

NS 27

Socialist Outlook

A monthly marxist review * New series No. 27 * September 1999 * 50p

LOBBY Labour Party Conference

- **Restore the link - Decent pensions**
- **Welfare not warfare**
- **A 35 hour week - no loss of pay**
- **End privatisation and PFI/PPP**
- **Repeal the anti union laws**
- **Scrap the Asylum and Immigration Act.**

Bournemouth, Sunday Sept 26

Lobby called by: Tariq Ali, John Foster Gen Sec NUJ, Jack Jones, Justice for Ricky Reel campaign, National Coalition of anti-deportation campaigns, Liverpool Dockers, N/NW London CWU, Mark Steel, Jeremy Hardy and other trade unionists and campaigning groups.
 Also (all in a personal capacity) Gordon Vassel exec FBU, John Ireland Postal Exec CWU, Christine Blower NUT NEC, Candy Udwin UCLH UNISON.

Bid to revive London Socialist Alliance

Greg Tucker, secretary London Socialist Alliance

SOCIALISTS in London have agreed to work together to stand a slate for the Greater London Authority elections next year.

Representatives from around half a dozen political groups met with independent activists at the beginning of August to discuss whether a Socialist Alliance joint election campaign would be possible. Despite varying emphases, they agreed to work together.

The election of the Scottish Socialist Party's Tommy Sheridan showed that with a consistent long-term approach it was possible to build the confidence of working people to vote for a socialist alternative to Labour.

Closer to home, the victory of Ian Page for the Socialist Party in a Lewisham Council by-election in June has shown that with sufficient local roots it is possible to tap into the growing disgust with New Labour's broken promises.

Credible

Over the next months the London Socialist Alliance has now to set itself the task of laying the basis for a credible election campaign - developing its political programme, choosing candidates and putting in place local socialist alliances across London, able to encourage a broad socialist challenge to Labour.

Some forces at the meeting

wanted to immediately move to a formal delegate structure - in effect declaring a new party into existence. This was rightly rejected, for a looser form of organisation, designed to ensure that existing organised groups work together on areas where we can agree. The key is not to formalise relations but to build a practical experience of unity in action.

However, to do this means overcoming the problems that became apparent in the run up to the European elections. Hedging their bets, the main political organisations, in particular the SWP, refused to engage their membership in building anything practical.

Fright

Whilst they promised forces during the election campaign itself, up to that point everything was to be conducted at a leadership level only. When the SWP took fright at the prospect of Arthur Scargill standing in London, their membership could not be blamed for having missed the whole exercise altogether.

This time round it is important that roots are put down in local communities from the start.

That means every organisation being prepared to work collectively, now - building local groups, involving all socialists, through the practical collaboration of existing political organisations and by tapping the talents of independent activists.

Building the lobby of Labour Party conference would be a good

first step.

That said, the work done in preparation for the abortive Euro-election campaign has laid down basic points of agreement on a political platform.

Where that needs extending is in our relation to green politics and the Green Party in particular.

The Greens have already chosen candidates for the GLA elections. It is clear from the Euro-elections that they represent in the eyes of many a serious alternative to the left of Labour.

So is co-operation with them possible or even desirable? The general feeling of the meeting seemed to be that co-operation would not be possible, but it's clear that environmental issues are basic to socialist politics.

Our political platform has to raise the simple facts that socialism is not viable without respect for the environment in which we live - and that it is the capitalist market system which is the motor force behind the destruction of the environment we are witnessing today.

Being Socialists means being green, but equally without being a socialist you cannot be a green.

New Labour has now chosen its candidates for the GLA. Party members were given little choice from a rigged panel.

Almost without exception, its Blairite candidates will support government attacks on the working people of London.

It is important that we are open to all developments within the Labour Party, as the New Labour

offensive continues to drive committed socialists out of Labour's ranks.

We have to show that there is an alternative. Central to that will be building practical support for all those defending themselves from government attacks.

The LSA agreed to try to work closely with trade unionists fighting privatisation, supporting their campaigns now, but also looking to involve prominent rank and file activists in our campaign, as part of our slate of candidates.

Already inside the RMT, the London Underground Regional Council has indicated that it would consider supporting candidates prepared to endorse RMT policy to keep the tube public.

Opportunities

As UNISON members in health and local government come under further attacks and as the government prepares to outlaw strikes by fire-fighters, opportunities for collaboration must be seized.

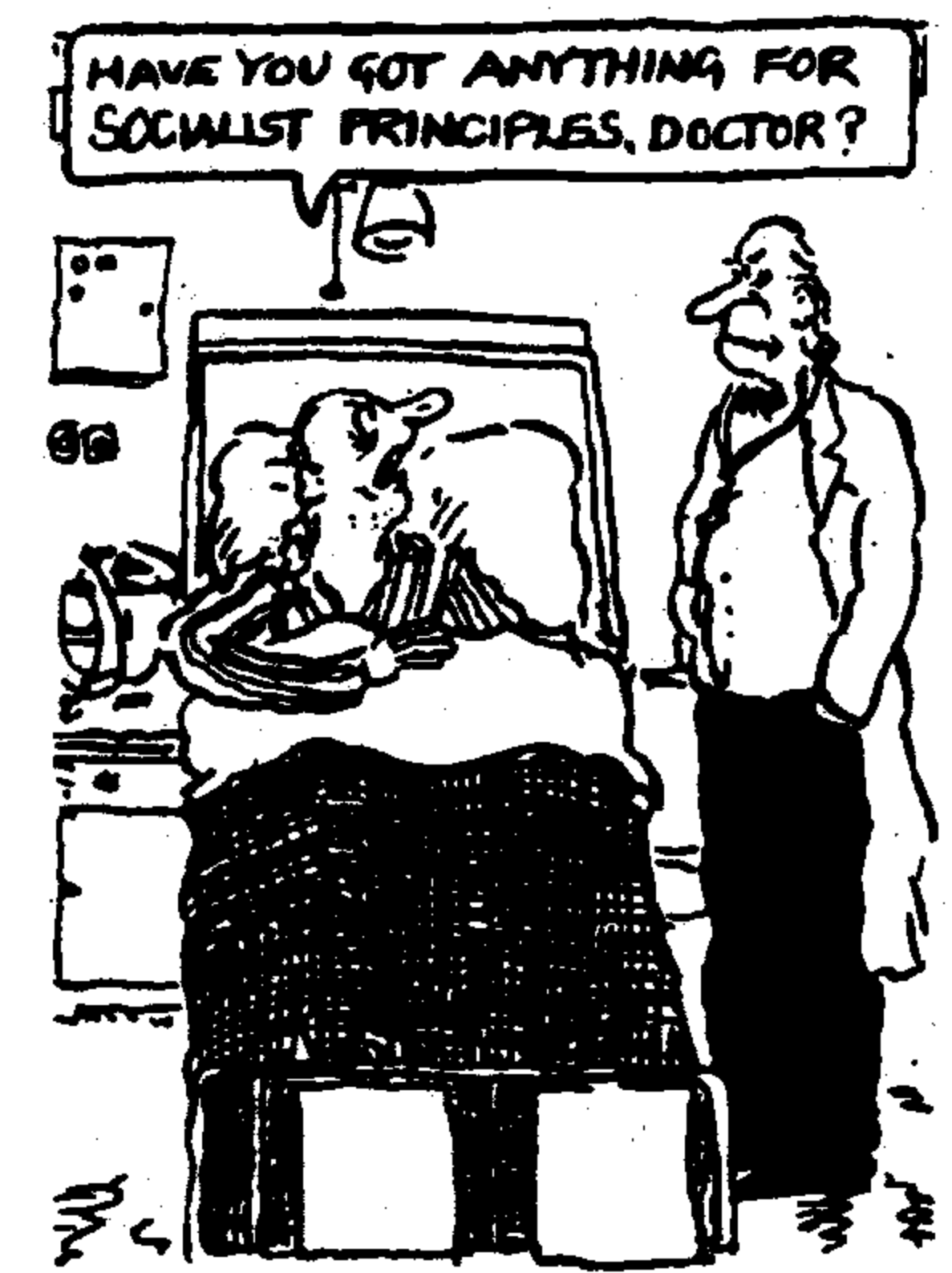
Above all the Socialist Alliance needs to put down roots in the communities across London. We cannot pretend to be a new political party, fully formed - but we can show that it is possible for socialists to work together.

If we are successful in building such unity, we can present a serious alternative in the Greater London Authority elections.

Not as an end in itself but as part of building the fight-backs of our class and of a process of rebuilding the left as a political force in Britain.

It is important that roots are put down in local communities from the start

We can show it is possible for socialists to work together



Doug McAvoy re-elected NUT General Secretary
by Keith Sinclair, President Hull NUT (personal capacity)

VOTING for the election for General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers for the five-year term 1999-2004 ended at the start of the summer.

Doug McAvoy was re-elected to the post of General Secretary. The results were McAvoy 39,245 and left challenger Christine Blower 22,183.

The vote was a disappointment for the left in the NUT, which has waged a united and well-organised campaign.

However, the result was not totally surprising. McAvoy had carefully positioned himself against the government on the key issue of Performance Related Pay and had appeared, to many, to be willing to lead a serious campaign on the issue at NUT conference.

The reality has been that there was no strike action in the summer term. A boycott of appraisal has been introduced following a successful ballot.

This ballot has not yet had any major effect partly because most well organised schools have not been participating in appraisal schemes for a number of years.

The real battle is yet to come and will revolve around New Labour's new appraisal scheme which will be used to try to bring in Performance Related Pay.

The left needs to continue to build the campaigns around Performance Related Pay and privatisation. We need to remind everyone that the vote for McAvoy was not a vote for the government despite ministers welcoming McAvoy's victory.

Even McAvoy's keenest supporters are critical of New Labour. The left needs to work to convince ordinary teachers of the need to actively take on New Labour and to make them understand the all-to-real possibility of the newly elected General Secretary trying to reach agreement with the government on the basis of some spurious

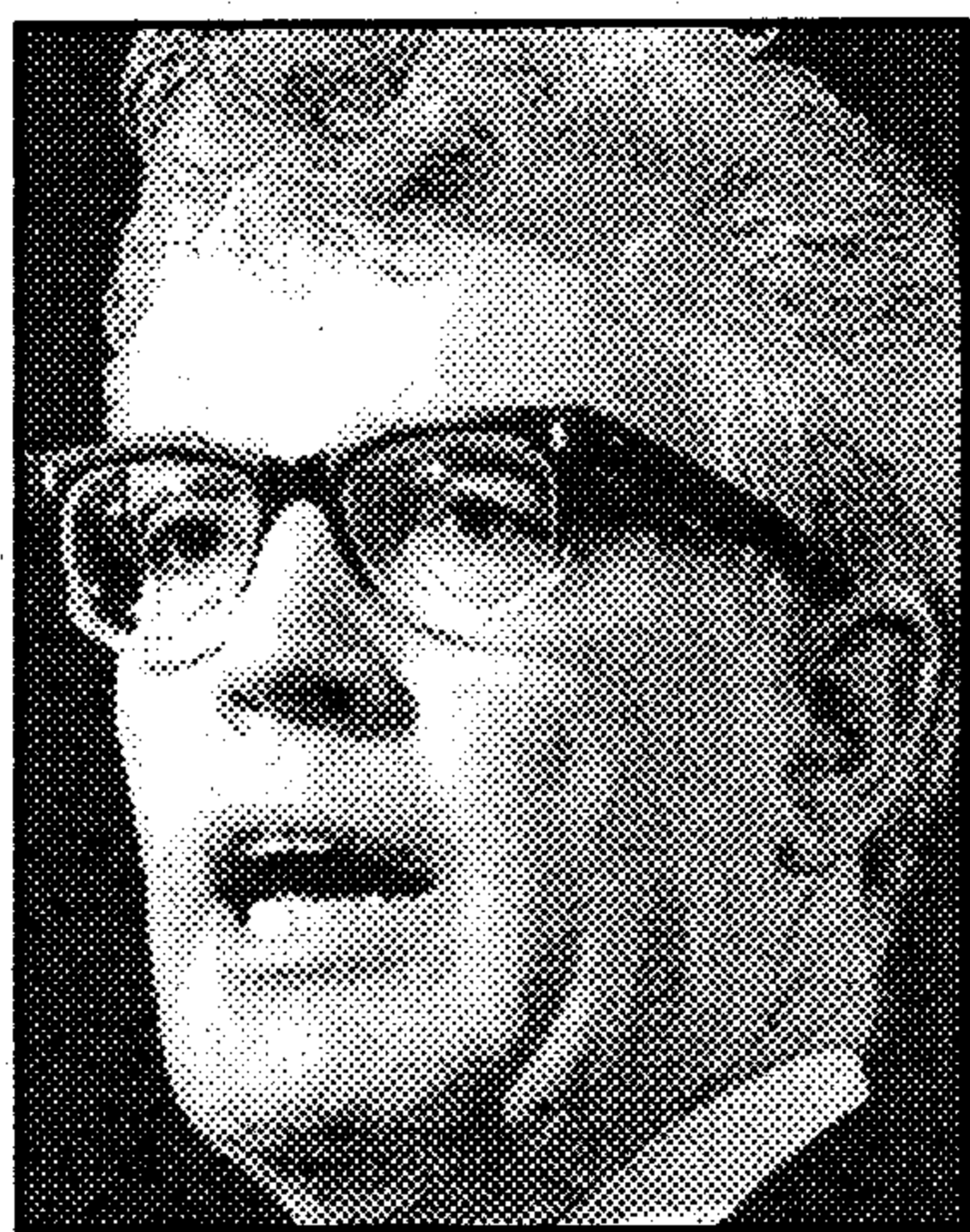
Bickerstaffe fronts witch-hunt of supporters of UNISON policy

Simon Deville

OUTGOING General Secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe has written to all UNISON branches, regions and national departments of the union threatening disciplinary action for using any branch funds or resources to support the upcoming lobby of Labour Party conference.

The lobby has been called to campaign for decent pensions, welfare not warfare, a 35 hour week with no loss of pay, end privatisation and PFI/PPP, full union rights and to scrap the Asylum and Immigration Bill.

In an amazing and daring feat of legal gymnastics, Rodney argues that supporting a lobby around these demands - all of which are in line with existing UNISON policies - would be in breach of the union's political fund rules and of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation Act 1992.



Bick: bowing out attacking the left

The letter states... 'branches are instructed not to use any funds to support the 1999 lobby. To do so would be in breach of the union's rules and statute.

The Certification Officer has already issued two rulings against UNISON concerning branch payments to political parties. In his ruling dated June 1998, the Certification Officer indicated that he

'would not expect to take such a lenient view of any further breaches' by UNISON branches'.

Whilst many of us might scratch our heads wondering what donations to political parties have got to do with supporting the lobby, earlier on the letter says that 'an article in Socialist Worker calls for union branches to pledge support for the lobby and to book transport.'

We can only deduce from this that the SWP have secretly brought a network of coach and rail companies, and hence booking transport would go straight to their coffers.

The SWP also urged support for UNISON's April 10 demonstration for a Living Wage - and other demonstrations correctly backed by the union - but this was not used a reason for seeking to prevent UNISON branches sending delegations.

At the 1998 Annual Delegates Conference the bureaucracy managed to get a motion banning branch affiliations to the Campaign for a Fighting UNISON by assuring delegates that this did not mean that branches were not allowed to publicly campaign around issues of union policy. Having won that position the union leadership are attempting to move the goalposts even further.

Meanwhile, conference is barred from discussing how the Affiliated Political Fund is used to campaign against union policy within the Labour Party since even discussing the APF's role at conference would be in breach of UNISON rules.

It is absolutely clear that if these moves aren't clearly rejected by the membership then union democracy will disappear in the same way as it has in the Labour Party.

Unite to challenge Straw's racism

Home Secretary Jack Straw's outrageous stereotyping of the traveller community has been rightly greeted by a good deal of anger.

In an interview with BBC Radio West Midlands on July 22 Straw said: "There are relatively few real Romany gypsies left, who seem to mind their own business and don't cause trouble to other people, and then there are a lot of people who masquerade as travellers or gypsies who trade on the sentiment of people, but who seem to think that because they label themselves as travellers that therefore they've got a licence to commit crimes and act in an unlawful way that other people don't have."

He then went on to make even more offensive comments claiming that travellers were going round stealing and defecating in doorways.

As Rachel Morris, coordinator of the traveller law research at Cardiff University responded "He has fallen into the trap of thinking that you have to live in a painted wagon and sit around a campfire to be a real gypsy. Any-

EDITORIAL

one who doesn't fit with that romantic image is automatically given the other label of being a thieving, anti-social trouble maker."

Traveller organisations in Britain and elsewhere have worked hard to build unity across the communities. By law the term gypsy incorporates anyone with a nomadic way of life - not just the Roma, but Scots and Irish travellers as well as new age travellers.

These communities have many differences in culture but they face the same discrimination historically and today. It is this common experience of discrimination - of lack of decent sites, harassment by the police, lack of clean water, or access to jobs and to decent education, that has forged this unity. They will not be thrown off course by the racism of people like Jack Straw.

The experience of harassment and stereotyping has strengthened their organisations. Signs in

pubs that refuse admission to travellers may seem trivial to those that they don't exclude, but few would react in the same way if it were other ethnic groups that were excluded.

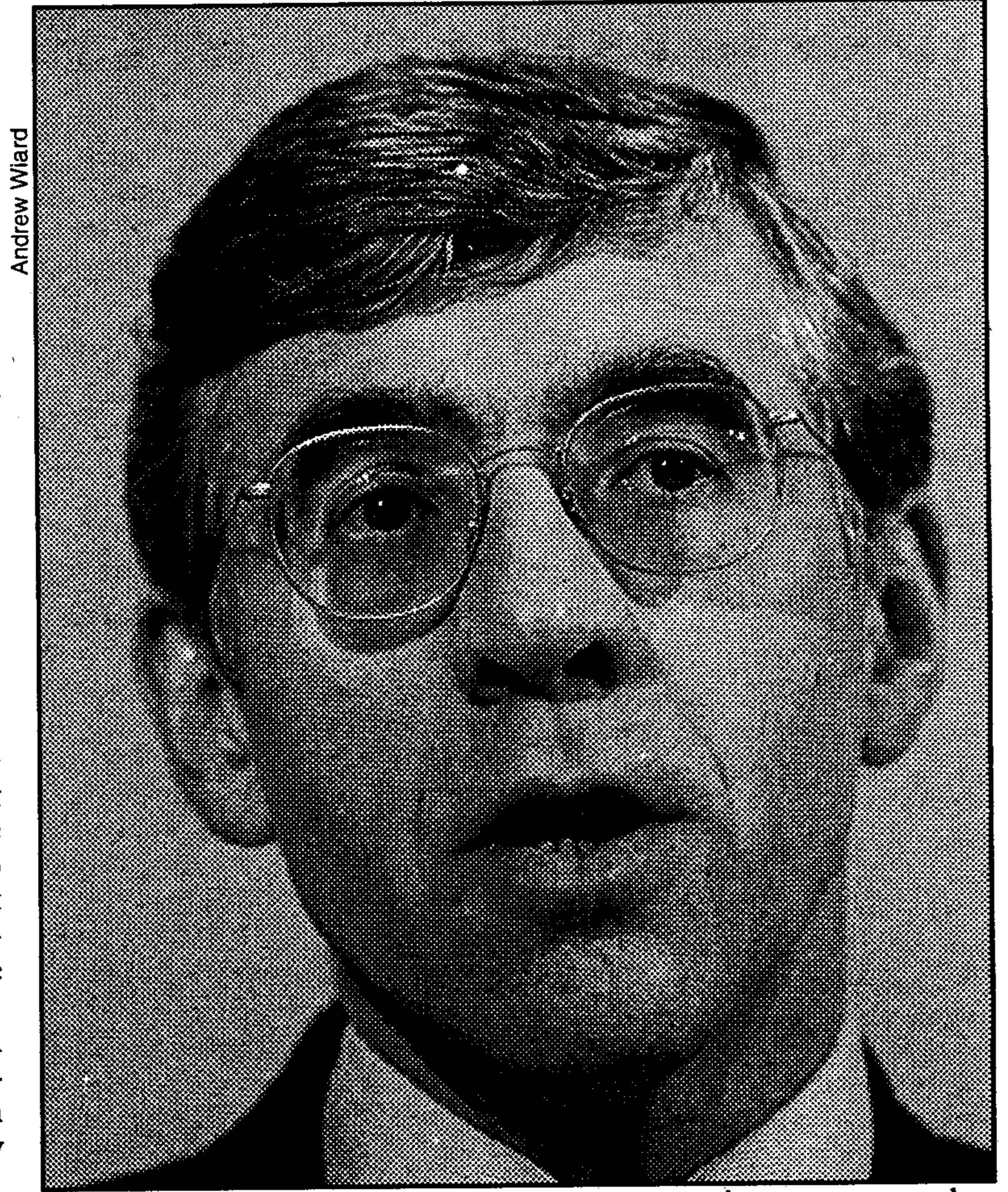
It is pleasing that criticism of Straw's intervention has come not only from travellers' organisations themselves but also from sections of the black community.

Darcus Howe for example argued that Straw would not have been able to get away with using the spat of shootings by some from the Jamaican community to brand all black people (or all West Indians, or all Jamaicans) as murderers in this post-Lawrence environment.

But Straw and his supporters in Millbank clearly do not understand the unity against racism that is being slowly but surely forged.

The parallels drawn with Enoch Powell's 'river of blood' speech are accurate, despite John Prescott's fawning over Straw.

What is most important - particularly so soon after the eruption of racism in Dover - is the effect the speech has on others as it legitimises and reinforces the big-



Andrew Wiaard

otry of others.

But the power of Straw as an individual should not be downplayed. As Home Secretary he must have been well aware that at the same time as he was making these prejudiced comments, junior minister Mike O'Brien would be asking the Czech gov-

ernment to intervene to reduce the numbers of Roma applying for asylum in this country.

The fight against racism and the fight for a genuine right to asylum are part and parcel of the same battle. The rights of all travellers must be a key aspect of this struggle.

New Labour, old discontent

For the first time since Tony Blair entered Downing Street, staff from the two unionised emergency services - fire and ambulances - are balloting for strike action.

