Rianta the airports authority has been instructed to draw up a privatisation plan and Team Aer Lingus has just been sold to the Dutch company FLS.

The state run Irish Fertiliser Industries is up for sale as is the state owned bank ACC, the likelihood is that CIE the bus and rail company will follow suit. The national electricity supplier ESB is to face private competition.

The sale of the state sector is being justified on the basis of the usual ideological neo-liberal cant, to improve service, to enhance the performance of the state sector, to raise money for the exchequer and to widen share ownership.

In theory an Irish left should not find it too difficult to shoot down the arguments now being touted on behalf of privatisation. There exists, for example, a welter of evidence in relation to the British experience of privatisation to show that it has not been a thrilling economic success and certainly done little to improve services (Martin and Parker's recently published study of 11 privatisations).

The problem is that the official leadership of the Labour and Trade Union movement is so enthralled by the hyperbolic talk of a Celtic Tiger and so wrapped



Dragging Irish Labour further to the right? De Rossa

up in the ideology of social partnership that left criticism of the privatisation programme has so far been minimal.

Proudly wearing their social partnership badges leading Trade Union officials from the CWU, CPSU and IMPACT have joined with the management and government in promoting the idea that the selling off of Telecom Eireann will be in the interest of the common good. The company is to be sold in stages, stage one to be a 35 per cent or £1 billion floatation on the Dublin, London and New York stock exchanges.

Even though the privatisation programme includes a proposal to lose 2,500 jobs, a new six day week and an 8am to 8pm working day the union officials are busy trying to find ways to persuade workers to go along with it.

To win over the work force they have negotiated a deal with management which involves the workers being offered an

**Leading Trade Union officials have joined with the government in promoting the idea that selling off Telecom Eireann will be for the common good**

million loan to buy a further nine per cent of share at a 20 per cent discount. Similar ESOP schemes are being negotiated in other privatisation deals.

For those workers not impressed with the union's deal-making skills the top officials have been using two other ploys to bring them into line. Union officials have made it known that if the workforce votes against the deal at the end of February a 5.3 per cent pay rise for the coming year will be lost.

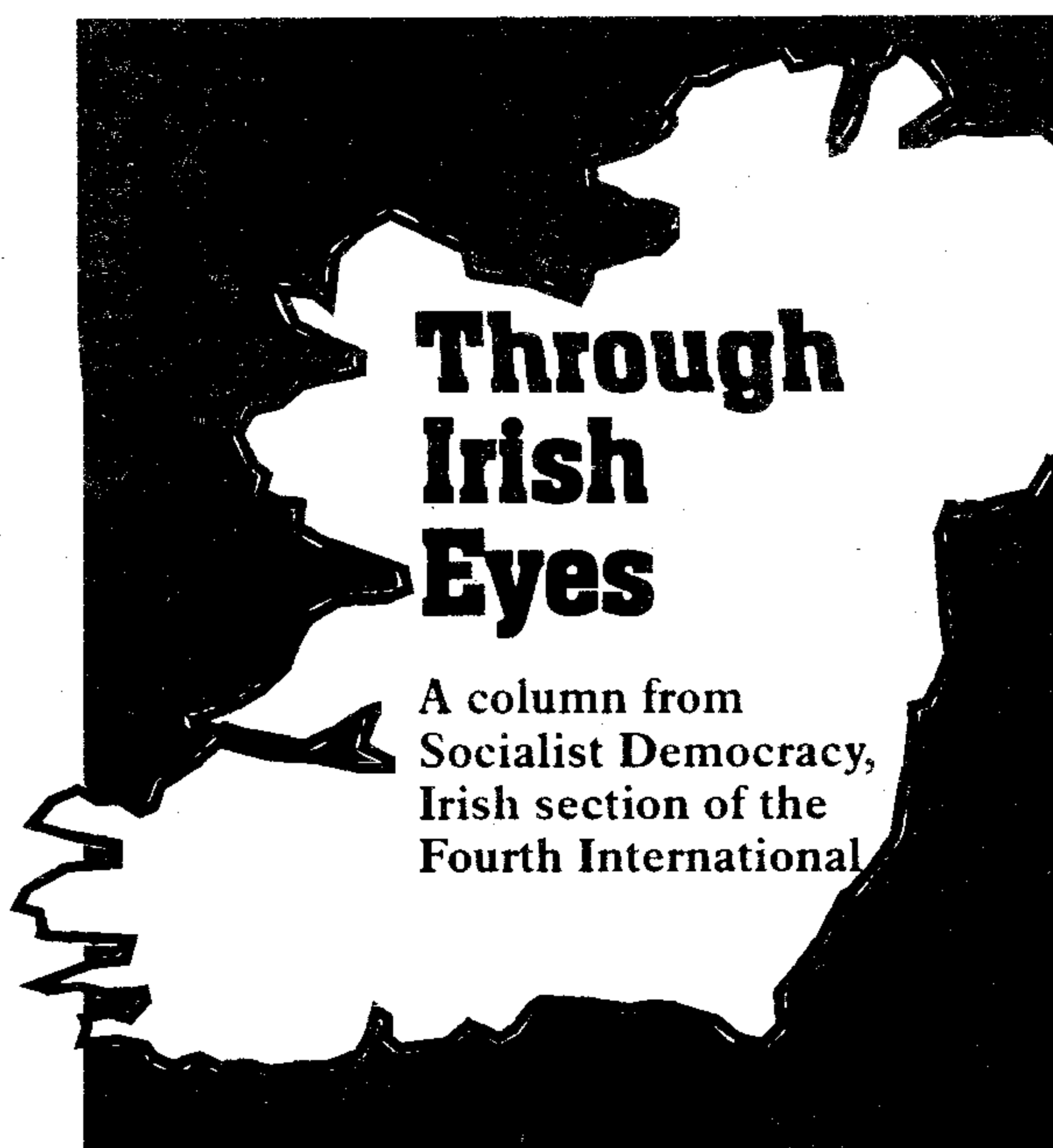
Another spin is that the privatisation is inevitable whether workers like it or not as it is in line with the Irish government fulfilment of an EU directive which is legally binding.

Last week Minister Mary O'Rourke, in an effort to raise potential investor confidence in the privatisation, sacked the company board on the advice of investment bank Merrill Lynch.

The new chairman is to be none other than Ireland's foremost advocate of neo-liberal policies, Fianna Failer Ray MacSharry. In a laughable gesture to the feelings of the workforce, Dick Spring was appointed to the new board "to look after the best interests of Telecom's workers." Spring has lost no time in acquiring for himself a string of such boardroom positions.

Workers resistance to the privatisation of Telecom will probably follow the way of Team Aer Lingus.

On several occasions workers at Team voted against privatisation, in response the union officials just kept coming back and coming back with slightly altered proposals for a yes vote until



Employee Share Option Plan (ESOP). Workers are being advised to take up the offer of control over a 14 per cent per cent shares stake in return for their co-operation in the privatisation process.

eventually they got what they wanted.

Shay Cody Deputy General Secretary of IMPACT, a key player in the negotiations is sounding confident. This wearing down of rank and file morale by the union bureaucracy in the interest of the plans of management is what social partnership is really all about.

Whilst it is difficult to fight the ethos of social partnership in today's conditions, a passive acquiescence in the face of the privatisation programme should not be encouraged or condoned. Socialists can use such occasions to relate to those workers who continue to vote against the advice of their union officials and to intensify the wider political campaign against another instalment of social partnership.

Although the Irish state sector is not a bastion of socialism against capitalism it nevertheless came in to being because the Irish capitalist class was unwilling to risk their own capital in building up essential national public utilities, preferring to invest abroad.

The state sector was paid for by the Irish working class and so belongs to them, it has over many decades been a haven for tens of thousands of workers against the insecurity and anarchy of the market.

Today it is as essential as ever to defend the principle of common ownership from the attacks of possessive individualism.

## United in betrayal: the Labour Party and Democratic Left

When the leaders of the Labour Party and Democratic Left first floated the idea of a fusion there were still a few newspaper columnists around who said it would probably never happen.

