

SOCIALIST Outlook

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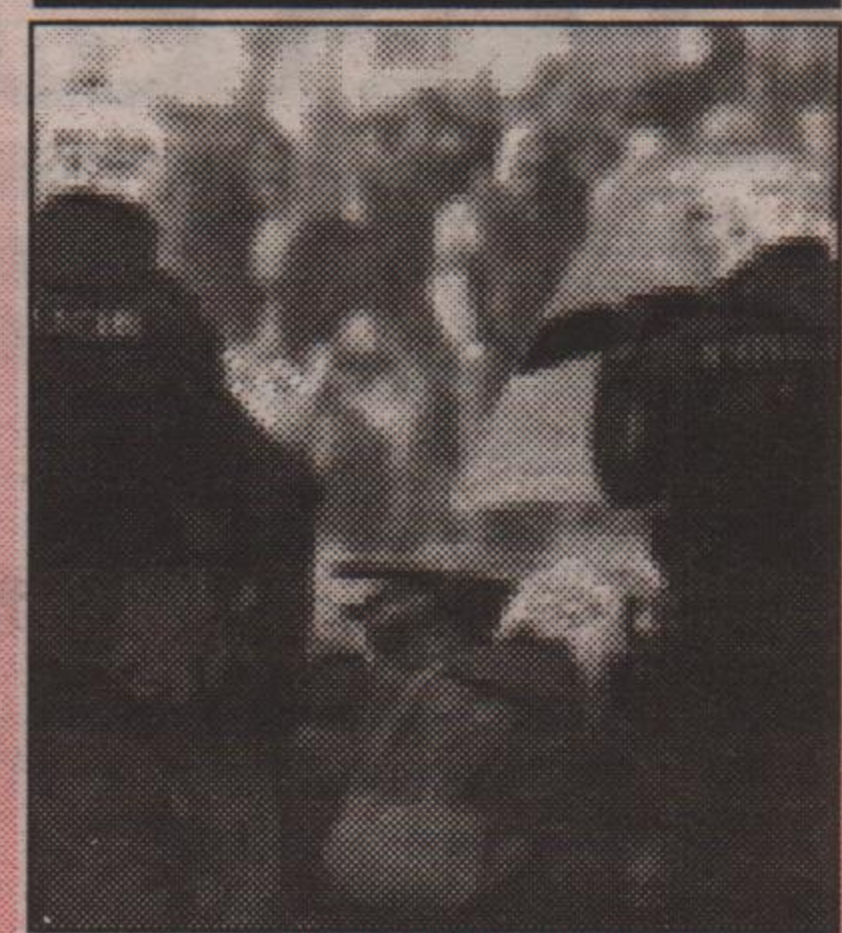


As Palestine
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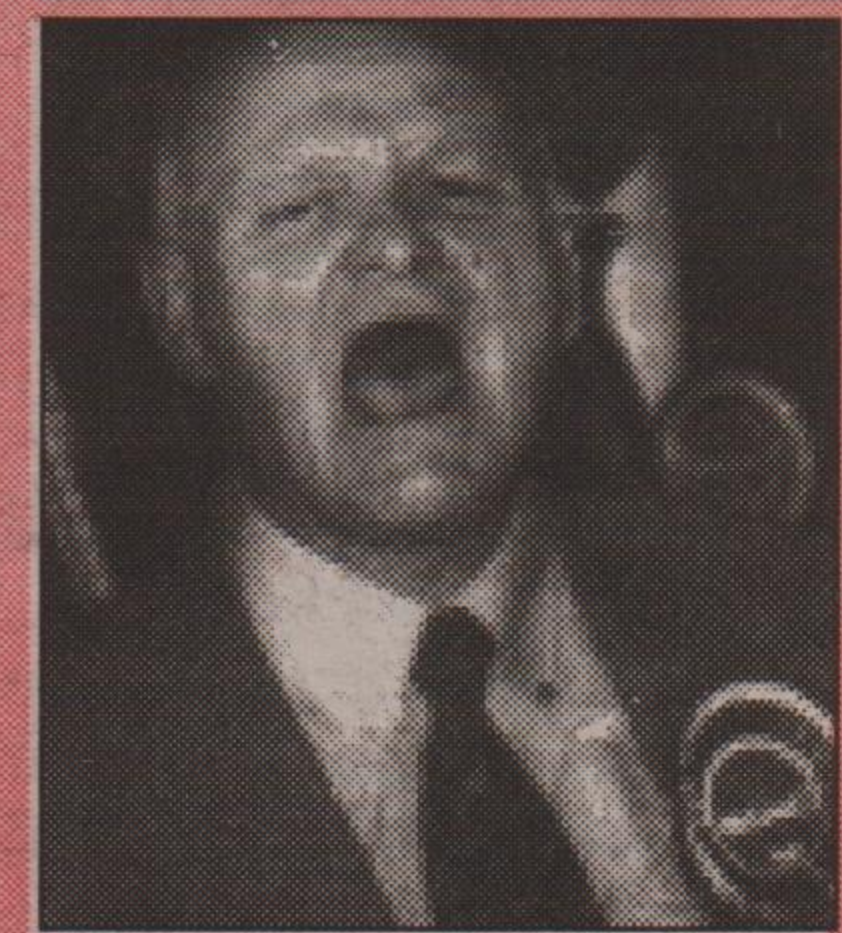
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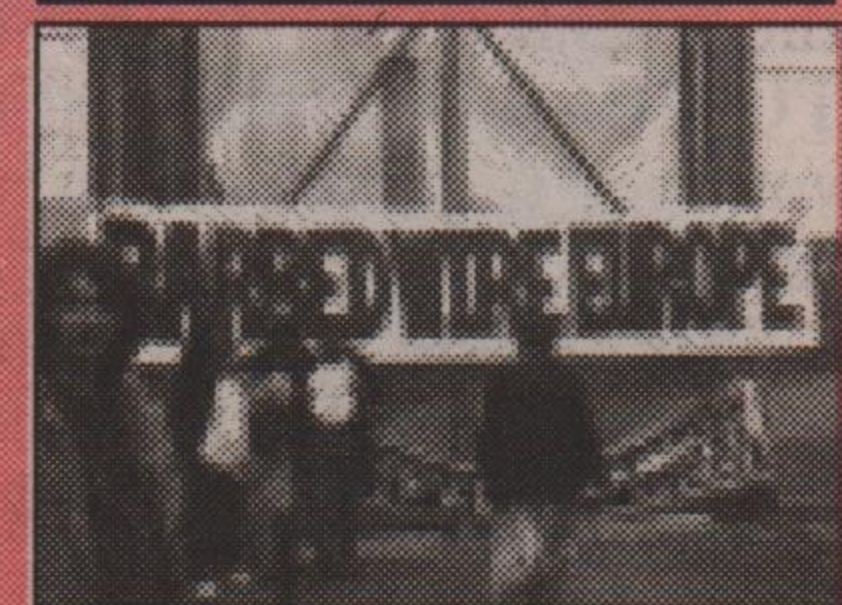
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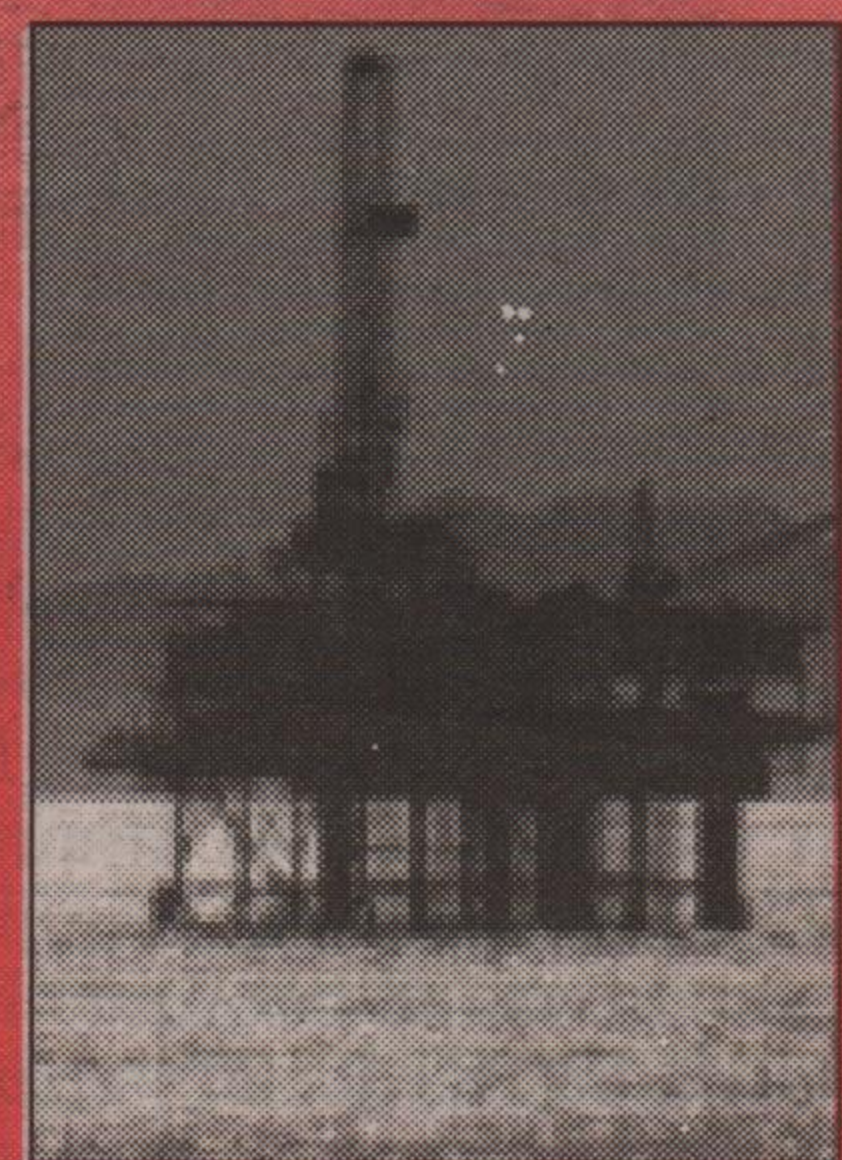
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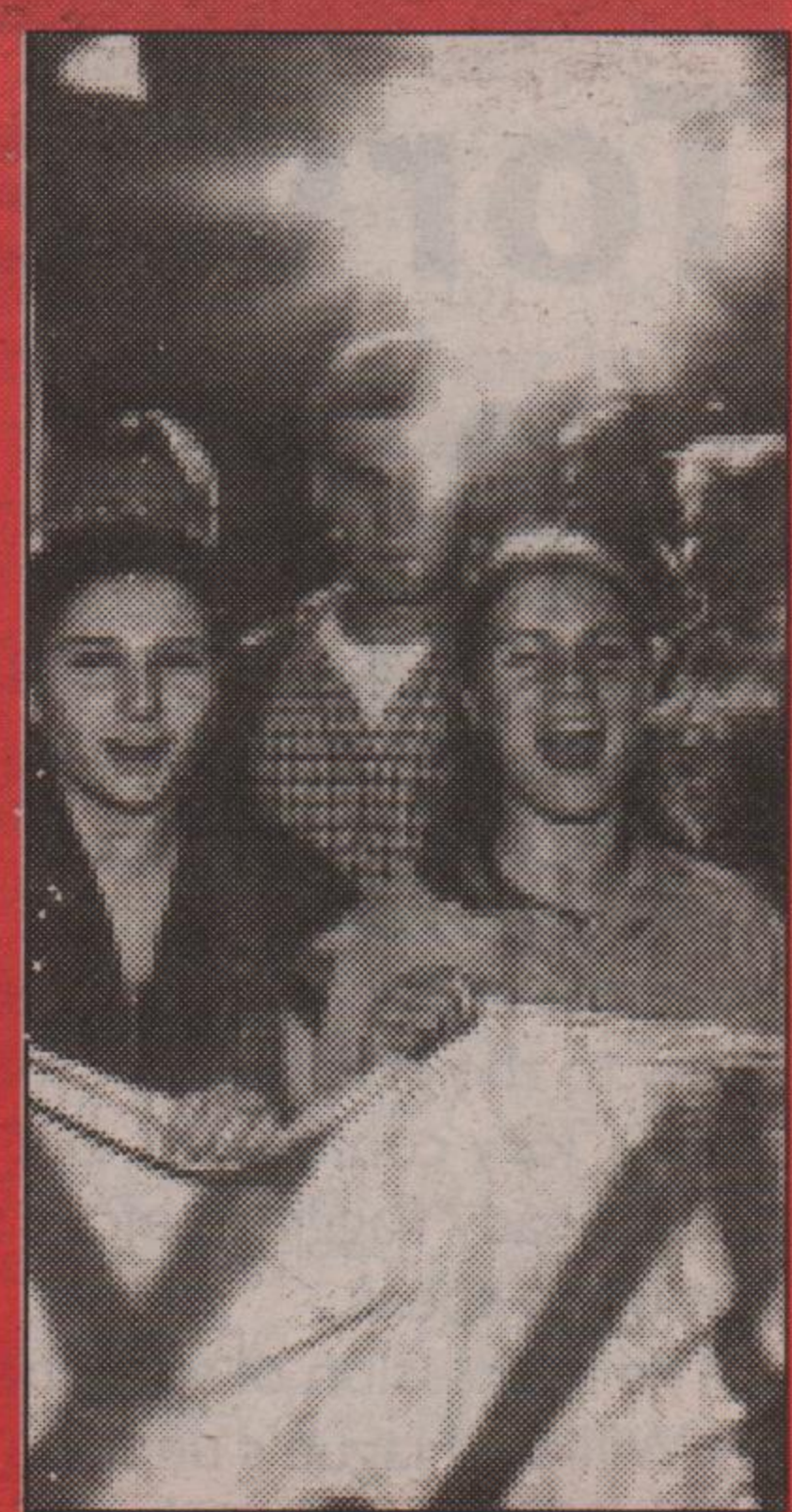
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TUC calls for action – against picketing!

Alan Thornett - at the TUC conference

WHEN the TUC Congress opened in Glasgow on September 11, little notice was taken of the fuel blockades which had been gathering over the weekend.

The conference was going through its routine business, a bit like watching paint dry.

Some useful things did happen at the conference. It endorsed the restoration of the link of state pensions with wages, and supported the resolution from the TGWU for scrapping the voucher scheme for asylum seekers.

This can be used by those mobilising against the voucher scheme to step up their vital campaign especially in the unions.

But these were social issues, not requiring the union leaders to do anything industrially or confront any employers. When it came to down to relationship with the bosses, it was social partnership all the way. The conference was drenched in this reactionary framework.

When it came to the formal session on social partnership, on Tuesday, there was little for the platform to say. In fact it was over in five minutes. The mover said how important it was to continue and build on the social partnership decisions of previous conferences, and that was it.

There was no discussion from the floor, and the conference passed on to next business.

The only thing which



Andrew Wlaid

No fans of picketing at the best of times: AEEU boss "Sir" Ken Jackson and his would-be merger mate, MSF's Roger "Expenses" Lyons

broke the tedium that day was the debate over Britain's entry into the single currency. That got them going.

John Edmonds, from the GMB, moving a General Council resolution, led the pack demanding the earliest possible entry. He accepted that immediate entry was not on, given the high value of the pound, but called for the value of sterling to be brought down as rapidly as possible to facilitate early entry.

Multinationals

He was backed to the hilt by the AEEU's Sir Ken Jackson. Tony Dubbins from GPMU followed him by arguing that the alternative to the Euro

was multi-national capital – a strange argument given the enthusiasm of European multi-national capital for the Euro.

Three unions spoke against the resolution, two very strongly. UNISON opposed the resolution by expressing strong support for the European Union social model!

NATFHE comprehensively opposed the Euro and the whole EU project, as did the Community Youth Workers Union, who argued that the EU project would lead to a European super state.

Replying to the debate Jackson said "if it had not been for EU legislation, in

the last year, we would have made no gains at all for our members". Well well well. I wonder why?

By the following day the country had run out of petrol, and the TUC high command began to catch on that something was happening. Picket lines were about to bring the country to a halt! This had to be stopped at all costs, it could catch on. Not only that there was a threat to new Labour.

There was apparently no thought that there might be some legitimate demands involved, even though it was not an action by workers; no matter that there was mass support for the action in the working class due to the punitive level of tax on fuel. It had to be opposed.

John Monks addressed the conference, in a lather, to propose a General Council statement and to "to express the full support of Britain's trade unions for the Government's efforts to ensure the immediate and full resumption of oil deliveries".

Bullying

He went on: "What we have seen this week in this country has gone well beyond democratic protest.... This is no legitimate protest against an employer. It is an attack on a democratic government – a clear and crude attempt to bully the government into a change of course.

"Across the country today these protests are threatening vital public services.... And what about the factories that are laying off thousands, public transport grinding to a halt, the life of the nation is being strangled?"

"We call on Britain's trade unionists to work normally and take no part in this bosses' blockade.... let me tell you one thing today. You will not, and should not, shift this government – with bully-boy blockades and civil disruption.

"Make your case peacefully by all means. This is the great strength of any democratic society. But these blockades are not blockades on fuel. They are blockades on our

democratic system."

So according to the TUC it is fundamentally wrong to pressurise a government to change course by industrial action (let alone bring it down) because that would be an attack on democracy! Clearly there is not much future for the unions in the public sector under that doctrine.

Monks was backed to the hilt by TGWU chief Bill Morris, whose union represents the majority of directly employed tanker drivers at the refineries – many of them long since derecognised by the oil companies.

He told the conference: "This campaign has crossed the line from democracy into anarchy. If they are breaking the law, the protesters should be arrested".

New laws

No wonder Blair was soon talking about new laws to ensure the transportation of fuel as an essential service. Monks and Morris had left the door wide open.

In the end it was not new laws which came out of the joint talks between the oil companies the government and the unions (although new laws are still not ruled out).

But there was an agreement that fuel would be treated as an essential service: a policy that would prevent tanker drivers taking action to defend their own wages and conditions.

Yet again Congress indicated the importance for the left in the unions of building fighting opposition to the pernicious doctrine of social partnership.

PCS: Mark Serwotka for General Secretary

Darren Williams

Members of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) face the prospect of general secretary's election later this year in which they will have a 'choice' that is restricted to two right-wing candidates.

The election is to take place a couple of years earlier than originally scheduled, because one of the union's two right-wing factions, 'Membership First', has made a temporary alliance with the left to prevent 'Moderate' incumbent Barry Reamsbottom from running the union alone when the other joint general secretary retires in a few months' time.

Membership First are putting up Assistant General Secretary, Hugh Lanning for the civil service union's top job, and there has been enormous pressure for all anti-Reamsbottom factions to give him a clear run as the only candidate who can beat the incumbent.

At its national conference on 9 September, the union's main socialist grouping, Left Unity, narrowly agreed not to put up its own candidate but to back Lanning. Its leadership – dominated by the Socialist Party – seeks to justify this decision on the basis that Reamsbottom has consistently sold out members' interests during his period in office, refusing to organise a fight against pay cuts, job losses and privatisation, and smashing the union's internal democracy.

But while Lanning seems to be more open to working with the left, and promises to respect union democracy, his

politics are no different from Reamsbottom's. If the election result is to make any difference to members' lives, there has to be a real choice, with a socialist candidate offering a real change of political direction, and a determination to challenge New Labour's continuation of the Thatcherite 'efficiency agenda'.

Left Unity's failure to see this reflects the extent to which the Socialist Party has been sucked into machine politics, since the days when, as Militant, it ran PCS's predecessor, CPSA and appointed full-timers who remain in place today.

One of the worst aspects of the situation is that Left Unity has agreed with Membership First that any potential candidate in this election must secure nominations from fifty branches in order to get on the ballot-paper.

This anti-democratic stipulation is clearly to designed to prevent any left candidate from standing.

Nevertheless, such a candidate has come forward. Mark Serwotka, a well-respected militant activist who is currently secretary of the DSS Sheffield branch, is being supported by the Socialist Caucus, the SWP and left independents.

His candidacy is the only hope that members have for there even to be a discussion about the kind of leadership that the union needs.

It is therefore vital that socialist activists push to get their branches to nominate Mark and take this election out of the hands of the bureaucrats.

Tory ambitions go up in smoke

John Lister

Ann Widdecombe's ludicrous attempt to crack down on casual use of cannabis may have delivered the final death blow to the credibility of this year's Tory conference, but it was already flagging before she got up to speak.

The succession of speeches by William Hague's undistinguished team of largely unrecognised shadow ministers had been Tony Blair's most encouraging news since before the fuel protests.

The heady few days in which the Tories had appeared to be ahead of Labour in a few opinion polls had already melted into memory, as the party's deep divisions over Europe and its lack of talent or direction had floated back to the surface, with Kenneth Clarke brushing aside Portillo's economic analysis as "blithering nonsense".

Just as Blair has picked up and hardened some of the key Thatcherite policies – notably on law and order, privatisation and asylum seekers – the Conservative tactic has become one of seeking to out-flank Blair ... to the right!

The upshot has been a succession of bizarre and inconsistent policies, ranging from

Hague's nationalist mantra on the need to keep the pound, to Liam Fox's monumentally unpopular call for an expansion of private medical insurance.

The hostility to the Euro and to all things European has helped confirm the Conservative Party's almost total isolation from the bulk of its traditional big business supporters.

This year's conference exhibition in Bournemouth was patronised by fewer companies than even the Liberal Democrats. There were just 75 stalls – 13 of them inhabited by various Party stands. Even Railtrack, which has done so well from Tory privatisation, did not bother to take a stall.

Talk of a major revival in the party's fortunes are greatly exaggerated. So too is the claim that a new "caring Conservatism" – largely stolen from US Presidential hopeful George W Bush – is emerging as the party's philosophy.

Michael Portillo's subconsciously explained his well-rehearsed breast-beating speech about the need for "toleration" as the natural extension of his neo-liberal economic views ("small taxes, small government") to the social sphere "don't interfere in



Thatcher: model for Blair

people's personal lives".

Of course there were traditional Tory populist pledges to slash taxes on "hard working families", and cut red tape.

Widdecombe's demand for a harder line against drugs, cheered to the echo by the assembled conference of seaside landladies and retired colonels, was intended to be following triumphantly along the same populist line, finding an area of law and order where New Labour has not (yet) taken a more brutal line than the Tories.

It fell – just as John Major's crazy "back to basics" idea fell – because Widdecombe and her ageing party are so completely out of touch.

As Hague struggles to repair massive damage and refloat his floundering party once again, there will be few business leaders who regret their decision to give Bournemouth a wide berth this year.

Blair's team dig in under fire at Brighton Not listening, hearing, or caring!

Brighton this year saw Labour's first crisis conference since Tony Blair's overwhelming victory in the General Election.

This time Conference took place in the context of a sharp fall in new Labour's position in the opinion polls, with the Tories edging into the lead.

But Conference ended to the sounds of a poll revival – despite the leadership being defeated for the first time in the six years since Blair was leader, on the question of pensions, rail safety and pollution.

How was this turn round achieved?

Blair's speech attempted to parry the criticism that he was "not listening", which had become so damaging during the fuel protests. He admitted that errors had been made over the Dome and over the 75p rise for pensioners.

However he certainly did not concede anything of substance – particularly on the issue of restoring the link between the state pensions and average earnings, which was broken under Thatcher and is now the key demand of the pensioners movement.

He counterposed the anger over fuel duties to frustration over the need for more investment in education, the NHS, the police and public transport.

The core of his message was that the job of government was to choose between competing good causes. "It's not an arrogant government that chooses priorities. It is an irresponsible government that fails to choose".

Blair's attack on the Tories centres not at all the question of substantive policy disagreements – but rather the fact that Hague and his team are portrayed as insubstantial and opportunist.

Of course that attack is accurate – both in terms of the weakness of the Conservatives today, but also because on policy after policy it is increasingly difficult to see any difference between the two parties. But that is not how the rhetoric reads.

For many people, as workers and as users, a key issue on which there is anger and frustration with new Labour's policies is on the question of privatisation – whether hidden under the

label of PFI, PPP or some other acronym. But this is not defended anywhere in Blair's speech, because this is not the face he needs to present when poll ratings are so vulnerable.

We are told instead "The NHS was the greatest achievement of the post war Labour government. It was based on a single clear and enduring value: that health-care should be based on need, not ability to pay. ...

"The Labour Party will never abandon what was one of the greatest civilising acts of emancipation this country has ever known."

What about prescription charges and charges for dental and optical work? What about the increasing number of Labour voters who are told they have the choice of waiting interminable lengths of time for pain relieving operations – or paying to have them instantly?

We are told "If people want me to go out and exploit the asylum issue for reasons of race, then vote for the other man".

Tell that to the refugees imprisoned in places like Oakington detention centre, opened by this government. Tell that to the thousands struggling to survive on vouchers meted out to asylum seekers, to those forcibly dispersed away from places where there is at least some community support for people fleeing persecution at home.

So what we have in the end is an admission that mistakes have been made – but a ruthless determination to carry on in the same direction.

And the opinion polls demonstrate that this strategy is having some success. Of course part of that is because the Tories are such an unattractive option.

At the conference itself, the key debate was on the issue of pensions. The pensioners movement has managed to rally broad support for its platform. The demand to restore the link with earnings is a demand for a decent standard of living for this section of the working class..

But what came increasingly into focus was the means by which this standard of living should be achieved. The demand for restoration of the link is in practice a campaign for universalism, against means-testing and for progressive taxation.

In opposing this position the leadership and their lack-

eys put forward two main arguments. The first – which again is not at all confined to the question of pensions – is that current government practice is "targeting" the people who really need help – the poorest.

The other point they make is that while restoration of the link could be afforded today, this would not be the case in the years to come. Obviously this is part of the campaign for a second term – "The large majority we won was never a reason to do the job quickly: but to do it properly".

These two arguments are based on Blair's desire to cuddle up to Middle England and therefore to refuse to support progressive taxation. The left needs to refute this reactionary nonsense and make the call for taxing the rich and big business a key part of our armoury.

The resolution was watered down so that restoration of the link was only one of the things that could be considered.

This, it seemed, would have been acceptable to Blair – but Gordon Brown, on his return from Prague, insisted that there should be no compromise.

For the trade union leaders, it is easier to challenge the government on social issues like pensions, where they are not called on to do anything more than make left speeches, than on the day to day questions facing their members at work.

And the fact that retiring UNISON chief Rodney Bickerstaffe is about to take



Andrew Ward

over from Jack Jones as chair of the national Pensioners Forum must have had some effect on his eventual stance in refusing to remit the resolution.

The breakdown of the vote was highly significant: 84% of the unions voted for the resolution but only 36% of CLP delegates.

This indicates an unparalleled weakness of the left in the constituencies – a complete turn around from the days when the CLPs opposed the platform time and time again and the union bureaucrats came to the leadership's rescue.

We should also bear in mind that over 60 CLPs did not bother to fork out the exorbitant cost of sending delegates to this conference, at which decisions would be so roundly ignored.