Ambulance crews are furious at the miserable 3 percent pay offer that has been made to the majority of NHS staff other than nurses and professionals.

Fire fighters, many of whom have already been involved in campaigns and localised strikes against budget cuts, station closures and job losses even since the new government took office, are also to vote on whether to strike in defence of their unique national pay agreement.

The FBU deal, won as a result of

a bitter 10-week national strike against the Callaghan government, links firefighters' pay to the top quartile of male manual earnings.

Though this formula has brought a few years in which increases were below inflation, the deal has been upheld for two decades, throughout the years of Thatcher government.

Only now have Tony Blair's team of union-bashers decided to question whether the deal is compatible with fire fighters retaining the right to strike.

Home office ministers have begun discussing "further measures" to prevent action by the FBU from disrupting emergency services.

In a letter leaked to the FBU



Andrew Wiaard

Essex firefighters have been among those who have fought bitter battles against government-driven cuts in services

written by then Home Office minister George Howarth the venomous hatred of New Labour for trade unions is unmistakable. He declares "full support" for the employers seeking to undermine the "outmoded and unjustified" conditions won by the fire fighters.

And - having endorsed the confrontational approach of the fire authority bosses - he goes on to castigate the very notion of strike action as a "relic of an old and discredited confrontational approach to industrial relations".

It is clear that the government is considering going well beyond the full-scale military scabbing operation organised by the Callaghan government to make strike action by firefighters illegal.

Such a step, against a TUC-affiliated union which pays a political levy to the Labour Party would in normal circumstances be met by an explosive reaction from other union leaders.

But the public reaction to the leaked letter was almost non-existent, a worrying symptom of the moral collapse of the union bureaucracy before the machinery of New Labour.

FBU leader Ken Cameron, to his credit, has been forthright in condemning the government intervention on the side of the employers "without having the decency to meet the union and find out our point of view."

Firefighters have been concerned that the government has been

deliberately holding back the looming confrontation over the pay agreement until additional troops could be brought back from Kosovo to carry out a re-run of the 1977 strikebreaking exercise. However the aged "green goddess" fire appliances are in desperately short supply.

As New Labour sticks the boot into ever wider layers of its core trade union support, the fear among union leaders must be the possibility of a re-run of the "winter of discontent" of 1978-79.

Millions of public sector workers finally lost their rag with a Labour government which had slashed back their living standards. Despite the present low tempo of class struggle, it could happen again.



Molly Cooper

Hackney school students show what they think of Labour's plans

Students join fight against Action Zones

Veronica Fagan

THE LEFT in the National Union of Teachers has campaigned for complete opposition to Education Action Zones (EAZs) while the Broad Left majority on the Executive has so far successfully counterpoised to this a policy of "constructive engagement".

This fails to recognise that EAZs are a Trojan horse, which in the name of tackling social disadvantage actually enshrine inequality while introducing business interests directly into the state education system.

Part of the balance sheet so far is that most bids for EAZs have been formulated in secrecy keeping parents and teachers as much in the dark as possible. This was demonstrated yet again at the end of last term in the London Borough of Islington where the proposed EAZ will affect 22 schools.

NUT teachers at Ashmount primary school unanimously voted against the proposal and won the support of more than 300 parents who signed a petition in opposition to the scheme, forcing the school's governors to call a parents meeting. Over 100 attended and the opposition was so strong that the school has now pulled out.

However at nearby Yerbury a push by parents for a similar meeting was ignored; they were outraged to be told there will be no further consultation with them.

Even more scandalously, just after the end of term the Council announced that three primary schools in the borough will close as part of the bid. Parents, teach-

ers and other activists are organising now to ensure maximum opposition when schools return in September.

Hackney walk-out

Molly Cooper reports

Over 250 angry school students walked out of classes at Kingsland school in Dalston at 2.30pm on Tuesday July 20, in protest at the threat to bring in an Education Action Zone (EAZ) to run their school.

They held an impromptu demo outside the school and occupied the road, Shacklewell Lane, stopping traffic. They demanded every car that approached the demo beep their horn in support of their demands.

They produced a leaflet they had written, which said their school was not for sale. I asked one of the students, Hassan Suppyan, why he had come on the protest.

"I think that the EAZs will take away our chances of getting a well rounded education. If this goes ahead we will lose our Drama, Music and Art classes. They have tried this in other areas and failed, we believe we can stop it here."

I also spoke to Aavatef Jbilou. She said: "I think the protest is very good, the EAZs are not happening in Hampstead, so why should they happen in Hackney?"

The demonstration was supported by some teachers in the school and some members of the local community.

Witch hunt and left talk at AGM: Mixed signals from RMT

A RIGHT wing offensive at this year's RMT AGM saw Pat Sikorski, the left candidate in the recent Assistant General Secretary elections, disciplined for supposed breaches of the election rules. Any further "infringement of rules" by Pat in the next three years would automatically result in him being debarred from holding any office in the union.

The witchhunt against Pat, led by General Secretary Jimmy Knapp and former left wingers on the national executive, has nothing to do with any breach of rule, and everything to do with the fact that Pat came close to winning and that he successfully exposed their own incompetence in the process.

However, the attack has given succour to forces in the union who want to fundamentally change the direction of the RMT. For them the next battle is now over the election of the other Assistant General Secretary position, currently held by Bob Crow.

A right wing candidate is being heavily pushed by all those forces who have had their cosy relations with management upset by industrial disputes over the last few years. Unfortunately Bob Crow's attitude of sitting on the fence over Pat's situation has not helped him.

For the rest of the week at the AGM things went in a different direction.

Having centred their attack on Pat Sikorski, the right were unable to counter the pressure from the membership to be seen to be doing something about the crisis caused by privatisation.

At the political level, anger continues to rise over the way the Labour government has abandoned its promises. In response, the AGM almost unanimously agreed to work with those to the left of Labour, like Tommy Sheridan and Dennis Canavan in the Scottish Parliament who actually support RMT policy, whilst also reviewing the financial support given to Labour MPs to ensure the RMT only financially support those who are prepared to campaign for re-nationalisation



Witch hunter: RMT chief Jimmy Knapp

of the railways.

At the industrial level, the AGM pledged to fight to support members under threat. In particular a campaign was launched to defend Guards on trains, once again threatened by changes in the official Railway Rule Book put up by Railtrack.

After the RMT prepared for a ballot of all Guards nationwide Railtrack has now suspended the Rule changes for eight weeks "for further consultation". The RMT

leadership has hailed this as a victory and suspended its ballot, but activists remain concerned that behind Railtrack's cosmetic changes the fundamental attack goes on.

It is vital that the RMT leadership are not allowed to let this issue fade away. Branches and activists must apply pressure to ensure that the ballot - of all traincrew, not just guards - is reinstated unless Railtrack fully withdraw their proposals.

Joint union fight to stop Tube sell-off

At the AGM, Peter Snape MP, from the RMT parliamentary group, tried to defend the privatisation of the tube. His hollow excuses only served to further antagonise the delegates.

With continuing problems over finding private finance - no one wants to take the risk with deep tube lines, and Railtrack is openly considering withdrawing from the talks on the subsurface lines (District, Hammersmith & City, Metropolitan, Circle and East London), the government is now faced with a united front of all three rail unions opposing the privatisation plan.

ASLEF has now switched its policy to opposition, and the three unions have linked up in a joint campaign, launched by a 300-strong joint public meeting.

Whilst the union leaderships want to restrict the campaign to safe lobbying of MPs, their unity has helped revitalise the campaign of street leafletting and public meetings.

Activists initially targetted the selection process for Labour candidates for the Greater London Assembly. All the hustings were leafletted and all candidates have been asked where they stand on the government's proposal.

Taking matters a step further, the RMT LUL Regional Council has now made a call for independent candidates who endorse

union policy to be supported.

Whilst ASLEF and TSSA have not been won to a campaign of strike action, the joint campaign at least marks a step forward from the previous position where the RMT was the only union opposing the government - and made it easier to argue for support among tube workers.

In the spring the initiative was lost when the RMT strikes were called off.

Whilst there were undoubtedly real problems of morale, the RMT leadership decided to retreat rather than confront those problems.

Despite all the hurdles the government faces it remains clear that they will not back down faced solely with a campaign of lobbying. The task of LUL activists and their supporters is to use the new united campaign to overcome the problems of morale and to force the RMT (and ASLEF) leadership to put industrial action back on the agenda.

■ The CATP can be contacted on 0181 981 8065 or by e-mail on johndleach@aol.com

■ Donations should be made payable to CATP c/o John Leach, 47c Wadson Street, London E2 9DP.

■ You can subscribe to the campaign's e-mail list by visiting: <http://CATP.listbot.com>

Time for Solidarity

Hitting the streets this month is *Solidarity*, a new magazine of news and debate for trade union activists.

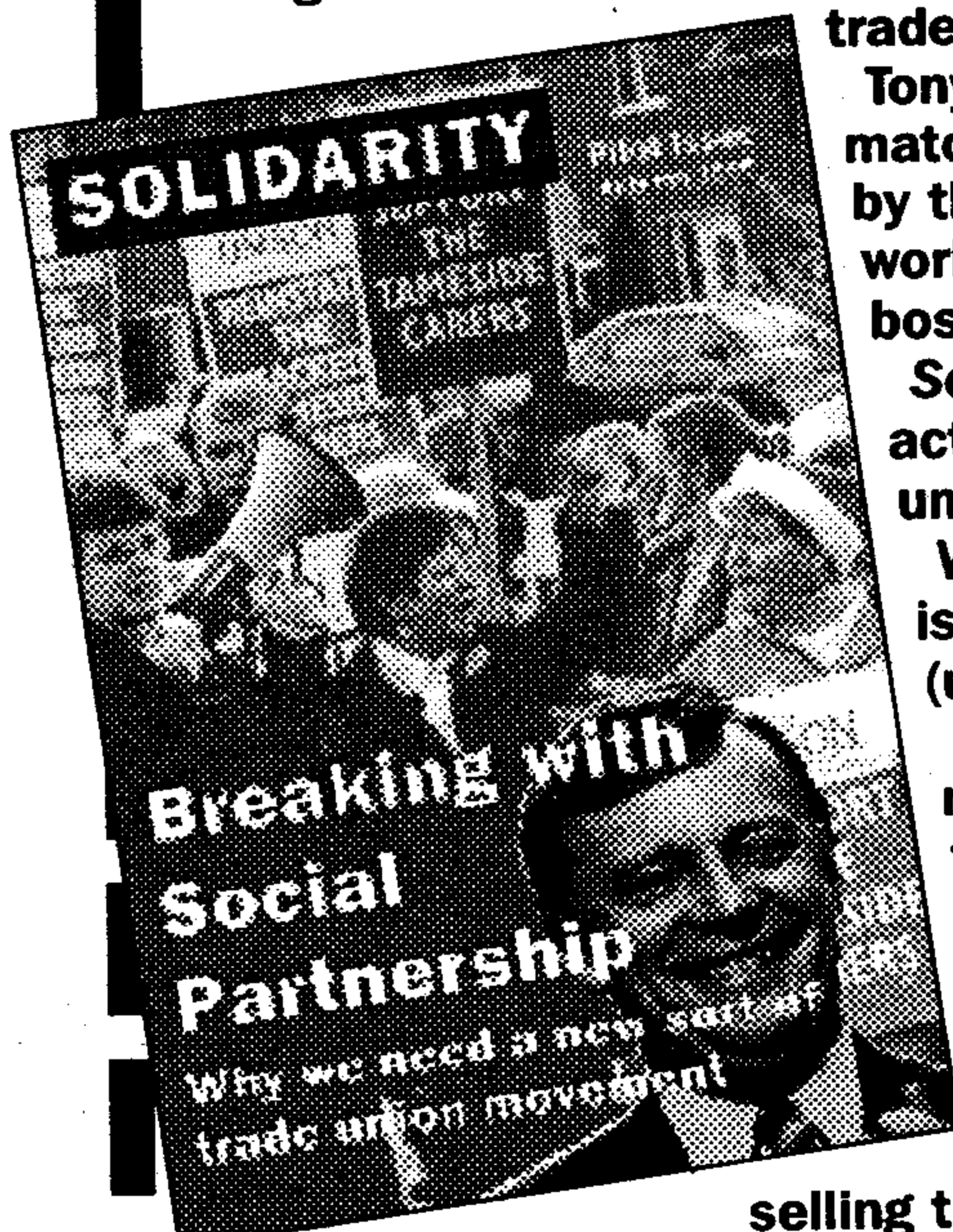
Tony Blair's ideological domination of New Labour is matched by the domination of the TUC, under John Monks, by the ideology of "Partnership" - that the interests of workers are best served by promoting the interests of their bosses (and against other workers).

Solidarity has set itself the modest aim of providing activists with ammunition in the fight to break the trade union movement from this dead weight.

What we need is a new, fighting democratic trade unionism which responds to the real needs of working people (united against their oppressors).

The first issue includes reports from Canada where nurses have been waging a campaign of "illegal" strikes; from Australia examining the rise of the rank and file movement in the Maritime Union; and closer to home developments inside the FBU, PCS, RMT, T&G and UNISON.

Solidarity needs your support - if you want to help, financially, submitting articles for future issues or by selling this one, contact: martin.wicks@btinternet.com



Two flashpoints could spark fight from lifeless TUC



Andrew Ward

Seeing the bosses' point of view even before they do: euro-fanatic TUC chief John Monks

Harry Sloan

As the TUC heads for what seemed certain to be another soporific and largely irrelevant conference, two issues seem likely to break the consensus of bureaucrats seeking to coexist with the New Labour government.

The first is a straightforward trade union issue: the aggressive drive by the Engineers and Electricians union AEEU to squeeze out rival unions and establish reactionary single-union deals in industries outside their usual influence.

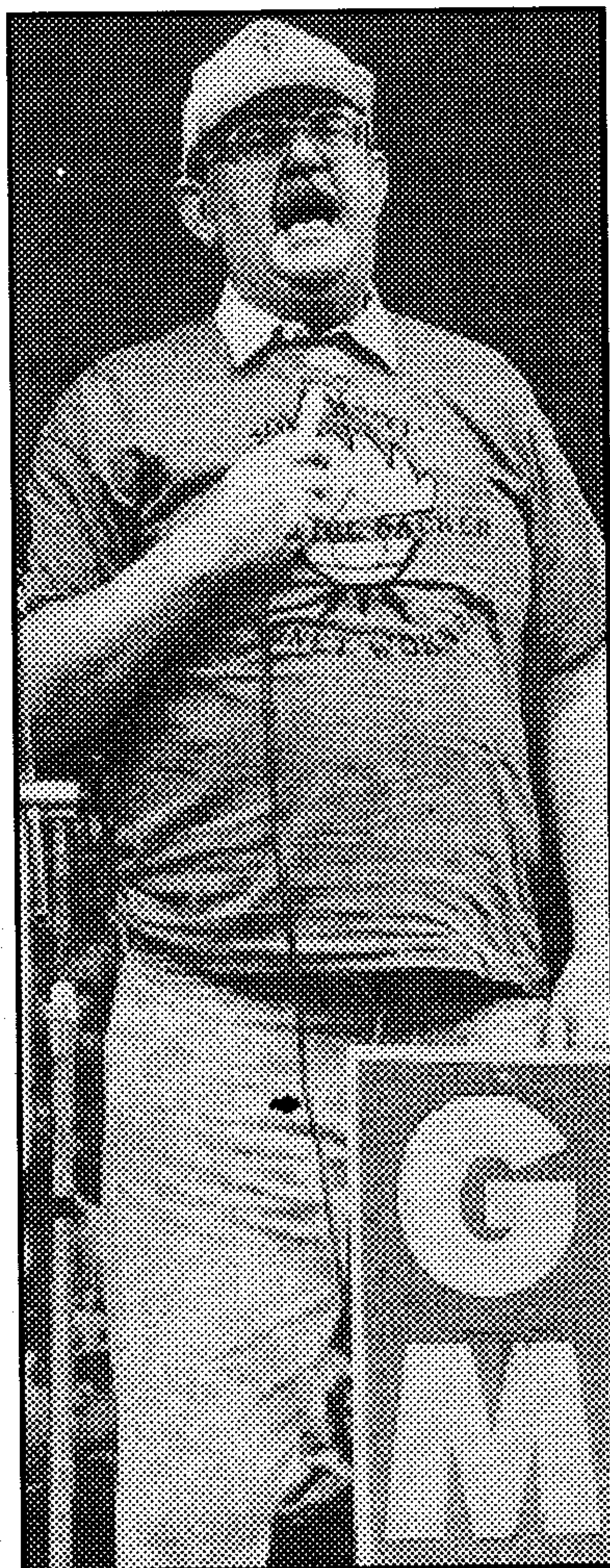
The most notorious case in point so far is at the *Western Mail* newspaper in south Wales, where the AEEU, representing a tiny handful of members, are seeking a single-union deal that would exclude any representation for over 100 NUJ journalists and large numbers of print workers.

This has been widely recognised as a grotesque attempt to re-run the union-busting collaboration between what was then the electricians' union EEPTU and Rupert Murdoch's News International, which led to the prolonged Wapping dispute.

For its scandalous role the EEPTU was expelled from the TUC, and the electricians only managed to get back in through reincarnation in their merger with the AEU, which has now taken its place as the most craven advocate of "partnership" with the bosses and right wing policies in the trade union movement.

With engineering and manufacturing industries in continued decline, AEEU efforts to muscle in on new sectors at the expense of other TUC unions have not stopped at the print industry, but apparently also include recruitment of shop workers, treading on the toes of the impeccably new realist USDAW.

Despite the apparent willingness of the main print union



Throwing his weight behind euro and AEEU: GMB boss Edmonds

GPMU to disregard the AEEU's scandalous activities, the NUJ leadership has taken a hard line, and it seems that sufficient other unions, including the TGWU, may have been affected to make a fight on the floor of TUC Congress inevitable.

The demand must be that the AEEU immediately drop its efforts to squeeze out other TUC unions or face expulsion from the TUC.

The other key area in which a conflict seems likely is over TUC policy on the European single currency.

Up to now TUC General Secretary John Monks has been able to strut around as a leading advocate

of early British entry to European Monetary Union, despite the fact that two of the TUC's largest affiliates, UNISON and the TGWU, along with several smaller unions hold the opposite view, and opinion polls show a clear majority of union members are against. Many unions have yet to discuss or vote on the issue.

While Monks sees the acceptance of increased control over the British and European economy by a cabal of unelected bankers on the board of the European Central Bank (ECB) as a logical extension of his commitment to "partnership" with the CBI and British bankers, union members are more wary about the potential cost of EMU in jobs and conditions.

Levels of unemployment are much higher in Germany and other Euro-land countries than in Britain, not least as a result of austerity measures designed to shoehorn eleven countries into compliance with the rigid Maastricht convergence criteria for EMU. Meanwhile the efforts of the ECB to keep the value of the fledgling currency above that of the dollar add another obstacle to any serious effort to boost economic activity.

Privatisation and PFI are also endemic in Euro-land, with the

French government having outdone even Thatcher's gang of asset-strippers in the scale of privatisation in the dash to cut back government spending in readiness for the Euro.

In spite of all the evidence of the ways on which the structures and restrictions of EMU work against the interests of European workers, Monks has been only one of an increasingly vocal band of right wing union bureaucrats urging an early British entry to the single currency.

Until now they have largely been content to grumble in the wings that by not joining the currency in January British business has somehow "missed the boat". This line is similar to that argued by disgraced former EU economics commissioner Yves de Silguy, who recently had the nerve to claim that the failure to enter from day one was a "European

tragedy" for the Blair government.

Now it seems that GMB leader John Edmonds will link up with the renegade AEEU to launch a new right wing offensive aimed to commit the TUC to campaigning actively for the single currency.

A fight over the euro at the TUC will put pressure on UNISON's diffident leadership to defend its conference policy, which until now the union's Millbank-run political staff have contrived to relegate to the background.

It could also push the issue back into the limelight, and trigger a new round of debate on the implications of the euro within the trade union movement.

Socialists should maintain the line of fighting for maximum solidarity with European workers against the bosses and bankers who are so keen to impose the single currency and the austerity that goes with it.

Builders get tough with PFI bosses



Molly Cooper

PRACTICAL internationalism broke out in South London last month as building workers from countries across Europe, all working on a PFI contract for King's College Hospital in London, took joint action to secure back wages for one building gang.

Two hundred workers picketed the hospital site demanding that the main contractor ensure that one section of workers be paid after their subcontract boss had skipped out owing them a month's pay.