It was felt that the past record of the political leadership of the Democratic Left, ex-Republican and Euro-Communists was so littered with political corpses that the respectable middle class leaders of Labour would think twice about admitting them into 'their' party less they bring into being yet more sectarian turmoil.

No political faction in Ireland can match the extraordinary ideological circumvention that has been the life of Prionsas De Rossa and friends.

From IRA inmates in the 1950s

(Sinn Fein) to ultra Provo opponents in the early seventies (Sinn Fein Workers Party) to loyal friends of Moscow in the eighties (the Workers Party) to left alternatives of the Labour Party in the eighties, to breakers with the Workers Party in the early nineties, to government coalition partners with the traditional right wing of Irish politics Fine Gael in the mid-nineties; and now into Labour.

So the ideological gymnasts of Irish politics have pulled off yet another somersault. On Monday January 25 it was revealed that the four remaining DL deputies are to take up front bench positions within the Labour party, De Rossa himself is to be the opposition spokesperson on foreign affairs.

One of the biggest surprises must be the fact that 90 per cent of the Labour party membership voted in favour of taking them in, only two prominent members resigned in protest.

The DL's vote collapsed to 3 per cent in the last election and for them this looks like nothing more than a last ditch attempt at personal survival on behalf of a handful of career politicians.

What really explains the willingness of the Labour Party to take DL under their wing is their own dismal record of political betrayals of their working class constituency.

### Ten percent support

In the 1997 election the vote of the Labour Party sank to a mere 10 per cent from an historic high of 19 per cent in 1992.

What happened in between was that the party, elected on a set of promises to stand up for the interests of the working class, betrayed the trust of those who believed in them by entering into an unprincipled government coalition not with just one right wing party but with two, first Fianna Fail and then with Fine Gael.

When the party leader Dick Spring was campaigning in the 1992 election he pledged his support to Aer Lingus workers fighting redundancy, the result was that his coalition government oversaw a thousand redundancies.

The Labour Party was in office at a time of unprecedented economic growth, but its reforms were non-existent. Tax on company profits were cut by 4 per cent, a tax amnesty for the wealthy was introduced as was the selling of passports to the rich.

After R. Quinn's first budget the Sunday business post ran a front page headline with the headline 'Ruairi's bourgeois budget'. In 1997 thousands paid Labour back by not voting for them.

The bigger Labour party is now saying it is aiming to get between 20 and 25 per cent of the vote at the next election. As things stand Ireland has the smallest labour vote in the EU (13%).

It is obvious that Labour has learnt nothing from its previous electoral failures, staking a claim on the tiny 3 per cent vote still held by DL does not even begin to retrieve the working class votes the party lost in 1997 due to its right wing policies.

A basic requirement should have been a Labour party that was preparing a modern left programme: instead we end up with the most right wing leadership the party has ever had.

**OUT NOW!**

**The Real Irish Peace Process** available (£6 plus 70p p&p) from **Socialist Outlook**, PO Box 1109 London N4 2UU



# Stop "sanctioned mass murder" of Iraqi people!

Roland Rance

**A**ir raids continue nearly every day against Iraq, leading to further casualties. Iran has protested that one US bomb has landed in Abadan, rather than on its target in Iraq. Even the US government has been forced to concede that one of its "smart bombs" has hit the wrong target in Basra, destroying homes and killing many civilians.

The British and US governments have provided spurious arguments in an attempt to justify these illegal bombings, claiming Iraqi non-compliance with the UN weapons inspection teams.

Many diplomats in Baghdad, however, have confirmed that any non-compliance was marginal and technical, and was seized on by the US and Britain as a pretext for a bombing campaign which they were already determined to carry out. Meanwhile, it has become clear that many of the targets were identified by these same inspection teams, who were acting as spies for the US as well as reporting to the UN.

Since the Gulf War of 1991, the Iraqi infrastructure has been devastated by both bombings and sanctions. Iraq, previously a country with a strong economy, good nutrition, near-Western levels of child mortality, and well-developed health, education and welfare provision, has been reduced to a below-subsistence economy.

The sanctions are now even more devastating than the bombings, leading to a far higher number of deaths. Yet, until recently, the focus of protest has been on the bombing, with many opponents of direct military attack supporting sanctions as a means of imposing Western demands on the Iraqi government.

Last year Irish diplomat Denis Halliday resigned as UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq, describing sanctions and the so-called "Oil-for-Food" policy as "illegal and immoral".

In a packed meeting at London's Conway Hall in January, Mr Halliday pointed out the consequences: 5-6000 children die every month of malnutrition and preventable disease; UNICEF reports that 30% of Iraqi children suffer malnutrition, 20% chronically.

A study by Dr Richard Garfield, an epidemiologist at Columbia University, shows that the death rate for under-5s in Iraq has tripled since 1990, a phenomenon unprecedented in the modern world.

Other speakers at the meeting

included Tony Benn and former Algerian president Ahmed Ben Bella.

A particularly moving speech was made by Sukhdev Reel, mother of murdered black youth Ricky Reel, who spoke of her grief as a mother at losing a son, and of her empathy with the thousands of grieving Iraqi mothers.

In an interview with the Independent last year, Dennis Halliday described the "Oil-for-Food" policy, which he used to administer, as "band-aid". The British and US governments regard this policy as proof of their concern for the people of Iraq.

Robin Cook claimed to Parliament in November that it allowed Iraq to sell over \$10 billion of oil every year to pay for food, medicine and other humanitarian goods - implying that this money was being diverted by Saddam Hussein to other purposes.

In fact, as Cook well knows, 30% of the notional income is diverted by the UN for its own operating expenses and for war reparations. In addition, the fall in oil prices, and the embargo on supply of spare parts for Iraq's oil industry, mean that the available income is far less than Cook has claimed. Even if the entire \$10 billion was available, this would not be sufficient to rebuild Iraq's shattered economy.

Cook further claimed that sanctions had never covered food and medicines. In fact, food exports to Iraq were banned from August 1990 to March 1991 while many medical supplies, such as swabs and gauze, are indeed banned.

Additionally, the combination of sustained bombing and the ban on exports of pumping gear and other necessary equipment has

caused a drop of 50% in the quantity of available water.

In some regions, as much as 35% of this is contaminated with sewage and uranium-tipped artillery shells.

Water-borne disease has become rampant, while the lack of drugs and medical equipment means that treatable conditions now lead to hundreds of deaths every week. Iraq's children and poor, of course, suffer disproportionately from this.