The other predicted row the leadership wished to avoid was on the barbaric system of vouchers for asylum seekers.

It was positive that confer-

ence delegates voted for this – along with pensions – to be one of the four contemporary resolutions that were on the agenda.

It seems clear that the massive campaign against vouchers mounted by the Campaign to Defend Asylum Seekers has had an impact here as well as at the TUC.

However – despite the rumours that the particularly pernicious practice of refusing change to those paying for goods by voucher might be dropped – TGWU General Secretary Bill Morris agreed to remit the motion in exchange for a promise of a "review" of the whole system of vouchers.

This was no concession at all from the platform: they had already made the same promise at July's National Policy Forum.

In any event there is nothing useful that could come from a review – the whole

system is discriminatory and rotten to the core. The campaign for abolition needs to be stepped up inside and outside the Labour Party – and Morris must pay a price for letting the leadership off the hook.

In overall terms, Gordon Brown made clear the leadership's contempt for conference. Speaking on Radio 4's Today programme, he said

"It is not for a few composite motions to decide the policy of the government and the country. It is for the whole country, and I am listening to the whole country".

Blair made similar comments, making clear that for the government, the Labour Party is now seen as only one interest group amongst many. They are riding roughshod over even their most servile supporters.

The task for the left inside and outside the Labour Party is to step up joint campaigning against the reactionary policies of New Labour.

Pensions: make fat cat bosses pay their share!

PERHAPS the most sickening argument used by Tony Blair and Gordon Brown to oppose the link between the state pension and average wages is that although the government could afford to implement it this year, the cost in future years would be too high.

This not only concedes that – as pensioners have argued – the money is there, but makes it plain that the government expects the gap between pensions and wages, which is costing today's pensioners over £25 per week, to grow even larger as time goes by!

It is also clear from this argument that Labour's hard line against pensioners today is aimed purely and simply to safeguard the future profitability of capitalism.

The crazy argument that a big pension increase would mean handing cash to wealthy pensioners can be easily answered: the wealthy can pay it back in tax!

In fact so low are the incomes of most who depend on the state pension that two thirds of pensioners are too poor to pay any income tax at all (below £112 per week) – and the average weekly income of

all pensioners is just £138.

A key reason why British pensions are so low compared with those across the European Union is that British companies pay far less than their European counterparts in National Insurance.

French trade unions have been waging a long and militant fight to prevent employers reducing pension contributions from the current level of 40 percent of gross wages.

The equivalent contribution by British employers is closer to 10 percent!

Hutton review slates PPP ... but only tube workers can stop privatisation

Greg Tucker

The Hutton Review of London Underground funding has now reported. Set up by Ken Livingstone in a deal with Labour GLA members, the Review slates the government's Public Private Partnership (PPP) privatisation plans.

But in accepting that some form of contracting out is inevitable it offers little comfort to tube workers.

With the government prepared to face out any legal challenge from Livingstone, only action by tube workers can stop LUL privatisation. And with time running out it is vital that the labour movement across London now shows its support to give tube workers the confidence to fight back.

The tube is falling apart – as every passenger can testify.

the seemingly unthinkable route of taxing the rich.

Hutton effectively rules out this option from the start. Instead he focuses on comparing PPP with LUL bonds. The government argues that PPP is better because business know-how will lead to improved efficiency, at a cheaper cost. This is shown to be utterly unfounded.

There is no evidence that the private sector can manage any better than LUL. Indeed it is clear that the main, if not only, road to improved "efficiency" is the erosion of workers' terms and conditions.

The only other improvement comes with the long-term stability given by a thirty-year contract. There is no reason why LUL, if given the same stability, could not be even more efficient in the public sector, without having to attack jobs and conditions.

private sector debacle of the Channel Tunnel. But even putting the Channel Tunnel aside, let's not forget that the problem with the JLE was that LUL failed to control its contractors – the very ones who are bidding for the PPP!

Once a fairer set of assumptions are made the bond issue comes out significantly cheaper than the PPP – even with the extra interest that LUL would have to pay compared to the Treasury. Direct government investment would be even cheaper.

The government counters this by saying that under PPP the contractors carry the risk if something goes wrong. As the report says, "this is a serious misunderstanding of risk allocation. No sensible private company will accept a risk without receiving full



Stefano Cagnoni

sector will pick up the risk." When BR was privatised the Tories put in a Rail Regulator to keep the private sector under control – everyone knows that this has been a joke. With LUL, Labour have watered even this down and will split regulation between a "PPP Arbiter" and LUL (under the control of the Mayor).

Even if Livingstone was serious about using his powers to make the contractors' lives as intolerable as possible, it is questionable about how much he would be able to do so. Despite using his threats to push up their charges, it is apparent that the potential PPP contractors are not unduly worried by this system.

Having demolished the financial arguments Hutton turns to the small matter of safety. As he comments:

"the letter from the Inspector of Railways that was leaked during our review plainly reveals official unease at both the safety culture within LUL and some particular problems thrown up during the shadow running of the PPP..."

"There is also some worry that LUL's powers in enforcing safety (under PPP) are more apparent than real."

Rail privatisation has shown that with a hundred and one different companies responsible for safety lines of communication get blurred and in the end no one is responsible.

Even if the contractors were the most safety conscious things would be unacceptable. And we all know that the construction companies bidding for the PPP have some of the worst safety records going!

So what is Hutton's answer? Having refused to

countenance secure government funding, the Review ends with two unappealing options. That the government allows the GLA and Mayor to introduce bonds, on the understanding that such an option should include private sector management being contracted in at a much higher level than under traditional forms of contracting, what it calls a "win-win solution". Or that the PPP should go ahead – but only if it meets much more rigorous safety and value for money criteria.

Prescott and co. have latched on to this to claim endorsement for their general strategy, with only the details to quibble over, but of course, from Hutton's perspective he has delivered what Livingstone wanted – showing the PPP is unworkable and offering bonds as a viable alternative.

Just don't hold your breath if you are a tube worker. However bad PPP has been shown to be, the government calculates they can defeat any legal challenge, and the bond issue will still be a potential threat to jobs and conditions.

All of this is made worse because the PPP is already beginning to affect tube workers' lives. LUL has been carved up into smaller sub-companies under "shadow running".

The effective transfer of staff from the protection of LUL into what will be the privatised contract companies has thus already taken place.

As with rail privatisation this transfer does not appear to make much difference at this stage, with LUL centrally still in control (though the Railway Inspector's letter on safety shows that he cer-

tainly is concerned).

But when it came time to hand over to the private rail franchises rail workers found that a number of their legal options to challenge their privatisation had already disappeared.

At the time we were sold this pup as a way for Knapp and co. to dodge the call for industrial action. Whilst this may not be quite the case here it does mean that the campaign to halt the PPP needs to hot up rapidly.

It is clear that only industrial action by tube workers can halt the PPP. But it is important that the workforce is not divided.

The infrastructure workers, being threatened with the private sector, left to fight for themselves, face an uphill struggle. But all tube workers will be affected by the PPP – whilst many workers will remain in the public half of LUL, if nothing else every worker's safety will be jeopardised.

However it is organised, all workers need to fight united – the RMT needs to be making clear at the earliest opportunity how essential unity will be campaigned for.

The Hutton Review provides some useful ammunition in the campaign against tube privatisation, but the key is now the actions of the London labour movement.

The LUL RMT have called for support for a demonstration on 21 October (11am Euston) and a lobby of the GLA on 24 October (6pm Marsham Street).

Both demonstrations need to be supported. Underground workers have got to be convinced that when the time comes any action they take will be supported.



But the current Treasury-led system is unable to guarantee the long-term funding necessary to plan a proper investment programme.

New Labour's PPP solves this problem by giving the tube infrastructure over into private hands for thirty years.

Alternatively Livingstone proposes to raise capital through an LUL bond issue.

Both proposals dodge the option supported by the majority of Londoners, that the government directly fund the tube – the cheapest option by far, especially if instead of Treasury bonds the money was found through

As to cost, the government has only allowed some of its costing assumptions to be made public. But even from these it is clear that they have stacked the odds in favour of the privatisation plans – assuming high growth, low costs for the private sector against poor performance from LUL – the benchmark the contractors would have to meet is 5% below current performance levels! To justify this they point to LUL's mismanagement of the Jubilee Line Extension. Hutton counters with the

payment for it."

In fact many of the financial risks are being kept on the public side of the PPP. Those that are on the private side will be paid for in full.

And, as the Review makes clear, the possibility will also exist for the contractors to hold LUL up to ransom. The slightest necessary change to the PPP at some point in its thirty-year cycle will be enough to put LUL on the spot:

"The arguments about risk transfer are silly. London needs the Underground, otherwise it grinds to a halt, which is unthinkable. So in the final instance, the public

Fighting scandal of council house sales

Terry Conway

IN THREE YEARS since the election of this New Labour government more council houses have been privatised than under the Tories. Now the government is planning the transfer of more than 200,000 a year – meaning that, if it is successful, within a decade there will be no council housing left.

This is a massive attack on the welfare state that would see us return to the days of Rachmann.

One of the biggest lies in this whole scandal is that these plans are being carried through for financial reasons. But the government are bribing councils by promising to write off up to £12 billion in debts if they transfer stock to the private sector.

Another myth is that we shouldn't oppose the transfers anyway because Housing Associations are not really the private sector – they are non-profit organisations.

But *Inside Housing* points out that

56% of all Housing Associations made profits of over 10% in the period 1995-1999 and gave average annual pay to their Chief Executive of £67,000!

Fortunately an increasing number of local campaigns are being set up to fight back against these plans – and some have won significant victories.

Recent ballots where council plans have been defeated include in Wycombe, where there was a 52% no vote, in South Bedfordshire, where 72% said no and on the Ethered Estate in Lambeth, where the vote against privatisation was 60%.

Defend Council Housing National Conference

Saturday October 21, 11 am
Manchester - Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount St.



John Harris

Lib-Lab coalition: a backwards step for Welsh Labour

Darren Williams

THE POLITICS of the National Assembly for Wales took a sharp twist on Thursday October 5, with the announcement that the ruling Labour group is to enter a coalition with the Liberal Democrats.

Labour has governed as a minority since the first Welsh general election in May 1999 gave it only twenty-eight of the Assembly's sixty seats.

This meant that Labour had to make ad hoc agreements with at least one of the other parties – usually Plaid Cymru – if it was to ensure that it could win votes on controversial issues, and avoid a humiliating defeat like the no confidence motion that forced the resignation of Blairite First Secretary, Alun Michael, earlier this year.

Now, Michael's successor, Rhodri Morgan, has drawn up a 'Partnership Agreement' that seeks to guarantee 'stability' by giving the Liberal Democrats two seats in the Cabinet, with Liberal leader Mike German becoming his deputy.

The agreement, set to run until the next election in 2003, was agreed by an emergency meeting of the Welsh Labour Executive Committee on Thursday night, and has to be ratified by a Liberal Democrat conference on 14 October if it is to go ahead.

The Partnership Agreement has been generally welcomed by Labour Assembly Members, who see it as a necessary step to ensure that the Assembly can deliver policies that they say will benefit the people of Wales and enhance the body's own standing in the process.

The Agreement contains over one hundred policy commitments, including the promise of substantial sums of money for health and education, to cut hospital waiting lists and school class sizes.

While the Liberal Democrats are claiming credit for these pledges, almost all of them are in keeping with the aspirations of mainstream Labour opinion.

Most are unexceptional, if positive, but a few stand to distinguish the Assembly's programme from that of the Westminster Government: for example, an independent review of student funding whose proposals could see Wales, like Scotland, offering a element of financial support for students that is unavailable in England.

Other policies that Labour would not have promised include reviews of the powers of the Assembly, and of the electoral system for local government.

The fact that these initiatives are welcome in themselves does not at all justify the coalition that has put them on the agenda. The bit-

ter irony, that it has taken the Liberal Democrats to initiate a process that could at last distinguish the Assembly's politics from those of Westminster, is merely a reflection of the political timidity of the Labour group.

In fact, Labour could have produced proposals like these itself and demanded support from both the Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru, with no strings attached, which would have been forthcoming in most cases if the parties had wanted to retain their progressive credentials.

The defeats inflicted on Labour in the past – most spectacularly the removal of Alun Michael – have been a response to the administration's control by Blair, who effectively imposed Michael against the wishes of Labour Party members and a majority of the Welsh people.

Plaid is to the left of Labour on a whole series of issues, and it is unfortunately significant that this deal has been struck not with them but with the Liberals.

For, however progressive the Partnership agreement, a Lib-Lab coalition will ultimately pull Labour to the right.

The process by which the deal has been agreed also suggests a worrying move away from the Labour Party democracy that Rhodri Morgan supposedly embodies, in contrast to his predecessor. Labour AMs, outside

the cabinet, were not even told about the deal until the day that it was publicly announced – by which time a detailed pact had been drawn up with the Liberal Democrats.

They therefore felt bounced into agreeing the deal, and while four AMs reportedly opposed the proposal as such, unease about the procedure is far more widespread.

The Welsh Executive was treated with even more contempt, being asked to endorse the proposals after they had been publicly announced, and therefore given the choice of falling into line or publicly humiliating their own leadership.

Labour's minority position is a consequence of the unhappiness of large sections of the Welsh electorate about the politics of New Labour.

Rhodri Morgan's administration should be seeking to demonstrate that it is in touch with grassroots Labour supporters, and by extension with the majority of the people of Wales.

Instead, it has signalled a move towards the politics of backroom manoeuvring, out of sight of the people.

Left Labour activists should work for the dissolution of this partnership and for Welsh Labour to demonstrate the genuine political independence that is necessary for the Assembly to become the tribune of the people of Wales.

Nice target next for campaigners

Pete Cooper

Following the successful mobilisation against the IMF and World Bank in Prague in September, the next target of anti-capitalist campaigners needs to be the European summit in Nice in December.

Both the ATTAC network and the Euromarch network in France will be making Nice a priority.

Both these forces were key to the impressive turn out of nearly 100,000 demonstrators protesting against globalisation in the small French town of Millau earlier in July.

Given that, and the strength of the left in the French labour movement, together with official Trade Union backing for the mobilisation, there is a real potential for December 6 to be another major step forward in building a genuine European response to neo-liberalism. Let us make sure that we build a serious turn out from Britain.

This appeal is currently being circulated and deserves the widest possible support from individuals and labour movement bodies:

Appeal

WE THE UNDERSIGNED call for the biggest possible mobilisation for the demonstration called by the European Confederation of Trade Unions (ETUC) and supported by the TUC in Nice, France December 6 2000.

● The Prague anti-capitalist demonstrations effectively exposed the role of IMF and World Bank in bringing misery to tens of millions of people across

the globe, through their austerity and structural adjustment plans.

● But behind the WTO/IMF/World Bank stand the US and governments of the European Union. The EU is being used as one of the main instruments of the neo-liberal offensive against public services and living standards in Europe.

● The Inter Governmental Conference will be deciding on a Charter of Basic Rights.

This Charter, which is designed to form the basis of an EU Constitution, "guarantees the freedom to conduct a business", but gives no guarantee of the right to collective bargaining and trade union action, including strike, at European level", in the words of ETUC General Secretary Emilio Gabaglio.

Nor are there any guarantees of the right to employment and housing, which are written into the constitutions of many EU countries.

● The ETUC expects at least 50,000 demonstrators to converge from all over Europe. We call on all labour movement bodies, NGOs, and anti-capitalists to show their opposition to the direction of EU policies by mobilising with our

European brothers and sisters, and calling for a fundamental change of course by European governments.

Meeting to build for Nice

Monday October 30, 7.30
Diorama Centre, Osnaburgh St London NW1 (nr Great Portland St tube), includes report back from planning meeting in Paris on Oct 21.

Fuel protests: how should the left respond?

Labour reaps the whirlwind from its refusal to tax the rich

Alan Davies

September's fuel blockades coincided with similar actions across Europe, and brought Britain close to paralysis. The attitude of the left to the crisis has involved knee jerk reactions – from opposite ends of the spectrum.

Some sections of the far left, and much of the left in the Labour Party and the trade unions see the movement that erupted as simply one of small employers, to which the labour movement should offer no support at all.

There are even those who say the more these people are smashed up the better. Others, parts of the far left, have seen the protests as a new emergence of working class struggle, which has to be recognised and built on.

In our view both of these positions are profoundly wrong.

First of all we have to be

clear: the blockades were not protests by the working class.

The protestors were crisis-ridden sections of the small business people, sections of the petty bourgeoisie, who have turned against new Labour as higher fuel prices have been added to the unremitting pressures of the market which they face every day.

Many of these people became self employed as the result of Thatcherite deregulation and outsourcing in the 1980s, and now work endless hours in deregulated markets and are struggling for the survival against small profit margins.

But does this mean we cannot give them any kind of support? We don't think so.

We should support progressive movements of the petty bourgeoisie in defence of their interests against big business.

There were of course a range of dubious backers and manipulators behind the

protest. These included the oil companies and the Road Haulage Association as well as the Countryside Alliance and the Tory Party.

We do not support these forces: but we do support the stated aims of the protest both in terms of a reduction in the tax on fuel, and in alleviating the crisis facing small farmers, small hauliers, and owner drivers, which are at the core of the action.

The blockades centred on the emotive issue of petrol prices. British prices are the highest in Europe, due to the level of tax, and are now punitive against big sections of poorer people who run cars.

The protest therefore enjoyed mass support amongst the working class, and linked in to a range of other grievances against new Labour. The result was an explosion of anger and resentment.

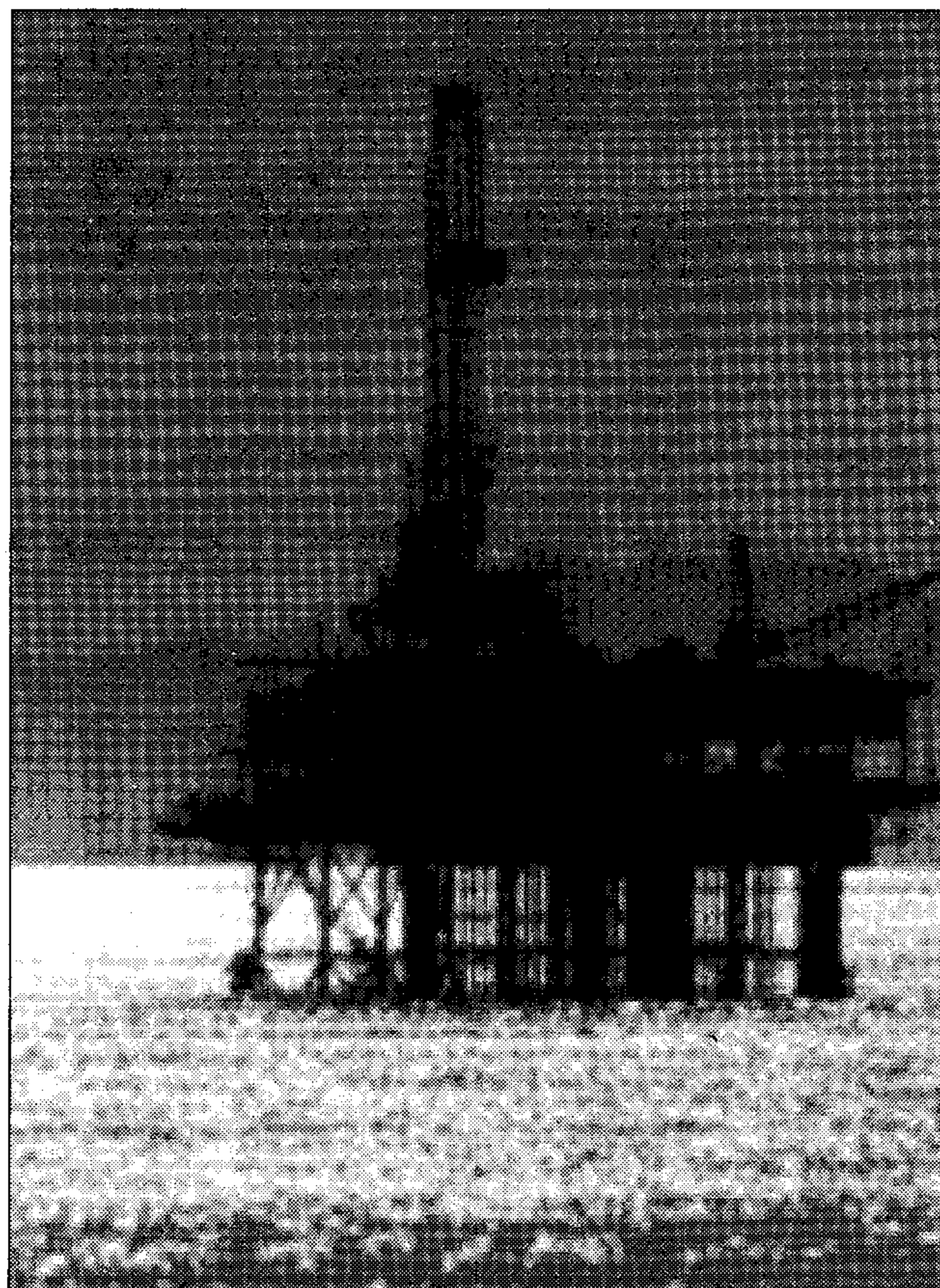
People who live in the countryside, and small business people, feel victimised by fuel prices. Small farmers, hauliers and owner drivers are being squeezed out by big business, neo-liberal deregulation (unregulated market forces), and – in the case of the small farmers – the supermarkets and food manufacturers who profit from buying their produce at knock-down prices.

We should stand with them and call for the protection of small businesses threatened by their principal enemy – big capital and multinational companies. We reject any notion that this is not the business of the left or of the labour movement.

Tory tax

It is argued that high fuel taxes are there to protect the environment. This was never the case.

The fuel price escalator was introduced by Tory Chancellor Norman Lamont



Virtually tax free ... The Tories made North Sea Oil a massive profit stream for the oil bosses – and they want to keep it that way!

in 1993 as part of a package of measures to switch the burden of taxes from the oil companies to the consumer. Another measure brought in at the same time was the imposition of VAT on domestic heating fuel. In the same budget Lamont slashed petroleum revenue tax paid by north sea oil extractors from 75% to 50%, – and abolished it for firms developing new oil fields.

In one move Lamont was able to line the pockets of his oil company pals, secure a major additional source of growing revenue for the government, and cynically masquerade as a defender of the environment.

The escalator has ensured that fuel duty has risen above inflation every year since – piling up revenue for Tory and Labour governments: ironically it was Gordon Brown who announced this year that he would end the price spiral.

But Brown's main answer to those who wanted him to go further and cut fuel taxes was – and still is – that it would mean cuts in spending on hospital and schools. The money raised through this indirect tax is being used to avoid the need to tax business and the rich.

Protect the environment

Of course there is a genuine environmental problem to be addressed: the issue of car use and road transport is indeed central to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. We can see the flooding taking place in the Indian sub-continent and south east Asia at the present time and the consequences of the rise in sea levels for countries like Bangladesh are all too clear.

We have to put action against global warming at the top of the political agenda.

But we do not accept that environmental protection can be achieved by the current ineffective and regressive tax on petrol.

increases in indirect taxation carried out by successive governments in this country have resulted in a redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich.

We say reverse this situation. Reduce indirect taxation. Tax the rich and impose massive direct taxation on the oil companies to pay for an environmentally sustainable transport system: the current tax on oil extraction in the North Sea is the lowest in the world.

This should be a first step towards nationalising the oil companies and the banks.

Only by taking on the power and wealth of capital can a green agenda be pursued. The Green Party's lack of any class analysis has left it with a blind spot on indirect taxation on fuel.

We link our call for a reduction in fuel tax to a call for a sustainable energy policy and an integrated transport policy for both people and freight. This must include not only new rail and tram services for passenger travel but a complete reorganisation of freight transport, to switch large quantities of material from road haulage back onto rail.

The current levels of transportation of goods (and even people) are a product of "just in time production" – a feature of globalisation, as Andy Kilmister's article explains on page 18. This method has to be challenged.

New Labour, of course rejects all calls to tax the rich and the big corporations. It is as keen as the Tories on promoting the anarchy of the free market, which stands as a major obstacle to any planned transport system or attempt to safeguard the environment.

Business friends

The government's attitude to the fuel protest – which it denounced as "a challenge to law and order" – was determined by the strategic alliance which now exists between new Labour and sections of big business. In fact of all the business interests courted by Blair's team, new Labour's relationship to the oil industry has been the closest.

As Private Eye points out "No area of British business has supplied more expertise to the Blair project than the oil industry. The role of Lord Simon, former BP chairman, as Minister for Europe has been well documented". Peter Mandelson when he was Trade and Industry Secretary actually brought together a "task force" of oil executives "to tackle the problem of low oil prices".

The public pronouncements of new Labour ministers took the softest possible line on the oil companies – continuing to quote claims of "intimidation" or "violence on the picket line" as the reason for the tankers not going out from refineries.

But the protest was a new phenomenon in many ways.

Mixed signals from hauliers

Small haulage companies and owner drivers face a European-wide crisis in their industry. This however is not caused mainly by fuel prices, but by the way the industry was deregulated, beginning in the 1980s.

Even those regulations that still exist are flouted by most of the industry, particularly owner drivers, in the struggle to survive. This deregulation has led to the cut-throat competition which now exists in the haulage industry as part of the globalised economy.

But the demands that they have raised are far from clear. The tax take from heavy lorries may be substantial, but it is less than the environmental damage they cause, and although British fuel taxes are high, there are no tolls on British motorways, and taxation on lorries and on business are much lower in Britain than elsewhere in Europe.

Some hauliers have argued that their particular problem is not the overall price of diesel (on which they can already claim back the VAT) but the comparative price of diesel in France and other European countries. They claim this allows haulage vehicles to cross the channel and compete with them with cheaper diesel in their tanks.

They call for a 'level playing field' – even if that means a general levelling up in prices across Europe rather than a levelling down.

Direct taxation

We call for a turn back towards direct taxation. The

Collusion

The pickets were effective not because they physically stopped anything, but primarily because of collusion between the oil companies, the hauliers, the owner drivers and the police. The oil companies – not the protesters – were the force that made the action so effective.

The oil barons are making a fortune out of the processing and distribution of oil products – but feared that with crude oil prices rising Gordon Brown might seek to increase the pitifully low rate of taxation they pay on North Sea oil.

They argue that their take at the pump is low (but fail to point out that this is because they have already extracted super profits earlier in the chain). Above all the oil companies are keen to see the government take the blame for high fuel prices while keeping their own rip-off profits intact.

That is why they supported the dispute behind the scenes, forming a bizarre alliance with the hauliers to cut off the supply of petrol and diesel. In some cases tanker drivers were instructed not to go out – even though the road outside was open. Others were given the option to go out ... or go home on full pay!

These are employers who normally make breaking picket lines a matter of principle, and who would automatically instruct drivers to drive through – and sack them if they refused. Anyone who doubts this should try picketing an oil refinery for any other reason – and see what happens.

There were no threats to the pickets from the oil companies, there were no injunctions: they did not even ask the pickets to leave. Some of them allowed the pickets to use facilities inside the refineries.