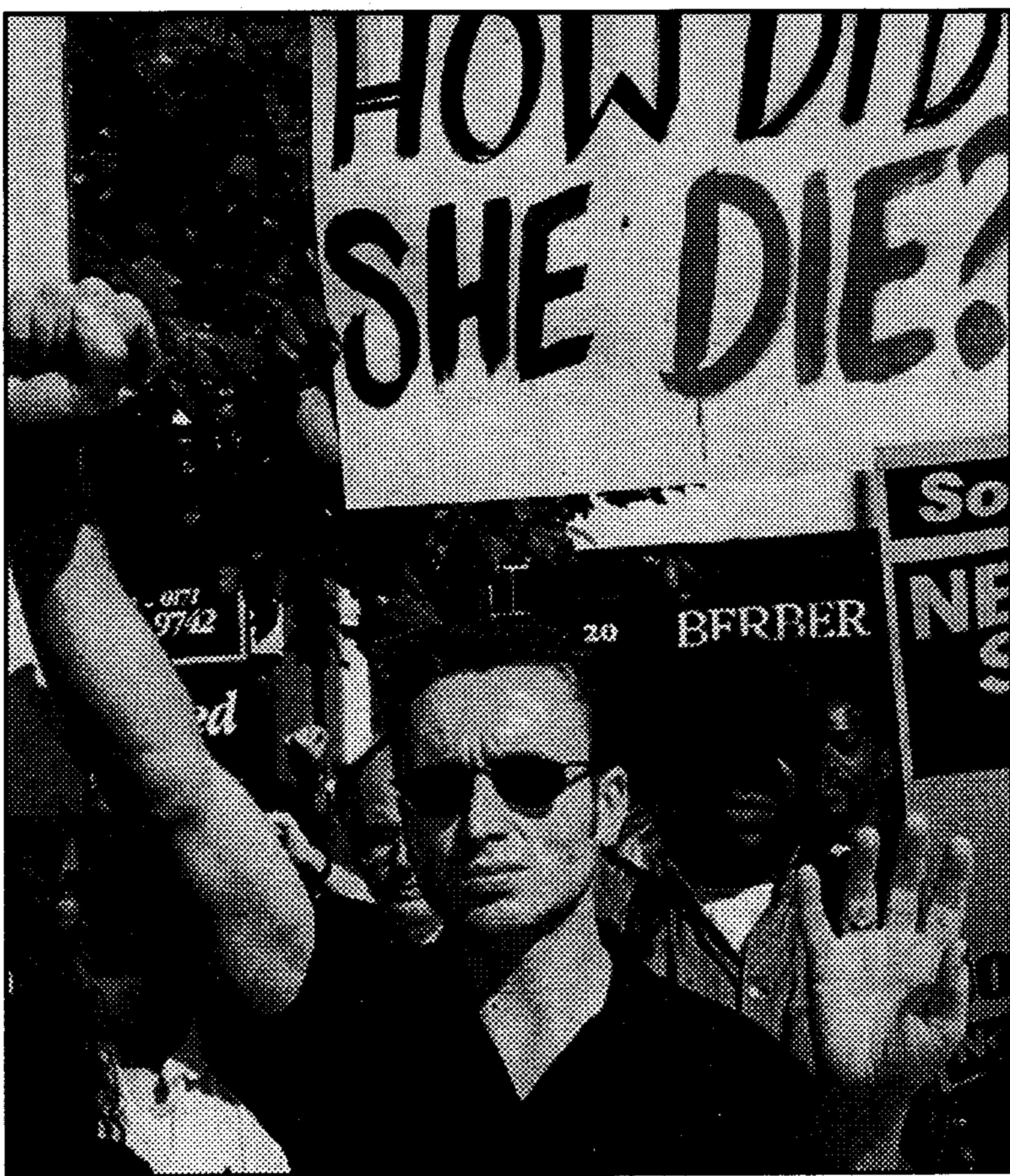
Some workers were owed up to £2,500, some of the foreign workers being left destitute forced to sleep rough on the streets. As well as British building workers up to a third of the pickets were French, others employed by separate subcontractors included gangs of Latvian, Kosovan, and Portuguese workers.

Organised by the London Joint Sites Committee the strike was 100% solid - all stayed out from work for the day until UCATT officials were able to negotiate an agreement to pay back wages with the main (French) contractor Bouygues.

Rank & File Transport Workers
UNITE!
Rail + Tube + Bus workers = Triple Alliance
We have the **POWER**
Greetings from **UNITE!**

UNITE!, the new journal for Rank & File transport workers, is available now. Send donations to Triple Alliance Box at 46 Denmark Hill, London SE5 8RZ.

New death at Stoke Newington nick



Molly Cooper

Paul Doyle, Sarah Thomas's boyfriend, picketing Stoke Newington police station

Simon Deville
SARAH THOMAS, a 34 year old black woman from Tottenham, was arrested and taken into Stoke Newington Police station in August.

A doctor was called, only to find that she had suffered a seizure, at which point she was taken to Homerton Hospital - where she died two days later.

Sarah's death is just one in a long line of deaths in police custody and, although in numerous cases the coroner has delivered a verdict of unlawful killing, not one police officer has ever been prosecuted for a death in custody.

Any investigation into the conduct of the police will be carried out by the police

themselves, and any decision whether or not to prosecute the officers concerned is made by the Crown Prosecution service - acting upon the recommendations of the police.

Despite the inadequacies of this system being consistently raised throughout the Stephen Lawrence inquiry, the inquiry refused to offer any criticisms of the police complaints procedures.

Stoke Newington Police has had it's share of deaths in custody and has a widespread reputation for corruption and violence against black people.

The Justice for Sarah Thomas! campaign has been launched with the support of Paul Doyle (Sarah Thomas'

boyfriend), Campaign Against Racism and Fascism, Greenwich Action Committee Against Racist Attacks, Hackney Monitoring Group, Inquest, Movement for Justice, Newham Monitoring Project, the 1990 Trust and the United Families and Friends Campaign.

The campaign is demanding the immediate suspension of the officers involved pending an investigation by the Police Complaints Authority, a high profile campaign appealing for witnesses to come forward and an Independent Public Inquiry into Sarah's death.

To contact the campaign call Hackney Monitoring Group on 0181-806 0742 between 11am and 7pm.

Defend Pride march

Terry Conway

30 years after the Stonewall riots led to the rebirth of the lesbian and gay movement - a good time to take stock of what we have achieved.

There was a good deal of controversy this year in the run up to lesbian and gay pride in London about the expensive Mardi Gras festival. The Pride march itself was transformed into a parade, and numbers dropped from 100,000 of the 1998 march to 25,000.

In recent years a free festival had been an important component of the Pride celebrations, which had moved on from being small marches of lesbian and gay activists in the early seventies into huge carnivals which continued to raise political ideas and demands but involved far wider sections of the communities than those involved in on-going campaigning.

But if the charge made for this years Mardi Gras festival was not bad enough a greater threat has now been made to the traditions of lesbian and gay organising.

Reports have been circulating that the business interests behind Mardi Gras intend to take over the march and hold it as a "Mardi Gras parade". Further rumours suggest that another plan may be to prevent any march at all.

Pride London, the non-profit company that has organised the march in the last few years has become very dependent on Mardi Gras, with the only other significant sponsorship coming from UNISON.

It seems more than a little suspicious that this should be taking place when Pride London was about to discuss broadening its base amongst lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups.

But trade unionists and other activists are determined to fight

back. A letter has been submitted to the September issue of *Gay Times* signed by members of the TUC Lesbian and Gay Committee, the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights and a number of individual unions challenging these moves.

The signatories state that they will be calling on their organisations to sponsor Pride and that they will be calling on others to do likewise.

They urge the maximum possible attendance at the Special meeting of company members of Pride (London) that has been called for October 16- the meeting that will decide the direction of next year's event. Their appeal should be supported.

■ To vote at the meeting you need to join Pride (London) at least a week before. Send £10 (£5 concessions) to Pride (London), BCM Box 6097, London WC1N 3XX

Asylum victory at last for Ozbay family

Dave Landau

The Ozbay family has won the right to remain in this country.

Veli Ozbay said "We are all very pleased and happy. This means a lot to my whole family. Now we have nothing to worry about any more."

The Kurdish Alevi family - Hanim and Huseyin, and their sons, Ali, Veli (16) and Semih (14) fled persecution in Turkey to Northern Cyprus. In Northern Cyprus they faced attack and torture from Turkish soldiers, so they fled again, this time to England where they have lived four 4 years.

The Home Office's view was that Northern Cyprus was a safe country so they should be deported.

In response a campaign was launched, supported by tenants of the Six Acres Estate in Finsbury Park, the Compton School in Finchley attended by the boys, a local church and anti-racist organisations.

We had numerous pickets of the Home Office attended by lots of children from Compton School, who exuberantly sung, shouted and probably gave every Home Office worker a leaflet about the plight of the family.

The campaign regularly leafleted and collected more than 7,000 signatures on the petition near where the family lived and around the school.

After two years of campaigning and legal work by North Islington Law Centre, the Home office accepted that as the family were not Cypriot citizens as they had

not spent enough time there, so that if they were deported it would be to Turkey. At that point we thought we had won.

But no, then the Home Office wrote saying that they did not have evidence of persecution of Kurdish people in the particular part of Turkey which the Ozbay's came from! So the campaign went on.

The family launched an appeal which was begun on May 5th. They heard Hanim's evidence and the case was adjourned. Even the Home Office's own presenting officer recognised the distress caused to Hanim by recounting her experiences in Turkey and Northern Cyprus.

Then on July 28th the family were granted indefinite leave to remain.

Stressful

Despite all our support, it has been a terribly stressful time for the family. Their relief and joy at their victory was tremendous to experience.

Nobody should be forced to go through that worry and pain. It shames New Labour that the threat of deportation was not lifted the day the Labour Government took office.

As John Stewart from the Ozbay family campaign said "This victory shows that campaigning does make a difference."

The government's Immigration and Asylum Bill will make the conditions of those who seek asylum in the UK even worse and will increase the need for people to come together to campaign against deportation."

A code is not enough!

Veronica Fagan

THERE have been a number of important victories for lesbian and gay people at work over recent weeks.

United Airlines, the largest airline in the US, has agreed to give the same benefits to the partners of lesbians and gay men as the spouses of married employees currently enjoy.

Closer to home, journalist Anthony O'Connor won damages from his employer and an unprecedented apology from his former employers after they admitted harassment and unfair dismissal in an out of court settlement. Mr O'Connor had been sacked after formally complaining that he had been subjected to homophobic abuse.

Fierce debate has broken out amongst lesbians and gay men over news that the government is considering a draft code of good

practice which would offer protection from discrimination in the workplace.

The clear view of campaigners is that anti-discrimination should have been enshrined in the legislation itself but this was not accepted by the government who refused to accept an amendment to the Employment Relations Bill to this effect.

It is at this point that disagreements have arisen with the powerful Stonewall group drawing up a draft code of conduct while the Lesbian and Gay Employment Rights group (LAGER) fears that this will give the government the perfect excuse not to legislate at all.

Its all very well for Angela Mason of Stonewall to insist that: "There is no question in my mind that a voluntary code of conduct is not enough to protect lesbians and gay men. There is an urgent need for legislation before

the next election", but she doesn't answer LAGER's charge.

Given the record of this government on lesbian and gay rights - for example the lack of action to abolish Section 28 it seems that a little caution and a lot of campaigning would be well advised.

The TUC is also committed to campaigning for legislation and has published a Charter for Equality.

The TUC's policy officer for Lesbian and Gay rights, Peter Purton has written to the employment minister Margaret Hodge making it clear that a code is not good enough.

While it seems very likely that this stance will be backed by the TUC Lesbian and Gay Committee it is important that the debate is taken up more widely across the unions. Protection for lesbian and gay workers against discrimination is a task for the whole movement.

Justice for Ricky Reel

Elkie Dee

Police have finally started a new investigation into the death of Ricky Reel in October 1997, nearly two years on.

They have discovered CCTV footage of white youths shouting racist abuse at Ricky and his friends, a group of young Asian men on a night out, and are now appealing for members of the public who may have any further knowledge or information to come forward.

So why has it taken so long for them to look at this footage or to consider it relevant in investigating his death?

Ricky's mother, Sukhdev Reel, has spent nearly two years speaking to anti-racist and union meetings around the country, asking why police failed to investigate Ricky's disappearance and death as a possible racist killing. Mrs Reel, her union branch, Hounslow Unison, and the Southall Monitoring Group launched the Justice for Ricky Reel Campaign, and this campaign has linked up with others, around deaths at the hands of racists and in police custody.

When Ricky didn't return home on the night of October 14, 1997, the police explanation of Ricky's death was that it was a drunken accident - he had fallen into the river while urinating into it.

They ignored the reports of the friends who had been with him earlier about being abused and attacked by racists, refused to investigate other theories, and concluded that no further investigation was necessary.

An independent pathologist hired by the family after the police had refused to look into the matter further found evidence in total contradiction of the police version of events, indicating that Ricky fell into the water backwards and that his bladder was full. He remarked that third party involvement could not be excluded.

The family made a complaint against the police which was undertaken by the Surrey Constabulary and supervised by the Police Complaints Authority - the family have been refused access to the completed report.

Like the Lawrences before her, Sukhdev Reel is still seeking the truth of what happened to her son, so that she can mourn properly.

Clearly, the police feel they need to be seen to be doing something - it is good to see that they feel under pressure for once.

There is still a lot of work to do though, both to find out and publicise the truth and to stop deaths at the hands of racist thugs inside and outside the police.

New Labour policies promote Dover racism

Mark Jansen

Several clashes between immigrants and local youths in Dover have been used as an excuse to try and whip up racism from a number of sources. The local national media and leading conservatives have leapt upon the opportunity to warn of the 'problems' of Dover being 'swamped by immigrants' in the words of a local Conservative, paraphrasing Margaret Thatcher.

In particular it is refugees from the Balkans who are being blamed for the 'civil unrest'.

Even those who have attempted to distance themselves from some of the more overt racism, have greatly exaggerated the scale of immigration. Official statistics show 442 (0.4% of the population) refugees living in Dover and around 1,500 (0.1% of the population) in Kent as a whole.

Far from the area being swamped, the number of refugees has actually declined in recent years.

It is clear that when immigrants are forced to live on food vouchers, or on incomes way below benefit levels, and with dwindling resources, then there are going to be a number of social problems within immigrant communities.

But the problem lies squarely with the government's refusal to provide refugees and asylum seekers with even the most basic necessities to live on.

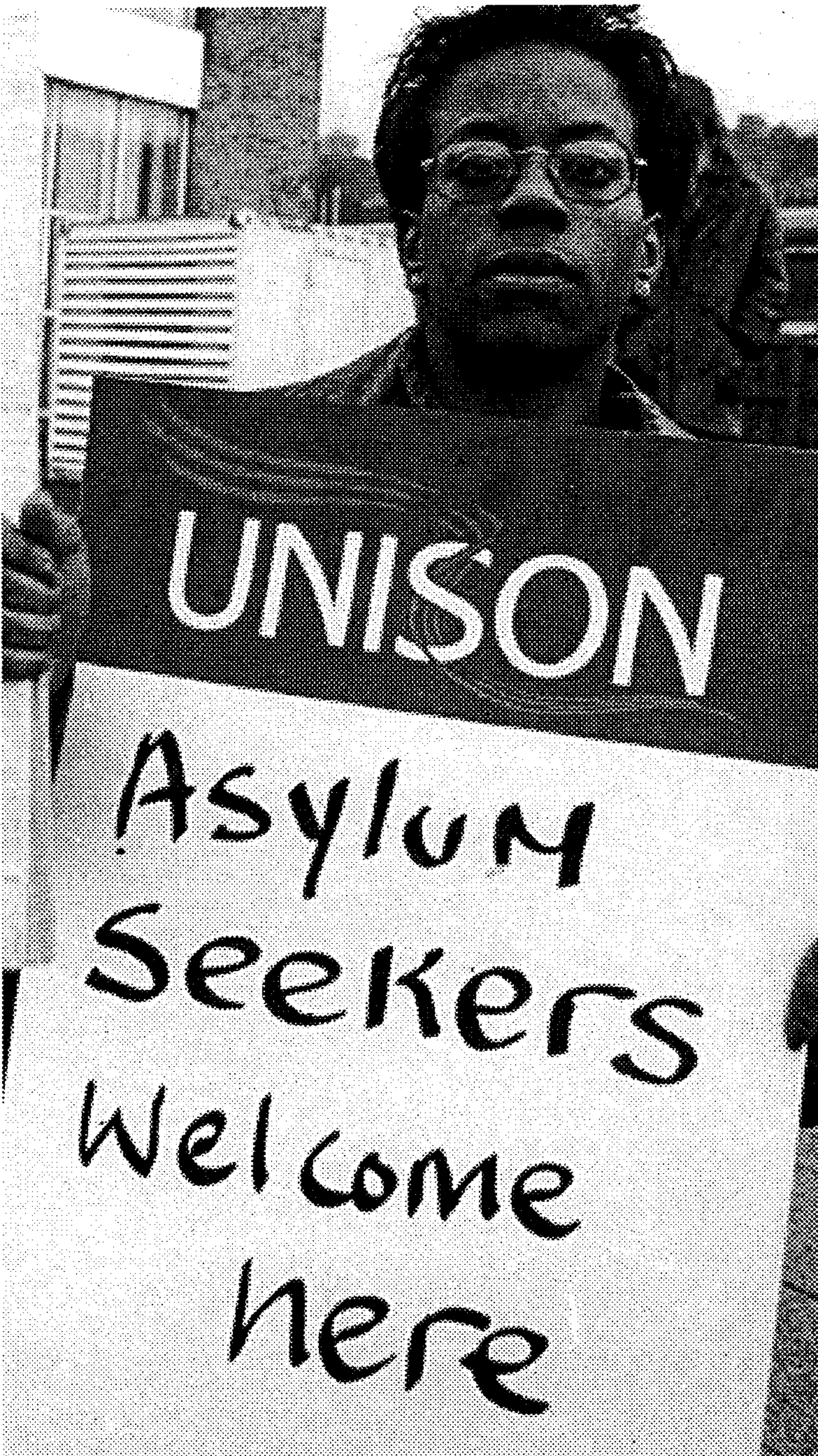
Under the Conservatives, many people pinned their hopes on the election of a Labour government to help the plight of those fleeing persecution. Sadly things have gone from bad to worse.

During the process of conducting a war against Serbia, supposedly in support of Kosovar refugees, the government was notable in its refusal to allow Kosovans into Britain. In fact many Kosovar children have been locked up in detention centres because they have been unable to prove that they were Kosovans and not Albanians.

Wayne Rogers

THE BODIES of two children from Guinea were found frozen to death in the landing gear bay of an Airbus330-300 that landed in Brussels on 2 August. It appears that their bodies had been in the undercarriage for around 10 days, making daily trips between Belgium and Conakry, the capital of Guinea.

The bodies of 14 year old Yaquine Koita and his 15 year old friend Fode Tourkana were sent home in Zinc lined coffins following a ceremony attended by the Guinean ambassador and representatives of the Belgium government. Many people have commented that had they arrived



Dover protests have already challenged racism against refugees

Whilst weeping crocodile tears the government was able to pass the Immigration and Asylum Bill through parliament, and to ensure that the walls of fortress Europe remained intact throughout the war. Recently the government have admitted that their system of food vouchers for asylum seekers

will cost more to deliver than it would to give asylum seekers benefits, but they argue that they want to make life hard for asylum seekers to deter 'bogus refugees'.

In recent weeks the Home Secretary has twice come into conflict with the courts over asylum seekers, in an apparent attempt to outdo Michael Howard's reactionary record.

Firstly, Straw attempted to deport a number of asylum seekers fleeing non-governmental forces to a 'safe third country'.

For example one refugee fleeing persecution from the Tamil Tigers entered Britain via Germany. Although the threat to the individual was real, unlike British law neither German nor French law accepts asylum applications from those seeking asylum from non-governmental forces.

Since Britain considers Germany to be a 'safe' country, Straw attempted to deport him to Germany, knowing that he would then be deported to Sri Lanka to face persecution.

The Appeal Court ruled this and two other cases to be unlawful. With another 218 similar cases pending relating to either France or Germany the government's attempts to deport these are likely to be over-ruled.

Straw's second appearance in the dock recently involves the jailing of asylum seekers for travelling on false documents. The Geneva convention on refugees recognises that in fleeing oppressive regimes it will be necessary for many people to travel on false documents.

Despite this the government and the crown prosecution service have prosecuted and imprisoned hundreds of asylum seekers for travelling on false documents. In one case the CPS decided to prosecute someone even after they had been granted full refugee status.

That the government can try to pose as being concerned for the plight of refugees or of being opposed to racism whilst carrying out such measures is an absolute scandal.

The needs of asylum seekers must be placed at the centre of the struggle against racism.

The anti-racist movement must champion the cause of those least able to take up a political fight, whether the attacks come from racist thugs or from the government.

Victims of Fortress Europe

alive, they would simply have been deported with no such ceremony.

The death of these two friends would not have even reached public attention were it not for the fact that a letter was found on the body of one of them that addressed "Excellencies, sirs, members and officials of Europe...we have the honourable pleasure an great confidence to write you this letter to tell you the objective of our voyage and of our suffering, we, the children of Africa.

"We appeal to your kindness and solidarity to come to the rescue of Africa," the letter goes on 'Help us, we are suffering enormously...we have war, disease, not enough to

eat. There are schools, but a great lack of education, of teaching..."

The letter ends up "If you see that we have sacrificed ourselves and lost our lives it is because we suffer too much in Africa and need your help to struggle against poverty and war...Please excuse us very much for daring to write this letter."

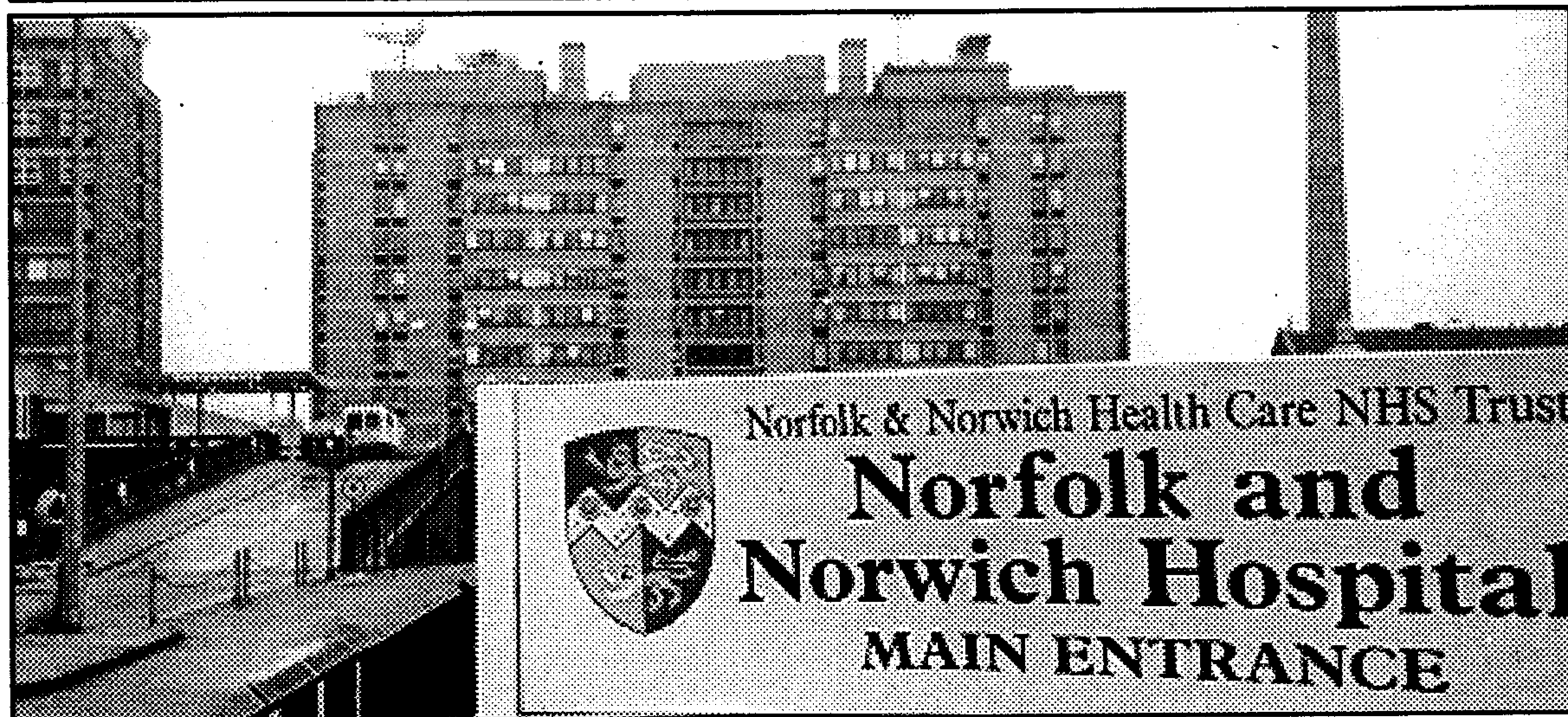
Embarrassed

The fact that these two children were prepared to die to deliver this message has embarrassed Belgium government officials into promising more aid for Africa and to circulate the letter to other European governments.