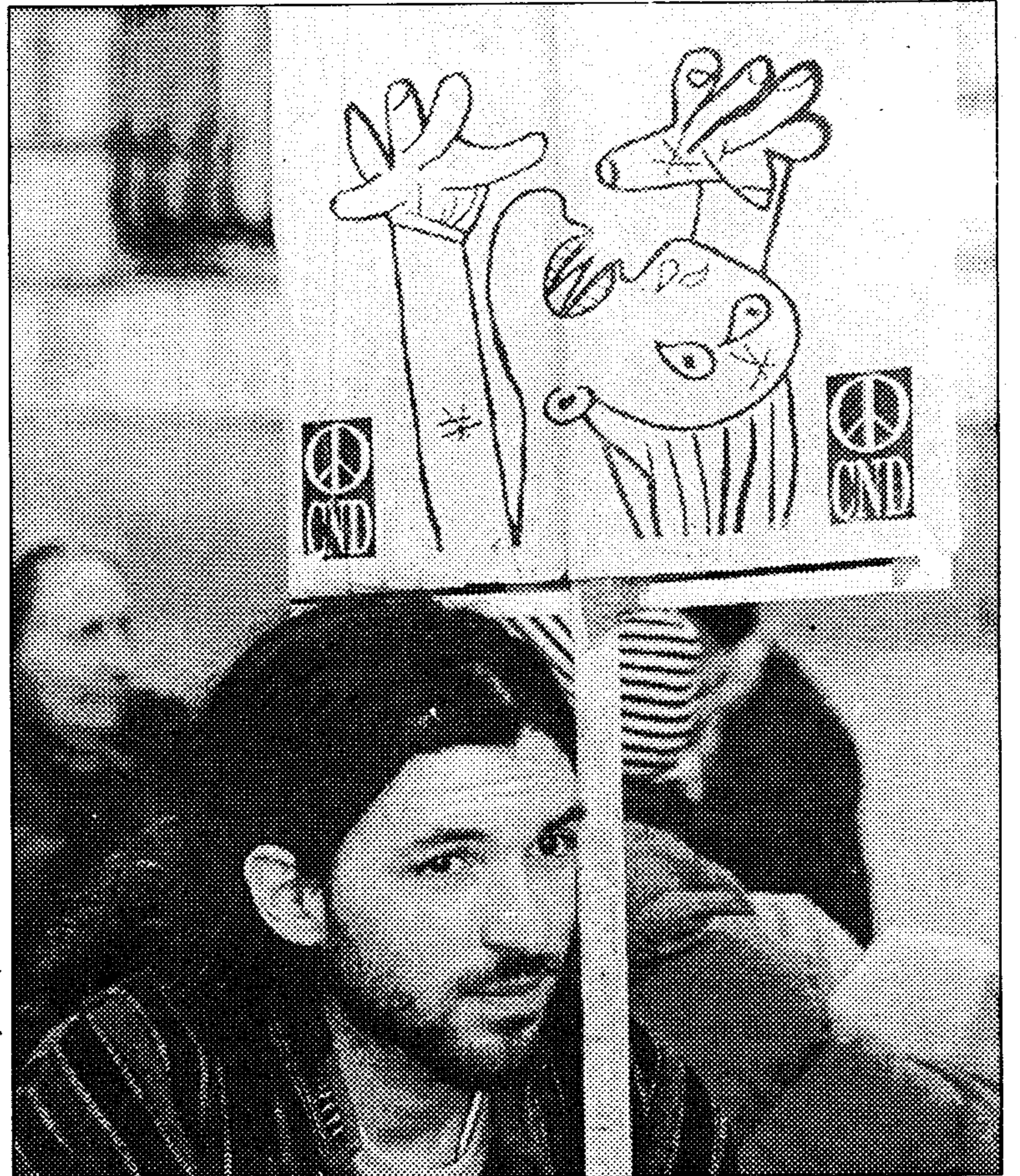
According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation in 1995, about 7-9% of the population was thriving on trade, while 70% was in precarious conditions. Dennis Halliday commented at Conway Hall that members of the United Nations could not continue to punish the Iraqi people, including thousands of children every

month, simply because they were unable to communicate with Saddam Hussein.

Whatever the crimes of Hussein against the people of Iraq, they are a fraction of those committed by the US and Britain. These states, who colonised the Middle East, who drew up the post-colonial borders, who built up Saddam Hussein in an attempt to defeat the Iranian revolution, and who continue to support Israel in its 50-year war of dispossession and cultural genocide against Palestine, have no right to intervene in the affairs of Iraq or any other state.

Protests against the sanctions have been growing in the US. The Chicago-based Voices in the Wilderness group faces a huge fine from the US authorities for travelling to Iraq and distributing medicine and toys.

The academics and activists Noam Chomsky, Edward Herman, Edward Said, and Howard Zinn have described sanctions as



Molly Cooper

Sit-down protest in Whitehall called by CND and others opposed to British-US policy of attacking Iraq.

"sanctioned mass-murder that is nearing holocaust proportions."

In Britain, Voices in the Wilderness plans a National Day of Action Against Sanctions on 27 February, and the Campaign Against Sanctions and War on Iraq plans a national demonstration on 17 April; Tony Benn and Ahmed Ben Bella will be among the speakers. All unions should be pressed to support this demon-

stration and its demands; all CLPs should be calling on their MPs to denounce the criminal sanctions and demand that they be dropped.

■ Voices in the Wilderness, 12 Trinity Road, London N2 8JJ. voices@viwuk.freemove.co.uk

■ Campaign Against Sanctions and War on Iraq, BM 2966, London WC1N 3XX.

## Women's protest fights Turkish butcher state

**Women are frequently the earliest and most active campaigners against wars and repressive regimes. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, and the Women in Black in Jerusalem and Belgrade, are among the best known groups. A less-well known group is the Saturday Mothers in Istanbul, who gather every week to protest at the disappearance, and presumed murder by the Turkish state, of their relatives. A delegation of British women visited Istanbul in January to show solidarity with the Saturday Mothers, who face constant harassment from the Turkish authorities. JAMES KAFKA reports.**

MEMBERS of the delegation, organised by the International Committee Against Disappearances, gave moving accounts on their return of discussions with mothers and wives of the disappeared.

The protest, in which the women place flowers in Istanbul's Galatasaray Square, was prevented by police - about 300 armed police surrounded two mothers of disappeared people, eight supporters, and five British women.

On previous occasions, women have been arrested; over 400 have been arrested since the protest was declared illegal last August. On one occasion, the women were held on a bus, which was then filled with tear gas. This repression may have deterred some women from joining the

protest, but it has strengthened the resolve of those who continue, week after week, to demand the return of their loved ones, or of their bodies.

In the course of Turkey's war against the Kurdish people and Turkish socialists and human rights activists, some 2000 people have "disappeared" since 1993. The government and military have denied any involvement.

But their responsibility is proved by the evidence of one of the few to survive, revolutionary activist Ayhan Uzala, who was held from 29 November to 18 December 1995, beaten, threatened with execution, and interrogated about the Communist Party of Turkey (Marxist-Leninist). Ayhan's speech to the second international conference against disappearances is published in Disappearances: Never Again, published by the ICAD.

### Harassment

The war against the Kurds has spread inexorably westward, and hundreds of Turkish human rights activists have been harassed, including Turkey's leading novelist Yasar Kemal. Leading sociologist Dr Ismail Besicki and Kurdish MP Leyla Zana have received long political sentences for legal professional activity. Hundreds of members of the legal political party Hadep have been arrested, and several newspapers have been closed.

The army, which claims that it is protecting Turkey's secular constitution against a threat of "Islamic

fundamentalism", has intervened in the country's nominally democratic processes, insisting that they will prevent an Islamic party from forming the government should they win the forthcoming general election.

Indeed, the Islamic Welfare Party, which won the largest number of votes in the December 1995 election, was subsequently banned.

Turkey is a key element in the Anglo-American system of control in the Middle East. Its recent military pact with Israel ensures that Iraq, Syria and Iran face the possibility of a concerted attack from two directions.

Although human rights violations may be used as a means to exclude Turkey from the EU, the British government continues to prop up the Turkish regime.

Despite the Labour party's much-vaunted "ethical foreign policy", British Aerospace and British Leyland still arm the Turkish military, while British police help train the Turkish police. Meanwhile Kurdish and Turkish asylum seekers face continued harassment in Britain.

The Labour movement must act in support of those facing Turkish repression.

Self-determination for the Kurdish people! Freedom of political activity in Turkey! Stop the harassment and imprisonment of asylum speakers! No arms sales or military support for Turkey!

■ ICAD (British Section), PO Box 8446, London N17



# Brighter prospects for Sri Lanka left

**SRI LANKA'S ruling People's Alliance (PA) has inflicted an electoral defeat in the North Western Province on the United National Party (UNP) who previously held the province. Elections took place for the provincial council at the end of January in this Sinhala dominated part of Sri Lanka. The election campaign saw a marked increase in accusations of violence over the last local government elections in 1997, according to the interim report on election violations. P Sandanam reports.**

One of the noticeable things about these elections was that the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) stood for the first time in a provincial council election and came third behind the two main parties.

The JVP, a Sinhala radical petty bourgeois movement, previously opposed the formation of provincial councils (PCs) in 1987 as a method of devolving power to minority Tamils. They launched a campaign of violence against the PCs in 1987, and the then government used state terror against them killing or disappearing nearly 60,000 youth and destroying the leadership.

The chauvinist forces which were in the JVP have left and today joined hands with the militarist forces within government which are led by Deputy Anuruddha Ratwatte and formed a so-called 'anti terrorist movement' which campaigns for war against the Tamils and against all provincial governments.