Derecognised

Many oil companies have derecognised the unions – a factor which seemed to have no effect on TGWU officials who met workers in these companies to urge them to work normally.

In most cases the oil



A contradictory alliance: lorry drivers, the Road Haulage Association – seeking lower fuel prices – and the oil companies, keeping them as high as they can get away with!

tankers no longer belong to the oil companies. They have been contracted out and are operated by haulage contractors.

The biggest fleet of tankers, it turns out, is owned and operated by the notorious strike breaker Lord Stirling, the P&O chairman who broke the seafarers' strike by organising mass scabbing through the picket lines.

He was an adviser to the Tory Party, and was present with the oil executives at their meeting with Blair. The idea that he would not send his tankers though completely ineffective picket lines unless he was backing the action beggars belief.

Large numbers of owner drivers are also contracted to work for the oil companies. This reflects the huge change in the haulage industry since the mass strikes of employed drivers in the late 1970s.

By the time of the 1984 miners' strike, the industry had changed, and convoys of owner drivers were used to keep the power stations going. Then they were willing to drive not down an open road past a few protesters behind police lines, but through pickets of thousands of battling miners.

The TGWU still organises some people who are directly employed by the oil companies, although how many is not clear.

But the TGWU was one of the unions that have now signed up to the new "protocol" between the government, the oil companies and the unions, designed to keep oil supplies moving in the

event of a repeat of the blockades at the end of the 60 day truce.

Not only is this wrong: it is tantamount to a no-strike agreement for the industry. Does the TGWU really accept that tanker drivers should no longer ever be allowed take action to protect their own jobs, wages and conditions?

Precedent

The protocol is also a dangerous precedent for other sectors of workers in what could be described as "essential services". If it is wrong for picket lines to disrupt oil supplies, what about public transport on road or rail? What about food supplies to the supermarkets? What about ambulance crews, hospital workers or fire fighters?

This new, covert attack on trade union rights is a dangerous development, which should be opposed in the unions.

Reluctant to tax big business, and increasingly reliant on the tax revenue from fuel prices, Labour dug in against the protestors while trying to avoid a conflict with the oil companies. They are prepared to see sections of the petty bourgeoisie squeezed out of existence by precisely these big business and multi-national interests.

In this new Labour had the full backing of the TUC, which intervened strongly on behalf of the government. John Monks compared the protests with the lorry owners' action which helped

bring Pinochet to power in Chile in 1973.

Backlash

But the Chilean example is a real warning to us here: it showed the ability of the right wing to mobilise a backlash from small business after they had been alienated by the policies of Allende's social democratic government, which ignored their needs. Despite the overwhelming support of working class people for the protest, the trade union leaders were mainly concerned with upholding "the rule of law" – which of course includes the anti-union laws – and the fear that French direct action methods might be taken up by British trade unionists.

Their statements can be read as an objection on principle to any protest or dispute aimed at changing the policy of an "elected government". So the union leaders have set their faces permanently against any future strikes against anti-union laws, wage controls, or other reactionary government policies.

Such TUC support for the government could also have led to the introduction of new laws of the distribution of fuel. This in turn might well have been used against the trade unions at a later date.

Indeed the objective of Jack Straw's "task force", hurriedly pieced together after the blockades were lifted, was to put an absolute duty on the oil companies to supply oil. This in turn implies no right to strike by tanker drivers – or anyone else involved in the production and delivery of fuel.

So the protestors got no support from the TUC.

Some on the left take a similar line, and argue that socialists cannot and should not support movements and protests of the petty bourgeoisie. This idea should be rejected.

It is true such movements often attract some nasty political allies, including the far right. But this is simply an added reason for giving them support in order not to

drive them in that direction. Such movements can be extremely dangerous if they fall prey to the far right, which may provide charismatic leaders for the cause.

Marxists understand that the petty bourgeoisie is not politically independent as a class (although it can have its own political demands); it has always tended to gravitate towards the strongest class in society.

The working class must therefore defend them against the banks and finance capital, if we are to win then to our side and prevent them allying with the right. Trotsky argued that the working class should always be prepared to establish and lead alliances with the petty bourgeoisie, warning that they will move further to the right if they do not move towards the working class.

Tax the rich

We say tax the rich, not small business. We say abolish VAT, cancel the debts of small businesses and provide them with cheap credit as an alternative to being fleeced by the banks.

Meanwhile the left needs to get to grips with the political issues raised by the fuel blockade and begin to address the problems of the petty bourgeoisie in order to

deal with this kind of movement. The politics of the protestors – and their demands – are confused and contradictory, and they offer no easy way in for the left, as some found to their cost when they tried to join the fuel protestors' picket lines.

But the left must help to clarify the real battle lines, and press for the wider labour movement to respond.

We can start with the following list of demands:

- Protect the environment
- Tax big business and the rich to fund a massive programme of sustainable transport
- Free or token passenger pricing
- Defend jobs and wages
- No no-strike agreements in essential services, or anywhere else
- A massive programme of agricultural job creation in sustainable farming systems
- Cheap credit and fuel for small farmers and the self employed
- Freeze or lower petrol prices
- Nationalise the oil companies
- Socialise the transport sector and build sustainable transport systems
- Socialise agribusiness, property companies and large land owners
- Demand TUC support for this programme.

Farmers harvest bitter fruits from deregulation

PROTESTS by small farmers are not new. The strength of the pound against the Euro is a major problem for farmers in Britain as prices for their products are consistently undercut by cheap imports.

But few farmers pay any income taxes. They had been campaigning for more subsidies: but they joined the fuel protest despite the fact that their own (red) diesel carries no tax at all – and retails at 24p a litre.

However there are genuine problems for the (relatively few) small farmers who are

not part of the growing agribusiness sector.

They have been hit by a range of big business interests – from banks to fertiliser manufacturers, and of course they have been squeezed by the supermarkets.

To compound the crisis, small farmers have suffered a succession of body blows from a succession of food scares triggered by the unscrupulous activities of the feed manufacturers deregulated under Margaret Thatcher – the most obvious result being the BSE scandal.

Pumping up the oil firms' profits

This crisis is not caused solely by taxation. The oil companies have massively increased their already gross profits: the top five companies are on target to rake in over £30 billion this year, by exploiting both consumers and the oil producing countries.

Their role needs to be highlighted by the left. We should defend the right of poor countries which depend on oil exports to sell at a reasonable price.

The fact that the price of oil has gone up from \$10 a barrel to nearly \$35 in the last year is partly a product of the fact that prices have been low since 1980 (other than for a brief period during the Gulf War).

This low price was part of a general fall in world commodity prices driven by globalisation. The left has opposed this in terms of other raw materials – we should not exclude oil from this view.

Nor should we fall for the demonisation of OPEC by the government. The world's major oil producer is the US, which is not part of OPEC.

After toppling Milosevic ... Serbian workers must break from nationalism



Posturing in Kosova with an AK47, Kostunica is tainted with Serbian nationalism

Geoff Ryan

There can be no doubt that what happened in Belgrade on Thursday 4

October was a revolution.

Slobodan Milosevic was overthrown by a mass uprising of the Serbian people. His downfall is to be welcomed by all socialists.

The revolution in Belgrade demonstrated the validity of the socialist argument that when the working class is united and prepared to take decisive action it can achieve anything.

In the face of determined action the repressive forces almost melted into thin air.

Nevertheless, while we can undoubtedly rejoice at Milosevic's demise, we also have to have a sober assessment of what it means. Certainly it opens up new possibilities, but there are also many new dangers.

Milosevic lost the presidential election despite massive fraud. His attempt to have the election nullified and re-run at a time of his own choosing was the last straw. Large numbers of former Milosevic supporters began to withdraw support. In particular Serbia's miners struck and occupied their pits. The official trade union movement gave its support to strike action.

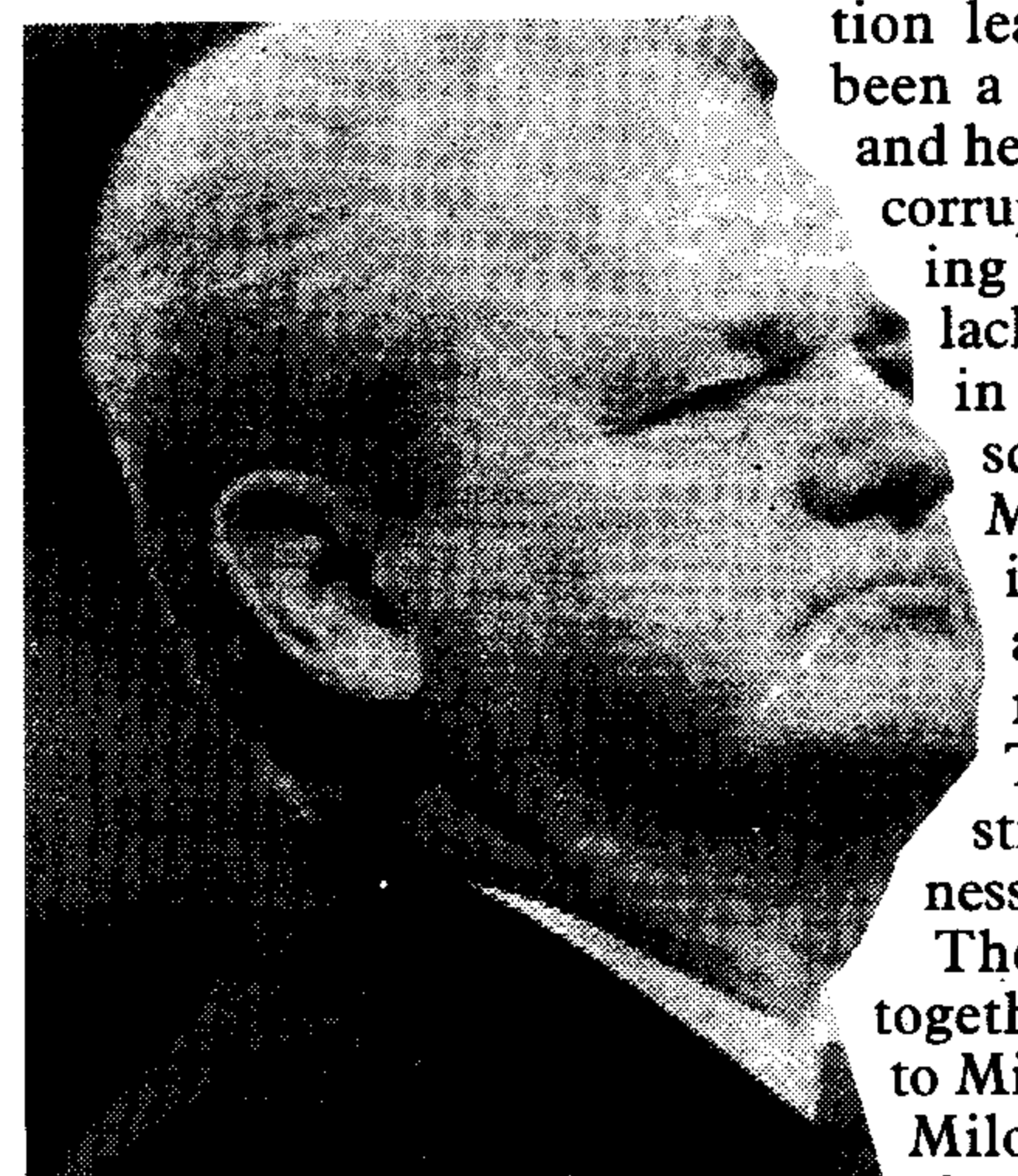
This entry onto the scene by the organised working class was decisive. It encouraged the leaders of the opposition to believe they could win and, more importantly, undermined the willingness of Milosevic's security forces to take repressive action. Support for Milosevic evaporated within a few hours. Hence the revolution was virtually bloodless.

Milosevic also lost because the disparate forces of the opposition managed to maintain unity. In fact they attracted further support.

Vuk Draskovic, who had stood his own candidate against Milosevic, quickly gave his backing to the coalition backing Vojislav Kostunica, admitting his error in refusing to support Kostunica's candidacy. Draskovic's candidate had



Serbian riot police run from angry demonstrators in Belgrade as Milosevic's machinery of repression breaks down. Subsequent reports suggest that top generals ordered him at gunpoint to a meeting with Kostunica which led to Milosevic's resignation statement.



Suddenly, he was on his own!

received a derisory vote. Vojislav Seselj, leader of the far-right Radical Party, whose Presidential candidate also did extremely badly, announced he was considering breaking from his coalition with Milosevic.

Kostunica is now President of Serbia, though for how long he will continue to have much influence is open to question. In fact one of the reasons the opposition coalition won the elections was precisely because Kostunica was a relative nonentity. Unlike most of the opposi-

tion leaders, he had never been a Milosevic supporter and he also had no record of corruption. His modest living standards and his lack of past involvement in the internecine squabbles of Milosevic's opponents is what made him so attractive to large numbers of Serbs. That is both his strength and his weakness.

The coalition was held together only by hostility to Milosevic. But now that Milosevic has been overthrown all the differences will start to re-emerge. The political differences are enormous and are likely to be exacerbated by personal hostilities and ambitions.

We should be under no illusions about the nature of the majority of the opposition parties. The vast majority of these organisations were not opposed to Milosevic because he had waged wars of aggression against the peoples of former Yugoslavia. They opposed Milosevic not for starting wars, but for losing them.

Kosova was the last straw. Not only did Milosevic lose the war in Kosova but, for the first time since the break-up of Yugoslavia the people

of Serbia had to face war.

In the short term, the massive destruction of Serbia by NATO rallied Serbs around the regime. Nevertheless, the economic hardships resulting from that destruction led to rapid disillusionment.

By focussing solely on the responsibility of Milosevic for Serbia's plight, the opposition leaders have ignored their own complicity in the crimes committed in the name of Serbian nationalism. No doubt they hope that by putting all the blame on Milosevic the west will ignore their responsibility. In that they will almost certainly be right.

The west has shown that it will back even the most virulent anti-Milosevic nationalists, such as Biljana Plavsic in Bosnia.

Kostunica's support for the war in Kosova, and Zoran Djindjic's backing of Radovan Karadzic against Milosevic in Bosnia will probably be quietly forgotten in western capitals.

The inability of the Serbian opposition to grasp the fundamentally reactionary and destructive nature of Serb nationalism is a massive weakness. It infects virtually

every sector of the organised opposition.

This is not, of course, a product of the Serb psyche. It is a reflection of the collapse of the Stalinist leaders of the League of Communists of Serbia into Serbian nationalism during the 1980s: a collapse that brought Milosevic to power.

The rise of Serbian nationalism certainly pushed the Stalinist leaders of the other Republics of the former Yugoslavia in nationalist directions, but they never capitulated completely to nationalism.

This is most clear if we contrast Croatia and Serbia. The leaders of the League of Communists of Croatia certainly supported Croatian independence, largely in response to the Greater Serbian nationalism that was dominating the party in Serbia.

Nevertheless, they also maintained criticisms of the Croatian chauvinism of Franjo Tudjman. In particular they opposed Tudjman's brutal aggression against Bosnia, a stance supported by Croatia's independent trade unions.

Opposition to Tudjman also came from within his own party, the HDZ. The current President of Croatia, Stipe Mesic, was one of the founders of the HDZ, but he broke completely from Tudjman over the war in Bosnia.

Criticism of Tudjman's nationalism from the former Communist leaders - now transformed into social democrats - and sections of the HDZ was on a generally principled basis of opposition to Tudjman's chauvinism.

It found strong echoes amongst large numbers of Croats. That is why Ivice Racan, former leader of the League of Communists of Croatia, is now Prime Minister and Mesic is President.

Moreover, Racan and Mesic have not been averse to taking action against those responsible for war crimes in Bosnia. The sacking of seven Croatian generals is only the latest in a series of moves that

have been taken against those responsible for implementing Tudjman's policies.

We can, of course, criticise Racan and his followers for many things: not least their willingness to embrace capitalism and their illusions in the EU. The development of a socialist opposition in Croatia will emerge in conflict with such policies.

Nevertheless, the willingness of Racan (and Mesic) to wage a fight against nationalist hardliners is in stark contrast to the situation in Serbia where large parts of the opposition are the hard-line nationalists, whose hostility to Milosevic has centred around his failure to win wars, not against the brutal nature of those wars or the nationalism that fuelled them.

The collapse of both the League of Communists and the trade unions into support for Serb nationalism meant there could be virtually no challenge from the left. In fact the left in Serbia became primarily identified with Mira Markovic's JUL (United Yugoslav Left), part of Milosevic's coalition.

It is too early to predict Milosevic's fate. He has announced his intention to step down from politics to spend more time with his family, but has not ruled out returning to political activity at some time. Of course Milosevic is hardly, even if belatedly, recognising that Kostunica easily won the elections.

He is recognising a much more serious reality: that he can no longer rely on his repressive apparatus to stay in power. Some of his family, moreover, do not show the same enthusiasm for cosy domesticity, having fled the country, no doubt taking as many of their ill-gotten gains as they could carry.

Whether or not Kostunica will be pressed into handing over Milosevic to the Hague war crimes tribunal is also not yet clear. At present Kostunica says he has no intention of doing so, though a combination of carrots and

Socialist Outlook

sticks from the west could probably induce him to change his mind and retract much of his anti-NATO rhetoric.

Kostunica is right to criticise NATO's brutal war against Serbia, and therefore we would not demand that he hands over Milosevic to western governments who hypocritically maintain their right to do as they see fit throughout the globe.

However, Milosevic should certainly go on trial for his crimes. The Serbian people must settle accounts with crimes committed in their name. That requires a coming to terms with the reactionary nature of Serb nationalism. It means recognising that many of those who now wish to demonise Milosevic also bear heavy responsibility for the crimes of the regime.

A real settling of accounts would demonstrate the complicity of large parts of the new leadership and, especially of the Orthodox church hierarchy, for the crimes committed by the Serbian state.

The new rulers are hardly likely to carry out such an investigation. After all it would reveal their own criminal responsibility. For any real settling of accounts to take place the Serbian working class will be decisive.



Students blocked main roads in solidarity with striking miners as the old regime lost its grip

The Serbian working class has shown it is capable of acting. Without the strikes throughout Serbia over the last week the overthrow of Milosevic would have been much more difficult, if not impossible.

But the Serb working class has now to begin to develop a programme to defend its own interests. That can only be done by recognising that the interests of Serb workers are the same as those of other

workers throughout the Balkans, irrespective of their nationality.

That will mean them coming into conflict with the new leaders of Serbia.

This will be most apparent in potential conflicts that lie ahead over the status of Kosova and Montenegro, as well as relations with Bosnia.

For many of the new rulers of Serbia, hostility to Montenegrin and Kosovar independence will be almost

a point of principle.

Although it is possible that the change in regime in Belgrade will weaken support for independence in Montenegro – though that is by no means certain – it is unlikely that the Albanian majority of Kosova will give up their aspirations for their own state.

It is equally unlikely that whatever government Kostunica forms will meekly accept the further break-up

of the Yugoslav state – not least because western governments are also hostile to Montenegrin and Kosovar independence.

We can expect to see massive pressure on the Montenegrins and Kosovars by western governments to remain within Yugoslavia. Nor is it likely that

Kostunica's government will abandon support for Bosnian Serb Republic and argue for its integration into a unitary Bosnian state. Much of the opposition was united in hostility to Milosevic's abandonment of the Bosnian Serb leadership at Dayton, when the west still saw Milosevic as the best guarantor of stability in the region.

The interests of Serb workers, however, demand support for the right of Kosova and Montenegro to independence if the Kosovars and Montenegrins choose that road. They demand abandonment of the reactionary Serb entity in Bosnia and its reintegration in a unitary, multi-ethnic Bosnia.

Failure to distance themselves from Serbian nationalism will seriously weaken the tremendous potential the Serb workers have already shown to dramatically transform the political situation throughout the Balkans.

Socialists should certainly welcome the overthrow of Milosevic. But we also have to open up a dialogue with Serb workers.

International Workers Aid for Bosnia has made such attempts in the past, in much more difficult conditions. Now the opportunities for more fruitful discussions are opening up we have to seize them rapidly.

Sniping from the Left

By Charlie van Gelderen



Banking on poverty

In what it describes as "the most detailed study ever" of world poverty, The World Bank claims that the poor have benefited from globalisation.

If it wasn't so tragic, this statement would be almost hilarious.

Its own World Development Report, released on September 13, says 2.8 billion people – almost half the world's population – lived on less than \$2 a day. A further fifth had to do with less than \$1. Some benefit!

Learned critics of Karl Marx, while acknowledging the accuracy of his analysis of capitalism, always aver that he was wrong about the increasing impoverishment of the masses.

But according to this report, the gap between rich and poor countries has doubled over the past 40 years, with the average income in the 20 richest countries now 37 times the average in the poorest 20.

This does not only apply abroad. A report published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation claims that two million children in Britain lack at least two basic necessities. Social scientists from four uni-

versities found that 14.5 million people were too poor to afford essentials.

Margaret Thatcher, when she was Prime Minister, always claimed that some of the wealth accumulated at the top of the economic pyramid would "trickle down", and everyone would gain.

Not so, according to this survey. It estimates that the proportion of households living in poverty grew from 14% in 1983 to 24% in 1999.

New Labour has done little to correct this situation.

Another popular criticism of Marx is his anticipation of power passing from the bourgeoisie to the proletariat – the working class.

"The working class?", ask the academic critics. "What working class? Haven't they almost completely disappeared, their place taken by modern technique which makes the workers redundant?"

Indeed? Who makes the clothes these erudite scholars are wearing? Or the food they eat?

Who mows down the trees in the verdant forests from which the paper on which they write their learned theses are manufactured?

It is true that in the economi-

cally advanced countries millions of workers are not working any more. They have joined the vast army of the unemployed: but even here it is still workers who sell their labour power to build the houses, manufacture the cars and provide the multitude of services on which the rich depend for their super-high standard of living.

Of course to most of the consumers of expensive clothes and exotic food, the people who make this possible are invisible. They work in sweat shops in the so-called 'developing world', often small children working long hours for a mere pittance.

An Indonesian Nike worker who came to Seattle last year to take part in the anti-capitalist action, gasped when she learned that the trainers which she made for \$2 a day were being sold in San Francisco for £120 a pair.

Marx's proletariat are still there – hundreds of millions of them, and, as Marx predicted, they are being joined by sections from other classes in the battle to put an end to this destructive system.

No room for principles

Michael Young, who helped to draft the manifesto on which Labour won its landslide electoral victory in 1995, pin-points the difference between old Labour and the new variety in an article in *The Guardian*.

The Attlee government was not revolutionary socialist; far from it. It was a reformist government. Its manifesto was based on two basic principles.

The first was public service, in local government and in essential industries such as water, electricity, fuel and railways; the

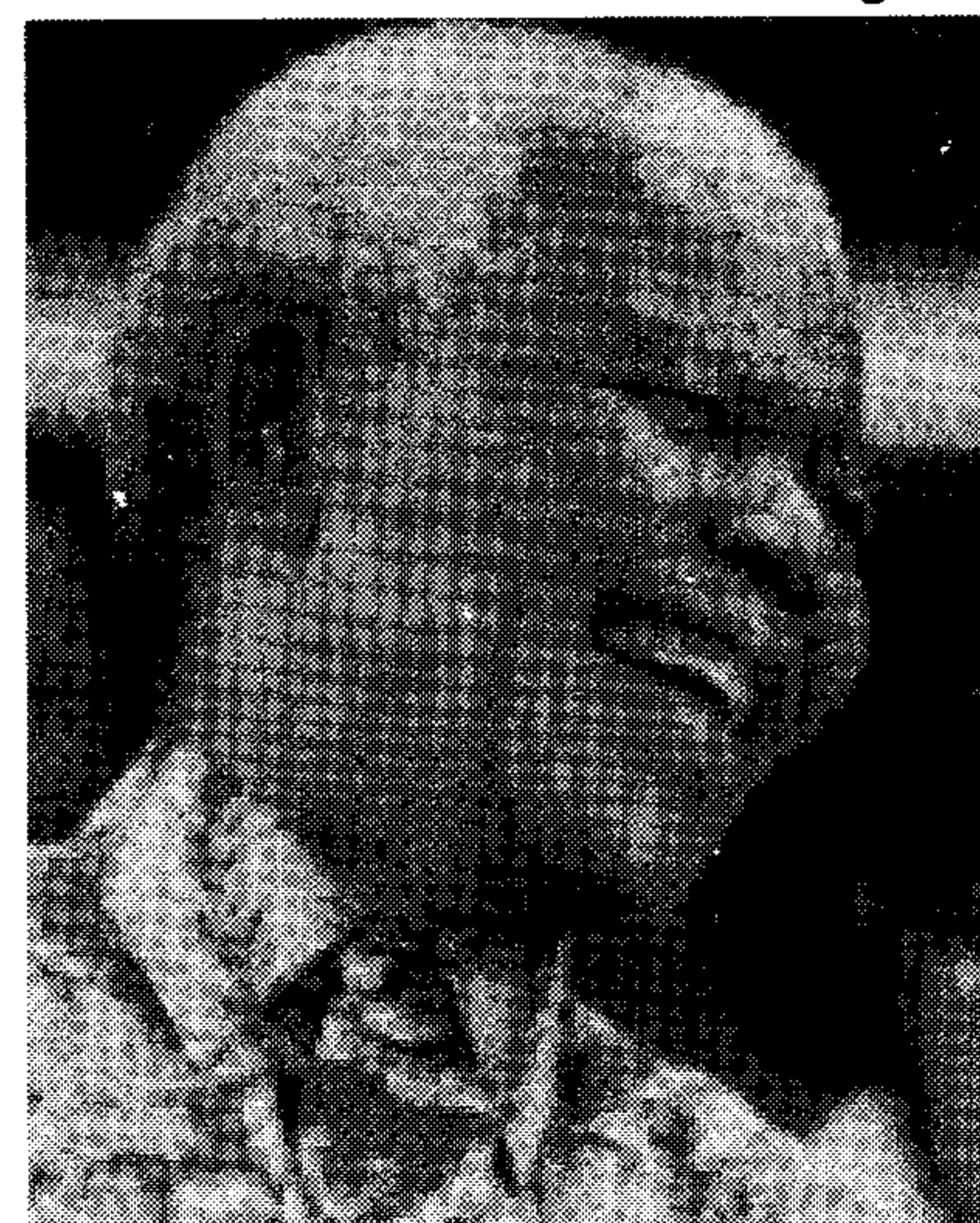
second equity in the distribution of income.

New Labour has thrown both these principles overboard. As Michael Young puts it, "teachers have become the butts of criticism; social workers have hardly done better; and even doctors and nurses have not escaped obloquy altogether."

As for equity in income, a recent *Guardian* survey shows that the pay of Britain's top businessmen went up by 16.5% in 1999, four times the average wage increase.

The increase was from an already elevated base. More than 110 senior executives (including one woman) received more than "£1 million a year in basic income, not counting share options with their tax advantages."