The Belgian government has no

intention, however of loosening the racist immigration controls that mean that people do feel forced to risk their lives trying to enter Europe illegally.

The appeal of these two African children may seem naive, but at the root of poverty and war throughout Africa lies a legacy of failed European colonial adventures and of continued imperialist intervention that is bleeding the continent dry. The meagre aid with strings attached that is sent to Africa and elsewhere throughout the third world pales into insignificance compared to the vast wealth that is taken out in debt repayment or as the profits of multinational companies.



The £214m Norfolk & Norwich Hospital PFI scheme will cost a massive £70m (50%) more than a publicly-funded option

PFI schemes axe more NHS beds

John Lister (London Health Emergency)

MINISTERS are closing their ears to criticism and ignoring all of the warning signs as they rush headlong to rubber-stamp more hospital building projects financed by the Private Finance Initiative.

Another list of six major new hospital developments (totalling £650m) which have been given the green light to finalise deals with private sector consortia was unveiled early in July, covering schemes in Leeds, Oxford, Havering (East London), Portsmouth, Blackburn and Derby.

Two more years of costly negotiations will follow before building begins on these schemes in 2001.

37 new hospital projects have now been agreed in principle, with 17 of them currently under construction – all but four of these funded by PFI.

Tony Blair has joined Alan Milburn and other ministers in claiming that the combined package of PFI schemes, costing a massive £3.1 billion, represent the “biggest hospital building programme in the history of the NHS” – ignoring the fact that previous NHS hospital building was financed by government cash, and created new assets for the health service rather than long-term debts.

But even as the bulldozers and cranes swing into action, the storm of scepticism and opposition is increasing.

● doctors’ leaders in the BMA are warning that ministers are unleashing the “largest acute hospital closure programme” ever to hit the health service;

● the all-party Commons Health select committee has called for a halt to new PFI projects while the true costs are evaluated;

● the NHS Confederation, representing Health Authorities and Trusts, has expressed its reservations at the cost and complexity of PFI deals;

● Community Health Councils, the patients’ watchdog bod-

ies, have also voted overwhelmingly at their 1999 national conference to oppose PFI;

● the National Audit Office has warned that the first PFI hospital to be completed, Dartford & Gravesham, will fall short of the promised savings;

● academics are warning that PFI deals can only claim to represent value for money by fiddling the figures and leaning on government subsidies;

● building firms and others in PFI consortia are boasting of the fat profits they expect to coin in from these projects over the next 30-60 years;

● and campaigners across the country are protesting that PFI deals will result in hospitals moving to remote greenfield sites, and leave local services desperately short of front-line beds.

So embarrassing are the facts to government ministers that a detailed review of the PFI process, set up by Health Minister Alan Milburn before he departed to the Treasury, has been shelved by his successor John Denham, while many Trusts embroiled in PFI schemes are hiding vital information behind a curtain of “commercial confidentiality”.

I work for the NHS and care for the patients-

-I cook their food-

-and I cook the books!



Health authorities commonly respond to detailed criticism of the viability of their plans by simply refusing to answer questions – and omitting questions they cannot answer from their summary of the consultation process.

One classic example of this is Worcestershire, where a new PFI hospital, in Worcester means a massive 35 percent cutback in acute beds throughout the county.

The viability of the Full Business Case rests on the injection of an extra £7m to the revenue of the Worcester Royal Infirmary, at the expense of axing in-patient care at Kidderminster General Hospital and A&E services in Redditch: but the Health Authority has stubbornly refused to answer any detailed questions from campaigners on how the reduced hospital services would cope with demand.

A detailed study commissioned by UNISON of one Full Business Case, for the North Durham Acute Hospitals Trust, revealed the extent to which PFI deals rig the figures to make the case for private funding.

The new hospital will be able to use only 350 beds, compared with an original plan for 900 in 1991. The Trust will have to cut back on clinical staff, mainly cutting nurses, in order to afford the new building. This reduced number of beds will treat fewer patients, but still cost the health authority more money each year, and require an additional £750,000 a year subsidy from the government. The public sector option would have cost much less over 30 years.

London Health Emergency, health unions and other campaigners have warned from the outset that the huge reductions in front-line beds being driven on by the PFI process will leave hospitals and health services struggling to cope with a rising tide of medical admissions.

Ancillary and non-clinical staff will be handed over wholesale to profit-seeking private firms, and health authority budgets will be skewed by the long-term obligation to fund Trusts locked in to long-term, legally-binding lease agreements with PFI consortia.

Far from a dream solution to the cash problems of the NHS, PFI – dreamed up by Tory ministers as a means of privatising sections of the NHS – is a nightmare in which dwindling NHS resources are siphoned into the coffers of banks, building firms, cheapskate contractors and their shareholders.

The longer it is allowed to go on, the worse will be the long-term damage to the NHS.

No free care for elderly Dobbo sticks to Tory means-test

AFTER six months of constipated silence, Health Secretary Frank Dobson has opted to overrule the findings of the Royal Commission on Care of the Elderly.

Pensioners groups and charities are furious that he has opted to maintain the system of means-tested charges for nursing home care introduced by the Tories in 1993.

Thatcher’s government saw the possibility of forcing a growing number of patients to pay for their own care, by switching responsibility for continuing care from the NHS (where treatment is free at point of use) to local authorities.

The Royal Commission – set up following a pledge in the 1997 election campaign – had recommended that all nursing care for frail elderly patients should be paid for by the NHS, at a cost of an extra £1.3 billion a year.

This is the amount now being paid by individual nursing home patients, often at the cost of selling their houses and liquidating their life savings.

Labour MPs and councillors from the outset supported the Tory “community care” reforms, first proposed by Sainsbury boss

Sir Roy Griffiths in 1988, which extended the system of means-tested charges as a way of cutting government spending.

But the implementation of the new system from 1993 led to an estimated 40,000 houses a year being sold by elderly people to pay nursing home fees.

Vicious new “eligibility criteria” from 1996 enabled health authorities to slash back their provision of NHS continuing care beds for the frail elderly, and helped generate a groundswell of anger.

Tory ministers were already under pressure from their own voters in the run-up to the election, where Labour hinted that a Royal Commission would lead to a change of policy.

Two years later it is clear that Dobson will seek only the most timid changes, deferring for up to three months any instruction for elderly patients to sell their houses to pay for their care.

Coupled with the refusal to upgrade the state pension, and the restrictions on prescriptions for Viagra, Dobson has compounded New Labour’s policy of sticking the boot into the elderly, while leaving the profits of the private sector untouched.

Big firms line up to fleece the NHS

Building firms, banks, business consultants and other PFI hangers-on are eagerly anticipating a generous flow of profits as the first hospital schemes take shape.

A recent investigation in the *Health Service Journal* showed building contractors “expecting returns of up to 20 percent a year on the equity stakes they hold in the project companies” as soon as the building is complete and Trusts start paying up for the use of the new buildings.

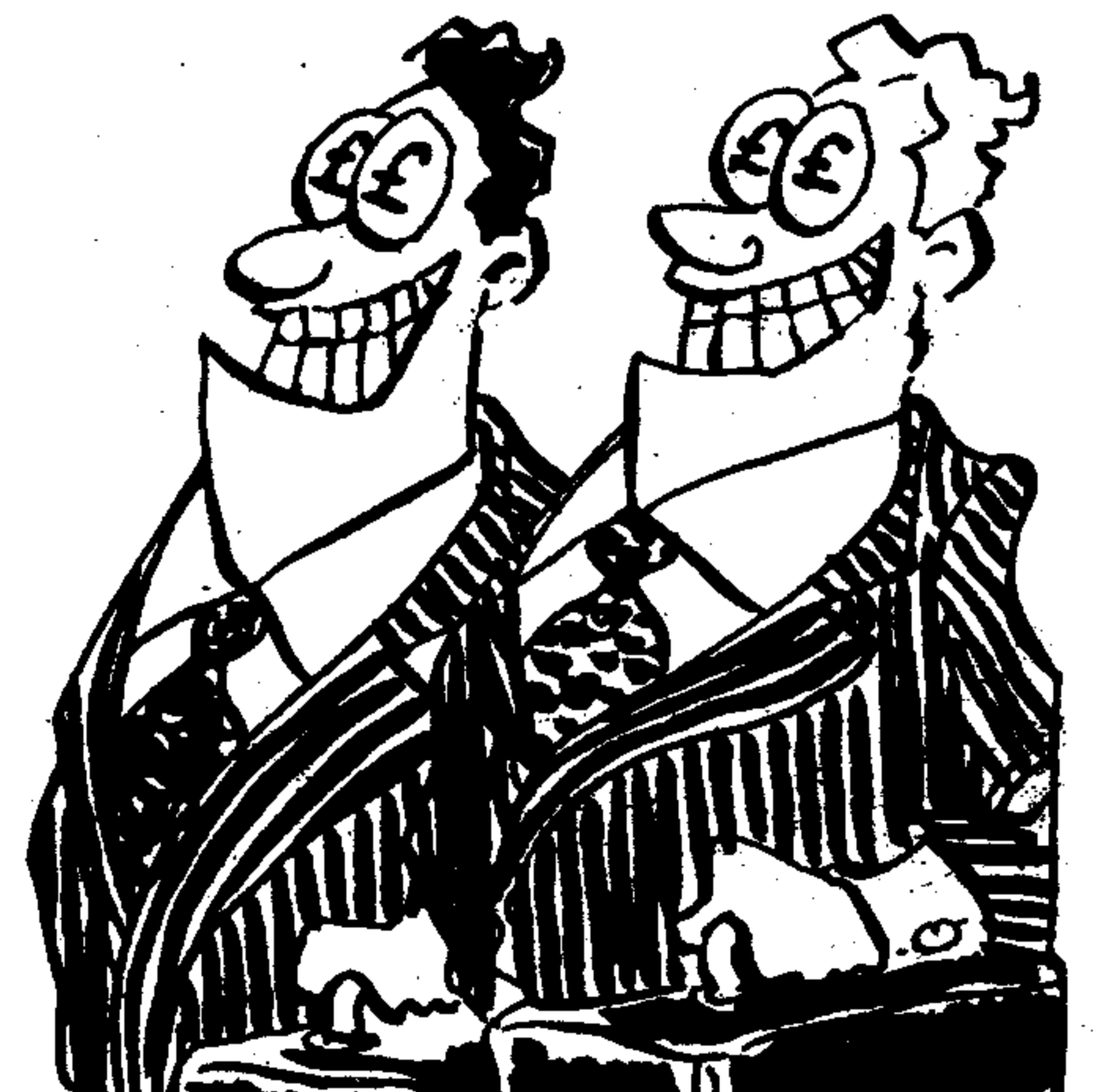
Consultancy firms, too – architects, engineers and surveyors – are pocketing above average fees for work on PFI schemes.

And once the building is finished, maintaining the buildings will deliver comfortable, guaranteed profits of up to 7 percent for firms holding service contracts.

As the *HSJ* article points out “there is little chance of the construction industry losing interest in PFI hospitals”. (Profits for Industry, *HSJ* 13 May).

A recent *BMJ* article pointed out that shareholders in PFI schemes “can expect real returns of 15-25 percent a year”, and went on to explain how little risk is involved for the companies in PFI consortia.

The new Greenwich Hospital scheme, for example, assumes that risks worth a massive £20m are being transferred to the private sector. But in fact the prospectus of Meridian, the firm launching the bond issue to fund the deal, claimed that the contract was structured so that “few risks



inherent in the project are retained” by the company.

A detailed study commissioned by UNISON of one Full Business Case, for North Durham Acute Hospitals Trust, revealed the extent to which some PFI deals rig the figures to make the case for private funding.

The new Dryburn hospital represents more than a 50 percent reduction in beds compared with the original 1991 plan for a publicly-funded hospital, and will treat 7 percent fewer inpatients than the present level, while axing more than ten percent of its qualified nurses.

“Despite an investment of £96m, annual payments to the private sector of over £12m a year for 30 years, subsidies from central government and the selling off of NHS property, not a single extra patient will be treated.”

* *Downsizing for the 21st Century*, by Declan Gaffney and Allyson Pollock, published by UNISON.

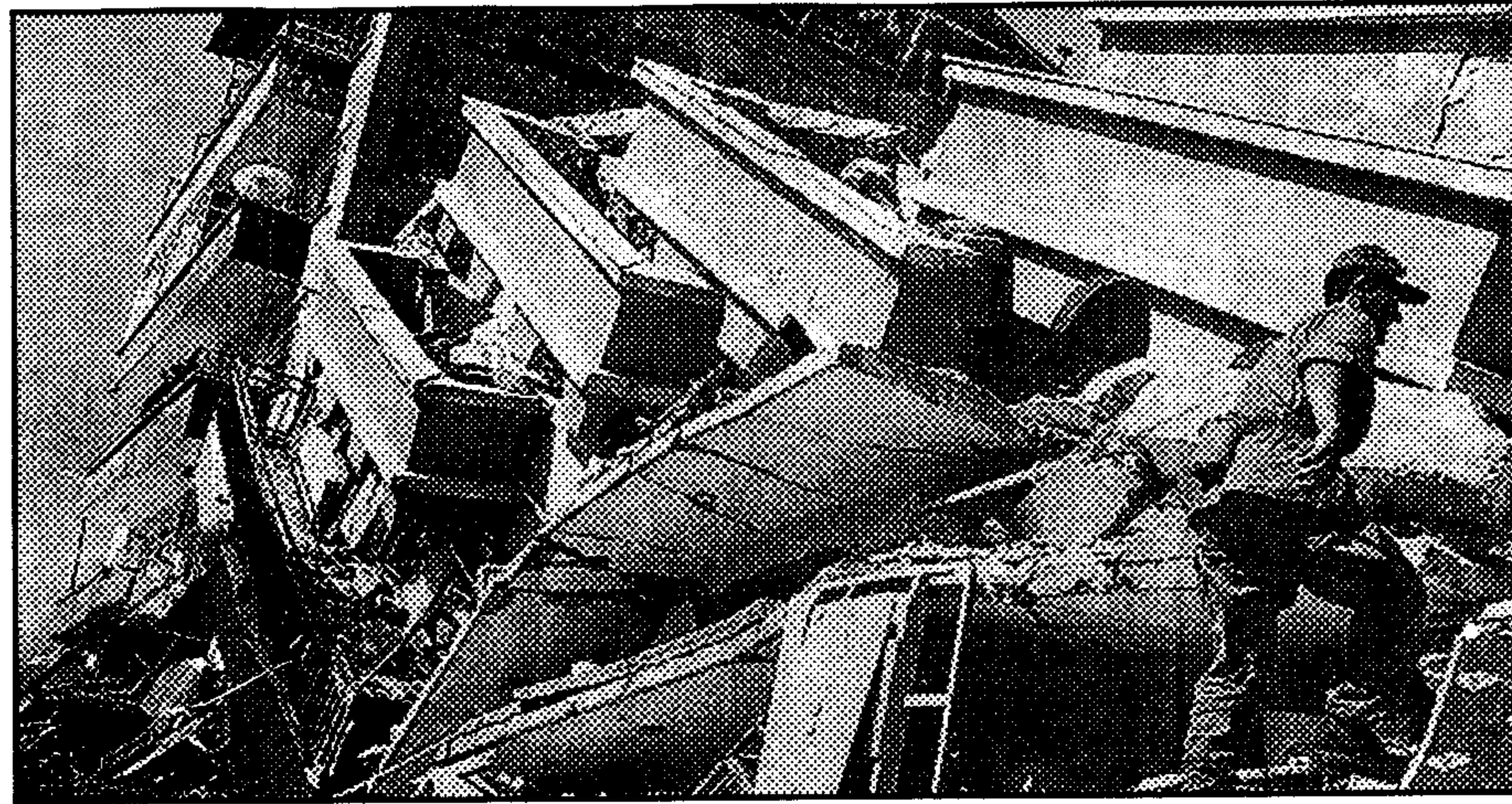
Turkish regime compounds quake horror

Susan Moore

AS WE go to press, the death toll from the horrendous earthquake in North-western Turkey on August 17 continues to mount.

Tens of thousands lie buried under collapsed buildings, and many are at risk in the weeks to

come as the damage to sewage and clean water supplies leads to the spread of disease. Further it remains likely that there will be a series of aftershocks or further tremors that could last for months or even years.



Cost-cutting concrete buildings without reinforcement have taken a brutal toll of lives

What is clear is that the fall out from the calamity has been made

worse by the relentless search for profit. Many buildings on the long known about fault line have been thrown together in defiance of building regulations which would have cut the profit margins of the construction companies by requiring stronger materials or sounder building methods.

Buildings constructed from bricks have survived for centuries in earthquake zones but the materials are more expensive and labour intensive to construct.

Buildings made from poured concrete should be strengthened by the use of reinforced steel if they are to stand a chance of withstanding tremors, but government inspectors have turned a blind eye to these breaches of health and safety regulations.

If this wasn't outrageous enough, less than a month ago the Turkish government announced that it would be reaching a final decision in the next couple of months on

whether to go ahead with the building of a nuclear power station at Akkuyu on the country's Mediterranean coast.

Energy minister Cumhur Ersumer made it clear that the government was likely to go ahead with the project that they hope to complete in 2006 – despite concerns that the projected site is in an earthquake zone.

It is also clear, as many affected by the tragedy are increasingly pointing out, that there has been a differential response to different groups affected by the quake.

Not only did the Turkish government act speedily to rescue those trapped at the naval base at Gökçuk, but Israel speedily lent a hand to rescue a small group of Israeli nationals who were also caught.

Kurds

But the majority of those affected were working class and poor, including many Kurds as well as Turks – so they have been left to their suffocating fate.

It remains to be seen whether the increasing anger at this indifference can be turned into an organising potential, as happened after the massive earthquake in Mexico City in the 1980s.

One of the bases of that movement was to fight the corruption that meant that much of the money raised to help those affected by that disaster was siphoned off by corrupt officials and gangsters.

It is with that in mind that we publish the appeal below from Day-Mer.

Appeal from Day-Mer Turkish and Kurdish Community Solidarity Centre

THE TURKISH government has shown itself to have reacted irresponsibly once again, leaving its citizens to deal with the situation themselves.

Tens of thousands of people were left alone in the rescue work, trying to dig up tons of debris with their bare hands. As time goes by, hope for the rescue of those trapped is fading away.

In addition to tens of thousands of people killed, lost or injured, hundreds of thousands are affected materially as well. Past experience indicates that these people will receive nothing from the government but undelivered promises.

There has been very little state co-ordinated rescue work, and almost all of this has been concentrated on the navy base in Gökçuk while the ordinary people in many earthquake-hit areas have received no help. This too raises suspicion as to how the aid received by the government is to be distributed.

Therefore it is very important for the people of Turkey to get support directly from the people of other countries. Please contribute to our hardship fund.

Also emergency goods and clothing will be very valuable. The most needed items are medicine, children's food, nappies, underwear, corpse bags, plastic bin bags, heavy work gloves, etc. All goods and funds will be delivered to the relief committees set up by democratic mass organisations in Turkey with a lorry hired for this purpose.

These organisations, which include human rights organisations, trade unions and community groups, can guarantee that all aid received will go directly to people in need.

Please make your cheques payable to Day-Mer Migrant 2 and send them to Day-Mer, Turkish and Kurdish Community Centre, Former Library, Howard Road, London N16 8PR.

If you are able to donate goods please also bring them to the above address between 10 am and 7 p.m. any weekday. Any help you can give, big or small, will make a real difference to those in need. We thank you for your support. This appeal is endorsed by Day-Mer Turkish and Kurdish Community Solidarity Centre.

Fighting Canadian anti-union laws, cuts and pay limits

Nursing a grievance

Nursing staff in Quebec and several Canadian provinces have been embroiled in a succession of bitter strikes, in defiance of anti-union laws.

The most sustained action was the month-long strike by Quebec nurses, which began on June 26 and was wound up by the leadership of the 22-union Quebec Federation of Nurses with a sell-out deal which left nurses facing individual penalties as high as \$7,000.

47,500 nurses had backed the walk-out, demanding a pay increase of 15 percent over 3 years, and a 10 percent pay adjustment to move towards parity with teachers and social workers. The claim was almost immediately reduced by union leaders to 6 percent over 2 years – but this was still well above the Quebec government's target of holding public sector pay increases to just 5 percent over 3 years.

Nurses' anger was fuelled by more than just wages, however, and there were demands for the filling of a growing number of nursing vacancies, and for much of the rising tide of overtime worked by health staff to be con-

verted into new full-time jobs. Less than half of Quebec's health and social service staff are full-time employees.

Quebec's nurses are the lowest paid in Canada, earning between \$30,000 and \$44,000 a year.