Under new leadership the JVP have made a sharp turn to the left, demonstrated not only by their participation in the provincial elections but by the fact that they

are closely allied with the New Left Front in all types of struggles against the onslaught of neo-liberalism in Sri Lanka.

The newly formed New Left Front (NLF) comprising of the Nava Samasmaja Party (NSSP), United Socialist Party (USP) - a party affiliated to Militant - and the New Democratic Front (NDF) managed to get a significant vote of 12,817 (1.2 per cent).

The total percentage of votes for the JVP and the NLF was over 5 per cent. This is remarkable as the present government came into power in 1994 as a coalition with the support of the Communist Party and the Lanka Samasamaja Party (LSSP) - centre left - a defeat for the Sri Lankan left.

The blow was heavily felt in the NSSP as their most popular leader, Vasudeva Nanayakkara, split away with a group and joined the coalition to "create a left from within the forces of PA".

The PA claimed that they would be able to reach a just settlement of the Tamil question. Of course they have completely failed in this. The NSSP explained that the bourgeoisie would not be able to deliver peace with their market-orientated policy.

In this election Vasu made a personal statement asking the voters to vote for candidates who are campaigning for the progressive ideas that the PA supposedly stood for.

## Vote for left

Asked by the media whether he saw anyone in the PA who fitted his criteria, he was forced to answer no. He had to passively say that the Left should be given a vote. Today the Left which stood to build its forces from elements who are disillusioned with the PA can rejoice about the outcome.

The Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) - a non-governmental organisation - has shown that there were 675 reported incidents of violence in

45 days of the campaign and the main culprit was the PA.

The UNP certainly don't have clean hands either. Patrick Fernando, the leader of the NLF team, and Vickramabahu Karunaratna, General Secretary of the NSSP, were both assaulted by PA thugs. Patrick had to be hospitalised.

Two days after the results were announced, the JVP, the NLF and the MULF (Muslim United Liberation Front - a radical Muslim force) launched a massive demonstration in the capital, Colombo, attended by nearly 4000 people.

The majority were workers. Their demand was that the election result should be declared null and void, given the massive violence and ballot rigging. The CMEV and the UNP have also come out with similar demands. In the unlikely event of the NWP being dissolved and fresh elections held, the left is sure to capture a better share of votes.

According to a ruling by the courts, the government should hold elections in five other provinces. These elections were postponed on supposed "security reasons".

The deputy defence minister, who is part of the chauvinist block, said that elections will be held once the war against the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) is won.

The government is at a stalemate in the war and the court has ruled against them over the postponement of local elections.

There is a working class majority in some of the other provinces, particularly in Western province which contains the capital, Colombo. Once these elections are held, the Left is sure to gather more momentum and win a far more significant number of votes.

The ruling coalition showing its complete inability to deliver and resorting to violent means of gathering votes clearly exposes its oppressive character.

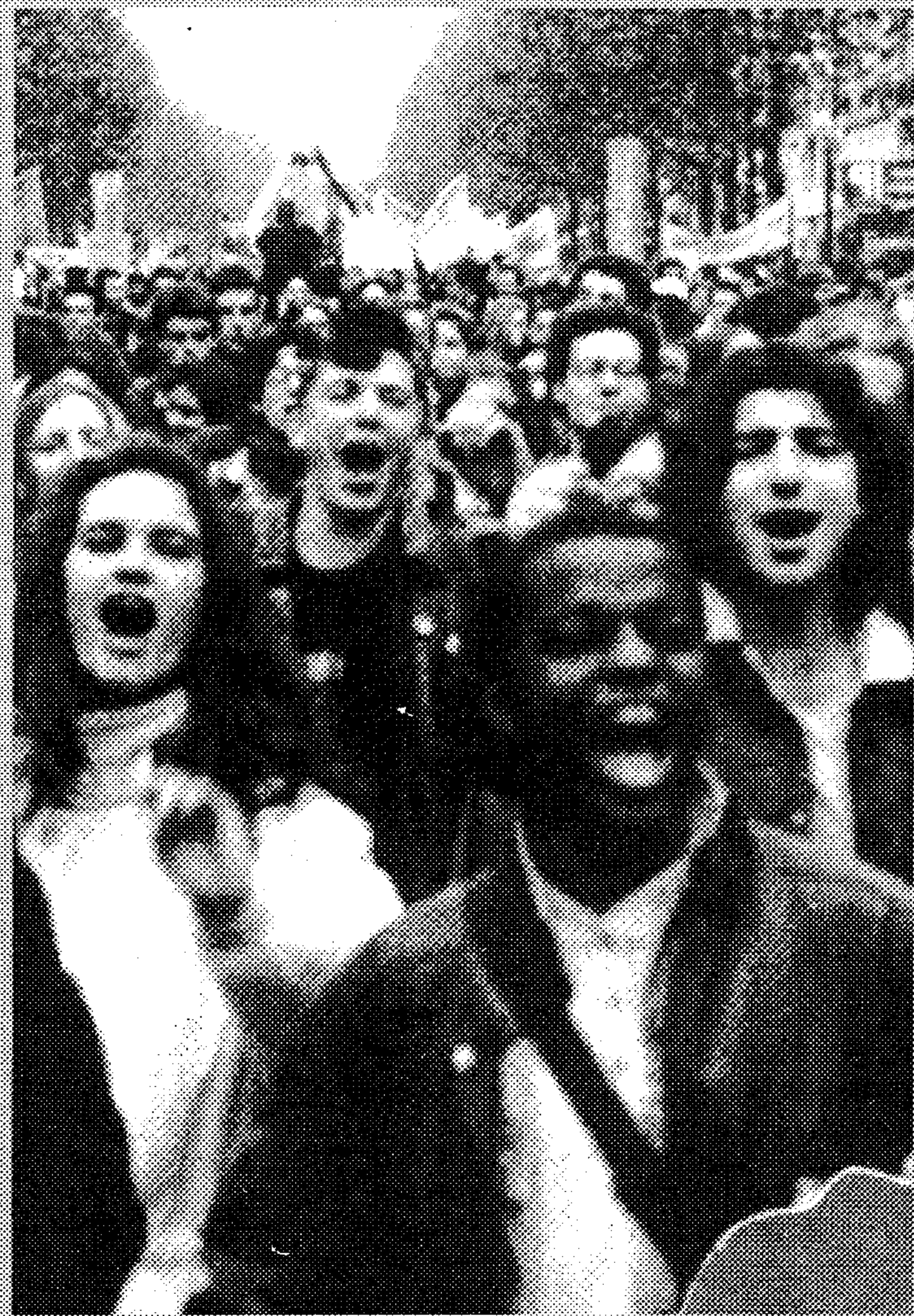
Vickramabahu Karunaratna of the NSSP explained: "The left within the PA coalition that planned to wag the dog by its tail has failed utterly. They remained tight lipped while all these atrocities were committed".

Losing one of its significant strongholds will add to the decline of the UNP. Both the major parties pumped a massive amount of money into the election.

The forces of dissent gaining a 5 per cent vote in this election marred with violence, ballot rigging and state terror clearly shows that the Left wing forces in Sri Lanka are making their way to the forefront."



**Losing one of its significant strongholds will add to the decline of the UNP.**



## SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

### Where we stand

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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**A Socialist land reform programme**

**Making the Land ours**

**Dave Bangs**

**T**he issue of land reform is back on the public agenda after being unmentionable for 20 years. With the huge crisis of the farming industry, the debate on the Lords reform, the Scottish land reform proposals, and the international examples of the Zapatistas, the Brazilian MST, and the Indian anti-GATT farmers, a political space is being re-created for a radical countryside politics.

It seems like another world – though it is well within living memory – that Lloyd George could call at a meeting of 25,000 rural workers for the state ownership of land. Only 15 years ago Frank Dobson (Right Honourable) could support, through the Labour Land Campaign, “the socialisation of all land wealth”

Despite half a century of the most brutal destruction of our biological and cultural resources and the wholesale elimination of rural land-based labour, any political challenge to the structure of land ownership has until now been effectively marginalised.