The Blair government has done nothing about the opulence of the rewards which directors are granting them-



Honorary Blairite: Mandela

selves. Even Ted Heath denounced it as "the ugly face of capitalism."

Gifted

A great fuss is being made about whether Gordon Brown

lied about the £1 million which Formula One entrepreneur, Bernie Ecclestone, gave to the Labour Party before the last general election.

Surely the important thing is why these wealthy capitalists give money to political parties. They have only one reason – they want something in return.

Ecclestone got what he wanted – exemption from the tobacco advertising restrictions. And he also got his million back! That's really good business for you.

Pass the parcel

For the past two years, UPS has donated £5000 to the New Labour Party. Have their directors been converted to the 'core values' Tony Blair proclaimed with much heart-beating at this year's Brighton Conference?

Or is their real motive their aim to see an end to the Post Office monopoly? No prize for the answer!

No honour in Labour

Nelson Mandela was made an honorary member of the New Labour Party after he addressed conference.

Is he aware that Isaac Kaye, who supported the National Party, who governed

South Africa in the apartheid years until black majority rule in 1994, has been a major donor to New Labour, since 1997.

He gave £100,000 to the party last year, and also paid £5,000 for tickets at New

Labour fund raising dinners as well as donating £10,000 to Frank Dobson's ill-fated attempt to be come London Mayor.

After moving to London in 1982, he became involved with Harris Pharmaceuticals. Harris became Norton Heath Care, which says "unions are not in line with company philosophy.

No ethics, please, we're New Labour

So the New Labour government is not going to commit itself to the pursuit of an ethical foreign policy at the next election. So what's going to change?

There will be no reason now to deny that the British firm GKN is selling armoured cars to Indonesia.

Several Labour MPs enjoyed the hospitality of this firm: Roger Casale (Wimbledon) – five freebie trips to Italy over the past two years; Bruce George (Walsall South) and Rachel Squire (Dunfermline) were also treated to trips to Italy by the friendly GKN.

On August 17, six children were shot dead and five injured in Colombia. Troops opened fire on the children who were looking for a picnic spot, without provocation.

Last year Britain sent components for heavy machine guns to Colombia's military.

Labour's decision to ditch any pretence of ethics also gives the all-clear to British firm Balfour Beatty to go ahead with its participation in building the Ilisu dam in Turkey, which would destroy the homes of up to 25,000 Kurds and potentially stop the flow of the Tigris river into Syria and Iraq.

Left links up for major campaign at next election

ALAN THORNETT gives the International Socialist Group's assessment of a landmark conference.

The conference of Socialist Alliances held in Coventry on September 30 was a historic event on the

British left. Over 400 hundred activists embracing the bulk of far-left organisations in Britain (outside of the Stalinist tradition) came together, along with independent activists and local campaigning groups, to hammer out a framework for a united intervention into next years general election.

This remarkable gathering included a large number of members from the two largest far-left organisations in Britain, the Socialist

Workers Party and the Socialist Party. As Dave Nellist, who chaired the conference, said in closing it: "not only were we all in the same room at the start of the conference, we were also all in the same room at the end of it".

The conference itself - which was four or five times as big as any previous such gathering called by the Socialist Alliances nationally - reflected a wide realisation that without a Socialist

Alliance campaign there will be no significant socialist voice in the general election, given the current weakness of the left in the Labour Party. The resulting successful outcome of the conference has set the scene for the biggest electoral intervention by the left in Britain since the war.

This is a unity which springs from the harsh realities of the current political situation in Britain: the rightward march of Blairism

on the one hand, and the disaffection from it, on the other, of socialists looking for an alternative.

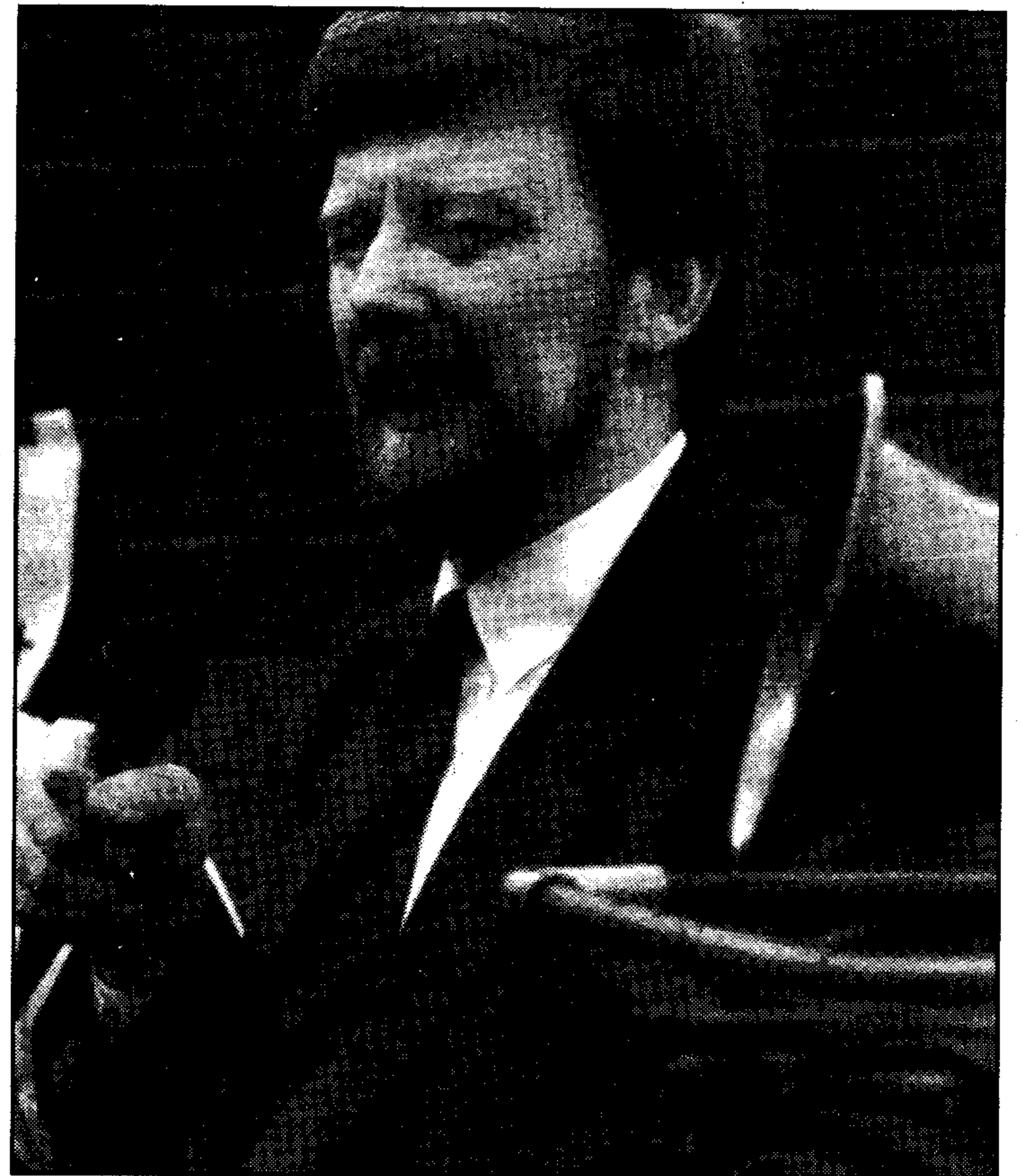
There is an opportunity for political realignment to the left of Labour, and a wide realisation that this potential cannot be fulfilled on the basis of the old divisions but only on the basis of a new spirit of unity.

The conference was not before time, however. Since the success of the London Socialist Alliance, the expan-

sion of Alliances in towns and cities across England has far outstripped the development of the structures needed to consolidate them and maximise their potential in the election.

The practical upshot of the conference was the adoption of an agreed protocol which can provide both an organisational structure for the election campaign and an approach designed to bring as many left candidacies as possible under the banner of

*Dave Nellist:
"not only were we
all in the same
room at the start
of the conference,
we were also all
in the same room
at the end of it".*



General Election Protocol as agreed at the Socialist Alliance National Conference on Sept 30th

1. The Socialist Alliance will stand candidates in the next General Election to give people a chance to vote for a socialist alternative to New Labour and the Tories.

For this to be a credible alternative for people, we have to have maximum unity. To mount the most effective challenge as the Socialist Alliance we believe that local Socialist Alliances should seek to build the broadest, most inclusive and united organisations possible.

Local Socialist Alliances, together with the national network, should begin raising money and winning working class support in the unions, the local communities and from all progressive campaigns now with the aim of recruiting wider forces to the alliances in preparation for the election campaign. This means building Socialist Alliances locally as active, campaigning organisations oriented to the struggles of the working class.

We must not limit the alliances to being electoral vehicles to be used only at election time for the benefit of the various organisations who make up the national network.

2. The Socialist Alliance will work to co-ordinate the widest possible number of socialist and other anti-cuts candidates to fight the Westminster General Election, in seats in England. We will do so in liaison with the Scottish Socialist Party,



The London campaign started the Socialist Alliance bandwagon

which will fight seats in Scotland, and with the Welsh Socialist Alliance, which will fight seats in Wales.

3. A further conference will be held (possibly in February, certainly before the election) to finalise a national election manifesto; the national committee should invite drafts to be put forward now and should vote on a substantive draft to be put to such a conference for discussion and amendment.

A short series of demands (our key pledges, so to speak) should be agreed by

the manifesto conference as the demands carried on all leaflets as a summary of what we are fighting for.

4. All local Socialist Alliances/groups and political organisations which are members and which want to fight this election are invited to contribute to fighting together under the electoral registration name of the 'Socialist Alliance' - with the freedom to describe their own backgrounds and their own party/organisation affiliations (a protocol to be developed by the Election Committee).

All affiliated organisations within the alliance are free to publicise their own programmes in their own name.

5. Local Socialist Alliances/groups should seek to build the broadest, most inclusive and united organisations possible. Whilst affiliated political organisations clearly have the right to produce their own political material, the establishment of broad, inclusive and united organisations will mean affiliated political organisations having to exercise self-discipline in promoting their distinctive political positions and identities within the Socialist Alliance.

Only by putting what unites us in the Socialist Alliance first will we attract the candidates and active supporters beyond the existing organisations affiliated to the Socialist Alliance who will be vital to our success.

6. All local Socialist Alliances/groups and political organisations that accept the minimum programme are invited to stand under the electoral registration name of the 'Socialist Alliance' in the General Election.

We will encourage as many organisations as possible to stand under the name 'Socialist Alliance'.

7. The diversity and pluralism of the Socialist Alliance must be reflected in our candidates. Therefore:

a) Organisations and local groups are asked to give special attention to promoting women, black people, young people, manual or low-paid workers, and trade-union activists, as candidates.

b) It is important that political trends which represent substantial components of the Socialist Alliance nationally are also included in the candidate lists.

We call upon all groups in the Alliance to use their best efforts to ensure that the political pluralism of the Socialist Alliance is substantially represented in the candidates' list.

8. Local Socialist Alliances/groups in negotiation with affiliated political organisations will have responsibility for electing their own candidates and agents. They will also be responsible for their own election campaign including raising finance and the production of election material for their campaigns.

Provided their material supports the minimum programme of the Socialist Alliance they will be free to raise additional demands and ideas within their material.

9. The Election Committee of the Socialist Alliance will have responsibility for co-ordinating the work of the Socialist Alliance during the election, including the election campaign, other campaigning work, our national

media profile and national fund-raising initiatives.

10. The Election Committee will act as a clearing house, in order to resolve any difficulties locally and to enable agreement to be reached on seats which are proposed to be contested, so as to be able to endorse SA candidates formally.

The Election Committee will thus formally endorse local candidates, agents and treasurers.

11. The National Agent will provide nomination papers for all local socialist alliances/groups and others who agree with the minimum programme in order for them to be able to use the name 'Socialist Alliance' on the ballot paper.

In return, all such local socialist alliances/groups and others will agree to supply the officers of the Socialist Alliance with whatever financial and other information is necessary to comply with the new election legislation.

12. The Election Committee will consist of the Liaison Meeting, which is the elected officers, national agent and one delegate for every affiliated organisation and local Alliance.

13. This protocol is for the purpose of fighting the Westminster General Election only. We commit ourselves to building on this unity in our future work.

Socialist Outlook

the Socialist Alliances.

The protocol was, however, sharply controversial, particularly with the Socialist Party. The final outcome was a compromise, but it does appear to represent a structure which all the organisations present could accept and work with even if they remain unhappy with aspects of it.

The sharp debate on structures, though, represented a deeper division over the character of the Alliance we are setting out to build. Would it be an Alliance of organisations and individuals seeking as far as possible to present themselves as a part of a common project, and prepared to subordinate, to a degree, their individual identities to strengthen the common identity?

Or would it simply be an electoral arrangement between competing organisations, which would go on putting their own identity, and own interests, first in the traditional way?

There were many shades of opinion expressed on these questions, but it seemed that the Socialist Party were the only current to consistently defend the latter view. Their speakers intervened to claim (astoundingly) that the officers' proposed protocol would create 'over-centralisation' to the extent that it was only appropriate for a full blown political party! This is an irrational view in relation either to the original proposals or to the policies eventually adopted [see box].

All that was being proposed was the minimum structure capable of presenting a united and coherent campaign, with an election committee at national level, a high degree of autonomy at local level, and with the political organisations involved free to make clear their own identity and project their own politics.

To argue that this represents the structure of a political party is absurd. But it is true that the protocol from the officers represented the formation of a political alliance rather than simply an electoral block.

We are trying to build a national political current. Therefore certain minimum criteria are necessary. This, in our view, is the only way to mount an effective campaign and the only way a genuine convergence can be maintained and developed.

The Socialist Party meanwhile have got themselves in a twist. The stance they have taken in the Socialist Alliances, for the last six months or more, is that the Alliances should move towards becoming a new political party to the left of Labour. They have regularly denounced the SWP for treating the Alliances as simply a temporary electoral block, and for not understanding the urgent need for a new workers' party.

They have repeated this mantra at every opportunity. Now they have done a complete summersault by arguing that that the Alliances under the officers' protocol would be too much like a political Party – and that they should pull back from



Dudley hospital workers are on a fifth round of solid strikes against the loss of jobs and working conditions to a private employer under New Labour's Private Finance Initiative

this and simply be an electoral pact.

It is an extraordinary turn around.

They still call for a new party of course, but it is simply propaganda stripped of all content. We must have a new party – but the Socialist Alliances, which are the most promising development in that direction for a very long time, are becoming too much like one. Suddenly the Alliances are not the basis for such a new party. But if the Alliances are not the best development in that direction to date, maybe the SP could tell us what is?

As far as the International Socialist Group is concerned, we agree with the SP on the need for a new party, and we think the Socialist Workers Party are wrong not to address the issue of the longer term development of the Alliance we are building.

But the way the SP are conducting themselves on this blunts the debate with the SWP rather than taking it forward.

The SP presented their position at the conference as a defence of the democracy of the Alliances. In fact the logic of what they say is not a defence of democracy in the Alliances, but a threat to it.

The SP have made it clear both at the meeting of the SA officers and in a recent edition of *The Socialist*, that they intend standing 18 candidates in the general election. They gave the officers the 18 named constituencies where they intend to do this.

This was presented not as an aspiration – which would be a completely different matter – but as an intention. In *The Socialist* it could not have been clearer: "Of these seats [those contested by the SAs] 18 will be contested by the Socialist Party".

What is going on? It should be the local alliances who stand candidates not particular political tendencies! Candidates should be chosen at local level and endorsed by the election committee. If they are members of political organisations, no problem, but they are the candidates of the local alliances – duly adopted.

This approach of the Socialist Party was repeated

at the conference. In response to the discussion it was 'clarified' that they meant SP candidates standing under the name of the Socialist Alliances.

This is very welcome. But it only resolves one problem, not the other. If the democracy of the local alliances is to mean anything, how can the SP guarantee having SP members as SA candidates in 18 pre-determined constituencies?

How can local alliances be formed in those constituencies on the basis that the candidate has already been predetermined by the SP? All everyone else has to do is rally round! It would create an unacceptable situation.

It is not surprising that the Socialist Party wants to minimise any national development or authoritative structures for fear that it may limit their room for manoeuvre. They reject any national structure or protocol which can determine anything to do with "their" seats.

This is the sort of attitude which will prevent Socialist Alliances developing into genuine broad organisations and restrict them to no more than a pact between existing left currents.

It is an attitude which needs to be rejected. The SAs must be built on the most open and democratic basis possible, with a full input from everyone participating at local level. And this is not a moral issue. The more broad based and united the Alliances are, the more effective they will be in mounting a serious challenge.

The very act of uniting under a single banner in the elections will maximise our potential support. It will attract new forces and organisations who will be crucial for our future growth.

In the past the organised left in Britain has been infamous for its sectarianism, and that included many on the Labour left.

We have to prove that we can unite around the issues we agree on in a common programme of action. In this way the sum Socialist

Alliances will prove to be greater than the sum of its individual parts.

No one is arguing that any one should drop their politics or stop putting out their own material. We will certainly continue to put out our views. The issue is how that is done within the parameters of a united campaign.

The final debate at the conference was on what would constitute the election committee, the body which would run the election campaign.

There were three proposals: the existing officers' committee, which we considered too narrow; the existing Liaison Committee, which is the officers plus one delegate from every affiliated organisation; and an extended officers' committee, with one from each of the main political organisations plus four independents.

The ISG supported the third option, but we have no problems with the outcome – which was the Liaison Committee proposed by the SP. It will need to reorganise itself to do the job, but we have no doubt that that will happen.

The conference did not resolve all the problems of building an effective election intervention.

It did not tackle one issue which we regard as crucial: not standing against left Labour candidates. This is an issue on which the SP – and others who think Labour is now a straight capitalist party – will not agree.

There is a lot of work to be done before a credible election campaign can be launched. An election manifesto will have to be agreed. The Alliances nationally do not yet even have a web site.

There is no co-ordination of activities, and no common source of information as to what is going on. The existing bulletin is now inadequate for the expanded system of Alliances which is now coming into being.

The Liaison Committee has a major job ahead of it and will need to act quickly. But the conference was a very good start, and at least established some ground rules on which the campaign can be built.

Human Trafficking - Human Misery!

Blame it on Europe's governments!

IN JULY this year the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) published their report *The trafficking and smuggling of refugees: the end game in European asylum policy?* The report is an in depth analysis of human trafficking and smuggling and concludes that existing policies are part of the problem not the solution.

"Refugees are now forced to use illegal means if they want to access Europe at all. The direction of current policy risks not so much solving the problem of trafficking but rather ending the right of asylum in Europe, one of the most fundamental of all human rights.

"Any comprehensive approach that tackles trafficking and smuggling successfully requires legal and safe migration opportunities for all refugees, as well as necessary enforcement measures.

"As international policy currently stands, if European governments were ever successful in stopping organised illegal migration...they would have ended European asylum policy as we know it."

The final effect of criminalisation of irregular migrants who later claim asylum is the public, as well as official, perception that their claims must be bogus otherwise they would not enter clandestinely. And, once labelled as 'bogus', there is almost no way for asylum seekers to exonerate themselves.

The UNHCR report makes a number of useful proposals: "it is misleading in the extreme to continually refer to people, who are likely to be refugees, as 'aliens'; 'bogus asylum-seekers', 'clandestines' or 'illegal immigrants'.

All parties must be clear and consistent in the language they use in order to overcome the large amount of public confusion and mistrust on issues of

asylum policy."

"It is ethically indefensible for member states to promote human rights in their foreign policy if the right to asylum is negated by pre-entry border control measures.

"All migrants have human rights, regardless of their immigration status, their legality or whether they are refugees or not.

"European Governments have a basic obligation to protect all irregular migrants from racism and actions of discrimination. As part of this, governments have a duty not to accommodate or settle refugees in situations where they risk such persecution.

"There is a duty not to portray refugees who used an illegal means of entry as being in any way criminal."

Unfortunately, this report comes in the aftermath of the EU meeting in Tampere last year where the foundations for a common asylum policy have already been set out.

The Conclusions from the meeting outline the new approach to asylum and immigration, and one of them (22) urges the establishment of a common EU visa issuing office as an answer to illegal immigration and trafficking.

The idea is to create a multi-disciplinary approach to immigration and asylum which would combine efforts in foreign policy, development and aid and trade with 'migration management'.

"United for Intercultural Action" has documented more than 2,000 deaths as a result of Fortress Europe and the human smuggling business is booming.

As far as European policy-makers are concerned if anyone wants to be considered a 'genuine', asylum seeker they will have to parachute themselves into Europe, because no



Breaking through Europe's barbed wire



Tony Richardson

Protests against the jailing of asylum seekers have continued outside Campsfield (above) and Labour's own asylum prison at Oakington, near Cambridge

Terry Conway

The Barbed Wire Europe conference, held at Ruskin College Oxford on September 15-17 was a unique event for the British anti-racist movement – a European Conference held in Britain.

An amazing amount of discussion and debate was packed into a weekend's activities, which were stimulating in their analysis of the place that immigration detention plays in the strategy of the European ruling class and positive in their determination to strengthen continental wide opposition to these plans.

Those attending included representatives from refugee organisations, campaigners for an end to detention and expert speakers from Africa, Latin America, Asia and most European countries.

Speakers analysed the intensifying racist crackdown on asylum seekers and other migrants being pursued by EU governments, in particular the spread of detention centres across Europe.

Osaroen Igbino, from the VOICE, the German migrants organisation, explained that in Germany, more and more states (lander) are building detention centres. The German government only grants asylum to 3% of applicants. Last year it deported approximately 32,000 asylum seekers.

Osaroen explained that asylum seekers in Germany are subject to a particularly vicious and unique law: the Residenzpflicht passed in 1982. This means that asylum seekers are forbidden without police permission to leave the district to which they are allocated.

Osaroen spoke passionately about the importance of the self-organisation of refugees, and organised a workshop at the conference itself to take forward this key dynamic on a European basis.

Dominique John from Forschungsellschaft Flucht und Migration in Germany explained how the governments of the European Union are trying



Stalingrad O'Neill

to persuade the Czech Republic, as an aspiring EU member, to detain more migrants and close its borders to the east.

The information he provided demonstrated clearly that compliance with repressive policies towards asylum seekers will be as much a criterion for expansion to the east as the economic criteria which generally receive a good deal more attention from the left.

A positive note came from Italy, when Giuliano Acunzoli from Ya Basta! spoke of the 14 months' campaigning in Milan which achieved the closure of Via Corelli, a much-condemned detention centre built under the central ring road in the city.

20,000 people attended the last demo of the campaign, and it took a two-hour riot and the physical forcing of the gates to persuade the authorities the centre was an unacceptable abuse of human rights. The fact that journalists, who had previously not been allowed into the centre, were taken inside by the demonstrators and took pictures of the inhuman conditions also helped.

Unfortunately other centres remain open elsewhere in Italy, and Via Corelli is being replaced. Other activists were keen to find out how such broad support had been built for the cam-

paign. Odile Schwartz-Favrat from the Federation des Associations en Solidarité avec les Travailleurs Immigrés (FASTI) from France spoke of the successes and failures of the campaign in France, analysing the impact of the sans papiers movement, and explained why her organisation (which organised two previous European conferences on this theme) was so committed to European co-ordination.

In the subsequent discussion, a delegate from Ireland expressed fears that it is only a matter of time before his country joins the crackdown, and asked advice on how to pre-empt racist asylum legislation and detention centre building. Other contributions talked of the success of direct action at airports in preventing deportations.

Direct testimony came from former detainees, such as the Algerian who had lived in England for nine years, only to be seized one day by immigration officials, detained indefinitely in Rochester prison and threatened with deportation. As a result he lost both his job and accommodation and nearly had a nervous breakdown.

Workshops covered more specific issues: racism in the media, the European Convention on Human Rights, trade unions, the trauma of detention, asylum from rape, organising bail for

detainees, direct actions at airports to stop deportations, and at detention centres to call for their closure, the increasing criminalisation of the regimes inside detention centres.

Following an excellent social on Saturday evening which allowed time for more informal discussion, the conference reconvened on Sunday morning for a session on "The case for no immigration controls". Author Bob Sutcliffe put forward a persuasive case with which no one disagreed, while Tony Bunyan of Statewatch again underlined why immigration policy was so central to the who project of European integration.

Delegates were clearly not impressed by the recent announcements from the Home Office that they would grant permission to come to Britain to those with qualifications for jobs where there are labour shortages. Neither the divide and rule approach, nor the further attacks on the economies of the countries who would be adversely affected were appreciated.

The conference was also critical of the way that the welfare state, and increasing parts of the voluntary sector, were involved in carrying out the reactionary immigration and asylum policies of the current government.

In agreeing a programme of activity and demands (see box) a lively debate took place on whether the day of action against detention centres should be organised to coincide with Holocaust Memorial Day.

This was not assisted by the fact that no one actually knew what the designated day was – and it became clear that there needed to be more consultation in general, especially with groups from outside Britain.

It was worrying however that some people seemed to think that there needed to be consultation with Jewish organisations in general – as if the conservative leadership of much of the Jewish community had the right to own the memory of those who died in the concentration camps.

It certainly seemed telling to me that all the people who identified themselves as Jewish in the discussion argued strongly that fighting against today's racism was the best way to commemorate the Holocaust.

The conference was a stopping-off point for the Civil Rights Caravan, currently touring Britain to campaign for racial justice and the rights of asylum seekers. Their delegation came for the Sunday sessions, and spoke at the conference and later at Campsfield.

As well as highlighting issues of racism faced by refugees and asylum seekers in Britain the participants also highlighted aspects of the situations in the regimes from which they had fled.

In particular the speaker from Colombia talked forcibly about the dangers of Plan Colombia (see page 16) while the Iranian speaker talked about the threats posed to women's rights by Islamic fundamentalism in her country among others, and the hypocrisy of the British government on this issue.

On Sunday afternoon over 100 of the delegates held a rally outside Campsfield Immigration Detention Centre near Oxford. Group 4 guards cringed in their glass box by the gate as Pritam Singh, who had chaired the conference, exhorted them to resign their jobs and atone for their sins by joining the demonstrators outside. There were speakers from the Civil Rights Caravan, from France, Germany and Italy.

Continuing the rally around the back, where detainees could hear, speeches were made in as many languages as could be found among the delegates (about a dozen). Detainees shouted in reply.