Strong public support for the strikers rested also on the recent record of cuts and under-funding of health services in Quebec, where it is common to wait 2 years for an operation, and where A&E units are overcrowded and cash-starved hospitals have resorted to bed closures to balance the books.

The Parti Quebecois government, which has squeezed health budgets as part of its Thatcherite drive to cut taxes and hold down public spending, took a hard line from the outset. It insisted that it would demand the nursing unions and their members face the full draconian penalties for their unlawful strike.

For each day on strike a nurse would be docked two days' wages, while the automatic dues check-off system would be suspended for 12 weeks. Every union involved would additionally be fined \$125,000 for each day of action: by the first four days of the strike the penalties added up

to over \$14m.

Despite the very narrow approach of the QFN leadership, which consistently avoided any move to link up with other sections of health workers, the strike remained

remarkably solid: only days before the final sell-out deal was agreed by the union's council, 75 percent of members had voted to reject a similar sell-out.

However the QFN leadership did succeed in demobilising the action by imposing a suspension of the strike for a "truce" period while their proposed deal was put to the vote, and the dispute suffered a body-blow when staff at the well-organised Sacré Coeur Hospital in Montreal – seen as a bastion of rank and file militancy – were led back to work even after voting against the sell-out.

But just as the elitist nursing union leaders refused to build



possible jail sentences for contempt of court, fighting to demand action to deal with massive staff shortages and parity with nursing staff in other Canadian provinces.

In what almost seems like a dress rehearsal for the bigger Quebec strike two months later, 8,400 nurses were left deliberately isolated by other public sector unions, including the Service Employees International Union which scandalously postponed a strike by 10,000 health workers.

Nurses have also been in dispute in Manitoba and Newfoundland, and have compelled the government in Ontario to spend an extra \$375m taking on an extra 10,000 nurses.

But the impact of the sell-out in Quebec could have more widespread and lasting consequences.

Press pundits and union officials had been playing up the prospect of a "hot autumn" of confrontation involving 400,000 public sector workers challenging the 5% pay limit.

90 percent of the Quebec Federation of Labour's 55,000 public sector members had voted for strike action if necessary to win a bigger increase – with inflation running at 3 percent. Teachers were lining up to follow health and social service staff.

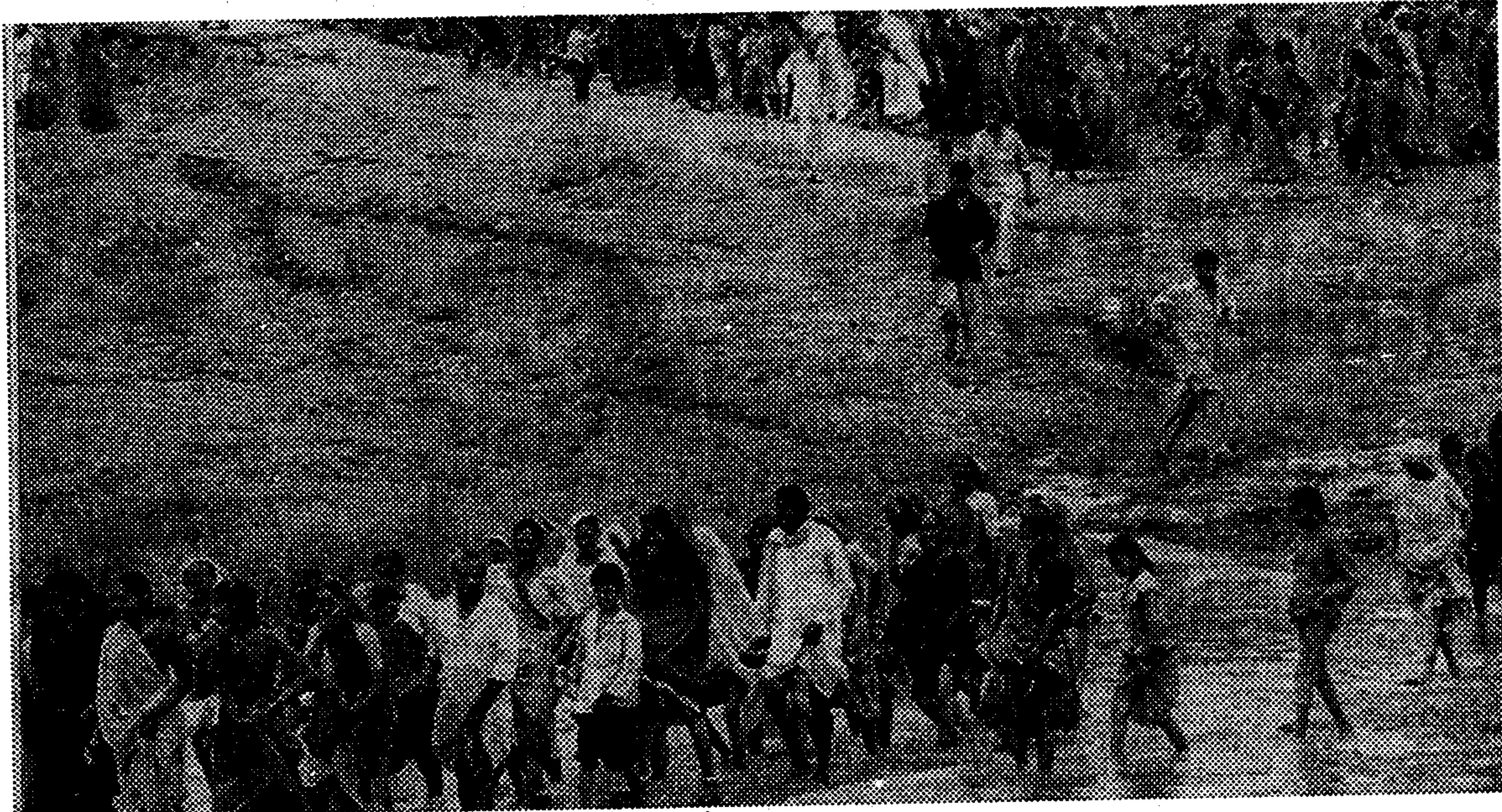
Now that the nurses have been cynically hung out to dry by common consent of the various trade union bureaucracies, the chances of sustained and united action must have been set back.

That is just what the union leaders and the Parti Quebecois wanted to see.

any broader alliance against the government, leaders of Quebec's other public sector trade unions deliberately held back from giving any practical support or solidarity – despite a general recognition that defeat for the nurses would set back the prospects of any public sector workers challenging the 5 percent pay limit.

The Quebec nurses ensured that throughout the strike emergency cover – equivalent to weekend staffing levels – was provided to deal with emergency admissions, Intensive Therapy Unit patients, maternity cases and dialysis services.

Similar tactics were employed earlier in the year by striking nurses in Saskatchewan, who also defied anti-union laws, risking



Local people in a mass protest at the Narmada dam project

One dam thing after another...

One of the issues that the ecology movement is battling in a number of different parts of the globe is that of huge dam systems – like those of the Narmada or the Ilisu, which we deal with in more detail below.

To some extent this development represents a partial success for green campaigners, as hydro-electric power is often posed as a cleaner alternative to nuclear power. Indeed the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions has led to orders to reduce electricity consumption altogether in some parts of the world – for example in the US President Clinton has called for the federal government to reduce its energy use by 35 percent by 2010.

In June in Washington the National Hydropower Association criticised Clinton for leaving hydropower out of an executive order designed to reduce government greenhouse gas emissions by requiring more use of renewable power.

“Not only is hydropower undisputedly a renewable energy source by any standard definition, it is our nation’s oldest and most significant

renewable energy source (that is essentially infinite,” the trade group

said in a letter to Clinton.

The request comes as the administration is under pressure on the question of existing dams – some of which have already been

removed and others of which campaigners are arguing should be because of their profoundly negative effects on fragile eco-systems.

But the questions posed by dams, particularly the huge systems consisting of many individual dams over an extended length of one or more major rivers pose far broader questions than many in advanced capitalist countries often think of as environmental questions.

Particularly on the left there is a conservative tendency to think of human beings as the species affected by social questions, and ecology as the study of what happens to other animals and plants.

The politics of dams shows that such a separation can’t be meaningfully made. The construction of huge dams has already caused the displacement of millions of people and the destruction of their homes and livelihoods. This has often affected communities of ethnic groups who are discriminated against, often the first peoples of the planet.

Not only are Kurdish people threatened by the Ilisu, not only have millions of tribal peoples been dispossessed in India, but in Labrador, Canada the Inuit people are fighting a plan to expand the Churchill Falls system which sells electricity cheaply to the north-eastern United States.

Already a lot of their land has been lost by an earlier system built in the 1970s for which they never received the compensation

promised. Now they have managed to halt the new process until meaningful consultation takes place.

In Vietnam 103,000 people including ethnic minorities will be relocated to build a reservoir for a giant hydro-electric power plant in Son La province, a remote area in mountainous northwestern Vietnam.

“Building the Son La power plant is a 1,000-year dream of the ethnic minorities there,” Nhan Dan, mouthpiece of the ruling Communist Party, claimed in a lengthy article.

Some of these projects also pose questions of control of water supplies over vast areas with political ramifications beyond the state boundaries.

Water from the Tigris and the Euphrates is key to the economies of countries of the Middle East far beyond Turkey. The prospect of wars for water is not an idle speculation as the prospect of serious drought increases.

Many of these projects are aimed at expanding into new markets where current electricity consumption is very low. In Nepal for example, less than 15 percent of the kingdom’s 22 million people, among the poorest in the world, have access to electricity.

U.S. energy giant Enron International has applied for a license to study the possibility of building a hydroelectric dam on Nepal’s Karnali river, which could export electricity to neighbouring India and China.

One of the successes of campaigning on this issue has been that many multilateral bodies including the World Bank have become very suspicious of such projects and refused to fund them favouring instead small hydro-electric projects that minimise the impact on local people and the environment.

This means that loan guarantees for these schemes usually come from governments in Western Europe and the US.

This puts an important responsibility on activists here to ensure that our governments are not funding schemes that will devastate the lives of so many people.

GM food:

As the government announces the sites for next year’s farm-size trials for GM foods, VERONICA FAGAN examines some of the issues posed by the debates on genetic modification.

As a socialist I am in favour of scientific progress. But I guess in the last twenty years, I – along with many other people – have become more aware that I need to examine what that statement really means in the context of the real world we live in.

It’s a world in which research and development into new areas of science are driven by the hunt for greater and greater profits rather than to end human suffering or enhance the quality of our lives. That also means that short term gains in terms of profit come before long term needs in terms of resources – so corporations and governments are prepared to destroy whole eco-systems that have taken thousands of years to build up, like rain forests.

It’s a world in which basic precautions in terms of health and

safety are thrown to the wind in this quest – as the ghastly stories about what happened at Porton Down which came out in the press recently remind us all too graphically.

Similarly while I am not qualified to assess the evidence on how BSE became CJD, it is clear that diseases are jumping the species barrier and this is something that needs to worry us all – certainly it threatens us all.

And if the government’s own Food Safety advisory Committee is telling us that the high use of antibiotics for farm animals is something that needs to be stopped, then there must be strong evidence of this.

The Committee, reporting in August, expressed particular concern about the use of synthetic antibiotics that are used in humans to treat E-coli, typhoid and salmonella and the use of growth promoters.

Our response to all of this should not be a Luddite, anti-progressive one. Rather it needs to be one in which we demand that investment and enquiry is driven by the real needs of people.

To ensure that this what hap-

Villagers refuse to be flooded out by profiteers

Susan Moore

IT IS ONLY in the last few months that people in the west are likely to have heard about the Narmada river valley project since novelist Arundhati Roy became involved in the campaign against it.

Roy, whose book *The God of Small Things* won the Booker Prize in 1997, joined the fight by writing an essay in an Indian magazine, later republished in the west, attacking big dams for displacing 50 million tribal people in India in the past 50 years.

The essay “The Greater Common Good” aroused so much fury in the area of the projected dams that Congress Party youth made a bonfire of it, as well as threatening those who stocked it.

The project is a series of over 3000 cascading dams costing £6.4 billion along the 1300 km river. The project seen as a symbol of progress by the governments of the states directly affected: Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh

and Maharashtra.

They claim that the project will generate electricity and provide clean drinking water. Certainly there is a demand for electricity from large farmers and industrialists in the region who put their thirst for profit way above the lives of the people whose homes will be destroyed.

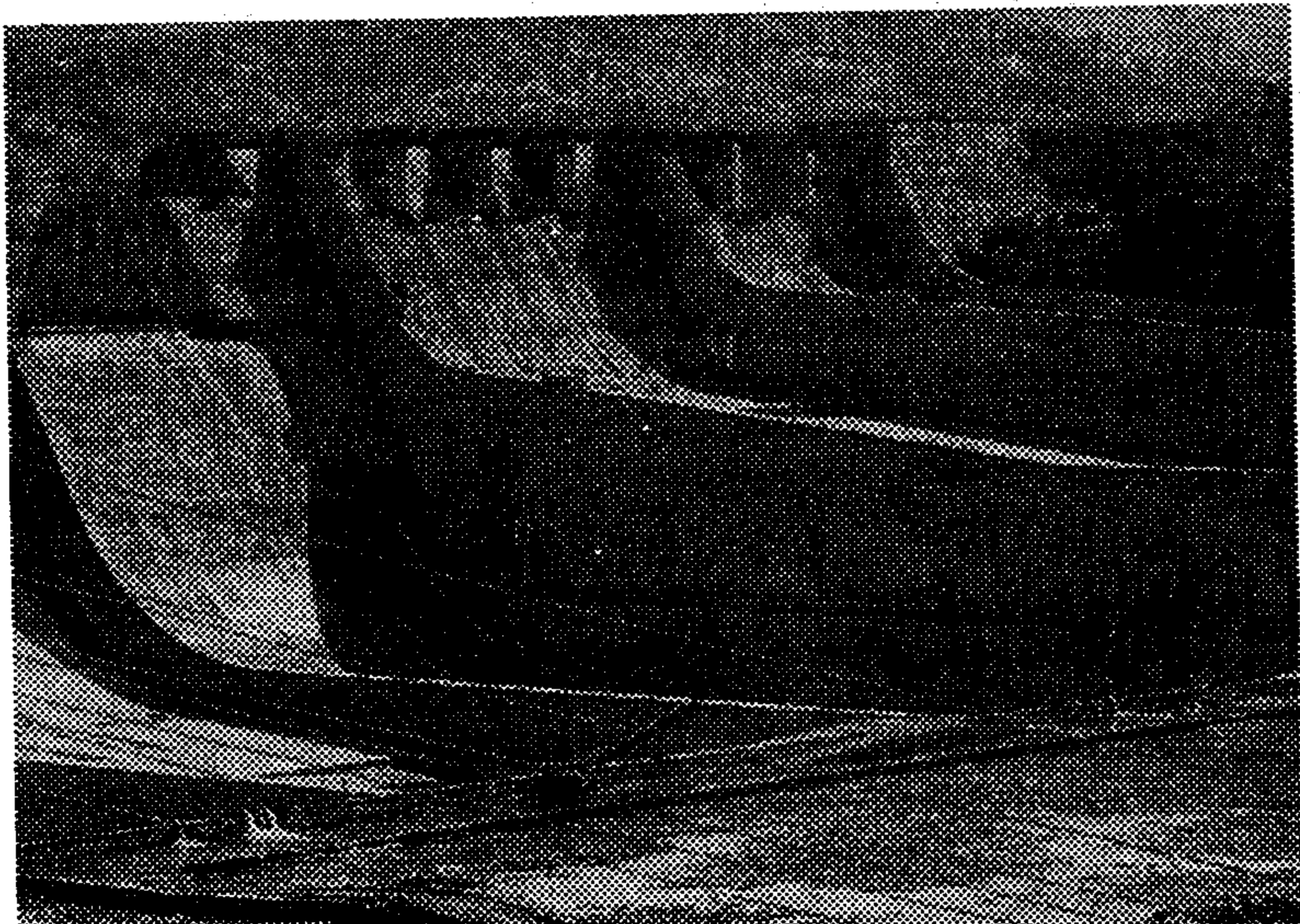
But the campaign against the damn did not start with Roy’s intervention. For 14 years the project has been dogged with controversy both because of its

For 14 years the project has been dogged with controversy

threat to the environment and to the many tribal people who will be displaced by it.

In 1993 the World Bank was forced to withdraw support because of the strength of local campaigning. Then work on the last dam, the Sardar

Sarovar, was suspended in January 1995 following a court order on a petition filed by environmentalist Medha Patkar’s Free Narmada movement (NBA) alleging large-scale displacement of tribals living in the area where the dams are



Part of the massive Narmada dam project

the reasons to be fearful

pens, ordinary people have to have control of where the money goes, and real and accessible information about the results of that research.

Again one of the horrifying aspects of the Porton Down story was the fact that those who 'volunteered' for the experiments had no real information about what was going on.

So what does all of this mean in terms of the debate on genetic modification?

Firstly we need to separate the question of modification in medicine and in farming. In terms of

medicine I think that the key question is ensuring that trials take place in an open and extensive manner.

There is no doubt in my mind that if we are able to find cures for diseases through this process then it is one we should support – but that we need to

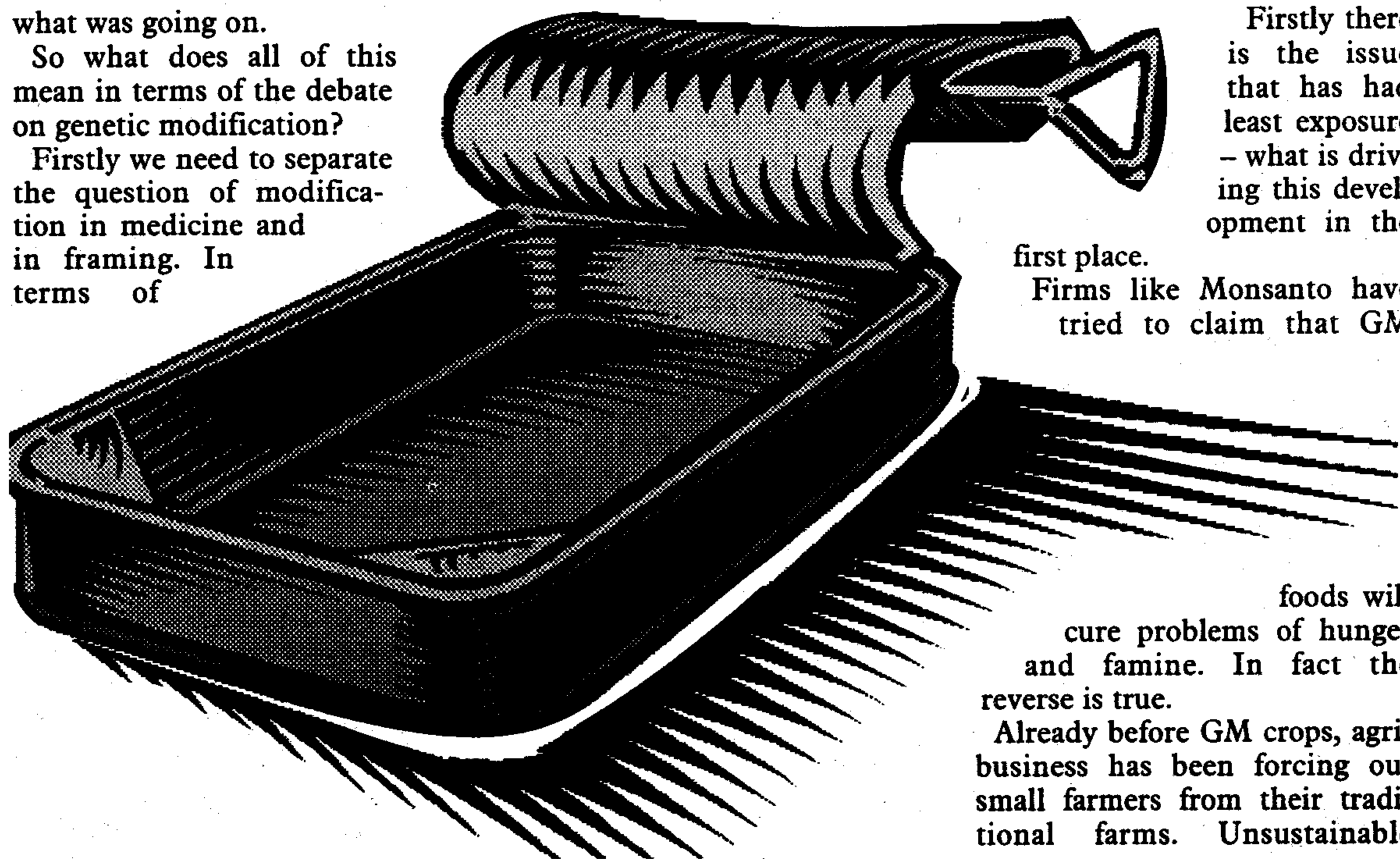
have the confidence that this won't lead to side effects that could be as or more dangerous than the original problem.

But most of the controversy over genetic modification has concentrated on the question of farming. Here there are a whole range of questions that need to be addressed.

Firstly there is the issue that has had least exposure – what is driving this development in the

first place.

Firms like Monsanto have tried to claim that GM



foods will cure problems of hunger and famine. In fact the reverse is true.

Already before GM crops, agribusiness has been forcing out small farmers from their traditional farms. Unsustainable

being built.

The Gujarat government wants to raise the height of the dam to 115 metres.

Then in February 1999, the Supreme Court decided the dam could be raised to 85 metres from 80.3 metres. This, activists argue, has sealed the fate of 60 villages which will be submerged by the monsoon rains. 37,690 hectares (93,132 acres) of land in the four states would be submerged, affecting more than 45,000 families and 2,000 poor farmers in the western states.

On July 31 1999 thousands of residents of villages likely to be submerged by the dam demonstrated in slush and rain in the remote village of Parthrad. Marchers shouting "Dams shall not be built, we will not vacate our lands" were joined by Roy other supporters wearing "Free the Narmada" T-shirts".

People waving banners lined the roads to welcome Roy as a convoy of buses carrying anti-dam activists passed through villages. "We have come to express support to your struggle," Roy, on a six-day campaign tour, told the villagers.