Indeed, there has, in the post-war period, been a considerable re-legitimisation of big land ownership. The re-birth of a socialist land politics will not be before time!

**The legacy of Liberalism and Labourism**

A combination of the post-war structural changes in patterns of tenure and the historical strength of anti-socialist conceptions of land reform have contributed to our defeats.

In the late nineteenth century debate between socialists and supporters of Henry George’s Land Tax, it was the Georgists who won. These “true free traders” believed that the solution lay in attacking the parasitic burden represented by land rent and site development value on the free development of the market economy.

The so-visible results of rural and urban landlordism brought them thousands of working class supporters, and the formal adoption of much of their policy by both Liberal and Labour leaderships.

Yet the progress of post-war productivist farming has broken up the old tri-partite structure of rentier landlord, tenant farmer and waged worker. At one end of the scale land-based labour and small farming have been largely eliminated. At the other end the landlord and tenant roles have been merged.

Huge, highly capitalised farming units, covering thousands of acres are run by a mixture of adaptive old landlords and new entrepreneurs. The Georgist distinction between the parasitic landlord and the progressive producer has proved to be entirely secondary, if not reactionary.

Thus the movement was not ideologically prepared for the definitive assault on the rural



*Space: the final frontier. It's time to boldly go ...*

landscape and farm employment which post-war productivist agriculture brought.

Indeed, the Attlee government reforms, which institutionalised price guarantees and protected the business farmer against the demands of rural workers and the environment, laid the basis for this assault.

**The present debate**

Now this ideology of the liberated market is raising its head in a new and worrying form. Opponents of the horrors of productivism, from the far right (like old Tory MP Sir Richard Body) to the direct action left (like George Monbiot) make common cause in favour of “liberating” farm markets from the distortions caused by gross producer subsidies.

Pundits like George Harvey (“The Killing of the Countryside”) call for farmers to become entrepreneurs again, free “from the straight-jacket of subsidy and state control”.

A passionate and powerful polemic against agri-business is entangled in a confused attack on any state control, and an advocacy of a small farming agriculture in a liberated market which looks back to a non-existent golden age.

The new land rights organisation The Land is Ours, which seemed to offer such promise at its inception, continues to operate at the margins of the debate rather than at its centre. It does have many strengths. It understands that the issues of urban and rural land are linked, and it operates across both environments.

It uses direct action as a key weapon, and it encompasses a whole range of anti-development, access, biodiversity, and sustain-

able farming campaigns. But its vision seems heavily “back-to-the-landist”, and too much of its energy goes into endorsing utopian and escapist initiatives whose history of incorporation and marginalisation is almost as old as capitalism.

The debate in Scotland seems to have progressed furthest, with formal proposals published by the Scottish Office provoking broadsheet headlines like “Clearing the Lairds” (*Daily Telegraph*), and “At Last: an End to Feudalism” (*The Independent*).

Yet the proposals are anything but radical. They offer the possibility of a community right to buy only at the point of sale. They offer no significant new resources.

They apply only to undefined “remote fragile communities”, and they do not even promise the abolition of agricultural rate relief. Furthermore, the suggestions on wildlife protection may leave Scotland with a weakened system, given the developmentalist thinking there.

**For a Socialist Countryside**

A socialist politics of the countryside must be based firmly on two principles. Firstly, that the forces for progressive social change lie overwhelmingly in our towns and cities, not in the countryside itself. Even the days of Joseph Arch’s Agricultural Labourers Union (in the 1870’s) the support of urban workers was crucial to the new union’s survival. Nowadays rural working people are marginalised by middle and owning class in-migrants, and are without an independent political voice.

Secondly our socialist demands must be based on democracy and self management. The countryside needs to be managed by the

collective of all its users, both urban and rural.

So what should our programme include?

● **Maximum size limits**

Presently, huge local monopolies exist. Strict ceilings should operate, related to the quality of the land – as they already do in many other bourgeois democracies.

● **The socialisation of all land holdings above the maximum size limits.**

Our demands for socialisation are based on a highly capitalised modern industry with a global division of labour and a highly skilled workforce, not on a peasant economy of hand-worked smallholdings (like Russia in the 1920’s). Our problems are with over-production, not under-production (as in Stalinist Russia).

The forms of social ownership will vary considerably, with co-operatives, local authority and neighbourhood managements, and a strong central state sector. Already a significant socially-owned sector exists in some areas, though much of it is a “sleeping giant” in terms of its progressive potential.

● **Democratisation of Land management**

The high technical and cultural level at which many user groups operate (farm and forestry staff, conservation and recreation managers and others) would enable a rapid development of good self management practice. In Brighton the Keep Our Downs Public coalition proposed such a new accountable structure for the borough’s 11,000 acre estate.

Supervisory structures also need to exist for those areas not in public ownership, and only partial models exist for such bodies. User groups would automatically have the right of representation proportionate to their social weight.

● **Socialisation of all development rights**

Modern planning law has created a complex system of negative control of change of use and development which is at best ameliorative and reactive, and, at worst, a mere facilitator of private profit.

It does not tackle the main anti-social dynamics of the market economy, such as uneven regional development, the creation of mega-cities, the destruction of natural and cultural resources, the elimination of land-based labour or the development of unsustainable transport systems.

We must elevate the community and the state to the role of sole developers. Built development should be based primarily on local and national development agencies, direct labour organisations, socially owned industries, or the central state.

● **End all production subsidies and means test all conservation and employment subsidies.**

Production subsidies are a tool for imperialist food politics, and for the destruction of the environment. Conservation subsidies without means testing merely serve to re-legitimise big land ownership. It is crazy that single parents and the unemployed are means tested to the hilt, while parasitic barley barons are paid for every cosphe they replant.

● **Democratise access to land as an economic resource**

There are few farmers of working class origin, few from city areas, few women farmers, and virtually no black farmers. On the Labour-controlled 11,000 acre Brighton Downland estate one extended family controls a quarter of the farmed land.

● **End the hereditary ownership of land**

Hereditary ownership perpetuates exclusion and bolsters the cultural power of landed wealth by its constant engendering of images of continuity and tradition (as though only ruling class people had such things).

Land-based occupations need to be normalised by acquiring the character of salaried jobs – as secure and well remunerated as all useful jobs deserve to be – rather than as rights to the total control of fractions of the land.

The issue of land tenure is not some sideline to the issues of healthy, sustainable food production, biodiversity, or access rights. Ownership is power, and the countryside needs that power to be socialised and democratised.

From our towns and cities we will reclaim our countryside.

■ **Sunday March 21 the Sussex network of The Land Is Ours is having an important trespass walk to bolster support and publicity for the vital 2nd Reading of Gordon Prentice’s Right To Roam Bill on March 26.**

**We urge all socialists to attend this event. The theme is “the aristocracy”. Meet Brighton Station 10.00 am sharp. Wrap up warm. Wear good boots. Bring packed lunch. Sorry no dogs. Walk up to 6 miles Contact Brighton (01273) 620 815.**

**It's crazy that single parents and the unemployed are means tested to the hilt, while barley barons are paid for every cosphe they replant.**



# Marxism: key to the national question

Paul Flannigan

It is often asserted that the Marxist tradition has made little contribution to an understanding of the rise of national struggles in the modern age. But this is an assertion that does not stand up to any scrutiny.

One Marxist in particular, Lenin, actually predicted that the desire for national independence would become an arena for explosive revolutionary activity in our century.

From the time of Lenin until today the Marxist position on the national struggle has included an attempt to inter-link three concepts: the understanding of imperialism, the concept of self-determination, and socialist revolutionary strategy.

A distinctly Marxist thesis can be succinctly formulated in the epoch of capitalist imperialism: the fight for national independence takes on a new importance and socialist support for democratic self-determination for nations becomes a central element of socialist strategy for winning large sections of the exploited to the cause of international socialism.

For some it may come as a surprise to discover that that it has been Marxists who have fought hardest and longest to defend the idea of national self-determination.