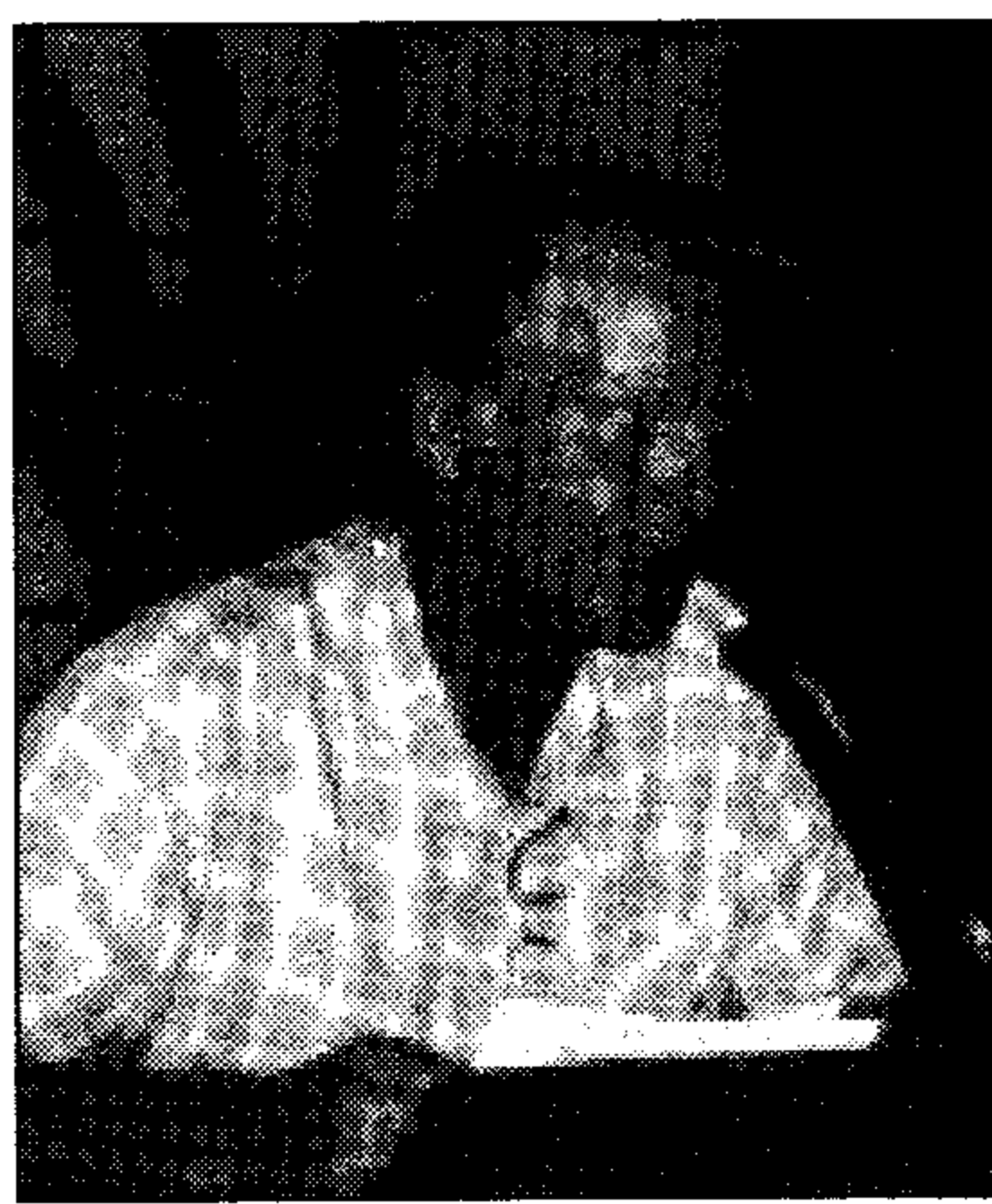
People banged on the fence so hard the pillars rocked visibly. Someone inside Campsfield has a good arm – one of the detainees managed to throw three packets of digestive biscuits over to the outside.

Many people said that this was the best demonstration there had ever been at Campsfield in terms of the response of the detainees – and this must have been because we were such an international delegation.

I returned to London after the demonstration exhausted – but more inspired than I can remember being by a conference for a very long time.

To express your views on when the international day of action against detention centres should be held, to obtain a copy of the full conference report or make contact with the campaign contact: ConfAgstImmDetn@aol.com 111 Magdalen Rd, Oxford, OX4, Tel 01865 558145.

"There is no place more institutionally racist than an immigration detention centre!"



Bill MacKeith

The opening speech at the Barbed Wire Europe conference in Oxford was given by Bill MacKeith, a key organiser of the conference and of the Close Campsfield campaign, and President of Oxford Trades Council.

Ware here to build the movement against immigration detention. It will be part of the movement for all sorts of justice – for freedom of movement, the right to work and to full benefits for refugees and other migrants – equal treatment with other residents.

It will be linked to the fight for a world free from the activities of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, big companies and governments that support them that subordinate people to the needs of private profit, a world free of the debt burden, from despots sustained and often put in power by the force of arms sold by the rich countries.

And we should note that last year the UK sold more arms abroad than any other country except the USA.

Brutal (often futile) attempts to control the movement of people are a world-wide problem. In the last 2-3 months thousands of immigration detainees have revolted at a centre in the wilds of western Australia, thousands of south Chinese have been deported from Canada. A great wall, armed police and vigilantes divide the USA from the rest of the Americas to the south, and inside the USA two million people—disproportionately black people—are in prisons built and run for private profit—a system that is being imported into Europe.

Europe is a world super-power in the process of construction at the expense of people's rights inside it and without. The walls around the Spanish enclave Ceuta in North Africa, immigration officials, airline liaison officers, embassies, consulates and visa systems are to erect a fortress Europe.

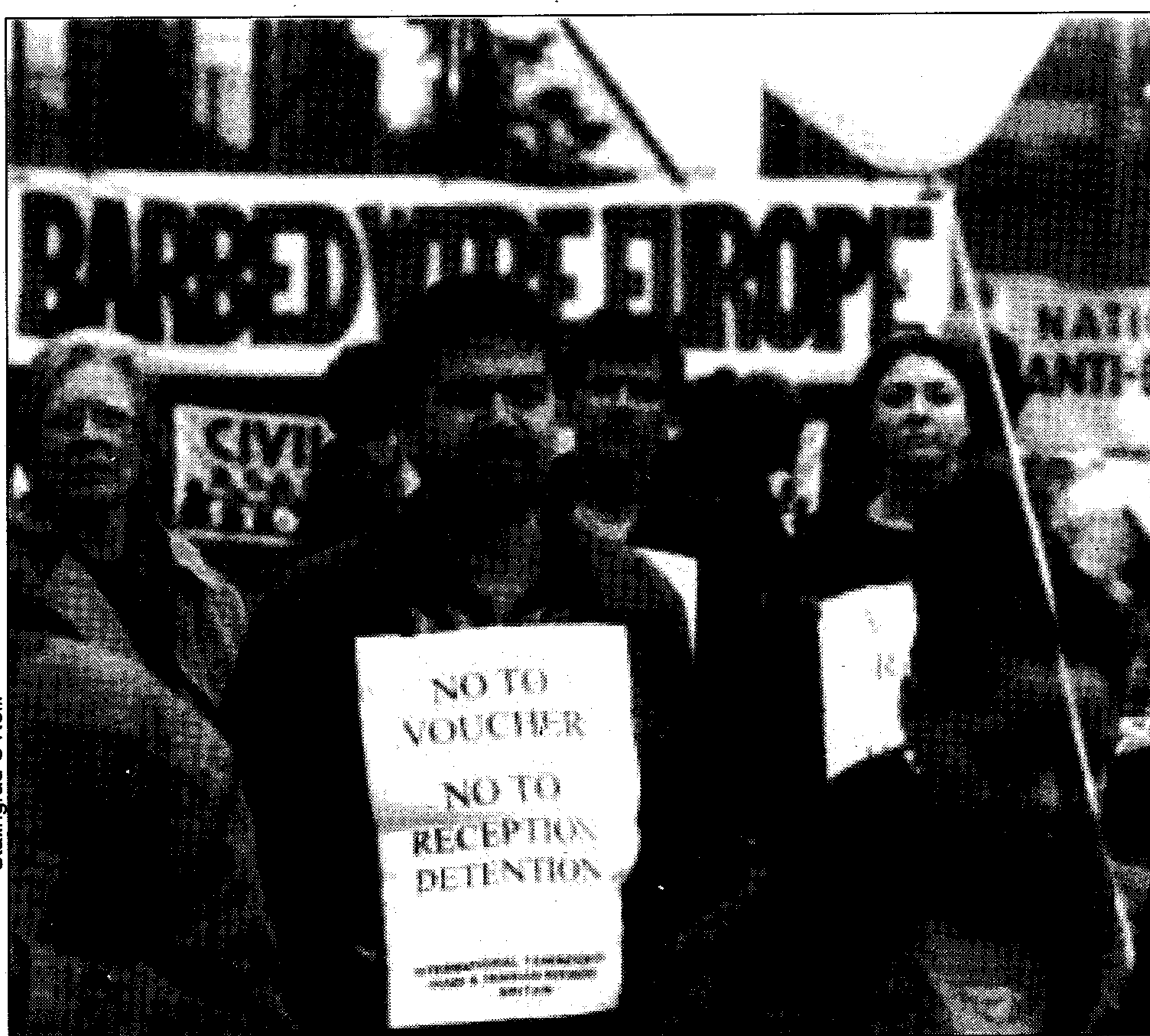
This conference is dedicated to opposing detention because the practice of arbitrary detention of refugees and other migrants not only is part of the European fortress but also is a key mechanism of the divide and rule home policy of governments inside the European Union.

As well as being unjust, painful, boring, traumatic, depressing and very bad for your health (particularly your mental health), arbitrary detention of migrants is a gross incitement to racism in thought and deed. "If they are locked up, they must have done something wrong" is a common reaction.

We are very angry that the British government talks about opposing institutional racism, when, we believe, there is no place more institutionally racist than an immigration detention centre.

The government attitude reminds me of another piece of breath-taking hypocrisy: the Anti-Racism Declaration which is on display—to visitors, not detainees—as they first enter Campsfield.

In the past 2-3 years, there has been a very rapid extension of immigration detention in Europe. This morning's speakers will relate the key developments in eastern Europe—a buffer zone to check immigration from the east—and in Italy—what the German and



British governments in particular regard as the soft and vulnerable underbelly of Europe.

The past 2-3 years has seen the development of new forms of resistance to detention and other forms of racism—major protests by detainees, border camps, signs of internationalising of resistance—this conference being an example, the further development of independent migrant organisations, such as the VOICE movement in Germany following the sans papiers in France, the stopping by passengers, pilots and others of air flights with deportees on board.

An important boost to European-wide work to end detention were the two conferences organised by the French organisation FASTI, at Lille in 1997 and Fernay-Voltaire in 1998. They were under the title "Europe Barbele".

The Campaign to Close Campsfield took part in these and—in the absence of any other offers to do the job, has organised this "Barbed Wire Europe" conference in the same spirit. The aim is to take stock of the considerably altered situation described above, to inform ourselves, make new friendships and build new contacts, and agree a realistic programme for future collective action—a few points that we can actually carry out will be more productive than a massive shopping list.

The Campaign to Close Campsfield seeks to work closely with the detainees and with ex detainees and migrant organisations. The organisation of migrants themselves will be crucial in changing the situation in the UK. That is why this conference is organised to encourage refugees and other migrants to participate.

I think that last night's session on conditions in countries of origin was very useful

in this respect. I am sure that participants in this hall will be among those who will build the sans papiers movement in the UK and Ireland (and decide what it will be called). I am sure this will happen now that the voucher scheme and forced dispersal has led to organised protests by refugees in Hull and in the West Midlands, from which a group of protesters set out recently on a protest march to London.

The UK Caravan for Civil Rights will be part of this UK migrants mass movement; it is very good for this conference and I think for the Caravan that it is coming here on Sunday to lunch, speak and join the demonstration at Campsfield tomorrow. These demonstrations are not big media events, but they the detainees find them very supportive. So if you can come it will be worth it.

Campsfield was opened in November 1993. It holds nearly 200 detainees for an average 5 months. Both detainees and their supporters in the campaign have staged many protest actions—some spectacular, and done much campaigning. Both detainees and the campaign have a remarkable history.

In the UK, before the current expansion of detention, over 10,000 immigrants a year, most of them seeking political asylum, were detained under the 1971 Immigration Act on a

decision made by an individual immigration officer at the lowest level.

At this moment over 1,000 are detained at detention centres near Oxford (Campsfield), at Harmondsworth near Heathrow, at Tinsley near Gatwick, and Oakington near Cambridge (this one opened this year and is called a "reception centre" where asylum applications can supposedly be turned round in a week or ten days), at Lindholm in Yorkshire, and at prisons at Rochester, Kent, and Haslar, Portsmouth.

A 700-bed detention centre is being prepared at Thurlough near Peterborough. Total current detention capacity is 1,327, but in addition many people are held for short periods at ports and in police stations.

Following a vicious and organised campaign against migrants, particularly asylum seekers, in the Tory press, the Labour government has now stated that it will quadruple the number of detention places. The Conservatives say they would put every single asylum seeker in detention.

A key reason that detention centres are so important is that they make it easier to deport people. Labour has carried out its election policy—to deport more people than the Tories. In the first 7 months of 2000 there was a 29% increase in the number of deportations and removals over the same months in 1999. The number was 26,515.

Finally, we should like to see two kinds of initiative coming out of this conference:

A group of participants agreeing to form the basis of a group that will facilitate—by email as well as by more traditional means—coordinated actions across Europe at detention centres, at seats of government and in the cities.

Some steps focusing on the institutions of the European state, the European Union, that is, the Parliament and the Commission, not to mention the secret meetings of interior ministry officials who shape immigration law along with crime and drugs in the same meeting. The Parliament has never discussed detention. It is time that it did.

The decisions of the conference were:

- 1 To maximise Europe-wide participation in co-ordinated actions against detention at places of detention, in town centres and outside key symbolic institutions.
- 2 To identify and lobby MEPs to raise migrants' and asylum seekers' rights in the European Parliament.
- 3 To demonstrate solidarity with detainees across Europe and a determination to end immigration detention by reconvening the conference outside one of the UK's most notorious places of detention, Campsfield 'House' Immigration Detention Centre, at 5pm on 17th September 2000.
- 4 To encourage the dissemination of these ideas and actions, we urge all those who can to participate in a European-wide network of anti-detention and anti-deportation campaigns.
- 5 To use existing email networks which share our views on detention.
- 6 To call an international day of action against immigration detention on a day to be decided in consultation with participants in the conference and other networks in Europe.
- 7 To develop anti-detention actions in conjunction with organisations seeking to mark Holocaust Day, with special reference to the situation of Roma people in Europe.
- 8 To support the demonstration called by the UK civil rights caravan on 14 October in London.
- 9 To seek to raise the issue of immigration detention in schools.

Caravan tours to promote civil rights

The Civil Rights Caravan is currently travelling throughout England in solidarity with asylum seekers, migrants and black victims of racist attacks and murders. The Caravan, a form of grassroots resistance, is demanding:

- Full rights for asylum-seekers, undocumented workers, migrants and victims of racist attacks

- The right to asylum and an end to detention, deportation, vouchers and dispersal

- An end to racism and racist violence

The idea for the caravan comes from Germany, where it has been an important and successful tool developed by the anti-racist movement.

The Caravan brings together black families, asylum-seekers and those

working to defend their rights.

In each place the Caravan visits there will be a variety of events, such as public meetings, anti-racist festivals, pickets and demonstrations.

The caravan is visiting hostels and detention centres to expose the conditions under which asylum-seekers are forced to live and travelling to rural areas where black families are often isolated in their struggles against racism. Wherever we go, we will seek to provide practical support and help.

The original timetable for the caravan was delayed because of the fuel crisis though a number of pre-planned events went ahead on a more ad-hoc basis.

Following a successful public meeting of over 200 people in Leicester to greet the



The Caravan rolls into Leicester

caravan, a new group was established to support asylum seekers and victims of racist attacks in the area.

They went to Oxford for the Barbed Wire Europe Conference and the subsequent demonstration at Campfield, at both of which the speakers were well received by activists present.

The links they made between fighting immigration detention and other aspects of racism strengthened the debate already taking place during the conference.

The caravan also participated in a successful workshop at the Brighton S26 conference and in the subsequent demonstration to Labour Party Conference.

The rest of the Calendar is:

London, 14 October

National demonstration against racism on the anniversary of the disappearance of Ricky Reel. Assemble 1pm, Embankment, London

Margate, 20 October

12:00pm, Caravan arrives in Margate. Walk from the sea front to St. Paul's Community Centre
1:00pm, Gathering at community centre
3:00pm, public meeting at community centre
7:00pm, party in Dover

Dover, 22 October

11:00am, Meet up at

Market Square
11:00-12:00pm, Leaflet around Market Square
12:00-1:00pm, Civil Rights walk from town centre to the sea front

1:00pm, Vigil at sea front
4:00-5:00pm, Visit to reception centre at Ashford

Coventry, 27 October

2:00pm, Demonstration with asylum seekers in local park

Birmingham, 28 October

2:00-4:00pm, public rally in Victoria Square
4:00-7:00pm, Civil Rights Caravan convoy through inner city
7:00-9:00pm, reception

hosted by City Council
9:00pm, benefit social, fund-raising event with live band and DJs

Manchester, 29 October

Public meeting to be confirmed

Join the Civil Rights Caravan:

Contact us by e-mail: CaravanforCivilRights@ncadc.demon.co.uk Or phone: 020-7837 1450
Or fax: 0870 052 5899
Or post: CARF Caravan, BM Box 8784, London WC1N 3XX

Flying pickets can stop airline deportations!

One of the forms of direct action that was much discussed at the Barbed Wire Europe conference in Oxford was the increasing number of actions being taken at airports to prevent deportations. VERONICA FAGAN looks at the campaign to prevent the deportation of Amanj Gafor and the plans to widen these forms of action.

SADLY the battle to prevent the deportation of Amanj Gafor from Britain was not finally successful. On August 13 he was removed by boat after a four-and-a-half year struggle, during which he had sought asylum in six EU countries.

Nevertheless many milestones were passed in this fight. During his seven month campaign to stay in Britain, activists stopped two removal attempts by British

Airways and one by Lufthansa.

A sea blockade was also planned but, in the end, Amanj made the decision to go - a decision that was reluctantly respected by his supporters. He had been ground down by his wholesale rejection in Fortress Europe.

He is now being held in a refugee camp in Germany, awaiting removal to Iraqi-Kurdistan, from where he fled for his life in 1996. An oppositionist to Saddam's regime, he had refused conscription into the army.

The day before his removal from the UK, Amanj said

"I will not beg those who do not want me anymore, the solicitors, the governments. I know it is not people's wish, but now I want go back and fight.

"I leave behind me a new-found family in the UK - those who came to visit me in detention, the trade unionists that adopted me, the many supporters that I will never know, the protesters who faced police lines and the courts for myself and others.

"Now, I prefer to fight, and pay the price of death for my

beliefs, in Iraq, and to stand proud in the face of tyranny rather than beg for the human rights that Europe doesn't offer any more."

On the first attempt to remove him by plane, Amanj fought until the last moment, struggling physically against his captors who bound and handcuffed him on British Airways flight BA4715. Amanj's struggle won the compassion of the pilot and flight crew, who refused to take off.

Passenger

On August 3 the government tried to remove Amanj secretly. He was booked as a passenger on a Lufthansa flight from Heathrow Airport, but this was cancelled, and Amanj was re-booked on a BA flight from Gatwick, without any prior communication with his solicitor. Amanj resisted being put on the flight and was taken to Tinsley House Detention Centre.

British Airways, who were initially in charge of the deportation, were annoyed about the protest at their check-in desk; they are aware of the bad image they create

with such activities.

BA are making millions from Labour's immigration policies. But the chosen alternative, Lufthansa, has no better record: they are the official German deportation transport.

Supporters managed to mobilise people to come to the airports to stop Amanj's deportation but, due to the tough action of the police, the action was fragmented.

Airport authorities applied obscure 1950s bylaws, and although they were unable to quote which ones, they demanded protesters leave the airport.

The police acted using the same arguments. A photographer reported a scene where "protesters were being dragged away despite no apparent signs of provocation, television crews were blocked by airport staff from filming the outrage."

When activists unfolded banners at the Lufthansa check-in point with slogans such as "Amanj must stay", "Deportation is a crime", "Unfasten your seat-belts! Stand up for human rights" and "Stop these cruel deportations", they were asked to

remove them immediately. When chanting started they were asked to stop.

They did manage to leaflet the passengers informing them of the kind of action they were planning.

On the leaflet passengers were asked to demand the pilot refuse to take off and thereby prevent the deportation taking place.

An activist managed to get onto the plane, but didn't act because - obviously - he couldn't see Amanj among the passengers.

The plan was to stand up informing the passengers of what was going on until the pilot decided to take Amanj off the flight. This kind of action was initiated by the CAGE group, who managed to stop the deportation of the Zairean Salim Rambo.

Union

The intervention of the PCS (the union representing air traffic control workers) which circulated the campaign's communique through its affiliates, was very positive.

The reaction of the majority of passengers was very supportive. There are will be

more possibilities for this kind of action at future deportations.

To send letters or messages of support to Amanj in Germany please contact:

AMANG GHAFUR
(Ref No: 2543036-438)

LRA
Auslanderbehrode
Oberstadt
1-84130-Dingolfing
Germany

A national campaign against airlines who help the UK Government enforce their immigration rules by carrying deportees, is to be launched on October 14th 2000.

British Airways are the largest carriers of deportees and make millions out of this 'legal trafficking'. BA are to be the first target.

■ If you want to be part of the action, contact National Coalition against Deportation Campaigns, 110 Hamstead Road, Handsworth, Birmingham B20 2QS,
Phone: 0121-554-6947
Fax: 0870-055-4570
E-Mail
ncadc@ncadc.demon.co.uk

Declaration of Prague, (Sept 28)

We, the members of non-governmental and community-based organisations from different parts of the world, gathered in Prague and signing this statement, note the unprecedented early suspension of the 2000 Annual General meeting of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Given the number of scheduled sessions, including meetings with non-governmental organisations, that will evidently be cancelled, the claim that they have simply finished their business rings hollow.

We believe that the cancellation of the final day of meetings reflects the institutions' recognition of their own lack of credibility. Confronted with vigorous protests from organisations like ours and a refusal to accept the empty rhetoric of "poverty reduction" and "debt relief" offered in response to assertions of their responsibility for decades of economic malfeasance, they have, at last, wisely chosen silence over more lies.

Our challenge to the right of these institutions and those who control them to dictate economic policy, largely through the leverage gained through illegitimate debts, has gone unanswered. Our call for a wholly new global economic structure, one which mandates not a single model but many choices for the many peoples of the world, is one that these institutions cannot accept, or even comprehend.

We gathered in Prague for an exceptionally broad, inclusive, international protest against the discriminatory and unjust policies of the IMF and the World Bank. We oppose the undemocratic and elitist character of both the institutions and the meetings they hold.

Our numbers include a great many young activists as well as people from Central and Eastern Europe who have now inaugurated the movement against corporate globalisation in this region. Our numbers also include protesters in over 30 other countries, including Bangladesh, South Africa, Argentina, the United States, France, and India, who staged solidarity actions this week.

We came to Prague to act in solidarity with the millions who could not be in Prague: the impoverished women farmers of Africa, the workers laid off in Asia, the Pacific and Caribbean islanders denied credit for their livelihoods, the young women working in Latin American sweatshops.

We have spent our time in Prague not only protesting, but also discussing positive, people-centred alternatives to the debt crisis, structural adjustment programs, corrupt and environmentally devastating infrastructure projects, and the economic philosophy of development through exploitation of both the ecology and large majorities of the people in the South and in the East.

At the same time we denounce the psychological terror and physical repression executed by the Czech police forces before and during the conference of the IMF and

World Bank. Their actions, notwithstanding instances of provocative behaviour by a few protesters, have injured dozens of innocent people and resulted in hundreds of unjustified arrests during and after the essentially peaceful demonstrations. We express our solidarity with the hundreds who remain imprisoned, and call for humane treatment and speedy release of all those detained.

We particularly express our grave concern over reports of brutalisation of those held in Czech prisons.

We note that the World Bank itself has acknowledged this month that its policies are failing. Its World Development Report, although subjected to censorship within the institution, offers a revealing critique of the growth-centred development philosophy that has long been the Bank's adamant answer to every question. And its report on the transition economies of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe has revealed a tenfold increase in poverty, from 2% to 21%, a clear indication that the neo-liberal recipe peddled by the IMF and World Bank has failed yet another entire region of the globe.

Given the evidence supplied by the World Bank itself, we would suggest that it and the IMF, and the commentators who continue to support them, consider that their calls for more of the same medicine, more of the same conditionalities, are inadequate. A revolution in economics is called for, one that returns control of economies to the people who live in them. The time has come to put economics at the service of the people, rather than entire societies at the service of economic models that have failed for over 20 years.

Our protests in Prague, following those in Melbourne, Okinawa, Geneva, Chiang Mai, Washington, Seattle, and countless other cities, have again exposed to the world the contradictions and inadequacies of corporate globalisation, and of the IMF and World Bank.

Our protests also echo the struggles going on today in Bolivia, one of the many places where people from many sectors have risen up against the local manifestations of the globalised economy.

So long as that model continues to be imposed by the rich and the powerful, organisations like ours shall continue to protest and to do everything in our power to expose the plain failures of the system. Wherever those who have taken upon themselves the power to make decisions for the global economy will gather, we will be there to witness, to expose, and to protest.

Focus on the Global South - Thailand, (INPEG) - Czech Republic, 50 Years Is Enough Network - USA, EuroMarches Against Unemployment - Austria, ATTAC France, Jubilee 2000 South Africa/Jubilee South - South Africa, Center for Economic & Policy Research - USA, Rights Action - USA, National Free Union of Students - Germany, Zaslava Trade Union - Armenia, Association - Russia, Committee for the Cancellation of the Third World Debt - COCAD



Welcome to the free market of neo-liberalism: Czech riot cops put on a display for the anti-capitalist protestors

Prague Diary

**Campbell
McGregor,
Glasgow Kelvin
SSP**

**Friday 22
September**

I got a cheap flight from Glasgow to Frankfurt and a night train to Prague, to take part in the protests against the IMF/World Bank conference.

Saturday 23

I took part in a legal labour movement march through Prague, with about 3000 people.

Sunday 24th

I attended a large discussion which was part of the counter-summit.

It was announced that a train from Italy containing protesters had been stopped at the border, and that a protest at this would take place near the Sparta football ground.

There was an impromptu march to the city centre, police looked on but did not do anything. Later, I took part in a sit-down protest on Charles Bridge. There were cheers when it was announced that the train had been allowed through.

Monday 25

This was a quiet day so I visited Prague Castle. In the evening I attended a discussion meeting between various Trotskyist groups, and sold some material from the Irish group Socialist Democracy.

Tuesday 26

The first day of the IMF/World Bank conference. Around 10,000 protesters gathered in Peace Square to march on the conference. I told a journalist from Red Pepper "I was thinking of going to

Majorca for a week, this is much more fun".

The plan was to divide into 3 groups who would march on the conference 3 ways. I was with the largest group, eventually we came to a narrow bridge blocked by riot police. They were standing behind a crowd control barrier, wearing gas masks, with batons drawn. They had an armoured car with a water cannon aimed at the protesters.