"The court realised that construction of the dam is a must for the development of country's western region," Gujarat state's Irrigation Minister Jainarayan Vyas said following the Supreme Court verdict.

Vyas said the state has spent 70.46 billion rupees (\$1.66 billion) on the project which will irrigate 1.9 million hectares of land and generate 1,450 megawatts of power. It will also provide drinking water to 8,215 villages, he said. The minister said 236 km (147

miles) of the main canal and a part of the two power stations had already been built.

He said all the tribals displaced by the Narmada project had been rehabilitated at alternate sites with all facilities.

But environmental activist Nandani Oza said 8,000 tribals displaced earlier when the dam was meant to touch a height of 80 metres had not been provided alternative homes.

"Some of them have returned to their native villages which are not yet been submerged," she said.

To Medha Paktar, leader of the Save Narmada movement, the project shows the need to fight for a development policy that is not organised in the interests of the powerful. The movement argues that the dam will produce far less electricity and at far greater cost than the planners claim.

Ms Paktar argues: "Throughout India, even with the regionalisation of politics, there is no true decentralisation so nobody in power ever supports giving power to the people. But there is a silent majority in this country that is living a different kind of life. They realise that more and more resources are being snatched from them and they are beginning to react."

Ms Paktar's announcement that she intends to stay in Domkhedi when the waters rise together with other villagers has been controversial including amongst other ecological activists. After all, one quarter of the land that will be submerged was already flooded by the time this protest was announced. Would it not be better they ask of her, and of Roy, to focus on winning better settlements for those whose vil-

lages are next?

There is no doubt that the tactics proposed here are extreme – and pose a serious danger that people who oppose the project may not become involved. But it is clear that they are only one of the methods of struggle employed by the movement.

Equally importantly, those that oppose them most vociferously do so because they question the aim of stopping the project all together; taken in by the notion strong in Indian society (and elsewhere) that all industrialisation equals progress. But as Roy and others have pointed out the balance sheet of the last 50 years is that projects like this have served to increase the already obscene polarisation in Indian society – to make the rich richer and the poor poorer.

In any event there is now a new direction for the campaign as the publicity has generated has begun to exert pressure in Germany. At the heart of the project is the massive Siemens corporation who are demanding DM 240 million in export guarantees to underwrite their involvement.

Siemens, who are involved in a joint venture with Bavarian Hypo Vereinsbank and the Indian conglomerate S Kumar made it clear in May that they cannot go ahead without these guarantees and will pull out if they don't get them.

Nor is it likely to prove easy to replace them when two German electricity companies pulled out early this year and a US consortium pulled out in the mid-1990's.

Maximum international pressure needs to be exerted both on the companies involved and the German (supposedly Red-Green coalition) government to make sure this scandalously project is stopped before more lives are lost and fragile eco-systems destroyed for ever.

methods of mono-culture - which rob all the goodness from fertile farm land and leave it barren in a relatively short period of time - have replaced methods of crop rotation practised successfully for centuries.

The destruction of forests, the building of massive dams have laid waste vast tracts of land in which communities once lived. The seas have been polluted and over-fished through the use of industrial trawlers that decimate fish stocks much more quickly than they can be replaced, undercutting the livelihoods of many rural communities.

None of this is to argue that life for small farmers, fishers or artisans in these traditional communities is utopian. This is not our vision of how we want everyone to live – where life is fragile, disease rife, poverty endemic.

But what capitalism is doing today is destroying this and replacing it with nothing in terms of these communities. Across the third world these are the people who are forced increasingly into cities where there are no houses for them to live in, no jobs to do, not health or education systems.

This is already the motor force behind the street children in the cities of Latin America, Africa and Asia.

Genetic modification will make this process even more extreme. Power will be concentrated in even fewer hands at the expense of even greater numbers who will be dispossessed and destroyed.

Instead of saving the seed from one year's yield to plant for the next, farmers will be compelled to buy new seed at inflated prices – prices that they will not be able to afford. That is why there is so much opposition to genetically modified crops from small farmers across the third world.

That is why all socialists should stand with them in opposing these developments.

There are of course other issues too, issues that have had rather more airing in the media here. It is true that once genetically modified crops are grown outside a laboratory environment it is extremely likely that this will cause cross-contamination of other plants – including of organic crops.

The danger here is that this cross-contamination will make it impossible to really tell what the effects of genetic modification are, as there will not be any comparators outside a laboratory situation.

But the government tells us that these trials are necessary if we

are not test out the implications of this technology, so that must be right mustn't it?

The trials are being paid for by you and me, as taxpayers, rather than by the corporations

They never point out that it

would be perfectly possible – if costly – to construct huge laboratories in which the tests could take place which mirrored all the conditions of the natural environment, but didn't pose the same risks.

But that would undercut the profits of giants like Monsanto if they had to pay for it – and that's another point. The powers that be also keep rather quiet about the fact that the trials are being paid for by you and me, as taxpayers, rather than by the corporations who will benefit from their outcome.

All in all then, while I have some reluctance to support the tactics of those who trample GM fields (because at first glance their attitude seems anti-scientific) in the context of the world we live in GM foods will not bring positive benefits to anyone other than the multinationals.

That's probably another good reason for changing the world.

The dam will produce far less electricity and at far greater cost than planners claim



Scandal of squeeze on AIDS treatment

Charlie van Gelderen
CAPITALISM'S aim is to maximise profit whatever the human cost may be.
 South Africa, with 3.5 million cases of people who are HIV+ has the most explosive epidemic of any country in the world, according to the AIDS Consortium, part of the AIDS Treatment Action Campaign.
 There are between 1500 - 2000 new infections every day - a very high percentage of those affected are young women under 35.
 To combat this scourge, the

South African government plans to source cheaper AIDS treatment drugs, such as AZT. South African legislation in the shape of the Medical Amendment Act allows for compulsory licensing, ie, allowing the manufacturing of generic forms of expensive AIDS drugs, despite patents being held in another company if this would be in the national interests of the country.
 The act also allows for the importation of drugs from cheaper sources.

This has aroused the anger of the powerful drugs lobby in the United States, which is pushing for the protection of intellectual property rights. It is urging the US government to threaten trade sanctions if South Africa goes ahead with plans for cheaper drugs.
 Not satisfied with trying to bomb the world into compliance with American imperialist interests, the US also has no compunction in threatening human lives if profits are threatened.

South Africa fights AIDS - and US drug profiteers

Thenjiwe Mtintso, deputy secretary general and the highest-ranking woman in the African National Congress, is an important voice for women in South Africa. She visited the United States in July and was interviewed by Key Martin and Gloria Rubae of the People's Video Network. Here we reprint some of what she said:

"The legacy of apartheid is such that it is going to take us a long time to actually reverse this, especially for the poor communities, particularly in the rural areas. And when you talk about the rural areas you are talking about women primarily, because they are the ones who tend to be left as men go into the urban areas to seek employment. And because of patriarchy... they are the ones who have got to take care of the sick. So the burden is primarily on the women..."

"We have set in place primarily preventive and educational programmes. But you must also know that we are dealing with backward communities. The rate of illiteracy is high. Violence against women is strong. Women fear challenging their partners because they know the kind of violence that will erupt. So they succumb. A woman cannot force her partner to use condoms, whether she is married or unmarried."

There has not been the politics of keeping to monogamous families in our societies, so you find that our men, and our young men, have more than one relationship. If the man is infected, it implies he infects five others. This is one of the reasons why you get a higher rate among women. There is also the belief that if men sleep with virgins or young women they get cured. Rape is on the increase. Because sexuality and sex education are



Despite the cant about "partnership", profits come before patients

subjects that are still taboo in some of the rural families, you have problems when you go around trying to teach people."

"It is in this context that our health department came up with the Medical Amendment Act, looking at the production of generic medicine, and what is called "parallel imports" as well as "forced licensing". All these practices, in our understanding, are within the World Trade Organisation regulations and the clause that deals with "intellectual property". Our aim here was to make medicine accessible to our poor people.

If companies like Glaxo, for example, were producing certain medicines abroad and selling them cheaper in Canada than they were selling them in South Africa, our minister should be able to order these medicines from Canada, which is a parallel import. And if people had patent rights to certain medicines, and either were not producing them or producing them expensively in South Africa, then the minister had a right to ask other companies to produce them cheaper.

In terms of prescription, if people were prescribing these expensive medicines, the health minister and the doctor and the patient had the right to go and get the cheaper medicine. These were

some of the elements of this act that allowed our minister and our doctors to do that.

The pharmaceuticals saw red. Their argument was that it was going to be piracy. And it's not true.

Their other argument was

that we were going against TRIPS (the World Trade Organisation's rules on intellectual property rights), and that is not true. But the American government came fully behind these pharmaceuticals.

The truth of the matter is that it is profits that they are defending. So the lives of people are less valuable than the profits these big pharmaceuticals are going to be making in South Africa.

And now we are being taken to the Constitutional Court by the pharmaceuticals backed by the American government. We have not been able to implement the Medical Amendment Act.

Many of our people are in danger of dying because of a lack of access to cheaper medications.

We are not dealing with only South Africa. It is a continental problem. Zimbabwe next door is in crisis. So any alternative access to cheaper medicines would benefit not only South Africa but the whole continent. But we are being denied that.

If the United States government could allow us to set in motion those processes and programmes that we think in our country would work for our people, then let us begin. But we are not being given that opportunity by either the US government or the pharmaceuticals.

Cameron: "The first prominent African to come out"

LAST APRIL, the South African judge and human rights advocate Edwin Cameron confirmed publicly that he is living with Aids. Cameron has been an out gay lawyer for more than twenty years could have used his privileged position to hide his status but chose instead to try to create a broader public debate on the questions involved.

Cameron, has a long association with ANC organisations and the trade union federation COSATU, and was part of the movement to ensure that the new South African constitution included non-discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation. He was in London in July for an international gathering of lawyers to discuss partnership rights for lesbians and gay men. He also spoke at a fringe meeting organised by UNISON during TUC Lesbian and Gay conference. Terry Conway reports.

EDWIN Cameron's story is a moving one. He is certainly an impressive person, someone I felt I wanted to get to know after hearing him speak for twenty minutes or so. But more because behind the individual there are more stories.

As Cameron explains there is the issue of the government's attitude to HIV and Aids.

"One of the puzzles of our transition to democracy has been the ineffectual government response to the Aids epidemic. The one twentieth-century figure who really could use personal persuasion to manage young people's behaviour", former President Nelson Mandela, has largely stayed silent. "It had to have been a choice or a semi-conscious act of denial on his part, because we did everything we possibly could".

This has been a profoundly frustrating experience for someone who has a lot of confidence in Mandela and the ANC. Cameron feels that South Africa has a good deal to learn from the experience of Uganda, the most positive model for fighting Aids on the continent where the government has taken a very interventionist role.

He reckons that he was infected with Aids some time in the 80s but was catapulted into making a public statement about his status after he was nominated as a High Court judge. By this time he had started combination therapy following a bout of illness in late 1997, and felt it was vital to make a public declaration that he had Aids but was healthy and strong enough to do his job.

His guess that finally talking about his illness was the right thing to do has been confirmed:

"I have had the most deeply moving and astonishing response to my public statement from every

corner of South Africa, from all sectors and segments of society... I have had many hundreds of letters and cards and faxes from people all over Africa, Nigeria and Zambia and Tanzania and Uganda who say "you're the first prominent African to come out."

They don't say "even though you are a white gay man, we're very glad you have come out"... they're saying you're an African and that's why your coming out matters'... They have claimed me as an African, they have claimed my act as an African act in this particular epidemic.

He tells the story of Gugu Dlamini, a woman from a township near Durban who spoke publicly on World Aids Day last year and was stoned to death less than three weeks later.

He believes that if more people were able to come out that the negative attitudes that led to her murder will change. "Its only by



Edwin Cameron

four million of us creating the conditions for making that statement that we can create safety for each other. Its one of those paradoxes."

For him, the key issue facing all Aids activists is the fact that treatment is so expensive as to be completely inaccessible to the majority of Africans. This is despite the fact that the production costs of these drugs are a tiny fraction of what the multinationals charge. In this context he praises the work of South Africa's Treatment Action Campaign.

While the focus of both Cameron's appeal and that of the Treatment Action campaign is on Africans, certainly he is ready to acknowledge that the same issues are facing millions in Asia where Aids is spreading rapidly. For example it is predicted that 20% of GDP may be lost in Thailand by 2000 because of Aids.

Of course fighting expensive medication is only one part of the battle against Aids in an situation where structural adjustment programmes and neo-liberal policies are undermining spending on health care and education so necessary to combat the pandemic.

But a campaign that highlights the gruesome profit levels the pharmaceutical industry makes from death and disease as well as the inequality between north and south deserves maximum publicity and involvement.

For all Aids activists, for all socialists this is an issue that we must take up vigorously.

Yeltsin plays for high stakes in new PM swap

Alan Thornett

Boris Yeltsin has several major problems as next year's presidential election creeps closer, as far as determining his successor is concerned. The overarching problem is the economy. He has been unable to resolve the economic crisis in Russia which brought the economy close to meltdown at this time last year.

The situation faced by Russia was part of a global crisis centred in South East Asia and Japan and which threatened to precipitate a world-wide slump. The rouble dropped into free-fall after a rapid drop in production in the Tiger economies resulted in a drop in the world price of oil – one of Russia's principal exports.

Since that time, the worst case scenario has not developed world-wide: the line was held, principally in the USA – at the cost of a grossly over-valued stock exchange. How long that situation can remain is a matter of speculation but at some stage it will readjust, and major instability is likely to return to world markets.

Meanwhile things stabilised a bit in Russia, but nothing was resolved – and no one has much idea how to resolve it. Yeltsin wants to push economic reforms forward as quickly as possible but in practice reestablishing capitalism in Russia is a long term uphill task.

The laws of capitalism are hardly present in big swathes of the economy and many industries, as well as individual people, survive by barter and the black market. Meanwhile gangster capitalism dominates the smaller profitable sectors of society.

Then there are those who are organising against Yeltsin, aiming to take the presidency. The most significant of these is the new Fatherland Movement initiated by the mayor of Moscow,

Yuri Luzhkov. This organisation has just been joined by former prime minister Yevgeny Primakov – sacked by Yeltsin at an earlier stage and a popular politician in the country. They launched the Fatherland Movement publicly at a conference on August 21.

Frustration as to how to combat this new formation, stay in office, and ensure the succession led Yeltsin to sack yet another prime minister last week, this time Sergei Stepashin (who had only been in office three months), and threaten to dissolve the parliament if it did not endorse his new nominee for the job.

This was the faceless former KGB agent Vladimir Putin, notable only for his loyalty and subservience to Yeltsin and his inner circle.

Russians were left in little doubt that what was involved was a move by Yeltsin's inner circle to line up an electable candidate for next year's presidential elections when Yeltsin introduced Putin not only as his nominee for Prime Minister, but also as his chosen successor! Nothing very subtle about that.

It is not only for political reasons that Yeltsin is determined to have a loyalist follow him into the presidency, but fear of moves against both him and his inner circle for corruption whilst in office.

Serious allegations of corruption have been made against both Yeltsin and his supporters. It seems that investigators in Geneva may be about to track down Yeltsin's personal fortune which has been laundered through Swiss bank accounts. This is dangerous stuff when at the present time Russian law does not provide immunity for ex-presidents.

But it is not just this mess and the intractable problems of the economy which will face both Yeltsin's new Prime Minister and

his successor as president next year.

The disastrous war in Chechnya has now been followed by a war in Dagestan where a rebel army is demanding independence. It is led by Shamil Basayev – a general who caused them great problem in Chechnya.

The situation is now developing into a full scale war and is soaking up resources the Russian government simply doesn't have. To avoid the demoralisation which arose from the Chechnya war, the army is using only volunteers, paid at enhanced rates. But, like Chechnya, this may also be a war Russia is unable to oust outright, despite its military superiority.

There is speculation, however, that Putin may have an answer to some of these problems, at least the elections and the corruption – a state of emergency. This could be called over the crisis in Dagestan.

It could be kept in force for some time and used to postpone the elections until Yeltsin judged that he would be better placed to get a supporter in office.

Whatever happens in these political shenanigans the poverty-stricken and precarious state of the Russian economy will continue. All contenders for government and presidency – including the Communist Party opposition – are committed to marketisation and reform. The only thing which divides them is how to attempt to implement it.

It is not difficult to see that the new Fatherland Movement has little to offer. They announced that their top priority, should they be elected, is to ensure that Russia has a new flag! "Without such a new symbol," they said, "it will be impossible to get the economy right".

Meanwhile the problems of the economy are of staggering proportions. The information emerging from an investigation by international law authorities in New York have shed some light on the scale of the activities of the Russian mafia and the extent to which they are integrated into

business and banking at every level.

Some mafia bosses now own banks, and are therefore able to integrate their mafia business with "legitimate business" in a much more complete way

The sums of money controlled by the mafia are huge. Investigators in New York claim, for example, that Semyon Mogilevich, a 53 year old "business man" under investigation laundered \$10bn though New York bank accounts – a sum of money equivalent to 40% of the Russian government's annual budget – or 6% of Russia's GDP!

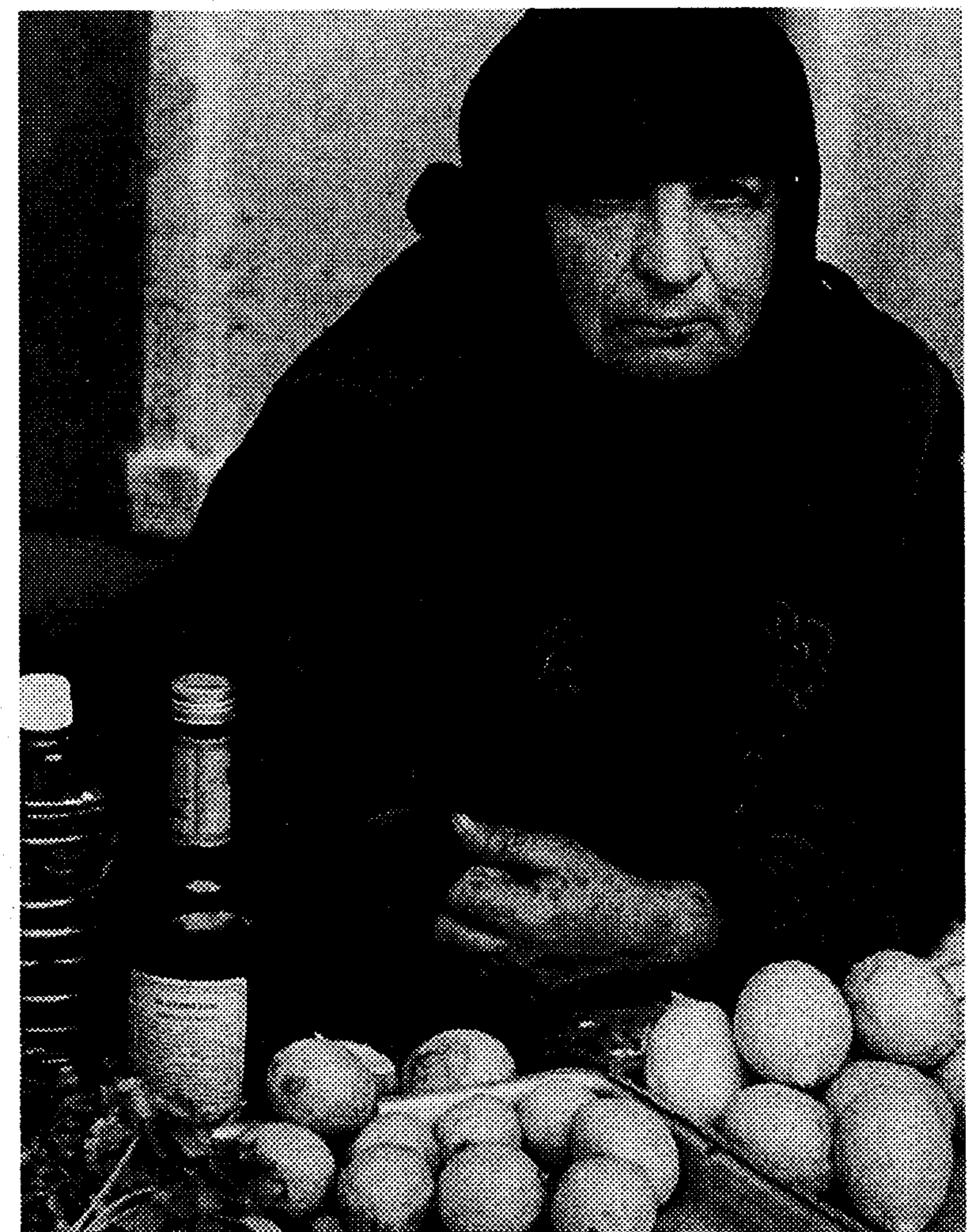
Huge sums of money destined for foreign investment are also routinely laundered through the city of London and Swiss banks. It is something currently under investigation in both the City of

London and Zurich.

It is not a new problem, of course. Russia's new gangster capitalists can get a far better return for their ill-gotten gains than investing in Russia itself. It has been estimated by Fitch IBCA that \$136bn dollars of capital poured out of Russia between 1993 and 1998. This sum far exceeded the total capital inflows into the Russian economy during the same period.

It is clear that whoever wins the presidential elections will need a lot more than a new flag to reintroduce capitalism into Russia and make it work.

Meanwhile the abject poverty and subsistence existence imposed on the vast majority of the population by these processes will not only continue, but could rapidly worsen if the investment bubble on the US stock exchange were to burst.



Was this what they meant by "market reforms"?

Serious allegations of corruption have been made against both Yeltsin and his supporters

Religious cult banned as it recruits Chinese Party members

New crackdown on disssidence

Zhang Kai

High-handed repression of the Falun Gong organisation has been conducted since late July, with the organisation being labelled as illegal and all its propaganda, books, practice or activities being banned.

This signals the most serious crackdown on disssidence throughout the country since the June Fourth crackdown in 1989.

The *People's Daily*, in its July 24 editorial, explained that "this is a severe ideological and political struggle, pertinent to the fundamental beliefs of us communists, pertinent to the fundamental ideological basis of the solidarity of the people of the whole country, and pertinent to the future and destiny of our Party and the state."