After all, isn't this supposed to be a straightforward capitalist demand? Wasn't it American President Wilson who turned this idea into the highest principle of international law?

## Lip service

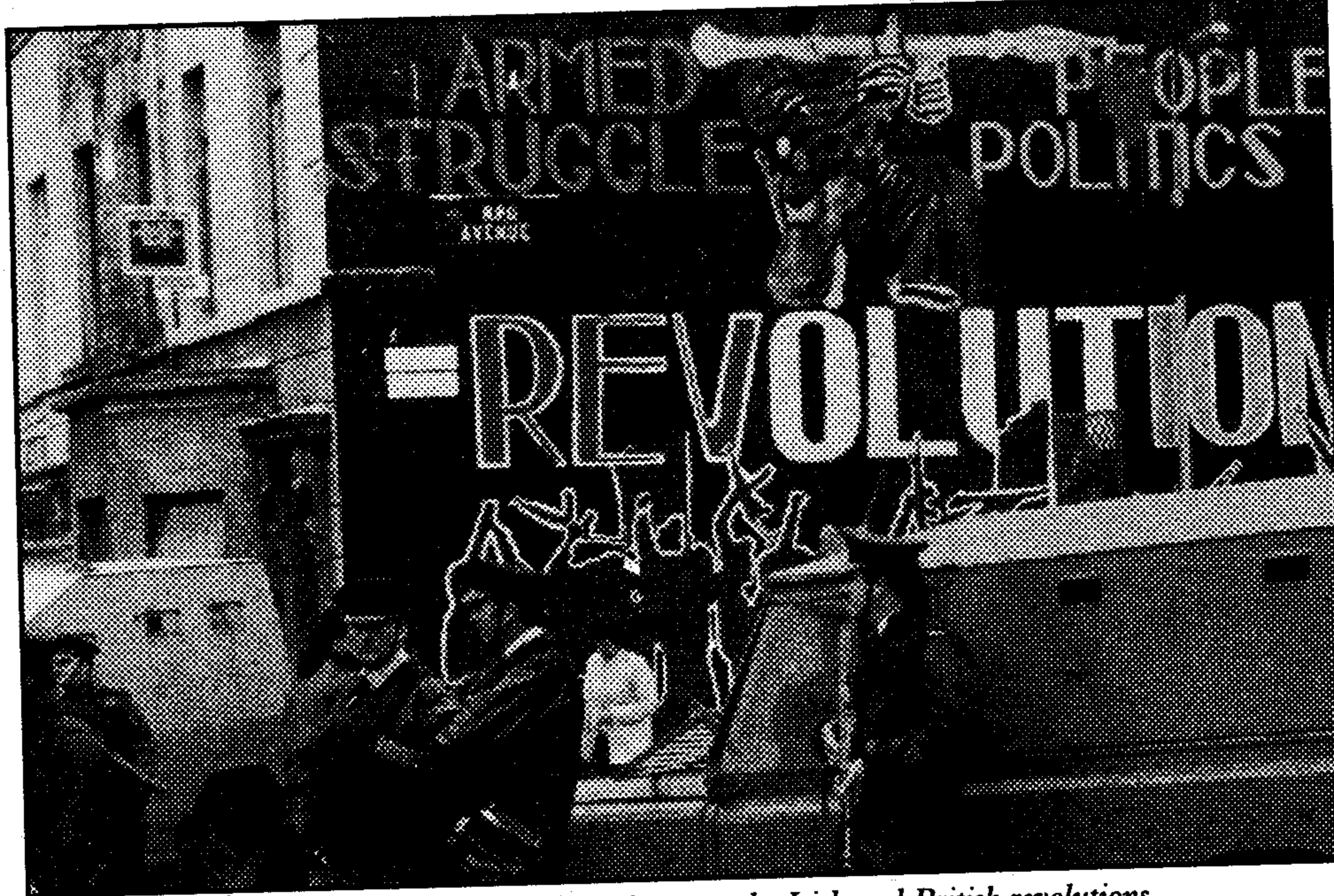
The answer to that was explained by Lenin in 1916 in his pamphlet on imperialism; in the era of imperialism the great capitalist powers would only pay lip-service to the demand for self-determination. On most occasions, he predicted, the capitalist democracies would dishonour their own sacred principle.

It didn't take long before Lenin's prediction proved itself sound in practice. In 1918, shortly after he had outlined his world programme in favour of self-determination for nations, Wilson's government flatly refused to recognise Ireland's vote in favour of self-determination. Only Lenin's Bolshevik government recognised Ireland's independence declaration in 1918.

Lenin is the central character who forged our thinking on the national question because his theory of imperialism allowed him to realise without recourse to repeated experience that the advanced democratic states would always tend to betray their own democratic principles.

To achieve what he did he had to contest a powerful Marxist current going right back to Marx himself that tended to undervalue the revolutionary significance of the demand for national self-determination. To quote from the *Communist Manifesto*, due to industrial expansion "National differences and antagonisms between people are daily more and more vanishing".

Marx tended to overestimate the speed



Marx was one of the first to recognise the link between the Irish and British revolutions

with which the world expansion of capitalism would break down national barriers, and so shatter the illusions of political independence entertained by nationalist movements.

Marx did not expect or predict a future characterised by a proliferation in new nation states: rather he expected the growth of a world or cosmopolitan bourgeoisie, and its gravedigger the international working class.

"The need for a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections every where. The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country."

Marx lived before the period of capitalism that Lenin identified as imperialism fully took shape. Because of this he only ever enjoyed glimpses into why the already formed democratic capitalist states were increasingly unlikely to support democratic demands made on behalf of oppressed peoples. Because Marx lived before the capitalist imperialist era he also failed to fully see the revolutionary potential of these struggles for national self-determination.

Marx and Engels also tended to assume that a progressive causality could work only in the one direction: they thought social emancipation could only be brought to the rest of the world by working class revolt spreading outwards from Britain, France and Germany.

Whilst it is true Marx never espoused an unconditional right of national self-determination for oppressed nations, something close to it did emerge from his studies on Ireland in the late 1860s.

Out of his studies on Ireland he formulated two ideas that were subsumed into the Leninist concept of self-determination: that "a nation that oppresses another nation itself cannot be free" and that the political liberation of an oppressed nation may act as an inducement required to spark a socialist revolution in the domi-

nant nation.

In 1867 Marx wrote to Engels "For a long time I used to think the separation of Ireland from England impossible. I now think it inevitable, although after the separation there may come a federation."

In November 1867 Marx wrote to Engels "For a long time I believed it would be possible to overthrow the Irish colonial regime by English working class ascendancy ... deeper study has now convinced me of the opposite."

"The English working class will never accomplish anything until it has got rid of Ireland."

What we find here is an anticipation of Lenin by Marx: the idea that causality works in both directions, and that political struggles in the colonial and semi-colonial world can play a progressive part in influencing socialist consciousness in the advanced capitalist world.

In 1913, in his thesis on the national question Lenin's declared that "our programme cannot be interpreted to mean anything hut political self-determination, the right to secede and form a separate state."

## Strategy

Lenin's determination to uphold this right had as much to do with revolutionary strategy as political principle. His understanding was that capitalism had entered a new stage of development, which he termed imperialism.

Lenin outlined five primary features of imperialism as

1. The concentration of capital into monopolies and cartels.
2. The merging of banking capital and industrial capital into finance capital.
3. The new importance of capital export as opposed to trade.
4. The division of the world between international monopolies.
5. The territorial division of the world between the big imperialist powers.

For Lenin the bottom line was that capitalism had entered an imperialist stage which brought with it an even greater level

of exploitation for the many and privileges for the few. Imperialism at the level of the world economy was about extracting what Lenin called 'super-profits'.

It was Lenin's thesis that the super-profits extracted mainly by the monopolies, and especially the financial bourgeoisie, played a crucial role in saving advanced capitalism from potential social crisis.

They shored up the entire world system, to such an extent that capitalists were even afforded the riches to pay off certain layers of privileged workers.

Lenin drew two political conclusions from his analysis.