A message was broadcast in several languages "Citizens! The police of the Czech Republic wishes to inform you that this gathering is illegal. We ask you to leave peacefully. If not then the forces of order will take whatever action is necessary"

I went up to the line of riot police, and said to one "Hello friend. (in Czech) I think it's a really rotten job you're got. You must be feeling really hot in all that gear." Some of the protesters put on makeshift riot gear like gas masks.

We spent over 2 hours facing each other. This was a pretty hairy experience. I realised that there was the serious risk of getting hit by the water cannon, so I put my Czech phrase book (borrowed from Glasgow City Libraries) in a waterproof bag.

Towards the end I really thought that the protesters were going to make a serious attempt to force through the police lines, and a few stones were thrown. Instead the apparent organisers announced that we should all go to the Opera House, where an event involving the conference delegates was going to take place.

I felt that the protest could be dying down, so I decided to go to the railway station, 2 stops away by under-

ground, to deal with a query. At the first stop up the line everyone was told to leave the train, apparently the authorities were shutting down this line.

I had difficulty finding the Opera House (the maps in the Time Out guide to Prague are not very good. Then I noticed a police helicopter circling - there was the Opera House.

Protesters were surrounding the building, preventing any event from being held. I noticed nearby at the top of Wenceslas Square that a MacDonalds had a heavy police guard. Later I noticed that it had been trashed, presumably the police had been temporarily outnumbered.

The riot police assembled further down Wenceslas Square, when they started moving up most protesters stampeded very easily, but there did seem to be a few hardened street fighters looking for a serious fight.

I saw the police fire tear gas, and a protester throw the canister back at them.

Firecrackers went off, a few people were arrested. I got away as soon as I felt it was safe to move. I heard there were sporadic fights with the police during the evening. Later I saw a convoy of 14 police vehicles speed past.

Wednesday 27

I got the train back to Frankfurt. It was quite a few days!

There has been some discussion about the Prague events in the left press in Britain.

There are valid questions to be asked about the organisation of the protest and problems of democratic accountability. I had doubts over whether the best route was chosen on the day.

However given the forces involved, on the whole, the protesters did well to achieve as much as they did. They took over part of central Prague, the conference was seriously disrupted, the Czech authorities were forced to mount a military-style operation.

I feel it was correct that the main group of protesters did not try to force their way through the police lines (although another group did get very near the conference) but this is a concrete assessment based on the balance of forces, not a matter of principle.

The sporadic fights later in the evening were not helpful, but we should understand the anger behind them.

The protesters seemed to be a diverse collection of leftists from across Europe, with a limited base in the labour movement in their own countries. I did notice a UNISON banner, and Rifundazione Comunista from Italy was officially represented.

There was little sign of Czech involvement (one Czech protester I spoke to said that there had been a lot of anti-communist propaganda) although curiously most of those arrested in the evening were Czechs.

To have achieved much more would really have needed a higher level of involvement by the labour movement, particularly the Czech labour movement.

The labour movement should support those who were arrested and protest strongly against their ill treatment.

Many of those in Prague hope to carry out similar protests world-wide next May Day. The labour movement in Britain should discuss how to respond.

Washington plans "fumigation" – and military bases in major new Latin American offensive

First Colombia – but where next?

WHEN Bill Clinton visited Colombia on August 30, his primary purpose was to give his personal endorsement to Plan Colombia which he claims is anti-narcotics and pro-peace. GEAROID O LOINGSIGH explains why he was lying on both counts.

Plan Colombia consists of a \$7 billion programme in primarily military aid to the Colombian army in a so called war on drugs. The Colombian government will provide \$4 billion and the USA will provide \$1.3 billion, with the shortfall being made up with EU and Japanese money.

Most of the money will be spent on equipping three new anti-narcotic battalions of the Colombian army with 30 new Blackhawk and Huey helicopters, along with other equipment and logistical support.

Part of the budget is destined for 'social' programmes such as helping the internally displaced population. Almost 2 million of Colombia's 40 million population has been forced off their land in the last 10 years.

They will not receive one cent from the Plan Colombia as its money is destined to provide emergency cover for a few days to those that the three anti-narcotic battalions will displace.

Plan Colombia has been publicly presented as a plan to eradicate coca and heroin poppy production in Colombia and consequently reduce the supply and consumption of the finished products heroin and cocaine.

The eradication programme will take the form of aerial fumigation through the application of up to 13.47 litres per hectare of Roundup – a descendant of Agent Orange – in the Colombian Amazon and Orinoco basins – resulting in an increase in deforestation and destruction of the environment.

However, coca is a resilient plant and grows back within 6 months of being fumigated.

Furthermore, it has been proven through past experiences in Peru and Bolivia that fumigation only moves the production of coca from one region to another or from one country to another as has been seen with the transfer of



Who is really in command of armed police on the streets of Colombia?

production from Peru and Bolivia to Colombia in the 1990s.

Peasant farmers are being presented as the source of all evil – even though a farmer makes only \$100 on a kilo that will eventually sell for \$150,000 in Europe.

The drug mafias in North America and Europe who receive over 85% of the profits from the drugs trade will not be touched by the plan. Neither will those US and German companies that make legal profits from the drugs trade be touched (The US and Germany are the main legal suppliers of acetone and ether two essential ingredients in the production of cocaine).

Needless to say the banks and brokering firms through which the money is laundered will not be touched either.

Imperialism and the internal armed conflict

Coca is a tropical plant and unlike marijuana and heroin cannot be grown outside of tropical areas like the Amazon basin.

The Amazon basin in Colombia is a region which was never integrated into the state and with the rise of the insurgency, most of this region fell under the control of the FARC with the exception of some of the larger towns.

The FARC have for some time levied a tax on drug barons buying coca paste in

the areas they control. Such taxes raise in the region of \$500 million per year for their war effort (approximately 1% of the street sale value).

Consequently any military action taken against peasant farmers growing coca in FARC areas will mean taking military action against the FARC and thus escalating the conflict.

The US are no strangers to involvement in Colombia. For many years Colombia has been the third largest recipient of US military aid after Israel and Egypt. There are also a large number of military advisors in the country.

Some have pointed to parallels with Vietnam. However, even imperialism learns its lesson. Those who expect the marines to land in a rerun of Vietnam and Santo Domingo will be disappointed – unless there is a major change in the political landscape of Latin America that makes it necessary.

US interests are wider than Colombia, and its strategy is more long term. We should not however underestimate their role in Colombia itself.

US officials have already publicly stated that regardless of what happens in the peace process with the FARC (the process with the ELN counts little in terms of the Plan Colombia) the fumigations will go ahead, and con-



sequently so will the military activity in those areas.

In other words, the US government decides the course of war and peace according to its own interests. It reserves the right to scupper any agreement that is arrived at should it not concur with their own position.

Colombia though is only one factor in the equation. The excuse of the war on drugs has allowed the US present other plans to Latin American governments which do not depend entirely on the success or otherwise of

Plan Colombia. US bases

Apparently as part of an anti-narcotics strategy the US has persuaded a number of governments to allow it to set up what are called Forward Operating Locations (FOL).

These are essentially US bases in Latin America, even though the personnel are often local troops ostensibly under the command of US officers who have ultimate control.

The US have set up FOL in Honduras, Ecuador, Colombia, Curacao, Peru and Brazil. Added to that the border countries with Colombia have agreed to militarise their borders with Colombia.

The US thus finds itself in a position of being able to command considerable logistical military resources in various points of Latin America even though the same govern-

ments are somewhat hesitant at taking the next logical step of forming a multinational force of intervention made up of Latin American armies but responding to US plans.

Although Brazil, one of the major players in the zone, has thrown cold water on the idea of such a force, it is not altogether buried.

Essentially the US has engaged in a kite-flying exercise. There is no need for such a force at the moment to intervene in the Colombian internal armed conflict but the idea has been mooted, and what objections exist are merely tactical.

Counter productive

No government has spoken out against such a move in principle, but rather on the grounds that it would be counter productive.

In the 1970s the main threat to imperialist interests existed in the Southern Cone countries. This threat was neutralised through the imposition of military dictatorships.

These dictatorships gave way in the 1980s and 1990s to regimes that equally guaranteed imperialist interests without the bad PR of disappearances and torture centres (although the fear that they might return never fully went away).

In the 1980s the threat to imperialism was to be found in central America, primarily the Sandinista government of Nicaragua and the insurgencies of El Salvador (FMLN) and Guatemala (URNG).

These countries represented a threat to imperialism through their example more than the economic loss they represented to imperialism (though it was the loss of plantations owned by United Fruits that prompted the US coup in Guatemala in the 1950s).

Colombia on the other hand is potentially the seventh richest nation on the planet. It is the largest coal producer in Latin America, a major producer of oil, gold, emeralds, and uranium and is a major enough player in the banana and coffee trade to be able to hold world markets to ransom.

There are also plans to build a new 'dry canal' to replace the Panama canal: it will run through Uraba, the most violent region in Colombia.

With 'Plan Colombia' imperialism not only guarantees its control over Colombia and its wealth – but also gains through the FOL the opportunity to formalise its military influence by building logistical centres of operations under US command throughout Latin America.

Should the production of coca be displaced anew to Bolivia and Peru, the US may seek to expand the number of FOL in operation.

Essentially the US gains control over Colombia, which has borders with five other mainly important players in the area (Ecuador being the minor player), and establishes its right to extend its operation further afield.

Plan Colombia is the plan for the re-hegemonisation of the Americas by the US with EU cooperation and the good will of the Latin American governments themselves.

■ For further information on campaigning against Plan Colombia contact the Latin America Solidarity Collective, PO Box 8446, London N17 6NZ Tel 07950 923 448 E-mail lascollective@hotmail.com

Rebellion in Palestine "We are a people"

Roland Rance

The latest Palestinian uprising marks a decisive turning point in the history of the Palestine conflict. It has put a definitive end to the period of diplomatic negotiations which opened with the 1990 Gulf War and the 1991 Madrid conference. It also exposes the terminal bankruptcy of the Labour Zionist strategy, with the probable establishment of a broad coalition government, and the likely creation of a new national party led by ex-generals Ehud Barak and Ariel Sharon.

The most significant aspect of this uprising is the massive involvement of Palestinian citizens of Israel. There have been previous massacres by Israeli forces of Palestinian citizens; notably Kufr Qassem in 1956, when 49 peasants were shot for breaking a curfew imposed after they had left for their fields, and Land Day in 1976, when six villagers were killed in a protest at the theft of their land under the official policy of "Judaising Galilee".

What is new this time is both the level of Palestinian anger (with protests and demonstrations in virtually every village, town and urban ghetto), and the clear declaration of a common purpose with Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and those in exile.

Although there are specific reasons for Palestinian protest in Israel (ongoing theft of land, systematic institutionalised discrimination, denial of resources), this was clearly a rising in protest at the killings in Jerusalem. As such, it represents a Palestinian reassertion of the principle first stated, for the Jews, by Theodor Herzl, founder of the Zionist movement: "We are a people - one people".

The Palestinians are not simply resisting Israel's intransigence in the recent Camp David talks; they are rejecting the whole basis of separation behind these talks, and ultimately behind the existence of Israel as a racist state.

The rising comes barely two weeks after a chain of demonstrations, in Palestine itself, the refugee camps in exile, and around the world (including London), calling for the realisation of the Palestinian right to return. These demonstrations were organised independently of the increasingly discredited PLO, by a generation of young Palestinians, the children and grandchildren of people expelled in 1948.

It is unlikely that these renewed energies will be satisfied with the Bantustan-type solution which was the maximum offered by Barak at Camp David.

The bloodshed started with the provocative visit of Likud leader Sharon to Haram ash-Sharif, the compound in the Old City of Jerusalem containing the Al-Aqsa and Dome of the Rock mosques, and allegedly the site of the biblical temple. But it would be wrong to

ascribe all responsibility to Sharon, as some simple-minded supporters of the Israel government are attempting.

Sharon, a famously secular Jew, was not paying a private prayer visit before the Jewish New Year. His visit, accompanied by an estimated 3000 troops, came one day after the decision of the Attorney General not to prosecute former Likud leader Binyamin Netanyahu for corruption.

Netanyahu's promised return to politics threatens not only Sharon's position as head of the Likud, but also Barak's own position as prime minister. Opinion polls suggest that Netanyahu would defeat any rival for the position.

Barak's willingness to provide Sharon with such a huge escort, his crude threats to end the "peace process", to wage war on Syria and Lebanon, and to reoccupy Palestinian cities, and the discussions between Barak and Sharon towards a national coalition government, add credence to the suggestion by some Israeli activists that the entire provocation was a deliberate ploy by the two generals to upstage Netanyahu's political comeback and put an end to the diplomatic process.

But, however much Barak may threaten, it is doubtful whether it is within President Yasser Arafat's power to put an end to this revolt.

In 1987, both Israel and the PLO professed to believe that the Intifada had started in response to an order issued by Arafat from Tunis. To most observers, it was obvious that the spontaneous uprising, despite its verbal support for the PLO, was in reality a threat to Arafat's continued ineffectual diplomatic manoeuvring.

This was the reason both Israel and the PLO leadership were prepared to negotiate a deal in which the PLO would police the occupation on Israel's behalf. As *Socialist Outlook* has consistently argued, such a deal was inherently fragile, since the maximum Israel was prepared to always less than the minimum Palestinians were prepared to accept.

The bourgeois press is mistaken to argue that this uprising strengthens Arafat's hand in the diplomatic manoeuvring with Israel. In fact, it leaves his strategy in tatters, and Israeli pressure only deepens this.

If he accepts the Israeli ultimatum, he will be unable to rein in the Palestinian masses, and will become an irrelevance, if not an obstacle to be removed. If, on the other hand, he now takes the side of the Palestinian masses, he will be swept aside by the Israelis, for whom he no longer fulfils a purpose, while being unable to mobilise the masses and outline a clear strategy.

The uprising also puts a definitive end to the dream of a moderate, concessionary Zionism.

It has become clear that the apparently open hand of friendship which Barak offered the



Palestinians is in reality the same "Iron Fist" which his mentor Yitzhak Rabin promised during the earlier Intifada. At the last Israeli election, Barak attracted over 90% of the Palestinian vote; enough to give him the post of prime minister. Immense pressure was exerted on the independent Arab candidate, Azmi Bishara, to withdraw in order not to split the "left" vote and let in the right-wing Netanyahu.

But, from the moment of his election, Barak has repudiated his Arab backers, refusing to base his coalition on the Arab parties in the Knesset, and seeking support

would have the virtue of clarifying the real political issues in the Palestine conflict. Ten years ago, only marginal forces on the left used the term "apartheid" to describe Israel's practices, in the state of Israel as much as in the 1967-occupied territories.

Now the term is common currency on the Israeli left. Not only on the left, in fact. On 28 September, *Ha'Aretz* the liberal Israeli paper, quoted former Shin Bet (security service) head Ami Ayalon as saying that no "real" Palestinian state (with full sovereignty and economic resources) will be established.

will be viable.

The increasing politicisation of Israel's Mizrahi population - Jews from Arab countries, who have suffered racism and economic exploitation in the Jewish state, and form the overwhelming majority of the Israeli working class - demonstrates the need and space for a mass class-based party which will take up the struggle against this apartheid, and for a common future for all of the people of Palestine, and those who have been expelled.

However, at present the prospect for such a party seems remote. The Palestinian left is dispirited, with PFLP leader George Habash quitting the organisation he led for over 30 years in despair.

The Israeli left is rudderless and demoralised, split between those who see Barak and the Labour Party as preferable to Sharon or Netanyahu and the Likud, and those who see no difference between them.

New forces are developing among both communities, around the right to return, and in opposition to apartheid. The task of the left now is to find a way to knit these two strands together, into a democratic movement for a democratic state in the whole of Palestine.

The alternative is now apparent to all, summed up in the horrific film of the murder of a terrified Palestinian child.



among those who voted for Netanyahu. Under his government, the pace of settlement activity has increased. Meanwhile, his promise to the Israeli public of "peace with security" has collapsed. Despite his reputation as Israel's most decorated soldier, the man who dressed as a woman in order to infiltrate Beirut and assassinate Palestinian leaders, he is now seen as a political failure.

The Palestinian uprising and the renewed threat of war with Syria are likely to be used as the justification for a new

government of national unity, bringing in Sharon as deputy prime minister and possibly defence minister. The real reason for this will be to preserve the political careers of these two Arab-killing generals.

It is also possible that they will attempt to build a new Israeli National party. The ideological differences between them are minimal; Sharon's political career started in the Labour party, before he quit over personal differences in order to found the Likud, while Barak has already dissolved the Labour Party into the non-ideological "One Israel" bloc.

Such a government and party

Israel has just two options: "to become a state without any Jewish characteristic, or to become an Apartheid state". At the same time, the demand for the Palestinian right to return was seen as extreme and marginal; it is now clear that no solution which denies this right

Free Mordechai Vanunu now! For a nuclear-free Middle East!

Mordechai Vanunu, the nuclear whistle-blower convicted by an Israeli court of "aiding an enemy state in time of war" and sentenced to eighteen years in prison, after being illegally kidnapped by Israeli agents in Rome in 1986, has been returned to solitary confinement.

Since his arrest, Vanunu has been held for over 11 1/2 years in solitary, in an attempt to destroy his mind. Israeli authorities are outraged not only by his revelation of the size of their nuclear arsenal, but also by his conversion to Christianity, which is viewed as an even greater treason.

Vanunu's regular requests to be imprisoned with Palestinian political prisoners, rather than Jewish criminals, have all been rejected. He has now been told that he will not be eligible for any parole, and cannot expect to be released before 2004.

A 12-hour vigil outside the Israeli embassy in London on 30 September, the fourteenth anniversary of Vanunu's kidnapping, was supported by Tony Benn, Jeremy Corbyn, Harold Pinter, Benjamin Zephaniah, Bruce Kent and many other political and cultural figures. The defence campaign continues to hold regular pickets every Saturday.

Further information at <http://www.vanunu.freeserve.co.uk/>

Why the planet cannot live with global capitalism

It is becoming more and more apparent that ecological struggles are central to creating socialism.

The protests against the IMF, World Bank and WTO at Seattle, Washington and Prague have shown how important environmental questions are to building a movement against globalisation.

At the same time the rising price of oil, the impact of global warming, increases in atmospheric pollution and a host of other developments have placed 'green' issues at the centre of political debate.

But what do Marxists have to offer in this area? Does the rise of the ecological movement mean that Marxism has become less relevant - or does that movement need Marxist ideas to fulfil its radical potential?

ANDY KILMISTER reports.

A great deal of the thought of Marx and Engels was centred on issues that we would now recognise as ecological. Engels' book *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, written as long ago as 1844, discusses not just the situation in workplaces and trade unions, but also the environment in which workers lived in Manchester.

He outlines the effect of industrialisation on the air they breathed and the water they drank and devotes many pages to the dramatic effect of industrialisation on the landscape of the North East. In a similar way, Marx's great work *Capital* looks at questions like food adulteration, and links this to the low wages of workers which force them to eat bread mixed with alum, dust and chalk, as well as to the intensification of work in the baking trade.

Recent works like John Bellamy Foster's *Marx's Ecology* (Monthly Review Press) have shown how central ecological ideas have been to the Marxist tradition since its birth.

For Marx, capitalism has two central characteristics which make it incompatible with preserving the earth's ecology. Firstly, capitalism has an inherent drive towards commodification. Throughout its history things previously held in common have been taken into private ownership in the pursuit of profit.

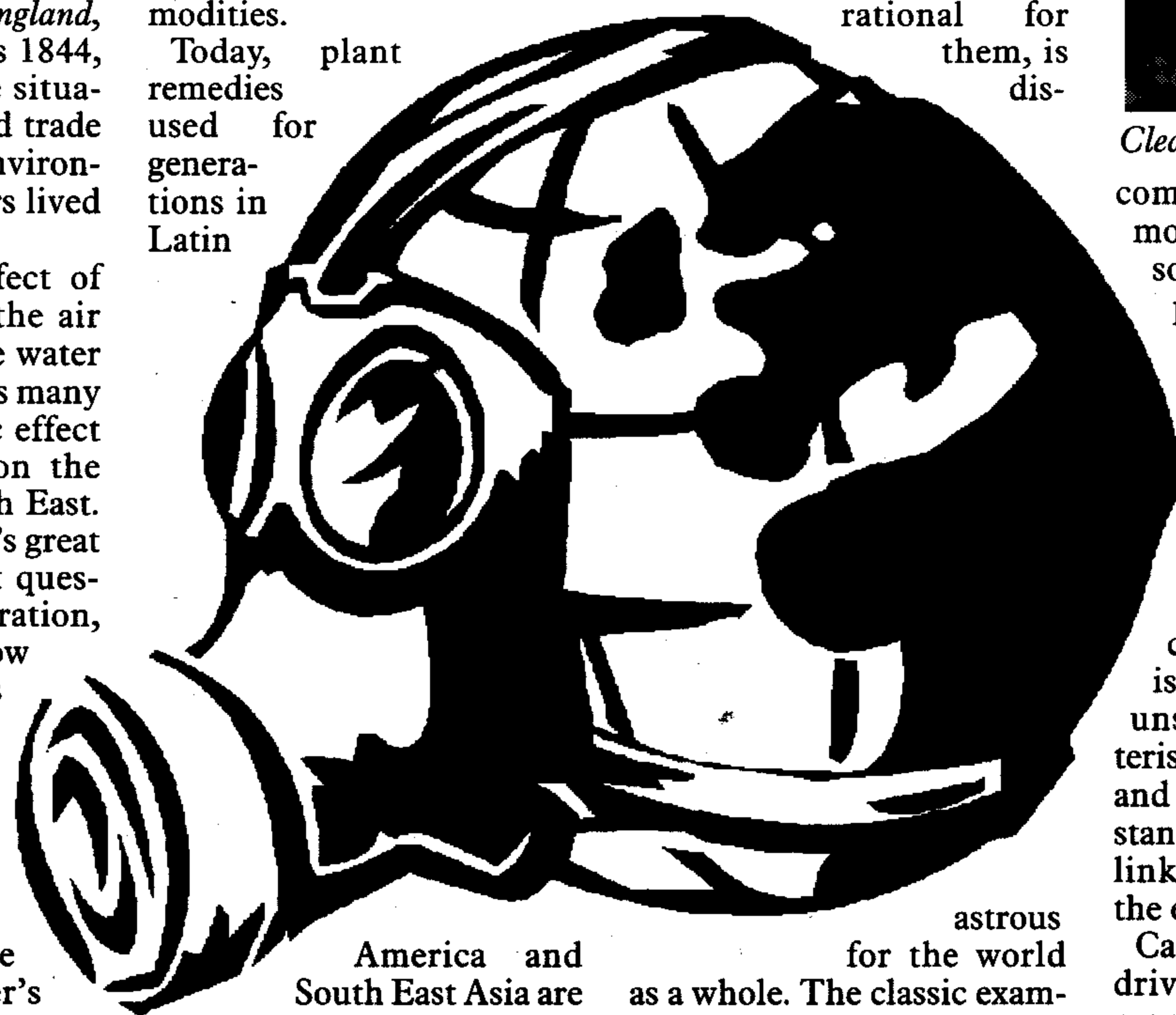
The first example of this, which provided the basis for

the foundation of capitalism, was the enclosure of common land, from the sixteenth century onwards. But since then capitalism has depended on transforming freely held objects into private commodities.

Today, plant remedies used for generations in Latin

whole are ignored as commodity-owners concentrate on maximising the returns from their particular spoils.

What might, from their individual perspective as capitalists, appear rational for them, is dis-



America and South East Asia are being patented by US and European multinationals. Indian rice growers have seen the recipe for Basmati rice, which they have grown for centuries appropriated by foreign companies.

Even the genetic structure of individuals who have undergone particular medical treatments is now being patented by pharmaceutical firms.

This means that the environment has increasingly become fragmented into private commodities. The complex links between different parts of this interrelated

astrous for the world as a whole. The classic examples of this are world-wide phenomena like global warming and the destruction of the ozone layer, where capitalist production actually threatens the survival of the planet.

The second characteristic of capitalism which is incompatible with environmental security is its drive towards expansionism.

Capitalism is unique among the various economic systems ("modes of production" in Marx's terms) which have existed until now, in the way it depends upon continuous expansion for its economic viability.

Profits for capitalists depend upon exploiting living labour in the process of production. As capitalism develops, such labour works with an ever-increasing amount of machinery and fixed capital - which does not generate new profits.

If production remained at the same level, this would tend to drive down the rate of profits, and threaten future production.

So, to maintain profits, productivity has to increase, generating more and more



Clearing up after an oil spill: the drive for profits means cutting corners on health and safety

commodities. These commodities in turn have to be sold to realise the new profits, either by the creation of new geographical markets or by generating new "needs" for products among either capitalists or workers.

This movement towards expansion is a characteristic of capitalism (though it is a deeply unstable process characterised by alternating booms and slumps). But it is in constant conflict with the fragile linkages binding together the earth's ecology.

Capitalism's expansionary drive has shaped the environment for centuries, for example in its discovery and exploitation of new sources of energy. But it has done so in a deeply distorted way, governed not by any long-term plan of developing the world's resources, but by the immediate pressure of the market.

These two characteristics of capitalism make it fundamentally opposed to ecological sustainability, as Marx and Engels recognised.

However, this opposition takes dramatically different forms in different historical periods. The ecological crises generated by capitalism are in many ways similar to economic crises.

At each point capitalist production generates ecological contradictions which in turn threaten the stability of the system. Such crises are resolved, but in a way which in turn sets up future contradictions and tensions.

However, until such contradictions become apparent it can appear that the market can generate the basis for preserving the environment - in the way that, for example in Eastern Europe today, capitalist firms like Asea Brown Boveri are making environmental reclamation a central

part of their foreign investment strategy.

Tracing the links between capitalism and environmental destruction cannot just be done by looking at the abstract nature of capitalism as a system, but requires concrete analysis of particular historical periods.

What then are the particular contradictions between the current phase of capitalist production, globalisation backed up by an international neo-liberal offensive, and ecological sustainability?

There are a whole range of examples which could be pointed to here. The following three seem particularly appropriate, given the direction of current political struggles.

The first example is that of the exploitation of primary commodities. The recent agitation over high fuel prices and the worry of capitalists about the price of oil only underlines the extent to which growth in the imperialist countries over the last two decades has depended on low commodity prices.

Apart from oil, these

remain at record low levels, and even oil is still only half its 1980 price in real terms. The ability of the US economy in particular to grow for the last nine years without inflation rising has depended crucially on these low prices.

How has this been achieved? In the long boom following World War 2 commodity prices were kept low by the systematic application of science to the production of synthetic substitutes.

But by the 1970s this potential was largely exhausted, leading to a dramatic rise in commodity prices and inflation.

This has been reversed since 1980 by a massive offensive in the developing world, promoting expansion of food and commodity production for export and largely reversing the development towards manufacturing of the previous decades.