The question at issue here is not whether this is an exaggeration of the influence of Falun Gong, but how this reveals the gross fear of the CCP leadership towards what is destabilising its rule and probably bringing about "the end of the Party and the state".

It is reported that Falun Gong activities began in 1992 and spread quickly in the span of a few years. Different versions give the number of practitioners of Falun Gong from tens of millions to 100 million. Li Baoku, Deputy Minister of Civil Affairs, quoted a figure of around 2 million.

At the same time, the government report of the Falun Gong organisation showed a pretty extensive network, with 39 headquarters in the provincial capitals or major municipalities of the autonomous regions, over 1,900 support stations in counties and cities all over the country, and over 28,000 venues of practice.

The government has waged a propaganda war against Falun Gong, denouncing it for its illegal and violent activities and harmful effects. There are many allegations, but here are just two examples.

The authorities allege that from April 1998 to July 1999, there were 19 cases in which crowds gathered to "besiege and attack" government offices and propaganda institutions.

Another allegation is that Li Hongzhi, the founder of Falun

Gong, amassed wealth equivalent to US\$150,000 in 1993 and 1994 through selling books and teaching the Falun Gong practice.

From the official allegations, it may be surmised that the Falun Gong is seen as a threat because it is not a religion that the CCP feels it can contain and control. On the contrary, CCP members and even high-ranking officials have been recruited into the ranks of the Falun Gong sect.

What the CCP cannot tolerate is that on April 25 this year, without any warning, over 10,000 practitioners of Falun Gong "besieged" Zhongnanhai to demand recognition of its legality. The Falun Gong leaders and representatives, according to the Reuters report of July 25, were current or retired high-ranking officials.

It is difficult to tell the size of the Falun Gong membership among CCP members and cadres.

pen after Li Hongzhi and his Falun Gong are being revealed and criticised" ... "There should be serious preparations, watching out for developments, and in case of serious happenings, they should be promptly discovered, reported, controlled and resolved in order to secure social and political stability."

The anxiety behind the warning forebodes an acceleration of the crisis of the CCP rule despite the repression of Falun Gong.

Such anxieties are also expressed in the CCP's crackdown on dissidents before and after the tenth anniversary of June Fourth. According to the China Human Rights and Democratic Movement Information Centre, about 140 dissidents were arrested by the police for their preparatory work in commemorating the June Fourth anniversary.



The 1989 crackdown on the Democracy Movement (above and left) has left space for bizarre religious cults instead.

cratic Movement, Pursue Responsibility for the Massacre, End One-Party Dictatorship, Build Democratic China" were shouted. Outside China, thousands of people joined gatherings or demonstrations in major cities in the US, Canada and England.

As for the signature campaign initiated by Wang Dan, the 1989 student leader, 100,000 signatures had been collected by early June. The signature campaign will continue until October 1, the fiftieth anniversary of the People's Republic of China.

Thus, despite repression, resistance and protests continue. On

It was reported that in Shijiazhuang, Hebei Province, 1,200 current or retired cadres above the rank of department chief were under house arrest in the suburbs to learn and study Party central documents, and the next phase was to order 3,000 rank-and-file Party members and cadres to withdraw from the Falun Gong sect.

In Hanzhou city, 100 members of the Democratic Party applied to hold a commemorative gathering in a public park: the application was rejected, and about 20 people were arrested; still about 50 people gathered in the pavilion of the park for the commemoration.

In Sichuan Province, 45 dissidents, against the warning of the authorities, conducted a hunger strike at home and held a candlelight vigil. In Liaoning Province, 100 dissidents jointly applied to hold a candlelight vigil on June 4th.

In Hong Kong which was returned to China's sovereignty after July 1997, which still remains the only place in China where a candlelight vigil can be held in public, the tenth anniversary drew an impressive 70,000 people.

In the gathering, chants of "Rehabilitate the 1989 Demo-



May 24, the families of 105 deceased in the June Fourth crackdown jointly filed a lawsuit to the Supreme People's Procuratorate against high ranking officials, including former premier Li Peng, and others such as Yuan Mu, Li Ximing, Chen Xitong, and Yang Baibing, for their criminal liability in the June Fourth crackdown.

After the effort of a decade, the families, led by Ding Zilin, professor from the People's University in Beijing, whose only son was killed during the June Fourth crackdown, had managed to identify the families of over 160 deceased and about 70 handicapped during the June Fourth crackdown. The lawsuit was politically explicit and audacious. It was rejected by the court, but a political statement had been made.

The high handed repression drives Falun Gong underground and antagonises it

The popularity of Falun Gong shows the extent of general social polarisation, unemployment, disillusionment and accumulating grievances.

The high handed repression drives it underground and antagonises it. The lack of confidence that the CCP will manage to crack down and eliminate the opposition can be seen in the end of the Party document to all Party members forbidding any practice of Falun Gong: "All levels of Party structures should fully recognize the complexity and arduousness of this struggle". "There should be adequate estimate of what may possibly hap-



It's OK to worship some decadent idols, but not a cult that threatens Party control of the state



Opposition to Slobodan Milosevic's increasingly-beleaguered regime has continued to grow both within Serbia itself and in the remaining parts of the rump "Yugoslavia". The next issue of Socialist Outlook will carry a full assessment of the situation after the war.

Fitting reward for stooge without scruples

Lord Robertson of Kosovo

Harry Sloan

IT MAY have left thousands dead, industries and transport links in ruins and a deadly legacy of unexploded cluster bombs and radioactive shells, bomb-casings and bullets scattered across a polluted landscape, but the NATO bombing of Serbia has been good for one man: George (now Lord) Robertson.

The Defence Secretary whose endless willingness to excuse NATO's blundering attacks on embassies, trains, coaches and other civilian targets matched even that of NATO's PR chief Jamie Shea, is said to have had a "good war".

So good was his performance for the imperialist alliance that he has now won unanimous selection as NATO's Secretary General, where he can oversee more and bigger bombing campaigns into the new millennium.

Robertson's appointment is further evidence of the way in which Tony Blair's New Labour party is pushing back all of the conventional boundaries and replicating itself as a born-again Conservative Party.

Of course he is far from the first Labour politician eagerly to embrace the imperialist goals and objectives of the NATO alliance, which was founded to fight communism in the midst of the Cold War 50 years ago, with eager support from Labour's then Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin.

But he is the first British Labour politician to take charge of the 19-country alliance – an area of interest and involvement normally regarded as the preserve of the Tory right and retired military top brass.

NATO has traditionally been the means through which the USA has set out to keep its European "allies" on board as it escalated its attempt to assert military control on a global level.

Under the banner of loyalty to NATO British Labour governments have connived at the stationing of US nuclear submarines, long-distance nuclear bombers and more

recently Cruise missiles in bases in England and Scotland.

In return, NATO has cultivated a loyal right wing layer of trade union bureaucrats and Labour politicians for whom the goals of containing communism and supporting the US notion of "democracy" outweighed any notional commitment to socialism or internationalism.

George Robertson was certainly never troubled by any socialist principles. Born into what is politely termed "a police family", he has always opposed unilateral nuclear disarmament, and has not a shred of radicalism to conceal in his political past.

This total lack of any scruple or internationalist sentiment stood Robertson in good stead during the Kosovo conflict.

It enabled him to act as the most craven apologist for the US bombardment, even while other NATO governments – notably Greece, Italy France and Germany – expressed growing levels of concern and tried behind the scenes to prevent any further escalation of the bombing.

The brownie points he scored for this have clearly been the decisive factor in winning over Washington support for Robertson's appointment to a post which in recent years has been held by a token European as a means of distracting attention from the overwhelming level of US control.

Interestingly, the outgoing NATO secretary general, Spain's Javier Solana, is set to become the EU's commissioner dealing with defence issues.

This, coupled with Robertson's elevation, will further strengthen US military influence within the EU, and serve to counter any trend towards a weakening of the Atlantic alliance.

The Kosovo bombing showed the extent to which the US, with British government complicity, was ready and able to ride roughshod over the expressed policy decisions of the other NATO countries.

From the beginning there were

strict limits on the range of targets which the 19 NATO countries agreed should be "legitimate" targets for bombs and missiles. In particular there was no agreement to allow the bombing of "Phase Three" targets such as power stations and buildings in central Belgrade linked to Milosevic's state machinery. In theory any decision to escalate to this level required a unanimous vote from all 19 NATO members.

But on March 30 Solana together with supreme commander General Wesley Clark and General Naumann told NATO ambassadors that the original phased plan had been discarded – challenging anyone to disagree.

Immediately afterwards NATO

bombers struck Milosevic's presidential palace, the party HQ and Serbian TV stations.

Robertson has clearly convinced his US sponsors that he is the man to front up similar aggressive behaviour, and not a man troubled by the toll of civilian casualties that result from striking obvious civilian targets.

Nor did he ever give credence to the key delusion of some on the left who went along with the NATO bombing – that the war was being waged to free the people of Kosovo. In every interview Robertson was adamant that Kosovo would not be independent, and that the KLA would be disarmed as soon as the conflict ended.

Now, as a new round of ethnic

cleansing begins under the passive gaze of K-for "peace-keepers", the similarities between the NATO intervention in Kosovo and the 1969 British army intervention in the north of Ireland become even more striking.

As the mayhem continues, Mr Robertson is one of the few to emerge smiling from the rubble. Sounding like a Miss World contestant, Robertson claimed as news of his impending appointment leaked that his objective was to work for "world peace".

But his dogged commitment to the capitalist system and to its most vicious defenders – the US government – means that Robertson is likely to be a figurehead for further imperialist military aggression for years to come.



East Timor goes to polls

The East Timorese are to vote on the issue of independence from Indonesia in a referendum on August 30. The choice they are offered is independence or autonomy under Indonesian sovereignty.

Supporters of independence for East Timor face several obstacles. Many independence activists remain in exile. Anti-independence militias trained by the Indonesian army are actively intimidating the electorate, while the police turn a blind eye.

If the vote is for independence, it will be at least 3 months before this can be ratified by

the Indonesian parliament. This parliament is likely to be dominated by a nationalist party whose leader, Megawati Sukarnoputri, has threatened to override the referendum result if she is elected.

The UN has organised the registration of voters and the referendum ballot, but has indicated that it will pull out after the referendum unless the Indonesian state maintains security.

In other words, the UN is afraid to stay in East Timor for this period, while of course, the majority of East Timorese have no choice.

Peace process crash confuses republicans, unites orange forces

John Mc Anulty.

The "crash" of the Irish peace process saw the unionists assert yet again the demand for unconditional surrender by republicans, and this exposed the fundamental contradictions at the root of the process.

Nationalist workers suddenly saw that the unionists were not a misunderstood culture but a gang of sectarian bigots asserting once again an agenda of domination no different from their traditional programme.

The republican leadership, who have based their whole peace strategy on the belief that British imperialism was now going to play a progressive role in Ireland, saw British PM Blair drive a coach and four through the structure of the peace process to accommodate Unionism.

Republican militants who have been told time and again by the leadership that they would be judged by their pledge never to surrender arms; "not a bullet, not an ounce (of explosive)", suddenly heard of a "seismic shift" in the republican policy which would lead to a timetable for the total surrender of weapons and an initial handover within days of an

executive being formed.

Anthony McIntyre (see article opposite) explains the problem well. Militants kept their eye on the bathwater as the baby - opposition to Stormont, the unionist veto and the British occupation were all thrown away.

The peace "crash" has united the unionist party, at least temporarily, behind Trimble's leadership in restating, more firmly than ever, a rejection of the deal as it was originally formulated on Good Friday.

Of course, despite the "crash" the peace process marches forward.

Pacification

The peace process will continue because it is central to British strategy in Ireland. What is new is that it will now be more clearly seen for what it is - a process of pacification - and the question of resistance will be more clearly posed.

Opponents of the agreement have a window of opportunity if they can physically unite and organise in action around questions of democracy and repression not addressed by process and if they can endorse an alternative political vision for the Irish

working class.

The starting point for any new mobilisation must be the primacy of politics. It must offer a political critique of the peace process, democratic methods of political organisation for those wishing to oppose it and a programme of action counterposed to the surrender to imperialism that offers a convincing way forward.

The first question that will confront such a movement is the question of defence in the face of the marches and the persistent (and often ignored) terror campaign by loyalists, involving "ethnic cleansing" and murder with the collusion of the state forces.

Defence has to be political. It has to expose the responsibility of the British and state forces and make them pay.

Instead of building new state institutions we should be tearing them down, calling on nationalists to get out of Stormont and opposing collaboration between Dublin and the British, asserting the right of communities to defend themselves, exposing the silence of trade unions, attempting to restrict the movement of the RUC.

A new resistance would be

based on democratic mass campaigns opposed to diplomacy or secret decisions by the republican leaderships. We should assert democratic rights for all, and resist the tendency built

into the peace process to call for communal or cultural rights.

We should wage a consistent struggle to break out of the sectarian boundaries imposed by the British and, as part of that struggle, not concede that the front men of the death squads, such as the Progressive Unionist Party represent Protestant workers.

Part of that resistance to ghettoisation would be resistance to the nationalist family. The Dublin government and the SDLP do not support the disbanding of the RUC and that means that they are enemies of any consistent resistance, not members of it.

Socialist Democracy believes that to succeed the resistance movement has to go beyond republicanism and support working class demands. The only



coherent identity beyond the "two traditions" claptrap is membership of the Irish working class. That identity is not provided by the trade unions or existing political parties.

Both the trade unions and the "left" parties define workers' unity as deferring to loyalism and promoting social partnership with the bosses.

Alongside a movement for the united defence of democratic rights, militants should build a revolutionary party of the working class to challenge the influence of loyalism, the attacks of capitalism and the betrayals of the trade union leaderships.

For those who break with the illusions of militarism the only available weapon to counter the force of imperialism is the potential strength of the Irish working class and the politics of socialism.

"Peace" deal turns back the clock

Bernadette McAliskey

IN 1922 the British government secured a peace agreement in Ireland. Partition created two 'states' - an Irish nationalist Free State within the Dominion and a unionist sub-state within the United Kingdom.

In the event of it not working, the British government retained a fail-safe mechanism for 'pulling the plug', and returning authority to London.

After 50 years of systematic human and civil rights abuses, one party rule, pogroms, sporadic armed insurrections, an unbroken state of emergency, and the imposi-

tion of military rule, the British government finally thought it appropriate to implement the fail-safe mechanism in 1972. The Northern Ireland Parliament at Stormont was abolished in an afternoon.

Unionists demanded that the 'democratic deficit' be remedied, and exercise of power returned to the devolved administration at Stormont. The British government insisted it was their desire to do so, but that the price of devolution was to remedy the 'democratic deficit' which excluded non-unionists from sharing in the exercise of such power and authority as the

British saw fit to devolve.

In that same year, 1972, and on that basis, the first position papers on a Northern settlement were invited and prepared. Successive British governments have consistently adhered to the 1972 position paper put forward by the government of the day. The 1972-74 positions of the other relevant players were as follows:

The Irish government and the SDLP supported the power-sharing concept, with the creation of North-South bodies to facilitate social and economic interaction. They were supported in this position by the British government.

The unionists rejected the concept, insisting that copper-fastening the Union (no North-South bodies) was a pre-requisite to power-sharing. Any deviation from unionist rule was a concession, in their gift alone.

The 'Official' republican movement and the Communist party supported power-sharing as "the democratisation of Ulster", and an opportunity to develop non-sectarian class politics on a cross-community basis. The small anti-imperialist 'left' groups opposed it as excluding the interest of both Catholic and Protestant working class, further institutionalising the problems created by partition, and objected to Britain inserting itself as an impartial referee in the equation.

The 'Provisional' republican movement opposed the concept

as a continuation of discredited British Rule and betrayal of the northern nationalist community by the Irish Government, the SDLP and the 'Official' republicans. They argued for armed struggle.

Those who criticised the power-sharing proposals argued that nationalists, republicans and other non-unionists, long denied their rights, were being asked to accept the opportunity to secure them as a concession for which they should trade other rights.

Essentially a guarantee not to use any newly acquired power to the detriment of unionism was a pre-requisite to getting any opportunity to participate as equals.

Power-sharing failed because unionism viewed the exercise of power by nationalists as a concession, not a right. They still do,

demanding an ever higher price for granting the concession.

As history repeats itself and we await the grace and favour of unionism to proceed towards implementation of the 1972 proposals, it would appear that the present-day positions are as follows:

The SDLP position remains as it was in 1972.

Unchanged

The unionist position remains the same; the exercise of power by anybody other than themselves is a concession, not a right. Unionist concessions to date include allowing people to live in the same place as them, to sit in the same room as them, to speak critically of them, and not killing them for

doing so. These concessions are conditional, and will be rescinded at any sign of 'danger' to the Union.

The Irish Government remains committed, and, with the people of the Irish Republic, have conceded to unionism that the sovereign will of the Irish people as expressed through the Irish Constitution no longer includes the people of the North, and that the six counties are no longer territorially in dispute. They have returned

to the territorial terms of the 1922 Treaty.

Sinn Fein has moved from rejection to acceptance of the 1972 concept. In order to be accepted by it, they have conceded to unionism the constitution, partition, participation in collective responsibility for the

continued administration of British Rule in Northern Ireland, and decommissioning of IRA weapons.

What has been gained?

The end of the war, and Sinn Fein participation with the SDLP in administering British government policy.

What has been lost?

Life and Liberty! In 1972 the 'provisional' republican movement rejected this package and argued for war. Speaking in 1999 from the steps of Stormont in support of the package. Gerry Adams berated those who rejected it, accusing them of "sending young men and women to their graves".

There are undoubtedly matters Mr Adams is entitled to lecture others about. Sending people to their graves isn't one of them.



Bernadette McAliskey

OUT NOW!

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

Another victory for Unionism

Anthony McIntyre

The joke doing the rounds among republican cynics while the Sinn Fein leadership was involved in the latest bout of negotiating up at Stormont was "What time do you think they will sell us out at?"

It was nothing more than a witicism as the vast majority of republicans firmly support the republican leadership. But such facetious barbs have emerged against an atmosphere of unease and hesitancy. And the feeling on the ground in west Belfast on Friday was no longer one of outright confidence that that leadership integrity would not disappear in the vortex of decommissioning.

If the proposals announced by Blair and Ahern are carried, unionism will have secured a major victory. Not only will republicans be consigned to administer British rule for the foreseeable future, the acceptance by them of the principle of decommissioning has served to delegitimise and criminalise the previous republican resistance to that rule.

It also elevates to a higher moral plateau British state weaponry. Basically, republicans are being told that the weapons used by Francis Hughes, the deceased hunger striker, to kill a member of the British SAS death squad are con-



Ahern and Blair keep smiling through, but give Adams little to smile about

taminated in a manner which the weapons used to slaughter the innocent of Bloody Sunday and the victims of shoot-to-kill are not.

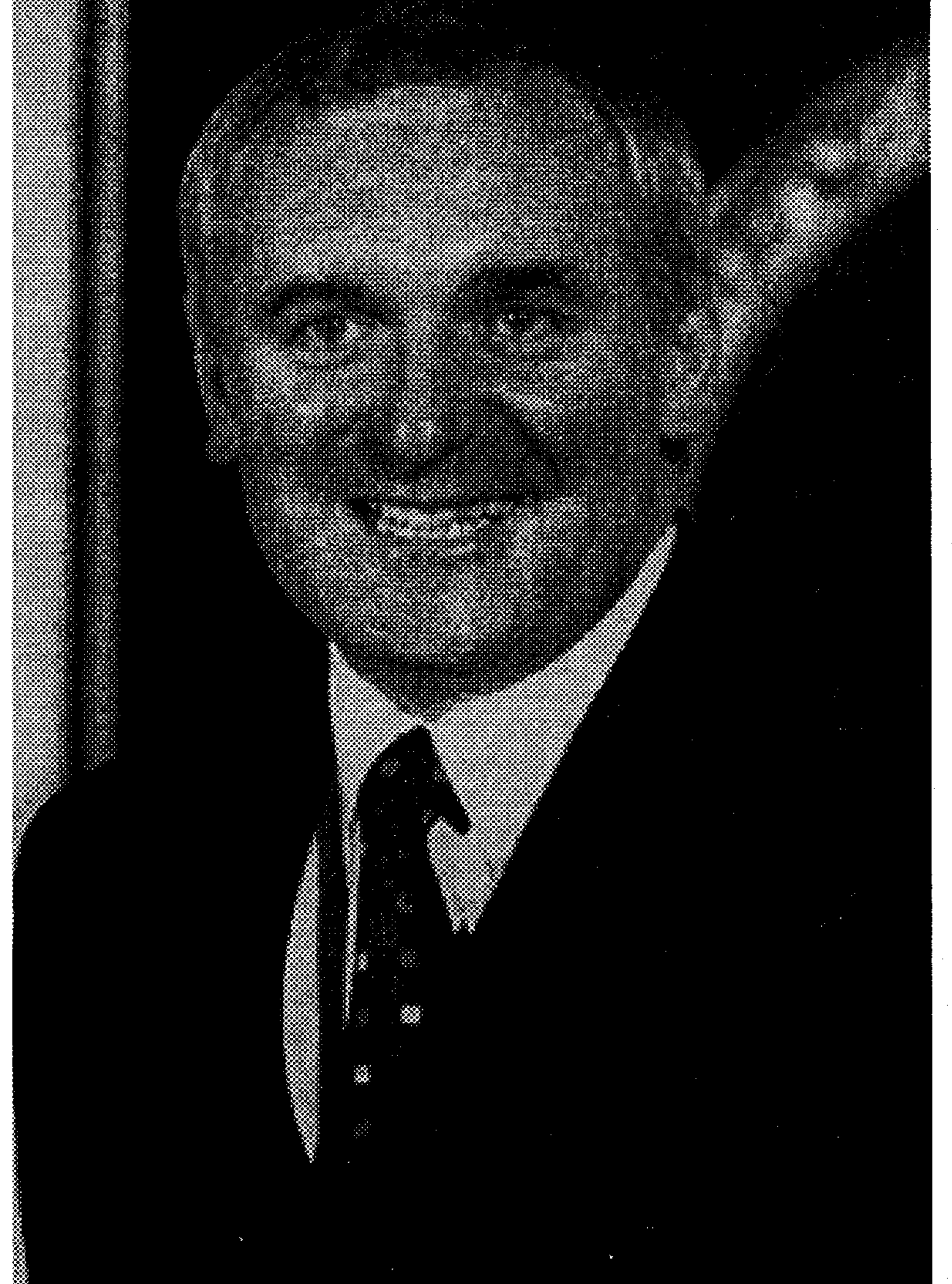
Sinn Fein played it poorly. The strategy of 'never, but will' merely encouraged unionism to hold out for a better deal. Many positions previously held had been abandoned in spite of 'never, never, never' ad infinitum.