The first was that imperialism had no interest in spreading its own democratic ideals across the world: "both in foreign and home policy, imperialism strives towards violations of democracy, towards reaction. In this sense imperialism is indisputably the negation of democracy in general, of all democracy, and not just of one of its own demands, national self-determination."

The second conclusion was that if imperialism was denied access to super-profits in the colonies and neo-colonies, the whole capitalist chain held the potential to be periodically thrown into crisis.

During periods of crisis the fomenting of popular anti-imperialist rebellion based on the right of self-determination would effectively undermine the whole capitalist world economy.

Lenin therefore urged socialists not to shy away from fighting for the capitalist demand for national self-determination, but on the contrary to fight hardest on its behalf. Writing in defence of the Irish 1916 rebellion Lenin declared:

"To imagine that social revolution is conceivable without revolts of the small nations in the colonies and in Europe, without revolutionary outbursts by a section of the petty bourgeoisie with all its prejudices, without a movement of the politically non-conscious proletariat and semi-proletarian masses against oppression by landowners, the church and the monarchy, against national oppression ... to imagine all this is to repudiate social revolution."

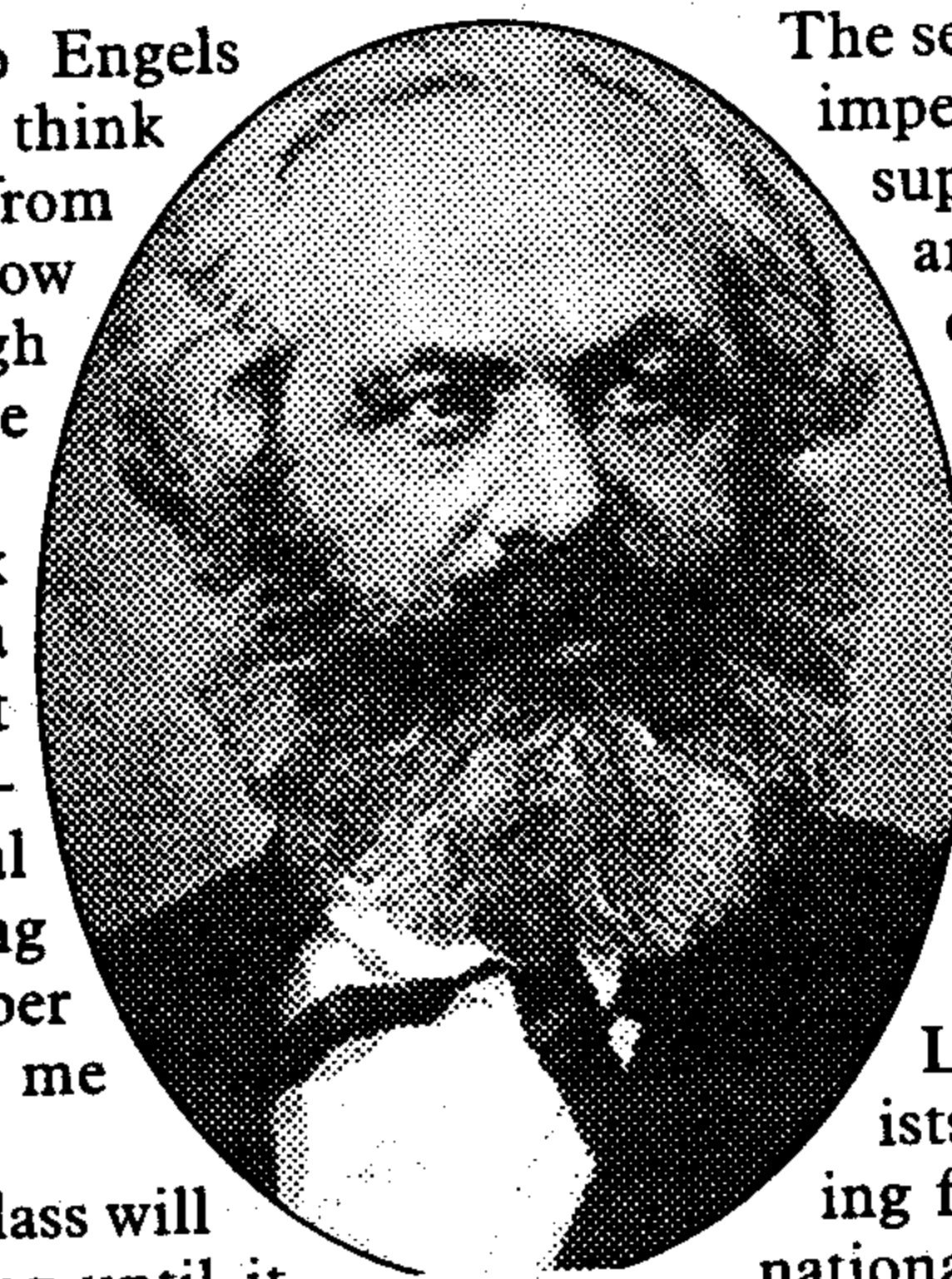
If we look around the world today many of the tendencies of international capitalism first unearthed by Lenin in 1918 can still be seen working themselves through.

All around the world we find advanced capitalist democracies consciously opposing claims for democratic rights of national self-determination - Ireland, Euskadi, Palestine, East Timor, Kurdistan, Kosovo, and Bosnia to name but a few.

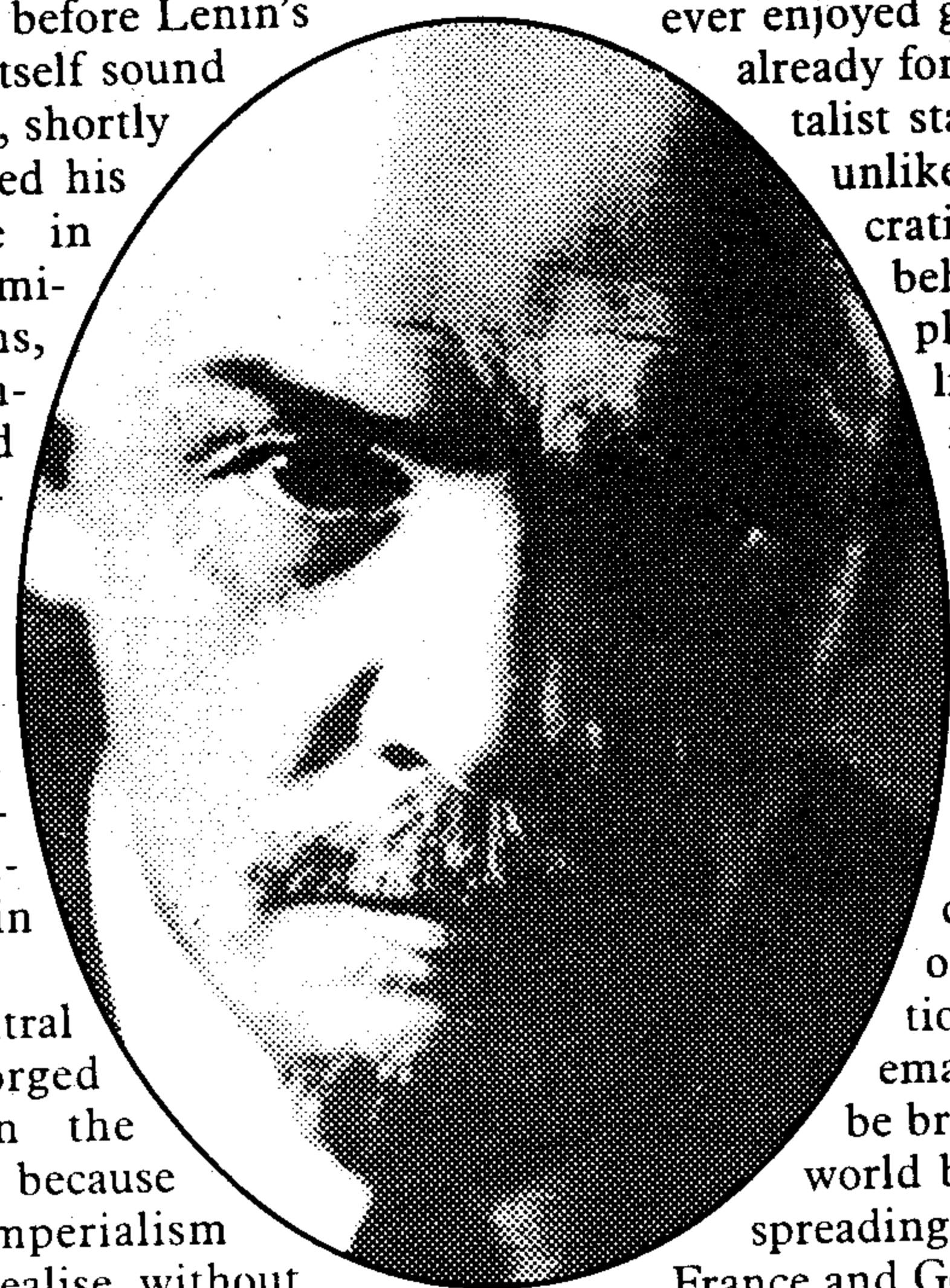
So far from having nothing to contribute to our understanding of the national question, Marxism is the only school of political theory that actually forewarns us of what to expect from the great capitalist democracies.