A key element in allowing this has been the growth of international debt, forcing countries into expanding export revenues to pay off



The cleverest dolphins now steer clear of tuna to avoid factory ships

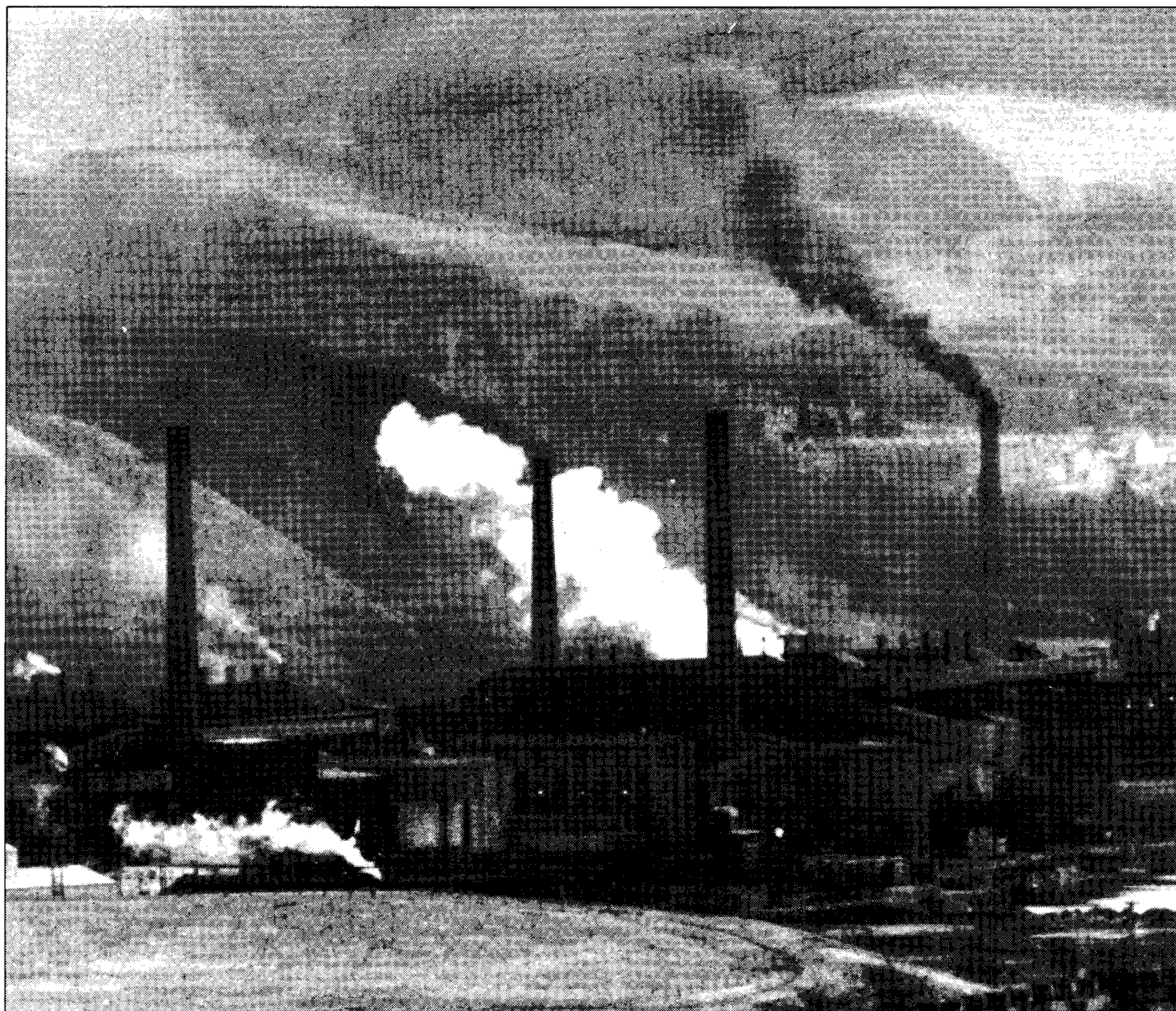
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their debts. Latin America was first in this process, followed by sub-Saharan Africa and, after 1991, the Eastern European countries and the former USSR.

The ecological consequences of this dramatic shift to export-oriented agriculture and raw materials production are obvious. The destruction of the rainforests of Latin America and South East Asia to provide timber and clear land for crops is only the clearest example.

In retrospect, the most surprising thing about the recent rise in oil prices is that it has taken so long to arrive and that it is still so limited. This is a testimony to the integration of the rulers of the Middle East into an imperialist framework.

However, the limited rise in the price of oil, partly stimulated by the slightly more independent

regime of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, is enough to scare significantly Western employers and policy makers. As the *Economist* recently observed, the rise in oil prices is not enough on its own to cause a recession.

But if it reduces confidence in the increasingly shaky US stock market, then its impact would be dramatic. Given this it is clear how deep a change would be required if global commodity use were to approach ecological sustainability.

The second example of the impact of globalisation on the environment, also apparent in the recent fuel crisis, is the rise of 'just-in-time production' - originally in the car industry, but now across large parts of the economy in

the USA, Europe and Japan.

The move towards carrying low stocks necessitates regular deliveries of goods to factories and shops. Originally in Japan, Toyota managed this by grouping suppliers around the assembling factory, in the so-called 'Toyota City'.

But gradually this raised costs, both wages and rental values, in the surrounding area. Increasingly, then, firms have started to organise just-in-time production on a widely dispersed geographical basis.

This can only be done effectively through a massive amount of transportation, and it is no accident that the rise of such production techniques over the 1980s and 90s went hand in hand with a major programme of road building, particularly across Europe, and a dramatic growth of lorry transport.

This both encouraged and was encouraged by the dereg-

The third example of the impact of globalisation on the environment comes through the massive expansion of foreign investment over the last two decades.

Not only has this increased the pace of the extraction of primary commodities described above, it has also led to the export of ecologically damaging production to countries where it has been thought that resistance will be less.

A famous example in the 1980s was the Bhopal disaster in India as a result of toxic leakages from a Union Carbide plant. To take just one case in recent years, it is worth looking at the country which is the single largest recipient of direct investment in the developing world, China.

In 1997 Richard Smith published a detailed account of the impact of economic

unfit for drinking and their fish unfit to eat. Since the 1980s some 10 million hectares of farmland have been polluted by rural industrialisation, causing losses of crops and animals worth some \$2.7 bn.

During 1992 and 1993 more than 100,000 Chinese were poisoned by pesticides and fertilisers. More than 14,000 of them died. Polluted air and respiratory disease is now the leading cause of death in urban areas of China.

In China's ten biggest cities some 3,000 tons of plastic wastes are produced every day. The government estimates that environmental losses total some \$12 billion annually.

The import of cheap commodities, the rise of just-in-time production and the expansion of foreign investment are not marginal aspects of contemporary capitalism. They are central to the whole process of globalisation and to the neo-liberal offensive. And ecological questions are central to them.

These strategies depend on the process of commodification outlined earlier, where the environment is taken into private ownership and the costs of ecological destruction are not borne by those who receive profits but are transferred to workers and to future generations.

Any struggle against globalisation has to make ecological considerations equally central to its theory and its practice, and to build on the insights of Marx and Engels in a contemporary setting.

We need to build a movement which makes the analysis of the impact of capitalism on the environment a crucial part of the struggle against the system.

"The massive expansion of foreign investment over the last two decades has led to the export of ecologically damaging production to countries where it has been thought that resistance will be less."

ulation of road haulage. Again, the ecological consequences of this change in the nature of production have been severe, leading to congestion, air pollution and the loss of countryside to tarmac.

Such costs have not been borne by the companies using these techniques, but have been passed on to society as a whole (particularly the working class, who are least able to move to areas with low transport densities) and to future generations.

conditions in China on the environment, in *New Left Review*, largely using official Chinese government figures. His findings are devastating.

Each year China discharges some 36 billion tons of untreated industrial waste water and raw sewage into the country's rivers, lakes and coastal seas. This is equivalent to the entire annual flow of the Yellow River.

Four-fifths of China's rivers and lakes are seriously polluted, with their water

COSATU SOWS seeds for workers' party

Charlie van Gelderen

THE ANNUAL congress of the Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), which has just ended in Johannesburg, while reaffirming its support for the ANC-led government, nevertheless expressed strong criticism of aspects of the government's policies.

It went so far as to threaten a general strike if the government goes ahead with key changes to labour laws which, it says, would undermine workers' gains since apartheid ended in 1994.

"We are saying to government and business, if they violate our rights, we will do to them what we've done to the apartheid regime", COSATU president, Willie Madisha, told more than 2,000 delegates in his closing address.

COSATU says that the labour law amendments would allow the labour minister to vary core labour agreements, thus removing the basic shop floor rights of workers, undermine collective bargaining and result in increased lay-offs.

The federation and the South African Communist Party, the third leg of the alliance which helped the ANC to power, also differ with the ruling party over the government's market-friendly macro-economic policy and its stance over

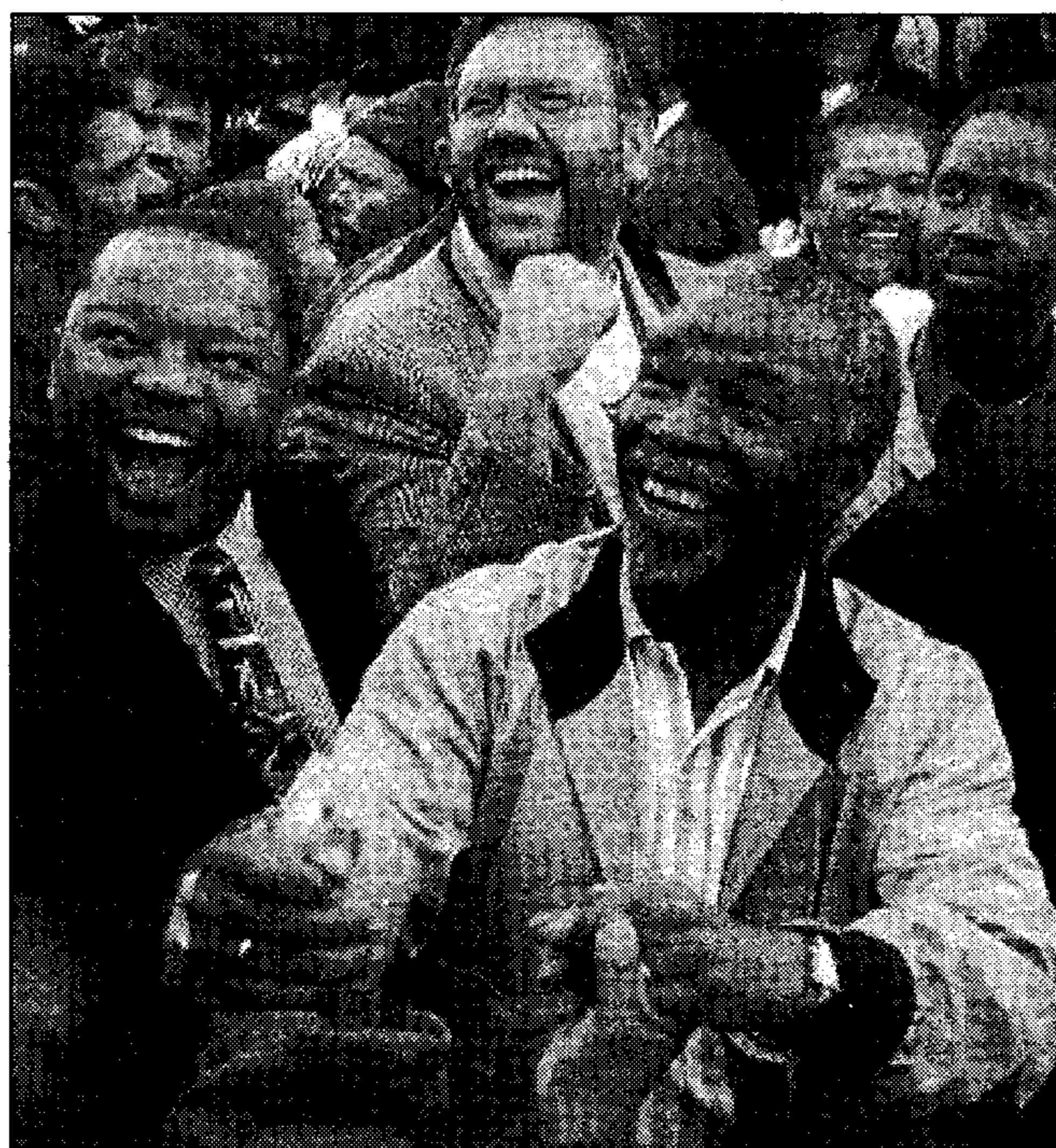
HIV/AIDS.

The congress also saw a renewed stirring towards a workers-based political party, delinked from the ruling ANC. This would be in line with a previous COSATU agreement to host conference of the Left before the end of the year.

Even the traditional resolutions of support for the ANC in the forthcoming municipal elections and in participation in the tripartite alliance met with a great deal of hostility. The National Union of Mineworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) and the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) pressed hard to make union support of the ANC - if support there had to be - strongly critical. The platform had to work hard behind the scenes to prevent these sentiments being translated into resolutions.

The congress made its almost obligatory tame commitment to socialism in "reconstructed form", by which it means a more radical version of German social democracy, arguing for a mixed economy with stakes for both the private sector and the state.

COSATU set itself two goals after the 2000 congress: to intervene at government level to translate its mass power into policy victories and to support members in industries and companies that are undergoing restructuring.



Honeymoon over; the right wing policies of Mbeki's ANC government are leading towards a split with the trade unions

Stage set for a new shift to the right

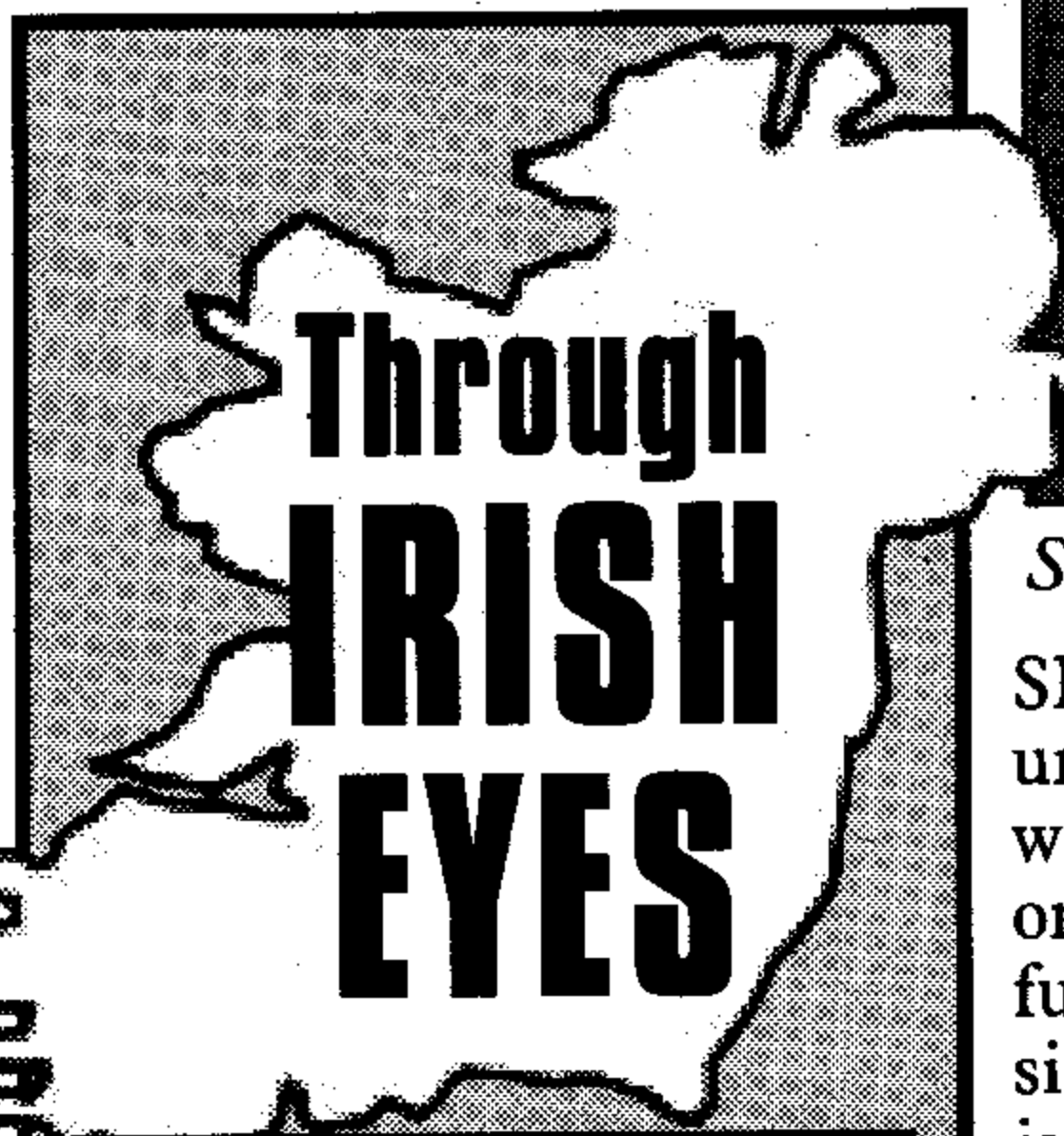
Joe Craig

The victory in the South Antrim by-election by the singing vicar of Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party against Unionist Party candidate David Burnside has plunged the peace process into yet another crisis.

There is hardly a safe unionist seat in the north and the prospect of a UK general election has focused minds in the Unionist Party.

McCrea, the vicar of loyalist mass murderer Billy 'King Rat' Wright, was pitted against Burnside, also 'opposed' to the agreement and one time PR chief of British Airways. Trimble confirmed his own moderate credentials by nominating Gary McMichael, front man for the UDA, to the new civic forum, a talking shop add-on to the Assembly for those unable to get on the gravy train directly.

The UDA is currently involved in a turf war with the UVF on the Shankill Road in a battle that combines drugs and politics. This nasty little conflict has put terror into some working



A column from Socialist Democracy, Irish section of the Fourth international

class protestant communities but so far hasn't stopped some on the left from supporting the UVF as the embodiment of local socialism. Apparently the protestant working class means so much to these people that vicious sectarianism dressed up in plebian clothes is good enough for them.

Once again, the media is pushing the agenda that nationalist Ireland must save David Trimble and the Good Friday Agreement from the "no" men of unionism. The story goes that unless the



Say aaaargh! The singing bigots are setting the pace in the "peace" process

SDLP and Sinn Fein accept unionist demands to further water down the Patten report on the RUC and the IRA take further steps in decommissioning, Trimble will be finished and with him the Good Friday agreement.

But things are not this simple. Trimble is leading the demands for dilution of the Patten report and decommissioning and the "no" men are as keen to keep the local assembly as all the rest of those with their bums on the fancy seats.

If there is a difference in policy, as opposed to tactics, it is that Trimble might be prepared to see republicans remain in government if they are absolutely humiliated through unconditional surrender.

For many in the unionist opposition, no republican should be allowed in the place while for others any

catholic in government is unacceptable. Booting out the Provos would simply be the first step in weakening the SDLP with a view to their eventual expulsion as well.

The problem for the Provos is that saving David Trimble in order to save the agreement they love hardly makes sense when Trimble leads the fight for demands that are outside the agreement. The "no" men aren't actually against the agreement. They are for it, minus the Provos.

This explains their lack of street campaign against the agreement, their participation in the assembly and its committees beside Sinn Fein and their taking of ministerial seats.

It also explains why there are those criticising Paisley for conceding to the Provos

as well. Yes, I know, it's hard to believe but that's what this sectarian little hole is like!

As we go to press, the Unionist Party opposition is preparing to oust Trimble by passing policies that tie Unionist Party participation in the Government Executive to further retreat on Patten and decommissioning.

There is even speculation that Trimble will propose something like this himself. The differences between them are clear!

Meanwhile the British are pressing the SDLP and Sinn Fein, partly through the Dublin government, to accept continuation of the RUC without even a new lick of paint by way of a name and badge change.

The IRA is being called on

to make yet another 'confidence building measure.' That is, confidence they will soon surrender absolutely.

The SDLP sold the peace process on the basis that they had finally got the deal they had been seeking - a share of sectarian privilege. The Provos sold it on the basis that it was just the start. They were both right. The sectarian privileges will be shared but the unionists must get the lion's share because they are 'the majority'. The agreement was just the start, the start of reaction following the complete collapse of opposition to imperialist rule and its sectarian state.

Whether Trimble falls or not, whether the Executive or Assembly keep going, are suspended or finished, whether the Good Friday agreement collapses or staggers on are all important. This will partly depend on whether the unionist opposition miscalculates and brings down the Stormont they love with the Provos they hate. It will depend on what the next chapter in republican collapse is.

There remains room for Trimble and the British to manoeuvre by concessions to bigotry and/or suspension of parts or all of the Agreement institutions. The pressure through Dublin can be maintained, if necessary, to keep republicans as a loyal opposition.

But what matters is that the dynamic behind the peace process will continue and above all that real power will rest with the British. The push towards the right might lead to continuing movement rightwards or temporary collapse of the present framework. The task of building a democratic and socialist opposition remains.

Lethal "partnership" deal kills off Irish rail strike

Paul Flannigan

After ten weeks on strike the 130 locomotive drivers of Irish Locomotive Drivers Association (ILDA) were forced to return to work. They came out in strike not just for themselves but to guarantee a safe rail network for everyone.

The lamrod Eireann management were jeopardising rail safety by the imposition of eleven hour work rosters, by de-skilling and by reducing training for new drivers. What started out as an important but fairly routine industrial dispute quickly turned into a national political furor.

The press quickly targeted ILDA General Secretary Brendan Ogle as public enemy number one. The Independent group of newspapers accused Ogle of causing everything from the closing down of entire businesses to putting at risk the lives of cancer patients.

Politicians from every political party raised up one hell of a chorus of disapproval against one trade unionist. Some newspaper columnists called for the law to come down hard on the strikers.

Worst of all the ITCU and the union leaders of Ireland's biggest union Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) and the National Rail and Bus Union (NRBU) joined in the tirade. They issued a letter to their members instructing them to scab and break picket lines. Why was such a fury of invective directed at a small group of workers on strike?

Affront

The answer is that the formation of ILDA itself was seen as an affront to the spirit of our time which goes by the inappropriately named 'social partnership'. The ILDA was identified by the social partners as a union opposed to the proposed privatisation of the railways.

Even before the strike began, fears were expressed that ILDA was a militant union beyond the control of the social partners. Its militancy in organising secondary picketing during the strike merely confirmed this fear.

Social partnership thrives on deals being struck at the top table well out of the reach of ordinary union members.

Successive governments have sought more and more of a partnership with the union leaders which today crucially involves support for privatisation.

The ILDA was formed out of a frustration and instinctive opposition to this. It grew out of a pressure group formed in 1994 by three train drivers who were members of SIPTU and opposed a productivity deal agreed between their union officials in SIPTU and NBRU and the employers. The drivers used to meet regularly in Dublin's Ashling Hotel and finally registered as a union in July 1999.

In establishing itself free from the official union apparatuses, ILDA was going against the program of union centralisation and privatisation encouraged by the enactment of the 1990 Industrial Relations Act and the ideology of partnership and consensus.

In the last few years the state has dished out over two million pounds to facilitate union mergers and centralisation. With this help the number of unions has fallen from 150 to below 50.

So from the outset there was a pronounced hostility to ILDA. The ILDA people were portrayed as dangerous militants. It is hard enough to win a dispute even with the solidarity of other unions but when their leaders are actively organising against you then you really have got big problems.

During the course of the strike the rail workers received magnificent support from ordinary workers who simply ignored the instruction to scab from the union chiefs. When ILDA put pickets on bus garages, most workers refused to cross them.

Picketing

For the first time in years we saw the power of secondary picketing. Nobody can now claim that the rail workers lacked determination or that their tactics were not militant enough. However they were still forced back to work.

They were in the end beaten by the political conspiracy that is social partnership. There are plenty of workers who are angry, there are even enough potential militant leaders capable of fighting hard.



Irish premier Bertie Ahern is an eager proponent of "partnership"

But what is lacking is a comprehensive political consciousness that appreciates the necessity of combating the mechanisms and ideology of social partnership right across the board. Instead of the present episodic and spontaneous outbursts of militancy we need a consciously organised fight against social partnership which is well prepared in advance.

The workers need an organised current of politically conscious workers armed with an action programme to fight against privatisation - and the support for it from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU). In short Irish workers need to become overtly and progressively more political.

The ILDA was an industrial dispute that the capitalist bosses and their press recognised was a key political battle

because it was about forcing the pace of privatisation. The ILDA membership was slow to realise just how politically sensitive these issues are.

Small more militant break away unions are not in themselves the solution to the problems facing Irish workers. The real problem for rail workers is that their industry is being readied for privatisation through the worsening of their conditions.

The ILDA workers were in fact left stranded, unable to influence the crucial debate on privatisation taking place in SIPTU and NBRU. The railway workers need a solution based on stopping privatisation. This can only be brought about by means of a general political struggle against social partnership.

Popular NO vote defeats Denmark's euro elite

Finn Kellejer

Hundreds of jubilant young left wingers gathered in front of Christiansborg on the eve of 28 September to celebrate the no victory in the euro referendum. Meanwhile, behind the walls of Parliament, there were tears and bitter comments from the establishment politicians.

In spite of a massive scare campaign, a 53.1 per cent majority came out against Danish participation in the single currency – a verdict strengthened by a poll turn-out of 87.8 per cent.

The bulk of those who voted no were supporters of parties which supported joining the Euro. More than a quarter of the Liberal and Conservative voters said no.

In spite of a well-planned campaign from Social Democracy and the Danish trade union confederation, LO, 40 per cent of the social democratic voters said no. And even though the pro-euro wing of the left wing Socialist People's Party (SF) got lots of friendly media attention for their "New Europe" campaign (funded by the Confederation of Industry!), 88 per cent of the SF electors chose to say no.

While the working class was clearly divided on the euro question, there was certainly a massive no vote from what is often termed "Under-Denmark": The poorest, least educated urban areas showed a "no" majority of around 60 per cent, while well-off areas went to the "yes" side by as much as 70 per cent.

The ones who fell marginalised and threatened by the "development" are very likely to have rejected the euro while many of the better-off workers have given it their consent.

In the final phase of the campaign, SF leader Holger K. Nielsen, became the main spokesperson for the "no" side, engaging in an intense polemic with Prime Minister Nyrup Rasmussen on welfare questions.

Pia Kjærsgaard, leader of the far right, xenophobic Danish People's Party (DF), has been portrayed in some media as the "No" Queen. It is true that the right wing, not least DF, has been clearly strengthened since previous referendums. Social democracy did its very best to focus on the role of DF in order to deter progressive EU sceptics from sharing a no vote with nationalists.

The DF campaign called for a "Danish vote" to protect "crown and country", but stayed low key on its anti-immigrant issues in order not to stage unnecessary provocations.