Unionism learned the only never is "never listen to what the Sinn Fein leadership says it will never do". And this helped sustain it throughout the recent

months of ping-pong pressure as each side in the dispute was probed for some sign of weakness. Why should unionists blink first when experience shows that Sinn Fein always does?

Now we are beginning to see what the Good Friday agreement really meant. Despite repeated promises of no decommissioning, Sinn Fein now accepts that decommissioning as part of the agreement is valid.

Republican activists were not told this at the time when they were asked to support the Sinn Fein leadership endorsement of that agreement. People who ventured the opinion that the process might lead to decommissioning were angrily dismissed and ridiculed.



In a bid to shield the reality from the grass-roots, the silly statement of the year for 1998 was manufactured by a leading mem-

ber of Sinn Fein, who informed his audience that, while not transitional, it remained possible to view the Good Friday agreement as a transition to a transition.

Which, by logical extension, meant that the week before Good Friday constituted a transition to a transition to a transition. Perhaps now the audience will be told that last week's outcome, while a transition away from a transition to a transition, is still endowed with transitory potential nonetheless.

One would imagine that this sort of nonsense could only have a limited shelf life. But it has carried the day. Like the pickpocket who tells his victim while he robs him "your personal security is brilliant", Sinn Fein told the republican grassroots they were the most politicised people in western Europe while republicanism was stripped away in front of their very eyes.

In this sense, the decommissioning issue actually assisted Sinn Fein. The people were told if they could not follow the complexities and intricacies nor penetrate the undemocratic secrecy surrounding the negotiations, then watch the ball of decommissioning. Trust in the process became reduced to that one issue.

Therein now lies the problem for Sinn Fein. Having thrown the baby out it now needs to get rid of the bathwater. But in the process of deceiving its base, it has depicted the bathwater as the baby. And the base is reluctant to let it go.

The unionists may yet snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. It would be nice if they did.

But ultimately a partitionist administration is their baby. And the likelihood remains that in the future this paper will be reviewing the book by a Sinn Fein cabinet minister *My fight for a reformed Stormont*.

The only never is "never listen to what the Sinn Fein leadership says it will never do"

David's insecurity

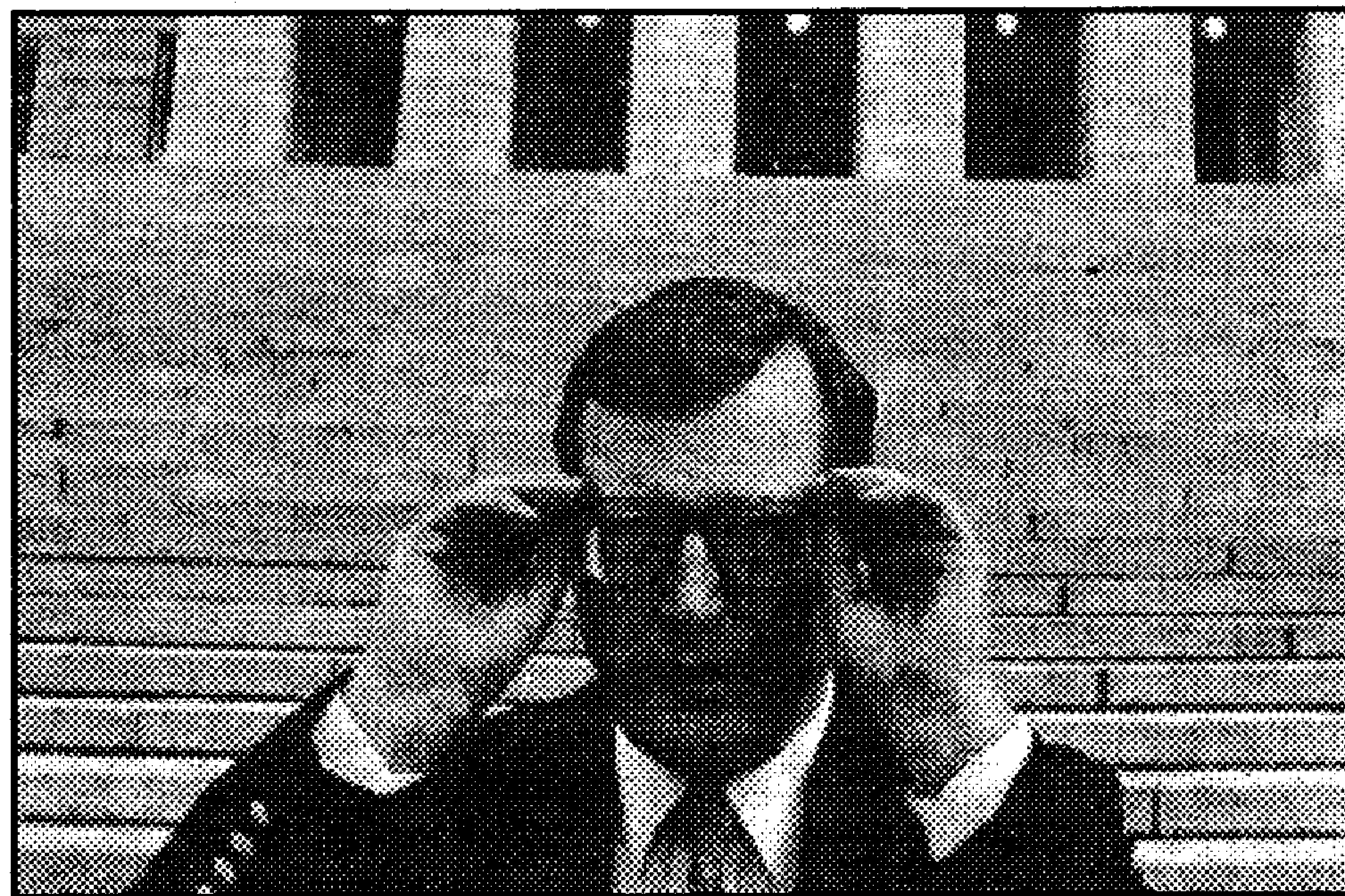
Tommy McKearney

IT IS SAID that a sure sign of an insecure man is when he uses both a belt and a pair of braces to keep his trousers up. If this is so, it looks a fair bet that First Minister Trimble is now also fastening a safety pin through his shirt tail and pants for good measure.

Apart from chronic insecurity there seems to be no other explanation why he continues to refuse the prize that is currently on offer to him. The Good Friday Agreement has not only guaranteed fundamental unionist tenets. It has also gained for them the endorsement of an All-Ireland referendum, prime-ministerial approval in London and Dublin and the acquiescence of the main nationalist parties in Northern Ireland.

Unionists have been resoundingly successful in having the constitutional issue settled to their satisfaction. So much so that Tony Blair was moved recently to express his astonishment that the threat to the union is hardly mentioned any longer.

The reality is that all parties in favour of the Agreement accept that the Northern Irish status quo will remain unchanged until a majority in the area vote otherwise. That this arrangement will endure is acknowledged by all who take office in Stormont. Accepting administrative positions of state allows government to function. In contrast, the iron law of revolution is to destroy the state apparatus. Even the maligned cross-border



Many steps left to the power he covets: Trimble

institutions should be reassuring to the thinking unionist. A frontier can hardly be threatened by something designed to function because of its existence. After all, nobody buys a dog-box if they intend to sell Rufus.

Of most significance to all but the purblind is the ending of an armed campaign designed to break the union. Not just a sullen conclusion as with previous IRA campaigns but an end where guns are to be decommissioned as well as "The Boys" sitting in parliament.

Against this, David Trimble argues that he cannot simply accept a promise to disarm. The UUP leader claims that there is no incontrovertible evidence that undertakings will be honoured.

In a legalistic sense he is right. There is no signed and written statement pledging to surrender

weaponry. No republican has appeared on television to announce an agenda for destroying guns.

A reasonable examination of the facts indicates however that such theatricals are unnecessary.

In the first instance it would make no sense whatsoever from a Sinn Fein point of view to irretrievably alienate their new voters at home and recent allies abroad by being deliberately misleading on such a crucial issue. A photo opportunity while taking cabinet position would be overshadowed by ignominious defenestration the following month.

And that embarrassment would be as nothing in comparison to the angst and disarray at grassroots and leadership level as a ten-year strategy crumbled in ruins. Sinn Fein has no alternative to its cur-

rent strategy if only because it has invested so heavily in this process. Contemporary thinking in the organisation is predicated on gaining office - not returning to conflict.

The most convincing testimony to the sincerity of Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness is the confidence Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern demonstrate. Some unionists have attempted to misinterpret the Blair-Ahern position on decommissioning. To recycle a phrase from the eighties, they are accused of being "wet" on the arms question.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Blair and Ahern are elected heads of government and they look on armed republicanism as a threat to the authority of their states. Laws governing the use of state power are primeval. None but government has the discretion to use force. Neither premier would make space for any party which preserved an option of armed revolution.

Trimble need not fear Sinn Fein reneging on their promises. The republican leadership will deliver what even the most cynical of us felt impossible only a few months ago. This insecurity is not based on concern about Gerry Adams' behaviour. It has everything to do with rebels in his own party. His final words on decommissioning may not be directed against Sinn Fein. He is more likely to croak "Et Tu Taylor, Donaldson, Weir" etc.

Marching in a time-warp

John North

Thirty years on from the Civil rights movement in the North of Ireland, one might be forgiven for a sense of déjà vu all over again at the sight of the RUC batoning defenceless demonstrators on the Ormeau road.

The bizarre sense of life in a time warp is compounded when the demonstrators are arrested in dawn raids and charged with demanding civil rights on a public highway and sitting obstructively in a public place.

And these are actions by the same force that watched Robert Hamill beaten to death before their eyes in the centre of Portadown, and who have been willing to turn a blind eye to countless sectarian assaults by the orange mob during the demonstrations at the Gervaghy road and at the Harryville church in Ballymena.

The Ormeau Road demonstrators were beaten when they protested the decision by the parades commission to allow a sectarian parade by the Apprentice Boys to proceed through the area.

This followed a declaration by the commission of a policy of "you talk, you walk".

The British government has defined the issue as one of communication between communities rather than one of sectarian harassment. Just how false that definition is can be seen by the actual actions of the Apprentice Boys.

Having marched in triumph through the area, they boarded a bus for a demonstration in Derry which again was forced through in the face of protests. The Ormeau march, and a whole series of "feeder" matches, are simply demonstrations of sectarian rights over a second-class Catholic population.

The parades commission, seen as an instrument of the peace process that would gradually desectarianise the North, is now clearly an instrument in asserting the continuation of sectarianism.

Brendan McCoinnaith, leader of the Gervaghy road residents group, warned of this reality at the beginning of the marching season.

Speaking to a support group in Belfast, he warned of an agreement embracing sectarianism. Around this understanding he has built a coalition to oppose the sectarians.

The problem is that it is based almost entirely on Sinn Fein

Andrew Ward



members and supporters and that throughout the summer they have been blind to the need of the Sinn Fein leadership to remain within the peace process and their resistance to mass mobilisation that might destabilise it.

So, built in to the resistance are serious weaknesses. The worst of

these is the residents committee structure which prevents broader united front organisation, leaves little room for pressuring political parties and trade unions and leaves the committees isolated and largely dependent on Sinn Fein.

Another weakness is the "no talk - no walk" slogan, which allowed the British to present the issue as one of community relations.

Both these aspects were aimed at alliances with the Catholic bourgeoisie, and it is a significant comment about that policy that the RUC arrests followed an editorial in the main Catholic daily, the *Irish News*, supporting British policy and denouncing the residents' protests.

When the British moved against the Ormeau road residents, a massive demobilisation had already taken place. Behind the scenes the Sinn Fein leadership turned their faces against broader mobilisations and protest was restricted to largely apolitical rioting in Derry. This was followed by a new lurch to the right, when Sinn Fein denounced the rioters.

This is a major shift, because it puts the responsibility for violence on those being oppressed, rather than the sectarians and the state forces oppressing them.

When the Republican paper *An*

Phoblacht appeared with the headline "Nationalist residents Betrayed", one is tempted to believe that the Republican leadership are indulging in post-modernist irony.

It is widely believed that Tony Blair bought peace with the Orangemen at the beginning of the summer by promising them their march down the Gervaghy road. A problem is that they will speak to no-one, demanding their undiluted right to sectarian privilege.

The suggestion is that representatives of the Orangemen could speak to representatives of the residents and that this would be enough to force a march down the road.

This success would enable the British to concentrate on a diplomatic process where they already have Sinn Fein where they want them, having successfully demolished action on the streets and put in place structures like the parades commission that would effectively outlaw protest.

Either the resistance will be put down, or it will break free of the restrictions posed by Sinn Fein and make possible a genuine political resistance to the peace process.

Activists in Britain and elsewhere have an important responsibility to send messages of support to strengthen that possibility.

Scotland's grim legacy of bigotry and sectarianism

EVEN BEFORE composer James MacMillian made his well publicised attack on anti-Catholic bigotry in Scotland the issue had had some media exposure south of the border.

In particular controversy over the behaviour of several prominent Rangers supporters had aroused discussion on the topic. CAMPBELL MCGREGOR reports:

OPPOSITION to the Roman Catholic Church has a long history in Scotland. Up to 1986 it was part of the official doctrine of the Church of Scotland that the Pope is the Antichrist, and that the Roman Catholic mass is a form of idol-worship.

However in the past two centuries this issue has been dominated by the large immigration of Irish Catholics to the industrial towns of the central belt, although smaller numbers of Catholics have been immigrants from Lithuania and the Catholic enclaves in the Highlands.

Some Northern Irish Protestants have also migrated to Scotland, bringing with them the traditions

and attitudes of that community. A significant role was played by shipyard workers who came just before the First World War. This has been an explosive mixture.

The traditions of Orangeism include singing songs about the Battle of the Boyne and the siege of Derry, seen as Protestant victories over the Catholics, though actually it was not as simple as that. (For example the Pope welcomed William of Orange's victory). Curiously, they do not sing about the Williamite victories in Scotland at the battles of Dunkeld and Cromdale.

Racial abuse

Particularly controversial is the song "Billy Boys" which includes the line "We're up to our knees in Fenian blood, surrender or you'll die" ("Fenian" is used as a term of racial abuse for a Catholic).

Anti-Catholic bigotry has been promoted not only through the Orange Order itself but through Protestant football clubs - especially Rangers F.C.

Although always seen as a Protestant team Rangers did not have a rigid ban on Catholic players until WWI, and it has recently come to light that they played two Catholics by mistake in the 1950s!

During the seventies one sup-

porter who tried to get onto the board of directors was blocked because he had married a Catholic, even though she had been dead for 20 years.

Players who married Catholics were squeezed out, and everyone knew that their occasional claim that Rangers did not have a ban on Catholics was a barefaced lie.

One possibly apocryphal story is that Danny McGrain, the leading Celtic and Scotland player, was not signed by Rangers because he had what sounded like a Catholic name, even though he was really a Protestant who had supported Rangers as a boy.

Credit certainly goes to current manager Graham Souness for ending this ban, but he could not change the whole ethos of the club single-handed.

What surprised some people about Donald Findlay's recent episode was not that anti-Catholic songs were sung, but that this was done not by a few mindless bigots who did not know any better, but by an educated man, one of Scotland's leading lawyers.

MacMillian has done the left a favour by bringing this discussion out into the open - hopefully discussion will lead to better ideas as to how to challenge this legacy of sectarianism.

You've seen some articles: now buy the magazine!

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Some questions of policy

I greatly enjoyed reading your paper, although I have a few criticisms and questions about your analyses and positions:

The Headline

"Three Wheels on his Wagon" juxtaposed with a photo of Blair playing the bongos could be perceived by some as having racist overtones: I know that this was definitely not intended. I've found that socialists have to be extremely careful about humour - it is easily taken the wrong way! A simple agitational headline would make your paper easier to sell on demos etc. (I know that coming up with your headlines week after week is easier said than done!)

Attitude to former workers' parties

Articles in your paper seemed to be pulling in different directions -

praise for the Scottish Socialist Party and for the LO/LCR victories in the Euro election, as well as acclaim for the left success in Labour NEC elections.

Which way do you see socialists going forward in the next decade - building inside the Labour Party or building an alternative to it? Surely at some point soon you will need to choose.

France

What do you think of the CWI suggestion that LO/LCR should unite to form a new Workers Party (with full rights of faction) now that they have demonstrated the existence of a political and electoral base for the marxist left? Full congratulations are due, by the way, to Alain Krivine and the other Trotskyists elected as MEPs - I hope that their success will be built on and not dissipated.

National Question/Balkan War

Socialist Action correctly identified NATO's aims in this war as imperialist.

Socialist Outlook correctly defended the right of Kosovar Albanians to self-determination.

With one grouping calling for critical support for "Yugoslavia" and another calling for the arming of the KLA, a very serious problem emerges for the 4th International.

Had there been sections of these groups in Kosova and Serbia then socialists loyal to the same International could literally have been at war with one another! How has this situation come about, and is it sustainable?

What do you think about the CWI call for non-sectarian workers and peasants' militias to defend all communities from attack by NATO/JNA/KLA etc? Has the recent massacre of 14 Serb farmers by the KLA made your organisation reconsider its position on this

bourgeois nationalist grouping?

I think that is enough questions for one letter!

As you may have guessed, I support the CWI/Socialist Party's positions on the issues I have mentioned - but I think it is a lesson of Trotsky's life and death that socialists should always be willing to give and accept criticism and to think independently at times when there is time to do so.

In this spirit, I look forward to reading your answers to my questions, and no doubt, to your criticisms of the CWI!

Max Neill

■ **WE REPLY:** Max has packed a large number of questions into a short letter - more than we have room to answer here. Some will be answered by articles elsewhere in this issue. However two can be answered very briefly.

● We can see no serious way in which the use of a picture of Tony Blair looking ridiculous can be legitimately construed as having any racist overtones: we are clearly



Letters

Write to us on any topic at PO Box 1109 London N4 2UU

attacking Blair and his political project - not bongos, bongo-playing, or bongo-players of any colour or race.

● We assume Max's reference to "Socialist Action" is to the rump right wing organisation of that name in Britain. They long ago severed their former links with the Fourth International.

For more answers to the remaining questions, keep reading *Socialist Outlook!*



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.

No easy escape from hard Labour

I WRITE this letter following the excellent meeting with Alain Krivine in London, and the relaunch of the Socialist Alliance, in which *Socialist Outlook* participated.

While I am not against the idea of a socialist alliance in that I am for free discussion and debate on the left as well as co-operation in action, I am not for making a fetish about electoral alliances which are supposed to "challenge Labour".

In this country class struggle is at a low ebb. This is inevitably reflected in the Labour Party, which is as right wing as it has ever been. Blair's project is in essence an attempt to fuse the party with the Liberals. In effect, he wants to change a bourgeois workers' party into an out and out bourgeois party.

To leave Labour now or try and stay in whilst standing candidates against Labour, is aiding Blair in this task, and the latter gives him a chance to cleanse the Party of the entire active Left. If he succeeded in this, it would set back the British working class 100 years.

Meanwhile, all these ideas of "left parties" are futile anyway. This is partly due to the sectarianism of the SLP and the SWP, and also due to the disintegration of the Socialist Party.

However, the main reasons are that the majority of workers still look to Labour as their party, and secondly that the Labour left (as Pete Firmin pointed out in July's paper) is still a major force. Indeed, the 55,000 or so votes for Liz Davies means that the Labour left is still bigger than the combined membership of the entire far left.


The only successful electoral challenge to Labour throughout Britain would have to include at least the Labour left and probably some of the "centre" also. It would also have to have a real base in the trade unions.

However, socialists shouldn't at this stage encourage a split, as if the Left was to split it should be on the basis of an upsurge in the class struggle and a radicalisation of the masses, not during a historically low point. Even then it should be over an issue important to the working class.

Comrades shouldn't forget Trotsky's criticisms of the ILP in the 1930s, when he called a party of 100,000 with firm roots in the working class a "sect" because they refused to orientate towards Labour.

Will Matthews (Cambridgeshire)

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Socialist Outlook

West Herts campaign halts massive bed cuts

PFI
schemes
axe more
NHS beds –
inside p8

FIGHT SINKS PFI PLAN



CAMPAIGNERS fighting to defend Watford General and Hemel Hempstead Hospitals have notched up a massive victory.

Months of protests, lobbies, petitioning and pressure have helped persuade Health Minister John Denham to throw out a health authority plan to replace the two hospitals with a new, much smaller, hospital on a greenfield site financed through the Private Finance Initiative.

Health union UNISON has been actively involved from the outset in broad based and vocal campaigns that have united local communities against the health chiefs' plans, which involved a massive reduction of over a third of the local hospital beds, and meant longer and more difficult journeys for treatment for the majority of people.

Tens of thousands of signatures had been accumulated on petitions, and hundreds of people from a wide range of local bodies have attended rallies and public meetings

to defend their hospitals against a determined attack from a health authority seeking not only to rationalise services but also to cut spending in order to balance the books.

The SW Herts Community Health Council also formally objected to the scheme, which was the decisive factor in ensuring the plan had to be referred to ministers for decision.

John Denham's rejection of the health authority plan is coupled with a statement that Accident and Emergency services should remain at both hospitals "for the foreseeable future", and an instruction to the HA not to pursue plans for a possible greenfield site.

At a point where the bulldozer of rationalisation and the PFI machine seemed unstoppable, the West Hertfordshire victory should encourage hospital campaigners elsewhere to stand their ground and fight on: if you don't fight, you can't win!

**No to PFI! Defend the NHS and public services!
Lobby Labour Party Conference, Bournemouth, Sept 26**