Marxists always expect imperialist solutions which favour big business instead of democratic ones that might help free people from oppression and exploitation.

Without such a theory we are easily led into an empiricism which is always left disappointed when the 'democrats' like Clinton and Blair fail to deliver on their fine-sounding democratic ideals.



Karl Marx



Lenin

Marxism is the only school of political theory that actually forewarns us of what to expect from the great capitalist democracies



## Letters



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

## Too harsh a review of Brenner?

I'M SURPRISED there has been no comment about Andrew Kilmister's hard-hitting review, recently reprinted in *International Viewpoint*, of Robert Brenner's special issue of *New Left Review*. Brenner is an editor of 'Against the Current' the magazine of the revolutionary group Solidarity, within which most US supporters of the Fourth International can be found.

Brenner's thesis is that the long economic boom after WW2 was ended mainly by inter-capitalist competition. Most British leftists argue otherwise, suggesting that working-class wage demands squeezed profits and triggered the recession of the 1970s.

*Socialist Outlook's* article was an especially harsh criticism: suggesting that Brenner's views opened the door to reformism. I wonder if the criticism went too far.

We need to be rather cautious about the 'back to the 1930s' economic perspective that most British left groups are developing.

Brenner's analysis seems to counter not only those who anticipate a recession like the 1930s, but also those who think world markets can develop even growth worldwide.

The revolutionary left needs a reasoned debate about the world economy.

Generally, I think it mistaken to argue that Brenner's view cuts against revolutionary socialism. There are some serious problems with Brenner's article. However his historical and political grasp are excellent.

The main problem as I see it is that, because of his neoclassical theory of value, Brenner dismisses the falling profit rate as an operational factor.

I'm sure this would be an interesting debate for *Socialist Outlook* to explore further.

**Chris Brooks,**  
Reading

■ WE WELCOME contributions towards such a debate - Eds

## Look north for action on Section 28

MARK LEWIN'S article on the anti-gay Section 28 of the 1990 Local Government Act (January 1999) rightly notes that the repeal of the Section seems to have fallen off the agenda of some London based "campaigning" organisations. Had he used his web-browser to look a bit further than London he would have found a different story.

Campaigning HIV voluntary organisations such as George House Trust in the North West, or the Aled Richards Trust in Bristol have never forgotten that Section 28 exists and have continued to campaign for its immediate repeal.

Section 28 theoretically outlaws the 'promotion of homosexuality' by local authorities. But one of its worst effects has been to frighten schools from offering sex-education for lesbians and gay men. Is it any wonder that HIV infections amongst young gay men con-

tinue to rise if sex-education is denied. Section 28 is costing lives.

Surveys of MPs (by George House Trust and Stonewall) show there is no significant support in the House for maintaining this law. A one line Bill could scrap it.

It is not acceptable for the massive majority new-Labour Government to use any excuse, including that of an un-elected House of Lords, to mean that legalised discrimination continues and the desperately needed sex education remains missing for another year.

For further details of the campaign against Section 28 contact George House Trust. (www.georgehoustrust.org.uk) Text of an open letter from GHT, ART and the All-Party Parliamentary Group on AIDS can also be found here.

**Tim Pickstone,**  
George House Trust

## Time to get good guys together!

FRANK Wainwright (Letters, Dec 1998) is right on the subject of revolutionary regroupment: "it seems like there is a spirit of rapprochement in the air".

The event in November reminded me of the Workers Press/WRP sponsored event in November 1986 on the Hungarian Revolution, at which Bob Pennington, Balasz Nagy, Cliff Slaughter, Peter Fryer, Bill Hunter and others addressed an audience of several hundred militants from across the far left.

The fact that some previous attempts at political fusion between supporters of different left papers should not deter us from trying to regroup the dispersed forces of the revolutionary left today.

One spectacular failure was that of the weekly *Socialist Organiser*, which came from a fusion between two papers, *Socialist Press* and *Workers Action* (no relation to today's publication of the same name!). The former supporters of *Socialist Press* were expunged from the ranks as the others politically degenerated into the current now known as the Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL), known for their controversial views on international questions like Ireland and Israel/Palestine.

At a recent debate between the AWL and Alan Thornett on the European Single Currency, AWL supporters bayed like a pack of wolves and abused Alan, equating his opposition to Maastricht with the views of the Tory right.

Whatever my personal disagreements with Alan over

## New Labour summed up

Margaret Cook says that Robin sold his principles in favour of a career.

Tony Blair says Robin is superb. Enough said?

**John Nicholson**  
Manchester

Europe, there is no basis for political degeneracy of this nature.

The major problem today is that many comrades are becoming demoralised by the low level of class struggle, writing contributions in *What Next?* and *New Interventions* arguing for "rethinking it all".

This is a cover for dumping all the theoretical baggage which differentiates Trotskyism different to other left wing political philosophies, that is, defence of the permanent revolution, the transitional method, the Marxist theory of the State, our understanding of the degeneration of the formerly Stalinist states, and the confidence that the working class is the only class capable of seizing power from the bour-

## More confusion on Zionism and Palestine

STEVE COLLINS seems to get into quite a state about the elementary assertion that "the Zionist state since 1998 has continued to defend and uphold its imperialist position". (Jan 99)

First we have the hot air about left-Zionists and how some of them were pro-Moscow. Well, the record of Stalinism in supporting the state of Israel is well documented, and for us, is neither here nor there - except that it confirms our view of the rotten upstarts who used to run the Kremlin.

Then we have the real howler, "What do you think Israel should have done in the face of the gyptian/Iraqi/Jordanian/Syrian/Arab League armies?" It's hard to believe that a marxist

would pose the question in such a way! (And I have it on very good authority that Steve is indeed a marxist.)

The facts are (as if we need to restate them) that the very nature of the Zionist project in Palestine,

- is racist, based as it is on the idea of building a racially exclusive "Jewish state" (the point here, of course, is not whether Jews are "a race", but that they're seen as such by the Zionists - see, for example, the so-called "right of return")

- is based on the idea of "a land without a people for a people without a land". Well, that land had people who had their land stolen from them

- denies the possibility of Palestinian self-determination - there is no "right of return" for them!

- creates a "little Jewish Ulster" in permanent conflict with its neighbours. Can anyone doubt that this is why the US so heavily bankrolls the Israeli state?

This situation is the main obstacle to the unity of Palestinian and Israeli workers.

When some can only wring their hands and see a tragic "no-win" situation, when some can see the only choice as being between bourgeois nationalism and Zionism, between the PLO and the Israeli state, socialists have an alternative - a class alternative. We defend the fight for a bi-national, secular workers' state, as part of a socialist Middle East - the only solution for both Palestinians and Israelis.

**Jim Padmore,** Spain

**Michael Calvert,**  
London

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# Socialist OUTLOOK

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