Denmark's two main EU-critical cross-party movements, the People's Movement against the EU and the June Movement, including many left wing activists, favoured the broadest alliance stopping short of Pia Kjærsgaard's party.

They entered into a "Euro No"-campaign including, among others, the Thatcherite Conservative Youth. When it came to actual campaigning, though, the right wing seem to have played a small role.

Parallel to this, individual campaigns were carried out by the Socialist People's Party (SF), the Red-Green Alliance (Enhedslisten) and other left wing parties, as well as by minority currents inside Social Democracy and bourgeois parties.

Overall, the no campaigns proved less problematic than could have been feared. They were not marked by nationalism and self-sufficiency, while such attitudes did make themselves felt among part of the electorate.

No campaigners often put forward the situation of East Europeans who are having a hard time joining the EU because of the harsh EMU criteria. And, as pointed out by an Enhedslisten poster: "The world is larger than the EU".

The impact of the EMU on the welfare system played a major part in campaigns ranging from the left wing to social democratic dissidents and even some bourgeois group-



Even free flowers for the ladies from increasingly desperate Danish PM Rasmussen couldn't buy him a yes vote on the Euro.

ings.

Increasing tax competition combined with the Stability Pact rules against budget deficits constitute a threat to the funding of the welfare state, it was argued. In Denmark, 69 per cent of welfare payments are tax financed, a share far larger than in most euro countries.

Prime minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen has been boasting about his role in placing "employment" high on the EU's agenda. He even put forward the Lisbon summit last March as proof that the social Europe is happening right now.

"Insubstantial and obligation-free". That is how another prominent social democrat, Ivar Nørgaard, referred to the Lisbon employment goals. As a government minister, Nørgaard co-signed Denmark's joining the EC in 1973.

But he was deeply disappointed, when the Maastricht criteria were laid down without including one on maximum unemployment. The problem with the euro is that price stability goal is given a far higher priority than the employment situation of the various countries, he said.

Ole Jensen, a representative of "Trade Unions against the Union", also warned against the Lisbon theses, according to which millions of new jobs will be created in small and medium sized enterprises. Behind all the talk of "innovation", he puts his finger on well-known corporate-friendly prescriptions making up the concrete measures agreed in Lisbon:

"You have proposals to alleviate taxes on the lowest paid, so that, in return, their wages can be lowered. And once again, you have the demand for greater flexibility. This usually

means lower wages, wider wage gaps, uncomfortable working hours and easier access to sacking workers."

The "yes" establishment had at its disposal by far the most money, the government services, three quarters of the MPs, massive support from employers' as well as trade union federations, and all major newspapers except one tabloid.

However, the "yes" was weakened by a series of mistakes.

A few weeks before the referendum, the Prime Minister made a fool of himself by "guaranteeing" the future of the national pension scheme. This guarantee was considered untrustworthy by three quarters of the public, especially since, in order to win the 1998 general election, Nyrup Rasmussen "guaranteed" the early retirement pension, and six months later introduced an important element of private insurance, thus adapting to EU policies.

While the yes parties tried to keep the EU core countries' plans of increased EU powers from the public, the no side was able to quote leading EU politicians voicing demands for further harmonisation and an "economic government" still louder as the euro rate went down.

According to some analysts, the yes side could have gone on the offensive by arguing openly in favour of a closer political Union. However, most pro-euro politicians were painfully aware that this would have caused an overwhelming no majority.

Opinion polls before and after the referendum show that, in general, the Danes are interested in and well-informed about EU questions, but they tend to be sceptical towards the Union project because they fear that the EU is undermining democracy. One opinion poll shows that half of the voters

made their choice on the basis of the general EU development.

That is why the yes side resorted to a scare campaign similar to the ones used in the five previous EU referendums in Denmark.

Failure to join the euro, portrayed as a shelter of solidarity against the "crude market forces", would mean the Danish crown would come under pressure, they claimed, causing interest rates to go up, which would cost 20,000 jobs and 20 billion crowns. Voting no would unleash a package of austerity measures.

The same message was conveyed by an alliance of bosses and trade union officials. Full-page advertisements showed managers and shop stewards saying: "We, the people working in the enterprises, fear a no vote".

Nevertheless, the catastrophic scenarios failed to convince a majority and were discredited by the extremely moderate response by markets in the days following the vote.

The no victory was a heavy blow for Poul Nyrup Rasmussen and his Social Democrat-Social-Liberal government.

While promising a series of "people's hearings", the government is trying to prevent the EU critics from gaining any influence on the Danish EU policies.

The negotiations on a new EU treaty to be decided in Nice in December are central to the discussions about the consequences of the no vote.

The government claims that the Nice Treaty is something completely different, while the EU-critical movements demand that government put a brake on the Union train in Nice by blocking for further majority decisions, particularly on social questions.

The legacy of George Orwell

Darren Williams

In January of this year a small milestone passed somewhat unnoticed amid the glut of millennial celebrations: the fiftieth anniversary of the death of George Orwell, from tuberculosis at the age of forty-six.

Orwell's literary career was relatively brief: His first book, *Down and Out in Paris and London* was published in 1933, and his last and most famous, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in June 1949, a few months before his death. The work that he produced in this short period had enormous impact, however, and its influence has endured long after his death.

There are plentiful recent illustrations of this. In the last three years there have been film versions of his novels, *Keep the Aspidochelone* and *Animal Farm* (the second version).

The latter and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* appeared among the top ten of 'Britain's favourite novels' in a recent survey carried out by Waterstones. Orwell's views are still widely cited by political commentators:

for example, last year, the Guardian columnist, Francis Wheen, quoted at length from Orwell's writings on fascism in order to justify his own support for the NATO bombing of Serbia. Even the TV programmes, *Big Brother* and *Room 101*, are based on trivialised versions of ideas from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

A contested legacy

Orwell's last two novels reflect the major preoccupation of his last years: the danger of totalitarianism, the features of which he saw as common to both Nazi Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union.

Nineteen Eighty-Four is a horrific premonition of Britain (renamed *Airstrip One*) in what was then the near future: under the monolithic regime of *Ingso* (English socialism), 'the Party' has brutally suppressed all political pluralism, cultural diversity and even independent thought.

The plot of *Animal Farm* closely follows the history of the Russian Revolution, with the revolutionary overthrow by the animals of the

tyrannical humans leading to the creation of an egalitarian society, which is sabotaged by the corruption of the pigs, representing the Bolsheviks.

For this reason, these works have been invoked, since their appearance at the outset of the Cold War, to justify the view that revolutions inevitably become corrupted and socialism means the denial of freedom.

This was very far from Orwell's intention, however. He remained a socialist to the end of his life, and argued, throughout the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War, that revolution was both desirable and an urgent necessity if fascism were to be defeated.

In his non-fictional books and in his prolific journalistic output, Orwell was a tireless critic of class society, social injustice and colonialism, and continually sought to explain in clear and concrete terms why socialism was needed in Britain and what it would mean.

The absence of a strong theoretical tradition on the left in Britain, and the popularity and accessibility of his more famous works, means



that Orwell occupies an extremely important position in the British socialist tradition. Although by no means a theoretician, he made a number of important contributions to socialist thought, which today's left can ill afford to ignore.

Orwell's background

Orwell (whose real name was Eric Blair) came to socialism relatively late in life, with no background in the labour movement, or even in the working class. He was born, in 1903, into a family which he meticulously described as 'lower-upper-middle class', meaning that their financial situation didn't match their social status. His father was a colonial official, in the Opium Department of the Indian civil service.

The young Blair attended a prep school near Eastbourne, and worked hard enough to earn a scholarship to Eton. His subsequent academic career was

unimpressive, however. After leaving Eton in 1921 he went not to Oxford or Cambridge, but to Burma, where he served as an officer in the Imperial Indian Police until his return to England in 1927. After seeing for himself the reality of the occupation and exploitation of that country by a foreign power, he came to hate British imperialism.

This was undoubtedly a politically formative experience – turning his natural rebelliousness towards a specific target – but at this stage he did not develop a general critique of capitalist society. His decision to become a writer was motivated entirely by literary – not political – goals.

Even the poverty that he described, from first-hand experience, in *Down and Out in Paris and London*, was undergone voluntarily for the purposes of 'social investigation', and was the poverty of tramps and drifters, not of the working class itself.

It was not until 1936 that he became convinced of the necessity of socialism, seeing it as the only hope for the future in a world beset by economic crises, fascism and the threat of another major war. Living in Hampstead at the time, and mixing with the middle-class intelligentsia, Orwell seems to have been influenced by friends in the Independent Labour Party (ILP).

The first literary expression of his socialism was *The Road to Wigan Pier*, which attacked capitalism by vividly describing the poverty of the Lancashire and Yorkshire mining communities, but also deplored the weakness of the socialist movement and its apparent inability to win the support of ordinary working people.

In this book, Orwell set out for the first time, most of the key ideas that he was to develop throughout his subsequent writings and political activities.

'Socialism and the English genius'

The second half of *The Road to Wigan Pier* addresses the problem that, just as socialism is more urgently needed than ever, so it is becoming less attractive to its intended beneficiaries. Orwell argues for the movement and its propaganda to be taken out of the hands of middle-class intellectuals, whose 'crankiness' repelled potential supporters and who were preoccupied with abstract ideas, and incapable of relating to the concerns of working class people.

He argues that if socialism is to succeed, it must be rooted in the experiences of the people to whom it is aimed, taking account of the specific social circumstances of each country.

In England this means, for instance, recognising the many gradations of class which exist and which take on undue significance because of the effect of snobbery; and accepting that socialists must appeal not just to manual workers, but to all those in the intermediate social strata who do not consider themselves working class, but who nevertheless have an interest in the defeat of capitalism.

Their class prejudice will ultimately be broken down, Orwell argues, only by involvement in political struggles alongside the proletariat.

The need for English socialism to reflect its social and cultural background is set out at greater length in *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius*, a pamphlet written in 1941, when the war imparted a new urgency to the task of overthrowing the bourgeoisie and building a socialist society.

Here Orwell argued that a native socialist revolution could not be achieved by attempting to transplant onto English society the experience and ideas of the revolution in Russia or any-

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.

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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 2JU, and we'll be in touch.

where else, without regard to local circumstances.

Instead, an English revolution would take up the best elements of the country's culture and traditions: the distrust of unaccountable power, the belief in democracy and fair play, the 'common decency' and also the patriotism that Orwell sees as a progressive, not a conservative, force, "since it is a devotion to something that is always changing and yet is felt to be mystically the same".

These things would be given a new, socialist content, infusing the country's plebeian traditions into a new political and economic regime, characterised by nationalisation of the means of production, constraints on personal incomes and democratisation of the educational system.

Orwell believed that the struggle against Hitler could be victorious only by turning it into a revolutionary war. Although the course of events did not bear out the book's prognosis, there is much to be said for its central idea – that socialism must, in part, be a progressive development of the existing national culture, not an alien imposition. This argument needs to be taken far more seriously by the left, despite the rather sentimental and ahistorical way in which Orwell presents it (not to mention various other problems, such as his neglect of the Scottish and Welsh national questions).

The critique of Stalinism

Among the targets in *The Road to Wigan Pier* are the Stalinists, whom Orwell sees as isolated from the British working class, not least because of their uncritical adulation of the Soviet Union. It was through his experiences in the Spanish Civil War, however, that he saw Stalinism at its worst.

Homage to Catalonia – perhaps his most important book, in political terms – describes how he went to Spain with to help defend the democratic Republic against fascism, only to discover that there was effectively, a second war taking place behind Government lines, with the Communist Party, the liberals and right-wing socialists on one side and the left socialists, the anarcho-syndicalists and the POUM (in which Orwell was fighting) on the other.

His first visit to Barcelona in December 1936 convinced Orwell that a social revolution was taking place:

"Practically every building of any size had been seized by the workers and was draped with red flags or with the red and black flag of the Anarchists ... Every shop and café had an inscription saying it had been collectivized; even the bootblacks had been collectivized and their boxes painted red and black. Waiters and shop-walkers looked you in the face and treated you as an equal..."

"There were no private motor-cars, they had all been commandeered, and all the trams and taxis and much of the other transport were painted red and black."

For the Stalinists, however, the revolution was endangering their Popular Front with the liberal bourgeoisie, which they saw as essential to win the war. Whereas the non-stalinist left saw the war and the revolution as inseparable, the Communist Party insisted that the revolution would have to wait until Franco was defeated. In the meantime, private property had to be protected, in order to reassure



Ken Loach's film *Land and Freedom* revived interest in the politics of the Spanish civil war

their liberal allies.

On Orwell's second visit to Barcelona in May 1937 it was clear that bourgeois normality was being restored. When political tension erupted into street-fighting between the two forces on the side of the Republic, the POUM was suppressed and its members, along with many anarchists and other revolutionaries, were thrown into prison, tortured or murdered by the Stalinist-controlled secret police. Orwell himself narrowly escaped.

The experience convinced him that the 'official' Communist movement was a counter-revolutionary force, which consistently subordinated the interests of the working class to the dictates of Soviet foreign policy, with its alliances of convenience with bourgeois powers

Homage to Catalonia was attacked by many on the left – far beyond the Communist Party itself – who romanticised the Soviet Union and the parties of the Comintern. To a lesser extent, this tendency persists among sections of the left even today.

In exposing the machinations of the Stalinists in Spain, Orwell made one of his most important contributions demonstrating that the socialist project stands its best chance of success when it pursues its objectives with revolutionary determination, and that Stalinism, with all its bad faith and shabby compromises, is the very opposite of this.

Ken Loach's film, *Land and Freedom*, gave a wider audience a flavour of the conflict between the pro-Soviet and the independent left in Spain. Such events help to understand the hatred of Stalinism that was such a prominent feature of Orwell's later writings.

This did, however, sometimes lead him to reactionary positions – such as critical support for the USA in the Cold War, and an almost McCarthy-esque readiness to denounce anyone whom he believed to be doing Stalin's work in Britain. This is no more acceptable for being understandable, but it does not detract from the fact that Orwell's critique of Stalinism, from 1936 onwards, came clearly from the left.

The defence of intellectual honesty and critical judgement

Orwell's experiences in Spain and their aftermath, sharpened his

awareness that the distortions spread by the Stalinists and their fellow-travellers represented something qualitatively different from the propaganda that had always been associated with major political and military conflict.

The development of totalitarian movements and regimes had been accompanied by the development of totalitarian habits of thought among the pro-Stalinist and pro-fascist intelligentsia.

It was no longer enough for such people simply to attack their political adversaries: they had to attribute motives and associations to their opponents that made their ideas and actions appear too disingenuous or corrupt to be worthy of consideration. Thus, the Stalinists they attributed the views of their opponents to the deliberately disruptive activities of the "Trotsky-fascist fifth column".

These lies were repeated unquestioningly by pro-Communist press and commentators around the world, often by people who had no personal knowledge of the conflict or participants themselves.

In later years, Orwell regularly challenged those who were apologists for Stalinist and other totalitarians, and to the ritual denunciation of whichever enemy was their current target.

In a number of articles, and particularly his classic essay, 'Politics and the English Language', he described the way that intellectual adherents of a particular orthodoxy would use pretentious language, abstract terms or worn-out metaphors to conceal the fact that they were defending the indefensible:

"People are imprisoned for years without trial, or shot in the back of the neck or sent to die of scurvy in Arctic lumber camps: this is called elimination of unreliable elements. Such phraseology is needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them."

In opposition to this intellectual deceitfulness, Orwell vigorously insisted that political issues should be discussed in clear, concrete language – as he had always done himself.

And although the open, explicit manipulation and censorship of language described in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has not come to pass, his concerns in this area remain topical today.

Despite the formal freedom of the press and a great diversity of information sources, 'news man-

agement' has today attained a degree of sophistication that allows invasions, wars and repression to be perceived as necessary and desirable – as rebel intellectuals like Noam Chomsky and John Pilger have shown in detail.

And meanwhile, much of the far left continues to speak an incomprehensible, jargon-filled language that cuts it off from the very workers whose support it so desperately needs. We still have a lot to learn from Orwell.

Reclaiming the legacy

I have picked out just a few of Orwell's key ideas, but his writings are rich in social observation, insights into human relations and a determination to deflate the pomposity and disingenuousness of the rich and powerful.

Orwell was never a Marxist, although he admired and defended

(up to a point) both Marx and Trotsky. His arguments for socialism were often more emotional than scientific, but given his lack of a definite analytical method to interpret of the events he lived through, his judgement and political integrity show a creditable consistency.

The books that I have mentioned, and the many shorter pieces found in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters* (4 vols.) should be essential reading for all socialists today, likewise the classic biography of Orwell by Bernard Crick.

We need to reclaim the revolutionary and democratic ideas that ran through Orwell's work, if we are to maintain the link between the fight for socialism in the twenty-first century and the best traditions of the British left.

Free Samar and Jawad!

Roland Rance

A date has finally been set for the appeals of Samar Alami and Jawad Botmeh, Palestinian activists sentenced to twenty-year prison terms after their wrongful conviction in connection with the 1994 bombings of the Israeli Embassy and Zionist headquarters in London. The appeal, which starts on 24 October, will be their first chance to challenge the suppression of evidence which could have led to their acquittal.

Samar and Jawad were convicted of "conspiracy to cause explosions". A co-defendant (who neither of them knew) was acquitted of actually planting the bombs, and the prosecution accepted that Samar and Jawad had certainly not planted them.

The trial was riddled with inconsistencies, with the prosecution mistakenly producing a map of Lebanon as a map of London, with the revelation of Israeli involvement in withholding forensic and video evidence, and with an attempt by an Israeli correspondent to interfere with the jury. None of this prevented the convictions and vicious prison sentences.

Since the trial, it has been revealed (partly through David Shayler) that the prosecution withheld evidence from both the defence and the court.

Far from operating, as they had claimed, in an intelligence vacuum, M15 had apparently received a tip-off that a foreign government was likely

to bomb the Israeli Embassy. This would have exonerated Samar and Jawad, since the prosecution argued that they were not acting on behalf of any state.

Shayler has further revealed that an internal M15 memo had argued that the Israelis bombed their own embassy. Although this memo is not proof, its production at the trial would have seriously undermined the case against Samar and Jawad.

The use of Public Interest Immunity certificates to deny evidence to the defence has been ruled by the European Court of Human Rights, in the case of the M25 Three, to prejudice the right to a fair trial. Supporters expect this precedent to be applied in the case of Samar and Jawad too.

As the defence campaign notes, had they been convicted by an Israeli court of an offence in which nobody was injured, they would by now, despite the faltering peace process, have been freed. But in Britain, unless the appeal succeeds, they can expect a further 16 years in prison, followed by deportation.

■ Picket the appeal, Royal Courts of Justice in the Strand, from 10.00 to 12.30, and from 14.00 to 16.00 on 24 October.

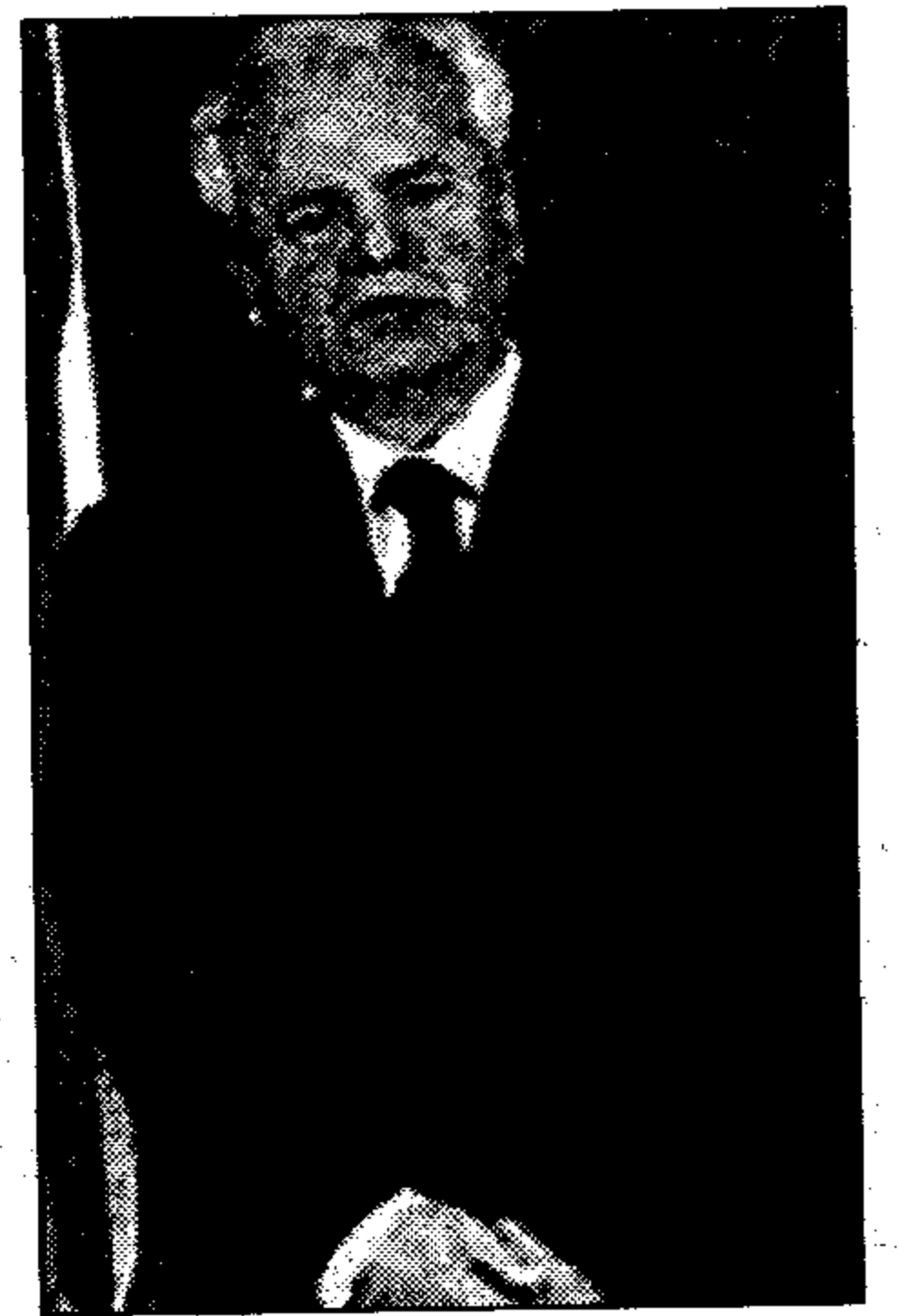
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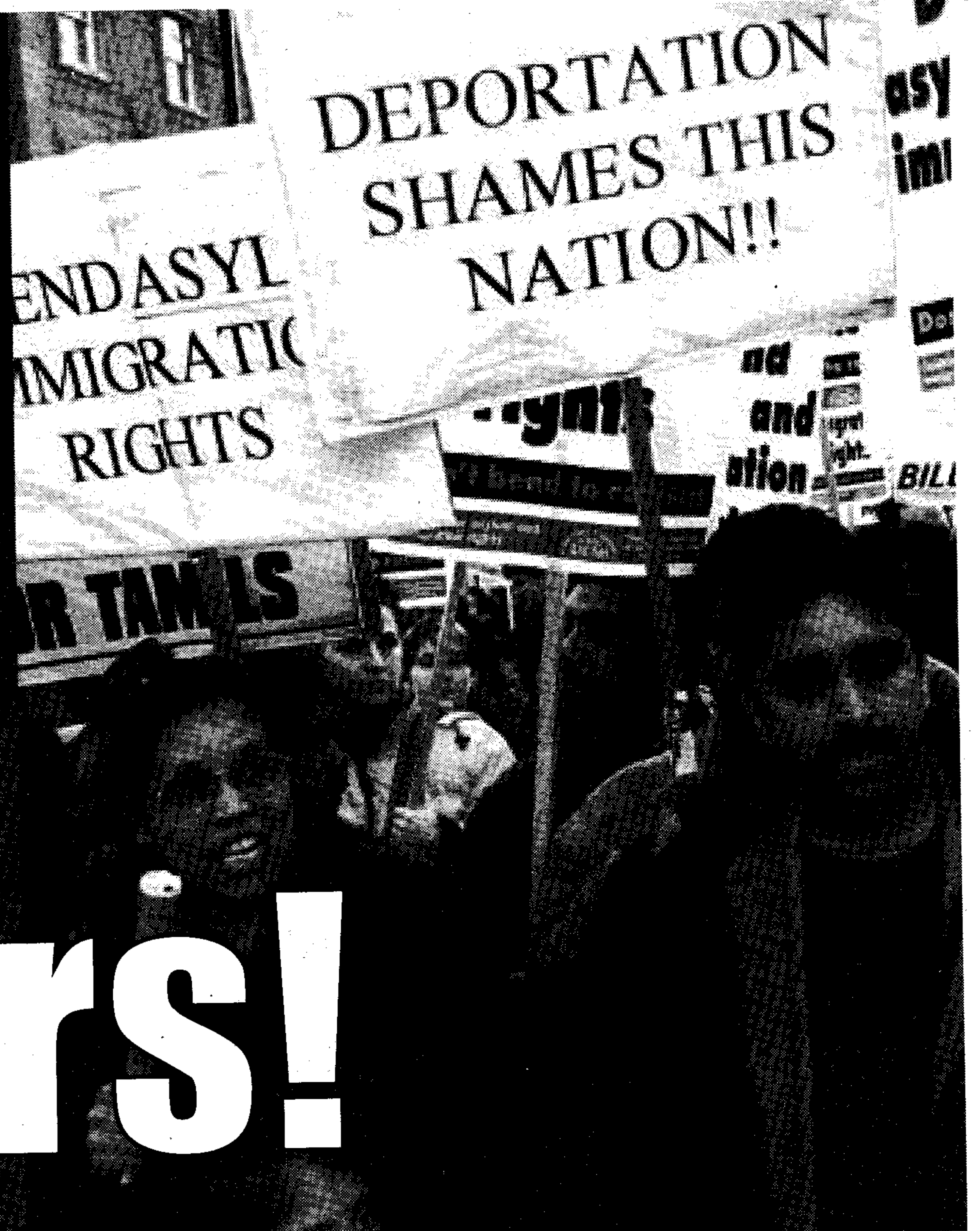
OUTLOOK



Where next for Serbs after Milosevic? p8

"Review" won't end scandal

Scrap Straw's vouchers!



Stalingrad O'Neill

When TGWU leader Bill Morris remitted the motion to scrap vouchers for asylum seekers at Labour Party Conference, it was apparently because the Front Bench promised a review of the system.

No review is needed to show that people can not live of 70% of poverty level income support

No review is needed to show that giving asylum seekers vouchers not cash is racist and demeaning

No review is needed to prove racist attacks against asylum seekers are on the increase since vouchers and other reactionary measures like dispersal have been introduced by this new Labour government.

Increasing numbers of people have be won to support for the Campaign to Defend Asylum Seekers which is demanding that the voucher system be scrapped.

The only positive thing about the review is if it gives campaigners an opportunity to make our case even more loudly. Add your voice!

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